

RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO
1975

RETURN WITH US NOW.

Volume 21, Number 4

November, 1995



Winchell Walter (1897-1972): Prominent newspaper columnist who graduated to radio in 1930; always began his show with the shouted greeting, "Mr. and Mrs. North America and all the ships at sea."; *Walter Winchell's Journal* ended its days on ABC in 1955.



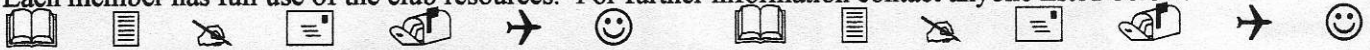
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING: There will be a board meeting will be **7:30 p.m., December 7th** at Dick King's home. All members are invited and encouraged to attend.



There will be the annual yuletide gathering at the clubhouse at 7301 W. Yale Ave. on Saturday, **December 9th at 5 p.m.** Look for the map in the December newsletter.



RETURN WITH US NOW... is the official publication of *The Radio Historical Association of Colorado, Inc.*, a non-profit organization. Cost of membership is **\$25.00** for the first year with \$15.00 for renewal. Each member has full use of the club resources. For further information contact anyone listed below.



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From the



King's Roost

Where did October go?

November 1st we will be headed for the SPERDVAC Convention in Los Angeles and we're looking forward to a leisurely drive to California.

First we'd like to advise Colorado members to mark their calendars for December 9th. The RHAC Christmas party will be held at the Village Townhouse Clubhouse. It's the same place as last year. The December newsletter will give you directions and a map. So, reserve the date and look for the December newsletter.

We have had two members who have taken off for parts unknown with RHAC property. If you know of Cindy Clark in the Denver area, please tell her to return her RHAC tapes. If you know of Christopher Turner in Atlanta, Georgia, please tell him to return his RHAC tapes. We have so many great members that we cannot permit a few bad apples to spoil things for us. We just wish they would be more considerate.

We just mailed catalogs to more new members. We hope they enjoy RHAC and the access to our treasures as much as most of you do. We've been busy replacing damaged tapes in the libraries: a very time consuming job. One consequence of this was that we missed the Newark convention. We heard great reviews about Newark. But there is just not enough hours in the days to get everything done. So, some things just have to be put aside once in a while.

We watched the Denver Broncos play in the snow. But by the end of the week we were out in the sunshine in shirtsleeves. One never knows from day to day what to wear. Just look outside before you dress in the morning.

We are busy trying to get out all orders now on hand and into the mail before we leave for California. So, please, be forewarned that any orders arriving during our absence will be delayed an additional two to three weeks. We have to take a few extra days to visit with friends and family before we head back.

Dick recorded our September meeting with our guests.

Our September guests, Hal Stone, Sam Edwards and Dick Beals were exciting and interesting to hear. It was interesting to hear that these proven artists are still asked to audition in todays much more competitive markets and to be judged by much younger production people; people so young that some may well have been students of theirs.

Many of us who have gray hair have often looked down our noses at the young "executives" who make many foolish mistakes and never seem to learn from their experience.

The most noticeable trait of the many radio guests that we have had is that they are all very positive thinkers. They do not waste energy looking back; they are always looking ahead. That is part of what makes it such a pleasure to have them visit us. They also all enjoy spending time talking with any young people they happen to find in their audience.



Radio's Own Life Story

By Llewellyn Miller

1926: This was the year that people climbed up on flagpoles, trees, water-towers and other unlikely perches and just sat there for the glory of breaking a record. Valentino died at the age of thirty-one, and there was hysteria in the streets of New York as weeping fans blocked traffic at his funeral. Gilda Gray was doing a naughty new dance called the "shimmy" after she described her technique as "just shaking my chemise." Ramon Novarro and Francis X. Bushman in "Ben Hur" chalked up the top boxoffice take of many a year, but it was Edmund Lowe and Victor McLaglen in "What Price Glory?" that left the heaviest stamp on the year. That film started every one saying "Sez you?" and answering "Sez me!"

They also began saying "Yowzah, yowzah," because Ben Bernie, self-styled "The Old Maestro," was taking the air by storm as the first band leader to make a big feature of ad libbed wise-cracks. His trademark was a cigar. He was never seen without one. He smoked twenty a day and a telling part of his routine was his jaunty handling of a big fat stogie. Many a lesser light has tried to make a cigar take the place of wit since, following the pattern that died with the Old Maestro in 1943.

Over 1,750,000 new sets were sold this year, and people heard

the World Series for the first time on a national hook-up—words that were to be heard more and more frequently in connection with special events. The gate for the Dempsey-Tunney fight was nearly two million dollars. You couldn't get in for love or money but the broadcast went out to all parts of the world that Tunney had won (decision), and the sale of radio sets took another vast leap. Stars appearing regularly began to build up enormous followings.

