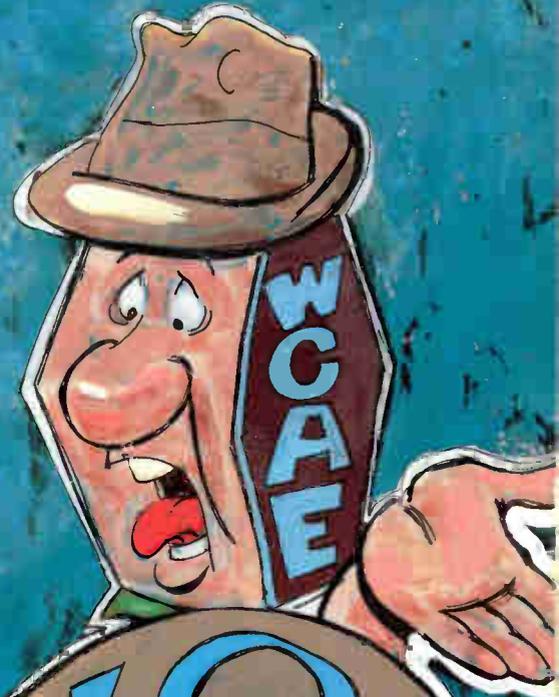


When Radio Was Young

QUESTIONS
AND
ANSWERS
ABOUT

Early Pittsburgh Radio





When Radio Was Young

**QUESTIONS
AND
ANSWERS
ABOUT**

Early Pittsburgh Radio

by

William G. Beal

Alice Sapienza-Donnelly

Richard J. Harris

edited by

Marjorie Michaux

Charles A. Ruch

Harriet Rush

© Copyright 1995

Wilkinsburg Commission Inc.

First Printing, 1995

© Copyright 1995 by the Wilkinsburg Commission Inc.

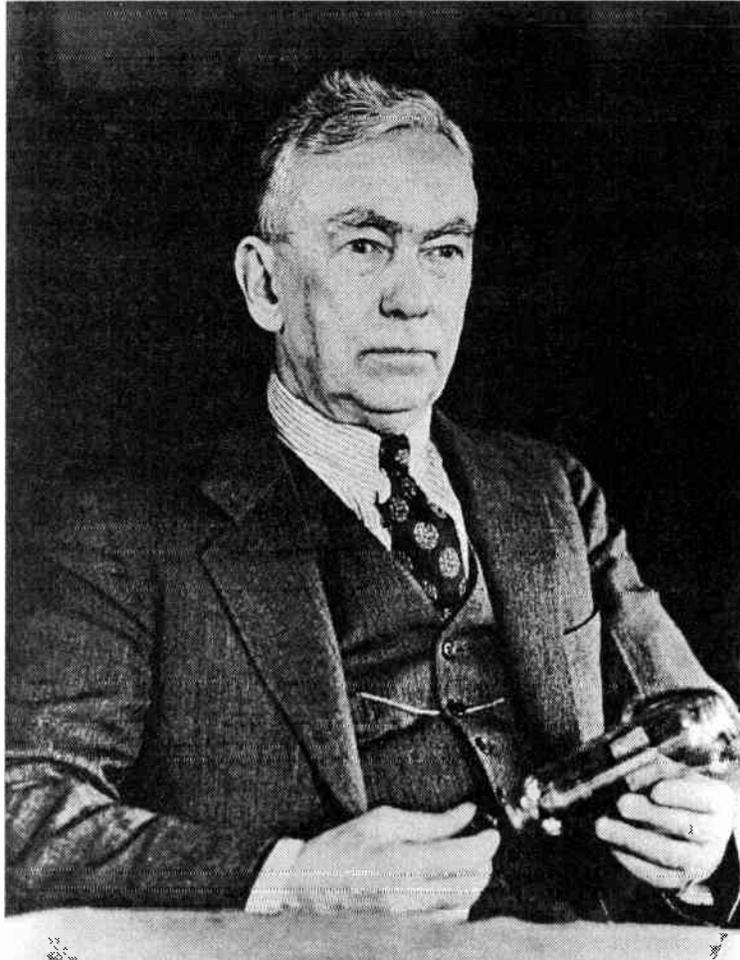
All rights reserved. This publication may not be reproduced in whole or in part by any means without prior written consent.

Printed in the United States of America.

Contents

Dedication	4
Preface	5
In the Beginning	7
The Twenties	11
The Thirties	55
The Forties	111
Don't Tune in Tomorrow	145
The Conrad Project	151
Epilogue	156
Acknowledgements	157
Contributing Editors	158
In Remembrance	159

Dedication



Frank Conrad
The Father of Radio Broadcasting
1874 - 1941

Preface

When radio was young, Pittsburgh's radio pioneers changed the course of history forever. This book is a tribute to them and to the birth of an idea—commercial radio broadcasting. Born in a little brick garage in the Pittsburgh suburb of Wilkinsburg, broadcasting today is a 35 billion dollar-per-year industry that is the world's chief source of news and entertainment.

From 1920 to mid-century, radio dominated our lives. It gave us news from our neighborhoods and from around the world and music of every venue and variety. It set our imaginations aflame with dramas of conflict and passion and introduced us to personalities who helped enrich our lives.

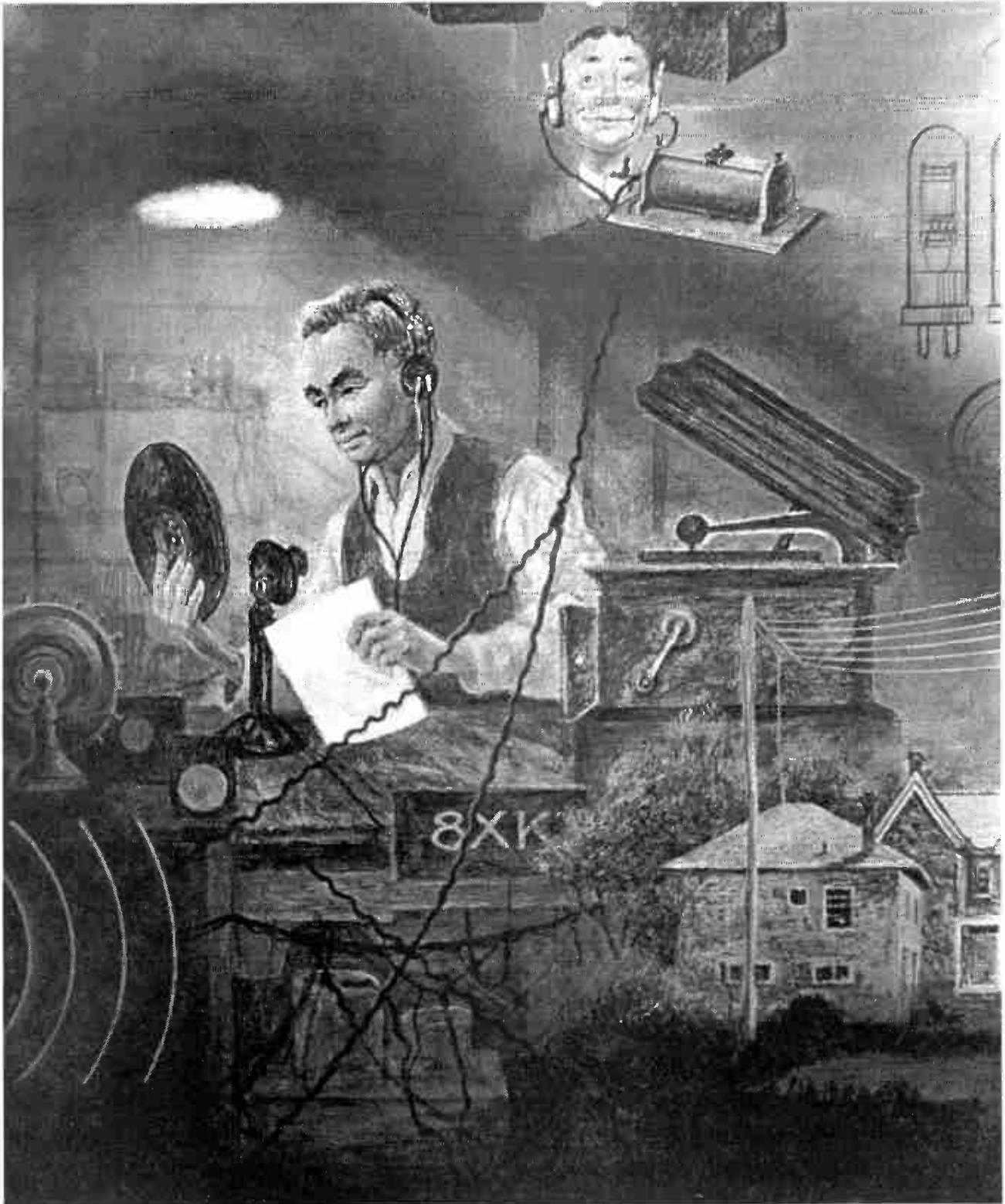
Sure, we remember the Green Hornet, Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy, The Shadow, Arthur Godfrey, The Hit Parade and Amos 'n' Andy.

But we must not forget our own radio favorites of those early years: Rosey Rowswell, Tap Time, Beckley Smith, Cordic & Company, Uncle Ed and Rainbow, Party Line, The Dream Weaver, the Wilkens Amateur Hour, Bernie Armstrong, and the local stations where they originated.

Through a series of questions and answers gleaned from early original manuscripts and articles, and from people who worked in Pittsburgh radio during those halcyon years, you will have an opportunity to remember or discover America's love affair with radio.

The profits from this book will be donated to the Conrad Project, an effort to establish a National Museum of Broadcasting in Pittsburgh. It is named in honor of Frank Conrad, the Westinghouse engineer whose garage-based experiments in 1919-20 "gave civilization its greatest thrust since the wheel." Broadcasting museums are favorite tourist attractions in other cities yet Pittsburgh, where radio *and* television essentially originated, has none.

Broadcasting museums provide an eager public with a storehouse of memories and offer students of communication a means of studying the roles radio and television played in shaping our world. The proposed Pittsburgh museum would highlight the region's pioneering role in radio and TV, provide interactive displays of 10 decades of electronic technology, and showcase the programs and personalities that have filled the airwaves here for 75 years.



In the Beginning

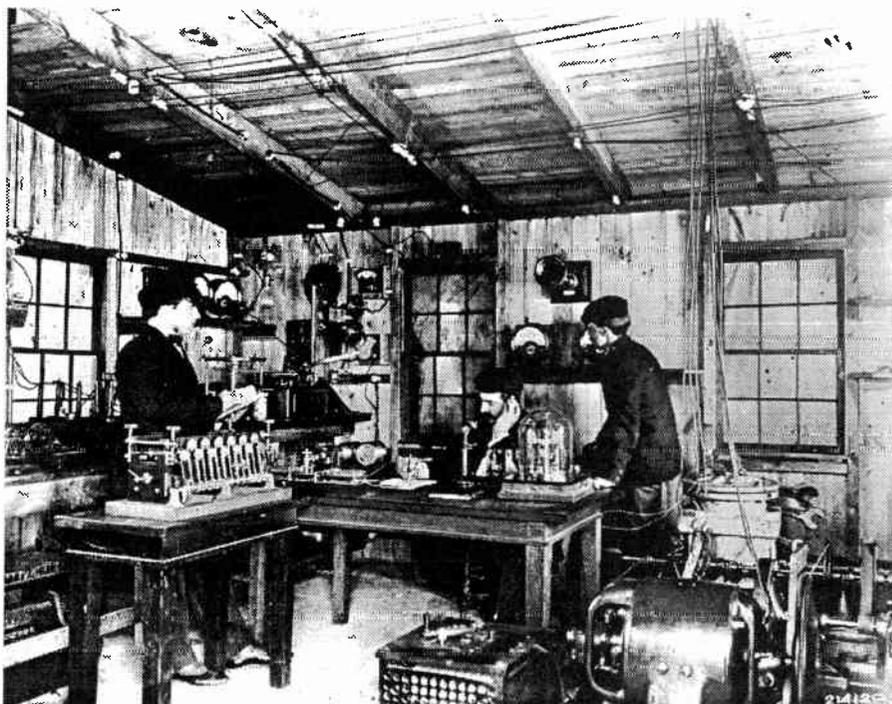
Americans welcomed the twentieth century with an air of optimism, high energy and a will to progress. They were captivated with the many useful devices that had become available: the telephone, the typewriter, and the sewing machine. The first decade heralded the dawn of new technology that brought astonishing achievements. Chief among these were the development of the self-binding harvester, the automobile, the airplane and the miracle of wireless communication.

The first decade was a splendid, cocksure era. Americans had developed a love affair with the Gibson Girl, the automobile and various venues of entertainment: theater, moving pictures, the circus, and vaudeville. The music from New York's Tin Pan Alley chronicled, in part, the new century's history of progress and its humor: "Won't you come with me, Lucille, in my merry Oldsmobile," "Come, Josephine, in my flying machine," and the song with a vaudevillian flair, "My Wife's Gone to the Country. Hurrah Hurrah."

Among the amazing scientific advancements of that first decade, the most spectacular of all was the development of transmitting sound without wires. Never before had man been able to hurl into space and retrieve from space the human voice and music. It was this scientific mystery that held the greatest fascination for a man named Reginald Fessenden, head of the Electrical Engineering department at Western University (now the University of Pittsburgh).

Fessenden took great interest in following the wireless telegraph experiments of Guglielmo Marconi in Europe and began experimenting himself at a primitive lab at the Allegheny Observatory. Marconi's system could only transmit and receive dots and dashes—Morse code. Fessenden was sure, however, that in much the same way as the telegraph gave way to the telephone, the wireless telegraph would give way to the wireless telephone.

The task proved to be difficult, however; initial experiments produced only minimal results. Undeterred, Fessenden took a completely different approach to the problem and developed the theory of the "continuous wave"—a means to superimpose sound onto a radio wave and transmit this signal to a receiver where the radio wave would be removed, leaving the listener with the original sound. This surprisingly simple concept forms the basis of modern radio and TV transmission.



Reginald Fessenden's transmitting station at Brant Rock, Mass., 1906.

Fessenden later put the theory into practice and made the first long-range transmission of music and voice on Christmas Eve 1906 from a station at Brant Rock, Massachusetts. This event amazed, shocked and even frightened the unprepared radio operators on ships far out into the Atlantic who had never before heard so much as a syllable from their earphones amidst the staccato drone of the Morse code.

As long distance transmitting technology advanced into the second decade, amateur enthusiasts of "radio," as wireless telephony was now called, began communicating with one another; and they exchanged stories and information about their discoveries. One story tells of the mysterious music that came over the air from one hundred and fifty miles away as Prince Albert of Monaco sailed into New York harbor in September 1913. His yacht, the "Hirondelle," was equipped with a "wireless" piano. Surprised radio-telegraph operators all over the coast were delighted to hear strains of the Star-Spangled Banner and a lively waltz. The music disappeared as mysteriously as it had come when the royal visitor sailed away.

By the time a system of licensing and call letters came into use, transmitting voices and music became the favored activity of a few esoteric die-hards from the east coast to the west coast. Now able to identify their locations, they expanded their experimental activities and shared with fellow amateurs their successes at transmitting and receiving long-distance messages.

Frank Conrad was one of these amateurs, having built a transmitting station on the second floor of the garage behind his home in Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania, just outside of Pittsburgh. Conrad had only a seventh-grade education but when it came to mechanics and electronics he was a genius. As Assistant Chief Engineer at the East Pittsburgh Works of Westinghouse, he acquired over 200 patents in his lifetime.

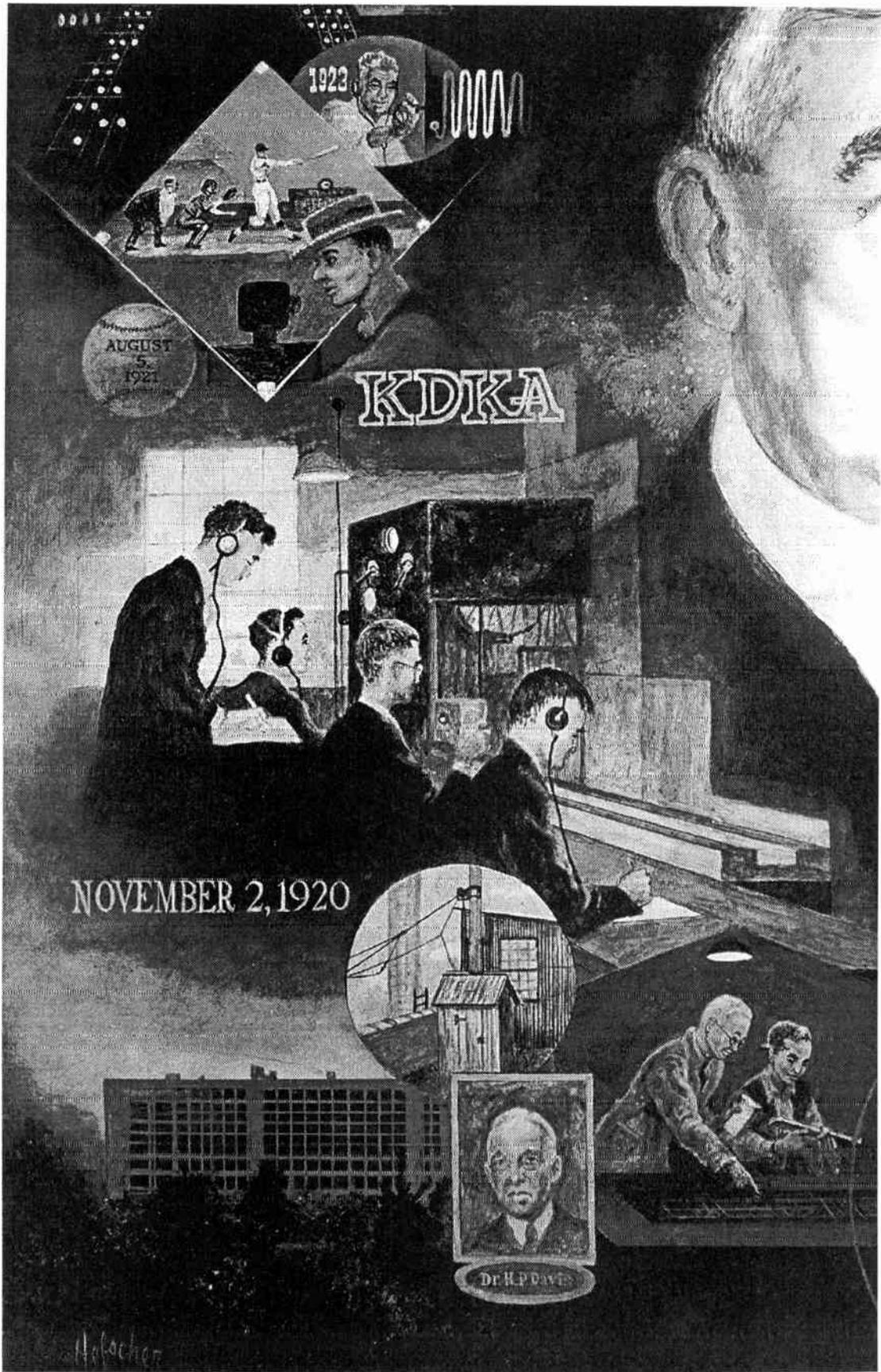
It is Conrad to whom the broadcasting industry owes its existence. Often working into the wee hours of the morning in his garage workshop, he advanced not only the technology but the business concepts upon which the industry is based.

Conrad first became enthralled with radio in 1912 when, to win a bet on the accuracy of his watch, he built a radio receiver to pick up the Naval Observatory's daily time signals from Arlington, Virginia. Conrad was so fascinated by this new technology that in 1916 he built a transmitter and began operating an amateur radio station. Licensed as 8XK, Conrad's station was so technologically advanced that the government used it for communication experiments during WWI at a time when all other amateur stations were banned from the air.

In late 1919 the ban on amateurs was lifted and Conrad, with wartime-improved equipment, suddenly became one of the best-known amateurs in the country. In November of that year, to save his tired voice from the endless hours of speaking into the microphone, he substituted a phonograph and played music over the air. The results were astounding. By playing records, Conrad accidentally discovered a large audience of listeners who had fashioned their own crystal radio sets and who, upon hearing the music, wrote or phoned requests for more music and news.

Overwhelmed by this response, Conrad announced that rather than fill individual requests, he would "broadcast" musical programs two nights a week. Conrad had redefined an old farmers' term—broadcast—meaning to scatter seeds in all directions and applied it to this new radio concept. Within a year, the new definition of "broadcast" would be recognized worldwide.

For all of its burgeoning technological developments, little did post-Victorian Americans realize that the best was yet to come when the birth of national radio broadcasting began in the 1920s. Of all the entertainments that held appeal for people of every age, no one could predict the spectacular appeal of having free home entertainment in one's own parlor. From a scattering of avid listeners who donned earphones to hear barely audible programs from their crystal sets, an affordable new craze evolved. America had opened the portals to the vast universe.



The Twenties

The “Roaring Twenties” ushered in the Jazz Age, Hollywood mania and the “It” girl. Ladies who had left their homes to join the Suffragette Movement won the right to vote. Flappers sported high hemlines, the boyish bob and did the Charleston.

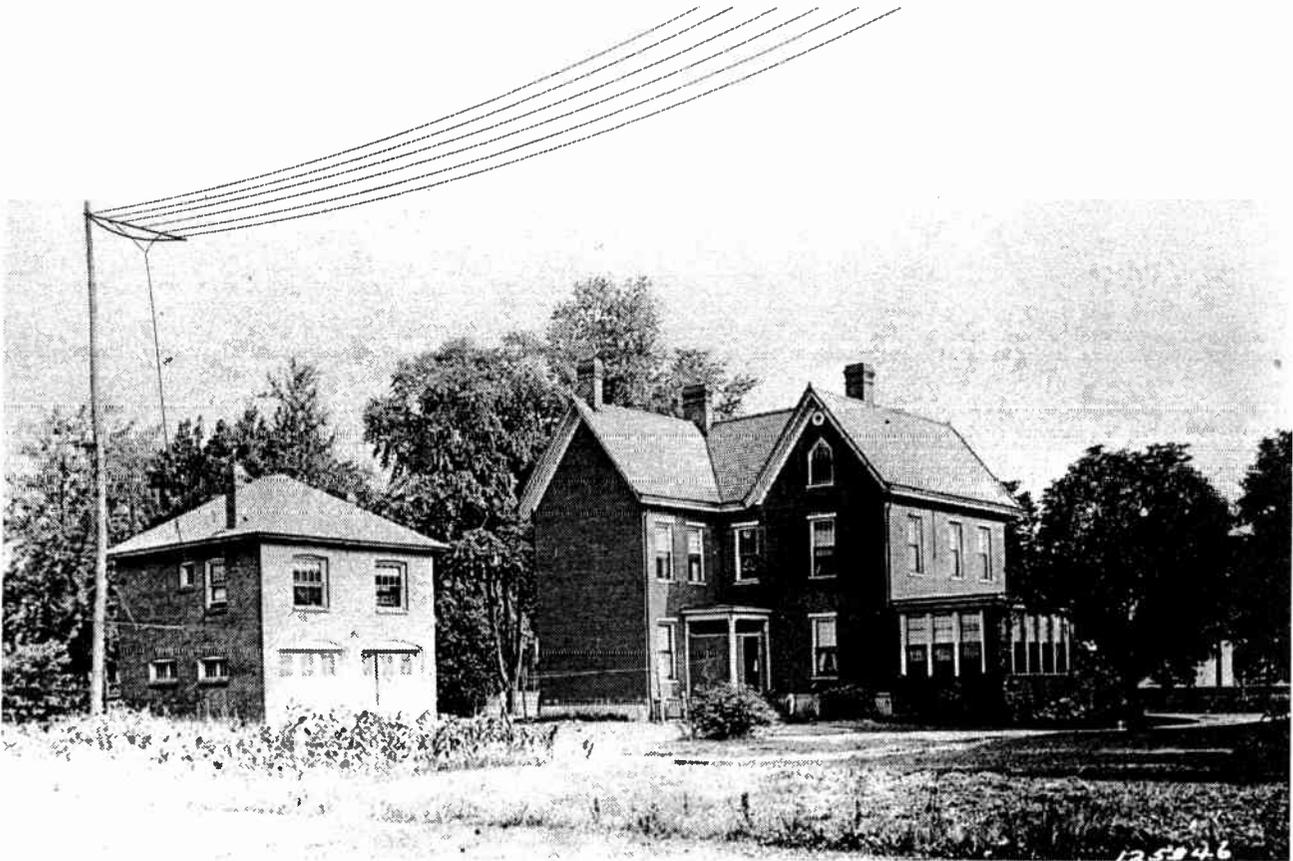
People loved endurance contests. Couples danced to exhaustion in marathons. Men ran the long-distance “Bunyon Derby” and engaged in flagpole sitting. And they enjoyed sporting the four-wheeled rich-man’s toy, racoon coats and college humor: “She doesn’t drink, she doesn’t pet. She hasn’t been to college yet.” (Tennessee Mugwump)

This was a new age of idealism and hero worship. An American hero emerged after Charles Lindberg made his famed trans-Atlantic flight. And Americans took to air travel in a livingroom aloft, although the railroads boasted of travel from coast to coast in forty-eight hours. Even a reluctant Will Rogers took to the skies in his self-named “suicide suit.”

Scarcely two weeks into the Twenties, “The Noble Experiment” brought with it Prohibition. Regular raids were staged upon underground saloons or “speakeasies,” which flourished into the ’30s, to cover illegal drinking. American humor and satire were reflected in a song of that period from the Louis Jordan repertoire as patrons declared at the threat of a raid: “There Ain’t Nobody Here But Us Chickens.” And African-American music came into its own as it set the trend for the popular music that would eventually evolve from Ragtime to Jazz to Rhythm & Blues to Rock ‘n’ Roll.

At the start of the decade the printed word reigned supreme as the sole provider of news and information to America. But in the Fall of 1920 something new was (literally) “in the air.” In a few short weeks an upstart newcomer would appear on the national scene to challenge the autonomy of the press.

From his little garage on the outskirts of Pittsburgh, Frank Conrad continued to forge the path toward commercial broadcasting with regular, scheduled programs, sponsors, and, most important, an unseen audience who encouraged him every step of the way through phone calls and letters.



Frank Conrad's house and garage, July 1920.

When Westinghouse finally recognized the commercial merit of Conrad's activities and set up its own station, KDKA, the decision was in some respects anti-climactic. It was simply a natural extension of the activities that Frank Conrad had been undertaking for the past year.

Yet the national implications of KDKA's first broadcast caught the attention and fired the imagination of the country, setting off a radio boom that, in many ways, continues today. Radio gave impetus to future newsworthy events. It captured the spirit of the Twenties as the radio craze came into full swing. Its impact was felt on the social front and in the market place.

The golden age of advertising was now full blown and it gained new momentum as people were sold via the airwaves. Old-timers remember with nostalgia the Happiness Boys, sponsored by Happiness Candy. Their popular patter also helped plug Interwoven Sox in one of the early commercials: "Sox, sox; we're the Interwoven pair; we're Billy Jones and Ernie Hare . . ."

The country was seduced by commercialism, but Lee DeForest, who had invented the three-element vacuum tube and who considered radio a public trust, was outraged and railed against radio advertising. "What have you done to my child?" he lamented. "You have sent him out on the street in rags of ragtime to collect money from all and sundry. You have made of him a laughingstock of intelligence, surely a stench in the nostrils of the gods of the ionosphere."

Nonetheless, the popularity of radio reached into every area of society. It propelled the information highways, boosted business fever and advanced political careers. Fittingly, radio's debut on the national scene came during the election of a new chief executive, Warren Harding, when the country was changing its mood and its aspirations. This new scientific upstart had helped create a new dynamism. What began as a visionary concept from Frank Conrad's amateur station 8XK, had developed into a full-fledged industry spearheaded by the first commercial broadcasting station, KDKA.

During the '20s, KDKA was the dominant radio station located in Pittsburgh, although four other stations were on the air: KQV, WJAS, WWSW and WCAE. The official population figure for the city of Pittsburgh, as recorded in the 1920 census, was 588,343. Nationwide, for the first time in American history, more people were living in cities than in the country.

Radio stations sprang into operation across the nation in great numbers. In 1920 there was only one broadcasting station. The next year, 29 more came on the air. In 1922 more than 500 new stations opened for business.

Following the lead of the early shortwave network based in Pittsburgh, the National Broadcasting Company was formed in 1926. By the end of the decade, there were two national networks operated by NBC, known as the "Red" and the "Blue." The CBS network was organized in 1927.

It was during those early years that radio-set ownership took a sensational leap. Sales of radios and parts grew from almost nothing at the start of the '20s to \$650,000,000 in 1928. A radio receiver could be found in virtually every home. The fortunes of the radio manufacturers were increasing rapidly. If there was ever an "instant industry," it was radio.

When the stock market crashed in 1929, the young radio industry, although affected, had the vibrancy and potential to continue as a dynamic force in improving and enriching everyday life in America.

What types of programs did Frank Conrad broadcast from his garage in Wilkinsburg?

