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WWJ — Pioneer in Broadcasting

Cynthia Boyes Young

NO SCIENTIFIC INVENTION DURING THE FIRST HALF of the twentieth century, except perhaps the automobile, made a more immediate and direct impact on American society than that of radio broadcasting. It is to Detroit's credit as a dynamic and progressive city, that here both radio and the automobile were first made available to the American people on a large scale.

The subsequent results of automobile mass production are readily apparent to all Americans today, but the many implications of radio broadcasting are perhaps not so well known. Programs of an educational and cultural nature have carried the finest music, drama, and public lectures into the most remote sections of our country. Radio has also become important in our national life in such varied manifestations as the promotion of social solidarity, the apprehension of criminals, relief of suffering and distress, the dissemination of accurate news, entertainment of the people, encouragement of interest in public affairs, and the development of skills, vocations and habits.¹

It appears that these tremendous possibilities for radio were partially foreseen by James E. Scripps, founder of the *Detroit News*. As early as 1901 he listened to the story of a young inventor, Thomas E. Clark, and witnessed his demonstration of wireless communication through the air. Operating from the top of the Banner Laundry Company at 73-75 Michigan Avenue (opposite the present site of the Book-Cadillac Hotel), Clark sent a message to Scripps who was waiting two blocks away in the Chamber of Commerce Building at State and Griswold. So excited was Scripps over the success of the demonstration that he gave Clark a check for \$1,000 with which to continue his radio experiments and told him:

I think you have a good idea there and I want you to have every opportunity to do what you can with it. I don't care whether I ever see the money again. It is my contribution toward helping a little idea become a big, worthwhile fact.²

¹Dwight L. Dumond, *America In Our Time*, 45 (New York, 1947).

²Hershall Hart, *The Detroit News*, August 20, 1930.

During the next twenty years many technical improvements were made in wireless transmission. Through the efforts of men like Clark,³ Lee DeForest, and others, the way was paved for wider use of wireless telephony, and in 1920 the people of Detroit were invited to participate in the first experiment in regularly-scheduled radio broadcasting.

The actual beginnings of the Detroit *News* radio station, later to be known as WWJ, were not recorded at the time, and the story can only be partially pieced together from the reminiscences of radio pioneers.

There seems to be no question, however, that the enthusiasm of James Scripps about the potentialities of radio was passed on to his son, William E., and grandsons, William J. and James E. Scripps II. Both young men were ardent radio amateurs. It is quite probable that they were partly responsible for convincing their father, William E. Scripps (owner of the *Detroit News*) to install a transmitter in the *News* building⁴.

In a speech given by Dr. DeForest at WWJ's tenth anniversary celebration, he recalls that about 1917 he and Clarence Thompson⁵ approached William E. Scripps with the suggestion that the *Detroit News* should purchase and install a radio transmitter because there were so many enthusiastic amateur listeners. DeForest and Thompson had been promoting this idea among newspaper owners all over the west and south, but had met with no interest until they talked with Scripps.⁶

The fact that no action was taken immediately was probably due to the fact that the United States was on the verge of entering World War I. Strict regulations prohibited any use of radio except for military or commercial purposes.

The recollection of Thomas E. Clark, who maintained a close

³Thomas E. Clark continued his experiments and went on to develop ship to shore wireless communication on the Great Lakes. He later formed the Thomas E. Clark Laboratories, which carried on experimental work and manufactured special wireless apparatus for the United States government. He holds over ninety patents in wireless communication and train control.

⁴Personal interview with Edwin G. Boyes, engineer with WWJ since May, 1922.

⁵Thompson was the president of Radio News and Music, Inc., contractors for radio installation and agents for the DeForest Wireless Apparatus Company.

⁶*Detroit News*, August 21, 1931.

friendship with the Scripps family, is that in about 1919, William E. Scripps talked with him about the matter of purchasing a transmitter. Clark was invited to a meeting of the *Detroit News* board of directors to present the idea and explain the principles of radio transmission. Though Clark was given an icy reception by the board, Scripps was undaunted and proceeded to send Clark to New York to purchase a transmitter. However, he was unsuccessful in obtaining one and the *Detroit News* later made its own transaction.⁷ It was at this point, apparently, that the *News* again made contact with the DeForest Radio Telephone and Telegraph Company.

Though the actual sequence of events leading to the decision to purchase the transmitter are obscure, it seems probable that all of the foregoing were factors influencing William E. Scripps. By 1920 he had agreed to the idea of experimenting with radio broadcasting, thus making the *Detroit News* the first newspaper in the world to install a radio broadcasting station.⁸

The original apparatus obtained by the *Detroit News* in the summer of 1920 and installed in a corner of the sports department, consisted of a DeForest Type OT-10 transmitter, similar to those DeForest had been selling to the navy since 1914. The panel mounted two oscillators and two modulator tubes using a grid modulation circuit.⁹ It was operated at a wave length of two hundred meters and had a power rating of twenty watts. The power supply was derived from a 150 watt, 500 volt, d.c. generator driven by a one-fourth h.p. motor.¹⁰ Enthusiastic amateur operators who belonged to a group called the Detroit Radio Association put in many hours of time at the new transmitter as volunteer operators.

According to correspondence¹¹ dated May 28, 1920, between the Radio News and Music, Incorporated and the *Detroit News*, the DeForest transmitter was rented to the *News* for the first experimental broadcasting. Arrangements were made through Radio News and Music, Incorporated, whose Detroit representative, Michael D.

⁷Tape-recorded interview of Thomas E. Clark made by Edwin G. Boyes, April 19, 1953, in Boyes' files.

⁸Radio staff of the *Detroit News*, *WWJ-The Detroit News*, 7 (Detroit, 1922).

⁹Reprint of speech by Dr. Lee DeForest, *Detroit News*, August 21, 1930.

¹⁰*Detroit News*, August 20, 1930.

¹¹*Detroit News* files.

