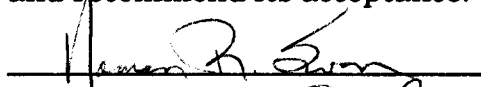
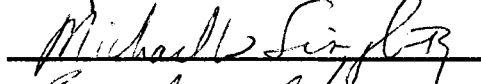
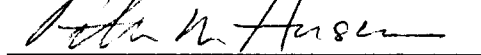


To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Jerry Wayne Rinks entitled "We Shield Millions: A History of WSM 1925-1951." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Communication.

  
Dr. Herbert Howard, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation  
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

  
Associate Vice Chancellor  
and Dean of The Graduate School

WE SHIELD MILLIONS: A HISTORY OF WSM 1925-1950

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jerry Wayne Rinks

August 1993

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## ABSTRACT

This study attempted to develop a history of the first quarter-century of WSM, Tennessee's first and only 50,000 watt clear channel AM radio station. With an original investment of \$50,000, the National Life and Accident Insurance Company began a broadcast endeavor which led to WSM, Nashville, becoming one of the nation's most influential radio stations.

To complete this study, statements and accounts of primary sources were utilized including interviews with key figures in WSM's history. Federal Communications Commission Records were researched as were industry trade papers and newspapers of the period.

Among findings were the actions of individual Congressmen in helping WSM attain favorable treatment by the Federal Radio Commission in 1928 which led to WSM being granted one of the 40 clear channel frequencies in the nation. WSM was found to have played a very active role in fighting to preserve clear channel AM broadcasting.

It was concluded that WSM's success and leadership was the result of the financial strength and commitment of the parent company, WSM's affiliation with NBC, and the national appeal of the Grand Ole Opry.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

On Saturday night November 12, 1932, radio listeners all over the United States were treated to a special 46-minute program heralding the fact that WSM was on the air. The purpose of the program was to inaugurate the 50,000 watt service of the South's first and Tennessee's only radio station to have nationwide protection from interference -- a clear channel.

It had been only seven years earlier that WSM began broadcasting. It was on October 5, 1925, that "Nashville went on the radio map" when the National Life and Accident Insurance Company fired up its 1,000 watt Western Electric transmitter (DeWitt Interview, 1990).

#### Overview of Industry

Radio, as we know it today, was only five years old when WSM went on the air. KDKA, recognized as the oldest station still in operation, went on the air in 1920 in East Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Head, 1956).

Radio grew quickly. By the end of 1923 there were 556 radio stations licensed in the U.S. (Bureau of Navigation Reports, 1924). This number had grown to 571 stations by the time WSM went on the air. Most of the stations broadcasting in 1925 were located in the major metropolitan areas of the Northeast and the Mid-West. Nashville had only two other stations on the air when WSM made its debut in 1925. There were 38 stations in New York; Chicago had 40 stations (Bureau of Navigation Reports, 1926). The number of radio stations increased from 831 in 1941 to more than a thousand at the end of World War II. By 1950, the end of the time frame for this study of WSM, there were more than 2,000 AM radio stations in the United States, the majority of them smaller stations serving local areas (Sterling & Kittross, 1990).

In 1925, an estimated 10% of America's households had a radio set. Despite the fact that the average radio set cost around \$80, the percentage of households with radios grew to almost 50% by 1930. More than 95% of households owned at least one radio set by 1950 when the cost of receivers had dropped to around \$25 (Sterling & Kittross, 1990).

During the years chosen for this study, radio advertising grew rapidly. In 1927, the year networks and network advertising became prevalent on radio, revenues totaled \$4.8 million dollars. By 1930, annual radio advertising revenue grew to more than \$40 million or about 2% of all advertising dollars spent in the nation. By the end of 1950, radio advertising totaled \$605.4 million, about 11% of total advertising revenues in the United States. It should be noted that the percentage of radio revenues going to national networks dropped from 79% in 1927, to less than 33% in 1950 (Sterling & Kittross, 1990).

#### Foundation for American Broadcasting

Head & Sterling (1990) noted the emergence of some key broadcasting concepts in the early 1920's. Three of these concepts became the foundation for broadcasting in the United States.

(1) Broadcasting's purpose is to serve a large audience; (2) Advertising became the principal means of radio's financial support; and (3) The federal government was given the power to regulate and license radio stations to serve the public interest, convenience, and necessity.

Within this paradigm of the American system of broadcasting, station profitability and service to the public were not seen as mutually exclusive propositions. Federal regulation has recognized the desirability of profitable broadcast operations which made possible meaningful public service by station licensees. Thus, profitability and public service were seen as compatible in the American broadcasting system. It was from this point of view that this study was undertaken.

#### Importance of WSM

While WSM was not the first radio station to go on the air in Tennessee's capital city, it quickly became Nashville's leading station. It also became a broadcast leader at the national level during a period of momentous development and change within broadcasting. Through the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression, the War Years, and beyond, WSM became an innovator in the industry and a powerful voice for the region.

WSM was one of the first "chain" (network) stations in the South. The station's tower at 878 feet tall became the tallest AM tower in the nation (Hay, 1933; The Nashville Tennessean, November 12, 1932).

WSM's early programming may be best described as diverse. The station imported the Metropolitan Opera to the region and exported the "hillbilly culture" of the Grand Ole Opry to the entire nation. In fact, the Grand Ole Opry grew from being one of fourteen "major" country music radio variety shows to be the "focal point of the development of the music industry in Nashville" (Peterson, 1975, p. 357).

The Air Castle of the South, as WSM became known, was also an industry leader in the areas of farm broadcasting, public service efforts, and support for the war effort in World War Two. Although these contributions are not mentioned as often as the Grand Ole Opry in popular literature (or in scholarly works, for that matter), they deserve attention.

WSM also operated one of the nation's pioneer Frequency Modulation (FM) stations. In January, 1941, WSM began operation of the nation's first commercially licensed FM radio station and became a leader in forming a national FM radio network (FM Broadcasters Association Bulletin, April 3, 1941).

WSM was and still is an important radio station. A study of WSM's first 25 years is needed to understand its own history as well as the nature of clear channel broadcasting during those years.

### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to present a historical description of the development and operation of WSM Radio, Nashville, Tennessee, with an emphasis on its role as a clear channel radio station.

### Time-Frame

This study will focus on WSM from its first broadcast on October 5, 1925, until the inauguration of WSM-TV, September 30, 1950. Within this 25-year span, the WSM Barn Dance began (1925), the Grand Ole Opry was born (1927), 50,000 watt clear channel broadcasting was inaugurated (1932), the Grand Ole Opry was picked up by NBC (1939), and the Grand Ole Opry moved to the Ryman Auditorium, (1943), where it was to stay for the next 31 years. WSM also began the nation's first commercial FM operation (1941), and in 1950, WSM-TV went on the air as the second TV station in Tennessee and one of the first TV stations in the South (WSM Station Files, FCC, Washington DC). WMC-TV in Memphis was the first television station to go on the air in Tennessee.

## Questions

This study will seek to provide a history of WSM during the first 25 years of its operation, with emphasis on WSM's service as a clear channel station. The following research questions have guided this study:

1. Why did the National Life and Accident Insurance Company enter the radio business in the first place? Nashville already had radio service. What prompted the insurance company's investment in radio broadcasting?

2. What technology was used in the inaugural broadcast? What programs were aired? Who took part in them?

3. How did Nashville papers report WSM's debut?

4. What type programs were broadcast on WSM during its early period? What was the early program schedule like? How did the WSM Barn Dance come about?

5. How did WSM obtain the singular 50,000 watt clear channel frequency in Tennessee?

6. How was the inauguration of WSM's 50,000 watt service covered by Nashville newspapers? What new

technology was used? What programs were broadcast? How did the audience respond?

7. How did WSM fulfill its mission to the rural audience as a clear channel station? Was WSM typical of other clear channel stations? How did WSM serve its local audience and serve the needs of the rural audience?

8. What was the impact of WSM's new high power and clear channel coverage area on the station's billing and on the sale of life insurance?

9. After the war the FCC considered reducing the protected coverage area of clear channel stations. How did WSM protect its clear channel status?

10. How did WSM become one of the pioneer FM operators in the nation with the first commercially licensed FM radio station to go on the air?

11. How did WSM bring television to Nashville? What impact did WSM-TV have on its radio operations?

12. In what ways was WSM unique? How did its development relate to the broadcasting industry in general? Why did WSM become an important station during the period of this study?

14. What were WSM's major contributions to broadcasting? Who were the key contributors?

### Method of Research

To answer the research questions involved in this study, three types of sources were used: original documents, periodicals and newspapers, and interviews. Wherever possible, efforts were made to corroborate information from two or more sources.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) files contain legal documents pertaining to WSM. Since WSM began operations prior to the FCC's creation in 1934, Federal Radio Commission (FRC) documents are valuable sources for the years between 1927 and 1932. Annual Reports of the Department of Commerce and minutes of the House Committee on the Merchant Marine and Fisheries contain information on WSM's early years.

