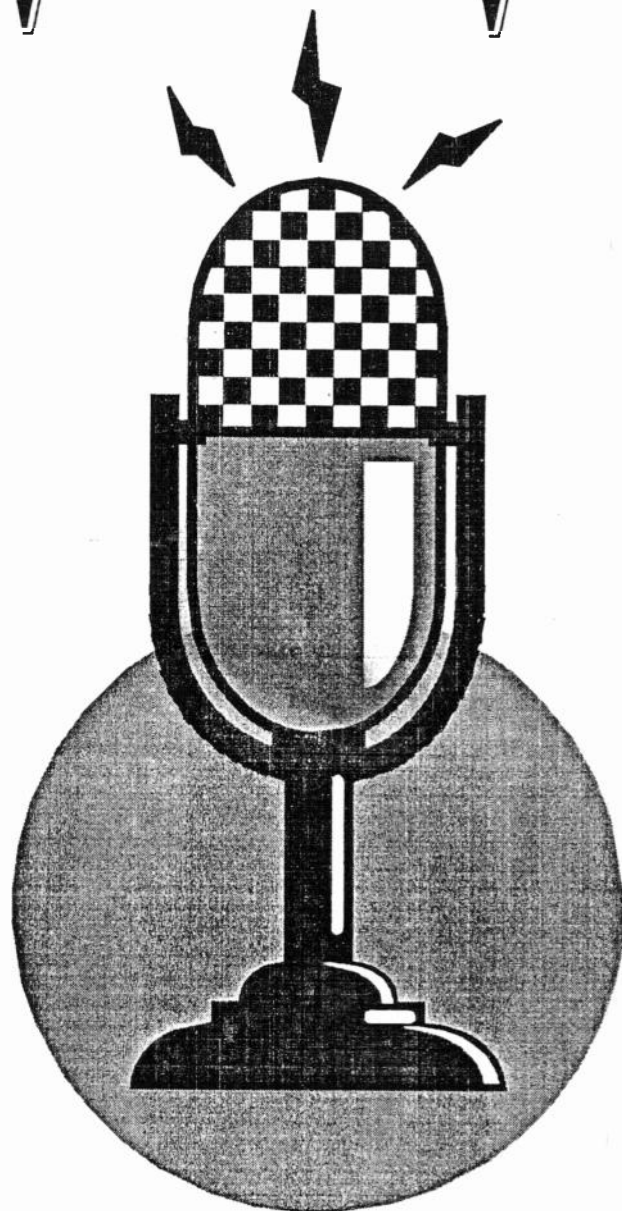


# V ALLEY V OICES



*by* **JOHN RUSSELL GHRIST (N9HVF)**





**A HISTORY OF  
RADIO BROADCASTING  
IN  
NORTHERN ILLINOIS  
AND  
NORTHWEST INDIANA  
FROM  
1910-1992**

*To my radio friend  
Steve,  
John Russell Shurt*



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## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all Chicagoland radio professionals, area libraries, and historical societies who helped compose this work, and to my old pet cat, Schmoster, at one time the only friend I had.

Special thanks to Angelo Polvere (KA9CSO); Terry McNichols (WI9T) of Kwik Copy in Arlington Heights; Jeff Ash of Flash Foto in Dundee, Illinois; and Art Hellyer for their special assistance.

And to Sandra Lynn, who recognized the importance of this work.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Russell Ghrist is a veteran of over 25 years of broadcasting. He has been employed by several radio stations, and has been involved in many facets of the communications field. In addition, John has worked as a police dispatcher, served as the coordinator of a special radio service for the print handicapped, and is an amateur radio operator (N9HVF). He was a weekend radio traffic reporter for WLS/WMAQ with the Shadow Traffic Network in Chicago from 1986 to 1989.

*Valley Voices* is his first book. It summarizes the development of early radio in the Chicagoland area, and presents some interesting aspects and anecdotes of his career. Mr. Ghrist is available to present talks and slide presentations about local radio to area groups and organizations.

Currently, John is employed by the Illinois Department of Transportation, and is the voice of highway advisory radio. He is an avid softball player, shortwave listener, and collector of old records. John is presently completing his college degree through correspondence at Indiana University.

## DISCLAIMER

Due to the ever changing aspects of the radio business, no publication can keep up with the constant call letters, format, or personality switches that are evident in this field. These perpetual changes also include the countless stations that are sold and operated differently under new managements.

Every attempt has been made since the beginning of radio history in the Chicagoland area through 1992 to highlight the past and current radio scene. No attempt has been made to list every air personality who has ever read a newscast or spun a record on these stations; that is also an impossibility. But herein is a short summary, an electronic sketch if you will, dedicated to this subject to change industry. No doubt this book will be somewhat outdated, when it is finally published . . . captured here are many little known facts and the roots containing the early histories of many area stations, including the ones that have long vanished and been forgotten.

We have built upon their silent signals.

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## A RADIO SONNET

Many a holiday weekend  
and many a midnight.  
I played your favorite songs,  
I was your friend in the night.

Doing a disc jockey show  
With one turntable that was slow,  
And two broken cart decks.  
I read the news and weather there,  
Did the traffic upstairs,  
And suffered through broken headsets.

I drove junky cars,  
And about literally starved,  
While my family wore raggedy clothes.  
Radio, I gave you my best years,  
And have shed my last tear  
For a new occupation that I've chose.

Making pretty maps for the State pays better,  
I've pulled my finances together,  
And even bought a new car.  
Gone is playing records back to back,  
And those goofy voice tracks.

It costs too much to be a star.

Radio free,  
They no longer need me  
To twist those knobs and dials.  
Leave me alone,  
With my third class phone,  
And I'll spend the weekends in style.

--John Russell Ghrist

## FOREWARD

This publication represents a lengthy research effort into radio's past and present in the Chicago suburban area. In the ever changing world of broadcasting, it is quite easy to lose track of the numerous stations that sometimes without notice suddenly disappear from the radio dial. With renewed interest in reviving old call letters, the casual radio listener could easily become confused by the numerous changes and frequency swaps that sometimes occur.

Today's radio listeners will also be surprised that certain old store fronts, buildings, and even a recent subdivision were once the locations of old stations or transmitter sites. Although seemingly unrelated at times, additional facts have been provided that will often parallel the topic being discussed. No doubt someone will find this extra information useful one day.

It has been noted in recent years, that while some early history about local towns has been well-documented, there seems to be a large gap in noting the events of recent years. This is especially evident as information about "silent" stations can only be found hidden in oblivion in the annals of non-indexed newspapers. It is almost impossible to keep track of the numerous personnel changes, too. Some are documented in this work; unfortunately, some names presently unknown to me will be regretfully missed. These unmentioned persons should also be thanked for their contributions to the industry.

In the years to come, this reference book will give radio enthusiasts and students of local history a clue as to how the industry has changed since the advent of radio in the 1920s. From the preliminary stations of the experimental era of the 1920s to the FM booms of the 40's and 60's, here is a summary of the suburban development of radio through the early months of 1992.

My thanks to all who cooperated to make this work possible. Since the world of radio changes daily, chances are this book will be obsolete before it is published. But nevertheless, it captures what is being quickly forgotten about this evolving industry. Hopefully, now it is all in one place, and never to be forgotten, again. Connie Brown and Art Hellyer will make sure of it.

The book recalls the "fun" era of radio shared by "star struck jocks" and radio professionals who had their eyes far beyond the local airwaves. It remembers some of the bloopers and mistakes that will be laughed at again and again . . . and some of the people who have dedicated their lives to the local industry.



## THE BEGINNING OF THE RADIO AGE

In the fall of 1921 radio experimenters and listeners were to hear the first signals intended for radio broadcast to the general public. A new era of electronic technology had begun. It continues to grow and improve.

In Chicago the first licensed station was KYW owned by Westinghouse Corporation at 78 West Adams Street. The station's power was 500 watts at 360 meters, or 832.8 khz. It had been previously operated as experimental station 9XY. The first twenty-five stations were all licensed by the Department of Commerce and were on 360 meters. Later 485 meters, or about 618.6 khz, was used. It was relatively easy then for the government to keep track of a few stations scattered around the country far enough away from each other to eliminate interference.

Earlier a simplistic approach to assigning call letters on a worldwide basis was adopted in 1908 by the Berlin Convention allocating the letters A, N, W and K to the United States. In the United States the commercial broadcast stations on the west side of the Mississippi began with K; the ones on the east began with W. This rule still applies, except for a couple of early stations like KYW, now in Philadelphia, WCCO Minneapolis and KDKA Pittsburgh, whose experimental operations prior to 1921 grandfathered them an exception. Prior to this time (around 1912) the Navy was in charge of licensing amateur stations, most of whom chose their own call letters. This included many "wireless" stations dating back to 1915 in the Chicago area.

The first radio transmissions to emanate from the Elgin area are believed to be those of Francis M. Anderson, of 156 West Center Street. Anderson, a phone company employee, had been experimenting with early spark and wireless transmissions since 1905. In 1912, his wife Anne sang on his station. The short broadcast was picked up over most of the Midwest, according to an early article in the Elgin Daily News. In 1915 the government banned the ownership of radio sets for a short time, possibly for military purposes. Anderson reopened his station in 1918.

By 1922 six hundred stations of all types were on the air, including WDAP Chicago, which would later become WGN. Both radio broadcasting and especially amateur, or "ham," radio continued to grow at astounding rates. The first nationwide radio broadcasting society was formed in Chicago on October 19, 1922. The National Broadcasting League (NBL) selected George S. Walker of Denver as its president. This organization later evolved into the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB). Here is a brief listing of some early "hams" in the Fox Valley area courtesy of Alice Brannigan of Popular Communications Magazine.

9AWK Charles Erbstein, RFD 6 Box 75, Elgin

9BOB E.A. MacCormack, 1021 Highland Ave., Elgin

9CBV Raymond G. Ellithorpe, 131 Tennyson, Elgin

9DVK Hiland B. Fillmore, 386 Hendee St., Elgin

9EEQ George D. Carpenter, 665 South St., Elgin

9EIA E.W. Kersten, 260 DuPage St., Elgin

9ELU Allen Wooldridge, 385 Fulton St., Elgin

9OS Richard S. Rea, 133 Hinsdell Pl., Elgin

Note: The prefix "9" indicates the midwest portion of the country. Calls were subject to frequent changes.

An early 1920s clipping from the Batavia Herald congratulated radio amateurs for their job in aiding Mississippi flood victims. The article stated "reports from members to the American Radio Relay League tells the story of how many a youth in his teens sat at his transmitter when the waters rose, communicating with the outside world long after telephone and telegraph wires had been swept away by floods." The early "hams" were heralded for their efforts in reporting messages, requesting medical aid and other help during the devastation. Many earlier "hams" later became involved with commercial radio operation. Where possible, their amateur radio call numbers are also listed next to their names in this book. Today amateurs continue to employ their approach to radio for civic purposes. Fine examples are EARS (Elgin Amateur Radio Society), VARA (Valley Amateur Radio Association) and WAFAR (Western Area FM Repeater Club).

In 1923 one of the longest wireless transmissions took place between an operator in Syracuse, New York, and a ship 2,954 miles away in the Atlantic Ocean. That year automobile manufacturer Henry Ford contemplated the construction of 400 of his own radio stations. He decided to stick with cars instead, but used radio to communicate between his offices and railroads.

In 1924 American Legion Director Frank T. Hines announced that all forty-seven veterans hospitals were being equipped with radios. Hines added, "Experimenters have proven that the 'radio' is a highly valuable adjunct to hospital equipment and the most adaptable and popular of recreational facilities now provided for the disabled."

By 1925 communication over a distance of 3,700 miles had been accomplished. On August 6th an Associated Press radio station, 9XN, owned by the Zenith Radio Corporation in Chicago, conversed with Lt. Commander E.F. McDonald of the S.S. Peary stationed at Etah, Greenland. McDonald, who had founded Zenith, answered questions about his expedition during one of the far northern hemispheres six month daytime period over the radio. Two years later AT & T would offer to send public audio messages between London on shortwave and the U.S. for \$25.00 a minute. In 1928 another radio milestone--long distance communication was accomplished between RCA engineers in Riverhead on Long Island in New York to Malcolm P. Hanson, a radio operator for Admiral Byrd's expedition at the South Pole.

The early wireless sets gave way to the addition of more stations with many using higher power. A seemingly overnight innovation in technology had become increasing chaos for both listeners and the government. The radio dial was fast filling up with stations and, unfortunately, unforeseen static interference and noise. By 1925 there were 733 stations broadcasting public entertainment and a total of 18,119 radio-sending stations of all sorts.

Radio station ownership was indeed on the increase. I remember hearing about the beginnings of Crown Point, Indiana's WLBT "Where Lover's Become Tied" which was named after the city's "marriage mill" reputation. Harold "Buster" Wendel used two windmills for antenna towers for his 100 watt station in 1926. Local talent programs were presented. Newspapers, stores, radio manufacturers, private individuals and many religious organizations all owned radio stations. The beginnings of radio evangelism had started. Frequent evenings of live dance music were broadcast. News, sports, and election returns were added to broadcast schedules. But no matter how good the programs were, something had to be done by the government to better regulate the broadcasting industry.

An October 6, 1925 account in the Elgin Daily News cited problems with interference, especially with a loose agreement among radio stations requiring local stations to observe Monday night as "silent night." This would enable listeners to enjoy programs from distant stations. Most Chicago stations observed "silent night," but many with transmitters outside of the city felt exempt from the agreement. Frank H. McDonald, president of the Broadcast Listeners Association, a local organization of Chicago area radio fans, called for a general strike. He urged listeners not to tune to local stations violating the "silent night" policy. Other radio listeners urged a boycott of advertised products on those stations. "Silent Night" ended in late 1926 as stations, fearing loss of license due to inactivity, resumed Monday night broadcasts. Only the Army and Navy took a break from transmitting in 1924 to monitor the airways hoping to hear some reported signals from Mars. These transmissions had been heard as early as 1919 by radio inventor Guglielmo Marconi and SCAN-TV scientist C. Francis Jenkins, according to Popular Communications Magazine. Jenkins, using a Nesco receiver manufactured in 1918, even taped the transmission and turned them over to the government. The signals were recorded on photographic strips. Nothing ever became of the investigations.

Listener protests didn't silence the stations, but urged Congress to think about reorganizing the broadcast industry. Six radio zones were contemplated, allowing for different "silent nights" in each area of the country. Much of the early problems were sparked by Chicago's WJAZ, which was owned and operated by the Zenith Radio Corporation. In 1925, the station without authority changed frequency and increased its power. A point was raised that the Radio Act of 1912 did not include provisions for assigning dial positions or power levels. This was upheld by the U.S. Attorney General on April 16, 1926, who stated that stations were free to move about the radio spectrum to seek a place to broadcast in which to be better heard by their listeners. Soon many stations changed their frequencies causing total discordance in the broadcasting industry.

By the end of 1926 there were still no real controls on radio, and no one to police the industry's activity. Listeners were caught in the middle. The public even blamed the power companies for static and excessive noise.

In Batavia, Western Gas and Electric Company took out a full page ad in the Herald outlining what listeners should do about their radio's operation. The utility had become overburdened with customer complaints and service calls. Most of the problems were with the sets themselves and not with the electricity being delivered to the homes. However, causes of interference and static which knocked out radio reception in June of 1926 was traced to a 110 volt line lying across a 220 volt line at the Rogers Brothers Galvanizing Plant at 220 North Batavia Avenue. Newspapers reported, "A rattling, cracking, buzzing sound had eclipsed radio reception in the north part of the town for months." Similar episodes had occurred in Elgin, Sycamore and Belvidere.

Something else known as the radio "boll weevil" *bugged* listeners by boring through wiring in the back of the sets causing short circuits. Newspaper columns warned of this insidious creature who dared preempt "Sam and Henry," or the civic opera broadcast.

Meanwhile, back in Washington, several proposals were being considered. President Coolidge promised an end to the annoyance and interference for listeners. Another capable G-Man, then Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, asked for the public's patience while new regulations were being worked out. Lawmakers were also frustrated. Pending legislation called the "Dill Bill" threatened to set up a committee to enact radio laws and controls and to strip Hoover of his authority. This measure failed in Congress. A committee was later formed with three commissioners who worked closely with Hoover. Attempting to sort out radio's early problems were Orestes H. Caldwell, H.A. Bellows, and Rear Admiral William H.G. Bullard. Bullard wanted to clear the airwaves by eliminating the smaller unprofessional stations. A 1925 radio conference, headed by Hoover, proposed that no new station licenses be issued until some existing ones went off the air (White Bill). Each station should be properly licensed. The suggested fee was ten cents per radiated watt for a five year duration.

The conference also urged that stations with 5,000 watts of power or more should have their own frequency and that the broadcast band stay intact allowing stations to operate between 200 to 550 meters. Speculative buying of frequencies for profit, direct commercial advertising, interference causing receivers that re-radiated signals, as well as the use of spark transmitters were discouraged. The conference sought to ban the rebroadcasting of programs without permission of the primary station. Congress was urged to appropriate more money and pass legislation to properly supervise the radio industry.

Confusion continued on the airwaves until the Federal Radio Commissions Act of 1928 and the creation of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 1934, outlined future broadcast provisions.

An early form of subscription radio was also discussed on Capital Hill. There were bills proposed to charge listeners for the stations service by requiring a "patent device" to be installed on each set to hear desired programs. This idea was unfavorable and dropped, but today is in extensive use. Cable TV continues to enjoy mass popularity across the country utilizing special boxes that detune the picture and sound to non-subscribers. Various movie channel operators have since "crossed up" private satellite dish owners by scrambling their signals, and today's FM station owners reap profits from selling "elevator" or background music to retail stores requiring a special "box" to hear sub-carrier broadcasts. The biggest supplier of background music is Muzak, Inc., founded in 1934. Telephone lines brought early Muzak programming to stores.

Incidentally, publicly programming music and commercials to stores urging shoppers to make purchases was the sole purpose of broadcasting for several early Chicago FM stations in the 1940s. This practice later became illegal. Many commercial FM stations offer a variety of subscription services for stores and businesses ranging from music to information accessible only by a decoding box sold or leased to the store. This is called SCA, or Subcarrier Authority Broadcasting.

Meanwhile the debate continued in Washington. Legislators had several tasks: (1) create a commission to regulate radio; (2) eliminate interference from too many stations; and (3) define a policy for licensing and allocating power outputs of each station. Later they would set up classes of stations ranging from full-time clear channel stations to small daytimers.

Naturally, there were charges that "radio monopolies" would be created, others opposed the creation of another division of government. Early attempts to pass legislation on the matter were struck down in the courts. The Batavia Herald reported Secretary Hoover's disappointment at the lack of progress in controlling the radio industry. "It is my prediction that \$600 million worth of radio equipment might as well be thrown into the ash can will come true unless Congress takes quick action." Congress did, they suspended all station licenses for 60 days. The stations were allowed to continue broadcasting, but their fates were undetermined.

In June of 1927 a commission was finally formed by Hoover. Provisions for a five member board was initiated and a study of each station was underway. All stations were issued temporary licenses. The Elgin Daily News predicted "mortality among broadcasting stations" as the commission began its review. This would be the first of two major frequency shuffles. The Radio Act of 1928 would combine and eliminate unnecessary and poorly run stations. The 1941 (NARBA) Radio Act, or the Havana Treaty as it was called, attempted to eliminate interference around the U.S. borders with foreign stations. This affected many stations at the high end of the AM band, raising their initial frequency. (In earlier days, the AM broadcast band only extended to 1500 Khz. It was later extended to 1600 Khz, and under FCC proposals may be extended. Early police calls were heard at 1700 Khz.) It had already



been determined that adding more stations and increasing the band width would not benefit service. The commission also observed that some stations had not been holding to their proper "wavelength." Special FCC radio equipped vans were sent to large cities to monitor radio traffic.

Elgin Antique Radio Museum Curator Dr. Ralph Muchow, a member of the Antique Radio Club of Illinois, mentioned that stations would cheat a little bit. Two stations might be licensed, let's say at 275 meters, one of the stations would shift frequency and begin broadcasting at 275.1 meters. A strong radio would be able to separate both stations for reception."

By 1928 the newly formed commission started reviewing the activities along the radio dial. Certain frequencies were set aside for full power stations to provide for continental coverage (clear channel stations). Other channels were reserved for regional and local directional and daytime only coverage. The reallocation attempted to curtail cross-talk interference in the five new radio zones across the country, especially between 600-1000 Khz. The maximum power outage was set at 25,000 watts, much later increasing to 50,000 watts. The commission also ruled that stations within 300 miles of each other could not broadcast the same program on different wavelengths. Plans were also made to eliminate or consolidate stations to clear up the radio spectrum. At that point some stations licenses were revoked and were never heard of again. Now the air was starting to clear.

With improved radio reception, once again sales of receiving sets continued to soar. The Elgin Daily Courier reported that by the end of 1928 two and own half million radio sets would be produced and installed into homes. The article pointed out that many of these sets would be replacements for outdated equipment. That year a survey showed that 85% of the homes in Chicago were served by electricity to power just about everyone's favorite past time--listening to radio.

Technological developments included better sounding speakers and new receiving, transmitting and amplifier tubes. The Radiotron UX 866, a new rectifier power supply tube by RCA, was introduced which stabilized high plate voltage in transmitters. Most new sets were designed to be plugged into alternating current, thus eliminating the sets of old that utilized heavy batteries. Meanwhile, RCA expanded radio teletype service and began development of the first car radios.

#### EARLY CONTRIBUTIONS BY ERBSTEIN AND MEYERS

Another of the earliest notations of organized radio broadcasting in the Fox Valley appeared in a 1924 issue of the Batavia Herald, the forerunner of the Batavia Chronicle. At that time the Department of Commerce issued amateur radio licenses to Robert H. Larson, son of Hugo Larson (9BGY), and to Raymond Johnson (9AJC). The stations were located in the homes of these Batavia youths. The prefix "9" stands for the Midwest, namely Wisconsin, Illinois or Indiana.

Radio was new and exciting, and there was much to be learned. The Baptist Church in Batavia even had a radio class for boys. Radio at that time consisted of mostly experimenters with a limited number of parts and knowledge. Listeners and hobbyists fashioned receiver sets utilizing "cat-whiskers." By pinpointing a selective spot on a piece of galena crystal, a radio signal could be detected. Combined with a specified number of turns of wire on the tuning coil, strong stations were picked up and advanced to the earphone wearer. A long wire stretched through trees or thrown over a fence served as the set's antenna.

The crystal sets gave way to vacuum tube models. Radio tubes were invented in 1904 by Sir John A. Fleming of Great Britain and two U.S. experimenters, Dr. Lee DeForest and Major Edwin H. Armstrong. The earliest "electric" radios consisted of one-tube, or one "bulb" sets, and were sold by department stores, gas stations and bike shops. Early listeners tuned to some twenty-five stations, including WTAS owned by wealthy Chicago lawyer Charles E. Erbstein. The station's engineer was an electronic mastermind by the name of Carl J. Meyers who, at an early age, began experimenting with radio.

Meyers built his first crystal radio at the age of 10 in Cincinnati in 1912. At the age of 14, he had a ham license (W9DN). At 15, he helped install one of the first voice transmitters in a navy ship. In June of 1922, Meyers built station WGAS for a radio exposition. The station was owned by Ray-Di-Co of Chicago and operated with 500 watts on 360 meters with other area stations. It was known as the Plymouth Station and later became WWAY.

In 1923 he operated station WWAY at Marigold Gardens in Chicago. Talents like Eddie Cantor, Sophie Tucker, and Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle were among the first to entertain on his station. Later that year, WWAY

operated from February to June 1923 from the home of FCC Inspector Lawrence Dutton, 1340 N. Homan, Chicago. WWAY left the air June 1923 after going bankrupt.

Toward the end of 1923 Meyers built Erbstein's operation at WTAS. But his career did not stop at a small suburban station. On Christmas Day 1925 Meyers became WGN's Chief Engineer. This began a lengthy innovative career with the Tribune station which helped propel WGN to its present day status as a major station in the country.

Meyers was an electronic wizard. He was the first to demonstrate the usefulness of using radio to dispatch police cars. During World War II he worked on some secret radio technology in the Navy and helped develop color TV broadcasting. He was the senior vice-president and director of engineering for WGN for over 30 years. Broadcaster Jack Brickhouse once stated that "Meyers was tinkering with radios 15 years before Marconi even invented it." Marconi experiments go back to the 1890s, but it was Meyers who realized radio's capabilities. Erbstein recognized Meyers' skills and talents and hired him on the spot. Carl's short three years with Erbstein helped him launch a long time rewarding career with WGN.

Carl John (Jack) Meyers, Carl Sr.'s son, who lives in Sleepy Hollow, related that his dad was well taken care of by Erbstein. "Charley" provided a luxurious room for Meyers on the top floor of the radio station in the coach house and bought him a Pierce Arrow Roadster for his birthday. Meyers later convinced Erbstein to take back the luxurious car for a slightly less expensive Studebaker. It was Erbstein's stipulation that Meyers be retained as an employee of WGN when Charley sold his operation to the Tribune. After all, it was Meyers who got Erbstein going in the radio business.

Both Meyers and later his son, Jack, enjoyed long years of employment with WGN. Jack Meyers also worked for WGN for over thirty years as a TV cameraman, shooting a large variety of programs. The shows ranged from Golden Gloves boxing to numerous news and sports events, as well as children's shows like Garfield Goose. Jack says his dad thought highly of Erbstein. A sketch of Erbstein was always displayed in a prominent place in the Meyers home. The senior Meyers, who passed away in 1978, was also the recipient of the prestigious Engineering Achievement Award presented by the National Association of Broadcasters around 1930.

Meyers helped Erbstein turn a used Navy ham radio set (9AWK), and earlier equipment built by George Carpenter, into a long legacy of radio in the Fox Valley area. Erbstein today is considered the "Father of Fox Valley Radio." Erbstein's life is documented in several books plus two well-written accounts of the Elgin-Hanover township area by local historian E.C. Alft.

Alft, a former Elgin Mayor, is an economics teacher at Elgin High School. He has done extensive studies of the Elgin, Streamwood, and Bartlett areas and writes a periodic column for the Elgin Daily Courier News. His historical works are under lock and key at the Gail Borden Library Reference Desk. The books are so popular that people keep stealing them as mementos of our time.

Erbstein, in Alft's book, is characterized as an intelligent, innovative, but brash lawyer who abandoned his lucrative law practice to pursue his radio interests. He could afford to, as he did what every man would like to do--gain a fortune, then do what he wanted for the rest of his life.

Charles Ephraim Erbstein was born in 1876 in Cleveland, relates one of his grandsons, Charles Boedeker of Wilmette, Illinois. Erbstein attended Chicago Kent College of Law, which is now a part of IIT, but couldn't afford the necessary textbooks. Instead he borrowed the books belonging to wealthy students and studied them on weekends. Charles and Sue Boedeker have collected many photos of the Erbstein family, enhancing this publication with several of them.

Charles and Robert of Glenview are sons of Olivia and Robert Frances Boedeker. Olivia was one of two adopted daughters of Charles and Olivia Erbstein. The Erbstein's other adopted daughter, Charlene, married Julius Sedlmayer and moved to Long Island, New York.

Charles Boedeker, born in 1940, and Charles Erbstein have much in common--the same birthday (November 18th) and the same first and middle names (middle names being spelled slightly different). Both attended the same college.

Erbstein held several odd jobs and worked as a clerk and a reporter for City News before opening a law office in 1909 at 5247 Washington Street. He later maintained offices at 68 and 76 West Monroe Street in 1917. By that time he had already gained notoriety in his law practice defending many notable criminals. He also represented women accused of killing their husbands and over 1,700 divorce cases.

Erbstein highlighted in his book, The Show Up, Stories Before the Bar, something that is very true today concerning the increasing number of divorces in this country. Out of the 1,772 cases that he handled, 656, or nearly

half, were caused by what Erbstein called "The Installment Plan." It all begins with the purchase of the engagement ring, so much down and so much a week. "The Easy Payment Plan," suggests Erbstein, "lures young couples into the sea of matrimony on a flimsy raft only to wreck them on the hidden shoals of bankruptcy and divorce."

If one would read Erbstein's book, The Show Up, they would soon see that Charley was a smart and, sometimes, lucky lawyer; like the time a murder suspect was tied to the crime scene by a hat that he supposedly left behind. When Erbstein tried the hat on his client, the suspect, the hat was much too big. The jury laughed as they went out to deliberate returning a "not guilty" verdict 15 minutes later. Erbstein often intimidated juries and prosecutors to the point that he had to successfully defend himself against disbarment.

Erbstein indeed had the wisdom of Perry Mason, the dramatics of Clarence Darrow, and the cunningness of a trickster. These tools were used over and over again to sway juries. A Dixon lawyer, Howard Smith, recalls being in court many times with Erbstein. Smith was amazed by Erbstein's courtroom antics and how evidence in cases would suddenly appear. Smith, in 1924, also sold advertising for WGN for four years.

Erbstein apparently felt that radio broadcasting was more of a challenge and gave up his lucrative law practice. His personal interest in the field set the stage and planted the programming ideals enjoyed by today's broadcasters: Give the public what they wanted and plenty of it! Later pages in this book will highlight many of his broadcast innovations.

### ON THE AIR EVERYWHERE

At home the interest on the airwaves seemed to center around politics. The public wanted to know who was saying what in Washington that would later shape their way of life. Concerts, dance music and religion continued to amass the radio dial. Everyone was out to capitalize on radio; it had become a part of our life to stay.

In New York, in 1928, a judge sentenced a quarreling couple to "30 days." Each night for a month they had to stay at home and dance with each other to the radio. Prior to this in 1922, a judge had prohibited a couple to be married by radio stating the pair must be in view of each other. A Los Angeles man had also purchased a steel coffin and had it equipped with a radio set. Fred R. Kimball, age 79, wanted to keep in touch with the news until the Judgement Day.

During each September National Radio Week was observed. A columnist happily proclaimed "60 million dial twisters who have been harassed by hetrodynes (annoying ringing sounds caused by interference) who live more than 100 miles from a station will derive the greatest benefit from the new radio frequency reallocation."

Technological advances also affected the stations themselves. Suburban stations as early as 1924 had begun to broadcast programs from Chicago through telephone lines. The WDII detector tube was invented. News events were recorded on disc on location.

In 1937 the most famous of these events was the radio account of the Hindenburg Disaster. The explosion of the dirigible as reported by Herbert Morrison, of WLS, has been played over and over in speech and broadcasting classes for years and remains an epic in the field of early journalism.

In the late 30's Network Radio began to develop. NBC's Red and Blue networks spawned the legacy of many programs like Fred Allen, Jack Benny, and Amos 'n Andy. These are considered radio classics today. By 1945 NBC's blue network became the American Broadcasting Company. Listeners in the Midwest enjoyed entertaining programs like Art Page's Dinner Bell program on WLS. They were also inspired by radio dramas presented by Chicago's Pacific Garden Mission's "Unshackled" program. Even the enemy was listening. Comments about weather conditions were strictly forbidden during wartime. This regulation must have totally frustrated sportscaster Bob Elson's call of a Bears game one foggy day in Chicago. The "Commander" couldn't tell the radio audience why it was taking so long to call the plays. Weather information served as "aid and comfort to the enemy."

Music programs were always popular. Live orchestras from a variety of Chicagoland ballrooms pranced on the radio dial each night. The Trianon, Guyon's Rainbow Ballroom, and Marigold Gardens featured nightly dance programs from Chicago. But by 1927 the Federal Radio Commission passed a ruling that if a phonograph record was being aired, the announcer must say on the air that it is a record, not a live band. Some of the earliest band recordings were produced at the Starlite Room Studios at the Webster Hotel in Chicago. Victor Records maintained a studio there. Records, news, religion and entertainment, all at the touch of a button. But where could one buy one of these innovative little boxes that could bring these sounds right into your living room? Department stores, bicycle shops, and gas stations all sold radio sets. Merchants were eager to sell this new "hot ticket" item.



## The Sale of the Century

As radio sales soared shop owners stock piled large varieties of sets. Dr. Muchow has collected numerous newspaper ads that appeared showing prices and features of the early sets. In smaller print the consumer found out the price did not always include tubes or the speaker. However, as exciting as radio was, not everyone wanted one. It was "like pulling teeth" selling a radio to a farmer, said the Elgin dentist. "They thought radios would catch fire and burn down their barns." Dr. Muchow's pick of the best radio sets was the Atwater-Kent brand manufactured in Philadelphia around 1927. He called them the "Cadillac of the radio lines." The company went out of business rather than sacrifice on quality during war cutbacks on certain materials. The firm also sponsored their own network radio program.

Incidentally, some parts for Atwater-Kent radios were made by the Neucomb-Hawley Company in St. Charles. City Historian Earling Holmstrom stated the firm operated three plants. One was located at 201 First Avenue North near State Avenue, which was knocked down in 1974 and is now a parking lot near the fire station. An adjacent office building at 10 State Avenue is also believed to have been part of the firm's property at one time. The other facility was located behind the Harris State Bank of St. Charles' parking lot on Route 64 east of the Fox River at 201 First Avenue South (also listed in 1928 as 100 S. First Avenue). It burned down in the early 30's. A large turbine used to generate electricity from the running waters of the Fox River for the plant has been made into a monument behind the bank. Some other warehouses nearby were also believed used by the firm.

The company moved to a third location at 333 North 6th Street. This building was once owned by Colonel Fabyan. The west side firm manufactured molded paper and fiber products, including speaker cones and hats. Workers were paid 26 cents an hour in 1932 to work at the company's plants.

About the same time electro-static speakers were being tested by Riverbank Laboratories. The firm is located on Route 31 south of Batavia. These were large horn-like devices that were later referred to as "morning glory speakers," because they resembled large flowers. Colonel George Fabyan founded the company in 1918 which today specializes in acoustic research. Don Williams (W9KYO) of Batavia, was born on the Riverbank property. His father Bert was Fabyan's chauffeur. Williams worked for over 35 years as an engineer at the plant. Today, the company is operated by ITT. Research continues in acoustics and in the manufacturing of tuning forks and choir chimes. Williams explained that the early speakers designed by Riverbank contained metal grids and rubber diaphragms covered with a thin strip of aluminum. When a large DC voltage was applied, the speaker was activated sending the sound through the horn. Modern speakers contain permanent magnets.

Another early Riverbank employee, Fred W. Kranz of 615 S. South Street, Geneva, was one of several partners of the short-lived Eclipse Radio Company in 1922.

The Geneva firm was located in the Maher Building believed to be the old candle company building at 318 Anderson Boulevard.

Kranz continued his career as research director of Neucomb-Hawley in St. Charles, and later with another firm called United Producers Corporation, which manufactured speakers. The name, Neucomb-Hawley, was later changed to Hawley Products. In 1984 Hawley's was changed to Applied Composites, which presently occupies the same building at 333 N. 6th Street in St. Charles. The plant today makes plastic molded products. Around 1990, the firm's name was changed to B. P. Chemicals.

A partial list of radio distributors in the 1920s that advertised in local newspapers and some of the brands they carried are:

1. A.B. Cooley, Joliet. Sold Federal Ortho Sonic Sound radios and A.C. Dayton brands.
2. M. Abelman & Son, Spring/DuPage Streets, Elgin. All brands.
3. Ackemann's Home Furnishing Center, 168 E. Highland Avenue, Elgin. Still in business today--radio brands sold: Atwater-Kent, Garod, Amrad, Magnavox, and Argus.
4. George V. Andrews, First National Bank, Marengo. Majestic.
5. Apex Radio Shop, 225 E. Chicago Street, Elgin.
6. Automotive Battery Company, 210 DuPage, elgin. Sold Westinghouse and Prest-o-Lite batteries.
7. Automotive Electric Company, 518 W. Second St., St. Charles, IL.
8. L.A. Barmann, 136 Cass Street, Woodstock, IL.
9. Barrett Hardware 65-69 N. Ottawa, Joliet. Sold Philco radio sets.
10. Bego Mfg. Co., 844 Adams, Chicago. RCA.
11. Fritz E. Carlson's, Batavia Bicycle & Electric Shop, 91 West Wilson Street, Batavia. Sold Atwater-Kent.

12. Clark Radio-Print Shop, 128 S. 2nd Street, DeKalb, 1924 deForest and other bands. deForest Reflex Radio Phones "sold by the man who invented broadcasting and the vacuum tube," the Audion. Dr. Lee deForest.
13. Coppotelli Music and Radio Shops, 20 Illinois Street, Chicago Heights, Illinois, and 303 East Van Buren Street, Joliet sold Operadio sets.
14. Eclipse Radio Company, Maher Building, 318 Anderson Blvd., Geneva. Owned by Oscar Nelson (Illinois State Treasurer) and H.E. Kranz (Geneva businessman), F.W. Kranz (brother), E.R. Wells, J. Anderson, and C.A. Ashley in 1922.
15. Ekman & Anderson, 67 S. Batavia Avenue, Batavia. Sold Spartan radios.
16. Electric Chandelier Company, 29 S. First St., Geneva. Lucas W. Maher, owner/operator in 1924. This building is believed to be formally the old Swedish M.E. Church.
17. Electrical Equipment Company, 23 S. Spring St., and 207 E. Chicago Street, 2nd Floor, Elgin. Sold Westinghouse radios.
18. Elgin Electric Supply, 157 Brook Street, Elgin.
19. Elgin Radio Corporation, 8 South Spring Street, Elgin. Supertron Radio tubes.
20. Elgin Tool Works (Fox Electric Supply), 67-69 North State Street, Elgin. Ernest Hassellquist. Radio supplies, Lawrence Radio Sets.
21. Elgin Washer & Poultry Sales Co., 63 South Grove Avenue, Elgin. Sold Crosley Radio sets.
22. Enterprise Furniture, 412-416 N. Chicago, Joliet. Sold Kellogg Radio Sets.
23. Expert Radio Repair Service "The little old radio man" Arthur A Kraus, 471 Scott Street, 927-31 Jefferson Street, Joliet, IL from 1932-1988. Sold Admiral, RCA, Zenith, holds 4 electrical patents, operated cable TV firm.
24. The Fair, a State Street department store, Chicago. Sold all major brands including Freshman (made by the Earl Company 1924-1932), Majestic and Stewart-Warner. The Fair (now Wards) owned WGU which later became WMAQ.
25. Fairchild's, 620 Wright Street, Elgin. Sold RCA and Motorola.
26. M.A. Felman Company ("Will County's Largest Store"), The Boston Store, Joliet. Owned WCLS, 301 E. Jefferson.
27. R.D. Fries, 95 South LaSalle, Aurora. Sold Neutrowound, "The Go-Getter of Radio". Neutrowound also owned and operated WOK, a 5,000 watt station at 1380 khz, in Homewood, Illinois in 1926.
28. Graham and Crombie, 1000 Collins St., Joliet.
29. Hogan Electric, 111 Newell, Woodstock, IL; parts.
30. Hubbell Motor Company of Elgin. Sold Bosch, (American Bosch Magneto Co.) Atwater-Kent, Sonora, offered free radio logs.
31. A.J. Johnson, Woodstock, IL. RCA, Radiola.
32. Johnson Radio Supply, 820 Cass, Joliet, IL.
33. Sperner C. Johnson, 104 West Chicago Street, Elgin. Spartan Radio.
34. Kelly Bros., Woodstock. Sold Kennedy Radios.
35. Kennell Bros., 160 East Chicago, Elgin. All brands.
36. Kimball Furniture, 14 S. Grove Street, Elgin. RCA, Zenith.
37. E.W. Lawson, 215 Chicago Street, Elgin. Sold Michigan Radio Corporation sets.
38. LSK Radio, 104 N. Spring Street, Elgin. Sold Admiral sets.
39. Majestic Radio Company, N. State Street, Elgin. Majestic radios. This plant was located on the property of Chicago Rawhide. It also operated another facility near the DuPage airport.
40. McCulla Radio Store, 107 Madison and 146 1/2 Genesee Street, Waukegan. Employees H. Kozel and H. Bashkin.
41. Motorola Corporation, 1200 St. Charles Street, Elgin.
42. Neucomb-Hawley, 333 N. 6th Street, St. Charles. Peter Akerand, vice president, made parts for Atwater-Kent and speaker cones (with two other locations on First Avenue).
43. Nolan Television and Appliances, 109 Van Buren, Woodstock. Various brands.
44. Operadio. Several plant locations in St. Charles (now the DuKane Corporation).
45. P.A. Renie Radio Service, Union, IL; parts and repairs.
46. Ray-Di-Co, Inc., 1547 N. Wells St., Chicago. Manufactured its own sets and operated station WGAS (WWAY). The station was located at 1215 Lehland Ave., Chicago. WGN engineer Carl Meyers got his start here.
47. Rex Radio Company, W.J. Josecelyn & C.R. Shenberger, Marengo, IL.
48. Fred Richter, Batavia Eastside Shoe Dealer. Sold Mohawk radios.



49. Orlo E. Salisbury, automobile dealer, 141 S. Grove Avenue, Elgin. Sold radio kits.
50. Sampson Electric, 3201 South Michigan, Chicago. Atwater-Kent.
51. Sanders Brothers Tire and Accessory Store, 607 Jefferson, Joliet. Sold all types of radio sets, including Crosley; operated radio stations WKBB.
52. Schickler & Miller, 28 South Broadway, Aurora. Sold Sonora "clear as a bell" radios.
53. Schmidt, Herman. Electrical Reapri Shop, 91 Main Street, West Dundee.
54. Major Ray Schoonhoven, 313 Seneca, Elgin. Manufactured and sold tuner coils.
55. J.C. Seaton Pianos, 13 Fox Street, Aurora. Sold Fada radios.
56. John D. Shaw, 106 Milwaukee Street, Chicago. Sold Beckley-Ralston radios.
57. Silver-Marshall, Inc., 105 S. Wabash, Chicago. Radio supplies.
58. Sinclair & Dewey Rexall Drug Store, 120 W. Main Street, West Dundee. Sold RCA Radiola.
59. Charlie Singer Electric, 57 Douglas, 66 South Grove (Fountain Place) 1930-1972. All brands.
60. Vernon Smith, 112 W. Main Street, West Dundee.
61. William Stillman, 147 Main, Batavia. Magnavox radio sets.
62. Frank G. Sutflin, 350 S. Eighth Street, West Dundee. Maintained small repair shop in barn in rear of property. Sold Westinghouse sets. (Note: Frank's brothers, Reuben and William, started Citizens Light and Power Company in 1892 in Dundee.)
63. Tillman Jewelry Shoppe, Chicago/Spring Streets, Elgin. Fada Radios.
64. Wendell/Splitgerber, 7 (or 13) Douglas, Elgin. Sold all radio brands.
65. Whitney Battery Co., 133 First Ave., Batavia.
66. Wireless Telephone & Electric Company, R.D. Warner, Owner, Aurora Hotel Building.
67. Willard Battery Co., 56 River Street, Elgin, R.H. Arthur, owner. Sold Atwater-Kent. (River Street now Grove Avenue).
68. X-L Radio Service, 223 Van Buren, Joliet. Sold Atwater-Kent sets and owned WIBD radio station.

There were other brands, too, like Temple, Garod (1923), Radiola (RCA), Arway, Freed Eisemann, Bremer-Telley, Pathe, Richardson, Amrad (American Radio & Research Corporation taken over by Crosley in 1921). A good example of each of these fine radio sets can be found today in Dr. Muchow's Radio Museum at 107 Center Street, Elgin. Batavia resident Cliff Anderson, who used to repair sets, once stated "You knew you had a good set if you could pick up KFI in Los Angeles."

Now that you had a radio, where to listen was no problem either. A variety of radio logs were printed and up-to-date listenings were regular features of local newspapers. The papers often featured columnists who would answer radio design questions sent in by readers. The newspapers themselves carried stories about boxer Jack Dempsey, the death of actor Rudolph Valentino, Charlie Chaplin's scandalous divorce, the Black Sox scandal, the days of John Dillinger...these historic news events parallel the early development of radio. Correlating these events gives us an idea as to how long radio has been with us.

### RADIO'S LATER YEARS

In the late 40's and early 50's another era of radio began. It included the development of early FM broadcasting. Among the Midwest pioneers were John Jage who managed WRBI-FM (1000 watts at 94.3 mhz) in Blue Island, Illinois, and Anthony Santucci owner of WCHI-FM (250 watts at 95.9 mhz). WCHI was formally the call letters of a Batavia station and were issued the second time around to Santucci, standing for Chicago Heights, Illinois. Today, Tony operates WCGO/WTAS-FM in the same south suburban community. Jage became a morning talk show host across the state line on WLTH, Gary, Indiana.

Early FM although static free had problems. There were not enough FM sets around, so Jage bought sets from Zenith at \$19.00 each and resold them at cost just to get them into the hands of the public.

The early sets were poorly designed and drifted off frequency very easily. There were also FM line of sight problems with small 250 watt stations. Santucci also pointed out that the public could have been confused by the fact that there were two FM bands. The first FM frequencies, where Zenith operated their station, W51C (WWZR), were located between 40-50 mhz. This band was affected by "skip" or interference from distant foreign broadcasters. RCA president David Sarnoff urged the FCC to move the band. According to a PBS documentary, "Empire of the Air," Sarnoff's move was a ploy to ruin the work and earlier success of Edwin H. Armstrong, the inventor of frequency modulation broadcasting.

By 1946, the FM band had been moved to its present location of 88-108 mhz., between TV channels 5 and 6 (TV channel 1 had been dropped also). Most problems were then eliminated except for occasional TV-FM harmonic interference. The first area simulated stereo broadcasts were performed by Jage in the early 50's.

Listeners using an AM radio tuned to WJOB-AM, Hammond, Indiana, and an FM receiver tuned to its "sister" station WJIZ-FM could hear two channel separation if both radios were located in the same room.

Jage arranged a concert to be simulcast on both stations from a popular bowling alley in Burnham, Illinois, the Playbowl, located at 156th and Burnham Avenue. The Four Freshmen, a well-known male singing group of the time, were featured on the program. WJOB engineers Earl Vieaux and Jess Peters did some church broadcasts in the same fashion. Vieaux was believed to be first with another idea to legally rebroadcast phone conversations over the air, beginning with servicemen on Christmas in 1952. Vieaux now works for WCGO; Peters is an engineer for WIND.

During the 1950s, many AM station owners considered FM unprofitable and a waste of time and proceeded to delete their FM operations. Many early FM stations went off the air for good in the late 40's and early 50's including the Chicago Tribune's powerful WGNB 98.7 mhz. The 35,000 watt FM station operated from 1947 to 1954.

By the 1980s, the tables had been reversed. In many areas, FM stations became more popular than conventional AM stations. While AM stations struggled with mostly informational formats, FM outlets became giant metro music stations. This popular trend had been noted in a 1975 Arbitron survey which reported an 81% increase in FM listening over the past five years.

In 1992, the FCC listed 197 silent AM operations. Perhaps future government proposals for AM stereo and widening of the AM band to 1700 khz will help ease congestion and revive AM broadcasting. However, radios that tune to these new higher frequencies will have to be quickly mass produced to avoid the pitfalls that early FM suffered in the late 1940s, namely many new stations and no radios to hear them.

Other recent radio notes include the beginning of the first all news station, WINS, in New York City in 1965. WINS was originally a pop music station in the 1950s which starred the "King of Rock & Roll" Alan Freed, who ironically passed away that year. Freed's work helped spawn the careers of other disc jockeys including Murray the K and American Bandstand's Dick Clark. Speaking of music, America's first disc jockey, Martin Block, who emceed the "Make Believe Ballroom" from 1935-1954 in New York, passed away in 1967.

Veteran radio commentator Westbrook Van Voorhis, known for "The March of Time" broadcasts from 1931-1953, passed away in 1968. Cigarette advertising on radio was snuffed out in 1970. National Public Radio began in 1971.

On commercial radio, the FCC warned FM stations that were beginning to play more and more music not to program records that promoted the sale of illegal drugs. The FCC also cracked down on so called "topless radio" in 1973, prohibiting the airing of sex-oriented telephone call-in shows (see WGLD, Oak Park). World Book Encyclopedia in 1974 noted that over one thousand stations were now playing country and western music, up from 81 stations the year before. People all over the United States were finding out that they could get their jobs, dogs, trucks and wives back, as well as stop drinking, by listening to country music records backwards.

In 1975, another well-known radio voice, Lowell Thomas, retired after 46 years of broadcasting news and commentaries. He pass away in 1981.

In 1987, the FCC mandated the "Fairness Doctrine" to allow air time to citizens with opposing viewpoints. That year also marked the passing of Elgin's Earl "Madman" Muntz, a promoter of automobiles, TV sets, and car stereos since the 1930s. It was Muntz's zany advertisements that brought him much fame and visibility in the various business enterprises he operated. In 1954, Muntz teamed up with Toledo engineer George Eash to develop the plastic tape cartridge (Muntz Stereopak) that lead to the mass production of car tape players and broadcast cart machines. Muntz operated a finance and auto business at 229 National Street in Elgin around 1940.

Getting back to radio, contemporary and beautiful music formats dominated most radio station formats in the 1980s with most AM stations becoming news-talk operations in the early 1990s. The majority of the FM stations today continue with a mix of popular music aimed at certain age and ethnic groups. Sometimes they all sound the same. Thank goodness for push button tuning.

What got me interested in preparing this book was the abundance of station listings supplied by Tom Kneitel. Tom's book, "Radio Station Treasury 1900-1946," revealed many stations that existed during the 1920s and radio's early years, how they operated and what happened to them. The interest was further fueled by Marty Zivin of WRMN, Elgin, who told me about the early years of WGN in Elgin at the old Borden building on U.S. 20. Jan Lowry, of Broadcast Profile in Hollywood, California, added extra spice to the project. A look at radio, old and new, will be attempted in the next chapters. Tom, Marty and Jan: You guys got me hooked.

## THE HISTORY OF THE VILLA OLIVIA AREA

Our story actually begins just prior to the summer of 1919. Erbstein had built a successful law practice dealing with criminal cases and divorces. Coming to the Elgin Area periodically since 1915, the Erbstein family was interested in auto racing, but during one visit became entranced with the beauty of the Fox Valley Area. This included the rolling hills of small farms along Lake Street (U.S. 20, formerly the Grant Highway or Villa Street) east

of Elgin. Among the owners of these farms were Henry Gromer, Dr. Charles C. W. Sharp, Henry Boehning and Charles Gromer.

Henry Gromer was one of the commissioners of the local schoolhouse, Spaulding School, which was located south of Villa Olivia off of Naperville Road on Spaulding Road. One of Henry's daughters, Luella Bjick, relates that she was a young playmate of one of Erbstein's daughters, Olivia. Erbstein also had a son, Charles, and another daughter, Charlene.

Henry Gromer purchased the Sharp Farm. Henry's grandson, Richard Gromer, was born on the property and today is the owner of a large supermarket on McLean Boulevard in Elgin. Gromer also owned another store including one on National Street on the site of the old Elgin Watch Factory. The factory was torn down in 1966.

Luella remembers that her father, Henry, sold ten acres to Erbstein. Charley liked the home, perched on a hill overlooking the Elgin area, and named the property "Villa Olivia" after his wife and daughter. Mrs. Bjick remembers that the Erbsteins remodeled the home installing a large billiard room on the east side of the home. On the west side of the structure was a large sunroom for plants. The home included seven bedrooms, a butler's pantry and a large dining room. A swimming pool, golf course, and pond were built later. A barn-like building nearby became a carriage house and later Erbstein's radio studio. The fully equipped radio station was built in the upper room of the structure. It was remodeled to resemble the inside of a ship's radio room complete with port holes and a ship's clock. Large auxiliary generators were installed in the lower level of the building.

Elgin resident Herb Covey, who used to be in the TV repair business, remembers the station's headquarters as resembling the inside of a submarine. As a youth, Covey was hired to do maintenance work at Villa Olivia and spent many afternoons picking weeds at the Erbstein mansion. He later sold appliances and fixed radios and TV sets at Singer Electric. Herb was also secretary of the Elgin Owls Radio Listening Club in 1923.

Covey's cousin, Ray Schoonhoven, a Major in the Armed Services, of 313 Seneca, Elgin, employed several women to manufacture tuner coils designed by Schoonhoven. Some of Schoonhoven's products are on display in Dr. Muchow's radio museum.

According to Phil and Dan Corrado, the present owners of Villa Olivia, the Erbstein mansion, complete with guy wires running everywhere, and all other buildings were knocked down about ten years ago. Today the only remaining Erbstein building is a white stucco pumphouse which stores the pumping equipment for the complex swimming pool. The pool still exists as does the golf course built by Mrs. Erbstein for her husband. The Corrado family later purchased the estate from Erbstein's former grounds superintendent Walter Wallace, who was attempting to buy the property on contract.

The president of Villa Olivia, Phil Corrado, says the exquisite country club now spans 146 acres. It includes a country club, sports shop and the popular Peter Sharp Hill, used for winter skiing. The dangerous curve on Route 20 around Villa Olivia resulted from Erbstein's successful show of force to keep the state from running the road through his property.

Another Erbstein landmark was a nearby roadhouse known as the "Purple Grackle," where live band broadcasts took place. The "Grackle" was managed by Erbstein's brother-in-law, Val King.

In the late 1920s, a wire was strung between the Purple Grackle and Villa Olivia for band broadcasts on WTAS. Surrounded by a grove of evergreen trees, the rounded white stucco structure stood on the south side of Route 20 facing west. Its location is approximately between the extension of Bluff City Boulevard and the eastbound lanes of the Route 20 bypass, east of another notable establishment, Max and Marge's.

A winding stone driveway which was in better shape than Route 20 itself, circled the building with parking on the west side. A small garage or outbuilding was located on the rear of the property to the south.

Some of the best descriptions of the Purple Grackle come from former Elgin Justice of the Peace Donald T. Anderson. Judge Anderson's memory is explicit in recalling the "Grackle" and the other numerous bars and roadhouses that dotted Route 20 from Chicago to Marengo.

It could be said that the good judge sat on both sides of the "bar". He worked his way through law school as a bellboy at the old Fox Hotel in Elgin and was a drummer in several area bands, including the Don Beverly Trio. (Beverly played sax and clarinet and Carl Greiner was the pianist). This trio was the last music that was heard in the Grackle, according to the Judge. "This was all night in June or July of 1955," remembers the well-liked traffic magistrate. The music usually began about 10:30 p.m. and went until 4:00 a.m., when it was cleaned and swept and re-opened at 7:00 a.m.

The Judge maintains that the place stayed open until it was demolished by the state to build the bypass. Others say that all the old bars along Route 20 had been vandalized, or boarded up, long before state demolition.

From Judge Anderson's perch on the small elevated stage behind the bar he could see a variety of illicit activities going on around him. The judge let out a hardy laugh when he recalled that Blackjack, call girls and bookmaking ran rampant in the place. "Women called '26 girls' would roll the dice for you," remarked Anderson. "Players needed 26 points to win." Former Elgin City Building Inspector Fred Ackmann's Uncle, Alvin, was a card dealer in the Grackle. (Fred is the brother-in-law to Luella Bjick).



The judge says that band members usually ignored the festivities going on in the place and on the dance floor. When shootings would breakout, they would duck the stray bullets and resume playing once the gunfire stopped. There were at least two murders in the parking lot, the Judge recalled, but he does not remember any fires there.

The building's west entrance featured an open solid cement porch-like structure with four or five steps and a short roof over the doorway. It was supported by two smooth solid pillars, probably made out of cement, according to the Judge.

In later years the entry was guarded by two large heavy doors that were either red or mahogany. A bouncer inside kept unwanted patrons out. One Elgin resident stated that the place resembled a speakeasy from the 1930s.

Once inside the judge noted the following structures: a coat check area, a hallway with a winding staircase that led upstairs which was usually locked, washrooms, and a large bar room. In the bar room was a horseshoe shaped bar, booths, and next to it a large ballroom. The staircase leading upstairs featured a balcony and the apartment of Clyde and Jean West, the rumored last manager's of the Purple Grackle. They each drove Cadillacs and parked them in the garage behind the building.

It was unclear at times who the owners or managers were through the years. Max Burstein and Ralph Epstein operated the Purple Grackle in 1934-35 for Mrs. Erbstein. She sold the property around 1943.

The Purple Grackle measured 62 X 70 feet, according to an old state survey, was rounded at each end, both north and south, and was built very solid. Skylights about 35 feet above the ballroom floor on the north end of the building let in sunlight during the day. The judge says there were no windows at eye level. Sometimes an accordion player would go around to the tables in the dining area. The audience always consisted of newspapermen looking for a good "scoop" or to keep track of the notables frequenting the place.

Some of the judges' description of the Purple Grackle and its activities meander back and forth to what the place was like when Erbstein owned it and what it later became. For most of the time the Grackle was outside of the city limits, which permitted a host of illegal activities to prosper even in later years. The judges' recollection of the size and the description of the building seems to follow closely with some state documents and an actual photo obtained from the Elgin Daily Courier News before the building was torn down.

In later years the Purple Grackle was well-known for its bookmaking activities. The newspapers, along with WGN radio, carried news of the numerous raids that took place there. One of the more well-known "bookies" was a man named Jim Flood. Judge Anderson stated that name was probably an alias.

Sometime later one area resident scouring the four-acre site, sifted through the building rubble. He discovered many old photographs of patrons apparently taken through keyhole openings in the walls. There were no doubts as to the existence of secret doors or compartments which served as hiding places. This information parallels the kind of scenario our publication found in writing about another old station in Forest Park and the building which shrouded its activities.

By 1957 one state worker stated that the Purple Grackle had been reduced to an oval foundation. According to a state contract, the building and its four acres of property were sold to the state by Michael and Margret Marchese on April 21, 1955 for ten dollars and other valuable considerations. (Adjacent property with buildings owned by Harriet Baker were sold for considerably higher prices).

Elgin businessman Chuck Hines, who operates "Anything But Animals," in downtown Elgin, an antique collectibles and clothing store, sells napkins obtained from the Grackle. He also described the place as a "mobster roadhouse," but had no trouble sneaking in for a beer even as a minor.

Remembered only by past patrons willing to admit that they used to go there, the Purple Grackle was typical of the many bars of the time in the area. Today, just an obscure section of land, life in the fast track means cars and 18 wheelers which now rumble past were the Grackle once stood. They have replaced the buses, cattle wagons, and old cars with party goers that traveled old Route 20 back then, heading for a good time at the Purple Grackle.

### U.S. 20'S Notorious Past

The area along Route 20 since the Purple Grackle days has undergone massive changes. It would be suiting to take a historical pause to recall what this area was like prior to the Route 20 bypass construction.

It should be noted that the whole project had been under consideration since 1935. The only major delays were the clearing of the numerous structures along Route 20 and the construction of the bridge over the Fox River. The stage of acquisitions of properties between Lovell Road and Gifford Road included the Purple Grackle and numerous other establishments. The completion of the bypass resulted in the extension of Bluff City Boulevard and the elimination of the Grackle and its activities. The end result was a modern route for motorists around Elgin. In order to accomplish this, the state purchased these old bars, as well as numerous right of ways and frontages.

From old plat maps state employees David Starr, Jim Evers and Fred Seeley, and long time area residents Joe Lenz, Bob Blanchard, and Judge Anderson have pieced together the various business places as they stood when the Purple Grackle was in operation.

Heading East to West on old Route 20 were places like the Lester Boehning Farm, located near the Safety Kleen plant, on the north side of the street west of the E.J. & E. Overpass. Lester's brother Harry and wife Jerry owned a farm on the south side of the road and east of the viaduct near the old Maywood stables. Their father, Henry Boehning, had been a farmer in the area for many years. The Shell Oil Company also owned some property near the plant.

The Crystal Brook Stock Farm was located to the west of the tracks on the north side of Route 20. This land was once owned by the E.C. Cronwall Company. Across the street, before the land was subdivided, two men, Henry Siems or Siema and William Ramsay, owned 165 acres (around 1915) which included the property where the Purple Grackle was later built. According to an old tract book, later owners of the property were Charles Veeder, Walter E. Healy, George W. Glos, and Frank A. McCarthy, as well as much earlier the Joliet Sand and Gravel Company. The Purple Grackle, or "Motor Inn" as it was earlier called, could have been built by any one of the above. At least two liens were filed against the property in the late 1920s by area contractors.

Starting back on the south side of Route 20, west of the viaduct, over the years the property was owned by the Public Service Company, Pott-NGE-R's Nursery, and Chicago Sand and Gravel. Farther west on Route 20 were Emil Brandner's Highway Lumber, auto dealer Harry Pierce's Diamond Tool Company, and Carl Mitchell's Comet Motel. Judge Anderson referred to the motel as a "quick sheet joint," infamous for its fast customer turnover. The motel, built around 1955, has been extensively remodeled by the Ray Graham Association and Institute for Human Development. The building was renamed Beverly Lake, a center for handicapped adults.

The Précision Diamond and Tool Company is located just to the west. Once located near the motel was Twin Gables, recalls Bob Blanchard who owns a feed and western store on Route 25 in St. Charles. It opened about 1937 and was managed by the Dorsey and King families, relatives of Charles Erbstein. The restaurant changed hands many times over the years. It was last owned by Marie Whitting. The 1949 City Directory lists the owner as M.H. Bongard. Twin Gables was destroyed in a suspicious fire November 27, 1951.

To the south of Bluff City Boulevard were numerous scrap yards including Kimball's, Polick's, and Highway Auto. Maurice Kaplan owned a large scrap yard in later years in the area. Going west from the Twin Gables was a home once owned by cement contractor Joe Lenz. Then came the four acre site of the Purple Grackle. Next to the Grackle was a trailer sized bar called Vera's Place, owned by William and Vera Heine. The bar is remembered for not having any indoor plumbing in the late 1940s. A hanging reportedly took place there.

Just to the west was Fred "Bitz" Zimmerli's place, which later became Jack Olsen's Log Cabin Tavern. Zimmerli's had sold out and moved south near the quarry, where a government raid finally closed him out. This is according to his brother John who operated a garage business in Elgin. John Zimmerli relates that all the bars then were controlled by the Capone Family. They sold the alcohol to the places, who then mixed it with near beer to stretch it still further.

In 1943, Max C. Wilcox bought the Log Cabin property, opening up "Max and Marge's Tavern." The Purple Grackle, noted for its rampant gambling and later wrestling matches, is not to be confused with its nearby and sometimes rowdy neighbor Max and Marge's. In the 1940s "M and M's" was notoriously known for numerous beer brawls and dangerous fights. Patrons often used broken beer bottles as weapons against each other.

One well-renowned episode, Elgin resident Vince Frisby recounts that a customer borrowed a flashlight from the bartender. He then used it to smack another patron on the head, knocking him out.

In 1959, the State bought the tavern property for the route 20 bypass. The operators of the tavern repurchased the building from the state for five hundred dollars and moved it south to its present location on the southeast corner of Bluff City Boulevard and Gifford Road (Stelford Place/1157 Bluff City Blvd.). The State paid \$24,500 for 1.8 acres of the property which was owned at that time by George B. Carbary, a well-known lawyer and area political figure, Warren E. Carbary, and George Turnquist.

Today, Max and Marge's is still family-owned and is popular lunch and drinking establishment. In a 1948 City Directory, the bar is listed as Max and Mary's. Both Olsen and Wilcox had wives name Marge. Many of these places are remembered by Bob Blanchard, who used to transport horses and cattle through the area, and by Judge Anderson. The place is known today as "Bubba McDuffy's".

The good judge adds to the regional list of bars up and down route 20, which includes in the Spaulding area John Pauley's Bar, who used to play for the White Sox. There was Bob's Restaurant, which resembled a gas station near Bartlett Corners. Lots of political figures used to go there. Further east Judge Anderson recalls Dr. Nelson's Restaurant which later became Clyde's Bar-X. This bar was located near route 59 and was later operated by Dewey Kane.

In the vicinity in later years was the "no tell" Jo-El Motel. Near Max and Marge's was Willow Gardens, later known as the "Trocadero," or something close to that. (A dance hall called "Trocadero" was located in Rockford at Charles Street around Broadway Avenue.) Further west on route 20 west of Elgin was the Moonlight Gardens Dance Hall near Red Barn road towards Udina. Today this place would be located on the rear property of a home at 27W774 West route 20.

Traveling through the area today shows little evidence of the types of activities that used to take place in the numerous bars and roadhouses that used to be located along Route 20. Our historical trip along Route 20 and the Villa Olivia area attempted to capture what used to be and points out the changes that are now apparent. It is here that the story of Fox Valley Radio begins and moves forward.

Erbstein's purchase of the Purple Grackle in May of 1923, provided a setting for live music for his radio stations. Erbstein later acquired more land for a riding stable and race track across the street from Villa Olivia. The stable building is now an old crumbling structure standing in the rear of the property owned by the Ace Coffee Bar offices on route 20 next to the old Borden building (now Pet AG). The sad shape of this fine Spanish-styled building contains brick stalls with marble shower floors. Long time area businessman Bob Blanchard recalls the jockeys had apartments upstairs in the structure. A wide race track was located in front and surrounding a large flag pole.

By 1923 Villa Olivia now included 53 acres. Luella Bjick remembers the Erbstein's as a generous family giving her first wristwatch. Erbstein's children were tutored by Esther Frisby, Jack and Vince Frisby's aunt. The Frisby's, also of Elgin, stated that their aunt was picked up by a limo and taken to the tutoring sessions.

Other long time area residents Beatrice Dorsey and Marie Floto knew much about the Erbstein family. Marie listened to Erbstein's broadcasts on a crystal radio set made by her brother, Clarence McMahon. Marie and her family would often break apart the family's radio set headphones so that more than one person could listen at a time. Beatrice remembers some of Charley's antics on radio and even sang on the station herself. Three of the popular songs of the time were "Horsey, Keep Your Tail Up High To Keep the Sun Out of My Eyes," "When You and I Were Young" and "The Cremation of Sam McGee." Charley also sang duets with his sister-in-law, Addie Hahn, or would talk, tell jokes, or read poetry for hours without a script. There was never any "stand by please," or "pregnant pauses" on WTAS with Erbstein at the mike, especially at the Purple Grackle. While Mrs. Erbstein was vacationing at their winter home in Palm Beach, Florida, she often heard her husband singing to her over the radio, according to Mrs. Dorsey.

The operation of the Erbstein's businesses and Fox Valley's first radio station WTAS stayed within the family. Mrs. Erbstein's brother, Val King, married Marie Dorsey, Marie's brother, Jim, married Beatrice. The Dorsey and King families ran the Purple Grackle. Beatrice recalls being at the Purple Grackle one night and observing two odd men dressed in black tuxedos only to be wearing brown shoes. The Purple Grackle was rumored to have burned, once shortly after it opened in 1924.

Besides music programs from the establishment, concerts and other shows were presented at the station's modern studios at Villa Olivia. A large outdoor dance floor was installed near the Erbstein home where broadcasts like summer concerts took place.

### THE BEGINNING OF WTAS

In October 1923 Charles Erbstein began operation under the call letters WTAS. The call letters were originally assigned to George Dennett Carpenter (9EEQ) of 655 South Street, Elgin, on February 16, 1923. The frequency was 360 meters, or 833 khz, sharing time with most Chicago stations. The licensed power was 500 watts.

"Denny," as he was called, was a friend of Erbstein and probably the person who built some of Erbstein's early equipment. Carpenter was often mentioned in Jack Graham's radio column in the Elgin Daily News for his radio accomplishments and distant contacts. Using three 50 watt tubes, the first set was built by Carpenter to be used at Villa Olivia. Worldwide contacts were made with this set. It was replaced by a new set containing eight 50 watt tubes using two 70 foot towers, a six wire cage antenna, and an 1800 watt generator.

On February 16, 1923, a WTAS broadcast featuring the Beljean Orchestra, was heard in Ontario, Canada. Carpenter received his first class radio telephone license on February 15, 1923, and the station license for WTAS the next day. Prior to this time, Erbstein's station 9AWK operated in advance of WTAS, gaining notoriety and popularity with Charley's songs and talks. Carpenter was the first engineer at WTAS (before Carl Meyers). Two other operators at the station were Roy Weisbach (9UU) and William Hillard (9ECR). Early test broadcasts of 9AWK featured the Ora Bailingier Orchestra. Carpenter sold his station to Erbstein in June of 1923.

It was not known how much broadcasting Carpenter did with his station. Erbstein was more or less interested in the WTAS license, which eliminated area competition.

WTAS moved to 275 meters, or 1090 khz, when it was purchased by Charles E. Erbstein, then of Rural Route 6, Box 75, Elgin. Carl Meyers joined the staff later that year and began redesigning the station equipment. On May 8, 1923, a concert featuring the Don Barnes Orchestra was presented. Prior to this time test broadcasts and mostly non-musical programming was presented on Erbstein's Villa Olivia radio phone, carrying the call letters 9AWK. Erbstein also broadcasted information and descriptions of wanted criminals for the Elgin Police Department over the radio. Meanwhile, Carpenter, a first class spark, signal core, and radio telephone operator, honorably discharged from the Navy in 1917, continued in amateur radio using the calls: 9ANW, 9EBR, 9UV, 9UM, and 9EEQ (this was from several sources).



His brother, Paul David Carpenter (W9TII), was also involved in amateur radio for many years. Paul taught Pharmacy at the University of Illinois. Paul's wife, Florence, stated that George and Paul often talked with people around the world from their bedroom amateur station at night and still has numerous QSL cards (written reception reports) to verify the contacts.

George, meanwhile, was never married. He worked for Borden's and for Kennell Bros., (a department store at 160 East Chicago Street) in the 20's like other members of his family did. In 1936 George Dennett Carpenter started a new career by attending the Elgin Watchmakers college. He worked for M.J. Rystrom Company in 1958, and continued his watchmaking and repair business from his home at 665 South Street through the 50's. His brother Paul, and Paul's wife, Florence, lived two doors down at 669 South Street. George and Herb Covey were in the same ham radio club. George has never been recognized as a radio pioneer, or given any credit to helping pave the way for Erbstein's later successes, despite holding the first commercial radio license in Elgin.

In 1923 Erbstein began operation under the inherited call letters of WTAS. Radio stations were quick to grab call letters that spelled words or stood for the initials of the station's owner. To Erbstein, WTAS stood for Willie, Tommy, Annie, and Sammy. These names became fictitious characters that acted in Erbstein's monologues on the station.

Charley's stories, singing and band remotes from The Purple Grackle made WTAS one of the most professionally run stations in the Midwest. The Milwaukee Journal presented WTAS with an award in 1924 for being the most popular station. WTAS actually broadcasted from Milwaukee by direct lines in September of that year, presenting music and entertainment during a radio exposition.

Early broadcasts consisted of band programs featuring the Elgin National Watch Company Band, Vaudeville's Fanny and Eddie Cavanaugh, Billy Beljeans Orchestra, Jules Herbuveaux Band, Ora Bailing's Band, Don Barnes Syncopaters, and Dell Lamps Conn Trianon Orchestra with J. Bodewalt Lampe.

Regular Monday night concerts featured Fred Hamm and his Eggs, and Eddie Loftus, who wrote the song "Dirty Fly." The W.W. Kimball Company presented "Radio Frolics" each afternoon. Also featured were Husk O'Hare and the WTAS Orchestra and Frank Morris with yodeling and Irish songs. Pianists featured were Lee Sims, "Lucky" Wilbur, Chester Cohn and Ala Hooker with vocalists Mary Jayne, Maxine Brown, Albert Hay Malotte and "Nubs" Allen. Allen was a female singer pictured on the cover of an early edition of "On The Air," WTAS' monthly program guide, wearing curly matted hair and adorned with one of those stuffed furs (complete with an animal's head) direct from a taxidermist hanging about her neck.

WTAS basically went through two stages of programming. Most of the more well known entertainers appeared towards the latter portions of WTAS' existence. Quaker Oats was an early advertiser.

While the station later became noted for its live direct broadcasts from places like Kimball Hall in Chicago, local programs were also aired from Elgin. Eloise Ellis conducted the Elgin High School Girls' Glee Club in a May 1923 concert. On November 9, 1923, a special Batavia night program featured Mrs. William Arthur, soprano; William Benson, tenor; and Miss Evelyn Nelson, pianist. Benson, a railroad worker, also sang on WJJD later. The station broadcasted results of Elgin High School's state basketball championship in March 1924. The team was led by All-Star Louis "Soup" Semeny. Reverend Alfred Barnard of the First Congregational Church also preached on the station in its first month of operation.

WTAS with its powerful generators could easily be heard in Canada, Cuba, and at least once in England.

Suddenly Charles E. Erbstein was transfigured from a well-known divorce lawyer to a radio star. He was probably the first entertainer to call himself the "Boss," long before singer Bruce Springsteen did in the 80's. Together the "Boss" and Carl Meyers put together the first successful radio station in the Fox Valley Area. WTAS was on the air!

### The Early Years

Within a year Erbstein's amateur radio station, 9AWK (now WTAS), began to compete with the programming of early Chicago stations. In 1924 Aurora Beacon-News columnist George Britt interviewed Erbstein. "Charley" told the columnist, "Lonesomeness, while his family was in Florida for the winter, started his radio interests." Erbstein had passed his government license test in 1922, copying code at 15 words per minute. He was duly capable of operating his own equipment.

Tinkering with an old Navy set, his hobby grew from talking on the radio a few evenings a week to a rigorous broadcast schedule. His familiar HA-HA-HA and "Jewnited States" comments echoed as far away as South America and Hawaii. A single one hundred foot aerial was replaced with three 200 foot antennas. The power of the station was later increased from five hundred to one thousand watts. Duplicate transmitting equipment was also installed for back up purposes and different programs. In 1924 the station moved to 1050 khz.

The master oscillator circuit incorporated ten 250-watt tubes. The bottom floor of the barn consisted of three motors, generators, and a back up power supply for the station. Visitors were welcomed, and prizes like a new crystal radio set were given away in conjunction with the Elgin Daily Courier Newspaper.

Five people now worked at the station running music remotes every night of the week from various locations in Chicago via special telephone lines. Baseball scores were read on the station every afternoon. WTAS boosted its own list of weekly performers, featuring artists Will Rossiter, Isabel Simpson, Betty Holmes, Jimmy Cairns, Bert Davis, Charley Hughey, Lindsey Coons and Hirsh-Gorney and the Miller Trio. Conn Musical Instruments of Elkhart, Indiana, were endorsed as were Kimball Pianos. The station's schedule featured various band remotes from 7:30 to 11:30 every night of the week.

Erbstein ascertained that since his transmitter and three towers were in suburban Elgin, he refused to observe Monday night as "Silent Night" for Chicago stations. Instead he conducted Monday night broadcasts from Kimball Hall located at 25 East Jackson at Wabash. This building, formally owned by the Kimball Piano Company, built in 1917, is now a part of the downtown DePaul University Campus. Other broadcasts came from Guyon's Paradise Ballroom, the Trianon Ballroom and Stratford Theater in Chicago.

There is a difference in being good and loud, or loud and good. The WTAS signal was so strong it overrode the tuning circuits of small radios and interfered with other stations. WTAS was cited several times by the Federal Radio Commission for sometime brash, or profane, commentaries. Ham radio operator Erlind Olson (W9NE) of Aurora relates he often heard these kind of transmissions late at night, on the station, which annoyed many listeners.

The Elgin Daily News back then had a radio columnist, a high school student, by the name of Jack Graham. Graham was bombarded with questions on how to "tune out" WTAS. The Elgin Daily News "wave trap" became a popular item. Graham often sent out instructions on how to make the \$5.00 tuning apparatus to listeners who wrote in.

Erbstein stated, "If the people of Elgin are not proud of the fact that this station is already known all over the world as an Elgin station, I shall hereafter, if they so desire, state that the Villa Olivia broadcasting station is located in Hanover Township, Cook County, Illinois." The telegraph station at Bartlett was then overloaded with messages for WTAS. Elgin businessmen enjoying the charity and notoriety of having a radio station in their midst, withdrew their objections. Later, the station's identity returned to "near Elgin." A telegraph office was maintained at Villa Olivia to handle all correspondence to the station.

WTAS adopted two slogans, "Yes, we have no sopranos," and "the people's broadcasting station." Erbstein used his overnight hobby to enhance and promote his favorite causes and charities, refusing donations for the operation of the station. In Britt's column, Erbstein was characterized as a man who had a fondness for making "noise" in the world through his contribution in the legal field. "Radio undoubtedly gives him a chance to send that noise reverberating a bit further into space." Sometimes in the evening little noises could also be heard as his 10 year old daughter, Olivia, read bedtime stories on the station at night.

The standard operation frequency of WTAS was 286 meters, or about 1045 khz. But in 1925 stations changed frequency, power, and broadcast locations quickly. An early 1924 broadcast schedule in the Aurora Beacon News listed WTAS at 286 meters with the following program schedule for the evening of Friday, December 19, 1924:

6:00 p.m. Concert  
9:30 p.m. Studio Program  
10:30 p.m. Dance Music  
11:30 p.m. Various Artists

On Saturday, August 1, 1925, the Elgin Daily News listed WTAS at 302.8 meters, or about 990 khz. This was during the second reign of WTAS which will be explained later. On that evening the programs presented were: 7:00 p.m. Orchestra and Songs; 8:00 p.m. Popular Concert.

The following night WTAS presented a popular concert at 8:00 p.m. The next night a 7:00 p.m. concert was featured from Villa Olivia. Broadcast Profile of Hollywood, California, also listed WTAS as operating from 2:00-5:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. to midnight on Sundays. There are at times definite contradictions in information received from newspapers and other sources about the operation of Erbstein's stations WTAS and WCEE. Listeners were told that the best source of information on the station could be found by subscribing to "ON THE AIR," the official WTAS monthly program guide which sold for a dollar a year.

The publication was produced by program director Charles P. Hughes. Hughes also assembled another publication called, "Who's Who in Radio," featuring photos of early Chicago radio stars.

Singer Martha Raye, at age 6, and the Paul Whiteman Orchestra were among the early entertainers on WTAS. Band leader Bix Beiderbecke, who played the cornet, also appeared.

During this time Erbstein operated a second station, WCEE. It was first licensed for 536 meters, or 560 khz; it later broadcasted on 275.1 meters, or at 1090 khz. While Erbstein named his estate after his wife, Olivia, station WCEE was often referred to as the "Charley" station, named after himself. Some sources will differ and say that Villa Olivia was named after his daughter, Olivia, and WCEE was named after his other daughter, Charlene.



While WCEE stood for Erbstein's initials, Popular Communications writer Alice Brannigan found other information stating that the station's motto was: "Where Charlene Entertain's Everybody."

WCEE operated in 1925, according to E.C. Alft, and did most of its broadcasting from Chicago at Kimball Hall, but utilized the towers at Villa Olivia for a time. Forbes Fairbairn was named the station manager. Fairbairn was another publisher of the station's monthly program guide. Various musical programs and band remote broadcasts were presented on WCEE.

At this point in history the radio dial became a confusing array of stations, switching frequencies and power allocations. There was no Federal Communications Commission to police the operating practices of the stations. Radio stations signed on and signed off several times during the day and night. Several stations used the same frequencies. Long time area residents, Alden Odt of Geneva, William Wood, and Paul Dahlstrom of Batavia, and Vince Frisby of Elgin, recall hearing different types of programs on the same channel. Stations seemed to scramble for the "quiet" spots on the dial to set up operations.

Prior to this time an ambitious businessman who saw the potential for radio broadcasting, Col. Robert R. McCormick, owner and publisher of the Chicago Tribune, had just entered the radio business. In 1924, he purchased a small Chicago station, WDAP. The operation was known as the "Drake Hotel Station." WDAP had been on the air since 1922.

In 1924 the publication known as the "world's greatest newspaper," the Tribune, obtained the call letters "WGN," courtesy of Great Lakes ship operator Carl D. Bradley. In those days ships had designated three letter call signs for their radio operations. The Chicago Tribune had also started a weekly news magazine known as Liberty Weekly for Everybody, or later Liberty Weekly. The magazine operated until 1954 and featured current news as well as fictional stories. It sold for a nickel. A few copies of Liberty Weekly are still at the University of Illinois downstate campus in their archives. In 1925, according to Chicago Tribune columnist Lloyd Wendt, Erbstein's wife, Olivia, had urged Charley to put an end to wild weekend parties at Villa Olivia and get out of the radio business. His family being more important, he relented.

On September 29, 1915, Erbstein sold WTAS to Liberty Weekly, but continued to be a frequent feature on the Tribune's new station WLIB. Erbstein sold approximately five acres of land across the street from Villa Olivia to Liberty Weekly for \$3,000.00 in October 1925, according to Cook County Land Records. In 1929 Liberty Weekly deeded the land to the Tribune Company for \$1.00. With Tribune backing, the station's power increased to 15,000 watts and changed frequency to 990 khz. Erbstein's former chief engineer Carl J. Meyers had been hired by the Tribune to run its broadcast stations. Erbstein made it a condition of the sale requiring WGN to hire Meyers. They never regretted it.

WGN-WLIB continued to operate from Villa Olivia in the 1920s using the former WTAS towers and its L-shaped cage antenna. The Tribune was planning to build a powerful station combining all the stations into one operation. The process was slow as WLIB and WGN operated separately for a couple of years alternating programs on the same channel 302.8 meters (990 khz). WGN was a Mutual Broadcasting System station, while WLIB carried NBC programs (National Broadcasting Company).

WLIB presented early programs like the Radio Floorwalker, a series called "The Hoodlums," and Bobby Meeker's Orchestra. In 1928 Miss Doris Booth, WLIB's whistling soloist, entertained Mayor E.E. Lindgren and town residents at the Batavia Homecoming Festivities on Labor Day that year at Glenwood Park. The door prize at the picnic, fittingly, was a Zenith Radio.

Except for Erbstein's continued dramatic, rowdy, but sometimes sentimental appearances on WLIB, Erbstein was out of the radio business. He also sold his other station, WCEE, to the Tribune. The Tribune operated WCEE separately from the Drake Hotel and later the Tribune Towers. Its transmitter had been relocated to Wood Dale, Illinois, and leased out.

A 1927 article in the Elgin Daily Courier News listed WCEE as formally WSWS. The article pointed out that Erbstein had disposed of WCEE to the S.W. Straus Company in 1925. The Straus Company, a bonding and financial conglomeration, changed the station's call letters to WSWS and operated the station for about two years. But in early 1927 Erbstein was back. He bought back WSWS and moved the operation from the Straus Building in Chicago to Kimball Hall where he maintained offices. The station, under the Straus firm had been utilizing 275 meters, about 1080 khz, and sharing the channel and the tower with a religious station, WORD, in Batavia. With the announcement of the sale Erbstein changed the call letters back to WTAS.

In 1926 the Federal Radio Commission reported listing the Illinois Broadcasting Corporation as leasing the station from the Tribune Company. The Richard Harris Company operated the station until it was repurchased and taken over by Erbstein again. WTAS promised new programs of "symphonic jazz" and band broadcasts consisting of twenty piece orchestras. Programs were planned from the Guyon Paradise Ballroom in Chicago. Erbstein also negotiated tower use from WLIB at his former station site. Newspapers happily proclaimed "Willie, Tommy, Annie, and Sammy were back!"

Through the month of January 1927, listeners heard the first tests of the all new WTAS. By the end of the month the station was in full operation; it later moved to new quarters. A 1927 Chicago phone directory lists the station's address as the Belden Stratford Hotel, 2300 North Lincoln Park West, and later as the Parkway Hotel, 2100 Lincoln Park West. The Parkway was also the home of notorious gangster Bugs Moran. Two years later most of Moran's gang would be "wiped out" at the infamous St. Valentine's Day Massacre just a block away in a garage at 2122 North Clark Street.

In February 1927, Erbstein initiated a 25 cent listener fee for his station's programs. The idea was popular in Europe and was being discussed in Congress. While some stations proposed "selling their signals" by utilizing a subcarrier transmission, which would require a special device to pick up the station and be sold by the station, Erbstein merely requested a 25 cent annual fee in which each listener would receive monthly program guides from his station.

That February of 1927 Erbstein was back on top of the radio business. He was the master of ceremonies of the Chicago Broadcaster's mammoth radio party on February 28, 1927, at Rainbow Gardens. Erbstein introduced many well-known radio celebrities of the time during the two hour program. Charles P. Hughes rejoined Erbstein as the station's program director at WTAS. Frequent band remotes were featured from Guyon's Paradise Ballroom in Chicago.

Meanwhile, progress in radio broadcasting was continuing. The Tribune had purchased land across the street from Villa Olivia from Erbstein and contracted for two 250 foot towers to be erected on the property. These towers were fifty feet taller than the ones at the Villa Olivia property and were manufactured by the U.S. Wind, Engine and Pump Company located on Water Street in Batavia. The Batavia firm also built and erected towers for other radio stations, including WLS, when it was owned by Sears, Roebuck and Company. A Spanish style orange stucco building was also built to house WLIB-WGN's new transmitting equipment. These towers were in use until 1939 when WGN moved to Roselle, its present day transmitter site on Route 53, south of Schaumburg.

Back in Washington, Congress continued to tackle the problems of the crowded radio dial. On May 26, 1927, the Commerce Department issued its first set of regulations, reorganizing some radio station frequencies. WTAS, sharing time with WORD Batavia on 275.1 meters, was allowed a power boost to 3,500 watts on its 1090 frequency. WORD was already broadcasting at 5,000 watts, sharing its tower with WTAS southeast of Batavia. WORD then moved to 1490 khz. At this time Erbstein had become severely ill. WTAS later received permission to again use the towers at Villa Olivia.

WGN, WLIB, and WTAS had been using 302.8 meters as their frequency, or 990 khz, as late as August of 1928. However, on November 11, 1928, the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) stated that WTAS, WLIB, and WGN all be combined under one station, WGN. That year ninety-one stations were ordered off the air by the FRC. In 1928 WTAS is listed as being owned by a firm called the Illinois Broadcasting Corporation in the Chicago Tribune Picture Book. The station's offices were moved back to the Straus Building in Chicago. This was after WTAS had started back up after taking over WWSW (formally WCEE).

Late in 1928, WTAS began share time operations on 1490 khz, with WORD and WHT, Deerfield, which was owned by the Radiophone Corporation. In 1928, WTAS's signal had been reduced to 500 watts. Effective November 11th, the call letters of WTAS were no longer heard on the channel. On November 30, 1928, the FRC cancelled WTAS's license.

Erbstein never saw the consolidation of all these stations as he passed away on May 27, 1927, in his home at 1443 Astor Street in Chicago. Erbstein had been battling scarlet fever which later developed into pneumonia. At age 51 the man wore himself out. His last words whispered were, "Get the priest, I'm going west," indicating perhaps he had changed from his Jewish faith to Catholic which was his wife's religious faith. His wife and daughters were there when he died. Because of the fear of spreading scarlet fever, a private funeral was held. Flowers and messages spilled out of the funeral parlor from all over the country. At Charley's request Taps were played on many Chicago stations at the time of his funeral. Axel Seterberg, superintendent of the Villa Olivia estate, stated Erbstein possessed a wonderful, unselfish heart.

He was later eulogized in a 1952 account of prominent people in the Chicago Tribune. James Doherty wrote about the lawyer from the Chicago Kent College of Law--Erbstein was the most controversial, pint-sized, sharp-eyed, brilliant, witty and resourceful expert of the time. Former band leader and NBC Chicago executive Jules Herbeveaux, commenting in a 1947 Chicago Tribune column by Lloyd Wendt stated, "If Charley Erbstein would have lived, he'd be the biggest man in radio today. There never has been another like him."

A few weeks after Erbstein's death, a will was found providing \$75,000 in personal property to his wife and daughters. Already Mrs. Erbstein owned some million dollars in real estate. WGN, meanwhile, was planning a new program, "Charley's Line," but Erbstein died before it was started.

At the time of Erbstein's death, negotiations for the sale of the 250 acre Villa Olivia property were continuing. Mrs. Erbstein moved to 399 Fullerton in Chicago in 1928. The vast Villa Olivia estate and golf course, now spanning 340 acres, were opened to the public, which Olivia operated until around 1943. The original coach

house building that housed the radio station was turned into a concession stand. The Corrado's purchased the property in 1953, later removing all of the Erbstein buildings and constructing newer facilities. Olivia Erbstein passed away in 1973. Both Charley and Olivia are buried at the All Saints Cemetery in Des Plaines.

WTAS remained off the air for three days in honor and respect for Erbstein. Today a small FM station in Crete owned by Anthony Santucci bears these call letters which now stand for one of Santucci's daughters, Therese Ann. Does history repeat itself?

## WGN

### Chicago's Radio Success Story

It seemed that Colonel Robert R. McCormick had envisioned a plan to build a powerful radio station even before the 1928 Radio Act that combined WTAS, WLIB, and WGN. The acquisition of WDAP, formerly owned by Midwest Radio Central in 1922 by pioneer broadcasters Elliott Jenkins and Thorne Donnelley, was the beginning of the most successful era of broadcasting enjoyed by any Chicago station.

Prior to WGN's purchase of WDAP, the small operation was an experimental station with its antenna on top of the Wrigley Building. WDAP broadcasted at 360 meters, often featuring concerts by the Blackstone Quintet and the Jack Chapman Orchestra. A tornado blew down WDAP's antenna in the early 20's. At that time the station moved its antenna to the Drake Hotel. Its 1,000 watt signal was heard in Hawaii during an all night broadcast on January 2, 1923. Amplico concerts and stock quotations were also broadcast from the Board of Trade Building. The tiny station in early 1924 was the first to give away a new car during a contest sponsored by the Calumet Baking Powder Company.

Other early WDAP programs consisted of one man, Ralph "The Shiek" Shugart, trying to run a remote broadcast from two locations with one mike. Successive years accounted for the station's diligent contributions to the broadcasting industry. WDAP, WLIB, and WTAS were combined to form an unequalled winner. After its all night inaugural broadcast of music and news on March 29, 1924 (still as WDAP), WGN never looked back. On June 1, 1924, listeners heard for the first time "This is WGN, formerly WDAP". Announcers like Quin Ryan, Bill Hay, and Jack Nelson became household names.

Ryan, Lee Simons of WCFL, and Tony Coates of WEA, New York, appeared on a WGN broadcast in 1927 at the Arcada Theater in St. Charles. The comedy team Sam & Henry, starring Charles J. Correll and Freeman F. Godson, first got their start on WGN-WLIB. (They also had appeared on WEBH and WJJD). The pair often made appearances in the Elgin area, including a few stints at the Men's Riverside Club. The duo later became known as "Amos and Andy on WMAQ". John Fink's WGN: A Pictorial History, written in 1961, outlines the station's story in more detail, edifying WGN's numerous sports and programming accomplishments.

The current WGN staff includes Bob Collins, Roy Leonard, Wally Phillips, Spike O'Dell, Milt Rosenberg, Paul Davis, Johnnie Putman, Steve King, Don Vogel, Mike Rapchak, "Suburban" Ed Curran, and Al Lerner. The sports announcers are Chuck Swirsky, Hub Arkush, Wayne Larrivee, Thom Brennaman, Ron Santo, Harry Caray, and former DePaul basketball coach Ray Meyer. Traffic reports are Linc Hampton, Mike Mathis, and Anne Maxfield. News reports are Dave Ellsworth, Tom Petersen, Wes Bleed, Steve Bertran, Rod Sierra, David Stewart, Lyle Dean, Judy Pilack, Jan Coleman, Dick Sutliff, Tim Jackson, and Jim Boutet. Weather reporters are Roger Triemstra and Diane Clark. Orion Samuelson and Max Armstrong handle agri-business news. The station is owned by the Tribune Broadcasting Company. James C. Dowdle is president and Wayne R. Vriesman is vice-president.

In past years, the broadcasts of the Chicago Cubs games have been done by Jack Brickhouse and Milo Hamilton. The recent list also included Vince Lloyd, Jack Quinlan, and Lou Boudreau during the Ernie Banks era. Long time overnight talk show host Eddie Schwartz left in May of 1992 for WLUP.

But getting back to Elgin, WGN still utilized the two 250 foot towers from October, 1926 until March, 1939 across from Villa Olivia. The station also moved from the Wrigley Building to the Drake Hotel to the Edgewater Beach Hotel. They switched frequencies with WJJD using 990 Khz, 810 Khz, and by 1929, WGN was a clear channel at 720 Khz. Studios were moved to the Tribune Towers in 1935.

For a time WGN even owned a portion of the Mutual Broadcasting System. Today WGN operates at fifty thousand watts at 720 Khz. Studios are located at the WGN Continental Broadcast Center, 2501 West Bradley Place, Chicago, near Wrigley Field. They also maintain downtown studios at 435 North Michigan Avenue. WGN continues to be one of the city's most successful and popular radio stations. The station carries exclusive coverage of the Chicago Cubs and Chicago Bears broadcasts and boasts a talented staff of radio professionals. Jack Brickhouse and Harry Caray did the games for many years. Dan Fabian is general manager of the station, Dave Ellsworth is news director, and Chuck Swirsky is the sports director.

In 1939 WGN purchased 101 acres of land on the west side of I-290/Illinois 53, about four miles south of Higgins Road, and erected a 750 foot tower, which is the radio station's present transmitter site. Later in 1939, the orange stucco spanish-style building in Elgin, the old WGN transmitter site, was sold to the Borden Dairy Company and used as a laboratory. The company then let bids to demolish the towers.



Crowds gathered to watch a Chicago demolition firm pull the towers over in late 1940. Extensive coverage of the destruction of these longtime landmarks was carried by the Elgin Daily Courier and the Chicago Tribune. "Put up at a cost of \$18,000, they are now worth about one-tenth for scrap steel," reported the Tribune. It took about two hours to tear down both structures. WGN's chief engineer, Carl J. Meyers, remembered the first broadcast that emanated from the towers (See WTAS). It was a 1926 baseball game between the Cardinals and the Yankees. Meyers wasn't on hand for the festivities. "I worked for years to keep them standing, I wouldn't want to be around to see them come down". Several other area amateur radio operators worked as engineers at WGN's Elgin facilities including Jim Turner and "Blackie" Blackman.

Today the property is owned by a separate laboratory firm, Peg-Ag, Inc., which does animal nutrition research. Dr. William J. Monson, Ph.D., Vice President of Research and Development, gave me a tour of the five acre site. He pointed out the large cables and insulators still in the building and the cement pillars of the old towers. A government survey marker is embedded in one of the old pillars. Another era of radio hadn't ended, it just moved to the big city.

### Fixing an Old Misunderstanding

It is commonly believed among radio circles that the roots of Chicago's WGN sprouted from Elgin stations WTAS, WLIB, and Chicago Board of Trade station WDAP. This is all partially true, and Tribune founder Colonel Robert R. McCormick slowly acquired all of these stations for their frequencies, thus eliminating them from the airways.

Many sources quote Tribune authorities that WGN radio began on June 1, 1924 after taking over WDAP, a small station at the Drake Hotel in Chicago. According to Broadcast Profile, WGN actually began about three months earlier on March 24, 1924, on the way to becoming a major Chicago station. At that time, WGN had leased all the airtime of another station, WJAZ.

WJAZ was located at the Edgewater Beach Hotel at 5349 North Sheridan Road. Its towers were affixed to a smaller building just north of the hotel. WJAZ was owned by the Zenith Radio Company, Eugene F. McDonald was the president of the firm. The company was also known as the Chicago Radio Laboratory and operated amateur station 9XN. The broadcast station operated out of the Crystal Room, a completely enclosed glass studio in the hotel. Microphones and lighting were built into the floor of the facility.

The Tribune leased all of WJAZ's airtime until June, 1924 and was known as the Tribune-Edgewater Station. On March 28, 1924, WJAZ's call letters were actually changed to WGN, according to Broadcast Profile, moving from 670 Khz, WMAQ's share time frequency, to 810 khz. (Some sources indicate this occurred on April 2, 1924.) Listeners called WGN, which stood for World's Greatest Newspaper, the World's Greatest Noise because it now interfered with WDAP which operated at 833 Khz.

By May 9, 1924, WGN ended its ties with Edgewater Beach Hotel, joining up with WDAP and later purchasing it. McDonald's station then became WEBH, standing for Edgewater Beach Hotel, on June 2, 1924. It aired NBC programs as well as the early comedy skits of Sam 'N Henry, who later became Amos 'N Andy. The station's call letters also stood for "Where Everybody's Happy" as they shared the 810 Khz with unhappy WJJD. Robert D. Boniel was the station manager.

By 1928 WEBH's power was reduced from 2,000 watts to 500 watts and was moved to 1020 Khz to share time with KYW/KFKX. In November WEBH dropped its NBC programming and its affiliation with the Chicago Evening Post, becoming a 500 watt booster station for KYW. Its call letters became KYWA. KYWA left the air in January of 1930 when KYW and later KFKX moved its transmitter site to Bloomingdale, Illinois. KYW later was sold to WMAQ. McDonald, meanwhile, had restarted WJAZ in 1925 and had moved it to the Straus Building in Chicago, erecting towers in Mount Prospect, Illinois. It would be McDonald's and Zenith's second station. (See WJAZ)

In 1958, Chicago broadcaster Buddy Black would bring back radio to the Edgewater Beach Hotel with WEBH-FM, which lasted until 1970 when the station was sold and the hotel torn down. Chicago landmark commission member Jan Curtis says that only the Edgewater Beach Apartments remain today at 5555 North Sheridan Road.

Whatever roots WGN had, there is no disputing of its greatness and professional contributions to the broadcast industry. It remains one of the most important stations in the country.

## WJJD

### The Call of the Moose

What makes a little station great? It's the unique ingredients of local news and personalities, combined with the professionalism of a big city sound. Put these components together and you have the little station that could--WJJD at Mooseheart.

For nearly twelve years, WJJD successfully served the Fox Valley Area with solid local programming, distinguished on the air guests, and many entertaining music programs from Chicago.

With its later CBS network affiliation for a short time, a variety of sports events were presented. But the real "heart" of the Mooseheart broadcasts were the children that lived there and performed on the radio. Often listeners heard the announcement, "This is radio station WJJD. You're listening to the Child City at Mooseheart, Illinois, where 1,300 children are being cared for and trained because their deceased fathers were members of the Loyal Order of Moose. Due to the loss of their father, the Moose fraternity makes it possible for the children and their mother to live and receive care here". Mooseheart is a small community located on Route 31 between North Aurora and Batavia.

During the early 20's interest in the construction of radio sets was introduced by Superintendent Mathew Adams and a radio club was developed. R. D. Warner of the Wireless Telephone and Electric Company had installed the first radio sets in Batavia and Mooseheart in 1922. By 1924 the idea was conceived to operate a station from Mooseheart. Plenty of eager youthful talent, singing, acting and playing musical instruments stood ready to perform. The station's first frequency allocation was in October of 1924 at 278 meters, or 1080 Khz. WDAP-WGN's Jack Nelson became station manager. Nelson, a talented performer, also wrote a then popular song called "After the Storm".

In 1930 Lucille Snoor Williams took over the reigns of the station. Mrs. Williams told me about the uniqueness of the station. The industry's first female station manager stated, "It was not uncommon to receive mail from listeners in Montreal, Canada, or Bakersfield, California. There was no advertising or TV competition, just a family of children and friends displaying their sincereness on the radio".

One of Mrs. Williams' protege's was Arthur Wright, a student at Mooseheart who later excelled at WGN. He later sang with Kay Kyser and the "Swing 'N Sway" with Sammy Kay Orchestra. Another student, Russ Raycroft, is currently a communications consultant.

WJJD operated at several frequencies signing on with five hundred watts at 278 meters (about 1080 Khz). on October 27, 1924. According to Mooseheart Public Relations Director Roy Dickow, the original studios were located in the Women's Legion Building, later they moved to the Roosevelt Auditorium. A large power generating station was also located on the property which supplied power to the dorms and station. The power station was run by Alfred Hunt, whose son, Jim Hunt (W9PQH), now resides in Dundee. Pillars of the old towers still remain on the property.

The "Call of the Moose" switched to 990 Khz dividing time with WTAS as ordered by the FRC in January, 1925. In December, 1925, it swapped frequencies with WGN at 810 Khz now sharing time with WEBH.

WJJD's first broadcast schedule consisted of daily programs from 3:00 - 4:00 p.m. and then Chicago broadcasts from 7:00 - 8:00 at night, except Thursdays. Charlie Straton's Orchestra was featured along with band remotes from the Rendevous Club located at Diversey and Broadway in Chicago.

Loyal Order of Moose Director, then Secretary of Labor James J. Davis (in which the call letters stood for), opened the station's first broadcast, ironically on his 51st birthday. Davis spoke from Washington via telephone lines to deliver his address. The following weeks' edition of the Batavia Herald announced, "Batavia fans gathered in homes and in downtown stores to listen and all enjoyed the opening program".

In 1926 the Mooseheart station maintained an auxiliary studio at the Palmer House for musical broadcasts at night. WJJD wasn't the first to broadcast late night musical programs from Chicago. However, the station was credited with a number of other broadcast firsts. In 1924 regular church services of several faiths were broadcast regularly from area churches over leased wires from Aurora. One of the first ministers heard on WJJD was Rev. Benjamin E. Chapman of the Trinity Episcopal Church. The first sports talk show aired on November 27, 1924. Each Monday night Mooseheart Football Coach, Ben Oswalt, Sr.; would discuss sports on the air. Ben Oswalt, Jr., many years later, would own part of WMRO in Aurora.

WJJD often broadcast live band concerts from Exposition Park located on the west side of Route 31, just north of I-88, the East-West Tollway. The Central States Fairground was located nearby between Route 31 and Randall Road, south of Airport Road.

On the property set the Log Cabin Ballroom which was billed as the "World's Largest Log Cabin". Frequent concerts featured a 12 piece band known as the Seattle Harmony Kings. Two of the band members were Whitey Berquist and Red Nichols of Batavia. Red later formed "Red Nichols and the Five Pennies". Country and western singer Gene Autry also performed on WJJD from the Leland Hotel in Aurora, long before his famous broadcasts on the WLS Barndance.

Aurora historian Fred Graham, Jr.'s uncle, William Benson, a well-liked tenor, sang and played the piano during the band's breaks. Benson worked for the Chicago Northwestern Railroad and sang on WTAS. Graham, who now teaches classes in antiques at Aurora University, worked as a youth at the fairgrounds in 1922. He was a waterboy for the workers who were installing a large roller coaster. The location of the fairgrounds and Log Cabin Ballroom, just a few miles from the station, prompted many local broadcasts of the area's concerts over WJJD.

Today an off-track betting parlor sits on the property facing Route 31. The building was formerly the old Hilton Inn and Greyhound Bus Depot. A retirement home called Ashbury Court sets behind the betting parlor in the approximate area where the Log Cabin was near Airport Road. In later years, boxing matches were held in the Log Cabin. Graham has always had an interest in radio, building his first crystal set in 1924. He later worked across the street on the east side of Route 31 for WMRO at its first transmitter site as a fill-in announcer.

On December 11, 1924, the Ray Fiju Orchestra featured the "Velvet Tenor" voice of Raymond Balter. On December 31, 1924, WJJD broadcasted a New Year's Eve dance party from the Log Cabin Ballroom with announcer Jack Chapman, who also worked for WGN. In February 1925, men were asked to keep listening to WJJD for information when to report for duty if war broke out.

In June, 1925, Batavia Postmaster Lloyd D. Wood presented several programs on the proper way to address mail on WJJD. The station slogan was later changed from "Call of the Moose" to "Every Child is Entitled to a High School Education and Trade". The station's 1926 recipe contest was successful. 4-H Club shows and other informational programs were presented.

WJJD broadcasted the 1925 World Series plus a boxing match between Tiger Flowers and Mickey Walker. The Blossom Health Entertainers Orchestra program was presented from the Fox Theater located at 48 Fox Street, Aurora. This address was later changed to 26 Fox Street during a renumbering change in 1929. The street is now called East Downer Place.

On February 1, 1926, another broadcast first: an entire county board meeting from Woodstock was aired. Remote broadcasts began from various spots in Geneva, St. Charles, and Batavia. A monthly program on Boy Scouting was a radio first, presented by the Fox Valley Council. It was directed by Charles Cockley and featured solos by Margot McNamer and nationally known violinist Professor V. Gullota. A talk was given by Council Director D. R. Sperry. Elmer Sandem was in charge of a monthly Geneva program.

In April, 1928, the Batavia American Legion was invited to do a program each Monday night. Various Legion officials including Commander Carl E. Christiansen and Arnold Bensen, Kane County Commander, participated along with a popular singing group, The Legion Four, composed of Dr. Gifford A. Johnson, Karl Collins, Joseph Kelley and Herman A. Benson. In addition, WJJD presented news programs with various nearby city officials and broadcasted organ programs from the Fargo Theater, 319 West State Street, Geneva. Various concerts in Chicago, including ones from the Palmer House, were also presented.

WJJD had a special Memorial Day program on May 31, 1928, that featured Batavia lawyers Emil J. Benson and Mary D. Bailey. B. A. Warrick, Mooseheart Band Instructor, appeared with the Batavia Bugle Corps. Soloists on the program were Madge Geiss, Hazel Reiman, and Dorothy Fargo Currey.

Earlier in 1924 the organization had considered moving to Chicago, but Director James J. Davis stated that only a few offices would be relocated. The community had feared the whole operation would leave the area.

During the 20's WJJD switched frequencies as did many stations utilizing 1080 Khz, 960, 810, 820 with one thousand watts, and later 1130 and 830 Khz. The station's old Western Electric transmitter was maintained while WJJD petitioned for a power increase before the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) of twenty thousand watts in 1927.

WJJD, operating on 820 Khz, placed there by the Radio Commission, met with stiff opposition by several low power stations in Massachusetts and Florida when it wanted to raise power. The Radio Act in late 1928 moved WJJD to 830 Khz and made it a daytime station at five thousand watts. In October, 1928, U. S. Secretary of Labor, James J. Davis, and the Loyal Order of Moose petitioned the FRC for a better frequency. The daytime only allocation virtually cut off the station from broadcasting its usual fine evening music broadcasts from Chicago. CBS had also ended its affiliation with the station.

The November 11, 1928 decision left WJJD with a time-sharing arrangement with WCFL Chicago and WRM the University of Illinois station at Urbana. The station continued with quality programming featuring a 1929 concert with Bill Donohue's Illini Jazzadoors and other bands. Its power output increased to ten thousand watts and broadcast schedule extended to 9:30 p.m. The early sign off protected a station in Salt Lake City, Utah.

By 1931 the station had moved to 1130 Khz with twenty thousand watts of power. Around 1935 the station's operating costs began to exceed its limits. The station only advertised Mooseheart and competition with commercial stations kept growing. In 1935 broadcast investor, Ralph Atlass, who owned several Chicago stations, bought WJJD and moved the studios to 201 North Wells Street in Chicago. Atlass and his brother Leslie were in the poultry business in Lincoln, Illinois. They owned WBBM and WIND also. WJJD was later owned by Marshall Field Company in 1938 and moved to 1160 Khz around 1942.



Before the sale the station's director, Lucille Snoor Williams (now of Aurora), went about trying to secure jobs for some of her students at WGN in Chicago. In later years, the station operated during the daytime at 1160 khz and left the air at 10 p.m. From the 50's through the 80's the format shifted from pop to country to big bands ("music of the stars"). Plough Broadcasting, a pharmaceutical firm, sold WJJD AM/FM to Infinity Broadcasting in the early 1980s. The deal bypassed an offer by several Chicago radio personalities, including Art Hellyer, to buy the AM station only.

Today WJJD broadcasts with 50,000 watts daytime and a directional signal of 10,000 watts at night. Mel Karmazin is president of the station, Harvey Pearlman is vice president, and Gary Price is program director.

WJJD's first FM station with the call letters W47C operated for a short time in the old FM band at 44.7 mhz in 1942. WJJD FM began operations in 1961, after WSEL FM went bankrupt. WJJD FM changed to WJEZ in the late 70's and to WJMK in 1985.

WJMK programs 1960s era music and utilizes pop era disc jockeys Dick Biondi, Ron Britain, and John Charleston. Both Biondi and Britain are former air personalities from WLS and WCFL. Also from the same time frame and stations, veteran talk show host Clark Weber enjoys success on the AM side. Studios for both stations are located at 180 North Michigan Avenue in Chicago.

In the 1930s WJJD became a successful tool for promoting the Moose organization, according to its then director James J. Davis, whose energies helped the organization achieve its successes today. Davis said of WJJD, "It's greatest resource was its young talent, many who built poise and self-confidence which they carried with them throughout their lives." WJJD has my vote for the most well-run and creative station ever to exit in the Fox Valley. Today, WJJD is the fourteenth oldest continuously licensed AM broadcasting station.

### History of the Transmitter Site

Some of the research in this book has been backed up by an old amateur radio operator, Arthur B. Sonyly (W9G1Z). Sonyly's hobby was taking pictures of old radio installations. His historic work fell into the hands of Elgin dentist, Dr. Ralph Muchow.

One of Arthur's photos is an old house that, for many years, was the transmitter site of WJJD-AM and a former station, WIBO. This site today would be on the southwest corner of Greenwood and Ballard Roads near Des Plaines. WIBO is listed as using this site in 1931 in an old phone book. The station was owned by the Russo and Florito Orchestral Exchange and Nelson Brothers Furniture.

After Ralph Atlass purchased WJJD from Mooseheart, he apparently took advantage of WIBO's failure to maintain a station license. When WIBO finally lost their long running battle with the FCC to stay on the air, the time was right for Atlass to purchase WIBO's transmitter site; this included the property where WIBO's two towers stood at the corner and a brick house where the transmitter was located to the west at 8707 Ballard Road. A large 20,000 watt water cooled transmitter was installed in the house, along with the station's main equipment.

Local resident, Glen Wood, who lives on the north side of the street at 8700 Ballard Road, remembers the site well. The station's towers stood on the corner property. To the west is an old house, which is numbered incorrectly at 8600 Ballard Road. Further west was the transmitter building at 8707 Ballard Road. The Courtley Creek Apartments occupy the old transmitter site today. Wood has lived in the area for 43 years.

Wood says that a small airstrip also occupied the land near the towers. Portions of a small plane were stacked nearby. Prior to WJJD ownership, WIBO was operated by the Nelson Brothers Mortgage and Bonding Company, predecessors to Nelson Brothers Furniture. Studios were located at 6310 (later renumbered to 6312) Broadway in Chicago. According to company secretary Alice Blinder, radio station WJJD purchased this property on June 11, 1933, when WIBO lost its license. WIBO had been involved in a long court battle to stay on the air after its 560 Khz frequency was reassigned to WIND, then located in Gary, Indiana.

Ralph Atlass owned both WIND and WJJD at the time. Atlass also purchased another old Chicago station, WPCC, to secure the 560 Khz dial setting for his WIND operations in Gary, Indiana.

Long time WJJD news director, Reese Rickards, who worked at the old former site, says an addition was built to house the transmitter. During its early years, the WIBO engineer lived in the house. The station broadcasted big band music, foreign language programs and "DX" reports.

Early TV experimentation by Western Television Corporation took place in the late 1920's in the 146 meter band. Portions of the old three-sided towers are still laying on the property. The NBD Trust Company plans a grocery store and other commercial developments soon on the old tower site. The old brick house was also a plumber's service for a short time after WJJD had moved to its present site.

Today WJJD operates its 4-tower array in Des Plaines from a swampy area at 2355 Ballard Road east of the Tri-State Tollway. The station moved to this site about 1968. A long stone and brick building faces the street which houses the station's transmitter and some former offices. WJJD was one of the first stations in 1959 to use tape cartridges, which eliminated turntables and union people to operate them.

## TUBES, TURNTABLES AND TUNING FORKS

No book on radio or electronics can ever be complete in the Fox Valley or any other area. The industry not only keeps changing, but new names seem to surface quite often. These include past and present radio personalities that I have not met, as well as a host of companies and business places that sold radio sets and parts. Area city directories list countless stores, shops, and garages that sold early radio sets. Some are mentioned in this work. Again the author apologizes, for missing any names of local importance.

Two early radio firms that should be included in this work are the Majestic Radio Company, and Continental Electric. These companies date back to the 1930s, but only portions of one exist today. Richardson Electronics, Ltd., in recent years, acquired what was once Continental, or as it was known in later years as Cetron.

Majestic's claim to the Fox Valley was its short time location in Elgin at the Chicago Rawhide Plant at 900 North State Street (Rt. 31). The old buildings in the rear of the complex were built in the 1930s to manufacture war materials. Majestic moved there in 1948 and was gone by 1951.

Actually, Majestic was an old name on a new company. The firm was first formed in 1927 to manufacture exquisite radio sets. Bertram J. Grigsby, an auto parts store manager and William C. Grunow, the firm's first auditor ran Majestic. Grunow owned a lavish 400 acre homesite in River Forest and a farm in Barrington. Some sets also carried a Grigsby-Grunow label. Majestic of Chicago went bankrupt in 1936 and was reorganized by the Davega Stores. The new company turned a profit only once from 1936 to 1940.

By the late 1940s, Majestic's president was E. A. Tracey of Algonquin. Phonograph records were also made in the Elgin plant. In the past the "Majestic" name has been used by several different companies. Later the firm merged into the Grundig Corporation. Majestic also operated either a plant or a warehouse which is listed in old St. Charles city directories. The firm's location was in Wayne Township near the DuPage Airport in 1947.

Elgin experimenter, E. J. Wisner has several Majestic sets in his collection including, a model 200 which was built in 1929. Majestic's can also be found in Dr. Muchow's Radio Museum. The sets are characterized by their large floor model cabinets and stylish wooden legs.

### Richardson Electronics, Ltd.

Also, in the Fox Valley, is a trail of systematic acquisitions of several smaller companies, which has evolved into a local giant in the communications industry. Like most small successful firms, Richardson Electronics, Ltd., started out as an unknown specialty company. Years later, it became a large distributor of electronic equipment. This took place over a period of some sixty years, of acquisitions, merges, and outright purchases of local companies or branches thereof. Most of these companies manufactured or sold different types of photo or electronic tubes.

Sales of vacuum tubes today accounts for only about 20% of Richardson's business. The firm does a greater volume of commerce in distributing semi-conductors and computer equipment. The company which began in June of 1947, was founded by Arthur H. Richardson, Sr. His son Edward J. Richardson, became president in 1961. An executive vice president is Dennis Gandy. Former WFXW announcer, Bob Birkeneder is in charge of advertising for the firm. Richardson Electronics, Ltd., is located at 40W267 Keslinger Road in LaFox, west of Geneva, Illinois. The firm formally started in Chicago with offices at 608 S. Dearborn, and later at 3030 N. River Road, in River Forest.

Even before Richardson began to make his mark in the communications field, two other companies had a head start in the Geneva area. In 1931, Continental Electric opened a factory at 200 S. First Street, on the site of what is now the Fox Island Shopping Center, in St. Charles. This was the location of the Crown Electric Chandelier Company and later one of several locations of Operadio. Continental moved to 715 Hamilton Street (SE corner of Hamilton and Richards Streets), in Geneva, about 1935. This building is believed to be the site of the old Geneva Organ Company and the Hiawatha Phonograph Company.

Continental was owned by two brothers, Hubert A., and Oran (O.T.) McIlvaine. Subsequent owners of the company after 1946, were Milton Ritzenberg, Edward Glaser, and Russ Packard along with Emil Makar. The above information was supplied by John Benes, who worked for Continental beginning in 1941, as the chief chemist. He left the company in 1957, and today operates his father's clothing store in Geneva.

Benes joined Continental, after graduating from Purdue. He remembers that the Hamilton Street building housed three separate firms. On the first floor was a company that made wooden boxes for machine guns. A women's coat shop was on the second floor, and Continental used the fourth floor of the building. The third floor was vacant.

When World War II broke out, Continental took over the entire building, manufacturing photo tubes, mercury rectifiers, vacuum gauges, and infra-red detectors for computers. The firm later made transmitting tubes for Heath-Kit, and other companies. Products were shipped in orange and blue boxes. Projection tubes and neon lights were produced by Continental in the old Ludlow Shoe Factory Building in Elgin in the late 1940s.



Some of Benes' fellow workers were Harold Alford, who was the chief engineer, and Robert Sadler, who built one of the first color TV sets and mounted it on a ping-pong table. Sadler later went to work for Argonne Laboratories. Steve Sims became plant manager in 1941 after previous employment with Majestic Radio in Chicago.

Benes served as a consultant in later years when the firm began involvement with military electronics. Continental Electric changed its name to Cetron in 1961 (some sources say 1959). This was probably done to eliminate confusion with two other Illinois firms with the same name.

Another of Benes' colleagues at Continental was Jack (John) Hutchings, who in 1945 resigned along with several others to form a new company. Hutchings had previously worked for General Electric, and was a vice president of Continental Electric. Hutchings formed National Electronics and opened offices in rented space at Riverbank Laboratories near Batavia. National's first product was a "paper jogger," a device for stacking paper. The firm later moved to 628 North Street in Geneva.

In 1947, Hutchings started manufacturing electronic tubes. He started another company called Industrial Tube Company at 321 Stevens Street. The firm manufactured tubes for RCA, GE, and Westinghouse, as well as under its own name brand (some sources list the starting date for the Stevens Street location at 1951).

Two Salt Lake City radio amateurs, William Eitel and Jack McCullough, purchased National Electronics in 1960. Eitel-McCullough (EIMAC) manufactured high powered radio transmitters. Hutchings, a neighbor of Benes, moved to California sometime around 1980.

In 1965, EIMAC merged with Varian Associates a world wide firm. That year National Electronics, under its new owner, moved from its North Street address to new quarters on Keslinger Road. This is the present day location of Richardson Electronics, Ltd. In 1981, Richardson Electronics, Ltd. made two important acquisitions, one was purchasing National Electronics, a division of Varian Associates in May. In December Richardson acquired Cetron, a large producer of photo electric tubes. The company's headquarters were soon moved to La Fox, and the building was enlarged. Within sixty years, two smaller tube companies have merged to become one successful firm, Richardson Electronics, Ltd. Radio tubes are still manufactured, but the company enjoys more success today in the sales and distributorship of computer and space age electronic equipment.

#### Colin Kyle, Forgotten Riverbank Scientist

Often the world of science, medicine, or invention recognizes just one person for a certain accomplishment or innovative idea. These individuals are then singled out and remembered in our pages of history as the "founder, father of, or developer" of a certain new technique or product. While they go on to enjoy much honorable credits, forgotten are the many other experimenters or engineers who first conceived an idea, but were unable to advance it.

For example, Geneva funeral director John Wittenberg stated that his father invented the first shock absorber, but the patent was sold by the family to meet college expenses. A relative of mine still insists that he invented the electric toothbrush. Other individuals have sold off ideas, discoveries, or inventions when they were not in a position to capitalize or promote them. Some of the best ideas over the years have been conceived and improved upon by others, while their originators have long since been forgotten.

For Colin Kyle it was the invention and development of the Electro Static or condenser speaker, The Kylectron, the product that revolutionized the world of early radio sound. The device, which also became a brand name for a certain line of radio sets, was highly marketed in the 1920s and became a standard feature in radios, public address systems, and amplifiers. There is some evidence that he was instrumental in the development of early Victrolas™, and the making of records.

For a short time this Geneva engineer enjoyed the headlines, fanfare, and notoriety of scientific success, but in his later years, he fell into thankless oblivion. He became a quiet, subtle man spending most of his time on his hobbies and solitary interests. His contribution to the fields of science and electronics were quickly absorbed by the industry robbing him of fame and future recognition.

Colin Kyle was born on October 9, 1894 in Sacramento, California. His brother David lived in Santa Barbara, and his mother resided in San Jose, which he often returned to visit. Colin came from a family of "tinkerers," his father, Alexander, who later lived in Toronto, Canada, was a machinist, according to this first cousin Gwendolyn Avery Rolls. Mrs. Rolls maintains that Colin sold his patent for an early phonograph and/or record making process to the DeForest-Crosley Company. One of these devices was installed in Radio City, New York. Colin's nephew Dave (D. G.) speculates that Colin came to Illinois to teach after he had graduated from San Jose State University (Teacher's College). Dave stated that Colin was a very learned man, a poet, and a fine mechanic. Kyle taught school and served as principal in desert schools in Arizona and California.

Young Colin had a fascination with motorcycles that he often worked on. A tragic accident rendered him some lifelong injuries. One leg ended up shorter than the other, necessitating the purchase of special built-up shoes. He had a pronounced limp as the injury never quite healed properly. Others in the Fox Valley had thought that Colin had had polio, or had been thrown by a horse.

Kyle came to Geneva in 1928. He was employed by the Newcombe-Hawley Company, the Howell Plant, and Riverbank Laboratories. Newcombe-Hawley had several locations around the St. Charles area. The firm, partially owned by college football star Jess Hawley, made paper products including the paper cones for speakers. Hats were made including some army helmets designed by Kyle.

The Howell Plant was first located in the Geneva buildings now occupied by the Riverwalk Grill, just west of the Fox River on Route 38. Geneva Historical Society President Alden Odt stated that the firm made irons and moved to the St. Charles Piano Factory and manufactured furniture.

It was at Riverbank Laboratories, however, where Kyle's extensive mechanical and electrical knowledge was combined with acoustical research. A 1929 booklet, The Sensational Story of Peerless and Courier Radio, highlighted Colin Kyle as the developer of the Kylelectron electro static speaker. "It's not a radio, it's a voice," the ad proclaimed. Earlier experimentation had taken place at Riverbank, near Geneva.

The publication detailed how the speakers were used in Peerless and Courier sets to improve reception and fidelity. For two weeks the radio firm displayed its equipment at the Boston Store in Chicago, and at another location at State and Madison where spectators and celebrities gathered to test the new radio device. A weekly syndicated radio program called "Real Music" was broadcast featuring studio musicians to explicitly demonstrate the quality sound of Kyle's speakers. The speakers were also installed in the Roxy Movie Theater in New York City.

The advertisement was printed by the United Reproducers Corporation of Rochester, New York, and Springfield, Ohio. The firm stated that it was the merger of the United Radio Company (Peerless Speakers), Newcombe-Hawley Company, Precision Products Company (Arborphone), and the Buckeye Cabinet Company. United sold several floor model sets in exquisite cabinets from \$149 to \$600 (less tubes). Information sent to potential distributors identified the Kylelectron as the big, new sensation of radio. The advertisements read, "Think of the demand for a radio, without a cone, without a magnetic coil, without a floating needle. . . a radio without the radio sound." The speaker was essentially a large condenser, two flat plates bolted together, but separated by a thin sheet of insulation (piezo electrical effect).

Another publication, Popular Mechanics (May 1929) detailed Kyle's achievements in acoustical research and development of the speaker. Batavia resident Austin Runde remembers the article, and stated that Kyle was on hand to present a paper and a demonstration to some since forgotten scientific organization. Runde recalls that Colin received virtually nothing for his discoveries, which were later redefined and improved by other notable persons in the field of electronics. Manufacturers later reverted back to speakers with paper cones and magnets.

#### Riverbank's Contribution

It was customary in the 1920s for Riverbank's Colonel George Fabyan to employ innovative persons like Kyle in his laboratories, give them space to work, and encourage the development of new ideas. Fabyan's Riverbank Laboratories, located across from his estate, was first the home of early acoustical research by Harvard Professor Clement Wallace Sabin. Later, Sabin's cousin, Dr. Paul Sabin, formulated "sabinite," an acoustical type of plaster. Albin Anderson, a bit later, experimented with early police radio sets. Much of this information is detailed in a forthcoming book by a supervisor at the laboratories, John Kopec, who has spent several years researching the company's history. Today, IIT continues the work of acoustical research, which began when the building was constructed on Route 31 (1512 S. Batavia Avenue) in 1918. Dick Schlindwein, in recent years, purchased the other division of the firm which manufactures tuning forks, church chimes, and handbells.

Don Williams (W9KYO), another long time employee, stated that tuning forks made from carbon steel and nickel were the company's main product. They were used to syncopate electronic equipment before the invention of the oven heated crystal. Williams was born in an apartment above a garage on the property. His dad, Bert, was Colonel Fabyan's chauffeur. At one time over 250 people were employed to run the laboratory, grounds, and maintain the nearby windmill that the colonel had brought over from York Center for his milling business.

Bert Eisenhower had helped restore the windmill on Route 25 near Batavia. The depression almost wiped out the colonel, who passed away around 1936, and is buried in Boston, where he amassed his fortune in the textile industry.

Williams slightly knew Kyle and remembers him as one of the many hard working staffers at the laboratory. Mrs. Frank (Genevieve) Sanfanda recalls that Kyle was a roomer with Katie Hawkins, the long time Geneva Librarian, who owned a home at 515 James Street.

"I liked him," she recalls. "He was a quiet, shy, but likeable man, who had many interests. I had one of his speakers in my house that he designed."

Austin Runde remarked that "some people go through life telling people about their accomplishments, Colin's talents were shown through his work. He was also an expert in mineral and rock identification."

Alden Odt, Geneva's historical society president, added that Colin was an excellent photographer. Many of the slides that Odt uses in his presentations about Geneva are from pictures taken by Kyle.

In his later years, Colin Kyle continued to quietly pursue his hobbies in his rented room and in the basement of the Hawkin's home. He never married. At the age of 70 Kyle passed away after a lifetime of unheralded scientific achievement, behind a veil of obscurity, probably the way he wanted it. Kyle's death came on March 21, 1965, and he is buried at Oakhill Cemetery. Donations were received on behalf of the American Cancer Society and the Geneva Historical Society for the town that he gave so much to.

We continue to enjoy his contributions in electronics that were later improved upon by others every time we turn on a radio or phonograph.

### WHEN THE "WORD" WAS BROADCAST

In radio's early years a variety of clubs, newspapers, stores, and religious groups were owners of the first radio stations. Across the country religious broadcasters have since popped up everywhere. Evangelists have long sensed the importance of radio in conveying their message to the general public.

In the late 20's the Chicagoland area was served by several religious stations: WCBZ Zion, Illinois, was operated by Wilbur Glenn Voliva and the Zion Christian Church; WPCC Chicago, Illinois, owned by the North Shore Congregational Church, Pastor John C. O'Hair (the call letters stood for "We Preach Christ Crucified [or Coming]); WMBI Chicago, owned by the Moody Bible Institute and the only Chicago based religious radio station still on the air; WJBT, Chicago (Where Jesus Blessed Thousands), owned by Rev. Paul Rader; and WORD Batavia, a station owned by the People's Pulpit Association and the Jehovah Witnesses called the "Watch Tower Station".

While other early stations discussed in this book only exist in the archives of old newspaper clippings and tattered phone books, the remains of WORD's tower can still be visited today. They are proof of the station's early dominance of radio in the Fox Valley. Several of the huge cement supports can still be found south of Giese Road and west of Hanover Drive, east of Batavia. The large concrete anchors protrude into a flower bed in the backyard of Russ and Barbara Phillips at 1201 Thrun Street. According to Batavia Mayor, Jeff Schielke, one of the towers was still standing as of about ten to fifteen years ago. Schielke believes his aunt might have sung on this station. People in the area still remember when the WORD was broadcast as well as another station, WSWS, who also shared time on 1080 KHz with WAAF, the Union Stockyards station in Chicago. One of Erbstein's stations, WTAS (the second time around), also broadcasted for a short time from the tower.

In the 1928-29 Evans Tri-City Directory, we find Max M. Melhorn. His 53 acre farm is located two miles southeast of Batavia. A short time before this, most of the land in the area belonged to the Wagner family. Wagner Road, which was relocated to build Cherry Park Subdivision, is named after the family.

On the Melhorn Farm two huge broadcasting towers were constructed in 1924. A long wire ran between the towers (flat top "T" type antenna). Everyone knew the Melhorns. People stated that if you stopped to talk with Max on the street, or later his son-in-law, Henry Janssen, you most certainly received a short sermon and a gospel tract. Neighbors of the Melhorns, Meg Schmielpfenig and Audrey Andrews, sister-in-law, were interviewed by Batavia historian, J. B. Nelson and former school principal, William J. Wood. Wood also talked with Alvin Dahlstrom who owns a farm nearby.

Dahlstrom remembers a small wooden soundproof building between the two towers that was used for some supplemental broadcasting; however, most of the programs later came from Chicago. The station was licensed to the People's Pulpit Association which was apparently the holding company for the Jehovah Witness broadcasting operations. The company owned several other low power stations including CHUC Saskatchewan, Canada, and on again - off again WBBR Rossville, New York (which was actually located on Staten Island). The national headquarters of the stations was listed as 124 Columbia Heights in Brooklyn, New York.

Other organizations connected to the People's Pulpit Association were the IBSA (International Bible Students Association) and the Watch Tower & Bible Tract Society. The organization founder, Paster Charles Taze Russell was succeeded in 1916 by Judge Joseph F. Rutherford. When Rutherford also finished his earthly course, he was succeeded by Nathan Knorr in 1942.

A publication called the Yearbook of American Churches explained the function of the religion and early participants were referred to as "Russellites". Judge Rutherford also appeared on remote broadcasts, including what is believed to be the first national broadcast hookup of scores of stations in the United States and Canada for his address to the IBSA on August 5, 1928. The program was also carried on WORD and WGN radio.

In 1931 Rutherford changed the name of the organization to Jehovah's Witnesses and continued to use radio extensively. In 1938 another broadcast first--Rutherford engaged radio and telephone facilities between Royal Albert Hall in London and twenty-three cities in the U.S. plus stations in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. It was the first time that a transoceanic broadcast had exceeded 15 minutes. For an hour listeners heard the Harvard Judge speak about theocracy and Armageddon on a program called "Face the Facts".

WORD's early programming featured Uncle Dan's Study Club, news digests and some farm informational programs on poultry raising. The station sponsored a recipe contest directed by Mrs. Eva Sharkey and the Public Service Company in 1926. From the small building at the transmitter site local programming was presented,



including area soloists. A piano was donated by an Aurora company. Appearing on WORD in the 20's were members of the Columbia Conservatory located at 23 Fox Street in Aurora (75 Stolp Avenue was another address). A late December, 1924 broadcast featured director Harry Detweiler and assistant director Melvin Keil. Also on the program were the following artists named in a paid newspaper ad: Melvin W. Keil, William Lester, Melita Krieg, Mrs. Layard Thorpe, Maude Bouslough, Ruthanne Burnett, Lewis C. Shults, Paul Sloes, Maude Myers, and Frances Mae Anderson.

Within a month the station increased their broadcast schedule. On February 19, 1925, the evening's program consisted of the IBSA Ensemble, Florence Smith, pianist; John T. Reed, bass; Merryl Larson, soprano; and a message by Rutherford. In December, 1925 an old fashioned concert featured Miss Katherine Mae Rossow, reader, tenor Blaine J. Cainon, violinist Tracy Monohan, along with pianist and director Earl Wagner and students from the Aurora Art Academy.

WORD officially signed on December 28, 1924. A brief note on the front page of the Batavia Herald announced that the station would be on each Wednesday and Friday night from 8:00 to 10:00 p.m. Unlike the plentiful news coverage given to WJJD at Mooseheart a few months earlier, WORD only received sporadic mention in area publications. People seemed to be confused about the doctrine of the station. Several long time residents of the area recalled hearing the station and related that "it was some sort of religious programming". There were no commercials.

A Batavia publication, The Windmill News, says the station angered farmers and the surrounding community. At 6:00 a.m. Mrs. Melhorn would say, "This is WORD, the Watch Tower Station." Then you would hear Mr. Melhorn call his cows, "Come Boss, Come Boss." Then they would turn the station up to full power and knock out Chicago stations KYW and WLS. Additionally, the Windmill News stated:

The farmers would go crazy because they couldn't get the livestock results and prices from Mr. Bowes at the Union Stockyard. The housewives couldn't get their favorite radio programs like Uncle Bob, Helen Trent, Fibber McGee and Molly, Ma Perkins, and Amos and Andy. All hell broke loose on Friday night when they blocked out the husbands fights from Madison Square Garden in New York. There was threats against the station including going out there and taking down the tower. It finally got settled somehow. These were the days of Day Fan, Majestic, Grigsby Gruno and Atwater Kent radios. Kids made crystal sets out of a board, a small crystal, some wire and a set of ear phones. In the 30's if you had a car with a radio and a heater you could really pick up the chicks. (The kids are saying "what?")

Listeners also could have been confused by other stations which shared the channel. WORD presented mostly preaching and religious music with an occasional performance by the Webster Hotel Orchestra. The Watch Tower Orchestra also presented periodic concerts. Chicago studios were maintained at the Webster Hotel located at 2150 Lincoln Park West, down the street from where Charles Erbstein operated WTAS the second time at the Parkway Hotel.

A long time Batavia area teacher, Dorothy Bechtold, now of North Aurora, was a boarder at the Melhorn farm. Bechtold's teaching career spanned forty years beginning with her first teaching job at Wagner School from 1929 to 1931, located near the station. It was a typical one room schoolhouse that contained all eight grades. This building is now a residence next to a small pond on Giese Road, east of Raddant Road. She remembers that the Melhorn's frequently had young people living with them. Max and his wife, Emma, had two daughters, Mabel and Ruth. Henry Janssen (some called him Luke) was a boarder at the house about the same time and eventually married Ruth Melhorn. (Janssen later became the owner of the transmitter site as well as some surrounding property east of it bordering Kirk Road).

The Melhorn home contained one room set up as a radio studio where many guest speakers did talks on the station. Other broadcasting took place in the building near the towers.

The station operated through the 1920's sharing time with Erbstein's WCEE and WTAS, and WSWs owned by the S. W. Straus company. Its main frequency was 278 meters, or 1080 Khz, but later used 1090 Khz, 720 Khz and 990 Khz.

Around 1927 WORD began airing more musical and secular programs. The North Shore Incorporated Request Program featured vocalists Leroy Hamp, Grace Holversheid, Wally Hamyer and Ester Arnesen. The Waukegan Sun stated that WORD broadcasted with 7,000 watts and had received reception reports from as far away as New Zealand.

By July 17, 1927, several residents of Belvidere were regularly assigned to a broadcast on the third Sunday of each month. Appearing on WORD were Mr. and Mrs. E. H. Comstock, Miss Josephine Herbert, Miss Mildred Clogston, and Charles Lindquist. They sang various numbers, and Mr. Comstock delivered a Bible lecture entitled "The Drama of the Ages." The Belvidere Daily Republican stated that the two hour program would begin at 1:30 p.m.

The Radio Act of 1928 moved the station into a time sharing arrangement with Erbstein's WTAS and three other small Chicago stations: WSAY, which broadcasted out of the Chez Paree nightclub on McClurg Court; WHT, with studios in the Wrigley Building and its towers in Bannockburn. WSBC Manager, Roy Bellavia, says the WHT call letters stood for Chicago Mayor, William Hale Thompson, or Write Home Tonight; and WIBO-Deerfield-Des Plaines, which later combined with WJKS and became WIND. WSAY was later taken over by the Zenith Radio Corporation which changed the call letters to WJAZ.

In 1930 WORD operated during the day on weekdays and until 2:00 a.m. weekends with Lee Pastor as the manager.

All these stations then used 1490 Khz. WORD still broadcasted with five thousand watts. In 1931, apparently trying to identify more with the city of Chicago, the call letters were changed to WCHI (probably for Chicago, Illinois). At that time, WJAZ, WHT and WORD were left to share the channel. WHT had changed its call letters to WSOA, then to WCHI. When WCHI went out of business, WORD petitioned the FRC and received permission to use the call letters WCHI. The station's slogan changed from "The Watch Tower Radio Word" to "WCHI, the voice of Chicago." WORD later became the call letters for a station in South Carolina.

WCHI left the air on November 12, 1931, a day after the Federal Radio Commission consolidated a number of stations and ordered many of them off the air. At the end J. P. Holmes was handling the operations. The station had moved from the Webster Hotel to the Illinois Women's Club Building at 111 East Pearson Street, Chicago. WCHI was utilizing a Westinghouse 104A transmitter and a single wire vertical antenna located on Waukegan Road in Deerfield (possibly the old WHT site). WCHI had discontinued use of its' Batavia site in 1929, where the Melhorn's and Janssen's had lived. Finally, the station moved to 201 North Wells Street. It entered a court battle to regain its' license, but lost the case in May, 1932.

Stan Lenart of Batavia, a retired school teacher, remembers climbing the tower and playing in the area with Bob Janssen, Henry's son. Bob was considered an honor student and graduated from Batavia High School in 1949. He is now a professor of microbiology at Arizona State University. A trip to the old Batavia transmitter site with long time resident, Mark Wagner, was necessary to unveil the tower's forgotten story.

On Monday evening, April 11, 1988, it was just about dusk. Mark and I drove to the site. Mark knew it well for he had played there as a youngster climbing the tall 120 foot structure and sitting on its perches near the mast.

"It's funny," he stated, "after the tower was gone, it was like I could still put my hands through the rungs of the space where the tower once stood...or imagine myself climbing to the top to view the countryside...the tower was gone."

The land itself is on a high ridge abutting a residential area known as the Cherry Park Subdivision. It is just north of where the old Third Rail Line passed through the valley. The train made stops at Wagner Road and Raddant Road. Wagner remembers the stubs of utility poles running perpendicular from the tracks to the tower, perhaps to carry both electricity and program lines from Chicago. An old two-sided barn-like house used to stand nearby. Batavia Assistant Fire Chief, Stephen Lusted, has copies of old Sidwell maps showing the building and tower in 1966. The 1970 map shows that both structures were gone. The top of the tower was diamond shaped, according to Lusted. This fact was emphasized by early photos taken by Mark. A large foundation of the house was still there in the late 60's with a few bricks scattered about. Watchword Tower stood alone in the prairie.

At the apex of a gentle rolling ridge during its prime, it had blasted the Fox Valley with five thousand watts of power which, at that time, was a good-sized station. Old time crystal sets and early tube radios had poor selectivity and were overwhelmed by WORD's powerful signal. Area residents Tom Mair, Evelyn Kramer, John Fitzgerald and Alvin Dahlstrom stated that when WORD came on it obliterated reception for other stations. The loud signal wasn't enough as Wagner's father, Ray, advised that the Janssen's had positioned a loud speaker on the outside of the building. It has been said that on clear nights people in Cherry Park could hear the public address announcer from the Batavia High School football field. Can you imagine how the sound of preaching and hymns then echoed through the valley? Area farmers complained and the speaker was finally turned off.

Mair, a well-known Batavia lawyer and writer for the Windmill News, listened to radio back then on a Bremer-Telly set. His father, Hugh, hired James Eager (W9TJ) of 111 East Wilson Street to put the set together. Evelyn Kramer recalls hearing the Janssens' sing on the radio.

Henry Janssen was a well-known baritone and later worked for WGN as an engineer from 1935 to 1965. For a short time he was also employed by WJJD at Mooseheart.

John Fitzgerald also remembers the tower and, at one time, understood that the Janssen's wanted "Watchword" tower to remain as an historical landmark in the community. Janssen had sought some agreement with the developer that bought the land to keep the tower there, but this "Tower of Babel" didn't stand the test of time. The early 60's and 70's dealt the housing industry a setback. The developers couldn't build the houses and the adjoining subdivision laid incomplete.

Meanwhile some sinister activity was taking place. One foggy, drizzly afternoon, two men appeared on the scene to cut the tower down. Through the pea soup-like atmosphere in early November, 1969, the Fitzgerald's could see the glow of acetylene torches in the distance. The yellowish lights began to gnaw at the legs of the tower: a salvage operation had begun. Mrs. Elizabeth Fitzgerald called the newspaper and the police. The men presented the authorities with some paperwork from Continental Developers that indicated that they had permission to cut the tower down, according to Mrs. Fitzgerald. The police were convinced and the men continued to work. The old tower was manufactured by an east coast firm called Aero.

The demolition wasn't without incident. For years farmers had chased children away from the tower. Kids played in the old house that was filled with useless furniture and collapsed floors. Youngsters dodged a deep well nearby to climb the tower. They had dug in the dirt to make forts and had run into the radius wires that were embedded from the base of the tower. But two men on the scene for just a short time could not escape injury. While busy turning this monument into a memory, one of the men was injured as the tower fell. After all the legs were cut, the once rigid structure came crashing to the earth. The mangled piece of rusty steel was then cut up and dragged away. Some of the concrete pillars were busted out of the ground. In just a short time the very heart of early broadcasting in the Fox Valley had been ripped out.

By the time a newspaper reporter had arrived, the incident was over. An area resident, Cliff Carlson, recalls the event in 1970. He stated that the tower had become a rickety hazard and was removed for safety reasons. Those who took down the tower later found that the metal was practically worthless. Another set of pillars are still in the ground just a few feet north at the Phillips residence. New neighbors in the area are unaware that their new home abuts this historic area where radio first started in the Fox Valley. Mr. Henry Janssen died in 1973.

Late in 1988, house construction resumed in the subdivision. Several loose pieces of the tower's pillars were apparently carried off and buried nearby.

### WCEE / WSWS Money Gone South

Sandwiched in between the time that Charles Erbstein operated radio stations at Villa Olivia and Chicago was the brief appearance of radio station WSWS. When Erbstein sold WTAS to the Tribune in 1925, the publication's new weekly news magazine, Liberty Weekly, took over WTAS which became WLIB.

At that time WGN was a fifteen hundred watt station in downtown Chicago, WLIB (formally WTAS) reached over fifteen thousand watts by 1927, after the first set of new power and frequency reallocations were issued by the Federal Radio Commission. WGN also purchased Erbstein's WCEE and transferred its license. Erbstein later repurchased WCEE (which had been changed to WSWS)--changing it back to WTAS.

The Daily Courier in heralding "The Boss's Return to the Airwaves," mentioned that Erbstein had once owned WSWS, only it was called WCEE or the "Charley Station" back in 1925. WSWS operated in 1925 to January, 1927 before Erbstein reacquired it.

After Erbstein sold WCEE to the Tribune Company, it operated for a short time out of Tribune Tower. Later it was renamed WSWS and owned by the S. W. Strauss Company, a wealthy firm that sold bonds for the construction of large buildings. During this time WSWS operated on 275.1 meters, or 1090 Khz, sharing time with WORD Batavia. (1370 Khz. was also used for a short time in 1926.) Both stations used the same tower at Batavia; however, WSWS was only a one thousand watt station. A variety of evening music programs were presented over the station, as well as nighttime programs called "Junkin and His Pals" and "The Witching Hour" featuring the Ralph Williams Orchestra in 1927. WSWS featured Sunday morning church services from the Moody Church in Chicago, "The Magic Crystal Concerts" and programs from North Park College in Chicago.

In December, 1926 four WSWS staff performers appeared in a mock concert at a Methodist Church in Palatine. A simulated broadcast entertained parishioners for the benefit of the church's new choir. Appearing on the program were Misses Zolla Holmes, pianist, Zeila Grey, violist and John Clark, all of Chicago. Hugh Aspinwell of Palatine offered vocal selections and Clark served as the announcer for the evening. A noted local referee, Nick Kearns, did football talks in 1927. Captain Major and His Merry Men's radio production "A Night in Gloucester," featured announcers Aspinall, Clark, and Rudolph Winter.

#### About the Company

S. W. Straus Company was owned by Simon W. Straus, who helped finance the Drake Hotel and a long list of other prominent city structures. The company, based in New York and Delaware, often issued statistics for construction and housing starts each year. A 1929 survey issued by the company showed housing starts up by 33 percent in the Chicago suburbs as compared to the previous year. Slight declines were shown for Batavia and Elgin as the depression era drew near.

The Straus Company built their own skyscraper in 1923. After a city mandated ceiling on building heights was removed, the Straus Building was constructed with 29 floors and a nine foot tower. According to Pam Sahr,



Vice President of Lake Development Limited of Chicago, the Straus Building, at 310 South Michigan Avenue was the tallest building in the city in the 30's.

William Farnsworth of Monroe Realty and Management of Chicago headed the building's messenger service from 1928 to 1939. One day he was introduced to actress Joan Blondell. Famous people were often seen in the building. Farnsworth remembers several radio stations that were in the building. A 1927 Chicago phone book listed WSWS offices at 310 South Michigan. Zenith' WJAZ, ABC's WENR and WBCN also had studios there, all on the 23rd floor. Westinghouse's KYW/KFKX and WEBH also had studios in the Straus Building during the 1920s and 1930s.

The Straus Safety Deposit Box Company owned the building which also housed the Straus National Bank, a forerunner to the American National Bank. In the 1930s the offices of the Baseball's American League were also in the building.

The structure went into receivership in the 30's and was purchased by Continental Bank in 1943. The building was also owned by the Northwestern Mutual Insurance Company at one time. Many of the Straus Company clients defaulted on their bonds during the depression causing the company to go under. The building stayed empty until the 50's. Today, the structure is called the Britannica Building after its major client. A precarious blue light in the shape of a beehive symbolizing thrift and industry glows down on Michigan Avenue from the rooftop of the tower at night. The S. W. Straus Company was one of many firms to own a radio station in the 20's.

For a short time in 1926 WSWS was operated by the Bligh-Whittingham Company. The station was still located in the Straus Building, operating at 1090 khz at 1000 watts. In 1927 the Richard Harris Company operated WSWS. The operation utilized a transmitter site in Wood Dale and the WORD site in Batavia. Harris was president of the Illinois Broadcasting Corporation. By this time the station was reduced to 500 watts.

WSWS was repurchased from the Straus firm in January, 1927 and renamed WTAS by Charles Erbstein. Erbstein later moved the transmitter site from Batavia back to Villa Olivia in Elgin where it once was operated as WCEE. A boost in power was sought. WTAS continued to share airtime with WORD until the second radio act by the Federal Radio Commission combined both stations on 1490 Khz. Erbstein, absent from radio management for nearly two years, was anxious to get back into broadcasting. After the purchase of WSWS, Erbstein broadcasted test programs during January, 1927. By the end of the month he was ready for his second hurrah with WTAS. The station officially returned to the air on January 29, 1927. Erbstein was at the mike along with the former chaplain of the American Legion, Rev. Father Joseph Lonergan.

The newspapers of the day proclaimed "Willie, Tommy, Annie and Sammy and the 'Boss' are Back." WTAS operated until November 11, 1928, when the FCC canceled the licenses of many stations to clear up the radio dial.

#### **WMRO/WAUR/WYSY AM-FM Partners in Heritage and Progress**

The oldest continuous operating radio station in the Fox Valley is alive and well today and can be found at 1280 Khz in Aurora. WMRO went on the air on December 13, 1938, with one hundred watts. (In late 1989 the call letters were switched to WYSY-AM.)

The call letters WMRO were the initials of former owner Martin R. O'Brien, who operated the station from 1938 to 1957. Russell Salter (see WKKD) was the station's first program director. Charles Hunter, the first voice ever heard on WMRO, was part owner and became a well known morning air personality on the station. Hunter roomed with Salter and overslept on the station's first broadcast day. Employees had been up late conducting overnight tests. The operation identified with Aurora and several local communities during many years when it was the only station on the air in the area.

The early years of WMRO will probably be remembered for its many broadcasts of live music. Well-known organist, Ken Griffin performed on the station, Aurora singer, Estelle Jiavis and pianist Margy Nelson were among the last of the live performers.

The station's early studios were located at two downtown Aurora locations. WMRO's first transmitter site was located in North Aurora on Route 31 (also known as Lincoln Way or Lake Street) across from Exposition Park (see WJJD). On this property today is the River Park Atrium Center at 161 South Lincolnway. This is a large office building which was formerly the Skorberg Furniture Store.

On Skorberg's north parking lot once sat a brick two-story oblong shaped structure which housed WMRO's RCA equipment. The station's transmitting antenna stood nearby. Martin O'Brien bought the building and two acres for back taxes in 1938. The Insulite Chemical Company was the former tenant of the building; in later years a woodworking shop moved in.

The building contained a couple of offices and an apartment that was rented to Georgene Weith Rieke and her husband. Fox Gardens, a prohibition era speakeasy, was located next door to the south. It opened in 1923,

changed hands several times, and finally burned down in 1927. The North Aurora Fire Department finished the structure with a practice drill that year.

North of the office building is Mike Brackett's Pedal & Spoke Bicycle Shop. This is a remodeled home built in 1911 by the father of Aurora historian Fred Graham, Jr. Graham was a part-time announcer at WMRO in the late 1930s.

The locations of these business places give one a modernistic location of the original transmitter site. WMRO began low power testing late in 1938. The previous weeks tests at 40 watts were heard as far away as Canada, according to an Aurora Beacon News report. The station's 211 foot antenna was knocked down twice by ice storms in the early 40's at the North Aurora site. The real attraction of the station was downtown in Aurora. O'Briens' modern studios were first built at 34 South River Street.

The old Merchant's National Bank was located there until 1932. The Aurora Savings and Loan owned the building later and rented studio space to WMRO, according to Michael O'Brien, one of Martin's sons who worked in the station part-time. Michael is a Vice President with the Old Second National Bank in the city. The station's building today is occupied by Fox Valley Blueprint Co.

O'Brien's modern air conditioned studios consisted of large double soundproof windows, pastel painted walls and indirect lighting. Two rows of folding chairs were positioned in the lobby in 1938 where fascinated people could watch the employees at work. The large studio contained a grand piano. The younger O'Brien stated that the latest equipment was employed at the station consisting of wire recorders and two types of tape players, standard and reverse feed. Michael's older brother, James O'Brien, once served as commercial manager at the station.

When live remote shows were presented a 1938 radio equipped Ford Van was used to transmit "on the spot" programs. The van contained RCA equipment, large OB4 amplifiers, a Hallicrafters receiver, and a Gates mixer. All the equipment, wires, and microphones fit nicely on shelves inside the van. A converter connected to the van's battery powered the mixer for the broadcasts. The van was severely damaged when it collided with a truckload of empty chicken coops. The cages crashed through the van's windshield injuring engineer Leo Burch who had been driving.

Much later direct phone lines were used for remotes. (Over the years stations have gone back to remote transmitters because of the high costs for leased telephone lines.)

The station's first frequency allocation was 1250 khz., but later the daytime only station was switched to 1280 khz. by the Havana Treaty of 1941. Many times WMRO received permission by FCC telegram to broadcast special ballgames or events at night. During the early 1940s one particular evening O'Brien received FCC permission to broadcast the "Major Bowes' Amateur Hour." The popular female trio "The Wilhelmi Sisters" from Aurora were to perform that evening.

O'Brien also ordered about twenty extra phone lines to allow listeners to call the station and vote for the local group. The Wilhelmi Sisters won the contest. WMRO Program Director, Russell Salter later married Arlene Wilhelmi of the group.

Other special programs included local high school sports. Fred Leo was the station's sportscaster in 1939. For most games WMRO merely taped the game and played it back the next day. Most daytime only stations, like WMCW Harvard, also presented night-time sports this way. However, O'Brien can be sincerely thanked for breaking an unfair monopoly of the coverage of the state basketball tournament in Springfield. Champaign area stations did their best to keep other stations out, or forced local stations to take their feeds. O'Brien told tournament officials that the state basketball tournament belongs to everyone, and proceeded to send crews each year to broadcast the event. O'Brien's nephew, Vince Cofey, did the "Sweet 16" Tournament several times. Martin was also considered a good sportscaster.

Other favorite programs on WMRO included "Aurora Answers," a noontime "Man on the street" type program. On one occasion an "expletive" was used by a person being interviewed on the show. The station received numerous letters of protest. The program usually took place on Broadway in downtown Aurora. The daily newscasts were held at 11 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. A religious program, "The Church in the Wildwood," (named after an old country hymn) aired at 1:30 p.m. It was popular among shut-ins. An afternoon request program, numerous public service shows, including Army/Navy programs and Christmas programming were arranged.

An amateur hour program, a children's show, the "Organ Hour", and Bill Blough's popular country and western music program were also presented. Live programs were often carried from Mooseheart and Easter church services were broadcast.

WMRO's first staff members included a wide variety of hardworking talented personalities, some who later went on to become household names. O'Brien put his sons Michael and James to work in various capacities around the station. Michael was mainly an announcer who worked sign on and sign off shifts sandwiched in between a somewhat less glamorous job at a factory. It was Michael whom Joliet's WJOL called on one night to emcee a live band broadcast at the Leland Hotel's newly remodeled Sky Club. The 16 year old O'Brien was paid about \$12 for



the half hour, which featured the Bob Harley Dance Band in 1946. Gene Autry started his country and western singing career doing programs at the Leland Hotel before he became a star on the WLS Barndance Program.

WMRO's other first employees were Program Director, Russell Salter, who would later own several other stations around the state and in Wisconsin. Salter's views on just about everything was different than the WMRO management. He later built competitive WKKD AM-FM almost next door to WMRO's new studios near Eola, and worked at several other stations in Chicago and Indiana. (WKKD was located on the property first.)

Robert Diller, formally of WIND Gary, Indiana (Chicago) and later of WBNU was the Promotion Manager. O'Brien's nephew, amateur photographer Vincent G. Cofey, joined the station as Commercial Manager in 1940. Leo Burch was the first engineer, John Kitner, has been the engineer since 1948. Leo and his brother Joe helped build the station for O'Brien.

Other early employees included Arlene Hoffman, music director, Mary Louise (Brown) Plants, program director; sportscasters Fred Leo, Chick Hearn, and Bob Kennedy of the Chicago Cubs; engineers, Truman Van Norman, Phil Olson, and Robert Greenslaugh; announcers, WGN's Johnny Putman, WOPA's Art Hellyer, John Drury and Bob Booker. Other early staffers were Jack Anderson, Jeanne Doran, Bill Randles, Sam Alsheuler, Robert Carlton, Edith Hinckley, Darlene Gordon, and Janet Goss. Among the late 1970s and early 1980s staffers were Dean Richards, Ford Colley, Dan Lewis, Jim Richards, Scott Wagner, Pat O'Kelly, and David McAlley, who is now with WRRR, Rockford.

A host of other announcers and office personnel have worked at WMRO during the past 50 years. A few of these have become well known in the professional broadcasting field. Among these are TV's John Drury, sportscaster Frances D. "Chick" Hearn, and organist Ken Griffin.

### John Drury

Drury, in the early years of WMRO, was a student at Aurora West High School and signed the station on in the morning. Drury has since served for many years as a respectable journalist and TV newscaster.

Drury, who was known as Jack Drury back then, also worked at WTMJ in Milwaukee and WGN-TV in Chicago. He once had to change his name while working for a small Indiana station because a beer of a different name sponsored the program.

He has been on Chicago TV and radio for many years. Drury's hard hitting, business-like, but friendly style of broadcast journalism enhances the evening newscasters on WLS-TV, an ABC station in Chicago.

### Frances D. "Chick" Hearn

The most successful radio personality to emanate from the Fox Valley radio scene was Frances D. "Chick" Hearn, the current play-by-play voice of the Los Angeles Lakers. Hearn is truly the finest example of finesse, dedication, and hard work ever to rise from the AAU hardwoods to a professional broadcasting booth.

While Chick is kept busy year round with the Lakers, he often pauses to remember those early years behind the microphones at WMRO and WBNU. His Fox Valley roots, however, go back long before he began working for the likes of Martin J. O'Brien and Vince Cofey, serving as a referee and official for many sporting events in the area. Today this background helps him to call a play before it even materializes, making him the nation's most thorough and respected sportscaster.

In the late 30's or early 40's, Hearn remembers his first broadcasts on WMRO as the announcer for the Clippers, a semi-pro football team that played Wheaton College and other teams including Highland Park and teams in Wisconsin. The Clippers played most of their games at Aurora, East and West fields, and at the Labor Temple Field. Rudy Nebel was a long time star halfback for the team. The Clippers folded about 1956. Hearn did a fine job of covering these games, but local residents will always remember Chick for his fine accounts of area high school games including the traditional Aurora East-West High School football contests that were usually played on Thanksgiving Day.

Chick also did high school basketball and holds the record for broadcasting the most games in one day. Hearn explained that the state high school basketball tournament in the late 40's were played in the George Huff Gym in Springfield. The "Sweet 16" event featured eight games on Thursday, four on Friday, and two on Saturday. Hearn did all the games by himself, and on at least three occasions, did all eight games on Thursday of the tournament as well.

Needless to say, his voice was a bit raspy after Thursday's games, but instead of resting, he spent the rest of his time preparing for the next day's contests. Chick soon learned that he could talk fast, with clarity, as well as chime in timely comments about each player. Hearn often stresses to broadcast students, "It is more important to enunciate properly that to talk fast, even if you miss a dribble. "Good announcers," according to Hearn, "are skillful, well-prepared and up-to-date. The poor ones soon get lazy in their preparedness, which ultimately shows in their performance."

The veteran of over fifty years of sports broadcasting also recalls his years as a player on a semi-pro basketball team sponsored by Austin-Western Company, a road grader manufacturing firm located at Farnsworth Avenue and Dearborn in Aurora. The firm closed in 1978.

Chick relates on one occasion a secretary for the firm won a considerable amount of money in a contest, about \$600, and told him that she would buy him a new pair of basketball shoes. The rest of the team chuckled and waited to see if the secretary's intentions would be carried out. At the team's next game a new shoe box was found at the foot of Hearn's locker. Expecting a new pair of basketball shoes, Hearn opened the box and discovered instead a mutilated, half frozen chicken that had been run over by a car and stuffed into the box.

The grotesque mess found in the shoe box gave birth to a creative new nickname for Frances D. Hearn. Some teammates called him chicken, and later "Chick." The name stuck and now serves as a classy accolade. For a person who needs no introduction at "Jumpball," Hearn says even the nickname sounds like a sports name. He added, "A name like Francis wouldn't go many places, unless his name was Francis Albert Sinatra."

There were certainly no goose eggs for Chick Hearn's future either, as the later years would serve up some heaping plates of prosperity for the promising sportscaster. Perhaps there were some hard feelings between Chick and Martin J. O'Brien when Hearn went to work later for Aurora's new FM station WBNU, owned by the Aurora Beacon News. Due to the lack of FM radio sets in the community, WBNU only lasted a short time, but long enough to continue to propel Chick into the sports scene. The new station had unlimited broadcast hours being an FM station, while WMRO, owned by O'Brien, had to seek special FCC permission to broadcast after sunset for a special event.

At a benefit game in 1949, at West Aurora, WBNU had decided at the last minute to broadcast a sell-out game that was arranged by O'Brien. The contest was a great idea, according to Hearn, who halfway through the game was surprised to see the familiar faces of three policemen approaching his broadcast set up. The police told Chick that he had to stop doing the game as O'Brien had filed an injunction against the broadcast.

Since that time Hearn has been nonstop. He left the area in 1952 to do Bradley University games on WEEK, and NBC affiliate in Peoria. The Broadcast Yearbook for that year, lists Hearn as the sports director of the station. He later went to work "big time" for NBC doing numerous golf tournaments, the East-West Shrine game, NCAA football, and the Rose Bowl game many times. He is frequently called on to do commercials, voice overs, and when time permits, UNLV college basketball games.

When the Minneapolis NBA franchise moved to Los Angeles in 1961, Hearn was chosen to do their games. The world champion Lakers broadcasts quickly grew from a few stations to a nationwide network. Hearn is the first announcer to be simulcast on both radio and TV. Similar operations now take place in Chicago and other cities.

The Laker games are carried on KLAC in Los Angeles and a host of other radio and TV stations across the country. Hearn is currently enjoying a consecutive string of over 2,200 games broadcast. Only twice has he missed a game; once during conflict where he was already contracted to do the Bob Hope Desert Classic Golf Tournament, another due to terrible winter flying conditions. A pinch hitter announcer by the name of Jack Brickhouse did the broadcast for Chick on that night.

Hearn's key to success is basic and simple--he strives to take care of himself, prepares for each broadcast, and instinctively gets to know the players and what they will do with the ball. "Most of all, enjoy what you do," Hearn added.

Today Frances D. "Chick" Hearn is an inspirational success to the Fox Valley. Chick took advantage of his early broadcast opportunities here and took the time to polish each stepping stone on his way to the big leagues.

### Ken Griffin (Griffith)

Griffin was one of three organists who were featured on the station. The other two being Mary Louise (Brown) Plants, WMRO's long time music and program director, as well as another local favorite, George Strand. Ken Griffin (he had changed his name from Griffith many years ago) was born in Columbia, Missouri, and had first studied the violin. In his earlier years, he played at a roller skating rink, in Sandwich, Illinois and later did some recordings in Gary, Indiana.

Griffin had the backing and long time friendship of WMRO owners, Martin R. O'Brien and Vince Cofey, which helped make him become one of the country's most famous organists.

Cofey was approached one day by Frank Book the owner of the Midway Cafe in Naperville. Book urged Cofey to come and hear his new organist and boasted of the musician's great talent. Thus, Griffin was discovered. Ken became very popular on live broadcasts from 4:00 to 4:30 p.m. Monday afternoons from the cafe.

Cofey was the announcer and took much of the air time to read all the requests before the music was played. Other later remotes were aired from the West Side Beer Garden and the Rivoli Cafe owned by Mike and Ann Covelli (New York Avenue and River Street). As his popularity increased, so did his salary.

Kenneth Wilson Griffin later skyrocketed into popularity with his million seller recording of "You Can't Be True, Dear."

Griffin, described by WMRO music and program director Mary Louise Brown (Plants), was egotistical. Ken always called her "Mary Louisey Brown" and told her that she would never be an organist. Perhaps he kidded her too much, but needed her services quite often. Brown always had to play new songs for Griffin, who then picked them up and played them by ear. He was then able to use them on his weekly radio show. Plants was also an accomplished organist and played often in the community, as did George Strand.

Griffin's music can be characterized as the type one would hear at a roller rink or on a merry-go-round. Griffin's style was mechanical and simple. "He probably wouldn't know what to do with all those modern additions to today's organ like computerized drums and other buttons," said Brown.

Besides his musical ability, Griffin had other interesting personality traits. He often stated, "I'm the world's greatest organist, if you don't believe that, ask me." Cofey states that Griffin would often be seen counting his money, and if he would come across a twenty dollar bill in his wallet, he would state, "How did that get in there?" and proceed to wad it up and toss it in the waste basket. Cofey says, "Naturally, he beat me to the trash container to retrieve it."

Griffin served in the army for a short time in 1943 at Camp Berkley near Abilene, Texas. He was the chapel's organist. Crown Point, Indiana barber and army pilot Burdette Wood recalls Ken as a friendly, talented gentleman. Other sources say Griffin disliked being in the service. His discarded army belongings laid around the station for weeks until someone threw them away. Martin O'Brien's son, Michael, stated that his dad was continually supportive of Ken despite the organist's frequent drinking problems and his inability to manage his own affairs.

Some of those problems, which were never unique to musicians, prompted Brown to make frequent appearances pinch-hitting for Griffin at the Rivoli Cafe. It was the elder O'Brien who got Griffin's Hammond organ out of hock, enabling Griffin to move to other establishments that boosted his popularity.

Griffin recorded many albums for Columbia Records, which has re-released them many times. Songs like "Cruisin Down the River", "Have You Heard?", and "Till I Waltz With You Again", were among a variety of favorites recorded by the famed organist. But nothing topped Ken's 1954 recording of "You Can't Be True, Dear", which sold 3-1/2 million copies.

In the early 50's Griffin could readily be found charming and entertaining dinner guests at the Old Heidelberg Restaurant located at 14 West Randolph near State Street in Chicago. His last local appearance in Aurora was in 1952 at a concert at Aurora West Junior High.

Griffin was a talented musician, but also a hypochondriac. Martin O'Brien and Vince Cofey often heard Ken say that he thought something was internally wrong with him. Numerous check ups gave Griffin a clean bill of health, but he apparently worried himself into a fatal heart attack. The first came in 1955 in Spokane, Washington during a series of concerts. Griffin died of a second heart attack in Chicago on March 11, 1956. Shortly before, Ken had paid for a large funeral for his father whom he had admired very much. Both are buried at Lincoln Memorial Park on U.S. 30 in Oswego Township. Ken was just 47 years old when he died.

Griffin's "roller skating" style of playing the organ was long popular after Ken left the area to pursue his career. WMRO regularly featured the "Organ Hour" for many years, saluting America's most well-known and well-liked organist who began his musical career in the bars and restaurants of downtown Aurora and nearby Naperville.

Today, Mary Louise Brown is married to L. F. Plants and continues to enjoy playing her organ, bowling, and recalling the early years of radio in Aurora. Her son, Ronald Newman, also an accomplished organist, plays at St. Mary's Church in Aurora and the Arcada Theater in St. Charles.

### History Continues at WMRO

Throughout the years many successful careers were born and polished in the Fox Valley by their experiences at WMRO. Besides hiring professional personnel, well-known people visited the station. Prime Minister Nehru of India, who was visiting a local farm, once appeared on WMRO. Other guests were Sgt. Alvin C. York a World War I hero who was promoting savings bonds and boxing champ Jack Dempsey. Michael O'Brien even remembers getting a call for then Chicago Mayor Ed Kelly one night.

WMRO moved its studios down the street from 34 South River to 184 South River. Power was increased to 250 watts in 1949. The new studios were located in an older brick home purchased by O'Brien. The tower was relocated to Hurd's Island about a half mile south of the station on the Fox River. The transmitter itself was placed in the basement of another home owned by O'Brien on Rosewood Avenue. The rest of the home was rented out. The station's coaxial transmission lines were suspended across the east channel of the Fox River to Hurd's Island.

The transmitter site on the island was a jungle scene infested by wild undergrowth, tainted by blowing dark soot from a nearby power generating plant. Consulting engineer Robert A. Jones and FCC Inspector George Skolm used machetes to chop their way to the antenna site. "Inspections were done very quickly," says Jones, who now runs an engineering firm in LaGrange, Illinois. The city's soccer fields are now located on Hurd's Island which is now served by a bridge.



One of O'Brien's favorite sayings became, "Don't tell me any continuing stories." He was implying that he might not be around to hear the ending. Failing health forced O'Brien to sell his 250 watt operation to his nephew Vince Cofey and business associate Ben Oswalt.

Oswalt was the manager of the Campana Company in Batavia. (The Campana Company is a cosmetic firm that produces, among other products, the diet-aid candy "AYDS.") Oswalt's dad was a football coach and announcer at WJJD Mooseheart. The station sold for \$85,000 on August 16, 1957. Vince Cofey was also one of the areas finest sportscasters. He did many play-by-play broadcasts of local high school games.

At that time two other broadcasters filed for station licenses in Aurora. Russell Salter, of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, who already owned several other stations, would later build WKKD AM/FM on a plot of ground just west of WMRO. Another broadcaster, Glenn Miller of Logansport, Indiana's WSAL, sought an Aurora license for 1480 Khz. His plans never materialized.

In 1959 WMRO became a 1,000 watt daytime station broadcasting a 500 watt directional signal at night. Three towers were erected on Eola Road. The nighttime pattern protected stations in Evansville and Minneapolis.

In 1965 Cofey improved WMRO's signal, moving its studios to the transmitter site at 620 Eola Road. In the previous year (September, 1964), Cofey had opened WMRO-FM. FM studios were maintained in the Graham Building in downtown Aurora at 33 Stolp Avenue. Its 3,600 watt signal came from a tower located on top of the Leland Hotel. It used the same antenna base as WBNU, Aurora's first FM station. A construction permit for 95.1 mhz was later changed to the stations official frequency of 107.9 mhz.

In 1965, Oswalt was bought out by Cofey and Hunter, who sold WMRO in 1969 to the Stevens Broadcasting Corporation. The company was headed by Dale Stevens of Elmhurst, R. W. Hakanson, and Hal Brokaw. Brokaw brought many years of broadcasting experience to Aurora having worked in two stations owned by the Westinghouse Broadcasting Company, WIND Chicago and WOWO Ft. Wayne, Indiana. Cofey and Hunter agreed to change WMRO-FM's call letters to WAUR.

The new venture was now known as Aurora FM Incorporated and broadcasted mostly "supermarket" music. By 1973, Cofey of Sugar Grove sold WAUR, a 31,000 watt FM station of extensive coverage to another Stevens' organization, the Stevens Communication Group, owned by Stevens, Brokaw, and several others.

In 1976, WAUR was moved to its new quarters on Eola Road with WMRO. In 1986 both of Steven's stations, WMRO and WAUR were sold to T. Furman Brodie, a South Carolina lawyer. The new firm operates both stations under the company Midwest Broadcasting of Chicago (Beasley Broadcasting Group). Both Stevens and Brokaw were convinced that the \$30 million deal would remain in the best interests of the community, rejecting several earlier offers. Brokaw told me, "That the company promised an expansion on those programs he started. Besides, it was time for a new, younger management team to take over." Each successful owner had added something to enhance the station. Brokaw told the Beacon News, "That the new owners would be 'polishing the diamonds'."

By this time WMRO mainly aired talk shows. During the tenure of Brokaw, WAUR amassed great strength and coverage. It became the biggest FM station outside of Chicago. Its new 740 feet strobe lit antenna tower gave the station fifty thousand watts of effective radiated power, stronger than some Chicago FM stations. The tall structure also became the home of the area's "Echo" amateur radio repeater transmitter.

Brokaw stated that it has only been the last ten years that FM stations have been able to turn a profit. The ones that came before survived because they had an AM station supporting it. Today Hal Brokaw continues to enjoy a busy civic life in the Aurora area.

WAUR. The station's new high powered success was interrupted twice with tower problems; once in 1984 and again in 1986. The facility's huge tower fell over. The second time the incident occurred, the station's AM tower was also knocked down taking both stations off the air for a considerable period. This was related by Shadow Traffic reporters Joe Collins and John Milligan. Another WAUR announcer, Joe Bartosch, became embroiled in another station problem. Bartosch boarded himself up inside a studio vowing not to emerge until the Chicago Cubs baseball team snapped a current losing skid. The station was not amused by the stunt, and instead of capitalizing on the incident, as some stations often did on similar stunts, the Aurora police were called and the announcer was removed. Later the same day, the Cubs won anyway. WAUR's long time news director David Blair has since moved to WFXW in Geneva.

The stations' new owners dubbed WMRO as the "neighborhood station." A construction permit was sought for 2,500 watt operation for the future. The WAUR-FM call letters were changed to WYSY in 1988. Their new slogan is "Doing it in the Burbs." The AM operation is 1,000 watts daytime and 500 watts directionally at night. In 1988, an AM station, WBYG in Sandwich, Illinois, owned by Roger Nelson, picked up the WAUR call letters. Nelson also owns WSPY-FM in Plano, Illinois. Both stations were combined into WYSY AM/FM in 1989, dropping the historic call, along with its local news format. Ken Anderson is the station's popular morning man. Chuck Williams is the general manager. WYSY-AM became WBIG in June of 1991.

Former station owner Vince Cofey today enjoys a leisure retirement at his home in Sugar Grove. He recently returned from a honeymoon in Ireland. Cofey, 80, a former school teacher and fine sportscaster, is also an amateur photographer, having filmed more than 500 weddings for Virginia Fields, a well-known photographer in Aurora. Vince still eagerly recalls times, dates, and facts about his early years as the radio nephew of WMRO owner, Martin O'Brien. Other former partners, Ben Oswalt, now resides in Florida, while Charles Hunter lives in Arizona.

### Art Hellyer

One of Chicagoland's best known radio and TV personalities began his career at Martin O'Brien's WMRO in Aurora. Art Hellyer's scrapbooks contain numerous broadcasting credits and historic accolades. These date back to the early years of radio when being an on-the-air personality meant more than reading the time and temperature and spinning a few records.

This era spawned such communicators as Dave Garroway, Ken Nordine, and John Doremus. Hellyer's accomplishments and diversity make him the envy of anyone else written about in this book. His professional enthusiasm helped make him one of the busiest personalities in the Chicagoland area in the 50's and 60's. His voice was heard on numerous stations as a disc jockey, TV booth announcer, and on hundreds of commercials.

Hellyer, who was born in suburban Elmhurst, began his broadcasting career in the army, while working at KOB in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He gave up a possible career as a ball player to continue his broadcasting interest. He later worked for WKNA in Charleston, West Virginia, WOWO in Fort Wayne, and stations WISN and WMAW in Milwaukee.

While being groomed as a later announcer for CBS, Art would spend a short time working in local radio, including a short stop at WMRO in Aurora. On Hellyer's first trip to the station, O'Brien gave him a live audition reading the noon news on the air. Hellyer stayed and worked the rest of the day. Hellyer was employed by Martin O'Brien from October, 1947 to November, 1948.

O'Brien, who was active in politics and a shrewd businessman, literally ran Hellyer from sign on to sign off, usually six days a week. Art would do a disc jockey show all day on the station, then while five minute transcriptions (programs recorded on large discs) were playing, he would run to three separate locations in downtown Aurora for regular remote broadcasts. These live programs took place at 12:15 p.m. at a nearby Sears store, 3:00 p.m. at a local bar on Broadway, and to the Ken Griffin Program at the Rivoli Cafe later in the afternoon.

The program at Sears came on after the "rip and read" Noon News. Secretary Jean Doran would put on a five minute program on disc, enabling Art to leave and return to the station. Hellyer interviewed shoppers at Sears. At 3:00 p.m. Pretty Kitty Kelly entertained listeners with keyboard favorites using a Solovox, a type of piano, with Hellyer as the host.

The broadcast day concluded at the Rivoli Cafe with famed organist Ken Griffin. Griffin delighted the listeners until sign off, which was about 8:00 p.m. in the summer.

Hellyer was the host and engineer of Ken's request program. Art said, "Ken was a very talented musician, but had the foulest mouth." Art kept Ken's mike off to keep frequent expletives off the air during the music. For all this running, Hellyer earned 45 cents an hour. O'Brien was truly a frugal businessman even refusing to replace burnt out tower lights when he thought the price for relamping was too high.

O'Brien, according to Hellyer, saved more money later in Art's stint at WMRO by giving him four hours off in the middle of the day without pay. The air time was given to a volunteer announcer, someone from the owner's family. Hellyer spent the afternoons catching carp in the Fox River and throwing them back.

During Art's broadcast day, the only break that he received was during Chick Hearn's sports report from 6:00 to 6:15 p.m. Art recalls that Chick would trudge into the studio from a local factory carrying an old lunchbox to do the show. Hearn today is the voice of the Los Angeles Lakers basketball games. (See WMRO, WBNU).

During 1947, Hellyer's innovative ideas included rolling out a special floor and describing tap dance routines as area youngsters danced to records. Special mikes on the floor picked up the taps.

Hellyer brought bowling to radio and became controversial when he installed safety belts in his car that year. After one year at WMRO it was time to move on.

The rest of Hellyer's career reads like a precise train schedule. From 1948 to the present he has been derailed only once, in 1967, during a network New Year's Eve broadcast in Chicago's Loop. A drunken reveler attacked him, and Hellyer sustained some paralyzing injuries that would later confine him to a wheelchair and back brace. These injuries resurfaced in 1975, slowing down his pace, but not dampening his desire to perform.

During this time Hellyer shared his skills and talents with students at Columbia College. Art helped turn out some of the city's best traffic reporters in Barry Butler and Roz Varon. For Hellyer it would be the second of three broadcasting schools where he would teach. Some years before, he taught at the Radio Institute under Doris Keane and Dr. George Courier (See WWAE). Art later taught at the College of St. Francis in Joliet.



It is difficult to pick out all the numerous highlights of Hellyer's illustrious career because of his vast experiences and inexhaustible dedication in the industry.

It has been said that ratings don't lie. No one could dispute his number one position as having the best morning show on WCFL (now WLUP) from 1950-1957. He previously had worked in Milwaukee. Hellyer's fine voice was also heard as the booth announcer on WBKB (now WLS-TV).

Through the 60's and early 70's, perhaps unknown to the listener, Art has given numerous station breaks and sold more gasoline, beer, bread, and Kellogg's cereal than one could consume in a lifetime. He has been the announcer for Patti Page, "Rocky and His Friends", ABC Monday Night Football and numerous other local and network programs. His voice has been teamed up with other fine freelancers like Ted Liss and Harry Elders to "hawk" thousands of products.

In 1958, Hellyer hosted a popular TV quiz show called "It's In the Name" on WGN-TV. The show pitted last weeks' champion against three contestants who tried to make additional words out of celebrity names. Carmelita Pope was the announcer for the show which was sponsored by National Tea. Burt Klaster was the show's producer (and later the producer of "Romper Room"). On the show the prizes sometimes exceeded one thousand dollars. "It's In The Name" lasted one year and was the last locally produced game show on TV. Quiz shows were slowly being phased out after the \$64,000 scandal.

From 1961-1965 Art hosted a popular music program, The Supper Club, on WBBM. During 1966-1982 he did programs on WLS-FM, WAIT, WJJD, and WOPA; again Art was number one. In the late 60's with WLS-FM, the station featured other familiar voices including Steve Hodges of WJJD and Mike Rapchak of WGN. This successful easy listening sound was later scrapped for a rock format.

Most of Hellyer's programs on WOPA were recorded and played back while Art was busy doing something else, somewhere else. He continued to be the booth announcer at Channel 7 in Chicago. His time at WJJD will always be special as he teamed up with WGN's Eddie Hubbard to play big band music like he had played years before.

Art's career expanded to Mokena's Satellite Music Network from 1984-1987, where he did his "Stardust" big band program. The show was aired in six time zones across the country on 200 stations, including China. His years in radio were celebrated on a memorable program on May 6, 1988, on WBBM. There, "Radio Classics" host Chuck Schaden hosted a two hour program live from the Wrigley Building (the former location of WBBM through 1956). Hellyer was honored that night along with the Leslie Atlass Family who founded the station.

Today these memories continue on. Hellyer was asked by former Satellite Network Director Ralph Sherman to join him at WJOL. Sherman is the new manager at the Joliet station.

Art and his wife Elaine have raised five children and currently live in Naperville. Because of his past injury, he is confined most of his time in a resting position. Today his memories live on, as Art Hellyer tirelessly travels to Joliet each Saturday for his afternoon program, "When Radio Was Radio." The show aired from 2 to 6 p.m., but was later switched from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays. Hellyer is heard with his own brand of music, laughter, nostalgia and conversation. This weekly program follows a long career of work with Chicago's major stations and a brief tenure at the Satellite Music Network (where he still gets fan mail).

My first encounter with Hellyer was in 1966. Some friends working in a garage were listening to an old beat up radio with a cracked cabinet. The dial stringer had broken years before leaving the station stuck to one position on the dial. The radio casing was covered with numerous paint droppings and dust. But coming through clearly were the sounds of a true entertainer, Art Hellyer and his music, a Chicago legacy not to be forgotten.

NOTE: The next chapter is taken from an article written for Senior News. In it, I spent several delightful afternoons listening to Art Hellyer unwind many humorous yarns about his long and exciting radio career. It is reprinted here...

### Radio's Hard Working Nice Guy

Older radio listeners often ask, "Where have all the good songs gone?" The answer is "Find Art Hellyer on the radio dial, and you'll find not only some good music, but the same friendly voice that has been entertaining Chicagoans for over 40 years."

Art Hellyer sincerely has been blessed having been a part of Chicago's most interesting radio era, the 50's and 60's, but then again, he has also felt the industry's sometimes cruel turnovers and tragedies. One such incident rendered Art a debilitating injury at the hands of a New Year's Eve reveler in 1967. He's also been fired several times.

Hellyer's den is a wall-to-wall panorama of Chicago radio history which stars Art himself in a variety of ads, pictures and news clippings. There would be a few more honors up there if it wasn't for a 1957 flood in his Skokie home that destroyed other momentos of the time.

He has worked with the most interesting cross section of celebrities, stars, and technicians, singling out Doctor K, Lenny Kaye the "turntable technician," as his favorite record turner.

Hellyer's history marks a time when most everything on the air was either live or on transcription, mechanical or make-believe. Record turners, not disc jockeys, actually played the records. Back then there were no tapes, but there were rules, and Art managed to bend most of them.

Hellyer is the type of person that one could sit down and listen to all day. The listener usually sits, and today Art is more comfortable when he stands as he delivers an endless monologue of radio yarns for anyone who likes radio as much as he does. Many of the antics and experiences that Art has pulled or participated in have become SOP (Standard On-The-Air Procedure) today. He was one of the first major Chicago DJ.'s and capitalized on it. Who would think of giving the time during the morning rush hour one hour ahead all morning as an April Fool's prank? Or advertising a non-existent product (Slurps) that is guaranteed to remove rust from one's bloodstream because of too much iron.

Hellyer's career marks a time when the communications industry made its greatest leaps to modern solid state technology. When Art started in radio in 1946, most everything was done live. WBBM, the Showmanship Station, located at the Wrigley Building, featured live bands or scripted programs in its early years. It has long been one of the hallmarks of the radio industry and an impressive place to work. While being groomed for this prestigious plateau later in his career, he had to first do what most aspiring announcers do, start out in some small remote area far from the glimmer and glamour of large audiences. CBS announcer Bob Cunningham helped him get started.

A star outfielder for the 1945 National Championship Air Force Baseball Team, Hellyer gave up a possible athletic career to go into broadcasting, a decision he, his wife Elaine, and their five children never regretted. Besides baseball, broadcasting has always been in his blood. Art's father, Arthur L., a later DuPage County Treasurer and successful lawyer, gave young Art a small public address system. With it, Art amused neighbors with his pretend programs and characterizations. This interest led to a job while in the service at KOB, Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1946, and later with WKNA in Charleston, West Virginia. Hellyer recalls signing on the new station with a morning newscast that was read from newspapers. The janitor, thinking that he was saving the station money on electricity, had shut off the teletype machines the night before, leaving Art with no copy.

Early programs at WKNA featured a well-watered music group, that Art performed with called "Slim Dry and the Carolina Hillbillies." Salaries ranged from 35¢ to 45¢ an hour there and at WMRO in Aurora. Hellyer became one of four announcers to work for owners Martin O'Brien and Vince Cofey, who later became household names. They included organist Ken Griffin, LA Lakers sportscaster Chick Hearn, and Channel 7 newsman John Drury.

At WMRO, Hellyer received an on-the-air audition requiring him to read the noon news. "If I like you, you're hired," intimated O'Brien. After reading the noon news, Hellyer spent the rest of the day and the next year there often serving as Ken Griffin's engineer at the famed Rivoli Cafe. Describing dances, doing remotes, and even reporting bowling scores were among his early duties at WMRO. Midway in the afternoon during a split schedule, he fished for carp in the Fox River, then threw them back just to pass the time until his late afternoon hours began.

By 1948, Hellyer had moved on the WOWO in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and WMAW, WISN, and WMIL in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, before getting his first start in Chicago at the Radio Institute. The talented Hellyer, with his friendly resonant voice, quickly landed another job doing midnights at WCFL. Mal Bellairs was leaving to become a freelancer (which Hellyer would also become later). His new late night program was called the "Outer Drive".

Spinning the radio dial during the 50's and 60's listeners could easily find Art. He did programs for most of the Chicago radio and TV stations. It was easy for the city's dial twisters to find him, but it took much more commitment to fulfill all the air time purchased for him by his agency. Most programs were recorded on transcriptions and had to be delivered to the stations. A cue sheet and play list were included with each program. Janitors, elevator operators and cab drivers were slipped regular gratuities to make sure Art made all his daily connections. On one occasion Art leaped over a five foot span of the partially stuck up State Street Bridge just to make one of his broadcasts on time.

If he wasn't busy beating other crosstown personalities in the annual celebrity go-cart race at O'Hare Stadium, he was busy racing around town to his next assignment. It was probably to his "Downtown Nash" program on WMAQ, or to do some commercials or booth announcing for CBS and WGN-TV. Hugh Downs was his announcer at WMAQ. These later led to his top ranked "Morning Madcap" program on WCFL which was number one in Chicago from about 1950-1957. Hellyer was joined by his long time record turner Lenny Kaye, who was the unspoken star of the show. The pair often used out of context "voice drop-ins" by celebrities for comical affects on the program. Quoting the late Mayor Daley, Hellyer recalls thanking him for stopping by today, followed by an audio cut perceived to be the mayor saying, "There's no light in the men's room."

Hellyer had a good rapport with the late mayor from doing the "Marriage License" show on WGN. Sometimes his work was not as funny especially during live TV commercials that were flubbed. It was then like a page right out of a Jackie Gleason and Art Carney script, reminiscent of the time John Cameron Swayze watched helpless as his new Timex watch was being beat to pieces during a live demonstration. One particular spot

advertised a 144 piece set of exquisite china. When one of the pieces accidentally broke on camera, Hellyer remarked, "Oops, it's now a 143 piece set."

Another live spot featured a scale model window and screen combination. As the features of the product were being explained by Hellyer, the window refused to operate properly, prompting Art to stick his hand in the picture to unjam the window. People thinking the window was full size in the commercial, wrote in wanting to know just how big Hellyer's hand really was.

From 1953-1955, Art relived his enjoyment of baseball serving as Bob Elson's color man and pre-game show host. These times featured colorful interviews with some greats of the game, namely Bob Feller, the sometimes "articulate" Yogi Berra, and ageless Yankee manager Casey Stengel. Berra, known for his one line double talk blunders, was once introduced after a car commercial. Without thinking Yogi announced on the air, "I don't drive them (the advertiser), them's junks, I drive Cadillacs." Stengel's contribution was a bit more philosophical, "Being hired is the first day on the road to being fired."

Hellyer already knew what that was like, Legitimate and some rather pretentious pranks got him into trouble. At one radio station he announced the phone number of the station owner, urging listeners to call and help "cheer the old man up." Another station owner disliked Art's name and wanted it changed on the air. So Art signed off identifying with two well-known city landmarks, "This is Ambassador Drake with the news."

His unpopularity with station owners prompted him little leeway for leniency. One cold night Art opted to wear an expensive turtleneck sweater under his suit instead of the usual required tie to protect his sore throat. He was seen and fired immediately. A co-worker had also been previously dismissed for another violation of the WBBM radio dress code for wearing a suit and tie, but white buckskin shoes.

But Art always found another job, and after a successful stint with WCFL, he soon went back into freelancing appearing on so many stations that the IRS couldn't keep track of him. They requested a detailed account of how Art could be on so many stations at once and keep up such a definitive schedule. What they got was a minute by minute account of Art's exhausting daily routine, appearing live or delivering discs, as laid out by his ad agency. It included all parking tickets, and what he had for lunch that particular day.

As busy as Art was, he still had time to emcee "It's In the Name," a popular word game show on WGN-TV in 1958 with Carmelita Pope. Finally, being torn from his family by his 200 weekly appearances on radio and TV, Art left for an unplanned vacation just to get away for awhile. It was soon afterwards that his busy schedule resumed, rushing from his Skokie home to do the midnight news on Channel 7 (1959), the Supper Club on WBBM (1961), and Memory Lane on WOPA-FM (1966).

Art continued to be live on one station and on tape across town somewhere else. This rigorous schedule was to continue for several more years; his secret, probably good clean living (he has never used the permitted expletives on the air), an understanding wife and lots of luck. But luck was to run out in 1967. His coverage of the annual New Year's Eve countdown in front of the Chicago Theater was marred by an insidious character who attacked Art on network TV.

Just before midnight, recalls Hellyer, some unknown person (even to this day) came out of the crowd viciously assaulting his from behind. The perpetrator, a young well-dressed man, punched and kicked Hellyer rendering him helpless on top of a nearby parked Corvett. "Get Art," someone said, as even the program's producer was being whisked away by the wild crowd. Hellyer's assailant quickly evaporated into the crowd and was never seen again.

"The guy succeeded what he intended to do," remorsees Hellyer, "to get on national TV by assaulting someone."

Before the broadcast Art was warned that he would be out there with "animals". Future similar remote broadcasts now always isolate spectators from the announcers because of this incident. That night Art Hellyer traded his \$17.50 fee for a nightmare of lifetime injuries. He attempted to keep up his exhausting schedule until one afternoon he found himself clinging in pain to the side of the Lincoln Tower Building. Several discs in his back were unrepairable, requiring surgery and regular traction. During this time, he taught broadcasting at several schools from a wheelchair, including Columbia College and the College of St. Francis in Joliet.

Many students were inspired, including Hellyer himself, who reentered broadcasting doing anonymous commercials, including hot dog taste tests, later taking a regular spot at WLS-FM in 1969. In a short time Art was number one again along with colleagues Mike Rapchak, Ernie Simon, Steve Hodges, and Bob Larsen from his old WKNA days. Chicago Blackhawk PA man, Harvey Wittenberg, was the program director who pulled all the MOR music, but it was the seasoned jocks themselves who made the station what it was.

About a year later the station's New York headquarters opted for a new "rock" format (Doctor Love) and presented figures that boasted higher ratings than Hellyer's widely followed morning program. "I've got a following", Hellyer bitterly remarked to Sun Times columnist Ron Powers. "I didn't even get a good-bye from the new station boss." It was inevitable that Hellyer and others were to get the axe by station management who were busy swinging the gigantic FM door open to young adult audiences. Only Hellyer hastened station action, by



expressing his displeasure over the air a week before his expected termination. He disagreed with the management's audience figures stating, "I resent that piece of material put out by the people upstairs". Station management didn't seem swayed even after program director, Harvey Wittenberg, had pointed out that Hellyer had went from fifth to first in ARB ratings in a year and a half.

In his swan's song the embattled announcer commented several times during his last two hours on the air criticizing the station's move. But in the end, ABC cleaned house, sweeping out Hellyer and others who had "lost to love".