But the biggest thing by far in 1926 was the formation of the first major network, The National Broadcasting Company. NBC began when the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, which until this year had poured money into the operation of radio stations, decided to concentrate on the supplying of long distance lines and to leave the entertainment end of radio to others. Its holdings were huge, but then, so was the opportunity. Four men got together to see what could be done. It was a powerful quartet: Owens D. Young, Chairman of the Board of General Electric and also of the huge Radio Corporation of America; General James G. Harbord, president of RCA; General Guy E. Tripp, Chairman of the Board of Westinghouse, and David Sarnoff, who had risen far and fast and was now vice-president and General Manager of RCA (remember he was the immigrant boy who had outlined the fantastic plan of a "radio music-box" in 1915).

Backed by the millions of their various corporations, they formed a new company and cast around for a name. They finally decided

on National Broadcasting Company since their ambitious plan was to buy enough stations to take radio to every corner of the nation. They looked around for a man best prepared by experience to keep this objective in mind, and chose Merlin H. Aylesworth. As Director of the National Electric Light Association, he had visited nearly every town of over ten thousand population in the country and knew first-hand what people all over the country wanted. He became NBC's first President.

The new network bought WEAf (now known as WNBC) for a million dollars and made it the parent station of the chain that was to grow until today it is a giant of 172 stations.

The first program, broadcast on November 15, 1926, was terrific. It was carried by twenty-four stations and the guess was that it reached ten million people. Astounding! The grand ball-room of the old Waldorf-Astoria Hotel (where the Empire State Building now stands) was chosen for the inaugural festivities. The audience was admitted by invitation only. It turned out in tails, ermine wraps, evening gowns and jewels as lavish as for the opening of the opera. The show went on the air at 8:05 and lasted until 12:15, and the assemblage of talent was staggering.

The New York Symphony was conducted by Dr. Walter Damrosch. The New York Oratorio Society sang. So did Tito Ruffo, Metropolitan star, and Caesar Sodero led an operatic sextet. Harold Bauer, concert pianist, played and the great comedy team of Weber and Fields did a turn. A dazzling exhibition of remote control was the piping in of George

Olsen's dance band from the Hotel Pennsylvania, B. A. Rolfe's band from the Palais D'Or, Ben Bernie from the Roosevelt Grill, Vincent Lopez and his band from the Casa Lopez. While the glittering audience sat on gold chairs looking at an empty stage, Mary Garden sang from Chicago, and Will Rogers spoke all the way from his dressing room in Independence, Kansas. What a terrific evening! Who could ask for anything more?

1927: The Jazz Age was working up to its feverish peak. Sober minds were beginning to be worried about the divorce rate, now one in every seven marriages. Some people blamed it on "gin weddings" and many communities passed three-day marriage license laws. Some people blamed it on the new freedom from chaperonage that the automobile had brought the younger generation. Some people blamed it on the movies. Judge Ben Lindsay of Denver had a solution that became the hottest controversy of the year. He advocated the legalizing of birth control and spoke in favor of what he called "companionate marriage," since, he claimed, many young people were practicing it anyway. This was true. In spite of the fact that the country was booming, many salaries were low and the list of unemployed was long. Young men and women who could not afford to marry cast aside old standards. More and more girls were speaking frankly among themselves of "going all the way." The air was full of lectures asking "What is our youth coming to?"

January 1, the Rose Bowl game was broadcast from Pasadena, the first time that a national hook-up had originated from the West Coast. This was such an important novelty that Graham McNamee went out to report the 7-7 tie between Stanford and Alabama. On May 19, Charles Lindbergh put a sandwich in his pocket, lifted his Spirit of St. Louis off a runway in New York, landed in Paris the next day and a new national hero was born. His return was broadcast over the largest network assembled to this time.

Of outstanding importance to the future of radio was the Radio Act of 1927. This was the answer to a crying need. In 1926, the courts had ruled that the government had no right to jurisdiction over the air, and that anyone could use any wave length. It was a matter of months only before public and broadcasters alike set up such a howl of protest that Congress was forced to take action. It gave the President power to appoint the first Federal Radio Commission (in 1934 this became the seven member Federal Communication Commission with even greater powers). Congress was careful to make announcement that the act was in no way intended to limit the freedom of the air, but it did arrange for stations to be assigned positive wave lengths, and it put teeth into the ruling by providing for canceling of license to broadcast if a station jumped its assigned wave length. Though we have never had government censorship, as such, we shall see how this possibility of loss of license became a not wholly excellent thing in relation to freedom of the air in later years. However, in

1927, it was the best thing that could have happened and everybody heaved a sigh of relief when the FRC began to police the air traffic.