The Shield, the in-house publication of WSM's parent company, and WSM's Program Release were also utilized as primary sources. Other primary sources were interviews and first person written accounts of former and present WSM employees. This material serves as eyewitness accounts to some of the milestones of WSM history.

Considerable material for this study was found in early periodicals including Broadcast News, a publication of the RCA Victor Company published sporadically in the 1930's. Radio World, Broadcast Advertising, and Radio Digest were other important sources for information on WSM in the 1920's. Variety Magazine covered radio programming and broadcast industry developments. Broadcasting contains a wealth of information on broadcasting beginning in 1932.

The monthly in-house publication of the National Association of Broadcasters, NAB Reports, was also searched for material on WSM. Publications of the FM Broadcasters Association provided a chronology of WSM's involvement in FM broadcasting.

The Nashville Tennessean, The Nashville Banner, The Courier-Journal (Louisville), and the News-Sentinel (Knoxville) each contain valuable articles on WSM during time-frame chosen for this study. Radio program listings in The Nashville Tennessean were used in a content analysis of WSM programming during the period.

The initial research for this study began with the on-line card catalog at the University of Tennessee's John C. Hodges Library in Knoxville. The traditional hard copy card catalog was then searched. Areas

examined included broadcasting, Tennessee and Nashville history, country music, the Grand Ole Opry, and insurance. Various indexes were also consulted.

Individual newspapers were researched as were the minutes of governmental meetings on file in the Federal Repository at the Hodges Library. Special collections were also researched at Vanderbilt University, and the Ben West Library, Nashville. The Broadcast Pioneers Library, the Federal Communications Commission Archives, and the National Association of Broadcasters holdings provided documents which serve as primary sources for this study.

The Country Music Foundation in Nashville houses many items relating to WSM including issues of the National Life Shield and copies of Rural Radio magazine from the late 1930's. The Foundation also was the source of several oral history interviews with key figures in the development of WSM including John H. DeWitt, Jr. These taped interviews recorded by John Rumble in the 1980s were extremely useful to this project.

### Definition of Terms

Terms and definitions pertaining to this study include:

AM radio -- amplitude modulation stations divided into various classes based on geographical coverage; broadcast band (medium wave) currently assigned between 525-1705 kHz.

Chain Stations -- a term identifying those stations connected by permanent telephone cables for distribution of network programs (network affiliated stations).

Clear Channel -- one of 40 cleared frequencies on which only one station would be broadcasting anywhere in the nation during evening hours, allowing for better skywave reception (see skywave) in rural areas up to the limit of the stations nighttime signal. (Also see Groundwave).

Extension Broadcasting -- programs of interest to the farmer and homemaker often seen as "extensions" of educational services provided by the United States Department of Agriculture, state universities, and various state agencies.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) -- the permanent body created by Congress in 1934 to regulate all broadcasting (except that done by the military)

Federal Radio Commission (FRC) -- a temporary body created by Congress in 1927 to "bring order to the airwaves", by allocation of stations by frequencies, power, and hours of operation.

FM radio -- frequency modulation broadcasting developed in 1933 with commercial broadcast authorization coming in 1941. the current FM broadcast band is assigned to the space between 88 MHz to 108 MHz. (Author's note: this study refers to frequency in "hertz" [Hz], as adopted internationally in the 1960's. The earlier term, "cycles" appears in this study in quoted material).

Groundwave -- waves which propagate along the surface of the earth, following its curvature and, traveling beyond the horizon.

National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) -- a voluntary organization of broadcasters formed in 1923 in an effort to provide self-regulation for radio

National Broadcasting Company (NBC) -- the first network (1926). NBC offered continuous and regular program service through affiliates utilizing the first permanent cable connections. NBC operated a double

network (NBC-Red and NBC-Blue) until 1943 when the Chain Broadcasting Regulations forced NBC to sell one of the networks. NBC sold the Blue network which was renamed the American Broadcasting Company in 1945.

National Life and Accident Insurance Company -- parent company of WSM.

Old Time Music -- a term used to identify music of rural America, later known as "Hillbilly Music", currently known as country music.

Skywave -- radio waves bending back or bouncing off the ionosphere at night often traveling thousands of miles.

### Limitations

The parameters for this study were set between 1925, when WSM went on the air, and 1950, when WSM-TV began broadcasting. To give a better understanding of how WSM began, the time frame was stretched to cover events leading up to the station's initial broadcast in 1925 and the months following the debut of WSM-TV.

This reporting of a history of WSM as a clear channel station was based on evidence that exists today including FRC and FCC primary documents, archival

materials, and interviews with key persons directly involved with WSM. Limitations include: (1) very few of the key persons are still alive, those who were available may suffer from selective memory; (2) it was not possible to do a listenership study of the period; and, (3) it was not possible to interview competitors of the station. Because resources for obtaining other perspectives were not available, what is presented here often reflects the perspective of WSM's ownership, management, and personnel on what was essentially an "establishment" station operated by a powerful company with political connections reaching well beyond Nashville, Tennessee. The study was done from the perspective of a broadcast historian interested in the development and operation of WSM, a nationally important station, and especially in how this station fulfilled its responsibilities as a clear channel station.

The scarcity of scholarly material on WSM provided a challenge. Fortunately, this study has uncovered both primary and secondary source material relevant to the time frame chosen for analysis.

Numerous subjects offer potential for additional research. Among these are the various key figures

involved with WSM between 1925 and 1951 in the areas of management, engineering, and programming.

Another area that would offer potential for additional research is the development of non-country music programming on WSM.

### Organization

This study is arranged topically in chronological order with Chapter I serving as an introduction.

Chapter II examines the literature relevant to the study.

Chapter III covers the early history of Nashville radio and the beginning of WSM in 1925.

The operation of WSM from 1925 to 1928 is detailed in Chapter IV.

Events leading up to WSM's 50,000 watt, clear channel authorization are examined in Chapter V.

The debut of WSM's high power operation is covered in Chapter VI, with particular attention given to the relationship between WSM's development and the sale of life insurance for the parent company.

Chapter VII explores WSM's public service efforts including extraordinary efforts during the "Flood of 1937."

Chapter VIII reviews WSM's role in the development of farm and extension programming and the station's efforts to enlist public support for the war effort in the 1940s.

Chapter IX covers WSM's advances in the field of Frequency Modulation broadcasting including WSM's developing (and, later, shutting down) one of the nation's first commercially licensed FM stations. The fight to maintain WSM's clear channel coverage and the beginning of WSM television are also covered in this chapter.

Chapter X examines the evolution of WSM programming through the time-frame of this study.

Chapter XI contains the summary and conclusions. Specific suggestions for further research are also noted.

## CHAPTER II

### THE LITERATURE

Numerous books and articles exist dealing with broadcast history. Among this literature are several histories of individual stations as well as technical and regulatory histories of the developing industry. At this writing there exists no published history of WSM radio. This is not to imply that the station has been overlooked by historians, for an investigation of references in scholarly literature will discover many mentions of WSM. Unfortunately, most of the references are limited to information regarding the WSM Barn Dance, the Grand Ole Opry, or country music, generally.

WSM and the early days of broadcasting in Nashville were the focal points of a brief article written in 1972 by retired WSM president, John H. DeWitt, Jr. DeWitt was an active participant in Nashville radio even before WSM went on the air. His association with WSM began before the station's first broadcast. Although DeWitt's list of publications is brief, John Rumble's (1986), WSM's (1990), our 1993 interviews with DeWitt serve as valuable primary sources for any comprehensive study of WSM.

Among publications dealing with an overview of broadcast history, Archer (1938), Head (1956), Barnouw (1966), and MacDonald (1979) made significant contributions for a general understanding of how broadcasting began.

The National Association of Broadcasters' 1933 publication of American Radio offered the broadcast industry's justification for commercial advertising as the financial underpinning of the broadcast industry.

Bergreen (1980) also focused on commercial advertising in modern broadcasting. The work offers a comprehensive view of the development of broadcast advertising.

Sterling and Kittross (1990) is especially useful as a secondary source of information due to its concise presentation of descriptive data on early broadcast stations. The work also contains a comprehensive bibliography on broadcast history.

While each of the works mentioned above offers information on the development of broadcast regulation, several works treat the specific subject in detail. Davis (1927), and Schmeckebier (1932) each contribute to the story of how broadcast regulation began and evolved.

Bensman (1969) offered a thorough history of early regulation by the Department of Commerce and offers convincing evidence that later regulation was essentially a continuation of that early regulatory policy.

Emery (1961) and Weeks (1962) are also valuable studies of the evolution of standards and policies for broadcast regulation.

In addition to a scholarly analysis of the development of broadcast regulation, Rosen (1980) offered useful information regarding the birth of the first network, the National Broadcasting Company.

