

FROM CRYSTAL TO COLOR
WFBM



The first microphone used by WFBM RADIO in its initial broadcast in 1924

FROM CRYSTAL TO COLOR
WFBM

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Published by

The WFBM Stations
Indianapolis, Indiana

Copyright © 1964 by The WFBM Stations
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 64-8449
Printed in the United States of America

A note about this book:

The cover, jacket and illustration pages were designed by
Claude R. Lehr Studios.

The composition was done by
Rogers Typesetting Company, Inc.

The text pages were printed by
Litho Press, Inc.

The Jacket was printed by
Speedway Press, Inc.

The paper is by Kalamazoo Paper Company.

Binding by Bechtold Company.

Production supervision by Maurice J. Boyd,
assisted by Mrs. Donna Massey, copy editor.

Foreword

An exciting part of the twentieth century is the dramatic emphasis placed upon progress in the fields of exploration into the unknown future, together with the concurrent exploration into the historically unknown past. For every commitment of energy toward finding out where we are going, civilization continues to make commitments toward preserving a continuity of knowledge concerning where we have been.

The WFBM stations, as with the remainder of the broadcasting industry in America, represent but a fleeting moment in man's progress, yet it is now apparent that, short though forty years are in the long panorama of life, communication has never known a more exciting hour. Electronics communication has proven in forty years its ability to market ideas, philosophies, governments, products, and to fulfill the demands of the performing arts. Behind all great accomplishments are the stories of the little things that made it possible. In that arena the scheme of this book is drawn. Fortunately for the American public, our story is one that could be repeated in city after city and in state after state.

But this is our story, and *we* like it *best!*

E. C.

Acknowledgment

The invaluable assistance and wholehearted cooperation of the Indiana State Library staff, particularly Margaret Pierson, the Indianapolis Metropolitan newspapers and the many helpful suggestions and contributions for this book made by scores of Indianapolis and Indiana broadcasting personalities, past and present, all are gratefully acknowledged by the editors.

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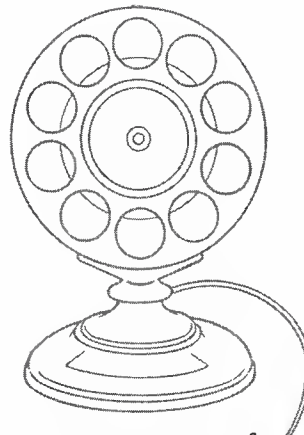
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Chapter 1

IT STARTED WITH STATIC



Radio couldn't have come along at a nicer time for Indianapolis. It was the dark years of prohibition and women suffrage. The very early '20's had little to recommend them, really. Gone were the friendly neighborhood saloons, ignominiously padlocked—or worse, converted into antiseptic ice cream parlors. Women were voting and attending meetings. Pop, his favorite recreation now only a foamy memory, stayed home with the kids and grumbled. The kids, bless them, were often home too. Those were the days before youngsters were propelled into joining every uplifting organization designed to keep them off the streets and away from home. Mom was out passing motions and Dad was bored.

In those years, normalcy prevailed in the land. Then along came radio. And, as the 'twenties rose into crescendo from a bleat to a roar, Hoosier homes regained their role as entertainment centers. Of course, radio was hardly "entertainment" then. It was more of a sport, like fishing. The quarry was a magic voice seined out of the whines and crackles saying, "KDKA, Pittsburgh." Or on the night of a big catch, even "WJZ, New York."

In those dim days of the crystal set and the four-dial superheterodyne, with battery acid eating through the floor, no one really cared very much whether it was "Lopez speaking"—Vincent, that is—or Joe Doakes. Distance was the thing, and electronic annihilation of space was the marvel.

Night after night, in Hoosier homes the watchword was “Shhh.” Ordinary families passed around a lone pair of head phones, and more privileged households had up to three pairs. Meanwhile, Pop ran the gamut of dials, fishing endlessly through the welter of static for a human voice or a few bars of melody, hanging on firmly with hair-thin adjustments until the station was identified and entered in the family log. Woe be to the youngster who coughed or sneezed at the crucial moment. Off he went, even if it was only two hours past his bedtime.

Eventually, the novelty of pioneering began to pall. Radio and show business, having flirted with each other from the very first, now became really serious and soon they were one. From the union was born the first promise of the great shows and series which grew up in the later 'twenties and 'thirties and were still going strong when television came along to give us another good excuse for staying home to be entertained and informed.

Of such stuff are memories—and books—made.

Contained in these pages are some of the people and places, the times and the events that have made memorable the forty-plus years that broadcasting has been a lively part of Hoosier life.

For many of us who can remember when there was no such thing as broadcasting and who grew up with “Amos 'n Andy,” Major Bowes, and “One Man's Family,” these pages will tug back many memories. As for the younger bunch, maybe they'll learn why Mom sighs and pauses in her dishwashing when a disc jockey flips on an old Guy Lombardo tune. Or why Pop gives Mom a warm pat when an old Benny Goodman number drifts his memory back to Saturday night dancing in the parlor, with the volume on the Atwater Kent turned down low.

The younger ones, too, may appreciate a little more how the experience of the past has contributed to today's high level of broadcasting, in both television and radio.

And, by reliving a little of the past, we may all catch a glimpse of what's ahead as broadcasting continues to mature and fulfill the promises of yesterday and today.

Chapter 2

“THAT DAMN’ DINGUS”

To Samuel Lewis “Lew” Shank, popular, colorful mayor of Indianapolis, goes the honor of making probably the first—and certainly one of the most memorable—radio addresses by a Hoosier official. Although Mayor Shank had some nice and hopeful things to say about the year 1922, which was about to be born, his long remembered follow-up was the most noteworthy.

“Hamilton, do you mean to tell me that people can actually hear me over that damn’ dingus?”

Thus, on New Year’s Eve, 1921, Mayor Shank gave birth to the “blooper.” He was soon joined by the ranks of radio personalities and others who, in similar circumstances down through the years, could only complain lamely, “But I thought it was off.” This group some years later was joined by the beloved proprietor of a children’s show who ended his broadcast on the usual saccharin note and then exploded within earshot of a live microphone, “There, I guess that’ll hold the # *%* # little # *%* #’s for another day.”

But in Mayor Shank’s case, there was little, if any, repercussion. Practically no one out there in Indianapolis “radioland” was able to hear him. Probably no more than a corporal’s guard of “wireless” bugs could be mustered in all Central Indiana that raw winter night to celebrate with the mayor and the city’s first fledgling station, 9ZJ.

Shank’s question was addressed to Francis F. Hamilton, Hoosier

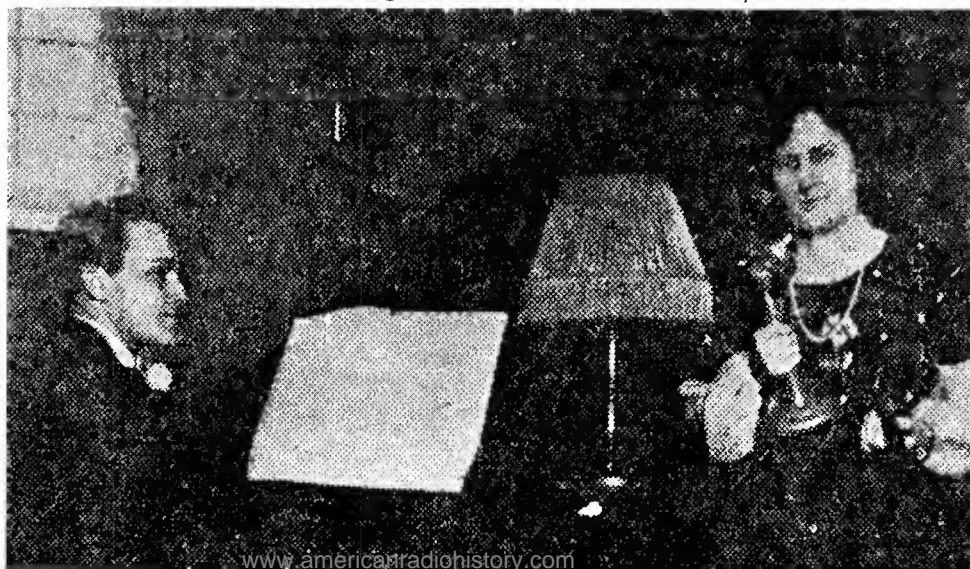
radio pioneer. The scene was the somewhat cramped 9ZJ studio in Hamilton's garage at 2011 North Alabama Street. A few friends, including the mayor, had been invited by Hamilton to greet 1922 with a "wireless" salute. Since radio reception was better than usual that night, early in the evening the group thrilled to sounds directly from Pittsburgh, New York, and Newark. When those distant signals faded, the studio group and the lonesome band of local crystal set tuners were entertained with musical numbers broadcast by Mr. and Mrs. N. C. Hilgenberg of Indianapolis. That night also saw probably the first "remote" broadcast in Hoosier history. Hamilton had rigged up an ordinary telephone receiver on the stage of the B. F. Keith Theater to catch the vaudeville acts, thus getting the jump on Ed Sullivan by a good thirty years.

Then, on the stroke of midnight, Hamilton enthusiastically struck a large gong in the studio. And whether Indianapolis knew it or not, that New Year of 1922 was given a radio send-off. It was a fitting beginning, too, for that year saw the birth of a second radio station in Indianapolis.

Mayor Shank had high hopes for the new year, too. Earlier, before expressing his doubt about the efficiency of Hamilton's equipment, he had shared these thoughts with his radio public:

"The old year is nearly gone. Its joys and sorrows are but memories, hallowed by the thoughts of what might have been. The draperies of death are being hung on the year 1921, and let us pray that the same will serve for the war god—Mars! We Hoosiers, as well as the rest of

This 1922 newspaper photo shows Mr. and Mrs. Noble Hilgenberg performing via "radio telephone" from their home, 3841 North Capitol Avenue, broadcast from Francis J. Hamilton's station at 2011 North Alabama Street. Today, Mr. Hilgenberg is Chairman of the Board for Railroadmen's Savings and Loan Association in Indianapolis.



the world, would like to see poverty and 'white mule' and strikes and gunmen buried with old '21, and hope that peace and prosperity and '22 come as welcome triplets."

Unfortunately, the poor didn't get much richer in 1922; the bootleggers stepped up their deliveries to the "blind tigers;" Chicago gangland bustled right along, and in June, '26, men lost their lives in a violence-studded coal mine strike at Herrin, Illinois.

The "wireless telephone," as radio was often called then, had come to Indianapolis only a few months before that first New Year's broadcast. In the fall of 1921, the U. S. Department of Commerce assigned the call letters "9ZJ" to Hamilton for the station he was assembling in his garage. Hamilton, son of Lucius Hamilton, a founder of the Hamilton-Harris Company, learned about radio while acquiring an electrical engineering degree at Purdue University.

Spurred by World War I demands, Purdue in 1918 became a partner with the U. S. Army Signal Corps in the instruction of radio operators. They began with about 150 trainees, but this number was later stepped up to 400. The radio bug caught Hamilton, and in 1919 he completed a rather advanced and efficient long range receiver as part of his work. The set was later presented to the university and became a part of the Purdue amateur station's permanent equipment.

Hamilton wasn't the only one who saw more than a wartime use for the new gadget radio. In the 1922 Purdue graduating class, ten students stepped up to receive degrees in radio engineering. The farsighted pioneers were C. R. Hanna, F. R. Finehout, and N. C. Percy, all of Indianapolis; J. R. Parnin, Ft. Wayne; H. G. Jordan, Rensselaer; Terry Raffensperger, Goshen; F. H. Willis, Carlisle; M. L. Potter, Kankakee, Illinois; W. G. Modlin, Marion; and H. T. Budenbom, Elizabethtown. The influence such men as these had on the infant radio industry is still evident today.

The early activities of Hamilton and his cohorts did not go unsung. An awed, unnamed reporter for *The Indianapolis News*, a little baffled by the whole thing, wrote late in 1921:

"In the midst of a labyrinth of wires that stretch and wind and turn from one queer instrument to another, may be found the working parts of Hamilton's special amateur station.

“Hamilton has carried on his experiments as a pastime and has spent thousands of dollars in his efforts to solve the problems of annihilating space. Interest throughout the country has swung in the last few years from wireless telegraphy to wireless telephony, and now that some show of success is to be had in the transmission of the voice and other sounds, Indianapolis people, through Hamilton’s work, are privileged to hear voices of persons speaking in places hundreds of miles away.

“Explanations of how it is done mean little to others than the technical men. Through a series of extremely delicate and sensitive instruments in the laboratory of Hamilton, the voice of a person speaking there can be amplified and sent out to be heard as far away as Boston or Denver.”

If the writer had stopped there and quit fiddling with his crystal ball, the story might have been more accurate—if less interesting. But he went on:

“The commercial advantages of the wireless telephone are seen only in the dissemination of weather reports and such general information concerning which there is no secrecy.”

But then, it must be remembered, this was 1921, “commercial advantages” were down the line a bit. And it was some time yet before “Just Plain Bill” sold his first box of soap chips.

But if the advertising dollar was still over the horizon, Hamilton soon had some solid support of another sort. A short time after 9ZJ’s acknowledgment of 1922, *The Indianapolis News* proudly announced that it was combining forces with him to bring Indianapolis expanded wireless service. The latest in broadcasting equipment was installed on the tenth floor of *The News* building on West Washington Street. And *The News* promised the growing band of radio listeners such treats as programs by *The News*’ Glee Club, concerts by the Newsboys’ Band and readings by William Herschell, the famous *News* feature writer and poet.

True to its word, *The News*’ dedicatory program featured zither solos by J. Fremont Frey of the band. Most of the listeners must have been zither music lovers at heart, because dozens called to express appreciation to Hamilton after that first program. Strangely, *The News* made no mention in its announcements of any plans for news programs or even the airing of bulletins. Apparently news was too valuable a commodity to be entrusted to the fragile air waves. But *The News* did begin offering

in its columns complete schedules of practically all stations heard from time to time in the Indianapolis area.

It was only a few weeks after *The News*' debut into radio that 9ZJ became WLK at the insistence of the Department of Commerce. The department had decided a little order was called for before things got out of hand. Radio stations with Commerce Department limited, commercial licenses were popping up in other garages, storerooms, and attics throughout the land. As a result, the department felt definite paths should be blazed through the kilocycles before the jungle closed in.

L. S. Ayres & Co. was next to climb aboard Hamilton's bandwagon. In April, 1922, the store announced it was joining forces with WLK, which thereafter was to be known as the *News-Ayres-Hamilton* station. The announcement coincided with another from Ayres that it was opening a Radio Room on the sixth floor. Store ads proclaimed the room would offer "The best known radio sets, from Radio Corporation, Grebe, Kennedy, Clapp-Eastman, Tusca and Crosley—also a large supply of parts, storage batteries, recharging outfits, switches, wires, and all other necessities."

Ayres, always on its merchandising toes, also announced that records from its phonograph department would be played now and then over the station. The ads failed to say just who would play the records.

Chapter 3

FIRST FALSE START

The Indianapolis radio boom picked up speed as spring came to Central Indiana that year of 1922. Another station, WOH, joined the pioneering WLK late in March, but it was more as a colleague than as a competitor. In fact, for some months the newcomer scheduled its musical programs from 8:30 to 10 p.m. on Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday evenings only, leaving the air clear for WLK and its musical programs on Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday evenings. Apparently both stations were aware of the facts of Hoosier life, and they declined to compete for attention against the traditional Friday night high school basketball games.

WOH was established by the Hatfield Electric Company, Indianapolis dealers for radio receiving sets, parts, accessories, and the avalanche of books on the hot, new hobby, which came tumbling from the presses of *Wireless Age* and McGraw-Hill. Hatfield reasoned, logically enough, that if the company expected to encourage people to buy and build radio sets, the least it could do was make sure there was something to listen to. Soon *The Indianapolis Star*, perhaps with a wary eye on its then separately-owned competitor, *The News*, decided the whole thing was a good idea and joined Hatfield as a co-sponsor of WOH broadcasting. Studios for the new venture were set up in the Hoosier Athletic Club at 902 North Meridian Street.

Operators of the new station were as boundless in enthusiasm as they

were in their vision of what they expected radio, particularly WOH, to accomplish. In their advance publicity they opined that:

“Speakers will address a vast and unseen audience. Their voices will penetrate to the church and to the sickroom. They will find with ease their way to the farmer and the wage earner, just as they will to the homes of secluded millionaires. The very spirit of Indianapolis will go forth to a vast part of the United States in a manner not to be denied.”

Just how the spirit of Indianapolis fared on the nation’s airwaves in the months that followed is hard to assay. But there is no doubt WOH fared well in the columns of its co-sponsor, *The Indianapolis Star*. Following the impressive dedicatory broadcast on March 29, *The Star’s* long-time, top feature writer, Mary E. Bostwick, wrote a story headlined:

CELEBRITIES BROADCASTED GET BACK TO EARTH INTACT

NEW ACHIEVEMENT PROVES THAT PERSONS ARE NO
EXCEPTION TO RULE, FOR THOSE WHO TRIED IT
ARE LEFT TO TALK ABOUT IT

A group of notable and talented personages, including Miss Bostwick, took part in the initial broadcast. The well-wishers included Governor Warren T. McCray, Mayor Lew Shank, Albert E. Metzger, Everett Shinn, Booth Tarkington, Meredith Nicholson, and T. B. Hatfield.

Musical portions of the program were provided by no less than the Purdue Glee Club, Miss Hazel Silvey, and Russ Holler’s Hoosier Athletic Club Orchestra.

Even Miss Bostwick was suitably impressed with the wonder of it all. Her account was laced with such comments as:

—“Imagine saying ‘Gimme a match!’ and having it heard in South Dakota.”

—“The Purdue Glee Club, 36 strong, sang ‘Hail Purdue.’ Then Holler’s Orchestra played ‘Goodbye Shanghai.’ I’ll bet many a foot in far-off Oklahoma was jiggling because it couldn’t help it.”

—“Between numbers the announcer (who said I couldn’t put his name in the paper) said: ‘This is WOH—Hatfield Electric Company.’ I heard those initials so often that they are graven in my memory as the poet says, along with BVD, COD, FOB and phrases like that.”

Unlike today’s stations with their compulsion to fill every second with

sound, WOH took a break in the middle of the dedication and was off the air for ten minutes.

Station WLK remained complacently silent the night of WOH's debut. No one recalls now whether the senior station chose to regard the newcomer more as a friendly fellow trail blazer of the airwaves than as a competitor, or whether WLK just didn't plan to broadcast that night.

In fact, in the casual, relaxed atmosphere of those early radio days, ulcers were something only newspaper and advertising men got. Broadcasting was not on today's tight, minute-by-minute schedule. If live talent missed a streetcar and failed to show up by air time, there was always the studio pianist or a record to fill in the time. Or the listener could just move the "cat's whisker" around on the crystal of his set and wait until the station was good and ready. By way of example, the log of one of the nation's larger stations—WEAF, New York—for Christmas Day, 1922, read: "Station closed so employees can spend Christmas at home."

Engineer for the new *Star-Hatfield* station, Noble B. Watson, was one of Indiana's true radio pioneers. Born in Shelbyville, he began experimenting with the radio telegraph in 1909, and by 1915 he had one of the few government commercial operator's licenses. Two years later, he went to work for the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company, where he helped to develop and to maintain facilities in Europe and in Central and South America. He later served as an instructor for the U. S. Navy at Harvard University and also for the Naval Radio School in New York City.

That year, 1922, also brought the first broadcast of a major Indianapolis sports event. Naturally, it was the 500-Mile Race. Engineer Watson and his counterpart at WLK were busy that May setting up and testing special telephone connections to the judges' stand. Both stations broadcast only at intervals, giving standings and some highlights of the race, which Jimmy Murphy won by pushing his Murphy Special under the checkered flag to set a new track record for the distance, a blistering 94.48 miles per hour.

WOH went off the air shortly after the new year 1923 began. Money, it seems, was a necessary ingredient for success. With practically no revenue from any source, operating costs high, and advertisers still less than enthusiastic about the new medium, the *Star-Hatfield* station

quietly gave up the ghost. An optimistic sporting goods store in Joplin, Missouri, bought the broadcasting equipment to start a station there.

The pioneering *News-Ayres-Hamilton* station hung on grimly until March, 1923, when, despite heroic and imaginative efforts by Hamilton, WLK also slipped away. Hamilton tried vainly to interest 5,000 Hoosier listeners in subscribing to a proposed magazine, *The Magnet*, for three dollars a year. In return for such survival aid, he promised a publication carrying complete WLK programs and other nuggets of radio news. But not many listeners seemed to care three dollars' worth, and the first brief fling of Indianapolis radio was all over. And it was more than eighteen months then without a station to call its own.

Chapter 4

THE VISION GETS VOLUME

It's a wonder WFBM ever got on the air in 1924—or at all. With the untimely demise of its predecessors as an object lesson, and with the possibility of making any money out of broadcasting still remote, prospects for a successful attempt with another local station were less than bright.

Thus, it was more by accident than design that a group of bright young men with radio “know-how” were blessed with both indulgent and far-sighted bosses and a spare transmitter at the same time. From this lucky mixture was born WFBM, the first station to get a firm toe hold in Indianapolis.

About the time the idea for WFBM began incubating, there was considerable difference of opinion as to which path radio should take on its way to becoming a successful industry. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover believed broadcasting should be supported by industry. David Sarnoff, vice president and general manager of the Radio Corporation of America, thought stations should have endowments, like libraries and museums. Martin P. Rice, of General Electric Company, argued that broadcasting should be financed by licensing individual radio sets or by promoting voluntary contributions. The president of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, H. B. Thayer, was solving the financial problem by selling time on company stations. Even then, AT&T was thinking the biggest, most profitable thoughts.

All of this, however, was a little beside the point for that bunch of young men who lived, breathed, and dreamed radio, both on and off their jobs with the Indiana Electric Corporation. Their job was making radio work for the corporation.

At the time, the Indiana Electric Corporation was one of the largest producers and distributors of power in the state. Much of this came from a large generating plant on the banks of the Wabash River near Terre Haute. The corporation distributed electricity throughout much of Indiana, and one of its most important affiliates was the Merchants Heat and Light Company—which eventually evolved into today’s Indianapolis Power and Light Company.

To have quick, private communications between its scattered affiliates, Indiana Electric installed an ingenious, carrier-type radio system. It was similar to the regular broadcasting equipment of the day. But a special antenna parallel to company power lines kept the radio waves following the wires instead of flying off in all directions. The whole business was installed and maintained by the group of young men who were just around the corner from founding WFBM.

Their hangout was a small radio shop on East Ohio Street. “Shooting the breeze” one night, mostly about radio, one of the gang, Clem Portman, remembered that a few days before a vice president of the corporation, John Ferguson, had idly suggested that since the company owned an extra carrier-current transmitter, it might be altered for regular broadcasting. The extra equipment originally was intended for installation in a southern Indiana town, but signals were switched and it was now gathering dust in a storeroom.

The more Portman, John Tribby, Hobart Ashlock, Frank Sharp, and others of the group thought about the possibilities, the hotter the idea became.

A few days later, by invitation, they descended on Vice President Ferguson and Thomas “Tom” Polk, the company’s public relations director. Anything they lacked in facts and figures, they made up for in enthusiasm. They must have been persuasive, because Ferguson and Polk found themselves agreeing to put in a strong plug for the scheme with top company brass.

One of the group of enthusiasts was not present for the historic selling

job. Because he wasn't employed by the company at the time, Frank Sharp elected to remain quietly chewing his nails in the office reception room while his friends made the pitch. This was about the only chapter of the WFBM saga in which Sharp was not personally involved. From the germination of the idea through forty years of service, Sharp's gentle, creative mind has helped to build WFBM. And he is still at it, as the station's competent, versatile, administrative assistant.

After the youthful founding group's promising interview, things moved quickly. Company officials came through with approval, but with some interesting qualifications. They gave Portman, Tribby, and others of the group responsibility for altering the surplus transmitter and installing it, but they decreed it was to be an extra-curricular activity. Although the company would bear the expense, the work had to be done during slack periods on the regular jobs or after hours—if they were crazy enough to spend them that way, which they were.

When the transmitter was finally completed, it was installed in the company's Harding Street plant. A fourth floor studio room of the Indianapolis Athletic Club was swathed in heavy draperies, making a sound-proof cocoon in which to hatch the still-evolving programs.

The required license was sought, approved, and later signed with a flourish by Herbert Hoover, then Secretary of Commerce. The effective date was October 23, 1924.

Before the big initial broadcast, however, there was still much testing and adjusting to be done. With the ghosts of WLK and WOH still hovering about, Portman and his crew were taking no chances. Everything had to be right.

The premiere was set for the night of the general election, November 4, when all Central Indiana would be breathlessly waiting to hear whether the country was going to "Stay Cool with Coolidge" or let the Democratic candidate, John W. Davis, take some of the credit for the economy, slated to continue booming in any case. There also was more than passing interest in the race between Republican Ed Jackson and the Democratic candidate for governor, Carleton B. McCulloch.

But WFBM was not alone in its laudable desire to bring the public the election results. *The Indianapolis News* went all out, and by pulling a few City Hall strings, the newspaper had street car and auto traffic

rerouted off Washington Street. This allowed flash election returns to be projected from *The News* building onto a large screen placed across the street on the Charles Mayer & Company building. *The Indianapolis Star* hired the Cadle Tabernacle Hall for the evening. There, election returns were flashed on a screen in front of the choir area between numbers by the Indianapolis Concert Band, under the baton of Herman Rinne. Not to be outdone, *The Indianapolis Times* also joined in and spotted its bulletins on a screen erected across Meridian Street from its building. There was some difference of opinion among the papers next day as to which had drawn the largest crowd. But it was agreed a lot of people braved chill November winds that night to be among the first to know.

WFBM on that historic occasion, perhaps foreshadowing things to come, endeavored to give the public the best of two worlds, sound and sight. That part of the populace with radio sets was given the further comfortable option of staying home and getting the news just as fast as the shivering crowds in the streets. But, caught up in the fever of projecting visible election returns, the WFBM crew decided also to hang some screens around the old Merchants Heat & Light Building at the northwest corner of Meridian and Washington Streets and to supplement their initial broadcast with screens in the street. But the major attraction, of course, was the opening broadcast. And to make sure the crowds knew just who was doing what, loudspeakers were employed from second floor windows to amplify the broadcast.

The public was alerted to all this by Merchants Heat & Light ads which invited one and all to come down to "Daylight Corner," as the location was known in company advertising, and see as well as hear the election returns. Or, as the ads reminded the citizens, they could simply stay home and hear them, courtesy of the city's newest marvel, WFBM.

Contemporary accounts of that memorable first broadcast are sparse. But apparently Portman, Tribby, Sharp, and company had made their long hours of preparation count and, despite some natural first night jitters, all went well. WFBM, as scheduled, came on the air promptly at 6 p.m. Until midnight, Chief Announcer Tribby, occasionally spelled by some of the others, kept the election news flowing with live orchestral, piano, and vocal music to tide them over between reports. Then,

with Calvin Coolidge apparently destined for four more years in the White House and Ed Jackson on his way to the State House, the tired crew quietly celebrated the beginning of a new force in the city's life and went home to bed.

WFBM had survived its first crisis—being born.

Chapter 5

PROGRAMMING PRESENTED PROBLEMS

During that first full year of WFBM broadcasting, the matter of programs was something of a problem. This wasn't unique. Most stations everywhere in those days were operated as a "public service." And since there was no charge for time, there was no money to pay performers. Luckily for WFBM, if not necessarily for the listeners, it developed that there were thousands of people clamoring to donate their services to the cause of filling up air time. This led to innumerable complications and much fast foot work on the part of those in charge of arranging programs. For them, it was a question of balancing the need for some kind of performers against the possibility that early listeners might decide radio was not yet ready.

The first national network was still a year or so away. Only a few of the older, larger, eastern stations could boast any revenue from advertisers. These were developing such radio personalities as the "Silver Masked Tenor" and bringing along such programs as the "A & P Gypsies" and the "Gold Dust Twins." Later that year, the Atwater Kent program made its debut, bringing many of the world's great musicians to the growing radio audience. For some of these early, stellar attractions, stations would link facilities in an informal network arrangement. For the inauguration of President Coolidge, twenty-one stations from Boston to San Francisco teamed up to let some 15,000,000 listeners hear "Silent Cal" speak.

Meanwhile, in Indianapolis, the succession of amateur hours which resulted from WFBM's non-existent program budget was not without its compensation. The management soon learned to spot at a distance a fond mother preparing to offer the services of a ten-year-old pianist whose speciality was playing "Chopsticks" with his nose. Those charged with scheduling programs were sometimes cheered by genuine talent showing up, and numerous local performers gained their first appreciative audience, courtesy of WFBM.

Numerous clubs, churches, musical groups, civic organizations (and even a few business establishments) soon caught the broadcast fever and arranged complete programs. The newspapers, still fascinated by the wonder of it all, gave such programs wide coverage. They printed columns of radio programs daily for stations far and wide. And, unable to resist getting into the act, they frequently arranged to sponsor their own programs on WFBM.

Some of the organizations were so enthusiastic over the new medium of expression, they made special arrangements for broadcasting programs from their own headquarters. By the end of the year, WFBM had accumulated twenty-one such "remote" broadcasts.

But it was not all amateur hours and groups beaming their own ideas of entertainment that first year. A station as Hoosier in origin and outlook as WFBM was a natural to broadcast high school basketball at the first tweet of the referee's whistle. Came the finals of the state high school basketball tournament that March, 1925, and WFBM was there. There was a sponsor, too—*The Indianapolis Times*. *The Times* not only sponsored all fifteen games—nine on Friday and six on Saturday in those days—but provided the sportscasters, too. Blythe Q. Hendricks, *Times* feature and sports writer, and his newsman brother, Thomas A. Hendricks, thus got in on the top floor of the business. The "top floor" in their case was a "cage" suspended high above the playing floor of the old Cow Barn of the State Fairgrounds. As *The Times* said, whetting the appetites of its expectant listeners, "the Hendricks brothers can see each and every play just as it takes place. Then over their direct wire from the Coliseum to the station, they will bring to listeners in a most dramatic manner the full report of every game only a second after each play."

Since the old marathon-style tourney started at 9 a.m. on Friday and wound up with the final game at 8 o'clock Saturday night, Blythe and Tommy sometimes ran short of words. To tide them over, they were relieved occasionally by such illustrious net coaches as Ward Lambert, of Purdue; Everett S. Dean, of Indiana; Edward Barry, of Iowa; and Pat Page, of Butler. The "father of basketball," Professor James Naismith, of the University of Kansas, was on hand and interviewed on the air. If he expressed any misgivings at what his baby had done to Hoosiers, it was not reported.

Carl Fohl, Radio Editor of *The Times*, filled in with pertinent comment between games of that 1925 tournament broadcast which, according to *The Times*, had an "unprecedented number of interested listeners." It was the year Frankfort won the championship by defeating Kokomo in the final game, 34 to 20. Fan mail poured into the station and *Times* offices for days. The WFBM crew got the message. Top sports coverage has been a staple in the station's fare ever since.

Another 1925 innovation was the broadcasting of religious services from various Indianapolis churches. Lester C. Nagley of *The Star* hailed the first such program in a feature story on an April Monday morning, saying: "Three Indianapolis churches were put on the air yesterday, utilizing the far-reaching influence of radio to share their good tidings of sermon and song with the country."

Pioneering the first such religious broadcast that Sunday were St. Matthew Lutheran Church, the Reverend L. C. E. Fackler, Pastor; Tabernacle Presbyterian Church, the Reverend J. Ambrose Dunkel, Pastor; and First Presbyterian Church, the Reverend Matthew F. Smith, Pastor. From such a beginning came today's extensive religious broadcasting by Indianapolis radio and television stations, whose contributions to the area's religious life have been nationally recognized.

Another WFBM coup that year was as inevitable as the state basketball tourney broadcast. It was *The Indianapolis News* this time which grabbed off sponsorship of another Hoosier classic, the 500-Mile Race. Prest-O-Lite agreed to help pick up the tab for pre-race broadcasts and the race itself. In return, the sponsor was privileged to remind listeners it was done in the spirit "of service to the thousands of users of Prest-O-Lite radio batteries." On the Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday before

the Saturday race, the daily time trial results also were relayed, in behalf of Prest-O-Lite, to WGN, Chicago.

The News, naturally, took full promotional advantage of its broadcasting pole position and left few adjectives unturned in calling attention to the “unprecedented” coverage it would give the Memorial Day event, both by radio and in its Speedway extras.

The populace also was making plans for the race broadcast, according to *The News*, which reported:

“Fred Wardwell, 1529 Woodlawn Avenue, has a loud speaker on his radio set that can be heard for two squares. He expects to use it for the advantage of his neighbors Saturday. The loud speaker will be put on the front porch during the 500-Mile Race broadcast by *The News*. He expects many people in the neighborhood, as well as automobile parties, to take advantage of the broadcast.”

Unfortunately, there was no follow-up to the story, no report on any traffic jams around the Wardwell residence or howls of protest from mothers of sleeping babies. Apparently Mr. Wardwell’s neighbors were all extremely tolerant, or 100 per cent pro-race. In any case, they were rewarded by learning as soon as did fans in the Speedway grandstands that Peter DePaolo roared in ahead of the pack in his Duesenberg Special. His average speed was 101.13 miles per hour, the first time the century speed mark had been breached at the track.

Following the race broadcast, hundreds of enthusiastic telegrams and letters came from near and far. There was no doubt that Hoosiers liked their sports hot off the airwaves. This was confirmed later that first year when the Hendricks brothers took to the mike again to broadcast a few baseball and football games.

For a few fleeting months that year of 1925, Indianapolis again had two radio stations. Noble Watson, the pioneer radio engineer who in 1922 had helped launch WOH on its brief, lively life, gave it another good try. This time he put WBBZ on the air from his home at 233 Iowa Street. But it was tough sledding, and soon he sold his equipment to the Carroll Theater Company of Chicago. This outfit specialized in shuttling portable stations from city to city, and Watson’s facilities wound up in Ponca City, Oklahoma.

