

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CLEVELAND'S
RADIO INDUSTRY

by

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There appears to be a significant error in this work. My interview of Mr. Knowlton, related to WJAX, was attributed to William Knowlton. It appears that the correct first name was Donald. Donald Knowlton was advertising manager of the Union Trust which was a client of a PR firm. When the bank failed in the early 1930s, Knowlton teamed up with John Hill to form the powerful firm Hill and Knowlton which was headquartered in Cleveland. When Hill moved the company's central offices to New York, Knowlton remained in the firm's Cleveland offices.

PREFACE

After an exhaustive search of Cleveland's annals pertaining to the development of her radio industry, I ultimately found that, in general, detailed information concerning the pioneers of the radio industry in their area, simply wasn't available, and I was therefore forced to resort to personal interviews. The production of this survey would have been entirely impossible without the time, and effort, generously expended by those people credited in the bibliography. The many conflicting facts concerning early stations, and the general chaos that reigned in the industry at that time, would make a reasonably accurate history of these stations a literal impossibility without their aid in unraveling the contradicting accounts. In particular, my sincere thanks go to Richard D. Webner, whose guidance secured for me the interviews to which I refer.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF CLEVELAND'S

RADIO INDUSTRY

The transmission of impulses, and later voice, by radio waves was practiced as early as the turn of the century, on an almost entirely amateur, and very crude, basis, with little or no thought of commercialization. Cleveland's initial acquaintance with radio was therefore, much the same as that of most other areas of the nation; prior to the year 1921 she had within her confines a small, but dedicated group of what we now call "hams", interested in the transmission of almost anything over the air, with little, or no, governmental control.

Needless to say, such a system of radio broadcasting, characterized by such loose form, in short time managed to create general havoc in the ether, by virtue of its total lack of coordination.

It was in such an atmosphere that Cleveland's first true broadcaster commenced operations on July 26, 1921. Warren Cox, one of the growing number of Cleveland's "hams", set up a station, W8ACS, on a frequency of 1500 kcs., 200 meters, at his factory where he manufactured automobiles,

at 3138 Payne Avenue.¹ Cox was, at that time, a member of the Cleveland Radio Association, which offered the total amount of local coordination available to city at that time, and which, ultimately, became the sponsor of a system by which various concerts, and lectures, were broadcast to the city once a night, a different member station carrying a different event each evening.

Cox's effort is considered the first station in the city, although at that time he was licensed only as an amateur, as were all the other operators in Cleveland. His distinction, however, lies in the fact that his operation ultimately evolved into WHK, and of even more importance, he broadcast features over the air that he felt were of interest to the general public—a type of programming that set him aside from the other broadcasters in the city.

Under similar circumstances the city's next major broadcaster, W8CJS, was founded in 1922. Operated by S. Eddie Leonard, an employee of Cleveland's Willard Battery Company, this station was the forerunner of WTAM, and lays claim to the nation's first battery powered radio station.² Transmission at this time was accomplished with crude spark gap transmitters, which needed approximately 500 volts to polarize the plates of the tubes; this value, was far too

1. Rose, William G., Cleveland, The Making of a City, Cleveland, 1950, p. 805.

2. Mount, Harry A., Cleveland Plain Dealer, 10/10/26, np.

high to be obtained from the conventional dry batteries, and operation of radio equipment off house current did not become generally accepted until the late twenties; thus, faced with a lack of a power source, resourceful broadcasters used generators which usually made a disturbing amount of noise over the air. Thus, the development of battery units for such power proved a great boon to the industry.

Various reports are available; most sources give W8GJS credit for this initial entry into battery power. Leonard's employer, owner of the Willard Battery Company, was both interested in radio, and able to supply the necessary units; thus, his claim is usually accredited.³

A different story is obtained from KYW engineer, Howard Spiller, who told me in a telephone conversation, of his father's station, W8ACR; according to Mr. Spiller, W8ACR originally operated off the same motor generator system that all other hams employed, until one day Willard paid his father a visit; after suggesting battery power, and being told that such a battery pack wasn't available, Willard left without further comment on his proposal. Some time later a large truck delivered 20 cases, containing battery cells sufficient to produce the 500 volt plate voltage, and the evening of their installation W8ACR was

³ ibid., np.

heard in Alaska. This, according to Mr. Spiller, was the nation's first battery powered radio station.⁴

In any event, it was with Cleveland's radio scene in this generally chaotic condition, with about 1000 radio receivers in the city late in 1921,⁵ that the Department of Commerce, which at that time was responsible for Federal control of the airwaves, ordered all amateur operators to cease operation, in an effort to coordinate frequencies, time of operations, specify general types of programming, and dictate the confines of an amateur license. In such a situation, Warren Cox moves WBACX to 5105 Euclid Avenue, where he built a new transmitter, using two 50 watt tubes, and awaited the government's next action. His answer came on February 21, 1922 when he received a license to operate station WHK on a frequency of 830 kcs., (360 meters),⁶ the first station in the nation to receive a Federal license.⁷

Fall of 1921 also saw the formation of the city's second radio station, WJAX, according to its general manager, William Knowlton. Originally the station was placed on the

4 Telephone conversation with Howard Spiller, 5/7/63, 3:45 pm

5 Condon, George, Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 3, 1957, np.

6 Van Metre, Maurice, Cleveland News, March 4, 1957, np.

7 Cleveland Plain Dealer, February 10, 1951, np.

air by its owner, the Union Trust Bank, to broadcast to the downtown banks the latest results on the stock market for a period of one hour each noon; not long after its inception, Mr. Knowlton was appointed its manager, with little restrictions on programming. Soon WJAX's schedule found the 750 kc. frequency broadcasting banjo and jazz band music on a once-a-night basis, with Mr. Knowlton on the banjo.⁸

