



THE HISTORY OF BROADCASTING IN MAINE

The First Fifty Years

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*WCSH radio's first General
Manager Bill Foss in 1925*

The
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of
Broadcasting
in
Maine

The
First
Fifty
Years

by
Ellie Thompson

Published by:

MAINE ASSOCIATION
OF BROADCASTERS

Augusta, Maine

*To the men and women who had the vision to
inform, educate and entertain the people of
Maine through the electronic media. . .*

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Foreword

It is not only a great privilege for me to be the chairman of the Maine Association of Broadcasters' History Committee, the group responsible for this book, but it also seems fitting. For it was my grandfather, Henry P. Rines, who was the original owner/operator of the first commercial radio station in Maine, WCSH-AM, Portland. I have always heard of my grandfather's exploits and of his daring but could only guess about the others who traveled the same path.

Here now is the amazing story of the men and women who had the same imagination and intuition that made up the "stuff" of the early radio and television pioneers in Maine. Their story is full of tremendous foresight and horrible decisions, humor and tragedy, brilliance and dumb luck. To me, the story reads more like classic tragedy than anything else. We have not told all the stories which could be told nor have we given every person the credit he or she deserves, for we were limited by time and space. If we have but touched on the major points and have given some examples worthy of recording, then we hope that you will feel as we do and will be aware of the important contributions which these men and women have made to the overall history of the State of Maine.

FREDERIC L. THOMPSON
President

WCSH - TV, Portland
WLBZ - TV, Bangor

Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible without the cooperation of a few select individuals who recognized the contribution of Maine's broadcasting pioneers and wanted to make certain that their history was recorded.

Ed Guernsey has made a second career out of studying the adventures of his cousin, Thompson Guernsey, the founder of WLBZ radio, Bangor. Ed himself was a very important player in Maine broadcasting, working for 35 years at WLBZ.

Norman Gallant and his wife Kay were co-hosts of their own radio show on WFAU-AM, Augusta in the 1940s. Norm later became the Executive Director of the Maine Association of Broadcasters, supplying several historical documents and allowing many History Committee meetings to be held in his home.

Terry Economy headed this committee for many years before business took him away from the project.

Don MacWilliams, Joe Eaton, Elby Stevens, Dan Kelly and Ben Hubley attended every meeting and have been invaluable in supplying information, time, energy and inspiration to the project.

Editing is an arduous task and took several dozen hours. Special thanks to Ben Hubley, Anne Reinhart, Don MacWilliams, Dan Kelly and WCSH-TV Station Manager Jeff Marks.

And last but not least, thanks to Ellie Thompson, who is the only person in America today who could have pulled this off. She has uncovered stories which no one else alive knew about. She has settled several running debates, some of which have gone on for decades. She has been tireless in her research, leaving no stone unturned and transferring many laurels to the proper persons. All of this took a great deal of time and energy, most of which she did from her home in Vermont.

All the elements have come together to make this a truly exciting history.

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Maine Radio in the 1920s

I MAGINE A WORLD with no VCRs, no satellites, no television, no fax machines. Staples of everyday life which we now take for granted like electricity, telephones and automobiles were in their infancy. A telegram was the quickest method of written communication.

Hence, radio was hailed as “the miracle of the age.” It was a new way of reaching large numbers of people and opened up a wealth of possibilities for entertainment, news, education, religion and politics. There was a surge of interest in this new wonder and little stations popped up like mushrooms throughout the state.

It was all so new and so experimental that it is no surprise that of the fifteen radio stations licensed in the 1920s, only three were still on the air by the end of the decade. Very little is known about most of them. They were brief bursts of enthusiasm with no financial support, often operated by a single person. Once the novelty wore off and the time and money it took to keep them on the air began to take their toll, they soon ran out of steam. In addition, once the concept that a radio station could be a business took hold, these smaller stations were overshadowed by larger and more powerful commercial stations.

WMB, Auburn

The first radio station to be licensed in Maine was **WMB** in Auburn. In 1916, recent high school graduate Thurl Wilson went to work for Auburn businessman Elmer Nickerson. Nickerson owned the Auburn Electrical Company (an electrical store) on Court Street and a battery and tire store located at 95 Turner Street.

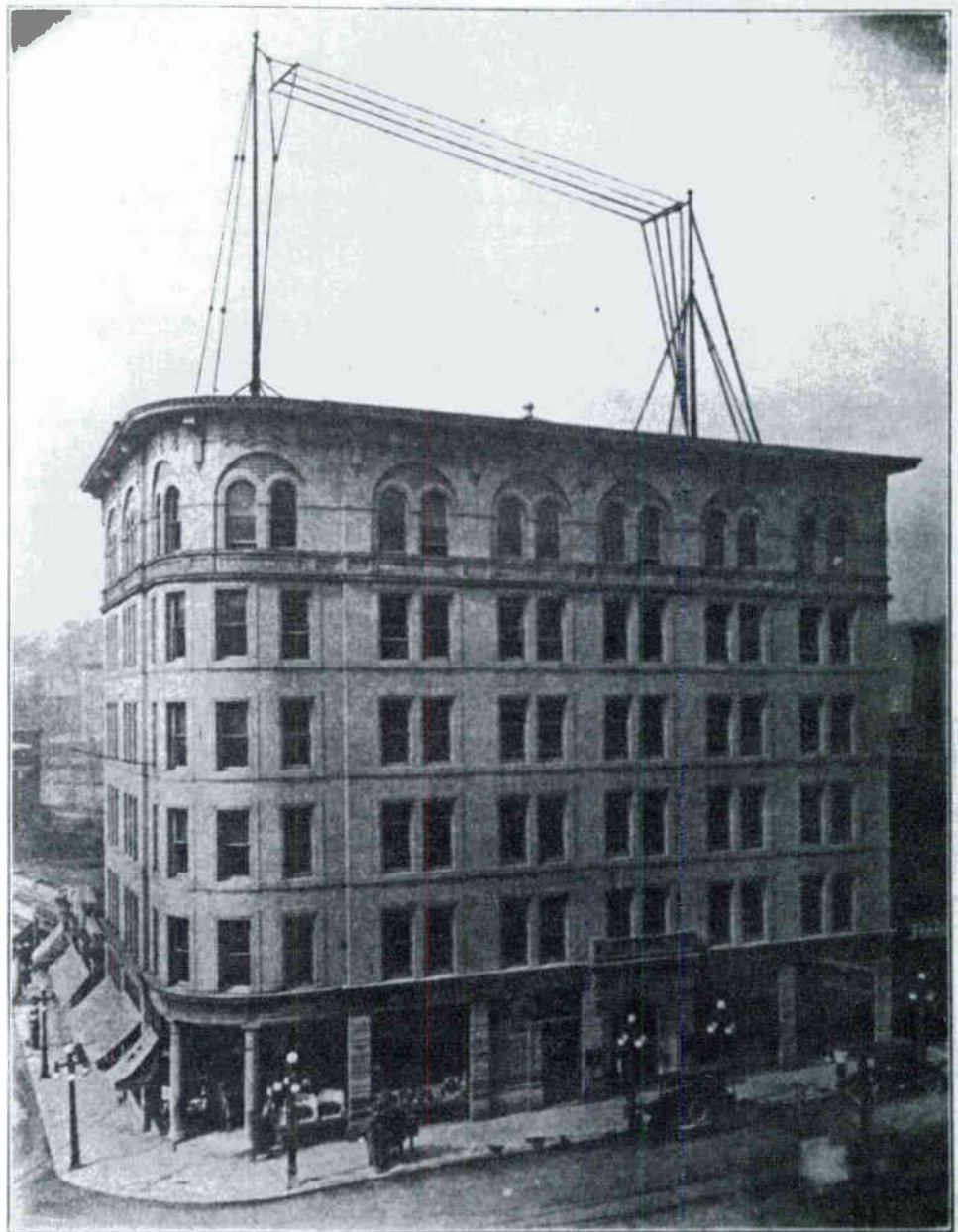
Like many young men at the time, Thurl Wilson’s imagination was on fire about anything that had to do with electricity. Working after hours and at his own expense at the battery store, Wilson built a transmitting set. He began reciting poetry (“The Face on the Bar Room Floor” was a favorite). He also sang and played the mandolin and the banjo over the air.

However, local owners of crystal sets began complaining that his new station was cutting into their reception. This pointed out the need for a license and a licensed operator, which young Thurl was not. As Fate would have it, however, there was a licensed operator in Auburn. His name was D. Wayne Bendix.

In April of 1922, the Department of Commerce issued a license for **WMB** to the Auburn Electrical Company, with Bendix as operator and Wilson as assistant — although Wilson continued to do most of the broadcasting.

The Lewiston Evening Journal (April 22, 1922, p. 6) states that the first broadcast, an

Maine's oldest continuing radio station, WABI, first took to the airwaves on June 30, 1923. The station was started and operated by the Bangor Electric and Railway Company, operating at 1250 kilocycles with 50 watts of power. The studio was in the Andrews Music House at 98 Main Street in Bangor. The transmitter and broadcast antenna (shown here) were located at 84 Harlow Street. In early 1924, WABI raised its power to 100 watts. A year later the station was purchased by the First Universalist Church and moved to 120 Park Street.



Antenna on Building of Bangor Railway and Electric Company, from Which Maine Gets the Railway's Radio Programs

The First Fifteen

The following is a list of radio stations that were granted licenses in the 1920s in Maine. The dates are when the licenses were granted, not the dates the stations went on the air. Only three of these first fifteen stations survived into the 1930s.

