

## THE NBC "ORANGE" NETWORK:

By John Schneider

Immediately after the National Broadcasting Company's first broadcast on the East Coast, November 15, 1926, the network began seeking routes of expansion. On January 1, 1927, less than two months later, a second NBC network was instituted, again only serving the eastern two-thirds of the nation. To distinguish between the two separate telephone-line networks, AT&T technicians used **red** designators at their jack panels for the original network's connections, and **blue** designators for the newcomer. The names of the two networks were casually derived from these practices, and the two networks became the **NBC Red Network** (the WEAF group) and the **NBC Blue Network** (the WJZ group).

In the beginning, NBC was "National" in name only, as its programs reached only as far west as Denver. In its first years, NBC was unable to set up a coast-to-coast hookup. AT&T had not yet installed broadcast quality telephone lines across the Rocky Mountains.<sup>[1]</sup> To alleviate this problem, the NBC Board of Directors voted on December 3, 1926, to establish a third NBC network: the **Pacific Coast "Orange Network"**.<sup>[2]</sup> They assembled a full duplicate of the New York program staff in San Francisco, and the Orange Network began originating programs for seven Pacific Coast stations: KPO and KGO in the Bay Area, KFI Los Angeles, KFOA San Diego, KGW Portland, KOMO Seattle, and KHQ Spokane. The seven stations were connected by 1,709 miles of telephone lines.<sup>[3]</sup>

The inaugural program for the NBC Orange Network was held April 5, 1927, less than five months after the first NBC broadcast in New York. The program originated from temporary studios in the Colonial Ballroom of the St. Francis Hotel, as permanent studios in the new Hunter-Dolin Building were not yet ready for occupancy. The program opened with an address by Henry M. Robinson, the Pacific Coast member of the NBC Advisory Board and president of the First National Bank of Los Angeles. Robinson spoke from the studios of KFI in Los Angeles. The program was then turned over to San Francisco for the broadcasts of music by Alfred Hertz and the San Francisco Symphony, and by Max Dolin, the newly-appointed West Coast music director, conducting the National Broadcasting Opera Company.

On April 11, the network began regular broadcasting with the program "Eight Neapolitan Nights", sponsored by the Shell Oil Company. The initial network schedule was 8 to 9 p.m. Monday and Saturday, and 9 to 10 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, giving the network a total of six hours of programs weekly.<sup>[4]</sup> (At first the networks operated only in the evenings because circuits could not be spared from the standard telephone service during the busy daylight hours.<sup>[5]</sup>)

The Orange Network **recreated** the same programs heard in the east on the Red Network. At the conclusion of a program in New York, all of the program continuity, including the scripts and musical scores, would be shipped to San Francisco by Railroad Express, where it would be rehearsed for performance exactly a week later. Thus, the San Francisco cast was producing such well-known early network shows as "The RCA Hour", "The Wrigley Program", "The Standard Symphony Hour", "The Eveready Light Opera Program", "The Firestone Hour" and many more. At the conclusion of each program the announcer would say, "This program came to you from the San Francisco studios of the Pacific Coast Network of the National Broadcasting Company." This would be followed by the traditional NBC chimes. The chimes were a part of all NBC programs from the very beginning; however, they were considerably longer and more involved than the later three-note chime. Because they were so long and clumsy, they were shortened to the well-known G-E-C progression heard today. It is said that the notes G-E-C stood for the "General Electric Company", a melodic tribute to one of the network's major parent corporations. The original NBC chimes were struck by hand, but they were replaced in the mid-30's with electronically-produced, perfect-pitch chimes.<sup>[1]</sup>

Shortly after the Orange Network's inaugural broadcast in 1927, the staff moved into its permanent headquarters in the new Hunter-Dolin Building, at **111 Sutter Street**. The NBC studios occupied the entire 22nd floor, while the network offices were located on the second floor. The studio complex included three completely-equipped studios and an elaborate new pipe organ. It was in these studios that most of San Francisco's "Golden Decade" programs would originate. The entire NBC complex was decorated in a Spanish motif; one of its more unusual features was a glass-enclosed mezzanine, decorated to resemble a Spanish patio. It was designed so that a small audience could watch the programs while they were being broadcast. Some of the heaviest users of the booth were the sponsors of the programs, and this experience sparked the establishment of sponsors' booths in network studios across the nation.<sup>[1]</sup>

