

DEPARTMENT STORES AND THE ORIGINS OF AMERICAN BROADCASTING,

1910-1931

by

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(Under the Direction of Associate Professor James Hamilton)

ABSTRACT

When the technological and social practice of broadcasting became widespread in the early 1920s, radio stations were started by a variety of groups for a variety of reasons. A few dozen department stores established their own stations, using the nascent medium of radio to stimulate a demand for receivers and to promote their overall business. Drawing from the prior literature on the early broadcast industry and the history of department stores, original archival research, and informed by the theories of the social construction of technology and the diffusion of innovations, this dissertation explores department store radio stations of the 1920s and early 1930s. This group of stations has never been documented or studied in any systematic fashion, though many department stores facilitated the growth of broadcasting through the stations they operated, shows they sponsored on others, and promotional activities that actively encouraged this new form of communication. Philadelphia was the most active city for this type of broadcasting, with four major retailers establishing their own stations in 1922. These stations are at the center of the narrative, although those located elsewhere are also included in order to paint a broader picture of the phenomenon.

In contrast to those historians who have framed the commercialization of American radio as a declensionist narrative, this dissertation stresses the explicitly commercial nature of many early radio stations. The stations operated by department stores, for example, fashioned programs around specific types of merchandise, advertised their parent company, and drew potential consumers onto the sales floor. This initial approach to radio advertising helped to pave the way for the model of commercial broadcasting which developed in the United States. In the second half of the 1920s, as resistance to direct forms of advertising decreased, the stores were again at the forefront of this change and their “radio shopping shows” directly foreshadowed the rise of home-shopping and e-commerce.

The educational efforts of the department stores, including set-building contests, window displays, and classes, also reveal that the commercialization of a new media technology is not necessarily a later stage occurrence in the overall pattern of technological diffusion but may affect the initial stages of innovation itself.

INDEX WORDS:     Radio history, broadcasting, department stores, social construction of technology, diffusion of innovations, commercialization, new media

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2007

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In a departure from the standards of academia, I would like to begin this section by thanking my wife and family. Without their moral support, financial assistance, and much-needed help with childcare, my research would not have been possible.

My research into the early period of American broadcasting was sparked by the first class that I took in graduate school, a seminar on the history of technology by Dolores Greenberg at the City University of New York Graduate Center. In a subsequent class with William Boddy I narrowed this broad topic to something more specific and first began researching the intersection of department store and radio history. I would also like to thank some of my other professors at the same institution who left vivid impressions on me, including David Nasaw, Louis Menand, and David Jaffee.

When I decided to return to the University of Georgia for another degree, James Hamilton was one of the first professors that I was fortunate enough to encounter. We quickly established a productive relationship, and I thank him for not only supervising this dissertation but also for helping me navigate through the doctoral program. Along with James and my other committee members, my particular approach to the study of mass communication benefited from my experiences with several other faculty members at the University of Georgia, including Carolina Acosta-Alzuru, Andanam Kavoori, Nate Kohn, Joseph Dominick, and Elli Lester-Roushanzamir.

My research was aided by the Vincent Wasilewski Scholarship that I received in 2005 from the Broadcast Education Association. I thank the BEA for their support, as well as Patrick Communications which made this award possible.

I would also like to especially thank the countless librarians and archivists who have helped me along the way, including those at the National Archives, the Library of American Broadcasting, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Free Library of Philadelphia, the Billy Rose Theatre Collection of the New York Public Library, and the interlibrary loan staff at the University of Georgia Library. Despite the wealth of information that is available online, there were many instances when an actual human being provided far greater assistance with my research.

Some of the material in chapter four of this dissertation appeared in the article “The Wireless in the Window: Department Stores and Radio Retailing in the 1920s,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* published in Vol. 83, no. 3 (2006).

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

With the addition of television, by which a picture of the product in colors will appear before the home radio audience, there is the probability that the department store counter will be radioed right into the home. It is conceivable ... that at certain hour each morning a department store salesman will unroll a bolt of fabrics or place other articles before the camera and with colored motion picture and microphone give a selling talk to several hundred thousand women who have seated themselves before the radio in their homes and tuned in for the daily store news.

- Frank Presbrey, *The History and Development of Advertising* (1929)

In a modern day realization of Presbrey's prediction, made when television was more dream than practical reality, the screens of an ever increasing variety of electronic devices indeed function as department store windows, transforming the pleasures of looking into a commodified, marketplace relationship. The parallel between the display window and the screen is more than a symbolic metaphor, however, and goes beyond the mere fact that both have been used to showcase goods to potential consumers. The department stores of yesteryear pioneered new retail practices such as the use of display windows and also encouraged the innovation, development, diffusion, and commercialization of electronic communications technologies, a connection that has not been explored or documented in any systematic fashion. As a step in uncovering this connection, this dissertation explores the phenomenon of department store radio stations during the first decade of American broadcasting.

I first encountered this particular topic many years ago while researching an entirely different aspect of radio history. My research led to a collection of scripts, correspondence, memos, and other material preserved by Dailey Paskman, the director of a radio station in the 1920s.<sup>1</sup> While the material contained information relevant to my original inquiry, I was especially intrigued by the unusual nature of Paskman's employer, WGBS, a station owned by and located inside Gimbel's department store in New York City. Even at this early stage in my academic career, I knew that commercialization was an issue of perennial interest to media scholars. I was also aware that the 1920s was a particularly crucial period in the development of broadcasting because the economic, regulatory, legal, and cultural frameworks developed at this time continue to inform contemporary media practices.

With this perspective in mind, a department store radio station from the Roaring Twenties seemed an especially strange phenomenon. My understanding of television and radio stations was that of the traditional commercial model in which privately owned stations sold portions of their airtime to advertisers. WGBS, by contrast, was an earlier approach to broadcasting that existed before the industry had stabilized into an overtly commercial model. This station seemed like a quaint relic of the past, and paradoxically a decidedly contemporary approach to advertising. With modern viewers exposed to so many promotional messages in an increasing number of forms, advertisers use techniques such as product placement to cut through the clutter. A radio station intertwined, quite literally, with a retail operation struck me as an extreme form of product placement; it wasn't just individual program or commercial announcements that were sponsored, but

an entire realm of programming. Sufficiently energized by my unexpected discovery, I wrote a case study of WGBS as a master's thesis.<sup>2</sup>

Upon returning to graduate school years later, I encountered many other historical accounts of radio, but department stores were mentioned only in passing if at all. In an understandable desire to present a coherent narrative, or because their ultimate focus lay elsewhere, media historians largely omitted these retailers from the wildly complex story of 1920s radio. By contrast, when I delved into accounts of radio written in the first half of the twentieth century, I discovered an almost overwhelming number of references to these institutions. Uncovering this story has thus felt like discovering a forgotten family member. First, you notice an unknown middle-aged man, an uncle perhaps, in one photograph, and then you notice him in a photo from another gathering. As you flip through an album, this same man is always there, perhaps blurry in the background or partially obscured by a Christmas tree, but present nonetheless.

This study, by analogy, does not forge a connection between two unrelated topics, broadcasting and department stores, but rather restores a relevant institution to the chronicle of early radio. Much of the evidence regarding the stores and their use of radio intersects with the commercialization of the broadcast industry during the 1920s and early 30s. This initial observation inspired the primary research question behind the dissertation: What role did department stores play in the construction of the commercial broadcasting system in the United States?

In addition to shedding light on the development of one particular communications technology, this historical excursion has additional significance for the early twenty-first century. Digital video recorders, online file-sharing, wireless web

access, video-cellphones, and other technologies are currently transforming the ways we consume information and entertainment, while media industries transform their practices to accommodate the same innovations. The issue of emerging technologies has attracted increasing attention from scholars, with particular focus on the process by which they are developed and incorporated into daily life. A study of department stores and radio, looking back to the period when this was the new media of the day, offers a case study of one particular technology and addresses the secondary research question: What is the role of commercialism in the development of new communications technologies?

### **Alternate Views of Television and Technology**

In *Just Looking*, Bowlby examined the depiction of consumer culture in the naturalist novels of Theodore Dreiser, George Gissing, and Emile Zola.<sup>3</sup> The growth of department stores in the late nineteenth century, as a new type of retail and social institution, is central to her critique, as well as to the novels included in her study. According to Bowlby, Gissing was the harshest critic of the commodification of daily life where the “demands of a competitive, monetary economy are superimposed upon what would ideally be a free and creative artistic self.”<sup>4</sup> Dreiser represents the alternate view in which the “endless and dreamlike promise of the advertisement” is realized through the consumption of newly affordable and widely available consumer goods.<sup>5</sup> This positive, empowering view was shared by department store owners themselves who claimed that they “democratized luxury,” bringing the benefits of the good life to the masses.<sup>6</sup> Bowlby situates Zola somewhere in between these two poles; “his department store is both a fantasy palace and an oppressive machine.”<sup>7</sup>

The range of views expressed by these three authors, as outlined by Bowlby, are analogous to the range of scholarly views regarding mass media. For those who would emphasize the negative aspects, the fact that American media industries are funded by advertising or otherwise commercially oriented means that their products can do little more than perpetuate dominant ideology and the prevailing status quo.<sup>8</sup> I label such theories an “enslavement” perspective of media as they argue that ideas, beliefs, and social norms are artificially imposed upon the populace. In his overview of television scholarship, Hartley grouped similar theories into the “fear” school of analysis.<sup>9</sup> The studies of the Payne Fund from the early 1930s were part of this enslavement tradition as they alleged that specific kinds of anti-social conduct could be directly attributed to the influence of films upon younger viewers.<sup>10</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno’s denunciation of popular media, as expressed in “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” is another classic application of the enslavement perspective and argued, among things, that radio was the “universal mouthpiece of the Fuhrer.”<sup>11</sup> The views in this essay, published in 1944, remain evident in more current media criticism, albeit in a qualified, less strident form.

The opposite side in the debate is an “empowerment” view, or what Hartley dubbed the “desire” school.<sup>12</sup> Rather than focusing on a passive audience, unable to resist the power of the message, desire/empowerment scholars see “communication as a two-way, interactive practice of meaning-exchange.”<sup>13</sup> The intended meaning of a media message, as Fiske and others have famously argued, is not necessarily received and interpreted in the same manner by every member of the audience.<sup>14</sup> Television, viewed from this perspective is a less a Fuhrer, imposing his will upon the public, and more of a

teacher exposing students to a variety of messages which may very well have educational, positive benefits. Just as department stores claimed to “democratize luxury,” proponents of empowerment claim a similar democratizing effect of mass media.<sup>15</sup>

Empowerment is less common than the enslavement perspective in academic discussions of early radio, though not entirely absent. In *Making a New Deal*, Cohen argued that the growth of radio, film, and chain stores in the 1920s signified the homogenization of culture, but also encouraged immigrant, blue-collar workers to see themselves as a unified group rather than a fractured collection of ethnicities.<sup>16</sup> The labor movements of the 1930s, according to Cohen, resulted from this new method of self-identification, and “radio, probably more than any other medium, contributed to an increasingly universal working-class experience.”<sup>17</sup> The respective works of Fones-Wolfe and Roscigno and Danaher similarly explored the way radio fostered solidarity among workers and disseminated pro-labor views.<sup>18</sup> Newman also argued for the empowering aspect of early radio, and claimed that the consumer movements of the 1930s and later were themselves spurred by the growth of commercialized radio; “Advertising often provoked listeners to think of themselves more self-consciously as consumers.”<sup>19</sup>

By outlining this enslavement/empowerment spectrum, I do not mean to suggest that any scholar resides exclusively in one camp or the other. Hartley summed up this observation by stating that “these distinctions don’t so much mean opposition as dialogue,” and most scholarship exhibits some combination of these perspectives.<sup>20</sup> However, even if the enslavement/empowerment dichotomy does not exist in an absolute form, it is a nonetheless useful framework for analysis. These extremes represent the



parameters of the debate, and academics maneuver between these poles in constructing and situating their own arguments.

For media historians, one's particular position regarding empowerment versus enslavement is heavily influenced by one's view of commercialization. The proliferation of advertising can be seen, for example, as primarily a corrupting influence on the specific medium in question, or as vital source of revenue without which said medium could not flourish. The development of the commercial system of broadcasting in the 1920s, then, is a particularly telling period in the relationship between broadcasting and society because the decisions made at this time continue to reverberate. By broadcasting I do not limit this concept to a literal definition — terrestrial distribution of an electronic signal — and include all the technologies for delivering entertainment and information to individual devices owned by the viewer. Later forms of electronic mass media were themselves based on, and derived from, the techniques, genres, and institutions that developed with the initial forms of broadcasting.

More specifically, historians of American radio debate if the medium was pushed into the abyss of commercialism, jumped willingly, or if any other outcome was even possible under the free market system.<sup>21</sup> Early media historians had a non-critical, empowerment perspective and celebrated commercialism.<sup>22</sup> Beginning with Barnouw, and the rise of the conflict perspective of history, the enslavement view offered a declensionist perspective.<sup>23</sup> According to this thesis, broadcasting was an inherently democratic form of communication that developed first within the community of amateur radio enthusiasts, but large corporations then exploited the technology for their own purposes and a commercial model of broadcasting developed. As sponsors began to have

more influence on programming, the diversity of viewpoints expressed over the airwaves was reduced. The absence of formal government regulation over the nascent broadcast industry allowed the commercial system to take root, and by the passage the Federal Radio Act of 1927, the system was well established.

The evidence to support this declensionist narrative has been drawn primarily from the histories of the large corporations, from books and editorials published by opinion leaders of the era, and from government documents and examinations of various legal conflicts. Douglas looked for precedents for the growth of commercial radio by examining the development of wireless technology in the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>24</sup> She concluded that the commercial system of broadcasting was in place “technically, economically, legislatively, and ideologically” by 1922.<sup>25</sup> By ending her narrative so early, however, we are left with a “black box” model regarding the growth and actual implementation of the commercial system. The conditions of the early 1920s may have been conducive to radio’s commercialization but Douglas does not explain the specific process by which this particular system of broadcasting spread to the industry as a whole.

In one of the better known histories of radio’s commercialization, McChesney argued that this particular economic and cultural approach to broadcasting was not firmly entrenched until well into the 1930s.<sup>26</sup> To support this claim, McChesney mined legal and political records to document the opposition to commercialization. The work is well-researched, though strays dangerously close to a conspiratorial explanation in which a restrictive system is inflicted upon a malleable public. Smulyan’s monograph, the only one to date specifically focused on radio’s commercialization, tempered this neo-marxist

analysis by incorporating the attitudes of the public; listeners desired some form of nationalized radio, though not necessarily the commercial system.<sup>27</sup> She outlined a deliberate campaign to “sell” the commercial system to the industry, and like McChesney, presented a scenario in which commercialism arises in the mid-20s to corrupt an already developed media technology.

An exploration of some previously overlooked stations from broadcasting’s earliest period, by contrast, presents a somewhat contradictory view of commercialization. According to Doerksen’s study of “rogue” stations, commercialization occurred not because a handful of corporations controlled the industry, but precisely because they did not.<sup>28</sup> Smaller, independent stations openly embraced advertising, and the widespread, popular resistance to commercialism which McChesney and Smulyan described should be understood as an elitist sentiment from the upper class. According to Doerksen, less-educated listeners and farmers in the Midwest did not object so strenuously to advertising.<sup>29</sup>

The works of Benjamin, Slotten, Streeter, Rosen, and Horwitz focus on the legal and regulatory process by which commercialization occurred, rather than attempting to situate this development along the empowerment/enslavement spectrum.<sup>30</sup> Three of these scholars invoked Hawley’s concept of the “associative state” to explain the practices of Herbert Hoover, who as Secretary of the Commerce Department was most responsible for government radio policy in the 1920s.<sup>31</sup> Guided by the vision of an associative state, Hoover believed that free enterprise should regulate itself with minimal government control. Seen from this perspective, radio’s commercialization was not the result of government inaction, but a byproduct of deliberate policies.

Other cultural histories of radio supplement the discussion of commercialization with a “feminization” thesis; at the same time that the medium was being commercialized, it was made more palatable to women. Boddy and Douglas discussed, for example, the link between notions of masculinity and the cult of the amateur enthusiast.<sup>32</sup> Boddy also explored how the early radio industry courted female listeners, recognizing that their support was vital to expand the medium beyond a limited realm of amateurs. In addition, Smulyan and Hilmes documented the development of programs aimed at female listeners.<sup>33</sup> The feminization thesis fits neatly into the larger commercialization perspective as it characterizes the first generation of listeners as active and male while later listeners were passive and female.

This dissertation responds to the accepted periodization of the commercialization of radio broadcasting with the goal of clarifying, explaining, and illuminating some of the unexplored aspects of the process by which this development occurred. The existing literature documents the government’s role in this process, along with the resistance and proposed alternative to this development. Less well-documented are the early precedents for commercialization and the first stations devoted to advertising via the airwaves, including those of department stores. The empowerment/enslavement perspectives inform the present analysis, though I realize that it is impossible to definitively situate commercialization within either side of the debate. These are not questions that can not be answered as concisely as “what is the average rainfall on the Serengeti plains,” and, as Aitken wrote, “differences in ideology are not resolved by appeals to evidence.”<sup>34</sup> Regardless of one’s preference in this debate, an understanding of the process by which

commercialization took places offers insights into the broader relationship between media and society.

An assumption often made by both the enslavement and empowerment camps is that media act as an exterior force upon society, with effects that can be isolated and identified through social-scientific analysis. This assumption runs beneath many mainstream opinions regarding the influence of technologies on modern life, though it cannot withstand scrutiny. Like a Kalahari bushman perplexed by the accidental discovery of a soda bottle, those who emphasize the effects of television or the Internet *on* society sidestep the complex nature of the human efforts that brought these technologies to fruition. Ira Hirschmann, a department store executive, made a similar observation when speaking to a trade group in 1944; “I advise merchants not to think of television as the miracle which, like Minerva, sprung full-armed from the head of Jove.”<sup>35</sup> Scholars who study technology echo Hirschmann’s sentiment, suggesting that “we must figure out a way to take the common evolution of technology and society as our unit of analysis.”<sup>36</sup>

This holistic approach is not only helpful, but in fact mandatory if we employ a sociotechnical definition of technology that goes beyond hardware itself to include the social, economic, and regulatory systems that manage its use.<sup>37</sup> Determining the nature of the relationship between technology and society, however, is no small task. Slack presented four ways to theorize this relationship, and her work is a useful starting point for exploring the development of new communications technologies.<sup>38</sup> After dismissing two theories, dubbed simple and symptomatic causality, for failing to account for the totality of technology and society, Slack outlined a theory of “expressive causality.”<sup>39</sup>

This theory points to some core essence that can explain a particular technology as well as the society that produced it.<sup>40</sup> Expressive causality is illustrated in a critique of the oft-made assertion that computers (or mechanization in general) cause unemployment:

If the computer was searched for, invented, and innovated primarily as an efficient method of decreasing labor costs and enhancing efficiency, the “cause” of unemployment would be every bit as much (if not more) attributable to the ideology of efficiency, economic strategies, contradictions between labor and capital, and the conjunctures between them.<sup>41</sup>

This expressive theory of technological causality, however, suffers in Slack’s interpretation in that it entirely collapses technology and society into one phenomenon. A similar critique has also been leveled against Ellul who defined technology, or technique to be more precise, so broadly “that it includes virtually every aspect of modern life.”<sup>42</sup>

Taken to an extreme, expressive causality is a reflection scenario. It cannot explain instances where technology might trigger some rupture in the social order, nor does it account for relevant social groups who consciously attempt to direct a technology down a particular path.

As a counter to this shortcoming, Slack proposed a theory of “structural causality.”<sup>43</sup> Technologies may be integrally related to the societies which create them, according to this theory, though they nonetheless possess some level of autonomy. Simply identifying the appropriate social structures, economic systems, corporate relations, and patent agreements (among other factors) cannot definitively tell us which path of development a technology may follow, nor can we definitively predict how it will be adopted by users.

Slack’s work shares much in common with social construction theories of technology. The general concept of social construction, which draws from a variety of

sociological and philosophical precedents, was directly applied to technology by Pinch and Bijker in 1987.<sup>44</sup> In contrast to linear models of technological development, with each phase representing an implicit improvement, social construction offers a multidirectional view. There is no single, pre-ordained path along which technologies develop, nor is there a self-evident logical use for any particular technology. Relevant social groups, including institutions, organizations, or simply groups of individuals, have their own perspectives on how a new technology should be used. The degree to which a technology can be said to “work” is dependent on how well it satisfies the requirements of relevant social groups, groups which exert different levels of influence based on differences in their economic, cultural, or political power. After an initial period of uncertainty and flexibility, the particular form of a technology is stabilized in a process that Pinch and Bijker defined as closure.<sup>45</sup> In a study of large-scale electrical systems, Hughes opted for the term “momentum” to describe a similar development.<sup>46</sup> Closure/momentum does not suggest that all the uncertainties with a particular technology have been resolved, but that any profound change becomes less likely.

Social construction offers a means of explaining the degree of technological autonomy that exists within Slack’s concept of structural causality, as does the diffusion of innovations theory.<sup>47</sup> Diffusion may initially appear at odds with social construction and has been critiqued for possessing a “pro-innovation” bias, as if technical developments were inherently positive and driven by some internal logic.<sup>48</sup> As originally articulated by Rogers, diffusion theory did present a somewhat linear model of development, with technologies being adopted by various demographic segments of the population in predictable succession, including early adopters, early majority, etc. The

1995 edition, however, of Rogers' famous text includes enough examples of technologies that did not become popular and enough attention to contextual, cultural factors that the "pro-innovation" critique no longer applies.<sup>49</sup> Taken together, the theories of social construction and diffusion offer a supplemental body of concepts and ideas for exploring the development of new communications technologies. This study treats commercialization both as a particular means of diffusion and as a collection of ideas about how a new technology should be utilized and developed.

In an overview of the diffusion and social construction approaches, Lievrouw stressed their similarities and the respective attention to determination and contingency.<sup>50</sup> Diffusion of innovations places more emphasis on determination, while social construction emphasizes contingency. The concepts of contingency and determination, however, much like the empowerment and enslavement views, are not mutually exclusive, opposing poles of some theoretical spectrum. All technologies result from some interplay between these two forces. An entirely determinist view presents technological development as being controlled by one particular factor, whether it be economics or gender, or it simply collapses technology and society into one, undivided entity. An entirely contingent view, emphasizing the unpredictable nature of development and user behavior, "may to seem to imply that anything is possible, that each configuration of artifacts and social groups can be built up or broken down at will."<sup>51</sup> Bijker rejected this extreme form of contingency and noted that "such a view of our technological society clearly underestimates the solidity of society and the stability of technical artifacts."<sup>52</sup> This study of department stores and the introduction of radio thus



pays attention to contingency, determination, and the role of commercialization in the development of a new communications technology.

### **Definitions and Nomenclature**

Before identifying which radio stations and which retailers to analyze, a definition of “department store” had to be established. The 1981 book, *The Retail Revolution*, used an official government classification:

Retail stores carrying a general line of apparel, such as suits, coats, dresses, accessories; home furnishings, such as table and kitchen appliances, dishes and utensils. These and other merchandise lines are normally arranged in separate sections or departments with the accounting on a departmentalized basis. The store’s departments and functions are integrated under a single management.<sup>53</sup>

Relying on such a precise description, however, was beyond the scope of this study. A particular store might have advertised itself as a “department store,” for example, even though it did not offer the full range of merchandise cited above or conduct its “accounting on a strictly departmentalized basis.” Without a time-consuming and rigorous examination of business records, which may no longer exist, it would be a Herculean effort to categorize retailers of the 1920s in such a precise fashion. I therefore relied on self-selection; if retailers advertised themselves as department stores or dry goods stores, the original name for this form of merchandising, I included them.

The process of self-selection admittedly has limitations. It is possible that many of the other retailers from this era, namely clothing, furniture, or hardware stores that owned their own stations, possessed enough relevant characteristics to justify inclusion in this study. I have not, however, encountered anything beyond a cursory mention of such stations during my research. An additional reason for excluding them from the study is

that none of these other kinds of stores possess the same history as the department store. Cultural and business historians have identified this institution as a leading innovator in new forms of merchandising and advertising.<sup>54</sup> Building from this body of literature, this present study relates department store radio activities to their broader history.

The term “department store radio station,” used frequently throughout the dissertation, is an even more ambiguous animal. With WGBS providing the initial creative spark, I originally envisioned stations that were established and operated by a single store. However, a number of co-owned stations existed, such as newspaper-department store ventures or stations begun by another company then sold to a retailer. A rigid definition of a “department store radio station” might exclude these other examples, unnecessarily limiting the end result. A more inclusive interpretation yields a broader view of the complex and fluid nature of the early broadcast industry. I have thus employed a loose definition of “department store radio station” and specified, wherever relevant, those instances in which a station was co-owned or otherwise operated by some entity other than the store.

With my objects of study thus defined, a process akin to issuing a casting call, an interloper soon arrived at the audition. The Sears-Roebuck Company created and ran its own dedicated station, WLS, out of Chicago for four years.<sup>55</sup> While conventional wisdom might unquestionably deem Sears to be a department store, unlike the other retailers in this dissertation, it began first as a mail-order catalog business and then established a chain of stores. Traditional department stores, especially in the time period in question, were grand buildings in dense urban environment that focused on a specific geographic area.<sup>56</sup> A 1970 economic study of department stores specifically excluded

Sears, along with J.C. Penney and Montgomery Ward, from its analysis as they were “regarded by trade associations as national department store chains rather than traditional department stores.”<sup>57</sup> Omitting WLS from the study, then, might be justified on some level, but would be a myopic approach to the phenomenon, just as omitting newspaper-store stations would unnecessarily restrict analysis. While I included WLS in my cast of characters, I found that, when it came time synthesize the evidence into specific observations, it did not conform to the prevailing conventions of other department store stations. The Sears station makes an appearance in chapter five, primarily to illustrate how it differed from others.

Regarding the other stations included in this narrative, I am fully cognizant that readers are not as intimately familiar with them as I have necessarily become. In order to avoid an intimidating alphabet soup of acronyms that begin with the letter W, I refer as often as possible to particular stations via the store that controlled them. In instances where strictly following this convention would produce unneeded repetition, I use call letters. Additionally, as another means of keeping the narrative uncluttered while also preventing confusion, Appendix I individually profiles a number of store stations.

Regarding the changing terminology for the technology of broadcasting, I use the language of the specific era in question. Prior to the boom of 1922, the term “wireless” was more common, with “radio” then taking its place. In chapter two, focusing on activities of the Wanamaker stores prior to 1920, the term “wireless” is thus used. Both terms are used in chapter three, dealing with the initial upsurge of broadcasting in 1920-22, and “radio” is used for developments in later years. To denote the specific portion of the airwave spectrum licensed to the stations, (put more plainly, where one might find

them on a radio dial), I give the wavelength as signified by a certain number of meters. This was the original system of classification used by the Department of Commerce, though stations later identified themselves according to the frequency of their signal, given as the number of kilocycles. Since most of the evidence that I draw upon used “wavelength meters” as a means of identification, including government documents and newspaper listings, I have used this particular measure throughout the dissertation.

### **Strategy of Analysis**

The particular years of interest are 1922 through 1928. This was the period in which the radio industry grew from a handful of experimental stations into a national phenomenon and the practice of selling airtime, as a means of funding, was endorsed by the government. In order to better understand the department store as a distinct phenomenon itself, the story begins in the middle of the nineteenth century. The study concludes in the early 1930s, for reasons explained in detail in chapter five.

Limiting the research to this time frame allows for a level of depth that would not be possible if the narrative extended until the mid-point of the twentieth century or later. As another technique of focusing the research, four particular store stations from Philadelphia occupy a central role in the narrative. No other city was home to so many examples of the phenomenon, and close attention to this group illustrates trends that were common to store stations located elsewhere.

The evidence comes from a variety of sources including government documents, materials published by the National Retail Dry Goods Association (NRDGA), the trade press, mainstream publications, and other historical accounts of early radio. Individuals

directly involved with these stations are no longer present, though a handful of interviews and oral histories contain invaluable, first-hand accounts of certain developments. In particular, the recording of a 1964 interview with Ed Davies and James Tisdale, two of the first employees of Gimbel's WIP in Philadelphia, proved especially helpful in reconstructing the origins of that station.<sup>58</sup>

The evidence was evaluated in relation to growth of the commercial system of broadcasting, an approach that triggered a series of specific questions: What was the original purpose of these department store stations? How were they funded, and when did this original economic arrangement change? Was their programming related in any way to specific kinds of merchandise? How aggressively did the stores promote themselves over their airwaves? Were there any identifiable programming practices favored by the store stations? When did they begin selling airtime to other businesses? When did they make the transition from indirect advertising to the more overt form which we are familiar with today? Given the notoriously sketchy documentation of broadcasting from this period, the lack of any recordings, and the limitations of oral histories, I answer these questions as fully as possible within the boundaries of substantiated speculation.

Other topics that I encountered during this research have been downplayed, a decision made only partly because of the lack of evidence. Stations frequently changed their wavelengths during the 1920s, as the government continually attempted to reduce interference and regulate the airwaves, and I refrain, for example, from charting every permutation. The changing power output of each station has likewise been left unstated in a few cases. While some information regarding wavelengths and wattage is included in the narrative, I limit this to information relevant to the purpose of this study. On a similar

note, chapter three explores the various radio retailing techniques used by department stores, though I have not included figures regarding their share of this particular market. This decision is in accord with Crossick and Jaumain's justification for studying European department stores, despite the fact that these institutions controlled only a small fraction of the overall retail trade; "The political and cultural impact of a commercial phenomenon is not directly related to its economic weight."<sup>59</sup>

Much of the evidence, particularly two manuals published by the NRDGA and the retailing advice cited in chapter three, is prescriptive more than descriptive in that it lays out recommendations and suggestions.<sup>60</sup> This material is included not as a direct, empirical account of real-world events, but rather to outline the particular department store vision of broadcasting and how this technology should be integrated into daily life. In this regard, it is less important to determine how often such policies were actually implemented (though according to other sources, many of them were.) I likewise include many claims of "first" made by the stores themselves and other information proclaimed in their newspaper advertisements. It would be difficult to imagine a historical record of less veracity than a department store advertisement, though such evidence is valuable in its own right. According to theories of social construction, the development of a technology is influenced as much by ideas of what it "should be" as by specific technical innovations. It is not important then to determine the honesty of the claims in these advertisements, but it is important to identify which events the stores felt worthy of celebration. When noting the many "firsts" in this study, I qualify the claims and indicate, when possible, instances that are demonstrably false.

Within the existing historiography of 1920s radio, those stations affiliated with major corporations, like RCA, AT&T, and NBC, stand out prominently as they left a wealth of evidence. This observation highlights a recurring question for scholars of all disciplines; does one study an extraordinary example of a particular phenomenon or a more mundane, typical example? In terms of radio history, is it more instructive to study those corporate stations which defined the practices that would become dominant, or is it more instructive to explore the less-powerful, average stations of the early 1920s? Since the former category has been well documented, it is perhaps not surprising that scholars are now looking at stations that belong to the latter.<sup>61</sup> In this vein, Hilmes encouraged other scholars to explore the overlooked, forgotten, and neglected aspects of radio history to “bring them to other scholar’s attention and to reflect more fully our diverse and conflicted media heritage.”<sup>62</sup>

This dissertation helps to fill the void that Hilmes identified. Some of the practices and program genres of the department store stations migrated to the industry at large, though the stations themselves have never been singled out for analysis. However, even given the stated intention to explore a group of average stations, the historical evidence discussed herein largely pertains to three particular stores, Bamberger’s, Gimbel’s, and the Shepard Stores. Their respective radio operations were the most successful and well-known of all the store stations, and in this regard, I am perhaps guilty of the same sin as the earlier generation of radio historians. Many department store stations were short lived, ineffectual operations, and they left the most fragmentary records of all. For this reason, this dissertation cannot, and should not, be viewed as the definitive history of department store radio stations in the 1920s but rather as an initial

study which traces the rough outlines of this phenomenon in relation to other stations of the era.

### **Outline of the Study**

Chapter two establishes the foundation for the following chapters by outlining the history of department stores from their inception up to 1920, the year that signaled a dramatic change in the use of wireless technology. This history is based primarily on existing secondary literature and emphasizes the stores' approach to advertising and early adoption of new technologies, such as electricity. Much of the chapter dissects various accounts of two wireless telegraph stations located inside Wanamaker's department stores, stations that have been noted in other radio histories but never documented in any detail. Prior to World War I, when wireless telegraphy was reserved primarily for maritime purposes, the Wanamaker stations helped to arouse the public to other possible uses of the technology.

Chapter three covers the period from 1920-22, admittedly a narrow time frame for historical analysis. These years, however, were the beginning of the broadcasting boom and the most active period for department stores in terms of radio. The most successful store stations started during this time, the Department of Commerce held the first national radio conference, and the NRDGA published a manual devoted exclusively to the merchandising of this new technology. All of these topics are discussed, concluding with an examination of the "accident" thesis that has often been used to characterize the contingent nature of broadcasting's origins.



Chapter four is a slight detour from a strict examination of the store stations per se and outlines the retailing techniques used by department stores to sell radios during the 1920s. Establishing a dedicated radio station was one such technique; this chapter relates these operations to a broader range of practices. Drawing primarily upon advice columns in the *Dry Goods Economist*, this chapter uncovers a seasonal influence on the early radio industry, a phenomenon overlooked by those media historians who have based their observations on standard categories of analysis and conventional sources of information.

Chapter five charts the development, growth, and transition of the store stations from 1922 until the early 30s, an end point which signaled the rise of radio's "Golden Age." Many of the original stations ceased operations during this period, were taken over by new owners, or adopted the standard commercial model of operation and sold portions of their airtime to other businesses. As the commercial system became entrenched, many stores sponsored shopping programs which, when combined with the communicative possibilities of the telephone, projected a virtual sales floor into the listener's home. This chapter concludes with a brief discussion of television in the 1940s and 1950s, suggesting that the events documented within this dissertation were repeated, in a slightly different format, when broadcasting added a visual element.

Chapter six revisits the various perspectives on mass culture, television, and technology previously introduced, using the phenomenon of department store radio as a starting point. Rather than focus on one contemporary phenomenon, the analysis is instead centered on Slack's theory of structural causality and the role of commercialization in the introduction of new communications technologies.

Following the conclusion is an appendix that provides further documentation regarding most of the stations included in the narrative. This section is not an afterthought, nor a carefully concocted mincemeat pie to hide the offal. Rather, I provide this information for those readers who may want further evidence for particular claims that I have made, or for researchers interested in a particular station. My own work would not have been possible without the wealth of information established by previous historians, and as one small way of repaying this debt, I thus offer the most helpful outline possible for those who may come after me.

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<sup>1</sup> This material referred to throughout the dissertation as “Paskman Papers.” See References for full citation.

<sup>2</sup> Ronald Arceneaux, “Attention Shoppers: WGBS and the History of Department Store Radio” (master’s thesis, City University of New York Graduate Center, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola* (New York: Methuen, Inc., 1985.)

<sup>4</sup> Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 151.

<sup>5</sup> Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 151.

<sup>6</sup> The phrase “the democratization of luxury” was frequently used at the end of the nineteenth century to describe the growth of mass consumption. See Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 11.

<sup>7</sup> Bowlby, *Just Looking*, 151.

<sup>8</sup> For one example, see Todd Gitlin, “Prime Time Ideology: The Hegemonic Process in Television Entertainment” in *Television: The Critical View*, 6th ed., ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 574-594.

<sup>9</sup> John Hartley, *Uses of Television* (London: Routledge, 1999), 135.

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind* (Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 124-125.

<sup>11</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 159.

<sup>12</sup> Hartley, *Uses of Television*, 135.

<sup>13</sup> Hartley, *Uses of Television*, 135.

<sup>14</sup> John Fiske, *Television Culture* (New York: Methuen & Co., 1987), in particular chap. 5, "Active Audiences," 62-83.

<sup>15</sup> For one example, see Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>16</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 325.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Waves of Opposition: Labor and the Struggle for Democratic Radio* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Vincent J. Roscigno and William F. Danaher, *Voice of Southern Labor: Radio, Music, and Textile Strikes, 1929-1934* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Kathy Newman, *Radio Active: Advertising and Consumer Activism, 1935-1947* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 53.

<sup>20</sup> Hartley, *Uses of Television*, 135.

<sup>21</sup> For a widely cited, descriptive account of commercialization, see John W. Spalding, "1928: Radio Becomes a Mass Advertising Medium," in *American Broadcasting: A Source Book on the History of Radio and Television*, eds. Lawrence Lichty and Malachi Topping (New York: Hastings House, 1975), 219-228; See also Mary S. Mander, "The Public Debate About Broadcasting in the Twenties: An Interpretive History," *Journal of Broadcasting* 28, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 167-185; See also Werner J. Severin, "Commercial vs. Non-Commercial Radio During Broadcasting's Early Years," *Journal of Broadcasting* 22, no. 4 (1978): 491-504.

<sup>22</sup> See for example Gleason L. Archer, *History of Radio to 1926* (New York: American Historical Society, 1938) and also William Peck Banning, *Commercial Broadcasting Pioneer: The WEAf Experiment, 1922-26* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946).

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<sup>23</sup> Erik Barnouw, *A History of Broadcasting in the United States*, 3 vols. (New York, Oxford University Press, 1966-70); For works that fall under the declensionist framework, see Susan Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899-1922* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); See also Robert W. McChesney, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for the Control of U.S. Broadcasting, 1928-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); See also Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920-1934* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian University Press, 1994).

<sup>24</sup> Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting*.

<sup>25</sup> Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting*, 317.

<sup>26</sup> McChesney, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy*.

<sup>27</sup> Smulyan, *Selling Radio*.

<sup>28</sup> Clifford J. Doerksen, *American Babel: Rogue Radio Broadcasters of the Jazz Age* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> Doerksen, *American Babel*, ix-x.

<sup>30</sup> Louise Benjamin, "Working It Out Together: Radio Policy from Hoover to the Radio Act of 1927," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 42, no. 2 (1998): 221-236; Hugh Sloten, *Radio and Television Regulation: Broadcast Technology in the United States, 1920-1960* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Thomas Streeter, *Selling the Air: A Critique of the Policy of Commercial Broadcasting in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Philip Rosen, *The Modern Stentors: Radio Broadcasters and the Federal Government, 1920-1934* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980); Robert Brit Horwitz, *The Irony of Regulatory Reform: The Deregulation of American Telecommunications* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>31</sup> The concept of the "associative state" from Ellis Hawley, "Herbert Hoover, the Commerce Secretariat, and the Vision of an 'Associative State,' 1921-1928," *Journal of American History* 61, no. 1 (1974): 116-140. References to this particular concept appear in Benjamin, "Working It Out Together," Sloten, *Radio and Television Regulation*, and Horwitz, *The Irony of Regulatory Reform*.

<sup>32</sup> William Boddy, *New Media and Popular Imagination: Launching Radio, Television, and Digital Media in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), particularly chap. 2, "Wireless Nation: Defining Radio as a Domestic Technology," 16-43. Some of this material appeared in an earlier essay as "The Rhetoric and the Economic Roots of the American Broadcasting Industry," *Cinetracts*, no. 6, (1979): 37-54; Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination, from Amos 'n' Andy and*

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Edward R. Murrow to Wolfman Jack and Howard Stern (New York: Random House, 1999), particularly chap. 3, "Exploratory Listening in the 1920s," 55-82.

<sup>33</sup> Susan Smulyan, "Radio Advertising to Women in Twenties America: 'A Latchkey to Every Home'," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 13, no. 3 (1993): 299-314; Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1997), particularly chap. 5, "The Disembodied Woman," 130-150.

<sup>34</sup> Hugh G. J. Aitken, *The Continuous Wave: Technology and American Radio, 1900-1932* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), 522.

<sup>35</sup> I. A. Hirschmann, "Television in the Retail Field," *Journal of Marketing* 8, no. 4 (April 1944): 397.

<sup>36</sup> Wiebe E. Bijker, *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs: Toward a Theory of Sociotechnical Change* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 10.

<sup>37</sup> This particular method of conceptualizing "technology" is now common amongst historians of technology. For a particularly influential use of this concept, see Thomas P. Hughes, *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society, 1880-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

<sup>38</sup> Jennifer Daryl Slack, *Communication Technologies & Society: Conceptions of Causality and the Politics of Technological Intervention* (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1984).

<sup>39</sup> Slack, *Communication Technologies & Society*, 64-80.

<sup>40</sup> Slack cited Raymond Williams' influential work on television as an example of "expressive causality, though her interpretation of his work is debatable. For Williams' discussion of the origins of television, see *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 75.

<sup>41</sup> Slack, *Communication Technologies & Society*, 16.

<sup>42</sup> Aitken, *The Continuous Wave*, 521.

<sup>43</sup> Slack, *Communication Technologies & Society*, 81-92.

<sup>44</sup> Trevor J. Pinch and Wiebe E. Bijker, "The Social Construction of Facts and Artifacts: Or, How the Sociology of Science and the Sociology of Technology Might Benefit Each Other," in *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*, eds. Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor J. Pinch (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 17-50.

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- <sup>45</sup> Pinch and Bijker, "The Social Construction of Facts and Artifacts," 40.
- <sup>46</sup> Hughes, *Networks of Power*, 140.
- <sup>47</sup> Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1995).
- <sup>48</sup> Leah A. Lievrouw, "Determination and Contingency in New Media Development: Diffusion of Innovations and Social Shaping of Technology Perspectives," in *Handbook of New Media: Social Shaping and Consequences of ICTs*, eds. Leah A. Lievrouw and Sonia Livingstone (London: SAGE Publications, 2002), 187.
- <sup>49</sup> Rogers directly addressed this critique in the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of *Diffusions of Innovations* (1995), 100-114. Additionally, the same work includes a brief case study of gas vs. electrical-powered refrigerators as an example of the social construction approach, a further indication that the two approaches are compatible, 138-139.
- <sup>50</sup> Lievrouw, "Determination and Contingency in New Media Development." In this essay, Lievrouw emphasized "social shaping of technology" perspectives, which includes the social construction theory.
- <sup>51</sup> Bijker, *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs*, 15.
- <sup>52</sup> Bijker, *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs*, 15.
- <sup>53</sup> Barry Bluestone et. al, eds., *The Retail Revolution: Market Transformation, Investment, and Labor in the Modern Department Store* (Boston: Auburn House Publishing Company, 1981), 4.
- <sup>54</sup> H. Pasdermadjian, *The Department Store: Its Origins, Evolution, and Economics* (London: Newman Books, 1954); Michael Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Susan Porter-Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Elaine S. Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1993); Bill Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995); Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, eds., *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1999.)
- <sup>55</sup> For the history of Sears and WLS, see James F. Evans, *Prairie Farmer and WLS: the Burridge D. Butler Years* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1969), 158-175.

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<sup>56</sup> Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian University Press, 1989), 211.

<sup>57</sup> Louis H. Grossman, *Department Store Merchandising in Changing Environments* (East Lansing, Michigan: Bureau of Business and Economic Research, Michigan State University, 1970), 3.

<sup>58</sup> Davies/Tisdale Interview.

<sup>59</sup> Crossick and Jaumain, *Cathedrals of Consumption*, 6.

<sup>60</sup> Arthur Wiesenberger, "Radio Merchandising in Department Stores: A Survey Covering the Underlying Principles of Radio – Its Merchandising and Advertising Possibilities in Department Stores," (New York: Bureau of Research and Information of the National Retail Dry Goods Association, 1922); Frank W. Spaeth, ed., *Radio Broadcasting Manual: The Radio as a Publicity Medium for Retailers, An Appraisal with a Resume of Experiences* (New York: Sales Promotion Division, National Retail Dry Goods Association, 1935.)

<sup>61</sup> Doerksen, *American Babel*; Michael Stamm, "Mixed Media: Newspaper Ownership of Radio in American Politics and Culture, 1920-1952" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2006); Ari Y. Kelman, "The Culture of Yiddish Radio in New York, 1923-1947" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 2003.)

<sup>62</sup> Hilmes, *Radio Voices*, xvi.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Technologies of Display and the Display of Technology, 1852 - 1919**

In the summer of 1910, a newspaper ad for Wanamaker's department store promoted women's clothing, parasols, straw hats, pillow covers as well as something rather distinct from this typical assortment of merchandise.<sup>1</sup> According to the ad, wireless stations were under construction in the store's New York and Philadelphia locations, a development that signaled a new use for the technology. Wireless telegraphy was used almost exclusively at the time for point-to-point communication, particularly useful for ships at sea, while amateur enthusiasts experimented with their own makeshift, improvised equipment. Wanamaker's early adoption of the technology was thus an unusual move for a non-maritime business because, in the words of one historian, "the corporate sphere publicly expressed indifference towards the invention."<sup>2</sup> The stated purpose of the stations was for routine communication between the two stores and to send messages to steamships, though John Wanamaker was also aware of their publicity value. In a self-published 1926 book, the wireless stations were included in a list of the store's historic "firsts," along with the installation of electric lights and pneumatic tubes.<sup>3</sup>

This purpose of this chapter is to trace the history of the Wanamaker wireless stations, (a topic for which the existing historiography is inconclusive), and to relate them to department store practices of the era. By the second half of the nineteenth century, stores had developed an innovative approach to retailing, advertised heavily, sponsored public entertainments, and utilized new technologies where ever possible.<sup>4</sup> These



practices foreshadowed the creation of the Wanamaker stations and would coalesce in the following decade with full-fledged department store radio stations.

Viewed from the perspective of social construction, the Wanamaker stations contributed to the development of radio by demonstrating various uses of wireless technology, uses that were novel and noteworthy at the time. Among other uses, the stations promoted a business, entertained shoppers, communicated over land, facilitated retail sales, disseminated news, and broadcast music. In the 1920s, radio was used for all of these purposes by department stores and by the broadcast industry at large. The Wanamaker wireless stations represent, then, multiple precedents for later developments, and also embody the integral connection between new media technologies and new forms of commerce. Technical innovations are motivated by a variety of reasons, and in the American context, the desire to sell consumer goods has been one of the most enduring.

### **The Science of Selling**

Department stores resulted from the application of the principles of scientific management to the distribution of consumer goods in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Managers and engineers were already using these principles to increase industrial productivity with manufacturing facilities that benefited from economies of scale. Merchants sought a similar benefit and recognized that a single large store could offer the same amount of merchandise as several smaller businesses at a lower cost. Department stores originated in Paris in the 1850s, implementing policies that differed from those of earlier retailers in a number of ways. Rather than sell a limited number of goods at high mark-up, for example, the stores sought to increase the overall volume of

sales and priced items only slightly higher than wholesale. Additionally, prices were fixed and clearly marked, patrons could browse, and unsatisfactory merchandise could be returned. Earlier merchants relied on barter and trade for transactions, with no standard price for goods, and verbally engaging a salesman was an understood commitment to purchase. The informal, face-to-face transactions of the village market were giving way to a more impersonal, regulated, controlled, though theoretically more democratic, form of retailing.<sup>6</sup>

American businessmen copied the European approach. By the end of the century, department stores had appeared in virtually all major North American cities, particularly those in the Northeast, with Chicago and San Francisco also providing fertile terrain. Initially, they were known as “dry goods” stores, referring to their principle merchandise of clothing and fabric, though they also stocked house wares, furniture, rugs, dishes, lamps, toys, pianos, and everything else that was rolling off the factory assembly lines. The practice of grouping different kinds of merchandise into special sections gave rise to a new designation, “department store.”<sup>7</sup> This system of organization offered more variety to potential consumers and facilitated centralized control. Extensively-trained clerks were no longer needed as most of the decisions, including the establishment of prices, were made elsewhere. These stores were often the most impressive buildings in town, dwarfing nearby establishments in size and grandeur. By displaying goods in such ornate, elegant surroundings, replete with classically inspired architecture, statues, and fine art, the stores promoted a refined, luxurious lifestyle that was previously restricted to the most elite section of society.<sup>8</sup>

A variety of factors fueled the growth of the stores, including rising industrial productivity, the growth of cities, and improved methods of transportation. Railroads provided the critical connection between distant factories and display counters. Within cities themselves, the growth of public transportation allowed businesses to congregate in dense downtown districts with individuals living in the less-congested peripheries. Department stores thrived in the central districts, as no other part of the city had the continual flow of potential shoppers that was their lifeblood.<sup>9</sup>

The stores, however, were more than merely new kinds of buildings; they were a new kind of gendered public space deemed particularly appropriate for women. In the late nineteenth century, the public sphere was synonymous with male activities, while women were largely restricted to the private realm of the home. Department stores, by contrast, targeted female consumers with merchandise and environments designed for their tastes. Leach, Lancaster, Friedberg, and Barth discussed the gendered transformation of public space, while Porter-Benson and Abelson focused on additional gender-related issues in their respective explorations of department stores.<sup>10</sup> Whether one views this form of public space as empowering women or as trapping them within the restrictive confines of consumerism depends upon one's larger view of mass culture. Crossick and Jaumain surveyed the scholarship on this particular topic and identified contrasting perspectives, analogous to the empowerment and enslavement views discussed in the introduction.<sup>11</sup>

The growth of corporations in the nineteenth century, a development famously dubbed "the incorporation of America" by Trachtenburg, affected all aspects of the economy and was a further boon to the spread of department stores.<sup>12</sup> These were not

meagerly funded mom-and-pop operations but collaborative ventures with the necessary capital to fund extensive enterprises. Smaller retailers protested this centralized approach to retailing and encouraged politicians to pass punitive legislation, though such measures were largely unsuccessful. By the end of the nineteenth century, “the wars to vanquish department stores began to peter out.”<sup>13</sup> In 1901, a federal government report explicitly praised the stores, claiming that they elevated America’s standard of living.<sup>14</sup> According to Crossick and Jaumain, the situation was similar in Europe with resistance to them producing only token responses.<sup>15</sup>

In one of the definitive works on this form of retailing, Leach ascribed a central role to John Wanamaker as no other department store magnate was as widely imitated.<sup>16</sup> In 1876, Wanamaker converted a Philadelphia train depot into a lavish store with a three-acre sales floor.<sup>17</sup> Originally, he called it “The Grand Depot,” though eventually it was simply known by its founder’s name. The building was continually improved and expanded until it was one of the most audacious buildings in the city. From the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair, Wanamaker acquired an immense pipe organ that weighed well over two tons. The organ made its debut store performance in 1911 as part of a Jubilee Year celebration, witnessed by “more than 35,000” guests including President Taft.<sup>18</sup>

Wanamaker’s success inspired merchants in other cities to construct their own grand stores. Along with his scientific approach to selling, other merchants also echoed Wanamaker’s rhetoric and positioned themselves not as profit-seekers but benevolent public servants.<sup>19</sup> John Wanamaker repeatedly claimed, for example, that his legendary store was devoted to fulfilling the needs of the people. Leach attributed this devotion to

public service in part to the traditions of Christianity, of which Wanamaker was a fervent believer.<sup>20</sup>

Equally influential among other retailers was Wanamaker's prolific use of advertising, a practice that soon became a defining part of the department store tradition. The stores thus became one of the first industries to recognize the value of persistent advertising, and they innovated techniques that would eventually become commonplace, such as graphically intense newspaper ads that spanned more than one column.<sup>21</sup> Wanamaker pushed this technique to its obvious limit and issued the first ads that spanned the entire page.<sup>22</sup> Other retailers brazenly copied the styles and texts of his advertisements.<sup>23</sup> In 1929, one historian went so far as to state that Wanamaker's success led to "the great era of national advertising by manufacturers."<sup>24</sup>

Before the proliferation of advertising dramatically altered the nature of broadcasting in the 1920s, a similar development had occurred with newspapers and magazines.<sup>25</sup> In a study of the commercialization of the press in the late nineteenth century, Baldasty identified department stores as one of the primary forces behind the growth of print advertising.<sup>26</sup> As other retailers and industries became aware of the potential benefits of this practice, advertising grew into an influential revenue stream for newspapers. According to Baldasty, editors and publishers were so willing to accommodate their new patrons that they avoided alternative or potentially offensive points of view, and the explicitly partisan views which once dominated American newspapers became less popular.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, newspapers introduced new content features, such as women's sections, in order to create an attractive audience for department stores and other sponsors. To afford these persistent advertising campaigns,

the stores sometimes divided expenses with manufacturers and helped to initiate the system of “cooperative advertising” which would eventually spread to other industries.<sup>28</sup>

The economic importance of the store-press relationship was certainly noticed at the time, and one 1904 retailer boasted that “the newspaper of today is largely the creation of the department store.”<sup>29</sup>

While they were using newspaper pages to showcase goods to consumers, the stores were doing the same with elaborate window displays. Such displays were aided by the availability of large, plate-glass windows, an architectural feature that department stores adopted more rapidly than other businesses.<sup>30</sup> According to Leach, the stores intensified their focus on the presentation of goods at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> In 1889 the *Dry Goods Economist*, the principle trade journal for the industry, “shifted its format from the mechanics to the theatrics of commodity exchange.”<sup>32</sup> As part of this change in industry, the task of arranging, or dressing, window displays became a specialized occupation unto itself.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to impressive architecture, window displays, and persistent advertisements, merchants orchestrated a wide-range of promotions to attract patrons, promotions that one historian aptly described as “Barnum-like.”<sup>34</sup> Potential shoppers were enticed with free merchandise, food, lectures, parades, fashion shows, art exhibits, theatrical performances, and in a particularly outlandish promotion, one New York store housed an elephant for a short time in 1896.<sup>35</sup> Many of these events were designed to attract children, an effective way to also bring in the primary care-giver, the mother. The focus on children’s entertainment climaxed in the 1920s with elaborate Christmas displays, conveniently staged in the toy department.<sup>36</sup>

Sponsoring musical performances was one of the more common promotional techniques and music was transformed into a commodity to serve specific commercial needs. In a detailed study of this subject, Tyler identified the years 1903-1915 as the “heyday of live music in department stores.”<sup>37</sup> Many stores went so far as to construct auditoriums or theatres for these performances, and musicians altered their arrangements and repertoire to satisfy the new patrons. As with other endeavors, Wanamaker was a leader in this area, and he sponsored more prestigious, high-profile concerts than any other merchant. Classical music and operatic selections were the preferred fare for department stores, reinforcing the aura of upscale gentility that they sought to promote. Professional musicians were often employed, though it was also common to assemble employees into choral groups and small orchestras for these performances.