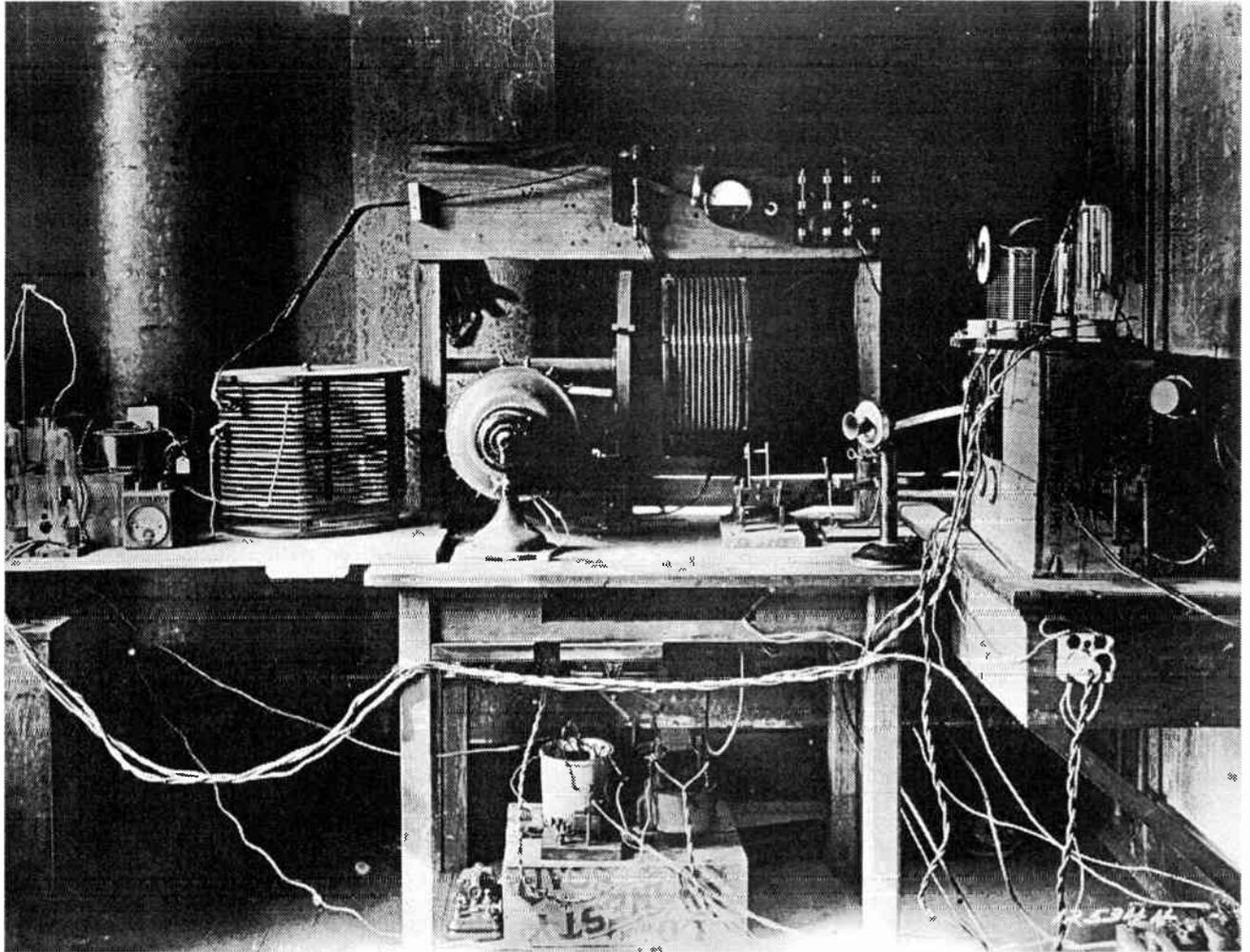
At first the programs consisted of phonograph records. Soon friends and neighbors of Conrad's who were musically talented were invited to perform on the programs, which were broadcast regularly on Wednesday and Saturday evenings throughout 1920.

Eventually Conrad ran a microphone into the parlor of his home and aired piano solos played by his sons Crawford and Francis—one of the first "remote" broadcasts.

Interest in Conrad's programs grew steadily by word-of-mouth and newspaper articles describing his latest radio feats.



Frank Conrad's house and garage, July 1920, showing "remote" line into the house. Conrad's station was on the second floor of the garage, behind the upper right window.



Interior view of 8XK, showing the equipment Conrad used for his broadcasts, July 1920.

How did a Wilkinsburg music store become the first radio advertiser?

Eventually Conrad had aired all of his own phonograph records and those of his neighbors; new material was needed. So he took his dilemma to the owner of the Hamilton Music Store on Wood Street in Wilkinsburg.

The owner, aware of Conrad's broadcasts, was happy to lend him all of the records he needed with the stipulation that he tell his listeners where they could purchase the recordings. Conrad agreed and the store owner soon discovered that records played over the air sold better than others. The commercial aspect of broadcasting was born and remains today a foundation of the industry.

What Pittsburgh department store advertised radios for sale to pick up Conrad's broadcasts?

The Joseph Horne company ran an ad in the Pittsburgh Sun on September 29, 1920 offering radios for sale to the general public. The ad described the reception of a Conrad broadcast by the store's newly-installed radio receiver. Sets could be purchased starting at ten dollars each.

The ad was a milestone; it was recognition by an established business that radio broadcasting had money-making potential. The old notion of radio as a "wireless telephone" connecting two individual stations, vanished in the ink and paper of that edition. The advertisement was the spark that led Westinghouse to enter the broadcasting field.

*Joseph Horne Company
ad of September 29, 1920
offering radios for sale to
"pick up" Conrad's
broadcasts.*

**Air Concert
"Picked Up"
By Radio Here**

Victrola music, played into the air over a wireless telephone, was "picked up" by listeners on the wireless receiving station which was recently installed here for patrons interested in wireless experiments. The concert was heard Thursday night about 10 o'clock, and continued 20 minutes. Two orchestra numbers, a soprano solo—which rang particularly high and clear through the air—and a juvenile "talking piece" constituted the program.

The music was from a Victrola pulled up close to the transmitter of a wireless telephone in the home of Frank Conrad, Penn and Peebles avenues, Wilkinsburg. Mr. Conrad is a wireless enthusiast and "puts on" the wireless concerts periodically for the entertainment of the many people in this district who have wireless sets.

Amateur Wireless Sets, made by the maker of the Set which is in operation in our store, are on sale here \$10.00 up.

West. Document

Who was the Westinghouse executive responsible for the start of KDKA radio?

Harry P. Davis, a vice president of Westinghouse, is credited with the decision to start KDKA. He was a friend of Frank Conrad and well aware of Conrad's amateur radio activities. He also happened to be Conrad's boss. When Davis read the Horne's radio ad in the newspaper on September 29, 1920, he became excited.

Davis called Conrad into his office at the East Pittsburgh Works the following day and told him of an idea that was just beginning to take shape.

During WWI, Westinghouse had invested a sizeable amount of money in radio manufacturing facilities. A large staff of experts was employed. With

the war now over, the company found itself with this large investment and organization on its hands—and no work. Clearly something needed to be done.

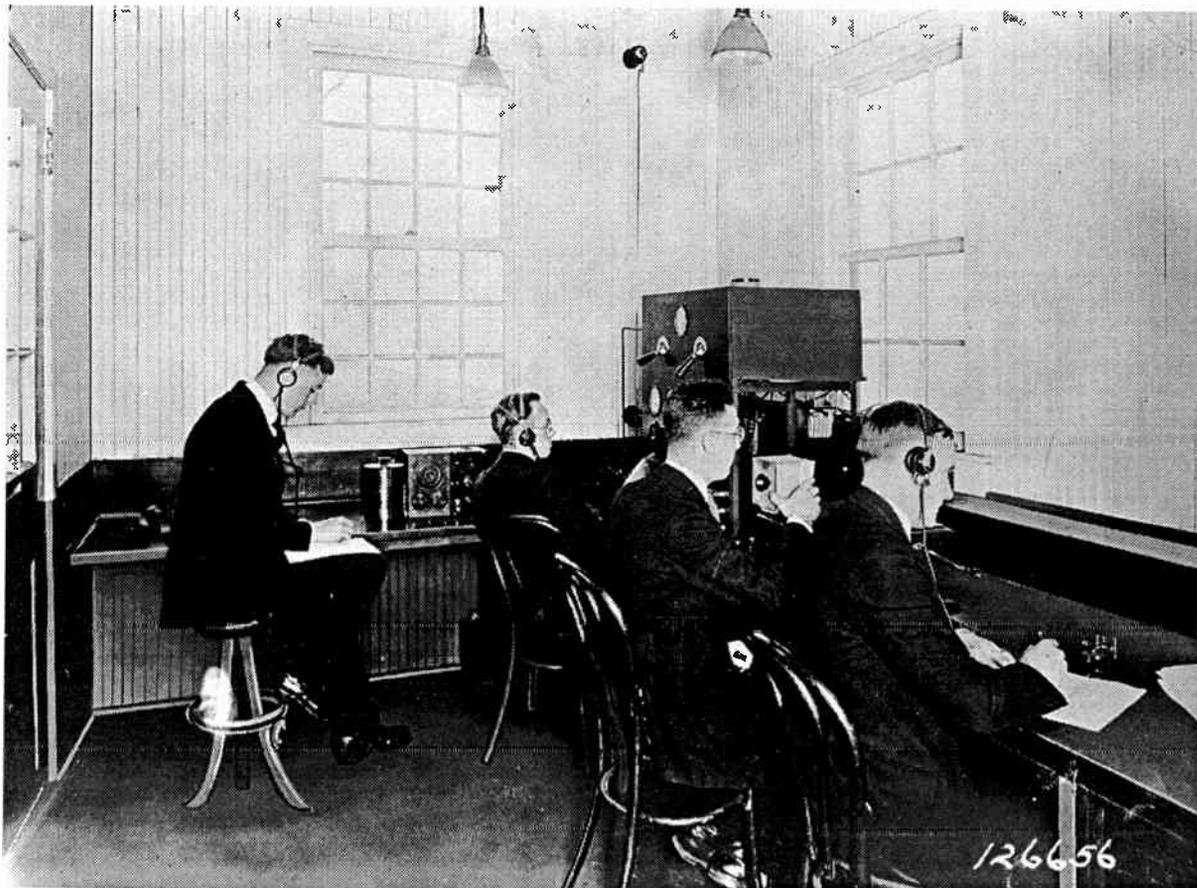
Referring to the Horne's ad, Davis proposed that Westinghouse set up its own commercial station and use its idled radio manufacturing facilities to produce simple receivers for sale to the public. The company could produce programs as a community service and publicize the Westinghouse name.

Other executives were called in and agreed to the idea. It was decided to launch the station by broadcasting the presidential election returns, just four weeks away. Could the station be set up



Harry P. Davis, founder of KDKA.

by that time? Conrad said yes. Application for a radio license was promptly prepared and, under Conrad's supervision, work commenced on a 100-watt transmitter.



*The scene of KDKA's first broadcast, November 2, 1920.
Left to right: R. S. McClelland, William Thomas, Leo H. Rosenberg, John Frazier.*

Where and when did the first KDKA broadcast take place?

The tallest building at Westinghouse's East Pittsburgh Works was the eight-story "K" Building. It was decided that maximum signal strength would be achieved by installing the transmitter on the roof of this structure. A small wooden shack, covered by metal sheathing, was built near a corner of the roof and was finished just days before the station was set to go on the air.

At 8 P.M. on November 2, 1920, KDKA made its debut, broadcasting the Harding-Cox election returns supplied by telephone from the Pittsburgh Post and Sun. Leo H. Rosenberg, of Westinghouse's publicity department, became the station's first radio announcer.

Ironically, Frank Conrad was not at this first broadcast. Because the transmitter had not been adequately tested, Conrad stood by at his amateur station in Wilkinsburg ready to take over if the new equipment atop the "K" Building failed.

The broadcast, heard by several hundred to perhaps a few thousand listeners, created a national sensation. Stories about the election night broadcast were carried in papers from coast to coast. Soon everyone wanted to tune in Pittsburgh, the center of this new radio universe.

It is generally supposed that the four men shown in the picture on the opposite page were the only ones in the broadcast shack on the historic night of November 2, 1920. But there was indeed someone else in the shack that night.

The story began a few months before when Frank Conrad, in one of his twice-weekly broadcasts, said he would like to hear from amateur radio operators beyond several cities he named. In a tiny town in northeastern Ohio, with the long name of Gnadenhutten, 12-year-old Albert Sindlinger had built his own radio receiving set. Albert knew his geography well enough to gauge that he was farther from Pittsburgh than any of the cities Conrad mentioned. The next day he followed Conrad's instructions to call him "collect."

This began an extended series of communications, as Albert called "collect" each time Conrad posed a question about forms of transmission being used at his garage station. Eventually Albert received a handwritten letter from Conrad, inviting him to attend the first KDKA broadcast on November 2. The letter included instructions on how to take the Ardmore trolley from Pittsburgh to the Westinghouse plant and the "K" Building in Turtle Creek.

The letter impressed young Sindlinger's father, who offered to drive Albert and his younger brother to Pittsburgh for the event. When they arrived at the shack, they met Conrad, who warmly introduced himself to Albert's father. It was only then that Conrad learned that his knowledgeable Ohio correspondent was not the father but 12-year-old Albert. When Conrad left for his garage station, he told the visitors from Ohio they were welcome to stay at the shack.

As the evening wore on, and the broadcast of election numbers became routine, Albert was invited to read some of the dispatches. Thus, regardless of what claims others may make about "first broadcasts," Albert Sindlinger clearly was the first 12-year-old announcer on radio.

Now in his late 80s and living in Wallingford, Pa., Mr. Sindlinger publishes an economics newsletter for clients all over the country.

***What President's inaugural address
was the first heard on radio?***

The inaugural address of Warren G. Harding, the 28th President, was broadcast over KDKA on March 4, 1921, just four months after the station had reported his election over Cox. (Here in Allegheny County, Harding won a plurality of 105,000 votes over Cox).

Two years and five months later, KDKA broadcast news of Harding's death, August 2, 1923.

The following year, KDKA broadcast the Republican and Democratic conventions at which Coolidge was nominated for president on the GOP ticket and John W. Davis won the nod for the Democratic slate.

***What is the connection between
the Arlington Time Signals and radio?***

As a public service, KDKA began broadcasting the Arlington Time Signals from Washington so listeners could set their timepieces accurately. Each night at sign-off a long beep would be transmitted, signifying 10 P.M.

When the station tried to abandon these nightly signals, the avalanche of letters from listeners virtually demanded that the signals be continued. To this day, radio is kept on time with the hourly beep which keeps the nation in synchronization.

***What future President unknowingly made
his radio debut on January 15, 1921 in Pittsburgh?***

Herbert Hoover was invited to speak at the Duquesne Club in downtown Pittsburgh. He was Secretary of Commerce in the Harding cabinet and the purpose of his speech was to appeal for funds to help the starving people of Europe after World War I.

Because radio was so new, Hoover was not told in advance that his speech would be broadcast. The microphone was cleverly concealed in a pot of flowers on the lectern. His message was heard by thousands of listeners whose generous response played a significant role in making Hoover's mission of mercy a success. Hoover's appeal pioneered the use of radio in seeking public support for worthy causes.

Who is credited with being the first regular announcer on radio?

It was Harold Arlin, who started his work at KDKA in February 1921. He introduced guests and performers and later reported baseball and football games. For all intents, it was he who created the profession of the radio announcer. As programming expanded, others were hired to assist Arlin.

It is interesting to note that most announcers in the earliest days of radio were not permitted to identify themselves over the air. The stations apparently did this out of a fear that announcers might become too popular and hard to control.

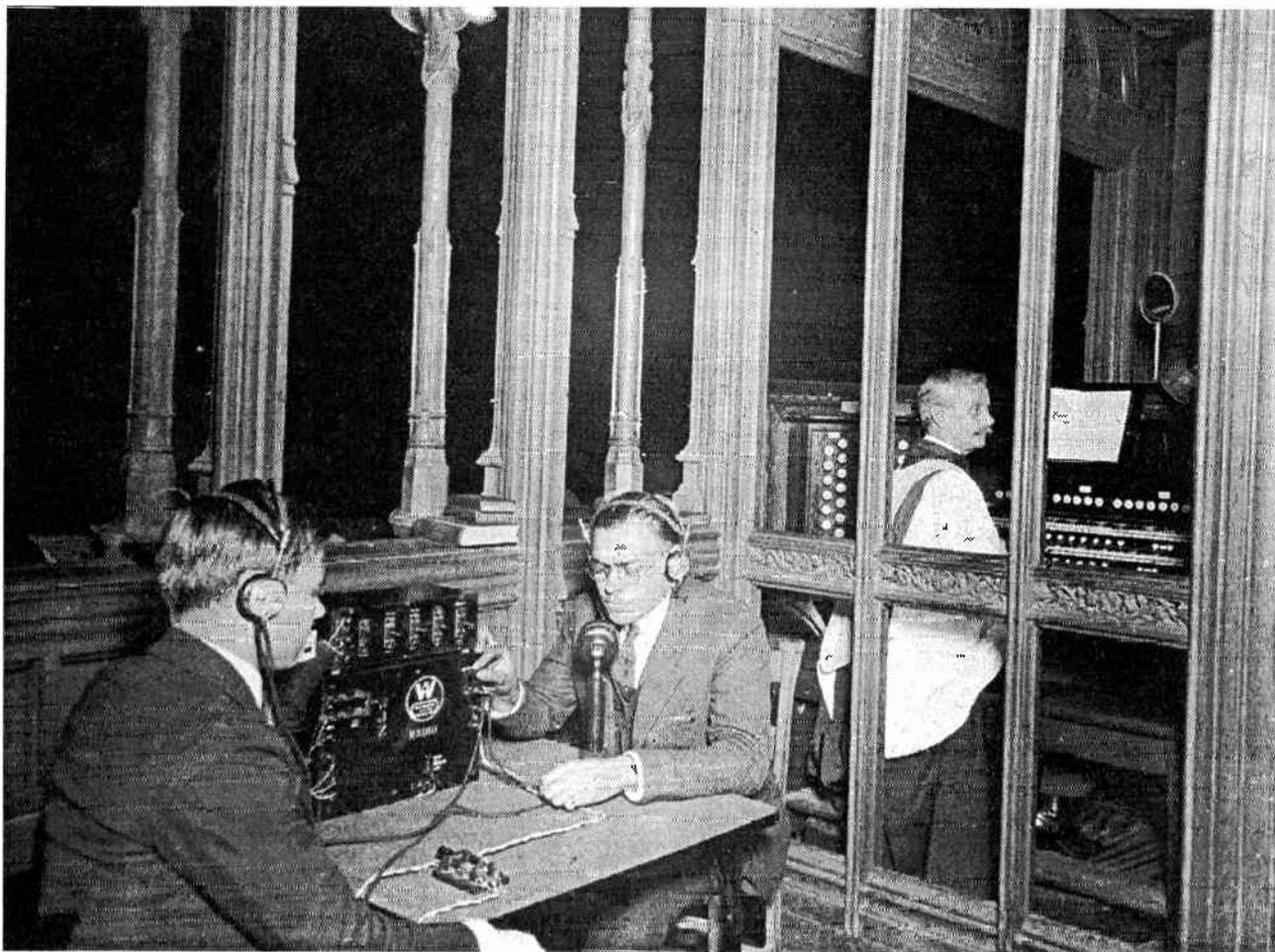


Harold Arlin at the KDKA microphone in the early '20s.

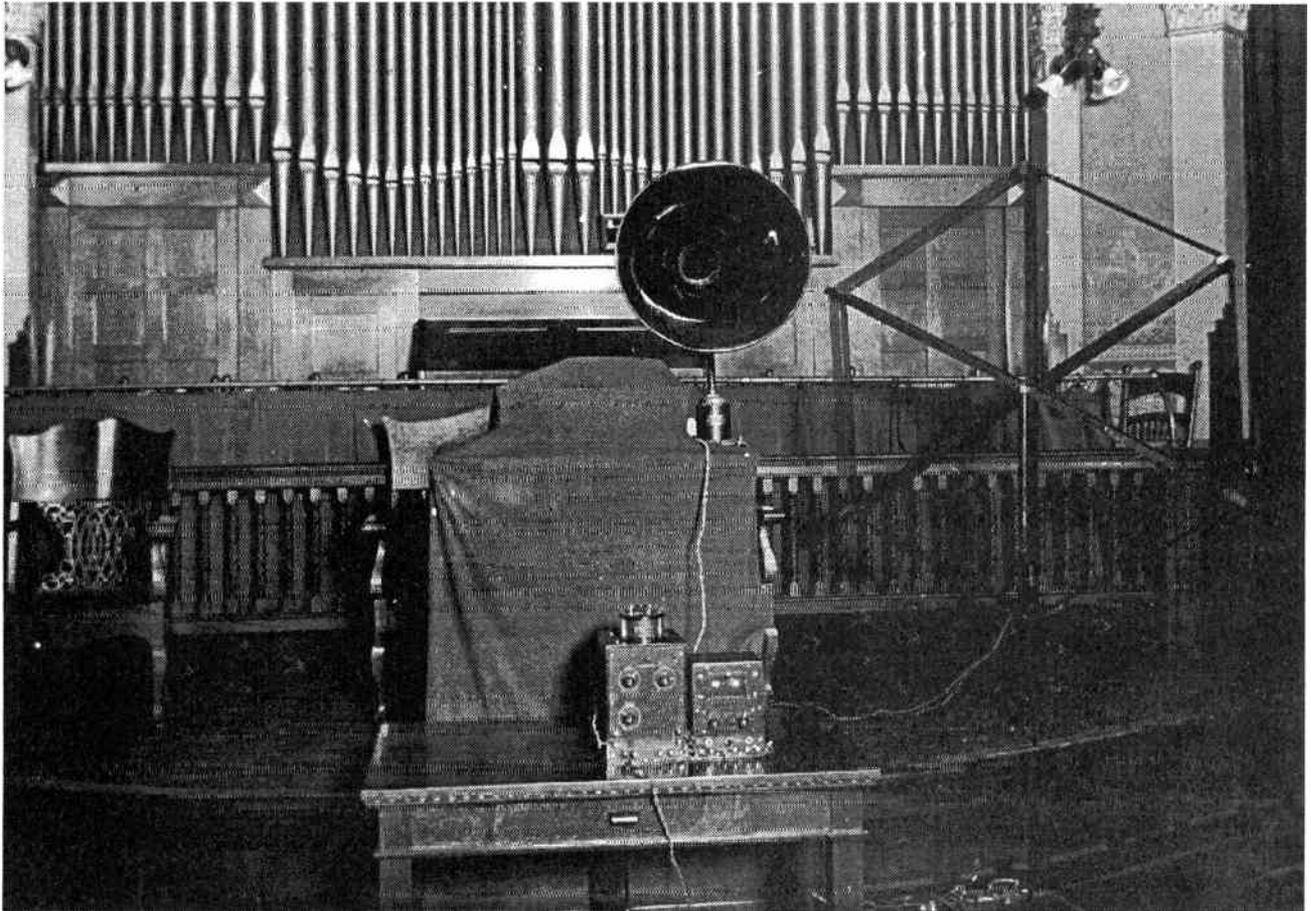
When was the first church service broadcast on Pittsburgh radio?

On Sunday, January 2, 1921 KDKA carried its first church service from the Calvary Episcopal Church in East Liberty.

Leo Rosenberg, the person who did the announcing on the Harding-Cox election returns two months earlier, was sent to cover the services with a co-worker. Leo was Jewish and his co-worker was Catholic. The story goes that they dressed in choir robes to be inconspicuous while they handled the technical chores. According to Leo, they sometimes sang along with the choir.



Early church service broadcast showing some of the radio equipment used.



Herron Hill Presbyterian Church at the time of the “pastorless” church service.

Another first, a church service conducted by radio, occurred on Sunday April 17, 1921 at the Herron Hill Presbyterian Church. The Herron Hill congregation was without a pastor so a radio receiver was installed to pick up the Sunday evening services from Calvary Episcopal Church. In this unique experiment, the congregation assembled as usual, but watched and listened in amazement as a loudspeaker took the place of a minister in the pulpit.

Pittsburgh papers heralded the event as the future of church-going in America. Although radio never replaced clergymen in churches, broadcasts of religious services became a regular part of radio station program schedules.

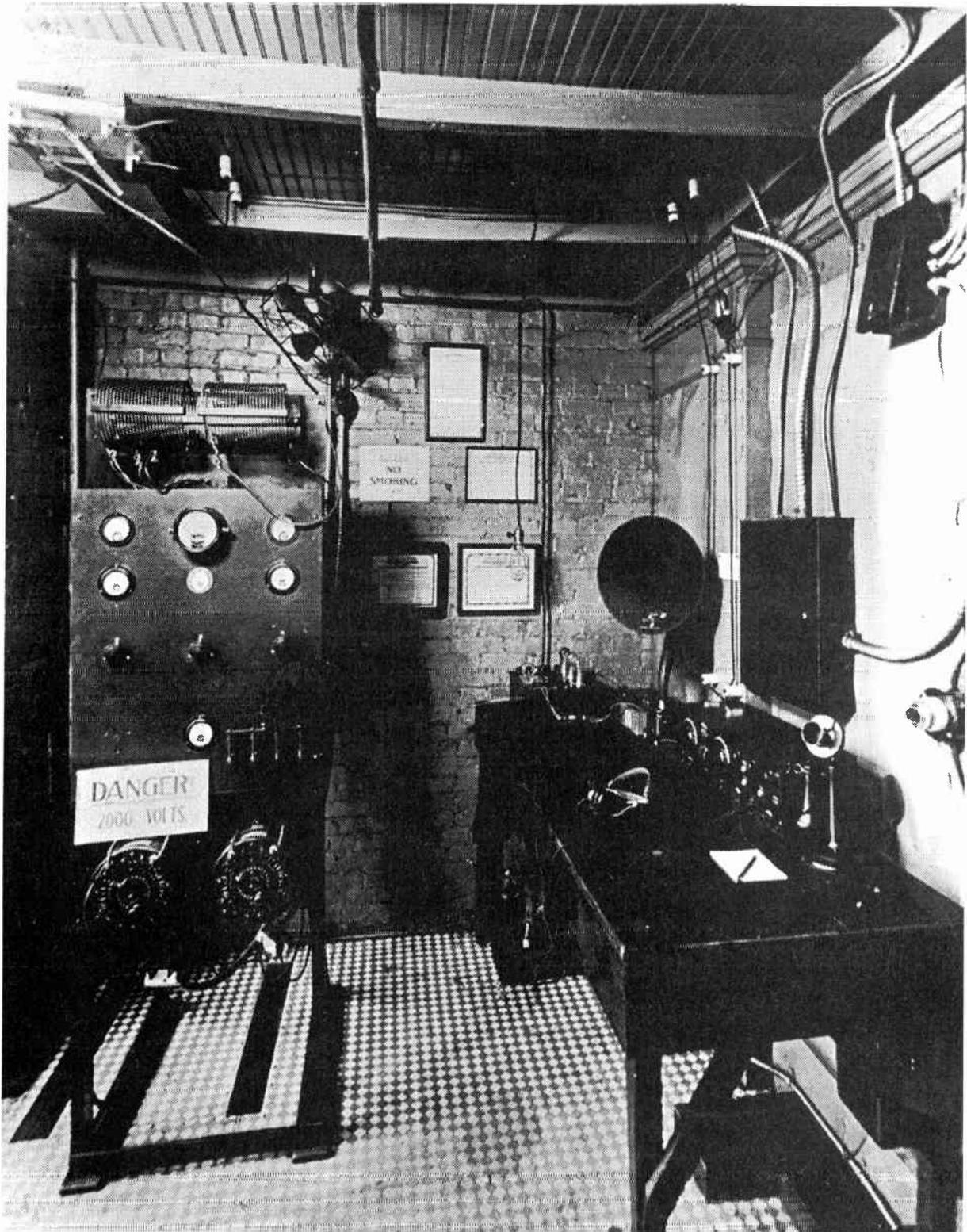
***Didn't other radio stations
come on the air soon after KDKA?***

KQV, owned by the Doubleday-Hill Electric Company, was Pittsburgh's second radio station. It was licensed in October, 1921 but operated two years earlier under the amateur call 8ZAE, licensed to Bert Williams, an employee of the company. This gave rise to the contention that it actually predated KDKA in broadcasting, a debate that continues today. What seems clear, at least, is that KQV was the first broadcasting station located within the City of Pittsburgh limits. KDKA, on the other hand, was based at the East Pittsburgh Works of Westinghouse in a building physically located in Turtle Creek Borough.

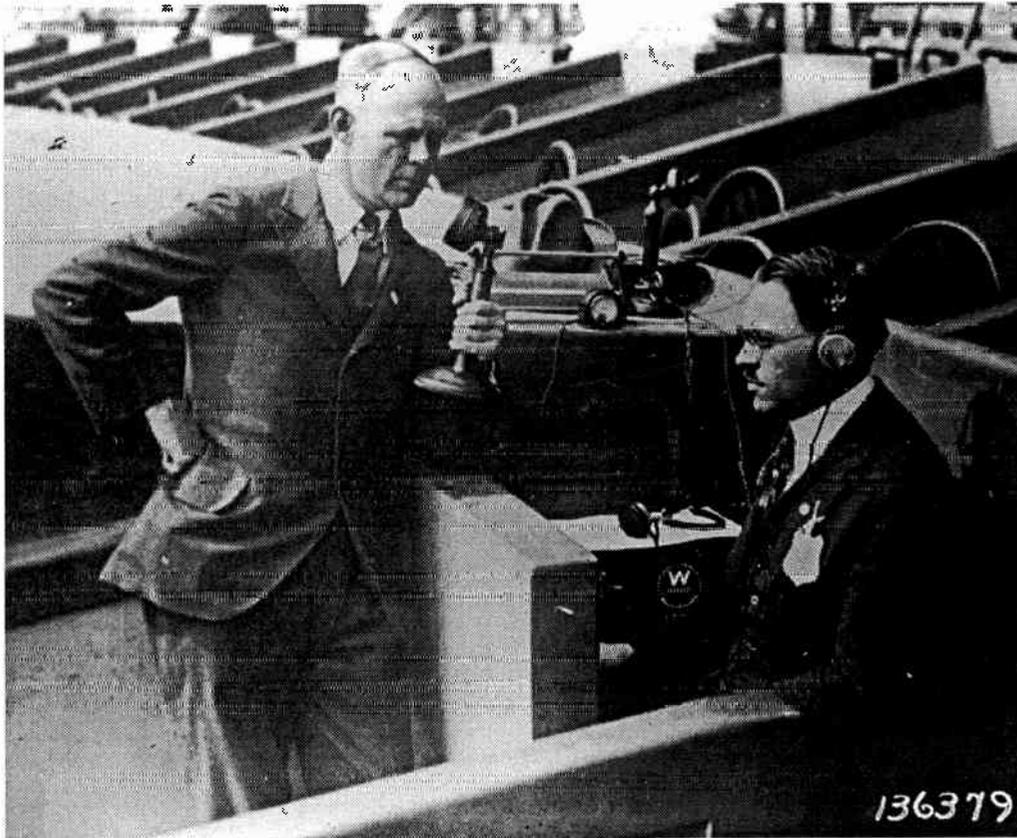
In May 1922 WCAE came into existence. Officials of the Kaufmann & Baer Department Store and the Pittsburgh Press built WCAE, housing it in a corner of the 8th floor of the store. Three small phonograph demonstration rooms were used for the transmitter, master control room, studio and offices. The aerial was strung across Smithfield Street to the corner of the Nixon Theater. Although it was licensed to operate on 100 watts full-time, broadcasting was sporadic. When Gimbels bought Kaufmann & Baer in February 1926, it took over WCAE. Two years later Gimbels sold WCAE to the publishers of the Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph for around a million dollars.

The early history of WWSW is shrouded in mystery. Some say it was originally the property of an evangelist, Buck Sproul, in Monessen. The call letters were WMBJ and it operated at 1500 on the dial. However, it operated only sporadically—whenever Sproul decided to hold revival meetings. It is also rumored to have been operating in the East End of Pittsburgh on Frankstown Avenue. When purchased by William S. Walker, whose initials were used in the call letters, the studios were in the Schenley Hotel in Oakland.