To staff its new network in San Francisco, NBC drew primarily from the existing area radio stations. KGO and KPO (now KNBR), the NBC affiliates, were hardest hit, and as the network schedule was expanded this process continued. One of the most popular KPO personalities to make the move was Hugh Barrett Dobbs, who moved his "Ship of Joy" program to the network, where it became the "Shell Ship of Joy", sponsored by the oil company of the same name. Another person to make the move was Proctor A. "Buddy" Sugg, who came to NBC from KPO as a technician and gradually moved up the ladder until he became the nationwide executive vice president of NBC.<sup>[1]</sup>

During the first few years of operation, program announcements were made by actors, musicians, or generally whomever was available. However, as the staff continued to grow, the first full-time staff announcer was hired. He was also borrowed from a local station, and Bill Andrews moved from KLX in Oakland to NBC in 1928. Other announcers followed: Jack Keough came from KPO; Jennings Pierce was recruited from KGO; Cecil Underwood was imported from affiliate KHQ in Spokane. Many others were gradually added until there were seventeen at the height of the operation. Andrews became chief announcer in 1933.<sup>[1]</sup>

The entire NBC-Pacific operation was headed by Don E. Gilman, vice president in charge of the Western Division. Gilman had been recruited from a local advertising firm to manage the operation in 1927. Prior to that time, he had been one of the best-known advertising men in the West, and had been president of the Pacific Advertising Clubs Association.<sup>[7]</sup>

Initially, although the network provided several hours of programming to its affiliates, it otherwise had little impact over the day-to-day operations of the stations. KGO was operated by the General Electric Company, and KPO by Hale Brothers Department Store together with the San Francisco Chronicle. This changed in 1932, when NBC leased the licenses and facilities of both stations (they were later purchased outright). When this happened, the program staffs of KGO, KPO and NBC were combined into one collective staff of over 250 persons. This included complete orchestras, vocalists and other musicians (there were five pipe organists alone), and a complete dramatic stock company. The entire operation was consolidated under one roof at 111 Sutter Street. It was there that all programming originated for the network, which then averaged about fifteen hours a week, as well as local programs for KGO and KPO. As a result, these stations lost their independent identities, except for their separate transmitter facilities.<sup>[1]</sup> (KGO operated at 7,500 watts from a General Electric factory in East Oakland. KPO transmitted from the roof of the Hale Brothers Department Store with 5,000 watts until 1933, when a new 50,000 watt facility was constructed on the bay shore at Belmont.)

The old KPO studio at the department store continued to be used for just one NBC program, "The Woman's Magazine of the Air", with host Jolly Ben Walker. This was a morning home economics show popular in the West for many years. Reportedly, the first bona fide singing commercial -- that is, one sung for the sole purpose of praising a product -- was heard on this program. The commercial was for Caswell's National Crest Coffee, and, according to Bill Andrews, "went something like this":

Coffees and coffees have invaded the West,  
but of all of the brands, you'll find Caswell's the best.  
For good taste and flavor,

you'll find it in favor.  
If you know your coffees,  
buy National Crest.<sup>[1]</sup>

Some of the other programs that originated from 111 Sutter Street during these years were "Don Amaizo, the Golden Violinist", who played for the American Maize Company (the musician who performed for West Coast audiences was Music Director Max Dolin); "Memory Lane"; "Rudy Seiger's Shell Symphony", broadcast by remote from the Fairmont Hotel; "Dr. Lawrence Cross"; and the "Bridge to Dreamland", originated by Paul Carson and consisting of organ music by Carson intermixed with poetry written by his wife.<sup>[1]</sup>

Throughout all of these programs, even though the performers went unseen by their radio audiences, NBC required formal dress. This meant that actors and announcers wore black ties, actresses wore formal gowns, and musicians wore uniform smocks, with the conductor in tie and tails. This was done for appearance, in the event that the sponsor or some other important person should drop in unannounced.<sup>[1]</sup>