Other information obtained from Mr. Knowlton, though not directly related to WJAX's chronology, sheds an interesting light upon the radio industry of the early twenties. WJAX can claim the distinction of being the first radio station in the nation to air Guy Lombardo and His Royal Canadians; Mr. Knowlton, after auditioning the band, agreed to air them, every other Saturday night, live from the Fort Louis night club on condition that Lombardo pay the cost of the remote telephone lines for the broadcast; and thus, every other Saturday night, for quite some time, WJAX transported their remote control panel to the Fort Louis, and Mr. Lombardo payed \$15 for the privilege of broadcasting his band.⁹

Also gleaned from my conversation with Mr. Knowlton are these other bits of interesting nostalgia. Once, when called to a conference on radio in Washington, at which the Secre-

8 Telephone conversation with William Knowlton, 5/7/63, 1:45 pm.

9 ibid.

tary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover, presided; (prior to the Federal Radio Commission, the governing of radio broadcasting was entrusted to the Department of Commerce); Mr. Knowlton was appalled, as were the other delegates, when Hoover suggested rather mildly that it was almost time for the government to assume control in a more strict sense, of the radio communications media. Aghast at this picture of "government encroachment upon free enterprise" the convention broke up into ten-man committees. Of the ten men on his committee, nine were entirely against governmental control of broadcasting-however, one young man, just recently involved in the industry, insisted that such control was necessary, justified, desirable, and inevitable, if radio were to flourish. The committee thought him mad-but as time would tell that young man, David Sarnoff, had an important role to play in the national development of radio.¹⁰

Also recalled with a certain streak of humor, is the time that a soprano, while at the mike in the middle of a song, stopped and screamed so loudly into the microphone that she caused the casing to rattle, after which she calmly went on with her song. Later, a very curious Mr. Knowlton after inquiring, was duly informed by the diva that she "wanted her sister in Texas" to hear her.¹¹

Meanwhile, WJAX and W8CJR were sharing time on a fre-

10 ibid.,

11 ibid.,

quency of 750 kcs., with rather flexible schedules, which usually called for one to operate during the day, and the other in the latter portion of the evening.

Early in 1924 W8CJR became W8XG, still owned by the Willard people, and still run by Eddie Leonard, and it was not until late that year that the station assumed the more conventional four letter call of a commercial broadcaster—WTAM, a name that would soon become nationally famous. WTAM operated on 750 kcs. as did its predecessors, utilizing 5000 battery cells, (placing a total voltage of 10,000 DC volts on the transmitter tube plates), housed on shelves 55 feet in length. In the words of Mr. Leonard, it was "probably the biggest (battery) ever built."¹² At that time WTAM operated with a power of 1.5 kilowatts, making it the most powerful radio voice in the United States. Originally, it broadcast night programs three hours in length, (WJAX was on the same frequency during the day), but it later expanded its schedule considerably as we shall see.¹³

1924 also saw the entry of a new radio voice onto the Cleveland radio scene. On May 15 of that year, a license was granted to Stanley J. Broz of M. F. Broz Furniture, Hardware and Radio Store, to operate radio station WDBK on a frequency of 1320 kcs. with a power output of 100 watts, at

12 Condon, George, Cleveland Plain Dealer, October 21, 1951, np.

13 Cleveland Press, February 10, 1938, np.

his store located at 13918 Union Avenue.¹⁴ WDBK had a rather short history on the Cleveland radio scene, as we shall see later, and is little remembered in the minds of Cleveland's radio listeners; its low power output undoubtedly precluded certain areas of the city from receiving the station, which may account for the lack of recognition of this early member of the Cleveland broadcast community.

By this time Warren Cox had found his old headquarters on Payne had grown far too small for the ever-expanding WHK, and he was compelled in 1924, to move to new quarters in Cleveland's Standard Building¹⁵; during this same year WHK changed its frequency from 830 kcs. to 1030 kcs., presumably at the time of the change of the studio location; this, however, is an assumption, since no records are available on this particular subject. Radio was an expanding business, and expand it did.

On November 15, 1926 the NEC Red Network made its debut, with a rousing membership of 25 national affiliates, WTAM being one of the charter members of this original net. With such a change in programming, and with the pressure of two competing stations, WTAM found the time-sharing basis on which it operated with WEAR too restrictive, and on April 24, 1926 acquired the Goodyear property. WTAM was then ret

14 Federal Communications Letter #8720, from Ben Maple, received May 12, 1963.

15 Cleveland Plain Dealer, January 14, 1951, np.

a power of 3500 watts, but reduced to 1000 during the merger to match WEAR. As S. E. Baldwin, WTAM manager stated, "Eventually we will probably consolidate the two stations, using one transmitter and full time on the air. We have the assurances of Department of Commerce officials that...full time will be granted."¹⁷ The reduction in WTAM's power was effected in compliance with the National Radio Conference request that stations in large cities remain at powers of 1000 watts or less. From this time on, until 1928, WTAM assumed the call letters WTAM-WEAR with both separate and simultaneous programming over the two stations, both still on 750 kcs.

