

# WCGN

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*Text*  
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*based on a company history by*  
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*A Pictorial History*

## *Preface*

In 1924, The Chicago Tribune undertook radio broadcasting through its subsidiary, WGN, Inc., as an adventure in communication and an extension of business enterprise.

First in radio, then in television, WGN has served the Middle West in terms of information and entertainment for more than one third of a century. We are proud of our many contributions to music, drama, sports, news, and dissemination of information which evolved over the years.

This book is dedicated to the generations who have shared, and who will continue to share, our efforts in serving the public interest through enlightened free enterprise.



J. Howard Wood  
President  
WGN, Inc.

## *Table of Contents*

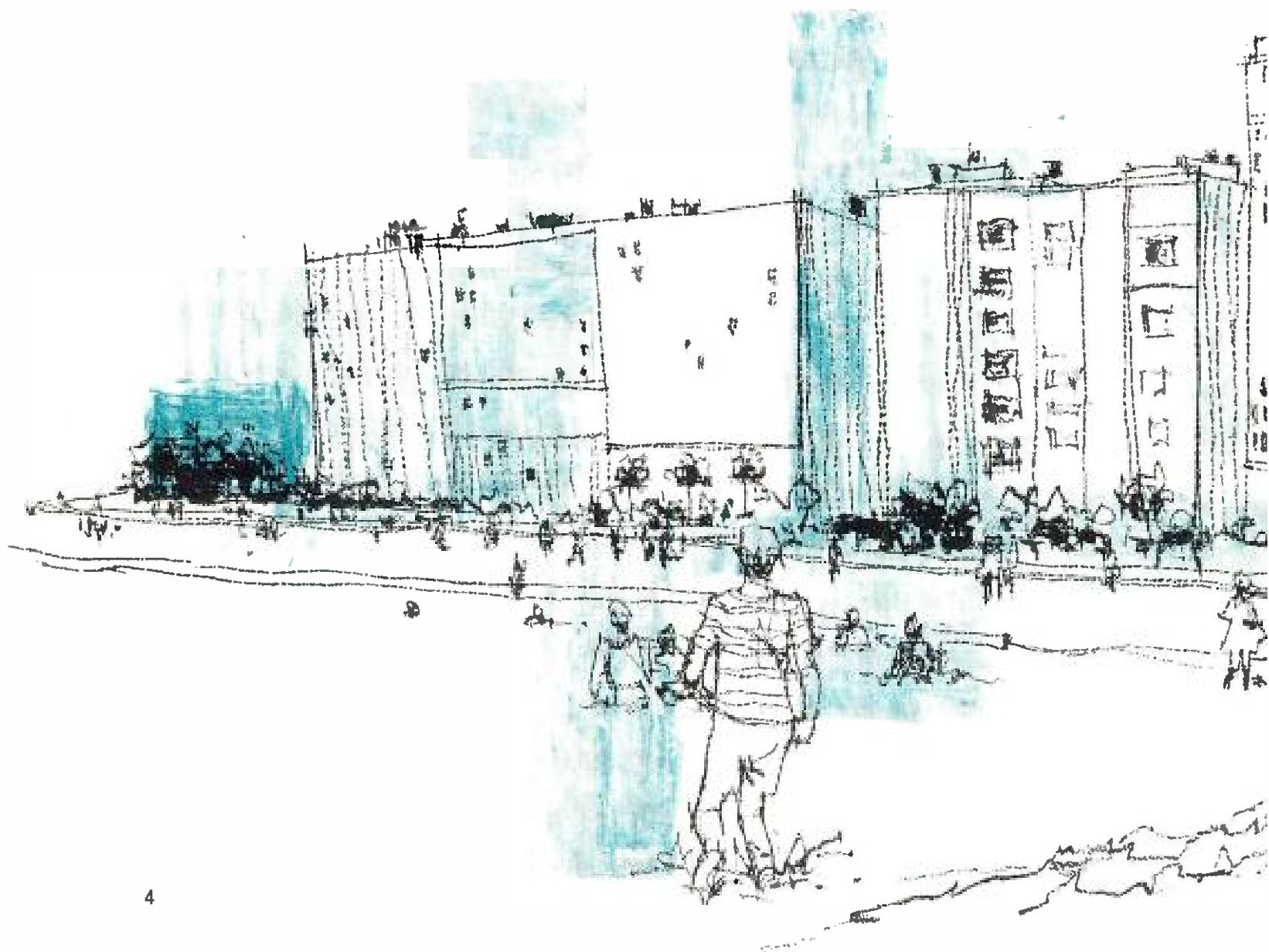
<i>Part I</i>	<i>Page</i>
THE LITTLE BOX . . . . .	5
 <i>Part II</i>	
A THEATER OF THE AIR . . . . .	39
 <i>Part III</i>	
ADVENTURE INTO TELEVISION . . . . .	71

“I don’t know where you happen to be.  
If you’re on this world,  
You can listen to me.”

—song lyric by Jack Nelson,  
program director of WDAP  
on the Drake Hotel, 1923.

‘You cannot help being thrilled at the little box  
that picks sounds from the air. . . .’

—Col. Robert R. McCormick  
in a letter to his mother, 1923.



*Part I*

THE LITTLE BOX



## *Introduction*

Early in this century, thousands of Americans began to listen and to chatter in telegraphic code. At the end of the first world war, these ardent amateurs flocked to radio sets operated by the new vacuum tubes. They were the first mass audience—alert, ingenious, receptive, and enthusiastic. What did they want to hear? News, information, and entertainment.

They were listeners ready for someone with something to say, consumers avid for the message of someone with something to sell—waiting like atoms for a chain reaction.

When it came, the radio explosion was no towering blast. It was—at first—a small, accidental, slightly disreputable noise.

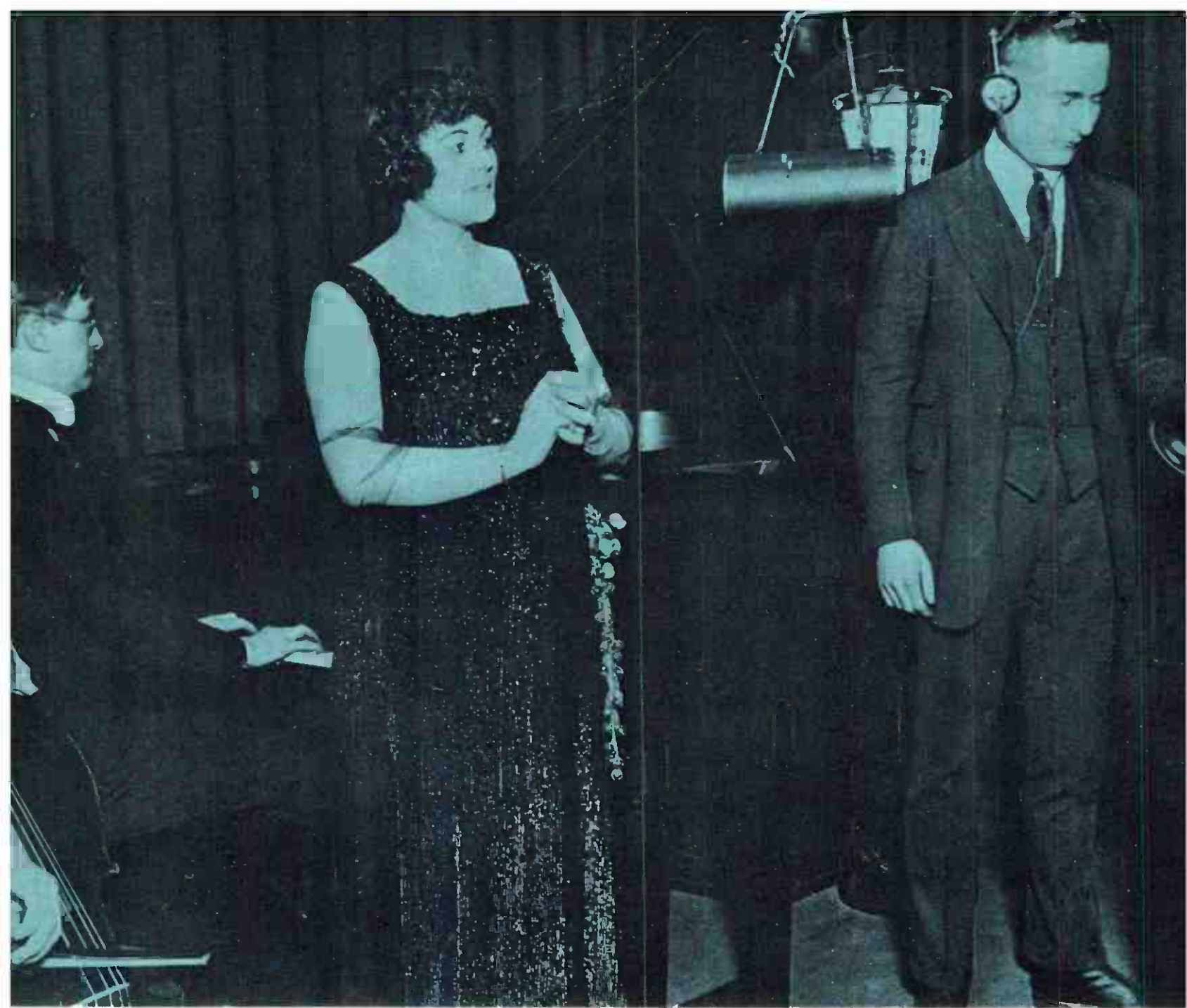
The noise was made by pioneer broadcasters: (1) zealots with a need for self-expression, (2) cautious educators and publishers with something to communicate, and (3) manufacturers and distributors of radio equipment with something to sell.

The noise also was made by creative station managers and program men who began to evolve a surprisingly uniform pattern of entertainment. It was made by adventurous performers—stars of stage and screen, musicians, politicians, educators, business leaders, and other less exalted personalities near at hand. (Almost any entertainer volunteering a free performance was welcome before anybody's microphone.)

But the chain reaction that had begun with spluttering and static resulted in enduring forms of radio entertainment. The years 1921, 1922, and 1923 saw the emergence of the studio orchestra, the dramatic show, the remote dance band, the comic team, the kiddies' hour, sound effects, and the innumerable variations of the interview and public affairs program.

One thing the pioneer radio programmer did *not* foresee: the amazingly rapid acceptance of the true radio personality.

*People were tuning in to hear people.*

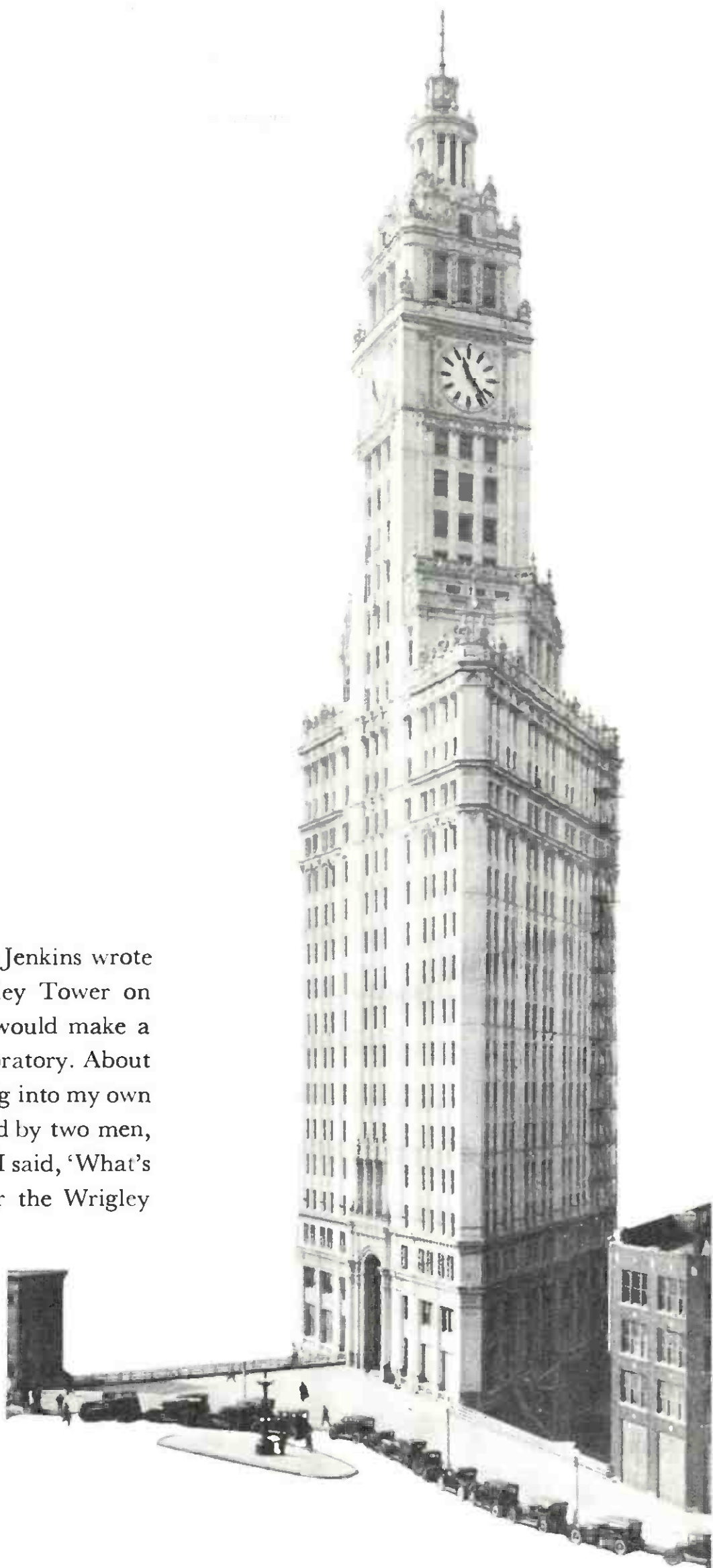


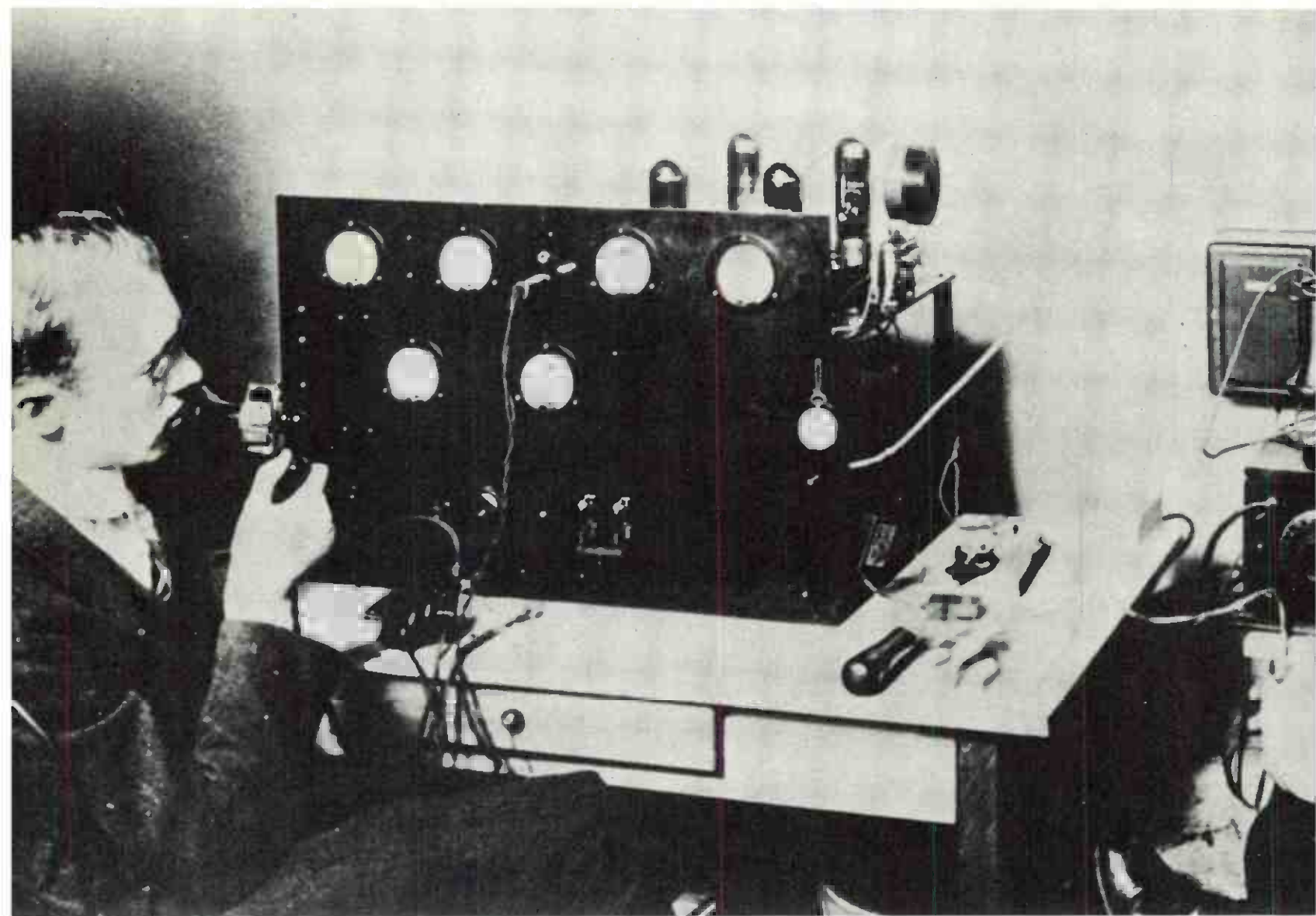
“How it looks from the sending end. Thousands of owners of radiophone receiving sets in a 500 mile radius of Chicago ‘listen in’ nightly to a musical and news bulletin service sent from atop the Commonwealth Edison building by the Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company and The Chicago Tribune.” The soloist was Elsa Harthau Arendt. The station was Chicago’s first—KYW. In December, 1921, The Tribune agreed—for a brief period—to supply news and market reports for the Westinghouse station’s broadcasts, which included grand opera. Chicagoans listened on 20,000 sets.

Meanwhile, other stations began broadcasting—among them WGU (later WMAQ, the National Broadcasting Company outlet); WAAF, beamed at a rural audience, and WEBH (later WJAZ and, for a time, WGN). WDAP, which began operations in May, 1922, was to play an even more significant role in the WGN story. Its owners, two socially prominent young Chicagoans, showed the true radio enthusiast’s disinterest in economics and his zeal for experimentation.



“Thorne Donnelley and I,” Elliott Jenkins wrote later, “were riding past the Wrigley Tower on Michigan Ave. I said I thought it would make a good place for an experimental laboratory. About a week later Donnelley came bursting into my own laboratory on Van Buren St., followed by two men, three boys, and several dozen boxes. I said, ‘What’s this?’ ‘Our broadcasting station for the Wrigley Building,’ he replied.”





Elliott Jenkins and Thorne Donnelley

Altho WDAP programs seemed to have an erratic effect on Mr. Wrigley's favorite clock, for three months Donnelley and Jenkins broadcast talks, weather reports, and three concerts a week. Then, in July, a tornado scattered the antenna and WDAP moved its studios to two handball courts on top of the Drake hotel.

Because the station owned only one microphone, its single remote control broadcast of dance music from the Drake dining room called for ingenuity and agility. "Ladies and gentlemen, you will next hear the music of Jack Chapman and his orchestra, playing from . . ." Seizing the mike, the announcer would race downstairs, dash past astonished guests to the bandstand, and pant ". . . playing (puff) from the dining room (puff) of the Drake Hotel (puff), a program already in progress." Chapman's first night time dance program increased station mail from 200 to 800 letters a day.



Chapman



The Drake

Until October, 1922, WDAP mustered one employee. He was Ralph (The Shiek) Shugart—licensed operator, studio engineer, transmission engineer, telephone operator, program director, announcer, secretary to the management, and publicity director.

When the accumulated (mostly unopened) mail filled two packing cases, Donnelley and Jenkins hired Myrtle E. Stahl to take care of the mail, programming, public relations, and publicity. She was in radio continuously until her retirement in 1960.

In 1923 Robert R. McCormick, editor and publisher of The Chicago Tribune, wrote his mother: "I have written to arrange to have an operator come to your room with a radio set and give you an exhibition. I don't think you will want to keep one, but you cannot help being thrilled at the little box that picks sounds from the air . . ."



Shugart



Stahl



Margraff

Tuned to WDAP, the little box brought in Henry Selinger and his Drake Hotel Concert Ensemble playing luncheon and dinner music and, later, music by Irving Margraff and the Blackstone Hotel Quintet.

A Tribune survey showed more than 100,000 receiving sets in the Chicago area as 1924 began. But WDAP also reached across astonishing distances—even to the McMillan expedition in the arctic. The station song, written and sung by its program manager, Jack Nelson, “The Man in the Moon,” pointed with pride:

*Hello, John,  
Are you on  
The radio tonight?  
If you're tuned in  
I'll send a tune out  
And hope you get it right.  
I don't know where you happen to be.  
If you're on this world  
You can listen to me,  
Because I'm sending  
—I'm REALLY sending—  
From WDAP.*

**CHORUS:**

*On the Drake Hotel, Chicago,  
Run by the Board of Trade,  
You can be in Troy or Fargo  
And a clear connection can be made.  
From Boston to Alaska,  
From Frisco to Tennessee,  
If you want to hear  
The best on the air,  
Tune in WDAP!*

# CHICAGO TRIBUNE To Broadcast RADIO Programs

**Control of the Zenith-Edgewater Beach Broadcasting Station will be assumed tomorrow by The Chicago Tribune.**

**For new wave length and for details of wonderful inaugural program including finest theatrical talent in America see:**

## **Tomorrow's Chicago Tribune**

The board of trade (immortalized by Jack Nelson) had bought WDAP from Jenkins and Donnelley in 1923. The next May the Whitestone Company, managers of the Drake, took title—briefly. For, waiting with new call letters in the wings, was a new owner—WGN (World's Greatest Newspaper, long a familiar Tribune slogan).

On March 24, 1924, the newspaper had leased enough time to assure program dominance of the Zenith Edgewater Beach Hotel station, WJAZ. It obtained the WGN call letters through the courtesy of a Great Lakes skipper, Carl D. Bradley. On Friday, March 28, a full page advertisement made the announcement.

Mayor William E. Dever, John T. McCutcheon, the cartoonist, Edith Mason, the opera star, and “zippy jazz tunes by the Oriole Orchestra, coached by Ted Fio Rito” were heard in an inaugural program that started at 6 p.m. Saturday. It ended the next morning at 8 o'clock after a five hour experimental broadcast heard 8,640 miles away in Australia—the first “pre-arranged” broadcast across the Pacific.



McCutcheon



Fio Rito

# STATION W-G-N

CHICAGO TRIBUNE, Zenith Station,  
Begins Broadcasting at 6 o'clock tonight  
from the Edgewater Beach Hotel.  
Wave Length 370 meters.