Lyons, installed the equipment. Lyons was a radio amateur himself and was secretary of the Detroit Radio Association.¹²

The broadcast range of this first outfit was limited and under the best conditions was not more than one hundred miles. It was estimated that there were about three hundred operators receiving in the area covered, and one hundred privately-owned receiving sets in Wayne County. These radio amateurs were among approximately twenty thousand in the entire country. Their apparatus, usually one and two tube regenerative circuits, were used only to communicate with each other.¹³

Though the *News* transmission set was in place and ready for operation on August 20, 1920, no public announcement of it was made until a ten-day series of experimental transmission of opera recordings had been conducted. When these proved satisfactory it was announced that the August 31 primary election returns would be broadcast.¹⁴

The anticipated birth of newscasting was announced in a page 1 story in the *Detroit News* on August 31, 1920:

The *Detroit News* tonight will announce the results, as they may be received, of the State, Congressional, and County primaries over southeastern Michigan, using as a medium, its newly completed wireless telephone. . . . So far as is known here, this is the first time in the history of radio development that a newspaper will use the radiophone in the transmission of news. . . . Every wireless operator¹⁵ in Michigan, Ohio, and Ontario is invited to open up his receiver and participate in the enterprise. Every community that houses an operator is fortunate; and every man, woman, and child invited by an operator to sit in and listen to tonight's demonstration will be specially favored, for they are participating in an event that will be in a sense, epochal.

A large box in bold face type on page 1 excitedly called to the attention of amateur operators the plans for the evening:

¹²Correspondence in the *Detroit News* files dated June 27, 1921, requests the DeForest Radio Telephone and Telegraph Company to cancel the *Detroit News* contract for rental of the equipment as of July 31. However, it would appear that the management later decided to purchase the transmitter, as it was subsequently owned by WWJ and enclosed in glass to preserve it as a historic item. On December 7, 1959, the transmitter was presented to the Detroit Historical Museum to be added to its extensive collection of early radio equipment.

¹³*Detroit News*, August 20, 1920.

¹⁴Radio Staff of the *Detroit News*, *WWJ-The Detroit News*, 7.

¹⁵Reference made to "amateur operators."

RADIO OPERATORS! ATTENTION! Here is the necessary data by use of which you may listen in tonight and get the election returns and hear a concert sent out by the Detroit News Radiophone: FOR LISTENING: Use wave length of 200 meters. FOR CALLING THE NEWS TO REPORT RESULTS: Use call 8MK. TRANSMITTING BEGINS 8 O'CLOCK TONIGHT. MISCELLANEOUS NEWS and music will be transmitted from 8 until 9 o'clock that operators may adjust instruments. Election bulletins begin at 9 o'clock and continue on the hour and half hour until midnight. WRITE LETTERS to Radiophone Department The Detroit News telling if you received messages and music and give all details that will tend to improve this service.¹⁶

The success of the venture and recognition of its significance were dramatically reported in the *News* the following day:

The sending of election returns by The Detroit News radiophone Tuesday night was fraught with romance and must go down in the history of man's conquest of the elements as a gigantic step in his progress. In the four hours that the apparatus . . . was hissing and whirring its message into space, few realized that a dream and prediction had come true. The news of the world was being given forth through this invisible trumpet to the waiting crowds in the unseen market place.¹⁷

So the story began. From that date on, the *News* offered uninterrupted service to an increasing audience, constantly enlarging and elaborating the programs.¹⁸

In the first week of broadcasting, baseball news, bulletins of foreign affairs, and campaign proceedings went out over the air. The results of the Dempsey-Miske fight were broadcast within thirty seconds of the time the bulletin was received by wire.¹⁹

The first music concerts were confined entirely to phonograph music and were broadcast twice daily, at 11:30 A.M. and 7:00 P.M.²⁰ On September 4, 1920, a party was held at the Charles F. Hammond home at 700 Parker, Detroit, where Charles, Jr. and a dozen of his

¹⁶Detroit News, August 31, 1920.

¹⁷Detroit News, September 1, 1920.

¹⁸The controversy over whether WWJ or station KDKA in Pittsburgh was the first station to broadcast is explained by the fact that WWJ, then 8MK, a noncommercial station, broadcast the first published regularly-scheduled program on August 31, 1920, but KDKA received its commercial license and began broadcasts as a commercial station before WWJ. See "WWJ: Seniority over Hoary KDKA," *Time*, 28:23 (August 31, 1936).

¹⁹Robert Kelly and Edwin G. Boyes, Summary of Important Events in the History of WWJ-The Detroit News. Appendix. Typewritten manuscript. 1940. In personal files of Edwin G. Boyes.

²⁰Radio Staff of the Detroit News, *WWJ-The Detroit News*, 8.

young friends danced to music from the Detroit *News* Radiophone.²¹ Reported in the society column of the Detroit *News*, this event was considered to be the local beginning of the social aspect of wireless.²²

Soon responses began coming in by mail reporting that the concerts were being successfully received: "Your concert was heard last night and greatly enjoyed"; "We could hear the News Radiophone as plain as if it was in the next room."²³

By the end of the first week of programs, ships in the Detroit River equipped with commercial wireless and amateurs in Canada and nearby towns were reporting good reception. The captain of the steamer, *W. A. Bradley*, reported through the Marconi station at Ecorse, just west of Detroit, that the ship had received music of a *News* concert as she steamed along in the middle of Lake St. Clair. This report impressed the public as even more remarkable than sending music over land.²⁴

Among other significant events of that fall was a meeting of the Detroit radio operators held at the *News* building, at which the members thanked the *News* for its radio service and agreed to cease sending after 10:00 P.M. for the benefit of news bulletin broadcasting.²⁵

Hoping to present live music as well as phonograph, the *News* requested Charles Mixer of the Edison laboratories to play his violin so that the quality of studio production could be compared with that of phonograph records. A few days later, on September 22, Miss Mabel Norton Ayers gave the first vocal concert on the air.²⁶

When the scores of the World Series games in Brooklyn were announced on the radio in October, and the returns of the Harding-Cox election were broadcast in November, the traditionally sceptical man in the street was greatly impressed.²⁷ What had at first been regarded as a fad by the public was now being recognized as a great new medium of communication. The attitude toward radio seemed to change overnight. Interest grew and dealers reported a big demand

²¹Detroit *News*, August 20, 1930.

²²Radio Staff of the Detroit *News*, *WWJ-The Detroit News*, 9.