In 1925 the Union Trust Bank was becoming increasingly displeased over its involvement in the radio industry; what had originally began as a simple stock market quotation supply station, had evolved into a complex radio voice of the city, and WJAX was straying too far from banking realm; furthermore, the commercial aspects of WJAX had an irritating affect on some of the bank's customers, and thus, in 1925 WJAX manager Bill Knowlton sought out Lucien King of Goodyear Tire and Rubber, painting the radio industry as a highly lucrative opportunity to place the Goodyear name before the public; Mr. Knowlton's crowning selling point was the alteration of the call to WEAR, since Goodyear prided

¹⁷ Cleveland Plain Dealer, April 4, 1926, np.

itself on the longevity of its products. It wasn't difficult to persuade Goodyear to add WJAX to its chain, starting with WZAF in New York, and the station became WEAR soon thereafter, changing hands for the price of \$15,000.¹⁸

1 By 1926 the lusty Cleveland radio industry had turned into more than an interesting pasttime in which banks might indulge, and amateurs amuse themselves, for with the addition of commercial revenue, radio became a highly lucrative enterprise. Thus in 1926 plans were announced for the establishment of WJAY, to broadcast from atop the Hotel Hollendon, the station to be owned and operated by the ABC network.¹⁹ Under the management of Charles Burns, WJAY took to the air on January 1, 1927²⁰ on a frequency of 688 kcs.,²¹ (this was still in the time when stations picked their own frequencies), however they moved quickly to 680 kcs., on April 24, 1927, when the Federal government assumed control of the regulation of broadcasting frequencies.²² In June of the same year, when frequency allocations were given to all stations, WJAY received 1320 kcs., the same frequency occupied by WDBK- which created problems.²³

18 ibid., np.

19 Cleveland Plain Dealer, December 8, 1926, np.

20 Randall, Edwin T., Cleveland Plain Dealer, September 19, 1937, np.

21 Kintner, Robert, Cleveland Plain Dealer, January 27, 1928, np.

22 Cleveland Plain Dealer, April 24, 1926, np.

23 Letter from the Federal Communications Commission #8720, received May 12, 1963

During the frequency allocations WDBK had been busily consulting with the Department of Commerce; on June 1, 1927 it received permission²⁴ to increase its power to 250 watts, still on 1320 kc²⁴s.; (the Department was blissfully ignoring the fact that it had assigned WJAY the same frequency.) The stations involved were painfully aware of the discrepancy and a confused Cleveland watched the two stations shake their heads in dismay. Finally, on June 27, 1927 the Department of Commerce ordered WDBK to share time with WJAY and the former requested permission to leave the city, which it received on July 21,²⁵ Thus WDBK moved, shortly thereafter, to Akron as a property of the Akron Beacon Journal, as station WJJC, still on 1320 kc²⁵s., and still posing a frequency conflict with WJAY.²⁶ For a time the two stations shared time, and later, after the new frequency allocations of 1928, the problem was alleviated.

In the latter part of 1926 word leaked out from Washington that the Department of Commerce was fast finding that there were more requests for stations than the frequency bands could physically accommodate and there ensued a melee in which everyone desiring a permit immediately applied, in the hope of "getting in under the wire" before the then-expected "freeze" on permits went into effect. (It may be

24 op. cit. FCC Letter #8720

25 ibid.,

26 op. cit., Mintner, January 27, 1928, np.

quite reasonably assumed that this, at least in part, prompted the founding of WJAY.) Thus, on December 11, 1925 Henry Grossman, former general manager of WTK, a commercial radio-telephone station owned by Intercity Radio, and located on the Hotel Cleveland, announced his intention to found WHG, which according to my sources, never became airborne. Proposed plans for WHG called for ownership by the Eastern Broadcasting Corporation, a subsidiary of Doller Dry Cleaning Company, of New York.²⁷

In August of 1927 a dispute arose over the legality of one aspect of radio's programming, when Attorney General Edward C. Turner of the state of Ohio ruled that it was illegal for Cleveland's City Council to pay for the live broadcast of concerts from the Public Auditorium, and it was not until the Law Director of the City, Carl F. Shuler and Lincoln Dickey, manager of the Hall, went to Columbus and convinced the Attorney General that the publicity derived for the hall from such broadcasts resulted in increased revenue for the Hall, that these broadcasts, one of Cleveland's broadcasting cultural highlight of the time, were allowed to resume.²⁸

At this time, while Cleveland was enjoying a period of extreme activity and prosperity in the radio industry, cer-

27 Cleveland Plain Dealer, December 11, 1926, np.

28 Cleveland Plain Dealer, September 2, 1927, np.

tain governmental agencies in Washington were slowly, but surely, growing aghast at the monster they had created in the person of the radio industry. Without the close policing of frequencies now in effect, the stations, allowed to select their own frequencies, had often encountered both a shortage of frequencies, and a serious problem of interference with other stations who operated on similar frequencies. In order to add some measure of sanity to the confusion, in April of 1927 the new allocations were given out throughout the nation; in Cleveland WTAM-WEAR was moved to 389.4 meters, (770 kcs.), with WTAM allowed to move up to 5000 watts, while WEAR remained at 1 KW. WDBK was allowed to move up to 500 watts, on 1320 kcs., while WHK, after boosting from 500 to 1000 watts, was assigned 1000 kcs., (272.66 meters).²⁹ For some unexplained reason, however, at the last possible moment WJAY moved to 1450 kcs. rather than to the 1320 kcs. that had been previously announced.³⁰ Obviously done with Federal sanction, I would surmise that this was the Federal Radio Commission's answer to the problem of WDBK remaining on 1320 kcs.

The same growing pains that had caused WHK to move to larger headquarters in 1924 forced WTAM-WEAR to seek additional space for its combined operation. The original WTAM studios,

²⁹ Cleveland Plain Dealer, April 26, 1927, np.