## INAUGURAL PROGRAM 6 p. m Saturday to 8 a. m. Sunday

### Dinner Hour Program 6 to 7:30

Dinner Music.....Oriole Orchestra  
"Illinois," a state address.....

.....John H. Camlin, Rockford, Ill.  
Mr. Camlin is president of the Illinois Chamber of Commerce.

"Illinois," baritone solo.....  
.....Jor D'Ooge, Pekin, Ill.  
Mr. D'Ooge is known as the "aging secretary" of the Pekin Chamber of Commerce.

Soprano Solo.....Monica Graham Still's

Readings.....Julia McGrath

Dinner Music.....Oriole Orchestra

"The Agricultural Program" address.....

.....O. E. Bradford  
Mr. Bradford is president of the American Farm Bureau Institute.

"Winnie Winkle," soprano solo.....

.....Sara McCabe

Baritone Solo.....George G. Smith

Dinner Music.....Oriole Orchestra

Baritone Solo.....Walter Auen Stults

7:30—Sign off until 9:00 o'clock

### 9 o'clock to Midnight

Dance Music.....Oriole Orchestra

Address.....E. F. McDonald, Jr., President Zenith Radio Corp.

Soprano.....Miss Edith Mason, prima donna Chicago Civic Opera.

Isaac Van Grove, conductor of the Chicago Civic Opera company, accompanist

Address.....Mayor William E. Dever

Dance Music.....Oriole Orchestra

Address.....John T. McCutcheon, Cartoonist of The Chicago Tribune.

News Bulletins from The Chicago Tribune.

Piano Solo.....Dean Rerrick

Baritone.....George G. Smith

Address.....E. A. Beane, United States Supervisor of Radio

Dance Music.....Oriole Orchestra

Address.....William M. Dewey, Manager, Edgewater Beach Hotel

Tenor.....Fred W. Agard

Songs.....Bernard & Robinson, "The Dixie Stars."

Soprano.....Evelyn Converse

Dance Music.....Oriole Orchestra

News Bulletins from "The Chicago Tribune"

### Midnight to 3:00 A. M.

The following theatrical, opera and vaudeville artists will take part in a special three hour program to be announced as they appear.

R. M. D'Angelo, Edra Bennett, Herrnan Gruenberg, of the "We've Got to Have Money" company, Cort theater.

Taylor Holmes of "The Nervous Wreck" company, Harris theater.

Gregory Kelly, reading; Olga Jick, soprano; James B. Carson, monologue; Roger Gray, monologue; Martha Throop, soprano, of the "Little Jessie James" company, Garrick theater.

Ernest Truex and Vivienne Osborne of the "New Toys" company, The Playhouse, dialogue.

Aimee Torriani of the "Eva and Topsy" company, Selwyn theater. Miss Marguerite Paulson, accompanist. Contralto.

Al Bernard and Russel Robinson, "The Dixie Stars," songs.

Richard Bold, tenor, of the George White's Scandals company, Illinois theater.

Frederick Tiden, address in behalf of Otis Skinner; Rupert Graves, musical director; Walker Moore, Harold Brown.

Rawles Hampton, Olga Treakoff, Margaret Ingraham, Meric Stevens, of the "Sancho Panza" company, Powers' theater.

Jack Little and Tommy Malie, songs.

Cambridge Sisters, songs.

Langdon Brothers, guitars.

Harry Geis, songs.

Harry Davis, songs.

### 3:00 A. M. to 6:00 A. M.

Special program for Australia and New Zealand broadcast listeners.

The first hour of this program will be broadcast on a 448 meter wave length, already announced through New Zealand and Australian press. The second hour will be broadcast on a 370 meter wave length and the third hour on a 448 meter wave length.

In addition to the musical program there will be greetings from The Chicago Tribune Cable Editor to the press of Australia and New Zealand; greetings by Captain Waldo Evans of the United States Navy to the British fleet visiting in Australian waters; greetings from the president of the National Association of Broadcasters to the radio fans of Australia and New Zealand; greetings from the Australian High Commissioner to the United States and from the British Consul.

### 6:00 A. M. to 8:00 A. M.

Alternate calls on a 448 meter wave length and listening periods for Okehs from New Zealand and Australian sending stations, especially 4YA, which has advised it will attempt to Okeh for thirty minutes after WGN signs off. 4YA will Okeh on a 370 meter wave length.

The Chicago Tribune intends to maintain in its broadcasting standards of entertainment and instruction worthy of the call letters WGN. Watch The Tribune every day for detailed programs.

## The Chicago Tribune

THE WORLD'S GREATEST NEWSPAPER



McDonald

Two other notable broadcasts were aired before WGN studios changed hotels. One was a Prohibition debate inspired by one of the station owners, Eugene F. McDonald, Jr., then president of the National Association of Broadcasters as well as Zenith Radio Corporation. One of the four speakers was the redoubtable attorney Clarence Darrow. Some 47,000 listeners (from every state, Mexico, Canada, and Cuba) voted 3 to 1 against Prohibition.



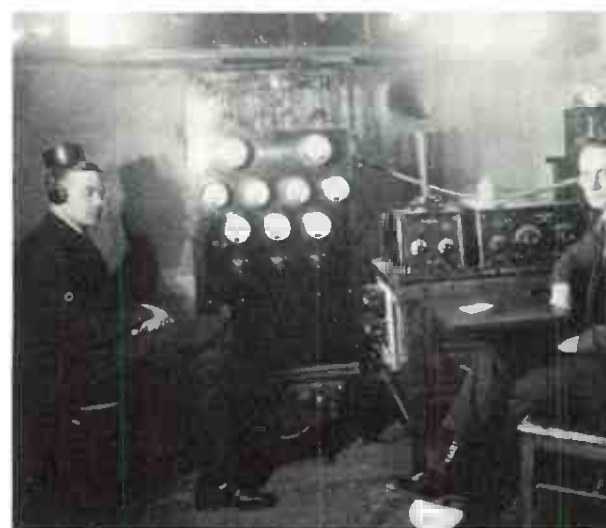
Kaney

The 1924 Memorial Day 500 mile automobile race from the Indianapolis Speedway was remarkable in several ways: It was the first to be broadcast. And the outlet was not the month-old Tribune-Zenith station on the Edgewater Beach Hotel. Surprised listeners heard a new identification: "This is WDAP, soon to be WGN, located on the Drake Hotel, Chicago." The starter's flag whipped down; drivers gunned their cars; explanations could wait. Announcer A. W. (Sen) Kaney was on the air for seven hours, and—miracle of miracles—Barney Oldfield and Henry Ford spoke into the WGN microphone.



“Sen” Kaney stayed with the new WGN when, on June 1, 1924, it took over WDAP’s programs and its studio—a “soundproof sanctum of heavy carpets, canopies, and drapes.” So did Jack Nelson and various hotel entertainers—Chapman’s orchestra, the Drake Concert Ensemble, the Blackstone Quintet, and the Barton Organ Program. And the voice that made the June 1st announcement, “This is WGN, formerly WDAP . . .” was the voice of the supervising engineer, Elliott Jenkins.

Paul Neal and Larry Lesch handled the controls. Switchboard: Irene Jones. Stenographer: Lois Breed. Liaison: Myrtle Stahl. Top Tribune executives advised on over-all policy, and Colonel McCormick delegated principal tasks to the newspaper’s business manager, Samuel Emory Thomason, who in turn picked James M. Cleary, manager of business survey and promotion, to lend a hand. It was Jim Cleary who, on August 11, 1924, assigned the editor of The Tribune house organ (a sometime Northwestern University student actor, column contributor, cub reporter, theatrical ghost writer, and free lance announcer) to WGN. His name was Quin A. Ryan.



Paul Neal, Larry Lesch



Quin A. Ryan



The musicians of the Drake Ensemble eventually found places on the staff. The group's director, Henry Selinger, was to become the station's musical director, founder of its music library, and, for a time, its program manager. Fred Meinken, Leon Beneditzky, Armand Buisseret, and Leon Lichtenfeld found permanent (if precarious) places on the payroll.

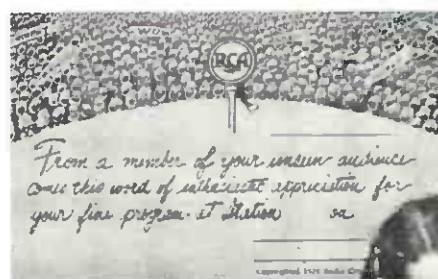


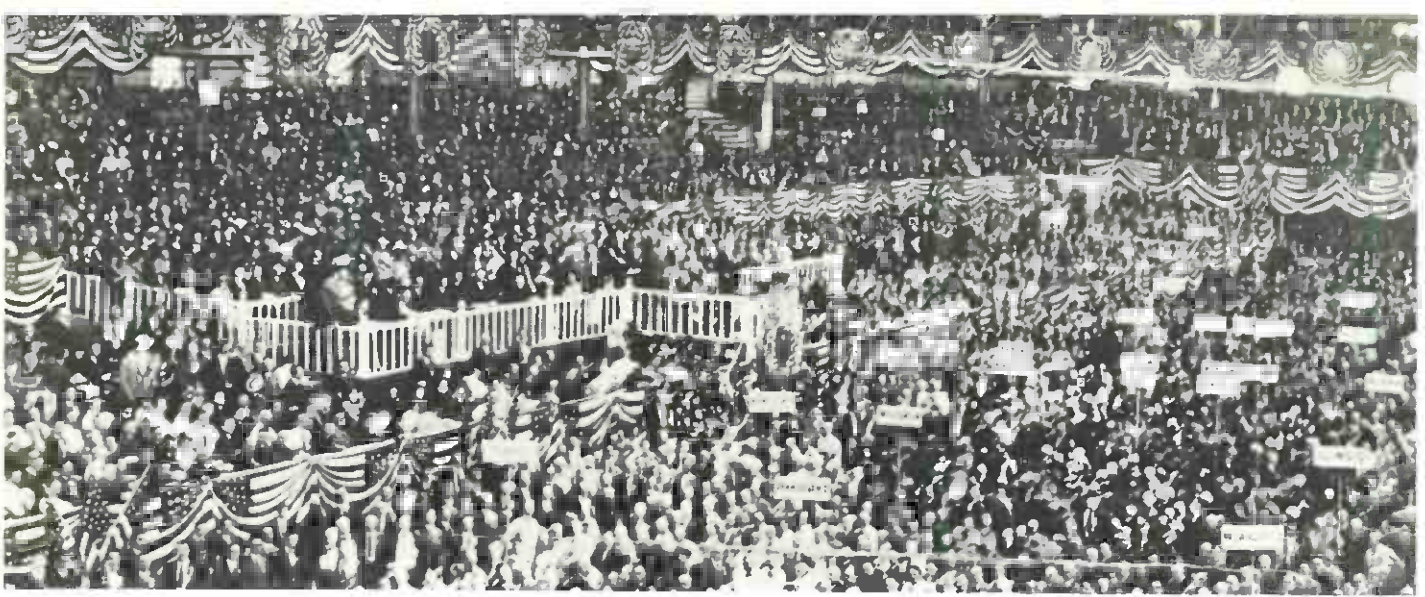
Henry Selinger



Leon Lichtenfeld, Armand Buisseret (top), Leon Benditzky

“Rocking Chair Time” made its bow. In a sense, the midafternoon program anticipated the soap opera in its bid for the feminine audience. Tribune comics were read on Sundays. The narrator at first was called Uncle Walt (from the strip “Gasoline Alley”). But the new voice was unmistakable, and Uncle Walt became Uncle Quin.





Most of the early programs were unpretentious remote control and studio shows. The typical "big broadcast" was a report of an outstanding event, a theatrical or operatic performance, a public spectacle. Four years after radio broadcasting began (on election day, 1920, when KDKA, Pittsburgh, aired the results of the Harding-Cox election) the full proceedings of both the Republican and Democratic conventions were carried (via the first large A. T. & T. multiple station hookup) on WGN. Graham McNamee of New York was at the microphone in Cleveland, Ohio, as the G.O.P. nominated Coolidge and Dawes, and in New York City as the exhausted Democrats chose John W. Davis and Franklin D. Roosevelt on the 103rd ballot.

In September WGN listeners heard Judge John R. Caverly sentence Richard (Dickie) Loeb and Nathan (Babe) Leopold, sons of wealthy Chicagoans, to life imprisonment for the "thrill slaying" of young Bobby Franks.

Play by play baseball broadcasts from the Cubs and White Sox parks began on October 1, 1924, as the teams met in the City Series. Sen Kaney was the announcer. The contests led off a resounding autumn sports program that included Quin Ryan's account of the Oct. 18 Illinois-Michigan football game. A crowd of 67,000 saw the dedication of the Illinois Memorial Stadium and an Illinois victory, 39-14. Harold E. (Red) Grange, scoring four touchdowns in the first 12 minutes, was becoming a football immortal. And Ryan, on the same afternoon, was becoming one of the demigods of radio.



Judge Caverly, Walter Bachrach (defense), States Atty. Robert E. Crowe, Clarence Darrow (defense), Leopold, and Loeb.

Grange starts touchdown run, Earl Britton leading the way.



Ryan was one of the first and one of the most eloquent of the "Gee Whiz" announcers who transmuted with commonplace into the marvelous. Perched on the roof of the vast Illinois stadium, he revealed with delight and wonder that the Illini came on the field bare-legged (an innovation) and that Grange wore the number 77 (also the number of the Michigan fans' special train). The "Gee Whiz" style was to yield to far more technical football reporting, but for more than a decade WGN broadcasts were midwest pacemakers.

The Station on the Drake Hotel continued to program concerts, remotes, newscasts, and interviews, as announcers ad libbed their way through doubtful cue sheets and engineers monitored by guess and gravity. Then, incredibly, the remote bands were playing "Auld Lang Syne" and WGN had entered upon a new year and a new season.

In 1925 WGN was the Tournament of Roses and the Notre Dame-Stanford game (27-10) at Pasadena. WGN was an Old Time Song Prize Contest, a daily Marshall Field and Company show, the Dolly Sisters, and evenings with De Wolf Hopper and Company at the Great Northern Theater in "Mikado" and "HMS. Pinafore." WGN was Floyd Collins, trapped in a Kentucky cave. It was opera in English, performed by the Western English Opera Company. It was a Prohibition debate, with Clarence Darrow and Wayne B. Wheeler.

The first of a popular series of celebrity interviews brought Mayor Dever to the microphone; then James Stephens, Irish poet and novelist more talkative than the announcer; then Gloria Swanson, the bride of a genuine French marquis. "If you'd like to know the secret of her stardom, or her favorite vegetable, just send your query," ran the announcement. Quin Ryan, the man who "radio interviewed" them, wrote: "In order to quench their radio nervousness, I sit informally beside them at a table upon which lies an unobtrusive microphone. We smoke, we lean back, we just gossip."



Darrow, Wheeler



Stephens



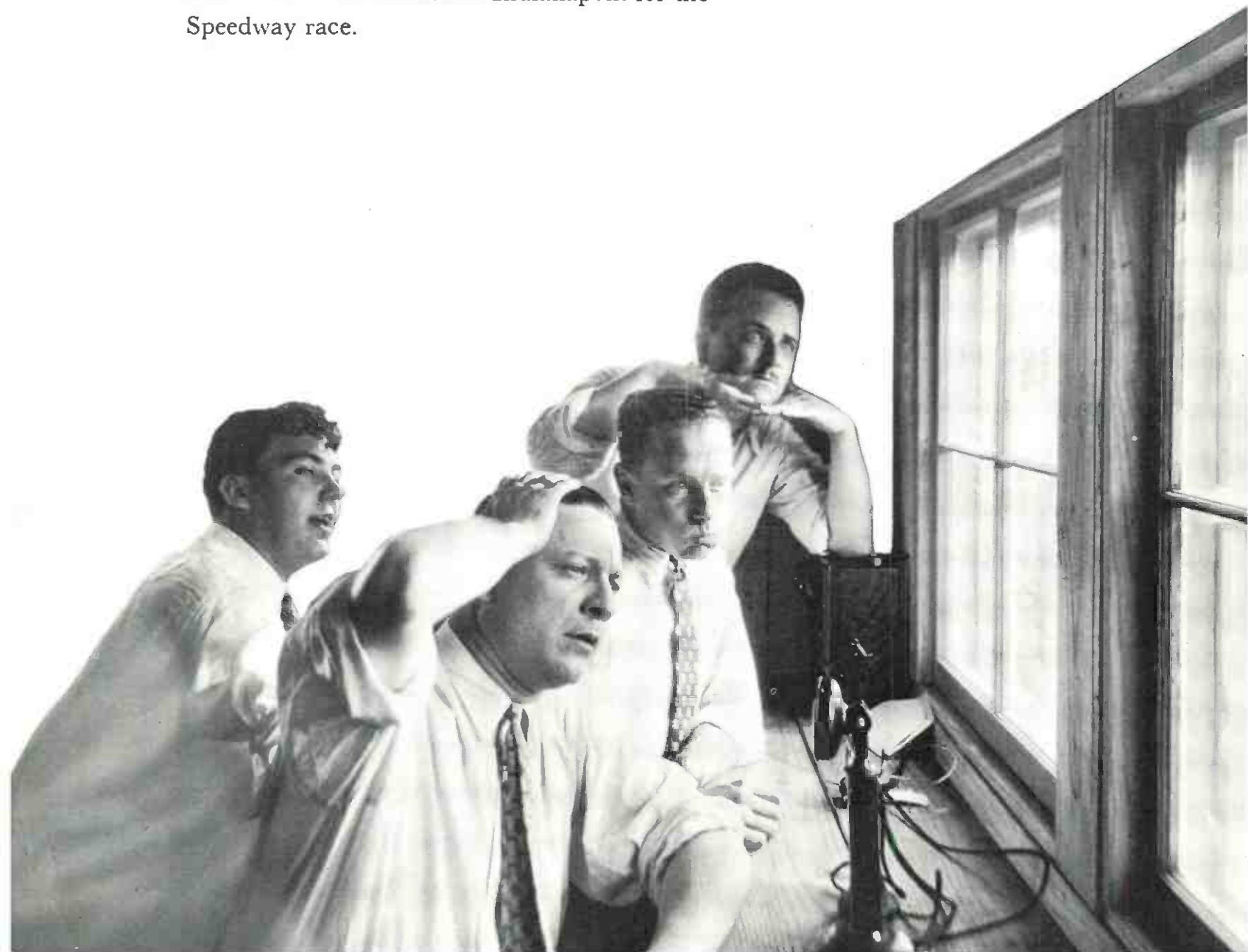
Gloria Swanson and Marquis

Between such towering radio achievements, the station filled in the valleys. The WGN Instrumental Trio was organized—Selinger, Lichtenfeld, and Benditzky. Civic events, travelogues, and a children's show, "Skeezix Time," with Ryan and Vernon Rickard, were broadcast.

Major remote control presentations—unlike studio shows—quickly took on an astonishing maturity. The radio reporter was Everyman at the microphone. The first of many broadcasts of the Kentucky Derby in May was an elaborate experiment. Backed by the Pullman Porter's Quartet, a corps of eight radio observers (including Quin Ryan, Frank Dahm, and the singing team of Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden) reported from the cupola above the stands at Churchill Downs. Ryan presided again on May 31 when WGN returned to Indianapolis for the Speedway race.



"Skeezix Time"





Darrow

*Then, on June 28, 1925, a Tribune announcement:*

### WGN Will Bring Evolution Case to Your Home

This was the trial of John Thomas Scopes, a young Dayton, Tenn., high school teacher who had been indicted for teaching evolutionary theory. William Jennings Bryan offered his services for the prosecution. Clarence Darrow of Chicago, long America's foremost defense attorney, volunteered for Scopes. The nation chose sides with the champions, and Judge J. T. Raulston presided. The broadcast was exclusive and unprecedented. Seating arrangements were revised so that the microphone might occupy a central position. Paul Neal, engineer, and Quin Ryan, announcer, took their places in the stifling courtroom. Bryan fanned himself and Darrow cocked his thumbs in a pair of blue suspenders.

Telephone long lines cost more than \$1,000 a day; WGN deferred broadcasts until the principle contestants joined battle. Then, on July 13, the courtroom came to the nation. Tempers were taut. At one point the jury retired while lawyers argued—outside, on the lawn, they listened to the broadcast! When Bryan took the stand, it was the high point of the radio drama:

BRYAN: I want the world to know that this man, who does not believe in God, is trying to use a court in Tennessee—

DARROW: I object to that!

BRYAN: —to slur at it, and while it will require time, I am willing to take it!

DARROW: I object to your statement! I am examining you on your fool ideas that no intelligent Christian on earth believes!

The next day, August 21, the trial ended. Scopes was found guilty. His fine: \$100. Five days later, Bryan died of apoplexy at the age of 65.

Later Quin Ryan wrote:

“Do you remember, Microphone, the broad-browed man, the broad smiling man? He died yesterday, Mike. Remember the two old men, both a thousand years old, and their union soldier uniforms were white with dust. And remember, we guessed they must have driven a hundred miles over the mountains to shake the hand of Bryan . . . .





Bryan



Ryan and engineers

“Remember one morning I told you—‘Mr. Bryan enters and sits at the prosecutor’s table, and now from here his bald pate looks like a sunrise over Key West’—and he turned ’round to us and laughed. . . .”

“He was fighting for something down there in the Cumberland valley, Mike—and now it’s all over. . . .”

The report of the Scopes trial had been tremendously effective, a smash hit in a national theater. The name in lights: WGN, the Chicago Tribune Station on the Drake Hotel.



Erbstein

The Tribune bought two Elgin radio stations from Charles E. Erbstein in the fall of 1925, as part of its plan to assure a clear channel, full time operation. Programs on WGN-WLIB (for Liberty, the Tribune's new national magazine), were broadcast, after a few months, from the more powerful Elgin transmitter. (In 1927 WGN was assigned its present clear channel frequency—720 kilocycles.)