²³George W. Stark, "We Old Timers," the Detroit *News*, August 19, 1941.

²⁴Stark, "We Old Timers," in the Detroit *News*, August 19, 1941.

²⁵Kelly and Boyes, Summary of Important Events in the History of WWJ-The Detroit *News*. Appendix. Typewritten manuscript. 1940. In Boyes' files.

²⁶Kelly and Boyes, Summary of Important Events in the History of WWJ-The Detroit *News*. Appendix. Typewritten manuscript. 1940. In Boyes' files.

²⁷Radio Staff of the Detroit *News*, *WWJ-The Detroit News*, 9.

for radio material. By November, the *News* was so overwhelmed with requests for information that a radio department column was included in the Sunday edition of the *News*.²⁸ The column offered information to all beginners about “radiophone” and the methods of achieving best reception. Schematic diagrams were printed in the paper and the *News* offered further benefits to its listeners in the forms of assistance by the technical staff of the station, improved and extended transmission, and a greater variety of programs.

Because electrical shops couldn’t supply enough headphones to meet the rush of new radio listeners, there grew up quite an epidemic of pilfering of telephone receivers—mostly from apartment house phones. So enthusiastic were these beginners that many scrupulously honest souls indulged in this petty thievery. With a single wire antenna strung in the room or attic, a coil on an oatmeal box, a piece of silicon or galena with a cat whisker, and a telephone receiver, the would-be radio operator was able to participate in the amazing magic of voices and music on the air.²⁹

While listeners grew more and more excited, not all of the executives of the *Detroit News* showed the same enthusiasm. Opinions ranged from coolness, to the attitude that the transmitter was an expensive plaything, to indifference to its future.

Financially, the radio station was not considered a loss to the *Detroit News* in spite of the expense incurred in its operation. Although no radio advertising was sold, the station was popular enough to be considered a good-will medium, and hence of value to the newspaper circulation. Therefore, despite the general indifference and opposition of some members of the board of directors, *Detroit News* owner William E. Scripps, and general manager Herward S. Scott continued to support the radio experiment and saw that it was perpetuated.³⁰

The *Detroit News* radiophone welcomed in the New Year 1921 with a concert by the famous baritone and Detroit attorney, Louis Colombo. The story in the *Detroit News* on January 1, 1921, read:

²⁸Kelly and Boyes, Summary of Important Events in the History of WWJ—The *Detroit News*. Appendix. Typewritten manuscript. 1940. In Boyes’ files.

²⁹Frank E. Hill, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, tape recorded interview with Edwin G. Boyes, May 23, 1951. Typed transcript in Edwin G. Boyes’ files.

³⁰Personal interview with Edwin G. Boyes.

For the first time as far as is known, a human voice singing a New Year's melody of cheer went out across uncounted miles over the invisible ether that is the medium of wireless telephone.³¹

The year 1921 brought further improvements in the station's equipment and program offerings. Among the most astonishing events was the enjoyment of a radio concert by those in attendance at a banquet at the Masonic Temple. Reception was achieved by means of a three-wire aerial strung along the ceiling.³²

So ambitious were the plans of the young station that the original transmitting set was soon found to be inadequate and was partially rebuilt. In June, 1921, a two-wire antenna, 290 feet long, was stretched between the *Detroit News* building and the Fort Shelby Hotel. Soon after, reports began to arrive from such distant points as Belleville, Illinois; and Atlanta, Georgia; that *News* broadcasts were being received. At the same time, the *News* receiving set was picking up wireless telegraph messages from such far distant places as Germany, Rome, and Hawaii, and the United States Navy station at Bordeaux, France.³³ At this time two young engineers, Frederick Lathrup and Walter Hoffman, were operating the transmitting equipment.³⁴

The program schedule was now expanded to include more musicians and theatrical talent from Detroit playhouses. Members of the *Detroit News* staff: George W. Stark, Robert Kelly, William Holliday, and Al Weeks undertook to book talent for radio appearances.³⁵ Ernest R. Ball, composer of "Mother Machree," "Love Me and the World is Mine", and other songs, was appearing with the Keith circuit on the stage of the Temple Theater in 1921, and was one of the earliest professional entertainers over the *News* radio. George W. Stark, present *Detroit* historiographer and veteran member of the *Detroit News* editorial staff, recalled Ball's performance:

The microphone was almost more than he could bear. At the conclusion of "Mother Machree" he looked at it rather helplessly; then touched his thumb to his nose and wriggled his fingers, the familiar gesture of the

³¹Radio staff of the *Detroit News*, *WWJ-The Detroit News*, 9.

³²Radio Staff of the *Detroit News*, *WWJ-The Detroit News*, 10.

³³Radio Staff of the *Detroit News*, *WWJ-The Detroit News*, 10.

³⁴Personal interview with Edwin G. Boyes.

³⁵Personal interview with George W. Stark.

frustrated and the final answer to all things. It was masterful pantomime. But he sang an encore.³⁶

The *Detroit News* of December 18, 1921, had this to say about Ball's reaction to radio broadcasting:

The receiver is not a very appreciative instrument, at least in appearance. One can't tell from the looks of the microphone whether his number is liked or not. This was quite baffling to Ernie Ball. He sang one or two of his most popular numbers, heard no applause and finally looked at the microphone in a manner that registered blind rage. And then he stuck out his tongue at the instrument, which seemed to relieve his feelings a lot, for he swung immediately into another selection.

Some of the other stage stars who appeared before the *News* microphone in these early years reacted in curious ways. For instance, the noted monologist, Frank Tinney, believed himself to be the victim of a hoax and feared that he was actually talking for the sole entertainment of the practical jokers in the private room where the microphone was located. It was not until he heard music relayed back by telephone from Windsor, Ontario, that he was convinced the microphone carried his voice beyond the four walls.³⁷

Embarrassment or a kind of stage fright used to grip many veteran performers the first time they stood before a microphone. In some extreme cases, the old theater trick of slapping a performer in the face or sticking him with a pin had to be employed to shock away fright.³⁸

For the value of the experience, stage and musical personalities readily appeared on the *News* station with no thought of compensation. To many it was a matter of prestige to have appeared before a microphone and they were eager for the opportunity.³⁹

The program expansion in 1921 was also marked by the appearance of the well-known Finzel's orchestra of Detroit and other musical groups, who furnished dance music by radio. The *News*' second Christmas concert on December 24, 1921, was a "peace program" including songs by carollers, and addresses by Governor Alex J. Groesbeck, Mayor James Couzens, and the Rt. Rev. Fr. John P. Mc-

³⁶Stark, "We Old Timers," *Detroit News*, August 20, 1941.