³⁰ Kintner, Robert, Cleveland Plain Dealer, November 12, 1928, np.

located on the twentieth floor of the Union Trust Building, were retained to house the transmitters and battery power supplies, however, two new studios were constructed on the fourth floor of the building's annex, on Chester Avenue. The new facilities afforded the station 4,800 square feet of floor space, and boasted the newest facilities; including Celotex, the newest acoustic padding, on all studio walls; warning lights over each studio tell any potential intruders whether a "live" mike was in that studio—now a standard feature of any station—first made their appearance in the area at that time.³¹ The move was made in the summer, and all went well at WTAM-WEAR for some months thereafter. From December 1, 1927 on they were on an exclusive wave, (there was no other station broadcasting on their frequency in the entire country), now on a frequency of 750 kcs., once again; however, on the tenth of December WTAM was ordered to share time with WSBT in South Bend, Indiana. This necessitated a complex schedule which I reproduce here to give the reader a general idea of radio programming in the latter twenties. The most immediate effect of the change was felt that Saturday night, when in lieu of the normal midnight sign off, WTAM was forced to close down at 11pm, with the Wandering Minstrels down the

31 Cleveland Plain Dealer, May 29, 1927, np.

Mississippi; the Tribune station in South Bend then signed on, at 10:00 CST (11:00 EST), for a period of two hours.³² During the following Times WTAM would, by agreement with WSBT, "stand-by" to allow the Indiana station to transmit:³³

Sunday	8 to 9 pm; alternate weeks
Monday	7 to 8 pm; 10:30 to 11:30
Tuesday	7 to 8 pm;
Wednesday	7 to 7:30 pm;
Thursday	7 to 8 pm; 11-12 pm
Friday	7:30 to 8 pm; 11-12 pm
Saturday	11-12 pm

Both stations could broadcast during the day "on the assumption that range will not be sufficiently great to the detriment of which of course would result at night."³⁴

In mid-December WHK announced plans for a new move, from its studios in the Standard Building, and the government, in granting the request, also granted a temporary license till February 28, 1928 on a new frequency of 1130 kcs. (263.3 meters), a 1 KW during the day, and 500 watts at night.

WTAM-WEAR made radio history again in Cleveland when they were purchased in May, 1928 by the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company and the Van Sweringen brothers; the new owners evinced the intention of retaining the same call letters and the same basic programming. "It is understood that the Federal Radio Commission is familiar with plans for the

³² Kintner, Robert, Cleveland Plain Dealer, December 10, 1927, np.

³³ ibid., np.

change of ownership...and since it involves only a transfer of stock, no formal permission is required."³⁴ A far cry from the detailed permission ~~now~~ required for transfer of a station's title.

February of 1929 marked a historic ~~first~~, both for Cleveland, and national, radio, for on the first of that month a trans-Atlantic broadcast was attempted, and was successfully completed, the first of its type to be judged successful. Station 2LO in England transmitted to the United States on a short wave, and then the NBC Red network in New York broadcast the ten minute program, (it began at 4:50 PM Cleveland time), throughout the nation. A previous attempt on New Years Day of 1925, when station WJZ had attempted to broadcast "Big Ben" from London, had failed due to extremely weak signals.³⁵ Cleveland radio was now progressing beyond even a national scope.

Cleveland, as well as the rest of the nation, was still embroiled in the battle of frequencies-for the FRC revisions in radio allocations, first attempted in 1927, had met with only partial success. WJAY, 1450 kcs. in Cleveland, continued to experience interference with WHK, then on 1390; thus on March 9, 1929 the Commission announced the change of WJAY's frequency to 620 kcs., at a power of 500 watts. With

34 Kintner, Robert, Cleveland Plain Dealer, May 30, 1928, np.

35 Kintner, Robert, February 2, 1929, Cleveland Plain Dealer, np.

the loss of WDBK, Cleveland's radio log then looked like this:³⁶

WJAY	620 kcs.	500 watts
WTAM-WEAR	1070 kcs.	3500 watts
WHK	1330 kcs.	1 KW; (2 KW day)

Just one month later, on April 26, 1929 the FRC announced that it had granted permission to WTAM-WEAR to enter the "big league" of broadcasters, by erecting a remote transmitter in Brecksville with a power output of 50 KW. At that time there were only five other cities in the nation that could boast such super-giants of the airwaves, (WJW, Cincinnati; KDKA, Pittsburgh; WGY Schenectady; WEAZ, New York; WGNR, Chicago); standard procedure was followed in that the Cleveland station was granted 25 KW basic power and 25 KW experimental, which afforded no obstacle to full power output on a regular basis.³⁷ The decision was not intended to affect, however, the 1000 watt WEAR, which would remain on a separate, status quo, basis. In the same action the Commission granted WHK permission to construct a 5 KW remote transmitter near the WTAM Brecksville site.

On September 2, 1928 WHK became the first Cleveland station to enter the new CBS radio network; coverage from the national chain was inaugurated at 2:00 that afternoon, and gave Cleveland its third network at that time, (WTAM carried NBC Red-ABC had moved into Cleveland with the erection of

36 Kintner, Robert, Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 9, 1929, np.

37 Cleveland Plain Dealer, April 26, 1929, np.

WJAY).

The Federal Radio Commission was still attempting to unravel the tangled problem of frequency allocations, and on October 13, 1928 word again went out from Washington, that new allocations were to be made. WHK was given 1390 kcs., with a power of 500 watts day and night; Cox had hoped to place his station on 940 kcs. with a power of 1000 watts full-time, but the FRC contended that this frequency was not available.³⁸ WTAM was the only station to be untouched by the changes-it remained at ~~3500~~ 1070 watts on 1070 kcs.