Until September of 1928, there was still no such thing as a weekly "coast-to-coast" network program. Even then, the connection between Denver and Salt Lake City was a temporary one made by placing a long distance telephone call. Eleven sponsors reached the Pacific Coast with their programs using this method for a few months. AT&T finally completed the last link in the broadcast quality telephone network in December of that year. The first program to use the new service was "The General Motors Party" on Christmas Eve, 1928. Regular programming began shortly thereafter, and western listeners could now enjoy the original eastern productions for the first time. NBC now boasted a nationwide network of 58 stations, with the potential to reach 82.7% of all U.S. receivers.<sup>[8]</sup>

With the inauguration of the new transcontinental service, the process of duplicating the programs of the eastern networks in San Francisco was discontinued. Because only one circuit had been installed, however, the Red and Blue networks could not be fed simultaneously. Instead, a selection of the best programs from both networks was fed to San Francisco, where they were relayed to the western affiliate stations. Thus, the Orange Network continued to exist, although in name only.<sup>[1]</sup>

Even though the duplication of programs was no longer needed, the Western Division staff was not dissolved. It continued to produce additional programs for western consumption only, which were used to augment the eastern schedule. In addition, the trans-continental line would occasionally be reversed, and programs

produced in San Francisco would for the first time be fed eastward to the rest of the nation.<sup>[1]</sup> The first nationwide broadcast from the West Coast had been the Rose Bowl Game from Pasadena on New Year's Day, 1927, with Graham McNamee at the microphone.<sup>[5]</sup> But, this had been accomplished on a temporary hookup over normal phone lines. The first regular coast-to-coast broadcast from the West over high-quality lines took place in April of 1930, with the broadcast of the "Del Monte Program" sponsored by the California Packing Company. Other programs quickly followed. Soon the San Francisco staff was bigger than ever, simultaneously producing programs for local broadcast over KGO and KPO, for the Western hook-up, and for nation-wide consumption. All of these production activities were further complicated by the time difference between the East and West Coasts. This meant that a program for broadcast in the East at 7 p.m. would have to be performed in San Francisco at four, and then repeated three hours later for western audiences. Thus, it was not uncommon to have all three San Francisco studios in use at once: one producing a program for the East Coast, another for the West Coast, while a third was producing for one of the local stations.<sup>[1]</sup>

Several programs produced in San Francisco within the next few years quickly gained nationwide popularity. Programs such as "Death Valley Days", "The Demi-Tasse Revue", Sam Dickson's "Hawthorne House" and many others quickly gained nationwide popularity. Dickson was one of San Francisco's best-known radio writers. He got his start there in the twenties at KYA, writing shows that featured the station manager and the switchboard operator as principal characters. In 1929, Dickson conducted a survey for the Commonwealth Club about radio advertising. Broadcast advertising had not yet come into its own, and there were many who voiced objections to radio being put to such a use. Dickson's survey was revolutionary, in that it discovered 90% of the city's radio listeners did not object to commercials, providing they were in good taste; and, virtually all of them actually said they patronized the few advertisers that were then on the air. The results of Dickson's survey were indeed revolutionary, but they also prompted a revolution he didn't expect -- he was blacklisted by every station in town!<sup>[9]</sup>

Sam Dickson fought the blacklisting as best he could. He was still doing some writing for KYA, and managed to do some writing for NBC under an assumed name. By the time NBC discovered his true identity, however, his work had become admired to the point where he was allowed to remain as a staff writer. He wrote scripts for many programs in the ensuing years, including two popular series, "Hawthorne House" and "Winning of the West", as well as police stories and biblical stories for children. He continued with NBC as one of its most prominent writers up into the sixties, and in later years was the author of "The California Story", a series heard on KNBC (formerly KPO, now KNBR) for a quarter century.<sup>[9]</sup>

Several other San Francisco programs were nationally known. One was "Carefree Carnival", sponsored by the Signal Oil Company. This was a program of western music and skits broadcast from the stage of the Marines' Memorial Theater beginning in 1934. It was hosted by home-spun Charlie Marshall and featured Meredith Willson's Orchestra. The most famous program to ever originate in San Francisco, however, was "One Man's Family". This program was a national favorite on radio and television for 27 years, and was always among the ten most popular programs in the nation. Its author, Carleton E. Morse, was the biggest figure in San Francisco radio at the time.