³⁷Radio Staff of the *Detroit News*, *WWJ-The Detroit News*, 17.

³⁸Hill, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, tape recorded interview with Edwin G. Boyes, May 23, 1951. Typed transcript in Boyes' files.

³⁹Personal interview with George W. Stark.

Nichols, president of the University of Detroit. Another feature of the program was the broadcasting of music played by the chimes in the steeple of the Fort Street Presbyterian Church across the street from the *News* building.⁴⁰

On October 13, 1921, The *Detroit News* received its first commercial broadcasting license and was assigned the call letters, WBL.⁴¹ Later correspondence, on February 15, 1922, and May 15, 1922, between the local Federal radio inspector, Samuel W. Edwards and Warren Booth, assistant business manager of the *Detroit News*, indicates that the license was issued for short periods and renewed.⁴²

By 1922, the radio department had outgrown its original quarters and was moved to the fourth floor of the *News* building where it occupied 3,003 square feet of floor space, divided into an editorial and executive office, transmitter and operating room and generator workshop. A small fourth floor auditorium was added to two small producing studios. The staff during 1922 grew to consist of a supervising editor (Charles E. Kelley), two reporters (G. Marshall Witchell and Elton M. Plant), a secretary (Genevieve Champagne), a program director (William F. Holliday), an assistant program director and announcer (E. Lloyd "Ty" Tyson), a chief engineer (Howard E. Campbell), and three engineer operators (Edwin G. Boyes, Walter R. Hoffman and Keith Bernard).⁴³

On January 28, 1922, the *Detroit News* installed its new Type 1A-500 watt Western Electric transmitter. Since none of the local men were familiar with this equipment, Howard E. Campbell, an engineer from the Bell laboratory, was brought from New York to supervise and train the staff. Edwin G. Boyes replaced Fred Lathrop who had been asked by William E. Scripps to act as supervising engineer of a concern started by Scripps (The Scripps Motor Company) to manufacture nonregenerative receiving sets which would

⁴⁰Radio Staff of the *Detroit News*, *WWJ-The Detroit News*, 12.

⁴¹"Birthdays: WWJ's Sixteenth Anniversary Reopens Old Feud," *Newsweek*, 7:9 (August 29, 1936).

⁴²Letter in *Detroit News* file: "Attached hereto is Provisional Limited Commercial Broadcasting Radio Station License No. 239 issued to your company for a period of three months for the purpose of broadcasting music and like matter only on a wave length of 360 meters. The official call WBL is again assigned to your station."

⁴³Radio Staff of the *Detroit News*, *WWJ-The Detroit News*, 19.

offer better quality reception than the many types of regenerative sets being used by the public.⁴⁴

With their new equipment the engineering staff worked enthusiastically toward even larger quarters. As Boyes recalls it:

Like all other radio personnel in those days, we believed that in order to acoustically treat a room we had to hang many drapes. At first we went overboard in this and made our studios too dead. But little by little we learned more about acoustics, reverberation, absorption, reflection, and such things, as required in various sized studios.

The transmitter and the engineers were in a separate room adjacent to the studio and cables were used to run in microphone lines and signal system. The microphone used in 1922 was the double button carbon mike produced by Western Electric. Boyes describes this as looking like a squirrel cage with the microphone mounted inside, and recalls that its large, businesslike appearance made it a symbol of radio for many years.

A push-button signaling system devised by the engineers gave visual instructions like, "stand-by," "one minute," "on the air," "closer to the mike." Boyes remembers that occasionally it was augmented by someone running back and forth between control room and studio with more detailed instructions on technique. He notes, however, that even a crude signaling system was adequate then because broadcasting was not yet concerned with accurate mike and talent placements and the split-second timing so essential in radio broadcasting today. Boyes stated also that in those days if you were two or three minutes late getting a program off the air it didn't make too much difference. But there was one important responsibility and that was to protect the audience from something that might be said in the studio if someone neglected to turn off a switch. This required constant alertness on the part of the control engineer.

With new equipment and a larger staff, the *News* began to develop longer and more carefully planned programs and continued to introduce many more "firsts" in radio broadcasting.

On February 10, 1922, The Detroit Symphony Orchestra conducted by Ossip Gabrilowitch, gave the first complete symphony concert

⁴⁴Hill, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, tape recorded interview with Edwin G. Boyes, May 23, 1951. Typed transcript in Boyes' files.

ever presented by radio.⁴⁵ Another memorable musical occasion was the first performance on May 28, 1922, of the sixteen-piece Detroit News Orchestra. The first radio concert orchestra ever assembled, its members were drawn primarily from the ranks of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.⁴⁶

Another of the presentation of special events in which the *News* pioneered in 1922 was the broadcast of church services. For the forty days of Lent, leading clergymen of all denominations provided sermons that were presented every evening. During the Easter season, beginning on Palm Sunday, the Easter cantata and the sermon of Warren L. Rogers, Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, were heard on a broadcast of the cathedral services. The morning and evening Easter services were broadcast and a regular presentation of cathedral services was continued thereafter.⁴⁷ At the end of the first year, Dean Rogers described the broadcast as "the greatest missionary achievement since the time of Jesus Christ." Other churches without rectors of their own worshipped by radio with St. Paul's. One Presbyterian church in Michigan installed a receiving set and heard the services of St. Paul's while the pastor was on vacation. "These incidents", the Dean said, "are becoming more numerous with the growth of the popular knowledge of radio and with the decline in the prejudice against radio equipment being used for religious purposes."⁴⁸

During 1922, the *News* also offered its readers an impressive and diversified array of stars and programs undreamed of in the earlier days. To name only a few, there were the radio debuts of operatic soprano, Emma Calve; the Shakespearean artists, E. H. Sothern and his wife, Julia Marlowe; the appearance of Will Rogers; the presentation of the University of Michigan and Michigan State University

⁴⁵Kelly and Boyes, Summary of Important Events in the History of WWJ-The Detroit News. Appendix. Typewritten manuscript, 1940. In Boyes' files.