<u>Station</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Licensee</u>
WMB Auburn	April 1922	Auburn Electrical Company
WFAR Sanford	June 1922	Hall & Stubbs
WJAL Portland	July 1922	Victor Radio Company
WLAN Houlton	September 1922	Putnam Hardware Company
WPAY Bangor	January 1923	Bangor Radio Laboratory
WABI Bangor	May 1923	Bangor Railway & Electric Co.
WTAJ Portland	August 1923	The Radio Shop
WCBL Houlton	March 1924	Northern Radio Manufacturing Co.
WDBN Bangor	May 1924	Maine Electric Light & Power Co.
WDBU Skowhegan	June 1924	Somerset Radio Company
WHBK Ellsworth	February 1925	Franklin Street Garage
WGBX Orono	February 1925	University of Maine
WCSH Portland	June 1925	Congress Square Hotel Company
WABI Bangor	October 1925	First Universalist Church
WLBZ Dover	December 1926	Thompson L. Guernsey

Arbor Day speech, took place on Friday evening, April 18 and was repeated the following evening. **WMB** was one of only twenty-four government-licensed radio stations in the nation at the time and the only one north of Medford Hillside, Massachusetts. As such, it was required to broadcast all government radio reports, which included crop reports, weather forecasts and government speeches.

It is mentioned in the newspaper article that in addition to this government programming "... local doctors will deliver into the air special speeches on hygiene and care of the body, local bankers will speak on thrift and banking principles, (and there will be) orchestra selections, as well as addresses by prominent persons who have come to Auburn or Lewiston."

WMB even had ambitious plans to do broadcasts from places such as Lewiston City Hall. The paper reports that "As now contemplated, the Auburn Electrical Company station will make wire connections with some place as the Lewiston City Hall when some famous speaker or well-known singer is present; and will broadcast the speech or song, whichever the case may be."

Around early May of that year, the station was moved from the battery shop to rooms leased on the top floor of Auburn Hall. The Lewiston paper (May 3, 1922, p. 2) reported that "... a 150 foot inverted 'L' type aerial was fitted onto the roof and a two 50-watt sending outfit installed with a 360-meter capacity."

That appears to indicate that **WMB** was a 100-watt station, although Ralph Skinner reported in a 1968 "Historically Speaking" broadcast on **WLAM** that **WMB** was a 5-watt station.

One thing certain is that the aerial installation caused a storm of protest. In preparation for a speech by Y. M. C. A. official Roy Handley, the aerial wire was stretched across Court Street from the Auburn Hall roof to the roof of the Auburn Electrical Company building. The day after this first official broadcast from the Auburn Hall location, Auburn city officials ordered the aerial removed.

The Androscoggin Electric Company of Lewiston had complained that the four-strand antenna passed directly over hundreds of heavily charged electric

light and power wires, as well as uninsulated trolley car wires. It was feared that if the aerial should fall in heavy winds, police and fire alarms would be knocked out in the ensuing electrical fireworks. Nickerson moved the aerial, explaining that it was only intended as a temporary arrangement while awaiting approval for stretching the wire from Auburn Hall to the Goff Block.

Another equipment problem involved the transformer, which had twenty-four wire connections. It would heat up after being in operation for a while and Wilson would have to shut down his broadcasting three or four times a night.

Nickerson bought a used grand piano from Bates College for \$10, according to one report. Another account says it was \$25. Whatever the cost, it took three men to carry it up the three flights of stairs to the station. Imagine how they felt when the person hired to play this piano on the air stomped out of the station after playing it only once, shouting that it was an insult to ask anybody to play such a piano!

In addition to live music and government programs, Ralph Skinner's 1968 "Historically Speaking" broadcast on **WLAM** reported that **WMB** advertised that it broadcast news, Arlington time signals and baseball reports. Although it covered about a fifty mile radius, **WMB** nonetheless received reception cards and calls from as far away as Denver, Colorado.

Then **WMB** received a letter of warning from the government because it had broadcast a business plug for the Lawrence Music Company. The government would not allow stations to sell advertising or play recordings. This was the beginning of the end for **WMB**. Wilson, who worked a regular job by day and worked at the station at night (without pay) was beginning to feel the strain.

Exactly when the station went off the air is uncertain. An article in the *Maine TV-Radio News & Guide* in 1953 reported that it was March 16, 1923, not quite a year after **WMB** had received its license. Ralph Skinner's account says it was "by 1926." Thurl Wilson remained interested in electronics all his life, going on to head his own electrical contracting business.

WABI, Bangor

WABI in Bangor was first licensed to the Bangor Railway & Electric Co. (predecessor of the Bangor Hydro-Electric Co.) in May of 1923. With call letters **WIXC** and **WIXG**, the company had been experimenting with radio equipment since the previous year, to communicate between Bangor and Ellsworth. This experiment proved unsuccessful.



WABI transmitted from this antenna rigged atop the First Universalist Church at 120 Park Street, Bangor from September 1925 to May 1930.

The station we now know as **WABI** was born when Electrical Engineer Arthur L. Davis and Treasurer Philip L. Sprague brought the idea for a second try at broadcasting to company President Edward M. Graham. Known as "Radio-Phone Station **WABI**," it used the slogan "The Pine Tree Wave." The transmitter was located on the fifth floor of the Graham Building at the corner of Central and Harlow Streets and the antenna was on the roof. The pickup circuits were run to the First Universalist Church on Park Street, City Hall on Hammond Street and the Andrews Music House on Main Street. A studio was constructed at the Music House and musical programs were broadcast from there weekly.

Personnel included Davis as engineer, Sprague as operator/announcer, W. G. Burrill as director and announcers H. D. Tucker and A. D. Marston. Broadcasts featured live music by local talent, including the **WABI** Trio and the **WABI** Orchestra.

In 1925, **WABI** became a religious broadcaster when it was bought by Ashley Smith and the First Universalist Church to broadcast its Sunday Church Services. Former Maine Governor Bob Haskell (then a **WABI** engineer) told Ed Guernsey how it happened. Haskell had to go to Harlow Street every Sunday to turn on the transmitter so that Smith could broadcast his Sunday Services. "I got tired of this," he said, "so I asked Mr. Graham about selling the station to Smith and then he could move it to the church. I don't know if Bangor Hydro was ever paid anything."

WABI not only survived the decade but also is now the oldest continuously operating radio station in Maine.

WTAJ, Portland

Another young man with a fascination for this new medium was James Nicholson. When only twenty, he had a little radio sales and repair business called the Radio Shop at 218 Federal Street in Portland. On August 17, 1923, he was granted a license for **WTAJ** in Portland. A charter member of the Radio Club in Portland, formed in 1914, he had been an amateur radio operator since boyhood and had served in the Navy as a wireless operator. He was mostly interested in the technical aspects of the new medium. He said in an interview at **WCSH**, "Selling and business didn't mean a thing to me. I was just wrapped up in radio."

Broadcasting with a 20 to 30 mile radius, Nicholson did all the work himself at first. Then Manley Haskell, who was a salesman at the Radio Shop, got his operator's license and began to help out at **WTAJ** as well. Around 1925, Nicholson turned **WTAJ** over to Haskell in order to take on a new challenge: to help set up Maine's first commercial radio station.

WCSH, Portland

The amateur radio stations (the predecessors of the "Hams" of today) and the early government-licensed stations (such as **WMB**), were not allowed to air advertisements. However, the concept of radio as a business had already been pioneered in 1920 at **KDKA** in Pittsburgh.

Henry P. Rines, President of the Congress Square Hotel Company in Portland, decided that radio would be a good way to promote his hotel interests. He had talked with Joseph Groce of **WEEI** in Boston and discovered that it might just be possible to make a little money from radio advertising as well.

Meanwhile, Bill Foss, then an enterprising young man in his thirties was also interested in building a broadcasting station in Portland. Foss had studied electrical engineering and worked for the Maine Central Railroad and the local power utility. He was selling and servicing home radio receivers when he first became interested in building a radio station. Legend has it that he walked up and down the streets of Portland looking for a business willing to invest in his proposed radio venture. He met with skepticism and indifference — until he came to the Congress Square Hotel.

Rines and Foss joined forces and found a used transmitter and other equipment at the seaside estate of Colonel Edward Green in South Dartmouth, Massachusetts. Foss began looking for

engineering expertise to help set up the new station and persuaded Jimmy Nicholson to accept the challenge and to stay on as chief operator.

And so, on July 13, 1925, Maine's first commercial radio station, **WCSH**, was born. It seemed only natural that the Congress Square Hotel should be its home. Two 70-foot steel towers, which supported a flat-top antenna were erected on the roof. The transmitter and studio controls took up half of the popular "sun parlor" with a brass rail separating them from the guests. The studio was one floor below the sun parlor. It was created from a private dining room. The walls and ceiling were draped with monks cloth and the floor carpeted for acoustical purposes.

It was warm the evening of the first broadcast, with Governor Ralph Brewster, the Fifth U. S. Infantry Band, several soloists and announcer Linwood T. Pitman assembled in that one relatively small room. Pitman left the newspaper field in 1926 to become **WCSH**'s first paid announcer. He also helped General Manager Bill Foss with sales.

Foss sold advertising to **WCSH**'s and Maine's first radio advertiser, the John J. Nissen Baking Company. Early advertisers bought program sponsorships rather than commercial announcements and used institutional copy rather than detailed descriptions of products or services. Mention of price was taboo.

Children's programming was one of the first genre of shows to be developed. The multi-talented Bill Foss became "Uncle Billy" on the Kids Klub program begun in the late 20s. He was aided by "Uncle Jimmy" Nicholson, who eventually took over the program.

Another early programming element was the broadcasting of church services. **WABI** was the first to do so and during the years that it was owned by the First Universalist Church, that was the station's whole purpose.

The First Radio Parish Church of America was another pioneer in the area of religious programming. It was founded by the Rev. Howard O. Hough at **WCSH** in 1926. Today, the program is heard on nine radio and TV stations in Maine and two radio stations in New Hampshire. An interdenominational program, it is the oldest continuously broadcast religious program in the country.