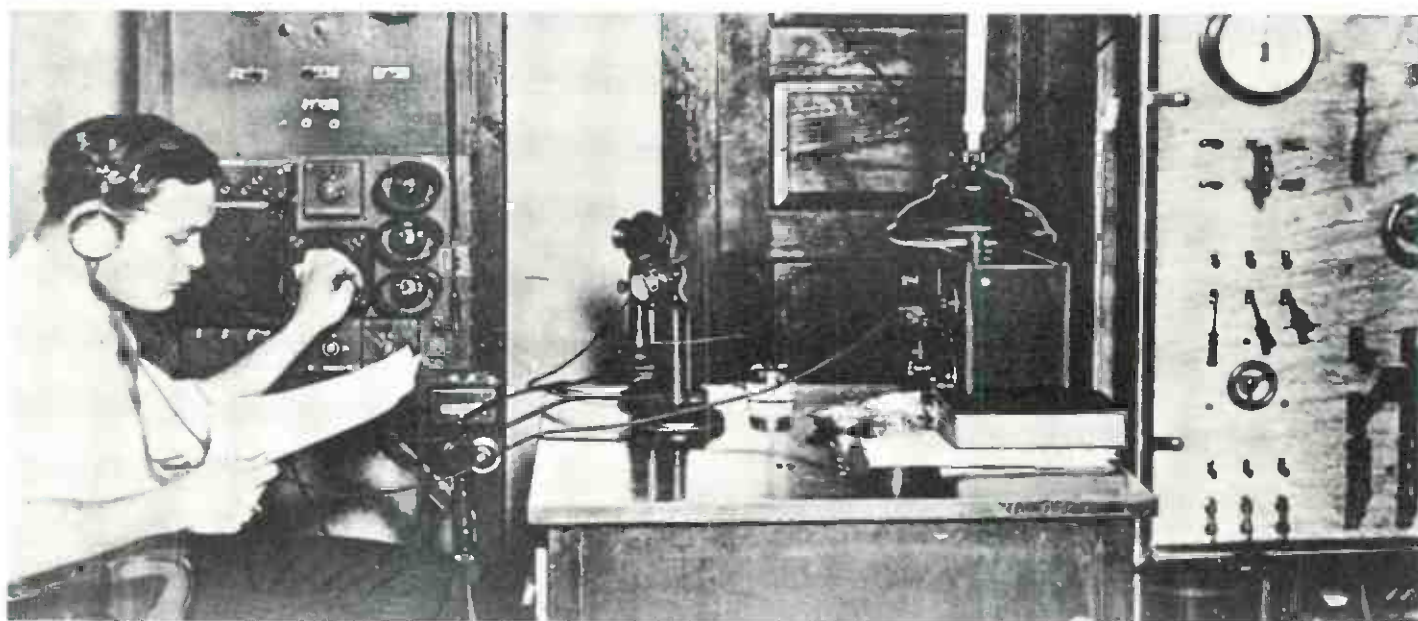
The WLIB audience was used to Charley Erbstein's kind of showmanship—brash, dramatic, talkative, sentimental, rowdy, typical of Chicago in the rip-roaring Twenties. (A microphone installation was fastened to his office desk. When a comment occurred to him, he shared it.) WGN-WLIB planned a regular show for him, but Erbstein died before "Charley's Line" could go on the air.

Meanwhile, the Tribune-Liberty organization had acquired the services of the technician who had built the Elgin stations—Carl J. Meyers, who is still with WGN, Inc., as director of engineering.

As the station on the Drake Hotel made ready for autumn, 1925, remote dance bands were playing "I'll See You in My Dreams" and "Sister Kate." The new WGN Male Quartet was busy with "Nola" and "Rose Marie" (from the new operetta of the same name).

During the summer, the new production unit

Carl Meyers





headed by Henry Selinger had undertaken regular music-drama presentations (“In the Old Heidelberg with the Student Prince,” and scenes from “Les Miserables” and “Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch”). The WGN Trio had been heard in all four movements of Mendelssohn’s “Trio for Strings in D Minor.”

In September, Al Smith, speaking at a Democratic picnic at the Beverly Hills forest preserve, made his first memorable impression on the middle west by his reference to rad-dio.

Quin Ryan and Graham MacNamee shared the microphone for a “network” broadcast of the World Series between the Pirates and Senators. Football was back, with the radio men, including a “spotter,” now in glass enclosed cubicles. For less athletic sportsmen, WGN announced a series of bridge lessons prepared by experts.

Bill Hay did Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol” against an organ background, and radio looked forward to the “big broadcasts” of 1926—remote control operations in which radio played the part of the highly privileged gate crasher.

Listeners attended the Ringling Brothers’ Circus, the Eucharistic Congress, the Derby, the Indianapolis 500, World and City Series (but not daily) baseball games, and midwest football contests.



Al Smith, governor and candidate.



Bill Hay

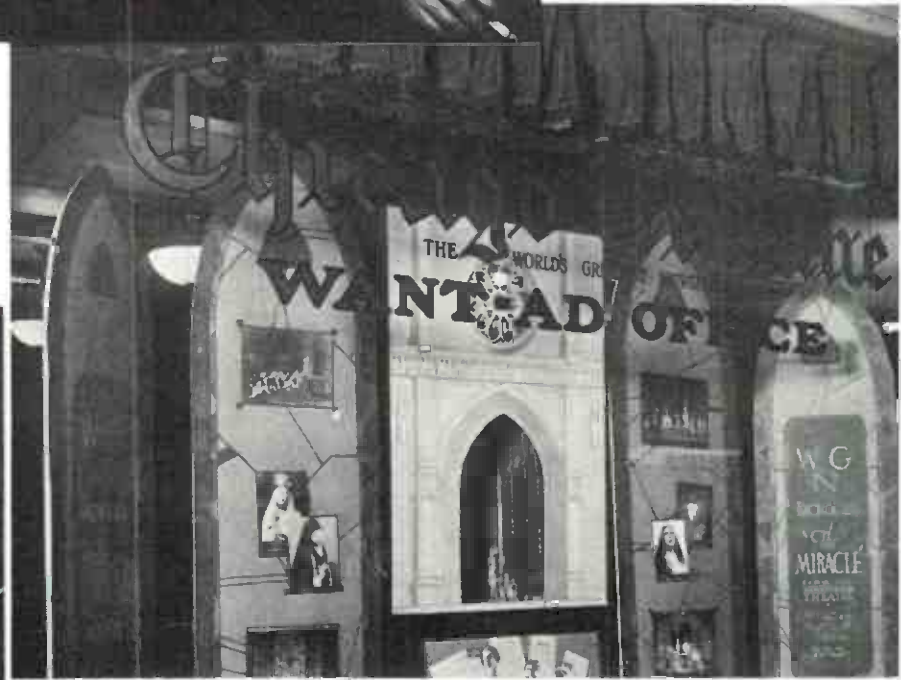


Mayor Dever, Cardinal Bonzano, papal legate to the Chicago Eucharistic Congress, and Cardinal Mundelein.

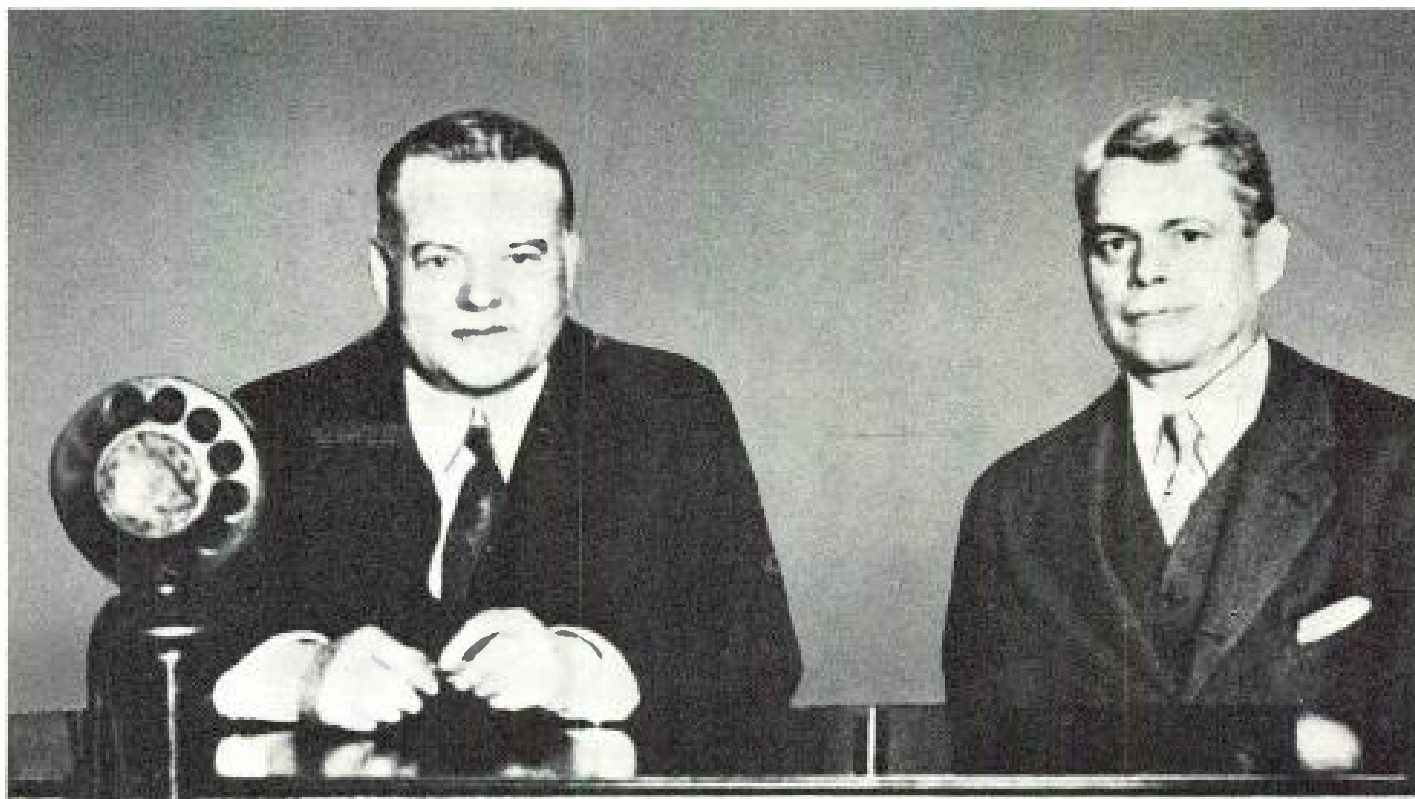


Ryan, Gest, Gibbons

Senator William E. Borah of Idaho: against.



WGN listeners heard the entire performance of Morris Gest's "The Miracle," broadcast from the Auditorium Theater. The producer was interviewed by Ryan and a Tribune foreign correspondent, Floyd Gibbons, one of the first radio commentators. Even in those days, distance lent enchantment! So WGN's first "big broadcast" of 1926 was a pioneering venture from Washington, D.C., billed as "The World's Greatest Debate." Senators Walsh and Lenroot (pro) and Senators Borah



Secretary of Commerce Hoover, Tribune Washington Bureau chief Arthur Sears Henning.

and Reed (con) debated the question "Shall we or shall we not join the World Court of the League of Nations?" Among the features of the two hour broadcast were the story of Floyd Gibbons' stroll with President Coolidge and a speech by Secretary of Commerce Herbert C. Hoover.

Some 4,000 radio fans in search of piano lessons found them at 5 o'clock each Friday afternoon. The young pianist-professor was Edward Barry, his complete course of 30 lessons in 30 weeks designed to take the pupil to simple third grade music. Alfred G. Wathall's arrangements of well known melodies were somewhat wistfully described as intended to "make the course as interesting and agreeable as possible."

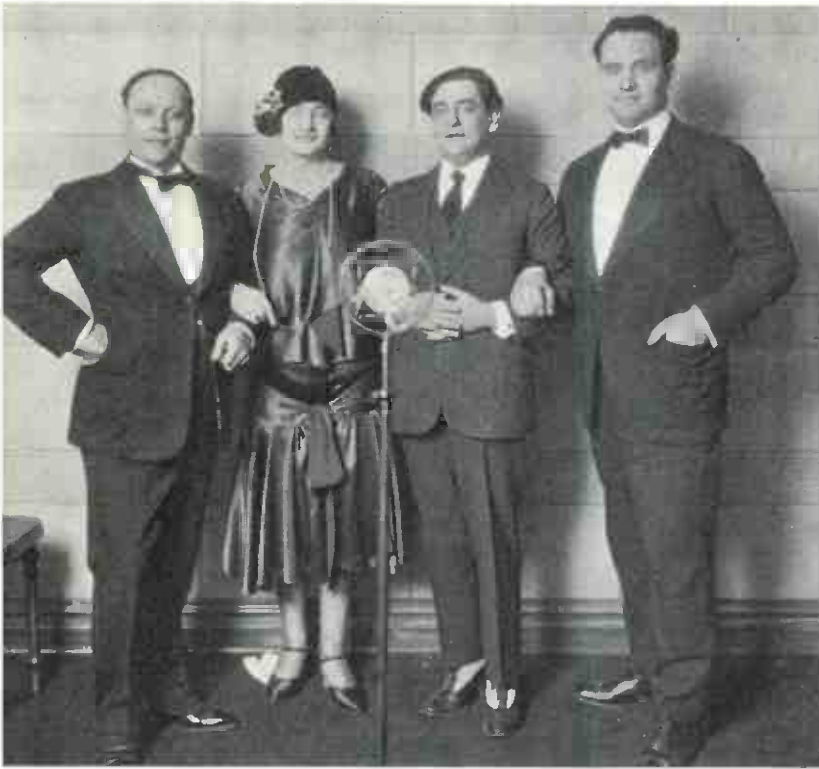


Barry



Wathall

Opera's Virgillo Lazzari, Rosa Raisa, Tito Schipa, and Giacomo Rimini celebrate a countryman.



To meet the combined requirements of WGN-WLIB, program originations had been doubled. Ben T. McCanna, the Tribune executive now devoting full time to radio, proposed ingenious public service shows with the nonchalance of a studio pianist running over the scales—child care, business forecasts, fashion notes, recipes, bright sayings of children, motion picture gossip, Chicago tours, and news interviews.

The station broadcast a message recorded by Benito Mussolini for Chicagoans of Italian ancestry. The Tribune Philharmonic orchestra (15 pieces under the baton of Henry Selinger, also concert master of the Chicago Symphony) offered fine classical readings.

Although the proposed WGN Jazz Symphony



Paul Ash



never materialized, dance orchestras were as popular as ever. Paul Ash and his “merry-mad, musical gang” were heard on Friday nights “direct from the stage of the Oriental Theater.” (Ash’s theatrical contract prohibited him from changing his barber.)

Small groups of singers and instrumentalists also became new radio personalities. A station memorandum: “Charlie Correll and Freeman Gosden comprise a harmony team that is becoming one of the most popular in the country.” McCanna’s concept of a “radio theater” (“bits of drama and musically pictured incident”) came about through the borrowing of a cartoon strip idea and was given immortality by a new show, “Sam ’n’ Henry”—the forerunner of “Amos ’n’ Andy” (in the 1950s, WGN-TV acquired the television version on film).



Freeman Gosden (Sam, left) and Charles Correll (Henry):  
“Sam, don’ argew with the genmen, cause we ain’t got no chance.”



The first introduction voiced by Bill Hay, on January 12, 1926: "Ten O'Clock . . . WGN . . . Sam 'n' Henry." The Correll-Gosden show proved immensely popular and brought the team \$50, then \$125, a week. It was among the top dozen of WGN's regular shows, along with "Tomorrow's Tribune," "Uncle Quin's Punch and Judy," "The Sunday Funnies," "The Music Box," "The Phantom Violin," "Arabian Night's Entertainment," "Auld Sandy" (Bill Hay), Correll and Gosden, regular dance, dinner, and concert programs, Floyd Gibbons' Washington reports, and the Salernos, a song team.

WGN-WLIB also brought listeners "The Best of the New York Programs" — "The Gold Dust Twins," "Eveready Hour," "Roxy and His Gang," "The Hires Program," "The Goodrich Zippers," "The Cliquot Club Esquimos," and "The Atwater-Kent Hour of Music." Participating stations had begun to be spoken of as belonging to a radio network.

The new Elgin transmitter, serving the Tribune-Liberty stations, began operations in October, 1926. The following year, only KYW, WLS, and WGN-WLIB broadcast on high power installations.

Carl Meyers



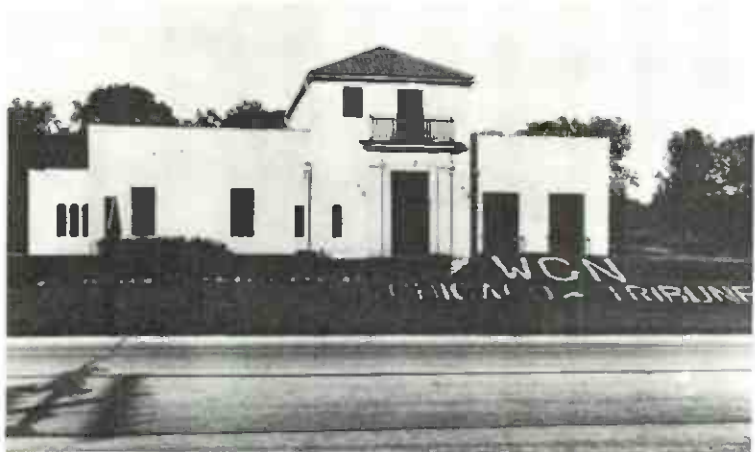
“Here is power!” exclaimed a brochure, blithely describing the three-paneled transmitter. “Every radio word and note of music travels up and down behind these panels before leaping from the aerial over the hills and far away to your radio horn.” Programs were carried by wire to the transmitter in a Spanish bungalow, then aired from an antenna rigging, supported by steel towers 250 feet high.

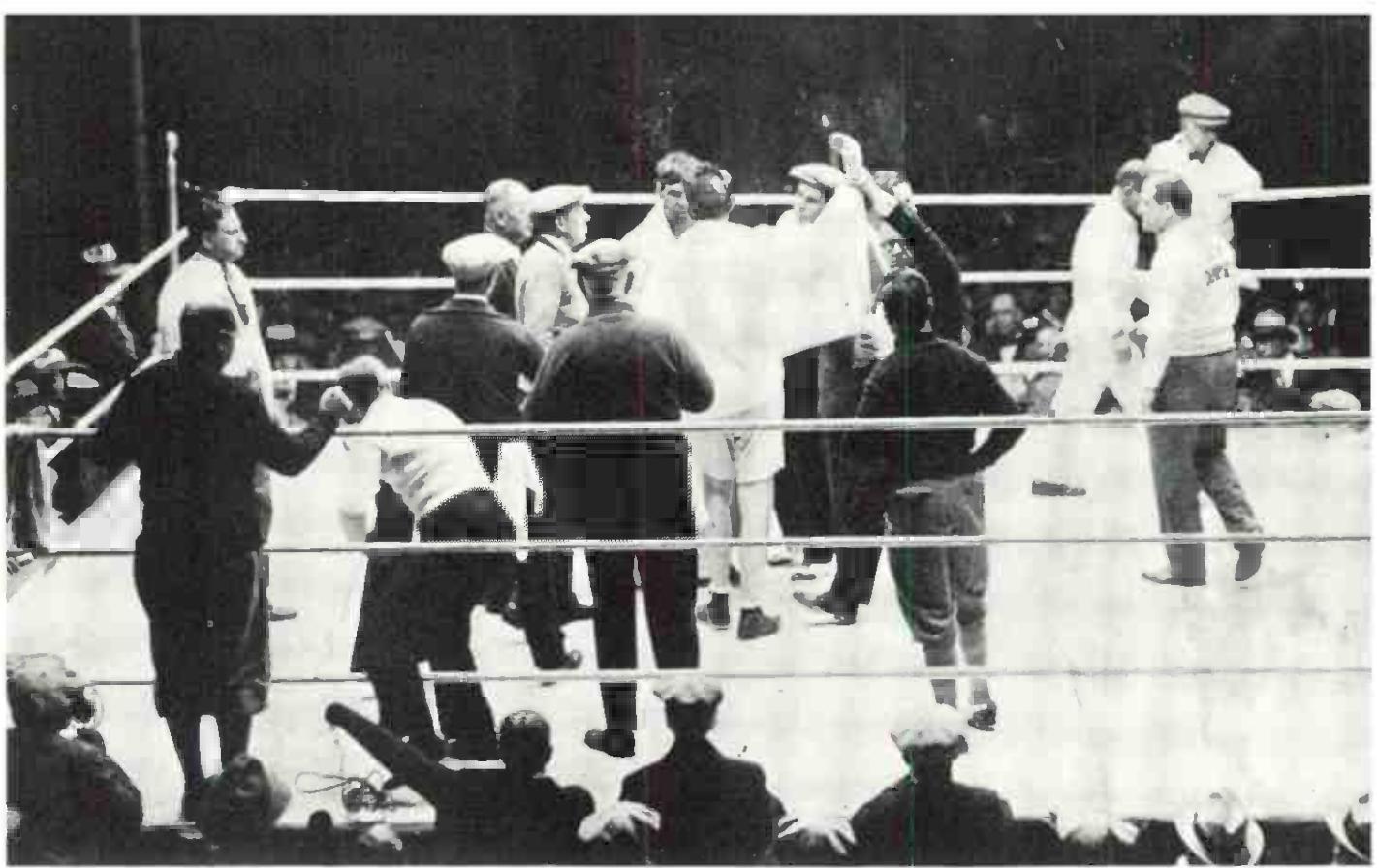
The Elgin installation beamed tragedy and excitement to the midwest. When the Lincoln Park excursion steamer “Favorite” foundered and sank off Oak Street Beach, Quin Ryan described the disaster from a studio in the Drake Hotel.

WGN covered the most controversial incident in ring history in September, 1927, at Soldiers’ Field, when Jack Dempsey met Champ Gene Tunney in



Disaster on the lake





Coates



Meeker



Tyson



Love



Plasencia



Dahm



Miss Scull

a second fight. It took him seven rounds to catch Tunney with a paralyzing series of blows, but Referee Dave Barry halted his count to push Dempsey to a neutral corner. Tunney got up on rubbery legs—after 14 seconds—and kept his title.

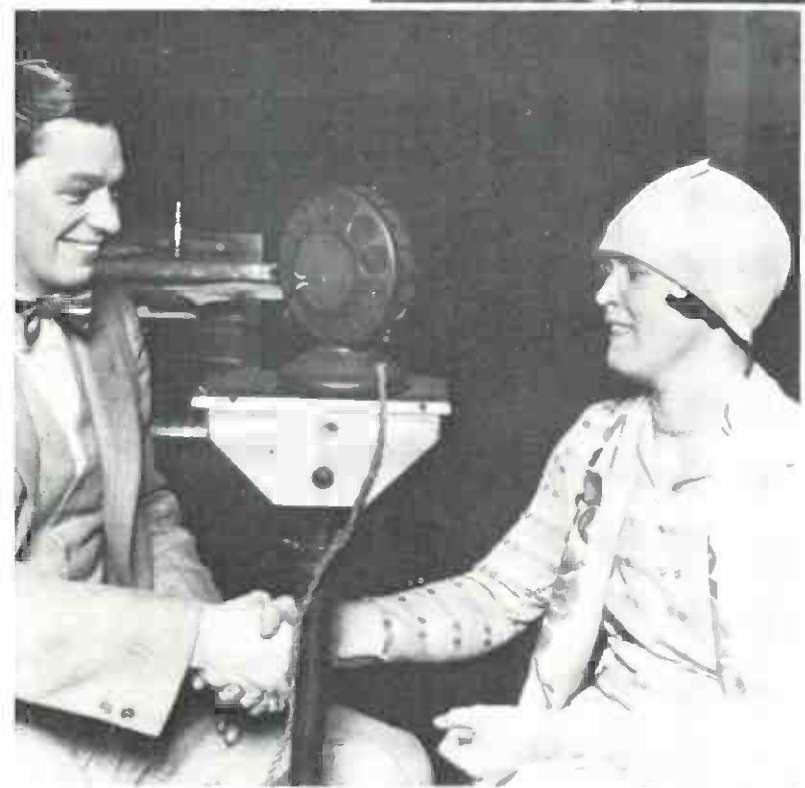
But while the “big broadcast” of the spectacular event still held its place in programming, the young men and women who spoke and sang claimed a wide (and, in some cases, a passionate) following. WGN celebrities included Tommy Coates, announcer and lyric baritone; Bobby Meeker, leader of the Drake Hotel Dance Orchestra; John Reed Tyson, morning announcer; Mark Love, sonorous basso and director of the WGN choral group; Frank Dahm, publicity and continuity writer and sports announcer; Fern Scull, staff accompanist and recitalist, and (“Langorous Spanish nights . . . a serenade . . . ‘Marcheta’”) Flavio Plasencia, young Mexican baritone.