⁴⁶The personnel of the ensemble consisted of Otto E. Krueger, conductor; Maurice Warner, concertmeister; Herman Goldstein, first violin; LeRoy Hancock, first violin; Armand Hebert, second violin; V. P. Coffey, viola and piano; Frederick Broeder, cello; Eugene W. Braunsdorf, bass; Thomas J. Byrne, oboe; R. M. Arey, clarinet; Vincenzo Pezzi, bassoon; Albert Stagliamo, French horn; Edward Clark, French horn; Floyd O'Hara, trumpet; Max Smith, trombone; and Arthur Cooper, xylophone. Radio Staff of the Detroit News, *WWJ-The Detroit News*, 21.

⁴⁷Radio Staff of the Detroit News, *WWJ-The Detroit News*, 21.

⁴⁸Sterling Bowen, "Religion by Radio," *Detroit News*, April 1, 1923.

extension courses; and the baritone voice of Thomas E. Dewey of Owasso, singing with the Detroit News Orchestra.⁴⁹ One of the most notable achievements of the station that year was the broadcast of appeals resulting in locating a ten-year-old boy missing for ten days in Ohio.⁵⁰

The present call letters of the Detroit *News* station, WWJ, were adopted in March, 1922, replacing the first commercial call letters, WBL. The reason for the change is explained by Edwin Boyes. When the fad was raging to pick up distant stations,⁵¹ people often sent postcards to the transmitting station to inform them that their programs were being received at great distances. WBL was sent hundreds of cards, addressed not only as WBL, but as WGL, WDL and other combinations of letters that sounded the same. Interference on the air waves and noise on the receiving sets made it difficult to hear call letters clearly. Hence, it was decided that letters would have to be chosen that would be more easily recognized through the interference. This need was made known to radio inspector Edwards who in turn requested the commissioner of navigation to assign new call letters to the Detroit *News* station.⁵²

The station had requested WKL or WWW. However, in a letter from Edwards dated March 6, 1922, they were informed:

You will also note your call has been changed from WBL to WWJ. This is about as good as we could do in the matter of call letters and we hope that you will find them satisfactory.

Competition in the field of radio broadcasting first faced the Detroit *News* in March, 1922, when it was learned that the Detroit *Free Press* intended to begin broadcasting as soon as Western Electric delivered to them the same type of radiophone that the Detroit *News* was using.

The first broadcast by the Detroit *Free Press* station occurred on May 4, 1922, and included the participation of the Hon. Alex Groes-

⁴⁹In the log book for that evening (July 3, 1922) is a notation by the engineer on duty: "very lousy"; in Detroit *News* files.

⁵⁰Kelly and Boyes, Summary of Important Events in the History of WWJ-The Detroit *News*. Appendix. Typewritten manuscript. In Boyes' files.

⁵¹Distance seemed to interest listeners more than quality of reception.

⁵²Samuel W. Edwards to the commissioner of the Bureau of Navigation, February 1, 1922, in the Detroit *News* file.

beck, Governor of Michigan; Dr. Marion LeRoy Burton, president of the University of Michigan; and Edgar A. Guest, Detroit *Free Press* poet-humorist.⁵³

The Detroit *News* of May 4, 1922, stated their reaction in an editorial:

For the last two years the Detroit *News* has been building up a nationwide service for the people through its radio broadcasting station. This work is just at its beginning and will be continued on a still larger and broader scale despite the handicaps imposed upon Station WWJ, The Detroit *News* Radio Bureau. The handicap consists of a temporary, at least, curtailment of hours now used by WWJ by order of the Department of Commerce.

When the wave of popularity of radio swept the nation during the first two years of Detroit *News* broadcasting the government was unprepared in the way of laws to govern the air. Only one wave length (360 meters) had been allotted by law for broadcasting. Other desirable wave lengths were under the control of the navy department and its regulations did not permit re-issuance to other interests. The only thing the department of commerce could do in the meantime was allot hours of transmission until Congress could proceed by law for another wave length. The editorial continued:

This was the situation when the Detroit *Free Press* decided to break in on the Detroit *News* service and demanded of the government that it too be allotted hours. . . . The *Free Press* frankly stated in its advertising that it preferred to wait until the experimental stage had been passed before getting into it. That is, it preferred to wait until the *News* had done all the pioneering work and had built up a public service which had brought instruction and pleasure to the people, before attempting to interfere with it.⁵⁴

The advent of the *Free Press* radio station was just one local indication of the great impact radio was making all over the nation. The Associated Press saw its enormous potential and recognized a possible

⁵³Detroit *News*, May 4, 1922.

⁵⁴The *Free Press* position was stated as follows: "The sole object of this paper in establishing a broadcasting station is to serve the public in a friendly and neighborly way by endeavoring to meet a large and growing demand for information and entertainment via the wireless. It realizes that in entering the purveying field, it is creating a state of competition locally, but if competition is good in trade, it ought also to be good in the radio field; and the *Free Press* feels that it is helping everybody and is injuring nobody by undertaking its new enterprise. Detroit *Free Press*, May 6, 1922.

rival in the form of news broadcasting. In 1922 it issued a notice to its member papers forbidding them to broadcast by radio telephone or telegraph, any news dispatches received on A. P. wire. A spokesman for the A. P. gave this explanation:

The free distribution of news by wireless telephone broadcasting stations has been giving many newspaper publishers food for thought. At present the instruments for receiving these messages are more or less of a novelty, but what the result on newspapers would be when receiving sets became more popular and in many more homes is what publishers are wondering.⁵⁵

And well they might wonder about radio's future, not only as affecting newspapers, but as it was to affect nearly every aspect of our lives. Through the years to come, WWJ continued to pioneer in all areas of radio broadcasting and to set high standards for quality that have made it a great asset to the *Detroit News* and a credit to the city.

