

379
N81
NO. 671

A HISTORY OF WKY-AM

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

By

Herman Ellis Meeks, B.A.

Denton, Texas

May, 1991

This is an authorized facsimile, made from the microfilm master copy of the original dissertation or masters thesis published by UMI.

The bibliographic information for this thesis is contained in UMI's Dissertation Abstracts database, the only central source for accessing almost every doctoral dissertation accepted in North America since 1861.

U·M·I Dissertation
Information Service

University Microfilms International
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106
800-521-0600 OR 313/761-4700

Printed in 1992 by xerographic process
on acid-free paper

Order Number 1344126

A history of WXY-AM

Meeks, Herman Ellis, M.S.

University of North Texas, 1991

U·M·I

300 N. Zeeb Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI

University Microfilms International
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
313 761-4700 800 521-0600

Meeks, Herman Ellis, A History of WKY-AM, Master of Science (Radio/TV/Film), May, 1991, 61 pp., bibliography, 32 titles.

The problem of this study was to document the history of radio station WKY, Oklahoma City, and to locate its place within the development of American radio broadcasting.

This thesis divides WKY's history into two periods: 1920 through 1925, the years it was operated by Earl Hull, and 1926 through 1989, after it was acquired by E. K. Gaylord.

The purpose of this study was to record the history of the oldest radio station operating west of the Mississippi River, its effect on the broadcast industry in general, and its effect on Gaylord Broadcasting Corporation, the parent organization. The study also explored the innovations in both programming and engineering that caused the station to grow into one of the most popular radio stations in the Southwest, as well as its decline in recent years.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This study would not have been possible without the help of the employees of WKY Radio and Gaylord Broadcasting Corporation who so generously assisted me and made their files readily available.

Also, thanks to Mike Dean of KOMA Radio in Oklahoma City, for assistance in retrieval of archival information on early broadcasting in Oklahoma from his early station records; to Rafael McDonnell for all he did; and to my committee: Dr. John Kuiper, Dr. Steve Fore, and the person most responsible for this achievement, a man I am proud to call my Major Professor, Dr. Edwin L. Glick.

Special thanks also to my mother, who stood with me through it all.

Most importantly of all, thanks doesn't seem quite enough, but it will have to suffice for my typist, friend, supporter, cheerleader and fellow researcher, my wife Kathy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	
Purpose of the Study	
Methodology	
Related Research	
Justification	
Scope and Limitations of the Study	
Organization of the Thesis	
II. WKY-AM: THE HULL YEARS (1920-1925)	12
III. WKY-AM: THE GAYLORD YEARS (1925-1989)	21
IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	49
APPENDICES	55
BIBLIOGRAPHY	60

CHAPTER I

Introduction

In 1990, the American broadcast industry was some seventy years old, and reached practically every home in our nation. According to Broadcasting magazine, there are 10,717 broadcast stations on the air with another 1,396 under construction.¹ The first form of broadcasting was, of course, radio. In spite of the competition it has faced from television, it has continued to thrive. One reason for this has been the variety of programming available on radio today which attests to its ability to adapt to the public's wishes in a rapidly changing world. The first radio broadcasters in 1920 had hoped that the new medium would be successful, but even in their wildest imagination they did not foresee an industry which would generate billions of dollars in revenue or reach such a large audience.

The earliest broadcasters were amateurs who, through an avid interest in the ability to send messages through the "ether," began experimenting in their living rooms and garages. Their aim was not to establish an industry, but rather to experiment and satisfy their interest in this novel idea of sending messages through the air.

One of the earliest examples of amateurs who built and experimented with radio transmitters was Reginald Fessenden. Fessenden, a Canadian who had been an electrical engineering teacher in Pittsburgh and had worked for Westinghouse, began experiments in transmissions of voice in 1900 under the auspices of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. With the help of backers, he was able to form the National Electric Signaling Company in Brant Rock, Massachusetts which concentrated on uninterrupted transmission of voice. Fessenden described this service with such terms as "radio-telephone," "radio phone," and "radio."²

The most dramatic breakthrough occurred for Fessenden on Christmas Eve in 1906. One of his transmissions, which included the reading of a passage from the Bible, a woman singing, and a violin playing, was heard by ships at sea as well as by many others up and down the coast. The broadcast concluded with Fessenden's wishing everyone Merry Christmas and promising another broadcast on New Year's Eve. Those who were able to hear the transmission were asked to notify Fessenden, and many appear to have replied.

The broadcast on New Year's Eve was much the same as the earlier one, and was heard as far away as the West

Indies; one reply came from a banana boat operated by the United Fruit Company.³

Another of the pioneers dedicated to the idea of transmission of voice was Lee DeForest. DeForest worked for Western Electric and developed an avid interest in experimenting with radio waves. The earliest experiments were conducted in his rented bedroom.

One of the major evolutionary steps in the development of voice transmission was the invention by DeForest of the "Audion" tube in 1907, a vacuum tube capable of amplifying signals. In 1907, the DeForest Radio Telephone Company was formed and DeForest began intensive testing in both the receiving and sending of signals.

The hopes and aspirations of DeForest are best described by a March 5, 1907 entry in his personal diary:

My present task (happy one) is to distribute sweet melody broadcast over the city and sea so that in time even the mariner far out across the silent waves may hear the music of his homeland. . . .⁴

The Columbia Phonograph Company supplied DeForest with phonograph records to use in his experiments at first, but later he began inviting singers into his laboratory to provide live music.

Despite financial problems, DeForest persisted and his most spectacular achievements occurred in 1907 when he secured permission from the French government to broadcast

from the Eiffel Tower. The broadcast reportedly was heard 500 miles away.

In 1910, DeForest installed a 500 watt transmitter in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City and broadcast the operas *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci* featuring famed tenor, Enrico Caruso.⁵

By 1912, there were literally thousands of amateur radio operators who were avidly practicing the art of radio transmissions. Even though the U. S. government passed a law requiring that all transmissions be licensed by the government, it did little to lessen the congestion and interference occurring on the airwaves.

During World War I, the use of radio for military operations grew rapidly. The U. S. Navy was so impressed with the potential value of this medium, that after the war it proposed that it be granted a monopoly on the use of radio. Although Congress introduced a bill to this effect in 1918, it met with vociferous opposition and ultimate defeat, even though the U. S. State Department had endorsed the bill.⁶

With the eruption of transmitting stations during this period, the foundation for some of the earliest radio stations in the nation was formed. Some of the most significant examples were 8MK, the Detroit News station, which later became WWJ, and 8XK in Pittsburgh, which became

KDKA.⁷ KDKA was put on the air by Frank Conrad, a Westinghouse engineer.

Conrad had begun broadcasting phonograph records out of a studio in his garage through his transmitter, and soon began receiving requests by mail to play specific songs at specific times.⁸ The mail requesting songs became so heavy that Conrad announced he would transmit music for two hours each Wednesday and Saturday beginning at 7:30 in the evening.⁹ Occasionally Conrad's sons added both live vocal and instrumental talents to his broadcasts.

The popularity of these broadcasts continued to grow, and the Conrads began transmitting nightly. Several newspapers began to mention the concerts, and on September 29, 1920, a Pittsburgh department store ran a display advertisement in a local newspaper announcing the "Air Concert Picked Up By Radio Here . . . Amateur Wireless Sets Made by the Maker of The Set which is in operation in our store are on sale here 10.00 up."¹⁰

This newspaper advertisement caught the attention of Westinghouse Vice President Harry Davis. Although the audience for Conrad's transmissions had been primarily people who had the technical knowledge to build their own receivers, Davis believed that almost everyone would find simple-to-operate receivers a popular addition to their homes, if stations existed to supply daily programs.¹¹

Davis approached Conrad with his ideas on broadcasting and said he wanted a Westinghouse station on the air, ready to broadcast the election returns on November 2, 1920. The request by Davis gave Conrad only 33 days to achieve this feat.

Conrad installed the transmitter on top of the East Pittsburgh Westinghouse plant and was able to meet Davis' deadline.¹² Thus, the election of Warren G. Harding over James M. Cox became the first presidential election returns to be broadcast. The station began operation under the new call letters of KDKA, which had been assigned by the U. S. Department of Commerce. Although there is some disagreement on what the first radio station on the air was, there is general agreement that KDKA was the first station on the air to be in continuous operation.