Howard and Kievman (1986) offer an excellent overview of programming developments for both radio and TV.

Robinson (1979) examined the government's concern with early network dominance of the broadcasting industry. The author also details the extent of advertising content on the networks in the 1930s.

Shurik (1946) made a significant contribution to the area of individual station research by providing a chronology of broadcasting milestones, including WSM's public service efforts during the Ohio River floods of 1937.

Brown (1975) examined the impact of the FCC's attempts to limit the protected coverage area of clear channel stations (including WSM) in the Clear Channel proceedings from 1945 until 1972. Brown's study offers a comprehensive history of the challenge brought to clear channel broadcasting during the period.

Eagan (1956) wrote a history of the Clear Channel Broadcasting Service and its work to preserve clear channels.

Sterling (1969) examined the development and licensing of FM broadcast stations but does not include W47NV as a pioneer FM station.

### The Grand Ole Opry and Country Music Histories

As previously stated, a substantial amount of published work exists regarding barn dances and the Grand Ole Opry. Evans (1969) and Biggar (1971) offer histories of the National Barn Dance on WLS, a forerunner to the Grand Ole Opry.

George Hay, who is credited with giving the Grand Ole Opry its name, brought his National Barn Dance experience from WLS to WSM. Hay's (1953) recollection of the Opry is among the earliest Opry histories. Hay's

columns in Rural Radio also gave details on WSM and the Opry from an insider's point of view.

Country music historian Bill C. Malone (1985) also looked at the development of the Grand Ole Opry. Malone's examination of "early commercial hillbilly music" is an invaluable resource.

McDaniel and Seligman (1952) offered valuable information on the development of the Opry.

Wolf (1975) supplied a most inclusive work on the Opry's early years. He included information on the relationship of WSM's parent company, the National Life and Accident Insurance Company, and the Opry.

Hurst (1975) also examined the history of the Opry and the early days of WSM broadcasting.

Rumble (1980) detailed the work of Fred Rose in the development of the music industry in Nashville in the 1940s and 1950s.

Peterson (1975) examined the interrelationships between country music programming and the insurance company ownership of WSM. Stamper (1968) further detailed how the sale of insurance was aided by WSM.

WSM's country music and other program services to the rural audience is documented in testimony before the Clear Channel License Renewal Hearings of the

Federal Communications Commission in 1947. Detailed information on WSM farm broadcasting may be found in Baker (1981) who offers a history of the first sixty years of farm broadcasting in the United States. Scroggins (1981) traced the ties between early farm broadcasting on WSM and The University of Tennessee's extension services.

### Station Histories

Along with the various general broadcast histories, there exists within the literature scholarly works on individual station histories such as Banning's (1946) history of WEAJ, New York. WEAJ is credited with running the first paid commercial in 1922 when the station was owned by American Telephone and Telegraph (AT & T). WEAJ later became WNBC and is currently WFAN. Lichty (1964) examined the development and operation of WLW, the Cincinnati facility that was (at one time) the most powerful AM station in the United States. Rimes (1963) produced a history of Detroit's WWJ which claims the Detroit station was the world's first radio station.

Useful historical material is also found in non-scholarly, public relations, histories. An example of the latter is Welcome South, Brother, Cox Broadcasting Company's 1974 history of the South's first radio station, WSB, Atlanta.

#### Periodicals, Newspapers, Special Collections

In the case of WSM, it appears there have been few scholarly articles written specifically about WSM. This apparent lack of scholarly attention may be attributed to the focus being placed on country music and the Grand Ole Opry, rather than on the station which originated and developed the Opry.

Considerable newspaper coverage of WSM may be found in both The Nashville Tennessean and The Nashville Banner. Vanderbilt University's Jean and Alexander Heard Library and the Ben West Public Library in Nashville contain special collections pertaining to WSM and the Opry.

While both collections house correspondence, promotional material, and company publications. The Vanderbilt collection contains program schedules, scripts, and photographs. A most helpful resource is

the data presented to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Clear Channel Hearings of 1947.

WSM station files stored at the Federal Records Center in Suitland, Maryland contain many invaluable documents pertaining to the operation of WSM. Included are license renewal applications and various items of correspondence between the FCC and WSM. The Broadcast Pioneers Library in Washington D.C. contains oral histories pertaining to the development of broadcasting during the time frame chosen for this study, however, few of the oral history items found relate directly to WSM. The Pioneers Library and The National Association of Broadcasters Library, also in Washington D.C., contain valuable early trade publications as well as important NAB reports useful to this study.

Only a limited amount of literature has been produced about clear channels. No previous studies have been done on WSM as a clear channel station, therefore, this dissertation will attempt to fill a void in the literature of clear channel radio history and in particular, WSM, Nashville.

## CHAPTER III

## EARLY NASHVILLE RADIO AND THE BIRTH OF WSM

When WSM began operations in October 1925, local newspaper headlines declared that "Nashville was now on the radio map" (The Nashville Tennessean, October 6, 1925). A quick glance at the newspapers of the day might have led a recent arrival to the city to mistakenly believe that WSM was the first station to go on the air in Nashville. In fact, WDAA was the first radio station to go on the air in Tennessee's capital city almost three years earlier when sixteen year old Jack DeWitt built and installed a 20-watt radio transmitter at Ward-Belmont School in May of 1922 (DeWitt, 1986).

WDAA's broadcasts were scheduled when a prominent speaker or artist appeared at Ward-Belmont. The station featured an early "disc jockey" show in which Belmont's voice teacher, Gaetano deLuca, used his Victrola to broadcast the voice of Enrico Caruso and other performers. DeWitt's station, was operated by the school (which is now known as Belmont College) for only a year at which time the college decided that it could no longer afford to operate WDAA (Dewitt, 1972).

### WABV and The Nashville Business Club

DeWitt was not to remain out of the broadcasting business for long. Seven months after WDAA left the airwaves, DeWitt began operation of 50-watt WABV from a converted chicken house in his backyard, where he had earlier operated a ham radio transmitter. WABV, which began broadcasting in November of 1923, soon captured the interest of a local luncheon club known as the Nashville Business Club. That club "adopted" the station as a community project. One of the club members was Harry Stone, who, like young DeWitt, was later to become general manager of WSM and who would rise to national prominence in the rapidly developing broadcasting industry. Other persons who were to become WSM luminaries had WABV connections. Band leaders Francis Craig and Beasley Smith performed their music on WABV prior to becoming programming fixtures on WSM (DeWitt, 1972).

### The First Baptist Church and WCBQ

WABV was soon joined by another Nashville broadcast outlet. Dewitt (1972) lists March 1924 as the date he began test transmissions for WCBQ, a

station licensed to the Business Men's Sunday School Class of First Baptist Church, Nashville.

DeWitt (1972) reported letters from listeners as far away as Nebraska reporting clear reception of the station's 100 watt signal on a wavelength of 236 meters (Bureau of Navigation Report, June 30, 1924).

WCBQ (the call letters stood for "We Can't Be Quiet") had its formal debut broadcast on April 6, 1924, when the station broadcast services of the First Baptist Church. In 1926 WCBQ was sold to Braid Electric Company (Atwater-Kent radio distributor) and Waldrum Drug Company and was then operated as WBAW (Bureau of Navigation Report, June 30, 1927).

#### WEBX: The "Mystery" Station

The next station to go on the air in Nashville probably was WEBX, owned by John E. Cain Jr. of the Cain-Sloan Department store firm. The station is mentioned briefly in DeWitt's article on early radio broadcasting in Middle-Tennessee and is also mentioned in Broome and Tucker's (1990) The Other Music City.

WEBX, licensed in October 1924 (DeWitt, 1972), is not listed in the "Radio Stations of the United States" section of the Bureau of Navigation Annual Reports of

June 30, 1925, June 30, 1926, or June 30, 1927. WEBX is also absent from local radio program listings. More research is needed to clear up the "mystery" of WEBX.

#### WDAD and "Radio Dad"

The history of Nashville's fourth (or fifth, if one counts WEBX) station is well documented. WDAD was licensed to Dad's Auto Accessories Inc. in September 1925. The call letters, WDAD, had previously been licensed to a 10-watt station owned by William L. Harrison of the Central Kansas Radio Supply Company in Lindsborg, Kansas (Bureau of Navigation Report, 1922, p.74). What happened to the original WDAD is unclear, but the June 30, 1924, Bureau of Navigation Report makes no mention of WDAD or any other station being licensed to Lindsborg, Kansas.

Nashville's WDAD operated on 225.4 meters (1330 kilohertz) with a power of 150 watts. WDAD's transmitter was obtained from WOAN in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee and was moved to Nashville by DAD's Auto Accessories, Inc. (DeWitt, 1972). WOAN's owner, music store operator James D. Vaughn, had obtained a 500-watt transmitter to operate on 282.8 meters, a frequency to

later be shared with WSM (Bureau of Navigation Report, 1926, p. 72). Many early radio stations worked out shared time arrangements to avoid interference problems.