Meanwhile, WFBM was growing. M. K. Foxworthy, the station man-

ager, announced construction of an additional studio on the top floor of the Indianapolis Athletic Club. It was for special broadcasts of such things as talks and program odds and ends that would give a change of pace to the almost nightly programs of Gus Edwards and his orchestra from the Club's dining room. Such flexibility has remained a WFBM trait through the years.

Chapter 6

THE WHEELER MISSION

The oldest continuous radio program in Indianapolis, perhaps in the nation, began in October, 1925. It is the weekly WFBM broadcast from the Wheeler City Rescue Mission. The inspirational program, still carried on WFBM, also holds the distinction of being the first mission broadcast anywhere, and it was one of the first regular religious broadcasts of any type.

Wallace O. Lee at that time (1925) was an official of the Indianapolis Light and Heat Company. With the merger of Indianapolis Light and Heat Company and Merchants Heat and Light Company in March, 1927, Lee became an official of the surviving company, Indianapolis Power and Light Company. He was also on the board of Wheeler Mission. As a member of that board, he participated in an Indianapolis meeting that fall of the Executive Committee of the International Union of Gospel Missions. Distinguished visitors, guests of the Reverend Herbert E. Eberhardt, Wheeler superintendent, including Dr. W. F. Paul, honored as the "dean of rescue men;" Dr. Peter MacFarlane, familiarly known as "Mr. Rescue Mission;" John Bennett, founder of a large rescue unit in Washington, D. C.; and Clem Ellis White, for twenty-five years secretary of the international organization, and others who had devoted their lives to mission work.

Lee was profoundly impressed by their stories, and a few telephone calls later he had arranged for an hour of the station's choice time so a

wider audience might share his experience. In a long-remembered broadcast from the Athletic Club studios, each of the men gave a moving account of his work. The Reverend Mr. Eberhardt served as moderator.

Response to the broadcast was heart warming, and WFBM's program director quickly asked the Wheeler Mission superintendent whether a similar program could be arranged weekly. The Wheeler board approved, and the program was launched. The original format—the singing of familiar hymns, Bible readings, and a brief inspirational message—has varied little through the years. The first program featured singers and musicians such as Gertrude and Marie Mueller, the Reverend George Heflin, and others who contributed their talent to the cause of the mission program.

Hymn-singing Hoosiers kept the mails filled with their requests for favorites, and the mission had to appeal for help in locating old hymnals. Listeners' response was immediate and continuous, and, as a result, Wheeler's library now boasts one of the most extensive collections of hymns in this part of the country.

The one-hour program originated for some years from the WFBM studios. When Wheeler Mission's new building was constructed in 1930 at 245 North Delaware Street, site of the Old Elm Saloon, special facilities were installed at the rear of the chapel for remote broadcasts. The programs originated there until 1950, when they were moved back to station studios. The hour-long program was reduced to thirty minutes after some years and during World War II became a fifteen-minute, Sunday evening feature.

Although there was no solicitation of funds for the mission's work, the program made so many friends that there was little difficulty raising \$120,000 for the present building during a one-week campaign. A drive in 1940 to erase the mission's \$40,000 debt was equally successful.

The Reverend Mr. Eberhardt, called to Washington in 1944, was succeeded by the Reverend Leonard C. Hunt, who has continued the vital work of Wheeler Mission. He still admits to feeling both a little humble and a little proud when he introduces the Sunday evening programs with, "This is your Wheeler Mission program, the first rescue mission to broadcast in America, the oldest continuous radio program in Indianapolis."

Through the years, WFBM's succeeding owners and managers have shared Mr. Hunt's sentiments. When the successor to Merchant's Heat & Light, the Indianapolis Power & Light Company, sold the station in 1939, the new management announced: "The Wheeler Mission broadcasts have become a proud tradition of this station and will be continued."

Amen.

Chapter 7

HERE TO STAY

In 1926, even the diehards began admitting radio was more than just a fascinating toy. Programs were improving. Advertising dollars had started trickling in. And broadcasting began shedding its hobby status, emerging as a full-fledged business. Set ownership in the country was approaching the eight million mark.

Radio as a source of home entertainment and information received a big boost late that year with formation of the first nation-wide network. The National Broadcasting Company was born on November 15, with WEAJ, New York, as its key station. The network embraced a group of nineteen scattered stations hooked together by some 3,500 miles of special telephone wires.

Network affiliation was still to come for WFBM, but, all in all, it was a rewarding year for Indianapolis radio fans. The city's first full-scale radio exposition was staged by dealers and jobbers in the Manufacturers' Building at the State Fairgrounds. And, late in the year, another station set up shop in the city.

All the stops were pulled to make the exposition a howling success. *The News* devoted a 24-page special tabloid section to the event a few days before the October 25 opening. The front page summed up the changing view of radio, proclaiming:

"RADIO, the Modern Miracle in Your Home . . . Radio brings the whole world's entertainment resources into your home. It never fails to

inspire, to entertain, to inform, to instruct, to thrill, to fascinate. Homes with radio are the richer and happier for it. One needn't try to understand it, just enjoy it."

The thousands who thronged the exposition, for the most part, were ready to take *The News'* advice. They had long ago given up trying to understand radio, and they were ready to sit down and "just enjoy it." They came to the show to shop for bigger, better sets, preferably one with the goose neck loudspeaker which was fast replacing the ear cramping headphones. They came also to see and hear the nationally famous radio personalities and announcers, themselves happy to give a boost to the budding industry whose explosive growth was carrying them with it to greater fame and fortune.

The exposition even had a "Radio Queen." She was Miss Gladys May Ewbank of 3456 Salem Street, whose essay on the wonders and advantages of radio had been judged best in a well-publicized contest. WFBM stretched its usual broadcast hours to put on a special program from 9 to 11 o'clock each night of the exposition.

At about the same time, WFBM began a program late on Friday nights that is still recalled with quiet pleasure by many a pioneer listener in the area. It was an all-request program of music with Dessa Byrd at the console of the Circle Theater organ. The theater manager, Ace Berry, usually announced the program and urged listeners to call or to write their requests. Seldom was Miss Byrd stumped, and thousands of local listeners made a habit through the years of beginning their weekends with her late, Friday night melodies.

Shortly after the first Radio Exposition, an old hand at broadcasting, Noble Watson, teamed up with his brother Carl to again bring Indianapolis another station. With an appropriate promotional flurry, station WKBF became one of the few stations, if not the only one, to begin life in an automobile dealer's showroom. WKBF went on the air November 29, 1926, from the Ford Motor Company's location at 1315 East Washington Street. The live broadcast was beamed directly from a special studio in the showroom where a display of new Fords competed for the attention of more than 2,000 spectators. The first close-up of broadcasting proved so fascinating that the Watsons and their crew stayed on the air an hour longer than scheduled.

The station kept up the pace for a week in its temporary location, presenting programs arranged by such institutions as the Metropolitan School of Music. Letters arrived from as far away as Wheeling, West Virginia, hailing the new station and proudly testifying to "loud and clear reception."

On December 10, WKBF settled down in its permanent home on the second floor of the Hoosier Athletic Club at 902 North Meridian Street. Its first regular broadcast featured Kathleen Bumbaugh, contralto, with Helene Harrison Glossbrenner at the piano. Russ Holler and his Hoosier Athletic Club orchestra also took part.

The Watson brothers left no doubt that their new venture was a business operation. A regular schedule of broadcasting would be offered with commercial time sold by the hour. And they wooed prospective advertisers with word that WKBF reception was consistently good within one hundred miles of Indianapolis.

Chapter 8

THE GOLDEN ERA DAWNS

Any way you look at it, 1927 was a banner year for radio. And what was good for radio was good, or at least enjoyable, for the country. Lindbergh made his historic flight to Paris that spring—and radio flashed the word. Radio fans were howling with the “Two Black Crows,” Moran and Mack, as they expounded on the merits of “goofer feathers”—the fuzz off peaches. The first coast-to-coast network broadcast brought the Rose Bowl Game into millions of living rooms to start the year with a bang. The nation’s economy was still climbing its roller coaster tracks, with the breath-taking plunge from the top more than two years away. Big national advertisers, such as Dodge, Listerine, Wrigley and Studebaker, discovered radio. And, in September, Indianapolis fight fans were able to start wrangling immediately over the “long count” in the Dempsey-Tunney bout in Chicago, thanks to Graham McNamee, NBC, and the fact that both WFBM and WKBF elected to carry the ringside account. It was the city’s first network program.

One of the less memorable early events of that crowded year was the Circle Theater’s well-meaning attempt to find a more fitting word than “announcer” for “the gentlemen who stand before the microphones as interlocutors.” The contest was popular and produced some highly interesting suggestions, all of which were ignored by the public.

The state high school basketball tourney finals and the 500-Mile Race broadcasts helped enliven the Hoosier spring that year, as usual. The

Hendricks brothers, by now professionals at the business, were again at the microphone for WFBM's tourney finals broadcast. For the Memorial Day classic, the station again teamed with *The Star*, lined up a sterling broadcast crew including Dwight Craig, E. M. Ragland, Jr., James Carvin, Bailey Fesler, Gene Barth, J. F. Connell, Miller Hamilton, Merle Scott, Dan V. Goodman, and Chester Rubush. *The News* lined up with WKBF to broadcast the race, "as the radio fan wishes it to be put into the microphone."

But Indianapolis was hit by a destructive tornado on May 18, 1927. There was heavy damage, particularly on the near east side, and vagrant winds knocked out the WFBM transmitter. As a result, the station was off the air for several weeks.

On June 17, the formal opening of the luxurious new Indiana Theater took place. And WKBF, which had managed to stay on the air, carried the news. City and state dignitaries gave their customary blessing during impressive ceremonies and stayed to see Lewis Stone as the "Prince of Head Waiters." The cornerstone for the Indiana War Memorial was laid, appropriately enough, on the Fourth of July that year, and in November Butler University officially opened its new Fairview Campus.

The Dempsey-Sharkey fight in July was broadcast from Yankee Stadium in New York with Graham McNamee at the microphone. The Scripps-Howard newspapers, working both sides of the coverage street, sponsored the broadcast. Neither of the Indianapolis stations was set up to carry the direct network account, but WKBF improvised with a fast-paced, blow-by-blow account recreated from wire reports. Commenting on the network broadcast to which most of Indiana apparently was tuned that night, *The News* approvingly declared:

"Certainly the broadcasting Thursday night proved the value of radio as an entertainment medium for the entire country. Dempsey's wife in Los Angeles heard the account and the decision as quickly as those in the \$25 seats at the ringside . . . In Indianapolis Friday, listeners were commenting on the fact that Dempsey's voice was heard at the close of the scrap, of the loudness with which the gong came through the loudspeaker, and how well the voice of Graham McNamee carried even through the blanket of static which settled down early in the evening. KDKA (Pittsburgh), according to reports, was up to old tricks of fading out, but WLW (Cincinnati), afforded good reception."

With both Indianapolis stations carrying the Dempsey-Tunney fight a few months later, by way of the Red Network of the NBC, static and fading were reduced to a minor irritation. The broadcast was roundly hailed, and thousands of Hoosier fight fans felt a deep, personal commitment to one or the other of the participants in the disputed finale, because they “were right there” when it happened.

WFBM warmed up its fight audience with a program by the Indianapolis Athletic Club orchestra and a Mary Traub Busch presentation of “The Mayor of Tokyo” in tabloid form. WKBF’s pre-fight come-on included the Vagabonds Banjo Quartet; Larry Fly, pianist; and Thurston Spangler, soloist.

There was a “fight” of another sort in Indianapolis that year involving the two stations, which by now were beginning to feel their competitive oats. In this tiff, the newly appointed Federal Radio Commission was the referee. It began quietly enough when, early in the year, Dan V. Goodman, Radio Editor of *The Star*, relayed the word that the FRC was allocating new wave and power assignments to more than 600 stations, and that the FRC expected them to stay in their assigned grooves without wandering off across the airwaves. The stations were promised a chance to change their minds later, but only with the formal blessing of the Commission.

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION
 LAT. 39°-40' N LONG. 86° 10' W

Official No. _____

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
 FEDERAL RADIO COMMISSION

APPLICATION FOR RADIO STATION LICENSE
 (OTHER THAN SHIP AND AMATEUR)

(Submit in triplicate to District Supervisor of Radio. Swear to one copy)

To the Federal Radio Commission *duplicate*

1. Name of applicant INDIANAPOLIS POWER AND LIGHT COMPANY (W-T-B-M)
2. Post office address: State Indiana City Indianapolis
 Street Monument Circle Number 48
3. Citizenship American
4. If a corporation, company, or association:
 (a) Organized under laws of State of Indiana
 (b) May one-fifth, or more, of capital stock be voted by an alien or his representative or by a foreign government or the representative thereof? No
 (c) State name and position of any director or officer who is an alien:
None
 (d) If applicant is a subsidiary, state name and address of parent company:
Utility Power & Light Company, Chicago, Illinois
5. Is the applicant the representative of an alien or foreign government? No
6. Has the applicant, since February 23, 1927, been found guilty by any Federal Court of unlawfully monopolizing, or attempting to unlawfully monopolize, radio communication through control of manufacture or sale of radio apparatus, exclusive traffic arrangements, or any other means, or by unfair methods of competition? No
7. Description of transmitting apparatus:
 (a) Spark apparatus: Make None Type _____
 Input power to transformer _____
 (b) Arc apparatus: Make None Type _____
 Power _____
 (c) Tube apparatus: Make COMPOSITE Type _____
 Output power of oscillator or amplifier tube 1000 watts
 C. W., I. C. W., or phone? Phone

7. Description of transmitting apparatus, etc.—Continued.

Electron tubes, number of 17
Oscillators: Number of 4 Plate current 1 amp. Plate voltage 2000
Modulators: Number of 6 Plate current 1.1 amp. Plate voltage 2000
RECTIFIERS 6
Filament voltage 10-volt Filament current 15 amp. per tube

8. Location of transmitter: State Indiana County Marion
City or town Indianapolis Street 1037 No. 1037
LAT. 39° 44' N. LONG. 86° 10' W.

9. Was station constructed or was the construction of the station continued after February 23, 1927?
Continued under Construction Permit dated Oct. 13-1927

10. The class of license requested to be issued to the applicant is Broadcasting
(Broadcasting, point to point public or private, coastal, experimental)

11. Time, wave length or frequency, and power requested are as follows:

(a) Time Unlimited. Usually operate from 2 P.M. to 12:30 A.M.
(Specify the days of the week and the hours)
every day in the week. Regular schedule, with definite set
programs, are worked up months in advance. Special features
added as occasion requires, any hour of the day or night

(b) Wave length 275.1 meters (frequency of 1090 kilocycles).

(c) Maximum power 1000 watts.

12. If broadcasting station:

(a) During the last preceding year—
(1) What wave lengths have been used? 257.7 and 225.4 and 275.1
(2) What power output has been employed? 250 watts
(3) What days of the week and at what hours did the station regularly operate during the year?
Sunday - 9:30 A.M. to 9:30 P.M.
Monday - 5:30 P.M. to 12:00 Midnight
Tuesday - 2:00 to 7:30 P.M.

12. If broadcasting station, etc.—Continued.

Wednesday - 5:30 to 12:00 Midnight
Thursday - 2:00 to 7:30 P.M.
Friday - 5:30^{P.M.} to 12:30 A.M.
Saturday - Silent

(4) What was the total number of hours the station operated during the year? 1500 approx.

(5) Was the station connected by land wires to any other station? N.B.C. periodic

- (6) What service is proposed to be rendered? National, state and local items of commercial, industrial, agricultural and domestic interest, such as weather reports, markets, general business, news, instructions and enlightenment on the above; also covering civic matters, such as safety, schools; also religion, music, general entertainment, domestic help talks, sports, etc. In fact all subjects of general and local interest, in a well-balanced program.
- (c) Why will the operation of the station be in the public convenience, interest, and necessity?

Indianapolis, the capital, located in the center of the state, far enough removed from other broadcasting stations of consequence, makes it the logical location for such a station. We are pioneers, furnishing a service recognized by the general public to be of interest and value, due to our broadcasting of national, state and local items of commercial, industrial, agricultural and domestic interest, along with high grade entertainment.

- (d) Location of studios:

Indianapolis Athletic Club, 350 N. Meridian St.

- (e) Will station be connected by land wires to other stations? Yes - N.B.C.

12. If broadcasting station, etc.—Continued.

(f) Will the applicant sell time? Not at this time, but under consideration.

(g) If applicant does not propose to sell time, how will station be supported? As a good-will and promotional expense in connection with company business.

(h) State minimum number of hours station will be operated during each quarter:
At least nine hundred (900) hours

13. If point to point station, state names of stations with whom it is proposed to communicate:

None

14. If coastal public-service station, state hours during which the station will be open to public service and the minimum and other rates:

None

15. The applicant waives any claim to the use of any particular frequency or wave length or of the ether as against the regulatory power of the United States because of the previous use of the same, whether by license or otherwise, and requests a radio station license in accordance with this application.

Dated this 5th day of December, 19 27

INDIANA POLIS POWER & LIGHT COMPANY
Applicant.
Radio Director

STATE OF Indiana)
COUNTY OF Marion) ss:

M. K. Foxworthy, being first duly sworn, upon his oath deposes and says that he is the Radio Director
(If applicant is not an individual, insert "agent of")
above-named applicant and that the facts stated in the foregoing application are true of his own knowledge.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 5th day of December, 19 27

My commission expires Sept. 20, 1930

Marshall V. Fish
Notary Public.

RADIO SUPERVISOR'S REPORT

Application received.....

Remarks:

On June 1, WFBM switched from 1120 to 1330 kilocycles, WKBF from 1230 to 1190 kilocycles. A short time later, WFBM applied to the FRC to change to 1090 kilocycles and increase its power from 250 to 1,000 watts. At the subsequent hearing, in Washington, D.C., the request was pushed by M. K. Foxworthy, Commercial Manager; Everitt M. Shinn, Engineer; and Bailey Fesler, Program Director. A Washington attorney, Thomas P. Littlepage, former Boonville resident, shored up the legal end. While the Commission pondered a decision, WFBM appealed to listeners to drop the station a line emphasizing the need for much stronger and better broadcasting facilities in the Hoosier capital.

FAN SAYS IT WITH INK.



One Indiana radio fan, G. D. Leyenberger of Balnbridge, sent in his indorsement of Station WFBM's request to the Federal radio commission for higher power in the form of the cartoon reproduced above. The cartoon came to the Indianapolis Power and Light Company without comment. WFBM officials said it was a vivid and graphic portrayal of the situation.

EXPENSES OF EVERETT N. SHINN
ON TRIP TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

Period from August 8th to 10th inclusive, 1927.

Railroad Fare.....	\$64.90
Taxi.....	1.45
Meals and Tips.....	4.15
Car Fare.....	.25
Hotel.....	4.00
Total	74.75

APPROVED: _____

In addition to the above--

Mailing Letters to the Federal Radio Commission,
Monday evening by registered mail..... \$2.20

EXPENSES OF BAILEY PESLER ON TRIP TO
WASHINGTON, D. C.

Period from August 8th to 10th inclusive, 1927.

Railroad Fare.....	\$64.90
Meals.....	7.20
Stenographer.....	1.00
Telegrams67
Tips	1.75
Hotel	5.00
Total.....	80.52

APPROVED: _____



The 1927 transmitter for Radio Station WFBM, located on South Meridian Street in an old one-room school house, later rebuilt to house the day's newest and most modern broadcasting equipment.

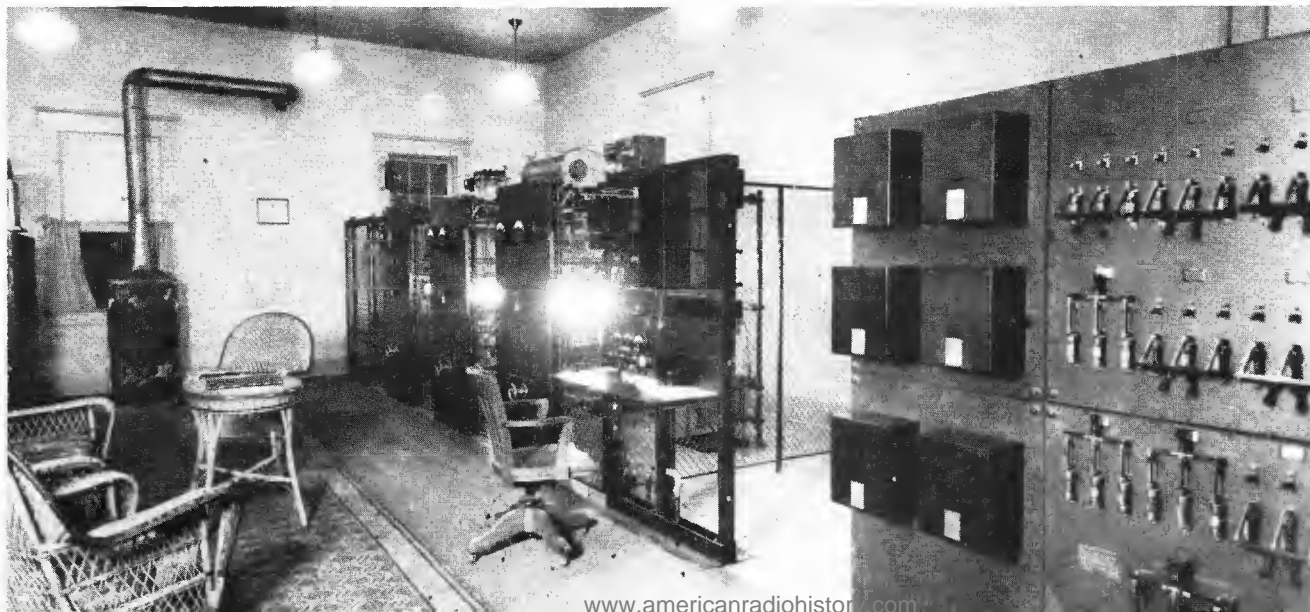


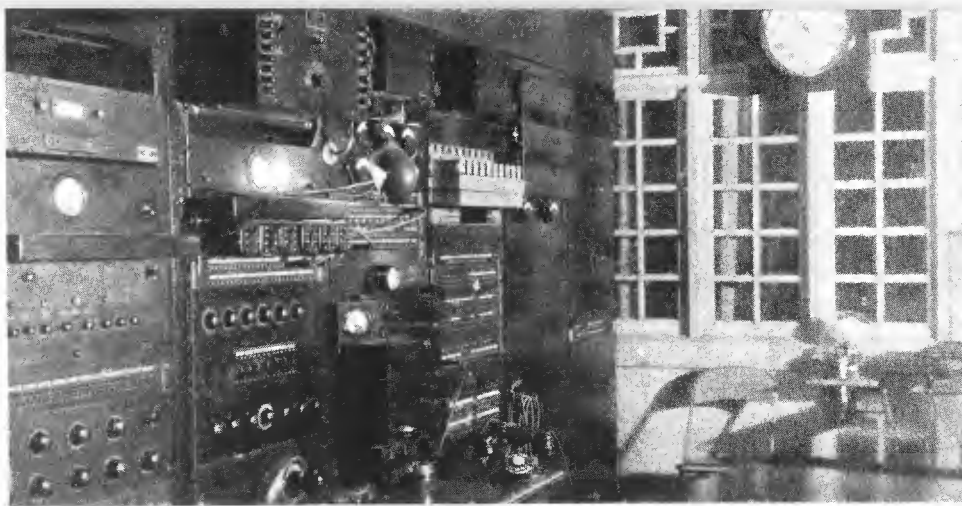
While this was going on, WKBF had asked for a power increase to 500 watts. It was also claimed WFBM had no business requesting 1,000 watts, because it was off the air for some time as a result of the tornado damage, and therefore, it was contended, WFBM should be considered as a new applicant. Later, however, WKBF backtracked a little, saying that if its request was granted, the WFBM plans would not be opposed. WKBF warned that, otherwise, it would be forced to “gang up” with other stations outside Indiana to oppose the WFBM application.

When the Commission ruling came in early October, confusion and indignation prevailed all around. The decision allowed both stations to increase power to 1,000 watts, but it called for them to share time on the same wave length. Happily, before the order became effective, the Commission went back into a huddle and rescinded it. On the second go-around, WFBM’s original request for 1,000 watts on 1330 kilocycles was granted. WKBF was also boosted to 1,000 watts and allowed to keep its 1090 spot on the dials. But both stations were told to pack up their transmitters and get them out of town.

This was the first of many moves for WFBM, whose transmitter and studios both led vagabond lives in the early years. The standing staff joke was “Where do we go to work tomorrow?” Early in 1927, the transmitter had been moved from the parent utility’s Harding Street plant to the Stevenson Building at Kruse and Daly Streets. Following the Commission’s order, the engineers packed up again to take the transmitter about eight miles south of the city on what is now Indiana 135. Several other shorter moves followed before the station’s transmitting facilities,

First transmitter equipment used by WFBM Radio. The operation was housed in a remodeled, one-room school house.





WFBM Radio Master Control Room, housing this very modern broadcast equipment in early studios at 227 North Pennsylvania Street.

considerably expanded and improved, came to rest at their present location on Millersville Road near Indiana 100.

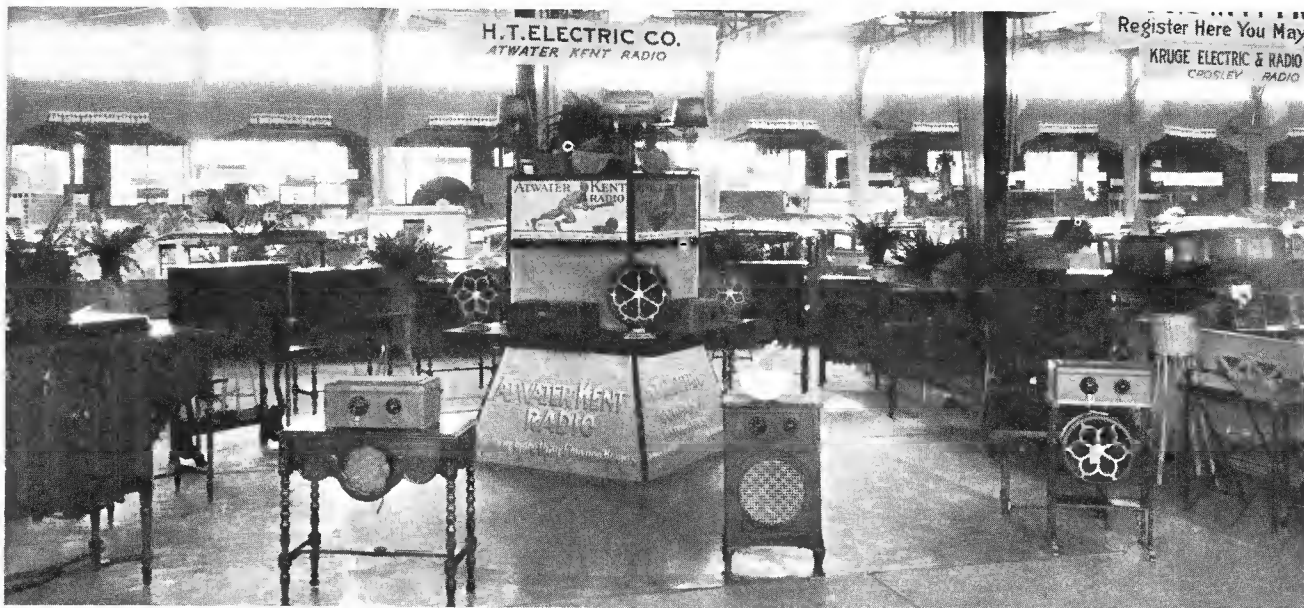
WKBF responded to the Commission order by moving its transmitter from the Watson home at 233 Iowa Street to a location west of the city, near Clermont. Today, WIRE—successor to WKBF—has its transmitter northwest of Indianapolis, near 44th Street and Knowlton Road.

The WFBM studios also meandered around considerably. The heavily draped room on the fourth floor of the Indianapolis Athletic Club had served well in the formative years, providing a radio home for such musical stalwarts of the earlier '20's as Charlie Davis and his orchestra, a young singer named Dick Powell, and the late Jack Tilson with his cohorts. Now, growth brought a need for more convenient quarters. The studios were shifted to the third floor of a building at 227 North Pennsylvania Street, only to be moved again in 1934 to the second floor of what is now the *Star-News* Building on North Pennsylvania. Moving time came again early in 1937, when the fourth and fifth floors at 48 Monument Circle became “home” for the wandering station. A convenient and congenial neighbor in the building here was the Indianapolis Press Club. The final studio move came in 1951 with the completion of the new WFBM building at 1330 North Meridian Street.

WKBF also had a congestion problem that year, and shortly before Christmas, 1927, an additional studio was opened on the mezzanine floor of the Severin Hotel. The idea was to alternate programs from it and the home base in the Hoosier Athletic Club. The advantage was primarily one of traffic control. As the station announcement pointed out, “It has been our experience that fifteen musicians cannot leave a studio as another group enters without causing confusion. For example, a program

often ends at 8 o'clock, and another starts immediately. Yet time must be allowed for the shift in musicians." Thus, WKBF management erased the interesting possibility of seeing and hearing two bass violin players, with instruments, steer collision courses through the same door.

The new glass-enclosed Severin studio was spacious by the day's standards—15 by 30 feet—and draped in black cloth underlaid with burlap. Ceiling drapes in bright colors gave a canopied effect, with spotlights above the glass front blending, according to contemporary accounts, "into a picturesque and dramatic setting." From the standpoint of the spectator, his nose pressed against the glass front, the set-up was ideal.



Popularity of radio had grown to such a degree that in 1928 the first Communications Exhibit was presented in the Manufacturer's Building at the Indiana State Fair Grounds, showing the latest in radio cabinet design.

The practice of radio's showing off its wares to the public by means of the goldfish bowl technique had received a boost a few months earlier at the rousing radio exposition and fair in the State Fairgrounds Manufacturers' Building. Local radio dealers and jobbers, members of the Indianapolis Radio Distributors and Jobbers Association, combined forces for the extravaganza. In addition to displaying the latest model receivers and all the accessories, the show featured daily programs over a port-

able, 250-watt station, KGFO. Mounted on a truck, complete with a 30-foot aerial atop a glass body, the station exposed every aspect of the broadcasting process to thousands of delighted fans.

Early in the year, Merchants Heat and Light Company merged with the Indianapolis Light and Heat Company to form the new Indianapolis Power and Light Company. WFBM went right on broadcasting, but Norman Perry, president of the new utility, announced some station management changes. These included appointment of the newsman and sometime sportscaster, Blythe Hendricks, as the new managing director. Other appointments included Bailey Fesler, chief announcer and program director; Everitt Shinn, engineer in charge of the technical department; and Frank Sharp, chief monitor of remote broadcasting. Miss Louise Moss was named to double as station hostess and accompanist.

While broadcasting in Indianapolis had made significant strides within a few short years, there remained a somewhat casual, informal air about the business. In the daily schedule when there was nothing very worthwhile to present, the station simply went off the air. And it didn't resume until something deemed worthy of hearing came along.

Programs for a typical day in 1927, with the time gaps showing, read:

WFBM

- 2:00 p.m.—American Legion Program
- 2:45 p.m.—Greene's Flower Shop Talk
- 3:00 p.m.—Johnny Kime
- 6:00 p.m.—White's Cafeteria Knife and Fork Club Orchestra,
 Johnnie Robinson, Director
- 6:30 p.m.—George Irish, Athletic Club Orchestra
 Pasquali Montani, Claypool Orchestra
- 7:30 p.m.—Pay-o-Mist Serenaders
- 8:30 p.m.—American Legion Boxing Show

WKBF

- 10:00 a.m.—Recipe Exchange
- 10:30 a.m.—Market, Weather, Farm Bulletins
- 10:40 a.m.—Musical Program
- 12 noon —Organ Recital by Burnett Burkett, from Zaring's
 Egyptian Theater
- 7:00 p.m.—Late News Bulletins
- 7:30 p.m.—Indiana College of Music Program

Chapter 9

FARM AND PULPIT



Rural Indiana residents, if anything, were ahead of their city cousins in their early and sustained enthusiasm for radio. Cow-path roads were still abundant over many areas of the state in the late 1920's. Communication facilities were not much better in some parts. But with radio, the farmer and his family enjoyed instant access to the world of information and entertainment. Their interest, too—in such items as timely livestock market and weather reports—was certainly far from casual. WFBM management, early in the game, had sized up the opportunity and potential and had begun a daily noontime program beamed specifically to farm homes.

Then, one day along in 1926, a young man walked into the station to say he thought it might be a good idea for him to make a broadcast about farm life. The man was Henry S. Wood, Farm Editor of *The Star* and a regular contributor to farm publications. Since he was well known at WFBM and things were a little



Henry Wood was the popular WFBM Farm Editor for twenty years. His first broadcast was 1926.

dull anyway that day, Wood was in front of a microphone almost before you could say “feedlot.” A highly successful 20-year relationship began as casually as that.

Filling ten minutes a day with chit-chat on farm affairs was “quite a chore,” as Wood recalled years later. But with the help of many Hoosier farm leaders, county agents, 4-H members, the Farm Bureau, and other knowledgeable groups, the program continued to pick up interest. Eventually, it graduated to a 30-minute, daily program, “The Hoosier Farm Circle.” Amateur musicians and entertainers were still dropping into the station on the off-chance of an audition. Wood grabbed many of these from waiting room chairs for his program. Some professional musicians—Pete French, Paul Burton, Jack Simpson, and Tommy Moriarity—had come to work for the station part-time and wound up as “The Haymakers,” a regular program feature.