For musical offerings on the actual sales floor, managers took great care with the placement of amusements. “Retailers often preferred to have the musicians hidden from sight,” presumably so they would not distract from the actual selling of goods.<sup>38</sup> But if the musicians might have been a distraction, the music itself was a supplement to retailing. As early as 1903, one trade journal advised that staging an entertainment event on an upper floor was an ideal technique for pulling patrons off busy sidewalks and deep into the store itself where they would be exposed to aisles and aisles of merchandise.<sup>39</sup>

Whether drawn in by the window displays, newspaper ads, a concert, or some other promotion, once a shopper had entered the sales floor, retailers sought to keep them inside as long as possible. In Philadelphia, Wanamaker opened the Crystal Tea Room, a luxurious restaurant able to seat well over a thousand patrons at a single time.<sup>40</sup> Other retailers saw the value of such an amenity, and restaurants, along with post offices and

complimentary baby-sitting services appeared in many stores. By 1880, Macy's in New York had established a branch office of Western Union and installed telephones for customer use.<sup>41</sup> Other stores built "women's parlors" where visitors could relax, while Gimbel's in Philadelphia, in an attempt to provide literally everything for its patrons, installed a "hospital with [a] trained nurse in constant attendance."<sup>42</sup>

But if drawing consumers into their physical locations was the primary goal, merchants also found that they could use various forms of communication to sell goods to consumers who might never even set foot on the sales floor. In the late 1860s, for example, numerous dry goods stores issued catalogs so that customers could order products through the mail, a practice that was greatly boosted after the government introduced rural free delivery (RFD) in 1896.<sup>43</sup> RFD was first proposed by Wanamaker while he was serving as the Postmaster General for President Benjamin Harrison.<sup>44</sup> Mail-order catalogs were so effective that two retailers, Montgomery Ward's and the Sears-Roebuck Company based their operations on this technique, relying on the network of rail lines emanating from Chicago to reach consumers in a vast swath of the Midwest.<sup>45</sup> In Canada, the catalog from the Toronto store Eaton's was so famous that it was dubbed "the Farmer's Bible" and was reportedly used to teach language in public schools.<sup>46</sup>

The technology of the telephone, with its two-way communicative function, also proved to be a useful addition to the remote shopping equation. The Jordan Marsh Store in Boston was reportedly the first to install phones in 1876, and by the start of the twentieth century, the devices had become a standard feature for department stores.<sup>47</sup> Consumers who had seen a product in a catalog or earlier in person could now communicate their orders instantly to a store clerk. Conversely, clerks could also initiate



sales calls and reach out to consumers in the privacy of their own homes. A set of guidelines published in 1922 advised stores that sales calls were most effective between 10 and 11 in the morning because “evening calls find husbands at home.”<sup>48</sup> A 1927 overview of department stores claimed that “the use of the telephone by the store’s customers” was one of the principal factors behind the institution’s growth.<sup>49</sup>

The telephone, however, could be more than simply a means to conduct retail transactions; it could also distribute messages to a mass audience. In the 1920s, wireless technology was used for precisely this reason, though as early as 1911 one Newark department store implemented a telephone system to accomplish the same.<sup>50</sup> The incident calls to mind Edward Bellamy’s 1885 utopian novel *Looking Backward* which envisioned a harmonious future where department store-like institutions provided all consumer goods and entertainment was piped, twenty-four hours a day, into buildings through wires.<sup>51</sup> The 1911 incident of “phone-casting” was initiated by a business that modeled itself after a newspaper and was called, quite aptly, the Telephone Herald. Subscribers to the service paid for special receivers in their homes and, according to one trade journal, “news is constantly on tap, like water or gas.”<sup>52</sup> On the opening day, a sizeable crowd congregated at a local department store which had installed fifty of the receivers.<sup>53</sup>

The Telephone Herald broadcast for only a few short months, though its programming warrants a close examination because it so clearly resembles a program schedule from the early days of broadcasting. (See Table I following page.) When broadcasting developed in the following decade, radio stations carried the same kinds of content, including announcements of the correct time, market updates, household shows

**Table 1**

Sample schedule for the Telephone Herald:  
as reprinted in Arthur F. Colton, "Telephone Newspaper – A New Marvel," *Technical World Magazine*, February 1912, 669.

8:00	Exact astronomical time
8:00-9:00	Weather, late telegrams, London exchange quotations; chief items of interest from the morning papers
9:00-9:45	Special sales for the various stores; social program for the day
9:45-10:00	Local personals and small items
10:00-11:30	New York Stock Exchange quotations and market letter
11:30-12:00	New York miscellaneous items
Noon	Exact astronomical time
12:00-12:30	Latest general news; naval, military and Congressional notes
12:30-1:00	Midday New York Stock Exchange quotation
1:00-2:00	Repetition of the half day's most interesting news
2:00-2:15	Foreign cable dispatches
2:15-2:30	Trenton and Washington items
2:30-2:45	Fashion notes and household hints
2:45-3:15	Sporting news; theatrical news
3:15-3:30	New York Stock Exchange closing quotations
3:30-5:00	Music, readings, lectures
5:00-6:00	Stories and talks for the children
8:00-10:30	Vaudeville, concert, opera

for women, bedtime shows for children, and musical programming in the evening. A 1925 *Radio News* retrospective on the Telephone Herald described its studio and noted that it was “just the same in nearly every detail” as a contemporary broadcasting studio.<sup>54</sup> Not only did the programming and facilities foreshadow later trends, the collaboration between a department store and a newspaper, (or at least an institution modeled after a newspaper), was also a sign of things to come. In the 1920s, newspapers and department stores in several cities joined forces to operate radio stations.

Along with these other precedents, the Telephone Herald also questioned the acceptability of mixing program content with commercial appeals, a question that was later debated during broadcasting’s formative period. The 1925 *Radio News* article noted that a large Newark department store, (presumably the same one with fifty receivers), sought to insert daily advertisements in the Herald’s line-up.<sup>55</sup> Whereas department stores had previously broken down space limits in print advertisements, introducing ads that dominated the page, with the inception of this new form of media one store was similarly seeking to advertise in a space previously reserved for content. The directors of the Herald “refused to comply for fear that it would cheapen the broadcasting.”<sup>56</sup> The store’s rebuked request may have been the first acknowledged conflict between an advertiser and a broadcaster, though certainly not the last.

Perhaps even more so than the telephone, there was another technology that department stores rapidly adopted and utilized as a means of impressing shoppers. This technology is so ubiquitous in modern life that its presence is rarely noticed though its absence is a cause for alarm — electricity. In 1878, Wanamaker installed 28 arc lights in his Philadelphia store, a feat that Aitken credited as the “first commercial installation” of

electrical lighting.<sup>57</sup> Two years later, Macy's in New York followed suit, and stores across the country quickly recognized the value of electric lights.<sup>58</sup> This was a flexible, clean, and efficient means to illuminate a cavernous sales floor, particularly when compared to gas lighting, and the technology simultaneously enforced the aura of modernity that the stores sought to evoke.<sup>59</sup>

Merchants and engineers used department stores as laboratories, real-world opportunities to experiment and refine new uses for electricity. Stores, for example tested new filaments and bulbs for electric lights as they sought, quite literally, to cast their products in the best possible light, and the power source was put to use in countless other applications. "A long paper could be written on the miscellaneous uses of electricity in the modern department store," wrote the *Electrical Review* in 1912.<sup>60</sup> Articles in this journal described how department stores used this power source for elevators, escalators, clocks, sewing machines, vacuum cleaners, ventilation systems, air-conditioning units, dishwashers, and even delivery vehicles.<sup>61</sup> Some stores used electricity to facilitate communication within their sprawling, multi-level buildings, installing colored lights which could be used to summon a manager to particular location or to communicate the specifics of a customer's credit rating.<sup>62</sup>

To satisfy their growing demand for electricity, stores installed their own generators because city-wide systems for supplying this power source had not been established. In a study of the electrification of Chicago, Platt cited Marshall Field's as an example of a self-powered store and noted that this situation was an obstacle for the growth of the electric industry.<sup>63</sup> The builders of large, centralized generators, known as "central stations," sought to service as many clients as possible to justify the expensive

facilities. As more clients joined the system, the cost of power for each user was reduced, so it was in the interest of central stations to persuade department stores, and other large establishments, to join their networks. A 1913 report in *Electrical Review* surveyed the various uses of electricity in the stores, primarily so that operators of central-station could effectively woo them as clients.<sup>64</sup> “For many reasons there is no harder class of business to obtain,” intoned the report. The use of electricity in department stores paralleled the use of radio as the stores initially produced both themselves before allowing a centralized provider to satisfy their needs.

The department store approach to retailing, which emphasized the concept of “democratizing luxury,” and their particular methods for attracting shoppers influenced the programming of the radio stations that they later operated. Additionally, the stores’ exploitation of new technologies, including electricity and the telephone, foreshadowed their later promotion of radio broadcasting as a wondrous, somewhat magical invention of modern science. The most obvious precedent, however, for the rise of department store stations proper were the wireless stations of John Wanamaker. The legacy of this particular merchant has been clouded by hyperbole, though his achievements were indeed influential and for the topic at hand, his wireless stations warrant a close examination.

### **The Wanamaker Wireless Stations**

During the first decade of the twentieth century, John Wanamaker arranged to have the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company of America install stations in his Philadelphia and New York stores. Just as department stores served as the initial point of consumption where shoppers encountered an impressive array of mass-manufactured

products, Wanamaker's stores served a similar function with wireless communication. This was a public location where individuals could experience and engage the technology first-hand.

The historical record offers contradictory claims as to when these facilities were established, though 1911 appears to be the date when they actually began operation.<sup>65</sup> Their construction was publicly announced in July of the previous year, just one month after the first significant federal legislation of wireless technology. In June 1910, Congress had passed the Wireless Ship Act, mandating the use of wireless equipment on all ships carrying fifty or more passengers.<sup>66</sup> Passage of the law was encouraged by a 1909 maritime disaster in which a wireless operator, Jack Binns, saved thousands of lives by quickly notifying rescue ships.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps John Wanamaker saw a business opportunity in the new legislation, an opportunity to publicize his stores through the exploitation of a new technology as well as an opportunity to extend his sales floor beyond its physical boundaries. The principal public use of the stations, according to the *Philadelphia Inquirer* advertisement, was to send messages to steamships which were now obligated to install wireless equipment. Conversely, steamship passengers could likewise send messages to individuals in the Philadelphia area which would be "delivered free within our local telephone or special delivery limits."<sup>68</sup>

Although the ad did not promote the notion of "wireless shopping," a number of individuals had already recognized the possibility of using the technology in this manner. One day after the *Philadelphia Inquirer* advertisement, for example, the *Christian Science Monitor* announced the construction of the Wanamaker stations in an article which bore the headline "Voyager on Ocean Soon May Shop by Means of Wireless."<sup>69</sup>

The article did not provide specifics on this “wireless shopping” scenario, though a separate newspaper account from May 1910 detailed this phenomenon. According to the article, an upscale London retailer was working with two ships of the Cunard Line to provide a shipboard shopping service aimed at women.<sup>70</sup> Models would “promenade the decks to tempt the wives and daughters of wealthy passengers to buy clothes.”<sup>71</sup> The orders would be transmitted via wireless, with the outfits waiting when the ships docked. A few months later, a second newspaper article predicted that “every department store” along the East Coast would soon install transmitters as part of this service and that “bulletins of bargains may be published on shipboard.”<sup>72</sup>

This particular prediction failed to materialize, though an apocryphal incident from August 1911 illustrates the intimate connection between new media technologies and new forms of commerce. According to a contemporary account, a passenger on the Olympic steamship “planned a little joke on the New York Wanamaker station” and used the onboard telegraph to order some socks.<sup>73</sup> When the Olympic was off the coast of Long Island, a biplane swooped low over the deck, dropping a packet of letters and a package of socks. The account concluded with the insightful observation that “the wireless telegraph-the aeroplane-the 45,000 ton vessel-each in its own way a marvel of the present decade” were brought together by a “joking order for dry goods.”<sup>74</sup>

The *Marconigraph*, a publication of the British Marconi Company, described the Wanamaker stations in August 1911, one of the few detailed descriptions of this operation.<sup>75</sup> The journal praised Wanamaker for proving the technology’s effectiveness over land and estimated that several thousand dollars in telephone charges could be saved by using wireless for communication between the two stores. Another statement in the

same article suggested an unusually close collaboration between the department store and American Marconi. The stations were promoted as “official Marconi stations,” though the journal clarified that the operators were technically employees of Wanamaker’s as the “American Marconi Company do not [*sic*] undertake intra-state business.”<sup>76</sup> But, if the operators were employees of Wanamaker’s on paper, American Marconi had a significant amount of control over the facilities from their very inception. David Sarnoff, for example, later to become the head of the Radio Corporation of America, worked for American Marconi prior to being transferred to the New York Wanamaker station.<sup>77</sup> In 1913, when the federal government began to issue annual lists of licensed wireless stations, American Marconi was the designated owner of the Philadelphia and New York stations.<sup>78</sup>

As indicated by the *Marconigraph* article, the two Wanamaker stations were something of an anomaly and were used as real-world laboratories for new innovations. The memoirs of Thomas Appleby, an operator at the Philadelphia branch, provide further details as to the cutting-edge nature of these stations.<sup>79</sup> According to Appleby, the stations were among the most powerful and well-equipped at the time. On top of the Philadelphia store, two 125-foot towers supported a 1,000 foot antenna that stretched from Market to Chestnut Streets. Messages were sent by a five-kilowatt rotary-gap transmitter, while the receiver used a Fleming valve detector to filter out unnecessary signals, including those from a government wireless station at a nearby naval yard. The stations were the only ones employing a novel “break-in” system of communication; other operators could not respond to a message until the incoming transmission was complete, though Wanamaker operators could interrupt each other and immediately ask



for clarification or repetition of a word. For a current example, think of the difference between using a walkie-talkie and a cell phone. “Here was one of the choicest jobs on the Atlantic sea-board,” wrote Appleby, “and every wireless operator in the country would have given his right eye to land such a berth.”<sup>80</sup>

Appleby and the other operators developed a condensed, short-hand version of telegraph code which utilized abbreviations and, along with the break-in innovation, allowed the transmission of over thirty words a minute, a dramatic improvement over the standard speed of the time. The Philadelphia station, for example, was originally known by the call letters HE, though operators reduced this to a single letter, E; the New York Station, originally HI, was known simply as I. Correspondingly, the word “the” became simply the letter T, while “that” was TT. According to Appleby’s memoirs, the chief operator of the nearby government station was so surprised by the lightning-fast transmissions that he visited the Wanamaker store to witness operations first-hand.<sup>81</sup>

While the towers were located on the roof, the operators themselves worked from a room inside the store, a room which quite literally showcased the technology to the public. Specially constructed walls silenced the violent sounds thrown off by the rotary-spark generator, though store visitors could watch the operators through a large glass window. Appleby later recalled:

We would generally wait until the crowd got nicely settled around the window. The guide would nod his head and then we would cut loose with a message, sometimes faked, just to give the crowd a thrill. At a touch of the key a pistol like shot and the brilliant blue white flash of the spark would cause the crowd to jump, clasp their hands over their ears and then slyly glance at us with a sheepish grin.<sup>82</sup>

The New York Wanamaker station even figured into one of the biggest news stories of the era, the sinking of the Titanic, though its role in the disaster has been wildly

overstated. A young David Sarnoff was working at the station in April 1912 when wireless messages about the famous disaster began to reach North America. Gleason's 1938 radio history glorified Sarnoff's actions, an account which later appeared in an official biography written by Sarnoff's cousin.<sup>83</sup> According to the embellished version of the story, Sarnoff was the first wireless operator to receive distress signals from the doomed ship on April 14, 1912. A solitary Sarnoff stayed at his post for the next 72 hours, relaying messages from rescue ships and names of survivors to reporters and an engrossed public. So vital was Sarnoff's job that President Taft silenced all other wireless stations to prevent interference. This heroic version of events snowballed into one of the great myths of early radio and was reprinted numerous times. Bilby's 1986 biography of Sarnoff deflated the myth, though the old chestnut has not been entirely expunged from the historical record.<sup>84</sup>

Bilby traced the inspiration for the myth to material that appeared two days after the famous ship struck the infamous iceberg.<sup>85</sup> A New York newspaper, the *American*, announced that it had struck a deal with the Wanamaker station for the exclusive use of all Titanic news received by the department store. Articles in the *American* noted Sarnoff's role in collecting news of the disaster, though they also named two other employees, including Jack Binns, the legendary wireless hero from 1909. Contrary to what Gleason and others would later claim, Bilby documented that stations in Newfoundland and Boston picked up the first distress signals from the Titanic and stations all along the eastern seaboard joined in the frantic newsgathering effort. To ease the chaotic situation of the airwaves, American Marconi, not President Taft, requested

that many stations temporarily cease activity. Wanamaker's New York station was one of the stations that ceased operation for a few days.

Following the tragedy, the Wanamaker stations received new call letters from the government and officially became WHI and WHE.<sup>86</sup> The change in policy was part of the Radio Act of 1912, legislation which, like the act from two years before, had been encouraged by a naval tragedy.<sup>87</sup> If more ships in the vicinity of the Titanic had been equipped with wireless, and had been manning their equipment, the severity of the disaster could have been mitigated. In an effort to prevent further tragedies, the new act mandated even more demanding standards for wireless equipment on ships. The Department of Commerce's Bureau of Navigation was to enforce the regulations, as well as license all wireless stations

The 1912 act also instituted a policy of wavelength assignments as the airwaves were carved up amongst various users. In the following decade, these policies were continually refined and adjusted and the most well-funded, corporately owned stations received the best assignments. The preference for commercial stations was already evident in 1912, in fact, as the amateur operators were shunted to the short-wave end of the spectrum, considered to be of little value at the time. American Marconi benefited greatly from the increased, and legally mandated, demand for wireless equipment and trained operators.

The Titanic story proved that wireless could be a valuable tool for newsgathering, and two years later, Wanamaker's New York station again helped to popularize this particular use of the technology. According to a March 3, 1914 article in the *New York Times*, several correspondents, "out of reach of wire," had been instructed to send their

information to Wanamaker's.<sup>88</sup> A storm on the evening of March 2 temporarily disabled local telegraph lines, and subsequently, the department store received wireless dispatches for the *Times*. The feat was described as “the first use of the Marconi wireless for the transmission of domestic news,” though the paper likely overstated the case to play up its own role in the historic event.<sup>89</sup> The *New York Herald*, for example, had been operating its own wireless telegraph station since 1913.<sup>90</sup>

On May 13, 1914 the Wanamaker station successfully transmitted the sounds of the human voice and phonograph music, a notable accomplishment that raised public awareness regarding the possibilities of the technology.<sup>91</sup> Wireless telegraphy would eventually give way to wireless telephony and the Wanamaker broadcasts were a signal of the coming transition. The *New York Times* found the feat worthy of its front page, though this was certainly not the first time that voice and music had been transmitted via wireless.<sup>92</sup> In 1914, however, the dots and dashes of Morse code continued to comprise the overwhelming majority of wireless messages. In *The Continuous Wave*, Aitken was skeptical that these Wanamaker broadcasts took place, noting that the spark telegraphy equipment of the station was not capable of musical transmissions.<sup>93</sup> Magoun, however, wrote that American Marconi had installed an experimental arc transmitter, capable of musical broadcasts, in the department store in the spring of 1914.<sup>94</sup>

Wanamaker's advertisements in two Philadelphia newspapers the following day announced the successful experiment, further evidence that the stations were promotional vehicles as much as facilities for routine business communication.<sup>95</sup> Articles which appeared in the same papers provided some details and highlight how innovations in communications technology are often driven by commercial imperatives. According to

the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the stores exchanged “the first commercial message by wireless telephone” on May 13 at 3:45 pm.<sup>96</sup> The message was nothing as prophetic as “What hath God wrought?” or an urgent plea such as “Come here Watson, I need you,” but rather an entirely ordinary message — a request that the Philadelphia store send some stationary to the New York establishment. Appleby was the operator who received the message, and he telegraphed back to New York that the experiment had succeeded. This account, along with similar one in the *Public Ledger*, stated that the Wanamaker stores had offered the use of their stations to American Marconi in order to test this advance in wireless technology.<sup>97</sup> However, it is unclear why American Marconi, the licensed operator of the station according to the federal government, would have needed any particular invitation from Wanamaker’s to carry out the experiment. Perhaps John Wanamaker was serving as a sponsor and patron of American Marconi, or perhaps these statements are merely examples of his skill at self promotion.

As part of the May 13<sup>th</sup> experiment, operators in the New York store also broadcast phonograph records of opera singer Enrico Caruso. Sarnoff, who had by now ascended even higher in the ranks of American Marconi, was sixty miles off the coast of New York aboard the S.S. Antilles. Sarnoff’s traveling companions were no strangers to wireless, indeed they were headed to a convention on railway telegraphy, though they were nonetheless surprised when the ship’s receiver picked up the musical broadcast.<sup>98</sup> At 4 p.m., the Marconi operator aboard the Antilles responded via telegraph that this portion of the experiment had likewise been succeeded. Operators in the New Jersey and New York area also heard the strains of Caruso, though at least one was not entirely

enthusiastic; a message was reportedly received which read: “Am hearing music clearly but that’s a rotten phonograph. Get a new one and some new records.”<sup>99</sup>

Even though the ability of a wireless signal to reach a disparate group of listeners had been recognized, American Marconi was still developing the technology under the point-to-point model of communication. A *New York Times* account, for example, of the May 13 experiment concluded with the statement that a “commercial wireless telephone service” was to be established between New York and Philadelphia “just as soon as it can be made selective.”<sup>100</sup> A Marconi publication from April of the following year stated that the service would begin “within a few months,” though it had been “long predicted and confidently awaited.”<sup>101</sup> It does not appear that the proposed service was ever completed.

But if most employees of the Marconi Company retained the point-to-point conceptualization of wireless, at least one did foresee the potential value in disseminating one message simultaneously to many listeners. In 1916, Sarnoff wrote a memo to Edward J. Nally, the General Manager of American Marconi, which outlined plans for a full-fledged broadcasting service.<sup>102</sup> A number of inventors and amateur enthusiasts had successfully transmitted music over the airwaves, though none had presented a concrete plan for how a broadcast operation might be funded. According to Sarnoff’s memo, American Marconi could establish a series of stations to broadcast music, as well as recitals, lectures, sporting news, and other items of interest. To fund this venture, the company would sell “Radio Music Boxes,” which could be priced at \$75 per unit, a hefty price at the time. The text of the purported memo was reprinted by Gleason in 1938.<sup>103</sup> Benjamin has shown that this widely-cited version of the legendary memo is actually

from 1920, a few years after Sarnoff claimed to have authored it, though her research does show that some version of this memo, perhaps in a less developed form, existed before November 1916.<sup>104</sup>

Gleason wrote that the Wanamaker's experiments "no doubt stimulated the active brain of David Sarnoff" and directly inspired the Radio Music Box concept.<sup>105</sup> As indicated, this scholar is not entirely reliable, though this particular assertion is reasonable. Even more so than other department stores, Wanamaker's had long used free musical concerts to lure shoppers to its sales floor. The Radio Music Box scenario similarly relied on free entertainment as an inducement to sell a new product. It is therefore entirely possible that the experimental broadcasts from Wanamaker's department store on May 13, 1914 influenced Sarnoff's conception of a Radio Music Box.

Unlike many of his other initiatives, John Wanamaker's foray into the realm of wireless telegraphy does not appear to have been mimicked by other merchants. I have been unable, for example, to identify any other department store experimenting with wireless prior to the development of broadcasting in the 1920s. In the summer months of 1916, an announcement appeared in both the *New York Times* and *QST*, the journal of the American Radio Relay League, stating that girls at a summer camp were learning wireless telegraphy.<sup>106</sup> "Women particularly are preferred as wireless operators in department stores," stated the articles, a demand that the camp was seeking to fill. This statement, on the surface, appears logical enough, as stores not only focused on female consumers but employed many as well. Operating a land-line telegraph was a known practice for stores, though if anyone beyond Wanamaker took the effort to install a

wireless telegraph station, these other examples have slipped from the historical record.

The statement about the preference for female wireless operators may have been merely a promotional claim put forth by the summer camp, a claim that did not necessarily correspond to reality.

The two Wanamaker stations closed during World War I, or more accurately, they were forced to close. After the U.S. entered the war in 1917, the government invoked a clause in the Radio Act and the Navy assumed control of all wireless stations.<sup>107</sup> In 1919, the Navy reluctantly relinquished this control, and WHE and WHI resumed normal operations. The stations continued to operate even after wireless technology entered its next phase of development, radio broadcasting.<sup>108</sup> Wanamaker's patronage of the technology continued, and his stores eventually operated their own radio stations, WOO in Philadelphia and WWZ in New York. These broadcasting stations were not replacements for the wireless telegraph ones, but separate entities, and are dealt with more thoroughly in chapter five.

## **Conclusion**

In accord with Bowlby's analysis of the literary depiction of department stores, these retail institutions can be seen as either purveyors of false material values, transforming citizens into loyal consumers, or they can be seen as public benefactors, agents of change which made the good life available to all. The merchants themselves, such as John Wanamaker, stressed the positive aspects of the growing consumer culture, and despite their own biased reasons for doing so, such views can not be entirely discounted. In her own discussion of this question, Abelson wrote:



Though merchants did all they could to push the new products, descriptions of women crowding the new toiletries departments lend credence to the repeated assertions by merchants and dry-goods publications that customers were, in fact, demanding new consumer items.<sup>109</sup>

It is undeniable that the managers, window-dressers, sales clerks, and advertising men of the stores sought to shape this demand within the framework of a particular ideology, but it can not be argued that the demand for material goods was an entirely artificial creation.

The question of new technologies and their introduction into society, however, is more problematic; how could consumers demand something if they were unaware of its very existence? In this regard, department stores and other commercial enterprises played the crucial function of exposing the public to the latest technical marvels. Technologies were quickly adopted and adapted to specific ends, with an emphasis on spectacular displays, and the sales floor thus doubled as a classroom and miniature world's fair. Department stores continued this tradition of technological innovation into the 1920s and beyond, a tradition which was at its core rooted in a scientific approach to retailing.

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<sup>1</sup> Wanamaker's advertisement, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 July 1910, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899-1922* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 194-195.

<sup>3</sup> John Wanamaker, *A Friendly Guide to Philadelphia and the Wanamaker Store* (Philadelphia: John Wanamaker, 1926), 46.

<sup>4</sup> Ralph M. Hower, *History of Macy's of New York, 1858-1919: Chapters in the Evolution of the Department Store* (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1943); Frank Mayfield, *The Department Store Story* (New York: Fairchild Publications 1949); H. Pasdermajian, *The Department Store: Its Origins, Evolution, and Economics* (London: Newman Books, 1954); John William Ferry, *A History of the Department Store* (New York: Macmillan, 1960); Robert Hendrickson, *The Grand Emporiums: The Illustrated History of America's Great Department Stores* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979); Michael Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Russell Lewis, "Everything Under One Roof: World's Fairs and

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Department Stores in Paris and Chicago,” *Chicago History* 12, no. 3 (1983): 28-47; Susan Porter-Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Elaine S. Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1993); Bill Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995); Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, eds., *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1999.)

<sup>5</sup> Porter-Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Rosalind H. Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 67.

<sup>7</sup> On origin of the term “dry goods” store and the change to “department” store, see Hendrickson, *The Grand Emporiums*, 30-33; See also John Henry Hepp, IV, *The Middle-Class City: Transforming Space and Time in Philadelphia, 1876-1926* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 147.

<sup>8</sup> Porter-Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Howard P. Chudacoff and Judith E. Smith, *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000), particularly chapter 4, “Industrialization and the Transportation of Urban Space, 1850-1920,” 86-117

<sup>10</sup> William R. Leach, “Transformations in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890–1925,” *Journal of American History* 71, no. 2 (1984): 319–343; Bill Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), 171-194; Anne Friedberg *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Porter-Benson, *Counter Cultures*; Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving*.

<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, “The World of the Department Store: Distribution, Culture and Social Change,” in *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939*, eds. Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1999), 33.

<sup>12</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982.)

<sup>13</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire*, 30.

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<sup>14</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire*, 30.

<sup>15</sup> Crossick and Jaumain, *Cathedrals of Consumption*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire*.

<sup>17</sup> Details of the Wanamaker store from Hendrickson, *Grand Emporiums*, 78-79 and Ferry, *A History of the Department Store*, 103-108.

<sup>18</sup> Information on the debut performance of the organ, along with the “more than 35,000” assertion, from Wanamaker, *A Friendly Guide to Philadelphia and the Wanamaker Store*, 43.

<sup>19</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire*, 113-114.

<sup>20</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire*, 116.

<sup>21</sup> Porter-Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 17.

<sup>22</sup> Porter-Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 17.

<sup>23</sup> Frank Presbrey, *The History and Development of Advertising* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1929), 332

<sup>24</sup> Presbrey, *The History and Development of Advertising*, 248.

<sup>25</sup> For one study about the rise of advertising in the late nineteenth century and its effects on magazines, see Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Market, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London: Verso, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> Gerald Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

<sup>27</sup> Along with Baldasty, Daniel Boorstein also argued that commercialization encouraged a politically neutral tone in the press. See *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York: Random House, 1973), 106.

<sup>28</sup> Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 210-211.

<sup>29</sup> 1904 quote from the *Dry Goods Economist*(DGE), 16 July 1904, cited in Leach, *Land of Desire*, 43.

<sup>30</sup> Pasdermadjian, *The Department Store: Its Origins, Evolution, and Economics*, 26.

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<sup>31</sup> William Leach, "Strategists of Display and the Production of Desire," in *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and the Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 99-132.

<sup>32</sup> Leach, "Strategists of Display," 107.

<sup>33</sup> Leach, "Strategists of Display."

<sup>34</sup> Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving*, 47.

<sup>35</sup> Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving*, 48.

<sup>36</sup> Leach describes many store promotions in *Land of Desire*. On Christmas-related ones in particular, see 88-90 and 336-338.

<sup>37</sup> Linda L. Tyler, "Commerce and Poetry Hand in Hand: Music in American Department Stores, 1880-1930," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 45. no.1 (1992): 83.

<sup>38</sup> Tyler, "Commerce and Poetry," 82.

<sup>39</sup> Advice on upper-floor entertainment from *DGE*, 24 October 1903, 52, as cited in Tyler, "Commerce and Poetry," 95-96.

<sup>40</sup> Hendrickson, *The Grand Emporiums*, 46.

<sup>41</sup> Macy's information from Hower, *History of Macy's of New York*, 166.

<sup>42</sup> Hepp, *Middle Class City*, 152-156.

<sup>43</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire*, 44.

<sup>44</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire*, 182-184.

<sup>45</sup> On Montgomery Ward's and Sears, see William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 334-339.

<sup>46</sup> Eaton's information from Mayfield, *The Department Store Story*, 43.

<sup>47</sup> Jordan Marsh information from Hendrickson, *The Grand Emporiums*, 54; Leach mentioned a number of stores that implemented phone order systems in the early 1900s, see *Land of Desire*, 133.

<sup>48</sup> Frank H. Williams, "The Busy Little Telephone Improves the Shining Sales Total," *DGE*, 16 September 1922, 25.

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- <sup>49</sup> J. Russel Doubman and John R. Whitaker, *The Organization and Operation of Department Stores* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1927), 14.
- <sup>50</sup> Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 228-230.
- <sup>51</sup> Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959 – original copyright 1888), 113-116.
- <sup>52</sup> Arthur F. Colton, “Telephone Newspaper – A New Marvel,” *Technical World Magazine*, February 1912, 666.
- <sup>53</sup> “500 Get the News by Wire at Once,” *New York Times*, 25 October 1911, 7.
- <sup>54</sup> G.C.B. Rowe, “Broadcasting in 1912,” *Radio News*, June 1925, 2309.
- <sup>55</sup> Rowe, “Broadcasting in 1912,” 2311.
- <sup>56</sup> Rowe, “Broadcasting in 1912,” 2311.
- <sup>57</sup> The specific claim of “28 arc lights” from David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 176; The claim of “first commercial installation” from Hugh G. Aitken, *The Continuous Wave: Technology and American Radio, 1900-1932* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), 111.
- <sup>58</sup> Macy’s information from Hower, *History of Macy’s of New York, 1858-1919*, 166.
- <sup>59</sup> On the use of exterior lighting as a form of advertising, see C.M. Axford, “Electricity as an Advertising Medium,” *Electrical Review and Western Electrician*, 11 March 1911, 492-493.
- <sup>60</sup> “Electrical Construction in Department Stores,” *Electrical Review and Western Electrician*, 16 July 1912, 15.
- <sup>61</sup> Other related articles from this journal include “The Wiring of a Department Store,” 25 July 1914, 169; “Lighting Features of a Boston Department Store,” 13 February 1915, 312; “Increasing the Sale of Energy to Department Stores,” 20 March 1915, 546; J. Daniels, “Improving Lighting Conditions in Department Stores,” 12 February 1921, 251-253.
- <sup>62</sup> For one example, see “The Wiring of a Department Store,” *Electrical Review and Western Electrician*.

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<sup>63</sup> Harold L. Platt, "City Lights: The Electrification of the Chicago Region, 1880-1930," in *Technology and the Rise of the Networked City in America*, eds. Joel A. Tarr and Gabriel Dupuy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 246-281

<sup>64</sup> "Electricity in Department Stores," *Electrical Review and Western Electrician*, 2 August 1913, 205.

<sup>65</sup> The exaggerated claims of John Wanamaker himself contribute to the confusion over this particular date. A 1911 promotional book from the store, for example, claimed that the stations were established in October 1907, three years before the store announced construction in the 1910 advertisement. See John Wanamaker, *The Golden Book of the Wanamaker Stores* (Philadelphia: John Wanamaker, 1911), 113; The notes of Henry Adams Gibbons, a biographer of Wanamaker, also included the 1907 claim, though both of these sources were likely influenced by the entrepreneur's relentless self-promotion. See Herbert Adam Gibbons, *John Wanamaker* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1926). Gibbons notes are held by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania as part of their collection of Wanamaker Papers. References to the Wanamaker station in 1907 in Wanamaker Papers (#2188), Gibbons Card Files, Drawer 17; A reference book on Philadelphia history published in 1933 states that the Wanamaker stations were installed in 1909, see Joseph Jackson, *Encyclopedia of Philadelphia*, vol. 4 (Harrisburg, Penn.: The National Historical Association, 1933), entry on "Radio, Philadelphia's Part in its Development," 1031-1032; If the stores had in fact operated wireless stations at such an early date, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* advertisement from July 22, 1910 would have undoubtedly addressed this fact. The 1910 date is affirmed by a brief, three-sentence announcement in the *New York Times* from September of that year. See "Wireless for the Wanamaker Stores," *New York Times*, 29 September 1910, 9; Regarding the date in which the stations actually began operation, the evidence points to 1911. In that year, for example, the *Christian Science Monitor* described the stations as "just installed." See "Modern Invention and Some New Socks," *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 August 1911, 15; The August 1911 edition of *The Marconigraph*, a journal of the British Marconi Company, also stated that the Wanamaker stations were "recently completed." See "Wireless as an Adjunct to a Great Stores [*sic*]: The Wanamaker Stations," *Marconigraph*, August 1911, 22-23.; And, in contrast with Wanamaker's own claim in *The Golden Book of the Wanamaker Stores*, a 1926 book published by the same store now claimed a date of 1911. See *A Friendly Guide to the Philadelphia and the Wanamaker Store*, 46.

<sup>66</sup> Christopher H. Sterling and John Michael Kittross, *Stay Tuned: A History of American Broadcasting*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Mahway, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 43.

<sup>67</sup> Susan Douglas discusses Binns' heroics in *Inventing American Broadcasting*, 200-204; Marvin Bensman stressed the importance of the disaster on later wireless regulation, see *The Beginning of Broadcast Regulation in the Twentieth Century*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2000), 6.

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<sup>68</sup> Wanamaker's advertisement, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 July 1910, 8.

<sup>69</sup> "Voyager on Ocean May Soon Shop by means of Wireless, *Christian Science Monitor*, July 23, 1910, pg. 11.

<sup>70</sup> "Dressmaking By Wireless," *Washington Post*, 18 May 1910, 6.

<sup>71</sup> "Dressmaking By Wireless," *Washington Post*.

<sup>72</sup> "Shopping in Midocean," *Washington Post*, 15 August 1910, 6.

<sup>73</sup> "Modern Invention and Some New Socks," *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 August 1911, 15.

<sup>74</sup> "Modern Invention and Some New Socks," *Christian Science Monitor*.

<sup>75</sup> "Wireless as an Adjunct to a Great Stores [sic]: The Wanamaker Stations," *Marconigraph*, August 1911, 22-23.

<sup>76</sup> "Wireless as an Adjunct to a Great Stores [sic]: The Wanamaker Stations," *Marconigraph*.

<sup>77</sup> Kenneth Bilby, *The General: David Sarnoff and the Rise of the Communications Industry* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 29.

<sup>78</sup> Department of Commerce, Bureau of Navigation, Radio Services, *Radio Stations of the United States* (Washington, D.C., 1913.)

<sup>79</sup> Appleby Memoirs. After establishing a reputation by co-founding the Philadelphia School of Wireless Telegraphy, Appleby was asked in 1912 to take over the Wanamaker station in that city.

<sup>80</sup> Appleby Memoirs.

<sup>81</sup> Appleby Memoirs.

<sup>82</sup> Appleby Memoirs.

<sup>83</sup> Most of the information in this paragraph from Bilby, *The General*, 30-31; Gleason L. Archer's account in *History of Radio to 1926* (New York: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1938), 111.

<sup>84</sup> Brian Winston repeated the myth in *Media Technology and Society: A History From the Telegraph to the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 72.

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<sup>85</sup> Bilby, *The General*, 30-31.

<sup>86</sup> Bensman, *The Beginning of Broadcast Regulation in the Twentieth Century*, 8. Bensman also pointed out that the Radio Act of 1912 had already been drafted and approved by Senate committee before the disaster, though the tragedy did facilitate its passage into law. Regarding the changing call letters of the Wanamaker stations, Appleby explained that “HI” later became “WHI.” This change corresponds with the new call letter policy that the Bureau of Navigation adopted in 1912. Both WHI and WHE appear in the 1913 edition of *Radio Stations of the United States* from the Department of Commerce, Bureau of Navigation, Radio Services.

<sup>87</sup> Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 43.

<sup>88</sup> “Times Makes First Use of Wireless to Replace Wires Prostrated by Storm,” *New York Times*, 3 March 1914, 1.

<sup>89</sup> “Times Makes First Use of Wireless to Replace Wires Prostrated by Storm,” *New York Times*.

<sup>90</sup> Department of Commerce, Bureau of Navigation, Radio Services, *Radio Stations of the United States* (Washington, D.C., 1913.)

<sup>91</sup> “Talk by Wireless With Philadelphia,” *New York Times*, 14 May 1914, 1.

<sup>92</sup> “Talk by Wireless With Philadelphia,” *New York Times*.

<sup>93</sup> Aitken, *The Continuous Wave*, 465, footnote 100.

<sup>94</sup> On the installation of a new transmitter in the Wanamaker New York station, Alexander Magoun, “Pushing Technology: David Sarnoff and Wireless Technology, 1911-1921,” paper presented at the 2001 IEEE Conference on the History of Telecommunications, St. John’s, Newfoundland, 25-27 July 2001; In an essay published earlier, Elliot N. Sivowitch claimed that the station installed low-powered vacuum tubes early in 1914, this in “A Technological Survey of Broadcasting’s PreHistory, 1876-1920,” in *American Broadcasting: A Source Book on the History of Radio and Television*, eds. Lawrence Lichty and Malachi Topping (New York: Hastings House, 1975), 17-31. This source is incorrect however in its claim that the Wanamaker’s used a vacuum tube transmitter in 1914. According to Magoun, it was an arc transmitter.

<sup>95</sup> Wanamaker’s advertisements in *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 14 May 1914, 11, and also (*Philadelphia*) *Public Ledger*, 14 May 1914, 9.

<sup>96</sup> “Wireless Phone Covers 90 Miles,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 14 May 1914, 8.



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<sup>97</sup> “Wireless Phone Covers 90 Miles,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*; “Talk by Wireless Phone to New York,” (*Philadelphia*) *Public Ledger*, 14 May 1914, 5.

<sup>98</sup> These details of the experiment from the newspaper accounts previously cited in note 96, along with “New York to Philadelphia by Wireless Telephone,” *Wireless Age*, June 1914, 725; Sarnoff’s particular role in this experiment is unclear according to the existing evidence. Archer stated that Sarnoff was directly involved, though as the exaggerated Titanic-myth indicates, this particular historian can not be trusted unquestionably. See Archer, *History of Radio to 1926*, 112; The fact that the experiment began shortly after the Antilles had begun its journey, and before it was out of range, strongly suggests that the musical transmission to the steamship was no accident but in fact part of the plan. Given Sarnoff’s documented role in pushing forth earlier technical innovations for the Marconi Company, Magoun agreed that Sarnoff was likely involved in coordinating, if not in fact conceiving, the experiment. This observation from personal correspondence with Magoun, December 13, 2005.

<sup>99</sup> “New York to Philadelphia by Wireless Telephone,” *Wireless Age*, Jun 1914, 725; The “rotten phonograph” quote from “Talk by Wireless With Philadelphia,” *New York Times*, May 14, 1914, 1.

<sup>100</sup> “Talk by Wireless With Philadelphia,” *New York Times*.

<sup>101</sup> “Marconi’s Wireless Telephone,” *Wireless Age*, April 1915, 489.

<sup>102</sup> Louise Benjamin, “In Search of the Sarnoff ‘Radio Music Box’ Memo: Nally’s Reply,” *Journal of Radio Studies* 9, no. 1 (2002): 97-106.

<sup>103</sup> Archer, *History of Radio to 1926*, 112-113.

<sup>104</sup> Benjamin, “In Search of the Sarnoff ‘Radio Music Box’ Memo.”

<sup>105</sup> Archer, *History of Radio to 1926*, 112.

<sup>106</sup> “Girls to Study Wireless,” *QST*, August 1916, 201, and also “Girls to Study Wireless,” *New York Times*, 11 July 1916, 6. The *New York Times* account contains an additional paragraph about the girls learning about aviation, though the text of these two stories is otherwise identical. Michele Hilmes cited the *QST* article in discussion of female amateur radio enthusiasts, though did not qualify this claim. See *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1997), 133.

<sup>107</sup> Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 48.

<sup>108</sup> See Department of Commerce, Bureau of Navigation, *Commercial and Government Radio Stations of the United States* (Washington, D.C.) for the years 1923, 1924, and

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1925. Both WHE and WHI continued to operate after Wanamaker had established two formal broadcasting stations, WOO and WWZ.

<sup>109</sup> Abelson, *Ladies Go A-Thieving*, 33.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **A Sales Floor in the Sky, 1920-22**

More than two decades after inventors first sent messages using wireless technology, American businessmen, merchants, journalists, educators, politicians, and church leaders realized that it could also be used to broadcast messages to a large, dispersed audience. In the early 1920s, all of these groups erected their own transmitting towers, claiming a slice of the airwave spectrum for their own. The sky was filled with a variety of electronic messages, many coming directly from the sales floor. By the end of 1922, the government had doled out broadcasting licenses to over 600 entities, including 30 department stores.<sup>1</sup> Radio stations owned by department stores were most common in the Northeast, with Pennsylvania itself home to ten, one third of the total. Philadelphia was the busiest city with four major retailers taking to the airwaves in 1922.<sup>2</sup> This chapter focuses on department stores and their promotion of radio during the years 1920-22, the beginning of the hectic period which has become known as the “broadcasting boom.”<sup>3</sup> The four store stations in Philadelphia are at the center of the analysis, though ones located elsewhere are also included in order to present a broader picture of the phenomenon.

Radio stations were established for a variety of reasons during the 1920s, and the goal of this chapter is to document department stores’ initial use the medium. The store stations provided one of the first models of “commercial broadcasting,” years before this

system was entrenched. They demonstrated how radio programs could be fashioned around certain types of merchandise, how the airwaves could be used for advertising, how women could be targeted, and perhaps most significantly, how this new form of mass communication could be transformed into a source of profits.

### **Making a New Medium**

Department store exploitation of radio actually predates the broadcasting boom and these institutions were involved from the medium's very inception. The birth of broadcasting, for example, is typically dated to November 1920 when KDKA started in Pittsburgh, a pioneering station that was directly inspired by a promotion of the Joseph Horne department store.<sup>4</sup> The story of KDKA's genesis has been told and retold countless times, though the narrative merits yet another repetition because of the often overlooked roles played by this particular store and also by the military. Rather than depicting broadcasting as an innovative use of wireless that developed accidentally in a rarefied sphere, far removed from the taint of commercial interests, a more comprehensive account of KDKA acknowledges the number of institutions which participated in its development.

Before the establishment of a formal radio station in Pittsburgh, Frank Conrad in nearby Wilkinsburg regularly broadcast phonograph records out of a garage studio using the call letters 8XK.<sup>5</sup> Conrad also worked for Westinghouse, a position which gave him access to state-of-the-art technology. During the war, this company had researched wireless on behalf of the U.S. and British militaries, using the same garage studio as a testing facility.<sup>6</sup> Conrad, then, was not the average radio amateur, tinkering with

salvaged parts and makeshift equipment, but rather someone directly involved with one of the largest corporations in the wireless industry. The September 1920 issue of *QST*, the principal journal for the amateur community, praised the performance of 8XK and documented its equipment in a three-page article.<sup>7</sup>

The first institution to recognize the potential commercial applications of Conrad's activities was the Joseph Horne department store. Conforming to the department store pattern of exploiting earlier technical innovations such as the telephone and electricity, Horne's sought to promote itself with this new form of communication while simultaneously stimulating a demand for a new consumer product. The store's regular advertisement in the *Pittsburgh Sun* on September 29, 1920 announced that "wireless receiving stations" in the west basement "picked up" Victrola music that had been "played into the air."<sup>8</sup> For ten dollars, interested customers could purchase their own receiving sets, constructed by the same person who installed the demonstration units. The notice was a relatively minor part of the advertisement. Far more space was devoted to dinner plates, hats, and women's wool suits.

H.P. Davis, vice-president of Westinghouse, saw the famed advertisement and immediately set in motion plans to open KDKA, which, from its very inception, was conceived as an adjunct to the merchandising of a new technology. With the department store ad providing the imaginative spark, Davis speculated that a radio station broadcasting on a regular basis could promote the image of Westinghouse while creating a market for radio receivers.<sup>9</sup> Westinghouse was eager to manufacture these receivers. Barnouw claimed that it was the September 29 advertisement that inspired KDKA, a claim that corresponds to Davis' own admission that the famous ad mentioned Conrad's

musical programming.<sup>10</sup> This particular ad, however, was at least the second time that Horne's advertised wireless receivers. On September 27, an advertisement in the *Pittsburgh Sun* included an even smaller mention of radio. The top half of the ad promoted a sale on corsets, though tucked into the bottom, almost as an afterthought was this notice:

A Wireless Receiving Station

—has been installed in our Play Store, and Amateur Wireless Operators and others interested in the subject are invited to come in at any time during the day and “listen in” on any messages which may be floating through the air. Our instrument is capable of receiving radios within a distance of 1,000 miles. Amateur Outfits are for sale in this section.

—West Basement<sup>11</sup>

The text of this promotion emphasized the technical and participatory aspect of radio with its description of listeners as “operators.” The later promotion which caught Westinghouse's attention focused on the music which could be “picked up” from the air. These two particular ads, separated by only two days, neatly illustrate the broader transition of wireless telegraphy to broadcasting and how a department stores' need for publicity influenced this development.

KDKA, the call letters assigned to the station by the Department of Commerce, began broadcasting in November 1920 and more radio stations began to fill the airwaves.<sup>12</sup> By January of 1922, the government had issued 30 broadcasting licenses, including three additional ones to Westinghouse.<sup>13</sup> None of these early stations were operated as profit-generating ventures in their own right but were instead supplements to the license-holder's primary business. Following the same logic as Westinghouse, the majority of stations licensed before 1922 belonged to electrical supply shops or manufacturers of radio equipment.<sup>14</sup>

The first full-fledged department store radio station in North America appeared in Canada. A September 29, 1921 advertisement in a Toronto newspaper, *The Globe*, stated that Eaton's was offering daily concerts through its station 9BA.<sup>15</sup> The station remained open for an additional half-hour after the broadcasts to receive orders for "radio supplies" from local customers, a possibility for those who had their own transmitting capabilities. This same store had previously bolstered its reputation with a widely-distributed mail-order catalog and was now applying the concept of remote shopping to wireless.<sup>16</sup>

The month after this ad appeared in Toronto, Hamburger's in Los Angeles became the first department store in the United States to officially try its hand at broadcasting.<sup>17</sup> In October 1921, the store began using a meager 5-watt transmitter under the call letters 6XAK. Most of the programming consisted of daily musical concerts, lasting one hour each afternoon; the station also broadcast a play-by-play of the 1921 World Series and once featured singers from a touring opera company. 6XAK was first licensed as a "special land station," a designation ostensibly for experimental activities, though Hamburger's reportedly used it "at the same time to carry on considerable worthwhile publicity for the firm as well."<sup>18</sup> In an overview of the station, *Radio News* proudly proclaimed that "commerce and science joined hands and met on common ground."<sup>19</sup>

In addition to offering free music to potential patrons, 6XAK was also used to educate the public about radio. The technology of the time was not the streamlined, simplified system with which we have become accustomed, where operating a receiver requires the merest touch of a button. In the early 20s, a listener had to first connect cumbersome, acid-filled batteries to the set, install an aerial, put on headphones, and then finally tune the receiver.<sup>20</sup> Even this final task could be arduous as there were multiple

tuning knobs that required almost continual adjustment. There was no guarantee that a station would be received on consecutive nights even with the same, exact settings. As part of its educational mission, Hamburger's worked with physics classes from local high schools and built a dedicated classroom on its premises.<sup>21</sup> By June of the following year, the *Dry Goods Economist* reported that the store had trained "400 pupils in up-to-date wireless instructions."<sup>22</sup>

At the start of 1922, Hamburger's changed its license from a "special land station" to that of a "commercial station," adopting the call letters KYJ as part of this transition.<sup>23</sup> The designation "commercial" at the time did not mean that the station accepted advertising, as this term would later imply, only that the station was operated by a business and supplied a regular stream of programming.

Following Hamburger's example, other department stores began to install their own transmitters. These particular institutions had a history of pushing forth the boundaries of earlier forms of advertising (as discussed in chapter two), and were among the first industries to recognize the promotional value of this new medium. The 1930 work *This Thing Called Broadcasting* included three paragraphs on the department store stations, one of the few books (other than publications from the National Retail Dry Goods Association) to provide anything beyond a cursory mention of the phenomenon. In explaining the reasons such stations were created, the book stated:

Since it appeals to the masses and chiefly to the home, the department store seized radio as a means by which to gain the good will of its potential customers in the favorable environment of the home. And it had the necessary funds to see the job through to success. Accustomed to spending large sums of money for advertising, the department store has come into the broadcasting field with the necessary financial sinews and organizing mind.<sup>24</sup>



The reference to “financial sinews and organizing mind” is apt as it highlights why the department store stations were distinct from those started by other kinds of retailers and merchants.

After Hamburger’s, a similarly named store in Newark, New Jersey became the second department store to extend its sales floor to the sky — Bamberger’s.<sup>25</sup> Started in February 1922 with the call letters WOR, this was to become not only the most famous of all the store stations, but in fact one of the most famous of all the stations from the initial broadcasting boom. Jack Poppele, first director of the station, later recalled that Bamberger’s “thought that by supporting the air with a broadcasting system they would help sell radio sets down in the radio department.”<sup>26</sup> An overview of the early history of WOR illustrates a few characteristics of department store stations in general, including an integral link between programming and retailing, increased activity around Christmas, and shows designed for female listeners.

According to his own recollections, Poppele was hired in a rather nonchalant manner.<sup>27</sup> As a former wireless operator for the Navy, he had a government broadcasting license and was approached while inside Bamberger’s. This person knew of his credentials and offered him the job on the spot. Poppele agreed, and immediately set about helping to establish the station. WOR formally debuted on February 22 with a recording of Al Jolson’s “April Showers.”<sup>28</sup> The transmitter was a creation of Lee De Forest, a particularly active inventor from radio’s earliest period, though it had been originally designed for wireless telegraphy, not broadcasting.<sup>29</sup> The studio and transmitter were housed in the same makeshift, windowless room on the roof the building.

As evidence of the integral retail connection between WOR and Bamberger's radio department, Poppele was instructed to sell receivers when not actually broadcasting, a division of labor that would be repeated at other stores. After several months of operation, with the holiday season approaching, Poppele noticed that many individuals were buying receivers as Christmas presents. Based on this observation, he suggested that WOR remain open on the holiday so that there would be at least something to listen to. Many stations in the region closed for the day and Poppele credited the 1922 Christmas broadcast as a key moment in establishing WOR's reputation as a premier station.<sup>30</sup>

Bamberger's also set itself apart by targeting female listeners when radio was still a male-dominated technology, with the ranks of amateur enthusiasts comprised overwhelmingly of men and young boys. As retailers, department stores had long targeted female consumers so this gendered approach to the new medium was perhaps not surprising. The March 4, 1922 issue of the *Dry Goods Economist* announced that Bamberger's had "taken the lead among department stores in the radio field" and described its programming:

Concerts, such as are sent by others stations, will be broadcasted. These are to be a minor part of the program however. Lectures on cooking, on house furnishing and decoration, on sewing, on new style trends — all these will appeal to the woman in the home. Besides these features, news of what the women's club in Bamberger territory are doing will be spread.<sup>31</sup>

As part of the female appeal, the station hired Jessie E. Koewing as an announcer, boasting that she was the first woman in such a position.<sup>32</sup>

The *DGE* said that the station could be heard within a radius of 100 miles, and while a broader range was possible, "it is desired to only reach radio receivers owned by

people who have — or may have — some interest in the Bamberger store.”<sup>33</sup> The application for a broadcasting license from April claimed a range of 250 miles; the increase followed the installation of a new Western Electric transmitter designed specifically for broadcasting.<sup>34</sup> Poppele recalled that, after a few months of operation, the studio expanded and moved to a corner of the radio department, with the performers visible behind glass.<sup>35</sup> The new and improved studio may have coincided with the transmitter upgrade.