There were larger than ever audiences for interviews. Gertrude Ederle, the first woman to swim the English channel, shook hands with the “swim champ of swim champs,” Johny Weissmuller, in a Drake Hotel studio. She was quoted after the broadcast: “It was harder than the channel swim!”

And larger audiences for the funnies—Sidney



Sidney Smith



Weissmuller, Ederle



Smith was “radio interviewed” in 1927 at the initial broadcast of the radio version of his famous comic strip, “The Gumps.”

Was there progress in radio broadcasting? Who could doubt it? Page girl Dorothy Bennett displayed her faith in the industry’s future when she posed with this TV receiver made by Western Electric Television Corporation in 1928. The circular picture, however, was only a reflection of WGN (radio) windows.

Was there progress? Junior high school spellers thought so. In 1929 at the Lincoln Park zoo, Leo

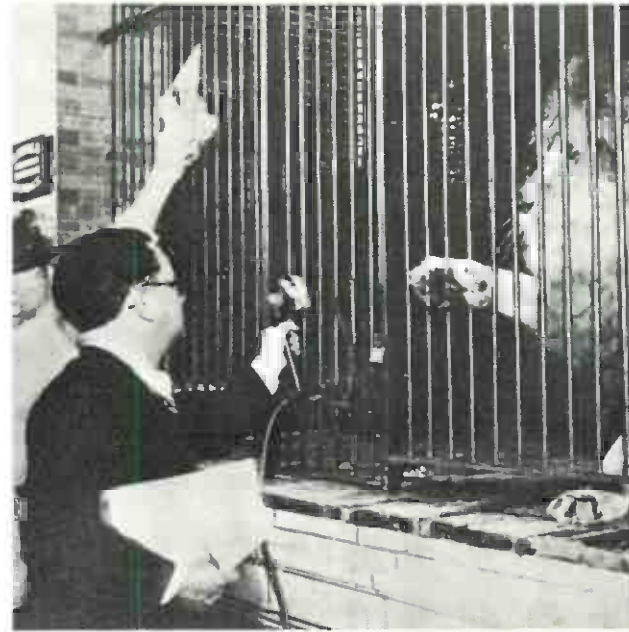


roared his opinion (whatever it was) into a WGN microphone for one of the station's first sound effects recordings.

Thousands were thrilled at Quin Ryan's description (in July, 1929, at the foot of 8th Street at Lake Michigan) when the Tribune plane (the "Untin' Bowler," a giant Sikorsky amphibion) was launched on a much publicized round trip to Berlin. As in broadcasting, only the sky was the limit. But the plane was lost during a storm in Hudson Strait on its way to Greenland. The two pilots and Robert W. Wood, Tribune aviation editor, made their way back.

Even more impressive was a project implemented by the station's chief engineer, Carl Meyers, and given its first test in March, 1929, when WGN relayed police messages to wide eyed detectives in squad cars. The experiments (cost: \$40,000) helped speed the nation-wide adoption of the police radio system. (A 7 tube, strapped-in set carried Deputy Commissioner John H. Stege's bulletins thru a small speaker horn fastened to the car's top ribwork.) Messages interrupted WGN programs, and listeners often interrupted lawbreakers at work.

The first commercial program, "The Radio Floor Walker," made its appearance in January, 1928. It was a variety program, mostly musical, with



"Untin' Bowler"

"Calling all cars!  
Calling all cars!"  
(Left, Carl Meyers)





Democrats in Texas.

commercials interspersed. When listeners complained of “the constant barrage of advertising,” the station promised “improvements.” Some revenue did come in. But the future lay with the single sponsor, single impact program—the sponsored program as we know it today.

The great broadcasting achievement of 1928 found WGN the single independent station in America that was in free and forceful competition with the two major networks. At its own expense, relying on its own staff, WGN broadcast its own report of the Republican and Democratic national conventions.

At Kansas City, Missouri, it was Hoover and Curtis. The Democrats at Houston, Texas, chose Al Smith of New York (nominated for the third time by Franklin D. Roosevelt) and Senator Joseph T. Robinson of Arkansas.

V. R. Pribble, station manager in Chicago, wired Quin Ryan in Texas: “Everything coming through beautifully except cowboy band seems to blast hell out of your work . . . Can anything be done to shut them out while you are talking . . . .”

The broadcasts left a deep impression on the middle western listener, who felt that the clear channel station saw, so to speak, with something like his own eyes and spoke in his own tongue. He identified himself with the station broadcasting primarily to and for Chicagoland.



At the G.O.P. convention: The Tribune's Genevieve Forbes Herrick and Arthur Sears Henning, WGN's Carl Meyers and Frank P. Schrelber, political writers Arthur M. Evans and Oscar Hewitt, and Quin Ryan.



“The Tribune,” wrote Frank Hinman, radio reporter, “is annually spending a quarter of a million dollars in the operation of its station . . . Outside of its equipment, a station’s only asset is the number of listeners it can command.”

Initiating and improving WGN programs with mass appeal was on the agenda of many a newspaper-radio parley. But Colonel McCormick’s specific contributions remain largely undocumented because the Colonel, a tall, strong, vigorous man, was fond of impromptu conferences called when he felt the need of exercise. Striding into an employee’s office, the editor and publisher would boom a hearty invitation to accompany him on a brisk walk.

As McCanna, the chief radio executive, well knew, the walk might be only around the block, or it might be around half a dozen blocks. Setting a timbercruiser’s pace, indifferent to Chicago’s infamous winter, Colonel McCormick vigorously launched upon whatever ideas occupied his mind. As in this note from the winter of 1927:

*In ancient Rome the circus was heard and seen perhaps once every six months. Music probably was confined to a few princely houses, and they could hear it only at intervals. Trace slowly the development of opera, public concerts, vaudeville, stressing intervals between the entertainment, and winding up with RADIO which can be heard practically all day and all night without cost, showing that the owner of a Radio Set is many times better off than Caesar or Queen Victoria, or Commodore Vanderbilt.*



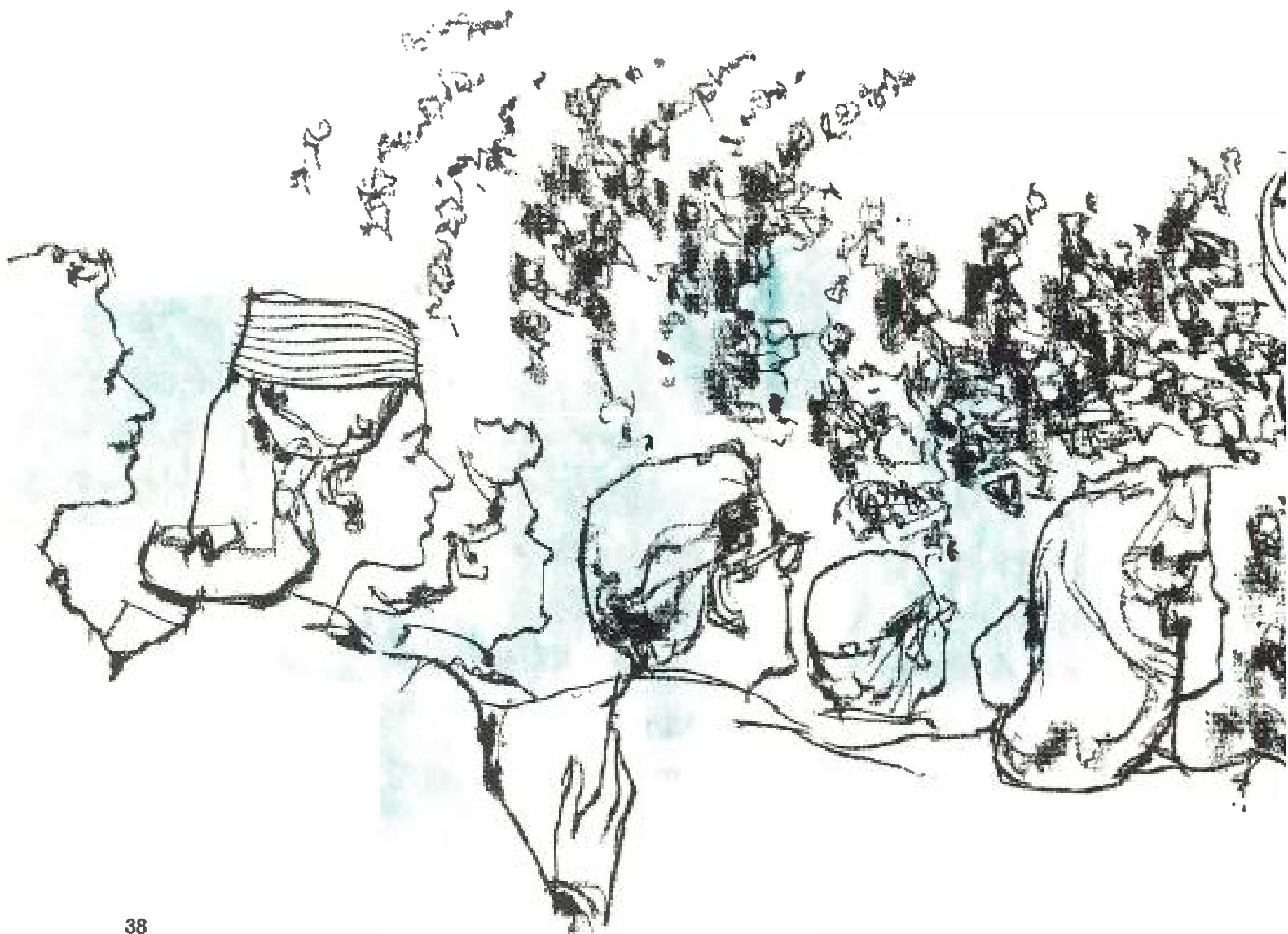
Colonel Robert R. McCormick



Ben T. McCanna on Canadian assignment: filming “From Trees to Tribune.”

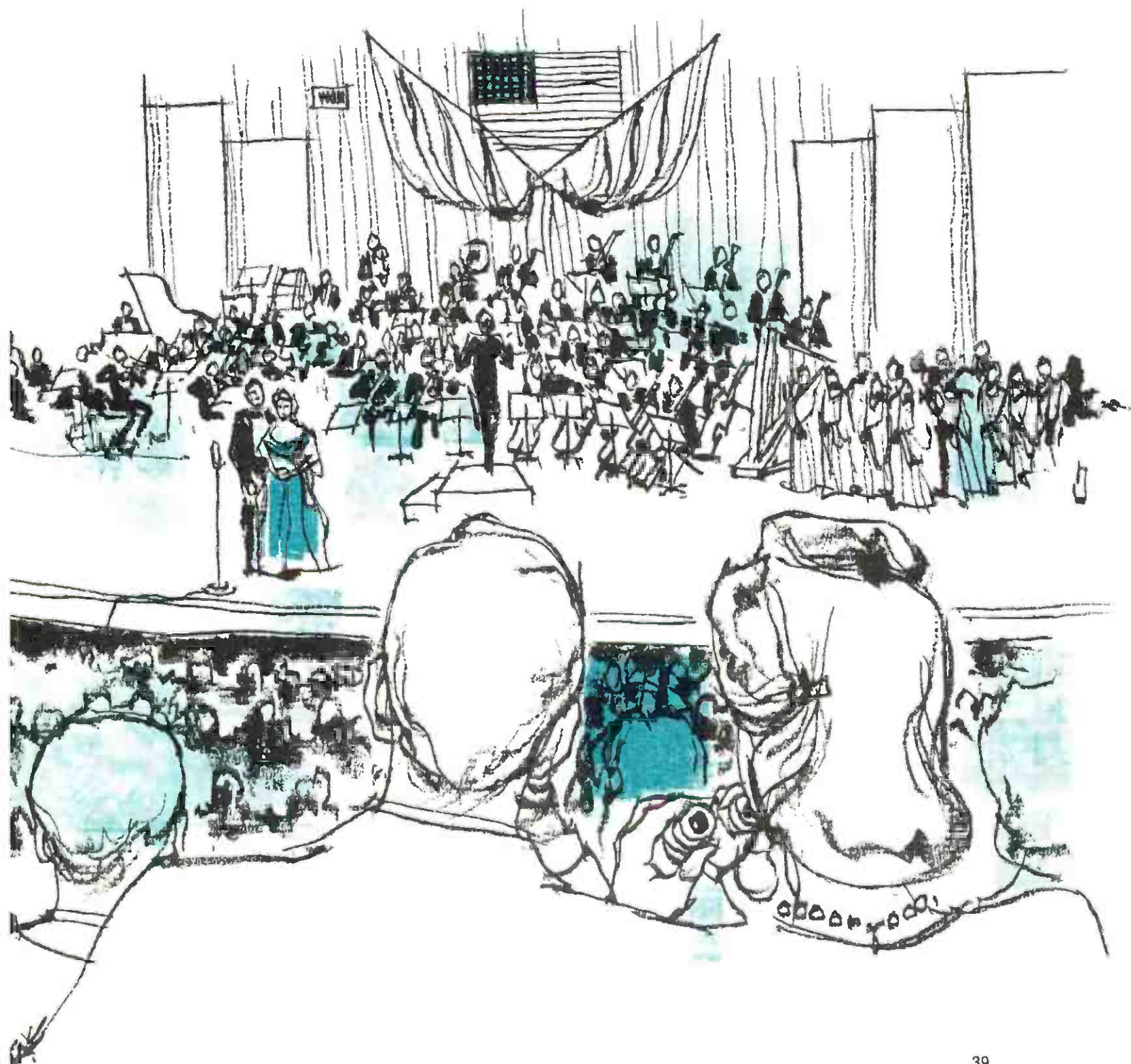
“WGN is the first radio station in the country to have a radio theater. By presenting bits of drama and musically pictured incident, we give our listeners something tangible to wait for, to listen to, to find fault with or to praise. . . .”

—Ben T. McCanna, chief executive of WGN in the 1920s.



*Part II*

A THEATER OF THE AIR

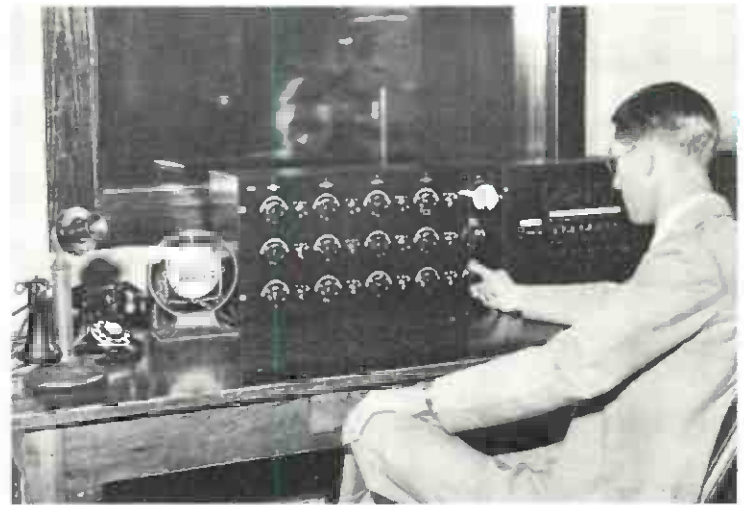




Bob Elson (left). On the floor, Pierre Andre.



From carbon  
(right)  
to condenser.



Bob Sibold

By the early 1930s, radio broadcasting had evolved to a fairly high point. So had the by-play between those two wizards of the young radio world, the control room engineer and the studio announcer.

Announcers were (and are) likely to be practical jokers. The oldest and most effective announcer's prank is to address the microphone in full voice—then stop speaking but continue to mouth the words. The engineer, thinking his line has gone dead, frantically checks his equipment.

Listeners were humorists, too. One gave a French bulldog to Pierre Andre—on the condition that he enter him in shows under the name “Pierre of WGN.” Pierre (or “Pete,” as he was called) won several blue ribbons.







Louie and the Weasel



"Uncle Remus"—Fred L. Jeske with "Joe" (Charles Flynn) and "Miss Sally" (Mary Afflick).



Other comedians were the professionals, following in the lead of Sam 'n' Henry. The rich German dialect of two former musical comedy players was heard every night at 10:20. They were Henry Moeller and Hal Gilles, Louie and the Weasel of "Louie's Hungry Five," a "lectle German band." These programs offered music, foolishness, and a continued story by transcription to more than 40 stations.

Ed East and Ralph Dumke contributed 15 minutes of harmony and comic household hints every afternoon. The former vaudeville troupers made their "Sisters of the Skillet" club so popular that midwestern women's clubs adopted the name for their bridge game meetings and afternoon teas.



↳ "Little Orphan Annie" (Shirley Bell) and "Joe Corn-tassel" (Allan Baruck), arms around Quin Ryan.

One of the nation's most popular radio serials, a dramatization of Tribune cartoonist Harold Gray's "Little Orphan Annie," began in 1930 with Frank Dahm at the typewriter. Later sponsorship of similar shows by soap and detergent companies gave them the slightly derisive name "soap operas." But in their appeal to the mass audience, in their creation and development of character, and in their skillful use of suspense, sound effects, and writing and acting skills, they were the true beginning of today's radio and television drama.



Irene Wicker, the Singing Lady.

“Harold Teen,” the radio version of Carl Ed’s collegiate comic strip, drew its leading actors (and its script writer, Blair Walliser, class of ’29) from the Northwestern University campus. Bill Farnum played the title role and Eunice Yanke was Lillums. Irene Wicker, WGN’s Singing Lady, was Giggles. She also portrayed one of the three major characters in the morning serial “Painted Dreams.” The other two parts were played by the script writer, Erna Phillips. Second grader Antonia (better known as Toni) Gilman, daughter of WGN’s production manager, played in this and other serials.

The emotional tone and dramatic devices developed by such early playlets remain the stock in trade of today’s broadcast drama.

“In ‘Painted Dreams,’” Miss Phillips said in 1931, “one finds the dreams of everyone. It is the story of the joys and hopes and disillusionments of average people.” Lovable Mother Moynahan couldn’t reconcile herself to the “goings on of the younger generation.” She was fearful of what might happen to Irene, who clerked at a cigar counter, and to Sue, a cloak room attendant. But the girls had their dreams . . . (Erna Phillips went on to become Irna, a highly successful network detergent dramatist; Miss Wicker won a Peabody Award for 1960’s best local children’s show, on a New York City station.)



Clockwise, from top: Jack Spencer (Beezie Binks), Ruth Dennen (Cicely), Wally Colbath (Lilacs), Bill Farnum (Teen), Eunice Yanke (Lillums).



Antonia



The knitting club

Chicago in the 1930s was the point of origination for much of the nation's radio, and WGN was the pacesetter in Chicago. The rumor was that Chicagoans working in the radio vineyard never went home—they stayed around the studio and knitted. The “knitting lady” in 1928 was Charlotte O’Brien. Her demonstrators were Katherine Roche, Don Pontius, Ed Smith, and the girl who played “Pearlie” in the sports serial, “Rube Appleberry.” By 1932 there was a WGN Knitting Guild. Its President, Mary Laura Simpson, welcomed new members with a set of 10 rules, which included:

*“MIND YOUR KNITTING.*

*Knit to fit.*

*Don't be afraid to rip.*

*Be persistent, consistent, patient, and careful.*

*Do everything with your knitting needles that can possibly be done with them.”*

The big cast of the “Heart to Heart Club,” a regular Monday night feature, included (from left) Don Pontius, Virginia Clark, Karl Huebl, Sally Smith, Gene O’Connor, Alice Hill, Bob Fiske, Ethel King, Pierre Andre. Pontius; his father, Walter (a noted singer), and O’Connor also were highly regarded as sound effects men. Marching feet were blocks of wood, rain was sand falling on lettuce, fire was the crinkling of cellophane, and a

“Heart to Heart Club”



“tunk” on a melon simulated a blow on the head. (The sound of running water on a board was running water on a board.) In “The Pied Piper of Hamelin” listeners heard the squeaking of thousands of rats (resined corks twisted on glass) and the patter of tiny feet—short ends of insulated wire pattered on a marble surface.

The rubber insulation conveyed the illusion of tiny pads of flesh, and copper wires were rodent toenails scraping against the stony hill where the Piper vanished with the unfortunate children. (Pleasant dreams, kiddies.)

The station broke new trails—“In Chicago Tonight,” a later series of variety shows (presented weekly from July 1940 to May 1941) was the most elaborate of its kind in the city’s history. Guest stars—performers in specially written productions—ranged from the Mills Brothers to the Andrews Sisters, from Bob Hope to Teddy Wilson, from Gary Cooper to Gypsy Rose Lee. But in 1930, Gene Goldkette’s band attracted its share of notables: trumpet player Lee Shikin and (out of uniform) conductor Victor Young both went on to fame in Hollywood.

The WGN Concert Orchestra, reorganized and directed by Henry G. Weber (starting in 1934) was among radio’s most distinguished.

Among the staff pianists—Allan Grant (left), Delos Owen (third from left), Edward Barry, Leon Benditzky.



Goldkette band



WGN Concert Orchestra

Weber





Marion Claire, James Melton



In 1938 the Concert Orchestra—and stars of opera, operetta, and concert—began a series of hour long “streamlined” operas in English: “Samson and Delilah,” “Carmen,” and “Lohengrin.” During the 1940s “The Chicago Theater of the Air” presented popular operettas in English starring such soloists as Marion Claire, Conrad Thibault, James Melton, Jan Peerce, Attilio Baggiore, Bruce Foote, Thomas L. Thomas, and Richard Tucker. These drew about 20,000 studio visitors a year. In 1940, 147,000 letters requested continuation of the program.



World's Fair interview studio on the Avenue of Flags.