April 29, 1929 was a nostalgic day in Cleveland, for it saw the demise of one of the nation's pioneers on the radio scene; WTAM which had for several years been maintaining both WTAM and WEAR separately, announced the cessation of operations on the familiar 750 kcs. spot on the dial-and the station that had begun as a stock market reporter an hour a day, left the Cleveland radio scene. However, WTAM was busily expanding; her new transmitter was finally selected, (it was an RCA³⁹), and was located 15 1/2 miles from Public Square of downtown Cleveland; several large towers 300 feet in height, were supported by porcelain insulators, standing on concrete footings, with floodlights installed to illuminate the structures for passing aircraft. Between the towers a small building, the "tank" was situated, with

38 Mintner, Robert, Cleveland Plain Dealer, October 13, 1928, np.
39 Cleveland Press, July 3, 1929, np.

wires running between it and the transmitter, on tall wooden poles. The four largest tubes in the world, each taller than a man, were crated, and awaited installation-in toto, their output capability was about 1000 KW. WTAM's transmission equipment located on the downtown site, still operated on the large battery installation obtained from Willard years before; however, in the new system only the speech input equipment was to utilize battery power-for with the new transmitters, a generating plant was being constructed to power the massive 50 KW unit. Power and lighting systems were constructed in duplicate, as were telephones, lines, in an effort to guard against temporary "black outs". The RCA transmitter had a frequency response of 3007,000 cps, or "practically the entire audible musical range"⁴⁰ as were the telephones lines equalized for a frequency response of 30-7000 cps;⁴¹ in short, the installation represented one of the most modern stations in the country, and represented an tremendous advance in Cleveland's broadcasting status.

The grand inauguration, which included a change in frequency to 1100 kes.⁴² took place on November 7, 1929; one hour after the new transmission facilities were signed on the air, a telegram was received from New Orleans, describing the station's signal as "remarkably clear."⁴³ The program

40 Kintner, Robert, Cleveland Plain Dealer, October 6, 1929, np.

41 Ibid., np.

42 Cleveland Plain Dealer, November 7, 1929, np.

open4d with some locally produced entertainment, in addition to the customary dedication speeches. Arthur Pryor's Band was on hand to contribute a stirring rendition of Sousa's Thunderer, as well as the Cleveland Orchestra, under the direction of Nikolai Sokoloff, which played Tannhauser Overture, White Rencoch by Wagner, Brahms #2 Movement, Blue Danube, and a composition entitled New Years Eve in New York.⁴³ At 11pm a special relay from the network, (NBC Red), in honor of WTAM's new system, was aired from New York; the program included Jessica lDragonette, soprano, the Cavaliers, and many of the nation's top orchestras, including Clevelander Phil Spitalny and his Pennsylvania Music; James Melton, tenor and Wilfred Glenn, bass, sang, and Gustav Haenshen's forty piece band contributed an offering. After it was all over the concensus of those who listened and attended, was one of high praise for the new installation; the crowning success was a listening confirmation from the West Coast, where WTAM's inaugural broadcast was received on a battleship. 200 miles west of San Francisco.⁴⁴

The turn of the decade saw the entry of a new set of call letters onto the Cleveland airwaves; WGAR managed to sign on on December 15, 1930, despite general opposition of

43 ibid., np.

44 Cook, Arthur, Cleveland Press, November 7, 1929, np.

much of the city; backed by WJR, Detroit, the station claimed that its erection would give Cleveland the opportunity to hear the Blue Network of NBC-the Chamber, of Commerce, however, felt differently; it contended that Cleveland's airwaves were already sufficiently cluttered; to add a final coup de grace, the NBC network denied that it had ever promised the new station an affiliation.⁴⁵ The station signed on at 6 pm on the evening of the 15th, and at 7pm switched to the NBC Blue network, (it had obtained the affiliation)-but at that crucial moment when the network "feed" was cut in, suddenly the line went dead-just when all of WGAR's new listeners were expecting to hear that never-to-be-forgotten duo of the day, Amos 'n Andy. It was the first time in three years that the network had experienced such difficulty, for the trouble was at the NBC headquarters in New York, but at that moment, the information was of little comfort to the young station. Ultimately, the network broke through, but it was an anxious inauguration; the station was assigned 1450 kcs., at a power of 500 watts, which it retained for several years. Several months after its opening, it created somewhat of a stir by interviewing, on remote location, a genuine bootlegger, (whose identity was withheld), who waxed eloquently over the injustice of the Volstead Act,

45 Cleveland Plain Dealer, September 26, 1930, np.

and the other Federal restrictions that hampered his livelihood. No mean feat for a newcomer, inaugurated on such shaky footing.⁴⁶ At that time Cleveland's potential listening audience, according to the 1930 census, consisted of 46.1% of the city's population; quite an incentive for any station.⁴⁷

The early thirties found Cleveland's radio industry relatively dormant—the Depression was on in full strength, and the new 50 KW transmitters weren't quite in the budget. WHK did manage to move from the Standard Building to one of the upper floors of the Terminal Tower, where she remained until 1936. Chief Engineer Delaney in that same year, (1931), aided the Cleveland Police Department in setting up their first radio communications system; WHK went so far as to tune one of its transmitters to the police wavelength and operated it for some time for the city.⁴⁸

September 26, 1927 saw the change of another's station's call letters. WDAY, which had begun operation on Jan. 1, 1927, was acquired by WHK, and became WCLE, on 610 kcs. On that day WCLE began an affiliation with the Mutual Network; WHK, now on 1420 kcs., had been carrying CBS, but switched her affiliation to NBC Blue, which WJAR had been carrying since its founding, and the latter took WHK's CBS coverage. When the dust had cleared the radio scene looked much the same as

46 Condon, George, Cleveland Plain Dealer, December 11, 1960, np.

47 Cleveland Plain Dealer, August 13, 1931, np.

48 Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 2, 1947, np.

it had before the swap-with the exception of the fact that once again, in an attempt was going to be made for two stations to have a common owner in the same city, (remember WTAM-WEAR)-and it was to have the same results.