But WOR did not have the airwaves over the New Jersey/New York area to itself, as it was forced to share time with a nearby Westinghouse station.<sup>36</sup> All of the pioneering broadcasters used the same frequency, a decidedly awkward situation that resulted from inadequate government policy. The Department of Commerce operated under the Radio Act of 1912 in which portions of the airwaves were reserved for amateur operators, naval vessels, and international distress signals.<sup>37</sup> When broadcasting developed as a distinctive use of wireless, the government assigned the new category of stations a place on the spectrum that would avoid interference with these other uses. As more stations appeared and the airwaves became increasingly overcrowded, Hoover sought to establish a new set of government regulations for broadcasting.

The Department of Commerce’s regulation of early radio should be understood within the context of the growing American economy of the 1920s. The United States was the first country to transfer its industrial productivity from wartime demands to manufacturing consumer goods, and following a brief post-war depression, the “Roaring Twenties” began. Between 1916 and 26, the average income for those filing tax returns more than quadrupled. During the corresponding period, consumer prices rose only sixty

percent, indicating a substantial increase in discretionary income that could be used to purchase automobiles, homes, or electrical appliances.<sup>38</sup> Such rough statistics admittedly present the economic boom in broad brush-strokes, though determining the specifics of which social groups saw their incomes rise by which percentage is less important than understanding the vision of Herbert Hoover, Secretary of the Department of Commerce, and other economic regulators.<sup>39</sup> This vision included a firm belief in the value of capitalism to improve the economy and the well-being of the public. The shortcomings of this philosophy would become painfully apparent with the Great Depression, though consumerism remained the gospel of federal regulators in the 1920s. It is not surprising that in such an environment radio was perceived primarily as a new consumer good, an item for enhancing Americans' leisure time, rather than as a way to educate citizens or otherwise enhance the public sphere. Guided by the vision of the associative state, the Department of Commerce allowed private groups to control the burgeoning radio industry, believing that this policy would yield the best product and greatest profits.

A member of the National Retail Dry Goods Association (NRDGA), the leading trade group for department stores, spoke at the First National Radio Conference organized by Hoover in February 1922.<sup>40</sup> Representatives of government agencies, the military, amateur organizations, and commercial interests had been summoned to D.C. to debate how the airwaves might accommodate so many new stations and how advertising could be reduced, a practice that Hoover denounced as detrimental.<sup>41</sup> Westinghouse affirmed its right to broadcast and boasted of the high quality programming from its various stations. A company spokesperson speculated that between twelve to fifteen powerful stations could blanket the entire country with programming. The revenue to

fund these stations would come entirely from the sale of receivers, though Hoover openly wondered what would happen after the saturation point had been reached.<sup>42</sup>

Harold Young of the NRDGA spoke in defense of the department store stations and brought along a representative from Bamberger's WOR. Young said that retailers across the country were eager to start their own stations and he urged that the airwaves not be given over to a monopoly.<sup>43</sup> These proposed store stations, according to Young, would not "cheapen" the medium with direct advertising, such as announcing prices or giving explicit product descriptions.<sup>44</sup> Newspapers were better suited for this purpose, and department stores merely sought to provide beneficial, educational material to the public as a benign form of indirect advertising. In this regard, Young was following the lead of John Wanamaker and other merchants who long characterized themselves as public benefactors.

Hoover observed that the spectrum could not handle every proposed station, especially with many newspaper and universities requesting similar access. Young said that stores would be agreeable to pooling resources, such as with a local newspaper, and establishing a shared transmitter. Another speaker from the Pacific Radio Trade Association stated that one store in Los Angeles (almost certainly Hamburger's) was already cooperating with four unnamed groups and "such cooperation might be worked out anywhere."<sup>45</sup>

At a similar, regional conference organized by the Department of Commerce a few months later, a representative for Wanamaker's also warned against a Westinghouse monopoly over broadcasting. This conference dealt exclusively with the congested airwaves over the New York metropolitan area where no less than seventeen stations

sought access.<sup>46</sup> Speaking for Westinghouse, one participant compared the company's local station to an express train running on a single railroad track, a scenario which had inherent limitations. The speaker defended the company and said that it was Westinghouse's "intention ... not to surrender any of their ether rights."<sup>47</sup> Wanamaker's representative countered with the observation that even where express trains ran, every town still required some kind of local service. Wanamaker's "would insist upon having some local train service."<sup>48</sup>

With these wavelength squabbles, department stores had effectively changed their opinion regarding the consolidated control of an industry. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, local merchants fought futile battles to defend their turf from the encroaching spread of department stores.<sup>49</sup> Now, the stores were the ones struggling to retain their authority, arguing that a concentrated, conglomerated big business could not satisfy the needs of everyone. In the 1920s, some stores were beginning to merge their operations while others had branches in multiple cities, but the original department store approach to retailing was not to overwhelm the country with a swarm of identical shops.<sup>50</sup> This category of retailer is more accurately called a chain store, the next step in applying scientific management principles to selling. For the first department stores, the emphasis was on a single spectacular institution located in the center of town. A similar philosophy guided the creation of their radio operations, with each retailer clamoring for its own. The NRDGA did not want to see Westinghouse, or any other group, control the airwaves. And, just as mom-and-pop retailers failed in their fight against department stores, the fight against the monopolization of the airwaves proved equally unsuccessful.

The stores' opposition to Westinghouse exposed tensions that existed within the fledgling broadcasting industry. These tensions went beyond the well-documented conflict between advocates for non-profit system and those who supported a profit-based model. The various commercial interests themselves disagreed as to the most efficient way to exploit the medium. As noted at the First Radio Conference, a store in Los Angeles shared the cost of its own broadcast operation with other businesses, an alternative to the economic model that would proliferate in later years. This particular arrangement was similar to the earlier system of cooperative advertising that had been used in department store print campaigns. AT & T, the same corporation which pioneered the overt form of commercial broadcasting, also put forth a plan that divided expenses among those groups wishing to use the airwaves. In February 1923, an executive for the phone company suggested that institutions in a particular locality, including "the chamber of commerce, the important newspapers, [and] the department stores," could join forces to purchase a shared transmitter.<sup>51</sup> Tensions among commercial broadcasters continued to surface throughout the 1920s, specifically over the issue of payments for the use of phonograph recordings and live performances, in contradiction to the claim that "commercial interests marched in lockstep."<sup>52</sup>

### **Marketing a New Medium**

In addition to defending the broadcasting rights of the store stations, the NRDGA helped members capitalize on the rapidly growing interest in broadcasting by organizing a special conference in April 1922.<sup>53</sup> Receivers were no longer unsightly contraptions assembled in garages and attics but were now a new type of consumer good and could be

purchased ready-made.<sup>54</sup> An astonishing variety of merchants sold an astonishing variety of receivers, from poorly constructed crystal units to ones with vacuum tubes that could cost hundreds of dollars. In response to this chaotic situation, representatives from five hundred department stores congregated in the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York to discuss the best way to merchandise and commercialize the technology of radio. The managing director of the NRDGA, Lew Hahn, outlined the reason for the conference:

Department store officials believe that they are essential to the full development of this trade, and are eager to establish broad-casting stations. The department store men want to make sure that only first-grade radio equipment is put on the market, so that, for example, a man will not spend \$25.00 for a receiving set that he thinks will take messages from 200 miles away and then find that it will only cover 15 or 20 miles. As is natural in any boom business, inferior goods are being distributed in many cases, but the manufacturers are ready to cooperate in remedying the situation.<sup>55</sup>

In conjunction with the conference, the NRDGA released a report written by Arthur Weisenberger.<sup>56</sup> The 24-page *Radio Merchandising in Department Stores* advised stores on the best techniques for selling receivers, what parts to stock, and how to advertise the technology. For those stores that had not yet segregated radios from other kinds of merchandise, the report urged that this area “be separately departmentized at once.”<sup>57</sup> The most common locations for radio sections were near “electrical goods, sporting goods or phonograph departments” because the buyers for these areas were the ones most often assigned the new product. This observation neatly encapsulates the public perception of radio at the time — a new type of electrical appliance, a leisure time pursuit, and a method for bringing music into the home. The ideal location for a radio section, however, was an upper-floor, as close to the roof as possible. Such a location was conducive to reception, and was equally beneficial should stores install transmitters. The



display of the new technology could also draw customers through several floors of other merchandise, exactly as the staging of musical entertainments on upper floors had done in years before.<sup>58</sup>

In a section on advertising, merchants were encouraged to conduct promotions that might warrant coverage in the newly created radio sections of local papers.<sup>59</sup> Starting a broadcasting station was an ideal method for obtaining free press coverage, and Hamburger's and Bamberger's were singled out for effective use of this technique. The report, however, gave only cautious support for this practice, noting the expense of installing the equipment, maintaining it, and supplying programming on a regular basis. Some stores that joined the broadcasting boom had done so with inexpensive transmitters from independent companies and found their performance unsatisfactory, just as WOR had done. Wiesenberger advised that stores purchase transmitters from Western Electric, a subsidiary of AT & T. Under a comprehensive patent-sharing agreement at the time, Western Electric was the only entity who could sell transmitters to commercial broadcasters. In this passage, the NRDGA revealed that contrary to its representative's statements at the First Radio Conference, department stores were indeed engaged in commercial broadcasting.<sup>60</sup>

For stations willing to undertake the expense of establishing a radio station, there were said to be definite advantages:

The installation of a broadcasting station in a community where as yet no other store or organization has one creates a tremendous amount of prestige and is of exceptional advertising value. It must be understood that for the present no direct advertising may be sent through a broadcasting station ... However, in making each announcement on your radio program you are privileged to give the name of your station and its location.<sup>61</sup>

Wiesenberger further elaborated how the stores could arrange specific programs to attract customers.

Thus, you can have your fashion expert talk on style, or have your shoe buyer talk on shoes and their effect on health, or in other words develop programs that suggest to the minds of the listener the fact that your store is the logical center for certain lines of merchandise and for others of an associated nature.<sup>62</sup>

The report also noted that stores in agricultural communities could broadcast regular weather reports, current price quotations for produce, and other information of particular interest to farmers. The Department of Agriculture distributed such information for free via telegraph and stores were instructed to decode the messages and relay them over the airwaves.<sup>63</sup>

Wiesenberger's suggestions for broadcasting, again, do not correspond exactly with Harold Young's words at the First Radio Conference where he stressed that department stores would not advertise nor describe any specific kind of merchandise. Wiesenberger, by contrast, was explicitly urging stores to use their stations as advertising vehicles, though in unobtrusive ways that allowed them to skirt charges of "direct advertising."

Another intriguing programming technique outlined in the report was an interactive promotion from WOR. A local newspaper printed a large grid, with the various squares designated by letters and numbers akin to a bingo card. On WOR, listeners were instructed as to which squares to fill in. By correctly following the instructions, the listener thus created a crude picture; the example in the report is a duck. A properly completed grid served as a coupon for free merchandise at Bamberger's.<sup>64</sup>

The *Wall Street Journal* took note of the NRDGA study in an article headlined “Radio Telephone Sales Large.”<sup>65</sup> The article stated that, of the 71 licensed broadcasters then in operation, seven were run by department stores in the following cities:

**Table 2**

Store Stations, April 1922:  
According to “Radio Telephone Sales Large,” *Wall Street Journal*, 18 April 1922, 17.

City	Stations	Call Letters
Philadelphia	3	Gimbel’s WIP, Strawbridge WFI, Wanamaker’s WOO
New York	1	Wanamaker’s WWZ
Newark	1	Bamberger’s WOR
St. Louis	1	Stix-Fuller-Baer WCK
Los Angeles	1	Hamburger’s KYJ

The two Wanamaker stations in the above list, (including the one in Philadelphia which had been licensed but not formally opened), were not replacements for the Marconi wireless stations established in 1911. These two original stations remained in operation, reserved for intra-store communication.<sup>66</sup> And, while the *Wall Street Journal*’s list neglected at least three other department store stations, it does indicate that Philadelphia was the most active city for this form of broadcasting.<sup>67</sup>

### **Philadelphia and Beyond**

A detailed overview of the four store stations in Philadelphia from 1922 reveals an identifiable and distinct department store approach to broadcasting, an approach shared by retailers in other cities as well. The stores of Gimbel’s, Strawbridge & Clothier, Wanamaker’s, and the Lit Brothers used their respective stations to promote themselves, their products, to entertain shoppers, and favored conservatory music and operatic

selections for musical programming, the same kind of material that stores had favored with the live performances they sponsored years before.<sup>68</sup> Barnouw characterized this programming as “potted palm music...music played at tea time by a hotel orchestra.”<sup>69</sup> Such fare was consistent with the retailers’ claims that their stations were not commercial enterprises but public services that transmitted refined, luxurious sounds for the benefit of the audience.

Department store radio officially began in Philadelphia on March 18, 1922, with the Wanamaker wireless stations from the previous decade serving as an informative prologue. On this particular day, Strawbridge & Clothier began transmitting from station WFI and Gimbel’s opened station WIP.<sup>70</sup> The store of the Lit Brothers meanwhile, not quite prepared for its own broadcasting operation, unveiled a radio department; an ad in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* promoted “Radio Concerts All Day Today” with “experts ... fully prepared to give advice on the selection and installation of radio receiving phones.”<sup>71</sup> These three stores were, in fact, located on different corners of the intersection of Market and 8<sup>th</sup> Streets and were connected via underground passageways from a subway stop.<sup>72</sup> Given the scarcity of stations at this time, the “radio concerts” at Lit Brothers quite likely involved the programming from its nearby rivals.

The opening day programming of WFI consisted of speeches from politicians and dignitaries, including the state’s governor, along with songs from local singers and a choral group comprised of store employees, the “Strawbridge & Clothier Quartette.”<sup>73</sup> A glass-enclosed studio on the fourth floor allowed curious shoppers to witness the proceedings first hand, just as Wanamaker’s original wireless operators had been on display years before.<sup>74</sup> To help promote the technology, the local paper reported that

“store management [would] conduct an educational demonstration during the day for the benefit of the laymen.”<sup>75</sup>

WIP, located just across the street in Gimbel’s, began its programming less than hour after Strawbridge & Clothier had done so. Gimbel’s filled its airtime with musical performances, talks from a few “motion picture stars,” occasional news briefs, and a lecture from a government radio inspector on the “care of wireless apparatus.”<sup>76</sup> Mayor Hampton Moore, who also appeared on WFI that day, was escorted by a troop of Boy Scouts to the glass-enclosed studio on the seventh floor of Gimbel’s.<sup>77</sup> Although the mayor had to physically move to speak first through WFI’s and then through WIP’s microphone, the fact that both stations were dividing the same frequency meant that those at home heard him in the same virtual spot — 360 meters.

The necessity of sharing the airwaves in this fashion also meant that the competing stations could not begin at precisely the same time, and WFI was the first on the air that day by a lead of 45 minutes.<sup>78</sup> However, the Gimbel’s advertisement that day in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* boasted of a pre-emptive strike. Above a schedule for WIP’s programming was the blunt phrase — “Yesterday’s broadcasting was most successful.”<sup>79</sup> Strawbridge & Clothier did not suffer silently and answered back in an ad of its own the following week.

This store was the FIRST to give practical radio demonstrations, FIRST to receive temporary government permit for broadcasting, FIRST to receive official government license, “signed, sealed, and delivered.”<sup>80</sup> (emphasis original)

Despite WFI’s claim to primacy, WIP promoted itself with the slogan “Philadelphia’s Pioneer Voice” for years.<sup>81</sup>

The 1964 interview with Edward Davies, one of the first employees of WIP, provides some information regarding its genesis.<sup>82</sup> According to his recollection, Gimbel's entered broadcasting in response to repeated inquiries from shoppers wishing to purchase receivers. Ellis Gimbel, Jr., then in charge of the toy department, had received numerous such calls and asked Davies, a personnel manager at the store, if he knew anything about the subject. Davies was intrigued by the musical aspect of broadcasting and agreed to investigate the subject on behalf of the junior Gimbel. As a result of this initial conversation, a radio station was built as an adjunct to the store's piano department. Davies was in charge of the operation and, looking for "someone who knew show business," he hired a local actor as his assistant. Among other early employees was a woman who managed the Philadelphia Orchestra, who became the program director, and an announcer who came from the Philadelphia Operatic Society.<sup>83</sup>

Leach wrote that in the 1920s department stores "worked systematically through their trade associations with other consumer-oriented institutions...and with city governments," and the simultaneous launching of both WIP and WFI appears to have been part of such a campaign of civic boosterism.<sup>84</sup> The days preceding March 18<sup>th</sup> were devoted to "Talk Philadelphia Week," a city-wide campaign to promote the city.<sup>85</sup> The climax was a 3,000 person luncheon at the Philadelphia Real Estate Board in which Mayor Moore and local leaders conducted a mock auction of local homes and industries. Along with the slogan "The City of Brotherly Love," the campaign also stressed that the city was the "Workshop of the World" and the "City of Homes."<sup>86</sup> When the mayor then appeared on the Gimbel's and Strawbridge & Clothier stations, in both instances he delivered a "Talk Philadelphia" address, perhaps the very same one.<sup>87</sup> Additionally, a

member of the “Talk Philadelphia Week” committee, Horace Groskin, also spoke over the Strawbridge station.<sup>88</sup> Whether it was to curry favor with local politicians, impress out of town dignitaries, or simply to take advantage of publicity already surrounding the event, the “Talk Philadelphia Week” likely contributed to the selection of March 18<sup>th</sup> as an opening day for the two stations. The competitive nature of the stores also contributed; once one of them decided upon a date, the other followed suit.

The pattern of stations opening with sub-standard transmitters and then quickly improving their equipment, as noted in Wiesenberger’s study, also played out in Philadelphia. WFI replaced its original transmitter after only two weeks, for example.<sup>89</sup> According to one source, listeners as far away as Montreal, Florida, and Wisconsin could hear the signal. The equipment improvement at the Wanamaker station, meanwhile, was so significant that the station’s original opening day has been overlooked by some historians.<sup>90</sup> Wanamaker’s station in Philadelphia, WOO, first opened on April 24, sharing the 360 meter wavelength with WIP and WFI.<sup>91</sup> A modest newspaper ad from the day announced the programming, which consisted of “orchestral selections” and two addresses from Gifford Pinchot, a Republican candidate for governor.<sup>92</sup> According to a promotional pamphlet from the station published later that year, the original equipment was not satisfactory and the store installed a more powerful Western Electric transmitter.<sup>93</sup> A few months later in August, the station celebrated a second opening and John Wanamaker himself gave an inaugural address. Wanamaker praised the “glowing torch of science” and recalled the installation of electric lights in his store.<sup>94</sup>

The store of the Lit Brothers, which started a dedicated radio department on March 18<sup>th</sup>, did not go on the air with its own station until June.<sup>95</sup> By this time, the

Department of Commerce had exhausted the supply of three-letter call signals and assigned the letters “WDAR” to the fourth department store station in the city. After government regulations changed in 1925, the store swapped call letters for a combination more closely connected to its own name, WLIT.<sup>96</sup> Curiously, the other department stores in town maintained their original call letters which had been randomly assigned.

In 1922, stores across the country rushed to establish their own stations. Gimbel’s, for example, started WAAK from its branch in Milwaukee, just one month after launching WIP.<sup>97</sup> Headphones were installed at various spots on the sales floor so that shoppers could listen to the broadcasts. These “listening posts” could also encourage shoppers to purchase their own receiver.<sup>98</sup> The microphone in the third-floor studio was connected directly to the high voltage power supply for the transmitter. As a safety precaution, the microphone was suspended from a “handsome brass birdcage stand supplied by the store.”<sup>99</sup>

The Shepard Store also opened two stations in that year, WNAC in Boston and WEAN in Providence, Rhode Island.<sup>100</sup> There was already another department store station in Providence, WJAR operated by the Outlet Company.<sup>101</sup> Leon Samuels, one of the two brothers who ran the Outlet, financially supported and encouraged the experiments of a local amateur enthusiast, Thomas Giblin, who had been transmitting music from his home since 1919.<sup>102</sup> Once broadcasting became a national mania, Leon Samuels persuaded his brother to fund a formal radio station and Giblin’s equipment was moved inside the store. Giblin was hired to run the station, assisted by a former naval wireless operator. The naval operator was also put in charge of the radio department, similar to the responsibilities given to Jack Poppele at Bamberger’s. Most of the



programming was music, though the station also developed regular shows, including one titled simply “Household Hints and Music” which aired from 10 – 11 a.m.<sup>103</sup> Hosted by a young woman, the show was designed for housewives in the audience, similar to WOR’s approach to programming.

A colorful incident at WCAE, a joint venture between the Kaufmann & Baer store and the *Pittsburgh Press*, reveals the intense level of competition that sometime existed amongst early broadcasters. Shortly after the station installed a new 500 watt transmitter in December 1922, someone tampered with the equipment, causing it to fail a government inspection.<sup>104</sup> Among other signs of mischief was a wire that had been cut, then taped together so as to go unnoticed. The station took out a large newspaper ad and offered a \$1,000 reward to anyone who could identify the guilty party. Kaufmann & Baer then wrote the Department of Commerce to explain the situation and even included a handful of notarized, eye-witness descriptions of the sabotaged transmitter.<sup>105</sup>

Next to Pennsylvania, California had the second most number of department store stations in 1922 with a total of four.<sup>106</sup> Two of these were in San Francisco; KPO, run by the Hale Brothers, and KSL, run by the Emporium.<sup>107</sup> Similar to the educational efforts of Hamburger’s in Los Angeles, Hales Brothers also organized classes to instruct young boys in the intricacies of radio.<sup>108</sup> KSL, meanwhile, sought to attract female listeners and initiated a morning show devoted to “marketing hints, menus and cooking recipes,” along with a similar series devoted to fashion.<sup>109</sup> The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that both shows were successful, with fans congregating at the store for “personal conferences” with the fashion expert.<sup>110</sup> The power of radio, according to many proponents, was that it made geography no longer relevant, though in the case of the

Emporium, broadcasting was used to promote physical presence, not erase its significance. The store did not want fans to simply listen from the comfort of their parlors; it wanted to induce them to visit in person. In focusing these programs towards women, the Emporium may have been copying Bamberger's, though the station more likely was doing what seemed only logical for a department store.

The geographic dispersion of the first wave of department store stations corresponded to the spread of radio in general, as the penetration rate in the South lagged behind the rest of the country throughout the 1920s.<sup>111</sup> The District of Columbia, Missouri, and Texas were home to two stations each, and even Wisconsin and Arizona got into the act, though the Deep South was noticeably absent of any examples. Store stations eventually appeared in New Orleans, Birmingham, Atlanta, and possibly other southern cities, though the phenomenon remained more common in the northeastern and western states.<sup>112</sup>

For most of the stores, the decision to operate a broadcasting station was explicitly connected with their effort to merchandise a new type of consumer product. With some stores, though, establishing a radio department did not necessarily coincide with the opening of a station. Lit Brothers, for example, created a radio department months before its station began, while alternatively, Wanamaker's did not sell receivers until after it had been broadcasting for several months. An ad from December 1922 explained that "in the maze and confusion that attended the extraordinary radio fever," Wanamaker's remained conservative until it could offer something "genuinely good at a reasonable price."<sup>113</sup> The store was "particularly interested in placing these sets in the homes of people who want to 'listen in' to the Wanamaker great organ" from distant

locations.<sup>114</sup> In San Francisco, Hale Brothers took the unusual step of waiting more than three years after the establishment of its own station before selling receivers.<sup>115</sup>

The Wanamaker station in Philadelphia was a particularly strong proponent of the high-brow department store approach to radio programming as the station consistently emphasized its organ concerts. This was an enormously complex instrument, with thousands of moving parts, whose range of tones was beyond the capability of the standard transmitting equipment of the time.<sup>116</sup> As a solution, the store experimented with a new type of microphone to accurately reproduce organ sounds.<sup>117</sup> Of this feat, Archer wrote that Wanamaker's achieved "what radio engineers had declared impossible — broadcasting organ music in a highly satisfactory manner."<sup>118</sup> Ed Davies, in the 1964 interview, similarly emphasized WOO's use of a condenser microphone, an innovation which would later become the industry standard.<sup>119</sup> In San Francisco, the Hale Brothers station KPO also aired organ music on a regular basis, and according to one account, similarly relied on a "special microphone ... to reproduce the music."<sup>120</sup>

Other stores offered more diversity than Wanamaker's with their stations, and the Hecht Company in Washington, D.C. even made a direct comparison between merchandise and radio programming. According to the *Radio News*, the manager of the radio department also served as the station manager for WEAS and he promised not to focus too heavily on music.<sup>121</sup> Just as the store offered a diversity of goods, WEAS would offer a variety of programs to "elevate and instruct."<sup>122</sup>

Shows targeted to women, especially informative lectures on fashion, cooking, and other domestic chores that aired in the morning hours, were relatively common on store stations, and the genre grew in prominence over the next several years. Bedtime

stories became another department store staple, and most all of the stations developed such programming. WIP, for example, introduced a bedtime show soon after it went on the air and in less than a month, the host had been christened “Uncle WIP.”<sup>123</sup> In July of 1922, the Hecht Company in D.C. tried a rather unorthodox approach to programming and aired a “mind reading” program over WEAS. Listeners were invited to send questions to a mental telepathist before the show, and these same listeners could then “have their minds read by radio.”<sup>124</sup> Bamberger’s also invited its listeners to directly participate in programming with an original short story contest held in the fall of that year.<sup>125</sup>

Along with the typical fare of music, informative talks, and bedtime stories, store stations often provided news, particularly when they were co-owned by a newspaper. Along with the example of WCAE in Pittsburgh, the *Chicago Daily News* teamed with the Fair store for the creation of WMAQ.<sup>126</sup> In later years, when many stores decide to sell their radio stations, newspapers were frequent buyers. The 1922 manual *How to Retail Radio*, for example, described one unnamed store’s technique for educating clerks in the radio department. Clerks constructed the station as a means of learning the technical specifics of radio, then “the broadcasting station was turned over to the use of one the daily papers.”<sup>127</sup>

In instances where a paper did not have a direct financial stake in the station, stores established cooperative arrangements with local publications. Gimbel’s WIP presented news “courtesy of the *Public Ledger*,” for example, which it publicly acknowledged in advertisements.<sup>128</sup> Stations also provided the latest information on crops, the weather, and the markets, and such programming was particularly relevant in

rural, agricultural communities. The Department of Agriculture asked a few of the stations, including the Gimbel's stations in Philadelphia and Milwaukee to broadcast this information.<sup>129</sup>

The aggressive, innovative approach to advertising of department stores was so pronounced that even those retailers without their own dedicated stations still found ways spread their names over the airwaves. Horne's in Pittsburgh, the same store which had played a pivotal role in the development of KDKA, for example, arranged a regular program over that same station. A program schedule for December 12 included a 7 p.m. "Weekly Fashion Talk for Women" presented by Horne's.<sup>130</sup> Westinghouse was not selling airtime at this point, though still needed to fill its airtime. Through this arrangement, Horne's could promote its store and fashion department without the headache of licensing, constructing, and managing a station.

In the broadest sense, these radio stations were clearly advertising efforts from department stores, though specific product descriptions and discussions of merchandise were rare. The main focus was rather to promote the image, or brand in contemporary vernacular, of the store. This indirect approach to advertising was done simply by announcing the name of the parent company, and often its street address, whenever the station was identified. The evidence to this effect is found in some of the contemporary attacks on the practice of radio advertising. In November 1922, for example, *Radio Broadcast* published a now famous article that harshly condemned advertising over the airwaves.<sup>131</sup> The same article included a photo of the studio for KPO with a caption that suggested that in relation to other advertisers, this particular station was rather innocuous:

There is some excuse for mentioning the call letters and name of a particularly good station which conducts only the better sort of programming, even though it is owned by some commercial company. This is KPO, Hales Brothers Department Store, San Francisco. A station may be made valuable to the operators without grating on the nerves of listeners-in.<sup>132</sup>

But if the stores avoided too much direct attention on specific kinds of merchandise, they were nonetheless interested in extending their virtual sales floors as far as possible. The goal was not, in other words, to reach only those listeners in a store's immediate area. Bamberger's originally claimed that this was their intent with WOR, though as transmitters were improved and wattage was boosted, stores sought to reach as many listeners as the technology would allow. According to Wiesenberger's study, in April 1922 there were two kinds of Western Electric transmitters, 100 and 500 watts, which could broadcast at a range of 50 – 100 miles.<sup>133</sup> This range, however, was not absolute and was influenced by atmospheric conditions, interference from other stations, and the quality of the listener's receiver among other variables. It was not uncommon for stations to claim range beyond 100 miles; Strawbridge & Clothier advertised that its signal reached as far as North Carolina and Massachusetts.<sup>134</sup>

In October 1922, the government began to categorize stations, a policy that benefited a few of the store stations. Applicants which won the "class B" designation could increase power to 1,000 watts and broadcast at 400 meters, a relatively less-congested space on the spectrum than the original 360 meter wavelength. In Philadelphia, Strawbridge & Clothier, Gimbel's, and Wanamaker's all won this classification, as did Bamberger's in Newark.<sup>135</sup> Reports filed by the government inspectors who performed the mandatory inspections of these stations detailed some of their inner-workings. At WIP and WFI, for example, inspectors took the time to explain systems of multi-colored

lights, bells, and telephones that coordinated the activities of engineers, announcers, and performers.<sup>136</sup> These systems echoed the earlier use of colored lights in department stores for various communication purposes.

As part of their preferred class B status, all the programming was to come from live performers, as opposed to phonograph records, player pianos, or other mechanical means. Recordings or “canned music” were deemed to be a second-rate use of the medium. An additional technical factor was that the 78 rpm discs of the day, which played for only a few minutes on each side, did not sound particularly good when broadcast. When department stores first took to the airwaves, evidence suggests that they did rely on recordings at least occasionally, though this practice was soon abandoned by the major stations.<sup>137</sup> By the time Gimbel’s, Strawbridge & Clothier, and Wanamaker’s received class B status at the end of 1922, they all eschewed recordings.<sup>138</sup>

One department store, however, displayed a particular affinity for the use of recordings. WOR, whose inaugural broadcast was a phonograph record, joined the class B category in 1922. The station, however, debated the particular clause of the license that forbade recordings. In a letter to Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, a representative for Bamberger’s suggested that in certain situations, such as when artists failed to appear, a phonograph was an ideal method for filling otherwise silent airtime.<sup>139</sup> Hoover disagreed, believing that listeners would not object to a few moments of silence. According to Sterling and Kittross, in 1929 WOR became one of the first stations to employ “electrical transcriptions: 33 1/3-rpm discs, which were as large as 16 inches in diameter and played for 15 minutes a side.”<sup>140</sup> A few years later, WOR engineer Jack

Poppelle defended the use of transcriptions in the trade journal *Broadcasting* and argued that improved recording technology now surpassed its “past mediocrity.”<sup>141</sup>

Following the power amplification of WIP at the end of 1922, Gimbel’s announced that the signal had been successfully received by a government operator in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. As part of a congratulatory note, the operator informed that he had heard bedtime stories read by Uncle WIP, though the listener regretted “that he doesn’t talk Japanese as we have a large assemblage here.”<sup>142</sup> WOR, meanwhile, beamed its signal all the way to London where it was heard by shoppers in Selfridge’s department store.<sup>143</sup>

This examination of some overlooked stations from the broadcasting boom indicates that, in contrast to some accounts of radio’s development, commercial interests did not come late to the game, co-opting and subverting a fully realized media technology, but were actively involved in the very construction of the medium. Some stores, including those of Hamburger’s in Los Angeles, the Emporium in San Francisco, and the Fair in Chicago, ceased broadcasting after the initial burst of activity, though others persisted for years.<sup>144</sup> Advertising over the airwaves, practiced by these stations from their very inception, gradually solidified to become the medium’s principle use by the end of the decade. Indirect advertising remained in effect, though this restrained approach gradually lost ground to more direct methods. Department stores were among the first advertisers to employ overt sales pitches in the later half of the decade, particularly through the development of “shopping shows.” Later developments in radio advertising and programming, as typified by the department store stations, are outlined more fully in chapter five.



## Conclusion

Broadcasting, as a cultural, social, and technological practice, was not an accident, as some have characterized this development. According to this thesis, which favors contingency over determination in explaining technological developments, large corporations were blind to the inherent possibilities of wireless, and it took the community of noble amateurs to invent this form of media. Such a notion is romantic and attractive for it emphasizes the heroism of the “little man” in contrast to the faceless bureaucracy of corporations. It is also a relatively easy idea to comprehend in that it focuses on a few isolated instances, rather than on the longer, more complicated and multifaceted process by which broadcasting evolved from a concept into a mainstream application of a technology.

A full account of the rise of broadcasting must include all of the relevant institutions that affected its development. Amateur enthusiasts were the first to demonstrate the potential of broadcasting, though their particular use of wireless technology was developed, diffused, and incorporated into society under the influence of commercial and corporate interests. Crucial technological advances were made possible by military experimentation and patent agreements. Newspapers promoted the technology with the pages they increasingly devoted to the new medium. Commercial interests, as illustrated by department stores and other merchants, were integrally involved in the medium’s development through their merchandising efforts and the stations they established. In his own study of early radio, Aitken made a similar observation: “Broadcasting itself was an unplanned social innovation, but the corporate context in which it appeared was the result of a great deal of planning.”<sup>145</sup> To paraphrase *Radio*

*News'* description of Hamburger's station, the history of American broadcasting is not a tale of commerce corrupting a scientific breakthrough but rather a tale of commerce and science joined hand in hand.

Various ideals were put forth in the 1920s regarding the best methods for utilizing the new medium, ideals which themselves were derived from earlier social practices and cultural institutions. Broadcasting could be used, for example, like a town hall to air public opinions, like a classroom to spread knowledge, like a newspaper to distribute important information, and even like a sales floor to promote new consumer goods. The explicit retail connection of the store stations was thus not an artificial, or substandard, use of broadcasting, but one of its constitutive factors.

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<sup>1</sup> The statistic about 600 stations from Christopher H. Sterling and John Michael Kittross, *Stay Tuned: A History of American Broadcasting*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Mahway, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 69; The statistic about the number of department store stations from a study by AT & T. The results were published as "Who Will Ultimately Do the Broadcasting?," *Radio Broadcast*, April 1923, 522-526. This study categorized all the stations active at the end of 1922; A table with remarkably similar numbers appears in William Peck Banning, *Commercial Broadcasting Pioneer: The WEA Experiment, 1922-26* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946) 132-133. According to Banning's table, his numbers refer to stations active as of February 1, 1923. Given that Banning was a vice-president of AT&T, his table was almost certainly based on the material used to compile the one that first appeared in *Radio Broadcast*. Sterling and Kittross used Banning's numbers for their own table in *Stay Tuned*, 70.

<sup>2</sup> "Who Will Ultimately Do the Broadcasting?," *Radio Broadcast*..

<sup>3</sup> Sterling and Kittross denote the period from 1922-25 as the boom period, *Stay Tuned*, 69.

<sup>4</sup> For one discussion of the "first" station debate and other claimants to the title, see Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 63-65.

<sup>5</sup> Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 65; For an overview of Conrad's career, see also Erik Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 66-69.

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<sup>6</sup> H.P. Davis, "The Early History of Broadcasting in the United States," in *The Radio Industry: The Story of Its Development* (A.W. Shaw & Company: Chicago and New York), 191-192.

<sup>7</sup> "Amateur Radio Stations" section of *QST*, September 1920, 32-34.

<sup>8</sup> Advertisement for the Joseph Horne department store in *Pittsburgh Sun*, 29 September 1920, 7. The text of this ad has been reprinted a number of times, including in Barnouw, *Tower of Babel*, 68.

<sup>9</sup> Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 65.

<sup>10</sup> Barnouw, *Tower in Babel*, 68; In his own recollection of the event, H.P. Davis said that the advertisement mentioned the programs being broadcast by Conrad, see H.P. Davis, "The Early History of Broadcasting in the United States," 194.

<sup>11</sup> Text from advertisement for the Joseph Horne department store in *Pittsburgh Sun*, 27 September 1920, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 66.

<sup>13</sup> Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 68.

<sup>14</sup> This characterization of pre-1922 stations based on lists of stations as published in government's *Radio Service Bulletins*.

<sup>15</sup> Eaton's advertisement in the *Globe* reprinted as part of the article by Victor Rawlings, "Radio in Department Stores," *Radio News*, December 1921, 485.

<sup>16</sup> Frank M. Mayfield, *The Department Store Story* (New York, Fairchild Publications 1949), 43.

<sup>17</sup> Victor Rawlings, "Radio in Department Stores," *Radio News*, December 1921, 485; The *Radio Service Bulletin* from October 1921 lists the "special land station" license for 6XAK, controlled by the Leo J. Meyberg Company, the owners of the store.

<sup>18</sup> Rawlings, "Radio in Department Stores," 485.

<sup>19</sup> Rawlings, "Radio in Department Stores," 485.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas W. Volek, "Examining Radio Receiver Technology through Magazine Advertisements in the 1920s and 1930s," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1990). Chapter 5 includes a detailed overview of the technical issues involved with early receivers.

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<sup>21</sup> Rawlings, "Radio in Department Stores," 485.

<sup>22</sup> "Distinctive Character of Hamburger's Services Makes Unusual Trade Appeal," *Dry Goods Economist (DGE)*, 1 July 1922, 13.

<sup>23</sup> The commercial license for KYJ is listed in the *Radio Service Bulletin* in the January 1922 edition.

<sup>24</sup> Alfred N. Goldsmith and Austin C. Lescarbours, *This Thing Called Broadcasting: A Simple Tale of an Idea, an Experiment, a Mighty Industry, a Daily Habit, and a Basic Influence in our Modern Civilization*, (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1930), 73.

<sup>25</sup> First license in WOR License Files, 1922-1926.

<sup>26</sup> The Reminiscences of Jack Poppele 1982, in the Oral History Collection of Columbia University, 7-8.

<sup>27</sup> The Reminiscences of Jack Poppele, 4-5.

<sup>28</sup> The claim about the debut recording from Marianne Macy, *WOR Radio: The First Sixty Years* (New York: Nightingale Gordon, 1982.) This work has no page numbers.

<sup>29</sup> Information on the original transmitter from the Reminiscences of Jack Poppele, 13; The first license issued by the Department of Commerce confirms that a "DeForest VT Telephone" was used for broadcasting, see WOR License Files, 1922-1926.

<sup>30</sup> The Reminiscences of Jack Poppele, 15-16.

<sup>31</sup> "Bamberger's Takes Lead in Radio," *DGE*, 4 March 1922, 9.

<sup>32</sup> On first woman claim, see "His Mistress' Voice," *Radio News*, December 1922, 1060

<sup>33</sup> "Bamberger's Takes Lead in Radio," *DGE*.

<sup>34</sup> License dated April 29, 1922 in WOR License Files, 1922-1926.

<sup>35</sup> The Reminiscences of Jack Poppele, 14-15.

<sup>36</sup> On the WOR time-sharing arrangement, Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel*, 92.

<sup>37</sup> Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 93; For an overview of the Radio Act of 1912, see also Marvin Bensman, *The Beginning of Broadcast Regulation in the Twentieth Century* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2000), 8-11.

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<sup>38</sup> Information on average income from *Statistical Abstracts of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce), specifically the ones published in 1923, 705, and from 1934, 173; Information on consumer prices from *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1975), 211.

<sup>39</sup> For an analysis of the era that stresses the “have-nots,” see Frank Stricker, “Affluence for Whom? — Another Look at the Prosperity and the Working Classes in the 1920s,” *Labor History* 24, no. 1 (1983): 5-33.

<sup>40</sup> For an overview of events leading to the conference, see Bensman, *The Beginning of Broadcast Regulation in the Twentieth Century*, 44-48.

<sup>41</sup> Hoover’s dismissal of “advertising chatter” at the conference has been widely cited by historians, see originally Department of Commerce, “Minutes of Open Meetings of Department of Commerce Conference on Radio Telephony” (Washington, D.C., February 27-28, 1922), 2-3.

<sup>42</sup> “Minutes of Open Meetings of Department of Commerce Conference on Radio Telephony,” statements from L.R. Krumm and Hoover’s comments, 33-36.

<sup>43</sup> “Minutes of Open Meetings of Department of Commerce Conference on Radio Telephony,” 96-99.

<sup>44</sup> “Minutes of Open Meetings of Department of Commerce Conference on Radio Telephony,” 96.

<sup>45</sup> “Minutes of Open Meetings of Department of Commerce Conference on Radio Telephony,” quote about “cooperation anywhere” from Max Loewenthal, 101.

<sup>46</sup> “First Radiophone Conference Held in the Field,” United States Custom House, New York, New York, May 16, 1922. Pamphlet #3033, Library of American Broadcasting.

<sup>47</sup> “First Radiophone Conference Held in the Field,” 7.

<sup>48</sup> “First Radiophone Conference Held in the Field.”

<sup>49</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire*, 30.

<sup>50</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire*, 265.

<sup>51</sup> Steve Wurtzler, “AT&T Invents Public Access Broadcasting,” in *Communities of the Air: Radio Century, Radio Culture*, ed. Susan Merrill Squier (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), 50.

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<sup>52</sup> Robert W. McChesney, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for the Control of U.S. Broadcasting, 1928-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 6.

<sup>53</sup> "Sales Conference on Radio Sets," *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 April 1922, 3.

<sup>54</sup> Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 89; See also George H. Douglas, *The Early Days of Radio Broadcasting* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1987), chap. 5 "A Million Sets Are Sold," 68-80.

<sup>55</sup> "Plan Better Radio Goods," *New York Times*, 19 April 1922, 22.

<sup>56</sup> Arthur Wiesenberger, "Radio Merchandising in Department Stores: A Survey Covering the Underlying Principles of Radio – Its Merchandising and Advertising Possibilities in Department Stores" (New York: Bureau of Research and Information of the National Retail Dry Goods Association, 1922.)

<sup>57</sup> All information and quotes in this paragraph from Wiesenberger, "Radio Merchandising in Department Stores," 10-11.

<sup>58</sup> Advice on upper-floor entertainment from *DGE*, 24 October 1903, 52 as cited in Linda L. Tyler, "Commerce and Poetry Hand in Hand: Music in American Department Stores, 1880-1930," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 45. no.1 (1992): 95-96.

<sup>59</sup> For a study of newspaper coverage of early radio, see Randall Patnode, "Heralding Radio: The Social Construction of Broadcasting by Newspaper Specialty Sections, 1922-1926" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1999.)

<sup>60</sup> Value of starting a station on Wiesenberger, "Radio Merchandising in Department Stores," 15; Warnings about inexpensive transmitters and on-going expenses on 18-19.

<sup>61</sup> Wiesenberger, "Radio Merchandising in Department Stores," 20.

<sup>62</sup> Wiesenberger, "Radio Merchandising in Department Stores," 20.

<sup>63</sup> Wiesenberger, "Radio Merchandising in Department Stores," 20.

<sup>64</sup> Explanation of this promotion, with the duck-grid image in Wiesenberger, "Radio Merchandising in Department Stores," 15.

<sup>65</sup> "Radio Telephone Sales Large," *Wall Street Journal*, 18 April 1922, 17. This article only supplies the cities and the number of the stations. The specific stores and call letters are based on current research.

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<sup>66</sup> At the First Radio Conference, General George Squier asked Harold Young about the two Wanamaker wireless stations, indicating that they were still in operation in February 1922. See “Minutes of Open Meetings of Department of Commerce Conference on Radio Telephony,” 99; The two stations were also listed in *Commercial and Government Radio Stations of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Commerce, Bureau of Navigation) in 1923, 1924, and 1925.

<sup>67</sup> Overlooked stations include KSL, run by the Emporium in San Francisco, KPO from the Hales Brothers in San Francisco, and WAAK by Gimbel’s in Milwaukee.

<sup>68</sup> Tyler, “Commerce and Poetry Hand in Hand,” 75-120.

<sup>69</sup> Barnouw, *Tower in Babel*, 126.

<sup>70</sup> For description of the openings of WIP and WFI, see Barnouw, *Tower in Babel*, 100; See also “Mayor Employs Radio to Talk Philadelphia” and “Governor Sproul Gives Wireless Phone Talk,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 March 1922, B15.

<sup>71</sup> Quotes from Lit Brothers’ advertisement from *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 18 March 1922, 5.

<sup>72</sup> On the subway details, Alfred Lief, *Family Business: A Century in the Life and Times of Strawbridge & Clothier* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968), 120.

<sup>73</sup> “Distinguished Speakers Open Strawbridge & Clothier Broadcasting Station,” *Store Chat*, April 1922, no. 4, 655-657. A copy of this newsletter, published by the department store for its employees, is held by the Free Library of Philadelphia.

<sup>74</sup> Lief, *Family Business*, 157; In the accounts of the opening day ceremonies that appeared in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (see note 2), only WIP is described as having a glass-enclosed studio. However, according to an advertisement from November of that year, WFI eventually installed a studio with glass windows adjacent to the third floor’s radio department. It is entirely possible that Strawbridge & Clothier had been using such a studio from the opening of the station, though did not promote the fact until November; See Strawbridge & Clothier advertisement in *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 November 1922, 7.

<sup>75</sup> “Governor Sproul Gives Wireless Phone Talk,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 March 1922, B15.

<sup>76</sup> “Mayor Employs Radio to Talk Philadelphia,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 March 1922, B15.

<sup>77</sup> “Mayor Employs Radio to Talk Philadelphia,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

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<sup>78</sup> Barnouw, *Tower in Babel*, 100.

<sup>79</sup> Advertisement for Gimbels, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 18 March 1922, 9. This same ad is described by Barnouw, *Tower in Babel*, 100.

<sup>80</sup> Advertisement for Strawbridge & Clothier, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 March 1922, 7.

<sup>81</sup> Davies/Tisdale Interview.

<sup>82</sup> Davies/Tisdale Interview. All information in this paragraph from this source.

<sup>83</sup> Davies/Tisdale Interview.

<sup>84</sup> William Leach, "Strategies of Display and the Production of Desire" in *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and the Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 127-128.

<sup>85</sup> "Talk Philadelphia at 'Selling' Rally," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 17 March 1922, 12.

<sup>86</sup> "Talk Philadelphia at 'Selling' Rally," *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

<sup>87</sup> "Mayor Employs Radio to Talk Philadelphia" and "Governor Sproul Gives Wireless Phone Talk," *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

<sup>88</sup> Strawbridge & Clothier advertisement in *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 March 1922, 7.

<sup>89</sup> "Distinguished Speakers Open Strawbridge & Clothier Broadcasting Station," *Store Chat*.

<sup>90</sup> See entry on WOO in Appendix I. For the difficulty in establishing precise opening dates for stations from this era, see also the entries on KPO and KSL in Appendix I.

<sup>91</sup> Wanamaker's advertisement in *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 April 1922, 11.

<sup>92</sup> Wanamaker's advertisement in *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 April 1922, 11.

<sup>93</sup> "Broadcasting the World's Greatest Organ: Radio Station WOO," promotional pamphlet published by Wanamaker's Philadelphia, 1922, 3. A copy of this pamphlet is held by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in the Wanamaker's Papers collection, Box 277.

<sup>94</sup> Herbert Adam Gibbons, *John Wanamaker* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1926), 464.

<sup>95</sup> Station WDAR first appears in the *Radio Service Bulletin* in the June 1922 edition.



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<sup>96</sup> Information on the changing of the call letters originally from the Davies/Tisdale Interview. Program listings in numerous sources confirm the change.

<sup>97</sup> WAAK first appears in the *Radio Service Bulletin* in the May 1922 edition.

<sup>98</sup> These details about WAAK from Terry Baun, "WAAK — Milwaukee's First Radio Station," *Once a Century*, annual publication of the Milwaukee Press Club, vol. 89, 1985. Accessed at <<http://www.broadcast.net/~sbe28/waak.html>> (5 March 2007.)

<sup>99</sup> Baun, "WAAK — Milwaukee's First Radio Station."

<sup>100</sup> WNAC received its first license on September 13, 1922, see WNAC License Files, 1922-1926. WEAN was first licensed on June 5, 1922, see WEAN License Files, 1922-1926. References to the two Shepard stations linking together appear in numerous stories in *Radio Digest Illustrated*, including "Relay Boston Broadcasts to Station in Providence," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 24 November 1923, 6.

<sup>101</sup> History of WJAR from Ralph J. Begleiter, "Biography of a License: The Fifty-Year History of a Commercial Broadcast Station" (Master's Thesis, Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, 1972). The station's affiliate relationship with WEAJ is discussed on 23-24.

<sup>102</sup> Begleiter, "Biography of a License," 1-16.

<sup>103</sup> Begleiter, "Biography of a License," 11.

<sup>104</sup> WCAE first appears in the *Radio Service Bulletin* in the June 1922 edition. The sabotage of December of that year dealt with a new transmitter that had been recently installed. The WCAE Correspondence Files contain numerous references to this incident, along with a copy of the newspaper "reward" advertisements.

<sup>105</sup> Letter dated December 15, 1922, along with five notarized eye-witness accounts, in WCAE Correspondence Files.

<sup>106</sup> "Who Will Ultimately Do the Broadcasting?," *Radio Broadcast*.

<sup>107</sup> Station KPO first appears in the *Radio Service Bulletin* in the May 1922 edition; Station KSL first appears in *Radio Service Bulletin* in the April 1922 edition.

<sup>108</sup> "New Project Designed to Aid Novices," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12 May 1922, 4.

<sup>109</sup> Information on the shows for women in "Emporium Radio Will Broadcast Hints on Marketing, Menus, Cooking Recipes," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 April 1922, 7, and also "Radio Vogue Finds Favor With Women," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 27 April 1922, 4.

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- <sup>110</sup> “Radio Vogue Finds Favor With Women,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.
- <sup>111</sup> On the geographic diffusion of radio, see Douglas B. Craig, *Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in United States, 1920-40* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 13.
- <sup>112</sup> See entries on WDBE, WSMB, and WSY in Appendix I.
- <sup>113</sup> Wanamaker’s advertisement in *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 December 1922, 13.
- <sup>114</sup> Wanamaker’s advertisement in *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 December 1922, 13.
- <sup>115</sup> Hales Brothers advertisement in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9 August 1925, R6.
- <sup>116</sup> “Broadcasting the World’s Greatest Organ: Radio Station WOO,” 4-5.
- <sup>117</sup> Ray Biswanger, *Music in the Marketplace: The Story of Philadelphia’s Historic Wanamaker Organ, from John Wanamaker to Lord & Taylor* (Bryn Mawr, Penn.: Friends of the Wanamaker Organ, Inc., 1999), 126.
- <sup>118</sup> Gleason L. Archer, *History of Radio to 1926* (New York: American Historical Society, 1938), 293.
- <sup>119</sup> Davies/Tisdale Interview.
- <sup>120</sup> “News of the Broadcasters,” *Radio*, March 1923, 33.
- <sup>121</sup> S.R. Winters, “Radio Broadcasting and the Department Store,” *Radio News*, September 1922, 536-537.
- <sup>122</sup> Winters, “Radio Broadcasting and the Department Store,” 537.
- <sup>123</sup> This information from an Uncle WIP profile on the website for the Broadcast Pioneers of Philadelphia, and the dates were confirmed with listings in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. The “Uncle WIP” story at <<http://www.geocities.com/broadcastpioneers/unclewip.html>> (5 May 2005).
- <sup>124</sup> “Mind Reading by Radio,” *Washington Post*, 6 July 1922, 9.
- <sup>125</sup> “Stories in the Air” *Radio Dealer*, October 1922, 92.
- <sup>126</sup> See entry on WMAQ in Appendix I.
- <sup>127</sup> Editors of *Electrical Merchandising, How to Retail Radio* (New York: McGraw-Hill

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Book Company, 1922), 118-119.

<sup>128</sup> See Gimbel's advertisements in *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 28 March 1922, 9, and also 30 March 1922, 9.

<sup>129</sup> Request for Gimbel's WIP in WIP Correspondence Files. Request for Gimbel's WAAK in WAAK Correspondence Files.

<sup>130</sup> KDKA program schedule from the Westinghouse publication *Radio Broadcast News*, 9 December 1922, 8. A copy of this publication is held in the Library of American Broadcasting.

<sup>131</sup> Joseph H. Jackson, "Should Radio Be Used for Advertising?," *Radio Broadcast*, November 1922, 72-76.

<sup>132</sup> The photograph of the KPO studio along with this particular caption appears in Jackson, "Should Radio Be Used for Advertising?," 74.

<sup>133</sup> Wiesenberger, "Radio Merchandising in Department Stores," 18.

<sup>134</sup> Strawbridge & Clothier advertisement in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6 April 1922, 7.

<sup>135</sup> For a discussion of the creation of the "class B" category, see Bensman, *The Beginning of Broadcast Regulation in the Twentieth Century*, 74-78.

<sup>136</sup> Report on WIP dated November 9, 1922 in WIP Correspondence Files. Report on WFI dated October 9, 1922 in WFI Correspondence Files.