Yet Hellyer refused to give up. The success of his time at WLS-FM led to a reunion with another long time Chicago favorite, Eddie Hubbard, at WJJD in 1982. Considered unprofessional by WLS management, WJJD had no problem acquiring Hellyer and encouraging his to again return to the days of old, only this time, it was slightly tuned down. This reunion spawned memories that Hubbard and Hellyer shared in their earlier radio years; they played the same music, wore the same clothes, but both had become inevitably older. It was another stop along "memory lane" for Hellyer who remarked in a 1982 Chicago Tribune article: "Each time I became number one in this town, I really had the feeling that I was indispensable to that station, that the advertisers would pull out if I were fired. When I did get fired, the next day someone was working in my place and business went on as usual".

Hubbard remarked in the same article, reflecting his many years in the business, "There's so much competition these days, that today people can't even remember the stations, let alone the personalities." The two senior announcers continued to reminisce at breakfast one morning downtown. The industry was continuing to march on, leaving behind its earlier voices, including one "Tired American".

The folksy nostalgia that Hubbard and Hellyer brought to WJJD lasted about two years. A plan to collect all the old time Chicago radio personalities to buy and program the station failed. The owners were not interested in selling just WJJD-AM. Ironically, the station today plays the same kind of stuff that Hellyer thought would work in Chicago. He later came to dislike the city, its' traffic and problems, coming back only to visit his old record turning pal, Lenny Kaye, and appearing on Chuck Schaden's program on June 12, 1988 on WBBM. Kaye worked with him at WBBM, WCFL, WAIT, WLS-FM, and WOPA-FM.

In 1985, Hellyer's talents reached upward, projecting over several time zones as the voice on Satellite Music Network's "Stardust" format. Invited to SMN by long-time friend Ralph Sherman, Hellyer later felt uncomfortable continuing the operation's practice of localizing the announcer with recorded individual station promos and using the station's letterhead.

Hellyer later followed Sherman to WJOL where he continues to conduct his successful Saturday program as in the days of old. The show features the humor and music that Art's many listeners have continued to enjoy over the years, touching on special holiday presentations and poetry. Why does Art travel to this small station in Joliet each week? He merely replies, "I love radio. Here I can do the kind of show that I want to do, free of formats and restrictions." If he wants to play two Nat King Cole or Frank Sinatra records back-to-back, he can in Joliet, but probably not in Chicago.

His show often features unusual vintage music, comments, and interviews. The program is sold out with a waiting list of other eager advertisers. When not on the air, Art enjoys building model railroads, collecting antique cars, and discussing baseball. He and his son, Jeff's, Rotisserie baseball team finished in first place this year. But his main love has always been radio.

Appearances over the years on WIND, WMAQ, WOPA, WLS-TV, WGN, WBBM, WAIT, WLS-FM, WAAF, WCFL, and WJJD, are just pleasant memories now for a man who has devoted his entire life to the industry. Glimpses of the past have earned a decisive spot on the walls of honor in his Naperville home, symbolisms of the times when life was simpler and radio was closer in tune with personalities than music formats.

Art kept us laughing in those years and still sounds like he's having fun on WJOL. Today Art is still a Chicago radio legacy just a little older, but not out of tune with his listeners. Some well-known Hellyer-isms taken from old Chicago newspapers are:

There's a candy company that insists it's going broke, but Art insists that everyone knows that they are making a mint this year.

A minor league ball club has found a scheme to hypo attendance by offering each woman who attended a night game a case of beer. By the seventh inning, reports Hellyer, the "bags were loaded".

All the animals in Noah's Ark came in pairs, except worms, they came in the apples.

Art recalls the time his brother, Argyle, flooded the school gym, the coach told him to go in as a sub.

Art Hellyer calls Marilyn Monroe's picture a work of art, it's a "Whistler".

## WBNU

### Early FM in the Fox Valley

It is tough to beat a media combination in a small city where a newspaper owns a radio station. But apparently, there weren't enough people listening to enjoy the innovative efforts of a classy new FM station operated by the Copley Newspapers in 1948. Prior to this time, FM stations had been assigned the 42-47 Mhz band. Today this space is used by some two-way operations and state police.

Few of the FM pioneers lasted through the experimental era. The ones that did were owned by profitable AM stations who footed the loss in operating revenue. Even the Chicago Tribune's FM station, WGNB, 98.7 FM, which was started in 1947, folded in 1954. It operated with 35,000 watts. Early FM stations in St. Charles, Brookfield, Blue Island and Chicago Heights were deemed unprofitable and went off the air a short time later.

With the move by the FCC to the 88-108 Mhz band, FM broadcasting brought new horizons in high fidelity programming. Up above the noise, the first FM stations concentrated solely on sound quality. Listeners could even hear the clear sound of a basketball dribbling. Equalized telephone lines were used for remote broadcasts.

In 1948 among the hype and excitement of the new sound of FM, the Aurora Beacon News owned by Copley, introduced WBNU to the Fox Valley. The "B N" stands for Beacon News.

Prior to this time the newspaper had printed many stories of the expected success of FM broadcasting. Large numbers of FM receivers were expected to be sold, and in return WBNU pledged extensive news and sports coverage for the area. The Beacon News boasted of its new broadcasting tower installed at the top of the 21 story Leland Hotel. Antenna height was very important. Its automatic beacon, mounted next to the hotel's "Sky Club" sign, could be seen for fifty miles on clear nights. The studios were on the 18th floor of the building located at the southwest corner of Galena and Stolp Avenue in downtown Aurora. Aurora Beacon News editor and publisher, Charles Hoefler, stated, "Station WBNU will be a part and parcel of Aurora and will be operated in the advance interest of this community and its environs." The station broadcasted on 103.9 Mhz with one thousand watts and an antenna height of 342 feet. FM stations were then rated by square miles covered instead of power output.

The station hired Robert Diller as director and Jack Cunningham as chief engineer. A local sports official, Frances "Chick" Hearn became sports director. Hearn was a well-liked high school referee, and had previously worked for WMRO. Bruce Miller, formally of WEXI and now a sportscaster for WWL in New Orleans, stated that Hearn as an official could mesmerize the crowd at any athletic contest and keep the game under control. "Chick" went on to become the voice of the L.A. Lakers and was a manager for a short time at WBNU (see WMRO).

In its first week of operation the station broadcasted all the games of the 1948 Regional Basketball Tournament at West Aurora. Frequent programs also featured orchestras like the Don Pedro Orchestra playing at the hotel's Sky Club. The Beacon News' John Curley stated apparently the anticipated success of the station fell short of the number of listeners and advertisers needed to support the station despite the crystal clarity of this new type of broadcasting.

In the early fifties, 225 FM station licenses and construction permits had been voluntarily returned to the FCC. In short, interest in WBNU-FM was diminishing fast. The hoopla of the station's first day on the air on March 1, 1948, when dignitaries overflowed its new modern studios, was now a disappointing memory. Publisher Charles Hoefler went on the air the last evening of the station's short tenure shortly after 7 p.m., announcing the station would cease operations at 11 p.m. Hoefler blamed listener apathy, TV development, and the lack of FM radio manufacturing as causes for the station's closure.

FM radio sets were just being developed prior to the outbreak of World War II. Hoefler added, "Much to our regret, FM has not lived up to the bright promise of two years ago." At that time, 52% of Aurora households had FM radios, but companies had slowed the production of these sets. The station ceased operations on August 1, 1950.

WMRO (WYSY-AM), Aurora's first AM radio station, started in 1938 by Martin O'Brien continues in operation today. WMRO-FM (now WYSY) used the tower at the Leland Hotel for a short time until it moved to its present location on Eola Road. WBNU's programming efforts should not go unrewarded. They just came at an early time that was victimized by short-sided preparedness and little interest on the part of listeners and radio manufacturers that virtually killed early FM.

The advent of TV further stifled marginal radio operations like WBNU. Copley continues to operate a successful chain of newspapers, but like many other publications wanted to give early radio a try. The station's former director, Robert Dilling, was often heard on commercials on WMRO in Aurora during the 60's.



## WEXI

### Broadcast Day Comes to a Fiery Conclusion

In May of 1949 several area men attempted to make a go of an early FM operation in St. Charles. FM broadcasting, at the time, was an unproven entity. There weren't many FM radio sets and even fewer advertisers and listeners.

A survey taken by the University of Illinois in 1949 stated that only seven percent of listeners in the St. Charles area had FM radio sets. About a year later fifty percent of the homes had FM sets and that was mainly due to purchases of TV consoles which also included AM-FM phonograph combos inside the same cabinet. The idea of the quality static free sound that frequency modulation broadcasting offers had not caught on yet. With minimal support early FM station WBNU owned by the Aurora Beacon News during the same time period, had shut down its operations. WEXI-FM met with a different fate, it burned down. WEXI began broadcasting on May 28, 1949, from a 20 x 30 foot white cement block building located near 15th Avenue and West Main Street in St. Charles (on the north side of the road). The station was near Ray's Evergreen Tavern just west of Charlie Nelson's Wholesale Meat and Locker business. (The tavern was named after the adjoining subdivision.) These business places are located across from Grim's Shopping Center. Marse Van Glabek (Todd Moffett of WFXW's mother-in-law) had in-laws who lived just west of the station. She recalls the tiny building that was located where the parking lot of the Spring View Restaurant is today (behind the St. Charles Memorial Works on Route 64). A small creek wound around the building and separated the two properties. Folks in the area recall that Route 64 was no more than a two lane gravel road in the early fifties, and the meat plant was the only other building in the area around 1942.

St. Charles fireman, Tom Comstock, recalls the building set deep in the lot with its tower about forty feet north behind the building. St. Charles Deputy Assessor Rudy Deweidt remembers the tower was about 250 feet tall (actually 253 feet). The station's wooden call letters were mounted above the door.

WEXI received its FCC construction permit on October 21, 1948. Construction began on November 11th. Early records from the St. Charles City Directory supplied by Charyls Wheeler of the St. Charles Library, Marian Burton of the Geneva Library, Susan Kendall of the Batavia Library, and Joe Esser of Broadcast Yearbook in New York indicate the following station ownership in 1950: The station was owned by Greater Illinois Broadcasting Company, Box 269, 5-1/2 East Main Street, St. Charles. John A. (Jack) Schroeder, of South Elgin, was the president and chief engineer. Schroeder used the radio name "Jackson Q". Schroeder was also employed by Woodruff & Edwards in Elgin, and earlier at WMRO. He did the station's popular "Polka Party" program.

Two Chicago men, William Phillip Gray and Sidney F. Gray of 5370 N. Normandy Avenue were listed as early station owners with Schroeder as of June 11, 1947. At this time the Greater Illinois Broadcasting Company was formed. The Gray's sold out to Mason Evans III and Gerald F. Kraus on July 30, 1948, before the station was actually started.

Mason Evans III became general manager and program director. Gerald F. Kraus, who lived at 114 South Third Street, St. Charles, was the commercial manager. He used the radio name "Jerry Weston" and later became the president of the station. Both Kraus and Evans were employed for a short time at WCLO in Janesville, Wisconsin, a station owned by the Janesville Gazette. WCLO sales manager Charles "Bill" Bessire, stated that Kraus was his station's afternoon announcer for about six months.

Evans was from Canada and had relatives who worked for the Canadian Broadcasting Company. Evans mysteriously disappeared from the Janesville area while employed by WCLO. Both men had very polished radio voices, according to Bessire, who stated that WCLO was the starting point for many announcers who went on to bigger stations. Kraus later left radio and worked for the Geneva Chamber of Commerce. The station's main backing, however, later came from Operadio of St. Charles (now the Dukane Corporation).

J. McWilliams Stone, Sr., (W9LH) was the president who had begun Operadio in 1922. George Haase, Sr., was the secretary-treasurer. John M. Stone, Jr. and Charles H. Redman were also listed as officials in the station's annual corporate report.

Operadio had moved from its East 14th Street address in Chicago to the old Universal Press Warehouse on 13th Avenue in St. Charles on April 28, 1928. Lester Norris of the St. Charles Chamber of Commerce was instrumental in bringing Stone's firm to St. Charles and handled the building's lease. Stone's firm had manufactured speakers in Chicago and was just getting into manufacturing radio sets in the 1930's. Operadio's name was later changed to the Dukane Corporation (which stands for DuPage and Kane counties).

The elder Stone's interest in radio and wanting to help out the young enthusiastic personnel at WEXI (pronounced WEX-EE) kept the station from an early failure. Stone was more of an inventor than a broadcaster designing many electrical products including some ingenious radio sets.

Much information about the beginnings of WEXI came from former or retired employees of the Dukane Corporation in St. Charles. Entertainer J. Earl Chapman of South Elgin, who plays the organ at the Elgin Moose Lodge, stated that he did transmitter work at the station.

Dukane's Chief Engineer, W. R. "Bill" Torn, (sometimes called "Rip"), stated that the station failed because not enough area people had FM radios. Torn told silent partners Stone and Haase that he himself didn't even have an FM radio. "Mac" Stone was the kind of person, according to Torn, "who wanted to be a step ahead of his time."

The elder Stone was eager to get in on the ground floor of new things like early FM radio. Stone invented a number of other electrical products like an early clock radio that tuned in preset stations. The stations often drifted providing poor reception. Stone also invented the first portable radio in 1922. The set used three batteries for the radio's tubes, bias, and filament voltages, and utilized a detachable portable antenna. Torn contacted various manufacturing companies to reconstruct an original set which is now on display at the Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. Henry Ford was a friend of the elder Stones'. The original portable radio was the first principal product manufactured by Operadio, the forerunner of the Dukane Corporation.

The firm also produced the first tape recorders. Magnacords helped revolutionize the broadcast industry by enabling stations to present taped programs for repetitive or future use. Torn stated that Stone's inventions would have been perfected if they had come along about five years later in the fast growing radio market.

Stone apparently left the announcing end of WEXI to several capable young persons who used the station to launch their professional careers.

Other employees included Bruce Miller, of 227 North 3rd Street, St. Charles. He was a sportscaster at WEXI, and in October, 1950 broadcasted one of the earliest high school basketball games ever aired in the area--St. Charles versus Batavia. Miller eventually went into military broadcasting.

Miller has fond memories of where he first started in radio and stated he learned much about the industry from Schroeder and Vince Cofey. Cofey, who later owned WMRO Aurora, was also an excellent sportscaster. It was Cofey at the mike during a St. Charles-Geneva football game when Miller scored an extra point while playing end for the Geneva Vikings in 1948.

Bruce is the nephew of St. Charles' residents George and Florence Gorecki, who live near the site of the old station. Bruce refused to ridicule the operation, despite having to drive through axle deep mud to get to the building and being at the mercy of extreme temperatures inside. The station, relates Miller, had an old furnace that barely put out enough heat to warm the studios in the winter. Also, since few women came to the station the women's restroom was never used. There was always a yellowish ring in the bathroom bowl that Tidy-Bowl couldn't even get out. Jackson Q reminded Bruce about the perils of drinking too much pop and proceed to demonstrate how a bottle of Coke could quickly eradicate to ring in the women's toilet.

Schroeder gave Miller other assistance as well, plus an opportunity to broadcast local basketball and football games. Games to be broadcast like St. Charles versus Naperville or any of the Fox Valley schools were always mentioned in the St. Charles Chronicle.

After a year with WEXI, Miller joined the Air Force and went to Korea. He later did two years with the Armed Forces Radio and TV Service, broadcasting re-enacted baseball games, complete with canned crowd noise and phoney bat-cracking sounds just like former president and sportscaster Ronald Reagan did. The broadcasts sounded so real that servicemen thought Miller was at the game and not in Munich, Germany at the AFR studios. He also once interviewed actor Clark Gable while in Europe.

After several years in radio at Champaign, Illinois, Miller today enjoys an exciting broadcasting career in New Orleans. He does a morning radio sports show on WWL and pre-game and interviews for the New Orleans Saints football team.

WEXI's brief on-the-air tenure began with much fanfare and a large ad in the May 25, 1949 edition of the St. Charles Chronicle. The ad read, "WEXI WOULD HAVE THE LATEST IN NEWS, MOST IN SPORTS AND BEST IN MUSIC." The station operated mainly from 3 p.m. in the afternoon until 10 p.m. at night. A young high school lad, Kenneth Lind, of St. Charles, was hired as a studio engineer at the station. Listeners will remember Kenny's familiar introduction of a popular female vocalist of the time, "Here's the latest singing rage, Miss Patti Page." Lind is now a communications consultant with the Dukane Corporation in Batavia and lives in Wellesley Hills, Massachusetts. His amateur radio calls are K9CEM/W1HGS.

Lind remembers the wide variety of programs the station offered the community. In the afternoon various programs were presented from 18 inch "floppy" transcription discs. These featured national entertainers from Army or Navy radio shows and syndicated programs. Newscasts were presented featuring local news, plus state, national and international news from the INS network. The station subscribed to the International News Service and received their news via teletype. The INS offered the reporting of famed journalist Bob Considine in its service.

Various local personalities regularly performed on WEXI. Henry A. Feltgen, Jr., whose father owned Feltgen Buick (12 North 3rd Street, St. Charles), played his accordion on the station. Henry, Jr. was an accountant with his dad's dealership from 1945 to 1956 and later with Continental Can in Chicago. He is currently with Richard Buick in St. Charles. Feltgen, who is visually impaired, played accordion in a band known as the "Country Boys" on the station. William "Bill" Gasten played steel guitar and Robert "Bob" Bouman played spanish guitar. The

group became the "Country Pals" when they were joined by female vocalist Jean Diebert Frost. They played at the Kane County Fairgrounds and for free at WEXI. Feltgen still has wire recordings of the band's performances.

Today, Feltgen plays his accordion for senior citizen events, calling himself "the good for nothing accordionist" because he plays for nothing. He still uses the accordion that he purchased in 1949 and used on the radio. "It plays old songs because it's an old accordion," says Feltgen.

In 1952 Feltgen was the emcee for the Saturday Jubilee, a local talent program on WRMN in Elgin. WEXI also had other local talent personnel that are still involved in the surrounding community.

Kane County Clerk of the Circuit Court Jan Carlson had a disc jockey program back then. Carlson teamed up with a local banker, Eldon Anderson. Carlson and Anderson, with Lind as their engineer, were the forerunners of disc jockey comedy. The duo were the first in the area to use two-man scripts, sound effects and comedy drop-ins taken out of context. Carlson went on to work for Martin O'Brien and Vince Cofey at WMRO. Jan also helped develop Northern Illinois University's radio station WNIU-FM before hanging up his earphones and going into government work.

WEXI also had a polka program at 7:30 p.m. each night followed by more local talent. Listeners could often catch Shorty Hobart from Batavia play the spoons while his two younger daughters sang country and western favorites. The broadcast day was rounded out by Jerry Weston's call-in request show. Listeners had no problem calling in requests for "My Gal Sal", or any other selection from the station's six thousand disc record collection which were mostly 78 rpm recordings.

Early programs included Fox Valley Roundtable of the Air (weekly) starring L. Bowden DeForest, Secretary of the Elgin Association of Commerce. The show's first program featured Elgin Mayor Walter E. Miller. Area physician Dr. S. L. Gabby hosted "Your Doctor Speaks" each week.

WEXI promised lots of sports, and they delivered, Lind, along with the owner of the Dukane Corporation, J. McWilliams Stone, Sr., convinced the energetic sports reporter of the St. Charles Chronicle to join the station staff. Stone and Lind, who were both amateur radio operators, told Eddie Chessman that he was just the right person for the job. Chessman was hired as sports director at WEXI while maintaining his "Sports Rialto" column in the Chronicle. He was also the personnel supervisor at Dukane all at the same time. Chessman succeeded Miller. Years later Eddie revealed to me that Stone told him to work for the station and help out the young people employed there. Stone had become the owner of the struggling station about two years after it had opened. Chessman was offered \$2 a week for his sports shows, but declined to take the money. (The salary was similar to those paid to me for recent radio work!)

Chessman was an active sports enthusiast himself. He played baseball with former St. Charles Fire Chief and Township Trustee Karl Madsen. Eddie had a reputation as being a fine golfer also. Chessman still lives in St. Charles and was the sports editor for the St. Charles Chronicle from 1935 to 1955. Among his duties at WEXI was a nightly sports talk show. One of his early interviews featured former DePaul basketball greats George Mikan and Whitey Kachan. Chessman was joined by Russ Reid and Walter Best in broadcasting the 1951 high school basketball sectionals from Woodstock and Waukegan. The station also broadcasted Elmhurst and Augustana College football games.

Chessman was never sure if anyone was listening to the station, so he bought an FM radio for his wife to assure himself of at least one listener. Having few listeners didn't stop the station from becoming a beehive of activity. The tiny FM station broadcasted with 380 watts using a Raytheon transmitter at 106.3 Mhz. Its signal radiated from Aurora to Elgin. WEXI was always listed in the Elgin Daily Courier's Radio-TV listing. On October 18, 1950, WEXI broadcasted by taped delay the inauguration ceremony for the St. Charles Student Council. On December 6, 1950, the station announced plans to build a five hundred watt daytime AM station. A construction permit was granted for 1560 Khz. WEXI was also in negotiations to join the new Progressive Broadcasting System.

By late 1951 those interviewed all agreed that the station was in financial trouble. There were few listeners and few advertisers. Announcers were paid less than a dollar an hour. Eddie Chessman was tired of the pace he set with WEXI and the Chronicle. The INS news machine had been repossessed, making it difficult to do an evening sports show. Chessman went on vacation and was replaced by another young energetic reporter by the name of Hugh Hill.

Hill sold advertising for the station, but agreed with Kenny Lind that few listeners and poor management contributed to the downfall of the station. Hill recalls the station was poorly designed and related, "The people who ran that station really didn't know what they were doing. They failed to correct transmission problems that pushed a considerable amount of the station's signal into the ground, which greatly affected WEXI's coverage area." Hill went on to build a successful, respectable career in radio and television journalism and is still employed by WLS-TV, Channel 7, in Chicago. Bruce Miller did some of his first sports broadcasts with Hill. Chessman went back to the newspaper business and later retired.



WEXI had problems from the start. During construction the forms holding wet concrete for the foundation collapsed, spilling out quick drying concrete all over the project. Neighbors quickly scurried to the scene to help save the job. The driver of the cement truck merely dropped the load and left the mess to the struggling workers.

With no listeners, no advertisers, and lots of debts, the end of this station came swiftly. Kenny Lind had taken the remote equipment home with him for the next day's basketball broadcast. The station was on the air from noon to midnight, so there was no one on duty to notice an early morning fire that rapidly became out of control.

The fire was spotted by two hunters in a nearby wooded area who reported it to a neighbor, Edward Van Glabek. Van Glabek had a woodworking shop nearby. When Fire Chief George Modine and his crew arrived on the scene, he found the building completely engulfed in flames. Coupled with the fire's headstart and limited water supply, the building quickly became a total loss. WEXI's equipment was ruined and the six thousand disc Lang-Worth transcribed record collection totally destroyed. The building's roof had also collapsed.

The station's tower stood alone, escaping the sinister flames. The newspaper listed the cause of the fire as undetermined. WEXI was now gone and never returned to the air. Kenneth Lind relates only the tower and the timing device that operated the tower lights and the remote equipment that he had taken home remained. The station's manager, Gerald Kraus, showed up at Lind's home to collect the equipment the next day, and Lind never saw him again.

The tower was torn down shortly afterwards. The popular rumor of the time was that the fire could have been caused by a troublesome furnace in the station. The suspicious fire remains a mystery in the Fox Valley today. It was believed that WEXI was originally one of several small suburban stations that was created as part of a network. Other stations in the network, including WRBI Blue Island, were put on the air with very little financial backing by broadcasting students.

Operadio had taken over the station and had kept it going in later years until its fiery conclusion. Bob Martin was the station's last program director. Ray Doane was the chief engineer; Dick Fitzgerald was the last sales manager. Some of the original owners of the station were students at Radio Institute in Chicago.

In May of 1964, McWilliams and Haase dissolved the corporation that owned the station after many years of inactivity. The land was sold to developers about five years later. WEXI later became the call letters of a station in Arlington Heights, WSEX, which was changed to WCBR in January of 1989.

## OPERADIO

J. McWilliams Stone, Sr. (W9LH) was the founder of Operadio and the Dukane Corporation in St. Charles. Stone was an early experimenter in wireless communications and a member of the Chicago Wireless Club. The organization maintained offices in room 52 in the Auditorium Building in Chicago. Stone, who lived at 5129 Harper Avenue, Chicago, at an early age used a kite wire at the 51st Street Beach and strung 600 feet of wire on the roof of the Hyde Park Hotel in 1912 to conduct early wireless communications. He used the self given call "DO" in his early experiments. His firm is credited with the development and manufacture of the first portable radio sets which were operated by batteries.

The first sets were made in the basement of Stone's home in Chicago in 1922. One of these early sets is on display in the Henry Ford Museum. In 1923 the gifted Stone was vice president of the Van Doren Coupler Company, a railroad supplier located at 2324 South Paulina Street in Chicago, and much later in Woodstock at 110 1/2 Benton Street.

Operadio was reorganized in the late 20's and moved from Stone's basement to a large manufacturing plant located at the northeast corner of 13th Avenue and Indiana Avenue in St. Charles. A Sycamore newspaper reported that Operadio also had operated out of a 14th Street building in Chicago, prior to its move to St. Charles.

In the mid 30's (about 1936) Operadio moved to larger quarters at 101-107 North 11th Avenue (11th Avenue and Cedar). Operadio changed locations with the Globe Music Company who manufactured ukeleles and mandolins. The music firm moved into the 13th and Indiana location.

In the 1940's Operadio also operated a second plant which is now Fox Island Square, an L-shaped shopping center located at One West Illinois Street (north of the Piano Factory). Its former address was 206 First Avenue South. This building has been extensively remodeled for small shops and businesses.

Operadio's 11th Avenue location is owned today by Batavia Enterprises which leases sections of the building out to some 30 other businesses. Operadio set up other locations which were assembly lines for government contract work in Joliet, Quincy, and in an old bank building in Dundee. Amplifiers and speakers were produced on assembly lines employing many St. Charles area residents.

For a brief time in the 1940's, some assembly work took place in an old dairy building on North 4th Street in St. Charles. Old city directories list the St. Charles Dairy at 320 North 5th Street which today is a private residence.

In 1951 Operadio became the Dukane Corporation (standing for Dupage and Kane Counties). The firm moved to its modern industrial and technological center at 2900 Dukane Drive (Kirk Road and DuKane Drive) in



1970. Long time former officers were George Hasse, Sr., who was the senior vice-president for many years; L. A. King, sales manager; R. T. Anderson, treasurer; and Eddie Chessman, who was the personnel director of the firm for 31 years.

In 1970 Stone's son, J. McWilliams Stone, Jr., became the company's chief executive. Through the 70 years that the firm has been in existence, the Dukane Corporation has manufactured speakers, amplifiers, tape recorders, language laboratories, and parts for Western Electric, General Motors, Wurlitzer, and the federal government.

Today the Dukane Corporation is a national leading communications firm. History still abounds in the company's board room, where the elder Stone's early ham license and other credentials are mounted on the wall of the room. An oil painting of Stone's graces the firm's lobby.

### WRMN/WJKL Successful Partners

The most successful and consistent radio station in the Fox Valley is WRMN, now nearly 40 years old and still growing. The station has long been the news and information authority of the area. Combining local news coverage with its UPI and Mutual Network affiliations, people and advertisers know a winner when they hear one.

WRMN first went on the air September 10, 1949, broadcasting with five hundred watts. The early owners, George Ralston and Jerry Miller, finally ended their five year battle with an Oak Park firm for a full-time license on 1490 Khz. The license for 1490 Khz eventually went to the Village Broadcasting Company (WEBS) and later to Egmont Sonderling, owner of WOPA (now WPNA). Ralston and Miller then settled for a daytime license for 1410 khz. The station moved from an old wooden building that resembled a "chicken coop" on Route 58 to newer facilities at the Fox Hotel, 156 Division (later called the Douglas Hotel). The station operated from the first floor.

WRMN continued to grow boosting its AM signal to one thousand watts in 1955. The 60's saw continued progress by the station, including new studios at its present location at 18-1/2 Douglas Avenue. WRMN-FM 94.3 mhz signed on with one thousand watts in 1960 and went to three thousand watts in 1964. A new tower erected in 1971 brought horizontal and vertical FM broadcasting for WRMN-FM. WRMN-FM's call letters were changed to WJKL (standing for the owners' name Rick Jakle) in 1972.

At the heart of the WRMN/WJKL operation is a special computer system that was installed in 1973. It was the first station to use this specially made automated programming device for a radio station. The machine actually plays the music and commercials. WRMN began 24-hour operation in 1980. When WRMN-FM became WJKL, it switched from a progressive rock format in the 70's to programming big band music. Local high school sports are carried over both stations.

The FM side, which used to be called "The Fox", delighted adult listeners with a unique blend of "torch" songs, snappy big band favorites and 60's standards. Jakle programmed the "Great Music Station" with 6,000 albums he purchased at an estate sale. At the time, he called it the best format change he had ever made. There was enough music for ten years without repeats. Today WRMN-AM serves the local community with news, sports and information, while WJKL/94 has expanded operations with another office and studio in Schaumburg.

Both stations operated off a new 375 foot tower on Route 58 near Lord's Park. Night time operation for the AM station is handled through four directional towers in South Elgin. A background music service called "Musico," is also operated by WJKL-FM.

Through the 50's and 60's the station was owned by Joseph, John, William and F. F. McNaughton and Richard Sutter. They were also in the newspaper business and were partners in other downstate stations including WCRA in Effingham. Today, the station is managed by Rick Jakle. Marty Zivin was the station manager in the 1980's and later moved to Des Moines, Iowa to work at clear-channel WHO. Bruce Stralinsky, formerly of WFXW, was a recent manager of WJKL. The station engineer is Hal Catron, a colorful, knowledgeable gentleman and former dispatcher/ technician at the Elgin State Police Post. Ken Kosek is the news director. Curt Ackman is operations manager. Char Daley was a news reporter in 1985.

Jakle has been the managing owner of the Elgin Broadcasting Company since 1967. The call letters RMN stand for the early owners, Ralston, Miller and the "N" is for Elgin. Over the years this professionally run small city station has been responsible for the career beginnings of many radio personalities; including former program director Floyd Brown now of WGN. WRMN's lively informative morning air personality is Larry Forester, who is also the operations manager. Mutual's Larry King entertains until 2 a.m. on WJKL-FM, while talknet is programmed on WRMN at night. Directional nighttime antennas are located in South Elgin.

In 1990, WJKL activated a new transmitter site in Bartlett which uses a strobe lit tower. Its former site on the southeast corner of Route 58 (Summit Street) at Hiawatha is being sold for commercial development. An old restaurant/bar, "The Pig Parlor", was formerly located in this site along with WRMN's first studios. Dick Lose's Marathon service station is located on the corner of the property. In the past, a variety of programming has been

presented including old time radio shows by George Barker and Carl Amari. A successful radio shopping show airs on Fridays.

In June of 1990, WJKL was programmed by the Satellite Music Network of Mokena, Illinois. The station's logo again became "The Fox". Contemporary music replaced the former big band format. A new addition to the station's format is the "Radio Shopping Show", which is hosted by Mike Lawrence. Brad Bohlen is the new program director of the 6,000 watt station.

## WEPS

### A Learning Experience

Many an announcer wished that he or she could have the broadcasting foundation and opportunities given to students at School District U-46's WEPS. The operation is the oldest educational station in Illinois signing on the air on January 13, 1950, with 10 watts of power at 88.1 mhz. That year the school's Audio-Visual Director E. C. Waggoner started the station with a \$10,000 budget. A. C. Kadow was the technical advisor, and Roland Fenz was the program chairman.

The broadcasting of high school basketball games used to be the most popular portion of the station's activities, according to the station's engineer Don Tuttle. "The school gym couldn't hold everyone who wanted to attend the games, so many heard the games on the radio."

During the early years of modern radio in Elgin, the town's commercial station WRMN could not broadcast after sunset, giving WEPS a captive audience at night for sports broadcasts. Early WEPS programming also included musical instruction programs and music from SESAC transcription discs.

News and community programs produced by students were also aired. In January of 1960 the station's power was increased in 364 watts. Its frequency was moved to 90.9 mhz. In 1978 a new broadcast electronics transmitter was purchased for the Elgin Schools by the College of DuPage's station WDCB. The two stations then switched frequencies. WDCB operates with 5 kw at 90.9 mhz. WEPS was then switched to 88.9 where it operates today, giving up a future construction permit for 5,000 watt operation in 1978 to the college. The station had to correct a number of TV interference complaints from residents after the frequency switch.

The WEPS' studios and 100 foot high antenna have always been located in the old high school building at 355 West Chicago Street (precisely around the corner at 46 South Gifford Street). Today this building is known as Old Elgin Central. Tuttle, formally the school system's planetarium director, also maintains a fleet of FM radios located in the classrooms needed to hear the low wattage station. The station's biggest obstruction is Peter Sharp Hill, the steep ski slope at Villa Olivia on Route 20. Special gain antennas are utilized at schools behind the hill for better reception. Tuttle has been with the station for 28 years. The main goal of WEPS as well as any other high school station is to teach proper broadcasting techniques to the students and present school news to the community.

WEPS, which stands for Elgin Public Schools, at one time employed students at nearby Larkin and Streamwood High Schools. The station of late has fallen under the auspices of the school's IMC department directed by Ellie MacKinney. Carolyn Bradnes is the station technician. At this point the station has scrapped its rock format and "hit list" survey in which school officials deemed inappropriate in 1988. Along with WGN's Floyd Brown, I had been asked to be a consultant during the station's reorganization. Both MacKinney and Tuttle agree that the station should be not only a training ground for broadcasting students, but its programming should exemplify the school's image.

Public service programming should be offered that has an important impact on the student and the surrounding community. News and community service programs are being planned for the future. Minimal programming is being maintained while a new format and funding are being sought. Officials want to serve the entire U-46 School District.

WEPS is one of many school stations in the western suburbs. Other educational stations include, WONC at Naperville and WDCB at the College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn.

As of the end of the school year in 1990 a few new programs had been added by its new board. Several plans to increase the station's staff and broadcasting hours had been turned down by the school administration. WEPS currently operates on school days from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. No definite plans have been formulated for its continued operation. Present programming consists of a jazz show, public service programs and classical music.

At one point I suggested that WEPS would be an excellent spot to begin a radio reading service SCA operation for the blind and visually handicapped. No such plans have been discussed.

### Lutheran Minister Broadcasts from Elgin

One of many Chicagoland radio preachers was Rev. Allen R. Blegen, who produced some of his early broadcasts in Elgin. Blegen was educated in Iowa and served as pastor for several churches including ones in

Lisbon, Illinois and at Immanuel Lutheran in Chicago. He was also president of the Lutheran Institute of Chicago from 1944 to 1954.

Rev. Blegen and his wife Frances lived at 630 Prospect Street in Elgin (Frances is an Elgin native). Having a radio outreach was an idea shared by both Rev. Blegen and another minister from Morris, Illinois, Clarence M. Hanson. The two ministers, in 1935, began the "Lutheran Gospel Hour," and before the invention and availability of recording tape, often drove to Chicago to do the programs. Hanson left the show shortly after it started and later took a pastorate in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The 15 minute broadcasts of the "Lutheran Gospel Hour" were later produced on the fifth floor of the Elgin Professional Building at 164 Division Street. Special soundproofing devices were installed as well as drapes and recording equipment in room 511. On a few stations the program was heard as a half hour broadcast. Rev. Blegen's inter-denominational association also operated a book store on the main floor of the building.

Early programs were heard on WAIT in Chicago and WIBA in Madison, Wisconsin. Some stations carried the program three times a week. The broadcasts featured Rev. Blegen along with occasional appearances of the Wheaton College Ambassadors Quartette, soloist Earl Lassen, Evangelist Arthur Lawrence, and for a short time a children's choir from Chicago. The "Lutheran Gospel Hour" programs were produced in Elgin from 1941 to 1946.

Around 1947 the program moved into Chicago and operated from a building located on the corner of Washington and Cicero with other later locations at 1339 West North Avenue and 130 West Liberty (Liberty Building) in Wheaton. The book store remained at the North Avenue site. Blegen spent the last 22 years of his ministry in Wheaton.

In the early 1970s, "The Lutheran Gospel Hour" was changed to the "Hope of the World Broadcast." Rev. Blegen belonged to the Evangelical Synod until 1964, and wanted to alleviate any confusion between his radio program and the "Lutheran Hour" produced by the Missouri Synod.

Another outreach of the "Hope of the World Broadcast" was its mission work in Nigeria which continues to be carried on by one of Rev. Blegen's daughters Barbara, of Black River Falls, Wisconsin. Mrs. Blegen says that the programs were paid for by donations from listeners and that there were times when funds were slow in coming in. For a short time the broadcasts were stopped so that the bills for air time could be paid up.

The "Lutheran Gospel Hour" or "Hope of the World Broadcast" was aired on as many as fourteen stations at once including WRMN in Elgin. Rev. Blegen was also heard over Chicago stations WGN, WCFL, WAAF, WYCA in Hammond, and much earlier on HCJB in Quito, Ecuador. The program's secretary was Sylvia Floistad. Mrs. Blegen, who also boxed the tapes that were sent to the stations, says the program was strictly a faith ministry. "We never missed a meal and were overjoyed when we received our first donation in the mail of seven dollars. God was good to us all through the years."

Rev. Blegen continued his programs until 1979, when he went to be with the Lord on September 21st. Broadcasts continued shortly afterwards until all prerecorded tapes had been aired. He was also associated with the Full Gospel Christian Businessmen's Committee. Rev. Blegen was characterized by both his wife and program secretary as an honest, fundamental Bible teacher and preacher.

### DR. MUCHOW DISPLAYS RADIO HISTORY

Most everyone has heard of Fibber McGee, Amos 'N Andy, or the Great Gildersleeve, famous old time radio shows that Chuck Schaden features on his Chicago Broadcasts. While much fun and entertainment is enjoyed by listening to these old shows, there is also some keen interest in the old radio sets themselves where many of these programs were first heard. Your father or grandfather probably had an old Philco, RCA Radiola, or Crosley that has long since been dispatched from your home or attic. Chances are it or its replica today occupies an honored spot in Dr. Ralph Muchow's Historical Radio Museum in Elgin, Illinois.

Dr. Muchow's collection spans the era of early crystal radio and tube sets through 1945. A few early slow scan TV's are also included in his museum which includes some 3200 sets. They're all there: Grebe, GE, Westinghouse, Atwater-Kent, E.H. Scott, DeForest, Zenith, Magnavox, Majestic, Echophone, Freed-Eisemann, Philco, Bremer-Tully, Operadio, and hundreds more occupying several rooms, each labeled and displayed chronologically. It is probably the largest collection of antique radios in the world, and people from all over the world have come to view it. The good doctor calls it "a complete history of the wireless."

Dr. Muchow, a well-known Elgin dentist, still scours attics, estate sales, and even curbsides for old radios, when not fixing teeth, building slot cars, or beating opponents at table tennis. His interest in radio developed from his early youth, when he first built crystal radio and simple tube sets, much later purchasing his first antique set in a second hand shop.

After putting his children through college, Dr. Muchow realized he had plenty of time and needed a hobby. In 1967, he purchased an old radio from a second hand shop and proceeded to bring it back home and place it in working order. "Back then, I had Wednesday off," says Muchow. "People weren't interested in old radios, and I found them easy to obtain." The Elgin dentist would spend his day off traveling to area towns in search of those



who might have old radios laying around. The rest of the day was spent rummaging through attics, barns, resale shops, and trash cans looking for these antique treasures. He would bring home 25 radios in various states of disrepair. Some of the sets would be worn out or in mere pieces in a bushel basket. Dr. Muchow would then take them back to his basement shop to be reassembled and repaired.

By 1974, numerous radio sets were spilling out of his basement and home. Stacks of sets approached his nine foot ceilings. It was only natural that a place be found for his growing hobby. As tenants moved out of his dental office building, they were replaced by rooms of radios which make up the museum today. Among Dr. Muchow's collection are a one of a kind Fountana Electric Radio which also houses a clock, a radio, and a water fountain light. Numerous other unique sets that are built into bars, pianos, and even a hair dryer are also on display.

Dr. Muchow's favorite sets were the ones produced by Arthur Atwater-Kent who, from 1929 to 1936, manufactured 12,000 quality radio sets a day from his 32 acre warehouse site in Philadelphia. The plant closed instead of compromising on quality due to a lack of materials during the war years. Kent's entry into the radio business was a natural as he had been an early experimenter with car ignition systems.

"During the 1920s and 1930s, there were over 2500 national manufacturers making radios and parts," says Dr. Muchow. "Many of these firms were early companies who were bought out, or crumbled, during the depression." Some of his radios on display were made in the Chicago area, like Majestic, later in Elgin, Operadio (now the Dukane Corporation) in St. Charles, Bremer-Tully in Chicago, and Lawrence sets made in Elgin.

Dr. Muchow has several samples of each one, including the shiny E.H. Scott models with their all chrome chassis. Many of the sets are also enclosed in beautiful hand carved cabinets. "It seemed everyone was interested in radios back then, but many could not afford them." Good radios would cost \$300.00 in the 1930s, which would be about \$3,000.00 in modern day costs. Tubes and speakers were extra. "Farmers were the hardest to sell radios to," says Muchow. "They thought that the radio sets would catch fire and burn their barns down."

What has really caught fire in interest has been the growth of the Antique Radio Club of Illinois. The organization issues monthly bulletins and holds an annual radiofest in August where sets and parts are sold. Muchow founded this organization and is a board member in several other similar clubs. His museum is open daily by appointment.

The museum is complete, but he is always looking for something new or different that is radio oriented to add to his display. Such unique items as a WLS Prairie Farmer Station Rug is one of the first vintage pieces one will find greeting visitors and setting the stage for what else is behind the doors. Inside, the kind well-liked Elgin dentist enjoys showing off the sets and telling how he obtained each one and how it was repaired. The museum also contains a room where all his awards for slot car racing, and table tennis are on display.

Dr. Muchow candidly jokes about spotting tennis star Bobby Riggs ten points then beating him in table tennis many years ago. But today Dr. Muchow doesn't need to boast about his unique radio museum--it speaks for itself. Ask him to turn one on for you!

## WJUD

### Judson College Wired For Sound

For colleges and high schools wishing to service their campus and who are not prepared to air programs for the general public, the alternative is closed circuit radio. Closed circuit, or carrier current radio transmissions, use the school's phone or power lines to send their signals between buildings.

In Elgin, Judson College, located on Route 31 just south of I-90, uses several 20 watt transmitters coupled to phone and power lines to reach the campus community. Twenty-five year old Judson College, with a student enrollment of about 500, is named after a Baptist minister who worked in the country of Burma some 200 years ago. The small Christian college enjoys a full radio set up complete with renovated equipment and radio labs.

Located in Volkman Hall, WJUD broadcasts religious music and campus news over 640 khz. (A radio station in Wisconsin actually owns these call letters). During the school year, the Judson College station operates from 6:00 to 10:00 a.m. daily, 4:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. afternoons and evenings, with some Saturday hours dedicated to old time radio. There are no Sunday broadcasts currently.

The early years of WJUD were coordinated by Merla Sipisich Hammack, a communications instructor, and Dr. Stuart Ryder, an English Professor. The present general manager is Ron Stotyn, Assistant Professor of Communications Arts. Professor Stotyn says the station's format is progressive, contemporary Christian, that is the music "sounds more secular and 'rocky' as the day progresses." Area pizza places purchase advertising on WJUD.

WJUD serves three purposes: (1) as an outlet and training ground for broadcast students; (2) to provide inspirational entertainment for students; and (3) to carry campus information. The small college has an active sports program in which most basketball games are aired on WRMN in Elgin. Professor Stotyn has begun research on a possible 3,000 watt FM operation for the near future to better serve the campus and surrounding community. A frequency search must first be done. [WJUD has operated since 1982.]



Several other local colleges operate small stations in the Chicagoland area: North Central College, Naperville (WONC); Elmhurst College (WRSE); College of DuPage (WDCB); Triton College (WRRG) which is directional; Wheaton College (WETN); Lewis College (WLRA); College of St. Francis (WCSF); Valparaiso University (WNVR); Lake Forest College (WMXM); Rockford College (WRCR-closed circuit); Northern Illinois University (WNIU/WNIJ); DePaul University which operates WRDP, a closed circuit station at 640 khz, which broadcasts the school's basketball games, and closed circuit WHCM at Harper College.

### WKKD-AM/FM

#### Second to None in Sound and Service

In the late 30's when Russell Salter came to Aurora, he must have thought it was a great place to build a radio station. The first city in the country with electric street lights deserved another improvement, namely that of a second radio station. Russ already had roots here and was set to contribute his radio expertise and know how in the community.

Salter had helped Martin O'Brien get WMRO on the air and served as its station's engineer and first program director. After coming to Aurora he married Arlene Wilhelmi, who sang on Major Bowes' Amateur Program which was carried on WMRO. He often differed with the WMRO management on a variety of subjects. In 1957 he began work on his own stations in Aurora. Actually, Salter's radio career goes back further than radio station management.

Russell Salter (W9AVO) was born in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin where he graduated from high school in three years. He and another "electrical genius" drove an old Model T out to California and attended engineering school at the Radio and Electrical Institute of Los Angeles. This school is now part of UCLA.

Salter's first commercial radio job was with a small Portage, Wisconsin station, but according to an old engineering friend, Robert Jones, Russ often tuned an old 160 meter ham radio transmitter down to the broadcast band and went on the air. These weekend music programs featured members of Salter's family and served to entertain the community.

In his early career, he worked for many small stations including one in Indianapolis, where his oldest daughter Jill Salter Nelson was born. Jill stated that her father was a creative, talented man and a good storyteller.

In the late 40's he was the voice of the WLS Barndance Program and worked as an announcer for WBBM, WIND, and WJJD. Salter sold cars on the side, did national commercials, and was an engineering consultant for RCA. He kept up this pace for ten years according to Mrs. Nelson, to save the required down payment to buy his own station.

One of the first stations he owned was WAUX, Waukesha, Wisconsin. Salter built WTAQ in LaGrange, Illinois practically by hand in 1953. He also had his hand in the development of many other stations. Salter passed away after a successful career of broadcast professionalism and dedication on November 27, 1983.

In 1958 Salter bought eight acres of land on Plain Avenue and started the first of two stations to operate from the Eola area. WMRO/WYSY moved into the area later. A 20 x 20 foot building was erected in 1958 with new additions for expanded operations added to each end of the building in 1962 and 1963. In 1974, a house was built just to the east for WKKD-FM.

WKKD-AM operates with 250 watts daytime with a directional pattern (3 towers) at night on 1580 Khz. WKKD-FM at 95.9 is a three thousand watt full time FM operation. WKKD first came on the air in 1960 beating out a Logansport, Indiana firm for the license. Almost immediately afterwards, Salter sought an FM license as well. The FM station came on in 1961 and merely simulcasted AM programs until 1968. WKKD stands for Kane, Kendall, and DuPage counties.

Between 1968 and 1978 WKKD-AM call letters were switched to WFVR (Wonderful Fox Valley Radio). WFVR was programmed as a country music station. The president of Salter Broadcasting and WKKD-FM, Chuck Filippi, stated the two stations began to compete against each other. Staff members from each station were not talking to each other even though both stations were owned by the same management. The two stations were consolidated again in 1982.

The station was involved with a couple of lawsuits concerning its coverage of some local news stories; both suits were either dropped or settled out of court.

WKKD became involved in a major frequency battle over 930 Khz, in 1987. Salter had successfully engineered and petitioned the FCC for a new full-time channel to replace his limited 1580 Khz operation before his death. A Sandwich, Illinois firm also filed for the channel and won it. The FCC claimed there was no AM radio service in Sandwich, but there was AM radio service in Aurora. Salter did all the work on the channel only to have his company lose it later on.

Today, WKKD-AM/FM proudly unveils successful programs and local information. WKKD-AM programs 60's music (The Great Gold Rush), local sports and local news with an accent on Aurora and Naperville. With a new nighttime pattern, WKKD-AM will run 250 watts at night to cover adjacent areas. Meanwhile, on FM, Program

Director, Jay Stevens, personally picks and splices music tapes for a quality sound. Little gets in the way of interrupting the new FM music format except for a capsule amount of concise news from UPI and local information. WKKD's broader based format uses more polished FM announcers for a more professional sound.

WKKD AM/FM is still owned by the Salter family along with operations in Rockton, Illinois (WRWC), Beloit, Wisconsin (WBEL), and a Florida station. Chuck Filippi, who started his career in Dixon, Illinois in 1965 says, "Both stations are intensely involved in the community, as compared with some stations that sound like they are out of Chicago." Filippi goes on to say, "We're proud to be identified as a local station."

Stevens, a broadcast colleague of mine at WLCL, has left the station for work in Texas. The former news director, Geoff Gillette, became a Shadow Traffic reporter for WMAQ in Chicago and later the news director of WLBK-DeKalb. He is now news director at WFXW.

Of late, WKKD-AM features 1960's/1970's era music and local sports. WKKD-FM (K-Lite) plays soft rock hits, and in 1992 began airing Kane County Cougars baseball games. Both stations are members of the UPI News Network.

### WGSB/WFXW Modern Hometown Radio

Little happens in St. Charles, Geneva, West Chicago and Batavia that escapes the friendly grasp of WFXW. The one thousand watt daytime, five hundred watt directional nighttime "Voice of the Valley" has a long time reputation of service to the community. "We'll broadcast anything, anywhere," stated former owner Gerald Gamel, who has been in communications for over forty years. WFXW has been known, at the drop of a hat, to show up with portable equipment to not only broadcast from ball games, but building dedications, art shows and flea markets, too.

The newly remodeled broadcast center at the corner of Main and Richards Streets near downtown Geneva is a constant behive of radio activity. A contemporary music format is offered along with many hours of news and public service. The station's ABC news affiliation brings the Fox Valley world events as well as national favorites like sports commentator Howard Cosell and newscaster, Paul Harvey. Local football and basketball games are covered about every night of the week during their seasons. It has been said that if an empty popcorn bag falls through the bleachers at a football game, WFXW is there to cover it.

WFXW first came on the air on November 11, 1961, as WGSB. WGSB stood for Geneva, St. Charles and Batavia, or "Where Good Sounds Begin." Ralph D. Buehlman of WJJD and another engineer built the station. In 1961 the station was owned by the Fox Valley Broadcasting Corporation; Robert M. Booth, Jr. was the president and F. Burt Squire the general manager.

Joe Barrie was the station manager at WGSB in 1962. Barrie stated that one of the hardest tasks of the station was to keep all the listeners in the Fox Valley towns of St. Charles, Geneva, and Batavia happy. "It seems that they each wanted their own station." There was also tough competition from stations in Aurora, Elgin, and Chicago.

In its early years, Barrie stated that the station sold spots for \$1.75 for 30 seconds. Coverage of the Geneva High School basketball team's trip to the state tournament in 1963 helped the station sell lots of advertising. The Vikings that year were paced by the likes of Bob Johansen and Tom Busch. They eventually lost in the final four to state champ Chicago Carver, 57-50. The station covered every moment of the exciting tournament. WGSB did its best to provide coverage for each the listeners in all nearby towns. Sometimes three games were broadcast during the evening; one live and two were tape delayed.

The community oriented operation also ran a popular "Party Line" program featuring listener comments and telephone calls. For several weeks during the course of the show, an Aurora woman used the program as a pulpit against gambling, openly criticizing the various area lodges for this practice. Bingo was not legal then. Members of the American Legion Posts in the area told WGSB officials that if they allowed the continued attacks by the caller over the air, they would boycott the station. WGSB mainly broadcast easy listening music, but aired well-known Chicago radio personality Dick Biondi's popular weekend music program. Biondi worked for Mutual back then and proudly proclaimed in network ID's that "Mutual was the network for Young America." Biondi now works for WJMK-MAGIC 104 in Chicago (see WJJD). Among the other station employees were Mike Baptist, Larry Brewer, Bob Roehrig, Jan Rosier, Brian Griffin, Kit Bernardi, Keith Anderson, Bill Morris, Brian Henry, Bill Martin, Rusty Tym (later of WKKD), Karen Sears, Roger Alan, Jeff Martin, Tom Petersen, Rick Gooby, John Howat, Tom Burton, and Les Hodge. (Morris later became the mayor of Waukegan.)

Barrie is currently the sales manager for WLBK, a one thousand watt AM station in DeKalb, Illinois. Joe Cerny, the former owner of WJOL Joliet, is the owner of WLBK, which also operates WDEK-FM, DeKalb. Barrie remembers many good times at the small Fox Valley station, including participating in an ostrich race at the Kane County Fair. Barrie rode his ostrich off the track into the stands.

In 1965 Walter Myers became president of the firm, Joe Barrie was still the general manager, and Ralph Beuhlman was vice president, according to Broadcast Yearbook. Other later officials of the station were vice presidents Robert Beuhlman and Michael Ross. Richard Willrett was manager in 1968 before he bought WVFV in Dundee. Richard Verachtert became station manager in 1970 followed by W. C. Porsow, William H. Shaw, Jan Roiser, and Bill McGrail. The station was owned by the Brickhouse Broadcasting Corporation in the early 1970's.

It was always Ralph Beuhlman's dream to own his own station, but there were others behind the station's success story. Another broadcast professional in his own right, A. R. "Mitch" Ellman later became the station's long-time accountant and vice president. The studios in the sixties were located in a house at the transmitter site at 1215 Fern Avenue in St. Charles. Former owners Gerald and Ida Gamel lived in the home after the studios were moved to Geneva. Gamel previously worked for WSDR in Sterling, Illinois and was in the newspaper business.

Through its history WFXW has had the distinction of being owned by two famous Chicago personalities, Howard Miller (WIND) and Jack Brickhouse, the Cubs announcer on WGN. Brickhouse, famous for his "HEY, HEY" on television, had bought into WGSB in 1966 and became its owner in 1972. Jack's wife, Nelda, actually ran the station after 1969 when he was elected as vice president at WGN. Nelda received control of the station later in a divorce settlement. Jack says that the station had always been in his wife's name and that he never owned it.

Dolf Hewitt, a singer whom Brickhouse met when WGN took over the old WLS Barn Dance Show, was a former manager and part owner in 1969-1970. Hewitt was later bought out by Ellman.

A. R. Ellman, CPA, considered one of the industry's best radio accountants, operated the station jointly with Hewitt. When sales were down it was Hewitt's idea to approach station advertisers and tell them how badly the station was doing, hoping they would spend more money with WGSB. Ellman decided that wasn't a good idea and took the opportunity to buy out Hewitt.

From 1965 to 1967 the station manager was Richard Hubbell of St. Charles. Hubbell had previously managed WLKB in DeKalb. In a time when FM stations were programming "beautiful music", Hubbell tried a successful FM format on AM. "The Adult Broadcasting Voice of the Fox River Valley" would feature sweeping strings, orchestras and other instrumentals during music blocks. Commercials would be grouped together after 15 minutes of music. In addition, WGSB carried all local basketball and football games, sometimes carrying two games at night. The station was first a member of the Mutual Broadcasting System and then switched to ABC in the early 1970's.

The AM band at this time was filling up fast, according to Gamel. "People wanted AM stations, not low wattage FM stations with their line of sight and polarization problems. The FCC went strictly by the rules in awarding AM station licenses, Hubbell added. "They could force the station to be sold if the rules weren't followed and records kept current."

Hubbell currently owns RMH Sales in St. Charles, a company that sells promotions to radio stations. He was associated with WLXT, Channel 60, Aurora's first television station for a short time in the sales department and with WVFV in Dundee.

Nelda Brickhouse ran the station in the late 1970's. The station really wasn't doing very well and it was purchased in 1980 by another well-known personality, Howard Miller. Miller changed the call letters to WFXW after an unsuccessful attempt to obtain the call letters WFOX. Miller was an outspoken morning talk show host and program director at WIND Chicago and once ran for mayor of the "Windy City." Many of us will remember Miller's political commentaries plus his music samplings which included the likes of Rosemary Clooney, June Valli and Lawrence Welk's "Josephine" as his program closer. Miller has also owned several other stations.

The Gamel family purchased the station from Miller in 1983. Bennett Palmer Gamel became vice president and treasurer of WFXW. The family-run station, with other local stockholders, had successfully made its mark in the community. Listeners began to recognize WFXW as the Fox Valley news source and an important asset to the surrounding community at 1480 on the AM dial. In recent years WFXW's staffers have included Todd Moffett, program director; Linda Geraldi, news director; engineers Jon Morgan, Howard Enstrom, and Jeff Glass. Bennett P. Gamel was the station manager in the mid 80's. Other talented staff members have included Bob Birkeneder, Bruce Lee Stralinsky, Rich Charhut, Helen Lance, Dave Albright, Bernie Cryer, Susan Gamel, Jerry White, Joy Wagner, Ken Misch, John Watanabe, Greg Springer, Alice Biggers, Ed Tate, Dianna Glusek, Greg Weindorf, Anita Marie Black, Larry Scott, Jeff Collins, Scott Galetti, Gwen Pippen, Ken Steinenger, Rev. W. B. Mathews, Dorothy Bilotto, Bill Morris, Bob Beck, Bill Russell, Dan Kiburz, Mike Norris, Don Hein, Rolf Doerfle, Ginger Doerfle, Bill Delmonico, John Abrams, Mike Chirico, Ray Steele, Geoff Gillette, Julie Mann, Cynthia Foster, John Dzech, Mark Colonna, Denny Farrell (formerly of WJJD), Kim Pye, and John Russell. Combine this list with the previous list in this section, and one will quickly notice that an abundance of talent has been employed at this station.

Between 1986 and 1988 I worked at WFXW as a weekend announcer. Besides a Saturday night "oldies" show were opportunities to broadcast from the Kane County Fair, "The Pride of the Fox" street dance with "The Moonglows" orchestra, and remotes from "Railroad Days" in West Chicago. Large crowds came out and danced on a couple of cool summer evenings on the Harris Bank rear parking lot in St. Charles. The crowds were not as



friendly at a rock concert during Railroad Days as staffers had to retreat to their make-shift studio on the roof of a restaurant one night to avoid being trampled by those in attendance. I can remember doing special Christmas programs and giving away prizes including a trip to Bermuda and a snowblower. The usual gamut of prizes were movie rentals, a \$5 gift certificate for furniture stripping, a coupon for a free chicken dinner with the purchase of one, and one free trip to a chiropractor's office.

During many of its broadcast years, WFXW relied only on ABC for its news. There was no teletype service. Instead news happenings and sports scores were obtained by listening to other stations (while doing a board shift). Local news was covered, but often the copy was unreadable containing crossed out dates and changed verb tenses. In an attempt to "shake up the audience," I made funny phone calls or interviewed people, such as "jello wrestlers." One evening seven overweight people crowded into the studio to do a program on dieting. Reading original poetry over soft music was an added touch at night. On one occasion the station owner insisted that a poem be interrupted to relay a local basketball score. I read the score and then went back to my program; local information was what the station was all about.

Gerald Gamel did not pay his help very much, but it was a fun place to work. The only time I ever saw Gamel upset was after having to pull the record "The Curley Shuffle," by a local band ("Jump in the Saddle"). The popular Three Stooges spoof was then limited to just one playing per day. The Gamel's treated all the staffers like they were part of the family. The only secret they kept was the eventual sale of the station.

In a surprise move in June, 1988, the Gamels sold out their 55 percent share of stock in the station. The new owner is Louis F. Pignatelli, who was a minority stockholder in the station. Don Oberbillig, who worked with Gamel at WSDR in Sterling, Illinois, is the new president and general manager. Another stockholder, Jack Cassens, owned the building at 6 Richards Street where the station was located. The new management, Valley Communications, Inc., has plans for progressively growing and expanding in the Fox Valley area.

In late 1989, WFXW began 24-hour operations. It had done so for a short time in the early 1970's. A local all night inspirational program, "A Friend in the Night aired after Midnight."

About the same time WFXW moved from its offices at 6 Richards Street, Geneva, back to its transmitter site at 1215 Fern Avenue in St. Charles. Broadcast operations take place in a house next to the towers. Former WAUR newsman David Blair is WFXW's new program director. Former station manager Bennett Gamel is employed by Ameritech. Todd Moffett is in the satellite TV business, and Bob Birkeneder works for Richardson Electronics.

The station recently celebrated its 30th anniversary with special interviews of former staffers. Les Hodge appeared and recalled the many sports broadcasts and interviews that he has presented on the station. His 1970s broadcasts featured many interviews with sports celebrities and coverage of the Fox Valley Lassies Softball games. Les recalls that Joe Barrie was the first voice ever heard on the station, when it signed on at 6 p.m. on its first day.

## **WELG Hi-Fidelity Failure**

Some stations are destined to fail from the start, and such was the case of two early FM stations that have long been forgotten, except by a few hi-fi buffs. The stations were Citadel Broadcasters, WELG FM (103.9 mhz. Elgin), and WELF (107.1 FM mhz Glen Ellyn). Both of these stations operated in the early 60's with one thousand watts. WELG's antenna height was listed at 80 feet; WELF's was 110 feet.

WELG and WELF sometimes traded air personalities, equipment and programs. In the end they both went down together in a sea of scandal and debt.

For the most part radio stations that have been owned by well-known radio or TV personalities have done rather well, or remained solvent enough to be resold.

In the early 60's FM broadcasting was trying to make a comeback. Radio people knew about its crisp sound and future drift-free, technological developments, but advertisers had to be convinced. TV, newspapers and AM stations already demanded huge chunks of a firm's advertising budget; there wasn't much left for out of town FM broadcasters, like Dick and Elizabeth Coughlin.

The Coughlins were from Wheaton where they owned property and horses. Elizabeth was a freelance writer, while some of us still remember Dick's years as the host of WGN TV's "Bugs Bunny and Friends." A handsome, talented performer in a Dion Dimucci-type flannel shirt, Coughlin charmed children with his puppetry and characterizations. He also appeared as Sgt. Coffee periodically on the old Dick Tracy Show with Ray Rayner.

WELG-FM operated out of the 12th floor of the Tower Building, 100 East Chicago Street, Elgin. WELF studios were in a store front at 546 Crescent Boulevard, two doors down from the Glen Theater. WELF's transmitter was in a garage on Roosevelt Road in Glen Ellyn. Coughlin also owned an AM station in Atlanta, Georgia, according to Lee Hesterman of the Glen Ellyn Historical Association. Coughlin's popularity enabled him to get loans and credit from local institutions.



A large ad in the Elgin 1961 Polk City Directory boasted the station as "the quality voice of the Fox River Valley." But lack of adequate advertising and listener support, coupled with the usual polarization problems of low wattage FM stations, kept the operation from getting a foothold in the community. There was also no profitable AM station coupled to it to keep it afloat during its introduction to the Fox Valley.

WELG maintained an erratic broadcast schedule in its last days. Sadly, both stations went off the air in 1964, and the Coughlins disappeared from the area. On March 11, 1964 the FCC had revoked the stations licenses citing that the stations had been transferred to a new firm, Citadel Broadcasters, without government sanction.

## WVFFV

### Innovative Fun Radio in the Sixties

Seventeen months after WELG, Elgin went off the air, several Dundee area residents had the opportunity to bring FM radio to their community. The frequency is 103.9 Mhz, the year is 1966. Enter WGN's Jim French and Chuck Meyer and another engineer, Ralph Batt, all worked on a new sound for the Fox Valley.

The trio of electronic masterminds created WVFFV the "Voice of the Fox Valley." Studios were built at 111 West Main Street, and a new 265 foot tower was erected in nearby Gilberts. WVFFV was designed to become the "communicator of the Fox Valley." Owners stated that the station intended to "publicize area events and promote community growth." Every school, church, or organization was offered free airtime to advertise its activities. Construction of the station's new studios above the old location of Cardinal Savings and Loan began in May of 1966. The facilities were installed in an old apartment on the building's second floor. The station's correct address was 111 West Main Street in the same building as "Tip Toe Tech." However, a tall staircase and a separate entrance was used to reach the station which was actually situated over the savings and loan at 109 West Main Street. WVFFV went on the air on September 1, 1966. The station's first receptionist sat behind a card table to greet the station's visitors. French, who also worked at WXFM in Chicago, ran a middle of the road, big bands type format until 1970. The station was sold to Richard Willrett, a current member of the West Dundee Zoning Board of Appeals. Willrett was the manager of WGSB in 1968.

The station formatted rock music until 1965 when it was sold to Ralph J. Faucher. Faucher had been sports director of WMRO Aurora in 1952 and commercial manager of WTAQ LaGrange in 1965. He did White Sox broadcasts with Harry Caray on WTAQ in the sixties. Faucher was later elected to the Illinois Sports Hall of Fame.

Faucher's adult contemporary format coupled with a staff of young talented announcers with innovative ideas helped WVFFV enjoy its best years. The staff, in 1979, consisted of general manager Richard Prather, who still owns the old studios and building, plus other fine area talents.

Another employee, Greg Allen, who had been with the station since 1970, was joined by other Chicago radio personalities Ron Day (WKQX) and Terry Flynn (WSEX, WLOO). Allen, who was the program and music director, recalls the years at WVFFV as fun ears. "There was a 'hot clock' and a music format, but it was flexible enough for the jocks to enjoy themselves while at work. Provisions and liberties were often taken by the announcers to break format for the broadcast of an important local news event. Allen served as program director and station manager under Willrett and Faucher.

Prather stated the station was always doing something exciting for the listeners. Promotions and a likeable music format swayed listeners to WVFFV. Gasoline was sold for twenty-five cents a gallon during one promotion. Another sensation consisted of placing placards of playing cards in stores. The correct numbered caller with the right location of a certain playing card won the jackpot. The "Wild Card" promotion was the brainchild of Dick Hubbell of RMH Sales, St. Charles, a one-time employee of Jack Brickhouse as WGSB.

Billings went up and the small market operation enjoyed amazing success with its three thousand watt signal. However, in 1980 the station was sold to American Ministries of the Gospel, a large missionary religious group in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Prather still owns the original WVFFV building and equipment and had ten percent of the station. He tried to get several stockholders together, but could never get station owner Ralph Faucher to agree on a price. Faucher later sold to AMG for \$315,000. Prather relates it was a sad end for a station that was appreciated by so many area residents. It was the starting point for many young Chicago radio stars like Day, Flynn and Mike Frett.

Other stations envied this staff of young professionals and always tried to lure them away from WVFFV. Around 1978, Prather started an early form of AT&T's sports phone. Callers could get all the latest sports results by calling "Dial A Score". The service was voiced by WVFFV's Jenny Judson, a Northern Illinois broadcasting student and weekend announcer. The studios were named after another announcer, Marty Murphy, who died in a tragic accident.

The station offered continuous service through the time of the sale to AMG, except for three days in 1976 when lightning "fried" the transmitting tower at Gilberts. Prather and Day pulled twelve hour shifts during one winter snow storm to keep the station going for several days in 1978.

Prather and Allen now manage a public relations and advertising firm together in Dundee called Allen-Prather Enterprises. The two don't have to go very far to reminisce about their radio days, as the original WVFV studios are located inside their offices.

The studios were used again between 1982 and 1986 to broadcast a daily news program. "Dundee News" was broadcast at 1:05 p.m. Monday through Friday on WRMN in Elgin with Prather and Allen. The duo presented solid local news plus actualities during the newscast. Prather says the equipment still works, "Just plug it into a transmitter, and we'd be on the air again."

### WCRM (WABT) Today's Christian Music

It's ironic that one of the first and last stations in the Fox Valley were religious stations, although greatly differing in doctrine. The people at WORD Batavia knew the value of radio as an evangelistic tool. Nearly sixty years later, a Christian organization sparked the interest of area churches and listeners.

WCRM (the call letters really don't stand for anything) came on the air in 1980. Ralph Faucher, owner of WVFV, sold the station to American Ministries of the Gospel of Chattanooga, Tennessee. The station was administered by the organization's profit-making division CLW, "Christ the Light of the World."

The station's general manager was Hal Fisher, a veteran of both secular and religious broadcasting. Fisher served in management capacities at WTRX in Flint, Michigan, KRRZ in Fargo, North Dakota, and with stations in Rochester, New York, and Cleveland as part of his ten year career with Malright Broadcasting Company. Fisher stated that he was anxious to get back into Christian broadcasting and found the right opportunity with WCRM. Fisher saw the station grow and become very popular in the northwest suburbs during the station's short tenure.

When WCRM took over from WVFV, they elected to be off the air for thirty days. The station operated out of the WVFV studios for ten months at 111 West Main, West Dundee. Then they moved the studios to 700 Willow Lane, Suite 8, during 1984 only, then relocating at the west end of Highlander Point Shopping Center on Route 31, West Dundee. The transmitting tower is still in Gilberts.

The station featured contemporary Christian music which was designed to capture the ears of dial twisters who stumbled on WCRM's music with a message. Many Fox Valley residents recorded hours of the station's music to replay later. Unlike many religious stations, WCRM lumped together most of their Bible teaching programs between 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. and spent the rest of the time playing records.

The music featured a variety of Christian contemporary artists, especially picked for airing at certain times of the day. Each artist had to demonstrate a Christian testimony. The station pulled the recordings of one popular singing group because they felt that "the group had not used their performance during a secular concert to present the message of Christ."

Michael Sean Black was the station manager, Todd Chatman was the music director. Jeff Collins, formerly of WFXW, was often heard evenings. The station also benefitted from secretary Laurie Van Sant, a Chicago Shadow Traffic reporter and news announcer at the station. WCRM was one of the country's "Top 10" religious stations and was the only station in the area that published a monthly program guide. The operations income came from advertising, like all other stations as well as payment for the religious programs aired from a wide variety of area churches and religious organizations.

Fisher admitted that listener support for some programs suffered due to some recent scandals by a few notable religious figures. Fisher said, "It hurts the quality programs that have no connection to the Baker or Swaggert situations." WCRM provided local information, news via the USA Radio Network and quality programs and music "that preach the message of Jesus Christ." The station sought a power increase from three thousand watts to six thousand watts to expand its coverage area in 1988 and an increase in tower height.

Early in 1989, the sale of WCRM to Atlantic Morris Broadcasting Corporation, a New Jersey Utility Company, was announced. The sale price was rumored to be about \$1.5 million, roughly three times the original purchase price. A secular format was installed later in the year. WCRM manager, Hal Fisher, who did an excellent job of creating a "redeeming" profitable and popular Christian music operation, was transferred to the CLW Marketing Department in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Most of the station's original staff are now employed elsewhere. Former music director, Todd Chatman works for a Christian record company in Texas.

In April of 1989 the call letters were changed to WABT, which stood for WABBIT, and the station logo was a rabbit. Most of the WCRM employees were offered jobs with the new station. Ron Turner quickly became one of the station's major personalities, Bruce Law is the station manager. Marketing consultant Kevin Stevenson said that a new format of rock and roll music from the 60-90's will be presented on WABT. Songs are chosen from a computerized list to make sure that tunes are not overplayed as Top 40 stations often do. An emphasis on local news and information for the area is a top priority on the adult oriented hit music station.

The new station also brought in several employees from Michigan to work and sell WABT in the community. WABT is the third station purchased by Atlantic Morris Company. At first, citizens who enjoyed

WCRM's Christian music format were shocked at the format change. They were relieved to find out that WTWV (WYLL), Des Plaines changed from a jazz station to playing Christian contemporary music to satisfy their needs.

WABT is now known as the "Northwest Rocker." The staff includes program director Randy McCarthy, Cara Simms, Charlie Metro and Phil Jacobs.

**NORTHWEST BROADCASTING STATIONS  
IN MCHENRY COUNTY**

**WILA • WCLR/WIVS  
WMCW • WAIT  
WREK/WSTK/WXRD/WXET**



## MCHENRY COUNTY RADIO SUMMARY

While radio stations in Kane County were busy growing, changing hands, or going off the air, radio evolved separately in McHenry County. For the most part it's stations were started by outsiders, who later gained acceptance in the communities. Most were eventually successful and profitable after being bought out by major concerns. Making the biggest impact in McHenry County Radio was Chicago TV-radio personality Mal Bellairs.

Bellairs had worked in radio and TV since the mid 40's for WGN-TV, WBKB-TV (ABC) and all news WBBM radio. He began his Chicago radio career at WCFL in 1946 and has worked in virtually all phases of broadcasting and programming.

Bellairs could be classified as an early "pitchman." They were many in those days (Randy Blake, Lynn Burton "for certain," and Marty Faye) who were seemingly always busy "hawking" somebody's cookies, rugs, cars, or clothes. But Bellairs had done all that before and was looking for something new. He established the "McHenry County Sound," bringing a bright mix of big city radio and "folksy information" into the homes of the Crystal Lake and Woodstock area. Dial twisters found a friendly voice and instant companionship with the Bellairs family at the controls.

A new age of radio began in 1969 with the purchase of WCLR, a five hundred watt AM station in Crystal Lake. Bellairs bought it for \$400,000.00. He later acquired WSTK-FM in Woodstock. Both stations were later sold and the Bellairs moved back to Barrington. The Bellairs impact continues today under the devoted professionalism of the Lake Valley Broadcasting Company.

The other success story in Northern McHenry County is WMCW Harvard. The tiny station, rich in heritage and public service, continues today and is owned by the Mitchell Broadcasting Company. It was many years of dedicated work by the station's founder, Esther Blodgett, that caused the operation to be recognized in the community. Esther was "Miss Radio" to the Harvard community, broadcasting years of local news, gossip and coverage of town events for the area she loved to serve. Esther was one bold person who actually ate and slept radio as the station's studios were in her home. The town of Harvard could not begin to give back a portion of what she gave the town in dedicated service. Esther sold WMCW in 1979.

If Esther were alive today, she would probably tell us about what went wrong at WILA-FM, McHenry County's first commercial FM station. The Woodstock community first saw the emergence of WILA's 316 foot tower around July 4, 1948. The station started out with the energy of a firecracker, only to become a forgotten fizzle less than three years later. Today, the station's owner, Harold Z. Benton, is remembered for his invention of car radio push buttons, but not for his early attempt to run an expensive FM station when few people had FM radio sets.

Bad luck seemed to surround this innovative radio pioneer. A tragic accident severely injured several staff members resulting in a costly lawsuit against the station. A neighbor remembers that when Benton decided to sell his property and leave the area, his large travel camper caught fire stranding the family until repairs were made to the trailer.

The youngest of Benton's seven children, Jim, of Lake Bluff, recalls glimpses of the station's quick past and shares some remembrances in this chapter. McHenry County's development of radio, past and present, is noted in the next section's summary.

### WILA-FM

#### Enthusiastic Professionalism

Late in 1948 the third of three early FM stations in Northern Illinois came on the air with high hopes for fast success. As in the cases of WBNU and WEXI, the promises of static free transmissions coupled with quality local programming lured many a new FM station owner into bankruptcy and financial collapse. WILA-FM 92.1 mhz., had all the ingredients for success. Talented, knowledgeable people interested in local news coverage were at the controls of WILA, but in the end the station suffered from the same bugaboos that had plagued earlier FM stations, namely not enough advertisers or FM radio sets and apathetic listeners.

In 1948 the arrival of McHenry County's first FM station was much heralded by the Woodstock Sentinel. In later years, newspapers and radio stations became so competitive that they ignored each other in the media. The Sentinel generously published a series of articles on how FM broadcasting actually worked and differed from traditional AM broadcasting. The publication, which sold for three cents a copy, also carried progress reports on the installation of the station's new 316 foot antenna and christening. The 42 ton structure was completed and installed by Electrical Tower Service of Peoria at a cost of \$11,750.00 on June 13, 1948. WILA's tower lights were probably added a few days later. Its 1,000 watt signal gave the station a range of about fifty miles.

The station's studios were built in a small farm hand's house on South Road east of Franklinville Road and Rose Farm Road about three miles west of Woodstock. The area land was owned for many years by Fred Heinz. Heinz sold thirty-five acres to station owner Harold Z. "Zip" Benton.

Benton, born August 6, 1898, according to the Woodstock directory, had previously lived at R.R. 3, Greenwood Township west of Bull Valley. The family also lived in Highland Park and Glencoe, Illinois, before moving to the Woodstock area in 1940.

Benton's business partners, area realtor George Huffman and attorney David Joslyn, Sr., are now both deceased. Heinz also sold nearby property to Frank Roth. Roth later sold his land to Kenneth and Mary Ellen Marunde. The Marunde's related this information to me during an interview. They operate a farm and produce business (Pumphouse Boutique) nearby, and later purchased the Benton property.

A long time mailman and radio amateur, Bruce Steinke (W9CH), served as the station's engineer. Engineer/Announcers Bob Kuhn and Ken Young assisted in installing the station's modern equipment. Benton boasted that the latest available equipment was being utilized, costing about \$45,000.00. In short, it was one of the most expensive stations placed on the air during this time using the best equipment and the most professional staff.

Originally, the call letters WILL were sought, W-ILL for Illinois. The letters were already in use by the University of Illinois so the next choice of letters was WILA.

At the helm of this operation was Benton, who also served as president of the Northern Illinois Broadcasting Company, the firm that owned the station. Benton had worked in the early years of WDAP which later became WGN. He was also employed as an engineer at another Chicago station, WHT Deerfield, and at the Amphenol Company in Chicago, a company that manufactured wire and coaxial hardware.

Benton, who changed his name from Harold John Zbinden to Harold Z. Benton, retained the nickname "Zip" to all who knew him. He had also been employed by the Zenith and Philco Radio Corporations. It was about this time that he received a patent for push button radio tuning. Benton is the inventor of those five buttons that allow us to tune stations on a car radio by pushing one of them.

Jim Benton, the youngest child, now living in Lake Bluff, teaches computer science at Lake Forest High School. The younger Benton said his dad always wanted to own a radio station. He stated that his father was industrious, ambitious and always had a good job, even through the depression. Jim did a Sunday afternoon "disc jockey" type program on the station around 1949. On December 13, 1949, WILA began broadcasting many hours of Christmas music to Woodstock holiday shoppers that was piped into stores in the business district.

The station's staff also included other professionals like program director, Frank Ulrey, who was employed previously by Zenith's WEFM Chicago. WILA published its own monthly four page tabloid program guide which depicted staff members and news about the station. WILA was a member of the Great States FM Network which provided an extensive array of national programming, including some late night organ programs.

There was a remote line to a popular night spot near Lily Lake, east of Woodstock, for musical programs. Singers like Dick Haymes and Helen Forest, along with pianist Bud Conway, were growing national favorites. They were heard on disc each week on the station. Local talents like the Singing Smiths, Walter Steffen (the Triple Treat Man), WILA's Hi-Neighbor Girl singer Darlene Adams and organists Danny Daniels and Art Klemme played live from Simonini's Restaurant formerly located on the northwest corner of Route 31 & 62 in Algonquin. It burned down in the early 70's. Steffen was called the Triple Treat Man because he could play guitar, harmonica, and sing. Paid ads in the Elgin Daily Courier urged listeners to tune into "Favorite Story" every Friday night with Ronald Colman.

Another first for WILA was a special program that aired on two stations at the same time featuring the comedy of Bob Davy of WILA and Dusty Rhodes of WBNB Beloit. Alice McConnell, the first wife of local county politician A.B. McConnell, did a woman's talk show. Announcers like Jack Randolph, Chuck Paetow (Paetow was with the Woodstock Players), and engineer Art Marske rounded out the staff. W.H. "Bill" Tammeus made frequent appearances on WILA while he was the county extension agent. Tammeus also wrote a weekly farm column in the Woodstock Sentinel called "Around the County."

Woodstock public relations man Don Peasley owns a photograph of former Illinois governor Adlai Stevenson in front of a WILA microphone. Stevenson first announced his candidacy for president from the Woodstock Opera House over WILA. Peasley also was heard on the station during the county fair, he has handled the public relations end of the fair for many years. "The Voice of McHenry County" was also heavily involved in the community organizing talent shows and covering local news.

The station utilized a station wagon that was fully equipped with radio equipment used for remote broadcasts. Country Companies Insurance agent Jim Keefe (who later handled the Benton's property insurance) recalls the station provided the area's only coverage of Woodstock High School football games. The station broadcasted the Woodstock Blue Streaks and Elgin High School basketball sectionals in 1949 and later the state basketball finals from Springfield. The station's efforts in doing the games was greatly appreciated by the community.

In 1949 WILA's small staff was filled with the same enthusiasm that other area FM stations had. Wide growth for FM and TV was anticipated by early FM broadcast entrepreneurs eager to gain hold of this new market on the upswing. But it was the long tradition of established AM broadcasters and the new fascination with television

which won out. The manufacture and sale of FM radio sets fell below anticipated levels...even the crystal clear, static free sound of FM wasn't enough to hold an audience. Advertisers slowly drifted away, too.

The station's most appreciated service, the live broadcasts of high school basketball games, ended abruptly with the crash of the station's remote broadcast vehicle on the evening of March 11, 1949. The head-on mishap occurred on Route 20, five miles west of Elgin at Plato-Burlington Road (near the Route 20 cut off at Plank Road). The accident severely injured three WILA staffers and four Elgin area high school students. The driver of the station's van apparently thought that Route 20 veered to the left of this long time confusing "Y" intersection. The van crashed into a car that was exiting Plank Road onto U.S. 20.

Announcers Tom King and Jack Randolph, both of Woodstock, and engineer Gerald Higgins of Harvard had just finished announcing the Elgin-Oak Park game and were returning to Woodstock. All three young men received lifetime injuries in the accident which totally destroyed WILA's radio vehicle valued at \$3,000.00. King's jaw was broken in five places. Randolph had two broken legs amongst other cuts and bruises. Higgins had one broken leg. The Elgin Fire Department transported the trio to St. Joseph's Hospital in Elgin after cutting them out of the twisted wreckage. Volunteer announcers from four other stations filled in at WILA to finish broadcasting the state basketball tournament and stayed for a short time afterwards. Randolph finally left the hospital in August of 1949.

The hype and aesthetic enthusiasm of WILA soon wore away, and in the third year of operation the station left the air for good with little fanfare. The station's engineer Bruce Steinke stated that towards the end WILA just wasn't popular anymore and "just went out of business." Losing a lawsuit resulting from the remote unit accident further crippled the station financially. Frank Ullrey passed away in 1976. He had lived in Crystal Lake and Waukegan. Late in life Ullrey worked in public relations for the National Housewares Association. The firm put on frequent shows at McCormick Place in Chicago. Paul Collin was the station's second program director.

When the Marunde family bought the Benton property in 1957, the tower had been removed and all the equipment had been sold. Ken Marunde took down the remaining cement pillars of the tower. The farm containing the small radio station building was sold around 1975 to Captain Larry Fortin of the McHenry County Sheriff's Department, who raises horses on the property. Fortin lives in the remodeled house that used to be the station. The home was formerly owned by the Mortz family and was moved to its present site from Vermont road by Benton. An addition has since been added to the structure.

Across the driveway on the same side of the street resides an area contractor, John and Perrue Hoeflich, who now live in the large two-story home where the Benton's lived (15003 South Street). Harold and his wife, Mary, and their children left the area for Arizona in the early 60's. Marjorie Benton, who had christened the station's tower in 1948, is now a head nurse in a Tempe, Arizona hospital.

Leon and Esther Shaw recall Benton as a likeable, wholesome fellow. Leon, who used to be in the farm machinery business, also stated that "Zip" was somewhat of a "dreamer"; he had big ideas. Benton passed away in 1974. His wife Mary lives in Scottsdale, Arizona and is an excellent championship bridge player. Jim Benton recalls his father's work at WILA in his early memoirs written in the early 40's.

Benton's invention of car radio tuning buttons had brought notoriety to the family. The patent, dated October 31, 1939, showed Benton living in Glencoe, Illinois and employed by the Clock Name Plate and Manufacturing Company in Chicago.

Jim Benton, who was always fascinated with his fathers' inventions, recalls the era of WILA with this excerpt from the family history.

## WILA

### The "Voice of McHenry County"

"A radio station!" exclaimed Tommy as he dropped his fork and his eyes bulged.

"That's what I said," Dad answered back to an astonished family finishing the last few crumbs of Happy Day cake at dessert one evening in May. "I got to talking it over with both George Huffman and Dave Joslyn last Friday night on the square in Woodstock. They picked right up on the idea and thought that an FM station had possibilities."

We all sat there passing the dessert plates along to mom who was standing next to the sink filling the dish pan. We had foregone the routine "Stack, Wash and Dry" when dad's announcement stunned us. Mom remained silent for most of the discussion that followed, for she had a way of anticipating dad's business ventures. Most were not too successful; but the war was over, and the country seemed to be calling out for ambitious entrepreneurs willing to take a risk to get the nation back on a post-war economy once again.

George Huffman was well-known to our family. He was a frequent guest in our home as well as mom's employer in her real estate ventures. Dave Joslyn, on the other hand, was a new name.

"Mr. Joslyn," continued dad, "told me that he was interested in investing in a radio station and thought that the three of us brought the necessary expertise together as a three-way partnership."



Mom, who had remained silent up to now, wiped her hands dry on her apron and turned toward dad. "Zip, honey, what are the financial arrangements?" Naturally, mom had this in her mind all along, for she knew all too well dad's *modus operandi* of doin' first and payin' later.

"No problem, mother," he called her affectionately, "both Dave and George will be putting up nearly all of the money. My function is the radio electronic end." With this arrangement, even "Scary Mary," as we children referred to mom during electrical storms particularly, could not possibly find an objection.

Dave Joslyn had a law practice in Woodstock, invested heavily in real estate (hence his friendship and business dealings with Huffman), and would prepare all of the legal papers--including the limited partnership agreement--which would protect the assets of our family in the event the radio station did not succeed. Dad always entertained the dream of having his own business to retire to someday. The radio station concept filled every niche: independence, electronic expertise, and abandoning the commuting rat-race after twenty-five years of waking up before sunrise to catch the Northwestern to Chicago five days a week. Mom shared his dream, for she never failed to rise with him every morning, prepare his bacon and egg breakfast and drive him to the station even in the foulest weather.

Dad contacted the Federal Communications Commission for assignment of our call letters. He wanted WILL, for obvious reasons, but was told that the University of Illinois already had claim to that set. He thought of WMCH (for McHenry County), as well as WDSK (for Woodstock) but they were also taken. The FCC, in fact, actually assigned us the call letters, WILA; there was little "choice." We sat around the dinner table one evening and collectively came up with the slogan: "WILA, the Voice of McHenry County."

Just east of our house construction began on the station, a modest two-story resident-looking building; but the walls were heavily sound-proofed, and double-paned glass separated the control room from the two studios: A and B, A being the larger. We stood around most afternoons that summer watching the construction and keeping out of the way as much as possible without losing our vantage points. Mom got so concerned about the traffic in and out of the driveway that she had me and Tommy put up a couple barriers. Little Johnny wheeled his tricycle back and forth raising about as much dust as the workers did. The real excitement started when the 316-foot tower began to rise! Triangular-shaped and tapering skyward to a fraction of its base, this magnificent tower rose section by section over a three-week period. Once after the steelworkers had left for the day, Tommy and I crawled up the shaky ladder about level with the lightening rods on top of the barn. We thought we were on top of the world, albeit only sixty feet up. As the tower grew, our nerve shrunk. Although seemingly dead calm at ground level, winds came from nowhere after we crept up to about 100 feet late one afternoon. The red and white tower swayed gently like some giant metronome, not whipping around necessarily, but there was enough motion to keep us from going any higher.

The tower grew to its full height of 316 feet looking for all the world like the biggest "iron-stemmed weed" I'd ever seen! What a magnificent structure. Traffic along Franklinville Road seemed to intensify, especially on Sunday afternoons, as gawking youngsters hung out car windows. Everyone, it seemed, sooner or later drove by to view the only "wonder in the world" in McHenry County. Little Suzie and Cindy set up a lemonade stand out on the side of the road to take advantage of the curious passers-by.

One windless day, early in the morning, I mustered up the nerve to crawl up the tower to about 200 feet. I sneaked out of the house without letting mom or dad know. But my God what a view! Not only could I see the whole of Kishwaukee Valley lying sleepy still under a filmy blanket of mist in early morning, but downtown Woodstock, over two miles to the east, came into view just over the horizon as a church spire and the town hall's bell tower poked up through the haze. I hung there for what seemed hours; actually it must have been no more than fifteen minutes not only gazing at the gently rolling Northern Illinois farm lands, but also studying the birds who were circling around the tower like a pack of racing planes in hot pursuit of a pylon. For the first time in my life I felt that I could really understand what it must be like to be able to fly and look at my small piece of the world from a bird's eye view. The old weeping willow tree, which we hung a long rope swing on, looked like the top of a giant's head, all parted and combed down.

Suddenly my exalted reverie was broken by mom's voice coming at me from straight down. "Jimmy, what on earth are you doing up there? Get down here this minute! And be careful!" I was ready to climb down anyway, for a body can take just so much ecstasy that early in the morning. All through breakfast mom didn't say a word to me. She didn't have to, for I knew exactly what she was thinking. I never climbed up the tower again although I sat under it often and looked straight up until I got giddy from watching the "stationary" clouds and the "toppling" tower.

One of dad's responsibilities involved promoting the station before the date of our first transmission. He arranged to show a twenty-minute movie to the workers of the Alemite factory in Woodstock and answer a few questions afterwards--the most common of which was, "What does FM mean?" Tommy and I went with him and set up the projector and screen. The workers sat enraptured and seemingly convinced until it became increasingly



clear that FM was new to McHenry County, and very few people had an FM radio set. Dad enlisted the help of the local appliance dealers and talked them into running promotions in the Woodstock Sentinel which offered prizes for the first 100 persons to buy an FM radio. Sales were a little sluggish at first but picked up when he came up with the bright idea to broadcast the Blue Streaks football and basketball games during the up-coming season. We had no idea just how popular our local high school team was until sales starting soaring. I always believed that since almost everyone in town had had Larry Dale as either a teacher or a coach when in high school, they were just continuing an "adult version" of his famous spirit-rousing "Locomotive" and could cheer on the Blue Streaks vicariously.

But whatever the reason, the station opened in October of '48 with a full daytime schedule of music, transcribed programs on huge rose-red 33 and a third RPM vinyl disks, news, sports and even live entertainment. Out of Harvard, Illinois (the "Milk Capital of the World," as they advertised themselves) came Darlene Adams, the "Hi Neighbor Girl." Her nasal twanging hillbilly country songs were an immediate hit, and Darlene had quite a following among the county's faithful. She always showed up with a complete coordinated cowgirl outfit with leather streamers dancing around her legs, a rhinestone studded hat, and a huge Spanish guitar slung over her back.

"Hey, Darlene," I asked her once I got to know her, "why do you wear all of the cowgirl stuff when this is radio and no one can see you?"

"I can see me, Jim. And if I don't *look* country, I ain't about to *sing* country."

The football and basketball game broadcasts were a tremendous success. Advertising revenues substantiated that quite clearly. Driving home one evening late in November after a game with Crystal Lake, our sports announcer, Tom King, apparently dozed off, and his car ended up in a ditch against a telephone pole. He was rather severely injured, requiring stitches on his face and hands. He was alive all right but would probably have to give up his career in radio announcing, for his mouth had been cut rather badly and required eight stitches. We lost track of Tom after he left WILA, but rumor had it that he became a script writer for a large network affiliate in Chicago.

Dad offered me a chance to fill in as a disc jockey one Sunday afternoon when the regular announcer called in sick at the last minute. I was a junior in high school, really into jazz music and all of the popular singers of the time. The station possessed a huge record library--in addition to the records that Dick and I had in our own collections. Dick was off to the University of Illinois in pre-med and had left his records in my safe-keeping. The "permission" to use them at the radio station was more my assumption than his.

As it turned out dad wanted to fire the disc jockey anyway, and I had a "permanent" job every Sunday afternoon for three hours from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. Because Paul Weston's *Hot Canary* currently held first place on the hit parade, it became the theme song of the show which I called the "Canary Club." I was forever dedicating songs to favorite friends and one girl friend in particular, Gay Ann Wright, whose father was a big cheese with Kraft Foods Company. One hour of the three I reserved for phone-in requests, a method I was told that gave the station an indication of the listening audience. From the number of calls, we concluded that our advertising rates were justified.

Unfortunately for radio, even FM radio, television was coming into its own. Although the station enjoyed a substantial following of loyal sports fans and country music devotees, the inevitable change in the style of home entertainment forecast the "Voice of McHenry County's" eventual demise. By the time the decade of the 50's arrived, the station had run its course, and the equipment (by this time essentially out-of-date), the office furnishings, and the vast collection of records and transcribed programs were sold off at a loss. Although our family was sad with the radio station's closing, the saddest was that another of dad's attempts at independence had failed. He had put his heart, soul, and some money into WILA; it was his pride and joy. He took it all in stride though, but I knew he was deeply disappointed. Although I never saw my father cry or show any outward deep emotion, I could tell, because as the tower was being dismantled section by section, he stood off to the side silently, pipe clenched tightly between his teeth, and faced into the wind, which probably dried his tears before they had a chance to run down his cheeks. [WILA as remembered by Jim Benton]

Many folks in the Woodstock area still remember WILA as it left a trail of fond memories for the ones it tries to serve. The station was just too early for its time.

### WMCW--HOMETOWN RADIO Or the Story of Esther Blodgett

Few stations have enjoyed the long heritage of success as WMCW, 1600 khz, Harvard, Illinois. The station's longevity and community acceptance could not have been attained without the diligent, dedicated work of its founder Mary Esther Blodgett.

Blodgett's historical career began in 1952 as a reporter for the Harvard Herald. She had also sold cars, worked for the Red Cross, and ran a dry cleaning business previously. Her journalistic skills and appeal gained her employment as a reporter for WBEL Beloit, Wisconsin, a station owned by Russell Salter of WKKD. Esther also

worked for WCLO Janesville, Wisconsin, which is still owned by the Janesville Gazette. Vern Williams managed WCLO in 1950. The Gazette, which also owns WJVL-FM and several other stations, was attempting to dip into the Harvard market in 1950. They hired Esther because of her diversified radio and newspaper background.

Harvard funeral home operator Ben Saunders (Saunders and McFarlin, 108 West Sumner Street) remembers Esther's work on WCLO's "Harvard Hour." The tape recorded program regularly featured news, births, obits, and special events in the community. Saunders also owned a furniture store and Blodgett was there to record a program on the store's 25th Anniversary.

The program ran from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. for about a year and a half. WCLO sales manager and vice-president Charles "Bill" Bessire, who has been with the firm since 1946, recalls frequent meetings with Esther on the content of the "Harvard Hour." Esther sold all the advertising, wrote all the copy and the news for the program. It was suggested that perhaps the advertisers should be diversified; there were many farm implement dealers on the program. Esther promptly then told WCLO, "it's my program. I'll do it my way."

In 1953 the station was getting ready to drop the Harvard Hour when Esther decided to begin turning the dials for construction of her own station. WCLO sales manager Gene Steinhorst, who later managed WGEZ in Beloit, Wisconsin, was the first sales manager at WMCW. Bessire remembers that WMCW's first transmitting tower was an old windmill with an added extension which is still in use today.

The call letters WMCW were released from the U.S. Ship "Juanita," and later stood for "Milk Capital of the World," in honor of the area's large dairy business.

WMCW first signed on the air on January 30, 1955, and until the station was sold in 1979, Esther missed only two morning air shifts in nearly 25 years of broadcasting due to deaths in her family. Her last broadcast was March 14, 1979. During these years, Blodgett could readily be seen broadcasting commentaries at the annual "Milk Day Parade," or at any other community event by remote hook up.

The station stood for service. Thousands of broadcast hours were donated to the coverage of public service events. Ben Saunders recalls the station had always delivered important local information, winter road closures and, of course, obituaries. Esther would often comment on the passing of a local resident, adding colorful remembrances of the individual that wouldn't make the "obit" column in the newspaper. She often deleted facts in the news about people to save the families some embarrassment, especially the names of juveniles who got into trouble.

Fran Tody of the Northwest Herald recalls Esther as having a low pitched rambling voice often repeating herself to express a point in her frequent ad libs. Tody says, "Today's announcers go too fast, with Esther, you didn't miss anything."

Veteran journalist Van Sells, formerly of WKRS Waukegan, stated, "Esther never wrote anything down, she just talked and ad libbed everything." Sells says Esther always wore a hat that completely covered her hair. Don Peasley, the former editor of the Woodstock Journal and now manager of his own public relations firm, regularly appeared on WMCW with Esther. Peasley brought many notable people from the annual county fair to the station to be interviewed. He described her as a "feisty, independent woman, very proud of her station and community." Fred Green (W9YUN) bought lots of advertising from Esther. Green, who owned True Value Hardware Store #6, says the WMCW studios were often cluttered but well-equipped.

The station's motto was "Top of the Dial, Top of the State." Marguerita Johnston, archivist for the Harvard Museum, stated the station sounded like a hometown operation. The programming was sometimes interrupted by Esther's cooking or a tea kettle whistling. Jed Davis, an area dairy man, was described by Esther as "cute and little," as he proudly served as Grand Marshall of the Annual Milk Day Parade during one of her broadcasts as Davis marched down the street. (Milk Day is the first Saturday in June in Harvard). Esther's sense of humor was displayed one morning as she announced the birth of the eighth child to an area family. The occasion was marked by Esther dedicating the record "It Takes Two to Tango," to the couple.

Another Harvard resident Gwen Danner, who writes a question and answer column for the Northwest Herald (Harvard Herald) said, "Esther had a definite set of rules that had to be followed, she screened all material before it was broadcast." The little station could do big things when it wanted to--Associated Press wire copy was used. A long list of live interviews were presented by Esther which included Mr. Chicago Cub Ernie Banks, and boxing great Jack Dempsey, football great Red Grange. Former First Lady Lucy Banes Johnson also visited the station along with country and western singers Tex Ritter and Del Wood. These notable individuals knew how to reach the people of Harvard by appearing on WMCW.

Many people volunteered to assist the people of Crystal Lake and Belvidere after a tornado in the 60's did severe damage to the towns. They heard requests for help over WMCW and responded. Esther turned in so many stories about the tornado in 1965, that she was the AP Correspondent of the Month. Harvard remembered their radio lady with a special "Esther Blodgett Night" in 1965.

Today the station operates from more modern facilities in downtown Harvard at 67 North Ayer Street. The station was sold by Blodgett to Obed Borgen in 1979. Borgen moved the station to the upstairs of the Seeley Drug

Store at the corner of Ayer and Sumner and programmed country and western music. Esther worked for a short time for Morgan as an announcer.

Since 1984 the station has been owned by the Mitchell Broadcasting Company. The old farm house studios were located on the Blodgett Farm at 7607 Route 14, one mile north of Harvard. It is rumored that FCC inspectors were chased away from the farm on one occasion by Esther wielding some harsh words and a shotgun. She wrote the FCC and told them she was too busy selling advertising and running her station to fill out their license forms or admit commission inspectors. (Esther's handling of the FCC often caused the delegates at the NAB Conventions to chuckle.)

Some other radio personalities touring the station one day were asked by Esther, "With so many of you here, who is running your station?" Esther lived in her station (which was her house) and never had a very large staff. Esther's niece and nephews, Peggy Witcher of Harvard, George Blodgett of Pensacola, Florida, and John Blodgett of Hanover Park, served in many different capacities at the station. John and his wife Audrey, sang on the station frequently. Peggy and John's father, Orrin Blodgett, did all the carpentry and installation of the equipment. Leo Ropen was the engineer. Other announcers included Vince Moore, of the Elgin area, who worked weekends and sold pet care products for Hartz Mountain during the week. NBC's Roy Ahlred, of Rockford, and Johnny Molinaro were other staff announcers.

The five hundred watt station which could have been built into a five thousand watt station operated from sunrise to sunset. It was enough wattage to serve fifty miles of the tri-county area. Peggy Witcher stated her aunt "did more in her lifetime than some people even try." John Blodgett said, "Esther was more interested in serving the public than making money. She knew everybody and had set about, previous to the station's opening, to interview all of the area farmers." John also served as the station's sportscaster broadcasting local high school games. The contests were usually played at night and taped to be played during the next day's broadcast.

Mary Esther Elizabeth Blodgett (never married) was born in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, August 6, 1902, and passed away at the age of 85 at the Woodstock Resident Nursing Home on September 27, 1987. She is believed to be the first woman in radio in the area and the first woman to own a radio station in the country. Esther's grandfather was Dr. Pliny Wilmont Blanchard. Her father, John Wesley Blodgett, was superintendent of Walworth, Lake Geneva, and Burlington High Schools.

Much of the above information was supplied by the McHenry County Historical Society by Dorothy McEachren, President. Some of WMCW's old Presto turntables and Collins control board donated by the Mitchell's is on display at the Harvard Historical Museum at the First Presbyterian Church Annex at 308 Hart Street. The old equipment was in use when the station was located above the Seeley Drug Store, when it was owned by Mr. Borgen.

Mianne Mitchell Nelson is the general manager of WMCW today. She is the daughter of famous Iowa broadcaster Forrest "Frosty" Mitchell, who is the president of Mitchell Broadcasting Company which owns the station. The 500 watt daytime station is reaching further out in the community with more local news and sports coverage with adult contemporary music. WMCW is planning an 18 watt nighttime operation to cover a local sports. A new transmitter was recently installed to increase the station's range. One 1,000 watt operation is planned for the near future. Meanwhile, the old Blodgett farm house where Esther once operated WMCW was remodeled into a residence by the Witcher Family. The old address of the station was later changed to 205 E. Brainard Street. The house was torn down in October of 1991.

#### **WREK, WSTK, WCLR, WXR WXET, WIVS, WAIT AM-FM, WZSR**

#### Rounding Out the Area

In recent years Woodstock and Crystal Lake have been blessed with a parade of energetic owners who operated the present day stations in the area. Long after WILA had gone off the air, Woodstock would get another chance to be served by a local FM station beginning in 1965.

WREK never got off the ground. A construction permit for the new 3,000 watt FM station was held for nearly three years by the McHenry County Broadcasters. The business address of the firm was listed at 511 North Rose Farm Road according to Broadcast Yearbook. In 1964 the Woodstock City Directory listed Lloyd Burlingham, an announcer for WBBM radio in Chicago, living at that address.

Lloyd "Doc" Burlingham did a farm report show for WBBM at his previous address (2411 Vermont Road, Woodstock) from 5:00 to 6:30 a.m. Robert A. Jones (W9DWD) of LaGrange, Illinois, was a radio engineer also at WBBM, and a business partner of Burlingham's. Both co-owned WBEL in Beloit and another Wisconsin station for a short time.



## Lloyd Burlingham

Burlingham devoted his life to agriculture and broadcasting according to his son, Vaughn, who lives in Petaluma, California, just outside of San Francisco. Lloyd was born in Central City, Iowa, and attended the University of Kansas. He worked with livestock for many years and directed the National Dairy Show.

The senior Burlingham began his radio career selling five minute radio talks about farming which were aired over WLS. At that time WLS was owned by the Agricultural Broadcasting Company and part of the NBC Blue Network. One of Burlingham's radio memories was trying to get a Thanksgiving Turkey to talk on the radio. His son Vaughn discovered that by racing a nearby car engine, the turkey would pronounce its familiar "Gobble Gobble."

Burlingham, besides enjoying a long career with WBBM, owned WIXN in Dixon from 1961-67 (which was later owned by Russell Salter and the Janesville Gazette), a station in Rockford, and KTOP (Top of the Bay) in Petaluma, California.

In 1961 Burlingham and Jones teamed up and sought construction permits for an AM/FM operation in Woodstock. They applied for an AM station on 930 khz. That open frequency would later become the object of a bitter battle involving Russell Salter, owner of WTAQ and WKKD and another Kendall County broadcaster. Burlingham and Jones were set to put up the AM towers east of Woodstock near the fairgrounds, but the FCC froze all AM applications. Instead they received an FM construction permit for WREK. The call letters were assigned by the FCC.

Burlingham, along with consulting engineer Robert A. Jones, sued the FCC citing the many hours of planning that went into the development of their proposed station. They lose their case. Nothing was done with the FM construction permit which was eventually sold to Joe Salvi. Jones has been an engineering consultant for many years and has worked for many stations, including WRMN Elgin in 1951.

After Burlingham moved from the Rose Farm address, W.X. Beguelin lived there for a short time. Beguelin later moved to Indianapolis. Burlingham left the area for California. He died in 1971. No broadcasting ever took place at the Rose Farm address. Burlingham's sister, Mrs. Richard (Betty Babcock) still resides in Woodstock, and in the 50's produced some radio material for Chicago charities.

In 1968 Angelo "Joe" Salvi, owner of WLUV-AM/FM in Love's Park-Rockford, bought WREK's construction permit from Robert A. Jones. The call letters WSTK were issued to Salvi. Dean Clayton became the station's general manager. The station's frequency was 105.5 mhz.

Salvi purchased a five room log cabin kit from a local lumber yard and set up the station near the intersection of Route 14, east of Dean Street. The address was 12636 Davis Road (addresses in the area have since been renumbered). For a short time there were no bathroom facilities in the station. Salvi stated that WSTK tried very hard and participated in community affairs with a minimal staff. "A few more good salesmen working in a very tight-knit community could have brought more money into the operation," Salvi said, "but it made enough to pay the bills."

The station combined country and middle-of-the-road formats which lasted for about five years. The task of entertaining the Woodstock area over the 3,000 watt FM station then fell to a group of mainly high school students and young people who virtually ran WSTK. The young staffers included announcers Steve Ellis, Dan Simpson, Greg Allen and Doug Mather (KD9PK).

Allen was one of the station's more polished announcers and later went to work for Richard Prather at WVFV Dundee. Mather is the third generation of family members employed at the Hal Mather & Son Company in Woodstock, a computer and printing firm.

Mather recalls the large variety of early programs at WSTK, which included "Country Hoedown" and several syndicated army and navy musical programs on disc. News came from the Mutual Broadcasting System which the station piped in from a radio tuned to WJJD. Mather has strong feelings about the lack of a real Woodstock station in the community now; meanwhile recalling pleasant memories of a group of young people who used to have some good clean fun on the radio in the 60's. There was a small following to the station, but not enough to turn a profit. Mather says the management didn't seem to care as long as the station kept going and was tastefully operated.

The students made extensive use of sound effects in their clever presentations. On one occasion one of the announcers did a commercial from outside of the station screaming about a large fire sale that was in progress down the street from the station at the city dump. Mather also recalled that the station's operators sometimes worked with only one turntable and played plenty of public service announcements while the next record was being "cued up."

The unofficial station slogan was "WSTK, located on the dial at the point of maximum hum." The station's equipment emitted an annoying AC hum. Mather went on to do some engineering work for Esther Blodgett in Harvard. WSTK was later sold to Mal Bellairs and the call letters changed to WXRJ "The Crossroads of McHenry County."

WSTK's old log cabin studios have since been made into a house owned by Earl and Nancy Goodyear. The original foundation of the station is under the kitchen.

In Crystal Lake WCLR, then standing for "Crystal Lake Radio," first appeared in 1967. It was owned by George DeBeer and sold after DeBeer passed away to Lynn Renne a year later. In 1969 the operation, owned by Lake-Valley Broadcasters, was bought out by Chicago's radio personality Mal Bellairs. The call letters were changed to WTVS, and Bellairs installed several members of his family at the controls of the operation located at 145 Virginia Street. WCLR later became the call letters of a Chicago station now known as WTMX.

Jerry Bellairs became the general manager and Rick Bellairs was the program director of WIVS. When WAIT Chicago changed their call letters to WCZE, then WXEZ, the station recognizing the long heritage of WAIT snatched it up. Its 850 khz signal at 5,000 watts is heard over most of Northern Illinois and Southern Wisconsin.

Over the years a variety of formats have been tried on the station ranging from country and western to talk. Bellairs was the anchor, motivator and chief entertainer of the operation. In 1975 Bellairs purchased WSTK-FM. Joe Salvi listened to several offers over the period of a few years before selling his station to Bellairs. The station was moved from its Davis Road location and reassembled upstairs in the Woodstock Court House. The beautifully remodeled studio resembled a fish tank, recalls news director Stew Cohen. The call letters were changed to WXRD. A rock format was then installed.

In 1980 WXRD moved to 300 Commerce Drive in Crystal Lake and was combined with WAIT. Katy Industries, who owns the Kansas and Texas Railroad, bought out Bellairs in 1981. In 1987 Dean Phelps became the general manager. Katy was just getting into the broadcast business. Bellairs was pleased to sell to a local firm. Katy still operated under the Lake-Valley banner and had offices in Elgin. Art Reis (K9XI), of the Satellite Music Network, was the engineer.

In 1988 a group headed by Gerald Vento bought both stations. John Schaller became the new general manager. Stew Cohen is still the long-time news director. Mal Bellairs still comes back to the station to do a four hour Christmas and St. Patrick's Day program (he also owns a house in Ireland), and still can be heard on commercials for White Fence Farm Restaurant and a retirement home.

Cohen's efficient news staff recently won the Silver Dove Award from the Illinois Broadcasters Association for the best talk show on a small market radio station. The program is called "Northwest Spectrum."

Cohen enjoys his success at the station stating that, "Every day is different and challenging. WAIT was then programmed country; WXRD which became WXET in 1985 became an adult contemporary station. Both were programmed by the Satellite Music Network in Mokena, Illinois. The AM station goes off at sunset.

Late in 1989 the FM call letters were changed to WAIT-FM. The AM side featured 50's and 60's music. Larry O'Brien was one of the popular disc jockeys. Other staffers were Gene Davis, Greg Newton, and news director Jim Michalski. Weekend programming featured the long running Lil' Richard Polka Show, Alfred Richter's Voice of the Homeland (German music), Mike Jackson's "Outdoors," and the St. Peter's Lutheran Church service from Arlington Heights.

Meanwhile, WAIT-FM was managed by Chicago announcer Kevin Malloy, who featured an adult rock format. Malloy's "fiery" dismissal paved the way for new satellite programming called "The Heat." This format was followed by "classic hits." Some fifteen announcers lost their jobs when the station went satellite.

Late in 1990, studios for both stations were moved to Orchard Bend at 8600 North Route 14, northwest of Crystal Lake. An unsuccessful attempt was made to obtain an open Chicago frequency (820 khz) for full time operation. In 1991 WAIT-AM switched back to a beautiful music format. Its automated assist facilities complete with live announcers gave way to a current all computerized operation. The voices of former owner Mal Bellairs, WGN's Jay Andres, and Jim Olsen are heard throughout the day. Bellairs is still the voice on many commercials.

On the FM side, the long heritage of station call letters beginning with WSTK, then WXRD, WXET, and WAIT-FM, switched again in late 1991 to WZSR ("The Star of the Great Northwest"). The satellite programming (Unistar AC-2) comes from Hollywood and is owned by entertainer Dick Clark. Only the morning drive announcer is live. Former WJJD personality Steve Sands gave way to WJMK's Steve Wallace. Sands left the area to work in satellite programming in California, as did another earlier WAIT employee Susan Carr. WZSR plays adult contemporary music. Presently, Steve Wallace is the program director of the two stations, Stew Cohen is the news director, and Paul Ciarrochi is the production manager.

Both WAIT-AM and WZSR are owned by Pride Communications, a group of about 25 investors headed by Jim Hooker. The sale was made on July 29, 1991 to Pride from Lake Valley Broadcasters and Katy Industries of Elgin. Former station president John Schaller operates a low power TV station channel 45 in the Loves Park-Rockford area. Another former announcer, Gene Richards, is the morning man on WNUA-FM in Chicago.

## OTHER SOUNDS OF THE PAST

In recent years radio operations have been located and operated from Joliet, Plainfield, Sandwich, Plano, Sycamore, DeKalb, Mt. Prospect, Des Plaines, Waukegan and Zion, Illinois, outside of the Chicagoland area. In a 1924 edition of the Woodstock Sentinel, radio tests were made from Woodstock using the call letters WZAP. Plans for a large station never materialized.

On record is a broadcast license for WBNT for 1927 in Elgin. The license was held by the Elgin National Watch Company, but the station was never put on the air. For many years before (about 1910) the watch company had broadcasted time signals on shortwave from its observatory at 33.5 mhz. The company also operated stations W9XAM and W9XAN on a wide variety of frequencies (1715 khz; 4795 khz.) to communicate with other hams and for experimental purposes. Frank Urie ran the company's radio operations.

The station's antenna was a four wire aerial 28 feet long and 150 feet high. Monitoring was done by using an "audion" (a radio designed by Dr. Lee deForest) to set the watches. The set picked up time signal station NAA in Arlington, West Virginia. The watch factory was torn down in 1966.

In 1928 the Chicago Federation of Labor sought a construction permit to build a new fifty thousand watt radio station and an airport in Elgin. The station was to operate along with the Federation's other station WCFL. The firm had an option on a farm in Elgin, but the new station was never built. The Chicago Federation of Labor sold WCFL in the mid 70's and is now known as WLUP. In 1990 the old WCFL call letters were in use again by a Morris Illinois station.

In 1929 a large New York based telegraph firm contemplated building a branch office near Plainfield. Around 1930 a large fireproof brick building was constructed on 127th Street, east of Route 59, north of Plainfield by Universal Wireless Communications Incorporated. The building was to house one of several transcontinental sending and relaying stations. Similar line of sight stations were located out east already, and the Plainfield operation was an important link to the system. Universal Wireless Communications was headquartered in Buffalo, New York. The main office was listed as 1703 Liberty Bank Building. The firm's president was William H. Fitzpatrick, Sr. Other officers included Secretary John E. Barry and director Milton Jerry Blanchard. All three were from Buffalo.

Other later officers in 1930 were John W. Henry, one of Fitzpatrick's business associates, who later became president of the firm; Alonzo Hinkle, vice-president, and Paul E. Fitzpatrick, one of the elder Fitzpatrick's three sons, who became treasurer.

The main person behind Universal was the senior Fitzpatrick. "Fitz" rose from a rural milkman to an influential civic and political leader. Fitzpatrick, who served as Erie County Democratic Chairman, was involved in politics in Buffalo, New York, for 35 years. As a realtor he built hundreds of homes in South Buffalo and was also responsible for the construction of the city's New York Central railroad terminal. The \$10 million structure was later built in 1932.

Besides employing those with large financial assets, Universal was also surrounded by many electrical experts. Dr. Nathanson, a Navy technical expert, served as consultant of the firm. He was able to convince the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) in 1929 that the company's new technical development would revolutionize the wireless industry.

Universal engineer Earl Koch formally of Westinghouse in Chicago, along with scientists Dr. Rose Gunn and Howard L. Ford, developed the "Screen Grid" vacuum tube. Universal's transmitting equipment was a closely guarded secret in the early 30's. The method used by the company allowed for the sending of five different messages all at once on the same channel: 750 khz. wide. Despite the firm's failure to issue stock by a required date, the FRC continued to sanction the young firm as they had with RCA because of both firms new technology. Universal secured permission for forty shortwave channels, attempting to utilize 110 cities, including Plainfield, Illinois, for its operations. Each transmitting office and facility would cost about \$12 million.

Universal had operations either installed or slated for the states of California, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Delaware, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Washington, and the District of Columbia by late 1930. The firm was incorporated in the state of New York on January 11, 1929. Locally, business was to be conducted from the office of William R. Watson of 112 Adams Street in Chicago. Watson owned Blessing Electrical Manufacturing Company. Universal received its Illinois corporate papers on January 16, 1929. At this time, vast land holdings were owned by the firm. Universal purchased about 180 acres of land in sections 16, 27, and 28 near Plainfield. Most of the land was purchased from Chicago businessman John J. Keating. Part of the land in Section 16 in Wheatland Township was formally known as the Robins farm.

On this property, north of Plainfield, the firm's large antenna, brick operational center, and offices were built. Universal's large sending tower, long since removed, was located on the northwest corner of Route 59 and 127th Street. A small house that could have been the transmitter building now sets on this property at 24016 West 127th Street. The brick building that housed Universal's operations and offices still stands today at 23756 West



127th Street about a half mile east of Route 59 on the north side of the road. The old radio equipment inside the building was sold to Joliet amateur radio operator Frank Harris (W9BCH).

It has long been rumored that an important official of the firm was electrocuted by a jolt of 660 volts in the operations building. Other early employees of Universal were F. E. Von Ohlen who lived with his wife Leah on the next farm north of the station. (People in Plainfield commonly refer to Universal as the "radio station.") Von Ohlen was a Merchant Marine telegraph operator.

Leah remembers that the firm handled mainly telegraph messages in Morse Code for businesses. The Von Ohlen's left the area in the early 1930's to work for a similar firm in Tinley Park.

Another early employee was Walter Mueller. Mueller, the father of Norm Mueller of Plainfield, cleared the land for the operational center building and later did maintenance work for the company.

According to county records, Universal went bankrupt during the Depression Era on September 30, 1930. The next January, the firm's trustee M & T Trust Company of Clarence, New York, took control of Universal's assets in New Jersey, Michigan, Ohio, Massachusetts, Kentucky, and Plainfield. Allen G. Swigger of New York City, received control of the property in the above states. Illinois revoked Universal's charter to operate on November 15, 1930. According to the Buffalo Times, Universal's President William H. Fitzpatrick, Sr. passed away as the result of a heart attack on January 4, 1932.

The large brick structure stood vacant for about five years before it was sold to John Schmidt. All of the electrical equipment had been previously removed. Left behind was a curious room in the cellar where a large piece of equipment once stood. A large water boiler which is currently inoperative is located on the other side of the basement.

Buying a fireproof building seemed logical for Schmidt, who had lost some relatives in a home fire. A large redwood storage tower, located northeast of the brick operational center, once supplied water for the building. Schmidt dismantled the top redwood section, using the materials to remodel the inside of the building. Extra insulation and a new front now covers up the company's name on the southeast corner of the entrance of the building.

In the 1940s regular square dances were held in the basement (Schmidt Hall). A small stage is still located in the basement. The structure has since been made into apartments.

The above information was provided by John's wife Frances Schmidt who owns and lives in the large brick operation center building. Frances, now a widow, has made many improvements to the building. A very pleasant and knowledgeable person, she spends most of her time reading or working in her garden. Mrs. Schmidt was a former Plainfield and Naperville school teacher. Her husband John bought the vacant building around 1937.

From 1932 to 1938 several other large shortwave stations operated in the Elgin and Aurora areas. WQDU Aurora at 5600 Khz was another early experimental station. In 1938, W9XDH was owned by Press Wireless, Incorporated, at 12.862 mhz and was probably used to transmit data to newspapers. In 1939 radio range station WAOE at 2.022 mhz was operated by WMRO's Martin J. O'Brien.

There were numerous pirate stations on the air that disappeared fast when FCC inspectors came to town. A one hundred watt pirate FM station on the west side of St. Charles operated in 1957. Much earlier another pirate experimental station operated in the early 20's from the Willard Battery Company on Blaine Street in Batavia. Old timers in the area say the station was rumored to be operated by William A. Whitney of 133 First Street. Whitney operated Whitney's Electrical Shop and Service Station at the same address in Batavia.

Residents agree that it was not beyond the capability of Whitney to build and operate a radio facility. The station, which featured local talent and guitar playing, was eventually closed down by the FRC. In the early 40's Postal Telegraph operated in several cities including Elgin and Plainfield. The Elgin operation was located at 18 North Grove Avenue and managed by Grace L. Williams.

In the late 50's Lloyd Burlingham did farm report broadcasts on WBBM Chicago from his home in Woodstock. Don Peasley, also of Woodstock, was a frequent guest on his program (see WREK). Northwest Illinois is remembered as the home residence of Julian Bentley of Harvard, a former broadcaster with WLS.

At the end of the 50's and into the early 60's Vanesse (Van) Sells did McHenry County news from a store front at 107 East Judd Street (just off the Woodstock Square) for WKRS Waukegan. The 1220 khz, one thousand watt AM station could be heard in parts of McHenry County warranting news coverage of the Northwest areas.

Sells, who used the first name Van instead of Vanesse to masquerade the fact that she was a female reporter, was the editor of the Woodstock Daily Sentinel for six years. She did regular news casts for WKRS from 1952 to 1962 and later from the station's Waukegan studios. The Woodstock Daily Sentinel is now the Northwest Daily Herald.

Sells related that she would like to write a book about being a reporter in a small town someday. She came from an era of journalism where radio stations and newspapers no longer cooperated with each other in the same competitive market. Sells had to battle most of her career with her male counterparts for competitive salaries. She is now retired from the Public Relations Department of the RTA and resides in Wonder Lake.

Another Woodstock area journalist was Don Peasley, whose agricultural talks were aired on over 100 stations including WLBK in DeKalb and WGN in Chicago. Don's five minute program, called "Farm Front," featured information on hog raising, farm safety, and agricultural news. Don used an old magnacorder set to do the tape recorded programs for the Illinois Agricultural Association. These programs ran from 1950-58. Peasley also worked as a writer for TV farm reporter George Menard in Chicago, and was the editor of the Woodstock Journal. In later years, he was often heard on WMCW in Harvard, and currently runs his own public relations firm in Woodstock.

For a short time prior to 1970, WLXT-TV Channel 60, operated in Aurora. It is best remembered for accidentally showing X-rated movies. It later went bankrupt. A few years later, Aurora again had TV service with WPWR. It later switched channels with a defunct educational outlet WCAE-TV (Calumet Area Education) in St. John, Indiana. For a short time in the late 60's, I worked as a booth announcer at Lake Central High School.

WPWR (Chicago's Power Station) moved most of its operation to Chicago and exchanged channels with WCAE. The former Aurora operation took the lower channel 50 frequency which had been assigned to Gary, Indiana. The educational outlet later came back as WYIN Channel 56 Merrillville, Indiana, which had been compensated for the channel shuffle. Home Shopping Service then opened up on the vacated Channel 60. West Chicago's WBBS-TV, Channel 60, never got off the ground, except to adorn late night TV screens with the "best of TV test pattern" in 1986. Today, Joliet's WGBO-TV Channel 66 operates mostly out of Chicago.

### JOLIET RADIO CONTINUES TO ADVANCE

One's first impression of the city of Joliet is probably that of an old city, consisting of crumbling buildings and confusing one-way street mazes. The city is easy to approach, but somehow difficult to leave during evening rush hours when the downtown bridges are up over the Des Plaines River for ship traffic. While the city's wipe out of old downtown structures continues, a new program of decorative street corners has also begun. At several locations in the downtown area were the city's earliest radio operations. WJBA was operated in 1925 by David H. Lentz (9AQC) from his home at 301 Whitley Avenue. WJBA operated on 1450 khz in June, 1925 with 50 watts and in 1927-1928 used 930 khz and 1210 khz. The station was on the air Tuesday evenings from 8-11 p.m. Lentz decided to get out of the radio business and closed down WJBA in September, 1928.

Another early station in Joliet was WIBD. It operated in 1925 on 1495 khz with 50 watts of power. The station was owned by William P. Hilliard (9PZ) and X-L Radio Service at 223 Van Buren Street. Some local concerts, news and market reports were aired as well as ads for X-L Radio. The station was mainly used to demonstrate the firm's radio sets. It was one of the few stations that could be heard during the daytime in the Joliet area, although most radios could not tune to its high frequency. The station went off the air in November, 1925.

A third early station was listed as WJBI which went on the air in May, 1925 at 1400 khz. The station, owned by Harold M. Couch, used 100 watts increasing to 150 watts later in the year. The original studios were located at 104 Summit Street. The call letters were later changed to WCLS in 1925 to end public confusion with WJBA.

The last station that figures in the early development of radio in Joliet was WKBB. It operated in 1926 with 100 watts mostly on 1400 khz. The station was owned by the Sanders Brothers; Benjamin, Albert, Edward and Jacob. The firm operated a tire store, an auto wrecking company, a radio station, and sold auto and electrical supplies out of their store at 607-613 East Jefferson Street. WKBB later moved to East Dubuque, Iowa, and became a 250 watt daytime station at 1490 khz. Al McCormick, a local tenor, was often featured on the station.

WWAE, which is associated more with nearby Plainfield than Joliet, began with 500 watts in November, 1923. The station operated at 1320 khz out of the old Alamo Dance Hall at 327 Clinton Street. The owner of the station was "chief announcer" Lawrence J. "Butch" Crowley. Crowley's short venture into the broadcasting business could have been influenced by his brother, William, who, along with Anthony Arnold, operated amateur radio station 9AJM in 1927 from 1608 Raynor Street. The Crowley name is marked with fame as one of the downtown streets still bears the family name. Later it turned to shame with Crowley's exploits of crafty business dealings in connection with Electric Park. Electric Park was a well-known resort along the DuPage River in the late 1920's near Plainfield. Crowley's rumored "bootleg" dealings and shady business practices ultimately ended in a hail of bloody gunfire at his demise. Crowley, described as a short, tubby, demanding man with a face like Al Capone, was assassinated on October 8, 1936. More about this station's activities follows at the end of this section.

During the early 20's and up to the present time, the city of Joliet has been served by several fine continuing radio services. This includes long time area favorite WJOL at "Radio Hill." WJOL has won numerous awards for community service and is the current Emergency Broadcast System (EBS) station for the area.

#### WJOL at Radio Hill

WJOL dates back to 1926 with its roots emanating from two former stations: WCLS and WKBB. WKBB, owned in 1926 by the Sanders Tire Store, changed its frequency from 1060 khz to 1400 khz to 1390 khz. Large

ads appeared in the Joliet Evening Herald News advertising the store's merchandise which included radio sets. An even bigger advertising campaign was behind WCLS. Both stations were once located at 222 North Chicago Street. WCLS shifted frequency early from 1400 to 1390 khz.

In 1926 both stations operated alternately on the same frequency. WCLS, Incorporated became the property of M.A. Felman Company that year. The firm had operated the Boston Store since 1889. The station was purchased from Harold M. Couch for one dollar and moved to the store's address at 301 East Jefferson.

WCLS stood for Will County's Largest Store. Clothing advertisements in the Joliet Herald Evening News always reminded listeners about WCLS in sales ads. In September, 1928 the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) began combining some stations and eliminating others. Both stations were moved to 1310 khz. Officially, in November, 1928, the ownership of WCLS was listed as WCLS, Incorporated; Albert J. Felman was the owner. Both WCLS and WKBB operated with 100 watts, and by 1931 the stations began to separate. WCLS remained at 301 Jefferson, but the transmitter was moved to 307 Scott Street. A five wire cage "L" type antenna was used by WCLS. The studios and transmitter of WCLS were moved to the Joliet Bank Building at 406 Clinton Street in 1932. Felman then sold WCLS to Richard W. Hoffman. Joseph Slauf managed WCLS and WKBB, both of which operated at 1310 khz. WCLS increased its power to 150 watts.

In 1933, WKBB, still owned by the Sanders Brothers, moved to the Hotel Julien in East Dubuque, Illinois, and was managed by Reginald B. Martin. The station later became a 250 watt daytime station moving to 1500 khz. Walter E. Klauer eventually became the station manager.

In 1934 WCLS remained in Joliet still sharing time with WTRC in South Bend/Elkart, Indiana, and WKBB. WKBB received its new dial position in 1934, while WTRC and WCLS continued to operate at 1310 khz, sharing time at night only.

Ray Fay was replaced as station manager of WCLS in 1935 by M. E. Maxwell. Wally Nehrling was the program director and Odsler Wedin was the engineer. The next progression of managers included Richard W. Hoffman, who owned WHFC in Cicero, L. W. Wood and Walter Ashe. Wood moved the station from the Joliet National Bank Building in 1938 to new facilities in the Joliet Building at 7 East Clinton Street. He became president and general manager in 1938. For a short time in 1936 WCLS was a member of the Affiliated Broadcasting Company (ABC). The network went bankrupt on January 21, 1937. (WIND, Gary, Indiana, was the network's major station.) WCLS was on the air from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily and until 10:30 p.m. Friday nights in 1938.

In 1940 a new 189 foot Windcharger vertical antenna was in use at the station's transmitter site. The Havana Treaty (NARBA) moved WCLS to 1340 khz., making it a full time station. After Wood's death, Robert W. Thomas, the estate's administrator, transferred the station license to Walter Ashe. Ashe became the president of the station and Robert Holt was named the general manager. Ray Fay was back as the commercial manager. The power was increased to 250 watts in 1942, and the studios and transmitter were relocated to its present day facilities at 601 Walnut Street.

On July 17, 1945 WCLS, Inc. was sold by Ashe to the Joliet Broadcasting Company. The call letters were changed to WJOL. Calvin White became the president of the firm, Robert L. Bowles was the vice president and station manager, and Joseph J. Garvey was named general manager in February of 1949; Robert W. Thomas served as the vice president. In 1954 Willard Erwin, Jr. became the manager of the station, followed in 1955 by former WBBM engineers Joseph Novy and Jerome F. Cerny. WJOL's hours of operation were 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily. Novy and Cerny purchased the station for \$112,000 and operated in until 1965. WJOL became a full-time station in 1956 and increased its power to 1000 watts daytime in 1963, and 250 watts nighttime. Novy was president and general manager. In June, 1964, WJOL was sold to newspaper publisher John P. Harris. WJOL-FM came on the air previous to the sale in 1960 programming easy listening music with 1000 watts. Both stations were sold for \$1.1 million to the Harris Newspapers and Stations Groups. An additional \$120,000 was paid to Cerny and Novy to not compete in the market with any other broadcasting interests. William W. Hansen was named general manager in 1964. Cerny later purchased WLBK in DeKalb.

In 1969 WJOL-FM raised its power from 1000 to 3000 watts and its antenna height from 125 feet to 300 feet greatly expanding its coverage area. Its call letters were changed to WLLI-FM in 1971. The call letters stood for Will County and featured a mascot named Willie. The station was programmed with country and western music.

Peter McDonald became the president of the operation in 1970 (then owned by Harris Enterprises). The station became a member of the ABC Information Radio Network. From 1976 to 1985 T M Communications provided an adult contemporary music format which was changed to a talk/information format in 1985. The latest change in the station's operation came in 1987 when the country format and the mascot were eliminated and WLLI became I-Rock, programming contemporary hit music. Today WJOL-AM and WLLI-FM are the top stations in Joliet. WLLI broadcasts with 3,000 watts at 96.7 FM; WJOL broadcasts with 1,000 watts daytime and night time. Full power night time operation began in 1985.

A final sale of the stations took place on October 14, 1987. Joliet businessman Robert Tezak purchased them for \$3.5 million. The licensed ownership later changed from the Joliet Broadcasting Company to UNO



Broadcasting Company, after a popular card game of the same name. Ralph Sherman was named general manager in 1987. Sherman, a former marine recruiter, was the station manager of WLBK in DeKalb under Jerome Cerny. The Joliet Broadcasting Company is again the official owner of WJOL. Today WJOL is the seventeenth oldest and continuously operated radio station in Illinois. The operation's president is Lloyd Balhagen; William W. Hansen is the general manager.

Over the years WJOL has enjoyed a constant influx of talented professional announcers trying to make it into the Chicago market, or who were on their way out of the area. Chicago Cubs announcer Harry Caray once worked at WJOL. Chicago radio personality Art Hellyer does a Saturday morning music program.

WJOL is located at 601 Walnut Street across from Silver Cross Hospital. It broadcasts at 1340 khz with 1000 watts. It is mostly talk. Its middle of the road format is supplemented by ABC network newscasts. Long-time talk show host Frank O'Leary does a daily "Phone Forum" program. He has been with the station for thirty-three years, travelling from Chicago each day to do his show. A former program director was Larry Watts, a veteran of many operations, including the Satellite Music Network and a traffic reporter for WBBM in Chicago. Watts now works for WMAQ in Chicago. WJOL and WLLI are the top rated stations ranked by Arbitron in Joliet. [This information was prepared from "Station Profile of WJOL and WLLI-FM sections of the Broadcast Yearbook from 1935-1988, and Broadcast Profile's WJOL, Hollywood, California.]

### St. Peter's - Oldest Church Broadcast

Ministers, evangelists, and churches have long known about the advantageous outreach and impact that radio has on the population. Many religious organizations still operate their own radio stations today. While some religious programs have left the airwaves for various reasons, the Joliet area is still being blessed by the country's oldest continuously running morning church broadcast.

St. Peter's Lutheran Church, located at 310 North Broadway in Joliet, is beginning its 65th year on the air. The regular morning service is carried live at 10:45 a.m. each Sunday morning over WJOL 1340 khz. The church has been recognized by the National Council of Churches for its broadcasting efforts, which date back to October 22, 1927.

Early broadcasts of the church were first carried over WCLS, the forerunner to WJOL. A representative of the station heard the church choir practicing one night and asked the church to be on the air each Sunday. Programs took place inside the Boston Store where the WCLS studios were located (WCLS stands for Will County's Largest Store; see WCLS.)

In 1987, the church saluted current and former announcers and board engineers who have worked on the broadcasts. Those included 92 year old Elmer Pritz who served for 20 years as the program's announcer and director. Other announcers and engineers include Elmer Kelty, Erwin Sievers, Charles Meyer, Kenneth Mietz, Brent Pritchett, Fred Hoffman, Ray Pritz, Elmer Bensen, Bill Phillips, Stephen Gannaway, and Dave Hallerberg. Brian Himmelman is the current program director.

In 1945, the church's present broadcasting booth was built by George Bitterman. The first ministers heard on the broadcasts were Rev. Erdmann Frenk and later his son Rev. Martin Frenk. The younger Frenk's wife Beverly also stated that the church regularly appeared on WGN-TV in Chicago on selected Sundays in the 1960's. For about 10 years in the 1960's Martin and Beverly did a 15 minute inspirational program on WJOL on Tuesday evenings. Martin played the organ and Beverly sang. Erdmann, who passed away in 1970, also started WOCG, a short-lived church radio station in Sycamore. Martin passed on in 1975. Beverly is still active at St. Peter's Church and also works at the Joliet Public Library.

### **OTHER JOLIET STATIONS**

In 1960 the city's first FM station came on the air. WAJP-FM, 93.5 mhz, was owned by Alfred and Mary Jane Pohlers. It operated out of the upstairs of a garage behind 451 West Ruby Street. The exact address was actually behind the structure at 807 North Vine, and the tower was located between the buildings. The call letters stood for the owner's initials.

A. J. Pohlers, for many years, ran a simple family radio operation out of his house. Backed by several airplane engine patents, Pohlers used his resources to develop another hobby of his, radio broadcasting. Before WAJP, Pohlers had set up his own mini-network according to former employee Lane Lindstrom. A variety of remote or ethnic broadcasts were recorded and shipped to other stations in the area. Presto disc cutters and tape decks were used in this operation.

When the Pohlers began their station, they were well-equipped. Boards, microphones, and turntables used for earlier network tapings were in excellent condition.

WAJP's programs were, for the most part, selling 15 minute blocks of music to advertisers. Air time consisted of "tracking" the sides of records. When the fifteen minutes were up, the record was taken off and

replaced in its cover. Parades, remotes, polka shows, and the "Memory Hours" were among the station's successful programs. Ken Griffin (Griffith) organ music was also featured.

By striking the fourth chime in a five chime set that hung on the wall, the correct time was given and sold to advertisers.

At one time the Pohlers lived in the building to keep better eyes on the station. A gun was located under the turntables to protect the station from intruders. A makeshift dummy waiter operated inside of the building. The station was actually located inside of a garage-like building. A piano was stored on the third floor.

The 1000 watt station had considerable range reaching over to Indiana. It was the favorite station of Burdette Wood of Crown Point, Indiana, who entertained patrons with it in his Cedar Lake Barber Shop. Wood cut hair amazingly while adjusting the antenna on his radio for best reception. Sometimes patrons got good haircuts. "Woody" was a good friend of Ken.

At WAJP, the Pohlers did everything right, according to Robert Jones, a broadcasting consultant. The station's programming had a good following for many years. Actually, Pohlers got his start in area radio doing a polka program on WTAQ LaGrange, where Jones worked. A bus load of fans would come from Joliet to do the show with Al on Sunday afternoons; later broadcasts came direct from Joliet through a remote line. Pohlers defied critics by playing polka music every night on WAJP. Soon half the city was listening. Al was not only a talented engineer, but a program host that everyone liked.

In 1970 WAJP raised its antenna height to 250 feet and boosted its signal to 3000 watts in 1974. The call letters were changed to WJTW in 1985 when Mary Jane Pohlers sold the station to New Horizons Communications. WJTW now programs adult contemporary music from its studios at 2455 Glenwood Avenue. The station's transmitter is still located at the former WAJP site. The power output of the station is still 3000 watts, but its clear channel allows its signal to reach into Chicago. The publisher of Chicago Radio Waves, Stan Peters, is a current weekend announcer at WJTW with Jim Murphy as the program director. Jack F. Daly is the general manager.

In 1974, Alfred J. Pohlers passed away in Florida. His wife, Mary Jane, later sold the station which became WJTW. The new station still houses its transmitter at the old site, but has moved its studios to more modern facilities. Jim Murphy is the program director of WJTW and morning man. Jim previously worked at WKAK in Kankakee and across the city at WCCQ. [Lane Lindstrom obtained all the old WAJP equipment and has it set up in working order at WPOK/WJEZ, his stations in Pontiac, Illinois.]

#### Lane Lindstrom Remembers Joliet Radio

In over 30 years of radio, now successful engineer Lane Lindstrom (WN9LQM) remembers growing up in Joliet and watching the industry change from its early basics to its now sophisticated operations. Lindstrom says that radio was "fun back then; we had to cue our own records and make do with what we had to work with." He could write his own book about behind the scene antics where he was employed as a young announcer, as well as some of the later facilities that he helped build.

"It's too bad," Lindstrom remorsed. "Some of today's stations are run so automatically, that all the elementary skills once taught to young people in the industry have been eliminated."

As an early ham, he experimented with electronics, built equipment, and got his first job at A. J. Pohler's WAJP in Joliet. The station's call letters were taken from Alfred J. Pohler's initials. Some of the staffers at the time were Paul Christiansen, Don Weber, Dick Yack, Cliff Cronk, and Bob Baudek. A. J. Pohlers and his wife Mary Jane owned the station. The staff announcers, which were mostly high school students, were paid minimum wage to track album sides, which was the format of the station.

WAJP operated out of a three-story garage type structure at 451 Ruby Street. The building contained an add-on third floor, small elevator, complete machine shop in the basement, and an apartment on the second floor. Mike flags for many area stations were made in the shop. The elevator, built by Pohlers, was used to hoist the station's transmitter as well as a grand piano to the third floor. The tower stood on the south side of the building. Studios on the second floor were used in the 1950s (before WAJP) to produce Al Pohler's "Memory Hour" which aired over WTAQ and WMRO.

WAJP's format served as a sort of "Muzak" for area businesses. The announcers would pick an album, track about 15 minutes of music, then read the sponsorship of the 15 minute segment. There were no newscasts, but weather forecasts were provided by a teletype service and sponsored by Merichkas, a poor boy sandwich shop. "The Golden Voice of the Middlewest" also sold the announcement of the correct time utilizing a small chime set. After the sponsorship tag was read, the announcer was instructed to strike the chimes in their proper sequence.

This device was often used as a mischievous prank on unsuspecting staffers. Announcers had to make sure that the previous boardman had not loosened the head of the rubber mallet used to strike the chimes. Several times when it came time to hit the chimes, the mallet's head went sailing off across the room. On another occasion the bracket holding the chimes came crashing down on top of a cart machine, making a loud banging sound over the

air. The chimes were later replaced with a "doctored" telephone touchtone pad, and a tone was used instead of the chimes.

Besides the 15 minutes of music, there were programs of Hawaiian organ and waltzes (usually Ken Griffin). The "Alpine Hour" featured music played on a zither, which was sponsored by Art Kraus's TV repair shop. Perhaps the most successful show was the nightly polka show which featured Al and Mary Jane airing from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m.

Lindstrom remembers Pohlers as a very practical and patriotic man. If anything broke at the station, it was taken down to the machine shop or fixed on the spot. Often the listeners heard screwdrivers and pliers being jiggled around, along with comments in the background by Pohlers on the progress of the repairs.

Pohlers was quite handy around the station and, like Art Kraus, another area tinkerer, held several patents. Al's were mainly airplane engines. Lindstrom recalls the time that a caller phoned the station and told Pohlers that someone was going to come over and tear down the station's large U.S. flag. Armed with two guns, Al patrolled for several hours outside the station, defending his flag and flagpole. There was also another gun and ammunition hidden under the large 16 inch transcription turntables in case "terrorists" attacked the station. Authorities were informed that if the station announced that its facilities had been moved from 451 Ruby Street to 807 Vine Street an attack was imminent. It was doubtful that anyone at the police station was listening or remembered the secret cipher. Lindstrom says the gun looked like something that Roy Rogers might have used.

For sometime after the Pohlers' retired, Al would do a half hour radio program via telephone from Fort Lauderdale, Florida where the couple spent their vacations. All the commercial copy, Lane recalls, was typed on canary yellow teletype paper. Often an old weather forecast had been printed on the reverse side of the page. Large stacks of cut teletype paper were stored for this purpose. The studio walls were covered with pegboard. Nothing went to waste at WAJP.

Lindstrom remembers that the Pohlers were well-liked around the Joliet area. Their brand of sometimes awkward but friendly presentations on the radio were well appreciated by older listeners in the community. There was much uproar when the station was finally sold and turned into a popular music station. The old format of tracking albums continued for about a week under new owners before the station's call letters were changed to WJTW.

Lindstrom maintains WJTW's transmitter which is still located in WAJP's old building. Mrs. Pohlers still owns the building. Today, Lane's office is decorated with memorabilia from WAJP. He has the old set of chimes used to announce the time and some other equipment. Unfortunately, the station's large record collection was sold very cheaply to a Plainfield record dealer. Lindstrom went on to WCCQ with WJTW's Jim Murphy, and recalls working with Brian Davis (WBBM) and Ron Smith (WJMK music director).

Loosened control board knobs and other pranks followed Lindstrom to his next station. He recalls the time that someone placed firecrackers inside of a teletype machine. The machine caught on fire, and as it was kicked to the floor, Lane remembers seeing the machine continue to type out the news as flames erupted from it.

It all hasn't been jokes and antics for Lindstrom, who later moved with Roger Nelson from WCCQ to WAUR/WSPY. Lindstrom does engineering work for Nelson, having built the new WAUR. He also does maintenance work for several other stations and is part owner of WPOK/WJEZ in Pontiac, Illinois. Listening to WJTW's Jim Murphy and Lindstrom for several more hours would no doubt yield more interesting stories. The two continue successful, serious careers in radio, but often pause to remember just how much fun the old times of radio used to be.

Joliet's second AM station, WJRC, standing for Joliet Radio Corporation, began broadcasting with a 500 watt directional signal in 1964. The station's frequency is 1510 khz. Harold Rothrock was the station's first president. Karl Eisele became General Manager in 1968. News was provided by the Mutual Broadcasting System.

By 1972 the station had located to 567 West Jefferson Street programming beautiful music after trying an "oldies" format. Anthony Morici became president, J. Robert Wheeler was the general manager. The Midwest Radio Corporation acquired the station in 1974 presenting a mixture of good music, country and western, and urban contemporary tunes. Morici was still the president in 1974. Dale Zahn, who became WJOB's favorite morning man in 1971, was WJRC's music director in 1975.

In 1988 the station's new president, William Lipsey, changed the call letters to WWHN. After a brief try at an all news format, "oldies" were tried again as the station's format. "Remember When" was the station's motto. The new address of the station is 125 North Chicago Street. The station is a member of the Cable News Network (CNN).

Joliet received its third FM station in 1976 (WJOL-FM and WAJP came first in 1960). WCCQ, a three thousand watt horizontal and vertical station, operates today at 98.3 FM. Woodrow D. Nelson, the station's owner, first began with an "oldies" format competing with WJRC. WCCQ is now a well-established country music station. It is located at 1520 North Rock Run Drive and is licensed for nearby Crest Hill. WCCQ is owned by the CHB Venture Group; Robert Channick, president.



Also on the air in Joliet is one of many religious operations owned by Family Stations of Oakland, California. WJCH-FM, 91.9 mhz at 50,000 watts began operations in 1986. Its tower height is 460 feet with studios located at 13 Fairlane Drive. Harold Camping is the station's president, John Rorvich is the station manager. [This information was received from Broadcast Yearbook and Broadcast Profile, Hollywood, California.]

## EDUCATIONAL RADIO IN THE JOLIET/LOCKPORT AREA

### WLRA

#### Lewis College

What started out as a practical joke by some college students in the 1960s, eventually evolved into a full service university radio station. Today, WLRA brings superb programming to the Lewis College student body and surrounding community, as well as turning out skilled broadcasting professionals.

Assistant coordinator of electronic media and manager of the school's broadcast operations, Ed Tennant, says WLRA has gone through several transitions from its early years as a carrier-current station to its present technical success. The school also operates an on campus TV station (channel 10), which serves as another outreach to students. Some of the TV programs are also presented on the local cable system.

Back in 1965 several students began a small operation which brought interest in someday operating a legitimate station on campus. Tennant explains that a certain campus band called "The Blue Velvets" (possibly named after the Bobby Vinton/Tony Bennett classic) recorded their own record. At the same time, some students on the then male only campus had strung wires from one room to another. A set of speakers were set up in one of the band member's room. From a makeshift studio, students in Sheil Hall played records over the pretend station, once in a while tossing in the recording by the "Blue Velvets." They portrayed themselves as a Joliet station, impressing those who happened to be in the room, who thought that they were listening to a real station. Naturally, it was a boost for the band as listeners thought the "Blue Velvets" were getting airplay on a local station.

Norb Bora, now a Chicago dentist, engineered the "broadcasts." The masquerade was carried one step further the next year as other students fashioned tiny transmitters from scrapped TV sets and set up the school's first campus operation which operated near 530 khz. When the campus was finally wired, the carrier current station used the call letters WLCL (standing for Lewis College Lockport). The tiny station's call letters later became WERA (We're A Radio Station). A line over to the college of St. Francis in Joliet was installed for remote broadcasts from the all-girls school.

Around 1970 plans were begun to build a low power FM station on campus. Meanwhile, the AM operation continued until its equipment finally failed a few years later (around 1976).

WLRA-FM went on the air in November of 1972 with new studios in the lower level of Fitzpatrick Hall, the station's present location. Early staffers were Steve Partman, Diane Drinka, Mark Walters, John Mason, Laura Skala, and engineer Vern Weiss of WJJP. A new 300K Harris transmitter was purchased by the school. Stereo broadcasts began in 1986. Tragedy struck WLRA in 1980 when the transmitter caught fire and almost burned down the whole station. The operation was off the air for several months until repairs could be made.

By 1985 a former Lewis College student, John Carey, came on the scene and became the coordinator of electronic media. Lewis College became the first school to operate their own campus TV station under Carey.

Assistant new director Mary Kathryn Touhy says that WLRA (Lock 88) offers a variety of musical programs to its listeners. Alternative, dance, album-oriented rock (AOR), as well as news programs and interesting features are presented. News is provided by an associated press wire and coverage of the Lewis College sports teams (The Flyers) is presented. Music programs are geared to 13-30 year olds.

WLRA boasts a long list of broadcast graduates who have gone into professional radio and TV. Past staffers include Sandra (Janicke) O'Brien, who now heads the Fox 32 news department in Chicago at WFLD-TV; Joe (J.D.) Vercett (Vercellotti), who runs a promotions firm; and WGN radio personality Spike O'Dell. Former students Len O'Kelly and Len Svoboda are employed by WLLI (I-Rock) in Joliet. Anthony Musiala is the current music direct at WLRA and John Freberg is the engineer.

The station recently celebrated its 25th anniversary and produced a video to mark the occasion. Currently, director John Carey says that some remodeling is taking place at the station, and there are plans to relocate the tower to another area on campus.

WLRA operates with 250 watts at 88.1 mhz from the college located on Route 53 north of Joliet and just west of Lockport. The station is licensed for the Lockport/Romeoville area.

## WCSF College of St. Francis

As in the case of Lewis College's WLRA, WCSF has benefitted from a former student returning to take the reigns of operations bringing professionalism to the campus station. General Manager Robert Zak has had the best of both lives: first climbing the ladder towards a successful broadcast career, then returning to where he learned his trade to help polish the skills of other aspiring announcers.

Bob Zak worked for WCFL in Chicago, as well as Joliet stations WCCQ and WJRC. Now he's back with the chairman of the Journalism/Communications Department Rick Lorenc to bring quality radio to the college and community.

When questioned about the history of the station, Zak was quick to bring up the names of two nuns who were instrumental in bringing radio to the college. Sister LaVerne Ralli who, for many years, headed up the speech and drama department and Sister Clare Edward Whalen, who worked along side Sister LaVerne. Sister LaVerne (d. 1991) directed some 500 broadcasts that were carried via telephone lines on WJOL (WCLS) in Joliet. The Interlude, the college's newspaper, promoted these special broadcasts between 1941 and 1945. College librarian Sister Carol Ann Novak stated that programs between February and April of 1945 consisted of dramas, skits, musical programs and interviews with servicemen.

Chicago broadcaster Art Hellyer, who does a weekly program on WJOL, once appeared on one of the college's programs. At this time, Hellyer was working for Radio Institute as was called in to help with one of the shows. He remembers that the college's radio facility in the alter 1940s was in need of repairs and renovation. Nevertheless, the programs continued for many years from the school.

A. J. Pohlers (WAJP) and Art Kraus (Kraus Electronics, Joliet) helped build the school's broadcasting studio and TV facilities. Both Arthur A. and his son Arthur J. "Skip" Kraus operated a cable TV firm in Joliet.

The campus was radio silent until the late 1970s. About 1978 students began a campus carrier-current station which operated at 640 khz. Studios were later built on the fourth floor of Tower Hall in room S411. These replaced the antiquated facilities on the first floor of Speech Hall, an old gym (now the Fine Arts Center). Walter Hamilton was the first director of the carrier current operation. The new station's 112 foot antenna is on the roof of Tower Hall.

FM broadcasting at the College of St. Francis began on September 5, 1988, after eight years of planning and building directed by chairman Rick Lorenc.

The station's 100 watt signal covers an area of about 20 miles at 88.7 mhz. Students involved in the Journalism/Communication program also participate in the school's closed circuit TV facility. Some programs are also aired on local cable.

A variety of music programming is featured on WCSF including jazz, country, rock, dance, and rap. However, much of the station's air time is devoted to various public service programs and cultural shows. Talk shows on the environment, performing arts, and specials on interesting persons speaking on campus are also part of WCSF's format. The station features hourly newscasts from the Associated Press wire service. Students use the copy and rewrite many of the stories. Local high school and college sports are also presented.

The station's motto is "The Best of Today's Hits and the Best of the Rock from the 1980s." The music format is catered to 20-40 year olds. Ed Morris is WCSF's engineer and the current full-time technician at WJOL. Michael Budzinski is the general manager. Through the brief history of WCSF, many students have graduated and gone into the broadcasting field. Rick Halberg now serves as the program director for WBNQ in Bloomington, Illinois and Ed Murphy (formerly of WJRC) produces sports for Chicago TV. The school is looking to begin airing some courses for credit on the station and has begun procedures to increase its power.

## WWAE Brought Early Radio to Indiana

Off the winding path of the Fox Valley is the Village of Plainfield, Illinois, where there once existed a large radio station. It is mentioned here because of its proximity to other stations in this book, both in location and time. Its later colorful notoriety became a portentous page in the annals of early radio broadcasting, ultimately placing a shameful insidious blot on the industry. This section of the book traces the beginnings of radio station WWAE.

WWAE's story goes back to the early 20's, relates Plainfield Historical Association Members, Norm and Ione Mueller. The station is best remembered for its early years at a popular resort of the time called "Electric Park." The site encompassed twenty acres of hotels, numerous restaurants, dance halls, cottages, a baseball field, a roller coaster, and other recreational facilities. Pictures of the park are a display of the Plainfield Historical Society's new museum at 719 Main Street at the old grain elevator office.

Probably one of the country's first theme parks, Electric Park was located on the west side of Plainfield on U.S. 30 along both sides of the DuPage River. Long before the Riverview's and Great America's of our time, park patrons could ride the "Shoot the Chute," a large water slide that dumped riders into the river. Street cars brought people to the park which was owned by the Aurora, Plainfield, and Joliet Railroad Company (later Electric Company). Fisher Construction of Joliet developed the property.

The station was located in an ideal area to be heard and enjoyed by park patrons and the surrounding communities. Frequent band remotes were broadcast from the Chautauqua Auditorium. Rita Rio's all girl fifteen piece dance band once performed there. The name Chautauqua comes from the name of early social groups who put on plays, musicals, and other cultural events. A similar group existed in Sycamore, along with another "Electric Park." Families from Aurora, Joliet, Chicago, and elsewhere came and enjoyed the many festivities in the park, or rented a cottage for \$15-\$25 a month.

Interest in the resort fizzled and the park, which opened in 1904, closed in the late 1920's. This was mainly due to the discontinuance of the novelty electric street cars (interurbans) and the trains that served the park. The rail company stated that the operation of the cars and trains were no longer profitable. Several passengers had been killed in a street car accident in 1901 near the park which further cautioned the rail company. By 1924 all commuter forms of transportation leading to the park were replaced by Pierce Arrow buses. The Chicago, Aurora, and DeKalb interurban line was placed on the auction block in 1922 at Geneva. There were no bidders. (See Sycamore, Electric Park, WOAG).

Electric Park continued to host some activities into the early 1930's. The president of the Electric Park in 1916 was R. A. Moore, followed by C. E. Fraser in 1924. The Popular Communications Radio Station Treasury listed WWAE of Electric Park as operating at 780 khz with a power output of 10,000 watts in 1926.

Very few stations had more than 1000 watts, other than operations owned by General Electric in California, RCA's WJZ in New York, KYW Chicago, and KDKA Pittsburgh, owned by Westinghouse and Charles Erbstein's WTAS in Elgin, Illinois.

Band remotes were regularly featured through the 20's, along with concerts and church services from the Plainfield Methodist Church on WWAE.

WWAE's story stars two important but different characters: A shrewd businessman, Lawrence J. "Butch" Crowley, and a progressive Methodist minister, Dr. George F. Courier. Crowley, according to old newspaper articles, was rotten to the core, a loser, a rumored bootlegger and shyster operator. "Butch" of 915 North Raynor Avenue, Joliet, listed his occupation by trade as an automobile dealer. He operated the Central Garage at 512 Cass and gas stations at 300 Collins and 901 Cass in 1923. However, he earned much more money in the brewery business: In was widely rumored that he continued in the illegal sale of alcohol during prohibition.

According to former WJOB Program Director, Quin Morrison, Crowley started construction of his own transmitter and studio equipment at his dance hall to use radio as a means to promote his bands. The beginning of WWAE was similar to the goals of Erbstein's WTAS, except there was much more money behind WTAS and more "professionalism."

Crowley's name can be readily found on the front pages of the Joliet Evening Herald News in the 30's, for a variety of luckless episodes and sour business dealings. He was the former owner of the Wigwam Dance Hall in Chicago. Bad debts and bad news seemed to follow Butch around.

He first lost his new boat on the DuPage River, then revenue agents confiscated his car for back debts. Crowley claimed the car belonged to his wife, Gertrude. Anything good that Crowley may have done in the name of broadcasting was shrouded in scorn by the local newspapers. The Plainfield Enterprise, owned by U.S.G. Blakely, who was also the town's long time mayor and postmaster, printed little about Crowley, but much about Blakely's son, Paul, who was appearing on numerous New York radio shows playing tenor sax in the Bernie Cummings band. Paul also recorded for Brunswick Records. The small town publication was also filled with the usual social news of the day and ignored reporting about area crime and problems.

The quiet town settled in 1829, which was the childhood home of Mrs. Thomas A. Edison, ignored a troublesome fellow Crowley. Most of us would like to see what else was printed by the Enterprise in which several years of history is lost forever because of missing issues of the newspaper. The paper did highlight the other main character of WWAE's story, Dr. George F. Courier, a well-liked minister at the Methodist Church.

Dr. Courier and his wife were frequently mentioned in articles concerning church functions. An early real estate document lists his wife as Elizabeth, but in later years it was Valeria. It is unclear if Courier was married twice. Valeria had a beautiful singing voice and was often featured on church broadcasts. However, she gave up most of her singing career to take care of a handicapped daughter by the same name. "Dolly", as the daughter was nicknamed, and her mother, both ended up in mental institutions.

Mrs. Courier passed away in 1960; her daughter in 1973. A son, Rev. Wilfred G. (Billy) Courier, who was born in Plainfield, was killed on August 14, 1963 in a freak accident at his new summer home in Whitewater, Wisconsin. "Chug" was a minister at several different Chicagoland churches. He was found dead a couple of days



after apparently falling off a roof at his Wisconsin home. At that time he had been serving as the Minister of Education at the Winnetka Congregational Church.

The younger Courier had held a similar position at the Calvary Methodist Church in Minneapolis. He was past president of the Evanston Council of Churches and Radio Committee. The family resided at 1056 Augusta Avenue in Elgin for several years and are buried at the Bluff City Cemetery.

Meanwhile, Dr. Courier's career continued to blossom and progress. He was born in Blue Earth, Minnesota in 1882. He was not the usual Sunday country preacherman, but a businessman at heart. He later became the owner of two radio stations, several pieces of property and directed a broadcasting school. Besides serving as pastor for eight years in Plainfield, his later career spanned 15 years in the Elgin area, including at Plato Center.

Lucinda Muirhead Corron stated Courier was a compassionate, dedicated man, who seemed to understand people's problems. "He was a fatherly sort of man," said Mrs. Corron, "one you could talk to." Lucinda has written much about the history of the area and used to teach at Plato Center Township High School. She stated Courier was much involved with his radio stations and only came back to the Elgin area on Sundays to preach at the Plato Center United Methodist Church. Preaching was sort of a "hobby" or sideline of his, related Mrs. Corron.

The tiny country church is located at the intersection of Muirhead and Russell Roads, across from a small community cemetery. The church has an interesting heritage dating back to 1859, when it was the center of a bustling town. Plato Center, formally called Homer, moved a half mile west to its present site in 1888 to accommodate the construction of the Chicago Madison and Northern Railroad. Men were paid a dollar a day to build the line which today is the Illinois Central Railroad. Stores, mills, and a blacksmith shop once stood nearby.

The area's few buildings, including a post office and an old high school (now used as a grade school built in 1928), are located about one mile further south of the church. At the end of the road, Plato Center's last store, the Muirhead Brothers General Store, burned down on Christmas Eve in 1982. The last minister of the Plato Church, Pastor Al Matthei, passed away suddenly on July 7, 1990. The church secretary and organist is Sharon Vinci. Courier came back to the community in 1959 for the church's centennial celebration.

Courier is best remembered at Plato Center for marrying many of the area residents, including members of the John and Don Muirhead families, and being responsible for the installation of a new church heating system, an oil burner, in 1938. Mrs. Corron was at Courier's Hammond station only once, but was always offered Chicago Bears football tickets that the minister apparently obtained through his station.

Kevin Leonard of Northwestern University outlined Courier's career as a Rock River Council Methodist Minister.

- 1909 - Lockport Methodist
- 1915 - 4th Methodist of Aurora
- 1917 - Grace Methodist, Elgin
- 1920 - Plainfield United Methodist
- 1927 - Plato Center United Methodist
- 1940 - Assistant Pastor, St. James Methodist, Chicago
- 1944 - Sabbatical, Chaplain in WWII
- 1945 - Retired (Director of Radio Institute, Chicago)
- 1951 - Mt. Greenwood and Worth Methodist Churches
- 1953 - Retired

Courier's last addresses were 975 Sheridan Road and 3339 Skokie Valley Road, Highland Park. He passed away on January 29, 1961, at the age of 78 and is buried at Bluff City Cemetery with his wife Valeria, daughter, and a young son, Edward Kirk Courier.

While Courier lived to a ripe old age, his former business partner did not. As mentioned, Butch Crowley continued his ruthless rip-offs of business associates. He drove big cars and flashed large wads of rolled up bills. Giving big tips, including dollar tips to paperboys, was a way of life for Crowley. This continued until he was tragically killed in front of his home by "hitmen" on October 8, 1936.

Six hours after police had raided a Lockport still, they found Crowley shot in the street in front of his home. During his fight for life, he refused to answer questions by Joliet Police Chief, N. J. Fornango denying that he had anything to do with the area's illegal slot machine business. Butch refused to reveal who his assassins were. Crowley, 48, died later in the day and was buried in a large expensive mausoleum at Mount Olivet Cemetery in Joliet. Federal officials were called in to continue the investigation.

At the inquest the following week, a neighbor testified that Crowley told him that he was shot by "two dark complected fellows." "They shot me, and I don't know why," stated the dying man. The neighbor who had known Crowley for many years thought he was telling the truth.

Lawrence J. "Butch" Crowley was the youngest son of William and Ellen, both of Ireland. Edward, Thomas, and William were the names of his brothers. The elder Crowley, a policeman, died in 1916. Lawrence was born May 31, 1888. The inquest noted that Butch died of two gunshot wounds. No suspects were named. Today the site of his home, which had golden doorknobs, has been replaced by a newer long white building composed of many apartments.

It is believed that Crowley's home was cannibalized for whatever worth it had to settle back debts. Elmer Ott, a long-time reporter for the Joliet Evening Herald News, stated that Crowley's murder remains as one of the many unsolved homicides that occurred in the late 1920's and 1930's in the Joliet area.

### The Beginnings of WWAE

Now you know the characters behind WWAE. Let's begin in the early days of radio, November 10, 1923. The Bureau of Navigation Radio Division, U. S. Department of Commerce, licensed Lawrence J. Crowley for a 500 watt station at 1320 khz (227 meters). The station operated out of his Alamo Dance Hall at 327 Clinton Street. The Alamo Broadcasting Station operated Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday nights from 9 p.m. to midnight with dance music and a "studio program." Butch Crowley was the owner, manager, and announcer of WWAE and proprietor of the Alamo Ballroom.

The building at the northwest corner of Clinton and Chicago Streets housed a billiard room and a cafe. It was recently torn down for city library expansion. A Walgreens store was located there in later years, according to Joliet historian Mels Schroeder. WWAE was off the air for two months as it was moved later from 327 to 315 Clinton Street between August and October 1924. The dance hall was turned into a restaurant.

As Plainfield's Electric Park was coming to the end of its glorious era, it was purchased by Crowley in 1923. In October of 1924, the station was moved to Electric Park, and its frequency was changed to 1240 khz. The station's studios stayed at Electric Park throughout May, 1925. It was about this time that Crowley met Courier. A large celebration took place in September, 1924 welcoming Courier back for his fifth year at the Plainfield United Methodist Church.

The Church, built in 1866, is located at Chicago and Illinois Streets. Courier had come from nearby Lockport with his wife. The friendly minister was a well-respected religious leader in the community officiating at many church functions, funerals, and working with the Boy Scouts. His wife sang at many church functions.

He purchased seven acres on the west side of town in 1921. Residents remember hearing his Sunday morning church services on WWAE, along with organ concerts. Plainfield's Then and Now historical book listed the manager of the station as Harold Boland. The book also shows a car parked at the station's transmitter site advertising WWAE on its spare tire cover. The 1925 Chevrolet was owned by James G. Whalen of the Woodruff Inn, Joliet, according to Sam McGaw of the Secretary of State's Office. Perhaps Whalen had something to do with the station. Other WWAE performers included pianist Bill Brady, organist Marcella Bronson and performer Mary Hickey. Sunday church programs featured Mrs. Courier and Floyd Hensel, who played the flugal horn (a type of wind instrument).

Much later the famous Milt Herth Trio would perform on WWAE. On August 2, 1926, a talk program featured an Aurora minister, Rev. W. W. Aylesworth, Pastor of the Fourth Street Methodist Church. "The Reverend," as he was called at the time, was vice-president of the Aurora Civic Betterment Committee. The focus of his talk was "community problems" according to an article in the Elgin Daily News dated the previous day.

Nightly concerts and classical music programs were also presented. A large grand pipe organ located inside of the studios was built by Hinnors Organ Company of Pekin, Illinois, and later sold to the Methodist Church.

WWAE's studios were located in an addition of a 14 sided building on the Electric Park property. Formally a dance hall, the Chautauqua Auditorium was later turned into a roller skating rink, and much later a warehouse where pallets were made. This landmark structure was destroyed along with many other buildings in the Plainfield area by a tornado on August 28, 1990. The station used two 200 foot towers. The facility's heating system was installed by Plainfield handyman Worthy Brockway. Brockway appreciated the opportunity to work for Crowley during the pre-depression years and always got paid for his time. Worthy remembers that Crowley "didn't say too much, just gave out orders" and paid Brockway from a large wad of rolled up bills he carried around with him. Worthy, a former fireman in Plainfield, passed away in May, 1990.

Plainfield resident Della Rock, who lives across U.S. 30 from Electric Park, remembers that she and her playmates were often chased off the park property by Crowley.

Late in December, 1925 Crowley moved his studios back to Joliet at the Joliet National Bank Building (222 North Chicago Street); the transmitter site stayed at Electric Park. By January, 1927, WWAE had moved again. Advertising dollars were rolling in, but Crowley's usual dealings got him into trouble.

WWAE moved to 2024 Wabash Avenue in Chicago and still at 1240 khz. The building was the home of Greer Auto Technical College. Today it is used for parts storage. In June, 1927, the FRC assigned WWAE to 1290 khz, sharing time with Chicago's WSBC and WJKS in Gary, Indiana.

WSBC began operations in 1925 and was owned by Joel Silverstein, president of the World Storage Battery Company in which the call letters stood for. Its early studios were located at 13th and Michigan at the New Southern Hotel. Today, WSBC's general manager is Roy J. Bellavia, a former WRMN employee. The station still shares time at 1240 khz with WCRW and WEDC. All three stations broadcast foreign language programs.

The channel was also shared by Johnson and Kennedy's WJKS which broadcasted from the Gaymill Ballroom (540 North Lake) in the Miller section of Gary, Indiana. WJKS's call letters stood for "Where Joy Kills Sorrow." The station programmed dance music and was later purchased by Ralph Atlass, who changed the call letters to WIND (IND for Indiana).

All three stations signed on and off at various times during the day and night. In August, 1927, Courier purchased the station from Crowley. A strip of land was also purchased in Electric Park along the river, possibly containing the tower space from Crowley's wife, Gertrude. The date of that sale was August 24, 1927. (Some sources indicate the station was given to Courier).

Courier made other land deals in the area as well. Also that year a storm had blown down some nearby baseball bleachers in Electric Park. High winds sent them crashing into the station's transmitting towers, bringing them down. The baseball field was located in front of the studio building in early days at the park. The station's two towers were located behind the bleachers just to the east of the studio building. Worthy Brockway was again called to haul the damaged towers to a new site in Hammond, Indiana. Courier was planning on moving his station there. Brockway was prohibited to continue to work on the project by the local union. Ironically, similar storm damage was reported at the other "Electric Park" in Sycamore on May 24, 1927.

What was left of Electric Park in Joliet fell into tax delinquency. The radio station was now gone. A fire later destroyed one of the large bath houses in 1928. The Park seemed to fall from its glory quickly. Most of the cottages were empty, the other buildings were in need of repair. In 1924 the Plainfield Enterprise called it "cheery news," that a large amusement and theatrical firm had planned to buy the park. Robert A. Moebus and Company of Chicago, Cincinnati, and New York desired to clean up the park and restore the sixty-one cottages. The publication stated, "it's reasonable to expect a rehabilitation and bringing back of the park to its beauty and inviting aspects from almost complete dilapidation and demoralization."

Plans by this syndicate, however, fell short, leaving Crowley with the property and its problems into 1930. Butch had redeemed his property twice from back taxes, but now he was forced to sell. On August 14, 1930, at a Sheriff's sale, the property was sold to developer Walter L. Darifier of Chicago for \$20,543.17. This was not enough to keep Crowley out.

The next day the Electric Park Coaster Company sued Crowley for interfering with its operation. Previous to the sale of the park, the company had installed a \$31,000 coaster ride in March. E. E. Elder of Des Moines, Iowa, owner of the firm, had agreed to provide Crowley with a large percentage of the profits from the fifteen cent ride. Crowley allegedly, according to the suit, used force against the firm's employees, even to the point of turning off the electricity. About \$15,000 in yearly receipts were up for grabs. The company maintained that Crowley had allowed the park to depreciate and no longer held enough dances at the park to generate customers.

Troubles continued for Crowley, who continued in bootlegging and other corrupt business practices until he was assassinated by unknown persons in 1936. Oddly enough the death certificate was filled out by Deputy Registrar Williard G. Blood.

By August, 1927, WWAE was a 500 watt station on 1320 khz sharing time with WJBC of LaSalle, Illinois, and WCLO, then of Camp Lake, Wisconsin. WWAE's studios moved down the street to 2295 South Wabash Avenue in Chicago. Dr. Courier formed the Hammond-Calumet Broadcasting Company on June 15, 1928. Plans were made to move the station to Hammond, Indiana.

By August of that year, Courier had set up operations in Hammond, while maintaining a small remote control studio in Chicago (130 North Wells Street) at the City National Bank Building. WWAE's transmitter was moved to Hammond's Douglas Park (now Pulaski Park) on the north side of the city at 137th and Pochman Avenue. The avenue was named after developer C. J. Pochman. The Pochman addition to the city dates back to 1893. The avenue has since been renamed Grover Avenue.

The area contained a large swampy lake and a few homes. Most of the lake is gone, and the area today is occupied on the north by the Sheffield Trailer Park and on the south by Pulaski Park. Back in 1928 Courier set up his flattop "T" antenna consisting of two 100 foot lattice towers which were 200 feet apart on the property. A small three room building housed the station's 500 watt transmitter at the tower site. The station's first engineer was Roland Palmer, who previously owned and operated WCBZ and WJBZ, the Coppotelli stations in Chicago Heights in the late 20's.

On November 11, 1928, the FRC lowered their mike boom on WWAE, just as they had on many of the other smaller stations. WWAE was assigned to operate with only 100 watts at 1200 khz., sharing time with two downstate Illinois stations and WCLO now of Kenosha, Wisconsin. Dr. Courier was president of the Hammond-



Calumet Broadcasting Corporation, which owned WWAE, and Doris Keane (previously of 2828 Pine Grove Avenue, Chicago) became managing director of the station.

New studios were opened late in 1929 at Suite 402, 5217 Hohman Avenue in downtown Hammond. This structure was known as the Hammond Building, or Jack Fox Building. Several stores and offices as well as the city newspaper, The Times, are located in the building located on the east side of Hohman Avenue between Sibley and Fayette Street. The Times' best sportswriter, Johnny Whitaker, became WWAE's and later WHIP's sports director. WWAE also aired the "Southtown Church Hour." Over 100 area churches periodically participated on the daily show.

In 1932, WWAE added a Chicago studio to its Hammond facilities setting up facilities at 1525 East 53rd Street. The station was a member of the short-lived Affiliated Broadcasting Company in 1936, which went bankrupt the following January. WWAE continued to operate on 1200 khz with several smaller Indiana and Illinois stations and WCLO in Janesville, Wisconsin. The operation continued under Courier and Keane. Harold A. Fall was the program director and Roland Pamler was the chief engineer. James Pirri was also a managerial member of the station in 1937. H. V. Fitzcharles was the station's last engineer.

WWAE moved again in June, 1937 to the Lincoln Life Insurance Building at 5935 Hohman Avenue. Today, this building is the old Hammond School's Administration Building located just south of Harrison Park. WWAE's Chicago studios were moved to its business office location at 1525 East 53rd Street, Chicago. The Hammond-Calumet Broadcasting Company later had Chicago studios at 520 North Michigan Avenue and 165 North Michigan Avenue.

In addition, Courier and Keane also operated the Delaware based Radio Institute from 165 North Michigan Avenue in Chicago, which was an overrated disc jockey and dramatics school. The school operated through the 50's. On October 13, 1937, the broadcasting firm opened WHIP, a daytime 5000 watt directional station at 1480 khz. (later 1520 khz.). Both stations were run by Courier and Keane from 5935 Hohman Avenue before moving to Chicago locations.

While WHIP's programming was directed to a larger audience in Chicago, WWAE's schedule was local in nature and very diversified. Mike Rapchak of Whiting, Indiana, a well-travelled announcer, and now of WGN, stated WHIP and WWAE's programming "was really mixed up. They didn't have a solid format. We thought the call letters WWAE stood for the 'World's Worst Air Entertainment.'"

WHIP's three tower directional transmitter site (protecting a dominant Buffalo, New York station) was slated for Highland, but ended up at the north side swamp with WWAE. The company invested over \$100,000 in antennas and equipment, buying a new Truscom two hundred foot tower for WWAE in 1939. The area became a large "antenna farm," in Douglas Park (now Pulaski Park) west of Gruener's Grove.

WWAE became WJOB on June 25, 1940. The station was sold by Courier to O. E. Richardson, the president of Hoosier State Bank, and Robert and Fred Adair. Richardson had been commercial manager of WHIP. The station's transfer stated the sale was made to "satisfy claims." WJOB's first program manager was W. R. Bean. A well-known Chicago TV/Radio engineer, John Felthouse, was WJOB's first engineer. Felthouse, in the late 70's opened his own station, WJCK-FM in Rensselaer, Indiana. Felthouse passed away around 1985. The ownership trio ultimately did not work out as a schism developed over a free 250 watt transmitter given the station by a supplier. Richardson owned several other stations including WIMS in Michigan City, Indiana according to Bob Schilling, WIMS's current engineer.

On March 29, 1941, WJOB began unlimited operation on 1230 khz. A new two hundred foot R. H. Harrell antenna was installed on top of the Millikan Building (449 State Street, Hammond) for WJOB. The pole antenna blew over at least twice in the 40's knocking the station off the air. A large 150 seat studio auditorium was also located there.

During this time Chicago personalities Hugh Hill, now with WLS-TV Chicago, and network newscaster Frank Reynolds worked at WJOB. Mike Rapchak, now a late night weekend music show host on WGN, was a former WJOB employee in the late 50's. He also was the sports director at Chicago's WAAF in 1955. Another WAAF employee news director, Ray Wheat, also worked for WJOB. Quin A. Morrison was an earlier program director. Millikan's, a well-known sporting goods and record store, as well as some adjacent shops, burned down in a devastating fire in the late 1970's.

Prior to 1948, WJOB constructed a tall self-supporting tower at 6405 Olcott Avenue, just off Indianapolis Boulevard in the Woodmar section of Hammond. Operations began at the Olcott Avenue site behind Smith Chevrolet on May 29, 1956. Outlying studios in Gary and Chicago Heights, Illinois, were consolidated in Hammond. WCGO newsman, the original "Mr. Talk Radio," Earl Vieaux read regular newscasts from WJOB's Chicago Heights studio. He later did experimental stereo broadcasts. WJOB-FM, later WJIZ-FM, 93.3 mhz (later WYCA 92.3 mhz) began in March 1948. WYCA was sold by WJOB owners to the Crawford Broadcasting Company, a religious organization in 1959. WYCA later moved to 6336 Calumet Avenue, Hammond, and maintains its transmitter in nearby Burnham, Illinois.

Meanwhile WJOB's Robert Adair became president and general manager in 1948; L. B. Weller became station manager. WJOB's signal rose from 100 watts to 250 watts in 1950 to 1000 watts in 1962. Today it is the oldest station in Indiana and operates at 1000 watts daytime and night time to service the entire Calumet area 24 hours a day. Adair became involved with one of the church broadcasts and left the area in 1960, becoming a religious leader in Florida. Adairs' South Shore Broadcasting Corporation was sold to Julian Colby for \$435,000 on January 20, 1960.

The Colby Broadcasting Company operates a fine community format consisting of local news, sports, talk, and weekend ethnic programming. Colby's former engineer, Jess Peters, operated a paging and car phone service in the same building through the 1970's. Peters sold South Shore Radio Telephone to a cousin of mine, William Eisele. The company is now called Page America. (Peters now works for WIND/WOJO.) Gordon Boss, the former owner of WLNR-FM in Lansing, is the present station engineer. At one time I worked for both WJOB and WYCA in the late 60's and early 70's, along with sportscaster Tom Lanhan, Cosmo Currier (no relationship to George), Larry Peterson, John "Top Banana" Anastoplos, NBC's Emery King, announcers Dale Zahn, Paul Hinton, Tony Riguero, and "Jazzman" Larry Smith (now of WBEZ Chicago). Vivian Carter ("Livin with Vivian") was also a well-known night-time personality at WJOB around 1970, along with J. J. the D. J. and Amos Cobb "On the Job". Many amusing antics occurred at the station during the time of my tenure (perhaps a subject for another good book?). Some are mentioned in the second section of this publication.

### WHIP/WJWC Crafty Confusion

With WWAE sold, Dr. George F. Courier and Doris Keane directed all their efforts towards WHIP. The daytime 1520 khz station (formally 1480 khz) operated with 5000 watts. Its high frequency and narrow day directional path kept it from covering much of the city of Chicago, according to long time WWCA/WGVE engineer Victor Voss. The station moved in 1938 from its studios at 5935 Hohman Avenue in Hammond to three different Chicago locations. They were: 1525 East 53rd Street, 520 North Michigan, and finally to 165 North Michigan Avenue. The firm's other interest, the Radio Institute, was located in the same building at 165 North Michigan.

Even though the station was slated to begin operations on September 15, 1937, there were numerous delays and tests later ordered by the FCC. Apparently WHIP's new state of the art directional antenna system and other equipment had to be fully tested to the satisfaction of federal officials. A Buffalo, New York station on the same frequency (WKBW) had to be protected against interference, so for the first year of operation WHIP was a directional station even during the daytime.

According to early Hammond Times newspaper accounts, several dignitaries were on hand to officially open the station on October 2, 1937. The power switch was turned on by Hammond Mayor Frank R. Martin. Martin participated in a number of other city innovations, including the construction of the city's new water filtration plant. Another politician on hand for the grand opening was Hammond Congressman William T. Schulte, who is believed to be the first voice ever heard on the station. Schulte, a personal friend of Dr. Courier's, went to bat for the station in Washington, securing extra power for both WWAE and WHIP, "which put Hammond on the radio map." Regular operations began on October 13, 1937, at 6:30 a.m.

At the heart of WHIP's operation was a modern Lehigh three tower installation that was built over a filled in swamp near Douglas Park (Pulaski Park) on the north side of Hammond at 137th and Pochman (Grover Avenue). The self supporting towers were 350 feet tall, which also included the installation of a power amplifier to boost the signal and double WHIP's power, according to Chief Engineer Myron Schradermeier. A new high fidelity Western Electric transmitter was installed. Officials stated that the range of the station would be "three hundred miles." Each tower was embedded on concrete slabs two feet deep and 23 square feet wide and were connected to rods that went another 12 feet in the ground. Despite the tower's heavy duty supports, they began to lean and gradually came down.

From the beginning the intentions of quality programming were a delight to local critics. Polished announcers like Jack Holbrook and Robert Venables were added to the staff along with former affiliated Broadcasting Company's Alice Oleson, who became the station's staff pianist. Dr. Courier even preached for an hour on Sunday mornings on WHIP.

Regular programming schedules were printed in early editions of the Hammond Times. University of Chicago football games were broadcast live from Stagg Field. The football games added to a "mixed bag" of church, ethnic, and local programs centering around Chicago.

WHIP commenced its broadcasting from the Lincoln Insurance Building at 5935 Hohman Avenue, which was also the home of WWAE. The structure was first known as the Northern States Life Insurance Building located on the southeast corner of Hohman Avenue and Waltham Street across from Harrison Park. Today the building is the old Hammond school's headquarters. WHIP's \$125,000.00 worth of equipment was tested by Bell Laboratories before the initial October 13th broadcast.

A 1937 photo in the Times featured a very attractive young female executive, Miss Doris Keane. Miss Keane, according to the article, had some ten years of broadcasting experience before coming to WHIP/WWAE. The publication credited her with the idea and planning behind station WHIP, which would serve a larger area than low powered WWAE. In 1937 Keane told the Times, "Radio work is hard and the hours are long, but if you are in love with the career you pick out, you don't mind."

Numerous conversations were held with respected broadcasting personalities around the city in preparation for this publication; however, when the subject of Keane came up, many refused to participate in the interviews any further, or declined comments on her activities. One broadcaster stated, "Why would anyone want to write about her?"

Later in her career, Doris Keane gained a ruthless reputation for running radio stations into debt and financial trouble. Revelations about Keane's involvement with area radio stations proved not only interesting, but alarming. Keane also continued as director of an announcers and dramatics school called Radio Institute, and through the years she worked at various radio stations. The name of the school was apparently taken from a company with the same name that operated in 1929.

The first Radio Institute was operated by George C. Richards of 530 Essex Road, Kenilworth. According to the company's Articles of Incorporation, Radio Institute was a Delaware based firm. The company was located at 40 S. Clinton Street in Chicago. Other officers were W.A. McCombs of the same address and C.W. Muench of 718 Roscoe Street. It is believed that either Muench or McCombs were in the brokerage business. Both Radio Institutes had the same objectives, namely to manufacture electrical gear, produce radio programs, and to train announcers.

The first Radio Institute went out of business after about a year, according to state records. A second Radio Institute was started in the early 40's by Doris (Irvin) Keane of 4847 Woodlawn Avenue, Chicago, Elgin minister Dr. George F. Courier of 1056 Augusta Avenue, and a Chicago woman Ann Barnes of 1713 Belle Plaine.

An annual report issued by the state showed that Keane still ran the operation in 1958 with Courier, while Keane's husband William served as secretary. Another director of the firm, George's son George F., also a minister, gave his address as 308 W. Randolph. The Randolph address was a later location of the firm, while the others involved in the firm used the address of 975 Sheridan Road in Highland Park.

Courier and Keane's home at 4847 Woodlawn was just up the street from where Francis K. Bridgman had operated his WFKB radio station in 1925 at 4536 S. Woodlawn (Managed by Horace Kelun). Courier and Keane's home was later sold to Eljah Mohammed.

Radio Institute was administered by Chicago Professional Schools, Inc. The school later moved to 165 N. Michigan Avenue and then to 180 W. Randolph. The Michigan Avenue address has since been replaced by Doral Plaza.

Keane later became Doris Irvin. Doris's husband, William, was a well-respected editor and columnist for the Chicago American Newspaper. She was married the first time to a man named Keane, and continued to use this as a stage name. There was a radio actress with the same name who died in New York in 1945.

Dr. Courier was a teacher at the announcer school in 1946 and its director in 1948. At this time he still commuted from his Elgin home, but spent most of his time in Chicago or Hammond. Courier was busy managing his radio operations. His busy schedule had also prompted him to visit Europe where he had studied foreign stations and their programming. Keane and Courier were inseparable as they were often seen together and worked together all the years the two were in partnership at WWAE, WHIP, and the Radio Institute. Years afterwards Courier was often seen at another station where Keane and her husband worked, WSEL-FM Chicago.

Dr. Courier trusted Keane completely with the operations of both WWAE and WHIP making her managing director in charge of programming, scheduling and personnel. William Florian, owner of Chicago's classical WNIB-FM, stated it was Keane's intention to construct several low wattage suburban stations to form a network. These early stations were staffed by young broadcasting students and were poorly financed.

At WHIP many of the decision making policies of the station ultimately came from Keane who stated, "Naturally, we could sell thousands of dollars worth of radio time that would be detrimental to public policy. It is our duty to serve the listening public from the standpoint of education and helpfulness."

Despite the station's vocal commitment to the general public, it went ahead and aired programs by Father Charles E. Coughlin, a controversial radical priest from Detroit. Coughlin became desperate for stations after his removal from CBS for repeated racial attacks on ethnic groups and later President Roosevelt. WHIP became his Chicago airing point with one of his first programs appearing on the station on January 9, 1939. WHIP was listed in the program guide of Coughlin's newspaper called "Social Justice." Coughlin was as anxious for stations as the Hammond-Calumet Broadcasting Company was anxious for his money.

Coughlin's program, the "Golden Hour of Little Flower," spread from Detroit to Cincinnati and then to fifteen CBS network stations. During the great era of the depression in 1929, the public was eager to hear anyone who spoke of hope or had any new or good ideas. Coughlin spoke of the supernatural and Christian democracy.



He blamed ethnic groups for world problems and proposed unethical government spending programs. The radio priest even accused President Franklin D. Roosevelt of being a communist in 1933. Opponents like Father Ryan, another popular priest, stated in the Joliet press that Coughlin's ideas were radical and would never work.

A poll taken in 1934 showed Coughlin second only to President Roosevelt in popularity. A staff of two hundred secretaries processed a quarter of a million letters a week. Funds for the broadcasts were subtly sought through the mail. Coughlin's words were dripping with emotion, bigotry and hate, and they were mired in political and economic ignorance (Popular Communications).

Coughlin's repeated attacks on politicians and ethnic groups finally soured most station executives in 1932. CBS dumped him, and Mutual wouldn't have anything to do with his programs. WIND, WJJB, WGN, and WMAQ stopped his programs in 1935. A small network of low power stations continued to carry his transcribed programs into the 1940s. Coughlin, a person who mastered the use of the media, died in relative obscurity a few years after his retirement from Little Flower in 1966.

Besides Coughlin's radical programming, WHIP continued to suffer from a variety of other problems mostly due to poor management. John Jage remembers seeing pictures in the Hammond Times in the mid 40's of the sagging transmitter towers. The new five tower system was gradually sinking in the surrounding swamp south of Wolf Lake. Guy wires attempted to correct a twenty degree tilt in the station's towers. Some of the antennas began to fall over. A lack of technical maintenance and expertise was evident.

The broadcasting firm, formed by Courier and Keane on June 15, 1928, was not doing well. WHIP made very little money in Illinois advertising sales despite its efforts to reach the Chicago market with its new expensive antenna system. The firm's sister station WWAE was not doing much better. Competition against established Chicago stations which had access to professional announcers and national programming, outclassed WHIP's attempts to secure Chicago audiences and advertisers, according to Vern Whaley, a former city newspaper editor. He now runs "Photo Ideas" in Chicago.

The April 13, 1931 Annual Report listed the following officers: George F. Courier of Elgin, president; well-known Hammond attorney Frederick Crumpacker, secretary; and Doris Keane, treasurer. Keane listed her address as the firm's business location, 1632 Hyde Park Boulevard in Chicago. Other directors were George B. Stafford of Chicago, John Paul Stafford of Palatine, and Robert Willette of Chicago. According to the Palatine Centennial Book published in 1955, John Paul (J.P.) Stafford served as a minister of the First Methodist Church of Palatine from 1927-1932. Willette later opened an advertising agency. WHIP changed from 1480 to 1520 khz in 1941 and began night-time directional operations.

Hammond-Calumet, under Courier and Keane, continued to operate WHIP until July 1942. Marshall Field III, a department store magnate, acquired thirty percent of the station's stock for \$50,000.00 in January of that year. Field was the owner of the Chicago Sun newspaper and a department store. The Hammond-Calumet Broadcasting Company was then reorganized in July of 1942 when Field bought into the company, buying out Courier and Keane. The call letters were changed to WJWC, the initials of the newly named president, John W. Clarke of Chicago. Clarke ran an investment firm in the Field Building at 135 S. LaSalle.

William R. Cline, formerly of WLS, became WJWC's general manager. Cline's address of 165 N. Michigan was listed as the same as the station. Radio Institute was located in the same building. Mary A. Clarke, and later Charlotte Barr, served as secretary of the reorganized company. The station continued to be a directional station all hours of the broadcast day.

With Field's backing Clarke operated the station. Some of WJWC's programs were: 1520 Club, The Baby, Army-Navy programs, Strikes and Spares, music shows, and Sunday services from St. James Church where Courier was the assistant minister. The station's main program was "Sun Air Edition," which was the daily reading of the editorial pages from Field's Chicago Sun Newspaper. Station news commentators included Guy Savage, Myron Wallace, Clifton Utley, Bill Costello, Rod Holmgren and Maynard Krueger. A new five tower directional antenna system was installed in 1942.

On February 7, 1943, the FCC pulled the plug on WJWC. It was taken off the air for a variety of technical and business reasons including repeated financial losses. The station was in deep debt. It is interesting to note that no one is listed in the 1943 Broadcast Yearbook as being the engineer for the station.

Clarke joined the army and got out of broadcasting, while Marshall Field III bought interest in another Chicago station, WJJD. WJJD, at that time, was owned by broadcaster Ralph Atlass. Atlass also owned WIND, which was being moved from Gary, Indiana, to Chicago. Atlass employed future WWCA/WLOI station owner Dee O. Coe and Aurora announcer Robert Diller. Marshall Field III later bought WFMT and had greater success in the newspaper business starting the Chicago Sun in 1941 and merging it with the Chicago Times in 1947 to form the Sun Times.

In June of 1944 Courier and Keane petitioned the FCC for the return of the station license to them for the 1520 dial position. They reportedly had purchased the former WJWC equipment at a receivers sale in September of 1943 while continuing to operate their radio school. However, the FCC, on July 18, 1945, awarded the channel

to the Cornbelt Broadcasting Company of Clinton, Illinois. The FCC in denying Courier and Keane's appeal stated, "The principal stockholders have been reluctant, evasive, and guilty of a lack of candor in making prompt, fair and full disclosure of information relating to stock ownership" with alleged irregularities. Dr. Keith Rhea opened up WHOW-Clinton, on 1520 khz, which is now an AM/FM operation owned by J.R. Livesay.