In March of 1938 the Cleveland Board of Education was granted permission for the construction of a high-frequency educational station, which signed on in September of that year, on a frequency of 41.5 mcs, broadcasting AM short-wave. The station had been constructed through the aid of WHK engineers, and utilized a Collins 500 watt transmitter to reach its many small listeners throughout the Greater Cleveland schools.⁴⁹

The Board of Education didn't have a monopoly on new stations that year, for WHK was busy in its own right. In June of that year W8XNT, an experimental station broadcasting from atop the Terminal Tower on a frequency of 307600 kcs., (AM), began carrying programs of the NBC Blue and Mutual Networks, not being aired over WHK and WCLE, the normal Blue and Mutual affiliates. W8XNT operated at a power of 100watts with the objective of testing a new type antenna design for high frequency AM transmission. The original ball that was situated atop the tower of the dome in the Terminal was approximately 2' in diameter; however, the mounting of the antenna necessitated the replacement of

49 Telephone conversation with William Nelson, 5/7/63, 4:15 pm

the original ball with a new one, 3' in diameter, in which the matching networks for the new antenna were housed. W8XNT proved to be, as we shall see, the first of many such experimental stations operated by WHK; in this case, W8XNT remained on for about three years until the outbreak of the Second World War.⁵⁰

Cleveland's importance as a radio market was evidently becoming fast recognized, for on December 19, 1939, the Federal Communications Commission announced that on the first of the coming year a permanent office of the Commission would be opened in this city.⁵¹ The Cleveland market was making steady progress. In February, 1942, Cleveland was treated to its first FM broadcasting station, when WBOE acquired an Armstrong modulator, which was donated, and signed on as WBOE-FM with a power of 1 KW on a frequency of 42.5 mcs.⁵²

On September 8, 1942 Cleveland again found a station employing two call letters, for on that day WHK-WCLE, (remember WTAM-WEAR), dropped their individual networks which they had been carrying since September, 1938, and both assumed a mutual affiliation. Station WJW, originally founded in Mansfield in 1926, and then transferred to Akron in 1932, saw an opportunity, and in 1943 moved into Cleveland on a

50 Telephone conversation with Ralph DeLaney, 5/10/63, 7:00 pm
51 Cleveland Press, December 19, 1939, np.
52 op. cit., Nelson conversation.

frequency of 850 kcs., with a power of 5 KW, to assume an affiliation with the NBC Blue network. WJW signed on in Cleveland on November 17, 1943. In Akron she had occupied 1240 kcs. with a power of 250 watts, though she had only been there since 1932. In any event, once again when the dust cleared, Cleveland still had all its major networks, which is more than can be said for it presently.

In May 17, 1944 WJW announced that it was moving WCLE to Akron, where it would assume the call letters WHKK, (sister to WHK), and the second attempt at combining two stations into one failed after a six year attempt. Plans called for the station to move in the fall of that year, and assume a new frequency, of 640 kcs. (it was then on 620 kcs), with a power of 1 KW, (it was then at 500 watts).

As a result of the FCC's general confusion concerning the allocation and use of the FM broadcasting bands, WBOE, operating on 42.5 mcs., was told that it would ultimately have to move to the higher FM bands, between 88 and 108 mcs., recently assigned for such use; thus, as a preparatory step for such a change, on January of 1946 WBOE-FM moved from 42.5 to 44.5 mcs, still at 1 KW, and in March, 1947 began broadcasting simultaneously on 90.3 mcs, at a power of 10 KW, and on 44.5, still at 1 KW. This was continued until Septem-

53 Telephone conversation with Ruth Gary, 5/8/63, 3:45 pm
54 Stinson, Robert, Cleveland Plain Dealer, May 17, 1944,
np.

ber, 1946, when WBOE left the air. Upon resumption of transmissions in January, 1949, WBOE operated exclusively on the new high FM band frequency of 90.3 mcs.⁵⁵

Though WBOE had the distinction of being the city's first FM station, back in 1942, she was tested in the race to the high FM bands by WER's experimental station WCAFD-FM, which operated on 107.1 mcs, at a power of 1000 watts, and began broadcasting in March, 1946. This station, set up atop the Terminal Tower in an effort to test a circular polarized antenna design, was kept on the air for about one year.⁵⁶

In 1947 Samuel R. Sague applied for permission to operate Cleveland's first true suburban stations, WSRB-AM and FM, (SRB for Sague's initials), to be located in Cleveland Heights. WSRB-AM was licensed on 1490 kcs. with a power of 250 watts; a small discrepancy occurred in the licensing of WSRB-FM; originally assigned 107.9 mcs, they ultimately received 95.3, also on somewhat lower power than most other Cleveland stations.⁵⁷ (Since these stations were designed to serve suburban Cleveland they were assigned, and needed, relatively low power transmitters.) They ultimately began broadcasting in early December, 1947.⁵⁸ The booming Cleveland radio industry saw another new station in 1947. On June 1, WJMO, 1540 kcs. at 1000 watts, signed on from its studios and transmitters

55 *op. cit.*, Nelson conversation.

56 *op. cit.*, DeLaney conversation.

57 Bacon, Elmore, Cleveland News, December 4, 1947, np.

58 *ibid.*, np.

located at 21575 Euclid Avenue.⁵⁹

WIK remained busy in the experimental FM field, with the signing on of WILX to replace WEXUS, which signed off early in 1947. WIKX, while operating from the terminal, used the frequency 100.7, which WIK-FM later inherited.⁶⁰ This station remained active until mid-1948, at which time WIK's FM operation formally assumed the call letters WIK-FM.⁶¹ However, the Cleveland FM airwaves were far from empty. Also in operation from November, 1947 to March, 1950 was an FM facility of the Scripps-Howard newspaper chain, NEWS-FM, (102.1 mcs.), a sister station of WAFB-TV, the first commercial television station in Cleveland.⁶² WJW inaugurated FM service in 1948 on a frequency of 104.1 mcs., with a powerful 20 kW transmitter, while WTAM-FM began broadcasting in October, 1948, on a frequency of 105.3 mcs.