<sup>137</sup> One week after WFI debuted, for example, the station aired a program listed in an advertisement as "Victrola with Victor Records." See Strawbridge & Clothier advertisement, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 March 1922, 7; In October 1922, the journal *Radio Broadcast* also stated that department stores played records over the airwaves. In an editorial about the congested 360-meter wavelength, the journal defended WJZ: "It would be sheer nonsense to stop the operation of WJZ for one minute so that some dry goods store might send out a scratchy fox-trot phonograph record..." This quote is cited in Archer, *History of Radio to 1926*, 270. This exact same quotation was again used by Archer in his later work, *Big Business and Radio* (New York: American Historical Company, Inc., 1939), 68

<sup>138</sup> Specific references about "no mechanical devices" are in the government inspection reports for the Gimbel's and the Strawbridge station. See WIP and WFI Correspondence Files.

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<sup>139</sup> This exchange is documented in the WOR Correspondence Files. Letter from Edgar S. Bamberger to Herbert Hoover dated September 27, 1922. Hoover's response dated September 30, 1922.

<sup>140</sup> Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 109.

<sup>141</sup> J. R. Poppelle, "Some Practical Facts About Transcriptions," *Broadcasting*, 15 October 1932, 7, 27.

<sup>142</sup> Gimbel's advertisement in *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 8 December 1922, 10.

<sup>143</sup> "Radio Concert Held in Newark Store is Heard at Selfridge's in London," *New York Times*, 2 October 1922, 8.

<sup>144</sup> On the Fair's departure from WMAQ, see Chester F. Caton, "Radio Station WMAQ: A History of Its Independent Years, 1922-1932" ( Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1951), 68.

<sup>145</sup> Hugh G. Aitken, *The Continuous Wave: Technology and American Radio, 1900-1932* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), 13.

## **Chapter Four**

### **The Wireless in the Window:**

#### **Radio Retailing in the 1920s**

As the number of broadcasters proliferated in the 1920s, the number of radios multiplied at an even more astonishing rate. From 60,000 receivers in 1922, a figure corresponding to less than one percent of all American homes, the total number topped 13 million by the end of the decade and the household penetration rate approached 50%.<sup>1</sup> This chapter uncovers some of the cultural and commercial processes involved in the rapid rate of diffusion with an emphasis on the radio retailing techniques used by department stores. As indicated in the previous chapter, the creation of a station was one particular way to promote the sale of receivers. By looking at the broader repertoire of radio retailing techniques, this chapter seeks to contextualize these broadcast operations in relation to other department store practices of the era.

Before listeners could be sold a radio, they had to be educated about the potential uses of this new kind of electrical appliance. To this end, the stores orchestrated classes, lectures, and window displays to promote the concept of listening to radio in the privacy of one's own home (preferably one that was well-decorated and suitably furnished). By helping to create an audience for broadcasting in this fashion, the stores supported the radio industry in general, not just their own dedicated stations. Drawing from their experience in attracting and satisfying customers, department stores served as

“consumption junctions” for the sale of radio receivers. Cowan developed this particular concept and argued that an explanation for a certain technology’s success or failure must go beyond a description of the innovation itself.<sup>2</sup> A more productive approach, according to Cowan, is to focus instead on the consumer and the process in which the new technology is first encountered. Though Cowan’s initial discussion depicted the junction as symbolic, department stores can be seen as literal manifestations of this concept, as these establishments were the physical locations in which many individuals were first exposed to radio.

Scholars who have studied radio retailing in the 1920s have focused almost exclusively on gender and the related issue of receiver design.<sup>3</sup> Early broadcasters believed that the industry would expand beyond the limited realm of male enthusiasts if simplified, decorative receivers were developed for females. Carlat touched briefly on department stores in his study, characterizing them as “palaces of consumption catering to women” in which radio was “not a high-priority item.”<sup>4</sup> Receivers were more commonly sold, according to Carlat, by “electrical supply, radio, music, and hardware stores.”<sup>5</sup> In fact, all of these locations along with department stores marketed the devices and there was a debate within the retail industry over who was best equipped to handle the new line of merchandise. Jome outlined this debate in a 1925 study and concluded that while electrical shops had the necessary technical expertise, “large cities are dotted with department stores which handle radio as one of their lines.”<sup>6</sup> The volume of advice contained in the trade journals from the era, as well as references in other sources, indicates that these establishments were actively involved in radio retailing during the initial broadcasting boom.<sup>7</sup>

In their study of early radio retailing, Brown and Dennison focused on the physical transformation of the bulky, inelegant devices into stylish pieces of living-room furniture.<sup>8</sup> Their study contains valuable technical information, but makes the questionable claim that the change in receiver design was initiated by listeners themselves “at the popular level where the technology was used” rather than being driven by the radio industry.<sup>9</sup> Volek’s 1990 dissertation is the most detailed account of the development of simplified, easy-to-operate receivers and the ways they were advertised in popular magazines.<sup>10</sup> Kline has found that rural areas, particularly in the South, were slower to adopt radio, but that in comparison to other electrical appliances, this technology proved remarkably appealing to farmers.<sup>11</sup>

The emphasis on department stores in this chapter is not meant to suggest that their marketing techniques were the most important factor driving the diffusion of receivers, nor did the stores necessarily dominate the retail sector of the industry. In the absence of specific statistics, anecdotal evidence suggests that dealers of electrical appliances sold the bulk of receivers and related accessories during the 1920.<sup>12</sup> Department stores practices were often imitated by other retailers, however. An in-depth exploration of their retailing techniques illuminates the larger picture as to how this technology was sold to the public during the initial broadcasting boom.

### **Educating the Consumer**

In contrast to other retailers who stocked many parts for amateur enthusiasts, department stores were particularly interested in the casual listener. On their sales floors and in their display windows, stores relied on techniques previously used to market other

kinds of electrical appliances in order to present the technology as something that could be easily incorporated into the home. Retailers had already demonstrated, for example, the effectiveness of in-store demonstrations, uncluttered window displays, and the Christmas season for selling lamps, washing machines, and fans.<sup>13</sup> Department stores applied similar tactics to radio.

During the first half of the decade, the stores focused on educating potential customers and, to borrow a phrase from Marchand, functioned as “apostles of modernity.”<sup>14</sup> To this end, they arranged public demonstrations, exhibitions, classes, lectures, and set-building contests. These activities brought potential customers into the store and doubled as effective promotional stunts, warranting space in the “radio sections” that many newspapers introduced in 1922. The manual *How to Retail Radio* noted that department stores were particularly successful in orchestrating publicity stunts, though any dealer could attempt one:

Wanamaker’s, Bamberger’s and other great department stores in the East, for example, have a knack for getting their names into print. You may not be able to open up your own broadcasting station but you can “pull off” some stunts just the same that will get you talked about.<sup>15</sup>

One stunt from Lord & Taylor’s in New York, a series of instructional lectures in the seventh floor toy department, attracted press coverage in the winter of 1922.<sup>16</sup> Speaking from the “stage where Santa Claus reigns supreme during the holidays,” Jack Binns demonstrated a radio receiver and gave an overview of the industry.<sup>17</sup> Binns’ fame as a wireless operator had been established years before when he sent distress signals during a maritime accident; the success of the ensuing rescue mission facilitated the passage of the Radio Act of 1910.<sup>18</sup> Now, Binns was promoting not wireless telegraphy



but the next stage of the technology, broadcasting. Lord & Taylor's could not have found a more appropriate advocate.

The emphasis on education was particularly pronounced in the 1922 NRDGA study *Radio Merchandising in Department Stores*. The foreword stated that “nine out of ten purchasers of radio goods will know little or nothing about radio,” and for a potential listener, there was much to learn.<sup>19</sup> Anticipating that consumers would have many questions, the study explained specific technical issues such as wavelengths, aerial height, crystal versus tube receivers, and the mechanics of tuning. A detailed questionnaire was provided so that stores could test the knowledge of potential sales clerks.<sup>20</sup>

In order to minimize the technically intimidating nature of radio, department stores and other retailers often offered complimentary installation and repair services. The NRDGA also warned against selling expensive receivers to novices and recommended inexpensive models instead.<sup>21</sup> Only after listeners had acquired the necessary skills for tuning and adjusting the various components should they graduate to more elaborate equipment. A cynical estimation of this technique would be that stores simply wanted to sell two receivers instead of one, though it also indicates how strongly the report emphasized the educational angle.

A first step in educating consumers was to showcase the technology with a public demonstration. A lengthy *Radio News* article in the fall of 1921, months before interest in broadcasting swept over the country, urged would-be retailers to stage exhibitions in various public locations.<sup>22</sup> An editorial note adjoining the article advised amateurs that they should “read between the lines” and join forces with dealers, lest they miss out on “the chance of a lifetime.”<sup>23</sup> Similar advice was later expressed in the journal even more

directly; amateurs were instructed to contact radio manufacturers and work with them to stage demonstrations inside local theatres.<sup>24</sup> While many amateurs decried the commercialization of broadcasting, at least a few members of the community saw the same development as a lucrative opportunity.

For stores who wanted to stage public demonstrations of their own, the scarcity and unpredictability of early radio programming presented something of a problem. The Maison Blanche department store in New Orleans took matter into its own hands and simply drove a float equipped with loudspeakers through the city, broadcasting the sounds of WSMB, a station that it co-owned.<sup>25</sup> As indicated in the previous chapter, many stores installed their own transmitters because this was the most effective (though expensive) method for ensuring that consumers would find something to listen to on their new receivers. The link between retailing and radio programming was particularly vivid at WJAR, run by the Outlet Store in Providence.<sup>26</sup> If a salesman wanted to demonstrate a receiver at a time when the station was not on the air, he would notify the phonograph department via a special light. The second party would then start a phonograph next to a remote microphone and WJAR would come to life momentarily, presumably just long enough to make the sale.

Demonstrating a receiver during the day was particularly problematic since many stations limited their programming to the evening hours. In January 1924, the Kaufmann & Baer store in Pittsburgh wrote to the Department of Commerce that “the lack of broadcasting during the day time in this city brings about the necessity of having a [transmitter].”<sup>27</sup> The same store was already operating WCAE, in conjunction with a local paper, though it was now requesting a license for a low-power station that would be

even more explicitly linked to its retail efforts. Before the new license was officially granted, the store's radio department launched the short-lived WBBK. Just like WJAR in the Outlet Store, this particular station would transmit for a few moments when a potential customer wanted a demonstration. Following the request for another broadcasting license, a government inspector visited the store and immediately shut down WBBK. The equipment was of such poor quality that it could not transmit on any fixed frequency; the resulting signal could cause interference for anyone listening to a radio within a sixteen miles. The inspector also noted that the sales clerks did not possess the necessary government licenses to engage in broadcasting.<sup>28</sup> Barnouw noted that an electrical shop in North Carolina also started a station in 1923 so that some radio programming would be available during the day.<sup>29</sup>

Demonstrations of radio could do more than simply boost sales in the relevant department. Curious customers, en route to a radio exhibition or studio on an upper floor, were exposed to several floors of additional merchandise. The proprietor of a Maryland store wrote in the *Dry Goods Economist (DGE)* that a broadcast demonstration in his establishment had a minimal impact on receiver sales, but it did attract new patrons and increase traffic flow to other areas.<sup>30</sup> Stores were known for their adoption of cutting-edge technologies, including electric lighting, elevators, and telephones, and sponsoring radio demonstrations was another way to support a merchant's reputation as being on the cutting-edge of technological innovations.

Other advice in the *DGE* regarding the value of demonstrations recognized the influence of early adopters, predating the diffusion of innovation theory by a few decades.<sup>31</sup> Arthur Sinsheimer, an instructor at Columbia University's School of Business

who had a regular column on advertising for the trade journal, wrote that there were “many ladies’ aid societies and women’s clubs that would welcome your offer to give them an hour’s radio entertainment during their social meetings.”<sup>32</sup> *How to Retail Radio* suggested another technique previously used with vacuum cleaners — loan the appliances to wealthy individuals in the immediate area.<sup>33</sup> The hope was that other members of the public would be so impressed that they would become radio owners themselves.

Given the initial scarcity of ready-made receivers, the NRDGA recommended classes in “radio construction” as “these have proved so successful in the past in dressmaking, lampshade and other departments.”<sup>34</sup> Some stores offered classes, while others sponsored construction contests for local amateurs. These contests typically coincided with the opening of a store’s radio station, such as one conducted by Bamberger’s shortly after WOR started. Awards were given in numerous categories, including “the smallest working set,” “the most efficient crystal detector set,” “the most efficient vacuum tube set,” and “the best set made by a Boy Scout.”<sup>35</sup> The NRDGA praised the promotion and encouraged others to imitate this effort:

The sets were on exhibition in the store auditorium and attracted thousands of visitors besides bringing a great deal of publicity to the store through the local papers. Bamberger’s did a remarkable business of supplying parts used in construction of the equipment entered in the contest and also created for themselves the position of “radio headquarters” in Newark.<sup>36</sup>

Gimbel’s in Philadelphia and the Emporium in San Francisco sponsored similar promotions when their own stations opened.<sup>37</sup> In St. Louis, the Famous & Barr Company announced a construction contest a mere three days after the nearby store of Stix, Baer & Fuller opened station WCK.<sup>38</sup> The timing of the contest was surely no coincidence. In

this instance, one retailer sought to exploit the local interest in radio that was being encouraged by the promotional stunt of a rival.

The emphasis on educating consumers was not without qualification, though, and too much information was perceived to be detrimental to the sales effort. Sinsheimer, for example, advised salesmen to stress the valuable (and free) entertainment that could be had from a radio, rather than focus on internal components and technical details.<sup>39</sup>

Another article in the *DGE* advised against hiring radio experts as salesmen. They were “enthusiastic about radio from a theoretical standpoint, but at a loss when it came to merchandising.”<sup>40</sup> As an alternative, the article suggested that an amateur be allowed to conduct experiments within the store as a way to generate additional publicity.

*How to Retail Radio* also disparaged technical experts. The book separated potential customers into two groups, “nuts” and “fans.” Nuts wanted to talk about antenna height and wavelengths, and perhaps purchase a few parts, whereas fans wanted to purchase complete receivers. In order to prevent nuts from distracting clerks, the book recommended creating a clubroom with reference materials and accessories. The nuts would then share information with one another and leave the salesmen to focus on the more profitable fans.<sup>41</sup>

But if many radio retailers recognized the value of public demonstrations and the confusing aspects of the technology, there was one particular technique in which department stores excelled — the art of the window display. Building from their experience and expertise in visual display, the stores choreographed domestic tableaux for their show windows with aesthetically pleasing receivers in well-furnished, middle class living rooms. Whereas the technology had previously been associated with attics,

backrooms and garage workshops, in this new domestic setting, the entire family could enjoy broadcasting. A female mannequin, representing the woman of the house, often sat on a couch while a child or the husband posed closer to the device itself.<sup>42</sup> These window arrangements contrasted with those of other merchants who often filled crowded displays with various components and emphasized the technical aspects of radio.

As an indication of the importance of window displays, an entire chapter of *How to Retail Radio* celebrated the technique, using photographs of Macy's and Lord & Taylor's as instructive examples.<sup>43</sup> In 1925, the manager for the radio department of the Fair Store in Chicago was quoted extensively in *Radio Dealer*.<sup>44</sup> The store used "semi-technical language" in newspaper advertisements for the "benefit of those familiar with radio" while window displays emphasized instead the simple "pleasures of 'listening in.'"<sup>45</sup> Displays of parts and their corresponding prices might work for dedicated fans, according to the manager, though domestic-themed window displays were more effective for bringing in new clientele, particularly women. It should also be noted that, along with the receivers themselves, department stores also sold the clothes on the mannequins, the furniture, the rugs, and everything else in the displays. *Radio Dealer* praised department store windows again in 1926 as effective displays to be emulated.<sup>46</sup> Since most radio dealers did not also sell home furnishings, the article suggested that merchants borrow props from another store. The dealer might receive, for example, a set of living room furniture and in turn place a card in the window acknowledging the assistance of the other merchant.

## The Significance of Santa

Another way that department stores promoted radio was through their appropriation of holiday rituals. No holiday was off-limits, from Mother's Day to Easter to Thanksgiving, though Christmas was unquestionably the high holy day for radio retailing. The stores conducted most of their promotions in the preceding weeks.<sup>47</sup> The transformation of this once austere religious event into a festival of consumption had been originally spearheaded by department stores at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>48</sup> In the 1920s, this holiday became the pinnacle for radio sales in part because it was the one time of the year when purchasing an expensive (and novel) gift was socially sanctioned. In 1922, both the *DGE* and *Radio Dealer* promoted the slogan "A Radio Christmas," echoing earlier holiday campaigns to sell electrical appliances.<sup>49</sup>

Over the years, the *DGE* offered numerous ideas to maximize Christmas sales, and seasonal window displays, complete with trees, wreaths and yule logs, became *de rigueur* for department stores. *Radio Dealer* also stressed the importance of holiday campaigns and noted that "if at any a season a pretentious window display is worth while it is at Christmas."<sup>50</sup> Sinsheimer was a vocal supporter of such promotions and he urged stores to heavily advertise their radio merchandise during the holiday season.<sup>51</sup> On an annual basis, Sinsheimer also offered "gift suggestions" regarding the type of radio or accessory most appropriate for each family member.<sup>52</sup> One of his more novel ideas was giving radio kits as gifts. The gift-giver would include a certificate allowing the recipient to come to the store for free assembly instructions where he might be induced to make additional purchases.<sup>53</sup>

Given their emphasis on Christmas, it is not surprising that department stores found ways to enlist St. Nick into their radio activities. Sinsheimer suggested, for example, that stores arrange to have their Santa Claus appear on a local radio station. The broadcaster would be grateful for the programming, provided “you don’t insist on putting your store name in too often,” while the performer could address young listeners “and of course tell them about his headquarters at your store.”<sup>54</sup> The age-old tradition of writing wish-list letters was also updated via the new technology; a store in Kansas featured a seasonal display with the jolly gift-giver wearing headphones as if he were taking “orders over the wireless and pounding them out on his typewriter.”<sup>55</sup> In 1927, *Radio Dealer* described how merchants in Milwaukee sought to boost radio sales by hiring university students to dress as Santa and visit area retailers. The use of students, rather than older men, was based on the “advice of the largest department store in town which has had a great deal of experience in the matter.”<sup>56</sup>

In an effort to incorporate other holiday traditions into the sales effort, Sinsheimer advised that Mother’s Day was a good opportunity in May, typically a slow month for sales. Since this was a common time for gift-giving, he asked “what could be sweeter or more practical for [Mother] than a radio set that gives so much pleasure and comfort, especially to brighten her declining years.”<sup>57</sup> *Radio Dealer* devoted an entire article to Easter-themed displays, noting that “no radio display seems to be complete without its monster egg showcard or cut-outs, in addition to its fluffy chicks, ducklings and fuzzy rabbits.”<sup>58</sup> The same article advised as to which kind of flowers worked best in displays and recommended that dealers “visualize Easter in terms of Christmas” when planning promotions.<sup>59</sup>



These holiday promotions blended tradition with commerce, a combination exemplified by some of Sinsheimer's suggestions pegged to Thanksgiving. In 1927, he recommended that stores use their newspaper ads to tell potential buyers about the various football games that would be broadcast on this particular day. He further suggested a living room window display with the remnants of a feast visible on a table in the back. The idea was to create the impression that "dinner was over and the company had adjourned to the living room to finish their coffee and listen to the broadcasting of a football game."<sup>60</sup> Retiring after the meal, often with an unbuckled belt, to enjoy a football broadcast is an informal holiday ritual in thousands of American homes. When the radio industry was still in its infancy, retailers had already identified this activity and were actively encouraging it as means to market a new technology.

### **Standardization and the Summer Slump**

Christmas remained the peak season, though in the second half of the decade radio retailers and department stores in particular sought to extend sales throughout the entire year. The surge of holiday buying was followed by an inevitable decline in business, and summer was a particularly slow period. As a result, after-Christmas clearance sales were common in the early 20s, and Sinsheimer initially advocated this practice to the readers of the *DGE*.<sup>61</sup> During the first years of the broadcasting boom, competing radio manufacturers also overestimated the size of the market and produced too much merchandise. An RCA executive recalled the problem during a 1927 speech and noted that department stores had proven especially helpful in liquidating excess stock through their clearance sales.<sup>62</sup>

The seasonal nature of sales was quickly seen as detrimental to the industry as a whole. *Radio Dealer* warned, for example, that listeners who had purchased expensive receivers might be justifiably annoyed to later discover the same merchandise at a fraction of the original price.<sup>63</sup> That same year, a study from Curtis Publishing concluded that selling expensive receivers would be increasingly difficult once consumers became accustomed to post-holiday discounts. The Curtis report compared the diffusion of receivers to automobiles, which were first sold on a similar seasonal basis.<sup>64</sup> In 1926, the *DGE* queried fifteen radio manufacturers on the subject; fourteen of the respondents unequivocally denounced clearance-sales.<sup>65</sup> This particular *DGE* article also made an analogy to cars, and the trade press frequently held up the year-round success of the auto industry as an exemplary path that radio could follow.

The “summer slump,” as the seasonal slowdown was known, was blamed on technical as well as cultural factors. In 1924, one radio manufacturer wrote that warm weather increased interference and static; “On the average receiving set, the receiving range is probably reduced about one-half.”<sup>66</sup> Sinsheimer advised that the “overheated summer atmosphere is not conducive to good, clear reception.”<sup>67</sup> Manufacturers and retailers also recognized that individuals had increased options for leisure activities during the warmer months. So pronounced was the summer recession that WEAS, operated by the Hecht store in Washington, D.C., shut down in May of 1923. In its description of the closing, the *Washington Post* wrote: “In consideration of the various outdoor attractions which will divert attention from listening-in during the early evening hours formerly taken by the station, the management has decided to close down until autumn.”<sup>68</sup> The station did not re-open.

To help the readers of the *DGE* deal with the slump, Sinsheimer encouraged the sale of portable sets, ideal for camping trips, and in 1927, he criticized the industry for continuing to maintain a seasonal system of operation.<sup>69</sup> He urged store managers to write to manufacturers and encourage year-round production and advertising schedules. Sinsheimer believed that such a change would eradicate clearance sales, which he blamed on excessive amounts of merchandise being brought to market at one time.

Other techniques for fighting the slump relied on the cadre of primarily male amateurs being interested in their hobby all year. In August 1926, for example, Sinsheimer advised stores to establish a reference area adjacent to the radio department; “Why not give it a trial and begin by discussing ‘Getting the Best Summer Reception’?” he wrote.<sup>70</sup> The concept of a reference area or clubroom had been around for years, but it was now advocated as one way to combat the seasonal slowdown. *Radio Dealer* was even more willing to court amateurs and recommended hiring young boys as summer help because they might in turn attract their network of male friends.<sup>71</sup>

Broadcasters also battled the summer slump by altering their programming to suit the weather. A 1928 *Radio News* article stated that both the NBC and Columbia networks believed that “lighter” programming was more appropriate in the warm months: “Wagner as interpreted by heavy baritones and mellow contraltos may be beautiful in November, but it is not so good in July.”<sup>72</sup> Sporting events, such as baseball games, were also thought to be suitable entertainment for summer.<sup>73</sup>

Department store efforts to spread sales across the entire year coincided with their efforts to standardize and streamline the technology. At the 1922 NRDGA meeting the organization’s director said that stores wanted to ensure that only “first-rate” equipment

was produced.<sup>74</sup> Sinsheimer continued this theme in later years as he encouraged manufacturers to produce the best-possible product, to include detailed instructions with all sets, and to avoid disreputable distributors.<sup>75</sup> He also advocated for standardization of radio sets to improve sales and to relieve retailers from the burden of stocking so many different parts.<sup>76</sup>

The development of simplified, standardized receivers, designed to harmonize with the rest of the living room furniture, signaled radio's transition to "parlor utility instead of an attic experiment."<sup>77</sup> By the second half of the decade, most of the cumbersome aspects of receivers had been eliminated. Tuning was simplified to a one-knob operation and technical improvements alleviated summer reception problems. Loudspeakers replaced headphones and sets powered by household current replaced ones with batteries.<sup>78</sup> By 1926, Page stated that receivers had been largely standardized and "marginal manufacturers had been dropped and the industry was facing an era of stabilization."<sup>79</sup>

When radios were transformed into furniture, however, consumers did not always purchase them ready-made; they sometimes made the modifications themselves. In 1925, for example, Gimbel's promoted a phonograph cabinet that could be converted to accommodate a radio receiver.<sup>80</sup> The following year a *Radio News* article, "The Place of Radio in Home Decoration," similarly suggested that a Victrola cabinet or some other piece of furniture be used to house a receiver.<sup>81</sup> While interest in tinkering with sets clearly declined over time, and while merchants preferred to sell completed receivers, retailers were willing to accommodate do-it-yourself buyers when it suited their needs.

Once the technology had been standardized and simplified, however, the *DGE* drastically reduced the attention it devoted to radio after 1928. This editorial shift was part of a larger transition affecting the department store industry in general. During the 1920s, chain stores and other rival businesses increased their market share by employing the same techniques that department stores had originally popularized, including aggressive advertising campaigns and reliance on centralized management.<sup>82</sup> By the second half of the decade, the stores began to focus on their principle line of merchandise, clothing, in order to halt the decline in profits.<sup>83</sup> The financial collapse of 1929 was a further economic blow.<sup>84</sup>

But if department stores' vigorous promotion of radio waned, their vision of the technology as an accepted part of mainstream culture did not. The stores had articulated this vision in their carefully choreographed window displays, and by the end of the decade receivers had become common fixtures in American living rooms. By 1928, approximately one-third of American families owned receivers and broadcasting had evolved into a thriving, commercialized industry.<sup>85</sup> It was thus no longer necessary for retailers to educate the public, orchestrate stunts, or otherwise promote the technology so aggressively.

## **Conclusion**

The stations, window displays, classes, and set-building contests that were used to promote the new technology, along with retailers' continued courtship of the amateur community, highlight the critical educational role that commercial interests can perform during initial stages of technological diffusion. These marketing techniques were

informed by, and grafted onto, pre-existing cultural beliefs such as the importance of holiday gift-giving and the cult of the male hobbyist. This dynamic illustrates how technologies do not arrive fully formed, nor are their uses self-evident. Potential listeners were educated and wooed as part of a deliberate campaign to promote the technology; the content of radio programming and the shape of the receivers themselves were developed accordingly.

Given the previous literature's emphasis on gender, it is perhaps surprising that this research did not uncover more overt strategies to sell to women. The desire to simplify the technology was part of an overall effort to attract female listeners, but the bulk of the advice in the *DGE* targeted the male consumer. Everyone in a family might enjoy radio programming, but the conventional retailing wisdom of the time was that the husband was the one to actually make the purchase. The manager for the radio department in the Fair store stated this fact directly in 1925; "We direct the greater part of our publicity towards the men."<sup>86</sup> In his study, Carlat similarly found that "radios were made attractive to women so that they would encourage men to buy them."<sup>87</sup> This research underscores Carlat's observation and emphasizes the perceived connection between radio and masculinity in the 1920s, even within an institution otherwise oriented toward female consumers.

The evidence does not support, however, Brown and Dennison's assertion that the "radio as furniture" phenomenon bubbled up from popular culture rather than originated within the industry. Department stores displayed radios in domestic settings from the very beginning of the boom, and while it may have taken manufacturers a few years to overcome the more awkward aspects of the devices, it would be a mistake to interpret this

delay as a lack of effort. A more accurate explanation of the “radio as furniture” phenomenon would take into account the actions of producers, retailers, and consumers, all of whom promoted the concept.

A topic that clearly emerges from this research is the influence of seasonal factors on the development of broadcasting. The importance of Christmas and the corresponding summer slow down have been overlooked or otherwise unexamined in most all of the previous scholarship on radio during this period.<sup>88</sup> When the radio retailing techniques of the era are explored, it becomes apparent that manufacturers, programmers, and retailers largely structured their activities around these two seasons during the first few years of broadcasting.

And, despite the numerous and dramatic technological changes over the past several decades, the seasonal rhythms of early radio persist in the current world of mass media. Christmas remains the preferred time frame to launch new electronic products, whether it is a high-definition television, the latest MP3 player, or the newest version of a home gaming system. The “summer slump,” meanwhile, is still evident in the major television networks’ approach to programming; new series debut in the fall, have their finales in the spring, then go into the predictable pattern of reruns during the summer. Cable channels are increasingly moving away from this particular formula, as are the networks themselves, though the traditional concept of a “television season” continues to inform a significant amount of primetime programming. The persistence of this vestige of the original summer slump can be attributed partially to the various outdoor activities that compete for the viewer’s attention, but also because of a particular vision of how broadcast programming should be integrated into daily life. This vision was in place from

the earliest days of broadcasting and can be clearly seen in the methods first used by department stores to sell radios.

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher H. Sterling and John Michael Kittross, *Stay Tuned: A History of American Broadcasting*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Mahway, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 862.

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "The Consumption Junction: A Proposal for Research Strategies in the Sociology of Technology," in *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology of History and Technology*, eds. Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor J. Pinch (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 216-280.

<sup>3</sup> William Boddy, *New Media and Popular Imagination: Launching Radio, Television, and Digital Media in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), particularly chap. 2, "Wireless Nation: Defining Radio as a Domestic Technology," 16-43; Louis Carlat, "A Cleanser for the Mind: Marketing Radio Receivers for the American Home, 1922-1932," in *His and Hers: Gender, Consumption, and Technology*, eds. Roger Horowitz and Arwen Mohun (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 115-137; For another study of gender and early radio, see Richard Butsch, "Crystal Sets and Scarf-Pin Radios: Gender, Technology and the Construction of American Radio Listening in the 1920s," *Media, Culture & Society* 20 (1998): 557-572.

<sup>4</sup> Carlat, "A Cleanser for the Mind," 127.

<sup>5</sup> Carlat, "A Cleanser for the Mind," 127.

<sup>6</sup> Hiram Jome, *Economics of the Radio Industry* (Chicago: A.W. Shaw & Company, 1925), 114.

<sup>7</sup> Historians have indicated that department stores were among the earliest promoters of radio technology. Michael Brian Schiffer notes, for example, that after Hugo Gernsback introduced a "complete wireless telegraph" in 1904, several New York department stores ordered the devices. See Michael Brian Schiffer, *The Portable Radio in American Life* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991), 37; In a study of radio receiver technology, Leslie Page cites a particularly impressive sale in New York at Gimbel's where "240 clerks sold 5,300 receivers" in a single day in 1925. See Leslie J. Page, Jr., "The Nature of the Broadcast Receiver and Its Market in the United States from 1922 to 1927," in *American Broadcasting: A Source Book on the History of Radio and Television*, eds. Lawrence Lichty and Malachi Topping (New York: Hastings House, 1975), 469.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Brown and Corley Dennison, "Integrating Radio into the Home, 1923-1929," *Studies in Popular Culture* 20, no. 3 (1998): 1-17; A study of early radio receivers in England indicates this development occurred slightly later than in the United States, but the process was otherwise similar. See Shaun Moores, "The Box on the Dresser":



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Memories of Early Radio and Everyday Life,” *Media, Culture & Society* 10 (1988): 23-40.

<sup>9</sup> Brown and Dennison, “Integrating Radio into the Home,” 1.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas W. Volek, “Examining Radio Receiver Technology through Magazine Advertisements in the 1920s and 1930s,” Volumes I and II, ( Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> Ronald R. Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), particularly chap. 4, “Tuning in the Country,” 113-127.

<sup>12</sup> References to this fact appear in numerous articles in the trade press. A graphic accompanying an article in *Radio News* offers a concise illustration of the radio market. According to this graphic, “15,000 electrical dealers” sold receivers, compared to “8,000 department, hardware, drug & furniture stores.” See Roger W. Babson, “Radio, A Leading Industry,” *Radio News*, July 1924, 30-31.

<sup>13</sup> On the importance of window displays, see “Window Displays,” *Electrical Review and Western Electrician*, November 27, 1915, 974; “Contractor-Dealer,” *Electrical Review*, September 20, 1919, 497-498; “Merchandising Suggestions for the Electrical Dealer,” *Electrical Review*, October 18, 1919, 670-671. On the importance of demonstrations, see “Demonstrations Popular,” *Electrical Review*, April 24, 1920, 74; “Stimulating Appliance Business with Specialties,” *Electrical Review*, August 27, 1921, 299-302. On the importance of Christmas, see “Helping the Dealer in Christmas Sales,” *Electrical Review*, October 6, 1917, 613-614; “An Appropriate Christmas Window Display One of the Greatest Merchandising Assets,” *Electrical Review and Western Electrician*, November 4, 1916, 804-805.

<sup>14</sup> This phrase is the title of the first chapter in Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>15</sup> Editors of *Electrical Merchandising, How to Retail Radio* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1922), 84. Several pages later, the manual again noted that department stores were often the leading innovators of novel forms of advertising, 93.

<sup>16</sup> Grace T. Hadley, “Featuring Radio Believed Desirable to Maintain Store’s Leadership,” *DGE*, 11 March 1922, 16. Wiesenberger reprinted one of Lord & Taylor’s newspaper advertisements which touted Binns’ lectures. See Arthur Wiesenberger, “Radio Merchandising in Department Stores: A Survey Covering the Underlying Principles of Radio – Its Merchandising and Advertising Possibilities in Department Stores” (New York: Bureau of Research and Information of the National Retail Dry Goods Association, 1922), 14.

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- <sup>17</sup> Hadley, "Featuring Radio...", 16.
- <sup>18</sup> Erik Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 29.
- <sup>19</sup> Wiesenberger, "Radio Merchandising in Department Stores," 2.
- <sup>20</sup> Wiesenberger, "Radio Merchandising in Department Stores," 17.
- <sup>21</sup> Wiesenberger, "Radio Merchandising in Department Stores," 9.
- <sup>22</sup> Armstrong Perry, "Show Your Goods," *Radio News*, October 1921, 289, 336-342.
- <sup>23</sup> Perry, "Show Your Goods," *Radio News*, 289.
- <sup>24</sup> R. Dalton, "Money for the Amateur," *Radio News*, April-May 1922, 963.
- <sup>25</sup> A.W. Roe, "How One Department Store Went After Radio Sales," Electrical Goods section of *DGE*, 7 November 1925, 22; See also entry on WSMB in Appendix I.
- <sup>26</sup> Ralph J. Begleiter, "Biography of a License: The Fifty-Year History of a Commercial Broadcast Station" (master's thesis, Columbia University, 1972), 16.
- <sup>27</sup> Letter from Kaufmann & Baer Company, dated January 11, 1924, WCAE Correspondence Files.
- <sup>28</sup> Letter from Howard S. Pyle, Assistant U.S. Radio Inspector, dated February 19, 1924, WCAE Correspondence Files.
- <sup>29</sup> Barnouw, *Tower in Babel*, 125.
- <sup>30</sup> George A. Luers, "The Lure of Radio Brings Customer Response of a Gratifying Sort," *DGE*, 5 August 1922, 15.
- <sup>31</sup> Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Free Press, 1995.)
- <sup>32</sup> Arthur Sinsheimer, "Advertising Ideas," *DGE*, 19 August 1922, 158.
- <sup>33</sup> *How to Retail Radio*, 88.
- <sup>34</sup> *How to Retail Radio*, 16.
- <sup>35</sup> *How to Retail Radio*, 15-16.

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<sup>36</sup> *How to Retail Radio*, 15-16.

<sup>37</sup> On the Gimbel's contest, see the store's advertisement in *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 4 April 1922, 9; On the Emporium's contest, see "Lucky Winners in Emporium Contest Named," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 20 April 1922, 4.

<sup>38</sup> On the announcement of the contest, see Famous & Barr Company advertisement, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 21 April 1922, 16. On the opening of WCK, see "Store Tonight to Give First Radio Program," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 18 April 1922, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Arthur Sinsheimer, "Don't Talk Too Much," *DGE*, 28 October 1922, 82; Arthur Sinsheimer, "Don't Let the Radio Scare Stuff Get You," *DGE*, 30 December 1922, 50.

<sup>40</sup> Alex Eisemann, "What to Do About Radio," *DGE*, 15 July 1922, 19.

<sup>41</sup> References to "fans" and "nuts" are throughout the book, but see particularly p. 83 and chap. 15, "How a Clubroom for Amateurs Builds Sales."

<sup>42</sup> For one example of such an arrangement, see Ernest A. Dench, "Easter Spirit and Radio Sales," *Radio Dealer*, April 1927, 27-28. In this display from Woodward & Lothrop in Washington, D.C., a woman sits on a couch while a small girl tunes the receiver. This same store operated station WIAY for a time. For another example of this type of window display, see "The Latest Opportunity in Retailing – To Cash in Via Wireless," *DGE*, 25 February 1922, 16. This particular window from Gimbel's in New York has a woman on the couch while a man stands near the radio.

<sup>43</sup> *How To Retail Radio*, 96-114.

<sup>44</sup> William Bliss Stoddard, "Twenty Thousand a Month Turnover," *Radio Dealer*, October 1925, 113-114. This same store had previously operated station WMAQ along with the *Chicago Daily News*. See entry on WMAQ in Appendix I.

<sup>45</sup> Stoddard, "Twenty Thousand a Month Turnover," *Radio Dealer*, 114.

<sup>46</sup> Ernest A. Dench, "Living Room Realism in Radio Displays," *Radio Dealer*, October 1926, 86-87.

<sup>47</sup> A chart in a study from Curtis Publishing presents a monthly breakdown of radio sales from 1924. The line graph is in the form of an almost perfect triangle. The peak is December, in which over 25% of all radios were sold. June and July are the definite low points, with each month having less than 1% of sales. See Charles Coolidge Parlin, "The Merchandising of Radio" (Philadelphia: The Curtis Publishing Company, Advertising Department, Division of Commercial Research, 1925), 18. Additionally, numerous articles in the *DGE* make clear that winter holidays and the preceding weeks were the most important season for radio sales.

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<sup>48</sup> Leigh Eric Schmidt, "The Commercialization of the Calendar: American Holidays and the Culture of Consumption," *Journal of American History* 78, no. 3 (1991): 887-916; For a study of the importance of Christmas shopping season for British department stores, see Christopher P. Hosgood, "Doing the Shops at Christmas: Women, Men and the Department Store in England, c. 1880-1914," in *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939*, eds. Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1999), 97-115.

<sup>49</sup> John R. Hall, "Make it a Radio Christmas This Year," *Radio Dealer*, December 1922, 38, 80; Arthur Sinsheimer, "Radio – Christmas – Gifts," *DGE*, 25 November 1922, 80.

<sup>50</sup> John R. Hall, "Make it a Radio Christmas This Year," *Radio Dealer*.

<sup>51</sup> Arthur Sinsheimer, "Advertising Ideas," *DGE*, 22 November 1924, 24.

<sup>52</sup> See for example "Radio Gift Giving" in *DGE*, 21 November 1925, 26; "Radio Christmas Suggestions," *DGE*, 20 November 1926, 12.

<sup>53</sup> Arthur Sinsheimer, "Advertising Ideas," *DGE*, 25 November 1922, 80.

<sup>54</sup> Arthur Sinsheimer, "Advertising Ideas," *DGE*, 21 November 1925, 26.

<sup>55</sup> R.T. Whitnah, "Why Crosby's Holiday Feature Was Put Inside – Not in Windows," *Chicago Merchant Economist and Dry Good Reporter*, 23 October 1926, 16.

<sup>56</sup> W.B. Arvin, "How Santa Helped the Wisconsin Dealers Increase Their Business," *Radio Dealer*, December 1927, 32.

<sup>57</sup> Arthur Sinsheimer, "Advertising Ideas," *DGE*, 25 April 1925, 22.

<sup>58</sup> Ernest A. Dench, "Easter Spirit and Radio Sales," *Radio Dealer*, April 1927, 27-28.

<sup>59</sup> Dench, "Easter Spirit and Radio Sales," *Radio Dealer*.

<sup>60</sup> Arthur Sinsheimer, "Making Radio Play Its Part in the Thanksgiving Sales Plan," Electrical Goods section of the *DGE*, 12 November 1927, 26.

<sup>61</sup> Arthur Sinsheimer, "A January Radio Clearance," *DGE*, 20 December 1924, 14.

<sup>62</sup> J. L. Ray, "The Distribution and Merchandising of Radio Equipment," in *The Radio Industry: The Story of Its Development* (A.W. Shaw & Company: Chicago and New York), 253.

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<sup>63</sup> W. F. Crosby, "Pros and Cons of Christmas Merchandising," *Radio Dealer*, December 1925, 87-89.

<sup>64</sup> Parlin, "The Merchandising of Radio," (Curtis Publishing), 25.

<sup>65</sup> "Bargain Sales," the Electrical Goods section of *DGE*, 6 March 1926, 16-17.

<sup>66</sup> Powel Crosley, Jr., "Keep on Selling Radio This Summer," *Radio Dealer*, March 1924, 27.

<sup>67</sup> Arthur Sinsheimer, "Interest Promotion," Electrical Goods section of the *DGE*, 7 August 1926, 30.

<sup>68</sup> "Listening In," *Washington Post*, May 29, 1923, 11; See also entry on WEAS in Appendix I.

<sup>69</sup> Arthur Sinsheimer, "Portable Sets Solve Summer-time Radio," Electrical Goods section of the *DGE*, 25 April 1925, 16-17; "The Merchants Shall Lead Them," Electrical Goods section of the *DGE*, 8 January 1927, 22.

<sup>70</sup> Arthur Sinsheimer, "Interest Promotion," Electrical Goods section of the *DGE*, 7 August 7, 1926, 30.

<sup>71</sup> A. Schaeffer, Jr., "Put Up that 'Boy Wanted' Sign," *Radio Dealer*, March 1924, 25.

<sup>72</sup> Julia V. Shawell, "Radio Programs to Suit the Thermometer," *Radio News*, July 1928, 17, 70.

<sup>73</sup> H.R. Carlisle, "It's Radio's Greatest Summer — Let Your Prospects Know It," *Radio Dealer*, August 1928, 16.

<sup>74</sup> *New York Times*, "Plan Better Radio Goods," 19 April 1922, 22.

<sup>75</sup> Arthur Sinsheimer, "New Year's Radio Resolutions We Ought to Adopt," *DGE*, 29 December 1923, 50; Arthur Sinsheimer, "Some Radio Resolutions for the New Year," *DGE*, 24 December 1927, 12.

<sup>76</sup> Arthur Sinsheimer, "Sh! At Last There is Action Towards Standardized Radio Parts," Electrical Goods section of *DGE*, 6 February 1926, 45.

<sup>77</sup> Jome, *Economics of the Radio Industry*, 86

<sup>78</sup> Volek, "Examining Radio Receiver Technology through Magazine Advertisements," 116-150.

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<sup>79</sup> Page, “The Nature of the Broadcast Receiver and Its Market,” 472.

<sup>80</sup> Gimbel’s advertisement, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 30 November 1925, section II, 27.

<sup>81</sup> Golda M. Goldman, “The Place of Radio in Home Decoration,” *Radio News*, December 1926, 634-635.

<sup>82</sup> Boris Emmet, *Department Stores: Recent Policies Costs and Profits* (Stanford University, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1930), 9-11. See also H. Pasdermajian, *The Department Store: Its Origins, Evolution, and Economics* (London: Newman Books, 1954), 54.

<sup>83</sup> According to one study, department stores sold almost 83 million dollars worth of “radios, phono, TV sets, records, etc.” in 1929. Four years later, this figure had plummeted to less than 18 million, a decline of almost 80%. By comparison, the same source claims that the category of “women’s and misses’ ready-to-wear apparel” declined only 30% in the same four year period. See Robert David Entenberg, *The Changing Competitive Position of Department Stores in the United States by Merchandise Lines* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1957), Appendix Table I.

<sup>84</sup> A 2003 dissertation on department stores also noted that these institutions were experiencing an economic slow-down before the onset of the Depression, see Louisa M. Iarocci, “Spaces of Desire: The Department Store in America” (Ph.D.dissertation, Boston University, 2003), 248.

<sup>85</sup> Daniel Starch, “A Study of Radio Broadcasting Based Exclusively on Personal Interviews With Families in the United States East of the Rocky Mountains” (New York: National Broadcasting Company, 1928). A slightly lower percentage, 27.5%, is claimed in Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 862.

<sup>86</sup> Stoddard, “Twenty Thousand a Month Turnover,” 113.

<sup>87</sup> Carlat, “A Cleanser for the Mind,” 125.

<sup>88</sup> Page included a 1926 quote from one retail executive about the seasonal nature of radio sales in his study, see Page, “The Nature of the Broadcast Receiver and Its Market,” 471. Carlat mentioned this particular reference in one of his endnotes, simply to say that beyond this single reference, these seasonal factors have not been addressed, see Carlat, “A Cleanser for the Mind,” 135.

## **Chapter 5**

### **From Public Service to Paid Sponsorships, 1923-1931**

By the time radio entered its “Golden Age” in the 1930s, many of the original department store stations were gone. The model of commercial broadcasting had become widespread, and stores found it easier to buy airtime from a radio station, as opposed to building a studio and installing their own transmitter. One of the first academic studies of broadcast advertising stated that twenty-two stations were operated by “department stores and dry goods establishments” in 1923.<sup>1</sup> This is significantly fewer than the 30 stations identified by AT&T for the previous year, suggesting that a decline had already begun.<sup>2</sup> The same study noted that only 10 such stations existed by 1932.<sup>3</sup> Those that survived adopted the traditional commercial model and sold airtime to other companies, including ones that were marketplace rivals to the stores themselves. The stations run by Bamberger’s, the Shepard Stores, and Gimbel’s even established their own small networks, though this was the exception to the rule.<sup>4</sup>

While the number of store stations was shrinking from 1922 to 1932, the motivation behind these operations, advertising, was becoming more prevalent. The quantity of advertising messages changed during this period, as did the quality, and the indirect approach gave way to one that was more overt. The goal of this chapter is to outline this change in radio advertising, using the history of department store stations as a case study. Stores were among the first institutions to exploit the publicity value of the

new technology, buy airtime, target women, rely on chain broadcasting, use studio audiences, and give direct price quotations. They continually pushed advertising as far as possible while staying just inside the border of acceptability. For industry professionals unsure of the benefits of broadcasting, department stores offered evidence to this effect, and their stations were lauded in the first generation of radio advertising manuals. The physical, brick-and-marble department stores helped to commodify the world of material goods; their virtual sales floors in the sky helped to commercialize the world of electronic mass media.

In terms of chronology, this chapter picks up the thread from chapter 3 and maintains the focus on Philadelphia. Gimbel's, Strawbridge & Clothier, and the Lit Brothers continued their radio operations well beyond the early 1930s, the ending point for this chapter, though this period signaled a dramatic change. In 1931, Gimbel's sold its interest in two stations, WGBS and WCAE, and was no longer the sole operator of WIP, its flagship station.<sup>5</sup> In 1934, Strawbridge & Clothier and the Lit Brothers merged their respective stations into a single entity, WFIL, which was affiliated with the National Broadcasting Corporation.<sup>6</sup> By this time, the eclectic, unpredictable, and somewhat chaotic industry of the 1920s had been thoroughly consolidated and commercialized. The original store stations helped to pave the way for later developments within the industry, even if many of them lasted only a few years.

This chapter concludes with an examination of "shopping shows," a genre of programming that reveals the influence of retailing on the development of radio advertising. Since the earliest days of the broadcasting boom, stores had been airing morning talks for women and by the second half of the 1920s, this time-slot was given



over to blatant sales pitches. A female announcer, typically adopting a fictional persona, would broadcast product and price information, sometimes even offering a phone number so that listeners could engage in a bit of home shopping. When the NRDGA published a radio manual for department stores in 1935, shopping shows were among the most favored recommendations.<sup>7</sup> In the 1940s, when television began to take significant steps out of the laboratory and into American living rooms, the stores sponsored early programs modeled directly on the radio shopping formula.<sup>8</sup>

The intersection of department store and radio history during the 1920s is an intersection of divergent trajectories. One institution devoted to entertaining and educating consumers was losing ground, while another was just taking off. The original department store vision, an audacious building in the center of a dense urban environment, was declining in this decade. The economic pressures presented by chain stores, the Depression, and the growth of suburbs encouraged stores to merge and consolidate. Broadcasting, by contrast, drew from a variety of technological and cultural practices and gained popularity as the stores were losing their luster. Whereas the stores had been on the leading edge of new techniques in distribution, display and advertising, these roles would be played in the future by broadcasting.

The phenomenon of department store radio, as described herein, runs counter to some media histories which emphasize the haphazard nature of the early radio industry. Smulyan, in particular, painted the radio stations of the 1920s in this light. She downplayed the number of regularly scheduled shows that ran during this era, citing “unreliable” amateurs, and claimed that before the mid-30s, “only risk-taking businesses advertised on the radio.”<sup>9</sup> Department stores had a number of regularly scheduled

programs, and a great range of companies advertised over the airwaves in the 1920s.<sup>10</sup>

This current research also supplements the previous scholarship on early programs for women; rather than being developed anew in the late 1920s by the networks and the government, such fare was on the air from the beginning of the broadcast boom.<sup>11</sup>

In his own study of the era, Doerksen presented a similar argument regarding the widespread use of radio advertising in the early and mid-1920s.<sup>12</sup> The stations in his study, however, saw themselves as outside of the status quo. Their aggressive, outspoken advertising practices drew criticism from government regulators and well-funded corporate broadcasters. Department stores, by contrast, promoted a more restrained approach and altered their sales pitches based on time of day or the demographic of the intended audience. They positioned themselves as public benefactors, dedicated to promoting upscale, quality programming, a strategy that served to blunt criticism. This was the model that the commercial networks later followed.

### **“Wherever you go, there’s a Gimbel...”**

Department stores played a central role in the establishment of commercial broadcasting at WEAJ, a New York station built by AT&T in 1922. Strictly speaking, this station was not the first to sell airtime to potential sponsors, though it was the first to do so with the acknowledged support of the major corporations involved in wireless communication.<sup>13</sup> Under a comprehensive patent agreement, the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), General Electric, and Westinghouse could manufacture radio receivers, while AT&T could charge other businesses for the use of a radio transmitter. This practice, known at the time as “toll broadcasting,” was not an inevitable development as

there was no inherent reason that wireless technology had to be used in this manner. AT&T was applying the revenue model of another technology, the telephone, directly to the new medium of radio. A potential advertiser would pay for the use of a radio transmitter, just as one paid for the use of phone lines for personal communications. WEAf's success, largely due to the financial support of its department store clients, proved a much-celebrated and championed beachhead from which the system of commercial broadcasting spread.

The local business community was initially skeptical of advertising through WEAf, though thirteen organizations eventually purchased airtime by the end of 1922, including the New York stores of Gimbel's and Macy's.<sup>14</sup> The sponsored programs were brief talks, ten to fifteen minutes in length, and many of them were Christmas-related children's stories.<sup>15</sup> WEAf attracted a number of new clients in the first months of 1923, though Gimbel's was far and away the most prolific advertiser at this time.<sup>16</sup> Working in conjunction with the store, AT&T constructed a studio on the eighth floor of Gimbel's, which according to Banning was "the first broadcasting location where the general public could observe broadcasting in progress."<sup>17</sup> In March 1923, as part of a radio sale at the store, Gimbel's went beyond the simple fifteen-minute talks and sponsored musical programs that lasted from thirty minutes to an hour.<sup>18</sup>

Stores had been organizing concerts and musical performances for decades as an indirect adjunct to their larger retail efforts, though the events of March 1923 were a new development in terms of radio. Gimbel's and AT&T had introduced a model in which the sponsor would supply the entire program instead of a simple commercial. Archer lavished praise on the store, writing that it had "blazed a trail for successful commercial

sponsorship.”<sup>19</sup> Other businesses followed suit and developed their own programs, with the sponsor’s name doubling as the name of the program; Gold Dust soap, Lucky Strike cigarettes, and Cliquot Club ginger ale all had eponymous programs on WEAJ.<sup>20</sup> Even without direct admonitions by the announcer, corporations could increase awareness, or “goodwill” according to the vernacular of the day, for their products. In the following decades, advertising became an even more potent influence on the medium and advertising agencies were ultimately responsible for the bulk of primetime network programming.<sup>21</sup>

The New York branch of Wanamaker’s also sponsored radio programs in 1923, a move that perhaps encouraged the store to close its own dedicated station, WWJ.<sup>22</sup> To maintain a presence on the airwaves over New York, Wanamaker’s sponsored concerts on WJZ, a local station run by RCA. WJZ was battling AT&T for radio supremacy in the metropolitan region and gave airtime to anyone willing to sponsor programming.<sup>23</sup> Along with Wanamaker’s, Macy’s also exploited this offer.<sup>24</sup> In one of the first manuals on radio advertising, Felix reprinted a newspaper advertisement from July 1923 which promoted a Wanamaker organ recital on WJZ.<sup>25</sup> The caption claimed that this was the “first advertisement of a goodwill radio program.”<sup>26</sup> It is difficult to accept Felix’s assertion at face value, though the advertisement is additional evidence of the Wanamaker organization’s proficiency in self-promotion.

While department stores in New York chose to sponsor radio programs on other stations, merchants of Philadelphia opted to maintain the ones they had opened in 1922. Differences existed among the four stations, differences that will be elucidated below, but they shared much in common. Keeping with the established department store tradition of

promoting the most-refined, well-heeled aspects of high culture, the stations employed a similar approach with their programming. Informative lectures aired during the daylight hours, along with news about weather, sports, market reports, and time signals. Music was interspersed throughout the day, often supplied by eponymous performers such as the Strawbridge & Clothier Quartet or the Gimbel Orchestra. The evening hours were largely reserved for musical performances, dramatic selections, and the occasional lecture. The studios were located inside the stores themselves, and remote broadcasts from churches, theatres, and hotels were also common. A newspaper listing from April 17, 1923 provides a snapshot into their programming.<sup>27</sup> Gimbel's had a talk on planting trees, followed by a selection of songs and "dinner music;" Strawbridge & Clothier started the day with a livestock report from the Department of Agriculture, aired a hotel orchestra and dance music in the afternoon, then a talk from an insurance company in the evening; the Wanamaker organ dominated that store's line-up, accompanied by time signals and weather reports; the Lit Brothers had organ music, plus a selection of songs.