### Wide Coverage Claimed

WDAD claimed a coverage area of 2,000 miles having received mail from as far away as New York, Des Moines Iowa; and Atlanta (Wolfe, 1975). One newspaper article noted that WDAD was receiving "letters of applause" from practically all states East of the Rocky Mountains as well as from Canada (The Nashville Banner, October. 25, 1925, p. 5). "DAD's" as the station became known, was advertised in Nashville newspapers which emphasized radio equipment available at DAD's Auto Accessories and Radio Store, co-located with WDAD on Eighth Avenue North. A newspaper article pointed out that operating a broadcasting station helped Dad's radio department test and tune sets they installed (The Nashville Banner, October 4, 1925, p. 4). Newspaper advertising for WDAD featured a well dressed man identified as "Radio Dad" shown proudly announcing that "everybody should have a radio." (The Nashville Tennessean, October 12, 1925, p. 12).

### WDAD Programming

WDAD was broadcasting daily in October of 1925, mainly in the afternoon and early evening hours. A variety of music was presented including jazz and at least one performer of "old time music", Dr. Humphrey Bate (The Nashville Banner, October 25, 1925, p. 5). Dr. Bate, a surgeon and member of a historically prominent family, was later to lead the "Possum Hunters" band on the early broadcasts of the WSM Barn Dance (Hurst, 1975). WDAD had several local performers on its broadcast with so many artists volunteering that sufficient room could not be found for all of them (The Nashville Tennessean, September 27, 1925, p. 10). WDAD would later share its frequency with and eventually would be bought out by WLAC (Bureau of Navigation Report, 1927, p. 70).

### Nashville "Goes on the Radio Map"

On October 5, 1925, less than one month after WDAD began operations, WSM grabbed the headlines and the spotlight. WSM's parent company, the National Life and Accident Insurance Company, had tested the Western Electric type 6-A transmitter the previous week using

the call letters "4XC" (DeWitt, 1972). Local newspapers covered the progress toward the first WSM broadcast.

The owners of National Life must have been pleased when the local papers proclaimed "the inaugural program will make history" (The Nashville Banner, October 4, 1925, p. 3) and "great program to greet radio fans of nation" (The Nashville Tennessean, Special WSM Section, October 4, 1925, p. 1). Nashville's 136,000 residents (at least those who read the local newspapers) were told of the event which was planned for the next day. In a special multi-page WSM section in the October 4, 1925, Sunday editions of The Nashville Banner and The Nashville Tennessean, Wm. S. Howland wrote:

With a program which for variety, quality and comprehensiveness never has been surpassed in the South, WSM, the National Life and Accident Insurance company's great 1,000 watt Western Electric radio broadcasting station will be dedicated officially to the service of Nashville, Tennessee, and the South, starting at 7 p.m. Monday until 2 a.m. Tuesday on a wave length of 282.2 meters. (p. 1)

The touting of WSM may have resulted from the fact that its ownership, National Life, was a prominent member of Nashville's business community along with the major banks, another insurance company, major department stores, and the local newspapers. Thus, WSM began its operation as a member of Nashville's establishment and benefited from that favored status.

#### Studio Facilities

The original studio of Nashville's most powerful station was located on the fifth (top) floor of the National Life and Accident Insurance Company's corporate headquarters building on Seventh Avenue, North. Newspaper accounts of the era provide detailed information about the WSM broadcast operation. The studio was 21 feet wide and 24 feet long barely large enough to accommodate a 40 piece band. The sound proof studio was equipped with wine-colored drapes and a crystal chandelier overhead. A double plate glass window allowed visitors in an adjacent "auditorium" to see the program as it was being broadcast and to hear the broadcast over a loudspeaker. Ventilation was to be

provided by windows located on the East side of the National Life building (The Nashville Tennessean, October 4, 1925, WSM Section, p. 1).

Earlier WSM announced that they would not open the studios to the public until after the inaugural broadcast, "any day or night thereafter, the National company urges Nashville citizens who are cooperating so splendidly and wholeheartedly in making WSM the best station in America to inspect the studio and hear the concerts in actual process of broadcasting" (The Nashville Tennessean, October 5, 1925, p. 10).

Communication between the glass paneled control room and the studio was accomplished by means of a "signalbox" mounted on the wall of the studio next to the control room door. The apparatus amounted to a telephone connection between the announcer in the studio and the operator in the control room. The signalbox featured a "green light" which was activated by the operator to let the announcer know the transmitter was operating properly, then a red light was flashed on to indicate the studio program was on the air ("Fine Acoustic Effect Secured", The Nashville Banner, October 4, 1925, WSM Section, p. 3).

The WSM studio was furnished with an ebony Steinway parlor grand piano, reportedly chosen by Mr. Steinway himself "who felt that Nashville's leading musicians who will use it at WSM's studio, were deserving of no less an authority than himself to choose the perfect instrument as the perfect background for their art" ("Steinway Piano, Jewel in Ebony", The Nashville Banner, October 4, 1925, WSM Section p. 7).

#### WSM Transmitter and Towers

The transmitter chosen by executives of National Life for the WSM operation was the Western Electric Type 6-A. Installed by K. S. Price and John C. Herber, of Bell Telephone Laboratories in New York, the transmitter featured a 50 watt speech amplifier tube, a 250 watt modulator, a 250 watt oscillator and a 1,000 watt water-cooled radio frequency amplifier tube. The signal was broadcast on a wave length of 282.8 meters which was equivalent to 1060 kilohertz. Power for the transmitter came from by two 2,000 volt generators (WSM Station Files, FCC, Washington, DC). (See Appendix A)

WSM utilized two 165 foot towers built 300 feet apart to suspend its broadcast antenna, patterned after

WSB, Atlanta. The transmitter building was constructed at the base of the tower (WSM Station Files, FCC, Washington, DC). (See Appendix B). WSM engineer Thomas Parkes was located there to allow him to "be constantly on the premises to handle and take care of the intricacies of the equipment" (Giant Radio is close to City, The Nashville Banner, October 4, 1925, p. 4).

The twin towers and suspended antenna, located three blocks from Belmont College, were to remain in use by WSM until 1931 when the current 878 foot antenna was put into operation (WSM Station Files, FCC, Washington, DC).

Three private telephone lines connected the WSM studio operator with the transmitter operator located some two miles away on Fifteenth Avenue South in downtown Nashville. One line was for transmission of regular programs, one for emergency use, and one for conversations between the studio and the transmitter operator. The WSM facilities, constructed at a cost of \$50,000, were said to be "exact replicas" of WSB, Atlanta, and WWJ, Detroit ("Giant Radio Is Close To City", The Nashville Banner, October 4, 1925, p. 4).

### WSM's Inaugural Program

What one newspaper called the "greatest array of beauty and talent ever assembled at one time in Tennessee" was chosen to participate in the premiere broadcast of WSM" ("Inaugural Program Will Make History", The Nashville Banner, October 4, 1925, p. 3).

WSM management brought in what they considered to be the best radio talent from WSB, Atlanta, and WLS, Chicago, and WJR, Detroit, to help do the inaugural broadcast.

The following account appeared on the front page of the October 6, 1925 edition of The Nashville Banner, which called the WSM premier a great success:

The first voice broadcast was that of National Life Vice-President Edwin Craig, who announced shortly after 7 p.m.: "This is station WSM--we shield millions--owned and operated by the National Life & Accident Insurance Company, Nashville Tennessee."

Following Craig's announcement, the program was turned over to WSB's noted announcer Lambdin Kay, "the little Colonel", who introduced a brief invocation by Dr. George Stoves, pastor of the West End Methodist Church. Then the Al Menah Shrine Band played the National Anthem.

Next on the program was Tennessee Governor Austin Peay who noted the utility, advertising, and commercial possibilities of radio. The governor also commented on the opening of WSM as National Life's answer to the public obligation which is felt by every successful company.

Interspersed between live musical selections were other congratulatory messages from key figures from the Bureau of Navigation, which at that time was charged with the regulation of radio broadcasting and others.

David B. Carson, Federal Commissioner of Navigation, praised WSM as "a lasting monument to the National Life & Accident Insurance Company." WSM was also lauded by Major Walter Van Nostrand, Bureau of Navigations radio supervisor for the Fourth district, who told the audience that WSM would serve an area of the country that had not known adequate radio service.

Nashville Mayor Hilary E. Howse also appeared on the first hour of WSM's dedication program and invited listeners to the program to visit "the Athens of the South," a motto which is still in use in Nashville's promotional literature attesting to the large number of colleges and universities located in the city.

The next half-hour featured the Fisk Jubilee Singers with spirituals including "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," introduced by Leo Fitzpatrick, of WJR, Detroit.