Early radio looked to newspapers as its source of news reports. In 1927, **WCSH** was broadcasting news bulletins twice daily from the newsroom of the *Portland Evening News*. In 1928, Guy Gannett invited **WCSH** to install remote equipment in the newsroom of the *Portland Press Herald and Evening Express*. Except on Sundays, three newscasts were broadcast daily using Gannett news people on the air. Charles "Chick"



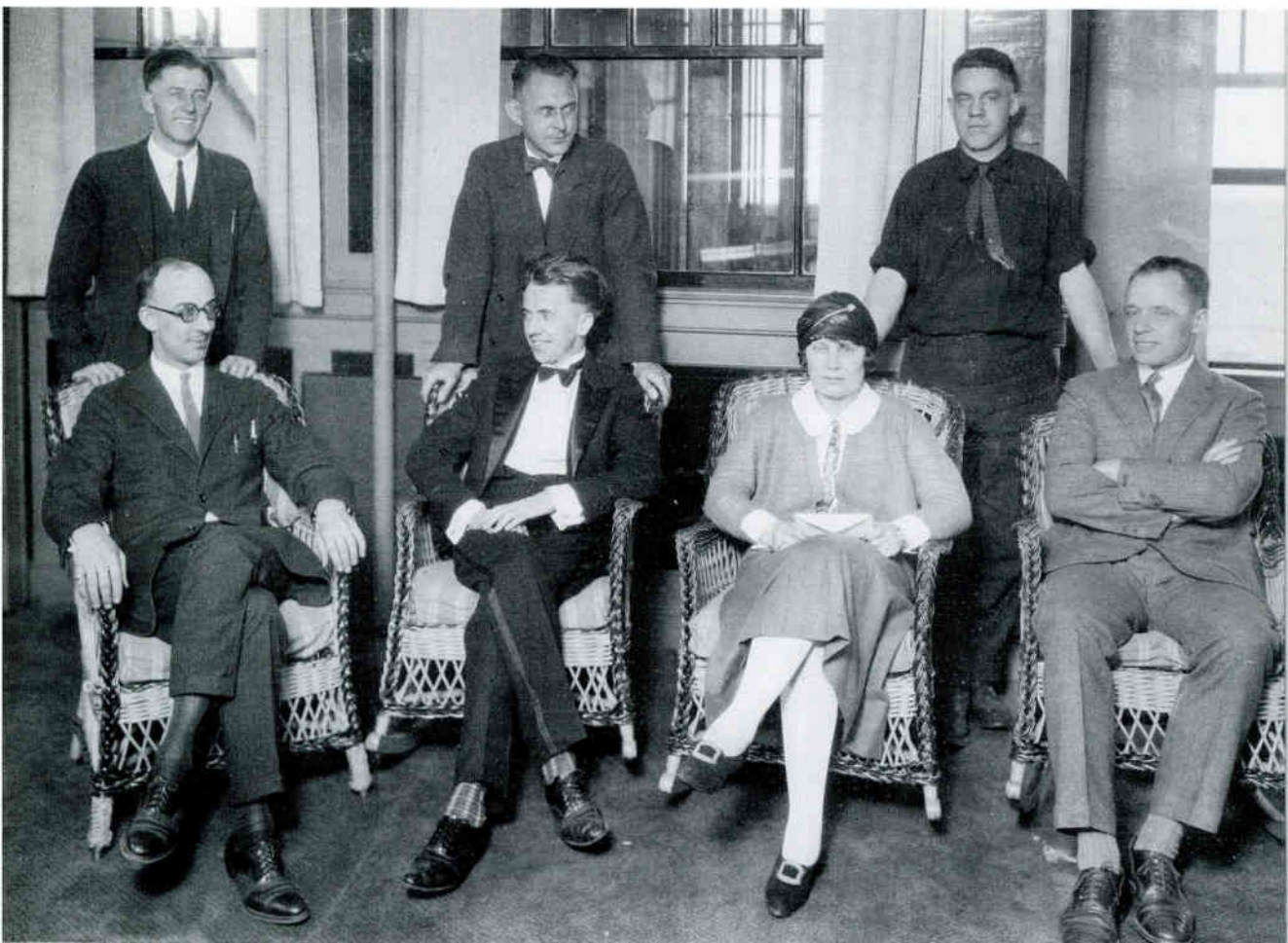
Mary Rines Thompson and her brother William H. Rines sat with their father, WCSH founder Henry P. Rines when the radio station went on the air on July 23, 1925. William began work as the station manager in 1941 after his father died and eventually became president of the Maine Broadcasting System (WCSH radio & TV, WLBZ radio & TV and WRDO radio), a position he held until his death in 1970. Mary Rines Thompson took over at that time and eventually became chairman of the board until she retired in July of 1983. The Rines/Thompson family still runs the business and is one of the oldest NBC affiliates in the country, having helped form the network in 1926.



Evans was often heard on these newscasts. He later joined the WCSH staff.

WCSH was the first Maine radio station to affiliate with a national network. Experimental network operation over telephone lines had begun as early as 1922 in New York. WCSH joined WEAJ in New York, which had become the NBC flagship station in March of that year.

When NBC was incorporated in the Fall of 1926, WCSH was one of its twenty-six basic Red outlets. WCSH thus was a charter member of the national NBC Radio Network. The Rines/Thompson family still runs WCSH-TV, which makes it the oldest NBC affiliate in the country still run by the same ownership, with 64 years of NBC affiliation.



Original staff of WCSH radio, taken at the Congress Square Hotel Studios, Portland, in early 1926. Seated from left: Linwood Pitman, J. D. McDonald, Gwen Marshall and Archie Legro. Standing from left: James Nicholson, William Foss (station manager) and John Fraser. Nicholson started Portland radio station WTAJ on August 17, 1923 and ran it out of his radio shop on Exchange Street before turning it over to Manley Haskell in 1925 to go to work for WCSH. William Foss walked up Congress Street visiting several department store owners seeking an entrepreneur to help start a radio station. Only Henry P. Rines at the Eastland Hotel saw any future in this fledgling business.

WLBZ, Bangor

WLBZ grew out of a hobby of Thompson L. Guernsey, son of a prominent Maine Congressman. According to his cousin, Ed Guernsey, Thompson had begun experimenting with radio in 1917 at the age of thirteen. He was granted a license for Amateur Radio Station 1EE in 1921. At only twenty-two, he received a commercial license from the U. S. Department of Commerce. Using his then modified 1EE equipment, he put **WLBZ** on the air on December 30, 1926.

WLBZ's first broadcast was from the harness room in the chicken house at Guernsey's residence in Dover-Foxcroft. As his hobby grew into a business, Thompson moved **WLBZ** into the back room of the Andrews Music House at 98 Main Street in Bangor. The Andrews Music House was owned by Frank Atwood, whose son Jack later became one of Maine's leading broadcasters.

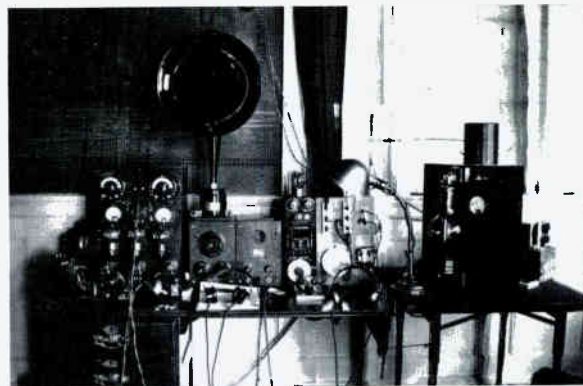
The first **WLBZ** antenna was described by Maine broadcast veteran Carleton Brown at a 1964 NAB convention as "... a flat-top antenna with four wires strung between bars and held up by two windmill towers." It frequently iced up in winter and, more than once, fell down.

Irving Hunter worked as a transmitter engineer at **WLBZ** in those early days. During a taped group interview of broadcast veterans on March 27, 1985, he told how during one winter the weight of the ice broke the wires and the antenna came tumbling down. Tom Guernsey drove down from Dover-Foxcroft with his big, beautiful, Straight-A Packard Roadster. "And so," Hunter said, "we mended the wires, soldered it all together and Tom hooked up onto the steel cable with his Packard to pull the antenna back up between the towers."

So far so good. Only it was so slippery and the car so fast and powerful, that it pulled the antenna up too quickly and "... split the thing apart and it came down and had to be done all over again."

An early program log at **WLBZ**, carefully preserved by Ed Guernsey, demonstrates how radio already reflected almost every aspect of life in Maine. It included a University of Maine Farm Bureau program, a broadcast of local church services, a political forum with Governor Ralph Brewster as the principal speaker and probably the first broadcast of a high school basketball game in Maine on January 20, 1928.

An early programming staple was the staff pianist. Norman Lambert began performing on **WLBZ** the day it went on the air at the Andrews Music House location in 1928. His long career there as traffic and music director is legendary. Lambert remembers having to wear a tuxedo for broadcasts, which were performed in



Thompson Guernsey's amateur radio station 1EE in 1921. Part of this same equipment was used to build commercial broadcasting station WLBZ.

front of a live studio audience. Equally talented on piano and organ, he was the first in the state to play the two instruments simultaneously. His theme song was "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows."