These four Philadelphia department stores competed with one another when it came to selling goods, though their stations were forced to work together under the time-sharing arrangements mandated by the government. At the end of 1922, three of the stores were broadcasting on the same frequency, 400 meters, though the Department of Commerce soon shifted their wavelengths. In spring of the following year, as part of an ongoing effort to reduce interference, the stations from Strawbridge & Clothier and the Lit Brothers were moved to 395 meters.<sup>28</sup> These two stations shared time with one another for years before they merged in the following decade. The reorganization of 1923 also moved Gimbel's and Wanamaker's to the same location, 509 meters, while two

other Philadelphia stations each received their own local frequency.<sup>29</sup> Some friction was perhaps inevitable. Stations did not always agree on who had the right to a particular time period, and the tradition of “silent night” further complicated time-sharing arrangements. According to this practice, common in the early 20s, stations closed on a specified night of the week so that radio enthusiasts, dubbed “DX fiends” by the press, could tune in distant stations without local interference.<sup>30</sup>

The store stations in Philadelphia and elsewhere were not, for the most part, free-wheeling, maverick broadcasters, and they cooperated with established institutions of the day. They played polite, socially acceptable music (as opposed to “vulgar” jazz), and largely avoided the use of phonograph recordings, a substandard use of the medium in the eyes of government regulators. Local dignitaries were invited into their studios on special occasions, and stores actively courted politicians and other members of the business community. As an indication of the stores’ close relations with the government, John Shepard III, the founder of WNAC in Boston, participated in the Commerce department’s radio conferences; Ed Davies from WIP claimed that he was asked to be a founding member of the Federal Radio Commission.<sup>31</sup>

One store station to depart from the ideal formula was run by the Sears-Roebuck Company from 1924 until 1928.<sup>32</sup> Working from its base in Chicago, and relying on that city’s extensive network of rail lines, Sears-Roebuck targeted rural consumers in a broad swath of the Midwest with a legendary mail-order catalog. The company established an agricultural foundation to educate farmer, while also indirectly promoting its many products. As part of this effort, Sears-Roebuck ran station WLS out of Chicago and aimed much of its programming at rural listeners. One of the most important radio shows

in the development of country music, for example, the *National Barn Dance* aired on WLS.<sup>33</sup> Other department stores aired agricultural reports, often at the request of the government, but their musical offerings typically favored the “potted palm” genre rather than old time fiddle tunes and hillbilly songs.

Recordings of the Philadelphia stations do not exist, (at least not from this early era), though government records, newspaper program listings, trade journals, and other sources suggest that Gimbel’s was the most innovative and creative of the group. WIP managed to attract national attention with unusual publicity gimmicks, a daily children’s show, promotion of radio as a public spectacle, and forays into chain broadcasting. After closing its Milwaukee station at the end of 1923, the store ran two additional stations in the second half of the decade and created its own small network.<sup>34</sup>

“WIP has broadcast more unusual features than any other station in Philadelphia, and possibly in the entire country,” wrote *Radio Digest Illustrated* in a station profile from November 1924.<sup>35</sup> One stunt involved a remote broadcast from a studio on a pier in Atlantic City, approximately 60 miles away. In the summer of 1924, a diver from the Philadelphia Derrick and Salvage Corporation donned a helmet specially equipped with microphone and broadcast an eye-witness description of the sea floor.<sup>36</sup> This stunt was repeated several times, and the Atlantic City studio also broadcast the sound of waves, presumably to entertain those who could not physically travel to the beach.<sup>37</sup> Another publicity stunt mentioned by *Radio Digest Illustrated* was a remote broadcast from inside of a prison featuring “an entire concert by the convicts.”<sup>38</sup> On New Year’s Eve 1925, WIP again won praise from the same publication when it broadcast the ringing of the

Liberty Bell, an event that inaugurated a sesquicentennial celebration for the Declaration of Independence.<sup>39</sup>

Recalling the Marconi Company's experiments at Wanamaker's wireless telegraph stations, Philadelphia stores used their radio stations to test out the latest technical innovations in the 1920s. Gimbel's WIP, for example, experimented with high-power broadcasting, and before the end of 1924, transmitted its signal all the way to Europe and South America.<sup>40</sup> Gimbel's signal, however, was not alone in crossing the Atlantic. In November 1923, *Radio Broadcast* sponsored a series of experimental transmissions and all of the Philadelphia stations increased their power at designated times.<sup>41</sup> The station of the Lit Brothers was reportedly received in England and Scotland.<sup>42</sup> Strawbridge & Clothier also claimed success and reprinted notes from listeners in England and Puerto Rico in a newspaper ad.<sup>43</sup>

Wanamaker's department store participated in the same tests, and the station in fact boosted its power on several occasions, thereby blasting the sounds from its legendary organ to listeners in Europe and Australia.<sup>44</sup> Following one occasion in 1924, the store claimed one of the more unusual "firsts" in radio history. In an experiment conducted with the British Broadcasting Company, music from both the Philadelphia and New York stores was picked up and re-transmitted overseas by Westinghouse station KDKA.<sup>45</sup> An advertisement subsequently appeared in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* describing the achievement. The text boasted that Wanamaker's was the "first to erect wireless transmitting towers" as well as the first in "transoceanic dance programs."<sup>46</sup>

Experimental broadcasts to distant countries were not the exclusive practice of the Philadelphia stations, however, and Bamberger's WOR was even more successful in its



own endeavors. In 1922, its signal emanating from Newark was received in Selfridge's store in London, and similar experiments were conducted in following years.<sup>47</sup> A 1925 profile of the station bore the headline "Six Continents Hear WOR at Newark, N.J."<sup>48</sup>

In addition to unusual publicity stunts, such as the ocean-floor and prison broadcasts, WIP established its reputation with a daily program of bedtime stories. The program of "Uncle WIP," initiated when the station was only a few weeks old, proved remarkably durable and several performers filled the role in subsequent years.<sup>49</sup> Audience participation was a defining element of the program, including a "roll-call" of listeners' names. When the fictional character went underwater in September of 1924, (a variation on the original Atlantic City stunt), a newspaper account noted that "he read the names of numerous youngsters who had written to him."<sup>50</sup> This radio persona is not well-remembered today, save for the oldest generation of radio listeners, though Uncle WIP's fame earned a spot in one of most enduring, apocryphal stories in the history of radio — the so called "li'l bastards" legend.<sup>51</sup>

A former telephone repairman from Chicago, Harry Ehrhart, was an announcer at the fledgling station and the first person to step into the role.<sup>52</sup> He "made a phenomenal reputation as Uncle WIP," according to a 1924 newspaper account, "and during the day hundreds of children would flock to the store" to see him.<sup>53</sup> Soon after the Uncle WIP program went on the air, the rival store of the Lit Brothers lured Ehrhart to its own WDAR with a position as chief operator. Gimbel's then hired opera singer Chris Graham to handle the hosting duties.<sup>54</sup> The change of performers did nothing to dampen the popularity of the show, and the more dedicated fans joined "Uncle WIP's Kiddie Klub."

Graham was such a success, in fact, that the city reportedly issued him a license plate reading “UNCLE WIP.”<sup>55</sup>

Just as stores based many of their retailing strategies on holiday rituals, Christmas-related programming was popular on their stations as well and Uncle WIP played a central role in one such stunt. For many years, Gimbel’s sponsored a Thanksgiving Day parade in which the famed storyteller escorted Santa Clause to the toy department.<sup>56</sup> That department, meanwhile, was renamed “Uncle WIP’s Toyland.”<sup>57</sup> Bamberger’s also used its station to promote an elaborately decorated toy department during the Christmas season, and in 1925, arranged for its Santa to broadcast from an airplane.<sup>58</sup> By the middle of the following decade, in fact, radio-airplane-Santa’s had become a somewhat common convention for the stores. The 1935 NRDGA manual listed three stores which had sponsored some variation of this stunt.<sup>59</sup>

The popularity of Uncle WIP encouraged two of the other store stations in Philadelphia to initiate their own programs of bedtime stories. The original Uncle, Harry Ehrhart, adopted the pseudonym of “Dream Daddy” after he jumped to the Lit Brothers station. A 1925 article in *Radio Digest Illustrated* praised him as one of the “original air saints” and noted that the airwaves were now filled with “Dream Daddys” and “Uncles” and “Big Brothers;” the “Big Brother” to which this article referred was most likely the performer on the department store station KPO who used this title.<sup>60</sup> Ehrhart achieved such fame under his new moniker that he inspired a hit song and temporarily left Lit Brothers to tour radio stations across the country.<sup>61</sup> The Strawbridge station, meanwhile, trotted out its own program for children, originally using female hosts. By the spring of 1924, a male performer, Jean Hight, had taken over the time slot as “Sunny Jim, the

kiddies pal.” A February 1925 *Radio Digest* article said that he was “a hit over night” and he was one of the only performers mentioned by name in the profile of WFI.<sup>62</sup>

Bamberger’s introduced its own program for children in 1928 hosted by “Uncle Don,” perhaps the most famous of all early radio “uncles” though certainly not the first.

Many stations during radio’s early period broadcast bedtime stories and department stores had a particular motive for doing so. If a station could encourage a child to regularly listen to its bedtime stories, the station was simultaneously establishing a relationship with the primary care-giver, most often the mother. Many parents were undoubtedly compelled to visit Gimbel’s in order to please their star-struck offspring; once inside the store, they were a captive audience for the merchandise.

As an even more direct method of targeting mothers and wives, Gimbel’s hired newspaper columnist Anna B. Scott to host a morning program in 1925.<sup>63</sup> Scott dispensed recipes and household tips to the readers of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and her radio program consisted of similar fare. This arrangement persisted for a few years, while Strawbridge and the Lit Brothers established their own shows for housewives in the spring of 1928.<sup>64</sup> The Shepard Store in Boston organized its own women’s club, which numbered in the tens of thousands and was lead by “Jean Sargent,” an on-air persona used by multiple performers on station WNAC.<sup>65</sup> In contrast to these other stores, Wanamaker’s did not air informative talks in the morning hours for female listeners, nor did it air bedtime stories.

Along with its innovative stunts and famed storyteller, Gimbel’s differentiated itself from other stations of the era by staging radio performances as theatric spectacles. Before department stores incorporated broadcasting into their operations, they treated

their sales floors as pseudo-theatres, manipulating glass, color, and light to produce an atmosphere conducive to shopping. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that one store applied its expertise in visual display to this latest form of advertising. In May 1924, Gimbel's WIP demonstrated broadcasting techniques on stage at the Metropolitan Opera House in a program entitled, plainly enough, "A Night in a Broadcasting Station."<sup>66</sup> A brief newspaper article that appeared the day before the event stated: "Station officials have planned this performance in order to give the general public an idea of just how broadcasting is done."<sup>67</sup>

The Metropolitan Opera event served as a blueprint for an even more ambitious exploration of the "radio as theatre" concept. In July 1924, the *New York Times* outlined a new station that Gimbel's was planning to launch in New York:

The entire station, including the studio in which the artists perform, the transmitting room and power room, will be in a glass enclosure, so that the public can see how broadcasting is done and how the apparatus functions. Each instrument will be labeled and its purpose briefly explained. Visitors will be allowed in the studio when programs are being sent into the air and a special receiving room will be provided which will enable people to gather and hear important events broadcast by various stations.<sup>68</sup>

Based on reports published elsewhere and other accounts, it is not clear if Gimbel's executed on this plan exactly as promised, though the use of a "studio audience" was a defining element of the new station from its inception.

Gimbel's officially unveiled WGBS on October 24, 1924.<sup>69</sup> By this date, radio stations could request specific call letters and the store claimed that the acronym stood for "World's Greatest Broadcasting System."<sup>70</sup> It was no accident that the same letters could represent the "Gimbel Brothers store." As part of the opening night gala, a small theatre was constructed on the eighth floor, the very same location where shoppers first observed

“broadcasting in progress” according to Banning.<sup>71</sup> To run the new station, the store hired Dailey Paskman, a 27-year-old Philadelphia native with promotional experience in the theatrical world.<sup>72</sup> Paskman recalled the star-studded event in an undated memo in which he referred to himself in the third person:

After all a department store is a rather prosaic setting for the theatrical venture he had planned, and in order to make the thing a success, Mr. Paskman realized that it would be necessary to give the theatrical folks a background that would make them feel at home. To accomplish this, he did not have the use of stage carpenters scenic artists and electricians, but after all was forced to make use of the possibilities that a department store affords. That he was entirely successful can be attested to by those who were fortunate enough to have been there.

A miniature stage was erected at the end of a bowered grotto of growing plants and vines that completely hid the display of merchandise. The stage was fully equipped with as modern as type of lighting as can be found in our best theatres, and upon this stage many of the performers put over their stunts to the delight of the fortunate guests. At the same time, microphones picked up the sounds and passed it on to the waiting thousands who were picking it up from the ether.<sup>73</sup>

In Tyler’s study of music in department stores, she noted that the performers were sometimes obscured, presumably to leave shoppers free of the visual distraction.<sup>74</sup>

WGBS was reversing this dynamic, deliberately minimizing the station’s relationship to the commercial activities of its parent company.

The station printed eloquent invitations to its opening night ceremony; one was sent to Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover himself. The invitation promised that “the entire fascinating business of broadcasting will unfold itself before your eyes.”<sup>75</sup> To achieve this effect, the studio was located behind a large plate-glass window, recalling the layout of Wanamaker’s original wireless telegraph stations years before. *Variety* documented the celebrity-filled opening night, which was hosted by Eddie Cantor and also broadcast over WIP in Philadelphia.<sup>76</sup> Several years later, Cantor would become a

bona fide radio star on a self-named variety show, though judging from the positive review of his WGBS performance, he was already comfortable in front of the microphone. In a good-natured teasing of his sponsors, Cantor quipped “Wherever you go, there’s a Gimbel; you almost fall all over them.”<sup>77</sup>

The same article quoted Ellis Gimbel on the economic philosophy of the station.<sup>78</sup> Ellis stressed that WGBS was not a commercial station and would not sell advertising time, nor would the station pay its performers.<sup>79</sup> According to this logic, a radio station boosted a performer’s popularity and therefore did not have to financially compensate artists. A few months later, the director of the Shepard Stores’ flagship station WNAC voiced a similar sentiment regarding payments for the use of songs: “If we must pay for the use of the song, we expect them to pay for the use of a broadcast station.”<sup>80</sup> These comments reveal one of the debates within the early radio industry, a debate in which at least two department store stations shared the same position.

In April 1926, shortly after the installation of a new transmitter for the station, *Variety* wrote:

For the first time since the radio stations have been broadcasting, Gimbel Brothers are the first with a broadcast invitation for the public to visit the studio on the eighth floor of the store and see how it operates.<sup>81</sup>

This claim of “first” can likely be attributed to some overly zealous publicist, as it was certainly not factual. Many department stores, including Gimbel’s main branch in Philadelphia, had already built radio studios with plate-glass windows on their sales floors.<sup>82</sup> This particular set-up, in fact, appears to have been the de facto standard for stores as it encouraged curious visitors to enter the building.<sup>83</sup> There was an occasional broadcast directly from a store-front window, though this was less common.<sup>84</sup>

But if WGBS was not the first to use a studio audience, the specific language used by the trade press of the era suggests that this station promoted the concept more aggressively than others. *Radio News*, for example, printed a photo of the WGBS facility and described it as a “novel glass partitioned studio.”<sup>85</sup> The photo shows a man seated behind a microphone in what appears to be a well-furnished, middle class drawing room, similar to the domestic tableaux that department stores staged in their store-front window displays. This station was not the “first” to employ a studio audience as claimed by *Variety*, though the practice was still unusual enough to warrant the adjective “novel.”

The use of shoppers as an audience by Gimbel’s and other department stores was a prophetic development in the history of electronic communication. Dallas W. Smythe argued that the fundamental commodity in commercial broadcasting is not the advertised product but the audience itself.<sup>86</sup> Potential advertisers “buy” audience members, or at least momentary access to their attention span, and those shows with higher ratings cost proportionally more than those with lower numbers. Viewed from this perspective, consuming electronic media is tantamount to labor in that it produces something of value. Watching television, or listening to the radio, may be perceived as the antithesis of productive activity, but Smythe’s observation highlights how integral this activity is to the functioning of the commercial system of entertainment. In the department store scenario, consuming electronic media is conflated not only with “working” but also with “shopping,” for there is little distinction between the three activities. As more and more televised advertisements are directed to the public, on screens of varying sizes and shapes in a bewildering number of locations, and as technology increasingly allows for

individuals to purchase products directly through the same viewing devices, the scenario of “audience members as shoppers” is not an unusual arrangement but rather the norm.

In an interview conducted some years later, the director of WGBS, Dailey Paskman, explained his reason for moving into a new medium:

In accepting the directorship of a radio station, I had no thought of leaving the theatre, but merely aimed to bring the theatre to the radio studio. In my initial effort on our opening night, I evolved a setting whereby the stage and radio could be combined.<sup>87</sup>

Over the next few years, Paskman indeed brought “theatre to radio” and he arranged to have numerous plays, musicals, and operas broadcast directly from the stage, and WGBS often aired reviews of local productions. A review of one theatrical broadcast from March 1926 praised it as “one of the most perfect pick-ups that has ever been engineered from a stage.”<sup>88</sup> Paskman adapted and created many dramatic works for radio, this at a time when musical performances and informative talks dominated the airwaves. In recognition of the particular requirements of an aural medium, he incorporated music to sustain the listeners’ attention during otherwise silent moments. “Those set owners who have never heard a radio play will find this one worth tuning in for,” wrote the *New York American* in a review of the WGBS play “Danger.”<sup>89</sup> To develop new types of content, Paskman also borrowed liberally from the past and he brought nineteenth century blackface routines to the air with his own troupe of “Radio Minstrels.” In 1928, he co-authored a book on American minstrelsy and credited radio with breathing new life into the decades-old art form.<sup>90</sup>

Paskman’s duties extended beyond running the radio station, as he felt compelled to explain to the *Newark News* in December 1925. The paper had lamented WGBS’



“tiresome” programming and wondered what had become of the station’s inventive radio dramas.<sup>91</sup> Paskman responded personally, explaining in a letter that he had been organizing a circus as part of a Gimbel’s Christmas promotion. He even invited the reviewer to pay a personal visit “before the Circus closes as I would like to show you how a department store can be converted into a young Madison Square Garden.”<sup>92</sup>

In the same letter, Paskman also mentioned that he had recently visited Boston to assist with a broadcast of “The Miracle,” a play originally staged by his former employer. This particular production had been staged at the Boston Opera House and was sent over the airwaves courtesy of WNAC, the station of the Shepard Store. WNAC frequently broadcast from local theatres, with an emphasis on opera.<sup>93</sup> Both Paskman and John Shepard III believed that radio was an aid, not an obstacle, to the financial viability of the theater. Listeners who heard an opera on the radio, according to this logic, would be induced to visit the production in person.<sup>94</sup>

But if Paskman’s minstrel shows promoted unrealistic stereotypes of African-Americans, some of his other programs sought to satisfy various ethnic groups. “WGBS is striving to find programs appealing to Radio fans who have not been very long in this country,” wrote *Radio Digest Illustrated* in 1925.<sup>95</sup> This mention was in reference to a program featuring Italian artists, and WGBS also aired Russian, Mexican, and Danish performers. Before attributing any altruistic motives to these programs, it’s instructive to recall that the airwaves of New York were among the most crowded in the nation. Paskman may have been simply engaging in what we might now call “counterprogramming,” going after under-served segments of the audience.

There were two features in particular that appeared consistently on the WGBS schedule.<sup>96</sup> In an obvious attempt to duplicate WIP in Philadelphia, the New York store had “Uncle Gee Bee” in the early evening. This program lasted a few years, disappearing when the station was reorganized in 1928 as a commercial broadcaster. The second regular feature of WGBS programming were morning talks aimed at women. About the same time that Anna Scott began her program on WIP, Therese Rose Nagel began such a show for WGBS. “Timely Talks,” as the program was known, remained on the air for several years. Other shows airing in the morning and daytime hours were devoted to fashion, shopping, and beauty, and there is little doubt as gender of the target audience. One particular program from March 1925 required that women not only listen but also shop at the store.<sup>97</sup> Over the course of two days, WGBS aired step-by-step dress-making lessons, while Gimbel’s offered special prices on the necessary fabrics.

While WGBS was winning accolades in New York, Gimbel’s continued to operate WIP in Philadelphia and extended its radio holdings to Pittsburgh. The history of Gimbel’s radio illustrates two of the biggest trends to affect the industry in the 1920s.

### **Consolidation and Commercialization**

Just as department stores were involved in the beginnings of broadcast advertising at WEA, stores in Boston, Providence, and Pittsburgh figured into that station’s creation of a network. In order to reach the maximum number of listeners, and thus charge more to potential sponsors, the phone company used its expansive infrastructure to disseminate the same program over multiple outlets. In January 1923, engineers for the phone company used long distance telephone circuits to establish a link between WEA and a

department store in Boston. Banning anointed the event “the first network broadcast” and described the programming as three hours of music, songs, and bird calls.<sup>98</sup> The signal was transmitted from New York and then broadcast over WNAC, owned by the Shepard Store. Engineers used the opportunity to resolve technical issues with the hook-up, and AT & T immediately set out to establish a formal network.

The WNAC hook-up was a one-night event, though other department store stations would comprise some of the first regular affiliates of WEAFF’s network. By the end of 1923, three stations were connected on a regular basis. Two of these stations were directly owned by the phone company in New York and Washington, D.C., while the third was WJAR, run by the Outlet Store in Providence.<sup>99</sup> By October 1924, the chain had expanded to six outlets, including WCAE, owned by the Kaufmann & Baer department store in Pittsburgh. These six stations were the basis of the “red network,” or what would eventually become NBC.<sup>100</sup> In identifying stations to partner with, AT & T targeted broadcasters who had purchased transmitters from its subsidiary Western Electric; Banning listed 58 such stations, 11 of which were owned by department stores.<sup>101</sup>

Despite its initial connection to WEAFF, WNAC did not become a regular affiliate. Rather, Shepard established a “proto-chain” of his own and hooked up to WEAN, the station of the Shepard Store in Providence, Rhode Island.<sup>102</sup> Shepard became such an impassioned supporter of the medium that Archer described him as someone who “literally ate, drank and slept immersed in the thoughts of radio broadcasting.”<sup>103</sup> Shepard was elected as the first vice-president for the National Association of

Broadcasters and grew his operations into the Yankee and Colonial regional networks in New England.<sup>104</sup>

Gimbel's also experimented with chain broadcasting in the 1920s, the same time that the store was expanding its operation to multiple stores in different cities. Many of the programs heard on WGBS, for example, were also broadcast over WIP. In April 1925, Paskman utilized his show business connections and organized a celebrity-filled gala aboard the S.S. Leviathan.<sup>105</sup> An evening's worth of programming was broadcast directly from the ship, and some portion of the event was also carried by WIP. Paskman detailed the program in a letter to a local newspaper, explaining that WGBS had temporarily interrupted the program to broadcast a distress signal from another vessel. "But, fortunately, I had arranged a hook-up with the Gimbel's station in Philadelphia — WIP — so that they could broadcast direct from New York during the period we were off," Paskman wrote. "Their station is an inland one and hence not affected by SOS regulations."<sup>106</sup>

WIP also shared programs with an Atlantic City station, particularly for programs coming from its studio-on-the-pier, and in the summer of 1926 announced that a network of five stations would soon commence.<sup>107</sup> *Radio Digest Illustrated* began its story on the proposed chain by stating: "One of the most important moves in eastern broadcasting will take place early in June."<sup>108</sup> In addition to the two store stations in Philadelphia and New York, a third Gimbel's station was now part of the mix, WCAE in Pittsburgh. At the end of 1925, Gimbel's had taken over the Kaufmann & Baer store, along with the accompanying radio station.<sup>109</sup> The organization now controlled six large stores in New

York, Philadelphia, Milwaukee and Pittsburgh, and created its own networks to reach shoppers in these areas.<sup>110</sup>

Like Gimbel's, other department stores in Philadelphia also participated in chain broadcasting, though they typically functioned as affiliates, not as the originators of programs. Strawbridge & Clothier, the Lit Brothers, and Wanamaker's, for example, were all affiliated with either the WEAf or NBC chain.<sup>111</sup> When the Strawbridge station aired a speech from President Coolidge in April 1924, it was one link in the WEAf chain; when WIP aired a Coolidge speech a few months later, it was the leader of its own 3-station chain.<sup>112</sup> A few years later in 1927, the Lit Brothers aired the Penn-Cornell Thanksgiving Day football game as part of the NBC chain; WIP, meanwhile, aired the same game on its own, as it had done for the past five years.<sup>113</sup>

While WIP may have experimented with chain broadcasting, its attempts were overshadowed by the growth of the NBC and CBS, the Columbia Broadcasting System. Founded in 1926 and 1927 respectively, these two businesses evolved into powerful networks, with dozens of affiliates across the country, and together they dominated American radio by the early 1930s.<sup>114</sup> Both networks relied on the policy first called "toll broadcasting" which by 1925 was no longer the exclusive practice of AT & T, and their growth symbolized the commercialization of the American airwaves.

The commercialization and consolidation of the American radio industry was greatly aided by the actions of government regulators, even if they publicly decried these trends. At the first radio conference, for example, Herbert Hoover uttered these oft-quoted words:

It is inconceivable that we should allow so great a possibility for service, for news, for entertainment, for education, and for vital commercial purposes, to be drowned out in advertising chatter.<sup>115</sup>

At the later conferences, Hoover's attitude softened and it is telling that advertising over the airwaves was never made illegal, nor did the government support any alternative funding scheme for the fledgling medium. By the Fourth Radio Conference, the government endorsed indirect advertising as an appropriate and suitable use of radio.<sup>116</sup>

The Department of Commerce choreographed these radio conferences in conjunction with those corporations directly involved in radio, though they failed to produce any binding legislation. Without specific guidance from Congress, the Department of Commerce continued to derive its authority from the Radio Act of 1912 and formulated its own policies for regulating broadcasters. After a Chicago radio station, unhappy with a wavelength assignment, filed a lawsuit against the government, the courts ruled in 1926 that the outdated legislation did not in fact grant the Commerce Department any authority over broadcasting.<sup>117</sup> Stations now no longer felt it necessary to remain on assigned wavelengths or limit their power to avoid interference with others.

The result, as might be expected, was a chaotic situation for both broadcasters and listeners. Congress resolved this "tragedy of the ethereal commons" with the Federal Radio Act of 1927 which established a Federal Radio Commission.<sup>118</sup> The FRC took its initial guidance from the Department of Commerce, and was an official inscription of policies already set in motion. Recognizing that the airwave spectrum was a finite resource, the FRC mandated that stations operate in the "public interest." The government opted for a technocratic interpretation of this vague phrase.<sup>119</sup> Powerful stations which refrained from delivering specific points of view, such as the big

commercial operators, were deemed to be in the public interest as they delivered strong, clear signals to the broadest group of listeners. Stations that disseminated the views of a labor union or a church, by contrast, were thought to represent only one viewpoint, and therefore were not in the public interest. Likewise, broadcasters who could not afford the most up-to-date or highest quality equipment were given second class treatment.

All existing broadcasters had to file for new government licenses, and most had their frequencies re-assigned. With an act known as General Order 40, the FRC established 40 “clear channels,” frequencies given exclusively to one station. Those stations not fortunate enough to win such a choice assignment had to continue awkward time-sharing agreements. The majority of the clear channels went to stations already affiliated, or soon-to-be affiliated, with one of the commercial networks. McChesney, in particular, attached great significance to this act and wrote: “U.S. broadcasting rapidly crystallized as a system dominated by two nationwide chains supported by commercial advertising.”<sup>120</sup>

The actions of the FRC may have supported the spread of radio advertising, but commercialism existed before the passage of General Order 40 in 1928. Indeed, Hilmes wrote that “never was there a time in the development of broadcasting in the United States when commercialism ... did not form a central core of the listening experience.”<sup>121</sup> Department store stations, as well as those owned by manufacturers and retailers, in radio’s earliest period are a testament to Hilmes’ claim, though some historians have dismissed this initial approach to advertising. In their exhaustive history of broadcasting, for example Sterling and Kittross wrote: “Department stores owned a station as a

publicity investment; although it wasn't advertising, the simple announcement of ownership or location was deemed worth the cost."<sup>122</sup>

If there was indeed a difference between the goodwill publicity of the early 1920s and the more direct advertisements of later years, the difference should be understood as one of degree and not of quality. Department store stations were vehicles for advertising, and some of their fare was clearly intended to push specific products. Recall that as early as 1922 the NRDGA suggested that stores give talks focusing on particular departments, such as fashion. With this in mind, how can dress-making instructions from WGBS, to mention just one example, not be interpreted as a promotion for Gimbel's fabric department?

In an advertisement for the debut of its New York station, Gimbel's claimed that the station would be "a public servant in the fullest sense of the word," just as John Wanamaker and earlier merchants positioned themselves as public benefactors.<sup>123</sup> Such claims were not always believed. In 1923, a district court scrutinized the operation of WOR and found that, despite Bamberger's claims, the station was not a charitable institution.<sup>124</sup> The case involved the broadcasting of a particular musical selection, and the court found that such an action could constitute a "public performance for profit," a violation of the original composer's rights. As evidence to support its decision, the court noted that WOR frequently repeated the slogan, "L. Bamberger & Co., One of America's Great Stores, Newark, N. J." Had the aim of WOR been anything other than to advertise the department store, there was no reason for such a slogan.

In 1925, Gimbel's echoed Bamberger's sentiments and argued that its New York station was not an advertising vehicle. In a meeting with government regulators, a



representative of the store noted that its street address was never mentioned on the air.<sup>125</sup>

Another individual who had attended the same meeting later wrote to the Department of Commerce to comment on the absurdity of this claim:

There is no question but that the air is plastered with advertising. It is as if the National Yellowstone Park were permitted to become the Happy Hunting Ground of the bill-poster.<sup>126</sup>

At the time, critics of advertising clearly understood the motivations of the department store broadcasters, though the explicitly commercial nature of so much early broadcasting has been downplayed by some media historians.

Some of the resistance to radio advertising at the time was not based on aesthetics, morality, or politics, but a more basic question — was it actually effective? Smulyan has outlined a campaign, spearheaded by NBC in the late 1920s, to convince potential clients that radio was an effective medium.<sup>127</sup> Department stores needed little convincing, however, and were among the voices supporting the benefits of radio advertising. After the City of Paris Dry Goods Store in San Francisco took over station KFRC, for example, it was claimed that “the business in the radio department increased many times over the amount done previously.”<sup>128</sup>

Strawbridge & Clothier gave even more pronounced support for radio advertising, claiming that it was more cost effective than newspapers or direct mailings. Writing in the *Bulletin of the NRDGA*, the store’s sales manager cited specific successes and claimed that one listener had even purchased a piano similar to one played on WFI because he so enjoyed the “tone.”<sup>129</sup> In his history of the same store, Lief detailed an instance (possibly the same) in which that instrument also proved the retail benefits of broadcasting.<sup>130</sup> Strawbridge & Clothier was selling pianos and deliberately restricted the promotion to

radio, with a “well-known local pianist” providing demonstrations once a week for fifteen minutes at a time. The experiment aimed to sell twenty-five pianos over the course of five weeks. Lief claimed that this figure was reached after only two weeks. An enthusiastic statement from Strawbridge & Clothier also appeared in a 1928 industry report about the effectiveness of radio advertising.<sup>131</sup>

The ultimate goal of the store stations was to encourage the sale of merchandise, though their programming emphasized “showmanship” over “salesmanship.” According to Meyers’ study of advertising professionals and early radio programming, these two terms were used at the time to denote alternate approaches to advertising.<sup>132</sup> The indirect, goodwill publicity of the early 1920s was clearly in the showmanship vein, and department stores were identified as particularly adept practitioners of this approach. Hugo Gernsback characterized store stations in an editorial in the November 1925 issue of *Radio News*:

Suppose a large department store has a broadcasting station. How long would its listeners stand for it if the department store were to praise its wares in almost every sentence? Nothing like this, of course, ever happens.<sup>133</sup>

Gernsback was one of the principle voices of the amateur radio community and if store programming was offensive or grating in the least, he would have most likely attested to this fact.

In the summer of 1925, Edwin Dunham of the Shepard Stores’ WNAC authored a passionate defense of commercialized broadcasting.<sup>134</sup> The memo was intended to persuade local businesses to sponsor radio programs and stated quite directly that “there really should be no criticism of this practice.”<sup>135</sup> According to Dunham, advertisers should be thanked for all the high quality programming they brought to the American

public. In this memo, as well as a similar one from the following year, Dunham claimed that commercial broadcasters would not allow boring, uninteresting, or offensive messages to alienate listeners. In this regard, commercial broadcasting was inherently preferable to the non-commercial variety.

Store stations did more than merely generate goodwill publicity for their owners, however. In 1925, both Bamberger's and the Shepard Stores started to sell portions of their airtime to other businesses, while Gimbel's and Strawbridge & Clothier in Philadelphia did so the following year.<sup>136</sup> Davies explained that Gimbel's felt somewhat forced into this decision:

My competitors were selling time without restriction and making money. They were in the position of going out and buying the best talent in Philadelphia while I had to depend upon amateurs or friends, who were getting offers with pay from the other stations and I had to suffer.<sup>137</sup>

Gimbel's granted Davies permission to sell airtime, but not to companies that sold products already available in one of the store's 108 departments. As a compromise, Davies recalled that he arranged for a coal company to sponsor a one-hour program on a weekly basis, as this was one of the few items not sold by Gimbel's. The compromise lasted for two years, and other non-competitive sponsors included ice and milk companies, along with Western Union. According to *Broadcasting* magazine, the first commercial on WIP was for Hajoca Plumbing Supplies; "The sale was made on a Gimbel's department store sales slip, just like selling a pair of shoes."<sup>138</sup> This alternate claim is also possible, as it is unlikely that the department store engaged in this particular line of business. The restriction lasted two years and Gimbel's became an even more explicit commercial broadcaster in 1928. In the words of Davies, "the bars were dropped."<sup>139</sup>

While stores were accepting advertisements for other companies, they did so with an eye toward maintaining their respected reputations. Strawbridge & Clothier, for example, would not promote beer or allow “any other controversial advertising.”<sup>140</sup> The Hale Brother’s KPO in San Francisco made a similar claim; “Although sponsored programs are accepted and broadcast, price quotations, astrologers, soothsayers, fortune-tellers and ... the sale of all questionable products are not permitted.”<sup>141</sup> In this same vein, a government inspector who visited Gimbel’s in 1930 praised the station’s fine programming, mentioned Uncle WIP, and found that “very few of the short advertising announcements, common to most stations, are used.”<sup>142</sup>

### **End of an Era**

In November 1928, WGBS became a commercial broadcaster and broke free, quite literally, from Gimbel’s.<sup>143</sup> The studio was moved from the store’s eighth floor to the Hotel Lincoln in the theatre district.<sup>144</sup> The department store retained partial ownership of the station, with Dailey Paskman and another shareholder controlling the rest. The owners referred to themselves as the “General Broadcasting System,” and preserved the same call letters.<sup>145</sup> Therese Rose Nagel continued her program under the new ownership; Uncle Gee Bee did not.

Two years later, the General Broadcasting System was generating profits with an extensive roster of advertisers and planned to expand into a nationwide network.<sup>146</sup> While many of these advertisers, such as General Motors, Warner Brother Pictures, and the New York Times, were not competitors to the store, many were, including Bloomingdales and the Sears-Roebuck Company. Gimbel’s controlled one-third of the

interest in the station though was not limiting the commercial operation as one might expect from a department store.

The General Broadcasting System's network dreams, however, were not realized. In October 1931, the American Radio News Corporation, an organization of William Randolph Hearst, purchased WGBS and changed the call letters to WINS.<sup>147</sup> The station persists to this day, under different ownership, as an all-news station, a legacy of Hearst's original acquisition. The Gimbel's station in Pittsburgh, WCAE, was also sold to one of Hearst's companies. In December 1931, the *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph* acquired the station, which had been originally established as a joint venture with a different paper in the previous decade.<sup>148</sup>

Being taken over by or joining forces with a newspaper was, in fact, a common fate for department store stations. In 1928, Sears-Roebuck chose not to adopt the commercial system of operation for WLS and instead sold the station to the *Prairie Farmer*, a publication geared towards the same rural audience.<sup>149</sup> In San Francisco, the Hales Brothers combined forces with the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 1926 to operate KPO; in 1932, the station was sold to NBC and became the primary west coast affiliate.<sup>150</sup>

In 1928, Wanamaker's closed station WOO, a decision that according to Biswanger, was made by the store's new management.<sup>151</sup> One of John Wanamaker's sons, Rodman, had been running the store until he passed away. The new managers "were unwilling to continue several store activities that had been private passions of Rodman Wanamaker."<sup>152</sup> Biswanger also quoted a contemporary observer who wrote that the management was unwilling to improve the "out of date" equipment.<sup>153</sup>

By comparison, the Philadelphia stations of Strawbridge & Clothier and the Lit Brothers did not come to an abrupt end, but rather combined to become the local affiliate of the NBC network. These two stations had been sharing the same frequency for years and were both affiliated with the network.<sup>154</sup> This arrangement gave NBC a steady outlet in Philadelphia as the network could send its programming to whomever happened to be broadcasting on a given night. In 1934, the two stores formed the WFIL Broadcasting Company; a set of call letters that owed something to both precursors as well as their city of origin.<sup>155</sup> The studio was located in the Widener building, separate from both stores, and Strawbridge & Clothier and the Lit Brothers each received three hours a week of free airtime on the newly formed WFIL.<sup>156</sup> The *Philadelphia Inquirer* bought the station in 1945. Of this transaction, Lief wrote “like other department-store owners of radio stations who disposed of them to newspapers; the markup was quite high.”<sup>157</sup>

WIP, which had been operating on a commercial basis since 1926, entered into a similar collaborative arrangement with another Philadelphia station. In 1931, Gimbel’s pooled its resources with the Keystone Broadcasting Company, owners of WFAN which shared the same wavelength.<sup>158</sup> As part of the agreement, the department store retained direct control over one hour of airtime each day; thirty minutes in the morning and thirty minutes in the early evening. For approximately a year, the station used both sets of call letters and broadcast as WIP-WFAN. In 1932, the station reverted to its original, more succinct call sign and was operated by the Pennsylvania Broadcasting Company, a subsidiary of Gimbel’s.<sup>159</sup>

Gimbel’s retained an interest in the station until WIP acquired new owners in 1959.<sup>160</sup> In a phone interview, an employee of WIP in the late 1940s insisted that the

department store no longer had anything do with the station's operation.<sup>161</sup> By this time, the main studios had been relocated to an office building owned by Gimbel's, adjacent to the store. The Uncle WIP program was still around though, and station employees got a 10% discount at the store.

Two other stations that have been major players in this narrative, WNAC of the Shepard Store in Boston and WOR from Bamberger's in Newark, also survived the industry shake-out of the early 1930s. WNAC became the anchor of the Yankee network, while WOR joined with a handful of other stations to form the Mutual network.<sup>162</sup> Bamberger's department store had been taken over by Macy's in 1929, though WOR remained licensed to the "Bamberger Broadcasting Service."<sup>163</sup> And, like WIP, both WNAC and WOR operated as traditional commercial broadcasters and sold time to companies that were ostensibly competitors to the department stores which first brought them to life.<sup>164</sup>

### **Shopping Shows**

At the same time that stores were leaving the radio industry or otherwise restructuring their operations, advertising over the airwaves became increasingly direct. In his description of this change, Barnouw wrote "the years 1929-32 were a period of almost spectacular retreat from previous standards."<sup>165</sup> The economic downturn of the era spurred the transition; sponsors were willing to go even further to entice potential consumers, and commercial broadcasters competed with each other to attract paying clients. Advertising agencies established separate divisions, if they had not already done

so, and developed new techniques and programs for the medium. Direct advertising first appeared during daytime programming and migrated to the evening hours.<sup>166</sup>

This change in advertising is typified by the growth of shopping shows, a genre of programming particularly favored by department stores. In contrast to indirect advertising, in which the sponsor's name was invoked but products never discussed, these shows were explicit descriptions of products and prices. The sales messages were often woven into a flimsy dramatic narrative, though some shows dispensed with even this pretense. Fictional female characters typically served as hosts, sometimes using names derived from the respective store; Burdine's of Miami, for example, reworked the syllables of its name and had "Enid Burr" as a spokesperson.<sup>167</sup> When the *DGE* gave recommendations for telephone-shopping services in 1922, it claimed that female sales clerks were more effective than men; in 1935, the NRDGA issued similar advice regarding radio-based shopping services:

Almost all stores use a woman – primarily because her talks are on subjects of interest to women ... Hers must be a good microphone voice. As the window displays are frequently called the eyes of the store, the broadcaster becomes known as the voice of the store. This is so important that in some stores a great part of the cost of the radio program is represented in the salary paid the announcer.<sup>168</sup>

Ira Hirschmann, a department store executive who was particularly supportive of radio, used *Broadcasting* magazine to advise other retailers of the best ways to utilize the medium.<sup>169</sup> According to Hirschmann, Bamberger's introduced the first direct selling show in 1927 on WOR, though for the first six months, the goal was simply to introduce the store's announcer. "After six months, when we felt that the audience was responding to this approach," wrote Hirschmann, "we offered merchandise one day and were



stormed with orders.”<sup>170</sup> Nine a.m. was recommended as the ideal time for such a program; the 1922 telephone-shopping suggestions from the *DGE* had also suggested morning hours for optimum sales. As an additional suggestion, Hirschmann stressed that advertising campaign should be coordinated between radio and newspapers.

Accompanying one of Hirschmann’s articles was a sample script for a domestic scene in which all the dialogue revolved around a shirt sale at Bamberger’s.<sup>171</sup> The characters consisted of a woman, her male cousin, and a stereotypical African-American maid. The presence of the maid was no accident as the store consciously promoted an elite lifestyle to which its consumers could aspire. A study of *Charm* magazine, a promotional venture from Bamberger’s that ran from 1924-32, similarly stressed the elite appeal of this publication: “Undoubtedly the readership ... was skewed to those who enjoyed a certain economic stature.”<sup>172</sup>

A similar shopping show from the John Taylor Dry Goods Company of Kansas City also appears in the literature on early radio advertising.<sup>173</sup> Hettinger praised the success of the “Joanne Taylor” program and noted that everything in the show, from answering letters from listeners to comical banter with an office boy, was choreographed around merchandise.<sup>174</sup> According to Hettinger, the show was a proven success; a brand of chiffon hose promoted by Joanne Taylor outsold two national brands despite a higher price.<sup>175</sup>

Just as department stores had used the least offensive form of indirect advertising on radio, they found the least offensive way to use direct advertising. A 1931 manual on broadcasting example, for example, warned that a station could lose the “great mass of its audience” if direct advertising overtook entertainment:

There are exceptions to this rule where, for instance, a shopping service has been sponsored by a great department store in a way where price information, style data, guidance in the selection of commodities, etc., have been worked out in a type of conversational continuity both pleasing and valuable, thereby creating a service without any attempt at a program of entertainment.<sup>176</sup>

A similar manual, also published in 1931, singled out WOR as a station that found success with informative talks during the day: “The advertisers have found that they can talk more in the daytime and that housewives do not find the talks offensive.”<sup>177</sup>

Hirschmann’s claim that Bamberger’s was the first to employ overt advertising, like other similar claims, was not accurate. Two stations in Shenandoah, Iowa, both owned by seed companies, used their airwaves for direct selling years earlier.<sup>178</sup> According to Doerksen, KFNF, the first of these two stations, added an extensive range of items to its inventory and become a virtual general store of the air. Imitators popped up in other rural areas.<sup>179</sup> Unlike WOR, these rural “direct sellers” did not seek to build goodwill in the audience before advertising their merchandise; they were explicitly commercial out of the gate.

But if direct selling began prior to 1927, the year Bamberger’s introduced such a show, that year saw a marked expansion of this technique. In January 1927, a station in Boston launched with the unusual moniker of “Air Shopping News.”<sup>180</sup> John Shepard III was one of the merchants behind the effort which took the idea of joint-station operation, as originally evidenced by Hamburger’s in Los Angeles, to an even further extreme. Using the call letters WASN, fifteen different department stores controlled separate blocks of airtime. The various programs consisted of musical numbers, news of the day, and sales information, all supplied by female announcers.<sup>181</sup> According to one contemporary account of WASN, the direct selling technique was already fairly common

in the Midwest.<sup>182</sup> In October 1927, the *Dry Goods Reporter* additionally noted that a station in Nauvoo, Illinois had begun to broadcast prices on behalf of a local department store.<sup>183</sup>

In 1928, the Fair store in Chicago sponsored a similar radio program, though another communications technology was added to the mix — the telephone.<sup>184</sup> Six days a week on station WMAQ at 10:40 a.m., the store would broadcast “important features in styles and values.”<sup>185</sup> Shoppers could call a designated phone number to place their orders. Years earlier, this same store received the first broadcasting license for the station that would eventually become WMAQ.<sup>186</sup> The *Chicago Daily News* was now running the station, though a commercial relationship with the original owner remained.

WIP’s morning program appears to have taken on a more direct approach to advertising as part of this transition to direct advertising. After Anna Scott’s program disappeared from the lineup in 1928, for example, the new morning programs bore such titles as “The WIP Shopper Talks to Her Friends” and “The Gimbel-gram: a Shopping Service.”<sup>187</sup> After Gimbel’s partnered with WFAN and retained control over a block of morning air time, “Gimbel Gossip” aired at 9:30 a.m. each day.<sup>188</sup>

In the summer of 1932, Benedict Gimbel, the president of WIP-WFAN, penned an article for *Broadcasting* magazine that touted a successful experiment in radio advertising.<sup>189</sup> Women who watched a particular broadcast in the store’s auditorium were given slips of paper; these slips were then presented when an item was purchased. After this crude system of consumer tracking was implemented, “a very appreciable increase in business was immediately apparent in all departments.”<sup>190</sup> The same article also praised the daily morning show from “Jean Dale,” the official “Gimbel Shopper.” A

close examination of sales receipts proved the effectiveness of her program, with lower priced articles benefiting the most from radio promotion. Jean Dale did more than merely boost profits for Gimbel's itself as her show also accommodated other sponsors. Manufacturers of food products, cosmetics, household appliances, and other items which targeted to females all bought time in the WIP-WFAN morning timeslot.

A number of articles in *Broadcasting* from the early 1930s recommended that department stores sponsor their own shopping shows, often invoking a specific example of the genre.<sup>191</sup> Similar to the creation of the "Air Shopping News" in Boston, some of these programs were joint efforts with multiple stores as sponsors.<sup>192</sup> These articles had a somewhat pleading tone, with broadcasters and other retailers urging department stores to devote more of their advertising budgets to radio. Despite the level of department store involvement in the original broadcasting boom, these institutions were not among the leading users of radio in later decades.<sup>193</sup> The stores were frequent advertisers on local stations, though in relation to other types of businesses, they devoted only a small portion of their overall advertising budget to the medium.<sup>194</sup>

The reluctance of department stores to invest heavily in broadcasting in the 1930s, as some had done in the previous decade, can be attributed to a few factors, not the least of which was the Depression. While a handful of the major stores retained their broadcast operations, the majority of them had abandoned their peripheral activities in the late 1920s. To fulfill a store's promotional needs, newspaper offered plenty of space, and advertising on a radio network with national or regional coverage was deemed unnecessary. A 1931 study of advertising explicitly attributed the demise of WOO, Wanamaker's Philadelphia outlet, to the newspaper circulation in that city. According to

Dunlap, “in Philadelphia local newspapers that thoroughly cover the city and suburbs are available.”<sup>195</sup> Wanamaker’s therefore did not have to maintain its own station to advertise to local shoppers. By comparison, “it is felt that Newark papers do not necessarily reach all the prospective buyers in the New Jersey suburbs.”<sup>196</sup> Dunlap believed that this was the reason that WOR, the Bamberger’s-then-Macy’s station, continued to flourish. This source does not mention the management change at Wanamaker’s, Biswanger’s explanation for the end of WOO, though newspapers were unquestionably the principle outlet for store advertising in the 1930s.

When the next major evolution in broadcast technology arrived, television, there was a renewed burst of department store activity and they sponsored many programs that conformed to the direct selling model.<sup>197</sup> In another parallel with their earlier use of radio, stores also installed in-store television systems and exhibited the technology immediately before and after World War II.<sup>198</sup> In 1939, the same year as RCA’s much heralded demonstration of television at the World’s Fair, a similar collection of equipment traveled to 88 department stores, allegedly giving more than three million Americans their first exposure to the medium.<sup>199</sup> Gimbel’s in Philadelphia was again a particularly enthusiastic supporter of the new technology and even awarded Uncle WIP his own show in the 1940s.<sup>200</sup> Department stores once again gave producers an opportunity to refine the techniques of advertising and find the appropriate balance between showmanship and salesmanship.

## Conclusion

Rather than focusing on the spread of radio advertising as a dramatic development in the late 1920s, as other historians have done, this chapter stresses the continuity of practices. Radio stations established by department stores were part of these retailers' ongoing tradition of adopting new technologies, patronizing the arts, innovating new forms of advertising, and conducting retail transactions with remote consumers. The structure that the commercial broadcasting system would eventually take, with sponsors, broadcasters, and advertising agencies as separate entities, should be seen as a specialization and professionalization of radio advertising, not as a wholesale paradigm shift.

As indicated previously, department stores did not cease their involvement in broadcasting following the Depression. A continued focus on these institutions could shed new light on some major events within the history of radio. For example, after the technique of frequency modulation was developed, a number of stations affiliated with department stores moved into this arena for the same reason as before — to sell receivers.<sup>201</sup> Additionally, did newspapers really want to alienate department store stations during the famed Press-Radio War of the 1930s since these same businesses controlled so much print advertising?<sup>202</sup> The role that stores stations played in establishing networks, with both WNAC and WOR creating their own, is another area for additional research. While these particular topics, along with television, fell outside the scope of this current study, taken together they indicate that the influence of department stores extended beyond broadcasting's formative period.

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<sup>1</sup> Herman S. Hettinger, *A Decade of Radio Advertising* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), 173.

<sup>2</sup> The results of the AT & T study were published in “Who Will Ultimately Do the Broadcasting?,” *Radio Broadcast*, April 1923, 522-526.

<sup>3</sup> Hettinger, *A Decade of Radio Advertising*, 174.

<sup>4</sup> See entries on WIP, WOR, and WNAC in Appendix I for further details.

<sup>5</sup> See entries on WCAE, WGBS, and WIP in Appendix I for further details.

<sup>6</sup> Alfred Lief, *Family Business: A Century in the Life and Times of Strawbridge & Clothier* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 217.

<sup>7</sup> Frank W. Spaeth, ed., *Radio Broadcasting Manual: The Radio as a Publicity Medium for Retailers, An Appraisal with a Resume of Experiences* (New York: Sales Promotion Division, National Retail Dry Goods Association, 1935.)

<sup>8</sup> The only scholarly exploration of this topic is Anna McCarthy, *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2001), chap. 2, “Gendered Fantasies of TV Shopping in the Postwar Department Store,” 63-88. The television trade press of the 1940s contains numerous references to these shopping shows, see for example David Arons, “Television Becomes Sell-A-Vision at Gimbels-Philadelphia,” *Television*, June 1948, 22-23, 42, and also David Arons, “30-Day Experiment Doubles Sales,” *Television*, May 1949, 21, 31.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994.) The claim about regularly scheduled shows from 98; the claim about risk-taking businesses from 103.

<sup>10</sup> To cite one example of an established company advertising over the radio, the Don Lee Cadillac Company advertised on KPO before the same company established its own regional network in the late 1920s. See “KPO Features Auto Tour on Air Tonight,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 23 April 1925, 6. On the formation of the Don Lee network, see John Schneider, “The History of KFRC and the Don Lee Networks,” <<http://www.bayarearadio.org/schneider/kfrc1.shtml>> (6 March 2007). An even larger automotive company, General Motors, sponsored a weekly series on a chain of 28 stations in 1927. See “General Motors To Go On Air Soon,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 October 1927, B20.

<sup>11</sup> Susan Smulyan, “Radio Advertising to Women in Twenties America: ‘A Latchkey to Every Home’,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 13, no. 3 (1993): 299-314; Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1997), particularly chap. 5, “The Disembodied Woman,”

130-150; For a discussion of similar programming from the 1930s and later, see Steven J. Smethers and Jolliffe, Lee Jolliffe, "Homemaking Programs," *Journalism History* 24, no. 4 (Winter 1998/99): 138-147.

<sup>12</sup> Clifford J. Doerksen, *American Babel: Rogue Radio Broadcasters of the Jazz Age* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.)

<sup>13</sup> On the creation of WEAf and AT&T's policy of selling airtime, see Christopher H. Sterling and John Michael Kittross, *Stay Tuned: A History of American Broadcasting*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Mahway, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 75; Doerksen identified station WHN in New York as one station that had developed its own policy for "selling airtime" before WEAf, *American Babel*, 23.

<sup>14</sup> Details on early WEAf advertising and Gimbel's involvement from William Peck Banning, *Commercial Broadcasting Pioneer: The WEAf Experiment, 1922-26* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 108-109.

<sup>15</sup> For some details on the early WEAf advertisements, along with dates, see Gleason Archer, *History of Radio to 1926* (New York: American Historical Society, 1938), 288-289

<sup>16</sup> Archer, *History of Radio to 1926*, 289.

<sup>17</sup> Banning, *Commercial Broadcasting Pioneer*, 109.

<sup>18</sup> Banning, *Commercial Broadcasting Pioneer*, 109.

<sup>19</sup> Archer, *History of Radio to 1926*, 290.

<sup>20</sup> Erik Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 158.