The next half hour featured jazz from Beasley Smith's Andrew Jackson (Hotel) Orchestra with announcing done by George D. Hay of WLS. Hay, who became known as "the solemn old judge" while on WMC in Memphis, would soon join the WSM staff and become known as the man who gave the Grand Ole Opry its name.

The inaugural program would also introduce WSM listeners to the station's program director Bonnie Barnhardt, formerly of WSB, and to Jack Keefe, WSM announcer. Miss Barnhardt, known as "The Lady of the Radio," had become noted for her broadcasts of children's bedtime stories on WSB. The Nashville Tennessean (October 4, 1925, p. 4) reported that Keefe, a Harvard graduate and football star, had known success as a Vaudeville entertainer and, later, as an attorney.

WSM listeners also were introduced to an orchestra that was to become a regular feature on the station. Francis Craig (Edwin Craig's first cousin) and his orchestra played as employees of the insurance company and their friends joined in an impromptu dance on the fourth floor of the National Life Building.

It should be noted that among the various musical selections on the inaugural program, apparently none was of the "old time" or country variety. The artists listed on the dedication program and in newspaper accounts of the broadcast included three baritones, two sopranos, one contralto, four pianists, one violinist, an instrumental trio (featuring cello, violin, and piano), and one saxophone soloist. Groups or orchestras included the Shrine Band, the Fisk Jubilee Singers, Beasley Smith's Orchestra, Knights of Columbus Quartet, and Francis Craig's Columbia Recording Orchestra.

#### Reaction to WSM Debut Broadcast

The favorable reaction to WSM's first broadcast had been anticipated by National Life executives. The company made arrangements with Western Union to install an exclusive direct wire connecting WSM with the main operating room of the telegraph company. This was done to handle what was expected to be an unprecedented volume of congratulatory messages from listeners to the inaugural program and from National Life's 2,500 insurance representatives from around the country ("Station WSM Is Given Direct Wire", The Nashville

Banner, October 5, 1925, p. 7; "New Radio Station to Carry Name of National Life Co. To Four Corners of Nation", The Nashville Tennessean, October 4, 1925, p. 9).

So many telegrams came in that the the four telegraph operators on duty were "all but overwhelmed." Messages came from listeners in Ohio, Louisiana, Missouri, Texas, Georgia, Arkansas, and Mississippi. Messages also came in from other radio stations including WSB, Atlanta and WBAP, Fort Worth, both later to become clear channel stations. ("Messages Flood Studio Praising WSM Dedication", The Nashville Tennessean, October 6, 1925, p. 5).

WSM's signal was reportedly heard as far away as Ontario, Canada and Galesburg, North Dakota (WSM'S Inaugural Program Heard by Millions Over Wide Territory", The Nashville Tennessean, October 18, 1925, in "Firing Line Section", p. 1).

The long distance reception was made possible through the cooperation of WOAN in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee. WOAN, which also operated on a wave length of 282.8 meters, agreed to remain off the air during the WSM broadcast. The owner of WOAN, Dr. James D. Vaughan, a publisher of gospel songs, was one of the

guests of National Life at the WSM inaugural broadcast ("WOAN Silent as WSM goes on the Air", The Nashville Banner, October 4, 1925, p. 5). WOAN later shared a frequency with WREC, Whitehaven-Memphis, which eventually bought out the Lawrenceburg station.

A similar spirit of cooperation was apparent as Nashville's three radio stations, (WDAD, WCBQ, and WSM) announced a mutual agreement not to be on the air at the same time to reduce interference to each stations signal ("Local Stations Will Co-operate", The Nashville Banner, October 4, 1925, p. 5). WSM announced that programs would be broadcast by the station on Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday nights reflecting a common practice of sharing time among stations. (The Nashville Tennessean, October 6, 1925 p. 5).

WSM was typical of other early radio stations which broadcast only limited hours at first. For a time, pioneer station KDKA only broadcast two hours of programs each night. At that time KDKA did not broadcast on Sunday nights to allow radio listeners the opportunity to tune in distant stations (Howard & Kievman, 1986).

### Nashville Has "Radiolitis"

On the day following WSM's dedication broadcast, a front page article in a Nashville newspaper declared that "Nashville suffered an acute attack of radiolitis Monday night---and liked it..." ("WSM Premiere Great Success", The Nashville Banner, October 6, 1925 p. 1).

Newspaper accounts indicated that thousands of local listeners filled the streets around the WSM studio to hear the first broadcast over Western Electric public address speakers installed for the occasion. Prior to the event, many Nashvillians had taken to the stores to buy radio receivers in what was described as akin to a "Christmas rush shopping spree" (The Nashville Banner, October 6, 1925, p. 1).

The Nashville Tennessean used the WSM debut as a newspaper subscription promotion by offering a Howe Receiver with head phones for \$4.94 with a three month's subscription, new or renewal (Special WSM Section, The Nashville Tennessean, October 4, 1925).

WSM had become one of the approximately 528 radio stations on the air in the United States (Commercial and Government Radio Stations, June 30, 1926). Nashville was now on the radio map.

## CHAPTER IV

## WSM IN THE 1920s: PROGRAMMING, POWER, WAVELENGTH

The inaugural WSM broadcast was intended to give listeners a sample of the types of radio programming that would be featured on the station during the period of operation before WSM's 1926 affiliation with the National Broadcasting Company (NBC). By the end of the 1920s, NBC features would come to comprise roughly one-half of WSM's programming. During the period 1925-1928, WSM would operate on several different frequencies and would benefit from a substantial increase in power.

Music Programming

Program listings in The Nashville Tennessean and The Nashville Banner during the period of 1925-1927 indicate that studio recitals by artists from the music and voice departments of area colleges and churches were heavily featured on WSM. When network (NBC) programs began to appear on the daily WSM schedule, programs featuring the area college and church musical talent appeared less often.

Local artists and musicians also appeared on WSM's "Community Programs" broadcast live from the First Presbyterian Church on Monday nights. Old-time music (which is now known as country music) found a spot in WSM's Saturday night lineup, beginning with the station's first months of operation. WSM Program Director, Bonnie Barnhardt, read her "Bedtime Stories" evenings at 7:00 with an invitation to youngsters to join the "Bedtime Club." WSM announcer Jack Keefe appeared on several variety shows (The Nashville Banner, October 4, 1925).

#### Religious Programming

Religion soon became a regular feature on the WSM program schedule. On October 11, 1925, WSM began regularly scheduled live broadcast from the First Presbyterian Church in Nashville featuring Dr. James L. Vance, who was described as "one of the twenty-five leading ministers in the United States" (The Nashville Banner, October 4, 1925, p. 3).

According to The Nashville Banner's radio program listings for October 25, 1925, all three Nashville radio stations carried religious programming. WCBQ

broadcast the morning services of First Baptist Church. WDAD featured an afternoon program with the David Lipscomb College quartet. WSM broadcast the evening services from the First Presbyterian Church. Later, when WSM affiliated with NBC, the schedule was expanded to include "The Protestant Hour," "The Catholic Hour," and the Jewish program "The Eternal Light."

#### Sports Programming

The 1925 World Series and Vanderbilt University Football games were brought to Nashville radio listeners by WSM. Radio owners were already aware of the drawing power of sports, and many sporting events were aired by pioneer stations. The Giants and Yankee series of 1921 was the first World Series to be described on radio (Howard & Kievman, 1986). WSM, in conjunction with The Nashville Banner, moved quickly to bring sports to the Nashville airwaves.

In what was described as the "greatest world series service ever offered in Nashville," residents were invited to "see" and hear Washington of the American League take on Pittsburgh of the National League at the Banner offices. Radios at the newspaper office tuned to WSM, whose announcers would read game

accounts from the Associated Press teletype installed at WSM for the purpose. A device called a "Playograph" board was set up at the Banner's office to allow sports fans to see the movement of the ball on the field of play and follow the advancing base runners. Commerce street in front of the Banner offices was closed to automobile traffic to allow fans to participate (The Nashville Banner, October 4, 1925, p. 5).

Vanderbilt University football games were also broadcast using details furnished on the Associated Press wire. Such broadcasts later became known in the broadcast industry as "recreations" to set them apart from live on-the-scene play by play announcing (The Nashville Tennessean, October 25, 1928, p. 4).

#### Old Time Music and the WSM Barn Dance

On November 28, 1925, the WSM Barn Dance was begun by George Hay, who had gained fame as the "Solemn Old Judge" when he was a popular announcer on WMC in Memphis and on WLS, Chicago. Hay participated in WSM's inaugural broadcast in October 1925 while still employed by WLS. National Life hired Hay for WSM on November 2. By November 9, Hay had moved to Nashville to serve as WSM station director (Wolfe, 1975).