Morse was a newspaperman who made the transition to radio with NBC in 1929. He authored numerous successful radio productions, including "House of Myths", "The City of the Dead", "Dead Men Prowl", "Chinatown Squad" and "Barbary Coast Nights" before developing "One Man's Family". It told the story of the Barbour family, an affluent, moral family residing in the Sea Cliff district of San Francisco. This series did not fit into any previously-used program formulas -- it was unlike anything that had been done on radio up to that time. It simply told the story of everyday life in a model family. Morse hoped it would become popular because the public would identify closely with its characters.<sup>[1]</sup>

The program made its debut on Friday, April 29, 1932. It was carried from 9:30 to 10:00 p.m. on just three stations, in San Francisco, Los Angeles and Seattle. However, after the first few episodes, the other West Coast stations requested that the program be opened to the entire network.<sup>[10]</sup>

Western listeners responded to the program almost immediately, and their response was overwhelming. "One Man's Family" quickly became one of the most listened-to programs on the coast. However, the story concept was new, and companies were reluctant to sponsor it. After almost a year as an unsponsored feature, an announcement was made at the end of an episode that NBC was considering dropping the program, and that audience response was being solicited. The thousands of letters that swamped the mail room overwhelmed everyone, especially Morse. In a final, desperate attempt to woo a sponsor, the Sales Manager hired a suite of rooms in one of San Francisco's posh hotels and scattered the many letters over the floors, furniture, and every other horizontal surface. After wining and dining officials of the Wesson Oil Company in the hotel dining room, he took them up to the suite, where he showed them the scene and invited them to read just one letter. Needless to say, they bought the series; Wesson Oil and Snowdrift became the sponsors of "One Man's Family" January 18, 1933.<sup>[10]</sup>

Soon after, on May 17 of that year, the program became one of the first San Francisco programs to be piped through the trans-continental line to the East, where it

was heard nationwide for the first time. Wesson Oil sponsored the Western production, while the version heard in the East was sustaining, or unsponsored. Separate scripts had to be utilized for nearly eight months, until eastern audiences could catch up with the story line and the two productions could be consolidated.<sup>[10]</sup>

NBC took two major steps in 1936 that had a profound effect on Pacific Coast radio. The first was the opening of a second Pacific Coast network. Now, for the first time, the entire compliment of programs from both NBC networks could be heard on a nationwide basis. The original NBC "Orange Network", with the exception of KGO, became the Pacific Coast Red Network. KGO, along with KECA Los Angeles, KFSD San Diego, KEX Portland, KJR Seattle, and KGA Spokane formed the new Western Blue Network.<sup>[11]</sup> (The latter three stations had been a part of the "**Gold Network**" from 1931 to 1933, after the demise of the Seattle-based American Broadcasting Company, the first of several networks to use that name. The Gold Network was discontinued by NBC in 1933 to save line costs.<sup>[12]</sup>) The West Coast Blue Network was inaugurated with the broadcast of the Rose Bowl Game from Pasadena on New Year's Day, 1936.<sup>[13]</sup>

The second major event of 1936 -- the one that ultimately proved to be fatal for San Francisco's position as a broadcast center -- was the breaking of ground for NBC's new Hollywood studios. This was in response to the American public's increasing desire for West Coast programs. The success of "One Man's Family" and other early coast offerings played a part in this process. But more important was the public's desire to hear their favorite Hollywood movie stars on the radio. Rudy Vallee apparently started the trend in the early thirties. While in Hollywood for the making of a motion picture, he broadcast his weekly program from California and introduced his audience to film star guests.<sup>[6]</sup> This trend advanced rapidly, and there were no less than 20 network programs released from Hollywood over NBC and CBS during the 1934/35 season.

In the first years of the network, it had been necessary for Hollywood stars to travel to San Francisco to make a broadcast, a requirement that severely limited the frequency of their appearance. This had been necessary because AT&T's broadcast lines fed from San Francisco to Los Angeles, and not the other way around. Programs were fed nationwide from city to city on a serial hookup, and Los Angeles was the end of the line. In order for programs to be fed nationally from Los Angeles, they would have to be fed eastward by a separate circuit to Chicago, where they could connect into the network. When Eddie Cantor moved his "Chase and Sanborn Program" to Hollywood in 1932, this aspect added \$2,100 per week in line charges to the program's budget.<sup>[14]</sup>