Carleton Brown got his start in broadcasting when Tom Guernsey decided to open a studio for **WLBZ** in Waterville in 1929. At the NAB convention in 1964, he told the story of how this **WLBZ** outlet got started:

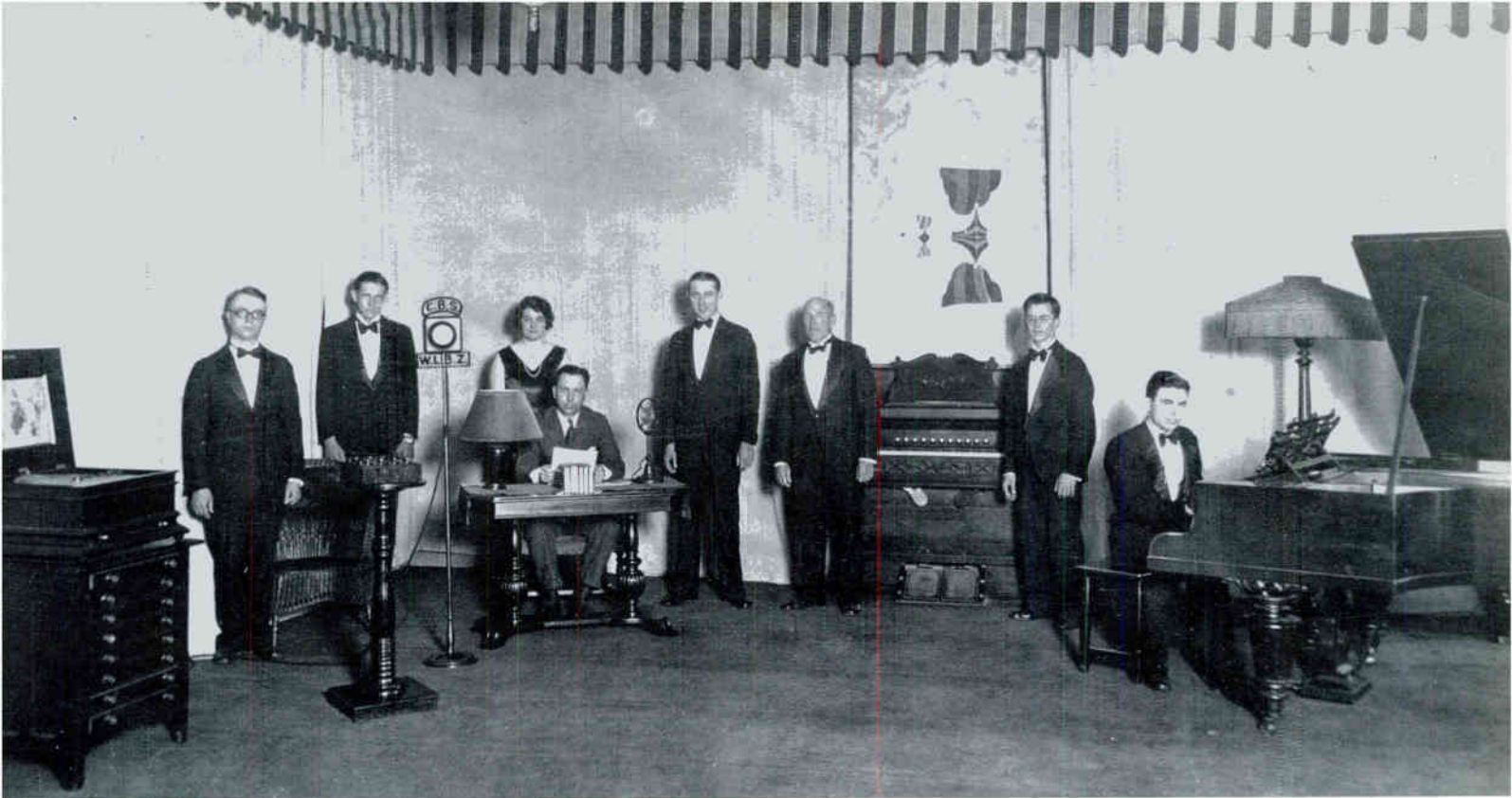
"Tom Guernsey, who had been a graduate of the University of Maine, decided that he would like to extend the influence of **WLBZ**, so he decided to establish a Waterville studio. (It was) in the rear of a music store, and a curtain partitioned it from the rest of the store where records and sheet music were sold. We had two 78 rpm turntables and we had an (storage battery operated) amplifier."

"We were sixty miles from Bangor where the transmitter was located. When the time came to go on the air, we would listen to a battery-operated radio with a little loudspeaker on it and we would listen to Bangor make the station break, then we would turn off the radio and turn on our amplifier."

"We were connected to the transmitting station by open wire line, Western Union. We hired circuits from the Western Union Telegraph Company and of course this wasn't a very high quality circuit but it did carry the intelligence."

The original studio location for WABI radio in 1924 was in the Andrews Music House at 98 Main Street in Bangor (section of building shown here marked "The System Co"). This became the studio for WLBZ when Thompson Guernsey moved his station there from Dover-Foxcroft in 1928. WLBZ later expanded to the second and third floors of 100 Main Street as shown in this photo taken in the 40s. WLBZ maintained its studios at this location until it moved to outer Broadway in 1960.





To commemorate its affiliation with CBS Radio in 1930, the crew of WLBZ poses for the camera in the back of the Andrews Music Store in Bangor. From the left: Albert Weymouth Jr., Jack Atwood, Charlotte Carter, Jack Riley, Walley Poller, Harold Lloyd and Norman Lambert at the piano. Seated is Thompson L. Guernsey, founder and managing director. Carter was the first woman announcer in the state. Lambert worked at WLBZ until he retired in 1958 and Atwood went on to become the Executive Vice President of the Maine Broadcasting System until his retirement in 1974.

The Waterville studio opened during Brown's first year in college. His father owned a dry goods store and was the largest retailer in Waterville. Here is his own account of how he happened to work for Tom Guernsey:

"When I learned what Tom was doing, I applied for a job. I was just a kid. I took the train to Bangor. (Tom) had built a studio on the second floor of the music store and the control room was behind a glass. It looked very awe inspiring. Tom gave me a Webster's Dictionary and said, 'Start reading' and then he said, 'Read faster.' So I read faster and he came out and said, 'Well, that's all right. You are hired.' And I said, 'What for?' He said, 'You are an announcer. Take the train back to Waterville and Alfred Childs will be there. You will go on the air at 5:00.' I said, 'What do we do?' 'I don't know,' he said. 'You and Alfred can do something.'"

Brown hosted an hour-long record show every day (using records from the music store in which the studio was located) and also did an hour of band music on Sundays. Guernsey had a fondness for band music, so the Waterville Military Band was a regular for several years.

By 1929, only three radio stations were still on the air in Maine. **WABI** in Bangor was non-commercial, broadcasting religious services for the First Universalist Church. **WCSH** in Portland was commercial and doing well. **WLBZ** in Bangor was also commercial and doing well with studios in Bangor and Waterville.

Maine Radio in the 1930s

THERE WERE SEVEN commercial radio stations in the state of Maine by 1939. It is no surprise that these first stations had sprung up in the most populated areas of the state: Bangor (**WABI, WLBZ**), Portland (**WCSH, WGAN**), Augusta (**WRDO**), Lewiston (**WCOU**) and Presque Isle (**WAGM**).

From its earliest beginnings in the 1920s to the end of the 1930s, Maine radio had progressed from the hobby stage of amateur stations and the self promotional efforts of businesses and organizations to a staple of daily life and a profitable commercial enterprise. All three of the stations who survived the 1920s (**WABI, WCSH** and **WLBZ**), were on the air as commercial stations by the end of the 1930s.

WABI became a commercial station under manager Fred Simpson when Community Broadcasting Service, Inc. (of which Simpson was President) purchased the station from the First Universalist Church around 1938.

WLBZ closed and then reopened its Waterville outlet during the 1930s. Feeling the effects of the Depression, Thompson Guernsey closed Waterville in 1935. As remembered by Carleton Brown (in a speech at the 1964 NAB Convention), Guernsey could no longer support the staff there, which by then included Brown, engineer Alfred Childs and salesman/ manager Conrad Kennison. Kennison later became manager of **WRDO** in Augusta.

By 1938, Brown had graduated from college, had married, and had opened a photography studio in Waterville. Guernsey leased the space next to Brown's studio and reopened his **WLBZ** outlet there, with Brown as manager.

The first new station in the 1930s was **WAGM** in Presque Isle. Two young ham radio enthusiasts, Red Hughes and Bob McIntosh, were the principal stockholders when this small 100-watt station started in 1931.

With the success of **WCSH** in Portland, Henry Rines founded **WRDO** in Augusta in

1932. The Maine Broadcasting System anniversary booklet, "The First 40 Years" states that corporate ownership of **WRDO** was vested in the Capitol Broadcasting Company and later assumed by **WRDO, Inc.** The 1935 *Broadcasting Yearbook* (the first year it existed) lists **WRDO, Inc.** as the name of the licensee, which suggests that this change had taken place by 1935.

Harold Dinsmore, who became chief engineer at **WRDO** in 1935, remembers that Thompson Guernsey made a proposal to purchase the station sometime in the late 1930s. Apparently, nothing came of this as **WRDO** remained in the Rines family.

WGAN in Portland and **WCOU** in Lewiston both debuted in August of 1938. They had something else in common: both were founded by newspaper publishers. Guy Gannett chose the call letters **GAN** after the first 3 letters of his last name. Faust Couture did the same with **COU** for his station.

These early radio entrepreneurs were men of vision who were not afraid to take risks. They had faith in their local areas and used their stations to promote their communities. They also were experienced businessmen with varied interests and heavy community involvement.

WRDO ABOUT TO OBSERVE 15th ANNIVERSARY



BEHIND THE SCENES AT WRDO—Top row: Manager Jack S. Atwood, left, Walter Weightman, sales manager. Second row: left to right, Dan Kelly, traffic manager-announcer shown with studio group; Don Powers, program manager; Elliott Hold, chief announcer. Third row: Leslie Hubley, announcer; Agnes Day, receptionist; Richard Dysart, announcer. Bottom row: Harold Dinsmore, chief engineer; George Newell, technician; John Litwinowich, technician.

WRDO celebrated its 15th anniversary in this February 1947 edition of the Maine Broadcaster, a newsletter of the Maine Broadcasting System (WCSH, WRDO, & WLBZ). Mistakenly headlined "1922", WRDO went on the air in 1932. Several members of the Cony High School Radio Club worked at WRDO including Ben & Les Hubley, Dan Kelly, Don Powers and Richard Dysart. Dysart, shown here, went on to play the senior partner in the NBC-TV Network series "LA Law."

Locations

Having faith in radio is one thing, actually getting a station on the air is another. First, you need a place from which to broadcast. In the 30s, there was no such thing as facilities especially built and designed for broadcasting. So Maine's radio pioneers used and adapted what was available.

Like WCSH, WGAN began broadcasting from a hotel, the Columbia, in the center of the city. Located on the second floor, the studios were designed by Electrical Research Products, Inc. and according to an article in the Portland Evening Express (May 3, 1954), were the first scientifically constructed studios in Maine:

"... sound treated and suspended from the main structure of the building."