Following the lead of Westinghouse, 30 licenses were issued to would-be broadcasters by the end of 1920, and by 1922, more than 200 stations had been licensed. During that year 100,000 receivers had been purchased.¹³

In October 1921 Westinghouse inaugurated WJZ (later to become WABC), and in August 1922, A.T.&T. began broadcasting WEAJ (later to become WNBC), both in New York City.¹⁴

In January 1920, a young radio enthusiast named Earl Hull began operating 5XT out of his garage in Oklahoma

City. 5XT was the first radio station west of the Mississippi River to broadcast on a regular daily basis, and the third station in the United States to broadcast daily programs. 5XT later became WKY Radio.¹⁵

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to document the history of radio station WKY, Oklahoma City, and to locate its place within the development of American radio broadcasting.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to record the history of the oldest radio station operating west of the Mississippi River, its effect on the broadcast industry in general, and its effect on Gaylord Broadcasting Corporation, the parent organization. It also explored the innovations in both programming and engineering that caused the station to grow into one of the most popular radio stations in the Southwest, as well as its decline in recent years.

Methodology

Primary information for the research of WKY radio came from station records and logs. I have interviewed current employees about their knowledge of the station's

history. I have also interviewed corporate executives of the Gaylord Broadcasting Corporation for information, not only about the station's history, but also about the Group's policies which have affected the station during its seventy years of operation. Secondary information came from The Daily Oklahoman from 1920 through 1989. The Oklahoma Historical Society also has all of the newspapers of record for the 77 counties in Oklahoma on microfilm so the subject index research was useful in yielding information from other secondary sources in the state which included trade publications, as well as historical publications also available in the Oklahoma Historical Society Library.



Related Research

A search of the catalog of Masters Thesis Abstracts from 1970-1990 showed no research directly related to the subject proposed for study.

A few of the theses that dealt with histories of radio stations were: "A History of the Concept of Public Broadcasting 1967 to 1980", by Beery L. Eli, M.A., Michigan State University, 1987, studied growth and ideology of the public broadcasting system during those specific dates; "Standard Broadcast Station KRLA, A Case Study," Donald C. Beem, M.A., California State University, Fullerton, 1980,

researched the history of a specific broadcast station in California including its problems involving licensing and re-licensing by the F.C.C.; "Fighting Bob Shuler and KGEF: The Silencing of A Radio Crusader," Charles E. Orbison, M.S., North Texas State University, 1975, dealt with a landmark case in which the Federal Radio Commission revoked the license of a radio station; and finally, "An Intensive History of a Broadcast Station KBGO, Waco, Texas," John M. Spencer, M.A., Michigan State University, 1974, detailed historical studies of the legal, corporate and managerial problems including an in-depth study of Waco. In some distantly related materials "The History of Pirate Radio in Great Britain" was reviewed.

In A Bibliography of Theses and Dissertations in Broadcasting: 1920-1973 by John M. Kittross, a number of historical papers on both radio and television stations are listed, but again none dealt with either WKY or Gaylord Broadcasting Corporation.

A 1970 article in Oklahoma Today magazine on the 50th anniversary of radio deals briefly with WKY.

Justification

WKY Radio is the oldest station west of the Mississippi River to broadcast on a daily basis, having been in continuous operation since January 1920. In its

seventy years of operation it has only undergone one change in ownership, and that change occurred in its infancy when it was purchased by E. K. Gaylord. Furthermore, WKY is the first station in a company which has grown to be one of the largest privately (family) owned broadcast groups in America today. Because Gaylord's holdings cover the United States, this study into the reasons for the growth and success of this station in past years, it speculates, also, on its decline in recent years.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This paper focused on WKY-AM from 1920 until 1989.

Treatment of the station's earliest years--in particular, the years in which the station was operated by Earl Hull--are somewhat sketchy because Hull left Oklahoma City, moving to New York, and has since died. Contacts with associates and former employees yielded little information on Hull's years in Oklahoma City.

Endnotes

¹"Summary of Broadcasting and Cable,"
Broadcasting, 13 August 1990, 75.

²Erik Barnouw, Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 13.

³Erik Barnouw, A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Vol 1 to 1933 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 21.

⁴Ibid, 25.

⁵Ibid, 27.

⁶Erik Barnouw, Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 21.

⁷Ibid, 28.

⁸F. Leslie Smith, Perspectives on Radio and Television (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 15.

⁹Ibid, 15-16.

¹⁰Sydney W. Head and Christopher H. Sterling, Broadcasting in America, A Survey of the Electronic Media (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, Sixth Edition), 41.

¹¹F. Leslie Smith, Perspectives on Radio and Television (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 16.

¹²Ibid, 16.

¹³Sydney W. Head and Christopher H. Sterling, Broadcasting in America, A Survey of the Electronic Media (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, Sixth Edition), 42.

¹⁴Ibid, 44.

¹⁵WKY Radio, Oklahoma City. "An Outline History of WKY, AM, FM, TV." January 20, 1990. (WKY Radio Station computer database).

CHAPTER II

WKY: The Hull Years (1920-25)

The forerunner of WKY Radio, 5XT, an experimental station with a 20-watt transmitter, went on the air in the living room and garage of Earl C. Hull on January 20, 1920. Hull's residence was located at 1911 W. Ash, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Hull and his partner, H. S. Richards, used Hull's residence to broadcast from the "Oklahoma Radio Shop."¹ Hull became interested in radio through his work with wireless telegraphy as a student at St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York, in 1914 and 1915.²

5XT, now known as WKY Radio, was the third radio station in the United States to broadcast regular daily programs, and the first such station west of the Mississippi River.³

1920 was the time of crystal sets, and Hull established the Oklahoma Radio Shop to sell parts for making crystal sets, and used the profits to keep the station in operation.

One broadcast provides an example of the 5XT's pioneer status: It was one of the stations that carried the 1920 Harding-Cox presidential election returns. Regular programming included recorded operas, concerts,

soloists, news reports and interviews.

On April 21, 1921 Hull received a license from the Department of Commerce & Labor for his station to broadcast at 1040 kilocycles; its call letters: WKY.⁴

Hull had requested and received permission to wire the First Christian Church for the broadcast of a concert to be given on March 8, 1922 by Alma Gluck, a famous opera star. Hull moved the entire station, transmitter and all, to the church for the broadcast. At the last minute, Gluck with-drew the permission she had granted earlier. Not to be outdone, Hull hid the microphone and broadcast the entire concert without Gluck's knowledge.⁵

An article in The Daily Oklahoman on May 30, 1922 reported:

The Daily Oklahoman, co-operating with the St. Louis & San Francisco Railroad, the Oklahoma Radio Shop and the government radio station at Fort Sill, accomplished Tuesday a feat yet to be equalled by any other radio broadcasting station or railroad, . . . the feat of receiving and transmitting messages by radio on a moving train for a distance greater than 25 miles from the broadcasting station. Constant communication was kept up between WKY (Oklahoma City) and DN6 (Post Field).⁶

In 1923, WKY outgrew its cramped quarters in Hull's residence and was moved to a room atop the newly completed Shrine Auditorium at Northwest Sixth and Robinson.

The Daily Oklahoman began lending assistance to WKY by publicizing its operations and providing it with news and market reports. An example is listed below:

Regular concerts on Tuesday and Friday evenings beginning at 8:30 o'clock.

Special Shrine program Thursday night, beginning at 9 o'clock.⁷

Another headline in that same edition of The Daily Oklahoman promotes upcoming broadcasts on WKY:

Lion Tamers Will Perform for Radio. Two Popular Orchestras in WKY Programs.

Oowab! The Lion Tamers' club has something up its sleeve. None knows but members of the club what it will be except that the club is going to surprise listeners of WKY . . . next Friday night.

Two other special programs are scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, the regular concert nights at the station. Harry Steinberg's orchestra will furnish Tuesday night's entertainment while the orchestra of the First Methodist Church, under the direction of Edward H. Frey, will play Wednesday evening.⁸

WKY was honored by Oklahoma Governor John C. Walton. He gave a formal invitation, the promotion of which was also published in The Daily Oklahoman as follows:

Governor Walton will speak from . . . WKY, Thursday night, when he will extend a formal invitation to the Shrine Directors' association for the 1924 international convention to meet in Oklahoma City.

The invitation will be the first ever given for such a convention over radio, and Shrine directors, who live in all parts of the country and from Canada to Mexico City, have been notified to listen on WKY that night. . . .

Oklahoma City's invitation for the 1924 convention is being given Thursday night in advance of the 1923 convention to be held at Indianapolis, Ind. February 15, 16 and 17. . . . The program will begin at 9 o'clock.⁹

This article in The Daily Oklahoman shows the significant place that broadcasting was beginning to take in the lives of Americans, and the attention given to WKY by as large an organization as The Shrine shows the station emerging as a recognized power in the field of broadcasting.