Wood developed some techniques which were widely copied and which have since become fairly standard in farm programming. He was primarily responsible for the first broadcasts from WFBM’s glass-enclosed booth by the Administration Building at the State Fairgrounds. It was there he began to grab any available visiting celebrities or just typical rural fairgoers for a “folksy” interview. But Wood didn’t wait for entertainment or interviewees to come to him. He hit the Hoosier county fair circuit—doing live broadcasts, staging amateur contests, and bringing

winner winners to the Coliseum for a Saturday night program at the State Fair. And frequently he would lug the cumbersome portable recording equipment of that day into a barnyard for a friendly visit with one of his constituents. The next day the inter-



“The Haymakers,” popular music-makers on the Henry Wood “Hoosier Farm Circle” program. Standing, from left to right, are Paul Burton, Douglas Way, and Jackson Simpson; seated are Tom Moriarity and Pete French.

WFBM constructed the first permanent radio studio at the Indiana State Fair Grounds in 1926. Thousands of visitors stopped to see the full-time operation of the station and to meet radio personalities.



view would be put on the air, with the sound of clucking chickens, cowbells, and other noises providing an authentic farm background.

Wood stepped upon the national radio stage briefly as master of ceremonies for a remote control network broadcast from Lebanon when the first electric power pole was set there to start the nation's rural electrification program.

A Wood strong point was the development of the human interest angle in interviews. With such personalities as Actor John Barton, the indolent "Jeeter Lester" of *Tobacco Road*, or Stewart Donnelly, celebrated international confidence man, it was not much of a trick. But the tongue-tied farm boy, his giggling little sister, and the like, often called for the last ounce of Wood's friendly, encouraging charm. One interview, recalled now with a chuckle, almost cost him his job. Ad libbing on the air one day with the girl friend of a notorious midwestern hoodlum, Wood was struck with her modest dress, lack of makeup, and general air of innocence.

"Why," he exclaimed, "she looks like an ordinary Hoosier girl walking down the aisle in church on Sunday morning."

From the scorching letters and phone calls that flooded the station, it was apparent that a lot of ordinary Hoosier girls and their admirers were not flattered by the comparison.

After twenty years with WFBM, Wood developed a throat ailment which curbed his radio activities. Still proud of his place in the early family life of WFBM, Wood subsequently has spent most of his time in traveling, in writing, and in photographing the Indiana scene. He maintains a home at New Palestine, but in recent years he has spent much time watching the Ohio River roll by, from another home on the river bank at Madison.

About the time Henry Wood was making his niche on the WFBM schedule, another program was given a trial run, a run which

Frank O. Sharp, Administrative Assistant of the WFBM Stations—pictured here on the right—was a one man engineer operation in this 1927 radio remote broadcast. At left is Me Sidener.



was to continue for a quarter of a century, from 1926 to 1955. This was the celebrated “Christian Men’s Builders’ (CMB) Hour,” broadcast Sunday mornings from the Third Christian Church, then at 17th and Broadway. Sparkplug of the class for many years was Merle Sidener, former Indianapolis newspaper editor and a principal in Sidener-Van Riper advertising agency—now an integral part of Caldwell, Larkin & Sidener-Van Riper. Organized in 1913, the CMB was promising enough to incorporate two years later.

At the outset, “Side,” as he was known to practically everyone, was less than enthusiastic about broadcasting. His was a demonstrative nature, and he was quite a platform athlete. Wound up and going strong, he would pace through his inspirational message, punctuating his points with rifle shots of common sense and humor. Being tied to a microphone might spoil his aim, he argued, and some of his close colleagues shared his fear that some of his remarks while “talking straight from the shoulder” occasionally might be misconstrued.

“Side,” however, did agree to give it a try. Ray Harrington, Joe Lutes, Earl Robinson, and other class members were given the green light to make arrangements for a one-month schedule, beginning in April, 1926. The response was instantaneous and laudatory. Messages poured in from shut-ins, the elderly, and a host of other citizens whose lives and spirits were given a needed boost by “Side’s” stirring words. This settled the objections. In November, the CMB Hour went on the air regularly.

There was a brief period of fumbling for the proper format for the program. There was also the problem of going gracefully on and off the air and of filling those long pauses while someone decided what to do or say next. But the rough edges were soon smoothed. Class members were drafted to be directors, announcers, and technicians; through the years such men as Wallace Sims, Marion Clark, Tom King, and many others gave the program a professional gloss.

The CMB Glee Club introduced each program with “Stout Hearted Men.” The CMB Orchestra provided incidental music during announcements. Class members learned to start and stop singing on cue, and a system of signal lights helped everyone to keep on schedule until a male quartette closed the program with “Sweet Hour of Prayer.”

There was nothing static about CMB. Its motto, “We help young men

make good,” was more than a catch phrase, as dozens of today’s successful Indianapolis citizens will testify.

To accommodate the crowds at Easter, the class was forced to move to the Zaring Theater, and WFBM went along to help “Side” and the others spread their special kind of message. CMB sponsored a special train trip to the 1934 “Century of Progress” Exposition in Chicago, giving some 600 class members, their families, and friends a long remembered Labor Day weekend.

A milestone occurred on Sunday, May 31, 1936, when the 500th broadcast was celebrated with a special program. Tribute was paid to some of the many groups in the state who attended classes regularly by radio. Among those saluted were the Home for Aged Women, Sunnyside Sanatorium, and Veterans’ Hospital, Indianapolis; the Masonic Home, Franklin; and Odd Fellows Home, Greensburg.

The following year, the class held a “Radio Contest of Towns.” Entrants included Connersville, Crawfordsville, Franklin, and Greensburg. The winner, Greensburg, then played host to a typical class session one fine Sunday afternoon, with WFBM on hand to keep it authentic.

About every two years thereafter, similar celebrations marked the passing of another one hundred CMB Sunday morning broadcasts. The total had stretched beyond the 1,400 mark when the final program over WFBM was presented on May 29, 1955. The class broadcasts continued at various times on other stations, and in recent years they have been heard over WFMS-FM with Robert Book as teacher. But with or without radio, CMB has continued to thrive. Loyal members who joined in celebrating the class’s 50th Anniversary in March, 1963, included many whose fathers had been spurred on to greater effort and to more Christian living by “Side’s” words and example. Mr. Sidener continued as teacher and leader of CMB until his death on May 10, 1948. Inspired by his enthusiasm, a number of influential speakers had been persuaded to substitute for him occasionally through the years, and many continued to fill in as teacher after his death.

Chapter 10

STUCK WITH STATIC

Static had been the bugaboo of radio listeners since Marconi began sending code signals across the English Channel in 1899. By 1928, with set ownership nearing the 10 million mark, there were about 10 million families griped about static. When it was learned that much of the interference was man-made, they had an identifiable target for their irritation. The war with static was on.

Indianapolis entered the fray with typical thoroughness. An organization was formed and a fund drive started. Early in 1928, a community-wide effort got under way to raise \$6,000 to fight static. *The News* outlined the problem in a feature story on Feb. 14, which read in part:

“As the first step in a city-wide plan to eliminate interferences to radio reception, A. J. Allen, secretary of the Broadcast Listener’s Association, will give talks over WFBM and WKBF. His placing of the seriousness of the interference problem before the set owner is the result of wholesale complaints from every part of the city, but especially the east and south parts, to the effect that ‘man-made static’ is in many instances completely ruining reception. Many listeners report that Indianapolis stations are ‘taken out’ by buzzes and roars. . . . The Broadcast Listener’s Association for a long period has cleared up bad cases of interference. However, the men who worked nights on the interference crews were merely members of the Association, with advanced radio knowledge, and who gave their time that radio reception in the city might be bettered. None received pay. After clearing 2,000 cases of radio interference membership did not gain. Several months ago the interference trouble shooters disbanded.

“Interference noises have increased by leaps and bounds. Recently the entire Broad Ripple area was ‘out’ because of an electrical disturbance. William Mow, chairman of the Association, and a group of his associates started at 63rd and Central, finally wound up at 45th and Keystone. Trouble was spotted at a power station. It was immediately rectified and by 7 p.m. sets could once again receive clear reception. It has now reached the place where ‘something ought to be done.’”

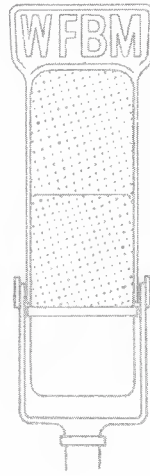
One recommendation of the campaign leaders was to have listeners pay at least one dollar annually to keep interference crews on the job. Pledge blanks ran in the newspapers, and WFBM and WKBF braved the static-laden air to plead for support into the homes. Business firms contributed \$25 to \$100 each, and the Indianapolis Radio Distributor’s Association kicked in \$500. It was the great static war of 1928 which brought WFBM and WKBF together. On Leap Year Night, the two linked talent, facilities, and their hearts in a combined promotion for the cause. It was billed as a “Fun Frolic” and originated from the WFBM studios. The immediate purpose was to ballyhoo a meeting the next night at Shortridge High School, then at Pennsylvania and North Streets. The meeting was planned to whip all listeners into a lather over the problem and get the fund drive rolling.

The meeting brought out the listeners en masse, and that old devil static took a terrific drubbing. It was the turning point in the war. Team captains volunteered to scour at least twenty-four neighborhoods for contributions. Other fund raising plans were agreed upon, and everyone went to work. But come the windup, the contributions came to little more than \$3,000 of the \$6,000 goal. The sponsors glumly returned the money to donors, as agreed, and went home to their radios. As one old-timer remembers it, the static was particularly bad that night.

Only with the later development of better transmitting equipment and receivers, plus voluntary suppression of the worst sources of man-made static, was the howling dragon subdued.

Chapter 11

EARLY PEP UNLIMITED



Some people may think disc jockeys, like the poor, have been always with us. Just who first thought of mixing platter and patter into a sometimes agreeable combination is uncertain. But there's no doubt about Indianapolis' first disc jockey. He was Don Hastings. The time was along in January, 1928, and the station was WFBM. Hastings has another "first" to his credit. He was first to force a crew of the station's technicians to show up for work at the unheard of hour of 7 a.m. Until Hastings came along, everyone had a good night's sleep and came in refreshed to begin the day's broadcasting at 11 o'clock. But the "Pep Unlimited Club" began stirring the town up early. Hastings had a talent for gab and mixed a stimulating potpourri of sprightly chatter, wise cracks, time and weather information, interviews, and off-beat stunts. In between, he spun such numbers as "A Cottage Small By a Waterfall," "Doodle-De-Do" and "Ramona." There was more than an occasional paid spot announcement.

"Pep Unlimited" was not a one-man show. Hastings was known as the "Conductor," Pete Gruman was "Brakeman," and Bert Post, the "Engineer." Since that was before the day of diesel locomotives, Hastings soon decided his train needed a "Fireman" or better yet, a "Firewoman," even if only an honorary one. With typical gusto, the crew set about recruiting the missing member among listeners. More than 2,000 aspiring "Firewomen" sent in their photographs, from which the

overworked judges chose Mary Tansey as the young woman the Hastings crew would most like to ride the rails with. The train theme was also kept on the track by publicity stunts. At one time the crew showed up at the Monon's 38th Street Station to take over the cab of the Chicago train and to induct several puzzled trainmen into the Pep Club. A round of ceremonies and photos wound up with the christening of the train, which chugged on its way as "The Pep Unlimited Special."

In giving the correct time on the Pep Unlimited Club, Hastings, for no particular reason, began identifying it as "Indianapolis wrist watch time." Like Joe Penner's immortal and equally inane, "Wanna buy a duck?" the phrase caught on, and it was soon being run into the ground in countless Hoosier households.

Somewhat more tangible proof of the club's popularity occurred about a year after its debut. The crew decided to publish a Pep Unlimited log, to include pictures of the gang and the program listings for WFBM, WKBF, and for WLW, Cincinnati. With the price set at ten cents, Hastings thought 2,000 might be sold eventually. The initial printing was gone in a week, and 5,000 more were ordered and in the mail within a short time.

Even more gratifying to WFBM owners was the boost Hastings and his club gave to the sale of spot announcements. The prevailing rate at the time was six announcements for \$12 or \$18, depending upon the time of day. With the pulling power of Pep Unlimited established, Hastings raised the going rate to six for \$36, a tidy sum in those days. One story tells of the time the cautious Wm. H. Block Company decided to test the results of radio advertising. Hastings was given the job of plugging a well-known brand of soap at a giveaway price. When the mob finally dispersed and the clerks were recuperating in the infirmary, an indignant Block official vowed the

In the late 1920's Bill Kiley followed Don Hastings as co-writer and host for his very popular program, "Pep Unlimited"



store wanted no more “riot advertising.” Hastings and his cohorts took a more positive view of the incident and quickly shared the news with a host of other undecided advertising prospects. Pep Unlimited had finally gotten up a full head of steam.

Hastings eventually sold his interest in the club to Fritz Schneider, who wisely retained Hastings as “Conductor.” It was about this time that William F. Kiley was hired as copywriter and salesman for the program. It was a good move for both the station and Kiley, who advanced steadily up the executive ladder at WFBM. He was vice president and general manager in 1957 when he and Ted Nicholas, for 11 years a top station salesman, resigned to form the Kiley & Nicholas Advertising Agency.

Chapter 12

FEEDING THE NETWORK

WFBM joined the Columbia Broadcasting System in March, 1928, and for the first time Hoosier listeners had a front row seat for regular network programs, which were getting better all the time. And the rest of radioland had a chance to hear some of the top-notch talent which was developing in Indianapolis. The Charlie Davis Band, for instance, and the George Irish Indianapolis Athletic Club orchestra, among others, often provided programs of dance music for CBS.

Transmitter Engineer O. C. Winters checks some of the equipment used in broadcast operations in 1930.



When nationally famous entertainers and dance bands came to town for personal appearances, they often used WFBM facilities to feed their regularly scheduled programs to the networks. There was a parade of such new radio celebrities as Tony Wons with his scrapbook, Morton Downey, Burns and Allen, Lum and Abner with their “Jot ’Em Down Store,” and many more. There were the bands, too—such as Ben Bernie, Wayne King, Ted Weems, Phil Harris, Guy Lombardo, Kay Kyser,

Horace Heidt, Fred Waring, and a host of others—who helped make life a little lighter, a little brighter through the depression years.

All was not sunshine and roses for the WFBM crew when the big acts came to town. Each of the “names” brought their own peculiar problems. Station oldtimers still recall the time George Burns and Gracie Allen insisted upon complete privacy for their broadcast here. No one was to watch them go through their act. So they went on the air behind a hastily improvised screen. When Guy Lombardo and his band hit the studio, as they did periodically, hours were spent arranging every instrument for perfect balance around the tenor saxophone, which once led a crew member to observe that “making ‘the sweetest music this side of heaven’ was sure a helluva lot of work.”

One of the early CBS stars was practically a member of the WFBM family. “Singin’ Sam, the Barbasol Man” first originated his network show over the local station. Away from the microphone, he was Harry Frankel of Danville, Kentucky. He had been one of “The Two Blackbirds,” and also an end man for Al G. Fields Minstrel Show before he hit Indianapolis in 1929 and became identified with the Barbasol Company. Later he made many transcriptions for Coca Cola. He died at Richmond, Indiana, in June, 1948.

The engineers may have grumbled at times about the demands of a network show, but the announcers did not. CBS shows called for a local announcer to do the honors. Jockeying for the prestige the national exposure brought were such local favorites as John Tribby, John Holtman, Bill Brown, Don Hancock, Ken Ellington, and, of course, Durward Kirby. When these left WFBM, one by one, it was for network or larger station assignments. Most are still going strong.

Not long ago in a letter to Frank Sharp, who knew and worked with



Frank O. Sharp and Marthabel Geisler have been with WFBM for most of its life. Miss Geisler joined the staff in 1930. Mr. Sharp in 1924.

them all, Holtman recalled his days with WFBM. Wrote Holtman in part:

“As nearly as I can recall, I began announcing at WFBM in 1930—on a part time basis. Worked every Sunday, so the two regular men could have every other Sunday off.

“After several months, I became a full time member of the staff. I left WFBM in September of 1937 to join the NBC-Chicago announcers staff—and am still here. A total of more than 27 years of service . . .

“As far as WFBM is concerned, I actually worked on dramatic programs there in the middle to late '20's. Also, I remember the great honor of my WFBM days, which were motivated by my boss—one F.S. (Frank O. Sharp)

“I had the experience of doing a couple of red hot CBS network shows passing through. The Camel Quarter Hour for a whole week—with Morton Downey, Jacques Renard's Orchestra and Tony Wons. And the Robert Burns Cigar show—Guy Lombardo and the Royal Canadians, with Burns and Allen.

“Then there was the Early Bird Show, written by Bill Kiley and Tea Time Tunes, also by Kiley, which ended with the rhyme, ‘Tomorrow I'll Be Back—yours very truly, Mrs. Holtman's boy, Jack.’”

Durward Kirby also did a little reminiscing not long ago, at Sharp's suggestion. As he remembers it:

“You gave me my first break during the State Fair in 1934. I had been in to see you several times for auditions, but there were no openings.

“Finally there was to be a pickup from the Fairgrounds with Harry Basin and his orchestra. These broadcasts were from 2:30 to 3:00 each afternoon during the Fair, with the final one on Saturday night. There was no engineer with me, and the show started by a telephone ring from the downtown studio—one ring for a 30-second standby, then two rings to take the air. I was never so thrilled in my life.

“After the final show Saturday night, you asked me to come right down to the studio. I thought, ‘Oh, boy! Here I've been given a chance, and now I've probably blown the whole opportunity.’ So I cancelled a ‘date,’ and hurried down to see you.

“We talked for a while about the shows I had done that week. Finally you said: ‘How would you like to come on the staff Monday morning with our Chuck Wagon Show?’ Wow! I thought my heart would stop right there. Imagine, me with a job I'd been praying for . . .

“You will remember, we had to pull our own records out of the library. So you showed me how to do that, then told me to write lead-ins to all the music, also all about how to give the time, weather, temperature, etc., and, most important, where the commercials went on the show . . . I could hardly wait for 6:30 a.m. Monday to roll around . . .

"I guess that was the shove I needed, and I've been trying to keep rolling ever since."

Kirby did a pretty good job of rolling upward at WFBM. He did a stint with Early Birds, an all-request program with a big teen-ager audience. He also handled remote programs, did commercials, and station breaks.

From Indianapolis, he went to WLW, later to NBC in Chicago, and on to New York. He won the coveted H. P. Davis Memorial Announcer's Award in 1941. During a two-year stint in the Navy, he regularly mc'd the "Meet Your Navy" programs. He returned to New York in 1946 and ran a successful half-hour program for more than a year before going on his own as a free-lancer. In the late 'thirties, he'd worked with Garry Moore in Chicago. In 1950, he teamed up with Garry again and has been with his crew-cut pal ever since.

WFBM also played something of a part in Kirby's personal life. In the mid-'thirties an attractive vocalist for the station was Mary Paxton Young. Many of her programs were sponsored by Marott's Shoe Store. She wandered off to WLW for awhile, but soon she returned. She became Mrs. Durward Kirby in 1941.



Durward Kirby and his bride, Mary Paxton Young.

Chapter 13

KID STUFF

Major Bowes was still practicing his “All right, all right” when the Wm. H. Block Company got in on the ground floor of the amateur business with its own uninhibited show. This was the well-remembered, one-hour, Saturday morning program, “The Children’s Radio Hour.” Beginning in September, 1932, it continued uninterrupted through each school term until June, 1940.

At the outset, the show originated on an improvised stage in Block’s toy department. Later, its home became the newly completed sixth floor auditorium. Even that was usually filled to overflowing well ahead of show time. With all children ranging in age from the toddling two’s to the early ’teens as contestants, the show had a guaranteed audience, divided into as many as twenty highly partisan cheering sections, depending upon the number of contestants.

There were no auditions, no rehearsals.

And there was always a little freckle-faced Johnny who, his mind having gone blank at the high point of his recitation, very sensibly started over again. And there were lots of “Susies” who tried their song in three different keys before settling on the wrong one. There was more than one “Jimmy,” too, so enthralled with his own virtuosity, he insisted upon repeating his number then and there.

But somehow the quick-witted individuals responsible for the show managed to get the program off the air on schedule, with a minimum

of fuss, almost 300 times over the years. Their example of fortitude and bravery beyond the call of duty has seldom been equaled in radio.

In addition to station personnel, those largely responsible for the Children's Hour were Sue Carolyn, who glossed over many a childish bobble with her skill as pianist and accompanist, and Rose Einsteadig, secretary to a Block executive, who registered the contestants and juggled things around each week to schedule the acts.

Master of ceremonies for most of the programs was George S. Madden, at the time a Block advertising executive and presently compiler of this book. Looking back over the years, the view perhaps somewhat softened by time, he has stated emphatically that "every single youngster who appeared, cooperated admirably and behaved perfectly. There was never the least bit of trouble with any of them."

At times, doting mothers were something else again. As a rule, they were more agitated than their offspring, who were inclined to be rather nonchalant. This was particularly true on a few reckless occasions when only children from two to six were scheduled. Such programs were completely spontaneous, unpredictable, and thoroughly delightful. One notable program on February 29, 1936, featured all "Leap Year Children." Ages that morning ran the gamut from "one" to "twenty-one."

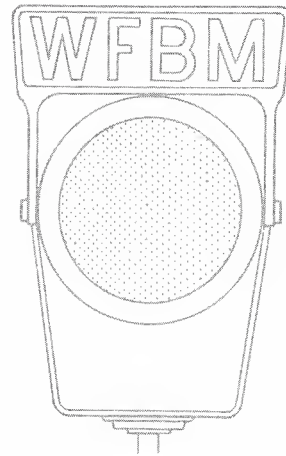
An outgrowth of the children's program was Block's "High School Scholarship Hour" broadcast on Saturday afternoons. Before it went off the air in 1940, the program attracted talented high school pupils throughout the state. Weekly winners returned twice each season to compete for sizable scholarship cash prizes. Pete French of the WFBM staff was the popular master of ceremonies for the high school series.

In 1933 George Madden and Rose Einsteadig were hosts for Wm. H. Block's, "The Children's Radio Hour." Pianist Sue Carolyn assisted on this popular program.



Chapter 14

TWO GREAT SPORTS



With the annual state high school basketball tourney and the 500-Mile Race—two sports naturals—right on its doorstep, it's no wonder WFBM gave each of them such devoted attention in the early years. The station's steadfast regard for these Hoosier institutions has wavered not a whit through the years.

Tommy Hendricks still cherishes 78 telegrams he and his late brother Blythe received during and after broadcasting the 1926 net tourney. After their debut as sportscasters the previous year, they were old hands at the business. From their cage above the playing floor, they kept thousands of fans within earshot of their sets through the two-day affair when Marion defeated Martinsville, 34 to 22, in the "finals." Between periods and games, the reading of telegrams helped to pass the time. Senders of messages strove constantly and consciously for new heights of pith and wit. A typical telegram from the C. A. Herons of Tipton read: "No flies on WFBM cow barn games and reception wonderful." From Frankfort, Coggswell and Snyder of the Star Barbershop wired: "Games coming in fine. Charging Frankfort fans one dollar for shaves—their faces so long."

Blythe Hendricks found his niche in radio and was WFBM manager from 1927 to 1932. He was then named director of information for the State Highway and State Conservation Departments by Governor Paul V. McNutt. He was later associated with WKBF for a time, until Mayor

John W. Kern named him secretary of the Board of Safety, a position he held until his death in August, 1938.

For Tommy Hendricks, broadcasting was largely a labor of love. A native Hoosier and Princeton graduate, he had joined *The Indianapolis News* in 1919 after World War I service overseas. Sports were his hobby. After his flirtation with radio in those early years, he was named secretary of the Indiana State Medical Association. In the early '40's, he became executive secretary of the American Medical Association in Chicago until his retirement a few years ago.

For their 1927 tourney finals broadcast, the Hendricks were joined by a knowledgeable colleague, John E. Stempel, later to become the long-time head of Indiana University's journalism department. In the finals that year, Martinsville finally edged Muncie, 26 to 23, for the title. When Stempel returned to Bloomington, he gave a graphic description of his experience with the new-fangled medium in a bylined newspaper story headlined:

FOR TWO DAYS I DIDN'T KNOW WHO GOT ME

Wrote Stempel:

"Out there some place were a couple of hundred thousand people with their ears tuned in on their loud speakers.

"They were basketball fans, which folks in this state are nothing else but. They couldn't buy tickets, because there were only about 15,000 to go around, but they just had to follow the great state tournament, and WFBM was putting it on for them.

"I knew they were out there and had heard something, because the telegrams—'Coming in fine, etc.' (you know the line)—were beginning to come in. But whether they were hearing me or not, I didn't know, and I didn't know for a couple of days until I came home and forty people stopped me on the street to say they had heard my voice over the radio.

"If I ever felt like a nut talking into a squirrel cage it was at Indianapolis, Friday and Saturday. Blythe Hendricks put me on with a big introduction, and then handed over the microphone, which looks like a little squirrel cage. And I sat there and talked into it about like I might sit here and talk to you over the desk tonight. None of this shouting stuff, none of this oratory—it just doesn't go over the air.

"I had stage fright for a while, worse than when as a high school freshman I went down to Bedford to take part in an oratorical contest. You can always watch a crowd and tell what it is going to do, but you can't see to whom you are talking when it's over the air.

"WFBM had a whole staff, as complete as any newspaper staff, on deck to give the people of the state their tournament. Most of the announcing of the games themselves was done by Blythe Q. Hendricks, veteran announcer, and his brother Tommy Hendricks, famous sports writer. Carl Fohl was the technician and handled the amplification, and in between halves read the telegrams which came in. I was the statistician and basketball 'expert,' and did my stuff after each half for the boys who wanted the straight dope."

Stempel continued his article by telling about some of the basketball celebrities who visited the broadcasting booth and also commenting about several of the individual telegrams received. His concluding paragraph read:

"Oh, yes. That cap. It was my cap, bought in Bloomington last week, which shielded the microphones from the yelling crowd so you could hear the announcers."

WKBF also had its moments of triumph and an all-star string of broadcasters during state basketball tourney finals in the late '20's. Among appreciative messages from pleased fans in 1928 was this from R. C. Roberts of Franklin: ". . . would not want too many games like the Muncie-Anderson game. We particularly enjoyed the work of a Franklin man, Roger Branigin." It was the same Roger Branigin who was to receive attention again in later years as a popular public speaker, a Democratic power in the state, and a 1964 candidate for governor.

Another "thank you" note to WKBF that year was from W. F. Root of Muncie, who wrote: ". . . very specially to thank Mr. Fox, Mr. Branigin and Mr. Thompson . . . You made it easy for listeners to visualize the actual situations on the floor." The "Mr. Fox" was the long-time sports editor of *The News*, William F. Fox, Jr., and the other member of that pioneer crew was Ray C. Thompson, Fox's predecessor on *The News*.

Radio coverage of the 500-Mile Race also expanded in quantity

Staff announcer Len Riley interviews famed race driver Ralph DePalma on one of the many early day WFBM remotes.



and quality during those last years of the 1920's. *The Star* joined with WFBM to broadcast the 1928 race in its entirety. The Hendricks brothers, naturally, were on hand—along with Earl Mounce of WFBM and Dan V. Goodman, automobile editor of *The Star*. The broadcast followed the fans into the stands at 9:30 a.m., and the crew kept the colorful account going until 2 p.m. WFBM then joined NBC when Graham McNamee took over the mike to follow Louis Meyer through the final laps and into Victory Lane.

Evidently, *The Star* was pleased with its sponsorship of the broadcast. A few days later, a full page was devoted to reproducing favorable telegraphed comments from 176 appreciative listeners. *The Star* also noted that:

“In the broadcasting of the race, an experiment was tried by placing a specially constructed microphone about fifteen feet from the track, where the cars went whizzing by. As soon as the race started, listeners were asked to notify WFBM if the roar of the motors interfered with their radio reception.”

No tally was reported on listener response to the request. It is generally conceded, however, the experiment gave WFBM claim to one of the decade's noisiest broadcasts.

Coverage of the 1929 race was even more extensive and complete, according to contemporary accounts. *The Star* again sponsored the WFBM broadcast and later reported enthusiastic response from listeners as far east as Philadelphia and as far west as Oklahoma City. A full and sterling crew kept listening fans hugging their speakers. Blythe Hendricks and Cor-

bin Patrick kept up a running account from the starting line. Tommy Hendricks and Harold Bean were stationed in the pits for frequent “cut-ins.” Earl Mounce and Frank Sharp were stationed at the dangerous north turns to keep their eyes on activities there. Bromley House was in



In the very early days of radio, announcer Ken Ellington did many on-the-spot reports. Here, he interviews Captain Eddie Rickenbacker and Ralph DePalma.

the bandstand, where Paul Whiteman's orchestra entertained throughout the day. Leonard Carlson was the engineer in charge of the broadcast. Cleo Kern, then radio editor of *The Star*, was in charge of the messenger and communications services. Direct hookups had been arranged with Vitaphone and Movietone equipment in some city theaters to let audiences hear how Ray Keech was roaring along to victory in his Simplex Special.

The 1930 Speedway broadcast followed the successful pattern of the previous years. Most of the old WFBM crew was back on the job, along with some recruits. Blythe Hendricks and Patrick were again at the starting line. Tommy Hendricks was joined in the pits by Claude A. Mahoney and John Heiny. House and Sharp had the north turns, while William J. Brown and Frank Knight were stationed at the south turns. Others participating that year were Al Lynch, William A. Etter, Ray Wheeler, Al Rutherford, and W. A. Jacoby. Billy Arnold won the race in his Miller Special. A treat of sorts was reported by *The Star*: "Barney Oldfield addressed over the radio a multitude of race fans who could hear but not see him." And it was a pity, old timers agree, that the colorful, cigar-chomping Oldfield cut a swath across the racing scene without the benefit of television. For this, both Oldfield and television were the losers.

Broadcasts of local prize fights also gave radio fans some exciting moments in the late 1920's and early '30's. Ralph "Cauliflower" Elvin, with his gift for colorful accounts of ring action, was the favorite announcer for the events. The fights were held variously at the Armory, Fort Harrison, and the old Washington Street ballpark.

Because of a quirk in the Indiana law, these were "no-decision" bouts. But *The News*, *Star* and *Times* obliged their readers next day with their versions of who would have won had there been a decision. Such newspaper decisions, naturally, did not always coincide, which gave amateur bookmakers a bad time.

For one upcoming, fight-card broadcast, Blythe Hendricks, by now WFBM manager, had a serious problem. He lacked a qualified fight announcer. Hurriedly, he got in touch with William "Curly" Ash, local sports authority, former Wabash and Notre Dame athlete, and now publisher of *The Indianapolis Commercial*. At the studio, Ash was handed

a “dead” microphone and told to try to describe an imaginary fight, including colorful and authoritative comments during the one-minute intermissions. Ash proceeded to give an exciting blow-by-blow, word picture of an action-packed, ring drama. At the rousing finish, a perspiring Ash was told by Hendricks, “That sounded fine. I want you to broadcast tomorrow night’s fight for us at the Armory.”

Ash hesitated long enough to catch his breath and then agreed to give it a try. After a successful premiere performance, he became the station’s regular fight announcer.

Chapter 15

GREAT NEWS

Strangely enough, radio was some time catching on to the value of regular news broadcasts. In the early days, news was a once-in-awhile, sometime thing, in contrast to today's keen rivalry between radio and television for extensive and on-the-spot coverage. Big special events received lavish attention. But the bread and butter items of even national news didn't exist where most stations were concerned. Listeners in 1927 could have heard a one-hour broadcast of Floyd Bennett's funeral service. Or they could have heard the tumultuous reception given Hoover as he accepted the Republican nomination at Palo Alto. Or heard Charles A. Lindbergh upon his return following his solo flight to Paris. Or marveled with Ted Husing at the wonder of the Graf Zeppelin arriving over New York. But most listeners would have missed the gory details of the Snyder-Gray murder case, had it not been for the newspapers.

There is some uncertainty as to when news programs began to creep regularly into the WFBM schedule. It is generally conceded that Ken Ellington was probably the pioneer newscaster in the area. Unfortunately for radio, he deserted the medium for the aviation



Ken Ellington, the first WFBM newscaster was master of ceremonies for all programs. His was the voice of WFBM Radio for many years. He is shown interviewing Buddy Rogers.

industry in 1941, later accepting his present post of vice president and assistant to the president of Republic Aviation Corporation at Farmingdale, Long Island, New York.

Ellington still fondly remembers his early trials, tribulations, and triumphs at WFBM. In a letter to Frank Sharp, he gives a lively, first person account of radio life as it was lived, endured, and enjoyed in bygone days. He recalls:

"It was in 1933 that I first tested my vocal chords on a WFBM microphone. That was for audition purposes and I didn't do so well. Early the next year, however, I talked you into letting me do a weekly exercise entitled 'Curtain Call'—and I was launched on a radio career after a few false starts. I had worked in Chicago in 1931 for WIBO and, ever so briefly, in Indianapolis at WKBF, with Jim Carpenter, Buford Cadle and a tired old record-player.

"Curtain Call was a once a week program consisting of theater and entertainment news, book reviews and occasional interviews with visiting personalities of the day, i.e. Kate Smith, Buddy Rogers, Walter Huston, Lum and Abner and any such that we could inveigle away from English's Theater, the Lyric, Indiana or Circle. I once suggested an interview with a burlesque 'queen,' but that was not considered within the policy approval of the Indianapolis Power & Light Company, which owned the station at the time.

"In 1934, the radio stations and the newspapers weren't getting along too well, and WFBM bought a news service, called, I believe, Press Radio News. Originally, it came in on short wave from New Jersey and was picked up by our engineers and read aloud to me while I took notes on it and transcribed it into two-finger typewriting. Later, it was sent by tele-typewriter which was frequently more garbled than the earlier, primitive method.

"The first break for Ellington came when I was hired by you to do these news shows, four a day, seven days a week. Later on, we subscribed to INS-Universal News Service and the programs became 15 minutes long, so I got a raise. As for me, well, with such unruly cohorts as John Holtman, Bill Brown, Durward Kirby, Don Hancock, Bill Kiley, Don Menke and Frank Sharp, who needed money? You're right. The only ones who needed money were Holtman, Brown, Kirby, Hancock, Kiley, Menke, Sharp and Ellington. So we lived on happiness, instead.