WRDO started out broadcasting from the Augusta House. Dan Kelly tells a story he heard from either Harold Dinsmore or George Levensaller about WRDO's early broadcasts from this studio:

"It was located on the first floor in the back. It seems this room was also used at night as a storage room for the hotel's canaries. They would bring the cages in and cover them up so the birds could sleep peacefully. Tenor Roger Nye and his accompanist Marion McVea would come in early to rehearse for their early morning program of songs. The canaries would still be there. So when Roger sang, he often had a canary accompaniment!"

Harold Dinsmore recalls that WRDO's transmitter was located on Water Street and was built by Leslie Hall in 1932 out of leftover parts from WCSH and whatever else they could come up with. The studios were moved to Depot Street and then to 175 Water Street, corner of Bridge Street, in 1939. There was more room there and new and better equipment was installed.

The top floor of the Old Theater Building on Main Street in Presque Isle was the first home of WAGM. WCOU's first broadcast was from the stage of the Old Music Hall in Lewiston, which was packed with an enthusiastic audience despite the 92 degree heat. WCOU's first studio, however, was on the third floor of the building that housed the Couture family's French language newspaper "Le Messenger."

According to Norm Gallant, Faust Couture went to considerable expense to soundproof this studio. To avoid the press noises, he installed a floating floor, along with an early type of acoustic paneling. The studio was quite modern for its day: windowless, air conditioned and equipped with a fine grand piano and organ.



Guy P. Gannett (right), President of WGAN radio, welcomes Maine Senator Wallace H. White (center) and Columbia Broadcasting System Vice-President Harry C. Butcher (left) to the studio's opening ceremonies in 1938. Gannett went on to build an empire that included several newspapers and radio and television stations. Gannett died in 1953. His daughter, Jean Gannett Hawley, took over and increased the family's media holdings. The Gannett family is still in the business and operates newspaper, radio and television properties in seven states.

Equipment

Keeping a station on the air in the 30s required heavy doses of Yankee ingenuity. It was a long way from the sophisticated equipment of today, but in its day, just as miraculous. Richard Marshall remembers the **WAGM** equipment as limited to the basics and all handmade.

Irving Hunter recalls his early days as a transmitter engineer at **WLBZ**: "Everything was improvised and if you got an idea, you put it into play, and you did it any way you could ... you never knew what was going to happen from one

moment to another. You had to be prepared."

Even something as small and seemingly harmless as a June bug could cause big trouble. Hunter traces the origin of the term "technical difficulties" to an incident one summer when a June bug flew into the transmitter between the blades of the hand-built air condenser. Of course it committed bug suicide and got zapped. It also caused a short-circuit which blew all the fuses and knocked the station off the air.

Norm Lambert (**WLBZ**) remembers the old carbon mikes hanging from wires. Sometimes they had to be tapped to get started and often



In the 1930s and 1940s, network radio correspondents traveled all over the world to get their stories and all broadcasts were "live." Here Lowell Thomas broadcasts from the studios of WCSH.



SAM HENDERSON
Chief Announcer

"Genial" Sam starts you off on the right foot every morning on the "Late Risers" Club at 7:30.



CARLYLE N. deSUZE

Announcer, whom everyone knows as "Uncle Carl" of the popular "WGAN Talent Club" broadcast Saturday mornings at 9:30.



RICHARD E. BATES
Program Manager



RUSSELL A. DORR

Announcer, who presents "Songs for You" in his fine baritone voice every Wednesday evening at 8:30.



CARLTON IDE

Announcer, cheerfully answers requests on the "WGAN Musical Special" afternoons through Friday at 5 o'clock.

failed, requiring another tap or two. Condenser mikes, which came along a little later, had problems of their own. They were square, enclosing a tube, an amplifier, and a switch, similar to a light switch. Only the switch often failed, and then you were in trouble. Ed Guernsey (WLBZ) remembers how ". . . if it failed while the mike was open, someone would have to keep talking. If it was failed closed, you would have to put another record on."

Early WGAN personalities. Sam Henderson and Richard Bates went on to become radio station managers. Carl DeSuze became a household name, appearing for many years on Boston's WBZ radio.

Maine stations did on-the-scene broadcasts from the very start: concerts, political speeches, public events, sports. The date of this incident related by Elden "Denny" Shute is not definite but it is a classic story of remote broadcasting.

"An important person in the community had passed away. The local radio station owner not only considered him a good sponsor but a good friend. The station manager scheduled a broadcast of the funeral eulogy. Remote lines were ordered into the church."

"The afternoon of the funeral arrived and people were crowding into the sanctuary. The front of the church, the casket and the platform were banked high with floral tributes. The station's engineer/announcer was hidden behind the flowers."

"But he was having difficulty raising anyone from the studio. The organ music was loud. In desperation, and to be heard down at the station and above the organ music the announcer resorted to shouting. Just as the music stopped and the pastor rose to approach the lectern, these stentorian words overwhelmed the audience: 'We're all ready up here if you're all ready down there!' "

These stories may give the impression that the equipment was less than reliable. Actually, most of the time things went quite smoothly. Then, as now, engineers and announcers were flexible and resourceful. The ability to improvise so that the "show can go on" despite the unpredictable nature of the equipment is the mark of the real professional.

Local Programming

Local radio programming connected Maine listeners to their communities. Neighbors felt closer and towns more unified. Community spirit was heightened by broadcasts of local sports, school events, community calendar programs and the like. Radio became a forum for local politicians, the center of cultural and community activity. As Ben Hubley recalls, "Someone interesting and well-known was always doing something at the station."

Radio also provided basic information like the time, weather and road conditions. This was particularly important, as it is now, in time of emergencies, like the flood of 1935 and the hurricane of 1938.

Another important role of radio was as showcase and training ground for local talent. And there was plenty of that! Early stations usually had a talent show program, such as the "WGAN Talent Club" (which featured local people who could sing, play an instrument, read poetry, do imitations, etc.) and the "WRDO Radio Players" which premiered in 1932 or 1933.

Many individuals and groups had their own fifteen minute or half-hour shows of popular or classical music, comedy, commentary or variety. These included radio staff orchestras or shows like the WRDO Cony High School "Cony Speaks," a weekly program that introduced many Maine career broadcasters to the medium.

An early programming staple was the staff pianist, beginning with Norman Lambert at WLBZ as mentioned in the previous chapter. Early WGAN listeners tuned in to staff organist and pianist Allister "Sandy" Grant, whose "Piano Impressions" and "Organ Moods" aired five days a week. Ben Hubley recalls how WRDO staff pianist Harold Newcomb would take over if there was a technical problem or they had a programming hole to fill. At WABI, the staff pianist was Harold Dorr, who was also program director.

Country bands were a very popular segment of early programming. They performed live, often before an audience. Smiling Ken MacKenzie did two shows a day Monday through Saturday on WGAN. Then there was the Lone Pine Mountaineer and Curley O'Brien. Hal Dutch of WABI remembers Gene Hooper and his wife, who was the sister-in-law of the Lone Pine Mountaineer. Sometimes the two groups played together on WABI. The Pine Tree Revelers were a favorite at WLBZ, and "Smiling Ernie" was heard regularly on WAGM.

At first, stations were on the air in the evenings only. But as they began to expand their broadcast hours, they created daytime programming for those most likely to be at home: housewives. Stations soon developed programs like "The Housewives' Half Hour" on WLBZ, "Going Places" with Jean Murray on WRDO, and WGAN's "Social Calendar," hosted by Miss Gwendolyn Graves. These shows catered to the interests of women (most of whom were housewives in those days) with cooking, housework, child rearing and social news. The hostess was usually the only woman on the air staff.

A noteworthy exception to this was Roselle Coury. Roselle had attended the Radio School of Technique in New York and was a singer in a New York nightclub before coming to WCOU in Lewiston in 1939. Roselle was not limited to the usual women's programming. She sang on her own nightly music show, introducing

new songs and taking requests. Her favorite was Vincent Youman's "Without A Song." She did a talk show, "Strolling About Town," a giveaway show called "The Lucky Dollar Program" and even a fifteen minute newscast.

WCOU owner Faust Couture complimented her by saying that she could run a station all by herself if need be, for she had done writing, announcing, singing, servicing accounts, interviewing and administration. She was one of the few women of her day who successfully combined a career with the traditional role of homemaker for her husband and two children.

Another natural for daytime radio was children's shows, like the one hosted by "The WGAN Story Tell Lady," Miss E'Lora Pease. Dan Kelly at WRDO hosted and produced a popular Saturday morning talent show for kids called "Meet the Mike." In the early 30s, WRDO had a kids' talent show called "Aunt Pansy," on which Catherine Rice and Ben Hubley appeared. Manager Harold Glidden's wife Duska was the children's show hostess at WAGM.

"Uncle Hezzie Q. Snow" at WLBZ entertained enthusiastic young listeners on Saturdays on "The Children's Community Sing." This program was broadcast live before a studio audience and as Ed Guernsey recalls: "... seemed to draw every kid in Bangor, since the station passed out lollipops as the children left the building after the program." Snow enjoyed a long career in both Maine radio and TV.

Religious and inspirational broadcasts were also part of the programming in the 30s. Most stations featured live broadcasts of local church services. In addition, there were programs such as "Keep on Keeping On," which aired weekly on WRDO. It was broadcast from the bedside of Rev. Herman A. Clark in Gardiner. Blind and bedridden by severe arthritis, he voiced cheerful messages of hope and courage while his daughter played the organ. Pioneer broadcaster Harold Dinsmore engineered this program and married Rev. Clark's daughter. Dinsmore was the engineer and play-by-play announcer for many of WRDO's earliest high school football broadcasts.

The First Radio Parish Church of America, which had begun in 1926 on WCSH (as mentioned in the previous chapter), is another important example of religious programming in the 30s. It is still on the air on WCSH-TV.

Almost all local programming in the early days was live. News, music, commercials, everything. That meant in addition to technical problems, an announcer also had to worry about the inevitable slip of the tongue or, even harder to predict, practical jokes.

Early radio had no recording devices and until the mid 40s, all programming was "live." A popular band in the 20s and 30s was "Dick Lewis and His Sleep Chasers." Dick Lewis (at the piano) chats with WCSH radio manager Bill Foss (holding the clock). The woman is Lucille Potter (Lavin) whose daughter Linda starred in the network television series "Alice."