In the late 40's former WJOB (now WIND/WOJO) engineer Jess Peters curiously investigated the former WHIP/WJWC transmitter site near Douglas Park. Peters found the place completely destroyed. The station's expensive self-supporting towers had sunk deep in the swamp despite guy wires needed to hold them up. A concrete block building that used to house the transmitters had all of its windows smashed out. The transmitter rack cabinets had been completely stripped and vandalized. The whole scene, according to Peters, was a complete, worthless mess.

### WSEL-FM Wealth and Pain

Doris Keane's somewhat whimsical and sometimes irrational broadcast leadership was soon felt at another old Chicago station, WSEL-FM, a forty thousand watt station, managed by William Irvin, Keane's husband (d. 1970). Keane was the program director in 1956 and continued as the director of Radio Institute.

WSEL-FM (104.3 mhz.), was formally WMOR-FM (102.7 mhz). Downtown Chicago Studios were located at 188 W. Randolph Street. The station was owned by Dario Tofinetti, a Chicago restaurant owner. It programmed background music for stores using material from the Capitol and World Transcription Record Library. WMOR-FM came on the air in 1949 and was operated by the Metropolitan Radio Corporation of Chicago. WMOR-FM left the air in 1951, possibly due to the loss of store accounts that were paying for its public broadcasts. At the same address WSEL-FM came on the air nearly two years later. The station featured a variety of music and community programs.

WSEL-FM was later partly owned by Sidney DeLove, an avid gun collector and president of Cook County Federal Savings at 2720 West Devon. An auxiliary studio and a library were located in the bank building. DeLove was a very patriotic man. He wrote a song, "Can you Wave the Flag Too Much?" His bank often sponsored essay contests. Trips and savings bonds were awarded to contest winners. A large replica of a Liberty Bell was located inside the building which was called Chicago's Independence Hall.

The call letters of the station were probably derived from DeLove's initials. The station, however, used the motto "We Sell Advertising." The station was operated by the Chicago Skyway Broadcasting Company which formed on October 23, 1952. The firm merged with the Statewide Broadcasting Company on July 15, 1959, and went out of business in 1961. In the late 50's DeLove was found innocent of accusations of fraud during a bank probe. He allegedly used one of his own firearms to commit suicide in October 1971. He was apparently despondent over his financial situation. DeLove was never charged with any crimes.

Maryann Koppel, a disc jockey who spun records by request, cited disorder around the station. Koppel's program, "Maryann's Musical Menu," was shifted around in the station's schedule frequently for no apparent reason by Keane.

Dean Carroll, an assistant to DeLove, later managed the station. WSEL-FM went into receivership in 1958. The transmitter at Willoughby Towers, a 36 story building built around 1929, had been moved to 8 S. Michigan Avenue, while other studios were located at 188 W. Randolph. Francis J. Curtis was then in charge of WSEL-FM.

Long time Chicago radio station owner Frank Kovas opened WKFM at the Randolph Street address in 1957. Kovas, who owns WONX in Evanston and WGL in Fort Wayne, Indiana, labeled his predecessors as a "slippery bunch." He indicated that the owners of the building wanted WSEL out and a paying tenant in. WKFM operated at 103.5 mhz., and later in 1970 was sold to RKO, Inc. which changed the call letters to WFYR (now WWBZ).

WSEL's station license was purchased by WJJD on January 2, 1961, and its 104.3 mhz., frequency became WJJD-FM (WJEZ) programming country and western music. The FCC approved the purchase of the bankrupt station. The spot on the radio dial is now occupied by WJMK (MAGIC 104), which programs 1960s and 1970s music.

Both WSEL and WKFM operated in the same building until WSEL finally closed down. After WSEL went bankrupt, Courier and Keane were then out of the broadcasting business.

Courier went back into the ministry for a short time, then passed away in Highland Park in 1961. Usually a lengthy biography is written up for Methodist ministers for the reference collection at Northwestern University. No such report exists for Dr. Courier. Another era of radio which began in tiny Plainfield had ended in big city fashion in remorseful ruins.

During the time Keane worked at WSEL, she also published a radio magazine called FM Review. The \$3.00 per year monthly publication carried ads for Rogers Park business places and WSEL's program guide. Her plans to form an innovative network in the Chicagoland area never materialized. Keane was a creative and energetic ambassador of radio. However, many of her ideas, goals, and operations fell by the wayside, mainly due to technical impracticalities and financial chicanery. The FCC and federal government were quite aware of her "modus operandi."

Keane continued as Executive Director of the Radio Institute in the late 50's. The school continued to turn out disc jockeys and announcers. Two of the school's better known students were Tom Bosley of television's "Happy Days" and Tim O'Connor of "Peyton Place" and, in later years, "Buck Rogers."

In its early years, Radio Institute employed many outstanding teachers including Chicago radio free-lancers Ted Liss, Art Hellyer, Russ Reed, and Herb Graham. All four are frequently heard on various national and local commercials and have extensive backgrounds in Chicago radio and television. Dr. George Courier, Sr., was also a teacher and later director of the school. Another Institute instructor was Ed Grennan, who hosted WMAQ-TV's "It's Academic," a high school quiz show in the early 60's. Grennan is the afternoon booth announcer at WMAQ-TV.

Many of the instructors taught part-time at the school and held regular full-time jobs in the broadcast industry in the city. Between 1954-1957, there were also many veterans who attended classes at the school under the GI Bill. During those years, the government investigated the school, finding many irregularities. In a government indictment, federal officials charged that students attending the school under the GI Bill were only attending classes one day a week, kickbacks were paid to the school, and attendance records were falsified. Most of those employed at the school, including Keane, stated they he knew nothing about the scam.

The Chicago Tribune reported on May 18, 1961, that the scheme netted the school about \$60.00 per student, the rest of the GI benefit money apparently went back to the student. As a result during the three year period, the government was defrauded \$250,000.00. Some instructors said that the only time they saw some of the students was on "payday."

Doris Keane was convicted of defrauding the government and sentenced to five years in prison and fined \$5,000.00. The school was also fined the same amount. Keane, then 50, of 975 Sheridan Road, Highland Park, later appealed her conviction while an instructor at the school, Charles Lee of 4246 Michigan Avenue, received a two year sentence. The school went out of business in 1959. Keane apparently left broadcasting for good after the Radio Institute scandal.

Apparently, time and appeals ran out for Keane who, on September 27, 1961, was ordered to begin a five year prison term for falsifying attendance records and defrauding the government's GI Bill Benefits Program. Federal Judge Edward A. Robson sentenced Keane, according to a Chicago Tribune article.

In 1972 Doris (Keane) Irvin, then age 71, of 1516 Hinman Street, Evanston, was severely injured in a fiery cab crash on Lake Shore Drive. Several years ago WLS-TV booth announcer Jerry Mitchell stated that he ran into Keane at the Merchandise Mart. Mitchell, who worked as a newsman for WLS in the 60's and as a program director for WJOB in Hammond in prior years, recognized Keane in the Mart. She was now in the retail gift and jewelry business.

Clearly, but ironically, a contagious virus had spread from bootlegger Butch Crowley's initial ownership of WWAE to the shrewd business dealings of Doris Keane. Society eventually intervened in these distinct radio parallels ultimately dealing punishment for each.

But was the failure of WHIP and WSEL Keane's fault? In a recent interview with Keane's son, William the III, the focus of the station problems was shifted away from personalities and blamed on early broadcast development and other people. Here is that interview.

Doris Craun was born on January 15, 1901, on a train that was passing through Michigan at the time. She lived a long respective life dedicating herself to the field of radio broadcasting and the performing arts. She graduated from Boston College and earned a Master's degree from Columbia College. Serving in a European opera company and doing some early theater work highlighted the beginnings of her professional career.

After literally being born on a train, she remained on the right track to managing a major broadcasting school and being involved with several Chicagoland radio stations. Her first marriage to one of her college instructors, Wilfred Keane, lasted only about a year. It was this name change which prompted many people to assume that Doris had adopted the stage name of Doris Keane, after the 1940s opera star. She later married Chicago newspaper editor William Irvin. Irvin, in his own right, was a dedicated journalist writing for several major newspapers serving as one of the city's first radio/TV critics. He died in 1970.

There was no secret about her relationship with Dr. George Courier; they were cousins. Their business relationship began when Courier was asked to visit Doris while she was recovering from an accident. William Irvin, III, Doris' son, relates that his mother was a passenger in a taxi cab which was struck by a truck carrying steel rods. The accident killed the driver and rendered serious injury to Doris. This was the first of two serious cab accidents suffered by Keane. Courier were impressed with his cousin's experience and talent. Thus, a relationship was struck between the pair that carried them through the ownership of several stations and a broadcasting school.

In the late 20's and early 30's, Doris Keane Irvin was working for Colonel Robert McCormick's station, WGN, as a writer. There was a falling out between the two, possibly because Doris, as a woman, possessed much drive and management skills that was unheard of back then for females. Her later husband William walked the Colonel's dog to win his favor, resulting in McCormick paying for his college education.



Courier's entry into the radio field began when one of his parishioners at his church literally gave him a station (WWAE). That early church-goer was a bootlegger by the name of Lawrence "Butch" Crowley, who also owned Electric Park. The station moved from place to place until it ended up in Hammond, Indiana. WWAE later became WJOB.

Prior to this time, problems had started in the Courier home in Elgin. Courier's wife was suffering from a disease resulting from experimental x-ray exposure and forced her husband and son Billy out. The two moved to a home in the vicinity of the University of Chicago. Billy was ordained as a minister, serving with several Chicago area churches. He was involved with his father's business for a short time at Radio Institute. Later, he was mysteriously killed in a tragic accident at his summer home. Some relatives speculated that he was struck and pushed down an elevator shaft. His new home required an elevator to reach all seven levels. This was during his second marriage.

It seems that Courier and Keane's pitfalls were many, according to William Irving, III. No one could speculate during those early years what it would cost to place a station on the air and keep it operating.

Those were trying years for Keane and Courier, especially during the depression. WWAE, the couple's first radio station, was the first to air a "Tradio" (Trade-E-O, or swap shop) type program offering listeners the opportunity to advertise goods and services they had available. During depressed times, area residents advertised goods and services that they were happy to exchange in lieu of money or food.

Bob Venables was an early station announcer, along with free-lancer Herb Morrison, who's vivid account of the Hindenburg disaster has been played over and over again in journalism classes. William said Courier and Keane looked after Morrison after he had suffered an emotional breakdown while reporting the tragic crash of the dirigible. WWAE was a small 100 watt community station, but it did not limit the horizon of Courier and Keane.

After the pair had sold WWAE, they invested all their resources in WHIP. This station attempted to be the first "super station" of its kind and turned out to be a miserable failure. Operating costs, talent salaries, and equipment soon put the station under. Even its predecessors could not keep it going. Courier and Keane's attention then centered on the Radio Institute, turning out many distinguished personalities like actors Tim O'Connor and Tom Bosley and another notable Howard Rooney.

The school graduated several GI's who studied broadcasting and later opened their own stations. Student Jerry Kraus opened WEXI in St. Charles around 1949. It was already in financial trouble when it burned down. Irvin says that since the place had no fire insurance, it was never rebuilt. Kraus and his wife Connie moved to California. Several other GI students operated WRBI in Blue Island for a short time before it too went under. Keane educated the staff, but promised no financial assistance towards these new operations.

Meanwhile at Radio Institute, Keane's partner had become successful Black businessman William Lee. Keane had become very much involved with a new Rogers Park station WSEL-FM and had spent most of her time there. Simply overseeing the school and signing a few papers did not allow Keane to really know what was going on at the school. According to her son, she hardly ever delegated her authority to anyone. Some students who really did not want an education, collected unlawfully on their GI benefits, prompting a government investigation of the school. For slipping school officials several dollars, perhaps \$20.00, they were marked "present," enabling them to collect their full GI benefits which were turned over to the school. The government was defrauded when the payments in the form of kickbacks were refunded under the counter back to the students.

After an intense government investigation by the FBI, both Lee and Keane were convicted and sent to jail. Keane served two years at a West Virginia women's penitentiary and fined \$10,000.00. She ran out of money for further appeals by 1955-56. She contended all along that she knew nothing of the scandal and was busy tending to the affairs of WSEL. The last three years of her sentence were served on probation.

The final years of WSEL, according to the family, were the most promising. Much of her hard work at the station was almost starting to pay off. The station printed a successful program guide containing advertisements from local stores in the Rogers Park area.

Another minister, Virgil Kraft (who is believed to have been the first minister to perform a marriage over the radio), and Keane's husband William also ran the station, which featured good music and local information. It was about 1959 when listeners started to realize that FM was the thing of the future, and WSEL was about to turn the corner towards solvency.

In the wings were people like Frank Kovas, a successful storecaster, who had built a store broadcasting empire bigger than Muzak. Storecasting provided stores with background music and in-store commercials on the public airways. This type of broadcasting is not allowed for the public anymore. Kovas, who owns several successful stations today, ended up with a commercial FM frequency after WSEL went out of business. He started WKFM (now WFYR).

Then there was banker Sidney DeLove and several other clandestine figures who wanted to get into radio when FM started to become popular. Some of these individuals became backers and financial partners in the station

to help it continue to stay afloat. Some of these persons had other side activities which may have gotten them into trouble later.

William Irvin, III, speculated that these "background investors" were being watched by the FBI. There is probably more to this side of the story that could easily find itself in a mystery movie instead of a book about radio. Despite having good music, well planned programs, and talented announcers like Hal Lansing and engineer Bob Boyd, the station failed.

In the end, WSEL went into receivership. It's frequency later became WJJD-FM (later WJEZ, now WJMK). After 1961 Doris Keane Irvin, along with her son and husband, went into a jewelry business at 1502 Merchandise Mart. The LaChaise jewelry line featured costume jewelry along with more expensive types.

As Keane began to fail in health, the business was later sold. Then there was another taxi cab accident. Keane lived a quiet lifestyle the rest of her life, living at Hinman House for sometime in Highland Park. She died at the age of 88 on April 14, 1989.

Over the years there have been plenty of industry colleagues critical about the way that she and Courier operated their stations, but no one can dispute that she was one of the first who underwent the perils of early station ownership and management. It gave us all important lessons of what to do and what not to do in radio, today. Right and wrong was not as easily discernable back then. [Much of this information was supplied by William Irvin, III.]

PHOTO CREDIT PAGES

1. Downers Grove Reporter, Elgin Daily Courier, Motorola Museum
2. Mark Beeching
3. John R. Ghrist, Tim Samuelson
4. John R. Ghrist
5. Vince Cofey, St. Charles Historical Museum
6. Charles Boedeker
7. John R. Ghrist, Dr. Ralph Muchow
8. Thom Carpenter, Dr. Ralph Muchow
9. Mark Beeching
10. Thom Carpenter
11. Thom Carpenter, Florence Carpenter (Mrs. Paul Carpenter)
12. Charles Boedeker
13. Elgin Daily Courier, Chuck Hines, "Anything But Animals," IDOT, David Starr
14. Charles Boedeker
15. Mark Wagner
16. Popular Communications
17. Moose Magazine, Raymond Dickow, Aurora Historical Society
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19. William J. Monson, PhD., Chicago Tribune, Charles Boedeker
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32. Vince Cofey
33. Chuck Filippi, Aurora Historical Society/John Jaros, Director
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40. Bennett Gamel
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42. Dr. Ralph Muchow, Bennett Gamel



43. J. R. Ghrist
44. J. R. Ghrist
45. Farm Progress Company, Robert A. Jones, Don Peasley Public Relations
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48. Popular Communications, Buffalo Times
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53. Isabelle Shirk, Gary Post Tribune
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81. B. Anderson, G. Wolf
82. Tom Kelly, Margret Kuch, B. Heuer, Homewood Historical Society
83. George Wolf. C. Currier
84. Ruby Pamler, C. Currier
85. C. Currier, J. Litton, Chicago Tribune/C. Boedeker
86. Majorie Ghrist, C. Currier
87. Chicago Heights Star, Kevin Beese

88. R. Pamler, Ron Coppotelli
89. R. Pamler
90. Richard Dominiak
91. J. R. Ghrist
92. Dale Zahn, WBEE Radio, California Father's Garden Club
93. South Holland Star-Tribune, Carol Kelly
94. J. R. Ghrist
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96. J. R. Ghrist, The Olivetian, Olivet Nazarene University
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111. Popular Communications, "Leaves of Healing," Aurora Beacon News
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- 117A Sycamore Republican, IDOT
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119. Rockford Register Star, NIU
120. Rockford Register Gazette, Boone County Historical Museum  
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129. Mercedes Nelson
- 129A Florence Carpenter (Mrs. Paul Carpenter)

130. D. Salisbury/WROK
131. Angelo Joe Salvi/WLUV, Robert A. Jones
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133. Freeport Journal Standard
134. J. R. Ghrist
135. WBEZ, Mutual Broadcasting System, WMAQ-TV
136. Farm Progress Company, Jack Brickhouse/WGN-TV, Floyd Brown/WGN Radio
137. John Doremus/STAR 999
138. A. Hellyer
139. C. Currier, Connie R. Brown
140. Satellite Music Network, WCCQ, WXLK/WKRS, WEEF, WLBK, WQFL, WCGO, WFXW, WMBI, WNDZ
141. WLTL, WONX, WROK, WABT, WXXQ/WFRL, WSQR, WJTW, WMWA, WZOK
142. City of Rockford, City of St. Charles, C. Currier
143. WFJS (Freeport Journal Standard), WDCB, WJOL, WLLI, WBUS, WDKB, WJMK
144. WBBM, WLS, WJJD, Tradewinds Radio Reading Service, WKKD, WMAQ, WAIT, WXET (Pride Communications)
145. Don Lades/WJOL Radio
146. Tony Ray/WJOL Radio
147. Doyne McReynolds/WJOL Radio (Courtesy of Frank "KA9VPH" and Lois "N9MZR" Rasmusson)
148. George and W.F. Ridgway
149. John Drury/WLS-TV, St. Charles Historical Society, J.R. Ghrist
150. Chuck Schaden, Nostalgia Digest
151. Elgin Public Library, Variety Radio Directory 1937
152. WDCB College of Du Page

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THE WORLD OF RADIO IN THE 1920s  
AND THE 1930s

**RADIO!**

Get Ready for Fall and Winter - the Ideal Radio Season

If you desire a complete set, I have them from \$25 to \$225; one tube to five tubes, complete. All sets furnished with dry cell tubes; no need to use a messy storage battery when a single dry cell will produce better results.

I CAN GET ANY SET MADE FOR YOU AT A  
SUBSTANTIAL SAVING

See the new 4-tube set which uses no loop, aerial or ground and receives from hundreds of miles. On a 20-foot inside aerial will hear both coasts!

If you build your own, get your parts from me. Any part, any make, at 15 per cent discount. Also lots of second hand parts, really cheap. Got your radio from an old head in the game, have had a set since 1916. Operating the only transmitter in town. Listen for a new broadcasting station to be opened in about a month in Downers Grove.

Will repair, rebuild or exchange your old set for a new one.

**E. HOLMAN O'NEILL**  
123 Summit Street Telephone 89

**RADIO!**

We are agents for a number of carefully selected Radio Receivers made by reliable and responsible makers.

**Freshman's Masterpiece Sets**  
From \$39.50 Up to \$115.00  
These sets are all 5-Tube Radio Frequency Receivers  
DISTANCE, SELECTIVITY AND CLARITY COMBINED

**Grebe Syncophase**  
From \$155.00 to \$315.00  
POWERFUL, SELECTIVE AND FAR-REACHING

**Kennedy Receivers**  
From \$90.00 to \$235.00  
The Most Powerful, Selective and Sensitive Receivers of their kind  
Demonstrations at your home. Expert Service Available

**R. V. CARRIER & CO.**  
5 Illinois St. Phone 1480

(top) E. Holman O'Neill's shop in 1923 from the Downers Grove Reporter. (top right) Elgin Daily Courier ads for radio stores. (bottom) various models of fine Motorola sets.



1927 Model 6-Tube "Super-Power"  
**Neutrowound**  
REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

THE "GO-GETTER" OF RADIO

GIVES wonderful performance and brings the world's best entertainment into your home. Unsurpassed for Range, Power, and Tone Quality. Brings in Distant Stations with the Volume of Local Stations. Sharply separates all stations on the dial and tunes them all without bunching or piling up.

You Can't Buy More Radios for \$1,000 Price \$95.00



**R. D. FRIES**  
85 So. LaSalle St. Telephone 5310

Neutrowound sets were made in Homewood, IL.

Many Motorola products are now on display at the new Motorola Museum in Schaumburg. Sharon Darling is the Director.





The development of long distance communications made the world seem smaller. By 1930, music, sports, and entertainment reached into each home making radio "Man's Best Friend."





EARLY BAND REMOTE SHRINES  
IN CHICAGO



Guyon's Hotel, 110-118 N. Pulaski, home of WGES (World's Greatest Electrical School). (Coyne) Also past locations of WOAK/WVON/WFMT. Two towers were on the top of the hotel and pre-tuned radio sets were in all hotel rooms. Guyon's Paradise Ballroom (128 N. Pulaski) was torn down. It appears that the fire department now sets on this land, around the corner from the hotel.



Aragon Ballroom, 1106 Lawrence Avenue, used in later years for wrestling matches and concerts.



Marigold Gardens (formerly Bismarck Gardens), 801 Grace Street. This was the former home of WWAY and later the site for boxing matches and a church. It has undergone extensive remodeling. The remaining portion is owned by Faith Tabernacle the corner lot is now a pancake house.



Fred Mann's Rainbow Gardens, 4836 N. Clark Street. This building one had two towers on the roof and is now used as a skating rink.

Information courtesy of Timothy Samuelson and Janice Curtis, Commission of Chicago Landmarks.

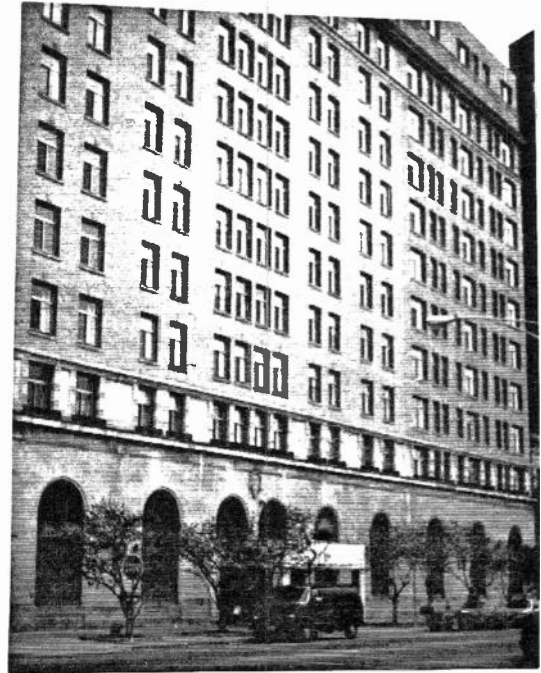




CHICAGO'S RADIO HOTELS



Webster Hotel, WORD



Parkway Hotel, WTAS in 1927



Belden-Stratford at Lincoln Park-West  
WTAS



A "beehive" of activity in the 1920s. The S.W. Straus Building. WWSW, WENR and other stations operated here in the 1920s. It is now called the Britannica Building.



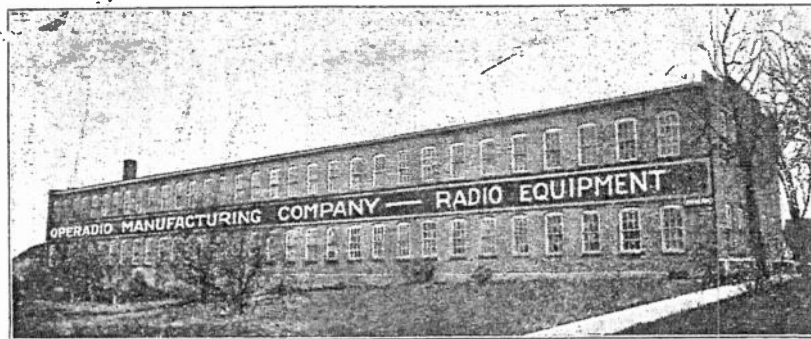
## FOX VALLEY RADIO



Elgin's first public broadcast from the Francis Anderson home in 1910 at 156 Center Street.



(right) WMRO 1938 Ford Remote Van, operated by engineer Robert Greenslaugh. The vehicle contained shelves to hold radio equipments. It was severely damaged when engineer Leo Burch was struck by a truck carrying live chickens. Burch was driving the van back from a live broadcast.



*A*NNOUNCING the REMOVAL of our offices and factory to our new home, located at St. Charles, Ill., 30 miles west of Chicago.

TELEPHONE  
St. Charles 2300

OPERADIO MANUFACTURING CO.

Operadio's first location in St. Charles at 13th and Indiana Streets. This is from a 1928 post card from the St. Charles Historical Museum.





FOX VALLEY RADIO



Elgin Historian Clarence Reber holds an original 212D Westinghouse Tube from WTAS.



Atwater-Kent sets are on display at Dr. Ralph Muchow's Antique Radio Museum.



The interior of the Erbstein home at Villa Olivia.

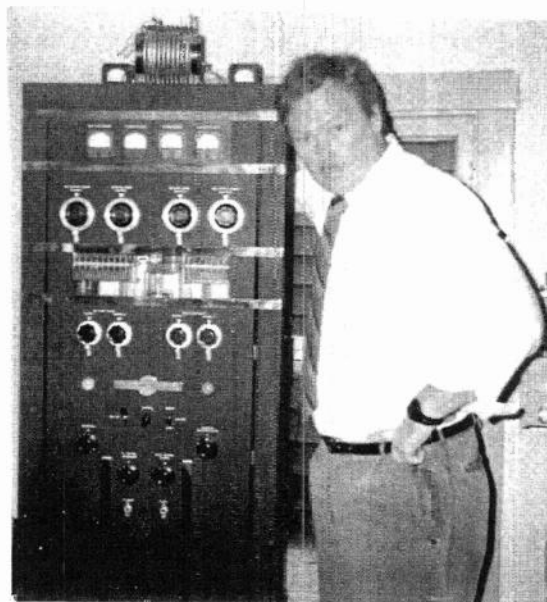




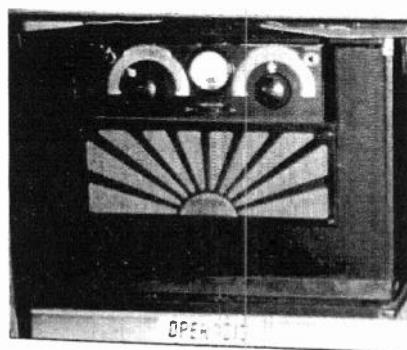
## ELGIN RADIO HISTORY



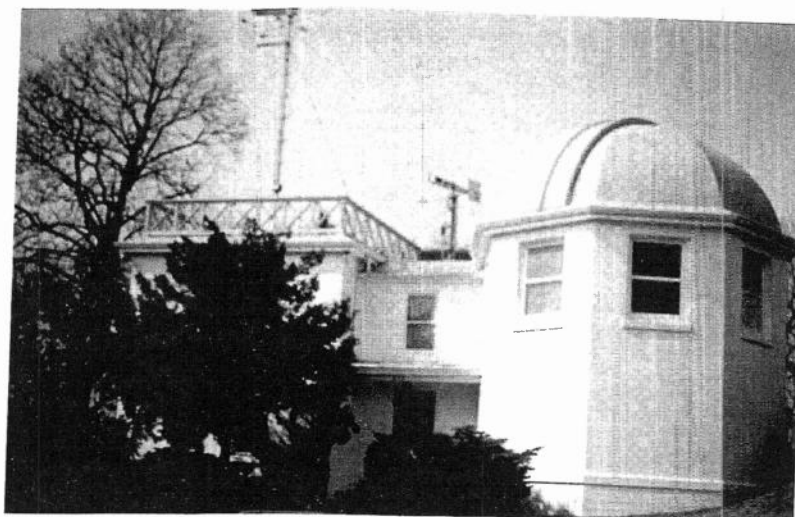
E.J. Wisner collects and repairs old Majestic sets once made and sold in Elgin.



Astronomer Gary Kutina displays transmitter once used by the Elgin National Watch Company.



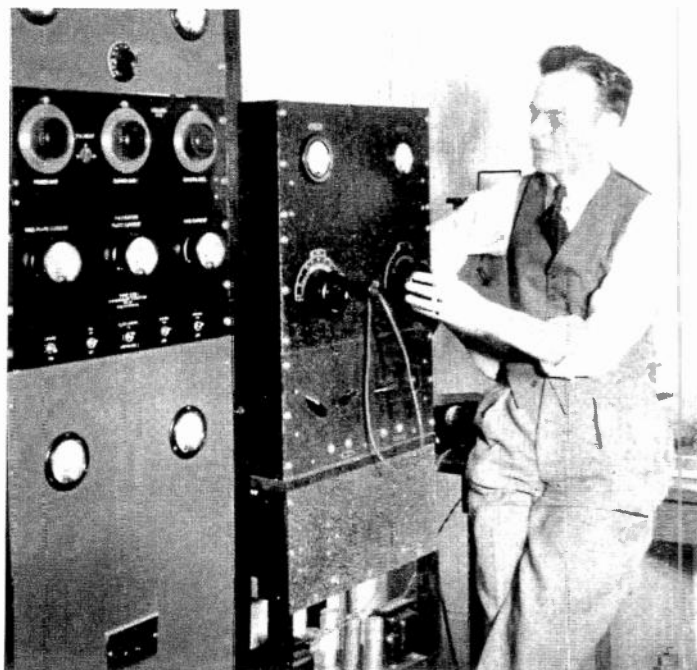
An Operadio made in St. Charles with familiar "sunburst" front.



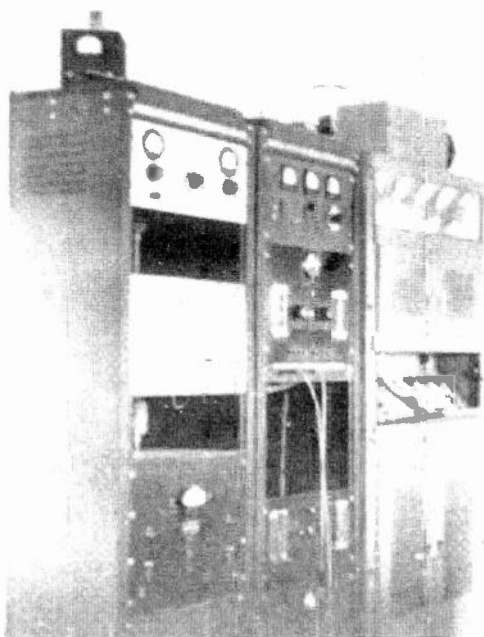
Elgin National Watch Company Observatory.



## ELGIN RADIO HISTORY



Paul Carpenter adjusts the controls of station W9TII from his home at 669 South Street. His "ham shack" later moved to a small building in his backyard. (Photo courtesy of Thom Carpenter)



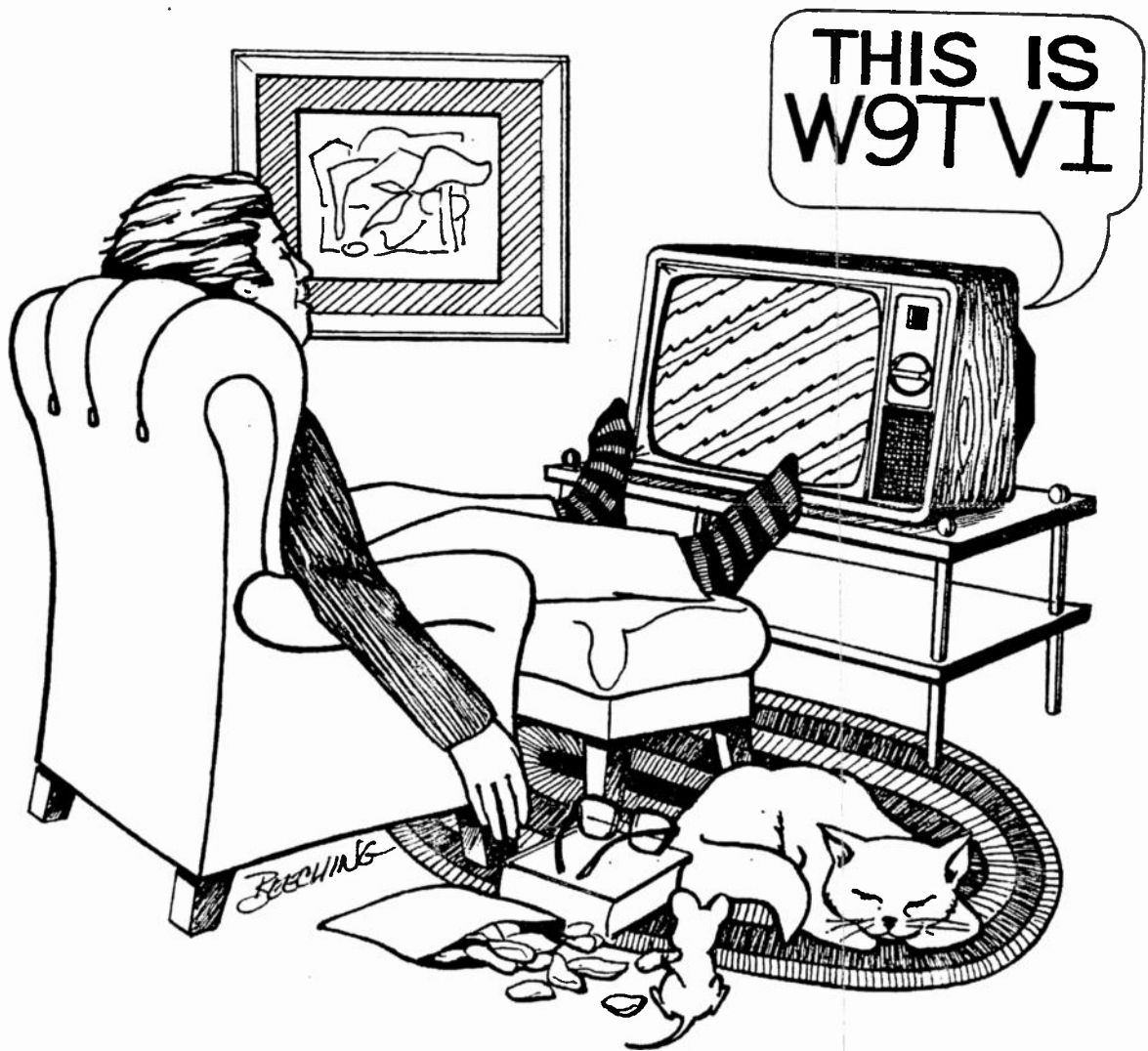
WRMN's homemade 500 watt transmitter in 1951. WGN's Charles Meyer was the station's first engineer. Studios were at the Fox Hotel and a small wooden building on Route 58/Lord's Park.



Paul Carpenter's ham shack in the rear of his home at 669 South Street, Elgin.



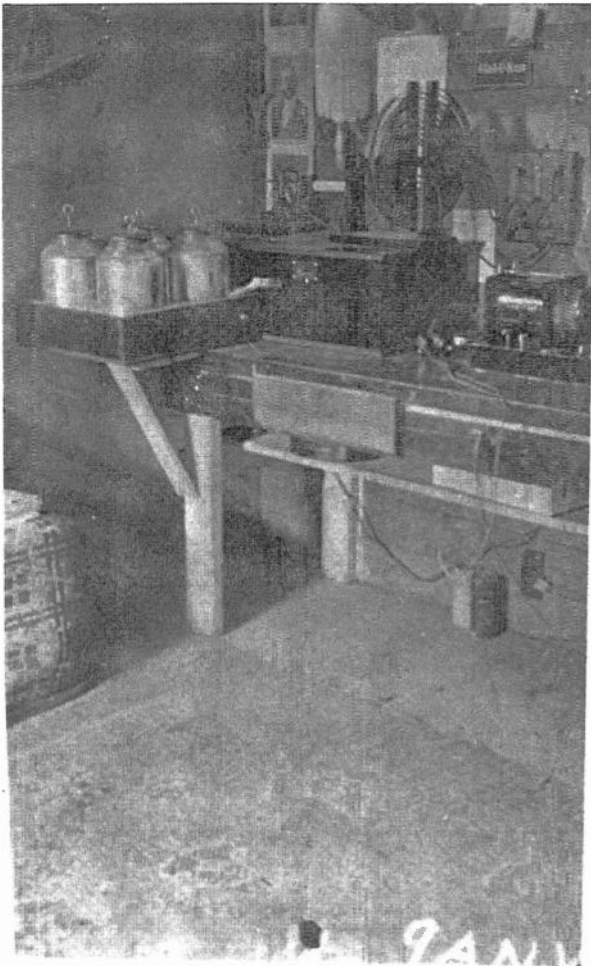




Some of the earliest amateur radio operators became the first commercial broadcasters.



## ELGIN RADIO HISTORY



George Dennett Carpenter, 665 South Street, served as a first class spark and signal core operator in the Navy.

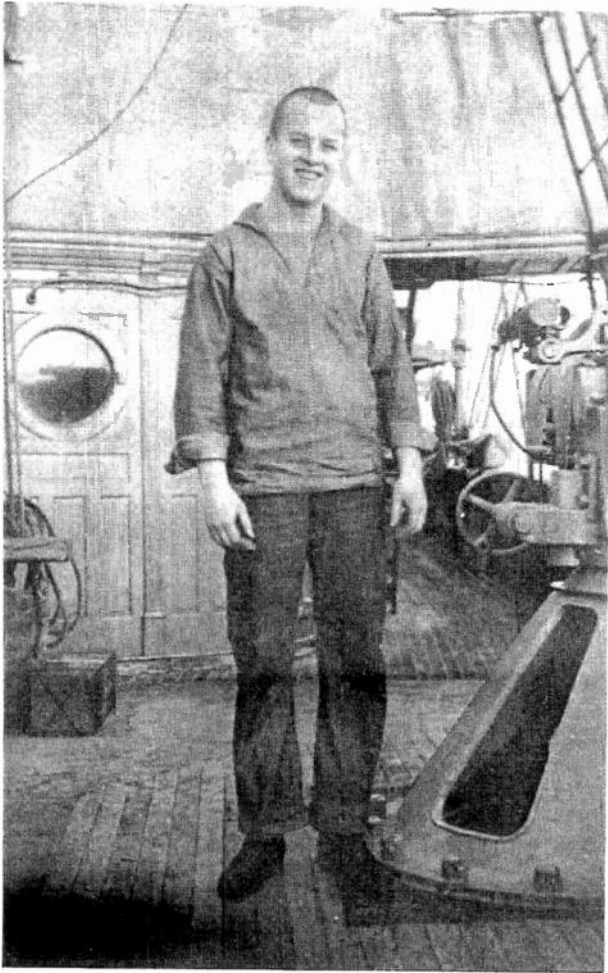
(above) George Dennett (Denny) Carpenters, 9VM, 9EEQ, 9AWN in 1914. Denny held Elgin's first radio license for a commercial station issued on Feb. 16, 1923. (left) 9AWN spark coil set. (bottom) Charles Erbstein's horse stable lies in ruins across from Villa Olivia.







ELGIN RADIO HISTORY



George D. Carpenter learned electronics while serving in the Navy. He held the first license for WTAS, later purchased by Chicago lawyer Charles Erbstein.



At 86 years young, Herb Covey of Elgin remembers listening to WTAS. Covey was Erbstein's gardener.

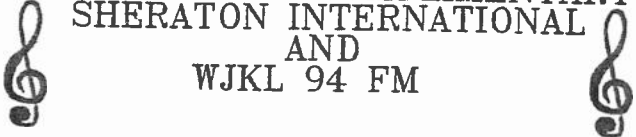


MUSIC YOU'LL LOVE  
PLUS LOCAL NEWS  
WEATHER & SPORTS

NO PUNK, NO FUNK, NO JUNK!!

THE FOX 94.3 ON YOUR FM DIAL

LES ELGART ORCHESTRA  
VALENTINE'S DAY DANCE  
ADMIT ONE - COMPLIMENTARY  
SHERATON INTERNATIONAL  
AND  
WJKL 94 FM



Elgin FM station WJKL abandoned its big band format for a return to popular music in 1990. The 6,000 watt station operates off a new strobe lit tower in Bartlett. Most of its programming comes by a satellite music service, except the morning program and local sports.



**ON  
THE AIR**

Published at **ELGIN, ILLINOIS**



"Hello children, this is Olivia,  
and I am now going to tell  
you a Bed-Time Story."

OLIVIA FRANCIS ERBSTEIN.

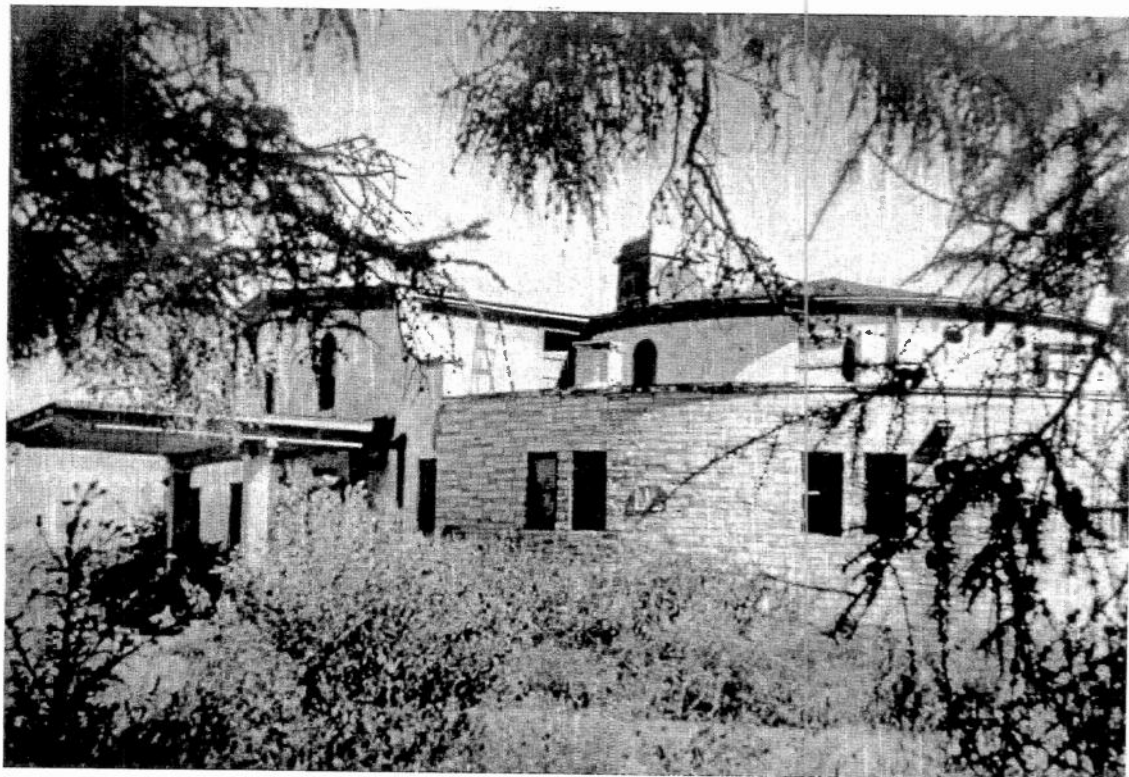
Volume 1      **JULY · 1924**      Number 3







ELGIN RADIO HISTORY



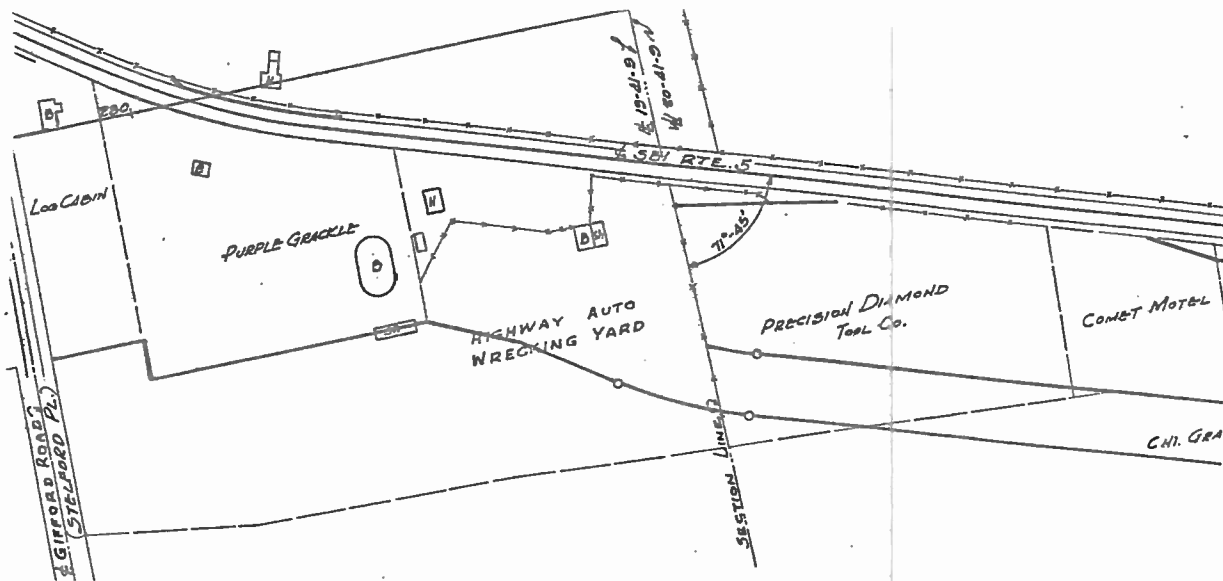
The Purple Grackle from the archives of the Daily Courier.



(top) The Purple Grackle, once located on Rt. 20, was the scene of many broadcasts over WTAS.

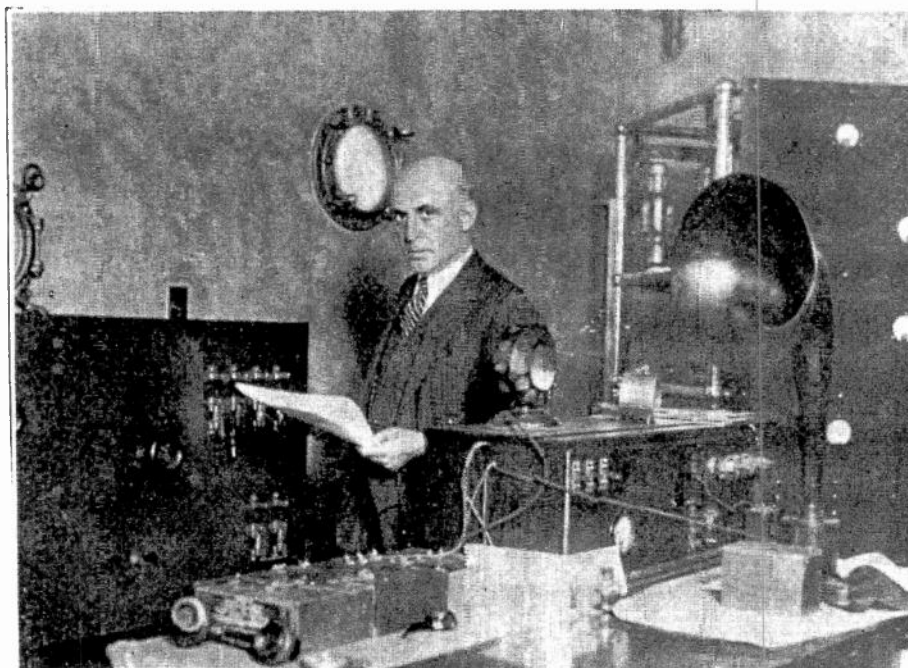
(left) Napkin logo courtesy of Chuck Hines.

(bottom) Route 20 location map (c. 1950) from the Illinois Dept. of Transportation (IDOT).

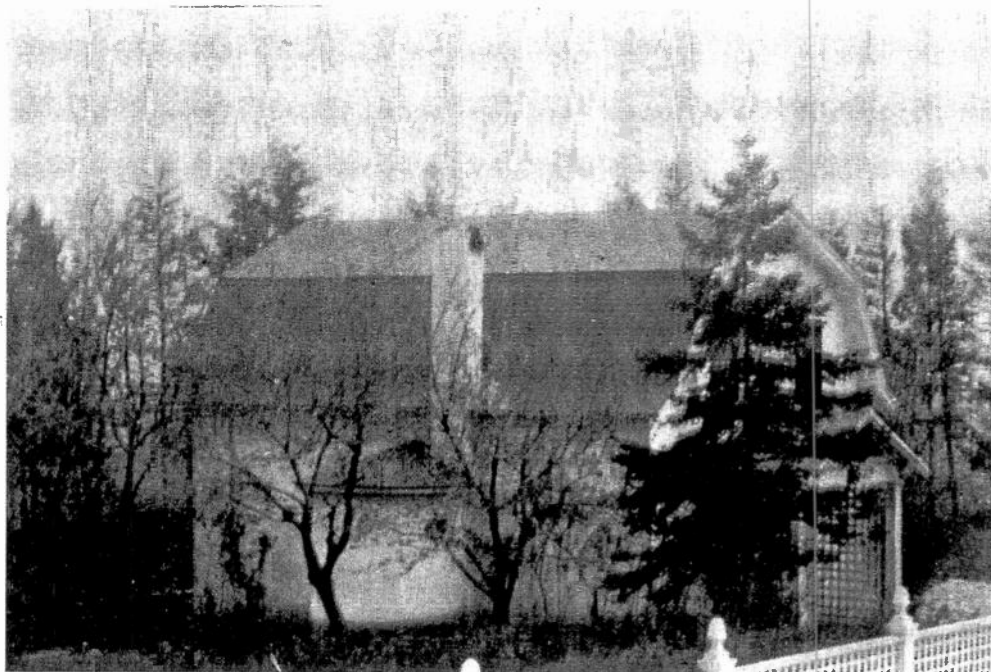




## WTAS IN ELGIN



Charles Erbstein about to go on the air in 1924. Notice the station's equipment and port hole window.



WTAS operated out of this coach house at Villa Olivia. It was later used as a refreshment stand then torn down.

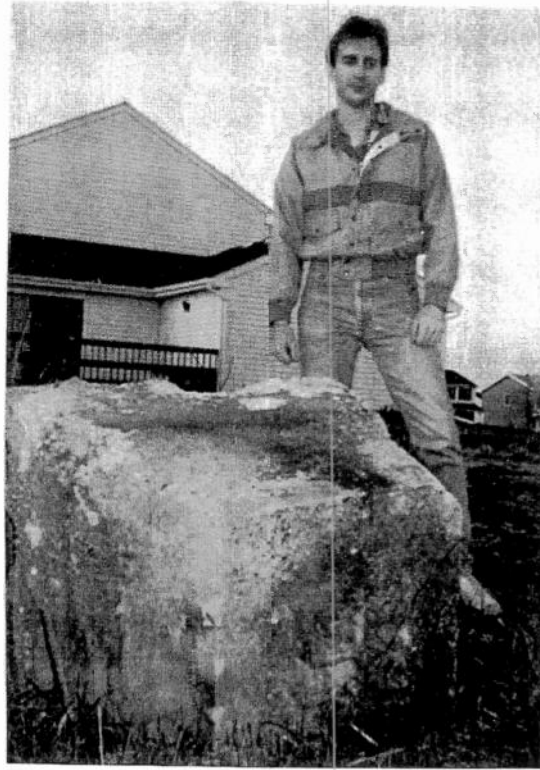




## BATAVIA RADIO

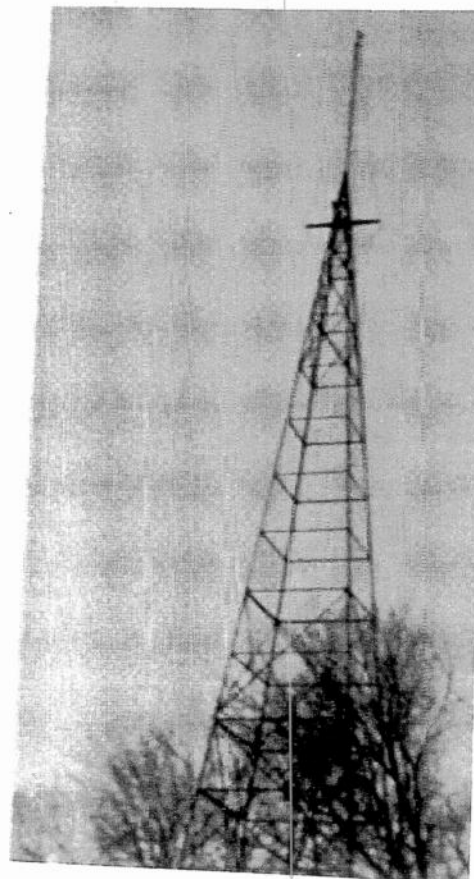


WORD, the Watchtower Station. Photos by Mark Wagner.



WORD'S tower supports.

As a youngster, Mark Wagner took the only pictures of radio station WORD's tower in the Cherry Park Subdivision. The tower stood from the early 1920s until sometime in the 1970s. This religious station broadcasted with 5,000 watts. Children played on the tower until it was taken down.





WORD BATAVIA-CHICAGO

Actual copies of reception report letters sent to  
listeners from station WORD in Chicago. (Courtesy  
of Alice Brannigan, Popular Communications)

## THE WATCHTOWER RADIO

J. P. HOLMES  
*Director*

# W-O-R-D

Phone  
SUPERIOR 7910

201.6 Meters — 1490 Kilocycles

ILLINOIS WOMEN'S ATHLETIC CLUB, 111 E. Pearson St., CHICAGO, ILL.

October 24, 1930

POWER 5000 WATTS

PRIVATE EXCHANGE  
SUPERIOR 7910

## WCHI BROADCASTING COMPANY

*"The Voice of Chicago"*

ILLINOIS WOMEN'S ATHLETIC CLUB

111 EAST PEARSON ST.

*"Just West of the Watertower"*

CHICAGO

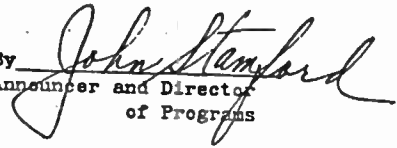
Dear Radio Friend:

Thank you most cordially for your  
letter. We are pleased, indeed, to send you this  
proof of reception. WCHI - "The Station of the  
Illinois Women's Athletic Club" is the "Voice of  
Chicago" and we shall continue to present to our  
listeners the utmost in radio entertainment.

Thanking you again in anticipa-  
tion of your further comments, we are

Sincerely yours,

RADIO STATION W.C.H.I.

By   
Announcer and Director  
of Programs

JS  
AM



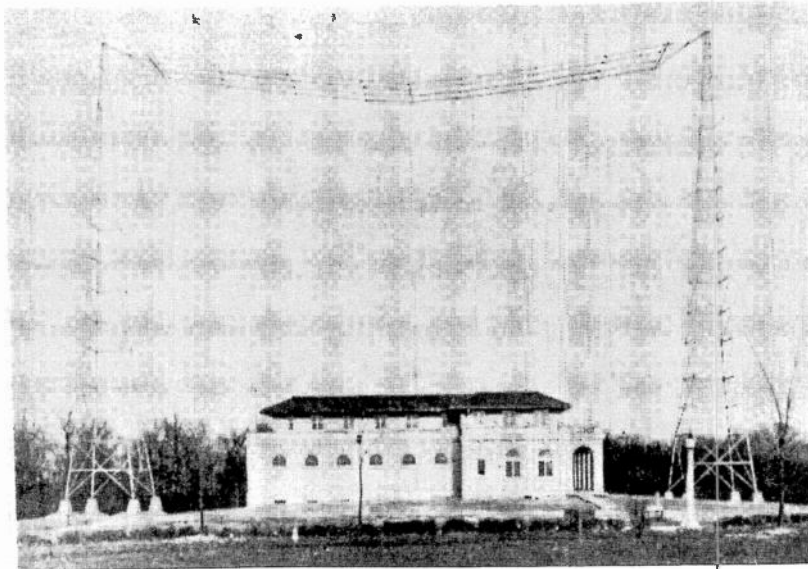


## WJJD RADIO AT MOOSEHEART

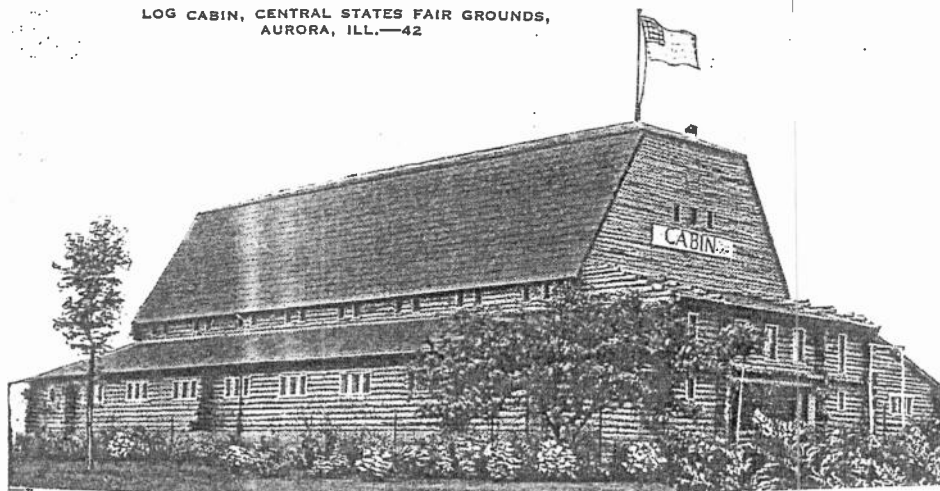
Radio at Mooseheart in the 1920. Most of the programming was done by children who lived at Mooseheart.

WJJD's studios were located in the Women's Dorm (center).

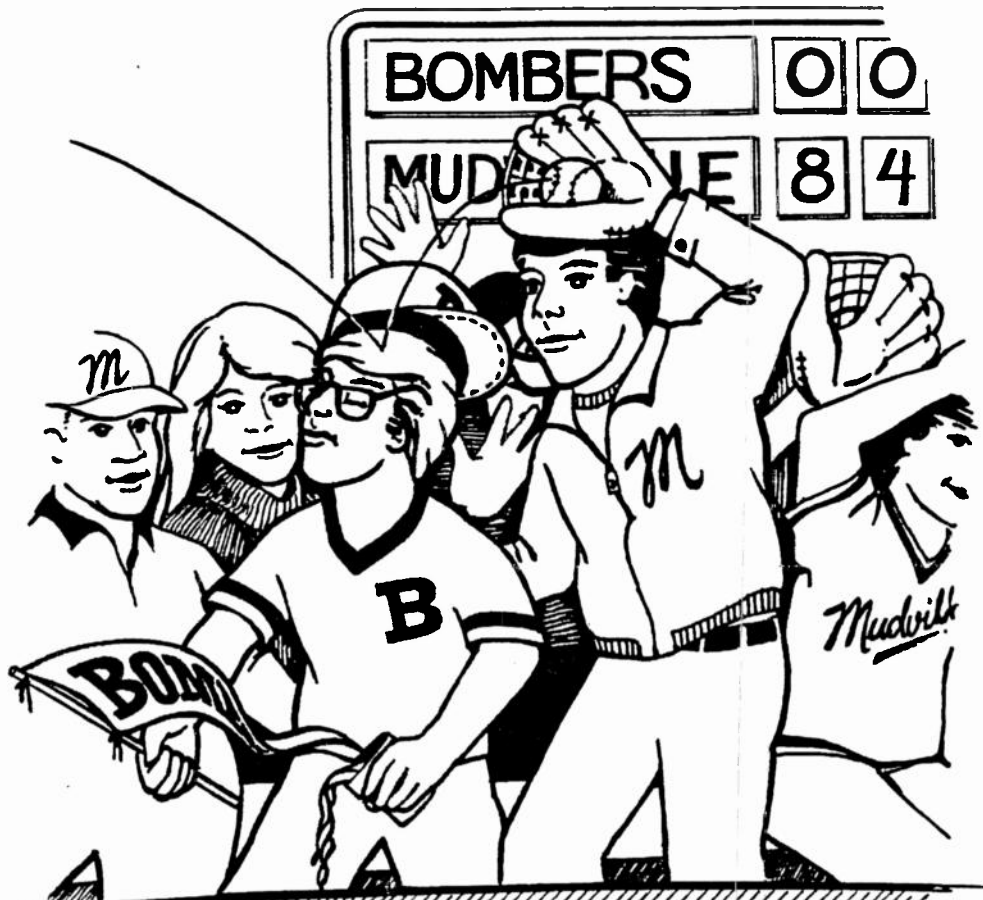
Live band broadcasts and other events were aired live from the Log Cabin Ballroom (bottom).  
(Photos courtesy of Raymond Dickow of Moose Magazine and the Aurora Historical Society)



LOG CABIN, CENTRAL STATES FAIR GROUNDS,  
AURORA, ILL.—42







**NO PEPPER GAMES**

*BEECHING*

360

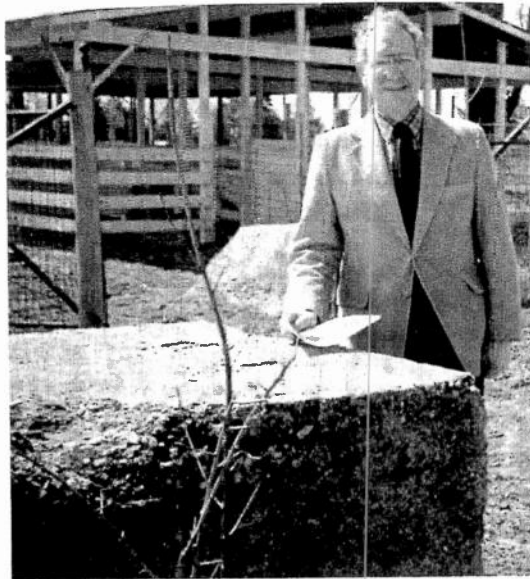
Baseball games were broadcast by WJJD and WGN in the early 1930s.





WGN RADIO

William J. Monson, PhD., shows original WGN tower supports located on the Pet-Ag property.



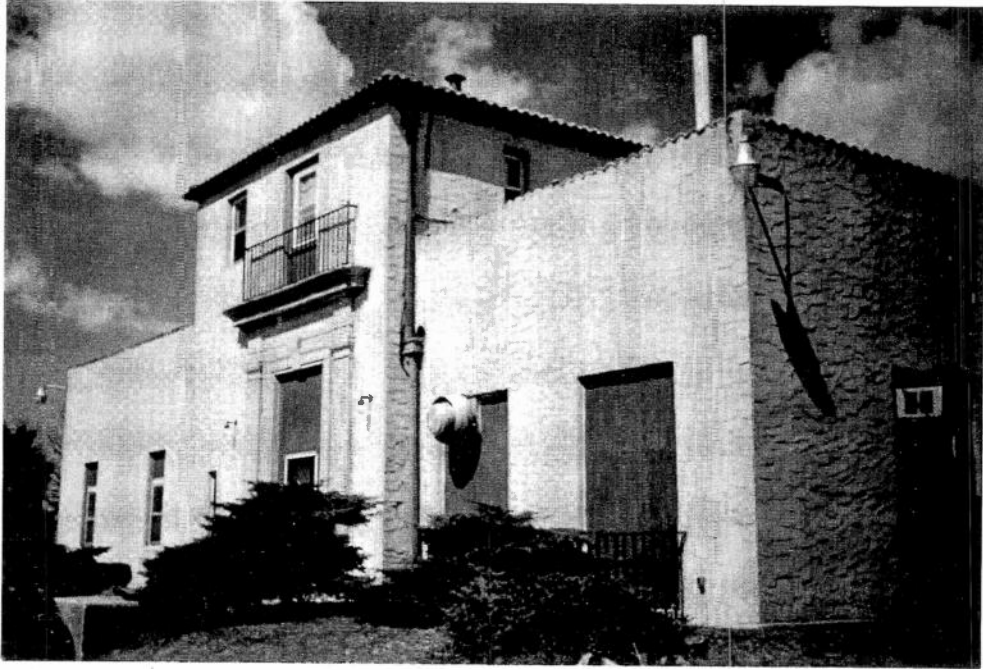
(below) WGN/WLIB's transmitter site at 30W 432 E. Route 20 in 1933 at the old Borden Plant.



Carl J. Meyers, WGN's long time engineer.



## WGN RADIO



The Pet-Ag building as it stand today on Route 20 in Elgin, former site of WGN radio.



WGN radio transmitter site after construction in 1927.

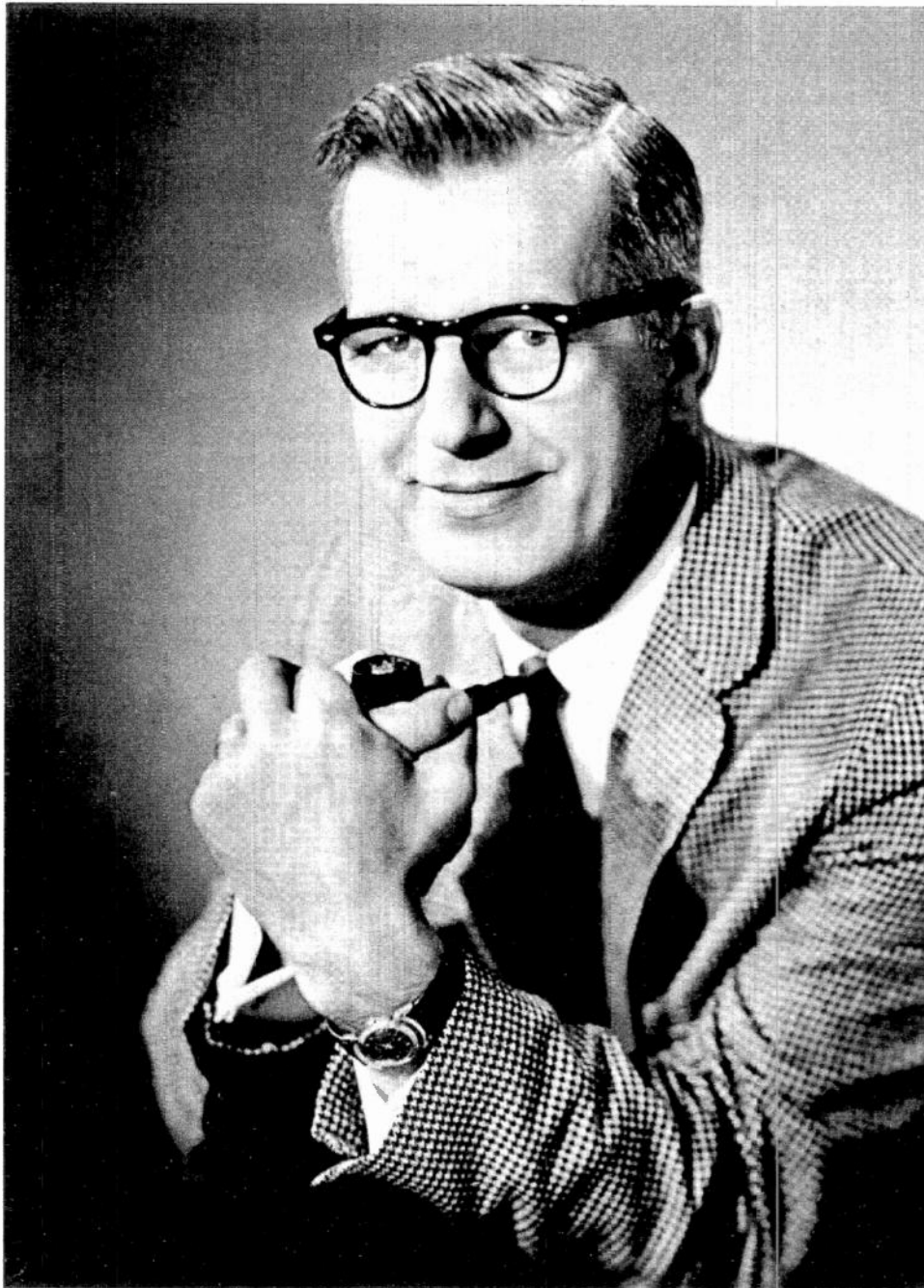


Demolition crews remove WGN antenna towers in preparation to move the transmitter site.





WGN RADIO



Everyone's favorite big band music host, Mike Rapchak, entertains every Saturday night on WGN radio in Chicago.





Friendly competition between radio stations and newspapers ended in the 1950s, as both openly competed for lucrative advertising revenue.

(above) This cartoon appeared in the Lake County Star in Crown Point, Indiana with the Caption: "When's the last time your radio gave you a handful of money saving coupons?" This is an original cartoon drawn for this publication by Mark Beeching of Demotte, Indiana.

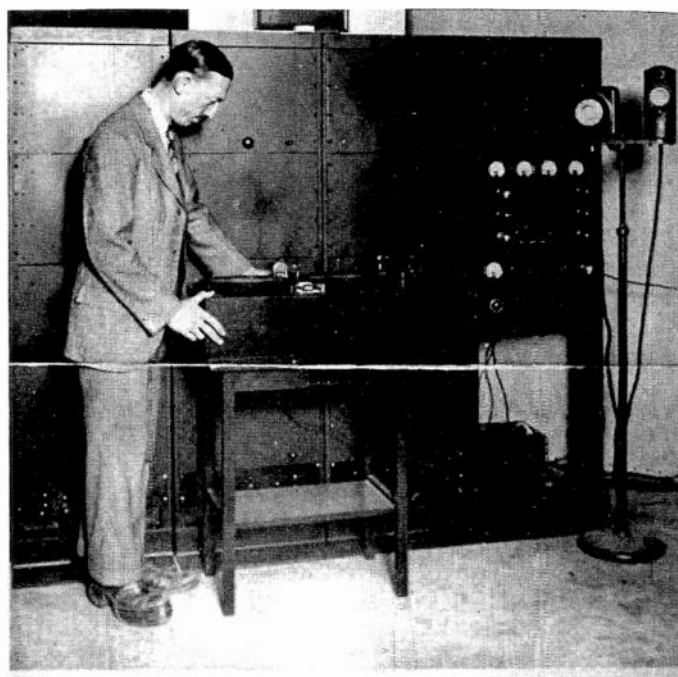




RADIO EXPERIMENTATION IN BATAVIA



Riverbank Laboratories in Batavia.



Colin Kyle invented acoustical speakers.



OPERADIO/DUKANE CORPORATION

courtesy of Rudy DeWeirdt, Deputy Assessor

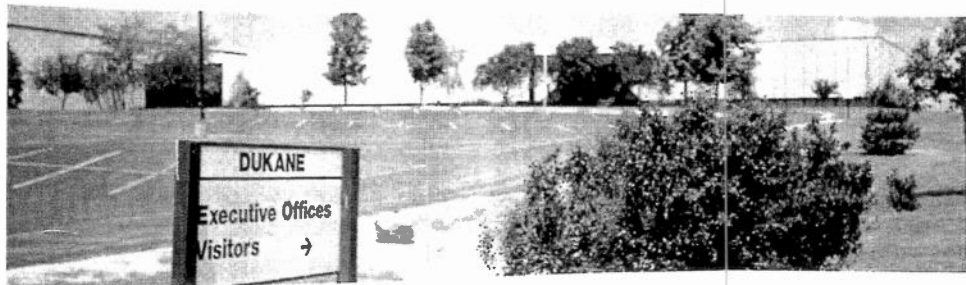
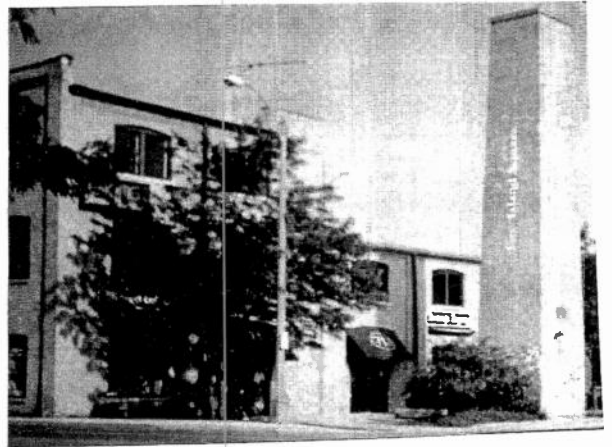
First location before 1930 at 13th and Indiana, NE corner. This building was built in 1904.



Second location in the late 1930s at 101-107 N. 11th Avenue at Cedar Street. This building was built in 1914 and has had several new additions.



Operating concurrently with site #2 in to the 1940s, this factory at 206 S. 1st Avenue is now the Fox Island Square Shopping Center. Its address is One West Illinois Street.



Today the Dukane Corporation operates from Modern facilities at 2900 Dukane Drive at Kirk Road in St. Charles. Operadio became the Dukane Corporation in 1951.





## AURORA RADIO

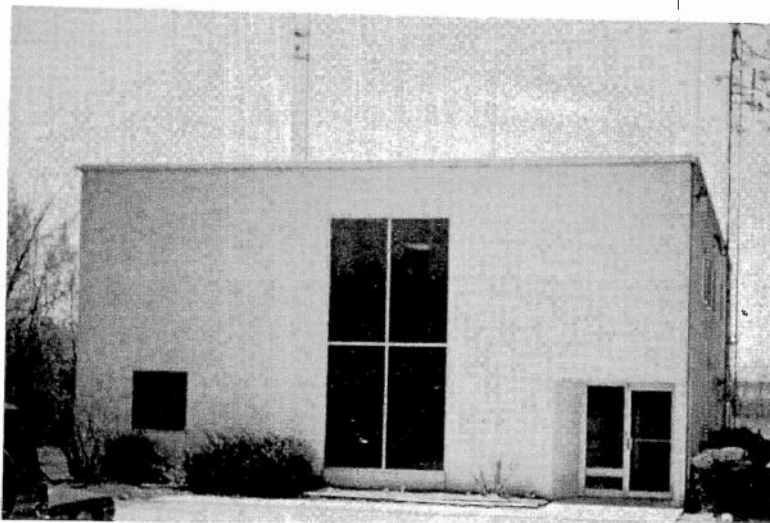


WMRO's first studios were in North Aurora.  
(top) Second location in an old bank building at  
S. River Street. Other later locations of  
WMRO/WAUR-FM, WYSY AM-FM, WBIG-AM

At one time WMRO's tower was located on Hurr  
Island on the Fox River.



184 S. River Street (1938)



Modern studios of WYSY-FM and WBIG-AM near  
Eola. Both stations simulcast their programming.



AURORA RADIO



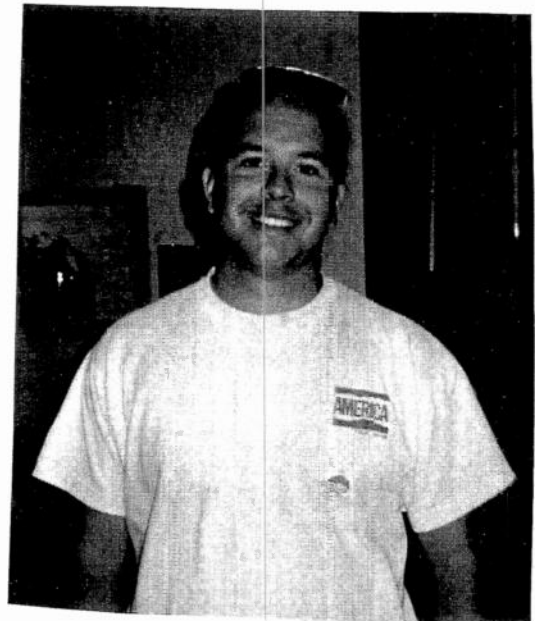
Operadio's J. McWilliams (Mac) Stone.



WMRO's Martin J. O'Brien who often stated, "I feel fine, but don't read me any continuing stories."



WJJD's Arthur Wright sang with big bands and worked for WGN, Chicago.



Joe Bartosch of Shadow Traffic/WAUR.



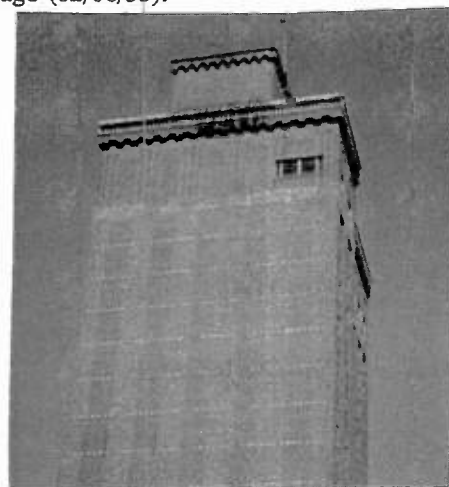




WMRO organist Ken Griffin (standing) entertains friends Burdette Wood, his wife Bertha and daughter Judy Wood Diehl at the old Heidelberg Restaurant, 14 W. Randolph in Chicago (02/06/55).



WKKD in 1966 with Chuck Filippi (left), Rusty Tym and (seated) Russell Salter, owner.



In 1948 the Aurora Beacon operated WBNU-FM from the Leland Hotel. It was also the transmitter site for WMRO-FM/WAUR in the 1960s.



The Rivoli Cafe on the S.E. corner of River Street and New York Avenue where Ken Griffin played in the 1940s.





WMRO sportscaster Fred Leo calls the action of an East Aurora High School football game in 1939. Pictured are Felz Company executives.



WMRO announcer Bob Brooker entertains from the Kresge Store window located at 16-18 Broadway in downtown Aurora in August of 1956. Vince Cofey and Ben Oswalt had just purchased WMRO prior to its move to S. River Street. (Photos courtesy of Vince Cofey)





CHICAGOLAND PERSONALITY



Chicago radio personality Art Hellyer is now heard on Saturdays over WJOL in Joliet.





Aurora announcer Chick Hearn did play by play sports for WMRO and WBNU. Today he is the voice of the Los Angeles Lakers basketball team.







Orchestra leader Wayne King with WMRO's Mary Louise (Brown) Plants, taken in Aurora in 1942.



The world's greatest organist, just ask him, Ken Griffin (Griffith).



WKKD's manager Chuck Filippi and sales manager Bill Baker in 1972.



## AURORA RADIO



1956 WMRO staff (standing left to right) Ben Oswalt (co-owner), John Kimer (engineer), Eric Erikson (announcer), Sam Miralgia (sales & news), Vince Cofey (co-owner), Roy West (announcer), Tommy Thompson (sales), seated Mary Adams (continuity), Tal Jones (announcer), Bill Brooker (announcer). Seated left to right Jean Doran (manager), Bonnie Anderson (continuity). (Photo courtesy of Vince Cofey)







Actress Maureen O'Sullivan (center) appears live with Russell Salter (left) and P.D. Michael Diem during a remote on WKDD. (Photo courtesy of Chuck Filippi)



WMRO's Martin J. O'Brien (center) interviews four lovely ladies. (Left to Right) Louise Miller, Jo Anne Peters (Siebert) of Aurora West, Wanda Merritt and Norma Pfeifer of Aurora East. This is a 1947 photo by Don Wredling. (Courtesy of the Aurora Historical Museum; John R. Jaros, Director)





WKKD's founder Russell Salter did the WLS Barndance Show in 1953.



The present day WKKD AM-FM studios in Aurora.







(top) WEXI sportscaster Bruce Miller in 1950.  
(right) Today Bruce does the color for New Orleans Saints games on WWL.



Jack A. Schroeder (Jackson Q) and friend Ruth Goodwin in front of the WEXI studio building in 1950. The building was once located across from Grim's Shopping Center on Rt. 64 in St. Charles.



WEXI IN ST. CHARLES

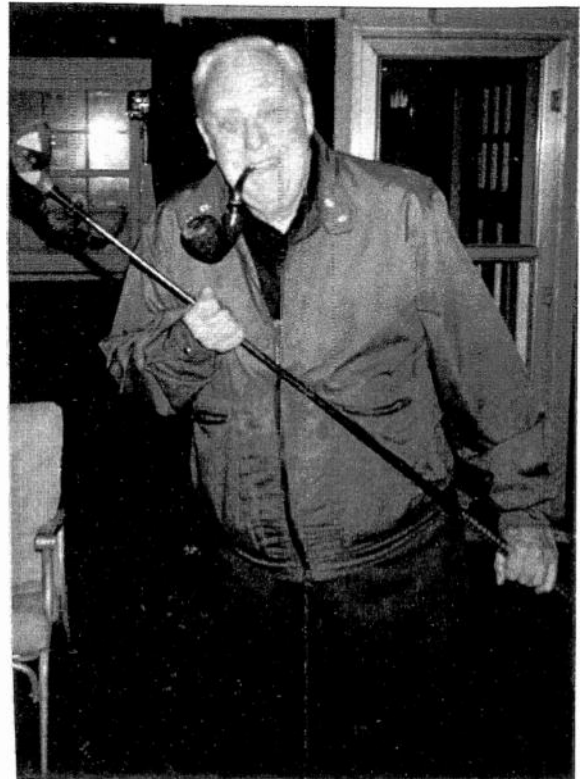
A 1949 Elgin Daily Courier ad announcing the signing on of WEXI. (below) WEXI sports director Eddie Chessman.

**St. Charles FM  
Radio Station  
WEXI  
Goes on the Air  
Saturday, May 28, 2 P. M.**

- LATEST IN NEWS
- MOST IN SPORTS
- BEST IN MUSIC

**106.3 on Your FM Dial—Channel 292**

Bucklin and Lowrey Advertising, Inc. • • • Exclusive Elgin Representatives



WEXI was left in crumbling ruins after a 1951 fire.





**BASKETBALL**  
ON  
**WGSB**  
"The Voice of Kane County"  
1480 KC ON YOUR  
AM RADIO DIAL

**JOE BARRIE**  
Sports Director  
WGSB Sports Staff  
Bill Morris, Bob Beck  
and Bill Russell

8:00 P.M. FRIDAY, JANUARY 18  
**GENEVA vs. BATAVIA**  
9:20 P.M. FRIDAY, JANUARY 18  
**AURORA WEST vs. ELGIN**  
11:00 P.M. FRIDAY, JANUARY 18  
**ST. CHARLES vs. BELVIDERE**



Joe Barrie was the Fox Valley's favorite talk show host and sportscaster.

On many nights during the high school basketball season, WGSB would broadcast three games per night, one live and two were presented by tape delay.

Barrie now is the sales manager for WLBK/WDEK in DeKalb, IL.

(Newspaper advertisements courtesy of the Aurora Beacon-News)

**JOE BARRIE**  
Invites  
You to Join Him on the  
**WGSB**

**"PARTY LINE"**  
Weekdays 10:30 A.M.

The Fox Valley's most talked-about Radio Show, where listeners talk back, giving spontaneous opinions on government, business, their families, even WGSB.

**WGSB**  
1480 on Your Dial  
"The Voice of the Fox Valley"



# Radio Station WGSB

## WGSB, NEW RADIO STATION IN TRI-CITIES, WILL OPEN NEXT WEEK

WGSB, a radio station, whose call letters represent the Tri-Cities, Geneva, St. Charles, and Batavia, is scheduled to open next week at 1480 on the dial. Plans call for operation from 5:30 in the morning until 12 midnight, giving Geneva a full-time radio station.

The Geneva Republican welcomes WGSB to the Tri-Cities. WGSB later became WFXW.



WFXW staffers (seated Ken Misch and Jon Howat.

**THESE ARE THE PEOPLE YOU HEAR WHEN YOU DIAL 1480**

**W**  
 JACK ALLEN  
 CARL COMO  
 JOE BARBIE  
 CHARLES BATCHELDER  
 WHITNEY BOLTON  
 JOE CAMPBELL  
 PHIL CLARK  
 BILL COSTELLO  
 DICK DE PRIETAS  
 MARTIN EDWARDS

**G**  
 BILL EDMONDS  
 BILL EVENSON  
 AL LA VIE  
 CEDRIC FOSTER  
 TONY MARTIN  
 HANK HARMON  
 KEN FRENCH  
 JAFFEY FORD  
 MIKE ROCHE

**S**  
 JAMES McCARTHY  
 SCOTT BRADLY  
 STANFORD MARSHALL  
 STEVE MCCORMICK  
 VAN PATRICK  
 MIKE PRELEE  
 BILL OWEN  
 RICHARD HENDELL

**B**  
 DELL SHARBUTT  
 R. K. SCOTT  
 PHIL CLARK  
 BILL STEIN  
 FRANK SINGISER  
 CHARLES WARREN  
 FRED VAN DEVENTER  
 WESTBROOK VAN VOORHIS

WISHING YOU  
 "GOOD NEWS"  
 IN  
 1965

and "MART"  
 THE WGSB REMOTE VOICE

along with the above 28 men who bring you news from WGSB and there is  
 RED...RED ROVER our mobile unit... You can depend upon the Men who  
 are listed here...they ARE the WGSB news department

**"The Voice and Choice of the Fox Valley"**

An Aurora Beacon-News ad listing news personalities.

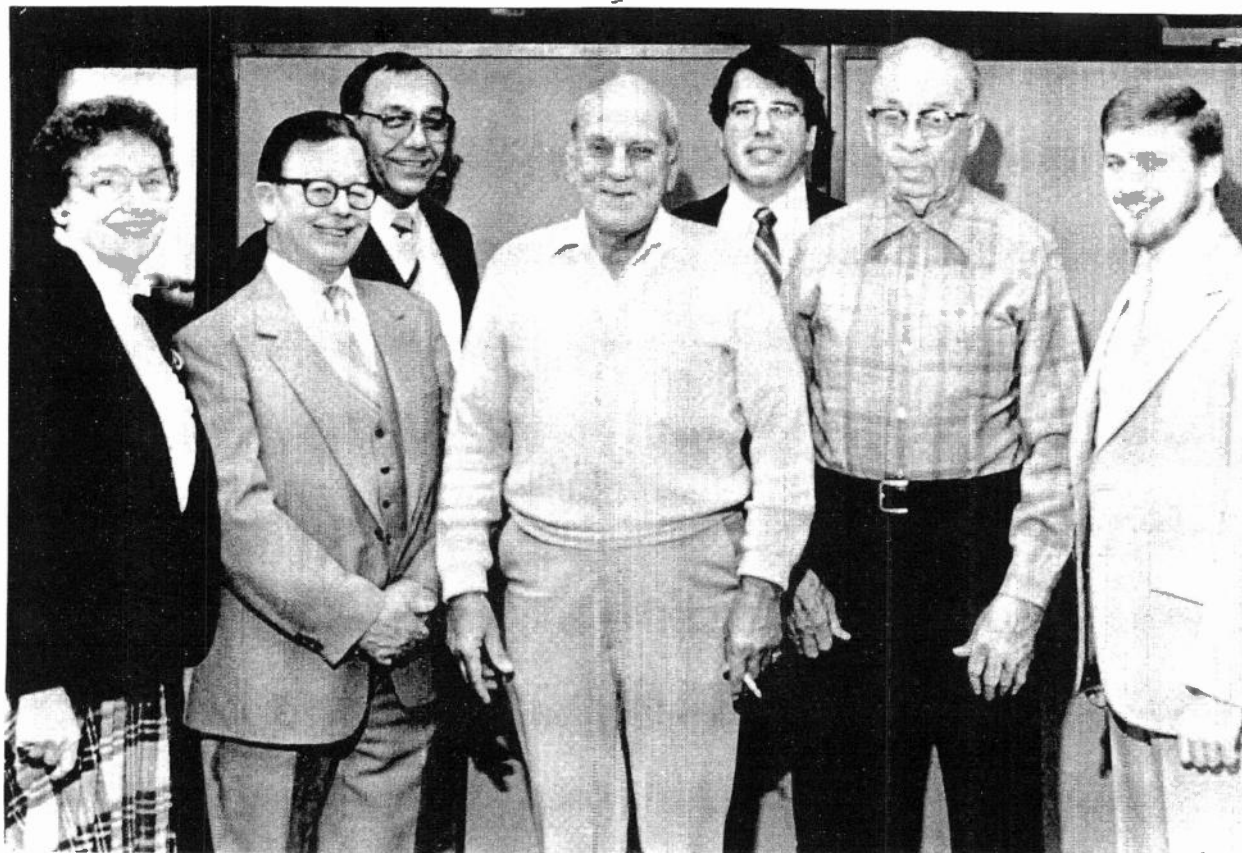


WGSB/WFXW studios and transmitter site in St. Charles.

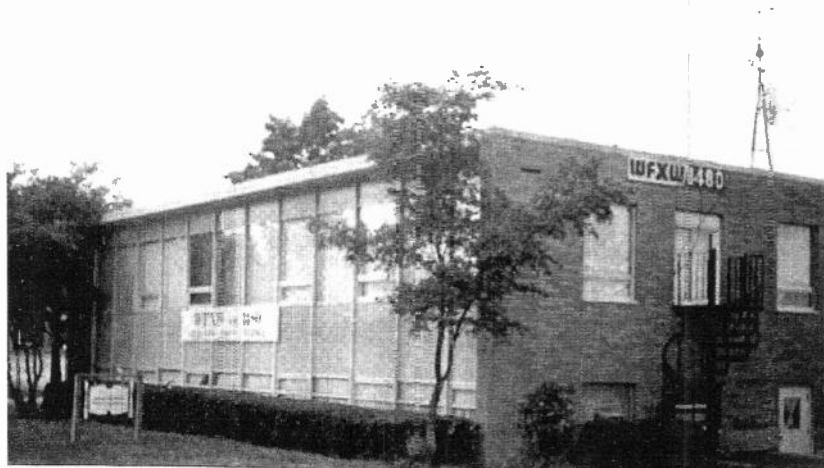




## WFXW RADIO IN GENEVA



The Gamel Family purchased WFXW in 1983 from Chicago radio personality Howard Miller. (Left to Right) Iva Gamel, Gerald Gamel, John A. Cassens, Jr., Howard Miller, Louis F. Pignatelli, John E. H. Cassens, Sr., and Bennett Gamel. Bennett is now employed by Ameritech in Chicago.



The WFXW studios at 6 Richards Street in Geneva. In later years, WFXW moved its studios back to St. Charles.



WFXW RADIO IN GENEVA  
PAST AND PRESENT STAFFERS



News director Linda Girardi.



1988 Personalities (left to right) Bob Birkeneder, Rich Charhut, Bill Martin, Joy Wagner, and Todd Moffett.



Rolf Doerfle recently celebrated his 20th anniversary with WFXW. He does a German music program on Sundays and works for Motorola.





SPINNING THE "PLATTERS AND MAKING WITH THE CHATTER" IN THE FOX VALLEY

(below) Author John "Records" Russell during a Saturday night disc jockey show at WFXW in 1986.



(above) WAIT's bubbly afternoon host Larry O'Brien (AJ Gurka). Larry has worked for WLS, WAIT, WSEX, and WJMK. He presently operates a mobile disc jockey business called "Music Mania" in Mt. Prospect.



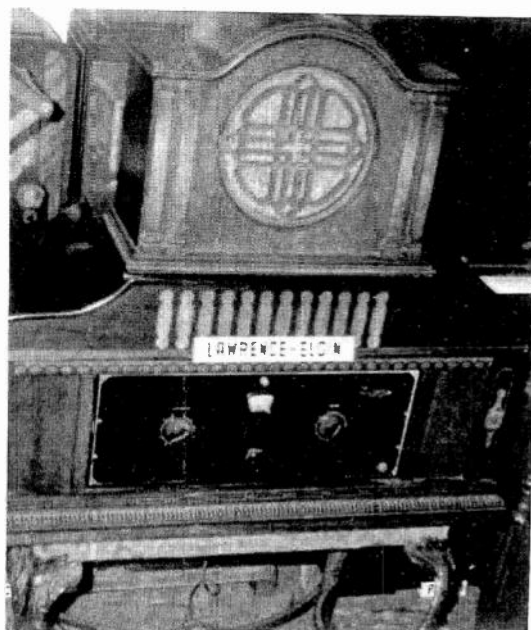
Cetron, a division of Richardson Electronics, an early tube distributor in the area. This plant is located at 628 North Street, Geneva.



Richardson's main location is on Keslinger Road.



WFXW's Bennett Gamel (right) waits for a cue for a live broadcast from Brookfield Zoo in 1986 and (left) Batavia Access Chairman Ted Schuster.



Lawrence-Elgin sets were built by Fox Electric and can be found in Dr. Muchow's Radio Museum.



John R. Ghrist interviews youngsters at the "Pride of the Fox" street dance in 1987.

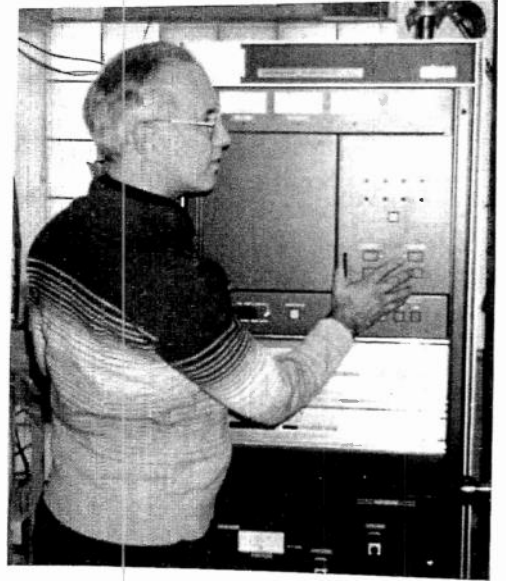




EDUCATIONAL RADIO  
ELGIN/NORTHERN ILLINOIS



Elgin High School IMC Director Ellie MacKinney and Station Coordinator Carolyn Brandes (seated) are currently in charge of programming at WEPS.



Long time engineer Donald Tuttle makes some technical adjustments to the WEPS transmitter at Elgin H.S.



NTU students John Monson (seated) and Jack Manganiello spin favorites at Sycamore's WSQR.



FOX VALLEY RADIO  
DUNDEE/ELGIN/HARVARD



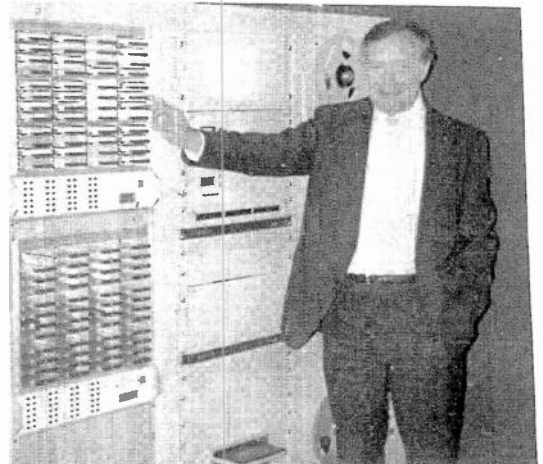
(top) Richard Prather demonstrates old WVFV equipment still in working order at his office in Dundee.



WCRM's General Manager Hal Fisher.



New WMCW studios in downtown Harvard.



Rick Jackle's automated WRMN/Elgin.





NORTHWEST RADIO



"That's a 30" Harvard's Julian Bentley was news director of WLS in 1940.



Young Bob Jones as a disc jockey in 1951 at WRMN. He now operates Robert A. Jones consulting engineers in LaGrange, Illinois.



WBBM's Lloyd Burlingham did his daily farm commentary show from his home on Vermont Road in Woodstock.



Illinois Governor Adlai Stevenson speaks at the Woodstock Opera House in 1948 live on WILA.

(Photos courtesy of Don Peasley Public Relations)



FOX VALLEY  
GENEVA/HARVARD



Program Director Todd Moffett entertains listeners on his afternoon radio program on WFXW.



WMCW, Harvard ribbon cutting ceremony in 1955. Esther Blodgett with former Illinois Governor Otto Kerner.

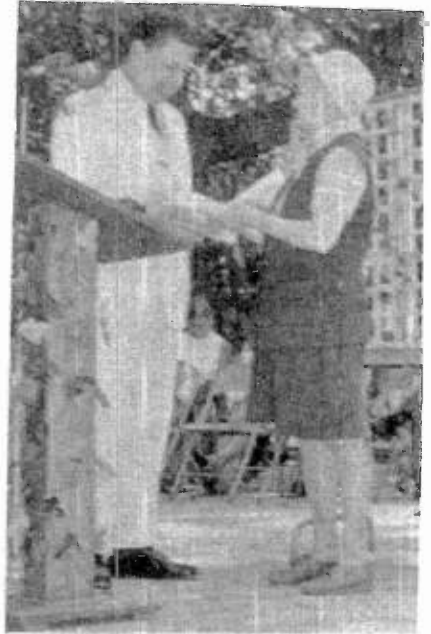




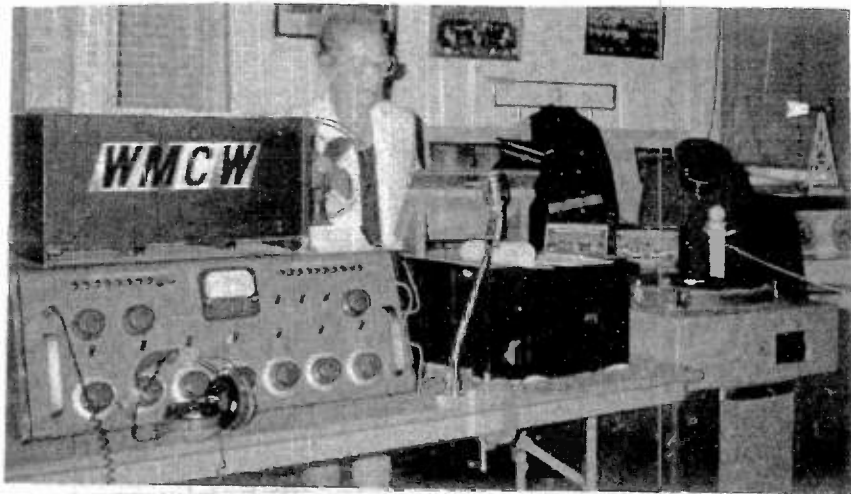
WMCW IN HARVARD



Former location of WMCW, removed in October of 1991.



Esther Blodgett won many community service awards.



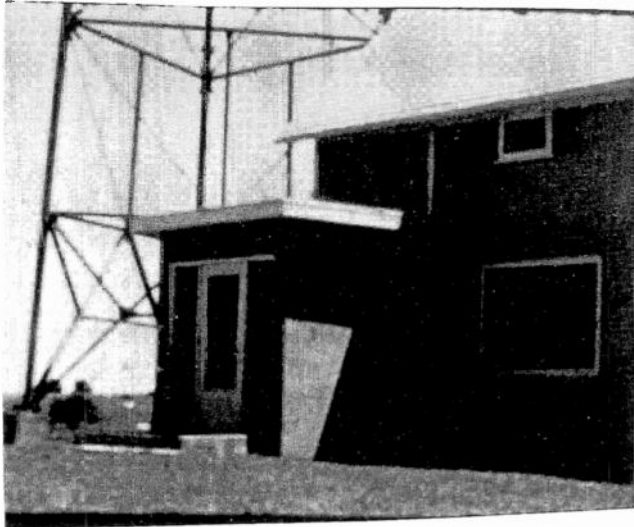
Marguerita Johnson displays WMCW equipment at Harvard Museum.



Esther Blodgett loved her many nieces and nephews.



NORTHWEST/MCHENRY COUNTY RADIO



James Benton shares his photos of 1000 watt WILA-FM in Woodstock in 1949. (above) Tower and transmitter building. (right) Benton's father Harold "Zip" Benton, owners of WILA. Zip Benton invented car radio push buttons.



Always informative and entertaining Mal Bellairs (right) of WAIT and news director Stew Cohen. Cohen is now with WFXW.





UNIVERSAL WIRELESS IN PLAINFIELD



Universal Wireless Communication Company, Inc. operated in several states including Illinois. (above) A stock certificate sold in 1929 before the company went bankrupt (Photo courtesy of Alice Brannigan, Popular Communications). (below) Buffalo Times photo of company president William H. Fitzpatrick, Sr., and actual building site in Plainfield owned by Francis Schmidt.







Dr. George F. Courier (left) and son Wilfred F. (Billy) Courier about 1940. (Photo courtesy of Lucinda Muirhead Corron)

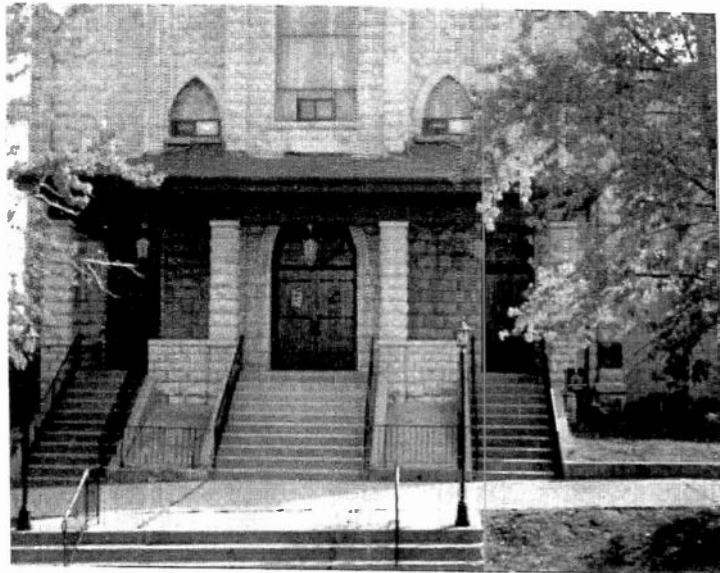
(below) Hammond Mayor Frank R. Martin speaks with program director Doris Keane on WHIP's first broadcast in 1937 (photo courtesy of The Hammond Times Newspaper).

Keane and Courier operated both WWAE and WHIP in the 1930s and 1940s.





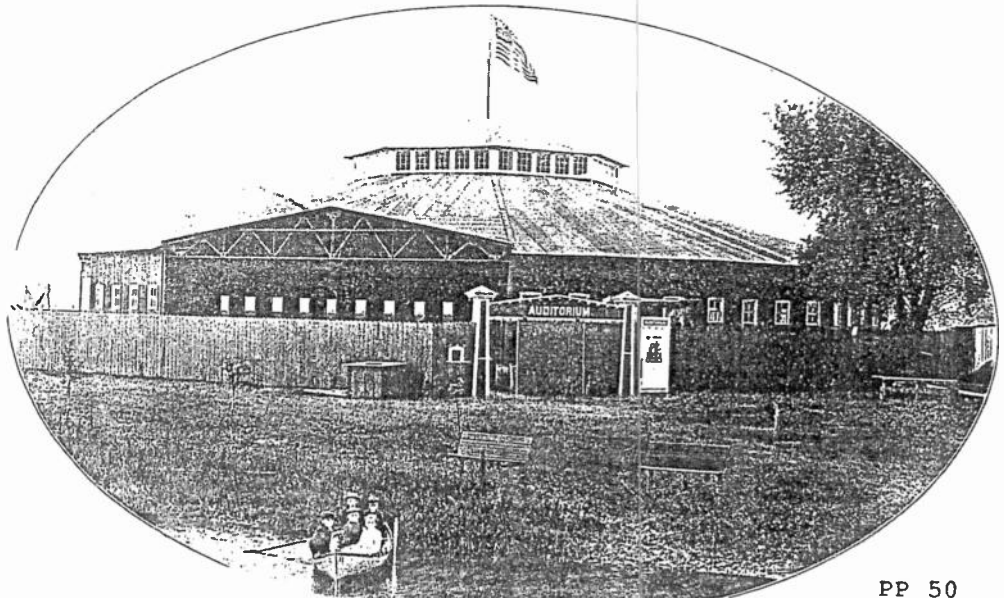




The country's oldest church broadcasts are carried live each Sunday morning from St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Joliet over WJOL.



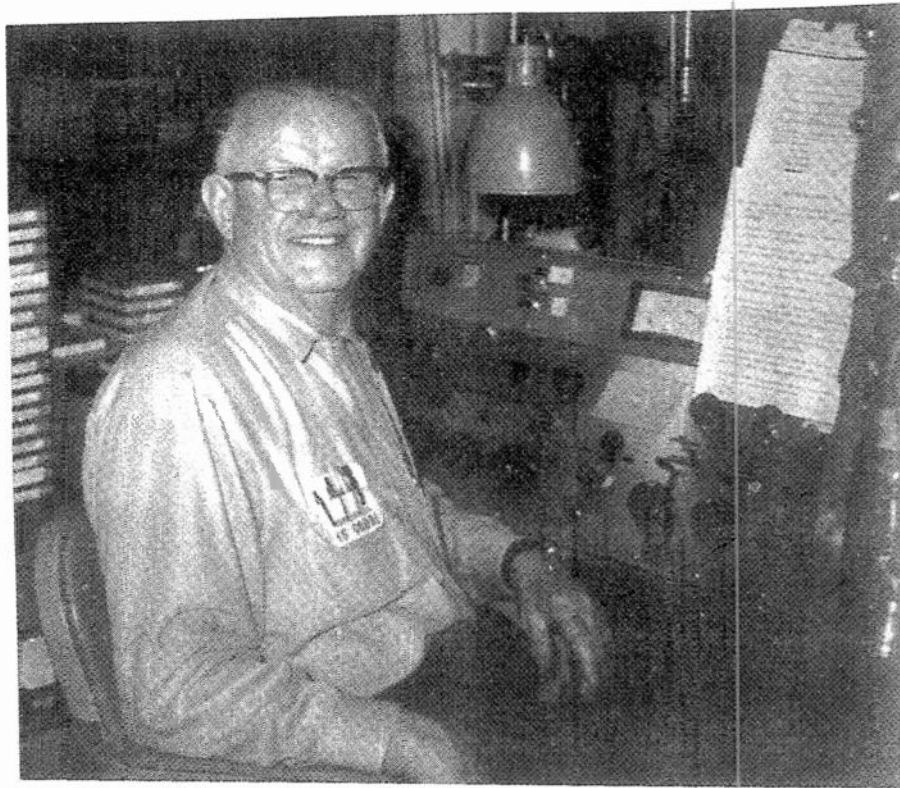
WJOL/WLLI studios at Radio Hill, Joliet.



Former WWAE studios at the Chautauqua Auditorium along the DuPage River near Plainfield about 1925 (photo courtesy of Plainfield "Then and Now").



JOLIET RADIO



WJJP's Al Pohlers in studio "B" during his "Polka Time" show in December of 1973.



A.J. and Mary Jane Pohlers operated WJJP from this garage behind 451 W. Ruby Street (807 N. Vine Street).





## JOLIET RADIO



WJOL's Frank O'Leary has worked at the station for over 30 years.



Radio station WWAE was located in the Alamo Ballroom at 327 Clinton Street (NW corner of Clinton and Chicago Streets). Entry to the ballroom was made near the second white car. The building, removed for library expansion, was also the site of a popular drug store/luncheon counter.





Kenneth Shirk, a long time Gary resident and engineer from the Miller area, worked for WIND for over 20 years and was also employed by WJOB in the 1940s.

**TOM and FRANCES Say—**  
***Come Over to Our House!***

**GAY MILL** **DINE and DANCE**

***Hear and See Us Broadcast!***  
**BROADCASTING STATION**  
**W J K S**  
Voice of the Steel City—Gary  
**DANCING EVERY NIGHT AND SUNDAY AFTERNOON**  
Gay Mill Orchestra—Tommy Thompson, Director

All persons desirous of becoming Radio Artists are invited to use our stations. Make appointment or try-out and if you qualify, we will do the rest.

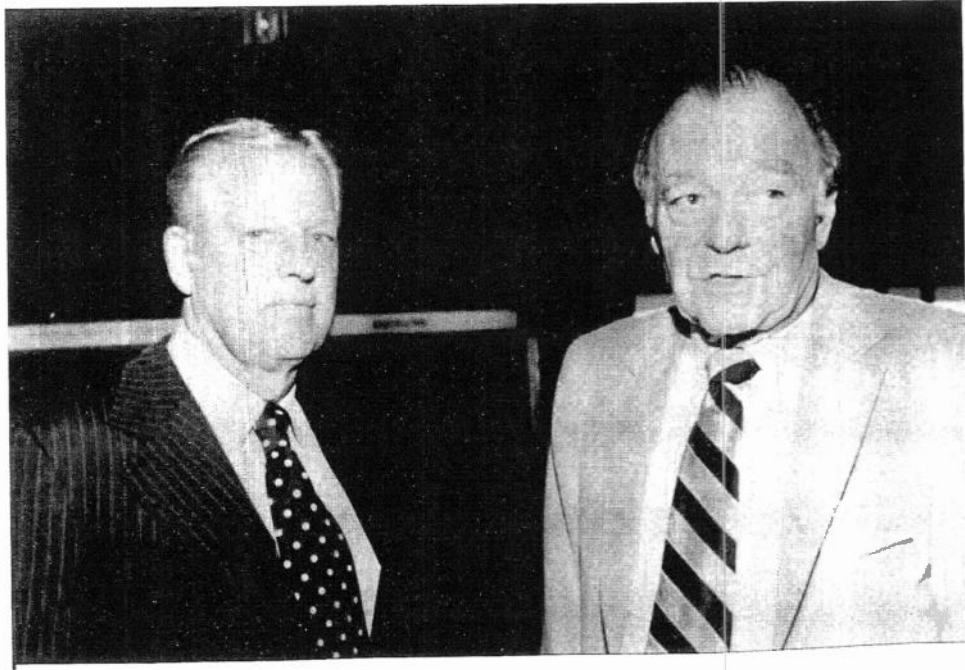
Dinner and dancing were on the menu at the Gay Mill Ballroom. many bands provided the music for this pre-depression hot-spot (Post Tribune).



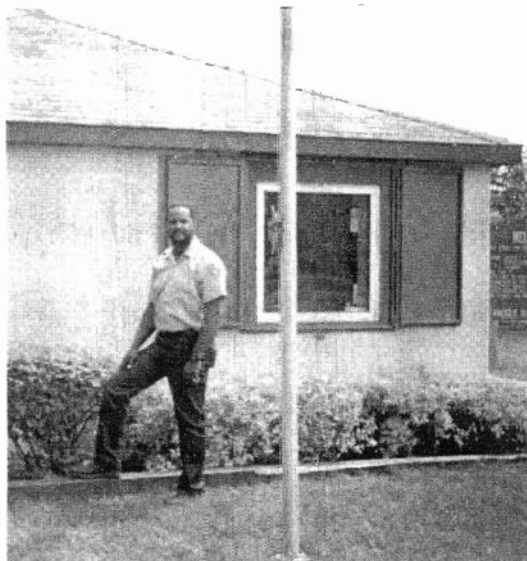
The Gay Mill Ballroom with its various additions. To the left (south) is WJKS' antenna. The complex was destroyed around 1936. (Photo courtesy Gary Post Tribune Jubilee Book, 1956)







Behind the success of WWCA were (right) station owner Dee O. Coe and manager Joe Haas. Coe had been an earlier manager at WIND. (Photo courtesy of Calumet Archives, Indiana University)



Lake Etta Park Director Gordon Phillips displays the guard house that used to be the WIND transmitter building before 1940.



WWCA's Ted Thorne (seated) covers a golf tournament with Matt Hart and Victor Voss (right).



WGRY/WLTH, GARY



(top) WGRY (WLTH) signed on from this army quonset hut on November 5, 1950. The hut still stands today abandoned on the west side of King Drive in an unpleasant jungle of underbrush and snakes. (above) WGRY owner George Whitney formerly of WCFL in Chicago. (right) Edward Brennan (1908-1975) who enjoyed a lengthy career in radio, journalism and politics.





CALUMET AREA NEWSMAKERS  
WLTH/WJOB



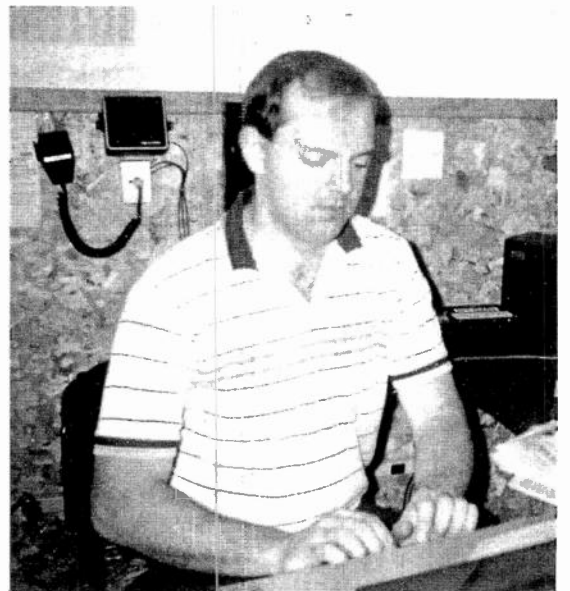
WJOB's Edward D. Oskierko "Polish Varieties" over 40 years of service.



WLTH's Greg Lenburg now with the Herald Newspapers.



WLTH sportscaster Tommy Williams.



WLTH newsman Stan Maddux prepares the morning news.



GARY RADIO



The WLTH news team in 1983 (standing) Carmen McCollum, Claudette Jernigan, (seated) Cosmo Currier news director and Felicia Middlebrooks, now with WBBM in Chicago.



"Livin" with Vivian Carter.



James "Pookie" Hudson and the "Spaniels" recorded for V-J Records beginning in 1953.



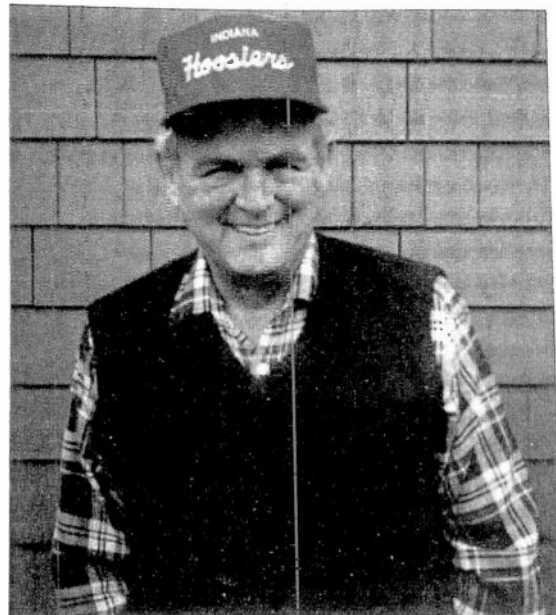




WWCA employees on strike in 1966. Left to right: matt Hart, Jesse Coopwood, and Steve Bauer. Also pictured is Bauer's son, Terry, now a writer for WMAQ in Chicago. (Post Tribune photo)



Everybody's favorite morning man Tom Higgins, now of Indiana NW.



Mr. "Lake County Fair" John H. "Patt" Patterson.



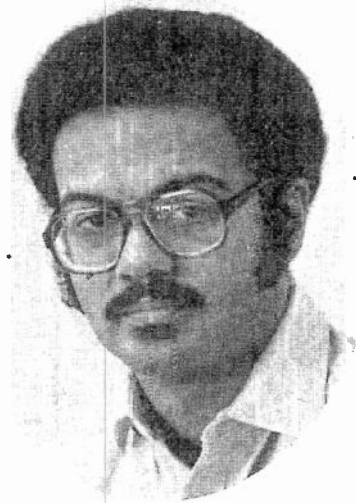
EDUCATIONAL RADIO-GARY, INDIANA



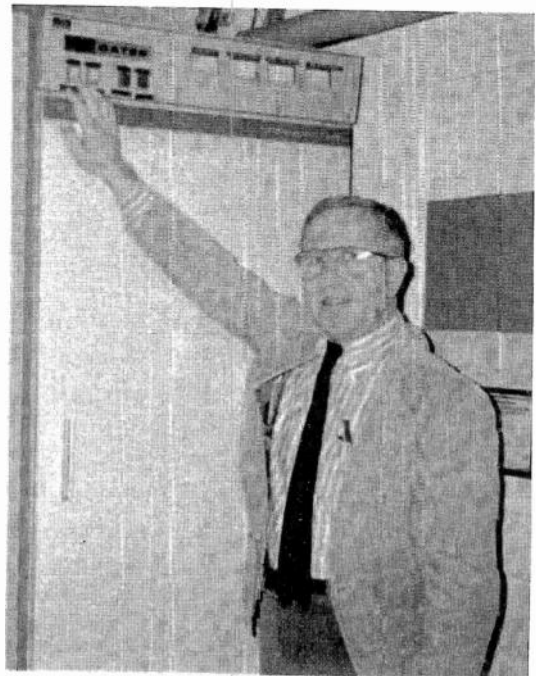
Steve Somerville and Angela Shives teach students broadcasting at the Gary Area Technical Vocational High School at WGVE. Shives is also the director of Tradewinds radio.



Tony Rose, formerly a teacher at WGVE and announcer with WWCA. He is now an administrator with the Hobart Schools.



Lanel Chambers, WGVE P.I.O. Director.



Lawrence Ventura WGVE Director.







WLTH studios at 3669 Broadway in Gary.

WLTH's daily noontime newscast features Cosmo Currier and Mary Hodge. The station's new motto is "Superstation, 1370."



WLTH's morning talk show host in 1989 was John Jage. Jage has worked for several area stations including WRBI-FM and WLS-TV.





WYCA RADIO



WYCA staffers in 1967 (clockwise) Wendell Borrink, Oscar "Jay" Litton, Ron Klemm, Bob Phillips (now WMAQ), John R. Ghrist, Dave MacNamera, "Cuzzin" Jim Cole, Larry Foss.

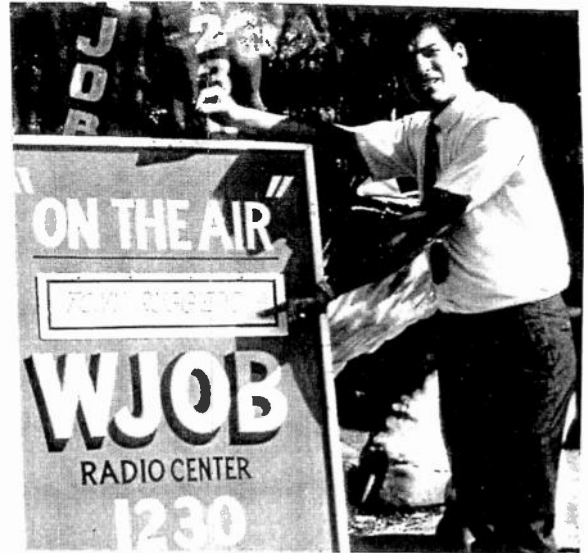








Station manager Judith Grambo and daughter Diane.



"Slick Chick Pick's" Tony Ruggiero.



Millie Pilot

Political reportor Millie Pilot retired in 1985 after 12 years of award winning reporting from the state legislature.



WJOB's top night personality Jan Gabriel always ended his program with "be kind, be careful, but most of all, be."





Cosmo Currier worked for WJOB for over 20 years before moving to other stations. He left radio in 1991.



**Look Cool**  
**Feel Cool**  
**Be Cool**  
 LISTEN TO  
**COOL COSMO**  
 OVER  
**WJOB**  
 1230 ON YOUR RADIO DIAL  
 SATURDAYS 10.05 - 11.00 A.M.

WITH  
YOUR  
MUSICAL  
HOST



NO. 1  
COSMO  
CURRIER

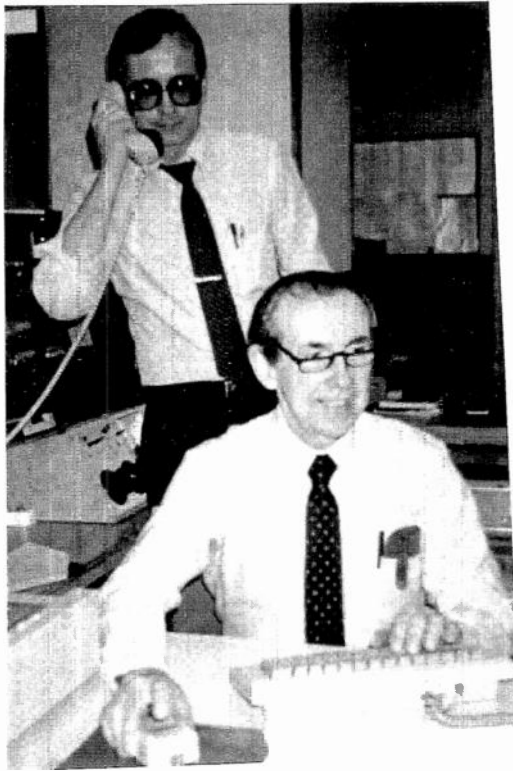


WJOB studios in 1991.





WJOB RADIO THROUGH THE YEARS



1990 WJOB News Director Ron Perzo (standing) formerly of WWCA and newsman Larry Peterson (seated).



Emery King worked in the news departments of WJOB and WWCA in the 60's and 70's. King has worked for NBC news and has anchored TV news in Detroit.



First traffic reporter in the air Les Downing. He was also a Hammond Police Officer, a pilot, and appeared on TV shows. He passed away on November 10, 1969.



Larry Peterson about 1970 from WJOB's production studio preparing for his daily "Party Line" show.



CALUMET AREA RADIO PERSONALITIES



WNDZ Christian radio (seated) Richard Lindsey, program director, and Rick Schwartz, general manager.



One of the first popular R&B disc jockeys Eddie Honesty on WJOB in 1950.

WJOB

MORNING NEWSMAN  
Larry Peterson

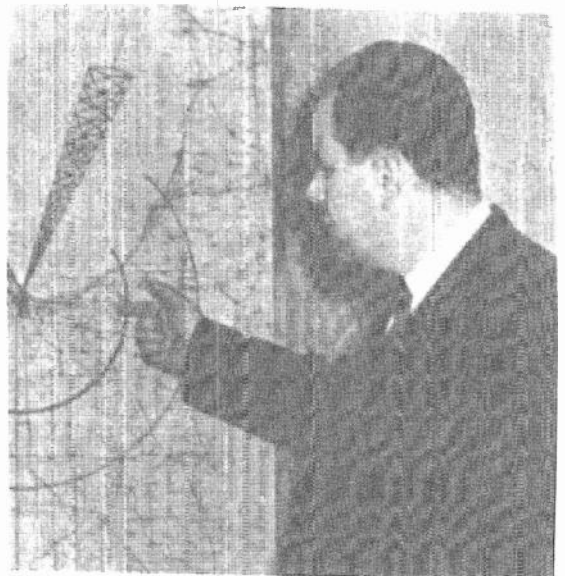
AFTERNOON NEWSMAN  
John Anastaplos

PIIIS---

**NEWS**  
**24 HOURS**  
**A DAY**

**WJOB**  
**RADIO**  
**1230**

**WJOB PAYS CASH FOR**  
**THE THREE TOP NEWS TIP**



Roy Tobin, WJOB and WYCA sales manager.

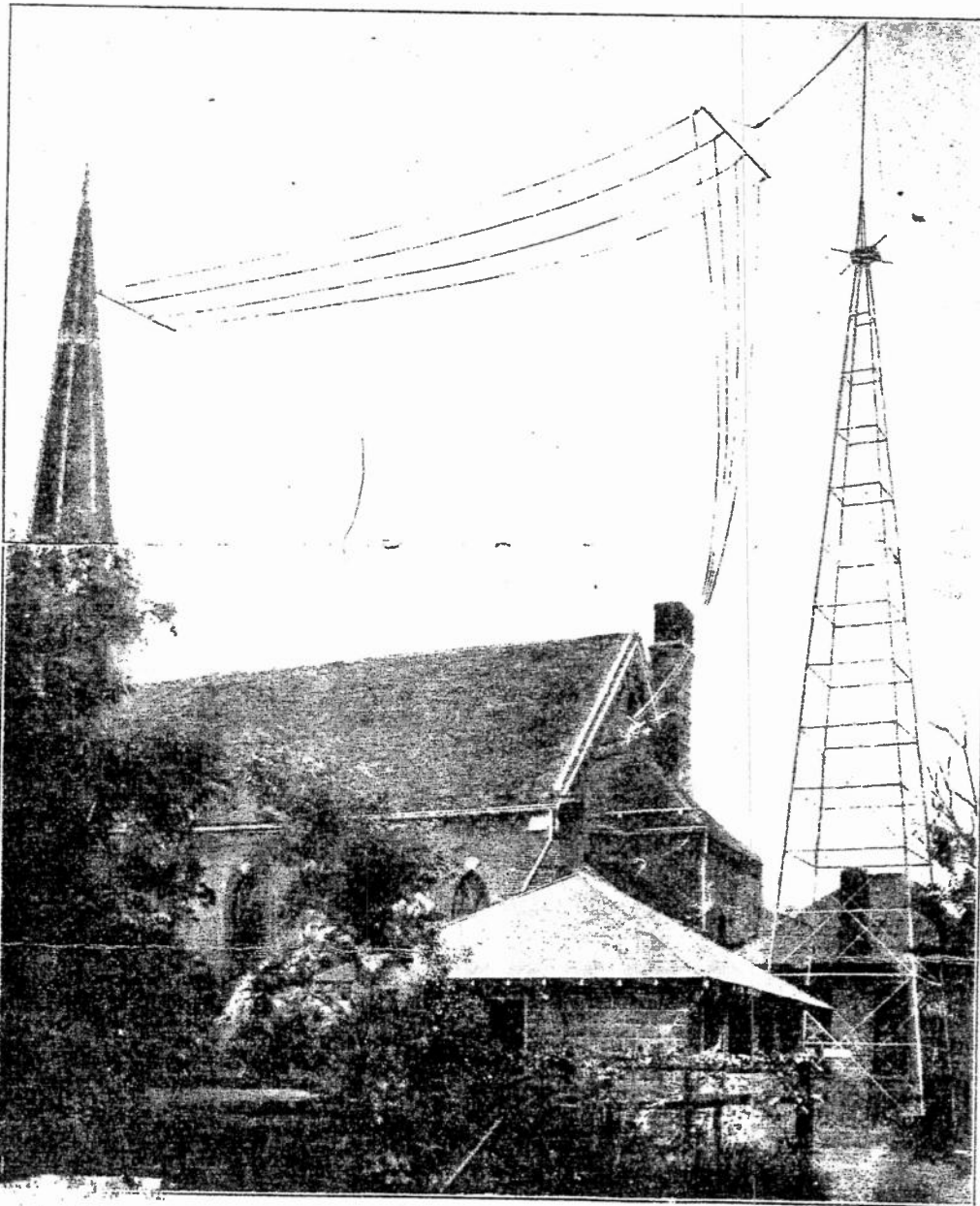
WJOB newsmen John (Big Johnny A) Anastaplos and Larry Peterson in 1971.





**BACCALAUREATE SERVICE  
GRADUATING CLASS  
VALPARAISO HIGH SCHOOL**

**Sunday, May 17th, 1925**

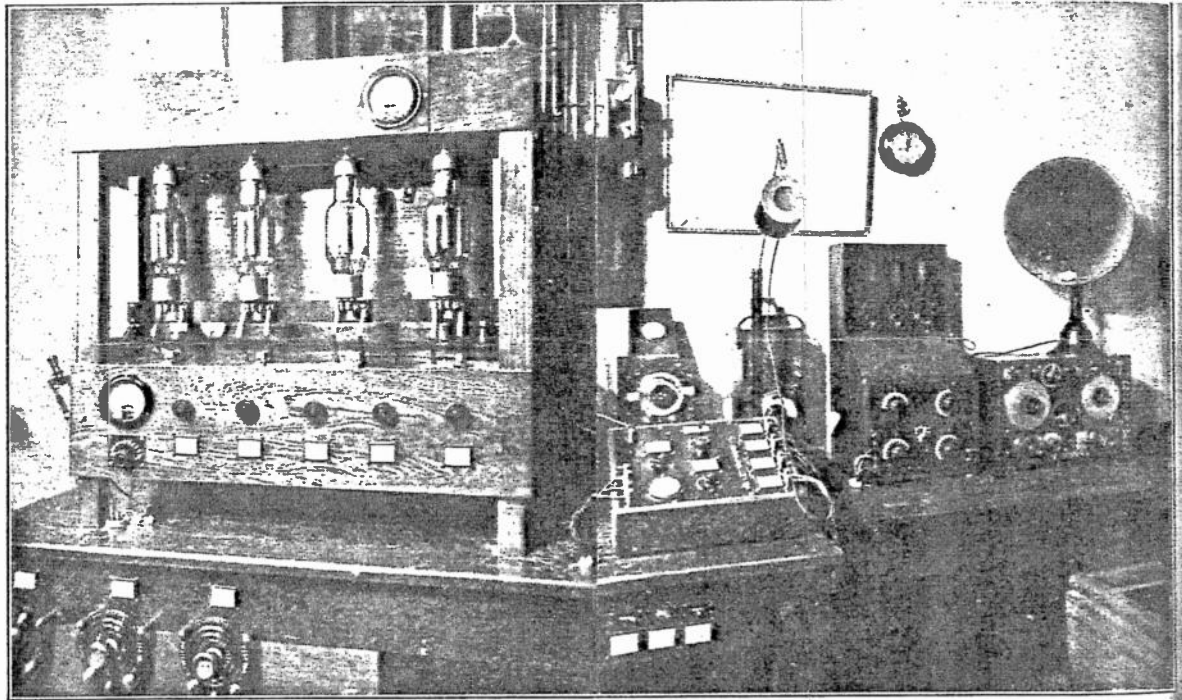


**IMMANUEL LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
**The Service is broadcast over Radio Station W R B C**  
**Owned and operated by this Church.**

WRBC signed on from the Immanuel Lutheran Church in June of 1924. The station's call letters stood for "World Redeemed By Christ." (Photos courtesy of Edgar and Dorcas Luecke)



WRBC, VALPARAISO, INDIANA



Large cabinet contains transmitting apparatus. 2 large tubes to left are oscillators. 2 large tubes to right are modulators. 2 amplifying tubes invisible. Square box in center is control cabinet. Switching to various microphones is made here. Switches in panel of table control signal lights. Cabinets toward left are receivers.  
Mr. Dale Clemmons, Chief Operator

WRBC equipment designed by Dale Clemmons from church news letter.

**RADIO STATION**  
OWNED AND OPERATED BY  
**IMMANUEL LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
VALPARAISO, INDIANA

**W-R-B-C**

"As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord."—Numbers 14, 21

500 Watts  
278 Meters  
1080 Kilocycles

An early station advertisement.



WRBC founder Rev. George F. Schutes, L.L.I







Watching over the controls of Valpo's WRBC is Dale Clemmons, its builder.



Engineer Ron Borden rescues the WLTH transmitter, again.



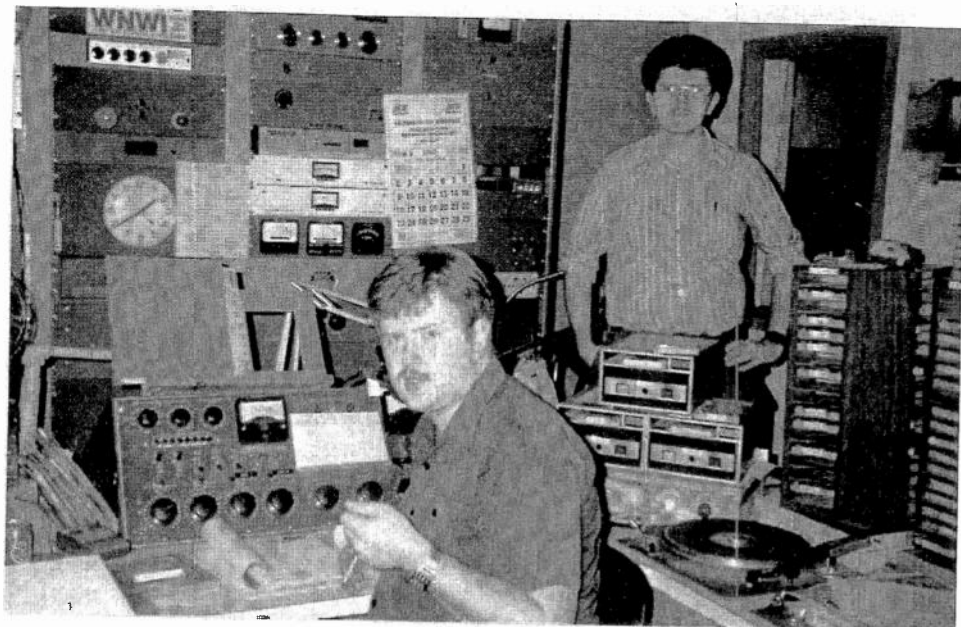
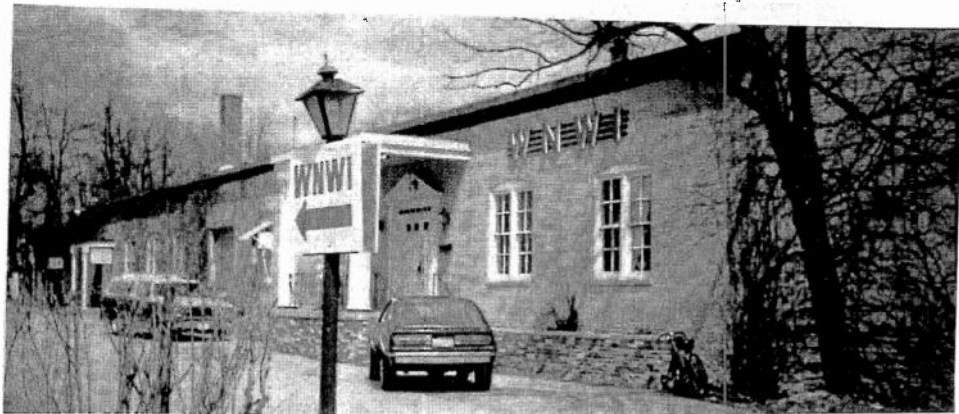
"Hammer the Jammer" (Jeff Hamilton) operates his record store in Merrillville. Also pictured his friend "Wolfman" Jack.





## VALPARAISO RADIO WNWI

A 1965 Vidette-Messenger photo showing G. Edward Hershman (seated) and D. E. Wiggins, engineer, planning WNWI. (below) WNWI studios at 1 Center Street on the VTI Campus, formerly the Dodge School of Telegraphy. WNWI broadcasts with 250 watts daytime and get incredible range with its 10 watt signal at night. (bottom) WNWI employees brothers Marvin (seated) and Jason Walther. The pair are also students at the school.







Len Ellis, owner of WAKE/WLJE, has been active in NW Indiana radio for many years. He built WAKE (WAYK) in 1964. WLJE-FM was added in 1967. Ellis has interviewed many country and western stars and still makes spot appearances.



(above) WAKE studios at 2755 Sager Road. (right) WLJE staffers Gary Gorman (seated) and Dan Lynch, who has worked at several NW Indiana stations.





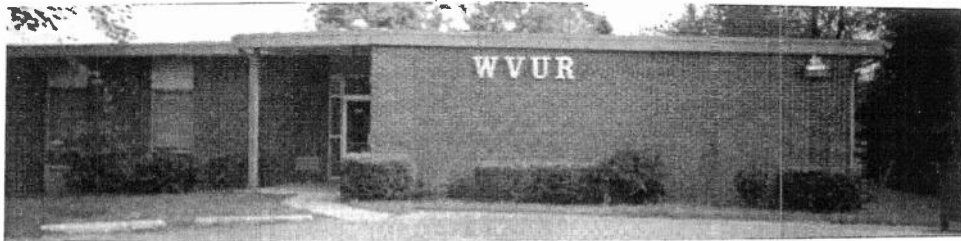
EDUCATIONAL RADIO AT  
ST. JOHN/VALPARAISO/CHESTERTON



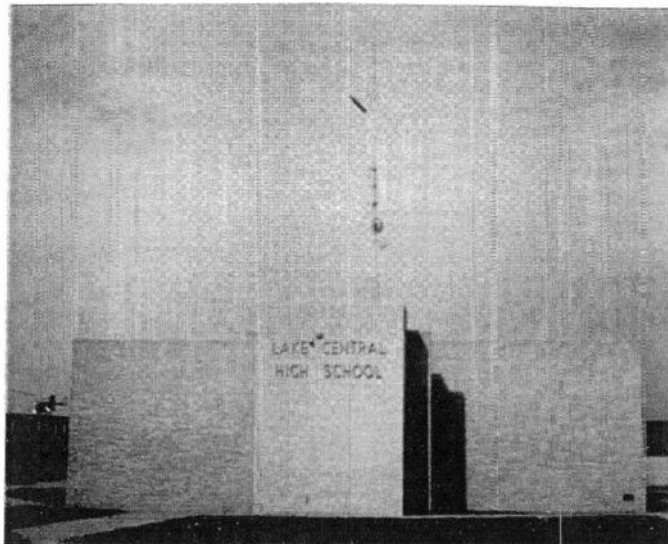
Students Jeff O'Keefe (left) and Chris Planchunas write local newscasts at WDSO, Chesterton High School.



WVUR 's John Sable hopes his campus experience will land him a job in commercial radio.



Valparaiso's WVUR broadcasts from this modern facility on the west side of the campus.

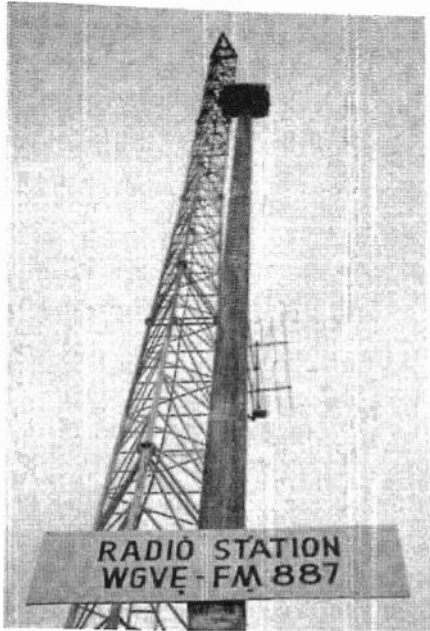


WCAE-TV, channel 50, signed on in September of 1967 and operated until 1982 at Lake Central High School in St. John.





TRADEWINDS RADIO READING SERVICE  
GARY, INDIANA



TWRRS operated off WGVE-FM at the Gary Area Career Center.



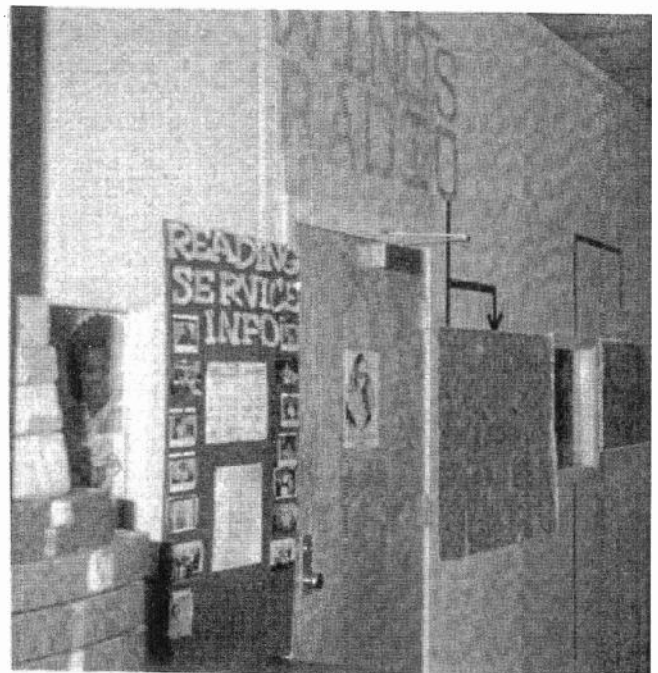
Camille Plautz, a TWRRS volunteer engineer, won the Governor's Award in 1984. She now resides in Florida.



Chicago White Sox star Al Pilarcik pitches a "beep baseball."

TWRRS broadcasted the daily reading of local newspapers plus magazines and special programming. They also had a softball team for the visually impaired adults of the area.

At one time TWRRS operated 60 hours weekly serving the visually impaired in Gary, Indiana beginning in 1979.

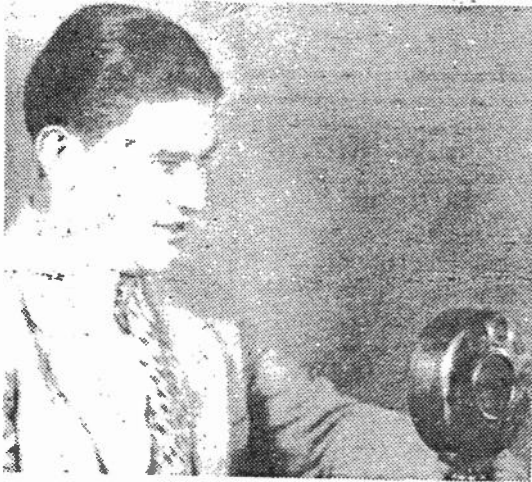


TWRRS operated out of the school garage.





CROWN POINT RADIO



At age 18, Bud Wendel operated WLBT.

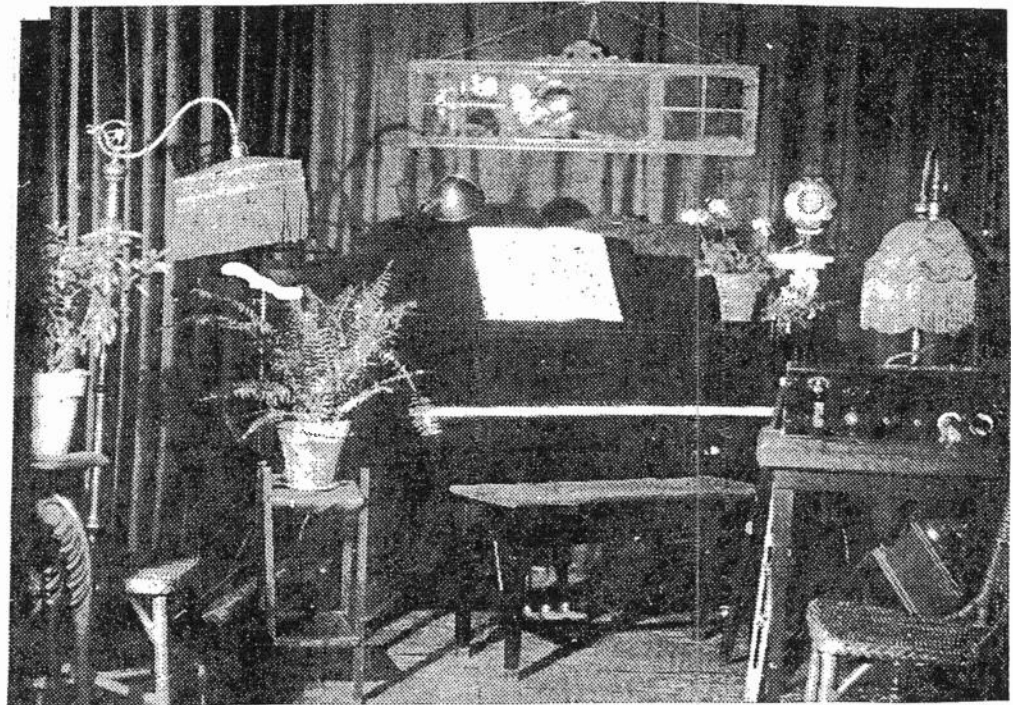


John Meyer of WWJY (WFLM).



WWJY studios in 1991.

PP 73



WLBT studios at 7 N. Court Street with Steinway piano around 1927.







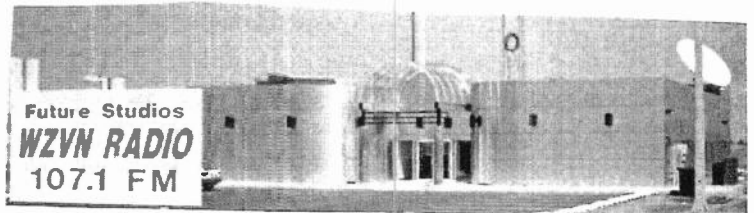
Bill Dunn (left) and Paul Wierman broadcast a tractor pull from the Lake County Fairgrounds (photo by William J. Dunn).



Uncle Don Holt.



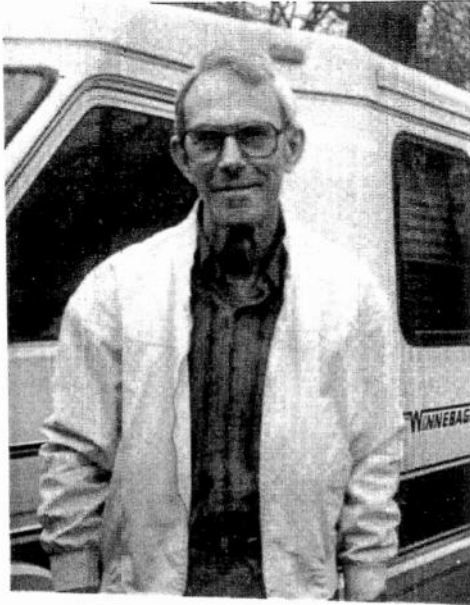
WZVN was purchased by WJOB IN 1986.



New facilities for WZVN in Merrillville.



MR. RADIO FIX-ITS



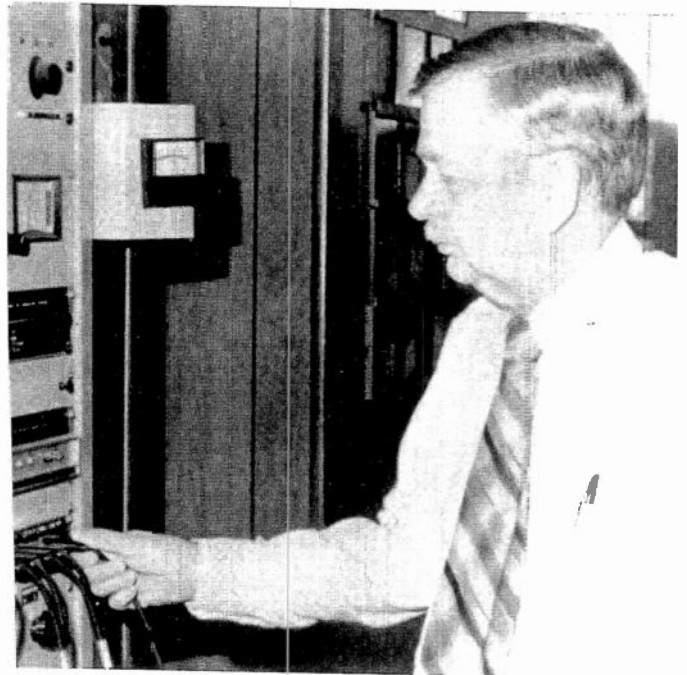
Victor Voss is the former owner of WWCA in Gary. He still maintains WGVE radio. Voss has been in radio since the late 1940s.



WLTH's Ron Borden has done it all: DJ, newsman, engineering. He also does a syndicated music program.



William "Bill" Eisele (N9DUU) has worked at many of the area stations and owned South Shore Radio Telephone in Hammond. He inspired his cousin to write this book.

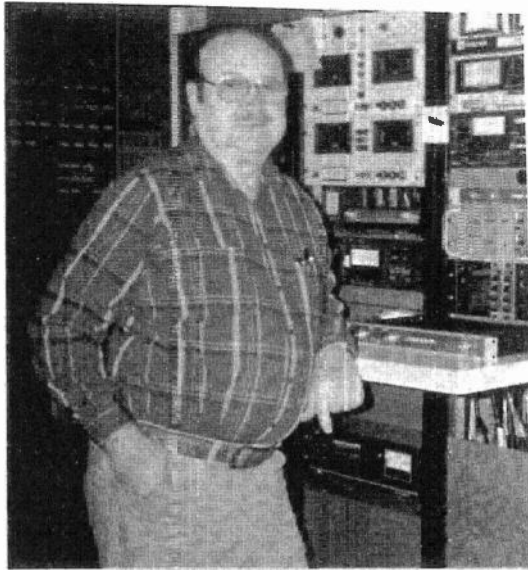


Gordon Boss adjusts the transmitter at WJOB. He has been the station's chief engineer for over 20 years. He start WLNR in 1961.

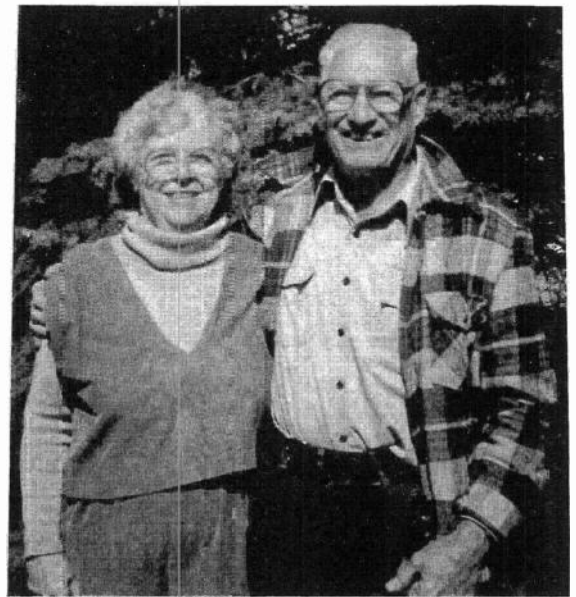




## MR. RADIO FIX-ITS



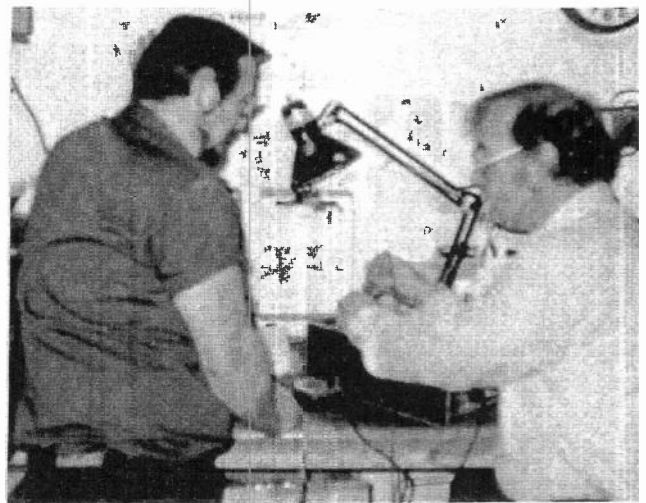
Jess Peters keeps WIND's new spanish music format on the air. Peters has worked for WIND, WJOB (1947-1956), and owned South Shore Radiotelephone. His other credits include SCFL, WLOI, WLNK, and building WXSS for Pervis Spann in Memphis, TN. Peters has been with WIND since 1976.



Peter H. and Helen Van Milligan met and married while both were working as first class radio engineers at WMBI in Chicago. Peter also maintained WLNK and WCGO/WTAS for many years.

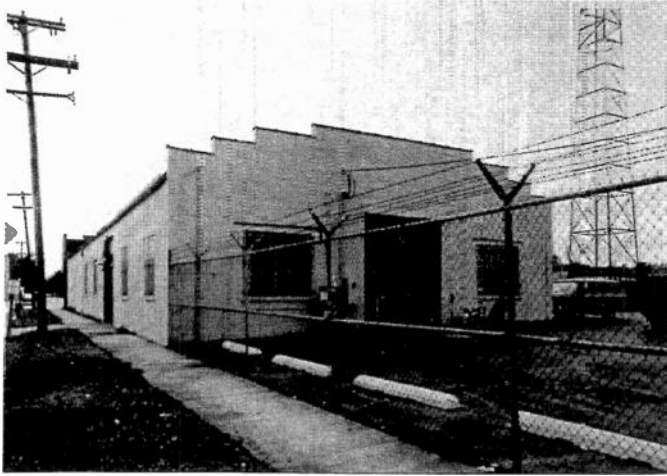


WCGO/WTAS owner-engineer Anthony V. "Tony" Santucci has operated radio stations since the 1940s in Chicago Heights.

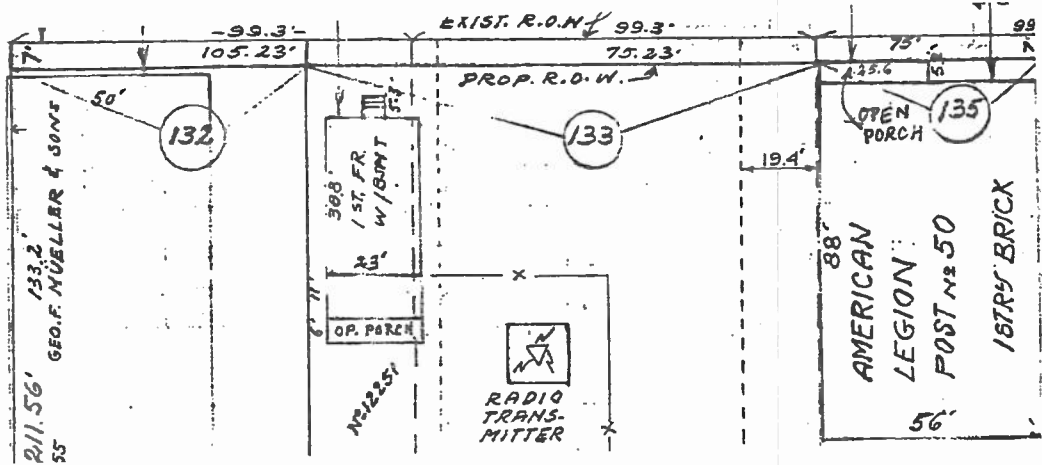


Scott Cordes (left) and Art Reis (K9XI) make up the engineering staff at the satellite music network in Mokena. Reis also worked at WMCW and WIVS.





(left) George Mueller's warehouse and WRBI tower. (center) "The Bad Luck Corner" at the NE corner of 123rd and Western. (below) L. NaDean McKeever's diploma from the Radio Institute signed by George Courier and Doris Keane.



NE corner of 123rd and Western.

PP 77

# Radio Institute of Chicago

This Certifies that

**L. Na Dean McKeever**

*has honorably completed the two year course of instruction, has satisfactorily passed all the required examinations, and merits this*

## Diploma

In Witness Whereof Our signatures are hereunto affixed  
*this 30<sup>th</sup> day of June 1948*

*G. F. Courier*

Dean

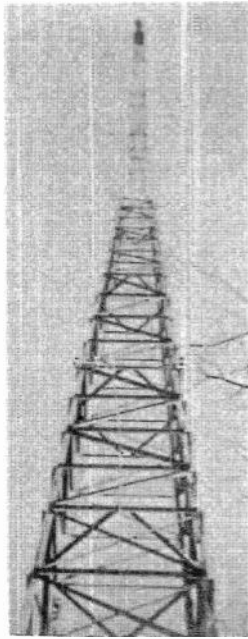
*Doris Keane*

Managing Director

L. NaDean McKeever's diploma.







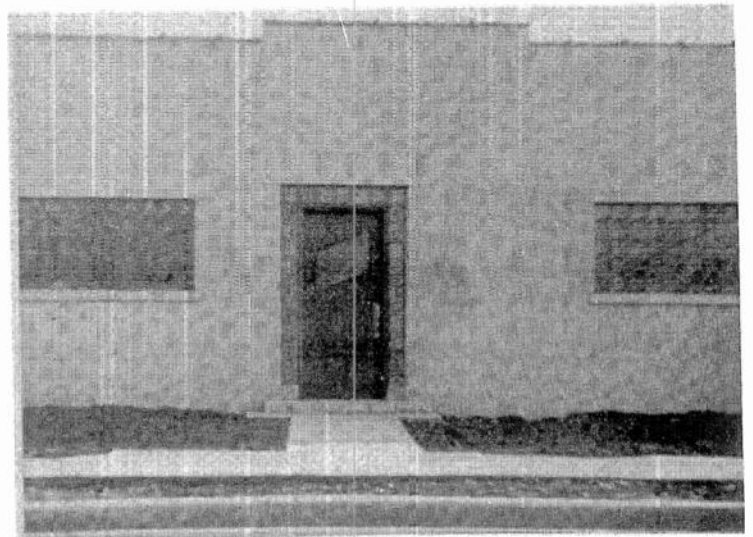
WRBI tower stood behind the studios.



WRBI builders and staff in 1949. (front, seated) Tom Mannos. (left to right) John Svejda, "Doc" Barbone, Mike Dyk, and L. NaDeen McKeever. (Photo by John Michael Wollner)



John Michael Wollner, station manager in 1949.



Built by staffers, this is the just completed building in 1949.

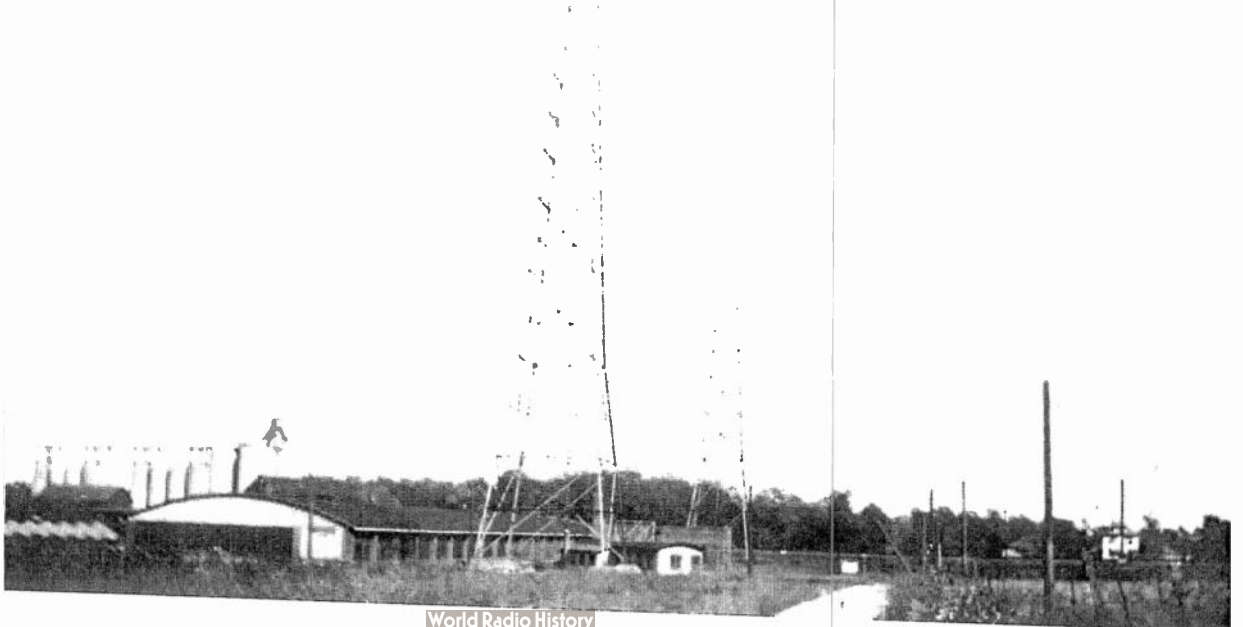


Call letters were placed on the building later (photo courtesy of Blue Island Sun Standard).





The charred remains of the Parson's Ammonia Plant, west side of building. This portion of the structure housed radio station WOK which was owned by the Neutrowound Radio Company and operated in the 1920s. (below) A 1931 photo showing the plant and adjacent coal yard. Condos occupy this land today. (Photos courtesy of Arthur Sonyly, Marion Moore, Bertram Heuer, Dr. Ralph Muchow, and the Homewood Historical Society).

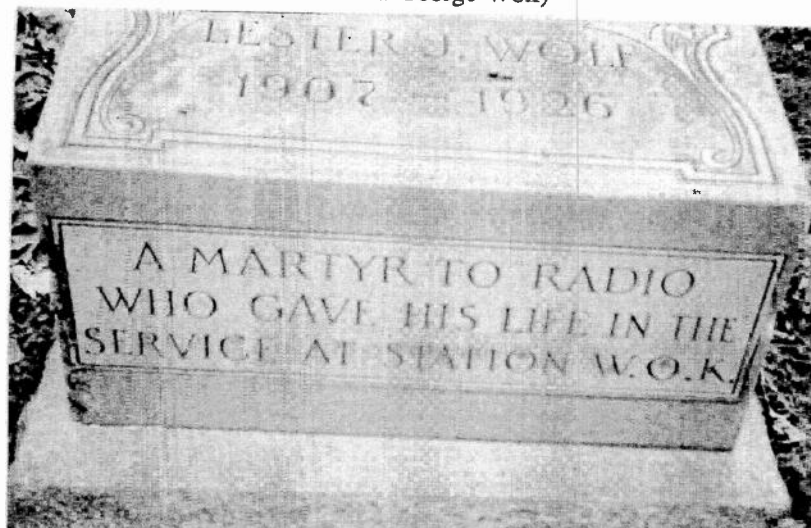




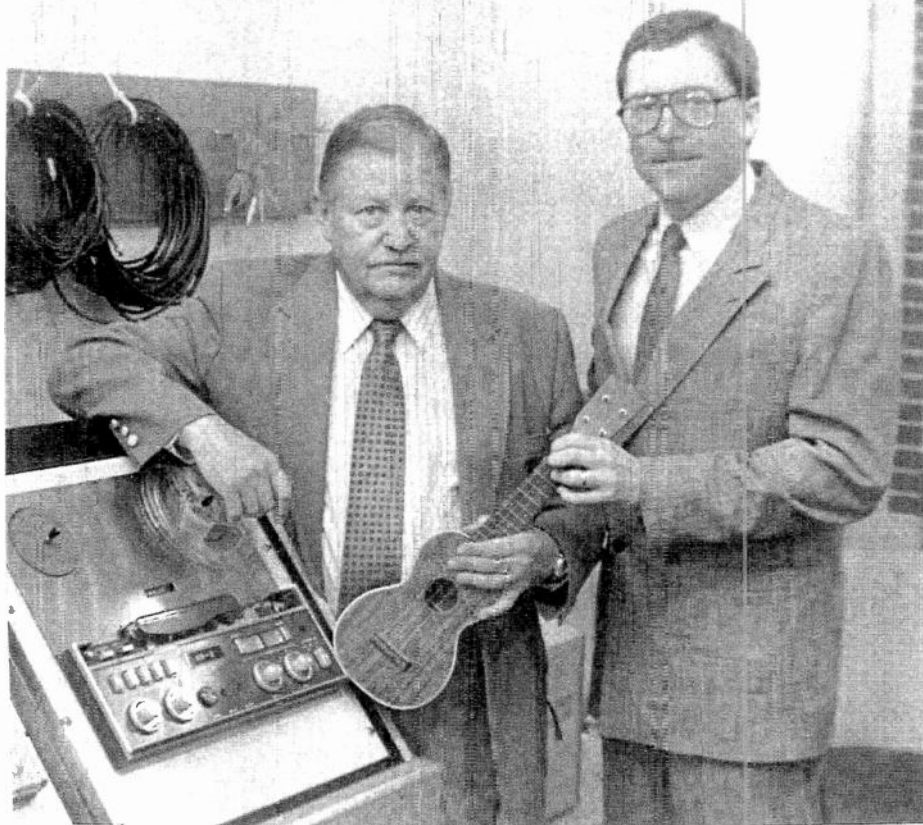




At age 19, Lester J. Wolf (Ukulele Les), and engineer at WOK, Homewood, was electrocuted in 1926. (below) Wolf's tombstone in Section A at Homewood Memorial Gardens. (Photo courtesy of Bob Anderson and George Wolf)







Homewood Village Trustee George Wolf (left) and Prairie State Public Relations Director Bob Anderson display the instrument played by Ukulele Les. Lester J. Wolf was George's uncle and Bob's great uncle. A special fund was set up in honor of Lester (see telegram below), but someone stole all the money that was later raised.

CLASS OF SERVICE	SYMBOL
TELEGRAM	
DAY LETTER	BLUE
NIGHT MESSAGE	NITE
NIGHT LETTER	N L

# WESTERN UNION

# TELEGRAM

CLASS OF SERVICE	SYMBOL
TELEGRAM	
DAY LETTER	BLUE
NIGHT MESSAGE	NITE
NIGHT LETTER	N L

NEWCOMB CARLTON, PRESIDENT      J. C. WILLEVER, FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT

The filing time as shown in the date line on full-rate telegrams and day letters, and the time of receipt at destination as shown on all messages, is STANDARD TIME.

Received at 1459 East 53d St., Chicago, Ill. Telephone Midway 4321

A125C WP21 2 EXTRA

ZG NEWYORK NY 1159A JUL 12 1926

WOK

125 1600 HYDEPARK BLVD CHICAGO ILL

WOULD YOU APPROVE NATIONAL MOVEMENT MEMORIALIZING LESTER WOLF AND  
DEVELOPING FUND FOR HIS FAMILY THE FIRST MARTYR IN BROADCASTING

CHARLES D ISAACSON      STATION WRNY

12P





OLD SCENES FROM HOMEWOOD  
AND CRETE RADIO



A 4th of July parade before 1950 showing the old Mertin House (right, center), later home of carrier current station WQAT. The Kroger and Community Drug Store was not yet built. (Photo courtesy of Tom Kelly, Margret Kuch, and Bertram Heuer of the Homewood Historical Society)

PP 82



First transmitter site for WLS, the "Prairie Farmer Station" in 1929. This location is at 1712 Dixie Highway in Crete, which today is the Queen's Estate Mobile Home Park.





Quin Morrison operates the controls of WQAT, Homewood.



homewood-flossmoor jaycees  
'HOME-ARAMA 1959'

Homewood's first station since the 1920s, WQAT, operated near the downtown section of the city from 1956-1959. At the home show (front left), Cosmo Carrier, George Waters, Phil Harper, and a city official. Morrison is at the controls. Many of the above staffers went into commercial radio.





SUBURBAN RADIO FACES



WAIT's Gene Davis entertains with contemporary music in the afternoons.



Young Roland G. Pamler in 1926 opened WCBZ, Chicago Heights' first station.



WQAT's Dick Thornburg takes a regular turn on the air over Homewood's carrier current station in the 1950s.





WQAT's Quin Morrison.



Annette Flournoy of WBEE.



WYCA's Alice Frame.



The Boss, Charles Erbstein of WTAS.





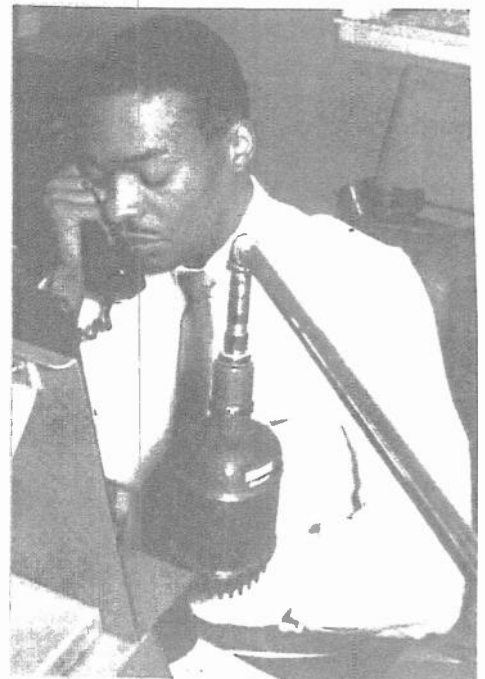
RADIO MEMORIES



Illegal station WCYA operated at 950 khz about 1965 from South Holland. This photo was taken when I was about 16, and with other neighborhood children we would play records and read the news on this unique station.

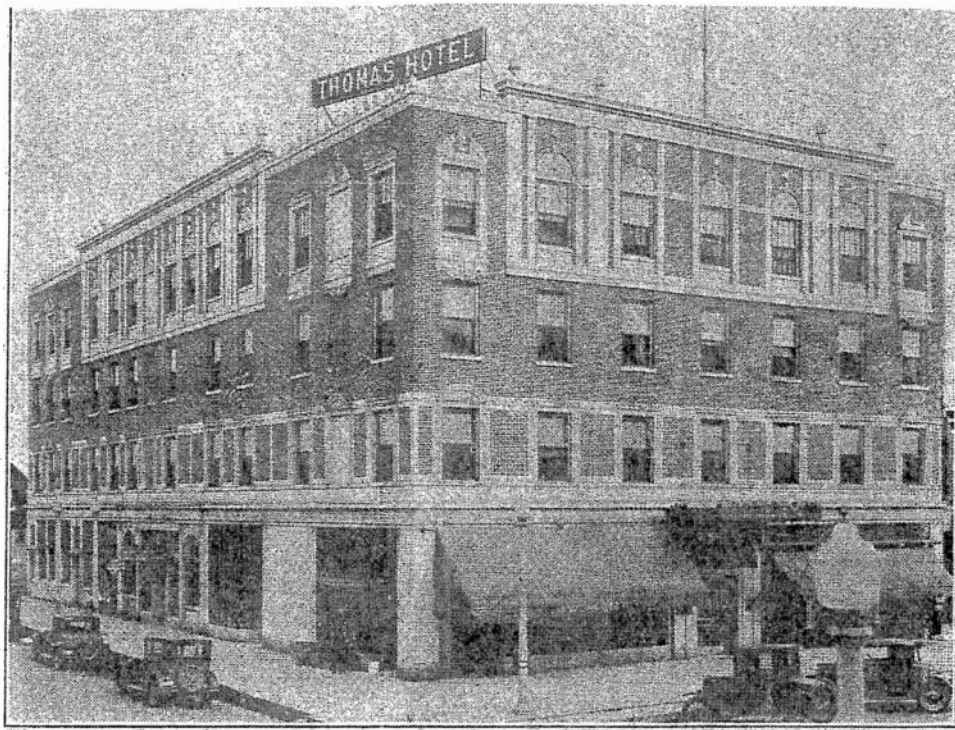


Shadow Traffic's flying Don Nelson worked for WLS and several Indiana stations.



In 1956, one of WBEE's popular DJ's was Herb Kent "The Cool Gent." He later worked for WVON.





The once elite Thomas Hotel, located at 1703 Halsted Street, was built around 1922. WJBZ operated out of the fourth floor. The hotel was managed by Theodore Williams and was named after the city's first mayor, John W. Thomas, who passed away in 1908. Al Capone's men lived on the second floor. Described as the most attractive building in the city, it was leveled in the early 1970s. (below) Ads for Coppotelli's Music Store in the 1920s (courtesy of the Chicago Heights Star).

**Here It Is!---**

**THE 1925 OPERADIO**

— AT —

**COPPOTELLI BROTHERS**

*The truly Wireless Radio with many remarkable new features*

- No Wires or Connections.
- A Real Portable.
- The Original Self-Contained Radio Set.
- A Six-Tube Set.
- Two Dials Do All the Tuning.
- Take it with you wherever you go.



COME IN AND HEAR IT OR ASK FOR A DEMONSTRATION.

We have many other good makes of Radios, including Radiola, Super-Heterodyne, Freshman, Grebe, Crosley, Zenith and others.

Exclusive agents in this territory for the **Brunswick-Radiolas**

**Coppotelli Bros.**

EVERYTHING MUSICAL

20 Illinois Street Telephone 2015

Our Latest Announcement

**Coppotelli Bros.**  
Formerly Swanson's Music Store

We are sole agents here for the celebrated

**Kimball**

Musical Instruments

Kimball Phonographs

Piano Music Rolls

and the great "Okeh Records"

20 Illinois St. Chicago Heights, Ill.



**Okeh Records**

FOR JUNE JUST OUT





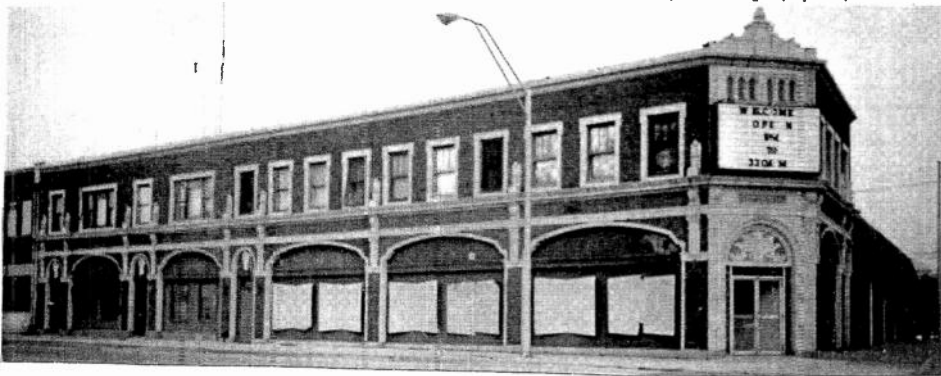
## CHICAGO HEIGHTS RADIO



Roland G. Pamler (1962). His early background in amateur radio, broadcasting, and electronics, lead to later developments in microwave cooking and space technology.

(center) The abandoned Wehrmann Building at 15th and Emerald. Henry Wehrmann, a Hudson care dealer, built a sound proof studio for WCBZ around 1925. WCBZ had been moved from the Coppotelli Music House.

(bottom) Anthony Coppotelli and 13 year old son Ron about 1953. Ron owns Glenwood TV and Electronics. (Photos by Ruby Pamler and Ron Coppotelli)



"Rollie" Pamler and Anthony Coppotelli operated WCBZ in the Wehrman Building in 1925.



Anthony and Ron Coppotelli.



STATION LICENSE-----  
CLASS: BROADCASTING.  
-----

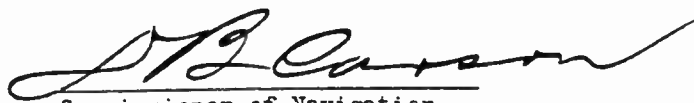
Roland G. Pamler is hereby licensed to operate a radio transmitting station and all apparatus incidental to or used in connection therewith, upon the terms and conditions following:

1. The owner of the station is R. G. Pamler - A. Coppotelli,
2. Its location is 139 East 23rd Street, Chicago Heights, Illinois.
3. The purpose for which said station is licensed is the carrying on of general broadcasting for public information, instruction, amusement or entertainment.
4. The wave length designated by the station as its normal sending wave is 419.3 meters, 715 kilocycles.
5. The hours for which the station is licensed are not limited.
6. The President of the United States in time of war or public peril or disaster may cause the closing of this station and the removal therefrom of all radio apparatus, or may authorize the use or control of the station or apparatus by any department of the Government, upon just compensation to the owners.
7. The operator of the station shall not wilfully or maliciously interfere with any radio communication from another station.
8. All operations of the station shall conform to the laws of the United States, and the provisions of any international treaty or convention to which the United States is a party.
9. This license will continue in force for three months from its date.

This license is issued pursuant to the Act of Congress of August 13, 1912, entitled, "An Act to Regulate Radio Communication," and is subject to the restrictions and regulations therein contained.

Done at Washington, D. C., this 24th day of November, 19 26.

S E A L

  
Commissioner of Navigation.

HERBERT HOOVER  
Secretary of Commerce.

HVC

Copy of broadcast license issued to Roland G. Pamler for station WJBZ in 1926 (courtesy of Ruby Pamler).





# CHICAGO HEIGHTS RADIO



WCGO News Director Jim Crockett in 1989.

WCGO has always been the area's information station. (right) Members of the "Good Times" band do their "Blues Brothers" act. They were featured on WCGO/WTAS. (bottom) Roland Pamler and Anthony Coppotelli operated station WJBZ from this home in 1927. Poles holding up the antenna stood in the back yard.



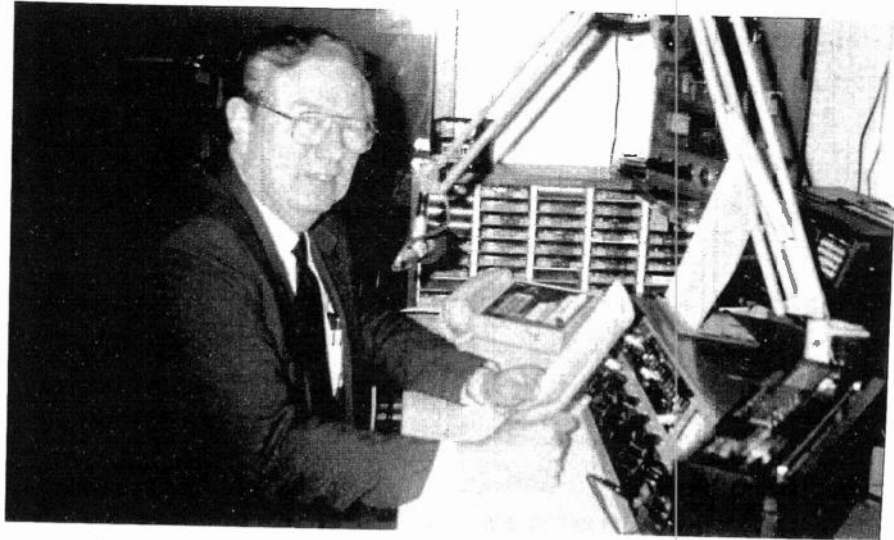
Bob Nagy (left) and Richard Dominiak.



183 E. 24th Street, owned today by Joseph Petrongelli.



CHICAGO HEIGHTS RADIO



WCGO/WTAS newsman Earl Vieaux has been a veteran pilot, engineer, and news report for over 50 years in the Calumet area.



Tony Santucci does a weekday morning show on WCGO. His father owns the station.



Controversial talk show host Warren Freiberg shares his viewpoints with listeners on WTAS. Warren has also worked at WLTH, WLNR, and WCIU-TV.







Former WJOB disc jockey Dale Zahn is now a successful realtor for Coldwell Banker in Park Forest. Zahn also worked for WCGO and WJRC.



The WBEE studios in Harvey at 157th and Campbell.



Popular Jazz DJ Marty Faye.

PP 92



WBEE Announcer Emile McKendall ..



SUBURBAN RADIO



WLNR, Lansing Studios in 1962, at 2915 Bernice Road. (Photo courtesy of Carol Kelly, Kevin Beese, Star-Tribune)



Same location as above, 20 years later, now owned by Johnson Products.



Former home of WVTV, Dundee. The station's studios owned by Richard Prather are still intact upstairs at 111 W. Main Street.





WTAS, CRETE/BEECHER, ILLINOIS



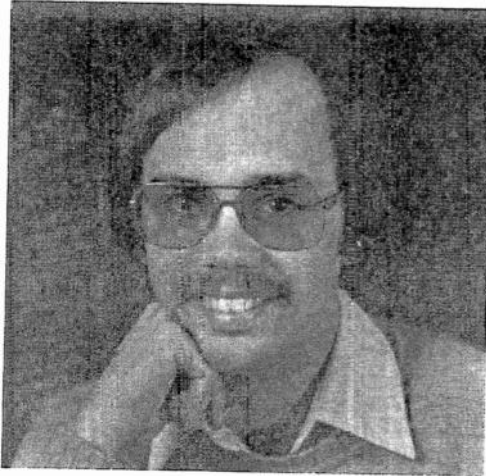
John "Records" Russell operates the automated assist equipment at WTAS during a weekend shift in 1981.



WTAS studios on Route 1 S/O Beecher, operated by remote control from Chicago Heights.



# WBYG-FM 99.9



**Ken Zyer**  
Mornings



**Bill Taylor**  
Afternoons



**Christie Kayhill**  
Evenings



**Jim Murphy**  
(and the Murph-Tones)  
All Night

1980s air staff at WBYG, the "Air Force." Jim Murphy is now program director at WJTW, Joliet. WBYG later became WBUS. (Photo courtesy of Bill Taylor, Kankakee County Convention and Visitors Association)





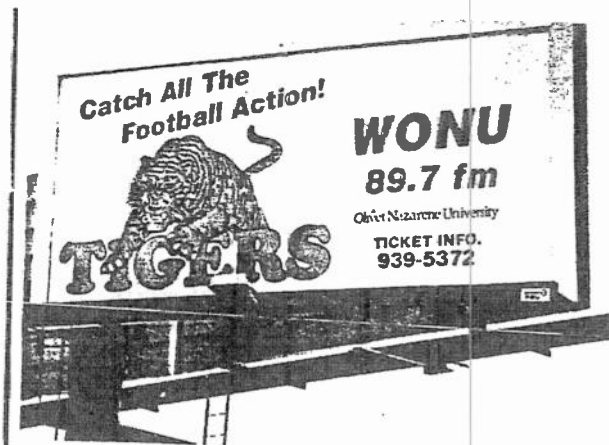
## KANKAKEE RADIO



In 1975 WKAN moved to new studios at Dearborn Square. WLRT-FM signed on in 1986.



The "Bus" provides popular music and community service for its listeners.



Tiger football and WONU radio joined forces to advertise Olivet on billboards in Bourbonnais, Kankakee and surrounding towns. All home and away football and men's basketball games are aired on the 35,000 watt station at 89.7 on the FM dial. The signal has been heard from 60 to 100 miles from the campus in every direction.

The Olivetian/July-Aug. '89/Vol. 57, #7

The new WONU-FM at Olivet Nazarene University features inspirational programming, Tiger football, and 35,000 watts of power. (Courtesy of the Olivetian)





Dine while they broadcast from



Station WNBA



# TRIANGLE CAFE



Desplaines Ave.  
and Harrison Street.

Forest Park,  
Illinois

Most Popular Cafe in Suburbs

*Music, Dancing and  
Entertainment*

Chicken and Steak Dinners  
American and Chinese Dishes

BANQUETS AND WEDDINGS A  
SPECIALTY

For Reservations Phone Forest  
1248, 414 or 499

M. T. RAFFERTY, Prop.



(above) M. T. Rafferty's Triangle Cafe in 1931. Two towers were located on the roof and were possibly used later by WHFC in Cicero. This is one of several photos by Arthur B. Sonyly (W9GIZ). (left) WNBA ad from the Forest Park Review in 1972. (bottom) Sonyly's photo of aviation radio station KDA believed located on the Hines Hospital property, N/O 22nd Street and Penn Central Tracks on First Avenue in Maywood (around 1933).







## WHFC RADIO IN CICERO

WHFC owner Congressman Richard W. Hoffman was a part owner of the Cicero Life Newspaper.

In later years, the station's call letters stood for Hoffman For Congress.

(below) The Olympic Theatre building as it looks today. A large antenna system was once located on its roof. The structure was also known as the Sokol Slavsky Building. Entrance was on the east side on 61st Court. (Photo courtesy of Cicero Life)

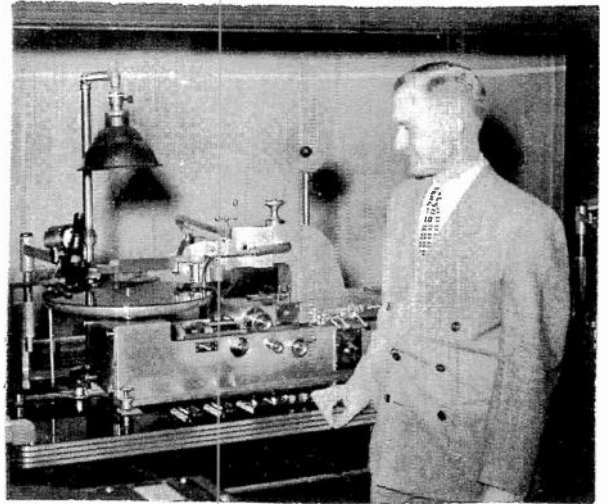




WHFC, CICERO PERSONALITIES IN 1949



Man on the Street Reporter Norm Palmer.



Engineer Bob Smith looks over a Scully Recording Lathe. Bob worked for NBC and WHFC in 1951.



Jack Odell later produced the popular "Unshackled" religious radio drama program for the Pacific Garden Mission.



Lee Bigos also worked for NBC in 1957 and WRGK in Brookfield.





*Introducing*  
**JIMMY HARPER**

**ANOTHER OF THE SHINING STARS  
WHO KEEPS THE KILOCYCLES HAPPY**

**AT 1450  
ON YOUR DIAL**

You can hear Jimmy from 11 P.M. to midnight projecting his pleasing personality on that popular request hour.

**"THE FRIENDLY  
TAVERN"**

Make WHFC Your Daily Listening Habit  
for Music—News—West Towns Topics



**1450 K.C.**

**On Your Dial**

**FOR YOUR FM LISTENING PLEASURE TUNE IN WEHS, 97.9 m.c.  
ON THE AIR FROM 10 A.M. TO 9 P.M. DAILY**

Jimmy Harper was one of many popular announcers at WHFC. (Photo courtesy of Ethel Carraro, Life Printing and Publishing Co.)



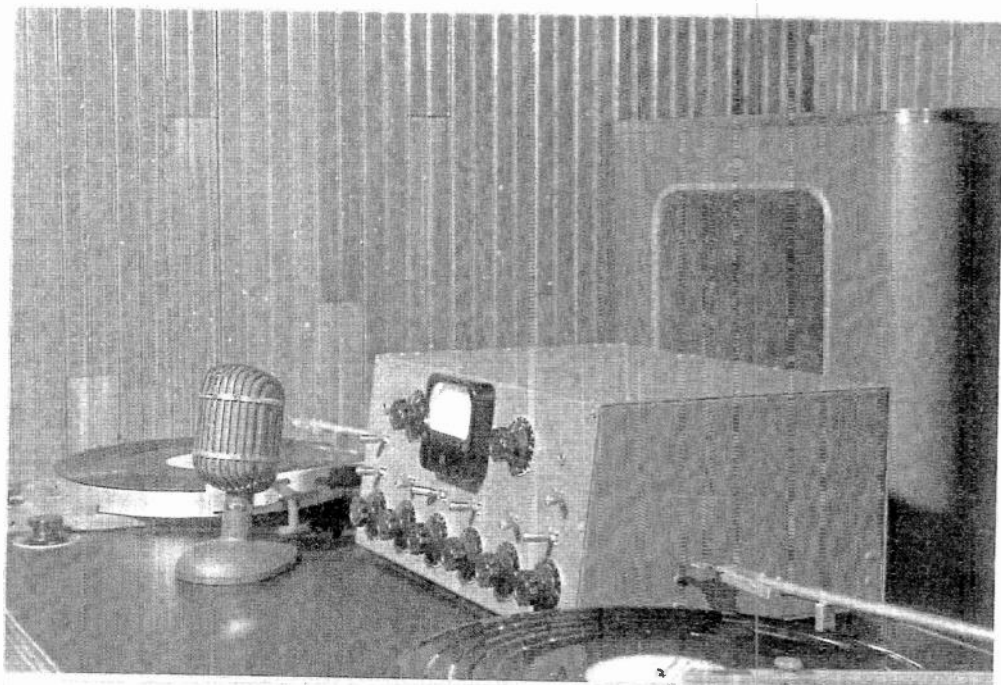
WRGK BROOKFIELD



In 1947 WRGK operated out of the Ives' home at 4221 Arthur Street.



George and Rose Ives in the 1960s. They now reside in California.



The WRGK console equipment in 1947. The station's transmitter was on the back porch of the home (pictured above).





EDUCATIONAL RADIO  
ARGO H.S., SUMMIT, ILLINOIS



Candi LeGrand is one of 90 students working at WARG.

THE RADIO

# WARG

ALTERNATIVE  
88.9 FM

WARG 88.9 FM -- 1989 MANAGEMENT

Ralph Beliveau	General Manager
Larry Moran	Station Manager
Lazar Mavrenovic	Program Director
Ron Oglesby	Chief Engineer
Charlotte Bachelor	Development Director
Natasha Sintich	Co-Music Director
Shawn Sapienza	Co-Music Director
Kevin Hargis	News Director
Amanda Hall	Traffic Director
Dave Johnson	Sports Director
Jon Call	Production Director
Tony Samoska	Special Programs Director
Steven Fill	Promotions Director



EDUCATION RADIO  
LYONS TOWNSHIP/HOMEWOOD-FLOSSMOOR



Lisa Bolin is one of many student announcers at WLTL.



Former WLTL announcer John Toth is now at SIU.