Beginning with the World's Fair years of 1933 and '34, WGN broadcast concerts by the world famous Chicago Symphony Orchestra—an association that continued into the 1960s. Concerts from Grant Park and Ravinia, and broadcasts from the stage of the Civic Opera, brightened many a season—as did the elaborate pageantry of the annual Chicago-land Music Festival.

Triumphal March (of 500) from "Aida" in the 1943 Music Festival.





One of the studio shows of the mid-thirties starred Arthur Wright (later vocalist with Kay Kyser's band) and Virginia Clark. Del Owen conducted. Regular light-classical concerts were performed by a group known around the studio as "The Stone Crushers"—Lichtenfeld, Harold Turner, Armand Buisseret, and Lawrence Salerno. And Ralph Ginsburg's Palmer House Ensemble was heard on WGN daily.



"The Stone Crushers"

Ginsburg, at right







Clyde McCoy



Jan Garber, George Fortler

WGN's parade of dance bands (live remotes, not recorded) led the nation during the 1930s, beginning with the famous Coon-Sanders organization and embracing such bands as Jan Garber, Clyde McCoy, Bob Crosby, Hal Kemp, Wayne King, Lawrence Welk, and Kay ("Yet's dance!") Kyser.

Kyser and Pierre Andre were on hand at Papa Roth's famous Blackhawk to welcome comedian Joe E. Lewis back to show business, after he had been savagely assaulted by the Capone mob.



The Bob Crosby group.

Greetings for Joe E.



The Ol' Professor and Paul Fogarty, calisthenics master of "Your Figure, Ladies," a show that slenderized generations of women. During the 1930s Len Salvo played the organ while the announcer sang the opening theme (to the tune of "Fine and Dandy"\*):

*Stretch and be  
Fine and dandy,  
Sugar Candy,  
Your disposish. . . .*

It was sung with fervor—while Salvo feverishly modulated his keys to chase the announcer's voice all over the tonal register. Fogarty (who wrote "Betty Co-Ed") silently offered his daily apologies to George Gershwin, the original composer.

WGN's regular religious, public service, and educational programs served both local and regional interests. Of the 21 programs of the University Broadcasting Council aired in 1937, WGN carried eight—more than any other local station. Northwestern University's "Reviewing Stand" represented a joint contribution to public education spanning more than a quarter of a century.

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Kyser, Fogarty



Salvo

WGN

WGN EDUCATIONAL AND PUBLIC SERVICE PROGRAM

**New Features**

7:22 Special of Youth Relief Hours  
Radio Relief Council with and with  
Radio Relief Council

7:28 Lecture on an National Girl  
Life in America Radio Relief Council  
Life in America

7:34 Home Management Help  
Radio Relief Council

7:40 Open to All - one hour show  
Spelling Bee  
Dedicated to Chicago Board of  
Education by Radio Relief Council  
in the school room.

7:46 News feature with Radio Relief  
Council and with Radio Relief Council  
and Radio Relief Council

7:52 Billie Holiday  
Radio Relief Council  
Radio Relief Council

7:58 National Religion and Home  
with Radio Relief Council  
Radio Relief Council with Radio Relief  
Council

7:59 National Constitution  
Radio Relief Council and Radio Relief  
Council

8:05 News on Radio Relief Council  
Radio Relief Council

8:11 Review Stand of the  
Radio Relief Council  
Radio Relief Council

8:17 Radio Relief Council  
Radio Relief Council

8:23 Radio Relief Council  
Radio Relief Council

8:29 Radio Relief Council  
Radio Relief Council

8:35 Chicago Spelling Contest  
Radio Relief Council  
Radio Relief Council

8:41 National Religion and Home  
with Radio Relief Council

?

WGN  
will continue cooperating  
with University Broadcasting  
Council and Board of Education  
of Chicago.  
WGN will add new features  
prepared by its staff.  
WGN will continue to carry an  
open mind towards all educational  
and public service programs  
presented.

**DAILY**

7:10 - 7:15 AM News  
7:15 - 7:30 AM News  
7:30 - 7:45 AM News  
7:45 - 8:00 AM News  
8:00 - 8:15 AM News  
8:15 - 8:30 AM News  
8:30 - 8:45 AM News  
8:45 - 9:00 AM News  
9:00 - 9:15 AM News  
9:15 - 9:30 AM News  
9:30 - 9:45 AM News  
9:45 - 10:00 AM News  
10:00 - 10:15 AM News  
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10:45 - 11:00 PM News  
11:00 - 11:15 PM News  
11:15 - 11:30 PM News  
11:30 - 11:45 PM News  
11:45 - 12:00 AM News

**SATURDAY'S ONLY**

10:00 AM - 10:15 AM Radio Relief  
Council  
10:15 AM - 10:30 AM Radio Relief  
Council  
10:30 AM - 10:45 AM Radio Relief  
Council  
10:45 AM - 11:00 AM Radio Relief  
Council  
11:00 AM - 11:15 AM Radio Relief  
Council  
11:15 AM - 11:30 AM Radio Relief  
Council  
11:30 AM - 11:45 AM Radio Relief  
Council  
11:45 AM - 12:00 AM Radio Relief  
Council

**SUNDAY'S ONLY**

10:00 AM - 10:15 AM Radio Relief  
Council  
10:15 AM - 10:30 AM Radio Relief  
Council  
10:30 AM - 10:45 AM Radio Relief  
Council  
10:45 AM - 11:00 AM Radio Relief  
Council  
11:00 AM - 11:15 AM Radio Relief  
Council  
11:15 AM - 11:30 AM Radio Relief  
Council  
11:30 AM - 11:45 AM Radio Relief  
Council  
11:45 AM - 12:00 AM Radio Relief  
Council



Ryan at Purdue

Baseball and football were the major sports broadcast, and the station's announcers became famous—Quin Ryan, Bob Elson, Jack Brickhouse, Vince Lloyd. Indiana humorist George Ade drew an appreciative laugh from Tribune humorist John T. McCutcheon between halves of the 1930 Purdue-Wisconsin game. (Purdue won, 7 to 6.) In 1932, WGN broadcast a game from Los Angeles, then the longest remote by a single radio station. (New slogan: "The station that broadcasts FROM greater distances than others broadcast TO.")



Farewell to Knute



Pegler, McNamee

Millions of listeners heard the funeral of Knute Rockne, beloved Notre Dame coach, at South Bend, Indiana. (Wrote the Rev. Charles E. Pettit of the Bloomington, Illinois, Methodist Church: "No more colorful, appropriate, and beautiful English have I ever heard than from your announcer . . .")

A roving Tribune sports writer and WGN broadcaster, Westbrook Pegler, was Graham McNamee's off-mike companion at NBC's 1931 World Series broadcasts in St. Louis.



Harrington



The "Golden Gloves" fight broadcasts continued to bring springtime excitement to Chicagoland.

Year in and year out, programs of news and comment took a 10 to 15 percent bite of the station's air time. For more than a decade, Quin Ryan read Tribune headlines nightly. The stockyards fire of 1934 made broadcasting history, and it illustrates the impact of radio when it was new and listeners were more impressionable. With Ryan and sports announcer John Harrington at the



microphones, jittery listeners thought the city was doomed to destruction. The fact is (and recordings show) that the eye witness broadcast was remarkably factual. But the myth of the city's being "burned by broadcasters" is still widely believed.

Competent broadcasters, in fact, are usually remarkably cool in moments of tension. Tom Foy, writer and producer (and later head of the WGN, Inc., news department), was fond of the harmonica. He punctuated many a dramatic script with folk songs while messengers waited nearby to rush the final lines to the studio. Typical crisis: Show in rehearsal or on the air. In the writers' cubicle, Foy plays the harmonica. Quin Ryan (fond of harmonicas and stories) strolls in. Foy plays. Ryan yawns. Messengers wait. Remarkably, no broadcast seems to have been missed for lack of a script.

Engineers were reckless with performers' nerves, too. Before the days of tape, recordings were transcribed on a big acetate record (33 $\frac{1}{3}$  r.p.m.) which could be seen impressively turning in the control room. The acetate record could not be edited; a failure anywhere in the program meant that the whole record had to be done over. Sample of the engineering art: The record turns, while cast and orchestra turn in a superb performance. Director fights rising tension in the last few seconds. The closing theme, credits, station identification, triumphant fade and cut. Then, from the control room comes a doleful voice. The technician holds up a glistening acetate disc—broken in half! But, as the last ripples of shock die away, it becomes clear that the broken record is a fake. (Morrison Wood was a fine director whose portrayal of incredulity, anguish, and then relief delighted connoisseurs of control room humor.)



Foy

Morrison Wood, at right.





After early participation in long distance A.T.&T. hookups, WGN, Chicago's leading independent station, accepted certain programs of the newly formed National Broadcasting Company from 1926 to 1930. For the next three years it was associated with the Columbia Broadcasting System. Then, convinced that eastern programming did not meet the true needs of the midwest, WGN returned to its independent status in the fall of 1933 with a musical program starring Attilio Baggiore, Helen Freund, and the Doring Sisters. Adolph Dumont was the conductor. The following September the station joined with WOR, Newark, and two other stations in the formation of the Mutual Broadcasting System, a cooperative network that lasted until 1956. WGN-Mutual's organ-accompanied Master Radio canaries (with Jess Kirkpatrick) made a unique place for themselves in radioland.

For years WGN and the Mutual network barred recorded music from major broadcasts. An exception to this rule caused an elaborate foul-up during the Presidential campaign of 1936. The Republicans furnished a recording of Alf Landon's replies to the political speeches of F.D.R. It was to be relayed from WGN to the Mutual network. In a fantastic confusion of labels, speeds, cuts, live inserts, and tricky cues, the feature was impressively announced and ludicrously mangled. In the local room of The Chicago Tribune, a special bell (enormously audible) signalled a phone call from Colonel McCormick. It sounded as if in anger, but McCormick



Kirkpatrick

Quin Ryan, Arthur Sears Henning at 1936 convention



spoke in sorrow: "I have paid \$600,000 for a radio station. There must be somebody down there who can play a phonograph record."

WGN's—and everyone's—Helen Trent (Virginia Clark) lit the candles in celebration of WGN's 10th birthday in July, 1934. Pierre Andre was the announcer for this, one of radio's early audience shows. It starred Clara, Lu 'n' Em and Irene Wicker, The Singing Lady. The orchestra was Jack Chapman's.



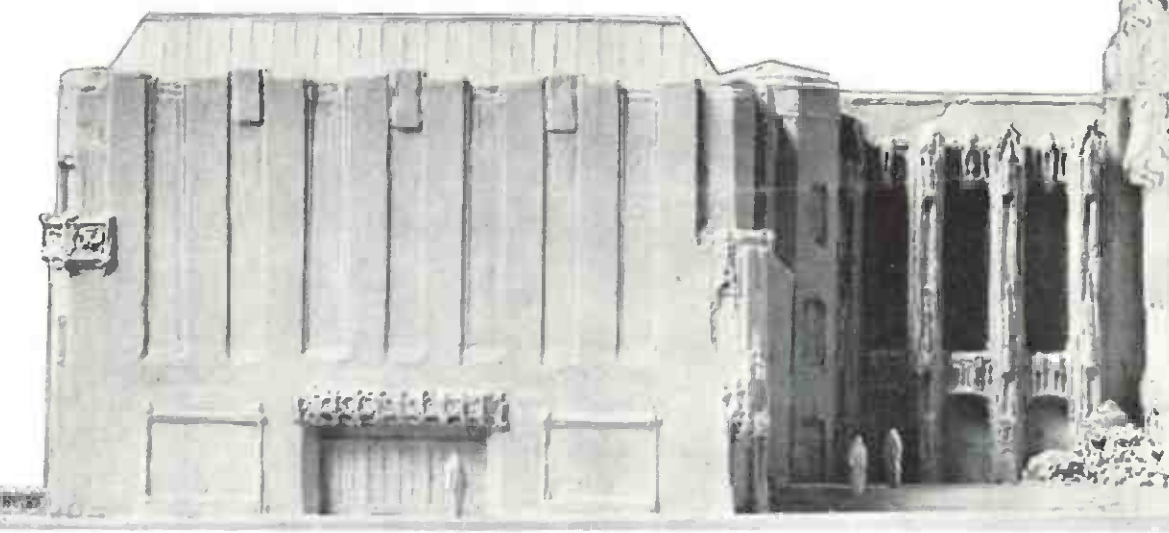
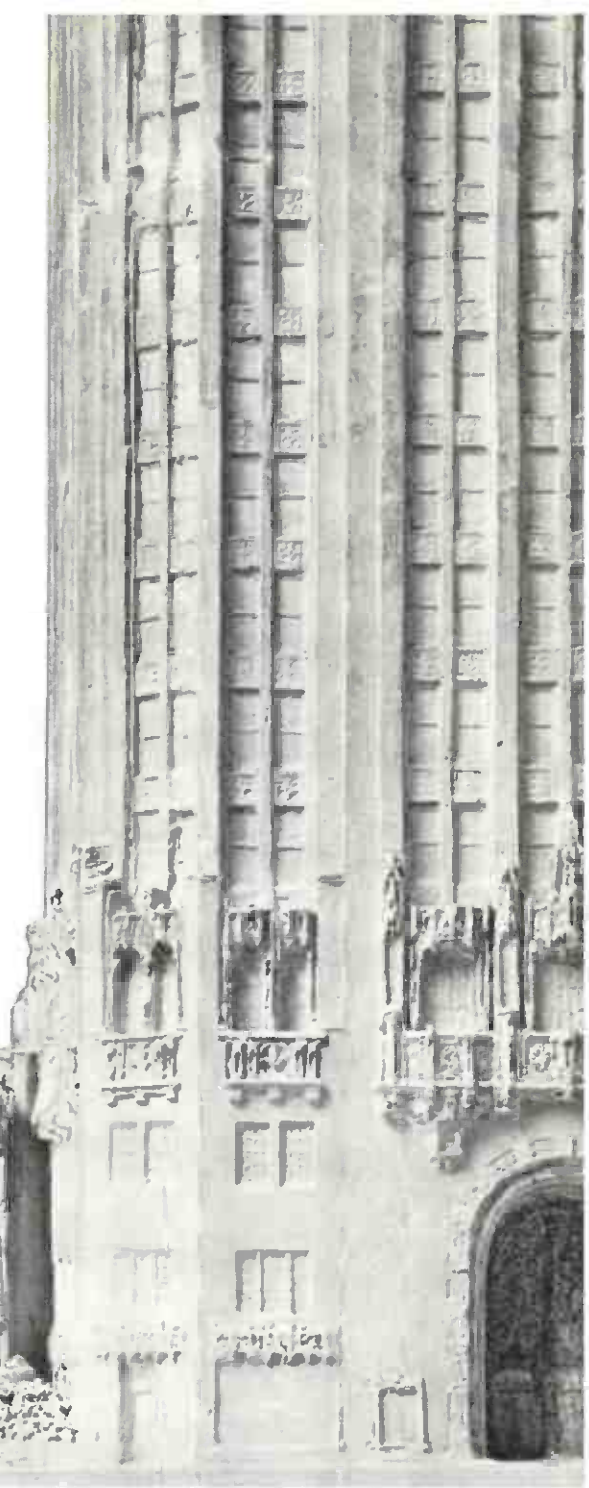


A 1935 address by the silver tongued Senator J. Hamilton Lewis found him surrounded by fans from the station staff (roughly from left): Hank Moeller (Herr Louie), Clara, Lu 'n' Em, Mark Love, Tom, Dick and Harry, Quin Ryan, Hal Gilles (The Weasel), Bob Elson, Russell Ryan, Gaston Du Molin, Abe Maule, and, as always, Pierre Andre.

WGN's long successful homemaker's program starred "June Baker" (Katherine Roche, and later Virginia Clark—as "Virginia Gale," who later was portrayed by Ruby Anderson). Announcer was James Fleming.



The 11 year WGN achievement was symbolized in October, 1935, by the dedication of a new studio building adjoining Tribune Tower on Michigan Avenue—opposite the Wrigley Building, the original home of WGN's predecessor station, WDAP. From four studios in the Drake Hotel, the station mushroomed into four stories housing six studios, four client's rooms, one master and seven studio control rooms, workshops, dressing rooms, offices, and Chicago's largest and most lavish studio theater. At a cost of \$600,000, the studio structure was built adventurously in the middle of the Great Depression.



The building's imposing new stage, handsomely equipped with amber footlights and colored borders, created a crisis for the cast of one dramatic program and for its gifted producer-writer, Blair Walliser. The vivid lighting patterns could be changed from a control booth to divert the studio audience during broadcasts. To augment this touch of pure swank, an agency man insisted that the scripts be typed in two colors—the more dramatic portions in red, to spur the actors to new heights.



Walliser



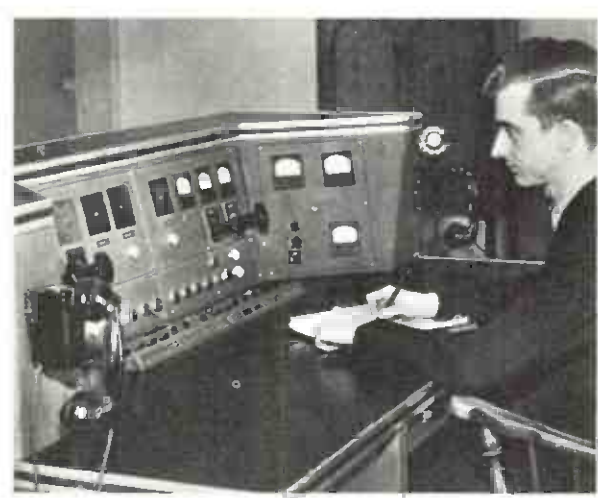
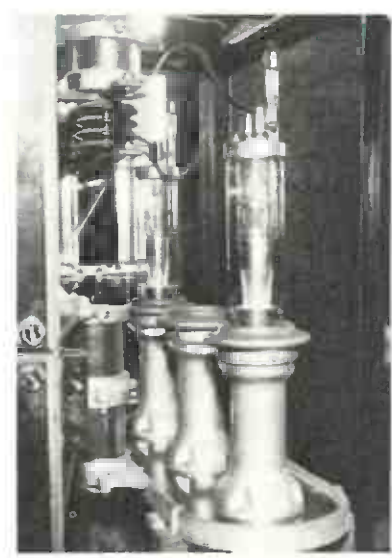
As this performance reached its climax, lighting cues called for red borders. The orchestra throbbed, the actors gasped—as the borders came up to a dramatic scarlet . . . and the actors' lines faded and vanished. Cast, producer, and agency man were all convincingly shaken by the evening's drama.

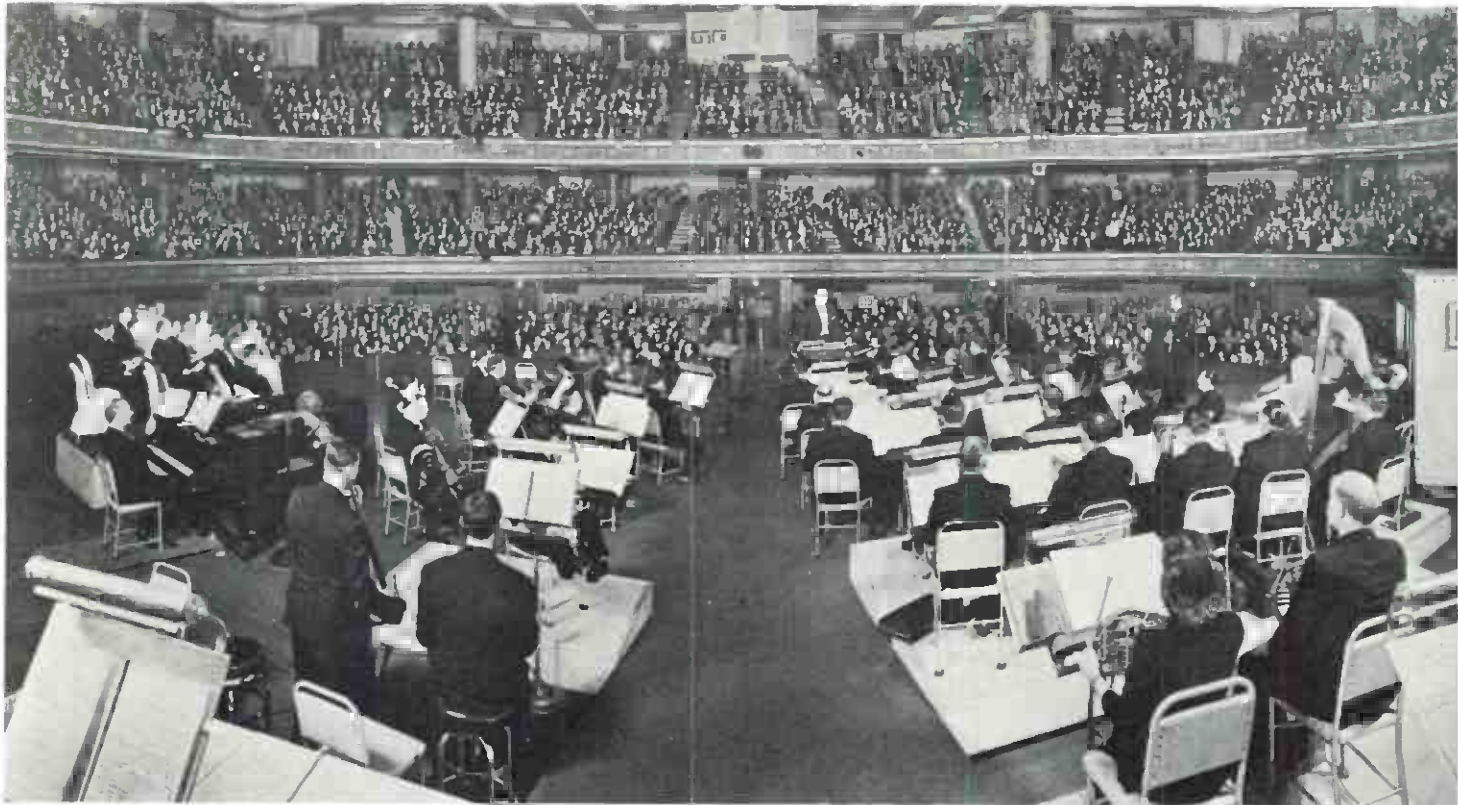




Tribune TV editor Larry Wolters, Carl Meyers

WGN's daylight range was extended over a radius of 400 miles when its new quarter million dollar transmitter building and tower near Roselle, Illinois, were completed in 1939. The tower, 750 feet high, was the tallest in the midwest. In December, 1941, the net investment represented by operation equipment topped \$184,000—plus nearly \$75,000 in long range experimental activities: police radio experiments, facsimile trials, FM tests, and—15 years before WGN-TV—experiments in television. Not until 1932 had the station shown a profit. Between 1924 and 1940, WGN, Inc., showed a net loss of about \$950,000. Station executives thought the amount astronomical, but Tribune management was not used to thinking of radio as a true commercial enterprise and the deficits were stoically borne.