Although Hay is credited with launching the WSM Barn Dance and with giving the Grand Ole Opry its name, he did not inaugurate old time (country) music programming on WSM. A musical group led by Dr. Humphrey Bate preceded Hay. Bate joined WSM in October, 1925, becoming a Saturday night regular. The Nashville Banner's radio program listings for Saturday, October 24, 1925, is the earliest documentation of old-time music being featured on WSM:

10:00--Studio program, featuring Dr. Humphrey Bate and his string quartet of old-time musicians from Castalian Springs; Mrs. Caldwell Bennett, Jr., soprano, assisted by Miss Virginia Martin, piano soloist, and accompaniment (1 hour)

Hay had witnessed the popularity of old-time music as an announcer on the WLS Barn Dance in 1924 (Wolfe, 1975). This may have led Hay to begin calling the WSM Saturday night old-time music broadcasts the "WSM Barn Dance" in November or December of 1925. In his 1958 book, Hay lists the November 28, 1925, appearance of Uncle Jimmy Thompson as the debut of the WSM Barn Dance.

In 1927, Hay renamed the Saturday night program the Grand Ole Opry. He also changed the image of the performers to fit a stereotyped picture of "hillbillies." Hay influenced Dr. Humphrey Bate, a noted surgeon and graduate of the Vanderbilt School of Medicine to rename his band the "Possum Hunters" (Hay, 1958). It apparently was an effort to project a more rural image. Similarly, early performers who wore suits on stage later appeared in hats and overalls for Opry appearances and publicity photos (Wolfe, 1975).

More than twenty years later, Hay (1958) described what he saw as the reason for the success of the Opry. "The principal appeal of the Opry is a homey one. It sends forth the aroma of bacon and eggs frying on the kitchen stove on a bright spring morning. That aroma is welcomed all the way from Maine to California." (p. 1)

#### Other WSM Local Programming

Old-time music with its strong appeal to the rural audience was limited to Saturday nights on WSM. On other days of the week, a different audience was served with more sophisticated program content.

The Nashville Banner (October 25, 1925, p. 5)

printed WSM's programs as follows:

Monday, October 26, 1925

- 6:30--Beasley Smith's orchestra from the Andrew Jackson Hotel (one hour.)
- 7:00--Bedtime story by Miss Bonnie Barnhardt
- 7:30--WSM community program broadcast from the First Presbyterian church (one and one-half hours.)
- 10:00--Studio concert sponsored by Vito Pellettieri, violinist and orchestra director, supported by Miss Neil Moran, soprano, and Miss Raga Hanson, piano accompanist (One Hour.)

Wednesday, October 28, 1925

- 6:30-- Francis Craig's orchestra from the Hermitage Hotel. (One and one half hours.)
- 7:00--Bedtime story by Miss Bonnie Barnhardt, ;  
Community Chest message.
- 10:00--Studio program presenting Mrs. Howard Olson, cellist: miss Clare Harper,  
violinist: Mrs. Daisy Roffman, pianist:  
Jimmy Melton, baritone, and other artists.

Friday, October 30, 1925

6:30--Beasley Smith's orchestra from the Andrew  
Jackson Hotel. (One and one-half hours.)

7:00--Bedtime story by Miss Bonnie Barnhardt

2:15--Details of Vanderbilt-University of  
Mississippi football game direct from  
stadium.

6:30--Francis Craig's orchestra from Hermitage  
hotel. (one and one-half hours.)

7:00--Bedtime story by Miss Bonnie Barnhardt;  
Community Chest message.

10:00--Halloween entertainment. (One Hour.)

WSM program listings in The Nashville Tennessean during 1926 indicate a continuity of the first year's programming on WSM. The station featured the local orchestras of Francis Craig, Beasley Smith, and Vito Pelletieri. Other regular programs featured local musical talent from area colleges along with the WSM bedtime story, and programs featuring staff announcer Jack Keefe.

In mid-1926, American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) sold WEAf, New York, to the Radio Corporation of America (RCA). RCA then organized the National Broadcasting Company in September 1926. NBC operated

two networks, known as the Red Network and the Blue Network of the National Broadcasting Company (Bergreen, 1980). In November, WSM became an NBC affiliate and carried programs from both networks (WSM Station Files, FCC, Washington DC.).

By 1927, NBC programming was a regular part of the WSM program schedule. Program listings in The Nashville Tennessean indicate that early network programs on the WSM schedule included The Maxwell House Coffee program from New York Thursday nights at 8:00 and the Atwater Kent hour on Sunday nights at 8:15.

In 1928, WSM added the Capitol Theatre Family (NBC) to the Sunday night program schedule. WSM also aired political debates from NBC and the National League of Women Voters on Tuesday nights (The Nashville Tennessean, January 15, 1928). The R. C. hour, another NBC offering was aired on Saturday preceding the Grand Ole Opry (The Nashville Tennessean, March 24, 1928).

WSM radio listings in The Nashville Tennessean in 1928 indicate that most of WSM's programming was local, not network. In reporting to the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) in March of 1929, WSM listed only 19 hours per week of network programming for 1928. WSM local programming offerings included broadcasts of the

Nashville Symphony, First Presbyterian Church services, the Grand Ole Opry, Jack Keefe, the WSM Minstrel Boys, and the Golden Echo Quartet, a spiritual group. WSM continued to broadcast primarily during the afternoon and evening hours, typically 11:45 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. (WSM Station Files, FCC, Washington, DC.).

As more programming became available from NBC, WSM increased its operating hours. When applying to the FRC for license renewal in September of 1929, WSM reported being on the air between 55 to 60 hours per week with NBC programming being featured around 30 hours per week (WSM Station Files, FCC, Washington DC.). Page 8 of the February 3, 1929 edition of The Nashville Tennessean listed the following NBC programs on the WSM schedule (all times are p.m.):

Sunday at 12:30, United Peerless Reproducers; at 3, Dr. S. Parkes Cadman; at 5, Stetson Parade; at 6:30, Baldwin Piano Company; at 7, Enna Jettick Melodies; at 8:15, Atwater Kent Hour.

Monday at 12, Montgomery Ward Farm and Home program; at 6, Hal Kemp and his Hotel Manager Orchestra; at 6:30, Roxy and His Gang; at 7, The Voice of Firestone; at 8:30 General Motors Family Party.

The Nashville Tennessean of February 3, 1929, also listed these programs on the WSM weekly schedule:

Tuesday at 12, Farm and Home; at 3:30, U. S. Playing Card Company auction bridge game; at 7, Stromberg-Carlson Hour; at 8, Everyready Hour; at 9, Chicquot Club Eskimos; at 10, Radio-Keith-Orpheum Hour.

Wednesday at 12, Montgomery Ward Farm and Home; at 8, Ipana Troubadours; at 8:30, Palmolive Hour.

Thursday at 12, Farm and Home; at 6:45, talk by Remington Schuyer on "The Cowboy Artist"; at 7:30, Hoover Sentinels; at 8, Seiberling Singers,; at 8:30, Maxwell House Coffee Hour.

Friday at 12, Montgomery Ward Farm and Home; at 6:30, Dixie Circus; at 7:30, Armstrong Quakers; at 8, Wrigley Review; at 8:30, Philco Hour

Saturday at 6:45, talk by Dr. Julius Klein and at 7, The Pure Oil Concert.

Local programs heard on WSM included Tom, Jack, and Joe, the WSM Minstrels on Wednesday nights; the WSM Jazz Band on Monday's; various dramatic readings; and music from the Andrew Jackson Hotel featuring the

Francis Craig orchestra. Other programs listed in the The Nashville Tennessean, February 3, 1929, included a Junior Chamber of Commerce "frolic" featuring an orchestra and dance music on Thursday night and a Sunday evening half-hour program with the Castle Heights Cadets, a military school located in nearby Lebanon, Tennessee.

Throughout the period (1925-1932) the Grand Ole Opry retained its usual Saturday night slot. The Nashville Tennessean listed the following line up for the Opry the week of February 3, 1929: Dr. Humphrey Bate and his "Possum Hunters," Uncle Joe Mangrum and Fred Shriver, the Crook Brothers Barn Dance Orchestra, and G. W. Wilkerson and his "Fruit Jar Drinkers."

The Grand Ole Opry consistently attracted a live audience too large for the WSM studios. In 1929, the National Life and Accident Insurance Company added a wing to its original home office building with the fifth floor of the new wing used to accommodate the Opry spectators who were still separated from the performers by glass studio walls (Stamper, 1968).

(Author's note: see Chapter X for more information on WSM programming).

### Changes in Frequency and Power Output

As America's radio listeners grew accustomed to hearing their favorite programs in regular time slots through the 1920s, they often discovered the station had changed dial positions. During the late 1920s several frequency reallocations were implemented by the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) in an attempt to bring order to the airwaves. A chaotic situation had developed due to the spreading popularity of radio and the government's hesitancy to set up an independent radio commission to regulate the industry.