The appearance of WERE-AM and FM upon the Cleveland radio appears somewhat clouded; several conflicting reports make a definite identification by date difficult. According to Robert Miller, general manager of WERE, (owned by Ray T. Miller of Cleveland Broadcasting Company), WERE-FM began operations on a frequency of 98.3 mcs. in November, 1947.

59 Cleveland Plain Dealer, August 21, 1952, np.

60 op. cit., Ralph DeLaney conversation.

61 ibid.,

62 Telephone conversation with Joseph Epperson, 5/7/63, 11:15 am.

and WEDR-FM in July, 1948.⁶³ Other sources credit the FM sign on as late 1948,⁶⁴ and the AM as being in July, 1949.⁶⁵ The reader may believe any date he chooses.

The FM market continued to grow, with the appearance of WLAL-FM, which signed on May 14, 1948⁶⁶ at a frequency of 104.9 mcs, at a power of 1 KW. This station, which operated in Lakewood, had a rather short life, for the FM market at this time, was neither exceptionally financially, and a suburban station, on FM only, simply couldn't make ends meet. Thus, late in 1949, WLAL-FM ceased broadcasting.⁶⁷ Another ill-fated operation was that of WOHC-FM, which signed on on June 1, 1949, at 105.3 Mcs, with a POWER OUTPUT OF 15⁶⁸ KW; owned by the United Auto Workers, it was the union's intention to start a "voice of labor" station in Cleveland, similar to their operation in Detroit. With their studios located at 1225 Theater, and their transmitter in North Royalton,⁶⁹ the UAW found out relatively early that the Cleveland market couldn't support a 15 KW station of theirs. Thus in mid-1951 WOHC-FM petitioned the FCC for permission to cease transmissions.⁷⁰

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- 63 Telephone conversation with Robert Miller, 5/6/63, 3:45pm.
64 Bacon, Elmore, Cleveland News, August 30, 1948, np.
65 Cleveland Plain Dealer, July 11, 1949, np.
66 Stephen, Robert, Cleveland Plain Dealer, May 15, 1948, np.
67 Condon, George, Cleveland Plain Dealer, November 30, 1949, np.
68 Cleveland News, March 24, 1949, np.
69 Condon, George, Cleveland Plain Dealer, June 30, 1949, np.
70 Porter, Philip, Cleveland Plain Dealer, June 14, 1951, np.

The situation on the AM scene looked considerably brighter however; on January 19, 1949 the FCC granted approval of a new station, located at 1200 nos., with a power of 5 kW, to Fred Wolf of Civic Broadcasters.⁷¹ Wolf, as the station was soon to be called, signed on the air on April 30, 1950,⁷² and brought a new type of programming to Cleveland. Not only did Mr. Wolf organize a schedule built around good music of the popular variety, he included classical music, daily-soap opera, which the Cleveland market hadn't seen in many years. Quite happily, and to the surprise of some, WOL, proved to be a resounding success in the long run.

January 31, 1951 saw an ever-expanding WOL move into new million-dollar studios at 5000 Euclid Avenue; they had occupied the Terminal Tower since 1951, and had moved there from the Standard Building.⁷³ Their new, spacious, studios were originally designed for television broadcasting - WOL had received the city's first television license, but returned it to the FCC thirty days after it was granted -⁷⁴ but they proved to be some of the finest radio studios in the nation. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the move was that WOL, when it began on March 5, 1922, was located

71 Cleveland Plain Dealer, January 19, 1949, pp.

72 Condon, George, Cleveland Plain Dealer, November 18, 1961, pp.

73 Condon, George, Cleveland Plain Dealer, January 14, 1951, pp.

74 Telephone conversation with Eddie Clark, 5/6/63, 11:00 am.

at 5105 Euclid, exactly across the street from the new location.

1952 saw the entrance of another broadcaster to the FM ranks, for in July of that year, WGAR-FM signed on on a frequency of 99.5 mcs.

With the recent failure of two FM broadcasters, WCUC and WJAN, an intrepid Fred Wolf, of the new WDOK-AM, on August 20, 1952 applied for permission to construct WDOK-FM, which was granted a frequency of 102.1 mcs., and a power output of 20 kW; on October 4, 1954 the newest member of the elite FM broadcasting club joined the airwaves of the city's other seven FM broadcasters, for what proved to be a very successful operation.⁷⁵

Broadcasting Cleveland received its greatest shock in many years in 1955, when WTAM, pioneer broadcaster in this area, and one of the nation's foremost operators, announced its acquisition by the Westinghouse Broadcasting Company on December 29 of that year. Shortly thereafter, WTAM left the city and the new Westinghouse property, still on 1000 kcs., became KLF, a set of call letters made popular in Philadelphia, where they were first used in 1923. On July 15, 1956 KYW announced that as of August 26, it would drop its affiliation with NBC; again this precipitated a flurry

75 Broadcasting 1960 Yearbook, Washington, D.C., p. A206.

of activity which ultimately resulted in WHK taking the NBC affiliation on December 9, 1956, and WSRB assuming WHK's former Mutual affiliation on September 30, 1956.⁷⁵ Network radio was still in serious trouble in Cleveland, however; December 28, 1957 saw WJW-AM and FM drop their ABC affiliation, held since the station moved to Cleveland in the Blue Net-and the status of network radio began to look even shakier.