In 1924, station records indicate that the first network broadcast was made, carried by several of America's better stations, and featured a program of songs by Reginald Werrenrath. The program was sponsored by Atwater Kent.¹⁰

Early day radio has abundant anecdotes of momentary lapses on the part of announcers who forgot that they were on mike. Earl Hull, in an Oklahoma Today Magazine article, related one such incident which occurred on WKY. Hull, suffering from laryngitis, was forced to persuade a friend who had no radio background, but was a fanatic baseball fan, to take over play-by-play duties for him. According to Hull:

Oklahoma City was playing St. Joseph in the old Western League, and this guy did fine until the fifth inning when St. Joseph got two men on base with two outs. The next batter hit an easy pop fly to our rightfielder, a fellow by the name of Guppy. My broadcaster said, "It's a high, soft pop fly to right field, folks, and Guppy will gather it in to retire the side. . . .!*#+![] The stupid _____ dropped the ball!"¹¹

Hull went on to say that he received 6,000 letters, most of which agreed that Guppy was indeed "a stupid

_____."12

Even though WKY was growing in popularity and seemed to be received well, it was, however, not without its problems--both financially and legally.

On September 27, 1924 Oklahoma Radio Electric Corporation filed suit against H. J. Richards, Earl Hull and the Masonic Temple in Oklahoma County District Court stating that Plaintiff and Defendants had contracted for a WKY receiver to be located in the Masonic Temple. The plaintiff alleged that Hull, Richards and the Masonic Temple had not paid for the broadcasting set and had not taken care of it. Evidently the terms of the contract specified that WKY had the option to buy the broadcasting set. However, the case was dismissed on October 1, 1924.¹³

Apparently when this lawsuit was dismissed, Richards and Hull agreed to pay \$500 for the broadcasting equipment, terms were \$125 per month for four months. Hull and Richards did not pay three of their four payments. There is no indication that this indebtedness was ever satisfied.

WKY was supposed to be earning \$150 per month from the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce for broadcasts, and \$150 per month from the First Methodist Church of Oklahoma

City. WKY was also to receive \$2,125 from George B. Rittenhouse, a salesman of electronic equipment. WKY bought radio receivers and other electronic equipment wholesale from Oklahoma Radio Electric Corporation. This \$2,125 was WKY's share of the equipment. The \$2,125 was money owed WKY by George Rittenhouse from the sale of the electronic equipment and radio receivers purchased at wholesale by WKY. Research does not determine whether this \$2,125 was ever satisfied. Therefore, a second lawsuit was filed in Oklahoma County District Court for a default judgment, but court records indicate that this case was also dismissed on May 16, 1925.¹⁴

Further indication of WKY's troubles was a third lawsuit filed by Oklahoma Radio Electric Corporation against Earl Hull on May 27, 1925 in Oklahoma County District Court. Apparently Oklahoma Radio Electric Corporation sued Hull and WKY for non-payment of promissory notes. This is an extension of the second suit, plus non-payment of equipment that WKY sold retail. The agreement was in the form of nineteen promissory notes to be paid by WKY to Oklahoma Radio for the transmitter and other radio equipment. Terms were \$100 per note payable weekly, plus 8% interest and 10% attorney fees. Hull paid three payments totalling \$410.85 on the total indebtedness. Oklahoma Radio sued for the balance of \$1,481.15 principal,

8% interest, and \$190 for attorney fees and court costs. On September 24, 1925 the judgment awarded Plaintiff \$1,673.33 principal plus 8% interest and \$190 attorney fees. WKY's ownership was 100 shares--50 owned by Earl Hull, and 50 owned by his wife.

On July 25, 1927 the then president of WKY, H. W. Duncan, was served with a notice of foreclosure because no further payments had been made since April 8, 1926. As a result, WKY was sold on the steps of the Oklahoma County Courthouse at 2:00 p.m. on August 17, 1927.

Mr. Hull had previously sold 1% of his station to Fred Ptack, leaving him only forty-nine shares, which were valued at \$100 a share. Forty-four shares were bought by Oklahoma Radio Electric Corp., the remaining five by J. T. Carter.¹⁵

Sometime between April 25 and May 25, 1925 (prior to the filing of the third suit), H. J. Richards ceased to be a partner. Nothing is indicated in my research to explain why.

Details of operation between the end of the May 25, 1925 lawsuit and the purchase of WKY by Mr. E. K. Gaylord are, at best, sketchy. Mention is made of WKY being off the air for several months in a brief September 19, 1925 article in The Daily Oklahoman:

WKY, Oklahoma City radio station, which has been silent for many months, has been testing for

several days, and will be back on the air shortly with a new 500-watt transmitter.

Towers of the station are now temporarily located in southwest Oklahoma City, but are to be moved still more distant from the city.

A modern radio studio will be constructed in a downtown Oklahoma City hotel and all programs broadcast by remote control.¹⁶

It was apparently during this time that Edward K. Gaylord first obtained a financial interest in the station, thus beginning a new era in Oklahoma broadcasting.

Endnotes

¹WKY Radio, Oklahoma City. "An Outline History of WKY, AM, FM, TV." January 20, 1990. (WKY Radio Station computer database), 1.

²Ibid.

³H. C. Neal, "50th Anniversary of Radio", Oklahoma Today Magazine, Autumn 1970, 31-35.

⁴WKY Radio, Oklahoma City. "An Outline History of WKY, AM, FM, TV." January 20, 1990. (WKY Radio Station computer database), 1.

⁵Ibid.

⁶The Daily Oklahoman, May 30, 1922.

⁷The Daily Oklahoman, Sunday, February 4, 1923.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰WKY Radio, Oklahoma City. "An Outline History of WKY, AM, FM, TV." January 20, 1990. (WKY Radio Station computer database), 2.

¹¹H. C. Neal, "50th Anniversary of", Oklahoma Today Magazine, Autumn 1970, 35.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Okla. Radio Elec. Corp. v. H. J. Richards, et. al., Ok. Dist. Ct., Case No. 44312 (1924).

¹⁴Okla. Radio Elec. Corp. v. H. J. Richards, et. al., Ok. Dist. Ct., Case No. 46406 (1925).

¹⁵Okla. Radio Elec. Corp. v. Earl Hull, Ok. Dist. Ct., Case No. 47082 (1925).

¹⁶The Daily Oklahoman, September 19, 1925.

CHAPTER III

WKY-AM: The Gaylord Years (1925-1989)

A brief entry in a journal kept by the station indicates that, in February 1926, The Daily Oklahoman, a newspaper owned by Edward K. Gaylord, became financially involved in WKY. From somewhat sketchy reports in the Oklahoma City newspapers, WKY continued to broadcast from a variety of locations in Oklahoma City.

1926 and 1927 saw WKY in two new studios. The first was located on the fourth floor of the Bass Furniture Company building where the station celebrated its fifth anniversary. The second was in the dungeon banquet room of the Huckins Hotel, where one of the favorite artists appearing on the station regularly was Bud Aurand's Huckins Hotel Orchestra.

A September 17, 1926 Daily Oklahoman article noted the fact that "WKY will be broadcasting live from the State Fair of Oklahoma during the last three days of the Fair"¹, a noteworthy event considering the fact that radio was still in its infancy.

Friday, July 27, 1928 the front page of The Daily Oklahoman carried the banner headline "OKLAHOMA CITY GETS BIG RADIO STATION". This headline and the accompanying

article heralded the purchase of WKY by the parent company of The Daily Oklahoman and The Times, Oklahoma Publishing Company. Oklahoma Publishing Company was owned by Edward K. Gaylord.

The headlines read:

WKY Bought By Oklahoman And The Times; Last Word in Transmitters Purchased; Will Be On Air October 1. TO USE 1,000-WATTS. Special Studio Prepared; Farmer-Stockman Will Give Crop News.²

Oklahoma Publishing Company had great plans for WKY--nothing but first-rate, state of the art facilities-- a true leader in the field of broadcasting in the southwestern part of the United States:

A modern, metropolitan broadcasting station with crystal control, 1,000 watts of power, the last word in equipment from the laboratories of the Radio Corporation of America, chain programs and all-day service comparable with that given by WDAF, the Kansas City Star, is promised for the State of Oklahoma not later than October.³

Phrases such as "the new super-station of the southwest" and "the last word in equipment" were intended to let the world know that Gaylord had plans to have the best possible facility, and to make a name for WKY in the field of broadcasting.

Two 150-foot fabricated steel towers were ordered for immediate delivery from eastern manufacturers. The height of these towers, along with the site of the station house, would enable WKY to have a tremendous outreach. A prime example of this is given by E. L. Gratigny, repre-

senting a group of radio dealers who were helping Oklahoma Publishing Company pave WKY's development:

This is the biggest news of the years for the radio fans and the radio business of Oklahoma. . . . It means that radio will be a feature in Oklahoma the year through, hereafter. Heretofore the fans have virtually abandoned the radio because of static from the first of June until the first of October. Hereafter, with a powerful, ethical station in Oklahoma City, every radio owner within a radius of fifty miles will get perfect daytime reception and the night power will carry all over the country during the fall and winter months. I think the station will put Oklahoma City on the map like nothing else could.⁴

The station building included the transmitter, controls, and electrical equipment at a location seven miles northwest of Oklahoma City "in the open country on the Thirty-ninth street Road". This site was selected by the plant engineer of the Radio Corporation of America after making a thorough "evaluation of the topography of the surroundings in a ten-mile radius of the business area so that WKY would have to deal with a minimum of power interference, and a maximum of accessibility and service to the community."⁵ Shortly thereafter, on November 11, 1928 WKY went on the air from its new Plaza Court studios at 1100 Classen Boulevard in Oklahoma City with a day and night operating power of 1,000 watts on a frequency of 900 kilocycles.