"The Theater of the Air" at Medinah Temple

Another anniversary—the 15th—had been celebrated with a lavishly nostalgic broadcast from the ballroom of the Drake Hotel, and football fans were tuned to the final Chicago game of the professional season. The Bears were playing the Cardinals at Comiskey Park on Sunday, December 7, 1941, when a WGN studio announcer broke into the play by play account: "FLASH—WHITE HOUSE SAYS JAPS ATTACK PEARL HARBOR!" In the next 10 days the station logged its longest continuous run. For 257 hours and 35 minutes it reported the newly begun war in the Pacific. The forties were the war years on WGN. In great measure, individual station and network achievements were pooled; listeners turned dials with little regard to program origination. Radio's essential service to the nation lay in the speed, accuracy, color, and interpretation of world reportage. As always, WGN provided an open forum for all shades of American opinion.

60

Drake ballroom



Newsroom at war: Gene Filip (left), Tom Foy



Meanwhile, the peacetime broadcasting pattern was distinguished by notable programs. In May, 1940, "The Theater of the Air," one of radio's most elaborate productions, went before a weekly audience. In 1943 it was moved to the Medinah Temple, where Marion Claire and other stars played before 3,000 to 4,000 spectators each week.

The idea for Colonel McCormick's participation in the regular broadcasts was suggested by WGN producer William A. Bacher. McCormick's performances were exhilarating. His written script usually was on hand for advance timing, but the Colonel, whose editorial motto was "Undominated," was no man to be intimidated by a stop watch. He spoke at rates of his own choosing and interpolated freely. His voice broke when emotion moved him; sometimes he went on to discuss matters that had just occurred to him. The director in the control room, and the operetta's cast, chorus, and conductor, stood by for emergency deletions. It was a matter of both pride and skill that "Theater of the Air" presentations always ended with a triumphant rendition of the theme.

Revolutionary battles were fitting subjects for the Colonel's rhetorical style. Thus, as the Continental Army crossed the ice filled Delaware on Christmas Eve, he described the hushed commands, the perilous foray, the hated Hessians revelling in rude wassail. And then—

Music swept in. "Next week," the Colonel announced, "next week we'll learn how this battle came out!"

Bass player Demitri Schmoklovski addressed first violinist Michael Wilkomerski in an anguished whisper: "We're citizens. We've got our papers. Who wins? He's got to tell us!"



Miss Claire



Producer Bacher

The Colonel, right; second man to his left, Marvin (Millionaire) Miller; Harold (Gildersleeve) Perry, extreme left, second from top; front row trio—Henry Weber, Miss Claire, Bacher.





WGN's FM station (W59C, later WGNB) went on the air on March 1, 1941. The previous year WGN began 24 hour operation, and the annual All-Star football game, the World Series, and the pro football championships were all WGN-Mutual exclusives. In the fall of 1941 the station broadcast the referee's pre-game instructions for the first time in the Western football conference at the Northwestern-Michigan game.





WGN-Mutual coverage of the two political conventions that year logged more hours than that of any other station or network. Reporting special events—or disaster—meant going wherever news was being made.





The station previewed the Police and Fire Thrill Show in 1941. The announcer—Ward Quaal. Farm news was always good news to a large segment of the Chicagoland audience. Hal Totten conducted remotes for the “Farm Hour.”

War time programs were integrated into the station’s schedule. At Fort Sheridan, Jack Brickhouse pitched the questions fielded by soldiers and sailors in the baseball quiz “Play Ask-It-Ball.” Jess Kirkpatrick was the umpire.



Totten  
Kirkpatrick, Brickhouse







Story of a bomber: Brickhouse



Such patriotic programs as “Americans at the Ramparts,” “On Stage Chanute” (a remote variety show from Chanute Air Force Base), “War Worker Awards,” and “America Unlimited” helped spur civilian production and military recruitment. Radio became a direct medium of government-to-citizen mass communication.



Network broadcasts, such as the navy version of the Battle of Midway and the eye witness accounts of the epic landing on D-Day, will be long remembered. But in 1943 WGN scored a radio scoop of its own, broadcasting the news of Mussolini's downfall to 35,000 baseball fans in Wrigley Field. Robert F. Hurleigh, director of the newsroom, stayed at the microphone 40 hours during a news vigil precipitated by a Japanese surrender offer.



The grin that shook the Axis—  
General Dwight D. Eisenhower returns in triumph to Chicago

Hurleigh



Three employees who had started their WGN careers when the station opened its doors in 1924 helped celebrate its 20th anniversary. Myrtle Stahl, educational director, posed with Fred Meinken, assistant music librarian and composer of “Wabash Blues.” The third was Leon Benditzky, pianist with the WGN Symphony Orchestra.

The station’s chief continuity writer observed his 15th July with WGN in 1944. He had this to say some years later:

“Radio and television people are too often given to breezy accounts of their labors. The implied attitude toward broadcasting is one of nonchalance. Yet the fact is that most of the work is exacting and tedious. Writing is slow work. Staging is a complicated chore. Hours are long. Frustrations, many. Ratings do not concern the writer or producer as much as what he feels to be the poverty of his inspiration or the feebleness of his powers.

“The business man writes a business letter and is done with it. The writer or player or producer functions in the shadow—always in the shadow—of greatness. So Chayefsky might have written this script, or Ed Begley played it, or Dave Susskind directed. High achievement places a sobering hand upon the creators of significant entertainment. Even the hack writer or the routine producer has before him (at the very moment he is falling short of distinction) the tormenting vision of some greater talent, some unattained perfection.

“It is only the arrant outsider who believes breezy accounts of the game called broadcasting.”



Stahl, Meinken



Francis Coughlin



Nanette Sargent, Sherman Dryer

"The Human Adventure," a drama series prepared in conjunction with the University of Chicago and the Encyclopedia Britannica, in 1945 won the coveted George Foster Peabody Radio Award as the nation's outstanding educational program.

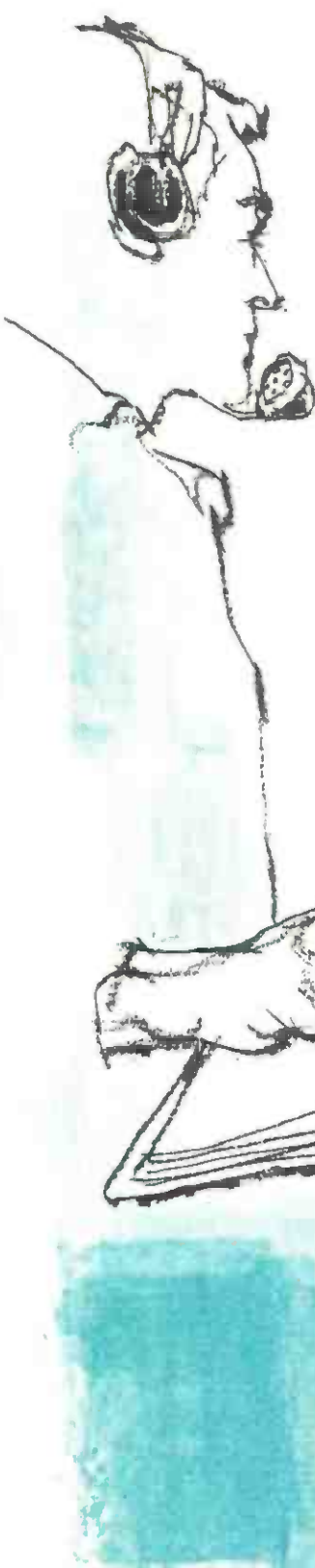
One FM transmission was hailed as revolutionary. In May, 1946, a four page "facsimile edition" of The Tribune was beamed by WGNB from the Tower to Colonel McCormick's Cantigny Farm.





But FM broadcasting, which continued to emphasize music and drama, was having little commercial success. Something new was in the ether.

It was part of WGN's plans for post-war expansion. The station already had ordered a new transmitter and—more significantly—filed an application for a television station.



“We are undertaking our adventure into television at the earliest possible moment. We are setting out as soon as we can. We are going as far as we are able.”

—Colonel McCormick, in a 1945 radio address.

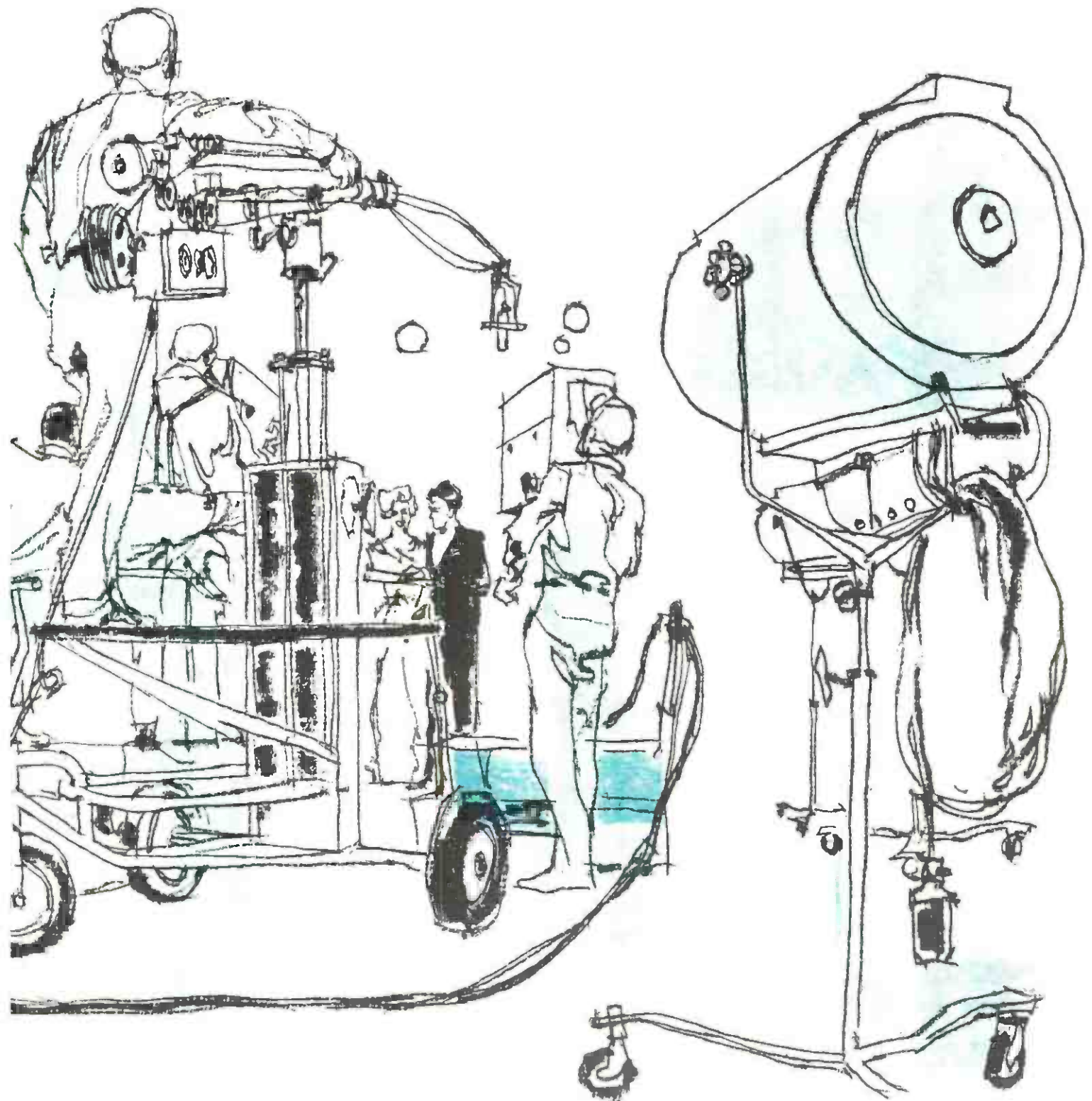
“As independent stations with no commitments to make our facilities available to the networks, we can serve better the vast Chicagoland radio and television audience.”

—J. Howard Wood, president of WGN, Inc., in 1956.



*Part III*

ADVENTURE INTO TELEVISION





McCaffrie



Ross

*Take a year—any year:*

In 1958 WGN radio addressed the largest radio audience in its 34 year history. Shaped to a mid-century pattern of music, news, sports, and public service, it was (and remains) the leading independent radio station in Chicago and one of the leading clear channel stations in the country.

A typical weekday schedule, starting at 6 a.m., with newscasts every hour (and, by executive order, no rock 'n' roll), included:

“The Eddie Hubbard Show,” “The Pat McCaffrie Show with Virginia Gale,” “Tello Test,” “The Pierre Andre Show,” “Compliments of (Dick) Coughlan,” “The Gadabout” (Paul Saliner), “Time to Reflect,” “Country Fair,” “The Wally Phillips Show,” “The Palmer House Ensemble” (Ralph Ginsburg), “John Mallow Presents,” “The Brickhouse-Hubbard Show,” “The Sports Scoreboard,” “Point of Law,” “The Tribune Sports Desk” (Vince Lloyd and the Tribune’s sports staff), “Panorama” (Robert Trendler, Frazier Thomas), “The Cliff Mercer Show,” “Tunes from Talman” (Norman Ross), and—during the baseball season—broadcasts of all Cubs games with Jack Quinlan and Lou Boudreau.



Virginia Gale



John Mallow



Paul Saliner, Hal Turner





George Strickler, Assistant Sports Editor,  
 Dave Condon, Conductor of "The Wake of the News,"  
 Wilfrid Smith, Sports Editor and Maurice Shevlin, Race Editor.



Boudreau-Quinlan



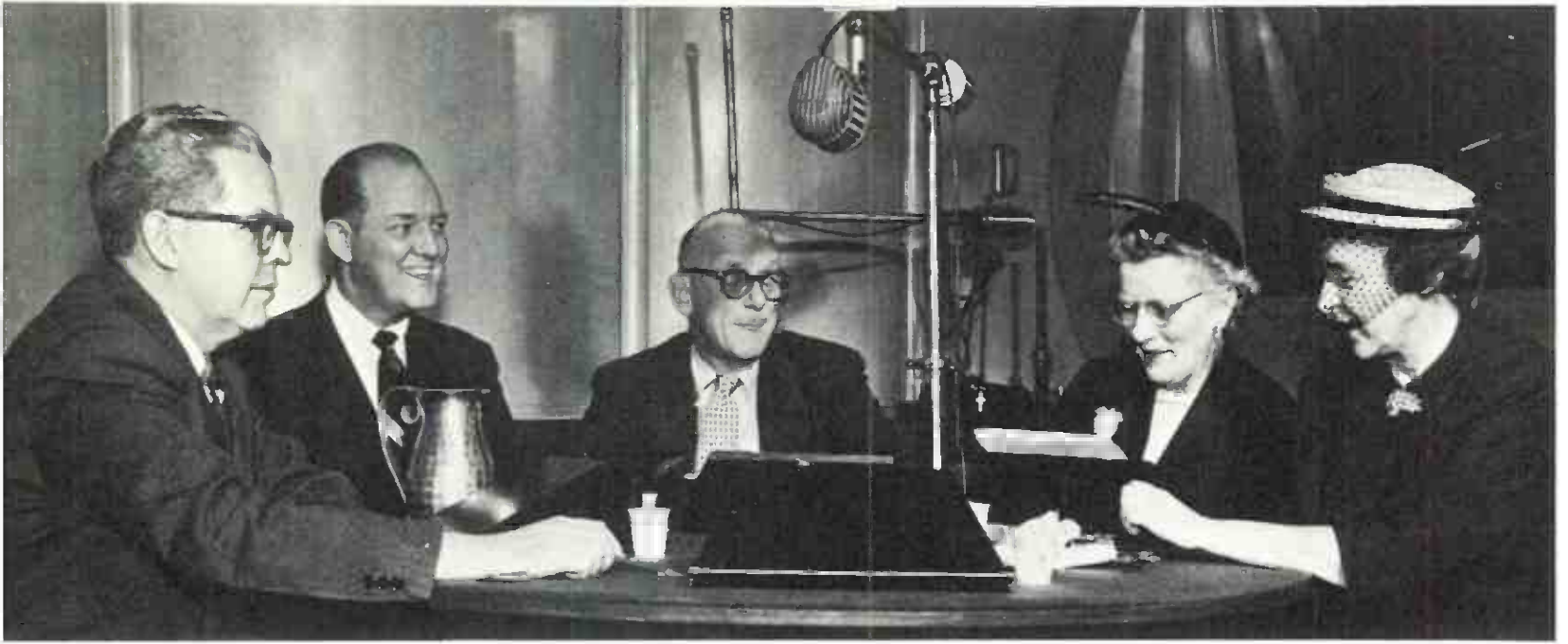
Andre



Brickhouse-Hubbard



Robert Trendler, Betty Bryan



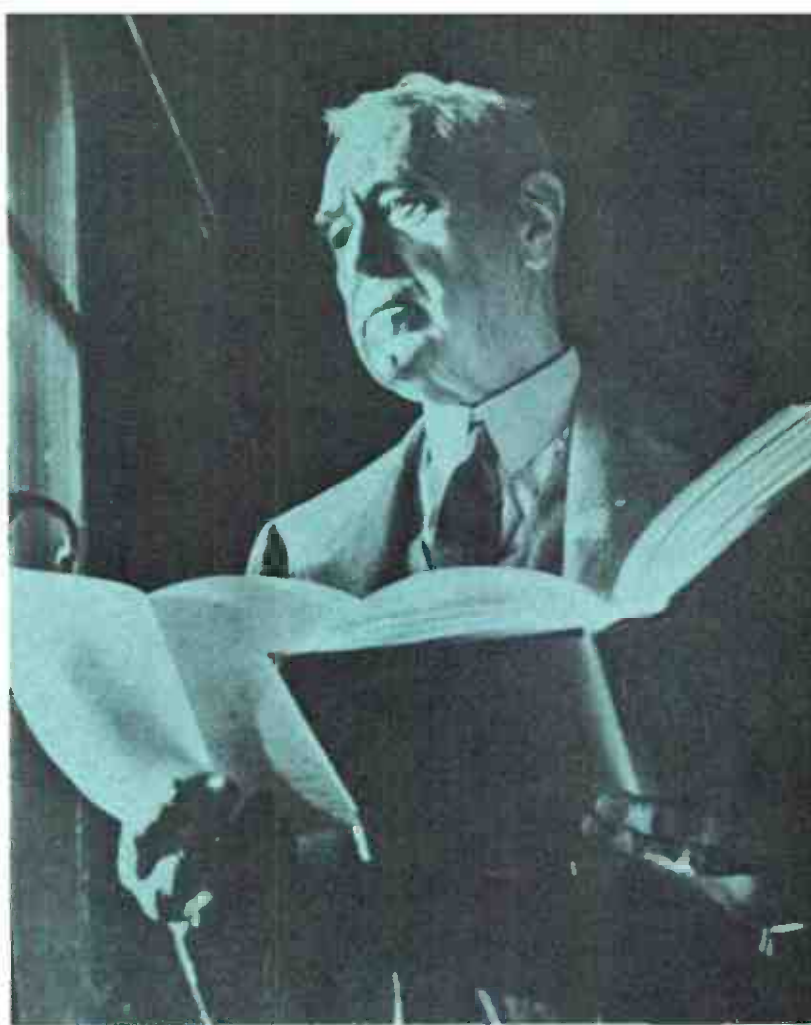
Moderator James H. McBurney, left. The subject: "What Should Children Read?"

But—a decade earlier—WGN’s ideals (later expressed as “Quality, Integrity, and Responsibility!”) were put to severe test when the sudden rise of television made its stunning impact on radio. Although TV was to become a national obsession almost overnight, in the beginning wartime restrictions had held it back. Many radio broadcasters gravely

underestimated its potential.

So radio continued to do its usual competent job with such longstanding programs as the Northwestern University “Reviewing Stand.” And the 1948 Presidential election again brought together WGN and Tribune political pundits, such as Spencer Allen and Washington bureau chief Walter Trohan.





Colonel McCormick



Chesser M. Campbell, who had supervised WGN operation in the late forties, was, at the time of his death in 1960, president of the Tribune Company, publisher of the Tribune, and a director of WGN, Inc.



Studio 10—McCormick's personal broadcasting headquarters.

To meet the challenge of TV, radio desperately needed new program concepts. But these were to be evolved only through a period of confusion and trial. The WGN radio staff was large, station tradition lavish, and the struggle painful. The critical years were from 1948 to the middle fifties. It was during this time, too, that Colonel McCormick's health slowly declined. He died on April 1, 1955, in his 75th year. But new executives would encourage fresh broadcasting approaches.



WGN Newsreel crew and county police chief Patrick Touhy.



The "flying hand" technique of Al Morgan.



The Cliff Johnson family gets a haircut.



Deejay Bill Evans (left) interviews Henry Morgan.



Tom Moore's "Ladies Fair."



Studio 1A, remodeled. Control booth below, client's booth above. On stage, the cast of "Theater of the Air."  
 Below: Henry Weber, WGN musical director, soprano Nancy Carr, and Marion Claire, production supervisor.

Some of these concepts had already been tested after the initial shock of TV: The shift from the single-sponsor program to the spot announcement. The evolution of "formula programming"—music, news, and sports. The careful selection of radio personalities. Although WGN continued to lead Chicago stations, well intentioned shortcuts sometimes led to a lapse in standards. But generally the WGN entertainment product was of high quality.

There were casualties. "The Theater of the Air" sounded its last lingering note in 1956. WGN-FM was no more. Morale fell.





Ward L. Quaal

Then on June 8, 1956, the Chicago Tribune announced: "Ward L. Quaal returns to WGN, Inc. on Aug. 1, replacing Frank P. Schreiber, who has resigned as vice president and general manager, WGN President J. Howard Wood announced yesterday. Quaal began his career in the radio-television industry as an employee of WGN, Inc., in 1941. For the last four years he has been vice president and assistant general manager of Crosley Broadcasting corporation in Cincinnati . . ."

Quaal had begun his broadcasting career as writer and announcer at station WDMJ in Marquette, Michigan, in 1936. He joined WGN the day after his graduation from the University of Michigan. As junior announcer and a minor executive, he voiced the first FM broadcast that year and within months, it is believed, became the first commercial announcer on an FM station. After naval service, he returned to WGN as special assistant to the general manager. In 1949 he left to become director of the Clear Channel Broadcasting Service in Washington, D.C.

Ward Quaal gave priority to three objectives: (1) re-identify WGN and WGN-TV as vital, independent stations serving local and regional audiences, (2) re-establish public acceptance and internal morale, and (3) place both stations on a sound and self-sustaining financial basis. By November, 1956, WGN, Inc. was in full compliance with the requirements of the broadcasting code. Quaal's efforts in behalf of good taste and sound merchandising were uncompromising and costly. There were clashes with agencies and sponsors. But not one sponsor withdrew during the transition. By November WGN-TV was enjoying the best year in its nine year history, and radio's gross billing for the month was its highest in 32 years.