WJAS was started by the Pickering Furniture Company on October 19, 1921. The studio was located in the Pickering Furniture building at 10th Street and Penn Avenue, downtown, near where the Convention Center now stands.



Amateur station 8ZAE in 1920, one year before it received the commercial call letters KQV.



Early broadcast of a baseball game.

What were the first major sporting events carried on a Pittsburgh radio station?

The Jack Dempsey-Georges Carpentier heavyweight title bout was one. Jack Dempsey retained his title on that occasion, June 21, 1921. Although it was fought in Jersey City, N. J., a report, blow by blow, was carried over KDKA in Pittsburgh.

The first Pittsburgh prize fight carried on radio took place even earlier, April 11, 1921, when Johnny Ray defeated Johnny Dundee for the lightweight title. Forent Gibson, one of the sportswriters at the Pittsburgh Post, was the pioneer radio announcer who described the fistic battle.

Early Pittsburgh radio covered many other sporting events. The Davis Cup Tennis Matches were broadcast from the Allegheny Country Club in Sewickley in August 1921. Also that month, KDKA aired a Pittsburgh-Philadelphia baseball game live from Forbes Field, the first major league game to be carried by radio.

How did farmers benefit from radio?

Although the Pittsburgh area was highly industrialized, with its major steel mills and manufacturing plants, it also covered a large farm population in the Tri-State area. Servicing this farm area, which comprised eastern Ohio, northern West Virginia and western Pennsylvania, was KDKA's "Farm and Home Hour."

Stock prices and commodity information were included on daily broadcasts, not only on the "Farm and Home Hour," but on local farm programs headed by Homer Martz on KDKA.

As early as May 19, 1921, KDKA was broadcasting Market Reports from Washington and the Chicago hog and feed markets. Later special rural-slanted radio programs that catered to that vast audience included "Grand Ole Opry," the "National Barn Dance," and others.



Broadcast of a farm program in the early '20s.

What was meant by the term “DX-ing?”

In amateur radio parlance, DX-ing means to receive a station from a great distance. As radio stations began to spread across the country, it became popular to try to pick up stations in other cities. Each morning people in Pittsburgh, for example, would boast that they listened to New York or Chicago or even San Francisco the previous evening.

A popular joke of the time relates the response of one radio fan who topped the DX-ing claims of his co-worker by stating, “Last night I stuck my backside out the window and got ‘Chile.’”

Some of the distant stations that Pittsburghers attempted to receive:

WAAQ - New England Motor Sales Co., Greenwich, Conn.

WBAA - Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana

WAL - McCook Army Station, Dayton, Ohio

WAAR - Groves-Thornton Hardware Co., Huntingdon, W. Va.

WBAG - Diamond State Fiber Co., Bridgeport, Pa.

KFC - Post-Intelligencer, Seattle, Wash.

KYY - Radio Telephone Shop, San Francisco, Calif.

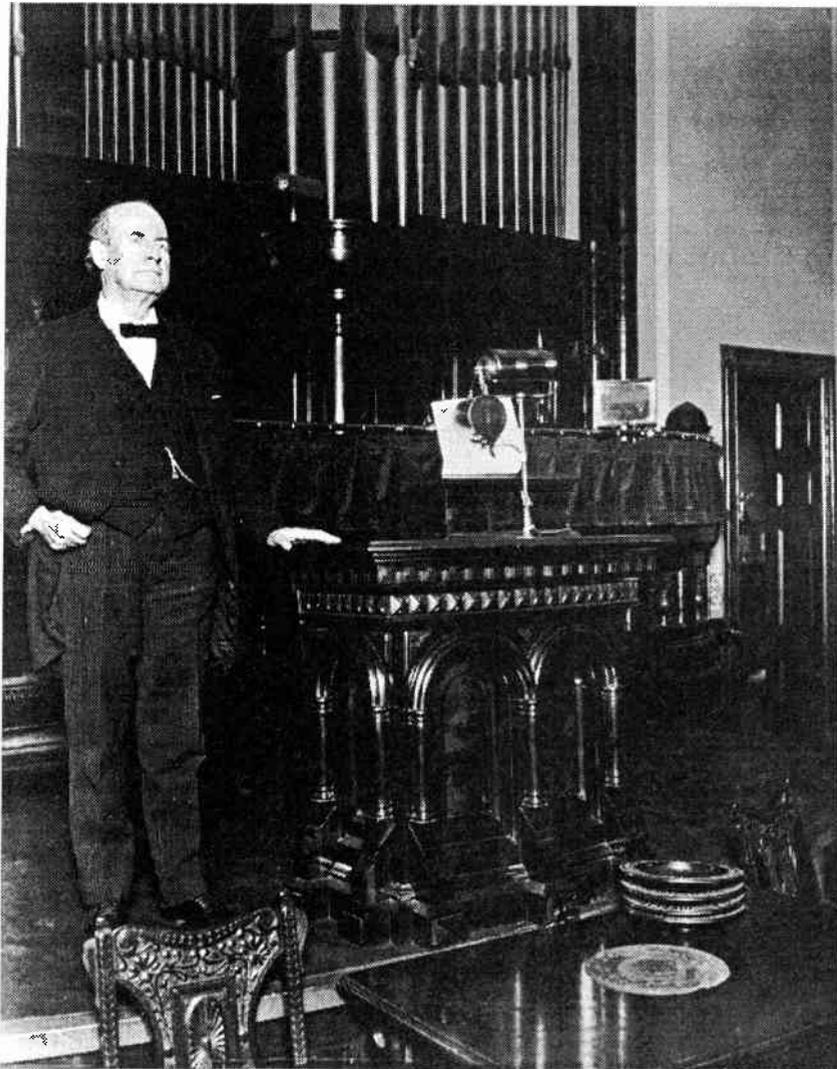


Pittsburgh Press “Good Old Days” cartoon looks back at the usual result of an evening of DX-ing.

What perennial presidential candidate broadcast from Pittsburgh in the early '20s?

William Jennings Bryan, "The Great Commoner," who three times headed the Democratic ticket for President, made a visit to Pittsburgh in 1922. One of KDKA's pick-up transmitters had been installed in the Point Breeze Presbyterian Church. It carried Bryan's sermon which was relayed to the East Pittsburgh transmitter.

Every prominent person who visited the city of Pittsburgh was invited to be introduced and interviewed on the airwaves to a growing radio audience. The number of listeners was increasing so fast that radio-set manufacturers were simply unable to meet the demand.



William Jennings Bryan speaks at the Point Breeze Presbyterian Church in 1922.

What distinction in radio does the name Saudek hold?

Victor Saudek was conductor of the first orchestra to be organized exclusively for broadcasting work, The KDKA Little Symphony Orchestra. Its personnel was chosen from among musically trained and talented employees of Westinghouse Electric.

The first broadcast of the Little Symphony Orchestra conducted by Victor Saudek took place December 4, 1922. This dinner hour program was the first of literally hundreds broadcast during the '20s. During the '30s, Mr. Saudek conducted concerts on the lawn of the Schenley Hotel in Oakland.

Victor Saudek's son, Robert Saudek, was for years the Continuity Chief at KDKA where he wrote many of the outstanding dramatic programs of early radio.

After leaving Pittsburgh, Robert Saudek went to New York where he was named producer of Omnibus, sponsored by the Ford Foundation. This program brought to the airwaves, first in radio and then on TV, the voice and person of Alistaire Cooke.



The KDKA Little Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of Victor Saudek, in a program that originated from Carnegie Library in Oakland.



Sebastian Sapienza, a member of the Westinghouse Band, played the first clarinet solo on KDKA.

What role did the Little Symphony musicians play in the development of radio broadcasting?

Before KDKA received its license, experiments in live broadcasting were conducted at the “K” building at the East Pittsburgh Works of Westinghouse. Various instrumental and vocal sounds were tested for their audio quality. A number of musicians who played in the existing orchestra and band were called from the lunch table to perform.

Because of its wide range of sound, the engineer preferred to test with the clarinet. A musician/composer, Sebastian Sapienza, was pressed into service to play the first live clarinet solo to be aired—“Annie Laurie”—followed by several opera selections and classical minuets.

After its formation in 1922, the Little Symphony Orchestra performed regularly on KDKA. In the later '20s it was scheduled to play nightly, following newscaster Lowell Thomas and the famed comedy series, “Amos ‘n’ Andy.”

The orchestra soon developed a long-range audience. One listener from Florida particularly enjoyed the clarinet solos by Sebastian and sent him crates of oranges and grapefruit, accompanied by a note of appreciation.

The recent immigrant, Sapienza, who had played the various opera houses in Italy, now created many of the arrangements for the orchestra and for the band, which was under the direction of T. J. Vastine.

***What was meant by “a pick-up station”
in early Pittsburgh radio?***

The KDKA studio and transmitter were located in Turtle Creek at Westinghouse's East Pittsburgh Works, 14 miles from downtown. It was decided to install telephone lines so many interesting events which were occurring throughout the city could be covered by radio. These pick-up stations, called remote broadcasts, linked Pittsburgh together more completely than any other city in the world. Here's a list from the early '20s of the locations from which programs could originate:

Alvin Theater, Sixth Street

Nixon Theater, Liberty Avenue

Calvary Episcopal Church, Shady Avenue

Unitarian Church, Morewood Avenue

Cameo Theater, 347 Fifth Avenue

Ritz Theater, 5th & Market Street

Carnegie Library of Oakland

The Willows, Oakmont, Pa.

Chamber of Commerce Building, Downtown

Davis Theater, 534 Smithfield Street

Sanders Inn, Freeport Road

Duquesne Club, Sixth Avenue

Syria Mosque in Oakland

East End Christian Church, Alder Street

Duquesne Theater, 532 Penn Avenue

Emory M. E. Church, Highland Avenue

First Presbyterian Church, Sixth Avenue

Forbes Field, Bouquet & Louise Street

Fort Pitt Hotel, 10th Street and Penn Avenue

Hotel Chatham, 423 Penn Avenue, Downtown

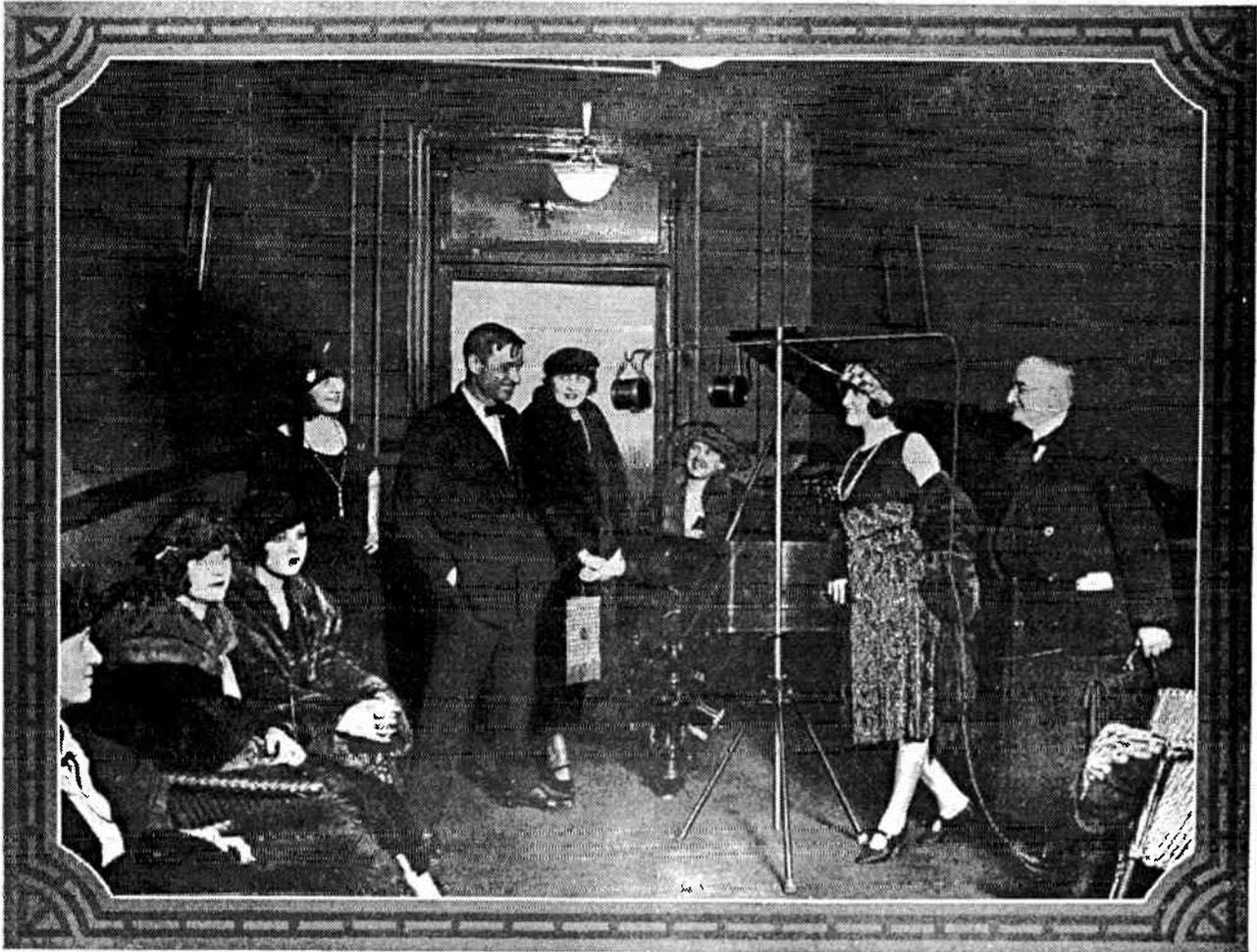
Kaufmann's Dining Room, Fifth Avenue & Smithfield Street

McCreery's Dining Room, Wood & Sixth Avenue

Memorial Hall (Soldiers & Sailors) in Oakland
Methodist Episcopal Church, Hale and Kelly Street, Homewood
Motor Square Garden, Center & Beatty Street
Pitt Theater, Seventh & Penn Avenue
Point Breeze Church, 6700 Penn Avenue
Rowland & Clark Theater, Wood Street, Wilkinsburg
Schenley Theater, Forbes Street
Shadyside Presbyterian Church, Amberson & Westminister Street
South Avenue M. E. Church, 723 South Avenue, Wilkinsburg
St. Patrick's Church, Liberty Avenue
Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church, Friendship & Evaline Street
The Pittsburgh Post, Downtown
Trinity Church, Sixth Avenue
Westinghouse Club, 601 Pennwood Avenue, Wilkinsburg
William Penn Hotel, Downtown
Frank Conrad's residence, 7112 Penn Avenue, Wilkinsburg



The Syria Mosque in Oakland was an early pick-up station for KDKA.



Will Rogers gave his first performance on radio from the Pittsburgh Post studio of KDKA.

What Pittsburgh company sponsored Will Rogers on radio?

In 1922, Will Rogers made his radio debut on KDKA. His down-to-earth commentary on the American scene was heard only by those who owned the very first radio receivers.

Gulf Oil also sponsored Will Rogers in the early '30s on NBC which was carried locally by KDKA. In fact, Gulf Oil was among the very first sponsors of radio programs, in time competing with Mobil, Texaco, Esso, Cities Service, etc. Eventually, gasoline companies would be spending millions of dollars trying to persuade the driving public to favor their brand.

Despite the burgeoning automobile production, most of Pittsburgh's working class used the trolley system. It's hard to believe that as late as October 1923, horse cars were still running along Sarah Street on the South Side.

Who was the oldest “old-timer” among the early Pittsburgh radio engineers?

His name was Herb Irving. Herb’s home was in Saxonburg, the location of the KDKA transmitter many years ago. He died in 1993.

He began as a radio engineer with Westinghouse in 1924, working at the “K” Building studio in East Pittsburgh.

Herb told a story that took him back to the very beginning of broadcasting. In the year 1920, Herb was a radio operator in the Merchant Marine. He was traveling up the east coast on November 2, 1920. As he scanned the spectrum, he heard the Harding-Cox election returns from KDKA in Pittsburgh. The victor was Warren G. Harding. Herb went to report the news to the captain of the ship, who was sure that Herb had made up the story. He knew that Morse code could be transmitted by radio but he had never heard that a voice could travel by air.

Who was the well-known news and political reporter in early Pittsburgh radio?

Louis Kaufman garnered one of the biggest audiences in Pittsburgh with his down-to-earth treatment of the news of the day, peppered with his personal observations and comments. During his many years in the radio broadcasting field, he was heard on KDKA, WCAE and WJAS.

A practicing attorney, he kept his audiences up-to-date on the latest in city politics and the human-interest happenings on Grant Street. His son, Louis L. Kaufman, Jr., was also active in radio.

Why did radio stations broadcast for only a few hours a day in the early ’20s?

Initially all stations broadcast on the same frequency, 360 meters (833 kilocycles), the frequency the government had set aside for news and entertainment. However, the government didn’t regulate time schedules; this was left to the stations in each city to work out among themselves. This often led to arguments and disputes over time-sharing.

In 1923, a system of assigning separate frequencies to stations was put into place and eventually evolved into the current AM radio band.

Didn't the idea of national and international broadcasting begin in Pittsburgh?

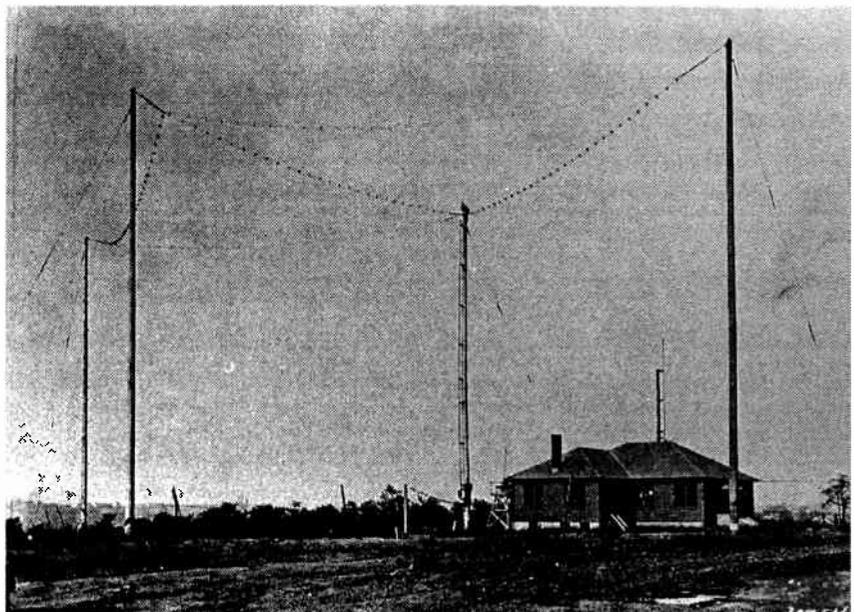
Frank Conrad's work in radio didn't stop with the advent of broadcasting. He turned his attention next to the shortwave band. Most radio engineers considered the shortwaves practically useless—the signals faded relatively close to the transmitter. Conrad discovered that while this was true, the signals got stronger at hundreds or even thousands of miles away.

From a high-powered shortwave station on the Greensburg Pike in Forest Hills Borough, broadcasts were made that were heard in South America, Europe, Africa and the Antarctic. For the first time in history a person could speak into a microphone and be heard instantly around the world by radio.

A national and international shortwave network of radio stations was soon established. Programs from Pittsburgh would be sent via shortwave to dozens of distant stations which would then rebroadcast them locally over their own transmitters.

Conrad also developed portable shortwave transmitters used for broadcasting from athletic fields, outdoor concerts, and other locations where there wasn't sufficient time to install a telephone line.

KDKA's transmitter and experimental shortwave station on the Greensburg Pike in Forest Hills Borough in 1924. In addition to broadcasting the first worldwide radio programs, this facility also transmitted the first television signals that were received by an all-electronic television receiver.

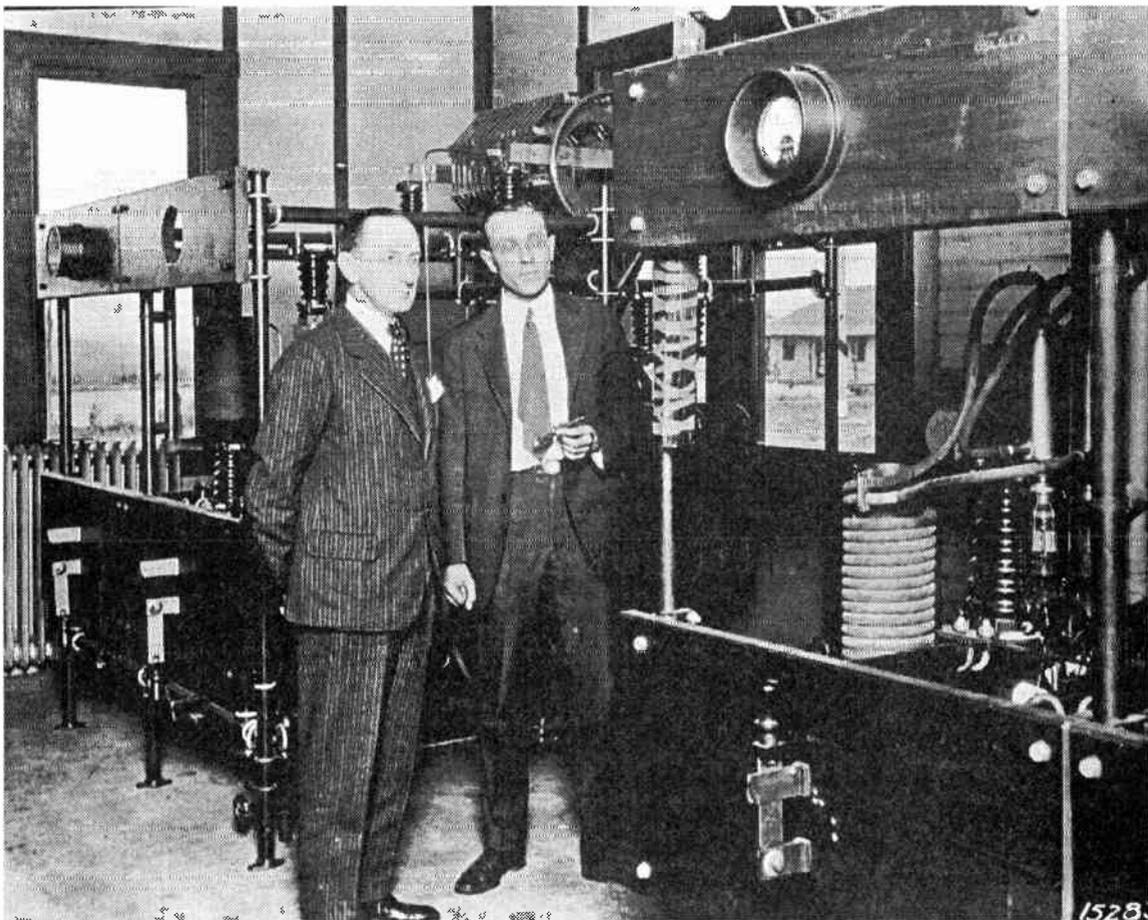


What Pittsburgh company was among the first to broadcast on the world-wide shortwave network?

H. J. Heinz used radio to celebrate Founder's Day, October 11, 1924. On that date an unprecedented number of 62 radio stations in the United States and overseas were hooked together by shortwave to transmit the anniversary celebration.

The program originated at the H. J. Heinz plant in Pittsburgh and was heard in Europe, South Africa, Scotland, England and Canada. President Calvin Coolidge participated in the program from the White House.

This historic international broadcast was the first world-wide linking of cities. All of this took place more than two years before the first so-called "national" radio network, NBC, came into being.



Guglielmo Marconi, left, and C.W. Horn of Westinghouse tour the inside of KDKA's Greensburg Pike shortwave transmitting facility in the mid-'20s.



*The glow-discharge
microphone that was used
in the broadcast of a human
heartbeat.*

What's the story behind the broadcast of a human heart beat back in 1924?

This experimental broadcast occurred on April 5, 1924 to demonstrate the extreme sensitivity of a new development in microphones. It was the glow-discharge type perfected by Dr. Phillips Thomas, a Westinghouse research engineer. It was purported to be able to pick up sound frequencies above and below the range audible to the human ear.

This new microphone was placed over the heart of the subject and it picked up the heart beat with amazing intensity, especially when the heart was subjected to stress.

The listeners responded with letters stating that the sound was “eerie” and they were stirred by the insistent “throb” of the heart.

What kind of programming was available during the mid-'20s on Pittsburgh radio?

Here's a sample taken from the newspaper listings:

NOVEMBER 15, 1925 - WCAE

Betty Crocker talk

A Menu of Thrifty Dishes

Etzi Cavato Orchestra

NOVEMBER 15, 1925 - WJAS

Talk by Mrs. Elinor W. Stills

Radio Family Hour

NOVEMBER 16, 1925 - KDKA

Live Stock, Chicago Grain Markets

Produce, Western Pennsylvania

Arlington Time Signals - 11:55 A.M.

7:30 P.M. - Girl Scouts

7:45 P.M. - Homer St. Gaudens, Dir. of Fine Arts, Carnegie Institute

8:00 P.M. - Gems from New Musical Plays

(No listing for WWSW or KQV)

Typical radio fare consisted of singers, bands, instrumentalists, and speakers, features which could be broadcast at little or no expense.

Listeners demanded more and the industry responded with more elaborate programming, introducing drama and comedy acts.

Radio became a part of our lives. The true art of radio was certainly the dramatic program—a chance for our imaginations to range far and wide—a chance to escape from the humdrum of daily life. Heroes and heroines of radio drama were seen in the mind's eye.

How did Brian McDonald of “Wilkins Amateur Hour” fame start in radio?

In the '20s Brian McDonald, who was developing a reputation around Pittsburgh as a promising young Irish tenor and showman, was hired to be program director-announcer-entertainer at WJAS. In his words: “I had to program the station with live talent for four hours each night without spending a cent. Sometime later, Hugh Brennan, who managed the down-stairs bargain basement for Sam Pickering, convinced Sam that radio had a future and the two developed WJAS into one of Pittsburgh’s better stations.”

Brian McDonald had been a featured performer on Broadway in “Earl Carroll’s Vanities.” He was also company manager and emcee of John Harris’ “Ice Capades.”



*Brian McDonald (far right)
on the air at WJAS in 1925.*

*As program director,
Brian McDonald had to
fill several hours of
broadcast time each day.*



***Is it true that Richard King Mellon had a role
in the early growth of radio in Pittsburgh?***

In answer to this question, William B. Hedges, then manager of KDKA, told this story. During the '20s, Mr. Hedges tried persuading the management of the Duquesne Electric Power Company (now Duquesne Light Co.) to advertise on radio but with no success. Then one day he noticed an ad for the Duquesne Electric Power Company in one of Pittsburgh's newspapers opposite an editorial denouncing the company. This gave him an idea. Taking the newspaper, along with a letter of introduction from a friend in New York, he headed for the office of Richard K. Mellon.

Once ushered into the office of Pittsburgh's most powerful financier, he laid out the newspaper on the desk and pointed to the ad and then to the editorial. Any advantage the advertisement achieved was negated by the disparaging editorial, he stated with finality and then said firmly: "Mr. Mellon, how would you like to advertise in a medium which will not erase the power of your advertising with an editorial? That medium is radio."

Mr. Hedges made his point. That meeting led to the production of a variety program called "Pittsburgh Varieties," a weekly show that featured dramatizations of the Electric Power Company's services and an orchestra under the direction of Umberto Egizi. The announcer was Glenn Riggs.

The program became a popular showcase for scores of talented Pittsburgh performers, along with occasional guest stars from New York, and continued for many years.

What choice did Pittsburgh listeners have in the late '20s?

There was a choice of three networks and two independent stations:

KDKA - NBC Blue Network - 50,000 watts

WCAE - NBC Red Network - 500 watts

WJAS - CBS Network - 500 watts

KQV - Independent - 100 watts

WWSW - Independent - 100 watts

Who were the major radio-set manufacturers?

The birth of a promising new industry brought scores of radio-set manufacturers into being and the demand for receiving sets was overwhelming. In fact, during 1922 more than sixty million dollars was expended for radio sets, parts and accessories.

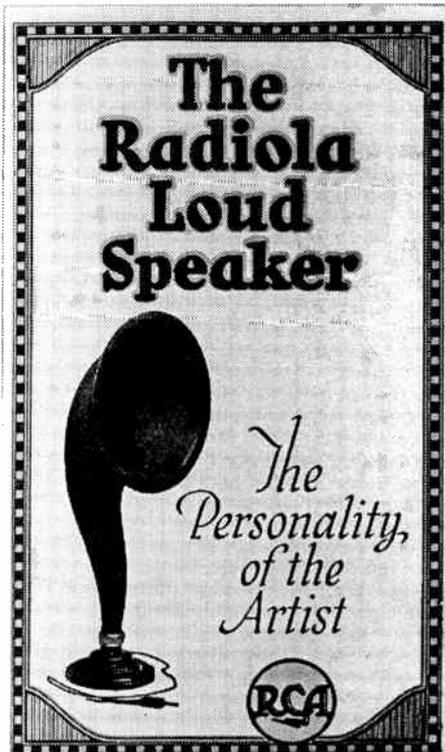
The manufacturers and their brand names included: Atwater Kent, Philco, RCA, Silvertone (Sears), Midwest, Admiral, Emerson, Zenith, Fada, Colonial, Apex, Stromberg-Carlson, Echophone and Westinghouse.

Until the sale of radio receivers, people listened on home-made crystal sets. They had to “fish” for the station by moving a thin wire, called a “Cat’s Whisker,” over a galena crystal. And it was necessary to wear earphones. To make a tuning coil, copper wire was wound around a Quaker or Mother’s Oats box. A long wire for an antenna and a ground wire connected to a water pipe completed the setup.

Next came tube sets—first one and two tubes operated by dry batteries, then larger sets with even more tubes powered by wet storage batteries. Head phones eventually gave way to horn loud speakers.

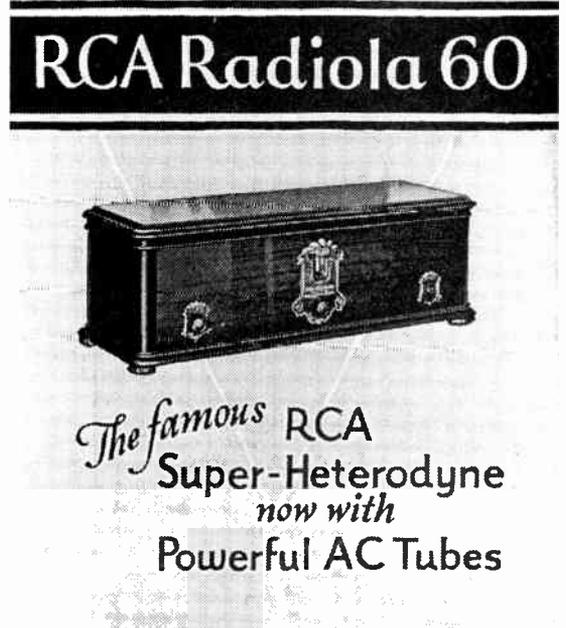


The Westinghouse Aeriola Junior, the first radio receiver manufactured for home broadcasting reception.