Between December 1925 and December 1926, the number of radio stations in the United States grew from 528 to 719. Some sixty-three stations had increased power and sixty-two had changed wavelengths (Rosen, 1980). The Radio Act of 1912 had been ineffective as a regulatory tool as it had not set aside any particular frequencies for privately owned broadcast stations. After Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover lost his power to allocate frequencies and set operating hours, (Hoover v. Intercity Radio, 286 Fed. 1003), many existing stations changed frequencies and increased power, creating interference and confusion for

operators and radio listeners. The resultant chaotic situation brought a call from the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) for self-regulation. The NAB, along with the Radio Manufacturing Association and other interested groups formed a Radio Protective Committee which called for industry restraint until Congress could pass a radio bill (Rosen, 1980).

In February, 1927, Congress passed the Radio Act of 1927, a one year authorization of the Federal Radio Commission granting the Commission authority to establish order to the airwaves.

Under the Davis Amendment, the Act set up five geographic zones under which all states, territories, and possessions were designated. Tennessee was placed in the third zone along with North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and Oklahoma (44 Stat. L., 1162).

Under the FRC, all prior licenses granted would terminate within 60 days. All operators would have to seek new short term licenses, cease operations, or be prosecuted. The FRC also opened sixty-nine channels by ordering a ten-kilohertz separation for rural stations, and a fifty-kilohertz separation for stations operated in urban areas. The FRC then set out to eliminate some

400 stations to cut down on signal interference. The FRC also ordered a general reallocation of frequencies (Annual Report of The Federal Radio Commission, 1928).

#### Increased Power for WSM under the FRC

WSM was a beneficiary of the FRC's new allocation of frequencies announced on May 24, 1927, and made effective on June 15, 1927. The FRC gave practically every station in the country a new frequency on which to broadcast.

In August of 1927, FRC General Order No. 19 changed WSM from 940 kilohertz to 880 kilohertz and increased its power to 5,000 watts, the maximum allowable power at the time. To accomplish the change, the FRC moved 750 watt KTHS in Hot Springs, Arkansas, from 880 to 940 kilohertz. WSM had been operating with 1,000 watts on 1060 kilohertz and was complaining of severe interference from KMOX, St. Louis. Less than six months later, WSM was moved to 890 kilohertz (a channel shared with Canada) to further lessen interference (WSM Station Files, FCC, Washington, DC.).

On November 10, 1928, WSM received a telegram from FRC Zone Three Commissioner, Eugene O. Sykes, granting

the station authority to move its 5,000 watt signal to 650 kilohertz, effective November 11, 1928 (WSM Station Files, FCC, Washington, DC.). To this day, WSM broadcasts at the 650 dial position.

#### Summary of Major WSM Achievements 1925-1928

In its first three years of operation, WSM advanced from a 1,000 watt station sharing time on a channel with WOAN, Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, to a 5,000 watt station operating on a channel soon to be cleared of other stations, thus enabling WSM's signal to reach most of the United States. WSM increased its weekly programming hours from around 10 hours a week in 1925 to over 50 hours per week in 1928, after affiliating with NBC.

The 1930s would see even more advances for WSM. WSM would receive a full 50,000 watts in power, allowing WSM to tout itself as "the Air Castle of the South." The events leading up to the 50,000 watt clear channel allocation and the effect on WSM's operations are examined in Chapter V.

## CHAPTER V

## WSM: CLEAR CHANNEL 650

The Davis Amendment and WSM

In January 1928, Congress faced three different bills to extend the Radio Act of 1927 for another year. Among amendments offered to the bill extending the Act was one amendment proposed by Representative Edwin L. Davis, a Democrat from Tennessee's Fifth Congressional District. The "Davis Amendment" set out to insure that all citizens of the nation receive equal radio service. Davis was convinced that the South had been shortchanged by the federal government's radio policy. Davis's amendment would force the FRC to distribute licenses, power, and frequencies so that the "people of all zones would have equality of radio broadcasting service, both of transmission and reception" (Public Law 195, 70th Congress, S. 2317). WSM would find a powerful ally in Representative Davis, who along with Edwin W. Craig, was a graduate of Vanderbilt University in Nashville and a well connected member of the Nashville business establishment.

House Committee Hearings on the FRC

Congressman Davis, a Democrat, represented a district made up of seven Middle Tennessee counties. Davis was a member of the House of Representatives Committee on the Merchant Marine and Fisheries (U. S. Congress- Biographical Directory of The American Congress 1774-1971). During the early months of 1928, the Committee conducted several hearings examining the jurisdiction of the Federal Radio Commission.

The hearings would examine the need for an extension of the FRC's one-year authorization to regulate the broadcasting industry. The Senate had already approved an extension of the Act, but the Senate version (S. 2317, as amended) legislated all of the FRC members out of office effective February, 1929. The Senate version also failed to address complaints that states in the South and the West had received less radio service under the FRC than they deserved.

As the Committee hearings got underway, the political reality was as follows: The nominations of three FRC members were pending in the Senate; the commissioners wanted to stay in office. The House

Committee members (particularly Rep. Davis of Tennessee) wanted more radio service for their states. Davis, specifically, wanted more power for WSM, perhaps because he wanted better reception at his Tullahoma home of the most important station in Nashville.

On January 26, 1928, during a Committee hearing, Rep. Davis questioned FRC Zone Three Commissioner, Judge Eugene O. Sykes, about what was described as the FRC's mistreatment of WSM. Pages 365-367 of the Minutes of the hearing indicate Rep. Davis' interest in obtaining more power for WSM. Davis noted that WSM was receiving signal interference from six or eight other radio stations but had been denied part time usage of a channel occupied by WHAS, Louisville. Later, according to Davis, WHT, Chicago was allowed to utilize the frequency.

Davis also characterized as "unfair treatment" the FRC's denial of WSM's application to move to 1040 kilohertz, a channel occupied by KFKX in Hastings, Nebraska. Davis was also critical of an FRC action effective June 15, 1927, that would have reduced WSM from 5,000 to 2,000 watts of power and moved WSM to 940 kilohertz, in direct conflict with KDKA, Pittsburgh.

(Author's Note: No evidence of unfair treatment of WSM by the FRC was found in this research).

Rep. Davis then told the hearing that it was due to the efforts of Senators McKellar and Tyson, also of Tennessee, that WSM was able to keep their 5,000 watts but was moved to 890 kilohertz, a frequency also utilized by Canadian stations.

Page 118 of the Minutes, House of Representatives Committee on the Merchant Marine and Fisheries of February 7, 1928, indicates a continuing effort on Davis' part to help WSM. Davis complained that he was unable to obtain satisfactory reception of WSM at his home in Tullahoma, Tennessee, just 69 miles from Nashville.

At the time WSM was broadcasting on 890 kilohertz with a power of 5,000 watts (WSM Station File, FCC, Washington DC.). The January 15, 1928 edition of The Nashville Tennessean carried an article attesting to distant reception due to WSM's skywave signal which apparently skipped over Tullahoma.

Mail was received during the past week at the office of WSM from radio listeners in 44 out of the 48 states. In addition, letters and cards came from Canada, Cuba and Newfoundland. Response from the daytime programs has come from the Middle West, South, and many parts of the East. (p. 6)

Davis Amendment Passes

At the conclusion of House Committee hearings on the FRC extension, a change was proposed in the language of Section 9 of the Radio Act of 1927. The committee voted to strike out the following:

In considering applications for licenses and renewals of licenses, when and in so far as there is a demand for the same, the licensing authority shall make such a distribution of licenses, bands of frequency and wave-lengths, periods of time for operation, and of power among the different States and communities as to give fair, efficient, and equitable radio service to each of the same.

The provision would be replaced with the following language, which later became known as the Davis Amendment:

The licensing authority shall make an equal allocation to each of the five zones established in Section 2 of this act of broadcasting licenses, of wave-lengths, and station power; and within

each zone shall make a fair and equitable allocation among the different states thereof in proportion to population and area (Public Law No. 195, 70th Congress, S. 2317).

The Davis Amendment passed the House by a vote of 235 to 135 with most of the votes against it coming from the states of New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Illinois. On March 28, 1928, the FRC was extended. The Davis Amendment was intact as the House Committee had wanted. However, the Federal Radio Commissioners' terms were still set to expire on February 23, 1929 (Schmeckebier, 1932).

#### FRC Actions of 1928

In 1928, the FRC issued a series of decisions intended to facilitate better radio reception in rural areas distant from urban centers. On May 25, 1928, the FRC issued General Order No. 32 which reduced the approximately 700 radio stations on the air to around 560 to cut down on interference. None of the stations denied license renewal was located in Zone Three, which included the South (Annual Report of The Federal Radio Commission, 1928).