<sup>21</sup> Cynthia Barbara Meyers, "Admen and the Shaping of American Commercial Broadcasting, 1926-50" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas-Austin, 2005), 3.

<sup>22</sup> See entry on WWZ in Appendix I.

<sup>23</sup> On WJZ's offer of free airtime, see Smulyan, *Selling Radio*, 100.

<sup>24</sup> Smulyan, *Selling Radio*, 100.

<sup>25</sup> Edgar Felix, *Using Radio in Sales Promotion: A Book for Advertisers, Station Managers and Broadcasting Artists* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1927), 99.

<sup>26</sup> Felix, *Using Radio in Sales Promotion*, 99.



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<sup>27</sup> Radio program listings from the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 17 April 1923, 23.

<sup>28</sup> Information on the re-assignment of the Philadelphia stations from the Davies/Tisdale Interview. Program listings from Philadelphia newspapers were used for confirmation.

<sup>29</sup> Davies/Tisdale Interview.

<sup>30</sup> Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 74.

<sup>31</sup> Shepard participated in both the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> National Radio Conferences, see files for the Predecessor Agencies to the Federal Radio Commission, "List of Persons in Attendance at Third National Radio Conference, October 6, 1924" and "'List of Delegates to Fourth National Radio Conference, November 9, 1925.'" RG 173, 54-A258; Ed Davies claim from Davies/Tisdale Interview.

<sup>32</sup> For the history of Sears and WLS, see James F. Evans, *Prairie Farmer and WLS: the Burrige D. Butler Years*, (University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1969), 158-175; See also entry on WLS in Appendix I.

<sup>33</sup> Evans, *Prairie Farmer and WLS*, 163.

<sup>34</sup> The store wrote to the Department of Commerce (December 6, 1923) informing them of the closing of WAAK. They requested that the call letters not be re-assigned, indicating that WAAK planned to re-open, but it does not appear to have done so. See WAAK Correspondence Files.

<sup>35</sup> "Station WIP – Watch It's [sic] Progress," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 29 November 1924, 5, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Information on the underwater stunts from "Radio Fans Hear Diver on Sea Bed," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 August 1924, 6, and also "Diver Talks Under Sea," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 2 August 1924, 1 & 7; the Davies/Tisdale Interview noted that this same stunt was also performed in 1925.

<sup>37</sup> Program listings from the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 4 August 1924, 7, include a 3 p.m. program on WIP described as thus: " 'What the Wild Waves Are Saying,' picked up by microphone placed amidst the breaking waves under the Steel Pier, Atlantic City, New Jersey." According to the Davies/Tisdale Interview, this was a regular afternoon program.

<sup>38</sup> "Station WIP – Watch It's [sic] Progress," *Radio Digest Illustrated*.

<sup>39</sup> "Liberty Bell is Heard Over Air," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 16 January 1926, 3.

<sup>40</sup> "Station WIP – Watch It's [sic] Progress," *Radio Digest Illustrated*.

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- <sup>41</sup> “Broadcasts Continued in Transatlantic Tests,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 28 November 1923, 22;
- <sup>42</sup> “Broadcasts Continued in Transatlantic Tests,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*.
- <sup>43</sup> WFI advertisement, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 26 November 1923, 8.
- <sup>44</sup> Ray Biswanger, *Music in the Marketplace: The Story of Philadelphia’s Historic Wanamaker Organ, From John Wanamaker to Lord & Taylor* (Bryn Mawr, Penn.: Friends of the Wanamaker Organ, Inc., 1999), 126.
- <sup>45</sup> “Music Here Times Dancers in Britain,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 December 1924, 4.
- <sup>46</sup> Wanamaker’s advertisement, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 13 December 1924, 6.
- <sup>47</sup> “Radio Concert Held in Newark Store is Heard at Selfridge’s in London,” *New York Times*, 2 October 1922, 8.
- <sup>48</sup> “Six Continents Hear WOR at Newark, N.J.,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 26 December 1925, 6, 10; See also “Station WOR Attempts Transpacific Tests,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 December 1923, Section II, 20, and also “WOR Blazes Radio Trail to Nippon,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 22 December 1923, 2.
- <sup>49</sup> The figure of a kindly uncle was already a well-established trope in children’s entertainment; the Telephone Herald of Newark, for example, featured bedtime stories from “Uncle Wiggily” a decade earlier.
- <sup>50</sup> “Sings Over Radio From Ocean’s Floor,” *New York Times*, 14 September 1924, 30.
- <sup>51</sup> See entry on WIP in Appendix I for a discussion of this legend.
- <sup>52</sup> “Dream Daddy Fixed Telephones Years Ago,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 4 May 1924, M6.
- <sup>53</sup> “Dream Daddy Fixed Telephones Years Ago,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*.
- <sup>54</sup> Davies/Tisdale Interview.
- <sup>55</sup> The “Uncle WIP” story on the website for the Broadcast Pioneers of Philadelphia. <<http://www.geocities.com/broadcastpioneers/unclewip.html>> (5 March 2007.)
- <sup>56</sup> “Santa Marches Triumphant to Toyland,” *DGE*, 9 October 1926, 19.

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<sup>57</sup> Gimbel's advertisements, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 December 1923, 9 and *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 18 November 1932, 20

<sup>58</sup> Letter from U. S. Supervisor of Radio in New York to the Commissioner of Navigation dated November 5, 1925 in WOR Correspondence Files; For another mention of WOR's Christmas programming, see "Santa's Workshop News for Kiddies," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 15 December 1923, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Spaeth, *Radio Broadcasting Manual*, 43. The stores were Burdine's in Miami, Davison-Paxon in Atlanta, and Gimbel's in New York.

<sup>60</sup> "Dream Daddy at WLIT Has 22,000 Kiddies," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 26 December 1925, 7 & 24.

<sup>61</sup> A few different recorded versions of the "Dream Daddy" song are discussed in Michael Jay Biehl, "The Making and Use of Recordings in Broadcasting Before the 1930s" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1977), 252-253; The specific claim about Ehrhart touring other stations from "Dream Daddy at WLIT Has 22,000 Kiddies," *Radio Digest Illustrated*.

<sup>62</sup> "WFI – In the City of Brotherly Love," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 14 February 1925, 5.

<sup>63</sup> Program listings in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* for 17 March 1925, 22, include a 10 a.m. show on WIP entitled "The Daily Menu and Intimated Talk to Housewives by Mrs. Anna B. Scott."

<sup>64</sup> The program listing for April 24, 1928 lists Scott's program on WIP, known directly as "Menu by Mrs. Anna Scott," while WFI had "Housekeeper's Chat" and WLIT had the "Household Institute." See the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 April 1928, 16.

<sup>65</sup> On the use of multiple performers to play Jean Sargent, see "WNAC Tried to End Sargent Name Use," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 11 July 1925, 3. According to this source, Bertha Mitchell had left WNAC for a station in Chicago and was trying to use the same name. Membership in the club was estimated at over 20,000. As part of its collection, the Library of American Broadcasting has a pamphlet entitled "Appearances Count" from 1927 that appears to be a promotional give-away from WNAC. It contains health and fashion advice for women, along with ads for stores in Boston other than Shepard's. "Jean Sargent" wrote the forward to the pamphlet. See Pamphlet #2882, "Appearances Count," Library of American Broadcasting.

<sup>66</sup> "Demonstrate for Fans," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9 May 1924, 22.

<sup>67</sup> "Demonstrate for Fans," *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

<sup>68</sup> "Gimbels to Install Radio Plant Here," *New York Times*, 17 July 1924, 18.

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<sup>69</sup> “Gimbels’ Radio Starts with Big Show,” *Variety*, 29 October 1924, 32.

<sup>70</sup> “Gimbels’ Radio Starts with Big Show,” *Variety*.

<sup>71</sup> Banning, *Commercial Broadcasting Pioneer*, 109.

<sup>72</sup> George L. Roberts, “Dailey Paskman Explains Secret of the Successful Radio Drama,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 10 October 1926, section IX, p. 5.

<sup>73</sup> This description is from an undated memo written by Dailey Paskman, contained in the Paskman Papers, Box 2, Folder 1.

<sup>74</sup> Linda L. Tyler, “Commerce and Poetry Hand in Hand: Music in American Department Stores, 1880-1930” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 45, no. 1 (1992): 82.

<sup>75</sup> Invitation for WGBS opening night in WINS Correspondence Files.

<sup>76</sup> “Gimbels’ Radio Starts with Big Show,” *Variety*.

<sup>77</sup> “Gimbels’ Radio Starts with Big Show,” *Variety*.

<sup>78</sup> Presumably this was Ellis Gimbel, Junior, and not the senior Ellis Gimbel. This distinction is not specified in the *Variety* article, though according to the Davies/Tisdale Interview, it was the Junior who initially had the idea for WIP and was the proponent of radio.

<sup>79</sup> “Gimbels’ Radio Starts with Big Show,” *Variety*.

<sup>80</sup> “Plugger Must Pay WNAC for Station,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 10 January 1925, 2.

<sup>81</sup> Details on the new transmitter from “New Location Aiding WGBS Transmission,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 20 March 1926, 4; The quote from “Gimbel’s Invitation,” *Variety*, 7 April 1926, 43.

<sup>82</sup> Gimbel’s station in Philadelphia debuted two years earlier from “small, glass-inclosed room” [*sic*] on the store’s seventh floor. This quote from “Mayor Employs Radio to Talk Philadelphia,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 March 1922, B15; In November 1922, Strawbridge & Clothier advertised that its new radio studio, “adjoining the Department of Radio Equipment,” could similarly be “viewed through the double-sash window.” These quotes from the Strawbridge & Clothier advertisement in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 November 1922, 7

<sup>83</sup> For store stations that used studios with large windows before *Variety*’s claim about WGBS, see entries for KPO, WDBE, WFI, WIP, and WOR in Appendix I. The one store

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station to not use such an arrangement was WLS. See James F. Evans, *Prairie Farmer and WLS: the Burr ridge D. Butler Years*, 160.

<sup>84</sup> In 1925, the Bon Marche store in Seattle converted one of its exterior corner windows into a temporary radio studio. The store did not own its own station, and was broadcasting over KJR. According to one account of this promotion, the store selected several women from among its employees depending upon their respective vocal or musical talents, along with their “ability to wear beautiful gowns properly.” As the women performed for the radio, an announcer would describe their clothing and thus promote the store. See “Radio Broadcast of Styles Was Knockout,” *DGE*, 11 June 1925, 19. A photo from August 1926 shows bystanders outside the City of Paris Dry Goods Store in San Francisco watching as “a special programme is being broadcast from the show windows on the street level.” See C.W. Geiger, “Does Broadcasting Help Business?,” *The Radio Dealer*, August 1926, 58-59.

<sup>85</sup> Photograph of WGBS studio in *Radio News*, January 1925, 1146.

<sup>86</sup> Dallas W. Smythe, “Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism,” in *Counterclockwise: Perspectives on Communication*, Dallas Smythe, ed. Thomas Guback (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994), 266-291.

<sup>87</sup> Undated interview for the publication *Radio Stories*, n.p.; contained in the Paskman Papers Box 2, Folder 1.

<sup>88</sup> “Last Night on the Radio,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 3 March 1926, 13.

<sup>89</sup> *New York American*, 12 December 1924, n.p.; clipping contained in the Paskman Papers, Box 2, Folder 3.

<sup>90</sup> Dailey Paskman and Sigmund Spaeth, *Gentlemen Be Seated!: A Parade of the Old-Time Minstrels* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1928.)

<sup>91</sup> *Newark News*, 4 December 1925, n.p.; clipping contained in the Paskman Papers, Box 1, Folder 6.

<sup>92</sup> Letter dated December 10, 1925 from Dailey Paskman to the *Newark News*; contained in the Paskman Papers, Box 1, Folder 6.

<sup>93</sup> See for example “Radio Opera Wins New England Fans,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 10 February 1923, 3, and also “Boston Broadcasts Grand Opera,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 3 March 1923, cover.

<sup>94</sup> According to an account in *Radio Digest Illustrated*, WNAC and twelve other radio-related companies in Boston underwrote a two-week engagement from the Chicago Civic Opera. These firms pledged to purchase all the unsold tickets to make certain that

broadcasting the opera would not result in a financial loss for the opera company. See "Radio Firms Insure Opera Broadcasts," 7 February 1925, 7. In a publication contained in the Paskman Papers, Dailey Paskman is quoted as saying that "in no way does radio take the place of the stage or keep listeners-in from patronizing the theater." See "Who Guards the Mike – WGBS," *Radiogram*, 24 April 1927, p.45, contained in the Paskman Papers Box 2, Folder 6.

<sup>95</sup> "Headliners of the Week," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 25 April 1925, 8.

<sup>96</sup> Generalizations about the WGBS schedule are based on a detailed analysis of radio schedules as printed in the New York Times. Three weeks of programming for each year were examined. See Appendix II for complete date.

<sup>97</sup> "Dressmaking Lesson Given by Radio," *DGE*, 4 April 1925, 22.

<sup>98</sup> Banning uses this phrase to introduce his account of the WNAC hook-up, *Commercial Broadcasting Pioneer*, 158. Regarding the length of this event, Halper claims that the hook-up lasted for five minutes. See "John Shepard — Boston's Showman," at <<http://www.olderadio.com/archives/people/shepard.htm>.> (5 March 2007.)

<sup>99</sup> Banning, *Commercial Broadcasting Pioneer*, 177. Prior to broadcasting through WJAR, another station was joined with AT & T. This was station WMAF in New Hampshire, though that affiliation lasted only for the summer months of 1923. This station, however, is not given much attention in Banning's history. According to this source the WCAP-WEAF-WJAR combination lasted longer and was used by engineers to refine various technical issues involved with linking stations together.

<sup>100</sup> Banning, 232.

<sup>101</sup> Banning, 233-235.

<sup>102</sup> "Relay Boston Broadcasts to Station in Providence," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 24 November 1923, 6.

<sup>103</sup> Archer, *History of Radio to 1926*, 286.

<sup>104</sup> See entry on WNAC in Appendix I.

<sup>105</sup> There are multiple documents relating to this broadcast in the Paskman Papers, including letters arranging the program, press releases, and portions of the announcer's script, Box 1, Folder 24.

<sup>106</sup> Undated letter from Dailey Paskman to the *New York American*, Paskman Papers, Box 1, Folder 24.

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<sup>107</sup> “New Chain to Pick-up Atlantic City’s Best,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, second half of May 1926, 13.

<sup>108</sup> “New Chain to Pick-up Atlantic City’s Best,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*.

<sup>109</sup> See entry on WCAE in Appendix I.

<sup>110</sup> “Gimbels Purchase Pittsburgh Store,” *New York Times*, 3 December 1925, 28.

<sup>111</sup> Barnouw lists both WOO and WFI as being affiliates of the AT & T chain in 1925, *Tower of Babel*, 176. A newspaper article from 1927 includes WLIT in a long list of station broadcasting a program from WEA, “General Motors to Go On Air Soon,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 October 1927, B20.

<sup>112</sup> “WFI Will Broadcast Coolidge NY Speech,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 18 April 1924, 20; On WIP’s chain, see “Sesquicentennial to Hear President,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, First part of July, 1926, 3.

<sup>113</sup> “Penn-Cornell Game,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 November 1927, section II, 19.

<sup>114</sup> On the formation of the two networks, see Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 116-122. For information on the growth and control over the industry, see Robert McChesney, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for the Control of U.S. Broadcasting, 1928-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 29.

<sup>115</sup> Hoover’s dismissal of “advertising chatter” at the conference has been widely cited by historians, see originally Department of Commerce, “Minutes of Open Meetings of Department of Commerce Conference on Radio Telephony,” Washington, D.C., February 27-28, 1922, 2-3.

<sup>116</sup> Marvin R. Bensman, *The Beginning of Broadcast Regulation in the Twentieth Century*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2000), 143.

<sup>117</sup> Sterling and Kittross, 97-98.

<sup>118</sup> Aitken is one of a few historians who have made the analogy between the overcrowded radio spectrum and “tragedy of the commons,” a term denoting a public resource which is depleted through overuse. See Hugh G. J. Aitken, *The Continuous Wave: Technology and American Radio, 1900-1932* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 5; For an overview of the creation of the Federal Radio Commission, see Sterling and Kittross, 141-142.

<sup>119</sup> Hugh R. Slotten, *Radio and Television Regulation: Broadcast Technology in the United States, 1920-1960* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 53-59; See also Louise M. Benjamin, *Freedom of the Air and the Public Interest: First Amendment*

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*Rights in Broadcasting to 1935* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), 87-88.

<sup>120</sup> On the significance of General Order 40, see in particular McChesney, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy*, 25-30. This quote from 29; See also Christopher H. Sterling and John Michael Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 143-145.

<sup>121</sup> Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices*, 17.

<sup>122</sup> Sterling and Kittross, 69.

<sup>123</sup> WGBS advertisement from the *New York Times*, 26 October 1924, section XX, 15.

<sup>124</sup> *M. Witmark & Sons v. L Bamberger & Co*, 291 F. 776 (DNJ 1923).

<sup>125</sup> Letter from A. Edward Wupperman to S. B. Davis, Department of Commerce, dated March 16, 1925 in WINS Correspondence Files.

<sup>126</sup> Letter from A. Edward Wupperman to S. B. Davis, Department of Commerce, dated March 16, 1925 in WINS Correspondence Files.

<sup>127</sup> Smulyan, *Selling Radio*, 72-86.

<sup>128</sup> C.W. Geiger, "Does Broadcasting Help Business?," *The Radio Dealer*.

<sup>129</sup> Roy E. Clark, "Viva Voce Advertising – Potent Publicity," *Bulletin of the NRDGA*, August 1926, 8-9. A copy is posted online at the American Memory website maintained by the Library of Congress. See <http://www.cs.umd.edu/hcil/ndl/ndldemo/anita/newmain.html> (5 March 2007.)

<sup>130</sup> Lief, *Family Business*, 217.

<sup>131</sup> "A Study of Radio as an Advertising Medium," prepared by the Research Department of the Erwin, Wasey & Company, January 1932, 32. A copy of this documented is online at the American Memory website maintained by the Library of Congress, see <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/coolhtml/coolhome.html> (5 March 2007.)

<sup>132</sup> The words "showmanship" and "salesmanship" appear frequently in Meyer's dissertation, as there was a continued debate within the advertising industry as to which approach was preferable. See Meyers, "Admen and the Shaping of American Commercial Broadcasting, 1926-50."

<sup>133</sup> Hugo Gernsback, "Who Pays for Radio Broadcasting," *Radio News*, November 1925, 585.



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- <sup>134</sup> Edwin Dunham memo, July 9, 1925. From the Hedges Collection #18: The John Shepard Saga, Library of American Broadcasting.
- <sup>135</sup> Edwin Dunham memo, July 9, 1925.
- <sup>136</sup> See entries for WFI, WNAC, and WOR in Appendix I for details.
- <sup>137</sup> Davies/Tisdale Interview
- <sup>138</sup> “Early Radio Sponsors Few, Far Between,” *Broadcasting*, 14 May 1962, 140.
- <sup>139</sup> Davies/Tisdale interview.
- <sup>140</sup> Lief, *Family Business*, 217.
- <sup>141</sup> This quote from Dockets No. 1615 and 1614 (one document) that the station filed on June 10, 1932 with the Federal Radio Commission in which it requested permission to transfer the license to NBC. See KPO Correspondence Files.
- <sup>142</sup> Letter from L.C. Herndon, U. S. Supervisor of Radio, to Department of Commerce, Radio Division dated November 8, 1930 in WIP Correspondence Files.
- <sup>143</sup> In January 1928, this transformation was announced publicly, though it did not go into affect until later that year. See “Trade Notes and Comments,” *New York Times*, 15 January 1928, 139. The specific month of the transition, November, is cited in a WGBS memo to Roy Hollis, Manager, *Daily News*, dated December 6, 1930, Paskman Papers, Box 1, Folder 11.
- <sup>144</sup> “WGBS in Stage Stars Orbit,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, December 1928, 18.
- <sup>145</sup> WGBS memo to Roy Hollis, Manager, *Daily News*, dated December 6, 1930, Paskman Papers, Box 1, Folder 11.
- <sup>146</sup> WGBS memo to Roy Hollis, Manager, *Daily News*.
- <sup>147</sup> “Hearst Buys WBGS [*sic*], Plans Improvement,” *Broadcasting*, 15 October 1931, 12.
- <sup>148</sup> “WCAE Dedication To Be Held Jan. 4,” *Broadcasting*, 1 January 1932, 36.
- <sup>149</sup> Evans, *Prairie Farmer and WLS*, 168.
- <sup>150</sup> See entry on KPO in Appendix I.
- <sup>151</sup> Biswanger, *Music in the Marketplace*, 184-185.

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<sup>152</sup> Biswanger, *Music in the Marketplace*, 184-185.

<sup>153</sup> Biswanger, *Music in the Marketplace*, 184-185.

<sup>154</sup> Docket No. 1126 filed with Federal Radio Commission May 2, 1931. As part of this document, there is a history of WFI which states that both it and WLIT are the only Philadelphia outlets for the NBC Red Network. See WFI Correspondence Files.

<sup>155</sup> Agreement between Strawbridge & Clothier and WFI Broadcasting on May 18, 1932 in WFIL Station Files, 1927-1934. The Lit Brothers took over WFIL Broadcasting completely in 1940. See Lief, *Family Business*, 218.

<sup>156</sup> Lief, *Family Business*, 218.

<sup>157</sup> Lief, *Family Business*, 218.

<sup>158</sup> Contract between Keystone Broadcasting Company and Gimbel Brothers, Inc. dated January 10, 1931 in WFAN Correspondence Files.

<sup>159</sup> Letter dated August 13, 1932 in WIP Station Files, 1927-1934.

<sup>160</sup> "Gimbel Unit Radio Sale," *Wall Street Journal*, 21 July 1958, 2.

<sup>161</sup> Interview with Mel Gollub, November 14, 2006.

<sup>162</sup> Christopher Sterling, ed., *Encyclopedia of Radio*, vol. 3 (New York: Fitzrory Dearborn, 2004), entry on WOR on 1556-1557.

<sup>163</sup> Sterling, *Encyclopedia of Radio*, vol. 3, 1556-1557.

<sup>164</sup> On WNAC, see "Novel Department Store Broadcasts on WNAC," *Broadcasting*, 1 October 1933, 54. This particular article is about a "Roving Shopper" program sponsored not by the Shepard stores but by the R. H. White Company. On WOR see "Department Store Net Has 11 Outlets," *Broadcasting*, 1 April 1936, 24.

<sup>165</sup> Barnouw, *Tower of Babel*, 237.

<sup>166</sup> Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 124.

<sup>167</sup> Spaeth, *Radio Broadcasting Manual*, 20.

<sup>168</sup> Spaeth, *Radio Broadcasting Manual*, 20.

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- <sup>169</sup> I. A. Hirschmann, "Applying Radio Broadcasting to Retail Advertising," *Broadcasting*, 1 March 1932, 7, 26 and also L. A. Hirschmann [*sic*], "What Retailers Should Know About Radio," *Broadcasting*, 1 November 1932, 9.
- <sup>170</sup> Hirschmann, "Applying Broadcasting to Retail Advertising."
- <sup>171</sup> Hirschmann, "Applying Broadcasting to Retail Advertising."
- <sup>172</sup> John E. O'Connor and Charles F. Cummings, "Bamberger's Department Store, Charm Magazine, and the Culture of Consumption in New Jersey, 1924-1932," *New Jersey History* 102, no. 3-4 (Fall/Winter 1984): 15.
- <sup>173</sup> The *Radio Broadcasting Manual* (1935) from the NRDGA includes a script for one of the Joanne Taylor programs, 65.
- <sup>174</sup> Herman Hettinger, *Practical Radio Advertising* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1938), 245-246.
- <sup>175</sup> Hettinger, *Practical Radio Advertising*, 245-246.
- <sup>176</sup> Frank Arnold, *Broadcast Advertising: the Fourth Dimension* (New York: J. Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1931), 79.
- <sup>177</sup> Orrin E. Dunlap, Jr., *Radio in Advertising* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931), 86.
- <sup>178</sup> Doerksen, *American Babel*, 78-87.
- <sup>179</sup> Doerksen, *American Babel*, 84.
- <sup>180</sup> "Sales Promotion By Radio," *Journal of Retailing* 3, no. 1 (April 1927): 26.
- <sup>181</sup> Donna Halper, *Invisible Stars: A Social History of Women in American Broadcasting* (Armonke, New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2001), 47.
- <sup>182</sup> "Radio Publicity," *Journal of Retailing* 3, no. 4 (January 1928): 15-16.
- <sup>183</sup> "'Station GCH' Hits the Broadcasters," *Dry Goods Reporter*, October 1927, 29.
- <sup>184</sup> Chester F. Caton, "Radio Station WMAQ: A History of Its Independent Years, 1922 – 1931" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1951.) The reference to the Fair store's program is on 325. This same dissertation states that one year earlier, in 1927, the local Davis Department Store also sponsored a regular shopping program on WMAQ. The Davis-sponsored program was the first on that particular station "entirely devoted to advertising," 254-255.

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<sup>185</sup> This quote from a Fair store advertisement, *Chicago Tribune*, 2 December 1928, section 6, 17.

<sup>186</sup> See entry on WMAQ in Appendix I.

<sup>187</sup> Radio program titles as listed in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 26 November 1928, 14 and 30 October 1929, 14.

<sup>188</sup> Program listings in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 28 March 1931, 11, and also 12 November 1931, 20.

<sup>189</sup> Benedict Gimbel, Jr., "Showmanship Aids Household Period," *Broadcasting*, 15 June 1932, 17.

<sup>190</sup> Gimbel, "Showmanship Aids Household Period," *Broadcasting*.

<sup>191</sup> In addition to the previously cited articles from Benedict Gimbel and Ira Hirschmann, see also "Lapel Mike for Department Stores," *Broadcasting*, 1 May 1933, 14; William C. Roux, "Radio as a Medium for Department Stores," *Broadcasting*, 15 November 1933, 9; Duke Murta, "Getting Our Money's Worth Out of Radio," *Broadcasting*, 15 May 1934, 7; Margaret Fitzgerald, "Department Store Crumbs or a Slice?," *Broadcasting*, 15 June 1934, 11.

<sup>192</sup> See for example "15 Merchants Sponsor Radio 'Treasure Hunt' Linked With Word Fair," *Broadcasting*, 1 June 1934, 43; see also Bruce Robertson, "Magazine Sponsor Broadcast Series of Shopping Tours," *Broadcasting*, 15 August 1935, 10.

<sup>193</sup> See for example Frank W. Spaeth, "Radio as a Publicity Medium for Retailer," *Broadcasting*, 1 February 1935, 9, and also Harry Trenner, "Three Tough Nuts – How to Crack Them," *Broadcasting*, 1 September 1936, 14 & 54.

<sup>194</sup> C.H. Sandage, *Radio Advertising for Retailers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 33.

<sup>195</sup> Dunlap, *Radio in Advertising*, 111.

<sup>196</sup> Dunlap, *Radio in Advertising*, 111.

<sup>197</sup> An article on the history of television in Washington, D.C. cites a few shows that were sponsored by department stores, see David Weinstein, "Women's Shows and the Selling of Television to Washington, D.C.," *Washington History* 11, no. 1 (1999): 4-23.

<sup>198</sup> McCarthy, *Ambient Television*, 63-88.

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<sup>199</sup> Bud Gamble, "The Television Tour of 88 Department Stores," *Televiser*, Fall 1945, 48. McCarthy cited this same article (64), though she implied that this tour of department stores was orchestrated by RCA. According to this specific article, however, both RCA and Farnsworth toured their respective equipment around the country, though Gamble only discussed the Farnsworth-tour.

<sup>200</sup> In November 1945, Gimbel's worked with RCA in the biggest experiment regarding the possible benefits of television for department stores. See Mary Gannon, "Television and the Department Store," *Television*, November 1945, 7-15; On the Uncle WIP television show, see *Television*, September 1948, 35.

<sup>201</sup> The Yankee Network, run by John Shepard III, opened two of the first FM stations, see Sterling and Kittross, *Stay Tuned*, 159. The first commercial station in New York was established by WOR under the guidance of Jack Poppele, see Sterling, *Encyclopedia of Radio*, vol. 3, 1557.

<sup>202</sup> At least two sources have made claims to this effect. On coverage of WOR due to Macy's prolific advertising, see Bill Jaker, Frank Sulek, and Peter Kanze, *The Airwaves of New York: Illustrated Histories of 156 AM Station in the Metropolitan Area, 1921-1996* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1998), 152. On continued coverage of WNAC and the stations of the Yankee Network, due to the Shepard Stores' involvement, see Gerald William Kroeger, "The History of Boston Radio to 1941" (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1968), 179.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

At the beginning of 2007, the Anheuser-Busch company launched BudTV, a promotional venture described as “the most ambitious and costly effort to date of a marketer creating Web content tailored to its own specifications”<sup>1</sup> The basic premise of the project is remarkably similar to that of the original department store radio stations, despite differences with the technology being used to deliver the advertising messages. BudTV is funded entirely by Anheuser-Busch and hopes to boost the company’s overall image with a diverse assortment of original online programs. Explicit appeals to purchase the company’s products will be avoided, just as the stores originally avoided direct advertisements for their own products. BudTV also claims that it will refrain from the vulgar, risqué kind of humor often associated with online entertainment. “We want to be edgy, we want to be fun and interesting, but I really want some class to it,” said one of the company’s vice presidents.<sup>2</sup> Department stores stressed a similar appeal with their radio offerings.

A hundred years before Anheuser-Bush began to exploit the internet for promotional purposes, department stores used earlier forms of technology, including electric lighting, telephones, and wireless, to similar ends. When the system of commercial broadcasting developed during the 1920s, stores offered a model as to how profits could be derived, albeit indirectly, from the new medium. By using their sales

floors as classrooms and laboratories, stores aided the process of commercialization and allowed programmers to experiment with new technologies and new performance practices. The department store techniques for blending promotional appeals with entertaining, informative content encouraged other stations to engage in advertising. When more direct methods of advertising appeared, the stores again provided a model to be emulated.

This research encountered another institution which also functioned as a guide as to how the technology of wireless could be used, an institution not seriously considered at the outset of the project, the newspaper. Despite a stated intention to focus on department stores, it is impossible to tell the story of their involvement with radio without acknowledging the influence of newspapers on many of these operations. The overlapping influence of both institutions on the development of broadcasting highlights a central tenet of the social construction theory of technology, namely, that technologies do not develop of their own accord but are influenced, shaped, and pushed down specific paths according to pre-existing concepts. In addition to the physical entities they are named for, newspapers and department stores are models for organizing and distributing information. It is not surprising, then, that the creators and programmers for the first wave of radio stations (especially those employed by these institutions) looked to these models when deciding what content to broadcast over the airwaves. The newspaper was a model for “technology as information,” while the stores were the models for “technology as commerce.”

Acknowledging the significance of newspapers to this present study also illustrates that media technologies, especially those of the past 100 years, do not develop

in isolation. Programmers from department stores recognized that radio and newspapers were not necessarily rival mediums, in contrast to the attitude of many publishers in the 1930s. Certain advertising techniques were appropriate for broadcasting; other techniques were appropriate for print. At the 1<sup>st</sup> National Radio Conference, Harold Young of the NRDGA argued for example that the store stations could limit themselves to indirect advertising because newspapers already offered explicit product descriptions.<sup>3</sup> Ira Hirschmann similarly stressed that retailers should develop print and radio advertising campaigns in conjunction.<sup>4</sup> In relation to more contemporary media technologies, this observation highlights how content being developed for cellphones, iPods, and the internet is, in many cases, derived from pre-existing content models, be they newspapers, films, video games, or television. The overwhelming amount of web traffic devoted to television shows, including fansites, message boards, and official sites, is an additional illustration of the need to analyze forms of media in relation to one another.

Though the explicitly commercial nature of many early radio stations has been a continuing theme of this dissertation, the evidence is not meant to suggest that the overall commercialization of the industry was entirely consensual. Government and industry officials took deliberate actions to support this particular system, and the commercial system most certainly encouraged the homogenization of programming and discouraged the airing of less popular, controversial political opinions. The original arguments against radio advertising are worth a second look, as many of the specific charges could be leveled against contemporary media industries. But if the nature of the early radio industry is not fully appreciated, particularly for the period before 1927, commercialization seems to suddenly appear in the historiography of radio as an



artificially imposed, corrupting influence on the medium. This perspective conforms to the conflict-theory of history and can be most easily sustained if technology and the forces that influence its development are isolated from the rest of society. A full accounting of a technology and society should seek connections between the two phenomena, not isolate one from the other.

A historical exploration of radio, by contrast, that focuses on the intersection of department stores and broadcasting illustrates the interrelation between technology and society, a relationship characterized by Slack as one of “structural causality.”<sup>5</sup> The rising industrial productivity of the 1920s, the commodification of goods and services, and a corresponding ideology of consumerism left an indelible mark on the way radio was utilized, marketed, and regulated. And, while universities, churches, and amateurs participated in the broadcasting boom, the rapid growth of the listening audience would simply not have been possible without the proliferation of receivers in department stores and elsewhere, devices built for a profit. Radio was positioned as part of the ever-expanding pantheon of consumer goods. As the broadcast and department store industries developed, both consolidated, standardized, and homogenized their operations. The commercialization of radio in the late 1920s and early 1930s was not an isolated or unique development, but part of a larger transition that affected many segments of society.

To borrow a phrase from Snowden’s analysis of text messaging, the initial practice of broadcasting may have been “unexpected” but this is not equivalent to “accidental.”<sup>6</sup> In contrast to those scholars who have propagated an accidental thesis for the rise of text-messaging, Snowden argued that this capability of mobile phones resulted

from a “complex, planned process that took place over more than a decade and involved European governments, the European community, telecommunication companies, equipment manufacturers, technical standard bodies, and regulatory and policy organizations.”<sup>7</sup> On the drawing board, the intended purpose of these short, text messages (up to 160 characters in length) was “to notify consumers of voice mail messages or network faults.”<sup>8</sup> The fact that users found other ways to employ the function, with some even favoring texting over traditional voice conversations, initially caught the major service providers off guard. However, even if the industry did not envision precisely how users might use this capability, text-messaging was not entirely an “accidental” application of cellphones as it occurred within a larger sociotechnical system that was itself planned.

Revisiting the contingency/determination spectrum outlined in the introductory chapter, Snowden’s argument places the development of text messaging closer to the pole of determination. The commercial system of broadcasting in the United States should be seen in a similar manner. The proposed alternatives never gained more than a minor foothold, and it is difficult to imagine that a radically different outcome could have occurred. A number of developments from before 1922, or what Douglas has called radio’s “pre-history,” pointed to radio’s later commercialization, including the government’s decision to essentially award so much of the spectrum to American Marconi, a privately owned, profit-generating enterprise, in the Radio Act of 1912.<sup>9</sup> The telegraph, an earlier communications technology which was also greeted with great enthusiasm by many, had been given over to commercial interests; the American public’s distrust of government-controlled industries was an additional contributing factor for the

rise of advertising-supported broadcasting.<sup>10</sup> Technologies of communication “have no natural edges,” as Marvin famously wrote, and on a theoretical level, broadcasting could indeed have developed along a number of paths.<sup>11</sup> But advocates for a government or publicly funded system, or one in which churches, labor unions, schools, or amateurs determined program content, were at a decided disadvantage before any debate had begun.

An argument for determination, however, does not necessarily suggest that commercialized radio had an enslavement effect upon a society, buttressing the capitalist system that developed it and perpetuating unequal social divisions. When store stations aired morning programs for women, for example, they hailed them as consumers while expanding the audience for broadcasting at the same time. The ethnic hours on WGBS, to invoke another specific example, served Gimbel’s own commercial needs, though also allowed listeners to symbolically connect with their respective homelands. Did an opera lose its luster simply because it happened to be broadcast by a store, as opposed to some other more-charitable enterprise?

To wrap an enslavement argument around the history of department store radio would require one to downplay both the positive, beneficial aspects that may be derived from mass media as well as the ability of individuals to interpret media messages for themselves. This critical perspective shares much in common with a standard, and enduring, critique of consumer culture, namely that it imposes artificial values of materialism into society. Department stores and similar institutions are responsible for the creation of new desires, according to this interpretation. Bowlby identified this view in Gissing’s novels, which is expressed today in various forms.<sup>12</sup> To this critique, Schudson

responded that humans' wants and needs can not be so easily divided into the categories of "necessary" or "artificial."<sup>13</sup> Throughout time, people have used material goods for symbolic reasons that go beyond pure pragmatic values, though blanket condemnations of consumer culture romanticize pre-industrial society as immune to such beliefs. Similarly, enslavement arguments against mass media suggest that whatever destructive tendency or behavior the scholar identifies, (racism, sexism, consumerism, etc.), might wither were it not for continual encouragement from the media.

However one chooses to characterize the phenomenon of department store radio in the 1920s, as contingent, determined, empowering, enslaving, or some combination thereof, extending this argument to the current state of electronic communications is difficult. Media historians have, however, customarily concluded their works with some analysis of the media *du jour*. Such conclusions are irresistible (and perhaps inevitable) because they raise the reader's attention to some contemporary significance illustrated by all the preceding archival research. Indeed, it is difficult to discuss department store radio stations with at least a nod to some present phenomena, such as satellite radio, cellphones, podcasting, BudTV, Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, online shopping, or the *Today* show's glass-enclosed studio. The high-definition and plasma-screen televisions that currently dominate the showrooms of electronics stores recall the chaotic and bewildering market for receivers in the 1920s, while corporate conflicts over downloading, file-sharing, and on-demand programming recall early radio's strained relations with the established film, theatre, and recording industries. Parallels exist between department store radio and all of all of these issues, though a detailed account of how "history repeats itself" may inadvertently obscure the underlying dynamics and

mechanisms that make this so. Focusing on one particular topic from today is further complicated by contextual differences between the 1920s and the first decade of the twenty-first century; just because commercialized radio functioned in one particular way several decades ago does not imply that newer forms of commercialized media continue this same function or maintain a similar relationship with the audience.

This analysis of department store radio stations from broadcasting's earliest period, however, illustrates an aspect of technological development not limited to one particular phenomenon. In the United States, and the West in general, commercial interests have played a particularly significant role in developing, introducing, and diffusing new communications technologies throughout society. Department stores' active encouragement of early broadcasting, especially when we focus on the timing of many of these actions, is an indication of this historical pattern. Stores engaged in broadcasting before the technology for doing so had been perfected; the disastrous start of WMAQ in Chicago is perhaps the best example of this. When television arrived on the scene somewhat later, stores were again early proponents of its use as well as the locations in which many consumers first encountered the technology. In both cases, involvement waned once a market for the new product had been sufficiently established, though department stores and other retailers naturally continued to sell radios and televisions. The "consumption junctions" that they so neatly embodied, with one location serving both as a site of production and consumption, fragmented and broadcasting was accomplished by separate entities dedicated to doing so.<sup>14</sup>

Bearing in mind the perspective that commercialization is an avenue for the introduction of new technologies, the *Christian Science Monitor's* description of the

“joking order for dry goods” that brought together wireless, an airplane, and a steamship in 1911 should be reconsidered.<sup>15</sup> It would be admirable if altruism, education, or some devotion to public service was the motivating factor behind new forms of communication, though the brazen pursuit of profits has proven more common in the United States. To dismiss the unusual sock purchase from Wanamaker’s as a simple “joke” is to ignore the larger dynamic typified by the event.

But, just as an enslavement effect did not automatically follow from the determined nature of commercialized radio, the process of commercialization which drives new technologies does not completely circumscribe their possible uses. The behavior of users is never dictated entirely in a top-down fashion, as has been indicated time and time again. Many of the first people to install telephones in rural communities, as described by Kline, frustrated local companies by playing phonograph records into the earpieces, thus monopolizing a shared party-line.<sup>16</sup> More recently, handheld devices for playing MP3 audio files were sold to the public in order to generate a profit and to encourage online music sales. Users discovered that these same devices, when connected to the internet, could be an effective method to exchange audio and video files, including those that individuals had recorded themselves. The phenomenon of “podcasting” was born; the term was derived from “broadcasting” and “iPod,” the name for the popular MP3 player made by Apple, though the files can be played through any such device.

And, almost from the moment that this practice gained national exposure, commercial interests added podcasting to their arsenal of promotional techniques. BudTV was similarly conceived to take advantage of another web phenomenon, what the *New York Times* called “the video-sharing democratization of YouTube.”<sup>17</sup> To appeal to the

young demographic associated with such entertainment, and to circumvent their aversion to traditional television commercials, Anheuser-Busch revived a model of commercialized electronic media from decades before. The author of the *Times* article on BudTV astutely recognized the parallel with sponsor-controlled programs from early television, such as the “Texaco Star Theater,” though the concept goes back to the earliest days of broadcasting.<sup>18</sup> In his analysis of patterns in media history, Wurtzler wrote that a “model is never entirely erased. Changing circumstances (further technological innovations, shifts in consumer behavior, market forces, etc.) can open up gaps in which that which was previously foreclosed can again return.”<sup>19</sup>

The continued vitality of the original department store model to new media creation reveals a particular relationship between technology, the market, and advertising, a relationship which served the needs of these retailers in the 1920s and continues to find adherents today. As the practice of broadcasting splinters into new forms, with viewers able to choose from an astonishing variety of content on their televisions, computers, and cellphones, the fact that these screens replicate the function of the original department store windows is no accident. It is a testament to the commercialization and its ability to bring new communications technologies into the mainstream.

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<sup>1</sup> Lorne Manly, “BrewTube,” *New York Times Magazine*, 4 February 2007, 51-52.

<sup>2</sup> Tony Ponturo, Anheuser-Busch's vice president of global media and sports marketing, quoted in Manly, “BrewTube,” 54.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Commerce, “Minutes of Open Meetings of Department of Commerce Conference on Radio Telephony” (Washington, D.C., February 27-28, 1922), 96.

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- <sup>4</sup> I. A. Hirschmann, "Applying Radio Broadcasting to Retail Advertising," *Broadcasting*, 1 March 1932, 7, 26.
- <sup>5</sup> Jennifer Daryl Slack, *Communication Technologies & Society: Conceptions of Causality and the Politics of Technological Intervention* (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1984), 81-92.
- <sup>6</sup> Collette Snowden, "Cstng A pwr4l spLL: D evOLshn f SMS," in *The Cell Phone Reader: Essays in Social Transformation*, eds. Andanam Kavoori, Noah Arceneaux (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 107-124.
- <sup>7</sup> Snowden, "Cstng A pwr4l spLL," 110.
- <sup>8</sup> Snowden, 108.
- <sup>9</sup> Susan Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899-1922* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.)
- <sup>10</sup> For the history of telegraph, see Daniel J. Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), chap. 1, "Lightning Lines and the Birth of Modern Communication, 1838-1900," 3-29.
- <sup>11</sup> Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 8.
- <sup>12</sup> Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola* (New York: Methuen, Inc., 1985.)
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- <sup>15</sup> "Modern Invention and Some New Socks," *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 August 1911, pg. 15.
- <sup>16</sup> Ronald R. Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 42.
- <sup>17</sup> Manly, "BrewTube," 52.



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<sup>18</sup> Manly, “BrewTube,” 53-54.

<sup>19</sup> Steve Wurtzler, “AT&T Invents Public Access Broadcasting,” in *Communities of the Air: Radio Century, Radio Culture*, ed. Susan Merrill Squier (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), 40.

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*Radio Dealer*  
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*Radio News*  
*New York Herald Tribune*

*New York Times*  
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## **Appendix I**

### **Department Store Station Profiles**

This appendix includes profiles of most all of the radio stations mentioned within the text. It includes every department store radio station for which something is known, beyond the mere fact that it existed. It is not a complete listing of every department store radio station from the 1920s. The list is alphabetized by station call letters. In cases where a station changed its designation, the two sets of letters are separated by a slash.

The profiles begin with the creation of the station, or the moment that a particular department store became part of its operation. The histories conclude with the closing of the station, or the moment when the store was no longer involved. Particular attention is given to the types of programming favored by the station and, in relevant cases, the period when the station began to sell airtime to other companies. Some of the material contained in this appendix is a repetition of material included in the main body of the dissertation (in a condensed form); much of the material does not appear elsewhere.

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WOR (Bamberger's/Macy's, Newark)	288
WPAD (W.A. Wieboldt and Co., Chicago)	292
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**KDZE / KFOA**  
**Rhodes Company**  
**Seattle, Washington**

The Rhodes Company department store in Seattle, Washington launched KDZE in the summer of 1922.<sup>1</sup> Approximately two years later, the call letters were switched to KFOA.<sup>2</sup> Like the stations of the Hales Brothers in San Francisco and Wanamaker's in Philadelphia, the store was home to a large pipe organ.

The power was a modest 10 watts, though this was boosted to 1,000 watts when the station later acquired new call letters, along with a new wavelength allocation.<sup>3</sup> A website maintained by aficionados of theatre pipe organs has a photo of performers in the studio on the second floor of the store in 1923.<sup>4</sup> This same source claims that the station was the first in Seattle to be affiliated with the NBC network. In February 1927, the station broadcast an address from Calvin Coolidge as part of WEAf's network, reportedly the largest broadcast of a presidential address up to that point.<sup>5</sup>

In April 1928, the *Dry Goods Economist* reported that Rhodes was "the first department store west of the Mississippi" to sell airplanes.<sup>6</sup> As part of this event, a naval officer was given daily lectures over the station. That same year, the owner of a local sporting goods store purchased KFOA and changed its call letters to KOL.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The station's first appearance in the *Radio Service Bulletin* is the June 1922 issue.

<sup>2</sup> "1922 — Year Radio's Population Soared," *Broadcasting*, 14 May 1962, information on KDZE/KFOA/KOL on 136.

<sup>3</sup> "1922 — Year Radio's Population Soared," *Broadcasting*, 136.

<sup>4</sup> Puget Sound Pipeline Online, Rhodes Department Store, at <<http://www.pstos.org/instruments/wa/seattle/rhodes.htm>> (5 March 2007.)

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<sup>5</sup> “President’s Address on Feb. 22 to be a Nation-Wide Broadcast – Seven Pacific Coast Transmitters Added to WEAf’s Network,” *New York Times*, 6 February 1927, XX16.

<sup>6</sup> “Rhodes Takes to Aviation, Carrying Planes With Standard Equipment,” *DGE*, 21 April 1928, 11. This article gives the call letters as KFCA, though this is a typographical error.

<sup>7</sup> “1922 — Year Radio’s Population Soared,” *Broadcasting*, 136.

**KFRC**  
**City of Paris**  
**San Francisco, CA**

The City of Paris department store in San Francisco operated this station for a little less than two years. A webpage devoted to KFRC contains a significant amount of information regarding its original creation and developments that occurred after the store sold the operation.<sup>1</sup> An article in the August 1926 issue of *Radio Dealer* outlined the studio arrangements at the department store, and also included a photograph of curious bystanders watching a radio performance.<sup>2</sup>

KFRC was established by in September 1924 by a local radio shop, broadcasting at 50 watts from a studio inside the Whitcomb Hotel.<sup>3</sup> Six months later, the City of Paris department store took over the station. The first broadcast under the new ownership occurred on April 15, 1925 and featured the mayor, the store president, a government radio inspector, and the standard assortment of singers.<sup>4</sup> The store broadcast “almost exclusively serious music,” along with a regular children’s show called “Mac and His Gang.”<sup>5</sup> A dramatic increase in the sale of receivers was attributed to the operation of KFRC, which was managed by the same person who ran the radio department.<sup>6</sup>

According to *Radio Dealer*, the City of Paris instituted the most unusual studio arrangement of any of the stores.<sup>7</sup> A large corner window at the intersection of Stockton and O’Farrel Streets was converted into a studio, while another glass-enclosed studio was built on a balcony that adjoined the radio department. This balcony-studio could be seen by “almost every person entering the main store,” and also had a window that opened to an exterior street. To ensure that everyone could hear the station, receivers were placed

throughout the store and a loudspeaker was hung outside. The men's clothing department reportedly featured a "dummy in the act of tuning in on the set."

In November 1926, the City of Paris sold the station to Don Lee, a local distributor for Cadillacs.<sup>8</sup> Lee connected KFRC to KHJ in Los Angeles as part of the Don Lee Broadcasting System, which then became part of the CBS network.

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<sup>1</sup> John Schneider, "The History of KFRC, San Francisco and the Don Lee Networks," at <<http://www.bayarearadio.org/schneider/kfrc1.shtml>> (5 March 2007.)

<sup>2</sup> C.W. Geiger, "Does Broadcasting Help Business?," *Radio Dealer*, August 1926, 58 & 59.

<sup>3</sup> Schneider, "The History of KFRC."

<sup>4</sup> "KFRC to Broadcast Musical Program," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 15 April 1925, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Schneider, "The History of KFRC."

<sup>6</sup> Geiger, "Does Broadcasting Help Business?," *Radio Dealer*.

<sup>7</sup> Geiger, "Does Broadcasting Help Business?," *Radio Dealer*.

<sup>8</sup> Schneider, "The History of KFRC."

**KPO**  
**The Hale Brothers**  
**San Francisco, California**

Of the three department store stations in San Francisco, the one launched by the Hales Brothers in the spring of 1922 was by far the most successful. A webpage devoted to KPO history contains a wealth of information along with several photos from its early years.<sup>1</sup> The station increased its power a few times over the years, and broadcast a variety of programming, including shows for housewives, bedtime stories, football games, morning exercises, symphonies, and organ music. In 1925, the *San Francisco Chronicle* became co-owners, and the station was one of the primary west coast affiliates for the newly formed NBC network.<sup>2</sup> NBC bought the station in 1932.<sup>3</sup>

This department store's interest in radio allegedly extended back far further than the original broadcasting boom. According to *Radio Digest Illustrated*, F. J. McCarthy was a teenage radio enthusiast in San Francisco in 1903.<sup>4</sup> He worked as a cash boy at the Hales Brothers store, and one of the owners encouraged and funded his hobby. McCarthy then founded his own "radiophone company" and by 1905 was giving public demonstrations. This particular claim, made some twenty years after the fact, may have been more of a public relations ploy than fact, though it does indicate how persistently the stores positioned themselves as public benefactors.

The Hales Brothers' station received its first license on April 17, 1922, and the original 50 watt transmitter was built by a former naval radio operator.<sup>5</sup> Two articles about the opening of the KPO stated that, similar to other pioneering stations, it began broadcasting unofficially for several days while the equipment was tested and refined.<sup>6</sup>



The programming was to consist of morning shows for housewives, local singers, and the orchestra that played in the store's tea room. Additionally, the store organized classes to instruct local amateurs about the technology.<sup>7</sup>

At the start of the following year, KPO upgraded to a 500 watt transmitter and was classified as a "class B" station, using the 400 meter wavelength.<sup>8</sup> An article about the change described the antennae arrangement, the sixth floor studio, and the new microphone designed "to reproduce the music of the magnificent organ."<sup>9</sup> This particular instrument remained a staple of programming. In 1927, after years of experiments, organist Uda Waldrop unveiled a new instrument at KPO that had been specially designed for broadcasting.<sup>10</sup>

Like WNAC in Boston and WJAR in Providence, KPO was an early participant in chain broadcasting. In July 1923, the station announced that it would carry a speech from President Harding when he visited the city.<sup>11</sup> This was to be a national event with five other stations, including WEAJ in New York, re-transmitting the signal. The proposed hook-up did not occur, due to Harding's unexpected illness, though it does indicate KPO's early interest in networking.<sup>12</sup> In March 1925, KPO was one of 40 stations to air live coverage of the inauguration of President Coolidge, one of the largest network broadcasts.<sup>13</sup> In August 1925, a photo of the cartoon character Andy Gump was transmitted from KPO using the mechanical television system of Charles Frances Jenkins; the same experimenter worked with WGBS in 1931.<sup>14</sup> In 1926, KPO began to carry programs from KFI in Los Angeles; both stations affiliated with NBC the following year, and the arrangement continued.<sup>15</sup>

In its report on the national broadcast of Coolidge's inauguration, the *San Francisco Chronicle* also announced that it had taken over half interest in KPO.<sup>16</sup> The sixth floor studio was expanded once again visitors could watch performances through large plate-glass windows.<sup>17</sup> A new, more powerful transmitter was introduced the following August.<sup>18</sup>

Following this change in ownership, the "cooking expert and domestic science editor" for the *Chronicle* started a regular radio program for women that aired in the morning.<sup>19</sup> The newspaper also supported the performer known as "Big Brother," the host of an early evening program for children. Listeners who wrote into the program might not only hear their names announced on the air, but printed in the newspaper as well.<sup>20</sup> Other regular programs from this period included 7 a.m. exercise lessons and concerts arranged by the Wurlitzer Company.<sup>21</sup> According to *Broadcasting* magazine, the station had been accepting sponsored programming since 1924, and the Wurlitzer program was quite likely such an arrangement.<sup>22</sup>

A specific technical innovation allegedly developed at KPO was a mixing board on which the announcer could control all the microphones in the studio. Schneider's webpage on KPO history claims that this innovation was unique to the station, though it would later become standard.<sup>23</sup> The *San Francisco Chronicle* mentioned this mixing board in an article about KPO's coverage of a university football game.<sup>24</sup>

In June 1932, the station filed paperwork with the Federal Radio Commission requesting that its license be transferred over to NBC, the network which it had been affiliated with for five years.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, the station was seeking to boost its power from 5,000 to 50,000 watts. According to this information, KPO had been

operating at a loss since its inception; \$273,000 was the estimated loss. The department store and the newspaper both claimed that the Depression had sharply curtailed their profits, and they could no longer maintain KPO which lost over \$88,000 in 1931 alone. The station's "rigid advertising policies" were identified as a contributing factor and "price quotations, astrologers, soothsayers, fortune-tellers and ... the sale of all questionable products [were] not permitted."<sup>26</sup> In 1947, fifteen years after NBC formally acquired KPO, the call letters were switched to KNBC.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Schneider, "The History of KPO, San Francisco," at <http://www.olderadio.com/archives/stations/sf/kpo.htm> (5 March 2007.)