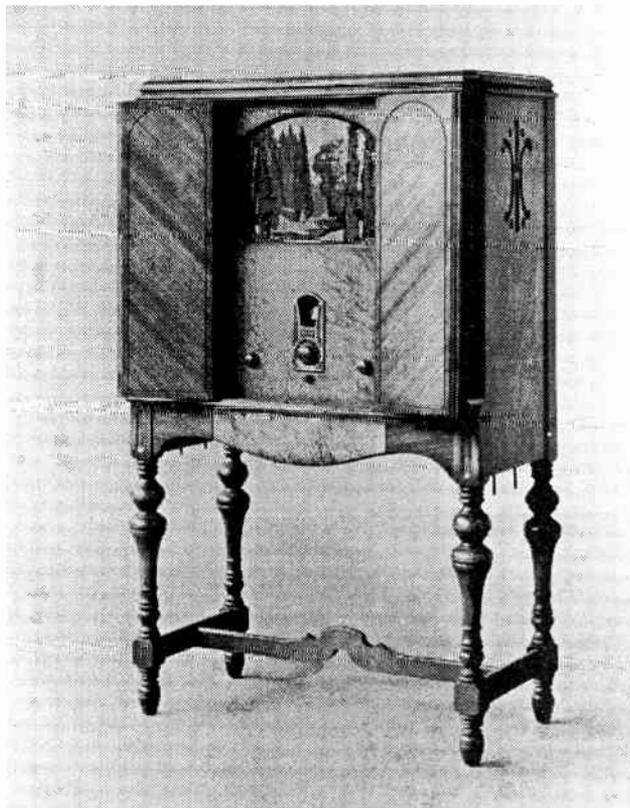


Radiola loudspeaker - 1923

In the later '20s the first AC-powered sets began to appear. It didn't take long for the manufacturers to realize that the radio receiver was to become the centerpiece of living and family rooms and they proceeded to enclose the set and speaker in elaborate consoles. Furniture makers supplied a wide range of attractive cabinets, some of which were provided with convenient hiding places for liquor.



*(Right)
The RCA Radiola 60 was the first AC-powered superheterodyne radio produced. (1927)*



*Late-'20s
Philco
console
radio.*



Ted Yearsley

What station carried tenor Ted Yearsley?

Ted Yearsley, one of Pittsburgh's early singing stars, had a regular program on WWSW. He also sang in the Westinghouse Quartet for many years and as a tenor with the Ambassador Quartette. His outstanding voice won him many honors on radio and also as a performer in church choirs and on the stage. Ted attended Fred Waring's Choral Workshop and for many years served as a popular choral director of singing groups. At age 85, Ted is still directing the Westinghouse Male Chorus.

***Did commercial radio dominate prime time
in the late '20s on Pittsburgh radio stations?***

This was a period when advertising agencies were discovering the selling power of radio. The major advertising agencies like J. Walter Thompson and Young & Rubicam in New York; N. W. Ayer in Philadelphia, and Lord & Thomas in Chicago, virtually took over the programming on network radio. They created the programs, hired the stars and put the sponsor's name on the title of the show.

If you tuned into WCAE, here are some of the programs you would have heard: The Atwater Kent Hour, The A&P Gypsies, The General Motors Family Hour, The Ipana Troubadours, The Palmolive Hour, The Cities Service Orchestra, The Lucky Strike Orchestra Hour, The Cliquot Eskimos.

WJAS carried The La Paloma Hour, and Majestic's Two Black Crows.

KDKA broadcast Collier's Radio Hour, Sylvania's Foresters, The Philco Hour, The Maxwell House Hour, The Armstrong Quakers, and The Wrigley Party.

KQV AND WWSW were not affiliated with a network but they supplied early programs consisting mainly of news, sports and phonograph records.

It's interesting to note that in those early days many west coast radio stations had not yet become affiliated with a network, so many listeners in that part of the country were unable to receive these commercial programs.

***What theater's stock company performed
weekly on WJAS during the late '20s and '30s?***

It was the Pitt Theater's stock company. At that time Pittsburgh played host to a repertory theater company which presented a new play each week with professional actors and actresses. In those days the stock company was the training ground for Broadway.

The Pitt Theater was located at Penn Avenue and 7th Street (now a parking lot). Among the many young stars of that era was Paul McGrath, a leading man, who went on to stage triumphs and Hollywood roles.

Each week the stock company would broadcast from the studios of WJAS, presenting excerpts from the melodramas and comedies which were the current attractions at the Pitt Theater.

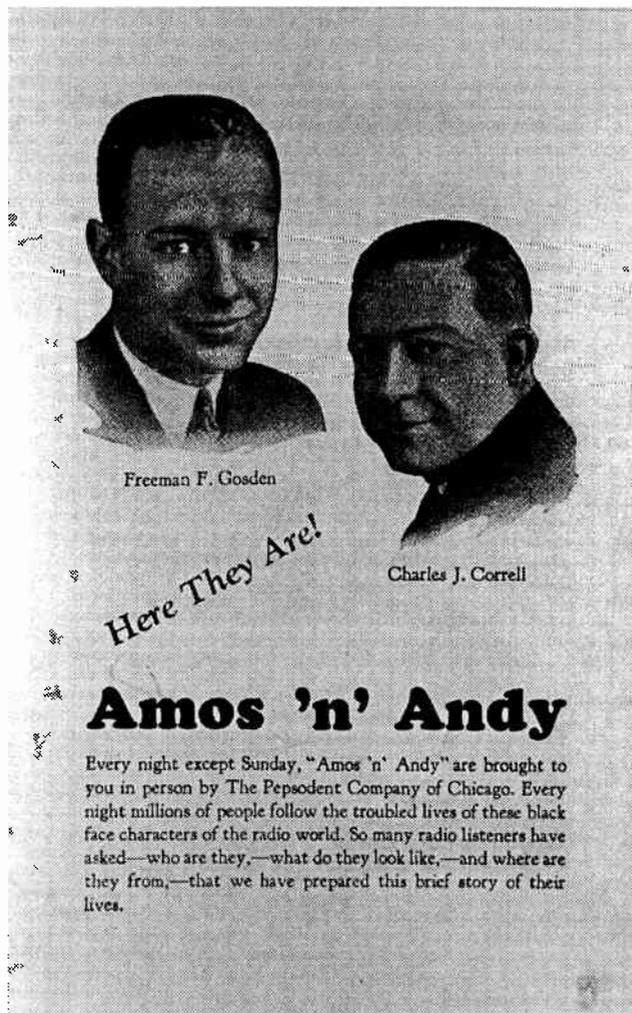
What was the top-rated network show in Pittsburgh?

The most popular program in Pittsburgh and America was undoubtedly “Amos ‘n’ Andy,” which burst onto the airwaves like a tornado in 1928, proving the power of early radio. Three weeks after “Amos ‘n’ Andy” went on the air, the sale of Pepsodent, the product it promoted, tripled.

The show was on the NBC Blue Network and carried locally by KDKA. Walking down any street in Pittsburgh one could hear the familiar theme “The Perfect Song,” peeling out from every home. It was said that the use of telephones dropped to a mere trickle between 7:00 and 7:15 P.M. on weekdays.

So popular was this program that movie theaters stopped their films and piped in the show at 7:00 o’clock so movie-goers could follow the story line.

Freeman Godsen and Charles Correll performed their roles as Amos ‘n’ Andy for 30 years, extending well into the TV era.



Amos ‘n’ Andy

***What distinction does WCAE
hold in radio station management?***

WCAE was the first radio station in the United States, possibly in the world, to have a female station manager. Her name was Frances Sturtevant; she set the stage for the many women who would take leadership roles in broadcasting in subsequent decades.



The pioneer woman in broadcasting, Frances Sturtevant.



© 1931, Pittsburg, Pa.

“Like most announcers, I prefer Lucky Strikes because they protect the voice and give greater pleasure.”
Brian McDonald

“This Is WJAS Announcing”
Brian McDonald—*noted Pittsburgh announcer*
—smokes Lucky Strikes and recommends them

Lucky Strikes are mild and mellow—the finest cigarettes you ever smoked. They are made of the finest Turkish and domestic tobaccos, properly aged and blended with great skill, *and* there is an extra process in treating the tobacco. “It’s toasted”—no harshness, not a bit of bite.



“It’s toasted”
Your Throat Protection

When in New York you are cordially invited to see how Lucky Strikes are made at our exhibit, corner Broadway and 45th Street.

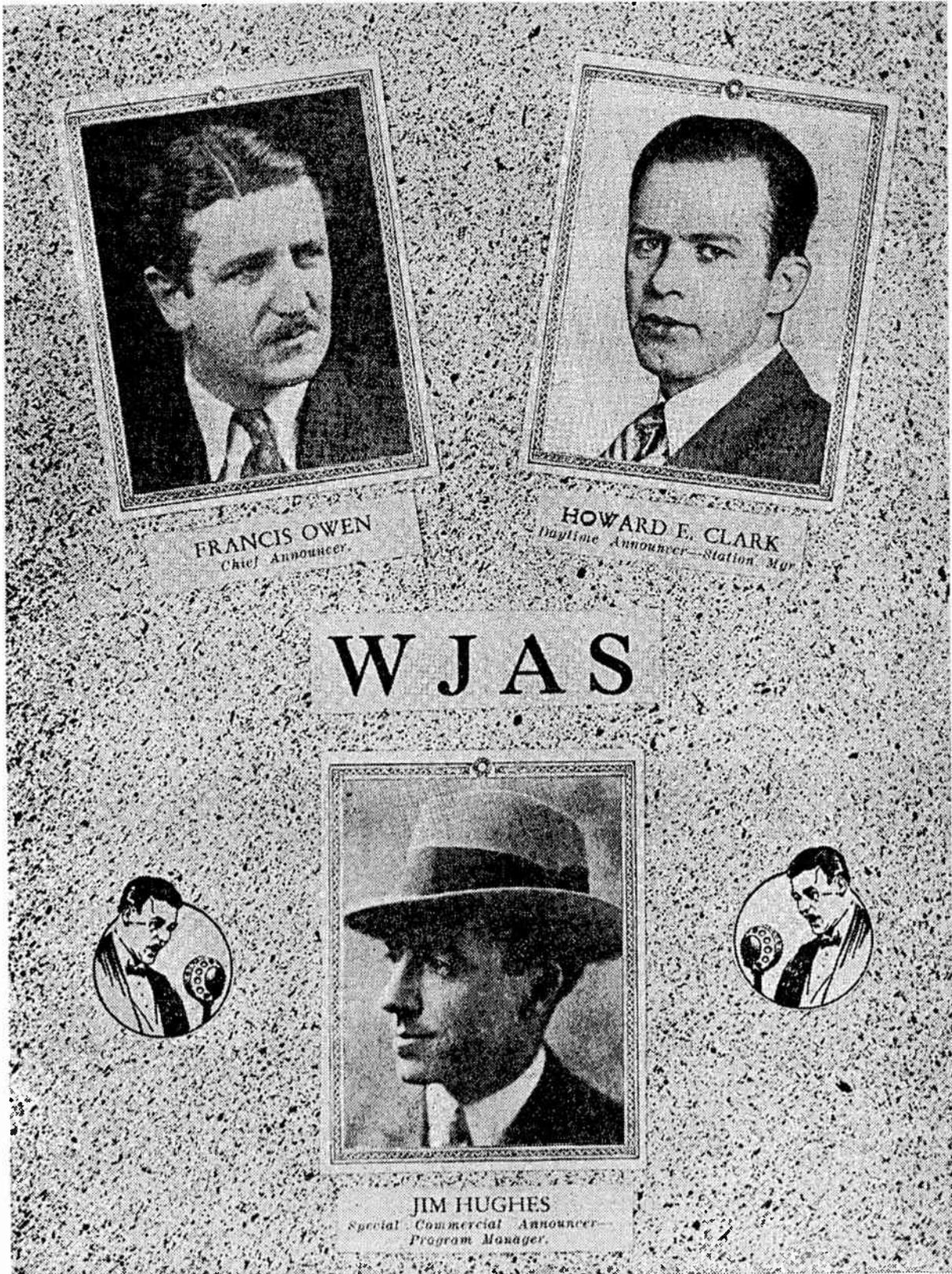
A cigarette ad with Pittsburgh radio personality, Brian McDonald.

Who were the big sponsors during those early radio days?

Makers of food and household products, cosmetics, gasolines, tobacco, pharmaceuticals and beverages. Many corporations and businesses used radio to build an image.

On the local scene, after the repeal of Prohibition, it was the brewing industry that spent the highest budgets on radio time and sponsored the greatest number of local programs. Also represented were the department stores.

Some of Pittsburgh's radio personalities of the '20s.



FORD MILLER
Chief Evening Announcer.

ADRIAN COOPER
Special Announcer
Program Director.

KQV

PAUL J. MILLER
Special and Sports Announcer.

FLOYD DUNBAR
Daytime Announcer.

TED KAUFMAN
Remote Control Announcer.

LORA McCLELLAND
Best Known as "Cousin Lora."

PAUL G. GRINE
Special Evening Announcer

WCAE

FRED E. WEBBER
Best Known for Gospel Song Hour.

HERBERT C. MCGEE
Daytime Announcer and Publicity Director.

LOUIS L. KAUFMAN
Friend of Far North Inhabitants

FREDERICK G. ROGERS
*General Program Director of West-
inghouse Stations*

STEPHEN H. LEYSHON
*Classical and Sacred Song Spe-
cialist*

WALTER G. MYERS
Your Dinner Hour Friend

GLENN E. RIGGS
Daytime Programs

RALPH P. GRIFFITH
The One and Only "Stockman Sam"

EVELYN GARDINER
*Director of the KDKA Home
Forum*

KDKA

What was one of the most common phrases of the '20s?

“Shh!! I’m listening to the radio!”



A four-year-old admonishes his father as he listens-in in 1922.



The Thirties

The fickle pendulum of cultural change characterized the spirit of the times. The Thirties were a paradox—full of contradictions. There were good times and bad times, happy and sad times. Unlike the Twenties, which boasted “Peace, Prosperity, Progress,” the boom and bust of the last decade left in its wake the Great Depression. Hemlines went up. Stocks went down.

Before the “crash” in 1929, many people had bought and improved their homes. Indoor plumbing had replaced the outhouse. Fireplaces and pot-bellied stoves gave way to coal furnaces. Electric washers had replaced the hand-cranked washer and wringer. The wooden icebox found its way to the back stoop, outdated by the electric refrigerator. And most homes had telephones and radios. The radio tabletop set had evolved into the handsome console and became the family’s major entertainment and information center. Rural people particularly valued this new medium. E. B. White observed that when rural people refer to “The Radio,” they mean “a pervading and somewhat god-like presence which has come into their lives and homes.”

The Thirties were the lean years when spending went down. But despite the economic turmoil of that decade, “the new kid on the block,”—radio—came into its own. Although there were fewer dollars to spend on entertainment and other non-essentials, radio became America’s number one salesman. And it became the poor man’s theater, its political barometer and newspaper. Listenership rose dramatically. The “new kid” was here to stay. It would bring listening pleasure and new personalities, just as movies had brought viewing pleasure and bigger-than-life movie stars.

While the film industry was expanding toward epic films, radio networks likewise kept getting larger and larger, bringing new stations into new markets. It would not take a clairvoyant to see the economic potential that radio had to offer. Hard times or no, new technology had provided the marketplace with new gadgets. Advertising agencies had discovered the selling power of radio and used it to advantage. People were lured by clever commercials into buying household and luxury products—if they could afford them.

The print media competed with radio for the advertising dollar. Reflecting the dichotomy of the times, advertising took different appeals. For example, Americans loved the automobile and began to see it both as a luxury and a commodity that held promise for employment. The ad agencies appealed to both markets and urged prospective customers to help the economy. “WHEN YOU BUY AN AUTOMOBILE YOU GIVE 3 MONTHS’ WORK TO SOMEONE . . . BUY A CAR NOW—HELP BRING BACK PROSPERITY.” Radio pitchmen appealed to the more affluent, using sophisticated commercials appearing on the “Ford Sunday Evening Hour.” And General Motors radio jingles urged their prospective customers to “see the USA in your Chevrolet.”

When the airwaves were innocent, the young were served up big portions of fair play and patriotism through the adventures of their hero, Jack Armstrong, the awesomely handsome, pure-in-heart All-American Boy. His mission was to vanquish all bad guys and peddle Wheaties to the tune of a catchy jingle: “Won’t you try Wheaties, the best breakfast food in the land...” As Jack Armstrong plugged Wheaties, a “little chatterbox . . . with the curly auburn locks” and her mongrel, Sandy, plugged Ovaltine. Who can she be? Why it’s the never aging Little Orphan Annie who jumped off the comics pages into radioland to moralize to the underclass, “ya hafta earn what ya get.”

During those lean years, daytime radio serials kept spirits up as husbands and wives exaggerated reality in absurd situation comedies. “Vic and Sade” and the “Easy Aces” showed their audience how to laugh at themselves. In the evenings zany married couples tickled America’s funnybone, too. Jack Benny and Mary Livingston, George Burns and Gracie Allen, and Fibber McGee and Molly performed week after week to build listener loyalty as they played upon human foibles. And America shared the dilemma, the problems and sterling family values of “One Man’s Family, dedicated to the Mothers and Fathers of the Younger Generation and to their Bewildering Offspring.” Radio drama was one escape from the stark realism of difficult times.

Families gathered around the radio to enjoy theater at home when there wasn’t fifteen cents to go to a movie. The only ticket to complete enjoyment was a good imagination. Sound effects of street noises carried the listeners up Broadway into the “Little Theater off Times Square,” where they sat spellbound as the play unfolded. On other nights, a mystery show’s sound man evoked delicious terror as creaking doors, screams and sinister footsteps conjured graphic images as the announcer intoned: “Lights out, everybody!”

So realistic were the dramatic portrayals and so trained was the American imagination that an estimated one million listeners truly believed Orson Welles when he narrated "Invasion from Mars," an adaptation of H.G. Wells' "War of the Worlds." The Halloween Eve, 1938 program caused a "tidal wave of terror that swept the nation." Hoping to avoid the invaders, frantic people called local police for advice. A Pittsburgh man wrestled a bottle of poison from his wife's hands as she screamed "I'd rather die this way than like that!" A cynical sociologist remarked: "Intelligent people were listening to Charlie McCarthy (a dummy)." Indeed, radio had become the theater of the mind!

Although New York was becoming the nation's broadcasting center, many network dramatic and musical programs originated from Pittsburgh's radio stations. The depression years were also the era of the big bands, which became famous because of their exposure on the airwaves. Many late night programs featured dance bands. The young danced the "Big Apple" while the poor sold apples on street corners. And the weekly Lucky Strike Hit Parade played America's Top Ten favorites.

On the one hand, radio orchestras were the background for elaborate radio programs with famous guest stars. On the other, the music of the era told the story of hard times; that is to say, many of the poor lived in subways or shanties. Others depended upon panhandling for their meals. The songs poignantly delivered the message: "It's Just an Old Shanty in Old Shanty Town," and "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" Some songs made it into politics. This latter song title was used on a poster as a political slap at President Roosevelt, who suffered the residual effects of the depression that had begun in Herbert Hoover's administration.

Although radio made its debut on the political scene during the Twenties, it played a minor role in American politics. During the Thirties, however, political figures recognized the value of radio. No president before Franklin Delano Roosevelt had used the airwaves to such advantage. During his campaign, radio time was used to ridicule Herbert Hoover, his political opponent, who claimed "prosperity is just around the corner." "Around whose corner?" the pundits asked. During his famous after-dinner "Fireside Chats," the new president calmed America's fears as the Depression deepened and war clouds loomed. His confident voice brought his often-quoted words of encouragement: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

FDR used radio to promote a veritable alphabet of social programs: the NRA, WPA, PWA, CCC and others. These were the hungry years. With no work, young men could join the Civilian Conservation Corps which President Roosevelt had offered as part of the solution for hard times. They could pick up scarce odd jobs, or fall to the attraction of easy money and crime. As incomes went down, crime went up.

The Eighteenth Amendment had been repealed. Prohibition and speak-easies were gone. Al Capone and his “bootlegger” cohorts were on the way down; but gangsters ran rampant and no radio program reflected the tenor of the times as did “Gangbusters.” And in the spirit of J. Edgar Hoover’s image, the hero cops always got their man. But Hoover and his G-men had a full plate in pursuing such gangsters as Machine Gun Kelly and his Mrs., John Dillinger, Bonnie and Clyde, Ma Barker and Her Boys, and Pretty Boy Floyd. No man was more reviled than the arch-criminal of them all, Bruno Richard Hauptman, who kidnapped and murdered Charles Lindbergh’s baby son. Newspapers and radio newscasts had a plethora of crime stories, depression news and stories of impending war to report.

The radio had become everyman’s instant newspaper. Each newscaster had his own broadcast style. Listeners of early radio were immediately alerted when the urgent, shrill, staccato voice of Walter Winchell introduced the news to the frenetic sound of Morse Code dots and dashes: “Good evening, Mr. and Mrs. America and all the ships at sea, let’s go to press. . .” Surely the specter of Marconi must have hovered nearby.

The earliest widely-recognized radio voice was that of the venerable newscaster Lowell Thomas, a carry-over from the peaceful Twenties. Another broadcaster who made a significant mark was H. V. Kaltenborn, dean of radio commentators. H. V. delivered an eighteen-day marathon broadcast during the Munich crisis which preceded World War II. Via shortwave radio and Kaltenborn’s commentary, the whole world followed Prime Minister Chamberlain as he left London to negotiate with Chancellor Hitler.

By the end of the ’30s, Americans held contradictory views about becoming involved in another world conflict. And in the ’40s when war became inevitable for the United States, shortwave radio took us to remote jungles and crimson battlefields and beaches. It brought the conflict home to America and to Pittsburgh, where shortwave broadcasting had been invented two decades earlier.

When did Ed Schaughency start his famous morning show with his sidekick “Rainbow”?

It was in the early '30s that Ed began broadcasting his every week-day morning program promptly at 6:00 A.M. with a musical alarm clock. His warm, genial manner captivated his listeners and he soon became Pittsburgh's most beloved radio personality.

Ed kept a steady patter of cheerful comment in between his favorite recordings and at the same time interspersed the music with spirited exchanges with his comedy partner “Rainbow” Jackson, whose real name was Elmer Waltman.



Uncle Ed

“Uncle Ed,” as he became known, dominated morning radio for many years. His voice, which was genuinely friendly and sincere, helped him to build a rapport with his listeners.

When television came to town, it was Ed Schaughency, dressed as “Pa Pitt,” who emceed Pittsburgh's first TV show from the stage of Syria Mosque.

For many years, he and his wife Gertrude ran a talent agency offering radio talent a chance to appear in person before audiences throughout the Tri-State region.

Did Pittsburghers love Hillbilly music?

Hillbilly music, as it was called back then, was very popular on Pittsburgh radio stations. It is now referred to as “country and western” and has a strong national following, but in the early days one might have been convinced that Pittsburgh was the hillbilly capital of the world.

The most popular exponent was Slim Bryant and his Georgia Wildcats, a group of versatile singing and instrumental talents, heard several times a day over KDKA.

Because of their popularity, Slim Bryant and his Wildcats were booked at picnics, town gatherings and country fairs for miles around. In addition to his leadership of the Wildcats, Slim composed an abundance of hillbilly songs which are still performed by some of the top country and western stars of today.



Slim Bryant and his Georgia Wildcats.



In the pose of a typical disc jockey is Bill Brandt.

How did the term “Disc Jockey” or “DJ” come into use?

As radio grew during the early days, the stations depended more and more on phonograph records for program fare and consequently recording artists won ardent fans who proceeded to buy their records at the local store.

During this period the radio industry was challenged by Fred Waring who objected to the playing of his records on the radio without payment of any kind to him. In fact, he printed on his record labels the phrase: “FOR HOME USE ONLY.”

The broadcasting industry fought back by contesting the idea of having to pay a royalty. In the mid-'30s the record ban was tested in court. Fred Waring lost his case, and stations were permitted to broadcast records with no risk of a lawsuit.

More and more artists recorded and more and more personalities on the air became known as disc jockeys—DJs for short. It was the job of the DJ to keep up a lively patter between records to entertain listeners and to promote the band, instrumentalist or singing star.

Each member of the Georgia Wildcats had singular musical ability: Slim with his guitar; his brother Loppy with the doublebass; Kenny Norton who played the fiddle and sang; Jerry Wallace on the banjo and Al Azzaro with his accordion.

Slim tells it this way: "I changed my name from Thomas Hoyt Bryant to just plain "Slim;" brother Raymond became "Loppy." We didn't want to go on working for Dad, but we did want to get out and do something with our music. That was in 1931. Loppy hoisted his bass fiddle on his back, I grabbed my guitar and we hit the trail."

Another hillbilly favorite in Pittsburgh was Denver Darling.



Slim Bryant and the Georgia Wildcats

Was the Pittsburgh Symphony ever sponsored on radio?

The Pittsburgh Symphony, under the direction of Fritz Reiner, was featured in a series of concerts over the NBC Blue Network. These concerts originated in the Grant Building studios of KDKA. They were of one-hour duration and took place in the late '30s. The celebrated music critic, Deems Taylor, served as master of ceremonies. The program was sponsored by United States Steel (now USX).

During the early years of radio, the Pittsburgh Symphony, under the direction of Antonio Moderelli, broadcast concerts from the Syria Mosque on Sunday evenings, but there was no commercial sponsorship.

When did Pittsburgh breweries begin to advertise on radio?

Prohibition was repealed December 31, 1933 in response to Franklin D. Roosevelt's campaign pledge that he would seek a repeal of the Volstead Act, which prohibited the sale of intoxicating beverages. As soon as he was elected, the breweries geared up for production and every Pittsburgh radio station offered programming to the three major breweries in town, Fort Pitt, Duquesne Brewing Company and Iron City.

It is interesting to note that announcers who auditioned for these shows were not acquainted with the nomenclature of the brewing industry. Most of the announcers in the radio industry had grown up after the start of Prohibition in 1920 and invariably they pronounced "lager" as it looks, with a long "a," instead of "logger."

What was the name of the early soap opera that originated in Pittsburgh?

There was a popular soap opera on local radio called "The Romance of Dan and Sylvia," which garnered a large listening audience. It dealt with the many emotional struggles and triumphs of a young couple trying to make a life for themselves in a tough, competitive world. This series became the forerunner of literally scores of daily soap opera programs carried on the networks, most of which enjoyed long and healthy radio reigns.

Who was responsible for the popular program, "The Dream Weaver?"

"The Dream Weaver" was conceived and written by Marjorie Michaux (then Marjorie Thoma) who had great creative talents and a deep understanding of human nature.

Her delightful and sensitive poems were read by Paul Shannon, whose mellifluous voice had a mesmerizing effect on listeners, as did the organ accompaniment of Bernie Armstrong, which was keyed in time to each poem.



*Aneurin Bodycombe at the organ, Paul Shannon at the microphone.
(Insert) Marjorie Thoma Michaux, author of "The Dream Weaver."*



Paul Shannon, voice of "The Dream Weaver."

"The Dream Weaver," during most of its long run on KDKA in the late '30s and through the '40s, had a midmorning slot and won a tremendous audience. It was sponsored by the Braun Baking Company, and was broadcast five days a week.

Marjorie Michaux's poetry was loved for its emotional appeal and the way in which she was able to reach the hearts of listeners who were seeking understanding and solace. Several collections of "Dream Weaver" poems were printed and distributed free in answer to fans' requests. A hardback book was published and sold over the air. Hundreds of poems were mailed individually to listeners who requested copies of the popular writings.

Did any of the big bands broadcast network programs from Pittsburgh?

Scores of big bands made stops in Pittsburgh for dance engagements on college campuses and on the stage of the Stanley or Loew's Penn theaters. While in town, some of the most popular bands originated their network radio shows from these local venues, including:

Kay Kyser & His Kollege of Musical Knowledge

Hal Kemp with Skinny Ennis

Ben Bernie

Tommy Dorsey with Frank Sinatra

Many other famous bands of that era came to Pittsburgh on a regular basis. They included:

Chick Webb

Paul Whiteman

Gene Krupa

Shep Fields

Guy Lombardo

Horace Heidt

Fred Waring

Glenn Miller

Artie Shaw

Lawrence Welk

Wayne King

Alvino Rey

Eddie Duchin

Frankie Carle

Glenn Gray

Bob Crosby

Tommy Dorsey

Sammy Kaye

Jimmy Dorsey

Paul Pendarvis

Charlie Barnett

Larry Clinton

Xavier Cugat

Matty Malneck

Charlie Spivak

Larry Kent

Don Bestor

Everett Hoagland

Vincent Lopez

Erskine Hawkins

Earl "Fatha" Hines

Mitchell Ayres

Duke Ellington

Lou Breeze

Jan Savitt

Louis Prima

Blue Barron

Joe Reichman

Freddie Martin

Jack Teagarden

Count Basie

Ted Lewis

Jimmy Joy

Dick Humber

Frankie Masters

Ted Weems

Lang Thompson

Leo Reisman

Jan Garber

Woody Herman

Freddie Martin

Fats Waller

Russ Morgan

Ray Noble

Jimmy Lunceford

Cab Calloway

Bunny Berrigan

Where did the big bands broadcast from?

There were dozens of ballrooms in and around Pittsburgh which had the equipment to book famous bands of the era. In many instances, these bandstand locations had a telephone line directly to a local station. The radio announcer might introduce the musical numbers from the studio, but more often the announcers went to the locations and became a part of the band presentation.

Some of the favorite big band locations were:

The Urban Room, William Penn Hotel, 17th Floor

The Chatterbox, basement of the William Penn Hotel

The Terrace Room, first floor of the William Penn Hotel

The Nixon Night Club, basement of the Nixon Theater

The Willows in Oakmont

Bill Green's in Pleasant Hills

The Harlem Casino, Center Avenue in the Hill District

The Ballroom of the Schenley Hotel in Oakland

Kennywood Park's Ballroom

West View Park's Ballroom

The Vogue Terrace

The Grotto on the North Side



Welcome Aboard Club

What local bands were favorites in Pittsburgh?