On October 1, 1928 H. J. (Jack) Lovell joined the staff of WKY. Lovell went on to become Chief Engineer of

the station. Although now officially retired, is still a regular visitor to an office he maintains in the WKY Building.⁶

December 1928 marked another milestone in Oklahoma broadcasting as WKY became the state's first network station when it affiliated with the National Broadcasting Company (NBC).⁷

A station journal records that during this same time Daryl McAlester and Muir Hite started reading comic strips over the air. The program continued for many years each Sunday morning. Among the other voices were Eleanor Naylor, Erma Rae Hite, Audrey Kerley, Georgia Mae Cook (Mrs. Hite), Frank Martin, Herbert Leteau, Ben Morris and Wakefield Holly.⁸

Lovell remembered an incident that occurred at WKY during the reading of the comic strips on Sunday morning:

One Sunday morning, the story goes, the man who read the funnies to kids over the radio finished up his hour-long stint, and being a bit hung over, reached into his desk drawer for a soothing nip of panther sweat. Believing the microphone to be dead, he observed with relief, 'that ought to hold the little ----- for another week.' There are some gaps in the logbooks. It would be impossible to determine just who did that, I imagine.⁹

Of course, the announcer's microphone wasn't dead. His remark was heard by thousands of listeners, and the station was overrun in the next few days with letters from angry mothers.¹⁰

The importance of WKY to Oklahoma broadcasting in particular and broadcast history in general is illustrated in a map published in the March 3, 1929 edition of the Sunday New York Times. It shows the location of broadcast stations throughout the United States in the Hoover Inaugural hookup. WKY is one of three radio stations in Oklahoma, and one of only eight in Oklahoma and Texas included in the hookup which was lauded as a means which would bring the inauguration to every home in America.

WKY continued to assert itself as a leading force in broadcasting in Oklahoma. On November 19, 1930, news reporters from WKY provided on the scene coverage of a devastating tornado which wrecked havoc and destruction in Bethany, a small town just west of Oklahoma City. WKY stayed on the air continuously for two days broadcasting information and appealing for funds. The appeal raised more than \$36,000 for victims in less than 48 hours.¹¹ Considering that Oklahoma had been plunged into the Great Depression the year before, the raising of \$36,000 is an astonishing accomplishment.

Although WKY was first operated directly by Oklahoma Publishing Company, in late 1931 WKY Radiophone Company was formed to operate the broadcast division of Oklahoma Publishing Company.¹²

Due to continued growth and their desire to keep up with their need to serve the public, the owner and management of WKY envisioned great achievements for the station. In the mid-30s, portable short-wave transmitters were put in for remote broadcasts, allowing WKY to originate such programs as the NBC broadcast of a PGA Tournament from Oklahoma City in 1935.

During this time a move to studios better suited to meet the needs of WKY was on the drawing board. Developers in Oklahoma City were planning to build a new hotel, a grand spectacle, to be named The Skirvin Tower Hotel. Architects included the WKY's modern studios in the original plans.¹³ An acoustically treated ballroom to be located on the third floor of the hotel was also to be available for broadcasts from WKY.

On April 1, 1936 WKY began broadcasting from new studios in the Skirvin Tower Hotel located at First and Broadway in downtown Oklahoma City. The studios and offices took the entire fifth floor of the hotel. Included were four studios, a modern kitchen for home service programs, complete air-conditioning, soundproof "floating" studio floors and walls, and all new furnishings.

A new transmitter for experimental operation of a new station, W5XAU, was installed on the 15th floor of the

Skirvin Tower to provide ultra-high frequency service on 31 to 41 megacycles in addition to regular AM broadcasts.¹⁴

A \$33,000 Kilgen organ (see Appendix A) especially built for radio broadcasting was purchased and placed in the studios.¹⁵ On April 20, 1936 Ken Wright joined WKY as staff organist. Wright continued his association with WKY Radio and TV, and because of his association, was well-known throughout Oklahoma. Wright retired in the mid-1960s and has since died.

In 1936 Gaylord shared his vision of the future of WKY, as well as exciting advancements to be made in the broadcasting industry:

It is hard to look back eight years and recall how crude radio was at that time [in 1928]. When we acquired WKY few people had receivers and all receivers were battery sets. Most of them produced more static than music. Those were the days when you fished all over the dial, trying to bring in a station 500 miles away. If you were lucky enough to tune in Atlantic City or even Detroit, you called your neighbor on the telephone to brag about it. You didn't really listen to the radio for its message or its music. You tuned in for the pleasure of logging a new station.

All this has changed. Whenever radio is discussed now, it is the program or the artist, not the reception nor the distance from the transmitting station. If you happen to tune in on a London or a South American station with your short wave set, you forget even to mention it at the office.

The development and improvement of radio in the past eight years has been marvelous, but the coming eight years will eclipse all that has occurred in the past. We know now that with ultra-high frequency it will be possible soon for the voice of one person to be heard around the world. Television is a matter of months and already we can visualize a great singer standing before a microphone with half the world both seeing and hearing the artist. The Alaskan miner,

snowbound at 60 below zero, in his winter cabin, can perhaps see the bathing beauties of Miami Beach and hear the splash as they dive into the pool. The sheep rancher in Australia can watch the world series games at the Yankee Stadium and hear the umpire being called a robber.

In short, radio and television will be the eye and ear of the world. It will be man's constant companion in his home, his office or in traveling by train or car. He can see great events in all countries, whether that be the crowning of a king, the fighting of a battle, or a pageant of the world's great industries.

We should all hope that radio and television and facsimile shall be the means of better acquaintance, more friendly understanding, and a great desire for peace among all the peoples of the world.¹⁶

On April 13, 1936 the new studios in the Skirvin Tower Hotel were formally dedicated and opened to the public. In his dedication speech, Gaylord alluded to the exciting advancements to be made in the broadcast industry. To prepare for these advancements, WKY had done "years of planning, study and effort" to design and build "one of the most complete and attractive studios which has ever been prepared to serve the radio listener . . . The studios as they now have developed are finer and more complete than the dreams or the blueprints that preceded them" . . .¹⁷ WKY was indeed designed to help meet the needs of the future in Oklahoma broadcasting, and is still dedicated to the service of the public. It was started largely to maintain the prestige and reputation of Oklahoma and Oklahoma City.

Gaylord confided that he purchased WKY without the slightest thought that it would ever break even on

operating expenses, let alone make a profit. In fact, one of his newspaper friends who operated a radio station in a western city confided that he was losing \$150,000 a year, and eventually sold the station. Other newspaper publishers who owned radio stations were losing up to \$200,000 annually. Gaylord mentioned that during the 1930s no one thought of operating a radio station for profit. It was either a daring adventure with a propensity for public service, or the owner was what was generally known as a radio nut.

Gaylord related that he had taken his family to London during the summer of 1928 when he received a cable from one of his managers stating that a wildcat gas well had been struck southeast of Oklahoma City. With the advent of oil and gas in Oklahoma, and an increase in business and population, he felt that he could afford to lose some money operating a radio station.

By return cable Gaylord instructed the manager to purchase WKY. The manager built the transmitting plant northwest of the city, installed all new machinery and had it on the air before December 4.

At that time WKY's output power was insufficient to reach and hold the Oklahoma audience, so its management was eager to be allotted increased power by the Federal Communications Commission. The power was granted and a

modern broadcasting plant was erected in the northwest part of Oklahoma City. WKY's management was also applying to become a member of the National Broadcasting Company network, but NBC was not interested.

Gaylord went on to relate that Oklahoma Publishing Company officials made innumerable calls to NBC executives, resulting in WKY's eventually being added as an NBC affiliate. The remainder of his speech illustrates his desire to provide quality broadcasting, as well as serve the public of Oklahoma:

The building of an elaborate studio for this station was to further enhance the value of WKY to its audience and to maintain the prestige of the Oklahoma Publishing Company. We will continue to have those same objectives.

In the future we look forward with the hope of being allocated greater power which will mean the construction of an enlarged transmission plant. Already we are licensed to operate an experimental short wave transmitter and as soon as the use of high frequency receiving sets becomes general, we shall hope to serve our audience in an ultra-high frequency band, as well as with standard wave transmission.