<sup>2</sup> "Chronicle Joins Hands With Hale Brothers for Joint Operation of Station KPO," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 4 March 1925, 1, 6.

<sup>3</sup> "1922 — Year Radio's Population Soared," *Broadcasting*, 14 May 1962, information on KPO on 90.

<sup>4</sup> Albert H. Munday, "Station KPO is Monument in Memory of F.J. McCarthy, Cash-Boy-Inventor," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 31 March 1923, 7.

<sup>5</sup> "1922 — Year Radio's Population Soared," *Broadcasting*, 90.

<sup>6</sup> "Big S.F. Store to Open Local Station Soon," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 May 1922, 7, and "New Project Designed to Aid Novices," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12 May 1922, 4.

<sup>7</sup> "New Project Designed to Aid Novices," *San Francisco Chronicle*.

<sup>8</sup> "News of the Broadcasters," *Radio*, March 1923, 33.

<sup>9</sup> "News of the Broadcasters," *Radio*.

<sup>10</sup> "KPO Dedicates New Broadcast Organ," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, September 1927, 12.

<sup>11</sup> "5,000,000 Will Listen to Harding by Radio as He Speaks Tuesday in San Francisco," *New York Times*, 28 July 1923, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Schneider, "The History of KPO, San Francisco."

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<sup>13</sup> “Chronicle Joins Hands With Hale Brothers for Joint Operation of Station KPO,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

<sup>14</sup> Television information from “1922 — Year Radio’s Population Soared,” *Broadcasting*. For Jenkins’ work with WGBS, see WGBS entry in Appendix I.

<sup>15</sup> Docket No. 1615 and Docket No. 1614 filed with Federal Radio Commission June 10, 1932. See KPO Correspondence Files.

<sup>16</sup> “Chronicle Joins Hands With Hale Brothers for Joint Operation of Station KPO,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

<sup>17</sup> “Greater KPO to Broadcast Monday Night,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 August 1925, 4.

<sup>18</sup> “Greater KPO to Broadcast Monday Night,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

<sup>19</sup> “Expert to Lecture on Housework,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 March 1925, 6.

<sup>20</sup> For one example of “Big Brother’s Letter Box,” see *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 November 1926, 12.

<sup>21</sup> “Physical Daily Dozen Broadcast,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 January 1925, 6, and “KPO Will Broadcast Continuous Music,” 9 January 1925, 6.

<sup>22</sup> “1922 — Year Radio’s Population Soared,” *Broadcasting*, 90.

<sup>23</sup> Schneider, “The History of KPO, San Francisco.”

<sup>24</sup> “Big Game Broadcast on KPO Today,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 20 November 1926, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Docket No. 1615 and Docket No. 1614 filed with Federal Radio Commission June 10, 1932. See KPO Correspondence Files.

<sup>26</sup> Docket No. 1615 and Docket No. 1614 filed with Federal Radio Commission June 10, 1932. See KPO Correspondence Files.

<sup>27</sup> “1922 — Year Radio’s Population Soared,” *Broadcasting*, 90.

**KSL**  
**The Emporium**  
**San Francisco, California**

Two department store stations in San Francisco started at approximately the same time, KSL of the Emporium and KPO of the Hales Brothers. KSL was the shorter lived of these two, and lasted for a little over a year. A webpage devoted to San Francisco radio history briefly mentions the station and names its first two engineers.<sup>1</sup> A handful of articles from the *San Francisco Chronicle* provide additional information on this station,

The opening was announced on April 3, 1922.<sup>2</sup> An article about the event stated that the Emporium's general manager would be first person to speak on the air, followed by a piano solo and song from Uda Waldrop.<sup>3</sup> This same performer would later be the organist for rival KPO. Additionally, a local reverend would speak on current events and conduct a "question box by radio telephone." Presumably, then, the debut of KSL allowed listeners to transmit their own questions via wireless telegraphy to the station.

A few weeks later, the same paper reported that KSL was formally dedicated on Saturday, April 22.<sup>4</sup> Two days later, the city would begin "Market Week," a gathering of retailers from across the West.<sup>5</sup> The station may have celebrated a second "opening day" in order to impress the visiting merchants, or it may have used the preceding weeks to test out its equipment. The report on the April 22 opening also stated that H. Gordon Selfridge, owner of a famed self-named store in London, was going to deliver a speech over KSL.<sup>6</sup> Later that year, Selfridge's store would serve as public listening area for an experimental trans-Atlantic broadcast from Bamberger's WOR.<sup>7</sup>

The Emporium organized a "set-building contest" to publicize the creation of its own radio station. Local amateurs entered 40 receivers in the competition, which was

included various categories such as the “smallest and most efficient crystal detector” and the “cheapest tube receiving set.”<sup>8</sup> Similar promotions were conducted by Gimbel’s in Philadelphia and Bamberger’s in Newark when their respective stations opened.

Programs aimed at women were an integral part of the Emporium’s approach to radio. During its first weeks of operation, the following promotional copy appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle*:

A housewife’s department is the latest innovation in radio broadcasting, initiated by KSL, the Emporium station, which will send out marketing hints, menus and cooking recipes every morning between 10 and 11 o’clock.<sup>9</sup>

Two weeks later, the same paper reported that this particular program, along with a similar one devoted to fashion, had generated considerable attention from local women.<sup>10</sup>

In May 1922, the *Chronicle* reported that popular film star Ruth Roland would perform several songs on KSL.<sup>11</sup> This appearance was credited to a special arrangement with the *Chronicle*, suggesting that before this same paper became a co-owner of the Hale Brother’s station, it collaborated with the Emporium’s own operation. KSL went off the air in the summer of 1923; the same call letters were later used by a station in Salt Lake City.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Schneider, “Early Broadcasting In the San Francisco Bay Area, Stations That Didn’t Survive: 1920-1925,” at <<http://www.bayarearadio.org/schneider/early.shtml>> (5 March 2007.)

<sup>2</sup> “Emporium to Celebrate in Novel Manner,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 April 1922, 6.

<sup>3</sup> “Emporium to Celebrate in Novel Manner,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

<sup>4</sup> “Concert Marks Radio Opening at Emporium,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 23 April 1922, F5.

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<sup>5</sup> The Emporium advertisement promotion Market Week, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 23 April 1922, CC5.

<sup>6</sup> “Concert Marks Radio Opening at Emporium,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

<sup>7</sup> “Radio Concert Held in Newark Store is Heard at Selfridge’s in London,” *New York Times*, 2 October 1922, 8.

<sup>8</sup> “Lucky Winners in Emporium Contest Named,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 20 April 1922, 4.

<sup>9</sup> “Emporium Radio Will Broadcast Hints On Marketing, Menus, Cooking Recipes,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 13 April 1922, 7.

<sup>10</sup> “Radio Vogue Finds Favor With Women,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 27 April 1922, 4.

<sup>11</sup> “Film Favorite and Singer to be Heard Afar,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 11 May 1922, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Schneider, “Early Broadcasting In the San Francisco Bay Area, Stations That Didn’t Survive: 1920-1925.”

**KYJ**  
**Hamburger's**  
**Los Angeles, CA**

Hamburger's department store in Los Angeles, owned by the Leo J. Meyberg Company, was the first such institution in the United States to officially establish a radio station. An article in the December 1921 issue of *Radio News* outlined the specifics of the operation, which lasted less than two years.<sup>1</sup> Like other store stations that would follow, Hamburger's broadcast opera singers and used its facilities to educate local youth about the new technology. Educating potential consumers was a common promotional strategy for the stores during the earliest years of the broadcasting boom.

Near the end of 1921, the store began using a modest 5 watt transmitter under the call letters 6XAK. This station appears in the October 1921 edition of the government's *Radio Service Bulletin*, listed as a "special land station." According to one source, the transmitter was the work of Oliver S. Garretson, a local amateur enthusiast who had already been working with wireless technology for more than a decade.<sup>2</sup> Garretson would go on to work at a number of other stations in the Los Angeles area.

Hamburger's designation as a "special land station" meant that the broadcasting was ostensibly intended for experimental activities, though the store reportedly used it "at the same time to carry on considerable worth-while publicity for the firm as well."<sup>3</sup> Most of the programming consisted of daily musical concerts, lasting one hour each afternoon; the station also broadcast a play-by-play of the 1921 World Series and once featured singers from a touring opera company. As part of its educational emphasis, Hamburger's worked with physics classes from local high schools and built a dedicated classroom on



its premises.<sup>4</sup> By June of the following year, the *Dry Goods Economist* reported that the store had trained “400 pupils in up-to-date wireless instructions.”<sup>5</sup>

At the start of 1922, Hamburger’s changed its license from a “special land station” to that of a “commercial station,” adopting the call letters KYJ as part of this transition.<sup>6</sup> According to White’s website on early radio, the license expired in May 1923.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Rawlings, “Radio in Department Stores,” *Radio News*, December 1921, 485;

<sup>2</sup> Barry Mishkind, “This is the KLAC History section of The Broadcast Archive,” at <<http://www.olderadio.com/archives/stations/LA/klac.htm>> (5 March 2007.)

<sup>3</sup> Rawlings, “Radio in Department Stores,” 485.

<sup>4</sup> Rawlings, “Radio in Department Stores,” 485.

<sup>5</sup> “Distinctive Character of Hamburger’s Services Makes Unusual Trade Appeal,” *DGE*, 1 July 1922, 13.

<sup>6</sup> The commercial license for KYJ is listed in the *Radio Service Bulletin*, January 1922.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas H. White, “Three-Letter Roll Call,” at <<http://www.olderadio.com/archives/general/3roll.htm#bycall>> (5 March 2007.)

**WAAK  
Gimbel's  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin**

This was the second station started by Gimbel's department store, WIP in Philadelphia being the first. An article first published in 1985 (now posted online) contains an overview of WAAK's genesis; little else is known about this station.<sup>1</sup> It did not survive long, and unlike the stations later controlled by Gimbel's (WGBS and WCAE), did not participate in chain broadcasting.

Like other store stations, WAAK aligned itself with local officials and established institutions. Senator Lenroot of Milwaukee wrote to Herbert Hoover in April 1922 in support of Gimbel's application for a broadcast license.<sup>2</sup> WAAK worked with the Milwaukee chamber of commerce to broadcast weather and financial reports, and at the request of the Department of Agriculture, also broadcast agricultural information.<sup>3</sup>

The first "official" broadcast took place on the evening April 26, 1922.<sup>4</sup> Like WIP in Philadelphia, however, the station had gone on the air numerous times in the preceding weeks to test its equipment. The microphone was wired directly to the 100 watt power supply for the transmitter. As a way of protecting the talent from potentially dangerous shocks, the microphone was hung in "a handsome brass birdcage stand supplied by the store."<sup>5</sup> To help promote the new station, "listening posts" equipped with headphones were placed around the store.<sup>6</sup> There is no report of the Philadelphia branch of Gimbel's using these devices.

In the spring of 1923, the store decided to close the station rather than install new equipment that the government required.<sup>7</sup> In December of that year, the store requested

that the Department of Commerce hold the call letters until the station could be upgraded and returned to the air; this does not appear to have happened.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Terry Baun, "WAAK — Milwaukee's First Radio Station" in *Once a Century*, the annual publication of the Milwaukee Press Club, Volume 89, 1985. The original article is online at <<http://www.broadcast.net/~sbe28/waak.html>> (5 March 2007.)

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated April 11, 1922, in WAAK Correspondence Files.

<sup>3</sup> WAAK Correspondence Files.

<sup>4</sup> Baun, "WAAK — Milwaukee's First Radio Station"; The station first appears in the *Radio Service Bulletin* in the May 1922 edition.

<sup>5</sup> Baun, "WAAK — Milwaukee's First Radio Station."

<sup>6</sup> Baun, "WAAK — Milwaukee's First Radio Station."

<sup>7</sup> Baun, "WAAK — Milwaukee's First Radio Station."

<sup>8</sup> Letter dated December 6, 1923 in WAAK Correspondence Files.

**WCAE**  
**Kaufmann & Baer / Gimbel's**  
**Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**

WCAE was the fourth radio station controlled by Gimbel's, following WIP (Philadelphia), WAAK (Milwaukee), and WGBS (New York). All of these stations operated out of branches of the department store, with WCAE joining the family when Gimbel's acquired the Kaufmann & Baer store in Pittsburgh at the end of 1925. The history of WCAE illustrates the overlapping influence of department stores and newspapers on early radio; it originally began as a joint venture with the *Pittsburgh Press*, and in 1931, the *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph* took over the operation.

The station's first appearance in the government's *Radio Service Bulletin* is in the June 1922 edition. The Kaufman & Baer Company [*sic*] was listed the owner, though the *Pittsburgh Press* was involved, if not from the very beginning, then soon thereafter. The station installed a 500 watt Western Electric transmitter in December 1922; someone tampered with the equipment, causing it to fail a government inspection.<sup>1</sup> Among other signs of mischief was a wire that had been cut, then taped together so as to go unnoticed. A large ad in the *Pittsburgh Press* offered a \$1,000 reward to anyone who could identify the guilty party. Kaufmann & Baer wrote to the Department of Commerce to explain the situation and even included a handful of notarized, eye-witness descriptions of the sabotaged transmitter.<sup>2</sup> The equipment was soon repaired and on within a week, an inspector recommended that the station's application for a "class B" license be approved.<sup>3</sup> The station moved to the 400 meter wavelength, reportedly the only one in the vicinity using that frequency.

The store would later open a second radio station, though this was remarkably short lived. In January 1924, Kaufmann & Baer wrote to the Department of Commerce that “the lack of broadcasting during the day time in this city brings about the necessity of having a [transmitter].”<sup>4</sup> The store requested a license for a low-power station that would be explicitly linked to its retail efforts. Before the new license was officially granted, the store’s radio department launched WBBK. Just like WJAR in the Outlet Store, this particular station would transmit for a few moments when a potential customer wanted a demonstration. A government inspector immediately shut down WBBK after an inspection the following month. The equipment was of such poor quality that it could not transmit on any fixed frequency; the resulting signal could cause interference for anyone listening to a radio within a sixteen miles. The inspector also noted that the sales clerks did not possess the necessary government licenses to engage in broadcasting.<sup>5</sup>

WCAE was one of the first stations to establish an affiliation with WEAf in New York. By October 1924, this chain had grown to six stations and was the nucleus of the NBC-Red Network after the phone company sold WEAf.<sup>6</sup> WCAE would maintain the affiliation with NBC for years, though like other stations of the era, was not exclusive to this particular chain. After Gimbel’s took over the Kaufmann & Baer store in December 1925, the station became part of the new owner’s larger radio operation.<sup>7</sup> In the summer of 1926, Gimbel’s announced that a network of five stations would soon commence, including WIP (Philadelphia), WGBS (New York), and WCAE (Pittsburgh).<sup>8</sup> The department store had locations in all of these cities.

Following the acquisition by Gimbel’s, a representative from WCAE explained to the Department of Commerce that the station did not need a new broadcasting license as

the ownership was not changing.<sup>9</sup> According to the letter, Gimbel's had taken over the outstanding stock of the company though "the Broadcasting station will be operated by the Kaufmann & Baer Company." Despite this claim to the contrary, Gimbel's had significant input into operation of the station; a program listing from 1929 includes a talk from the "Gimbel's beauty specialist" as well as a 7:40 p.m. program from "Uncle Gimbee."<sup>10</sup> The government's correspondence file for the station also contains multiple documents with a letterhead reading "WCAE—Gimbel's."<sup>11</sup>

Like the Gimbel's stations in Philadelphia and New York, WCAE adopted the traditional commercial model of operation and sold airtime to sponsors. An application for a broadcast license from 1929 stated that the station only allowed direct advertising on behalf of Gimbel's; the other sponsors presumably relied on indirect advertising.<sup>12</sup> In the summer of 1931, the station was reorganized as a separate entity, WCAE, Incorporated.<sup>13</sup> Later that year, Gimbel's sold the station to the *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, a Hearst publication.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The WCAE Correspondence Files contain numerous references to this incident, along with a copy of the newspaper "reward" advertisement.

<sup>2</sup> The letter to this effect dated December 15, 1922, along with five notarized eye-witness accounts, in WCAE Correspondence Files.

<sup>3</sup> Letter dated December 19, 1922 in WCAE Correspondence Files.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Kaufmann & Baer Company dated January 11, 1924 in WCAE Correspondence Files.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Howard S. Pyle, Assistant U.S. Radio Inspector dated February 19, 1924 in WCAE Correspondence Files.

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<sup>6</sup> William Peck Banning, *Commercial Broadcasting Pioneer: The WEA Experiment, 1922-26* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 232.

<sup>7</sup> “Gimbels Purchase Pittsburgh Store,” *New York Times*, 3 December 1925, 28.

<sup>8</sup> “New Chain to Pick-up Atlantic City’s Best,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, second half of May 1926, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Letter from M.L. Clum of the Kaufmann & Baer Company dated January 11, 1926 in WCAE Correspondence Files.

<sup>10</sup> Program listing from March 10, 1929, in WCAE License Files, 1927-1934.

<sup>11</sup> WCAE Correspondence Files.

<sup>12</sup> Application renewal of broadcast license dated March 16, 1929 in WCAE License Files, 1927-1934.

<sup>13</sup> Agreement from June 30, 1931 in WCAE License Files, 1927-1934.

<sup>14</sup> “WCAE Dedication To Be Held Jan. 4,” *Broadcasting*, 1 January 1932, 36.

**WCK / WSBF**  
**Stix, Baer & Fuller**  
**St. Louis, Missouri**

A brief history of this station can be found in a June 2001 article in the *St. Louis Journalism Review*.<sup>1</sup> Like the broadcasting operation of the Lit Brothers in Philadelphia, this station changed its call letters after a few years to reflect the name of the store. Stix, Baer & Fuller also had a regular series of bedtime stories and favored opera music, and like other stores, used its station as a method a tool to sell receivers. A newspaper ad from June 1924 listed a “WCK Radio Set” along with several other models.<sup>2</sup>

WCK made its official debut on April 18, 1922. An article in that day’s *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* previewed the opening night ceremony, and stated that the mayor would open the program by “speaking through a huge horn-like transmitter installed on the eleventh floor.”<sup>3</sup> The rest of the evening’s programming was comprised of a children’s story and musical performances, including one from a former opera singer. WCK concluded at 8 p.m. that evening, when KSD, the station of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* commenced broadcasting on the same wavelength, 360 meters. An advertisement in that day’s paper outlined KSD’s schedule and noted that “musical selections for tuning in” would occur at 7:45 p.m.<sup>4</sup> These “musical selections” were in fact part of WCK’s inaugural broadcast and this ad reveals one way in which rival stations worked together to share the same wavelength.

Soon after it went on the air, WCK moved to a new wavelength, 273 meters, and remained there until its eventual demise. The station expanded its programming, from originally only three nights a week, by the end of 1924 was on the every night of the



week. A program schedule from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* outlined the week's offering; The "Sandman Club Hour" ran most evenings shortly after 7 p.m. and, like Uncle WIP's show in Philadelphia, featured stories for children along with letters from listeners.<sup>5</sup>

The change of call letters was announced in June 1925.<sup>6</sup> According to a brief announcement in the newspaper, the station would close for a week, then re-open under the new name. The same report claimed an increase in power from 100 to 250 watts. The station broadcast frequently from local theatres, and reportedly organized its own opera company.<sup>7</sup>

The station closed in February 1927. According to the article in the *St. Louis Journalism Review*, the call letters WSBF were revived in June of that year with a station that was controlled by the Mississippi Valley Broadcasting company.<sup>8</sup> This new station, however, was not long-lived and ceased operation in 1928.

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Absher, "Radio History: We're talking obscure here...", *St. Louis Journalism Review*, June 2001, at <<http://www.stljr.org/archives/june2001.htm>> (5 March 2007.)

<sup>2</sup> Stix, Baer & Fuller newspaper ad in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 22 June 1924, section 5, 7.

<sup>3</sup> "Store Tonight to Give First Radio Program," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 18 April 1922, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Program listing in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 18 April 1922, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Program schedule as listed in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 20 December 1924, Radio Section, 3.

<sup>6</sup> "Higher Power, New Call for Radio Station WCK," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 21 June 1925, section V, 7.

<sup>7</sup> "Opera 'Faust' To Be Given on WSBF Wednesday Night," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 5 December 1926, section V, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Absher, "Radio History," *St. Louis Journalism Review*. This same article stated that the station went off the air in February 1928, though this appears to be typographical error. Program listings in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* indicate that 1927 was the year that the original WSBF shut down.

**WDBE**  
**High's department store**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**

For a little over a year, High's department store was home to the primary studio for this station which, like many others, allowed shoppers to observe the performers through a large window. The station had been established by the Gilham Electric Company at the end of 1924, and the first studio was on the second floor of the Ludden and Bates music store.<sup>1</sup> A newspaper article about the opening of the station stated that those readers without their own radio receiver could come to the store and listen to the programming through one of the units that was on sale.<sup>2</sup>

In February 1926, the station was broadcasting at 100 watts and moved its studio to High's department store.<sup>3</sup> Gilham Electric was still the owner, but apparently relied on the store to handle many of the responsibilities. The manager of High's radio department, for example, was also said to be in charge of its programming. An article about the new studio described the facility:

The broadcasting station is located in the radio department on the fourth floor of the High building at Whitehall and Hunter streets. The studio is a commodious and delightful room containing every modern device for perfection of broadcasting. It is decorated in blue and gold, and in addition to the perfect arrangements for the comfort of the artists, ample seating space has been provided for spectators, who may see the artists and equipment in operation through a large glass panel.<sup>4</sup>

The arrangement with High's expired on February 1 of the following year, and in April 1927, Gilham Electric was apparently no longer interested in maintaining the station. Two articles in the *Atlanta Constitution* noted that Gilham sought to give the station, free of charge, to a local high school.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Interior View of Big Station Which Radio Fans Hear Quite Often,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 October 1925, section D, 8; This article contains a good deal of technical information about the station.

<sup>2</sup> “Atlanta Firm Installs Raddio Broadcasting Station [*sic*],” *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 December 1924, 14.

<sup>3</sup> “High’s Radio Broadcasting Station to Open on Wednesday,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 February 1926, 2.

<sup>4</sup> “High’s Radio Broadcasting Station to Open on Wednesday,” *Atlanta Constitution*.

<sup>5</sup> “WDBE Offered to City School,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 4 April 1927, 1; “Radio Station Acceptance by School Board Predicted,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 6 April 1927, 5.

**WEAS**  
**The Hecht Company**  
**Washington, D.C.**

In the summer of 1922, the Hecht Company became the first department store in Washington, D. C. to establish its own radio station, (WIAF being the second). Both of these stations split time on 360 meters, though WEAS appears to have featured more diverse programming. *Radio News* profiled the station in September 1922, and the *Washington Post* wrote numerous articles about its programming.<sup>1</sup> White's webpage devoted to radio history in the District of Columbia also mentions WEAS.<sup>2</sup> The closing of the station reveals the strong seasonal influence that helped shape the early broadcast industry.

According to the *Radio News*, WEAS went into operation on June 7, 1922, the first station in the city to use a four-letter call sign.<sup>3</sup> Its first appearance in the government's *Radio Service Bulletin* was in the July 1922 edition. The manager of the radio department was also responsible for the programming (an arrangement that was common) and he made a direct parallel between the diversity of merchandise offered by the store and the diversity of its on-air offerings. In one particularly unusual stunt, the station aired a demonstration of "mental telepathy."<sup>4</sup>

In November 1922, the *Washington Post* reported that the original, meager 10 watt transmitter was about to be replaced with a 100 watt unit.<sup>5</sup> The same article described the 45-foot, four-tower antennae which would help extend the range of the station "several hundred miles." The programming of the station was described as "radio

vaudeville,” a phrase allegedly coined by the Hecht Company, and it featured theatrical stars and comedians, along with the usual line-up of local singers.<sup>6</sup>

In May 1923, the *Washington Post* reported that the station was closing down for the summer: “In consideration of the various outdoor attractions which will divert attention from listening-in during the early evening hours formerly taken by the station, the management has decided to close down until autumn.”<sup>7</sup> It was reported that the station would re-open in October; it does not appear to have done so.

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<sup>1</sup> S. R. Winters, “Radio Broadcasting and the Department Store,” *Radio News*, September 1922, 423, 536 & 537; For one *Washington Post* article, see “Hecht’s Program Attractive,” 2 August 1922, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas H. White, “Washington, D.C. AM Station History,” at <<http://earlyradiohistory.us/hist-dc.htm>> (5 March 2007.)

<sup>3</sup> Winters, “Radio Broadcasting and the Department Store.”

<sup>4</sup> “Mind Reading by Radio,” *Washington Post*, 6 July 1922, 9.

<sup>5</sup> “New Power Output for WEAS Station,” *Washington Post*, 19 November 1922, 24. A photo of the WEAS studio was also printed on this same page, under the heading “Radiophone Studio — WEAS Studio.”

<sup>6</sup> “New Power Output for WEAS Station,” *Washington Post*.

<sup>7</sup> “Listening In,” *Washington Post*, 29 May 1923, 11.

**WFIL**  
**(Formed from merger of WFI and WDAR/WLIT)**  
**Strawbridge & Clothier / the Lit Brothers**  
**Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

A number of stations from radio's early period were joint operations, though WFIL is the only example in which both of the parent companies were department stores. In 1934, Strawbridge & Clothier and the Lit Brothers of Philadelphia combined their individual stations, WFI and WLIT respectively, to form WFIL.<sup>1</sup> In 1945, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* bought the station, along with the corresponding WFIL-FM.<sup>2</sup> A history of Strawbridge & Clothier contains several references to WFI; that station and WLIT from the Lit Brothers were separately profiled by *Radio Digest Illustrated* in 1925.<sup>3</sup> The website of the Broadcast Pioneers of Philadelphia has an overview of WFIL's history, though this has no information about the department store relationship.<sup>4</sup>

WFI from Strawbridge & Clothier began broadcasting on March 18, 1922.<sup>5</sup> On the same day, the Lit Brothers announced the creation of a new radio department.<sup>6</sup> The first day's programming of WFI featured local politicians and dignitaries, including the state's governor, along with local singers and a choral group comprised of store employees, the "Strawbridge & Clothier Quartette."<sup>7</sup> Three members of this group were central to the station's history; Ednyfed Lewis was the first director for WFI, John Vandersloot was a prominent local singer and announcer, and Harold Simonds worked for the station (after it became WFIL) as an account executive until 1963.<sup>8</sup> A glass-enclosed studio on the fourth floor allowed curious shoppers to witness the proceedings first hand.<sup>9</sup>

An internal publication from Strawbridge & Clothier stated that shortly after the station began, the transmitter was upgraded to a newer, more powerful model.<sup>10</sup> WFI shared time initially with WIP on the 360 meter wavelength. When Wanamaker's went on the air with station WOO in April and the Lit Brothers finally did so in June with WDAR, all four stores split this frequency. WFI was moved to a "class B" classification at the end of 1922, and moved to the wavelength of 400 meters.<sup>11</sup> In the spring of 1923, the government moved all the Philadelphia stations once again and WFI and WDAR began to share the 395 meter wavelength.<sup>12</sup>

WFI became known for its musical offerings, which emphasized choral groups, symphonies, orchestras, and operas. The station also broadcast reports from the Department of Agriculture at the request of the government.<sup>13</sup> In a February 1925 profile, *Radio Digest Illustrated* praised the on-air talents of Lewis, Vandersloot, and Simonds, three of the original members of the Strawbridge & Clothier Quartette.<sup>14</sup> The same article mentioned the network programs of WEAf that were carried over WFI; Jean Hight, host of the "Sunny Jim" children's program was also mentioned. In 1926, the station started to sell airtime to other companies. Roy Clark, a sales manager for the store, was quoted in the *Bulletin of the NRDGA* that "if we so desired, we could sell every minute of the time which is allotted to us."<sup>15</sup>

As a direct continuation of its original affiliation with WEAf, the station was part of the NBC chain when the network formed. In 1928, an image of aviator Charles Lindbergh was successfully transmitted to the station from an airplane.<sup>16</sup> In 1931, the station filed a permit to increase its power from 500 to 1,000 watts; in the application, WFI noted that it had not generated a profit for any month until 1926, and showed no

annual profit until 1930.<sup>17</sup> These profits were derived from the sale of airtime and payments for carrying NBC programs. The same application specified that WFI broadcast “only clean, wholesome programs.”

The Lit Brothers started with the call letters WDAR, though it was the only Philadelphia store to change its on-air designation after it became possible to do so. In February 1925, WDAR became WLIT, a decision presumably made to increase the station’s promotional value.<sup>18</sup> “Dream Daddy” hosted a popular children’s program. Harry Ehrhart, the same performer who had originated Uncle WIP for Gimbel’s, adopted this name when he jumped to the Lit Brothers operation.<sup>19</sup> The December 1925 profile of WLIT in *Radio Digest Illustrated* focused on “Dream Daddy” above all other station performers.<sup>20</sup> The “Stanley Hour of Music” was another staple feature. This program broadcast symphonic and dance orchestras directly from a local theater. *Radio Digest Illustrated* also mentioned the performers “Rufus and Rastus;” this was almost certainly the kind of two-man blackface act relatively common at the time.<sup>21</sup> In the summer of 1924, the Lit Brothers established a remote studio on a pier in Atlantic City and used it to broadcast minstrel shows, among other regular features.<sup>22</sup> Like WFI with which it shared a frequency, WLIT was part of the NBC network.

In 1932, Strawbridge & Clothier established a subsidiary, WFI Broadcasting Company, to run its station.<sup>23</sup> In 1934, WFI and WLIT combined to become the WFIL Broadcasting Company; a set of call letters that owed something to both precursors as well as their city of origin.<sup>24</sup> The new studio was located in the Widener building, separate from both stores, and each store received three hours a week of free airtime on the newly formed WFIL.<sup>25</sup> The Lit Brothers took over the operation completely in 1940;



The *Philadelphia Inquirer* bought the station in 1945.<sup>26</sup> Of this transaction, Lief wrote “like other department-store owners of radio stations who disposed of them to newspapers; the markup was quite high.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “1922 — Year Radio’s Population Soared,” *Broadcasting*, 14 May 1962, 133.

<sup>2</sup> “Philadelphia Radio Sold,” *New York Times*, 28 September 1945, 17.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Lief, *Family Business: A Century in the Life and Times of Strawbridge & Clothier* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968); “WFI — In the City of Brotherly Love,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 14 February 1925, 5; “Dream Daddy at WLIT Has 22,000 Kiddies,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 26 December 1925, 7 & 24.

<sup>4</sup> Roger W. Clipp, “The History of WFIL,” at <http://www.broadcastpioneers.com/wfilhistory.html> (5 March 2007.)

<sup>5</sup> “Governor Sproul Gives Wireless Phone Talk,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 March 1922, B15; The station first appears in the *Radio Service Bulletin* in the April 1922 edition.

<sup>6</sup> Quotes from Lit Brothers’ advertisement from *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 18 March 1922, 5.

<sup>7</sup> “Distinguished Speakers Open Strawbridge & Clothier Broadcasting Station,” *Store Chat*, April 1922, No. 4, 655-657; A copy of this newsletter, published by the department store for its employees, is held by the Free Library of Philadelphia.

<sup>8</sup> Information about Lewis and Vandersloot from “Two Soloists Direct WFI,” *Radio Dealer*, August 1924, 84. This brief articles gives Lewis’ first initials as “W.F.” though numerous listings in program schedules give his name as “Edynfeld Lewis;” The statement about Simonds’ long career from “1922 — Year Radio’s Population Soared,” *Broadcasting*, 14 May 1962, 103; This same article has an original promotional photo of the Strawbridge & Clothier Quartette on 136

<sup>9</sup> Lief described the studio in *Family Business*, 157; A Strawbridge & Clothier advertisement from later that year also mentioned the glass-enclosed studio, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 November 1922, 7.

<sup>10</sup> “Distinguished Speakers Open Strawbridge & Clothier Broadcasting Station,” *Store Chat*.

<sup>11</sup> Davies/Tisdale Interview.

<sup>12</sup> Davies/Tisdale Interview.

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<sup>13</sup> Letter from the Department of Agriculture dated June 9, 1922, WFI Correspondence Files.

<sup>14</sup> "WFI — In the City of Brotherly Love," *Radio Digest Illustrated*.

<sup>15</sup> Roy E. Clark, "Viva Voce Advertising — Potent Publicity," *Bulletin of the NRDGA*, August 1926, 9. A copy is posted online at the American Memory website maintained by the Library of Congress, See  
<<http://www.cs.umd.edu/hcil/ndl/ndldemo/anita/newmain.html>> (5 March 2007.)

<sup>16</sup> "Picture of Lindbergh Radioed From Plane," *New York Times*, 15 August 1928, 15.

<sup>17</sup> Docket No. 1126, dated May 2, 1931, in WFI Correspondence Files.

<sup>18</sup> WLIT Correspondence Files.

<sup>19</sup> "Dream Daddy Fixed Telephones Years Ago," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 4 May 1924, M6.

<sup>20</sup> "Dream Daddy at WLIT Has 22,000 Kiddies," *Radio Digest Illustrated*.

<sup>21</sup> "Dream Daddy at WLIT Has 22,000 Kiddies," *Radio Digest Illustrated*.

<sup>22</sup> "Million-Dollar Pier Has Radio Studio," *Washington Post*, 13 July 1924, 15.

<sup>23</sup> See WFI License Files, 1927-1934.

<sup>24</sup> Lief, *Family Business*, 218.

<sup>25</sup> Lief, *Family Business*, 218.

<sup>26</sup> Lief, *Family Business*, 218.

<sup>27</sup> Lief, *Family Business*, 218.

**WGBS**  
**Gimbel's**  
**New York City**

WGBS was the third station from Gimbel's department store, following WIP (Philadelphia) and WAAK (Milwaukee). While many store stations allowed shoppers to watch radio performers in action, WGBS was particularly dedicated to the concept of "radio as theatre." After four years, the station began to sell airtime and was no longer funded entirely by Gimbel's. A 1997 master's thesis from the author of this dissertation is a history of this particular station.<sup>1</sup> The reference work *The Airwaves of New York* also contains an overview of this station's history.<sup>2</sup> The first director of the station, Dailey Paskman, preserved a collection of letters, memos, press releases, newspaper clippings, and scripts pertaining to WGBS; this material is now held by the Performing Arts Division of the New York Public Library.<sup>3</sup>

The radio activities in Gimbel's New York store preceded the creation of WGBS. At the end of 1922, Gimbel's was one of the first sponsors to buy time over WEA, and in the following months, engineers for AT&T constructed a studio on the eighth floor of the store; "the first broadcasting location where the general public could observe broadcasting in progress," according to Banning.<sup>4</sup> In March 1923, as part of a radio sale, Gimbel's sponsored musical programs that lasted from thirty minutes to an hour.<sup>5</sup> Archer lavished praise on the store in his history of radio, writing that it had "blazed a trail for successful commercial sponsorship."<sup>6</sup>

It is not clear why, at the end of 1924, Gimbel's choose to establish a New York station of its own, rather than continue to sponsor programs over WEA. A 1940

newspaper article about Ellis Gimbel, Jr. stated that this family member transferred from the Philadelphia to the New York store in 1924 and operated WGBS as “one of his first duties.”<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the decision to start WGBS was associated with this move.

Gimbel’s hired Dailey Paskman, a 27-year-old Philadelphia native with promotional experience in the theatrical world, to run the new station.<sup>8</sup> For the opening night ceremony, a special stage was constructed on the store’s eighth floor. Eddie Cantor hosted the event, which featured a number of celebrities of the day along with the Vincent Lopez Orchestra.<sup>9</sup> This same orchestra was a regular feature of WEAJ, suggesting that the new station enjoyed at least a cordial relationship with its original on-air partner.<sup>10</sup>

Most of the programming for the new 500 watt station originated from a glass-enclosed studio on the eighth floor. *Radio News* printed a photo in January 1925.<sup>11</sup> Building on Paskman’s continuing interest in the theatre, the station also broadcast frequently from local stages and created its own original dramatic presentations. A replica of the WGBS studio was built at the Picadilly Theater to demonstrate “how radio broadcasting is actually done.”<sup>12</sup> In April 1925, a program was aired from the S.S. Leviathan; in August of that year, a singer performed while flying over New York in an airplane.<sup>13</sup> Regular programs on the WGBS schedule included morning talks for women from Therese Rose Nagel, and early evening bedtime stories from Uncle GeeBee. This juvenile program was a direct copy of the popular Uncle WIP from Philadelphia.

One of Paskman’s particular programs, however, was more successful than any of his radio dramas, a minstrel show. This form of stage entertainment, developed in the middle of the nineteenth century, featured performers in blackface makeup who parodied

African-American speech patterns.<sup>14</sup> Paskman believed that the minstrel formula, with its combination of well-known jokes, songs, and dialect humor, worked well on the radio and he became an avid proponent of minstrelsy. His minstrels performed first in the summer of 1925, though they were first heard over station WMAF operating out of Dartmouth, Massachusetts. WMAF had been one of the first stations to connect to WEA in New York, and in the summer of 1925, also functioned as an affiliate for WGBS. In the fall of that year, the Radio Minstrels became a regular part of the WGBS schedule, sometimes appearing twice a week.

To take advantage of their popularity, Paskman organized two separate troupes of minstrels. One remained in New York to perform on the radio, while the second toured the vaudeville circuit. A review of one of their stage performances reveals an intriguing variation on the minstrel show formula.<sup>15</sup> Typically, a performer speaking proper English and not wearing blackface served as the “Interlocutor,” or announcer and straight man. Paskman, by contrast, replaced this character with a megaphone which “broadcast” a voice from an unseen performer. In a powerful metaphor for the growing significance of broadcasting in American life, the authority of the Interlocutor was now symbolized by the technology of radio.

Using its multiple stations, Gimbel’s experimented with chain broadcasting and connected WIP and WGBS on numerous occasions. In the summer of 1926, Gimbel’s announced that a network of five stations would soon commence.<sup>16</sup> Three of the stations were directly controlled by the department store, WIP, WGBS, and WCAE.

In November 1928, WGBS became a commercial broadcaster and began to sell airtime to other sponsors.<sup>17</sup> The studio was moved from the store’s eighth floor to the

Hotel Lincoln in the theatre district.<sup>18</sup> The department store retained partial ownership of the station, with Dailey Paskman and another shareholder controlling the rest. The owners referred to themselves as the “General Broadcasting System,” and preserved the same call letters.<sup>19</sup> The reorganized WGBS sold time to a variety of sponsors, including those that were marketplace rivals to Gimbel’s.<sup>20</sup> By the end of 1930, the department store still had a one-third interest in WGBS, but allegedly no input into its operation.<sup>21</sup> According to the *Airwaves of New York*, the new WGBS “presented some of the first transcribed programs.”<sup>22</sup> This same source reprinted a quote from Paskman in which he justifies the use of recordings, though insists that listeners would prefer live performances.<sup>23</sup>

WGBS worked with Charles Jenkins, creator of a mechanical system for television broadcasting. Under this arrangement, Jenkins’ television station W2XCR would broadcast the visuals while WGBS carried the corresponding audio. In April 1931, the two stations worked together to launch an ambitious schedule of three hours of programming each day.<sup>24</sup>

At the end of 1931, William Randolph Hearst acquired the station and changed the call letters to WINS.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald J. Arceneaux, “Attention Shoppers: WGBS and the History of Department Store Radio” (master’s thesis, City University of New York Graduate Center, 1997.)

<sup>2</sup> Bill Jaker, Frank Sulek, and Peter Kanze, *The Airwaves of New York: Illustrated Histories of 156 AM Station in the Metropolitan Area, 1921-1996* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1998), entry on WGBS on 75-76.

<sup>3</sup> Paskman Papers.

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<sup>4</sup> William Peck Banning, *Commercial Broadcasting Pioneer: The WEA Experiment, 1922-26* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 109.

<sup>5</sup> Banning, *Commercial Broadcasting Pioneer*, 109.

<sup>6</sup> Archer, *History of Radio to 1926* (New York: American Historical Society, 1938), 290.

<sup>7</sup> "E.A. Gimbel Resigns from Gimbel Bros.," *New York Times*, 3 January 1940, 39.

<sup>8</sup> George L. Roberts, "Dailey Paskman Explains Secret of the Successful Radio Drama," *New York Herald Tribune*, 10 October 1926, section IX, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> "Gimbels' Radio Starts with a Big Show," *Variety*, 29 October 1924, 32.

<sup>10</sup> "Gimbels' Radio Starts with a Big Show," *Variety*.

<sup>11</sup> Photograph of WGBS studio in *Radio News*, January 1925, 1146.

<sup>12</sup> "Stage Reproduction," *Variety*, 5 August 1925, 23.

<sup>13</sup> There are multiple documents relating to this broadcast in the Paskman Papers, including letters arranging the program, press releases, and portions of the announcer's script, Box 1, Folder 24; On the airplane performance, "WGBS to Radio Music from Airplane Studio," *New York Times*, 16 August 1925, XX13.

<sup>14</sup> For a general history of minstrelsy, see Robert Toll, *Blackening Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); For a history of radio minstrel shows, see Noah Arceneaux, "Blackface Broadcasting in the Early Days of Radio," *Journal of Radio Studies* 12, no. 1 (2005): 61-73.

<sup>15</sup> Christine Colby, "Radio Minstrels Score Great Hit at Ritz Theatre," *Staten Island Advancer*, 12 August 1927, n.p., contained in the Paskman Papers, Box 2, Folder 6.

<sup>16</sup> "New Chain to Pick-up Atlantic City's Best," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, second half of May 1926, 13.

<sup>17</sup> In January 1928, this transformation was announced publicly, though it did not go into affect until later that year. See "Trade Notes and Comments," *New York Times*, 15 January 1928, 139. The specific month of the transition, November, is cited in a WGBS memo to Roy Hollis, Manager, *Daily News*, dated December 6, 1930, Paskman Papers, Box 1, Folder 11.

<sup>18</sup> "WGBS in Stage Stars Orbit," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, December 1928, 18.

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<sup>19</sup> WGBS memo to Roy Hollis, Manager, *Daily News*.

<sup>20</sup> WGBS memo to Roy Hollis, Manager, *Daily News*.

<sup>21</sup> A license renewal for WIP dated December 29, 1930 said that at this time, Gimbel's owned WIP and WCAE and one-third of WGBS, but had no input into its operation. See WIP License Files, 1927-1934.

<sup>22</sup> Jaker, Sulek, and Kanze, *The Airwaves of New York*, 75-76.

<sup>23</sup> The quote is said to come from the *New York Herald-Tribune*, 1 December 1928, though this date does not appear to be correct. See *The Airwaves of New York*, 76.

<sup>24</sup> "Radio Talkies Put on Program Basis," *New York Times*, 27 April 1931, 24; See also "WGBS-W2XCR Television Invades Broadway," *Radio Broadcast*, September 1931, 15 & 86.

<sup>25</sup> "Hearst Buys WGBS [*sic*], Plans Improvement," *Broadcasting*, 15 October 1931, 12.



**WIAY**  
**Woodward & Lothrop**  
**Washington, D. C.**

WIAY was one of two department store stations in the nation's capitol that started their own radio stations in 1922. Both transmitted on 360 meters for most of their programming, though WIAY also broadcast market and weather reports at 485 meters.<sup>1</sup> A few articles in the *Washington Post* provide some information on the station. White's webpage devoted to radio history in this city also mentions the station.<sup>2</sup> In 1927, *Radio Dealer* printed a photo of a radio promotion in one of the Woodward & Lothrop's window displays, though WIAY had been off the air for a few years by this point.<sup>3</sup>

The station was first listed in the government's *Radio Service Bulletin* in the August 1922 issue. Its first appearance in the *Washington Post*'s radio listings was September 16, 1922.<sup>4</sup> The store may have been gearing up for the Christmas shopping season by establishing the station, as retailers had already identified this period as particularly important for selling receivers. In October of that year, Woodward & Lothrop demonstrated the technology at a public campground and equipped a car with a receiver as part of the exhibition. A report of the event stated that "hundreds of people may listen-in at the same time."<sup>5</sup> In contrast to the bigger store stations, much of the programming came from recordings or mechanical pianos, as opposed to live performers.<sup>6</sup> In February 1923, the store broadcast a new English-language version of "Faust" directly from the store's auditorium.<sup>7</sup> An article about the event additionally noted the WIAY's studio was moving from the fourth to the eighth floor at approximately the same time.<sup>8</sup>

In June of that year, the *Washington Post* reported that the station was about to shut down.<sup>9</sup> The article speculated as to the reason behind the decision:

It is thought the disbanding of the station and that of other local stations was undertaken for the good of the radio situation in general, leaving the field open for stations soon to be placed in operation by the Radio Corporation of America and the American Telephone and Telegraph Company.<sup>10</sup>

On July 14, 1923, the store wrote to the Department of Commerce to officially inform them of the station's closing.<sup>11</sup> White wrote that some of the broadcasting equipment was purchased by an electrical school in Takoma Park, Maryland and used at station WBES.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas H. White, "Washington, D.C. AM Station History," at <<http://earlyradiohistory.us/hist-dc.htm>> (5 March 2007); Originally, the Department of Commerce instructed stations to use one of these two wavelengths based upon the kind of information they were broadcasting, see Marvin. R. Bensman, *The Beginning of Broadcast Regulation in the Twentieth Century*, (Jefferson, N. C: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2000), 29.

<sup>2</sup> White, "Washington, D.C. AM Station History."

<sup>3</sup> Ernest A. Dench, "Easter Spirit and Radio Sales," *Radio Dealer*, April 1927, 27-28.

<sup>4</sup> Program schedules in the *Washington Post*, 16 September 1922, 5.

<sup>5</sup> "Listening In," *Washington Post*, 26 October 1922, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Program listings in the *Washington Post* consistently listed the use of Victrola records and player pianos, see for example the listings for 27 October 1922, 14, and also 13 February 1923, 9.

<sup>7</sup> "Washingtonians to Sing First Full Radio Opera," *Washington Post*, 11 February 1923, 4.

<sup>8</sup> "Faust to Be Broadcast from Capitol Tonight," *Washington Post*, 17 February 1923, 9.

<sup>9</sup> "WIAY Tonight Sends Out Last Program," *Washington Post*, 30 June 1923, 11.

<sup>10</sup> "WIAY Tonight Sends Out Last Program," *Washington Post*.

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<sup>11</sup> WIAY Correspondence Files.

<sup>12</sup> White, "Washington, D.C. AM Station History."

**WIP  
Gimbel's  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

WIP was the first station established by Gimbel's, followed by WAAK (Milwaukee), WGBS (New York). WCAE (Pittsburgh) also came under its control when Gimbel's took over the Kaufmann & Baer department store at the end of 1925. In 1926, WIP began to sell airtime and was no longer only a publicity vehicle for its parent company. Gimbel's retained an interest in WIP until 1958. An interview with Ed Davies and James Tisdale, two original employees, is the best source of information regarding the early years of WIP.<sup>1</sup> The history of this station illustrates the department store affinity for children's programming and experiments with chain broadcasting.

When *Radio Digest Illustrated* profiled the station in 1924, the call letters were said to stand for "Watch Its Progress."<sup>2</sup> Benedict Gimbel, Jr., however was quoted many years later regarding the station's original broadcasting license: "You just went down to Washington and asked for one. You got the license the same day; the next day you picked your call letters out of a hat."<sup>3</sup> According to Edward Davies, it was the idea of Ellis Gimbel, Jr., to establish the station.<sup>4</sup> This member of the family was then in charge of the toy department and had received calls from shoppers interested in radio receivers. Davies was intrigued by the musical aspect of broadcasting and agreed to investigate the subject on behalf of Ellis.

A glass-enclosed studio was then built by the local Durham Company as an adjunct to the store's piano department on the seventh floor.<sup>5</sup> WIP's debut was planned for March 18, 1922, the same day as the station operated by the rival Strawbridge & Clothier department store, WFI. Gimbel's advertisement in that day's *Philadelphia*

*Inquirer*, however, included the phrase “Yesterday’s broadcasting was most successful.”<sup>6</sup> Based on this claim, WIP used the slogan “Philadelphia’s Pioneer Voice” for years.<sup>7</sup>

The station began on the standard 360 meter wavelength, then shifted to 400 meters at the end of 1922 when it moved to a “class B” designation. The power was increased to 500 watts at the same time.<sup>8</sup> On the new wavelength, WIP divided time with Strawbridge & Clothier’s WFI and Wanamaker’s WOO. In the spring of 1923, the government shifted WIP to 509 meters, where it shared time with WOO. This time-sharing arrangement lasted for years.

WIP attracted more national attention than the other Philadelphia stations through a variety of stunts.<sup>9</sup> One such event involved a remote broadcast from a studio on a pier in Atlantic City, approximately 60 miles away.<sup>10</sup> In the summer of 1924, a diver from the Philadelphia Derrick and Salvage Corporation broadcast an eye-witness description of the sea floor.<sup>11</sup> This stunt was repeated several times, and the Atlantic City studio also broadcast the sound of waves.<sup>12</sup> Another publicity stunt was a remote broadcast from inside of a prison featuring “an entire concert by the convicts.”<sup>13</sup> On New Year’s Eve 1925, WIP won praise from *Radio Digest Illustrated* when it broadcast the ringing of the Liberty Bell, an event that inaugurated a sesquicentennial celebration for the Declaration of Independence.<sup>14</sup>

The bedtime stories from “Uncle WIP,” a daily series initiated when the station was only a few weeks old, proved remarkably durable and several performers filled the role in subsequent years.<sup>15</sup> Audience participation was a defining element of this children’s program, including a “roll-call” of listeners’ names. A former telephone repairman from Chicago, Harry Ehrhart, was an announcer at the fledgling station and the

first person to step into the role.<sup>16</sup> He “made a phenomenal reputation as Uncle WIP,” according to a 1924 newspaper account, “and during the day hundreds of children would flock to the store” to see him.<sup>17</sup> Gimbel’s hired opera singer Chris Graham to handle the hosting duties after Ehrhart jumped to station WDAR of the Lit Brothers.<sup>18</sup> The fictional character continued to be a popular draw and the store renamed its toy department “Uncle WIP’s Toyland.”<sup>19</sup> For many years, Gimbel’s organized a Thanksgiving Day parade which concluded with Santa being crowned by Uncle WIP.<sup>20</sup>

One of the most enduring, apocryphal tales from the days of early radio revolves around the host of a children’s program who (mistakenly) thought that his microphone had been turned off. The performer, as the story goes, uttered something to the effect of “there, that ought to hold the little bastards for a while,” thus horrifying his legion of adoring fans. The story has most often been attributed to Uncle Don from Bamberger’s station WOR, though others have fingered Uncle WIP as the real culprit. The 1935 autobiography from sportscaster Ted Husing, for example, named Uncle WIP as the perpetrator.<sup>21</sup> A 1979 radio history from J. Fred MacDonald also linked the tale to Uncle WIP.<sup>22</sup> A history of the Hales Brothers KPO, by contrast, attributes the same “little bastards” remark to Jack Keogh who hosted a children’s show on that station.<sup>23</sup> Mistakes of a similar nature undoubtedly occurred during the early days of radio, and in fact similar mistakes are not entirely unknown on today’s radio dial. There is, however, no conclusive proof that Uncle Don, Uncle WIP, or any other children’s performer uttered the notorious “little bastards” remark.<sup>24</sup>

In 1926, WIP adopted the commercial model of operation and sold airtime to other companies. Davies explained that Gimbel’s felt somewhat forced into this decision:

My competitors were selling time without restriction and making money. They were in the position of going out and buying the best talent in Philadelphia while I had to depend upon amateurs or friends, who were getting offers with pay from the other stations and I had to suffer.<sup>25</sup>

Gimbel's granted Davies permission to sell airtime, but not to companies that sold products already available in one of the store's 108 departments. As a compromise, Davies recalled that he arranged for a coal company to sponsor a one-hour program on a weekly basis, as this was one of the few items not sold by Gimbel's. According to *Broadcasting* magazine, the first commercial on WIP was for Hajoca Plumbing Supplies; "The sale was made on a Gimbel's department store sales slip, just like selling a pair of shoes."<sup>26</sup> This alternate claim is also possible, as it is unlikely that the department store engaged in this particular line of business. The limitation lasted for two years, and other non-competitive sponsors included ice and milk companies, along with Western Union. Gimbel's became an even more explicit commercial broadcaster in 1928 when restrictions were lifted and, in the words of Davies, "the bars were dropped."<sup>27</sup>

Gimbel's experimented with chain broadcasting in the 1920s, the same time that the store was expanding its operation to different cities. WIP shared programs with an Atlantic City station, particularly for programs coming from its studio-on-the-pier, and in the summer of 1926 announced that a network of five stations would soon commence.<sup>28</sup> In addition to the two store stations in Philadelphia and New York, a third Gimbel's station was now part of the mix, WCAE in Pittsburgh. The organization now controlled six large stores in New York, Philadelphia, Milwaukee and Pittsburgh, and created its own networks to reach shoppers in these areas.<sup>29</sup>

In 1931, Gimbel's pooled its resources with the Keystone Broadcasting Company, owners of WFAN which shared the same wavelength at that time.<sup>30</sup> As part of the

agreement, the department store retained direct control over one hour of airtime each day; thirty minutes in the morning and thirty minutes in the early evening. For approximately a year, the station used both sets of call letters and broadcast as WIP-WFAN. Benedict Gimbel, Jr. was the president of the new organization; in his own words, “It was the closes I could get to show business.”<sup>31</sup> In 1932, the station reverted to its original, more succinct call sign and was operated by the Pennsylvania Broadcasting Company, a subsidiary of Gimbel’s.<sup>32</sup> It carried some programming from the CBS Network at this time.<sup>33</sup>

In the 1940s, Gimbel’s was an active supporter of television. In November 1945, Gimbel’s worked with RCA in the biggest experiment regarding the possible benefits of television for department stores.<sup>34</sup> The store also sponsored a number of television programs around this time.<sup>35</sup>

Gimbel’s retained an interest in the station until WIP acquired new owners in 1959.<sup>36</sup> The station was purchased by Benedict Gimbel, Jr. and a group of investors.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Davies/Tisdale Interview.