Band leader Art Farrar recalls how, in the early '30s, he and his band came to make an early "remote" broadcast over KDKA. It seems that John Gihon, program manager at KDKA, stopped in at the Coconut Grove night club in Bloomfield where Art and his band were playing. He liked what he heard and arranged for the band to perform on the air. Today, Art still heads his band and is playing to enthusiastic audiences.



Art Farrar



Baron Elliott

Baron Elliott's band was one of the first to make records for sale locally. The National Record Mart was just starting in business at that time. (It was when "Deep in the Heart of Texas" was at the top of the charts.) Listed below are the names of the most popular band leaders of that day.

Art Farrar

Hermie Cumer

Al Marsico

Bill Leroy

Joey Simms

Carl Ludwig

Tommy Carlin

Val Garvin

Fran Eichler

Larry Faith

Clyde Knight

Baron Elliott

Jack Stevens

Herman Middleman

Lee Rivers

Art Giles

Herbert Fritsche

Benny Burton

Lee Barrett

Homer Ochsenhirt

Brad Hunt

Jimmy Gamble

Howdy Baum

Eddie Weitz

Joe Schafer

Will Roland

Ralph Harrison

Barry Blue

Etzi Cavato

Marty Gregor

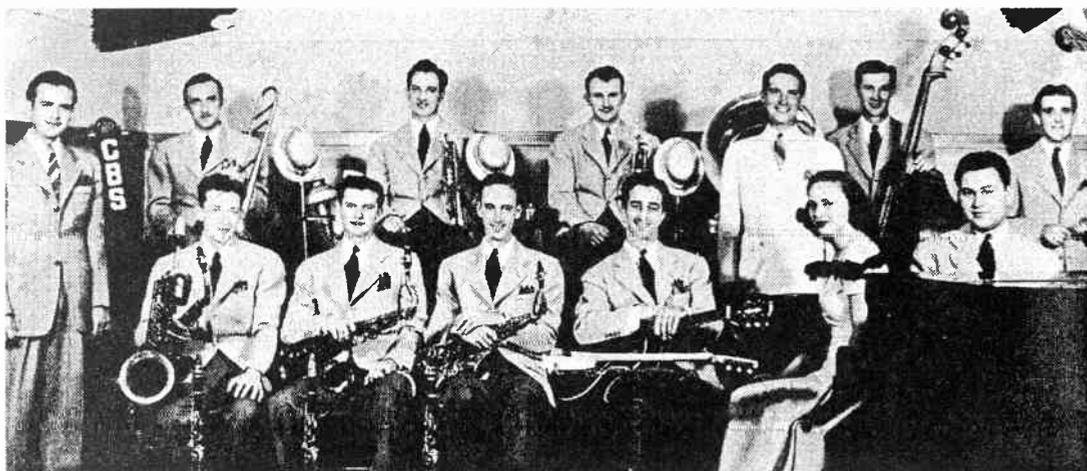
Lee Kelton



Art Giles Orchestra



Joey Simms Orchestra



WJAS Staff Orchestra under Baron Elliott

***Who were the musicians who performed
on Pittsburgh radio in the early years?***

At KDKA about 14 permanent staff musicians were employed. They played for Maurice Spitalny and Bernie Armstrong and for a variety of musical shows. Among their members were such well-known musicians as:

Russell Merritt - Piano
George Wilkins - Cello
Bill Merwin - Trombone
Emil Bielo - Bass
"Jazz" Wallace - Bass
Don Battist - Guitar
George Youngling - Sax & Clarinet
Buddy Murphy - Sax & Clarinet
Charlie Klug - Sax & Clarinet
Charles Fisher - Sax & Clarinet
Steve Sortino - Trumpet

The WCAE band, a popular group, was headed by Earl Truxell. Tony Pascarelli was one of the featured instrumentalists.

Other well-known radio performers of that era include:

Everett Neill	Adolph Zelenowski	Andy Glesak
John Mitchell	John Bachman	Frank Hull
Baron Elliott	Bill Bickel	Nick Ross
Dick Mack	Ernie Neff	Bill (Babe) Rhodes
John Gurnick	Everett Hayden	Leo Yagello
	Ralph Federer	

Who was Pittsburgh's early radio sound-effects wizard?

His name was John Scigliano, a gifted person who was very skillful at producing sound effects of all types. He constructed his own special sound effects table on wheels which could be moved from one studio to the next. With turntables, buzzers, wood blocks, bells, triangles, etc., he could produce virtually any sound effect required for radio drama.

In those days there was a great deal of radio drama on the air. "The Children's Bookshelf," produced by the Junior League of Pittsburgh, was a Saturday morning program on KDKA and later on WCAE. It dramatized famous children's classics. John Scigliano provided the sound effects for these productions, as he did for network shows which originated in Pittsburgh, among them, "Under Western Skies," a brainchild of KDKA's program director, Derby Sproul. (Derby was an early volunteer in the army and was killed in North Africa during WWII.)

*Sound man Scigliano
at work.*





John Scigliano, sound-effects expert.

What disc jockey referred to himself as “Fair, Fat and Forty?”

His name was Davey Tyson. Tyson started his career on a McKeesport radio station, then transferred to WWSW where he became popular as the morning DJ. He then joined WCAE where he held that morning spot for many years, in competition with Ed Schaughency on KDKA and Rege Cordic on WWSW.

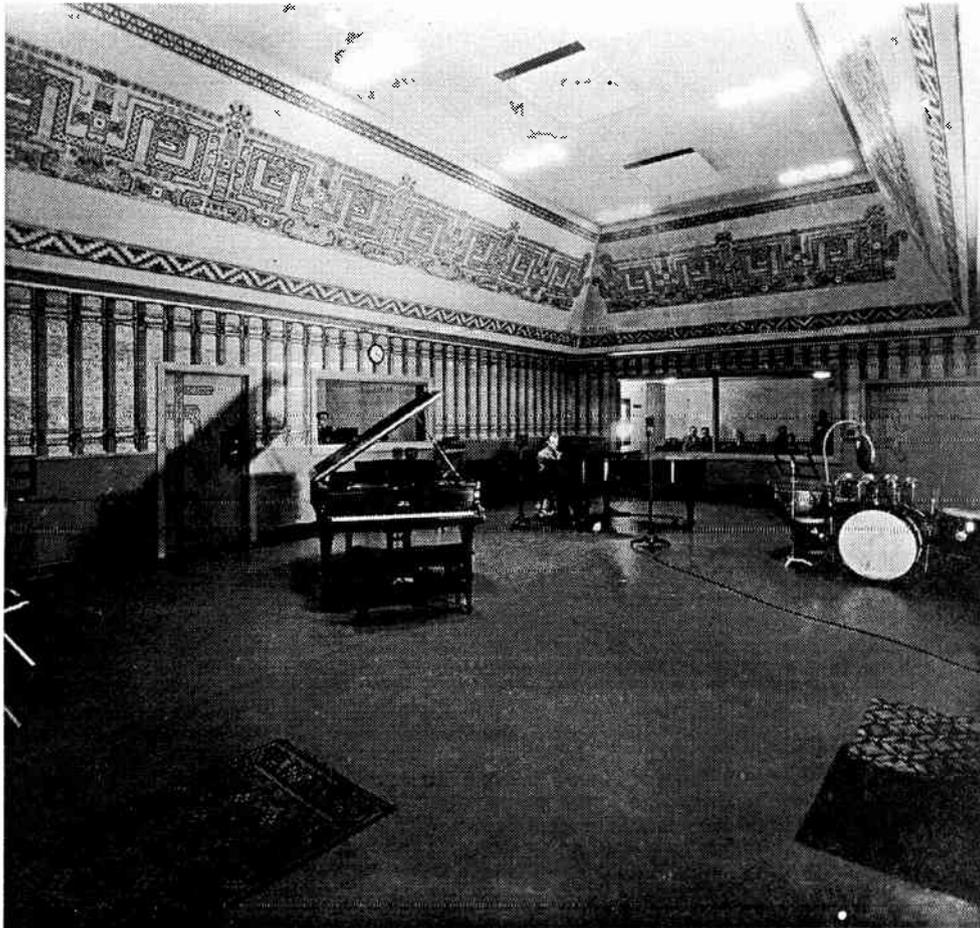


Davey Tyson

What famous architect designed KDKA’s Grant Building studios?

Henry Hornbostel, an erudite local architect, designed the KDKA studios which occupied the entire third floor of the Grant Building and were hailed as the last word in beauty, convenience and technical excellence. His design, of Mayan influence, had earthtone colors. To eliminate exterior sound, Hornbostel separated each studio from the actual building by an elaborate system developed and proved effective at Radio City in New York.

Hornbostel was also responsible for designing the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial building in Oakland and the original buildings for Carnegie Insti-



The KDKA Grant Building Studios in the '30s.

tute of Technology (now CMU). A flamboyant dresser and very much a man-about-town, he credited his close association with Andrew Carnegie for his Carnegie Tech commission. Regarding this association, he was fond of telling this story on how he hoodwinked the canny Scot.

After the Fine Arts Building was completed, he took “Andy” on a tour, starting on the first floor with the theater. Carnegie thought that anything connected with the theater was evil and suspiciously inquired: “What’s this, a theater?” Hornbostel replied: “Oh, no, Mr. Carnegie, it’s a laboratory.” Carnegie seemed to be satisfied with the explanation and they continued on the tour.

In time, Carnegie Tech’s Drama School became one of the foremost theater training facilities in America. Many of its graduates performed on early Pittsburgh radio and, in fact, radio’s first dramatic programs were presented by Carnegie Tech “dramats” (as they were called).

What broadcasts on KDKA began the idea of raising funds over radio and eventually TV?

The Milk Fund broadcasts were very much like today's telethons which present talent shows and are set up with a telephone bank where pledges are received and read over the air as the total contributions mount. They pre-empted the regular shows on the radio and lasted an entire evening. It was not unusual for every prominent performer in town to make an appearance on the show.

The Milk Fund was so named because the proceeds were used to pay for milk for the needy, undernourished children in the poor sections of town.

The sense of purpose and spirited excitement of the radio broadcast combined to build great audience response. No Milk Fund broadcast (and there were many of them during the '30s) was complete until one of the officials of the Harris Theater Chain (James Balmer) recited the poem "Friendship." The tears would flow, the music would mount and the telephones would ring. It was a great experience. The entire community shared the feeling of working together to support a worthy cause.

John Harris, who headed the Harris theater chain, was the moving force behind the Milk Fund broadcasts. He was also the founder of the Variety Club, which came into being after a young mother left her baby girl at the Sheridan Square Theater in East Liberty. The theater officials of the Harris chain, and John Harris in particular, decided to form an organization of show business people to adopt the young motherless girl who was given the name of "Catherine Variety." Chapters were formed in other cities until the organization became Variety International, pledged to philanthropic purposes.

Was Jackie Heller a part of early Pittsburgh radio?

"Little Jackie Heller," as he was billed, had a great following. His smiling face, upbeat personality and enthusiasm won him a host of friends. Jackie appeared on virtually every radio station in Pittsburgh during those early years. He went on to fame as a network entertainer, but he always drifted back to Pittsburgh, his home. During the Forties he was major domo of a downtown night club called the Carousel, which featured nationally known entertainers.

What was the highest-rated local radio show?

The Wilkens Amateur Hour started on WJAS in the fall of 1935, planned as a 13-week promotion for Wilkens Christmas shopping. The immediate popularity of the program and the impressive sales results began a broadcasting marathon that lasted for approximately 20 years.

The original emcee was Bernie Armstrong, popular Pittsburgh organist and entertainer. Jack "E. Z. Credit" Logan joined the show with the second or third broadcast.

Early in 1936, Brian McDonald took over as emcee. A few weeks after his arrival, the disastrous '36 flood took the program off the air because the Moose Temple, where the show was presented, was under water.

The second emcee was Al Noble, a bright, handsome personality who carried out his chores with great success.



Brian McDonald, longtime master of ceremonies of the Wilkens Amateur Hour.

Brian McDonald, former stage star, who produces the Amateur Hour and as Master of Ceremonies keeps it moving at a fast pace.



Jack "E. Z. Credit" Logan

What other performers appeared on the Wilkens Amateur Hour?

There were many of them: Gloria Bergman (Mrs. Ted Oken), Brian McDonald's niece, played "Jane Wilkens" for many years.

Another singer was "Tiny" Ellen Sutton, the Hillbilly Kate Smith, who was famous for her yodeling skills. In addition to her singing chores, she would participate in a variety of skits which were sprinkled throughout the program.

Perhaps the best known was Jack "E. Z. Credit" Logan, whose bald head made him the butt of many jokes. Jack played several roles on the show in addition to his commercial announcements. He was the "Mayor of Bald Knob," "Grandma Logan," and "Rajah Pay No Cash."

Others who were identified with the Wilkens Amateur Hour were Mr. and Mrs. Gus Bastheim, Lew and Dorothy Silberman, Jim Steck, Beckley Smith, Bob Thompson Sr., Ernie Neff, Jerry Mayhall, Harry Walton and "Girl Friday" Ruth Leake.

How were winners chosen on the Wilkens show?

The winners were determined by the number of telephone votes received. Scores of telephone operators were employed to man the phones and tabulate the votes for the various contestants. The act which garnered the most calls and mail-in votes—usually from friends, family and neighbors—was awarded the top prize.

Instant stardom was the goal of each contestant. Many amateurs did go on to show business fame.



"Tiny" Ellen Sutton performing on the Wilkens Amateur Hour.



Brian McDonald and Wee Willie Wilkens, a souvenir of the program.

What new type of commercial was featured on the Wilkens Hour?

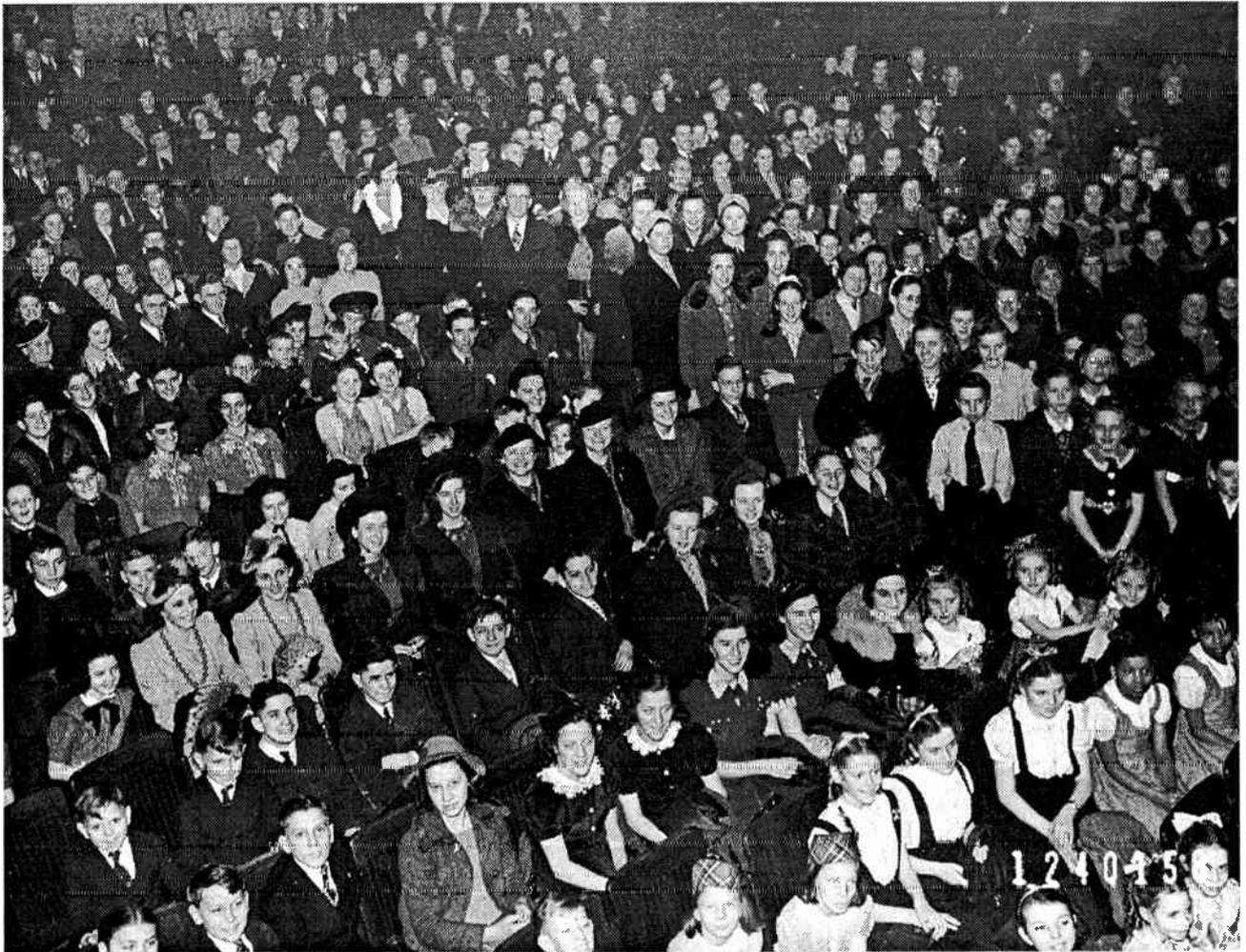
The Amateur Hour and other shows sponsored by Wilkens did feature what might be termed “comedy” commercials combining sight and sound. Announcer Jack Logan can remember those crazy commercials: “We never told the radio audience why the auditorium audience laughed so much and applauded so vigorously. Our philosophy was to entice them to come see the broadcast to find out what went on. As a result, we had a “Wilkens Stock Co.,” a “Wilkens Opera Co.,” a “Wee Willie Wilkens” ventriloquist act, a “Jane Wilkens” and a few other stunts, all leading to a jewelry commercial. Needless to say, the funny hats, wigs, costumes, etc., were all over the place. I think we must have stolen or otherwise utilized every vaudeville routine we could find. All corn—but it sold a lot of merchandise and made a lot of people laugh.”

Jack Logan goes on to recall the big-name guests: “At the time, Pittsburgh, like all major cities, had a very active night club, vaudeville and stage life, and most of them made a publicity-type appearance on the show. Most were good sports and “acted” in our skits—some even did a commercial blurb.”

What was a big feature each year on the Wilkens program?

It was the All-Twin show, when the contestants and audience were all twins. It was quite a spectacle and got coverage in dozens of magazines, newspapers, etc.

Most of the twins came from less than a 500-mile radius. Many times there were one or two sets of triplets. The idea was Lew Silberman's, of Wilkens, and he played it to the hilt, promoting, funding and merchandising.



325 sets of twins in the audience at the annual All-Twin show.

Who was considered Pittsburgh's Dean of Radio Engineers?

It was Joseph Baudino, Chief Engineer at KDKA for many years. His assistant was Ted Kenney.

Chief engineer at WJAS was Walter McCoy.

Other engineers who served at KDKA during those early radio days include: Glenn Luther, George Myers, Clyde Reed, Carl Wyman, Paul Sloan, Ken Waldren, Joe Shertler, Bill Stephan, Cliff Gorsuch, E. B. Landon, Earl Sneathen, Buck Dice, Walter Glaus, and Ted Bickerton.



At a special KDKA broadcast in the late-'30s are (seated) Sherman Gregory, Station Manager; Frank Conrad, the Father of Broadcasting; and Joseph Baudino, Chief Engineer. Standing are Derby Sproul, Program Manager; Bill Beal, Continuity Editor; and Bill Hinds, Announcer.



Father James Cox

***Which Pittsburgh station carried
Father Cox during the '30s?***

WJAS. Father James R. Cox was invited to conduct religious services over the station from Old St. Patrick's Church in the Strip District.

According to accounts of that period, WJAS was not doing well. Commercial revenues were down and local competition was strong. Soon after Father Cox started broadcasting the Mass each day, there seemed to be a change in the fortunes of the station as reported by those who followed local business trends. Whether the turnaround could be credited to the broadcasts of Father Cox is not known. WJAS from that time on enjoyed a period of progress and improvement as the CBS outlet in Pittsburgh.

***Did someone in Pittsburgh coin the phrase,
“The Champagne Music of Lawrence Welk”?***

It was Phil Davis, Continuity Director of WCAE. It seems that during an appearance of Lawrence Welk at the Chatterbox, a basement night club in the William Penn Hotel, Phil Davis was conversing with Mr. Welk about the musical selections scheduled for a particular broadcast. During their talk, Phil remarked that Welk’s music sounded like “bubbling champagne.”

Welk liked the sound of that phrase and from that moment he adopted it as his signature: “The Champagne Music of Lawrence Welk.” Many times during his network broadcasts Lawrence Welk acknowledged the contribution of Phil Davis to his mystique.

Welk’s use of floating soap bubbles began in Pittsburgh as well.

Lawrence Welk on one of his early visits to Pittsburgh, auditioning a young accordionist.



Who led the orchestra for the program “Tap Time?”

It was Maurice Spitalny, the brother of Phil Spitalny, whose all-girl orchestra in New York became famous during the '30s. “Tap Time” was a half-hour of topnotch music with singing stars and guests with both vocal and instrumental talent. Announced by Bill Hinds, “Tap Time” starred Faye Parker, Bill Sherman, Mary Martha Briney and Bob Carter. It was sponsored by the Fort Pitt Brewing Company.

Maurice Spitalny



Bernie Armstrong (left) with Tap Time members Faye Parker, Bill Hinds (standing), Mary Martha Briney and Bob Carter.

Who was Ken Hildebrand?

Ken Hildebrand was one of the most popular announcers on Pittsburgh's airwaves. While at WJAS, he won a strong following for his eleven o'clock newscast for the Duquesne Brewing Company.

Eventually Ken became the radio spokesman for Duquesne Brewing on all its local programs.



Ken Hildebrand

Whose musical ensemble performed each weekday at 6:45 P.M. on KQV?

This popular dinner-time program featured the music of Gregorio Scalzo and his ensemble. His selection of music was appropriate for the dinner hour and despite the stiff competition of Lowell Thomas and Amos 'n' Andy, Scalzo won a loyal following because of the type of music and the talents of his musicians.

What happened to Glenn Riggs after he left Pittsburgh?

Glenn Riggs, who was perhaps the best-known radio announcer in Pittsburgh, eventually became famous on the ABC network. He won acclaim for the emphasis he put on one word as he signed off each radio program. "This is the *American* Broadcasting Company." There was a note of pride in his voice which caused listeners to remember his announcing style.

In early radio, what was meant by "brokering time?"

It was the policy of some stations to sell air time to enterprising individuals who, in turn, would resell segments to a variety of sponsors. This was a common practice in the early days when the stations needed revenue. By brokering a certain percentage of their schedule, they could boost the overall sales. The broker then had the responsibility to find sponsors who made it possible for him to earn a profit.

What local racing event was fed to the networks?

It was the Rolling Rock Races. This popular Steeplechase race at Ligonier was one of the sports highlights of the Fall season. In fact, the celebrated race announcer, Clem McCarthy, who became famous as the announcer of the Kentucky Derby, came to Pittsburgh to describe the racing action at the Rolling Rock track.

The Rolling Rock Races were discontinued in the '80s, but until then they were regarded among the top social and sporting events of the year.

Who were some of the local female singing trios?

One was the group harmonizing under the name “Those Three Girls.” The trio consisted of Jeannie Baxter, Henrietta Littman and Dorothy Latterman. They were also known on the air as the “Sophisticated Ladies.”

Another singing trio was the Kinders Sisters or “Kinders Three” as they were frequently billed. The Kinders—Elaine, Barbara and Shirley, were featured on many of the weekly musical shows and a number of network programs.

Heard over WJAS were the Weston Sisters—Betty, Elaine and Dot, who won a loyal following as featured talent with a number of local orchestras.

Jeannie Baxter first came to radio as a partner of Buzz Aston. The program was titled “Jeannie & Buzz.” When Buzz went to war, he was replaced by Bernie Markwell and the program was renamed “Jeannie & Bernie.”



The Kinders Three



Jeannie Baxter



The Weston Sisters

Who was Pittsburgh radio's early Man-on-the-Street?

His name was Walt Framer, the fast-talking and entertaining WWSW announcer, who conducted a radio swap show on the downtown streets of the Golden Triangle. Walt would challenge his audience to come up with a comb or a hairpin or a paper clip for which he would award a valuable prize. His entertaining interview with people on the street won him a wide audience. He performed for many years in Pittsburgh and finally went on to national fame as the originator of the network show "Strike it Rich" which ran for a number of seasons.

Another personality who frequently did "Man-on-the-Street" interviews was George Heid, a radio name on KQV and later on KDKA, where he became program manager.

On what network radio show did Stephanie Diamond Cohen appear?

Stephanie, the wife of the Post-Gazette Drama Editor, Harold V. Cohen, appeared for many years on local radio dramas. Comedian Joe Penner became famous for his line "Wanna buy a duck?" which swept the nation. Stephanie became a regular cast member of his highly-rated weekly comedy-variety show.

Others who performed as dramatic talent on Pittsburgh's radio stations were (to name a few): Helen Wayne Rauh, John Johns, Bob Parks, Lionel Poulton, Bob Pritchard, Will Disney, and Dick Riebling.

Who were the Station Managers of early Pittsburgh radio?

Frank Smith was a long-time manager of WWSW. Hugh J. Brennan was owner-manager of WJAS and KQV. At WCAE, the General Manager was Leonard Kaplan. KDKA had a number of managers through the years: William Hedges, Francis Conrad, H. A. Woodman, Sherman Gregory, Les Rawlins, and Jim Rock.

What popular radio personality started out in the KDKA mailroom?

Bill Hinds was known around the station as “Sunbeam Billy”—a kid in his teens, always cheerful, always smiling. Glenn Riggs, senior announcer who conducted a daily variety show called “Stroller’s Matinee,” spotted “the kid with the personality.” He had heard that Bill and his brothers had their own quartet, so he invited “Sunbeam Billy” as guest on one of his shows. The listeners loved him. They wrote in asking Glenn to bring “Sunbeam Billy” back for more. Soon he became a regular. From there he went on to become an announcer and eventually co-starred with Buzz Aston in “Buzz & Bill,” the song and patter team that held sway on radio and television for many years.

Bill tells how he made his first appearance on radio by chance. It seems a neighbor lady, who conducted a children’s program on WCAE on Saturday mornings, called at his home. When his mother opened the door, 12-year-old Bill was standing beside her. “Do any of your boys want to be on the radio?” Yes! The eager volunteer went on to many a Saturday morning show with Laura McClennan and the Uncle John and Billy show, both on WCAE.



Bill Hinds



Buzz Aston and Bill Hinds—Buzz & Bill.

In the late '30s Bill Hinds formed an orchestra which he directed and served as male vocalist. He was featured at the ballroom of the Schenley Hotel under the name: Billy Hinds Orchestra.

At what Pittsburgh station did Dave Garroway work?

Dave Garroway came to Pittsburgh and joined the staff of KDKA in 1937. He had been an NBC page at Radio City. His ad-libbing skills were soon recognized and he was assigned to cover many special events during his announcing career in Pittsburgh. He also hosted a favorite game show called "You Don't Say."

After his stint at KDKA, he went on to Chicago where he won fame as the host of a late-night jazz show. Soon he was called to New York.

Pat Sylvester, the NBC executive who masterminded the "Tonight Show," chose Garroway to be host of the newly-created "Today Show." This innovative morning menage of news, interviews and personalities originated in the ground floor window of a Radio City store when it made its debut.



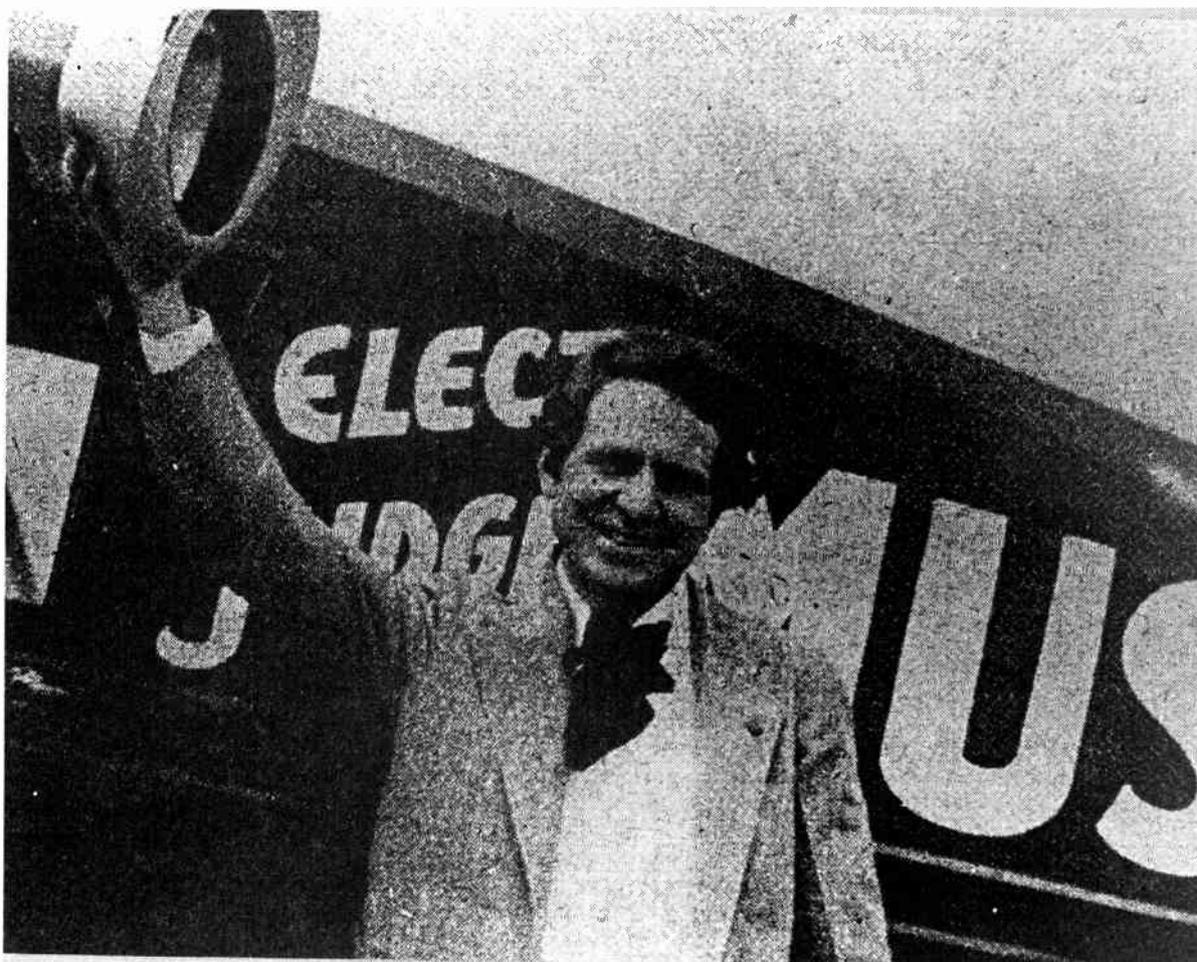
Dave Garroway (right) doing an on-the-scene interview.