When television and facsimile transmission are ready for the public, WKY expects to serve you.¹⁸

In November 1936 a new 300 foot vertical antenna was installed, replacing the horizontal wire system. A new 5,000 watt transmitter was installed with authorization by the F.C.C. for 5,000 watt daytime and 1,000 watt nighttime operation.¹⁹

A WKY program schedule published on August 9, 1936 in The Daily Oklahoman shows WKY's commitment to the people of Oklahoma. In addition to the regularly scheduled NBC network programs, there were a number of locally produced programs such as "Uncle Ben's Funny Paper Hour", cited earlier, "The Oklahoma Club Orchestra", and something WKY has continued to be known for over the years--a strong commitment to local news and sports with 15 minute news and sports reports delivered several times each day.²⁰

The success of WKY's local programming is perhaps best attested to by a letter from jeweler Jess McEntee to M. H. Bonebrake dated August 5, 1936 and published in The Daily Oklahoman as follows:

Just a note to tell you what I think of 'It's McEntee Time,' which has been on your station since April 17th.

I know I like for customers to tell me how satisfied they are with our merchandise, so I'm dropping this letter to you. Frankly, I'm tickled to death with the results. Each Friday, on the air, we make new friends, and customers. Our profits have always been small and fair, but we can count our customers everywhere. Our business has not taken the customary summary "nosedive", but instead, as the doctor says to the proud father, "It's doing nicely."

I appreciate the cooperation your department has given me and the interest your staff has taken in my program. Radio has become an integral part in McEntee's advertising set-up and I feel that people all over Oklahoma have been entertained by "It's McEntee Time."

Yours, as a satisfied customer.²¹

Over the years a number of well-known broadcasters have called WKY their home. One of the most notable worked

at WKY in his early career, and while he is a widely known and highly respected consummate broadcast journalist of today, Walter Cronkite's beginnings at WKY started with what could best be described as a disaster. His experience at WKY is recalled in a newspaper feature in March 1981:

It was 1937, springtime, and he got hired by the United Press in Kansas City, a relationship that lasted 11 years. They sent him back to Austin and other Texas towns and then returned him to Kansas City. Cronkite has always said that the best job of his life was on the UP overnight trick there, responsible for rewriting the news of the whole country west of the Mississippi for next day's afternoon papers.

The UP stint was interrupted by one more excursion into radio. He had earned a reputation at KCMO by doing reconstructed football games from Western Union reports (even as Ronald Reagan had done), and station WKY in Oklahoma City hired him to do games live. Again, he didn't want to go, but he was thinking of getting married, and they tripled his UP salary.

That lasted a year, which started in disaster. He had never done live football, so he whipped up an electric play-by-play board. Two spotters would push buttons lighting up on the board the names of players in various plays--he wouldn't have to look at the game.

But the board sort of pooped out, and the two spotters weren't any good. "At the first game, the station owner stood behind me saying, 'oh my god. . . oh my god. . . oh my god' for the entire game. It didn't help my morale any."

But he wasn't fired. He buckled down and learned his job and called the games as he saw them.²²

Other future celebrities who called WKY their home at one time or another in their careers, included a newsman who used the name of Mack Rogers on the air at WKY in the early 1940s. Rogers was the on-air name used by Frank McGee, who became a respected NBC broadcast journalist. Another future celebrity, was a well-known talk-show host

Mike Douglas, who was a radio singer at WKY in the early 1940s. One of the most popular country music stars of the 1940s, Jimmy Wakely, was a regular performer on WKY.²³ Georgia Holt, mother of actress and singer Cher, also sang on WKY when she was a child.²⁴

On August 14, 1940, WKY increased its broadcast output from 1,000 watts to 5,000 watts nighttime power, and selected a 145-acre site on East Britton Road for a new transmitter and new antenna towers. Construction began in 1940. This new transmitter facility cost WKY \$250,000. According to station records, the building was to be of concrete with brick facing, suspended ceilings, a studio room, workshop, auxiliary power unit, space for AM and FM transmitters and room for expansion. Work also started on WKY's huge 915 foot tower, with two directional towers 254 and 285 feet high."²⁵ Transmitter Engineer Jack Lovell supervised the design and construction of the new transmitter complex. Lovell was later promoted to Director of Technical Operations for WKY Television Systems, Inc.

In September of 1940 "The Serenaders," a popular singing group comprised of Harold and Louise Daniels, and Kenny and Lucille Driver, began entertaining on WKY. Even though their program was off the air from June 1943 until July 14, 1948 (interrupted during World War II), they returned to WKY as a regular feature.

WKY also contracted with a popular singing duet, Wiley and Gene, in the late 30s and early 40s to entertain its audience. A liner note on the back of one of their albums mentions WKY as one of the stations who carried them live:

"When My Blue Moon Turns to Gold Again" and "Live and Let Live" are country music standards, but while many can sing these songs, or at least hum the melodies, only a few would recognize the names of the talented singers who introduced the songs to the world. Wiley Walker and Gene Sullivan were one of the most successful country duets of the late 1930s and early 1940s; they, as well as their music deserve to be reintroduced to a new generation of music fans. . . .

Although Wiley and Gene's songs appeared on jukeboxes all over the United States, and were carried by homesick servicemen to distant corners of the globe, the two singers settled down in Oklahoma City and only rarely took their music beyond the listening range of WKY. Every country honky tonk reverberated with their songs, but Wiley and Gene kept their distance from that social institution which did so much to shape the sound of country music in the postwar years. Wiley and Gene were pre-eminently radio singers, and as such they became institutions in their adopted Southwest. For many years on WKY they sang the praises of their sponsor, Superior Feeds, and appeared often in small towns at picnics and feed stores where they promoted both their music and their sponsor's products.²⁶

March 24, 1941 marked the date that WKY changed its frequency to 930 kilocycles, where it remains today. No reason was discovered in my research for this change.

Since Oklahoma primarily derived its economy from farming in the 1940s, farm reporting had always been an integral part of WKY's programming. Hence, in August of

1944 a Farm Department was established as a separate division of the News Department.

Ed Lemons was appointed Farm Director, and he began attending farm gatherings throughout the state, established close liaison with the agricultural experimental stations, Oklahoma A & M College (now Oklahoma State University) from groups of all kinds, and the Oklahoma Extension Service in order to bring more complete coverage and make greater farm services available to farm families.²⁷

In late 1944 WKY's transmitter operation was moved to its new home on Northeast Britton Road. The previous site had made it impossible for WKY to raise the level of its tower, as that location was in the path of air traffic from Oklahoma City's Wiley Post Airport.

Throughout the years WKY continued to receive awards for its outstanding contributions to the field of broadcasting and public service. Just a few examples of awards received during the decade of the 1940s are listed in Appendix B at the end of this thesis.

On February 1, 1947 Hoyt Andres, WKY's Program Manager, produced a children's program, "Gismo Goodkin", along with a group of speech students from Oklahoma City's Classen High School.²⁸ This program is a clear example of WKY's commitment to serve all aspects of its listening public in Oklahoma.

To paraphrase the late Will Rogers, if you don't like the weather in Oklahoma, just wait. Oklahoma suffers from probably every extreme in weather. The most devastating of these is the tornado. Over the years WKY has made a strong commitment to keeping Oklahomans informed about severe weather and assisting them when the worst occurred. One such example is April 9, 1947, when Woodward (located in far northwest Oklahoma) was struck by a catastrophic tornado. Immediately upon learning of this disaster, WKY interrupted all regularly scheduled programming to give bulletins, relay appeals for assistance, and otherwise serve as Woodward's link to the outside world. WKY later followed an appeal for funds with a drive for funds to finance replanting of the hundreds of shade trees that had been destroyed by the tornado.

Station Manager P. A. Sugg determined that WKY's mobile equipment, as well as that of any other private or public agency in the Southwest, was inadequate to serve as a focal point of communications in the event of a major disaster.

Therefore, shortly after the Woodward tornado, WKY ordered a new mobile unit--a huge, highway type bus converted into a rolling studio equipment with AM and FM transmitter, receiving equipment, a mobile telephone, as well as short-wave apparatus. The mobile unit was unveiled

to the public at the State Fair of Oklahoma in September of 1948. At that time it was a one-of-a-kind in Oklahoma, and was utilized as a public address system at farm and civic meetings over the state and for similar public service events.

June of 1947 again proved WKY to be a leader in Oklahoma broadcasting, when WKY-FM signed on the air with 3,000 watts of power, later increased to 10,000 watts, on Channel 255, at 98.9 megacycles. Some of the programs on WKY-FM were original, while others duplicated local and network AM broadcasts. WKY engineers raised its tower height to 959 feet, as the FM antenna was added to the top of the tower. At that time it was the highest self-supporting tower in the United States.²⁹

The decade of the 1950's saw WKY continuing to develop as a broadcast leader in Oklahoma. Interestingly enough, during this time WKY discontinued its FM broadcasts because of apparent apathy on the part of the listening public.