By 1923 there was no longer any doubt that radio broadcasting was not only here to stay, but was growing rapidly. Recognizing this, WWJ moved to further improve the quality of its transmission by purchasing and installing a Western Electric 1-B 500 watt transmitter in May, 1923.⁵⁶ The additional features offered by this instrument enabled the station to maintain greater frequency stability, more effectively suppress harmonics (which might cause interference with other stations), and generally to improve program transmission.⁵⁷

These efforts toward constant technical improvement continued to bring WWJ the plaudits of listeners⁵⁸ and earned it a designation from the National Bureau of Standards as one of the six transmitting stations to serve as frequency standards. The announcement of this honor which appeared on December 1, 1923, in *Radio Service Bulletin*, the official publication of the bureau of navigation, read in part: Measurements of radio station frequencies by the Bureau of Standards show that there are some transmitting stations which maintain a sufficiently constant frequency to serve as frequency standards. . . . Unless

⁵⁵*Editor and Publisher*, 9, February 25, 1922.

⁵⁶*Detroit News*, June 16, 1941.

⁵⁷Personal interview with Edwin G. Boyes.

⁵⁸A letter from a listener in Oregon, one of many quoted in the weekly *Detroit News* column, "WWJ's Family Circle," stated: "You came in very clear and distinct last night. Your modulation was excellent."

special precautions are taken in a transmitting station . . . the frequency is not likely to remain constant. . . . A station which incorporates the best mechanical features in its antenna system and which observes a policy of allowing no tampering with the transmitting circuit may maintain a fairly constant frequency. . . . The six broadcasting stations listed below have attained the goal of varying not more than 2 kilocycles from the assigned frequency as recommended by the second National Radio Conference. WWJ, Detroit, read 19 times, showed a frequency variation of .1 per cent.⁵⁹

Among the popular program offerings of the year 1923 was the broadcast of a talk on the subject, "What is the Matter with the Movies" by movie idol, Rudolph Valentino, who was appearing in a dancing act in Detroit.⁶⁰ A picture of the Sheik, seated before a microphone, appeared in the *Detroit News* above the cut-lines: "Generally he is seen and not heard. Here he's being heard and not seen." However, WWJ poet-broadcaster, Anne Campbell, recalls that Valentino was seen as well as heard by great throngs of people who crowded to the *Detroit News* the day of the broadcast to get a look at the famous star.⁶¹

Two significant events in the development of broadcasting occurred in June, 1923, and both involved WWJ in pioneer undertakings.

Detroit became the first city in the United States to have municipal band concerts by radio in parks when WWJ began broadcasting the music of Herman Schmemman and his thirty-piece concert band which played at the Belle Isle band stand. Four other city parks heard these band concerts through special loud speakers set up by WWJ in cooperation with the department of parks and boulevards. The story in the *Detroit News* announcing this event assured readers: There is no danger of crowds being unable to hear the music plainly, as tests have shown that even a fly walking across the sounding board produces a thump that would be mistaken for the footfall of a man.⁶²

Of nation-wide interest that year was the expedition to the North Pole of the noted arctic explorer Dr. Donald B. MacMillan. Leaving in June, 1923, MacMillan, for the first time in the history of explora-

⁵⁹United States Department of Commerce, *Radio Service Bulletin*, 13-14 U.S. Bureau of Navigation (Washington, D. C. December 1, 1923).

⁶⁰*Detroit News*, February 10, 1923.

⁶¹Personal interview with Anne Campbell, *Detroit News* poet.

⁶²*Detroit News*, June 24, 1923.

tion, carried radio equipment with him, and transmitted accounts of his progress. Thirty thousand radio amateurs, members of the American Radio Relay League, and the North American Newspaper Alliance, of which the *Detroit News* was a member, cooperated in the experiment. The major service provided by WWJ was the use of its broadcast transmitter in the sending of news by code to the expedition. Reports from MacMillan were picked up by key amateur stations around the country and relayed to the *Detroit News*.⁶³

During the years of 1924 and 1925, the broadcasting features and technical improvements of the preceding years were further developed and made permanent parts of WWJ's schedule.

The station's policy of providing public service broadcasts was broadened in 1924 to include a series of weekly public lectures known as the Radio School, conducted by WWJ's chief engineer.⁶⁴

In February, 1924, the *Detroit News* reported that the gymnasium would soon be brought into the home via radio:

Beginning Monday at 8:00 A.M. and continuing daily at the same hour, R. [Roy] J. Horton, director of physical education of the Detroit YMCA, will give lessons in the "Daily Dozen" or setting-up exercises to the radio audience. These lessons will be of about 15 minutes' duration.⁶⁵

Another important event of 1924 was the first direct broadcast of the Gold Cup races from the old Detroit Yacht Club. Returns of the races were reported from the judges' barge by direct voice transmission rather than by the method used in 1923 when the first broadcast of the boat races was accomplished through the use of wireless telegraph from the judges' barge to the studio of WWJ. Because no wire facilities were available to the barge in 1923, the reports were received by code, compiled, and then broadcast.⁶⁶

Enthusiasm for sports has always been a characteristic of Detroit and in the 1920's this spirit led Detroiters to flock to Ann Arbor to cheer the University of Michigan Wolverines on the football field. On October 25, 1924, because the Michigan-Wisconsin game at Ferry Field had been sold out far in advance, Coach Fielding H.

⁶³Personal interview with Edwin G. Boyes.

⁶⁴*Detroit News*, February 2, 1924.

⁶⁵*Detroit News*, February 24, 1924.

⁶⁶Personal interview with Edwin G. Boyes.