Stars of one of the most popular local programs appearing on WGAN radio and later on WGAN television; country-western singer Ken MacKenzie and his band, shown here in 1936. He always referred to his lovely wife as "Simone, the Mrs." Ken had some extremely talented members in his band, including Betty Gribben (lower left), the original singing cowgirl comic. MacKenzie started working full time for WGAN radio and TV in 1951, retiring in 1983.



Denny Shute tells the story of a broadcast on Christmas day 1937 at **WCSH** when he was just starting out as an announcer. The usual network news broadcast had been canceled because of the holiday and the news was fed to the station via teletype. **WCSH** announcer Elmer Chambers presented Denny with the news on a long roll of paper, just as it had come off the printer, without having cut out and arranged the individual news stories. Despite this, Denny was holding his own with the newscast when he smelled smoke:

"To my horror I saw the other end of the paper had been set afire! Elmer had crawled under the desk and ignited the newscast with his cigarette lighter! I tried to catch the other end with my feet, to no avail. I tried to read faster to reach the end of a story before the flames ate it. Abruptly I ended the newscast . . . and turned to Elmer, now in one corner of the studio holding his sides in silent laughter. 'Elmer,' I said, 'how could you do this to me?' 'Well, Shutey,' he explained, 'I just wanted to welcome you to the great world of broadcasting!'"

Another popular practical joke of the time was for an announcer in the studio to silently "mouth" words to disconcert his buddy in the control room. Being able to handle the unexpected came in handy for Richard Marshall at **WAGM** when he had to interview a monkey for a show on the Northern Maine Fair. He drew the line when they brought in the snake!

It's not surprising that early radio news reporting relied on newspaper sources, especially since **WGAN** and **WCOU** were founded by newspaper publishers. In fact, they often broadcast directly from their corresponding newspaper's newsroom. The exception to this practice was Tom Guernsey, who according to Ed Guernsey, always insisted on independent radio news gathering at **WLBZ**.

WLBZ began its pioneer regional news service, the Maine News Service, in January of 1933. Ed Guernsey remembers receiving letters from some 40 or 50 correspondents throughout eastern Maine, who were paid the glorious sum of 25 cents a story.

Networks

WCSH was the first Maine station to affiliate with a network (NBC in 1926). NBC had two networks, the Red and the Blue until 1943. **WRDO** joined both the Red and the Blue in 1938. **WLBZ** joined CBS in 1930 but switched to NBC in 1938. **WGAN** and **WABI** joined CBS in 1938.

Maine stations not only received programming from these national networks but were also sources. **WCSH** fed the NBC network coverage of the takeoff of two groups of transoceanic fliers from Old Orchard Beach in June of 1929. In May of 1930, a performance of the University of Maine Band, with Jack Atwood announcing on **WLBZ**, was fed to CBS. In 1938, **WRDO** fed NBC live coverage of Maine's official reception for a young boy scout named Don Fendler, who had been lost in the Mt. Katahdin area for eight days.

Not only national networks sprang into life in those early days, but regional ones as well. Several Maine stations belonged to the Yankee Network by the end of the 30s. This regional New England network was started by John Shepherd and originated out of **WNAC** in Boston. **WLBZ** became affiliated with Yankee in 1930 and **WRDO** joined in 1935, as did **WCSH** in 1936. Yankee offered programs and news closer to home than the national networks provided.

In those early days, it was not unusual to carry programs from more than one network. There could be programs from one or more national networks and a regional network all airing on the same station.

John Shepherd founded another New England network, the Colonial Network. It originated out of **WAAB**, in the Boston area and lasted for five or six years from the mid 30s to early 40s. One of the last of the regional networks was the aptly named New England Regional Network, which originated out of **WBZ** in Boston. One of its cornerstones was the women's programs of Marjorie Mills.

Irving Hunter remembers the impact of network programming in the Bangor area:

"It was quite a thrill for people in this area of Maine to be able to get the network on their local station, and of course, you got better reception. In those days if you tuned in an outside station, you got a lot of static, and there weren't that many stations around. . . so when **WLBZ** went on the Columbia Broadcasting System, at the same time, they joined with **WNAC** in Boston for programs in that area . . . the people were treated to a lavish assortment of sports and entertainment and they were thrilled to death and could hardly believe it."

Networks linked Maine listeners to the outside world. They tapped their toes to the same tunes, laughed at the same comedies, cried over the same soap operas as other radio listeners nationwide. Radio in the 30s gave Mainers an awareness of other lifestyles and soon became a generating force of public opinion.

Like many other Mainers, Ben Hubley has vivid memories of getting up at 4 am — the early time of the broadcast was due to the time difference — to hear the King George abdication speech in 1930. Since his family had come to Maine from Canada, he wouldn't have missed it for the world. Another famous radio broadcast from the the 30s was the Hindenburg disaster. It was so powerful and emotional that Hubley remembers turning it off when it was replayed.

Franklin Roosevelt was a world leader who knew how to use radio to unite people. His "Fireside Chats" gave him the attention of a whole nation and at the same time provided the average citizen the opportunity to have an intimate "chat" with his President. The People and the President had never been closer.

Network stars (including singers, musicians, announcers and actors) of the 30s were as numerous as stars in the sky. They ranked with movie stars in popularity. Maine's own Rudy Vallee was one, along with Jack Benny, Eddie Cantor, Ed Wynn, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, Marie Wilson, Fred Allen and Gertrude Berg, to name only a few.

Sales

Last, but certainly not least in our journey through Maine radio in the 30s is the area of sales. Early ad copy was institutional in nature and mention of prices was taboo. That taboo was beginning to be broken when Ed Guernsey first came to work at **WLBZ** as a copywriter. He was paid \$18 a week, and remembers the mind stretching exercise of having to write 50 versions of the same ad ". . . it was handkerchiefs for two cents, neckties for a nickel and how do you write that fifty different ways?"

Businesses sponsored programs rather than buying "spots" to air during breaks as they do today. Sometimes the program sponsor even provided the talent. For example, the Northern Maine Fair often purchased quarter hour time slots at **WAGM** and sent Fair participants to be interviewed during that time, in hopes of stirring up attendance. Some of the country bands did this as well, paying for their own radio shows, during which they would promote their upcoming dance hall appearances.

In those days, radio salespeople had to sell radio itself as a viable sales medium. They had to convince often skeptical businesses that radio was not a passing fancy and could do the job for them. It took several years of "missionary work" to build a solid client base.

What radio had as a strong selling point, however, was the novelty and excitement for the client's hearing his ad on the air for the very first

time. Some business people even called and asked for radio advertising, especially if they could voice the ad personally and have the additional thrill of hearing their own voices on the air.

An interesting comment on the economic climate of the 30s recalled by Ed Guernsey is Tom Guernsey's fondness for restaurants and theaters as advertisers. Why? In the Depression, these were some of the few businesses that always had cash at the end of the day to pay their advertising bills.

Who were some of the first Maine radio salesmen? Manager Bill Foss sold the first sponsorship for **WCSH**. **WAGM** Manager Harold Glidden was the lone salesman at his station until the mid 40s. Ed Emery was a longtime salesman at **WLBZ**, beginning in 1933. He already had more than eighteen years experience in sales, having worked first for a woolens firm and an automobile business.

Longtime **WABI** salesman Guy Corey also started his sales career in Maine radio in 1933. Guy played trumpet for twenty years in vaudeville before going into radio sales at the age of 44. For years he was the station's lone salesman. He cut a sturdy but rather flamboyant figure, sporting a bright tie, felt hat cocked at a jaunty angle, a battered briefcase and an ever present cigar. He once said his success in sales boiled down to four words: "What's good for him?" The "Dean of **WABI** sales" understood the importance of knowing his client's needs and wants and built his sales presentations around that basic question.

Commercials were all done live and were therefore subject to the human frailties of the "open mouth, insert foot" syndrome. Denny Shute tells a story about when he was a promising young announcer at **WCSH**, just before Christmas in 1937. The Jack Benny program had just ended and the Chase and Sanborn Hour was about to begin. Denny was to read a commercial for Bulova watches, which included the time check. It was Sunday evening at 8 PM. Here's what Denny proudly announced for all the world to hear: "The time is 9 PM, Bulova Watch Time. See the new Bulova President . . . curved to fit the foot!" Denny was transferred a few weeks later to a sister station in Manchester, NH — perhaps for training in anatomy and telling time.

Maine Radio in the 1940s

RADIO'S POWER TO EDUCATE, inform and entertain blossomed throughout the 1940s. It raised money for charitable causes; delivered political speeches to millions; became a companion to listeners with local and network stars who seemed more like personal friends. As world leaders were discovering, it could be used to help unify a nation politically, firing up the emotions that would lead to war.

This was to be a war different in many ways from all the wars that had come before. Radio brought home the terrible sounds of war: gunfire, explosions, planes, marching feet, shouts of "Sieg Heil!", air raid sirens, tanks and the terror of those caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. There were the unforgettable voices of Roosevelt, Churchill, Hitler and Mussolini—men who knew how to use the power of the spoken word. Because of radio, they spoke not to hundreds or thousands, but to millions.

World War II dominated the decade in broadcasting as in all other aspects of life. Radio brought the first news of the war as it happened. It helped rally the American people around patriotic causes. It reminded listeners to conserve food and gasoline, to collect for scrap metal drives, to buy war bonds. Radio stars broadcast from military bases to boost morale.

The war had other effects on radio as well. Many career radio men saw action in the armed forces, some with microphones in hand. These included owners such as Faust Couture, managers such as Jack Atwood and John Libby and air personalities such as Don Powers, Hal Dutch, Uncle Hezzie Q. Snow, Denny Shute and Ben and Les Hubley.

The war brought a freeze on new stations and also on new equipment for existing ones. All resources were reserved for the war effort, delaying the growth of AM and the development of FM.