In the late 1940s, WKY was beginning to outgrow its facilities, so WKY's board of directors announced plans for construction of new offices, AM studios and television studios to be located at 500 East Britton Road, just east of the transmitter site. On July 10, 1950 WKY officially broke ground for their new offices/studios. A few weeks

later, the new 5,000 watt transmitter was installed, and the old 5,000 watt transmitter was prepared for emergency use.

March 25, 1951 was met with mixed feelings, as it was the last broadcast of WKY from the old Skirvin Tower Hotel in downtown Oklahoma City. The next morning WKY signed on the air at the new studios. These studios were built at a cost in excess of \$750,000, a modern structure, air conditioned throughout, and designed to fit the practical needs of a modern broadcast station. The AM facilities included four studios, as well as a master control console. The television studios were engineered so that they could also be used for originating AM programs.³⁰

The 1950s presented a real dilemma for radio broadcasters with the emergence of television and the loss of many of the radio programs which had filled its operating schedule. WKY made a decision to fill its program schedule with disc jockeys playing music in an attempt to hold the audience they had had for so many years. The format decided upon was rock and roll, and Gaylord Broadcasting President Jim Terrell commented on the programming philosophy of WKY and the decision to attempt this new style of programming.

WKY radio was probably one of the premiere NBC affiliated radio networks for years and carried all of the network programming and so forth. Back when we

made the decision to go more music and to eliminate the network programming basically except for news, and special events and sports and so forth. Both Mr. Ed Gaylord and Mr. E. K. Gaylord went with the recommendation of the radio people at that time. This was the wave of the future for radio and with television coming on with those programming of drama and so forth, radio programming, per se, was waning. This was what we perceived as being the route to go. So we went that, and we went full tilt, and we had a young manager at that time who was fairly astute in getting that type of programming, and we had good staff people. So, that's the route we went.³¹

Throughout the 50s, 60s and into the early 1970s the air staff at WKY remained virtually the same. There are several reasons for this. WKY's air personalities were dispatched throughout the State of Oklahoma to host dances, making them highly visible with their listening audience.

WKY also hosted an annual Bridal Fair at which all air personalities were present, and prospective brides and their parents from all over the State came to get ideas for their weddings.

In 1976 a decision was made to sell WKY-TV and maintain WKY Radio. In my personal interview with Jim Terrell, President of Gaylord Broadcasting, he discussed the reason for the sale, as well as the reason Gaylord Broadcasting decided to continue to hold the AM radio station:

In 1976 we sold WKY-TV. It was the opportune time to sell the station. We were in the Oklahoma City market with radio, television and the newspaper, and the FCC some years before--at that time rather than deregulating--were more intent on more regulation, and they had earmarked 16 markets for newspapers to divest

themselves of radio/television or vice versa. And, while Oklahoma City was not in one of those, we thought this might be an indication of things to come. And at that time period we were successful in selling the station to close business people that we knew well--The Detroit Evening News--and we knew their type of operation was similar to ours. They had agreed that they would take care of our people who were long-term employees of the station, and we also got a very handsome sales price for it. As a matter of fact, we were able to buy the New Orleans station and the Cleveland station.

In 1977 we bought the ABC affiliate in New Orleans and the independent UHF Channel 43 WUAB in Cleveland. And that was the extent at that time period of our acquisitions because we had the seven stations that the FCC allowed you to have--seven television stations.³²

Terrell speculated on why Gaylord Broadcasting decided to sell the television station rather than WKY Radio.

Well, there were several reasons. The Detroit Morning News was interested in television, we felt like it was an appropriate time for selling the television station at the best possible price, and we felt like that the selling of the radio station would not have been . . . what's the word I want to use . . . would not have the impact of selling the television station as far as divestiture. We were not forced to divest.³³

On March 15, 1977 a WKY Luncheon Tour was scheduled. Gaylord Broadcasting Company sent out printed invitations for their guests to share a meal and then take a guided tour through the new studios at 400 East Britton Road, located just west of their previous location. In order to provide proof of how successful the venture had been, a brochure entitled "Garage to Garage" was published pointing out that Earl C. Hull began 5XT (WKY's predecessor) in his garage at his home, and 57 years later WKY

invited its public to see their GARAGE--a garage large enough to house two semi-trailers, one of which was WKY's remote studios. Its studios and offices were ultra-modern, state-of-the art.

The brochure discussed all aspects of WKY's programming, and how the new facilities would affect them. WKY boasted that it had "one of the largest, most energetic news gathering organizations in Oklahoma." It had attained Oklahoma's most award-winning news as judged by professional broadcasters from outside of Oklahoma. Its news facilities included a newsroom, an on-the-air broadcast studio, three fully-equipped news cars, two-way radio plus emergency broadcast monitors for fire and police. Also included were the wire services, network feed and two broadcast lines from the Oklahoma State Capitol.³⁴

Its weather reporting was provided through special contractual arrangement affording "the most sophisticated meteorological and radar information" and capitalizing on how quickly Oklahoma's weather could become unstable and extremely severe.³⁵

Also by contractual arrangement, WKY had the services of the top sports broadcaster and his staff in the state.

WKY's mobile studio is a 36 foot tractor trailer fully equipped broadcast facility, and its mini-mobile is a

broadcast-equipped van. The main mobile studio has its own self-contained power generator, central heat and air conditioning with all the comforts of the main studio.

The management of WKY spared no expense on the sound quality of the station. Studio B has six cartridge playback units, two Revox 477 reel-to-reel record/playback units, equalizers and echo chamber.³⁶

Studio E was designed as WKY's primary production studio. It was furnished with everything from "movable, sound-absorbing panels" for acoustics to "light dimmers", implying that soft lights would fit the needs of the client. The engineers put twelve microphone connectors in Studio E that could accommodate "a variety of Electrovoice, Shure and Norman mikes, thus handling the most stringent recording requirements." The control room for Studio E was supplied with a custom designed "eighteen-channel, in-four-channel-out console for both stereo or mono recordings. The recording equipment is four model 350 Ampex records, one model AG440 Ampex recorder, a model MR 70, one-half inch, three track Mastering machine and an EMT-140 reverb unit."³⁷

WKY's Studio contained custom built console with basic record/reproduction equipment, while the master control room would be used to record music and commercial cartridges for broadcast.

WKY's News Department produced a documentary program profiling six victims of violent crime entitled "You're Next." This documentary won the United Press International Documentary Award for 1978, Edward R. Murrow Documentary Award for 1978, Sigma Delta Chi Award for Interpretive Reporting 1978, and was one of 53 finalists nationwide in the prestigious DuPont Columbia Awards.³⁸

After almost 30 years of broadcasting top 40 music, the ratings "sort of tapered off . . . we went to adult contemporary."³⁹ Management of WKY decided that by going to adult contemporary they would be in a better position to serve their listening public. WKY continued to program adult contemporary until 1984.

Even with its change in format in 1984, WKY continued to honor its commitment to delivering the best possible news, weather and sports to its listening audience.

Then in 1984 A Daily Oklahoman article announced that WKY had decided to change format from adult contemporary to country music on May 25, 1984.⁴⁰ In an interview with Billboard Magazine WKY's Program Manager, Greg Lindahl commented that:

The angle we're working on is bringing back that full service approach. Country music is just a vehicle to reach the people who remember WKY, and turned to it for news and information.

We're increasing our news staff considerably. The newsroom will be staffed 24 hours a day. . . . It's a good indication of our priorities."⁴¹

Jim Terrell of Gaylord Broadcasting Company stated his feelings about the reason that WKY changed its format to country music:

. . . we felt like that for a radio and an AM stand alone station, that country music basically was the best route for us to go. But, WKY was known more as a regional type station. We probably got into that a little later than we should have. We should have made the move more quickly, but we didn't. And, it has been successful for them [WKY], tying in with the Grand Old Opry and that type of operation. But we felt like country music fitted our type of audience we would be reaching out in the area, and country music was coming on strong all over the country, really and it had been strong for a few years, had a slight dip, and then, of course, now is on the way back up. So, that is basically, I guess the reason."⁴²

On April 21, 1987 the WKY newsteam was again awarded the Edward R. Murrow Award for the best overall news coverage during the previous year. WKY had won the prestigious award three years in a row, and five times in the last decade--no small feat.⁴³

On Saturday, June 30, 1990, WKY again changed its format from country to easy listening, filling a void in the Oklahoma City radio market when KKNG-FM changed its format from easy listening. A June 26, 1990 article in The Daily Oklahoman reported that WKY would continue its local and CNN national news, as well as local traffic reports during morning and evening rush hours, along with weather coverage from a meteorologist.⁴⁴

Even though many changes have occurred, WKY is facing one of the most formidable challenges in its seven decades of existence. As we enter the decade of the 90s, AM radio nationwide has shown a marked decrease in listenership and in revenue due to this decrease. The challenge facing WKY is: Can an AM radio station remain as WKY has for 70 years a viable force in the broadcast industry, as well as a revenue producer for its owners? One thing that may allow WKY to continue in its position of influence is that this pioneer radio station has remained true to its vision of excellence in broadcasting, and to serving the people of Oklahoma with the very best product that WKY can offer to the listeners of the State of Oklahoma.