The limitations of the AT&T network began to be overcome in 1936, under pressure of the network's desire to satisfy the public's taste for Hollywood programming. The new circuit that was constructed to bring the Blue Network to the coast in 1936 terminated in Los Angeles instead of San Francisco. Further, AT&T had incorporated a new system called the "quick reversible" circuit. Under this arrangement, the operation of a single key would reverse the direction of every amplifier in the line between Los Angeles and Chicago, so that the same line that formerly fed westward could now move programs from west to east. The circuit could be completely reversed in less than 15 seconds, well within the time of a station break.<sup>15</sup> Thus in 1936 it became economical to produce national programs in Hollywood on a wide scale for the first time. Big Hollywood names like Al Jolson, Bob Hope and Clark Gable were regularly heard on NBC after that year.

The new NBC Hollywood studios officially opened for business October 17, 1938. Sprawling over a 4-1/2 acre tract at Sunset and Vine, the \$2 million facility became the new Western Division headquarters for the network. The West Coast executive offices that had been divided between San Francisco and Los Angeles were consolidated in a new three story executive building. There were eight studios, including four auditoriums that seated 350 persons each, the largest ever constructed for radio.<sup>16</sup>

The opening of the Hollywood studios and improvements to the AT&T leased line system marked the beginning of a gradual exodus that, over a five-year period, saw virtually all of San Francisco's network programming move to Hollywood. By 1942, only a skeleton crew remained to program the local stations. One of the first programs to leave was San Francisco's beloved "One Man's Family". Production of this program was transferred to Hollywood in August of 1937, even before the new studios had been completely finished.<sup>[10]</sup>

For a while, NBC intended to operate equal personnel and artist staffs in both cities.<sup>[17]</sup> To that end, NBC began to draw up plans for an elaborate new studio building in San Francisco to replace the outmoded facility at 111 Sutter Street and match the opulence of the new Hollywood facility. This was NBC's "Radio City", which drew national acclaim for both its architectural and broadcast features. And it was built by mistake.

Plans were drawn up and bids taken in 1940 for the construction of an ultra-modern four-story studio complex at Taylor and O'Farrell Streets. Meanwhile, NBC apparently changed its mind and decided to move all the remaining operations to Hollywood. According to one story, the ground breaking was set to begin when the West Coast vice president received a telegram from New York. It said a decision had been made to phase out the San Francisco operation, and that the new building must



not be built. But, it was too late; the event, once set into motion, could not be reversed. The vice president himself officiated at the ground breaking ceremony that day, the telegram in his pocket.

The million dollar facility was formally dedicated April 26, 1942.<sup>18</sup> It was an impressive edifice, four stories of pink, windowless walls with layers of glass brick outlining each floor. Over the marquee, at the main entrance to the building, was a three-story mosaic mural designed by C. J. Fitzgerald which depicted different facets of the radio industry. Inside, facilities included a 41-by-72 foot main studio, two 24-by-44 secondary studios, and four smaller studios. In addition, a parking garage occupied practically the entire first floor. One of the smaller studios, Studio G, was equipped with a false fireplace, fur rugs and comfortable furniture. It was reserved for V.I.P. guests exclusively, and Harry Truman, General Sarnoff and H.V. Kaltenborn were just a few of those who eventually used it. Another feature of NBC's radio palace was a roof garden where Sam Dickson, Dave Drummond, James Day and other staff writers would produce scripts in their swimsuits and work on their suntans at the same time.<sup>[19]</sup>

The building was a magnificent tribute to the state of the art. It was also San Francisco's last great fling as a radio center, for less than a year after its completion the southward exodus had ended, and most of the facility stood unused except for an occasional network sustaining feature. In the ensuing years much of the building was leased as office space, and the entire radio operation consisted of a disc jockey playing records in a third floor booth. KGO was moved to Golden Gate Avenue in the early 1950's, and KPO, by then known as KNBR, moved out in 1967. That was the year the building was sold to Kaiser Broadcasting Company, and it became the new home of KBHK Television. At last, it finally began to see extensive usage for the purpose for which it was built.<sup>[20]</sup>

## **THE DON LEE-COLUMBIA SYSTEM:**

111 Sutter Street was not the only network broadcast address during the thirties. The other was 1000 Van Ness Avenue, the Don Lee Cadillac Building, headquarters for KFRC and the Don Lee-Columbia Network. It was there that another radio legend was born.