What Pittsburgh judge appeared on early radio?

He was Judge Michael A. Musmanno, a flamboyant personality whose colorful radio presentations were part of the radio schedule in the '30s and '40s. Each October 12, Judge Musmanno would make an impassioned defense of Christopher Columbus as the first man to discover America.

During his tenure on the bench, he wrote a book called "Black Fury" which dealt with conditions in the coal mines of West Virginia and Western Pennsylvania. Warner Brothers produced a movie based on that novel with Paul Muni as the star.

Judge Musmanno became famous as one of the justices at the Nuremburg War Crimes Trial in Germany after World War II. Later he was elevated to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.



Judge Michael A. Musmanno

Who were the major advertisers in the '30s?

Gasoline and tobacco companies, along with breweries, probably headed the list. Bakeries and department stores were also early radio sponsors. Horne's started its "Penny Stanwix" on WCAE. WJAS carried Beckley Smith twice daily for Kaufmann's. Mrs. Sarah Tomlinson, Director of Rosenbaum's Home Art Studio, broadcasted over WJAS.

Some well-remembered commercials were produced for furniture stores. "Three rooms, \$398" was a familiar slogan. "Feather your nest with a little down," was also a radio staple, and who can forget "E. Z. Credit Logan" of the Wilkens Amateur Hour?

Zippo lighters and Sea Breeze after-shave lotion were both introduced over KDKA. Other original Pittsburgh advertisers include: Mail Pouch chewing tobacco and Wheeling Stogies cigars.

What radio ventriloquist act originated in Pittsburgh?

Tommy Riggs and his partner Moke appeared on KDKA during the early '30s as "Riggs and Moke." Then Tommy developed his little girl character, Betty Lou. It was during the era that Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy were famous. Ventriloquists were well suited to radio because it was easy to imagine the characters they created. Betty Lou was a pert and rascally little moppet who got into all kinds of trouble and thereby won the hearts of listeners.

Tommy Riggs went on to network acclaim on the Fleischmann Hour with Rudy Vallee. He was a weekly guest for many seasons on that very popular radio show.

What WWSW announcer went on to fame as the host of "The Price is Right?"

Bill Cullen worked at WWSW for many years before he left for New York, where he became the master of ceremonies on a program that took the country by storm. "The Price is Right" enabled contestants to win expensive prizes by virtue of their pricing ability. Bill Cullen went on to be featured in many Goodson and Todman television productions.

John Kresge and Ruby Whalen in KDKA's music library.



How did the musicians' strike of the late '30s affect Pittsburgh radio?

The impact of the musicians' strike was felt most seriously by the stations with staff orchestras and local performing talent. Also, it affected small stations that played records. The strike meant that all music had to be "cleared" with ASCAP (American Society of Composers and Publishers).

The stations could program only music in the public domain. This led to thousands of hours of Stephen Foster tunes such as "Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair" and "Old Folks at Home."

A heavy burden fell on the music librarians at the stations. It was their responsibility to "clear" the musical selections for each program. At KDKA, Ruby Whelan and Jean Moore kept track of things musical. At WWSW, Marie Wilk was the music librarian. At WCAE, the librarian was Ben Muros.

To compete with ASCAP, broadcasters began their own organization, calling it BMI (Broadcast Music Inc.). They soon had a large library of music which broke the strike after a few years.

In the early '40s, even band music could not be broadcast from football games. The announcers had to close the windows in the booth to keep out ASCAP tunes.

Where did Rosey Rowswell begin announcing Pirate broadcasts?

Rosey and his sidekick Jack Craddock started reporting Pirate games over WWSW, with Bill Cullen handling the commercials. Rosey dramatized the action in such a way as to make the listener believe he was actually in the ball park. Instead he was in the studio with a ticker tape from Western Union.



Rosey Rowswell

ALBERT KENNEDY ("ROSEY") ROWSWELL, 1884-1955

When a Pirate hit a home run, Rosey would yell to his mythical Aunt Minnie: "Raise the window, Aunt Minnie, here it comes!" Then there would be a sound effect of a broken window and he would triumphantly announce a home run.

Later, Rosey was joined by Bob Prince, who worked alongside him at every Pirate game in Forbes Field and on the road.

Rosey and Bob continued their partnership when Pirate games were broadcast on KDKA. Rosey passed away in 1955 and Prince took over with a number of "color" announcers who worked with him in the booth. Among them were Jim Woods, Dick Bingham, Paul Long and Nellie King.

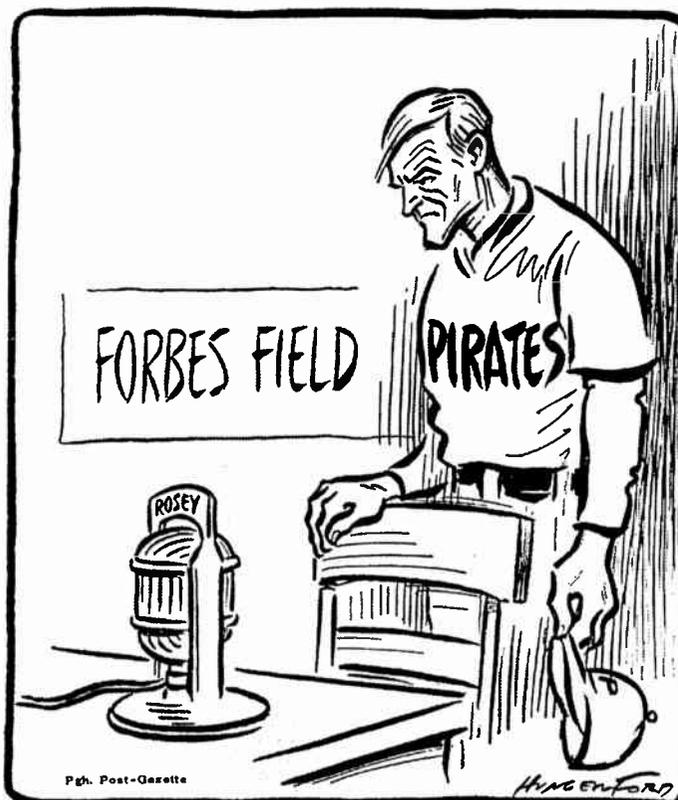
Rosey had become such an important part of Pittsburgh's life that on his death he was memorialized in a famous Cy Hungerford cartoon carried in the Post-Gazette.

Footnote to Rosey Rowswell's fame: Rosey was also known and loved for his poetry programs. His homespun verses, patterned after Edgar Guest's, were greatly enjoyed by his loyal fans and added to his popularity as an entertainer.

To "Rosey" Rowswell

His Greatest Rooter Signs Off

—By Hungerford



Rosey Rowswell is not dead. He lives. Though his one-time body is in earth and his all-time soul is in Heaven, his spirit endures and remains with us.

No man, no woman, no child, no infant "passes this way" without leaving his mark on others. Every created being of God has meaning that reaches beyond himself — or herself — and touches and imparts of itself to others.

Rosey was with us long, with us much. He — the living spirit of him — reached far, touched deeply, imparted of itself abundantly.

Rosey Rowswell is not dead. He lives. He lives forever with those who loved him. And, of all human feelings, Love is the Highest. Isn't that right, Rosey Rowswell.

Cy Hungerford's tribute to Rosey.

What effect did the 1936 flood have on radio in Pittsburgh?

The 1936 flood caused a local crisis in communication. Radio was the only means of informing the people about the rise of the three rivers as they surged higher and higher on St. Patrick's Day.

The flood waters rose to 46.4 feet. Seventy-four people lost their lives. Explosions and fires added to the peril and the emergency was so great that the Governor had to call out the National Guard to prevent looting.

Emergency announcements were carried by radio, instructing those in the flood areas to evacuate. Safety procedures and sanitary regulations were read hourly to advise residents how to survive and how to protect their families from typhoid. Health, relief and other city agencies mustered support to fight disease.

For three days the downtown studios of KDKA and WCAE were marooned. Staff personnel were obliged to camp out in the offices and studios. Radio was really the only communications link with those who were trying to escape the flood waters. Radio's role was essential through the emergency.

After the flood subsided, businesses mounted "Flood Level" signs on the outside walls of their buildings. These are still visible today.

How did motion picture companies promote their movies on radio?

A broadcast line was established to the Stanley Theater from KDKA, so that Warner Bros. pictures could be previewed over the airwaves. Later the Harris theater chain did the same thing. This occurred in the mid-Thirties.

Selections were made from the actual sound tracks and these excerpts were broadcast, just as today film clips are telecast to promote motion pictures.

Charlie Appel, one of the projectionists, was the technician who pioneered this concept.

It's interesting to note that all movies were silent until 1927, the year when Al Jolson sang in "The Jazz Singer." The first complete talking picture, "The Lights of New York," premiered in 1928.

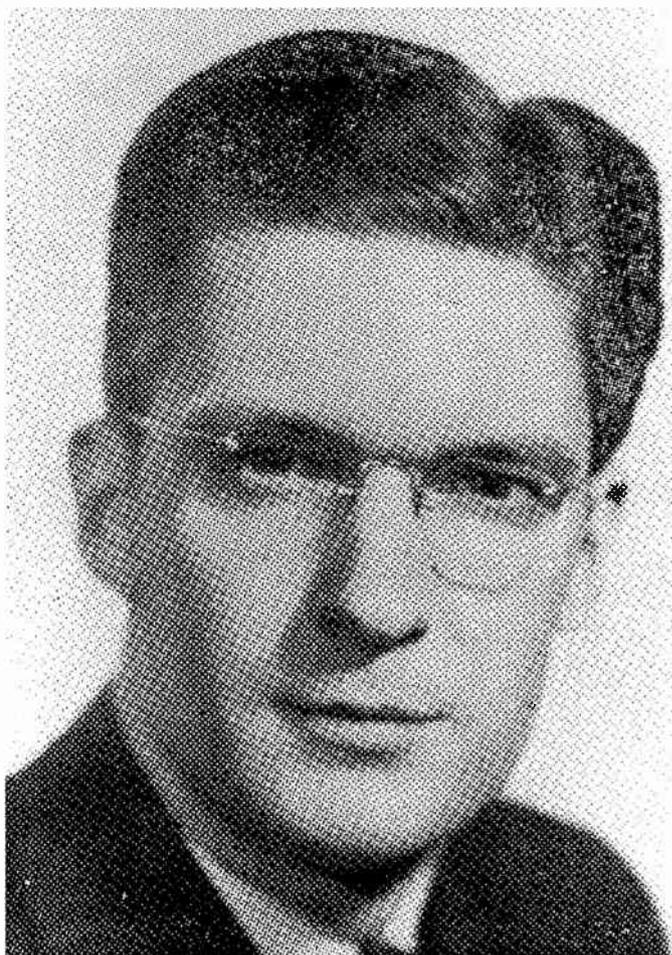
***What was the purpose of the program
“Messages to the Far North?”***

The program featured letters which were sent to KDKA by friends and relatives of those who lived and worked in the far reaches of Canada, Alaska and the Northwest Territories. They were trappers, missionaries, explorers, fur traders—all beyond means of communication except by shortwave radio.

During the late '30s, Bill Beal conducted the Far North Broadcast each Saturday night and became closely identified with the program.

In 1938, under the auspices of the Hudson's Bay company, Beal visited some of the remote trading posts to meet many of the people who listened each Saturday night to hear from loved ones back in civilization.

During the early '40s, the program was dropped because Nazi agents in America were using it to send fake letters which advised their spy network in the U.S.



Bill Beal

When did the radio performers organize a union?

The Pittsburgh chapter of AFRA (American Federation of Radio Artists) was formed in Pittsburgh in 1935. A New York radio announcer came to the city to organize the local branch. At first it was joined only by radio announcers who felt threatened in their jobs by young men coming out of high school and college. Later the union encompassed all who performed on radio. It enjoyed almost complete domination of those who appeared on the air. A performer could go on the radio without joining the union, but once such an appearance had ended, he or she could not appear a second time without being a union member.

With the advent of television, AFRA was changed to AFTRA to include all performers in both radio and TV.

Radio and TV labor strife has been at a minimum in Pittsburgh, with the exception of a strike in the '40s to win recognition for the union in a number of non-union areas. KDKA was struck by AFTRA for two weeks in February 1960. KDKA continued on the air with amateur talent.

What international cultural event in Pittsburgh was carried by radio?

Artists and critics from all over the world attended the Carnegie International Art Exhibit, which was held every other year at the Carnegie Institute and which always enjoyed radio coverage.

The exhibit put Pittsburgh on the map in the art world at a time when the city was considered to be nothing but a highly polluted, smoky, industrial center.

The Carnegie International has been a prestigious cultural event on the artistic calendar of the city.

***Who was the news reporter sponsored
by Kaufmann's department store?***

Beckley Smith was an outstanding favorite as a news broadcaster on station WJAS. He had a voice of authority which lent an air of believability to his broadcasts.

“Breaking the News with Beckley Smith,” was heard twice daily, Monday through Saturday, on WJAS at 12:15 P.M. and 6:15 P.M. He had a loyal following during those early years, his deep voice and no-nonsense personality making an indelible impression on his fans.



Beckley Smith

Who were some of the vocalists on early Pittsburgh Radio?

There were many: Nancy Martin and Ethel Ramos Harris accompanied themselves at the piano. Marie De Mar sang with Joey Sims, Beverly Bennett with Baron Elliott. Other featured singers included Helen Bell Rush, Betty Ellen Morris, Barbara Owens, Beatrice Beardmore, Mildred Don, Faye Parker, Mary Martha Briney, and Betty Smiley, to name a few. Among the men were Reed Kennedy, Tim Kirby, Dick Fisher, Ed Sprague, Billy Sherman, Howard Price, Bob Carter, Bill Cover, and Ted Yearsley.



Bob Carter



Mary Martha Briney



Betty Ellen Morris



Billy Cover



Howard Price



Marie DeMar



KDKA singers, including the Kinders Three.

What were the locations of the five Pittsburgh stations?

Their locations changed through the years: WWSW started out at the Schenley Hotel in Oakland and ended up in a hotel on Wood Street, Downtown. (The call letters, WWSW, were the initials of William S. Walker, co-owner of the leading advertising agency in Pittsburgh, Walker & Downing.) The station's offices are now on Allegheny Square.

WJAS started out in the Pickering Furniture Building at 10th and Penn Avenue diagonally across from where the Convention Center now stands. Later it was located in the Law & Finance Building and in 1932 moved to the Chamber of Commerce Building on 7th Avenue, Downtown. Offices today are on Crane Avenue in the South Hills.

KQV started out in Doubleday-Hill's building downtown and later moved to the Plaza Building. After more than 60 years in the Chamber of Commerce Building, the station is located today in the Centre City Tower.

WCAE was in the Gimbels Department Store (then Kaufmann & Baer). When KDKA moved to the Grant Building, WCAE moved to KDKA's vacated 21st floor studios in the William Penn Hotel. When the Carlton House was built in 1952, WCAE moved there. Eventually the station, with call letters changed to WTAE, moved to Ardmore Boulevard in Wilkinsburg.

It's interesting to note that when Spring arrived in 1921, KDKA's East Pittsburgh studio was moved outside to a tent on the roof of the "K" building. Evening broadcasts were interrupted by a long train whistle at around 8:30 P.M., the time a passenger train passed through the Turtle Creek Valley. Later that year the tent blew down in a storm and operations were forced back indoors.

In 1932, KDKA was located on the top floor of the William Penn Hotel, but in 1934 the station moved to the Grant Building and later to new studios in the Gateway Center in May of 1956.

With whose orchestra did Billy Eckstine start singing?

Billy Eckstine began his singing career in Pittsburgh with Brad Hunt's Orchestra and went on to fame with Duke Ellington and other famous orchestras of that era.

Who conducted a weekly wildlife program on KDKA?

Harris G. Breth, a naturalist who lived in Clearfield, Pa., came to Pittsburgh each week to talk about the great outdoors. The Tri-State area had a great many hunters and fishermen who tuned in his programs. Breth won high ratings because of the wildlife story he included in each week's broadcast, relating his experiences in the wild with various animals, birds and snakes. Breth's popularity on the airwaves led to his election as State Representative.



Harris Breth

What woman organist was featured on early Pittsburgh radio programs?

Her name was Lois Miller. She made her fame as a performer at the Heinz Pier in Atlantic City, where she played during the Summer months. In the off-season she was a regular attraction on many programs over Pittsburgh radio stations. Lois Miller was married to the promotional genius Byron McGill of KDKA.

Other well-known organists who were featured on scores of local radio programs included Bernie Armstrong, Johnny Mitchell and Ernie Neff.

Who was Aneurin Bodycombe?

Aneurin Bodycombe, an accomplished musician of Welsh descent, was well known as a choral director and a staff pianist on KDKA for many years, even as far back as the '20s. He was also the organist at the Shadyside Presbyterian Church.

His highly-regarded singing groups were part of radio programming for a long period. One such group had a 7:30 P.M. prime-time slot. It was called "The Silver Toppers," sponsored by the Duquesne Brewing Company season after season.

What's the Pittsburgh connection to Herb Morrison, the famous announcer of the Hindenburg disaster?

Herb Morrison worked as an announcer at WCAE during the '30s but left to take a job in Chicago at WLS. He had been assigned to cover the arrival of the Hindenburg at Lakehurst, New Jersey, an arrival that was expected to be routine. He was to interview any famous personages on the passenger list.

Passengers traveling from Germany to the United States in those days paid \$400 one way or \$720 for a round trip. The Hindenburg had on board 97 passengers and crew. As the huge dirigible came in for its mooring on May 6, 1937, the hydrogen-filled Hindenburg burst into a fiery mass, killing 33 passengers and ground crew.

Herb Morrison's emotional report of the disaster became one of the most gripping moments in radio history and was repeated over and over. Herb later returned to Pittsburgh and ran unsuccessfully for political office in his home county of Westmoreland.

Is it true that during the '30s the names of plane crash victims were read right away on radio?

Today, it is the policy to announce the names of victims only after next-of-kin have been notified. But in those days, it was the custom to announce the names as soon as they were known, a practice that caused the families of crash victims severe emotional shock.

One radio announcer at KDKA recalls a tragic evening in Pittsburgh in 1937 when a plane went down in a gulley beside McMurray Road, just off Route 19 South, killing over 20 passengers. The announcer on duty at the flagship station of the NBC Blue Network, Milton Cross at WEAJ in New York, phoned KDKA and requested that someone obtain the names of the crash victims.

In line with his duty, the KDKA announcer walked one block away to the County Morgue, where he went down the row of dead bodies, copying the names off tags which were attached to the large toe of each victim. He then returned to the studio and phoned the list to Milton Cross who promptly read the names over the network radio.

That insensitive policy was soon discontinued.

What popular quiz shows made stops in Pittsburgh?

One of the most popular was "Dr. IQ," which was presented from the stage of the Stanley Theater (now the Benedum Center). "I have a lady in the balcony," was the familiar call from the roving announcer. "Give that lady fifty silver dollars if she answers correctly."

Kay Kyser's Kollege of Musical Knowledge was a musical quiz show that won great popularity. One of its stops on the tour of the country was Pittsburgh in 1935, where it was presented on the stage of the Penn Theater (now Heinz Hall). In addition to the quiz aspects of his show, Kyser had a stable of skilled musicians and a comedy crazy-man called Ishkabibble.

Other favorite quiz shows of that era were "Information, Please," "Truth or Consequences," "What's My Line?" and "The Quiz Kids," to name a few.

Who were the radio editors of the Pittsburgh newspapers during the early years?

The Post-Gazette, owned by the Block family, featured Darrel V. Martin as radio editor. The Pittsburgh Press, the Scripps-Howard paper, had Si Steinhauser on its staff. The Sun-Telegraph, which was owned by the Hearst Corporation, carried Dorothy Randall. Darrel V. Martin was succeeded by Vince Johnson and Win Fanning.



Darrel Martin

From the earliest days, radio and newspapers had a close alliance. The Pittsburgh Post, which became the Post-Gazette, provided KDKA with what they termed, “Spoken Headlines.”

Two Pittsburgh Press writers who became household names during the '30s and '40s were news analysts. Don Hirsch and Dale McFeatters appeared nightly to give background, insights into notable events, and financial news.

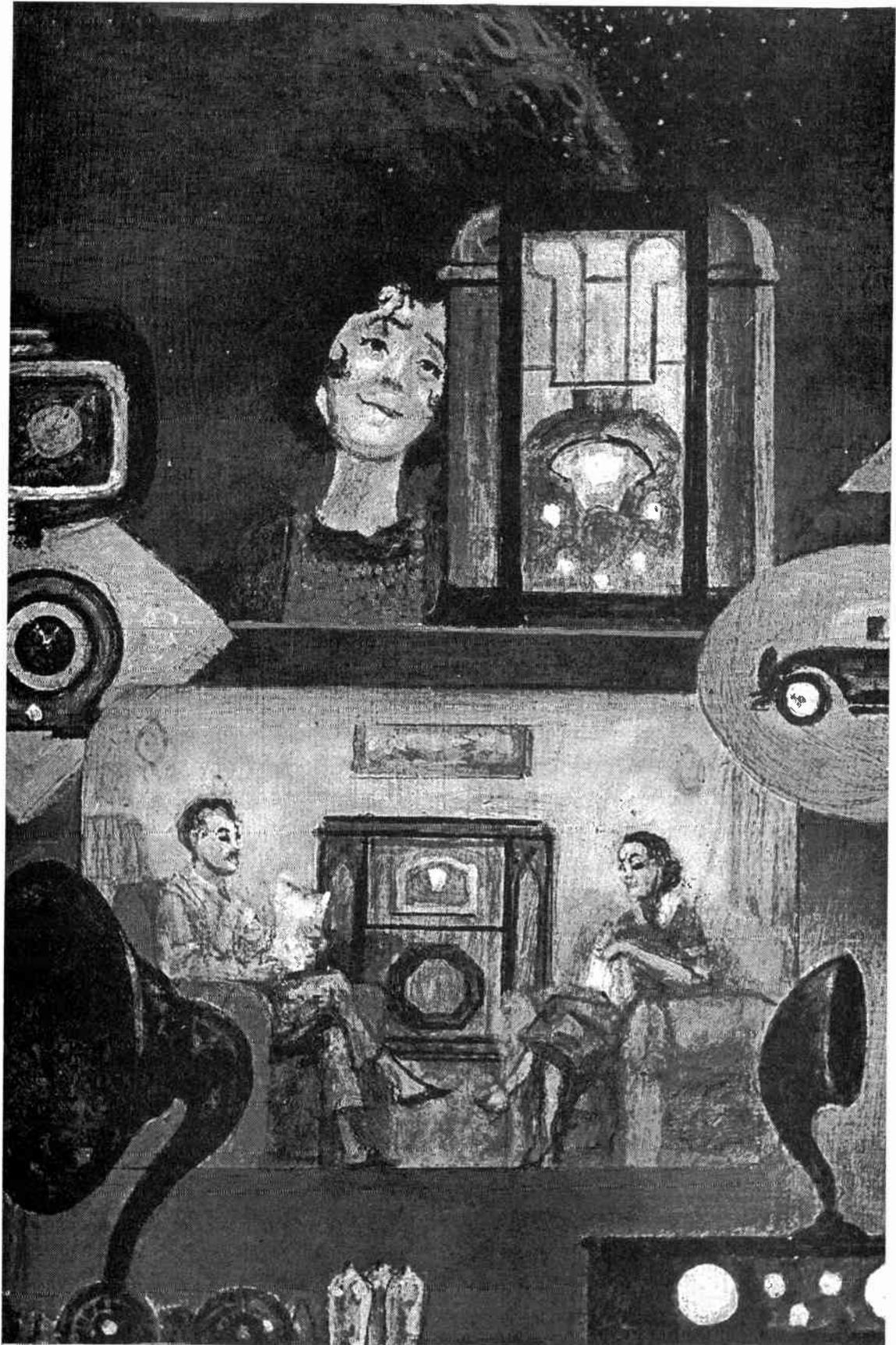


Si Steinhauser

Other newspaper columnists and personalities who made names for themselves in early Pittsburgh radio were Harold V. Cohen, who wrote the Drama Desk for the Post-Gazette; Chet Smith, the Sports Editor of the Press; Jack Hollister, who covered sports for the Post-Gazette; Florence Fisher Parry, who wrote a column for the Press, and Karl Krug of the Sun-Telegraph, who emceed a program on WJAS called "The Talk of the Town."



Dale McFeatters (far left) at the microphone in a KDKA broadcast from the '30s.



The Forties

This decade was a period of transition—a metamorphosis from America’s pastoral innocence to a period marked by grotesque unreality and human misery that is unsurpassed in world history. At the beginning of the decade, to many Americans, there seemed little else to worry about except such things as the Depression, the latest juke box hit, who would be the Rose Bowl victors, and the question of whether FDR would run for a precedent-shattering third term. Most Americans scarcely realized that they stood at the brink of peril in the gathering storm of World War II.

During these uncertain years, radio was a morale builder and it outdid itself in extending the range of radio tastes. Bobbysoxers and zoot-suited teenagers tuned in dance music and did the Lindy hop; or “messed around” to songs like “Juke Box Saturday Night,” “Elmer’s Tune” or “Mairzy Doats.” Radio engaged them in quiz shows like “Kay Kyser’s Kollege of Musical Knowledge,” and “Dr. I.Q.” These became an instant novelty; and the public was served a good dose of humility when Clifton Fadiman questioned those brainy “Quiz Kids,” who answered questions that baffled college professors.

During radio’s “Golden Age,” crime and mystery stories and spook shows were big with the listening public. Heroes were tracking down killers, tracing lost persons and scaring the pants off people with such shows as “Sam Spade, Detective,” “Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons,” and “Inner Sanctum.”

The encyclopedic volume of radio entertainment is testimony to the enormity of this industry. Too numerous to detail were the variety shows, adventure shows, situation comedies and sports events that were introduced. And Pittsburgh, like other cities, had its share of local innovative programs on all stations to augment the rich array offered on the national networks.

The Forties were the days of innocence when even the hint of a naughty or sexy word would bring severe censure. But if anyone believes that tabloid news is only characteristic of today’s broadcast journalism, one needs only to remember such radio reporters as Jimmy Fiddler, Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons. These gossip mongers brought their listeners juicy behind-the-camera tidbits about screen and radio stars that smacked of voyeurism.

Perhaps dearest in the memories of nostalgic listeners were those idyllic years when housewives could still escape into the imaginary world of the “soap operas” as they ironed piles of cotton shirts and dresses before the age of wash and wear. The “soaps” defined imagined domestic American life and its values. The main characters were middle-class white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, neither poor nor wealthy, neither well educated nor ignorant. Writers took care to make some of them professionals because it would better suit the housewife’s imagination to see herself as the wife of a doctor or lawyer when the announcer said: “This is your story . . .”

Soap operas roused fierce loyalties among their audiences and strong disapproval among their critics. Bypassing the usual dictionary definition of serial dramas, James Thurber’s definition succinctly sums up the format: “A soap opera is a kind of sandwich, whose recipe is simple enough, although it took years to compound. Between thick slices of advertising, spread twelve minutes of dialogue, add predicament, villainy, and sprinkle with tears, season with organ music, cover with a rich announcer sauce, and serve five times a week.” This humble art form was looked down upon by the cultivated but beloved by millions who found it necessary to their well-being.

But even this seemingly innocuous format prompted a crusade against the “soaps” by psychologist Dr. Louis Berg, who in his own pamphlet warned against the physically damaging addiction to radio serials, especially for middle-aged, adolescent and neurotic women. He concluded that serials are dangerous because they produce such symptoms as high blood pressure, vertigo and arrhythmia.

The era of radio soaps, golden though it was, would slowly lose its bubbles. The audience remained loyal even after the housewife left her ironing board behind and shed her feminine long-line dresses to don pants and join “Rosie the Riveter” in making war hardware for “the cause.” In the late ’40s, television gained momentum and posed a threat to the lives of Ma Perkins, Young Widder Brown and the rest. The old “bottom line” kicked in and local radio stations turned away from network programming and scheduled less-costly music programs. They made more money selling local commercials and doing local shows. Gradually the marvelous radio soap operas faded into oblivion along with their plots to eventually be replaced by talk radio—real-life characters with real-life problems, the listening audience who became the talking audience.

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, Senator Gerald Nye was in Pittsburgh to deliver a speech to a group of "America First" isolationists. He was passed a note telling of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. "Sounds terribly fishy to me," he said as the word spread through the auditorium. The gathering quickly dispersed. All across the country that day, the idyllic aura of American life came to an abrupt end, and the airwaves lost their innocence on the date "that will live in infamy."

Four days later another life came to an abrupt end as Frank Conrad, father of broadcasting, died of a heart attack. Not only had he lived to watch his radio hobby become a giant communications industry, he watched it become the voice of the world. He couldn't have imagined, in 1920, what horrific news his child, broadcasting, would convey to the world in the week of his death.

Never did radio play a more significant role than it did when it became the voice of America as it unified the nation, reporting about Americans in combat. Newscasters like the enduring Lowell Thomas, H.V. Kaltenborn and Walter Winchell were joined by other news greats including Edward R. Murrow, Eric Sevareid, Howard K. Smith, William L. Shirer and dozens of others. They reported all of the World War II news from the Munich Crisis to the raids on London, the attack on Pearl Harbor, the fall of Corregidor, the Normandy invasion, VE Day, the atomic bomb, and finally, VJ Day. And they informed us with justifiable bias about the atrocities committed at the hands of the Nazis and the Japanese. Names like Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Bataan were forever etched in our collective consciousness.

By now, newscasts had become an established part of network programming. Ed Murrow, "a sufferer" by his own wife's description, helped create radio journalism. He hired a team of reporters, "Murrow's boys," who became on-the-scene "beat" reporters; and newscasting moved from the static world of rephrased studio reporting to action newscasting. Murrow, admittedly "not contaminated by the conventions of print," carefully shaped his words and rhythms to engage the ear. During the London blitz, he conveyed the courage of the stoic Londoners under seige by holding a microphone on the sidewalk to pick up the sound of footsteps moving calmly toward the bomb shelter.

Murrow elevated radio journalism to new respected levels and came home from the war as a celebrity. Years hence, Murrow would make a cautious and restrained move to television. By the time his transition was complete, he would leave just as strong an impact on that medium as he had left on radio.

It was during the war that radio propaganda reached its peak. In the Pacific theater, American soldiers were fed incessant ongoing subversive radio messages by Tokyo Rose. Her German counterpart was Axis Sally. Both sides in the conflict, however, continually used radio propaganda to boost home spirits and weaken their enemy's morale.