After the war, there was a "Broadcast Boom" that paralleled the Baby Boom." In the three years from 1946-1949, eleven new Maine

radio stations went on the air. The eight AMs and three FMs brought the number of Maine stations to eighteen by the end of the decade. Five new stations debuted in 1946 alone! Some were the handiwork of the same entrepreneurs we met in the 30s, others of a new crop of innovators.

1946

WPOR went on the air in March, carrying Yankee and ABC network programming. It was owned by Centennial Broadcasting Co. Inc. and was located in the old Hotel Graymore in downtown Portland. Murray Carpenter was the principal stockholder, along with the Rea family of Pittsburgh and other investors. Carpenter, who had previously worked at the Compton Advertising Agency in New York, was also general manager.

In 1948, Dick Bronson arrived at **WPOR** as program director and chief announcer. Bronson recalls two important events that year: the name change to Oliver Broadcasting Co. (although ownership remained primarily with Carpenter



During World War II, Hollywood made many films to help promote the American war effort. On a swing through Portland in June, 1945 Anthony Quinn discussed his latest release, "Return to Bataan" with WGAN announcers and U. S. Army representatives. On the far right is Quinn's new bride, a Philippino actress who starred with Quinn in the movie. Many entertainers who passed through Maine to promote the war effort would inevitably end up on radio.

and the Reas) and the move across the street to the Chapman Building. Murray Carpenter's promotional talents made the most of this event with a week-long grand opening featuring tours for thousands of people.

WMTW in Portland also went on the air in 1946. Like WPOR (and so many others), its first home was a hotel—in this case the Falmouth. WMTW was owned by the Yankee Network and, of course, carried Yankee and Mutual network programming. John Shepherd was chairman of the board. Don Curran, who joined WMTW as a staff announcer in 1947, recalls that Yankee had planned for the station to be the first FM in Maine, with a link-up to a transmitter to be located in Poland Spring. Somehow that didn't happen, and it went on the air as an AM, with its tower legs implanted in the depths of an old abandoned water well in an enclosed cul-de-sac hotel courtyard.

Carleton Brown was the principal owner and president of Kennebec Broadcasting Company, which put WTVL in Waterville on the air on June 19, 1946. He also was general manager.

Bangor also got a new radio station in 1946. WJOR was owned by Bangor Broadcasting Service, Inc. and located at 22 State Street. Stephen Verladi was president and chief engineer,

Sidney Sloan was manager and program director and Lawrence Sloan, commercial manager. WJOR brought Yankee and Mutual network programming to Bangor.

Faust Couture's Twin City Broadcasting Co. put WFAU in Augusta on the air on October 2, 1946. As with WCOU, Couture chose call letters from his own name (FAU for Faust). Couture had originally planned for his second station to be located in Waterville. However, his frozen war-time application had lapsed while he was in the army and the filing was picked up by Carleton Brown. WFAU's first general manager was Robert Payne and its second manager (with the longest tenure in that position) was Norman Gallant.

1947

Four stations debuted in 1947, including the state's first two FMs. Lewiston got its second AM station on September 4, 1947 when the Lewiston-Auburn Broadcasting Corporation put WLAM on the air. Offices and studios were on the top two floors at 129 Lisbon Street in Lewiston and a newly constructed transmitter building and towers were located on Washington St. in Auburn. Chief owner and general manager was Frank S. Hoy. Denny Shute was station manager.

WPOR-AM announcers Lee Nelson and Ray Mercer clown around with audience participants during "Brunch at the Lafayette," a daily radio show sponsored by 20th Century Market in 1949. Dick Bronson, then a young program director, looks on with glee.



The founding members of the Maine Association of Broadcasters during their organizational meeting at the Augusta House in November, 1947. The Who's Who of owners and general managers of the pioneer stations in Maine. Seated left to right: Governor Horace Hildreth, Jack Atwood, NAB President Harold Fellows, Augusta Mayor Charles Nelson, Murray Carpenter, Carleton Brown, Harold Vigue. Standing left to right: Francis Simpson, Frank Hoy, Creighton Gatchell, Larry Sloane, Elden Shute, William Rines, Robert Payne, John Libby, Faust Couture, Unidentified, Edward Guernsey, Fred Simpson.



A little more than two weeks later, on September 20, Guy Gannett Broadcasting Services put **WGUY** in Bangor on the air. **WGUY** brought ABC programming to Bangor listeners who now could choose from four networks. The call letters **GUY** spell out owner Guy Gannett's first name. Station manager Sam Henderson would also be in charge of **WGUY-FM**, Maine's first FM station, which went on the air in November 1947.

Gannett put a third station, **WGAN-FM**, on the air in Portland on December 14, 1947. Both FMs were engineered by Roger W. Hodgkins, chief engineer of Guy Gannett Broadcasting Services. Creighton E. Gatchell, who had been manager of **WGAN-AM** since 1938, took on the same responsibilities at **WGAN-FM**. Another **WGAN-AM** veteran, Richard E. Bates, became program director for the new FM station.

The coming of static-free FM received favorable press, with Bates College president Charles F. Phillips hailing it as "another step in the progress of radio" in the *Portland Sunday Telegram and Sunday Press Herald* on 12/14/47. The paper even included a hopeful mention that, "the small wartime number of such receivers has increased rapidly during the past two years."

1948

Maine's third FM, **WCOU-FM**, debuted on February 29, 1948 in Lewiston. It was the third station for Faust Couture's Twin City Broadcasting Company. John Libby was general manager for both the AM and FM stations.

The last Maine station to come on the air in the 40s was **WIDE**, located at 234 Main Street in Biddeford. It was the only AM station without network affiliation. Gordon J. Lewis wore a number of hats that first year as president of Biddeford Broadcast Group and as general and commercial manager of the station.

Changes at the Original Seven Stations

Meanwhile, among the seven original stations, there had been some ownership changes. Henry Rines died in 1939. His widow, Adeline Rines, became head of the Maine Broadcasting System, which by the end of the 40s consisted of **WCSH**, **WRDO** and **WLBZ**. **WLBZ** had been purchased from Thompson Guernsey in 1944.

After preparation at Harvard and RCA Institute, Adeline's son William H. Rines took over the management of the Maine Broadcasting system in 1941 and became general manager of **WCSH**. Ed Guernsey was general manager at **WLBZ** and Jack Atwood managed **WRDO**.

The Rines family was the first to own more than one Maine station. By the end of the

decade, Guy Gannett Broadcasting Service owned four (**WGUY-AM & FM** and **WGAN-AM & FM**) and Faust Couture's Twin City Broadcasting Co. owned three (**WCOU-AM & FM** and **WFAU**).

At **WAGM** in Presque Isle, Richard Marshall remembers that the station was destroyed in a fire in the winter of 1944 and was rebuilt by manager Harold Glidden, who was now principal owner. Glidden moved the station to State Street, bought all new equipment, raised the power to 250 watts, joined the Keystone Broadcasting System and added to his management team Forrest Craig as commercial manager and Ted Coffin as program director.

Late in 1949, Fred Simpson sold the Community Broadcasting Service (**WABI**) to Murray Carpenter and former Maine Governor Horace Hildreth. This was to be the beginning of the Hildreth Stations network. Hildreth was then president-elect of Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania and Carpenter had sold his stock and was no longer involved at **WPOR**.

Walter Dickson recalled that Carpenter had gotten Hildreth interested in the broadcasting business as a way to further his political career. At the time of the purchase of **WABI**, Hildreth became president of the company and Carpenter became treasurer and general manager of the station.

Locations

The majority of new stations continued to emerge in the heavier population centers. By the end of the 40s, Portland and Bangor each had five stations (including one FM), Lewiston had three (including one FM) and Augusta two stations. Stations were also located in Waterville and Biddeford, with Presque Isle remaining as the northernmost station location in the state.

As in the 30s, many new stations were originally located in hotels (like **WMTW** in the Hotel Falmouth). But by the end of the decade, stations began to design and build facilities specifically for broadcasting.

WPOR started out in the Hotel Graymore, but two years later moved to the Chapman building. Dick Bronson recalls that, at the time, the new, specially designed facilities were very modern and state-of-the-art. Built in the Chapman Arcade, the main studio on the second floor had poly-cylindrical walls, with curved surfaces for sound control and a large plate glass window so that the public could observe the studio activities.

WTVL was housed in a private home which had been adapted to the needs of the station. Denny Shute remembers the UPI machine was in a closet, the sales offices were in the bedrooms and the front office and reception area were in the living room. The remainder of the house

The WABI radio studio was located here at 57 State Street, Bangor from 1937 until 1962 when it was moved to "Studio City" on Hildreth Street.



consisted of an announcing booth and two studios.

WFAU was one of the first Maine radio stations to house its studio and transmitter in the same building, according to "The First Ten Years," by Lucille Dostie (former WFAU Record Librarian). A new building was constructed in 1946 at 160 Bangor Street in only sixty-nine days and the tower was flown in.

A year later in 1947, Guy Gannett Broadcasting Services built a facility on Mt. Hope Avenue in Bangor to house WGUY-AM & FM. The glass and brick building and facilities were designed by Gannett manager Creighton Gatchell and chief engineer Roger Hodgkins. This building was later occupied by WLBZ-TV.

Engineering

The role of the engineer in the day-to-day operations of radio stations in the 40s was much more prominent than it is today. The task of keeping the programs on the air and the equipment functioning properly usually required more than one full-time engineer/technician. Many programs were still performed before a live audience. The people in front of the microphones (host, announcer or talent) were not operating the controls. It was a technician who set up the microphones, kept an eye on the levels, cued the music or sound effects, and switched from a studio show to a remote.

Stations were not on the air twenty-four hours a day, so transmitters had to be turned on and off and power output had to be strictly regulated. Nowadays this is often done by computer and is taken for granted. Here is a description of one of the daily engineering duties from an article about WGAN which appeared in the Portland Evening Express on 2/2/46:

"Starting a transmitter is not the simple matter the listener finds when he turns on his home receiver. With an opening program at 6 a.m. the engineer has about twenty minutes work warming up and testing the transmitter before the 'sign on.' He has to be there in ample time, too, for he can't hurry that warm-up period if he has any respect for tubes that cost hundreds of dollars each."