"Since NBC at that time had a monopoly on the 500-Mile Race, all we could do in 1934 was to work with local sources, including Jap Cadou and his INS local bureau staff to put on a synthetic race coverage from the studio. Incidentally, I don't know whether you ever knew I wrote byline ghost pieces about the race drivers for INS in order to make a buck extra.

One day I was Wilbur Shaw, the next day Howdy Wilcox, etc.

"In 1935, Len Riley and I did the race 'live' and I still have a clipping from Variety which says that we had the Number One coverage over Graham McNamee for NBC, Mutual and everybody else with a microphone that day. Sure I'm proud of it, but it was WFBM-CBS, not just Len and Ken.

"In 1936, Ted Husing joined us, but gave us generous approval and told CBS we could handle it from then on.

"Other nice things happened. The network asked us to do several special event shows for them. Also, the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, The Star, The News, and The Times, all joined us to help celebrate our 2,000th news broadcast. In early 1937, the network invited yours truly to Washington to participate in the Inauguration coverage. On the way home, tired but happy, I got off the airplane at Columbus, Ohio, instead of Indianapolis, to find that one of the worst floods in Midwest history was about to become one of the biggest news stories radio had ever covered.

"Arriving in Indianapolis, by train, late that night, I went directly to our studios where the entire staff was beginning what was to become a five-day vigil. WFBM stayed on the air 24 hours a day, broadcasting live coverage from Louisville, Cincinnati and Evansville, serving the network with special news shows and appealing to the central Indiana citizenry for clothing, food, equipment, money—to help those whose homes and lifelong savings had been inundated in what is now remembered as the Great 1937 Flood. Governor Paul McNutt set up state headquarters nearby and people brought in their contributions for shipment to the Indiana border and the flood area. Never was there such a great outpouring, never such a stunning expression of the typically American quality, generosity toward his fellow man. One case will always stay in my memory.

"We were on the air with requests for all kinds of things. One night, following a several-times repeated plea for spark plugs of a certain type to fit the outboard motors that were doing rescue work in the Louisville area, a fellow dressed in casual clothes and a cap came to our studio door and said 'Where do you want those spark plugs?' I recognized him from our 500-Mile Race coverage and said, 'Thanks, Bob, just drop them at the warehouse (owned by The Indianapolis Star) next door.' His response was immediate. 'They need them in the River, at Louisville, not in a warehouse here. Where do I deliver them?'

"And so, at eleven o'clock at night, Robert Bowes, now deceased, but then president of the Bowes 'Seal Fast' Sparkplug Co., drove over 100 miles to Louisville, his station wagon filled to the roof with thousands of spark plugs of just the right type to fill the need. There are great men and women everywhere, but that night, for my money, Bob Bowes was the greatest man in America.

“The next month, February, 1937, the CBS network beckoned from WBBM-Chicago and I moved up there to work. Don Hancock was already a staffer there. Later, John Holtman and Durward Kirby also arrived in Chicago, but they went to work for NBC, ‘down the river.’ We shared an apartment together for some time.

“Fortunately, I was able to get back each year as CBS gave me the permanent assignment to do the race on Memorial Day. That is, until the war. My last 500-Mile Race broadcast was in 1941. I had become interested in aviation shortly before the war, and, as you know, transferred my affections from kilocycles to Mach numbers. But I’m now a Board Member of the 500-Mile Old-Timers Club.

“Now I’m a WFBM ‘Old-Timer,’ too. I’ve known 30 of WFBM’s more than 40 years. I’ll always be grateful.”

When Ellington resigned to go with CBS in Chicago, he was replaced by Frederick G. Winter, a well known local actor with considerable stage experience during his days at Indiana and Butler Universities.

Later that year, a thin young man with a big, resonant voice came from Dubuque, Iowa, to join WFBM as chief news broadcaster. He was due to leave a sharp, bright, lasting impression on radio—and later television, news reporting, and on the thousands of Hoosiers he knew and the hundreds of thousands who felt they knew him. The thin young man was Gilbert Forbes.

Chapter 16

“MR. NEWS” IN INDIANA

For twenty-four years—from 1937 to 1961—the calm, authoritative voice of Gilbert Forbes was undoubtedly the most respected, most believed, most welcome source of broadcast news in Indiana. As a commentator, news editor, and analyst for WFBM, and later for WFBM-TV, his reputation was earned by rigidly objective reporting, a straightforward, lucid style, and the ability to project the warmth and depth of his own personality.

With the coming of television, his face became familiar to thousands of Hoosiers. As news editor, he originated and was quiz master for the popular “Test the Press” program which was one of the top local TV attractions from 1949 to 1955. This was the program which, over the years, induced hundreds of well-known Hoosier newsmen to step from behind their typewriters into the unfamiliar glare of studio lights for a good natured test of their knowledge of current news.

Forbes was born in St. Louis, attended Elmhurst (Illinois) College, and was graduated from the University of Dubuque. He was also an organist graduate from Chicago’s American Conservatory. He came to WFBM by way of stations in St. Louis; Joliet, Illinois; and Dubuque.

For many Hoosiers, his was the voice of World War II, beginning with his reading of the first bulletins of the attack on Pearl Harbor—even before John Daly interrupted the network musical show. His clear, dispassionate broadcasting of reports and bulletins brought the confusing

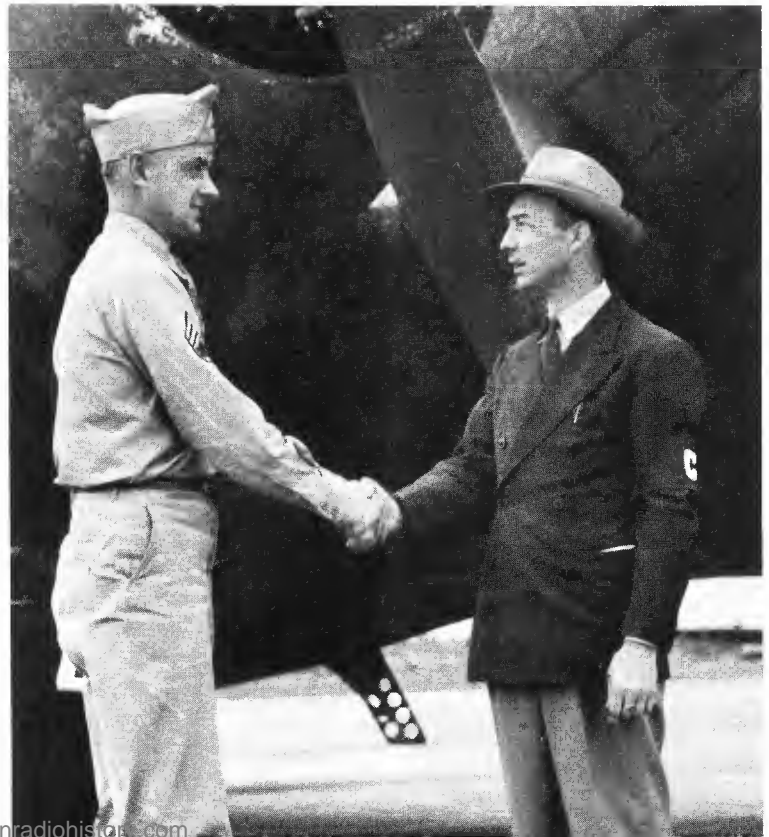
war picture into sharper focus for thousands of anxious Hoosier families. Not content with second-hand reporting, he served as a war correspondent in 1944, landing at Omaha Beach shortly after D-Day. He reported the combat experiences of Hoosier GI's with the 82d Airborne Division, the 4th Bomber Group of the 8th Air Force, and those of the 735th Tank Battalion during the battle for Metz, France. Upon his return from the battle fronts, he devoted a great deal of his energy and his own time to looking up and visiting with the families of men he met overseas.

"Gib," as he was affectionately known, was basically a modest, unassuming sort who was genuinely surprised at the honors which kept coming his way. His professional excellence, coupled with his personal concern and frequent involvement in community problems, led to his citation by many diverse groups. These, among others, included the Indiana State Teachers Association, American Legion, Order of DeMolay, Hadassah, the Health and Welfare Council, and the Indianapolis Railroad Community Committee.

Although time was a precious commodity in his busy life, he was an active, working member of the Indianapolis Press Club, the Indianapolis Literary Club, National Association of News Directors, and the Meridian Heights Presbyterian Church. The 735th Tank Battalion, as well as the Indianapolis Artists Club, were pleased to have him as an honorary member.

Throughout his years at WFBM, Forbes had many opportunities to join a network or move on to a larger station. But he liked Indiana as much as Indiana liked him, and he stayed.

Few Hoosiers in recent years have been mourned by so many and for so many reasons as was "Gib" Forbes upon his death September 18, 1961. Hundreds of messages of sympathy poured in from individuals throughout the state who had never met Forbes but felt they had



Staff Sergeant Bill Kiley arranged Gilbert Forbes' overseas transportation to his assignment as a war correspondent in World War II. Following the war and his discharge from the army, Mr. Kiley returned to the WFBM staff as general sales manager, Radio and TV.

lost an old friend. Political, governmental, and civic leaders paid tribute to him as a person and as a personality. *The Star, Times and News* eulogized him in editorials. In his case, the barriers which frequently separate radio and newspaper newsmen had never existed. *The News*, in an editorial on September 20, 1961, summed up the sentiments of those who knew him and of those who would have liked to:

THE STILLED VOICE

“Mourned in death by his colleagues and by his thousands of listener friends alike, Gilbert Forbes became a successful and highly-respected radio-TV personality because he remained first of all a newsmen.

“He combined a keen reporter’s instinct with a scholarly background. Indiana television and radio audiences received from Gilbert Forbes the benefit of interpretive thinking as well as spot newscasting. His deep, resonant voice carried the authority of studied conviction.

“His was a personable presence that won friends whether in studio and screen presentations or in the face-to-face informality of discussions like those at the roundtable of the Press Club, where his journalist colleagues, in a manner of speaking, sat at his feet.

“The Gilbert Forbes presence was at its best in the popular ‘Test the Press’ quiz of Indiana newsmen which he created and produced and on which more than 400 Hoosier journalists appeared from 1949 until 1955. He was an analyst and editor of news when he was not appearing in person on the air. Gilbert Forbes went behind the news and his listeners learned causes for events and his own philosophy—both serious and humorous—on many aspects of the current scene.

“His was a full life—reporter, war correspondent, graduate organist, literary devotee and recipient of numerous awards for civic, cultural and patriotic service.

“He was the dean of Indiana newscasters in far more than years of service. He was a presiding spirit in this community’s contemporary era who will be long and kindly remembered.”

Gilbert Forbes was the only news commentator from any local radio station to serve as a war correspondent during World War II. His reports identified him as the Voice of Authority to the people of Indiana. Loyal listeners rarely missed his 6 p.m. newscast.



Chapter 17

DISASTER BRINGS PLAUDITS

To almost a million Hoosier listeners, radio in the mid-'thirties was Jack Benny, "One Man's Family," "Baby Snooks," Fred Allen, "The American Album of Familiar Music," Boake Carter, Bing Crosby, Father Coughlin, Isham Jones, and all the other attractions and distractions of radio's golden years.

But suddenly, dramatically, radio early in 1937 assumed a new, somewhat unaccustomed role as public servant, comforter, and lifesaver. It was the great Ohio River flood which gave radio in the Midwest a new stature and a feeling of having grown up enough.

Both WFBM and WIRE, which the former WKBF had been redesignated a few years earlier, joined other Hoosier stations and the dozens of amateur radio operators throughout Indiana in a catch-as-catch-can network to relieve suffering. Normal methods of communication were snagged, if not out altogether. There were calls for shelter, food, flood-fighting, and medical supplies to be issued, rescue calls to be relayed, and thousands of affected Hoosiers to be informed of flood developments.

For almost a week, 24 hours a day, practically all bulletins, warnings, and messages between the Red Cross, police departments, state agencies, highway departments, and other relief groups were transmitted by radio. WFBM was granted an emergency increase in power by the FCC to insure that vital messages reached the stricken area. Both

WFBM and WIRE appealed over the air for anything from spark plugs to ambulances, from blankets to motor boats. WFBM alone directed more than six boxcars of supplies to the flood area. And WIRE broadcast a special program which raised more than \$1,000 for the Red Cross. Regular programming was abandoned as radio leaped wholeheartedly into the battle against misery, disease, and death.

Help came or was offered from all quarters. An eastern city offered to send police and first aid equipment. Cities throughout the Midwest—Detroit, Cleveland, and others—offered manpower, supplies, whatever was needed. A Chicago bus line offered equipment. But all of them needed to know where the help, supplies, and equipment were needed most—and the best way to get them there. Radio provided this information.

Indiana State Police directed much of their work in the stricken area over WFBM. Each day at 12:30 p.m., WIRE broadcast interviews with refugees temporarily housed at the Indiana State Fairgrounds. Only urgent personal messages were broadcast, but through them many a family was reunited.

State Adjutant General Elmer F. Straub later publicly praised and thanked the more than three-score amateur radio operators for their voluntary service during the emergency—service which meant, for the most part, long, lonesome hours before homemade transmitters, relaying an endless series of messages. The amateurs pooled their equipment, working in shifts to establish regular operating schedules. It was to them that military and relief authorities owed much for the efficiency of operations.

*WFBM's announcing staff posed for the Christmas greeting in 1937.
From left to right: Ned LeFevre, Ben Wilbur, Fred Winters, Joe Pierson, and Gilbert Forbes.*



Much of the amateurs' work was routine, but occasionally it reached dramatic heights. For instance, there was the Sunday afternoon of January 24. There was a call from WSYZ at the University of Cincinnati. "For heaven's sake," came the voice, "somebody in Indianapolis, please come in. WSYZ calling!"

It was 3:30 in the afternoon, Cincinnati time. Within ten minutes, a large Cincinnati power plant would have to shut down because of rapidly rising water. Could the Indianapolis Power and Light Company arrange to take over the load? An Indianapolis amateur, his name or call letters unfortunately now unknown, heard the distress message. He relayed it immediately by telephone to Emmet G. Ralston, executive vice-president of the Indianapolis utility. Within a few minutes, arrangements had been completed for IPALCO to guarantee up to 35,000 kilowatts to the Cincinnati company. About four o'clock, WSYZ was calling back with a message like that from a sinking vessel, "We're forced to go off the air." At once the radio-summoned power began pulsating through a hastily arranged circuit to spare Cincinnati the further misery of battling the flood in darkness.

Chapter 18

CRADLE OF THE STARS

Since the 1937 flood, there has been little question of radio's ability and willingness to dedicate its efforts in service to the public good, whether dramatically or quietly.

But radio's main business is entertainment and information. And Hoosier listeners wouldn't have it any other way—in the 1930's, or now.

As the cleaning-up process got under way after the big flood, Indiana families once more settled back to guffawing with Will Rogers, Stoopnagle and Budd, and with Jack Pearl's "Vass you dere, Sharlie?" They had heard President Roosevelt declare, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself" in an early fireside chat, and they continued to gather around the family console whenever he spoke to "My friends"—which was fairly frequently. Teenagers got goose pimples over the "Vagabond Lover," Rudy Vallee, and danced to the orchestras of Isham Jones, Benny Goodman, or Ben Bernie's "Yowsa!" And Pop fiddled with the dial to have the latest news shot at him by Floyd Gibbons' 217-word-a-minute delivery.

While the national network programs held a large part of radio's center stage in those days, local talent was not being neglected in Indianapolis.

During the earlier 'thirties, two young brothers, Jim and Walt Bullock, gained a wide audience with their harmony team programs over WFBM. Jim was blind, a handicap he surmounted with good humor and aplomb. Walt was a veteran of Civic Theater productions and was also an ad-

vertising copywriter. The brothers left Indianapolis for Hollywood in 1933, where Walt became a continuity writer for Ben Bernie. Later, he also wrote innumerable movie scenarios, including "52nd Street," most of the Shirley Temple movies, and Hit Parade song successes—among them "When Did You Leave Heaven?"



Jim and Walt Bullock were a popular harmony duo appearing on WFBM radio in the late 'twenties and early 'thirties. The brothers later became successful Hollywood composers and scenario writers for Shirley Temple films.

Indianapolis's answer to Ida Bailey Allen and her network cooking school was Rose Lee Farrell. A former teacher and home-service authority for the Banner-Whitehill furniture store and the Indianapolis Power and Light Company, Mrs. Farrell began her cooking school on WFBM in 1934. When Block's enlarged the store, she used the new auditorium as she demonstrated her recipes and homemaking hints for a live audience, meanwhile describing the operations for her legion of WFBM listeners without missing a lick with the egg beater. Some years later, she relinquished her auditorium chores, but she continued her radio school directly from her own apartment until shortly before her death in August, 1951.

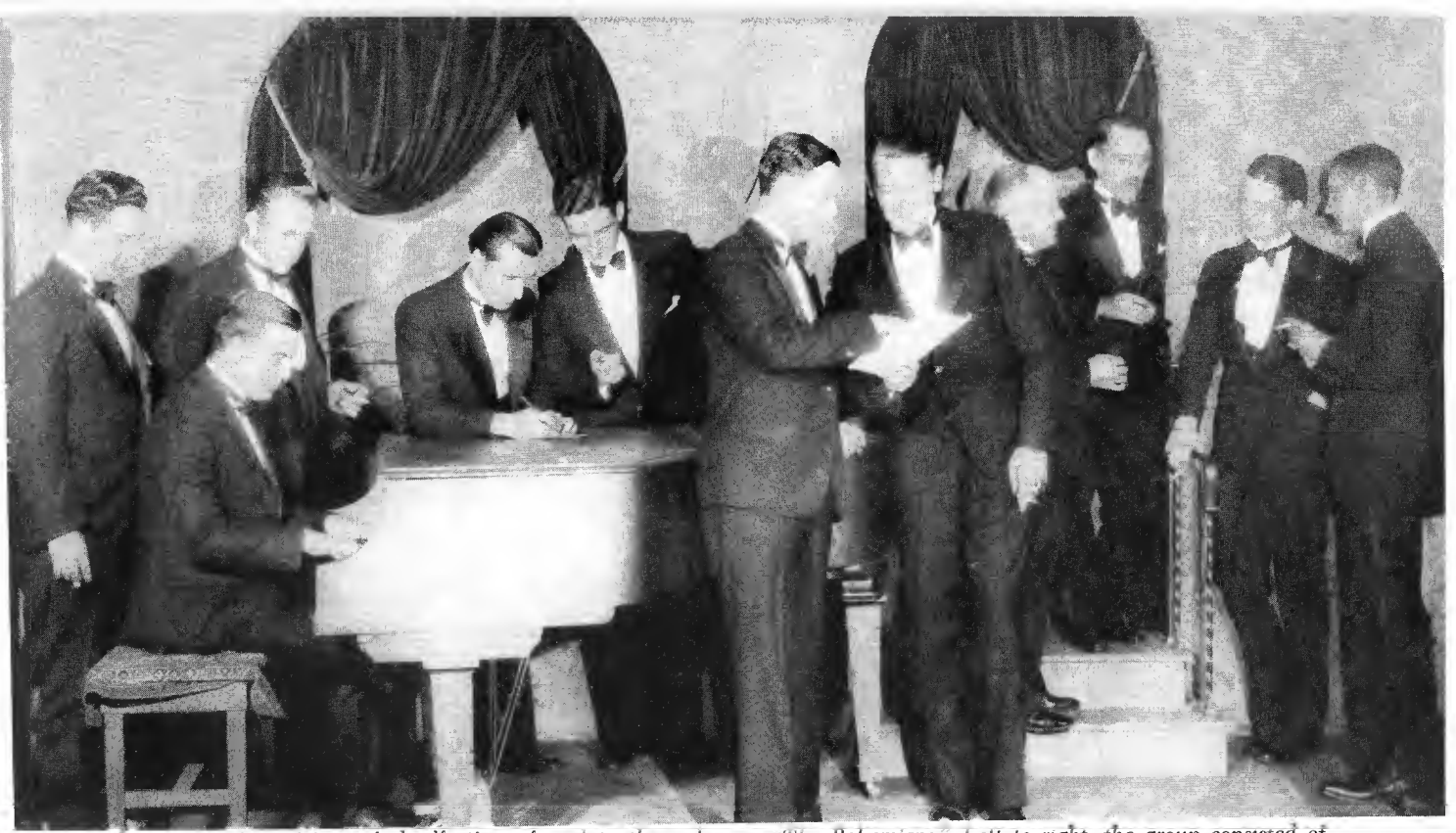
A well-remembered team that enlivened many an otherwise dull, bygone day for WFBM listeners was that of Bob and Gayle (McDonald) Sherwood. Gayle, a Kokomo native, was the pianist of the duo, who, with husband Bob, wrote a number of compositions which were first heard on their popular program. They knew practically every popular song written since the Civil War, and they put them across with a flair. Wayne Guthrie of *The News* in his "Ringside in Hoosierland" column recalled a few years ago how Gayle once had Indianapolis literally at her feet during a performance. She nonchalantly played her Baldwin upright, lashed with ropes to a balloon, as it swayed some 3,000 feet above the city. Piloted as a promotional stunt by a Captain Bambaugh, the balloon ascended from the old Indianapolis Gas Works plant and landed safely in Irvington. Gayle continued playing throughout the trip. How the aerial concert was received—if it was—by her earthbound audience is not recorded. Anyway, as Gayle would probably say today, that program was "strictly for the birds."



Hoagy Carmichael, pianist-conductor of his own orchestra, furnished dinner music for the Indianapolis Columbia Club. WFBM Radio carried special remotes of the Hoagy Carmichael music. Pictured with the famed musician are (left to right) Gordon Spangler, Ray Conolly, Warren Carr, Edward Wolfe, Don Bye, Chauncey Goodwin, Edward Dowling, Bob Volmer, Gorden Harper, and Andy Anderson.

In the 1930's these WFBM musicians often performed their radio broadcasts from the stage of an Indianapolis theatre. Pictured left to right, are Paul Williams, Maurie Bennett, Walter Reuleaux, Dale Lentz, Gale Stout, Ray Conolly, Doc Bennett, Louie Lowe, Earl Gordon, Paul Brown and Edward Brown. Mr. Reuleaux later became a television director and the first member of the staff to retire from the industry. Today he is a member of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra.





These WFBM musicians of the 'forties referred to themselves as The Bohemians. Left to right, the group consisted of Paul Williams, Dale Lentz, Earl Gordon, Walter Reuleaux, Louie Lowe, Maurie Bennett, Ray Conolly, Paul Brown, Gene Bennett, Edward Brown, and Gale Stout.

Another program which had Indianapolis up in the air in the mid-'thirties did not involve local stations. But just about everyone else in the area seemed to be involved. This was the celebrated "Indianapolis Night" on Major Bowes' popular Sunday evening "Amateur Hour." Four Hoosiers who had won local auditions were packed off to New York to try their luck on the program of May 10, 1936. Swelling Indianapolis bosoms with pride was the fact that this was the first time as many as four participants had been chosen from one honored city. Carrying the city's colors into big time competition were Ralph Penley, baritone, who chose to sing "Rio Rita;" Alvin Joslin, playing a saxophone solo, "Sommambul;" Sam K. Sims, later a staff announcer on WFBM, another baritone, whose specialty was "The Hills of Home," and Billy Jolly, Jr., primed to play "Go Go" on his banjo. As oldtimers will recall, winners on the program were determined by telephone calls to a special number. In this instance, Indiana Bell had set up Market 2211 as the number and enlisted 150 picked operators to handle the calls from 6 to 7:30 o'clock. The program, from 6 to 7, was heard in Indianapolis over WLW, Cincinnati. During the following week it was disclosed that 48,629 Indianapolis listeners had taken advantage of the chance to judge their fellow

townsmen's entertainment ability. It was the biggest vote ever cast in a similar contest. Jolly, the winner, immediately joined one of the several Bowes units then touring the nation's theaters.

About this time, another program of a somewhat different character, also put Indianapolis on the nation's radio map. This was "The Nation's Family Prayer Period." It was broadcast daily at 6 a.m. and on Sundays at 10 a.m. from Cadle Tabernacle over WLW and the Mutual network. In 1937, the Hearst network joined up, giving listeners in six larger New York State cities a chance to hear a number of Indianapolis religious leaders and musicians.

Radio programming of Indianapolis sporting events also expanded greatly during the late 'thirties, with the networks now vying with each other for ever better coverage—particularly of the annual 500-Mile Race. For the twenty-fifth race in 1937, listeners had their choice of three broadcasts by the major networks. Ken Ellington and Len Riley of WFBM headed the staff for CBS. The famous Graham McNamee, along with Charles Lyon, gave their version for NBC stations; Paul Sullivan and Joseph Ries of WLW broadcast for the Mutual network.

But WIRE, with its own home-grown broadcast for Hoosier listeners, more than kept pace with the illustrious competition and with the race winner, a young man who was to be heard of at the Speedway again and again, Wilbur Shaw. The WIRE crew that Memorial Day included Morris Hicks, Al Rutherford, Bill Frosch, Jack Stillwell, George Engelter, Norman Perry, Jr., Albert Beveridge, Jr., and Eugene Pulliam, Jr. Some of these also have been heard from again.

Chapter 19

BUT THE NAME'S THE SAME

Broadcasting in many ways is like an iceberg. Only the glistening peaks show. Underneath, supporting the music, the laughs, the drama, the timely information, the personalities of which the radio and television audience is aware, is a solid organization. As with the iceberg, the height and shape of broadcasting peaks are determined largely by the size, the structure, and the particular history of the supporting base.

In other words, there's a great deal more to broadcasting than meets the eye and ear.

The unseen side of WFBM has remained relatively stable, as such things go in the broadcasting business. While there have been the usual changes in management and ownership, the fact that such shifts have been, for the most part, smooth and gradual, has given the station permanence.

Blythe Hendricks, of early sports-casting fame, continued as manager until 1932, when Roy E. Blossom succeeded him. Blossom, who had

Roy E. Blossom was the WFBM Station Manager in the mid-'thirties.



been merchandise sales manager of the parent Indianapolis Power & Light Company, kept a steady, guiding hand on the station's growth until WFBM was sold in 1939.

Federal Communications Commission approval was sought in May that year for sale by Indianapolis Power & Light of its radio properties: namely, WFBM, four mobile transmitters, and a contract with Columbia Broadcasting System. The buyer was a newly-formed corporation, WFBM, Inc., headed by Harry M. Bitner, Sr., of Pittsburgh, a former general manager of Hearst Newspapers and publisher of *The Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*. Other principals were Jesse L. Kaufman and Jean E. Bitner. Sale price for the station was listed as \$450,000. The sale was approved in July, and Harry M. Bitner, Jr., was named general manager when the new owners took over on August 1.



Harry M. Bitner, Sr., Chairman of the Board, Consolidated Television and Radio Broadcasters, Inc.

Early the following year, William Kiley was appointed commercial manager. An old WFBM hand, he had served previously as a writer and continuity director. A few months later, Lester W. Lindow, a former newspaper man, took a leave of absence from his post as sales manager for a Pittsburgh station to assist temporarily in WFBM management.

In June, 1940, with World War II spreading in Europe, the management wisely began "beefing up" facilities and operations. Ultra modern transmitter towers were erected on Millersville Road, and the FCC approved a boost in WFBM nighttime power from 1,000 to 5,000 watts.

Another move in bolstering WFBM management came in 1941 with Don Menke's return to the station. Menke was no stranger to WFBM. During the free and easy operations of the 1920's, he was heard on the station occasionally while in his 'teens. Later, he had worked closely with the station during his employment in the William H. Block Co. advertising department. After a stint in the Chicago advertising vineyards, he returned to WFBM in the early '30's, went back to advertising in 1935, and rejoined the station's management ranks in 1941. He was named general manager of WEOA, Evansville, when the former

Harry M. Bitner, Jr.





Hazel Gaston was the first woman announcer to join the WFBM staff. She added another first to her credit when she participated in this first Indiana airborne broadcast. With her in this airplane-to-ground remote are Grayson Enlow, staff announcer, and Harold Holland, chief engineer of WFBM.

WFBM, Inc., acquired it in 1946. He returned to Indianapolis as commercial manager of WFBM-TV in 1955, and subsequently he was to become manager of stations, radio, television and FM.

Although television in Indianapolis was still almost ten years away, with a war to be won in the meantime, two WFBM oldtimers—Harold Holland, chief engineer, and Frank Sharp—already in the early '40's were turning their attention to the new medium. Their preliminary studies and advance planning gave the station a running start toward commercial TV and the city's first such station when the way was cleared a few years later.

All through the busy war years and afterwards, when television was moving from test patterns into solid programming, WFBM had continued to operate in the cramped quarters at 48 Monument Circle. Then, early in April, 1951, WFBM moved to a new home, a half-million dollar, newly-constructed, two-story building at 1330 North Meridian Street. It was the city's first building to have been custom designed for radio and television broadcasting.

First operations from the new studios were scheduled for Sunday, April 15. Except for minor difficulties, the transition was as smooth as the voice of an announcer selling baby powder.

For the first time, WFBM crew members had room to operate (while moving pieces of stage settings) without crossing elbows and knocking guest performers against a wall. The main television studio was 40 by 60 feet, room enough to arrange settings for eight shows at the same time. There was another, slightly smaller, studio for additional elbow room. Two rooms in the basement were occupied by the film department, with plenty of space left over for storage of the million-and-one pieces of

property and the settings which clutter TV stations like Fibber McGee's closet. A system of ramps allowed big items to be hauled quickly to the studios, then chucked back down into storage until needed the next time.

It was more than five years later that WFBM again made a sizable splash in the business news headlines. On December 16, 1956, *The Times* headlined a story:

**TIME, INC., REPORTED
BUYING WFBM STATIONS**

The Times reported, in part:

“Leading contender for the purchase of WFBM-WFBM-TV and affiliated stations is Time, Inc., at a purchase price of nearly 16 million dollars.

“The Time, Inc., offer is reportedly about \$600,000 more than that of Crowell-Collier Publishing Co., which was unable to complete its purchase deal two months ago. The deal would involve all properties of the company headed by Harry M. Bitner, Jr., including television and radio stations in Minneapolis and Grand Rapids, as well as a radio station in Flint, Michigan. Bitner, his father, and sister hold controlling interest in the company.

“Weston C. Pullen of Time, Inc., confirmed that Time had made an offer to Bitner . . .

“Some four and a half years ago Time began purchasing radio and television stations with an acquisition in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and has since purchased radio-TV outlets in Salt Lake City and Denver . . .

“Pullen emphasized that Time's stations are ‘run at a local level, with management entirely in local hands.’”

The newspaper story was essentially correct, and the deal went through a short time later.

Wayne Coy, a native Hoosier and former chairman of the FCC, returned to Indiana in the spring of 1957 to manage WFBM and WFBM-TV for the new owners. At the time, Coy was president and manager of KOB and KOB-TV in Albuquerque, a Time, Inc., operation. He was a native of Shelby County who had published a newspaper at Delphi before serving in top State House posts under Governor Paul V. McNutt. Coy later served on the FCC under Presidents



*Wayne Coy, native Hoosier and
former Chairman, FCC.*



Eldon Campbell, Decatur County native, now Vice President and General Manager, WFBM Stations.

Roosevelt and Truman before resigning in 1952.

Coy, however, was no stranger to WFBM radio; back in the 30's, as Executive Secretary to Governor Paul V. McNutt, he had frequent contact with the station. WFBM had arranged a series of Sunday evening "talks with the people" by the Governor. Three origination points were set up for the Governor's convenience—his State House office, his home and the WFBM studios. Coy advised the station each Friday from which location the Governor would speak on the following Sunday so an announcer and engineer would be on hand at the proper location. From time to time, other Indiana radio stations requested permission to broadcast McNutt's talks and this Hoosier "network" grew and continued throughout the Governor's term of office, foreshadowing the famous "My friends" fireside talks by President Roosevelt.

But Wayne Coy did not have long to enjoy his return to the state he knew and loved so well. He died on September 24, 1957.

With him, Coy brought another old-shoe Hoosier, a native of Decatur County, Eldon Campbell. Campbell, now vice president and general manager of the WFBM stations, attended Hanover College, later transferring to the University of Illinois, where he had his first taste of professional radio with the university station, WILL. Following graduation, he briefly went to an Arkansas station before joining Westinghouse Broadcasting Company's WOWO in Fort Wayne. In 1950, following a stint with the company's Portland, Oregon, station, he was named Westinghouse's executive sales representative in New York City. Two years later he was promoted to general sales manager. He left West-

inghouse in 1956 to become a broadcasting management adviser to Time, Inc. He served for a time as a consultant with the organization's Salt Lake City station before returning to Indiana and the WFBM management post.

Weston Pullen, the Time, Inc., executive who figured in negotiations for the WFBM purchase, was named president of Twin State Broadcasting, Inc., operating company for the station and also for WTCN radio and television, in Minneapolis. Campbell was elected to the Twin State board and named vice president and manager of WFBM stations.

Early in 1959, WFBM expanded into an allied field with the purchase of Muzak from Audio Services, Inc. Muzak sends a planned music service by wire and multiplex into hundreds of manufacturing plants, offices, restaurants, and the like within a radius of some 60 miles surrounding Indianapolis. An oldtimer at WFBM, Shirl E. Evans, was named Muzak manager and, later that year, head of another new operation, WFBM-FM. Robert Flanders, director of engineering, has since taken over the reins of Muzak and Don Menke the operation of FM.

Chapter 20

THE WAR YEARS

During the long and tortuous war years of World War II, radio was in the thick of the fight. Few older listeners today can ever forget the dramatic words, “This is . . . London” as a young Edward R. Murrow began another tense account of the Luftwaffe bombing of that city. The names and voices of other radio correspondents on the scene—Larry Lesueur, Charles Collingwood, Tom Traynor, who was later killed in action, Eric Sevareid, and a score of others—were familiar in millions of households. At home in Indianapolis, such local newscasters as Gilbert Forbes made a special effort to post listeners on war action of particular interest to Hoosiers.