Among the most successful radio propaganda operations were the so-called "black stations" which pretended to be on one side but were really operated by the other. "The Station of All True Americans," purported to originate in the Midwest, broadcast anti-Roosevelt messages and stories designed to spur racial unrest. Long-range radio direction finders finally traced the source to inside Germany. Some of the most successful British "black broadcasts" pretended to come from within enemy lines. In the last months of the war, they did a great deal to break the morale of German fighting men.

After the war, America was slowly going back to business as usual. But in the Fall of 1948, as in the Fall of 1920, something new was "in the air." The presidential election of that year would be reported by the press and radio as usual and, for the first time, by television.

Don Hewitt, a newcomer, came to network attention during the 1948 political conventions. Hewitt, full of journalism savvy, had the spirit and drive and creative impulse to make radio convention coverage more verbally visual. He also had an instinct for another "new kid" —television. Never one to stay at one job forever, he took a position in television. His boss at ACME News snickered and said, "Television? Oh, come on, that's a fad. It'll never last." Within a few weeks of being hired in TV, Hewitt became the show's regular director. He had found a new niche, eventually introducing the highly-popular "60 Minutes."

Pittsburgh's transformation from radio to television began within weeks of the Truman election. On January 11, 1949, station WDTV began operation with an inaugural telecast from the Syria Mosque, featuring Dr. Allan B. DuMont. Listeners became viewers who soon switched their affections to the new medium.

The Golden Age of Radio would soon bask in the light of nostalgia; for the metamorphosis from radio to television had arrived with Pearl Harbor, the atomic bomb and the new Atomic Age. America's transition from innocence was complete.

What radio dramas were broadcast on KDKA after the evening news?

In the late '30s and '40s came a period of experimentation. KDKA, with its orchestral resources and wealth of talent, was usually in the forefront with "live" innovative programs. Among these was a dramatic show that aired every week in the late evening. One series was called "Homing." A later series was entitled "Vox Humana." They were written by Marge Thoma and produced by Lionel Poulton. Music was furnished by Bernie Armstrong or Aneurin Bodycombe. Actors and actresses were from the Pittsburgh Playhouse. The Kinders Three and John (Tim) Kirby provided the vocals. Among the acting talent were familiar names such as: Polly Rowles, Adelaide Lasner Sachs, John Scigliano, Stephanie Diamond, Florence Sando, Bill Brandt, Patti Littell, Marjorie Davis, Phil Zinkand, Bob Shield, and many others, including producers and writers.

One late evening program "A Marine in Tokyo," written by Marjorie Thoma, was picked up by NBC and rebroadcast with its own talent over the national network.

Other early drama producers included Charlie Urquhart and Claude Morris, who master-minded a wide variety of dramatic presentations.



Live KDKA Drama Program.



"Fitz" Fitzsimmons

***How many times a day did the
Esso News reporter broadcast?***

Esso News, which dominated the airwaves during the '30s and '40s, was broadcast four times a day, at 8:00 A.M., 12 Noon, 6:00 P.M. and 11:00 P.M. These five-minute broadcasts of international, national and local news bulletins were supplemented by additional analyses which followed.

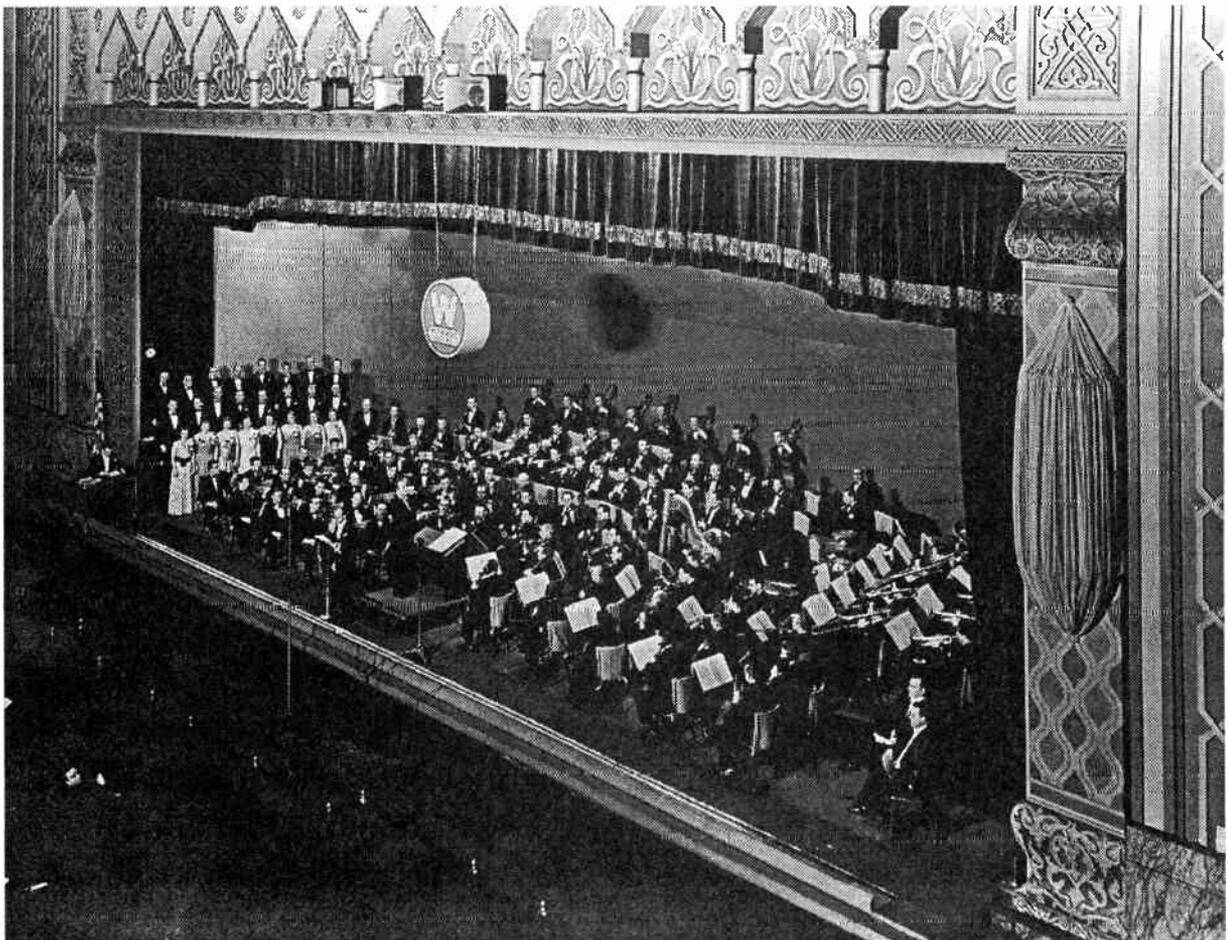
The personnel who compiled the news bulletins for Esso broadcasts were trained in journalism. For many years, "Fitz" Fitzsimmons prepared the news for the Esso broadcasts on KDKA. Jim Snyder also served as news director for a number of years until leaving to continue his career at Newsweek and the Washington Post radio stations in Washington, D.C.

***What network musical program was
aired from Pittsburgh in the early '40s?***

“Musical Americana” was broadcast each Thursday at 8:00 P.M. over 97 stations of the Blue Network of NBC. It was dedicated to the best in American music, both serious and popular.

Besides an orchestra of 102 musicians and a mixed chorus of 24 voices, the program featured Deems Taylor as Master of Ceremonies, Raymond Paige as musical director, Milton Cross as announcer and Kenneth L. Watt as producer.

Heard by shortwave in South America, Europe, and the Orient, “Musical Americana,” presented from the stage of the Syria Mosque, was sponsored by Westinghouse.



“Musical Americana” cast on stage at the Syria Mosque.

What did afternoon programming consist of?

Afternoon radio in the early years resembles today's afternoon television schedule of programs: News at noon, followed by soap operas, then after-school programs for children. News at dinner-time would round out an afternoon of programming. It was during the noon-to-six hours that many of the highest-rated shows in radio took place.

FORM NO. 1-WCAE

DAILY BROADCAST SCHEDULE
WCAE, INCORPORATED
PITTSBURGH, PA.

Name _____ Sheet No. 3 WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27, 1940

TIME	PICK UP	PROGRAM	Studio	ANNOUNCER	ENGINEER	REMOTE ANNOUNCER	TYPE OF PROGRAM
2:00	N	LIGHT OF THE WORLD (C) NO 2:15 BREAK	G	F	MAC		SKIT.
2:15	N	ARNO D GRIMM'S DAUGHTER (C)	"	C	"		SKIT.
2:30	N	VALLIANT LADY (C) NO 2:45 BREAK	"	F	"		SKIT.
2:45	N	BETTY CROCKER (C)	"	C	"		RECIPES.
3:00	B	SUN TELE (C)	"	"	"		ANN.
3:00	N	MARY MARLIN (C) NO 3:15 BREAK	"	F	"		SKIT.
3:15	N	MA PERKIN'S (C)	"	C	"		SKIT.
3:30	33E B	#7 BRAUN (C)	"	"	"		ANN.
3:30	N	PEPPER YOUNG'S FAMILY (C)	"	F	"		SKIT.
3:45	B	GHIPSO (C)	"	"	"		ANN.
3:45	N	VIC AND SADE (C)	"	C	"		SKIT.
4:00	B	OTTO (C) (30)	"	F	"		ANN.
4:00	N	BACKSTAGE WIFE (C) NO 4:15 BREAK	"	C	"		SKIT.
4:15	F S	TIE IN (C) SEE CUES	"	"	"		ANN.
	N	STELLA DALLAS (C)	"	"	"		SKIT.
	S	TIE IN (C) SEE CUES	"	"	"		ANN.
4:30	B	OTTO (C) (10)	"	G	"		ANN.
4:30	N	LORENZO JONES (C) NO 4:45 BREAK	"	C	"		SKIT.
4:45	N	YOUNG WIDDER BROWN (C)	"	G	"		SKIT.
5:00	B	FOLEY (C) (30)	"	C	"		ANN.
5:00	N	GIRL ALONE (C)	"	G	"		SKIT.
5:15	33EB	#8 BRAUN (C)	"	"	"		ANN.
5:15	N	MID STREAM (C)	"	C	"		SKIT.
5:30	B	SUN TELE (C)	"	"	"		ANN.
5:30	N	JACK ARMSTRONG (C)	"	G	"		SKIT.
NOTE:							
6:45	MUTUAL	OR PHAN ANNIE FEED WTSY ONLY 5:45-6					
5:45	B	TOOTSIE ROLL (C)	"	"	"		ANN.
5:45	N	THE O'NEILLS (C)	"	C	"		SKIT.
NOTE:		Record also off line 5:45-6:00					
6:00	B	GRANDALL MCKENZIE (C)	"	"	"		ANN.
6:00	33E	EVENING SERENADE WM. FENN (C)	"	G	"		MUSIC ET.
		MELLOR (C)	"	"	"		ANN.
6:14	S	GEO. WASH. TORACCO (C)	"	"	"		ANN.

WCAE Daily Program Schedule from 1940.

Why was the phrase, “By Electrical Transcription” used?

The records used extensively on the air in those early days were 16 inches in diameter and played at 33-1/3 RPM. These large transcriptions were the stock-in-trade at all the stations. Entire libraries of various musical organizations were recorded on these mammoth records and supplied to radio stations throughout the world. The FCC mandated that listeners be advised that such music was coming to them via electrical transcription

Many stations forbade recordings. They boasted that everything they broadcast was live, including commercials. However, economics forced the introduction of records. Some pundit, lost to history, dreamed up “electrical transcription,” supposedly because it sounded better than “recording.”

Who wrote some of the memorable jingles for early radio?

High on the list was the great Lennie Martin, who composed, among many others, the popular Roth Rug commercial which was used year after year. Lennie was also a talented arranger who worked under the wing of Bernie Armstrong. Most of the special arrangements used on the Duquesne Brewing Company show each Friday evening on KDKA were created by Lennie.

During WWII, what were transcription records made from?

Glass. Because of the shortage of metal, especially aluminum, record manufacturers were forced to develop a new type of transcription which consisted of a coating of acetate over a glass base. As a result it was necessary to exercise extreme care in handling these fragile transcriptions. There were many stories during this period of highly regrettable incidents when these glass records were accidentally smashed.

How did local radio help with the war effort?

In Pittsburgh, local radio's influence was especially helpful in stimulating the wartime effort to produce vital war materials. Likewise radio's spectacularly successful role in the sale of War Bonds is well documented. "The Steel City" proved to be a real kingpin in the munitions industry, turning out the weapons of war, and coming up with the money to help pay for them.

Local stations mounted "Bondwagons," manned by staff members and talent, and fanned out into the cities and towns up and down the tri-state area. Utilizing the popular tools of persuasion by song and dance, the troupers sold their patriotic wares to citizens eager to back their country in wartime.

What African-Americans performed on early Pittsburgh radio?

Ethel Ramos Harris was a talented pianist and singer on KDKA. There were many other black artists, like Errol Garner, who performed regularly in Pittsburgh, but few of them were featured on the radio. One exception was Billy Eckstine, who sang with Brad Hunt's orchestra.

There were no minority-owned broadcast stations in Pittsburgh at that time. The Sheridan Broadcasting Corporation, the country's first African-American-owned radio group, today operates WAMO-AM, which formerly had the call letters WHOD and was located in Homestead in the '40s.

What radio engineer made it possible for motorists to receive radio while going through the Liberty Tubes?

Ted Kenney, Assistant Chief Engineer at KDKA, is credited with making radio reception possible in the tunnels. Kenney evidently lived in the South Hills and was frustrated that his radio would fade out upon entering the Tubes, so he decided to do something about it. A system of strengthening and amplifying broadcast signals was installed. Today's drivers have Ted to thank for uninterrupted radio reception as they traverse the Liberty Tubes.

Who wrote the "Buzz and Bill" show?

His name was Si Bloom, one of the busiest writers in those early years. With a wonderful sense of humor and an ability to invest each production with something of interest to listeners, Si had many of his writings published and went on to serve in the field of advertising.

In addition to the "Buzz and Bill Show," Si wrote for many other early Pittsburgh programs.



Buzz Aston



Bill Hinds

What was meant by the term "Continuity" in radio?

Generally speaking, "continuity" refers to a radio script. In the days before tape recorders could store a station's daily output, every word to be spoken over the air by announcers was preserved on typed continuity sheets. This not only gave management a daily account of the station's broadcasts, it provided proof to advertisers that their commercials had been read over the air. As such, strict adherence to the continuity was a must; ad-libbing was not permitted.

10-14-40

WCAE, Inc.
Pittsburgh, Pa.

W-C-A-E O. K. _____

CONTINUITY

ANNOUNCER	PRODUCTION	MUSIC	SOUND	CONTROL	CAST
-----------	------------	-------	-------	---------	------

TITLE LANG THOMPSON'S ORCHESTRA CLIENT HOTEL WM: PENN

DAY Wed. DATE 3/27/40 TIME 7:30-8PM SCRIPT No. _____

WRITER PHILDAVIS

ANNOR: TUNES IN THE THOMPSON TEMPO.

THEME: YOU DARLIN' FADE FOR..

ANNOR: HERE'S DINNER DANCE MUSIC, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, PLAYED BY LANG THOMPSON AND HIS ORCHESTRA FROM THE BEAUTIFUL ITALIAN TERRACE OF HOTEL WILLIAM PENN IN THE HEART OF PITTSBURGH'S GOLDEN TRIANGLE.

THEME: UP TO END

ANNOR: AND NOW, COMING UP TO THE MICROPHONE TO INTRODUCE TUNES IN THE THOMPSON TEMPO...HERE'S LANG THOMPSON.

MUSIC: MY WONDERFUL ONE LET'S DANCE
STARLIT HOUR
ALL ALONE
WHEN YOU WISH UPON A STAR
EASY DOES IT

ANNOR: LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, FROM THE BEAUTIFUL ITALIAN TERRACE OF HOTEL WILLIAM PENN IN DOWNTOWN PITTSBURGH, WE HAVE PRESENTED THE SMOOTH DANCE MUSIC OF LANG THOMPSON AND HIS ORCHESTRA. ~~THE SELECTION WHEN~~

THEME: YOU WISH UPON A STAR" IS FROM "PINGOCHIO". THIS IS THE NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMPANY.

THEME: BREAK!

Continuity script from a WCAE broadcast in 1940.

Which radio station in Pittsburgh was the first to broadcast on FM?

Station WWSW, under the management of Frank R. Smith, Jr., established FM Station W47P which went on the air on August 29, 1941. The station achieved many firsts: it was the first frequency modulation radio station in Pittsburgh, the first in the state of Pennsylvania and the 14th in the nation. Two WWSW radio engineers, Henry Kaiser and James McFarland, handled the technical aspects of that pioneering event.

Pittsburgh's First FM Station W47P

"A Fuller Measure Of Radio Pleasure" Is Available To The Pittsburgh District Through W47P, FM Complement To Radio Station WWSW. The New System Of Broadcasting Makes Possible Clearer Reproduction Of Every Tone In Music And Every Cadence In The Human Voice.

By WALTER E. SICKLES
Program Director, WWSW—W47P

TOWERING above the Golden Triangle from the wind-swept promontory of Pineview Hill is WWSW's 253-foot antenna—now topped by six criss-crossing turnstiles that send out Frequency Modulation broadcasts to listeners in an 8,400 square-mile area in and around Pittsburgh. Frequency Modulation, or FM, is radio's newest miracle. It is the invention of Major Edwin H. Armstrong, professor of electrical engineering at Columbia University, who is also noted as the creator of the vacuum tube, the superheterodyne circuit and development that made possible the portable radio. But FM remains Major Armstrong's most noteworthy achievement.

Technical explanations and engineering principles of FM are much too complicated for anyone but a physicist to explain. And then, after all, how much does the average person know about the intricacies of his ordinary Amplitude Modulation, or AM set? Suffice it to say, the benefits

of FM are readily discernible by the ear. FM makes possible clearer, truer, reproduction of every tone in music, every cadence of the human voice. Programs come through the FM receiver with crystalline clarity. The high, singing notes of a violin, the deep rich swellings of the bass, the difficult-to-reproduce notes of the piano—all the beautiful but heretofore lost notes of a complex orchestration transform the home into the concert hall.

Man-made and natural static is cut out by FM. The clicks, buzzes, and roars of electric motors, X-ray machines, dial telephones, vacuum sweepers, and other electrical household devices are silenced. To listeners in rural areas, who encounter fading and station interference, FM's ability to maintain a sustained broadcast strength and to eliminate overlapping of signals is a special boon. On FM, the stronger of two signals invariably dominates. Listeners hear one or the other; never both.

Frank R. Smith, Jr., manager of WWSW and its FM component, W47P, long ago became convinced of the practicality of FM broadcasting and started immediately to lay the groundwork to bring its benefits to Western Pennsylvania. When the Federal Communications Commission finally gave its approval, W47P went on the air with regular program service on August 29, 1941—the first station in Pittsburgh and in the state and

That dot at the top of WWSW's 253-foot antenna on top of Pineview Hill is Harry Hagen, a 67-year-old former editor, who climbed it with the same dexterity he used to scale a mast. At the time the photo was taken, Hagen was installing the FM turnstile antennas that send out FM broadcasts. The turnstiles now occupy the last 60 feet of the antenna and are used by W47P. (Post-Gazette Photo).



Mr. Sickles

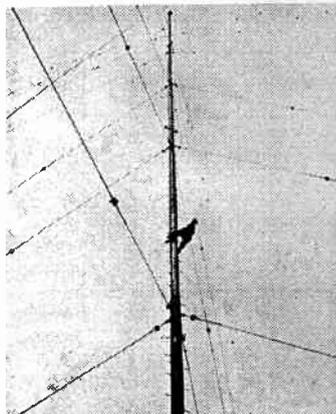
the fourteenth in the nation to take up FM broadcasting.

Operating on a frequency of 44.7 megacycles, W47P aired an inaugural show consisting of music by the NYA Chorus, directed by David Bisset, and "Buzz" Aston's Orchestra. The Bull Planetarium and Institute of Popular Science presented an effective dramatization of the history of radio. Special FM transcriptions were used in addition. Demonstrations of ordinary sound effects used in everyday programs were presented over both AM and FM, to illustrate the advantages of the latter medium.

Thousands had ample opportunity to hear and see FM demonstrated at the Ninth Annual Allegheny County Fair. WWSW and W47P operated a joint display booth for the duration of the fair, with announcers and performers staging regular broadcasts, including audience-participation shows.

FM gives W47P a much wider re-

Greeter: Pittsburgh



An article about new FM station W47P, 1941.

Who conducted the DX Club heard regularly on KDKA?

Ed Lipps. His program was devoted to the interest of shortwave enthusiasts who communicated with each other on a person-to-person basis. Technical advances in the world of electronics were discussed. Listeners were organized to render service in times of emergency by providing communication when regular telephones were down. Ed answered listeners' queries and often interviewed persons who related their experiences in the world of shortwave.

How keen was the rivalry between the early radio stations in Pittsburgh?

Healthy rivalry did exist among radio stations in Pittsburgh. While KDKA promoted itself as the pioneer broadcasting station of the world, the other stations did their utmost to outshine the giant with its 50,000-watt power and clear channel.

A subtly snobbish attitude did exist at KDKA which was resented by the other stations. WCAE, WJAS, KQV and WWSW were constantly fighting to capture the listening audience. In fact, despite KDKA's leadership position, WCAE boasted more listeners because of the popularity of its NBC Red Network programs. KDKA was on the Blue network, which did not have the top stars. WJAS benefitted when many of NBC's stars were lured to CBS.

KQV had a reputation as a feisty competitor and little WWSW carved its niche by concentrating on sports and top-name recording stars on transcriptions.

In radio parlance, KDKA had its nose in the air. It was the one to beat; the "Big Daddy" to out-manuever.

What network program originating in Pittsburgh used the song "Beyond the Blue Horizon" as its theme?

"Steel Horizons," an outstanding musical program under the direction of Bernie Armstrong, originated from the Urban Room of the William Penn Hotel. The sponsor was the Allegheny Ludlum Steel Corporation.

Paul Long



When did Paul Long come to Pittsburgh?

In 1946, Paul Long arrived in Pittsburgh, hailing from the small town of Como in Texas. Paul had been working at a number of small radio stations in Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas, but he wanted to work in a larger market, so he sent an audition recording to KDKA.

When Frank Tooke, then program manager, heard it, he wrote to Paul suggesting that if he were ever in this part of the country to drop in and see him. That was all the incentive Paul needed to hop in his automobile and head for Pittsburgh.

After one on-the-mike tryout, he was hired and has been in Pittsburgh ever since, first on KDKA radio, then KDKA-TV, and eventually on WTAE-TV. Paul is considered the Dean of Pittsburgh newscasters. He is married to Elaine Kinder of "The Kinders Three," the singing girls' trio on radio.

Where did Rege Cordic and his “Cordic & Company” start out?

Rege Cordic was a morning disc jockey on WWSW. While there, he developed his popular family of eccentric characters, played by some of his friends and co-workers.

Bob Trow was Brunhilda; Carman Monoxide, the punster; Max Forfendigas, the golf pro; Corporal Culpepper, the milkman; and Creighton Love, the announcer.



*A Cordic & Co. promotion
in downtown Pittsburgh.*

Karl Hardman played Louie, the garbage man; Sir Reginald P. Frothingslosh; Noodnicron; Roquefort Q. LaFarge, the staff announcer; Perrywinkle; Casey, the engineer; Mr. Murchison, the boss; Granny Gospel; Miss Gam; Brewster T. Galsworthy; Beauregard J. (for julep) Cornpone, the politician; and “The Inspector” (M’sieu Frontenac de la Jordinaire.)

Sterling Yates played Baldwin McMoney, Dad, and Quick & Easy O’Brien.

John Whited played Driggsie, the organist and Manuello, spokesman for the Brinks Boys who lived in a tree across the way.

Charlie Sords played Screamin’ Mad MacEldowney.



*Cordic & Co.
L to R - Karl Hardman,
Rege Cordic, Bob Trow,
and Bill Stephan.*

And of course, Omicron, the character from outer space, was played by Rege Cordic himself.

No mention of the show is complete without recalling the character of Baby, the sexy telephone girl, who was played by Tecla Marsico who was the receptionist at WWSW.

During the early '50s, Cordic set up shop with his cohorts at KDKA for the morning stint, replacing the long-running morning show, "The Musical Clock," with Ed Schaugency and Rainbow, played by Elmer Waltman.

Cordic continued on KDKA until he left for Los Angeles Station KNX in 1964 to replace Bob Crane who deserted radio for the television series, "Hogan's Heroes."

***What Pittsburgh radio station
broadcast only religious programs?***

Station WPIT came on the air May 10, 1947. Its studios were located in the old Americus Club headquarters building at 211 Smithfield Street, downtown. Each morning at 9:00 A.M. the Reverend Jack Munyon would conduct his religious program which was heard by a very large, loyal audience.

Other stations also carried regular religious programs. Dr. Solomon B. Freehof, Rabbi of the Rodef Shalom Temple, and the Rev. D. J. Holl of Pittsburgh's First Lutheran Church were both featured on WJAS. Many other clerics were speakers on other stations around town.



Dr. Solomon B. Freehof

***In radio parlance what were: “Dead Air,”
“The Day Book” and “Sustaining Program?”***

“Dead Air” was considered radio time when nothing happened. If a program ended early, the announcer on duty had to fill in with chatter to avoid the anathema of radio—“Dead Air.” In fact, when an announcer found himself with extra time to fill, he would often reach for the weather report or the program schedule and rattle away until the next program was scheduled to start.

“The Day Book” was the daily record of what went on the air and in what order. If the commercials were live, each announcer had to initial the copy to indicate that it had been read over the air at a specific time. The clients who paid the money to have their messages broadcast on the airwaves would receive a report of just when and by whom their spot was read or their recorded commercial played.

“Sustaining Program” was the term applied to radio shows which did not have a commercial sponsor. Since the airwaves had to be filled, those segments between the sponsored programs were given the term “sustaining.” They supposedly sustained listener interest until a commercial feature came on the air. Many of the big-time radio performers started out as talent on sustaining programs.

Merlin H. Aylesworth, the first president of NBC, proposed introducing commercial programs in this way: “The following program comes to you through the courtesy of (SPONSOR’S NAME).” It is said that the word sponsor was not used on radio until the late ’20s.

Where did Bill Burns start his radio career?

Bill Burns started on KQV after he returned from duty in World War II. As a newscaster, he gained a wide following because of his style and his aggressive new approach. Using an investigative manner, he would go after a story “on the spot” and report it later in an attention-getting and informative fashion. After a brilliant career in radio, he went on to fame as a top television news announcer. His daughter, Patti Burns, continues the family tradition as a news anchor on KDKA-TV.

What Pittsburgh-area companies sponsored network radio programs during the '40s?

The D. L. Clark Company sponsored “Mr. Anthony” and “The Mary Small Show.” Mail Pouch Tobacco sponsored “Counterspy.” Allegheny Ludlum Steel Corporation sponsored the two war correspondents, John Vandercook and John Gunther, and the program “Ma and Pa.” Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company sponsored the “Gary Moore Show,” and United States Steel sponsored a number of radio specials. Westinghouse sponsored “Musical Americana.”

What performer sang and played the ukulele?

His name was Pat Haley. He made his fame as a cheerful, enthusiastic, bouncy personality who could give real life and vitality to a song. He was featured as talent on a good many of the programs on KDKA.

Why were many of the most popular programs of the '30s and '40s carried on WCAE?

Because WCAE was an affiliate of NBC's Red Network, which embraced a greater number of radio stations and a wider range of markets than the Blue Network of NBC, thus offering sponsors a wider range of audience. Most of the Blue Network stations, such as WMAQ in Chicago and KGO in San Francisco, were big, clear-channel stations with 50,000 watts, like KDKA in Pittsburgh.

In 1940, WCAE carried the programs voted most popular by Broadcasting Magazine: Bergen & McCarthy, Jack Benny, Fibber McGee, Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Bandwagon, Pot of Gold, Ma Perkins, Pepper Young, Vic and Sade, Guiding Light, Marv Marlin, Stella Dallas, Woman in White and Road of Life.

In late 1941, however, a major network shift occurred in Pittsburgh radio. WCAE's Red Network moved to KDKA. KDKA's Blue Network went to KQV. WCAE became the local Mutual outlet. WJAS stayed as the CBS affiliate and WWSW remained independent.

In 1945 another shift moved KQV's Blue Network to WCAE and WCAE's Mutual jumped to KQV.

Did any Pittsburgh programs have a live studio audience?

KDKA introduced the live studio audience to radio with a daily show emceed by Glenn Riggs. It was called “Stroller’s Matinee” and it featured the KDKA orchestra and various guest artists. Listeners wrote in for tickets to these broadcasts and were seated both in the studio itself and in the viewing booth that was adjacent to the studio.

Anniversary programs at the station also featured a live audience.



Bill Beal , left, and Frank Conrad during a live studio audience anniversary broadcast in the late '30s.



Ed and Wendy King

Has any local radio show achieved the popularity of Ed and Wendy King's "Party Line?"

It's doubtful. Ed and Wendy King were the outstanding late-night stars of radio. Because KDKA's clear channel signal of 50,000 watts could be heard across the country, their "Party Line" program had an audience that was tremendous for those early years of Pittsburgh radio.

What is unique, and in these days hard to believe, Ed and Wendy were able to make the listener understand what each caller was saying by either repeating the caller's query or implying the content. The caller's voice was not broadcast, only the responses of Ed and Wendy.

In this day and age, when two-way radio talk shows are common, it is difficult to understand how Ed and Wendy were able to maintain their avid listener audience. Ed was also a talented writer, who authored many outstanding historical and anecdotal essays which were integrated in this memorable program.

In addition to the five Pittsburgh radio stations, what were some of the other regional stations?

There were WEDO in McKeesport; WISR in Butler; WLOA in Braddock; WHJB in Greensburg; WMBS in Uniontown; WJPA in Washington, Pa.; WKPA in New Kensington; WCVI in Connellsville; WPIC in Sharon; WBVP in Beaver Falls; WSTV in Steubenville, and WWVA in Wheeling.

Who was Vickey Corey?

While Jim Rock was manager of KDKA in the '40s, Victoria (Vickey) Corey was hired and named Educational Director. Her efforts helped to move programming into area schools with interviews, dramas and entertainment. Vickey emphasized networking with other local and national educational groups and was successful in introducing international viewpoints.

What became of the singer, Billy Leach?

Billy Leach was a popular singing personality on KDKA in the late '30s and early '40s. Prior to his coming to Pittsburgh, he had traveled all over the country as the featured vocalist with Art Cassel, whose orchestra was a big-band favorite.