Endnotes

- ¹Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City), 26 Sep 1926.
- ²Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City), 27 Jul 1928.
- ³Ibid.
- ⁴Ibid.
- ⁵Ibid.
- ⁶Jane McClure, personal interview by author, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, May 26, 1989.
- ⁷WKY Radio, Oklahoma City. "An Outline History of WKY, AM, FM, TV." Jan 20, 1990. (WKY Radio Station computer database), 2.
- ⁸Ibid.
- ⁹H. C. Neal, "50th Anniversary of Radio", Oklahoma Today Magazine, Autumn 1970, 35.
- ¹⁰Ibid.
- ¹¹WKY Radio, Oklahoma City. "An Outline History of WKY, AM, FM, TV." Jan 20, 1990. (WKY Radio Station computer database), 3.
- ¹²Ibid.
- ¹³Jane McClure, personal interview by author, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, May 26, 1989.
- ¹⁴WKY Radio, Oklahoma City. "An Outline History of WKY, AM, FM, TV." Jan 20, 1990. (WKY Radio Station computer database), 3.
- ¹⁵Ibid.
- ¹⁶Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City), 12 Apr, 1936.
- ¹⁷Edward K. Gaylord, speech delivered at Skirvin Tower Hotel in Oklahoma City on 13 April, 1936. (Oklahoma City: WKY archives).
- ¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹WKY Radio, Oklahoma City. "An Outline History of WKY, AM, FM, TV." Jan 20, 1990. (WKY Radio Station computer database), 7.

²⁰Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City), 9 Aug, 1936.

²¹Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City), 8 Aug, 1936.

²²Edmond Evening Sun (Edmond, Oklahoma), 5 Mar, 1981.

²³Jane McClure, personal interview by author, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, May 26, 1989.

²⁴Georgia Holt, Phyllis Quinn and Sue Russell, "My Child, The Star," Good Housekeeping, May 1988, 176.

²⁵WKY Radio, Oklahoma City. "An Outline History of WKY, AM, FM, TV." Jan 20, 1990. (WKY Radio Station computer database), 7.

²⁶When My Blue Moon Turns to Gold Again. Wiley Walker and Gene Sullivan. Photocopy of liner notes from their album produced by Frontier Records (independent record company located in Jenks, Oklahoma), catalog number unknown.

²⁷WKY Radio, Oklahoma City. "An Outline History of WKY, AM, FM, TV." Jan 20, 1990. (WKY Radio Station computer database), 8.

²⁸Ibid, 9.

²⁹Ibid, 10.

³⁰Ibid, 11.

³¹Jim Terrell, President of Gaylord Broadcasting, personal interview by author, Dallas, Texas, March 23, 1990.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Gaylord Broadcasting Company, Garage to Garage, The WKY Radio Story of 57 Years of Progress, 15 Mar 1977.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Sunday Oklahoman (Oklahoma City), 15 Apr 1979.

³⁹Jim Terrell, President of Gaylord Broadcasting, personal interview by author, Dallas, Texas, 23 Mar 1990.

⁴⁰Gene Triplett, "Radio Station to Switch Formats", Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City), 4 May 1984.

⁴¹"In New Post at Gaylord, Lindahl Maps WKY Shifts", Billboard, 19 May 1984, 16.

⁴²Jim Terrell, President of Gaylord Broadcasting, personal interview by author, Dallas, Texas, March 23, 1990.

⁴³WKY Radio, Oklahoma City. "An Outline History of WKY, AM, FM, TV." Jan 20, 1990. (WKY Radio Station computer database), 12.

⁴⁴"WKY Plans to Change its Format", Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City), 26 Jun 1990.

CHAPTER IV

Summary and Conclusions

5XT, WKY, was the first radio station west of the Mississippi River. It began as 5XT, an experiment in radio transmissions--truly a pioneer venture, although a financially shaky undertaking, through the efforts of Earl C. Hull and his early partner, H. J. Richards.

WKY was acquired in 1928 by E. K. Gaylord. Although WKY was the source of many innovations, it lost money during the first two years of Gaylord ownership, and was subsidized by Gaylord's newspaper operation. In its third year, however, the station began to pay its own bills despite the fact that other radio stations in the mid to late 1920s were losing hundreds of thousands of dollars.

As a pioneer in Oklahoma broadcasting, WKY served as a role model for other stations in the state, and indeed, in the central southwestern United States. Contributing to the impact of WKY was the fact that this pioneer station was located in a part of the country where most of the population was rural. When WKY's power was increased to 500 watts, it could practically be heard throughout most of the State of Oklahoma and was received in parts of southern Kansas and northern Texas. Its news

reports included farm programs and weather updates which were crucial to the farmer's livelihood.

Gaylord wanted WKY to be affiliated with a network. After much struggle and persistence, WKY finally became affiliated with the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) in December, 1928. The increase of the station's power from 1,000 watts to 5,000 watts in 1936 probably helped NBC decide to grant the station an affiliation contract.

A commitment to programming to both entertain and inform the listeners of the latest news and weather by Gaylord and his management in itself had a remarkable impact on the broadcast industry in Oklahoma and in the Southwest in general, as competitors tried to match WKY's quality.

Perhaps even more far-reaching is the effect WKY and its operations had on the field of broadcasting nationwide. The successes of WKY in Oklahoma City led Gaylord to acquire many other stations. Had the WKY venture been unsuccessful, one can only speculate that Gaylord Broadcasting one of the largest privately-held broadcasting companies in America, might have never spread beyond Oklahoma City.

At one time or another Gaylord Broadcasting has owned AM radio stations in markets such as Albuquerque, New Mexico; Portland, Oregon; and Colorado Springs, Colorado,

spreading the Gaylord standard of excellence throughout the nation. In addition to WKY's effect on radio, according to Jim Terrell, President of Gaylord Broadcasting, there was a rapid expansion of television stations in the mid-1950s stretching through to the early 1970s. Several of these stations were affiliated with major networks. Later, when Gaylord Broadcasting purchased KTVT Channel 11, an independent television station in Dallas, the corporate hierarchy discovered that not only did independent television programming provide an alternative to the regular network programming, it was very lucrative and the independent stations were an obvious success.¹

This discovery has led Gaylord Broadcasting into even more markets with independent television stations in Houston, Texas; Seattle-Tacoma, Washington; and Cleveland, Ohio--just to name a few. So, although the purchase of WKY by Gaylord Broadcasting in 1928 might seem far removed from the television industry, there is a direct connection to the successful venture and what we see today as a highly successful broadcasting company.

In 1983, Gaylord Broadcasting announced the purchase of the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, the world's most famous country music radio show.² Together with the Grand Ole Opry acquisition, came WSM-AM and FM, as well as Opryland and its luxurious Opryland Hotel.

To illustrate the impact of this Nashville purchase, WSM-AM is a 50,000 watt, clear channel AM station with a signal that reaches a significant portion of the United States and at times portions of Canada.³ It had broadcast the Grand Ole Opry from its inception, and WKY was the only other radio station in the United States other than WSM to carry the program.

As of March 23, 1990, Gaylord Broadcasting was the licensee of seven television stations and had held on to WKY and newly acquired WSM as its only AM properties. With the advent of FM radio and its stereo broadcasts, AM radio has experienced a tremendous decline in popularity in recent years. WKY has been no exception. Because of WKY's decline in popularity, WKY has changed its format four times. From rock and roll, which was programed during the 1950s, 1960s and most of the 1970s, to adult contemporary in 1978, to country in 1983; and the recent change to easy listening to fill a void left by an FM station in the Oklahoma City market when it changed its format. It must be noted, however, that during these changes, WKY has continued to provide public service programming of news and weather coverage in an attempt to continue a long standing tradition set by that station some seventy years earlier.

WKY has served its listeners for over seventy years and has continually striven to provide listeners what they

wanted in both programming and news, with a commitment to excellence in both areas which has led to the successes enjoyed by Gaylord Broadcasting. WKY's influence on the broadcast industry is far-reaching in that the goals and attitudes towards its operations have been passed on throughout the corporation.