Indianapolis radio also volunteered—and did a bang up job, too—in aiding every worthwhile drive and project connected with the war effort. There was official information to pass along, rationing regulations to clarify, the Red Cross, USO, Salvation Army, and a host of other volunteer relief organizations to be supported. And always there were War Bonds to be sold.

More than once, Indianapolis was the focal point for radio listeners throughout the nation. One such occasion occurred on Thursday evening, August 5, 1943, when more than 2,000 Hoosiers bought some \$2,206,625 in bonds to see and hear “America’s Town Meeting of the Air” broadcast. The program in the Murat Theater went out over WISH and the NBC network. A certificate of War Bond purchase was the ad-

mission ticket. Not all the bonds were of the \$25 variety; there were a number in the \$5,000 category.

George V. Denny was the forum moderator. Under discussion was "Shall the Small Nations of Europe Retain Their Prewar Boundaries?" Pressing the affirmative was Prince Hubertus Fredrich zu Lowenstein, political exile from the royal house of Bavaria. His opponent was Dr. Emil Lengyel, Hungarian-born author and also an exile. Official questioners were Dr. Edward C. Elliott, president of Purdue, and Norman E. Isaacs, editorial writer for *The News*.

The case for the wartime efforts of Indianapolis radio was aptly put during the Kiwanis Club luncheon May 16, 1945. The club was marking the 25th anniversary of the radio industry nationally, paying tribute at the same time to the war efforts of the local stations.

Robert C. Burnett, Sr., the club president, pointed out:

"Right here in Indianapolis, our four radio stations have made an outstanding contribution to the war effort through their promotion of bond sales and war charities, and the entertainment they have provided for our troops. Many local broadcasts have been produced in their studios featuring local personalities and sent to Indianapolis men overseas. In addition, they have brought last minute news to our eager families here, guided them and helped them to meet the many problems of a nation at war."

Burnett also lauded the stations for their many public service programs, their recruiting activities, and a host of other services which radio was capable of performing best—and did. Larry Richardson was master of ceremonies on that day when the laurels were being distributed. On the receiving end, in person, were William Kiley, WFBM business manager; Rex Schepp, WIRE general manager; Hal Shideler, WIBC chief announcer; and Lyman Hunter, WISH sales manager.

Radio reception in Indianapolis was considerably better during the war years than it had been earlier, thanks to a long overdue move by the FCC. In March, 1941, all local stations and nearly all in the nation were assigned new frequencies. The switch was made to cut down interference on the crowded air waves and thus to improve reception. It was then that Indianapolis stations in operation received the frequencies still in use. WFBM moved to 1260 kilocycles, WIRE to 1430, WIBC to 1070, and WISH, when it went on the air that summer, to 1310 kilocycles.

During the war, in 1942, Indianapolis radio played host to the National Association of Broadcasters at a two-day session in the Columbia Club. Neville Miller, NAB president, was among top industry leaders present to brief local station officials on what radio could expect—and what was being expected of radio—in a nation engaged in global war.

Shortly before the war and continuing into the early '40's, the local stations got together to cooperate with the Indianapolis public schools in a series of educational programs beamed directly at the classrooms. In October, 1940, WIBC inaugurated that season's series with "On Wings of Song." Thereafter, three days a week, classroom listeners in about 85 elementary schools heard programs on social studies, music, art, primary rhythmic, vocational guidance, and literature. A short time later, programs planned for high school pupils were being scheduled, including WIRE broadcasts of "High School Workshop" and "Shortridge Theater of the Air." On other days, WFBM broadcasts included "Tech High School Programs" and "CBS School of the Air."

Although there were children to be educated and war to be won, there was also a need for fun, entertainment, and relaxation to balance things up. There were plenty of these, too, in the '40's, with Indianapolis radio providing its share.

Twice in 1941, Indianapolis was delighted when the same network show, the General Electric "Hour of Charm," with Phil Spitalny's all-girl orchestra, threw the national spotlight on Indianapolis vocalists. Early that year, Maxine Moore—a 1934 graduate of Shortridge High School—made a solid hit as a soloist on the program. Earlier, in 1937, she had won the state voice contest sponsored by the National Federation of Music Clubs.

Late in 1941, another Indianapolis girl, Phyllis Wilcox, appeared on the same program for a different reason. She had arrived there from the Indiana University campus through a series of grueling auditions which culminated in a final contest on the popular network show. She won the contest, walking off with a music fellowship and handsome cash awards. Another Wilcox, not related to Phyllis, had a great deal to do with her eventual success. This was Howard S. "Howdy" Wilcox, then also a student at Indiana University and now general manager of *The Arizona Republic Gazette* in Phoenix.

Howdy had taken charge of the campaign to get Phyllis into the “Hour of Charm” competition by pulling all the publicity strings he could reach—and they were many and varied. For the highly successful effort in behalf of his “client,” in 1942 he was given a cash award and the title of “foremost college student publicist of the U.S.A.” As for Phyllis, she continued with music and in 1947 won a year’s study of her choice for her appearance on “The Big Break,” a New York network show with Eddie Dowling as master of ceremonies.

Plenty of talent stayed home and made something of a splash in Indianapolis during the war period and afterward.

An entertaining chap, still remembered by WFBM listeners, was Paul Roberts, “The Happy Monster.” From 1944 to 1950, he was probably Indianapolis’ most colorful, unpredictable radio and television personality. Born in Ludington, Michigan, he developed into a versatile athlete, musician, entertainer, and announcer in Michigan and Fort Wayne before descending upon Indianapolis.

Particularly remembered are his regular programs, “Million Dollar Party,” “Spinning Wheel,” and “The Old Fashioned Amateur Hour.” He was inventive, imaginative, and filled with off-beat prejudices and opinions. A favorite method of expressing displeasure with a performer’s recording was to hurl the offending record across the room. Since that was before the advent of unbreakable discs, the resulting smash and clatter of broken platters gratified Roberts no end and, often as not, soothed the listeners’ irritations as well.

Shortly before time to go on the air one night in May, 1950, Roberts suffered a heart attack and died within a short time. The loss of his rare ability to mix common sense with lunacy left an appreciable void in the Indianapolis radio scene. Two years later Ed Savola, former *Indianapolis Times* columnist, expressed the feelings of most WFBM listen-

Ann Wagner, “Girl DJ” at WFBM in the 1950’s, was one of the first women in radio and TV to hold such a position. Her show, “Make Mine Music,” was a Hoosier listening highlig



ers when he paid tribute in a memorable column to his close friend, “The Happy Monster.”

It was about this time, in the early '50's, that WFBM could boast one of the few female disc jockeys in the country. She was Ann Wagner, a native of Vincennes. Earlier, during a trip to the Indiana State Fair, she had won an audition and became a vocalist with Art Berry's Columbia Club Band. In 1949, she sang with the “Circle B Ranch” program and also worked with Sue Dillman on the popular “Ann and Sue” television series prior to her stint as a regular disc jockey.

THE WFBM STATIONS' CLASS OF 1964



First row: (l to r)

Cloria Groff	Eldon Campbell
Don Liggett	Don Menke
Bennie Colyer	Jim McIntyre
Gene Scott	Jim Hetherington
Emily Pearce	Harry Martin
Jan Shivers	Dave McGhee
Marthabel Geisler	Frank Prater
Norma Crowe	Earl Walker
Robert Gamble	John Whitaker
John Totten	Eric Rohlfig
Ruth Hiatt	Dean Coffin
Gene Vaughn	Agnes Wilkes
John Winningham	Jean Hiner

Second row: (l to r)

Verne Wright	Bob Berry
Bob Adamson	Herman Booth
Mary Vincent	Annette Dunlap
John Kissel	Phil Dunlap
Audrey Jones	Irene Myers
Marcia Steffen	Norma Sumner
Kenneth Routh	Tom Wendt
Glen Pommerehn	Tom Carnegie
Harold Jaynes	Jerry Chapman
Ron Hanson	Chuck O'Donnell
Clarence Hanks	Earl Schuman
Barney Hobbs	Tom Robb
Hugh Kibbey	Casey Strange

Third row: (l to r)

Al Westerman	Kelly Robbins
Bob Flanders	Bob Brockway
Dick Higgs	Arlene Schilling
Al Hendricks	Inez Hammonds
Emmett Depoy	Dorothy Glass
Harry Goodwin	Beverly May
Lana Jo Everson	Carol Rushton
Harold Davis	Marsha Clements
Ivan Waterman	Shirley Boltz
Gordon Douglas	Warren Wright
Elmer Friman	George Davis
Charles Guion	Lyell Ludwig
Frances Williams	Jim Gerard



Fourth row: (1 to r)

Fred Everett	Becky Damron	Bob Burgett	Curley Meyers	Mike Kibbey	Frank Forrest
James Avis	Connie Fowler	Ernie Crisp	Dave Livingston	Tom Davidson	Dave Romerhaus
Jim Green	Arla Dorsey	Robert Krumb	Not present at time of photo:		
Dick Reed	Terry Simpson	Richard Baldwin	Bob Arnold	Arthur Smith	Dick Mitchell
Bill Russell	Jackie Salb	Jim Mathis	Alan Freeman	Jerry Douglas	George Palmer
Alan Jeffries	Gene Hull	Stan Bock	Max Wheeler	George Clark	Eugene Napier
Paul Wilson	Bert Brouse	Earl Johnson	John Foland	Jerry Cooper	James Pratt
Clyde Curry	Paul Bender	Sue Staton	Carolyn Churchman	John Guion	Robert Riggs
Paul Roetter	Fifth row: (1 to r)		Glenn Webber	Don Hawkinson	James Shipp
Maurice Bush	Lee Bruner	Joan Shawver	Howard Caldwell	Robert Hite	Harold Stevenson
Sandra Jackson	Jerry Vance	Paul Raikes	William Litherland	Leo Kestler	Harold Stoeffler
Jackie MacDermott	George King	John Spring	John Croft	John Krom	James Walden
Gene Slaymaker	Ozzie Osborne	Hal Fryar	Virginia Gammon	Don McKinzie	Bernard Herman
		Lou Sherman			

Chapter 21

WIRE'd FOR SOUND

WIRE, which began a long and honorable existence as WKBF in 1924, was the product of persistence and know-how on the part of Noble B. Watson and his brother Carl. Beginning with its inaugural broadcast direct from a crowded automobile showroom, the station shared, with WFBM, all the trials and tribulations, the mistakes, and the successes of those pioneering Indianapolis radio days.

In July, 1929, WKBF was acquired by the Curtis Broadcasting Company, but Noble Watson kept his hand in as one of the incorporators. Others were Curtis Mushlitz and Henry B. Walker of Evansville and A. E. Reymonds of Crawfordsville. A few years later, in the early '30's, ownership of the station was again transferred, this time to the Indianapolis Broadcasting Company; D. E. "Plug" Kendrick was named vice president and general manager.

WKBF became a full-fledged affiliate of the National Broadcasting Company on a hot, sticky, August night in 1933. Only special network broadcasts had been heard on the station previously. WKBF and the network outdid themselves to celebrate the event, joined by thousands of Central Indiana fans who were now able to hear some of the great shows of the period for the first time. A special network show originated in the WKBF studios that first night. The Devore Sisters sang, Harry Bason played the piano, Meridith Nicholson extended Hoosier greetings, and Manager Kendrick plugged the station's coming attractions.

The switch in call letters to WIRE came in 1935. The Federal Communications Commission decided there was too great a possibility for confusion in identifying the two Indianapolis stations—WFBM and WKBF. One station was forever getting comments or criticisms of programs actually broadcast by the other. Despite the FCC's solicitude, however, radio and television people say this situation is little improved today. That a listener who is alert enough to catch a minor program error can fail to hear the station's identification is another of those things radio people learn to live with.

In December, 1936, the FCC granted permission for the sale of WIRE to Central Newspapers, Inc., Eugene C. Pulliam, president. Central Newspapers, later to take over *The Indianapolis Star* and *The News*, at that time published several smaller city newspapers.

A year or so after assuming control of WIRE, Pulliam was host at a couple of memorable "Appreciation Dinners" in the Riley Room of the Claypool Hotel. Guests were business leaders, advertisers, local and state officials, and celebrities who were available. Barbed wit was the order of the day at the dinners—forerunners, in some respects, to the Indianapolis Press Club's present-day Gridiron programs.

Al Wynnekoop of Lebanon served as toastmaster and reserved his sharpest shafts for the imposing bunch of dignitaries at the speaker's table. This included C. Walter "Mickey" McCarty, then president of *The News*. At one such dinner, McCarty, in his own inimitable way, lamented the fact that radio broadcasts of hot news bulletins often blocked out *The News* switchboard for some time. He explained this by pointing out that, naturally, people would turn to "The Great Hoosier Daily" to find out if what they thought they had heard on the radio was actually the truth. McCarty added that the radio reminded him of the cocktail hour—enjoyable sometimes, but with no lasting benefit. His advice for those desiring a news menu "that will stick to your ribs" was, "Read *The Indianapolis News*—Advertising rates upon application."

Late in 1936, WIRE began using its new directional antenna and tower transmitter on Millersville Road, near the present site of Roberts Dairy, about 3000 East, and in 1939 moved to its present transmitter location. The station leased the top floor of the Claypool Hotel early in 1940 and announced it would spend approximately \$50,000 for remodel-

ing and installation of studios, audition rooms, control facilities, and business offices. When time came for the move from 540½ North Meridian Street studios, the entire staff worked from midnight until 5 a.m. to keep programming on schedule.

Wally Nehrling went on the air that morning with his “Hoosier Hay-loft” program as Al Wessel, the engineer, gave him the “five o’clock go ahead” signal. It proved to be an unusually interesting morning for Wally. In the rush of moving, someone had neglected to install the bright red “on the air” signal above the studio door. As a result, someone was always barging in, usually ready to demand in a loud voice just where the blankety-blank-blank was such and such. Wally took it in his stride.

Rex Schepp was appointed general manager of WIRE in June, 1940. A native Hoosier, he had taught school and for several years was a performer and executive with Chicago radio stations. Schepp was succeeded as general manager in August, 1947, by Willard C. Worcester, who continued in the post until July, 1960.

The WIRE studios remained in the Claypool until December, 1949, when they moved to their present location, atop the *Star-News* Building at 307 North Pennsylvania Street. By this time, Pulliam had acquired *The Star* and also *The News* and wanted to consolidate his Indianapolis operations in one location.

In September, 1958, Pulliam was presented with a plaque marking WIRE’s quarter century affiliation with NBC. The presentation was made by Robert W. Sarnoff, NBC board chairman, and Matthew J. Culligan, executive vice president of the network.

With FCC approval, the Pulliam organization sold WIRE to Joseph C. Amaturio in July, 1960. Amaturio owned and operated a station in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He and his associates also had an interest in radio stations in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York City.

Amaturio personally supervised operation of the station, assisted by William J. Shuel, general manager; Mrs. Helen B. Huber, office manager; Douglas Zink, production director, and Paul Raikes, promotion director.

In May, 1964, Amaturio and his associates sold WIRE to an organization headed by Len and Burrell Small, Illinois newspaper publishers and

station owners with headquarters in Kankakee. The group publishes dailies in Kankakee and Ottawa and controls four radio stations. A new corporation, Mid-America Radio, Inc., was set up to operate WIRE, with Len Small as president and his brother as chairman of the board. Shuel was retained as general manager.

Chapter 22

GOOD NEIGHBORS

The two pioneer stations, WFBM and WIRE, had shared the Indianapolis airwaves and listeners' loyalty more than ten years before a third station appeared on the scene.

An Indianapolis attorney, Glenn Van Auken, in May, 1937, received FCC approval to build and operate WIBC. It was to be a daylight-hours-only operation. Since both of the other stations were network affiliated, the federal commission recommended the new station stick to local programming. WIBC was assigned a frequency of 1050 kilocycles and 1,000 watts.

It was more than a year, however, before WIBC got on the air. Incorporation papers were filed in February, 1938, for Indiana Broadcasting Corporation with Van Auken, Bethel Wilson, and Mrs. Nancy J. Ladd, all of Indianapolis, as the incorporators.

For studios and headquarters, the station chose the top floor of the Indianapolis Athletic Club where WFBM once had held forth. WIBC came on the air at 8 a.m., Sunday, October 30, 1938, although the official start of operations was not scheduled to take place until noon the next day. Meanwhile, the station gave listeners a rare treat—a full day and a half of solid music, with only station identification at required intervals. There was no news, no chit-chat, no commercials—nothing but music.

Then at noon the next day, Van Auken and C. A. McLaughlin, the gen-

eral manager, welcomed listeners and outlined station policies. WIBC, they said, would encourage and help to develop local talent and would also devote considerable time to civic, educational, and religious programs.

That date, October 31, 1938, went down in the books as one of radio's most exciting, but not because of WIBC's debut. That station had gone along its gentle way until sundown and had signed off with a cheery, "Good evening." A few hours later all hell broke loose on the nation's air waves and elsewhere.

It was the famous Halloween Night invasion of the country by the Martians and their imaginative leader and creator, a young man named Orson Welles. The too-realistic radio dramatization of the H. G. Wells story brought widespread panic and hysteria. Radio and newspaper switchboards were swamped with calls. Most callers sought reassurance that it was all a massive, bad joke. A few overwrought citizens called to report progress of the Martian attackers. It was the first and last such program. The FCC and the networks saw to that.

In July, 1939, Van Auken transferred his controlling interest in WIBC to a Detroit attorney, H. G. Wall, but continued as a director of the corporation.

It was on January 1, 1941, that WIBC began operating on a full-time basis, courtesy of the FCC. Its power was also increased to 5,000 watts daytime, 1,000 watts nights. Affiliation with the Mutual Network came that spring, and the station began broadcasting up to twenty hours a day. Construction also got underway on a new transmitter at 59th Street and Hollingsworth Road. At that time, Wall was president of the operation; McLaughlin was vice president and general manager; and Robert Longwell was program director. McLaughlin, however, resigned that December, and Wall assumed the manager's post.

In February, 1944, *The News* announced it was about ready to get back into the radio business. It will be remembered *The News* had taken a flier in broadcasting in 1922 when it backed Francis F. Hamilton and the first, although short-lived, Indianapolis station, WLK, nee, 9ZJ. Now *The News* was prepared to acquire WIBC from Wall and his associates—if the FCC approved. The FCC did approve and in May, *The News* took over, with Alex Campbell, Jr., in charge as manager. He was

succeeded the next year as manager by George C. Bigger, a former executive of WLW, Cincinnati.

The WIBC studios were moved to *The News* Building on West Washington Street in December, 1945, without the loss of a minute's broadcasting time. It was an overnight job, with all necessary changes made so that Joe Edison could come on the air at 5 a.m. from the new studios with his "Morning Neighbors" program. Bigger, the manager, thought it was quite a feat, and he had high praise for the advance planning of John H. Barnett, Roy Tracy of *The News* staff, and Harry E. Adams, WIBC engineer.

Richard M. Fairbanks became president and general manager of WIBC in April, 1947, and that September, Kenneth W. Church came from WCKY, Cincinnati, to take over the sales manager's post.

When the Pulliam interests acquired *The News* in 1948, WIBC was not included in the transaction. Fairbanks and his associates have continued in control of operations since that time. During that same summer, WIBC sought, and received, permission to increase power from 5,000 to 50,000 watts during daylight hours.

On July 1, 1951, Gilbert I. Berry, former University of Illinois athlete and a long-time radio executive, was appointed vice president and general sales manager of the station. About that time, officers of the controlling corporation included Richard Fairbanks as president; M. C. Fairbanks, vice-president; M. H. Geiger, secretary-treasurer. Other directors were Mrs. Adelaide Causey, W. Daniel Kibler, Jr., and Harry T. Ice, of Indianapolis; Mrs. Daniel Erincourt, Chicago; and Charles W. Fairbanks and Robert M. Vallancourt, Pasadena, California.

WIBC studios and offices have been located in the station's own building at 2835 North Illinois Street since May 31, 1955. The two-story brick and stone building was custom designed for maximum broadcasting efficiency.

Late in 1960, the station gave Indianapolis another frequency modulation station with inauguration of WIBC-FM.

Chapter 23

WIFE WAS WISH

WISH came on the air August 2, 1941, with one of the flossiest dedicatory radio celebrations up to that time. From studios in the Board of Trade Building, Indianapolis' own Colonel Roscoe Turner, one of the nation's best known aviation figures, interviewed the celebrities who turned out for the event. These, among others, included Governor Henry F. Schricker, Lieutenant Governor Charles M. Dawson, and Mayor Reginald Sullivan. A special orchestra and a host of local entertainment personalities were also on hand.

Since WISH was affiliated with the Blue Network of NBC, a coast-to-coast salute was a feature of the opening night celebration. WIRE, which was affiliated with NBC's Red Network, in a display of good radio fellowship, also welcomed the new station to the local ranks with a special congratulatory program. Earlier, WFBM, as well as WIRE and a number of other well-wishers, had welcomed WISH with ads in a special tabloid section of *The News*.

C. Bruce McConnell started the ball rolling for WISH with incorporation of the Capitol Broadcasting Company in June, 1940. In November, the FCC gave McConnell and his associates the go-ahead sign for a station to operate on 1310 kilocycles, with daytime power of 5,000 watts and 1,000 watts at night.

Successful negotiations for network affiliation ended the red tape, and WISH plans were accelerated enough to start broadcasting shortly before the formal dedication.

In addition to McConnell as president of Capitol Broadcasting, other officers included A. R. Jones, vice president; Edward W. Harris, treasurer; and Joseph G. Wood, secretary. Other directors included Joseph E. Cain, John E. Messick, Lyman S. Ayres, and Thomas Mahaffey, Jr.

Personnel of the spanking-new station included William W. Behrman, general manager; Robert E. Bausman, commercial manager; Miles Reed, program director; Stokes Gresham, chief engineer, and Luke Walton, sports director. Walton, a product of Terre Haute broadcasting, had a staccato delivery of up to 400 words a minute, which made Floyd Gibbons a mere stammerer by comparison.

McConnell and his associates organized the South Bend Broadcasting Company in 1944 to put WHOT on the air in that city. They followed by acquiring WHBU in Anderson in 1945 and WANE in Fort Wayne two years later.

Late in 1947 came the first of a series of shifts in ownership of WISH which were to keep business editors of Indianapolis newspapers on their toes frequently during the next ten years. Frank F. McKinney, Indianapolis banker, sportsman, and political leader, and his Universal Broadcasting Corporation bought WISH for \$554,000. Earlier, McKinney and his influential associates had applied to the FCC for approval of a fifth station in the city, but they dropped the matter with the purchase of WISH.

McKinney headed Universal Broadcasting as president, with Edward P. Fillion, vice president; David M. Lewis, secretary; and Chester L. Robinson, treasurer. The other directors were Frank McHale, Owen J. Bush, Robert Hickley of Ogden, Utah, and George C. and Wilda Jean Hatch of Salt Lake City.

The new owners took over WISH affairs January 1, 1948, and McConnell said he was gratified that the station would still be owned and operated by responsible, interested Hoosiers. He also pointed out that his son Robert, who had been active in the station management, would have more time for active operation of their stations in Anderson and South Bend. Shortly afterwards, George J. Higgins, former Minneapolis-St. Paul sportscaster and Des Moines station manager, was named WISH manager.

A little later, through a series of stock sales and transfers, McConnell

wound up as majority stockholder of Universal Broadcasting, again assuming a major role in the operation of WISH and the company's other stations.

About the same time that WFBM left the downtown area for the wide-open spaces of North Meridian Street, WISH also moved northward to settle in new quarters in the second floor of the Riddick Building at 1440 North Meridian. Thanks to McKinney's potent connections with professional baseball and other big-time sports, the gala dedication festivities had the flavor of a convention of big league greats. Among others helping to put the station on the air with a flourish were Casey Stengel, the colorful New York Yankees' manager, and his star, Joe DiMaggio; Ralph Kiner of the Pittsburgh Pirates; Al Lopez of the Indianapolis Indians, Harry Wismer, the famous sports announcer; and Wayne Coy, then FCC chairman.

WISH next hit the business headlines in a big way in July, 1956, when there were published rumors that J. H. "Jock" Whitney, the well-known Eastern financier, publisher, and sportsman, was dickering with McConnell. The reported deal would include WISH radio and television, WANE-TV, and another Fort Wayne station—all owned by Universal Broadcasting. McConnell admitted there was something to the report, explaining:

"Whitney has made us an offer, but I haven't made up my mind whether I want to sell."

By late August, the decision had been made, and the deal went through with the FCC's blessing for a reported \$10,000,000.

Four members of the Universal board of directors stepped over to the board of the newly formed Indiana Broadcasting Corporation, organized for the new WISH operation. They were the two McConnells, Frank McKinney, and Stokes Gresham. Robert McConnell was named station manager. At time of the sale, the elder McConnell was listed as majority stockholder. Other stockholders, in addition to the directors, included Joseph Cain, Frank McHale, Earl H. Schmidt, Samuel R. Sutphin, Dudley V. Sutphin, Luke Walton, Butler University, and P. R. Mallory and Company, Inc.

In June, 1963, Universal sold radio stations WISH and WISH-FM to Don W. Burden of Omaha, an operator of stations in Omaha and Port-

land, Oregon. Robert McConnell said the sale would allow more concentration on the station's television operations. Robert Ohleyer, who had long been associated with WISH in a number of capacities, was named general manager of the now-divorced radio operation. As a result of the split-up, new call letters were required, and WIFE emerged on the Indianapolis radio scene. The station's old familiar spot on the dial, 1310, remained the same, as did the studio's location at 1440 North Meridian.

About the time of the radio station sale, Robert McConnell announced WISH-TV would soon have a new home, an ultra modern, specially designed building of its own at 20th and Meridian Streets.

Chapter 24

AROUND THE TOWN

During the war years, there was little incentive and virtually no opportunity to launch new radio stations. New equipment was nearly impossible to obtain. And manpower—even advertisers—were in short supply.

Even so, it was about three years after Japan surrendered before the fifth Indianapolis radio station—WXLW—came on the air. Broadcasting on 1,000 watts during daylight hours only, the new station bowed in at the 1590 spot on radio dials early on the morning of August 18, 1948.

Offices had been set up in that old stamping ground of Indianapolis radio, the ninth floor of the Indianapolis Athletic Club. The studios, transmitter, and towers were at West 30th Street and Kessler Boulevard in a building originally constructed for experimental television work by P. R. Mallory and Company, Inc.

Officers for the corporation which promoted and launched WXLW, Radio Indianapolis, were Conrad Ruckelshaus, president; Fredric M. Ayres, Jr., vice president; David L. Chambers, Jr., secretary; and Dudley V. Sutphin, treasurer. George S. Losey was named station manager; Sam White, commercial manager; Ward Glenn, program director; and Charles Alter, chief engineer.

The station's avowed policy was one of adherence to local interest programming, concentrating on music, news, sports, and civic features. Except for a later hookup with the Mutual network for news and occa-

sional special events, WXLW has stuck closely to its local knitting with programming aimed at the "adult" audience. Access to all kinds of music has never been a problem to the station. When WXLW played its first record on the air, in its collection there were 14,999 more ready for the turntable, according to opening day publicity. The report did not say whom the station depended upon for its record-counting chores.

Second only to its opening day festivities was the celebration which marked completion of the station's new 5,000 watt transmitter, constructed early in 1955 at 56th Street and Guion Road. The new facilities were put into operation March 12, and at the same time the WXLW position on the radio dial was shifted from 1590 to 950, where it has remained.

To celebrate the big event, ceremonies included a special one-hour program featuring prominent personages from both radio and politics. They included Harold Fellows, president of the National Association of Broadcasters; Indiana Senators Homer E. Capehart and William E. Jenner; Mayor Alex M. Clark; Robert D. Enoch, who had become station manager in 1950, and a host of other luminaries.

Late in December, 1962, it was announced that a new organization headed by long-time manager, Robert D. Enoch, had bought the outstanding interests in WXLW. In recent years, principal interest in the station had been held by Enoch, Lyman S. Ayres, Frederic Ayres, of Indianapolis; and Eugene Sandford of Louisville. The new corporate lineup included Enoch as president; Eugene W. Strack, executive vice president and station manager; and Florence K. Enoch, vice president and secretary. Other directors included John G. Enoch, Robert D. Enoch, and John Wooling of Indianapolis. The FCC had already given approval to the setup before the public was let in on the secret.

WGEE

Eight years went by before the 1590 kilocycle point on the dial, vacated by WXLW, was filled in. Three groups were reported clamoring for the open frequency which eventually was granted to Rollins Broadcasting, Inc., of Wilmington, Delaware.

As a result, WGEE came on the air Monday, December 10, 1956, to begin daily schedules from 6 a.m. until sundown from its studios at 4800

East Raymond Street. At the time, Russell Chambers, assistant to the president of the parent company, and Arnold C. Johnson, the station manager, said their plan was "to supplement the radio service for this area."

"Supplementation," in terms of WGEE programming has been two-fold. WGEE—first radio station to recognize the sizable Negro market in Indianapolis—has directed approximately one-third of its broadcast schedule toward the serving of that portion of the population. In addition, WGEE recognizes the Indianapolis interest in "country music" and presents that type of entertainment as a part of its weekly schedule. In April, 1960, WGEE became affiliated with the American Broadcasting System.

WGEE is a division of Rollins Broadcasting Inc., of Wilmington, Delaware, who also owns radio properties in New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Norfolk, Virginia; Charleston, West Virginia; and Wilmington, Delaware. The Rollins Television stations are in Pensacola, Florida; Charleston, West Virginia; and Plattsburgh, New York. The Outdoor Advertising Division of Rollins includes the cities of Philadelphia, Washington, D. C.; Wilmington, Delaware, all of Southeast Texas, and 750,000 square miles in the Republic of Mexico. Recently Rollins Broadcasting acquired Satin Soft Cosmetics, Inc., and is in the process of taking over its latest purchase, Orkin Exterminating Co. Rollins stock is listed on the American Stock Exchange.

WIGO

All was relatively serene on the Indianapolis broadcasting front for some years. Then came the period of 1961-62 when there was a rash of ownership changes, switches in management, and three new radio stations—if you count WISH's transformation into WIFE.

Luke Walton, a regular with WISH for fifteen years until 1956, received FCC approval for a 250-watt, daytime station, in September, 1962. The next year, on May 15, WIGO, tuned in at 810 on the dial, was on the air from studios at 143 North Delaware Street. After leaving WISH, Walton operated his own Indianapolis advertising agency. In the summer of 1962, Walton, along with some local associates, Stokes Gresham, Jr., Dr. Fritz Morris, and Dr. J. William Adams, bought station

WMRT in Lansing, Michigan, an ABC-radio network outlet. Approval to set up WIGO followed shortly.

The initial WIGO personnel roster included a number of familiar Indianapolis radio names. In addition to Walton and Gresham, the list included Bill Frosch, program director; Mike Dunn, George Davis, Paul Luther, Milt Lewis, Bob Rogers, Chuck Mitchell, and Brad Bate. With so many veteran sports hands around, Indianapolis Indians baseball, with thirty-four games broadcast, received a lot of attention the first summer. Even games on the road were broadcast from direct telegraphic reports.

Sarkes Tarzian, Bloomington manufacturer and owner of radio and television stations, after receiving FCC approval to buy the new station late in 1963, took over operations in the spring of 1964.

Chapter 25

JOINING UP

Almost the first thing every endeavor does when its more progressive leaders decide it has reached the status of an industry—usually early in the game—is to form a trade association. This was not the case with the Hoosier broadcasting industry. Possibly because so many determined individualists were involved in creating the radio industry in Indiana, the boys didn't get together for mutual aid and defense until 1944. The Association of Indiana Broadcasters was formed at that time. But it failed to live up to the founders' hopes and, organizationally speaking, barely got off the ground.

But a good idea is hard to suppress, so Hoosier broadcasting leaders got together at a reorganizational meeting at the Columbia Club in Indianapolis in June, 1948, to pump new life into the association. Stations from Indianapolis and most of the others in the state were represented. That it would be advantageous for Indiana stations to endeavor to work toward a common goal, "to foster new ideas for the advancement of radio and to promote the general welfare of the state" was suggested. As there was no strenuous objection, a new organization was formed. So the public would know it was a new organization, and not the old "Association of Indiana Broadcasters," a new name was needed. With so much creative talent present, a decision was soon reached. Members agreed it would be the "Indiana Broadcasters Association." Thirty-six Hoosier stations signed up as charter members.

Among those active in getting the broadcasters together and in getting them to agree to stay together in the new organization were Don Burton of WLBC, Muncie; John Carl Jeffry of WIOU, Kokomo; and C. Bruce McConnell of WISH, Indianapolis; WHBU, Anderson, and WHOT, South Bend. The first three presidents of the association were C. Bruce McConnell, 1948-49; Daniel C. Parks, 1950-51; and O. E. Richards, 1952.

The principles of the IBA, drafted at the first Columbia Club meeting, are still advocated by members today. Basically, they are "To promote cooperation and understanding among broadcasters in the state; to foster and promote the development of the art of broadcasting; to encourage and promote customs and practices which would be for the best interest of the public and the broadcasting industry; to protect its members in every lawful and proper manner from injuries and unjust actions; and to act as a contact with other broadcast associations."

Early in its existence, the IBA tackled some of the tougher problems on the Hoosier radio horizon. These included solving the seating problem of broadcasters at the annual State High School Basketball Tournament, as well as clarifying tax and wage-hour laws as they applied to broadcasting, music license fees, and the interpretation of FCC rules and regulations regarding license renewals and broadcasting responsibilities. Later, the IBA also began serving as a central clearing house for manpower to help stations locate talented copywriters, salesmen, technicians, and announcers.

The Indiana State Fair has provided a splendid opportunity for IBA members to join together in a project. Members were instrumental in promoting construction of the Radio Center Building on the fairgrounds. Scene of innumerable radio and television broadcasts, it has also provided a convenient spot for visitors to drop in and get acquainted with Hoosier station celebrities and vice versa.

The IBA has also been an active booster for countless public service programs and civic projects. Radio coverage of the biennial Indiana State Legislature has been stepped up and improved by daily reports which are carried on a statewide FM network and fed to participating stations through an IBA arrangement.