The biggest news of the year happened on January 1. It was the start of CBS and the story is wonderful. It begins in 1926 when a convention of broadcasters met in the Astor Hotel in New York. They were desperate men. They were trying to solve the problem of the piracy of wave lengths. Loud was their outcry of grief against each other and against ASCAP.

A paving machinery salesman, George A. Coats, was stopping at the hotel. He was fascinated by what he heard in the corridors as the radio men argued their grievances. Suddenly paving seemed insupportably dull and drab. He began to attend the formal sessions of the convention uninvited. Pretty soon he was moved to make a speech. His theme was "Throw off the yoke of ASCAP!"

ASCAP, you remember, is the American Society of Composers and Publishers. They had been charging a pretty penny for the use of their tunes on the air. This was only fair, as a matter of fact. Why should the hard work of song writers be free? On the other hand, broadcasters felt that ASCAP asked far too much for the songs that stations were forced to play if they were to hold their listeners. They muttered that ASCAP was a highway robber, a rankling thorn, an unbearable monopoly, and they loved what Coats had to say. What an intoxicating idea—to defy ASCAP, even if it wasn't practical! They cheered him wildly and his success determined Coats to

get into this lovely new business of radio. He sought out Arthur Judson, manager of the New York Symphony and a great power in music, and suggested building a program service as a new business venture. They were joined by Major J. Andrew White, a song booker named Francis Marsh, and Edward Ervin assistant manager of the New York Symphony. These five formed the Independent Broadcasters.

They didn't even have one station, let alone a network, but they arranged to lease WOR for four days a week, and Coats immediately lined up eleven out-of-town stations. He had achieved a network by promising to pay each station fifty dollars an hour for a minimum of ten hours weekly of their time. It looked great, but it meant that the new company had to re-sell that time to a lot of sponsors in a hurry or else pay out a lot of money—money that United did not have in the bank.

The opportunity was enormous—but so was the obligation. About this time all ideas of doing battle with ASCAP were lost, and all efforts were bent to drag the new network back from the abyss of bankruptcy that yawned in front of it. What to do?

The rumor was that the powerful Victor Talking Machine Company was about to buy time on NBC. The officers of Independent lost no time in seeking out Victor's big rival, The Columbia Phonograph Company with a proposal.

The phonograph people were not having an easy time. Movies had cut their revenue dreadfully. So had motor cars. Now here was radio, another threat. Columbia Phonograph decided to turn this

new menace to account. It put a sizable sum into Independent to get a break for itself, and so CBS was formed though for a short time it was known as CPBC-Columbia Phonograph Broadcasting Company.

The first program took the air on Sept. 18, 1927, over sixteen stations. Deems Taylor narrated his new opera, "The King's Henchman." It was an important and dignified program, though very different from the roaring start that NBC had given itself the year before. However, it was not long before something happened that was to make CBS a close contender for the kudos that NBC had been enjoying alone.

This was the arrival in the company of one man, W. S. Paley, who is still the guiding genius of CBS. It all came about because people had started to smoke cigarettes. There seems to be no connection—but wait.

Before World War I, the cigarette had been unimportant in the tobacco business. They were known as "coffin nails" and were affected only by the fop. Then soldiers came back from the war wearing wrist watches (of all things!) carrying handkerchiefs in sleeves and smoking cigarettes. What had been a rather effeminate affectation, overnight was the nonchalant mark of the warrior. ("When in doubt, smoke a Murad!") Cigars, pipes and chewing plug sustained another blow when George Washington Hill of the American Tobacco Company chose the appalling slogan "Spit is an ugly word." As a matter of fact, he was so right. Visitors from Europe had been deeply shocked by the sight of spittoons and by

what Americans daintily called "expectorating."

Then Hill had the temerity to go a step farther. After the war, women figured in cigarette advertising only to the daring extent of inviting the man in the ad to "Blow some my way," but this year the Lucky Strike girl appeared on a billboard with a cigarette in her own hand! ! ! It was public recognition that nice girls by the hundreds of thousands were smoking.

When the sales of La Palina Cigars plummeted from six million a day to four hundred thousand, the advertising manager of that company grew desperate. This was W. S. Paley, son of the owner. He was twenty-five years old, young enough to try anything, and he sponsored a program on the new network, CBS. After the dulcet voice of a lady called (naturally) La Palina had told stories of fabulous adventures for twenty-six weeks, his cigar sales had risen to a million a day. That convinced young Paley that radio was wonderful. When he heard that CBS needed money, he bought a sizable share of the company. On September 26, 1928, he was elected its president. His new title conferred on him the responsibility for a network of twenty-two stations that was losing close to \$400,000 a year. It took heroic efforts on the part of all concerned, but, within the year CBS was out of the red.

The race of the giants was on.

Radio Mirror, April, 1950

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