Relatively few radio specialists had taken to TV. The new TV people—apt to be younger, more



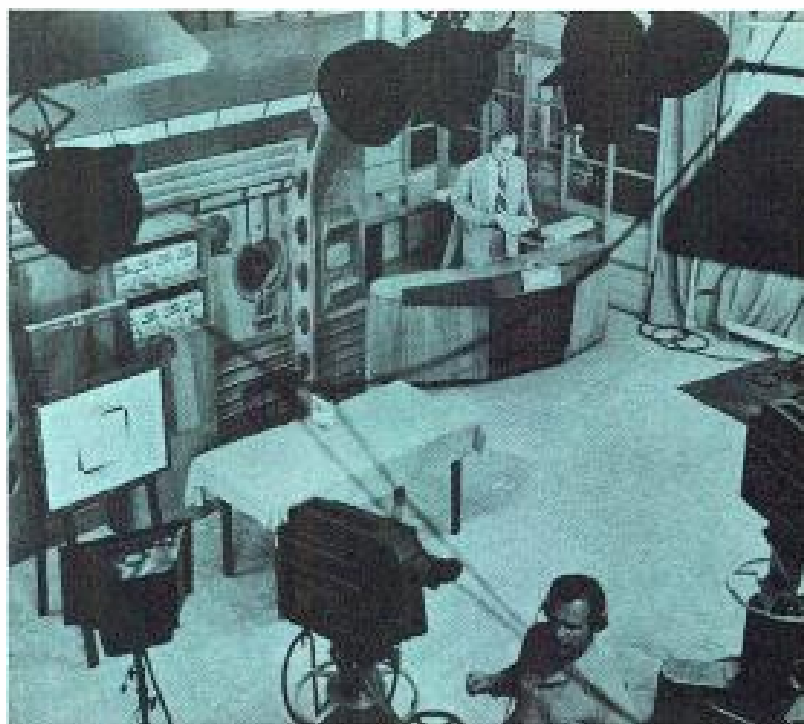
Producer-director-announcer Quaal created "Your Right to Say It" in 1946; later it became a WGN-TV program. At the microphone is Dr. Preston Bradley; Quaal is seated at left.

adventurous, and less well established—advanced rapidly through luck, skill, and improvisation. The radio engineer became the camera man; the mail boy became first a floor manager, then director, finally producer.

Special visual effects often were invented out of desperation. John Carradine starred in an early TV playlet inspired by “The Count of Monte Cristo.” Seeking to escape from a dreadful dungeon, the star spent most of his time in rags trying to loosen a crucial rock. His task was to force his way not to freedom, but to the very boots of a grim warden. The rock was made of plaster of Paris—which hardens rapidly. The play was half an hour long. The star struggled manfully to dig his tunnel. Behind the set, stage carpenter Augie Hoffman struggled just as manfully, smiting the rock with a stout mallet. As Carradine struck, the wall appeared to strike back. At the climax Hoffman’s mallet punched a dramatic hole in the hardened compound, and the pellet smote Carradine full on the forehead. He had just time to get his head through the barrier and register a despairing final camera take. The bruise on his forehead and the dismay on his features lent the production a note of unsurpassed realism.

Television wasn’t exactly a new idea at WGN. Station engineers had kept in touch with technical developments since 1927, and receiving equipment had been available in Tribune Tower since 1931. WGN ordered transmitting gear in 1944, and Colonel McCormick assured his radio audience:

“We are undertaking our adventure into television at the earliest possible moment. We are setting out as soon as we can. We are going as far as we can. Our partners in the enterprise are the American people. They, and not we, have determined our standards for us. Those standards are the world’s best.”



Colonel McCormick





Premiere, with Lee Bennett

Chicago's first postwar television installation, and the city's second commercial TV station—WGN-TV, channel 9—went into daily operation on April 5, 1948. Two valiant experimental stations (W9XBK and a Zenith outlet) had begun telecasts in the late 1930s, and in 1943 WBKB had taken to the air. (WENR-TV, which began operations in the fall of 1948, later was merged with WBKB.) WNBQ started telecasts in January, 1949. WBBM-TV and Chicago's educational TV outlet, WTTW, date from the fifties.

WBKB, WNBQ, and WBBM-TV were to be integrated with national networks. WGN-TV was briefly affiliated with CBS and—later and longer—with DuMont.

The new million dollar station on channel 9 telecast its first formal program on the evening of April 4, 1948. A gala two hour program with Lee Bennett at the microphone, the premiere came from the main studio of the WGN Building on Michigan Avenue. But it was relayed by a mobile truck called "The Blue Goose," and the new studios for daily telecasts and the antenna were located atop the Daily News Building at 400 West Madison Street.

Ironically, the man whose vision had brought about WGN radio and WGN-TV was ill and unable to be present at the inaugural telecast. His remarks were read by John Mallow:







"The Blue Goose"

"The pioneer (Colonel McCormick had written) . . . felt that in casting off the old he was adventuring toward something more splendid and more spacious. He marked out the trail, not only for himself, but for others. He went among the first, and there was high adventuring in his going.

"It is this feeling of adventuring that I would communicate to you. In television we have embarked upon another of America's adventures. Come along with us! Let us share the adventure together."

Chicagoland came along. Larry Wolters, the Tribune's radio and now television editor, reported that the reception of the premiere telecast was technically excellent.

Test transmission had begun earlier in 1948. The first telecast was a remote of the Golden Gloves tournament in March. The official opening programs on April 4 and 5 were the first of many Chicago telecasts of live music on a regular basis, and the first programs of the kind under a new contract with the American Federation of Musicians. The Chicago contract was, in fact, the first union-station-musicians' agreement to be negotiated in the TV industry.

Regular programming, assigned to about 60 men and women, began on April 5 from two rented studios plus an auditorium in a Loop department store.

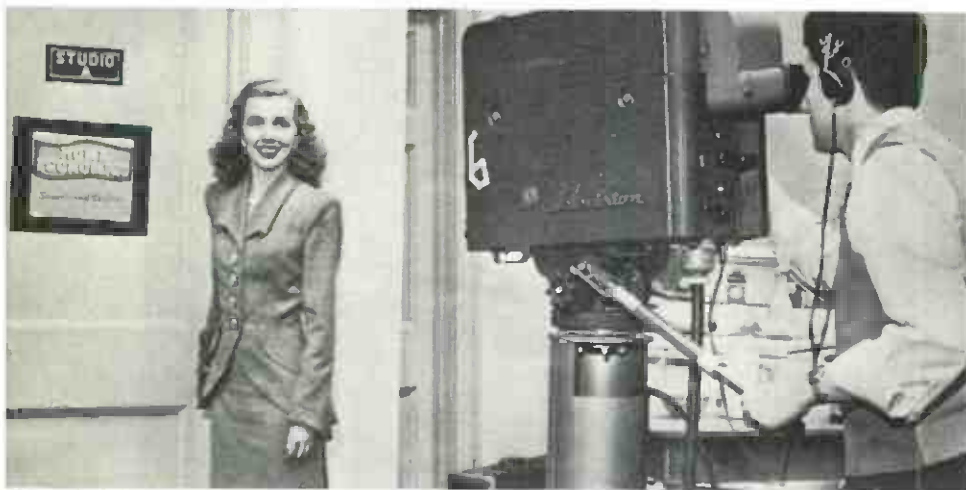


The first day's schedule, beamed at 16,000 sets (a quarter of them in taverns), began at 2 p.m. with a half hour newsreel. Then Barbara Barclay presided over a homemakers program from Goldblatt's. From 3 to 5—test pattern. From 5 to 6, Dick Baker, comic, singer, and pianist, shared billing with the Art Nelson puppets in "Wonder House." At 7:30, the "WGN Scrap Book." Then the weather, sports, "Sportsman's Corner," and a feature film.



Barbara Barclay

"Two Ton" Baker and heckler, Half Ton.



"Sauces and Skillets" class with Angel Casey.

In May WGN-TV acquired the first motion picture package, 24 Alexander Korda pictures, through WPIX, the New York Daily News' TV station, which was scheduled to go on the air a month later. Among these were "The Thief of Bagdad" (Conrad Veidt), "That Hamilton Woman" (Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier), and "Rembrandt" (Elsa Lanchester).





"Accused"

By July 1949 a new antenna adorned Tribune Tower. The first regular show (a cooking program) to be telecast from WGN's own Studio 6A was aired on January 23, 1950. Six of the 14 radio studios in the WGN Building were converted to TV that year. Other telecasts from studios at the Chicago Fair grounds included a home economics show, a feature called "Miss U.S. Television," and the highly inventive "They Stand Accused," a drama series in which judge and lawyers were actual attorneys. On July 6 the studios were formally dedicated. Radio concerts of "The Chicago Theater of the Air" continued throughout the season. "Your Figure Ladies," a long time radio exercise program, made its TV debut in October.



Hal Turner, Ami Silvestre, Paul Fogarty





By 1951 TV had “arrived” (in terms of content and direction) with the sports telecast, the feature film, the telethon, the careful reportage of major public events. The 1950 off-year election (Senator Taft, running strong in Ohio, was to reach for even higher office two years later) had been covered from the new Studio 7A, using three sets, three cameras, assorted visual aids, and a crew of 20.

“Down You Go,” a witty and literate panel-quiz, was launched. It was to enjoy a five year run on DuMont and two other networks. Its mail count would reach 185,000 letters a month.

When a warehouse on the Chicago river caught fire one dour winter night, the WGN-TV remote crew illuminated the scene for telecasting with a giant searchlight.



Bergen Evans, Fran Coughlin, Toni Gilman, Robert Breen, Carmelita Pope



Among other pioneering telecasts were the exclusive coverage of 154 major league baseball games, President Harry S. Truman's first telecast from Chicago, the Chicagoland Music Festival, the All-Star Football game, and an eight game college football schedule (including remotes from Northwestern, Notre Dame, and the University of Illinois)—all in 1948.

"The WGN-TV Chicagoland Newsreel" was one of the few station newsreel departments in the nation and the only one in Chicago that year.



Chicagoland Newsreel



Newsreel crews developed great agility in covering their assignments. When smoke and sirens announced a fire in the Boul-Mich Cocktail Lounge (a popular resort across from Tribune Tower and the WGN Building) camera crews took stations at windows overlooking the scene. Somebody rushed to Frank P. Schreiber, who was in his office watching patrons rushing out of the lounge. "We've got cameras on it," the messenger said. "Shall we—"

"Quiet," the station manager commanded. "I am counting announcers!"

The Newsreel's program of special events: the Railroad Fair, the Park Ridge Lincoln Pageant, the Automobile Show, General Douglas MacArthur's visit to the city in 1951, and the national political conventions of 1952.



General MacArthur

Adlai E. Stevenson accepts the nomination.





Bruce Foote, Audrey Paul, Nancy Carr,  
John Barclay, John Stamford



"This Is Music" anticipated later musical variety shows in form, content, and photography. The much celebrated "Chicago style" was as free wheeling as its radio speech, as mobile as its television cameras. Channel 9 continued to trailblaze in 1952 —with "The Armchair Philosopher," the first Chicago educational program offering college credit, and "Faith of Our Fathers," a nonsectarian half hour. The Chicago Automobile Show of 1952, refused by other stations as beyond their capabilities, was reported in a two hour remote telecast. During the middle fifties, about half of all programs were local and live.





Host Mike Wallace, left

TV makeup was new to fledgeling facilities people, and the “Tavern Pale Beauty Contest” (Mike Wallace, host) presented its special challenge: girls, girls, girls. In two years about 600 of them required makeup from head to foot—applied mostly by spray guns and sponges in the machine shop next to the dressing room. Bob Stebbins and George Petterson were the lucky fellows—but they reported their labors unenviable.

Other well remembered shows included a sometimes raucous “Hi Ladies,” (first with Tommy Bartlett, then Jack Payne, then Mike Douglas); a sometimes saccharine Morris B. Sachs “Amateur Hour” with Bob Murphy and the very listenable “The Music Show” with Robert Trendler.



Murphy, Sachs



Jack Payne, “Hi Ladies”







The 1956 G.O.P. national convention came and went, electronically. Then the Chicagoland Fair in 1957, the "V.I.P." charity shows, the civic series "Spotlight on Chicago," the rollicking music of "International Cafe," and, for exuberant teenagers, Wally Phillips on "Club 9."

Wally Phillips



Emcee Rudy Orisek, left, white tie.



Miss Rosemary



Miss Frances

Six children's programs, among others, helped make happy television history in Chicago: the nationally famous "Ding Dong School" with Miss Frances Horwich, "Romper Room" with Miss Rosemary Rapp, "Lunchtime Little Theater" with Ted Zeigler and Ned Locke, "Garfield Goose and Friend" (Frazier Thomas), "Bugs Bunny and Friends" (Dick Coughlan), and "The Blue Fairy."

Thomas

Coughlan



In January, 1958, more than a fifth of WGN-TV telecasts were in the area of public service—addressed to a midwest audience from the station serving with “maximum power from the highest tower.” Among its priceless contributions, WGN in 1957 presented its 30 year collection of musical arrangements (operatic, concert, and popular) to the University of Illinois.

Baseball fans had dialed 720 kilocycles and channel 9 for a decade. WGN coverage brought crowds out to the ball parks and into Tribune Tower’s Nathan Hale Court.



Illinois' Dr. David Dodds Henry, Ward Quaal



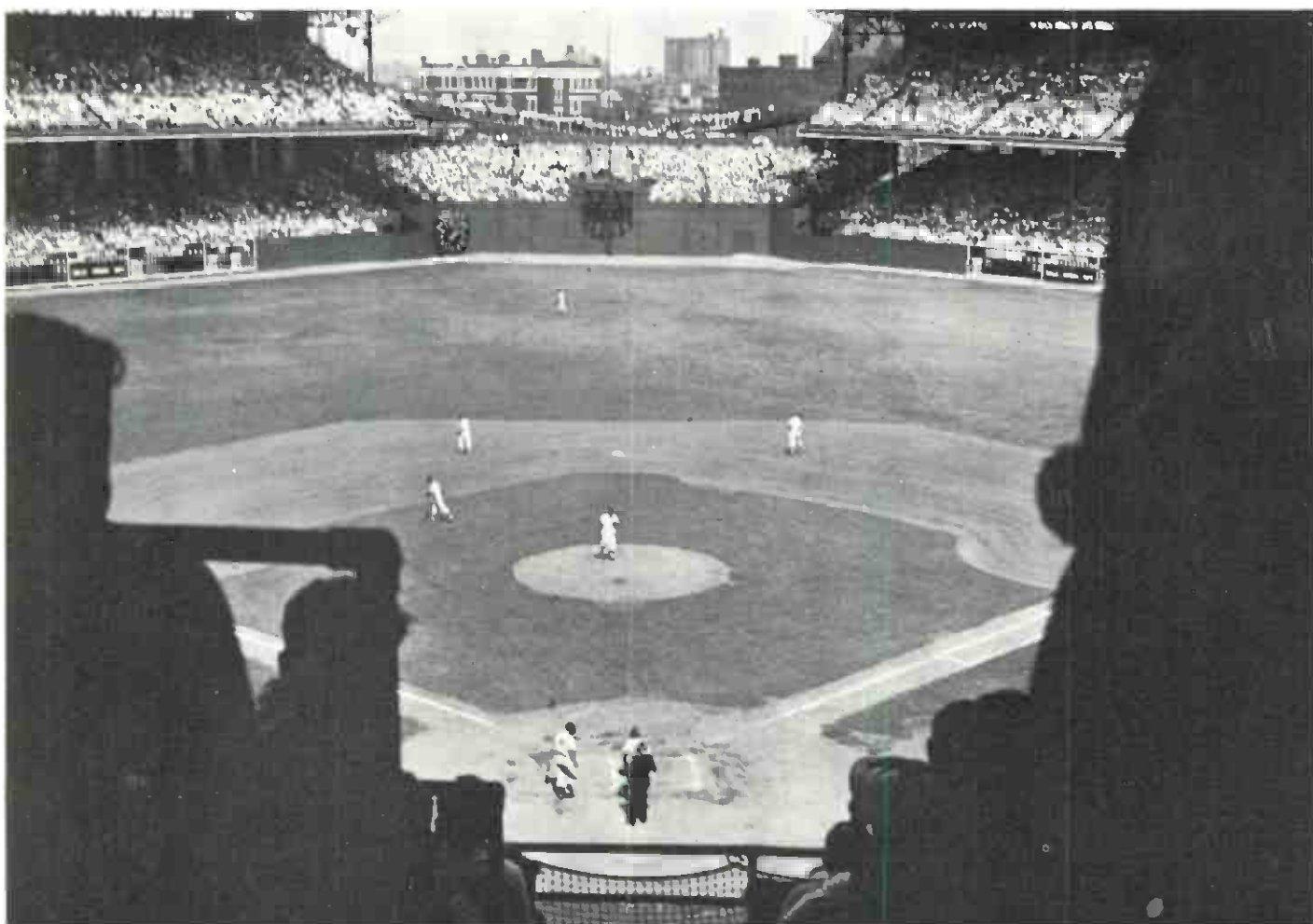


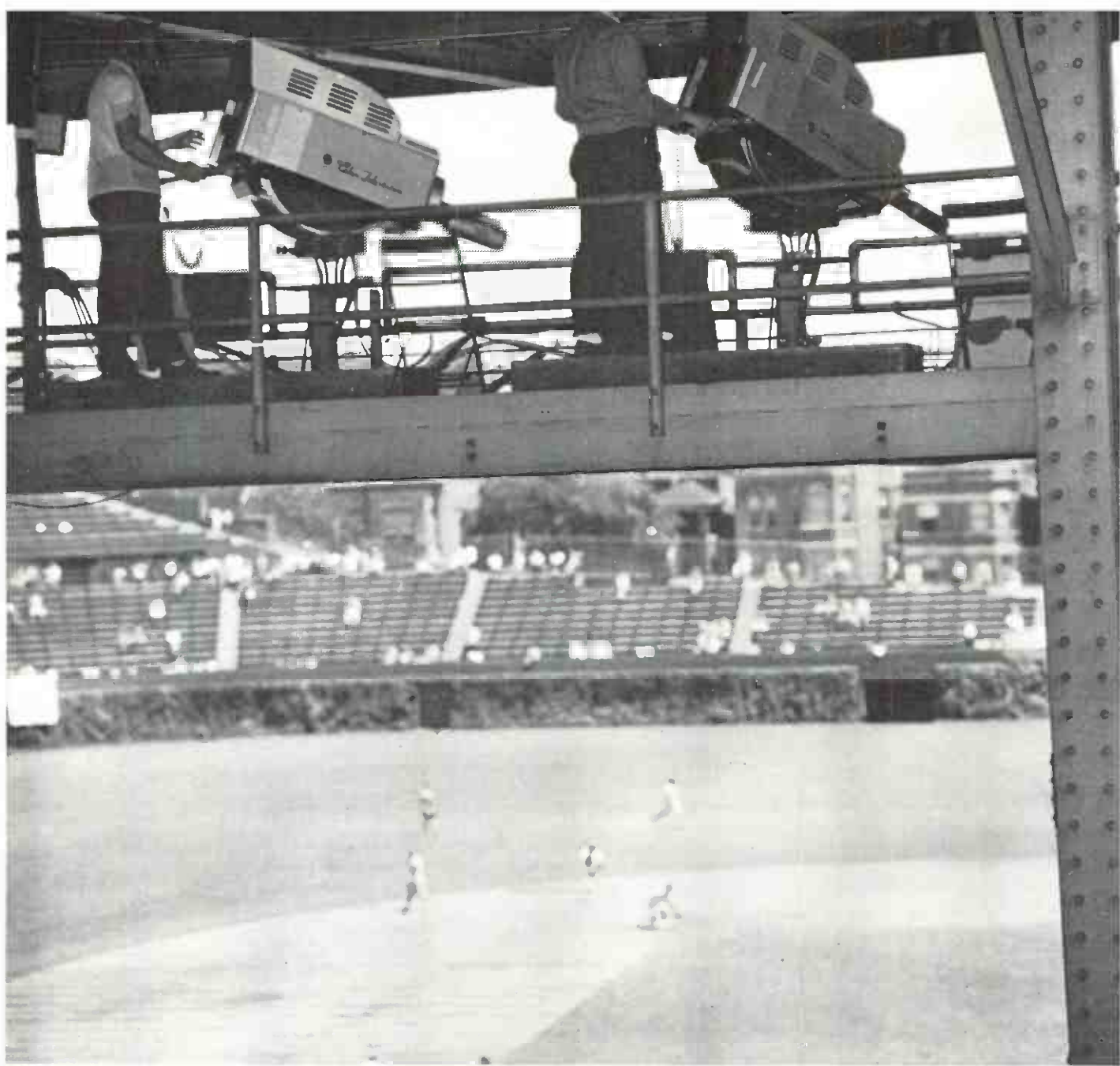
Brickhouse

The baseball schedule for 1958 included for the first time the exclusive coverage (with Jack Brickhouse in the TV booth) of all Chicago White Sox day games from Comiskey Park, all Cubs games at Wrigley Field, plus WGN radio coverage of *all* Cubs games.

Baseball is the most difficult of sports to televise. WGN-TV directors and crews are still hearing about the time the cameras followed a bird in flight—instead of the ball. Baseball telecasts offer an impressive illustration of the complexity of television in contrast to radio production.

Two announcers, two producers, and three technicians report baseball on radio—a total of seven in the ball park and the studio. Television demands more manpower: three performers, three directors, four cameramen, an audio man, video switcher, shader, engineering supervisor, plus studio personnel handling the game—a total of 23 to 25. On-camera performers aside, TV men usually outnumber their radio counterparts at a ratio of about 5 to 1.





But handling the 1960s' brand of baseball on TV is more complex than this. Ask Jack Jacobsen or LeRoy Olliger, channel 9's able baseball directors:

"We have logged 645 'shots' during a single game," says Jacobsen. "In following a single pitch, Camera 1 is on the pitcher, 2 is on the batter, 3 is on both, 4 is in center field. The director may call his shots in this sequence: Camera 2 on the batter, 1 on the pitcher, and 3 on both men the instant before the pitch. Then 4 showing how the batter looks to the pitcher and following the ball as it lances toward the strike zone—or 3, showing the batter and umpire from behind the plate.

"From the monitors in the mobile truck the director selects images for the air."