By the time television and FM stations appeared on the Hoosier scene,

the IBA was well rooted, and the newcomers joined up too. By early 1964, there were 69 AM radio stations, 27 FM stations, and 17 television stations operating in Indiana. While there is a certain amount of moving around in jobs, reliable estimates say there are more than 2,200 men and women employed in the Hoosier broadcasting industry.

In 1964, officers and directors of the IBA were:

OFFICERS

President—Reid G. Chapman, WANE, Fort Wayne
Vice President, AM—W. C. Fowler, WBAT, Marion
Vice President, FM—Martin Williams, WFMS, Indianapolis
Vice President, TV—Arthur O’Neil, WSBT-TV, South Bend
Secretary-Treasurer—W. T. Hamilton, WNDU, South Bend
Assistant Secretary—Richard Jackson, WSAL, Logansport
Assistant Treasurer—Ben Falber, Jr., WTHI, Terre Haute

DIRECTORS

Jack Douglas, WFIE-TV, Evansville
Donald Pilk, WCSI, Columbus
John Atkinson, WHBU, Anderson
Joseph Edwards, WAMW, Washington
J. E. Willis, WAZY, Lafayette
Immediate Past President, Don Menke, WFBM, Indianapolis

Chapter 26

MATURE AND VIGOROUS

Not many years ago, the pessimists and perhaps a few cantankerous optimists were predicting the decline and fall of the old radio empire. They said television would eventually sound the death knell for radio as a mass entertainment and information medium. And that FM radio would help polish off the pioneering AM variety. It is probably true the great radio shows of the 'thirties and 'forties are gone forever, destined to live only in the memories of graying middle agers who are fond of recalling them as better than many probably were. But radio as an industry, in number of listeners and number of stations, is more vital and healthy than ever. The advent of transistors and car radios is partially responsible for this happy state of affairs. Radio also learned to roll with television's punches, filling in, with imaginative programming, the areas TV couldn't touch because of expense and the delicate, yet ponderous, equipment involved.

Just as television stations found it to be a near necessity to be affiliated with a network, radio stations discovered they no longer had to depend on the networks for listenership or economics. Radio networks are still in Indiana and are represented on a great number of stations; NBC, ABC, CBS, and Mutual signatures can still be heard in Hoosierland.

Television, with its prime hour entertainment, has made a change in listening habits for radio. Radio's wonderful facility for mobility adapts nicely to the activity of daytime work and play.

Most AM stations today utilize a Music-News-Sports format, interspersing network, where available, or commercial or public service "talk" shows. Methods of use, however, differ dramatically from station to station.

Most stations choose one of several set patterns of programming as a basis and then vary this according to management desires. There are the classical stations which feature classics, top show tunes, and talk shows. Such stations are few in number. Many stations are "good music" stations that concentrate on show tunes and the more conservative "pop" tunes. The other end of the programming spectrum contains the "formula" stations. These concentrate on the top forty "pop" songs, regardless of the type, and broadcast a highly accelerated style of fast slogan patter from the "DJ's," interspersed with contests, gimmicks, and jingles.

The majority of the 250-1000 watt community stations, however, balance their programming to fit the local situation. They may play "country" and western music at one time of day, and "rock and roll" at another, depending upon the listening habits of the community. These stations are normally high on community events and news and prove themselves to be not only valuable advertisers, but also good neighbors.

All the full time (day and night) frequencies for Indiana have been allocated long ago with little hope of more opening up. However, the state has added scores of daytime-only stations, many in smaller markets to supplement statewide coverage. In areas where "daytimers" conflict directly with full time stations, they have proved themselves to be highly competitive.

Indicative of radio's impact on Hoosier lives is the tremendous increase in the number of licenses issued, particularly in recent years. In 1937, one of radio's "golden years," there were 17 AM stations in the state.

Now, according to the FCC radio director, July 1, 1964, there are 119 AM or FM stations in operation in Indiana.

Excellence has become a tradition which WFBM strives always to maintain. This "Hall of Honor" displays awards and citations received by WFBM through the years.



A PATTERN OF EXCELLENCE



In 1931 WFBM received its first award in broadcasting.

A PATTERN OF EXCELLENCE

In recognition and appreciation of
outstanding public service in
encouraging promoting and developing
American ideals of freedom and for loyal,
devoted service to the nation and to the
communities served by it

Station

WFBI

Indianapolis, Indiana
has been presented a

Station Award

for the year

1963

by

The Committee of Awards
of the

Alfred I. du Pont

Awards
Foundation

In 1964 WFBI won the nation's top award for excellence in broadcasting,
the Alfred I. DuPont Award.

Chapter 27

CAPTURING THE CROOKS

In the late “Roaring ’Twenties,” the roar, often as not, was the sound of another highpowered getaway car, its load of bank bandits, rum runners, or garden variety gangsters thumbing their noses at outdistanced police pursuers. Transportation had the edge on communications, at least as far as police were concerned, and the forces of law and order were fast losing the war on crime. Faster, surer communication between police units was a necessity, if the odds were to be tipped in their favor. A radio system was probably the answer, but small, practical, automobile radios were still in the developmental stage.

Then in 1929, a young Purdue electrical engineering graduate enlisted in the grim battle. Largely as a result of his work, big-shot criminals and punks alike soon found out that radio waves were faster any day than even a supercharged Duesenberg or Cadillac. And that roadblocks were mushrooming in the most inconvenient places.

Robert L. Batts was the man who did so much to turn the tide and to give police at least an even break with their adversaries. Batts, newly graduated from Purdue, was employed to design and to build a practical, police mobile receiver for Detroit, home base of the notorious “Purple Gang.” After his system worked there, Cleveland and Indianapolis wanted the same setup. That September, Cleveland’s first police radio went on the air.

The next month, Detroit police gave Batts a six-months’ leave to come

to Indianapolis and to install the country's third such radio system. The first broadcast over the police transmitter, WMDZ, located in the K of P Building, took place on Christmas Eve, 1929. Receiving the first message in a Stutz Bearcat police car was Chief of Detectives Jerry E. Kinney.

"By golly, the confounded thing does work," commented the happy Kinney, stepping from the running board of the Bearcat.

Batts' "six-months' leave" was one of the longest in history. He stayed with the Indianapolis Police Department twenty-two years, resigning as a captain in 1952 to enter private business.

Meanwhile, he had established a national reputation as an "idea" man in police and fire department radio communications. He conceived many improvements over the years, either designing the equipment himself or passing along his ideas to manufacturers.

Thanks to Batts' work, the Indianapolis Police Department can claim a long string of radio "firsts" including:

- First big city station to have two-way communication between station and patrol cars.
- First to have push-button control of the entire network from individual cars, a feature vitally important in high speed chases.
- First to have radio-directed motorcycles
- First broadcasting station of any kind to use "resonance cavities" so the same antenna can handle transmissions on more than one frequency
- First to have electronic push-button status maps for the control of patrol cars

Batts' successors and their colleagues have continued to keep up the pace he set, taking advantage of new developments as they came along. They can't let up. Control of crime in a metropolitan center like Indianapolis is tough at best. Without radio it would be impossible.

Among WFBM engineers presently employed at the station, Robert Flanders, Harold K. Jaynes, Emmett E. DePoy, Richard H. Mitchell, and Maurice Bush have been transmitter operators with the police department.

Chapter 28

THE BIG TIME

Many native and adopted Hoosiers became well-known radio personalities during the '20's to the '50's before television came along. The names and talents of a number of these are as familiar today to a new generation of television viewers—and a third generation of radio listeners—as they were then. Some are now big names on the national entertainment stage. Other personalities to whom Indiana has an affectionate claim have gone into other fields. Many of those, happily acknowledging the impetus radio gave to their careers, are doing very well, thank you. Still others have retired, a few have dropped out of sight—and too many have passed on, leaving broadcasting the richer for their having been a part of it.

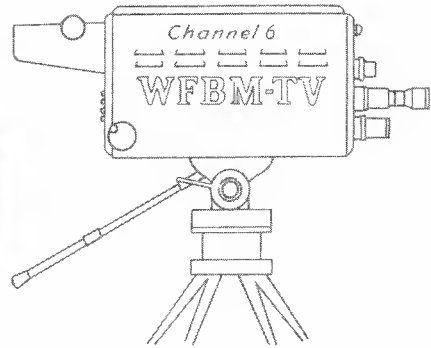
Compiling any list of such personalities is perilous. Practically everyone will remember an old Hoosier-connected favorite whose name was inadvertently omitted from the list. But, for what it's worth, several oldtimers on the Indianapolis broadcasting scene have drawn up such a roster. They admit to sometimes rusty memories—and all have had some candidates for whom the best they could do was: “Remember old what's-his-name, the one everyone was talking about back in '38. Close friend of mine. Wish I could think of his name.”

But, incomplete as it surely is, here's their list:

Abbott, Minabelle	Fox, Wm. F. Jr.	Parker, Bob
Alpert, Herman	Forbes, Gilbert	Parrish, Frankie
Ash, William "Curly"	French, Pete	Pittinger, Dick
Bailey, Harry	Frosch, Bill	Powell, Dick
Bason, Harry	Garber, Jan	Richardson, Larry
Beemer, Brace	Gordon, Earl	Ries, Joseph
Bell, Meri	Gordon, Elsie Mae	Riley, Len
Brickert, Carlton	Guedel, John	Robbins, William
Bruce, Donald	Gwynn, Easy	Roberts, Paul
Brown, Bill	Hancock, Don	Schenkel, Chris
Butterworth, Charles	Harris, Phil	Schort, Gwendolyn
Bullock, Jim	Hastings, Don	Seidel, Emil
Bullock, Walter	Haywood, Pat	Sherwood, Bob
Byrd, Dessa	Hendricks, Blythe	Sherwood, Gayle
Carlton, Frances	Hendricks, Tommy	Shideler, Dorothy
Carmichael, Hoagy	Hill, Edwin C.	Shriner, Herb
Carnegie, Tom	Hoosier Hotshots	Sidener, Merle
Carolyn, Sue	Holtman, John	Sims, Sam
Carpenter, Ken	Holler, Russ	Singin' Sam
Carroll, Helen	House, Bromley	Sisters of the Skillet
Chapman, Chuckles	Irish, George	Skelton, Red
Collins, Sid	Jolly, Billy	Snodgrass, Duane
Cowling, Sam	Kelly, Gene	Stewart, Jay
Croft, Mary Jane	Kirby, Durward	Studcbaker, Hugh
Davis, Charlie	Lasher, Will	Taylor, Paul
Davis, Elmer	Lowe, Louie	Thompson, Bill
DeVore Sisters	Maple City Four	Tilson, Jack
DeYoung, John	Martin, Dolly	Tribby, John
Dean, Bill	Martin, Harry	Tuttle, Lurene
Duey, Phil	Massey, Vera	Virden, James
Dumke, Ralph	Maxwell, Marilyn	Young, Mary Paxton
East, Ed	McConnell, Ed	Walton, Luke
Edwards, Frank	McKinley, Barry	Wheatley, Parker
Edwards, Gus	Mershon, Gil	Westover, James D.
Ellington, Ken	Moore, Maxine	Whitworth, Verna
Elvin, Ralph	Morin Sisters	Wilcox, Phyllis
Farrell, Roselee	Nehrling, Wally	Wilson, Bert
Fetty, Max	Otte, Ruth	Wood, Henry S.

Chapter 29

TELEVISION



With Henry F. Schricker's well-remembered gift for showing up at the right place at the right time, it's not surprising that Indiana's only two-term governor was the first Hoosier public official to appear on television. What is surprising is that Schricker was then only lieutenant governor. And the year was 1939.

What he had to say that historic day was typically Schrickerian: "My greatest regret is that I wasn't born handsome. However, I am glad to have lived in an age in which such marvels can be witnessed."

His appearance was not much of a "marvel" as television goes nowadays. But, remember, this was a full ten years before WFBM had even a test pattern on the Indianapolis air waves. That first telecast in May, 1939, was in the Antlers Hotel. Adolph Wagner, a radio distributor, had arranged for Philco engineers from Philadelphia to set up a temporary installation. The purpose was to give local Philco dealers, business leaders, and a few other guests a somewhat flickering idea of what was ahead. It offered, as Drew Pearson used to say so resoundingly, and so reluctantly, on his Sunday evening radio program, "predictions of things to come."

The images of Schricker and others taking part in that first TV demonstration appeared on a screen only a few feet from the portable camera being used. Witnesses recall now that the images were quite sharp but somewhat overcast with a greenish blue aura, giving performers a faintly

unwell appearance. Among WIRE personalities taking part in the demonstration were Morris Hicks, announcer; Mary Jane Hulse, vocalist with Art Berry's orchestra; Dick Herold and Eddie Kane, instrumentalists; Byron Taggart, impersonator of radio personalities; and Gloria Feld, vocalist.

Later that same year at the Indiana State Fair, WLS, Chicago, came down to put on a similar TV demonstration in the Manufacturers' Building. It was the first time the public had a chance to see what was in store. And fair-goers liked what they saw; particularly pleased were those invited to appear before the camera. Their relatives and friends hiked to a receiver in another part of the building to catch a recognizable glimpse of their own favorite "star." WLS had thoughtfully sent along some of its staff entertainers to help round out the volunteer talent format. The same kind of demonstration setup had previously excited spectators at the San Francisco and New York World's Fairs.

During the next few years the war, with its restrictions and material shortages, put a crimp in television development. But it didn't stop recurrent rumors as to exactly how and when TV would arrive in Hoosierland. As usual, almost everyone except the engineers had some kind of opinion.

The rumors took on more definite shape in the summer of 1944 when it was announced that two Indianapolis men, Gerald D. Smith and Marion E. Stevenson, had applied for a license to install a small experimental TV station in the basement of Smith's home at 2712 West 30th St.

After the equipment was installed, P. R. Mallory and Company, Inc., of Indianapolis bought the equipment from Smith and Stevenson. It was under the auspices of Mallory, then, in the spring of 1945, that the state's first television station, W9XMT, began operation on Channel 3 with assigned wavelength of 60 to 65 megacycles.

There was surprisingly little publicity about television's bow in Indianapolis. But then, W9XMT was primarily an experimental laboratory for Mallory. The only receivers in the city at the time were the few in the hands of some Mallory employees who were checking reception. The programs, too, were lacking somewhat in entertainment value, consisting entirely of test patterns. An evening of test patterns was hardly in the same league with radio's Bob Hope and Jerry Colonna, or even

“Grand Ole Op’ry.” The city’s first TV station, however, did occasionally broadcast a few records at noontime, primarily to test the sound, rather than to break the test pattern monotony.

W9XMT was fulfilling its purpose, according to Joseph E. Cain, then vice president and general manager of Mallory. He explained that the non-commercial operation was being conducted to aid in developing, testing, and improving the many television set components the company was beginning to manufacture.

The station continued operation from the basement of Smith’s home for sometime before it was moved to a new, specially constructed building at West 30th Street and Kessler Boulevard—now home base for WXLW. Smith continued as engineer in charge of the project, with his partner Stevenson as technician. Working with them was Charles Rainwater, engineer in charge of television development for Mallory.

After WFBM-TV, the city’s first commercial station, came on the air May 30, 1949, the Mallory experimental project became unnecessary.

When Indiana’s second television station, WTTV, went on the air November, 1949, Bloomington gained the distinction of being the smallest city in the world with a video transmitter. The station, owned by Sarkes Tarzian, and affiliated with the NBC network, began operation on Channel 10. The transmitter was built by Tarzian in the same shop where he previously had assembled an experimental transmitter, as well as equipment for his standard radio station, WTTS. Cost of the project was estimated as close to a quarter million dollars.

Taking part in the station’s dedicatory program were two of Indiana’s bulkier, illustrious citizens, Senator Homer E. Capehart and Indiana University President Herman B Wells.

At the time of the WTTV advent, it was estimated there were about 500 television receiving sets in the Bloomington area.

Chapter 30

THE TELEVISION BOOM

Had Central Indiana been as hungry for radio back in the early '20's as it was for television in the immediate post war years, the pioneering Francis Hamilton station would have blossomed from the start, instead of dying on the vine.

But the climate was different after World War II. Spendable money and the pent-up desire to buy things flooded the land after being dammed up so long by wartime shortages and restrictions. Almost all families saw a television set in their immediate future. But what good was a set if there was nothing to see? It was frustrating. So the conjecture and uncertainty continued in Indianapolis.

The appetite for TV was further whetted during the 1947 State Fair when daily demonstrations were presented in the Women's Building by WIRE personnel. Shows were scheduled each afternoon and evening from a specially constructed second floor studio. Viewers could see the results on telescreens on the main floor of the building. During intermissions, fair-goers flocked to the studio in the hope of being invited to get in front of a camera. After all, being able at that time to boast you had been on television was no mean distinction.

In the meantime, the Wm. H. Block Co. had been given authority to start actual construction of a television station. Merrill Lindley of WFBM transferred to the radio department and with other engineers installed the necessary equipment atop Block's downtown building. But

WWHB never got much beyond sending out test patterns. Eventually, wary Block officials backed off from the uncharted beaches of the virgin and uncertain land of electronics in favor of devoting full attention to minding the store. The FCC permit was voluntarily surrendered.

About the same time, both WFBM and the Crosley Corporation of Cincinnati had applications pending for stations at the Crossroads of America. Late in 1947, Crosley announced that over \$700,000 had already been invested in its WLW-T operation, which it hoped eventually to hook up with proposed television stations in Indianapolis, Columbus, and Dayton.

Meanwhile, television was going great guns in New York, Chicago, and a few other metropolitan centers. Programs were improving and the sale of TV sets soared, particularly in Eastern states. But, as in the beginning days of radio, it was the novelty of the thing, rather than great programs, which caught the public fancy. Tavern and restaurant proprietors and their patrons, as well as home viewers, would sit by the hour fascinated by seeing such wonders as cigarettes pop out of a package and trot around by themselves. All television set owners were popular in those days. Their guests, sights lined up on a screen about 5 by 6 inches, would placidly stoop, watch, squint, and envy.

Envy was definitely in order. Prices for television sets at that time ranged from \$2,565 for the Dumont television-radio-phonograph combination to around \$250 for the RCA TV set, plus, of course, \$45 for installation and one year's service. The Indianapolis RCA plant was fast becoming one of the nation's major production centers for such television receivers. The RCA console model, combining radio and TV facilities, was rolling off the production lines at a rapid clip and being snatched up almost as fast.

Early in 1948, WFBM received the long-awaited news that it had the FCC "go-ahead" to construct a television station. Sarkes Tarzian, at the same time, was granted permission to build WTTV at Bloomington which he subsequently put into operation November 11, 1949. Tarzian, a manufacturer of electronic components, had operated a Bloomington radio station and was also the developer of "HIFAM" radios. WIRE and WIBC also had license applications on file with the FCC at the time. George Higgins, WISH manager, announced that station, too, had pe-

tioned the FCC to reinstate a TV license application. *The South Bend Tribune* had also gotten into the swim and was pressing for a license. The rush was on.

While Indianapolis area residents in 1948 fumed and waited for television, some other Hoosier residents were smugly watching wrestling matches, old Western movies, and a few live programs from nearby Chicago or Cincinnati stations. Some of these fortunate souls later complained they had never seen so many visiting relatives from Indianapolis before or since. A few “eager-beaver” Indianapolis residents also purchased sets with special booster equipment and towering aerials in the hope of shagging an occasional program from over-the-border stations. And, if the atmospheric conditions were just right, they did—sometimes. One congenial tavern owner of Indianapolis’ South Side spent around \$1,000 for such an installation. Then he promptly inaugurated his friendly “sit, sip, and see” fraternity. He later said he wasn’t sure it was really profitable, “but it sure was fun.”

Earlier in 1948, Jep Cadou, Jr., now of *The Star*, wrote an informative series of articles covering all the known facts about the when, how, and where of Indianapolis television. In a cautious, hopeful way, he gave Hoosiers a good idea of what was in store in the not-so-distant future. Cadou also reported the success of Captain William Eddy the previous fall in flashing images to Chicago of some Notre Dame home football games. Despite the generally optimistic tone of the series, Cadou warned impatient viewers-to-be: Don’t expect too much too soon.

Like most good advice, it was largely unheeded.

Chapter 31

SEEING IS BELIEVING

When television did begin its first cautious, though definite, approach to Indianapolis, there was no secrecy regarding its progress. It was right there on top of the Merchants Bank Building, tallest building in town. Harry Bitner, Jr., WFBM general manager, had announced in September, 1948, that the roof of the 14-story structure would be the base for a 228-foot television and FM tower-antenna and that a 1,260 square foot building on the roof would house the station transmitter. From the time the first shaft of steel poked above the roof line that winter, progress could be checked by anyone who looked up. Most everyone did.

The tower was completed the next spring, and Roger Budrow, *The News* business editor, wrote a feature about it. He was happily amazed that it had gone up without any mishaps. Among other tid-bits of information passed along was the fact someone would have to climb the tower (448 feet above street level) every three months to replace all bulbs in the red aircraft warning lights. It was a Federal regulation. Budrow also reported that WFBM's Frank Sharp took such a proprietary interest in all phases of the project that he felt impelled to inspect the tower personally. About a third of the way up the lacy framework, Sharp decided the rest of the tower was probably pretty much the same, only higher, and he carefully, prayerfully descended.

From then on, the question of the hour was, "When will television

finally get here?” Harold Hartley, *The Times* business editor had an answer in one of his many stories on the subject. It was:

“If you keep your feet dry and don’t cross the street in the middle of the block, stay alive until next year, you may still be able to see Myrna Loy making those flapjacks, or—tut-tut—if the censors permit, see Betty Grable’s legs right in your own living room.”

It was not until March, 1949, that Indianapolis residents were actually encouraged to purchase television receivers. To spread the good word that now, at last, was the time to buy, the Indianapolis Electric League teamed with midwest distributors and dealers to sponsor an exposition in the Manufacturer’s Building at the State Fairgrounds. The WFBM mobile transmitter toured booths at the show televising the pictures to receiving sets scattered throughout the building. Local talent provided entertainment for the daily shows from March 19 through the 26th using the center area for an auditorium.

It was around the middle of April, 1949, that breathless and somewhat impatient Hoosiers got the word they had been waiting years to hear. WFBM announced it was probable the station would be on the air Memorial Day. And, playing Santa Claus to the hilt, further declared the inaugural program would be a telecast of the entire 500-Mile Race. It was one of the most popular announcements ever made by an Indianapolis broadcasting station.

There was a lot of red tape to go through—cinching agreements with the Mutual Broadcasting System; WIBC, which put the race on a radio network; Speedway officials, and the Perfect Circle Piston Ring Company, which had priority on broadcasting rights.

Moreover, there were a few technical details to be worked out. One problem was the placement of the three cameras to be used. This required the considered opinions of Wilbur Shaw, Speedway president; RCA officials, WFBM-TV executives and technicians, as well as those of officials of Indiana Bell Telephone Company which was to transmit the telecast from the track to the transmitter downtown. The decision was to put cameras in the home stretch, pit areas, and in Grandstand E at the southwest turn.

Engineers believed the initial program might be seen as far away as 60 to 70 miles. On the strength of this, it was estimated at least 1,200

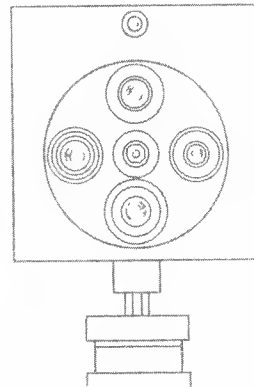
additional television sets would be installed in the Indianapolis area by May 30th. WFBM-TV confidently announced initial advertising rates. According to the station's first tentative rate card, filmed spot announcements would be \$25, filmed programs would be \$150 an hour, and live shows \$250 per hour. The prevailing rate then for radio time was roughly \$270 an hour.

With camera locations and commercial details out of the way, WFBM-TV could now begin to recruit capable personnel for the ambitious undertaking. This was no easy job, considering the whole business was fairly new to everyone concerned and experienced hands were few and far between. In addition, the station had boldly—some thought rashly—picked one of the world's top sporting events for its first video splash on Hoosier airwaves.

There was a certain amount of tension all around.

Chapter 32

CHANNEL SIX



While WFBM-TV crews were up to their collective electronic eyeteeth in preparations for their maiden program, the expectant public was also preparing itself for the wonders to come. Aiding the public educational process were special Sunday television sections in both *The Star* and *The Times*. Every aspect of the new marvel was covered from A to Z—antenna to zenith—and back again. Particularly exhaustive were the reports and the speculations on local activities and anticipated programming.

One minor disappointment was the estimate that it would be at least a year before “live” network programs came to Indianapolis. This would have to wait until a network of microwave towers and coaxial cables could be completed to connect major metropolitan areas. Even then, towers were going up in Northern Indiana at Angola, LaGrange, and Valparaiso as part of Bell Telephone’s linkage to New York, Chicago, and other cities in a TV-radio relay system. Such towers were generally about fifty miles apart. Microwaves travel in a straight line, paying no attention to the curvature of the earth. Consequently, a tower has to be high enough to catch the waves from the next tower and bounce them along before the waves wander off into space. Across the nation such towers often soar up 200 feet to clear topographical hurdles.

In addition to the northern series of towers, another series linking Dayton and Indianapolis by way of New Hope, Ohio, Brookville, Glen-

wood, and Greenfield was erected a little later. It was this setup which eventually beamed network programs to Indianapolis. Still later, a coaxial cable system was pushed from Indianapolis to Louisville to add Kentucky and points south to the national relay system.

All this was outlined and forecast in the Sunday newspapers. But after learning that the benefits of such splendid preparations were still considerably around the corner, the readers turned their attention to the here and the now—which was mostly WFBM-TV.

They learned that the station had already enlarged its staff by about fifteen persons in preparation for going on the air and that all radio personnel was also giving much time to preparations for Memorial Day. Sharing major responsibility and headaches for the planning under General Manager Harry Bitner were Frank Sharp, program director; William F. Kiley, sales manager; Harold S. Holland, chief engineer.

Bitner expressed the hope WFBM-TV would be able to broadcast at least twenty hours a week. And, looking ahead a few years, he foresaw construction of a new, modern home for the station.

On Monday, May 16th, several thousand new TV set owners in and around Indianapolis carefully tuned to Channel 6 and sat back to enjoy the first sight on their bright little magic screens. It was only a test pattern, but as a harbinger of wonderful things to come, it was a beautiful sight. Even those who saw only fuzzy, wavy lines, and circles were grateful. They still had more than a week to line up antennas and have sets checked before the big day. Set owners—and those who had set owning friends—were like small children counting off the days until Christmas.

Memorial Day finally came. And now, added to the usual, electrifying, race-day air, came *television*. Indianapolis was ready, waiting, and aware. For days, nearly every radio and television dealer in the area had been proclaiming the news that customers and friends were invited to be their guests for a front row seat at the race—or at least as many as could crowd in front of a display window or jam their way into a show room. Technicians were standing by many demonstration sets to make certain first-time viewers did not go away muttering, “If they ever perfect this thing, I might buy one.”

With preparations as complete as they ever would be, WFBM-TV

began a final round of test patterns early in the morning. This gave Johnny-come-latelys among set owners a few more hours to fiddle with unfamiliar knobs and gadgets as they strove mightily to tune in a perfect circle on their screens.

Finally, and promptly, at 10 a.m. the first glorious pictures darkened the screens as cheers ascended from every quarter. The warm-up, filmed program was sponsored by L. S. Ayres & Co. It was "Crucible of Speed," tracing the history of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Then at 10:30 a.m. came the first live pictures of Speedway activities, and at 11 o'clock, there, for all the television world to see, was Wilbur Shaw advising "Gentlemen, start your engines!" Minutes later, the race was on. It proved to be not only the first, but the last 500-Mile Race to be televised "live" in its entirety for regular broadcast. (The 1950 race was short, due to rain.) WFBM-TV returned in 1964 to the scene of its initial triumph, this time under agreement to provide personnel and equipment for a special, closed circuit telecast of the entire race to theaters throughout the country which, of course, charged admission.

Earl Townsend, Jr., headed the staff of announcers for that first televised race. Along with the technical crews, the announcers acquitted themselves like TV veterans. Their only problem, a minor one, seemed to be remembering that the audience could often see the scene they were describing as well, sometimes better, than they could. Nevertheless, it was a resounding success from every standpoint. For the first time, race fans miles away could see as well as hear how a winner like Bill Holland looked as he coasted into Victory Lane in his Blue Crown Spark Plug Special.

Another "first" for WFBM was the 1949 telecast of the Indianapolis 500-mile Speedway classic.





Channel 6 WFBM-TV cameras have become a familiar sight to 500-mile Speedway visitors. This one is located almost directly across the track from the now-demolished Pagoda.

That evening, *The News* confirmed the victory television had achieved: "Information reaching *The News* from set owners reports perfect reception. At press time, all was well as the electronic marvel fed a constant picture of the speed classic into homes, clubs, and stores over the city and surrounding areas."

The News spoke with some authority. Local distributors had kindly placed television receivers in the city rooms of the three Indianapolis dailies.

For several weeks after the race, WFBM-TV operated only a short time during the early evening hours, six days a week. Programs consisted briefly of films, newsreels, and Kinescopes with only a limited number of live shows. After five days' operation, the station disclosed the cost of operation had been \$5,200 and that revenues had been only \$3,500—a loss of \$1,700. In September, the ink on the station books was even redder. Operating costs for four months' operation had been \$118,000 with a revenue of only \$61,000. Expenses varied from \$5,000 to almost \$7,000 a week. Some major expense items included \$1,300 a week for program and studio costs; \$1,900 for technical equipment, line charges and power, and \$1,300 for fixed charges, including rent.

But WFBM-TV executives were not too grim about the unpleasant figures. Help was probably on the way in the form of some other figures which, although only estimates, were likely to be as sound as they were

In 1960, Dick Lingle was the master of ceremonies in the first outdoor color telecast for WFBM. The color-cast was a remote from the 500-mile Speedway track.



encouraging. From an estimated 4,000 TV sets in the Indianapolis area in June, the number had jumped to around 7,200 by September and was expected to top the 10,000 mark well before the end of the year. With three or four times that many potential customers living in homes that could afford television, the advertisers were expressing more than casual interest. The silver lining was nearly breaking through the clouds.

There was other evidence that television was on the upward swing. The Indianapolis RCA plant was enlarged that same year, and the company's plants at Bloomington, Marion, and Monticello—all involved in manufacturing television components — were booming along.

Meanwhile, WFBM-TV, red ink or no red ink, was not resting on its initial laurels. That summer of 1949, several Indianapolis Indians' baseball games were televised from Victory Field. Sponsors were Associated Distributors, for RCA products, Stark & Wetzel, and the Westinghouse Electric Supply Company, at a cost of a total of \$750 per game.

It quickly became apparent to Channel 6 that the baseball fan wasn't the only viewer interested in the Hoosier weather and that broad interest was increased by the advent of one of the favorite television personalities in the station's history. Ranking with Newsman Gilbert Forbes is Bill Crawford, "Weatherman." It was in June, 1950, that Bill walked into the station and applied for a job as weather forecaster and commentator. He had heard that such a service had become popular on a few TV stations and he felt he had the technical qualifications. Indeed, he had. As an Air Force officer in World War II, Bill had become a professional meteorologist and a member of the American Meteorological Society. After military service, he devoted his time and energy to accumulating enough money to go back to college and become a



Bill Crawford joined the WFBM staff in 1950. His 7 and 11 p.m. weather shows have been filled with warmth, humor, integrity, and information. He is the best-known single radio-television personality in Indiana and one of the few certified meteorologists in the nation.

dentist. He entered Indiana University School of Dentistry in 1949, and his visit to WFBM the following year was impelled by the need for funds to complete his schooling.

Although the station was impressed with Bill's professional credentials, his quiet sincerity, and pleasant personality, it wasn't ready at the time to tackle a weather program. Only a few weeks later, however, the Omar Baking Company decided to try a daily weather telecast presented by a graduate meteorologist, and the seven Hoosiers who qualified, including Bill Crawford, were invited to audition for the job.

During his audition, Bill was able to conceal his nervousness until his eyes fell on a view of himself in action on the TV monitor screen—when he completely lost his voice and composure. But the station people were impressed with Bill's potential ability, and convinced him to try again. After many hours of rehearsal before camera and microphone, he overcame his uneasiness in the presence of the mechanical gadgets, and with the encouragement of Director Walter Reuleaux and Camerman Kelly Robbins, he was able to go on the air with his customary "Hi," and go through his program in reasonable comfort. For several years he presented weathercasts on both WFBM radio and television, but his increasing dental practice forced him to give up his radio appearances.

Bill Crawford, pioneer weatherman, continues to enjoy to the fullest his dedication to family, dental practice—and the weather.

The first full length feature, strictly Hoosier in origin, was televised on the evening of June 22. It was "The Perfect Memorial" a filmed history of the James Whitcomb Riley Hospital for Children. The 26-minute film featured various Hoosier notables, including George Ade and Dr. Carleton McCulloch. Indianapolis dealers loaned receiving sets to the Riley Hospital to enable the young patients to see the show.

In mid-summer that first Indianapolis television year, Evelyn Imel Rhamy of *The Star* decided it was high time some recognition was given to the women who were toiling in the local television vineyards. When she got through listing the important chores being handled by the distaff side, there was some feeling the station could probably get along without any men at all. There was Dyna Phillips, who had graduated from secretary to the commercial manager to the post of film editor. She was responsible for all "canned" film—inserting local commercials in the

films, handling audition prints, and referring the right film to the right director.

Appearing before the cameras in their spare time were a number of Indianapolis women artists, including Mrs. Mei Mei Lee who passed along decorating hints. Then there was Georgia Sullivan, daughter of Ted Sullivan, Indianapolis Indians business manager, who “spotted” players for the station’s baseball announcer. Mrs. Libby Barnard was special receptionist from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. when one of her duties was to calm the irate viewers who insisted upon blaming the station for fuzzy images on their screens. There was also Marilyn Merritt, who wrote continuity and assisted Joan Jolly, WFBM music librarian. Marthabel Geisler was entrusted with the sensitive job of scheduling all spot announcements, carefully guarding against that cardinal sin of television advertising: the placement of two competing beer commercials “back to back.”