After a stint in the Army, Billy went to Chicago where he performed at the NBC affiliate WBBM. He now lives in suburban Chicago and volunteers at the Chicago Museum of Broadcast Communications.

What girl became popular for her whistling talents?

She was Faye Parker, a singer who appeared on "Tap Time" with Maurice Spitalny's orchestra. The program had two singing stars, Faye Parker and Bill Sherman. Faye had a delightful singing style which she augmented with whistling interludes, making her an unusual performer. She was married to George Youngling, Pittsburgh musician who arranged for some of the great bands of that era.

What were some of the early Kids' Shows on Pittsburgh Radio?

There were many radio shows designed to appeal to young listeners. Two popular KDKA programs come to mind. During the '30s, Sammy Fuller presented a five o'clock program with songs and patter that held the interest of every kid around. Then in the late '30s and '40s, Ed Schaughency was master-of-ceremonies of a highly popular Saturday morning program directed by Betty Dugan. Named "The KDKA Starlets on Parade," the show featured youthful talent from around the tri-state area, all enthusiastically showcasing their considerable singing and dancing talents.



Ed Schaughency and the KDKA Starlets on Parade.

Who hosted local radio programs for women?

Florence Sando's program was carried on WCAE during the early '40s. Her vibrant, no-nonsense personality, combined with a wide-ranging knowledge of topics of interest to women, won her a loyal following and the reputation of an outstanding commentator.

Other popular women commentators who conducted programs especially slanted to the feminine audience were Janet Ross and Evelyn Gardiner of KDKA. Gloria Abdou and Phyllis Morton also joined the daytime ranks of well-known women's shows.



Evelyn Gardiner



Janet Ross

Whatever became of Bernie Armstrong?

Bernie, who died during the '50s at a too-early age, is remembered as one of the most colorful and best-loved personalities on the air—a powerhouse of musical talent.

Bernie's career began as a movie-house organist, first in East Liberty and then downtown at the Warner Theater on Fifth Avenue.

On KQV and WJAS, and later on KDKA, Bernie Armstrong was a musical genius whose talent infused all aspects of radio programming. He was heard daily on "The Dream Weaver" as an organist and each week he served as director of the Duquesne Orchestra with Friday night presentations.

Originally from West Virginia, Bernie took Pittsburgh by storm and the city loved him. His wife, Dorothy Bushee, a talented dancer, was also in show business.



Bernie Armstrong

What tenor starred on KDKA's "Singing Strings" program in the '40s?

It was Tim Kirby who changed his name from John Kirby to avoid being mistaken for a contemporary named "John Kirby." His fine tenor voice won him a following at every level of listenership. "Singing Strings," a popular program conducted by Bernie Armstrong, featured old familiar songs as well as the favorite ballads of the day.

Tim Kirby was also featured on "Songs You Love to Hear," heard each Monday at 7:30 P.M. He won great popularity on both programs and went on to national fame as a singing personality with a number of network productions.



Tim (John) Kirby and Barbara Lee Owens.



Singing Strings Orchestra

Who played the role of "Penny Stanwix" on WCAE?

Polly Rowles was "Penny Stanwix." She was heard every weekday on a news and information program for the Joseph Horne Company. She went on to stardom on Broadway in many outstanding plays and musicals. Polly graduated from Carnegie Tech's Drama Department. After a brief stint in Hollywood, she returned to Broadway where she performed on stage. Eventually she assumed the television commercial role of "Head Inspector" for Hanes Hosiery.

Lillian Malone was also heard as "Penny Stanwix" during the '40s.

Ad for Horne's Newsreel.

TUNE IN TO
Horne's Newsreel
8:45 A. M.—12 NOON
MONDAY THRU SATURDAY

WCAE
BILL DEAL

WCAE
PENNY STANWIX

1250
ON YOUR DIAL

WCAE
FOR JOSEPH HORNE COMPANY

What are the names of announcers who worked at the various radio stations during these early years?

Listed below are names of some of the announcers connected with specific stations, although some were well known on a number of stations.

WCAE

Ray Scott
Davey Tyson
Warren Gerard
Charlie Rowe
Jim Murray
Ray Spencer
Ford Miller
Bob McKee
Bob Donley
Ralph Fallert
Carl Dozer
Joe Sartoni
Lee Philipps
Carl Betz
Ralph Spence
Marks Hartman
Chet Clark
Norman Twigger
Dave Olsen

WWSW

Art Pallen
George Bowes
Ray Lehman
Jan Andre
Walt Sickles
Bill Brandt

Ray Schneider

Bill Nesbitt
Joe Gibson
Kieren Balfe
John Davis
Jack Fleming
Bill Cullen
Joe Tucker
Rege Cordic
Ralph Weithorn
Ollie O'Toole
Jim Williams

KQV

Bill Burns
Dave Scott
Henry DeBecco
Jim Thompson
Phil O'Farrell
Si & Joe Mann
Al Nobel
John Gibbs
Phil Zink
Jim Dudley
Paul Barnes
"Tex" Howard
George Heid
Ken Hildebrand

KDKA

Glenn Riggs
Bill Beal
Dick Aiken
Sam Fuller
Pierre Paulin
John Stewart
Paul Long
Fred Webber
Jim Westover
Paul Shannon
Jack Swift
Bill Sutherland
Dave Garroway
Bob Shield
Ed Schaughency
Bill Hinds
Dick Hoge
Bill Farren

WJAS

Hilary Bogden
Jimmy Thompson
Beckley Smith
Louis Kaufman
Jack Logan
Ralph Petty
Roger Kelly

Some of the faces behind the voices of early Pittsburgh radio.



Hilary Bogden



Ralph Fallert



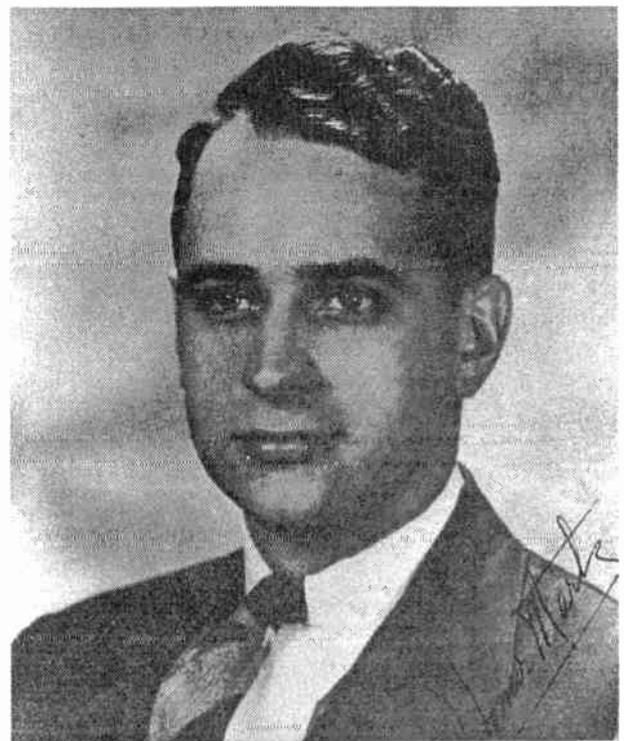
Adelyne Hood



Pierre Paulin



Bob McKenna



Homer Martz



Johnny Boyer



Roy Williams



Bill Brandt



Raymond Buechner



Bill Sutherland



Jack Swift



Chet Smith



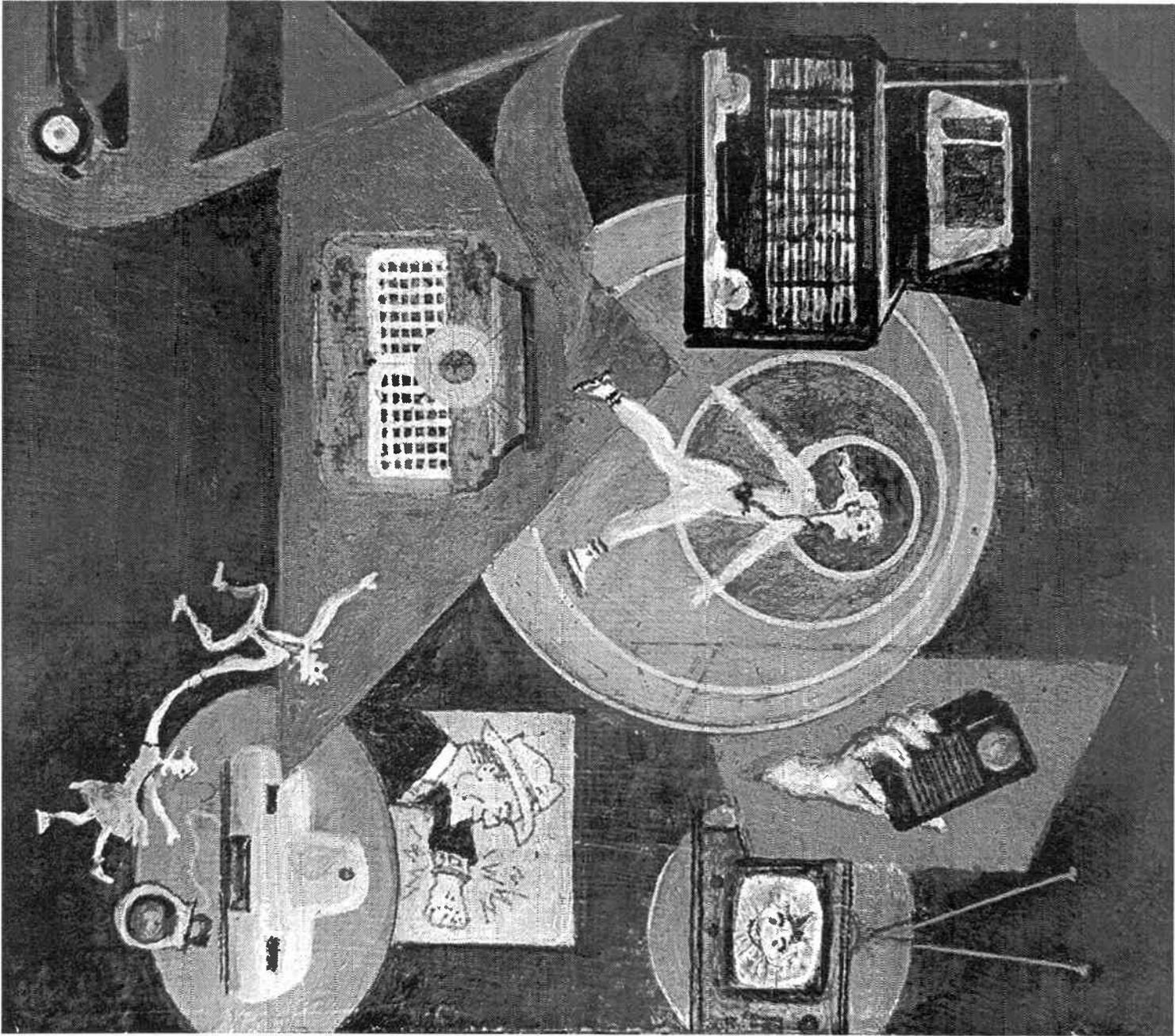
Henry Dabeco



Bill Thomas



Pat Haley



Don't Tune in Tomorrow

The end of radio's Golden Age should have been obvious. By 1948, radio had waxed and waned. The threat of a television take-over was as unsettling in the halls of Madison Avenue as it was in the radio production studios. Perhaps feeling a threat to its profits from radio commercials, some prankster had posted this sign in New York's Young & Rubicam ad agency: "Help Stamp Out TV!"

Radio script writers had begun to write the last heart-wrenching episodes of their soap operas, as heroines and their heroes went off into the Never-Land-of-No-Return. Sound men began packing up their creaking doors, wind and rainstorm paraphernalia, and other contraptions. The suction cups that simulated hoofbeats would gallop no more. And the announcer would no longer cajole, "tune in tomorrow."

But "hope springs eternal" in Soapland. Perhaps there was the possibility that the soap opera would not die. Perhaps the bubbles would rise again to keep the nation's women in a state of "unwholesome addiction." One of the soaps, "A Woman to Remember," attempted to transmigrate to TV as early as 1947 but failed after one episode, perhaps doomed to folklore as "A Woman to Forget." Others, like "The Guiding Light," were successful in the transition.

Television variety shows gave talented "show biz" people, comedians and dramatic actors a chance to take center stage. Beloved husband and wife comedy teams who moved into TV were as popular as they had been on radio. Other programs experienced such success. The move kept "Molly Goldberg" (Gertrude Berg) laughing as she posed with piles of scripts for a promo photo.

By 1948, listeners had become awestruck viewers as they strained to see "live" performances on dim, miniature TV screens. The inherent *faux pas* that were bound to occur before the advent of teleprompters and video tape were inevitable. Such things as an announcer practicing his pasted-on toothy smile might be inadvertently caught on camera. Or the back end of a stage-hand retrieving cable in the middle of a love scene might be caught within a cameraman's stray shot. And actors who had to memorize a fifteen minute script every day were given no reprieve from flubbed lines and mental blocks.

Those early hilarious years of novel entertainment, fraught with imperfections in black and white, are now the Golden Age of Television. Within ten years of its inception, that Golden Age ended in a pile of rubble, when in 1958 the public scandal of rigged quiz shows surfaced and heavy doses of integrity set in. As the New York District Attorney uncovered more quiz show frauds, producers were disgraced. Gradually television, too, lost its innocence.

People on Pittsburgh's radio scene who moved to television had the opportunity to expand their talents. Veteran announcer, script writer and man who wore many hats, Bill Beal, created Pittsburgh's, and possibly the nation's, first local television news program, "The Pitt Parade." Not a surprising development in a city of broadcasting "firsts."

Speaking of firsts, with any fond look back, one must pay special homage to Pittsburgh's electronic wizards who revolutionized communication: Reginald Fesenden, who developed voice radio; Frank Conrad, who pioneered commercial and shortwave broadcasting; and Vladimir Zworykin, who invented an all-electronic video system, from which modern-day television sprang.

Early concepts of television focused on a mechanical scanning system with motors and large rotating disks, capable of producing a picture about one inch square. It was heavy, bulky equipment and certainly not practical for home use. Zworykin developed an all-electronic scanning television system using his inventions, the iconoscope and the kinescope. Zworykin, a Westinghouse engineer, demonstrated his electronic television system in Pittsburgh in 1929, a full ten years before it was introduced to the general public at the New York World's Fair in 1939.

Because of their shared interests and talents, Conrad's and Zworykin's paths frequently crossed. The two exchanged ideas at work after Conrad's radio station 8XK expanded from his backyard garage to a modest wooden shack atop the East Pittsburgh Works "K" building to become KDKA. Later, they frequented the experimental radio and television laboratory and transmitting station in Forest Hills on the aptly-nicknamed "Miracle Hill." As Zworykin was watching crude pictures on a television set at his home in Swissvale, Conrad was beaming shortwave messages to Admiral Byrd at the South Pole and around the world—both radio and TV signals being broadcast from the same station.

Vladimir Zworykin demonstrates his electronic television receiver in 1929.



The Forest Hills station, sandwiched between Wilkinsburg and East Pittsburgh, is of foremost significance in the annals of communication. Never before in human history could a person speak into a microphone and miraculously be heard around the world in an instant. Engineers, scientists and broadcasting men-of-stature visited the laboratory, commonly called the "Hill Station." One can only imagine what Marconi, Zworykin, Conrad, Sarnoff and others discussed as they toured these state-of-the-art facilities.



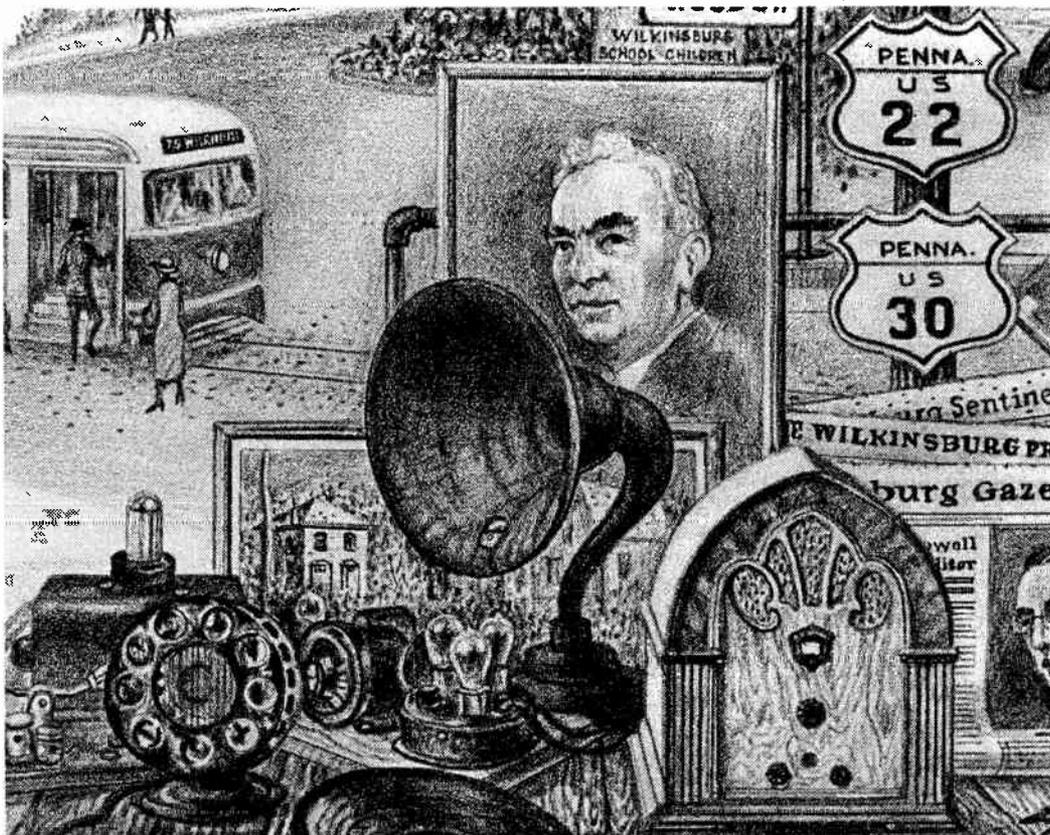
The world's first public television station, WQED, during the '50s.

In addition to its commercial counterpart, Pittsburgh was the birthplace of public broadcasting. In the mid-'50s, as the first Pittsburgh renaissance was in full swing, a group of local businessmen and Mayor David L. Lawrence huddled to discuss an alternative to the crass commercial television programming that was increasingly occupying the spare time of young and old alike. The result was WQED-TV, the world's first publicly-owned educational television station, which debuted in 1954.

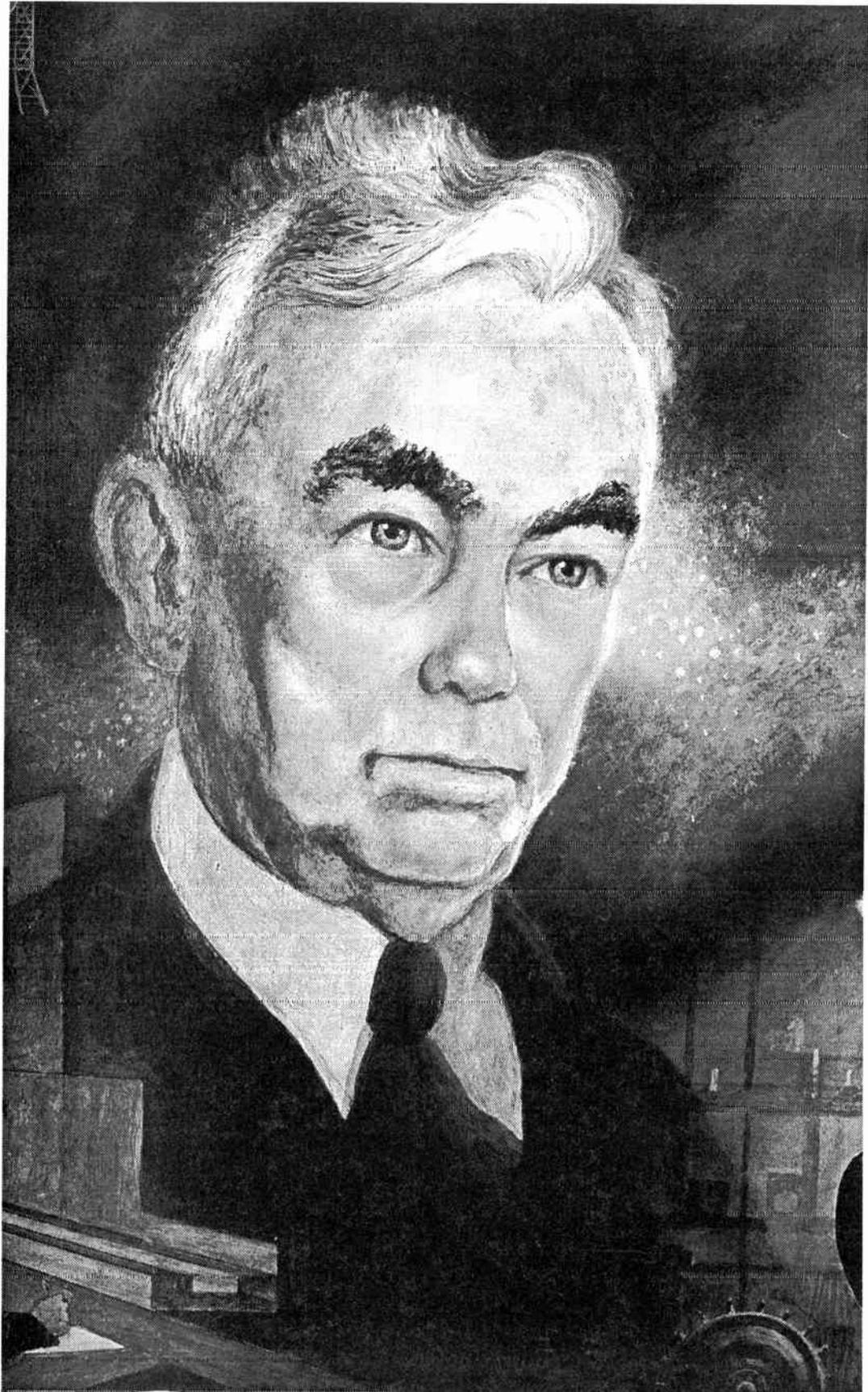
True, Pittsburgh can also rightly and importantly claim to be the first to bring public television to its viewing audience. But no business or broadcasting corporation, except Westinghouse, can ever claim to be first in commercial broadcasting, electronic television and worldwide broadcasting! Such monumental achievements should be treasured and loudly proclaimed. Conceived, born and raised in Pittsburgh, broadcasting is today a 35-billion-dollar industry whose influence on our lives and on world events is so powerful it cannot be measured.

But in the seventy-five years since broadcasting hurled civilization so rapidly into the future, its birth has gotten little more than verbal tributes. What is the legacy of Fessenden, Conrad, Davis, Zworykin and the many others who pioneered radio and television in Pittsburgh during the first half of the 20th century? If their story were to be committed to an old-time soap opera, how would the script play out? Let us imagine what an announcer might say as he or she signs-off (over a background of tremulous organ music):

Announcer: What has happened to the shack from which the first national presidential election was broadcast? . . . It has long been destroyed . . . What is the fate of the neglected little garage where commercial broadcasting was born? . . . It waits only for the wrecking ball or a savior . . . What is to happen to the transmitting station that broadcast the first voice heard "round the world?" . . . It too may soon be destroyed . . . What will become of Pittsburgh's vanishing historical landmarks of radio and television? . . . If you really don't care . . . **DON'T TUNE IN TOMORROW** . . . (music up and out.)



Detail of a series of historical prints by Wilkinsburg artist Bill Hofschler depicting Frank Conrad and examples of early radio equipment.



The Conrad Project

Broadcasting celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1970 amidst great fanfare and ballyhoo. There were the cursory tributes to the pioneers of the industry and light retrospectives of the personalities and programs of days gone by. But the celebration had a hollow ring to it, for although the broadcasting industry had profited billions of dollars since 1920, it had done nothing to preserve its birthplace, Frank Conrad's garage. By 1972, the long-forgotten structure was neglected, unwanted, and on the verge of demolition.

While conducting interviews for a writing assignment at the University of Pittsburgh, Alice Sapienza-Donnelly discovered the impending destruction of this historic landmark. Forcefully and eloquently, she argued for its preservation. She wrote:

. . . the faded blue garage doors were unhinged, the upper windows were dirty, some were cracked. The wooden stairs leading to Conrad's radio workrooms were sagged. Inside, the plaster crumbled, and there was a hole in the wall large enough to crawl through to an adjoining room. In three small rooms the scarred wooden floors were bare. In the fourth, a thread-bare rug, its colors and patterns indiscernible beneath the dirt, was mute testimony to the indifference shown toward this labor room where the modern miracle of broadcasting was born. The little apartment where Dr. Conrad had created the voice of the world was now desolate and unwanted.

I felt sad to think that most of us are unaware of Frank Conrad's contributions to communication. Certainly the inventions that have linked us city to city, nation to nation, and planet to planet deserve international recognition.

In a wave of mixed emotions, I thought of Edison, Marconi, and Westinghouse. Each must have had a sanctuary where he shut himself away from the world to tinker and experiment. Frank Conrad, too, had his sanctuary in this little garage where he spent long hours absorbed in testing and discovering new possibilities

for communication that would one day give civilization its greatest thrust since the wheel.

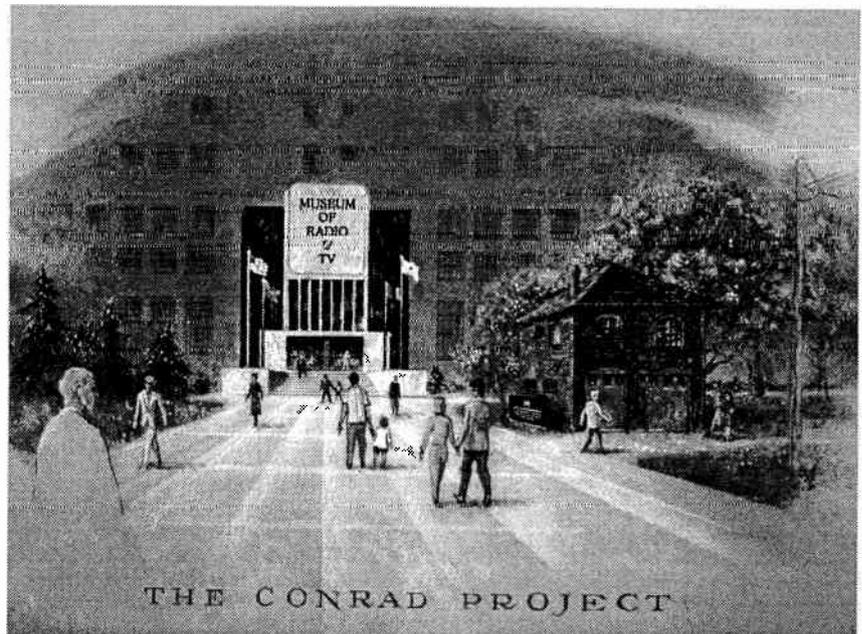
I felt Conrad's presence in the room and came out of the reverie and said to my host, "So this is where radio broadcasting was born. It's too bad they're planning to tear it down. We just can't let it happen!" My host agreed. "It would be a shame to destroy it," he answered. I wondered how posterity would judge us if we allowed it to be torn down and said, "I would stand before the wrecking ball to stop it, if necessary!"

Alice's efforts persuaded the owners to halt the demolition plans, but for the next 15 years no progress was made to preserve the structure. Windows were bricked up, doors replaced, Conrad's lab turned into a meeting room. Several times the garage was threatened by development but each time, almost miraculously, plans fell through.



The Conrad Garage in the 1980s.

*Artist Bill Hofschers
conception of the Conrad
Garage as a museum.*



The Conrad Project's proposal is to purchase the Recreation Center property and convert the lodge into the museum headquarters. The Conrad Garage would be moved to an area adjacent to the museum and restored to its original condition. As the museum grows, there is ample room for expansion on the 14-acre site.

The goal of the broadcasting museum isn't only historic preservation. Its many benefits to the region include education, land conservation, jobs and economic development.

A restored Conrad Garage and National Museum of Broadcasting would be a world-wide attraction, bringing thousands of additional visitors to the Pittsburgh area each year. Local interest, based upon the experience of other broadcasting museums, is expected to be significant. The tourist dollars infused into the Pittsburgh economy could eventually reach into the millions of dollars annually.

As this book goes to press, a grass-roots fund-raising campaign is underway. Both public and private funding is actively being pursued in a concerted, broad-based effort. Immediate support is needed. It would truly be an insult to history if the world were to lose this garage and lodge, the two most historic structures of an industry, born here in Pittsburgh, that has entertained, educated and enriched the lives of people worldwide for three-quarters of a century.

As Wilkinsburg celebrated its centennial in 1987, renewed efforts were underway to save Conrad's workshop. The Wilkinsburg Commission, Inc. (WCI) was formed with one of its stated purposes to insure that the garage be preserved. As a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, WCI has organized the **Conrad Project**, which would restore the garage as part of a proposed National Museum of Broadcasting in Pittsburgh.

Recently, the garage's current owners have agreed to sell the building to WCI provided that it be moved off the property. However, if no site for the garage can be found, the owners will have no choice but to tear it down.

Ironically, of all of the technological innovations and industries to come out of western Pennsylvania, broadcasting (i.e. to make widely known) is often forgotten. But perhaps no other Pittsburgh institution has had a greater, more profound influence on people worldwide than broadcasting has.

Pittsburgh's heritage in wireless communications dates back to the turn of the century to the very beginnings of radio itself. Out of Pittsburgh came voice radio, commercial and shortwave broadcasting, electronic television, and public broadcasting, along with dozens of "firsts" in the industry.

Although so many great milestones in radio and TV happened here, Pittsburgh has been left behind in the race to commemorate these achievements. In recent years broadcasting museums have opened in cities large and small: New York, Chicago, Tokyo, Dallas, even Huntington, West Virginia, to name just a few. Yet Pittsburgh, more than any other city in the world, has the historical precedent for such a museum.

Several other Pittsburgh organizations have joined WCI to help establish a permanent commemoration of broadcasting here. Comprised of historians, collectors, technicians, and broadcasters, these groups are determined to make significant advances toward their goal in 1995, the 75th anniversary year of broadcasting.

As this book was being prepared for publication, a site for the museum became available, one which itself is a historic broadcasting venue. Known today as the Westinghouse Recreation Center, its lodge building was the experimental transmitting station where shortwave broadcasting and television were pioneered. Unless this property is acquired for the museum, it, like Conrad's garage, will be torn down and with it a significant part of world communications history.