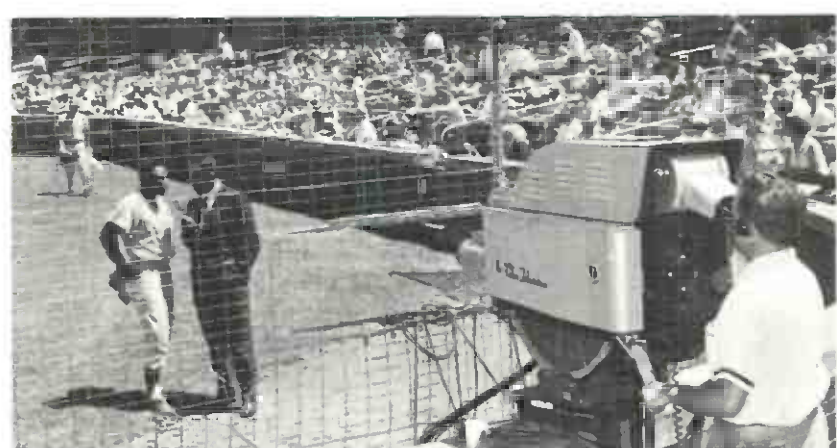
“Set up time for a black and white telecast (still quoting Jacobsen) takes about three hours. Color camera time takes about an hour longer. Break-down time takes one or two hours. Since we cover both parks, our cameras, crews, and mobile units must be ready to roll on a tight schedule.

“The size of the four color cameras presents added difficulties. They are hard to move quickly and tend to be slow in following a hard hit ball. And they have a tendency to waver in a brisk wind.”

After a decade, Jack Brickhouse and Vince Lloyd at the microphones and WGN-TV technicians at the cameras and controls found themselves in the nation’s only city with two major league teams. Competent critics called the station’s 1960 coverage the best in the country.



“Signal 10”



Vince Lloyd scores a TV first:  
a ball park interview with President Kennedy.



The response to the new WGN radio was encouraging. "Signal 10," begun in February, 1958, dealt with the staggering national problem of highway safety. It won the first Sloan Award given to a Chicago station. WGN was honored again in 1960 at a ceremony in New York attended by Quaal, Bruce Dennis, radio program manager and later news director, and Alexander Field, public affairs manager. Tribute was paid also to radio's award winning "Trafficopter" broadcasts, a feature begun in 1958 with Flying Officer Leonard Baldy, who met death in the line of duty two years later.



Officer Baldy,  
Bruce Dennis



Engle

The Illinois Associated Press Radio Association Awards for 1959 went to "Farm Outlook," the morning newscasts with Holland Engle, "The Tribune Sports Desk," the reporting of the murder of Roger Touhy after his release from prison, and the coverage of Queen Elizabeth's visit to Chicago.



Where Touhy diec from snotgun wounds.

"Long live the Queen!"







Other AP Awards went to WGN's reports of the marine landing demonstration at Montrose Avenue Beach and of the 1959 International Trade Fair.



Interview at the Fair: Lloyd Pettit.



Dorsey Connors asks Otto Kerner, Mayor Daley, and Jacob Arvey.



MacCormack



The variety of radio was outstanding. Broadcasting word-painted the exuberance of the Illinois delegation that had helped get the John F. Kennedy bandwagon rolling at the Democratic national convention in Los Angeles; the mellow midnight nostalgia of veteran announcer Franklyn MacCormack, and the aspiration of gifted young singers on "Opera Auditions of the Air," a talent search conducted by the Illinois Opera Guild and WGN.

A new WGN-TV tower (dedicated on January 15, 1956) rose 914 feet above ground level crowning the kingsize Prudential Building. Four remote units, seven studios, and 24 black and white and two color camera chains represented a capital investment of more than two million dollars.

From the Prudential tower WGN-TV beamed pace setting programs to entertain and inform its Chicagoland audience. The comedy team of Wally Phillips and Bob Bell brought back slapstick and added an ingenious brand of satire.



National Television Week, 1958

Phillips and Bell





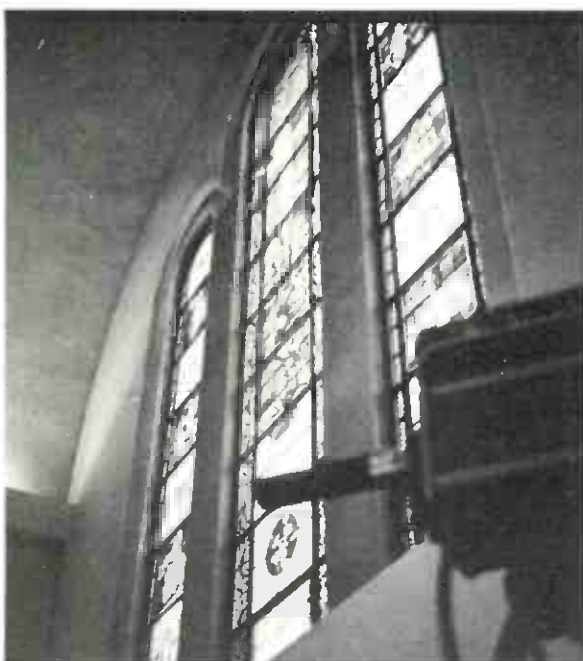
Carl Grayson's voice gave a ring of authority to newscasts direct from the Tribune newsroom.

"The Russian Revolution," eye witness films of the 20 years from the Czar to Lenin, was a memorable 1959 special. As it had always done, WGN-TV brought church services and religious programs to homes of all faiths.

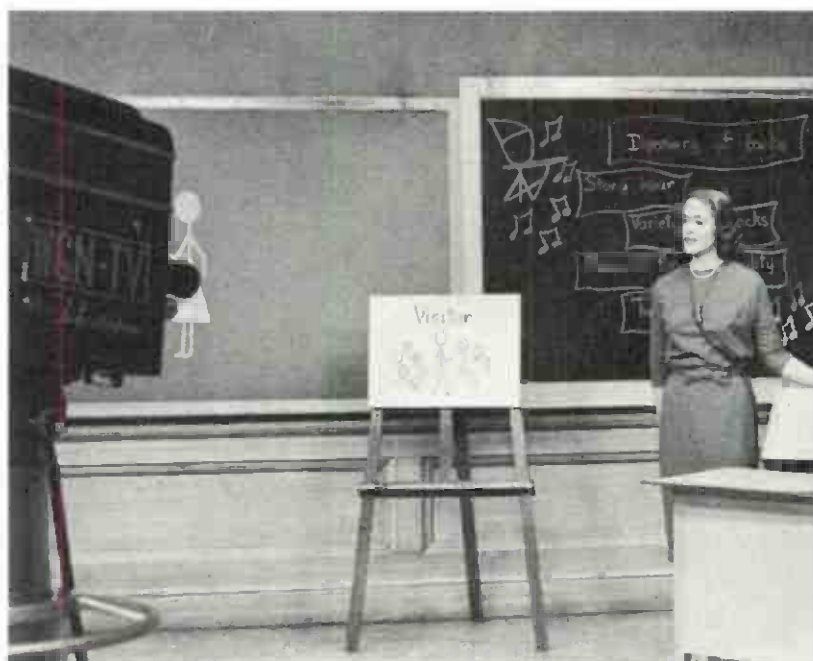
An unusual 36 week in-service training program in reading, for grade school teachers, was the equivalent of a grant of more than \$70,000 to the Chicago Board of Education.



Lenin



100



Reading for teachers

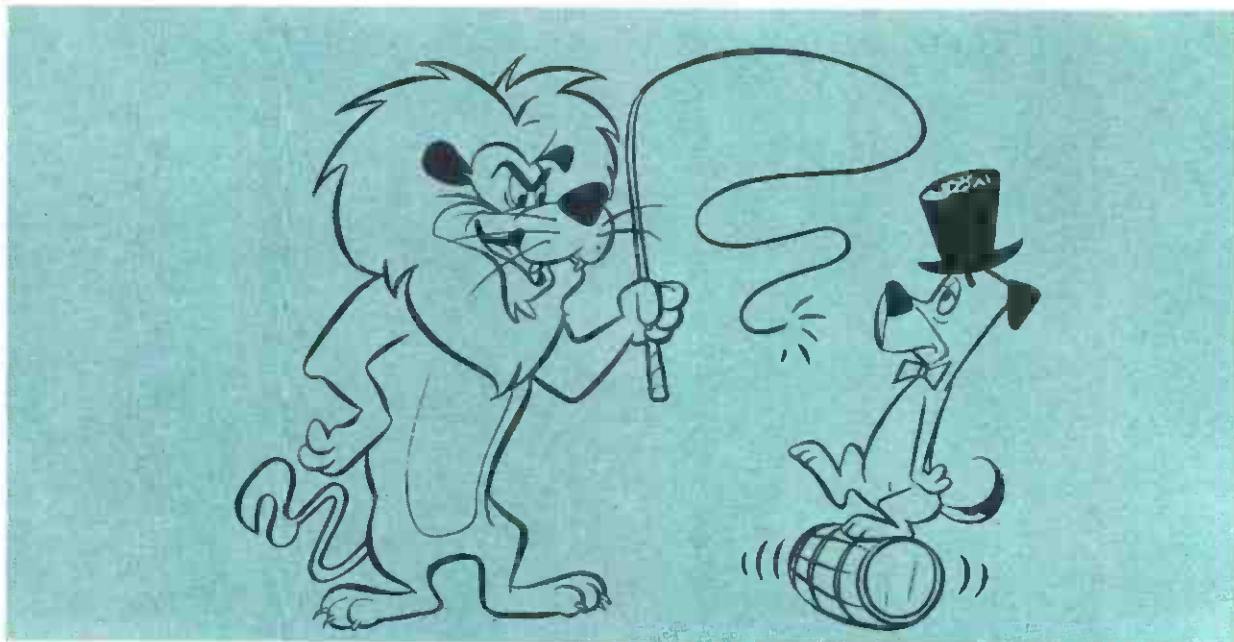
Phillips and Bell joined The Tribune's "Tower Ticker" columnist, Herb Lyon, in a fast moving celebrity show called "Midnight Ticker."

The most popular syndicated dog in television, Huckleberry Hound, attracted both kids and adults to channel 9 on Wednesday evenings.

Fran Allison headed the cast of one of local television's most ambitious day time programs, "The Fran Allison Show," telecast in color.



Lyon and Phillips



Huckleberry

Fran Allison





Jackie Van

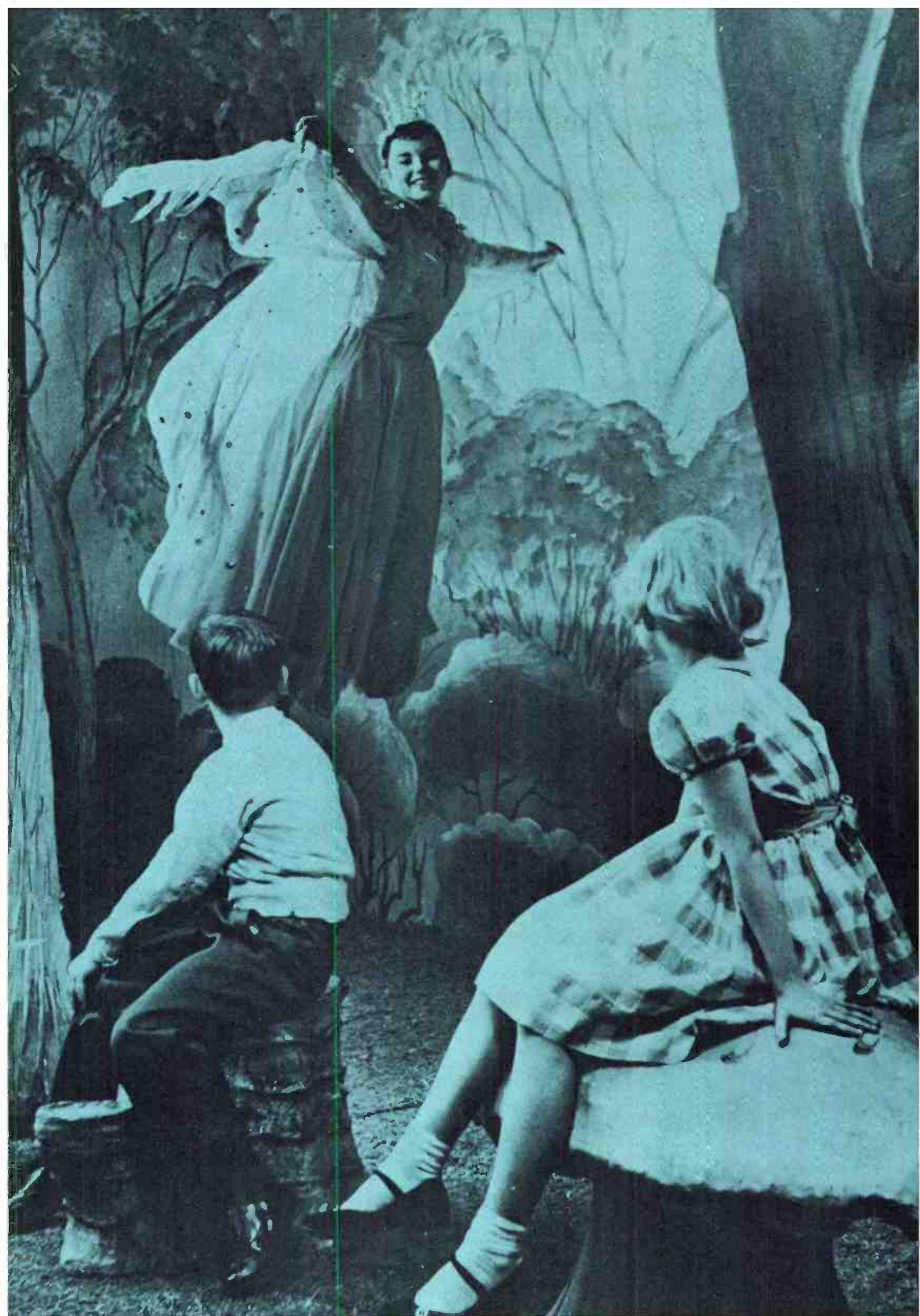
Color transmission equipment (ordered in 1952) had gone into operation in January, 1958, with color film sponsored by the Chicago Motor Club, and—live—“Ding Dong School,” song recitals by Jackie Van, and an incomparable children’s daily live and puppet fantasy.

“The Blue Fairy” brought national distinction to WGN-TV when it won the 1958 Peabody Award as the best children’s program—the only local TV feature cited. The show launched its star, 14 year old Brigid Bazlen, on a film career.

The important Ohio State Award went to a documentary film, “The Cardinal’s Two Hats,” a sensitive study of the career of Samuel A. Cardinal Stritch telecast shortly before his death.

Cardinal Stritch







The Chicago Symphony



Judith Anderson as "Medea" in  
"The Play of the Week"





The WGN-TV Hilton

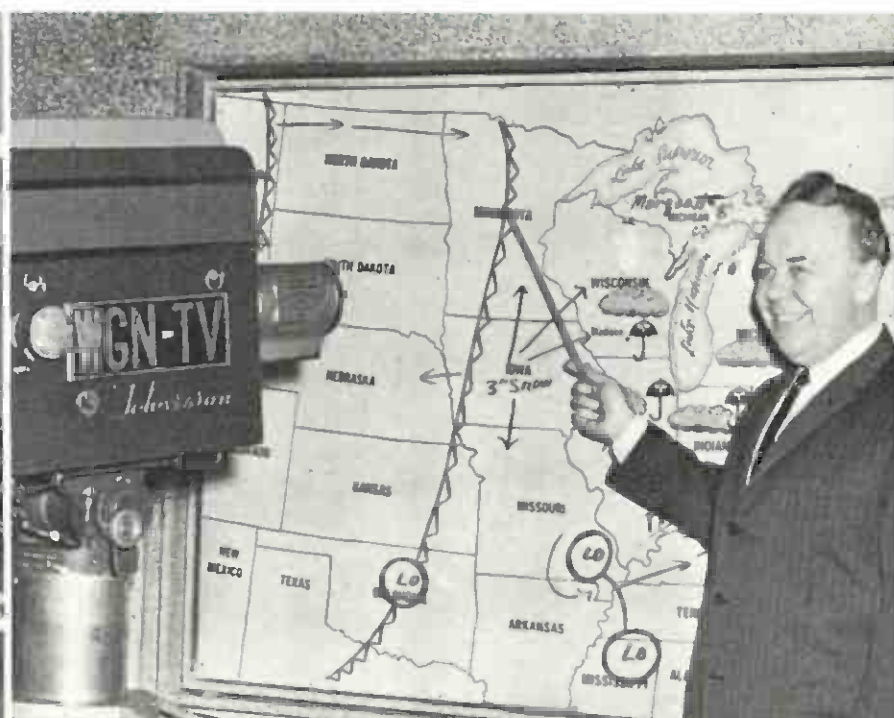
A popular Saturday dance program for collegians ("Spin Time with Jack Hilton") and a new noon-time show for youngsters ("Paddleboat") demonstrated the versatility of TV program manager Ed Warren's staff. Ned Locke also was featured as Channel 9's Weatherman on an ambitious, comprehensive half hour "Tenth Hour News" program with Jim Conway, Vince Lloyd, Carl Grayson, and the Tribune's John R. Thompson, Thomas Morrow, and William Clark.



Paddleboat Locke

Newsman Conway

Weatherman Locke



“Tempo 9,” chatty informal morning show for housewives and late risers, featured Dorsey Connors, Lloyd Pettit, and Ned Locke.

WGN-TV’s news department took honors in 1959—the Sigma Delta Chi award for coverage of an air crash near Midway airport.

Ron Terry’s lively “Polka Party” continued to attract the energetic (who rolled back their living room rugs) and to intrigue a large arm-chair audience as well.



Pettit, Connors, Locke





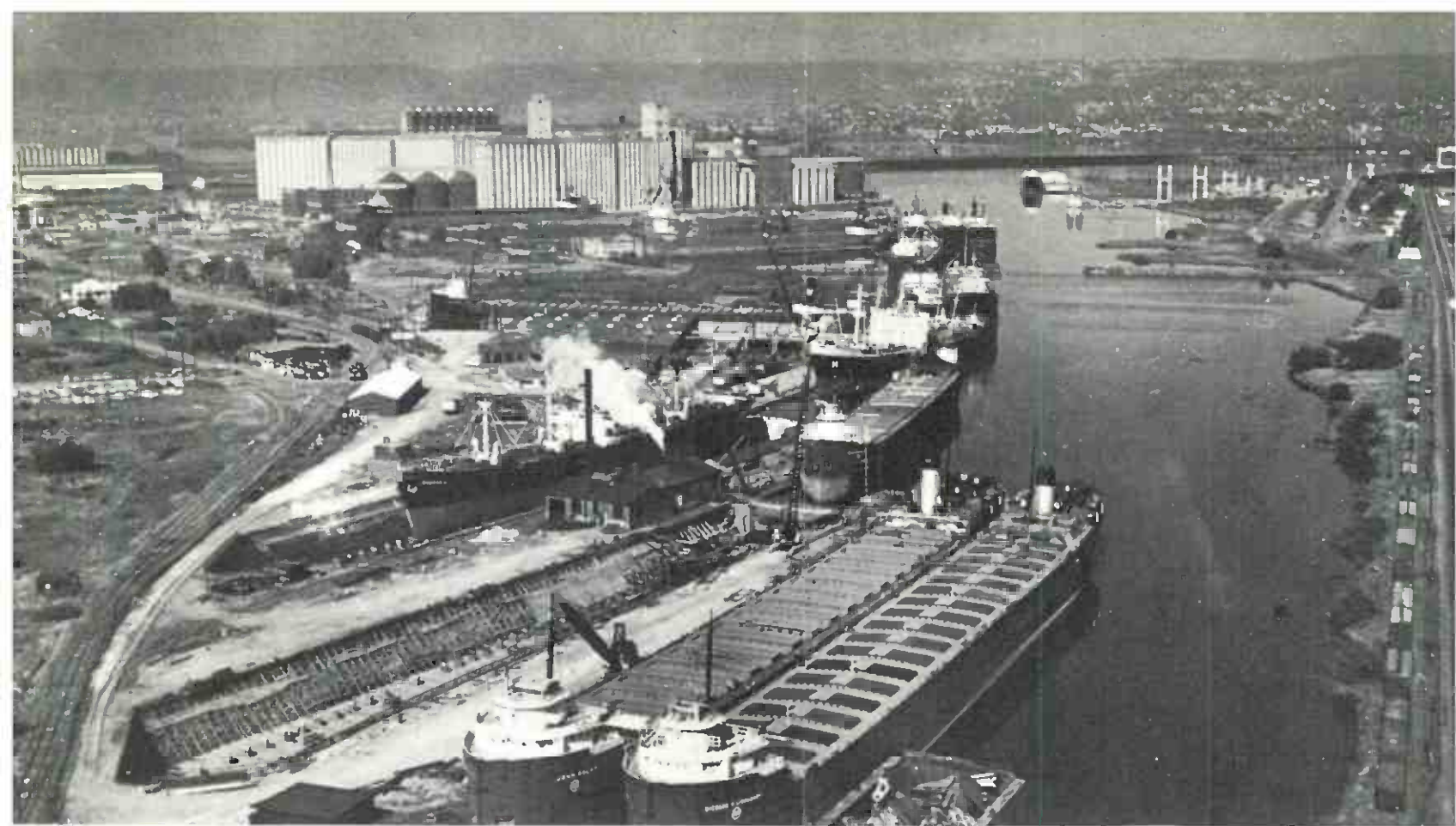
Mary Jane Clark was the hostess to pre-school children in an inventive daytime educational program, "Treetop House," telecast in color.

And—visions of the radio thirties—the "WGN Barn Dance" returned to Chicago. Orion Samuelson, WGN farm director, conducted the lively, informative "Milking Time" and "Country Fair."



Samuelson





The new Duluth-Superior harbor.



J. Howard Wood

In August, 1960, the purchase (for more than \$3,000,000) of stations KDAL and KDAL-TV in Duluth-Superior, twin ports at the head of Lake Superior, was announced by J. Howard Wood, president of WGN, Inc. and its parent Tribune Company, and publisher of The Chicago Tribune. The two CBS affiliates came under the supervision of Ward Quaal, who concluded the purchase in a meeting with Robert A. Detman, vice president of the Red River Broadcasting Company, Odin S. Ramsland, vice president of KDAL and KDAL-TV, and James A. Cotey, treasurer of WGN, Inc.



Tons of equipment moved with the 350 men and women of WGN, Inc., into the company's new two story building on a 14 acre site at 2501 Bradley Place on Chicago's north side in January, 1961. Official dedication ceremonies in June hailed the building as the country's largest and finest broadcasting facility housing a single radio and television company. (The vertical WGN Studio Building on Michigan Avenue was remodeled for Chicago's American, purchased by the Tribune Company in 1956.)



At 2501 Bradley Place: Pierre Andre, Dardanelle Hadley

Frazier Thomas gets a preview.



Telecasting from the new studios began on January 16. All live studio shows were telecast in color, as were the scheduled 130 daytime Cubs and White Sox baseball games—more live color programs than any other station, local or network. The WGN radio slogan adopted in 1960 was clearly a sober statement of fact: “First in sound, first in service, first in sports.” And—for both WGN and WGN-TV—first in the heart of Chicagoland.