As *The Star’s* article made abundantly clear, women—bless their hearts—had lost no time in getting their dainty feet well through the television door.

In 1961, Miss Marthabel Geisler, Traffic Manager for WFBM Radio, was honored by the American Women in Radio and Television for her thirty-one years of service to the broadcasting industry. Mr. Richard D. Peters, Editor of The Indianapolis Times, presented the citation plaque to Miss Geisler.



Chapter 33

TELEVISION GROWS UP

WFBM-TV made its first big cultural splash beginning in December, 1951, when a series of ten Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra concerts was inaugurated by the ambitious station. The half-hour programs originated in station studios with Conductor Fabien Sevitzky on the podium. Tavern patrons still constituted a sizeable percentage of the TV audience at that time. There was some trepidation that such viewers might take a dim view of mixing Bach with their bock. But the fears proved groundless. The concerts were a popular as well as a critical success. Corbin Patrick, *The Star's* music critic, said he was also pleased that for the first time he could review a concert without leaving his office. The programs were sponsored by Gates Motors, Arvin Industries, and The Gibson Company. They thought so highly of the televised concerts that at the conclusion of the series they presented Walter Reuleux, WFBM musical director, with a television set.

Early in 1952, the Indiana Theater cast the first shadow of coming events with announcement that a large, 15 to 20 foot television screen would be installed to bring major sporting events and special programs to its patrons. The festive premiere was presented in February with enthusiastic basketball fans paying one dollar each for the privilege of lounging in comfortable seats while watching Illinois beat Indiana University 77 to 70. The game was telecast from Bloomington over WTTV, and newspapers hailed the reception as remarkably good. Emboldened

by such initial success, Al Hendricks, the theater manager, hinted that among coming attractions might even be such things as championship prize fights.

Also on the 1952 television sporting scene were several Sunday afternoon Indianapolis Indians ball games direct from Victory Field. The station had conceded earlier that sponsors were not exactly standing in line to pick up the \$3,500 tab per game. But they promised stay-at-home Indian supporters that, sponsors or no sponsors, game telecasts would begin April 27. And they did. Most of them were sponsored, or at least partially sponsored. Only three years before the price tag on game sponsorship had read \$750. But as WFBM salesmen were not loathe to point out, now there were at least twenty times the number of TV sets in the area. And station costs had also mounted spectacularly. Gobbling up much of the \$3,500 per game charge were such expenses as the baseball club's fee, station time, engineering fees, the cost of relaying over Indiana Bell equipment, and a full day's pay for the necessary thirteen operators.

The first coast-to-coast televised sporting event from Indianapolis originated in the Fairgrounds Coliseum the night of Wednesday, May 28, 1952. It was the bout which saw Kid Gavilan, the welterweight champion, score a technical knockout over his French Canadian challenger, Fitzie Pruden. Both WFBM-TV and WTTV carried the fight.

Meanwhile, the makings of another kind of fight shaped up, a fight much closer to the hearts—and pocketbooks—of station owners and would-be owners. The three-and-one-half-year restriction on construction of new television stations was lifted in April, 1952, and the scramble was on. More than 1,000 applications for permits were on file from all over the country. About twenty of these were from Indiana—at least six from Indianapolis, where only two additional channels were called for. Months were to go by, stretching into years in some cases, before the FCC had waded through the applications and decided who got which channels. And for every license granted there were three or four—or more—applicants turned down. This made for a number of unhappy, disappointed, often bitter, losers, whose cries of anguish could be heard all the way to Washington.

Channels 8 and 13 were expected to be available in Indianapolis. Fort

Wayne, Evansville, and Terre Haute were also considered likely prospects for regular or very high frequency (VHF) stations. Some other Indiana cities were anticipating permits for ultra high frequency (UHF) stations.

Indianapolis applicants at the time of the big national thaw on licenses included WISH, WIRE, WIBC, Mid-West TV, Inc. (George Sadlier and associates), TV Indianapolis, Inc. (WXLW, Ayres, and others), and the Crosley interests of Cincinnati. None of the Indianapolis hopefuls appeared fazed by the fact that it would take from one-half to three-quarters of a million dollars to install a station and put it into operation.

The first Hoosier beneficiary of the license thaw was *The South Bend Tribune*, which rushed things along in December, 1952, and got WSBT-TV telecasting on UHF Channel 34. After some delay in the opening telecast because of technical difficulties involving the line to a new 479-foot tower, the station settled down to a broadcasting schedule of 7 to 9 p. m. on weekdays and 3 to 6 p.m. Sundays.

About the same time WFAM, Incorporated, of Lafayette received a construction permit and began operating the next summer on UHF Channel 59. In May, 1953, WKJG, Fort Wayne, made the grade with the FCC and began construction of its station, which had been assigned UHF Channel 33. Muncie joined the parade around the same time, and WLBC prepared for UHF operation on Channel 49.

The rash of licenses in Indiana and elsewhere for ultra high frequency stations, which could not be received by most sets then in use, made itself felt in Indianapolis. The Rex Electronics Corporation disclosed its plant at 1351 East Deloss Street had stepped up production of its Rex converter. This was a device which adapted standard TV sets for UHF reception.

Willis B. Conner, Jr., was the host on the first Indiana radio-television simulcast. This special one-half hour show was in behalf of the Hospital Fund drive.



Meanwhile, throughout 1952 Indianapolis viewers continued looking longingly at the unused “8” and “13” markers on their channel selectors, wishing to heck the FCC would make up its mind. Even more fretful were the six applicants for the two dark and silent channels.

* * *

While the FCC was still twiddling its thumbs over the matter of the vacant Indianapolis channels, WTTV had moved earlier in 1952 to fill the void to some extent. Transmitting facilities were increased and improved. Engineers figured the boost would put the WTTV signal into the Indianapolis area considerably stronger and clearer than before. And it did. With the aid of boosters and special antennas, many viewers were afforded, for the first time, the luxury of a choice in channels. It was a popular move, occasioning much public back-slapping in the press, including a congratulatory half-page ad from WFBM-TV. It might have been prophetic in early 1952 that WFBM-TV joined *Life* Magazine and a number of stations over the country to give parents and taxpayers generally a unique, first-hand report on what was going on in local city schoolrooms. Five years later, Time-Life was to become the proprietor of Indiana’s pioneer television station but this wasn’t even in the dreaming stage when the series of ten 45-minute telecasts was arranged to emanate from various Indianapolis city, county, and parochial schools, as “*Life Goes to School*.”

With Lyle Ludwig as narrator and Estel Freeman as producer, two cameras were focused on two or more classrooms each program. It was all unrehearsed, often spontaneous, and frequently revealing. Dr. Herman L. Shibley, Indianapolis school superintendent, and other educational authorities introduced the series. Schools covered in the roundup included School 80, John Strange, Broad Ripple, Shortridge, School 68, School 69, Roberts School, Howe, Cathedral, and Arsenal Technical.

After turning the spotlight on school classrooms earlier, WFBM-TV in the fall of 1952 decided maybe television also had a place in the Sunday School classroom. With sets provided by Indianapolis distributors, at least ten churches began tuning in the Sunday morning feature, “This Is the Life.” This was a popular family comedy drama. The moral and ethical implications of the weekly episodes provided an entertaining if unorthodox springboard for class discussion. Those taking part agreed

it was an interesting experiment but concluded it would be some time yet before volunteer Sunday School teachers need fear unemployment as a result of classroom automation.

The 1952 November general election was the first in Indiana to enjoy all the benefits of television coverage. By that time it was estimated some 150,000 Marion County residents would own receivers. And, with politics a favorite Hoosier sport, it was a safe bet all the owners would be depending upon television to learn whether General Eisenhower or Adlai E. Stevenson had made the White House—not to mention results of state and local contests.

Walter Cronkite was anchor man that night for the CBS national results, while Gilbert Forbes headed the WFBM radio and television election staffs. Equally important to partisan viewers was the announcement by many local television shops that they would have “minute men crews” of repairmen standing by throughout the evening. Station oldtimers, recalling WFBM’s initial election night broadcast twenty-eight years before, admitted the 1952 operation was more certain and efficient. But they doubted it was as much fun.

The Indiana Bell Telephone Company began its long-time television sponsorship of the Indiana high school basketball tourney finals in 1953. Under a unique arrangement, in lieu of payment for the rights to televise the four Saturday games of the tourney, WFBM and the sponsor, Indiana Bell Telephone, agreed they would pay for any vacant seats in the Butler Fieldhouse for any game that was on television. The

“Hoosier Hysteria” descends on the State of Indiana each year when the final games of the state tournament in basketball are played at the Butler University Fieldhouse in Indianapolis. Since 1950, WFBM has televised “the finals,” and for twelve consecutive years the Indiana Bell Telephone Company has sponsored the basketball tournament telecasts.



deal in the past twelve years has netted the Indiana High School Athletic Association \$74,710.50. This is one sporting event where the promoters always have a sell-out. The televising of the finals is a true TV service to Hoosiers, as there are only 14,943 seats, and approximately two and one-half million Hoosiers want to see the final game each year.

* * *

Meanwhile, the six applicants for the two vacant Indianapolis channels waited and hoped through the summer of 1952. The very interested parties continued to wait that winter while the FCC plodded through applications and hearings. Finally, with little active opposition, the commission bestowed the license for Channel 8 on Universal Broadcasting Company, the owner of WISH.

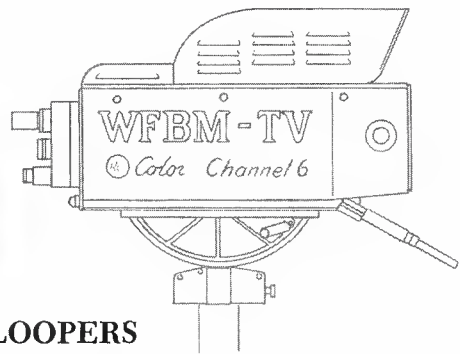
WISH was ready and waiting. With commendable foresight, the radio studios at 1440 North Meridian had been planned with just such an eventuality as TV in mind. There was plenty of room, and WISH lost no time in revamping it for the peculiar requirements of television. Meanwhile, a 1,000 foot antenna tower was going up on the station's forty-acre site on Post Road.

Despite the spate of speed in preparations, it was not until Thursday, July 1, 1954, that WISH-TV, with the appropriate flourish, came on the air. The 6 p.m. opening telecast came almost thirteen years after the star-studded dedicatory program which launched WISH Radio. For the first two warm-up days, the station telecast only during evening hours—but it came on the air at noon that weekend, before settling down to a summer schedule of 2 p.m. to midnight.

The new station took occasion during a fifteen-minute dedicatory program to introduce the eleven local owners of WISH and WISH-TV. Then Steven T. Briggs, the program director, presented Robert McConnell, vice president and general manager, who outlined the plans and aspirations of the new operation. Then, to dispel any lingering notions that only a few announcers and newscasters were all it took to operate a station, the entire staff was introduced on the air.

The long-awaited debut of WISH-TV was appropriately heralded by the press and others. And WFBM-TV ran a friendly, half-page newspaper greeting, "Welcoming Our Newest Neighbor, WISH-TV."

Chapter 34



BOUQUETS AND BLOOPERS

For those viewers whose experience with television operation was confined to fumbling with dials and switches of their own set, *The News* on October 7, 1955, ran a lighthearted but illuminating story. To get some idea of what went on at the station to provide the viewer a picture to fumble for, Myrtie Barker rambled around WFBM-TV for a day. Here's her report:

"I'm just back from another world. In my cargo of exciting recollections brought from this other sphere is a new conviction, namely, that there is more than one world. There are many. Every field of activity is a realm separate and apart from every other realm. In case of doubt, drop around at a television studio and observe what goes on behind the scenes.

"Cousin Billie Lawrence, organist at WFBM-TV, called: 'How would you like to spend the day with me down at the station?' she asked. It sounded like fun. And believe me it was. I was an Alice in Wonderland wishing for six pairs of eyes. A studio, just in case you are curious, isn't a diminutive affair. Strange, but I had always figured it as such—a sort of private office, where the performers took off on their aerial journeys into the country's living rooms. But, no, most of them are huge. Why, you take that first one we were in, you could set down three fair-sized barns in it, and still have room for a chicken house.

"I felt something like a mouse might feel tip-toeing into Butler Fieldhouse. Overhead were nests of lights. Down below were cameramen, the boom man, the prop man—all getting set for the show about to go on. What we see on our TV screens is a little scene especially prepared for a specific purpose. If it is a church program, they pull in a painted backdrop with a cathedral arch and a simulated stained glass window. The participants on

that program stand immediately in front of the backdrop. The audience at home sees just that. But listen, inches away other things are happening.

"For instance, immediately following the program called 'Hymn Time,' comes the 'Harry Martin Farm Show.' While Joe Lemon was singing hymns, they were toting in bags of chicken feed, poultry wormer, and cartons of eggs.

"On the opposite wall another scene was being laid. Shortly the big cameras turned. The sound man or boom man lowered his microphone. A voice came out of the rafters:

"Stand by!"

"And then, just seconds before the program went out, somebody made a quick move—and ker-plunk down went an egg. It was too late; the show was on. The raw yolk and the white ran out on the floor, and the crew struggled to retain their mirth. Harry Martin began chuckling, so finally he explained. The viewing audience had the rare experience of learning what had happened outside their vision.

"Truly, it is a world of its own, a world of magnificent coordination—from the program director on down. Time is the ruling god, and there must be no lapse between this phase of a program and that. In the control room sat four men, delegated to the four various departments of televising a program. I crept in to see. There was the man on video, the man on audio, the man on lighting, and the producer himself. Over the headphones of the crew in the studio, come the orders of the producer. No less than eleven men are involved in televising one program.

"Billie took me everywhere. We went down in the basement and saw the artist making the make-believe, the props that look real. In the course of the day I met a host of happy people, devoted to their singular tasks of entertaining other people in other fields of labor—other worlds."

It must have been a fairly dull, routine day when *The News* feature writer trekked through WFBM. No crisis erupted and only one egg spattered the floor. Usually things were much more lively and unpredictable. The new, unexpected situation is par for the course of the average telecast day. This was particularly true of the early years. And even today a station's well-oiled machinery frequently slips a cog or grates on a bit of undetected rust.

Ordinarily, the viewer is seldom aware that another television world exists beyond the one focused on his screen. This fact is not an unmixed blessing. Often the humor, the drama, the frustrations are more interesting than those caught by the camera.

WFBM's initial 1949 telecast of the 500-Mile Race produced its own off-camera drama. After weeks of near 'round-the-clock preparations for

the vital first telecast, Harold Holland, the chief engineer, was carried from the studios in a state of shock. At the verge of his triumph he collapsed, mentally and physically exhausted, and his colleagues went on to air that memorable first Indianapolis television program.

The first telecast brought some unexpected humor, this time duly recorded by the cameras. Pioneer TV viewers still recall it with a chuckle. As a gimmick, Ed Savola, former *Indianapolis Times* columnist, set about to build himself an infield stand with lengths of gaspipe. From time to time through the race, the camera recorded the straight-faced Savola's progress. Each piece firmed in place was a minor triumph over ineptness. The tower grew higher and higher. The final TV shot showed the victorious columnist happily settled atop his masterpiece—just in time for the end of the race.

Physical endurance was often as important in those early TV days as talent or know-how. The original cameras, built by the station's own engineers, used the old inconnoscope-type tubes. These required infinitely more light than the present orthicon tubes. As a result, the first small, crowded studios qualified as effective torture chambers. Oldtimers swear the light-generated heat could have baked the enamel on an automobile or have fried an egg.

The ingenuity displayed by engineers and crews was often taken for granted by the audience. There was the time, for instance, when the Grand Army of the Republic held one of its last reunions in Indianapolis. The technique and equipment for "remote" telecasting was still very much in the experimental stage. So the resourceful WFBM crew covered a major ceremony of the reunion by hanging a camera from the fourth floor window of the old Monument Circle studios. From this precarious vantage point, the camera duly provided a rare, panoramic view of the historic occasion.

The inevitable gremlins which creep in to "louse up" the best prepared TV scripts were often aided and abetted in the earlier days by crew members, particularly "prop" boys. There was the time Tom Carnegie, veteran sportscaster, was doing one of his first live shows. One of the crew rigging up a floor lamp for the set decided the time was ripe for trying out a circuit breaker which had come to hand. As a result, Carnegie manfully struggled through the show with the audience's attention firmly

riveted on the lamp, which flashed on and off like clockwork, every thirty seconds.

And then there was the time Chuck Breece was doing Bosco commercials, which required him to have a happy, satisfying drink of the stuff on the air. It was the pleasure of the “prop” boys, in preparing the Bosco, occasionally to substitute pickle juice, or worse, for the water. The results, mirrored on Breece’s face, were highly amusing to the crew, if not necessarily so to the sponsor.

It was probably the same group of fun-loving “prop” boys who delighted in watching Lynn Stevens during commercials on the nighttime weather show as she tried to lift an Omar cake out of the box in which it had been expertly glued. Some of the high jinks were not so subtle, such as the time former announcer Larry Richardson, on a near Christmas noontime weather report, confidently predicted snow. Results were instant. A “prop” boy’s arm shot into camera range and festooned Richardson’s bald head with artificial snow from an aerosol can.

Richardson figures in another favorite WFBM Christmas story. Decked out in fibreglass beard, he was the perennial studio Santa Claus, generally considered one of the most hazardous chores in television. On one occasion, one of his unpredictable guests asked Santa to bring him a sled. Having been prompted by the little cherub’s mother, Richardson asked what had become of the sled delivered last year. The forthright reply practically broke up the show. “I don’t know,” explained the boy, “some ——— — — ——— stole it!”

Today’s efficient teleprompters which unroll the inspired words of a commercial a few feet in front of the announcer, are a far cry from the old “idiot boards” of yesterday. There was the time Dick Pittinger, scorning even the old blackboard held by a crew member and relying on memory, was doing a sports show for L. Strauss & Company. With all the considerable salesmanship at his command, Pittinger insisted on reminding the audience that quality shirts were now a bargain at the Wm. H. Block Company. Sam Freeman of Strauss’, never one to miss a trick, called for the “makegood,” or replacement, commercial to consist of Pittinger standing in front of a blackboard on which he had written “L. Strauss & Company” 500 times.

Somewhat later in those pioneering TV days, Pittinger had another

harrowing experience. He was doing an oil company commercial for which someone had decided it was a good idea to prove that a quart of oil would fill a quart glass container. Pittinger confidently opened the can and began pouring. With the quart jar still far from full, the stream slowed to a trickle. Quickly Pittinger stopped pouring, shook the can indicating there was plenty more to come, held it alongside the jar and remarked, "See, equal amounts," – and quickly had the cameras switched.

Akin to the old "idiot board" was the blackboard, one side of which would carry half a commercial, with the balance on the back, ready to be flipped over. Came the day when Dick Lingle, considered to be one of the better ad-libbers in the business, reached a critical point in a commercial. The board was flipped over. The side was blank, erased by an over-zealous "prop" boy. Lingle's usually agile mind went as blank as the board. The sponsor got an extra commercial later. And, proving again that TV is a crazy, mixed-up business, the offending "prop" boy went on to become a sales manager.

"Bloopers," the occasions when announcers put their feet into their mouths and wish they'd taken up another line of work, are as common as the gray hairs they bring to the heads of apprehensive station managers. All Indianapolis stations have their favorites—most of them unprintable. WFBM has had its share, both printable and otherwise. Still recalled is the night Bob Rhodes, describing a basketball game, persisted in calling the Shortridge Blue Devils the "Blue Ridge Short Devils."

And then there was the night in the early days when the Bell Telephone commercials were done "live" during the state high school basketball tournament. John Drury was extolling the "service beyond the call of duty" often rendered by telephone operators. He described a dramatic case of a mother calling for help as the blood flowed from a deep cut in her son's arm. "And," said Drury, "The operator told her to quickly get a tournament from the closet and make a scarf out of it."

Jeanette Lee got it all out of her system when, giving one commercial for a dairy twice in one minute, the sponsor's slogan, "You can pay more, but you can't buy better," came out, "Remember, you can buy better, but you can't pay more." Almost as memorable was the time Elizabeth Farnsworth was lauding the neat merits of a well-known cracker, "The

perfect cracker, two bites but no crumbs.” In the Farnsworth version it came out, “Remember, it’s the perfect cracker—two crumbs but no bite.”

Carolyn Churchman, well-known WFBM figure, was once greeted in front of the camera by “Curly” Meyers with, “And now we give you Carolyn Churchman, your Chesty hostess.”

When a gadget fails to work at home, it’s an aggravation. In front of the TV cameras it’s an occasion for teeth gnashing and nasty memos. Jeanette Lee, some years ago, was demonstrating a versatile vacuum cleaner whose many accomplishments included the cleaning of ash trays. It performed this chore beautifully on the air for a few seconds until a cigar butt became wedged in the nozzle, bringing a cloud of wayward ashes drifting lazily to the studio floor. Later, it was the same show, same product, which threw the hapless Miss Lee again. Demonstrating a paint spray attachment, she forgot to reverse the switch. Instead of a beautiful mist of color, there was only the gurgle of the vacuum cleaner as it swiftly sucked the paint into the cleaner bag.

The contrariness of inanimate objects has given even the imperturbable Bill Crawford a bad moment or two. There was the time he was ready to open his weather show by opening the window and peering out. But despite his frantic tugging, the window wouldn’t open. Sizing up the situation as hopeless, Crawford calmly stuck his head through the glass-less prop window and said, “Hi.”

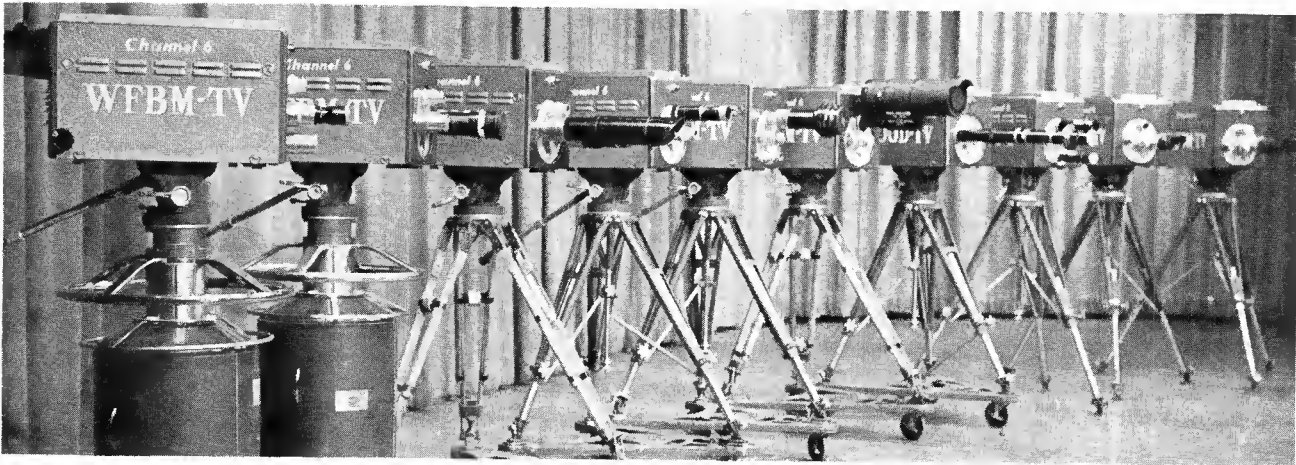
Frustrations are almost as common in the world of television as “bloopers.” Back in the early days of remote telecasting of Indianapolis Indian games, Dick Pittinger, the regular sportscaster, became ill unexpectedly with no substitute available. Frantic efforts finally located a replacement for a crucial Sunday game. But the man, Dick Shively, was covering the Three-I League in Davenport, Iowa. Desperately he drove all night. He arrived just in time to watch a driving storm rain out the game.

The constant improvement in equipment creates its own problems on occasion. WFBM-TV is now efficiently equipped with three individual color-capable television tape recorders. But the day the first one arrived was a “dilly” for all concerned. It coincided by prearrangement with the appearance of the sixty-piece Indianapolis Symphony at the studios for a one-hour taping session. With everything set to go, the brand new

tape recorders failed to function. The engineers went to work, spurred by the fact that the engagement couldn't be cancelled and that overtime for the orchestra could run to \$1,500 an hour. It was a scramble between the engineers and the clock. At the last possible minute, the persistent engineers hit the right combination, and the session went on with the orchestra having no inkling of the crisis surmounted.

Another incident with the Indianapolis Symphony had a sadder ending. The orchestra was performing at the Murat Theater and WFBM-TV was taping the program at the studio through a remote pick-up. Everything was going swimmingly. The orchestra looked and sounded great. But on the resulting tape, it sounded like a bunch of toddlers beating on tin pans, accompanied by the whining of lonesome dogs. Somewhere in the innards of the intricate taping mechanism, a ten cent resistor had let go, wrecking the recorded performance of a million dollar symphony.

In the realm of news, television crews have learned to move fast and efficiently when disaster strikes. In the case of the tragic Indianapolis Coliseum disaster, a staff member was on the scene when the lethal explosion came. Within ten minutes, a cameraman was on the job, and in less than an hour live cameras were probing the scene, telling the story



WFBM technicians constructed these ten cameras for use on studio and remote telecasts. These special cameras were built under the supervision of chief engineer, Harold Holland. WFBM-TV is believed to be the only television station in the country who made its own cameras.

of a catastrophic disaster and heroism throughout the night and morning.

Some years earlier, a WFBM-TV news crew received the unkindest cut of all from fickle fate. Terre Haute was threatened by a Wabash

River flood. The crew, truck loaded with remote telecasting gear, roared through the night to the disaster area. A suitable site to set up shop was chosen in the pitch dark. Arrangements had already been made with Indiana Bell Telephone to establish microwave contact directly with the Indianapolis studios. Then came the dawn. The first sight to greet the bleary eyes of the crew was a water tower looming solidly in direct line between the unit's telecasting facilities and the microwave pick-up point. Since television waves stubbornly persist in going only in a straight line, the crew might as well have been in Timbuctoo as far as getting a picture to Indianapolis was concerned. Any chance for a strategic move was cut off by a levee break which sent bedraggled unit members scrambling to salvage equipment and truck and heading for home base.

The daily ups and downs of TV life experienced by WFBM-TV could probably be matched, possibly topped, by some of the nation's other pioneering stations. It is doubtful if any other industry has spawned as many legends in so few years, which brings up the question of why television, always galloping off in all directions in search of new material, has never turned the cameras on itself. Who knows? There may be acres of entertainment diamonds glistening in dozens of back studios.

If anyone is interested in mining such a new, dramatic territory, Indianapolis seems a likely spot to start digging.

Chapter 35

TEACHING BY TELEVISION

Television, back in the early days, was widely hailed as a revolutionary answer to many of the nation's problems in education. It was seen as eventually bridging the teacher shortage gap, relieving the crowded classroom situation, and, in general, making the dream of universal education, from kindergarten through college, come true in the foreseeable future. Many of their extravagant hopes have not been realized and possibly never will be. But educational television, including the contributions of some commercial stations, can boast solid accomplishments. Whatever role it plays in the future, much will be owed to Hoosier pioneering work and development.

Indiana University and Purdue, as well as some others among the state's colleges and universities, were already old hands at utilizing radio when television came along. The IU "School of the Air" was set up in

Spacious TV production studio at Indiana University's new Radio-TV Center. Lighting and scene battens are motorized, and the lighting system and air handling units are capable of color production.



1947 by Professor George C. Johnson. Under his leadership, a series of radio educational programs was recorded for use in elementary and secondary schools throughout the state.

By early 1953, IU activities had been broadened to include telecasting from campus studios over WTTV by way of a beam relay system. Professor Elmer G. Sulzer, who in the meantime had come in as director of the university's radio and television service, outlined plans to create programs for use by commercial stations. Through this set up, students would get telecasting experience, and the cause of educational TV would also be served without going into the expensive proposition of building a station. Among early programs offered was a family series and a weekly dramatic presentation. Within two years, Sulzer, flanked by a full-time staff—with the assistance of interested students—had a fairly full schedule of campus programs going. In addition, the IU service was also reaching out into the state, providing both radio and television commercial stations with a variety of live, filmed, kinescope, and television tape material.

Educational television and its enormous potential, meanwhile, occupied the attention of more and more Hoosier educators and interested citizens. At Purdue in May, 1953, more than one hundred educators showed up at a conference to explore the responsibilities and possibilities of educational TV in Indiana. It was one of the first major get-togethers of those representing all corners of the many-sided educational television picture. Conferees included college presidents, school superintendents, television executives, and a few mayors whose cities were prime prospects for educational broadcasting.

Members of the Indiana General Assembly also began eyeing the possibilities of educational TV as a partial solution to some of the state's mounting school problems. In the 1955 session, a nine-member board was proposed for utilizing educational programs on commercial stations. Nothing came of it.

That same spring, Miss Betty Barth, Indianapolis public schools radio and television consultant, proposed a little more intensified, coordinated system for giving interested high school pupils some preparation for television careers. She wanted to pool such efforts, already underway at various schools, to give the pupils a wider opportunity to dip into every

possible phase of broadcasting. Her proposal bore some fruit in the form of more coordination of radio and TV activities in Indianapolis high schools.

In 1956, Purdue inaugurated one of the area's first experiments in using TV to teach a foreign language. This was "Hier Deutschland," a series of elementary German lessons. High school pupils, housewives, and other assorted citizens by the hundreds joined enthusiastically in the experiment.

There also were beginning to be some stirrings on other Hoosier campuses to join the educational TV parade. In the summer of 1957, Butler University filed an application with the Federal Communications Commission for vacant Ultra High Frequency Channel 39. Robert L. Montgomery, Butler's radio and television director, said the plan was to operate a "semi-commercial" station which would be self-supporting. But the proposed station would devote considerable time to cultural activities, the FCC was assured. Plans for such a station, however, were quietly shelved later on. Another serious effort by Indiana Central College to bring Indianapolis an educational TV station also was eventually lost in the shuffle. Dr. I. Lynd Esch, Indiana Central president, petitioned the FCC to make the then still-contested Channel 13 an educational television facility.

The first down-to-earth plans for teaching regular school subjects by television were hopefully announced at Evansville early in 1958. Dr. Ralph Becker, school superintendent and chairman of the Southwestern Indiana Educational Council, said definite arrangements were being completed to beam lessons into schools of ten southern counties that fall. Dr. Becker felt the Evansville school system might save as much as \$30,000 annually through cutting down on the need for additional teachers.

Not so down-to-earth were the revolutionary educational television plans announced jointly by Indiana and Purdue Universities late in 1959. This was the much-publicized airborne television instruction program. The two state universities, along with eight other educational institutions, proposed to telecast classroom programs on video tape directly from a high-flying plane to classes in a half dozen Midwestern states. As optimistically outlined by the sponsors, the system could give the quality

of education an efficient boost in Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Target of all this was some 5,000,000 students in 13,000 schools and colleges.

Basically, the plan involved a specially equipped DC-7 plane circling a wide area of northern Indiana at around 20,000 feet during the broadcast periods. The plane, in effect, serves as a super antenna to beam the Purdue classroom programs as far as 200 miles. By way of contrast, normal television transmission is limited to about fifty to sixty miles because of the curvature of the earth.

Using video tape on two different channels, four days a week, the program got off the ground early in 1961 with seven Indiana schools serving as "guinea pigs" for the initial tests. Each school was linked to a coordinating college in its area for the experimental period. In Marion County, North Central High School and Nora Elementary School were under the wing of Butler. Others and their coordinating institutions were Edison Elementary, South Bend—Notre Dame; West Lafayette High School—Purdue; University High School, Bloomington—Indiana; Honey

One of two DC-6 airplanes operated by the Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction. These flying, TV transmitters service educational TV to seven million students in seventeen thousand schools over an area of 127 thousand square miles. Currently two different programs are beamed simultaneously from the big plane's retractable antenna boom. The planes fly "lazy eight" patterns over Montpelier, beaming a signal in a 400-mile diameter.



Creek High School, Terre Haute—Indiana State; and Forest Park Elementary School, Muncie—Ball State.

Hoosier parents equipped, as few were, with UHF receivers, had the unique opportunity of sharing their offspring's lessons, minus the homework. All they had to do was tune in Channels 72 or 76 from 9 a.m. to 2:15 p.m., Mondays through Thursdays, to find out how much they had forgotten from their own more leisurely, non-electronic school days.

With a number of improvements and modifications, the airborne program continued gathering steam through the next school year. About 1,200 schools in the six-state area were taking advantage of the service, with results ultimately dependent upon how it was used, in other words, how well the regular teachers made it a valuable part—but not all—of their own time-tested formulas for educating their charges.

Although the airborne program is the most dramatic of Hoosier efforts to put television to work in education, a number of other solid achievements in the field have been—and will continue to be—noteworthy.

Among these are the successful educational activities of a number of the state's commercial stations. WFBM-TV, for instance, in 1962-63 put on a widely praised course in Spanish in cooperation with the Indianapolis Public Schools. Telecast at a time convenient for both students and those more casually interested, the course attracted more than 5,000 serious students. The same station in four years has offered a Bible course in cooperation with The Indianapolis Council of Churches and the Indianapolis Church Federation, with college credits from DePauw granted those qualifying.

Employment of television in education was also boosted along at Indiana University in 1959 when a closed-circuit TV classroom went into operation.

A boom in activities of the IU broadcasting department was noted with a touch of pride in 1960. Officials announced that during the previous school year the department had prepared 354 television programs, 118 kinescopes, and 72 radio programs in addition to operating radio station WFIU.

In November of 1963, the Indiana University Radio and Television Department moved into its new \$1,800,000 Radio-TV Center, one of the largest and most modern in the nation.

The department will use the new facility for the training of students, for the production of educational radio and television programs, and for the increasingly important University-wide distribution of closed-circuit television class sessions.