(Photos courtesy of John Wiesemes)



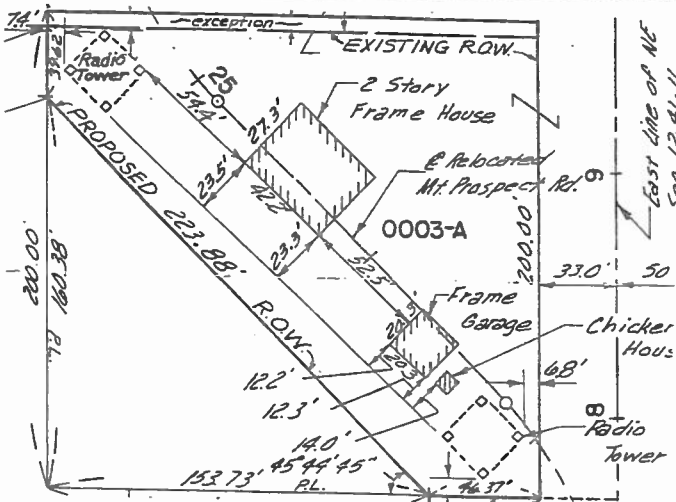
Broadcast students John Anker (left) and Amy Floyd share radio skills at "South Side Rock," at WHFH. (Photo courtesy of Betty Curvey, Homewood-Flossmoor High School)





W  
J  
A  
Z

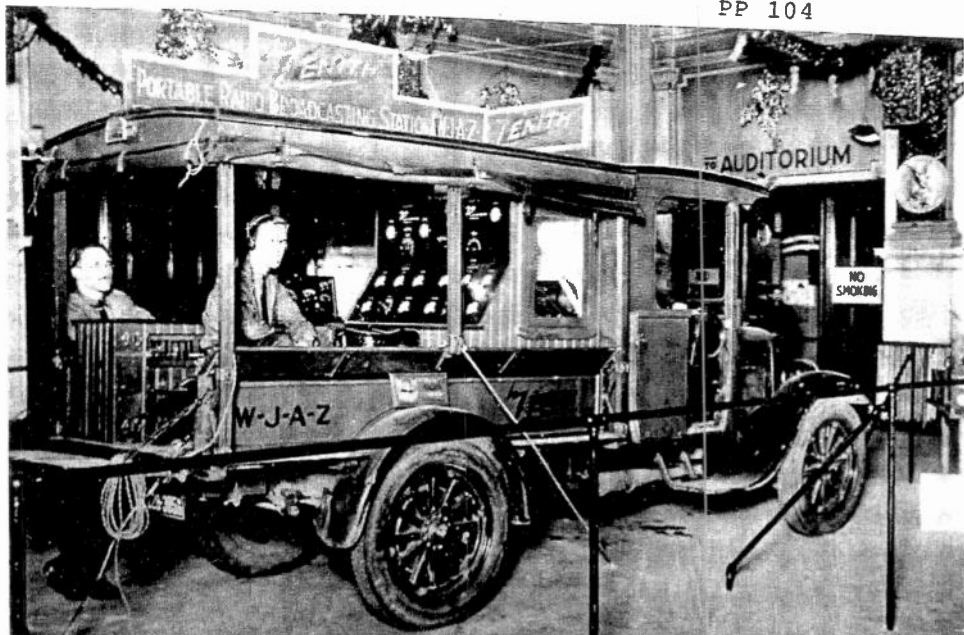
W  
J  
A  
Z



(top) WJAZ transmitter site at Rand and Central.  
(left) IDOT diagram for road right of way.

(bottom) WJAZ in its portable years. (Photo courtesy of John I. Taylor, Zenith)

This site stood for many years near Mt. Prospect.







An unidentified announcer spins records at WNWC in the early 1960s. (Photo by Jon Woods)

**SPECIAL FOR THE WEEK**  
 25 lbs. Purina ..... \$2.55 per bag  
 50 lbs. Ken-L-Biskit, small ..... \$5.50 bag

**WILD BIRD SEED**

**Race & Quarter Horse Feeds**  
 Fortified with necessary vitamins.  
 Stamm — Baker's Speed — Omdeline  
 Race Horse Oats — Hay — Straw

**DOG FOOD**  
 Ken-L-Ration, Ken-L-Biskit, Ken-L-Meal, Friskies,  
 Purina Dog Food, Evanger's Horse Meat, Evanger's 100% Beef, Art Dog Food, Mellody and Mello Crunch All Beef, Vitality.

**QUANTITY DISCOUNTS**

- Staley Hog, Poultry and Dairy Feed
- Stock Tanks — Fencing of all kinds
- Barb Wire, Baling Wire and Twine
- Fertilizers for farm and home
- Lawn Seeds — Peat Moss

**John Henricks**  
 INCORPORATED  
 Hay, Straw and Grain of all kinds  
 Store Rd. and Rte. 12      Arlington Heights  
 CL 3-0185      Open 7 to 5, Saturday to Noon

**Distance!**  
*Tune and Selectivity*

— see early ad on p. 105 for the "little" wonder, the No. 770 Globe DuoDyne Receiver

**GLOBE DUODYNE RECEIVERS**

**W.M. BUSSE & SON, Inc.**

**Wm. Busse & Son**  
 Incorporated  
**BUILDER'S HARDWARE**  
 Maytag and Horton Washers  
 Vacuum Cleaners and All Electrical Appliances  
 Everything in Hardware

(left) A 1960s ad from the Daily Herald for a local feed store that was once located across from WNWC. (right) A 1926 Cook County Herald ad for William Busse's radio shop. Busse was the mayor of Mt. Prospect from 1917-1929.







Long time Chicago radio personality Dick Biondi of WJMK (Magic 104) is interviewed by WNWC's Jon Woods about 1961. Biondi worked for WLS at the time. (Photo by John G. Woods)



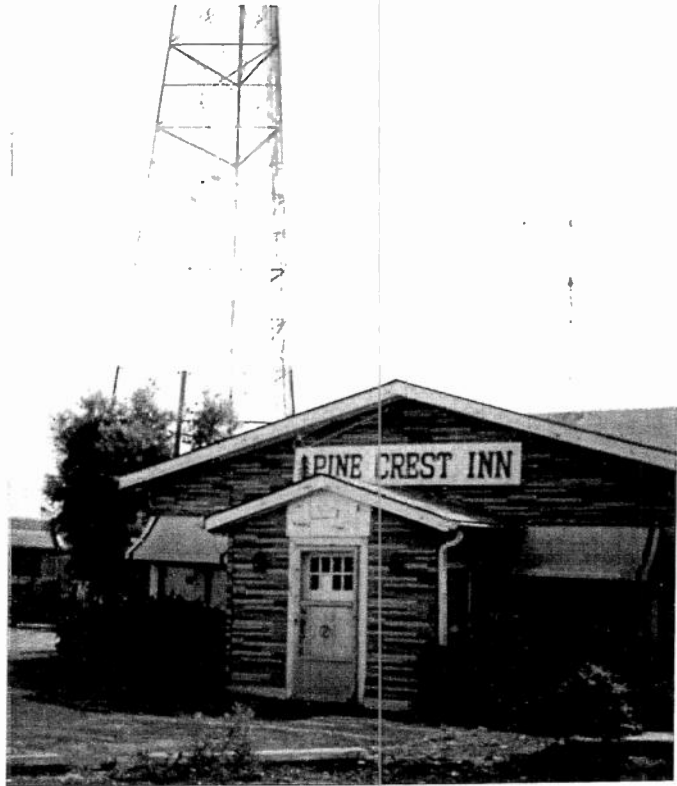
## ARLINGTON HEIGHTS RADIO

(right) Old WNWC tower behind the J&J Pine Crest Tavern.

The studio building was removed sometime in the middle 1960s.

The tower today is used for two-way radio operations.

This is the SW corner of Arlington Heights Road and Rand Road.



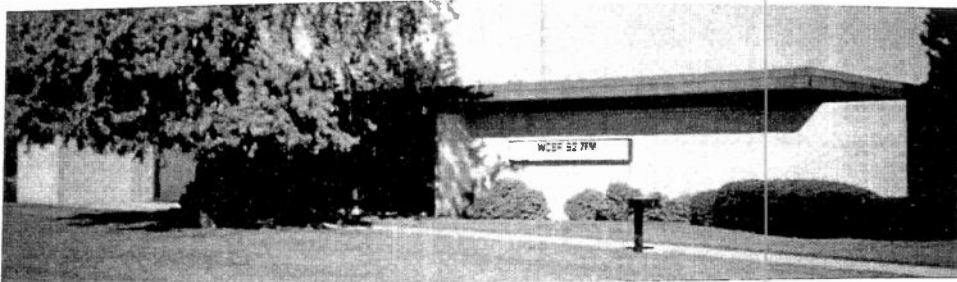
**WNWC — 92.7 FM**  
Arlington Heights, Illinois • Clearbrook 9-1030  
*Serving Over Two Million People*

---

RADIO ADVERTISING PAYS

WNWC stationary about 1962 by V & G Printers.  
(Courtesy of John G. Woods)

PP 107



WNWC is now known as WCBR at 120 West University Drive.





ARLINGTON HEIGHTS RADIO

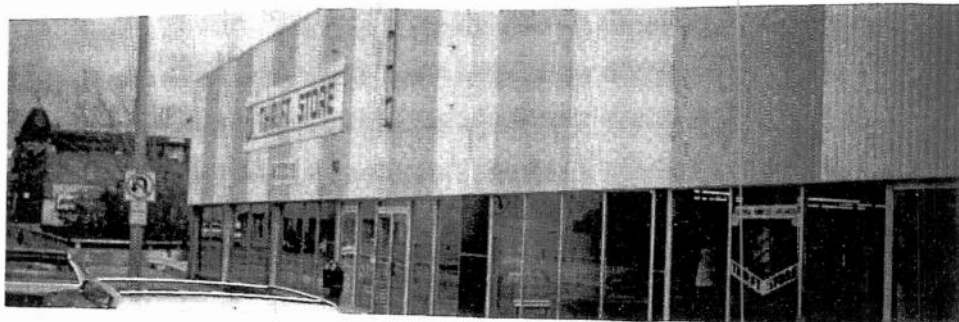


Country and Western singer Bob Atcher, formerly the owner of WNWC and the mayor of Schaumburg, still performing at age 78 years young.





Boxing champ Jack Dempsey (left) shares a secret with former WPEP radio station owner and Waukegan policeman Maurice Mayer.



Former WPEP studios at 133 Genesee Street in Waukegan, now a resale shop.





## WAUKEGAN RADIO

One of the oldest stations in Northern Illinois is WKRS. (right) Liz Dvorack entertains at WKRS's sister station WXLC-FM, HOT 102.3.

(center) WKRS/WXLC studios and transmitter site at Knight and Belvidere Roads located just west of Waukegan, Illinois.



WKRS-AM broadcasts with 1,000 watts; WXLC-FM is 3,000 watts.



Radio station WHT, Bannockburn/Deerfield along Waukegan Road in the 1920s.





Father Charles E. Coughlin

**Broadcasting from  
WORD**

Columbia Conservatory will be on the air Thursday broadcasting from the new station WORD from 1 to 3 o'clock. Tune in on this powerful station located near Batavia.

The following artists will appear under the direction of Mr. Detweiler:

- Melvin W. Keil, William Lester, Melita Krieg, Mrs. Layard Thorpe, Maude Bouslough, Ruthanne Burnett, Lewis C. Shults, Paul Sloes, Maud Myers, Frances Mae Anderson.

**Columbia  
Conservatory**

Harry R. Detweiler, Director  
Melvin Keil, Asso. Director  
23 Fox Street — Phone 235

WORD, Batavia

**Schedule Zion Broadcasting Station  
WCBD**

ZION, ILLINOIS

TELEPHONES 98 and 99

Wave Length 345 Meters—870 Kilocycles  
Owned and Operated by Wilbur Glenn Voliva

STATION SLOGAN

"Where God Rules Man Prospers"

CLOSING SALUTATION

"Peace be Unto You"

J. H. DEPEW

Manager  
Chief Announcer  
Publicity Director

JOHN D. THOMAS

Program Director  
Conductor of  
Zion White-robed  
Choir

P. B. NEWCOMER

Conductor of  
Zion Band

L. J. HIRE

Conductor of  
Zion Orchestra

FRED FAASSEN

Organist  
Shiloh Tabernacle

Broadcast from Shiloh Tabernacle:

**EVERY LORD'S DAY (SUNDAY):**

Daylight Saving Time.  
Bible School from 9:00 to 10:45 a. m.  
Zion Orchestra plays from 9:00 to 9:30 a. m.  
Principal Service of the Entire Week, from 2:30 to 6:00 p. m.  
Special music by Zion Band or Organ, and Zion White-robed Choir.

Address by Wilbur Glenn Voliva, General Overseer of the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion.

**ORGAN CONCERT:**

Every Wednesday noon from 12:30 to 1:00 O'clock, Central Standard Time.

Broadcast from the Studio:

**CONCERTS:**

Central Standard Time.  
Every Monday and Thursday evening, 8:00 to 10:30  
Special sacred concerts every Lord's Day (Sunday) evening in the Month, 8:00 to 10:30.

**EVERY THURSDAY:**

Daylight Saving Time.  
Service from 2:30 to 3:45 p. m. Sacred Solos and Duets.  
Address either by Wilbur Glenn Voliva, General Overseer of the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion, or one of his representatives.

RADIO STATION WCBD is located on the Temple Site, near Shiloh Tabernacle, at Zion, Illinois. Zion is located midway between Chicago and Milwaukee on Lake Michigan. The Chicago and Northwestern Railway and the Chicago North Shore and Milwaukee Electric Railway run through the City. This station is in plain sight of Sheridan Road (the main automobile thoroughfare between Chicago and Milwaukee) which becomes Elijah Avenue in Zion.

Station WCBD is of Class B Type and was erected by the Western Electric Company of Chicago, the equipment being the standard Western Electric 5000-Watt Radio Telephone Set, using Heising constant current method of modulation. The modulated carrier is fed into two high-frequency amplifiers connected in multiple. These high-frequency amplifier tubes are water cooled as are also the three 10,000-volt rectifier tubes. The aerial is a squirrel cage inverted "L" type supported by a messenger cable on steel towers 200 feet high and standing 420 feet apart. These towers are at an elevation of 80 feet above Lake Michigan.

Visitors are welcome at both Station WCBD and Shiloh Tabernacle.

Information regarding the City of Zion, The Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion, Zion Educational Institutions, and Zion Institutions and Industries (Wilbur Glenn Voliva) is supplied by two weekly publications—LEAVES OF HEALING and THE THEOCRAT.

Sample copies of these papers will be sent on request, free of cost.

LEAVES OF HEALING for 1 year—\$2.00.

THE THEOCRAT for 1 year—\$1.00.

Trial Subscription for LEAVES OF HEALING—10 weeks for 25c.

For THE THEOCRAT — 10 weeks for 15c.

Trial Subscription both Papers 10 weeks 40c.

WCBD, Zion from "Leaves of Healing"



WCBD studios destroyed by fire in 1937.





# WKZN



**Katie Paul**



**Billie Bicket**



**"Uncle" Charlie King**



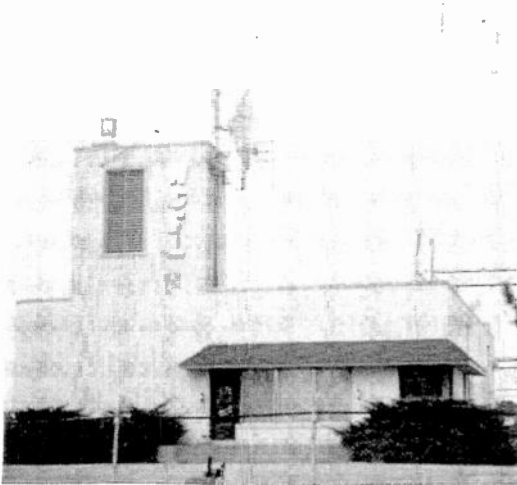
(top) William J. (Billie) Bicket's WZBN/WKZN with staffers Katie Paul and Charles King. Both are now employed by WNIZ. The old call letters remain on the family drug store at 2700 N. Sheridan Road and at the high school field.



**Billie J. Bicket** from a 1987 "Jubilee Days" promotion.



EARLY DOWNERS GROVE RADIO



WCFL/WLUP transmitter site.



Everett Mitchell hosted the National Farm and Home Hour as well as other agricultural programs over 40 years on WENR, WMAQ, and NBC in Chicago.



4502 Prince Street, the site of WHBT operated by Tizzard/Krueger.



The old WENR building, now the Frank J. Curran Chemical Company at 8101 Lemont Road.

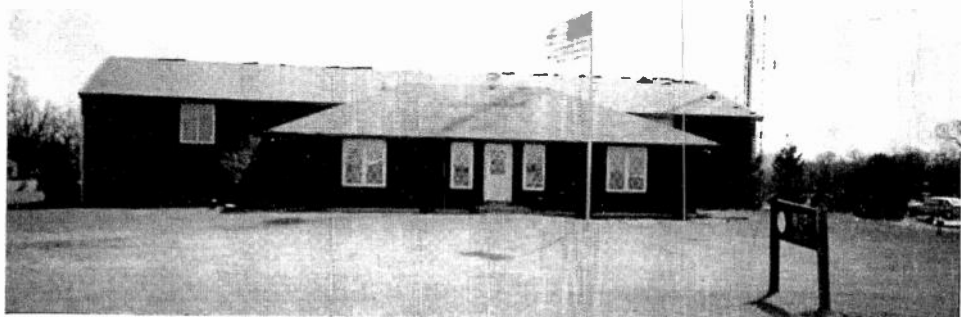




Stations WSPY-FM and WAUR operate from new facilities on Frazier Road at One Broadcast Center. The building also houses low power TV station WFXV, channel 30.



WSPY announcer Melinda (Wright) Collins.



WSPY/WAUR/WFXV-TV studios.



The Cliffhouse on Burr Oak Road near Plano, formerly owned by the Balaban and Katz Theatre Group, was the first location of WSPY-FM. A cable TV firm now occupies the building.



## SUBURBAN RADIO



WKTA (formerly WSSY and WEAW) operates from this house-like structure on Dundee Road just east of the Tri-State Tollway. Four towers are located behind the building.



Students and faculty operate Elmhurst College's WRSE. (Photo courtesy of Patty Fuller, WRSE)

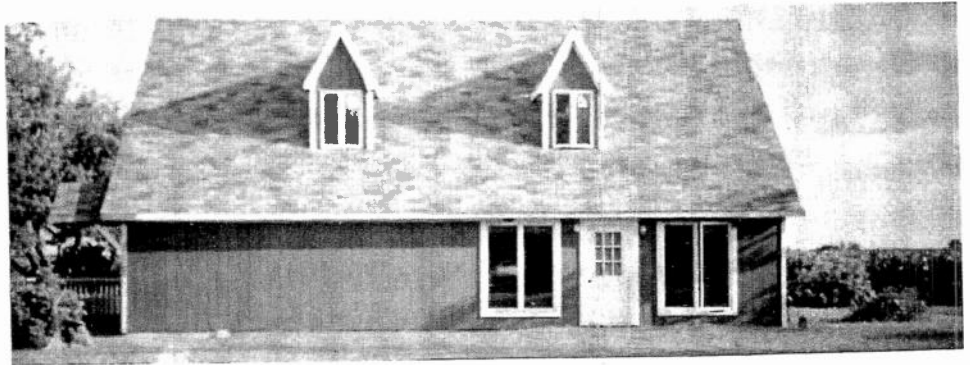




FORMER LOCATIONS OF  
OLD RADIO STATIONS



Chautauqua Auditorium, Plainfield. WWAE was located in this building in the 1920s. In later years the structure served as a roller skating rink and housed a pallet manufacturing firm. It was destroyed during the Plainfield tornado.

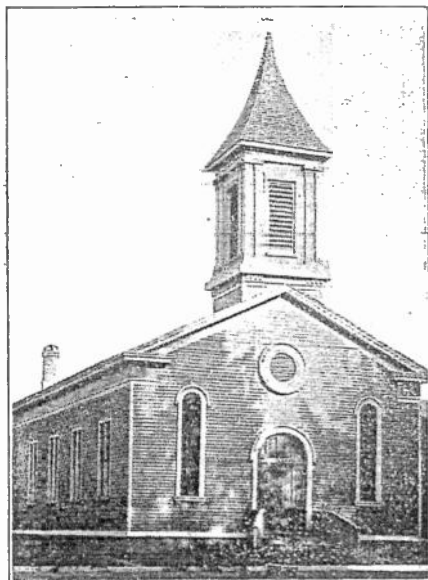


Old Griener Farm, 1107 Airport Road, Morris. This since remodeled home once housed the WRMI studios. The Moore family now occupy the home.



Former WIBO/WJJD transmitter building in the late 1920s. This building was located at 8707 Ballard Road in Des Plaines. Apartments now occupy this property.





WOCG was located at the old St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church.



Broadcast pioneer Robert C. (Bob) Brown began with WLBK in 1947 and still is the station's farm director.



Carl and Barbara Wallin's home is located on the old Electric Park Property, which includes the original cement foundation of the dance hall and street car shanty.



Sycamore's WSQR-AM 1560.





TWO ELECTRIC PARKS  
PLAINFIELD/SYCAMORE

**America's Blue Ribbon Band**  
11 ARTISTS 11

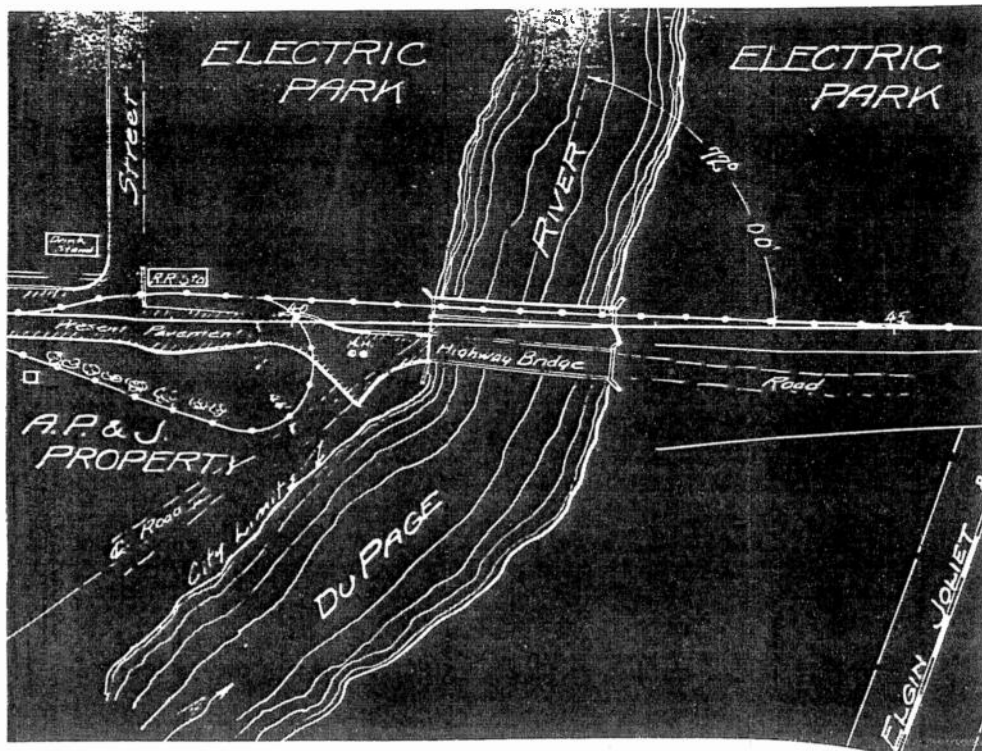


**OPENING**  
**Rockaway Pavilion**  
Between DeKalb and Sycamore  
**Sunday, May 25**  
Dancing, 9 till 1  
**JACK CHAPMAN**  
has featured  
Blackstone Hotel Sherman Hotel  
LaSalle Hotel Stevens Hotel  
Drake Hotel Tent Cafe  
Palace Theatre, Chicago  
WTMJ — WGN — WMAQ  
Schroedner Hotel  
Wisconsin Hotel, Milwaukee  
Orpheum Vaudeville  
The Goodrich Silvertown Orchestra  
from WMAQ  
DON'T MISS HEARING HIS BAND

**SUNDAY, MAY 25...Electric Park**

(right) A 1930 ad from the Sycamore Republican announcing the appearance of the Jack Chapman Orchestra at the Rockaway Pavilion. This popular dance spot off Coltonville Road burned down twice. The Wallin family owns the property today.

Both sites were called "Electric Park" because they were serviced by Interurban Rail Lines.



An IDOT map showing another Electric Park in 1923 near Plainfield. The Chautauqua Auditorium was located west of the E.J. & E. tracks. The area was serviced by the Aurora, Plainfield, and Joliet Interurban Loop and Rail Station on US 30/126.





DeKalb's oldest radio station, WLBK, along with its FM affiliate WDEK are housed in this modern building at 711 N. First Street. In fact all the city's stations are located on First Street.



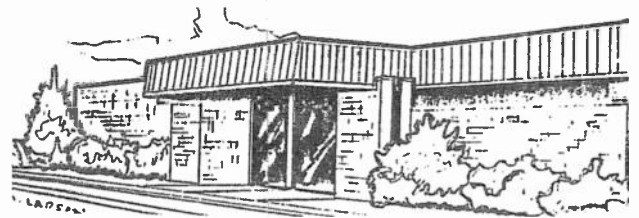
DeKalb's newest station, WDKB, operates from this office building on the NW corner of First Street and Dresser Road.



WLBK's old studios in the 1950s. The Wright Building on 4th Street.



Older Site of WNIU-FM/WKDI.



Northern's WNIU-FM has since moved to new facilities off campus.







Operations Manager Steve Chapman at WBEL/WRWC, Rockton.



Karen Wood Tony Thomas Lester Graham Linda Muszalaki

WNIU's award winning news team May 27, 1990. (Courtesy of Rockford Register Star.)



Bill Froom emcees NIU's commencement exercises over WLBK from an island on Northern's campus between 1949-1951. (Courtesy WNIU-FM's "Discovery" program guide)



# Radio Fans, Attention!

Here is your opportunity  
to buy a one-tube radio set for only

## \$16.50

With this outfit you can clearly hear stations within  
in a 1000 mile radius (under good weather conditions.) This set can be operated with either a  
dry or storage battery.

### Amusement, Education, News

waiting for you in the air

Your entire family will enjoy this Radio Receiving Outfit.

WE ALSO MANUFACTURE 2-STAGE AMPLIFIERS  
WHICH CAN BE USED WITH ANY KIND OF  
A SET, FOR ONLY \$21.00.

### This is the World's Best Radio Buy

Ask your nearest dealer—or send money order or check for  
\$16.50, and set will be sent prepaid at once.

## FERRO MANUFACTURING CO.

Manufacturers of Radio Outfits and Radio Equipment.

Belvidere, Illinois Phone Bel 125

Attractive openings for community dealers!

Our broadcasting station WTAH will give a musical entertainment every Tuesday and Friday evening, from 7:30 to 8:30

This 1923 ad from the Rockford Register Gazette tells of little known WTAH owned by the Ferro Manufacturing Company.

**THE FERRO HEAD PHONES**



Desired for their superior sound and their rugged construction, these headphones are made of the best materials that money can buy. They are available in a variety of styles and prices.

A NEW UP-TO-DATE PLANT EQUIPPED WITH THE MOST MODERN MACHINERY AND BACKED BY TWELVE YEARS EXPERIENCE GUARANTEES SERVICE AND COMPLETE SATISFACTION.

Ferro Mfg. Co.

**FERRO**

AN ENTIRE EVENING ENJOYED BY THE YOUNG LADIES WITH THE RADIO



Ferro Manufacturing Co.  
Belvidere, Illinois

This Beautiful Receiving Set









Early broadcasts on WOAG came from the Apollo Theatre built in 1921.



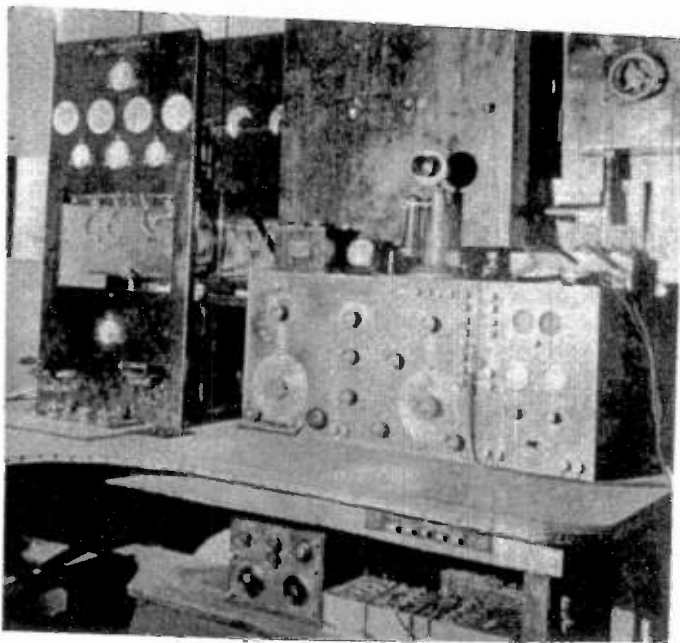
WLRB staffers in 1927. (left to right) Frank Hall, Jelly Gillette, George Ruschka, Ted Timoney, Pikey Carlson, (seated middle) Bill Wallingford, and Larry Kleber. (Photo courtesy of Larry Kleber and the Boone County Historical Society)



## BELVIDERE RADIO



Early staffers at WOAG and WLBR in Belvidere. Among those pictured are Ted Timoney (accordion player) and Larry Kleber at the microphone. Also pictured in the group are George Ruschka, Chester Kitchen, and many others. (Courtesy George Thomas, Boone County Historical Society)



The first Belvidere station, WOAG, was built inside the Apollo Theatre by William Wallingford. (Photo courtesy Edgar Penny, Belvidere Daily Republican)



An old AP teletype machine used by the Belvidere Daily Republican now on display at Boone County Historical Society.





# CENTRAL PARK GARDENS

THE  
BEST MEMBERS UP TO DATE  
UNPRECEDENTED SUCCESS OUTSIDE  
OF CHICAGO IN THE STATE

HEAR THE  
**THRILLER**

HEAR THE  
**WIRELESS**

HAVE FUN IN  
**THE FUN HOUSE**

SEE OF  
**THE WHIP**

HEAR THE  
**SEAPLANES**

TAKE A TRIP ON THE  
**MINATURE RAILWAY**

TAKE THE KIDDER ON  
**The Merry-Go-Round**

Matinee Every Sunday  
1:30 IN THE COOLEY PARK BY  
THE CITY SQUARE WE ARE  
OUT WHEN THE MUSIC  
BEGINS.

TICKETS 25 CENTS SPECIAL FIFTY  
FOR THE CITY & BELVIDERE ST. CAR  
TO OFFICIALS 25.

HEAR A REAL ORCHESTRA WITH  
NATIONAL REPUTATION — DANCE TO

## TRUMBAUER'S ORCHESTRA

THE ORCHESTRA THAT IS PUTTING ROCKFORD ON  
THE DANCING MAP—THE ORCHESTRA THAT IS GOOD  
ENOUGH TO MAKE FAMOUS DANCE HALLS—  
REAL DANCE MUSIC FOR DANCERS—  
THE ORCHESTRA THAT SATISFIES 7 NIGHT A WEEK

SEE — HEAR — SEE  
JAMES S. SHAFER'S  
REVUE DIFFERENT

## 'Hits and Misses'

ALL NEW ALL NEW  
A MESHANGE OF MIRTH AND MUSIC  
NEW ELABORATE SCENIC EFFECTS  
STUNNING CREATIONS STUNNING COSTUME

**15 TALENTED ARTISTS 15**  
**34 NEW, NOVEL NUMBERS 34**  
SEE IT FROM THE START

**DANCE  
Tonight**

WITH  
Trumbauer's  
MOST FAMOUS  
Orchestra  
AT  
Central  
Park  
DON'T MISS THE  
**REVUE**

## HARLEM PARK

TONIGHT AND EVERY EVENING  
THIS WEEK

# JOE KAYSER

AND HIS ORCHESTRA OF 8 MEMBERS.

## Swimming Pool

OPENS EVERY DAY—4 A. M. TO 11 P. M.  
Take a Dip This Hot Weather.  
SUNDAY EVENING — SEE SWIMMING MEET.

**Don't Be Disappointed**

By Being Not Able To

**Get Your Classified Ad in  
Tomorrow's  
Register-Gazette**

Central Park Gardens is believed to be the first site of a radio station in the Rockford area (WJAH). Local big bands also played at Harlem Park (Rockford Register Star).



This was the Gossard Corset Factory in Belvidere at 1000 Columbia Avenue. Sam Gossard Later left this business to begin manufacturing radio sets. This structure later burned. (Photo courtesy of Irma Baxter Niemann)



## ROCKFORD RADIO, WIAB

A collection of tired old garages ranging from 318 to 320 S. Church Street were the home of Rockford's first radio station, WIAB, owned by the Joslyn Motor Company. City building permits dating back to the 1920s indicate that these were the original structures on the property. WIAB was located at 320 S. Church Street in downtown Rockford. These buildings were demolished during the summer of 1991 for parking lots.



Facing south on S. Church Street.



Facing north on S. Church Street.





ROCKFORD RADIO, KFLV



The founder of WROK (KFLV) was Rev. Andrew Theodore Frykman who started his ten watt station to bring religious services to shut-ins in the community. The Swedish minister was first to coin a radio slogan: "This is KFLV 1301 kilocycles, good music, no yazz!" (Photo courtesy of Russell Cockrell, First Evangelical Covenant Church)





Rockford historian Russell Cockrell 76 years young. His interests include poetry, judo, and amateur radio. His church library aided in this book by providing much information about KFLV.

**NEW VICTOR MUSIC**  
**EVERY WEEK**

Beginning today, Victrola Records will be issued weekly. Lovers of good music can now delight weekly in the latest record.

**Double-Faced Red Seal Records**  
**At Lower Prices**

Another wonderful new feature of Red Seal Victrola Records is that they now will be **DOUBLE-FACED**. Not only do they bring you the best of music played and sung by the greatest artists, but they do so at exceptionally low prices.

Hear them all at  
**OGREN'S**  
415-417 Seventh Street.

All the latest models of Victrolas and Brunswicks now on display.



A 1923 Rockford Register Gazette ad for Ogren's Music House. Broadcasts on WIAB and KFLV were aired from this store.

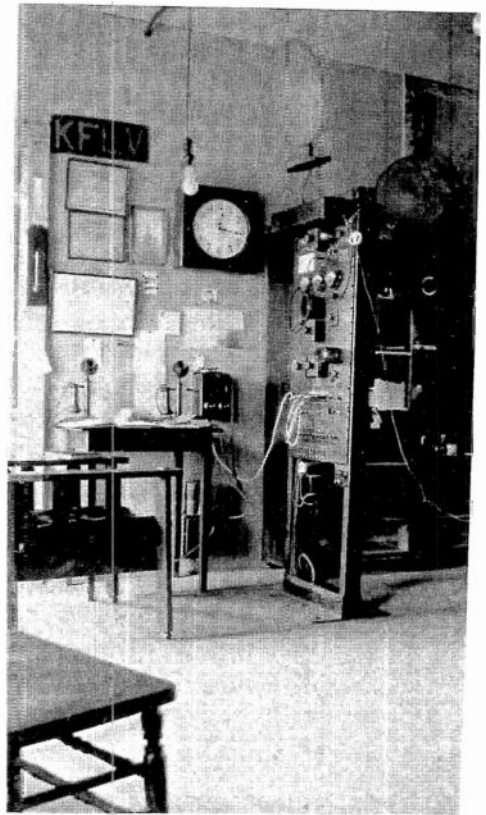
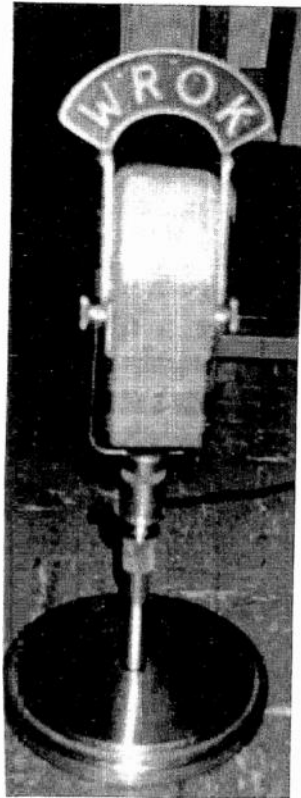


Ogren's Music House, 415-417 7th Street in Rockford. Early Broadcasts took place from a studio in the basement of this store. A parking lot and a bank occupy this property today. (Photo courtesy of Russell Cockrell, First Evangelical Covenant Church archives)

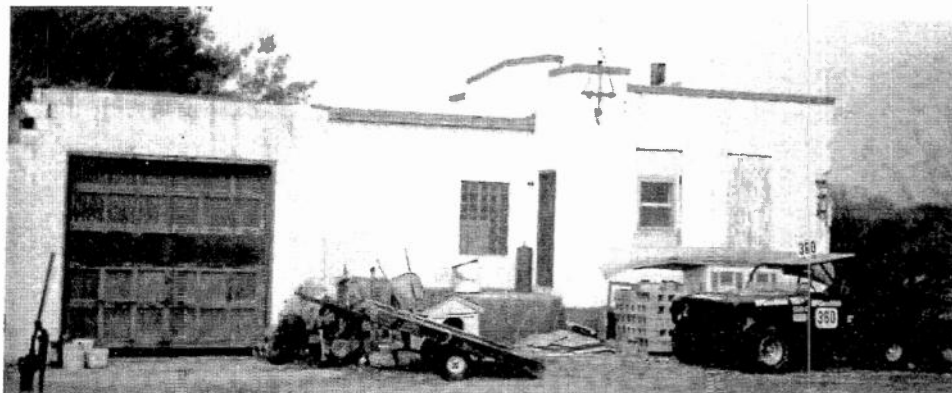




ROCKFORD RADIO, KFLV/WROK



1503 W. 4th Avenue at 11th Street.



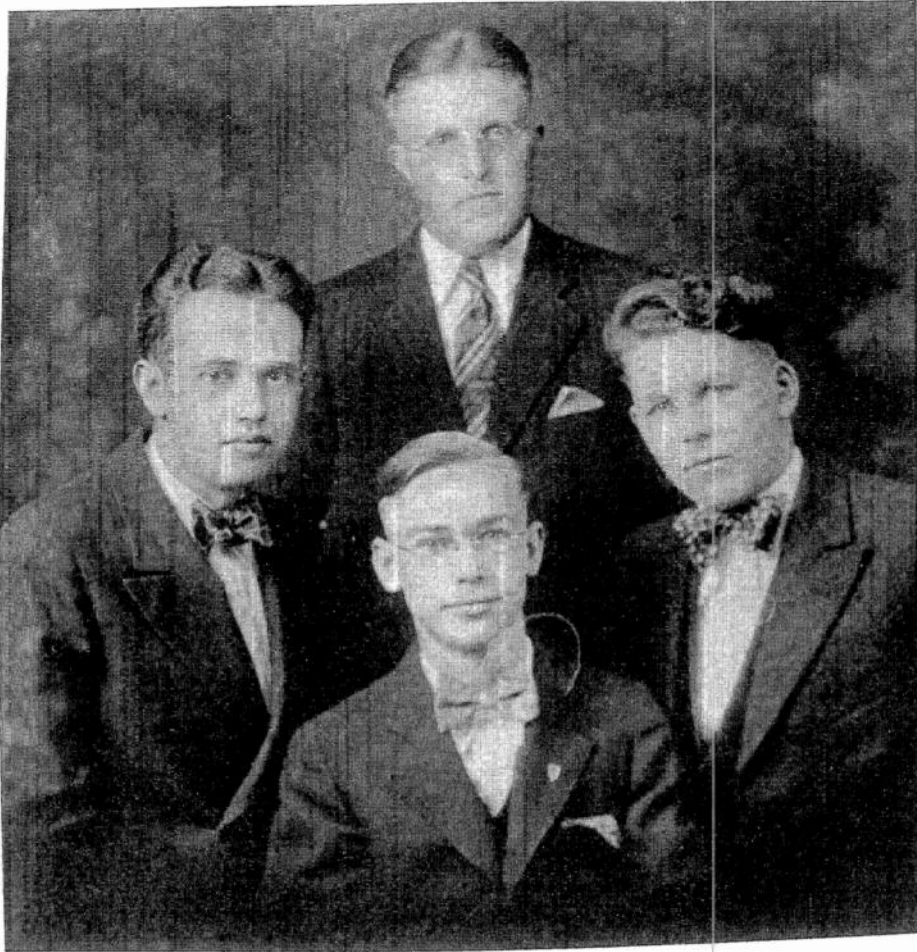
NW corner of N. Riverside Blvd. and Kilburn Avenue.

From the roots of an early Rockford religious station, KFLV, came today's WROK.

(above) Rev. Frykman's facilities about 1928. (left) Rev. Frykman's home where the station was located. (below) A later transmitter site for WJAH, KFLV, and later WROK. The building is used for storage today.



ROCKFORD RADIO, KFLV



KFLV's young announcers in 1927-28. (top) Paul Bodin, (right) Harold Nelson, (bottom) Aaron Markuson, (left) Willard Anderson. (Photo courtesy of Russell Cockrell, First Evangelical Covenant Church archives)





ROCKFORD RADIO, WROK



Maurice H. (Maury) Nelson began his radio career as WROK's engineer around 1929. He also did radio broadcasts for Bethesda Church and was a long time amateur radio operator. (Photo courtesy of Mercedes Nelson)



RADIO LANDMARKS



Some of the earliest amateur radio operators were behind the beginnings of area radio stations. Paul Carpenter and his brother George provided the foundations for WTAS/WGN. (above) QSL card provided by Mrs. Paul (Florence) Carpenter.

The Faust Hotel was built by Levin Faust in 1927.



Rockford's news tower, home of the Rockford Register Star.



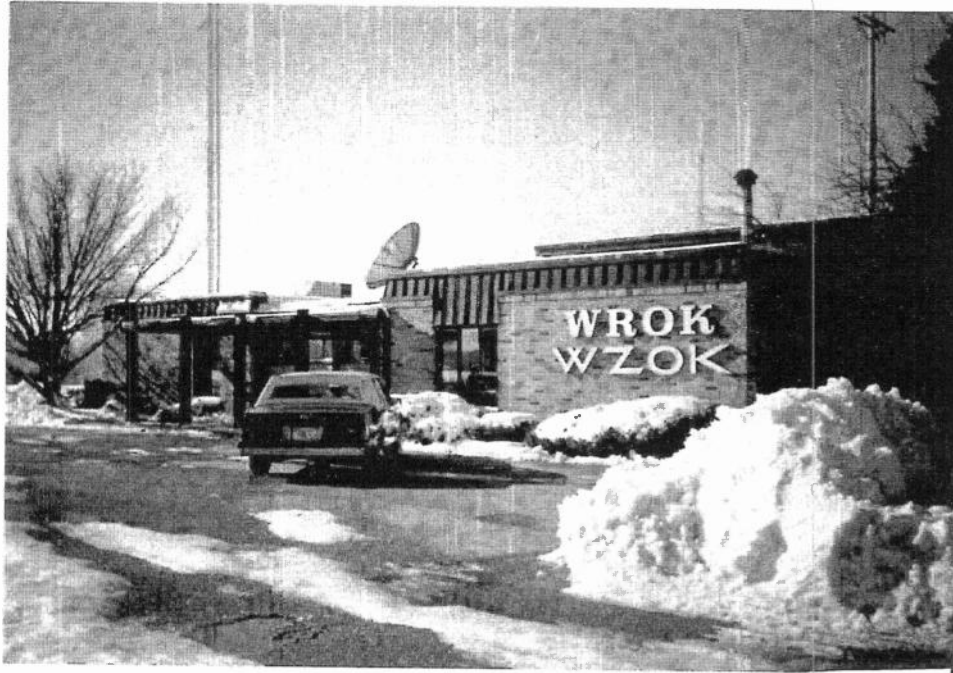
Faust Landmark (Hotel) or Tabala Towers, 630 E. State.

Both were former sites of WROK, Rockford and were engineered by amateur radio operators.





WROK, ROCKFORD



WROK (KFLV) and WZOK studios in Rockford.



WROK's popularity has been achieved through the hard community work of David Salisbury (left) and the late Vernon Nolte.

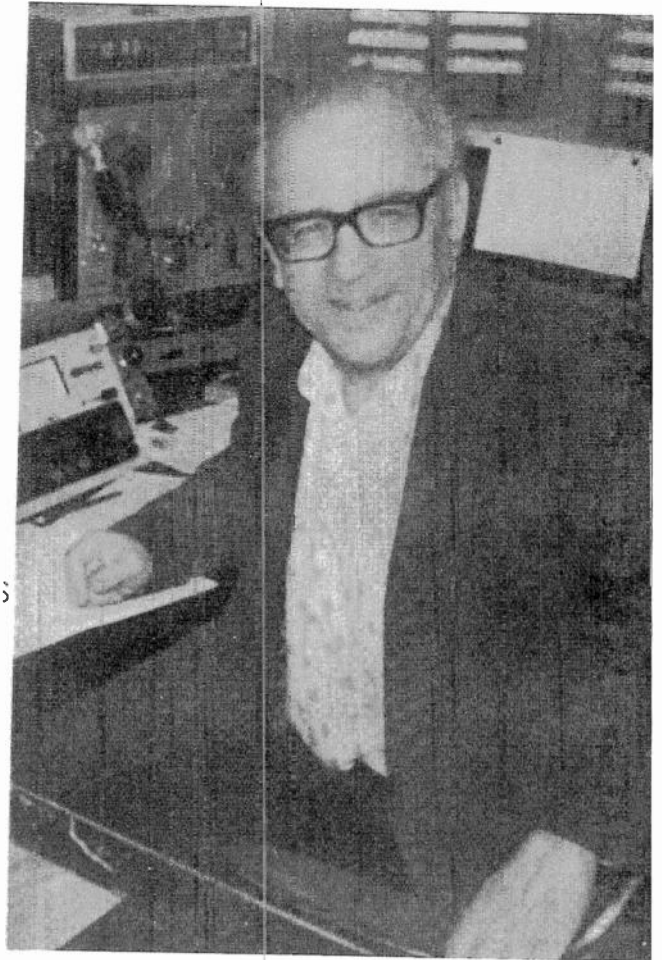


LOVES PARK/ROCKTON RADIO  
WLUB/WBEL/WRWC

WLUV's Angelo "Papa Joe" Salvi has been in radio for over 50 years. He's too young to quit.

(below) WLUV AM/FM studios and transmitter located on Elmwood Road NW of Rockford.

(bottom) The Salter family's WBEL/WRWC, Rockton. This photo was taken sometime in the 1950s. Pictured is Robert A. Jones in front of the studio building before later remodeling.







ROCKFORD/LOVES PARK RADIO



Loves Park's two religious stations, WQFL and WGSL. Both stations are located at 5375 Pebble Creek Trail in Rockford. Two towers are located across the street.



Rockford's WNTA (WKKN) and WKMQ on Reid Farm Road.



AirPlay Broadcasting owns both WXRX and WRRR.

PP 132

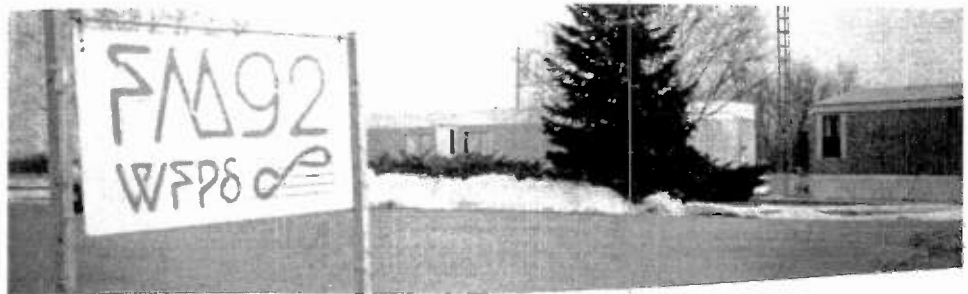


WXRX and WRRR are located at 2830 Sandy Hollow Road.





The current studio and transmitter site of WFRB and WXXQ, Freeport's oldest radio stations. These facilities are located on Tower Road and are owned by the station's new owners Freeport Radio Associates. (Photo by Holly Wilson)



Just a couple of miles west of Freeport on Route 20 are the modular studios of WFPS-FM.



**FM means Far More listening pleasure!**

**BASKETBALL**

on WFJS TONIGHT

**Freeport vs. East Rockford**  
(2 Games)

Pretzelettes 6:55	Pretzels 8:10
----------------------	------------------

An early FM station, WFJS-FM, operated in the 1950s at 217 W. Exchange Street in Freeport. The tower once stood behind this small office building. The above ad was taken from a 1952 promotion by the Freeport Journal-Standard who owned the station. A basketball game was one of its last programs.





## MOTOROLA RADIO



Paul Galvin founded Motorola, which has become a giant in the communications industry. The firm now occupies several acres on Algonquin Road in Schaumburg near I-90.

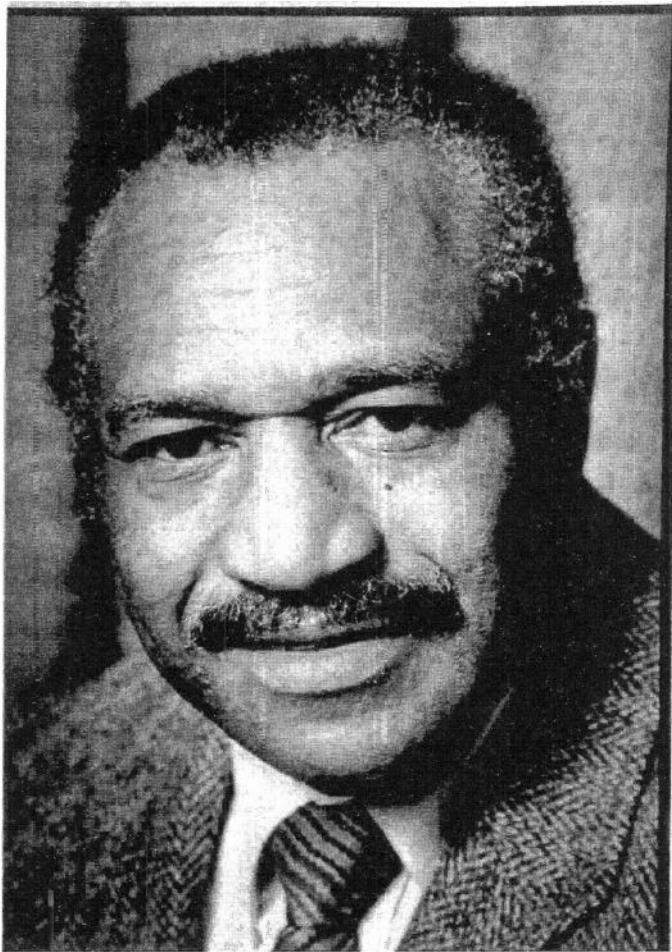


Motorola once owned this plant at 1200 St. Charles Road in Elgin. Leewards purchased this building around 1970.



A discarded radio sign along Rt. 25 south of Elgin depicts the vibrant audio only years before TV pulled the plug on radio.





Larry Smith

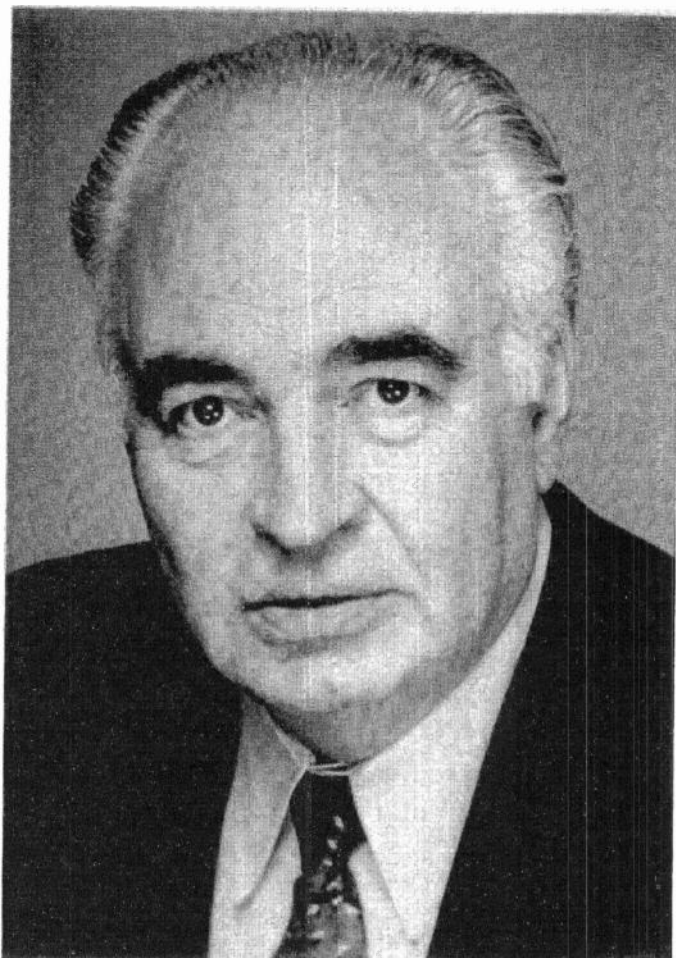
Chicago's all night radio  
show hosts.

(left) WBEZ's Larry Smith of "Jazz  
Forum."

(below) WMAQ-TV's Jim Hill.



Mutual's Larry King is heard in  
Chicago and many other stations  
across the country.

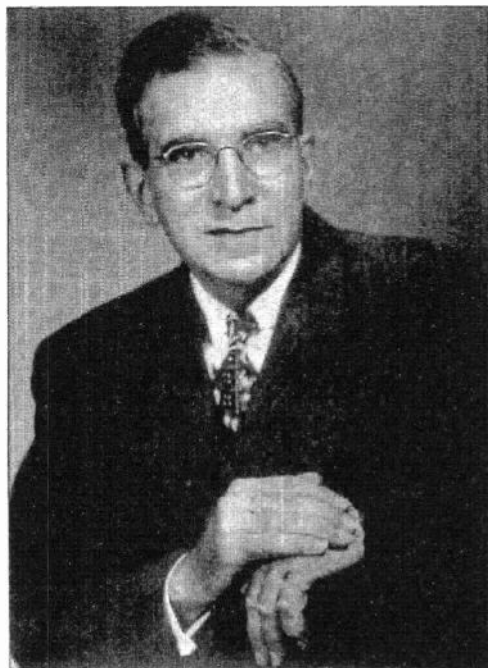


Jim Hill

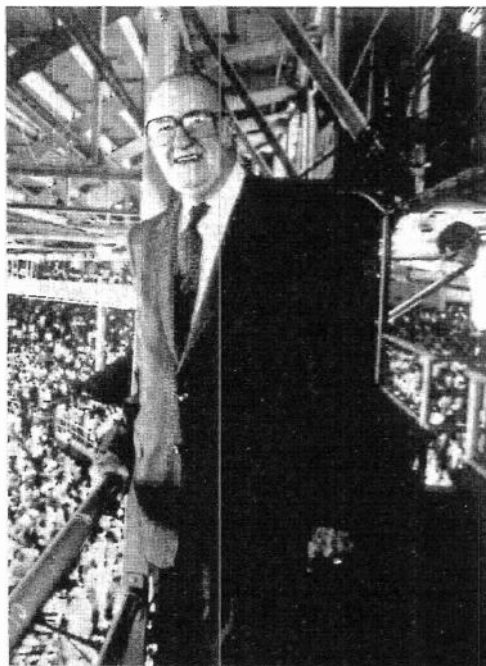




CHICAGO RADIO



Art Page, the WLS Dinner Bell Program.



Hey! Hey! Jack Brickhouse, the long time voice of the Chicago Cubs.



WGN's Floyd Brown.



CHICAGO RADIO ALL-STARS



"Put that in your pipe and smoke it," well-known and well-liked John Doremus has been an announcer for many Chicago stations and heads an ad agency in the city.



Long time WBBM traffic reporter Herb Howard.





ART HELLYER



ART HELLYER

Art Hellyer displays the original WAIT, Chicago microphone that he used.

(background) A history of radio on the walls of his study.





SUBURBAN RADIO FACES



WJOL's Art Hellyer (seated) with John Russell Ghrist during one of Art's Saturday programs.



WLTH's first traffic reporter John Russell checks out the traffic along the Borman in Gary.





POPULAR AREA STATION LOGOS

**Satellite Music Network**  
 12655 N. Central Expressway  
 Suite 600  
 Dallas, Texas 75243

**WCCQ**  
 98.3  
 FM

You're in Q Country

**WKLC**  
 FM 102.3 STEREO  
 NEWS 1220  
**WKRS**  
 "WE ARE LAKE COUNTY"

LISTEN  
 TO OUR NEW  
 RADIO  
 STATION  
**WEEF**

FM 103

AM 1430

**WLBK**  
 1360AM



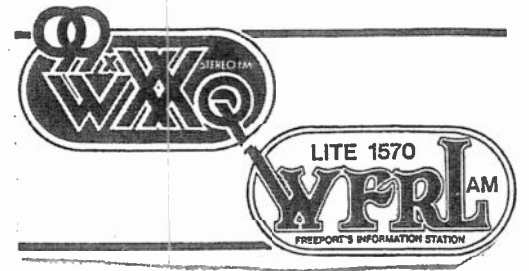
The LINN Burton Show—6:30 a.m.—9 a.m.  
**WGGO** CHANNEL 160  
 MODERN RADIO  
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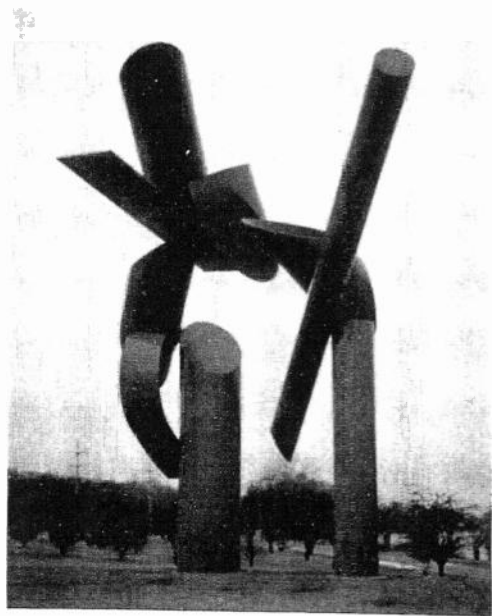
**WNDZ-AM 750**









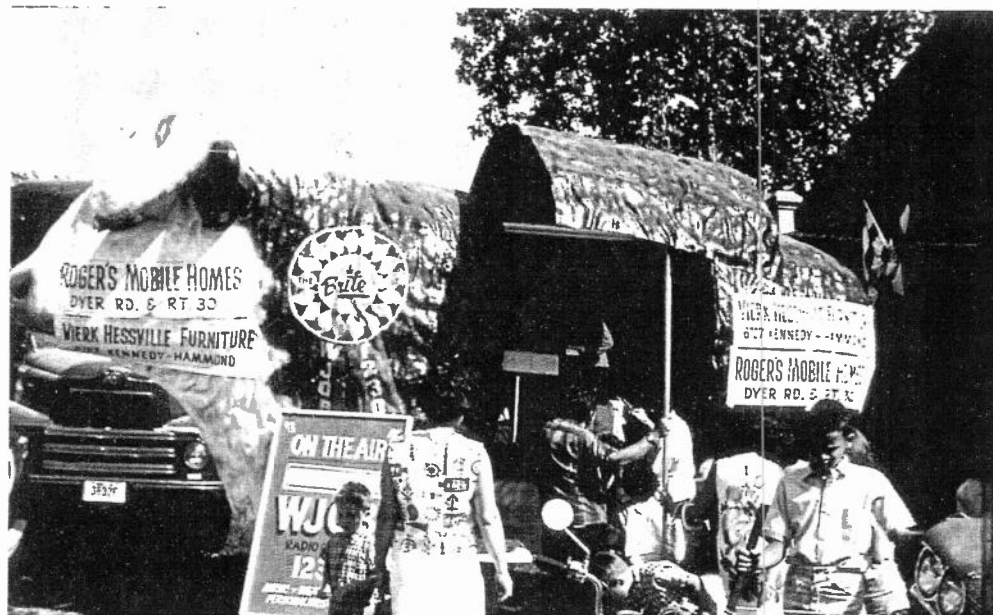


Rockford's symbol of industry located along the Rock River in Sinnissippi Park.

The curious structure was once a different color and was installed in the downtown section of the city.



This turbine was probably from a factory along the Fox River. It located in St. Charles and recalls an era of River Dependency.





POPULAR AREA STATION LOGOS

**Fm**

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gram that helps you recapture the  
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that real tear-jerker, "She's More To  
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time favorites. Here's a show you'll  
thoroughly enjoy! Be there when the  
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POPULAR AREA STATION LOGOS



BROADCASTING ON A SUB-CARRIER CHANNEL OF W.G.V.E - FM GARY, INDIANA



**WAIT** 850AM

**WXET** 105.5FM



JOLIET RADIO



Don Lades has been with WJOL since 1955 and is the president of the Old Timer's Baseball Association. He was recently inducted into the Illinois Sports Hall of Fame.





## JOLIET RADIO



Tony Ray has brightened mornings for Joliet listeners since 1978. He has been the station's program director for both WJOL and WLLI since 1989.



JOLIET RADIO



Doyne McReynolds (air name Greg Phillips) was an announcer for WJOL in the 1940s. He hosted "Crew Cut Capers," a popular jazz program from 1946-1948. Doyne later became an executive with a large manufacturing firm.





## FREEPORT RADIO



Ridgway Electric staff in the early 1920s. The two men in the back row are (left) Fred Ridgway and (right) Frank Ridgway. Front Row left to right: William Fox, Lynn Buchta, Virgil Bowen; the rest are unidentified. Ridgway Electric was located in the basement on Van Buren Street and on Stephenson Street. "Courthouse Opposite Us," was the firm's slogan.



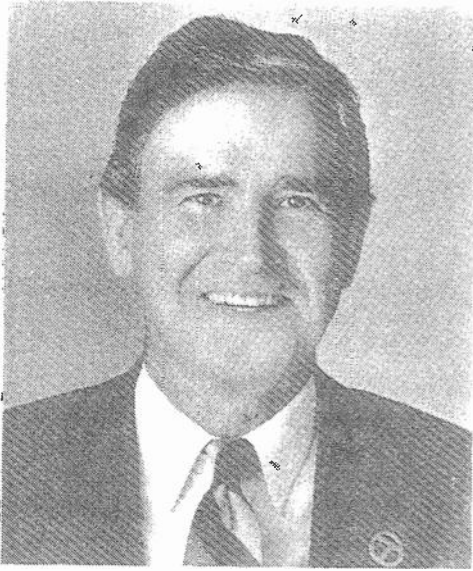
(W. F.) Bill Ridgway in the 1920s, operator of Station WIBB.



(W. F.) Bill Ridgway in the 1950s, as he helped area boy scouts earn radio merit badges.



## ON THE AIR



WLS-TV's John Drury worked at WMRO in Aurora in the early 1950s. He told staffers at the St. Charles Historical Society that he remembers that newscasts on the station sometimes came directly from the newsroom at the Aurora Beacon News. They were preceded by several back to back commercials. Drury was featured in the Society's September 1991 newsletter celebrating radio month.



Author John R. Ghrist (John Russell) was a Shadow Traffic Reporter from about 1986-1988 for WMAQ and WLS Radio.





## RADIO HISTORY



Chuck Schaden of "Those Were the Days" heard Saturdays from 1-5 p.m. on WNIB-FM and "Old Time Radio Classics" on WBBM Radio on the air weeknights at midnight and Saturday and Sunday nights from 8-10 p.m. Chuck has entertained listeners on Chicago radio for over 30 years and does his Saturday afternoon program live from the Museum of Broadcast Communications in Chicago.





*Thank You-*  
**VARIETY**

ESTABLISHED IN 1927 BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BROADCASTERS AND THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MUSICIANS  
CORPORATE OFFICE: 100 N. W. ST. N. Y. N. Y. 10036

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**Gary**

W-I-N-D carries on with a sports schedule more complete,  
more entertaining, and more popular than ever before.

FOR SPORTS IT'S

W-I-N-D

"The Tip-Top Spot on Your Dial"

National Sales Offices: 201 N. Wells St., Chicago

National Representatives: Weed & Company

Chicago station WIND was once a top sports station in Gary. The IND stands for Indiana, where its transmitter is still located today.



RADIO'S LATER YEARS .

# WDCB 90.9 FM

Public Radio From College of DuPage



## PROGRAM GUIDE

.....

### SUMMER 1991

WDCB broadcasts with 5,000 watts from the College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn. Its popular Eclectic Picnic is a regular summer music festival sponsored by the station. Jazz, local news, and college courses are also aired on WDCB.





## PART TWO

### FOREWARD

Exploring the history and development of suburban radio is an interesting and fascinating study of the passage of time in our culture. It closely parallels the important events of our time and along the way, the reader becomes acquainted with names, places, and facts that are slowly being hidden or forgotten. It is from my observance that it is far easier to learn about the pioneer times than the recent regional past. This information is being quickly tucked away on millions of spools of unindexed newspaper microfilm in our local libraries. This publication attempts to unroll some of those fast disappearing facts, and provide a creative insight into the beginnings of the radio age in our area.

Taking on compiling a book about a major city, like Chicago has been left to other energetic individuals. But before Chicago became a major radio giant, there was a considerable amount of radio activity in the suburban areas. Part one of this book detailed the radio developments of the Fox River Valley area. Part two explores other stations that operated or still exist in the suburban areas just outside the city. The book also takes in some regional stations for their local history value and some stations in nearby Indiana. From time to time some personal glimpses will be presented as I remember them, about the stations that I worked at. These include timely recollections of events, stories, and some observations of the various personalities that worked in these stations. A little local history is also tossed in for good measure. So, enjoy, enjoy, for the first time the suburban radio story is at last captured between the same two covers. Let us now continue with our coverage of local radio history.

## NORTHWEST INDIANA AND SOUTH COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS

### Personal Glimpses

This next section covers the history of radio in South Cook County Illinois and Northwest Indiana. This section would not be possible without people like Tom Kneitel, Alice Brannigan (of Popular Communications), Jan D. Lowry of Broadcast Profile, and a countless number of reference librarians, radio station personnel, historical societies, and friends who have contributed information.

While possibly not exact, I have tested this information, exhibiting here the most accurate available account of the stations and their beginnings. This work includes thumbnail sketches of the stations in Indiana then Illinois. Then unlike in previous sections, the text contains some of my own recollections of how these stations operated when I worked there. I have over 25 years of experience in local broadcasting, and remember interesting insights into of each station and am inclined to add these stories. Persons that crossed my path during those 25 years are usually mentioned in the script or found in the numerous illustrations presented (my apologies if I've missed anyone). Those that enjoy radio or early history should enjoy this section. So turn a page instead of a dial and segue into this nostalgic era of radio that is still changing, never to be the same again.

"Segue" is an old disc jockey term that is usually not found in dictionaries. It is an Italian word pronounced *Seg-way*, which means "one following another." To radio personnel Segue means to play one record after another without any interruptions or breaks. This is different from "tracking" records which is playing the whole album side. Segue implies that a variety of songs are played one after the other, blending melodies with a similar beat that is pleasing to the ear. Over the years in Northwest Indiana, and adjacent South Cook County Illinois there has been a "Segue" or continued variety of radio services for area communities. The beat of the Illiana region has included the best efforts and unequal attempts to entertain, inform, and enlighten its citizens by its early broadcasters. Some stations have done better than others. This section has a two-fold purpose: 1) to create a permanent record of the early stations, their personnel and their later demise; and 2) trace the segue of my career through the suburban area concentrating on the people that I worked with and what was happening around me. Relying on area radio veterans, many old stories about station operations have been collected and preserved here. Around the section is woven the observances of a naive young person thrust into the radio scene in 1966. He was determined to be a star, only to find out the actual broadcasting business is completely different than playing the next record on a pirate radio station operated out of a bedroom. My regrets are numerous including a poor background in phonics and writing skills...no one to warn me about the "sharks" who worked in the business...not making the most of my opportunities, and staying in the business too long to reshape my life. This section later overlaps into the history of Fox Valley Radio that also contained some of the my later years into the radio business.

Many of the early facts of WJOB in Hammond are mentioned earlier because it is the fore-runner of WWAE which moved here from Plainfield, Illinois. The contributors of this section are numerous (many are still my friends). Some are still in the radio business, others now are bankers, retired public relations people, dispatchers or once household names looking for yet another opportunity in local radio. Hopefully, I have mentioned about everyone which is next to impossible to do. My apologies for those who were left out by words but not spirit.

This section "Segues" into much more local historical data on the beginnings of broadcasting in the area. Don't mind the personal comments from me; they are merely afterthoughts arriving too late to change history. They point out that while I was attempting to have fun in the business, those around me were much more serious than I. Now I look back at it all with the five "R's" and Reminiscence, Recite, Remember, Relish and Replay the by-gone years of radio in my life. I was but a dull flashlight compared to the beams cast by the area's big stars during this era.

There exists in Northwest Indiana a long heritage of solid radio performers who used the Calumet area as a springboard to professional greatness...among these early radio people came names like Hugh Hill, Frank Reynolds and Mike Rapchak. These are the names of professional, respected Chicago radio people, household names who basically began their monumental careers in Lake County, Indiana. We can readily acknowledge their achievements, and welcome them into our homes during the dinner news hour, or on a late night music show. But this book is not just about them. Its about the countless ones of us who struggled and who still try to make a living doing something we like to do. For many of us who look back at the early years of Calumet Radio, it will bring us "snickers of joy" remembering how we all tried to raise families on \$125.00 a week. This comes many years after famed Chicago area radio and TV personality Art Hellyer remembers working his first radio jobs in Aurora for less than \$40.00 a week. Sadly some of us are still mired in this never ending occupation speared on by the motivations

of writing just one more news story or just playing one more record before the days end. To them, the daily stage changes little except for occasional new call letters and a new manager. The changes are only evident when we leave the area later to return to the same watt less wonders that Gordon Boss kept on the air.

It is here where I began some 25 years ago. I worked for practically everybody including two of the county's well known newspapers and its first educational TV station. To me they were all the same just a different signature on their flimsy paychecks. But no matter how one characterizes the areas radio stations all of them gave us our first start, our first opportunities and it was then up to us to reach fame or failure. To all of you, here is a look back at what radio was like in the 60's and early 70's, along with a few stories and some familiar names. Also included is a trip back of what went on before I arrived on the scene in an historic perspective on each station.

These sections also cover the fast spring up of small FM stations which are now among the oldest operations in the area. It was radio as it will never be again in Northwest Indiana and South Cook County Illinois. A segue of news, programs and voices transcribed from the memories of those who lived, breathed, and ate radio during those times. We all served together (it was in our blood) hopefully we can now all still remember and laugh at those years behind us. Those years of transfusions paved the way for the times in front of us. Here's a look back at the historic era of radio as I remember, as I have learned, and am now older but a little bit wiser.

## MY RADIO BEGINNING

### WCYA--The Bedroom Radio Station

Cousin Bill Eisele was the radio man of the family as a youngster. I used to marvel at the way my Aunt Enid and Uncle "Shorty" would allow him to have dinner in his bedroom, while he continued working on his ham radio equipment. At our house we had to stay seated at the dinner table until the meal was over. Bill (N9DUU) was quiet, but his presence was seemingly always around . . . high speed morse code could always be heard escaping through the cracks of his bedroom door. A high wooden tower stood in the corner of his yard which abutted my yard that held up his antenna wire. The fascination of knobs, wires, buttons, and lights coupled by squeaky clandestine BFO traffic amazed our family and me. For I wanted to be just like Bill.

When Bill was older he took me around to some of the places he worked at namely WJOB in Hammond and the old WMPP (now WCFJ) in East Chicago Heights, Illinois (now Ford Heights, Illinois). WJOB was a place I would get to work for much later, but I never wanted to work for WMPP. At that time, Allen Wheeler, was the station owner. Early jocks were Eddie Holland and Buddy Bell. The one thousand watt transmitter and six antenna tower system was located in a large cow pasture near Crete. Equipment in the rat infested shanty that housed the transmitter set up on old Coke crates. An RF choke (transformer like device) sat out on the floor with its wires running back into the transmitter cabinet. I almost tripped over it and got fried the first time I visited the station.

Bill handled the maintenance at WMPP and sometimes I got to play records while he did after midnight tests. An absolute delight was a large room across from the studio where the "record library" was located. It seemed that for months someone had just shoveled throw away DJ copies of records into the room. I felt like a kid in a candy store wading through waste deep piles of records that were merely tossed everywhere. The place was an absolute disgrace as far as a radio station goes. It was the first time my voice was heard on radio in 1963. The station later became a 24 hour religious station. Bill later left the radio business after a brief stint at WJOB as a Sunday night engineer buying a car phone and pager business. South Shore Radio Telephone formerly owned by Jess Peters moved from the WJOB building to 6 Russell Street in Hammond. I found a job there in its hot and dark broom closet-like office dispatching car phone calls. Bill insisted on precision procedures, it soon became evident that I did not like being growled at for pushing the wrong buttons by my cousin. He intimidated all the operators with his "handy talky" over the air when we goofed up. Bill did give me some good advice, "to make some money be an engineer, don't be a jock." But the math and technical know how just wasn't there, and I ended up as an announcer.

During the next years I would shape my future behind a microphone. My neighborhood was filled with innovative kids most of whom were interested in radio. Groups of kids would gather at John David Mark's house, an old grade school classmate. There we pretended we were on radio, reading made up news, and playing records like "There was a Fungus Among Us," and Dick Biondi's "On Top of a Pizza." Some of the youths in the area were very electrically inclined. Others just wanted to perform on the radio. Therefore, a series of low wattage phono-oscillators were built and operated in my community of South Holland, Illinois. Groups of kids scoured and scavenged alleys and back roads looking for scrapped TV sets, old radios, and junk phonographs to assemble their



stations. Operations with made up call letters similar to legitimate area stations sprung up and sought "quite" spots on the radio dial. They were all AM stations broadcasting with less than a watt—all except Master Control.

Master Control of Hammond used nearly fifty watts to cover most of the area. Phone requests were taken from phone booths and clever smart talking deejay's played the latest teen requests, slammed local officials and often used bad language on the air. Everyone knew Master Control was illegal, and soon the FCC was on to them. MC caused more trouble by picking up legitimate transmissions and rebroadcasting them on other frequencies. It was just a matter of time before they were closed down. Another 20 watt operation located in the Pacesetter Park area of South Holland was also dismantled by the FCC in the late 60's. This station was called "Weekend Radio." None of us had anything to do with these operations.

Probably the downfall of these stations were the obvious fact that they looked and sounded illegal. They often interfered with existing legitimate stations prompting FCC complaints. However, three other operations at the same time seemed to escaped FCC notice. They were run by persons who are in the radio business today. Their early expertise in running small illegal stations certainly helped polish their skills with legitimate stations later in their careers.

At our house WCYA (We Can't Yawn Anymore) ran about five hundred milliwatts, using an Allied Knight-Kit phono-oscillator. The set was designed to broadcast AM signals throughout the house with a ten foot wire used as an antenna. The neighborhood technical wizards quickly learned how to rebuild the set in an inverted cake pan, raise the plate voltage and add antenna line to increase the range of the station.

WCYA which went through several transmitters used about eight hundred feet of five conductor thermostat wire strung through trees to radiate the signal. The station operated at 960 kilohertz on the AM dial (Chicago station WAAF at 950 khz went off the air at sunset). It was a good place to be on the dial since we were directly located between two major stations. Announcers on WCYA turned into scavengers by day, rummaging through alleys looking for discarded ac/dc sets which contained the output tubes for the transmitter. A variety of music programs, commercials taped off other stations and news professionally written from newspapers highlighted WCYA's night time programming. We even covered the elections from a TV set with the sound turned off. To make the station sound even better, hourly network newscasts were "taken" off a radio plugged into our make shift board. Neighborhood kids could be readily found at our house, their parents merely had to turn on their radios and find them on the air. My mom (Marge) always knew where I was and frequently would be upset when the station was on the air until three a.m. She would burst into the room to sound her disapproval and find herself on the air.

While several of the stations announcers were PA people at the local Little League, most were just interested boys who wanted to play "Beatle" records on the station. For the most part, the group I hung around with were people who were interested in radio. They probably thought the station was properly licensed and never questioned why the call letters of the station were called WCYA. They were similar to a local stations call. According to White's radio log there was a WCYB, and a WCYC, but no WCYA. The call letters actually stood for something like Wacky, Crazy, Youth, Association. Most of the young people were just anxious to play current records on the station for their folks and neighbors. Off hours were used to do voice overs for each announcer and to steal commercials from other stations. A closed loop of tape with teletype sounds on it, cycled the heads of a beat up tape recorder to produce a "news room" sound. The tape frequently got tangled up around the legs of the console and a big blip like sound could be heard over the air every minute when the splice of tape looped across the heads. The tape was spliced with fiberglass tape used to hold lumber together. My siste Sue took an occasional board shift, our father (Glenn) enjoyed telling his friends about our station.

I usually engineered all the broadcasts which featured announcers like Donnie Hartkoom, Dan Swets, Larry Kelderhouse, Jack Oostman, Larry Dekker, Mike Gorniak (N7A1N), Norman Mathews, and Dan Villiapiano. While Gorniak went on to professional radio (chief engineer at KDWB, St. Paul), the only other polished announcer was Norman Mathews. Mathews had quite a collection of 45's dealing with many English groups. We looked forward to having Norman on Sunday nights. Chicago stations WLS and WCFL had British Billboard shows on the weekends and Norman could have easily filled in for them. He knew all about those groups. Mathews later entered the restaurant business in Chicago.

Dan Villiapiano was another story. Villiapiano's personality reminds one of a sick Steve Martin. The crazier the prank was, the better for Villiapiano. He was only on WCYA a few times but together we spent many weekends visiting Chicago radio stations. One night we got completely lost looking for a station and ended up inside the Union Stockyards. Our usual trips included meeting station engineers, fishing through garbage cans for throw



away records, or just admiring all that equipment. When we weren't busy bugging radio station people, Dan would do one of his "acts" inside a busy place like K-Mart. He would get near a crowd of people, make his eyes roll then collapse on the floor like he was having a seizure or heart attack. When a big enough crowd would gather around him, he simply got up and walked away much to the amazement of the shoppers. A lot of times we would see him start to do his act and then hide behind some clothes rack to watch. At one time he single handedly ruined all the drug store tube testers in the area. This was done by repeatedly inserting a suspected "defective tube" that had its pins soldered together. When smoke poured out of the tube tester because of a direct short, we were usually kicked out of the store.

Villiapiano didn't have very many friends, so I invited him to play in one of our sandlot games one afternoon. Someone gave him a mitt in which he promptly placed it on his foot and tried to catch the ball with it. He was an accomplished organist and very interested in operating his own radio station some day. The closest he got was making antenna hardware at the Andrew Company.

Besides our modified transmitter a seven foot table was constructed which held two beat up turntables. A reverse feed tape recorder and a mixer out of another tape recorder with a burned out motor was used as an amp. Toggle switches mounted on the table "clicked" on and off the various pieces of equipment. Pieces of "erector" sets used as mike stands held in place two ancient tape recorder microphones. The antenna wire stretched from 15930 Cottage Grove through a window then through several adjacent yards. Each announcer purchased several top records each week, but the majority of tunes came from the throw away pile at WLS and WIND in Chicago. Chicago stations usually received more records than they could handle and we enjoyed relieving them of their burden. Disguising ourselves as educational TV personnel, we trekked downtown for our monthly cache of throwaways.

WLS readily handed out all that we could carry. At WIND the music was handled by Eddie Schwartz. Eddie usually saved all the throw aways for the USO. But on a few occasions we beat them to the treasure. Eddie now a respected evening talk show host on WGN radio told us several times not to come back, but we were not to be denied. One school vacation day during the week, three of us, Mike Gorniak and Larry Kelderhouse, and I tried it again. The studio elevators at the Wrigley Building opened up exposing the entire operation of WIND. We could see Eddie busy working in his office. Gingerly we strolled up to the receptionist and requested any old records that they were going to toss. She led us to the usual room where we had been dozens of times before, scooped up all that we could carry and headed for the elevator, just then we were spotted by Schwartz. Eddie, even back then was a large man, but he moved fast around his desk and headed down the hall towards us. I punched up the elevator. As the three of us hopped in and closed the door, we could hear him say, "Hey, you guys! Hey, stop those kids!" We made off down Michigan Avenue carrying about two hundred 45's a piece and didn't stop until we crossed the Chicago River. Records and material for the station were often gained this way rummaged from garbage cans and alleys and at radio stations. A real prize was a fresh roll of teletype paper with the current news on it that could be used for several days and of course, recorded public service announcements.

WCYA entertained the neighborhood for close to four years. It is strange that parents in the area thought we actually had a license for the station. Only time and growing up caused everyone to lose interest in the operation. It was then time to move on to the real thing. All of us kids were always told the same thing, no experience, no job. Not many stations wanted to hire fifteen or sixteen year olds. We usually got auditions but never heard anything after that. Some how in 1963, I actually thought WDFW in Chicago, was going to hire me as their all night Big Band music program host. I knew the music and had listened to all their songs from my folks 78 rpm record collection for years. On the day of the interview I came down with the worst sore throat. Spending the prior hour gulping tea trying to get my voice back, in a nearby drug store, I finally got the nerve to do the audition. Program director Bob Longbons led me to an auxiliary studio to read some wire copy and play a few records on tape. I actually spent more time running my hands across the worn controls of their board and gawking enviously at how their equipment would have looked at WCYA in my bedroom. I didn't think I did a very bad job but soon came the form letter in the mail announcing that I had been rejected again. No one wanted to hire me except for Roy Bellavia at WXRT.

Roy's station was located on the west side of Chicago in a bad section of the city on West Madison Street. All of the programming was in Spanish on WSBC/WXRT and board engineers were always needed. I had two years of high school Spanish which interested Roy a little more. But I was turned off at the prospects of working there at night which delayed my first radio break.

One Saturday, braving the elements, I checked out his operations. Most of the building housing the station was vacant. Litter and trash surrounded the area which echoed neighborhood unpleasantness. Being fifteen and having no transportation, I soon decided this was not what I wanted. Roy, who at one time worked for WGRY in Gary, and who also wrote a booklet about Chicago radio, seemed to be a nice person to work for. However, the clincher was the fact that a guard had to take employees back to their car at night because of neighborhood problems. I had heard enough. I did notice that the Allied Radio Store was located behind the station. They were the manufacturers of WCYA's bedroom transmitter. I felt more comfortable and safer working out of my bedroom than to venture into the inner city despite at last getting the chance to work for a real station.

There were many of us back then who upon getting our third class radio/telephone licenses thought it was our ticket to stardom. I remember studying on the train ride and taking the test at the Dirksen building in Chicago. You really had to know something back then, to pass the test. Of course the engineers had seconds and firsts, but we weren't interested in technical stuff. We wanted to be DJ's. But there was still another distinction. The people in my group had a feel for different types of music. Big bands, jazz, and soft contemporary tunes were preferred. Most of us could do without the Beatles, or rock and roll. We wanted freedom to be program hosts, an entity that has since evaporated from today's stations in favor of formats and repetitious play lists. In order to get that portion of our career going we had to find our first radio jobs. Someone had to be willing to train and be patient with raw high school talent. There were few Rob Clavier's or Ron Borden's back then who were allowed on the air in their teen years.

Clavier was a Saturday night jock on WJOB and a later news man at WFLM (now WWJY). We think he was the one behind removing all the door knobs at Hammond High one year and tossing them into the school swimming pool. Clavier later married a Chicago Bears cheerleader and got into security work, while Borden became an engineer for ABC news man Paul Harvey. Borden is still at the same station WLTH (WGRY in Gary).

Very little chances existed for young people wanting their first break in radio. We were willing to do anything, even sweep the floor just to get an inside opportunity. Until this time we simply bided our time with CB radios, phono-oscillators, and doing PA work for the local Little League and Babe Ruth League baseball games. Some guys merely announced the batters but several of us did as much play by play as we could even to the point of entertaining the crowd before the game with records, news, and weather reports. The days baseball scores were copied out of a "borrowed" newspaper off of someone's porch. So complete with a script it was show time each night at the little league games. A worn out 45 rpm record player played music before the games. It sounded like a radio station operating from the park. To broaden the audience, we often cranked up the speakers to enable people several blocks away to hear us. The South Holland Police came over and made us turn it down.

One evening the Chicago White Sox mascot "Andy the Clown" (Andrew Rozdilsky) showed up at the game. Famous for his loud, drawn out "Go You White Sox!" screams we handed him the mike one night. He held each note so long his voiced equaled the towns fire alarm system in volume. He had great pipes. My folks who lived over a mile away could hear him on the PA that night. The crowd seemed to love the contests and the entertainment during the games, all except one trouble maker who sprayed me with mace one evening during a "broadcast". I remember rolling around in the dirt and staggering around in the crowd. I had no idea what had happened except that my eyes were burning shut.

Several of us were frequently honored at little league banquets for our announcing. The experience was a valuable contribution to helping add skills to my career. I almost became a baseball announcer because of those years with the little league and still would welcome the opportunity if it was ever presented to me.

I was a big admirer of Jack Brickhouse of WGN who did the Cubs games. I would have enjoyed to announce the names of the likes of Ernie Banks and Jay Johnstone. But Jack had that job sold up. But I did announce the name of Steve Trout, a former Cubs/Sox pitcher who played in the South Holland Little League back then. Steve made it to the big leagues, while I continued as a rookie on radio.

It would have been a lot more fun working in the early days of radio. Earlier, I highlighted the history of old stations in the Fox River Valley area west of Chicago. In the Calumet Area there is also a long legacy of stations plus a few that have gone silent. I worked in most of them, but let's start at the beginning.

### Early Radio Notes

In searching through countless annals of local history, I found few early radio stations in the Lake-Porter Counties of Indiana. There was much more activity going on in adjacent South Cook County, Illinois. Veteran

broadcaster Tony Santucci operated old and new FM stations in Chicago Heights as well as current day stations WCGO AM (1600 kilohertz) and WTAS FM (102.3 megahertz). Years before, Santucci had operated WCHI FM an early low wattage station in the late 40's. It is interesting to note that the calls WTAS and WCHI were first issued to stations in the 20's. WTAS first belonged to Charles E. Erbstein. The station premiered in 1923 and later was combined with another station to form WGN.

WCHI was the second set of call letters issued to a Jehovah Witness group in Batavia, Illinois in 1923. This stations call changed from WORD to WCHI when it moved to the "Windy City" and became the "Voice of Chicago" in the early 1930s. Prior to Santucci's operations the Coppotelli brothers operated stations in Chicago Heights in 1925.

In nearby Blue Island, John Jage ran WRBI FM a short lived one thousand watt station that eventually followed the usual road of radio obscurity in the late 1940s. Without a profitable AM station, uncoupled FM's soon bit the dust. In those times, there were few advertisers interested in spending money on FM stations. But even worse there were fewer FM radio sets around. Actual manufacture of FM radios in the 40's fell well below predicted levels. Meanwhile, fascination with TV continued to soar. Jage stated that his station actually sold FM radio sets at cost just to get them into the hands of listeners. FM really didn't get going until 1970.

In Indiana WJOB is the oldest continually running station with the longest heritage which dates back to 1923. The station has been researched many times, including in 1960 by program director Quin Morrison. Also, in Indiana there were a couple of early 1920s stations including WRBC in Valparaiso, operated by a local church. WLBT in 1926 was a low powered operation in Crown Point maintained by young Buster Wendel and friends. In the late 20's WJKS Gary, Indiana, later became WIND, a popular station in Chicago. Let's examine some of the early stations and attempt to bring radio history up to date. With time and limitation here is a summary of the more known operations from the 20's to the present. Where appropriate, my comments and experiences are noted.

## INDIANA STATIONS

### WJOB: The Bright Spot

Of all the Northwest Indiana stations, WJOB is the oldest and most professionally run operation. Its heritage and history dates back to 1923 giving the station plenty of time to establish itself as the "Calumet News Leader." Many Hammond area people over the years have risen in the morning and have been entertained and informed all day long by its long legacy of outstanding announcers. The station has launched the careers of countless news people and entertainers. The best known of these notable individuals has been Frank Reynolds, Hugh Hill, and Mike Rapchak.

Reynolds of nearby Munster, later became an ABC newsman. He passed away due to cancer in the early 80's. Hugh Hill a veteran of many area stations is currently a political reporter for WLS TV. The names of these two individuals were found recently near the top of the tower while crews replaced a lighting fixture. Their names were probably etched in the metal before the tower was erected.

Mike Rapchak has worked for many Chicagoland stations and is synonymous with the phrase "good music." He currently hosts a weekend nostalgia program on WGN. Eddie Oskierko did a polish program on Sundays for many years and Eddie Honesty was one of the areas first black disc jockeys. Other announcers like Quin Morrison, Emery King, Jim Gudas, and Doug Dahlgren have moved on to other cities. King now anchors the news in Detroit and followed the president around in the 70's for NBC news. Gudas works for WMAQ in Chicago. The country's first "man in the air" to do live traffic reports was Hammond Police Officer Les Downing on WJOB. Downing appeared on TV programs discussing his occupation on "What's My Line?" and "You Asked For It." He set up traffic programs for other stations in Canada and Cuba. After serving on the Hannond Police Department for twenty years, Downing took a commercial flying job. He passed away on November 10, 1969.

Many other jocks and news people are still in the area, proud of their years and opportunities given to them by WJOB. Well traveled and adverse newsman Cosmo Currier spent nearly 20 years at WJOB and later became the news director at WLTH. Many photos and glimpses of WJOB history have been supplied to this work by "Cool Cos" who sort of grew up working for the station.

The reader should be referred to two other works concerning WJOB history: 1) A 1945 booklet, WJOB at War, which is in some private collections and depicts the era of radio when WJOB first moved to the Millikin building; 2) Previous sections of this book describes the earlier years of WJOB when the station was first known



as WWAE and was located in the Joliet, Plainfield area. Around 1960, then program director Quin Morrison, did his own research on WJOB. Here is what he found.

Around the summer time of 1923 a man named Lawrence J. Crowley, the owner and the operator of the Alamo Dance Hall at 321 Clinton Street, Joliet, Illinois, started construction on his own transmitter in his establishment. He wanted to cover Joliet with entertainment especially to promote his bands and vocalists on the new medium of radio. His call letters were WWAE and licensed to a frequency of 1320 khz. His first broadcast on WWAE was heard on November 10, 1923. The station was also being inspected out of the Chicago office of the Bureau of Land Navigation, Department of Commerce, by an engineer named Parkhurst.

In August 1924, Crowley cleared the frequency of 1320 (leaving the way open for WJOL's present frequency and operations), moving the station down the dial to 1240. The license for 1240 came later in 1924. The station was still at the Alamo ballroom. May 19, 1925, Crowley asked the Bureau to have his location changed from the Alamo Ballroom to Electric Park in Plainfield, Illinois. The change was approved. The station moved and resumed broadcasting still on 1240 kilohertz out of his home.

December 27, 1926, Crowley was once again on the move with his WWAE operation. This time the station was moved from Plainfield to the Southside of Chicago resuming its operations at 2025 South Wabash Avenue. The first broadcasts from this site were heard on February 4, 1927.

Crowley sold or turned over his interests to Dr. George F. Courier that August. The new ownership took effect at the Wabash Avenue site August 15, 1927. This was short lived, 15 months later a group purchased WWAE known as the Hammond-Calumet Broadcasting Corporation and officially the station became a Calumet Region broadcasting facility on November 10, 1928. The studios were located at 402 Hammond Building, the corner of Fayette and Hohman Streets, Hammond, Indiana.

The transmitter was moved to 137th and Pockman Streets on the city's north side. The Hammond-Calumet Broadcasting Corporation ran the station until it was sold in June 1940. The next changes at WWAE were interesting. The studios were moved March 21, 1935 to 5219 Hohman Avenue. On September 26, 1938, they were licensed to 5935 Hohman. O. E. Richardson, Fred L. Adair, and Robert C. Adair bought the facility from the Hammond-Calumet Broadcasting Corporation in June of 1940. On August 29, 1940, they changed the call letters from WWAE to WJOB. The frequency moved to 1230 kilohertz on March 24, 1941. On July 31, 1941, construction was started on studios and transmitter site all in one location at 449 State Street, the Millikan Building. The first broadcasts out of this location were heard on October 13, 1941. The name South Shore Broadcasting appeared on the records as of December 12, 1946. The transmitter at Radio Center (6405 Olcott) was on the air sometime around 1948. The move to this building is shown on the records at 1956. It is believed that the building is older than that, but no one is sure. The date on the records of the studio's being here on the FCC papers is May 23, 1956.

Colby Broadcasting's takeover from South Shore Broadcasting was official December 30, 1960. With considerable remodeling and equipment purchasing in the years of ownership, WJOB now serves the Calumet region better than ever. So there you have the entire early history of the station. It seemed appropriate to add to the files. So a belated happy birthday to the program department. Signed Quin Morrison, program director.

Quin Morrison's account of the history of WJOB is quite accurate. In previous sections more details were outlined earlier about the operators of the station, and its constant movement in the area. No other station in this work can claim that they have existed longer than the continual radio operation of WJOB. The station indeed dates back to 1923 when it was a crude 100 watt operation located in a downtown bar in Joliet.

### Mike Rapchak

The mellow and dulcet voice of Mike Rapchak has long graced the airwaves in Northwest Indiana and the Chicagoland area. Rapchak in a word stands for good music and professionalism. You won't hear anything wild or way out on his programs. He may be seated behind a microphone somewhere in Chicago but Rapchak's style and his programs personal touches makes one seem like they are seated in the same room spoken to individually by Mike.

Rapchak's program is good music, big bands, torch songs, familiar melodies and tinkling pianos. He enjoys pianist Bill Snyder and often features phone interviews with those ones active in the entertainment business years ago. Band leader Ted Heath's music is often featured. His personal record collection numbered in the hundreds of albums has taken years to collect. During this time he has played his brand of music at many area stations and

has even worked in T.V. Rapchak of Whiting, Indiana, often tells the story of how he obtained his first radio job at WSOY in Decatur, Illinois merely because the other guy who auditioned was worse than he was.

Through the years Rapchak has grown in subtle popularity and was named the "best on the air music personality" in Chicago on WLS FM in 1966. That era of radio offered Chicagoland listeners the best all around format of easy listening music played by a group of dynamic professionals like Rapchak, Art Hellyer and Steve Hodges. Harvey Wittenberg was director of the station at the time. Despite the format's splendid success somebody at ABC was bent on changing the station to another rock operation. Rapchak quit just as he did before when ear pleasing easy listening sounds were traded for the noise of gummy guitars and screaming singers.

Rapchak became the morning show host on WWCA in 1950 when the station first signed on. Mike also spent a short stint with WIMS as an announcer in Michigan City, Indiana. He was also a well liked sports caster for WJOB doing some play by play high school games with WLS T.V.'s Hugh Hill in the early 50's. WJOB had also hired later ABC newscaster Frank Reynolds creating an unbeatable trio of early professionalism, which broadcasted from the "Millikan" building.

Rapchak also worked in Chicago for several stations besides WLS FM. He served as news and sports director for WAAF from 1954 to 1958. His main competition on the air at that time was Jack Brickhouse, Bob Elson and Jack Quinlan. Mike later worked as a staff announcer for 8 years at WCFL and did some freelancing and WLOO FM 100. Mike tried reading the tag lines on T.V. commercials and doing the station breaks on WBKB T.V. (WLS) during late night movies. The position, despite its good salary, was unchallenging and soon he returned to radio. Today, Mike Rapchak is heard all night on Saturday evenings beginning at 11:30 p.m. on WGN radio. His late night program attracts mail from many parts of the country, especially from listeners regularly requesting and remembering the old songs and the old times. A familiar highlight of Mike's fine programming is his customary playing of Frank Sinatra's "One for My Baby and One for the Road" at 2:45 a.m. The program concludes with a familiar goodnight to "Texas," his wife.

#### BEFORE WJOB THERE WAS WWAE

Lawrence Crowley, a rumored hard luck bootlegger, used this station to promote his bands at the Alamo dance hall. The station operated at a variety of frequency's close to its present dial setting usually at 100 watts. Crowley moved his station to a Plainfield, Illinois amusement area called Electric Park in 1925. Electric Park was a well known recreational area along the DuPage River. A number of rides, cottages, band concerts, and ball games took place there. Crowley eventually lost the park due to back taxes. As outlined earlier, Crowley was a controversial figure and constant trouble maker with authorities. He moved his station to Chicago in 1927. It was later sold (or given) to Plainfield minister, Dr. George F. Courier. Courier maintained a home in Elgin, Illinois but spent most of his time operating his station which moved to Hammond a year later. Roland Pamler who had operated radio stations WCBZ, WJBZ in Chicago Heights, and WOK in Homewood became WWAE's engineer. Lawrence J. Crowley, the previous owner of the station was assassinated by unknown persons on October 6, 1936. Courier was associated with Doris (Irvin) Keane for many years who helped run both WWAE and another early Hammond station WHIP. Doris later worked for WSEL and WLEY in Chicago.

WWAE's programming was very local in nature featuring community news and a daily church program and music. Keane and Courier were cousins residing later at 4847 Woodlawn in Chicago. Doris locally collected food and clothing for Hammond residents in 1930 during the depression years. The pair later started another larger AM station, WHIP.

WHIP's 5,000 watt directional signal and programming was intended for the Chicago metropolitan area. The station had constructed new towers in a swampy section in the Northwest corner of Pulaski Park (Douglas Park). The towers were later abandoned and fell over.

In June of 1940, WWAE was sold by Courier and Keane to settle back debts, to a group headed by the Adair brothers and O. E. Richardson. Richardson was president of Hoosier State Bank.

In late 1940, WWAE's call letters were changed to WJOB. The station moved into new studios at 449 State street in the Millikin Building. Its new frequency was now 1230 kilohertz. Its 100 watt signal radiated from a pole on the roof which toppled over a couple of times in the 40's. The Millikin building featured several studios and a large auditorium to broadcast concerts. WJOB broadcasted from the Millikin building until 1956 when it moved to its present studios at 6405 Olcott Avenue in the Woodmar section of Hammond. The station is located behind a car dealership.



Julian Colby in 1960 bought WJOB. He has other business interests and for sometime held a cable TV franchise in Hammond and East Chicago.

From 1955 to 1959 WJOB had an FM station at 93.5 mhz. The call was changed from WJIZ back to WJOB FM and later sold to Crawford Broadcasting Company who changed the call letters to WYCA. It is now a religious station which moved from the WJOB building to 6336 Calumet Avenue in 1965. Its frequency was changed to 92.3 mhz. Owners of WJOB did not realize at the time the future value of an FM frequency. Also located at the WJOB Radio Center building was a car phone and paging business, South Shore Radio and Telephone Company. Former WJOB engineer Jess Peters sold the radio telephone company to another engineer William Eisele around 1972. Eisele then expanded its service and moved it to Hessville. He later sold the business to Page America about 1985.

Over the years Julian Colby has been fortunate to have hired young, aspiring announcers and journalists. These employees have used the opportunities presented by WJOB to further their broadcasting careers or go on in the business world. One of the success stories is Judy Grambo who started with the station over 25 years ago as a woman's show host. Today she is the station's manager.

Today's staff bears little resemblance to the pioneer newsmen of the Ray Wheat-Hugh Hill-Frank Reynolds era of the station. Other notable employees were Rick Salinger, Larry Hardy, Red Wilhelm, Tom Lanham, Doug Dahlgren, Jim Skilbeck, Irv Lewin, John Anastaplos, and political editor Millie Pilot. Salinger of late reported news from the Persian Gulf War for CNN.

Other dedicated employees of the 1950s included engineer Earl Vieaux, who did newscasts from WJOB's Chicago Heights studio. Add to this list engineer Jess Peters and newsman John Jage. Morning man Tom Williams and popular music jock Art Mann brought new dimensions to this station. Mann stirred up his teenage audience with a box of noise makers he kept under the console.

When Mann left, he was replaced by another night time sensation, Jan Gabriel. Gabriel was a public relations man for a discount store chain and did those loud "Sunday" race track commercials. Jan was a creative smash with the teens. He emceed countless record hops and dances and produced his own gimmicks which included jokes by engineer Larry Laugh-A-Minute Schusler as well as traffic reports from the local lovers lane section of Thornton Woods.

Other jocks of the same era were Tony Ruggiero, Bob Scott, and Dale Zahn. John Anastaplos did an evening call in show. Ruggiero's "Slick Chick Pick" program asked callers, mostly females, to rate records. The same idea was used by Pete Marzano later on. Pete's program was called "Platter Poll." Dale Zahn was the bright morning show host in the early 70's. John Premetz was the sports director. Irv Lewin did commentaries.

At the heart of the WJOB staff was the news department which was the principal reason folks in the Hammond area listened. The station always maintained a staff of 15 newsmen who covered meetings and chased ambulances. For the most part, the news department was headed by Cosmo Currier. "Cool Cos," as he was called in his earlier DJ days at WQAT, WBEE, and at WJOB, Cos kept his news department on top of the important events of the area. Flooding along the Calumet River and the great Cline Avenue bridge collapse in 1971 were among the many important stories covered by "The Investigators."

Newsman Larry Peterson, a consistent performer at the station, and a host of a noon time call in show "Party Line" is truly one of the nicest persons in the business. In 1970 Peterson won two UPI awards for his essays on banning fireworks. Currier was also an award winner for his report on a raid at Raymond "Happy" Kulic's Gambling Parlor. In 1982 Millie Pilot was Communicator of the Year.

The station in addition has received numerous accolades for community service and election coverage. Its 1972 municipal election coverage directed by Jerry Mastey, scooped all of the other regional competitors. The station utilized over 30 reporters at several remote locations. WJOB also paid cash to listeners for news tips. Most of the money was believed won by East Chicago resident Helen Kronland, who had a police scanner in every room of her house.

Night time programs on WJOB were dedicated to R & B music and over the years featured "Livin with Vivian" Carter, Jazzman Larry Smith, now of WBEZ, J. J. the DJ, Amos Cobb "On the Job," and Harold Penix. In the mid 70's it was time for this group of stars to move on. Most of the jocks (except Penix) had left, including the me. Peterson was still there, Currier left and was later replaced by WWCA's Ron Perzo. Dan Bowman became a video store operator. Lee Jackson still does part time work for the station. The studios have been remodeled several times. In 1986, WJOB formed the Gracol Corporation (combination of Grambo and Colby) and purchased

WZVN FM in Lowell. WJOB today broadcasts with 1,000 watts of power 24 hours a day from its 435 foot tower, in the Woodmar section of Hammond. WZVN maintains studios in Merrillville, just off US 30.

From 1971-1973 I had worked at WJOB from 1971-1973 and could easily fill a separate book on the above two years of activity. During that time, many colorful personalities had crossed my path. Cosmo Currier taught me how to "sniff" out a news story; Larry Peterson pushed pride and patience; and John Anastaplos caused me to lose my temper. The Big "A", the Top Banana Anastaplos, did get me hired years later in Crown Point when I was out of work. He was not well-liked by his co-workers. One announcer threw a typewriter at him, another wired his car with smoke bombs, another called the police on him one night while John was parked in his car talking to a young woman. He was, however, the station's biggest name and is still remembered in the Calumet region for his "Open Line" talk show.

News people seldom made more than \$110 a week then. I recall that the station always gave us two cases of Pepsi, and a large candy bar with a \$100 bill in its box at Christmas. The pop was courtesy of John Surowiec of Pepsi-Cola and his news reporter son Paul. One announcer, thinking the box just contained chocolate, found out about the hidden money after he had disgustedly tossed the box into the station's incinerator.

It was an interesting place to work. In those two years, I saw two park board employees punch each other at a meeting, narrowly escaped covering a nude beauty pageant, and was saddened when someone blew up our cow mascot. Numerous hiring and firing took place, and after two years as a beat reporter, morning show host, charity basketball coach and soul jock, it was time to move on. At WJOB, news and its reporters were the most important aspects of the station, but at any moment any staffer could find himself on a soup line wearing clothes from Goodwill Industries.

It seems that WJOB news people were always getting into fixes. Part of the problem was the unique investigative nature that news director Cosmo Currier installed into each new recruit for his department. I remember badgering the station for a couple of years with resumes, tapes and interviews, until one day I just happened to stop in to renew my resume. The first two people into the reception area were instantly hired. The third person in the waiting room behind me was destined for months of red tape, and excuses for not being hired. I could hear him getting the same routine from the receptionist that I had been getting for months. It didn't matter that he might have been better than I, or had more qualifications. It was the fact that I had gotten there five minutes before he did.

Right from the start Cosmo installed in all of us, feelings that no politician, city worker, or policeman was to going to push us around. Timid individuals, who wouldn't dream of talking back to their mother, suddenly became bold seasoned newsmen. With microphones and tape recorders blazing they were unleashed into town halls, police stations, and school superintendent offices asking probing questions, and demanding answers on behalf of tax payers. If a news subject replied "no comment" he or she was belittled over and over on the air to the point that their office soon received numerous calls from citizens wanting to know what they had to hide. They were often ripped on call in shows like Larry Peterson's "Party Line" and John Anastaplos's "Open Line" program. In short it paid to talk to WJOB news people, and when one talked they'd better be accurate, for Cosmo kept all the tapes of council meetings and news stories. He'd burn people by pulling out two year old tapes of politicians, and point out their change of position on a certain matter. They usually found themselves on Cosmo's yearly review, which was composed of tapes gathered through the year.

One of Cosmo's favorite news events to cover was to investigate illegal fireworks stands during the Fourth of July. Cosmo would secretly record the sale of illegal fireworks and then later return to the stand with the police and play the tape for them. This resulted in several arrests. On one occasion one stand operator got wind of what was going on. When Cosmo returned to the stand with the police, the entire operation had been torched setting up a pre-Fourth of July display which destroyed any evidence.

Cosmo knew a good news story when he saw one. One of his favorite subjects was former East Chicago Mayor Dr. John B. Nicosia. Disc jockey Jan Gabriel had a tape that was played at 10:30 p.m. each week night asking parents if they knew where their children were. Jan always had some funny lead in which made fun of the curfew announcement. On another occasion, after the mayor's window had been shot out in his home, Nicosia interrupted newsman Gene Teibloom's telephone report to argue with the station over how the incident actually occurred.

Cosmo knew how to present the cold facts. Witnessing the Hammond Police shooting a fleeing burglary suspect, Cosmo attempted to conduct an interview with the man. The wounded burglar was sprawled out on the

ground in a dirty alley. The man lying in a pool of his own blood simply cursed at Cosmo. We did blow it with the police one time, broadcasting the name of a slain policeman before his family had been notified.

Cosmo used to boast that he had the largest collection of audio cuts of area people. We all found that members of a certain political party or particular persuasion were not welcome on the station, unless we could make them look bad.

A likeable man, former Gary City Councilman and realtor Gene "Republican" Kirtland was prompted to remark, "You know, John, WJOB isn't one of my favorite stations." He had no doubt been burned a few times, or received publicity for something that he said that wasn't popular with the masses in Gary. Kirtland once proposed to have his neighborhood secede from the city. His comments were never missed by reporters as newsmen were allowed to plug their recorders directly into the city council PA system. In addition, the Gary school's station, WGVE-FM, broadcasted the entire meeting (moderated by Lanel Chambers).

Cub reporters soon learned who the "talkers" were and who to automatically contact for a viewpoint. Good reporters who understood what was going on got the important beats like Hammond, East Chicago, or Gary. In the 1970s the station had a stinky night time signal in Gary, and the Indiana Harbor Section of East Chicago, but reporters were sent there anyway for news and election coverage.

Young men like AAA Chicago Motor Club's Jonathan Lehrer was once locked into a room after conducting an interview that was embarrassing to a city school official. Lehrer refused to surrender the tape. He went on to do battle with Will County newsmakers at WJOL in Joliet and WBYG in Kankakee. WJOB was a good training ground for radio newsmen. Many times the reporters themselves became the news, much to the delight of the station. This often occurred after confronting crooks or politicians. Sometimes it was difficult to tell the difference. We were always being threatened with lawsuits.

But no one messed with WJOB newsman Dan Bowman. Bowman was wider than most of the people he interviewed stood. He soon developed the same image that all WJOB newsman had, "Just the Facts." He could have thrown his weight around, but didn't. If Dan wasn't busy digging up a story in Hammond or East Chicago, he was busy entertaining. He is an accomplished organist who also played at several local establishments.

While many of the station's newsmen were busy chasing ambulances, I chased sewer cleaning machines and spokespersons for garden clubs and bake sales. Only a couple of times did my news reporting career reach any prominence. They could be counted on one hand, when my tape recorder just happened to be rolling at the right time. They included a shoving match at a Hammond Park Board Meeting between two city officials, the drowning of seven children at a Gary Swimming pool, and being kicked out of the Munster Town Hall with NBC newsman Emery King. One afternoon we both had burst in the public works director's office with live microphones unannounced. The Works Director John Bunnell had refused to grant me an interview to answer questions about his department's routine daily functions. Bunnell found himself being discussed on talk shows and being criticized by news anchor Irv Lewin. Lewin asked on his show, "What does Bunnell have to hide? Why won't he talk to our reporter? All the reporter (me) wanted was to inquire about the operation of the city snowplows and find out how many tons of leaves were picked up last year. Bunnell later invited me to his office.

Being a newsman at WJOB was probably the highlight of my career. Cosmo installed in all of us "The Investigators" what hard news was and how to get it. It was defeating at times that we were kept from being as objective as we wanted to be because of certain station policies. But this was evident at most small stations who did not wish to offend certain politicians or advertisers. When Cosmo and John Anastaplos left WJOB, the smaller stations in South County where they went were not ready for their type of investigative probing.

At WLCL in Lowell, two sponsors threatened to sue me and the station for exposing the fact that they were polluting a small lake and illegally burning garbage. The second advertiser removed his ads when I reported that his firm's crop dusting activities had defoliated adjacent lawns and gardens. True, I learned from Cosmo, but by that time he had moved on to a bigger station (WWCA and WLTH).

WLCL's other news director, Pam Reismeyer, ended up at WMAQ in Chicago, with another old radio colleague Bob Phillips. And I stayed behind to interview cub scouts, librarians and to report bowling scores and obits. I was always a step behind.



**WRBC (WDBL)**  
**World Redeemed By Christ**

In 1924 a Lutheran minister Reverend George F. Schutes of Logan, Ohio, set out to prove that his church denomination could use a more modern means to bring "the Gospel" to area people. Schutes writing in the publication American Lutheran stated that people of the time referred to Lutherans as "conservative old fogies". He pointed out that while a Lutheran missionary in Africa had just received a plane to carry on his mission work, a radio station might be the modern answer to stimulate local people. It also might solve the problem of the many half empty churches in the city on Sundays. Schutes had noticed much church apathy since his arrival in the Valparaiso area in the summer of 1923. The Valparaiso area, known as the City of Churches, was an ear shot from many stations in Chicago and ownership of radio sets was very popular in the city. Schutes pointed out the variety of programs that could be found at a twirl of the dial.

"So one moment you hear the grand tones of a master organ, next you tune into a blaring jazz band, now there comes floating on unseen wings a sacred anthem, now someone is complaining that they still have no bananas today." Astrologers, spiritualists, and Russellites are also featured, and on Sundays the "Doctors of Divinity hold forth."

Schutes reasoned "Why let the devil have all the good things?" His counter was to build his own station as a modernistic approach to reach the area with the message of his church. Schutes was convinced that people who would not or could not come to church would be reached by the broadcasts. The programs would unlock many doors with the Gospel message. A number of invalids would also be served by the station. The Lutheran minister added "if one soul is saved by the broadcasts, the stations existence will be justified." The idea of a church run radio station was put to an unanimous vote by the congregation of Immanuel Lutheran located at 308 Washington. It was to be one of the first stations in Indiana and the first station owned by a Lutheran Church.

Nearby at the Dodge School of Radio and Telegraphy at 407 Monroe Street, the church found a radio engineer willing to take on the task of building the station; his name was Dale Clemmons. Near the chancel an unused room became the radio room, generators were installed in the basement below. A total of 2,500 volts powered three pairs of amplifying modulators and oscillator tubes creating a 500 watt signal. It was the largest station in Indiana at the time. The station also installed three microphones; one each for the pulpit, organ choir, and for the announcer in the radio room. Four strands of copper wires each 90 feet long shaped with L-leadin's stretched from the top of the churches steeple to a 95 foot tower behind the church. Estimates by the minister put the cost of the station at about \$7,500 dollars, about half of the normal cost of a comparable Western Electric installation. Some sources say early Atwater-Kent equipment was also used by the station which was dedicated on March 25, 1925.

On May 3, 1924, the Bureau of Navigation Radio Division, the U. S. Department of Commerce had granted a license and the call letters WDBL to the church. Not satisfied with the government issued call letters Pastor Schutes requested different letters and submitted a list of 15 possible choices. The ninth call letter combination on the list WRBC was awarded by the radio division to the church. It stood for "World Redeemed by Christ". The frequency was 278 meters or 1080 khz.

The first few weeks of broadcasting were futile efforts by the church and its congregation. There were antenna problems and more tests needed to remedy unforeseen malfunctions. Ground wires and the restringing of WRBC's antenna wires caused the station to oscillate improperly. Pastor Schutes found out quite by accident that the problems at the station had corrected. While shopping downtown, several people brought it to the pastors attention that something was happening at the station. He hurried to a radio store and heard the sounds of the church organ coming through the loud speaker of the radio.

At that time a local 500 watt station dominated the radio dial. Schutes remarked in American Lutheran "its a peculiar sensation to hear your own church many blocks away, I instinctively began to listen for the preacher, then I remembered to think he was downtown."

On WRBC's dedicatory program renown organist professor J. L. Reutter of Chicago presented a two hour broadcast. City officials were on hand along with Mayor Edgerton W. Agar and Pastor Schutes to address listeners. Schutes told the community the station would be a religious operation. There would be no jazz bands and no commercials. Forest Jones was WRBC's announcer who also doubled as the station's engineer and janitor. In 1925 WRBC was on the air two days a week broadcasting morning and evening church services on Sunday with some musical and educational programs on Monday. The normal range of the station was 100 miles. A record 300 miles



was reported by some listeners. Letters poured in with reception reports and inquires about the station's operation. Schutes kept a careful ear on WRBC's programming. Regular church services and Immanuel Lutheran's choir were regularly aired. Some church programs were broadcast in German, French, and Spanish. Care was taken not to antagonize other religions by arguing differences of doctrine. News of tragedy and crime were omitted by Schutes who had just begun to realize the impact of his station on the community. Funds were solicited for Tennessee tornado victims and sent to WLS in Chicago. Some city news was presented including the station endorsement of a city planning project and obituaries were read. The "Stroller" a regular column in the Valparaiso Vidette-Messenger newspaper mentioned that at one point listeners could not receive the station because of unexplained interference. Other early stations had similar problems. After a week of riding around in a truck the Van Ness Electric Company equipped with a Pathe' receiving set found the cause of the disturbance. Heading out towards Chesterton, a leaky insulator was found at Woodville Junction. Listeners were again able to tune their "Radiolas" back to WRBC.

Since the station came on the air during the experimental stage of radio, listeners were taught how to make their own sets. Tuning coils were made by wrapping wire around a Quaker Oats box. Some records were played on WRBC with poor fidelity results. Live performances featuring vocalists Selma Claussen, Rudolph Boering, Miss Whitaker, August Bucci, and Margaret Ball Dickson were aired. Betty Jean Salberg won the stations beautiful baby contest. Abundant eager talent were more anxious than able to perform on the station.

A continuing story on WRBC was the disappearance of a local university student Harry Morgan. The lad had developed a blow to the head and had disappeared. The VM "Stroller" stated Morgan later turned up in Scotland. In early 1928 WRBC was assigned to 1260 khz by the FRC with a reduction of power to 250 watts. On November 11, 1928, WRBC as the result of a major nation wide frequency allocation was ordered to shift to 1240 khz. Its power was returned to 500 watts. Early in March of 1929, WRBC announced that it was temporarily going off the air for repairs to adjust to its new daytime only frequency assignment. The cost to run the station was becoming very high according to church officials and the newly formed Federal Radio Commission was putting pressure on smaller stations for extensive improvements. Pastor Schutes had convinced Lutheran Church officials in 1925 to purchase Valparaiso University. He was, however, unsuccessful in trying to sell WRBC to the school. WRBC was also faced competition with more powerful stations. For over four years tiny WRBC had served the public, the area, and its shut-ins. By December of 1929, the Government had scheduled a hearing to determine the station's license status. WRBC failed to file for license renewal by March 1930. Its license was officially canceled by the FRC on April 3, 1930 as reported by Broadcast Profile. Schutes stated that the station was not his hobby nor a grandstand of the congregation but an earnest missionary enterprise dedicated to proclaim the Gospel message. Five years after the station had closed down a schism developed in the church. Pastor Schutes left to form the Trinity Lutheran Church located down the street at Washington and Chicago Streets. The Immanuel Lutheran church congregation moved to another building at Monticello and Glendale Streets. The old Immanuel Lutheran church and site of WRBC became the Heritage Lutheran church.

Pastor Schutes' full name was Reverend Georg Freimund Wolfgang Schutes, he was born January 23, 1874, in the Kingdom of Saxony (Germany). He graduated from the Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. In 1897, Schutes had served as pastor of the Lutheran Negro Mission in Concord, NC, in 1909, as well as parishes in Ohio and Indiana. He is listed as a pastor in the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod from 1923-1932, at Valparaiso, Indiana. Seminary records indicate he was removed from office in 1933 without explanation. This was possibly due to the schism that had developed in his church, resulting in him starting a new church. Schutes passed away in Elkhart on February 9, 1938.

## WLBT

### Wear Lovers Become Tied

Long before today's radio waves began to criss cross Crown Point an enterprising young "Hub City" resident began the city's first radio station. The year was 1926. Few persons remember WLBT. The call letters stood for "Where Lovers Become Tied," reminiscent of the era when Crown Point was known as the "marriage mill." During this time Crown Point Judge "Spot Kemp" married thousands of people, including actor Rudolph Valentino. People wanting to get married fast traveled long distances to come to the city.

WLBT was owned and operated by Harold "Bud" Wendel. Bud later married his wife Edith and they lived for many years at 303 East North Street in the city. At the age of 18 Bud or "Buster" Wendel as some folks called

him was an electronics mastermind. He and several others constructed the station mainly out of spare parts. Electronic devices and equipment were very costly for young Wendel in 1926 and he often improvised or created "home brew" equipment to suit his needs. His 100 watt transmitter reached across the city at 1310 khz.

The FRC later required WLBT to operate at 50 watts at 930 khz and later 1210 khz by June of 1927. The antennae were 20 foot spreaders with 5 horizontal radiators. They were attached to two old windmill towers that stood near his father's greenhouses near the corner of Grant and North Streets. The station had no fixed schedule and no advertisers. It operated first out of Wendel's home. Later studios were constructed where attorneys Edward Reardon and David Wilson have their law offices today on North Court Street. The station also operated from the top floor of the Crown Point Community Building. This structure was known as the old American Legion Hall, at 7 North Court Street late in 1927. The transmitter and antenna were moved to the roof of the structure.

Wendel's programming consisted of news, public service programs, and music. For a small station with no budget, new records were expensive. Frequently publishing houses pressed for royalty uses from broadcasters, thus limiting the playing of records on WLBT. The little station however continued to grow in popularity. Articles in the Lake County Star and Crown Point Register newspapers in the late 20's, alerted listeners to this new form of entertainment. WLBT featured people that everyone knew around town. Residents huddled around large round cabinet sets or used cat whisker radios "to hear their local station." Many times a week a local band called the "Baker Harmony Boys" played informal concerts over the station. The band was composed of Crown Pointers Harry Baker, Luther Randolph, Dr. Archibald Farley, Fred Young, and Vernon Heintz. Heintz recalls the time that a local truck driver Dick Bielefield put up a Western Union operator to send a fake telegram to the station. The telegram was alleged from a listener in Tennessee who had enjoyed hearing Heintz singing the favorite "Mary Lou" on the show. The staff was first amazed that the station could be heard from such a distance and were later disheartened when they learned that the telegram was a hoax. The Heintz family ran a barber shop in the city. Wendel says that the station was a challenge to build and operate. His non profit hobby attracted the likes of Crown Pointers Fred Hall and Grant Fredericks to work at the station.

Grant Fredericks owned a plumbing supply store on South Main Street where a fried chicken restaurant is today. He resided in Gary and for sometime was the station's main announcer. Fred Hall was the station's engineer. Together the trio ran the operation for about two years until interest and finances failed. When the station license expired on August 1, 1928, WLBT left the air. On that date the FRC canceled the stations license. In his later years, Wendel managed TV repair shops on North Main Street. He often toyed with going back on the air but this never materialized. Ironically, he lived just around the corner from the studios of Crown Point's next radio station WFLM. At age 71, Bud was still interested in electronics and spent much time tinkering with appliances, old televisions, and homemade projects. Once in a while he would talk on his CB radio.

Even though WLBT has been silent for nearly 60 years, one often reads about the unusual characteristics of radio waves. After leaving the transmitting tower some waves travel further than others, especially at night. Others leave earth and go out into outer space. Perhaps somewhere in our galaxy, the former signals of WLBT are out there still traveling through space to let aliens know many years before that Bud Wendel was the first pioneer broadcaster and disc jockey from Crown Point. Wendel passed away around 1980.

## WIND/WJKS

### Where Joy Kills Sorrow

The setting for WJKS is a familiar scenario demonstrating the use of early radio to promote a popular dance spot in the late 1920s. The Gay Mill Ballroom or Gay Mill Gardens located at 540 North Lake Street in the Miller section of Gary, Indiana often featured the well known dance bands of that day. Owners wanting to attract more customers and promote their establishment began construction of a 500 watt radio station in 1927. WJKS became the call letters of the station, the letters stood for Johnson and Kennedy and Son and later stood for "Where Joy Kills Sorrow." The owners of the station were a well-known Chicago lawyer Thomas J. Johnson and actress Frances Kennedy; they were married in 1905. Hammond Times columnist Archibald McKinlay stated in his research that the pair settled at Miller Beach in 1920. The area was perfect to raise their severely ill infant son. The family purchased 80 acres of lake front property. Johnson meanwhile found himself bedridden from burns he suffered from saving his son from a fire that destroyed the family cottage. While recuperating he subdivided most of the property and contemplated building an amusement center in the area.

The Gay Mill Ball Room was built about 1925 and included seven additions to accommodate the growing interests of the community. Johnson and Kennedy also owned the Palace theater at 765 Broadway in Downtown Gary. They had literally given up their careers to raise their son and pursue their new business interests. The Gay Mill Ball Room soon became a well known attraction. Johnson and Kennedy investigated the means of radio to further promote their establishment and the bands that played there.

### HISTORY OF GAY MILL GARDENS AND THE LAKE SHORE AREA

Many long time Miller area residents remember the Gay Mill Gardens or the Gay Mill Ballroom this way. The ballroom was about a 150 foot square white frame building with green trim and shutters. The structure stood on the west side of Lake Street and Forest Avenue. A refreshment stand in the northeast corner of the building sold hot dogs to beachgoers.

The large mirrored dance floor in the ballroom featured lighted strips in the floor. Long time resident Fred Carr stated that all the major bands played at the Gay Mill Gardens including Rudy Valle and Morey Sherman. The two 100 hundred foot WJKS towers stood on the south side of the building in a northeast-southwest direction about 90 yards apart. Clifford Anderson, a local boy scout leader, as well as Thomas Johnson, did the announcing.

Another large restaurant was located inside the structure. Fred's brother Robert "Zeke" Carr explained that busses from the Gay Mill would travel between the ballroom and the point where the street cars stopped at Lake Street and the railroad tracks to pickup patrons.

Nightly dances took place in the ballroom. Ina Price of South Haven and Helen Stein recall dancing the "Charleston" there. Dance marathons were frequently held with the dances often aired on WJKS. Women hostesses wearing white gowns would charge patrons a "dime a dance, while Mickey Isley's Orchestra would play several chorus numbers.

"Chappy" Gibson another long-time resident delivered fuel oil to the many cottages that surrounded the ballroom. One of those cottages today is Koby's Bait Shop located at the end of Lake Street.

In the late 20's there was no Catholic church in the area, so church services were offered in the ballroom. Roller skating was held there later. The chief competition of the Gay Mill Ballroom in the area came from Carr's Beach Pavilion, a lake front amusement center at the end of Lake Street. It was owned and operated by Fred Carr, Sr. and his mother Drusille. The Carr's had substantial beach front property until it was acquired by the Gary Land Company. The firm had been hired to buy property for U.S. Steel.

Since 1881 the area had been known as Carr's Beach. However, on October 29, 1929 a severe storm ravaged many of the beach front properties. Lake Michigan rose and destroyed much of the Carr's Beach Pavilion. The matter of U.S. Steel's acquisition of the Carr property from Lake Street to Marquette Park was tied up in court for many years. The Carr's currently run a boat chartering business on Lake Michigan.

#### Johnson-Kennedy Proceed with Station

On Tuesday, August 16, 1927, a day after the Federal Radio Commission had awarded the newly formed Johnson-Kennedy Corporation a license, the station went on the air. Studios had been built in the Gay Mill Ballroom Building at Lake and Forest Avenue and a large five wire T-type antenna was erected on the south side of the building. The station's first frequency assignment was 1290 khz, sharing time with WSBC. WJKS was truly an Indiana station catering to the needs and entertainment of "Hoosier" residents. Its dial sharing partner WSBC, was a Chicago station (pronounced She-Caw-Go by its announcer Jerry Sullivan). WSBC (standing for World Storage Battery Company) programmed big bands and later foreign language broadcasts. Today it is managed by former WGRY program director Roy Bellavia, and is one of three stations operating on a shared channel arrangement in Chicago at 1240 khz.

WJKS's first station manager and owner, Thomas Johnson, made good use of his portion of this share time situation. A dedication program was aired the evening of August 16, 1927.

The opening night program on WJKS was a big success. It was dedicated to the late Judge Elbert H. Gary the founder of the city. A formal dedication was scheduled for August 29th. William P. Gleason superintendent of the Gary Works presided. The next night a two hour program was planned featuring many local entertainers. The station's owner Thomas Johnson selected Phil Middleton as the station's first engineer. Middleton had to reconstruct the equipment as the station was prepared to broadcast on another frequency other than 1290 khz



originally assigned by the FRC. A share time arrangement would be set up with Chicago station WSBC according to an article in the Post Tribune.

About 1928 WJKS began using the station slogan "Where Joy Kills Sorrow" derived from its call letters. The station moved to 1360 on the dial sharing time with Chicago's WGES which broadcasted band music from Guyon's Paradise Ballroom in Chicago. (WGES through the years became WYNR, WNUS, WVON and now WGCI-AM.) WJKS broadcasted with the power output of 1,250 watts during the daylight hours and 250 watts night time. By 1929, night time power had been increased to 500 watts. In the fall of 1929 studios were moved to the Gary Elks Temple at 15 East 8th Street. The station's transmitter remained at the Gay Mill Ballroom. Evening power rose to 1000 watts in 1930. At that time, Thomas Johnson was president of the corporation that owned the station. Frances Kennedy was Vice President. Frances Hayes was treasurer and Billie Johnson was secretary. The station's business address was listed as the Lake Hotel at 734 Washington Street. Other sources list the address at either 724 or 733 Washington Street.

In 1931, WJKS's business office was located at 803 Broadway in Gary. In 1932 WJKS's call letters were changed to WIND (IND standing for Indiana).

Meanwhile, at the Gay Mill, the depression and the advent of WWII finally closed in on what was once one of the busiest night spots in the Calumet Region. Some racial tensions also developed in the area with the attraction of black bands and entertainers. By 1936, the building was in deplorable shape. Some fires had also occurred there. Local band leader Mickey Isley says the building was torn down in 1936. He purchased some of the insulation to use in his band rehearsal room in his garage at 378 Johnson Street in Gary.

A local developer Willard Stein purchased the property for back taxes around 1940. Local American Legion trustee, Charlie Wolf, stated that by 1949 a layer of slag had been placed across the property. The buildings and towers had long been removed. A legion member Rex Phillips urged his constituents to purchase the property to build a new legion post. The legion bought it for \$3,700.00 and held the property for a couple of years when developer Saul Cohn became interested in the land. He paid the legion 62 thousand dollars for the property and built several apartment buildings. Today the Marina Dunes apartment building rests on the approximate spot of the Gay Mill Ballroom.

Years later, WJKS/WIND's long time engineer Kenneth Shirk's wife Isabelle became a volunteer announcer at the Tradewinds Radio Reading Service for the blind and handicapped in Gary. A Miller area realtor Bruce Ayers, Sr. says the area West of Lake Street and North of the IHB railroad tracks is still known today as the Johnson Kennedy Estates. A popular rumor that a young woman Arlene Draves was killed at the Gay Mill was found untrue according to 1931 editions of the Gary Post Tribune. The incident took place at a "whoopi" party at a home in Glen Park. Five men were convicted of the scandalous murder of the young woman.

Other notes about the early years of WJKS, record that Mickey Isley's band played frequently along with other road bands at the Gay Mill. Mickey also played at Madura's Danceland, a dome-shaped building at 5 points in Whiting (Indianapolis Blvd, Calumet Avenue, 114th Street) across from the Lever Brothers Plant. Isley stated that the combination of the depression and the development of talking pictures in the 30's caused people to lose interest in dance halls, many of which closed down or burned down during that time. Isley now 81 years old today plays in a band called the "Rusty Pipes" in the Lake Station area.

In April of 1931, broadcast executive Ralph Atlass bought 50% of the Johnson-Kennedy Radio Corporation. Atlass and his brother Leslie were formerly in the poultry business in Lincoln, Illinois. They had started WBBM ("We Broadcast Better Music"). The Atlass family at one time owned and operated stations WBBM-AM and FM (W67C the old call for WBBM-FM), WAAF, and WJJD. Leslie Atlass sold WBBM to CBS in 1931; Norbert Clancy was appointed manager of WJKS that year.

In 1932, after WJKS had changed its call letters to WIND, the station moved to new studios at the Gary State Bank Building at 504 Broadway in September. Besides transmitter improvements, Ralph Atlass surrounded himself with other qualified broadcast personnel. George H. Jaspert became WIND's station manager in 1933. Eugene S. Mittendorf was Gary resident manager in 1935. That post was filled briefly by Dave Brinkmoeller and Dwight Northup.

Prior to this time in radio history, the newly created FRC was anxiously attempting to clear up the crowded radio dial and discourage small unprofessionally run stations from operating. The FRC had earlier clamped down on many stations making unauthorized frequency and power changes. A quota of frequencies was set up for each area. Former Westinghouse outlet and first Chicago station KYW had been moved to 1020 khz freeing up the 560



dial position. KYW later moved to Philadelphia, then to Cleveland. The FRC wanted to reserve the 560 dial position for an Indiana station. In 1932, the station's slogan was "voice of the steel city". It then moved from 1360 to 560 khz sharing time with two Chicago area stations WIBO and WPCC. WIBO "Chicago's uptown radio station" was owned by Nelson Brothers Furniture and Bonding Company at 6312 Broadway in Chicago. Band programs featuring Ted Fiorito gradually gave way to foreign language broadcasts. The transmitter was located on Ballard Road in Des Plaines. WIBO also experimented with early television broadcasts. W9AXO broadcasted experimental images in the 146 meter range (about 2 mhz). The tests were conducted by Western Television Corporation.

WIND's other share time partner was WPCC (formerly WDBY) operated by the North Shore Congregational Church at 1101 Wilson Avenue in Chicago. John C. O'Hair was the church's pastor who had been cited by the FRC for his radical broadcasts. The station broadcasted mostly on Sundays with religious programs. The call letters stood for "We Preach Christ Crucified" or "We Proclaim Christ Coming".

Both WIBO and WPCC were 500 watt stations which began in Chicago around 1925. When the FRC assigned the frequency to Indiana in 1931, both stations fought the allocation. In the end, WPCC and WIBO were taken off the air and later bought out by WIND. In 1933 Ralph Atlass acquired full ownership of the Johnson-Kennedy Corporation. Atlass began immediate improvements to the station, shifting the transmitter from the old Gay Mill Ballroom to an area two miles southwest of the city to Calumet Township. There were two sites, both near 29th Street. The first site at 4801 West 29th Street is now in Lake Etta Park (the Black Oak section of Gary). Its four tower bases can be found by observing the large grassy mounds that cover the area where the antennas once stood. The park's guard house is the station's old transmitter building. The 55 acre site near 29th and Colfax near Griffith is the present transmitter location. This site with its four tower configuration has been in operation since 1940. It is easily viewed from the Borman Expressway near Cline Avenue. Jess Peters of Portage, Indiana, a former WJOB engineer today maintains WIND's Griffith site. Another early WJOB engineer, Kenneth Shirk, was employed by WIND/WJKS for nearly 20 years dating back before 1940. By the late 30's WIND was basically a Chicago station, which merely maintained an Indiana transmitter site.

In 1936 daytime power had been increased from 2,500 watts to 5,000 watts with a 1,000 watt signal at night. A Blaw-Knox 254 foot self supporting vertical antenna was now in use at the Calumet Township site. On April 18, 1936 WIND became the flagship station for the short lived Affiliated Broadcasting Company network. Programs emanated from the 42nd floor of the Civic Opera Building in Chicago using the former studios of WENR. The "ABC" attracted some 20 stations before it went bankrupt in 1937. For a time that year WIND rebroadcasted programs from WLW, Cincinnati. Like many other suburban stations, WIND moved most of its operation to Chicago. For a short time it kept an office in Gary to stay in touch with Indiana interests (and to broadcast Indiana sports).

In 1937 Eugene S. Mittendorf became General Manager of WIND. Ralph Atlass was still President of the Johnson-Kennedy Radio Corporation. WIND was consolidated in Chicago offices at 201 North Wells Street with part timer WJJD. WJJD had been purchased from the Moose organization previously. By 1938, WIND broadcasted daily from 6:00 a.m. to 4:00 a.m. Some CBS programs not carried by WBBM were aired on WIND in 1939. Early announcers were newsmen Brooks Connally and Stan Corley, and sportscasters Jack Drees, Russell Hodges, and James Dudley. General Mills sponsored Chicago Cardinals football, Notre Dame football and Northwestern basketball games were also broadcast. In 1940, offices were again moved to 230 North Michigan Avenue. Chicago Cubs owner P. K. Wrigley bought into the station and later another Cubs associate John Holland became WIND's promotions manager. A Gary studio was maintained at 504 North Broadway to satisfy FRC requirements and to assure the stations access for broadcasting some Indiana sporting events.

Three new Truscon towers each 357 feet high were installed at the stations present day transmitter site. One tower blew down on November 11, 1940. Eventually the site would contain four towers southwest of the intersection of 29th and Colfax Street (having since moved from the Lake Etta site). Improvements were made in the new site in 1975.

The 1940s brought new personnel changes. General manager Eugene S. Mittendorf resigned on January 25, 1941. Ralph Atlass became both the General Manager of WIND and the President of the Johnson-Kennedy Radio Corporation. The commercial manager was John T. Carey. A succession of program directors brought in Brooks Connally, Riley Jackson, Robert Diller, Fred Miller and Howard Miller. Diller went on to manage station WBNU FM in Aurora, Illinois. Howard Miller later became a well-known radio personality at WIND. Dee O. Coe, became the General Manager in 1943 with Victor Voss as engineer.

In 1944 when WIND closed their Gary, Indiana studios and offices, Coe and Voss began work on WWCA which they opened 5 years later. Atlass sold his portion of WIND to Chicago Daily News publisher John S. Knight in 1946 for just over \$800,000. The remaining stock in the station belonged to P. K. Wrigley and Atlass's brother H. Leslie Atlass. On May 1, 1947 WIND moved to the Wrigley Building at 400 North Michigan Avenue. There the station enjoyed 9,000 sq. ft. with four spacious well equipped studios. Broadcast Profile stated that Ralph Atlass rejoined the station in 1952 serving again as General Manager. Paul Harper became president of the Johnson-Kennedy Radio Corporation. One of the station's fine announcers later was Art Hellyer. Howard Miller did a regular morning program from 1947 to 1968. He later purchased Geneva radio station WFXW and Rockford station WRRR. Later announcers at WIND were Eddie Hubbard, Linn Burton, Jay Trompeter, Jim Lounsbury, and WRBI's Michael Dyk became a later engineer.

A new group, WIND Inc., composed of the Chicago Daily News, John T. Carey, the Atlass family and the Wrigley Group, jointly owned the station in 1953. The firm also sought a construction permit for a TV station for channel 56 in 1954. Veteran sportscaster Jack Quinlan joined the staff as sports director in 1954. He later teamed up with hall of famer Lou Boudreau to do the Cubs games for WGN. Quinlan was tragically killed in a plane crash around 1964. By 1956 the owners of the first radio station in Chicago (KYW), Westinghouse Broadcasting Company and its president Donald McGannon, purchased WIND for \$5.6 million. Ralph Atlass remained as general manager at WIND and was made Vice President of Westinghouse's Chicago interests. A number of well-known radio personalities were employed by the station including Milo Hamilton and Bernie Allen. Chicago White Sox games were broadcast in the 1950s. Cub games had been aired in 1943. On Saturdays the Record Shop Program featured 15 minutes of canaries singing with records. The program was sponsored by a bird seed company. Tunes by Tommy Dorsey, Dinah Shore, and Bing Crosby gave way to a middle of the road format in the 60's and an all oldies format in 1974. Large posters promoting the top 500 songs of all time were distributed in record stores.

WIND released its own oldies album that year. Jack Dreznes of Beverly Records in Chicago listed the staff photos on the record as those of Bob Deljerno, Ron Britain, Chuck Benson, Dave Baum, Larry the Legend, Dick Williamson and Connie Szerszen. Gordon Davis was named General Manager in 1951 followed by Edward Wallis in 1961, Richard H. Harris in 1966, Wallace Dunlap in 1967, John L. Williams in 1968 and Phillip E. Nolan in 1972. Well-known Chicago personalities James Gannon, Jerry Udwin, Jack Williams, Jim Slade and Ed Dorsey headed the station's news and programming departments in the 60's. Ralph Atlass who enjoyed a long broadcasting career in Chicago bought WAAF in 1967. The call letters were later changed to WGRT. Atlass sold the station in 1973 and passed away in 1979.

Harold Brokaw, a Westinghouse engineer at WOWO-Fort Wayne, joined the WIND engineering staff in 1968. Brokaw later bought WMRO and WAUR in Aurora. In 1971, WIND's studios were moved from the Wrigley building to new facilities on the 3rd floor at 625 North Michigan Avenue. In 1975 an adult contemporary format was heard over WIND's new 5,000 watt Westinghouse solid state transmitter.

The station continued operation at 560 khz 5,000 watts 24 hours a day going directional at night. Former shareholder Phillip K. Wrigley, who was also president of a chewing gum company, died in April of 1977. By 1978, a new group of executives headed the station. Donald H. McGannon became chief operating officer of Westinghouse. Daniel L. Ritchie was named president and chief executive officer of the company's stations. Programming came from the American Entertainment Radio Network. The station's adult contemporary format which began in 1974 ended in September of 1978.

It was the last time for many years that a record would be aired on WIND. The station had adopted a new talk format which included commentators, talk show hosts, and sports programming. Another era of executives ran the operation of WIND which included Michael J. Faherty, Robert J. Emery, Jane D. Coleman, Janet Hurbic-Shay and Donald Graves. The station's slogan was changed to News Talk 56.

Dave Baum, later of WBBM, one of the city's foremost talk show hosts. He was featured on WIND at night along with Clark Weber in the morning. Former mailroom attendant Eddie Schwartz and newsman Bernard Shaw were also early WIND employees. Schwartz became the music director of WIND in the 60's, and later a late night talk show host for WGN and WLUP.

On March 19, 1984 WIND became a Mutual outlet and began carrying the Larry King Show all night. On December 16, 1985 WIND was sold by Westinghouse and Cable Incorporated to McHenry Tichenor Media Systems. Charles J. Brooks became general manager of WIND and later purchased WOJO FM in Evanston. Its previous call letters had been WEAW. Brooks also bought interest in WFRL in Freeport, Illinois. Both WIND/WOJO feature

all spanish programming and contemporary music. Broadcast Profile notes that WIND is the 28th oldest continually operated station in the country.

### WHIP (WJWC)

#### A Broadcasting Folly

Around 1937, the broadcasting ownership team of Dr. George Courier and Doris (Irvin) Keane, attempted to reach the Chicago market with WHIP. They had owned and operated WWAE a 100 watt station in Hammond for nearly ten years. WWAE which later became WJOB served the Hammond area with its low power signal but Courier and Keane wanted an operation that would reach deeper into higher concentrations of the population. For a short time both stations were operated simultaneously in Hammond (See WJOB and WWAE).

Courier and Keane were shrewd business people. They operated Radio Institute in Chicago and had persuaded numerous GI's to attend the school and set up their own stations. All of these so called satellite stations including WRBI, Blue Island, and WEXI, St. Charles Illinois faded quickly.

WHIP with later Chicago studios at 165 North Michigan Avenue operated with 5,000 watts and during the first years of operation was a totally directional station even during the daytime. It's 1480 khz frequency was later switched to 1520 khz. Owners of the station persuaded advertisers that they covered the whole city of Chicago with their three tower signal in Douglas Park on the North side of Hammond. But the station sank deep in debt about as deep as its towers sank in the Wolf Lake muck. The station's main attraction was the Sunday night radical broadcasts of Father Charles E. Coughlin. His anti-semitic/anti-American attacks got him kicked off many stations.

Toward the end WHIP did not have even an engineer. Employees usually had to corner station owners for their paychecks. WHIP, in heavy debt, was sold in 1943 to John W. Clarke and Marshall Field. Field owned the Chicago Sun Times. The station aired the "Sun-Air Edition" which were readings from the editorial sections of the newspapers as its principal program. WHIP's call letters were changed to WJWC (Clarke's initials). WJWC was taken off the air by the FCC for numerous violations in February of 1945. Its debt ridden and illicit practices were finally silenced by the FCC and the frequency was given to a down state Illinois firm. Field had bailed out earlier and purchased interest in WJJD.

About two years later, Courier and Keane repurchased WJWC's equipment at a liquidation sale and attempted to put the station back on the air. But the FCC remembering past performances and operating practices of the pair refused to license the station. Courier went back to the ministry for a short time and Keane continued operating the Radio Institute which had moved from 165 North Michigan to 308 West Roosevelt in Chicago. Keane was later indicted for misuse of government funds. It was alleged that GI's using their benefits at Keane's performing school received kick backs for enrolling even though they did not attend classes. Keane was sentenced to 5 years in jail, but later turned up to operate WSEL-FM in the Rogers Park section of Chicago. She always claimed her innocence of the charges (see WSEL).

Engineers visiting WHIP's antenna site at Douglas Park (Pulaski Park in the late 40's) found the transmitter building completely vandalized. The towers had sunk deep into the mud and had fallen over. WHIP was definitely a station that deserved a better fate, but suffered greatly from mismanagement and technical troubles.

### WWCA

#### Working With Calumet Area

A published summary of radio stations in Northwest Indiana would not be complete without mentioning the energetic and industrious Dee O. Coe. Coe's tireless efforts help build WWCA (Working With The Calumet Area) into a continual source of information for the Gary area and a traditional ratings winner. Coe, formerly the general manager at WIND in 1943, developed an informative mix of programs that reached every ethnic group in the city. He also surrounded himself with professional staffers. During Coe's successful years of operating WWCA his corporation acquired several other stations including ones in South Haven, Michigan and an AM-FM operation in LaPorte, Indiana (WLOI/WCOE FM). These stations were run by Coe's son Ken.

While Sunday's were usually sold out to church and ethnic groups, a constant supply of professional personalities paraded through Gary gracing the weekday airways of WWCA. WWCA dominated Gary radio until 1983 when it was sold to a religious group who unwound the heritage of the station. WWCA (1270 khz) began broadcasting on December 7, 1949 with studios at the Hotel Gary at 8th and Broadway in the downtown section of the "steel city." Gary's other station WGRY (1370 khz) was located around the corner at the Lake Hotel. About



two years later the station moved to its present quarters at 545 Broadway. WWCA's four tower transmitter site remains near 47th street on the Gary-Griffith border.

A list of WWCA's accomplishments and its lengthy list of busy broadcast personalities would be difficult to compile. Early employees included Mike Rapchak who signed the station on each morning. Other important staffers included announcers Gene Watts, Jesse Coopwood, Pete Tanis, newsman Ted Thorne, and program director Todd Branson. Thorne who hosted "Sound Off" had a long career in Northwest Indiana radio and was a former newscaster at WGN TV in Chicago. Thorne later sold advertising for WIMS in Michigan City and WLOI in LaPorte. He often tells the story of why he quit the long late hours of TV work, and long commute. One night Ted found his son up late watching TV, when questioned why he was still up at this hour, the son replied, "I wanted to see what you looked like."

Early executives according to a 1952 edition of "Air Pockets" listed Joseph Fike, Commercial Manager, Salesman Jerry Tuerff, Jim Fitzgerald, Jim Connors, and auditor Martin Armstrong. Ed Brennan was one of the station's earliest news reporters. Brennan was also a photographer for the Post Tribune and involved with public relations with the county prosecutors office. He later went to work for WGRY. Renown band leader Buddy Pressner played during live Sunday afternoon broadcasts at the Hotel Gary on WWCA.

Other later staffers included Classical Music host Hans Alton, Jerry Gerrod, Emery King, Bill Warwick, Wally Petrovich, Mike Adler, Andy Janiga, Bill Gaines, channel 50's Ernie Nims, Steve Bauer, Jerry Wilkerson, Johnny Gibbs, Matt Hart, Al Evans, Keith Klein, Jerry Granger, John (Randle) Rappaport, a writer for TV's "MASH," Jim Lupas, John H. "Patt" Patterson, Tony Rose, Daddy J.J., Blanca Mayo, Jim Raggs, David Barancyk, Dennis Roberts, Bill Miller, Don Hagen, Jerry Mastey, and Vivian Carter. Many of these early WWCA employees also worked later at WLTH. WWCA's sportscasters were all named O'Hara, because of the jingle that introduced them. Tony Roberts (O'Hara) went into network sports.

The most interesting era of the station involved the broadcasts of the sixties and seventies. WWCA's solid morning man was Tom Higgins. Higgins, a likable guy, was knowledgeable on just about any subject and very versatile in any capacity of the station. Higgins also broadcasted the annual Senior League World Series games from Gary along with Frank Sauline. Listening to Tom was like enjoying your favorite toastmaster with your morning coffee. He got you pleasantly up and out the door in the morning. Higgins later worked for WLTH and WWJY, and played polka music years earlier.

John H. Patt Patterson was a very personable announcer who was well acquainted with 4-H activities and the Lake County Fair. Patterson usually worked at horse shows and was very knowledgeable about livestock. Patt ran the PA system during the annual Crown Point City Concerts and later worked for the phone company. He was also the public relations coordinator for the county fair for many years. At the fair, the station always had a booth in the industrial building. Large life-size cut outs of all the staffers in matching blazers stood up inside the remote studio.

WWCA benefitted from the training given to the students at Gary's educational station WGVE, Gary's technical-vocational high school. Doug Kullerstrand and Tony Rose were long time WWCA staffers who graduated from the school's radio program. Frank Sauline was WWCA's sports director. When covering elections or basketball sectionals WWCA had personnel at several different sites carrying the action. Station employees were the only ones in the area that were AFTRA members. A 22 day long strike later cost many staffers their jobs at WWCA.

In 1966, one of the striking employees, Steve Bauer, said the incident became a bitter struggle between management and staff. Extra help was brought in to run the station during the 1966 strike. Bauer, who said his first love was radio, later moved to Pittsburgh. Bauer's son Terry became a writer at WMAQ in Chicago. The strike was regrettable. WWCA staffers already made higher salaries than employees at other area stations. WWCA later dropped the union's affiliation.

WWCA's engineer was Victor Voss (W9RQG), a part owner who had also worked at WIND. Voss busied himself at maintaining all the corporation's equipment. He doubled as WGVE's engineer as well and built the Tradewinds Radio Reading Service. It was Voss who came through time and time again in keeping the stations on the air day and night. Voss rigged up long wire antennas to keep WWCA on the air after a storm had knocked down the stations towers in 1965. Voss set up short wave communications to keep listeners up to date during a massive flood around 1953. WWCA's broadcasting energies did not go unrewarded. Its yearly appearances at elections, county fairs, the Senior League World Series and other important community events always netted them in the



Chicagoland Arbitron ratings. Having a string of reporters on board at the Gary City Hall and at the Criminal Courts Building in Crown Point with the addition of ABC news created an unbeatable information entity in Northwest Indiana. Higgins and the rest of the staff enjoyed this admirable position until 1983. The staff at that time also included Ron Perzo, Tony Cappuccilli, Steve Brisker, Brent Burris, and Paul Wolf. Sylvia Burns and Joe Haas actually ran the station. Weekend and evening announcers often had to lock themselves in their studio to escape vagrants and looters who roamed the lobby.

During rumors of the sale to a religious firm, Tom Higgins and several business men attempted to purchase the station. At one time, former Gary Mayor, Richard Gordon Hatcher, was also an interested buyer. Instead Coe sold the station to pastor L. E. Willis. It was clear from the start that there would be radical changes in WWCA's format. Willis owned several other stations across the country. All those who represented the former secular format were swept out by the new management. Some had other activities going for them. Others are still wandering around the industry. It was a sad day for the public who lost one of the best run stations in the area but even a sadder one for those dedicated professionals who suddenly found themselves out of work. The new management was not paying tenured salaries. Sauline went to WWJY for a short time and did sports. Burris went into police work, Perzo became WJOB's news director, Higgins probably made the best deal of all and went to work in the alumni department at Indiana University Northwest in Gary. IU is also the home of an earlier WWCA staffer Keith Klein who teaches in the school's audio-visual department in Bloomington, at WTIU. Klein formerly worked for NBC news, and at stations WGRY, WLNR, and WMAQ. Higgins later became WWJY's morning man.

Despite the format change, the public expected the usual coverage of local news and sports. An attempt was tried to cover local events but it was not near the quality listeners had enjoyed in past years. WWCA's equipment began to deteriorate as well. WWCA's top salesman Bob Corbin pulled up stakes and moved to WJOB with Ron Perzo. Ted Thorne who had left earlier went to WIMS in Michigan City. The station's format turned totally religious delighting few of it's regular listeners. This opened the ratings door for WLTH which had begun night time operation and had hired former WJOB news director Cosmo Currier. WLTH sportscaster Tommy Williams at last realized a lifetime dream and became the city's only play by play announcer. During the first year, Birch rated WLTH #1 dispelling WWCA which had been the top station for many years in Gary. After a year of ownership, Reverend Willis decided to stop trying to be both a religious and a news station. During the station's last attempts to cover a football game, the inexperienced announcer was heard to say about a ball carrier "and he's tackled by a bunch of tacklers." It was a far cry from the professionalism that once was heard on the station. WWCA later became a totally religious station, picking up a new audience from the community. A plan to move to the city of East Chicago, a new nine tower system and an increase in power to 2,500 watts, is anticipated. Quentin McDuffy is the station engineer.

#### Profile of Vivian Carter

An outstanding performer during WWCA's early times as well as in recent years was Vivian Carter "The Hostess with the Mostess". Carter came to WWCA from WGRY in 1953. At that time she and her husband Jimmy Bracken of Kansas City, Missouri, had started VEE-JAY records. Vivian also owned a record store at 1640 Broadway. Carter is a success story in herself. With \$300 from a sale of a used car, Carter and Bracken built VEE-JAY records into a world wide company, attracting the Beatles, the Four Seasons and the Spaniels, Gary's popular R & B singing group. The Spaniels, in 1953, featured lead singer James "Pookie" Hudson, Carl "Hump" Range, Donald "Duck" Porter, James "Dimp" Cochran, and Gerald "Bounce" Gregory.

A relative once told the group that they sounded like a pack of dogs, so the young men decided to call themselves the "Spaniels." Under the guidance of VEE-Jay records the "Spaniels" released big hits entitled Baby It's You, The Bells Ring Out, Please Don't Tease, Everyone's Laughing and their million dollar seller "Goodnight Sweetheart." A relative of Carter's still receives royalties of the Spaniels Goodnight Sweetheart recording. During 1964, seventeen of the top one hundred songs were on the VEE-JAY label, four of them were in the Top Ten.

In her earlier days, Vivian referred to girls as "powder puffs" and to men as "sponges" during her regular radio show. Carter also worked for WJOB in the early 70's and WWCA several times lastly about 1982 doing a mid afternoon radio program and a 9 to 1 a.m. late night show. She also played religious music on the weekends at WWCA. Carter's life reads like the rise and fall of a hot commodity on the New York Stock Exchange. Beginning with next to nothing, her record company acquired offices in Paris, London, and in the U.S. in Los

Angeles, New York and Chicago at 1449 S. Michigan Avenue. The firm utilized these facilities to find new talent for their recording company.

Jimmy Bracken's signing of the Beatles in 1964 racked in millions for the company when the group recorded their hit "She Loves You". By that time the company did most of its business from its California offices where lavish parties and generosity flowed. While few people will comment about the demise of VEE-JAY records some will speculate that close business associates literally robbed the company of its financial base. In 1983 on a recorded talk show, on the Tradewinds Radio Reading Service (WGVE) I spoke with Carter about what happened to the company. Carter had recently suffered a stroke. She mentioned that much of the early recordings of the groups were farmed out to other companies in Chicago. Many record companies did not seek contracts with the Beatles and other such groups because they were not interested in popular music. But as the Beatles and The Four Seasons as well as the Dells and The Spaniels grew in popularity, the big companies started coming around in hopes to sign them away from VEE-JAY records. Cautious and perhaps unable to easily explain how trusted business associates had raided the companies till for their own interests, Carter stated that someday she was going to write a book about what actually happened to her company. It would no doubt implicate those who caused the companies financial downfall.

During the interview, Vivian recalled the numerous recording stars that she had met, played their records, and help promote all the years she was in the industry and on radio. She said a listener had called her about a dream that the listener had. In the dream the listener was told to tell Vivian that she should start playing religious music instead of popular music on the radio. In 1971 Vivian and WJOB newsman Larry Smith were honored at Carter's church, The First AME at 20th and Massachusetts, for their religious programming.

Carter's quick rise to fame lasted only 13 years. The I.R.S. closed down Vivian's record store in 1967 for back taxes. This was followed by two unsuccessful attempts at the Gary City Clerk's job. The Post Tribune reported that Carter had been employed by the Calumet Township Trustee's office from 1976 to 1982, but bad health forced her to retire. The newspaper also reported that on April 4, 1989 Vivian was moved from the Wildwood Manor nursing home to St. Mary's Hospital in Gary in deteriorating health.

Under Carter's guidance VEE-JAY records made several million dollars from 1952 to 1965. Many of the tunes VEE-JAY recorded are today's "oldies but goodies" that we continue to enjoy. Vivian was last honored at a testimonial dinner at Johnston's Disco in 1982 in Gary. In 1989 a Chicago firm, Avenue Edit, headed by Ed Marx was preparing to do a film on Vivian Carter and the VEE-JAY years. Carter passed away on June 12, 1989.

#### Larry Smith Profile

When I met Larry Smith, he was doing an overnight "gig" at WJOB Hammond in 1971. At night the station programmed soul, blues, and jazz. Smith teamed up with a long time friend of his, Vivian Carter and J. J. the DJ. Much later Harold Penix joined the group and still works for WJOB.

Smith is a versatile performer. He makes the audience feel like he is sitting with them talking and joking instead of being miles away. Larry always seems to be "with it." He knows the latest fads and trends in music and is eager to communicate as well as entertain.

While working at WJOB, Smith usually pulled a six hour board shift playing pop, soul, and R and B tunes. On weekends he'd switch to his first love, jazz. It seemed that Larry knew a lot about jazz because he knew personally many of the recording artists he played. For years he used the theme "The Sidewinder" by Lee Morgan. After his air shift, Smith hung around the newsroom and did the Gary Police Beat stories.

There was a limit on the length of the stories, but news director Cosmo Currier would allow the stories to continue to roll regardless of the time. The stories usually consisted of some Garyites' misfortune at a local bar with a clever editorial remark as only Larry could do.

The heading at the top of the copy was always catchy as well. On one occasion the story title was a take off of the old song "I Won't Dance, They Can't Make Me." The story involved a shooting incident at a Gary bar where one patron shot another in the foot for dancing with the gunman's girl.

Smith spent almost six years at WJOB and had built up a good sized audience in the Calumet area as well as the south side of Chicago, where the station could be heard at night. Previous to WJOB, Larry had played gospel music at WSBC, Chicago beginning in 1956. Twelve and a half years later after WSBC went to foreign language programs, Larry spent one year as an announcer at WEAW, Evanston. After the WJOB years, Smith did weekends at WBEE, Harvey and worked as a newsman at WWCA, Gary.

Larry Smith has never forgotten his love for jazz. Around 1976 Smith joined the staff at WBEZ Chicago. He is a staff announcer at the station and does an all night Friday night program called "Jazz Forum" which airs from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. WBEZ publicist Madearia King says Smith has been a valuable addition to the staff.

Thirty years of experience in jazz has paid off. Smith's program, one of the most popular, features live interviews with such notable artists as Winton Marsalis, Dorothy Donagan, McCoy Tyner, Bobby Bryant, Red Holloway, Bond Freeman, Guy Fricano and His Band, and the Bob Stone Big Band.

Smith, in the Jazz Forum tradition, offers historical background and commentary as he spins his favorites. He believes his audience is as diverse as the music he plays. A cross section of dedicated listeners range in age from mid teens to upper eighties. However, jazz is not for everyone. Smith is disheartened when others fail to appreciate the music he loves so much. "There are those who say they don't like jazz because they don't understand it. But you don't have to understand it to enjoy it," Smith advises.

Having once played as a professional trumpeter, Smith confesses to having a passion for recordings that feature brass. His trumpet playing may be a little rusty, but he hasn't lost his silver tongue. He has emceed numerous jazz events including the New Trier Jazz Festival, which features Dizzy Gillespie and the Jazz Members Big Band. He also appeared as the master of ceremonies for Gary, Indiana's first jazz festival on April 1, 1987 at the Genesis Center.

Larry is truly one of the fine gentlemen in the business today and never forgets a name, whether it's a performer, an old radio buddy, or a listener.

## WLTH/WGRY

### Gary's Third Radio Station

The city of Gary has been blessed by three fine commercial radio operations. One of these was the dream of a Chicago radio engineer who after several years of working for someone else was able to open up his own operation. George Whitney had contemplated his station for some several years. He had originally planned his operation for Peoria but later settled on Gary.

After working for WCFL as a board engineer for over 20 years, and waiting for the end of World War II, Whitney filed his application for WGRY. The formal filing came about the same time that Dee Coe applied for WWCA, so either station could have been first on the air in Gary. While Coe chose the prestigious Hotel Gary for his studio location Whitney described by some as a non-technical naive man settled on a less expensive site near the transmitter. Former WLTH morning man John Jage recalls helping Whitney erect an army quonset hut about a quarter mile west of the tower off of King Drive. The ugly curved prefabricated structure measured about 20 X 30 feet and was dark and cramped inside. Whitney made the most of every bit of space.

Besides studio space there were also sleeping quarters. The station's noisy teletype machine was located in the bathroom. News copy was fed through a hole in the wall. Rain pelted its metal roof during storms and mice ate through the studio wiring. Engineer Jess Peters, then of WIND, helped wire Whitney's control board and correct several problems. Another Chicago engineer, Edward Jacker (WCRW, WHFC and WAAF), helped set up WGRY's transmitter site.

A year later, when King Drive was extended, engineers Ron Borden and Quinten McDuffie ran coaxial cables through conduit under the street to reach the transmitter site. Most of the equipment to start WGRY came from discarded parts from WCFL. Early radio at Whitney's WGRY was indeed primitive in nature. Unfortunately, some of the same problems that Whitney had are still experienced by the present owners of the station which is now known as WLTH. The principal problems are those at the transmitter site which suffers from periodic flooding.

There are many old stories circulating about Whitney. George periodically received prank calls that his antenna lights were out so he purchased an apartment building in direct sight of his tower so he could do his own observing. At a remote broadcast at Miller Beach one afternoon, Whitney sensed the crowd was getting a little rowdy. To protect his investment he hitched up to his remote broadcast trailer containing on the air personnel and equipment and hauled it away. Cables snapped every which way but the real shock was to the announcers who began to sense the scenery moving around them as the trailer rolled away from the beach. The broadcast had abruptly ended.

The muck at the base of the antenna tower carried the ground signal well but mice often invaded the transmitter building and chewed the wires. When the transmitter mysteriously went off it was time to reset the mouse traps in the building. Whitney and his wife, a school teacher, lived in Chicago at the time. Operations



continued out of the metal hut for about two years until Whitney moved the station to the infamous Lake Hotel. (The old hut remains today abandoned deep in a woody swamp across from the transmitter about 2400 S. King Drive). For a time both Gary radio stations were within eyesight of each other. Whitney rebuilt his station in the lobby of the hotel at 733 Washington Street around the corner from WWCA.

Years before Gary's first radio station WJKS, which later became WIND, had their business offices located at about the same location. Band remotes from a revolving stage of the Lake Hotel aired on WGRY which sometimes featured the Buddy Pressner Orchestra. In 1952 a publication called "Air Pockets", published by Blue Cross Blue-Shield, outlined WGRY's energetic staff which consisted of disc jockeys, news people, and a women's director. Bill Miller and Bill Foster were the station's two disc jockeys. Miller's morning Coffee Club aired from 6:30 to 9:00 a.m. Foster formerly of WWCA aired his "Rhythm on Records" radio show from 3:30 to 6:30 p.m. in the afternoons.

Other early air personalities consisted of news director Ed Brennan, women's director Joan Klutch, and Vivian Carter. Brennan also worked as a photographer for the Post Tribune and at the Lake County prosecutors office. Brennan started out at WWCA in 1949 and worked for WGRY in 1951 and 1952. He passed away in November of 1975 at the age of 67 after a lengthy career in Lake County Democratic Politics. Another popular announcer at the station was "Lucky Cordell." WSBC's Roy J. Bellavia was an early program director at WGRY.

Vivian Carter, who has worked for all the major stations in the area, began at WGRY in 1951, after being turned down by WWCA. Along with her husband Jimmy Bracken, Vivian formed VEE-JAY records and operated her own record store. The label produced the first set of records in 1953 for the singing "Spaniels." Vivian's hour was heard everyday from 9:30 to 11:00 a.m. and from 9:00 to 10:00 a.m. on Sunday morning with "spirituals." She had previously worked in Chicago with entertainer Al Benson of WGES. Carter produced her own daily music show selling and writing her own commercials for the program. When former WGRY George Whitney told her that she was making too much money and that he could not pay her earned commissions she left and received employment at WWCA. She also worked with Eddie Honesty at WJOB prior to 1953. A scandal rocked VEE-JAY records in the early 60's causing Vivian to loose everything (see WWCA, Carter).

While located at the Lake Hotel, news reporter John Jage installed one of the first mechanisms to turn remote tower lights on and off. The system of gears knobs and buttons attracted engineers from around the country to observe its operation. Jage also recalls reading the news on the station one morning and discovering the previous night that the Gary police had made a huge prostitution raid in the upper floors of the building. The only way the station found out about the raid in their own building was to read it on their news wire.

In 1956, WGRY moved from the Lake Hotel to its present location in the Jubilee Building in Glen Park at 3669 Broadway. Permission to raise power from 500 watts to 1000 watts was granted around 1968. However, when engineers attempted to do this, the station's transmitter, that had been operating at 500 watts for many years, blew up.

Since the sixties, WGRY has gone through three major personnel shuffles. A popular music station around 1963, the WGRY staff included announcers Albert "Hoot" Gibson, Dale Dawson, Ron Borden, Bill Simms, Glen Busby, Glen Cain, Berney Viall, (Chris Erik Stevens), Scott Allen, Steve King later of WGN, and Frank Reynolds of ABC news were also early employees. King did remotes from the Shoppers World Store at 5th and Clark Street. Singer Michael Jackson and his brothers performed on the show for twenty dollars long before they became successful.

When WGRY moved to its present location in 1956, someone forgot to tell Gibson. He showed up at the Lake Hotel and discovered that everything had been moved out. Borden has been a fixture at the station since the mid sixties serving as a disc jockey newsman and is currently the station's engineer. It was Borden who used to make frequent amusing telephone calls to restaurants and women's clothing stores on the air. He once tried to order one thousand hamburgers from a local fast food shop for the army. Hobart Mayor Margret Kuchta was a former public service director. B. G. Snyder owned the station about that time.

WGRY changed call letters to WLTH standing for Wealth Radio (or We Love Tom Higgins), in about 1969. An influx of professionals from various other local stations then invaded WLTH. For the first time, the station attempted to compete with perennial ratings winner WWCA across town. In 1967, Mike Adler became news director, other staffers included WJOB's Harriet Fuller, and Tom Lanham, Tom Higgins, Tony Chavez, Oscar Canales, Matt Hart, Warren Freiberg, Bob Guarrero, and psychics Kirby Jeffries and Annie Rose (who later became Senator Rose Ann Antich).



Other owners of WLTH were Snyder, former Gary Mayor A. Martin Katz, The Post Tribune, Harry Porterfield of TV Channel 2 and the Metropolitan Insurance Company. Tom Higgins, who had worked for WWCA and WLOI, spent a short time at WLTH. Ron Borden went to work for the county coroners office and often reported live via his car from accident scenes. Lanham formerly of WJOB and a fine sportscaster did a music show afternoons on WLTH.

But for the most part the station was mostly talk, Big Talk. The arrival of Warren Freiberg and his wife Libby Collins brought a new dimension to the station's format. Freiberg's controversial comments and frequent attacks on just about everything and everybody brought new ratings to the station.

Most people listened to hear who Freiberg was talking about each day, but on one occasion one man wanted to visit with Warren personally on the air. It was Garland Jeffers, the leader of Gary's family street gang. Jeffers, with his guard, merely walked into the studio past the secretary and put a gun to Warren's head on the air. Jeffers stated, "You may talk about me all you want, but don't talk about my wife." The pair left the station as mysteriously as they had entered. It was the first of several threatenings of station personnel. Years later Cosmo Currier was threatened by a woman with a gun during a talk show. An unknown gunman shot at announcer John Jage shortly afterwards, and I was mugged outside the station one afternoon.

It was now all business at WLTH. Things had changed since the years when it was easy to entertain a few young girls who pleaded outside the station's "window on the world" to play Bobby Sherman records. Warren Freiberg had begun some psychic shows on WLTH. He also worked for WLNR, WWJY, WCGO, and WTAS during his local career.

In 1981, Inter-Urban broadcasting company was taken over by the Chicago Metropolitan Insurance company. The big price tags that came with good well known announcers were gone. Only Judy Reyome Burks and a few office people including bookkeeper Jody Christenson remained. Jocks at this time (1984) included Rick Stevens "the morning mouth," Jan Wolf, Dana Huskinson, Fred Moore program director, and Bob Coleman was the afternoon personality.

Ethnic and religious programming which made up most of the Sunday schedule was always sold out on Northwest Indiana stations. In another rebuilding stage in 1983, former WJOB news director Cosmo Currier took over the WLTH news department. The Mutual Black Network or the Sheridan Network was dropped. Currier had worked previously at WWCA and WLCL before coming back to Gary. He was also the WWCA news director for a short time.

A small group of energetic news people were hired along with sportscaster Tommy Williams. Lawrence Whittemore (Gary Law) became the program director. News people were Claudette Jernigan, Greg Lenburg, Carmen McCollum, and Felicia Middlebrooks. My job was to do traffic reports on local streets. Middlebrooks went on to WBBM radio in Chicago. Greg Lenburg who authored the "Three Stooges Scrapbook" became editor of the Herald newspaper. The sales director, Victor Howell, now sells insurance, and former station manager Judy Reyome Burks went into the restaurant business.

Before these changes took place, a new morning show called "Let's Talk" featured the traffic reporter, all news people, and one and a half minute carted conversations by callers each morning. Those participating in the program were recorded then played back during the show. Some amusing pranks and comedy routines were performed by the staff periodically during the mornings. Several charity basketball games were also presented by staff members.

In recent years, a management change has brought new personnel into the station. WLTH has learned that a news oriented format has been a successful move, forcing music to take a back seat during drive times. In 1986, WLTH became a night time station and completed work on an alternate transmitter site in Hobart. A clover leaf shaped pattern projects most of the station's night time signal over Gary and into adjacent Lake Michigan. WLTH (Superstation 1370) currently is the only non religious commercial station in the city. Newscasters Stan Maddux and Mary Hodge assist news director Cosmo Currier. Gil Palmer is an afternoon talk show host. Expanded newscasts and more community involvement had made WLTH the top station in the city. It is now also a member of the NBC Radio Network.

In December of 1989, the Chicago Metropolitan Insurance Company (Inter-Urban Broadcasting) sold the station to Lorenza Butler. Morning man John Jage and sportscaster Tommy Williams left the station. Williams and Jage did some cable TV work, appearing on WYIN channel 56 in Merrillville. Jage did a segment called "Johnny

on the Spot." Former WLTH program director (Gary Law) Lawrence Whittemore is now the editor for the Gary Crusader Newspaper. Williams also writes sports for that publication.

Early in 1991 WLTH and WYCA were the only Indiana stations that placed in Arbitron's latest rating period. Cosmo Currier resigned in August of 1991 to enter private business. A large party took place for him at the Genesis Center in Gary.

Remembering back, WLTH was the best place to work and the most dangerous. I did not believe this until air personality Rick Stevens pointed out all the bullet holes in the front of the building. I guess I was not surprised to hear in 1988 that a woman on a talk show had threatened newsman Cosmo Currier. When the gun suddenly appeared, Cosmo continued the interview in his usual impeccable fashion.

"Why do you want to shoot me?" quizzed Cosmo, making sure that the audience knew exactly what was happening in the studio. He milked the incident for all it was worth, short of getting killed over it. The woman was arrested, and the story made the TV news in Chicago.

Also in recent years, two staffers, a female salesperson and I, were accosted in separate incidents outside the station. While getting a newspaper one morning to rewrite the news because the station's teletype machine was down, two teenagers attempted to rob me. They grabbed me by the hood of my sweatshirt and slammed me down on the sidewalk, while holding a sharp object in my back.

"Turn around, and we'll keel ya," growled one of the thugs. The would-be robbers failed to find any valuables, and let go, warning me not to turn around again. The attack angered people at the station. Newsman Greg Lenburg and I returned to the scene of the crime with the Gary Police. The perpetrators, wearing blue shower caps, were chased down several alleys, but eluded authorities. A female salesperson had some gold chains ripped from her neck by a passing thief.

On April 6, 1990 rhythm and blues show host Terry Kirk fatally shot himself on his wife's porch. I covered the story of the tragic drowning of several youths at a closed city pool. We all appeared safe as long as we stayed away from what engineer Ron Borden called "the window on the world." (The large glass window where passers-by could watch the staff work).

When we did work we had fun. Greg Lenburg did characterizations, and I wrote many scripts where the staff acted, sang, and danced on the radio in 1982. Employees raised funds for the Gary Schools doing charity basketball games with teacher Willie Horn of Gary Tolleston School. My real duties consisted on doing live traffic reports for northwest Indiana. This was accomplished using a police scanner and spotters at gas stations. It was the second time Gary stations had attempted this type of service.

Tom Higgins relates years ago WWCA tried to fool its listeners by saying its reporters were in a helicopter. This worked until a bus pulled up and beeped its horn, which was heard over the air. The reporters were parked in a car in the bus loading zone at 8th and Broadway. WLTH's traffic reports were usually as accurate as the information available. Later Shadow Traffic in Chicago took over this service utilizing computers.

I remember engineering a basketball tournament broadcast one holiday. With 30 seconds to go in the game, someone went down press row and pulled out all the tie blocks, disconnecting all the stations at the gym. Only Tommy Williams had the foresight to call in and report how the game ended.

### Cosmo Currier "Cool Cos"

Cosmo Currier is a name that has been synonymous with local news in the Calumet area for over 30 years. Currier, born in Harvey, Illinois, has lived in the area for most of his life, except for a couple of years spent in the Army. For a short time he was absent in Texas, Iowa, and Central Illinois to polish his skills.

Like many established radio people, Currier began his career at an unlicensed radio operation. Several friends worked on a carrier current station, WQAT in Homewood, in 1955. This was not an ordinary "jukebox" operation as news, remotes and advertising were carried out by a group of aspiring young radio announcers.

The staff tried to run the operation so professionally that penny fines were leveled against those who "blew" proper names and commercials over the air.

In 1956 Currier also did a weekend show on radio station WBEE in Harvey, but was still looking for his first full-time radio job. It came in 1957 in Kewanee, Illinois when WKEI hired him as an announcer.

By 1959 he was back in Hammond at WJOB doing a "brokered" show on radio. He sold his own ads and played R&B music from 10-11 on Saturday mornings. Posters appeared around the area advertising the "Cool Cos" show.

In 1960 Cos left the area once again for opportunities at KCLN in Clinton, Iowa and KR0D in El Paso, Texas. The Iowa opportunity was located inside of a trailer near some railroad tracks. During the summer the announcers would have to shut the windows in the structure to keep the noise of the freight trains off the air or play continuous records until the trains passed. It got very hot inside the trailer during this time.

Currier did "Man on the Street" interviews at the El Paso, Texas station, a skill that he had been polishing while at WQAT. Only this time, FCC inspector Warren George was not there.

Currier spent 1961-63 in the Army and afterwards worked at R. R. Donnelly as a printer. "Cos first love was radio, and after nearly ten years of working odd jobs at smaller stations, Cosmo found himself back at WJOB. He became the news director after 1966.

Currier was always on hand to bring the Calumet area countless narratives of news stories, local events, and even coverage of parades. He directed "The Investigators," a team of usually ten to fifteen reporters who covered news events. Each reporter became responsible for police beats and coverage of local news for their respective areas.

During this time a variety of important news stories broke out and Cosmo and his news team were there to cover it all. The "Investigators" constantly scooped the local newspapers on such stories as The Cline Avenue Bridge Collapse and many bizarre crimes. People soon came to count on WJOB as the "Calumet News Leader".

Currier's boldness in news coverage sometimes developed into threatening circumstances. During a telephone interview with former East Chicago Mayor Dr. John B. Nicosia, the Mayor threatened Cosmo over a misunderstanding of a news story. An unknown person had fired shots through the Mayor's house. During a live telephone hook up, newsman Gene Teibloom "editorialized" his account of the incident. When Cosmo interrupted the report to make a clarification, the Mayor, who was listening on another phone, thought Cosmo was making light of the situation.

"Cosmo," the Mayor shouted, "I'm going to come over there and tear you apart." The Mayor was later involved in what Cosmo calls one of the most substantial stories that he has ever covered: the \$17 million sewer scandal in the "Twin City."

Stories of lesser magnitude were covered by Cosmo after leaving WJOB. These included the capture of a killer hiding in a dryer at an apartment complex, a man who sawed up his in-laws, and another man who committed suicide by hitting himself in the head with a hammer 35 times. In 1979, he was hired to direct the WLCL News Department. Apparently the salary and challenge were lacking in Lowell. By 1980 he became WWCA's News Director, and in June that year began rebuilding the WLTH News Department.

Cosmo seemed at home in his new position. He covered local news and took the time to teach radio news writing to aspiring reporters. The station's ratings over the last couple of years have quickly recovered from its doldrums when records were favored over information. Today Cosmo Currier continues his rapid pace of gathering news for the Gary area. His recent accomplishments include extended news coverage and a half hour news block at noon.

His many years of radio experience has solidified the station, and has made him one of the most respected news people in the business. He also does a daily radio talk show. He still comes into the studio in the morning and addresses his colleagues with "What do you got that's hot?"

Besides being one of the busiest newsmen around, Cosmo often enjoys sitting back and talking about the days of old when radio was really fun to work in. His unmistakable acute sounding voice was enjoyed by varied listeners each morning. Cosmo is also an avid tennis player and a computer programmer.

Note: Cosmo retired from WLTH in August of 1991 to pursue other business interests. He still does some consulting work for the station and works as a legal researcher for attorney John Breclaw.

### **WGVE Gary's Voice of Education Tradewinds Radio Reading Service**

Educational radio in Northwest Indiana began in 1954 far in advance of some of today's local commercial stations. Gary school teacher Mitch Gerbick directed an early 10 watt station that would later help turn out some of the areas finest broadcasters.

WGVE FM 88.7 mhz first went on the air January 4, 1954 with 10 watts of power at Lew Wallace High School. By 1963, the power had been increased to 294 watts to better cover the cities expansive school district.

In April of 1969 WGVE FM was moved to its present quarters at the Gary Area Technical Vocational School at 1800 East 35th Avenue. A 125 foot self supporting steel tower was erected and power was increased to



2100 watts. WGVE today covers most of Northwest Indiana and can be heard in South Chicago and portions of Lower Michigan.

The station has a two-fold purpose: first, to teach high school students broadcasting skills, and second, to carry a wide variety of instructional programming for the community. Lawrence Ventura is the long time General Manager of the station. Angela Shives is the program director and a broadcasting instructor at the school, Steve Somerville is the assistant director.

Former students and station staffers Tony Rose and Lanel Chambers have moved on to administrative positions. Another student, Doug Kullerstrand, a former WWCA newsman, is now in the banking business. Broadcaster David Barancyk also taught radio at WGVE. In the school's hallway hangs numerous awards naming a long legacy of students who had been trained in broadcasting at WGVE. Victor Voss, a former owner of WWCA, and Don Carp are the station's engineers. Today WGVE remains completely run by students. With the addition of public radio in 1971, some national programming has been added to the broadcast schedule. Educational programs, taken on and off the air by students are featured along the production of local newscasts. During the week WGVE also broadcasts the entire Gary City Council and school board meetings. UPI wire service is used. WGVE is a member of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters and the National Education Radio network.

When the station is off the air during the summer, Ventura spends the time productively writing for grants to keep a variety of instructional and entertaining programs on the air. Regular programming guides are supplied to the community each semester. In conjunction with WGVE, a special radio reading service for the visually impaired and handicapped operates off the station's sub channel. The Northwest Indiana Radio Reading Service (later called the Tradewinds Radio Reading Service, or TWRRS) broadcasts the daily readings of the Post Tribune, the Times, and other local newspapers. Volunteers serve as announcers on the station.

The radio reading service was built inside of a remodeled garage that also houses WGVE's transmitter. It has two studios. Special pre-tuned receivers are distributed to the area's visually impaired to hear the programs. During the summer the reading service can be heard by the general public on WGVE's main channel. The service opened in 1979. Kathy Bikos was the first director. Rich Vurva, a former Gary Tech student, was the first engineer. Gene and Donna Rieck of the Indiana Department of Rehabilitation was instrumental in securing funds for the station along with Dianna Pandak. In 1980 I joined the staff becoming its director in 1981.

The station staffers were Brent Burris, Carol Swisher, Robbie Cole, Camille Plautz, Bob Stratton, and Mike Morin. WBBM morning news anchor Felicia Middlebrooks was also a volunteer announcer.

At one time TWRRS used sixty volunteers and broadcasted 11 hours daily and won several awards for community service. Perennial awards were won by Carla Urbain and Harold Connelly. The station broadcasted from shopping centers, community events, and carried the Senior League Baseball series in 1984. The baseball broadcasts were done by Tommy Williams, George Royster, Harold Connelly, and me.

TWRRS sponsored a "Beep" baseball team and often conducted important interviews with newsmakers. Vice President Dan Quayle, and former baseball players Ron Kittle and Al Pilarcik appeared on talk shows. A number of civic and business people like Hammond Realtor, Joseph Doug Harkin and Munster's Harlan Kroll, hosted programs.

The small station's range was increased by utilizing three cable TV facilities. TWRRS's special receivers were retuned by David Wojcinski (W91A). In 1986, funds were cut from the program and the reading services program was reduced to four hours a day. Steve Haas and Angela Shives had been the recent directors of the radio reading service that once served some 600 listeners in the northwest Indiana area.

TWRRS ran out of funds and has been off the air since September of 1990. A plan to fund the service using area bingo proceeds apparently fell through. Haas now does traffic reports for the triple A Chicago Motor Club over WBBM in Chicago.

One never knew who was listening to TWRRS, especially when WGVE was off the air and TWRRS was on both its sub-channel and main channel at 88.7 mhz. (The "big antenna" they called it.) This was particularly true during summer months, when the school station was off the air and the general public could hear TWRRS's programs.

One night while leaving a part-time job as traffic reporter at WLTH, I heard a familiar song out in the street. The closer I got, the more familiar the melody. About three floors up in a run down apartment house, with the curtains blowing out a screenless window, the tune emanated and was recognized. It was TWRRS' sign-off song.



Someone had been listening to the newspapers. We had done our job and had reached somebody with our programming. The next day I couldn't wait to tell the staff that someone was listening.

### WYCA (WJIZ-WJOB FM)

#### Your Constant Christian Companion

WJOB owners probably did not realize that they should have held on to their FM station. For later on in the broadcast history, FM would be more popular than most AM stations. The first FM'ers were money losers including WJOB's FM station WJIZ (93.5 mhz). The only FM stations that were holding their own were ones that were coupled with successful AM stations. But even WGN's WGNB-FM closed down after a few years (1954). WJOB sold their FM rather than close it down.

WJOB-FM (earlier WJIZ-FM) operated out of WJOB's garage at 6405 Olcott in the south part of the building. Entrance was in the rear of the building. From 1955 to 1959 WJOB simulcasted many of its programs on AM-FM and attempted some early stereo broadcasts. Some church services and concerts were broadcast on both the AM and FM stations simultaneously with some channel separation. Listeners having both an AM and FM radio in the same room could enjoy simulated "stereo" broadcasts. John Jage and Jess Peters worked on these broadcasts. A makeshift FM studio was installed in the middle of the garage. A couple of cement blocks were removed to feed mike cables through a hole in the wall to create another studio. This studio contained a table, an AP machine, and a few desks. A bathroom made up of the rest of the cramped damp interior. When one was on the air, care must be taken not to operate the bathroom fixtures. They could be heard on the air.

A number of country and western disc jockeys including Cousin' Jim Cole and Len Ellis played records on WJIZ. In 1959 Percy Crawford purchased the station changing it to a religious station. The call letters were changed to WYCA. Its frequency was shifted to 92.3 mhz. The 30,000 watt transmitter was located in the WJOB section of the building and resembled an old pop machine. The "Maroon Goon," as engineers called it, was a constant maintenance problem. It caught on fire several times. Frequent hassles over rent and utilities caused the station to be turned off on several occasions. Roy Tobin formerly WJOB's sales manager assumed the same capacity with WYCA.

After the sale of the station to Crawford, there was a loose agreement that prohibited WYCA from selling advertising in WJOB's market except for religious oriented business. Jim Cole gradually changed his programming to gospel music. Other early employees included: Emie Hero, Oscar Jay Litton. Larry Foss, Ron Klemn, NBC's Andy Boroain, Dave McNamera and Dave Oseland. Frequent musicians heard on the station were singers Carol Wiersma, Dick Faulkner, and organist Marlys Dykstra.

WYCA moved from its cramped quarters to modern studios at 6336 Calumet Avenue around 1965. Its transmitter was installed in a semi trailer on Marble Street in front of an old meat packing plant. A new tower was also erected in the fenced in area near the plant in nearby Burnham, Illinois.

A variety of ministers and mostly conservative religious music was played. Each night from eight to nine, Cousin Jim Cole would do his "Gospel Melody Hour" which featured music by the Blackwood Brothers and other quartets. He had a large following of listeners. I was employed at this station on three occasions beginning in 1966. WYCA was off the air for a week in 1967 when high winds damaged the tower.

In 1968, some programming changes brought in ministers with slightly different views. Basketball games from Chicago Christian and Illiana High Schools were dropped. More contemporary type religious music was featured along with a complete change of staff.

Enough local churches persuaded the station to drop its motto "Constant Christian Companion" because of other programs that were aired. Listeners also differed with some of the practices of the station. Stanley Mastey's social security program was a regular feature.

Several years later WYCA (Standing for Young Peoples Church of the Air) went into a thorough contemporary Christian format. Wendell Borrink left as general manager of the station around 1970 to manage WLNR in Lansing. Reverend Larry Foss who ran missions in South Chicago and Gary moved to Montana and later New York. Dave McNamera of Taylorville, Illinois went back to veterinarian school.

Oscar Jay Litton, another one of radios "nice guy" professionals, moved to Tennessee to sell insurance. Litton worked at WYCA from 1959 to 1961 and at WLNR from 1961 to 1967 and then went back to WYCA from 1967 to 1972 before being let go. Today Jay works at a Christian station WMQN in Nashville, Tennessee and does

some part time work for WLAC. Litton also was affiliated with WWCR (World Wide Christian Radio), a new religious short wave station in 1989. Cousin Jim Cole passed away around 1969.

WYCA continues today as one of the more powerful commercial religious FM stations in the Chicagoland area. A variety of religious programs and christian music are featured. A later music director Tom Svoboda left the station in 1982, for WMBI in Chicago. Dick Marsh who managed WYCA in the early 70's joined Universal Broadcasting and recently put WNDZ on the air in Portage, Indiana.

Today WYCA is a 50,000 watt FM station licensed for Hammond-Chicago. I have tried hard not to hold grudges over my lifetime, especially when it comes to station management. I was very naive during my years at WYCA (1966-1971), somehow I had the idea that working there was the right thing to do with my life. I soon learned that WYCA was not a haven for young Christian broadcasters, but a business that was operated in the interests of its distant owners in Flowertown, Pennsylvania.

In the five years that I was there, not counting some later part time work, I was hired and fired (or let go) several times. The station usually had poor working equipment. Often I did shows with one turntable and used cart machines that ran past their cues. During late night music shows with poetry reading, the engineer would dismantle the equipment for maintenance, leaving me with nothing but a microphone. One night a man called the station, and told me that after hearing some hymns I had played, he had decided not to take his own life (PTL). During a snowstorm in 1967, part of the tower was damaged by the wind, after explaining to a listener why we had been off the air for a week, she snarled, "Well, why don't you announce that!"

I only met the top management once in all the years worked I there. His words to me were a mere "why don't I get a vacuum cleaner and clean this place up." I did get fired once for suggesting that an employee, who sported rather long hair, was late because he missed his barber appointment.

The two persons I admired the most there were Jay Litton and Jim Cole. Jay hired me and gave me my first chance. But Jim Cole taught me broadcasting. As felt in this old unpublished article I once wrote for a magazine some years ago, we were just nice guys trying to do the Lord's work.

### "The Most Unforgettable Person That I Had Ever Met"

#### "Cousin" Jim Cole

I'm not a writer, nor did I ever profess to be one, even though I used to write radio commercials some years ago. But let me tell you as clearly as I can recollect about the most unforgettable person that I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. He passed away about five years ago, but the kindness and the joy he brought to life still lingers on.

His name was Jim Cole. "Cousin" Jim Cole as he was called on the radio. The people loved him. They couldn't wait until 8:00 p.m. each evening for Cousin Jim to play their favorite hymn. He was the local Gospel Disc Jockey. You name 'em, he played them, the "Statesmen, Stamps, Oak Ridge Boys," every night except Sundays.

Every evening I would watch him come down to the station with about 30 albums under his arm, humming a familiar old song, brandishing his big smile... You just had to know it was Cousin Jim. He'd scoot into Studio A, with his records, then slip out again to answer the phones. I first heard of him, back in the late 50's, his picture was in the stations program guide. He was smiling his usual beaming smile, he wore a large off-white cowboy hat, a checkered shirt, the usual cowboy tie, and a short mustache, tinted heavy with mascara... Except for the caption, one could have easily mistaken his picture for a fried chicken ad.

I don't know much about his early life, except that he came from somewhere down south. He still worked as a crane operator in a steel mill, because local radio didn't pay very much. Whenever, he had shift work, he came in early to tape the show, or sometimes I'd do it. He was married, but I never saw his wife. Jim used to say that his wife didn't seem to be interested in his gospel music, and that the only thing she wanted was to return to Tennessee. He couldn't get her to attend church or come to any of his gospel sings either, and finally gave up on her (or put it into the Lord's hands).

It didn't seem to bother Jim. He'd show up night after night, and I can truly say, he was the only disc jockey who felt bad if he forgot a song request. Before he would even get to the station at night, I would be taking 10, 15, sometimes even 20 songs or prayer requests for Jim. The program was then all Jim Cole, except for the news and station breaks that I did.

I started at the station just as a weekend announcer running children programs most of the time. After two months, the station had me working every night along side of "Mr. Gospel Music" himself. Working with Cousin

Jim had to be the big break of my career. I soon got over the shyness that I had always had. He introduced me to many recording artists and ministers. One minister named Scotty will always be remembered. He preached at a small country church near Valparaiso in which the weekly attendance was a record when it reached twenty. Nevertheless, he continued to preach at the little church and play piano Sunday evenings at another country church.

Small as it was the little church continued to sponsor his 15 minute program each week. While many of the other announcers at the station talked about and became "Rock and Roll DJ's"... I remained working night after night with Jim. He would begin his program each evening with the favorite "there's something old and something new" then went into his featured selections of toe-tapping, hand clapping, and soul convicting songs by various artists.