Don Lee was a prominent Los Angeles automobile dealer, who had owned all the Cadillac and LaSalle dealerships in the State of California for over 20 years. After making a substantial fortune in the auto business, he decided to try his hand at broadcasting.<sup>1</sup> In 1926, he purchased KFRC in San Francisco from the City of Paris

department store. The following year he bought KHJ in Los Angeles and connected the two stations by telephone line to establish the Don Lee Broadcasting System.

From the beginning, Lee spared no expense to make these two stations among the finest in the nation, as a 1929 article from Broadcast Weekly attests:

Both KHJ and KFRC have large complete staffs of artists, singers and entertainers, with each station having its own Don Lee Symphony Orchestra, dance band and organ, plus all of the musical instruments that can be used successfully in broadcasting. It is no idle boast that either KHJ or KFRC could operate continuously without going outside their own staffs for talent, and yet give a variety with an appeal to every type of audience.<sup>[2]</sup>

In 1929, CBS still had no affiliates west of the Rockies, and this was making it difficult for the network to compete with its larger rival, NBC. CBS president William S. Paley was in need of West Coast affiliates, and he needed them fast. Thus it was that Paley travelled to Los Angeles that summer to convince Don Lee to sign a CBS affiliate agreement. Paley was a busy man, and he was frustrated by Lee's casual, time-consuming ways of doing business. Lee insisted that Paley spend a week with him on his yacht "The Invader" before any business could be discussed. After two lengthy sailings during which Lee had plenty of opportunity to evaluate Paley's moral fiber in the relaxed, informal atmosphere at sea, Lee agreed to sign an affiliate agreement which Paley was to dictate without any negotiation whatsoever. The agreement was immediately executed, and the Don Lee stations became the vanguard of the CBS West Coast invasion on July 16, 1929.<sup>[3]</sup>

The new chain was called the Don Lee-Columbia Network. Two more stations, KGB San Diego and KDB, Santa Barbara, were purchased by Don Lee and became a part of the network. Also, Lee had been feeding programs to the McClatchy Newspaper station KMJ in Fresno since 1928, and that station became a CBS affiliate, along with the other McClatchy stations (KFBK Sacramento, KWG Stockton, and KERN Bakersfield). Additionally, four Pacific Northwest stations called the "Columbia Northwest Unit" were added (KOIN, Portland, KOL, Seattle, KVI, Tacoma, and KFPY Spokane).<sup>[4]</sup>

KFRC and KHJ originated numerous programs for the West Coast network. CBS programs were heard in the early dinner hours, and the Don Lee programs were fed after 8:00 when the eastern programs ceased.<sup>[5]</sup> Additionally, several of the San Francisco and Los Angeles programs were broadcast nationally by CBS. Many of the most popular KFRC programs became network offerings in this way. Some of the most famous Don Lee-Columbia programs that originated from San Francisco were "Chiffon Jazz", "Salon Moderne" with Bea Bederet, and the "Happy-Go-Lucky

Hour" with brothers Al and Cal Pearce, which first debuted in 1929. The latter program was heard nationally on CBS until 1933 when it moved to NBC and became "Al Pearce and His Gang", a radio staple through the 40's. Another early program to originate in San Francisco was "Blue Monday Jambouree", a two hour radio vaudeville extravaganza that became a West Coast sensation. The program was first created in 1927 by Harrison Holliway, KFRC station manager, and was heard nationally on CBS by the end of 1930.<sup>[6]</sup> It was eventually moved to Los Angeles and became "The Shell Chateau" with Al Jolson.<sup>[7]</sup>

Perhaps one of the most notable aspects of KFRC and the Don Lee System during this period is the large number of people they graduated to national stardom. Meredith Willson was an unknown flutist when Lee hired him in 1929 to be KFRC's Music Director. Jack Benny's announcer Don Wilson began his radio career at KFRC as a member of the "Piggly-Wiggly Trio" before becoming a member of the announcing staff. Ralph Edwards and Art Van Horn were also announcers; so was Mark Goodson, who had a knack for quiz shows. He had several on the Don Lee Network before he left for New York and teamed up with Bill Todman. Others first heard on the Don Lee System from KFRC were Art Linkletter, Harold Peary, Morey Amsterdam, Merv Griffin and John Nesbitt.<sup>[8]</sup>