Equipment was still sometimes handmade or improvised, and even technical advances such as wire recorders had problems. The wire recorder was the predecessor of the reel-to-reel tape recorder. Eddie Owen, who started at WLBZ in 1942, recalls that it usually worked quite well and made it possible to reduce a whole basketball game to a half hour by recording only the action



Young Congresswoman Margaret Chase Smith spoke to a civic group in 1947 and was heard in Portland, Bangor and Augusta on the stations of the Maine Broadcasting System. In the 40s, it was small networks like this that allowed a politician to speak to the entire state from one location. Taken for granted today, it was impressive then to hear a politician speak from another town "live" and to realize that the speaker could be heard simultaneously all over the state.

and excluding the time-outs. "The only trouble with a wire recorder, if that wire ever broke, forget it. It was like a ball of steel wool; you could never get it unwound."

Don Curran, who joined the **WMTW** announcing staff in December of 1947, also remembers the wire recorders:

"Wire recorders were used on some remotes and used, I should say, with misgiving and trepidation. The wire was subject to extreme temperatures. If, for example, you recorded a Winter Olympics, as we did in Rumford when Lake Placid ran out of snow, you could not be sure of the result. If the wire didn't tangle, then the sub-zero temperatures were sure to affect the voice quality."

Perhaps one of the most dramatic events of the decade were the fires of 1947, during which it seemed at one point that the whole state was on fire. Telephone lines and wire recorders were used to provide new coverage. Ed Guernsey remembers this as the first use of the Webcor wire recorder at **WLBZ**:

"We not only used it for the first time, but John Wibby . . . could make things work with what he had and NBC covered the Bar Harbor fire from the Ellsworth telephone office or City Hall . . . The only amplifier John had down there with him was the wire recorder and he used that to feed the NBC network, with a little plastic microphone."

It was an occasion for improvisation and bravery. Don MacWilliams, working at **WMTW** at the time, remembers that **WCSH's** Phil Johnson even went so far as to phone in a report on the fire from a burning building.

In "the show must go on" tradition, Harold Dinsmore gives this account of a **WRDO** remote he was doing at a Boy Scout Jamboree. He is not sure of the exact date, but it was probably early 40s. The governor was to be the keynote speaker. Just two minutes before he was due to go on the air, someone accidentally tripped over his audio wire, and broke it in two. But the broadcast went on as scheduled:

"I didn't have time to splice it, so I held it (the audio line) between my fingers, one end in each hand. Somebody got the idea that I was holding the electric line together and they said the electricity was running right through my body and I was quite a hero. It sounded a little more weird than it was."

Joe Eaton recalls attempts made to solve the problem of a noisy newsroom at **WLBZ**. What with the UPI Teletype machine and "a little ticker" Western Union gave them which brought telegrams on tape into the station, Eaton had trouble hearing the reporters and correspondents who would call in on the phone. First, they tried putting an amplifier in the phone but it amplified the background noise too. Then they built a sort of sound proof booth around the news machines and that quieted it down quite a bit.

Engineers kept busy not only with studio and remote equipment but with transmitters and towers as well. Walter Dickson tells an interesting tale about **WABI's** tower:

"We would have to go out and check the towers, see if the lights were on and everything was all right. I went up there one day in the fall and I was standing there looking at the tower. It was a four-legged tower, self-supporting, 260 feet . . . and all of a sudden one of the legs of the tower where it is supposed to be welded on a plate lifted up about two inches. It had broken away from the weld and that tower would lift up there and drop back, lift up and drop back . . . So I called Fred (Simpson) because Fred was always in the office and he was happy to come out to the transmitter and . . . we finally called some people and we had to shut the transmitter off and they came out with a welding deal and spot welded that leg. But it is a wonder we hadn't lost it, you know, four-legged tower like that on three legs and in the wind."

Microphones were becoming more sophisticated in the 40s. Eddie Owen at **WLBZ** recalls the so-called eight ball microphone, which resembled a black pool ball. Then there were the "salt shaker" microphones, which he remembers as being durable, efficient and used extensively for sports.

Don MacWilliams at **WCSH** recalls electrical transcriptions containing programs, music or sound effects which were on big sixteen-inch in diameter disks. There were also station recordings made on acetate-coated disks. This made it possible to record a network show (such as a soap opera) which could be played later. During the war, glass replaced aluminium as a base for the acetate, leading to some embarrassing situations when they were dropped or even bent.

Dan Kelly, who began his professional career at **WRDO** in 1942, recalls how for one reason or another **WRDO** couldn't carry one such soap opera live each day from 11:30 to noon. So

WCSH would make a transcription and ship it to them. It usually got there in plenty of time, but he recalls one time when it came very late. Dan was standing at the head of the stairs, waiting for the package. It was getting closer and closer to broadcast time, with only seconds to go:

"I was unwrapping the package while I was running into the control room, getting ready to give the station break ... I placed the disk on the turntable, looked at the label and uh-oh, it was the wrong side! So I flipped it over quickly, and looked at the label. It was the same label! They had put the identical label on both sides of the disk! I had a 50% chance of playing the correct side, so I just let her go. As it turned out, luck was with me and the right program played."

Kelly had another interesting transcription experience the day he received his package on time but with a neat break right across the middle of it. Undaunted, he taped it together. Except for a slight rhythmic clicking sound twice every revolution, it played just fine."The tricky part was when I had to flip it over during the break to play the other side."

Ed Guernsey recalls two other technical firsts, both from 1949. One was the first broadcast

using the WLBZ radio mike on the "Bangor Sportsman Club Show" at the old Bangor Auditorium. Norm Lambert would play requests taken from the floor over this mike. The second was a phone conversation during a Jean Murray program with a woman in the radio listening audience.

Many changes of frequencies and dial positions occurred in the early 40s, caused by the increased need during the war for clarity and organization. The 1941 *Broadcasting Yearbook* shows that all Maine stations except WGAN and WLBZ had changes that year.

Networks

By 1949, all Maine stations, except WIDE and the three FMs, had at least one network. Most had more than one, usually one national and at least one regional network. In 1943, the FCC passed chain broadcasting rules which prohibited the operation of two services by one network in the same area at the same time. As a result, NBC sold its Blue Network, which became the American Broadcasting Company.

A new network appeared in Maine in the 40s, called the Keystone Broadcasting System (KBS). It first appeared in the 1945 *Broadcasting Yearbook* at WAGM in Presque Isle. Dick Bronson, a veteran of WPOR and WABI, describes it as a



John McKernan Sr. gives the play by play on WLBZ radio during the action between South Portland and Waterville High Schools for the state basketball crown at the University of Maine gymnasium in 1949. Joining him are announcer Eddie Owen and engineer John Wibby. McKernan died in the early 50s, but his love of sports survived in his son, "Jock," a high school and college athlete who became governor of Maine in 1986. The universal appeal of sports and radio's ability to bring the action into every household was one reason for the explosive growth of this medium.

Popular ABC radio network talk show host Don McNeill aired his nationally broadcast "Breakfast Club" live from WPOR-AM Portland studios on August 18, 1949.



radio sales organization with nationwide accounts, which supplied stations with programs and commercials in the form of electrical transcriptions. The stations were not interconnected by radio lines.

The power and popularity of the networks continued to grow through the decade, with big band music, soap operas, comedies, dramas and network stars such as Bing Crosby, Amos 'n' Andy, Chet Huntley and Betty Crocker.

Maine's own Marjorie Mills starred on the New England Regional Network. A native of Waterville, she attended Colby College for two years. Calling herself "The Soup and Beans Lady," her half-hour programs included chats about cooking, gardening, children, pets, poetry, hobbies, her grandchildren, new books and philosophy. She was known for her gentle good nature and friendliness.

Maine stations continued to provide as well as carry network programs. On August 2, 1940, for example, WLBZ fed NBC a half-hour broadcast of an interview with Admiral Byrd. It originated in the WLBZ third floor auditorium (studio B) and was relayed to the Byrd expedition at Little America using the General Electric Company short wave station WEEO. Ed Guernsey believes this to be the first broadcast from a Maine station involving overseas transmission.

Local Programming

Local programming continued with the types of shows begun in the 30s. Most stations carried programs of local news, weather, sports, food and fashion, juvenile, education, variety, comedy, music, drama, quiz and religion.

French language programming, pioneered by WCOU, was carried on at least four other stations by the end of the decade. This is a reflection of the large number of French Canadians who had settled in Maine, especially in the north.

Along with the big bands, country music remained popular, with groups such as "The Sweethearts of the Air," Tony and Juanita on WCSH and WLBZ. Hal Dutch remembers "Jimmy and Dick" (Jimmy Klasi and Dick Pierson) who came from St. Louis every summer to perform on WABI. Johnny McRae commented that Smiling Dave and Pappy Rappy built a special studio, accommodating 125 to 150 people for their western-cowboy music performances at WABI.

The new FMs featured mostly classical music. WGUY-FM offered broadcasts from the Metropolitan Opera Company every Saturday. During a special broadcast before the first of these opera programs on November 15, 1947, Raymond Floyd, music supervisor of the Bangor schools,

was so impressed with the educational potential of FM radio that he declared that, "radio today is the most important factor in the dissemination of music."

Local children's programs continued to flourish in the 40s. At WTVL, Waterville youngsters celebrated their birthdays on "Birthday Party," hosted by Allison Day. At WFAU, "The Story Book Revue" premiered in November, 1947.



Radio contests have always been popular as WRDO radio announcer Dan Kelly found out as he stood knee deep in 75,000 Drew's Dairy bottle caps sent in by listeners in 1948. Fans voted for their favorite talent on the popular local WRDO program "Meet the Mike," and sent in a bottle cap with each submission. Many radio contests exceeded wildest expectations, again proving the power of the medium and the enthusiasm of the listeners for such promotions.

WCOU staff in the mid 40s. Faust Couture, left, the dynamic owner/operator of WCOU, Lewiston and WFAU, Augusta was responsible for many Maine pioneer broadcasting careers. Faust was also a big believer in French language broadcasts and had his own French announcer/commentator on the air every day.