<sup>2</sup> “Station WIP – Watch It’s [sic] Progress,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 29 November 1924, 5, 8.

<sup>3</sup> “1922 – Year Radio’s Population Soared,” *Broadcasting*, 14 May 1962, 110.

<sup>4</sup> Davies/Tisdale Interview. All information in this paragraph from this source.

<sup>5</sup> The studio is mentioned in “Mayor Employs Radio to Talk Philadelphia,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 March 1922, B15. The claim about the Durham Company from Davies/Tisdale Interview.

<sup>6</sup> Advertisement for Gimbels, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 18 March 1922, 9. This same ad is described by Barnouw, *Tower in Babel*, 100.

<sup>7</sup> Davies/Tisdale Interview.



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<sup>8</sup> Report on WIP dated November 9, 1922 in WIP Correspondence Files.

<sup>9</sup> “Station WIP – Watch It’s [sic] Progress,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*.

<sup>10</sup> “Station WIP – Watch It’s [sic] Progress,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*.

<sup>11</sup> Information on the underwater stunts from “Radio Fans Hear Diver on Sea Bed,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 August 1924, 6, and also “Diver Talks Under Sea,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 2 August 1924, 1 & 7; the Davies/Tisdale interview noted that this same stunt was also performed in 1925.

<sup>12</sup> Program listings from the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 4 August 1924, 7, include a 3 p.m. program on WIP described as thus: “ ‘What the Wild Waves Are Saying,’ picked up by microphone placed amidst the breaking waves under the Steel Pier, Atlantic City, New Jersey.” According to the Davies/Tisdale Interview, this was a regular afternoon program.

<sup>13</sup> “Station WIP – Watch It’s [sic] Progress,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*.

<sup>14</sup> “Liberty Bell is Heard Over Air,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 16 January 1926, 3.

<sup>15</sup> The figure of a kindly uncle was already a well-established trope in children’s entertainment; the Telephone Herald of Newark, for example, featured bedtime stories from “Uncle Wiggily” a decade earlier.

<sup>16</sup> “Dream Daddy Fixed Telephones Years Ago,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 4 May 1924, M6.

<sup>17</sup> “Dream Daddy Fixed Telephones Years Ago,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

<sup>18</sup> Davies/Tisdale Interview.

<sup>19</sup> Gimbel’s advertisements, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 December 1923, 9 and *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 18 November 1932, 20.

<sup>20</sup> “Santa Marches Triumphant to Toyland,” *DGE*, 9 October 1926, 19.

<sup>21</sup> Ted Husing, *Ten Years Before the Mike* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1935), 50-52.

<sup>22</sup> J. Fred Macdonald, *Don’t Touch That Dial!: Radio Programming in American Life from 1920 to 1960* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979), 372-373. MacDonald cited a 1950 article as his own evidence, see Llewellyn Miller, “Radio’s Own Life Story,” *Radio and Television Mirror*, February 1950, 93.

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<sup>23</sup> John Schneider, "The History of KPO, San Francisco,"  
<<http://www.olderadio.com/archives/stations/sf/kpo.htm>> (5 March 2007)

<sup>24</sup> For a more thorough examination of the "li'l bastards" legend, see "Uncle Don" at  
<<http://www.snopes.com/radiotv/radio/uncledon.htm>> (5 March 2007.)

<sup>25</sup> Davies/Tisdale Interview

<sup>26</sup> "Early Radio Sponsors Few, Far Between," *Broadcasting*, 14 May 1962, 140.

<sup>27</sup> Davies/Tisdale Interview.

<sup>28</sup> "New Chain to Pick-up Atlantic City's Best," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, second half of May 1926, 13.

<sup>29</sup> "Gimbels Purchase Pittsburgh Store," *New York Times*, 3 December 1925, 28.

<sup>30</sup> Contract between Keystone Broadcasting Company and Gimbel Brothers, Inc. dated January 10, 1931 in WFAN Correspondence Files.

<sup>31</sup> "Benedict Gimbel, Jr., 71 Dies; Had Owned Radio Station WIP," *New York Times*, 6 February 1971, 32.

<sup>32</sup> Letter dated August 13, 1932 in WIP Station Files, 1927-1934.

<sup>33</sup> WIP License Files, 1927-1934.

<sup>34</sup> Mary Gannon, "Television and the Department Store," *Television*, November 1945, 7-15.

<sup>35</sup> David Arons, "Television Becomes Sell-A-Vision at Gimbels-Philadelphia," *Television*, June 1948, 22-23, 42, and also David Arons, "30-Day Experiment Doubles Sales," *Television*, May 1949, 21, 31.

<sup>36</sup> "Gimbel Unit Radio Sale," *Wall Street Journal*, 21 July 1958, 2.

<sup>37</sup> "Benedict Gimbel, Jr., 71 Dies; Had Owned Radio Station WIP," *New York Times*.

**WJAR**  
**The Outlet Store**  
**Providence, Rhode Island**

A 1972 master's thesis from Columbia University contains a wealth of information regarding the history of this particular station.<sup>1</sup> Some of this information was repeated in a history of the Outlet Store that was published by the company itself in 1984.<sup>2</sup> A 1923 program schedule for WJAR, which also contains a photo of the control room, was reprinted in Berg's *On the Short Waves, 1923-1945*.<sup>3</sup> This particular store station differs from others in that its original operator, the Outlet Company, never got out of the broadcasting business. In 1980, the Outlet Company even closed its self-named department store to focus on broadcasting.<sup>4</sup>

The inaugural broadcast of WJAR on September 6, 1922 featured remarks from the governor, the mayor, a former governor, as well as the two Samuels brothers who owned the store.<sup>5</sup> Following the creation of the station on the fifth floor, the Outlet began selling "RadioEar" receivers that had been manufactured by Thomas Giblin, the same individual who had installed the original broadcasting equipment.<sup>6</sup> Along with Giblin, the only other employee who worked for WJAR was Ray Blanchard, a former radio operator for the Navy who had been hired to run the store's radio department.<sup>7</sup>

The link between retailing and radio programming was particularly vivid at WJAR.<sup>8</sup> If a salesman wanted to demonstrate a receiver at a time when the station was not on the air, he would notify the phonograph department via a special light. The second party would then start a phonograph next to a remote microphone and WJAR would come to life momentarily, presumably just long enough to make the sale. Under Blanchard's management of the radio department, the store sold an estimated \$40,000

worth of receivers in 1922; this figure grew to well over \$200,000 the following year, a dramatic increase that was partly attributed to the operation of WJAR.<sup>9</sup>

By 1924, however, Blanchard felt that the novelty of broadcasting was already wearing off and he believed that thanks to WJAR and WEAN, the station of the rival Shepard Store in Providence, there was actually too much local programming for listeners. If WJAR were to cut back on its programming and observe a few “silent nights” each week, listeners might then be induced to purchase the more expensive receivers that could receive signals from New York and other distant cities.<sup>10</sup>

Blanchard also claimed that he conceived the idea of using a distinctive sound to help listeners identify the station. To this end, WJAR used a three note motif from a dinner gong, an instrument which had been borrowed from the furniture department. According to Blanchard, this musical signature directly inspired the three-note “chimes” associated with NBC.<sup>11</sup> The fact that the Outlet was an early affiliate of the WEAFF chain, the immediate predecessor to the NBC network, lends some credibility to this claim. However, the author of the thesis, Beglieter, noted that these identifying sounds were not used by NBC until several years later, and outside of the memory of one employee, no one else could confirm the claim. The 1984 history of the Outlet repeated Blanchard’s claim, but omitted Beglieter’s qualification.<sup>12</sup>

In 1924, the advertising manager for the Outlet, Joseph Gettler, became the manager of WJAR.<sup>13</sup> Gettler, along with John Shepard III, participated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> national radio conferences.<sup>14</sup> Under Gettler’s direction, WJAR maintained the affiliation with WEAFF that had been established in 1923 and broadcast several high-profile events from New York and Washington as part of AT&T’s original network. In 1925, WJAR

boosted its signal to 500 watts and experimented with electrical transcriptions, going so far as to establish a studio dedicated to creating them.<sup>15</sup> In 1929, the station installed a 1,000 watt transmitter and, for the first time, WJAR was no longer funded from the money allocated to the store's radio department and became a separate bookkeeping entry unto itself.<sup>16</sup> By this time, the station was affiliated with NBC, a continuation of its original affiliation with WEAJ.

Much of WJAR's airtime was given to network programming rather than local talent, though the station was responsible for the popular "Kiddie Review Show" in the early 1930s. The show relied on a studio audience filled with children, and demand for tickets was so great that the program was relocated to an auditorium inside the Outlet.<sup>17</sup> In 1933, the fifth floor studios were expanded and improved; the same facilities would serve WJAR until the radio station finally left the Outlet store building in 1979.<sup>18</sup>

Also in 1933, the Outlet organized a demonstration of the nascent technology of television. An announcer in one of the first floor windows stood before a "rapidly rotating disc," a mechanism crucial to the mechanical versions of television that were being developed at the time.<sup>19</sup> The image was received in a receiver in the fifth floor auditorium, though reportedly "looked terrible, because [the announcer] had refused to paint his face with the dark purple makeup required for early television pickups."<sup>20</sup> Sixteen years later, the Outlet established its own television station, WJAR-TV.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph J. Begleiter, "Biography of a License: The Fifty-Year History of a Commercial Broadcast Station" (master's Thesis, Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism 1972.)

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel Chipman Smart, *The Outlet Story, 1894-1984* (Providence, Rhode Island: Outlet Communications, Inc., 1984).

<sup>3</sup> Jerome S. Berg, *On the Short Waves, 1923-1945: Broadcasting Listening in the Pioneer Days of Radio* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1999).

<sup>4</sup> "Outlet's Broadcasting Pays Off," *New York Times*, 8 August 1980, D1.

<sup>5</sup> Begleiter, "Biography of a License," 7.

<sup>6</sup> Begleiter, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Begleiter, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Begleiter, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Begleiter, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Begleiter, 13.

<sup>11</sup> Begleiter, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Smart, *The Outlet Story*, 61.

<sup>13</sup> Begleiter, 33.

<sup>14</sup> Predecessor Agencies to the Federal Radio Commission, "List of Persons in Attendance at Third National Radio Conference, October 6, 1924" and "'List of Delegates to Fourth National Radio Conference, November 9, 1925," RG 173, 54-A258.

<sup>15</sup> Begleiter, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Begleiter, claim of separate accounting, 13; new transmitter, 40.

<sup>17</sup> Smart, 88.

<sup>18</sup> Smart, 87.

<sup>19</sup> Begleiter, 48.

<sup>20</sup> Begleiter, 48.

<sup>21</sup> Smart, 52.

**WLS**  
**Sears-Roebuck Company**  
**Chicago, Illinois**

The station of the Sears-Roebuck Company was used as a vehicle for indirect advertising, like other department store stations, though it differed from others in at least two areas; the studio was not located inside of a retail establishment, and the programming was aimed at rural audiences. A 1969 history of the station contains valuable information regarding Sear's involvement; much of this information also appears on a website devoted to WLS history.<sup>1</sup> Linton also included some information on WLS in his 1953 dissertation on Chicago radio.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of 1923, the mail-order company decided to establish the Sears-Roebuck Agricultural Foundation in Chicago. Many of the company's customers lived in rural areas, and the new venture was established to educate them about various issues relating to farm life.<sup>3</sup> The company had already received a license for its own radio station. According to Evans: "Widespread talk about the potential value of radio for farm people led to Sears to house the new station in its Agricultural Foundation and devote most programming to agriculture."<sup>4</sup> The main studio was inside the Sherman Hotel in downtown Chicago, with another studio in the Sears office building. The station formally debuted on April 12, 1924 with a celebrity-filled banquet at the hotel.<sup>5</sup> WLS began with a 500 watt transmitter, more powerful than most stations at that time.<sup>6</sup>

The call letters were said to stand for the "World's Largest Store." Stations from this era often devised clever phrases based upon their call letters, though originally these letters were randomly assigned. The phrase "World's Largest Store" is one of the best-remembered of these phrases, and is a particularly apt metaphor for the growing

phenomenon of commercialized broadcasting. Prior to settling on this particular three-letter combination, however, representatives from Sears and the Department of Commerce negotiated over a few other possibilities.<sup>7</sup> WBBX was the first call sign given to Sears, followed by WJR. The station however, specifically wanted some combination of letters that ended with “S,” namely WBS, WGS, or WLS. It is quite likely that the phrase “World’s Largest Store” had already been devised, along with other variations, though the Department of Commerce responded that WES was the closest combination of letters still available. The government then changed this assignment and Sears received yet another combination of letters, WLS; this was the combination that stuck.

The programming consisted of the usual repertoire of lectures, bedtime stories in the evening, hotel orchestras, dramatic presentations, and homemaking programs. Given the involvement of the Agricultural Foundation, a large portion of airtime was also given over to informative talks for farmers. Shortly after the station began, George Hay joined as the director and an announcer, adopting the on-air moniker of the “Solemn Old Judge.”<sup>8</sup> His distinctive voice became known nationwide, especially his pronunciation of “Chi-CAW-go,” and his use of a locomotive whistle became an identifying signal of WLS.<sup>9</sup> At his previous place of employment, WMC in Memphis, Hay had used a device called a “huskpuckiny” which was said to produce the sound of a river boat whistle. Once relocated to Chicago, Hay continued the concept but thought the sound of a train whistle more appropriate.<sup>10</sup> At WLS, he hosted the “National Barn Dance,” which was said to inspire “hundreds of barn dance programs over almost every station in the country.”<sup>11</sup>

After a few years of operation, Sears no longer felt it necessary or efficient to maintain a dedicated radio station. WLS had helped to spread the name of the company



across the country, though its branch stores in other cities also wanted to advertise themselves over the airwaves. Evans found that Sears' outlets in Atlanta, Memphis and Kansas City, for example, were either buying airtime on local stations or simply getting access to it for free.<sup>12</sup> Around the same time, the company concluded that it did not want to turn WLS into a traditional commercial operation by selling its own airtime, as it "competed with most any advertiser that might buy time on the station."<sup>13</sup> Ed Davies recalled that a similar dilemma confronted Gimbel's when it decided to turn WIP into a commercial station. As a result of this situation, Sears sold WLS to a publication called the *Prairie Farmer*. As a provision of sale, Sears got 12 hours a week on WLS, and the new owners agreed not to promote any mail-order business or chain store without permission from Sears.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James F. Evans, *Prairie Farmer and WLS: the Burrige D. Butler Years* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1969), 158-175; and also the WLS website at <<http://www.wlshistory.com/WLS20>> (5 March 2007.)

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Linton, "A History of Chicago Radio Station Programming, 1921-1931, With Emphasis on Stations WMAQ and WGN" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1953.)

<sup>3</sup> Evans, *Prairie Farmer and WLS*, 159.

<sup>4</sup> Evans, 160.

<sup>5</sup> Evans, 161.

<sup>6</sup> Linton, "A History of Chicago Radio Station Programming," 96.

<sup>7</sup> A number of telegrams document this exchange of information in the WLS Correspondence Files.

<sup>8</sup> Evans stated that Hay joined WLS in 1925. According to an article in *Radio Digest Illustrated*, however, Hay was the director of WLS in May 1924. See "WLS Adopts Train Whistle for Call," 17 May 1924, 9.

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<sup>9</sup> “New Radiophone Stations Operating in Chicago,” *New York Times*, 1 June 1924, XX19.

<sup>10</sup> “WLS Adopts Train Whistle for Call,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*.

<sup>11</sup> Linton, 97.

<sup>12</sup> Evans, 168.

<sup>13</sup> Evans, 168.

<sup>14</sup> Evans, 174.

**WMAQ**  
**The Fair Store**  
**Chicago, Illinois**

WMAQ was originally begun as a joint venture between the Fair and the *Chicago Daily News* in 1922, using a studio located inside of the department store. The genesis of this station illustrates that stores embraced the medium of broadcasting even before the technology for doing so had been perfected and refined. The Fair sold its interest in the station in 1923, and in 1931, the newspaper sold WMAQ to NBC. Caton's 1951 dissertation is the most detailed source regarding the pre-NBC history of this particular station.<sup>1</sup> Linton's 1953 dissertation also contains information regarding the early years of WMAQ.<sup>2</sup>

All historical accounts of this station mention the *Chicago Daily News* as a co-owner, however the first broadcasting license issued for the station (dated March 29, 1922) lists only the Fair.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the first appearance of this station in the government's *Radio Service Bulletin* is in the April 1922 edition, and in the column labeled "Station controlled by —," only the store is listed. According to Caton's dissertation, by contrast, the newspaper had significant input into the operation from the very beginning. Judith Waller, the first director of the station, for example, was hired by the *Daily News*, not the department store.<sup>4</sup>

The original transmitter had been built by Lee De Forest for wireless telegraphy, similar to the one first used by WOR.<sup>5</sup> According to a 1938 interview with Judith Waller, the transmitter was already located on top of the Fair store's building, and had been most likely used to communicate with ships on Lake Michigan.<sup>6</sup> Waller organized

a collection of songs to be performed on April 12, 1922, an inaugural broadcast which occurred under the call signs WGN on the standard wavelength of 360 meters.<sup>7</sup> The transmitter, however, proved woefully inadequate and was immediately retired.<sup>8</sup>

The newspaper, however, continued to broadcast by using the facilities of KYW, a Westinghouse station located in town. This arrangement lasted for several months while a new studio was built inside the Fair and another transmitter was installed, a 500 watt one that was “the first of its kind built by General Electric.”<sup>9</sup> Also during this interim period, the *Daily News* requested a new set of call letters from the Department of Commerce, to avoid confusion with the similarly named station WBU that was already operating in Chicago. When the revamped studio and new transmitter were ready for operation in October 1922, the station resumed broadcasting under the call letters WMAQ.<sup>10</sup> Famous comedian Ed Wynn, who would later become a major radio star in the 1930s, was “the first person to speak over WMAQ.”<sup>11</sup>

In February 1923, *Radio Digest Illustrated* profiled the station. The president of the Fair described one of the motivations behind the operation:

The business value of Radio is one of those unseen forces which can never be counted. In dollars and cents, the returns are not evident. But in good will, advertising value and general publicity it brings in its own returns. Hearing the station “On the Fair Store” and hearing the name broadcast many times daily, cannot but be a strong advertising force and when the government so regulates its stations that they may be used as definite advertising medium, then the returns will show financial value, for the man who listens in to a program is willing to listen in to a talk on good merchandise, where and how to get it.<sup>12</sup>

The same article described the variety of programming that could be heard on the station, including classical and popular music, lectures, recitals, and regular presentations from a

member of the National Federation of Women's Clubs. There was also a children's hour every Monday evening featuring the "Story Lady."<sup>13</sup>

The involvement of the Fair lasted only a few more months, and Caton attributed the store's departure to a somewhat unusual turn of events. D.F. Kelly, the manager of the Mandel Brothers department store located one block away, was annoyed that the sounds of WMAQ could be heard in the background whenever he made a phone call. After a reorganization of management, Kelly assumed a similar position at the Fair. The newspaper then took "advantage of Mr. Kelly's profound dislike for WMAQ" and bought the store's half-interest.<sup>14</sup> The studio and transmitter were then moved to the Hotel LaSalle, one of the tallest buildings in town.<sup>15</sup>

The Fair maintained a relationship with WMAQ, even though it was no longer a co-owner. In 1928, the department store sponsored a radio minstrel show that featured Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden, the same performers behind the wildly popular "Amos 'n' Andy" series.<sup>16</sup> That same year, the store also sponsored a shopping program on WMAQ in which individuals could order merchandise via the phone.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chester F. Caton, "Radio Station WMAQ: A History of its Independent Years, 1922-1931" (Ph.D. Northwestern University, 1951.)

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Linton, "A History of Chicago Radio Station Programming, 1921-1931, With Emphasis on Stations WMAQ and WGN" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1953.)

<sup>3</sup> See WMAQ License Files, 1922-1926.

<sup>4</sup> Caton, "Radio Station WMAQ," 60.

<sup>5</sup> Caton, 60.

<sup>6</sup> Judith Waller interview, March 6, 1948. Reel Orig 0966, Audio Collection. Library of American Broadcasting.

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<sup>7</sup> Caton, 61.

<sup>8</sup> Caton, 63-64.

<sup>9</sup> Caton, 64.

<sup>10</sup> Caton, 66.

<sup>11</sup> Vera Brady Shipman, "WMAQ Fights 'Faddists' in Air," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 17 February 1923, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Shipman, "WMAQ Fights 'Faddists' in Air."

<sup>13</sup> Shipman, "WMAQ Fights 'Faddists' in Air."

<sup>14</sup> William Hedges, editor of the *Chicago Daily News*, as quoted in Caton, 68.

<sup>15</sup> Caton, 68.

<sup>16</sup> Linton, "A History of Chicago Radio Station Programming," 233.

<sup>17</sup> See the Fair store advertisement, *Chicago Tribune*, 2 December 1928, section 6, 17.

**WNAC**  
**(Includes WEAN )**  
**The Shepard Store**  
**Boston, Massachusetts**

The *New York Times*' obituary for John Shepard III described him as "a department store executive who became a pioneer in radio broadcasting."<sup>1</sup> More so than any other single individual, Shepard epitomized the support for radio that came from these retailers. His primary station, WNAC, relayed the "first network" broadcast.<sup>2</sup> He was selected as the first vice-president of the National Association of Broadcasters, founded one of the first regional radio networks, and was one of the first proponents of FM broadcasting.<sup>3</sup> WNAC is one of the central stations in Kroeger's 1968 dissertation on the first two decades of Boston radio; a chapter of Russo's 2004 dissertation focuses on Shepard's regional networks and is the best source regarding this aspect of his career.<sup>4</sup> Boston-based researcher Donna Halper has also posted a good deal of information regarding Shepard on various webpages.<sup>5</sup>

The first radio station of the Shepard Stores, WEAN, was begun by the branch in Providence, Rhode Island on June 2, 1922.<sup>6</sup> On July 31, the Shepard Store in Boston started its own station, WNAC.<sup>7</sup> The first broadcast license, however, was not issued until September 13, 1922, and the station does not appear in the *Radio Service Bulletin* until the October 1922 edition.<sup>8</sup> A program listing in the *Boston Globe* from early August referred to most of the area stations by call letters, though that day's broadcast from "The Shepard Stores, Boston" was described sans call letters.<sup>9</sup> The station, then, may have begun before it was officially authorized to do and before the call letters had been assigned.

For WNAC's debut, the store's Colonial Orchestra performed in the afternoon and the mayor delivered an address.<sup>10</sup> The evening featured a variety of musical performances from the fourth floor studio. The station was under the control of Major John Fanning, an announcer with extensive military wireless experience, and Samuel Curtis, a former naval officer who was also in charge of the store's radio department.<sup>11</sup>

Over the next few years, WNAC was one of Boston's primary stations and regularly used remote pick-ups to broadcast church and synagogue services, plays, operas and hotel orchestras.<sup>12</sup> "Jean Sargent" was the pseudonym used by the host of WNAC Women's Club, which reportedly included more than 27,000 women in 1926.<sup>13</sup> The host was a staff writer from the *Boston American* (a local Hearst publication).<sup>14</sup> In Philadelphia, Gimbel's WIP similarly worked with a local newspaper to arrange its own women's show. Dramatic presentations on the stations were performed by the WNAC Players, a troupe composed of store employees including John Shepard himself.<sup>15</sup> In 1924, Shepard became the first vice-president for the National Association of Broadcasters, and participated in both the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> national radio conferences organized by Hoover.<sup>16</sup> In 1925, WNAC began to sell airtime at the price of \$150 for an hour or \$50 for a ten-minute talk, though direct advertising was forbidden.<sup>17</sup> The continued popularity and success of WNAC lead to a major expansion of the studio in 1929 when it was moved from the store to the Hotel Buckminster.<sup>18</sup>

Russo wrote that "the Shepard organization had a highly rationalized and vertically integrated structure, designed to maximize programming choices and profit making options."<sup>19</sup> This tendency was expressed as early as January 4, 1923, when WNAC was the first station to re-transmit programming from WEAJ in New York, an



important experiment which lead directly to the formation of the first commercial network. Banning's history of WEAJ stated that the evening's program lasted three hours, the same length cited by *Radio Digest Illustrated* in its coverage of the event.<sup>20</sup> Halper claims that the hook-up lasted for five minutes.<sup>21</sup> Despite the length of the broadcast, the experiment was successful enough to encourage WEAJ's development of a regular chain.

Shepard was similarly encouraged by the possibilities offered by chain broadcasting and set about establishing his own network, separate from that of WEAJ. By the end of 1923, WNAC was feeding programs to its sister station, WEAN, in Rhode Island.<sup>22</sup> Building from this two station hook-up, Shepard steadily increased his radio holdings over the years. In May 1925, he launched WNAB in Boston, a second, less-powerful station.<sup>23</sup> In 1928, he started selling airtime on both WNAC and WEAN; this arrangement became the Yankee Network in 1930 when a third (non-Shepard owned) station added to the mix.<sup>24</sup> The new network was an early user of transcriptions, or recorded programs.<sup>25</sup> In 1931, Shepard took over station WLEX, changed its call letters to WAAB, and it began to use the same studio and broadcasting antenna as WNAC.<sup>26</sup> In 1936, Shepard formed the Colonial Network, another regional operation which originated from WAAB.<sup>27</sup>

Using the handful of stations that he controlled — WNAC (Boston), WEAN (Providence), WAAB (Boston), plus WICC (Bridgeport, Connecticut) owned by the Yankee Network — Shepard used programming from the NBC, CBS, and Mutual networks at various times. Russo describes numerous instances in which Shepard was able to manipulate these various affiliations to boost his own profits, occasionally to the

network's displeasure.<sup>28</sup> He found ways to intersperse local commercials within network programming.<sup>29</sup> Two of the first books on radio advertising singled out WNAC's successful use of the medium.<sup>30</sup>

One of the stations owned by Shepard, WNAB, was not part of his network-operations, and was used for other purposes. At the start of 1927, the call letters were changed to "WASN," said to stand for the "Air Shopping News."<sup>31</sup> Fifteen department stores were now involved; each controlled a block of airtime consisting of musical numbers, news of the day, and sales information, all supplied by female announcers.<sup>32</sup> According to one report, this was the "first radio all-day shopping news plan to be tried out in the United States."<sup>33</sup> In June 1927, the call letters were changed again to "WBIS," for "Boston Information Service," and the combined-fifteen-store operation seems to have come to an end.<sup>34</sup> According to Halper, WBIS also broadcast shopping news and phonograph records. WBIS was discontinued in 1928.<sup>35</sup>

In the early 1930s, when newspaper publishers perceived radio as a potential threat to their own business, some publications decreased the amount of space given to the rival medium. According to Kroeger, however, the Boston papers continued to cover WNAC, WAAB, and the Yankee Networks as the Shepard Store was directly responsible for so much print advertising in these same outlets.<sup>36</sup> One history of WOR (another station run by a department store), made the same observation in relation to the newspaper coverage of that station.<sup>37</sup> In 1934, Shepard organized the Yankee News Network. This is was one of most extensive news-gathering operations established by a radio station during the Press-Radio War.<sup>38</sup>

In 1937, Shepard closed his Boston department store, reportedly to focus more of his attention to broadcasting.<sup>39</sup> In 1939, Shepard puts WIXOJ on the air, the first radio station in Massachusetts to use the new technique of frequency modulation, or FM broadcasting.<sup>40</sup> He also attempted to organize a chain of FM stations, the American Network, though this was not successful.<sup>41</sup>

In 1942, the General Tire and Rubber Company purchased Shepard's radio holdings.<sup>42</sup> A subsidiary of the same company would purchase WOR ten years later. Shepard continued as general manager of the Yankee and Colonial Networks, though both "operated more conservatively than they had in the past."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "John Shepard 3d, 64, Led Radio Network," *New York Times*, 12 June 1950, 27.

<sup>2</sup> William Peck Banning, *Commercial Broadcasting Pioneer: The WEAJ Experiment, 1922-26* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 158.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Sterling and John Michael Kittross, eds., *Stay Tuned: A History of American Broadcasting*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Mahway, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 69.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald William Kroeger, "The History of Boston Radio to 1941" (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1968); Alexander Todd Russo, "Roots of Radio's Rebirth: Audiences, Aesthetics, Economics, and Technologies of American Broadcasting, 1926 — 1951" (Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 2004), chap. 1, 18-64.

<sup>5</sup> See for example, "Some John Shepard History" at <<http://www.bostonradio.org/essays/shepard.html>> (5 March 2007); See also "John Shepard — Boston's Showman," at <<http://www.olderadio.com/archives/people/shepard.htm>> (5 March 2007.)

<sup>6</sup> "1922 — Year Radio's Population Soared," *Broadcasting*, 14 May 1962, 134; The station first appears in the *Radio Service Bulletin* in the July 1922 edition.

<sup>7</sup> "Radio Concert By Shepard Stores," *Boston Globe*, 26 July 1922, 2.

<sup>8</sup> WNAC License Files, 1922-1926.

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<sup>9</sup> Program listings in the *Boston Globe*, 8 August 1922, 15.

<sup>10</sup> "Radio Concert By Shepard Stores," *Boston Globe*.

<sup>11</sup> "Shepard Stores Put in Broadcasting Set," *Boston Globe*, 26 July 1922, 2; Information on the backgrounds of Fanning and Curtis from "The Major and Adonis of WNAC," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 8 September 1923, 5, and also "Operator of WNAC Resigns to Sell Radio Apparatus," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 22 September 1923, 2.

<sup>12</sup> There are numerous mentions of such events in Kroeger, "The History of Boston Radio to 1941."

<sup>13</sup> "WNAC Planning Its Greatest Season in Radio Entertainment," *Boston Globe*, 27 September 1926, 17.

<sup>14</sup> "Performers in Boston Get Pay Through Local Radio Stations," *Variety*, 18 April 1925, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Kroeger, "The History of Boston Radio to 1941," 62.

<sup>16</sup> "To Head Broadcasters," *New York Times*, 25 September 1924, 26; Predecessor Agencies to the Federal Radio Commission, "List of Persons in Attendance at Third National Radio Conference, October 6, 1924" and "'List of Delegates to Fourth National Radio Conference, November 9, 1925," RG 173, 54-A258.

<sup>17</sup> "Performers in Boston Get Pay Through Local Radio Stations," *Variety*.

<sup>18</sup> Kroeger, 94.

<sup>19</sup> Russo, 31.

<sup>20</sup> Banning, *Commercial Broadcasting Pioneer*, 158; F.N. Hollingsworth, "See Toll Plant Chain - Plans Follow \$25,000 Test of Simultaneous Broadcasting Service," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 3 February 1923, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Halper, "John Shepard — Boston's Showman."

<sup>22</sup> "Relay Boston Broadcasts to Station in Providence," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 24 November 1923, 6.

<sup>23</sup> *Radio Service Bulletin*, May 1925.

<sup>24</sup> Russo, "Roots of Radio's Rebirth," 30-31; "Yankee Network Being Formed," *New York Times*, 9 February 1930, X20.

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<sup>25</sup> Russo, 32.

<sup>26</sup> “We Pay Our Respects To — John Shepard, III,” *Broadcasting*, 15 August 1932, 17.

<sup>27</sup> Russo, 53.

<sup>28</sup> Shepard’s conflicts with various networks are a continuing theme of Russo’s first chapter in “Radio’s Rebirth,” 18-64.

<sup>29</sup> For one example, see “Yankee Network Being Formed,” *New York Times*.

<sup>30</sup> Edgar H. Felix, *Using Radio in Sales Promotion: A Book for Advertisers, Station Managers and Broadcasting Artists* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc, 1927), 83, and also Herman Hettinger, *A Decade of Radio Advertising* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), 264-265.

<sup>31</sup> Halper, “Some John Shepard History.”

<sup>32</sup> “Donna Halper, *Invisible Stars: A Social History of Women in American Broadcasting*, (Armonke, New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2001), 47. See also “Sales Promotion By Radio,” *Journal of Retailing* 3, no. 1 (April 1927): 26.

<sup>33</sup> “Boston Stores Adopt Radio to Send Out Shopping News,” *New York Times*, 30 January 1927, E1.

<sup>34</sup> Halper, “Some John Shepard History.”

<sup>35</sup> Kroeger, 96.

<sup>36</sup> Kroeger, 179.

<sup>37</sup> Bill Jaker, Frank Sulek, and Peter Kanze, *The Airwaves of New York: Illustrated Histories of 156 AM Station in the Metropolitan Area, 1921-1996* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1998), 152.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Stamm, “Mixed Media: Newspaper Ownership of Radio in American Politics and Culture, 1920-1952” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2006), 100.

<sup>39</sup> Halper, “John Shepard — Boston’s Showman.”

<sup>40</sup> Halper, “John Shepard — Boston’s Showman.”

<sup>41</sup> Russo, 60.

<sup>42</sup> Russo, 60.

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<sup>43</sup> Russo, 60.

**WOO**  
**Wanamaker's**  
**Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

Station WOO from Wanamaker's was the third department store station to launch in the Philadelphia, following Gimbel's WIP and Strawbridge & Clothier's WFI. WOO was not a revamped version of WHE, the wireless telegraphy station that had been operating out of the same store since 1911, but an entirely new operation.<sup>1</sup> Several references to WOO can be found in Biswanger's history of the famous Wanamaker pipe organ, an instrument which dominated the programming.<sup>2</sup> This station epitomized the high-brow department store approach to radio, though lacked the variety of the other Philadelphia store stations, nor was it mentioned as frequently in newspaper advertisements.

WOO began on April 24, 1922 using the same wavelength as Gimbel's and Strawbridge & Clothier, 360 meters.<sup>3</sup> "Orchestral selections" and two addresses from Gifford Pinchot, a Republican candidate for governor, comprised the first broadcast.<sup>4</sup> Months later in August, the store installed a more powerful Western Electric transmitter and celebrated a second opening.<sup>5</sup> The first opening has been overlooked by some historians.<sup>6</sup>

A promotional pamphlet issued by Wanamaker's in 1922 emphasized the organ concerts which WOO broadcast almost daily, and described the instrument in great detail.<sup>7</sup> The store experimented with a new type of microphone to accurately reproduce the wide range of sounds produced by the organ.<sup>8</sup> Archer wrote that Wanamaker's achieved "what radio engineers had declared impossible — broadcasting organ music in a

highly satisfactory manner.”<sup>9</sup> Biswanger additionally noted that for some performances, the power was “pushed near the breaking point” and the sounds of the organ could be heard as far away as Australia and Europe.<sup>10</sup> Time signals, as retransmitted from the Naval station in Arlington, were another standard feature of WOO’s schedule.

At the end of 1922, the station was awarded a “class B” designation and moved to 400 meters.<sup>11</sup> But if the idea was to reduce interference for area radio listeners, the fact that nearby Gimbel’s and Strawbridge & Clothier also received this designation worked against this effort. In May 1923, it began to split time with Gimbel’s WIP.<sup>12</sup> By 1925, it was affiliated with WEA’s network.<sup>13</sup> The station went off the air in 1928 when management was unwilling to improve the “out of date” equipment.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> WHE, the Wanamaker wireless telegraph station in Philadelphia, and WHI, the one in New York were listed in government files as still being in operation well after WOO went on the air. See the reports entitled “Commercial and Government Radio Stations of the United States” (Department of Commerce, Bureau of Navigation) for 1923, 1924, and 1925.

<sup>2</sup> Ray Biswanger, *Music in the Marketplace: The Story of Philadelphia’s Historic Wanamaker Organ, from John Wanamaker to Lord & Taylor* (Bryn Mawr, Penn.: Friends of the Wanamaker Organ, Inc., 1999.)

<sup>3</sup> Wanamaker’s advertisement in *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 April 1922, 11; This station first appears in the *Radio Service Bulletin* in the April 1922 edition.

<sup>4</sup> Wanamaker’s advertisement in *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 April 1922.

<sup>5</sup> “Broadcasting the World’s Greatest Organ: Radio Station WOO,” promotional pamphlet published by Wanamaker’s Philadelphia, 1922, 3; A copy of this pamphlet is held by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in the Wanamaker’s Papers collection, Box 277.

<sup>6</sup> Herbert A. Gibbons omitted the first date in *John Wanamaker*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1926), 464; See also Biswanger, *Music in the Marketplace*, 126.



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<sup>7</sup> “Broadcasting the World’s Greatest Organ: Radio Station WOO.”

<sup>8</sup> Biswanger, *Music in the Marketplace*, 126.

<sup>9</sup> Gleason Archer, *History of Radio to 1926* (New York: American Historical Society, 1938), 293.

<sup>10</sup> Biswanger, 126.

<sup>11</sup> Davies/Tisdale Interview.

<sup>12</sup> Davies/Tisdale Interview.

<sup>13</sup> Erik Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 176.

<sup>14</sup> Biswanger, 184-185.

**WOR**  
**Bamberger's / Macy's**  
**Newark, New Jersey / New York City**

In February 1922, Bamberger's department store launched WOR, the second such station in the country, (KYJ in Los Angeles being the first). The original operation grew into the one of the most powerful stations from broadcasting's first decade, far overshadowing similar efforts from other department stores. There is no definitive history of WOR, though it is mentioned numerous times in Barnouw's *A Tower in Babel* and countless articles in various trade publications from the 1920s and later.<sup>1</sup> Columbia University is home to a few oral histories from station employees, though only that of Jack Poppele covers the same time period as this dissertation.<sup>2</sup> *WOR Radio: The First Sixty Years* by Marianne Macy contains a great many photographs and information regarding the station, though no documentation, bibliography, or critical analysis.<sup>3</sup> The reference book *The Airwaves of New York* chronicles the station up to the late 1980s; Sterling's *Encyclopedia of Radio* has a less-detailed history up to 2004.<sup>4</sup>

Poppele recalled that after station WOR began from a windowless building on the roof of Bamberger's, a studio was soon built on the sixth floor. Glass windows on one side of the studio allowed visitors to see inside.<sup>5</sup> Approximately a year after starting WOR as an extension of the radio department, store owner Louis Bamberger reportedly wanted to close the operation:

Mr. Poppele, it is the consensus of the board of directors that we have received all of the value that we possibly can from WOR at this point. We consider the twenty thousand dollars invested in the station since our starting point one year ago to have been a worthwhile advertising venture for our radio department. It has been an interesting experiment, but we don't see much of a future for WOR and we agree that at this point, the best thing to do is to turn back our license to the government. Is there anything that you would like to say?<sup>6</sup>

Poppele persuaded Bamberger that the station would continue to be a worthwhile endeavor. Five years later, the store estimated that WOR had generated one million dollars worth of publicity for the store, a figure that was double of what the operation had actually cost.<sup>7</sup> During this time, WOR engaged in numerous experiments with high-powered broadcasting, sending its signal to several other countries, and by 1927, had increased its original power ten-fold to 5,000 watts.<sup>8</sup>

WOR was an early proponent of programming targeted at women.<sup>9</sup> As part of this female appeal, the station hired Jessie E. Koewing as an announcer, boasting that she was the first woman in such a position.<sup>10</sup> Another early program was a show entitled “Sky Pictures by Mr. Radiobug.” This program “ran in conjunction with a puzzle that appeared in a local paper for the children to fill in following Radiobug’s instructions.”<sup>11</sup>

In 1923, WOR lost a particularly important lawsuit regarding the status of copyright and the developing field of radio. A court ruled that, despite Bamberger’s claims otherwise, broadcasting a song could constitute a “public performance for profit.”<sup>12</sup> Several years later, when the use of recordings at radio stations became commonly accepted, WOR was one of the first to champion their use.<sup>13</sup>

In January 1924, the station attracted national attention when it helped save a Navy dirigible that had broken free from its moorings.<sup>14</sup> In the midst of harsh weather and strong winds, listeners within range of WOR’s signal phoned in with eyewitness-reports of the dirigible’s location. WOR in turn broadcast the information to the Navy and played a central role in the rescue effort.

In 1925, Bernarr Macfadden paid WOR for the privilege of hosting a morning calisthenics program. The program, which mixed exercise instructions with musical

selections, also served to promote his magazine *Physical Culture*, as well as the more tabloid-oriented *Graphic*.<sup>15</sup> John Gambling was a studio engineer on this program; he eventually took over the morning time-slot and became a WOR institution.<sup>16</sup>

In 1927, WOR was the first station in New York to carry programming of the new CBS network; this affiliation lasted for two years.<sup>17</sup> In 1929, R.H. Macy and Company, owners of perhaps the most famous department store in New York, purchased Bamberger's and operated WOR as a separate entity under the title of the "Bamberger Broadcasting Service."<sup>18</sup> In 1934, WOR was one of the central stations in the Mutual network, a rival to the well-established NBC and CBS operations.<sup>19</sup> In 1941, WOR formally moved its headquarters to New York; in 1952, the Bamberger Broadcasting Service was purchased by a subsidiary of the General Tire and Rubber Company.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Erik Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.)

<sup>2</sup> The Reminiscences of Jack Poppele 1982, in the Oral History Collection of Columbia University.

<sup>3</sup> Marianne Macy, *WOR Radio: The First Sixty Year* (New York: Nightingale Gordon, 1982.)

<sup>4</sup> Bill Jaker, Frank Sulek, and Peter Kanze, *The Airwaves of New York: Illustrated Histories of 156 AM Station in the Metropolitan Area, 1921-1996* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1998), entry on WOR 151-157; Christopher Sterling, ed. *Encyclopedia of Radio*, vol. 3, (New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2004), entry on WOR 1566-1557.

<sup>5</sup> Reminiscences of Jack Poppele, 14-15.

<sup>6</sup> This quote from Macy, *WOR Radio*, on one of the first pages, though the work has no page numbers.

<sup>7</sup> Jaker, Sulek, and Kanze, *The Airwaves of New York*, 152.

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<sup>8</sup> “Six Continents Hear WOR at Newark, N.J.,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 26 December 1925, 6, 10; See also “Station WOR Attempts Transpacific Tests,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 December 1923, Section II, 20, and also “WOR Blazes Radio Trail to Nippon,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 22 December 1923, 2.

<sup>9</sup> “Bamberger’s Takes Lead in Radio,” *DGE*, 4 March 1922, 9.

<sup>10</sup> On first woman claim, “His Mistress’ Voice,” *Radio News*, December 1922, 1060

<sup>11</sup> This quote from Macy, *WOR Radio*, on one of the first pages, though the work has no page numbers. The duck-puzzle that was reprinted in the 1922 NRDGA study was most likely an example of one of the Radiobug puzzles, Arthur Wiesenberger, “Radio Merchandising in Department Stores: A Survey Covering the Underlying Principles of Radio – Its Merchandising and Advertising Possibilities in Department Stores,” (New York: Bureau of Research and Information of the National Retail Dry Goods Association, 1922), 15.

<sup>12</sup> *M. Witmark & Sons v. L Bamberger & Co*, 291 F. 776 (DNJ 1923).

<sup>13</sup> J. R. Poppelle, “Some Practical Facts About Transcriptions,” *Broadcasting*, 15 October 1932, 7, 27; See also “WOR to Broadcast Records This Week,” *New York Times*, 27 July 1930, 122.

<sup>14</sup> “Blown 60 Miles North,” *New York Times*, 17 January 1924, 1. *Radio Digest Illustrated*’s 1925 profile of the station, “Six Continents Hear WOR,” claimed that the station was officially thanked by Congress for its efforts.

<sup>15</sup> Barnouw, *Tower in Babel*, 168.

<sup>16</sup> Jaker, Sulek, and Kanze, *The Airwaves of New York*, 152.

<sup>17</sup> Jaker, Sulek, and Kanze, *The Airwaves of New York*, 152.

<sup>18</sup> “New WOR Service,” *New York Times*, 31 January 1930, 28.

<sup>19</sup> Jaker, Sulek, and Kanze, *The Airwaves of New York*, 153.

<sup>20</sup> Jaker, Sulek, and Kanze, *The Airwaves of New York*, 155.

**WPAD**  
**W.A. Wieboldt and Company**  
**Chicago, Illinois**

This station represents another instance in which a department store station was transferred to an educational institution. According to a brief article in *Radio Digest Illustrated* at the end of 1923, the department store of W.A. Wieboldt and Company transferred its station to the Armour Institute of Technology.<sup>1</sup> The station, which had been operating under an experimental license as 9YL, was said to have a range of 1,500 miles. The programming was described as thus: “Educational topics and musical numbers will form part of the new station’s program.”

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<sup>1</sup> “Armour Institute is Given Station, WPAD, Chicago, Transferred by Department Store to School of Technology,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 8 December 1923, 2.

**WSMB**  
**Maison Blanche Company**  
**New Orleans, Louisiana**

WSMB was a joint venture from the Maison Blanche department store in New Orleans and the Saenger Amusement company. Its call letters were a clear reference to both organizations. According to one source, this was “the first real attempt in the city to establish a radio station with any amount of permanency.”<sup>1</sup> A 1969 master’s thesis chronicled the history of the station up to 1967, though there is little specific information about the department store’s role in the operation.<sup>2</sup> After four years, WSMB became an affiliate of NBC, as did a few other store operations.

At the end of 1923, *Radio Digest Illustrated* announced that WSMB would finally give New Orleans its own major radio station.<sup>3</sup> This announcement was quite premature; the station did not debut until April of 1925.<sup>4</sup> In a detailed profile, *Radio Digest Illustrated* wrote that the station broadcast at 400 watts of power at 318.9 meters.<sup>5</sup> The expansive facilities on the thirteenth floor of the Maison Blanche building were also described; they included a studio with large glass windows, and a room in which telephone and telegraph operators could receive “fan applause.” The thirteenth floor of the building was home to the station for decades.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the facilities inside the department store, WSMB also broadcast from a few remote studios. One was located at a local newspaper, the *Item*, which provided daily news bulletins and sports coverage.<sup>7</sup> Other broadcasts came from the stages of local theatres that were owned by the Saenger company.<sup>8</sup>

Taking advantage of the rich musical tradition of the city, Monday and Thursday evenings were devoted to “syncopated” music. *Radio Digest Illustrated* specified,

however, that this music would be “first class,” as opposed to the cheap jazz music which it described as “tin-panning.”<sup>9</sup> Other evenings were devoted to opera, classical, and semi-classical offerings. In another nod to the traditions of the region, Maison-Blanche converted a Ford truck into a makeshift float. The *Dry Goods Economist* gave a colorful description of this vehicle.<sup>10</sup> Glass cases along the sides showcased radio receivers that could be purchased at the store, while loudspeakers mounted on the back broadcast the sounds of WSMB. The gold-and-blue vehicle was also adorned with electric lights and made a “wonderfully unique and unusual attraction, either in day or night.” Two sales clerks from the radio department traveled with the vehicle as it gave demonstrations at parks, churches, and schools.

The first program director and announcer for WSMB, Clyde Randall, was a radio enthusiast who had previously helped to establish another station in New Orleans.<sup>11</sup> When a major hurricane blasted the Louisiana coast in August 1926, listeners heard Randall’s voice as the station stayed on the air for 40 hours straight to deliver updates.<sup>12</sup> The broadcast attracted considerable acclaim for WSMB. More than a year later, Randall boasted of the stations’ hurricane and flood warnings to government regulators.<sup>13</sup> In this letter, WSMB requested that the station be given a permanent wavelength allocation as it had already been forced to switch frequencies three times in the past year.

In 1929, WSMB joined the NBC network.<sup>14</sup> Much of the programming from this point forward was network, rather than locally, originated. The half-interest in the station owned by the Saenger company changed hands a few times; the Maison Blanche retained its interest until 1949, when the department store was taken over by City Stores, Inc.<sup>15</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Brian David Collins, "The New Orleans Press-Radio War and Huey P. Long, 1922-1936" (master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 2002), 39.

<sup>2</sup> Laura Fletcher Lemoine, "A History of Radio Station WSMB, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1925 Through 1967" (master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 1969.)

<sup>3</sup> "New Orleans will Boast New Station," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 13 December 1923, 2.

<sup>4</sup> "WSMB — Way Down South in New Orleans," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 5 September 1925, 5, 18.

<sup>5</sup> "WSMB — Way Down South in New Orleans," *Radio Digest Illustrated*.

<sup>6</sup> Lemoine, "A History of Radio Station WSMB," 108.

<sup>7</sup> Collins, "The New Orleans Press-Radio War," 40-41.

<sup>8</sup> A letter from a government inspector dated April 14, 1931 to the Department of Commerce outlined the station's operation, and named three theatres affiliated with the station. See WSMB Correspondence Files.

<sup>9</sup> "WSMB — Way Down South in New Orleans," *Radio Digest Illustrated*.

<sup>10</sup> A.W. Roe, "How One Department Store Went After the Radio Sales," Electrical Goods supplement of the *DGE*, 7 November 1925, 22. This article also contains a photograph of the truck-float.

<sup>11</sup> Collins, "The New Orleans Press-Radio War," 40; An article in *Radio Digest* also said that Randall had an amateur station in his home before WSMB was created, Dianne Dix, "Old Voice on the Air, New on Chain," *Radio Digest*, June 1930, 67.

<sup>12</sup> "Broadcaster Lifesaver when Storm Hits South," *Radio Digest Illustrated*, First part of October 1926, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from Clyde Randall dated January 16, 1928, WSMB Correspondence Files.

<sup>14</sup> WSMB Correspondence Files.

<sup>15</sup> Lemoine, "A History of Radio Station WSMB," 126.

**WSY**  
**Loveman, Joseph & Loeb**  
**Birmingham, Alabama**

WSY is an example of a station whose studio was located inside of a department store, though it was originally run by a different company. After the station has served its purpose for the store, it was given over to an educational institution.

The Alabama Power Company started construction of WSY in April 1922.<sup>1</sup> In May 1923, *Radio Digest Illustrated* gave a detailed description of a promotion in a department store window in downtown Birmingham. The specific store itself was not named, though it was almost certainly Loveman, Joseph & Loeb, the location of the studio:

In two show windows of a down-town department store is a novel display of the WSY, Birmingham's broadcasting station. And the display is attracting the attention of thousands of people who pass by this busy corner every day. The display consists of a map of the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, showing the various points where thousands of people listened in on WSY programs. The map forms the background, and running to the map are many ribbons showing the points where people have listened in on the program. On the floor of the windows are hundreds of letters from all sections of the three nations named from admiring auditors.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of that year, the power company transferred ownership the station to the store. An article on the change described WSY as "one of the most noted broadcasting stations in the South."<sup>3</sup> In March 1924, *Radio Digest Illustrated* reported that the station broadcast regularly from a Baptist church.<sup>4</sup> In 1925, the equipment of WSY was given to the Alabama Polytechnic Institute (now Auburn University) where it was combined with that of WMAV to form a new station, WAPI.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Radio Service Bulletin*, April 1922.

<sup>2</sup> “Station WSY Has First Anniversary,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 19 May 1923, 5.

<sup>3</sup> “Control of WSY Shifted to Birmingham Merchant,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 15 December 1923, 9.

<sup>4</sup> “1,000,000 in Congregation,” *Radio Digest Illustrated*, 1 March 1924, pg. 3.

<sup>5</sup> “1922 — Year Radio’s Population Soared,” *Broadcasting*, 14 May 1962, information on WAPI on 122.

**WWZ**  
**Wanamaker's**  
**New York City**

WWZ was one of two stations created by Wanamaker's in the spring of 1922, (WOO in Philadelphia being the other). Of the two, WWZ existed for a much shorter period of time and was off the air by the end of 1923. The reference book *The Airwaves of New York* has an overview of the station's history, one of the few sources to even mention it.<sup>1</sup> In 1946, long after WWZ had ceased broadcasting, Wanamaker's in New York was home to the flagship studio for the Dumont Network.<sup>2</sup>

The station began with 100 watts of power on March 24, 1922.<sup>3</sup> The following May, a representative of the station attended a conference organized by the Department of Commerce to deal with the already absurdly congested airwaves over New York where a total 15 stations were using the 360 meter wavelength, and others sought access.<sup>4</sup> The time-sharing schedule proposed in the government's report was more than a little confusing and suggests that none of the local stations could broadcast for more than a few hours a day.

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Jaker, Frank Sulek, and Peter Kanze, *The Airwaves of New York: Illustrated Histories of 156 AM Station in the Metropolitan Area, 1921-1996* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1998), entry on WWZ 190-191.

<sup>2</sup> "Story of DuMont's New Wanamaker Studio," *Televiser*, May-June 1946, 19-26; see also "Government, Video Celebrities at DuMont Wanamaker Debut," *Broadcasting*, 22 April 1946, 46.

<sup>3</sup> Jaker, Sulek, and Kanze, *The Airwaves of New York*, 190; The station first appeared in the *Radio Service Bulletin* in April 1922.

<sup>4</sup> "First Radiophone Conference Held in the Field," United States Custom House, New York, New York, May 16, 1922. Pamphlet #3033, Library of American Broadcasting.

## Appendix II

### WGBS Schedules

To determine the typical daily programming of WGBS, radio schedules as printed in the *New York Times* were consulted. Three weeks for each year were examined; the first full week (Sunday to Saturday) of January, March, and November.

November 2-8, 1924

January 4-10, 1925

March 1-7, 1925

November 1-7, 1925

January 3-9, 1926

March 7-13, 1926

November 7-13, 1926

January 2-8, 1927

March 6-12, 1927

November 6-12, 1927

January 1-7, 1928

March 4-10, 1928

November 4-10, 1928

January 6-12, 1929

March 3-9, 1929

November 3-9, 1929

January 5-11, 1930

March 2-8, 1930

November 2-8, 1930

January 4-10, 1931

March 1-7, 1931

November 1-7, 1931