Yost gave WWJ permission to broadcast the event. Thus, with Ty Tyson at the microphone the first University of Michigan football game was heard over radio. Before the next game the athletic association had received so many requests for tickets because of interest aroused by the broadcast that Yost gave WWJ permission to broadcast all home games.⁶⁷

The following year the station started the New Year 1925 on its way by broadcasting a play by play account of the New Year's Day Leland Stanford—Notre Dame football game in Pasadena, California. By combining broadcasting service with continuous wire service direct from the playing field, the station was able to bring to Detroit homes first hand the game that the *Detroit News* described as being "remarkable" and "full of thrills."⁶⁸

In January, 1925, WWJ abandoned 516.9 meters and began broadcasting on 352.7 meters as assigned to it by the Department of Commerce.⁶⁹

In accordance with its pioneer tradition, WWJ participated in the introduction of network broadcasting in February, 1925, by becoming one of the regular outlets in the chain of stations that was later to become the National Broadcasting Company.⁷⁰ The chain originated as a result of the plan of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company (AT&T) to experiment in long-line broadcasting transmission. Through their manufacturing division, Western Electric Company, AT&T built Station WEAJ in New York City. Using the telephone lines of AT&T's engineering division, the Bell Laboratories, WEAJ broadcast programs that were carried by a series of affiliated stations in the East and Middle West.

In 1926, AT&T sold WEAJ and rented its long-line broadcast

⁶⁷*Detroit News*, August 20, 1950.

⁶⁸*Detroit News*, January 2, 1925.

⁶⁹*Detroit News* correspondence files. WWJ license renewal application dated April 27, 1929.

⁷⁰On the occasion of NBC's 30th anniversary in 1956, WWJ received an Award of Merit plaque in recognition of its accomplishments as one of the original members of the network. Five other stations were also honored for helping to launch the first radio network. They were NBC affiliates, WJAR in Providence, Rhode Island; WTIC in Hartford, Connecticut; WCSH in Portland, Maine; KSD in St. Louis, Missouri; and WDAF in Kansas City, Missouri. The plaque read: "The National Broadcasting Company presents this award of merit to Radio Station WWJ of Detroit, Michigan, in recognition of 30 years of service, broadcasting in the public interest as an affiliate of the National Broadcasting Company." *Detroit News*, December 14, 1956.

facilities to Radio Corporation of America, which in the meantime was operating its own broadcast stations, largest of which was WJZ in Newark, New Jersey. With the combined facilities of WEAJ and its own station, RCA created the National Broadcasting Company.⁷¹ The first network was called the Red Network. Later additional stations covering less populous areas were included in a new network called the Blue Network. The contract between the National Broadcasting Company and WWJ committed WWJ to broadcast a certain number of hours of commercial network programs daily. Since these programs paid WWJ for their time, 1927 marked the first year that WWJ sold time commercially. Besides these required programs, the station could purchase additional sustaining hours from NBC.⁷²

Along with its network affiliation, WWJ increased its service in the broadcast of local, on-the-spot events such as parades, banquet speeches of visiting dignitaries, sports events, and hotel orchestras. Beginning in January, 1925, WWJ started the regular noon-hour feature of Julius Klein's orchestra from the dining room of the Hotel Statler.⁷³ Twice a week, Jean Goldkette's Victor Recording Orchestra⁷⁴ was broadcast from the Graystone ballroom for one hour in the evening.⁷⁵

By March of that year radio had grown so greatly in popularity in Detroit that it became apparent that WWJ would have to cease offering the service of free radio set testing. The announcement of this in the *Detroit News* on March 1 read:

The free testing of receiving sets by the engineers at the *Detroit News* Station WWJ, has been discontinued. The *News'* radio engineering staff will thus be enabled to devote their entire time and energy to the further development of Station WWJ and the expansion of the broadcasting service given the radio public through linking the *News* station with WEAJ.

⁷¹The National Broadcasting Company, *The Story of N. B. C., 1926-1951*. Typewritten manuscript. In music and drama department of Detroit Public Library.

⁷²Detroit *News* files.

⁷³Detroit *News*, January 8, 1925.

⁷⁴The first recording orchestra outside of New York City, Detroit *News*, May 25, 1944.

⁷⁵Goldkette's orchestra, a favorite with Detroiters during the decades of the twenties and thirties included in its ranks such now famous names in jazz as Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Bix Beiderbecke, Joe Venuti, Glenn Miller, Artie Shaw, Glenn Gray, and Hoagy Carmichael. Detroit *Times*, May 5, 1953.

The policy of free set testing had been started when WWJ was established and the *News* had the only engineers in the city who were capable of giving advice on receiving sets. However, by 1925, the public's enthusiastic interest in radio had encouraged radio dealers in the city and state to equip themselves to furnish testing service to their customers.

Public interest in radio continued to be stimulated by such programs as the broadcast of the details of Calvin Coolidge's inauguration ceremonies, which WWJ carried as part of a nation-wide loop.⁷⁶

In May, not long after WWJ had joined the National Broadcasting Company, one of the network's most popular musical figures, Wendell Hall, "the red-headed music maker," faced the microphone in the broadcasting studios of the *Detroit News* and delighted his local fans with stories and songs.⁷⁷

Also through the facilities of the newly-formed network, A. Atwater Kent arranged a series of thirty Sunday night recitals which were carried by WWJ.⁷⁸ Before determining to undertake the series, he had received from American Telephone & Telegraph Company figures on potential radio audience (based on number of receiving sets within one hundred miles of the transmitter) that ranked WWJ fifth on the network.⁷⁹

Technological improvements in radio were being made so rapidly and increased services received so eagerly by the public that the *Detroit News* again invested in advanced equipment to improve the quality of its transmission. On June 30, 1925, WWJ purchased its fourth transmitter—a Western Electric 1,000 watt 6-B—which was installed in the fourth floor studios of the *Detroit News*.⁸⁰ About six months later the transmitter was moved to the garage of the *Detroit News* on the corner of Lafayette and Third, and in November, 1926, two new antenna towers were built 265 feet above the street;⁸¹

⁷⁶Robert Kelly and Edwin G. Boyes, Summary of Important Events in the History of WWJ-The *Detroit News*. Typewritten manuscript, 1940. In personal files of Edwin G. Boyes.

⁷⁷*Detroit News*, May 22, 1925.

⁷⁸*Detroit News*, October 24, 1925.

⁷⁹WEAF (New York), 2,000,000 listeners; WEEI (Boston), 1,000,000; WOO (Philadelphia), 900,000; WCAE (Pittsburgh), 750,000; and WWJ (Detroit), 700,000. *Detroit News*, October 24, 1925.