And between selections, Jim would ramble on about his sponsors that he went out and got himself. They consisted of a collection of "fillin' stations, appliances stores, and insurance people." Then he would wheel around in his chair and say, "John R. I think I've talked entirely too much, I want you to listen to the beautiful message in this next song." Then he'd shut off the mike, lean way back in his chair with his headphones on and sing most of the hymn to me. Then he would turn on the mike again just in time to catch himself singing the final bars of the song along with the record. And the people loved it.

I can remember the very first time I did his program. Jim told me that he would be out of town and wouldn't have time to tape it. "You can do it, John R.," Jim assured. He always called me John R. after another radio preacher Reverend John R. Rice. Somehow I struggled through the program playing all the songs Jim usually played, but I know and the audience knew I couldn't take the place of Cousin Jim Cole. The next week Jim asked one of his sponsors how I did, and the sponsor, who sold used car parts replied, "Not bad, well, he gave me a good commercial."

Announcers came and went at that station and soon we were the employees that had been on the air the longest. This was my first station and his eighth. Jim had already been there for about four years before I was hired. That was when the station was in a cold garage and storage area across town. I was there once. It was damp and cramped inside. The announcers had to be careful as to not let the noise of the bathroom fixtures get on the air.

The station had come a long way from that drafty, cold hole in the wall, where secretary Alice Frame worked all day and never took her coat off, to a remodeled insurance building and new equipment. Jim was at both places, and now shared the good of the new facilities with me. He used to take me with him to some of the local churches. After the show, we would go to one and hear some good gospel quartets, and naturally he would be introduced and asked to give his testimony for the Lord. And then he would introduce me with some sort of clever remark about "Good 'O John R." as only Jim could.

The station was very strict about what music was played. Only recording artists who sang religious songs were allowed. But Jim somehow always got around that, and he played all the show-biz people like Johnny Cash, Jim Reeves, and Loretta Lynn. He would tell the people, "It's what the people feel in their heart while their singing these songs is what counts." I felt guilty and convicted doing it the first time, for all I was used to playing was George Beverly Shea records, but the people loved it, while the management began to mumble and disapprove.

They especially disapproved of Jim Cole's Christmas programs each year. Jim always talked about Santa Claus, which the station management thought was an unmentionable on a Christian station. But it didn't bother Big Jim, as he reached into his wallet, and handed me a five dollar bill. "Go and enjoy Christmas," he laughed. "Just say Santa Claus give it to ya." Five dollars was more than I made in three hours at the station. I clutched it in my hand with disbelief as I watched him switch the mike on and begin telling those listening in about the Baby Jesus, and the Virgin Mary. Then he would play an old tent campaign song "Sawdust and Folding Chairs."

Three years went by, and I still looked forward to every night with Cousin Jim at the radio station. Even after I started junior college, and missed much air time due to illness, I still wanted to be there. My salary meant nothing, just as long as I could watch him and read the news for him. When I was sick, Jim would call me up, play me a song, and pray for me.

But overnight, the success that we had been blessed with, the fans, the sponsors, and friends we made, seemed to be taken away. As the "Good Book" says "as a thief that cometh in the night," the end came. It seems that we were so busy talking about Jesus and playing His songs, that we didn't notice the changes taking place around us. The station was slowly changing employees again. We had survived a turnover last time, but not this time.



New faces began to appear and policies changed. Quickly the music was stepped up, and any song that mentioned God was played. The owner of the chain of stations had passed on, now things were being reorganized. It was Tuesday, and I waited for Jim at the back door as I always did. He showed up a bit earlier than usual. We were later met by the new management, who asked us to come into the office one at a time. I don't remember what was said, but Jim and I were both through. I picked up my coat and my lunch and slowly left through the back door. Jim was gathering up his recordings, including the ones he never got to play that night; neither of us spoke. The monitor speaker was on in the teletype room, and we could hear our replacement talking.

Jim patted my head, "They picked a good one, didn't they? He sounds like he's got a good voice." I was mad, but Jim would never admit that his feelings were hurt. He probably was used to it. He had been bounced around at several different stations before this one, and knew what it was like to be handed walking papers. Jim had quit several times, too, but there was always Jay, the program director who always seemed to talk him into coming back to work. But this time there was no one to ask him back. I watched him slowly load his trunk with all those "precious memories." He smiled, but it wasn't the same smile.

"You be a good boy there, John R.," he said, "and remember what I always said at the end of my show 'so long for now and may the Lord bless you real good.'" He slammed the trunk lid down, and drove off. And as he left, I could almost hear quartet music, singing from out of the trunk, and that's the last time I saw him alive.

The station called me back to work about two months later to work weekends again, but it wasn't the same without Cousin Jim there. After sign-off one Sunday evening, I received a telephone call from Ron Klemm. He spoke very slowly and told me that Cousin Jim had a heart attack and died. Ron went on to say that Jim was rushed to the hospital with severe chest pains, but was later released. Then several hours later he had another attack, and this time went to be with the Lord.

His funeral was very short. His wake lasted only one day. Many of his friends I saw later didn't know that Cousin Jim had passed on. I went to the wake with Ron, Jay and Scotty, but couldn't bring myself to attend the funeral. I have worked at several other stations since then. I've grown up a bit since the Cousin Jim days, but I know that I will never forget him. Whenever I still hear a gospel hymn, I can still remember him saying softly, "So long for now, John R., and may the Lord bless you real good."

## WAKE/WLJE (WAYK)

### A Family Affair

For the most part, the major stations in the Valparaiso area have always been family owned and operated. However, only WAKE/WLJE has been totally owned by one family since its beginning in 1964. At the helm of this family business is Len Ellis an entertainer in his own right who has over the years put together a solid AM/FM operation in the city.

WAKE operates as a daytime station at 1500 khz. WLJE is a 1000 watt FM station at 105.5 mhz. Both stations and transmitting antennas are located south of the city at 2755 Sager Road south of U.S. 30.

Ellis was a disc jockey at several other radio stations and hosted an "amateur hour" type program on WJOB in the mid 40's. He also did a country music show on WWCA, sponsored by a TV store that literally gave away appliances for low down payments. His aspirations went beyond working for other people ultimately beginning plans for his own station.

Ellis eyed Porter County which was then void of direct radio service. In 1964 plans were made to set up a community format with emphasis on Porter County news, religious and educational programming. Agricultural news and public service events would be highlighted. But Valparaiso residents would have to wait several more months for the station's formal opening.

In late August of 1964, vandals delayed the projected October 1st opening by vandalizing the station's transmitting tower installation. Sometime during the night, unknown persons cut the guy wires, causing both towers to tumble over. In an August 31, 1964 Vidette-Messenger article Ellis called the act a "professional sniping job." Both towers fell south of the studio building. Ellis was puzzled since there had been no remonstrances to the opening of his station. About \$7,000 in damage was done to the towers. The FCC and FBI were called in to investigate the incident. The Valparaiso Vidette-Messenger in its October 7, 1964 issue reported that midnight tests of equipment had begun. E. Harold Munn Jr. was the consulting engineer.

With the two 150 foot towers back in place actual broadcasting by the Porter County Broadcasting Company began on November 4, 1964. The call letters WAYK were later changed to WAKE. In the mid 1970s, WAKE -15



played pop music, disc jockeys had an odd way of announcing the time. For example, when it was 1:30 p.m., the announcer would say, "after one, it's 30," when it was 1:45 p.m., the announcers would say, "after one, it's 45, and so forth . . ." Former WGRY program director Dale Dawson served in the same capacity at WAKE in 1987, followed by Tod Allen in 1991.

Over the years, a variety of formats had been tried on the AM side, while WLJE has traditionally been a country music station. WLJE letters stand for Ellis' initials. Its 1000 watt stereo signal looms down on NW Indiana from its 513 foot tower. The station's van is usually found at county fairs and special events in the community. Program director Dan Lynch says the station features present country and western recording artists along with few country oldies that blend into the format. WLJE came on the air on October 6, 1967.

WLJE has continued to excel in the community and publishes its own monthly newspaper. WAKE is the community arm of the firm featuring local news and sports. Greg Doffin formerly of WWJY is the station's news director. Jack Edwards is the Program Director, Carl Fletcher is the Chief Engineer. Gary Gorman became the program director in 1991.

The station's interior is decorated with many pictures of Uncle Len appearing with various country music stars. Len's son Leigh oversees the daily operations and is the General Manager of WLJE. The Ellis family also held a cable TV franchise for a short time around 1980. WLJE's current motto is Indiana 105.

## WNWI

### Technical Excellence

Technical know-how tapped from two engineering schools has helped make WNWI historically one of the best run radio stations in the area. WNWI, standing for North West Indiana, was founded by Dr. J. B. Hershman on December 31, 1946. Hershman was also the founder and president of Valparaiso Technical Institute.

VTI merged with the Dodge Telegraph and Radio School at 407 Monroe Street, Valparaiso around 1950. Hershman also formed the Northwest Indiana Radio Company to operate the station. Hershman passed away in 1956 leaving his stock in the station to his wife Nettie B. and Sons, Arthur L. and G. Edward Hershman.

Other early stockholders in the station were Emmett Melleuthian, WNWI's secretary-treasurer of Valparaiso and Vice-President W. Jerome Dee of Chicago. The elder Hershman had great insight into the field of communications, deciding upon 1080 khz, as the desired frequency for his station (which was also one of several clear channels reserved for larger stations designed to serve cross country areas). The FCC finally lifted a ten year freeze on such channels in 1958. Ironically, 1080 was the original channel of WRBC Valparaiso's first station in 1925.

In granting 1080 to WNWI, Hershman seemed to know in advance that 250 watts would be enough to cover the Valpo area interference free. WNWI today also enjoys nighttime coverage of the area out to Michigan City with a mere ten watts of power. Again, technical foresight and know how have made these engineering feats possible.

From 1946 to 1958, the Hershmans waited for final approval of the station which came on June 28, 1965. Acting VTI President, G. Edward Hershman (air name Ed Lee) noted in the February 6, 1965 issue of the Valparaiso Vidette-Messenger, that WNWI must stand on its own financially. It would be a commercial operation not directly connected with VTI. However, the station would be used to train engineers for the broadcast industry.

Installation of WNWI's 230 foot tower began in April of 1965, in front of the main dorm at 1 Center Street. The back rooms of the main dorm (Memorial Dorm) were utilized to house studios and the transmitter. WNWI's first official day on the air was December 31, 1965. The technically sound station has operated almost continuously since then with the same equipment maintained by the VTI students. The station's first engineer was Donald E. Wiggins, an instructor at the school.

Current staffers include Mark Cavanaugh, Rande Dawson, Marvin and Jason Walther. Mickey Hershman, (air name "Bridgett") is the station's General Manager, Norm Roberts, the music director and Stacy Jacobs completes the staff as news director. The cramped main studio filled with antiquated equipment, uncompleted attempts of remodeling the interior, and a dusty scale model of the VTI Campus do not do justice to the long heritage of the station. This was the usual scene in the lobby a few years ago. In recent years rumors have persisted that the school and station are for sale.

Next door to the station is the Wilbur H. Cummings Museum which offers visitors a glance at the radio past. Many vintage radio sets and equipment are displayed in the Museum. WNWI features AP and local news and its own adult contemporary music format.

## WVUR

### Valparaiso University "The Source"

Radio has had an exciting heritage in Valparaiso, Indiana dating back to the years of the city's first station, WRBC. This station, which operated in the 1920s, had some interesting parallels to the later facility at Valpo. First, WRBC, which was operated by a Lutheran church in the city, convinced its synod to purchase the school in 1925. Next student from the college performed and worked at WRBC. Years later, the church repaid the station by supplying a five minute meditation program recorded at Immanuel Lutheran. The inspirational spot aired at 12:55 a.m. right before sign off each night.

From the time the WRBC left the air in the late 1920s to the late 40's, the only broadcasting that occurred involving the college was from the school's amateur radio station, W9CLX. Valparaiso University had an organized radio club that was interested in opening its own commercial station in the future. Promoting these ideas were radio club members Leroy Reutz, Earl Straight, and Fred Van Steen. The possibility also aroused the interest of Valparaiso University President O. P. Kretzmann in 1949. At that time, the great FM era was beginning with many companies, schools, and individuals hoping to obtain licenses for these new frequencies.

Some \$5,000 for equipment was appropriated for studios at Guild Hall. The school looked into the matter until 1952, but wisely decided not to build a station at this time. The programming of campus news, plays, and classes could have benefitted the school, but the start up costs and the lack of FM sets in the community probably caused the college to bypass broadcasting for a few more years.

By the late 1950s, interest in a campus station was renewed and pursued by student council president Jack Lawson. He made it one of his campaign pledges to start a school radio station. Lawson, a law student, became chairman of a committee to plan the operation. In 1959 test broadcasts using the call letters WPRX took place from Wehrenberg Hall. Students Bob Svoboda and Bill Pillnow were behind the operation of WPRX. When the school took over the operation, the station became known as WVUR, standing for Valparaiso University Radio.

From Purdue, on November 11, 1960, college president Kretzmann officially signed on WVUR from its new studios on the third floor of Benton Hall. This station was a carrier current operation at 600 khz on the AM dial. The station could be heard in all campus buildings, except dorm A, a women's sorority house on the other side of the campus. It was cost prohibitive to wire this building. In addition, the station could be received on portable radios within 150 feet of the power lines.

The school's newspaper (The Torch) listed the station's programming hours as 6 p.m. to 1 a.m. Monday-Saturday and 5 p.m. to 1 a.m. on Sundays. Easy listening music was featured along with some cultural programs, "The Lutheran Hour," and news from a UPI teletype machine.

Lawson continued to be active with the station and predictions were heard that the station would someday be heard all over northwest Indiana and would be able to sell commercial air time. In the early 1960s the carrier current station operated 13 hours a day. Staffers at that time included Jim Greabner (1960), program director; Chet Klege, comptroller; Bob Svoboda, engineer; along with crew members Julie Pottinger, Dick Erickson, Bob Cuccia, and Bill Karpenko. Cuccia was the station's sports director and, today, is in broadcasting in Maryland. Malcolm McBride was the faculty sponsor.

The carrier current operation continued through most of 1965 when the Board of Broadcasting was formed. Programs featured included an interview with entertainer Harry Belafonte and coverage of elections. The school, eager to get their own FM operation on the air, appropriated \$2,000 for equipment. A tower was erected on the roof of Brandt Hall (Benton Hall was torn down). WVUR-FM officially signed on September 25, 1966 at 90.3 mhz. The ten watt station featured popular music in the afternoon, nightly classical music programs, and student talk and discussion programs. The school then appropriated \$10,000 to operate the station. Bob O'Neill, serving as program director, received a salary of \$275 a semester.

In 1967 WVUR aired a Simon and Garfunkel concert and carried the NCAA finals. By the early 1970s, the school was starting to feel the pressure from the FCC to upgrade its transmitter. A new 250 watt transmitter meeting minimal FCC requirements would cost about \$6,500; money the school did not have. The agency was also wanting the school to adopt minimum wage standards of \$1.40 per hour to be paid to student staff members. Plans to sell advertising to offset operational costs never materialized. Instead, the advertisers became frat parties who hinted that alcohol would be served at their gatherings. The university, taking a responsible step, banned these ads from the station's airways.

WVUR then became a more professional operation. Newscasts were aired every hour, politicians were interviewed. The station's frequency was changed again around 1978 to 89.5 mhz, still operating with ten watts of power. Studios were moved to the second floor of Heimlich Hall.

The station's music sought a comfortable format between those of a top 40 station and a progressive rock operation such as WXRT in Chicago. Geoff Fischer was the music director in 1975.

In an article written by the college's publicity director, Lisa Nuss, recalling the station's 30 year history, Ms. Nuss points out some other early activities at WVUR. These included an attempt to burn the station down by a mental patient and quoting station manager Steve Lindstrom as hanging out the station's windows flinging old albums at passing trains.

In 1976, one of the other Valparaiso radio stations, WAKE, pulled out of an agreement which allowed WVUR to access ABC News feeds and Howard Cosell sports reports. WVUR used a limited staff to do news from an AP wire in later years.

By 1982, the frequency of WVUR was changed again to 95.1 mhz and power increased to 36 watts. This was enough power to cover most of Valparaiso and the university campus. The move was made by the FCC to remove weak stations from the educational FM band and to remedy interference from WCAE-TV. The station's tower height was 131 feet.

As the years continued new music forms and incoming students helped change the course and the sound of WVUR. Currently, "The Source-95" features an album-oriented rock format. New studios in recent years have been built in the school's publications building at 816 Union Street on the west side of the campus. A special telephone loop brings the station's signal to the tower at Brandt Hall, according to Professor Rodney Bohlmann, who helped install it in 1965. Top 40 music and progressive rock tunes are presented on the popular station today, along with AP wire service news, an urban contemporary show, and a request program. Ann Lombardi is the station manager, Steve Ludwig is the general manager, and Ted Carlson is the engineer. The school's recent archivist Alice Koby, a 1988 graduate from Valparaiso University, aided in the research of this article.

## WWJY (WFLM)

### SouthLake 104

Some 50 years after Crown Point's first radio station an enterprising business man from Munster decided to give the "Hub City" a try again. There is really no comparison between Buster Wendel's early experimental station and John Meyer's sophisticated equipment except that money was needed to run both operations. Wendel pulled the plug on his operation after two years.

John Meyer continues a successful operation, realizing that he must expand beyond Crown Point to find enough support for his small South County station. Meyer signed on November 10, 1972. Studios were originally located in a new office building at 250 North Main Street in the front basement of the building. Meyer had several business interests including a gas station, liquor store, and an investment firm. If he needed more money, he had friends at a local bank.

John had a long time interest in radio and used his resources from other firms to keep afloat during its early years. Announcers made about \$125.00 a week. If they wanted more they went to work elsewhere. It was announcer Bob Phillips who came up with 's motto "the world's finest listening music." But Meyer soon got tired of saying he worked for Phlegm and snatched up the call letters WWJY when a beautiful music station in Michigan City changed its call.

Meyer preferred SouthLake 104 or "JOY" as the station's motto. Early staff members included Andy Banis (Joe Radio), Roger Jay, Rob Clavier, Tom Maloney, Don Hlinsky (N91ZU), Glen Coble, Dick Ludtke, John Donovan, Ryan Davis, Greg Dehm, Fran Austin, as well as myself. Commentator Earl Nightingale's programs also appeared on the station. Also featured were old time radio shows and home economist Lu Stover. Roger Jay Knautz managed the station in 1991.

The station's schedule was printed in the short lived Compass newspaper in 1975. WWJY outgrew its studios in Crown Point and to better identify with nearby Merrillville and the entire South Lake area moved to its present location around 1979. The station occupies the whole building at 10200 Broadway. Its 3000 watt transmitter and tower remains at about 170th and Grant on the Martin Krapf farm, seven miles south of the city. WWJY



(103.9mhz) specializes in playing soft, adult contemporary music. The station is a member of the Mutual Broadcasting System.

Some specialty programs including local high school sports are presented. At one time when girls athletics were beginning to expand in Crown Point, the station was threatened with a law suit, unless it presented girls high school basketball. The girls in return had an exciting season going down state that year.

Three other features of the station have included old time radio with John J. Farkas an "oldies" record show with "Hammer the Jammer" (Jeff Hamilton) and Hank and Jerri Harmon's nostalgic music program. A locally produced religious program called the "Sunshine Hour," and produced by me, ran for six years. (I was among the first ten staffers hired by the station. My time was spent equally doing a morning show and a "soft lights and sweet music" program during the evening.)

In earlier years, a local record store purchased all air time after midnight for its "Nite Rock" program which starred Don Nelson. Nelson is now a WMAQ and Shadow Traffic reporter. The station missed exclusive coverage of a block long fire in nearby Lowell one night because a "brokered" announcer would not allow newsmen on the air.

Over the years, a host of fine announcers have been employed by Meyer including Tim Bandura, who later became station manager. Other well-known area talents, including John Anastaplos, Warren Freiberg, Frank Sauline, and George Roche, and Tommy Williams have worked for WWJY. Joel Woods, Ray Deluna, and Jim Barber were staffers in 1979. John Anastaplos once told station owner Meyer that if Meyer refused to hire me (John Russell Ghrist), he would cause trouble for Meyer. I was later hired and spent several years there. It took good references to gain employment at WWJY.

Today, the station offers the community a quality sound, Mutual news, and effective community programming. Chicago newsman Jack Taylor is featured mornings. Former Gary broadcaster Tom Higgins also hosts a morning program.

In 1988 WWJY's owner John Meyer and Crown Point Car Dealer Bob Anderson opened "Sh-Boom," a 50-60's night club in Mishawaka, Indiana. Meyer auditions all the music that is played on the station.

It seemed that anyone that had worked anyplace else wanted to do big things when they got to WWJY. When the station opened, the first eight people who applied got hired. A bit later I entered the picture and served for over five years in full- or part-time positions.

At first, there were just enough people on staff to run the operation. The disc jockey read the news (and sometimes wrote the copy), turned the records, and helped keep the place clean. There were no luxuries, like news people, janitor services, or music directors. Everyone pitched in, even management was often seen pushing a vacuum cleaner around. The station employees often went without towels, and the management insisted on using both sides of the teletype paper, sometimes single spaced.

WWJY received good publicity from summer concerts on the city square that some of the local musicians union and I put together. Gradually local events were also covered. At a downtown fire, the crowd gasped when what appeared to be a body came flying out of a burned out woman's store. A fireman had tossed a mannequin into the street.

The "General Store" program advertised free anything, but "used bedding, livestock, or firearms." Expanded sports coverage, and its inclusion into the Merrillville Market, helped bring success to the station. A trip back to WWJY while remembering the past portrays this station as one that has kept up with the times.

#### WZVN (WLCL)

Serving Lowell, Cedar Lake and  
South Lake County

Shortly after John Meyer signed on in Crown Point, the second of two south county stations also emerged in 1972. William J. Dunn owned the tiny station which was big in community spirit and service. WLCL was located at 415 Commercial Avenue in the downtown section of the city. Aggie's Crazy Greek Restaurant finally closed up, adding extra studio space to the station next door.

Until that time motorcycle riders gathered downtown in the restaurant. One night a farmer in a pick up truck tied ropes to all the cycles and dragged them down the street, angering the bikers. The radio station was a welcomed addition to the downtown section of the city. For the first time the town had its own station and didn't have to wait a week for week-old news from the Lowell Tribune. Lyle Pilcher's publication, however, was better



established in the community and both entities seemed to be able to work together. WLCL's power output was 3,000 watts at 107.1 mhz. Its tower stood about 3 miles east of town off Route 2.

At the controls of WLCL most of the time was Paul Wierman, who was once "Bunny-napped" by the Lowell Junior Women's Club one Easter. Paul hosted many programs, including "Crosstalk," did the ball games, and sold advertising. It took lots of \$2 spots to keep the station going. Dunn was also around hosting a regular morning show. Young people like Andy and Ed Eubanks, Eric Ellis, Bob Wiles, and Jay Stevens (later at WKKD) highlighted the staff. "Hammer the Jammer" (Jeff Hamilton) also worked there. The news was written by me at night for the next days' broadcast. I also covered most of the town board meetings. Other early WLCL staffers were Dave Straker, Ruth Dunn, John Wilson, Mark McLearn, Debbie Huke Sheets, Nancy Kelsey, Jim Pounds, Jerry Curtis, Pam Riesmeyer, Ellen Berg, Don Crane, Chris Morrison, Rich Larson, and Uncle Don Holt. "Bus" Brownell was the station's perennial radio Santa Claus.

Next to Paul Wierman, Uncle Don Holt was the station's other star. Holt produced his "Miss Piggy Program" and did frequent children's shows. Holt and his singing group, "EASE", which also featured Patrice Martin, Donna Stewart, and Lowell Police Officer Sam Oliverio, performed all over the area, including at nursing homes during the holidays.

Ellen Berg is currently an evening announcer at WKVI AM-FM in Knox, Indiana. Pam Riesmeyer, formerly WLCL news director, is now a news anchor for WMAQ in Chicago. Cosmo Currier, a later news director at WLCL, went to WLTH Gary, Indiana. As for me, a former WLCL news staffer and Lowell Police Dispatcher, I became a traffic reporter for Shadow Traffic at WMAQ and WLS. Diana Christine Kapnas, former WJOB/WZVN announcer, is employed by Shadow Traffic and WNDZ.

WLCL quickly became very popular. South County folks knew exactly where to turn to for local news coverage, obits, and even bowling scores. A buy, sell and trade show called "The Attic," aired mornings at 10 a.m. Lowell High School, Hanover Central football and basketball games were broadcast on a regular basis. It had been sometime since WTAS in Beecher had done the games.

Sunday morning brought broadcasts from the Nazarene and Methodist churches. The station was located so close to the Methodist church that the tape machine and control console at the church were merely unplugged and brought across the street to WLCL during a station break to replay the Sunday morning broadcast.

Local news was presented in detail including coverage of a major downtown fire and continued ramblings at the Cedar Lake Town Hall concerning the closing of an adult outdoor theater. Cedar Lake Town Board President Lemont Wolff and Board Member Charles Thornburg were frequently heard on the station urging the theater's closing.

During Fair Week, WLCL always broadcasted the annual 4-H Livestock Auction. State Senator and 3rd District Commissioner Ernie Niemeyer, an auctioneer himself, usually handled the event. Niemeyer recalled one evening auctioning off the Grand Champion Steer. As the bidding progressed, the top bid reached around \$2.50 a pound. When the bidding ended, a woman thought that she had bought the whole steer for just \$2.50. The whole bidding process had to be done over.

WLCL was a small station and did not enjoy losing advertisers. Unintentionally, I caused problems for two firms by writing stories about a couple of town incidents. One concerned some illegal burning and dumping into a small lake. The other involved some crop dusting that killed some neighbors' gardens. Both advertisers stopped their commercials until the stories were pulled. One threatened to sue the station. In the end the stories were taken off the air.

It seemed rather strange years later doing traffic reports on WMAQ with some old South County staffers, Bob Phillips and Pam Reismeyer. Both newscasters introduced me many times on WMAQ for traffic reports. Another Hoosier, Christopher Michael (Gil Peters), apparently sidestepped South Lake County radio in Indiana. Anyway, we all ended up at WMAQ together in 1988-89.

I also had the pleasure of working with another Hammond area announcer Don Nelson at WLS. He had worked at WLCL when it was changed to WZVN. "Fearless Don" flew in Shadow's helicopter doing traffic reports for several years on WLS and pulled weekend air shifts. He later worked for WFYR-FM in Chicago.

Don and I go back many years, back to the beginnings at WFLM. I worked evenings 6-12, and Nelson pulled overnights for a record store that brokered all night airtime. My "Soft Lights and Sweet Music Program", complete with soft tinkling piano music and mushy poetry readings would put the audience to sleep. At midnight

Don would pause for about five seconds of dead air after the I.D., then blast the audience with the loudest song he could find.

While residents continued to enjoy the free local information, someone had to pay the bills. WLCL's station's operating costs had soared close to its monthly income. Dunn finally sold out to White Advertising in 1983. Call letters were changed to WZVN Z107. White gradually rooted out the station's original staff, turning the station into a Chicago juke box. Most South County residents refused to listen to the new Z-107. White brought in Don Nelson, and several other "rockers" and refused to cover local news and sports. The only local story they aired was a car injury to Lowell Police Chief Robert Callahan.

In 1986 radio station WJOB purchased WZVN. Local news returned to the station, but the era of folksy radio and the Bill Dunn Show did not return. Dunn was heard in the early 80's reading the news and farm reports on WWJY. Meanwhile, WZVN picked up the Satellite Music Service for its programming. The station is operated under the banner of Gracol Broadcasting which is owned by Judy Grambo and Julian Colby of WJOB (see WJOB). The station moved to Merrillville around 1989. Gordon Boss is still the engineer for WJOB/WZVN.

Both Bill and Ruth Dunn have returned to the insurance business. Andy Eubanks is the program director at WSAL in Logansport, while his brother Ed and his wife are in the entertainment business. Wierman, a veteran of other stations including WWCA, WLNR, and WRIN, was rehired to sell advertising at WZVN. Bob Wiles works for the Cedar Lake Post Office. Many residents still pause to remember when the town actually had its own community station. Even former owner Dunn chuckles that "those radio days are gone forever."

#### **WNDZ Christian Radio 5,000 Watts AM 750**

On the radio dial listeners will find several religious formatted stations, and one local AM station that actually "practices what it preaches." WNDZ 750 AM Portage, Indiana, offers a wide variety of selected Christian programming along with contemporary religious music. The staff is totally committed to its listeners and its sound.

Behind the creation of WNDZ is Universal Broadcasting's Vice President Dick Marsh. Marsh previously was the manager of WYCA Hammond and has travelled all over the country setting up Christian stations. It was familiar territory for Marsh to set up WNDZ's operations in this area.

Rick Schwartz is WNDZ's general manager. Jeffrey Warshaw is president of the station which signed on May 13, 1987. Universal Broadcasting owns several other stations and has been in the radio business for over 25 years. One of WNDZ's first announcers, Dave Mitchell, formerly of WCGO, later joined WXEZ in Chicago. Richard Lindsey is the program director.

WNDZ's transmitter and two tower antenna system is located on Airport Road near Portage High School at 2574 Portage Mall. The antenna pattern focuses most of its five thousand watt signal over the city of Chicago and south suburban areas. The pattern protects WSB in Atlanta. Studios are located at 17213 West Continental in Lansing, Illinois. The station has applied for a power increase of fifteen thousand watts. Currently the station is restricted to daytime hours and can be heard as far away as Racine, Wisconsin and to the east, South Bend, Indiana.

One of the attributes of the station is its professional staff and its key location on the AM dial between WGN and WBBM. Schwartz says sometimes listeners do not know they are actually listening to a Christian station.

A quarterly magazine is published by WNDZ containing interesting articles and a complete broadcast schedule.

#### **WDSO Education in Action**

Radio station WDSO-FM, 88.3 FM stereo, is the perfect example of an educational station which teaches not only broadcasting, but how to keep such an important operation on the air. The station is the perfect "come together" of young journalists, student disc jockeys, school involvement and community participation.

The Duneland Schools are proud of their 413 watt station which is living proof that a surrounding community will support an educational operation. Despite some cutbacks of school programs in the area, the principal, Dr. Dirk E. Baer, is committed to keeping WDSO on the air and part of the community it serves.

Located at Chesterton High School, the idea for a radio station began in 1974. Back then it was called WSCB and stood for "Student Center for Broadcasting." The station operated until 1976 and was heard over the

school's public address system. In November of 1976 WDSO actually began broadcasting with 10 watts. The FCC awarded the school the frequency of 89.1, which covered most of the town of Chesterton.

In May of 1986 WDSO's power was increased to 413 watts by order of the FCC to cover the complete Duneland School District. The FCC was pressuring 10 watt stations to upgrade.

WDSO's frequency was changed to 88.3. It's tower stands at 180 feet. Today its signal reaches to Michigan City, LaPorte, portions of Lower Michigan, and Northwest Indiana. The station has a UPI news wire. James Cavallo, WDSO's first station manager, is the current General Manager of the station. Cavallo is also a communications instructor at Chesterton High School.

Lenny Dessauer is the station manager and Michelle Stipanovich, an experienced Northwest Indiana broadcaster, serves as WDSO's operations manager.

At the heart of the station's operation is a four year broadcast curriculum set up to turn out announcers, newsmen, and sports reporters. Strict guidelines are set up to ensure and enhance broadcast performance. Those that do not follow the rules are removed from the staff.

WDSO utilizes journalism students who supply the news for the station and frequently broadcasts school functions, concerts and community activities. Election returns, school sporting events, and some religious broadcasts are presented.

The station is basically a music station broadcasting album oriented rock selections. The Duneland School Corporation supplies the basics needed to operate WDSO, but most of the station's operating costs are paid by donors. Donations as high as \$150 are collected from area merchants to secure spots during programming hours. Because WDSO is an education station, an advertiser is limited to name, address, slogan, and type of product or services offered by the sponsor.

WDSO broadcasts daily from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m., Fridays 6 a.m. to midnight, and is off on weekends and during school vacation. WDSO has proven itself to be the only station in the community to turn to find out about school news and class cancellations due to bad weather. Under the guidance of dedicated teachers, WDSO is a well run student operation.

### **WCAE/WYIN TV Calumet Area Education**

Many educators and businessmen always thought that Lake County, Indiana should have its own television station. The Calumet region has been dominated by the Chicago TV market since the late 40's. But on September 29, 1967 local TV became a reality for Northwest Indiana.

WCAE-TV (call letters stood for Calumet Area Education), Channel 50, broadcasted from new studios in the rear of Lake Central High School in St. John, Indiana. Lou Iaconetti became manager of the low powered educational station. Carl Yates was in charge of promotions. Paul Lowe, a speech and dramatics teacher at the school, was involved in production of student programs. Joe Lukas was chief engineer in 1987.

WCAE used Lake Central and other high school students from the surrounding community as on-the-air talent and crew members. Dave Sims, now a local lawyer, and Jerry Curtis, an area broadcaster, were among the many students who were employed by the station. Curtis later worked for WLCL in Lowell.

Larry Cordes, who now operates his own TV production company in California, produced "Hobby Highway," one of the many fine programs at the station. Each week host James McGregor would interview a local person about his or her unusual hobby. The producer of the program was Libby Collins, who later married local radio host Warren Freiberg. Mary Lou Kieswetter's "Under the Stars and Stripes" featured interviews with servicemen. A shorter version of the program also aired on WJOB radio. This patriotic series helped Kieswetter and her group erect the Highway of Flags Memorial at the corner of Ridge Road and Route 41 in Highland, Indiana.

Jack Parry's "Outdoors" was a well-done weekly program on fishing. Parry wrote for the Post Tribune. In fact many of the station's main "stars" were borrowed from area newspapers and radio stations. Ernie Hero of WYCA was a volunteer crew member at the station. As a crew member and as a booth announcer I worked from 1968 to 1970.

About 1972 a low power repeater station was erected on Channel 72 at the Gary National Bank Building at Fifth and Broadway to boost the station's signal. The station increased its power from 14,000 watts to 30,000 watts.

Besides local news, the station's best emphasis was placed on sports. WCAE-TV brought Northwest Indiana viewers Indiana University and Notre Dame games. On Friday nights WCAE's high school "Scoreboard" was the best locally produced program in the area. Les Milby and John Tenant, and later Jim Barber, Bob Alvarz, and WJOB's John Premetz featured scores and filmed highlights of high school games played earlier in the same evening. The show, produced by Ted Lucas, aired at 10:30 p.m. on Fridays. Some area high school basketball games were also broadcast from Lake Central.

WCAE TV was a PBS member and presented many of the same programs as did WTTW Channel 11 in Chicago. In 1974, WCAE TV boosted its signal to almost two million watts and erected a new tower on the Standard Oil Property at the north end of Hammond off of Calumet Avenue. The Gary translator on channel 72 was disconnected. NW Indiana Public Broadcasting, Inc. was the licensee. Previous to this time viewers had difficulty receiving WCAE's low power signal, especially since it was in the opposite direction of Chicago, away from where homeowners had positioned their TV antennas.

As the years progressed, the costs of operating WCAE kept rising. Grants and even the annual TV auction could not offset its expense. The bills were being paid for by the Lake Central School Corporation.

In 1982 WCAE TV went dark. The school system decided they could no longer afford to keep the station going. A rumor persists that the station operated until it ran out of replacement parts, including spare klystron tubes. One of these expensive tubes was broken by accident at the transmitter site.

WCAE-TV's other demise was that its earlier low power and frequent rebroadcasts of duplicate PBS programs failed to sway viewers from powerful WTTW Channel 11 in Chicago. Towards 1982 there were fewer funds to produce local shows and news programs.

After WCAE TV left the air, a local group obtained the station's license with hopes to resurrect the station. Offices were set up at the Northwest Indiana Regional Planning and Transportation office on Kennedy Avenue in Highland. About 1985 a deal was worked out with WPWR TV Aurora allowing for transfer of Channel 50's frequency in exchange for monetary considerations. WPWR TV, formerly channel 60, became Channel 50 and moved their antenna to the Sears Building in Chicago. WPWR was required to use the station identification of Gary-Chicago. The old channel 50 group gained channel 56, a TV frequency that had always been set aside for the Gary area as was channel 50. Previous to this time, owners of Chicago radio station WIND had held a construction permit for channel 56 as did the Great Lakes Broadcasting Company of Gary in 1987. Great Lakes Broadcasting, owned by Earmon J. Irons of 461 Hayes Street, never got on the air. Call letters were WDAI.

WYIN TV, the new channel 56, Merrillville signed on in April 1987. It is located in a warehouse on Mississippi Street in Merrillville. A home shopping service took over the vacated channel 60. Today former station manager Lou Iaconetti teaches physical education in Lake Central grade schools. Les Milby teaches metal shop at Lake Central High School. Lawrence Ventura of WGVE serves on the board of WYIN TV which has erected an 800 foot tower near Cedar Lake, Indiana. It is now the educational station for Northwest Indiana.

Most of the old WCAE equipment became the property of WYIN. The former studios of WCAE are being made into a computer lab. The WCAE towers were dismantled in 1989 due to building expansion. A ham radio repeater and the school's bus radio system were moved off the tower at Lake Central High School. Meanwhile, WYIN faces some of the same problems WCAE TV met. It acquired high operating losses during its first years of operation.



## SOUTH COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS

### CHICAGO HEIGHTS RADIO WCBZ

#### Pioneers in Local Live Radio

The establishment of radio broadcasting in Chicago Heights is based on the efforts of two Italian men with the same first names. In the early 1920s Anthony Coppotelli and his brothers, with their music store, set up stations WCBZ and later WJBZ. They were the first broadcasting stations of any kind in the South Cook County area since the early wireless days of station WCM which was located in the Calumet section of South Chicago.

Much later Anthony Santucci built WCHI during the pioneer development of FM broadcasting in the late 40's. Today Santucci operates successful WCGO and WTAS-FM which are recognized as the South Suburban "sound of service" in the Illinois-Indiana region.

In their own right, both Coppotelli and Santucci should be remembered for bringing the talent and happenings of the Chicago Heights area to the public airways. Broadcast Profile, the Chicago Heights Star, and Chicago Heights historians F. S. Beeson and Louise Michalek bring the details of these stations into current focus. An ambitious program by the Friends of the Chicago Heights Free Public Library has indexed much information about the history of radio in the area. They have made a grateful contribution of the preservation of local history.

Unfortunately, most of the places where these historic radio broadcasts took place have been reduced to parking lots in the city. As time passes and memories fade, we'll try to capture the remaining bits of knowledge about these early stations.

On May 1, 1924 the FRC issued the call letters "WCBZ" to Anthony Coppotelli. The station's first broadcast was on May 9, 1924 broadcasting on 248 meters, or 1210 khz. The first broadcast of the new station took place at the Coppotelli Music House at 20 Illinois Street using 50 watts of power. Later broadcasts utilized 100 watts.

Music supplies and radio parts were sold at the time by brothers Frank and Carl. Carl lived at 138 East 24th, which later became one of the locations for a second Coppotelli station. A nephew of the family, Joseph Petrongelli, lives in this house today. Anthony Coppotelli also ran the A.C. Radio Service Store at 1826 Chicago Road. Today this would be located between the A-1 Taylor Shop and a newer yellow brick building.

The radio shop building was previously a half way house for coach travelers from Goodenow to Chicago Heights, as well as several other smaller businesses. It was torn down for a driveway in the 1970s. Coppotelli lived in an apartment in the rear of the small building.

WCBZ broadcasted on Monday and Friday nights, taking advantage of the Chicago station's usual "silent night" on Monday evenings. Many long time residents of the area remember remote broadcasts of WCBZ taking place at the Wehrmann Building, today an abandoned rundown structure located at the northeast corner of Halsted and Emerald at 15th Street (Halsted was also known as West End Avenue back then. Some sources list the address of the building as 1441 Emerald Street.)

The building was owned by Henry C. Wehrmann and was also known as "Ed Schoonover's Garage" where Hudson cars were sold. Willy Knight, Whippet, Oakland and Pontiacs were also sold there.

In later years a restaurant and cab company were located in the structure, and it was rumored that prostitutes operated in the building. The building was once owned by Alex Diccio who also built the Alexander Building on Illinois Street.

Another listed location of the station in 1925 was 1721 Prairie, which has current day residents baffled as to its location. Prairie today only runs between 1300 and 1400 South. This address would place the station in a housing development near 15th and Hickory, or perhaps the post office changed the numbering scheme of the buildings in the past.

Generated by the Chicago Heights Star much excitement and notoriety was expected from the station. On the evening of May 9, 1924 area listeners were not disappointed. The two hour broadcast opening night featured numerous city officials, musicians, the Cadillac Quartet, KYW's baritone James Funk, and the Rhythm King Orchestra. The orchestra was managed by Richard Deering and directed by Arnold Chapham. Dignitaries who appeared on the station's first broadcast included Chicago Heights Star Editor W. H. Freeman and City Mayor J. E.

Thomas. John King was the station's announcer and William "Waddo" Waddington served as WCBZ's music director.

The station's second night on the air was depicted by the Chicago Heights Star newspaper as a "dazzling array of local artists." C. G. Crumb and his Aslar Band were featured along with the Gilbert Brothers, the Rhythm Kings, and a talk about fire prevention from Chicago Heights Fire Chief Malcolm S. Phillip. A number of other local musicians were always featured on WCBZ as the station frequently offered time to musical groups. Four year old Audrey Greenfield often sang on the station and was a good example of the young talent that was often featured.

At the Coppotelli Music House a broadcasting studio, 20 x 15, was erected complete with wall to wall drapes to deaden echoes. On a large stand in the center of the room stood the station's microphone. The station's control box set on a desk.

Anthony Coppotelli managed the station, but much of the engineering was done by Roland G. Pamler (9BCB). Pamler lived at 1701 Halsted and earlier at 144 East 16th. The family glass business was located at the 16th Street address. It was Pamler who "saved the day" on the station's first broadcast, quickly making some "technical adjustments" keeping the station on the air. Pamler later enjoyed careers with WOK, WWAE, WJOB, and WJJD.

Chicago Heights resident Joseph Petrongelli stated that both Roy and Roland Pamler were amateur radio operators. Roland was a brilliant man credited with many technical advancements in radio.

Anthony Coppotelli, on the other hand, learned most of his information from text books. Roland attended the Armour Institute and became a qualified radio operator. WCBZ, which had a range of 500 to 1,000 miles, was heard during its first night of operation by listeners in Massachusetts.

The station's motto was "Where the Dixie and Lincoln Highways Meet." In the spring of 1925 the station moved from the music store to another building at 1721 Prairie, in the area before the Beacon Hills subdivision was built. (The Prairie Street location could also have been a Chicago address for WOK later.) It is not known when WCBZ or if WJBZ operated from the Wehrmann Building, but several senior citizens recall radio equipment being located at the structure in the late 20's. This fact is verified later in this chapter, in Roy Pamler's account of the station's history.

The station featured all live local talent, area musicians and occasional news bulletins. WCBZ was sold by the Coppotelli's in April 1925 to the Neutrowound Radio Company of Chicago. Plans were made to move the station to nearby Homewood.

The community was saddened to see the station leave the city. The Chicago Heights Star summed up the feelings of the community on April 30, 1925: "Having a radio station in Chicago Heights made it possible for many local musicians and musical organizations to get broadcast experience while the game was young. It brought out the fact that Chicago Heights has excellent talent, some of which has been heard on the great Chicago stations."

Radio would be absent for a season from the city. Two years later, however, Coppotelli and Pamler would be back with their second station WJBZ. It was located at the Thomas Hotel at 1703 Halsted Street, and later at the Petrongelli home at 138 East 24th Street. There is confusing documentation concerning whether it was WJBZ or WCBZ that also operated out of the Wehrmann Building. WJBZ featured material recorded on discs and much less live programming than its earlier sister station (see WJBZ).

Coppotelli and Pamler were not as successful the second time with radio as the magic and interest of live programs in its pioneer years could not be duplicated. Just after WCBZ had gone off the air, another operation made a brief appearance in Chicago Heights. It was one of many portable stations used to broadcast specific events. These stations usually benefited from a local newspaper article urging listeners to tune in. The spot on the dial was left abstrusely vacant by the almost clandestine station after the event was over.

In July of 1925, WIBJ (1390 khz) broadcasted a live talent show from the Lincoln-Dixie Theatre with Paul Earl as emcee. The movie house, located at 1658 Chicago Road, was managed by Conrad Foster. It totally collapsed during construction, but was rebuilt and remained open many years afterwards.

### Portable Radio

In 1925, two men received FCC permission to operate portable stations. These operations were set up in towns where no radio facilities existed to broadcast local events, show, and other forms of entertainment. These operations were approved by the Federal Radio Commission as long as they did not interfere with other stations.

These portables usually operated in the high end of the AM band and used 20, 50, or 100 watts of power. Frequencies used were 1290, 1390, 1470, and 1490 khz.

Charles Lewis Carrell, owner of the Carrell Theatrical Agency, held ten licenses for portable stations. Among the call letters used were WBBZ, WKBG, WIBW, WIBM, WHBL, and WHBM. (WHBL, purchased from James H. Slusser of Logansport, Indiana in September of 1925 later became the call letters for a Sheboygan, Wisconsin station in 1926. A few other listed stations also became permanent operations.) Carrell, who later owned broadcast interest in Ponca City, Oklahoma (WBBZ), operated out of offices in Chicago in the North American Building, Suite 1506, 36 South State Street. This 21-story structure, built in 1911, is now the home offices of the Evans Fur Company. (Other sources list his business address as 1536 South State Street.)

Carrell was an entertainer himself, a baritone soloist, who became interested in radio in 1922. He listened to an early receiving set that was connected to five headphones at once and envisioned how network radio would work. This was during a trip to Oswego, Oklahoma that year. Returning to Chicago, he obtained several licenses for portable sets and later acquired WBBZ, which was operating in Indianapolis at the time.

In the mid 1920s, WBBZ toured the country along with many professional entertainers, who were combined with local talent to put on live radio shows. These community programs took place mostly at movie houses and other local events. Singers, dancers, and musicians readily performed on these broadcasts. Newspapers at the time referred to these shows as being a part of the Redpath Chautauqua Circuit. A *chautauqua* was a cultural event which usually featured religious speakers. Named after a county in New York, these gatherings were very popular in the 1930s. The Redpath Chautauqua Circuit was probably more of an entertainment type enterprise than cultural. Redpath is a well-known family name in upstate New York and Canada, as well as the name of a famous museum in Montreal, and a minister, Allen Redpath, of the Moody Church in Chicago. The Redpath Chautauquas, like many of the other later portable broadcasts by Carrell, attracted large audiences to see the show and observe the radio equipment in use. Those in attendance, in effect, became the "studio audience."

In the Midwest, broadcasts took place from Canton, Ohio; Bloomington, Indiana; Joliet, Peoria, and Chicago Heights, Illinois. Most of these broadcasts occurred in June and July of 1925. However, for many weeks when the stations were not in use, their whereabouts were unknown by the government.

There were many other individuals who owned portable licenses, including Frank W. McDonald, who operated the McDonald Radio Company, located at 179 West Washington Street in Chicago. His firm owned station WIBL, which went on the air in April of 1925 with 150 watts of power. By May 18, 1925, McDonald had received permission to operate with 250 watts at 1390 khz. In June of 1925, WIBL operated in Sycamore at 1170 khz, broadcasting from a boys' school. The station also aired another event from Joliet that month. On August 7, 1925, the FRC found that WIBL was no longer in use and canceled its license. The Zenith Radio Corporation also ran portable stations WSAX and WJAZ in 1925.

Meanwhile, Charles Carrell continued to operate his portable empire through the early months of 1928. That year the FRC ordered all portable stations off the air as of September 1, 1928. Carrell sued the government, but finally lost the case in December of 1929.

In 1927, one of Carrell's station managers, Harry B. Kyler (WIBW, Wichita, Kansas) persuaded him to set up one of his portable operations permanently in Ponca City, Oklahoma. After a couple of test broadcasts that were well received by the town's population, Carrell moved his station and his family there.

Carrell continued to manage several stations across the country including a small network of Detroit and New York stations. It was in New York where he met his wife Adelaide, an Australian born opera singer. She had entertained troops in her country during WWI. When Carrell passed away at age 58 on December 11, 1933, Adelaide managed the station until 1949. She sold WBBZ to Allan Muchmore of the Ponca City Publishing Company for \$115,000 in January of 1949.

Today, WBBZ is a successful community-minded station, operating in AM stereo. David May is compiling a history of the station, manager Kathy Adams has planned several programs to celebrate the station's 65th anniversary. It is one of the few stations that carry the W-call instead of the usual K-call for stations west of the Mississippi River. David May says, ". . . that fact doesn't seem to matter to area listeners. We've been here so long, they don't even think about it." What started out as a temporary operation prior to 1927 has become a fine community station for the city it serves.



## WJBZ

### Radio Reprise for Chicago Heights

Radio service had been absent from Chicago Heights since April 1925 when the Coppotelli family had sold WCBZ to the Neutrowound Radio Company. The portable radio firm moved WCBZ to Homewood and later changed the call letters to WOK.

In November 1926, Chicago Heights was again to be served by radio, only this time the service was not to be as successful. The novelty and excitement of live radio was replaced instead by recorded music provided by the Coppotelli Music House. Listeners often complained about the station's selections.

WJBZ were the new call letters issued by the Radio Division, Bureau of Navigation of the U.S. Department of Commerce. The new 100 watt station operated at 208.2 meters equal to 1440 khz; earlier 419.3 meters was used.

Anthony Coppotelli (9AOR), the youngest of several musical and mechanical brothers, operated the station along with Roland Pamler (9BCB/9EFQ). Coppotelli was the manager. Pamler, who had also worked at WCBZ, was the station's technical operator. John King was back as the announcer. Frank C. Gibbs served as musical director, and Jack Mertaugh was the staff pianist.

Broadcasts on WJBZ were on Monday and Friday nights from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. and featured local musicians. WJBZ operated from several different locations including 138 East 24th Street and 144 East 16th Street. A brother, Roy Pamler, operated a glass business at the 16th Street address. Chicago Heights Housing Code Officer Sam Melei said the building was removed in the 1950's. Melei said his dad sold nickel hamburgers across the street from the glass company, which is also gone. Most of the customers were from a shoestring factory located nearby.

The Chicago Heights Star reported on January 7, 1927 the station's first broadcast emanated from the Thomas Hotel at 1703 Halsted. John M. Wiehl furnished an elaborate set of studios on the fourth floor of the hotel. The hotel was named after former Chicago Heights Mayor John W. Thomas, and was built around 1922. Managed by Theodore Williams, it was once described as "the most elite and attractive building in downtown Chicago Heights." Al Capone's men occupied the second floor in the 1920s. WJBZ featured material recorded on discs and much less live programming than its earlier sister station WCBZ.

The first test broadcast in early January of 1927 brought reception reports from all over the country. WJBZ's slogan in September of 1927 was "Crossroads of the Nation."

While located at 138 East 24th Street, WJBZ broadcasted from the upstairs of this home. Two 90 foot poles were erected in the backyard for the antennas. Downstairs a pantry containing bowls or fruit jars (wet cells) were always on hand to supply needed power and capacitors for the station's equipment. The home is owned today by Joseph Petrongelli, who was named after the Coppotelli's father, Joe.

This home was the Coppotelli homestead. It was made out of lumber from the Thrall Railroad Company factory at 26th and Wallace. The area was known as "Hungry Hill" after the numerous gardens that were planted in the yards to fight off starvation during the depression years.

After two years of operation, WJBZ's license was allowed to expire in September of 1928. The station was not profitable or very popular toward the end of its operation. Listeners apparently did not enjoy recorded music or programs that were offered off of early transcription discs. The FRC pulled the plug on this station, as well as other small wattage suburban stations, in favor of more powerfully and professionally run stations in Chicago.

The Coppotelli's were then out of the radio business. Roland Pamler went on to careers with WWAE, WJOB, and WJJD in Chicago. Pamler had been an amateur radio operator and an experimenter with disc T.V. Pamler passed away after a 39 year career in radio in Glendale, California at the age of 57.

The Coppotelli's had earlier worked at the Hamilton and Steger Piano factories before opening their music house at 20 Illinois Street. Carl, of 138 East 24th, who had operated the Music House until 1962, passed away at the age of 71 on July 4, 1967. Carl's second wife, Masalda, still lives in Chicago Heights. Brother Frank, who owned Coppotelli's Music and Radio Shop at 303 East Van Buren Street in Joliet, next to the Rialto Theater, passed away at the age of 66. Frank was a Joliet businessman from 1928 to 1951.

Anthony Coppotelli (W9GYG) along with another suburban TV repairman Pat Dangoia of the Chicago Heights Radio Hospital experimented with early disc TV sets. Dangoia's firm on U.S. 30 east of the C.E. and I Railroad tracks used a white ambulance-like vehicle to pick up and deliver radios and TV's. The firm later began Audio Annex in Homewood.



Anthony Coppotelli, a good photographer and the youngest of three brothers, moved to Glenwood in 1942 and opened Glenwood TV and Electronics in 1954. He passed away in 1956 at the age of 50. The shop is run today by Anthony's son, Ron, who still has some of the old transcriptions and radio station memorabilia.

Many of the old buildings, like the Coppotelli Music House, a theater and the Thomas Hotel were gradually leveled for parking lots in the early 1970's despite attempts from some area businessmen to create an historic old town shopping district or mall area. Chicago Heights would be without radio service until 1950, when another Italian, Anthony Santucci, would bring the first of three stations to the community.

### Roland Pamler

Roland George Pamler (9BCB, 9EFQ) was born on October 1, 1905 in Chicago Heights and is recognized as one of the area's most prestigious radio pioneers. His life story borders the development of the communications industry in the south suburbs.

During his early years, Pamler's interest and technical skills grew from the early days of the "wireless" to the intrinsic world of guided missiles and space exploration. Operating two small radio stations in Chicago Heights in the 1920s were mere stepping stones to greater engineering challenges and accomplishments he would enjoy later in life. This also included many years of employment with national scientific firms.

It all began with a ham radio license at the age of 16. Pamler and another area businessman, Anthony Coppotelli, a few years later, operated WCBZ and WJBZ radio stations. By far WCBZ was the more successful station of the two operations which featured live programming provided by Coppotelli's musical brothers. WCBZ was later sold to the Neutrowound Radio Corporation and became station WOK. WJBZ, which programmed early "mechanically reproduced" shows on disc, failed to impress local audiences.

WJBZ, a 100 watt station operated at 715 khz, equal to 419.3 meters, later moving to 1440 khz (208.2 meters) in 1927. The station later went out of business. Ron Coppotelli, Anthony's son, who operates Glenwood TV and Electronics, still has many of the transcription discs used on WJBZ.

For a brief time Roland was an engineer at WOK (formerly WCBZ). Roland graduated from the Armour Institute (now ITT) in Chicago in 1931. He stayed in broadcasting for only a short time after operating stations WCBZ and WJBZ. Among other stations that Pamler worked at were WJJD at Mooseheart, WWAE in Hammond, and WHO in Des Moines, Iowa.

Roland always watched for better opportunities and through the years served as a consulting engineer for Raytheon, Philco, Goodyear, Westinghouse, Hughes Aircraft, and Tamm-Dennison in Chicago. Roland and his wife Ruby lived in Boston, the Miller Section of Gary, Indiana, and Indianapolis where Roland taught trigonometry at Purdue in 1941.

He was in on the development of the first microwave ovens, and also worked for the jet propulsion laboratory doing some government research. Much of his time was spent on microwave ovens. The first appliances were huge machines that were sold mainly to restaurants. Pamler spent many hours testing the ovens cooking horse meat roasts, a cheaper form of meat. The meat was then taken home by employees and fed to pets. Roland continued to travel around the country, according to his wife Ruby, changing jobs from firm to firm. Meanwhile, Frank, his father, and brother Roy operated the family's auto glass and trim business back in Chicago Heights. The firm was busy in the 20's and 30's installing bullet proof glass for law enforcement officials as well as for gangsters.

Roland and Ruby moved to Glendale, California in 1954. Pamler passed away due to a blood clot on January 22, 1963 at the age of 57. Many radio stations and newspapers carried stories about his life and accomplishments. WHO radio on January 22, 1963 announced his passing every hour. Pamler is a member of a special group of ex-station operators including George Ives-WRGK and Jack Schroeder-WEXI, who left the Midwest and went into science research in California.

Roland's brother Roy was once asked to recall "Rollie's" accomplishments for a special awards presentation at Bloom High School. (Many years ago the school had its own radio club.) Roland did not win any awards, but his many accomplishments should have been recognized. Roy remembered Rollie's early radio years and submitted this account of his brother's first radio experiences beginning around 1914.

## My Experience with Wireless

by Roy Pamler

as supplied by Lydia Pamler

We shall look back to the year of 1914. That was the year that World War I started. There were very few radio amateurs at this time. The government passed a ruling forbidding the use of radio communications with the exception of military and certain federal agencies. The war ended in 1918, and the government lifted all restrictions on radio or wireless.

It was about 1919 when I saw an article in the Saturday night issue of the Chicago Daily News how to make a wireless receiving set. The author was Neely Hall. I had a brother who was five years my junior. His name was Roland, but we called him Rollie. I showed Rollie the article, and he became very interested in same.

The receiving set consisted of a tuning coil, detector, condenser, headphones, and an antenna. We procured an old rolling pin with square ends on it and managed to scrape up enough old bell wire with string. The detector was gelena (which looked like a hunk of stone and had a metal cat whisker). Before the tuning coil was complete, we read of a new innovation, the loose coupler having greater sensitivity. Now we got busy on the making of the loose coupler. We obtained an old apple box and made the cabinet, obtained two oatmeal tubes and wound the fine insulated wire. One tube moved back and forth into the other tube depending upon the tuning of the signal required.

Now after the coupler was completed, we assembled the complete receiver. In those days (about 1919) there were not [too] many commercial stations on the air. We read in the newspaper that the government sent out time signals from Arlington, Virginia about 12 o'clock at night. Before I go any further, I may say that we had our receiving set in the living room on a large business desk. With this receiver set completed and in operation, we received these signals every evening, but very weak (station NAA). Let's stop for a few moments and talk about the wave length used by the government and commercial stations. Wave length is measured in meters. The signals we were listening to were on about 5000 meters. You will find out later that by lowering the wave length the signal became more efficient.

Getting back to the Arlington time signal, we found these signals very weak, barely audible. About this time a vacuum tube came into being called the "Tubular Auditron." We bought one of these tubes and discarded our crystal detector. There was as much difference as night and day when the signals came in. We could lay the phones on the desk and hear dots and dashes come in fairly loud. Things were progressing very fast, [with] the new developments in equipment. Now the regenerative set came on the market. We made such a set, we tried to make the variometers, but no success, so we purchased two factory built units. Upon completion of the regenerative receiver, complete with vacuum tube, better ear phones, we now could receive greater distance and many more new stations.

As time went on we became interested in how (amateur radio) worked. Rollie took his amateur exam and obtained his license to operate a station. We were given the call 9BCB. I think we were either the third or fourth to obtain a license in our community.

The new thing we did was to build our radio shack behind our store building on the next lot. Now we had the building, the receiver equipment, so we proceeded to build our transmitter. This unit consisted of 1/2KW transformer, home-made condenser, oscillation coil and a home made rotary gap.

Our communication range was about 75 miles. The transmitter was in a small shed adjacent to our radio station. One day we accidentally left the door on the transmitter shed open while Rollie was pounding out dots and dashes. A cop happened to be in the near vicinity. He heard the arcing of the rotary gap and rushed into the yard to make his observation to what was going on. I happened to be near the transmitter, I greeted him and told him what was in progress. After our short conversation, he left with a satisfied feeling that there was nothing that the law could do about [it].

A year later we discarded the spark transmitter and made a new transmitter that used vacuum tubes instead of the spark transmitter. Our greatest thrill came the first night we used this new transmitter all along the eastern coast. In those days, as well as today, the amateurs mailed post cards telling you that they heard your signals.

Another thrill I had when I heard the first voice on radio. One Saturday afternoon while we were working on amateur, we happened to dial in an amateur from Joliet. He was broadcasting a basketball game from the Joliet High School.

Now we come to the year of 1925. Anyone that wanted a radio broadcasting station could have one by building same and applying to the FCC for a license. So Rollie and Tony Coppotelli, who also was a radio amateur,

built a fifty watt radio broadcasting station. They were assigned the call [letters] WCBZ. This was [the] only broadcasting station for miles. The station was located at Coppotelli's Music House on Illinois Street in Chicago Heights. Since funds were limited, and the sale of broadcasting time was hard to come by, we operated the station on Friday night from 7:00 to 11:00 p.m.

Early broadcast listeners did not accept records or taped entertainment as we know it today. They wanted live entertainment, so you can see the position we were in. Scarcity of live programs and lack of operating expenses brought the operation of the station to one night a week. After a year of operation, we moved the station to Halsted and Emerald in Chicago Heights. Mr. Wehrman spent quite a lot of money making a sound proof studio and other refinements that increased the quality of broadcast. Before I go any further, this was an a.m. transmitter.

Everything went well for the next year or so. One day Rollie received a notice from the FCC that if he wanted to retain the station, he would have to go to Washington to ask for permission to maintain the station. The reason for this was that broadcasting stations were springing up like mushrooms and the FCC was canceling out hundreds of stations. Rollie gave this notice serious thought and finally decided to give up the station. He was attending Armour Institute of Technology at this time and thought it was more important to graduate and obtain his degree.

Tony Coppotelli and I did not want the station as we did not have a commercial license to operate same. This was the death of broadcasting station WCBZ. In order to operate a broadcast station, a commercial operator license is required.

NOTE: Roland G. Pamler is an engineering executive with over 28 years' experience in high frequency communications, guided Missile, ground tracking and satellite fields. His experience covers all phases from Project Design through Management, directing the activities of the Product Assurance Laboratories plus serving in the Executive Technical Committee.

Roy Pamler also had an impressive background in local industry, operating a family auto glass business for many years. This building has since been removed. Roy passed away in 1987.

A brief résumé of Roy's business activities includes being co-owner of the first broadcast radio station (WCBZ), and co-owner of the third amateur radio in Chicago Heights (9BCB), Pamler Glass Service/Pamler Distributors, M-P Corporation in Momence, Illinois, and R.C. Pamler, Inc.-Electronics, a loan business and an auto agency.

Roy has been involved in a tremendous amount of civic volunteer activities that total over 5,000 hours with the Chicago Heights Lions Club, Open Door Friends, and Operation Friendship. He has gone to night school and worked at other personal interests such as plastic extrusion, practical electricity, personal management, and learned spanish.

## WCHI

### Early FM for Chicago Heights

It had been over twenty years since the city of Chicago Heights' last radio station. But with the era of new static-free FM broadcasting, Anthony Santucci felt the timing was right to bring a new station to Chicago Heights.

WCHI signed on in 1949 with 400 watts. Its studios were located in Santucci's house at 164 East 23rd Street near 23rd and Wallace. Local news, music, Bloom High School sports, and a lady reading children's stories made up most of the programming.

An employee of the Beldon Tower Company was killed instantly when a bolt fell off the top of the tower and landed on his head during the tower's installation. Area residents also complained that the FM station caused television interference. The station operated until it was deemed unprofitable.

Santucci was president and chief engineer of the station, which was owned by the Chicago Heights Broadcasting Company. Dr. F. J. Armbruster was the general manager, and Henry Bruns was the commercial manager.

In 1951 veteran newsman Earl Vieaux joined the staff, and Joe Gansen became the sports director. Other staffers included cartoonist Dick Wallmeyer, and later Congressman Casey Hanrahan. The station's power was lowered to 225 watts at 95.5 mhz, serving the Chicago Heights-Bloom Township area with local programming. The station went off the air in 1953.

Santucci later would return to the air in the early 60's with a successful AM-FM operation. (See WCGO-WTAS)



**WCGO/WTAS**  
**South Suburban South of Service**

WCGO/WTAS have been enjoyed by the Chicago Heights area for over 30 years. It includes the hard work and dedication of the Santucci family utilizing both stations for day and night time coverage of the south suburban area.

Anthony Santucci, Sr. followed in the radio footsteps made by the early Coppetelli brothers beginning his own broadcast operation in the early 50's. WCHI was the area's first FM station, but after four years, Santucci shut it down deeming it unprofitable.

In 1956 a group of businessmen planned AM service for the area adding FM in 1964. Santucci tried to get his former call letters, WCHI, standing for Chicago Heights Illinois, but they were taken. His firm, South Cook Broadcasting, settled for WCGO. An FCC construction permit was issued on June 8, 1958. The Chicago Heights Star ran a photo of several persons at a ground breaking ceremony on April 17, 1959, but the station didn't open until August 27th. The transmitter site, which has long been maintained by engineer Peter Van Milligan, was constructed at Joe Orr Road and Woodlawn Avenue near Illinois 394.

The first studios were built by Bernside Construction and were located at 119 Olympia Plaza. WCGO's first officers and staff included President Anthony V. Santucci, Sr.; Anthony D. Carlo, Vice-President; Gustav Hahn, Secretary; and Anthony D'Amico, Treasurer. Hahn operated Hahn and Coe TV Repair as 1247 Chicago Road in Chicago Heights. D'Amico served for several years as promotional director of the station.

WCGO's staff in 1959 consisted of Lee Edwards, manager; Jerry Clark, commercial manager; Pat Webster, program director; Gary Wilson, news director; James Caperelli, special events director; and Jan Griswold, women's director.

The sixties brought WCGO a bonus of radio personalities who went on to excel in the Chicago entertainment field. These included Ron McAdam, who did voice characterizations for the Bugs Bunny Show on WGN-TV; Linn and Gwenn Burton; Kay Westphal; Joe Franchina; Marc Conway; Bill Hayden; Fred Partido; Ken Berres; Pete Strassen; and Jerry Ingwersen. Later employees included Joe Cassidy, Roz Varon, Robert Dettbam (Bob Black), Tom Brocius, and Bob Anderson. Earl Vieaux did the news.

A variety of sports, talk show hosts, and play by play announcers have come and gone. Two of these sportscasters got into legal trouble elsewhere. Fred Partido became a newsman for WBBM in Chicago. Dave Mitchell became an announcer for WXEZ in Chicago and a later WBBM traffic report. Walter Lorenc was an early engineer at WCGO.

One of the station's best play by play sports team, Bob Black and Bob Anderson, did most of the area high school games through the 70's. Black is a teacher at Rich East High School; Anderson was in Public Affairs at Prairie State College, and now works for an area bank. On October 1, 1964, South Cook Broadcasting opened WTAS, a 3,000 watt FM station. Because of an FCC ruling, the FM operation was required to locate its facilities and 300 foot tower four miles south of Beacher on Route 1. Some programs were simulcast, but, for the most part, the FM facility became an automated easy listening station. During the day WCGO program directors, Don McAdam and Dee Shepard, could be heard introducing music played off of large reels of tape.

Jerry Ingwersen did a request music program at night with some Indiana and Illinois high school sports presented. WTAS did many games from Crown Point and Cedar Lake and Lowell until Lake County signed on their own stations. Many Illiana (Illinois-Indiana) merchants will remember those large WTAS clocks and pre tuned radios shaped like microphones that appeared everywhere in the area. In 1976 WCGO moved from the Olympia Plaza to 3313 Chicago Road in South Chicago Heights. The FM operation remained south of Beacher. Since the beginning of the station, a parade of news directors have worked for WCGO/WTAS, including Bill Spelbring, Richard Maginot, Joseph Palcek, Earl Vieaux, Pete Strassen, Bob Anderson, Roger Allen, Patty McDermott, and Jim Crocket. Other earlier announcers were George Waters and Dale Zahn.

Anderson, a combination sports director/news man, broadcasted the station-sponsored golf tournament each year. Anderson and McDermott still work weekends at WCGO. Santucci's son, Tony, Jr., became WCGO's music director in 1982. Tony has been a morning show host on the station for many years, having received valuable training from his father and through the broadcast curriculum at WHFH at Homewood-Flossmor High School.

Santucci's first radio station, WCHI, was located in a room, later becoming Tony's bedroom, in a family-owned home near 23rd and Wallace. William Beindorf, who has been with the station since 1966, is the current sales manager and vice-president of South Cook Broadcasting.



WCGO operates with 1,000 watts at 1600 on the AM dial. WTAS operates with 3,000 watts at 102.3 on the FM dial. Both are solid attributes to the Illiana region, offering a variety of local, ethnic, and sports programs to the community. Long time area newscaster and pilot Earl Vieaux still does the morning newscasts. Veteran controversial talk show host Warren Freiberg hosts a morning call in show on WTAS. Freiberg previously worked for Gary's WLTH and WLNR in Lansing, Illinois.

In 1989, WCGO/WTAS picked up programming from the Sun Network in Florida. This replaced the music tapes that had been running for over ten years on the FM side. The tapes were so well done at the beginning, that callers would phone the station wanting to talk with the canned announcers. Today the station staff is paired down to essential personnel. Network programming, CNN and local news, and automated music highlight the days' programming.

It is interesting to note that Santucci's earlier call letters, WCHI and WTAS, have historic significance. WCHI, Santucci's first FM station, became the call letters of a religious station in Chicago late in the 1920s. WTAS was the call for Charles Erbstein's radio station in Elgin, Illinois, which later became WGN. Erbstein's WTAS stood for Willie Tommy Annie and Sammy, fictitious characters in Erbstein's monologues. Today's WTAS call letters stand for Anthony, Sr.'s daughter, Therese Ann Santucci.

### WTAS Remembered

My best years and most enjoyment in the industry was during 1981-1985 at WTAS-FM. The station had been an automated, quiet giant for many years, used as a backdrop for background music by area stores. It was WCGO's night time outreach, carrying local high school sports, including baseball games. By far the broadcast team of Bob Black and Bob Anderson were the station's best play by play men. They were, unfortunately, passed over for the later "brokered" announcers who sold the ads and then did the games themselves. Another sports announcer, who was being chased by the underworld, disappeared for a time around 1985.

I can remember seeing Jerry Ingwensen doing an all-telephone request show at night at WTAS. Earl Vieaux was also sort of a fixture around there. It seems he's read the news and obits on WCGO/WTAS since its beginning. Tom Brocius was WCGO's morning talk show host in 1979. After many of the big names like Dee Shepard, Linn Burton, Ron McAdams, Ken Berres, Dale Zahn, Joe Cassidy and Roz Varon left, WTAS was basically on automation, simulcasting for newscasts each hour.

Gone except by tape were McAdam's characterizations and Linn Burton "For Certain." Cassidy and Roz exited the station one night through the rear door and ran into a cow. Why not? The station was surrounded by farms and cornfields out in the middle of nowhere (4 miles south of Beecher on Route One).

There was some story or FCC reasoning as to why it had to be so far from town. Every once in a while one of the night time people on automated-assist would forget to open the right pot and nothing would go over the air until someone drove from Chicago Heights to Beecher to make that adjustment. His job was also to set up the music tapes for the next day and reshuffle the carted public service announcements. There were seldom any commercials being purchased in the mid 80's, and virtually none on weekends during my work shift.

Setting out in the country offered the small staff (in the 80's the weeknight and weekend disc jockey), a pleasurable drive to work. But during the winter, the country roads were treacherous and sometimes blocked with walls of snow. Many nights were spent stuck at the station sleeping curled up in a moving blanket, while mice paced the floor and the automation system clicked on and off every ten minutes. The station was so far away from civilization, it sometimes served as a haven for lost motorists or those who had run out of gas. The Beecher Police usually refused to come out to assist these people.

On a couple of occasions, I had forgotten to lock the front door. During a newscast one cold night, a drunken couple wandered in. They had run out of gas. The pair walked into the studio and started asking me questions and directions while I was attempting to read the news. They were so intoxicated, they couldn't conceive that I was on the air. With the newscast already blown by all the interruptions, I proceeded to interview them both and persuaded the Beecher Police to help them. A patrolman later came out with some gas and spilled most of it on himself attempting to pour it into their car's gas tank.

Meanwhile, records were tracking over the air inside the station. The drunk then attempted to pay the policeman with a charge card. The officer snarled, "What do you think I do? Carry around one of those 'swish-swish' charge card machines? Get on your way!" Hopefully, the couple's fancy sports car made it to the next gas station.

Another time a man walking coast to coast playing his bagpipes stumbled into the station one rainy night. He got to play them on the air. No doubt weeknight announcer Dave Mitchell began locking the door. A motorcycle gang also kept circling the place one night.

Contemporary music gradually gave way to "oldies" every Saturday and Sunday evening. The station had many old records that hadn't been played in years. Sometimes spiders would crawl out of the album jackets. Weekend oldies brought a new audience to the station and featured area guests Mike Fagan, Stormin' Norman, Crazy Dave, Ralph Horner, Rich, Danny and Joe Dominiak, Alan and Barb Prokop, and Bob Olson. They all wanted to share their old record collection with the listeners. Rich was in "the Good Times" band and did a "Blues Brothers" routine.

Bob Olson usually called the station with his portable phone from a party and sometime during the evening was tossed into a swimming pool. Olson once told friends, "The station is out in the middle of nowhere, how could a 60 watt bulb in the middle of the night attract so many weirdos?"

A generous supply of gags, gimmicks, and laughs emanated from the station's nearby tower each weekend. The small five room station gave me a brief sanctuary from life's pressures each weekend. Even after moving from the area, I attempted to keep the show going, but winter was coming. I had collapsed along the roadside from exhaustion trying to work for five stations at once and decided to finally hang up my headset there. A dream had finally come true. I had worked for Gus Hahn in his TV shop as a youngster and had pestered Tony Santucci for a jock job since high school. It was the most fun I had ever had at \$4.00 an hour, and I haven't had that much fun since. Today, the station continues to serve the community with new voices and programs. And life goes on.

In early 1991 WCGO received permission to operate with 23 watts after sunset. Both WCGO and WTAS go off at 11 p.m. each night.

### **WCFJ (WMPP)**

#### **Winning Chicago for Jesus**

A long time fixture in the Chicago Heights area has been radio station WMPP Ford Heights, Illinois (formerly East Chicago Heights). WMPP signed on in September 1961. Studios were located at 825 East Drexel Square on the southeast side of Hyde Park in Chicago. The transmitter and six tower antennas were later set up in a cow pasture south of Crete.

The Seaway Broadcasting Company owned the station for many years. William Martin Pressner was the first president of the station. Jesse Coopwood, who would later work for many years at WWCA in Gary, was the program director. Charles Pinckard was the early news director. Quentin McDuffy, a long time Gary engineer, has kept the station going for a number of years, and is still the station's engineer.

In 1965 Doctor Herbert Erwin, Jr. became the president of the station; Leroy Eller was the sales manager. The main energy over the years behind WMPP has been Allen Wheeler who was either station manager or program director for many years.

Around 1963 the station moved to its present location at 1000 Lincoln Highway. Large call letters were mounted on the roof of the brick building facing the street.

In the sixties WMPP featured R & B disc jockeys Eddie Holland and Buddy Bell. In 1986 Michael Benages became president of the station with Wheeler as general manager. Jim Williams and then Chuck Edwards became program directors.

WMPP changed its call letters to WCFJ, Winning Chicago for Jesus, and became a religious station. WCFJ is now owned by the Jana Broadcasting Company. It operates with 1,000 watts 24 hours a day and features all gospel programming. Barry Warnell is one of the station's more widely known announcers. Assistant manager Jerome Johns says the station programming contains about 60% teaching programs and 40% gospel music recordings.

The station programs to a large section of the Black population in the South Chicagoland area and Northwest Indiana.

### **WRHS**

#### **Rich East High School**

In the late 1980s, some area school districts began to suffer severe financial problems. Unfortunately, when the budgetary axe falls, extra curricular activities like high school radio stations usually get closed down. The twenty year tenure of WRHS at Rich East High School in Park Forest met with the same fate around 1983.

WRHS, standing for Rich High School, signed on at 88.1 mhz on January 21, 1960. The 10 watt station could barely be heard a few blocks from the school, but served as a valuable training ground for broadcasting students. Several students, including Dale Zahn, went on to broadcasting careers. Zahn was WJOB's popular morning man in 1970. He also was employed as the music director of WJRC (now WWHN in Joliet) and worked as an announcer at WCGO in Chicago Heights. Today Zahn is a well-liked businessman in the community of Park Forest. After serving on the village board, Zahn became president of the Great South Suburban Board of Realtors. He now works for Coldwell Banker Realtors and is the track announcer for the Santa Fe Raceway.

Rich East social studies teacher, Robert Dettbarn (Bob Black), a former sportscaster at WCGO, also did some work for WRHS. Dettbarn was the assistant sponsor of WRHS from 1966 to 1981. Rick Salinger, another WRHS student, worked for WJOB and now is a Chicago newsman for NBC-TV and CNN. Doug Geren of WRHS now works in radio in Milwaukee.

Two school officials expressed the demise of WRHS. Rich East Principal Lou E. Schmidt says the antiquated equipment needed to be updated and that expensive repairs were needed to the station. Dettbarn added, towards the end, there were not many students interested in the station.

Another school official, Brian Barry, stated that phone lines used by the station were getting too expensive as well as other operating costs.

At this time, the FCC was requiring the school station to increase wattage to 100 watts to cover their school districts. Broadcasting at WRHS was discontinued in 1985. Recent sources at the school indicate there is a renewed interest in restoring the station. The area where the radio station was is currently being turned into a video lab.

## WOK-WMBB

### They Made Their Own Music And The Radios to Hear it On

In April of 1925, the Coppotelli brothers sold WCBZ to the Neutrowound Radio Manufacturing Company of Chicago. An era of locally produced programming gave way to live broadcasts of well-known Chicago orchestras and the first big city programming to hit the airways in the south suburban area.

As the FRC began to combine radio channels, Neutrowound was hoping to own a station that would help them promote their radio sets. Immediately after purchasing WCBZ, Neutrowound announced that they were planning to move the station out of Chicago Heights to nearby Homewood. The firm had built a plant and the radio station would be located adjacent to the factory. Former addresses of Neutrowound Radio Service were, 1603 S. Michigan, 7538 N. Ashland, 5505 S. Halsted, 1207 Winona, and in 1925, 1721 Prairie Ave., all in Chicago. In 1925, the Illinois Secretary of State listed the owners of the firm as Harvey Cory and James E. Ferguson. Neutrowound actually goes back to August 10, 1916, when it was known as the Myle Mayker Company. Business Partners at that time were, Edwin B. Mayer, Harry J. Lurie, and David Levinson. The firm mainly dealt with automobiles, machinery and appliance manufacturing. Obtaining patents, copyrights, and trademarks were also goals of the new company.

On June 28, 1919, the firm changed its name to The Duplex Shock Absorber Corporation. It moved from 1603 S. Michigan Ave., in Chicago to 1721 Prairie. On April 11, 1925, the company changed its name again to Neutrowound Radio Manufacturing Company.

In April of 1925, the station changed the call letters from WCBZ to WOK and the frequency switched from 1210 khz, (248 meters,) to 1380 khz, 217.3 meters.

WOK's Homewood studios and the Neutrowound plant were located near 183rd and Western, west of the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad tracks. The precise location today, according to Homewood Fire Chief Joe Klauk would be 2311 183rd Street near the Flosswood Condominiums.

Klauk remembers the area well. "The Homewood Coal, Ice and Material firm was located in the front of the property facing 183rd Street. Just behind the firm was a long, red building which consisted mostly of windows where production crews made the radios.

Nearby, another 40 x 60 foot red brick building housed radio station WOK. A greenhouse also stood on the property. Two 85 foot tall steel towers held up WOK's six wire flat-top t-antenna and stood next to the transmitter building.

At the plant, the firm's specialty was made: battery operated radios or "The poor man's breadboard," as they were sometimes called. The sets were cheaper in quality when compared to the popular Atwater-Kent sets of the



day. Earlier sets of the time had been made in 1924 by the Advance Radio Company in Chicago. According to Dr. Ralph Muchow, Elgin, who owns a radio museum, Neutrowound was in business until 1929. Muchow has some of these sets in his museum. WOK itself was powered by storage batteries on the site.

A retired railroad worker, Louis Hansen of Homewood, stated his brother-in-law Carl Jach was a foreman at the plant. Louis' brother Ed was a night watchman at the plant. Norman K. Wunderlich was the first general manager of the station.

WOK was off the air for several days during its move to its new Homewood site. With Neutrowound at the controls, WOK quickly became one of the more popular and powerful stations of the day. It returned to the air on July 20, 1925 with five hundred watts. On September 2, 1925 WOK became a class B station, increasing its power to 5,000 watts.

Experiments took place using two transmitters on frequencies of 217, and 238 meters for a 20,000 watt operation. Louis Hansen told me when WOK came on, no one in the area could hear any other station on their radio sets. In July 1925 an 18 x 24 studio was completed in the Terrace Gardens of the Morrison Hotel located at 79 West Madison Street. The structure, at Madison and Dearborn in Chicago, has been replaced by the First National Bank. During most of 1925, WOK shared 1380 khz with another Chicago station, WFKB owned by F. K. Bridgeman. After a brief stint at KFKX, veteran Chicago announcer Bill Hay also worked at WOK in 1925.

WOK presented musical programs from the Morrison and other hotels around Chicagoland which featured bands. A 1926 Northwestern University band concert was presented. A 1927 radio guide lists the Town Club program, The Capitol Theatre program and music by The Tip Top String Ensemble. Some earlier broadcasts also took place on Saturday nights from the Amalfe Gardens at 175th and Dixie Highway.

Homewood Historian Michael J. Hinko stated ballroom dances were featured from this establishment which is now called Surma's Restaurant. The dances featured "Little Herbie" at the piano. Elizabeth Shaw was a frequent vocalist on the station.

Tragedy struck WOK on July 10, 1926. A young 19 year old engineer, Lester J. Wolf, was electrocuted almost instantly from an accident at the transmitter. Wolf, according to several old clippings from New York newspapers, was attempting to change fuses in the transmitter with the power on. The station was airing a live band concert from the Chicago Beach Hotel at 5110 South Cornell Avenue when a thunderous applause "blew the equipment at the Homewood site."

George W. Allen, WOK's studio director, reported the malfunction to the station's chief operator Herman Pomy. Pomy summoned the young Wolf to make the necessary repairs. In Wolf's haste to get the program quickly back on the air, he failed to turn off the power. A blast of 65,000 volts knocked the young engineer to the floor. Les got back up to his feet and stated that "I am not hurt," but collapsed seconds later and died. Years later people still remembered the large black spot on the wall where the incident occurred. Some sources including engineer, Roland Pamler remarked, there was so much voltage in the building that night, that one's own body was often drawn to the shelves where huge batteries and equipment was stored.

A memorial to radio's first martyr was set up by radio station WRNY in New York hoping to collect some \$10,000. Wolf, who performed under the billing "Ukelele Les," had previously played in New York as an entertainer. After about \$5,000 had been collected, an unknown person stole the money.

Lester J. Wolf was a likeable and promising young man and believed to be one of the youngest radio operators in the country. Wolf's inscribed tombstone at the Homewood Memorial Gardens reads: A martyr to radio who gave his life in the service at radio station WOK. The passing of radio's first commercial martyr rocked the community and things were never the same. Lester Wolf was Homewood Village Trustee George Wolf's uncle, and WCGO broadcaster Bob Anderson's great uncle.

Meanwhile, another Chicago station had been under construction earlier in 1925 and would later be combined with WOK. The Trianon Ballroom, a famous dance spot at 6201 Cottage Grove Avenue, had built their own station and went on the air on April 15, 1925. The call letters, WMBB, stood for "World's Most Beautiful Ballroom."

The station operated at 1200 khz, 500 watts, sharing time with WGES in Oak Park which was owned by the Coyne Electrical School. WGES' call letters stood for "World's Greatest Electrical School"; the station later became WVON.

The Trianon, according to Broadcast Profile, was owned by the Woodlawn Theater Company, who operated an adjoining bowling alley and pool hall. The Trianon Ballroom was demolished in 1967. Mr. A. Karzas owned



the firm. On top of the Trianon two new steel framed lattice towers were constructed. A small hut housed the station's Western Electric 101B transmitter.

On April 15, 1925 a three hour dedicatory program unveiled the station from 7 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. Up to this time, WMBB was owned by Trianon Incorporated located at 32 West Randolph Street in Chicago. The American Bond and Mortgage Company assumed control of the Trianon and the Woodlawn Theater interests on May 1, 1925. William J. Moose was president of American Bond and George W. Allen was chief engineer from 1925 to 1930. (Allen also worked at WOK.) In June of 1927 both WMBB and WOK shared 1190 khz as required by the FRC. Roland Pamler was listed as an engineer at WOK in the 1927 City Directory.

WOK received permission to operate with 500 watts of power in 1925. By August of 1927, WMBB increased its power from 500 watts to 5,000 watts. Later in 1925, WOK raised its power to 5,000 watts. Both stations were officially consolidated by the FRC in October of 1927. In November of that year, WMBB's studios remained at the Trianon, but used WOK's transmitter at Homewood. It was a confusing situation as both sets of call letters and the same studio staff were used by the two stations, but had different management. The FRC allowed the stations to hold two separate licenses.

A variety of musical programs from the Trianon and other notable dance spots were presented. On October 22, 1928 both stations were combined under one ownership: Trianon Incorporated. The station still continued to be called WOK-WMBB on the air. Neutrowound had been dropped from the company name.

Late in 1925, the FRC canceled the station's application for renewal of license. About this time the FRC was continuing to root out the smaller stations. Operations like WOK-WMBB had feared that monopolies would soon exist under FRC procedures, spelling the end for smaller stations. In January 1929 some reports say that WOK-WMBB continued operations into 1929 with 20,000 watts of power. The whole matter ended up in court. Trianon Inc. ran out of appeals in 1931, when the FRC ruling was upheld by the courts. Neutrowound went out of business around 1930 in Homewood after four years of operation. Neutrowound had filed its last corporate report on February 27, 1928. By October of 1929, the Cook County Sheriff was ordered to collect franchise taxes. After ignoring state notices to pay such required fees, the superior court of Cook County dissolved the company on June 3, 1930.

Neutrowound's radio station had also been taken off the air. According to state archives information, the following men were listed as office holders of the defunct firm: Harvey Cory, president, R. L. Crawford, secretary, and W. C. Hoefflin, treasurer, all of Homewood, Illinois. Subsequent owners of the Neutrowound property were the Parson's Ammonia Plant, which operated from 1937 to 1963.

The east side of the building was turned into a boiler room. This side faced the railroad tracks. The west side of the building, which had contained radio equipment and the battery room, became the factory. The smaller building outside, which had housed the WOK transmitter was on the west side of the plant. Parson's had moved from the Clearing industrial area near Chicago's Midway Airport. Charles Moore was the plant's superintendent. The company was later taken over by the Armour Company. Parson's moved out around 1963. The Bunte Candy Company, occupied the building for a short time afterwards. A soybean factory also occupied the property.

In 1967, developers were clearing the land, but vandals were also at work. Residents thought the burning of the Parson's Ammonia Plant, (formerly the Neutrowound Plant) was being burned down for removal. The fire, apparently set by vandals, was left unreported for several hours, until it got out of control. Flames completely destroyed the plant. Homewood fire chief, Joe Klauk stated that sonic booms occurring in the area from passing aircraft, caused area residents to speculate that explosions had occurred at the ammonia plant. The fire on July 3, 1967, at 3:55 p.m. was covered by WJOB newsman, Cosmo Currier, who had visited the WOK building as a youngster. Former WJOB news director, Manny Hoffman, now a Homewood insurance agent was a member of the volunteer fire department. He was also, on the scene of the fire that day. The radio station towers had been removed in the 1940s.

Anthony Santucci, Sr. remembers the towers still standing when he went to high school. Flosswood Condominiums now occupies the old WOK property today.

## WQAT

### A Hobby That Launched a Career

In the mid-50's, a young ingenious electronic tinkerer, Quin Morrison, began working with a turntable and some hi-fi equipment. He strung a few wires around and amused himself by playing records in one room and listening to them in another room downstairs in his house.

Around 1955, some classmates got together and launched WQAT. The call letters came from the names of three of the students who ran the unlicensed operation: Quin Morrison, Albert Robinson, and Ted Glowinski. The station was located in Morrison's house at 1934 Ridge Road in Homewood. The initial broadcast utilized an old but familiar form of broadcasting known as "carrier current" using the power lines to radiate it's signal. The station could be heard around the downtown section of Homewood, at 1510 on the AM dial.

WQAT featured several young people who would later go on to broadcasting careers. These included Morrison himself, Cosmo Currier, and Doug Dahlgren. All three later worked at WJOB in Hammond. Morrison later became WJOB's program director, Currier became the news director, and Dahlgren was an outstanding morning disc jockey. Dahlgren later became half of the popular comedy team Dick and Doug, who performed mornings on WCFL in Chicago in the 60's. Dahlgren later worked with Currier at KCLN in Clinton, Iowa.

Other air personalities at WQAT included George Waters, who later worked for WCGO and WJOL, and Phil Harper, Dick Thornburg, Marty Yates, and Al Robinson. Cosmo Currier is credited with the first radio broadcast of a Homewood-Flossmor basketball game over WQAT.

The station, which was well received, was piped into many stores in the downtown section of Homewood. WQAT aired remotes including "man on the street interviews" and a special broadcast from a downtown home and real estate show.

Around 1958, the venturesome staff decided to go public with their station, and unlicensed WQAT began broadcasting with 100 watts, which greatly increased their coverage area. One afternoon during a sidewalk interview program, Cosmo Currier was busy interviewing shoppers. The next "guest" turned out to be FCC inspector Warren George. George himself, who had a neat radio sounding name, was not amused by Currier and his illegal operation. When Currier handed him the microphone, the FCC inspector identified himself and pulled out his badge and credentials.

"I am Warren George of the FCC, and I've come to close down this illegal operation," he announced.

After the FCC took the station off the air, WQAT resumed its original operation being piped in to downtown stores during 1959 and early 1960. Interest later dwindled in the operation, as those who operated it later went on to legitimate commercial stations.

Quin Morrison, one of radio's few nice guys, continues to work in radio in Colorado. We understand he was recently visited by an old pal, Warren George, who was transferred to the area.

WQAT's short tenure launched the careers of several high school students who are still active in the industry today. These young people learned proper broadcasting techniques and anxiously produced some creative community programming. Care was taken to sound as professional as possible because fines were assessed to announcers mispronouncing proper names.

Perhaps there should be some justification for a few channels to be set aside for a low powered operation like WQAT. Young people working at this station found a harmless hobby to shape their creative skills. This early station provided the foundation of several innovative students to become lifetime broadcasting stars.

WQAT's studios were located in an upstairs bedroom of the Q. A. Morrison home located at 1934 Ridge Road. The home formerly belonged to the Mertin family and was moved from near the intersection of Ridge Road and Dixie Highway (the NE corner near the Community Drug Store) many years ago.

Historians describe the structure as a 3-story gray frame home. It was located directly between Robert Lewis's hardware store at 1940 Ridge Road to the west, and the Homewood-Flossmor news Agency at 1930 Ridge Road to the east. Lewis opened his store in 1953 and later purchased advertising on the illegal station.

Sometime in the 1960s, Lewis purchased the Morrison home and had it knocked down to build additional parking for his store. A large stove that was in the home is buried under the parking lot. Lewis has since retired, and the hardware store is now the Village Square cleaners.

Lewis described Quin as a bright, intelligent youth and a good musician. It did not surprise the former hardware store owner that many of the announcers at WQAT later went on to radio careers. He stated that the station sounded very professionally run and had good equipment. Morrison's dad, according to Homewood officials,

was a zoologist, and his mother Selma was a writer for the Chicago Heights Star. Young Morrison now works in radio in Colorado.

In its early years, the station operated too close to the frequency of WJJD (1160 khz) which complained about WQAT's interference. WQAT later operated off the power lines at 1510 khz.

## **WHFH**

### **Homewood-Flossmoor High School**

Ten watts does not sound like much power, but it was enough to cultivate the careers of at least five students who have gone on to broadcast excellence in their respective communities. In June 1965 WHFH, standing for Homewood-Flossmoor High School, began operations with a mere 10 watts. School district 233 placed Jerold Garber in charge of the station and continued to back successful improvements to its operation.

A broadcast curriculum was set up, and students became skilled in all facets of radio including broadcasting high school basketball games. Garber was general manager of the station for much of its early years until 1980. James Thomas held the G.M. spot briefly until 1970. Donald Strom, Jr. was station manager in 1972 with David Brower serving as program director. By 1973 an influx of creative students seemed to arrive at about the same time. Garber was still in charge of the station, selecting Bob Anderson as station manager and Patricia Erickson as program director. Robert Barwa was WHFH's engineer. Barwa later became the G.M. of the station until the early 1980's.

WHFH, at that time, employed several announcers and programming people who later went on to broadcasting careers. Anderson became a full-time music show host and play by play man, and for over ten years hosted a week night sports talk show on WCGO/WTAS. Anderson is now in the banking business and still does weekends on WCGO.

Oddly enough radio has been in Bob's blood. His great uncle was Lester J. Wolf, an engineer at WOK in Homewood. Anderson teamed up with Bob Black (Dettbarn) in the early 80's to give WCGO its best play by play sports team. Other H-F alumni that worked at WCGO were announcers Dave Mitchell, Tom Brocius, and Tony Santucci, Jr. Mitchell does play by play hockey on cable TV and has worked for WNDZ and WXEZ. Brocius was WCGO's morning man around 1980. Tony's skills, personality, and professionalism probably would have gotten him a broadcasting job anywhere (See WCGO). He still does mornings for his father at WCGO.

In 1980 WHFH increased their power from ten watts to 13.6 watts to better serve the community. Robert Comstock, an H-F graduate, became the general manager in 1981. That year the station boosted its signal to 1,500 watts and became one of the biggest stereo high school stations in the country. Today, WHFH can be heard as far north as 95th street in Chicago, and in Hammond, Indiana, and Lockport, Illinois.

The station operates from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. during each school day. A UPI news wire provides news coverage for the station which is supplemented by the production of local newscasts by the students. A control room, news room, and two well-equipped production rooms make up the interior of WHFH's operation.

The station's motto is "South Side Rock." But besides popular music, all WHFH basketball games are presented as well as student produced documentaries on current affairs. Donations and grants help pay the operating costs. WHFH has a well-structured radio curriculum where students not only learn broadcasting skills, but hold responsible staff positions.

WHFH students are fully prepared for careers in broadcasting upon graduation.

## **OTHER SOUTH SUBURBAN RADIO**

### **WDHF Evergreen Park**

An FM station with a good clean sound? Who would be better at running a station like this than a hi-fi-buff himself James deHaan. WDHF-FM 95.5 mhz operated out of deHaan's Hi-Fi store in the Evergreen Park Shopping Center. A large window enabled shoppers to watch station employees at work.

The station signed on March 9, 1959 with 52,000 watts. The station moved back into Chicago when deHaan sold it in 1963. He also served as WDHF's engineer. Sources say that a studio fire caused considerable damage to the station in the early 1960s.



WDHF then moved into the city and operated at addresses on Wabash and State Streets. WDHF's original tower and transmitter site is still at 96th and Central Avenue. It has since been purchased by the City of Oak Lawn for municipal radio purposes. A cable TV firm is located nearby.

WDHF originally played big band music and operated in mono for many years. The National Science Network purchased the station in 1966. Bob Longbons was one of the station's personalities and long time program director. Metromedia purchased the station in 1973, changing the call letters to WMET in 1978. Rock formats were tried during the 1970s and early 1980s. The call letters were switched to WRXR in 1987.

Doubleday, Flint Chicago, and now Pyramid West have been the last owners of the station. In 1988, a new jazz format was started under the call letters WNUA, standing for "New Age." Studios are located at 444 North Michigan, with transmitter at the Hancock building.

Today, WNUA provides a bouncy but subtle format which is a refreshing change to office or elevator music. It joins the ranks of many stations which started out in the suburbs, but today operates out of Chicago.

## WRBI

### Radio for Blue Island

Some towns just seem to lend themselves to be perfect places to operate radio stations. They seem to have the bustle, the talent, and interest to support such an operation.

In the early 50's Blue Island was a growing vibrant town, rich in activity and heritage. Plenty of local talent was around, and there was always something happening at nearby Raceway Park. Sports fans will always remember, Bud Koehler, No. 77, racing against No. 3, Bob Pronger. Earlier, WBKB-TV's Joe Wilson brought his sports show to the Blue Island area.

Early copies of the Blue Island Sun Standard depicted the area as "a town breeding commerce, activity, and just a little crime to make things interesting." The Southtown Economist who earlier operated station WBCN took over the Blue Island Sun Standard in 1988.

One would think that radio station WRBI would have flourished in a fine community like Blue Island, but it didn't. Plagued by a combination of poor planning and some financial errors, WRBI faded fast after three years of operation.

On June 1, 1949 a localite, Ms. L. NaDean McKeever of 2409 Grove Street, along with several other WWII veterans received a construction permit for the station. NaDean had sung Country and Western music on the WLS Barn Dance dating back to 1933. She graduated in 1940 from Thornton High School and served in the Navy WAVES. She was also a bookkeeper and clerk at Woolworth's.

McKeever had attended Doris Keane's Radio Institute in Chicago. Keane helped the group get their application and was always on hand for consultation. Dr. George Courier, who ran the Radio Institute, was Keane's "uncle", according to McKeever. McKeever often babysat for Keane's son.

Two of McKeever's instructors were Ted Liss and Paul Barnes, who currently do television and radio commercials in Chicago.

The operation had been in the planning stages since 1948. The group used their G.I. benefits to learn broadcasting and finance the station. To the very end, WRBI was in constant money trouble.

The group decided to divide up all the jobs at the station, each taking on specific duties to avoid hiring extra help.

Ms. McKeever became the business manager, and J. Michael Wollner was the station manager. The duties of the program director fell to John C. Svejda. Michael Dyk became the engineer and Felice "Doc" Barbone became the maintenance engineer. Michael Mannos was the personnel director. The only other two hired were William Albright, who was the consulting engineer, and Sidney Breese, a popular radio and Chicago television actor and former dramatic director of the Goodman Theater. He also taught at Radio Institute, and became WRBI's announcer.

The station was located at 12247-49 South Western. WRBI, standing for "Radio Blue Island," or "Runs Batted In," operated with one thousand watts at 94.3 mhz. The station's first day of broadcasting was Wednesday, February 1, 1950. Broadcast hours were from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

RCA turntables played selections from the station's 3,500 disc Capitol library. The rest of the equipment was manufactured by the Raytheon Company. A 234 foot tower was erected behind the studio. A one-story white cement building was built especially to house the station. The station's call letters were painted in bright red and displayed on the front of the building.



WRBI was one of the most powerful FM stations on the dial in the Chicago area. Somehow it seemed that only the station's staff were excited about the potential of its clear channel static-free broadcast characteristic of FM.

Ms. McKeever was assured that FM radio set production would increase with the times and add to the popularity of her station. She was wrong on both accounts. Soon the onset of television played a bigger role in spelling the demise of WRBI. Ironically, Ms. McKeever stated that she had been dating William P. Gray in the mid 40's, another G.I. who attended Radio Institute in Chicago. Gray later opened WEXI in St. Charles, Illinois, another early FM station that failed. (Both the WEXI and WRBI buildings were similar cement structures.) Several other Radio Institute graduates opened KXGI in Fort Madison, Iowa.

Complete program guides for WRBI were readily printed in the Blue Island Sun Standard. Programming consisted of music and community programs.

With the station highly in debt, on the scene arrived John Jage (The station had been off the air for two weeks, after lightening had destroyed WRBI's transmitter.) He got the station rolling again. Jage was an energetic promoter who had an endless supply of nerve and ideas. He believed in brandishing his station's call letters wherever he went. Jage said he sank a considerable amount of money in the station. Improvements were made to the building, and the station's broadcast day was lengthened to midnight. McKeever told me that Jage thought he could save the station from bankruptcy. McKeever also said "he talked a good line, but fell short."

Jage was involved in a number of activities and fixed organs on the side. It was Jage, while working at the Midwest Recording Studio at 111 Larch in Elmhurst, who helped produce organist Ken Griffin's million dollar hit "You Can't Be True, Dear." The popular roller rink organist's tape was later sold to Rondo Records, then on to Columbia Records, where it sold more than three million copies. The old recording studio is now a glass company.

Jage first became the station's special events announcer and time salesman. In 1951 he first hosted a nine hour broadcast to benefit the March of Dimes from the local Woolworth's store. Later that year, he became manager and purchased controlling interest in the station.

One by one most of the G.I.'s left, except for McKeever and Svejda. Jage thought he had clear title to the station, but hidden debts later resurfaced causing considerable financial difficulty for both Jage and WRBI. "I was young then, and sank a considerable amount of money in that station," Jage said. "Somebody came by with money and past debtors were out to get all they could." In April 1951 he paid off Raytheon, who had confiscated transmitter parts taking the station off the air until old debts were paid.

To John Jage broadcasting was an unlimited venture of timely ideas and creative programming. Local baseball games were broadcast, auto racing from Raceway Park, music from the Cherry Hill Country Club, as well as programs from the Symphony Lounge were presented that year.

In 1951 WRBI was the only Chicago area station to broadcast the Indianapolis 500 race. Further broadcast firsts were made through the station's purchase of one of the first portable tape recorders on the market. The machine, manufactured by Stancil-Hoffman selling for \$240, weighed forty pounds and was used by the station to cover the Republican Convention. Well known CBS newsmen were flabbergasted at the little machine's capabilities which housed twenty minutes of tape.

Experiments in stereo broadcasts also began. A local singing celebrity, Dorothy Ann Ferguson, sang with WRBI's Ellis Chiltin. Ferguson had won many amateur awards on WLS and WGN and went on to sing at the Grand Ole Opry. Her favorite song was "I Didn't Know the Gun Was Loaded." The "Soulsters" featuring Sam Cooke and Lou Rawls also sang live on WRBI. The South Suburban Broadcasting Company featured Mayor Hart and Fire Chief Bluzak on WRBI's "Regional Roundup Show" on December 8, 1950 to discuss the town's purchase of fire equipment.

WRBI's "Safety Club of the Air" program also featured local civic groups. The Blue Island Boosters baseball and community high school football games were aired. A Chicago Christian student, Bill Vanderveen, began the "Ambassador's for Christ" radio program each Sunday afternoon. The show was called "Moments of Melody" and aired at 1 p.m. Frequent remote broadcasts took place at a local carnival and featured interviews with Snelden, "The Stratosphere Man." Broadcasts from the city's Bright Light celebration were aired. Jage called his new format "TNT," and promised time, news, and temperature every 15 minutes.

Despite John Jage's hard work, the station suffered in several areas. Most FM stations were having problems despite their clear, crisp transmissions because of the lack of local FM sets in the community. Sets were purchased by the station and sold at cost to listeners with the dial stringers broken so they would receive only WRBI.

WRBI's chief competition came from the development of television. Early experimental television had begun in the Chicago area in 1931. Two Chicagoland television stations had begun in 1943: WBIK, later WBKB channel 4, owned by the Balaban and Katz Theater Group went on the air. This station later became WLS on channel 7. WGN, channel 9, began operations in 1948.

WRBI became embroiled in a year long controversy with WGN-TV. The television station, along with many area television fans, complained that WRBI in May 1950 was causing interference with television reception in the area. The station was obliged to install filters on their equipment, but refused to undergo the expense of changing frequencies.

James H. Hutchinson, speaking for the station, cited the FCC in granting a license to WRBI, knowing the possibilities of interference. It was later determined that newer televisions were more susceptible to ignition noise, the nearby Pronger-Smith X-ray firm and the Blue Island Taxi two-way radios. WRBI was later exonerated of causing most of the interference.

The firing of a power company official's son, who worked for the station, prompted a vigorous crackdown on overdue electric bills. Other problems replaced ones caused by television.

The advent of phone service to the community opened the door for remote broadcasts. The station was constantly wiring up equipment to city pay phones. For a nickel a whole broadcast could be aired from some remote location. This displeased the phone company to have other equipment tied to their operations. The station was also slow in paying their phone bills.

Jage remembers getting around the use of the phone for a sports broadcast by purchasing five dollars worth of Army Surplus equipment to do a game. A 250 watt tank radio set, on what today is the CB band, was used as a transmitter link to the station. Amateur radio operators in Newfoundland heard the calls letters mentioned and could not figure out how a small FM station could broadcast so far, and what the FM station was doing on a short-wave frequency. On June 2, 1951 lightning struck the station, knocking it off the air for a couple of days.

The FCC gave WRBI other headaches. Inspector Warren George was always snooping around for suspected violations. Keeping the towers lights lit was another problem. Escaping the high cost of relamping, race car driver Bob Pronger was paid fifty dollars to replace the bulbs. Pronger was later killed by suspected chop-shop operators.

An area engineer who lent the station a turntable needle, retrieved it one day by merely plucking it from a spinning record.

The VFW's carnival nearly always brought with it Snelden, "The Stratosphere Man." The famed acrobat, who did his feats while balancing on a high pole, sent his daughter, also a performer, to the station one afternoon to relamp the tower.

Another year passed and some of the bills that Jage thought had been paid off resurfaced. A local bank was out to collect overdue loans and "hidden" second mortgages. An area communications firm also wanted WRBI's tower. A nagging problem expressed by McKeever came from wives whose spouses worked at the station. They soon grew tired of having their husbands working for nothing at the station, and working with a lady.

Late in 1952 WRBI went off the air for good. A dream of several G.I.'s that was poorly financed and those of a young, active businessman had collapsed. Manager, Michael Wollner, said it was tough to compete against the big Chicago FM stations that played hours of uninterrupted music. Their operating costs were absorbed by their sister AM stations, "listeners chose free music over commercials," he remorsed. Much of WRBI's equipment was sold to some Chicago stations. The tower was taken over by a local communications firm. Long time Blue Island Clerk Addison Heintz stated one of the last occupants of the WRBI building was Charlie Landgraf, who owned a deli on the other side of the block. Landgraf was a curious character who often placed vague signs in his window, like "Charlie will kill your ants for \$.10."

The tower, meanwhile, slowly deteriorated. The firm failed to maintain the lights, and the top section crumbled and fell. The tower was finally dismantled in the late 70's after many city complaints. A fire in the building next door, around 1977, destroyed a vending machine company, a house, and the former WRBI studios.

The whole northeast corner of the intersection at 123rd and Western stood vacant for many years. The building's vault was boarded up, and the concrete pad and pillars of WRBI's tower could be located by kicking aside a few dozen empty beer bottles and debris. The Tower Car Wash is located across the street.

Oddly enough, the whole corner has been the scene of trouble in the city, prompting a Blue Island librarian to label the section "The Bad Luck Corner." Not only did the radio station fail, but the owner of the vending machine company, millionaire George Mueller, was murdered in March 1986. The case involved a former Blue

Island Police Officer, who was later released. The murder for hire scheme was believed to have ties to organized crime, but nothing was ever proven. The case concluded in 1988. The Stratosphere Man had been killed earlier in an accident. A "strip" shopping center was built on the property in early 1992, next to J.D. Batt's tavern.

L. NaDean McKeever currently lives in Hazel Crest. Today John Jage enjoys an interesting career with WLS TV in Chicago and did a morning talk show on WLTH in Gary. After WRBI went bankrupt, the original station owners, dispersed into other communities and occupations. Felice "Doc" Barbone, moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, and went into nuclear research. Tom Mannos of Oyster Bay, New York, conducts horse shows. John Mike Wollner, now lives in Chicago Ridge. Wollner sold life insurance after his radio days, worked as a supervisor for 3M, and Kelly-Springfield. Wollner was in several plays and worked with other Radio Institute graduates, including actors, Tom Bosley, Tim O'Connor and Lois Nettleton. Bosley's voice was also heard over WRBI. Wollner and Bosley played on Radio Institutes basketball team. L. NaDean McKeever is retired and lives in Hazelcrest. Michael Dyk, WRBI's engineer, worked for Republic Steel, Hallicrafters Radio, and stations WAAF and WIND. Dyk retired in 1986, after 32 years with WIND as an engineer. Dyk lives in Harvey, Illinois.

Regretfully, nothing has ever been included in historical accounts of Blue Island about WRBI. There seems to be a differing consensus as to what really happened to the station in its final days. Station manager, Michael John Wollner and station engineer, Michael Dyk, agree that the station was going bankrupt. The papers on the station were held by a bank in Orland Park. In the station's closing year, it was John Jage who added excitement, and revived energy at the station by covering live events, and promoting special programs.

The ex-GI's, however, feel that Jage's contributions were more in programming than in financial support, for the station was already in severe financial trouble. Not much could save the station except for the injection of thousands of dollars that WRBI required to stay solvent. This money was needed for repairs, and operating costs. No one at the station had that much money to stave off bankruptcy, or to allow it to continue to compete against the bigger AM and FM stations as well as the growing interest in television.

In the end it gave up the ghost to television and competition, a valiant try at broadcasting by some ex-GI's, who dared and dreamed FM broadcasting at earliest age. Jage is listed as the station manager, in 1952, and has said that he funnelled some of his own money into the station. Only those on the inside really know what happened at WRBI.

#### WBEE (WCFS) Jazz City AM 1570

WBEE started in 1954 as WCFS owned by Charles F. Sebastian of Oak Park. Sebastian was the first owner of WTAQ in La Grange working with other busy broadcast executives Russell Salter (WKKD) and consulting engineer Robert Jones.

WCFS never got on the air as Rollins Broadcasting bought Sebastian's equipment and sought their own FCC license. Sebastian is a bank director today and lives in North Riverside, Illinois.

The Rollins Group built WBEE at 157th and Campbell, in Harvey, just east of the Tri-State Tollway (I-294) in 1955. The 250 watt daytime station at 1570 khz used much home-made equipment and utilized one tower behind the station. O. Wayne Rollins was president of the firm; Richard Scheele, general manager; and Robert Lazar was the commercial manager. Anthony Santucci, who would later open WCGO in Chicago Heights, was WBEE's first engineer.

While WBEE's city license was Harvey, much of its programming came from Chicago studios, which were located at 6205 Cottage Grove near the site of the old Trianon Ballroom. An auxiliary studio was maintained at the Harvey site.

One of the station's early disc jockey's was WLTH's Cosmo Currier, who later became the news director at several Northwest Indiana stations.

In the late 50's the station featured many du-wop type groups and mostly rhythm and blues music. A later WWCA sports director, Todd Branson, became commercial manager in 1958. Charles Presley became manager of the station in 1959 as the station's power was raised to one thousand watts. WBEE's Chicago studios were moved to 75 West Wacker Drive.

In the 1970s the station changed its emphasis from R & B music to jazz. Charles Sherrell, II, became general manager in 1977. Larry Smith, a well-known Calumet news and jazz man himself, became news director. Smith later worked for WJOB, WWCA, and WBEZ. In 1985, Randall Rollins became general manager, Mark



Ralton, marketing director, and Nancy Stinson, became program director. Chicago studios were then moved to 35 East Wacker Drive.

WBEE was acquired by Mariner Broadcasters in 1987. Charles Sherrell, II, became president and general manager of the station. Tracy A. Daniel was the sales manager and Margaret Bell, operations director. Also, to be included in this long list of employees were Harry Brister, Lawton Wilkerson, and Vince Sanders as past news directors. Frank W. German served as program director, and James Burdeau has been the engineer at WBEE for nearly thirty years.

WBEE's main claim to fame is its dedication to the promotion of jazz records and recording artists both on the local and national scenes. Veteran announcer, disc jockey and radio personality Marty Faye has been long associated with WBEE. Other notable personalities who have worked there include Merri Dee, Chile Childs, and Herb Kent "the Cool Gent". In the late 1970's Bob Foskett taped "Jazz on Campus" featuring area musical groups.

New sales offices have been opened at 3857 West 147th Street in Midlothian. John Hill, formerly of WJZZ in Detroit, is the new program director. WBEE's morning person is Emile McKendall. Annette Flournoy is the current news director. The studios remain at 157th & Campbell in Harvey.

The one thousand watt station uses a three-tower system to direct most of its' signal to Chicago. The station stays on to midnight with five hundred watts after sunset.

## WLNR

### A Community Station Which Moved to the City

The most knowledgeable of all Calumet area radio men is Gordon Boss (W9ACC) of nearby South Holland, Illinois. For the past forty years, Boss has been involved in most phases of communications in the area. He has worked as the maintenance engineer at several area stations and for nearly 10 years owned and operated WLNR in Lansing, Illinois. Boss was one of the last station owners who insisted in doing things right the first time. He believed the end result of a project may cost more, but it was worth the effort.

On Sunday mornings when many station owners would sleep in, or spending time with their families in church, Boss was also active in "church" riding the levels at remote broadcasts at the Oak Glen and First Reformed Churches. Equalized lines, proper mixing and an on-location engineer made the church broadcasts sound professionally inspiring.

Boss built his station around a group of later professionals utilizing the latest equipment and facilities. Records were air checked and tunes that sounded tinny, or unpleasant to the ear, were scratched off the disc itself as well as the album cover. Equalized telephone lines were also used to bring excellent sound from local high school basketball games. Listeners could even hear the dribble of the basketball over the air.

The idea of the station really came from South Holland barber Joe Vanschouwen. Vanschouwen convinced Boss and other partners to build the station. He felt there was a need for a community station to service the area.

As youngsters, many of us would marvel at the glistening, multi-colored dials on the station's new Gates control board. It was called "The Yard" because it was 36 inches long. The disc jockeys all wore cotton gloves when handling the records to ensure a clean static-free sound, free of scratches and fingerprints.

On August 28, 1961, WLNR signed on at 3 p.m. in the afternoon with 1,000 watts and usually went off around 11 p.m. at night except for early Sunday morning broadcasts and weekend basketball games.

The first staffers included news director Jay Litton, who later worked for WYCA; Paul Major; Pete Lecody; WGN's Don Harris; ABC's Dennis Swanson; Joe Vodek; Ken Haynes, son of Homer of "Homer and Jethro"; and Jeff Cook. Other later staffers included Ted Sachaschik, Donald Smith, Bill Wilner, George O'Brien, Ted Weber and Henry Hales. William H. Botma was the president, Joseph J. VanSchouwen was the commercial manager, and Harold D. Botman, program director. Richard M. Maltby was the commenal manager in 1967.

The station later reorganized under Gordon Boss. John M. Vanderaa became president. Other officers included Rita A. Vann (program director in 1965) and Lawrence McCann.

In 1967 the station owned by Illiana Broadcasters increased power to 3,000 watts. The station's sound was its most important product. Besides quality music and monitored remotes, WLNR used equalized phone lines to broadcast high school basketball games and other important community events. Listeners could actually hear a bouncing basketball over the air.

Boss says the station did some unorthodoxed things on FM that were unheard of in those days, but they worked. Boss stated FM broadcasting seemed to be just for good music back then, but covering high school sports



and playing station jingles just seemed to "fit in." Music programs included "candlelight cafe, evening on the south shore, Melody Lane, and music on Route 106.

WLNR which unofficially stood for "West Lansing Near Railroad" started out with basic equipment. Intro's and some commercials were left on reel to reel tape hung on a pegboard in lieu of being placed on carts. Peter Van Milligan was an early engineer at the station. Boss later sold WLNR on October 16, 1970 to a group headed by Wendell Borrink. Art Karmgard became president and chief engineer. Paul Wierman became the program director and Steve Bauer became the news director.

Borrink's group bought an additional building to the west and built another structure in between the two. (The original station building had a red brick front with the call letters and frequency in megs mounted on the front.)

The transmitter was then moved to the furthest building west. Borrink was formerly the manager of WYCA, and associated with the Moody Bible Institute. Borrink, backed by his father-in-law, a president of a Bible college, became involved in a wild scramble to persuade WYCA advertisers to come to WLNR. Later a variety of religious and all-night ethnic programs were added. A controversial figure, Warren Freiberg, worked in Gary and Chicago Heights before his opinionated and psychic programs came to the Illiana airwaves. It was Freiberg, years later, while appearing with a group of other talk show hosts, caused a brawl on stage. Freiberg sprayed talk show host Jerry Williams in the face with hand soap. The whole incident was carried on the Oprah Winfrey program on WLS-TV one morning. Williams, of Boston, had worked at WBBM radio in the sixties. Veteran Chicago personality Art Hellyer was Williams' announcer. Traffic reporter Herb Howard was Williams' producer.

Also at WLNR, Morris Wayne (Cochran), the director of the Northwest Indiana Better Business Bureau, became the station's news director, Don Burgeson became the program director. Burgeson later purchased WDWD in Wilmington Illinois.

In 1989, Borrink sold the station to the Johnson Products Company, who also owned WJPC in Chicago. A mixture of jazz and new wave music is featured with all female announcers who use only first names. The format is reminiscent of a popular sixties Chicago jazz station, WSDM (Smack Dab in the Middle). Very little local identification with the surrounding community is made. It is another case of a small suburban FM station trying to sound like and serve Chicago.

In 1988, a new, taller antenna was erected. The original tower still stands a few feet away and serves as a hanger for area two-way and paging services. Today Wendell Borrink is the manager of a Florida radio station and Gordon Boss serves as the chief engineer at WJOB radio in Hammond. Boss has worked in this capacity at WWJY, WZVN, and WYCA in the past. Gordon observes that today's radio stations run with few people.

"Some stations today are no more that a satellite dish and board. The exciting era of radio from the 60's and 70's has passed." In the past I had the pleasure of working on several proofs of performance tests, meeting him through the my cousin, Bill Eisele. Gordon is a patient, nice, and very knowledgeable person to work for. Boss, along with Peter Van Milligan, Victor Voss, and Jess Peters, are among a vanishing brand of long time area engineers who have served area stations for many years. Van Milligan and Peters also worked for WLNR in the late seventies. Van Milligan has since retired and moved to Missouri. Peters works at the WIND transmitter site in Gary.

## KANKAKEE RADIO

### WBYG "The BYG One"

When old radio stars get together, they could spend hours talking about the times, staff, and funny stories that took place at the stations that they have worked.

Whatever happened to so and so disc jockey? Remember the piece of equipment that always shorted out and knocked us off the air? Did you know that Harry Caray, the Chicago Cubs announcer on WGN TV, worked at WJOL in Joliet when it was WCLS?

Some Joliet group sometime ago presented him with a trophy, but spelled his name wrong. How many ways are there to spell Caray? How did WJOB's John Anastaplos spell it when he worked in St. Louis the same time Harry did? He used to call himself John Caray. Anastaplos is harder to spell than Caray.

The times and places are quickly forgotten, except by those who lived it. Still remembering is a radio buff by the name of Jim Murphy at WJTW, Joliet. "Murph," as his morning audience calls him, has been around the

Joliet and Kankakee radio scene for many years. He recalls when radio was actually fun to work in...and the people who made it that way.

Beginning with WCCQ, and later WBYG, Murph recalls the days of the old rock and roll junkyard at WBYG, which went on the air as WKAK. WKAK was owned in the late 70's by Harry Fitzgerald, who had sixty percent of the action. Two former WJOL partners, Howard Dybedock and Ben Cerven, who worked full-time at U.S. Steel, each owned 20 percent. They bought into the station from their profit sharing at WJOL, which was a good place to work in the 1950s.

Dybedock later became general manager and the engineer at the station. When its call became WBYG, one of the most fun and creative eras of radio had begun. WJTW's Jim Murphy recalls his career and his tenure at the "BYG" one.

### KANKAKEE EARLY RADIO

by Jim Murphy of WJTW, Joliet

Working suburban radio is drastically different than a medium or major market radio station. The first difference that comes to mind, of course, is that your W-2 Form has less zero's. You are also more accessible to your audience. You are not a star, but you're still a part of their daily routine. They know your face from the times you suffered through the drenching rains or unbearable heat of the community festivals or local charity events.

Suburban radio also means your station doesn't have an unlimited budget for broadcast equipment or elaborate studios. When I first got into radio, I was impressed. I had just left the dog food aisle at "Thrif-T-Mart" for a glamorous radio career. I had gone from Kal Kan to cart decks, and it was fun. Unfortunately, I didn't notice that the radio station that hired me didn't have deep pockets, just enough to get by. I started at WCCQ-FM in Joliet doing weekend work, and moved up to full-time overnights, then, as more people quit because the equipment stunk, and so did the pay, I was more than happy to move in to a better shift and an extra dollar a week.

In the late 70's, WCCQ was playing a mix of 50's, 60's, and 70's...sort of a "scratchy Elvis records on tape" format. It was live-assist automation. The music was on reels and the jock punched the buttons. That was the easy part. The meter readings were what threw me. They had a poor grounding system in the building, so every time I'd go to take the readings, I would get shocked and the station would go off the air. I never really understood the proper steps to get us back on, so I would always press the wrong buttons and blow a final output tube in the transmitter. They bought a million of those baby's...which is probably why they didn't have much money to buy any new equipment.

After the station changed formats (and general managers), I knew it was time to move on. I didn't want to pack up and move to Mayberry just to stay in radio. Chicago was out of the questions, so I started scanning the FM dial and found 99.9. It knocked me out. WBYG "Kankakee's BYG One". I was in love immediately...and they hired me.

I could leave this business tomorrow with no regrets because I worked at WBYG in its heyday. Every station has one. You're up, you're down, but look out when it all comes together. This was the right time at the right place, and more fun than anyone should be allowed to have in radio.

WBYG was the original "Pirate Radio." A college station with commercials. The equipment was better, the salary was better, and it was a fifty thousand watt powerhouse! WBYG was famous for many things, but none more than the "BYG Click". It, too, was live assist at one time, but the automation equipment wasn't hooked up, just the timer that controlled the machine's functions. So once every 60 seconds, and always when you turned on your mike, the timer would let its presence be known...  
C-L-I-C-K.

The radio station was located behind Belson Scrap and Steel in a suburb of Kankakee call Bourbonnais. You were literally surrounded by a junkyard. They had a giant machine that would smash cars and school busses into itsy bitsy one-foot-square blocks of steel, and sell it for scrap. Every once in a while they'd really let go with a good one. The force of the blow would shake the ground and skip the tone-arm of the turntable that was playing the song on the air. Try to explain that one to your audience! I officially named it "The Rock N' Roll Junkyard." The name stuck.

I started work at WBYG in the fall of 1979 and stayed through the early spring of 1987. I have had good experiences at other radio stations since then. I've had better ratings, started new friendships, made more money, but nothing will ever be able to steal my affections for the BYG ONE. We would be TOP 40 from 6-9 a.m. The

Trading Post from 9-9:30 a.m. Light AOR from 9:30-Noon. Then it was time for Paul Harvey News and Comment. The network feeds for ABC came from another station in the area. Sometimes they were so bad that the listeners heard a sound that resembled frying eggs in the background, which was often louder than Paul Harvey. Then more Light AOR from 12:30-Sunset, but when the street lights came on, it was "Move Over Rover and Let Jimmi Take Over!" Rock N' Roll from sundown to sunrise. No glitter rock, just blue collar boogie...Led Zepplin, Molly Hatchet, Lynyrd Skynyrd, The Who, ZZ Top, and Cream. Little did we know we were playing the Classic Rock of tomorrow.

I often wonder what WBYG would sound like if it were still on the air today. But then, it wouldn't be the same. Just as the old WYEN in Des Plaines or WAUR in Aurora were just by-products of its management, the jocks, and the times. I still get calls from people who'll ask, "Aren't you Jim Murphy from BYG? Whatever happened to Bill Taylor, Christie Kayhill and Ken Zyer?" I smile and tell them "They're al C-L-I-C-K fine."

Other former staffers of WKAK and WBYG were WMAQ's Christopher Michael (Gil Peters), Radio Waves' S. J. Peters, WLAK's John Gleason (now of WMAQ). Gil Peters remembers when WKAK played "elevator music" and he did remotes from car dealer lots. Two public relations men from the AAA Chicago Motor Club, Jonathan Lehrer and Steve Dagggers, also worked there.

This list include many more Chicago radio personalities who got their start in Kankakee or Joliet area radio. Lehrer worked at WCFL, WJOB, and WJOL. Dagggers also worked at WCFL and was the news director at WBYG. He recalls these memorable years:

When I joined the staff of WBYG as a news reporter in 1977, the station had just received FCC approval to increase its power to 50,000 watts from 6,600 watts. The station's slogan, which was promoted on thousands of bumper stickers that the air staff screened by hand in the sales manager's garage, was "More Power To Ya."

While the "BYG One" (pronounced big one) got bigger, its small studios remained housed in a brick building located in the middle of a steel and scrap yard along Route 50 in Bourbonnais at Robert Hall Road. (Robert Hall had left, but its moniker was still on the street sign.) When the heavy equipment rumbled to life in the scrap yard, the noise often could be heard over the air when a mic was open. And that wasn't the only natural sound BYG listeners heard from their radios.

All-news stations have been known to use a continuous tape of the sound of a pre-computer age wire service teletype machine to add that urgent "news sound" to the on-air presentation. BYG wasn't an all-news station, but if we were, we had that problem licked. Only a thin closet door separated the on-air news booth/newsroom from the clatter of the UPI machine. When you heard that machine clunking away behind a BYG newscast, it wasn't a tape, it was the real thing. And when the bells rang signaling a bulletin, the news anchor could open the squeaky closet door and rip and read the story as soon as it came across the wire.

Another interesting feature of the not-so-well-laid out studio was the news booth. It was behind the master studio. A mirror in the control room was the only way the news anchor could cue the disc jockey. The newsroom had no cart machines, so you had to depend on the jock to start actualities and commercials. All worked well if the jock was looking for the news anchor's cues in the mirror. More often than not, the jock was doing something else, so dead-air served as a backup cue.

Those who worked with me in the late 70's will probably remember me most for my unscheduled appearance on a Paul Harvey newscast. It happened this way: I was working morning drive with a jock who often cut commercials just before going on the air at 6, as he did in the production room each morning. At 7:25, I entered the production studio to tape Paul Harvey. We played it back on-air at 9. As the network cue tone ended, I punched up the cart and heard Harvey's booming voice say, "Good Morning Americans, the swallows have returned to Capistrano." I responded with an obscene reference indicating that I didn't care.

At 9, when we played the 7:25 Harvey newscast on air, I learned that my morning partner had left the production room mic open. The mic pot was just low enough that I could hear the monitors without feedback. What I thought was a private utterance, turned into my most-famous blooper.

But the staff is what really made my days at BYG memorable. In the spring, we'd humiliate ourselves playing softball to raise funds for charities. On election night everyone pitched in. We had that major market sound; reporters everywhere filing live reports. We covered the Kankakee River power boat



aces as if we were broadcasting on ABC's "Wide World of Sports." One year we entered the Kankakee River Raft Race. One of the jocks brought her neighbor along. I married that neighbor. Today, 11 years later, we have two children, not counting me.

Sometime before Belson dismantled and moved the old WKAK studios, a group of former employees got together for a special reunion. As a forever keepsake, Jim Murphy has the old WKAK call letters that he removed from the side of the building in the junkyard. He obtained these while braving wasps and mean junkyard dogs. Some people will do almost anything to remember the good times. Gone is this radio era, but it still lives in the hearts and minds of the former staffers of WBYG. Dagers spent several years with the Chicago Motor Club and now is with Joliet Junior College. Other early WBYG staffers were Dwight Nale, Bill Jurevich, and Rick Johns. In later years, the old WKAK building was moved and attached to the Belson Warehouse.

## WBUS The Bus

The 30,000 plus city of Kankakee is certainly blessed with the services of not one but four distinctive radio services. This includes long time radio favorite WKAN (1947) and its recent FM affiliate WLRT.

In 1966, Olivet Nazzarene College began broadcasting to its campus and surrounding community. Last year the school changed its call letters from WKOC to WONU, and improved its signal to 35,000 watts. Cities of this size would be fortunate to have one or two stations of this size, but Kankakee has four.

The only operation however, to have outgrown the Kankakee market is WBUS "The Bus". Probably the only reason why this publication included a section on Kankakee, was because of this bursting operation. "The Bus" has caught on quick with its contemporary music, concise news, and information format. It is the only station south of Chicago to repeatedly show up in the metro Arbitron surveys. With its new sales office at the Center in Park Forest, WBUS has now begun to entrench itself in the suburban communities. The station often broadcasts from a variety of popular events all over south Cook County, the Joliet area and Northwest Indiana.

WBUS originally signed on as WKAK with 6,600 watts, enough power to cover the adjoining areas of Bradley and Bourbonnias. Baker-Maltby-Baker Enterprises was the first owner. Air-date was January 5, 1962. Kenneth C. Baker was the General Manager, Beryl L. Dassow was the station's Chief Engineer. Gene Ahlborn was the Commercial Manager and Al Berry was the News Director. Studios were located in a converted house in Kankakee behind Belson's Scrapyard, near the intersection of Robert Hall Road and Route 50. Early staffers later kiddingly called the station the "Rock and Roll Junkyard." Bud Hamende began as station manager in 1967. Paul Irwin was an early station announcer.

By 1969, WKAK shuffled department heads with Claude Baker becoming president of the station. Current CNN Newsman Rick Salinger was the news director, Arthur DeMarco became general manager in 1970. By 1972, WKAK became a stereo easy listening station. David Henson was the general manager. The format changed to country and western with WKAK joining the ABC Network in 1974. Bob Witherington became general manager and chief engineer that year. WKAK was sold in 1975, changing its format back to middle-of-the-road with some farm programs. Harry C. Fitzgerald was the president of the station. Howard Dybedock served as general manager and news director.

By 1979, WKAK began several major changes, the station's tower height was increased from 210 feet to 500 feet, outward power rose to 50,000 watts and call letters changed to WBYG or the "The Big One." The station's staff remained mostly in intact with Kathy Robinson as sales manager, William Taylor, program director; Christine Kayhill, music director; Jan Parcell, news director and Benedict Cerven, engineer until 1984.

It was an interesting period as well as a fun-time for station personalities, according to William Giest, The later director of the Kankakee Valley Convention and Visitors Association. Back then Giest was spinning records on The Big One, "BYG" and was known as Bill Taylor. Station personnel were also involved in a variety of area civic activities. Music formats were changed quite often, and pushed to the outer interests of the audience. But by the late 70's, the smooth sounds of C & W, and light favorites were replaced by "The Doobie Brothers" and "Styx." Extra power and a higher antenna allowed WBYG to reach out to other communities but service continued for Kankakee with the broadcasting of area high school basketball games. The BYG air force included Ken Zyer, Brien McHugh, Bill Taylor, Christine Kayhill and Linda Karas. Frank Absher was program director.



By 1985, WBYG became WBSW-FM. FM America Radio 99 became the station's format featuring a wide spectrum of rock and roll hits. Two million dollars was sunk into the station plus another \$250,000.00 to upgrade transmitter, antenna, and production facilities. The station's motto became "The Bus" and listeners were treated to a daily ride of music, contests, leisure activities and community information. A contemporary album format was installed by new owner Gene Milner, (Milner passed away in 1988). Tim Milner became the sales manager, Tom Judge, program director, William Taylor still served as music director, Ken Zyer, promotions manager, Steve Dagers, news director, and Dick Parrish, engineer. Jacqueline A. Milner is the general manager.

Station advertising rates doubled during this time. New studios moved to another converted house at 292 North Convent Drive in Bourbonnais. The tower remained on I-57 south of Peotone. Kankakee's only other AM station WKAN, started WLRT-FM to compete with WBSW. In 1988, WBSW changed call letters again to WBUS (the WBYG call letters went to a new Sandwich, Illinois AM station which later became WAUR). WAUR was once the call letters for an old Aurora station which became WYSY. The new WAUR then set up an office in Aurora. The same firm owns WSPY-FM in Plano.

Other former WKAK, WBYG/WBSW announcers were, William Giest (Taylor), who now directs the Kankakee County Convention Center. Todd Chatman who also worked for WKOC and WCRM and is now an executive with Word Records. Stan J. Peters now publishes "Radio Waves." Former announcer Jim Murphy now is the program director of WJTW in Joliet. Howard Dybedock is now in the engineering consulting business and Jan Parcell works as a newsman for WKAN.

Today WBUS continues to accumulate a major share of the south suburban audience. Vice president and regional sales manager, Cathy Gagliano says "The Bus" has plans for future growth, promotions and visibility in the surrounding southland community. Its signal can be heard from Kankakee to the north Chicago suburbs and south to Champaign, Illinois, as well as in Northern Illinois and Indiana. Recently its regional sales office moved from Orland Park to Park Forest. An energetic staff continues to keep "The Bus" rolling non stop.

## WKAN/WLRT

### Continuous Service to Kankakee

Kankakee's first radio station is still number one in ratings on service to the local area. WKAN's 1320 khz, began by the Small family, on June 1, 1947, has proven each year that local news and information keeps listeners loyal. The station has perennially been on the scene of major events in the community offering the only timely source of local news, weather, and sports coverage. When something important happens in the Kankakee area listeners tune to WKAN expecting to hear about it, and they do.

WKAN's humble beginnings include the proper marriage between a local newspaper and a radio station. In solid markets each compliment each other. In Kankakee, the Small family operated both entities, The Kankakee Daily Journal was well established when radio began in the community. Burrell Small and his brother Len, ran the paper, but spent a large amount of time developing another electronic medium for the community. The men received a construction permit for a 1,000 watt AM station in 1946, and by the following June, WKAN was on the air.

Equipment for the station was assembled in the basement of the family home at 183 N. Schuyler. Leslie C. Small was station president, Burrell L. Small, general manager, Bruce Brown, station manager, Ralph Mueller, program director, and Robert Harrell served as engineer, Wayne Center became program director in 1949.

In 1950, the Small's got on the FM band wagon placing on the air one of the most powerful FM stations in the country, sources list WKIL-FM as operating at 100.7 mhz with 73,000 watts. The station needed enough power to cover the entire area. The FM station was apparently unprofitable and was turned off the air a year later as were many early Chicago area FM stations.

By 1950, the Small's had moved into the management end of the company trusting daily operations to a team of loyal professionals. Longevity of these solid performers guided WKAN through its early years, the staff included Orren Allen, program director; Richard Eckles, engineer; John Allen, news director; Sylvia Staebler, womens director; and Monty Moncrief, sales manager. Ted Parker, James Preston, and Stan Ronald, in 1955 served as news directors. Robert Hawkins became a later sales manager. In December of 1959, the FCC granted WKAN a construction permit to install three new towers to enable the station to broadcast at night. A new transmitter building was also erected at the station's antenna site, two miles northeast of Kankakee near Splear and Grinnell Roads.

By 1960, WKAN broadcasted with 1,000 watts daytime, and used a 500 watt directional signal to cover the area at night, the station stayed on until 10:30 p.m.

High school basketball games were broadcast for the first time on the station on November 25, Kankakee played St. Patrick High School. In 1963, Burrell Smith remained president of the station, while Len Small continued as chairman of the board. Donald Hoover was station manager, Jerry Heller became production director. WKAN's owner Mid-America Media, by this time, had begun acquiring other radio television and cable firms.

WKAN moved to newer studios at 150 South Dearborn Avenue in 1964. The station's format fluctuated from contemporary album hits, back to easy listening in 1974, but the station never compromised its' commitment to local news and sports coverage. In 1975, WKAN moved to its' present studios at 6 Dearborn Square, the site of the Dearborn Restaurant, later 2 Dearborn Square. Edger Munday became WKAN's news director in 1976, and UPI audio-news was added. Larry Anderson became the station's program director. In the years to follow, WKAN set up a local weather center to keep listeners better informed on local conditions.

A broadcast era ended with the passing of Burrell Small, the station's founder in 1981, and his brother Len a few years earlier. Burrell's wife Reva became president of the station, Volney Lamb Jr., became general manger, Larry Anderson, John VanZante, Larry Timpe, Gordy McCollum, Jim Brandt, and Maria Behrends were staff announcers. Munday and long time area newsmen Jan Parcell ran the news department, Donald Kerouac was the engineer. A variety of promotions, free trips, gas, meat, and money were offered by the station.

About 1987, Mid-America Media began to divest itself of its holdings, selling off most of its other stations. Burrell Small's daughter Susanne Bergeron, who had been running Imagery Inc., a subsidiary of Mid-America Media, decided to purchase WKAN. She had always had a deep love for her father's business and probably did not wish to see it slip out of the family. Bergeron, who did not wish to be interviewed, started WLRT, a 3,000 watt FM station at 92.7 mhz.

In September 1986, the new manager of the new soft rock station, as well as its AM counter part, was Gary Wright. Wright had been involved in radio in Findlay, Ohio. WLRT-FM's official sign on date is listed as September 21, 1986. WKAN beat out four other parties who had applied for a new FM station in the community. The channel was one of thirty newly opened in the midwest by the FCC. Preference in awarding the new station was given to firms that already owned successful AM stations.

Today WKAN continues to provide a vital service to the surrounding communities with local news, sports coverage, and good music. Its still the station tuned to by many area residents for information for fair or threatening weather conditions. Certainly sunny days are ahead and are continuing for WKAN/WLRT.

## WTKC

### Tourism Radio

The first station devoted totally to tourism went on the air on June 1, 1992 at 3 p.m. WTKC, standing for "Tour Kankakee County," will offer continuous taped information attempting to attract visitors to special events in the area. Motorists traveling along I-57 will be able to hear about various programs of interest and, hopefully, exit the interstate to attend them. Traffic reports, directions, taped broadcasts from restaurants and other points of interest will be presented daily on WTKC.

The 2100 watt station will be operated as a joint venture by the Kankakee Valley Convention and Visitors Association, Kankakee Community College, and WONU at Olivet Nazarene University. The college holds the license for WTKC, while the station's signal will be broadcast from WONU's tower. Programs will be produced from the Kankakee Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau office at 4 Dearborn Square in downtown Kankakee. The station operates at 91.1 mhz and is on the air approximately 20 hours per day.

At first most of the station's programming will be taped information segments. There will be no disc jockeys or music. Live broadcasts from special area events are planned for later.

WTKC and CVB director Jeannine Crooks stated that everything went well on the station's first day on the air. Over one particular weekend, the small staff struggled with computer problems. The system totally crashed, but was restored by engineer Howard Dybedock (formerly of WKAK) on time for the first days' broadcast, and a state official, whose car was only equipped with an AM radio, got lost on the way to the station and missed the sign on. Jeannine credits the development of the station to Bill Geist (Taylor), a former Kankakee area disc jockey who

worked with Dybedock at WKAK and WBYG. Both Geist and Dybedock had filed for the original license for the station. Geist was the previous CVB director.

The day's first programming consisted of repeated twenty minute long segments of news, fishing information, restaurant locations, and a general urging to the public to take in the many fine attractions to the Kankakee Valley area. Eight people were on hand in the studio to hear the first broadcast. Illinois Department of Tourism Director Donna Shaw has recorded station identifications for the new station. In the future, taped program segments will be lengthened to 30 minutes. Live broadcasts on Labor Day will feature coverage of the National Powerboat Championship and broadcasts of the Kankakee Community College basketball games this fall. The station operates from 5 a.m. to midnight.

This will be the most powerful tourism and information station in the Midwest. A similar station that broadcasts continual tapes of area information is operated by the Lake County Bureau of Tourism in Hammond, Indiana. It is heard at 530 khz on the AM band along stretches of I-94. Previous chapters of this book also details portable stations, whose sole purpose was to broadcast from events, in the 1920s. Now Kankakee County will have its own continual source of media information which will attempt to attract local residents and visitors to the area's many fine events and attractions.

### **WKVF Bourbonnais**

Two engineers at Olivet Nazarene College's WONU will be placing another station in the area on the air later in 1992. WKVF, 95.1 mhz, will operate with 3,000 watts. The station is currently licensed to the Baldrige-Shelton Partnership. Dennis Baldrige is chief engineer at WONU, and Richard Shelton is his assistant. Baldrige said that construction on the station would be in June of 1992 after many delays due to zoning problems. WKVF also had to seek a special provision to construct a tower in an agricultural area near St. Anne, Illinois.

Dennis says that a format for the station is undecided at this point. Some early plans concerning the music that the station was interested in playing leaked out and was quickly programmed into the formats of other area stations. Baldrige will only say that WKVF will play music and will attempt to fill a gap in programming not currently being met in the area. He would not elaborate. Community service would also be a large concern of station management.

WKVF will, hopefully, be on the air in September of 1992. A studio site is yet to be chosen. The two men plan to leave their posts at WONU and work full-time on their new station later in 1992.

### **WONU**

#### **Olivet Nazarene University**

Scanning across the educational (lower) portion of the FM dial, listeners are sure to find a powerful inspirational station that wasn't there a short time ago. It's the all new WONU, the 35,000 watt voice of Olivet Nazarene College in Kankakee. This new station is geared for the 21st century, but maintains a familiar theme that the message of religion can easily find its way into homes through radio. Now WONU has made the message easier to hear.

From humble beginnings, WONU wasn't always as powerful as it is today. Formerly called WKOC (standing for Kankakee Olivet College), the station's roots go back even further to the late 40's, to a carrier current operation run by the students. There had always been interests in radio on campus. Professor George Snyder had presented programs over WJOL, as early as 1946, in Joliet.

Late that year students strung some 13,000 feet of wire needed to bring a carrier current signal to campus dorms and offices. The less than 10 watt signal radiated at 640 on the AM dial, bringing programs from studios recently constructed on the fourth floor of the Burke Administration building "overlooking the beautiful Olivet campus."

Broadcasts began on February 2, 1947 using the call letters WONC, standing for Olivet Nazarene College. Bernie Smith was the first person heard on the station; he later became WONC's activities director. Some fifty students were involved in the station the first year. Professor Henry Engbrecht became program and station manager from 1948 to 1949. Students did all the announcing, including play by play basketball.



Selections from WONC's 100 record library, consisting of religious and classical music were played over and over again. War surplus equipment, microphones, and sixteen inch turntables were utilized in the operation. A campus newspaper, The Glimmerglass, identified early staffers as Kenneth Bade (who did "organ reveries"), Ray Hawkins, news editor and host of a popular quiz show, Earl Ferguson, program director, Willis Baldrige, newsman, Wanda Milner, community director. It is interesting to note that the same last names, Hawkins, and Milner figure in the development of other Kankakee suburban stations later on.

Other early staffers included Bill Foote, Marvin Carmony, Jay Pitts, Professor R.L. Lunsford, Linford Marquardt, James Green, Jack Goodwin, Gary Moore, Marie Replogle, and Ray Hammer. Talk shows emanated from a popular campus spot called the "Nook" in Miller Hall.

Financial difficulties and lack of new student interest forced the station to close down in 1951. WONC and radio, in general, from the school would be silent for the next sixteen years.

Upon the arrival of another communication professor, Ray Moore, work began on another campus station in 1965. Moore, an amateur radio operator since the age of 10, built the college's new station studios on the second floor of Ludwig Hall. Moore had also produced the denomination's "Showers of Blessing" program in Kansas City.

Olivet's new studios, housed in four rooms, included a new transmitter, control board, two tape recorders, and two turntables. Moore hurriedly trained about twenty students to pass the FCC third class radio telephone license test. Only much later did the school set up a broadcast curriculum to teach students the fundamentals of speech and technical broadcasting.

The station had a three-fold purpose: to teach broadcasting, connect the college with the community, and be a source of Christian outreach.

The Olivet class of 1941 raised funds during their reunion for the station. The new station signed on with 10 watts at 89.3 with the call letters WKOC standing for Kankakee Olivet College. The station officially signed on January 26, 1967. Its antenna height was 92 feet.

Professor Moore left the station in 1968, returning in 1971. Later Don Toland joined the staff to teach broadcasting in 1977. That year WKOC's signal was placed on the local cable system, and carried through the entire community. At this time the school began to set up a broadcast curriculum, students took internships at local stations and were graded on their work. A complete broadcast degree program was initiated in the fall of 1968. A host of students entered and completed the school's broadcast program, including Todd Chatman, later of WCRM, who is now employed by Word Records.

The late 70's and early 80's were an important development era for the station, automation was installed, helping to expand the stations broadcast day. "New Day," a new morning show was added, and station hours increased from four hours a day to an expanded schedule up to 11:00 p.m. Gary Griffin and Bonnie Green handled Tiger football and basketball broadcasts in 1978.

On November 1, 1982 new studios were completed on the third floor of the Brenner Library. By April of 1983 WKOC could be heard over most of the community with its new 421 watt stereo signal; the antenna height was still 92 feet. Automation helped WKOC achieve an eighteen hour broadcast day in the fall of 1983. A news department, UPI teletype service, and new remote equipment were installed by 1985. This included a Marti unit for sports broadcast and a Ureie console with eight stereo channels.

WKOC definitely had their eyes set for the future; a computer play list selected the music. The station increased its output power to 35,000 watts on September 1, 1986 and changed its frequency to 89.7 mhz in December. Some community problems developed as the new powerful signal invaded and overloaded poorly designed TV sets in the area and sets with antenna lead-in problems. The school cheerfully went to each home and rectified the problem with homemade wave traps.

A fire in early 1988 forced the station back to 4,000 watts for a short time until repairs were made. In addition, new transmitters were installed on campus for WKOC-AM and five 30 watt transmitters were placed in selected dorms and offices on campus. Receivers tuned to 590 khz could hear the campus carrier current station (formerly 540 khz). Call letters were changed to WONU for Olivet Nazarene University in 1989.

WONU increased their news coverage with UPI dish feeds and affiliation with CNN in November of 1988. A former satellite service called "Skylite" had been previously used. Fund raisers bought CD players, and new equipment for both stations.

Today a dedicated Christian group of young people, head the staff at WONU, which can now be heard over most of Northern Illinois. Inspirational music, news, campus activities, and religious programs are presented. Dr.



Harry Smith, oversees the station operation, along with president Leslie Parrott. Steve Krampitz is the station's production director. Dennis Baldridge is WONU's engineer.

## NORTH BY NORTHWEST

### Introduction

A quick survey of stations that serve Lake County, Illinois, and nearby areas north of Chicago shows that over 20 operations have existed in local communities in the past and present. This includes several educational stations that are also featured in this book.

A variety of formats catering to mostly special interest groups have been aired. Unfortunately, most of these operations have not been financially sound, and have suffered under multiple ownerships. A few of the large stations have gone totally ethnic. Another group of broadcasters have abandoned their local identities setting their sites on Chicago.

In addition, one of these stations have has as many as four call letter changes in recent years. With space permitting, here is a capsule of some of these past and present Lake County, Illinois, and most notable North Chicago Suburban stations.

## WJAZ

### The Story of Zenith

There exists a long list of early broadcasting pioneers which begins with the inventions and innovations of Marconi, Major Edwin H. Armstrong, Dr. Lee DeForest, and James deHaan to name a few. It was Marconi in 1901 who is credited with the first broadcast of any kind, transmitting the letter "S" during a transoceanic wireless broadcast on December 14, of that year.

In years to follow, Armstrong designed and patented early regenerative radio circuitry. DeForest who passed away in 1961, developed the vacuum tube, and deHaan, who operated WDFH-FM in the 1960s in Chicago, improved hi-fidelity equipment WDFH-deHaan Hi-Fi). But it was a Chicago car salesman and Arctic explorer Eugene F. McDonald, Jr., who advanced the development of radio with his sound business background and financial resources. He was a step ahead of his time, using his creative ideas, to put much distance between himself and his competitors during the early years of radio.

McDonald was born in 1890, in Syracuse, New York had previous experience with WEBH, an AM station at the Edgewater Beach Hotel (years later the hotel would operate an FM station with the same call letters). McDonald amassed his financial stability by being the first businessman to sell automobiles on time payments to the public. He worked on a plan to charge radio listeners by phone, for listening to certain radio programs. (In the early 1920s a number of plans were discussed to charge listeners including scrambled signals, and selling their air time as commercials). McDonald also helped develop the first hearing aids.

Eugene purchased his first radio in 1920, from two young men, R.H.G. (Ralph) Mathews, and Karl Hassel. The pair had earlier obtained patent privileges from Armstrong and had formed their own company. The Chicago Radio Laboratory was located at 1316 Carmen Avenue in Chicago. Both men were radio amateurs and operated station 9ZN in 1919. The name Zenith taken from the call letters of this early ham station became the laboratory's trade mark. It was later changed to Zenith when McDonald bought into the firm in 1920. The company's attorney was Irving Herriott, who stayed with the firm until 1953.

In the late 1920s, Mathews and Hassel's business began to grow with McDonald's leadership, and backing. The general public was eager to purchase sets to hear the new early stations like WHA, WDAP, and KDKA. The firm moved from Mathew's home where it used to take a whole day to make one radio set, to plants in the Ravenswood area, and on the south side at 3620 Iron Street. In 1922, the Chicago Radio Laboratory used facilities at 332 S. Michigan Avenue, and 4829 Kedzie Avenue. Railroad radios and some "longwave" equipment were manufactured by the firm. Car radios were developed and manufactured utilizing tuning buttons. Former WILA-FM station owner Harold Z. Benton held the patent on push button radio tuning. Shortwave transmitters for the Navy were made as well as the first radio sets mass produced for the public. They were battery operated sets, mounted in small suitcases. In 1926, the first AC operated sets were manufactured by Zenith for home use.

McDonald became the founder and president of the National Association of Broadcasters and president of Zenith Radio Corporation in 1923. The NAB held their first meeting in April of 1923, at the Drake Hotel in Chicago.

Like many other radio manufacturing companies, Zenith also got into the broadcasting business. The rest of the Zenith story is a confusing account containing the opening, closing, and sale of several stations owned by the company. On a couple of occasions Zenith maintained two stations, and kept switching the call letters between them. Long before the modern day WGN was on the air, it was briefly owned by Zenith. The Chicago Tribune, WGN's owner, had decided to lease all the air time from Zenith's station WJAZ. WJAZ was changed to WGN to accommodate the Tribune. WGN and the Tribune purchased another small station WDAP on June 1, 1924 and began to build the successful legacy that it enjoys today. Each time Zenith's president Eugene F. McDonald decided to reenter the broadcasting business, he again obtained the call letters WJAZ, which were attached to several different operations. The last WJAZ lost its license in 1931.

On August 17, 1922, the Radio Division of the Bureau of Navigation, U.S. Department of Commerce, granted the Chicago Radio Laboratory, a license for the first WJAZ. (C.R.L.'s name was officially changed to Zenith in 1923). McDonald then spent the next nine months planning and building his station on the main floor of the Edgewater Beach Hotel. The facility known as the "Crystal Studio" because it was surrounded by triple thick glass, was constructed in the north wing of the hotel at 5349 Sheridan Road in Chicago. Spectators could watch the entire operation through the glass, but could not see the station's microphones which were cleverly concealed in lamps in the floor. WJAZ's 20 watt transmitter and antenna were located on top of an adjacent building 500 feet north of the hotel.

The first WJAZ went on the air on May 12, 1924, on the then national AM frequency of 833 khz (or 360 meters). The Zenith-Edgewater station operated from 10:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. Tuesday-Saturday nights. It also was on the air from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Sunday evenings. Monday nights were regular "silent nights" for radio listeners in Chicago, who were then able to hear broadcasts from outside of the area. WJAZ was one of the stations to first broadcast commercials. After hearing an ad for a new radio magazine, listeners went out and bought every copy off newsstands. The magazine's publisher happily donated \$1,000.00 to the NAB.

Announcer Wendell Hall, later of KYW, who was also a vaudeville performer participated in a film that was produced at the "Crystal Studio." The film was called "Behind the Scenes at a Broadcasting Station." A firm called "Kinograms" marketed the movie. On May 14, 1923, two days after WJAZ came on the air the station moved to 740 khz.

In July of 1923, McDonald opened a second 20 watt station WSAX. (Some sources say WSAY). WSAX was Chicago Radio Laboratory's "station at the office." Facilities had been built into the top floor of the McCormick Building at 332 S. Michigan. WSAX operated at 1120 khz, with no definite schedule. At this point in time Zenith owned two stations. By August of 1923, WJAZ had increased its power to 1,000 watts and had moved to 670 khz, to share time with WMAQ.

On March 24, 1924, WJAZ was leased to the Chicago Tribune. The call letters were changed to WGN, standing for the "World's Greatest Newspaper." McDonald spoke on the station's inaugural program on March 29, 1924. The station had moved to 810 khz. (The authorization to change WJAZ to WGN came on April 2, 1924). By this time the Tribune-Edgewater station, became known as the "World's Greatest Noise," because it now interfered with WDAP at 833 khz, as well as other Chicago Broadcasters. (See WGN). WDAP was formally 9CT.

On May 9, 1924, WGN announced that it was severing all ties with the Zenith company, and was purchasing WDAP at the Drake Hotel to continue operations. Meanwhile, McDonald sold WGN to the Edgewater Beach Hotel, on May 28, 1924. The hotel changed the station's call letters to WEBH (for the initials of the hotel). The Tribune retrieved its WGN call letters on June 1, 1924 to replace the old call of WDAP, which the newspaper had just purchased. Both stations WGN and WEBH continued to operate for a time at 810 khz, until December of 1925. By February of 1926, WEBH broadcasted with 2,000 watts and shared time with WJJD at 820 khz in June of 1927. WGN moved to 990 khz, and then 720 khz in 1930.

WEBH, known as the "Voice of the Great Lakes," became one of the first stations to air the comedy team of Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll who appeared as Sam 'N' Henry, and later as Amos 'N' Andy. Robert D. Boniel was station director in 1925. WEBH operated through 1930, but was reduced to a mere booster station for KYW-KFKX, becoming KYWA, in November of 1928. Gone then was Sunday's "Twilight Musicale," and programs produced by the Chicago Evening Post as well as some network programming. Westinghouse Electric operated

KYWA until January 31, 1930. The 500 watt station was eliminated when KYW opened its new powerful transmitting site in Bloomingdale. This site today belongs to WMAQ. The Edgewater Beach Hotel would later host Buddy Black's WEBH-FM in 1958. The hotel was torn down around 1970.

Getting back to Zenith, after McDonald had sold his first WJAZ to the Edgewater Beach Hotel, he again sought the WJAZ call to replace WSAX. This change came in May of 1924. Then on September 17, 1924, the station reverted back to WSAX. The reason for the change was McDonald's opening of a new station, with you guessed it, the call letters being WJAZ again. The new WJAZ was mounted on a truck and became one of the many "portable" stations used for advertising purposes. Meanwhile the latest WSAX had such a variable schedule and low power that Zenith eventually returned the station's license to the government for cancellation in June of 1925. McDonald continued to operate WJAZ as a portable station with offices at 332 South Michigan Avenue. The 100 watt station continued to operate at 1120 khz.

By November of 1924, WJAZ became known as the "Most Powerful Portable Broadcasting Station in the World." The station was operated at various sites to promote Zenith products. WJAZ operated two hours a week at 930 khz, as of July 22, 1925.

In August of 1925, McDonald again switched the call letters of his stations. He made the portable station WSAX again, and prepared to build a large operation in Mount Prospect, that he intended to call WJAZ. With the WSAX call letters again affixed to the portable station, Zenith toured Texas and Oklahoma broadcasting from stores that sold Zenith radios. It had also toured stores along the Pacific coast. Former radio builder Ralph Mathews operated the station.

By December of 1925, WSAX was removed from its truck and installed back in the McCormick Building. Later in the month it moved to the 23rd Floor of the Straus Building at 310 South Michigan. In 1926, WSAX moved to the Zenith factory at 3620 Iron Street. WSAX changed frequencies on April 23, 1927 to 760 khz, and then 940 khz, sharing time with Chicago's WGES on April 26, 1927. In June of 1927, the FRC moved WSAX to 1470 khz. Its last broadcast was heard in early 1928. Due to its inactive status, WSAX's license was canceled on June 1, 1928. The FRC then proceeded to cancel all portable station licenses on August 1, 1928.

The last WJAZ went on the air in late August of 1925. Apparently, Zenith was more interested in its operation, allowing WSAX's portable license to elapse. It had been over a year, since McDonald had operated out of the Edgewater Beach Hotel. This time Zenith's WJAZ broadcasted from the "Spanish Garden Studio," in the Straus Building. (This was later the home of the Chicago stations WSWs and WENR).

Zenith had also built a large transmitting station near the intersection of Mount Prospect, Rand, and Central Roads in Mount Prospect. A small two story framed building, with the name "Zenith" printed across the roof stood between the two 150 foot towers which were 90 feet apart. The Zenith name also appeared on the top of the new pyramid towers. A 1,000 watt light was mounted on each structure. A specially designed water cooled transmitter was built inside the building by engineer J. Elliot Jenkins. A Mr. Herrick, formerly of Illinois Bell Telephone, was WJAZ's chief operator. He and his staff stayed in special quarters on the second floor of the transmitter building. Another listed engineer was W. H. Meinhard.

This station is best remembered for its live broadcasts of interviews with arctic explorer Commander Ronald B. MacMillan. (McDonald was also an explorer and had used radio in the past to broadcast from Greenland). The new WJAZ also created a governmental stir that eventually led to the formation of the Federal Commission and tighter licensing controls on the industry.

Eugene McDonald, Zenith's president had petitioned the government for a license just to broadcast Thursday nights from 10:00 p.m. to midnight. In late August of 1925, he was granted this share time arrangement on 930 khz, with Denver's KOA, which was owned by General Electric. The official sign on date was September 21, 1925, with 1,500 watts.

By December of 1925, WJAZ, desired more air time, so without government sanction it switched to a Canadian channel, 910 khz. A company publication stated that then Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover had welcomed a test case to see if stations could legally "wave jump," to better serve their listeners. But later Hoover discovered that Zenith's move also prompted other stations to also change frequencies. This then created chaos in Chicago, where there were many more stations on the air. It was a clear test of the government's 1912 Radio Act. On April 16, 1926, the U.S. Attorney General issued a ruling that the radio act did not include provisions for assigning dial positions or power levels, and that WJAZ could do what it wanted to reach and be better heard by its listeners. The U.S. Attorney General's decision urged the government to quickly enact new regulations, which



included the formation of what later became the Federal Radio Commission and later the Federal Communication Commission.

In October of 1926, WJAZ became a 5,000 watt commercialized station at 910 khz, moving to 760 khz, as directed by the new FRC on April 26, 1927. Offices and studios were still at the Straus building (23rd floor). WJAZ was sharing time with WCRW. (WCRW was owned by Clinton R. White). On June 1, 1927, WJAZ was reassigned to 1140 khz, another share time frequency with WMBI.

WJAZ used a portable operation for remote broadcasts to promote the station and the Zenith Corporation. The equipment was placed in a large truck. One of the remote broadcasts originated from Pike's Peak. By June of 1927, WJAZ moved its studios from the Straus Building to the company's factory at 3620 South Iron Street. A studio was also maintained at the "Chez Pierre Nightclub" on McClurg Court. WENR later took over the vacated studios in the Straus Building. The November 11, 1928 FRC radio shuffle, which affected most stations placed WJAZ, WHT Deerfield-Bannockburn, Chicago stations WSOA, WORD, and WCKY, Cincinnati, Ohio all on 1480 khz. (WCKY was then located in Covington, Kentucky, see WORD). WHT and WSOA left the air in 1929. By 1930, WJAZ was a non-commercial station. All three remaining stations were moved to 1490 khz, in February of 1930. The FRC, which had begun consolidating and moving smaller stations around, canceled WJAZ's license on November 1, 1931. The FRC cited alleged "infractions in its rules," possibly dating back to the time that WJAZ had changed frequencies on its own. Carl Swanson (W9SCN), formerly an engineer with Zenith, Rauland, and E. H. Scott, recalls an article in "Variety" in the 1920s which was critical of WJAZ's broadcast of a "wild party." The FRC required little reason to eliminate stations, including some good ones as well. WORD (later WCHI) a religious station also left the air, leaving the channel to full time broadcaster WCKY.

WJAZ's transmitting tower and building set abandoned for many years in Mount Prospect, and had not been used since the early 1930s. The site at the Southwest corner of Mount Prospect Road and Central Road in later years was needed for street improvements, and the relocation of Mount Prospect Road. The State of Illinois purchased the 40,000 square foot area on October 30, 1978, from the Zenith Radio Corporation for \$84,000.00. Demolition of the towers and building occurred in 1979-80, according to Carol Fields, Mount Prospect City Clerk. The above information was supplied to the city's library for inclusion into their history book. The old transmitter site is now a "green area" between the mentioned major streets in the area, across the street from a shopping center.

Zenith began early television broadcasts in 1931. TV station W9XZV premiered on February 2, 1939. (Earlier TV experiments had been conducted in 1931 by radio station WIBO, using the call letters W9AXO. The sound was broadcast on 570 khz, and the video aired on 146 meters, near two megahertz on the short wave band. Western Television Corporation conducted these early tests). Zenith perfected many television discoveries, and innovations. W9XZV broadcasted on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday nights from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., and from noon to 1:00 p.m. weekdays. Singers like Fanny Cavanaugh appeared on the station along with Burt Tillstrom's Kukla, Fran, and Ollie puppet show. The program later moved to NBC. Fran Allison, the show's popular hostess, who never used a script passed away in 1989, after a long career in TV and Radio.

Some other musical groups and films were presented on Chicago's only operating TV station at the time. Test patterns were broadcast at noon, to allow other manufacturers to align their sets. A Wednesday news feature, "Time on Television," was also broadcast. Color TV tests and the use of another company innovation "Phonovision," were also broadcast from the Field Building in Chicago in 1930, using the call letters K2XBS.

Major Armstrong, by the 1930s had perfected his own static and interference-free system of frequency modulation broadcasting by the mid 1930s. Zenith then signed on W9XEN, which became the first FM station in the Midwest. The studios were located at the company's factory. Power was increased to 50,000 watts on February 27, 1947, making it the biggest FM station in the country. The FM station's antenna was located at the Field Building at 135 S. LaSalle in Chicago. The call letters were later changed to W51C (45.1 mhz.) and later WWZR standing for Zenith Radio. Among the programs aired was the popular "Salon Hour."

When FM frequencies were moved in the mid 1940's to the 88-108 mhz., band WWZR became WEFM, the initials of Zenith's founder Eugene F. McDonald, Jr. McDonald passed away in 1958. WEFM's frequency was 99.5 mhz. Chicago studios were located at the company's factory at 6001 Dickens Avenue. The non-commercial station featured hi-fidelity classical music. Further musical enhancement was made by the invention of the "Cobra" turntable tone arm.

Around 1967, WEFM moved to 120 W. Madison Street. Long time NBC official and band leader Jules Herbeveux, who years before had played on Charles Erbstein's WTAS became station manager of WEFM. Long



time Chicago personality George Stone was the program director. Joseph S. Wright was president of the station. Despite much public disapproval WEFM was sold in 1972 to GCC Communications of Chicago Inc. (The public usually has no say in such matters). WEFM's format was changed to Top 40. Rock DJ's called the station WE-FM. It's call letters were briefly changed to WICV according to Broadcast Yearbook.

The station reverted back to WEFM in 1973, again with Stone as the general manager. In 1978, the station again switched from classical to rock until it was sold in 1982 to First Media Corporation. In recent years the station has operated out of the John Hancock Building at 875 North Michigan. Its power output is 6,000 watts with an antenna height of 1,174 feet. The call letters are now WUSN (US 99), a country music station.

It has been sometime since Zenith was in the actual commercial broadcasting business in Chicago. The firm has a long history of early radio, TV, and electronic accomplishments. Zenith has devoted itself to the manufacture of quality receiving sets to hear the many other stations that now or have existed. This includes major color TV developments dating back to 1953. The company with several Chicago plant locations, continues to develop and manufacture a wide range of electronic products still proving that "at Zenith, the quality goes in, before the name goes on."

The above information was prepared with assistance from John I. Taylor Director of Public Relations at Zenith Radio. (A history since 1919), and from "WJAZ" by Broadcast Profile.

### DES PLAINES RADIO WIBO-WYEN-WYLL

The city of Des Plaines, just a few miles northwest of the city of Chicago, has been the home of six radio operations. WIBO a later Chicago station began broadcasting on April 10, 1925. Its Chicago location was 6310 Broadway. Frequencies of 1330, 720, 980, and finally 560 khz were used through the late 20's.

By March of 1928 WIBO moved its antenna to Des Plaines. The owners of the station were the Nelson Bros. Bonding Company. Well-known band leader Ed Fiorito and Dan Russo arranged musical programs on the station. Alvin Enus Nelson was the commercial manager.

Earlier in 1927 WIBO began heavy foreign language programming in German and Swedish and was known as Chicago's "uptown" radio station. Some early TV broadcasting also took place. The TV sound utilized WIBO's audio while pictures were transmitted by Western Television Corporation in the 146 Meter Band. By 1929 WIBO was combined with religious broadcaster WPCC at 560 khz.

In 1931 both stations were eliminated by the FCC and the channel was given to WIND in Gary, Indiana. Its TV operation W9XAO continued until 1932.

The owners of WIBO were not happy with the FCC decision. WIBO still using it's T-type flat top antenna in Des Plaines continued to broadcast into 1933 from several downtown locations. It's license was finally canceled that year and equipment at 180 North Michigan was sold in an auction in Chicago. WIBO's early transmitter site on the southwest corner of Ballard and Greenwood Roads, was later used by Chicago station WJJD. Later WJJD moved further west on Ballard Road near the tollway (I-294). Twisted tower pieces still are found on WIBO's old site. Ballard Plaza will be built on this property.

#### From Requests to Religion

#### WYEN is now WYLL

The "Format of the Month" award goes to WYLL Des Plaines for it's periodic programming and call letter changes which began on December 3, 1971 as WYEN. The station has always been located at 2400 East Devon Avenue, it's frequency at 106.7 at 50,000 watts has been it's only constant over the years. WYEN's long time owner Ed Walters seem to find what was lacking on Chicago radio dials and turned his station into whatever new format seemed to be emerging. Jerry Westerfield was WYEN's early vice president. Chicago broadcaster Ray Smithers formerly of WNWC was program director. The station featured all requests into the 70's under the Walt-West ownership banner UPI audio news was featured in 1978.

By 1979 a black music format was instituted. WAIT Newscaster Stew Cohen worked at WYEN in 1979. "Middle of the road" music returned in 1980. The staff of Cathy Schilling, sales manager; Mike Waters, program director; Angie Smith, news director; and Mike Roche, engineer, remained in tact through the 1980s. In 1987, WYEN became WZRC or Z-Rock an album oriented rock station programmed by the Satellite Music Network. SMN continued as WZRC became WTWV. The station was purchased by Metro Mass Media Inc. In January 1987

Vernon Merritt Jr. became President. "New Wave and Soft Rock" programmed by SMN began in 1988 as the station advertised "No Disc Jockeys". Kevin Jay became program director, and David Dybas the chief engineer. New Age Broadcasting, Inc. operated WTWV late in 1987.

WTWV's New Wave-Jazz format seemed dull, and after another Chicago station, WNUA, began the same format, WTWV began looking for something new. In 1989, when CLW industries sold out WCRM Dundee, a religious station, WTWV began broadcasting contemporary Christian music. Slowly some area ministers purchased time and some old WCRM staffers were hired. Listeners soon forgot about WCRM and enjoyed inspirational programming on a newer more powerful station. (WCRM was only 3000 watts.) In 1989, WTWV changed its call letters to WYLL and continued its religious programming. The new Christian station features a variety of local and national religious speakers and popular christian contemporary music.

#### ELMWOOD PARK RADIO WLEY WXFM WCKG

WLEY was another product of the Chicago FM era of the late 40's and early 50's. The station began as a 1,000 watt operation at 107.1 mhz. Studios were located at 2526 North Harlem Avenue at Grand Avenue in Elmwood Park.

Zeb Zarnecki was the original and long time owner of the station. Music from the SESAC Library was used on WLEY. Walter Trofimuk was the station's first engineer in 1948. By 1956 WLEY, which stood for Leyden Township, moved to 105.9 mhz and increased its power to 32 kw.

In 1957 call letters were changed to WXFM and the station was moved to 400 West Madison Street in Chicago. The new owner was Evelyn Chauvin Schoonfield. James Day became general manager.

WXFM moved to 4440 North Clark Street in 1961. Robert C. Victor became general manager and was joined by engineer Jim French of WGN who would later open his own station in Dundee.

In 1967 WXFM was sold to a new group, WXFM Inc. Albert C. Victor became the president of "Brand X" FM. Stewart Olsen, general manager, and Robert Victor continued as commercial manager. During this time the station was moved to 333 North Michigan Avenue, a popular address for radio stations and power was increased to 50,000 watts.

During the early 70's WXFM featured nostalgic programs, band music, and a variety of German programs. By 1975 WXFM had moved its antenna downtown to the John Hancock building.

Under Robert C. Victor contemporary, classical, jazz, big band, talk, and drama programs were presented. A power increase from 3 kw to 4.2 kw was achieved in 1982. In 1984 WXFM was purchased by Cox Communications. Mark Morgan became general manager of the station carrying new call letters "WAGO". Top Forty music was programmed.

WAGO was changed to WCKG and classic rock music was formatted in 1986. WCKG is a Chicago station located at 150 North Michigan Avenue in Chicago, but is still licensed to Elmwood Park.

#### WMTH Park Ridge

WMTH is one of the oldest high school stations in the Chicago area dating back to May 28, 1960. It made its debut with 10 watts operating at 88.5 mhz at Maine Township High School, 2601 West Dempster Street. Jack Coombe was the station's first manager and Theron Whitfield was WMTH's engineer. Cynthia Schaulis was WMTH's manager for three years. William R. Mitchell became general manager in 1973.

The station was a member of the short-lived Suburban High School Radio Network. UPI news was added in 1980 and a power increase to 16 watts was granted. By 1985 WMTH increased its power to 100 watts and its frequency was shifted to 90.5 mhz with an antenna height of 103 feet. A variety of educational, jazz, and classical programs are featured.

Edward Finnegan is the student station manager, while William Mitchell continues as the general manager of the station.

WMTH's tower and transmitter remains at Maine Township High School, while separate studios are located at Maine West and South High Schools.

WMTH's call letters stand for Maine Township High or Where Marvelous Things Happen. The station is licensed for Park Ridge.

## **NORTH SUBURBAN HIGH SCHOOL RADIO**

### **WMWA Glenview**

WMWA is a classic example of a small educational station doing a variety of community service for the surrounding area. It is a privately owned religious high school station that serves the community through a lease agreement with Glenbrook High School which helps pay station operating costs.

The station is owned by the Midwest Academy of the New Church located at 74 Park Drive in Glenview. WMWA sounds like two stations in one. During the day it features classical music and Sunday church services. At night nearby Glenbrook High School students program rock, jazz, popular and big band music. Area high school sports are broadcast. There are no newscasts.

An automation system runs WMWA during the day. Studios contain the latest tape decks, CD players, turn tables and control consoles. Weekly features include "Sophisticated Swing" on Saturday afternoons, "Spotlight on Jazz" on Sunday afternoon, and "The Blues Edition" on Sunday evenings. Hours of broadcast are noon to 10 p.m. Monday through Thursday, Friday from 9 a.m. to 2 a.m., Saturday from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m., and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 2 a.m.

WMWA signed on January 13, 1979. It was formerly a Mutual Network station. Dan Woodard was station manager of the new ten watt station. Its antenna height was 100 feet.

WMWA first operated at 88.9 mhz. In 1985 its frequency was shifted to 88.5 and power increased to 100 watts. Salaried staffers include director Ann Fuller; Kurt Umberger, station manager; and Gary Schroder, engineer. The station was originally started to broadcast church services to shut-ins. Station officials have looked into using their subcarrier for additional religious programming from other area churches. Ann Fuller, who has been with the station since 1987, feels that community goodwill is important and frequent local programming is produced to serve the needs of the area population.

Recently WMWA participated in a stereo simulcast with a local cable TV firm to broadcast a local high school football game. WMWA has a range of about 15 miles.

### **WNTH Winnetka**

New Trier High School's WNTH has been in operation since 1961. Thomas A. Stewart served as station manager in 1966 followed by Glenn Gordon, Mark Hoffman, and Nancy McEachron. A variety of teachers and faculty advisors have followed.

WNTH started as a low powered ten watt station at the same dial position 88.1 mhz. Like many high school stations, WNTH operates only when school is in session.

In 1975 WNTH installed UPI wire service and began to air some NPR programs. A variety of foreign language shows are also presented. By 1977 WNTH featured many musical programs including rock, country and western, and jazz as well as some educational programming.

A power increase of 31 watts was granted WNTH in 1987. Richard Coxon has been WNTH's station manager since 1980. Dee Bauman is the other faculty advisor. Meredith Hazan is the current student program director.

WNTH, standing for New Trier High, utilizes one studio on the fifth floor of the school's main building; the antenna is on the roof. In 1988 WNTH increased its power to 100 watts in stereo. Its new format consists of three daily newscasts, progressive and alternative music, and broadcasts of school sports. About one hundred students are involved in the station.

## **THE HISTORY OF EVANSTON RADIO**

### **WNMP WEAW WOJO WLTD WONX WNUR**

The history of Evanston radio includes two major stations and how they evolved from local operations to their present status as large ethnic broadcasters today. These summaries are preceded by a much earlier station, WEHS, that operated out of Evanston High School in the late 1920s, and later the city's Orrington Hotel. This station later was combined with two other stations to form WHFC (see WHFC Cicero).

Another WEHS appeared in the beginning of the new Chicago FM era in the late 1940s. There is also a listing for another Evanston FM station during this time that was never built, as well as progressive WNUR at Northwestern University.



The city's two major stations came on the air in 1947 and show little resemblance to their original format or programming. Today both are basically ethnic stations, reaping comfortable profits for their present owners. Evanston's first stations were WNMP and WEAW-FM. (A third company held a construction permit for WTQS-FM, but it was never built.)

On the air first was WNMP, a 1000 watt daytime AM station at 1590 khz. The Evanston Broadcasting Company, founded by Fred Newton, operated WNMP from 2201 Oakton Street. The station was managed by Angus D. Pfaff.

By 1958 WNMP moved to 1580 Sherman Street (the old Mason-Smart building since raised north of the Valencia Theater). Todd Branson, who had been with WSDR in Sterling, WBEE in Harvey and WWCA in Gary, was named manager. James Hougen was chief announcer. German shows made up part of the station's programming.

In 1961 WNMP was purchased by wealthy Chicago politician Harry Semrow. Semrow was president of the Cook County Board of Tax Appeals. Otto Semrow, Harry's brother, became president of the station in 1963. The station was still licensed to the Semrow Broadcasting Company in 1964, when it moved to 1710 Orrington Avenue (1708 was the old address number). Sid Roberts was the commercial manager.

Harry Semrow resumed management of the station in 1970 and sold it around 1972. When Semrow passed away in 1987, he left huge sums of money to friends and co-workers, urging them to have a good time on him. His estate was valued at \$4.3 million, according to Chicago newspapers.

By 1972 the station had moved to 2100 Lee Street. WNMP's long time engineer Eugene Cummings formed the Cummings Communications Corporation. The general manager of WNMP became well-known Chicago broadcaster Buddy Black, who had previously owned WEBH-FM. News came from the Mutual Network.

Call letters were changed to WLTD in 1973, with Alan H. Cummings becoming chief executive. Chuck Schaden, best known for his presentations of "old time" radio shows later on WBBM, became WLTD's general manager in 1974. Under Schaden, WLTD enjoyed some successful years as a "mini-WGN" featuring a variety of music, nostalgia, and talk shows. More about this era at the end of this section.

A beautiful music format was instituted in 1976. In 1977, Frank Kovas, former owner of WKFM and later of WGL, a successful talk station in Fort Wayne, Indiana, purchased WLTD.

The call letters were changed to WONX in 1980. Frank's son Kenneth became program director shortly after the purchase. It's beautiful music format was replaced by Spanish programming in 1981. In 1988, WONX increased its power to 1000 watts daytime and 2500 watts nighttime directional. The station features a variety of Spanish and other ethnic programs today. Its slogan is One-X.

A slow pattern has begun to develop with low wattage AM stations that are located just outside of Chicago, but are easily heard in the "Windy City." These stations are attempting to serve the growing number of Hispanics and other nationalities that live there. Format changes and the ultimate sweeping out of long time talk show hosts and disc jockeys at these stations usually simmers down to mere memories in a few years. Forgotten are attempts of local news coverage, the broadcasting of high school sports, and some really good music in which these stations were originally planned for.

Current owners of these stations feel that they are indeed serving their audiences with "brokered" programming, or with format changes that are designed to reduce overhead.

In the late 1970s, the broadcast broom swept into the streets several popular announcers, who today remain bitter about the changes made at WLTD. These staffers tried their best, but in the end, it was the management, as always, who won out.

The progression of ownership change at this small station still burns in the memory of people like old time radio host Chuck Schaden. Schaden, who continues to delight Chicagoland listeners with his rebroadcasts of vintage radio shows on WBBM and WNIB/WNIZ, recently published an in-depth study of this once popular personality station. Schaden's May 1990 Nostalgia Digest and Radio Guide is an accurate account of progression of this station from a talk format to a new ethnic broadcaster. Composed of compiled articles by the Chicago Tribune's, Gary Deeb, and the Chicago Daily News' Norman Mark, the article portrays the dismissal of the station's popular personality line up, reducing the station to an all music station and later a Spanish station by 1981.

In markets where new managements have come in and swept out familiar voices and established formats, public outcry and huge write-in campaigns only temporarily delay the demise of well-liked personalities as WTTW's Bruce DuMont, Bill Nigut, Chuck Schaden, Ted Weber, Don Lucki, Steve Hart, and Mike Schwimmer. Gary Deeb



labeled WLTD as a "mini WGN," pointing out the well-liked talk shows and air staff that made the station popular with North Shore listeners.

Several of the above personalities sold their own program, making a profit, which may have incensed the station's owner, Cummings Communications, but it was in the contracts of these personalities to do so. On the contrary, Weber, Schaden and DuMont charged that the station ownership did little to promote or sell the programs. After much public pressure, new station manager Ernest Anastos was forced to renew the contracts of most of the people he had fired in favor of an all music format.

In the end, though, former WKFM owner Frank Kovas bought WLTD and turned it into a beautiful music station and later a Spanish station. Beside Schaden, Bruce DuMont remains in Chicago today, working for WTTW, WBEZ, and serves as president of the Museum of Broadcast Communications in Chicago.

Evanston's other main station was WEAW-FM at 105.1 mhz. WEAW-FM signed on in 1948 with 36,000 watts of power at the beginning of the Chicago FM era. For many years at the helm of WEAW was Edward A. Wheeler, whose initials make up the call letters of the station. WEAW's licensee was North Shore Broadcasting Company with original studios at 2425 Main Street. Robert Moran was WEAW-FM's first manager, Doris Peterson was the program director, and Sidney Schneider was chief engineer.

A construction permit was issued in 1948 for another large FM station, WTQS. It was licensed for 107.9 mhz at 30,000 watts by the Lake Shore Broadcasting Company. It never got on the air. Wheeler also bought WOKZ AM-FM in Alton, Illinois and sold it in 1954. In 1955 Wheeler opened WEAW-AM, a 500 watt station.

WEAW prided itself in programming good music. WEAW-AM broadcasting at 1330 khz increased to 1,000 watts of power in 1957. Robert Cronin was station manager. By 1970 both stations were programmed separately. WEAW-AM became a regional 5,000 watt operation with ABC news affiliation.

WEAW-FM became a 180,000 music power house broadcasting to many stores and businesses as well as homes. Chicago radio personality Art Hellyer and his wife Elaine did a morning program heard over WEAW and other network stations.

Restaurants accepted WEAW-FM's programming which came with a few glitches. A special switch mounted on WEAW's control board cut off commercials to subscribers who leased a decoding box for this purpose. Unfortunately, the announcements came into the businesses equipped with this device anyway when the announcer failed to activate this control. It was the station's attempt to program quality music to the public, as well as serve as a background music operation to clients.

Carmen Anthony was an early announcer at WEAW-FM later moving to WCIU-TV in Chicago. By 1959 WEAW-AM began broadcasting a mixture of ethnic-brokered programs. Studios in 1961 were moved to 1700 Central Street. By 1972, WEAW-FM moved its tower downtown to the Sears Building. (Its power was compensated for its antenna height at 6.2 kilowatts.) Both stations began adding more religious and ethnic programming. WEAW-FM carried mostly Spanish programming by 1973 and call letters were changed to WOJO.

In 1972 Chicago White Sox games were added as part of a network of stations headed by WTAQ in La Grange. The Sox did not have a major AM outlet at the time. Harry Caray and Ralph Faucher did the play by play of the games.

By 1976 a new firm, Broadcast Communications, took over the stations still headed by Wheeler. On the AM side, it was the first of several attempts by different groups to operate the 5,000 watt daytime station. Chicago broadcaster Dick Williamson headed a middle of the road format which featured some talk shows and brokered religious programs. Paul Molloy was the commercial manager, Elyse Mundell served as program director, and George Beres was news director. The studios were moved to 2008 State Bank Plaza. WOJO remained an all Spanish station.

WEAW-AM's big names were gone by 1978. Studios and offices were listed back at 2425 Main Street. In 1980, Wheeler tried another format, this time religion. Jane Hall became president of the station and call letters were switched to WPRZ. In less than a year, WPRZ was off the air. Two years later a group headed by Lee Hague called Forus Communications attempted an adult contemporary format. Some religious programs were also kept. The call letters were switched back to WEAW. Studios were moved to a remodeled house near the transmitter site east of the Tri-State Tollway at 4370 Dundee Road. Chicago broadcaster Kris Stevens became program director.

Wheeler's company continued to own both WEAW and WOJO. Contemporary Christian programming with a wide variety of ethnic shows highlighted WEAW-AM's programming in 1985. The schedule also included a half hour Portuguese program each week.

By 1987 another group, Poinet Communications, attempted an adult contemporary format. Walter Kotoba became president, John Rivers was the news director and Mark Napoleon, now of Shadow Traffic, was music director. Call letters were changed to WSSY, standing for Sunny 1330. Paula Fagan later became the station's news director, opting for a traffic reporters job at WFYR when Roz Varon moved to WLS-TV to become the city's newest TV traffic reporter since Gary Lee.

Some talk shows and news programs were presented. I turned down a Sunday board shift which consisted of plugging in spots for Dick Clark's syndicated Top 40 program.

The new group of announcers continued to struggle with station owners over the amount of revenue being brought in by local programming and music. Whenever sales dropped, management added more ethnic programming. WSSY featured a unique format of contemporary hits, oldies and contests. Announcers said that it was tough to establish a format or an identity for the station because of the numerous foreign language programs that slowly began to swallow up prime air time in 1988.

Former Chicago network announcer Arthur Mansavage of Riverwoods did an evening talk show on WSSY in 1988. Mike Czark became the next program director. The station, in 1989, received FCC approval to operate with 51 watts after sunset to service the North Shore area. Night air time was brokered to a heavy metal music outfit. It has long been rumored that a disgruntled employee pulled down all four of the station's towers many years ago.

Of late WSSY's call letters were changed again to WKTA (still licensed to Evanston) and continues to be an all ethnic programmed station. Today, WOJO is owned by Mac Tichenor, who also owns WIND-AM. Both WOJO and WIND program in Spanish.

### **WNUR**

#### **Northwestern University**

Northwestern University operates its own FM station, WNUR at 89.3 mhz. The station is located at 1905 Sheridan Road and features a variety of alternative, blues, and classical music programs. WNUR-FM signed on in 1957 with 10 watts. Charles Hunter was the station's first advisor. William C. Moody served as the station's first general manager. Early studios were at the Speech building.

WNUR improved its power to 1000 watts in 1963, making other transmitter improvements in 1977.

Arnold Weber was president of the station in 1989, Carmel McCoubrey at that time was WNUR's general manager. A variety of music and education programs are presented along with college sports coverage.

The station broadcasts in stereo with 7200 watts with an antenna height of 100 feet. One of the station's many alumni is Jonathan Lehrer, WNUR's news director in 1974, who is now a spokesperson for the Chicago Motor Club. Arnie Rogala is the current general manager.

### **SKOKIE WCLR-WTMX**

For all practical purposes WTMX-FM is a Chicago station with its early roots imbedded deep in Skokie. Its frequency, 101.9 mhz, is formerly the location of a Chicago station WCLM owned by Carol Music from which the call letters are derived.

WCLM owners were Carol Beamish Drenthe and William G. Drenthe. John Felthouse, a later Northwest Indiana engineer and station owner, was WCLM's engineer from 1956 to 1960.

Studios of the 18 kilowatt station were located at 333 North Michigan Avenue. Linn Burton was an early announcer at the station, playing a nice sampling of Dixieland music on weekends.

In 1961 the FCC closed down the station for gross violations. Sources say the station's sub carriers were being used illegally. A construction permit for 60,000 watts had been sought at the time.

With WCLM gone, WRSV, a one thousand watt FM station in Skokie, signed on. Its 98.3 mhz frequency was later switched to 101.9 in 1969. WRSV's original owner was Earlene Stebbins. The 1,000 watt station operated at 3611 Oakton Street. The antenna height was 125 feet. Edward Lucht was commercial manager, Joe Edwards the news director, Robert Mayhercy the engineer. The call letters stood for "Radio Skokie Valley."

In 1970 WRSV's power rose to 12,000 watts and antenna height increased to 560 feet. The station was sold that year to Joseph Dorton and the call letters became WCLR.

Frank King became program director at the station which had moved to 4849 Golf Road. Its antenna had been raised to 1170 feet and power stood at 6,000 watts.

In 1975 WCLR was purchased by Bonneville International. Its present owner Mo Gardner was named president; Jack Kelly, operations manager. Its beautiful music format was switched to middle of the road.

WCLR basically became a Chicago station with its downtown tower and Chicago oriented newscasts. Jan Coleman, now of WGN, was the WCLR news director in the early 80's followed later by Barry Keefe. Gary Price, another Chicago favorite (WJMK) became music director in 1984. Chet Redpath became WCLR's president that year.

WCLR received, in 1984, a slight power increase for the adult contemporary station and new studios at 8833 Gross Point Road.

In 1988, for a short time, WCLR aired a late evening program called "Pillow Talk" which featured love songs and record requests. By 1989 WCLR changed call letters to WTMX standing for The MIX. Its new format featured four songs back to back that were supposed to blend together. The format was promoted by numerous annoying billboards with upside-down printing.

## ARLINGTON HEIGHTS RADIO

### WNWC/WCBR

Radio service to the Arlington Heights and Northwest suburban areas has changed often over the years. It began under several family ownerships, only later focusing its attention to the Chicago area. WNWC signed on March 10, 1960 with 1,000 watts at 92.7 mhz. It was the first of six call letter changes in the station's short history. WNWC covered areas as far west as Elgin, as far south as Downers Grove, and as far north as the Wisconsin State Line. The Arlington Heights Herald called the operation, "the first FM station outside of Chicago to concentrate on local affairs."

One of the station's first programs was a regular taped delay broadcast from the Community Church of Rolling Meadows on Sundays. A high school program conducted by teenagers, community news, and sports coverage was planned by the station.

WNWC's staff of six included station manager Lewis LaMar who, at that time, had accumulated 38 years of experience in broadcasting. Dick Devine was another well-known announcer. Test broadcasts began in early March, and the management promised a variety of good music, pop tunes, and show tunes, but no country and western or rock and roll.

The first owners of WNWC were John D. Morgan and his wife Margaret who lived at 321 S. Drury Lane in Arlington Heights. The Morgans had lived in the village for 11 years. John was an electrical engineer by trade, ran an advertising business in Chicago, and was the promotions director for station WIND in Chicago. John served as the station's engineer while Margaret was the program director.

WNWC's first studios were built in an old farmhouse near the southwest corner of Arlington Heights Road and Rand Road (Route 12). Its address was 2108 N. State Road (which was changed to Arlington Heights Road in 1962). Today this structure would be located about 100 feet west of the center line of Arlington Heights Road behind Reichardt (now Edward's) Cleaners and just south of the J & J Pine Crest Tavern. Country and Western singer Bob Atcher, who later purchased the station, and former Arlington Heights Mayor John G. Woods say the old studio building was nothing more than a small 1 1/2 story white house. Woods recalls the place as a "sparsely decorated and cluttered bungalow." Atcher says that the upstairs of the house was not used. People knew where the station was even though there were no signs or call letters on the building. The licensee of the station was Northwest Suburban Broadcasters. WNWC's tower still stands on the property. The top third of the tower blew down during a 1964 windstorm. Today the structure serves as a relay station for two-way radios in the area.

The site was sold by Atcher to Motorola in 1988. He had continued to own the property long after the station had moved to its present location at 120 W. University Drive around 1967. The frontage of the land was sold about 1971 to Reichardt Cleaners who constructed a new building along Arlington Heights Road about 1972. Its present day address is 1935 N. Arlington Heights Road. WNWC's old studios were torn down around 1970. Later owners were interested in moving the station and erecting another tower.

Former Arlington Heights Mayor John G. Woods remembers that WNWC finally became popular in about April of 1961. Woods, who worked in radio prior to becoming mayor that year, often heard the station being played in local stores. He was employed at three stations (KTBS, KWAH, KRMD) in Shreveport, Louisiana, and perhaps



his interest rubbed off on his son Jonathan who worked at WNWC in the early 60's. Woods was mayor from 1961-1969 (and again for a short time from 1972-1973) was always being interviewed by the station. His son Jonathan was described by Atcher as a promising radio star.