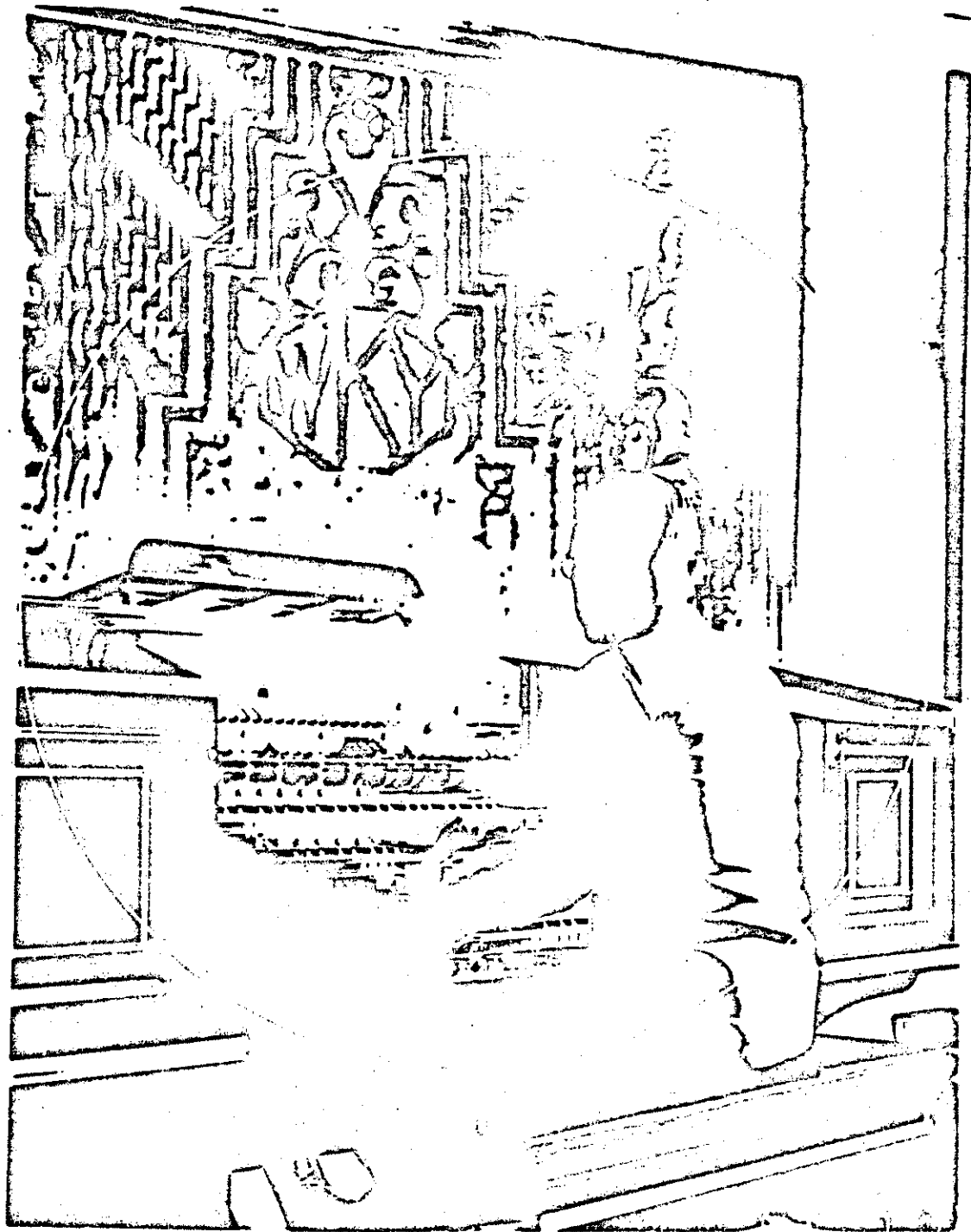
WKY's recent decline in popularity is endemic to all AM radio stations, and not due to any problems within the station itself. However, if any AM station is able to determine how once again become a powerful force in its market, I would not be surprised if WKY was that station.

Endnotes

¹Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City), 7 June, 1984.

²Ibid.

APPENDIX A
PHOTOCOPY OF PICTURE OF KILGEN ORGAN



APPENDIX B
PARTIAL LIST OF AWARDS RECEIVED BY WKY DURING THE 1940s

APPENDIX B

1. *Variety Magazine Show-Management Award* for helping the farmer fight and win the war through the efforts of WKY's Farm Department (1944);
2. *City College of New York Award* for most effective promotion by a regional station for a sponsored radio program . . . Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy (1945);
3. *The National Safety Council's top award of honor* for distinguished service in promoting the farm safety cause (1945);
4. *Billboard Magazine's award* for outstanding achievement in radio promotion of a single campaign (1945);
5. *DuPont Award of \$1,000 in cash* for WKY's outstanding attack on the venereal disease problem (1946);
6. *The National Safety Council's top award of honor* the second year in a row for distinguished service in promoting the farm safety cause (1946);
7. *A Show-Management Award* for expanding the social usefulness of radio in handling the series on venereal disease (1946);
8. *Citation awards* by the National Conference of Christians and Jews, as well as the Oklahoma City Chapter of National Achievements Clubs for a weekly public service program on Sunday mornings entitled "Creed, Color and Co-operation" with Kenneth Johnson, a Langston University student, as writer and talent. This program was very definitely ahead of its time (1947);
9. *Institute for Education by Radio* for the series on venereal disease, as well as for outstanding work in Farm Safety (1947);
10. *City College of New York award* for the most effective promotion of a local program, "Oklahoma's Front Page" (1947);

11. The National Safety Council's top award of honor the third year in a row for distinguished service in promoting the farm safety cause (1947);
12. *Billboard Magazine's* Award for Outstanding Achievement in radio promotion and public service promotion (1947);
13. *Billboard Magazine's* First Annual Local Program Competition for WKY Radio program, "Creed, Color and Co-operation" (1948);
14. Institute for Education by radio for WKY's Farm Safety Program and for outstanding work in human relations (1948);
15. *Billboard Magazine's* Award for outstanding achievement in radio programming in "Anthony Avenue", "The Editors Speak," and "Creed, Color and Co-operation," (1948).²⁸

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barnouw, Erik. A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Vol 1 to 1933. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.
- Barnouw, Erik. Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Douglas, George H. The Early Days of Radio Broadcasting. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1987.
- Foster, Eugene S. Understanding Broadcasting. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1982.
- Gross, Lynne S. See/Hear. Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1979.
- Head, Sydney W. Head and Christopher H. Sterling. Broadcasting in America, A Survey of the Electronic Media. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, Sixth Edition.
- Hybels, Sandra, and Dana Ulloth. Broadcasting: An Introduction to Radio and Television. New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1978.
- MacDonald, J. Fred. Don't Touch That Dial! Radio Programming in American Life, 1920-1960. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979.
- Smith, F. Leslie. Perspectives on Radio and Television. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988.
- Sterling, Christopher H., and John M. Kittross. Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1978.
- The Daily Oklahoman, 30 May 1922.
- The Daily Oklahoman, 19 Sep 1925.
- The Daily Oklahoman, 26 Sep 1926.
- The Daily Oklahoman, 27 Jul 1928.
- The Daily Oklahoman, 12 Apr 1936.

- The Daily Oklahoman, 8 Aug 1936.
- The Daily Oklahoman, 9 Aug 1936.
- Edmond Evening Sun, 5 Mar 1981.
- The Daily Oklahoman, 7 Jun 1984.
- The Sunday Oklahoman, 4 Feb 1926.
- Woodward News Bulletin, 24 Jun 1927.
- Okla. Radio Elec. Corp. v. Earl Hull, Ok. Dist. Ct., Case No. 47082 (1925).
- Okla. Radio Elec. Corp. v. H. J. Richards, et. al., Ok. Dist. Ct., Case No. 44312 (1924).
- Okla. Radio Elec. Corp. v. H. J. Richards, et. al., Ok. Dist. Ct., Case No. 46406 (1925).
- "Gaylord Hums Growth Tunes", Adweek, 15 Aug 1983. Vol V, No. 33.
- "Summary of Broadcasting and Cable," Broadcasting, 13 Aug 1990, 75.
- Neal, H. C. "50th Anniversary of." Oklahoma Today, Autumn 1970, 35.
- WKY Radio, Oklahoma City. "An Outline History of WKY, AM, FM, TV." Oklahoma City, 1952. (WKY database)
- Walker, Wiley and Sullivan, Gene. When My Blue Moon Turns to Gold Again. Photocopy of liner notes from their album produced by Frontier Records (independent record company located in Jenks, Oklahoma), catalog number unknown.
- Terrell, Jim. Personal interview by author. Dallas, Texas 23 Mar 1990.
- McClure, Jane. Personal interview by author. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. 26 May 1989.
- Gaylord, Edward K. Speech delivered at Skirvin Tower Hotel in Oklahoma City. 13 Apr 1936. WKY archives.