⁸⁰The Western Electric 500 watt 1-B transmitter was sold to the Moody Bible Institute. *Detroit News* files.

⁸¹*Detroit News*, June 16, 1941.

one on the paper warehouse section of the *News* building and the other on the garage. On June 15, 1927, WWJ began the use of the 374.8 meter wave length.⁸²

Though these innovations extended the station's area of coverage and improved the signal somewhat,⁸³ WWJ soon began to face the increasingly complex problem of crowded wave lengths and interference arising from radio's phenomenal growth and the resulting intense competition.

Congress' first attempt to deal with this problem led to the passage of the Radio Act of 1927 and the creation of the Federal Radio Commission which was made responsible for regulating broadcasting.⁸⁴ The Radio Act of 1927, approved on February 23, 1927, was intended to regulate all forms of interstate and foreign radio transmission and communication within the United States, its Territories and possessions; to maintain the control of the United States over all the channels of interstate and foreign radio transmission; and to provide for the use of such channels, but not the ownership thereof, by individuals, firms, or corporations, for limited periods of time, under licenses granted by Federal authority. For the purposes of the act, the United States was divided into five zones (Michigan was in the second zone) and the Federal Radio Commission created,⁸⁵ composed of five commissioners⁸⁶ appointed by the President.

One of the commission's first projects in setting up an improved system of regulation was to prepare new forms for all types of applications for licenses and construction permits. All stations were required to submit new applications for licenses.⁸⁷

Correspondence in the Detroit *News* files concerning the Federal Radio Commission's activities tell of the following series of events. On August 29, 1927, Commissioner Henry A. Bellows of the Federal

⁸²Detroit *News*, June 16, 1941.

⁸³Hill, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, tape recorded interview with Edwin G. Boyes, May 23, 1951. Typed transcript in Boyes' files.

⁸⁴*Dictionary of American History*. Edited by James Truslow Adams. Second edition, revised, volume 6. (New York, 1951).

⁸⁵Rear Admiral William H. G. Bullard, Judge Eugene O. Sykes, Orestes H. Caldwell, Henry A. Bellows and John F. Dillon.

⁸⁶*The Statutes at Large*, December 1925, to March, 1927, *Radio Act of 1927*, Volume 44, part 2, p. 1162 (69 Congress, 2 session) (Washington, D. C., 1927).

⁸⁷Detroit *News* files.

Radio Commission wrote to WWJ recommending an exchange of wave lengths between WWJ (800 k.c) and WOC of Davenport, Iowa (850 k.c.). The new arrangement was intended to iron out a number of interferences in the Great Lakes region and the East. WWJ replied that they were willing to cooperate with the commission in any way in improving conditions providing their present quality of service was not interfered with. Hence, effective September 15, 1927, WWJ began broadcasting on the 352.7 meter (850 k.c) band already occupied by three other stations (WNAC, Boston; WRR, Dallas, and WEW, St. Louis). Some interference was experienced from these stations but the situation was ultimately cleared up,⁸⁸ and WWJ remained on the 352.7 meter band until November 11, 1928, when it was moved to its present wave length of 325.9 (920 k.c.). On October 11, 1928, the station put into operation a Piezo electric frequency control unit that would enable it to stay on its assigned frequency more accurately.⁸⁹

Another proposed policy concerned with the future of radio was outlined for the press by Commissioner Henry A. Bellows in the fall of 1927. His plan was that in the future the commission would single out certain national stations for preference in the matter of wave lengths, the selection to be based on power and technical efficiency of operation.⁹⁰ Documentation of subsequent events and their results are not available in *Detroit News* files, but Edwin G. Boyes recalls that because of the high standards it had maintained over the years, WWJ was one of a few stations that was offered a clear channel. He suggests that the decision to turn down the offer may have been made because the *Detroit News* felt it was giving adequate service to its circulation area with its present arrangement, or because the expense of meeting the requirements for a clear channel, i.e., removing the location of the transmitter from the center of population and increasing power, would have meant too great an expenditure.⁹¹ The clear channel was later offered to and accepted by Station WJR in Detroit.

⁸⁸Personal interview with E. G. Boyes.

⁸⁹*Detroit News*, June 16, 1941.

⁹⁰*Detroit News* files.

⁹¹Hill, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, tape recorded interview with E. G. Boyes, May 23, 1951. Typed transcript in Boyes' files.

While the technological, financial, and legal aspects of broadcasting were being examined, revised and expanded, innovations in programing also continued. On April 20, 1927, the Detroit Tigers opened the baseball season at Navin Field and WWJ announcer, Ty Tyson, was on hand to give the fans at their radios a play by play account of the game direct from the field. This first broadcast of such an event by any Detroit station also introduced the idea, known in present-day sportscast lingo as "pre-game color." The preceding day's *Detroit News* reported:

A microphone for the use of the announcer will be placed in the press stands, and in various other parts of the field there will be concealed other microphones for the pick-up of crowd noises to lend realistic atmosphere to the game as heard by radio listeners in their homes. . . . Mr. Tyson from his vantage point high up over the heads of the audience will point out for listeners the colorful aspects of the scene before the serious work of broadcasting every move of the game begins.⁹²

One small indication of the success of WWJ's attempts to offer the best possible education, entertainment, and service over the air was provided by the visit to the *Detroit News* in March, 1927, of Mrs. Mae Fisher of Pasadena, California. Calling on the household editor, Mrs. Fisher reported that she and her neighbors in Pasadena always awaited with pleasure the "Dinner Menu By Radio" broadcast (which reached California at 6:30 A.M.). "To myself and others in Pasadena," she said, "the Household Editor of the *Detroit News* has become a personal friend with whom we chat each morning."⁹³

Several years later, veteran *Detroit News* reporter, Rex G. White, recalled the awe with which he realized in the earlier days the tremendous significance radio would surely have when "a single man could sit beside an inanimate thing and talk and his words could stir a nation, lead a cause, awake a public conscience, thrill a million hearts from Maine to California."⁹⁴

⁹²*Detroit News*, April 4, 1927.

⁹³*Detroit News*, March 7, 1927.

⁹⁴*Detroit News*, August 21, 1932.