

NBC Radio Network History-
From the Digital Deli Website

http://www.digitaldelift.com/LookAround/la_networkspot_nbc.htm

RCA had acquired radio station WJZ in New York and WRC in Washington, DC, and had been using Western Union's transmission lines for its 'network' transmissions, albeit at somewhat degraded quality, compared to the superior telephone lines of AT&T (apparently 'his master's voice' wasn't nearly as audible over Western Union's telegraph lines as over AT&T's phone lines). RCA solved this problem by simply buying-out the competition--in time honored American Business tradition. Thus having acquired its own monopoly, RCA formed **NBC** two months later, in **September of 1926** with an initial network of 19 stations.



Divide and Conquer: **NBC Red and NBC Blue**

In fact, NBC operated two networks: **NBC Blue**, headed by station WJZ, and **NBC Red**, headed by WEAF. This situation arose, due to NBC then owning two stations in New York (WEAF and WJZ). **WEAF and the 'Red' Network became the flagship network** and offered most of the established shows--and advertisers, and the 'Blue' Network carried most of the sustaining shows (e.g., shows without regular sponsors). How did they arrive at the names 'Red' and 'Blue'? The **felt tip marker pen** used to trace the routes of the WJZ-headed stations was **blue**, and as you may have already guessed, the marker used to trace the WEAF-headed stations was **red**. This was a confusing situation for everyone but NBC and its sponsors and advertisers, and that was just fine by NBC, thank you.

If that isn't confusing enough, NBC also operated three other 'color' networks: NBC Orange, NBC Gold, and NBC White. NBC White was NBC's Religious Programming network, also referred to as The Watchtower Network, and operated from about 1928 to 1936. NBC's Orange Network was its West Coast affiliates, KGO, KFI, KGW, KOMO, and KHQ, beginning operations in 1931. NBC also operated a 'Gold Network' comprised of KPO, KECA, KEX, KJR, and KGA, disbanded and absorbed by the Orange Network in 1933.

Those of us who catalog our Golden Age Radio collections, generally refer to NBC Red as NBC, and simply include NBC Blue as NBC up until NBC sold the Blue Network to the American Broadcasting Company. Indeed, NBC's Blue Network became ABC in 1943, due to a landmark Supreme Court Ruling that held that NBC had specifically maintained the two parallel networks for the express purpose of stifling competition (*Say it isn't so!*). NBC extricated itself from this sticky situation by subsequently selling NBC Blue to **Edward Noble** of the **Lifesaver Candy Company**, who first called his new network, simply 'The Blue Network', then 'The Blue Network of the American Broadcasting Company', and eventually in 1945, dropped the 'Blue Network' appellation completely after which time the old Blue Network was simply called the American Broadcasting Company (ABC).



No discussion of NBC's rich history would be complete without mention of NBC's famous 'chimes'. Those three little notes have acquired an almost cult-like following, with any number of alleged sources of attribution for them. In fact, at the end of a program an NBC announcer would read the call letters of all the NBC affiliate stations carrying the program. Naturally, as the network added more stations this became impractical and would cause some confusion among the affiliates as to the conclusion of network programming and when the station break should occur on the hour and half-hour. Some means was needed to signal the affiliates for these breaks and allow each affiliate to identify.

Three men at NBC were given the task of finding a solution to the problem:

- **Oscar Hanson**, from NBC engineering
- **Earnest LaPrada**, an NBC orchestra leader
- **Phillips Carlin**, an NBC announcer.



They acquired a set of hand dinner chimes from the *Lesch Silver Co. of Manhattan* for \$48.50, and between 1927 and 1928 they experimented with a seven-note sequence of chimes, 'G-C-G-E-G-C-E'. In practice, this proved too complicated for announcers to consistently strike in the correct sequence, so the original sequence was reduced to four notes--'G-G-G-E'. Shortly after, two Gs were dropped and a C added to become the three notes G-E-C (some maintain, to appease **General Electric Corporation**, one of the principal owners). The three note sequence was first broadcast on November 29, 1929, every 59 minutes 30 seconds, and 29 minutes 30 seconds past the hour.

Click to play

Now indulge me here for a moment, but I have to get this out of my system once and for all. This has been sticking in my craw since I first saw NBC's chimes logo on television. Just gloss over

this to the NBC Christmas shows below if you think this is too anal of me . . . but shouldn't the chimes logo have looked like this? Email me at webmaster@thedigitaldeli.net if you think you agree or not. . .

NBC White Network (from NYC Radio History Pg 3)

<http://www.angelfire.com/nj2/piratejim/nycamhistory3.html>

In 1939, WHN presented an idea to NBC for it to become the flagship station for a new "NBC White Network" (to join the then-current Red and Blue networks), but NBC wasn't interested.