FM, now continually expanding, saw a new arrival on March 2, 1958 when WBWC-FM, the Cleveland area's only collegiate broadcaster, on the airwaves, (several colleges own closed-circuit "Campus Carrier" networks-but none utilized standard transmission in the airwaves) sign on on 88.3 mcs., with a power output of 10 watts. This educational station, owned and operated by Baldwin Wallace College and its student body in Berea, Ohio, 15 miles from Public Square, serves a listening audience covering most of the East Side-soon to be expanded to include the entire county.

On December 19, 1958 Cleveland's radio markets suddenly found one of the most complex transactions that the industry had seen in years in the works. The owners of WJMO sold their property, and acquired simultaneously WSRB-AM and FM, changing the old SBS call to WJMO, but operating on the old SRS

76 Cleveland Plain Dealer, September 21, 1956, np.

frequency of 1490, starting in January of 1959, with the new JMO at a power of 1 KW, (the 1490 spot had previously been 250 watts).⁷⁷ WBSB-TV changed its call letters to WCUY, still on 95.3 mcs., and operated as an entirely independent station, with separate programming. This left the 1540 kcs. spot unfilled, until March 13, 1959 when the new WABQ signed on, on the old JMO frequency.⁷⁸

On the FM scene things were equally busy. December 7, 1958 saw the entrance of a new broadcaster on 103.3: WCRF-FM, owned and operated by the Moody Bible Institute began broadcasting on that day, with an entirely religious programming, the first station of its type in Cleveland's history.⁷⁹ On July 14, 1959 WNOB-FM, 107.9 mcs., signed on as Cleveland's newest, and thenation's most powerful, broadcaster. With a transmitter delivering 135 KW, and a highly complex antenna system utilizing 12 separate bays, things looked encouraging for the new property of the Northern Ohio Broadcasting Company, (NOB); unfortunately, the new station was plagued by technical difficulties. The monstrous transmitter was almost inaudible in many parts of Cleveland and reception in Toledo was excellent; similarly, the station was obliterating the signal of a 1 KW station (located about 15 miles outside of Indianapolis) in homes located not more than a mile

77 Cleveland News, December 19, 1958, np.

78 Cleveland News, March 13, 1959, np.

79 Cleveland Plain Dealer, December 8, 1958, np.

from the smaller station.³⁰ Engineers traced the difficulty to a phasing problem in the 12 bay antenna, which was shooting its signal above, and over, Cleveland. Ultimately, after many unsuccessful efforts at eliminating the problem, the decision was made to utilize only ten units of the antenna, which solved the situation, but also cut the station's power to 118 kW, (nothing to be ashamed of!).³¹

The new WABQ signed on a sister station in the FM bands on May 5, 1960, on a frequency of 106.5 mcs, which maintained these call letters for a few months, and soon became WXEN-FM the city's only nationalities station, still on the same frequency.

FM was definitely a booming business if not an entirely profitable one and listeners found it difficult to keep abreast of all the new developments on the "static-free" bands. WDGJ-FM was the next to sign on, on April 1, 1961, with a 40 kW transmitter on 95.5 mcs. Originally scheduled to commence broadcasting about a month earlier, it was forced to wait until WCUY moved its frequency to 92.3 to make room for the newer station.³² Billed as "Cleveland's Fine Arts Radio", and programming entirely classical music, the station changed hands several times.

Back on the more standard AM broadcast bands, the network

30 Telephone conversation with Richard D. Webner, 5/7/63, 12:00 pm.

31 ibid.

32 Telephone conversation with Robert Conrad, 5/6/63, 6:30 pm.

affiliations in Cleveland again rotated. WHK dropped its NBC affiliation in 1959 and assumed a ~~combined~~ Mutual-ABC coverage, which gave way to Retro-Media shortly thereafter, when the station changed hands. WJMO obliged by accepting ABC, and WDOX linked itself with Mutual far cry from the thirties when stations clamored for an affiliation. WJW assumed NBC on August 1, 1961, having been independent since it dropped its ABC affiliation late in 1957,⁸³ taking over the WHK affiliation. This association proved to be short-lived, however, for the network left WJW on December 21, of that same year, that station then going independent. Now without an affiliate, NBC began searching, and finally persuaded WGAR, long a bastion of CBS, to assume the NBC coverage, which it did on April 30, 1963.⁸⁴

On the FM airwaves, WDG6 changed hands for the third time in mid-1962, and on November 5, 1962 assumed the call letters WCLV-FM, still on 95.5.⁸⁵

To round out our listing of Cleveland's radio operations let me briefly mention two other stations, though not of the commercial variety. One, WCY, opened October 1, 1926 at West 117th and Madison, operated by RCA, with a power of 750 watts. It served as a marine communications station, and on

83 op. cit., Ruth Gary conversation.

84 op. cit. conversation with ~~Ernie~~ Ernie, 5/7/63, 4:30pm.

85 op. cit., Robert Conrad conversation.

January 7, 1929 moved to Bradley Road, Dover, between Detroit and Lorain, with a power of 5 KW, operating there for several years before discontinuing operations.³⁶

Another broadcaster was WJL, an experimental station of WHK's used for facsimile transmissions, which opened in the late thirties, at a power of 100 watts in the VHF band, (between 30 and 40 mc.).³⁷

Thus we have a chronology of Cleveland's radio development from the first primitive programs of W8AC3 all the way through the city's newest FM call, WCLV. Radio has gone through tremendous changes in the 42 years recapitulated here; the days of the networks have faded, as have the days of radio as a sole source of entertainment; nevertheless, the industry continues, particularly in the field of FM, ever-expanding and improving, for what appears to be a bright future.

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36. Cleveland Plain, October 2, 1926, np.
37. ibid., Ralph Delaney conversation.

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