Don Lee died suddenly of heart failure on August 30, 1934, at the age of 53, and Lee's son Tommy became president of the network.<sup>[9]</sup> This presaged a series of events which completely restructured network broadcasting on the West Coast over the next three years. CBS was apparently becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the structure of its western network. The affiliation between CBS and Don Lee, which had been a convenient mechanism for Paley to add affiliates quickly in 1929, was becoming a source of friction as CBS sought more and more control over its affiliates and programming. Apparently this friction even preceded Lee's death.<sup>9</sup> In any event, it came to a head March 19, 1936, when CBS consummated its purchase of KNX in Los Angeles for \$1.25 million. This was the highest price ever paid for a radio station to that time. The acquisition of KNX gave CBS a 50 KW clear channel network-owned facility in an increasingly important market. As mentioned previously, Hollywood-originated programs were becoming highly sought after by the radio public, and KNX would become the springboard for a major CBS West Coast program origination effort.<sup>[10]</sup> (The network's new studios, Columbia Square in Hollywood, were officially dedicated April 30, 1938.<sup>[11]</sup>)

Of course, the acquisition of KNX by CBS completely destroyed any remaining relationship with the Don Lee network. The purchase meant that KNX would replace KHJ as the CBS affiliate in Los Angeles. KNX had been sharing a number of programs with KSFO in San Francisco, so it was natural as well for the CBS affiliation in the northern city to transfer from KFRC to KSFO. In fact, CBS soon

announced it had leased KSFO with a later option to purchase the station outright.<sup>[12]</sup> (When that deal later fell through, CBS instead purchased KQW in San Jose, which became KCBS.) The entire structure of the Don Lee Network quickly collapsed. The McClatchy stations lost no time in joining with Hearst stations KYA San Francisco and KEHE Los Angeles to form the short-lived California Radio System.<sup>[14]</sup> The Northwest station group opted to remain with CBS.

As luck would have it, that same year a fledgling eastern network called the "Quality Station Group" had changed its name to the "Mutual Broadcasting System" and was rapidly seeking westward expansion. Tommy Lee contacted Mutual and lost no time in signing an agreement, and the Mutual-Don Lee Network was born. This was how Mutual became the fourth coast-to-coast network, and it also marked the beginning of a new West Coast chain that would continue operation into the fifties. The switch from CBS to Mutual was scheduled for December 29, 1936, the date which marked the expiration of the CBS/Don Lee contract. (In fact, for the last three months of the contract the CBS West Coast programs were produced at KNX and fed to KHJ for transmission to the network.<sup>[13]</sup>) The stations on the new Mutual network were the four Don Lee-owned stations, plus KFXM San Bernardino, KDON Monterey, KXO El Centro, KPMC Bakersfield, KVOE Santa Ana, and KGDM Stockton.<sup>[15]</sup> Also joining the network via shortwave hookup were KGMB Honolulu and KHBC Hilo. (A number of Pacific Northwest stations were added the following year.)

These upheavals had a major impact on KFRC as a radio production center. The CBS network feeds from the East had reached the West Coast at San Francisco, and branched north and south from there. This had made KFRC the key CBS West Coast station. But the new Mutual hookup reached the coast in Los Angeles, and KHJ became the key station. In the shake-up that followed these changes, most KFRC performers were either moved to KHJ or left to join other stations or networks. Key management personnel departed from both stations, including longtime KFRC manager Harrison Holliway who became the manager of KFI.<sup>12</sup> In short, the same forces that had caused the program exodus from San Francisco at NBC were at work within the Don Lee organization, and they occurred over the same period, 1936-1942.

## **SUMMARY:**

Most all network program production had left San Francisco by 1942. After that time, the city still saw some national prominence as the network news center for the war in the Pacific. It was also the programming and transmission headquarters for several short wave stations broadcasting to the Pacific by the Office of War Information (this was part of the genesis of the Voice of America). San Francisco

also retained some importance as a facilities control point for the AT&T network. But it would never again see the prominence in broadcasting it experienced during its heyday of the late 1920's and early 1930's.

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