Both knew Atcher quite well and enjoyed their association with each other through the radio station. One of the station's shining moments was its election coverage in April of 1961, the year Woods was elected. Atcher was also in politics. He was the mayor of Schaumburg from 1959-1975. He was also a local developer, owned a film company, and was best known as director of the WLS Barndance Program for many years (see Bob Atcher).

On July 1, 1961 Atcher purchased WNWC from John D. Morgan, installing David Terrill as manager and Kurt Henschen as program director. Other later staffers were Jonathan Woods, David B. Olson, Arthur LeTourneau, Fred Des Peres, Samuel Ayre, and Robert Mahercy, engineer. Another part owner was Thomas Hogan, an executive with the Electrolux Vacuum Cleaner Company.

Almost immediately Atcher and Hogan began a "clean up" of the station. Atcher told the Arlington Heights Daily Herald that he planned to "improve the station's programming and let the people know that [WNWC] was their station and it was here to serve the community."

Weather, civic programs, classical and show tunes and, in general, a good variety of all kinds of music, except rock and roll, was to be featured. Listeners were given two free want ads on the air each day. In December of 1963, WNWC raised money for some needy families in Elk Grove Village. The station's motto was the "Hi-Fidelity Voice of the Northwest."

WNWC was sold on May 1, 1965 for \$110,000 (three times what Atcher paid) to Lester Vihon. Wayne H. Smith was the general manager, Frank Leyva served as commercial manager in 1967, and Fred Barton was the news director. Vihon had previously owned WFMQ-FM in Chicago (WNUS-FM). WNWC continued to be owned by Northwest Suburban Broadcasters where Country and Western music was featured.

By 1967 WNWC had moved to its present address at 120 West University Drive. A construction permit for 3,000 watts with an antenna height of 300 feet was sought. These improvements were installed the following year, possibly with a new antenna at the current site.

Chicago Omnibus and FM guide lists the announcers in 1967-68 as Jim Vincent, Rick van Pelt, Larry Lauer, George Carl, John Terry, Bob Hume, and Ray Smithers. Other programs included Dr. C. R. Goff, Arlington Heights Evangelical Church, and a Sunday night program for St. Peter's Lutheran Church.

WNWC was sold in 1968 for \$150,000 to auto dealer Walter Mack. Duane H. Smith remained at general manager and chief engineer. Well-known Chicago personality Ray Smithers became program director. Call letters that year were switched to WEXI (for Exciting Stereo). [WEXI was the former call letters of an old St. Charles FM station.] By this time WEXI was fully automated.

Country and Western music was dropped in 1968 and a format of "good" music was initiated. Martin C. Burke became general manager. In 1974 WEXI's call letters were changed to WWMM. The station had been sold in 1972 to James Flannery, chairman of Community Broadcasters. John C. DeWitt became president. Jack Stockton, another well-known Chicago personality, became operations manager.

Stereo WWMM's format consisted of contemporary middle of the road music with some talk shows. By 1976 WWMM's format turned to jazz with UPI audio news. Robert Williams was the president. The station's motto became "Radio for the Great Northwest." Joe McClurg's overnight jazz program was featured.

On September 1, 1976, WWMM was purchased by the Trapani family. The new firm, Northwest Community Broadcast, Inc., consisted of Bennett Trapani, president and his son Daniel Trapani, commercial manager. John Schaller, of WAUR, another local broadcaster who would later become WAIT's owner in Crystal Lake, was WWMM's general manager. Some of the station's most successful years came under the Trapani leadership.

At this time, WWMM (standing for Wonderful Wireless Music Machine) was heavy into jazz and local sports. Full time sports and news directors were hired. High school sports along with American Legion baseball games were aired. The station once owned the contract for DePaul basketball games and was part of the White Sox network in the early 70's.

Disc jockeys and department heads attended area town board meetings and there were lots of contests. WWMM, according to Dan Trapani, trained and turned out many broadcasting beginners including Shawn Matthews, Greg von Seeger, Matt Bisbee (WLUP), Susanne Anderson (WKQX), Terry Flynn (WXEZ, WBBM, WCLR, etc.), John Schaller (WAIT, WAUR), Mark Hylan (WBEZ), Ken Cocker (WUSN), Ted Clark Philips (SMN), Bruce Blair



(ESPN) and Jim Dexter. Some of the best broadcasters came from Northern Illinois University, according to Trapani, who watched many WWMM personnel go to bigger stations.

The former managers of WWMM wanted me to mention that few stations served the community as this station did. Many of the staffers were members of local service clubs or sat on community boards. As far as music, WWMM featured jazz and had one of the best recorded libraries anywhere. Today many reels of ten and a half inch mylar tape lay in waste somewhere as a reminder of the stations popular format. The tape was used on automated assist equipment.

By 1981 the Trapani's had sold WWMM to Radio Communications Group, Inc. headed by Steven Pruitt, and Gene Gneuhs. John Bortowski remained as chief engineer. Bennett Trapani today is a local contractor, while his son Dan works for a local television ad agency in Chicago (KATZ Communications). The call letters became WTCO. The Trapani's jazz and middle of the road format was switched back to country music. WTCO lasted one year and was purchased on August 30, 1982 by Chicago broadcaster Darrel Peters of WLOO-FM (and earlier of WMAQ and WEBH).

Peters started a contemporary music format which later developed into "Top Ten Hits" programming. A Pioneer Press article in the mid 1980s showed that the station was completely automated with little announcing. Some special programs were aired on weekends along with a locally produced "Top Ten Countdown" show on Saturday evenings.

Chicago announcer Terry Flynn read "news minutes" on Peters' station while moonlighting at WCLR and other stations. Flynn does evening traffic now on WBBM.

In 1984 Peters ended a long running battle with the FCC over call letter changes. The station became WSEX that year as Peters had sought these unprecedented call letters to draw attention to his station.

In the late 1980s WSEX began to identify more with the Chicago area using Chicago in its station ID's. WSEX became WCBR in 1980. The new station motto is "Chicago's Bear." Disc jockeys and personality have returned to the station. Some sports including professional soccer is also aired on WCBR.

## COUNTRY STAR BOB ATCHER BRINGS SUCCESS TO THE NORTHWEST

We briefly touched on Bob Atcher in the last chapter concerning the operation of WNWC. Just a few lines about this famous star of country and western music does not do him justice. He has been in the entertainment business for over sixty years and is credited with many other accomplishments while serving as Schaumburg Village President. He is remembered not only for his fine years with the WLS Barndance Program (1948-1968), but also as an important civic leader. When Bob wasn't wielding a guitar, he was busy manipulating the forces of Republican government that, in the long run, has paved the way for the continuing success and growth of the Schaumburg area. He was also one of the incorporators of the village.

Atcher served as village president for nearly two decades and was instrumental in helping to extend Route 53 through the area, the building of the John Egan Water Filtration Plant, and 500 meetings later, the creation of the giant Woodfield Shopping Center. He was constantly bringing Chicago businessmen to the area to explain the growth potential of Schaumburg. His time and dedication to this ideal will be enjoyed for generations to come. Atcher does say that his road plans were not followed completely, leaving the area snarled with rush hour gridlock because of the abundance of industry and commerce that he brought to the community. All these innovations for the future came from this Kentucky youth who built upon his musical upbringing, delivering a lifetime of success and betterment to himself and to everyone his music and foresight touched.

Born James Robert Owen "Bob" Atcher, May 11, 1914 in Hardin County, Kentucky, Bob had never strayed from the gift that his father entrusted with him, that of music. Atcher's father George was a world champion fiddler and bestowed his love of music on his son by trading a good coon dog for Bob's first guitar. Bob then played with the rest of his musical family at square dances and community programs in Kentucky and later in North Dakota. The young Atcher learned every country song that was sung by traveling musicians.

Bob shared his love of early mountain tunes with audiences on station WHAS, Louisville, Kentucky. He was a pre-med student at the University of Kentucky which had a studio hook-up with the station at Lexington, and was offered frequent air time. Bob became so popular that he gave up medicine for music. This proved to be the correct prescription as it lead to a lifelong career in the entertainment field which began professionally in 1931.

By 1938, the "dean of cowboy singers" was working closely with the Atlass Brothers, Ralph and Leslie, who had each been given a million dollars by their father, who ran a large farm and egg business in Lincoln, Illinois. The brothers invested heavily into Chicago radio station WBBM and with Bob Atcher who was often heard on the station.

In addition, Atcher worked as the country music director at stations WJJD and WIND in the early 1940s, starting with the WLS Barndance Program in 1948. The show ran on WLS from 1948-1960 and then on WGN-TV and radio from 1960 to about 1968 (some sources say 1970). From 1948-1958 Bob did the Meadow Gold Ranch TV Program and was the spokesman for Meadow Gold products. The program won many awards.

Columbia Records and its various labels had Atcher under contract from 1934 to 1968. During this time, he was the first to record the million seller hits of "Cool Water," and "You Are My Sunshine." His "crying" song, "I'm Thinking Tonight of My Blue Eyes," released in 1939, sold over six million copies. The tune makes fun of a lonely man who severely misses his girlfriend. Atcher carries on crying and wailing in front of a laughing audience after singing the first verse with sincerity. During the third verse, Bob releases a panther-like screech, a characterization that he has been able to do for years. Guitarist Grady Martin is also heard along with the Jordanaires, the Anita Kerr Singers, and the Hoosier Sod Busters. The song was performed in one of Atcher's singing cowboy movies, "Hail to Rangers," and for audiences that he entertained while serving in the army during World War II on Arms Forces Radio. Bob received one-half cent for each of the thirty-five cent 78 RPM records that were sold. Chicago disc jockey Art Hellyer and his turntable sidekick Lenny Kaye often played the popular tune, which was sung as early as 1929 by the A.P. Carter Family. Atcher wrote the melody for the song.

Another million seller was "Pins and Needles in My Heart," sung in 1943 by Atcher and Bonnie "Blue Eyes." Personally, I enjoyed the more sensitive tunes like "The Place Where I Worship" (mountain are altars to God) and "Letter Without Words," in which a man receives only his half of a picture in the mail sent to him by a departing girlfriend. In "Crying Myself to Sleep," Atcher reiterates that men do cry under stressful breakups. The songwriter relates, "It just doesn't matter, so it seems I can't forget you, even in my dreams" (Courtesy Columbia Records). "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain" is another favorite of Atcher's, but he never recorded it; Willie Nelson did.

Atcher has written hundreds of songs, some of which include "Money, Marbles and Chalk," "Methodist Pie" (an old camp meeting song), and "Don't Rob Another Man's Cradle." Some of his best selling albums are "Early American Folk Songs," "Songs of the Saddle," "Bob Atcher's Best," and "Saturday Night at the Old Barn Dance." These albums were listed on a showbill for a YMCA fundraiser sponsored by the Schaumburg Rotary Club in 1975. He also recorded for Capitol and Kapp Records. Who's Who lists him as a broadcaster, but he is known better as a quality musician and the member of three musicians guilds.

In a phone interview from his Prospect, Kentucky home, Atcher says he was in country music when it was a lot cleaner. Bob says, "The only songs that sent out bad messages compared to today's music were tunes like, "Your Cheatin' Heart." He then proceeded to sing over the phone some of the songs that he had written.

Atcher performed daily on WNWC when he owned it for four years beginning in 1961. He had purchased the station from John D. and Margaret Morgan and later sold it for three times what he paid. Morgan operated some sort of mail order business, Atcher recalled. Bob found out that about one-third of the "checks in the mail" for commercials were always running late. With updated programming and equipment the station at last became profitable. Bob hired announcers Rich Harrington, Dave Olson, and Jonathan Woods.

WNWC carried church services from St. Peter's Lutheran Church for many years. Long time area resident and church member Oscar Maierhoffer visited the station one day and remarked, "the turntables they got there are as big as washtubs." Maierhoffer, a distant relative of mine, was astonished over the size of the equipment that was used to play sixteen inch transcription discs. Atcher soon replaced this antiquated stuff with new tape decks and cartridge players. His staff experimented with music voice overs attempting to make the station sound more professional. The transmitter, which kept drifting off frequency, was also stabilized. WNWC did not have any remote equipment during Atcher's tenure, so live sports were not carried. However, local news was features, and Bob performed live each day on the station, which eventually played all country and western music.

One of WNWC's highlights was Atcher's "Pioneers in Progress" programs where Bob interviewed long time area residents. These early oral history programs were believed turned over the local historical society. No doubt the guests interviewed talked about the area's past before commercial development and mentioned names like John Hendrick's Grain and Feed Store located across from the station. (My grandfather, Glenn Ghrist, Sr., worked there

for many years before the area was turned into massive shopping centers.) Just to the northeast on the same corner as the station, still standing, is the Pine Crest Tavern owned by Frances and Margret Kafka and Joe Kovalik. Long time residents call the once farm and forested area "whiskey hollow," perhaps because the tavern was frequented by area farmers set to do some "serious drinking" on Saturday nights. There were other bars in the area. Reichardt Cleaners sets in front of the approximate spot of the WNWC building. The old tower is now owned by Motorola and stands just to the south of the Pine Crest Tavern. About a third of the tower toppled over in 1964 during a huge wind storm, just missing the studio building. Bob recalls that the station was well-liked in the area. Several of his announcers went into Chicago radio. Atcher singled out Jonathan Woods as a hard working performer with much potential in the radio field.

One night Bob received a call at his home that a record was merely "tracking" over the air. When he drove to the station, he found Woods asleep on the floor. The popular young man had driven all day to pick up a needed power tube for the transmitter and had attempted to stay awake to do his board shift. Jonathan was later killed in an auto accident in 1966 on the way to a friend's wedding in California.

Tragedy of a different kind struck Atcher himself in 1963 when his Schaumburg home completely burned. He, his wife and their three children (Robert, Mary, and Cecily Ann) escaped, but the family lost nearly everything, including all of Atcher's memorabilia and a double set of all of the records he had recorded. Today, Bob goes around to flea markets paying up to fifteen dollars for his old 78 RPM records that once sold for thirty-five cents each. Home disasters were not new for Bob. As a child he watched as the family home was swept away by the raging Ohio River.

Operating the radio station was a major interest of Atcher's until he became further involved with Schaumburg government and development. He also operated an industrial film company at the same time and something had to go. The station was sold in 1965, so that Atcher could devote more time as Schaumburg Village President. He served in this capacity from 1959-1975, and many years without a salary.

It was often rumored that Atcher or another group were interested in opening another station in Schaumburg. Frequency searches have been made in the area, but a new station never materialized. Atcher said he was much too busy at the time to open another station.

From music to radio to government, Bob Atcher has served his fans and constituents well. Deriving the most benefit in recent years have been the people of Schaumburg, who has seen Bob's unselfish devotion and how his early realistic planning has paid off in countless dividends to the community.

Each year Bob and his wife Maggie (nee Marguerite Whitehill of Chicago and one of three female vocalists who recorded with Bob under the name "Bonnie Blue Eyes) give a little more of themselves when performing at the annual Schaumburg Septemberfest on Labor Day weekend. Atcher started this event in 1971 and even at age 78 years young, he plans to continue to attend and play for the folks that love his music and share in all the good things that he has done for the community.

Early radio merchandisers who advertised in the Arlington Heights Daily Herald in 1926 were: William Busse, mayor of Mount Prospect, sold Globe radio sets; Elfring's Radio and Shoe Repair, Bensenville, sold M. B. Sleeper sets; S. G. Hodgkins, 307 Dunton, Arlington Heights, sold Ozarka sets; W. P. Melzer Grocery Store-Northbrook, sold Dayton sets; Harry Schlenker, Palatine, sold deForest, Crosley, Sonora, and RCA sets; and J. H. Therrien Co., Northbrook, sold Premier, Howard, and Atwater-Kent sets.

## WHCM

### Harper College

Sometime in the near future, a well-thought out education station will be going on the air at Harper College in Palatine. Currently, the school operates its "wired" station through a speaker system in most of the campus buildings. The station is also heard on channels 19, 59, 91, as the background audio on two local cable TV operations (TCI and Continental). Radio programming is fed over the channels when the school is not broadcasting its telecourses. Studios are located in Building A at the College Center of William Rainey Harper College, 1200 West Algonquin Road (Route 62). Harper was a former president of the University of Chicago from 1981 to 1906 and a professor of Semitic languages and literature.

The current call letters being used by the school are WHCM, standing for Harper College Music. The station features Top 40, pop, and rock music during the day and adult contemporary music at night. Disc jockeys



do two-hour programs. News is rewritten from local newspapers. Some campus news and interview programs are also presented. About 40 students are involved in the operation. Interest in the facility varies from year to year.

WHCM operates from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday-Saturday, except during the summer. The station closes down on Friday afternoons to record its interview programs. A staff of four directors are appointed by the school to operate WHCM. The Director of Student Activities, Jeanne Pankanin of Elgin, oversees the station.

Ms. Pankanin says that the operation shuns the usual "alternative" programming of college stations. "Since we are broadcast over public address systems and cable channels, we cannot be easily turned off, so we present music that does not offend anyone." A glance at WHCM's music survey sheet compiled by music director Brian J. Shaver revealed that the station plays current pop hits. Some commercial ads were sold on WHCM last year. The 1992 student director was Rebecca Mandel.

WHCM has operated since 1973 and has applied to the FCC for an educational FM license. A frequency search for a 400 watt station to service the local area began in 1986. WHCM's current call letters are presently in use by a commercial station, so a call letter change is expected when the station goes on the air sometime in 1993. The college recently approved funds for an antenna, which will be mounted on top of Building A. The station's facilities which are across the hall from its earlier site, consists of two studios, a large record library, and offices. Chicago NBC executive Tom Schnecke is WHCM's Technical advisor and was responsible for securing used WMAQ/WKQX equipment for the station.

Harper College hopes that the new station will be an exciting outreach of the campus, acquainting the community with its activities and programs.

### **WFBH**

#### **Forest View High School**

A few students and former administrators remember that there was once a radio station at Forest View High School. WFBH (standing for Forest View High) operated from 1975 to 1981. The 10 watt station broadcasted mostly in the evening and was directed by LeRoy Thompson.

Thompson took on the gratis sponsorship of the station coordinating students from the electronics class to build studios and equipment.

Previous to this time, radio fever had already been evident at the school. A "ham" radio station had been constructed and programs aired over the school's PA system carried the WFBH call letters. Michael Suchecki assisted Thompson in managing the station. Lee Badgett later became program director.

Education programs, country and western, jazz, classical, and middle of the road music was featured. School sports contests were aired.

With its 100 foot antenna, WFBH's signal could only be heard about five miles away. Former Forest View High principal Leo Hunt, now at Elk Grove High School, stated that interest in the station gradually dwindled. Faculty advisors received no salary for their extracurricular work with the station.

WFBH, which signed on January 29, 1975, went off the air permanently in 1981. In 1986, due to declining enrollment, Forest View High School closed down. The building, at 2121 South Goebbert, is currently used as an administration building for six other high schools. Part of the building is rented out to Roosevelt University.

Former WFBH manager LeRoy Thompson is now an industrial arts teacher at Wheeling High School.

### **WPPR**

#### **Barrington High School**

For a few years Barrington High School operated their own 10 watt FM station. WPPR premiered in 1976 at 88.5 mhz. Julie Dister a student at the school was the station manager, Linas Klygas, Eric Vetter, and Todd Gillespie, were staff members. The station has been inactive for several years, even though it has been listed annually in the Broadcast Yearbook. Studios for WPPR located in the school administration center (now the nurses office) have been dismantled. The station's antenna still stands in the court yard behind the school.

Barrington School's media coordinator Joyce Karon, stated that WPPR's programming consisted of mostly music. A lack of adult supervision forced the closing of the station a short time after it was opened. Hugh Frebault, a since retired teacher, was the station's faculty sponsor. Amateur radio classes conducted by Angelo Polvere



(KA9CSO) and Jim Deards (WD9HGI) of the Barrington Amateur Radio Society at the school at night, turned out many local hams in the late 1980s (including me).

## LAKE COUNTY RADIO

### HIGHLAND PARK RADIO WEEF/WVXX

It would be easy to be confused with the two present stations that serve Highland Park. Both were once under the same ownership, and moved twice. Even though they are currently owned separately, both stations are now located in the same building (210 Skokie Valley Road).

In 1962, construction permits were issued to Eli E. Fink for WNSH AM/FM. The station's mailing address then was 135 La Salle Street in Chicago.

WNSH AM became a 1000 watt station at 1430 khz. WNSH-FM increased to 3000 watts in 1976, at 103.1 mhz. Both stations signed on August 15, 1963, and soon after the call letters were changed to WEEF AM/FM. The operation boasted in 1966 that WEEF AM-FM were the only stations serving the north shore suburbs. Through the 1960s WEEF maintained its three tower array near Lake-Cook Road and Pfingsten Road. Vandals once knocked one tower down near the old brickyard. Later WEEF moved its antenna site to near the intersection of Aptakisic and Weiland Roads. Deerfield Chamber of Commerce Director Bob York stated that the village was glad when WEEF's rickety towers were finally replaced by development at the Lake Cook site. Eli E. Fink continued as president, Howard Fisher was the General Manager, Dean Osborne, Jim Martinsen, and Jack Kelly were all early program directors. Herbert Schoenbrod and Mrs. Julius Epstein were also part owners. (The call letters of the station were taken from Fink's initials). By 1966 WEEF AM-FM was owned by both Fink and Harry Balaban. Complete Broadway musicals were aired along with local news and events. The owner of the simulcast stations in 1969 was Unique Radio. Original studios were located at 443 Central Avenue.

In 1973 both stations were sold to Vanguard Communications. ABC news and a progressive music format was begun. James Hoffman was president of the stations. In 1974, call letters to both stations were changed to WVXX AM/FM. By 1977 both stations carried much foreign language programming. The AM featured Greek and Arabic shows, while German music was programmed on the FM side. Some programs aired on both stations.

In 1978 WVXX AM became WQVQ. Under the same owners both stations moved to 210 Skokie Valley Road. Foreign language, special programs, and ABC news were featured. Universal Broadcasting bought WVXX-FM in 1978, and Bill Paar became General Manager. Some inspirational talk and ethnic programs were featured. By 1979 WQVQ was purchased by Metroweb Inc., Fred Eychaner president. The "Jazz Doctor" Brad Saul became news director. In 1980 WQVQ AM became WEEF again while WVXX-FM programmed oldies, religion, German, and Spanish programs. Both stations seemed to be going their separate ways, occasionally selling time to the same types of broadcasters.

In 1982, the AM station WEEF sought a construction permit for 1000 watt operation at night and featured some Jewish programming. The FCC issued WEEF a permit for 29 watts of power to be used after sunset. The FM station WVXX-FM increased its antenna height continuing with its varied format of oldies, religion, and Spanish programs. It broadcasts with 3,000 watts.

WEEF was purchased in 1985 by Gordon H. Winston which programmed heavily to the local Jewish community. Both stations continue to be multi-cultural in format. WVXX-FM programs heavy metal music all night, departing from its daily foreign language programs.

Sig Sakowicz has a daily talk show on WVXX-FM "The Real 103." Both stations continue to be owned separately and also carry licenses for the city of Deerfield.

### WMXM/WABA

#### Lake Forest College

Like many other colleges, Lake Forest needed a broadcast outlet for students. By 1973 most colleges and high schools already had working operations. Plans had begun for such an operation by John S. Munshower, the school's business manager.

On September 10, 1973, WMXM signed on with 10 watts with an antenna height of 86 feet. Its frequency has always been 88.9 mhz. Richard Wood was the general manager in 1975; Arnie Milan, program director; Sara Farrington, music director; and Dan Golden, news director. Progressive music was featured.

Fred Cary Garfield was the general manager through the 70's followed by Ann Shillinglaw, Eugene Hotchkiss III, and Adam Hoffberg. James Atkinson was the program director in the mid 80's.

In 1982 Lake Forest College received a construction permit to increase power to 300 watts and move their antenna to 109 feet. Power was increased in 1987 and the tower height was extended the following year. Art Schmidt was the engineer.

Associate Dean of Students Wayne Doleski now oversees the station, which is operated by 60-70 students. Doleski says he intervenes very little into the operations of WMXM which is totally programmed by the students. The stereo station features a mixed bag of talk shows, jazz, and alternative music. There are two studios which are located in the Student Union building. Its antenna is on the roof.

There is no broadcast curriculum at the school. Students prepare two newscasts per day. There is no wire service. Some college sports are presented. Corrina Chauvin is the current program director. Bob Blair became the general manager in 1991.

## WABA

### Lake Forest College's First Station

The roots of broadcasting go deeper than Lake Forest's current station WMXM. Actually, the college operated one of the first radio stations in the Chicago area. On April 17, 1923, the college received a license to operate WABA, an AM station broadcasting at 1130 khz. The station's first studios were located in the school's chapel building. It's class "C" license (#1095), allowed the station to operate at 100 watts.

On July 23, 1923, according to Broadcast Profile, WABA closed its doors for the summer. WABA's license expired in 1924. A new license and dial position was issued for the college station on January 8, 1925. T.T. Haviland, operator of the college station, opted for Thursday and Friday night broadcasting. On January 12, of that year a "gala" program was held to mark the return of the station to the airwaves. Its new frequency was 1320 khz.

By February, WABA, operated Wednesday nights at 7:00 p.m., and aired weekday morning, "Daily Chapel" programs at 10:00 a.m. from the Presbyterian based college. It's power had been increased to 200 watts. On July 2, 1925, the station's license expired again, and due to it's inactive status, the Federal Radio Commission deleted its license on October 14, 1925.

The college was "radio silent" until 1973, when WMXM, the school's current FM station was placed on the air. The college's librarian Art Miller, says much of WABA's history has been lost, or difficult to locate.

## VERNON HILLS

### Deerfield/Bannockburn Radio

The historical collections of the Deerfield and Bannockburn areas are largely incomplete, noting little information about the media in the past. There were also no newspapers to serve the area until recent years. Hence, numerous officials were consulted along with some long time residents in search of information about radio in these North suburban areas. Neither Deerfield or Bannockburn has ever had a radio station to serve its growing population.

In recent years, WNVR at 1030 khz, signed on March 1, 1988. Frank Kavenik, a radio veteran of WGN and WCBR, built the station in his hometown of Vernon Hills. Kavenik is president of Midwest Radio Associates Limited. The station's original call was WLMV.

WNVR represented the most serious attempt to serve North Shore listeners in recent years. Early programming consisted of a variety of announcers and columnists reading articles from the News Voice Newspaper. The call letters of the station stood for We're News Voice Radio.

The New Voice Newspapers, headquartered in Highland Park, was a string of eleven shoppers that eventually became important weekly newspapers under the direction of William H. Rentschler. Rentschler, himself was often heard as a columnist on the station. He felt that the idea to inform listeners through print and radio was a good one. (It was not an original idea, as Sun-Times staffers did the newsbreaks on Chicago's channel 32 in the 1960s live from the newspaper's offices). However, Rentschler stated that without a large parent firm to provide financial resources, through the operation's initial stages, the service could not continue. He poured much of his own

money into the operation (about \$150,000) to keep it going. WNVR hired Kyle Leonard, son of WGN's Roy Leonard to oversee the operation. The station's power output is 500 watts.

"We didn't know much about radio, and relied on management to supply the programming know-how," recalled Rentschler, who also stated that area communities had started talking about the station, and had started listening.

Perhaps the highlight of the operation's short tenure was its extensive coverage of a tragic shooting and hostage situation in May of 1988 that gripped the village of Winnetka. The station's on the spot reporting of the incident rivaled that of the Chicago stations, Rentschler said.

The News Voice newspapers acquired in 1983, ceased publication on January 30, 1991. A great blow to the company was the loss of a rather lucrative contract to publish the Great Lakes Bulletin, which served the nearby Navy base. Coupled with recession, the loss of the 24,000 circulation military publication, and the fact that WNVR had begun re-airing recorded news segments quite repetitively, Rentschler and Kavenik parted ways.

Today Rentschler publishes the "Rentschler Report," writes books, and does a regular column for North Shore Magazine. He ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. Senate in 1960.

After News Voice had gone off the air, WNVR's owner Frank Kavenik joined the 80 member Business Radio Network. BNR headquartered in Colorado Springs, Colorado provides up to the minute news, financial news, plus interesting features on loans, home buying, investing, and other consumer information. Kavenik says his 500 watt station with pre-sunrise authority operation reaches two million people. While BNR provides most of the station's programming, some local financial experts are featured on weekend talk shows. Kavenik says that in order for any small AM station to be successful, it must find a "niche" and zero in on some specialized format that appeals to a wide audience. Apparently making money and getting sound financial advice appeals to Kavenik and his listeners.

WNVR Business Radio 1030, has broadcast facilities in Arlington Heights, and at its transmitter site in Vernon Hills. Earlier offices were located at 950 North Western Avenue in Lake Forest. For a short time the Great America Theme Park operated a remote studio and broadcasted promotional material over WNVR after 9:00 p.m. in 1989.

Kavenik is a true crusader of radio. He likes talking about his early radio days with the WGN family. He grew up in the area, recalling when the Atcher Tower at Arlington Heights Road and Route 12 (WNWC now WCBR) was the only local radio in the area. The tower once fell over onto adjacent streets. Now all of this radio knowledge is being used to further a new age of the electronic media, as Kavenik's WNVR now means "business" to the Chicagoland area.

#### WHT--William Hale Thompson

A station more aligned with Chicago than Bannockburn located its tower and transmitter in this tiny community in the 1920s. The station was WHT which had built facilities near the southeast corner of Route 43 (Waukegan Road) and Route 22. This would be about 1500 feet north of Deerfield High School near the present day Bannockburn Office Complex.

Former WHFC and NBC engineer Bob Smith recalls that two towers once stood on the property, one on each side of a brick or stone structure that housed the station's transmitter. A large board hung on one of the towers with the call letters printed on it.

WHT stood for the initials of a then popular Chicago Mayor William Hale Thompson, (The station's sign off announcer often stated that WHT also stood for "Write Home Tonight," urging visitors to stay in touch with those back home) or Wrigley's high tower.

Thompson was Chicago's chief executive between 1915-1923, and then again from 1927-1931. The station was started in 1923, to help Thompson get reelected. Studios were located in the Wrigley Building. "Big Bill" and his backers, Carter Blatchford who served as secretary-treasurer, and Matthew O. Bliesius, who was chairman of the board of directors formed the WHT Radiophone Corporation in 1923. WHT operated in 1928 at 980 khz with 5,000 watts sharing time with WIBO. It had used 750 khz and 1260 khz with 3,500 watts of power in 1926.

Prior to WHT's sign on, the station printed up a half million souvenir program guides. Rockford newspapers carried progress stories on the construction of the station. A 44,000 pound "switching" unit was installed at WHT's transmitter site. The newspapers listed George Carlson as General Manager and Herbert Mintz as program



director in 1925. After the station came on the air, Charles Burke became program director. Concerts, plays, and even a regular program on proper grammar usage were aired.

A 1927 Chicago Tribune schedule for Sunday listed the following programs on 400 meters: Organ Concert, Sunshine Hour, Shepard Time for the Children, Aerial Girls Program, Radio Rnager, Fellowship Program, Missionary Program, Orchestra Concert, and at 10:30 p.m. a request program followed by Paul Rader and National Radio Chapel Staff.

Listeners of the time recall hearing singers Minnie Glumpf, Jacob Ginsberg, and the "Cute Trio," composed of Addison Sims, Cracker Barrel Joe, and "Silly" Sylvester Lee. WWSW's Hugh Aspinwall (or Aspinwell) of the Palatine Lions Club directed a Christmas program in December of 1926. Gladys Moan and her "Moaning Jazz Band" also performed between "favorable" announcements and commercials about Thompson, which helped him gain reelection in 1927. The station was first in propaganda programming long before the "cold war Tokoyo Rose" broadcasts. An article found in an April 1927 issue of a Belvedere newspaper stated that two local favorites, Clarence and Ruby Russell of Genoa, Illinois, would sing on WHT that night. "Big Bill" had also asked Evangelist Paul Rader of WJBT to speak on WHT. Al Carney was often heard as an announcer on the station along with another program "Collyer's Sport Gossip."

Thompson was a very controversial political figure, passing away in 1944. He was also a friend of WTAS owner and lawyer Charles Erbstein. WHT operated until about 1930, but its tower and transmitter building lasted into the 1970s before progress and development in the area won out. (see WORD).

WHFC engineer Bob Smith remembers that a small decorative pool had been built in the front part of the property. He toured the station some years later and discovered that the interior of the building had been completely stripped out inside. Local historian Don Wroblewski, an area architect remembers that only one tower stood in the 1960s. It still had lights on it about 1965, as it was being used for other radio purposes. This fact was substantiated by local ham George Schleicher (W9NLT). Schleicher, was a former Deerfield Village Board member. He was introduced to me by Deerfield Librarian Jack Hicks. George, who had worked at two Iowa stations WOI, and KBIZ, later was employed by Illinois Bell Telephone. The phone company and several other clients rented space for marine, mobile, and two way radio service off the tower.

The first experimental cellular phones in the area also operated off this tower according to Schleicher, who was an engineer for the utility. Transmitters for all the services that hung on the 175 foot tower were located either in the house or in some adjoining sheds. Wroblewski stated that a 1 1/2 story home was located between the towers. It was made of brick and looked spanish in style, with curved windows. He speculated that the structure resembled, the nearby Insull home. It had been added on to in the rear.

The Illinois Historic Structure Survey in 1973 took pictures of the building, but apparently were not very interested in it. Area residents say that a family named "Phillips" once lived there in the early 1960. This was Bill Phillips, a Zenith executive who purchased and lived in the home after the WHT days. Carl Swanson, Sr., (W9SCN) who also worked for the firm, stated Phillips used the towers to operate his ham station. Bill later retired in Arizona. Swanson says all of the WHT equipment in the exquisite home was sold for scrap when the station went off the air around 1930.

Although the historic house and radio station aroused the curiosity of Wroblewski, Schleicher, Smith and Hicks, the local police departments had a different viewpoint.

Deerfield Police Sgt. William Butler and Bannockburn Police Chief Tom Potter participated in a county raid of the home around 1965. Several burglary suspects were arrested at the then rented home. According to Don Wroblewski's records, the former radio station building was demolished after a fire in 1976. The tower was removed shortly afterwards.

## WAUKEGAN RADIO WPEP/WKRS/WXLC

The city of Waukegan continues to be the home of three distinctive radio services and one early defunct operation. Radio began in Waukegan on December 1, 1926 when the US Department of Commerce Bureau of Navigation Radio Division issued a license for WPEP.

WPEP's studios were located at 133 South Genesee Street in Waukegan (The Madrid Ballroom), moving the next year to 140 Hazel Court. Maurice Mayer, the city's building commissioner and member of the city's police force, was the owner of the 250 watt station. According to Broadcast Profile WPEP was ordered off the air in May



of 1928 due to a judgement for unpaid salaries. The station resurfaced with low power, but was taken off the air on May 24, 1928. The FRC canceled its license in September of 1928.

Waukegan's WPEP represents the continuing saga of the many very old stations which have long faded from the memories of city residents. Actually, WPEP was not around very long, and quickly disappeared for basically financial reasons. Being one of the first stations on the air in the area, WPEP began with the usual pomp and curiosity. Nearly two years after its initial broadcast, its only traces today are some scattered articles in the 1926-1928 Waukegan Daily News and Sun Newspaper. There apparently was not enough "PEP" in WPEP to keep it going.

Several long time city residents stated in an interview that Mayer was "one of the most good looking men to have ever walked the streets of Waukegan." He was also regarded as one of the best jazz piano players, playing in the "Coon Sanders" style. This was symbolic of the Chicago musicians who could play any toe-tapping standard by ear.

Mayer was a member of the 1920 U.S. Olympic Swim Team, coming from a whole family of sports minded individuals. His brother Sid was captain of the University of Illinois swimming team and had played football with Red Grange. His daughter Gloria was a tennis champion, while his son Henry had played high school football. Morrie himself had competed in swimming with Johnny Weissmuller and was a member of the Chicago Athletic Club. As the city's building commissioner, he and his father and brother helped build many of the major roads in the area.

It was at WPEP where Morrie met his wife Agatha, but prior to that Mayer appeared to be the "heartthrob" of nearly every single woman in Waukegan. Mayer's younger half-sister Laura Hiney says women would just stare at him while he was on patrol at the busy corner of Washington and Genesse Street. Besides being considered good looking, Morrie had a sternness about him, which probably made him an excellent police officer. When he stopped a vehicle for a traffic violation, the people knew they were in trouble. His 250 pound frame, resting on a car's running board, almost made the vehicle tip over.

Mayer joined the Waukegan Police Force on October 13, 1931. He made \$175 a month as an officer in 1932, becoming a Sergeant on November 16, 1945. Mrs. Hiney says if Morrie liked you, he was your friend for life. He was very generous and thoughtful about the people he cared about, including his family. Mrs. Nathan Rosenbloom (Josephine Foster) also knew of Mayer's radio station and popularity. Also remarking that he was a good looking stout man with dark hair, dark eyes, and a real catch for the right lady.

Much of Mayer's time in the mid 1920s was spent tinkering with his radio set. He had contacted Admiral Byrd during polar expeditions by radio, now he was set to begin "regular" broadcasting.

Test broadcasts began around December 11, 1926. Mayer had purchased four radio sets for testing purposes placing two of them in Chicago and the other two at sites in Waukegan. Studio acoustics consisted of drapes hung in the front of the ballroom installed by the Globe Department Store.

WPEP's first broadcast actually took place on December 29, 1926. Special speakers congratulating the station's commencement were county Judge P.L. Persons, Waukegan Daily Sun editor Nick Keller and commissioner Al Carney. Carney reminded the audience that there were now two Al Carney's on the air, (speaking of an announcer at WHT-Deerfield-Chicago) with the same name.

The inaugural program featured soloist Theresa Cook whom the newspaper described as sounding just as good and clear as the soloists on Chicago stations. Musical selections by the Frank Wallin Orchestra with drummer Harry Hathaway were interspersed in the program. During the show, a telegram was received by a listener in California. Waukegan area listeners seemed to enjoy their station's first broadcast. (Incidentally, Wallin is pronounced Wall-Leen. He was a past mayor of the city.)

The 250 station operated at 1390 khz, then later at 1410 khz, featuring mostly music and news. From then on WPEP seemed to receive less attention from listeners and the public. Well-known area pianist Pearl Roman was slated to appear in a future broadcast. Frank Wallin's "Kings of Harmony" played New Year's Eve, 1927, along with Billy Weinberg's "Vaudeville Revue."

On February 11, 1927, WTAS owner Charles Erbstein emceed a "Spanish War Veteran's Dance" on the station. The event featured members of the Ziegfield Follies, the Darling Twins, Earl Jack's Land-O-Lakes Merrymakers, and Frank Wallin's Broadcast Orchestra. The program from "You Know the Place," the Madrid Ballroom was broadcast over WPEP. The Madrid, at that time, was also referred to as "Waukegan's Popular Ballroom."

Local programming consisted of talks by local officials. Lester Benfrom spoke on behalf of the American Legion in a 1927 program. A June 29, 1927 program featured a recital with pianist Mrs. Walter Worth and students from the Arion Music and Drama Club.

Waukegan listeners, however, appeared to have their ears turned elsewhere and missed some good original programming. A local musical team, Jim and Hank (harmonica and banjo) were often featured on WRRS, Racine, Wisconsin. Waukegan city officials also donated a "wagon" to Sam and Henry (Amos & Andy on WGN) in response to one of their skits on WGN radio. The Waukegan Daily Sun listed WPEP as airing nightly programs at 7:30 p.m. and 10:00 p.m.

By early 1927, Mayer had moved the station and transmitter to his home at 140 Hazel Court, which was located just behind the Madrid Ballroom. In May of 1928, WPEP was ordered off the air because of a judgement against the station for unpaid salaries.

A May 28, 1928 article in the Waukegan Daily Sun stated the station had been off the air for two months. All of the tubes had blown out in the station's transmitter when WPEP had attempted to broadcast the Joliet sectional basketball tournament. The station was expected to lose its license soon as the FRC was determined to close down many small, unprofessional stations with irregular schedules.

WPEP returned to the air for a short time with limited manpower, finally shutting down for good on August 24, 1928. The FRC officially canceled WPEP's license on September 28, 1928, even though the station was listed in a suburban phone book in 1931.

After WPEP had moved into Mayer's Hazel Court home, the station's original location at 133 South Genesse became the Achen Motor Central Garage. A series of furniture stores as well as Sears and Spiegel occupied the building in later years. Most of the area behind the thrift store east to Sheridan Road is a parking lot, to the northeast a large two-story home, which today is number 125 Genesse.

Waukegan Historical Society Museum coordinator Sharon Laughlin says the Madrid Ballroom was one of several such establishments operating during the 1920s in the city. City officials say the Salvation Army Thrift Store that occupies 133 Genesse, and built around 1920, has been remodeled many times over the years dating back to the ballroom. Mayer's other property at 140 Hazel Court is shown on a 1929 Sanborn map as an old dingy two-story tenement house that was torn down many years ago for parking. Mayer lived at two other locations: 415 Ridgeland and 202 Keith.

After a lengthy career as a Waukegan Police Officer in charge of accident prevention and police photography, Mayer moved to Miami to teach swimming to youngsters. He had retired from the police force because of a disability in 1947.

Morrie Mayer will be remembered for his many years in law enforcement, as a world class swimmer, and as the city's first radio station owner. He passed away on March 7, 1969 in Homestead, Florida at the age of 65.

In his later years Morrie operated a gas station and was a Miami detective. His wife Agatha and son Henry still reside in Florida.

For a brief time Gene T. Dyer, the long time owner of WAIT in Chicago, operated WCBD out of the Karcher Hotel in 1935. WCBD is generally regarded as belonging to the Zion Christian Catholic Church, WAIT and WCBD would operate together later on. (See Zion radio). Today the Karcher Hotel is an abandoned boarded up structure at the southwest corner of Washington Street and Utica Street, in downtown Waukegan. Sometime ago the building was converted into a Senior Citizens Center, a fire damaged the building a few years ago and several people were killed.

### WKRS Brings Community Service to Waukegan

For the most part, Waukegan was without a real radio station until September 25, 1949. Frank H. Just the president of the News Sun Broadcasting Company built and opened WKRS AM/FM that year. WKRS-AM operated with 1000 watts at 1220 khz, and still does. (its original frequency was 1200 khz). Short-lived WKRS-FM operated with 12,000 watts at 106.7 mhz. This was at the beginning of the second FM era, after the band had been moved to 88-108 mhz. WKRS-FM was licensed under Keystone Printing Service at 116-120 Madison Street, another firm owned by the Just family.

Through the early 1950s Frank H. Just promoted his operation as Lake County's only station. He established a news bureau in McHenry as well, and also owned the Waukegan News Sun, Lake County's only daily

newspaper. Early WKRS staffers included Joseph Kirby, general manager; Palmer Clark, commercial manager; Alfred Fritz Sorenson, program director; and M.D. Hunnincutt, junior engineer.

WKRS-FM closed down in 1952. William L. Just, Frank's son became president of WKRS-AM in 1957 followed by Alfred Fritz Sorenson in 1959. Frank's other children, F. Ward Just and Mary Just Anderson, were also active in the station's early management. WKRS was the proper marriage of a newspaper and radio station under the same ownership in the same market. Both entities helped double the capacity of news coverage in the area, which was Frank Just's original purpose of the station.

According to A.F. (Fritz) Sorenson station manager, in 1964 a News-Sun interview, the station was to be a community operation for mature audiences. Sorenson said, "The basic policy of the station is to present news and information in a responsible manner especially tailored to local listenership and to combine this with a variety of quality music designed for adults."

A popular program on the station at the time was "Viewpoint," which comprised comments from guests and listeners, and not station management. Its host was Larry Leonard. Other 1960s personalities and news reporters were, Richard "Dick" Tuschscherer, Dave Davis, Allen Armstrong, Jim Jordan, Kieth Ryan, Paula Ervin, Irene Degen, John Lauer, and Van Sells, Samuel Kebak, and Verne Buland were engineers. Ryan was a sports announcer, while Sells, for many years did her daily McHenry County Newscast. Dave Allen a later talk show host, stated that WKRS, has always been a "hit" with the adult audience, with a continuing emphasis on local news. Another popular program on WKRS is "Swap Shop" hosted by Walt Stare. Stare has worked for several North Suburban stations including WZBN, Zion. On October 1, 1987, H. and D. Radio Ltd. purchased both WKRS and WXLC for \$5.5 million. Hal Coxon is the general manager and the program director is Dan Keeney.

#### WEFA/WXLC

FM radio returned to Waukegan when the FCC issued a construction permit in 1963, for a 1000 watt FM station. WEFA was set to broadcast at 102.3 mhz. The station was located at 4 South Genesee Street. Goldie Luftig was president; Deane Osborne served as general manager of the new station. Staffers in 1967 were Carl Hansen, Knut Shad, Ron Bleck, Gordon Duncan, Art Contois, Rick Goodwing, John Kelly, and Art Bailey.

By 1970, WEFA had begun selling much broadcast time to ethnic broadcasters while WKRS continued to be a local news and information station and a member of the Mutual Broadcasting Network.

WEFA had increased its power to 3000 watts in 1972. Through the 1970s WKRS continued with mostly the same staff including Jerry Cray, commercial manager; David L. Davis, program director; Dick Tuschscherer, news director, and Verne Buland, engineer.

Roger Kaplan, WEFA's former general manager, bought WEFA in 1977. Ed Curran became the music director. A variety of ethnic, middle of the road and country music programs continued to 1981. That year the call letters were changed to WXLC. An adult contemporary format was begun along with ABC news.

In 1983 Roger Kaplan purchased WKRS. Both stations are located at 3250 Belvidere Road and operate separately. WKRS-AM continues as a local adult talk and news station featuring ABC news; WXLC "(Hot 102.3)" is a 3000 watt top 40 station. Nick Farella became the program director in 1991 for H. and D. Radio Ltd.

The other Waukegan radio station is WKGA which operates at 1500 khz. Owned by the Liberty Broadcasting Company, it was formerly located in Zion. WKGA programs in spanish and is located 215 Water Street. It broadcasts with 250 watts. North Shore Broadcasting Group Inc. purchased the station in April of 1990.

#### ZION RADIO

##### WCBD/WZBN/WNIZ

The roots of radio in the city of Zion can be traced back to two men each with different goals in mind; however, through the years each of these gentlemen created a splendid broadcasting product which has since never been duplicated in the city.

To discuss the beginnings of radio in Zion a short understanding of the city's foundation is necessary. The city of Zion was basically a religious community and the creation of Dr. John Alexander Dowie. At the center of the city was the Zion Christian Catholic Church, which for many years controlled the city's housing, business and industries. Only during the 1929 depression era, did the Zion Church community fall on bad times. It later revived then as the rest of the country slowly recovered.



Dowie, who passed away in 1907, had appointed another energetic church leader Wilbur Glenn Voliva to manage the church and serve as mayor. Voliva had been active in the movement in 1895. He had been the overseer of the church's original settlement in Sidney, Australia.

A group of hopeful church officials had arrived in 1904 to start setting up the city of Zion which had been founded in 1901. A minister of the church, Jabez Taylor, who wrote the book "The Development of the City of Zion," explains that leader Dowie had recognized Voliva's administrative capacities. While Dowie suffered from deteriorating health, he had sent for Voliva to come to Zion and be the city's next "overseer." Mrs. Dowie had originally thought that she would be named Mayor.

Voliva, upon gaining control of the city in 1906, reorganized its financial structure eliminating money that had been set aside for personal use by Dr. Dowie. Dowie took the matter to court but lost and later passed away. Taylor explains that the church's message of salvation, healing, and holy living did not change with Dr. Dowie's passing. But under Voliva the city of Zion began to grow and prosper. Several factories and businesses sprung up with the help of outside investments. City improvements, like streets and parkways, were added to the new community. Voliva owned interest in most of the city's businesses, as well as large tracts of land in and around Zion. He insisted on full control of the city's industry.

Many newcomers to the area did not care for Voliva's conservative ways or "blue laws" that governed the city. A 1921 article in the Rockford Morning Star described the controversial "fierce battle in the holiest city." Police had begun to crack down on a vigilant group composed of some one thousand members of the Grace Missionary Church, pastored by Rev. Thomas H. Nelson. The group fought against Voliva's control of parks, restriction of other religions, and codes against modern dress and hair styles. Even the operation of drug stores, vaccinations, movie houses, baseball, and sale of ice cream were against the law. Smoking and operating businesses, especially restaurants, on Sunday were forbidden. Voliva ordered wholesale arrests and numerous fights broke out in the city. Voliva said of the 11 square mile area, "This city and every inch of its land is consecrated to God. I'm ruler here, and those who do not want to obey my will, will have to get out!" A holy war had indeed broken out.

According to the Rockford newspaper article, Nelson's group had raised over \$75,000 to be used to pay fines and get his members out of jail. Non-conforming residents who were not of the Zionist faith faced arrest and jail and seclusion for many years while Zion was under Voliva's control.

In 1922, as the Zion Bakery put out its one millionth fig bar, Voliva came up with the idea of having a radio station at the new church city. The station, WCBD operated by the church's Christian broadcasting company soon attracted more listeners to move to the area. Few stations were on the air then enabling WCBD's 500 watt signal to be heard as far away as New Zealand. The station printed its own radio guide, "The Zion Radio Call Book." For many years Reverend Michael J. Mintern, who passed away in 1961, and Reverend Carl Q. Lee operated WCBD. Program guides were printed in the church's publication "Leaves of Healing". Reverend Voliva, according to early listeners and author Reverend Jabez Taylor, had one of the best radio voices in the country. Voliva passed away in 1942. The controversial religious figure was often quoted in local newspapers with his critical comments and predictions. In 1928, in a Waukegan Daily Sun article, Voliva declared that the "world must be flat." He had just completed a 1900 mile cruise. Upon leaving the ship he stated, "the biggest ships in the world use flat maps, therefore the world must be flat."

In a 1935 article in the Belvidere Daily Republican, Voliva was mentioned as "the powerful overseer of the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church." In the article, Voliva predicted that a new battle of Armageddon would take place in 1942 or 1943. His other predictions included that "tidal waves, earthquakes, and devastations would occur in 1935, all due to Mother Earth groaning with her children." He also stated that the world would end on September 10, 1935.

Besides his preaching, solos, duets, concerts and instrumental music was presented from WCBD's studios located on the temple site near Shiloh Tabernacle. Later addresses of the station were given as 2700 or 2714 Enoch Avenue. (All the streets then had Biblical names). Each broadcast contained unusual clarity for the time and professionalism which promoted much mail from all over the world. Often heard on WCBD were the Treble Clef Chorus featuring Mr. and Mrs. G.A. Sparrow, Veatrice Beem, and Daniel Mason, a mixed quartet, along with the "Cestral Bells" and well known organist Fred Faassen.

At the heart of WCBD's equipment was its 500 watt Western Electric transmitter, two generators for filament and plate voltage and a 24 x 36 foot main studio. Studio walls had been acoustically treated for better sound. Two steel towers, 150 foot tall stood to either side of the 38 x 69 red brick transmitter building.



The station slogan "Where God Rules man Prospers" began each broadcast. It was originally picked as the city's official slogan by the late Dr. Dowie upon the city's founding. Each days' broadcast ended with the words of Jesus Christ "Peace Be On To You." Preceding each broadcast chimes sounded the melody of an old doxology "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow."

WCBD, which signed on some time around 1924, operated successfully into the 1930s. A relationship was developed with Gene T. Dyer, owner of Chicago stations WGES and WAIT. During 1935, Broadcast Yearbook lists the station being operated by Dyer out of the Karcher Hotel out of Waukegan. Its 870 khz frequency later became 1080 khz.

The station and its facilities suffered at the hands of several devastating fires. One on April 2, 1937, completely destroyed the stations studio and transmitter (another fire at the Zion College building, home of the annual popular "Zion Passion Play burned in 1959").

The station's license was apparently obtained for a short time by Dyer who operated the station from the Guyon Hotel where his other station, WGES, was located. Addresses for the building were listed as 128 North Crawford and 4000 Washington Blvd., which is the same building. Edward Jacker was the station's engineer, from 1938 to 1941.

WCBD shared time on 1080 khz with the Moody Bible Institutes' religious station WMBI. WMBI later changed frequencies, and by 1942 WCBD was off the air again. Church officials under Reverends Mintern and Lee kept the station going from 1947 to 1958 broadcasting on Sundays only, with 5000 watts over WAIT's frequency of 820 khz. By 1959, the lease agreement with WAIT had ended. Today the church has a regular Sunday morning worship service on WNIZ-FM in Zion. Tradition and religious values continue to be taught by the Zion Christian Catholic Church.

#### Billie Bicket's WZBN

Through the years the surrounding area of the city has been taken over by private industry and residents. The large Zion church continues to grow, offering an outreach to the community that it once dominated. Besides Voliva the other man who was instrumental in the development of radio in the Zion community was William J. Bicket. Bicket was often at odds with Voliva's followers and took on his opponents creating many civic developments for the continued good of the city.

"Billie" Bicket has been a monument to the community. He has been involved in the construction and development of the city's library, hospital and numerous stores and businesses. Bicket Pharmacy at 2700 Sheridan Road, operated by his grandson Jim, was one of many businesses started by Bicket (the store opened as BB Sweet Shop in 1922.) The list of improvements to the city composes an energetic era engineered by Billie and his wife Ruth.

To start, Bicket was a sound businessmen at heart. He was on hand in 1930 to save a local bank from certain collapse. Through the years other business opportunities and shops were open, including a veteran's housing project in 1950. He served on numerous boards and city committees and was instrumental in the organization of the Lakeview Church in 1964. He also organized numerous voter registration drives. In all, Bicket's various accomplishment's would have taken the average person ten lifetimes to achieve. It only seemed natural that a man of such respect should open the town's first commercial radio station.

Since the early days of WCBD at the Zion Christian Catholic Church, Bicket, who was a very religious person himself, continued to present religion on his station, but also took every opportunity to promote the city he loved. According to WNIZ-FM bookkeeper, Katie Paul, Bicket broadcasted everything he could think of. He believed "everyone was interested in everything." He sent news reporters to do a play-by-play or ditch-by-ditch account of the building of the Zion Nuclear Plant. Plant officials became irritated by the constant interruptions in work made by station news personnel. High school graduations, church programs, and local sports were aired from the old high school athletic field. Bicket also emceed his weekly "Gospel Jubilee" program.

The station's call letters remain painted on the side of the facility's press box today. In the end the city's advertisers could not support all the programs that Bicket wanted to air, and the station was later sold. William J. Bicket opened WZBN on September 19, 1967. Its transmitter was located near 21st and Delaney Road. William J. Bicket was president and general manager of the Zion-Benton Broadcasting Company, James Bicket became commercial manager and Charles King, engineer. Robert Cook was the station's program director, and Josef Hunley, news director, Walter Stone, commercial manager. The station broadcasted at 1500 khz, with 250 watts.

In 1969 Bicket purchased WAXO-FM in Kenosha, Wisconsin and later changed its call letters to WKZN-FM. Its transmitter and 500 foot antenna were located on Green Bay Road one mile north of the state line. WKZN-FM broadcasted at 96.9 mhz at 10,000 watts. Frank Falduto was the station manager, Tony Noce, later of WGN news, became WZBN's news director.

Through the early 70's WZBN and WKZN broadcasted a beautiful music format with some ethnic programs. A weekly country and western show and Sunday religious programs were also presented. Katie Paul became traffic manager in 1976, and hosted a call in show, "The Mike is Yours." Leo Kallsz did a polka music show. Walt Stare of WKRS was also an early staffer. UPI news was added, and that year the station was licensed by the Lake Kenosha Broadcasters. Both stations became WKZN-AM/FM in 1978, Bicket sold WKZN-AM/FM to a Chicago investment firm CDI on July 2, 1979, John Carpenter became general manager, long time station employees Charles King and Katie Paul continued to staff the station along with sports director Bob Reid and newsman Larry Joerger. By 1982, WKZN was carrying more ethnic programming, and the power rose to 500 watts in 1983.

On June 1, 1983 WKZN-AM/FM were sold to William and Sonia Florian, owners of WNIB in Chicago (Northern Illinois Broadcasting Company). The Florian's changed WKZN-AM/FM call letters to WNIZ-AM/FM. WNIB simulcasted its classical programs over WNIZ-AM/FM. WNIZ-FM increased its power to 50,000 watts in 1986. In late 1984, the Florian's had sold WNIZ-AM (now a 500 watt station) to Lake County Broadcasting Company. The station was operated by Joseph Wrona and moved to 2767 Sheridan Road and changed its call letters to WRJR. It later moved to studios at 40805 North Lester Lane. In 1987 WRJR became WKGA and moved to 215 Water Street in Waukegan. The 500 watt station presents spanish programming (radio Borinquen). The station's original owner, William J. Bicket, passed away at the age of 87 on May 15, 1992.

Over the last five years WNIZ-FM has opened blocks of air time on Saturday and Sunday mornings. Special community programs for the Zion area and local church services are aired. The Zion Christian Catholic Church also broadcasts their regular Sunday morning service on WNIZ-FM. During the weekend afternoons the station again is simulcast with WNIB's classical's format.

Katie Paul and Charles King still work for WNIZ-FM, which is still at 2700 North Sheridan Road. Katie handles the books for the station, while Charles remains on as engineer. William J. Bicket, the stations early founder, is in retirement.

#### BRIEF GLIMPSES OF THE FAR NORTH

In the late 20's and early 30's the FRC began eliminating many smaller and unsuccessful stations. Several stations were combined on the same channel and were gradually bought out by the one that became most dominant. This included WHT which located its tower in the Deerfield-Bannockburn area. Studios were located in the Wrigley Building in Chicago. The call letters stood for former Chicago Mayor William Hale Thompson (Big Bill).

WHT ended up at 1490 khz along with WSOA, WCHI, and WORD. Mickey Rafferty, the former owner for Forest Park's WNBA, bought interest in WHT and WSOA. All four stations were off the air by 1931. Today Chicago station WJJD maintains its AM transmitter site east of the Tri-State north of Ballard Road and west of Potter Road in Des Plaines.

Rock station WJZQ-FM, 95.1 mhz, out of Kenosha, Wisconsin, frequently shows up in Chicago ratings with its 50,000 watt signal. Automated WJZQ-FM is owned by Independence Broadcasting Inc. which also operates WLIP. WJZQ, which began in 1961, is located at 8500 Green Bay Road in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

Another Kenosha, Wisconsin station, WGTD, at 91.1 mhz, operates at 5,000 watts and is a national public radio outlet which is also heard in Lake County, Illinois.

## WEST SUBURBAN RADIO

### OAK PARK RADIO WOPA/WPNA/WVAZ

Of all the metro cities served by radio stations, the Oak Park community seems to be one of the more interesting areas of operation. Perhaps because of its closeness to the City of Chicago, several broadcasters of the time set out to do business in Oak Park with the later foresight of luring big city business to the suburb. In the end most of these executives ultimately secured some Chicago connection, moved there, or went out of business. Today, only one basically AM ethnic station remains, along with a Chicago FM station that merely hides its studios there. Another earlier operation was fined for airing illicit programming in 1973.

Through the years the important ingredients of Oak Park radio has been the Oak Leaves Newspaper, the Oak Park Arms Hotel, with a little spice thrown in by long time broadcast executive Egmont Sonderling. Sonderling, for many years, owned and operated WOPA AM-FM which operated out of the Oak Park Arms Hotel. It has been said in many circles that political maneuvering gained a license for Sonderling in the village, beating out several competitors. These competitors from Elgin and Beloit later received different frequencies, giving everyone a happy piece of radio pie, only Sonderling got the first and one of the last pieces as well.

The story of Oak Park radio begins on September 29, 1923. The Oak Leaves Newspaper (Pioneer Publishing) teamed up with the IODAR Sales Company to put the village's first station on the air, WJOC. The installation of the station was overseen by IODAR's J. Donald Vandercook, according to newspaper articles. Studios were being installed at 114 South Oak Park Avenue, a building that was apparently taken down for a parking lot around 1970.

Broadcast Profile states that both the offices of the Oak Leaves Newspaper and the radio station were located at 114 South Oak Park Avenue. Meanwhile comments about the radio station were requested to be sent to another Oak Leaves address listed on the front of each edition of the newspaper at 1112 North Boulevard. Testing of the new station was set for October 1, with broadcasts set to commence on October 6. The station license did not arrive until October 11 and because some necessary equipment was not ready, like a microphone to broadcast live music, the station's first broadcast day was delayed until October 13. This gave the station time to change its call letters from WJOC to WTAY. This was an attempt to end confusion with Chicago station WJAZ, which Zenith operated out of the Edgewater Beach Hotel.

WTAY signed on with 15 watts at 1330 khz, broadcasting on Saturday, Tuesday, and Thursday evenings. Talks by city officials and locally produced classical music selections were featured during the first weeks' programs. Walter H. Wilson, a well known dramatic director, was appointed WTAY's radio director. Telegrams from as far away as Indiana reported hearing the station during its first week, according to the Oak Leaves (the newspaper's publisher was listed as Telser McArthur).

On February 7th, WTAY moved to 1060 khz and increased its power to 500 watts. Studios moved to the Oak Park Arms Hotel at the corner of Washington Boulevard on Oak Park Avenue (408 South Oak Park Avenue). By May of 1924, WTAY's license was changed to the Oak Leaves Broadcasting Station, Inc. By February of 1925, WTAY broadcasted about two hours per day, except Sunday and Monday, from 6:15 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. and from 9 p.m. to 10 p.m. Wednesday and Saturday nights WTAY aired programs from 12 midnight to 1:30 a.m. The station's slogan was "Programs for Everyone," and by 1925 it was "Something for Everybody," referring to the many community interest programs aired for Oak Park "Listeners-In." Local news was also presented.

On April 6, 1925 WTAY was sold to the Coyne Electrical School, the call letters were changed to WGES, standing for "World's Greatest Electrical School." The 500 watt station switched to 1200 khz to share time with the Trianon Ballroom Station, WMBB. H. C. Lewis was the operator of Coyne School. He also opened a Chicago studio at the Baldwin Conservatory in August of 1925. Effective May 13, 1926, Coyne moved WGES out of Oak Park to the recently constructed Guyon Paradise Ballroom and Hotel. The popular dance spot built in 1925, is located at 128 North Crawford (corner of Washington Blvd. and Crawford [Pulaski] Avenue). In later years this building has been known as Guyon Towers and has been remodeled for offices.

The station maintained the call letters WGES, changing frequency several times and ending at 1390 khz. From this point, WGES becomes a Chicago station. J. Louis Guyon changed the license of the station back to the Oak Leaves Broadcasting Corporation. Dance music, Negro programming and foreign language specialties continued



under a succession of owners, including the Guyon family and another broadcast executive, Gene T. Dyer. Dyer owned WSBC, WAIT and earlier, WCBD.

Foreign language programming ended in 1966, when WGES was purchased by Gordon McLendon. Call letters were changed to WYNR, among listener protests. Popular urban contemporary music was presented until September 2, 1964, when McLendon changed the station's call letters to WNUS. Again, there were protests concerning the removal of local programming by the station's mostly Black audience. This AM-FM operation provided Chicago listeners with the city's first all news operation. With the announcement that CBS's WBBM would also begin an all news station, WNUS switched to "A Good Music Format" in 1968. A visit to the station at 24 West Erie revealed stacks of reel to reel tape machines setting on the floor, being switched on and off by automation to make musical selections.

In 1974 WNUS was sold to George Nield Gillet, Jr., of Globetrotter Communications. Globetrotter had purchased WVON from the Chess family in 1970. They then moved to WVON from 1450 khz to 1390 khz. WNUS' old dial position.

WVON had been the predecessor of WHFC and WEHS in Cicero owned by Congressman Richard W. Hoffman. Hoffman had sold his interests out to the Chess Family in 1960, who created a popular jazz operation, WSDM ("smack dab in the middle"). The company owned the Chess Recording Company in Chicago.

WSDM-FM later became WLUP-FM. By 1978 Globetrotter, Inc., had acquired WGCI-FM. WVON was changed to WGCI in 1982. The Gannett Newspaper Company now operates both stations utilizing a Black urban contemporary format 24 hours a day in stereo. Offices are located at 6 North Michigan Avenue. Including the years of WJOC, WTAY, WGES, WYNR, WNUS, WVON, and WFMQ/WGCI, the station is the eighth oldest continuing AM operation in the country.

The story of WTAY and WGES end in Chicago, but insert again the same studios and transmitter sites, and another episode of radio begins in Oak Park.

On December 4, 1941, William L. Klein, the head of a transcription recording company, applied for a 250 watt AM station in Oak Park. This was followed by several AM and FM applications. Klein's Village Broadcasting Company sought the call letters WEBS. The Oak Park Realty and Amusement Company, owner of WHN New York and a subsidiary of MGM, applied for an FM station.

Community Broadcasting President Lynn S. Snow, as well as firms in Elgin, Beloit, and Bloomington, Indiana, also filed for the village's 1490 khz available AM frequency. Hearings continued into 1946 on Village Broadcasting's application for the Oak Park frequency.

In 1947 Gale Broadcasting's Bernard Jacobs petitioned the FCC for a new FM station to be located at 6516 Roosevelt Road. Jacobs also sought a BZA permit to erect a 250 foot tower on top of the Oak Park Arms Hotel. This request was denied by the village. Jacobs' station, WOAK-FM followed the path of WGES by moving to the Guyon Hotel. A 250 foot tower was installed on the roof of the building, now listed at 4000 West Washington Blvd.

Jacobs worked on radio systems in the Army. His staff included Lester E. Jacobs, Vice-President; Harry L. Brown, secretary; Jack Shefrin, program director; Robert Kaylor, engineer and John Mulholland, promotions director. Mulholland had pioneered WTMJ-FM in Milwaukee (W55M) and had been serving as a manager of Goodyear Tire Stores in Hammond, Indiana.

WOAK-FM continued to be licensed as an Oak Park station (Mid-Illinois Broadcasting Company) at 105.9 mhz. The station's call letters were changed to WFMT and frequency later changed to 98.3 mhz in 1952 (98.7 in 1958). The station later moved downtown to the old WAAF-FM site at 1016 LaSalle-Wacker Building.

Bernard and Rita Jacobs ran the station along with Norman Pellegrini into the 60's. For many years, classical music has been presented. It is currently operated by the Chicago Educational Television Association (CETA) who also own WTTW-TV. WGN Continental Broadcasting bought WFMT in 1968, then relinquished control of WFMT as listeners thought that their "Fine Arts Station" would lose its classical format. WGN's donation of WFMT to CETA was finalized in October of 1969.

After Gale Broadcasting (WOAK) was denied permission to build a tower atop the Oak Park Arms Hotel, William Klein finally received approval to do so. Again there was much public unrest about the tower's construction, which later subsided. Klein's Village Broadcasting sought AM frequencies of 1490 at 250 watts, as well as an FM frequency 102.3 mhz at 1000 watts. Call letters WEBS-AM and WNOI-FM were changed to WOPA (for Oak Park Arms). An FM license was awarded in 1950 (both stations starting date are listed as October 17, 1950). Egmont Sonderling became general manager that year.



Early staffers included announcers Jerry Saxon of Chicago and Al O'Brien from WHBL Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Brian Wright was WOPA'S first engineer. Other station employees were Corrine Anderson, Paul Faltysek, William Dooley, Jerry Burkhart, Martin Bouhan, Paul Tee, Wayne Osborne, and Esther Kindness. Other early Oak Park radio staffers were Joseph Triner, Charles Hickman, E.J. Faltysek, and George Herman, Jr.

Wayne Osborne was WOPA's sports director during its early years. He was the first to broadcast live remotes from golf tournaments, utilizing a transmitter fastened to the back of a golf cart. Osborne also did the "Neighborhood Hour" which featured two 15 minute public service interviews with local people;. The program was changed in 1969, when Len Petrusis joined the station, becoming "Western Suburban Forum." Petrusis recalls that the station's early studios were damaged during a union problem during construction. He also remembers how one staffer was killed in a plane crash.

In 1954 Sonderling became sole owner of WOPA AM-FM. By 1958 WOPA began broadcasting many ethnic programs as did WTAQ. Stan Noyes of WTAQ became WOPA's promotion manager. WOPA-FM, now at 3,600 watts, continued to duplicate all AM broadcasts. In 1961 Al Michael became general manager, as a variety of ethnic and Black programs were presented on a brokered basis. Don Lucki became program director. Both stations continued to be owned by the Village Broadcasting Company at 408 Oak Park Avenue. They were a part of the Sonderling Broadcasting Company. WOPA moved to one thousand watts daytime, 250 watts night time in 1963. WOPA-FM duplicated only half of its AM programming and increased to 17,000 watts in 1966, and 50,000 watts in 1968.

Chuck Manson became the general manager of WOPA-FM. Fred Consentino did a popular Sunday night pop music program. About this time Big Band favorites were presented mostly on tape by Art Hellyer, who also doubled as a Chicago TV announcer. Linn Burton "For Certain" also spent some time at WOPA. The AM side continued to be brokered by ethnic and Black broadcasters.

Many people got their start in Chicago radio at WOPA. The list includes WGN's Ed Curran, Linda Ellerbee of WSDM, and NBC, Psyche, Terry Hemmert at WXRT, Pat Cassidy of WMAQ, Art Roberts of WLS, Scorpio, Ray Smithers, John Platt, Seth Mason, Chet Gulinski, and L'il Wally. Gulinski is currently the sales manager of the AM, his son Chris is the general manager.

Big Bill Hill, who's favorite phrase, when he would introduce a record, was always "Doin that Crazy Thing," bought late night time and broadcasted from the Salt & Pepper Lounge. Hill emceed a television dance show on Channel 26. Students from Oak Park-River Forest High School directed by Patt Long aired their own "Montage" program of school news Saturday mornings on the FM side.

In 1972 WOPA's FM station was changed to WGLD. Jack Donahue became sales manager, Morgan Tell was the program director, and Jan Sheehan became the news director. An underground rock format gave way to "oldies" in 1973. Kenneth Stancil became manager, Art Roberts (formerly of WLS) became program director, Darryl Roberts was the music director, and Pat Cassidy was the news director. Chicago DJ Don Lucki was often heard on the station.

WGLD played a good variety of popular tunes from the 60's. This format was superseded by the first of many sex-oriented programming attempts across the country. Morgan Moore's "Femme Forum" invited female callers to participate in "titillating" discussions on a variety of sexually oriented subjects. After many complaints, the FCC fined Sonderling Broadcasting of New York \$2,000 for 23 such shows. Thirty days was given to the station to fight the FCC decision or pay the fine. The FCC's war on so called "Topless Radio" had begun.

Sonderling, speaking from his New York office, saying that he did not agree with the FCC's ruling, but would pay the fine, and not cause an expensive display in the courts. The company, which owned several stations, stated it could not afford a court battle. Sonderling's case was sided by the Illinois Citizens Committee for Broadcasting who blasted FCC Chairman Dean Burch's stand on the issue. But in the end WGLD paid the fine. Future programs were "toned down."

After nearly a year of topless radio, WGLD changed call letters again. This time becoming WBMX in 1975, standing for "Black Music Experience." The stations 1,170 foot high 6,000 watt antenna and transmitter was moved to the John Hancock Building. Ronald Craven became general manager. Dereck Hill (now of WMAQ) became news director. Richard Steele and Jay Johnson were popular disc jockeys.

WOPA-AM, meanwhile, continued brokering time to ethnic broadcasters. Len Petrusis became operations director in 1982. By 1985 both stations became WBMX AM-FM. Some Polish programs were presented on the AM side, which in 1987 obtained a one thousand watt universal signal.

In 1987, with Sonderling still in ownership of both stations, the AM side became WPNA, standing for Polish National Alliance. A variety of ethnic programs continued on the AM side. WPNA continues to feature the first hours of activity from the Oak Park and Bellwood town board meetings. Jazz and blues are featured on weekends. Edward J. Moskal is president of WPNA.

While on FM, WBMX-FM became WVAZ, or V-103. Urban contemporary programming is presented. The station currently holds a construction permit for a nine kilowatt signal. Broadcasting Partners, Inc. president Barry Mayo owns WVAZ.

Both stations continue to operate from the Oak Park Arms Hotel (now a Senior Citizens Center). The WOPA call letters are in use once more by a new Chicago station which broadcasts Spanish programming at 1200 khz.

### FOREST PARK RADIO WNBA--TRIANGLE CAFE

The story of WNBA Forest Park, Illinois resembles a well thought out gangster novel, complete with bookies, speakeasies, and suspect syndicate connections. It appears the village itself during the 20's and 30's was adequately conducive to the breeding of numerous drinking establishments and rapid gambling parlors run by persons of notorious character. The nine miles separating downtown Chicago from Forest Park, was a convenient stop over for the subtlest of citizen visiting a loved one in many of the local cemeteries (perhaps to drown their sorrows).

It also played host to a number of illicit activities that kept local, state, and county police busy. Some of those incidents today are only spoken about in the confidence of friends, where rumors and gangster stories still abound. Writing these stories, in a sense, bridges a history of former radio station owners and captures the surrounding atmosphere of the era.

The star of this gangster thriller is Mickey T. Rafferty. The setting is his Triangle Cafe, formerly at the intersection of Dunlop, Harrison and Des Plaines Avenue (810 Des Plaines Avenue). Many early advertisements of the Triangle Cafe referred to Rafferty as being proprietor of the establishment. It is not known if he actually owned the building. According to Forest Park Building Commissioner Ed Masso, many of the village's early records stored in the basement of the village hall were destroyed many years ago in a flood (some sources say 1956). In articles supplied by Forest Park Historian Cora Sallee, the Triangle Cafe opened in July of 1925. The July 11th Forest Park Review of that year (the newspaper with the "personal touch") captioned "Rafferty Opens Soft Drink Parlor." Soft drink, in many cases back then, referred to low alcoholic beverages like beer. Others brought their own "drink" and combined it with mixers sold in Rafferty's place.

During prohibition the Triangle Cafe was well known to cater to those wanting an "illegal belt of booze." The place had that kind of reputation, but was better known for the rapid gambling that went on there. Bob Haeger, former editor and owner of the Forest Park Review (now owner of Forest Graphics), stated that Rafferty was always short of money. But plenty of money was being made behind the scenes. In the back of the building was a "wire room" where a betting parlor was located. Betting sheets were on the wall, and the "chalk man" marked the odds on the large sheets. Numerous speakers blared out the results from various race tracks. The Triangle Cafe was a three-sided two-story building which widened as it parted away from the intersection. It also contained a cache of secret doors, passageways, and tunnels. There was a large 40 x 25 foot bathroom that featured false walls, where gambling devices were wheeled away and hid. All this prompted me into thinking that many of these clandestine features of this building were in place long before Rafferty moved in. Geraldo Rivera would have enjoyed touring the numerous vaults hidden under the building. Perhaps he could have found something more interesting here than in Al Capone's hideout, the old Lexington Hotel in Chicago.

A former resident of the Triangle, Joe Hereau, stated that one of the tunnels led underground two blocks away. Its dead end was a manhole that could only be opened from the inside. Another tunnel's exit would be where the Eisenhower Expressway passes through the area today. This was in the middle of a cemetery which was moved to build the highway some years ago. Hereau's family lived above the building years later when it was taken over by the Moose Lodge. Joe explained that in one tunnel about 100 old phones were found along with some antiques. It was probably a "bookies" set up of some sort he explained. Other tunnels led to another nearby cemetery and an old amusement park. Some walls were three feet thick. Trap doors in the stage, a deep wine cellar, a huge grand staircase, along with a large and small dining room highlighted the building.

In 1927, Tony Yackey, a WWI flyer, built airplanes in the back of the structure. Hereau's family became caretakers of the building for the Moose. One time after a fire inspection, the department ordered that some old three inch thick carpeting be removed from the second floor. When the carpet was torn out, a large blood stain was found with a bullet imbedded in the floor.

Rafferty lived in Berwyn, according to some sources, and then later on the second floor of the Triangle. His brother-in-law, Lewis Roelle (who lived at 1347 Wisconsin Avenue in Berwyn), helped manage the business.

Local taverns and bars sponsored ball teams back then, too. Former Village Commissioner and sports official Mike Lambke played fullback on "Rafferty's Forest Park Triangles." Mickey bought the jerseys for the local semi-pro team which played at a field at Harlem and Harrison. Local teams from River Forest, Evanston, Washington Park, and Maywood often competed. The teams also played against the Black All-Stars. Coverage of the games made the Chicago Evening American. Lambke recalls a large canvas was placed around the fence of the football field and fans were charged admission. Rafferty usually showed up with some of his band singers to entertain at half-time. On one occasion Lambke recalls angry fans pulled down the canvas revealing the game to everyone. Lambke retired from People's Gas and now lives in Twin Lakes, Wisconsin. Mike says Rafferty was an energetic and enterprising fellow. It was widely known that he was also into beer running.

Those that remember Mickey T. Rafferty (b. circa 1897), say that he was a typical short, chunky, red-faced Irish man, about 5' 8" in stature with a penchant for expensive pleasures. Sources say he served in the Army and later amassed enough money to open the Triangle Cafe. He didn't drink or smoke but gambled heavily, often loosing at his own betting parlor. Friends said he'd spend a quarter as fast as he made one, which drained his profits quickly "like a bartender drinking his own whiskey." His flamboyance also got him into trouble on one occasion, challenging a local minister to a public debate on gambling.

Despite driving his own white Cadillac, he never had any money. His shy wife Irene drove a pink Cadillac. One resident recalls Rafferty use to host the Kiwanis Club meeting at his establishment, but had to go to another nearby saloon to borrow whiskey for the festivities after the meeting. From his second story window, a wire was tossed out to a nearby utility pole to illegally tap the electric lines.

Rafferty was street smart; he knew how to continually make money. During one New Year's Eve celebration, the Triangle Cafe pulled in around \$12,000.00. The Triangle Cafe's restaurant featured excellent cuisine, boasting a menu of broiled pork chops, two inch thick steaks, and chicken dinners. At the Triangle, amateur shows were often presented. Poor entertainers (ala the Gong Show) were yanked off the stage with a big hook. Singers Ray Reynolds, Adele Leonard, and Ed Lotus and a short man who pushed a white piano around to patron's tables provided legitimate entertainment. Lotus was best known for his rendition of an old song "Dirty Fly", while Reynolds doubled as the cooks assistant. These singers were later to star on Rafferty's radio station WNBA. (Incidentally, "Dirty Fly" was often heard on Charles Erbstein's WTAS in Elgin.)

The Triangle Cafe operated during the late 20's and 30's during the prohibition era. The village insisted on granting numerous licenses for "soft drink parlors" where fights and moral decay bred. In a 1975 edition of the Forest Park Review, reporter Dawn Debeers outlined how one episode developed into a full fledged bar brawl, issuing lifetime injuries to both Rafferty and his brother-in-law.

The event took place on the evening of February 4, 1929. A competitor of Rafferty's was involved in an auto accident with a vehicle who turned into the Triangle Cafe's parking lot. Angered by the incident, the competitor Irving McFadden (McFadden's Gardens, 844 Des Plaines Ave.) returned to the Triangle with several "associates". A fight broke out resulting in damage to the interior of the place. One man was thrown through a French door. The fight then moved outside, where Rafferty and Louis Roelle were shot. Rafferty became handicapped. The gunmen were never identified. The Triangle was also the scene of numerous police raids for gambling and illegal sales of alcohol.

### The Antioch Palace

Rafferty had other business interests. In 1929, while recuperating from the shooting, he bought interest in WHT. WHT's transmitter was located in the Deerfield area near Route 43 and 22 in Bannockburn. In the late 20's WHT, WCHI, WSOA, and WORD were all share timers on 1490 khz before the FCC eventually canceled their licenses. (WCHI, formerly WORD, was the last to go off the air.)

Rafferty also leased the old Antioch Palace, a large drinking and dancing establishment located on Route 83 (then Route 21) about one mile south of the town. Its approximate location today would be on the west side of



Route 83 just south of Beech Lake Road at 4958 North Highway Route 83. Back then numerous stills operated in the area. An old house and Shell gas station, formerly part of the property, still stand there today. The gas station is now a resale shop.

The Antioch Palace was once billed as the "World's Greatest Resort Ballroom" and operated from April 23, 1927 to September 12, 1931. According to early editions of the Antioch News, well known band leader Wayne King once performed there. As many as six hundred couples could dance on its 70 x 90 foot dance floor. The building measured 125 x 180 feet and was well equipped with concessions, a restaurant, billiards, and bowling. Ten flood lights lit up the parking lot. Concrete pillars and a Tennessee marble fountain highlighted the structures' interior. A well known 12 piece orchestra of the time, The La Floridans, directed by Luigi Pupillow and Victor Giannotti, played opening night. Boxing matches also took place inside.

The Antioch Palace opened under the direction of Richard Macek, who operated the place for three years. Macek got into financial straights and was foreclosed by the holder of the real estate mortgage C. K. Anderson. Mickey Rafferty leased the Antioch Palace early in 1931 and held frequent dances and amateur boxing shows. On the evening of September 12, 1931, Palace goers noticed the lights had flickered several times during a boxing match. At noon the next day a local farmer, Walter K. Hills, saw a blue flame on a nearby high tension wire. A few moments later the entire building burst into flames destroying it completely. Rafferty's employees, nephew Martin Roelle, Carl Woodard of Cicero, and George Maurer of Chicago, barely escaped the blaze. Roelle was badly burned. An investigation by Deputy Fire Marshall Paul E. Bertram revealed that the building, valued at \$125,000, had been partially covered by over one hundred insurance companies in the past. There was no water supply nearby.

At the time of the fire, all previous insurance on the building had been canceled, and Rafferty lost everything in the fire. It was later revealed that defective wiring had caused the blaze. Three men who had leased the Antioch Palace before Rafferty, Richard Macek, H. P. Lowry, a plumbing contractor and Robert Abt, a realtor, were exonerated of charges of removing goods from the building while it was closed.

With the Palace now gone, Rafferty again turned his interest back to Forest Park. Earlier, on the second floor of the Triangle Cafe, where the walls come together to a point, Rafferty installed his radio station. Broadcast Profile's Jan Lowry, states that the Radio Division of the Bureau of Navigation, U. S. Department of Commerce, issued the license to Michael T. Rafferty on February 4, 1927.

The two hundred watt station operated at 1440 khz. He had also applied for a short wave license. His small experimental station was soon replaced by a larger 5,000 watt operation located on the north end of the large dining room. This was apparently done to broadcast music and orchestras from the ballroom and dining rooms. Rafferty's programs consisted of music from the Triangle Cafe along with monologues, West Suburban police news and area happenings. Broadcasting took place at 9:15 p.m. to closing time weekdays and 8:15 p.m to closing on Sundays.

Unfortunately, Rafferty's engineering skills did not match his programming abilities. The station was often off frequency creating interference with other area "quality programs". Experts stated WNBA drifted as much as 500 cycles and ultimately achieved notoriety of being the first station that the government ever suspended for being off frequency. An April 21, 1928 edition of the Forest Park Review added that the "wave wabblers" had been warned many times of its illegal operation before its thirty days' suspension. It also mentioned that the station at one time had received permission to operate at as much as five thousand watts.

A call letter change was also pending. While off the air, Rafferty went to Washington seeking to renew his license. In the meantime, he purchased some better used equipment from WCLS (WJOL in Joliet). By September 1, 1928, WNBA's license had expired and Rafferty was never able to get his station legally back on the air. There is speculation that an illegal 5,000 watt transmitter discovered in an FCC raid was later in use using different call letters. This was never substantiated.

The Triangle Cafe continued to operate through the 30's without a radio station. Sometime in the mid 1950s Rafferty, along with city official Bill Bartz, left the area. Bartz was a well-known one arm fast ball softball pitcher in his younger years. Former village commissioner and local realtor Ben Hoffman stated that both men went to Covina, California. There Rafferty opened a gas station serviced by female attendants on roller skates. Hoffman suspects that Rafferty received much less than \$50,000 for his building after liens were paid off. Other long time residents and law enforcement officials agreed. They supplied other information about Rafferty, but did not wish their names to be used.



In recent years, I have been able to obtain old property records of the area. The documents show that Mickey Rafferty and the Triangle Cafe were in trouble with the government for tax problems. Liens were placed against his establishment in 1928, 1940, and 1947. Rafferty's former property appears to have been owned by a William Radtke and the Atlas Brewing Company in 1921, before Rafferty purchased the property at 810 Des Plaines Avenue in the early 1920s. A Mary Rafferty also appears on land records in the area.

Andrew J. Creighton and a local bank sold Rafferty's property to the Forest Park Moose Lodge #1671 in September of 1952. The lodge acquired title to all the adjoining property from the Chicago Title and Trust Company in 1962. Creighton bought out Rafferty in 1948.

In the early fifties, the Maywood Royal Order of Moose helped form a Forest Park Moose. The first Moose Lodge was located at 201 Des Plaines Avenue in 1951. By 1956 the organization had moved into new quarters in the former Triangle Cafe building (810 Des Plaines Avenue). Caretakers of the building became the Tom Hereau family. The former Moose Hall became known as the "Means Mesa."

On August 3, 1961 the Hereau family was routed in an early morning fire. A passing bus driver reported the blaze to the local fire department. Forest Park Fire Chief Dell Marousek's men fought the stubborn blaze that continued to burn for over two days. The Hereau family, which was not insured by the Moose, lost everything in the fire escaping with just their nightwear. Joe Hereau speculates today that the fire was caused by an electrical problem in one of the large air conditioners in the building. Ironically, Rafferty's other prize, The Antioch Palace also burned down years earlier due to a suspected electrical malfunction.

Young Hereau recalled the night of the fire, wrapped in a wet bed sheet, and escaping down a staircase through the thick green smoke. He was eleven years old then. The family boxer who helped alert the family perished in the fire. Joe recalled as a youngster exploring the numerous tunnels and hidden features of the building which are only memories buried deep under the rubble. A couple of days after the fire, crews knocked over the remaining walls. Joe's father, Tom, helped design the new hall which was later built on the same property. An era of bootlegging, gambling, and early broadcasting had ended.

#### CICERO RADIO AND CONGRESSMAN RICHARD HOFFMAN

The acquisition of WHFC and two other smaller stations (WKBI and WEHS) by Congressman Richard Hoffman is an interesting and detailed story. It led to the formation of some broadcasting giants in Chicago today.

In 1926, radio was beginning to bloom in Chicago. The FRC stated that there were more stations and licenses pending in Chicago than any other city in the country. A log jam of potential licenses was created. Some stations used the same frequency at the same time with differing amounts of power causing much interference and much chaos on the radio dial. Government officials began revising broadcasting regulations. Slowly some of the many stations were eliminated, or combined into one operation. Such was the case with WHFC.

In the beginning WHFC, WEHS, and WKBI were all operated separately by different owners. WHFC (standing for Hotel Flanders Chicago) started out as an illegal station in June of 1926. The government was swamped with license requests and temporarily froze all new applications. For a short time WHFC, which was complete and ready to operate, went on the air without government sanction. WHFC was built by the Koch and Barnitt Radio Laboratories. The firm was owned by William A. Koch and R.R. Barnitt.

Two steel towers 125 feet tall had been installed to support the 70 foot long flat top antenna which had been set up for 1160 khz. The building, constructed in 1924, is probably the same one standing today at 4143 Broadway (SE corner of Broadway and Buena). The multi-story structure contains apartments and several ground level shops today. (Some sources list this station as 4945 Broadway, the correct address). Costing about \$25,000 to build, owners of the new station became frustrated with governmental delays. They had also sought the call letters "WXYZ" which were already taken. Meanwhile, Koch and Barnitt waited through all of 1925 without a license.

Another share time station, WLTS (Lane Technical High School), briefly operated WHFC's equipment early in 1926. At that time the hotel went bankrupt, and its receivers kept Lane Tech from gaining access to the building. In July of 1926, Stanley Ehrman became station director, and under Triangle Broadcasters WHFC was finally licensed on August 19, 1926. Operating at 100 watts, then 200 watts, WHFC moved to 1390 khz to share time with WEHS (Evanston High School).

In August of 1927, Goodson and Wilson, Inc., owners of the Daily Press, who had purchased the Hotel Flanders, moved the station to 3350 South Kedzie at the La Salle Hotel in 1928. In one of two major frequency reallocations WHFC was switched to 1310 khz, and later 1420 khz in 1930. Its power was reduced to 100 watts

moving to 6138 W. 22nd Street (Cermak Road) in 1929 (The Olympic Theater). [Note: 22nd Street was renamed Cermak Road after former Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak who was killed in 1936.]

It was in April of 1931 when Congressman Richard W. Hoffman purchased the station. He was part owner of several local newspapers at the time. On July 17, 1936, WHFC was relicensed for 1420 khz with 100 watts sharing time with WKBI and WEHS. By November of 1936, WHFC was operating at 250 watts daytime and 100 watts nighttime. The station's address sometimes appeared at 2136 South 61st Court, which was the north entrance to the Olympic Theater Building located on Cermak Road. The call letters later stood for "Hoffman for Congress."

#### Hoffman Acquires WEHS and WKBI

By 1930, three stations were operating at 1420 khz, before they were all eventually acquired by Hoffman and combined together under one license. Evanston Township High School's WEHS began in June of 1925 with 20 watts of power operating at 1480 khz. The station intended for instructional programming soon became too expensive to operate. It was leased commercially to Robert Hughes in early 1926. (The Evanston Historical Society lists a Robert E. Hughes, who was an inventor, photographer, and high school physics teacher.)

The station remained at Evanston Township High School, 1600 Dodge Avenue, operating with 10 watts. Hughes leased WEHS in September of 1926 to Oliver G. Fordham. Fordham was a department manager at a Wiebolt's store and lived in Maywood. Hughes regained the station in early 1927. Its next owner was Arthur Becker who moved WEHS to 1318 Elmwood Avenue. It was operated in conjunction with Becker's Music Shop. News reports were furnished by the Evanston News Index newspaper. The station moved up to 100 watts in June of 1927, sharing time with WHFC and WIBL. WIBL was a portable station set up in local communities to broadcast special events.

By July of 1927, WEHS had been sold to Victor C. Carlson. He kept the transmitter at 1318 Elmwood Avenue and opened new studios at the Orrington Hotel, 636 Church Street in Evanston, in 1928. The Orrington Hotel's address is 1710 Orrington Avenue (some sources say 1708.) The station's new owner had built both the Orrington Hotel (named after one of the city's founders Orrington Lunt in 1923) and the Carlson Building (636 Church Street) in 1925.

The Carlson Building was probably the business address of the station where Carlson maintained his offices. Carlson was also the hotel's director at this time. Today the hotel is known as the Omni-Orrington. The 1928 and 1929 Evanston phone books list the station at the Orrington Hotel.

By late 1927, the FRC had moved WHFC, WEHS, and WKBI all to 1310 khz. In early 1930, all three stations were moved to 1420 khz. A new "Tower Studio" was built in February of 1930 at the Orrington Hotel for WEHS. A short time afterwards WEHS Inc., was sold to Richard W. Hoffman who already had purchased WHFC. Hoffman moved the station to Cicero, and eventually combined it with WHFC. Much later in the 40's and early 50's Hoffman started an FM station using the WEHS call letters. The FM station (original frequency 100.7 mhz) was operated out of the Banker's Building (40th floor) at Adams and Clark in Chicago. WHFC and WEHS's other share time partner was WKBI.

Fred L. Schoenwolf, an electrical engineer, operated WKBI out of his two-story home at 1917 Warner Avenue in Chicago (his business was located at 1066 West Adams). It was first licensed on August 16, 1926 for 1360 khz at 50 watts.

In late 1926, WKBI moved to 930 khz without permission, causing much interference and chaos on the radio dial. (Other stations also began to change frequencies without notice). It was about this time when the government began trying to clear up the radio dial which was composed of too many stations and too much interference. An FRC official in August of 1926 stated that the station was on the air for merely speculative purposes, waiting for the new frequency assignments.

In October of 1927, Schoenwolf moved the station to the Lincoln Trust and Savings building at Lincoln and Irving Park. On November 11, 1928 (when the government moved many stations or removed others from the air), WKBI (who's motto was "We Kill Blues Instantly") was assigned to 1310 khz, and later to 1420 khz, with WEHS and WHFC. Studios and transmitter were located at the five-story bank building at 1951 Irving Park Boulevard.

WKBI was purchased by Hoffman in April of 1931 and moved it shortly afterwards to Cicero. On November 10, 1936 all three stations were combined into one: WHFC. Prior to this, all three station's call letters were announced in signing on and off at different times during the day and night. They all used WHFC's four-wire inverted L-type antenna on top of the Olympic Theater Building.

By December 15, 1936, WHFC was the sole station on 1420 khz in the Chicagoland area, operating with 250 watts daytime and 100 watts at night. A new Blaw-Knox self-supporting antenna tower was erected on top of the Olympic Theater Building in Cicero. The station's studios were located on the third floor of the building with an entrance on 61st Court. Officials of the state were W.H. Scott, station manager; C.J. Lamphier, program director; George Busch, engineer; Marie Clifford and Florence Summers were later station managers in 1939.

WHFC operated daily from 7:00 a.m. to 1:00 a.m. and was known as the "Voice of the West Towns." After 1939, WHFC operated with 250 watts day and nighttime. On March 29, 1941, the FCC's NARBA treaty reassigned many stations including WHFC, moving it to 1450 khz.

In 1945 work was begun on WEHS-FM by engineer George Ives, who later built and operated WRGK in Brookfield. Ives had left his job with The One Way Clutch Company in La Grange to work for Hoffman (1937-1938). At that time, Ives was maintaining and had rebuilt Hoffman's other station WCLS (WJOL) in Joliet. He had also begun experimenting with stereo sound at WHFC. Ives stated that most of WHFC's early programming came off large transcription discs featuring singers like Bing Crosby.

Often band remotes were featured from WHFC's large studio or from the Olympic Theater. Zeb Zarniecki's Orchestra along with other well known bands of the day played on the station. (Years before, Jan Garber and Wayne King played for dances in the building, before the theater section had been installed. A swimming pool, now a storage area, used to be located in the basement.)

The building, constructed in 1925, is still referred to as the Sokolslavsky Building, named after the Sokols, a Czechoslovakian gymnastic group that maintained offices there for many years. This reference is usually made in connection with the offices on the north side of the building, where the entrances to the station were located. WHFC's newsroom exited into the balcony of the theater.

Hoffman kept in touch with the operation of his station, despite being away in Washington, D.C., as a Republican member of the U.S. House of Representatives. George Ives described Hoffman as "a person with a good heart who did not take any nonsense from people. Hoffman appreciated those who worked hard for him."

Richard Hoffman was born in Chicago in 1893. He often reminded folks that his earlier neighbors were Barney and John Balaban. The Balabans later formed the Balaban and Katz Company, which operated theaters, WBIK-FM, and WBKB-TV (WLS-TV) in Chicago. Perhaps this is where he became interested in broadcasting.

He purchased WHFC in 1931, and shortly afterwards gained control of WKBI and WEHS. Hoffman was a true civic leader, according to Cicero historian Ethel Carraro. He was an important stockholder in The Life Newspapers in 1941, and part owner of the Cicero Life Newspaper when it was called the Suburban Leader. His business partners were John F. Kubik and Gustav O. Randa. John's son Jack operates the newspaper today.

Hoffman Stadium, located at 26th and Harlem, is named after him. His tenure on the Morton High School board began in 1933. As president of the board, he successfully bailed the school out of financial turmoil and dismissed many useless patronage personnel.

From 1948 to 1956 Richard Hoffman served as congressman from the 10th district. As a World War I veteran, he was consistently interested in veterans affairs and reducing the cost of government. Hoffman was a member of many different organizations and a supporter of many charity events, including the March of Dimes and annual Franklin D. Roosevelt Birthday Balls. He lived in Berwyn, Cicero, and Riverside, and passed away on July 6, 1985, after a lingering illness.

As Hoffman acquired stations, he added more full time staffers. These included early announcers John Raveuel, Marx Hartman, and Grant Butler. The music director was Dave Volkow. Nighttime operation stopped in 1940, resuming later. At that time staffers included, Marie E. Clifford, program director and later station manager, who was recognized for selling \$1 million dollars worth of war bonds. Leo Kos, David Mearns, Elmer P. Haynes, George Ives, and Henry M. Kiertscher were all chief engineers at one time.

Kiertscher maintained WEHS-FM. Other late staffers included Norm Palmer (man on the street), "Unshackled's" John Phillips "Jack Odell," Frank (Goodman) Sterling, Jack Ostrode, Joe Scott (and his Friendly Tavern Hour, complete with bar room background sounds), and ethnic broadcasters, John Nieminski, Anci Albrecht and Casey Deveikis. [This information came from old advertisements collected by Ethel Carraro of the Cicero Life Newspaper.] Scott was replaced by Jimmy Harper. Eddie Plique's musical "Sportlite" aired Saturdays.

Young "Bob" Smith, an engineer, recalls that Richard Hoffman actually listened to the station. He often called and complained to the engineers about dead air or surface noise from old 78 rpm records. To appease the musician's union, who had forced the radio industry to hire actual musicians to operate the station's turntables, since



record players were considered musical instruments, two such persons were placed on the payroll. They were not allowed in the station by Hoffman, who instructed the engineer to drop their paychecks out the third floor window every Friday.

In their early years, WHFC and WEHS-FM simulcasted much of their programming. This situation developed after WEHS-FM stopped broadcasting to supermarket accounts. Smith went to work for NBC in 1955, with WRGK's Lee Bigos, and then went into sales and engineering work. Frank Kryda Senior, a local businessman, recalls WHFC's small studios on the third floor of the Olympic Theater Building. The station's antenna was on the roof of the building. Some of the station facilities were located on the second floor.

WEHS-FM operated with 16,000 watts at 97.9 mhz in 1950. Hoffman moved WHFC to 3350 Kedzie Avenue, in the early 50's, near the Chicago Sanitary Canal. WEHS-FM broadcasted music and commercials for the National Tea grocery stores and moved to the Bankers Building at 105 West Adams in Chicago. Music was supplied by the Lang-Worth Radio Transcription Library. Power was increased to 30,000 watts in 1953. That year WEHS-FM moved to 99.7 mhz, and later decreased its power to 21,000 watts. In 1954, Hoffman also held a construction permit for a TV station.

Eventually WEHS-FM moved back to the Kedzie Avenue address when it lost its contract with the National Tea stores. In 1957, WEHS and WHFC became WHFC AM-FM. Charles Lamphier became the general manager. The FM station reverted back to 97.9 mhz. Hoffman continued to operate both stations which featured ethnic and Black programming. Edward Jacker, a veteran of many Chicago stations including WAIT and WCRW, became WHFC's chief engineer in 1961.

By 1961 WHFC-AM's power was increased to 1,000 watts daytime and 250 watts at night. Florence Summers was still the station manager. Jack L. Cooper participated with many other broadcast brokers buying large amounts of air time. The station's broadcast day consisted of numerous Spanish, Polish, and Black programs. The station still operated at 1450 khz.

On February 18, 1963, Hoffman sold his stations to Leonard and Phillip Chess, (L and P Broadcasting, owners of Chess Records). The price of the sale was \$1 million. Lloyd Webb became station manager soon afterwards.

In February of 1963, WHFC's call letters were changed to WVON (Voice of the Negro). All Black programming began with gospel programming on Sunday. New announcers included E. Rodney Jones, Herb Kent "the cool gent," Bernadine Washington, and Moses Lindberg (Lucky Cordell) who became assistant manager. Cordell had previously worked for WLTH in Gary, Indiana and had brokered time on WHFC. Leonard Chess became general manager. Ray Wood was the news director, and Pat Cerone became engineer.

WHFC-FM became a 75,000 watt jazz giant, switching its call to WSDM (Smack Dab in the Middle). All female announcers using only their first names worked at WSDM, including the first lady of Chicago radio Yvonne Daniels and Connie Szerszen (later of WIND). Other announcers were Lady Kitten Galore, Cloudy, Anti-Freeze, Secret Agent, Halavah, Martine, and Newsman.

All of these changes took place around 1965. WSDM later became WLUP-FM. WVON was acquired by Globetrotter Communications for \$9 million on October 28, 1970. It was one of the highest prices ever paid for a small AM station. The new owners were George N. Gillet and Potter Palmer IV, stockholders in the Harlem Globetrotters Basketball Team. Lucky Cordell became WVON's general manager in November of 1970.

Later in the year, offices were opened at 203 North Wabash. The station's transmitter remained at 3350 South Kedzie. On June 15, 1972, WVON became a member of the Mutual Black Network. Mutual's headquarters and WVON's Chicago sales office were opened at 30 North Michigan. The new station's motto was "Chicago's Black Giant."

In 1974, Globetrotter purchased WNUS-AM at 1390 khz, (formally WYNR) and moved WVON from 1450 khz to 1390 khz, eliminating WNUS. Globetrotter wanted the better frequency for 5,000 watt operation. This deal became final in 1976, leaving the 1450 khz, frequency vacant. By 1982, WVON became a stereo music station, calling itself, "A Lotta Music 1390." The call letters then became WGCI.

Globetrotter also acquired WNUS-FM (formally WFMQ) 107.5 mhz. Globetrotter Broadcasting then changed its name to just Globe Broadcasting about 1982. It then merged with the Gannett Company, and continues to operate WGCI AM-FM.

As far as the vacant 1450 khz frequency goes, it did not stay unoccupied for very long. WFMT brought its classical music format to the AM dial for a short time. In 1980, classical music was presented on both AM and



FM. Next WCEV, owned by the Migala Communications Group, opened an ethnic station on the frequency. The call letters stand for "Chicago's Ethnic Voice." Joseph Migala is the president. The studios are located at 5356 West Belmont.

In 1981, WXOL opened up operations at the old transmitter site at 3350 South Kedzie Avenue. Wesley South was the president of the new Black music station. Both WCEV and WXOL using the same transmitter began to split air time with their various formats on 1450 khz.

In 1983 Pervis Spann, "The Blues Man," formally of the old WVON, joined WXOL as program director. In 1985 WXOL changed its call letters back to the more familiar WVON and continues to share time with WCEV. Talk show host Lou Palmer is heard over WVON late at night.

## WRGK

### Brookfields' Own FM

When one thinks of Brookfield, its popular zoo established in 1934 readily comes to mind. It's almost inconceivable that in this pleasant village, wild and rare species of animals roam their habitats just a short distance from human population.

Once divided into three sections, the village of Brookfield has yet another rare distinction of being the showcase for one of Chicago area's first FM radio stations. Its call letters were WRGK 103.1 mhz. The station was owned and operated by Chicago engineer George M. Ives, Jr. and his wife Rose. It was located in the Ives' home in the Congress Park section of Brookfield at 4221 Arthur Street. The 93 year old structure is owned today by John and Mary Kiser. A garage was added in 1952.

The WRGK studio was located in a north bedroom. Its 250 watt (1000 erp) transmitter sat on the back porch of the home. A 100 foot antenna was mounted on the roof of the Ives' home, giving the small station a range of about 15 to 25 miles. The call letters, standing for Rose, George and the Kids, were the last choice sent on a list submitted to the FCC. Ives had originally sought the call WBRO for Brookfield, but they were unavailable.

Ives was a long time Brookfield resident and highly qualified to build and operate the station. Born in Chicago on April 15, 1914, his family moved to the station's site in 1923. George graduated from Congress Park Grade School in 1928, Lyons Township High School in La Grange in 1932, and Lyons Township Junior College in 1934. In 1938 he received a Bachelor of Science degree in electrical engineering from Armour Institute of Technology which is now known as the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago.

Ives (W9THO) has been an amateur radio operator and has held a first class commercial radio telephone license since 1932. He also designed another area FM station, WRBI in Blue Island.

George Ives, while operating WRGK, worked as the chief engineer for R.W. Hoffman's WHFC in Cicero and built its FM affiliate WEHS (100.7 mhz). He had also worked as chief engineer for Hoffman's WJOL (WCLS) in Joliet. For many years Ives was a staff engineer for WBKB TV (channel 4, later channel 7), Balaban and Katz's operation in Chicago. Ives was the assistant chief engineer at ABC in Chicago operating the company's AM, FM and TV facilities (WBKB became WLS TV).

In 1935, George married Rose T. Zoller, and some ten years later they began planning WRGK. An application was made to the FCC in 1946, and on January 28, 1947 a corporation, WRGK Inc. (certificate #11898) was formed. Ives was the president, his wife served as secretary-treasurer. Thornton M. Pratt became vice president, and later Charles E. Dewey, Jr. replaced Pratt.

Ives completely designed the entire station and all of its equipment. Test broadcasts began on July 13, 1947, with actual programming commencing on August 18, 1947. Previous to the station's air date, Ives had caught the Brookfield village board off guard. In January of 1946, city officials, while delighted that broadcasting was a possibility in their town, expressed some concerns since the station was located in a residential area. The board first denied the station from selling advertising. Ives cooled fears that his antenna would cause danger or interference in the area.

George did most of the early announcing on the station, according to Mylon Fisher, who operated a drug store at 8900 Fairview at Grand. Fisher (Fisher and Paden's Pharmacy) played the station in his store all day and even purchased advertising.

Air time was sold by Elmer Mattson. Lee Bigos was the station's chief engineer, and Dave Kennedy a parts salesman for Allied Radio was a staff announcer. Bigos (later of NBC) did some remotes along with sportscaster

Bill Knowles who did most of the play by play broadcasts of local high school games. Rose Ives did the bookkeeping and wrote copy.

Brookfield Historical Society member Chris Stach unearthed many articles about WRGK in early editions of the Brookfield Magnet (The Magnet later became the Citizen, and today it is known as Suburban Life). Another old publication, The Enterprise, published by Elmer Johnson, also related stories about the station and its activities.

On January 24, 1949, The Enterprise sponsored a live broadcast of the Brookfield Village Meeting. The seven cents a copy publication reported that Lee Bigos was the announcer for the program with Ives at the controls. Brookfield listeners were delighted to hear their village board in action over the radio. Shoppers gathered at Fisher's drug store and at Lee's Fix It Shop, 8863 Burlington, to hear the live broadcast.

Other governmental broadcasts followed featuring Village Manager C. Harold Eash. A wire recording was made of the broadcast of the meeting. Issues of The Enterprise also contained letters to the editor praising the station's efforts. Area boy scouts were on hand to learn and observe during the broadcast.

WRGK also featured classical and symphonic music from The World Transcription Library. Sports programming was added later. Remote broadcasts by telephone line were often featured from Lyons Township and Riverside-Brookfield High Schools.

Ives periodically had problems securing phone lines for the broadcast. At one high school, the athletic field and school gym were handled by two different phone company offices. A traditional favorite was the annual football game between Lyons and Riverside Brookfield High Schools. The September 27, 1947 game, heard on WRGK, was won by Lyons 24 to 0.

A musical combo program was broadcast from the Candlelight Lounge. Ethnic broadcasts and church programs were presented. Services were regularly broadcast from St. Paul's Lutheran Church featuring Reverend O. A. Rockhoff, beginning September 18, 1949. The church had later broadcasts on WTAQ. By late 1949, WRGK was operating from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. and from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. with some Sunday hours. Hours were changed allowing for the coverage of specific events.

Late in 1949 Ives went back to work full-time for WHFC and allowed staffers to play music off of the stations's two 16-inch Western Electric transcription players. A Chicago station on an adjacent channel increased their power, drastically reducing WRGK's range. WRGK began to lose listeners and advertisers. Weak receivers of the time were overloaded by the stronger of the two stations.

Ives contemplated moving his station to the Brookfield Water Department Pumphouse on Maple near the railroad tracks. He requested permission to install the station's antenna on top of the town's water tower. Initially, Ives had written to the FCC to protest the interference. One newspaper listing stated that the station changed frequency to 104.7 mhz, but this was not substantiated. In the end, high costs, fewer than expected manufactured FM sets for the public, and interference spelled the demise for WRGK.

The station closed down after nearly two and a half years of operation at midnight December 31, 1949. Although it is listed in the 1950 Broadcast Yearbook, WRGK Inc. was dissolved by the State of Illinois (certificate #7063) on June 8, 1950.

Ives was elected president of the Brookfield Kiwanis Club in 1952 and was a frequent community speaker. From 1955 to 1971 George was employed at various engineering capacities at TRW Inc., and its predecessor Ramo-Wooldridge Corporation at Redondo Beach, California. He was a registered professional electrical engineer in Illinois, Colorado, and California, retiring from TRW on October 31, 1971. Some of his duties at TRW included working with guided missiles.

Presently George and his wife reside in West Hills, California and maintain a summer home at Presque Isle, Wisconsin. Two children, Judith and Theron, are married and reside in California. At 75 years old, George is happy and healthy and enjoys talking about his early years in radio in the Midwest.

Ives was an FM pioneer who designed and operated a quality station for the era that was just too early to be fully successful at the time. He wisely observed in 1950 it would take some ten years for FM broadcasting to be profitable and was correct in his assumption.

## NAVIGATIONAL RADIO KDA

### Maywood

A word should be said here of Arthur B. Sonyly (W9G1Z) of Sheboygan, Wisconsin, an amateur radio operator, whose apparent hobby was taking pictures of old radio installations. His photographic memories were

found in a priceless collection of pictures purchased by Elgin dentist Dr. Ralph Muchow at a yard sale. This album contains several original photographs (probably the only ones in existence) of former radio sites in the suburban areas. Some are reproduced in this publication.

One of these old pictures is the former KDA airport radio facility at Maywood. It was one of the many non-entertainment type stations that broadcast weather, aircraft information, or time signals. [Note: There were many stations like this, including NAA at Arlington, Virginia that broadcasted time signals at 600 khz, and NAJ (1510 khz) at the Great Lakes Naval base north of Chicago]. Both are believed to have operated shortwave stations.

KDA came a few years after the establishment of so called radio range or beacon stations that transmitted direction or guidance information in Morse Code. In the beginnings of aviation, a pilot needed to know how to fly as well as decipher Morse Code. The Morse and International Code were both used.

Department of Commerce Navigation Station KDA, Maywood, Illinois was in full operation around 1933. Chicago Tribune aviation editor David Young, who wrote the book, *Fill the Heavens With Commerce*, says that KDA was an early 10 watt station used to broadcast weather conditions and other flight information for planes carrying mail. Similar stations were connected together by 13,000 miles of teletype lines that helped form the Federal Airway System. KDA, as well as Lansing, Illinois' WCQ, operated in the longwave band. Frequencies used by KDA were 236 khz and 350 khz. KDA broadcasted information at 23, 10, 33, and 53 minutes after each hour.

Other Airway stations had similar schedules. The frequency's longwave of 278 and 316 khz were also used to relay information to radio equipped planes. The stations were divided into brown, blue, and red zones across the country. By 1938 there were 68 such stations in the country, most were about 200 miles apart.

Former pilot Donald Lockwood of Chicago suggests, along with Young, that KDA was located at Maywood Field. This facility was located on the land occupied today by Loyola and Hines Veteran Hospitals. This is the west side of First Avenue between Roosevelt Road (12th Street) and Cermak Road (22nd Street).

Lockwood insists that the building that housed KDA and where its towers stood was about 50 feet west of what today is First Avenue, just north of the Penn Central tracks that cut diagonally through the property, just north of Cermak Road. He recalls that an old water tower with a checkerboard emblem painted on it was located nearby.

Today, in the general area, there exists a remaining hangar marked by a commemorative plaque on Airmail Road. This is the only old building left from the airstrip days. Another historian, Josephine Becker, thinks that KDA could have been located closer to Roosevelt Road on the east side of First Avenue where a similar painted fuel tank with a checkerboard emblem once stood. This is near a cemetery by the Eisenhower Expressway.

Actually, there were two airstrips in the area. On the west side on First Avenue was Maywood Field, where military flights took place. It is rumored that world flyer Charles Lindenberg flew mail planes there. Right across the street in the Miller Meadows Forest Preserve was Checkerboard Field, where mail flights operated. (The area is named after former FPD Commissioner, George A. Miller). This side is marked by a large engraved rock located near the Roosevelt Road entrance to the park, just east of First Avenue.

Much research has been done on the former Checkerboard Field by Maywood historians Josephine and Albert Becker. According to the Beckers, who were responsible for erecting the checkerboard monument described earlier. The field got its name from the Checkerboard emblem painted on the wings of the mail planes that operated at the airstrip (which was really just a large field). The facility was established around 1919 by David Behncke of Forest Park, a pilot for United and American Airlines.

Around 1923, a huge fire burned the airstrips' large plane repair hangar. The entire operation then moved across the street to the west side of First Avenue. One tragedy of the old airport was experimenter Tony Yackey, who was killed in a crash at Checkerboard Field. Yackey built planes out of rented space at the old Triangle Cafe Building in Forest Park (where WNBA was located).

At that time Yackey was testing a new monoplane with a new wing design. When one wing came off, Yackey crashed 2,000 feet to his death. This occurred in 1927. The firm had been using the field after the mail flights had moved across the street. Checkerboard was deemed unsafe and closed about 1928. In the 1930s, both mail and military operations continued out of Maywood Field. In the late 1930s, KDA is listed as operating with 1200 watts. Maywood, Cicero Field, Ashburn, and Checkerboard all preceeded Chicago Municipal (Midway) and Orchard Field (now O'Hare Airport). Today, hobbyists fly model airplanes in Miller Meadows, in a special area set aside for such purpose. It is reminiscent of an era when much larger World War I planes used the same site and were guided by the transmissions of KDA.



LA GRANGE RADIO  
WTAQ

Western Towns Along the Q

The long time success of WTAQ reverts back to its original founders who literally built the station and nurtured it from its early "log cabin" days. We say log cabin not because the station came before Marconi's invention of radio, but because its first building actually resembled a primitive pioneer structure. If Marconi was a programmer, he would have marveled at how the station's two professional founders turned his invention into a dedicated community service. Those two pioneers were Russell Salter and Charles Sebastian.

Actually, Salter's roots begin in this episode long before his acquisitions of other stations (also see WKKD). Russ was a talented announcer, interviewer, and storyteller, working for several other stations, including some in Chicago, before becoming involved in station management. Some of his best years were spent during the early days of WIND and WJJD. Ralph Atlass owned both stations and personnel sometimes appeared over either wave length.

At WIND Riley Jackson's "Night Watch Program" gradually became Salter's show. Russ did the program in the mid 40's when WWCA's Dee Coe was the station manager. At 4:00 a.m. Salter shifted over to the WJJD side and began the (Breakfast Frolic) program from 4:00 to 7:00 a.m. Both stations were located in the same building at 201 North Wells Street in Chicago. Here Salter worked with two other well-known broadcasters: Bob Atcher and Dick "Two Ton" Baker. (Atcher later became mayor of Schaumburg. Baker went into TV).

Another friend and musician Bill Wardle worked for WIND. Wardle, who used the professional name Bill Ward, played the organ on the station. It has been said that Ward played at the same studio (8th floor of the Gary State Bank Building, 504 Broadway in Gary, Indiana) where famed organist Ken Griffin got his start (see WMRO). Ward would later become a business associate of Salter's.

Russ Salter's background also includes several years as an announcer for the WLS Barn Dance. It was here he met another broadcast professional, Charles F. Sebastian. Sebastian was a well liked journalist serving as news director and foreign correspondent for several stations in the Midwest. He was the associate news director for WLS in the mid 40's. In the early 50's Sebastian did correspondent work for WFJL-FM, a powerful, but short lived, station operated by Lewis College in Chicago.

Sebastian was a civic and religious leader in the community, he often visited Africa and decorated his office in relics collected on trips (and even kept a pet snake in his office). Sebastian began devoting all of his time to WTAQ in 1954. In October of 1948 Russell Salter filed his application with the FCC for WTAQ, a 500 watt day time station on 1300 khz.

Salter, who was also an engineer, picked La Grange as a suitable spot for his new station and did much of the engineering work. The first call letters were WBAY in which he promptly traded with a Green Bay, Wisconsin station to acquire WTAQ. Salter's station call letters always stood for some geographical importance to the area. In this case WTAQ stood for Western Towns Along the Q. The Q line in those days referred to the Burlington and Quincy Railroad that ran through the area. It was Salter's goal to provide service to the surrounding communities also served by the railroad.

Construction of WTAQ began in 1949 in a corn field next to Manse's Bar, and across the street from the National Cylinder Company near East Avenue (617 South 7th Avenue was an earlier address). The area has since been incorporated by the city of Hodgekins. A trucking terminal stands on this property today. There Sebastian, Salter, and early staffers erected the log cabin building that would house the station for its first five years. On July 3, 1950 the FCC issued its construction permit for the station which used one tower for daytime operation. Additional construction and design was provided by Brookfield contractor Andrew Gregory.

By October the station was ready, but eager staffers had to wait ten more days for the official FCC license which arrived on October 10, 1950. During October the FCC requires daytime only stations to sign off at 5:15 p.m. (local sunset). WTAQ received its notification by telegram at 5:10 p.m. that afternoon and proceeded to broadcast for five minutes on its first official day of operation signing off at 5:15 p.m. So on its first official day of operation, it was on the air for only five minutes.

In early years, WTAQ was known as "Chicago's Personality Station." Informal talks were presented by staffers and guests "who just happened to be passing by the studio." Local news and sports were presented. In contrast to the station's present format, there were no ethnic programs except for Russ Salter's "Polka Party," which aired weekdays from 10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. All announcing, however, was done in English.



Early staffers included Brookfield reporter Art Schlamann, Ted Carlson, Stan Noyes, Marvin Grey, and Virginia Tabor. James Weiss and Pat Nugent later became the station's engineers, but Robert A. Jones is more closely associated with WTAQ. Jones was a good friend of Salter and served as the station's weekend announcer, signing the station on Saturday and Sunday mornings. Today Jones is still the station's consulting engineer and has worked on many other radio projects with Salter over the years. He operates his own consulting firm in LaGrange.

Jones recalls that Sebastian was more business-like than Salter, while Russ was more outgoing and involved in the local programming aspect of the station. Jones remembers the quirks of the log cabin operation. The building had only one bathroom. One time, when the station had blown some fuses and went off the air, engineers could not put the station back on until a female employee was finished using the restroom.

The station's fuse box was located inside the bathroom. Later owner Bill Wardle recalls crawling under the building with a torch to thaw out pipes in the winter. The station's interior was subject to outside conditions. It could be so cold that frozen turntables would refuse to operate in the winter. Temperatures during the summer once reached 114° in the main control room because of the day's discomfort plus other heat generated by tube equipment. In its early days, WTAQ played programs from 15 minute large transcription discs. A slam of a door would send the turntables' tone-arm skidding across the record. At one point, the walls of the station began pulling away from the studio's ceiling.

The former WTAQ studio building was purchased around 1955 by a McCook policeman who moved the structure to 5016 South Glencoe Avenue, McCook and remodeled it into a house. Donald Paeth now lives in this brick structure. Besides Jones, other long time staffers included many dedicated news directors, managers and engineers. Vincent Essig, Larry Crail, Red Surrey, Margaret Burger, Winston Jolly, Ward Oury, David Rafferty, Ron Hughes, Kenneth Steininger, Forest Allan Mann, Andrew Weiss, and Patricia Schlamann (Bejlovic).

Sebastian also held a construction permit for a Harvey radio station in 1954. Shortly after WTAQ began, William M. Murphy and Ralph Faucher joined the staff. Faucher and Wardle bought the station in 1984. Faucher was a well-liked sports announcer. With professional people in place, WTAQ continued to grow. In July of 1954, new construction was begun on a bigger building about 1000 feet east of the old station site at 9355 Joliet Road. On March 30, 1955, the new building was completed and night time broadcasts began.

WTAQ had previously purchased eleven acres to construct four new towers for 500 watt nighttime operation. Application was made on April 14, 1955. The station's nighttime pattern went north/south missing Chicago during evening hours. A generous commitment was still being made to surrounding communities. Lyons Township High School Games, little league, including the Little League World Series from Williamsport, Pennsylvania and local news was presented. Students from Lyons Township High School did a program called Sounds of Summer in 1967. For seventeen years, Bill Wardle's Q-line Talk Show was aired. Church services from the First Congregational, LaGrange Bible, and St. Paul Lutheran were aired.

As the years progressed, the station took on more and more ethnic broadcasters from the Chicago area. Too much "brokered" time bothered Salter, but he needed funds to acquire additional stations. Shortly after WTAQ had started a 1000 watt operation in 1958, Salter sold out to Sebastian in 1959. S & S Broadcasting continued under Sebastian who began construction of additions to the WTAQ studios in 1962. Five thousand watt operation was granted on June 25, 1965. WTAQ joined the ABC Entertainment Network in 1968.

During the late 1960s, when the Chicago White Sox were perennial cellar dwellers, the ball clubs' management set up a small network of stations to broadcast the games. They had been dropped by WMAQ. Charles Sebastian set up a network of four stations in 1971. WTAQ was the only AM station in the group, the agreement was for two years. Harry Caray and Ralph Faucher did the Sox broadcasts. In 1972, a second story was added to house additional office space for the station.

As the years progressed, more and more ethnic broadcasters were added to the programming. WTAQ no longer identified with the initial communities it used to serve along the Q. Buying huge quantities of time were Angelo Liberti, Jose Venzuela, and Chet Shaver. These successful broadcasters bought air time and sold commercials over and above their initial investments into the station. On June 1, 1984, Wardle and Faucher bought out Sebastian. Sebastian who had helped build a hospital in Africa has been involved in the banking business. He is semi-retired today, and resides in North Riverside. Wardle and Faucher sold WTAQ the following year to Lotus Communications. Wardle stated that the company had approached WTAQ Inc. on several occasions to buy the station.

Over the years the large number of ethnic broadcasters that had been gradually added far exceeded the income that could be realized by local programming. The station was reportedly sold for twice its value. Lotus Communications is headed by Howard Kalmenson, and Joseph Newman is the general manager. WTAQ "Radio Fiesta" broadcasts 24 hours a day stereo programs in Spanish; selected White Sox games are also broadcast in Spanish.

Today Bill Wardle lives in Countryside and spends much time in travel and leisure activities. He's played the organ in many popular spots including Salters' WKKD radio station in Aurora. Wardle also played accordion on early broadcasts for "Polka King" of Frankie Yankovic on WGN. Wardle, an engineer, had a long association with Russell Salter, deeming him one of the most friendly and personable professionals in the business. It would be years later that Wardle would have learned that an envelope that Salter had asked him to mail in the mid 40's was the actual application to the FCC for WTAQ, the station that he had enjoyed being associated with for over 30 years. [Note: WTAQ has installed six new towers in Alsip, near the I-294 tollway, to cover Chicago directionally at night.]

## WLTL

### La Grange-Lyons Township High School

In 1966 two students had a dream to develop and place on the air a working radio station at their high school. The students, Wayne Terrell and Terry Marsalla, brought their idea to Superintendent Dr. Donald Reber. Funds were low so the school's radio club helped build and install all the equipment. It was also an educational experience for students, and saved the school much money in labor. Wayne Terrell was president of the school's radio club, Glenn Schubert served as junior president, Terry Marsalla was the secretary-treasurer.

As the station progressed, Marsalla became the station's general manager, Terrell became its engineer, and John Fisher was WLTL's first faculty advisor. The call letters WLTS (Lyons Township Schools) were first chosen, but were unavailable; the second choice, WLTL at 88.3 mhz, was awarded to the school.

The radio station was built in the north campus building at 100 S. Brainard Avenue in La Grange. The students didn't have to go far when they needed help, they called on local consulting engineer Robert A. Jones for assistance. Jones filed the station's construction permit on August 10, 1967.

From the start a variety of classical, jazz, and country and western music was presented. The station signed on January 8, 1968 with 10 watts. In 1969 Jerry Turner became WLTL's general manager, Joel Preston was the program director. Top 40 music came to WLTL in 1972 followed by progressive rock. WLTL offered extensive news coverage and covered the presidential election that year. The Suburban High School Radio Network involved five schools which each took a turn every 20 minutes on the air to relay election information. The station was moved to 88.1 mhz in 1971.

In 1975, WLTL moved its tower up 20 feet to 70 feet and increased its power to 25 watts. The class of 1973 donated money for the new antenna. The station's motto was "straight ahead radio." In 1985 WLTL increased its power to 180 watts and raised its antenna to 138 feet to better serve the school district.

Lyons Township High School participated in the Metropolitan Educational Radio Consortium set up to divide frequencies and power outputs for educational stations in the 1970s. The results of these meetings solidified the channels set up for educational broadcasters in the Chicagoland area today. John Wiesemes has been general manager since 1979, Kathleen Singletary is the program director, and Dennis Strecker is chief engineer; all three are teachers at the school.

WLTL broadcasts new music, public affairs, sports and talk shows to the community six days a week. WLTL's current format is variety rock. New music is often featured along with selected popular album cuts. "The Lyons Roar" is a popular sports talk show centering on high school sports. Another program, "The World of Sports," invites callers to discuss the national sports scene. Lyons Township play by play sports are also presented.

Recent past sports announcers have been Matt McLaughlin, Dave Juday, and Rob Vogt. Recent past student staffers include Bill Storie, Dan Larberg, Steve Sprague, Tom Molidor, Ray Murphy, Marty Marks, Cynthia Adamson, Jeff Kinney, John Lynch, Kirah Ostrowski, Jason Adesso, Steve Petrilo, Phil Schrock, and Ted Slowik, among others.

Studios have moved over the years: the basement of the North Campus was used in 1976 and a 3rd floor room in the Vaughan Building before that. One staffer recalls sailing many records out the third floor window. New facilities have also been added over the years at the North Campus, room 9.

Lyons Township High School has been rich in broadcasting heritage having started a wireless club in 1922. The club's president that year was Herbert Hoff, its sponsor was Mr. Howard. Years later the interest and dedication to broadcasting continues with a new crop of energetic youngsters interested in a career or just wanting to be on the radio. Faculty advisor and general manager John Wiesemes supervises the school's cable channel.

Wiesemes says, "WLTL gives students valuable broadcast experience enabling them to decide whether or not they are interested in pursuing a career in radio."

Several graduates have gone on to professional radio. David Perlmutter produces promotional announcements for "Murphy in the Morning" on Chicago's WKQX, Carla Leonardo is also a WKQX announcer, Allan Loudell is now news director at WILM, an all news station in Wilmington, Delaware, while Bobby "Ocean" Schmidt does Top 40 radio in Florida. Currently, about 75 students are participating in WLTL's broadcast program. The radio station has since been incorporated into the school's regular curriculum which features several courses of studio skills, production and station management.

### **DOWNERS GROVE RADIO WHBT WENR WCFL WDGC**

The radio history of the village of Downers Grove can be easily compared to many other similar towns and cities where interest in this new electronic fascination grew quickly. A noted statistician of the time, Roger W. Babson, reported in the Downers Grove Reporter that in 1924 the American public was expected to spend over \$400 million on radio sets, tubes, and equipment. People that year spent twice as much on radio than sporting goods. Babson wrote, "to sum the matter up, radio has passed through the fad stage and has become a utility." He noted that equipment and programs had gotten appreciatively better, prompting more interest and use of radio.

Radio developments always found space in the 1920s and 1930s editions of the Downers Grove Reporter. The newspaper was consulted several times in preparation for this article. In amongst the news of the day, like a four foot long alligator that was found in a swamp along Highland Avenue and the activities of the Chautauqua Cultural Society, were many references to the growing interest of radio to village residents.

The newspaper carried a weekly article by the Crosley Radio Company informing readers of programming notes and tuning techniques. There were many local stores that advertised and sold radio sets in the community. Some of these early Downers Grove merchants are listed here along with the brands they sold:

Annex Radio Shop, 19 East Curtiss Street

G.B. Austin, 4941 Main & 39 South Main (Victor Records and Players)

Fred Baker Jewelry Store, 755 South Main (Mohawk)

Central Radio, 1008 Curtiss

Central Service Station, 4903 Main (Philco)

Downers Grove Motor Sales, 1016 Warren (Sparton)

Electric Service Company, 12 North Williams, Westmont, IL (owned by C.W. Cox and Jack Winter)

C.W. Friedrich, 5121 Main, 33 South Main (Brunswick)

E. Holman O'Neill, 128 Summit Street (also an amateur radio operator, with a later shop at 741 Summit in the family home)

P.W. Battery, 97 South Main Street

Lemple Battery Station, Forest and Belmont (Freshman)

Quality Radio Company, 229 West Williams Street, Chicago, IL

Schultz Brothers, 15 West Railroad Street (J.M. Eichelman) (Majestic)

J.H. Tedens and Son, 1043 Curtiss (Majestic)

George M. Welch, 95 S. Main Street (Neutrodyne, Armstrong)

Zenith Radio Store

Rodlund Radio, Cox Electric all at 5111 Main Street. Cox Electric moved to 1008 Curtiss in 1934-Rodlund moved to 1010 Curtiss.

Quickly Downers Grove and the surrounding DuPage County communities were becoming home to radio transmitting sites. The village was already dominated by Chicago radio stations who needed space to set up

installations capable of covering large distances. West of Addison, KYW was building a new 50,000 watt site. (This would later become the home of WMAQ, who would move from Elmhurst).

WMBI was already located near Addison in 1929. Chicago stations WENR and WCFL would eventually locate their transmitters near Downers Grove and maintain auxiliary studios there. In addition, three other tiny stations were located in the village. Much later the local school district would operate an educational FM outlet, but only one AM station has ever been actually licensed for Downers Grove. Downers Grove was dominated by the big Chicago stations because of its proximity with the "windy city."

Frequently, local residents would appear on Chicago radio to sing, give speeches, or participate in contests. The stations would also travel to the village. Below is a partial list of Downers Grove participants on Chicago radio in the 1920s and 1930s:

02-08-24 Carl Vogler won the "Mystery Song" contest on WMAQ.

01-16-25 Downers Grove Homemakers Club on WLS.

01-23-25 George Bunge speaker for Christian Endeavor Society, spoke on WMAQ. Downers Grove residents contributed over \$1,200.00 to aid tornado victims in April of 1925, in a drive sponsored by WTAS, Elgin then broadcasting from Kimball Hall in Chicago.

12-26-25 WLS stars, Ford Rush and Glenn Rowell, put on a concert at the Methodist Church on West Maples.

03-04-27 WQJ Orchestra (a station in Chicago owned by the Calumet Baking Powder Company), participated in a parade, honoring the city's new street lights. Village residents followed news events on Chicago stations like wars, depressions, and the question of prohibition discussed by famous lawyer Clarence Darrow on Chicago station WJAZ on March 18, 1927. Downers Grove readers learned about the world's first wedding ever performed on television on October 5, 1928. A couple was married watching a minister through the facilities at WIBO. WIBO Chicago, with a transmitter in Des Plaines, also performed early TV experiments as did WCFL:

05-29-30 Howard Pfaff of E.G. Pfaff and Sons Hardware, 5145 Main, discussed types of chicken feed on WLS.

05-07-31 WLS auctioneer, Bob Nelson comes to Downers Grove to auction off used cars at an auto dealer in town.

02-07-32 WLS organist, Ralph Waldo Emerson and singer Hal O'Halloran performed at the Methodist Church.

Chicago stations looked at Downers Grove as one of many fine small communities to do occasional programs to keep listeners tuned in. Businessmen enjoyed the notoriety that two stations had located their transmitters in the area, and would sometimes mention Downers Grove in their station breaks.

As the years went by, these big city giants would again focus most of their attention on Chicago. With two large transmitters nearby, early radio sets were dominated by the signals of WENR and WCFL. WCFL engineers, which included a number of area amateur radio operators, would come out to homes to show listeners how to tune out the strong local signals.

The earliest reference to broadcasting in Downers Grove comes from amateur radio operator "NG." Before regulation and licensing by the government, operators chose their own calls, usually two or three letter combinations. The early operator who chose the call H-A-M labeled all future hobbyists as HAM radio operators. Other sources suggest that the term H-A-M was attached to inexperienced early amateurs by professional telegraph radio operators, or police dispatchers. The name could have been taken from the first initials of the last names of three men who operated the first wireless station in 1908: Albert Hyman, Bob Almy, and Reggy Murray, all of Harvard College, according to Steve Ewald of the American Radio Relay League.

NG was quoted in the Downers Grove Reporter in an editorial about the Sylvandale section of the city located west of Oakwood Avenue. It was not clear if the station existed, or if the writer of the article was pretending to use radio as a timely illustration as if he were announcing to the community.

On November 23, 1923, an ad appeared in the Downers Grove Reporter for radio sales and repairing. Elmer Holman O'Neill (9DSG) had been in radio since 1916. He stated that he had the only transmitter in town and that a new modern station would open in about a month. No other references were found to this station.



Elmer Holman O'Neill was the son of William J. O'Neill, the owner of a flooring company in Chicago. Elmer's mother was Lottie Holman O'Neill, the first woman elected to the Illinois House of Representatives. The ad listed O'Neill's shop at 128 Summit. The shop later moved to the family home at 741 Summit. A 1922 radio amateur call book lists Elmer and his brother William, Jr. (9CJX), residing at 123 Summit with permission to operate at 50 watts.

It would be nearly a year and a half before Downers Grove's first ever licensed AM station would begin broadcasting. This distinction would go to two students of Homer Bale's Radio Club at Downers Grove Community High School. The club had formed under Bale, an instructor at the school on September 4, 1924. Myron Steffey was president of the club which included about 35 students. Donald Davis served as vice-president of the group.

In its formation the students hoped that some day there would be a regular radio course at the school. None existed at this time. With Mr. Bale offering direction, students Thomas Tizzard, Jr. and Vernon Vanselow opened the village's first station, WHBT. Broadcast Profile listed the station at 10 watts at 1450 khz. The U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Navigation and Radio Division issued WHBT a three month limited commercial broadcasting license. The station lasted for only about two months, but in its short existence offered the surrounding community some genuine local musical programs featuring town musicians.

It took a considerable amount of time to determine exactly where WHBT was located. A number of old telephone books and city directories were carefully scanned and crisscrossed by Carol Wandschneider, of the Downers Grove Historical Society, and me. At least once and possibly twice the street addresses have been changed to coincide with the numbering system of Chicago. According to Jack Winter, publisher of the Downers Grove Reporter, one of these changes took place in 1927, making previous addresses obsolete.

In March of 1925, when WHBT was licensed, its address was 352 Prince Avenue, a gravel road just outside of the village limits. The confusion starts when later references are consulted rendering old addresses prior to 1927 useless. Addresses today on Prince are in the 4200 to 4700 series. Incidentally, Tizzard lived at 4524 Forest Avenue, one block east of Prince Avenue. Vanselow (pronounced Van-sa-low), resided at 4809 Northcote. Tizzard's old address under the old numbering system would be 518 N. Forest. It was not until a conversation with another long time Downers Grove resident, Jack Hoffman, that the historical society and I could agree on the exact place where the station had been. Hoffman mentioned that a Herman Krueger was also connected to the station in some capacity.

A DuPage County 1925-1926 directory (copyright 1924) listed both Tizzard and Krueger as living at 352 Prince Avenue. This was at the time the station existed. Perhaps, for a short time, the Tizzard's, or at least Thomas Jr., moved in with the Kruegers. A 1927 phone book lists the Tizzard's at their Forest Street address and the Krueger's at 4504 Prince Avenue.

An old house belonging to the Mata Krueger family still stands at 4502 Prince Avenue. The address had been changed again to accommodate additional homes in the area. Carol Wandschneider remembers that Mrs. Krueger sold produce that she grew in a vacant lot next door to the home. Hoffman remembers going to the Tizzard home to be on WHBT, and also recalls that Herman Krueger had something to do with the station. Since the county phone book places Krueger and Tizzard at the same address in 1925, and the fact that either Krueger or his father worked at Western Electric in Downers Grove, which manufactured early radio transmitters, it is almost certain that 352 Prince Avenue today is 4502 Prince Avenue. This is also based on finding that after 1927 the Krueger house number had been changed again, but the family had not moved. In a 1910 phone book the Kruegers are listed at Grant Street at Prince, and in 1926 at 538 Prince indicating another possible house numbering change.

Around 1927 the numbers were apparently changed once again to their current ones. This is in the neighborhood near the old high school. The home and barn behind it appear to be 1880 vintage and the oldest structures on the block. A 1925 amateur radio call book lists Thomas W. Tizzard, Jr., operating HAM station 9ELF at 352 Prince Avenue with 5 watts of power.

A 1926 reference to the station in the high school yearbook "The Cauldron" refers to the "Steffy and Tizzard studio, controlled by the Downers Grove Reporter and newspaper magnate Gilbert Mochel." The newspaper regularly printed the tiny station's program schedule on the front page.

Tizzard played the banjo and had plenty of other musical friends to draw from to perform on the station. This included Vernon Vanselow, an accomplished violinist and tenor. Vanselow often teamed with Jack Hoffman and appeared as "Jack and Van." The duo played what Jack called "tipples," ten stringed ukeleles. They performed on Chicago stations WSBC, WBBM, and WLS's Barn Dance program. The two met and began their singing career in the choirs at St. Paul's Evangelical Church. On WHBT they were known as the "Static Boys."

Another station musician, Russell Hoag, lived nearby at 4529 Prince Avenue. WHBT's call letters stood for "We Have Big Times," as mentioned in the Downers Grove Reporter. Station staffers, however, often joked about the station, calling it instead, "We Have Bad Tonsils, or Bad Teeth, etc..."

WHBT broadcasted mainly on Saturdays and Mondays. The station's first broadcast took place on Saturday evening at 8:00 p.m. on April 11, 1925. The inaugural program was sponsored by the Flea Publishing Company, who produced the nation's best little comic book, "The Flea." A number of local musicians appeared on the program including, Tizzard, Vanselow, John Wedell, harmonica; Wilbur Coleman, tenor; Howard Foreman, baritone; Willard Anderson, tenor; Charlotte Convey, ukelele; Mable Petra, reader; and the local "Static Boys," Tom Canty and Vernon Vanselow.

The April 13th broadcast at 8:00 p.m. listed some of the same individuals along with Russell Hoag, saxophone; Norval Deach, banjo; the "Static Boys," and the "Triangle Harmony Lads." The program featured requests and another feature called the "Hot Time Frolic." Similar programs were aired on April 25th, April 27th, and May 9th. The station featured the "singing announcer," who only spoke in song, when making introductions. The WHBT Orchestra was featured on the May 9th program. It is not known if plans to broadcast the Minuet Orchestra from the Masonic Temple each Saturday night ever materialized. The station appeared to be only an airing point for a number of friends to play their instruments and gather to sing each week.

After two months of broadcasting, the Radio Division checked and determined that the station had been abandoned. On June 23, 1925 WHBT's license was canceled. Both Tizzard and Vanselow later married local women and worked in Chicago at Ryerson Steel. In the early 1950s, Thomas Tizzard, Jr. was employed by the C.B.Q. Railroad, and later the Griswold Signal Company in Chicago, while Vanselow continued as a credit manager. Tizzard died January 8, 1960.

WHBT can be characterized as the station that hardly anyone remembers. Perhaps lack of time and interest brought the curtain down on the village's first ever licensed AM station.

Downers Grove also had two other stations which, for a short time, did some local programs from the village. They are mentioned here merely because of their suburban transmitter site locations and are generally considered as Chicago stations. WENR, the more visible of the two, built a transmitter site east of Downers Grove on Main and Lemont Road. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, the station offered some coverage to local events and church services.

The other station, WCFL, owned by the Chicago Federation of Labor, purchased a large tract of property off Ogden Avenue on the northwest side of the village. A transmitting station has remained on this site for many years. Currently, the facility is operated by WLUP-AM in Chicago. Early shortwave and TV broadcasting experimentation also emanated from this site near 39th and Roslyn in the late 1920s. The following sections highlight the early years of WENR and WCFL in the Downers Grove Community.

#### WENR--The Voice of Service

Perhaps one of the first radios purchased by our parents was a large floor model set complete with wood cabinet, box antenna, and those unique push buttons that enabled the listener to quickly locate their favorite stations. The buttons were labeled with the call letters of the more popular stations in the area. Those old sets found in the Midwest usually had one button reserved for station WENR. Long silent, WENR was one of the early powerhouse stations in Chicago through the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. This reflects upon how large city stations attempted to reach out to other communities they attempted to serve. WENR found Downers Grove to be a good neighbor and an untapped source of eager talent desiring to be associated with a well known Chicago station.

According to a September 1927 story in the Downers Grove Reporter, which was consulted quite often for this article, WENR (or WEE-NER as some announcers like Art Hellyer called it), was the first station in Chicago to operate with 50,000 watts. Transmitter tests using the call letters 9XF were conducted for several weeks, leading up to a July 1, 1928 official sign on of the station from Downers Grove.

At a Downers Grove Lions Club meeting, WENR's chief engineer Gager told the organization that new RCA equipment, towers and a modern building would be installed near the village. The announcer's first words over the new broadcast set up were, "This is WENR, Downers Grove, Illinois from our studio in the Straus Building in Chicago."

About this time, WENR had been sold to Samuel Insull's Great Lakes Broadcasting Company. The Insull utility empire was anxious to get into the Chicago radio market. The firm was building the Civic Opera House and

had purchased another smaller station, WBCN. WBCN was operated by Foster and McDonnell in the early 1920s from 728 West 65th Street in Chicago. The station's call letters stood for "World's Best Community Newspaper." William McDonnell, owner of the Southtown Economist (1917-1956), apparently sold out to the Insull interests, too. A former owner of the newspaper, Bruce Sagan, who now publishes the Hyde Park Herald, states that WBCN's tower was on top of the one and one-half story red brick building on 65th Street. The building has since been torn down and the publication moved.

WBCN operated at 1130 khz with 5,000 watts. Programs were carried over both WBCN and WENR. In another publication, WENR is stated to be operating at 1050 khz, and at the same time, operating with 50,000 watts at 870 khz. The 1050 and 1130 frequencies were probably the same station operating at either point on the dial. The Downers Grove Reporter (August 1928) called the operation the "Twin Stations," describing two signals (one at 5,000 watts, another at 50,000) going out from Downers Grove during different times of the day. Apparently, the lower powered station was later dropped, sold, or deleted by the FRC. Both WLS and WENR shared 870 khz after 1930, and carried NBC-Blue Network Programs. Red Network shows were carried by WMAQ and WCFL.

[Editors Note: The Red and Blue Networks were formed out of a government antitrust suit against AT & T, RCA, and NBC to break up an apparent monopoly of the broadcasting industry. This included the stations themselves and the methods used (telephone wires) to carry network programs into each market. In the end result, colored pens, red and blue, drawn on a map, connecting cities together decided which stations would be red or blue members. The American Broadcasting Company was formed out of the old Blue Network. WENR later lost its network affiliation.]

When WENR built its new site in Downers Grove early in 1928, the station's chief engineer, A.R. Johnson, helped conduct tours of the transmitter site for curious visitors. The fine masonry building was expected to be fully landscaped and was frequently visited. The station's motto, "The Voice of Service," was inscribed above the front door. Children were not permitted in the building because of its high voltage hazards. The Downers Grove Reporter added that WENR received over 30,000 pieces of mail, over 15,000 phone calls, and nearly 21,000 visitors to the new site, during its first year in the community. WENR used the Downers Grove facility until late in 1938.

Around 1941, the land was sold and turned into a factory which manufactured hand grenades, ammunition, and later mothballs. During World War II, a day care center for parents working in the plant was also located inside. The motto above the door in later years was changed to "Love Thy Country, Serve It Well." Downers Grove Historian Ted Dreuttel recently visited the area and observed that the old WENR building was still there. As a youth, he had been inside the 60 X 60 foot building in the 1930s. Ted recalled that two engineers were operating the equipment. Behind the building (years ago) stood two towers, one on each side; these are now gone. The cement colored structure contained the original spanish style windows. The building sets back about 1,000 feet off the road. The land today is occupied by the F.J. Curran Chemical Company located at 8101 Lemont Road (Main Street), on the east side of the road in unincorporated Downers Grove.

WENR was basically a Chicago station. Its tenure typifies the rise and growth of many old Chicago stations, priding itself with development of early programming and service to the city and its surrounding communities like Downers Grove.

WENR's call letters are derived from its founder E.N. Rauland, owner of the All-American Radio Company, located at 4201 W. Belmont Avenue on the north side of Chicago. Early studios and transmitter were located in the factory's building. The firm manufactured crystal radio sets, tube type radios, and later shared the patent for car radios with the Philco Company.

E.N. Rauland also produced picture tubes for radar screens. This product lead to the mass production of TV picture tubes. This branch of All American Radio became part of the Zenith Corporation. The communications division of Rauland's Firm became the Rauland-Borg Company, according to its current sales manager, Fred Molinhauer. All-American's former building, constructed in 1921, still stands today and is occupied by Mercoid Industries. Rauland passed away in Skokie in April of 1975, after a lengthy and successful career in electronic development. Rauland built the station's first 10 watt transmitter in 1924, and a year later constructed a 100 watt transmitter.

Later in 1925, WENR was using a 1,000 watt transmitter designed by Rauland and built by Western Electric. Western Electric had one of its several plants located in Downers Grove. After its purchase by Samuel Insull, WENR quickly became of the most powerful stations in Chicago and the Midwest operating fourteen hours a day. As previously mentioned, after the 1927-28 construction of new facilities in Downers Grove, the 50,000 watt



station boasted an impressive line up of "high brow" programs, rich in culture, religion, and entertainment. Only one time was WENR's image and integrity tarnished as the station succumbed to a cruel hoax by a vicious prankster. In the January 29, 1926 edition of the Cook County Herald (a Paddock Publication), it was reported that an anonymous caller pleaded with the station to announce a phony emergency message. The WENR announcer read the following statement: "Listen! Distress! Any listeners living near Arlington Heights, notify the Firmbachs that the baby is very sick and the mother who is at Arlington Heights should come home at once." The Firmbach Family received over 200 phone calls inquiring about the health of their daughter, who was not ill.

One of the callers who was first to respond, Mrs. G. H. Arps of Palatine, became infuriated with the station, The Herald, and with a Chicago Tribune editorial on the matter. Her letter to the editor, entitled "Wolf, Wolf," called the episode a misuse of radio and asked that the newspapers to use their influence to "sponsor laws that would provide penalties for persons perpetrating a hoax of this kind."

The newspapers defended the station citing WENR's anxious attitude to assist in an emergency. Evidently, WENR did not check out the information they had received before broadcasting it. Hopefully, each station operating today has some kind of policy to verify emergency information before it is broadcast to guard against similar frauds.

Articles from 1928 through 1930 editions of the Downers Grove Reporter mention many programs that emanated from Downers Grove. One successful program was the Sunday Evening Club, sponsored by The Men's Club of the First Congregational Church at 1047 Curtiss Street. The local Methodist Episcopal Church also hosted some of the programs. The Sunday Evening Club began on October 21, 1928 (some sources say October 26th or 27th) and ran through the spring of 1931.

The last program's special speaker was Dr. L.V. Redman of the American Chemical Society on March 8, 1931. The program featured a choir directed by Gardner S. Howland, vocalist, Gwyn Griffiths Vaughan, and organist Donald Drew. Ministers Reverend Bertram B. Hanscom and later Reverend Albert J. Pittman of the Congregational Church also participated on the program. The live show at the church featured religious as well as other notable speakers from around the country during the 8:00-9:00 p.m. broadcast. (Some sources say it was a half hour program beginning at 7:30 p.m. and later at 8:00 p.m.)

Organist Donald Drew, now 86 years young, still resides in Downers Grove, and often substitutes at local churches. He has played the Kimball organ at the Congregational Church and other churches for over 65 years. Now retired, he knew several of the musicians listed earlier as members of the WHBT staff. They were old high school acquaintances of his, including its owner Thomas Tizzard. Drew played in a February 18, 1927 concert on WENR, as well as on other stations.

WENR also broadcasted frequent church services from the Downers Grove community, until NBC took over the station around 1931. Other programs regularly heard on WBCN-WENR, were:

10:00 a.m. Sunshine Hour  
11:30 a.m. Noon Home Service feature with Anna J. Peterson (radio's first home economist)  
12:00-1:00 p.m. Noon Classical Hour  
1:00-2:00 p.m. Semi Classical Hour  
2:00-5:00 p.m. Afternoon Popular Program  
5:00-9:00 p.m. Classical Music with Organ, Orchestra, String Trio and Vocalists  
9:00-12:00 p.m. Popular Program

The "International Test Program" continued to 3:00 a.m. The Edison Symphony Orchestra, conducted by station manager Morgan L. Eastman, performed on Sundays. A full staff of announcers, musicians, comedians and their back-ups worked at the station, including the WENR Trio, Chuck Haynes, Raymond Ferris, and Eugene Arnold.

WENR and WJZ, New York City, were the nation's top gold cup stations in 1930 according to Radio Digest. The above schedule was taken from the Downers Grove Reporter (August 31, 1928). [Note: On April 2, 1928, Angelo Masouris, owner of the Downers Grove Restaurant, received a reception report that a California listener had heard WENR using a two tube Radiola set with 105 feet of aerial wire and a water pipe ground. The listener did not know the call letters, but had written to the restaurant after a song had been dedicated to the establishment, thinking the place had sponsored the program. Count this with the many letters the station received that year.]



Much of WENR's early success was due to the hard work and promotion of Everett Mitchell. Mitchell's career is highlighted in a biography by Richard Crabbe, a former consulting editor of The Daily Journal Newspaper in Wheaton. Area historian Jean Moore also contributed to Crabbe's work. The book, *Radio's Beautiful Day*, details Mitchell's life from his younger days of singing invitational hymns with Evangelist Billy Sunday, and appearing on the "first station west of Pittsburgh, KYW," to his later work with NBC. A monument marking the location of Billy Sunday's farm is located on Route 72 in front of the Dundee Township Garage in Sleepy Hollow. Mitchell's first singing lessons were paid for by his Sunday School teacher. He sang at the Pacific Garden Mission, and sold insurance before beginning his radio career, in about 1922.

Crabbe's book features many historical photographs depicting Mitchell's contributions to the radio field, as well as the story behind Everett's long running "National Farm and Home Hour" program that ran on WENR, WMAQ, and NBC for over 30 years. The show's first broadcast was on May 14, 1932, and ran six days a week until 1945 when it became a Saturday only program. It won so many awards that the network carried it unsponsored during its running. The program featured in-depth interviews from experts in the field of agriculture, as well as the latest farming information.

In later years the show was produced at WMAQ's Merchandise Mart Studios and aired over WENR on the NBC Red Network. Everett began his noon program by stating, "It's a beautiful day in Chicago, it's a great day to be alive, and I hope it is even more beautiful wherever you are." "Stars and Stripes Forever" was the musical theme of the show. His program successfully competed in later years against WLS's well known agricultural format. WLS at that time was known as the "Prairie Farmer Station" and was owned by the Prairie Farmer Journal. The two stations briefly, along with with Zion's WCBD, shared the same frequency (870 khz).

WENR under the direction of orchestra leader Frank Westphal and Everett Mitchell is responsible for a number of radio firsts. These included the first commercially sponsored program, the first large live audience show, and airing of the first radio prayer service. Mitchell began successful programs like "Air Juniors," a children's show, "The Smile Club," and other agricultural type programs. He was also responsible for the diverse scheduling of quality music programs heard in the station, and was joined later by the Harry Kogen Orchestra. Shirley Bell (Little Orphan Annie) got her start doing children's shows on WENR (and never drank Ovaltine). Crabbe carefully narrates the developments of these programs and attaches them to the related events of what was going on in the world at the time.

The book also traces the movements of WENR to the Kimball Building, where it occupied Charles Erbstein's studios for WTAS. Later in 1927, WENR moved to the Spanish Garden Studios at the Straus Building, when WSWS moved out and later became WTAS once again (see WTAS, WSWS). WENR moved to the Civic Opera House in 1929 and then to the Merchandise Mart by 1931. Veteran newsmen Walter Winchell and Gabriel Heatter were heard over WENR in 1925 (and WGN in the late 1930's). Vinnie Pelletier was also an early WENR announcer, along with Bill Hay.

Meanwhile, Mitchell's career continued to sparkle under the later managements of Samuel Insull's Great Lakes Broadcasting Company and NBC's Blue Network. NBC purchased WENR in 1931, and soon afterwards, Mitchell became the chief announcer at NBC's other Chicago station WMAQ.

Over the years, he became an indispensable radio personality, speaker, and authority on agriculture. Mitchell retired in 1968, after several successful years as host of WNBQ-TV's (WMAQ-TV) "Town and Farm" program. After his retirement, Mitchell continued to do research for the University of Illinois on his farm near Wheaton, until he sold the farm in 1973. He was also heard doing a commercial for a land development company on WREX-TV Rockford a few years later, according to Warren Anderson, a broadcast executive at the station. Anderson (formally K9LOM) was also an announcer at WENR around 1950.

Mitchell was raised near Oak Park and resided in Park Ridge. He passed away on November 9, 1990 after some 70 years as a broadcaster. His wife Clara still resides in Wheaton. His son Peter lives in Dallas, Texas.

It was mentioned that WLS and WENR shared their channel. This began in 1930, when both stations sought clear channel operation. That year the newly created FCC made 870 khz a clear channel, giving most of the time to WLS. After a lawsuit was settled between the two stations, both WLS and WENR equally divided their broadcast time on 870 khz. Both WLS and WENR moved to 890 khz in 1942 because of the "Havana Treaty." WLS, the prairie farmer station, broadcasted in the morning to its mainly agricultural audience, except for its popular National Barn Dance program. The show featured former Schaumburg village president, Bob Atcher, and later announcer

Russell Salter as well as many well known country music stars like Red Foley and George Goebel on Saturday evenings.

WENR was on the air evenings beginning at 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon. Warren Anderson remembers being given five seconds to sign the station on and move into the station's first program, "Club Matinee," which ran until 4:00 p.m. Rex Maupin's Orchestra and guest emcee Garry Moore, a later TV personality, were often featured on WENR.

WENR and WLS's sharetime agreement continued until 1955. When WLS, now owned by ABC, purchased WENR to gain full access to the channel. The WENR call letters were dropped; however, WLS's FM affiliate carried the call letters WENR-FM into the 1960s. WLS-TV (formerly WBKB-TV) was also known as WENR-TV in the early 1950s. An employee on hand at the time of the purchase of WENR remembers being told to discard "anything that had to do with WENR." Some records and files were even tossed into the Chicago River.

In later years both WENR and WLS used the same 50,000 watt transmitter in Tinley Park, just north of I-80, according to former WENR-TV engineers William Kusack (W9QEE) and Clar Heider. Broadcast consultant Sterling "Red" Quinlan, who managed WBKB-TV for Paramount and ABC, was also the overseer of WENR operations in the early 1950s. Quinlan has written several books including one called The Merger, which outlines the WLS-WENR consolidation and the dissolution of expendable staff members. The book portrays two sets of broadcast executives vying for control of a newly merged TV corporation.

WLS, formerly of Crete, Illinois, came on the air on April 12, 1924. The crete historical society says that the original WLS transmitter building was located at 1712 Dixie Highway. The station purchased the four acre site from F. P. Rohe in 1925. Two 200 foot towers were installed behind the building. The engineer of the 5,000 watt station was Dale Peck of Crete. The Queen's Estate Mobile Home Park occupies the propoerty today. The transmitter building was taken down in 1960. Today WLS utilizes a different transmitter site near Tinley Park. According to Chicago radio historian Roy J. Bellavia, the WLS call letters stand for World's Largest Store, dating back to the time that the station was owned by Sears, Roebuck and Company, until 1928. Studios were located at the Sears Headquarters at Homan and Arthington Street. The station was sold to the Prairie Farmer Publishing Company. Studios were moved to 1230 Washington Boulevard. Art Page managed WLS in its early years and produced the popular "Dinner Bell" program. Other notable staffers were farm reporters Julian Bentley ("that's a 30") from Harvard and Lloyd "Doc" Burlingham from Woodstock. Today the Prairie Farmer Publishing Company is now known as the Farm Progress Company which is located in Carol Stream, Illinois.

Through the late 50's and 60's to the present, the American Broadcasting Company made WLS into a popular music station. The only throwbacks to its early years of agricultural programs were announcers Captain Stubby (Tom Fouts) and Chuck Homer Bill, who did a fine entertaining and informative 5:00 a.m. wake up show, and Don McNeill's Breakfast Club, live from the London house at 9:00 a.m. (Stubby and Bill's routines have since been syndicated.) After many years as a music station, WLS went all talk in 1991, simulcasting with WLS-FM (formerly WYTZ/WDAI).

### WCFL--The Voice of Labor

Almost a year after WENR had moved to Downers Grove and had begun regular programming, another large Chicago station decided to locate near the village. The Chicago Federation of Labor had been planning a "super station" for sometime. A 1927 newspaper article stated that the federation planned to buy a farm and build a 50,000 watt station and an airport east of Elgin. However, the CFL chose Downers Grove instead. Lead by then secretary Edward M. Nockels, the organization purchased 100 acres of land known as the old Aherns farm. The property bordered Ogden Avenue, east of Fairview. Old Plank Road was located nearby. The transmitter site, according to labor officials, was more than a place to put up antennas--it was an entire community in which lots were sold to "friends" of the federation for \$750.00 to \$1,050.00. Those wanting to get in on the fast "westward development" of lands spreading out from Chicago were to profit. A number of federation sponsored work programs were also to make use of some of the land.

First reports of the proposed move of the station from its location at Navy Pier were denied, as it had appeared that the land deal had fallen through. But later in May of 1928, Nockels, an engineer named Bean, and several other Chicago Federation of Labor officials held a meeting at the State Bank and Trust Company in Downers Grove to officially announce that the sale of the land had taken place. Architect M.F. Strauch drew up plans for the new transmitter building, as verified in a 1928 WCFL Radiophone Magazine. Studios were located at 628 South

Wabash Avenue. Other offices were located at the north tower of Navy Pier. The first of several frequencies used was 620 khz.

At first Downers Grove radio listeners were concerned that another large station in their community would cause interference problems, but this notion was clearly put to rest by the organization's engineers. Construction started in early 1928. An auxiliary studio was built at the Downers Grove site, but most of the station's programming came from Chicago, first at the Furniture Mart at 666 North Lake Shore Drive and later at 300 North State Street at Marina City. WCFL's first transmitter site consisted of a wire strung between two poles at Navy Pier, signing on June 26, 1926.

An August 12, 1928 article in the Downers Grove Reporter stated that WCFL dedicated four hours of broadcast time to the village's annual picnic. Some entertainment was provided and results of a greased pig contest were announced. Old state maps show the WCFL property abutting Ogden Avenue. As the years proceeded, much of the land was sold off. Other land was set aside for a park.

Early landmarks on the property, better described as near 39th and Roslyn (or Williams), were two towers and a large pole on the main building. Today there are three towers. Area amateur radio operators served as engineers at the station. Some shortwave and early TV broadcasting experimentation also took place at the site. Edward Nockel's image is believed to be one of the first TV pictures to emanate from Chicago over the federations TV station 9XAA in 1928.

Back in Chicago, a large studio big enough to hold an orchestra, three grand pianos, and a large Barton organ provided daily programs of live music. In addition, remote band broadcasts from the Savoy Ballroom at 47th and South Parkway in Chicago featured Carroll Dickerson's "Savoyagers," and Clarence Black's Orchestra. Keith Beecher's "King Bees," performed from the Vanity Fair Cafe at Grace and Broadway. Other station performers were, Louis Panico, Al Henke, Paul Liebezit, Harold O'Halloran, Charles Smiley, Theodore Mohr, and organist, Roy J. Farr. A number of female vocalists added to the quality of WCFL's early live music broadcasts.

WCFL competed with large Chicago stations like WBBM, WJBT, and WGN for big band audiences. A trail of talented announcers have flowed through the doors of WCFL over the years, as newsmen and disc jockeys. White Sox baseball was carried for many years over the station (see Art Hellyer). WCFL was a member of the Mutual Broadcasting System. "Commander" Bob Elson and Don Wells did the games.

For a short time WCFL did battle with WLS attempting to be the top popular music station in Chicago in the late 1960s. The station lost out and went into beautiful music and talk formats, with an attempt at being an all religious station in 1984. In 1987 WCFL was sold to H & G Communications, who had acquired an FM outlet. WCFL had operated an FM station in the 1950s. The old WCFL call letters remained on the building in Downers Grove until last year, when a station from Morris, Illinois picked up the old call and jingle package.

Today, the old WCFL transmitter site (now WLUP-AM) is the only remaining portion of the village's early radio heritage. Big band and early pop music has been replaced by album-oriented rock and talk by Steve Dahl, Garry Meier, Jonathon Brandmeir, Bobby Skafish, Bob Stroud, Kevin Matthews, Chet Coppock, John Fisher, Buzz Kilman, and Ed Tyll. Studios are located on the 40th floor of the John Hancock building in Chicago. Downers Grove High School District 99 currently operates WDGC-FM, an educational station that has been on the air since 1969 (see WDCG). WDGC is Downers Grove's only station actually licensed for the village.

## WDGC

### Downers Grove District 99

WDGC general manager Fred Moore likes to call the station "Full Service Radio." It is the successful combination of student training and dedicated alumni who have taken the opportunity to give back something to the station that helped them get into their present careers. WDGC started as WDN 600 khz as a school carrier current operation around 1965. At that time, radio was an extra curricular activity. Student Jim Swick designed the station's early operations which began in a school closet.

The station signed on February 28, 1969, and each year new programs and equipment were added. WDGC was relocated in 1969 to room 330, a remodeled private classroom, and then to a portable classroom in 1972, and to its present quarters room 139 in 1980. The newest facility was a large storage and exercise area, which is now shared by radio and TV classes. WDGC's 10 watt signal radiated from an antenna 59 feet high in 1969. The station increased its power 250 watts in 1974 and became stereo with a 130 foot tower in 1976. Its 88.3 signal has a northeast/southwest configuration in a figure eight pattern. It is one of the few directional high school FM stations.



Early staffers at the station included Robert Foskell, Ray Nemo, and Joseph Smith. Fred Moore, who has been with the station since its beginning, says that some three hundred students are involved in the operation. Students are requested to produce thirteen week half-hour programs, which are aired at 9:30, 10:30, 1:30, and 2:30 p.m. daily. A variety of music programs ranging from top 40, dance, punk, and heavy metal are presented along with school sports. Students are not allowed to bring their own records, but choose music from the carted selections. Local news is written by students. Three radio courses and two TV courses are offered. Broadcast hours are 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. daily as well as during summer school.

The station's transmitter and main studio are located at Downers Grove North while a remote studio and UPI teletype machine are in operation at Downers Grove South; Rick Brickwell is in charge of the South operation. Besides being involved with WDGC, students participate in five hours of local cable TV programming.

A number of Downers Grove students have graduated from WDGC's radio program and now serve in various capacities in the Chicagoland area. These include WDGC's founder Jim Swick, who won a Chicago Emmy for designing channel 11's stereo simulcast system. He is now employed by Air Fax Productions. John Castaldo is a producer for the Phil Donahue Show. Blaine Webster is the chief engineer at WLIT in Chicago. Russ Krausfeldt is a WGN video technician. Kirk Moore is a salesman at WKKD. Jim Beatty works for Telelabs. Reed Pence, of Shadow Traffic and WLUP, works for Associated Press in Chicago. All of the above serve on the station's advisory board.

In 1985 the school filed an application for a UHF-TV station license.

## WKDC

### Elmhurst's Quiet Giant

The city of Elmhurst is a growing bustling area, struggling to maintain a small town-like atmosphere amidst a sea of sprawling development. It is criss-crossed by several interstates and main routes bringing potential to the community. A revitalization of the downtown section of a city rich in heritage is underway. At sleep, however, is the town's radio station. Shoppers pass by its door at 130 North York Street, a bit curious about its operation on the top floor of an old furniture store, but most of the time the door is locked. Upstairs a variety of ethnic broadcasters, mostly Italian, monopolize the station's broadcast day. Except for a three hour block of news and information, and big band music for the area in the morning, much of the time is brokered to foreign language programming.

Indeed, most of the city ignores the station, which incidently, was not listed in a recent city guide to businesses. WKDC signed on October 10, 1974. Frank Blotter and his sister Lois, operating under the banner DuPage County Broadcasters, opened with a middle of the road format covering local news, sports, and community programming. A faded station van often seen around town advertises the fact the WKDC was once a member of the ABC Entertainment Network. The 500 watt day time station at 1530 khz serves the northwest sides of Chicago and can be heard at times in Merrillville, Indiana. Its distant listeners enjoy WKDC's ethnic flavor. Its local broadcasters are treated as clients and are veterans at buying air time and selling ads to cover their costs.

In 1981, a Broadway music format was installed. Robert E. J. Snyder bought the station and served as general manager. Marian Fisher was the music director; Dick Chase, sports director; Sandy Davis, news director; and Tom Rodman, engineer. Snyder Broadcasting operated the station for nearly a year.

There are interesting and contrasting stories as to what happened next. Snyder Broadcasting's president, Robert Snyder, a broadcasting professor at Roosevelt University in Chicago, quickly sank \$150,000 into the station. He later learned that monthly rent at the transmitter site would be increased from \$600 to \$2,000 a month. He filed for bankruptcy on December 29, 1982. Court appointed trustee William Lester attempted to keep the station going while a new buyer was being sought.

Three firms wanted the license, including the Phoenix Broadcasting Company made up of Snyders' friends and family and the station's original owners Frank and Lois Blotter of Glen Ellyn. WKDC went off the air in October of 1983 for over a year before Blotter repurchased it and put it back on the air. At that time, he was also interested in beginning an FM operation.

In a short time the station had developed a unique heritage. Remote equipment had been used in the past to broadcast ball games, a bank robbery, a chemical spill, and a golf tournament where golf pro Lee Trevino had been struck by lightning. Blotter began playing "beautiful music," criticizing the former owners' choice of programming unfamiliar show tunes. "He had trouble paying his bills," Blotter added (Elmhurst Press).



Blotter's beautiful music at times sounded like canned brash supermarket music coming over the air through telephone lines. Other programs featured big band music and vocalists and an evening program featuring a mechanic who gave tips on car care to callers. When Blotter repurchased the station, its power was increased from 250 to 500 watts, and its two towers moved from behind the American Legion building to its present site just west of the Tri-State Tollway on Old York Road. Trade magazine writer John Osbon became one of the station's announcers in 1985, and AM stereo broadcasts began shortly afterwards. Blotter claims WKDC was the country's first AM stereo station. Bob Meridan features the best of old jazz recordings amongst the ethnic programs on WKDC. Robert Quarles is the program director; Gary Schroeder is the engineer.

Blotter himself is an interesting person. He is a past NBC engineer for many old time radio shows, such as Ma Perkins, Tom Mix, and Fibber McGee and Molly. While working in radio in the 30's in Cincinnati, he was first introduced to Richard the "Red Headed Ragamuffin" at a comedy relief program in Covington, Kentucky during the depression. It was the first time he had met Red Skelton. Blotter says he never goes to broadcast conventions anymore. After sixty years in radio, everyone he worked with is gone. Meanwhile, foreign language programming has turned WKDC into a financial success over the last couple of years.

When I visited the station, I was asked if I wanted to buy it. Blotter, a long time radio veteran, prefers to operate WKDC in this manner--mainly selling out as much air time to ethnic broadcasters which far exceeds income that can be raised with local programming. Perhaps someday the station will again identify with its growing surroundings. WKDC stands for Will, Kane, DuPage and Cook Counties, and Kenneth, David, Carol, the first initials of the children of the Blotter family.

## WRSE

### Elmhurst College

A large group of energetic college students are now set to inform and entertain DuPage County residents. In 1988, WRSE-FM realized a long time dream to be a full-time community station. Now with 100 watts of power in stereo, the station reaches homes in Elmhurst and several adjacent communities.

The dream began in 1946, when a campus electronics group began work in Irion Hall with \$50 worth of parts and supplies. Dr. Timothy Lehmann was the station's early founder. By October of 1947, the students had built studios in Kranz Hall and began a campus carrier current operation. The call letters were WRS at 600 khz, which stood for "Wired Radio Station." The first program aired was a show by Ward Ohrman. The second program was the "Smiling Irishman." Readings by Elizabeth Conrad, the Symphonic Hour, and the Anchor and Eagle Club filled the station's early programming. WRS's schedule ran from 7 to 9 a.m. Monday through Friday, 9 to 11 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and 7 to 10 a.m. on Saturdays. Uninterrupted classical music conducive to good studying was often programmed.

WRS became WRSE (Wired Radio Station Elmhurst) in 1950. Attempts were made to broadcast sports including a football game between Elmhurst College and Augustana College. By 1952, speakers set up in the Student Union helped students enjoy programs such as, Navy Star Time, News and Views from Tex and Wally, Request Review, Revue by Sandy and Tommie, Sports in Review from Big Ralph and programs featuring the Elmhurst Radio Players. From 1953 to 1955, WRSE was off the air due to a transmitter fire, and by 1956 WRSE was back with play by play football and basketball. The entire campus had been rewired for better reception replacing the archaic system using the school's signal bell circuits.

Dr. Donald Low reorganized the station in 1953 requiring all operators to be certified. By 1961 the station's motto had changed from "the low spot on the dial" to "the high spot of entertainment" to the new motto "the 600 sound." WRSE AM continued to provide information and entertainment of campus interest, broadcasting six nights a week. The station became a member of the Intercollegiate Broadcasting System in 1984. The AM carrier current station trained students for performance on the school's later acquired 10 watt FM station.

WRSE-FM signed on December 7, 1962. WRSE-FM, the voice of "Elmhurst College," was dedicated on February 25, 1962. Chicago broadcaster John Doremus (then of WMAQ) was the guest speaker. Several fine faculty advisors have headed the station's operations in the past, including Donald Juday, Dr. Donald Lowe, Chuck Schmidt, Bruce Hill, and Tom Teuber. Teuber is a former Chicago broadcaster (WMET) and manager of CRIS Radio.

In 1968 WRSE was selected Station of the Month by College Radio Magazine. UPI teletype service was installed and fine public affairs programs like "College Community Hour" and "Ideas in Action" were added to the

broadcast schedule. The early 70's brought more remodeling, and a new tower was erected on top of the student union building. Studio's had been moved from Kranz Hall to the southwest corner of the second floor of the College Union Building.

WRSE expanded its schedule to 3:00 a.m. with weekend broadcasts of new and alternative music in 1974. Expanded services of UPI news copy, college sports play by play, and community programs, as well as classic rock programs are currently offered. Music programs are enhanced by the new audio processor equipment installed in 1988. Stereo broadcasts also began.

Students receive class credit for working at the station, according to the station's college radio publication. Current student managers are: Mike Grove, program director; music director, Kelly Jourdan; assistant music director, Ken Wendorff; news director, Maribell Pino. Pete Schopen is the sports director, Patty Fuller is the station manager, and John Clark is WRSE's engineer. Another student, Robert Cushing, guides would-be DJ's through a four-hour training program before they are allowed on the air. Many students have graduated and gone on to commercial radio jobs including Terry Hemmert of WXRT in Chicago.

## WDCB

### College of DuPage

By far the most powerful college FM station in the Chicagoland area is WDCB. Its 5000 watt signal can be heard over most of the western suburban area. Its antenna height is currently 300 foot. WDCB's original frequency was 88.9 mhz, but before the station came on, it switched channels with Elgin High School's WEPS. The College of Dupage also bought Elgin a new transmitter as a time sharing agreement between the two stations, on the same frequency limited each others operation. The station's new frequency at 90.9 mhz gave WDCB further range in the metro area.

WDCB actually was the idea of a consulting firm who planned for the station even before the college was built. Around 1967 President Rodney Berg authorized Richard Ducote, Dean of the Learning Resources Center, to file an application for the station's license. The object of the station was two-fold: to cover the area and to serve the community. A variety of jazz, Shakespeare, and blue grass music was first featured. Local talent was also given a chance to perform.

The station first operated three days a week. July 5, 1977 being the station's first broadcast day. WDCB's hours were 3 to 7 p.m. P. Robert Blake was WDCB's first manager. Jeffry Powell served as operations director. John Valenta later became the engineer. A variety of education and music programs are presented. Traffic reports, new age and jazz make up most of the station's format, along with the broadcast of some college courses. Sidney Fryer is the current manager. Mary Pat LaRue is the program director. James T. Howard is the news director.

WDCB prints an attractive program schedule available through the mail quarterly. Studios are located in the OCC building, room 156. The station's transmitter and tower are located at 22nd and Lambert Road in Glen Ellyn.

## WNOC

### North Central College

Many radio schools will give a student broadcast training, but the best "hands on" experience comes from actually working at a campus station like WNOC. Founded June 1, 1968 (some sources listed a July 1 starting date), the North Central College station has served the community well and has turned out many broadcast professionals. Highlighted in a 1988 edition of the Naperville Sun, the newspaper turned back the pages of history when the station was in an experimental stage.

Broadcasting at NCC is actually over 40 years old. Long time Naperville resident James Bingle, a 1952 graduate, remembered that a group of World War II radio veterans assembled the first station on campus. Students Ivan Wiley, Herb Jordan, and radio club president John Beidelman were basically responsible for the station's operation. WNCC-AM utilized the city's power lines to cover Naperville in 1948. Radio sets placed under utility poles received the "carrier current station" the best.

Call letters were later changed from WNCC to WNOC when it was learned that a legitimate station in North Carolina occupied WNCC. Students operated the station without much supervision, recalls Bingle. Eugene Oliver was the communications professor. Morse code lessons were also taught at the school and some students produced their own program that was aired on an Aurora station.

In 1967 college president Arlow Shilling was hired as director to plan a new station; Richard Obermeyer became the station's first general manager in 1968. Richard Moyer was the station's manager; Phillip Duncan, program director; Steven Margeson, studio engineer; and Dr. Verne Dietrich became chief transmitter engineer of the 3.9 kilowatt station. The station's 89.1 mhz signal emanated from a 92 foot high antenna.

During the last 20 years, WNOC has turned out a great number of broadcast students. Philip Duncan (class of '71) went on to several commercial stations, including WCLR in Chicago. Bob King (class of '81) works at KKIQ-FM in Houston and hosts his own TV show on NBC. His career also included a few years at WMRO and WAUR in Aurora.

In 1980 NCC hired John Madormo to head the school's radio operations. Madormo, a former producer at WGN radio in Chicago (1974-1987), arrived to completely revamp the station. Computerized logs, play lists, and give aways were added to the station's energetic format. By September of 1984, all new stereo equipment was installed, and the station's broadcast day was expanded from twelve to eighteen hours daily. Madormo praises the school's commitment to the station, as enrollment in the schools speech department has tripled during the last three years.

Six out of seven broadcast graduates are now employed in the industry. The powerful college station plays popular music mixed with some specialty and religious programs. John Madormo is the current general manager, Michael J. Poucke is the station manager, and Ed Murphy serves as engineer.

## WETN

### Wheaton College

Serving the community singles out WETN from being just another small Christian college station. Students and area volunteers staff the 250 watt station broadcasting classical and contemporary religious music, as well as local play by play of high school and college sports. This visibility has helped the station become an important part of the community, which is not dominated by a local commercial station.

WETN began as WHON in 1947 as a typical carrier current station. A small nucleus of students from the school's radio club operated the "wired" AM station near 540 khz. When students learned that the call letters WHON were already in use, the school began using WETN. For some unexplained reason, the carrier current signal invaded the power lines and phone circuits in West Chicago in the late 40's. Adjustments in the station equipment reduced interference in the town.

The station's first studios were located under the organ pipes at Pierce Chapel. New studios were built in the basement of the chemistry building in 1955. Around 1961, faculty advisor Ed Hollatz began work on placing a 10 watt FM station on the air. Hollatz still teaches at the school. Ten watts barely covered the town, but it proved to be a valuable training ground for young announcers and was the first FM station to serve DuPage County.

WETN signed on February 27, 1962. By November of 1979, WETN became a stereo station and increased its power to 250 watts; its tower height is 140 feet. The station moved from the chemistry building in 1986 to modern studios at the Communications Resource Center at the Billy Graham Center.

WETN's general manager Stuart Johnson supervises a staff of about thirty volunteers who operate the station 24 hours a day all year. Current programs consists of alternating hours of contemporary, Christian, and classical music and news programs. An informative wake up program of music and news airs from 6 to 8 each morning with chapel services three times a week. Local high school sports and community events are presented. The school uses a UPI teletype machine and performs hourly news casts.

Johnson, who had been a teacher and has been head of the station since 1968, is also the director of communications research at the school. He worked as a student (1963-1967) at the station. Johnson says that the station has no real format and does not attempt to copy the sound of a Chicago station. "Community service is stressed, and there is no pressure for the operation to become a totally Christian station." During the summer, WETN remains on the air and is operated by community volunteers in absence of the students. One of the station's many broadcast graduates is WGN newscaster Wes Bleed.

## WARG Alternative Radio

Listeners looking for something different on the dial in the south suburban area will enjoy the alternative music format of WARG. The 500 watt directional FM station operates at 88.9 mhz from Argo High School in Suburban Summit. Directional? Yes, it shares the same channel with the Triton College station. The move by the FCC opened up more available frequencies for low wattage educational broadcasters in the area. WARG general manager Ralph Beliveau, once the station's student music director, says, "the station plays contemporary music not heard on other Chicagoland stations. Much of the tunes are 'experimental in format,' but still are on the conservative side of today's scene."

There is a fast turnover in the station's play list, enabling WARG listeners to experience the latest records from today's most popular artists. WARG works closely with area record stores in securing today's top music. Besides "alternative music" which sometimes includes odd lyrics and unusual tempos, WARG features oldies through 1975, jazz, classic rock, new wave, and heavy metal programs. The disc jockeys are the ninety volunteer students who attend Argo High School. Depending on interest and expertise, news and other programs are sometimes produced.

A few national public service affairs programs are aired. One of the more popular music shows is Saturday night's "The Photo Synthetic Tupperware Party," which features its own sound and experiments with backward audio tracks.

In season high school sports remotes are aired, including a recent action filled season with the school's basketball team, one broadcast featured a game broadcasted from the Rosemont Horizon. WARG regularly broadcasts the Summit Ethnic Festival. UPI wire news copy is read by students. The station remains on in the summer.

WARG began broadcasting in January 2, 1976 with 10 watts. In the early 80's, the FCC required high school stations to increase their power to completely cover their entire school districts. By 1985, WARG's power rose to 500 watts, broadcasting from a 100 foot tower next to the school. Studios are located on the fourth floor of Argo High School at 7329 West 63rd Street in Summit.

WARG general manager Ralph Beliveau graduated in Argo in 1976 and went on to college radio at WNUR at Northwestern. After a brief stint in TV film making, he came back to WARG as its director. Beliveau's brother John was the station's first student station director. Behind the early development of WARG was its first director Tom Janiak, who is still with the school system, and vocational director Wayne Shiffer, who wrote the grants for the station. Shiffer is now in the oil industry in Saudi Arabia. Former school principal John Connelly aided in early station development.

## WRRG Radio River Grove

What can a small college station do with 100 watts and still become noticed in the adjacent communities? The answer is plenty, and WRRG has been steadily growing into a popular source for news and information for River Grove and the surrounding area.

WRRG began broadcasting on March 10, 1975 with 10 watts. The station is owned and operated by Triton College, a two year area community college. It became a 100 watt station in 1981 raising its antenna to 127 feet. The station's founder was John W. Coné, a communications expert who was hired by the school to set up the station. Coné ran the operation until 1980. He was succeeded by Michael P. Chirico and Roy P. Millonzi. Chirico later worked for WGSB and in the hairdressing and mobile D.J. business.

WRRG presented mostly educational programs including some foreign language shows and jazz. Three other long time staffers have been Scott Dirks, program director; Craig Lynch, sports director; and Mark West, music director. Current staffers include Ann Hengehold, general manager; Tim O'Grady, music director and chief engineer; and Dan Berry, program director. Old time radio show host Carl Amari of "Radio Spirits" got his start at WRRG.

WRRG is not content with broadcasting tunes from a play list, but strives to be among the first stations to introduce a new release to its listeners. Its new rock format also presents programs for jazz and blues fans as well. WRRG readily presents coverage of Triton College sports, local high school games, and local play-by-play broadcasts of pony and little league contests.



There are two newscasts per day, but no teletype facilities. Yearly broadcasts are aired from a "Taste of Melrose Park" and the River Grove Fest. Often the studios are open to students or anyone else who wants to be a DJ. This popular program has attracted many others to the station giving them their first break on the air. The present management has set goals to renovate the station's production studio and begin stereo broadcasts.

WRRG broadcasts a directional FM signal 88.9. This station broadcasts from 6 a.m. until midnight each day from the Learning Resource Center, Room 101.

### **WHSD**

#### **Hinsdale High School, District 86**

In the late 60's-early 70's many high school districts were exploring the possibilities of opening their own small radio stations. The FCC awarded many "class D" 10 watt licenses to schools in the Chicagoland area.

It began an exciting era for students to learn broadcasting and pursue a professional career in the field. Some stations were blessed with having quality local professionals to design and oversee early operations. At WHSD it was WLS engineer Harry Priester who lived nearby and guided the station through its developmental stages. Priester said it would be a good idea for his local school district to have its own radio operation. He served as the school's technical advisor.

WHSD signed on December 6, 1970 with 10 watts under Priester. WHSD became a stereo station at 180 watts in 1980. The antenna was raised from 50 feet to 150 feet. The station's main studio and transmitter are at Hinsdale Central, while an auxiliary studio is maintained at Hinsdale South. Thirty to forty students produce programs, write local news, and do play by play sports. The station operates from 3:30 to 10:00 p.m. most school days, and is off during the summer.

Early staffers included Tim Murphy as general manager and Robert Wolfer as engineer. Sylvia Hennessey became general manager in 1974. Underground music was featured along with classical and other special programs. That year WHSD was a member of the suburban high school radio network, a loose union of small stations that covered elections and other main events. Matt McCann, Ken Lindeman, Jim Lawson, Larry Lathrop, and Sharon Kelly have served as general managers, with David Hartman as engineer.

The station is currently an MBS Network member and plays a variety of music. Phyllis Petcoff and Terry Kohl direct the station. Of its famous alumni was Mike McDonald, a disc jockey for WFYR and WLS in Chicago.

### **WGHS**

#### **Glenbard West High School, Glen Ellyn**

Over the years this tiny operation has been a valuable training ground for student announcers. WGHS provided community service and served a source of local information. Started by a group of interested students in 1969, under the direction of then principal John Sheahan, fund raisers and equipment donations were sought to place the station in operation. Mike Sloan was the station's first advisor. John Duffy later served as WGHS's general manager. Studios are located in the 6th floor tower of the high school building. The station's power allotment remains at 10 watts, but at the end of the 1988/1989 school year, WGHS signed off indefinitely. New equipment and required FCC updating caught the school district by surprise and expensive repairs were needed.

Assistant Principal of Student Services Bruce Viemow, the station's sponsor in 1974 to 1980, says meetings have been held to renew interest in the station. The school is seeking donations of equipment and adult supervisors. It is the school's policy to have adult supervision at the station at all times. There are possibilities to combine the station with Glenbard South, moving it to the city park department, or incorporating the station into its communication classes to off-set operating costs.

It is hoped that WGHS will return to the air in the near future. It is licensed for operation at 88.5 mhz.

## FAR WEST RADIO

### SYCAMORE-DEKALB-KENDALL COUNTY RADIO

#### Sycamore Enjoys Early Radio

The tiny town of Sycamore was like most young communities "ripe for radio" development in the early 1920s. There were three short-lived stations along with many area amateur radio operators at this time. A few radio experimenters also lived in the community, while a couple of stores sold radio sets and parts.

The county's oldest newspaper, The Sycamore True Republican, remarked in 1924 that radio development was welcomed in the community. "We were blessed first with the telegraph, then the telephone, and now radio is instantaneous."

The article was printed a day after area residents had listened to a speech by then President Coolidge. The newspaper sponsored a contest giving away a Radiola-X worth \$300 to the youth who sold the most subscriptions. Sycamore's modern drug store, Barker and Sullivan's, gave away two 1-bulb sets in their own contest. In those days "bulbs" meant radio tubes. The Butzow Brothers Garage at 330 Elm Street sold Crosley sets. Even a 1924 church bazaar had labeled all of its booths with made up radio call letters for identification. Imagine going to the W-U-B-S booth or the W-C-E-S booth for a cake or some other dessert.

In March of 1929, the Republican reported that the entire student body at Sycamore High School listened to President Herbert Hoover's inaugural address and a description of the scene and events by the announcer. Ed Swanson of Swanson Brothers had installed a radio set in the school. The newspaper reported:

It was a valuable lesson to all. No session of school could have been more of value. One can but stop and marvel at the miracles of this age, when every boy and girl in a small Illinois city many hundreds of miles away from Washington can hear the President's voice as he takes the oath of office."

The newspaper painted the event not only as a current event worth noting by the students, but the fact it was brought into the classroom by a new invention called "radio."

Around the town more shops sprung up to sell these devices, including Hayes Knodles' Radio and Bike Shop in the 300 block of State Street, in 1930. It was the first and to this day the town's only distributor of Zenith and later RCA products. Knodles was an early experimenter with crystal radio sets, and currently operates two stores in town. (One is located at 117 South California.) Some other early radio shops in Sycamore were:

C. V. Kebil Furniture and Funeral Home, 340 W. Exchange; sold Philco sets.

Horace Drayton Garage, 119 S. Main Street; sold Majestic sets in 1929.

Phillip and E. E. Swanson Electrical Contractors, 110 W. State; sold Radiola sets (RCA) in 1928.

Prescott's Sycamore Sports and Radio Shop (across from courthouse); sold Crosley, Amrad and Atwater-Kent.

Wetzel Brothers (technician J. D. McNamera), 306 W. State, sold Victor sets.

Clark Radio Shop, owned by amateur radio operator Bayard H. Clark, owner of Clark Orchestra Roll & Music Manufacturer, 128 South Second Street, DeKalb; sold deForest radio sets in 1924. The Miller Radio Shop at 304 E. Lincoln Highway is listed in the 1932 Ogle County phone book. The Republican was at the aid of the experimenter, publishing radio columns by Frank D. Pearne, chief instructor of electricity at Lane Tech High School in Chicago. (Lane Tech had their own station WLTS).

Up to this time, there were no stations in tiny Sycamore in the early 20's. So "listeners in" tuned to stations in Chicago and other nearby towns. They enjoyed the young tenor voice of WJJD's Raymond Balter and the station's popular organist Howard L. Peterson. Peterson played at both the Fargo Theaters in Geneva and Sycamore. WLS's banjo player, Chubby Parker, also appeared at the Fargo Theater, as did guitarist Guy Pulley and his wife Katherine, who sang and played the ukulele. Bradley Kincaid, "The Mountain Boy with the Hound Dog Guitar," and the "Lullaby Boys" Ford and Glenn, appeared at the Fargo on October 6, 1928. WGN's Sam 'N Henry were also invited to the Fargo.

The Stevens Quartet from the Universalist Church in Sycamore sang on WLS. The station's popular Barn Dance Show continued on for another thirty years. News and religious programs were heard on KYW. These programs and entertainers were all well-known to Sycamore radio listeners.

During the 1920s area radio enthusiasts looked forward to Monday night when all local stations were silent to allow for distant reception. However, the Republican reflected the views of angry listeners who were annoyed by newly installed electric lights that buzzed and obliterated reception in some areas. They also complained about announcers like the brash Charles Erbstein of WTAS, Elgin, and the sometimes radical preaching of Wilbur Glenn Voliva at WCBD, Zion.

Erbstein had caught wind of some Elgin businessmen seeking the revocation of his station's license. The witty and many times outspoken lawyer one night announced that his station would be headquartered near Bartlett. "The best thing about Elgin," he proclaimed was the fastest way through it and out of it." He later recanted and continued to operate out of Elgin. His experiments with 1,000-5,000 watts of power made it easy to pick up WTAS in Sycamore.

Complaints to national officials about certain stations only prompted authorities this still timely advice, "if you don't like it, turn it off." Legislators admitted that radio was too new to regulate.

Without a hometown station, Chicago operators gave Sycamore plenty of opportunities to be on the radio. Doctor E.B. Barrow of the town's Chamber of Commerce spoke on WGN in October of 1924. The Tribune station sponsored a talent and image contest between cities. Sycamore had a booth at the Illinois products exposition that year. The event took place at the Furniture Mart at 666 North Lake Shore Drive in Chicago. A number of Sycamore residents performed on the program. The event has, however, won by another town, with Batavia finishing second.

George Fox of Sycamore appeared on WLS on behalf of the Illinois Agricultural Association in December of 1924. Earlier that year, Zenith had announced that they were looking for a suburban site to build their new station WJAZ. Some test broadcasts took place, but the firm later located in Mount Prospect.

#### PORTABLE RADIO COMES TO SYCAMORE

The first real local radio program from Sycamore took place on June 25, 1925 and lasted only three days. Frank W. McDonald, president of the McDonald Radio Company located at 179 West Washington Boulevard in Chicago, brought a complete portable radio set to the town. McDonald's Company specialized in temporary radio services. His 250 watt equipment was licensed to broadcast special events in communities where no such service existed (and where no interference to other stations would result).