IU has already linked itself by closed-circuit television to the Indianapolis regional campus and to Purdue University. In 1963-64, Purdue and IU jointly offered a course in radio-astronomy, using the electrical engineers at Purdue and the astronomers at Indiana. About twenty-five hours a week of closed-circuit production is now under way.

The new building contains four radio studios, \$125,000 worth of new audio equipment for WFIU, and four television studios—two of which are designed specifically for closed-circuit production. The largest TV studio is 55 by 90 by 22 feet—one of the largest in the country.

The traditional, not-always-so-friendly rivalry between Indiana and Purdue was not allowed to stand in the way of another educational TV achievement inaugurated in 1962. The two schools were linked by closed-circuit TV. Now, students on either campus can take in lectures and demonstrations simultaneously on TV screens. Professors at both schools can bolster one another by teaching in tandem. Two-way voice circuits even permit an unprepared student to be tripped up by an instructor more than one hundred miles away.

But then, progress always exacts its toll from the unprepared.

Chapter 36

PEACE, IT'S WONDERFUL!

Seldom in the brief annals of television have the would-be operators of a station fought so hard to get on the air—and then had to fight so long to stay there—as the weary survivors of the Channel 13 war.

The battle lines were already largely formed when the Federal Communications Commission unfroze the nation's remaining channels in 1952. It was ten years before the final victor, the Cincinnati-based Crosley Broadcasting Corporation, could relax without having to glance frequently and apprehensively over its corporate shoulder to ward off another jab by the FCC, a court, and/or one of its persistent rivals. Altogether, the legal papers filed by all the parties to the fracas would probably stack almost as high as the WLW-I antenna.

Finally, on the afternoon of Friday, October 20, a long awaited telegram from the FCC gave WLW-I the green light for test patterns. These went on almost immediately and were hailed with joy, mostly by the long frustrated staff, but also by viewers who had nearly despaired of ever using their selector for Channel 13. Ten days later, on October 30, the FCC came through with the final OK, and at 5 o'clock that evening, WLW-I hit the Central Indiana airwaves. The next day Irving Leibowitz in his column in *The Times* disclosed one sidelight on the day's hectic activities:

“John Babcock, major domo of Channel 13's WLW-I, had to leave his

office, go downstairs to the drug store in the Merchants Bank Building to call newspapers confirming approval by FCC for telecast start. His own switchboard was lit up like a Christmas tree, and he couldn't phone out. (The station was telecasting yesterday loud and clear.)”

In addition to Babcock, others sharing administrative chores for the new station included Bruce B. Cox, director, special broadcast services; Gordon Graham, news director; Robert Lamb, sales manager, and George Willeford, announcer and director of special events. WLW-I started off as an ABC Network affiliate which gave Indianapolis-area viewers their first crack at a number of top TV shows.

Crosley moved late in 1957 to acquire property in the 1400 block of North Meridian Street for a new studio and office building.

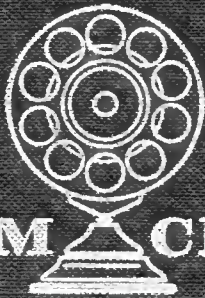
The building plans called for WLW-I to have possibly the only television station in the country constructed around a tree. The site boasted a tall, stately Chinese ginkgo tree, placed on the grounds of the former Vinton-Pierce home more than fifty years before.

But before WLW-I could move into its new headquarters, another legal cloud loomed on the horizon. In June, 1958, the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the FCC's granting of Channel 13 to Crosley should be set aside. The Federal Court called for new oral arguments before the commission. Then Richard M. Fairbanks, president of WIBC, Inc., veteran contender for the channel, asked the FCC to put WLW-I under a trusteeship, pending outcome of the new hassle. Fairbanks added that WIBC would be interested in negotiating for the purchase of station facilities from Crosley.

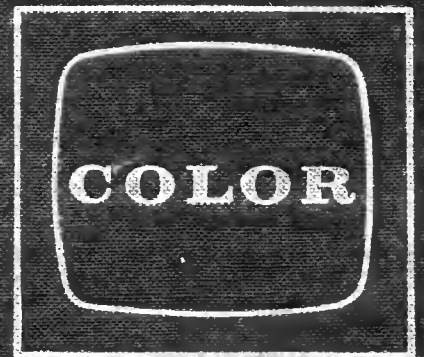
But it was in Atlanta, Georgia, rather than Indianapolis, that WIBC's long quest for a TV channel came to an end. During the summer of 1962, it was reported WIBC was dropping its claim for Channel 13. Instead, the well-founded story ran, Fairbanks and his associates would be paid back for expenses incurred during the long, long contest. And, in turn, they would buy the Crosley TV station, WLW-A, already operating in Atlanta.

That September, the FCC approved just such a transaction by a majority vote, thus ending what must surely be one of the most protracted, complicated battles for an FCC license in the history of American broadcasting.

The man who led the WLW-I troops through all the turbulent battle years, John Babcock, resigned in January, 1964, as general manager and a vice-president of Crosley. He became vice-president in charge of operations for Park Broadcasting, Inc., in Ithaca, New York, his hometown.



FROM CRYSTAL TO

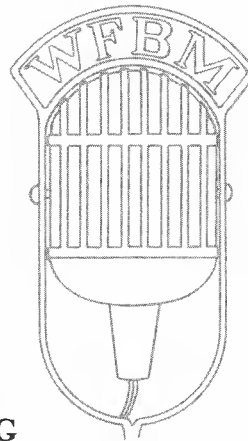


COLOR

W F B M

Chapter 37

THANKS FOR LISTENING



As any discerning reader has surmised by this time, a definitive history of broadcasting in the Indianapolis area is still to be written. This volume attempts only to throw a little light on some of the high spots, as well as on a few lower ones, that have gone into the building of an industry which offers home delivery of its wares to more people probably more often than any other.

In only a little more than forty years, broadcasting has grown from a lonesome melody, thrown out sputtering and crackling on the airwaves, into a billion-dollar-plus symphony. Indianapolis and Indiana have taken it all in, from home-made crystal receivers to today's twenty-four-inch color TV sets. This Hoosier-centered account has tried to trace, with no pretense of completeness, many of the major threads which have been woven by time into the enduring, colorful tapestry of Hoosier radio and television.

Any history of broadcasting is a story with a definite beginning, but no end, hopelessly outdated long before the last word can be printed. There are a lot of gaps in between, in any case. Many, if not most, of the old-timers were too busy building an industry to be any great shakes at writing history. They were making the stuff, not jotting it down.

The story of broadcasting cannot be separated from the era in which it sprouted and bloomed. It has grown from a novelty to a near necessity in the short span of forty years. During that time, broadcasting has grad-

ually become part and parcel of the life of the Hoosier state and its people. It has had a tremendous impact on the thought and actions of millions. It has even changed long-standing habits. In the heyday of Amos 'n Andy, families everywhere juggled the time of evening meals so their attention could be properly focused on affairs of the Fresh Air Taxi proprietors. Even sleeping habits did not escape change. The present multitude of sleepy late-late show addicts confirms this.

But it is in the areas of information, news, and education that the influence of radio and television has had its deepest, most lasting effect—more than most of us are aware, or, possibly, like to admit. Broadcasting has given the most isolated Hoosier farmer the same wide window on the world enjoyed by his most knowledgeable city cousin. Radio and television push away, with the flick of a dial, age-old barriers to the news and views of the world. If the people of the world ever learn to understand each other and come to live as brothers, broadcasting can take a sizable share of the credit.

Often unsung is the role broadcasting plays in the lives of thousands of Hoosier shut-ins, invalids, the elderly, and the lonely. For them, bleak walls of little rooms have been pushed away by the magic of radio and television. The sights and sounds of the world are theirs, too.

For all of us life would be a lot more bleak and drab, not nearly so much fun, without the entertainment, all kinds, we can pick at will from the airwaves. Whether our tastes run to “Bonanza,” Jack Parr, “The Telephone Hour,” “Mr. Novak,” or “That Was The Week That Was,” there’s always something available to amuse, enthrall, inspire, and stimulate us. And it’s for free, too.

What does broadcasting have in store for us? We have come a long way in Indianapolis since the days of Francis Hamilton and his “damn’ dingus.” Who foresaw then the impact radio and, later, television would have on our lives forty or so years down the line? So, who can say now what another four decades will bring.

But if the past, as traced in these pages, is any clue to the future of Hoosier broadcasting, it’s safe to predict the next forty years will be humdingers.

THE END

WFBM Stations Today

AM • FM • TV • MUZAK





Today WFBM news staff has been cited with local, regional and national awards for their daily programs, special programs and editorials. Pictured at work are John McGinnis, Gene Slaymaker, Allen Jeffries, Jim McIntyre, Dave McGhee, Howard Caldwell, News Director Bob Gamble, Jim Hetherington and Jim Green.

Chief Photographer Ernie Crisp gives special attention to motion picture processing in the fully equipped WFBM Photography Laboratory.





Staff announcer Lou Sherman places into position a MacKenzie Cartridge. The electronic tape machine expedites radio operation for spot announcements.



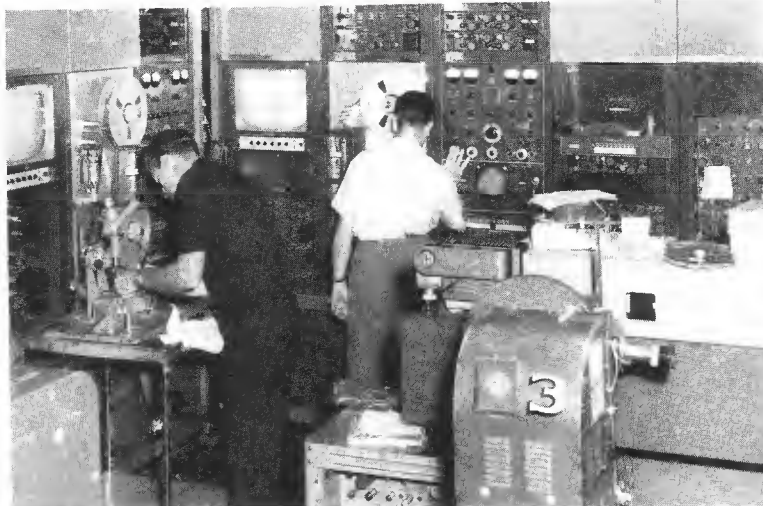
WFBM has made full news coverage a habit with Indiana listeners. Radio News Director Gene Slaymaker delivers his 6 p.m. newcast.



WFBM has always acquired the latest in electronic assistance for a more efficient operation. Engineer Arthur Smith operates the most recent acquisition, a video tape machine in the new television remote unit.



The WFBM TV transmitter is housed in this modern building at 71st Street and Ditch Road.



Engineer Supervisor Clarence Hanks splices video tape while Jerry Cooper checks the video tape machine operation.

WFBM-TV transmits over a radius of 90 miles in Central Indiana. The signal comes from a radiating tower which rises 1019 feet above normal terrain.

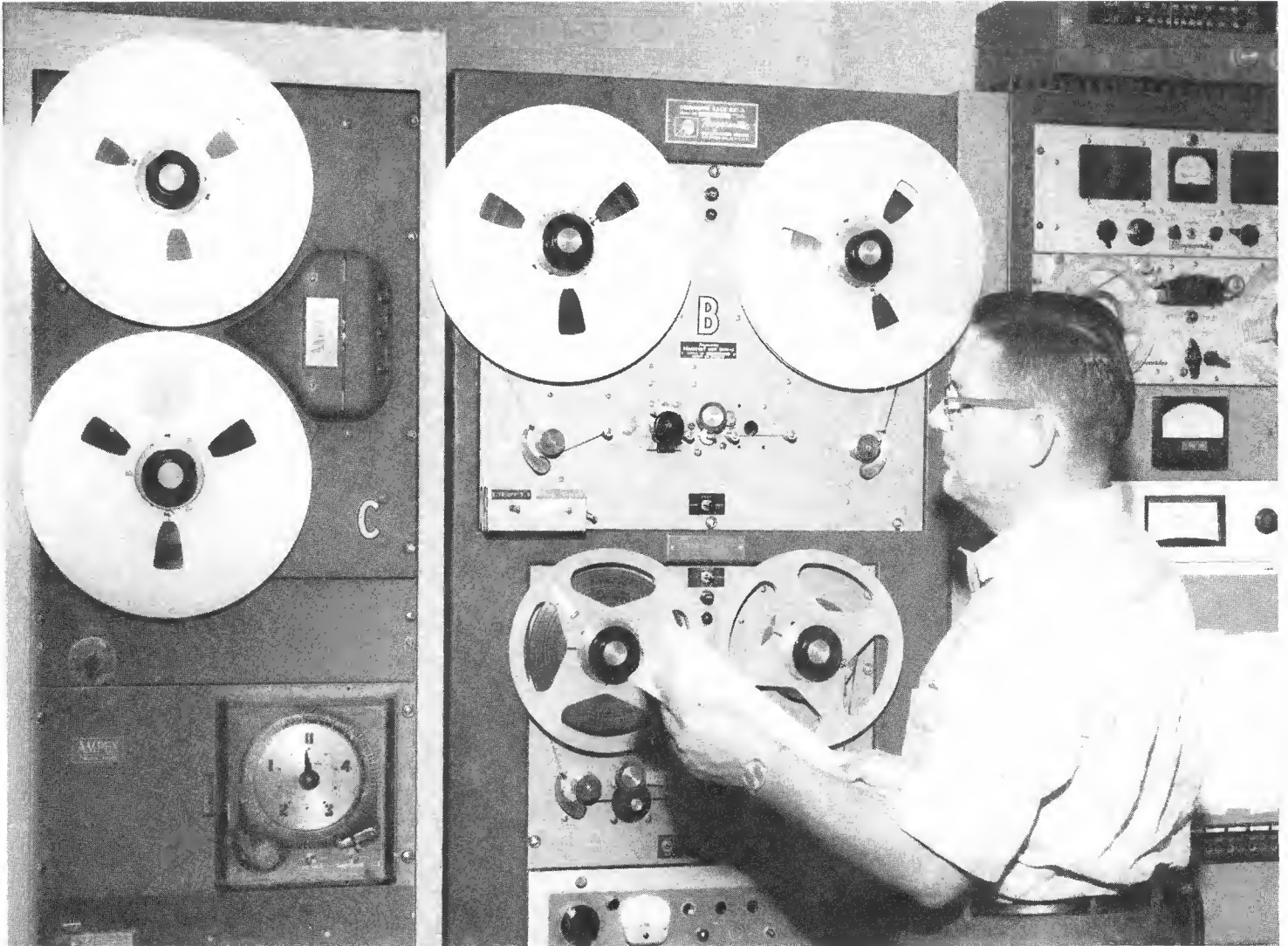


Phil Dunlap directs a telecast from Master Control. Engineers Lee Bruner and John Winningham command the switcher and audio panels.



Music Librarian Mary Vincent can fulfill the music requests of any disc jockey in a few moments. She makes her selections from a file of over 8 thousand albums. Mrs. Vincent also answers listeners' questions concerning music information.





Engineer Harold Jaynes checks equipment and program logs in the compact WFBM-FM studio.



First WFBM mobile unit, inaugurated in 1928, with the very latest in relay equipment. It was used for broadcasting the Soap Box Derby that year.



The WFBM News Cruisers



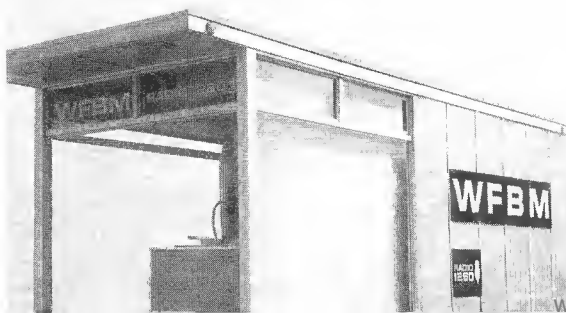
The service truck for radio and television remotes



The WFBM newest mobile Television unit equipped with video tape recorder and three camera units.



WFBM Muzak service and installation trucks.



*"The Ambassador,"
WFBM's remote radio studio.*

APPENDIX

Roster of Employees

WFBM STATIONS 1964

(A)

Arnold, Robert J.
Avis, James E.

(B)

Baldwin, Richard K.
Bender, Paul
Berry, Robert N.
Bock, Stanley E.
Boltz, Shirley
Booth, Herman
Brockway, Robert M.
*Brouse, Bert W.
Bruner, Lee
Burgett, Robert C.
*Bush, Maurice

(C)

Caldwell, Howard C., Jr.
Campbell, Eldon
*Carnegie, Tom
(Carl L. Kenagy)
Chapman, Jerry R.
Clark, George L.
Clements, Marsha
Coffin, Doyle D.
Colyer, Bennie D.
Cook, Michael
Cooper, Jerry Ray
Craig, Robert S.
Cripe, Don
Crisp, Ernest R.
Croft, John M.
Crowe, Norma J.
Curry, Clyde T.

(D)

Damron, Rebecca J.

Davidson, Thomas A.
Davis, George L.
Davis, Harold A.
•DePoy, Emmett E.
Dorsey, Arla J.
Douglas, Gordon H.
Douglas, Jerry M.
Dunlap, Annette K.
Dunlap, Philip S.

(E)

Everson, Lana Jo

(F)

*Flanders, Robert
Foland, John A.
•Forrest, Frank P.
Fowler, Connie S.
Freeman, Allen L.
Friman, Elmer
Fryar, Harold B.

(G)

Gamble, Robert T.
Gammon, Virginia
*Geisler, Marthabel
Gerard, James F.
Glass, Dorothy L.
Goodwin, Harry E.
Green, James L.
Groff, Gloria
•Guion, Charles E.
*Guion, John A.

(H)

Hammonds, Inez J.
Hanks, Clarence E.
Hanson, Ronald K.

APPENDIX

Hawkinson, Donald L.
 Hendricks, Alvin W.
 Herman, Bernard B.
 Hetherington, James C.
 Hiatt, Ruth
 Higgs, Richard L.
 Hinderliter, Gary
 Hincr, Martha Jean
 •Hite, Robert N.
 •Hobbs, Bernard E.
 •Hull, C. Eugene

(J)

Jackson, Sondra L.
 •Jaynes, Harold K.
 Jeffries, Allen C.
 •Johnson, Earl C.
 Jones, Audrey B.

(K)

Kestler, Leo M.
 •Kibbey, Hugh L.
 Kibbey, Michael L.
 King, George W.
 •Kissel, John H.
 Krom, John L.
 Krumb, Robert E.

(L)

Liggett, Donald L.
 Litherland, William J.
 Livingston, David S.
 •Ludwig, Lyell

(M)

MacDermott, Jacqueline
 •Martin, Harry
 (Modlin, Harold S.)
 Mathis, James B.
 May, Beverly J.
 McGhee, David M.

McGinnis, John B.
 McIntyre, James
 McKinzie, Donald D.
 •Menke, Don
 Mitchell, Richard H.
 Myers, Irene H.

(N)

Napier, Eugene

(O)

•O'Donnell, Charles
 •Osborne, Ozzie
 (Wilmer C. Froment)

(P)

•Palmer, George S.
 Pearce, Emily
 Piggott, Joe
 •Pommcrehn, Glen
 Prater, Frank C.
 Pratt, Dick J.

(R)

Raikes, Paul L.
 Reed, Richard F.
 •Riggs, Robert L.
 Robb, C. Thomas
 •Robbins, Robert W.
 Roetter, Paul P.
 Rohlfsing, Eric
 Romerhaus, David
 •Routh, Kenneth E.
 Rushton, J. Carol
 Russell, William C.

(S)

Schilling, Arlene M.
 Schuman, Earl W.
 Scott, Gene A.
 •Sharp, Frank O.
 Shawver, Joan L.

Sherman, Loris B.
 Shipp, James E.
 Shivers, F. Jan
 Simpson, Terrence E.
 Slaymaker, Gene A.
 Smith, Arthur J.
 Spring, John
 (John R. Phelps)
 Staton, Sue K.
 Steffen, Marcia
 Stevenson, Harold C.
 •Stoeffler, Harold H.
 Strange, K. C.
 Sumner, Norma G.

(T)

Tapscott, Lee
 Totten, John B.

(V)

•Vance, Jerry
 (Jerry F. Vincent)
 •Vaughn, Eugene B.
 •Vincent, Mary C.

(W)

•Walden, James R.
 Walden, Leslie E.
 •Walker, Earl R.
 •Waterman, Ivan
 •Webber, Glenn B.
 •Wendt, Tom
 Westermann, Alfred C.
 Wheeler, Max L.
 Whitaker, John T.
 •Wilkes, Agnes
 Williams, Frances S.
 Wilson, Paul T.
 •Winningham, John O.
 Wright, Verne R.
 Wright, Warren

(Z)

Zimmerman, Jerry

*20 or more years of service.

•10 years of service.

APPENDIX

WHEN DID IT HAPPEN?

*Highlights in History of
Indianapolis (AM) Radio Stations*

Fall,	1921—9ZJ “Hamilton Station,” 2011 N. Alabama	Dec.,	1926—WKBF started at Hoosier Athletic Club
Jan.,	1922—9ZJ became “ <i>News-</i> <i>Hamilton</i> ” Station	Sept.,	1927—WFBM-WKBF First National network broad- cast over local stations was Dempsey-Tunney fight
Feb.,	1922—9ZJ changed to WLK		
Mar.,	1922—WOH “ <i>Star-Hatfield</i> <i>Station</i> ,” Hoosier Athletic Club		1927—WFBM Studios moved to 227 N. Pennsylvania
Apr.,	1922—WLK became “ <i>News-</i> <i>Ayres-Hamilton Station</i> ”	Dec.,	1927—WKBF additional studios on Severin Hotel mezzanine
Jan.,	1923—WOH discontinued	Mar.,	1928—WFBM became affiliated with CBS
Mar.,	1923—WLK discontinued	July,	1929—WKBF sold to Curtiss Broadcasting Co.
Nov.,	1924—WFBM “ <i>Merchants</i> <i>Heat & Light Co.</i> <i>Station</i> ” started at Indianapolis Athletic Club	Aug.,	1933—WKBF became affiliated with NBC
Spring,	1925—WBBZ “ <i>Nobile Watson</i> <i>Station</i> ” at 233 Iowa, operated only a short time	Nov.,	1934—WFBM Studios moved to 307 N. Pennsylvania
Fall,	1925—WFBM additional studios on Athletic Club tenth floor		1935—WKBF changed to WIRE
Nov.,	1926—WKBF “ <i>Watson</i> <i>Brothers Station</i> ” at Ford Motor Plant for just one week	Jan.,	1937—WIRE sold to Eugene C. Pulliam
		Feb.,	1937—WFBM Studios moved to 48 Monument Circle
		Oct.,	1938—WIBC “ <i>Glenn Van-</i> <i>Auken Daytime Station</i> ” started at Indianapolis Athletic Club

APPENDIX

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|---|--|
| July, 1939—WFBM sold to H. M. Bitner and Associates | Mar., 1955—WXLW changed from 1590 to 950 kilocycles |
| July, 1939—WIBC sold to H. G. Wall and Associates | Aug., 1955—WIBC Studios moved to 2835 N. Illinois |
| Mar., 1940—WIRE Studios moved to Claypool Hotel | Nov., 1956—WISH sold to J. H. Whitney and Associates |
| Jan., 1941—WIBC has first night-time broadcast | Dec., 1956—WGEE started broadcasting |
| Feb., 1941—WIBC became affiliated with Mutual Network | 1957—WFBM sold to Time, Inc. |
| Aug., 1941—WISH “C. Bruce McConnell Station” started at Board of Trade Bldg.—Affiliated with NBC Blue Network | July, 1960—WIRE sold to Joseph C. Amaturio and Associates |
| May, 1944—WIBC sold to <i>Indianapolis News</i> | Dec., 1960—WXLW sold to Robert D. Enoch and Associates |
| Dec., 1945—WIBC Studios moved to <i>News Bldg.</i> , on Washington Street | May, 1963—WIGO started broadcasting |
| Aug., 1948—WXLW started broadcasting | June, 1963—WISH Radio sold to Don W. Burden |
| Aug., 1948—WIBC operated by Richard M. Fairbanks and Associates | Dec., 1963—WIFE became call letters for former WISH radio |
| Dec., 1949—WIRE Studios moved to <i>Star-News Building</i> | Feb., 1964—WIGO bought by Sarkes Tarzian, Inc. |
| Apr., 1951—WFBM Studios moved to 1330 N. Meridian | Mar., 1964—WNDY started broadcasting |
| Apr., 1950—WISH Studios moved to 1440 N. Meridian | May, 1964—WIRE sold to Mid America Radio, Inc., Len Small, President |

APPENDIX

INDIANA STATIONS
IN THE ORDER OF THEIR INCEPTION

South Bend	-WSBT (1921)	Fort Wayne	WOWO (1925)
West Lafayette	-WBAA (1922)	Indianapolis (Was WKBF)	-WIRE (1926)
Anderson	-WHBU (1923)	Muncie	-WLBC (1926)
Evansville	-WGBF (1923)	Richmond	-WKBV (1926)
Indianapolis	-WFBM (1924)	Terre Haute	-WBOW (1927)
Fort Wayne	-WGL (1924)	Gary	-WIND (1927)
Hammond	-WJOB (1924)	Elkhart	-WTRC (1931)

In 1964, all but four of the oldtimers were still on the job, using the old familiar call letters. But they had lots of good company now. The 1964 list from the August Standard Rates and Data:

Anderson	-WHBU (1923)	Evansville	-WGBF (1923)
(Was WCBC)	WHUT (1946)		WIKY (1947)
			WJPS (1948)
Bedford	-WBIW (1948)	(Was WEOA)	WROZ (1936)
Bloomington	-WTTS (1949)		
Boonville	-WBNL (1950)	Fort Wayne	-WANE (1948)
Brazil	-WBZI (1959)		WGL (1924)
			WKJG (1947)
			WOWO (1925)
Centerville	-WHON (1964)	Frankfort	-WILO (1953)
Columbus	-WCSI (1950)		
Corydon	-WPDF (19__)	Gary	-WGRY (1950)
Connersville	-WCNB (1948)		WWCA (1949)
		Goshen	-WKAM (1954)
Decatur	-WADM (per.)		
		Hammond	-WJOB (1924)
Elkhart	-WCMR (1956)	Huntington	-WHLT (1957)
	WTRC (1931)		

APPENDIX

Indianapolis	–WFBM (1924)	New Albany	–WOWI (1949)
	WGEE (1956)	New Castle	–WCTW (1960)
	WIBC (1938)	North Vernon	–WOCH (1955)
	WIGO (1963)		
(Was WKBF)	WIRE (1924)	Peru	–WARU (1954)
(Was WISH)	WIFE (1941)	Portland	–WPGW (1950)
	WXLW (1948)	Princeton	–WRAY (1950)
(Was WNDY)	WBRI (1964)		
Jasper	–WITZ (1948)	Richmond	–WKBV (1926)
Jeffersonville	–WXVW (1961)		
		Salem	–WSLM (1952)
Kendallville	–WAWK (1955)	Seymour	–WJCD (1949)
Kokomo	–WIOU (1948)	Shelbyville	–WSVL (1961)
		South Bend	–WJVA (1947)
Lafayette	–WASK (1942)		WNDU (1944)
	WAZY (1959)		WSBT (1921)
LaPorte	–WLOI (1948)	Sullivan	WKQV (1963)
Linton	–WBTO (1953)	Tell City	–WTCJ (1948)
Logansport	–WSAL (1949)	Terre Haute	–WBOW (1927)
		(Was WMFT)	–WAAC (1958)
Madison	–WORX (1956)		WTHI (1948)
Marion	–WBAT (1947)	Vincennes	–WAOV (1940)
	WMRI (1955)		
Michigan City	–WIMS (1947)	Warsaw	–WRSW (1951)
Mount Vernon	–WPCO (1955)	Washington	–WAMW (1955)
Muncie	–WLBC (1926)	West Lafayette	–WBAA (1922)

APPENDIX

INDIANA TV STATIONS
OPERATING IN 1964

- (1) Indianapolis—WFBM—Channel 6
Began operation May 30, 1949
Sale to present owners approved April 17, 1957
- (2) Bloomington-Indianapolis—WTTV—Channel 4
Began operation November 11, 1949
- (3) South Bend—WSBT-TV—Channel 22
Began operation December 21, 1952
- (4) Muncie—WLBC-TV—Channel 49
Began operation April 29, 1953
- (5) Evansville—WEHT—Channel 50
Began operation September 11, 1953
Sale to present owners approved October 24, 1956
- (6) Evansville—WFIE-TV—Channel 14
Began operation November 9, 1953
Sale to present owners approved July 13, 1956
- (7) Fort Wayne—WKJG-TV—Channel 33
Began operation November 21, 1953
Sale to present owners approved March 13, 1957
- (8) Elkhart-South Bend—WSJV—Channel 28
Began operation March 15, 1954
- (9) Indianapolis—WISH-TV—Channel 8
Began operation June 26, 1954
Sale to present owners approved April 17, 1957

APPENDIX

- (10) Terre Haute—WTHI-TV—Channel 10
Began operation July 22, 1954

- (11) Fort Wayne—WANE-TV—Channel 15
Began operation September 26, 1954
Sale to present owners approved October 10, 1956

- (12) South Bend—WNDU-TV—Channel 16
Began operation July 2, 1955

- (13) Evansville—WTVW—Channel 7
Began operation August 21, 1956
Sale to present owners approved August 27, 1962

- (14) Fort Wayne—WPTA—Channel 21
Began operation September 28, 1957

- (15) Indianapolis—WLW-I—Channel 13
Began operation October 30, 1957

- (16) Lafayette—WFAM-TV—Channel 18
Began operation on Channel 59, May 8, 1958
Went off the air May 15, 1959
Sale to present owners approved June 17, 1959
Resumed operation on Channel 18, November 15, 1959

- (17) Marion—WTAF-TV—Channel 31
Began operation November 1, 1962

APPENDIX

COMMERCIAL FM STATIONS IN INDIANA

(*denotes stations no longer operating)

Year Started	Call Letters	City Located	Year Started	Call Letters	City Located
1961	WAFM	Anderson	1954	WITZ	Jasper
1959	WTTV	Bloomington	1962	WFILO	Kokomo
1963	WCRD	Bluffton	1964	WLOI	LaPorte
1958	WCSI	Columbus	1950	WORX	Madison
1948	WCNB	Connersville	1948	WMRI	Marion
1963	WXAX	Elkhart	1947	WMUN	Muncie
1947	WTRC	Elkhart	1947	WCTW	New Castle
1948	WIKY	Evansville	1960	WRAY	Princeton
1959	WPTH	Ft. Wayne	1960	WGLM	Richmond
1962	WILO	Frankfort	1960	WKBV	Richmond
1961	WIFN	Franklin	1962	WSLM	Salem
1962	WSMJ	Greenfield	1964	WJVA	South Bend
1962	WTRE	Greensburg	1962	WNDU	South Bend
1959	WYCA	Hammond	1962	WSBT	South Bend
1959	WFBM	Indianapolis	1962	WPFR	Terre Haute
1961	WAIV	Indianapolis	1947	WTHI	Terre Haute
1957	WFMS	Indianapolis	1960	WVTS	Terre Haute
1964	WGEE	Indianapolis	1948	WRSW	Warsaw
1960	WIBC	Indianapolis	1948	WFML	Washington
1961	WIFE	Indianapolis			

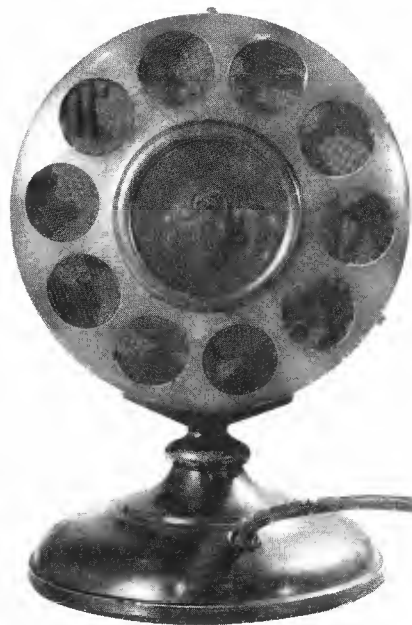
APPENDIX
NONCOMMERCIAL FM STATIONS IN INDIANA

City	Affiliation	Call Letters
Bloomington	Indiana University	WFIU
Crawfordsville	First Baptist Church	WBBS
Crawfordsville	Wabash College	WASH
Evansville	Evansville College	WEVC
Evansville	School System	WPSR
Gary	School System	WGVE
Goshen	Goshen College	WGCS
Greencastle	DePauw University	WGRE
Hartford City	School System	WHCI
Huntington	School System	WVSH
Indianapolis	Butler University	WAJC
Indianapolis	School System	WIAN
Indianapolis	Indiana Central	WICR
Muncie	School System	WWHI
Muncie	Ball State	WBST
New Albany	School System	WNAS
New Castle	School System	WYSN*
South Bend	School System	WETL
South Bend	Notre Dame	WSND
Wabash	School System	WSKS

Frequency modulation stations, relatively less expensive to equip and operate than standard AM stations, have given colleges and school systems a chance to offer broadcasting experience to students as well as gain a wider audience for educational programs.

The Indianapolis school system's station, WIAN, is a good example of radio put to work in secondary education. H. L. Shibler, former superintendent of schools, advocated such a move in 1953 with the idea of presenting some programs to supplement classroom work. In 1955, transmitting equipment was installed at Shortridge High School with the school board and Shortridge PTA footing the bill.

WIAN, operating on a frequency of 90.1 megacycles for up to 25 hours a week, is manned by interested students under faculty guidance. Programs are scheduled in advance and given to local teachers who may want to arrange class plans accordingly. Some time is also given to entertainment programs, noontime recordings of semi-classical music being especially popular.



*WFBM'S
first
microphone,
now
retired,
on
display
in
the
station's
lobby*