WIBL had broadcasted numerous events in Joliet, Chicago Heights, and other area towns within a 300 mile radius of Chicago. Since McDonald was on the Board of Trustees for St. Alban's School for Boys, he decided to broadcast the school's 35th anniversary festivities. Various speakers, musical programs, and graduation ceremonies were presented during the three day observance.

Theron Bushrell of the class of 1917 served as toastmaster. The Imperial Barn Dance Orchestra, The Peerless Novelty Orchestra, Jack Howes' Orchestra, and a choir directed by Florence Wollensak performed during the programs. Lots of cards and letters were received from Kansas and Nebraska concerning reception of the station. WIBL was licensed for 1390 khz, but in this instance the class A station chose 1170 khz.

There was much disappointment by the community and its newspaper when the station closed down. Obviously, during the three day broadcast, area listeners had become used to hearing local people on the radio. The Republican remorseful, "McDonald left town, and took the station's equipment with him."

Sycamore would then have to wait for more local programming when a local church would start broadcasting in the near future. WIBL, first referred to as the "Boys School Broadcasting Station," was never the property of the school, but a business provided by McDonald used to promote local events, and in some cases sell radio sets. The transmitting equipment was probably installed for a similar purpose a few days later in some other community.

McDonald's portable station license was canceled in August of 1925 for lack of use. It was one of several such conditional licenses issued by the Department of Commerce, Bureau of Navigation in the early 1920s. St. Auban's School has long been torn down. An apartment complex, St. Auban's Green, now occupies most of the property at 711 South Main Street where the school was located, along with some other housing and a hospital.

## WOCG

### Watch Our Church Grwo

While St. Auban's was busy entertaining the community, parishioners at the St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) were busy working on their own station. Shortly after the arrival of the church's new minister, Reverend Erdmann William Frenk, in May of 1925, a radio station was being planned. (Reverend Frenk succeeded Reverend Emil A. Bartsach). It was not uncommon for churches to own stations. Reverend Frenk, who had ministered in Minnesota, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin had received his training at the University of Chicago. He was probably well acquainted with radio broadcasting techniques and had maybe seen a few church run stations in operation. He and his son, Martin, set up similar operations later in Joliet, at St. Peters Lutheran Church. These Sunday morning broadcasts have continued on WJOL since 1927.

The church was the cornerstone in the community and had all the ingredients for a successful radio station except one: money. Several small donations in the ten and twenty dollar variety were collected. During those times, that's all the money folks had. It was difficult to buy expensive radio tubes and other equipment with virtually no funds. Just how much to spend of the church's money on radio would cause problems later for the station.

Reverend Frenk was a dynamic speaker. His sermon topics were always listed in the local paper. The church itself had a long heritage. It was built around 1846. The Lutheran Church itself was organized in the town in 1876, purchasing the church building in 1886.

At one time the church was also called St. John English Lutheran Church. Services in English and German were offered. Men and women once sat on opposite sides of the church. Church members Paul A. Nehring, Sr. of Nehring Electric, Philip Sehilthelm, Calvin Sellers, and Ross Hintzche formed the station's board. Walter Lopties assisted on labor. Nehring was in charge of wiring the station along with the Chicago Insulated Wire Company. A generator purchased from a Rockford firm powered the station.

On the property of the church, which was formally located on the southeast corner of Main and Exchange Streets, two towers were constructed; one was 75 feet tall, the other handled the lead-in wires for the four wire inverted "L" antenna. The shorter antenna tower was only 25 feet tall. The station's call letters were WOCG, standing for "Watch Our Church Grow." The "brainchild" of the operation was Raymond C. Sellers, son of Calvin Sellers. Sellers (W9DCM) lived on the first farm in the area with electricity northeast of Sycamore. Today this property is the Lauffenburger Farm which is the first farm on the west side of Darnell Road, north of Lindgren Road (6 acres) in Sycamore Township. David and Nancy Wirsing have lived there for the past 30 years.

Sellers was an early experimenter and produced hand cut crystals for Newark Electronics. Young Paul M. Nehring (W9GCD "where nine good cats died") and ham operator James Jarvis (W9QCM) assisted Sellers in his business. They were eager to learn his new trade. Nehring and Seller were very interested in the broadcasting business, and on several occasions they attempted to purchase WTAS from Erbstein before it was acquired by WGN.

The Nehring Family eventually owned several banks in the area. Paul Nehring, Sr. donated considerable money for the construction of the Lutheran Church's new building at 327 South Main Street at Ottawa Street. It was built in 1938. The older building served several other congregations. It was believed built by a universalist minister named Pargey and a few helpers. They first built a parsonage nearby. The church was demolished to build new county offices and a jail. The county moved into the new building in February of 1980.

After the St. Auban's station had gone off the air, the community anxiously awaited for the Lutherans to complete construction of their station. Parishioners soon found that the few donations they received were not enough to offset the high cost of equipment, proving to be too costly of a venture for the church. This caused some dissention resulting in Ray Sellers pulling the station out of the church.

WOCG moved to the upstairs of a garage located in a small building on State Street, across from the courthouse, on the southside of the street. The building had an outside staircase leading upstairs to the station's headquarters. Paul M. Nehring recalls that dance music from nearby Electric Park was broadcast. He remembers helping wire the station's new facilities and setting up double carbon mikes at the park for the broadcasts and engineering them back at the studios.

Wire supplies probably came from the Nehring Electrical Works, which had to be rebuilt after a fire on May 8, 1928 destroyed the plant. It was located on 9th Avenue and the CN & W Tracks in DeKalb.

WOCG 1460 khz was officially licensed on August 12, 1925. Shortly after moving out of the church, the station was relocated to 108 West State Street. Sellers and two other partners had formed the Triple Alliance Radio Company. The firm sold radio parts and supplies and operated the 10 watt station. (The store's address is difficult



to trace, since some buildings in the area have either been removed, replaced, or renumbered). Paul Nehring suggests the station was located just west of American Family Insurance. The insurance firm's address is 116 West State Street. It is the store with two white pillars out front holding up the roof. This was formerly Cooper's Gas Station, or the Elmore Oil Company. Where Nehring suggests WOCG was (west of the insurance firm) is now a parking lot. Historians Phyllis Kelley and Sheila Larson say on the lot was once the Alida Young Temple that burned down many years ago. The Mason's and Odd Fellows Club met there.

However, the address of the Triple Alliance Radio Club, which owned WOCG, is listed as 108 West State Street, according to Broadcast Profile. This address indicates that the station was located between an attorney's office (114 West State Street) and Bockman's Standard (or the Fargo Station, 104 West State Street, the corner of State and Main). Some long time residents of Sycamore say that there used to be a building where the gas pumps are now located. There is also a monument in front of the insurance firm marking the first county courthouse (115 W. Main Street). The exact location of the radio station is still not certain.

Broadcast Profile says WOCG did not have a required licensed engineer working at the station. By December of 1925 only a few broadcasts had taken place. No one had passed the license test, and by December 8, 1925, the station's license expired. During the evening of December 24, 1925, WOCG illegally operated without government authority. After this broadcast, its towers and equipment were reportedly dismantled. Sellers admitted to the radio division that the station was never legally operated during its short tenure. Its license was finally canceled in January of 1926. The Triple Alliance Radio Company was dissolved by its partners in March of 1926.

### ELECTRIC PARK

There seems to be a difference of opinion of whether or not broadcasts actually took place from Electric Park. Paul Nehring remembers, hearing the programs and recalls that Wayne King performed there. The "Waltz King," appeared all over the Midwest which has been frequently documented in many old newspaper articles.

A fan showed the author a picture of her and King taken together in Aurora sometime in the 1930s. Dee Palmer of DeKalb says his father C.H. Palmer, a violinist, also played at Electric Park, as did many other 4-6 piece bands. If broadcasts never originated from Electric Park, it certainly wasn't for the lack of talent.

The 1930 season opened with the well known Jack Chapman Victor Recording Orchestra, which was often heard on many Chicago stations, including WGN, WMAQ, and WJJD. Isham Jones, KYW's Louis Panico (Panico's Canton Tea Garden Orchestra), and the Ralph Williams Orchestra were booked that year. Panico played at Guyons and the Cinderella Ballrooms and was heard on WCFL and WGES. The concerts were arranged by R. H. Murphy. (The use of initials back then were more prevalent than names, but in later newspaper articles, Robert Murphy appeared to run the concerts). Earlier concerts were arranged by Charles Kettleson of DeKalb.

This particular Electric Park was located between DeKalb and Sycamore on Rich Road (now Coltonville Road). Another similar place also called "Electric Park" was located near Plainfield (see WWAE). The Sycamore-DeKalb version of Electric Park featured a large picnic grove, a race track, ball fields with bleachers, an airstrip, and a golf course. The park's highlight was a large 50 X 100 foot oblong wooden dance hall, the "Rockaway Pavillion," which doubled as a roller skating rink. Dee Palmer remembers that the structure had removable panels that were opened on summer nights.

About 200 couples could occupy the dance floor which according to a 1903 Sycamore True Republican Newspaper article was the largest dance floor in the county. Single persons often enjoyed a nightly feature called "Dime a Dance," where men paid the ladies ten cents for the next dance. Electric lights, a refreshment area, and adjoining kitchens were included in the building's interior.

Many a Labor Day and July Fourth were celebrated here, which also included a large fireworks display. Bringing folks to Electric Park was a small fleet of Electric Street Cars.

The Sycamore-DeKalb Interurban Traction Company ran service every half hour between the two towns. At one time a commuter could interconnect with railroads in Aurora and Chicago and make it all the way to New York. The service began on December 13, 1902. A few years later three more expensive luxury-type cars were added at a cost of \$8,500.00 each. Still the cost was economical for the public. Riders could take the street car to Electric Park and see a vaudeville show (reserved seating) for a quarter. The later street cars were handsome coaches with Cuban mahogany woodwork, toilets, separate smoking area, electric lights, and passenger push bells to signal the conductor when riders wanted to get off.

The service ran until April 17, 1924. The firm stated that in 1922 they paid out \$23,000 of the \$25,000 they made in operating costs. Automobiles and improved roads caused the street cars to become unpopular.

Meanwhile, at Electric Park, attendance was greatly affected by the lack of transportation. Later a heavy storm ripped down and destroyed the ball field grand stand on May 23, 1927. This explains why pieces of it are still found all over adjacent properties today.

A long quaint blue house at 2211 Coltonville Road (Rich Road) now occupies part of the Electric Park property where the dance hall once stood. The rest of the land is held in family trust. The 8 X 6 foot street car shanty used as a waiting room is still located in the rear of the property, along with the large remaining cement apron to the dance floor. The house and land are owned by Carl and Barbara Wallin (pronounced Wall-leen). Barbara is writing her own history of the park.

Her grandfather was Henry Groves who founded the park in June of 1903. It was formerly called Groves Park. Another early relative, Gurdon H. Dennis, owned the property before Groves around 1892. The first dance hall owned by Groves existed from about 1903 to 1923 when it burned down. The second hall, "Rockaway Pavillion," constructed a short time after the first fire, burned down seven years later on June 11, 1930.

The growing popularity of automobiles slowed attendance at the park. Mrs. Wallin also stated that the last devastating fire probably caused the park to close permanently. Phyllis Kelly of the Sycamore Historical Society has extensively researched Electric Park. Early newspaper articles in the 1930s indicated that only half the losses in the second fire were covered by insurance. The dance hall's manager Robert Murphy was already in heavy debt because of advance advertising costs and band leader Louis Panico's appearance. Panico ended up playing at another local place. With both Groves and Murphy's dance halls gone, there was little to attract the public to Electric Park. Arson was suspected in the second fire, but the cause could also have been traced to a faulty furnace used to burn trash. Plans to rebuild the structure out of cement blocks never materialized. Only debts and memories were left behind after the fire.

#### SYCAMORE'S NEXT STATION - WJBN

After WOCG had moved out, the church was left with towers broadcasting facilities but no station. Sometime later another Sycamore electronic buff and church goer, Albert N. Waldo, came to the church's rescue. The station's frequency, like St. Auban's Station, was 1170 khz. Sycamore amateur radio operator Clifford Andersen (W9TWM) says the station's transmitter could have been a 50 watt Western electric type number 103C.

Some old documents acquired by Andersen included a transmitter manual for the above set, an RCA tube guide with the call letters WJBN written on it, and some technical correspondence. A sheet detailing the cost of a 103C transmitter and a 1960 letter from Westinghouse stating that "the firm no longer had information on this equipment" are in the possession of Andersen. According to WJBN's license, the station was approved for 10 watt operation.

Waldo and his family were electricians. He lived at 228 Mason Court, where he reportedly owned a house and two other structures just to the north. One of those buildings resembles a store front. Waldo Electric was operated out of a small shop in the rear of the property, another shop was set up in the basement of his home. Large spools of wire and insulators were readily seen on the property. He also may have had something to do with Borland's Radio and TV shop at 204 Somonauk in Sycamore. Today, this is the Shar-Lyn Dress Shop. Waldo was also an early amateur radio operator securing license number 230 with the call 9BFC in 1929. A copy of his license issued by the Department of Commerce has been obtained by the author, along with an early sketch of a "Breadboard Radio." This schematic is signed by an engineer at WTAS (W.H. Greseke).

With Sellers and WOCG leaving the church, Waldo apparently became the church's engineer. St. John's Church received notification for the licensing of WJBN on October 12, 1925. The church newspaper, "Rundschau," stated that a forty minute test broadcast had recently been presented which had been monitored in Milwaukee. The newspaper stated that reception was good, but Paul M. Nehring and others recall that despite having built quality sound rooms for WOCG, early modulation and transmitter methods caused the WJBN station to suffer technically. This may have prompted the purchase of the 103C transmitter or its inquiry into it.

It is not known if WOCG or WJBN used the same towers or shared any common equipment. Little trace of WJBN even exists. Its primary purpose was to broadcast church services from the St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church on Sundays for "shut ins." After a three month licensing period, all broadcasting ceased. Its license was then canceled by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Radio Division, Bureau of Navigation in January 1926. About

the same time WOCG also lost its license. With the town's three short-lived stations out of business, all personnel returned to devote full-time to their occupations, including Albert Waldo.

Waldo lived at 228 Mason Court in the 1960s. Radio merchandiser Hayes Knodles recalls that he also might have lived in an apartment at Borland's Radio Shop at one time. Waldo passed away in 1968. He was never married. A step brother Johnny Thompson was a world champion boxer and also a relative to Sycamore amateur radio operator Clifford Andersen. Thompson lived at 916 Albert Avenue in Sycamore.

Years later Andersen was given many of the old pieces of equipment from either WOCG or WJBN which were still stored in the upstairs building on State Street. The building has since been removed. Judging from old city directories, this could have been the farmers implement store at 124 West State Street, which is now a parking lot (or other previously mentioned structures).

With both stations WOCG, and WJBN out of business it leaves radio buffs to think that there were many more 50 watt or less stations that have never been listed in old radio logs. Some of the old equipment given to Andersen was probably built by Sellers or Waldo for the two stations. After the radio experiences, Waldo and Sellers went back into private business. Sellers continued to manufacture crystals until he passed away in 1934. Waldo ran Waldo Electric and wired many barns and homes in the area.

Reverend Frenk left St. John Church on June 3, 1928, becoming the minister at the Immanuel Lutheran Church at DeKalb. Reverend Henry Tessman became the new minister at St. John, which had also absorbed the congregation of the Genoa Lutheran Church. Radio had proven to be too expensive of an operation for small churches to operate, and like their counter parts in the big cities, only the Moody Bible Institute Station WMBI remained in operation in the later years.

Another radio operation was believed to be located on California Street near Central School in the 1920s. Information on this station or operation has been scarce. A 1924 ad in the Sycamore True Republican showed that Willard Rykert operated a radio shop at 122 1/2 South California Street. The ad often appeared in conjunction with the promotion of sporting events in the community.

As for Raymond C. Sellers, WOCG's first engineer and builder, tragedy struck this young man's life at an early age. Born in Earlville in 1906, Sellers learned electronics through a correspondence school. He graduated from Sycamore High School and had been involved with electrical experiments at a World's Fair.

He lived on what is believed to be the first farm in the Sycamore area to be wired for electricity. It was about two miles northeast of town. The farm was also the location for his amateur radio station W9DVM (according to other sources it was W9DCM). Sellers had been married for five years to his wife Mrytle. They had two daughters, one died in infancy. A year previous to his untimely death, Sellers had been under medication for heart problems; however, he later refused treatment for his condition.

On January 4, 1934, he was home with his family when he apparently suffered a fatal heart attack in the kitchen of his home. His wife heard him say, "I think I'm going blind," before he collapsed, according to an area newspaper. Services were held at the farm and at the Earlville Lutheran Church. Burial took place at the Precinct Cemetery. Residents of the home today say they often hear an odd sound resembling the clattering of coffee cups on saucers in the house. They suggest the house either has a ghost or an unexplained structure problem. One bedroom wall contains a large hole where antenna wires probably entered the house.

Sellers had lived in the Sycamore area for 12 years and contributed much to the community in the form of his construction of radio station WOCG at the St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church. He was also very active with other amateur radio operators and had a contract with Newark Electronics for the construction of radio crystals, according to one of his early friends Paul M. Nehring. At the age of 27, Sellers was considered an electronics mastermind at the time, and perhaps an early genius, cut off too soon in the prime of life. It is no telling what other innovations he could have come up with, or taken credit for had he lived longer. One newspaper hailed Sellers as being "instrumental in the first attempts at radio in the Sycamore area." After his death, his family dissembled his radio operations at the farm, and disposed of them. As a memorial, his wife placed his ham radio call sign on his tombstone.

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, local radio operations had indeed fizzled, but it did not slow the development of radio in the community, or appearance of a well known's from Chicago stations.

By 1926 radio sets were installed in planes and at McGirr Field. In 1928 an amateur radio class was started at the Armory. Reverend Paul Rader, operator of Chicago Gospel Station WJBT (Where Jesus Blessed Thousands),



spoke at the Sycamore Community Center on January 9, 1930. Local listeners often tuned to the station's "Breakfast Brigade" and "Reveille Hour." This short lived station shared 770 khz with WBBM using 25,000 watts.

WMAQ sportscaster Hal Totten was the guest speaker at a Sycamore sports banquet on April 15, 1930. Numerous other sports figures including members of the Chicago White Sox Baseball team have come to the town through the years, as well as a variety of other notable speakers.

### SYCAMORE'S PRESENT STATION WSQR-Q1560

The Sycamore area is served by WSQR, 1560 khz, a 250 watt daytime station located at 1101 DeKalb Avenue (West Elm Street). The station originally signed on as an adult contemporary music station with four daily newscasts on June 11, 1981. A year later WSQR became a country music station until the spring of 1989, when a classic oldies format was adopted.

The original owner of WSQR was James Uszler of Des Plaines, a broadcasting professor at Morehead State University. He and student Len Watson became partners (Watson currently works for an ad agency in Chicago). The pair set up the station after months of government delays, transmitter tower location problems, and an FCC freeze on AM licenses in the 1970s. During the first day of operation the station's transmitter went off twice; slight adjustments corrected these problems. James Uszler, was the founder of Hometown Communications of Palatine.

The station license was sold to Larry Weatherford, Gary Benton, and Len Watson in 1985. Studios were moved from West Elm Street above Auto Meter Products to WSQR's next location 421 DeKalb Avenue about 1986. Six people worked at the station, including Tony James, station manager and morning DJ, Jack Manganiello, mid-days, and John Monson, afternoons. Both Manganiello and Monson are Northern Illinois University students in nearby DeKalb. The station's weekenders were Gregory Clarke and Terry Hennessy.

WSQR operates until sunset, which is a bit later during the summer allowing the station to do some evening high school sports and local softball games. James and Manganiello served as sportscasters. Games scheduled later in the night were taped and broadcast the next day. Local news and coverage of area events are still featured.

WSQR's call letters could stand for Sycamore's Quality Radio, but they do not. The station's first motto under Uszler was "welcome to our sunshine." At that time two local businessmen, Jerry Taylor (Taylor Motor Sales) and local realtor John Sweet, were also local investors. Receptionist Sue Hughes stated the community reacted favorably to the new "classic gold" format. More area businesses began advertising since the format change.

WSQR's transmitter is located on property owned by the New Hope Baptist Church near the corner of Route 23 and Swanson Road. WSQR's former owner is seeking an FM station license in Decatur.

The small station seems to have caught on in the tiny community and is tuned into exclusively during bad weather conditions in the area. The town's broadcasting pioneer St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church (the former operators of WOCG) sponsors "The Lutheran Hour," a syndicated program every Sunday on WSQR. [Note: In late 1990 WSQR (Q1560) began a new country music format at its new studios at 1101 DeKalb Avenue.] Current staffers are program director Norman Marion, Dan Sweeney as music director, Terry Mares as news director, and engineer Len Watson.

### WSPY-FM AND THE NEW WAUR

In nearby Kendall County, Larry and Pamela Nelson operate WSPY-FM and WAUR (The Great AM). Before 1989, WAUR's call letters were WBYG. The AM station became WAUR after a former Aurora FM station was sold and changed its call to WYSY (Y-108). Nelson, a former engineer at WLS and WBBM, beat out WKKD for this relatively clear dial position of 930 khz. He explained that past available technical information on the 930 khz frequency showed that measuring equipment was merely reading skywave signals and not daytime ground wave propagation. Engineers thought that 930 khz was not useable in this area for broadcasting.

Hence, the 930 khz frequency vacant in the area, was overlooked as a possible spot on the dial for a local station. Previous to this time, the only other AM station that had existed in Plano was a short lived portable station that had set up operation somewhere around Casey's store to sell radio sets in the 1920s. This was possibly near the Old Plano Theater at 16 North Center Avenue. After many sets were sold, the station left town, leaving towns folk with a bunch of inexpensively made sets that did not pick up distant stations very well.

With WAUR, Nelson was set to bring full time radio to the community. He had worked with WKKD's Russell Salter on the project, but when filing time came, the two took different sides. Salter had done much work



on the frequency and had wanted to move WKKD-AM to this better spot on the dial. Equipment had been loaned to both sides to conduct tests. One station official told the local newspapers that "whoever gets this frequency will be the new WGN." The FCC sided with Nelson because the Plano-Sandwich area did not have an AM station, and Aurora already had two. Since then Nelson has attempted to move his station into the Aurora Market with his country format.

WAUR broadcasts with 2,000 watts and has a strong nighttime north directional signal as well. The station has a construction permit pending for 4.4 thousand watts. The station, at one time, was licensed for Sandwich with its transmitter in Yorkville. WAUR-AM also uses a remote set up in an office building at 52 West Downer Place in Aurora.

Currently, most of the station's broadcasting comes from Plano, where a new spacious broadcast center occupies an attractive country setting. This building houses Nelson's older FM outlet, WSPY-FM 107.1 mhz. WSPY, standing for Sandwich, Plano, and Yorkville, utilizes just under 3,000 watts and specializes in local news and sports. Music is played from an "automated assist operation" utilizing a room of reel to reel tape decks. Agricultural programming is received through satellite from a special network which features WGN personalities Max Armstrong and Orion Samuelson.

A staff of about 14 operate the stations. It has been said lately of the Plano based station, that if a motorist is caught by police for any violation, they will usually hear their name on the radio. ABC news, Paul Harvey's commentaries, and even birthdays are read on the air. "The community minded station" WSPY-FM signed on January 19, 1974.

WSPY's original location was in the "Cliffhouse," a large home and poolside estate on Burr Oak Road. The facility was once owned by the Balaban and Katz Theater Group and was used to entertain movie stars and celebrities. B & K owned a theater in Chicago, and WBKB-TV, channel seven, (now WLS-TV).

In the 1930s, the firm wanted to open a radio station in the Cliffhouse, but after some hearings, the license for an area station went to Martin R. O'Brien, who later opened WMRO (now WYSY-AM) in Aurora.

Other owners of the property were Judge Holland, June Sidley (wife of W. P. Sidley, a Chicago lawyer and musician), and John Silver. Mrs. Sidley is also related to the Horlick family, the inventors of malted milk. WSPY operated out of the Cliffhouse until about 1976, moving to its present quarters, a large beautifully landscaped home and brown steel barn on Frazier Road (One Broadcast Center, Plano).

The 1976 staffers were salesman James Mann, continuity director Deanna Brown, news directors Paul Kallighan and Bruce Yentes, announcers Mark Morris, Robert Kramer, and Mike McKanna. Lane Lindstrom is one of WSPY's engineers, but most of the operation is run by Larry and Pamela Nelson. Ben Abbott is the program director of both stations. Belinda Collins, Chris Schwemlein, Roger Chesney, Lisa Kay Reuter, Liz Clark, Doug Booth, and Brett Onstott are current announcers at the station.

Lindstrom is part owner of WPOK-WJEZ in Pontiac, Illinois, and a former staffer at the old WAJP-FM in Joliet, (now WJTW). The Nelson's also own WFXV-TV, channel 30, a low power TV station in Plano.

New TV studios have been constructed in the larger building behind WSPY-FM's studios. The low power TV station is slated to be picked up by local cable firms. Meanwhile, a cable TV firm currently operates out of WSPY's former location at the Cliffhouse. WAUR broadcasts Kane County Cougars, class-A baseball games, Chicago power soccer games, Chicago Bears games, and broadcasts an "oldies" format from satellite.

## DEKALB RADIO

### WLBK-WDEK DEKALB'S FULL SERVICE STATIONS

The number of stations in DeKalb continues to grow, with two new FM stations joining the competition for listeners and advertisers this year. The area's oldest station, WLBK, continues to serve the community and general populous with local news and information. Besides WLBK's FM affiliate WDEK, WDKB (B95) has begun to wrap up some listener appeal. Also in the DeKalb market are two FM stations from Northern Illinois University, as well as the college's campus run station.

DeKalb's long time WLBK is looked upon by its listeners as the true pillar of the community. Dating back to 1946, the station has kept pace with the town it serves and has never strayed from its commitment to local news and public affairs programming.

Only the music has changed over the years, but WLBK plays enough of the standards to seemingly cause time to stand still at the station. This is especially true on Sundays, when big band favorites are featured along with many religious programs.

During the week WLBK features local news, current information, talk shows and sports. NIU and DeKalb High School football and basketball games are aired along with selected Chicago Bulls Basketball games. The Bulls games come from a network, which also includes WAUR in Aurora, WSPY, Plano, and WROK in Rockford.

WLBK's history dates back to 1946 when Reverend Theodore H. Lanes conducted a religious program each Sunday from his church over WMRO, Aurora. The radio programs were broadcast live from Reverend Lanes' church, "The Little White Church of the Air." The name of this church probably came from a popular hymn of the time, "The Little Brown Church in the Dale." The building was located on the spot now occupied by the Salvation Army Building at 830 Grove Street.

From this radio experience, Reverend Lanes saw the possibility of operating a station in DeKalb and set the wheels in motion for beginning his own station in town. The first attempt of bringing regular radio to DeKalb was through the purchase of an hour a day on WMRO. The program was called the "DeKalb Hour" and featured local news, organ music by local merchant, Mel Elliott, and a weekly quiz show featuring ladies from local clubs.

The program was such a success that Reverend Lanes sought and obtained a license for the area's first commercial station. WLBK signed on the air a little before 4:00 p.m. just after the reception of a telegram authorizing the new station. The date was December 8, 1947. The station moved into the Wright Building at 153 1/2 North Fourth Street. The second floor studios consisted of a newsroom and a control room which served as a combination announcer booth and main studio. WLBK's present farm director, Robert C. Brown, recalls that the room was about 9 X 12 in size. The station also contained a manager's office, announcer's room, library, and continuity room in another 20 X 14 foot space. A small office and rest room were also located on the floor. WLBK's early transmitter site and 200 foot tower was located on North First Street at the Kishwaukee River. Apartments occupy this land today.

Reverend Lanes then proceeded in hiring his staff, many of whom were largely inexperienced in radio, but dedicated to his operation. Rolland Wallem left his public relations position with the DeKalb Agricultural Association (now part of the famous seed corn company) to become the business manager, salesman, and part-time announcer at the station. Lois Montgomery Still, a druggist wife, wrote the station's copy and became a program host.

She had previously performed on commercials in Chicago for several advertising agencies. Bonnie Dolan did some air work and served as the station's bookkeeper. Don Ulrey, a school music teacher from Byron, did much of the announcing and served as play-by-play sportscaster and music director. Carroll Hauser was the station's first news director. The other staffers included musician Bud McMillan and engineer Charles Green. Robert C. (Bob) Brown, who is still with WLBK, became the program director and hosted the station's "Man on the Street" show for 15 years.

In the late 1940's, Brown performed in numerous amateur shows as an entertainer and a comedy impersonator. He appeared on a couple of radio shows in Chicago and performed with band leader Horace Heidt. His favorite radio blooper of all time occurred during one of the "Man on the Street" programs. A feature of the show was the offering of a small cash prize, usually about \$10, to the person who picked the crystal marble out of Brown's sack of multi-colored marbles. The jackpot increased each day that someone failed to pick the correct marble. The sack was about the size of a bank money bag.

On one occasion, Bob spotted an older gentleman in tattered clothes, who was very hard of hearing. Finally, after Brown explained the game to him, he asked the participant, "What would you do with all this money if you won?" And the old man said over the air, "Why, I'd fall flat on my \_ \_!" Bob still laughs about that one, as expletives like that were not permitted on the air back then. He prides himself as the senior member of the current staff of WLBK. Brown adds that Aurora broadcaster Russell Salter was on hand and helped emcee the station's dedication on its first broadcast day.

The two hour dedication program, which began at 1:00 p.m. on December 14, 1947, featured a cross section of town officials and musicians. Besides Salter, who was with WJJD at the time, according to the DeKalb Daily Chronicle, also appearing on the program was Mayor H.J. Hakala. The mayor pointed out that WLBK was the latest addition to this "modern city."

The newspaper also listed the following speakers: Senator Dennis J. Collins, school superintendent S.B. Sullivan, DeKalb Daily Chronicle editor Frank Greenaway, DeKalb Ministerial Association President Reverend Willard Foote, DeKalb Chamber of Commerce President Charles Raymond, Sycamore Chamber of Commerce President B. E. Holub, DeKalb County Farm Advisor Carroll Mummert, and General Electric Broadcast representative S.W. Pozgay. W. P. Froom, director of radio programs from Northern Illinois State Teacher's College, also appeared on the program. He would later host a number of broadcasts on WLBK from the college.

Musical entertainment was provided on the dedication program by Ellen Ramsey, accompanied by Doris Beach and The Weaver Sisters. Guitarist Bud McMillan also performed on the program. McMillan's name is spelled several different ways in the newspaper articles relating to the program. Other performers were by pianist Merlin Raddatz, and the high school faculty trio composed of Harold J. Bluhm, violinist, Janet Spickerman, cellist, and Merlin Raddatz. "Uncle Tobias and Aunt Aggie" also appeared on the program. WLBK scheduled programs from the high school, 4-H clubs and area churches.

Six thousand records were purchased for the station library and an Associated Press news wire was installed. The daytime station set up operating hours as 6:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Saturday, and 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Sundays. The daytime only station signed on with 500 watts and would operate daily until sunset.

Around 1950 a corporation of DeKalb businessmen had purchased WLBK from Lanes and Wallem, who reportedly both moved to California. The station was still licensed by a firm called DeKalb Radio Studios. George Spitz was manager of the station in 1952, Donald Whitman was the sales manager, and Clayton DeWitt served as engineer. Ulrey, Still, and Brown were still with the station. Still and Brown did their own comedy routine, "Aunt Aggie and Uncle Tobias," portraying an older couple who lived out of town at the transmitter site.

WLBK also featured programs from NIU until the college built their own station in 1954. A remote studio operated for a short time at the Fargo Hotel in nearby Sycamore. About that time WLS staffers Harold Stafford and George C. Biggar came to DeKalb. Biggar, a member of the National Association of Farm Broadcasters in Kansas City and the Radio Hall of Fame, had started out such talents as Gene Autry and Rex Allen in the entertainment business. He had been the director of the WLS Barn Dance program for many years.

George had spent his early life as a news reporter for the Illinois Agricultural Association and was one of the first persons to broadcast market reports via radio. He was noted as the executive that sent WLS reporter Herb Morrison to cover the Hindenburg Disaster. Biggar and Stafford soon learned that people in DeKalb were not listening as much to WLS anymore and were tuned to the local station WLBK.

In 1954 Biggar bought WLBK. He also operated stations in Dallas, Cincinnati, and Indianapolis. He retained Bob Brown as program director. Richard J. Meier was appointed manager of the station, and Dean Clayton was the engineer. Biggar moved WLBK to its present location at 711 North First Street in 1956. The station received permission for limited nighttime operation in 1959. WLBK at 1360 khz began as a 500 watt daytime station increasing its power to 1,000 watts in 1963. Its transmitter is located behind the studio building.

On December 17, 1961 WLBK-FM 92.5 mhz went on the air to give the station full nighttime service to the community. Its 3.1 kw signal duplicated its AM station's programming for several years. WLBK-FM increased its power to 9.5 kw in 1970. A stereo rock format was started that was separate from the AM side. WLBK-FM became WDEK in 1977 and continues to be a popular music station for 18 to 30 year olds.

WDEK increased its power to 20,000 watts in 1982 and raised its antenna height to 495 feet. The tower is located five miles south of town on Illinois Highway 23. Ken Huske has been the manager of the Top 40 station for several years. Geoff Gillette, a former Aurora broadcaster and Shadow Traffic reporter, served as news director for WLBK-WDEK. Gillette later went to WFXW. About 30 people work at the stations.

George Biggar retired in 1965 and sold WLBK to Jerome Cerny on August 30th of that year. Biggar passed away in Fargo, North Dakota in 1988. Under Cerny, who was formerly the owner of WJOL in Joliet, improvements were made to the station's building expanding twice to house WDEK-FM. Both Jerome and his wife Blanche have since retired.

Past station managers of WLBK-WDEK have been Ralph Sherman (also of WJOL), Richard M. Hubbell, formerly of WGSB, and Bill Cerny. Russell Pigott was WLBK's news director in the 60's. Joe Barrie is WLBK-WDEK's current sales and general manager. He has been with the station for over 20 years. Barrie managed other stations in Wisconsin, as well as WGSB in Geneva. Dick Kleisch serves as news and sports director. Robert C. (Bob) Brown is still WLBK's farm director. Dianne Leifheit is the general manager; Mark Charvat is the program director.



Brown says that the continued success of WLBK has been based on the station's philosophy developed years ago by its former owner George C. Biggar. It is simply, "keep your programming local, involve your listeners, ask them periodically what they want, keep a good music format, and urge your staff to become involved in community organizations and projects."

### NORTHERN PUBLIC RADIO WNIC, WNIU-FM, WKDI, WNIJ-FM

The story of development of radio broadcasting at Northern Illinois University is a continuing report of progress and growth. The school has acutely kept pace with the surrounding changing community and its campus, while also exhibiting a polished, intelligent image to the area its stations serve.

From its long time home at Kishwaukee Hall, new studios will be completed off campus in DeKalb. NIU has focused its signal on nearby Rockford, an ideal move since a non-commercial educational station does not exist there. Last July WNIU-FM provided a syncopated program of background music that coincided with the Rockford's Fourth of July fireworks display.

In addition, educational programs from National Public Radio are well received in the "Forest City," promoted by billboards and the station's powerful 50,000 watt signal into Rockford. The station had sought a 100,000 watt construction permit a few years ago, but since has settled for continued operation of a station half that power with plans to open an identical station in Rockford in May of 1991. Special campus programming comes via carrier current on WKDI.

As in the case of most successful operations, Northern's initial entry into the broadcast industry was small. The school, known then as Northern Illinois State Teacher's College, began with a 10 watt FM station in 1954. Previous to this, the school had been invited to do programs on DeKalb's commercial station WLBK. These shows began almost at WLBK's conception in 1947.

College president Karl L. Adams headed a faculty committee that was in charge of overseeing these public service programs offered to WLBK. The shows were designed to promote the school and its public relations in the community. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, WLBK broadcasted Northern's commencement exercises.

By 1950, the college's programs were directed by the NI Radio Club, which also produced a series called "NI On The Air." Public enthusiasm continued urging the school to operate their own station.

In 1952, broadcast quality radio equipment had been installed in the Swen Parson Library in a booth off the stage in the auditorium. The college took advantage of the nation's growth of early FM broadcasting and took steps to secure an FM transmitter and tower.

In October of 1954, the FCC granted the call letters WNIC-FM, standing for Northern Illinois State Teacher's College. A license for 10 watts on 91.1 mhz was issued by the government, offering listeners in a 15 mile range of the station programs directly from the college. While the library housed the main control room and studios, additional facilities were located in Barracks 18A. The station's staff consisted of members of the NI Radio Club.

The DeKalb Daily Chronicle reported on October 4, 1954 that college officials and DeKalb civic leaders would be on hand to participate in the station's inaugural program from the Swen Parson Library. The station's motto: WNIC, The Campus Station.

An early 1954 program schedule featured the broadcasts of home basketball games, classical music, drama, educational programs, and news. In the beginning WNIC-FM broadcasted 22 1/2 hours a week to the local community.

In the early 50's, FM radios were still scarce, thus, a carrier-current or campus station was begun which placed WNIC-FM's programming on AM. In 1957, WNIC-AM simulcasted WNIC-FM programming over its campus. WNIC-AM's transmitter was located in Gilbert Hall. The two stations split at night. The closed circuit AM system began using the call letters WKDI in 1972.

By 1964 WNIC-FM had raised its power from 10 watts to 2,500 watts reaching out to a 35 mile radius with its signal. Broadcast hours slowly increased to 100 hours, 7 days a week, except during summer vacation. WNIC-FM broadcasted all of its college sports, home contests, radio dramas, and classical music from the Fouser Music Room. DeKalb High School home basketball games were presented probably until early 1962, when WLBK-FM took them over.



In 1964 a new 260 foot antenna was installed and studios moved to Kishwaukee Hall. The station's frequency was shifted by the FCC from 91.1 mhz to 89.7 mhz. Changes were made in the station's programming making it more of an educational station.

Early station personnel in 1958 were William Dochterman, director of radio and TV, Edward Sainers, station manager, and John Walsh, engineer. William P. Froom was the college's director of regional services in 1961, while Robert H. Moore served as director of Radio and TV. D. Eugene Koskey was the director of radio and TV at Northern in 1964. R. E. West was WNIC-FM's engineer in 1964. WNIC-FM became a stereo station that year.

In 1968, WNIC-FM's call letters were changed to WNIU-FM reflecting the school's official name change to Northern Illinois University. Its frequency was also moved to 89.5 mhz to avoid interference with powerful WMBI-FM in Chicago. Through grants and fund raisers WNIU-FM continued to grow. The station's "Behind the Classroom Door" program became a regular feature on the National Educational Radio Network in 1969. That year a network to air NIU football games was begun and coordinated by WNIU-FM.

According to the station's 25 year newsletter, WNIU made great strides in the area of service, programming, and technology in the 1970's. Regular fund raisers began in 1977, when WNIU-FM became a charter member of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The station had raised only \$2,217.00 in its first fund drive in 1971. Programming hours were then increased to 18 hours a day on a weekly basis all year.

WNIU-FM began work to increase its signal in 1972. After plans were scrapped to build an auxiliary station near Oregon, Illinois, WNIU-FM received permission to increase its power to 50,000 watts in 1974. Money from the government was awarded for equipment and improvements to the station in 1978. WNIU-FM's SCA (sub-carrier authority) frequency was first leased to broadcast Muzak services, and then later farm information.

By 1979, the station's SCA was used to broadcast newspapers and other materials as a radio reading service for the print handicapped. The Northern Illinois Radio Information Service (NIRIS) will expand to Rockford in 1991, and uses volunteers to read area newspapers over its closed circuit sub channel to visually impaired listeners equipped with special receivers.

By 1979, WNIU-FM had joined the satellite age. National Public Radio programs could now be received directly from Western Union's Westar-I satellite through a special satellite dish antenna that had been constructed near Kishwaukee Hall. A new master control board has also been installed. Improvements to WNIU-FM in the late 70's were coordinated by William Monat, NIU's president, station manager Michael Lazar, and engineers John Freberg and Jeff Glass.

WNIU-FM presented a wide variety of classical music, jazz, and fine National Public Radio Programs like, "All Things Considered," according to its program schedules in the 1970s. Quality programming in the field of music and education are continuing to expand at WNIU-FM. Currently under construction are new broadcast facilities at 801 North First Street in DeKalb, and in the Rockford Riverfront Museum (the new Discovery Center).

Current WNIU-FM full-time staffers are Michael Lazar, general manager; Tim Emmons, assistant manager; Donna Brooks, NIRIS director; Robin Cross, chief engineer; Donna Gomas, development director; Lester Graham, news director; Bob Kern, music director; Todd Mundt, chief announcer; Linda Muszalski, anchor-reporter; Scott Neuman, operations director; Jill Wininger, announcer-producer; and Karen Wood, assistant news director.

By May of 1991, Northern Illinois University is expected to have a second FM station WNIJ-FM (90.5 mhz) in operation. Programs will emanate from Rockford and DeKalb studios. Unlike WNIU-FM, which broadcasts mainly classical music, WNIJ-FM will feature a variety of jazz. The school also holds a construction permit for a UHF-TV station.

#### Student Run WKDI at Northern Illinois University

Students on campus enjoy the college's powerful cultural station WNIU-FM, or tune their radios in their dorms and classrooms to WKDI 93.5 FM. This station, which broadcasts only on a closed circuit "carrier current" system around the school, features music, news, and information of interest to students. This service began as a device to relay programs of WNIU-FM into the dorms for students equipped only with AM radios. It was first known as WNIC-AM in 1957, and later as WNIU-AM, and finally WKDI in 1972.

Current studios are located next to WNIU-FM on the west side of Kishwaukee Hall. The station operates 24 hours a day and features "alternative music." Programs of rock, heavy metal, Christian rock, hard core punk, and rap are presented by the all volunteer staff of students. WKDI does four newscasts daily and two on Saturday and Sundays. A UPI news machine is located in the facility.

NIU senior Robert Dassie, majoring in computer science, told me that WKDI was just "a fun place to work." He stated that he enjoyed playing today's music called "college progressive music," for the campus, and had no intentions of seeking a career in broadcasting.

WKDI's program director Mike Gallagher, who is in his last semester of radio studies at NIU says over 100 volunteers work at the station. The station carries play by play coverage of NIU sports including women's basketball home and away games by phone lines. WKDI plans coverage of a spring women's basketball tournament direct from Alaska. In a recent conversation with a former staffer, Mike learned that WKDI's call letters are derived from a popular song lyric, "Kan You Dig It?" (The words are from the tune "Grazin' In The Grass" from the 1970s.) The station is planning a move to the Palmer Building. Mike Maciasz is the general manager of the station.

#### DEKALB'S NEWEST FM - B95 WDKB

Upon scanning the radio dial in DeKalb, one might think there are already enough stations on the air for the area. This includes the DeKalb stations, the ones at NIU, and stations from Plano, Sycamore and Rochelle. "But there was a need for an adult popular music station," says DeKalb native Tana Knetsch, who put WDKB (94.9 mhz) on the air on August 13, 1990. The station's power output is 3,000 watts.

Knetsch told Midweek Newspaper reporter Sharon Emanuelson last July, "We're under-radioed compared to most communities our size." Apparently the FCC agreed, accepting eight applications for a new FM channel in DeKalb beginning in 1987. In the end Tana's bid for the station beat out eight others, including the student run station at NIU.

The short history of WDKB and DeKalb Radio Limited actually dates back to July of 1987. As others dropped out of the running for the new frequency, Knetsch decided to join forces with remaining applicant Second City Broadcasting, Incorporated. (The Broadcast Yearbook, 1988, listed the operator of the new proposed DeKalb station as Second City Broadcasting, Incorporated, 1116 Franklin Street Iowa City, Iowa 52240.)

This merger brought Second City's expertise in the form of Steve Sinicropi and Randy Phillips to WDKB. Sinicropi and Phillips, veterans in station ownership and time sales, retain a small interest in the station. Phillips was formerly with WBBM-FM (B96) in Chicago. Bill McCown was WDKB's first program director (and no longer with the station). WFXW's Ken Misch is an announcer on weekends.

Emanuelson's article carefully documents Tana Knetsch's rise from local high school student to Communicable Disease Program Director for the DeKalb Health Department. She also has degrees in communications from the University of Illinois and in nursing at Northern.

The station sports an attractive van for mobile appearances, as well as the latest compact disc equipment. Most of the work of setting up the station was done by Tana's husband Jim Dionisopoulos, who is an anesthesiologist at Kishwaukee Community Hospital. The couple have been married six years. The station's studios are located in an office building on the northwest corner of Dresser Road and First Street. The building was purchased by WDKB from Tana's father Stanley. WDKB's 328 foot tower and 3 kw transmitter is located on Twombly Road, 7 miles west of DeKalb near Malta.

Tana says that she is still in the process of finalizing the path the station will follow. The station plays several songs back to back without announcements. Several mini-public service spots were mentioned in a minute, then more music was played when I had tuned in. The station is apparently geared up for music and less talk. When the station chooses to announce, public service information is presented, and hopefully some commercials.

For an older listener it maybe difficult to detect the difference between WDKB and its FM competitor WDEK. WDKB's music format apparently eliminates some of the more "rocky" contemporary selections enjoyed by a slightly younger crowd. Station owners say WDKB is an adult contemporary music station, "perfect for the office."

Tana looks forward to "friendly competition," in the DeKalb area for news, programming, and sponsors. "As a result of us coming in, the other stations will improve in general, and everyone will have to work harder to retain listeners." She also told the author that the station's exact format and staff has not yet been finalized.

Meanwhile, WDKB has already made several strides to gain notice in the community through sponsorship of local events like the Sycamore Pumpkin Festival and the local Halloween Haunted House. It was one of the first stations to give away yellow ribbons to remind listeners of our soldiers in the Persian Gulf War. B95 hats have become collector's items in the community.

WDKB is an ABC affiliate and airs newscasts in the early morning and early afternoon. Several weekly syndicated music programs are also featured including "Saturday Night Gold," Rick Dees, and Casey Kasem. WDKB's studios are located at 2201 North First Avenue.

The station's management hopes that its efforts in programming, music, and news will soon be felt in the area and regularly enjoyed by DeKalb area listeners.

## GRUNDY COUNTY

### THE NEW WCFL

It would be just a matter of time before some suburban station would pick up the old WCFL call letters and attempt to capitalize on its heritage (see WCFL, Downers Grove). By far the most popular times for the Chicago Federation of Labor Station was its ratings race with another Chicago station, WLS. Both were popular music stations in the late 60's, boasting a legacy of well known disc jockeys, including Larry Lujack. Lujack, best known for his "animal stories" routine, along with Chicago Bulls announcer "Little Tommy" Edwards, were long time favorites in the city. Lujack worked for both stations twice, and finally retired from WLS.

During its heyday, WCFL featured a unique popular music format featuring disc jockeys Dick Biondi (also a WLS alumni) and Ron Britain, as well as many others. (Biondi and Britain are now with WJMK Magic 104 FM). "Super-CFL," or the "Big 10," featured the famous Dick Orkin "Chickenman Series." After WLUP acquired the former WCFL (after a failed "lifestyle" talk format and religious programming), the old call letters laid dormant for a couple of years. But unlike using the station's past call letters as a springboard, another station has not only picked up the old WCFL call letters, but has opted for its old "pop" format, complete with its old jingle package.

WCFL's new home is in Morris, Illinois. The station identifies itself as WCFL-Morris-Chicago, replacing three other sets of call letters including WRMI. The new station frequently gives the Marina City temperature, reminiscent of when the old WCFL had studios there. This time WCFL is an FM station at 104.7 mhz. It replaces a 30 year history of smaller operations including WRMI-FM. Formerly a good music community station, WRMI-FM went on the air on January 16, 1962. It was a small town "folksy" type station owned by a farm couple, Will Raymond (W. R.) "Boots" Greiner (W9GUQ), and his wife Ottila.

Greiner was nicknamed after an old farm hound dog, who used to follow him around as a youngster. His wife, who friends refer to as Tillie, still resides in Morris. She was the town's first morning "wake up" disc jockey, rising at 3:00 a.m. to sign the station on. The show began with cows being called and the recorded sound of cows milk flowing into a bucket each morning.

Tillie "The Milkmaid" didn't have far to go to work, as the station had been built behind the Greiner farmhouse. The station's tower stood on the west side of the building, near a small shed that housed a generator. The Greiner's were assisted in their broadcasting venture by another amateur radio operator, Robert (Bob) White (W9AKM). White still operates the Radio Doctor, an electronic repair store at 116 Liberty in Morris. He supervised and built WRMI as well as Morris' other early station WCSJ-AM.

WRMI's first facilities behind the Greiner farmhouse were contained in a 20 X 30 foot building with enough space for two studios. The station operated with 3,700 watts, but was licensed for 50,000 watts at 104.7 mhz to serve the regional area. The address of the old station was 1105 West Airport Road (Church Road) about a mile east of Route 47. At the old site today, the tower has long been dug up and removed, and the studio building has been remodeled into a home. It is in the rear of the property.

White recalls that the only major problem at the site was a fire in the generator shed, which knocked the station off the air for several hours. WRMI broadcasted 15 hours a day. The station's call letters could have easily stood for Radio Morris, Illinois. But Tillie "insists" at least the first two letters stood for her late husband Will Raymond, who passed away in 1987. He also operated a vending machine route.

The little station believed in the FCC's original premise that licenses for low powered FM stations were issued to serve the local community and not to try to sound like a big city station. Ottila stated that she never thought that small FM stations would be doing what they are doing today, namely forsaking their home local audiences.



WRMI was always at some event promoting it. Mrs. Greiner remarked that the station gave away more advertising than it took in. She said, "it was always strange that local PR people would seek free promotion on the radio, then buy an ad with the local newspaper." Free obits were also aired.

The Greiner's did business like this for nearly ten years, giving of their energies and resources for the community. There was much outcry by the town over the sale of the station, which ultimately was purchased by the town's other station WCSJ-AM in 1972. About that time, I was offered a job there playing records during an eight hour shift at \$1.25 an hour. After a couple of years on the farm, WRMI's studios were moved into town. (A studio had been maintained at the Radio Doctor store). Later WRMI moved to the Farm Bureau building upstairs. At one time, engineer Bob White was heard frequently on WRMI. He recalls the station's best bloopers.

At a local hospital while conducting an interview, he referred to the obstetrics ward as the "obstacle" ward. Another time, another announcer with White was doing the "color" at a large farm sale. When an expensive item was let go at a fraction of its worth, the announcer protested over the air, "J \_\_\_\_\_ C \_\_\_\_\_, that didn't go for very much."

Listeners kidded White and the other announcer for months about those comments.

Like in most small stations, announcers came and went, moving on to better paying, but not necessarily more rewarding positions. Former announcer Bud Larson works in TV downstate, John Olson is an executive with Proctor and Gamble, Jack Black is a school teacher out east, sportscaster Pat Bolen is employed by the Northwestern Corporation, and Bill Dix is a plumber.

WRMI was once very active and visible at local events, but in later years it merely segued records and read local news brought over 2 to 4 times a day from the courthouse across the street. There was no wire service. The station's former engineer and the Greiner's business partner Bob White, sometime ago, wrote the station's history. Here is what he remembers:

#### The Building of a Country Radio Station: WRMI-FM

The first radio station in Morris and Grundy County was the brainstorm of a couple of amateur radio operators, Bob White and Boots Greiner. They felt this area should have a station of its own, just like other cities. A friend of Greiner's in Champaign who was in the process of trying to obtain a license, furnished enough information to enable Greiner to go ahead and see if he could convince the FCC that Grundy County should have a radio station.

Through a lot of work and some very good contacts in Washington, D.C., Kansas City, Missouri, and Chicago, Illinois, the FCC issued a construction permit to Mr. and Mrs. W.R. Greiner to build an FM radio station on their farm north of Morris. This was the last permit issued before a freeze on all radio station licenses. The Greiner's immediately hired Bob White as their engineer and Bob set out to put a station on the air even to the extent of constructing the building to house the equipment. The summer of 1961 was a busy one, but finally the FCC issued the permit for on air testing. Everything went smoothly, so the big day was set for January 15, 1962. During the night, however, a snow storm made roads to the station impassible so on January 16, 1962 at 10:00 a.m., Bob White signed the WRMI-FM on the air. This was a big day for a couple of radio hams and the reception received was overwhelming. The telephone never stopped ringing. It seemed like everyone in the county was extending congratulations and best wishes.

While Bob White was building the station, the Greiner's were busy with the financing and programming. It took some time to arrive at a successful program format, but there are many who still fondly remember, "Tillie, the Milkmaid," the "Ask-it-Basket," (with a high of 365 calls in one hour and 15 minutes), "The Saturday Night Party," "The Vesper Hour," "The Birthday Party," (with a high of 64 birthdays in one evening), "The Sunday Church Services," and the "Thought for the Day." Of course, the local news was the big item, practically as it happened and many times via remote as it was happening. And remember the fire calls, thanks to some of the fine guys at city hall. Music was a big plus because we played what most people, at least our listeners, liked to hear and we were always glad to honor a request.

After many experiences with "professional announcers," it was found we had some local talent who were much more professional. Among the locals serving their apprenticeship at WRMI-FM were Bob White, Bill Dix, Bob Larson, Til Greiner, Don Neushwander, Steve Brown, Bob Brown, John C. Olson,



Dick Carlson, Helen Ulrich, Tom Karlin, Bob Purdue, Doris Curtis, Al Pilch, Pricilla Liscomb, and Mae Reagan. Some of the other locals who participated in the operation of the station besides Mary Talty, station manager, were Gene Morrell, salesman; Milton Carlson, salesman; Dick Steele, announcer-salesman; Larry Nelson, announcer-salesman; Claudia Reader, bookkeeper; Diane Olson, news-office; Shirley Darin, news-office; Cathey Christianson, office; Judy Kuntz, sales; and many more we probably have overlooked.

WRMI-FM was very active in sponsoring and promoting civic activities such as co-sponsoring the yearly children's Easter Egg Hunt with Attorney James Peacock, getting Morris back on the track of celebrating the 4th of July with a big fireworks celebration at the high school, St. Patrick Day Parades, teen dances, at the Mazon Fair Grounds, etc. Most of the parades and community festivals were covered with live broadcasts as were the Grundy County Fair at Mazon and the 4-H Fair. A big promotion to save the Red Cross Bloodmobile was a huge success. Toys were collected and distributed to the less fortunate children every Christmas.

Prominent in WRMI-FM sports were Pat Bolen, Bill Dix, Frank Perruca, Chatka Bolen, and Butch Gable, as they did live broadcasts of all the Morris High School basketball and football games. This included games at the Sectional and State Tournaments. There were many broadcasts from other county high schools in the Coal Valley Conference.

For the first few years, all the activities were at the station studios in the country, but later a sales office in the Fey Building was opened with Mike Ross as announcer and salesman. Later, it was moved to the Radio Doctor Building, then the whole station, with the exception of the transmitter, antenna and tower, was moved to the Farm Bureau building on Washington Street. Before the final move, a carelessly thrown cigarette caused considerable damage to the station, but through the efforts of the Morris Fire Department and Bob White, the station was back on the air within 24 hours.

Finally, after serving the folks of Grundy County nearly 24 hours a day for 10 years, the Greiner's decided it was time for a rest, then too, they were not getting any younger, so with the last notes of "Good Night, My Someone" fading into the night, WRMI-FM was sold to continue under new management.

#### Russell Armentrout's WCSJ

Across town, Russell and Mildred Armentrout operated WCSJ, 1550 khz, the town's second radio station. It was also built by WRMI's engineer, Robert White. In later years, White could have continued to work for WCSJ, but chose to go back to running his own repair business. He was also once involved in a very serious car accident.

WCSJ's first studios were set up above Hornsby's Dime Store on the northeast corner of Main and Liberty Streets (303 Liberty). Its 130 foot tower was located on the opposite side of the town from WRMI south of Morris on Pine Bluff Road. Call letters for the 250 watt daytime station were derived from the first initials of the Armentrout's grandchildren. WCSJ signed on January 11, 1964 after some test broadcasts a month earlier. The Armentrout's operated the station under Grundy Broadcasting.

Original staffers included general manager Tony Craig (now with WPOK), Eldred Northup, sales manager; Ralph Jones, news director; Dick Steele, sports director; David Meyer, chief engineer; and Paul Harmon and Jim Enger, announcers. Early programs included "Sunny Side Up" (Craig) and "Coffee Time" (Jones). Paul Harmon emceed "Sports Scope" and "Melody Magic," according to a 1968 article in the Morris Herald Newspaper. The publication highlights other developments at WCSJ.

#### **WCSJ RADIO BROADCASTS BEGAN IN '64**

Other early shows included "Party Line" with Tony Craig and the Recipe Club and the Swap Shop. The Swap Shop is still heard on WCSJ weekday mornings at 10:30. Another early program was "Man on the Street" Saturday mornings.

In September 1965 Gene Vaughn was appointed general manager to succeed Craig, who moved to WJOL radio in Joliet.

On July 1, 1966, WCSJ was sold to Grundy County Broadcasters, Inc. The staff currently includes David S. Sutton as sales manager, James T. Murray as program director, Paul C. Chasteen as account manager, Robert Pitzer and Gary Clodi as staff announcers, and James Tammen as chief engineer.

WCSJ studios and offices are in the Hynds Building at 303 Liberty Street in Morris. The 130 foot transmitting tower and the transmitter are south of Morris on Pine Bluff Road.

The station is a member of the National Association of Broadcasters, (N-A-B), a subscriber to the Radio Code of Good Practices of the NAB, a member of the Illinois Broadcasters Association and the Radio Advertising Bureau (Morris Herald, 1968).

Both WRMI and WCSJ operated on a friendly basis in the small town. Both had booths and vehicles at the county fair. Sportscasters at the same basketball games would pass notes to each other, which often contained stats or other helpful information. When the Greiner's were ready to sell WRMI, WCSJ's corporation, Grundy County Broadcasters, were ready to buy them out. M. H. Stuckwish, who purchased WCSJ on June 30, 1966, bought out the Greiners in 1972.

At first the stations were programmed separately until 1978. They also joined the ABC Network. Other station managers included John C. Dewitt, Robert Damall, and Terry White. In the mid 70's WCSJ AM-FM moved to 105 East Main Street, with studios on the third floor of the Baum Building. Various formats were tried including "oldies" and country. For some periods of time, both stations were simulcasted.

In 1978 power rose to 6,800 watts, while a construction permit was sought for 40,000 watts WCSJ-FM. WCSJ-AM remained a low power community station (250 watts daytime, directional nighttime) at 1550 khz.

In 1988, WCSJ-FM became WUEZ-FM, a beautiful music station. Both stations that year were sold to an Ohio firm called Midwest Broadcasters. Studios were moved to the Technology Center. The beautiful music format lasted until April 16, 1990. During the previous evening, the new station owners played the 1963 hit "Louie, Louie" by the Kingsmen for almost 24 hours straight and featured teaser announcements about the new station. WUEZ then became WCFL.

Program director Gary Rivers stated that "the new WCFL would resemble the old Chicago favorite, with necessary 1990 programming ideas." All the staff members, none of whom are well-known, will be geared up to play oldies once aired on WCFL. "Rock without the do'wop," Rivers called it, "when listeners would spend much of the evening pushing car radio buttons and choosing between WLS and WCFL." Rivers, who worked previously in radio in Ohio says that the new station will soon improve its signal from 30,000 watts to 50,000 watts. I sent Rivers some old material about WCFL which included copies of promotional albums and a picture of WCFL's old sunset car antenna balls. Lately, the station has started sounding like an average rock operation, endeavoring to please a larger audience than listeners from that era, attempting to reach the Chicago area.

WCFL's present address is 1802 North Division, Suite 403, in the Morris Business and Technology Center. It is owned by Ohio Based Media Management Group. The station has plans to build a 600 foot transmitting tower and to move to new studios in Oakbrook in the future. Its modern studios only contain cart machines and compact disc players, no turntables.

Skeptics are watching to see if the new WCFL remains a "Chicago Gold" station or becomes just another tired repetitious rock music station. At 104.7 mhz, the new WCFL has a key dial position between two established Chicago stations. They will be attempting to draw audiences from both stations. Hearing the old songs and familiar jingles should bring back many memories to Chicago area listeners.

Meanwhile, the old WCFL (now WLUP-AM, 1,000) has joked in the past about its former heritage. Staffers of late have been playing some of the old "Big Ten" jingles. The WLUP transmitter building still has the old WCFL letters hanging on it at the facilities in Downers Grove. All this will probably change once the new station gets established. The owners of the new WCFL continue to operate AM'er WCSJ in Morris, Illinois, a small community oriented station.

Rafe Sampson is the AM promotion director, Randy Ness is the program director. The Morris radio scene has certainly changed since the days that N. J. Bannon announced Morris's parades over a PA system, and the Greiners and Armentrout families began the town's two original radio stations. Radio Doctor Bob White's prognosis is that the modern age is here, but he still enjoys reminiscing about Morris's radio past knowing he was a proud contributor and one of its fine pioneers.

WCSJ's signal still emanates from its original transmitter site on Pine Bluff Road. WCFL-FM's current site is about two miles further south. By June 1, 1990 WCFL-FM's new site will be ready to broadcast a 50,000 watt signal to the Chicagoland area. A new 530 foot antenna site is being constructed west of Route 47 just south of I-80.

Current WCSJ staffers are Dick Steele, morning show host and music director; former WRMI-FM staffer, Dave Todd, news director; Dave Rydell, afternoon host; Kevin Schramm, music director; Louanne Lenzie, promotions director; Rita Maxwell, evening announcer; and Randy Ness, operations manager. Two recent

acquisitions from WFXW, Geneva are Larry Scott and Biff Jannuzi who work in the station's news department. Scott was the former WSPY news director.

Both WCSJ and WCFL-FM operate out of new facilities at the Morris Technology Center. The building was formerly the Century Warehouse for Hornsby Stores. WCSJ's evening signal is 6 watts to serve the surrounding community.

Current WCFL announcers including mostly jocks recruited from Joliet's WLLI (I-Rock) are Bob Zak, Tom Kapsalis, Don Beno, and Jeff Andrews. The news is done by Randy Ness. Gary Rivers is the program director and morning show host.

On January 24, 1992, the FCC shut down and fined the station for causing interference and other violations. In all, some 21 stations, including WFRN Elkart, Indiana, complained that "Super CFL" was using too much power and bleeding over into the Elkart station's one microvolt service area. Other complaints came from Rockford's WXRK about co-channel interference. The station was ordered to install directional equipment to beam their signal in a narrow northeasterly direction towards Chicago. The complaints to the FCC came quickly when WCFL turned up their power from 11,000 watts to 50,000 watts, without the directional apparatus in place.

WCFL station manager Tim Spires stated that the FCC became interested in the pattern of the Elkart station as well and ordered them to turn back their radiation slightly to eliminate future problems. Spires says that he has been waiting near the phone for the FCC go ahead to turn the station back on. All the necessary repairs and alterations in station equipment have been made.

"We're just waiting for the go ahead from the government. There's an eight digit code that they need to insert in their computers in order to process the paperwork to let us back on the air," Spires stated, "and they can't find it.

When we come back on the air, you'll never hear those other stations again," he boasted. Spires says that WCFL will probably come back with some sort of promotion celebrating their return to the air.

"It's a unique operation. We play the best hits of the 60's and 70's, with the underlying thread being the old WCFL format. Complete with studio "echo" effect. Our local area will not support this type of programming, so we must branch out across the farm fields to where the larger populations are," Spires went on. The station had to drop its early programming of the famed "Chickenman" series from the old WCFL days because of high costs. Spires stated that with the station's higher wattage, sponsorship should pick up for these kinds of features.

Meanwhile, Morris Daily Herald managing editor Pete Resler stated that many people in the community are still upset with the station's programming. "Here they are giving station identifications like WCFL Morris-Chicago, and their signal doesn't even reach that far."

Resler admitted that young people in the area like the music, but local programming has been cut back. Spires says that the area's needs are met through the operation's sister station WCSJ-AM. Gone are AM news people Dave Todd and Jim Murray. Spires predicted that WCFL-FM will be an even bigger success after this episode is over.

On Friday evening, February 7th, WCFL-FM came back on the air. One of the station's jingles featured a song parody "We fought the law, and the law won." A clear signal is now heard in the Chicago metro area.

## BOONE COUNTY

### THE HISTORY OF BELVIDERE RADIO

The small town of Belvidere has had six known radio stations over the years. There were some joyous moments as well as some tragic times which included two suicides, a murder, and a suspicious fire. One operation remains today which really belongs to Rockford.

Much of the history of early Belvidere radio comes from the memory of former town businessman Larry Kleber (K9LKA; formerly W9CPD). For many years he operated a camera store (Hansen-Kleber's) in the Boone County town of Belvidere at 529 South State Street. Kleber served as the announcer for two of the three early Belvidere stations, and at the age of 17 ran most of their operations. Kleber, now 83 years old, lives in nearby Rockford and enjoys recalling the days of early pioneer radio in Belvidere in the 1920s.

One cannot study the history of the town without first looking at its hub which was the old Apollo Theatre. Ida librarians Jo Anne Emry and Margery Hinrichs supplied me with several bits of useful information taken from



old copies of the Belvidere Daily Republican. Kleber's memory is backed up by the old newspaper articles which detail the excitement and notoriety that the new theater offered the community. Many radio broadcasts emanated from this grand structure.

The Apollo Theater (now closed) at 113 North State was built on the site of the old Derthick Opera House in 1921. An elaborate facility for the times with its large stage appurtenances, the theater was constructed by the wealthy Rhinehart family for about \$100,000. The Apollo was operated by the Belvidere Amusement Company in which Frank Rhinehart was the president. The opening night performance on January 11, 1922 featured the popular musical "Take It From Me." Other musicals, movies, concerts, and organ programs proceeded. The theater included a Wurlitzer "orchestra" pipe organ. Early organists were Miss Bertha Woods and later George Ruschka who played on the radio broadcasts. Other musical selections were provided by the Apollo Orchestra. Many broadcasts took place directly from the stage.

#### WTAH--Belvidere's First Station

The Belvidere Amusement Company got into the radio business shortly after the opening of the theater. Broadcast license #902 was issued to the Apollo in late October of 1922, programming began on November 17, 1922. This was before many of the major older Chicago stations were on the air. The Radio Division of the Bureau of Navigation, U.S. Department of Commerce issued to the theater the call letters WOAG. The letters later stood for "Watch Our Audience Grow." The station operated at 833 khz (360 meters) as did most stations back then, with a limited power of 20 watts. Antenna, towers, and supports rising to about 70 feet were erected on the roof above the theater. A four wire antenna set up was strung between the supports.

[It is interesting to note here that about the same time a religious station in nearby Sycamore used the motto "Watch Our Church Grow" (see WOCC)].

According to Larry Kleber, the mastermind of the WOAG operation was William "Bill" (W. A.) Wallingford. Kleber remembers that Wallingford had previously worked for a theater supply house in Chicago. Bill was sent by the firm to install some electrical equipment in the Apollo and ended up staying in the community as the theater's projectionist.

Wallingford and his wife Verona lived at 315 Julien and later at 610 McKinley Avenue. The home on McKinley was built in 1926, according to a notation found in the wall recently. A newspaper article cites Wallingford as living on Chicago Street. In all, he built transmitters for four stations. These included WDBY (WPCC) operated by the North Shore Congregational Church in Chicago, KFLV, a ten watt station operated by Rev. A. T. Frykman of the Swedish Evangelical Mission Church in Rockford (KFLV later became WROK), and two early Belvidere stations WOAG and WLBR.

In 1922 it appears that two separate firms were vying to be the first on the air in Belvidere. The distinction went to little known WTAH, a ten watt station that operated on the same frequency as WOAG. WTAH was awarded a license in September of 1922 and went on the air that fall just prior to WOAG.

WTAH's license was held by Carmen Ferro, president of the Ferro Manufacturing Company. Edward L. Jacobs was the firm's secretary. According to Broadcast Profile, the station was located as operating at Columbia Avenue near Locust Street. The Standard Atlas of Boone County (1923) published by George A. Ogle and Company, shows the Ferro Manufacturing Firm in its tract book at Columbia Avenue, south of Locust Street. (The McCoy City Directory, 1923, lists Ferro at Columbia Avenue, first street south of Locust.) The tract book shows Ferro just north of the Chicago and Northwestern railroad tracks and the Rockford Interurban Railroad. On this property today is a large blue building known as the Belvedere Company at 725 Columbia Avenue.

WTAH was reassigned to 1270 khz in May of 1923. In September WTAH broadcasted for an hour a night, Tuesdays and Fridays. After a year the station closed, and its license was subsequently deleted by the government. Ferro stated that his little station could not compete with the programming of the big city stations as the reason for its closure. Its existence and passing evidently went unnoticed by the surrounding community. Small stations such as WTAH were usually operated as a hobby or used to advertise or test radios. WTAH went officially silent in May of 1924.

The Ferro Plant, remembered by the former president of the Boone County Historical Society Russell Neuffer, was an 80 x 100 foot one-story brick building. Neuffer recalls the plant made automotive parts and ignition wires. The firm's initial entry into the electronics market was crystal radios. Neuffer says that a man named "Fritz Meinhecht" assembled them for the company. Another area radio man, Rudolph Graf, also worked for the firm.



Ferro's background is a bit sketchy. From the 1910 National Census, Carmen is listed as one of ten servants living in a home owned by New York clothier Charles Sytton. The house is in the historic Prairie District in Chicago at 2710 Prairie Avenue where other wealthy city businessmen lived. Ferro, 30 years old at the time he came to the city in 1902 from Rombiolo, Italy.

In less than ten years, he quickly became the owner of his own company. The firm's Chicago location was at 2011 South Michigan Ave. The company owned three lots at this address. Ferro's plant was less than a block away from Al Capone's Lexington Hotel at 2135 South Michigan Avenue. This was the same hotel where Chicago Landmark specialist Tim Samuelson watched Geraldo Rivera make a fool of himself on national television while attempting to open a vault believed to contain gangster artifacts. The program aired about five years ago revealing a vault located under the hotel to be empty. Ferro continued to live in the same neighborhood at 2922 Prairie Avenue and later at 4941 Grand Boulevard.

The Ferro Manufacturing Company was officially formed according to Illinois Secretary of State's records on March 10, 1920. The board of directors consisted of Ferro, Chicago lawyer Edward J. Hess, and August G. Pineau, an engineer. Most of the company's stock was owned by Minnie G. Eckersberg of 1427 Winona Street in Chicago. City directories list Eckersberg's occupation as a stenographer. Pineau lived at 1904 Sunnyside Avenue in Chicago, while Hess (d. 1961) resided or maintained an office at 111 West Monroe Street in Chicago.

The firm increased its share of stock in 1920 and 1921 and changed its number of directors to five on November 3, 1921. Ferro officially moved his company to Belvidere on March 6, 1922, with John Tefft becoming secretary. On February 24, 1924, the company reduced the amount of stock it held. A year later Ferro Manufacturing Company changed its name to Gossard Radio and Wire Company (February 25, 1925).

A brochure found by George Thomas of the Boone County Historical Society, stated that the Ferro firm had already enjoyed 12 years of experience in making radio sets in 1923. A Chicago store, Rothchild and Company, had purchased for resale over 9,000 crystal sets made by Ferro. Perhaps some of the plant's workers had that amount of experience from previous employment, since the company itself had only been formed three years earlier. Ferro Manufacturing Company also made earphones and amplifiers. Early sets cost \$16.50, while two-stage amplifiers which could be used with any radio sold for \$21.50.

Residents of Belvidere say that Carmen Ferro and his family owned a large home located around 1024 North State Street (now a drive-up banking facility) on the southwest corner of North State and Marshall Streets. Former Ferro employees Ruth Armbrister and Mae (Sullivan) Lanning stated that Carmen was a stout, wealthy man. His sisters and wife Josephine were also involved in the business.

Mrs. Lanning lived near the corner of Columbia and Locust (the home being purchased and demolished when the plant expanded further north). She stated that her job was to braid together multi-colored ignition wires for Ford cars. Mae sang on WTAH. The broadcast emanated from a small room in the plant. A piano played by Alma Olson was brought in for the program. Neighbors reported hearing the static-filled broadcast.

Mrs. Armbrister stated that she made one of the Ferro radio sets in her kitchen. All she could get on it was the organ at the Apollo Theater (both WTAH and then WOAG operated on the same frequency). A stockholder in the company, Walter Holtfretter, said his dad Charles worked at the plant. Walter remembered that the company also made steering wheel locks. State records show that the firm had a patent on this car lock.

On November 29, 1927 Carmen Ferro was believed killed by mobsters. His body was found along a roadside near Bensenville. He had been shot twice in the head. The information on Ferro's death certificate filed in DuPage County listed a Michael Ferro who lived at the Lexington Hotel in Chicago. Ferro is buried at Mt. Carmel Cemetery in Hillside. According to a newspaper article, Ferro refused to pay extortion money to gangsters which may have prompted his assassination. His body was found with a considerable amount of money and receipts for two recently purchased large automobiles, according to the Belvidere Daily Republican. Residents said that they knew more about the incident, but would not elaborate.

They were shocked by another ghastly incident that same year: one of Ferro's engineer's, Rudolph (Rudy) Graf, described by many as a brilliant radio man, stepped in front of a train purposely taking his own life. He had been under stress at the time for unknown reasons. (Graf worked for other stations in Rockford.)

The Ferro Manufacturing Company lasted for a short time in Belvidere and is listed in the city directory as a manufacturer of electrical goods in 1923. In that year, the firm was operated by four prominent area businessmen, John Alvan Tefft, president; Samuel S. Gossard, vice-president (who later took over the firm); Robert B. Andrews, secretary; and Adolph E. Anderson, treasurer. Andrews was a well-known physician in the community,

while Anderson operated a clothing business. Tefft, an enterprising businessman for several firms, was employed for about ten years with the National Sewing Machine Company in Belvidere and began the Coralyn Artificial Flower Company (named after his wife) in 1919. After serving as president for a short time with Ferro Manufacturing, he became president of the Gossard Radio and Wire Company.

After about four years with the radio firm, John went into the real estate business. Several legal documents found in the Boone County Courthouse showed both Ferro and the later Gossard Radio and Wire Company, as borrowing over \$20,000 from banks and splitting stock to keep their business going.

### The Sam Gossard Story

The most important member of the Ferro Leadership quartette was Samuel S. Gossard. Convinced to come out of retirement, Sam took over the struggling Ferro firm converting it from an automobile parts producer to a radio and appliance manufacturing company. The Illinois Secretary of State's Document Department states that Ferro was in business around 1920 and became the Gossard Radio and Wire Company on February 25, 1925. Operations continued out of the old Ferro plant which was then listed as being located at West Locust Street and Columbia Avenue across from the Boone Distillery. The distillery was located behind the present day Dague Paint and Decorating Store. (Historians note that the distillery was also the former site of Frank Rogers Grain Elevator, which produced large amounts of denatured alcohol during the war years.) Some of it was stored in Gossard's corset plant, located down the street.

Around 1927 a Chicago businessman, Walter Kiefer, bought the old Ferro plant for \$1,100. Kiefer says he negotiated for the sale of the abandoned building from several owners who were represented by Belvidere attorney A. J. Strom. Strom was on the board of directors of Gossard Radio and Wire. Raincoats were made in the building after the radio firm closed. Kiefer remarked, "The structure had plenty of small windows in which 997 of them were broken out." He added on and remodeled the original building many times over the years to form the Belvedere Company (Italian for "beautiful view.") and chose this spelling which is different than the town name.

The company produced shampoo bowls, and now is a large manufacturer of barber and beauty shop furniture. Kiefer recently completed writing his own history of his company, which has greatly expanded over the years. The original Ferro Manufacturing Company building, and later the Gossard Radio and Wire Company, has been incorporated into the present day Belvedere Company facility on the southwest corner of Columbia and Locust.

Kiefer recalls that Gossard was not involved in the sale of the old building to him. It was possibly purchased from a later owner. Kiefer says that he was one of the first to own a radio in Belvidere in the 1920s.

In the early 1920s radio sales and equipment began to soar. The Belvidere Town Council passed in 1923 an ordinance to limit the size of receiving antennas, citing numerous safety hazards.

A February 8, 1927 mention in the town's local newspaper lists Samuel Gossard as the vice-president of the Gossard Radio and Wire Company. Sam had also set up another company called "Exclusive Radio." He closed the Ferro Plant (May 22, 1930) when it failed to make a profit, according to Illinois Secretary of State records. Sam's immense managing and marketing skills brought short time successes to the Ferro firm and to his own company before he chose to tragically end his life in 1935. Some of the above information was taken from his obituary.

Ask most people around Belvidere, and they will equate Gossard with corsets, not radios. There were several garment plants located around the town including the H. V. Gossard Corset Factory which operated from about 1904 to 1939. It was later known as the Associated Apparel Company before reportedly moving to Logansport, Indiana (now part of the Signal Corporation of Chattanooga, Tennessee). This plant would be located on the southeast corner of Allen Street and Columbia Avenue today. The Morgan Building and Maintenance Company at 1120 Allen is the only building left on the corner.

To eliminate confusion when studying old maps of the area, Allen Street was called Third Street in 1923. The next street south, which used to be called Allen Street, has been changed to Fourth Street.

The Gossard Corset Plant was located just to the south a few feet from the Morgan Firm. (The city directory lists the Gossard Plant as Columbia Avenue 2D w/o Locust.) Former city mailman Robert Blietz and long time resident Don Penny remember seeing a bus carrying female employees from downtown Belvidere to the plant. Approximately one hundred workers were employed there.

The corset factory building itself has an interesting history, according to Irma Baxter Niemann, whose late husband, George Baxter, bought the building in 1940. The T-shaped two-story white stucco and brick structure

became the Palco Manufacturing Company at 1000 Columbia Avenue. Palco made, among other items, furniture for barber and beauty shops as does the nearby Belvedere Company today. Baxter had brought his successful business from Evanston and had been a partner in the Atlas Furniture Company of Rockford. Palco owned both the Gossard building and the Morgan Plant. The cafeteria for Gossard employees was inside of the Morgan Plant. The Morgan building has undergone many improvements, but still remaining inside is a tombstone for "Browner," Mrs. Niemann's pet watchdog.

Palco operated until around 1964. Later several other firms leased the old Gossard Corset plant, according to Mrs. Niemann, until a devastating fire on January 8, 1970 destroyed it. The blaze also damaged the Morgan Building as well. Poorly stored, used rags, ignited by a space heater, was probably the cause of the fire, according to the building's owner.

### Sam Gossard's Early Life

Samuel Gossard, raised on an Indiana farm, was the fourth of ten children. His brother H. V. was the youngest of the family and the person who actually started the prosperous women's undergarment business. When the firm required another plant site, Belvidere was chosen. Because of his mechanical ability, Sam became involved in its operation. He managed the Belvidere plant, as well as ones in Dixon and Hanesville and lived in Dixon for a short time.

A former Rock Island railroad engineer and newspaper man, Gossard ran his family's corset company until 1923, before opting for the radio business on a full time basis. Sam still held financial interest in the garment firm having improved on a French product, patenting a new front laced corset which had contributed to the success of the company.

By 1923 Gossard, apparently looking for a new challenge, was talked out of retirement by John Tefft and talked into joining the Ferro Manufacturing Company, which was located just up the street from the corset factory. (A newspaper article stated that Sam and his brother had sold their interest in the garment business).

Up to this point, Ferro mainly manufactured automobile parts. Gossard determined that the plant could become more profitable if it manufactured radio parts and appliances. Gossard's ideas were put into motion, and the Ferro Company quickly found profitable markets for its new products.

An irreplaceable publication, the Rock River Valley Volume II, published by S. J. Clarke in 1926, contains biographies of prominent Northern Illinois businessmen, including Gossard. The publication labels Sam as one of the "most farsighted, prudent, capitalists. A genuine leader and promoter of the area." Belvidere historian Fred Franck says Gossard was "a kind, industrious man, a charitable man, when few were charitable."

A 1933 city directory lists the firm's new business as 318 South State Street. Sam had successfully exchanged corsets for radios and began pioneering a new career. Under Gossard's leadership, several unique radio sets were manufactured. Some were eventually placed in cabinets. These included reflex circuit radios designed by Rudolph Graf (9RP) and a couple of Gossard's early All Season three dial tuning sets. These along with other radios made by another Belvidere experimenter Emmett Sullivan are on display at the Boone County Historical Museum. The museum's activities coordinator George Thomas says the radios are clearly marked, but not much documentation has been made on the sets. (Another Sullivan, John E., operated a repair shop at 603 South State and sold radios down the street from Gossard's at 528 South State.)

Emmett and his sister Bessie operated an appliance and clothing store in Belvidere and contributed much to the museum. Emmett Sullivan's shop was located at 417 South State Street.

The radio manufacturing business was relatively new and there was much competition even in Belvidere. New sets and stores quickly bit into the early success that Gossard had enjoyed. The Belvidere Daily Republican stated that Sam became despondent and temporarily deranged over recent business reversals.

In late 1932 Gossard's wife of forty years passed away. Faced with this recent grief and the backward turn in his business, Sam Gossard, at age 70, took his own life on January 2, 1935 at his home at 1010 Pearl Street. A few minutes before, he had called a local funeral parlor to announce his intentions to "shuffle off." After penning a few disjuncting notes to friends, he apparently fired a .38 caliber bullet through his head. One of those notes to a friend published in the local newspaper stated:

"He has gone, he went, his money was all spent. Who cares? Here lies his earthly self. He was really a good fellow at heart. But we all must depart. So here goes, Frank, good-bye. Sam."



Afterwards, friends stated that Gossard had been despondent for the past three weeks. The rest of the notes, friends stated, were the "ravings of a disordered mind."

Sam Gossard was buried at the Belvidere Cemetery. It can be said that Gossard, too, gave radio some of the "best years of his life."

### WOAG/WLBR

The story of WOAG (Watch Our Audience Grow) and its successor WLBR has a much more pleasant tone than that of the tragic outcome of Sam Gossard and Carmen Ferro. There was merriment, entertainment, and much service devoted to the community through WOAG's many broadcasts.

At WOAG the Apollo Theater was the main benefactor of any publicity garnered by its station. After signing on in November of 1922, WOAG presented twice weekly broadcasts. Performers from both Rockford and Belvidere were invited to be on the station. WOAG once received a reception report via post card from England outlining a particular night's programming.

Typical of small stations in tiny towns, the operation's first broadcast usually contained a promotional piece describing the town to its distant listeners. WOAG's first program on November 17, 1922 featured Belvidere Chamber of Commerce Secretary P. H. Hawthorne, who expounded on the many interesting facets of the city. Apollo Theatre manager Frank Rhinehart then emceed orchestra, vocal, and instrumental selections featuring the Apollo Theatre Orchestra.

The station's first broadcast fell upon very receptive ears in the local area, while promoters of WOAG stated that the station's range reached 500 to 1,000 miles away. Its equipment was very primitive as announcers and performers gathered around a microphone that resembled a black tin can in order to be heard over the radio.

In the spring of 1923, WOAG was reassigned to 1340 khz, still using 20 watts of power. By January of 1924 the station moved to 1100 khz and had increased its power to 100 watts. On April 10, 1924 the theater received permission to broadcast a concert. The Radio Division extended Apollo's license for a few more months, reissuing its license on April 15, 1924.

Broadcast Profile indicates that a proposed move by the station in June of 1924 to Central Park Gardens in Rockford was never carried out. Central Park was one of two large amusement parks in Rockford. It was located near Central and Auburn Streets and closed sometime in the 1940s. The park had previously held a license for WJAH in July of 1922. (The other large amusement park in Rockford was Harlem Park, which today is a large section of exquisite homes located along the west side of the Rock River.)

By September of 1924 WOAG continued to be located at the Apollo Theater. However, the Radio Division canceled WOAG's license on September 8, 1924 determining that the station had been abandoned and was no longer broadcasting.

Later in February of 1926, the Apollo Theater applied for a portable broadcasting license. This was a popular trend back then to hold a broadcast license to air special events rather than operate on a consistent schedule. The Belvidere Amusement Company, using the old call letters WOAG and Wallingford's set, wanted to operate again from the roof of the theater building. The government, however, turned down the request. During the past two years, the Radio Division had placed tighter controls on the operations of radio stations attempting to eliminate poorly run, or those without regular schedules.

In the mid 1920s news of the confusion over the interference of too many stations began to appear in the Belvidere area newspapers. But despite the crowding conditions on the dial, the Radio Division gave the town of Belvidere another opportunity to operate a radio station.

Two years had elapsed since the Apollo Theatre station WOAG had been abandoned. Again, it was Bill Wallingford with a new partner, George Allason, who joined together to put Belvidere back on the air. Rockford resident Larry Kleber stated that the newly formed company was called Alford Radio, a name derived from the two last names of the firm's founders.

"Breadboard" radios (a flat piece of wood with wiring connections neatly bent at 90 degree angles) were manufactured on the second floor of the Manley Garage. (The exact location of Manley Garage or Manley Motors is 621 North State near Lincoln. It is the second Ford franchise in the country.)

Later in March of 1927, a studio was constructed at Alford Radio's new location at 116 Logan Avenue just west of the Julien Hotel. Radio sets were sold on installments to area residents for \$2.60 a week. Radio batteries were recharged for 75 cents. Wallingford, named honorary president of the Belvidere Amateur Radio Association



on March 9, 1927, had lots of competition in the town, including Sam Gossard. The G. B. Ames Dry Goods Store at 407 South State in Belvidere sold Pfanstiehl Overtone six-tube radio sets at \$125.00, and Thrush Hardware at 508 South State offered free tube testing. Wallingford's new company took out daily ads on the radio page in the Daily Republican.

To further advertise his new venture, Wallingford considered an electrical genius twenty years ahead of his time, secured a broadcast license for WLBR. The new station would operate at 890 khz with 15 watts of power. The newspapers listed Great Lakes radio operator and local "ham" Edgar C. Penny (9AKV) as the engineer of WLBR and Mrs. Charlotte Allason (George's wife) as the station's announcer. (Penny, now 83 years old, is a retired airlines communications engineer and lives in Las Vegas.)

During December of 1926, Wallingford's equipment was on display at Smith Brothers Confectionery, a cigar store at 525 South State Street. Operating at 15 watts was not the high powered status that the newspapers had reported WLBR would be, but the station had some other interesting innovations.

Wallingford, who seemed to have a penchant for religious broadcasters, offered free air time to local pastors. He had previously built radio transmitters for some churches. The station had the capacity to relay programs from as far away as 14 miles. Broadcast hours were set for Monday nights from 7-8 p.m. and one other night from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Later, Sunday morning church services were aired as well as some late night weekend musical programs.

Remote programming came from the Union Club, a "dry" social and athletic organization that met in the upper floor of the Farmers State Bank located on the northwest corner of State and Logan (530 South State). This building is now the Belvidere State Bank. The Union Club's popular basketball team was captained by Fred Schulte, who became a professional baseball player with the St. Louis Browns and Washington Senators. Besides broadcasts from the Union Club, other programs came from the Alford offices near the Julien Hotel.

Larry Kleber, a projectionist for the Apollo Theatre, was also an announcer for both WOAG and WLBR. Kleber mentioned that he would tell the audience that remote broadcasts were coming from the "Feather Factory in Cherry Valley." Of course this place did not exist, but it was part of the fun the station personnel was having with its audience.

Kleber pointed out that while WLBR was more organized than WOAG, the stations were quite similar in operation and used the same transmitting equipment. Programs came from the Union Club and the Apollo Theatre on both stations. Wallingford had built two new microphones for WLBR. WLBR frequently signed on with local vocalist Johnny Cameron singing "Little White House." The local Western Union office brought over a bushel basket of nightly telegrams to the WLBR studios. The sender of the furthest telegram to the station won a box of candy.

WLBR kept to a more regular schedule than its predecessor, but changed frequencies quite often. Wallingford would "cheat a bit" by slightly adjusting the station's transmitter to find the clearest spot on the dial. The station's transmitter was not crystal controlled, hence, it often drifted off frequency anyway. It used RCA tubes in its 50 watt amplifier. According to Kelber, Wallingford kept the 15 watt station operating around 25 watts.

Kleber remarked, "The station personnel were too busy having fun, and no one thought of selling advertising . . . no one thought of money until a tube burned out or a new record player needle was needed." A continued supply of money, equipment, and interest was necessary to keep small stations like WLBR going.

According to 1927 editions of the Belvidere Daily Republican (which prefers to be called the Daily Republican, Belvidere, Illinois), a variety of musical programs were performed by local residents. Larry Kleber was usually at the mike.

WLBR officially signed on February 13, 1927 at 11 a.m. The station broadcasted the regular Sunday morning service of the First Baptist Church. Doctor W. E. Mundell preached on the subject "Hope, The Anchor of the Soul." Music was featured by two quartets. A wire carrying the broadcast ran from the church to the Alford Radio Company's office on Logan Avenue. Reception of the program and a previous night's test broadcast were heard and enjoyed by the community. At this time, WLBR's schedule was set up to air programs "on the ether" (a timely term which meant "on the air") each Sunday, Monday, and Friday.

However, after some technical repairs, WLBR did not broadcast again until Friday night February 18, 1927. A program was aired from Logan School featuring Mrs. Paul Parsons and Miss Bertha Woods. Children from the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades performed on the show. Featured were readings by Elaine Morse, Betty Jane Meyers,

Frances Goodwin, and Miss Vera King. Charles Countryman performed a clarinet solo. An unidentified pianist and the Logan School children also sang on the 7 p.m. program.

The 11 a.m. morning worship service from the M. E. Church was aired on Sunday morning February 20th. Other church broadcasts were planned by the Presbyterian, South Baptist, and First Evangelical.

Besides religious broadcasts, the town's musicians regularly "Hooped It Up" from the Union Club during many late night programs. On February 26th, the talent included "Paul Revere and his Merry Old Gang of Nightriders," piano numbers by George Ruschka, Hawaiian guitarist Jack Beebe, vocalist John Cameron, and Frank Hall's "Music Masters." Listeners who tuned into the 11:30 p.m. until 1:00 a.m. broadcast were invited to join Paul Revere's Nightriders and become "Minutemen." A number of listeners participated in the radio promotion. Announcer Larry Kleber was identified by the Daily Republican as Paul Revere, "the always wise-cracking emcee," but, Kleber recently interviewed, did not remember playing the role. The newspaper attributed Kleber as the talent who added to the success of the broadcasts. Wallingford contributed the technical skills needed to run the station, but seemed to remain in the modest background of the operation.

The list of "Minutemen" soared even higher after WLBR's next "jazzy" late night program on Saturday, March 5th. Paul Revere was there, along with Ruschka, Cameron, a fiddler named Cy Withers, Frank Hall's "Music Masters," and the "Phantom Banjoist." On Monday evening March 9th, the program featured Marengo music teacher Mrs. Ella Herman and her pupils Harold Johnson, tenor, and pianists Edward Kliener and Donald Zenk.

The First Evangelical Church service was presented on Sunday March 12, 1927. Rev. William Albrecht delivered the morning service on the radio. The next night (March 13th) the Alford Radio Company featured a program of Rockford artists. William Hoke, a Rockford tenor, directed the program. The evening's broadcast featured Hawaiian guitar favorites by Kreuter and Winter. Charles Wade performed comedy songs and violin numbers. Alta Cleland played the piano. A number of vocalists were also presented. These included Mary Johns, soprano, Paul Shiglery, tenor, and Ray Woodworth.

It seems the station's greatest successes came in its late night weekend music shows. Letters and numerous telegrams poured into the station expressing their enjoyment of these programs. The station's usual Saturday Night Jamboree on March 19 at 11:30 p.m. again featured Paul Revere and his original "Sandsifters" orchestra. Also "sprinkling some late night sleepy dust" were the following performers: Shorty Houston and his Golden Uke, the Hauhalson Trio, "Pikey" Carlson and Frank Hall, along with pop song hits sung by John Cameron and played by pianist George Ruschka. R. R. Walls added "an enlightening discourse on 'bugology,'" as reported by the Daily Republican. A similar program with some of the same personnel was featured at midnight on April 9th.

On March 27, 1927, Doctor E. W. Mundell was back behind the pulpit as WLBR broadcasted the morning worship service from the First Baptist Church. The following evening, listeners enjoyed an informative talk by Rockford Public Health Commissioner Doctor N. O. Gunderson entitled "Good Health." Music for the evening was provided by Ben Hamish on clarinet, classical piano numbers by Mrs. Beulah Smith, and songs by Rockford's Harmony IV Quartet. The live program from the Alford Radio Company studio at the Julien Hotel also featured the Rockford Quartet. This musical group was composed of Roland L. Smith, Ozerie Hall, Uriel Ross, and E. C. Ware. The Union Club was the scene of Friday, April 8th's Old Timers Broadcast. Bert Spencer, Northern Illinois' champion square dance caller, was featured along of group of old time fiddlers, accordion, and harmonica players. Jack Beebe and Cy Withers were among those on the program.

The M. E. Church cantata, directed by Mrs. C. J. Coarson, was broadcast on Sunday, April 17th at 4 p.m. The program featured the combined choirs of the Methodist and Presbyterian churches.

In April of 1927, WLBR received a temporary license to continue broadcasting and a frequency change from near 890 khz to near 1400 khz. A number of other smaller stations lost their licenses during this time. In late May of 1927, WLBR moved to 1000 khz as the government's radio commission had started clearing up the country's crowded radio dial. This move affected 69 stations within one hundred miles of Chicago. Some sources list WLBR also operating at 1210 khz. On May 25, 1927, the Daily Republican reported that WLBR had moved to 930 khz, sharing time with Crown Point, Indiana's WLBT. This was a good spot on the dial, as it placed it comfortably between some major Chicago stations.

One of the station's last important broadcasts took place on May 28, 1927 from the Union Club. It featured Robert Koch on the banjo, along with Richard Walls, Cy Withers, George Ruschka, and Larry Kleber. Around July of 1927, Bill Wallingford moved to a home on Chicago Street (according to a newspaper article which was not substantiated by city directories). The station also had been moved from the Julien Hotel and had been off the air

for about two months. Wallingford announced plans to broadcast church services each Sunday from First Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, South Baptist, First Evangelical, and St. John's Evangelical. The first broadcast was slated for July 24th. The station was now located in his home.

WLBR seemed to drop from public view and was no longer mentioned by the media after July of 1927. On October 24, 1927, the station was sold to the Rockford Broadcasting Corporation. (A firm called Rockford Broadcasters, Inc. purchased WROK in 1929.) Broadcast Profile states that in December of 1927 WLBR was "dismantled and packed in Belvidere, but never shipped to Rockford." Larry Kleber says the actual equipment was built into a "rack cabinet." The station never resumed operation, and as of November 30, 1928, it was one of many stations whose license was canceled by the government.

It can only be speculated as to the reason that WLBR was bought and never placed on the air. Perhaps it was merely purchased for its frequency, keeping it from competing against other stations in the Rockford area. Sometime afterwards representatives from an oil company approached WLBR's owners, offering them "a considerable amount of money" for the station, according to Larry Kleber. But the station had already been sold, and its license returned to the government.

Kleber continued in business in the Belvidere area, and for a short time was part of a group interested in building WREK in Woodstock (see WREK Woodstock). He later invested in CATV in McHenry County. Kleber is retired, but continues to be active in amateur radio.

According to old city directories, Wallingford left Belvidere in the early 1930s, and in the mid 40's was employed as the projectionist at the Coronado Theatre in Rockford. He later built and installed two-way radio systems for the Rockford and Winnebago Police Departments. Wallingford, the son of a prosperous farmer, passed away at the age of 57 on December 11, 1954 at a Manteno, Illinois hospital. He was buried in his home town of Sheridan, Indiana, next to his late wife Blanche.

## WKWL

### BELVIDERE'S SHORT LIVED FM STATION

The town of Belvidere was without a radio station from 1927 to 1971. In 1970, construction began on a new FM station that identified more with Rockford than the community of Belvidere (even though it was owned by Belvidere Broadcasting Inc.). WKWL-FM lasted for about three years until it mysteriously burned down in 1974.

The early 1970s spawned many local FM stations. It was the FCC's intent to grant 3,000 watt FM'ers in small markets where no AM frequencies were available. Many of these operations are still on the air today, some of which have increased their antenna height and directed their interests towards the larger cities. Left in the distant memory of Rockford listeners is WKWL. Little remains of this station except that its former tower is located at the Cherry Vale Shopping Center. It was moved there around 1976 and is in current use by one of its subsequent owners WXRX-FM (104.9 mhz) Rockford-Belvidere.

WKWL was owned by Keith Walker of nearby Poplar Grove. The Rockford Register Star also listed Wallace Scott Morrison, Jr., a relative of Walker's, as the treasurer of the Belvidere Broadcasting Company, the firm that owned the station. Other officers were Rockford attorney Herbert Franks, secretary, WTVO technician Richard A. McDaniels, and Walter Morrison as the station's directors. Walker had formerly worked at WTVO-TV in Rockford as an advertising salesman. WREX-TV's Warren Anderson, a long time area broadcaster, and Betty Nitchie, an advertising buyer for Zenith in Chicago, stated that Walker and his wife were well-liked in the community; both were often heard on WKWL. Anderson related that Walker always had a deep love for radio dating back to Keith's work on John R. Livingston's WJRL (now WNTA). Nitchie mentioned that Walker always had faithful clients for whatever media he sold.

The 1967 and 1968 Rockford Register Star newspaper articles listed the other applicants for WKWL's frequency as the Greater Rockford Sound Inc. and Quest for Life, a religious organization owned by the First Church of the Open Bible in Loves Park. Quest for Life president Don Lyon was granted WQFL in 1974 and opened WFEN in 1991. WKWL was awarded the frequency by the FCC based on its overall plan to serve the entire community. Ralph Reynolds, formerly of WROK and WFRL, was WKWL's operations manager.

Early administration of the station was handled out of a lawyer's office at 1100 Rockford Trust Building. Construction of WKWL began in 1970, with its first day on the air being February 27, 1971. The ABC/UPI affiliate played a mixture of easy listening music and provided local information. In its later years it signed off at 2 a.m.



The WKWL studios and transmitting tower stood alone on a thirty acre tract of prairie and nearby cornfields. (Today this land would be located north of the Forum East subdivision.) The complete operation was housed in a small 40 x 60 foot white wood structure. A long winding gravel path, which was sometimes impassable in the winter, eventually led back to the building. WKWL's address was 944 North Bell School Road, but it set back a considerable distance west of the road. Another good coordinate would be Bruce Korerup's Rock Valley Greenhouse and Nursery which is located slightly southeast of the old station on the east side of Bell School Road.

Incidentally, Bell School Road got its name from an old circa 1860 school house which once was located on the southwest corner of Springbrook and Bell School Roads a couple of miles north of this area. House mover Paul Slabaugh of Caledonia purchased the old school for \$250 in 1961. He moved it to 7260 Spring Creek Road. The structure is now a modern looking white sided home with a brick front. Slabaugh and his family lived in the home for short time which is the fifth house west of Bell School Road on the north side of the street.

Bruce Korerup and another long time area resident Joe Poulter say that the underdeveloped area around the station provided good pheasant hunting. Poulter's wife Martha did a regular woman's program on the station for nearly a year. Although promised a salary for her work, she was never paid, but enjoyed doing the program anyway. Mrs. Poulter passed away in early November of 1990 after a long illness.

It took sometime to locate former staffers of WKWL, but some were still around. This included Ralph Cohen (Reynolds), a former farm director at WROK and now the audio-visual director at Rockford College. Cohen's whereabouts were noted to the author by WROK ambulance chaser and newsman Fred Spear, who covered the station fire, and former WROK engineer Larry Carlstrom (KS9B). Two former announcers David Moore and Randy Lundgren are currently out of radio, but still live in the community. Another announcer, Dennis Lee (Sloatman), is now in radio in Florida.

Randy Lundgren is a successful insurance agent in Rockford having begun his radio career as a WLS guest teen DJ. The popular Chicago station allowed teens to write in and appear for 15 minutes on Saturday evenings to play the top three phone requests at 10 p.m. Lundgren appeared with WLS air personality Art Roberts on February 28, 1965. Dave Moore is currently the director of support services at the Rockford YMCA.

Dennis Lee Sloatman worked for several Rockford stations after WKWL. He also operated a popular unlicensed station WDLS in 1969. He is currently technical director of WMGF in Orlando, Florida and coordinates all eleven stations owned by Metroplex Broadcasting.

Paul Feinman is believed to be in the jewelry business. He was known as Paul Elliot at WROK and Paul Irwin at WKWL. Feinman often fashioned his program around selected themes using old records.

Jay Sklar, known as Dave Ross, did the station's evening music program "Side Trip Theatre." Today Jay operates two family run men's clothing stores in Rockford and Loves Park (Parkside Men's Store). "Side Trip Theatre" was originally started by Bill Natale and Steven Bosanac.

The rest of the station staff included announcer Chuck Still, astrologist Sharon Tammen, and Greg Sherlock now a newsman in Florida. As many as fourteen people worked at the station at one time.

Ralph Cohen explained that WKWL was more than just a music station, it was the area's first independent stereo FM operation. WKWL played middle of the road music, but also did Belvidere High School sports, local news, and was heavy on farming information for Rockford and Boone County. A popular lounge show from "Jacks or Better," in Rockford, featured local musician Mike Pizzuto. The station also featured "The Auction Man," who sold everything from hamburgers to buses. A sixty second spot in the early 1970's cost between five and seven dollars on WKWL. Old time radio, the Boston Pops Classical Program, and overnight progressive rock and jazz shows filled out the station's programming. Pre-recorded programs were played back on high quality fifteen inch tape decks. Muzak operated off the station's subchannel.

Ralph Cohen, who every once in a while enjoys hearing someone call him "Ralph Reynolds," currently does voiceovers for commercials and narrates industrial films. He likes talking about his radio past and related the following story.

One day he was testing the mike in the station's auxiliary studio about to do some recording. Instead of counting, Reynolds often barked into the microphone to check levels. His "woof woof" sound came over the air, prompting listeners to call and wonder why a dog was barking while the music was on. Someone had left a channel open on the station's main control board allowing the barking sounds to come through over the air.



Cohen related that the station was well-liked in the community and projected figures stated that it would be operating in the "black" late in 1974. Up to this time it would not be surprising to have known that WKWL might not have been doing well financially. This was never substantiated, but a new FM station not coupled to an existing successful AM station nearly always operated marginally during its early years.

However, one of the station's most successful programs, "Side Trip Theatre," paid its own way on the air. The program's host Jay Sklar (air name Dave Ross) put together a successful mix of jazz, rock, and classical album cuts on his nightly program. Sklar had previously worked in the traffic department of WGN radio in Chicago before coming to WKWL.

The program always began with Jay stating that the show featured "Me, You, and Music." This was followed by the Emerson, Lake and Palmer cut "Welcome Back My Friends." Sklar says the program style was "laid back."

"It was sort of like the old WXRT format," explains Sklar. "The announcing was easy going, and the commercials were all soft sell live spots."

The show had plenty of sponsors which Jay personally recruited and sold. He had little to do with the daily operation of the station, bumping into management occasionally to turn in client's checks in exchange for his commissions. Announcer Dave Moore (formerly of WLUV-AM/FM Loves Park) stated that Sklar was WKWL's unofficial program director who helped obtain music for the station. Jay received records for WKWL through trade outs with area stores.

The night time format was quite different from the daytime music in which WKWL stood for "With Kindness, With Love," according to Moore, who hosted an afternoon program on the station. Sklar was the last voice ever heard on WKWL signing off with a cut from an old Beatles album, "Goodnight." He later went on to work for WYFE (Y-95, now WKMQ) and later with Howard Miller at WRRR. Today Sklar produces commercials for his store as well as some other accounts from his own personal recording studio in his home.

The end came swiftly for WKWL early in the morning on June 7, 1974. A devastating fire completely destroyed the station leaving only its tower untouched. The blaze was reported by a passing motorist at 4:45 a.m. according to David Bailey, the current chief of the Cherry Valley Fire Protection District. Flames were observed shooting some 300 feet in the air. By the time fire officials arrived, all they could do was to pour water on the fire. There was nothing left to save. The roof had collapsed destroying everything inside, turning the basement into a large casket of smoldering rubble. The loss was listed at \$100,000.

Investigations continued for some time afterwards, as the fire department had labeled the blaze as "suspicious." Across town about a week earlier, vandals had cut guy wires, toppling one of the towers at WROK, another Rockford station. It was never determined that these incidents were related.

At the time of the fire that destroyed WKWL, negotiations were underway with another Rockford AM station, WRRR, to buy the area's only independent FM station. After the fire, there was not much left to sell. David Moore stated that the owner of the station removed several expensive tape decks the night before the fire, stating that they were needed for a project at home. Night time jock Jay Sklar was also told, according to Moore, that the windows were to be left open to "air the place out because some important visitors would be coming to the station the next day." Sklar says that he didn't leave any windows open and was surprised that no investigators ever asked him anything about the fire.

Newspaper accounts in the Rockford Register Star stated that staffers would be questioned about the possible cause of the fire, but other announcers including Randy Lundgren and station manager Ralph Cohen said that no one questioned them or asked them to participate in the investigation either. Moore stated that a 10 p.m. newscast on a Rockford TV station said that WKWL's management had been questioned about the fire and cleared of the suspicious blaze. All of the former staffers were critical of the fire department's handling of the incident, including Cohen who spoke cautiously. He was hesitant in making any direct comments about the fire itself and was not satisfied with the aftermath investigation.

A previous fire, where boxes of teletype paper were ignited, burnt itself out before much damage had occurred. However, the station's second fire in a month accomplished what sinister persons had intended. Fire officials, according to Cohen, stated that the blaze was apparently started in a couple of places in the building near the record library and in the newsroom. The fire department could do little to save the building until the power was turned off. All electric circuits to the building were located underground.

"Had the power company gotten there quickly, at least the transmitter could have been saved." Cohen continued. "We could have gone on the air from a tent, it would have been a novelty item for the community, but at least we would have still been on the air."

Firemen had to return to the station the same day as the fire had rekindled. Owners of the station were "speechless" at the devastation as they walked amidst the fire debris the morning of the incident, according to the Rockford Register Star. The newspaper reported a week later that fire investigator August Mazzone had confirmed that the cause of the fire was arson.

It was also reported by the Star that a tax lien for a year's worth of employee withholdings had not been paid. A suit for \$1,422 was filed against the station by the IRS. The matter was turned over to the station's attorneys. A station engineer, who preferred to remain anonymous, told me that about the time of the first fire, he was called to work one morning at sign-on to repair the microphone control on the main console. Someone had neatly snipped off all the wires to the control. The engineer also reported that other equipment had also been tampered with.

Shortly afterwards, WKWL's owner Keith Walker moved from the area. Without a transmitter, all the station had left was a tower and a license. They were sold by Walker's father-in-law Wally Morrison to Jack Ambrozic who started WYBR-FM about two years later.

For sometime afterwards, young people like Bruce Kornerup would play in the area and sift through the rubble looking at burned up pieces of equipment and melted records. Around 1988 the property around the former WKWL site was subdivided and new home construction began. Today WKWL's old studio building would be located approximately on the site of garage eight near the southeast corner of Tulip Lane and Meander Drive. Meander Drive has been extended across Bell School Road. The property now belongs to the Briargate Apartments.

Was it a defective coffee pot, a heating or air conditioning malfunction, or a disgruntled employee that started the early morning fire? Was the blaze intentionally set on both occasions, successful the second time in destroying the station? Who, why, or how the fire started still remains a mystery. A lot of hearsay and many other rumors were circulated. The investigation by the Cherry Valley Fire Department was turned over to the county sometime later. No arrests were ever made, and nothing ever came of the investigation of the fire.

## WYBR-FM

### Yellow Brick Road Station

Belvidere's next radio voice was WYBR which commenced broadcasting on August 13, 1976 after a bitter scramble for WKWL's old 104.9 mhz frequency and license. The battle dragged on for nearly two years after WKWL's devastating fire between veteran broadcaster Jack Ambrozic and past owners of what is now WQFL Rockford.

WKWL's license was purchased on December 12, 1974 by Ambrozic along with the station's tower. The tower was repaired and moved to the Cherry Vale Shopping Center where studios had been constructed in the mall. Listeners in the Rockford-Belvidere area remember WYBR as the "Yellow Brick Road Station." A yellow path painted on the floor of the mall led shoppers to the station's location. It was WYBR's intention to have recording artists, when they were in the area, stop at the station and have their fingerprints placed permanently in the floor tiles.

Ambrozic didn't stop with just a yellow path to the station. He often dressed up staffers in costumes depicting the characters of the "Wizard of Oz" tale and paraded them around the community. The Tinman, the Scarecrow, and even Oz himself appeared at many remote broadcasts and fund raisers. Even the WYBR studios resembled "Infinity." Crowds of curious shoppers often gathered in the mall to watch the station's automated-assist equipment through a large window.

WYBR played some spanish programs on Sunday and did some high school football games in the beginning, but the time was right for a good middle of the road station to take hold in the Rockford area. Good music became the station's main ingredient, but towards the end of WYBR's tenure, the music publishing houses sued the station for failure to pay royalties. (Stations are obligated to pay music publishers a one percent fee based on the station's annual gross advertising sales.) WYBR management presented the usual argument that since the radio stations popularize the music by playing it, they should not have to pay any fees for using it. Nevertheless, a number of suits were filed against the station by BMI and other publishing houses on behalf of the record companies. All the suites were settled before the station was sold.

WYBR's staff included a notable crew of talented performers, including morning men Bill Monohan and Bill Hickok who between them could do about sixty different voices and characterizations. Other staffers included Jay Moore, Reese Rickards, Jr. (whose father has been with WJJD for many years), and WLUP's present morning man Jonathon Brandmeier. Robert Ambrozic, Jack's brother, says that Brandmeier was just as outlandish in Belvidere as he currently is in Chicago. The popular morning figure worked in Arizona between his air stints in Belvidere and Chicago.

Robert Ambrozic was WYBR's sales manager in the late 70's, and currently is an account executive for WKMQ in Rockford. Other air personalities referred to as the "Colonel" and "Mad Mountain Walker" worked briefly at WYBR. Other staff members were commercial managers Sally Johnson, news directors Robert Mason, Keith Darnay, Randy Osborne, and engineers John Wright and Fran Bartz. Ambrozic says that WYBR was a step ahead of its time. "The people didn't quite understand what we were doing with our Oz theme."

WYBR attempted to compete with Rockford's established information station WROK, but couldn't keep up with WROK's news vans and facilities. WYBR did local news and was an affiliate of ABC, CBS, and Mutual.

On May 12, 1982, with the recession, rising costs and interest rates, Jack Ambrozic sold WYBR. Considered a radio and network veteran, he is sure to pop up somewhere else in the future in broadcast management.

WYBR was sold to Sentry Broadcasting and moved from East 114 Cherry Vale Shopping Center to 2830 Sandy Hollow Road, Rockford, in 1984. The tower in the shopping center is still in use by WXRX-FM. A religious bookstore now occupies the space in the mall vacated by WYBR.

For a couple of years Robert Ambrozic stayed with WYBR and its new owner Sentry Broadcasting. He has certainly seen the many changes of station call letters and personnel in Rockford.

WYBR's new president was Don Colby, who tried a variety of adult contemporary and Top 40 formats. In 1988 WYBR was combined with Sentry's WXTA becoming WYBR AM-FM. A rock format was tried by the station's new owners, North Star Broadcasting. In 1989 the stations were separated with WYBR-FM becoming WXRX-FM (the "X") now a rock station. Tim Crull and Sky Drysdale are current staffers.

Early in 1992, the "x" teamed up with the Rockford Park District to provide computerized music for the city's Fourth of July fireworks display. Those in attendance at the event listened to a 35 minute program of specially selected patriotic tunes on their portable radios that were coordinated with the sights in the sky. The station also gave permission for its call letters to be used during a scene in the movie "Batman Returns" (1992). WXRX became the number one area station in 1992, according to Arbitron ratings, beating out perennial winners WROK/WZOK. WXRX is licensed for both Belvidere and Rockford.

On the AM side, WYBR reverted back to its original call of WRRR 1330 AM (Triple R Radio) which dates back to December 24, 1953. The station was then owned by the Rock River Broadcasting Corporation at 113 South Court Street. Boyd Phelps was the general manager of the station. H. I. Tingley later became commercial manager and eventually managed WYFE and WSDR. Successive owners were W. E. Walker, The Kankakee Journal, Radio Rockford Inc., Cummings Communications, and Chicago broadcaster Howard Miller in 1977. The managers in 1967 were Deane Osborne and Ward Hartman.

Doug McDuff was the commercial manager of the 1,000 watt daytime station from 1978 to 1982 under Miller. After a couple of years as a talk station and a rock station, WRRR is now programmed with easy listening standards by the Satellite Music Network's "Stardust Format." Former WGN and WJJD air personality Eddie Howard is often heard on WRRR. The station has a limited night time signal. Both WRRR and WXRX are currently owned by Airplay Broadcasting. Robert E. Rhea, Jr. is the manager of both stations. David McAlley (formerly of WMRO, Aurora) is the vice-president; Bob Schuman is the news director.

WXRX-FM is licensed for both Belvidere and Rockford. WRRR (Rock River Radio) continues as one of Rockford's older stations. WRRR also aired the long running Swedish religious program that was formerly heard on WROK.

## ROCKFORD RADIO REVISITED

The early years of Rockford radio evolved by itself without the familiar connections of Chicago. There were no large metropolitan stations in the area to influence residents or radio growth. The local newspapers printed the usual schedule of big city stations like WEAJ in New York, KYW in Chicago, and WJZ in Newark, New Jersey. Early hobbyists as well as some experiential broadcasting were noted in the local newspapers. These papers included The Morning Star, Gazette, and Republic, all of which evolved into the present day Rockford Register Star. In the 1930's one of the stations was affiliated with the newspaper (WROK).

In these early accounts, the newspapers reported that the local Moose temple had erected a 165 foot antenna on top of their building at 108 Mulberry Street. The aerial was placed in operation in June of 1922 to receive distant radio programs for club members. Other radio hobbyists were members of the "wireless club," or the Citizens Radio Club of Freeport.

The city took time out to observe the passing of Alexander Graham Bell in early August of that year. Rockford and the other thirteen million phone customers across the nation commemorated the passing of the "Father of Communication" with a minute of silence (non-usage of the phone for one minute).

In October of 1923 Verne T. Rider of the Barber-Colman Company and the "Walker Boys" started the Radiax Radio Club for Kids. Instruction of radio usage and construction was given to youngsters on Friday nights in the home of James Jarrett of 2019 Latham Street. Jarrett worked for the Rockford Postal Advertising Company.

This group of experimenters were no doubt interested in the development of the three element audion tube found in wireless telephones. Doctor Lee deForest unveiled his invention in November 1923 at a radio convention in Chicago. This was also mentioned in the Rockford newspapers.

Rockford High School's Wireless Club, established in 1907, operated its own amateur and broadcast station. In 1925, the school maintained station 9AEW with 50 watts of power. By 1926, the school increased their power to 100 watts with plans to broadcast student programs and sporting events. Walter Nelson, Ralph Pullin, and Fay Sweeney were among the operators of the station. The "wireless" was used to relay the results of a high school rifle meet in November of 1923. Rockford High School was then located at 301 South Madison Street (now a factory). Aleta McEvoy was in charge of the station.

By 1930 four students from the club owned their own ham stations. They were Milton Carlson (W9FFI), Maurice Fieldman (W9BNO), Everett Hallquist (W9AGV), and Paul Johnson (also listed as W9BNO). The school apparently went heavier into amateur radio than in commercial broadcasting. The radio club operated W9BIM, a 50 watt amateur station at 7.1 mhz in 1930. Information on high school radio club activities were often mentioned in the Rockford Register-Gazette and in the school's yearbook. The newspaper also passed out current radio logs and printed a regular radio schedule of programs.

Rockford folks were delighted to learn that a Baltimore radio station was using a Haddorff piano manufactured in Rockford during its musical programs. The local newspapers printed a column by Arthur Murray showing how to dance to the music on the radio. The author also ran across the details in one of the local newspapers on how Burton F. Miller of Beloit College's station (WEBW) had been injured after being shocked. He was listed near death after coming in contact with 2,000 volts from a faulty insulator.

Radio parts, supplies, and records could be purchased at many places around Rockford. Below are some of the shops that were found listed in 1920 era newspaper ads.

Andre Radio Doctor, 223 North Main Street  
Arnold, Fred, located opposite city hall, sold Atwater-Kent sets  
Barlow Radio Shop, 228 South Church Street, sold Crosley-Trirdyn and Freed-Eiseman sets  
Beale, J. J. Jewelry Shop, 406 East State Street, sold Atwater-Kent sets  
Bengtson, Earl, North First and Market Streets, sold Neutrodyne sets  
Brunswick Shop, 212 South Main Street, sold Brunswick Victrolas  
Cate Motor Shop, 510 Elm  
Dahlin's Music and Electric Store, 1202 14th Street  
Electric Specialty, 515 East State Street (rear)  
Ellis Electric, 413 W. State Street, sold Freshman sets  
Forest Brothers, 318 West State Street, sold deForest sets  
Gishwiller, A. F. Radio Sets, 211 Longwood, sold Super-Reinartz sets



Hess Brothers, 2nd & East Street  
 Jackson Talking Machine Co., 114 West State Street, sold Freed-Eisemann sets  
 Kling, L. D., 1117 Charles Street, sold Crosley, Dayfan, Airway sets  
 Leich Electric Company, Genoa, IL, sold "The Lark" radio headphones  
 Majestic Electric Company, 115 North Church Street, sold Crosley sets "no silent nights"  
 National Rubber & Vulcanizing Co., 905 East State  
 Oberg's, 517 West State  
 Ogren's Music Store, 415-417 7th Street, sold RCA Victor records  
 Paragon Radio, 507 7th Street  
 Parkhurst Battery & Electric, 223 North Main Street  
 Plager, C. A., North Third Street, sold Crosley sets  
 Pearson Electric, 206 7th Street  
 Rockford Battery & Electric, North Winnebago and Mulberry, sold Willard Batteries  
 Rockford Radio Shop, 309 Mulberry (and 228 South Church), owned by Lloyd Ward  
 Schumann Piano Co., State & Wyman, sold Freed-Eisemann  
 Selectodyne, 114 N. Court Street, operated by attorney Rudolph F. Leger, sold new sets at Dahlin Music Store and Forest City Auto  
 Simon Drug Co., State & Main, sold Stromberg-Carlson sets and Globe Duodyne  
 Stacy, Roy E., 325 Royal Avenue, sold radio log books  
 State Electric Co., 202 East State  
 Sutton, Elmer, Grantway Building, West State Street  
 Sutton Radio Co., 522 West State, sold Stewart-Warner  
 Sword's Electric, 625-631 7th Street  
 Talking Machine Shop, Guy Deetz, manager, 114 W. State  
 Triangle Sports Shop, 1120 14th Street  
 Ward's Radio Service, 1121 18th Street  
 Warner, Roy, RR 1, Rockford  
 Williams Sport Shop, sold Pfanstiehl-Michigan sets  
 Zenith Store, 211 East State Street

The following firms were listed in a September 30, 1929 ad in the Rockford Republic Newspaper for Philco Radio Sets. The advertisement was purchased by Lappin Distributors (listed as Lappen in the newspaper), 118 N. Winnebago Street. The sets were sold as part of a Cubs/Athletics World Series promotion, minus the tubes.

Broadway Radio Shop, 1224 Broadway  
 Ellis Electric Company, 413 W. State  
 Veril C. Hedrick, Playmore Shop, 211 7th Street; Radio Department, Stewart Dry Goods, 115 S. Main Street  
 Haddorf Music House, 220 N. Main Street  
 Parker Hardware, 5428 N. 2nd Street  
 Peterson Electric Company, 8th Street at Broadway  
 People's Store, 311 W. State Street  
 Rockford Maytag, 518 W. State Street  
 SAAF Electric Company, 408 7th Street  
 Universal Electric Company, 318 W. State Street  
 Warren Electric Company, 930 Kilburn  
 Wextark Company, 204 S. Main Street  
 Zenith Store, 1009 S. Main Street and 211 E. State Street  
 (Courtesy of Mike Brubaker, curator of Collections Midway Village, Rockford Museum Center.)

Early Rockford radio actually evolved from three separate sources. There were stations in a garage downtown, one at an amusement park, and another in a parsonage. Oddly enough, the smallest station with the least amount of equipment and backing survived the test of time. Through its early roots WROK remains in operation today.

There were plenty of vocalists, orchestras, and speakers from the Rockford Chautauqua (a religious and cultural society) eager to perform on the radio. Chautauqua's mentioned briefly in the Plainfield and Sycamore sections, usually consisted of 15 day meetings that also brought influential speakers to a community. The society, founded in 1874, is named after Chautauqua County in upstate New York. John Heyl Vincent, minister of the Court

Street Methodist Church in Rockford was the founder. A large Chautauqua meeting was held at Rockford's Harlem Park in 1905. Vincent's son George became president of the Rockford Chautauqua in 1907. These meetings ended in 1931 with the emergence of radio and other forms of entertainment.

### Radio Beginnings

Radio began in the old downtown section of the city. Time and progress usually have a great deal to do with the changing landscape of downtown areas. Rockford is no exception. The city brandishes a new municipal building, nearby exposition center (MetroCentre), and city hall, most of which has been created on top of the former addresses of older buildings. Rockford's unique crop of elm trees were devastated by disease sometime in the 1950's, almost causing revocation of its motto "The Forest City."

The city's metallic monument, "Symbol," a curious collection of protrusive, oblong shapes by Alexander Lieberman, has been moved from downtown to the Siniissippi Park area. Following in the footsteps of many depleted inner cities, a downtown mall has been built in recent years.

Hidden in the business section of Rockford are two historic relics which were former homes of the city's first two radio stations. They have withstood the wrecking ball and evaded city improvements, until recently. Curving along the city's skyline in the midst of downtown Rockford is the Faust Hotel. Built by Levin Faust in 1927, it was the home of KFLV (WROK) in the early 30's. The building is also called the Faust Landmark or Tabala Towers (630 East State Street).

Stretching from 318 to 330 South Church Street was a crude collection of tired looking garages. This was Joslyn's Garage in the early 1920s, and the home of the city's first station WIAB. The building was later owned by the J. B. Lanham Motor Company, A. A. Johnson, and the Osborn Oil Company in the early 1930's. WIAB dates back to its experimental operations of 1919. Though primitive in its efforts of transmitting programming, it served the city well as a catalyst for operations like KFLV, which eventually evolved into WROK. These garages were quietly leveled during the summer of 1991.

WROK's longevity and success is due to the farsightedness of an energetic Swedish minister who envisioned radio as a successful tool for reaching the public.

Rockford's other short-lived pioneer station operated out of the Central Park Gardens Amusement Park in 1921. Only scattered references have been found about the station defining its existence and purpose.

### **WHO WERE ROCKFORD'S FIRST BROADCASTERS? WJAH AT CENTRAL PARK**

By studying old newspaper articles, reading accounts of station digests taken from old licenses by Broadcast Profile, and talking to long time Rockford residents, the first station on the air in the city appears to be that of WJAH.

There is not much known about WJAH except that it was located at the Central Park Gardens Amusement Park, "Rockford's Wonder Spot." This large locally-owned facility featured one of the most spectacular roller coasters of the time, "The Thriller," along with other rides, shows, and nightly dancing in a specially built pavilion. (Portions of the Thriller and its rotting wooden supports remained up a few years after the park had closed around 1942.)

The park was located near Central Avenue north of Auburn Street. There was an entrance on Furman Street. Rockford radio amateur Bernard "Bud" Crittenden (KE9JB) recalls that the entrance to the park was somewhere close to Wayne's Feed Store, 3435 Auburn Street near Central Avenue (by the Amerock Plant). Kent Creek wound through the property making the area hard to subdivide. Bud recalls that two towers containing "flat top antennas" were located there and used for a short time by KFLV (WROK). The address of Central Park was 3100 Auburn Street (3400 Auburn in later directories).

A July 27, 1922 Rockford newspaper article mentioned that test broadcasts had been heard the night before from Central Park Gardens. It was the third such program which featured orchestra music and some live acts. The park, which opened June 8, 1921, advertised that a "wireless" was on display as part of its attractions. Like its nearby competitor Harlem Park, another amusement park along the Rock River, which had been reportedly started by the area's traction company in 1891, Central Park Gardens had its own "house" band and readily advertised its appearances in the local papers. Appearing on the broadcast was Frank Trumbauer's Orchestra, along with two selections by Lew Jenkins from the park's current musical "Hits and Misses."

Other regular performers at Central Park were the Century Jazz Kings and the Kings of Syncopation. Later, Bailey's Orchestra and the Babe Dursch Orchestra, along with vaudeville acts like "Rats and Cats," Dell & Fonda, and Joe & Maud would perform. Programs from the "Dance Palace" were directed by chief operator Peck of the "Wireless Station." The 1922 articles listed Frank Johnson as the manager of Central Park.

Paul Stich, a local CPA, was listed as the president of the Central Park Amusement Company in 1922. George A. Rubin, a local realtor, was the next owner of the park. In December of 1922, Rubin purchased the

remaining 110 lots of the park's subdivision for \$50,000. Central Park was not only an amusement facility, but a fine area of homes. Advertisements stated that Central Park was to be the most modern subdivision in the city. Rubin specialized in offering affordable terms for his homes. George and his wife Rose of RR 9, Rockford, operated Central Park Realty, Public Finance Corporation, Central Park Advertising Company, and Beloit Sand and Gravel Company located at 521 Ashton and in the Forest City National Bank building.

In late July of 1922, Curtis Dale is mentioned in a newspaper article about the operation of the station. Engineer "Peck" stated that WJAH promises news and music programs. Charles Breining, owner of the Inglaterra and some uptown dance halls, became manager of Central Park Gardens in 1926. (The Inglaterra is now the "Ing" skating rink in Rockford.)

The operation of WJAH was overshadowed by the more successful portions of the summer attraction. The park had opened with a two mile long parade down Auburn Street. Eighty thousand people had jammed the park and its six block long parking lot during its first two weeks of operation. Light showers kept the attendance down to manageable crowds. The theater, rides, refreshment booths, and dance floor were constantly busy, and the Tunnel of Love was known as "the old mill." The park lit up the night sky "rivaling anything seen at Coney Island or the World's Fair," reported the Rockford Morning Star.

Another article stated that "safety is our main concern," as recent editions of the Rockford newspapers carried tragic stories on how people had been killed on the roller coaster ride at Harlem Park. One of those killed was a soldier from nearby Camp Grant who had stood up on the ride.

A trolley service along Furman Street was planned to handle pedestrian traffic. Advertisements between the two parks continued all summer long. Articles mentioned that Beatrice Kyle would do a back somersault off the high dive at Harlem Park. Central Park urged patrons to enjoy "refined dancing" to Trumbauer's Orchestra. At Harlem Park Joe Kayser's eight piece orchestra along with E. H. Flindt's waltz orchestra performed. The competition occurred all during the summer while the two parks existed in the 1920's. Harlem Park closed in 1926 according to Lyle Bale, who wrote a splendid work entitled "Rockford's Harlem Park, the People, the Times." The only evidence of the former riverside attraction that remains are trolley rails still embedded in the pavement at Clinton and Harper Streets. The park was bordered by Willoughby Avenue on the north, Ellis Avenue on the south, the Rock River on the east, and Harlem Blvd. on the west. Exquisite homes occupy the area today.

WJAH, not to be confused with Belvidere's WTAH, operated sporadically through 1922. Another Belvidere station, WOAG, announced plans to move to Central Park.

A 1930 Rockford newspaper article stated that when KFLV (WROK) had begun operating at their new transmitter site on North Kilburn Road, the site had previously been used by "the station formerly located near Central Park." WJAH appeared to exist just to promote Central Park. Apparently, since the park was only opened during the summer, WJAH's license was canceled, or allowed to expire, and not renewed due to its inactivity.

Broadcast Profile shows the WJAH was licensed officially on July 29, 1922 and operated with about 20 watts at 833 khz, or 360 meters. This was the operating frequency of many early stations. Its address was listed at Furman and Auburn Streets. WJAH's last broadcast was in mid September of 1922. When the park closed for the season, the station ceased operation. Government correspondence indicated in a letter dated December 2, 1922 that the station had indeed ceased operations in mid September and had not been on the air since.

After learning of this, the FRC canceled Central Park's license. In June of 1924, the Belvidere Amusement Operators of the Apollo Company planned to move their station, WOAG, to Central Park, but this never materialized. WOAG went out of business shortly afterwards.

One can only speculate what occurred during these times which caused the demise of these stations. Perhaps the lack of a qualified operator could have been the reason. It certainly wasn't for lack of capital or talent as Central Park Gardens was doing extremely well at the time. Its owners spent a considerable sum of money for new towers at the park and a new transmitter site on Kilburn Avenue, which was later acquired by KFLV. The FRC was known to have started "weeding" out small unprofessionally run stations as well as seasonal or portable ones towards the mid 20's.

In the end, promotion of a large amusement park during the summer was not a good enough reason to allow Central Park to have a radio station. What started out to be a good idea fizzled after nearly two months, giving way to Rockford's next pioneer broadcaster WIAB, which lasted a bit longer and appeared to promote the community rather than itself.

#### WIAB AT THE JOSLYN GARAGE

There are probably those who would say that Central Park's WJAH really was not much of a station at all. Setting a live microphone on its dance floor or at its theater probably constituted its programming. Plans for improving its facilities with the construction of the transmitter site on North Kilburn Road would have made it the area's most powerful station. In addition, WJAH could draw from the various acts and bands that played at Central



Park. But in the end WJAH folded, as did its park, giving way to the longevity of WROK and its broadcast accomplishments.

However, sandwiched in between WJAH and KFLV (WROK) was another station which gave broadcasters another stepping stone to learn from. Its call letters were WIAB and operated out of Jud S. Joslyn's garage at 320 South Church Street. (The Joselyn Automobile Company sold Nash cars in the early 1920s.) This location later became a row of decrepit, connecting garages on the east side of Church Street in the downtown section of Rockford. The addresses of these buildings ranged from 318 to 330 South Church Street. Some mechanical activity apparently continued in later years in these structures whose frontages contained the hulks of worn out and battered vehicles. Tow trucks were always parked nearby. Copies of building permits for improvements tend to indicate that these were the original buildings on the property which date back to the time of Joslyn. They were all demolished in 1991.

WIAB received its sequentially issued license and call letters in July of 1922. This was about the same time as Central Park's WJAH. Both were on the same frequency 360 meters or about 833 khz. Bernard Crittenden (KE9JB), a long time radio amateur in Rockford, stated that WIAB's make shift studio was on the second floor of the garage. A piano, microphone, and a couple of music stands was about all the station owned. WIAB never operated above 50 watts during its short tenure, but during that time, presented a variety of local music and news programs that received regular write-ups in the local newspapers.

Some Rockford sources indicate that experimental programs had been broadcast from the Joslyn garage prior to 1919, which would make this station the city's first. However, WIAB was not officially licensed until 1922. Some of these early experimental or test programs were possibly conducted by Rudolph Graf (9RP), Crittenden's uncle. Graf had been a "ham" since 1916, a navy radio operator, and editor of a monthly newsletter for a network of other early "hams." He also worked at the Barber-Colman Company and WTAH. The wireless experiments had been stopped during World War I because of government restrictions on radio usage during the war.

WIAB's other engineer was Lloyd S. Ward, who would later operate his own radio store and assist Rev. A. T. Frykman in setting up KFLV (WROK). Lloyd installed the first RCA car radios in Rockford automobiles in 1924. Managing the Joslyn station was Arthur A. Johnson of 1506 School Street. Johnson was secretary and manager of the Joslyn Motor Company. He also managed the White Garage at 132 North First Street in 1921, sold farm machinery, and is believed to have run a radio business near 7th and Charles Street.

Bud Crittenden says that WIAB had few listeners at first, and very few individuals who could be considered as professionals appeared on the station.

"Back then people didn't have any experience in broadcasting because it was so new. People listened to the tiny station on crystal radio sets," recalls Bud.

WIAB's antenna was on the roof of the garage. WIAB operated at 833 khz (360 meters) as did many stations across the country back then. The station was reassigned to 1190 khz early in 1923.

The twice a week broadcasts featured a variety of musical programs and community forums. The Rockford newspapers regularly "plugged" upcoming broadcasts. To increase listenership Joslyn purchased one thousand radio sets and distributed them at half price to area listeners who were called "radioists," or "listeners in." The sets themselves were referred to as "radiophones."

WIAB's typical range was 35 to 50 miles; however, on Wednesday, August 2, 1922 an Alabama listener 600 miles away heard the station and wrote to compliment the broadcast. The listener reported that WIAB came in loud on his radio which consisted of a detector, two stage amplifier, honeycomb coil and 60 foot high antenna. The Bailey Orchestra was featured that night on WIAB. Usually, WIAB broadcasted on Mondays and Fridays for about an hour a time. The broadcasts started around 9:00 p.m. The Rockford newspapers regularly listed some of the stations' early broadcasts beginning with its first on July 28, 1922 at 7:00 p.m. Joe Kayser's Orchestra which appeared at Harlem Park was featured. (Kayser also played at the Arcadia Ballroom in Chicago and at the Inglaterra in Rockford.) It is not certain if this program was carried live from the amusement park, or that Kayser had brought his orchestra to the WIAB studios.

Tunes featured on the station's inaugural program were: Everybody Fox Trot, All Over Nothing At All, Yankee Doodle Blues, Don't Bring Me Possies, COO-COO, I dreamt I dwelt in Marble Halls, Everybody Stop (recorded by Kayser on record), Plantation Blues, You Won't Be Sorry, Lonesome Mamma Blues, Blue Danube Waltz, Sunshine of your Smile, Georgette, Syncoysate, Dancing Fool, and Stumbling. This list gives one an idea of the popular tunes of 1922.

In subsequent weeks, the following broadcasts were noted and advertised in the Rockford Register-Gazette:

Friday, August 4, 1922. A. Harold de Grosse, baritone, with the Los Angeles Metropolitan Grand Opera sang on WIAB.

August 8, 1922. Nelson Hotel Orchestra.

August 9, 1922. Guy Buchanan's Orchestra.



August 10, 1922. A program was featured from the Ogren Music Shop featuring vocalists Reuben Emerson, A. G. Ogren, and Ivan Lutzhoff, with Miss Anderson at the piano.

Saxophonist Verle Hedrick, who operates an electric service company in Rockford, remembers coming to the station in the early 20's to play on WIAB. Other programs that aired in 1923 were:

A contest to guess how many BB shots were in a glass container.

11/02/23. A forerunner to the industry's first "radiothon" or electronic fundraiser. Various speakers and singers appeared to raise money for the Social Service Federation Drive. The "Heart Tax" funds were to raise money for 20 civic organizations in the community. Featured were Rev. J. S. Dancy of the M. E. Church, Ernest S. Rastall, Chief of Police A. E. Bargren, Dr. D. B. Penniman and L. Fred Muller. Music was provided by Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Keller, Erick Eckstrom, Reuben Emerson and Mrs. R. M. Bissekumer.

11/16/23. A program of songs, readings, and humorous sketches presented by Glenn C. Gridley, a Scotch humorist with his company of entertainers. Included on the show were Fred Erickson, Carl Bruce, Mrs. C. C. Gridley, Anpias Baxter, Harry J. Gronson, F. J. Rafferty, H. C. Joslin and C. A. White. Soprano and tenor solos along with stories told in Swedish dialect were aired on the program.

11/19/23. McDonald's Orchestra featured.

12/20/23. Songs of the Pandora Masque.

Among the programs in 1924:

02/19/24. Frank Maynard, campaigning for the office of State's Attorney, broadcasted his political speeches every Monday night.

03/21/24. A program directed by the Sundstrand Adding Machine Company with vocalist J. W. Bergstrom and Lloyd Wessman violinist.

04/04/24. Clarence E. Patrick, secretary of the Rockford Chamber of Commerce, spoke about activities of the Rotary Club.

It should be noted that in this point in radio history Chicago's WJAZ, owned by the Zenith Radio Company, had become WGN on March 29, 1924.

Rev. A. T. Frykman had begun broadcasting church services for shut-ins on Sundays over KFLV. There were many other mentions of WIAB programs listed in the Rockford Register these were just a few.

When Jud S. Joslyn announced his retirement in 1924, he stated in the Rockford newspapers that his radio station would continue. The garage business and the radio station were taken over completely then by Art Johnson (W9HGQ). The station's 50 watt license was assigned to operate at 1190 khz as of the spring of 1923.

WIAB's license then changed over to Arthur A. Johnson's garage in June of 1924. The FRC was eager to clear the airways of small, unprofessionally run operations and determined that on December 15, 1924 the station had been abandoned. Broadcast Profile quoted the station's owner as unwilling to update the station's equipment, studio facilities, and spend money for "big city talent." The FRC determined that WIAB owned poor technical materials that were quickly being improved by industry standards. Due to its off-air status, WIAB's license was canceled in December of 1924.

## **WROK BETTER THAN EVER**

WROK's motto, "Better Than Ever," is well suited for this popular station. It seems that WROK has been in the community almost forever outlasting the two other previously described operations. WROK continues to be the most popular station in the area, and is turned to regularly by Rockford listeners for news, community information, and music.

When the WROK management was asked about the station's early history, they provided the following information.

January 29, 1991

John Russell  
Elgin, IL 60120

Dear John:

Here is a brief summary of WROK and WZOK's history in the Rockford area. Presently WZOK is the number one rated station in the Rockford market. WROK is rated number three.

WROK is not only Rockford's oldest radio station, but is also one of the oldest radio stations in the country. WROK was founded by the Reverend A. T. Fryckman in 1923. Then the station's call letters were KFLV. The station was designed only to offer religious services.

In 1929, the radio station was purchased by Rockford Broadcasters Inc. KFLV's programming shifted away from all religion and towards a broader spectrum of religious, musical, and commercial programming. Also in 1929 the station's studios were moved to the basement of a music house and later to the Faust Hotel (Now the Faust Landmark).

A year later KFLV became affiliated with the Rockford Newspapers and moved into special studios in the News Tower where they were to remain until 1962. In 1933, the call letters were changed to WROK, obviously playing on the "ROK" signifying Rockford.

In 1948, WROK became one of the first stations in the country to experiment with FM, giving birth to WROK-FM which later became WZOK.

The station was moved to the present facilities at 3901 Brendenwood Road in 1962 and increased its power making WROK the most powerful AM station in the Rockford area.

WROK's last major change was when it was sold to the Bloomington Broadcasting Corporation in 1963, headed by Vernon Nolte. Mr. Nolte acquired 100% of the stock in 1977. Since 1963, the management team of President Vernon Nolte and General manager David Salisbury has remained unchanged until recently. Vernon Nolte passed away in December 1989. John Nolte, Vernon's son, now presides as President and General manager. And David Salisbury is Vice President and consultant for WROK.

Throughout the following years both WROK and WZOK has seen vast improvements in technology, expanded staffs and station facilities, and changes in formats. But one thing has not changed: WROK's commitment to quality programming and community service. It is a rich tradition that is constantly renewed.

If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to give me a call.

Sincerely yours,

Adlai Rust  
Director of Marketing  
WROK/WZOK Radio

That was a good synopsis of how WROK began, but to really do the station justice, one of its long time staffers should be talked into writing his own book on about WROK. The writer could draw upon the large number of references found in the Rockford Register Star, as well as the remembrances of many of its announcers and engineers who worked there. WROK is the ninth oldest continuously operated station in Illinois. Its legacy goes back further than the small museum collection of memorabilia found in the station's interior. Its beginnings would be new information to many of the long time staffers that currently work there. In short, WROK is "Better Than Ever" because it keeps improving with age and is proud of its long time heritage in the community.

#### The Beginning of WROK (KFLV)

WROK's humble entry into the broadcast industry began as a small ten watt station in a parsonage on the southeast side of the city. In 1922 Rev. Andrew T. Frykman of the Swedish Evangelical Church was exploring ways to bring his services to shut-ins and use radio as a means to reach the community with his gospel messages. Archivist Russell Cockrell (W9JFT) of the First Evangelical Covenant Church (Swedish, part of the church's proper name, has since been deleted) characterized Rev. Frykman as a dynamic preacher whose main purpose in life was the preaching of the Gospel. Cockrell, a ham radio operator, poet, champion chess player, judo instructor, and the church's archivist, supplied much information about Rev. Frykman's early life.

The church, once located at 330 Kiswaukee Street, sold this building about 25 years ago and relocated to 316 Wood Road, also known as the Swedish Missionary Tabernacle. The old parsonage where some of Rev. Frykman's early broadcasts took place still remains standing at 1503 Fourth Avenue (the southeast corner of 4th Avenue and 11th Street). It was a nursing facility for a short time, but in later years has been turned back into a residence. Rev. Frykman occupied the parsonage from 1921 to 1934. The home is a large three-floor structure

which appears now to have been made into a two-flat. Separate entrances have been installed for both units. A small curious door on the third floor appears in the front of the building. Two 90 foot tall telephone poles serving as the station's antenna once stood in the back yard.

Timothy Johnson, archivist for North Park College in Chicago, supplied this short biography of Rev. Frykman's career.

Rev. Andrew Theodore Frykman  
Born: August 8, 1875, Sunne, Sweden

Came to the United States in 1888. Graduated from North Park College in 1897 and from Montana Wesleyan University in 1901. Served as Pastor or Educator at the following institutions:

Helena, MT, 1898-1900; President NW College, 1901-1904; Superior, WI, 1905-1906; Jamestown, NY, 1906-1919; Wausa, NB, 1919-1921; Rockford, IL, 1921-1934; Head of Evangelism, 1921-1943.

Suffered from a heart ailment in Chicago. Went to be with the Lord November 7, 1943. His wife, Ruth Elizabeth Skogsbergh, continued to serve in the church until her death in 1973.

Rev. Frykman had a distinct advantage over Rockford's two previous broadcasters. Not only did he have the Lord on his side, but the opportunity to see these other operations at work and take the best from both. Russell Cockrell and Bernard Crittenden mentioned that Rev. Frykman was often down at the WIAB studios looking over their makeshift equipment, deciding how he would use broadcasting for religious purposes. Rev. Frykman took note of WIAB's equipment, piano, and transmitter located in the upstairs area of Joslyn's garage located at South Church and Chestnut Streets. He later did broadcasts from Ogren's Music House, as WIAB had done earlier.

Rev. Frykman used the services of WIAB's engineer Lloyd Ward when it came time to improve the station and obtained WJAH's former transmitter site located on the northwest corner of Kilburn Avenue (IL 70) and North Riverside Boulevard (Springfield Avenue). He used WJAH's first towers at Central Park. His first low wattage transmitter was built by William "Bill" Wallingford, who ran WOAG and WLBR in Belvidere.

By late in 1923, Rev. Frykman was ready to open his station. His first broadcasts were only on Sundays. Using one microphone, a gospel quartet would sing several selections, then Rev. Frykman would unplug the mike and dash upstairs to his study to deliver his sermon in Swedish or English. His station was self-contained with studios in the parsonage, and his antenna on telephone poles in his backyard. Special wall outlets upstairs and downstairs had been installed as mike jacks. Later the church was wired for broadcasts.

On November 3, 1923 Rev. Frykman was awarded a broadcast license for his station, and the call letters KFLV were issued. The tiny station was authorized to operate at ten watts on 1310 khz reaching a 25 mile range. It shared the channel with one Wisconsin and two Minneapolis stations. Congressman John T. Buckbee had gone to Washington D.C. with Rev. Frykman helping to secure the channel for the new Rockford station. (It should be noted here that the station's call letters were sequentially issued between two Texas stations.) A clerical geographical error was made, issuing the station a K call instead of a W call (stations on the east side of the Mississippi typically begin with W). However, a couple of other earlier grandfathered stations with K calls still utilized their original K calls (KYW, KDKA) and enjoy these distinctions in the industry today.

The KFLV call letters issued Rev. Frykman were gladly accepted and put to use. Unfortunately, some radio enthusiasts in the area were not inspired by Rev. Frykman's sermons and programming. When KFLV went on the air, even though it was a low power station, it blocked out signals from other stations. It probably was not the fault of the station, since receiving sets were not very selective back then. Any local station easily could overload radio sets in the Rockford area. To those annoyed by Rev. Frykman's station, the call letters KFLV stood for Kill Frykman's Loud Voice. Those that felt that way were in the minority as many Rockford residents, especially shut-ins, did benefit from the broadcasts.

Listeners often heard Rev. Frykman announce, with his Swedish accent, "This is KFLV, 1310 kilocycles. Real music, no yazz!"

Besides its religious programming, it served as a training ground for several young announcers; three of which went on to become ministers. Rev. Frykman did most of the announcing, but some duties were given to Paul Bodin, Willard Anderson, Harold Nelson, Aaron Markuson, and later Oscar Olson. Of this group, only one is still living. Rev. Aaron Markuson, who now resides in Vashon, Washington, says that he was just out of high school when he was given a job announcing at the station.

"No one had any experience. We just did what Rev. Frykman instructed us to do," recalls Rev. Markuson. "Many times we just got on the air and said, 'KFLV, 1310 kilocycles.'" His experience came a couple of years after the station had begun doing programs from the basement of a local music store and at the church.

On Sunday evenings a group from another church (Calvary Lutheran) would come over and do a program at 9:00 p.m. Rev. Markuson added that another man named MacArthur was also an announcer, and that an early church member, Ragnar Anderson, had begun writing a book on KFLV. He died before the book was finished. Some attempts have been made to find this unpublished manuscript. A check with the North Park College Seminary Archives, and a few others thought to be associated with Anderson, did not turn up the document. However, Rev. Markuson and another later announcer, Oscar E. Olson, who submitted their recollections of the early years of KFLV to Anderson, have been obtained. They are printed here, virtually unedited, as the best information is usually obtained from those who experienced it.

#### Aaron Markuson Remembers Rev. Frykman

It was some time in late 1927 or early 1928 that Pastor A. T. Frykman asked Willard Anderson, Paul Bodin, Harold Nelson and me to be announcers for KFLV, the radio station which he owned and operated.

Many people must have wondered why we were chosen, and if they had asked us, we would have had to say that we didn't have the vaguest idea--except that our services were cheap. In fact, we received no salary. This is no complaint, for we enjoyed the experience.

I don't think that any of the four of us realized how important radio was to become or how sophisticated an instrument of communication it would be. I don't remember that we ever talked of the thrill of being pioneers in the field. As far as we were concerned, Pastor Frykman needed some help in turning a few switches and making some announcements, and we were asked to help him. It was as simple as that. I was just a kid, scarcely seventeen years old and just out of high school, and Harold Nelson was a bit younger than that. Willard Anderson and Paul Bodin were a bit older. We had no special training for announcing and the only instructions we had were what to say and what switches to turn on and off. Radio school? In 1927 what was that?

Sometimes we announced from a little room (originally intended as a clothes closet, I think) off the pastor's study in what was then known as the Mission Tabernacle, located on the corner of Kishwaukee Street and Third Avenue. Those participating in the programs were either in the pastor's study or in a large room adjoining the study. Sometimes the programs originated in Ogren's Music Store on Seventh Street, where we had a studio, so it was quite a make shift arrangement.

Some of the programs matched the studio in their make-shift nature. I have tried unsuccessfully to forget something that happened at one of the programs that originated at the Ogren studio. I was the announcer for a full-hour program put on by a male chorus from Rockford, a program in which both sacred and secular numbers were sung. I was a bit on edge from the outset, for no one from the chorus bothered to arrive early enough to allow time to go over the program in advance. As a result, the program developed as we went along, with the director handing me a slip of paper on which he had scrawled the title of the next number. All went along all right until he handed me a paper on which he had written the name of a popular song of that day, "When the Red, Red Robin Goes Bob-Bob-Bobbin' Along." I assumed that this was another number by the chorus--they had done all the singing up to that time--and I so announced it. To my surprise the members of the chorus sat down and a soloist, Allie Sharp, went to the microphone and sang a solo. If they thought of it at all, members of our vast audience must have thought that the goof was my fault, for they had no way of knowing that the program was a "choose as you go" thing with little chance of communication between numbers. Fortunately, things are done a bit differently today.

For all of the period that I was on the staff a program produced by the Calvary Lutheran Church was a regular Sunday evening feature, running from 9:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. or 10:30 p.m. Their pastor, Rev. Melvin Smith, was the M.C. for this program, but one of the four of us announcers had to be there to flick the switches, make the opening and closing announcements, and in general, see that things went all right. Without trying too hard I can still hear their theme song, which was sung to the tune of "Bringing in the Sheaves." It went like this:

"This is Calvary, this is Calvary,  
Sending out the message on KFLV."

Try it. Sing it. Maybe you won't like it, but you'll find it singable. Pastor Frykman didn't like it, but if a theme song is supposed to stay with the listeners, this one had it.

It was a very informal, folksy program which used a great many children and youth for the musical numbers, and I think it had a pretty good audience. The program, coming as it did during a good dating time after our own evening service, was not the favorite of us four announcers. It was with great reluctance that we took turns announcing this program. Unless my memory fails me, Harold Nelson and I took more than our share of responsibility in handling this program, since both Paul Bodin and Willard Anderson dated a great deal more than we did.

By far the most exciting experience I had in connection with KFLV came with the rescue of Bert Hassell and Shorty Cramer in Greenland. They had set out to fly from Rockford to Stockholm, Sweden, an expedition most



likely inspired by Charles Lindbergh's famous flight from New York to Paris not long before this. Hassell and Cramer were less successful, making a forced landing somewhere in Greenland and losing contact with the rest of the world for several weeks.

One evening while a gospel meeting was in progress, an announcement was made that Bert Hassell and Shorty Cramer had been rescued. It was a thrilling moment, and I remember rushing to Pastor Frykman's study at the church for the broadcasting of news items about the rescue. Since Pastor Frykman was there, he handled the broadcast, but I was a very interested and excited spectator.

If anyone was more excited than I, it was Mr. Clarence Patrick, then president of the Rockford Chamber of Commerce. I don't know why he was there instead of the mayor unless the Chamber of Commerce was one of the sponsors of the flight. This might well have been the case. At any rate, he was reading the news items as they arrived. He was excited about the rescue and nervous and inexperienced in speaking into a microphone. This combination caused him to rattle the manuscript in front of the microphone as he read. Pastor Frykman, the old pro, knew that the mike was making this sound like a huge fire and kept saying aside to me or anyone else who would listen: "He should hold the paper still. It will sound like a forest fire." But Clarence Patrick kept rattling the papers, Pastor Frykman got more and more upset, and the listeners (we probably had a great many that night) must have wondered what the strange background sounds were. It was quite a night, very vivid in my memory even sixty years later.

I vaguely remember that some time later the broadcasts began to originate from the Hotel Faust with a Mr. McArthur, a professional announcer from Davenport or Dubuque, Iowa, hired to do some of the announcing. I remember being at the hotel for the broadcasts a few times, but the hiring of a professional marked the beginning of the end for the four amateur announcers.

We had no regrets about being released. We had no ambition to become professional radio announcers, and were glad to turn over our responsibilities to more capable and trained individuals. It had been an interesting experience, and we were grateful for it. Aaron Markuson also supplied the following manuscript which was written by Oscar E. Olson.

Oscar E. Olson was an early leader of the young people of the Mission Tabernacle Church, Rockford, director of the Gospel Male Chorus, consisting of 45 young men, and the Sangarbröderna Male Chorus, an independent chorus, but consisted of men of the church and the Church Choir. In the early 1930s, Mr. Olson left Rockford to attend St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, and upon graduation joined the Faculty of North Park College, from which he retired in 1972. He was active in the work of KFLV from its early stages as announcer and program director to approximately the time that Rev. Frykman relinquished control and active participation. We will present Mr. Olson's own words of the days of KFLV.

Let's start with people. Prime mover, organizer, director and main "Performer" in the infancy of KFLV was the Rev. A. T. Frykman. He was one of those men who, no matter how busy, found time to indulge in "outside" activities. For in the early 1920s the incipient field of radio was not a common area of interest for clergymen. But Pastor Frykman's interest in science led him to this field and his rapport with teenagers and young men caused him to involve some of these young men of our church.

Pastor Frykman picked Aaron Markuson and Paul Bodin, among others, to assist him as announcers. I, too, was invited, a little later. While the passage of time has a way of softening events and their chronology, it must have been in the early or mid 20's that I came on the scene. I remember coming to the parsonage on the southeast corner of Eleventh Street and Fourth Avenue and being escorted up two flights of stairs to the attic. There, to the left, I saw the motor and generator supported on a frame, suspended from the rough rafters by four long coil springs. Before me, at an improvised table, lit by the small south attic window, I saw what appeared to be an upright telephone, but without the receiving portion—nothing to hear with, only the mouthpiece, to which was attached a cardboard megaphone.

Here we sat with earphones at our ears. In the first floor parlors, the pastor and his music talent, where his daughter, Doris (Mrs. C. Edwin Anderson) or others, were broadcasting what were called "the preliminaries." That meant everything that preceded the sermon. At the appropriate moment Pastor Frykman would say: "Stand by for a moment." Then he would pull the mike plug from the wall, carry his Bible and mike up to his study on the second floor and put the plug into the jack there. Then he would proceed with his sermon. Mrs. Frykman could then get the dinner ready without disturbing him.

Engineers who shared in the early days of KFLV included Frank George, who left, as I recall it, to go to WLS in Chicago. Lloyd Ward was an important asset, and finally Maurice Nelson joined the staff.

Finally, and much later in the operation of the station, we must mention Clarence Pamp, who acted as manager after the enterprise had become commercial, and the studio was located at the Faust Hotel. (Clarence Pamp was the son of Rev. C. F. Pamp, a Covenant pastor.) At one time Mr. Fisher managed the station in the News Tower.

Speaking of the attic, as we did earlier, and the Faust Hotel, we have introduced the second section of this excursion into memory, that of locations. Of course, the logical move for the broadcast meant getting to the sanctuary of the Mission Tabernacle at Kishwaukee and Third Avenue.

The microphones were strung from wires anchored to the balcony railings. Also, there was another microphone on the pulpit. So the full service with congregational and choir singing sharing with the sermon went out to the hearers.

Then, too, the controls were brought to the church, utilizing a small room, or large closet, off of the pastor's study. The study was hung with heavy drapes and was employed as a studio. In the fashion of those days, it was acoustically very dead.

My long time friend and sometime employer, Mr. A. G. Ogren, had a music store on Seventh Street. A basement area was converted into a studio. While I've lost the name of the young lady, I do remember that a harpist broadcast from that location. The task of moving the large stringed instrument down the narrow stairs to the studio was considerable. But it was accomplished!

The Faust Hotel has been mentioned already. We occupied space on the floor directly beneath the ballroom. (Was it the 10th floor?) Here we were more diversified in our programming. Guest performers were invited, and the religious programs employed ministers from other churches and denominations than the parent church (The Evangelical Covenant Church of America).

Ultimately, the station secured quarters on the second floor of the south section of the News Tower. We had two studios with large windows facing into the central control room.

I'm not equipped by either knowledge or memory to write of the engineering program. But I do recall that we did set up a large antenna west of Rockford. Quite an operation, including the burying of a sub-antenna in the ground.

What of programming? The nature of the original operation, in terms of objective and performers, made the religious emphasis obvious. Slowly the scope broadened beyond the physical locale and talent of the local church. Even when the pastor's study was used as a studio, I remember a complete stranger coming in to offer himself and a lad, identified as his son, as performers. They played mandolin and were aired a few times. I remember his suggestion, that I introduce him over background music, which he supplied on his instrument. I like it! As far as I know it was a "first" for our station.

By the time we were located in the News Tower, we had a substantial program--a young Black youth accompanying himself at the grand piano in the west studio, singing, "Look down, look down, that lonesome road, before you travel on," and the sweet young sisters trim and dressed in ankle length gowns, singing Country Westerns, or "The Lady in Red," always clad in the color of her program name.

We also had a regular "remote" from the Midway Theater. The organist was my high school mate, Marvin Alden. His father, as I recall, was president of the Swedish American National Bank. This was our last program of the day, and I had to go into the Theater to set up and test the lines.

The next year, in the early 1930s, I was again engaged as announcer for the summer. That year Marvin broadcast from the Coronado Theater, and at 10:00 a.m. I was also asked by my church to serve as choir conductor, a call I had before I left Rockford to attend St. Olaf College.

News and sports programs without teletype? Yes! All we did was to go to the corner store on East State Street, buy a late edition and then read selected stories. Quite elemental!

I dare say that I might qualify as an early D. J. (disc jockey). The program was a mood program of light classical music and the reading of poetry. I recall drawing closed the curtains in the east studio and reading from the light of a low wattage lamp. Mood!!! And the sponsor? Fred C. Olson Mortuary!

About enough! But a word about that early microphone. It was called a carbon mike. And for the best performance, we always turned it upside down before a broadcast and tapped it. We had to loosen and spread the carbon granules.

But now enough! To the background of Saint Saen's "The Swan," I am alone in the east studio saying, "This is your announcer, Oscar Olson, Good night!"

Oscar E. Olson, born February 14, 1906, went on to become a music and English teacher at North Park College from 1934-1971. He coordinated the school's media appearances on WGN-TV and WJJD radio. In Olson's autobiography, Oscar relates his experience running a remote organ broadcast, featuring organist Marvin Alden at the Midway Theater on KFLV. Before the 15 minute broadcast, his job was to go into the theater while the movie was on and test the microphones.

"Imagine going into the devil's den itself," remarked Olson, as he prepared for the broadcast.

Olson passed away on September 18, 1976 in Chicago, according to Timothy Johnson, archivist at North Park College and Seminary.

Church archivist Russell Cockrell stated that the following men were guest speakers on KFLV. The list included Rev. Nygren, Dr. R. A. Torrey, Marcus Chen from China, and Dr. Noessen from Sweden. Many soloists, singing groups, and other speakers also were heard over KFLV. Other programs included an appearance by Rev. Jacob Peterson of the Swedish Baptist Church and a musical production by students at Lincoln School.

An April 1924 note in a Sunday Rockford newspaper stated that Rev. Frykman "will broadcast his regular service for shut-ins at 12:30 p.m." Another article mentioned that the community was grateful for the news coverage given to the "Hassell and Cramer" flight by Rev. Frykman and his engineer Lloyd S. Ward. (The plane is on display at the Rockford Museum. Hassell had crashed in Wisconsin on his first flight.)

From its early 10 watt equipment, KFLV rose to 50 watts then to 100 watts in early 1924. From the parsonage on Fourth Avenue, studios were moved to the A. C. Ogren's Music Store (or Music House). A basement studio was used. The store was the site of an earlier broadcast on WIAB. Ogren's at 415-417 7th Street was in the Swedish section of town, which today would be near the Lundstrom and Peterson Paint Store. Sunday broadcasts continued through 1924-25 as programs now came directly from the church at 330 Kishwaukee Street. Broadcast Profile states that KFLV, now licensed to the Swedish Evangelical Missionary Church, was assigned a new frequency of 1120 khz as of June 1, 1927. As stations nationwide were assigned new frequencies by the FRC shuffle of stations on November 11, 1928, KFLV was moved to 1410 khz.

As of November of that year, the station's licensee again became A. T. Frykman. It shared time on 1410 khz with WHBL of Sheboygan, Wisconsin. The station's official address continued to be that of the parsonage at 1503 Fourth Avenue. Broadcasts from the church and the Music House had been conducted by phone lines back to the parsonage where the transmitter was kept.

In May of 1929, KFLV's signal was raised to 500 watts. It was about this time that the station began using the old transmitter site of WJAH at the Central Park Gardens Amusement Park.

By 1930 many changes took place at KFLV. A group had been formed which included many church members to oversee the station. Studios and transmitter were moved to the new Faust Hotel. The building was later called Tebala Towers, or in recent years, the Faust Landmark, at 630 East State Street.

There are differing stories as to how the station became owned by this new group known as Rockford Broadcasters, Inc. Some sources say that Rev. Frykman merely sold the station on the condition that the church could have free air time for services. Others suggest that through some clever legal maneuvers, Rev. Frykman lost control of his station to the group. Rev. Frykman successfully negotiated a contract with the new owners of KFLV to allow the church to air free of charge its Sunday morning worship service from 10:45 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. The contract also called for the free airing of the church's "Julotta" service from 5:00 to 7:00 a.m. on Christmas morning each year. A copy of this agreement was obtained by Rockford Historian Russell Cockrell.

November 12th, 1934

Swedish Mission Church.

Herewith is a copy of an agreement which Rev. A. T. Frykman had incorporated in an agreement in connection with Rockford Broadcasters Inc. made between Carl O. Anderson and Mauritz Nordell and Alexander L. Sherwood as follows:

"And secondly said corporation shall provide from date of this agreement and on each and every Sunday thereafter a period of one and one-half (1 1/2) hours for the broadcasting of Church services from the Swedish Mission Tabernacle Church of Rockford, Ill. Such broadcast period to be from 10:45 AM to 12:15 PM prevailing Rockford time, subject, however, to be governed by the terms and conditions of the license granted to the radio station operated by said corporation by the Federal Radio Commission it being the intent and meaning thereof that so long as said period of time from 10:45 AM to 12:15 PM is made available to the said station by the commission, said period of time shall be given to said Church without cost to it. It being expressly understood however, that if for any reason whatsoever said period of time is denied to said radio station by said commission then and in that event said radio station will allocate to said Church another period of one and one half (1 1/2) hours for the broadcasting of religious services. And it is further expressly understood that said radio station shall furnish a two (2) hour period for the broadcastin[g] of Julotta services on each Christmas morning between the hours of Five (5:00) to Seven (7:00) AM subject however to the terms and conditions of license granted to the said radio station by said commission."

The above second paragraph as quoted, is from the minutes of a Directors Meeting of Rockford Broadcasters, Inc. held on October 13, 1933.

Lloyd C. Thomas  
President and General Manager

The services continued for sometime (until about 1942) over the air, but sources at the church recall that a "friendly" lawsuit to test the validity of Rev. Frykman's contract with the station was later determined to be unenforceable. The broadcasts ultimately ended as the church would now be charged for air time. In my opinion the station should have continued the broadcasts as a service to the community, but this would have opened the door



for other churches wishing free air time for their services. Some churches still have contracts with the station. The Swedish broadcasts were later heard over WRRR, according to a new history book about Rockford.

By June of 1930 KFLV was managed by Ruth Hanna McCormick. Serving as engineer was Lloyd S. Ward, who had been with KFLV since 1923, and his assistant Maurice H. Nelson. Both men were radio operators on ships and helped install the station's new transmitting equipment at KFLV's latest location on the northwest corner of Springfield (North Riverside Boulevard) and North Kilburn Avenue (IL 70).

The site contained two 111 foot wooden towers painted white, a clay brick transmitter building, and a house which was already there. It was operational in June 1930. The house was used by someone hired to maintain the heat in the transmitter building. This would keep the water-cooled tubes in the transmitter from freezing when the station was off the air. On one occasion at this site, or the station's next location, this duty was neglected causing the tubes to crack. This forced station personnel to scurry to the Westinghouse Company in Chicago to purchase more tubes. Later, a used one thousand watt transmitter was purchased from WMAQ in Chicago and installed in the building.

The structure's basement housed all the power generators needed to run the station, along with a switchboard and storage. The towers extended north from the transmitter building. This site (a farm on the northwest corner of Kilburn, Springfield and Riverside Blvd) was used for about one year by WJAH, which previously had operated out of the Central Park Gardens Amusement Park. WROK broadcasted from this location until about 1940.

The property had been originally owned by Robert Darrington, a relative to Larry Carlstrom (KS9B) (later a WROK engineer). A grandson, Robert Ralph Darrington, a city fireman, lived in the house next to the transmitter building in 1929. The farm land was so low in spots that used bricks from a fire at Whig Hill School were used to level the land. Bob remembers the two wooden towers being toppled by a storm and replaced by one steel tower in the early 1930s.

Maurice (Maury) Nelson, WROK's engineer, was frequently seen at the building conducting his transmitter duties. On another occasion Darrington relates that a bad electrical storm struck the towers twice, blowing out the station's complete inventory of fuses (which was two).

The land was sold to Phil and Mary Samuelson in 1949. During an interview, Mary said that nearly all of the windows had been broken out of the transmitter building. Her husband made a workshop out of the structure and added a garage to the south side. The Samuelson's planted the evergreens that shroud the corner of the 14 acre tract. They also contracted an outside firm to remove the cement tower bases that extended north from the transmitter building.

Today the land on the northwest corner of Kilburn, Riverside and Springfield Avenue is a private residence. The transmitter building is a crumbling structure used for storage. The house next door has been rented out several times, and is currently owned by Jerry Zaugg, who plans to demolish the building and build a lake nearby.

In the early 1940s engineers were Maurice Nelson (W9BRY), Bill Smith, George Lodin, and Larry Lang (W9YRI). Lang, who runs an organ repair business in Rockford worked for WMBI in Chicago. Lang recalls that WROK's next transmitter site was closer to town (R.R. 3, Kilburn Avenue). This location would be on the north side of Kilburn Avenue approximately a mile west of the Highview Senior Citizens home on the opposite (north) side of the street. A small cement building about 600 feet off the road housed the transmitter. Six hundred feet further north stood the tower. An old wood house near where the Larson family lived stood nearby; the home burned about 1953.

A recent inspection of area revealed that the land is now a corn field with no evidence remaining of a radio station. Lang is the only one interviewed that recalls this site, which was in use until about 1947, when the station purchased land for a new facility near Guilford Road (its present site). A temporary wire antenna was used during the change over.

By 1931 KFLV was prepared to meet the demands of the public for a quality radio station. New studios were built for the station at the Rockford Republic Newspaper offices at 107-111 South Water Street. This began a long association with the Rockford newspaper. The publication provided comfortable acoustically perfect studios in the new building (southeast side of the building, second floor). Offices, a control room, and a large reception area equipped with a loud speaker offered visitors a chance to see and hear the station in action.

The staff at that time included H. E. Fisher, station manager, and Rex Fuller, Herbert Mahumed, Wesley Asprooth, George Swanson, Paul Sprauge, Walter Lindquist, and high schoolers Richard Paget, Everett Henderson, and Everett Hallquist. Other personnel were Wesley Wilcox, Scot Weakley, and D. E. Sherwood from KDKA. The Rockford Republic newspaper later changed the name of their building to the Newstower.

In December of 1933, the station changed it call letters to WROK, signifying Rockford. Robert Drey was the station manager. Drey introduced WROK's engineer Maurice Nelson to a young lady who would later become Nelson's wife. She had brought students to the station for a field trip. The couple, Maurice and Mercedes Nelson, later married.



## WROK

### 1930s to the Present

In 1934 Lloyd Creighton Thomas, a former NBC and Westinghouse executive, became president and general manager of WROK. He was formerly manager of KFKX in Hastings, Nebraska. It was Thomas who signed the agreement with Rev. Frykman allowing for the continuation of the Swedish Church Service on WROK. About this time, WROK began its famous "Man on the Street" interview programs.

Lynn Brandt (Bloomquist) conducted the first such program according to Rockford's "Sinnissippi Saga" in August 1933. The program featured delegates from the American Legion convention being held in Rockford. Brandt later worked for NBC and was tragically killed in a plane crash in the 40's.

The station had also begun pioneering in play by play sportscasts. The first Rockford High School football game was broadcast by Morey Owens on September 19, 1930. Other station announcers included Bill Traum, John McCloy and Rollie Sponberg. WROK's sponsorship of the Rock River Barn Dance (hosted by Brandt), probably a spin off of the WLS Barndance Program, began in 1934.

The program was moved from the Newstower Studios to the Palace Theater. Among the many groups regularly appearing on the show were the "Blackhawk Valley Boys," the "Livingston Trio" composed of Marlene Livingston Hand and her sister Marian, Uncle Younger, and piano playing mother Pearl. The groups' theme song was "I'm Sitting on Top of the World."

Effective March 10, 1936, WROK became a full time station at 1410 khz, as its share time partner in Wisconsin had been moved to another channel. WROK was a short time member of the Affiliated Broadcasting Company (known as A.B.C. back then). The twenty member Midwest network, which operated out of Chicago, folded shortly afterwards. Power was raised to one thousand watts daytime and 500 watts at night. A new 238 foot Truscon Steel Antenna was installed at the Kilburn site in 1940.

In recent years, the FCC has required WROK to maintain a daytime directional signal. By 1938 WROK operated daily from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. using the air motto "Serving Northern Illinois and Southern Wisconsin." Late in 1938 Rockford Consolidated Newspapers purchased controlling interest in the station. Mrs. Ruth Hanna Sims, co-owner and publisher of the newspaper, became president of Rockford Broadcasters. Walter Koessler and James W. Rodgers were named co-general managers of the station.

Effective December 1, 1939, WROK became a member of the Mutual Broadcasting System. They opted, however, for membership in the NBC Blue Network beginning May 17, 1943. The Blue Network became the American Broadcasting Company on June 15, 1945. Remote broadcasts became very popular. The station utilized two transmitters on 2190 khz (licensed as WAAR and WEKN) to send live programs back to the studios.

By 1940 Mrs. Simms had become full owner of Rockford Broadcasters, Inc. Mrs. Simms passed away at the age of 64 on December 31, 1944. Albert G. Simms then became president. Effective 3:00 a.m. March 29, 1941, the FCC reassigned most stations to new frequencies as part of the NARBA treaty with adjacent countries. The result was WROK being assigned to 1440 khz. Harriette Thompson, the station's first full-time female announcer, was hired that year.

On October 23, 1952 E. Kenneth Todd became president of WROK. The new firm, Winnebago Newspapers, publisher of the Rockford Star and Register-Republic, continued to operate WROK out of the Newstower at 97 East State Street. In 1954 the licensee of WROK was changed back to Rockford Broadcasters, Inc. John J. Dixon, Joseph B. Kirby and David W. Salisbury were the next general managers of WROK. Salisbury, formerly with the Rockford Morning Star, has continued with the station since 1962. At that time WROK moved into its present studio and transmitter site at 1100 Tamarack Lane (3901 Brendenwood).

On August 26, 1962 power was increased to 5,000 watts during the day and 500 watts at night in 1963. WROK was sold again on September 25, 1963 to the Bloomington Broadcasting Corporation, publishers of the Daily Pantograph Newspaper and owner of WJBC. Vernon A. Nolte became president of WROK on October 1, 1963. He is best known as the developer of the automatic tape cartridge recording system which revolutionized the broadcast industry (a feat also claimed by Earl Muntz).

In the next few years, the licensees of WROK were WROK, Inc., Evergreen Communications, and Vernon A. Nolte. Reorganizations of the stations were due to the passing of the station's head executives Loring C. Merwin (09/06/72), Walter M. Koessler (10/27/80), and Vernon A. Nolte (12/20/88). John Nolte became president of Nolte Communications, the latest licensee of WROK in 1987. David Salisbury continues as Vice president and general manager. The station was off the air briefly in 1974 when vandals tore down the station's antenna.

Salisbury, during an interview, said that WROK has been an integral part of the Rockford Community for many years. He recalls the station's many successes as well as two promotions that had tragic endings. One consisted of a Christmas promotion at the North Town Shopping Center. A man dressed as Santa Claus was supposed to parachute down to the Center's parking lot in front of thousands of spectators gathered for the event. The man's parachute failed to open and he was killed.

On a lighter note, WROK decided that the station was ready to do live traffic reports, like the Chicago stations. A helicopter was then rented and city police officers were retained to do the reports. Members of the force quarreled over who would be in the helicopter. Rockford police authorities argued that the city did not have any traffic problems. They remarked that a rise in auto accidents was due to motorists watching the skies for the helicopter instead of watching the road.

Over the years WROK has celebrated other broadcast initiatives including the beginning of AM stereo broadcasts in 1983, using the Motorola C-QUAM System in early 1984. Contemporary music has been featured since 1980. In 1985 NBC "Talknet" programs were aired at night. WROK continues to be a member of the ABC Direction Network, which also includes the airing of famed news commentator Paul Harvey.

WROK began FM broadcasts in 1949. The station previously had held an FM license for W71RF in 1941. The license expired before the station could be built. WROK-FM mostly simulcasted with its AM affiliate until 1964. By 1965 WROK-FM increased its power from 16,000 watts to 50,000 watts at 97.5 mhz. WROK-FM became WZOK (Z-OK) in 1975, switching from beautiful music to a contemporary music format in 1979. The FM side had been managed in recent years by Steve Summers. Jeff Wicker was WZOK's long time morning man. Both Summers and Wicker were gone by March of 1992. Wicker, who participated in many successful station promotions, returned to Ohio. Summers was fired when ratings for both WROK/WZOK dropped in the early months of that year.

In 1977, WROK was selected as the "Billboard Station of the Year." The well-known broadcast industry trade magazine also picked WROK as the "Best Top 40 Station" in markets of under a million in population. C. David Hamilton won program director of the year. Other 1977 staffers included morning man Mel Young and chief engineer John Shepler. In 1981, WZOK and its many listeners successfully convinced the rock group "The Rolling Stones" to come to Rockford for an unscheduled concert.

WROK/WZOK have won more community awards than all the rest of the Rockford area stations put together, says general manager David W. Salisbury. Salisbury owes much of the credit to WROK/WZOK's successes to the stations late owner Vernon Nolte. Salisbury stated, "Vernon Nolte was my mentor and friend. We enjoyed some wonderful rewarding times together both business and personal. I really miss him. I really believe that it was our genuine affection and respect for each other that made WROK one of the most respected radio stations in the United States."

Both stations are extremely visible in the community. Billboards, park benches, and busses carry the station's slogans. WZOK is very popular with young adults. WROK features talk shows, local news, play by play sports, and area information.

In the past Rockford Expos baseball, Rockford Lighting basketball, and Chicago Bulls basketball has been featured along with high school sports. Among the station's versatile performers is the "Better Than Ever" morning team of Doug McDuff and Dan Willis. Other well-known staffers are Fred Spear, TV weather reporter Sue Mroz, Bob Pressman, and Ken DeCoster. Greg Strossell, John Ivey, Ronald Gallina, and Jack Lambiotte make up the operations department. Both McDuff and Willis now work in Milwaukee radio.

North Park College Archivist Timothy Johnson has collected over three large binders of clippings and news stories concerning WROK since the days of KFLV. The present owners will agree that history continues to be made at WROK.

Many former WROK staffers have gone on to other stations. Long time morning man Dan Willis left WROK in July of 1991. Another WROK personality is welcomed into the living rooms of Rockford residents during the evening news hour. He is WTVO-TV newsman Bruce Richardson, a very friendly and knowledgeable media person. Richardson did a "man on the street show" and a record program about 1953 on WROK. He recalls once scaring a lady doing a live children's show with an ugly rubber mask at the station. Bruce had previously worked with WFXW's Gerald Gamel at WSDR in Sterling, Illinois.

"I thought I had hit the big time when I worked at WROK," Richardson remembers. "At WSDR you did everything. At WROK you had engineers turn the records for you."

On one occasion Bruce recalls introducing a 78 rpm record and listening as the engineer mistakenly played it at 33 rpm. After alerting the engineer that the record was running too slow, the technical person merely jammed the control up to 78 rpm. The record quickly picked up speed over the air and was heard by the audience. So much for the technical assistance, he had thought. He recently retired from the evening news on Channel 17 in Rockford.

Another channel 17 employee is Lance Nelson, whose father, Maurice Nelson (d. 1984), was a long time engineer at WROK. Nelson's widow, Mercedes Nelson, supplied a transcript of her husband's appearance at a 1964 National Association of Broadcasters meeting. The material outlines some important bits of local information about WROK and the beginnings of radio as Nelson remembered it.

On April 7, 1964, Maury Nelson participated in the Broadcast Pioneers Oral History Project, recalling his 35 year radio career. Nelson was interviewed by Chicago broadcaster Dick Lashbrok (K9GWC) at the annual National Association of Broadcasters meeting.

During the taping session, Nelson recalled his early years at WROK, going back to the late 1920s when the station was known as KFLV. Nelson was a ship radio operator before he became interested in broadcasting. He also met his wife Mercedes while working at the station.

For the most part Nelson spent much of his time keeping WROK on the air at the transmitter site. Maury remembers that it was his job to clean and check the B storage batteries, while the station operated at Central Park. He used water from Kent Creek to clean the batteries which were kept in containers that resembled large pickle jars.

Between 1929 and 1930, at the Central Park Amusement Park, KFLV had built a wooden building about the size of a three-car garage. Prior to the station's move to the park, Central Park had operated their own station there utilizing two tall steel towers. Central Park's station only operated for a short time. The towers were connected mostly to a receiver for park patrons to hear. Nelson explains that a goose-neck speaker was stretched outside a small building for folks to enjoy. Chairs had been set up to accommodate listeners. When KFLV used the towers they made a center fed flat top wire antenna called a "vertical key." Another explanation of the antenna was that it was of Marconi design "working against ground."

At first KFLV used a small one hundred watt transmitter before purchasing a Western Electric Transmitter with a water cooled tube in the final. This 500 watt transmitter was purchased used from WMAQ. It had been brought to Rockford from the LaSalle Hotel in Chicago when WMAQ went to 5000 watts. During the spring, the creek flooded, and the only way to get to the site was with boots. The new transmitter was installed at a truck farm "further out in the country."

At this time Nelson recalls that the station moved from the Faust Hotel to the Rockford News Tower. Two new wooden towers made from 4 X 4's and 2 X 4's were knocked down about a month after they had been erected. Nelson used the remaining twenty feet of the towers, stringing some cable between the two and got the station back on the air. He remembers WROK had one spring wound turntable to test the antenna site. They also had only one record, "If I Can't Have Your Love, I Don't Want Your Kisses." The song was played over and over again while tests were conducted. Nelson also remembered the first car radios by RCA which used antennas made of chicken wire placed in the ceiling or in the running boards.

Nelson makes no reference to the transmitter site that Larry Lang talks about on Kilburn Road near the Highview Nursing Home at Safford Road. The "truck farm" location was probably the Darrington Farm on the northwest corner of Springfield, Kilburn, and Riverside Boulevard. Nelson says that WROK operated out of this location until 1949 when they moved to their present location. The Samuelson's stated that they purchased the old Darrington Farm from WROK in 1949. A 1930 edition of the Rockford Register describes KFLV's transmitter site as being out in the country, where they had erected two wooden antenna towers. Two wooden towers were on the Darrington property, according to other sources. Perhaps there was an additional site in between the Darrington Farm site and WROK's present site where Lang worked. It could have been there for just a short time so that no one remembers except Lang, who is the only one left.

In information supplied by Mercedes Nelson, Maury had three sets of ham radio calls: 9AMP, W9BRY, and W9FL. Nelson recalls in the early 1930s that "there was a lot of drama on radio back then. . . I remember Amos 'N Andy. . . folks would sit around and listen to radio, just as they sit in the parlor and watch TV today." Besides WROK/WZOK and the earlier mention of WRRR, the 1960s brought several new stations to the area, which have been consolidated into the present day operations. They are described in the following section.

### OTHER ROCKFORD STATIONS

#### WKKN/WKMQ

In more current times, the list of Rockford stations includes WKKN (formerly WJRL), a country music station, and its "oldies" FM affiliate WKMQ. These were once owned separately, but are now under the same ownership, Mid-West Family Stations, Inc., and are located at 1901 Reid Farm Road. At the beginning of 1992, WKKN became WNTA.

WKKN, 1150 khz, was a one thousand watt daytime, limited power nighttime country and western music station. Air personalities drove around in a black pick up truck for station promotions. WKKN came on the air on June 18, 1960 as WJRL, a five hundred watt, low power nighttime station owned by John R. Livingston. Livingston later owned WPEO in Peoria.

Robert G. Foremning was the station's sales manager, Phillip Kempin was in charge of production, and Gerald Devore was WJRL's engineer. Studios were located at 125 North Church Street.

The station, owned by Town and Country Radio, Inc., was a member of the Mutual Broadcasting Service. WJRL was heavy on local agricultural information. Ray Watson was the farm director, and Joe Watson was the news director.

WJRL was sold on August 1, 1966. The call letters became WYFE. The station motto was "Your Musical WYFE." John D. Harvey was the general manager of the station, followed by Greg Rouleau in 1969, and Duane Daniels in 1970. WYFE was acquired by the Heart O' Wisconsin Broadcasters in 1972. At that time WYFE began



playing "oldies." Meanwhile, Heart O' Wisconsin also purchased WRVI around 1975, a small wattage FM station owned by Charles P. Rowland. Rowland had signed on his 1100 watt FM station on September 15, 1967. The station featured "block programming," changing its format every couple of hours.

WRVI operated from 2700 West State Street and was licensed for Winnebago. Walter Werner was the general manager of WRVI, Beverly Kruger was the operations manager, and Doyle Flurry the engineer. WRVI increased its power to three thousand watts in 1973.

Both stations were moved into their present quarters at 1901 Shaw Road (Reid Farm Road) about 1975. WRVI's call letters were then changed to WYFE-FM and became Y-95, a rock station managed by William Walker. The station's frequency was 95.3 mhz.

WYFE AM-FM were purchased by Mid-West stations on August 1, 1977. WYFE-AM's call letters were changed to WKKN. Country music was again played on the station. An "oldies" format was begun on WYFE-FM in the mid 1980s. WYFE-FM became WKMQ in 1986.

WKMQ is now known as "Rockford's Oldies Stations," playing ten songs without interruption. Bill Phillips is the station's popular morning man. Roger Piper is the program director. The station's well-known general manager, Duane Haas (radio name Dewey Daniels) was killed in an auto accident early in 1991. The station is licensed for Winnebago-Rockford. Other WKMQ staffers are Blake Patton, Debra Miels, and Greg Dahl as engineer.

Around Christmas 1991, WKKN ended its country and western music format and began simulcasting with its FM affiliate WKMQ. "Oldies" were aired on both stations until January 1, 1992. This gave the station time to remodel its AM studio for a new format and call letter change. The new year brought a news/talk format to the AM side. Call letters were changed from WKKN to WNTA. The FM programming on WKMQ remained the same.

Roger Piper, who supervises programming on both stations, stated that the new AM station would feature mostly national talk shows, including Rush Limbaugh, and a live local morning talk and news program hosted by Dave Gerard. Dee Lynn will do another local program Saturday mornings. WNTA has joined the CNN Radio Network. Most of the station's programming will come via satellite. WNTA continues to broadcast at 1150 AM with 1000 watts of power daytime and 62 watts nighttime. Both WNTA and WKMQ have been owned by the Mid-West Family Stations since 1977.

#### **WNIU-FM NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY**

NIU's format of PBS programming is also heard in Rockford from its campus in DeKalb. The station has long had a remote studio in the city's Discovery Center. In 1991, newer facilities are being planned for Rockford. (See WNIU/WNIJ)

#### **WGSL/WQFL**

##### **Rockford's Religious Radio**

The Rockford area is also the home of two FM religious stations: WQFL and WGSL. Both are owned by the same corporation, but are operated separately and aim their programs at different audiences. A third religious station, WFEN, is also now operating in Rockford.

WQFL, 100.9 mhz, is a 3,000 watt station licensed for Rockford. WGSL, 91.1 mhz, operates with 4,000 watts and is licensed for Rockford-Loves Park. The two stations are owned by the First Assembly of God Church and their subsidiary Quest for Life.

The stations are located at 5375 Pebble Creek Trail in Loves Park. Each has its own tower located on the property. Program Director Doug Smith says that the only times the stations simulcast is during a program called "Morning Magazine," a talk show. Otherwise, each has its own unique format.

WQFL is a commercial FM station programming mostly contemporary Christian music. WGSL is a non-commercial educational station featuring some music, many religious shows, and is programmed for adults over 45 years of age. The popular religious drama program, "Unshackled," produced by the Pacific Garden Mission, is featured nightly on WGSL, along with many other dynamic national ministers. Bill Pearce, formerly of WMBI, does his "Nightsongs" program for WGSL from his Rockford studio.

Both stations sponsored the Rockford Christmas Tree attraction in 1990. They share the proceeds from an annual fund drive. WQFL also broadcasted selected high school football games in 1990, and Rockford Lightning CBA Basketball games in 1991.

WQFL (Quest For Life) began operations on May 2, 1974. Its original call letters were WJJQ. The stereo station's address was 5500 East Riverside Boulevard. Don Lyon was the first president of the station. He had successfully obtained a license for WQFL after losing a long battle with WKWL for a previous available frequency. Ron Tietzort was the general manager of WQFL, Ed Myers served as program director, Bruce Evenson as news director, and Ben Pflederer was the engineer. The new station is also affiliated with the Open Bible Church.

WQFL was a member of the UPI/Audio Network, switching to ABC in 1979. David Norcross became president of the station that year. By 1981 the station was purchased by the First Assembly of God Church, Ernest



Moen became president of the station. Ron Tietsort served as general manager, Bob Ross was the commercial manager, Al Kunkel the music director and Wes Bleed, now with WGN in Chicago, was the station's news director. The 1991 staffers were Barry Armstrong, president; Mike Marino, program director; Jim Beeler, music director; and Joel Griffith, news director.

WGSL came on the air March 28, 1988. Several other entities competed for the new frequency which was awarded to Christian Life School and WGSL. Today both WQFL and WGSL continue to be professionally run religious stations in the Rockford-Loves Park community.

### **WBEL-AM/WRWC-FM SERVING BELOIT-ROCKTON-ROCKFORD**

It is difficult to discuss one of these stations without acknowledging its close connection with the other. Both are owned by the same management, use the same staff, and are located in the same building. They are, however, actually two separate, distinct operations committed to their own markets.

WBEL is licensed for South Beloit, and WRWC is licensed for Rockton. WBEL is a typical time, temperature, talk, community information station, while WRWC programs adult contemporary music over a wider area that also includes Rockford.

WBEL is older than most stations in Northern Illinois (except for WROK). The station signed on May 18, 1948 and has continued to serve the area with community involvement, while keeping up technically with the rest of the industry. Engineer Chuck Ingle explained the path that WBEL (1380 khz) has taken over the years to its current leadership position in the community.

The knowledge and legwork to establish WBEL belonged to its owner Russell Salter (see WKKD). Ingle explains that Salter was a technical wizard, but a very frugal man. "He was an early ham radio operator, and as all hams do, he could make do with a piece of equipment that he picked up, used, and then invest his money on other things."

The current setup of WBEL/WRWC resembles that of Salter's Aurora operation. First there was a building. Then as the operation expanded, wings were added to the main building to make a long narrow structure to house both stations. WBEL's four towers are just to the west of the building. Tower number one, formerly used by WRWC, is now part of the AM array. A new 500 foot FM tower for WRWC was placed into operation in December 1989 at Latham Road at Highway Two.

Salter was an all-around broadcaster. The Fond-du-Lac, Wisconsin native was raised on a dairy farm, operated a radio shop, an amateur station, and graduated from the University of Southern California in 1933. His list of broadcast accolades extend from his many years as the announcer for the WLS Barndance, as well as stops at WIND, WJJD, and Chicago's WENR-TV. He worked in Indianapolis, and many other midwest cities, including Rockford and Sheboygan, Wisconsin. The Salter family later built stations in Aurora as well as WIXN AM-FM in Dixon.

WBEL's first operation was designed by Salter, engineer Leo Wilson, and the consultant team of Walter F. Kean and George Sklom, a former FCC inspector. Consulting engineer Robert Jones also helped with WBEL. Russ has since passed away and his family still run the stations.

Operating under the banner Beloit Broadcasters Russ Salter and his early partner former WLS farm director Lloyd Burlingham, WBEL's first studios were located at 355 1/2 East Grand Avenue in the Newfield Building. Its transmitter and tower were located just off of Elmwood Avenue north of Beloit near the Beloit Country Club. Ingle explained that Salter felt that being a 500 watt daytime station was enough to serve the area. But soon the local newspaper, the Gazette, filed for a full time station, WGEZ, to compete in the small community. Salter then filed for a license for South Beloit.

WBEL's signal rose to one thousand watts in September 1948. It was then increased to five thousand watts when its transmitter and tower were moved to Owens Center Road in 1953. Past studio locations have been 430 1/2 State Street in the First National Bank Building in 1956 and 504 West Grand in an old doctor's office in Beloit in 1971.

In 1957 plans were begun to move WBEL's transmitter and towers to its present location at 4570 Rockton Road, west of Route 251. WBEL became a full time station in April 1958.

WBEL-FM went on the air from Rockton in 1963. Call letters were changed from WBEL-FM to WRWC in 1968. The towers were damaged due to a storm in 1971. Around 1973, WRWC began using its Rockton mailing address. Both stations used the Rockton antenna site; however, WBEL-AM continued to be a Wisconsin station and maintained studios in Beloit.

WBEL's four-tower array covers much of Southern Wisconsin, but protects stations in St. Louis and Fort Wayne. The station operates at 1380 khz and is in stereo.

Voices and personnel most associated with WBEL over the years have been the following: General Manager and Vice-President John Weitzell, who was the former news director; Irv Andreoni WBEL's sales director

for many years; announcers Jerry Dommer (sports), Bill Greener, Steve Benton, Bob Scholz; Vice President Joe Moen; and Bill Moore and Harry Bishop (news directors). Steve Chapman, a veteran of stations in Fond-du-Lac, Madison, and Rochelle is operations manager of WBEL and WRWC.

WBEL's retreat into Rockton just seemed to make sense economically. John Weitzel pointed this out in a Beloit newspaper article. "Its no longer good business to operate too completely separate facilities with two separate staffs at two different locations." Most of WBEL's facilities were in place for the move in September 1990. WRWC was already operating out of the new building. WBEL offers local news, community events coverage, and Milwaukee Brewers baseball to the area.

Recently issued ratings say that WRWC is currently on the move upwards. Vice-President Robert O. Moran and newly hired station manager Christopher Coffin laid down the format of the new FM station, when the Salter firm decided to split the operations in 1972. Previous to this time WRWC either simulcasted WBEL-AM's programming or played "beautiful music."

This format continued until 1984. Afterwards rock, big band, "oldies," and various other combinations were tried. Rhonda Moe was program director in the mid 80's when the station actually had a staff that operated the automated assist equipment.

In recent years WRWC decided to go satellite, like many other small FM stations. Both WRWC and Joe Salvi's WLUV-FM have picked up in ratings since going to satellite formats. WRWC is programmed by Unistar's "Format 41." There are presently no newscasts. During the recent Persian Gulf War, complaints were received for the lack of news coverage on the Los Angeles based satellite network. Information was then passed along about the war to satisfy listeners. WRWC's format is kept as simple as possible. PSA's and spots are inserted into rotation by whoever is running the AM side.

Unistar 41 plays all the local tags and spots by generating the cart machines at WRWC by tone control. Five second local announcements are played prior to the live announcer's voice on the tail of the music selections. WRWC's signal was improved recently with a new tower. The station now operates at 1200 watts (it's licensed for 3,000 watts) from its 500 foot tower at Latham Road and Route 2 on 103.1 mhz Both stations fit quite nicely into the Rockton facility and continue to be owned and operated by the Salter Broadcasting Company who also own WKKD AM/FM in Aurora.

#### JOE SALVI'S WLUV AM/FM HOME TOWN RADIO

It is certainly a novelty in this radio age to find the owner of a station actually at the controls, pulling a board shift and serving as the operation's morning man. One would expect "Papa Joe" Salvi to be seated in his office going over the station's ledger, barking out instructions to his sales people, or deciding what records the station should be playing. Well, he does all that as well as sign the station on in the morning, as he has done for the last 28 years.

"My goal was to be able to operate a station in my hometown," explains Salvi. "Since there were already so many stations in Rockford, my lawyer advised me to file for nearby Loves Park."

Joe, whose real name is Angelo, looked up the word love in the dictionary one day and decided to use its phonetic spelling "LUV" as the stations call letters. He purchased what was used as a model home for senior citizens at Wesley Willows and hired Paul Slabaugh of Caledonia to move it to its present location. WLUV AM-FM is located at 2272 Elmwood Road, northwest of Rockford. It would be difficult to find the station if it was not for its 300 foot antenna. Its reddish house-like structure sets back quite a distance from the road on the south side of the street. A long winding dirt and mire path leads back to the building. A watch dog howls when unfamiliar persons approach the station, warning the building's occupants that strangers are present. Inside this cleverly disguised structure are studios and enough office space to adequately run the operation.

The interior of the station resembles a gigantic yard sale of records. Stacks of them are piled on the floor, or busting out of the seams of old boxes, or are resting on dusty shelves. It is unusual to see so many records, as most stations now play tapes or CD's for their musical selections.

Used equipment, rack cabinets stuffed with wires, and parts are stacked everywhere. In Salvi's office, he has an enviable photo collection of local and national recording stars adorning the walls.

The AM announcer works out of a compartment slightly wider than a phone booth. Shelves of 45's are arranged behind him. The FM station is merely a control board setting by itself on a table in an adjacent room. Two cart machines play local tags and spots. These are controlled by a satellite music service. "The Heat," a rock format dropped by WAIT-FM in Crystal Lake recently, was picked up by Salvi. He turns the sound down in the room because Joe likes country music better that's played on the AM side. He does admit that he likes the improved rating (1.8) that WLUV-FM has been getting lately with its new format. Both stations use to simulcast country music.

WLUV-AM signed on September 29, 1962, but long before that time, Joe Salvi was busy gaining experience and becoming a broadcast pioneer himself. In a telephone interview, Salvi apologized for not being able to take the call the first time. He had completed his morning show and was filling in for another announcer, "Moose" McCabe, who was ill that day.

Radio has always been Joe's first love, dating back to his early years at Barber Grade School in Rockford. He often was the emcee of school programs. Appearing on some of those shows was actress Barbara Hale, one of Joe's classmates. (Miss Hale went on to star as Della Street, secretary to Perry Mason in a long running television series on CBS.) Salvi attended Columbia College in Chicago on the GI bill, then went looking for work.

Joe explained that his first radio job was in Logan, West Virginia in 1946 at WLOG. "This was in the heart of the coal mines," recalls Salvi. There was union trouble at the time, and someone was killed two doors down from the hotel where Joe was staying. This uneasiness affected Joe's performance on the air. He lasted about two weeks and was told by the station manager that he would never make it in broadcasting.

From West Virginia Joe took announcing jobs in Hannibal, Missouri; Bismarck, North Dakota; Sacramento, California and dozens of other places until he came to Indiana. It was at WITZ in Jasper, Indiana where management noticed that he was a gregarious, outgoing type of fellow, suitable to sell advertising. "It was that point I learned where the money was in this business," Salvi said. He occasionally did some play by play sports and jock work to help satisfy his incurable desire to perform on the radio. But after Jasper, it was on to numerous other sales and management type positions which included stops at WBOW in Terre Haute, Indiana and stations in Iowa and Colorado.

WLUV-AM has been a country music station since its beginning covering the area with 500 watts daytime at 1520 khz. WLUV-FM came on the air at 96.7 mhz with 3,000 watts on March 25, 1964. Until recently, WLUV-FM duplicated much of its AM station's programming. Salvi, wanting to make new roads in the Rockford market, has opted for satellite programming for WLUV-FM. The station management hopes that this non-duplication of music and its dial position between two other Rockford stations will help bring success to WLUV-FM. In addition, Mark Snodgrass does his "Listen To This" alternative music show weekends on WLUV-FM.

Meanwhile, on the AM side, a new "clock" has been set in motion. The station has come a long way from its days of playing "cow kicking music." Featured during each hour are old country tunes, as well as new ones, some bluegrass, and a gospel selection. Some easy-going country music and farm features are presented at noon on the "Farm Hour." ABC News and a program called "Solid Gold Country" are regular features.

Of late the station has been promoting itself as the "sports leader," presenting Chicago White Sox and St. Louis Cardinals baseball, Notre Dame football and basketball, the Motor Racing Network, "The Game of the Week," and Harlem High School sports. When asked who the news director is, Salvi replied that there wasn't one. News makers are urged to call the station. No one appears from WLUV running around with a tape recorder chasing down stories. Actualities are readily accepted by phone and given saturation on the station.

Salvi boasts that his 500 watt signal covers the same basic area as more powerful stations because of its clearer channel. It is heard in the areas of Freeport, Galena, Woodstock, and Dixon. Many of his past staffers are currently enjoying successful careers on other Rockford stations. "They come here fresh out of high school," explains Salvi. "They don't like our music, but get a start in the business." He admits there is a rapid changeover in employees at the station.

Many years ago WLUV participated in a franchise to teach broadcasting to prospective announcers. Tapes made by WGN's Franklyn MacCormack, TV's Arlene Francis and Hugh Downs, as well as sportscaster Bob Elson were made available to students. The group behind the program went bankrupt and the training sessions stopped at WLUV.

Salvi owned another station in Woodstock, Illinois. WSTK signed on April 1, 1968. The station operated out of a house that was a log cabin kit. It was a hit for young listeners in the community, but at best "just made enough money to pay the bills" Salvi recalled. There were personnel problems at the station, and Joe soon tired of the daily trek from Rockford to Woodstock. He sold the station to Chicago broadcaster Mal Bellairs in 1975, maintaining that he was looked upon as an outsider by the Woodstock community (see WSTK).

Salvi has explored making WLUV-AM a full timer, but the six tower array that would be necessary offered little additional benefit and was cost prohibitive. The station has applied to the FCC for 50 watt nighttime operation. Currently, just nine people work at WLUV AM-FM. Salvi admits that being more visible in the community could help him, but he seems satisfied.

At 68 years young, he enjoys the best of both worlds managing his own station, and even announcing over it. When there's a job to do around there, he pulls up his sleeves and pitches in like one of his employees. To Joe radio will always be in his blood. He's just one of the few guys in the business who has made it to that envious plateau of being his own boss.



Joe says he often gets inquiries about selling the station. But why should he sell? Joe is healthy, enjoys what he is doing, and is good at it. "If I sold the station," admits the busy broadcast legend, "then what would I do with my time?"

Salvi has outlived most of his fellow broadcasters, even recalling the time he went to see another country broadcaster, the late Russell Salter. Salter gave him a whole used broadcast tower and antenna that Joe loaded up and took back to his station for installation.

When Joe isn't doing his "Papa Joe" morning show, or seeing to the operation of his station, he doubles as a play by play announcer for local basketball. His color man is Joe James (Misunas).

His station had the Chicago Bulls games one year, but lost them as Joe told the Bulls that he'd carry local high school games instead of the Bulls if there were any broadcast conflicts. The Bulls ended up on WROK. As for the future of Joe Salvi, he plans to just continue what he's doing. He's not pleased with FCC discussions to place low power AM stations in a new band between 1600-1700 khz. His "clear channel" operation on 1520 khz is his life and love, and each day he looks forward to another day of living and loving what he does best: running his two stations for the benefit of the community he serves.

## WDLS

### The Rock of Rockford

In 1969, high school student Dennis Lee Sloatman and several classmates operated WDLS as an unlicensed carrier-current station. The AM-FM operation mainly used 1250 khz and had a range of about two blocks. The FM frequency was 92.7 mhz. The station's studio was located in Sloatman's bedroom of his parents home at 1227 6th Street. The Rockford Register Star reported that the station operated through the power lines in the area.

Located in Florida, Sloatman recalled his early years experimenting in radio. "We chose the call letters WDLS, not only because they were my initials, but because they sounded like Chicago Station WLS...at that time every kid wanted to sound like Larry Lujack." (Lujack was a popular air personality on WLS in the 1960s.)

"We had our own jingles, too: WDLS, (Drum Roll) The Rock of Rockford," Sloatman excitedly recalled.

Sloatman's buddies Bob Mackey and Mark Larson also worked at WDLS. Larson became a program director at a station in San Diego, Mackey has since passed away.

After WDLS, Sloatman's first gig was at WRVI, the predecessor to WYFE and the new WKMQ. WRVI was owned by Charles Rowland, Dennis recalls. The format of the 1,000 watt FM station was called "Family Radio." Sloatman remembers that Rowland insisted that one religious song be played every hour on the mostly middle of the road station. Dennis had a nightly rock music show right before Jimmy Windrow's country music program. Every few hours the format of the station seemed to change. Sloatman also worked for WKWL, WRRR, and WRWC, which stood for at that time, "Wonderful Rock in Winnebago County." Then it was on to work in station in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

His early experience in radio has paid off. Dennis is currently the technical director of WMGF, in Orlando, Florida, and eleven other stations owned by a firm called Metroplex. Of his experiences at WKWL, he remembers the fire and stated, "There were lots of rumors, but no one really knows what happened."

### Other Pirate Stations in Rockford: WYZZ

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the FCC literally had a field day closing down several illegal operations in Northern Illinois and Southern Wisconsin. The FCC quickly caught up and selected WZLX, operated by a youngster in Janesville, Wisconsin, but they had more trouble pulling the plug on WYZZ in Rockford.

"It was too bad," removed Eric Hultgren, station operator. "We sounded good and served our community. We had jingles, good equipment, local news, did EBS tests. The only thing we didn't have was a license." The station sounded so professionally run the public thought the operation was legitimate, and so did the FCC the first time they heard it.

WYZZ broadcasted with two watts in stereo (88.1 mhz) utilizing a modified transmitter built on a PC board. Other amplifiers equipment totaling \$1200 was hooked up to power the station. WYZZ's antenna helped the station cover some 15 miles over Rockford and Winnebago County, broadcasting "from the tallest tree in the forest city."

On the air Hultgren was known as the "Boomer." He did not grasp how popular the station was until one night, when he made a guest appearance at Rockford's Skateland. When he told the crowd who he was, he was greeted with a roar from, up to now, his unknown audience. One evening, when the station decided to take requests, using a friend's pager, the calls continued for three hours. Besides Boomer, two other announcers, The Duckman (Jerry) and "Broadway Bill" continued to spin the hits; first heavy metal, then later current dance mixes. During the more recent San Francisco earthquake, the station broadcasted continually for 48 hours to keep the area public up to date. Tornado warnings and other services were offered by the station to its community.



Power 88, during its short seven month life, reached a large cross-section of Rockford. Hultgren remembers traveling around the community and hearing his pirate station being listened to on car radios. "It's a high. . . a good feeling you get, knowing that you are doing something good, and people are listening," recalls Eric.

True, people were listening to Boomer and his friends and their sometimes re-broadcast of WBBM-FM (B-96) programs from Chicago. Even other area radio stations were listening. Hultgren stated that most of the radio people in the community knew who was running the station and admired its young operators. However, WYZZ started hitting some of the legal stations in the community where it hurt, right in the pocketbooks and for listenership. Hultgren remembers that his station would play a popular record and ten minutes later, another competing station in the area would play the same selection.

"It was almost like they were listening to us," he recalls.

The end came swiftly. Hultgren remembers that the FCC paid him a visit on March 25, 1990. It was the first week of the new ratings period, and WYZZ was determined to get a piece of the audience for themselves and wrestle it away from the legitimate stations in the area.

After the FCC had pulled the plug on the operation, Eric followed the inspector out to the car and observed the electronic compass and other equipment used to find him. Again, another group of youngsters had been taken off the air, prompting a familiar question: Couldn't there be some sort of radio spectrum set aside for something like this? He has since looked into putting an FM translator station on the air in the area.

No fines were leveled against Eric, an amateur radio operator (N9MCS) and now a subcontractor for a cable TV business. He is sincerely sorry for violating FCC rules, but admits that he enjoyed serving the area public for a short time over WYZZ Rockford.

### **WRCR Rockford College**

Typically, most colleges have some sort of radio outlet, either FM, PA, or "carrier current," a signal that is heard only on campus. At Rockford College students are offered a variety of musical programs, plus broadcasting experience over WRCR. The station has been in existence for about 30 years and is staffed by student volunteers.

The history of WRCR goes back to March of 1963, according to former student Webb Kerns. "At that time the campus was all on one transformer," recalls Kerns, who now heads up his own advertising firm, Fidelity Productions. The college, founded in 1847, moved from its downtown site to its present location at 5050 East State around 1960.

At its new multi-acre site, new buildings were quickly added, requiring the station to modify its transmissions to cover the entire campus. Small wattage transmitters have now been installed in each of the college's buildings to induce WRCR's signal into the power lines to be radiated throughout the campus. Kerns says that the station's first studios were located in the Nelson Hall dormitory. Newer studios were later installed in the Burpee Center, which used to be the Student Union building (it is now the school's administration center).

Around 1984 WRCR moved again to its present location at the Lang Center. Over the years, the station's frequency has been changed from 580 khz to 640 khz. The college chose 640 khz after the FCC had dropped use of 640 khz and 1240 khz for civil defense purposes (Conelrad). Most college carrier current stations operate on 640 khz, usually because it is the most quiet spot on the dial. Kerns recalls that about 65 students were involved in the station during his senior year in 1964. WRCR operated at that time from 7-9 a.m. and 7 p.m. to midnight.

Over the years the station has been operated with differing degrees of enthusiasm and professionalism depending on student interest and management. Former student Marcie Williams says that the station announcers play a variety of music ranging from classical, ethnic, blues, and hard rock. Ms. Williams, a 1984 graduate, says that the station is staffed not only by those who want to get into broadcasting, but by those who just want to play some music and have fun on the radio. Acting general manager Will MacLean adds that the music is left up to what ever the student wishes to play. Top 40 tunes are seldom featured.

Volunteers at WRCR sport black jackets with a Statue of Liberty and a guitar emblem on them, proclaiming "Musical Liberty in Rockford." The station is currently considering a new motto, "The only college station in Illinois' second largest city." Two students, Dave Oberg and Glen Dlicharz, do a program entitled, "Indigestion in the Afternoon." The director of campus activities and programming, Cheryl Miller, says the WRCR staffers double as DJ's for campus parties. Public service announcements are air every in 20 minutes. There are no newscasts or talk programs on this loosely organized station.

However, WRCR's biggest problem is similar to most small college stations, namely, lack of funds for equipment improvement. Otherwise, about thirty talented announcers are available to perform on the station. Among the staff are: Dave Wilson (Director); Will MacLean (Acting Director); Fred Pilipus (Engineer); Maria Moslander (Program Director); John Lobo and Matt White (Music Directors); Henrik Boes (PSA Director); Dahanarjay Agarwal (Secretary); and Chris Lindsay (Business Manager).

About ten years ago the school entertained thoughts of seeking a commercial license for the college. The director of development, John Spence, supported the station's progress, but plans for a public station never materialized. Webb Kerns, who is on the station's board, is spearheading a drive to have the station placed on the local cable TV service as an FM channel. The cable TV company will be fed the college's mono AM signal rebroadcasting it along with its other FM station offerings to the community.

WRCR currently operates from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays. Its equipment includes two microphones, two turntables, three CD players and one cart machine. Several people that have worked at WRCR have gone on to employment at several local stations. Kerns worked at WROK as a newsman and two other stations before opting for an administration position at the college, and then opening his own advertising agency. Walt Brady is another former WRCR announcer who is now in advertising in the area. Mike Porcaro is pursuing a career with PBS.

At press time, the station was in the state of reorganization. Former WROK and WKWL announcer Ralph Reynolds (Cohen) is the A-V director at the school.

### **WFEN ROCKFORD'S THIRD RELIGIOUS STATION**

In August of 1991, Rockford became home to a third religious radio operation. The station is owned by Faith Academy, located at Prairie and Simpson Roads. The school and church (Faith Center) is operated by Don Lyon, who was the originator of radio station WQFL. Lyon ran an unsuccessful campaign as a congressional candidate in the mid 1970s. WFEN (standing for Faith Education Network) commenced broadcasting with 5,400 watts in the traditional education portion of the FM band, and its signal is heard quite easily in the Elgin-Schaumburg area. Station manager Fred Tscholl (pronounced Scholl) says the 88.3 mhz frequency was the only channel available in the Rockford area. Power increases are planned for later.

Tscholl says the station features a variety of Christian programming, including current Christian artists on CD, teaching programs, CBN news, a local talk show, and some syndicated religious programs not currently offered on other area religious stations.

Current studios are located in the church at Faith Center, 4700 South Main Street. The station's towers are located north of the city. Three full-time and three part-time employees operate the station. Tscholl, who previously worked for Evangelist Oral Roberts, has a twenty year background in all forms of radio. In recent years he was employed by several Wisconsin stations.

### **FREEPORT RADIO BRIEFLY**

It was my intention to stop at this point, but since there are some close connections between Rockford and Freeport, space has been reserved for a Freeport section. The history of Freeport radio consists of three current operations, one defunct FM operation that was just too early for its time, and a 1925 AM operation.

Rockford and Freeport are some twenty miles apart, but there are some interesting parallels between the radio operations of both cities. Many staffers like former WROK announcer Ralph Reynolds worked at both WROK and Freeport's WFRL (1945). WROK (in its KFLV days) maintained a studio in the basement of the Hotel Freeport at 109 South Galena. This structure was once known as the old Rodeway Hotel, and later the Stephenson Hotel. It is now a Best Western Hotel and has 75 rooms.

The Rockford station used these facilities in 1932 to broadcast high school sports and band remotes from the Terra Aqua Gardens, an old dance pavillion once located at Yellowcreek and Walnut Roads. Members of both communities participated in early radio clubs together, including the Citizens Radio Club of Freeport. A TV station (WIFR, channel 23, formerly WCEE), is licensed for both Freeport and Rockford. Freeport does, however, have many more insurance companies operating in its boundaries than Rockford, according to city officials. Much work and experimentation was done by Freeport's early radio pioneers prior to the construction of the city's first commercial station.

In the radio section of the "History of Stephenson County," one of the few historical publications to deal with early radio, a generous amount of information from old newspapers is highlighted. Much of the credit of introducing Freeport to radio is given to high school teacher, John Alden Riner. Riner later founded station 9XM, which became University of Wisconsin's WHA, "the oldest station in the nation."

It was Riner's students in 1910 who built the first crystal radio sets. Rock chips containing galena, a material used to detect radio signals, was readily found in the area. Tuning coils were wound around oatmeal boxes under the guidance of another instructor, D. P. Williams.

An after school radio club produced the city's first ham radio operators in 1922. They were Donald and Jacob Stover, operators of 9AFN located in their home at 725 West Avon. Stephenson's history book relates that the city's first musical broadcast took place with this 10 watt station on January 16, 1922. This was accomplished by stationing a live violinist in his home and transmitting the music to Freeport High School. At the school, another

live musician, a pianist completed the duet by accompanying the broadcast of the violinist for those in attendance in the school. Stover later worked for Ridgway Electric and operated his own business, Radio Service Laboratory, in 1935.

The city's next ham is listed as being William Ridgway (9AKU). Nine preceded by letters is the designation for the Midwest. Another station for listening was installed at the YMCA. Around 1926, Dr. Van Ness operated ABC Radio and Repair Company. The Stephenson's book lists the firm's location in the Karcher Building, on the southeast corner of Douglas Street and Van Buren Avenue, now a parking lot.

ABC Radios were manufactured by the short-lived firm. The police and fire departments were next to use radio beginning in 1936. The city's first FM station was in the planning stages by 1944. It was to be an FM station on the FCC's new allocations for frequency modulation broadcasting. Across the country many early FM stations sprang up quickly hoping to cash in on predictions that FM would be the media for the future.

Manufacturers were also gearing up to produce FM sets that would promise never before noiseless, high-fidelity reception. In the end, despite FM's crystal clear transmissions, there were not enough FM sets produced to sway listeners and advertisers. Many of these stations folded quickly. Besides the early FM operation in Aurora described in a preceding chapter (WBNU), Freeport's first FM station was also owned by a newspaper.

### **WIBB, FREEPORT** **Western Illinois Basketball**

In 1925, Freeport was the home of both an all-star high school basketball team and what is believed to have been the country's first all sports radio station. The team had won the state championship in 1915, and with quality players like all tournament cagers Bunny Paul and Herbie Kieth, the townsfolk thought another title was in sight. All the excitement prompted the owners of the Ridgway Electric Company to seek a temporary FCC license to broadcast the three day Northern Illinois High School Basketball Tournament. The U.S. Department of Navigation, Department of Commerce, issued the license on March 3rd to sanction the broadcasts of the tournament games on March 5th, 6th and 7th. After Freeport's stunning 25-9 victory over Rockford, the station celebrated with a short segment of phonograph music then went off the air as instructed forever. Incidentally, the "Pretzels" (taken from the town's German heritage) later lost to eventual state champ Elgin 10-9 in the Joliet Sectionals. Freeport did win the state title in 1926 and 1951.

Having an exciting high school basketball team provided the perfect programming for the town's first radio station. It took a corps of electronic wizards, amateur radio operators, and the local phone company to make the broadcasts possible. Two cousins decided to undertake the operation, both tapping their special areas of expertise to build and maintain the station; they were Kenneth K. and William F. Ridgway (now WB9KOS). The pair were also aided by another local "ham" and experimenter Donald Stover (9AFN). William (age 18 at the time) actually built the station, while Kenneth served as the station's main announcer and did the play by play broadcasts of the games.

The resources of the station came from its licensee, Ridgway Electric Company, 113 W. Stephenson Street. The firm, started by Kenneth's father, Fred, and Uncle Frank in 1904, later moved its electric contracting business (wiring homes and businesses) to the corner of South Galena Street and West Spring Street. The company each year wired the lighting for the local Chautauqua meetings. Kenneth took over the business in 1929 and began to stock appliances during a grand opening in 1958. He was also operating a tire store in Berwyn in 1944. Kenneth, described as a "charmer and a good-looking ladies man" by his slightly younger cousin, also sold radio supplies in the store.

While the business end of the station was left to Kenneth, William began construction of the station's 50 watt transmitter. The set contained two A203 power tubes (which sold for \$37.50 each) that were installed in a 12 x 18 foot shack behind William's home at 507 W. Clark Street. Two 60 foot wooden towers held up the station's antenna. The FCC assigned the call letters WIBB to the station, which later stood for "Western Illinois Basketball." The station's broadcasts were heard as far away as Mexico, but locally, according to the Freeport Journal Standard Newspaper (who would later operate their own station), WIBB's basketball broadcasts were monitored in Belvidere, Rockford, South Wayne, Forreston, Sterling, Orangeville, Dubuque, and Chicago. The station was licensed for 1360 khz, or 220 meters. Ridgway thought that no one would hear WIBB, so he retuned his set to somewhere near 700 khz to broadcast the games. This was a common practice back then for small stations to better serve their listeners. (see WJAZ)

Apparently, the games were enjoyed by the "listeners-in." A newspaper article stated that the station received over 700 phone calls and telegrams complimenting the coverage of the tournament. The excitement spilled over and jammed the circuits of the Stephenson County Phone Company where over one thousand phone inquiries were received at the Freeport newspaper requesting tournament results.



The games took place about a half mile from William's home at the Odd Fellows Temple Building located at 301 W. Main Street. This structure is now a beauty supply warehouse, according to the Freeport Historical Society.

William, during our interview, stated that the operation of the station was limited to the products that he had to work with at the time. The microphone used to broadcast the games via phone company wires, picked up more crowd noise than the announcer's voice. Ridgway remedied this situation by placing the mike on a pillow inside a small box. The announcer then shouted the "call of the game" into a small two inch hole that was cut in the box. The frequency response of the microphone was less than 3,000 cycles. Uncle Fred's Victor wind-up phonograph played 78 RPM records between the games over the station. The record player used sharp cactus needles that were frequently changed to play the records. One of the more popular selections was "The Sheikh of Araby." No advertisements were aired as the government prohibited commercials then.

For the short time WIBB was on the air, it fulfilled the need to carry the local games for its many listeners, but for those not interested in basketball, WIBB knocked out reception from other stations. Rev. Frykman's KFLV suffered the most in Rockford partially because both stations were at first close in frequency and that WIBB operated at 50 watts while KFLV only had ten watts of power.

At a demonstration, William proved to a gathering of radio buffs that even with his transmitter operating on the same workbench next to a receiver, he could tune out his broadcasts using a directional antenna. The poor design of most of the areas receiving sets caused most of the complaints, William speculated.

At age 85 years young, William's early life in radio allowed him to be around during the industry's pioneer times. He knew Charles Erbstein of WTAS in Elgin and met Charley's delightful daughters. Recalling Erbstein, William remembers that there was indeed a fire at Charley's "Purple Grackle" roadhouse, a fact differed on by local historians. There was a microphone in the place that was used to broadcast live music programs. Erbstein turned the mike on to let listeners hear what a burning building sounded like from within. William also remembers hearing Erbstein say at the end of his broadcast day, "Well, I've got to pull the big switch, then I'll have a case of coke, or whatever the case may be." Knowing Erbstein, Ridgway suspected that Charley chose a case of something alcoholic instead of a soft drink. He often monitored some of WTAS's lewd programming.

William Ridgway knew most of the local amateur radio operators including Donald Stover (9AFN) and Clem Portman (9AFO) who later went into film production. Stover was on the board of directors at Ridgway Electric. William Wallingford (see WOAG/WLBR), who built stations in Belvidere and police radios for local municipalities, was also a friend. Wallingford was the projectionist for the old Palm and Coronado Theatres in Rockford. Wallingford once told Ridgway that he had received a phone call from Rockford Mayor C. Henry "Squeaky" Bloom. The mayor wanted Wallingford to design a microphone that Bloom could use to make his voice sound deep. Ridgway also assisted in broadcasts of music over a public address system at the Central Park Amusement Park in Rockford. He had moved to Rockford around 1930. His cousin, Kenneth, who was born in Morris, Illinois in 1879, passed away in 1977.

Visits with William F. Ridgway (W.F.) netted enough information to fill another book on local radio history. William (b. 1907) still has a sharp mind and recalls many details and facts that helped tie together previously collected information. He relates that his biggest radio thrill remains a time when town officials came to him and asked him to leave his classes at Freeport High School to help them during several days of severe winter storms. The town was virtually shut down. He used his amateur radio gear (9AKU) to make emergency contacts and send messages, reporting storm information live to radio station WOC in Davensport, Iowa. Important town officials scraped the ice off his antennas and kept the stove in his "ham shack" full of firewood so that emergency transmissions could continue. The same transmitter and wooden building would later become station WIBB. He once visited with former Chicago Mayor Big Bill Thompson and observed the mayor's ham station aboard his yacht on the I and M Canal. Ridgway, who earned ten cents an hour working for his cousin in the 1920s, retired from his engineering position with the Ingersoll Milling Machine Company around 1968.

In 1926, Kenneth sought but was denied a license for a permanent station for Freeport. Despite the interest generated by WIBB, the government was not issuing any new licenses at the time. If a new station could have been started by the Ridgway cousins, it would have probably been a success. These two men had the insight and capabilities to build and program a radio station that would have made the city of Freeport proud. They did, however, establish an important format now copied by many stations and networks across the country. WIBB was the first all-sports station pioneering the airways long before "The Score" sports channel and ESPN.

#### **FREEPORT-STANDARD'S WFJS-FM**

WFJS (acronym for Freeport Journal-Standard) commenced broadcasting on October 1, 1946. FM sets were so few in the town that the public was invited to hear the new station by coming down to the newspaper's office. An FM radio set had been installed at the publication's facilities at 12-16 North Galena Avenue. The newspaper moved to its present location at 27 South State Street in 1960.



WFJS-FM broadcasted with a power of 9,000 watts at 102.5 mhz which was a good sized FM station for the times. Studios were first located on the third floor in the Orchestra Hall Building at the corner of North Galena Avenue and Stephenson Street. By January of 1949, WFJS had moved to 217 West Exchange Street.

The station erected a 295 foot antenna that was installed in August-September of 1947. Prior to this time, a temporary aerial on the roof of the old newspaper building was used. This probably provided excellent reception for the FM radio set that had been installed in the newspaper offices to introduce the public to the station. The station's transmitter was made by General Electric.

WFJS's new antenna was erected behind its new studio building on West Exchange Street. This gave the station a range of about 50 miles. Freeport's new FM station could then be heard in Iowa and Southern Wisconsin, as well as Rock Falls and Marengo, Illinois. The Radio and Television Maintenance Corporation of Fort Wayne, Indiana finished installing the tower's 40 foot mast and C.A.A. required lighting system on September 11, 1947, making it the tallest structure in town. After the antenna was installed, construction began on new studios.

The station's new 30 X 50 foot two-story brick building contained a control room, announcer's booth and studio offices. It was in use nearly 2 1/2 years after the installation of the station's new antenna. The building is now a lawyer's office.

WFJS's first broadcast day began at 3:00 p.m. and ended at 9:00 p.m. At that time, the FCC required FM stations to operate at least three hours before and after 6:00 p.m. In its first year of operation, the Freeport Journal Standard (September 18, 1947) reported that WFJS had aired the following programs:

- 28 "RFD Freeport" (An Agricultural Program)
- 14 High school basketball games (Freeport Pretzels)
- 2 High school football games
- 24 Dance orchestra programs from the Masonic Temple Ballroom
- 17 Community health programs
- 18 "We Are Freeport" shows
- 8 "Teenagers," Inc. (Quiz Shows)
- 5 Talent hunt shows
- 4 Atomic energy shows
- Freeport High School Commencement Exercises
- Junior-Senior banquet and prom
- 3 Daily newscasts of local and associated press wire copy and many hours of fine recorded music, the station's "main stock and trade."

Major personnel of the station included Donald L. Breed, president of the station; John D. Holmes, station manager; Lee Boret, program director and Floyd Linneman; engineer. Holmes and Linneman actually operated the station; they had taken over from the station's first manager, Thomas Moers, a teacher at Freeport High School, on September 1, 1952. Milton Boyd (TV's Grandpa Happy) became program director, and Charles Englehart was the commercial manager of WFJS in 1952 followed by Vince Stierman in 1953. John Holmes operated WFJS until the spring of 1953.

WFJS's early staff had very good credentials. Thomas C. Moers was a physics teacher, a member of the army signal corps, and a graduate of the University of Illinois. He had received his Masters degree at Dartmouth College and held a first class commercial radio license. John D. Holmes of Lena, Illinois had been a ham operator since 1921, a ship radio operator, an FCC inspector, and the chief engineer for KVSQ in Ardmore, Oklahoma. Holmes had worked for RCA and the Texas Geophysical Corporation. He also owned the Stephenson Corporation, a radio and TV repair business at 226 West Stephenson Street. This firm operated WFJS in 1952.

Robert P. Moogk was WFJS's first program director in 1947. He was a journalism graduate from the University of Wisconsin with prior experience at WHBF in Rock Island, Illinois.

WFJS continued to supply the area with an abundance of quality programs of music, interviews, and sports into the early 1950s. Its last broadcast was the Illinois State High School Basketball Finals from Champaign-Urbana. The tournament came to the station via a special network sponsored by Northern Illinois Public Service Company. In the final game, undefeated LaGrange beat Peoria Central 72 to 60.

When the basketball season was over, so was the short life of WFJS. The station closed down due to the lack of advertisers and the short supply of FM sets in the community. WFJS went the way that many other FM operations went, into silence, before FM really caught hold in this country. Competition from Freeport's new AM station also probably hurt WFJS's chances for survival.

The Stephenson County history book pointed out that there were only a dozen FM sets in the community at the time WFJS entered into the radio field. Several years later, there still were not enough sets to allow listeners and advertisers to support the station. Around March 21, 1953, WFJS ended 7 years of broadcasting. The final

demise of the station is best summarized by its creator, the Freeport Journal Standard in the June 3, 1953 editorial. A portion is printed here:

In giving thanks to those who helped us, we should be most ungrateful not to mention the United States Government, which kindly allowed us to deduct the deficit of operations from our income tax obligation. We can't seem to remember that we ever had any special reason to thank the Federal Communications Commission, but perhaps we should be glad that they didn't send us any more blanks to fill out than they did.

We finally gave up, not for any one reason, but several, the advent of television being one. The Stephenson Corporation attempted a reduced operation, but that proved a forlorn hope.

If we had to do it over again, there are a number of mistakes we wouldn't make, but not all the mistakes were made by us. On the whole, in spite of all the suffering and hours of worry, we can't really feel sorry about the experiment, except that it failed.

Rusted sections of WFJS's towers were still seen years later by Freeport Historian Dorothy Glastetter. The structure was taken down and deposited across the street from the Glastetter home on Smokey Hollow Road, north of business U.S. 20. The tower pieces laid in John Holmes 30 acre apple orchard until they were mysteriously hauled away one day.

### WFRL LITE 1570-WXXQ

About a year after WFJS had started, a more successful AM station came on the air to stay. WFRL, a 1,000 watt daytime operation, began broadcasting on October 28, 1947 at 1570 khz.

Early studios were located at 9 North Chicago Avenue, above an appliance store. Its transmitter and tower were erected at the station's present studio location at 834 North Tower Road. WFRL was operated by RCA engineer Vincent Barker and his wife. Dave Taylor was the manager of the station.

Other early staffers were Arthur Hanstrom, Charles Harlan, and Ralph Reynolds. The Barkers operated WFRL (Freeport Broadcasting Company) until October 1, 1959, when it was sold to Triad TV Corporation, a Michigan firm. C. Wayne Wright became president of the station. Dave Taylor resigned in 1959 to pursue a station license for Dixon, Illinois.

By 1963 WFRL became a 5,000 watt full-time station. WFRL's 210 foot tower was joined by a 190 foot tower for directional operation at night. The station uses as its auxiliary an old transmitter purchased from WIND, Chicago. WFRL's nighttime pattern was later changed to serve closer towns to Rockford and Stockton. At one time WFRL could be heard as far away as Elgin at night.

WFRL's moved to the State Bank Building at 50 West Douglas in 1977. After a middle of the road, talk, and top 40 formats were tried, WFRL went to country music in the early 1980s.

On April 11, 1965 WFRL-FM signed on. On its air date it became WELL-FM. Rick Edwards (Edward R. Richter) was responsible for the FM side. Richard Carroll, a well known station and sales manager, left WFRL in 1968. That year WELL-FM increased from 12,500 watts to 19,000 watts of power. WELL-FM became WFRL AM and FM. Top 40 music was simulcast on both stations in 1978, with high school sports featured at night. That year WFRL AM and FM were sold to Bradford-Ross Associates. Neal Ross Nussbaum became operations director.

In 1980, the stations were sold again to the Illinois Broadcasting Corporation. Studios were consolidated at the station's transmitter site on Tower Road in 1984. WFRL-FM became WXXQ and separated into a more popular music format while WFRL-AM played "oldies."

In 1988 WXXQ increased its power to 50,000 watts at 98.5 mhz. Other names associated with WFRL are announcer Basil Hartman, program director Bud Walters, and Ruth Mahoney who hosted "Party Line." Mrs. Mahoney and her husband, Circuit Court Judge Francis X. Mahoney, began WACI (now WFPS) in Freeport in 1970.

Current staffers at WFRL (Lite 1570) are Jim McQuality, general manager; Randy Duncan, news director; Carl Plaster, engineer; Jim Readecker, program director; Don Wertz, sports director and sales; and Holly Wilson, receptionist. WFRL currently features local information and adult contemporary music and is a CBS affiliate.

WXXQ played mostly rock music through the 1980s and "comedy club" tapes at night. On February 24, 1992, WXXQ became "Hot Country Q98.5." The station's new owners Tim Carney, Tom Imhoff, both of Madison, Wisconsin, and Harish Puri of Rockford listened to several media consultants before changing WXXQ's format. The change came as quite a surprise to listeners who heard Vanilla Ice's "Ice, Ice, Baby" literally ripped off the air and smashed. The record was promptly replaced with a popular Garth Brooks' country tune, "Rodeo."

Those in the area industry took note when Boston's TA Communications sold the station to local interests who were apparently more in step with what the area needed. Program Director Mike Weis says the new format fills a void in the Rockford area.

"Hot Country (songs recorded after 1987) is one of the fastest growing formats in the country," says Weis, who noticed few complaints from listeners about the format change.

Rockford Magazine reported in its May 1992 issue the following new staffers: Carla Coulter (formerly of WKKN), Nick Shannon, Dan Sweeney, Ellen Brennan, and Casey O'Brien, all local announcers.

WXXQ's final playing of "Ice, Ice, Baby" was a fitting welcome to Carla, who sat on a block of ice all day for a WKKN promotion last year. Country music fans can enjoy their favorites on WJVL, Janesville, Wisconsin and WLUV, Loves Park as well as on WXXQ.

## WACI-WFPS

### WACKEY RADIO

For many years WFRL and its FM affiliate were the only stations operating in the city. This was true until November 1, 1971. County Circuit Judge Francis X. Mahoney and former WFRL announcer Ruth Mahoney, his wife, placed on the air WACI (referred to as WACKY) radio. The call letters were chosen after a ship's call. The vessel had been commissioned by Judge Mahoney. The Mahoney's thought that broadcasting would be their "nest egg," according to Ruth who revealed, in an interview, that competition was tight between both WFRL and WACI.

Merchants recognizing both local operations merely split their advertising dollars between the two stations. WACI's cut was not enough to keep the station going profit wise. The new station (92.1 mhz) was forced to locate outside of the city due to its protection of another station. This required WACI to set up operations west of the city at 5817 Highway 20. Two mobile buildings house the station's equipment with the tower location on the south side of the road.

"In those days, the station broadcasted almost anything to make money," Ruth recalls. "We even did little league games." Her son Michael announced the games and toyed with an announcing career, but later entered law practice like his father. Allan Newman was WACI's general manager in 1972.

The station was sold in September that year to Patrick J. and Katherine Broderick. Two other partners involved in the purchase in its early stages were Bill James and Bob Berry Doeffler. They were bought out by the Broderick's, according to Mrs. Mahoney. The station was sold again in 1981. Call letters were changed to WFPS in 1983, and Richard Weis, Freeport's Mayor, became general manager.

Today, the "Perfect Mix" FM 92 is owned by Friends Communications, Inc. Four partners are involved including Michael Brooks, who is general manager of the station, and Chuck Brooks, Gene Bryan, and Bob Elliot. Chuck Brooks is also general manager of WIND-WOJO in Chicago. WFPS's main announcers are Michael Sanborn, Jim Douglas, John Stevens (also an engineer) and Michelle Davis. Brad Hart does the news, and Chris O'Brian, who has been with the station for sometime, is sports director. Stevens has worked for most of the stations in the area. Michael Read (one time WFRL employee) writes copy for WFPS, Steve Wallace, Mike Burnette, and John Winqvist ran the front office in 1991.

The station offers the community plenty of promotions, does farm news, and airs syndicated "oldies" and Dick Clark's Top 40 program. A locally produced "blues" program is aired on the weekend. WFPS features coverage of local sporting events and is a member of the NBC Radio Network.

## FREEPORT'S RELIGIOUS TRANSLATOR

In 1978, three Freeport churches formed the Northwestern Illinois Radio Fellowship to bring programs from the Moody Bible Institute to the local community. The group was dissatisfied with the reception in the Freeport area from Rockford stations that carried some Moody programming. The trio of churches included the Park Hills Evangelical Free Church, the First Baptist Church, and the Zion CCC Church. The churches placed an FM translator operating at 88.3 mhz on the air in 1981. Its power output was 23 watts, according to Steve Postma (KA9ZSO), the translator's coordinator. All the equipment as well as the translator's 160 foot tower was housed at the Park Hills location.

Postma, an electrical engineer, stated that programming was first broadcast from WMBI-FM in Chicago. Later it was taken from WDLM-FM in Moline, Illinois. Glenn Rogerson, WDLM's chief engineer, stated that the churches chose WDLM because it stayed on the air early Monday morning when most stations go off the air for transmitter maintenance. When this happened, the Freeport Translator began rebroadcasting rock music from WDEK in DeKalb. Postma says that the translator was taken off the air around November of 1991 due to interference with Rockford's newest religious station WFEN. Since that time, a new frequency search took place.

At press time, the church group had filed with the FCC a petition to move their translator to 89.1 mhz and increase their power to 170 watts. In accordance with FCC rules, the license of the translator has been transferred to the Moody Bible Institute, since programming will be coming directly from a new satellite dish antenna to be installed at Park Hills. Permission to operate on 89.1 mhz was also received from WOC-TV in Davensport, Iowa, who gave up fringe coverage to the area.



The service represents the second attempt to bring Moody programming to the area. A similar operation owned by the First Evangelical Free Church in Rockford existed in 1989. Also, in the Midwest, a private individual operates an FM translator which brings Moody programming to the Valparaiso, Indiana area.

### RADIO IN OGLE COUNTY

Plans to replace two small FM stations on the air in the communities of Oregon and nearby Mount Morris are presently at a standstill. For the past seven years, two former broadcasters, Marvin Kunde and Charles Parish, have done much research and leg work attempting to bring local radio to the area.

However, a few years ago, when the FCC opened up additional low power allocations, they were quickly snatched up by outside speculators. One such national investor is believed to own some 200 construction permits under various names and corporations. These permits are then held onto for several months and then attempts are made to resell them to local interests. In most cases, the speculators have no desire in starting an actual radio service in these communities, but merely hold these towns at bay and serve as a middleman to dispense station licenses to interested local parties. In a sense, this raises the costs of station startup and puts the "little guy" at an already distinct disadvantage.

Both Kunde and Parish claim that they have been offered existing construction permits for as much as \$60,000. This is far higher than the original fees and start up costs if they had obtained the permit directly from the FCC. These men feel that these stations should remain dormant until some local person is prepared to start them.

Kunde speculates that if these stations ever got on the air, they would have difficulty surviving because of their close proximity to each other (about seven miles). Already, available advertising dollars are being taken from the market by Rochelle's WRHL (1966) and Polo's WLLT (1989), as well as local newspapers, cable TV, and the nearby Rockford media market.

Parish says that local people should operate local stations. He also shuns the idea of one speculator, whose idea was to place his tower as far north as possible to reach the Rockford market.

"What good would that do?" he protested. "There are already fine established stations in Rockford. Besides, it would be hard to cover the entire city anyway." Paris, who sells insurance and is a part-time professor at Northern Illinois University, would like to put his broadcasting expertise to work to establish a station just for the Mount Morris area. He has worked in the past at stations in Colorado and Iowa.

Marvin Kunde holds an FCC first class radio telephone license, is a graduate of Elkins Institute in Chicago, and has worked in the past at WIXN AM-FM in Dixon, Illinois, as well as other stations in Kokomo, Indiana and in cable TV. He currently serves as a chef in an area restaurant.

The pair have had numerous meetings with outside speculators concerning these dormant construction permits. The Oregon permit for WLFW, a 3,000 watt FM station at 106.1 mhz, is held by Edward Noeh of Des Plaines, Illinois. A Chicago TV weatherman holds the Mount Morris frequency (95.7 mhz), and reportedly told Parish and Kunde that he's looking for local investors. WFLD-TV's (Fox 32) Dan Dobrowolski says he's only applied for one other license in Wisconsin where he owns another business. He says that he has met with Parish and would like to get local people involved in his station, but no one has come forth with any offers to buy or invest in his operation. Dobrowolski, of Downers Grove, Illinois, told me that he is not a speculator and hopes to open the station sometime in the future. A format has not been decided upon.

Two other names also have resurfaced several times in connection with these "clandestine" permits. Parish says that during these seven years of haggling over these stations "not a spade of dirt has been turned over to begin construction on one." Both Kunde and Parish think that one station perched on the high ridges along the Rock River could serve the area well. Kunde is not in favor of seeing any local operation turn into another airing point for a satellite service.

"First the news department goes, then the sports reporter, then the morning man. Pretty soon the staff consists of only a general manager, a secretary, and a satellite dish," he observed.

The two men would like to bring "honest" radio to their localities, but presently cannot because of the FCC's lack of concern over who eventually obtains these construction permits, as well as what they term as "outside interference." Despite deregulation in recent years, the FCC still behaves like its predecessor, the old FCC of the 1920s, leaving truly interested citizens and speculators to fight amongst themselves for local station licenses. The one's with the most money, despite their addresses, always seem to win.

### WJOD

#### LOCATES IN HISTORIC GALENA TERRITORY

The picturesque countryside of Galena has just about everything a tourist or resident could want. Travelers often stop at Long Hollow Overlook Tower on Route 20 and gaze over the vivid colors of farm fields, gently rolling hills, and snare a distant glance of historical Galena some 15 miles to the Northwest.



Once in Galena, visitors will find that the town has changed very little from its early lead mining days that brought fame and prosperity to the community in 1848. Townsfolk have captured Galena's rich heritage, renovating a neighborhood of fashionable Main Street shops in the town's shopping district. There visitors can shop for everything from priceless antiques to a mere trinket to represent and remember their trip to Galena.

Grant's Museum greets its usual daily entourage of curious visitors in one of the few free attractions in the town. They not only see where the former President lived after the civil war, but learn about the man whose namesake is carried through some communities where U.S. 20 is still called the Ulysses S. Grant Highway.

While promoters of Galena wish to keep intact its historical atmosphere and quite active tourist trade, time refuses to stand still for the town. Riverboat gambling may soon dock on the Mississippi River at Galena, much to the dismay of many long time residents who do not wish to have their town's name tarnished by floating casinos.

One good addition to the community has been the construction of the area's first radio station, WJOD-FM, 107.5 mhz. WJOD signed on February 19, 1989 as an adult contemporary station, but quickly learned that a country music format would best serve the needs of the area. Its 6,000 watt signal reaches into the nearby populated area of Dubuque, Iowa, which is a needed sales market for the station to financially exist. Actually, WJOD has an effective radiated power of some 10,000 watts because its 320 foot tower is located on Horseshoe Mound on the southeast side of the town. It is the second highest point in Jo Davies County. WJOD's call letters are derived from the county which was named after a Civil War hero from Virginia.

Galena historian Daryl Watson says the station seems popular in the community despite its short duration. Only five people are employed there, including Bruce James Salzman, a former Dubuque radio executive who is the general manager and morning man at WJOD. Ken Peiffer is the afternoon music host and is the program director. Christine Wiener is the office manager. The station is owned by JDC Communications which is comprised of eight local investors. Jim Michaels and Ben Rosenthal were part of the management team in 1990, according to Broadcast Yearbook.

The station makes good use of its limited manpower. Frequent Saturday night dances are held and liver remote broadcasts are aired from a bar in Dubuque. Public service time is offered to community groups, and Dr. James Dobson's "Focus on the Family" broadcast airs Sunday mornings. Three daily newscasts in the morning are aired from the newsroom of KDUB-TV in Dubuque. The rest of the station's programming comes from Unistar Satellite Network, allowing WJOD to program country music 24 hours a day. It is also a CNN network affiliate.

WJOD's studios are located at 527 Bouthillier Street (named after a Galena ferryboat captain) in a remodeled warehouse complete with antique furnishings.

The station has become a popular addition to the community. It is believed to be the town's first radio operation, except for a number of amateur radio operators and some early enthusiasts who fashioned some of the first "catwhisker" sets made from galena crystals once readily found in the area. Galena's last lead mine closed in 1979.

WJOD should continue to prosper in the area by informing and entertaining folks on both sides of the Mississippi, as well as providing a friendly sound to the many tourists who visit Galena each year.

## ADDENDUM

### RELIGIOUS RADIO IN CHICAGO PAST AND PRESENT

Radio has always been an effective medium for broadcasting news, music, and information. Little did its inventors like Marconi, Edwin Armstrong, and Dr. Lee deForest realize it could be used to inspire and educate. It wasn't too long after the beginning of radio that various religious groups began to use radio as a means to evangelize. Large numbers of pulpit pounding and Bible thumping ministers graced the airwaves attempting to reach the masses and, sometimes, to do electronic panhandling on the side.

Today, the National Association of Religious Broadcaster's Annual Yearbook lists scores of religious stations and broadcasting companies, and the list continues to grow. Currently, there are over 1400 religious stations on the air in the U.S., an increase of 6.6% from 1989. This article highlights some of the area's earliest religious broadcasters.

In the Chicagoland area, one of the first religious stations was believed to have been WORD. It was owned by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah's Witnesses) and broadcasted with 5,000 watts from Batavia.

The station, operating around 1090 khz, was located in a farmhouse owned by Henry Janssen (later becoming an engineer at WGN). Under the leadership of one of the early founders, Judge Joseph F. Rutherford, WORD participated in the first worldwide network broadcast. Many local music programs were presented from the farmhouse until the station did like most suburban stations do: move to Chicago. Later the call letters became WCHI. (See WORD, WCHI)

Its old tower stood through the 1970s, until it was cannibalized for its scrap metal. Its cement pillars are still embedded in the backyard of a private residence near Batavia. The "WORD" went silent about 1931.

In 1924 Chicago's North Shore Congregational Church opened WPCC. The call letters stood for "We Preach Christ Crucified". John C. O'Hair was pastor of the church and often leveled radical blasts at individuals who were of other faiths. His 500 watt station's frequency was moved around several times, finally resting at 560 khz. The station was eliminated in 1931, clearing the airwaves for WIND which, at that time, was operating from Gary, Indiana.

Another early Chicago religious station was WJBT (Where Jesus Blessed Thousands). It featured Rev. Paul Rader and operated at 640 khz with 500 watts around 1930. The station was owned by John S. Boyd and did a few broadcasts from the Chicago Gospel Temple. WJBT was later absorbed by WBBM.

In 1925 WOCG, standing for Watch Our Church Grow, operated in Sycamore. During the mid 1920s, Rev. George Schutes opened WRBC (World Redeemed By Christ) from the Immanuel Lutheran Church in Valparaiso, Indiana. This 500 watt station lasted nearly five years before being forced off the air because of rising operating costs. The only early major religious stations to operate past 1930 were WMBI and WCBD.

WCBD began around 1923 operating at several frequencies, lastly ending up as a share-time partner of WMBI, and later broadcasting on Sundays on WAIT's old frequency of 820 khz. The Zion Christian Catholic Church operators of the 5,000 watt station once controlled the destiny and all business interests in the town of Zion which they founded in 1901. Controversial church overseer Wilbur Glenn Voliva is best associated with the station which produced many quality music and religious programs during its early years. A fire completely destroyed the station in 1937.

WCBD later operated on Sundays only on WAIT's frequency until the late 1950s. Today, the church's only broadcasting is their Sunday morning service on WNIZ-FM in Zion. WMBI started in 1926 and, owned by the Moody Bible Institute, continues as the oldest Chicagoland religious station today.

The development of radio in the Chicagoland area in the late 30's and early 40's seemed to slow down, although a handful of ministers continued to occupy the airwaves on Sunday. One of the more notable ones was Father Charles Coughlin of Detroit, who was aired locally on WHIP Hammond, Indiana. Coughlin's repeated racial remarks caused his removal from many of his network stations. WHIP, owned by Dr. George Courier and managed by Doris Keane, soon went off the air for a variety of other reasons (see WHIP).

Other 1940s era radio ministers were Rev. Carl S. Winters, Dr. G. E. Loman, and Rev. Floyd B. Johnson. "The Lutheran Hour" and the "All Nation's Pentacostal Church Service" were popular broadcasts. In Elgin Rev. Allen R. Blegen aired "The Lutheran Gospel Hour" (see earlier section). Rev. T. H. Lanes broadcasted over WMRO

in 1946. In the early 1950s, Dr. Preston Bradley of the People's Church had a regular nightly program on WGN and aired services over WJJD.

In the late 40's the Roman Catholic Arch Diocese of Chicago operated WFJL-FM. In recent years three other short lived religious operations folded quickly. WCFL (now WLUP-AM) tried religion after a failed "lifestyle" talk format. The station was owned for many years by the Chicago Federation of Labor. Chicago personality Kris Stevens handled program director duties in 1984. Evanston's WPRZ (WEAW) went silent in 1982 after nearly a year of operation. In recent years CLW (Christ, The Light of the World) Communications sold out well-liked WCRM Dundee to a utility company who added yet another rock station (WABT) to the city's already repetitive airwaves.

Today there still remains a flock of religious stations offering a variety of ministers, contemporary Christian music, and locally produced programs. These stations are labeled commercial (accepting advertising from non-objectionable products and services) to non-commercial which are funded by donations or backed by religious institutions.

Of all the religious stations in Chicago, WMBI AM-FM remains the oldest and largest. Beginning in 1926 with AM only, the Moody Bible Institute's stations have grown to a chain of several stations and provides affiliates and translators with programming from its own satellite network.

Henry Coleman Crowell is best credited with the beginnings of radio at Moody Bible Institute. A Yale educated engineer whose father was the founder of the Quaker Oats Company, Crowell successfully guided WMBI through numerous years of governmental frequency scrambles. At times it looked as though there would be no space or dial position for Moody's station. There were pressures from secular stations and a superstitious belief by some that radio was sinister in nature and not to be used for religious purposes. Crowell and his early group, along with Divine direction, persevered.

Moody students first performed on the air over WGES and WENR in 1923 before a share time frequency was available. Early studios were constructed in Smith Hall and a used 500 watt transmitter was purchased. On July 28, 1926, WMBI was finally able to begin its own broadcasting. A dedicatory program featured a talk by president Dr. James M. Gray and featured soloist T. J. Bittikofer and program director Wendell P. Loveless. Loveless read, "We dedicate this broadcasting station tonight as a witness that the church is the Body of which Christ is the Head, and that its mission is to carry the gospel of salvation to all men and to every nation under heaven."

Radio School of the Bible and a children's program, KYB Club, were soon started. Other commercial stations charged that WMBI interfered with their operations, but the Moody station was right where it was supposed to be on the dial and sent out its engineers free of charge to homes to adjust the primitive sets of the day. In 1927, when frequencies were reassigned again by the government, over 50,000 letters poured into Washington urging that a place be set aside on the dial for WMBI. WMBI shared its channel with several other stations including WCBD at several different dial positions before eventually arriving at 1110 khz, its present channel (broadcasting to local sunset).

FM operations began in 1942 with the country's first non-commercial religious station (W75C), in the old 40 mhz FM band. The call letters for a short time were WDLM, standing for the institutes founder Dwight L. Moody. Today, these call letters belong to the institute's Moline, Illinois station. Late in 1960, WMBI-FM was on the air to stay, shifting from 95.5 mhz to its present dial position at 90.1 mhz.

Through the years, WMBI AM-FM has been guided by other capable leaders and technicians including Dr. William Culbertson, Dr. George Sweeting, Dr. Joseph Stowell, Robert Neff, and long time news director Walter Carlson; A. P. Frye and Robert Caithamer, engineers. WMBI's AM transmitter and tower are located near Addison. (In the 1920s, they were located on top of buildings at the institute on LaSalle Street.)

Current station manager Tom Sommerville says WMBI is an adult-oriented non commercial religious station which receives 80% of its support through listener donations. WMBI, though not rated by Arbiton, shows strong figures in Burch in the 25-54 age groups. Half of WMBI's audience is under 45 years of age. The trend of AM Chicago radio has moved to talk over the years, prompting WMBI-AM to switch most of its special programs, including children's shows, to the AM side. WMBI also felt that there was not significant religious programming for Hispanics, prompting the station in 1980 to devote all of its Saturday air time to Spanish religious programmings. Andres Panasiuk is the Spanish coordinator.

One of Sommerville's goals is to increase the listeners awareness of WMBI. "There are so many other items that take up people's available time to listen to radio, WMBI would like to offer its 'Full Service' Christian

format to listeners and also keep them informed with news, information, traffic, and sports results. WMBI's prime purpose is to be a quality religious radio station with a positive sound," states Sommerville. One of the long time reasons for station success has been the fact that in the presentation of the Gospel, the station has never criticized other religions or persons of other faiths.

WMBI presents old and new religious music. Contemporary Christian music is selected for its adult audience. Listeners for many years have woken up with Bob Murfin's and Donald Cole's inspirational "Morning Clock" program. Jim Warren hosts "Prime Time America." Chris Fabry's "Open Line" is a long time favorite along with "Close Up" with Monte Larrick are some of the station's fine programs.

Many of WMBI's programs are found appealing and informative to non-religious or persons with differing religious backgrounds. A variety of well-known Christian speakers and programs are featured on WMBI and are available on the Moody Radio Network via satellite, none which have drawn national criticism.

Dating back to 1926 when friends donated \$2,600 for a used 500 watt transmitter, WMBI has gone forward to become a traditional sacred landmark on the Chicago radio dial. WMBI continues to combine quality programming, sincerity, and service to the Midwest, bringing the message of the Gospel into millions of households.

At the other end of the dial is Chicago's newest entry into Christian radio, WYLL (106.7 mhz) Des Plaines. Long known in radio circles as the "format of the month" station, new owners hope WYLL will have at last settled on a service that they feel will best benefit the Chicagoland area (former call letters were WYEN, WZRC, and WTWV). WYLL's program director Dave Gordon, who is a transplanted Hoosier from Terre Haute, hopes that the station will far exceed the work started by the former WCRM.

Beginning with a music only format, WYLL soon added well-known religious speakers including Dr. James Dobson, Dr. James Kennedy, and Dr. Charles Swindoll. The morning block of ministers and religious talk shows begin at 5:30 a.m. and runs to about 12:30 p.m. Contemporary Christian music programmed for ages 25-44 is featured the rest of the day. The station is owned by Salem Communications. The firm owns several other stations including one in the New York market. Gordon says that WYLL's music is fresh, crisp, and contemporary featuring such artists as Amy Grant, Michael W. Smith, Sandi Patti, Russ Taft, and Randy Stone. Interviews with the artists are often featured giving the listeners the opportunity to know the musicians themselves as well as their individual spirituality.

"WYLL is personality oriented," says Gordon. "Finishing 30th in the market earlier this year is just a start for this new station's quest for popularity and acceptance in the Chicago market."

It is a 50,000 watt station, more powerful than WCRM's 3,000 watts, but in defense of WCRM, former manager Hal Fisher stated that the station was making money when it was sold. Under Salem, WYLL hopes to improve its downtown signal and has added news and traffic reports. "You won't hear the Christian rock group 'Stryper', but you'll hear some fine dedicated inspirational entertainment that all ages can enjoy," adds Gordon.

Already WYLL has helped pack in and sell out dozens of contemporary Christian music concerts in the downtown area through promotions and ticket give aways. Studios of WYLL are located in the O'Hare Lake Office Plaza at 2400 East Devon Avenue in Des Plaines.

In Hammond, Indiana listeners can also tune to WYCA-FM at 92.3 mhz. WYCA offers contemporary Christian music along with a cross section of many local and national religious programs. The station began in 1955 as WJOB-FM (and WJIZ-FM) slowly twisting its way from a country Gospel station to its present day format. Its transmitter is located in nearby Burnham, Illinois.

Elsewhere on the radio dial in Illinois is Family Stations Inc., WJCH 91.9 mhz in Joliet. Owned by Harold Camping, the station provides an adult format of religious programs and music. WCFJ (Winning Chicago For Jesus) is located at 1470 khz and broadcasts from Ford Heights, Illinois (formerly East Chicago Heights, Illinois). WCFJ used to be a top 40 R&B station (WMPP) just a few years ago. It has a strong 1,000 watt signal across the city at night.

WNDZ 750 AM Lansing, Illinois, with its transmitter across the lake in Portage, Indiana, features local and national religious programming and contemporary religious music. It goes off the air at sunset, but has a FCC construction permit pending for additional hours of operation.

WWCA, 1270 khz, whose call letters once stood for "Working With the Calumet Area," dates back to 1949 when it was a long time news and information station until 1983. The station today is still located in Gary and features a varied format of religious programming.



Olivet Nazarene College's WONU (89.7 mhz) is now heard strong in the Chicago area thanks to its new 50,000 watt transmitter (located in Kankakee). The city of Rockford has three religious stations: WQFL, WGSL, and WFEN.

Two small stations, WETN (88.1 mhz) at Wheaton College and WMWA (88.5 mhz) at Glenview, owned by the Midwestern Academy of the New Church, offer some religious programming and classical music. WETN is very active in the community with other local programming, while WMWA is operated by students at Glenbrook High School at night.

Many Chicago stations have brokered out much time in the past to religious broadcasters. The National Association of Religious Broadcasters began moves in the 1940s to secure air time for religious programming and were later instrumental in requiring stations to sell time to ministers.

With the current day list of available stations, Chicagoland listeners are sure to find inspiration and comfort 24 hours a day. By the way, the Chicagoland area also has some other little known distinctions in the realm of religious broadcasting.

"Unshackled," a religious radio drama heard on hundreds of stations across the country, was first heard on WGN on September 23, 1950. Jack Odell, a former WCFL program director, produced this real life radio program that explores the lives of people who find religion to the benefit and betterment of their lives. John Gillies, organist Lucille Becker, Russ Reed, Jack Bivans, Harry Elders, Bob O'Donnell, Harry Saulnier, and many other actors have been heard on these programs. The series is produced at the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago. The public may view its live weekly taping at 4:30 p.m. on Saturday afternoons.

The oldest running Sunday morning church service continues to be St. Peter Lutheran Church in Joliet which has broadcasted on WJOL (formerly WCLS) since 1927.

### RADIO AFTER MIDNIGHT

While the majority of the city sleeps, there's a vast array of informative and interesting shows sure to please the most particular dial twister in the Chicagoland area. Whether one is an incurable insomniac, an all night taxi driver, or just like to stay up late, your radio could be your best company. You could become an activist, an informed consumer, or even a "midnight caller," by tuning in on these "off hour radio programs."

There's a whole line up of these programs after midnight, or early Sunday or Monday mornings, that can broaden your world of knowledge. Unfortunately, most of us are sleeping when they are on. Let's see what we are missing.

Since government deregulation, stations have seemed to opt for the littlest possible time for public service shows. Community announcements are "slickly" hidden over the beginnings of records on music stations, or run when commercial air time is hard to sell. But a few stations continue to boast an outstanding line up of thought-provoking and informative public service programs. But these are hidden under a veil of "off hours" programming. Nevertheless, they are there if we care to listen.

Some of these programs are aired when audiences are somewhat smaller, i.e. Sunday or Monday mornings, and yet public service directors insist that these programs receive lots of unexpected listener response.

Former WFYR and WMAQ public service director Patty Lawson says, "People are tired of moving out of the city seeking compatible living conditions and wish to stay here to help solve the city's problems." Many of the "off hours" programs do just that, namely center on city issues or publicize the efforts of special interest groups or programs. Shows like this include WTMX's "Page One," or WLIT's "Sunday Conversation."

Another group of public affairs programs deal with the financial world. Public Affairs Director Carol Friar of Chicago's Lite-FM (WLIT) says one of the station's most popular PA shows is "Money Makers" hosted by Lynn Moore at 7:30 a.m. Sundays. Friar says that the program has a large following of Sunday morning golfers who would rather be informed than entertained at that hour. Friar, incidently, has been at WLIT for 16 years and has seen the dent that deregulation has made into PA programming. During an era when the FCC has eliminated many of the old requirements for PA programs, Friar says that stations that maintain the same or add to their line up of PA programs stand a better chance of surviving license challenges at renewal time. "The FCC is always interested in the amount of time that broadcasters give to community service."

At WJJD/WJMK Public Service Director Tara Taylor lists "Chicago Viewpoint" with John Priester as one of the many fine PA programs examining the important news issues of the week. It is followed by Community

Calendar with Reese Rickards. The impressive list of PA programs also includes a number of shows produced by local health agencies and local universities. A few of these programs are listed.

WTMX-FM (MIX 102) Sundays

4:00 a.m. Insight (repeated at 6:00 a.m.)  
4:15 a.m. Words of Hope (repeated at 6:15 a.m.)  
4:30 a.m. Page One (Jewish program)  
5:00 a.m. Master Control  
5:25 a.m. Viewpoint with Barry Keefe  
6:30 a.m. Vantage Point (NE University)  
7:00 a.m. Clear Health Care  
7:30 a.m. Mormon Tabernacle Choir

WLIT-FM (LITE 94) Sundays

5:30 a.m. Sunday Conversation with Carol Friar  
6:00 a.m. Consumer Network with Anne Hengehold  
6:30 a.m. Sportlite with Gene Honda  
7:00 a.m. Back to God Hour  
7:30 a.m. Money Makers with Lynn More

WFYR-FM (Chicago's Fire) Saturdays

(Now known as WWBZ)  
7:00 a.m. In Focus with Dan Parker/Ron Davis

Sundays

6:30 a.m. New Day Chicago with Tom Edwards

WJMK-FM (MAGIC 104) Sundays

4:55 a.m. Chicago Viewpoint with John Priester  
5:25 a.m. American Focus  
5:55 a.m. Community Calendar with Reese Rickards  
10:00 p.m. Chicago Viewpoint (repeat)  
10:30 p.m. Lutheran Vespers  
11:00 p.m. American Focus  
11:30 p.m. Community Accents (Loyola University)  
12:00 a.m. Dialogue (UIC)  
12:30 a.m. Illinois Job Service  
12:40 a.m. Community Calendar

Listeners wanting information on these and other PA programs on Chicago radio stations can obtain a copy of the Citizens Guide to Chicago Broadcasters. Produced by the Community Media Workshop, the book lists all PA programs, contact persons, and show guidelines. For information on this publication, call or write Hank DeZutter at Malcolm X College, 1900 West Van Buren, Chicago, Illinois 60612; or call 312-942-0909, Ext. 421.

It has often been said that "one never knows who's listening out there." This is even true after midnight, where many people in all walks of life choose or must be up during these times. Focusing on this special audience are the numerous talk show hosts who grace the radio dial with their own brand of wit and wisdom. "Even at those hours, you've got to be good," explains former WMAQ late night talk show host Jim Hill. Hill has made a career out of working off hours, and he is currently the morning weatherman on WMAQ-TV's "News at Sunrise." He did a late night show on the former NBC radio outlet on and off for nearly 14 years.

Hill is one of the true gentlemen of the business, expressing a unique brand of genuine broadcasting politeness along with accuracy and timeliness of his meteorological deliveries. Hill comes off the tube as "being everyone's friend, and you feel you know him personally." Viewers will long remember Hill as the regular WNBQ-TV (before WMAQ-TV) evening weatherman. The segment was introduced by a slide with a bird on a mailbox, sponsored by a milk company. You won't see his picture at the broadcasting museum, but it should be posted there with the city's greats.

During those years, Jim did the weather on TV, then went over to the radio side for his all night program. Formally a jazz show, it later developed into a more conversational program with callers and special guests. It was

the way Hill felt comfortable doing the program, helping him keep tuned to the city. Hill followed a trail of other distinguished WMAQ talk show figures, "Rhyiming" Daddy-O Daylie, Tom Duggan, and Jack Eigen to the NBC mike at night.

In those days (late 50's-early 60's) overnight radio was experimental. However, WIND had been on all night during the World War II years to entertain shift workers. A program called the "Witching Hour" aired at midnight in the 50's. Most stations were off the air by 2:30 a.m., but later stations learned that a wide audience was still awake and eager to listen all night and participate in programs. WMAQ's powerful 50,000 watts reaches many points east, and Jim often received calls from Puerto Rico, and even the Philippines to the west. Hill admits that while he can interview anyone, and has, he mostly enjoys just talking to everyday people--people who work shift work, handicapped people, and some folks who just can't sleep at night.

"I like spirited people, no matter what their viewpoint is," Hill relates, as he often took an opposite viewpoint just to get callers going. "They're not a special audience. Nothing different has to be done to entertain late night audiences. They're just the people tuned in at that hour. There are lots of fine, intelligent people out there even after midnight that I have had the pleasure of talking with."

Hill looked back on his years on late night radio as a rewarding experience to get close to or help people anyway he could. He probably could be called the least controversial of all the talk show hosts that ever aired in the city. It was like talking to a friend. On the other hand, there was Jack Eigen.

"Everybody hated Jack," Hill explains. "I would hear callers say, 'I wouldn't listen to Eigen if they paid me a thousand dollars. Did you hear what he said last night?'"

"The solution is simple," relates Hill. "If you don't like what's on, change the channel." This response came when asked about his opinions of the current "shock radio" craze now sweeping many markets. This early riser has never seen the television show "Midnight Caller" to compare it to his brand of call in show. If it's on prime time, it's his sleep time because of his required early arrival at the station in the morning.

Hill began his career at stations in Knoxville and Chattanooga, Tennessee, living wherever his father was stationed in the service at the time. Before coming to Chicago he made \$52.50 a week working for small stations for some eight years and seemed to be going nowhere in radio. He went flat as a recording artist for Decca Records in the 50's before landing an announcing job at WMAQ in 1956.

Over the years the greatest compliments Jim has received from listeners have been comments that it seemed like he was giving a lesson in meteorology every time he did the weather. Some made accusations that during talk shows he was trying to turn Chicago into a small town. "Folksy radio," identifying with listeners and trying to make them feel that what they were saying was important, has been the hallmark of Jim Hill's long and warm career in Chicago. Today, Hill works exclusively on WMAQ-TV at their new NBC Towers Building and is one of the last of the station's long line of staff announcers.

"There were 15 at one time, now there are only two," cites Hill, who has escaped network cutbacks. The booth announcing duties are shared with Ed Grennan, the former host of channel 5's "It's Academic," a popular high school quiz show in the 60's.

Hill describes himself as an audio didactic weatherman, or a weather-science journalist. He knows weather from experience and speaks with fatherly authority when he delivers it. "Graphics has turned TV weather reporting into a show." Gone are the hand drawn maps and actual weather gauges used by P. J. Hoff. Hill looks up to another long time weather friend, Harry Volkman, who, like many early weather forecasters, used to "tap on the barometer" to show the audience that it was working. All three have had many fine years on TV and on radio.

Hill has no weather equipment at home except his "Maxwell House Rain Gauge," a coffee can inserted in the ground to measure overnight rainfall. His daily duties include doing the morning weather, reading commercial tags, and station breaks. His voice shows up on radio commercials occasionally. Jim kiddingly is asked, when his voice is heard (which is at all hours of the day), if it is live or taped? He replies, "If there are no mistakes, it's a tape."

Certainly, NBC Chicago has made no mistake in keeping one of the finest and hard working city radio and television personalities in Hill. When he's not busy with the weather, he's probably hard at work helping NBC work out some of their bugs at their new building. Since Hill, radio late night talk show hosts have come and gone. They include a long list with the likes of Russell Salter (WIND), Millard Hansen (WBBM), and many others.

From 1958 to 1971 WGN's Franklyn MacCormack kept listeners company on the "Meister Brau Showcase." MacCormack's career goes back long before his all night show prior to 1940. He appeared on the "Lady Esther Serenade" program with orchestra leader Wayne King over Mutual (WGN). It was with King that MacCormack recorded the favorite "Melody of Love" which included Franklyn's reading of the sentimental Mary Carolyn Davies' poem "Why I Love You." A copy of this album was found recently at a local yard sale for one dollar. The seller apparently did not know the value of this record.



MacCormack became ill during his program on the evening of June 12, 1971, and passed away the next afternoon. Years before announcer Guy Wallace had done nightly poetic readings on WGN. Born in 1906 in Waterloo, Iowa, he resided with his wife Barbara, his former secretary, in Lake Zurich.

MacCormack's poetic readings and soft music are still missed from the evening radio dial today. A parade of other deep voiced announcers including Jay Andres have attempted to fill his shoes over the years. WGN's Floyd Brown offers good company and inspiration early Monday mornings, and then there's Mike Rapchak's unbeatable big band music and wit beginning at 11:30 p.m. Saturday nights (as of this writing).

WLS's Tom Snyder is one of the few talk show hosts who actually allows listeners to speak their peace instead of being cut off or dominated by the host. On WGN it's Chicago's Eddie Schwartz (formerly of WIND), a big man with an even bigger heart. With Eddie you never know if you're on the air or not when he calls. Just ask some of the non-suspecting state highway dispatchers during a snowstorm. Eddie gets to the bottom of a story faster than he gets to the bottom of a soup bowl. Speaking of food, his annual holiday food drive brings in truckloads of necessities for the less fortunate, while spreading good cheer among the drive's many volunteers. Schwartz moved to WLUP in May of 1992.

All night radio included WSWS's "Witching Hour" program. Riley Jackson hosted WIND's "Night Watch" program and was replaced by Russell Salter. In the late 50's to some current times, many others have been heard during late hours on Chicago Radio. C.E.T.'s Bill O'Connor interviewed celebrities from Gibby's Restaurant on WENR. The list also includes Jerry Williams, John Calloway, John Conrad, Don Cannon, Art Hellyer, Dan Sorkin, Norm Pierce, Darrel Peters, Jay Andres (the Voice of American Airlines), Mal Bellairs, Jack Stockton, Larry Burrell, Bob Porter, Myron (Mike) Wallace and Buff Cobb (who did the "Chez Show"), Jim Lounsbury, Larry the Legend, Daddy-O Daylie, Steve King, and Fred Sander's Trucker Show on WMAQ. Marty Hogan, Eddie Hubbard, and George Stone also make up the endless list. John Doremus, John Mallow, and Paul Davis were seemingly always on hand a bit earlier in the evening. Then there were all night newsmen Millard Hansen and Bill Grisley.

Nationally, Larry King has been a growing favorite among all night radio fans. His eleven year hitch on Mutual's "The Larry King Show" has brought more stars, celebrities, and household names into the homes of local listeners than any other late night radio host. King, now 59 (same age as Jim Hill), has literally pulled himself up to the high ranks of radio without the benefits of lots of schooling and a whole list of fancy addresses of previous employment. Born Larry Ziegler, his start came sweeping floors in a small Miami radio station, later becoming a disc jockey and talk show host.

Since 1978, Mutual has never regretted hiring Larry who has seen his list of affiliates grow to over 400 stations. King's secret appears to be his ability to listen. In a March 10, 1980 biography in People magazine, celebrities say "he never loses the thread of a conversation meanwhile gently stripping his guest of their self-consciousness."

People seem to be comfortable and not intimidated on his programs. King admits that he asks questions of his guests that he wants to know the answers to himself. In Time (July 22, 1988) King stated, "I hate to ask questions that I know the answers to; and have never been afraid to ask a dumb question, it just might be the one that someone might want the answer to, but doesn't call in."

Who are the callers? Naturally, most have at least some sense of intelligence which reflects upon the quality of the host. King never incites his listeners as a "shock radio" host would. He admits in a 1984 U.S. News and World Report story that of all the listeners he has, only one percent actually call, taking their one chance to speak out on a subject, or talk to a celebrity. King does little to prepare for his programs, but is like most good talk show hosts, well versed on a variety of subjects including sports. Having a passion for the old Brooklyn Dodgers, he often fields questions on baseball in between calls on national and international issues.

"What are the chances of a particular team winning the pennant?" a caller asks.

"Not enough pitching, too many injuries," then King offers a short summary and comparison of key players before going on to other calls about abortion or crowded jails. Both King and Hill agree that abortion is a losing subject to use. "No one ever wins those discussions," Hill admits.

While enjoying a successful TV career with CNN and the Voice of America, King says that "radio is the theater of the mind; all you need is imagination."

On looks, Larry replies, "In radio you don't have to worry about it, if you are bald, fat, or unappealing, but have a good voice, you can be effective" (U.S. News).

In Chicago several stations have tried the "Larry King Show." He was on WXEZ and WFYR last year and, until recently, was aired along with the "wind up mouths" at WLUP-AM. Recently, King switched to WGCI-AM which has a mediocre signal around the city at night. King can be heard outside the city on WROK (1440) Rockford, WCSJ (1550) Morris, and WJKL-FM (94.3) Elgin. With WJKL's new popular music format station, personnel have indicated that they may drop King when his contract expires this fall. Meanwhile, WJKL's AM affiliate, WRMN, has opted for "Talknet" dropping King last year. It will be interesting to see how King does against



WLS's all talk format. As of this date, King is still going strong on WJKL (carried until 2 a.m.) and is being promoted by the station.

In short, there are many good things to listen for on radio during off hours besides annoying sex shows, ethnic programs, and music. Good listening is still available during a time when most people are asleep, or think that radio is nothing more than "dead air" after midnight. Your radio can be your best friend 24 hours a day.

### Radio and Electronic Manufacturing in the Elgin Area

No book on radio or electronics can ever be complete in the Fox Valley or any other area. The industry not only keeps changing, but new names seem to surface quite often. These include past and present radio personalities that I have not met, as well as a host of companies and business places that sold radio sets and parts. Area city directories list countless stores, shops, and garages that sold early radio sets. Some are mentioned in this work. Again the author apologizes, for missing any names of local importance.

In the recent past, Elgin was briefly the home of the Motorola Company from 1966-1970. The firm occupied what is now the distribution headquarters of the Leeward's Company, 1200 St. Charles Street (Route 25) on the far south side of Elgin. This large building was formerly the McGraw-Edison Plant which manufactured toasters and other appliances. Max McGraw's company, which later became Toastmaster, moved to an industrial park just south of I-90 in the late 1960s.

Motorola was founded by Paul V. Galvin in 1928. The company first made storage batteries under the name Galvin Manufacturing Company, developing its first car radio in 1930. Motorola research director Eric Schuster says the firm changed its name to Motorola around 1947. The new trademark combine the words motor (for car) and Victrola (for music) to create a name that sort of sounded like "music on wheels" to promote its car radios. Motorola, which manufactured mostly televisions in the Elgin plant, sold the site to Leeward's in 1970. Motorola then moved to its present sprawling complex at 1297 East Algonquin Road in Schaumburg. Robert W. Galvin, Paul's son, is chairman of the firm's executive committee. George M. C. Fisher is Motorola's chairman of the board and chief executive officer.

In 1991, the company opened a museum to highlight its many products. The museum is directed by Sharon Darling. Today, Motorola is a leader in the telecommunications industry.

Two other early radio firms that should be included in this work are the Majestic Radio Company, and Continental Electric. These companies date back to the 1930s, but only portions of one exist today. Richardson Electronics, Ltd., in recent years, acquired what was once Continental, or as it was known in later years as Cetron. (see Richardson Electronics)

Majestic's claim to the Fox Valley was its short time location in Elgin at the Chicago Rawhide Plant at 900 North State Street (Rt. 31). The old buildings in the rear of the complex were built in the 1930s to manufacture war materials. Majestic moved there in 1947 and was bankrupt again by 1951.

Actually, Majestic was an old name on a new company. The firm was first formed in 1928 to manufacture exquisite radio sets. Bertram J. Grigsby, an auto parts store manager and William C. Grunow, the firm's first auditor ran Majestic. Grunow owned a lavish 400 acre homesite in River Forest and a farm in Barrington. Some sets also carried a Grigsby-Grunow label. Majestic of Chicago went bankrupt in 1936 and was reorganized by the Davega Stores. The new company turned a profit only once from 1936 to 1940.

By the late 1940s, Majestic's president was E. A. Tracey of Algonquin. Phonograph records were also made in the Elgin plant. The site produced copies of bandleader Eddy Howard's hit "My Adobe Hacienda" in 1947. In the past the "Majestic" name has been used by several different companies. Majestic also operated either a plant or a warehouse which is listed in old St. Charles city directories. The firm's other location was in Wayne Township near the DuPage Airport in 1947.

Elgin experimenter E. J. Wisner has several Majestic sets in his collection including, a model 200 which was built in 1929. Majestic's can also be found in Dr. Muchow's Radio Museum. The sets are characterized by their large floor model cabinets and stylish wooden legs.

### Suburban Transmitter Locations

Many Chicago stations have located their towers and transmitters in suburban areas which have stood in these spots for many years. They are mentioned here because of their locations within the scope of this book. Each is a major station which would require a separate book to acknowledge their story and broadcasting accomplishments over the years.

For starters, WGN Chicago maintains their transmitter site near the I-290 expressway south of Schaumburg. The station moved from its Elgin location in 1948. Just up the road is the WBBM towers, another powerful Chicago station. WBBM formerly had transmitter locations at the Broadmoor Hotel in Chicago and in north suburban Glenview. WBBM absorbed another smaller Chicago station, WJBT, in March of 1929. WJBT was owned by John

S. Boyd, secretary of the Union Stockyards. Boyd had operated his speculative station at several locations on the same frequency as WBBM. Some religious programs were presented from the Chicago Gospel Temple. WBBM was also known as the Stewart-Warner station in 1931. (The call letters stood for We Broadcast Better Music.)

For many years it broadcasted from the Wrigley Building in Chicago. Old time radio show host Chuck Schaden has written an excellent book on this CBS station. It is available through the Museum of Broadcast Communications in Chicago where Schaden does his Saturday radio show.

Other major Chicago stations which have located their transmitters in suburban areas include WMAQ which is located at 23W033 Army Trail Road about a half mile east of Bloomingdale Road at Whitman Drive in Bloomingdale. Chief Engineer Margret Bryant says that two towers are on the property. The self-supporting one was moved from New York after the 1939 World's Fair. It was originally used to transmit TV pictures for RCA. After being in storage for a number of years, it was erected in 1951 by NBC.

The second tower, a "guide" tower, also fell over that year. Only one tower is used. WMAQ was formerly operated by the Chicago Herald and Examiner newspapers. It was the combination of two older stations, WGU and WQJ. The site was purchased by NBC from Westinghouse in 1934, who had operated KYW and KFKX at this site. The original KYW site was designed by Lt. George A. Sim, an instructor at Central Station of Chicago. Westinghouse then moved its KYW to Philadelphia and later Cleveland. Westinghouse repurchased the site in 1989, bringing its "All News" format to Chicago to compete with WBBM.

Two other Chicago stations utilize suburban transmitter sites. They are WLUP (formerly WCFL) which is located just off Ogden Avenue in Downers Grove, and WMBI which moved from atop the Moody Bible Institute to Addison in 1928. A large tower for navigational station KDA stood in Maywood near the present day location of Hines Hospital in the 1930s. WJJD's transmitter site is near Des Plaines.

In recent years Chicago station WPNT-FM (formerly WFMF, WLOO, WXEZ) utilized an AM transmitter site for its WCZE (Cozy) operation. WPNT (The Point), a Chicago station owned by Century Broadcasting, acquired this site at Church Road and Grand Avenue in Elmhurst in 1979. This was formerly the site of an old Chicago station WAIT (call now used by a Crystal Lake station).

Overlooking the I-290 expressway near Route 83, four directional towers once stood on this property. One of the towers was knocked down in 1948 by an airplane. Stubs or portions of four pillars from an old 5,000 watt transmitting tower are located in the northwest corner of the land. WAIT and WCBD used this beginning around 1941.

In January of 1991, the AM towers were taken down by WPNT after simulcasting its programming on both 100.3 mhz and 820 khz. Century stated that they were looking for a better site for their AM operation, but would not comment any further on their intentions.

The mystery of what Century Broadcasting was going to do with its silent WPNT-AM was finally solved late in 1991. On December 3rd the FCC approved the transfer of WPNT-AM to Diamond Broadcasters, Inc. of Chicago. Diamond also owns Chicago stations WXRT-FM and WSBC-AM. Daniel Lee is president of Diamond.

One of the new station's program hosts is Dan McNeil, formerly of WLUP. Other moderators are Mike North, Tom Shaer, Mike Murphy, former Chicago Bear Dan Jiggetts, and Chicago talk show host Dave Baum. Approval was given to move the station from its former Elmhurst site near I-290 and Route 83 at Church Street to 4949 West Belmont Avenue in Chicago (at WXRT).

Diamond obtained the call letters WSCR, standing for "The Score," sportsradio 820, according to Chris Scott of Crain's Chicago Business. The new station features an all sports talk format. WSCR operates on 820 khz (daytime only). Broadcasts began in January of 1992.

WKDC Elmhurst remains the only commercial station, actually located in DuPage county.

In other developments, La Grange's WTAQ has constructed six new towers just off the I-294 tollway in Alsip. WOPA (formerly WMXM), a new spanish station in Chicago, has set up new towers near 103rd and the Calumet Expressway. Another Chicago station, WJPC-AM, has a directional set up near Calumet City.

One operation has completely left the area. This is the Satellite Music Network (SMN), formerly located in a small shopping center in Mokena, Illinois. This is west of WLS's Tinley Park tower.

In late 1990, SMN decided to combine their operations and move to Texas. All antennas and satellite dishes were disconnected. The firm's local engineer was Art Reis (K9XI) who also operated his 220 mhz ham station repeater at this site. Reis continues to edit his publication "220 Notes" and has mounted a campaign to save the 220 ham band for amateur radio.

### Low Powered Utility Stations

Over the last few years, a number of low powered "specialized stations" have sprung up on the far ends of the AM dial. These stations exist for informational purposes only and have very short range. The Illinois Department of Transportation operates six one-watt or less transmitters along the Chicago Expressways that provide

computer traffic information for motorists. These stations operate at 530 khz and 1610 khz and are programmed from IDOT's office in Schaumburg. The author is the current computerized voice of the system.

For a short time Brookfield Zoo operated such a station in 1987 at 1610 khz. The Lake County-Indiana Department of Tourism operates a travel and current events station at 530 khz in the Hammond area. There is also a similar station located for travelers motoring in the Starved Rock State Park Area near Ottawa, Illinois. Several Chicago area towns now operate low wattage stations at 1620 khz to broadcast storm information. Great America Theme Park utilized a similar service near Gurnee, Illinois for a short time in 1989. The park broadcasted information about its facilities for a 20 mile radius on 1030 khz at night (over WNVR). The "Great AM" lasted just one year.

### Profile of Herb Howard

When you hear your favorite traffic reporter say, "on the outbound Kennedy downtown to O'Hare its 55 minutes", much thought, calculation, and computerization, made the above statement possible. It is though, little encouragement to the motorist who's temper and radiator are beginning to boil over at the same time.

In the early 60's, Chicago radio stations knew the city had traffic problems, and were peering from roof tops searching for a way to give accurate travel information to their audiences. WGN began using helicopters. Flying officers Len Baldi and Irv Hayden were killed in separate tragic accidents in 1960 and 1971.

Former WBBM radio traffic reporter Herb Howard says, "Back in those days, the words 'heavy' and 'congested' became tired adjectives in describing a routine rush hour." Then WBBM news director Van Gordon Sauter commissioned (told) Howard to come up with a better system. Sauter went on to become president of CBS news; Howard went to work on his new project.

Herb had been with WBBM, since 1965, having come to Chicago with veteran talk show host Jerry Williams. Herb had been his producer at WMEX, in Boston. Williams came to Chi-town when WBBM changed their long time motto and format from "We Broadcast Better Music" to "WBBM, The Talk of Chicago." An all news format was installed. Herb Howard produced Rick Weaver's "Sports Line," the Blackhawks' interview show with Brent Musburger, "Ask A Banker," and Williams' talk show. The news staff then featured channel 11's John Calloway and Frank Beeman. Turning a music station into a news/talk station wasn't easy the first few months.

One afternoon newscaster hurriedly read through 15 minutes of newscopy in 5 1/2 minutes, then asked over the intercom, "Now what do I do?" Besides giving the time and weather every 60 seconds, the announcer read from magazines laying around the station to fill the quarter hour. On another occasion, Howard recalls airing an hour speech of then President Richard Nixon. When the speech was finally over, the news resumed, and the first story was about Nixon featuring an audio-cut from his speech. During the cut, the newscaster, not knowing his microphone was still on, lamented "we just heard an hour of this 'expletive'; now he's back on." Afterward, the newscaster apologetically resigned.

News and talk shows like Jerry Williams quickly moved WBBM up the ratings. Williams, who's last appearance in Chicago ended up in a fight and face wash on the Oprah Winfrey Show, is back in Boston. Howard became one of the city's best known and liked traffic reporters.

The problem of setting up a workable system took three years of effort working with Joe McDermott of the Illinois Department Transportation. The state had installed pavement sensors on a small section of the Eisenhower Expressway. The data gleaned was used to calculate traffic volume and forecast when road repairs would be needed. Howard set up a working model, driving cars down 50,000 miles of expressways and utilizing 3,000 man hours. Cars departed at five minute intervals. Vehicles were driven in various lanes under differing conditions. Their travel times were carefully noted. Information gathered during these simulations which also included weather conditions, lane closures, and travel hazards were factored into the states' computer system. Sensors were installed over 254 miles of the metro expressway system, and somewhat, magically, out popped computer congestion limits, every 5 minutes and later updated travel times, every minute. WBBM became the first station to offer precise traffic information to the motoring public.

A small room on the second floor of WBBM studios, at 630 North McClurg Court, was set up to report the traffic. Much later, traffic reports were done from the Sears Skydeck. The most likely person to do the traffic reports was Herb. He understood the system and became an instant authority on radio traffic reporting. Herb today laughs and says that "traffic was the only way this gravelly voice could get on the air." Actually, Herb has a pleasant grandfather-like voice. In later, years Howard split the traffic duties with Herb doing the afternoons and Barry Edwards doing the morning rush hour.

Except for a three year stay working as an investigator for the State's Attorney's Office, Herb reported traffic on WBBM from 1971 to 1988. One can easily see why people enjoy Herb so much. One night as a bunch of Shadow Traffic reporters were relaxing at Danno's Bucket O'Suds on Cicero Avenue, Herb stood up and started telling some of his favorite radio stories. Other couples and patrons at the bar stopped their conversations and began to listen with interest as Herb related how radio used to be, much to the delight of his new captured audience.



Danno's was famous for impromptu jazz discussions, having played host to numerous jazz remotes on WVVX with the jazz philosopher Joe Danno and Brad Saul.

Today humble Herb has a new job as director of the areas Cellular 999 program for car phone users. A recent three year study showed that 60 percent of all car phones in the country had been installed and currently operate in the Chicagoland area. Cellular 999 utilizes these 120,000 pairs of roving eyes and encourages them to report highway incidents by making a free call to the program's headquarters in Schaumburg. Howard says that before there was no uniform way that Ameritech or Cellular One car phone users could make direct 911 calls to report emergencies to the proper authorities. Now Cellular 999 operators receive the calls and dispatch the information to appropriate municipalities.

The program has already paid for itself in being instrumental in saving the life of an individual who was having a heart attack at an athletic field near Winfield. During the incident, a nearby car phone was the only available communication. Cellular 999 was called and paramedics responded, bringing the victim to DuPage County Hospital. This person is alive today.

Sometime in October, the 200,000th car phone will be installed, possibly in Chicago, creating more eyes for highway problems. Car phone users are encouraged to use the free system and will be reminded this fall by signs, handbills, and radio and TV spots, by Chicago Bears head coach Mike Ditka and Governor Jim Thompson.

Herb Howard likes his new job and enjoys being able to continue to serve the motoring public. Nancy Sitarz is the program's assistant. (In 1990, the Illinois Department of Transportation took over this service.)

### Satellite Programming, Wave of the Future

The happy sound of your favorite disc jockey who "makes with the platters and the chatter" gives you the latest time and temp and swears he knows you, maybe a thousand miles away, in some distant city. Tucked away in some downtown Dallas office building surrounded by uplinks, antennas, and satellite dishes, or shrouded by the Los Angeles smog, overlooking the adjacent bay he or she is actually a "network" programmer catering to hundreds of stations at once. Try to invite him to emcee your next high school dance or local town promotion, and you'll get an ambiguous response, if at all. Even if the announcer wanted to be the next guest speaker at your town's annual celebration of "Cheese Days," or the local observance of the "Pride of the Fox Festival," he couldn't honor coast to coast appearances. Then how does he know, or even care, about what goes on in your area? The answer is "mechanicals," and this has led to the airwaves of the future: Satellite Programming.

Decisions like this are probably made in the smokey backrooms of local stations where anxious managements are seeking a way to raise cash flow and eliminate overhead. This is usually done at the cost of hiring and maintaining local staffers. Whatever staff left merely "babysits" while doing other station duties, like selling advertising or, hopefully, writing local news.

The station, in effect, only exists to rebroadcast satellite programming. If the station loses its link due to a storm or malfunction it merely signs off. Most of these operations do not have the capacity to do any other type of programming, except maybe simulcast. A few other stations use local "computerized" announcers and achieve the same satellite type format.

Northwest Indiana engineer Gordon Boss says many new stations today are nothing more than a control board and a satellite dish. A secretary does the logs and inserts the right tapes in its mechanical rotation. Gone are human's who actually once played the records and occupied a time slot at the station. Some operations like WLUV-FM in Loves Park, Illinois, does not even have turntables reel to reel tape machines, or CD players in its studio. It was noted last year during a storm that a local satellite programmed station merely signed off when it lost its downlink. What a better time to serve the public when threatening weather is approaching? Despite these isolated incidents or lack of important equipment Satellite Programming is quickly invading many markets across the country.

How does it work? The programs are simply picked up by a dish, processed through a control board (once operated manually), then sent out over the air over the local channel. If the disc jockey is on the other side of the country, how can he do hundreds of station breaks simultaneously, or know if the area's weather is lousy?

"It's easy. Mechanics," says one broadcaster.

About ten seconds before the end of a song, the announcer activates a tone which sets off a tape machine in the local station. The tape plays a "tag" recorded by the announcer mentioning the station's call letters, logo, spot on the dial, etc. The taped announcement is then followed by the same announcer this time live, to make some comment about the music, or to wish you a "Happy Groundhog's Day," or some other generic comment. What he says has to be very general in nature so it fits in all formats and time zones where the program is heard.

How does he do the weather? Your local station sends him a list of general scripts that say, "rain today, high in the 40's, complete weather coming up," or "fog expected near the lake tonight." Community announcements are handled the same way and voiced in advance by the announcer and inserted by the "babysitter" where appropriate. Write the disc jockey a letter and it comes back on local station letterhead, or course, supplied by the station.



The key to this electronic masquerade is listening for the difference in volume and voice fluctuations at the end of the songs. If there is a definite difference in the station's local pitch or tag and in the continued voice of the announcer after a record, it's a good chance you are listening to a satellite service over your local radio station.

Other keys to watch for include noticing when someone wins a contest, the listener's town is never mentioned. That's because they're probably not from your area and got through quicker on the set-ups 800 number. If the time is given, it's mentioned as "something" past the hour. Taking the time and temps away from most motor mouths leaves them only with lists of obscure facts, celebrity birthdays and giving directions on such subjects as how to fillet a squid for dinner.

Yet some station owners say it's good programming and has increased revenue and ratings in some markets. Rockford's WRWC moved from oblivion to fourth place in a market of seven stations this past summer. Owners enjoy leaving music programming to professionals. As one executive once stated, "A disc jockey is the most unproductive person on the staff." However, try to equate that to a former local announcer who planned his daily program, made guest appearances, and promoted area events. He's now using his gift of gab to sell shoes or appliances on commission, or now segues through the local soup line.

But for many other stations that still believe in people, actual flesh and blood run the controls, promote and appear at area events, and fight the same traffic to work as we do.

Another station owner says, "People are our most important asset, our listeners are not robots, so we're not going to entertain them with any."

But you be the judge. There is satellite programming in our area on a couple of stations. With this information, can you figure out on which ones? Hint: it's the one's that play the most music and whose announcers can't think of enough important things to say.

## EPILOGUE

This ends our summary of the suburban radio stations around the Chicagoland area. Left to someone else is the challenge of writing about the stations in the "Windy City." Any one of the Chicago stations could generate enough staff, pictures, facts, and information for an individual work. Chuck Schaden's book on WBBM is a good example. Anyone getting a hold of the old Prairie Farmer Magazines could do an excellent book on WLS.

All through this book there were some interesting trends that should be restated here that were not so obvious when this work was begun in 1986.

In most towns studied, the new fascination of radio was introduced to the community through experimenters and amateur radio operators. Radio and listening groups formed by clubs and churches taught youngsters electronics. Some of these students built the town's early stations and pioneered the first programs. With so many stations on the air, the government and big business gradually consolidated most operations into the station and frequency assignments that are in effect today.

In the early 50's, a second charge into radio was experienced by another group of businessmen who attempted to cash in on the advantages and future of FM broadcasting. Without enough sets, advertisers, and a successful sister AM station, many of these early FM broadcasters went belly up in their first few years of operation. Television also hurt this industry. FM has bounced back and is more successful than AM. (Most FM stations are in stereo today, except some educational outlets.)

What about AM? What goes through the minds of broadcast executives who can only see their towers blinking on and off in the distance at night, but cannot hear their signals that far. Why is it that just about every station that comes on the air now caters to young people? Yes, they have the money to patronize advertisers, but how long can we stand to scan the radio dial and hear the same song being played on several stations at once? Perhaps some stations only play the same ten CD's over and over again. Whatever happened to "folksy" radio where everyone seemed to know an announcer for how helpful and stylish he or she sounds rather than how obnoxious and off color they can be?

Just as records, band remotes, and crystal sets have become a thing of the past, someday satellite programming, compact disc players, and suggestive trashy talk on the radio will also be forgotten.

We'll probably be able to see the person actually playing the music, like a musical TV. Up and down satellite links will become as plentiful in homes as fax machines are quickly becoming.

The space age may bring us new technologies like live broadcasts from Mars. Imagine a group of martian rockett's "doin' the neutron dance," or some other program from the depths of space. Radio feats are sure to get larger, while the sets themselves will get increasingly smaller.

We may never go back to the crystal radio sets of old, but it is important to see where we have come from. Radio just didn't become a media for popular music overnight, but an educational relay of hopes, knowledge, and technology that has spanned over 80 years from its early spark transmitters to the glory of radio today.

With this book, we salute all those who contributed with their advancements, failures, ideas, and bloopers that have made radio what it is today. Pardon me, while I put my headphones back on and listen some more.

## ASSOCIATED PERSONALITIES

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| TRADEWINDS RADIO READING SERVICE<br>Kathy Bikos, Rich Vurva, John Russell<br>Ghrist, Brent Burris, Bob Stratton | WEAW, Evanston IL<br>Edward Wheeler   |
| WAIT, Crystal lake<br>Mal Bellairs, Stew Cohen  | WEEF, Highland Park IL<br>Eli E. Funk   |
| WAJP<br>A. L. Pohlers, Lane Lindstrom   | WENR, Downers Grove<br>Everett Mitchell   |
| WAKE/WLJE, Valparaiso IN<br>Len Ellis   | WEPS, Elgin<br>Donald Tuttle  |
| WBEE, Harvey IL<br>Marty Faye   | WEXI, St. Charles<br>Jack A. Schroeder, J. McWilliams<br>Stone, Bruce Miller, Hugh Hill, Eddie<br>Chessman        |
| WBNU, Aurora<br>Frances Chick Hearn, Robert Diller,<br>Aurora Beacon News                                       | WFLM/WWJY, Crown Point IN<br>John Meyer   |
| WBYG, Kankakee<br>Gene Milner, Howard Dybedock  | WGSB/WFXW, Geneva<br>Ralph D. Buehlman, Gerald Gamel, Joe<br>Barrie, Don Oberbillig, Bennett Gamel,<br>Joy Wagner |
| WCBD, Zion IL<br>Wilbur G. Voliva   | WGVE, Gary IN<br>Lawrence Ventura   |
| WCBZ/WJBZ, Chicago Heights IL<br>Anthony Coppotelli, Roland Pamler  | WHFC, Cicero<br>Richard W. Hoffman, Robert<br>Smith   |
| WCSF Sister LaVerne Ralli, Sister Clare<br>Edward Whalen, Rick Lorenc, Robert<br>Zak                            | WIBB, Freeport<br>Kenneth Ridgway, William<br>(W.F.) Ridgway, Donald Stover                                       |
| WCGO, Chicago Heights<br>Anthony Santucci, Earl Vieaux, Bob<br>Anderson, Bob Black                              | WILA, Woodstock<br>H. Z. Benton   |
| WCHI (formerly of Batavia IL)<br>Max Melhorn, Henry Janssen, Mark<br>Wagner                                     | WJAZ, Mt. Prospect<br>Eugene F. McDonald  |
| WCRM, Dundee<br>Hal Fisher, Todd Chatman  | WJBN, Sycamore IL<br>Ray Sellers  |
| WCSJ, Morris IL<br>Russell Armentrout   | WJOB, Hammond IN<br>Julian Colby, Cosmo Currier, Larry<br>Peterson, John Anastaplos, Larry<br>Smith, Dale Zahn    |
| WDHF James deHaan, Bob Longbons   |   |

WJOL, Joliet  
 Frank O'Leary, Art Hellyer, Jerome Cerny, Ralph Sherman, Wally Nelson

WKAK, Kankakee  
 Howard Dybedock, Bill Geist, Jim Murphy

WKAN, Kankakee IL  
 Burrell Small

WKKD AM/FM, Aurora  
 Russell Salter, Chuck Filippi

WKRS, Waukegan IL  
 Frank Just, Van Sells, Roger Nelson

WLBR, Belvidere, IL  
 Larry Kleber, William Wallingford

WLBK, DeKalb IL  
 Joe Barrie, Robert C. Brown

WLCL, Lowell IN  
 Bill Dunn, Paul Wierman

WLNR, Lansing IL  
 Gordon Boss, Warren Freiberg

WLRA John Carey, Ed Tennant

WLTH/WGRY, Gary IN  
 Geroge Whitney, Ron Borden, Warren Freiberg, Cosmo Currier, Judy Burks

WLUV, Rockford-Loves Park  
 Angelo Joe Salvi

WMCW, Harvard  
 Esther Blodgett

WMPP/WCFJ, Ford Heights IL  
 Allen Wheeler, Eddie Holland, Buddy Bell

WMRO, Aurora  
 Martin R. O'Brien, Art Hellyer, Russell Salter, Frances "Chick" Hearn, Ken Griffin, Vince Cofey

WNBC/WCBB, Arlington Heights IL  
 Robert Atcher, Daniel Trapani, Darrel Peters, Joe McClurg

WNWJ, Valparaiso IN  
 G. Edward Hershman

WOCG, Sycamore IL  
 Rev. Erdmann Frenk

WOPA, Oak Park  
 Egmont Sonderling, Len Petrulis

WRBC, Valparaiso  
 Rev. George Schutes

WRBI, Blue Island IL  
 John Jage, L. NaDean McKeever, Michael Wollner, Michael Dyk

WRGK, Brookfield IL  
 George Ives

WRMI, Morris IL  
 William "Boots" Greiner, Robert White

WRMN/WJKL, Elgin  
 Rick Jackle, Floyd Brown, Mary Zivin, Bruce Lee

WROK, Rockford IL  
 Rev. A. T. Frykman, Vernon Nolte, David Salisbury

WSPY, Plano  
 Roger Nelson

WTAH, Belvidere IL  
 Samuel Gossard

WTAQ, La Grange IL  
 Russell Salter, Bill Wardle

WTAS (formerly of Elgin IL)  
 Charles E. Erbstein, George Dennett Carpenter, Carl Meyers

WVFV, Dundee  
 Jim French, Richard Prather, Ralph Faucher



WWAE, Plainfield  
Lawrence, J. Crowley, Dr. George  
Courier, Doris Keane

WWCA, Gary IN  
Dee Coe, Victor Voss, Tom Higgins,  
Vivian Carter, Frank Sauline

WYCA, Hammond IN  
Jim Cole, Jay Litton

WZBN, Zion IL  
William J. Bicket

Many of the stations mentioned in this book are listed in the following tables. The information compiled is from several sources and may differ with earlier notations. These tables are presented to give the reader an idea of how many stations have existed within the scope of this book and when they approximately operated.

A few other unknown stations may also have operated; however, information on these has not surfaced.

No attempt was made to cover Chicago stations. They are only touched upon if they had historical suburban roots.



**FOX VALLEY RADIO TABLE**

<u>CALL</u>	<u>FREQUENCY</u> (Khz/Mhz)	<u>SIGN ON</u>	<u>SIGN OFF</u>	<u>POWER</u>	<u>ORIGINAL OWNER</u>	<u>LAST OWNER</u>
WTAS	990*	02/16/23	05/08/23	500 ERP	George Carpenter	
WTAS	990*	05/08/23	10/01/25	1500	Charles Erbstein	
WTAS	1080*	01/1927	11/30/28	500**	Charles Erbstein	No. IL Broadcast
WGN	720*	05/29/24	Present	50,000	Col. Robert McCormick	Tribune
WJJD	1160*	10/27/24	Present	50,000**	Loyal Order of Moose	Infinity
WORD/WCHI	1090*	12/28/24	11/12/31	5,000*	IBSA/Watchtower	
WCEE/WSWS	1080*	10/01/25	11/30/28	1,000	Erbstein/Tribune	Harris/Straus
WLIB	990*	10/01/25	11/01/28	1,500*	Liberty Weekly	Tribune
WMRO/WYSY/WBIG Midwest		1280	12/13/38	1989	1,000*	Martin J. O'Brien
WBNU-FM	103.9	03/01/48	08/01/50	1,000**	Copley/Aurora Beacon News	
WILA-FM	92.1	Fall 1948	11/1950	1,000**	H. Z. Benton	
WEXI-FM	106.3	05/28/49	11/27/51	380	Jack Schroeder	Gerald Kraus/No. IL
WRMN	1410	09/10/49	Present	1,000**	Ralston/Miller	Rick Jackle
WEPS-FM	88.9	01/13/50	Present	364**	Elgin Public Schools	
WMCW	1600	01/11/54	Present	500	Esther Blodgett	Mitchell Broadcasting
WRMN/WJKL-FM	94.3	09/1960	Present	3,000**	Richard Sutter	Rick Jackle
WKKD/WFVR	1580	09/21/60	Present	250**	Russell Salter	Salter Broadcasting
WELG/WELF-FM	103.9	Fall 1960	03/11/64	1,000	Richard Coughlin	
WKKD-FM	95.9	02/12/61	Present	3,000	Russell Salter	Salter Broadcasting
WGSB/WFXW	1480	11/11/61	Present	1,000**	Ralph Beuhleman Cofey	Louis F. Pignatelli
WMRO-FM/WAUR WYSY-FM	107.9	09/1964	Present	22,400**	Vince Cofey	Midwest
WCLR/WIVS/WAIT	850	10/01/65	Present	5,000**	George DeBeer	Lake Valley Broadcastng
WVFB-FM	103.9	09/01/66	05/01/80	3,000	Jim French	Ralph Faucher
WREK/WSTK	105.5	04/01/68	Present	3,000	Angelo Salvi	Lake Valley Broadcastng
WXRJ/WXET-FM/WAIT/WZSR						Mal Bellairs
WCRM-FM/WABT	103.9	05/01/80	Present	3,000	American Ministries/CLW	Atlantic Morris

\* Other frequencies were also used.

\*\* Power Changes





### KANKAKEE RADIO

<u>CALL</u>	<u>FREQUENCY</u>	<u>SIGN ON</u>	<u>SIGN OFF</u>	<u>POWER</u>	<u>ORIGINAL OWNER</u>
WKAN	1320 Khz	06/01/47	Present	1000/50000	Leslie Small, Burrell Small Mid America, Susanne Bergeron
WKIL-FM	100.7 Mhz	1950	1951	73000	L & S Small
WBUS (WBSW WKAK, WBYG)	99.9 Mhz	01/05/62	Present	50000	Baker-Maltby, Gene Milner
WONU(WKOC)	89.7(88.3)	01/26/67	Present	10/100/35000	Olivet Nazarene College
WLRT-FM	92.7 Mhz	09/21/86	Present	3000	Susanne Bergeron/Mid America
WKTC	91.1 Mhz	06/01/92	Present	2100	Kankakee Community College
WKVF (WZZP)	95.1 Mhz	10/21/92	Present	6000	Baldrige Shelton Prtnrshp/Rollings Comm.

### PLAINFIELD/JOLIET STATIONS

WWAE	1220 Khz	1923	1945	500**	Crowley/Courier
WJBA	1450 Khz	1925	1928	50	David H. Lentz
WIBD	1500 Khz	1925	1926	50	William P. Hilliard
WJBI (WCLS)	1400 Khz	1925	Present	150	Harold M. Couch
WKBB	1310 Khz	1926	Present	100	Sanders Brothers
WCLS	1400 Khz	1926	1945	100**	M. A. Felman
WJOL (WCLS)	1340 Khz	1945	Present	1000**	Calvin White
WAJP-FM/WJTW	93.5	1960	Present	50,000**	A. J. Pohlers
WJOL-FM (WLLI)	96.7	1960	Present	3,000	Cerny/Novy
WJRC (WWHN)	1510 Khz	1964	Present	500	Harold Rothrock
WLRA	88.1 Mhz	1972	Present	250	Lewis College
WCCQ-FM	98.3 Mhz	1978	Present	3,000	Woodrow D. Nelson
WCSF	88.7 Mhz	1988	Present	100	College of St. Francis
WJCH-FM	91.9 Mhz	1986	Present	50,000	Harold Camping

### EARLY JOLIET AMATEUR OPERATORS (1927)

9AJM	Anthony Arnold/Wm. Crowley, 1608 Raynor Ave.	9CSF	Melvin V. Jager, 225 Hobbs
9ALF	Raymond F. Kramer, 117 Clement Street	9CZB	Justin R. Laing, 209 Richmond St.
9AQC	David H. Lentz, Jr (WJBA), 301 Whitley Avenue	9DCI	Frank H. Tabler, 1211 Oneida St.
9AWI	Dominic L. Sandretto, 105 4th Avenue	9DIA	Lee A. Christiansen, 609 Tyler St.
9AWX	Harry E. Younghusband, 1322 Raynor Avenue	9DMP	Harold D. Wylie, 400 Walnut
9BIG	Peter C. Sandretto, 607 S. Chicago	9DZR	Albert L. Striegel, 314 Jessie St.
9CJR	Edward Keers, 2300 E. Washington	9OM	Elmer Johnson, 312 Collins
9PZ	William Hilliard, 233 Van Buren St.		

\*\* Power Changes



### LAKE AND PORTER COUNTY RADIO

<u>CALL</u>	<u>FREQUENCY</u> (Khz/Mhz)	<u>SIGN ON</u>	<u>SIGN OFF</u>	<u>POWER</u>	<u>ORIGINAL OWNER</u>
WJOB (WWAE)	1230 AM	11/10/23	---	1000	Crowley, Courier, Colby
WRBC (WDBL)	1080/1240 AM	03/25/25	03/1929	500	Immanuel Lutheran
WLBT	1310/1210/930	12/20/26	10/01/28	50/100	Bud Wendel
WIND (WJKS)	1290/560 AM	08/16/27	Present	500/5000	Johnson/Kennedy Atlass Westinghouse
WHIP (WJWC)	1480/1520 AM	09/15/37	02/07/43	5000	Courrier/Field
WWCA	1270 AM	12/07/49	Present	1000	Coe/Willis
WJIZ-FM	93.5 FM	1955	---		Colby Broadcasting
WJOB-FM	93.5 FM/92.3	1955	09/13/59		Colby Broadcasting
WYCA-FM	92.3FM	09/14/59	Present	30,000	Crawford Broadcasting
WLTH (WGRY)	1370 AM	11/05/50	Present	500/1000	Whitney Inter-Urban
WGVE-FM	88.7 FM	01/04/54	Present	10/2200	Gary Schools
WAKE (WAYK)	1500 AM	11/04/64	Present	1000	Len Ellis
WNWI	1080 AM	12/12/65	Present	250/10	G. Edward Hershman
WVUR-FM	95.1 FM	09/25/66	Present	40	Valparaiso University
WLJE-FM	105.5 FM	10/06/67	Present	1000	Len Ellis
WWJY (WFLM)	103.9 FM	11/10/72	Present	3000	John Meyer
WZVN (WLCL)	107.1 FM	11/24/72	Present	3000	Wm. J. Dunn, White/Gracol Colby
WDSO (WSCB)	88.3 FM	11/1976	Present	10/413	Chesterton High School
WNDZ-AM	750 AM	03/16/87	Present	5000	Universal

In 1965, the FCC closed down an illegal operation called "Master Control" in the Hammond area. In the late 70's, several high schools applied for 10 watt licenses, but no other stations commenced. WCAE-TV operated from approximately 1967-1980 before running out of funds. The low wattage station operated on channel 50 at Lake Central High School, St. John. This frequency now belongs to a Chicago based operation WPWR-TV. Today, WYIN-TV channel 56 broadcasts educational programs from Merrillville. WIND radio also once applied for Channel 56. WCAE-TV also operated a booster station in channel 72 from Gary, Indiana in the 1970s.





**SOUTH COOK COUNTY RADIO**

<u>CALL</u>	<u>FREQUENCY</u> (Khz/Mhz)	<u>SIGN ON</u>	<u>SIGN OFF</u>	<u>POWER</u>	<u>OWNER</u>
WCBZ-AM	1210/1380/1190	05/09/24	04/1925	50/100	Pamler/Coppotelli
WOK-AM	1190	05/30/25	1931	5000	Neutrowound
WMBB-AM	1200/1190	05/15/25	1931	5000	Trianon/American Bond
WJBZ-AM	715/1440	11/24/26	08/1928	100	Coppotelli/Pamler
WCHI-FM	95.9	1949	1953	400/225	Anthony Santucci
WRBI-FM	94.3	02/01/50	1952	1000	South Suburban/John Jage
WBEE (WCFS)	1570 AM	1955	Present	1000	Rollins/Mariner
WQAT-AM*	1510	1955?	1960	100	Quin Morrison
WCGO-AM	1600	08/27/59	Present	1000	Anthony Santucci
WRHS-FM	88.1	01/21/60	1985	10	Rich East High School
WLNR-FM	106.7	09/21/61	Present	1000/3K	Gordon Boss/Johnson Products
WCFJ (WMPP)	1470 AM	09/01/61	Present	1000	Seaway/Jana
WBUS (WKAK, WBYG, WBSW)	99.9 FM**	01/05/62	Present	6600/50000	Gene Milner
WCYA-AM*	960 (PM Only)	1962	1967	2 watts	John R. Ghrist
WTAS-FM	102.3	10/01/64	Present	3000	Anthony Santucci
* Weekend Radio, South Holland 20 watts, closed by FCC in 1965.					
WHFH-FM	88.5	01/65	Present	10/1.5K	Homewood-Flossmoor H.S.

\* Unlicensed stations

\*\* Licensed for Kankakee, IL



**WEST SUBURBAN RADIO STATIONS**

<u>CALL</u>	<u>FREQUENCY</u> (Khz/Mhz)	<u>SIGN ON</u>	<u>SIGN OFF</u>	<u>POWER</u>	<u>OWNER</u>
WTAY	1330/1060	11/11/23	04/06/25	15/500	IODOR/Oak Leaves/Pioneer Press
WGES	1200/940/1240 1360/1390	04/15/23	06/13/62	500/1000 5000	Coyne Electrical School Gene T. Dyer, Louis Guyon
WYNR	1390	09/1962	08/1964	5000	Gordon McLendon
WNUS	1390	09/03/64	02/05/75	5000	Gordon McLendon
WVON	1390	02/05/75	10/1983	5000	Globetrotter/Globe
WGCI-AM	1390	10/1983	Present	5000	Gannett Publishing
WHBT	1450	03/1925	06/23/25	10 watts	Thomas W. Tizzard, Jr.
WNBA	1440	02/07/27	04/14/28	200/3000 5000/5000	M. J. Rafferty
WHFC/WEHS					
WKBI	1420/1450	1926		100/1000	R. W. Hoffman
WSDM-FM	97.9/99.7				Chess Records
WVON/WXOL	1450	1981	Present	1000	Wesley South
WOAK-FM	105.9/98.3 98.7/98.3	1949	Present	1000/16kw	Bernard Jacobs
WFMT-FM					WGN/WTTW
WOPA-FM	1490	1950	Present	250/1000	Egmont Sonderling
WEBS-WPNA					Egmont Sonderling
WOPA-FM	102.7	1950	Present	1000/6000	Egmont Sonderling
WGLD-FM	102.7				Egmont Sonderling
WBMX-FM	102.7				Egmont Sonderling
WVAZ-FM	102.7				Egmont Sonderling
WTAQ	1300	10/11/50	Present	500/5000	Charles Sebastian, Russell Salter Ralph Faucher, William Wardle Lotus Communications
WRGK-FM	103.1	08/18/47	12/31/49	1000	George M. Ives, Jr.
WETN-FM	88.1	02/27/62	Present	250	Wheaton College
WRSE-FM	88.7	12/07/72	Present	100	Elmhurst College
WLTL-FM	88.1	01/05/68	Present	180	Lyons Twp Schools
WONC-FM	89.1	07/01/68	Present	3900	No. Central College





**WEST SUBURBAN RADIO STATIONS**

<u>CALL</u>	<u>FREQUENCY</u> (Khz/Mhz)	<u>SIGN ON</u>	<u>SIGN OFF</u>	<u>POWER</u>	<u>OWNER</u>
WDGC-FM	88.3	02/28/69	Present	250	Downers Grove North HS
WGHS-FM	88.5	12/08/69	1989	10 watts	Glenbard West
WHSD-FM	88.1	11/1972	Present	250	Hinsdale High School
WKDC-AM	1530	10/10/74	Present	500	Frank Blotter
WRRG-FM	88.9	03/10/75	Present	100	Triton College
WARG-FM	88.9	1975	Present	500 watts	Argo High School
WDCB-FM	90.9	07/05/77	Present	5000	College of DuPage



### NORTH BY NORTHWEST RADIO

<u>CALL</u>	<u>FREQUENCY</u>	<u>SIGN ON</u>	<u>SIGN OFF</u>	<u>POWER</u>	<u>FIRST OWNER</u>	<u>LAST OWNER</u>
WEHS	1480 Khz	03/1925	---	20 watts	Evanston H.S.	Richard W. Hoffman
WABA	1130 Khz	04/17/23	07/02/25	100 watts	Lake Forest College	
WCBD	1080 Khz	1924	1937*	500 watts	Wilbur G. Voliva	Zion Chr. Cath Church
WJAZ (WSAX)	833 Khz	05/12/24	11/01/31	20 watts	Zenith Radio	
WIBO	560 Khz	04/10/25	11/01/31	1000 watts	Nelson Brothers	
WPEP	1390 Khz	12/01/26	05/24/28	250 watts	Maurice Mayer	
WHT	750 Khz	1928	1930	5000 watts	William H. Thompson	
WWZR (WEFM)	45.1 Mhz					
(WUSN)	99.5 Mhz	1940	Present	6000 watts	Zenith Radio	First Media
WNMP						
(WLTD/WONX)	1590 Khz	1947	Present	1000 watts	Evanston Broadcasting	Frank Kovas
WEAW-FM (WOJO)	105.1 Mhz	1948	Present	180M watts	Edward A. Wheeler	Mac Tichenor
WLEY (WXFM, WAGO, WCKG)	105.9 Mhz	1948	Present	32M watts	Zeb Zamecki	Cox Communications
WKRS	1220 Khz	09/25/49	Present	1000 watts	Frank Just	H. D. Radio
WKRS-FM	106.7 Mhz	1949	1952	12M watts	Keystone Printing	
WEAW-AM	1330 Khz	1955	Present	5000 watts	Edward A. Wheeler	Poinet Communications
WNUR	89.3 Mhz	1957**	Present	10/1000 watts	Northwestern Univ.	
WNWC (WEXI, WWMM, WSEX, WCBR)	92.7 Mhz	03/10/60	Present	3000 watts	John D. Morgan	Darrel Peters
WMTH	90.5 Mhz	05/28/60	Present	100 watts	Maine Twp. Schools	
WCLM (WRSV, WCLR, WTMX)	101.9 Mhz	08/18/61	Present	6000 watts	Carol Music	Bonneville Broadcasting
WNTH	88.1 Mhz	1961	Present	100 watts	New Trier H.S.	
WAXO (WKZN, WNIZ)	96.9 Mhz	1962	Present	50M watts	Wm. J. Bicket	Northern IL Broadcasting
WNSH (WQVQ, WEEF)	1430 Khz	08/15/63	Present	1000 watts	Eli Fink	Gordon Winston
WNSH-FM (WEEF, WVVX)	103.1 Mhz	08/15/63	Present	3000 watts	Eli Fink	Universal
WZBN (WRJR, WKGA)	1500 Khz	09/19/67	Present	500 watts	Wm. J. Bicket	North Shore
WEFA (WXLC)	102.3 Mhz	05/1963	Present	3000 watts	Goldie Lufting	H.D. Radio





**NORTH BY NORTHWEST RADIO**

<u>CALL</u>	<u>FREQUENCY</u>	<u>SIGN ON</u>	<u>SIGN OFF</u>	<u>POWER</u>	<u>FIRST OWNER</u>	<u>LAST OWNER</u>
WMXM	88.9 Mhz	09/10/73	Present	300 watts	Lake Forest College	
WHCM Cable TV		1973	Present	Wired Radio	Harper College	
WFBH	88.3 Mhz	01/29/75	1981	10 watts	Forest View H.S.	
WPPR	88.5 Mhz	1976	1977	10 watts	Barrington H.S.	
WMWA	88.5 Mhz	01/13/79	Present	100 watts	Midwest Academy	
WNVR	1030 Khz	03/01/88	Present	500 watts	Frank Kavenik	

\* Also operated on Sundays from 1947-1958.

\*\* Some sources say 1952.



**SYCAMORE/DeKALB/FAR SOUTHWEST STATIONS**

<u>CALL</u>	<u>FREQUENCY</u>	<u>SIGN ON</u>	<u>SIGN OFF</u>	<u>POWER</u>	<u>FIRST OWNER</u>	<u>LAST OWNER</u>
WOCG	1460 Khz	06/1925	12/1925	10 watts	St. John Church	Raymond C. Sellers
WIBL	1170 Khz	06/25/25	06/28/25	250 watts	Frank McDonald	
WJBN	1170 Khz	10/12/25	01/1926	10/50 watts	St. John Church	
WLBK	1360 Khz	12/08/47	Present	1000 watts	Rev. T. H. Lanes	Jerome Cerny
WNIC/WNIU	89.5 Mhz	10/04/54	Present	10/50M watts	No. IL. Univ.	
WRMI/WCFL	104.7 Mhz	01/16/62	Present	3700/50K	W. R. Greiner	Midwest
WCSJ	1550 Khz	01/11/64	Present	250 watts	Russell Armentrout	Midwest
WSPY	107.1 Mhz	01/19/74	Present	3000 watts	Larry Nelson	
WSQR	1560 Khz	06/11/81	Present	250 watts	James Uzler/Hometown	Taylor/Sweet
WBYG/WAUR	930 Khz	05/19/86	Present	3300 watts	Pam-Lar Broadcasting	Larry Nelson
WDKB	94.9 Mhz	08/13/90	Present	3000 watts	Tana Knetsch	
WNIJ	90.5 Mhz	04/28/91	Present	50M watts	No. IL. Univ.	





**BELVIDERE-ROCKFORD STATIONS**

<u>CALL</u>	<u>FREQUENCY</u>	<u>SIGN ON</u>	<u>SIGN OFF</u>	<u>POWER</u>	<u>FIRST OWNER</u>	<u>LAST OWNER</u>
WJAH	833 Khz	07/29/22	12/02/22	10 watts	Central Park	
WTAH	833 Khz	09/1922	05/1924	10 watts	Carmen Ferro	
WIAB	833 Khz	07/1922	12/15/24	100 watts	Jud S. Joselyn	
WOAG	833 Khz	11/1922	09/08/24	10 watts	Belvidere Amusement	
KFLV/WROK	1310/1440 Khz	11/03/23	Present	10/5000 watts	Rev. A.T. Frykman	Vernon Nolte
WLBR	890 Khz	02/13/27	10/24/27	15 watts	Alford Radio	Wm. Wallingford
WBEL	1380 Khz	05/18/48	Present	5000 watts	Russell Salter	
WRRR						
(WXTA, WYBR)	1330 Khz	12/24/53	Present	1000 watts	Rock River	Airplay
WKKK						
(WYFE, WNTA)	1150 Khz	06/18/60	Present	1000 watts	John R. Livingston	Mid-West
WLUV-AM	1520 Khz	09/29/62	Present	500 watts	Angelo Joe Salvi	
WRWC (WBEL-FM)	103.1 Mhz	03/1963	Present	3000 watts	Russell Salter	
WRCR*	640 Khz	03/1963	Present	Carrier Current	Rockford College	
WLUV-FM	96.7 Mhz	03/25/64	Present	3000 watts	Angelo Joe Salvi	
WDLS*	1250 Khz/92.7 Mhz	1969	1971	Carrier Current	Dennis Sloatman	
WRVI						
(WYFE, WKMQ)	95.3 Mhz	1971	Present	3000 watts	Charles P. Rowland	Mid-West
WKWL	104.9 Mhz	02/27/71	06/07/74	3000 watts	Keith Walker	
WQFL	100.9 Mhz	05/02/74	Present	3000 watts	Don Lyon	Christian Life School
WYBR (WXRX)	104.9 Mhz	08/13/76	Present	3000 watts	Jack Ambrozic	Air Play
WYZZ*	88.1 Mhz	1985	03/25/90	2 watts	Eric Hultman	
WGSL	91.1 Mhz	03/28/88	Present	3200 watts	Christian Life School	
WNIJ	90.5 Mhz	04/28/91	Present	50M watts	No. IL. Univ.	
WFEN	88.3 Mhz	08/1991	Present	5000 wattts	Faith Center	

\* Unlicensed Operation. Consult text for exact information.



**FREEPORT/GALENA RADIO**

<u>CALL</u>	<u>FREQUENCY</u>	<u>SIGN ON</u>	<u>SIGN OFF</u>	<u>FIRST OWNER</u>	<u>LAST OWNER</u>
WIBB	1360 Khz/700 Khz	03/07/25	03/09/25	Ridgway Electric	
WFJS-FM	102.5 Mhz	10/01/46	03/01/53	Freeport Journal-Std	
WFRL	1570 Khz	10/28/47	Present	Vincent Barker	IL Broadcasting
WFRL-FM (WELL, WXXQ)	98.5 Mhz	04/11/65	Present	Triad Stations	IL Broadcasting
WACI (WFPS)	92.1 Mhz	11/01/71	Present	Judge Francis X. Mahoney	Friends Communications
WJOD	107.5 Mhz	02/19/89	Present	JDC Communications	

The Moody Bible Institute also operates an FM translaor on 88.3 Mhz in Freeport.





### HAMMOND-CHICAGO STATIONS

<u>CALL</u>	<u>FREQUENCY</u> (Khz/Mhz)	<u>SIGN ON</u>	<u>SIGN OFF</u>	<u>POWER</u>	<u>FIRST OWNER</u>	<u>PRESENT OWNER</u>
WJIZ-FM (WYCA)	92.3 Mhz	1955	Present	30,000	Adair/R. Colby	Crawford Broadcasting
WJOB (WWAE)	1230 Khz	11/10/23	Present	1,000	Adair/Richardson	Julian Colby
WHIP	1520 Khz	1937	1942	5,000	Keane/Courrier	J. Clark/Marshall Field
WWJC	1520 Khz	1942	1943	5,000	Clarke/Field	
WSEL-FM	104.3 Mhz	1952	9159	40,000	Sidney DeLove	Chicago Skyway/Statewide Broadcasting Co.

### OTHER METRO TRANSMITTER LOCATIONS

WLS-AM	870/890	1923	Present	50,000	Sears Roebuck, ABC/Capital Cities	
	Had transmitter location at 1712 Dixie Highway in Crete in 1925. The station currently operates from their Tinley Park site at I-80/95th Avenue.					
WJPC (WAAF)	950-AM	1924	Present	1000	Drovers Journal Atlas/Johnson Products	
	Has a nighttime transmitter site in Calumet City operated with WLNR.					
WIBJ	1390 AM	1925	1928	100	C. I. Carrell	
	Several licensed portable stations operated in Chicago Heights and Joliet Broadcasting local events.					
WOPA (WMXA)	1200	1989 not on air	2500		Arthur Velequez/CID Broadcasting	
	New foreign language station in Chicago has its transmitter site near 130th west of Calumet Expressway. Former call letters of WPNA in Oak Park, IL.					



**EARLY CHICAGO STATIONS**  
1920-1930s

These are some of the early Chicago stations that are beyond the scope of this book.

W9XBS	WKBA
KFKX	WKBG
KYWA	WNAJ
WBAS	WOBB
WBCN	WPAD
WBU	WQJ
WCM	WQX
WKFB	WRJB
WGAS	WSAH
WIBM	WTL

**EARLY CHICAGO FM STATIONS**  
1940s-1950s

WAAF-FM	WANF-FM
WBIK-FM	WBLZ-FM
WCFL-FM	WGES-FM
WGNB-FM	WVAC-FM

**EARLY 40 MHZ FM STATIONS**  
1942-1944

WBEZ (42.5)  
W67C (WBBM 46.7)  
W47C (WJJD 44.7)  
W71RF(WROK 47.1)  
W51C (WWZR 45.1)  
W75C (WDLM 47.5)  
W59C (WGNB 45.9)  
W79C (MGM 47.9)(CP)  
W63C (WMAQ 46.3)

(Courtesy of Broadcast Pro-File, "A Capsule History of Past and Present Radio Stations in the Chicagoland Area," by Roy J. Bellavia, WSBC Radio; Broadcast Yearbook, Radio Station Treasury (1900-1946), Tom Kneitel (K2AES); Popular Communications Magazine, Alice Brannigan.





**FM STATION GUIDE FROM 1967**  
From Chicago Omnibus & FM Guide

<u>Station</u>	<u>Freq.</u>	<u>City</u>
WNTH	88.1	Winnetka
WMTH	88.5	Park Ridge
WRSE	88.7	Elmhurst
WNUR	89.3	Evanston
WNIC	89.7	DeKalb
WMBI	90.1	Chicago
WBEZ	91.5	Chicago
WYCA	92.3	Hammond, IN
WNWC	92.7	Arlington Heights
WXRT	93.1	Chicago
WEBH	93.9	Chicago
WRMN	94.3	Elgin
WLS	94.7	Chicago
WDHF	95.5	Chicago
WBBM	96.3	Chicago
WJOL	96.7	Joliet
WNIB	97.1	Chicago
WSDM	97.9	Chicago
WFMT	98.7	Chicago
WEFM	99.5	Chicago
WKAK	99.9	Kankakee
WFMF	100.3	Chicago
WMAQ	101.1	Chicago
WRSV	101.9	Skokie
WEFA	102.3	Waukegan
WOPA	102.7	Oak Park
WEEF	103.1	Highland Park
WKFM	103.5	Chicago
WJJD	104.3	Chicago
WRMI	104.7	Morris
WEAW	105.1	Evanston
WXFM	105.9	Elmwood Park
WLNR	106.3	Lansing
WNUS	107.5	Chicago
WMRO	107.9	Aurora



## CURRENT CHICAGO AM STATIONS

Origin of Call Letters  
(on the same frequency)

<u>Station</u>	<u>Frequency</u> (KHZ)	<u>Previous Calls</u>
WIND	560	KYW, WJKS, WIBO, WPCC
WMAQ	670	WGU, WQJ (uses KQY's old site)
WGN	720	WTAS, WLIB, WDAP, WEBH
WBBM	780	
WSCR	820	WAIT, WCBD, WCZE, WXEZ, WPNT
WAIT	850	WCLR, WIVS
WLS	890	WENR
WJPC	950	WAAF, WGRT
WLUP	1000	WCFL
WMBI	1110	---
WJJD	1160	---
WOPA	1200	---
WCRW	1240	---
WEDC	1240	---
WSBC	1240	---
WGCI	1390	WGES, WNUS, WYNR, WXOL
WVON/WCEV	1450	WHFC, WFMT-AM, WVON
WPNA	1490	WOPA, WBMX-AM
WBEE	1570	---
WONX	1590	WMNP, WLTD

## SMALL EDUCATIONAL STATIONS

<u>Station</u>	<u>Frequency</u> (MHZ)	<u>Schools</u>
WHBI	88.5	Bogan High
WCRX	88.1	Columbia College
WCYC	88.7	Chicago Boys Clubs
WHPK	88.3	University of Chicago
WOU	88.7	Illinois Institute of Technology
WKKC	89.3	Kennedy-King College
WLUW	88.7	Loyola University
WSSD	88.1	Lakeside Communications
WUIC	88.1	University of Illinois (Chicago Circle)
WZRD	88.3	Northeastern Illinois University





**CURRENT CHICAGO FM STATIONS  
and Former Frequency Assignments**

<u>Station</u>	<u>Frequency (MHZ)</u>	<u>1940-50s</u>	<u>1960-70s</u>
WMBI-FM	90.1	---	---
WBEZ	91.5	(old WEHS site)	---
WYCA	92.3	---	---
WCBR	92.7	---	WNWC, WWMM, WTCO, WEXI, WSEX
WXRT	93.1	WFJL	WSBC-FM
WLIT	93.9	WAAF-FM	WEBH, WWEL, WLAK
WLS-FM	94.7	WENR	WENR, WDAI, WROC, WYTZ
WNUA	95.5	WMBI-FM	WDHF, WMET, WRXR
WBBM-FM	96.3	WBIK	---
WNIB	97.1	WBBM-FM	---
WLUP	97.9	WEHS-FM	WHFC-FM, WSDM
WFMT	98.7	WGNB	---
WUSN	99.5	WWZR	WEFM
WPNT	100.3	---	WFMF, WLOO, WXEZ
WKQX	101.1	---	WMAQ-FM, WNIS, WJOI
WTMX	101.9	---	WRSV, WXRT, WCLM, WCLR
WVAZ	102.7	WMOR	WOPA-FM, WGLD, WBMX
WWBZ	103.5	WMOR	WKFM, WFYR
WABT	103.9	---	WVFV, WCRM
WJMK	104.3	WSEL/WCFL-FM	WJJD-FM, WJEZ
WOJO	105.1	---	WEAW-FM
WCKG	105.9	---	WEAW-FM
WLNR	106.3	---	---
WYLL	106.7	WKRS-FM	WYEN, WZRC, WTWV
WGCI	107.5	WFMQ	WNUS-FM



## FAMOUS RADIO MILESTONES

- 1891 Thomas Alva Edison receives first radio patent using induction to send radio signals.
- 1895 Guglielmo Marconi sends first radio signal improving on the early experiments of Maxwell (1865) and Hertz (1885).
- 1901 First transatlantic signal sent by Marconi.
- 1902 First voice signal sent by Nathan Stubblefield, Philadelphia, PA.
- 1903 CDQ (Come, Quick, Danger) distress signal adopted; changed to SOS in 1906.
- 1906 Telimco radio sets are marketed at \$7.50 each, first advertised in Scientific American. They were made in New York.
- 1906 Reginald Aubrey Fessenden delivers the first radio broadcast of entertainment consisting of "CQ" (stop transmitting and listen), a violin solo, and a speech from Brandt Rock, Massachusetts.
- 1907 Eugenia H. Farrar appears as first radio soloist on Dr. Lee deForest's experimental station (later WJX).
- 1907 Dr. Lee deForest invents the first radio microphone.
- 1908 Modern Electronics of New York becomes the first radio magazine.
- 1911 George Hill Lewis of Cincinnati, Ohio receives first radio license.
- 1912 St. Joseph College of Philadelphia, PA receives first experimental license.
- 1916 First stations to broadcast election results, deForest experimental station, later WWJ (1920) and KDKA (1920).
- 1920 First radio station licenses awarded: KDKA (1920), WBZ (1921), WGY (1922), WDY (1921), WCJ (1921), KYW (1921), WJZ (1921), WJX (1921).
- 1920 David Sarnoff becomes general manager of RCA.
- 1920 First news broadcast aired 8MK (WWJ).
- 1921 First play by play baseball game aired KDKA, Pittsburgh, PA.
- 1921 Weather reports aired first by WEW St. Louis, MO.
- 1921 Calvary Episcopal Church aired the first church service on KDKA.
- 1922 First daily news program WBAY (AT&T), New York City.
- 1922 First AM radio advertiser-Queensboro Realty Com., WEAJ, New York.
- 1922 First collegiate football game aired WEAJ, New York. Princeton Tigers, 21; Chicago Maroons, 18; Stagg Field in Chicago.
- 1924 First livestock auction, WLS Chicago.





- 1924 "The Eveready Hour," first network sponsored program began on WEAF.
- 1926 National Broadcasting Company formed by RCA.
- 1927 NBC forms its "Blue Network."
- 1927 Columbia Broadcasting System established.
- 1927 Federal Radio Commission (FRC) formed with members Henry Adams Bellows, Admiral William Hannum Grubb Bullard, U.S.N. Ret., Orestes Hampton Caldwell, John Forrest Dillion, and Eugene Octave Sykes.
- 1934 "The Gibson Family" became radio's first musical comedy on WEAF.
- 1934 Mutual Broadcasting System began.
- 1937 First combined network broadcast of all three networks.
- 1937 Herbert Morrison's broadcast of the "Hindenburg Disaster" over WLS. This was the first coast to coast recorded broadcast.
- 1938 "War of the Worlds" broadcast with Orson Welles.
- 1940 First championship football game broadcast. Red Barber (Walter Lanier) described the game on MSB. Washington Redskins 73, Chicago Bear 0.
- 1941 First FM commercial license to W47NV Nashville, TN.
- 1941 First FM advertiser is Longines Watch Co. (time signals) W2XOR (W71NY) 47.1 mhz.
- 1943 NBC Blue Network becomes the American Broadcasting Company; the Red Network remains with NBC.
- 1954 Dr. Frank Stanton airs the first radio editorial on CBS (McCarthy hearings).
- 1955 First stereo broadcast KYW-AM, WFLN-FM Philadelphia, PA.
- 1956 First solar power radio manufactured by Sun Power Pak, Admiral Radio, Chicago, IL.
- 1958 First outer space broadcast, President Dwight D. Eisenhower.
- 1965 CBS journalist Edward R. Murrow passed away.
- 1990 "WKRP in Cincinnati" begins new season.
- 1992 WJZQ Kenosha, Wisconsin becomes WIIL. Angelo Polvere (A. J. Paul) resumes production of "Outdoors" on WAIT. (Radio keeps changing)

Source: Famous First Facts, H. W. Wilson Company, New York (selected entries).



NOW LEAVING THE AIR . . .

Being with you II

In what seems like a few moments  
Our time has come and gone,  
A couple of hours with you  
And a few favorite songs.

The lyrics bring back memories  
Of different times over distant miles,  
Brought back once again  
To your local radio dial.

And though a week must pass  
Til we're together again,  
I'll anxiously await the day  
Til I'm with my friend.

And though time and commitment  
May draw us apart,  
I'll anxiously wait the week  
Til once again you're near my heart.

For nothing else matters  
And nothing I would rather do,  
Then spend time in your company  
And just being with you.

*John Russell Ghrist, 1987*





AND FINALLY . . .

Radio is a changing field. Some disc jockey you may hear on one station may not be there tomorrow. The station may not even be there either. Announcers are constantly changing jobs, about as fast as stations are changing formats. The good music station that you are enjoying today may be doing talk or playing rock or top 40 music tomorrow. Nowadays, I shudder when I hear a disc jockey or announcer say that he is playing the Top 40 hits. . . I don't want to know what the bottom 40 sounds like.

Today, radio concentrates more on the entertainment of young people than providing instruction, education, and thought-provoking enrichment. Public service announcements for worthwhile causes are rambled through over the beginnings of musical selections. Annoying commercial jingles detract from the dignity of newscasts. Entertainment and information are fastly becoming one of the same. In 1958, CBS news commentator Edward R. Murrow lamented that radio was once "proud, alert, and fast." He was one of the best in bringing news and issues of a war torn world into each living room. His programs both on radio and later television touched the lives of many. Murrow saw the changes coming. Some were needed to keep radio in tune with the times, others are mere shortcuts to a vanishing commitment by the industry to the listeners (i.e., the airing of public service and community programs at a decent hour when people are awake to hear them and too much satellite programming).

As an announcer, you never know the impact you are making on your audience. About twenty years ago, I was working at a religious station playing hymns and reading inspirational poetry one night. After my show, a man called and stated that he was prepared to take his life that night, but didn't because he heard something during the program that made him change his mind. I don't know what he heard, but believe with all my heart that God was working that night to spare this man's life. I will probably never talk to this person again, but hope that he is enjoying a much better life. This is not "Play Misty for Me" stuff (referring to an old Clint Eastwood movie where Clint played a disc jockey who was hounded by a listener), this was a human life on the line. One never knows who is out there listening. We must be responsible and professional on the air at all times.

The enjoyment of being on radio is knowing that we are able to serve our listeners.



### FINE TUNING

Research on Valley Voices was stopped midway in 1992. However, as everyone in the industry knows, radio is a changing business. Chicago Sun-Times radio-TV columnist Robert Feder says he only writes in pencil in his rolodex because the call letters and the addresses of personalities at these stations change rapidly.

The next several pages contain information that was either omitted from the text or recently changed. As you read through Valley Voices, be sure to check this section for any information that has been added of late. Every work of this nature requires some "fine tuning."

We have tried to collect as much information as possible to keep this book updated, but we thought that we would stop so that we could finally print a copy and preserve what we have learned about the industry up to now.

Tomorrow's radio logs will certainly add yet another chapter of historical significance to the world of radio and, specifically, to the Chicagoland and suburban airways.





### Amos 'N Andy

Just about every Chicago station claims Charles J. Correll and Freeman F. Godson (formally Sam 'N Henry) worked for them first. The pair appeared on WEBH, WJJD, WLIB, WMAQ, and WGN. A humorous story was recently found in an old newspaper which explains the reason why when phone numbers are used in skits, the prefix is always the non-existent 555 exchange. Years ago the show had an arrangement to use old or disconnected New York phone numbers. One time "Ma Bell" goofed and a working number was used on a show. The phone rang off the wall for weeks with calls from people wanting to talk to "Kingfish." Chicago broadcaster Bill Hay was the program's announcer in the 1930s and early 40's.

### Warren Anderson

Lately of WREX-TV Rockford, Warren says that he worked at WMRO Aurora in the 1940s for \$8 a week, commuting on the old Aurora-Elgin line and still had money left at the end of the week. His next stop was WOC in Davenport, Iowa where he made double the money. Anderson also worked at WENR in Chicago in 1950.

### Terry Bauer

Terry has left WMAQ and now is employed in production and scheduling of programs for WPWR-TV channel 50.

### Mal Bellairs

"The industry has been good to me, I've had a marvelous time," says Bellairs, who is preparing to do his annual international Christmas program for the 37th time on December 20, 1992. Mal and I recently took a few minutes to capsule his lengthy and dedicated career that has spanned over 60 years. A work filled with Mal's memories and accomplishments could easily find its way on a reference book or coffee table. It would be a fitting tribute to a man who had enjoyed every facet of the electronic media including acting, directing, advertising, and station ownership. Mal has done it all.

You will never hear Mal Bellairs complain about anything; he doesn't have time. Even being semi-retired he still stays busy at WAIT in Crystal Lake, a station that he once owned. Mal also does numerous voice-overs and commercials for his perpetual accounts, on stations all over Chicagoland. He has long been the spokesperson for the White Fence Farm Restaurant (famous for chicken dinners) and the Chicagoland Ford Dealers.

Mal began his long stint in the industry as well as in the Chicago media studying acting at the Pasadena Playhouse in California. He came to Milwaukee in 1941 to continue his acting career, but in the fall of that year he volunteered for the Army. Mal served in WWII as an artillery specialist from 1941-1946.

His first Chicago radio position was at WCFL at the old furniture mart from 1946-1949 where he was a staff announcer. From 1949-1955, Mal did free-lancing on Chicago TV, hosting programs and doing commercials. One of the highlights of this time was his "What's the Answer?" children's quiz program which was sponsored by Salerno Butter Cookies.

In a previous interview with Art Hellyer, of whom Mal considers a good friend, it appears that both of these men lived the same kind of life. This included mainly rushing from station to station to do commercials and appearances. Mal maintained a precise schedule with cab drivers and elevator operators attempting to get to all of his accounts on time. Heaven forbid if the bridge was up over the Chicago River. It was an unwelcomed blockade to Mal's livelihood, namely getting to the next commercial on another station. All spots then were done live. Mal recalls having to be at WBKB-TV channel 7 at 10:12 a.m. to do a spot, then reappear in a different sportcoat at 10:23 a.m. across town at WMBQ-TV channel 5.

By 1955, the Chicago TV market was flooded with programs from New York, and Mal decided to get into something different. He then went to work at WBBM radio from 1955 to 1969 hosting his own programs.

In 1969 the timing was right for Mal to own his own station. Working out a deal with WBBM Program Director Art Thorsen, who owned a tiny Crystal lake daytime station, Mal and his wife Jo purchased WCLR and officially took it over on November 1, 1969. The couple moved from Wilmette to Woodstock and brought "folksy" professional radio to McHenry County.

"The station's checking account had \$93 in it when we took over," Mal remembers. "We made a go at it and always made a profit." Jo, considered by Mal as a wonderful performer and often appearing with him on his programs, passed away in 1975.



In 1981 Bellairs sold the station to Wallace Carroll of Katy Industries. The deal was sealed over a glass of wine at Mal's home. Previous to this time, Bellairs had changed the station's call letters to WIVS (for wives). The WCLR call later went to a Skokie station which is now WTMX. Mal also had purchased Joe Salvi's WSTK in Woodstock, changing the call to WXRJ (for "Crossroads") and installing a contemporary music operation. WIVS was later changed to WAIT by subsequent owners.

Mal had initially stated that he had planned to own WCLR for ten years and was ready to sell. He stayed on in an advisory role until 1984, continuing his annual Christmas program and popular St. Patrick's Day show. The Christmas program runs for several hours and features the first Christmas Carol and highlights holiday music from other countries.

In recent years, Mal has been back at WAIT doing some announcing which is inserted into the station's automation. He would like to get more involved in the station's programming in 1993. Jim Hooker of Pride Communications, WAIT's present owner, appears to have the right plan of success for the station, which has undergone a variety of ownership shuffles and formats. Recognizing the Chicago heritage behind WAIT's call letters and bringing in Bellairs, who is synonymous with "windy city radio," could provide the perfect profitable stability needed for the station. Bellairs' voice presently is dropped in by the station's computer, which also controls a large bank of CD players. Nighttime operation would also help the station, which has been denied repeatedly by the FCC.

Mal appears interested in continuing his pursuit of radio. If live radio or a regular morning program is an option in 1993, no doubt he will continue to pursue his next radio opportunity as faithfully as he has fulfilled all previous roles with timeless enthusiasm and professionalism.

He's often heard muttered by other past co-workers, "Well, if I ran this station, I'd change this or that. . .". But Mal dislikes that statement. Instead of complaining, he has always spent his time planning and making his programs better.

Together Mal and his wife raised seven children, and through all of his hard work, he hopes that people will remember him as a friendly, helpful voice on the radio and not just a man who sold chicken.

### Don Carney

Uncle Don Carney of station WOR in New York was a popular children's show host in the late 1920s. He specialized in reading stories to children at night on his broadcasts. On one of his programs it is reported that he cut loose with one of the all time radio bloopers. "That ought to hold them B\_\_\_\_ (expletive) for the night" supposedly went over the air after Uncle Don thought his microphone had been turned off. This incident was reported when Uncle Don was at his peak sometime around 1928-29. He told John Dunning of "Tune in Yesterday" that this never happened, and it was fabricated by a competitor. The idea of telling stories over the air to children was picked up by many stations including KYW in Chicago and WTAS in Elgin.

### Commonwealth Edison (9XY)

Westinghouse should not get all the credit for the success of Chicago's first radio station, KYW. The station was partially owned and built by the Edison Company and was located on the 18th floor of the Edison Building at 72 W. Adams Street. KYW was previously known as 9XY and operated at 360 meters. The station's first program on November 11, 1921 was a concert from the Auditorium Theater by the Chicago Civic Opera Company. The program announcer was E. H. Gager, an engineer later on for KYW and WENR.

In a well-documented book, A Spirit Capable, The Story of Commonwealth Edison, former WGN newsman John Hogan writes that recitals, records, and concerts by the Edison Symphony Orchestra were featured on the station. Station Manager Morgan L. Eastman conducted the orchestra.

KYW also launched the singing career of Wheaton's Everett Mitchell in 1923. Mitchell later managed WENR and went on to a lengthy career with NBC. It was at WENR that Mitchell and Irma Glen hosted "Air Juniors," an educational program for children sponsored by the Edison Company. One of the shows featured a letter writing contest urging young listeners to write about the advantages of using electric Christmas tree lights rather than candles. Electric toys were given away as prizes. (There is conflicting information about whether this particular program was aired over KYW or WENR.) Other sources indicate "Air Juniors" was only on WENR.

Other station personalities were Uncle Bob (Walter Wilson), who read bedtime stories for children, and Edward Borroff, who was the chief announcer. Uncle Bob is not to be confused with WOR's Uncle Don Carney, the author of a famous radio "blooper."





KYW moved from 360 meters (833 khz) to 750 khz in September of 1922, and then to 870 khz and 560 khz in 1923. Its power rose from 500 watts to 1,000 watts by September of 1924. The station's antenna was on the roof of the Edison Building. By this time, KYW was known as the "24 hour station." The "World Crier" program featured newscasts every 30 minutes from the Evening American Newspaper becoming the first station to air regular newscasts. New studios were built to air newscasts from the Hearst Building, Room 1014, at 326 West Madison Street. Hogan writes that some broadcasting also took place at the Fine Arts Building at 410 S. Michigan.

In August of 1925, KYW's transmitter and tower had been moved to the Pick congress Hotel at 508 S. Michigan Avenue (later known as the Conrad Hilton). Two towers were mounted on the roof of the hotel. Another studio was located on the 20th floor of the building. Managers through this time period were Wilson J. Wetherbee and Homer Hogan. Walter C. Evans was the engineer.

By 1928 KYW had been combined with stations KFKX and KYWA. NBC Blue Network programming was featured at 1020 khz at a power output of 5,000 watts. Ten thousand watts was experimentally used early in 1929. Studios were relocated to the Ohio Building.

By 1930 KYW's studios had moved to the Straus Building in facilities formally occupied by WENR. Station WENR took over new studios in Sam Insull's Civic Opera House. In June of 1930, KYW was broadcasting with 10,000 watts from its new Glen Ellyn site. This facility is used today by WMAQ.

The Chicago Herald and Examiner newspapers leased KYW from Westinghouse from 1932 to 1934. On December 3, 1934, KYW left the air in Chicago and moved to new facilities in Philadelphia. Westinghouse sold KYW to NBC in 1956.

The station's frequency had been changed in 1941 from 1020 khz to 1060 khz. Call letters at that time were changed to WRCV. During this period, Westinghouse obtained the KYW call letters for its Cleveland station. The Cleveland operation had formerly been NBC's WTAM. With Westinghouse operating in Cleveland and NBC in Philadelphia, both firms switched stations again. Westinghouse again began operating KYW in Philadelphia upon FCC approval on June 18, 1965. For one previous day, the call letters had been WKYC. Today Westinghouse continues to operate KYW in Philadelphia, at 50,000 watts in AM stereo. The station features an all-news format.

Back in Chicago, Westinghouse re-entered the windy city market with the purchase of WMAQ after many years of owning another Chicago station, WIND (1956-1985). The Edison Company divested itself of all of its broadcast interest in 1936.

Today the Edison Building still stands, and the company leases out portions of it to other clients. A microwave antenna is mounted on the roof. John Hogan, the recipient of many awards for news broadcasts, has been the director of Communication Services at Commonwealth Edison since 1978.

As a side note, another Edison facility at 2211-33 S. Throop Street, referred to as the Central Service Building, also had some early radio operations. This 13 story red brick building contains four sections and a four story radio tower. The building was built in 1926 and designed by George Mimmons. The tower, erected in 1941, was once used to dispatch trucks and send signals to generating stations on the south side. The tower is currently not in use at this time, but does have the mandatory FAA lighting system in operation. The building was purchased about 1967 by the Warshawski Auto Parts Company.

The above information was provided by Joan Hogan, Milt Rietveld, and Kathy Egan of Commonwealth Edison.

### Yvonne Daniels

The Dearborn Street Bridge over the Chicago River was dedicated on October 29, 1991 for this popular Chicago radio personality. Daniels, "The First Woman of Chicago Radio," passed away on June 21, 1991 at the age of 53 after over 30 years of service over radio stations WCFL, WSDM, WLS-AM, WVON, WYNR, WGCI AM-FM and WNUA. The Chicago Municipal Library notes that on September 11th the city council had originally chosen to honor Daniels with the renaming of the State Street Bridge, but the structure already had been designated the Bataan-Corregidor Bridge in 1949.

### Paul Harvey

A portion of East Wacker Drive between North Michigan Avenue and Wabash Avenue was renamed Paul Harvey Drive in honor of this famous Chicago ABC newscaster. The dedication was made by the Chicago City Council on February 1, 1989.



### Larry King

As of February 1, 1993, King will move to afternoons on Mutual after 15 years of doing overnights. Former Chicago newsman Jim Bohannon will do King's overnight show which runs on WJKL-FM in Elgin.

### Kishwaukee Amateur Radio Club-DeKalb

The correct ham radio call for James Jarvis is W9KCM.

### Museum of Broadcast Communications

The museum recently moved to new quarters at the Chicago Cultural Center at 78 E. Washington Street in Chicago, IL (60602). Bruce DuMont is the museum director. Besides the board of directors, another group called the "Broadcast Pioneers" are active in museum activities. The long list includes Jim Conway, Mal Bellairs, Bill Leech, Marge Warren and Clark Weber. Chuck Schaden does his Saturday afternoon broadcast, "Those Were the Days," live from the museum's "Hall of Fame" studio on WNIB-FM. I was fortunate to appear on the November 21, 1992 show. Schaden does his other show, "Old Time Radio Classics," on WBBM.

### Newcomb-Hawley

A building still standing at 10 N. State Street in St. Charles was the laboratory portion of the company. This structure is used as an office building today. The large smokestack has faded lettering on it that says "River Center." It was once connected to another building just north of the fire station, which is now a parking lot. Newcomb-Hawley in the late 1920s was also involved in the production and promotion of Kyle Colin's Kylelectron speakers (see Kyle). Fermi Lab's Daniel Schoo, who has done much investigative work on the speakers, says the United Reproducers Company and another firm, Peerless Radio Company, seemed to cease existence sometime in the late 1920s. Newcomb is also found as "Newcombe" in some works.

### Night Time Radio

There's an endless list of radio personalities who have appeared on the air at night on Chicago and suburban radio. A 1950s era radio page from the Elgin Daily Courier showed the following listings: Elmer Davis (WCFL), Jim Hurlbut (WMAQ), Deems Taylor (WGN), Art Linick (WENR), Billy Leach (WBBM), Dr. Preston Bradley (WGN), Barry Wood (WMAQ), Jack Bench (WMAQ), The Poole Show (WGN), Marty Hogan (WIND), Eddie Hubbard (WENR), Saxie Dowell (WGN), Alex Dreier (WMAQ), Gabriel Heater (WGN), Bill Henry (WGN), Edwin Hill (WENR), "Jam with Sam" (WGES), and Bill Evans, Ben Grauer, Dave Garroway, George Stone, Dick Lawrence and Ernie Simon.

### Pirate Radio

The FCC was busy in the Chicagoland area closing down illegal broadcast operations in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Feds pulled the plug on "Rockin Rick" in Antioch, Illinois, and on another operation in a house in a western Chicago suburb. This station was rebroadcasting NOAA weather radio programming on 530 khz. Low wattage FM stations on the air operated by youngsters in Palatine and Carpentersville escaped FCC detection. Another radio bandit temporarily interrupted broadcasts on two Chicago stations about 1990. This matter caused stations to better secure their facilities against clandestine operators.

### Rockford Radio

Two Rockford amateur radio operators have spent a great deal of their working years employed in radio for the government. Don Sjoberg (W9KIA) was an engineer for the Defense Department, while Jim Miller (W4JR) worked for over 30 years as an engineer worldwide for the Voice of America. Both are members of the Rockford DXCC Club.

### Chuck Schaden

Chuck's career spans over 50 years of serving Chicago area listeners. His early years of radio were spent at WLEY-FM (1953) which later became WXFJ in Elmwood Park. Chuck also appeared on WFJL-FM, a station that was operated by the Chicago Catholic Archdiocese in 1954. Since that time, he has appeared on stations WAIT, WCFL, WTAQ, and WGN. His old time radio programs were first heard in May 1970 over Evanston's WNMP (later WLTD). Chuck's present shows continue over WNIB-FM on Saturday afternoons from 1-5 pm and on WBBM nightly at midnight and on weekends from 8-10 pm.





### Jean Shepherd

This humorist, author, and actor was born in Chicago in 1925 and later moved to the Hammond, Indiana area. He has appeared on programs on PBS and WOR Radio in New York, as well as many other media outlets. Jean often writes about Hammond, East Chicago, and Gary, Indiana in his works. One of his more notable novels is "In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash" which supposedly takes place in Hammond or North Hohman at Christmas time. The book has been made into a movie called, "A Christmas Story," and is narrated by Shepherd. Shepherd lives in Manhattan, New York.

### Trade Winds Radio Reading Service

Omitted from the text, Priscilla Raue was a volunteer coordinator in the mid 1970s.

### "Unshackled" Radio Program

This original religious radio drama series continues to be produced by the Pacific Garden Mission located at 646 S. State Street in Chicago. Pat Amstutz is the program coordinator and says that the program is now heard over 900 outlets worldwide and in several languages. Bob O'Donnell is the new producer of the program since the passing of Jack Odell. Most of the original actors are still on the show including Russ Reed, Jack Bivans, Paul Barnes, Harry Elders, Mary Skol, Dorothy Jordan, Fern Persons and Harry Saulnier. Lucille Becker provides the organ music. The public may view tapings of the show on Saturdays at the mission at 4:30 p.m. The programs are taped 12 weeks in advance of airing.

### WABC, New York

Veteran Top 40 announcer/program director Rick Sklar passed away June 23, 1992. Sklar headlined a cast of popular disc jockeys which included Harry Harrison, Ron Lundy, Chuck Leonard, Dan Ingram, "Cousin" Brucie Morrow and Bob-A-Loo Lewis. Sklar was WABC's program director from 1962-1977. During this time WABC was one of the most popular stations in the country (Musicradio 77). [Courtesy Karl Zuk-Monitoring Times Magazine]

### WABT, Dundee

This station has moved from its former location in the Century Shopping Center (Highlander Point) to new studios at 231 West Main Street in Carpentersville. A new higher tower is also under construction at the transmitter site in Gilberts.

### WBBM-AM, Chicago

Current staffers include Felicia Middlebrooks, John Hultman, Dale McCarren, Sherman Kaplan, Dick Helton, Alan Bickley, Walt Hamilton, Donn Pearlman, David Roe, Carol Ramos, Chris Boden, Steve Crocker, Dave Bennett, Brian Davis, Bernie Tafoya, Regine Schlesinger, Kris Kridel, Len Walter, Phil Rogers, John Madigan, John Cody, Craig Dellimore, Don Mellema, Carleen Mosbach, Chuck Schaden, and many others.

### WBBM, Chicago

Chuck Schaden's old time radio shows are now heard at midnight weekdays and from 8-10 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays.

### WBNU, Aurora

Former announcer Chick Hearn recently celebrated his 37th year in broadcasting network sports. Most of those years have been with the Los Angeles Lakers, NBA Basketball team.

### WCBR, Arlington Heights

Now plays the old "Chickenman" series the once aired on WCFL, Chicago.

### WCFL, Chicago

The call letters stood for Chicago Federation of Labor and jokingly for "We Can't Find Listeners."



### WCLS, Joliet

Former studios were located at 301 E. Jefferson. This site is now the Pioneer Office Building at 54 N. Ottawa. The old Boston Store at the above Jefferson Street address has been torn down. Since the city has started a large renovation project, many buildings have been torn down and downtown addresses changed. The public library has taken over the property on Clinton which was once the Alamo Dance Hall at Walgreens. WCLS later became WJOL. Les DeCosta was an earlier engineer, as was Ernie Serena (W9DE), who worked for WJOL for 44 years retiring in 1986.

### WCGO, Chicago Heights

Veteran south suburban newsman Earl Vieaux passed away August 28, 1992 at the age of 66. Earl was employed by WCHI, WCGO, WTAS, and WJRC and was involved with experimental aircraft. Al Joseph has joined the station as a news reporter. The station is still owned by Anthony Santucci.

### WDCB, Glen Ellyn

Scott Wager is the new operations director, and Scott Witt is the current news director. Well-known Chicago radio personality Jay Andres begins an overnight program on November 10, 1992. Carolyn Wilson is the music director, Ken Scott is the marketing director, and Brian O'Keefe is the assistant news director. Some American Public Radio programming is featured.

### WDKB-FM DeKalb

Present staffers include former WFXW announcers John Wesley (Wantanabe), Ken Misch, and Greg Weindorf, along with Andy Miles, Tom Gaines, Scott Hall, Penny Rynberg, Jim Day-General Manager, and Mike McCarthy-engineer. Among the stations first staff in 1990 were Bill McCown, Brad Jefferies, John Ivanic, Lara Lane, Allen Hart, Greg Gullies, and Chris Cassidy. The station is still owned by Tana Knetsch and has settled into an adult contemporary format.

### WENR

Thurber "Bud" Bombaugh (W9AL) was one of ten engineers who regularly worked at WENR's transmitter site in Downers Grove. Bud, who lived in Downers Grove, enjoyed and experienced many radio firsts and went on to a long career with the ABC network.

Most of Bud's early life was spent working at WENR's transmitter sites. The station was the first 50,000 watt operation in the Midwest. The transmitter at Downers Grove was built in breadboard fashion with water cooled tubes mounted on a table. A large fence around the table had been erected for safety. An audio room, kitchen, and generators in the basement took up much of the rest of the structure. The building itself set on 40 acres. The towers were located about 500 feet behind the building, one on the north side and one on the south side, with a flat top antenna stretched between the two structures. It was a good antenna site, as stations WGN and WBBM used the equipment temporarily around 1938 while their new sites were being built on Route 53. Corn and soybean farming also continued on the property. Art Johnson was the chief engineer.

Bombaugh's first radio position was actually at station WBCN, a 500 watt operation owned by the Southtown Economist Newspaper (Foster and McDonnell). WBCN was on the air from about 1924-1927 and was the first station, according to Bud, to accept commercial advertising. The station (previously listed as a 5,000 watt facility) was purchased by Samuel Insull from the newspaper and combined with WENR. Engineers at the station were responsible for monitoring "SOS" calls from ships on Lake Michigan (a few sunk during this time) and programming an experimental TV station W9XR. He was also a ship radio operator.

Bud was the engineer on the first network type program ever aired in 1928. Band leader Guy Lombardo played over several stations for an hour, live and direct from the Granada Cafe at 65th and Cottage Grove. The program was sponsored by Williams Automatic Oil Burners. Bombaugh was frequently the site engineer at Paul Rader's Gospel Tabernacle Broadcasts and for the Sunday Evening Club.

Two carbon microphones were used on the Sunday Evening Club broadcasts, one for the choir and one for the vocalist. Bud, at one time, purposely had the vocalist sing into a dead mike so that the audience could better hear the choir, which sounded far superior than the singer. Bud remembers that gangsters frequented the Granada Cafe, and one night someone walked in and shot two people to death. He also remembers Charles Erbstein on WTAS in Elgin often reciting the words to a popular poem, "A Face on the Bar Room Floor."

Bombaugh was destined to go on to bigger and better things than working for small stations or listening to them. He was a part of the era when WLS and WENR shared the same frequency. During the depression, he





was one of the few to make money, getting a ten dollar a week raise in 1929. Later both stations paid half of his \$45 a week salary, while former business tycoons like Samuel Insull were forced into bankruptcy and exile.

In 1931 WENR became an NBC station and by 1938 both WENR and WLS operated from the same transmitter site in Tinley Park. From then on the two stations were constantly in court battling over their share time agreement. WLS eventually won, and the WENR call letters were dropped in 1955.

During the time the two stations shared the channel (870 khz then 890 khz), Bud ignored all the squabbles and had little to do with the announcers. One of his few occasions on the air was to fill time playing records from the Downers Grove site. The station had lost the feed for the popular "Smith Family" series. A fire at the transmitter site one time knocked out an episode of "Amos 'N Andy."

Through the years, Bud has worked as a board operator for many sporting events for ABC. He was the Midwest Radio Supervisor for the network for over 30 years, retiring in 1972. Today Bud lives in Leland, Michigan which is north of Traverse City on Lake Michigan. There Bud remembers his radio history and, ironically, lives not far from where he once traveled by Great Lakes steamer when he served as a ship radio operator in the 1920s.

### WEXI, St. Charles

Owner Jack Schroeder told me that he had a second career going changing tower lights at other nearby stations, including WGN in Elgin. He was always instructed to just remove the bulb and toss it over his shoulder and not look down. One time he did, and became so nervous that he never serviced any more towers. Schroeder remembers that it was Operadio's Mac Stone who paid for many of the needed repairs at the station including new antenna coax wire that greatly improved the station's signal. He also said it was Stone that removed Doris Keane and her group from the station. Keane had begun to get involved with advertising sales at WEXI. The station, however, needed some revenue help towards the end of its existence to meet its bills and to repair its equipment. "Jackson Q's Hitchin' Post" program and Gerald Kraus's housewife show did not interest enough advertisers.

### WGN Radio

The list goes on and on of people who have worked for this popular Tribune station. Some of the others include newsman Walter Winchell (1939), Quin A. Ryan, Bill Hay, Jack Nelson (1924), Pierre Andre (Little Orphan Annie announcer, 1930), Bob Considine (1954), and news and sports announcers of the past Bob Elson, Jack Quinlan, Jack Brickhouse, Vince Lloyd, Lloyd Petit (Blackhawks Hockey), Lou Boudreau, Jim West, Len Johnson, Jack Taylor, Marty McNeeley, Bob Jordan, Carl Greyson, Franklyn MacCormack, John Mallow, Ron Rolland, Frank Beaman, Steve Hunter, Jim Loughman, Jerry Tolbert, Irv Kupcinet, Cliff Mercer, Virginia Gale, Bill Mason, Bill Berg and Jay Andres. Some of these names are more associated with WGN-TV than WGN Radio, but sometimes appeared on both.

The call letters were relinquished by a Great Lakes ship operated by Carl D. Bardley, which also stand for "World's Greatest Newspaper." Present day staffers are listed earlier in this book. Sometimes the changes in radio occur so quickly that not even the staffers know if they are still employed at a particular station. Afternoon announcer Spike "at the mike" O'Dell says that the only way he knew at some of the smaller stations if he still had a job was to sneak into the program director's office and see if a "jock shout" jingle had been ordered for him.

### WIBB, Freeport

Photos of William F. Ridgway were located and added to this work by his son George. William is credited for teaching radio to area boy scouts and assisting instructor Vito Fiore set up the radio department at Rock Valley College in Rockford. It should also be noted that William made some of the first vacuum tubes in the area out of old coke bottles. "They did not work very well," he added.

### WJJD, Chicago

Current staffers include Clark Weber, Bob Dearborn, Bob Hale, Hugh Copeland, Adrian St. James, Gary Price, Reese Rickards and many more. Rick Patton is the music director. Long time station announcer Steve Sands (also of WAIT-FM) passed away on September 4, 1992 at 45 years.



### WJOL, Joliet

WJOL sports announcer Don Lades was recently inducted into the Illinois State Sports Hall of Fame. Lades, who has been with the station since 1955, regularly teams up with Scott Slocum for the station's play by play sports coverage. Lades also hosts the nation's longest running 15 minute daily bowling show "Ten Pin Topics" at 5:45 p.m. (WGN's "Ten Pin Tattler" Sammy Weinstein is only heard on weekends.) Lades and talk show host Frank O'Leary both joined the station in 1955. Other long time staffers include over night show host Howard Boykin, who has been with the station for 28 years and program director Tony Ray who has been with the station since 1978. Ray is also the station's morning show host, a local musician and choir director for the Shiloh Baptist Church.

Randy Bunger is WJOL's news director replacing Bob Herrick, who spent 14 years at the station. Biff Jannuzzi, Derrick Brown, Bob Eller, Janet Sutherland are WJOL news reporters. The station's new manager is John Daly replacing Ralph Sherman. Sherman now manages a small network of stations in Wilmington, Coal City, and Ottawa, Illinois.

At a recent meeting of the Will County Amateur Radio League hosted by Terry and Ann Berg (WA9AWO and WD9JHP), two long time amateur radio operators, added to the list of names that should be included in this work. Both Ernie Serena (W9DE) and Joe Blahunka (W9RCJ) were early engineers at WJOL (WCLS). Ernie, who was video tape supervisor for ABC-TV in Chicago, remembers working with the following WJOL staffers: Bob Philbin (also known as Phil Roberts, horse racing announcer), Les DeCosta, Ray Fay, Scott Dielworth, Jack Swantz, Jim Mitchell, Walter Ash, Bob Bowes, Charles "Rocky" Mountain, Doyne McReynolds (Greg Phillips air name), Burk Meade, Lois Zarley, Will Morrall, Marsha Mitchell. Serena recalls that early WJOL broadcasts came from Milcher's Cocktail Lounge on Cass Street with Lois Wood at the organ. Band leaders Joe Perush (Rondo Records Polka Band) and the orchestras directed by Roy Gordon and Gene Victor were also presented. WCLS was the station's call letters before 1945. When early broadcasts took place at the Boston Store, WCLS almost lost their FCC license for airing horse racing results. Bob Philbin simulated the races from teletype information on a program sponsored by the "Green Sheets." The FCC and some religious organizations in the area thought this type of programming was immoral and fostered gambling. Bookies were always tuned in, and WCLS feeds were piped directly into betting parlors.

Serena worked with some major Chicago personalities at Channel 7 (WBKB-TV now WLS-TV). These included Bill Guthrie, Chuck Bill, Art Hellyer, Ulmer Turner, Joe Slattery, Wayne Atkinson and Randy Kent. Thurber "Bud" Bombaugh (WENR) was a long time friend.

Of Al Pohlers, Ernie recalls that the long time owner of WAJP was a very friendly, but a "different" type of broadcaster. Al called Ernie one time to ask him about some de-gaussing (demagnetize) equipment. Al was much appreciative of Ernie's help and asked him to turn on WAJP. In a few minutes, Al appeared on the radio and announced that he was taking over for the board op and wanted to play some songs for his good friend Ernie Serena. After every selection, Al told the audience that the song just heard was "for his good friend Ernie Serena." The impromptu, a bit repetitious, request show went on for over a half hour with Ernie Serena's name mentioned after each record. Another time Al saw Ernie on a Joliet Street and stopped for several minutes to talk with him. Traffic was back up for blocks with disgruntled motorists beeping their horns wanting to get by. Al didn't care, he just continued the conversation. Al liked people and wanted them to know that he appreciated their friendship.

### WJPC-AM

This station programs all "rap" music (music that is primarily all rhymes and cadence, no melody).

### WJTW, Joliet

The current morning man and program director is Rob Martini (Martini in the Morning). Rob replaces Jim Murphy, who is now the marketing director for a local casino ship.

### WKDC, Elmhurst

The main announcers at the station are Rob Quarles, Kevin Horan, and Tony Salvatori. Big band and jazz music make up most of the stations programming along with many ethnic programs. There are no news casts.





### WKKD AM-FM, Aurora

Current staffers are David Beckman, Deb Ryan, Zerrian Bulut, Jeff Blanton, Ron Thompson, Dave Fischer, Mark Vasko, and Bill Baker.

### WKVF, Bourbonnais

Call letters were changed to WZZP when the station came on the air on October 21, 1992. The station is licensed for Kankakee, but studios are located at 32 Briarcliff in the Professional Center in Bourbonnais. The 6,000 watt transmitter is located in St. Anne, Illinois.

WZZP 95.1 mhz has a "classic rock" format. Its programming comes from Champaign, Illinois and is simulcasted over WZNF, Champaign; WZNX, Mattoon and a new Danville station that is scheduled to go on the air by the end of the year.

The Rollings Communications Group has an office in Rantoul and is headquartered in St. Louis. The firm also owns all news WUFI in Champaign which airs a feed from CNN.

Mark Rollings is the president of the company, Rick LeCompte is the sales manager, and Marty Wielgos is the general sales manager. Dennis Baldrige and Richard Shelton still manages WZZP and Susan Ingram is the news director. Some local news is done at each station and local tags are automatically programmed in over the air. The entire operation is run from its Champaign offices.

### WLNR, Lansing

This station is now WJPC-FM.

### WLS AM-FM, Chicago

Current staffers include Don and Roma, Roecon, Catherine Johns, Jim Johnson, Ty Wansley, Jeff Hendricks, and various network talk hosts like Tom Snyder and Rush Limbaugh.

### WLTH, Gary

Announcement to file bankruptcy was made October 1992.

### WLUW, Chicago

The call letters stand for "Loyola University Wadio," courtesy of Stan Peters, "Radio Waves."

### WLUP-AM, Chicago

Talk show host Ed Tyll has left the station. Shock jock Howard Stern's syndicated program from New York is now aired mornings. Chicago Blackhawks' games have moved to WLUP-AM from WBBM with announcers Pat Foley and Dale Tallon.

### WLUP-FM, Chicago

Steve Dahl and Garry Meier are now heard mornings; Jonathon Brandmeier has moved to afternoons.

### WMAQ, Chicago

Current staffers include Bob Phillips, Pat Cassidy, Pam Riesmeyer, Jay Congdon, Mike Doyle, Lynn Holley, Bob Conway, Nancy Benson, Chris Michael, Steve Yount, Derrick Hill, Otis Buchanan, Bill Cameron, Alan Crain, Larry Langford, Dave Berner, Mike Krauser, Lisa Meyer, Bob Roberts, Jim Gudas, Tom Greene, Steve Oken, Cheryl Raye, and many others.

### WMRO, Aurora

Aurora Beacon News reporter Lyle Rolfe remembers when newscasts from the station came from the newsroom at the newspaper office. The announcer will sit in the vicinity of the teletype machines to capture the "news" sounds as a background. Rolfe remembers announcers Harry Blair, Bob Lock, Sam Miralgia and disc jockey Bill Brooker. Girls would oogle at the good-looking Brooker when he would do his show from a booth at the Kresge Store in downtown Aurora. Another voice that was often heard on local radio was Beacon News sports director Dale Lancaster, who worked for the newspaper for 47 years. Rolfe himself was on the air usually Sunday mornings doing the police blotter news and election returns. WMRO is now WBIG.



### WNBA, Forest Park

The owner of this 1920s era station Mickey T. Rafferty passed away on February 25, 1981 in Palm Springs, California. He is listed as Michael Rafferty in records at the Schaumburg Family History Center, according to historian Helen Brooksby. Rafferty was 86. No formal obits appeared in local newspapers. At the time of death, he was listed as being self-employed as a service station owner.

### WNIB, Chicago

Ken A. Alexander, formerly of WAIT, is now an announcer for WNIB and frequently writes articles for Chuck Schaden's "Nostalgia Digest."

### WNIJ, DeKalb

A 55 watt FM translator (105.7 mhz) was installed on top of the Faust Landmark in Rockford to better serve its listeners. Jazz and PBS programming is simulcasted on both 105.7 mhz and the station's primary frequency 90.5 mhz. The translator was necessary to cover the entire city of Rockford, according to officials at Northern Illinois University, the owner of the station. The school's print handicapped programming (Northern Illinois Radio Reading Service) continues to be operated from the New Discovery Center in Rockford. Mike Lazar is the general manager of both WNIJ and WNIU.

### WNVR, Vernon Hills

This station which features all business news is owned by Midwest Radio Associates, Ltd. New studios are located at Suite 331, 126 East Wing Street in Arlington Heights. WNVR was sold to Polnet Communications (owner of WKTA, Evanston) in November of 1992.

### WQJ, Chicago

This station was owned by the Calumet Baking Powder Company and operated from Rainbo Gardens in Chicago in the 1920s.

### WOAG/WLBR, Belvidere

Station announcer Larry Kelber passed away on November 11, 1992. His obit in the Rockford Register-Star indicated that some of the station's early broadcasts may have come from the Rainbow Gardens Dance Hall near Belvidere. This fact was never substantiated in a 1990 interview with Kleber. The article also stated that Standard Oil Company was the oil firm once interested in buying the stations.

### RCA Radio Club of America

Founded in 1900, this organization has over 600 members and is the oldest radio club in the country. It is composed of radio and electronic experts who have been pioneers in the industry. The headquarters are in New York. Dr. Ralph W. Muchow in 1988 received the Ralph Batcher Award presented yearly by the organization for distinguished radio contributions.

### WRBI, Blue Island

FM pioneer broadcaster L. NaDean McKeever passed away February 8, 1990.

### WRMN, Elgin

Current staffers Brad Bohlen, Ken Kosek, Mike Lawrence, Jeff Meyers, Patty Oswald, Dee Hubbard, Rich Egger, and Joe Roach.

### WROK, Rockford

The main personalities as of November 1992 are Charlie O'Neil, Chris Bowman, and Rollye James. Nighttime programming consists of syndicated talk show hosts Bruce Williams and Larry King. Channel 17's Kim Lepak does a weekend sports show, while operations director Jon Wailin features a "Memories" program on Sundays.





### WRSE, Elmhurst

Brian O'Keefe is the station advisor, Joe Ahrendt is the station manager, and Pete Petrizzo is the program director. The station changes student officers each January. The power output of the station is 100 watts.

### WSCR, Chicago

Terry Boers is one of the many sports announcers regularly heard on the station.

### WTAS-FM, Crete

Black Gospel programming is simulcast over WTAS-FM and WWHN. The owners of WWHN are negotiating for the purchase of WTAS. A local marketing agreement is currently in effect between the two stations which began in May of 1992.

### WTAS, Elgin

Another one of Charles Erbstein's early ham radio calls were 9JC in 1924-25.

### WTMX, Chicago

Ron Britain is now heard afternoons after leaving WJMK.

### WVFFV, Dundee

Paul Dumdie (WB9QWZ) remembers that the station was located above the Cardinal Savings and Loan. WVFFV's turntables were mounted on an old door. A reel to reel tape recorded with teletype sounds recorded on it played in the background on all newscasts. Dumdie, who is in the cellular phone business, often worked with another engineer, Art Reis, who conducted proofs of performance tests and engineering duties at several suburban stations including WVFFV, WXR, and WIVS. Reis was the engineer at the Satellite Music Network in Mokena, Illinois until the operation moved to Texas. Art's call letters are K9XI.

### WWAE, Hammond

Hammond Times columnist Archibald McKinlay and WJOL's Art Hellyer recall that early band remotes were aired on this station from Mickey Madura's Danceland. This large ballroom located at 1337 N. Calumet Avenue near Five Points in Whiting was built in 1918. In 1923, it was part of the Boardwalk Amusement Park, which once stood on the property occupied today by the Lever Brothers Plant. That year the building was moved across the street from the plant by Mickey's father, Mike, who operated some park concessions and who owned the land at the new site. Madura's Danceland was dedicated on August 24, 1929 (some sources say August 29th). "Love Me or Leave Me" was the first tune heard in the building.

Art Hellyer remembers that the Tiny Hill Orchestra often played there along with Guy Lombardo, Tommy Dorsey, and later in the 1960s Chicago's Cryan' Shames. Numerous USO shows and dance marathons took place at Danceland. Lightning struck and burned the building down on July 23, 1967, according to the Hammond Historical Society. Madura's Danceland survived during some difficult times and was revived by rock and roll concerts.

No liquor was served in the building. Couples wanting to make a night out of the evening usually visited Margret's or Phil Smidt's Restaurant located on either side of the ballroom or walked along nearby Bobby Beach on Lake Michigan at the end of Calumet Avenue. Today the ballroom property has been replaced by apartments and parking lots. A large marina has been built on the beach known as Hammond Beach next to the city water plant. The "salty" smell from the nearby American Maize Plant is still in the air.

### WWHN, Joliet

Once a local news and "oldies" station, the operation has moved from 125 N. Chicago Street, Joliet to 240 E. 103rd Street in Chicago. WWNH maintains a studio and its transmitter in Joliet. The station is now owned by Ray and Tone Hawkins. Programs are simulcast over WTAS-FM Crete, Illinois and a Shreveport-Louisiana Station (10/92).

### WYCA, Hammond

J. Ralston Miller was a former announcer and advertising executive for the station in the 1960s.



## MANY THANKS

Antique Radio Club of Illinois, Dr. Ralph W. Muchow, D.D.S.  
Terry and Ann Berg, Will County Amateur Radio League  
David Blair, WFXW  
Kevin Belgrade, Waukegan News-Sun  
Ethel Carraro, Suburban Life  
Chicago Municipal Library  
Paul Ciarrochi, WAIT/WZSR  
Anita Drilling, Joliet Library  
Kathleen Egan, Commonwealth Edison  
Robert Feder, Chicago Sun Times  
Mary Ann Fergus, Northwest Herald  
Lisa Friedman, Daily Herald  
Dave Gathman, Elgin Daily Courier  
Jeff Graunke (N9MKM), Kane County Chronicle  
Art Hellyer, WJOL  
Rich Hershberg, Jones Intercable  
John Hogan, "A Spirit Capable, The Story of Commonwealth Edison"  
Dan Kenning, Chicago Tribune  
Scott Mitchell (KA9UST), Illinois Department of Transportation  
Mark Perry, Chicago Heights Star  
Nick Pullia, Elmhurst Press  
George Ridgway, Systems Managements  
Lyle Rolfe, Aurora Beacon News  
Chuck Schaden, WNIB/WNIZ/WBBM  
Don Sjoberg (W9KIA), Rockford DXCC Club  
Alice M. Stephens, Hammond Public Library  
Nancy Sullivan, Hammond Times  
Bill Wawak (N9MLJ)  
Bill Wimbiscus, Joliet News Herald  
Karl Zuk, Monitoring Times

The names of staffers at the stations listed in "Fine Tuning" and their spellings were provided by the promotional departments of each station. There are many more part-timers, news stringers, writers, producers, and behind the scenes people employed at these professionally run operations.





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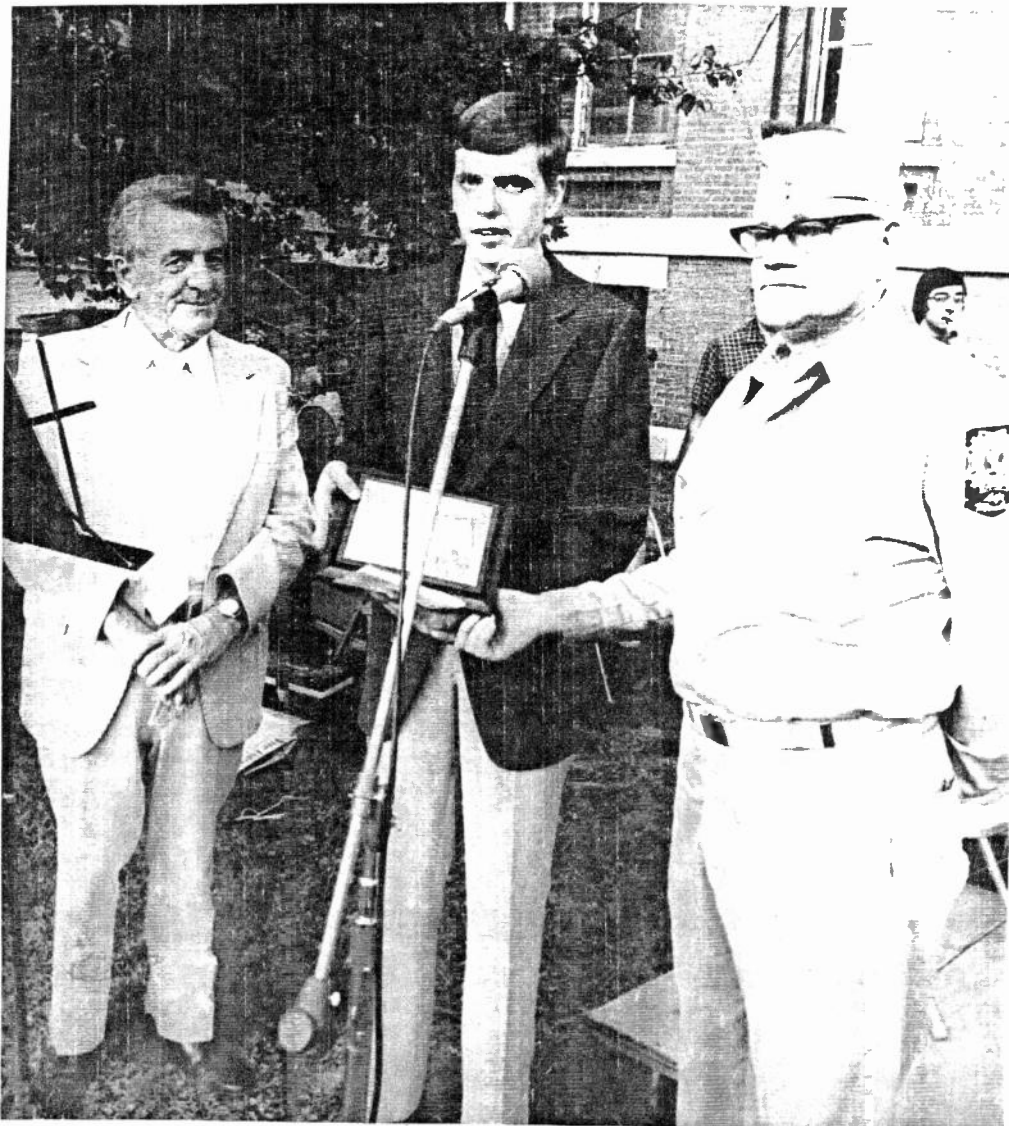












HARD WORK, COMMUNITY SERVICE, AND THE PRESERVATION OF HISTORY IS WHAT "VALLEY VOICES" IS ALL ABOUT. PICTURED AT AN EARLY 1970s SUMMER CONCERT ON THE OLD COURTHOUSE LAWN ARE (FROM RIGHT) CROWN POINT MAYOR RICHARD C. COLLINS, JOHN RUSSELL GHRIST, AND HIS FATHER GLENN H. GHRIST.

JOHN RUSSELL GHRIST HAS WRITTEN A "MUST READ" FOR ANYONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW WHAT RADIO WAS LIKE WHEN EACH SHOW WAS CREATED BY PEOPLE WHO WERE TRULY GENIUSES. TODAY'S RADIO IS A MINDLESS MONTAGE OF ROCK, COUNTRY-WESTERN, OR BRAINLESS TALK, SOME OF IT BLATANTLY DIRTY.

JOHN WRITES OF RADIO THAT CATERED TO THE IMAGINATION; RADIO THAT HAD THE ENTIRE FAMILY--GRANDPARENTS, PARENTS, AND CHILDREN--SPELLBOUND. THIS ISN'T JUST A HISTORY OF RADIO IN THE FOX VALLEY, THIS IS THE DEFINITIVE STORY OF ALL RADIO!

Art Hellyer  
WJOL Radio