On August 28, 1928, the FRC issued General Order No. 40 which set aside forty channels (eight to each zone) which would be cleared to allow the stations which operated on the frequencies to give good service to rural and remote listeners free from interference. The channels to be cleared were chosen based on engineering standards and geographical balance of radio service. The FRC then later decided between applicants for the clear channel frequencies on comparative basis.

The FRC ruled that only one station (minimum power of 5,000 watts) would be permitted to operate at night on any of the 40 channels (Annual Report, 1928). An accompanying order, General Order No. 42, limited the clear channel station's power to 25,000 watts with a provision for 50,000 watts during the next licensing period (Annual Report, 1928). The additional power was allowed to get a stronger signal to remote areas.

On November 10, 1928, WSM received a telegram from Commissioner E. O. Sykes granting the station authority to operated on cleared channel 650 with 5,000 watts of power, effective November 11, 1928 (WSM Station Files, FCC, Washington DC.). While WSM would be the only station using 650 kilohertz at night, two other stations also used the wavelength by day: KPCB, a 100

watt station in Seattle, Washington and 500 watt WAAW in Omaha, Nebraska (Commercial and Government Radio Stations of the United States, June 30, 1928).

DeWitt (1993) noted that WSM was granted the 650 channel after he (as WSM's Chief Engineer) testified before the FRC attesting to the commitment of National Life to provide service to a large rural area which lacked radio service. (It was the need for interference-free radio reception in rural and remote areas that led the FRC to set up clear channels). The area WSM wanted to reach with a clear channel signal also included the rural areas of 17 states worked by National Life's insurance salesmen (DeWitt, 1993).

In addition to the "show put on for the FRC by National Life" the fact that Representative Davis wanted Tennessee's clear channel to be in the state capitol also influenced the FRC's decision to pick WSM over WREC, Whitehaven-Memphis for the clear channel, dial position (DeWitt, 1993).

WSM Given Maximum Power

Almost three years would pass before WSM would be given authorization to operate with 50,000 watts. On October 1, 1931, the FRC voted to allow nine stations to join the 14 clear channel operations already using the maximum power of 50,000 watts. WSM was among the stations receiving full power under the amended General Order 42 (Broadcasting, October 15, 1931).

In Zone Three, stations WAPI, (Birmingham, Alabama), WBT, (Charlotte, North Carolina), WSM, (Nashville, ), WSB, (Atlanta), KVOO, (Tulsa, Oklahoma), and WREC (Whitehaven-Memphis, Tennessee) sought maximum power. The Commission voted to sustain Chief Examiner Ellis A. Yost and granted the applications of WSM and WSB for the construction of 50,000 watt stations, 25 kw. regular and 25 kw. experimental power. WBT, WAPI, and KVOO were among six clear channel stations authorized to operate at 25,000 watts (Broadcasting, October 15, 1931).

The Commission denied the application of WREC, which had sought the 650 frequency being used by WSM. An appeal by WREC was denied on November 17, 1931. WREC was operating with 500 watts to WSM's 5,000 watts in 1928, when the original decision was made to give WSM

the clear channel (Bureau of Navigation Reports, 1928). The fact that Representative Davis pushed the FRC to give "better treatment" for WSM cannot be overlooked.

On June 29, 1932, WSM notified the newly formed FCC that tests of the new 50,000 watt transmitter would commence (WSM Station Files, FCC, Washington, DC.).

As explained in Chapter VI, clear channel, high power operation would have an almost immediate positive impact on WSM and its parent company, National Life.

## CHAPTER VI

## FULL POWER OPERATION FOR WSM

Dedication Program

WSM dedicated the new 50,000 watt operation on Saturday night, November 12, 1932. As part of the dedication broadcast, National Life's top management took to the airwaves. According to George Hay's account in the January, 1933, edition of Broadcast News, C. R. Clements, executive vice-president of National Life told the radio audience about the rapid advances in broadcasting and power allocation:

"Due to the rapid progress in the art and to the demand for higher power, the Federal Radio Commission allocated a certain number of high-powered stations on cleared channels to each radio zone. Having a cleared channel and being mindful of our obligation to the public, we applied to the commission and were fortunate in having one of these high-powered stations allotted to us." (p. 2)

### The Network Show

One week later, November 19, 1932, a second dedication program was carried by NBC's Red Network affiliates. The program, which began at 10 p.m. Central Standard Time, featured congratulatory statements from artists and entertainers from New York, Cleveland, Chicago, Denver, and San Francisco.

National Life founder C. A. Craig chose the occasion to speak about WSM's obligation to the public as a clear channel station. As reported in Hay (1933), Craig told the network audience:

"As we join the ranks of America's radio giants we realize not only our increased opportunities but also our heavily increased obligation to the public services. Our constant desire and our constant effort shall be directed toward the fulfillment of these new opportunities and these new obligations." (p. 2)

Also participating in the network program was Harold A. LaFount, acting chairman of the Federal Radio Commission who also talked about clear channel broadcasting:

"The programs of this station, with its new power and modern equipment, will undoubtedly penetrate into many remote rural sections and heretofore isolated inhabitants will be provided with entertainment and instruction of a high order." (Harry Stone, WSM Testimony to FCC Clear Channel Hearing, Washington DC., 1947, p. 5).

#### Guests and Performers

Like the WSM debut broadcast some seven years earlier, the dedication of the 50,000 watt facility was attended by dignitaries. Among those present (in addition to LaFount) were George F. McClelland, Niles Trammel and Frank Mason, NBC executives and, I. R. Baker of The Radio Corporation of America.

Announcers for the WSM broadcast included Lambdin Kay of WSB, who had also been master of ceremonies on the first WSM broadcast in 1925, and former WSM staffer, James Melton of Cincinnati. Harry Stone, WSM Station Manager, A. W. "Tiny" Stowe, WSM continuity writer, and George D. Hay, WSM Publicity Manager joined Kay in handling the announcing on the 50,000 watt dedication broadcast of November 19, 1932 (The Nashville Tennessean, November 20, 1932).

Technical Improvements at WSM: The Tower

WSM's conversion to 50,000 watt operation required substantial changes in the technical aspects of the radio station operation, particularly in the areas of tower, transmitter, and power supply.

Prior to 50,000 watt operation, WSM used a Western Electric, Type 5-C, transmitter and a 160 foot "inverted L" flat top tower to achieve broadcast power of 5 KW at 650 kilohertz. WSM executives apparently had a difficult time deciding on what type of tower to construct for 50,000 watt operation. In correspondence dated Jan. 23, 1932, E. W. Craig told FCC Secretary James W. Baldwin: "...have not decided between a 900 foot vertical radiator and a conventional type antenna supported by 2 400 foot towers-- we shall probably use the 2 400 foot towers." (WSM Station Files, FCC, Washington DC.).

In the spring of 1932, WSM took the advice of Chief Engineer Jack DeWitt and chose a Bell Lab, Blaw-Knox constructed, tower over an RCA two-tower-with-antenna design. (DeWitt, while working with Bell Labs, had testified before the FRC in 1931 on behalf of WSM's efforts to obtain its clear channel).

DeWitt rejoined WSM in 1932 as Chief Engineer at a salary of \$275 a month). DeWitt strongly recommended the more advanced Blaw-Knox tower which used the tower itself as antenna and required only one insulator, allowing for better signal and tower tuning (DeWitt, 1986).

### The Transmitter

WSM had previously decided which transmitter it would use for 50,000 watt operation. (See Appendix C). An RCA Victor Type 50B transmitter (Serial # 2020) using direct Crystal Control and two 25 KW (RCA 862) vacuum tubes was chosen by January, 1932 (E. W. Craig Correspondence to Baldwin, WSM Station Files, FCC, Washington DC.).

Correspondence also located in the FCC's WSM Station Files details the investment involved in 50 KW operation. On May 10, 1932, E. W. Craig furnished the Department of Commerce Aeronautics Division in Washington, DC., with figures showing the nearly one-quarter of a million dollar investment required to bring WSM into the era of 50,000 watt, clear channel service:

## Installation Costs:

|                        |               |
|------------------------|---------------|
| Real Estate (30 acres) | 7,487         |
| Transmitter house      | 31,987        |
| 50 KW transmitter      | 154,020       |
| Antenna                | <u>41,000</u> |
|                        | \$243,494     |

WSM's new diamond-shaped tower was erected by the Blaw-Knox Company of Pittsburgh, 14 miles away from the WSM studios near Brentwood, in rural Williamson County. At 878 feet, it was the tallest AM radio tower in the United States, a fact to be heavily promoted by WSM. The tower was lighted with two 1,000 watt red lamps on top, in addition to the lights attached at the 370 and 570 foot levels (The Nashville Tennessean, November 12, 1982, p. 48). (See Appendix D).

It should be noted that the new WSM tower was originally 960 feet tall. The top 70 foot section of the tower was removed to produce a better groundwave and less skywave. The 70 foot section was given to a local school for use as a flagpole (DeWitt, 1986).

### Power Supply

Two separate electric circuits were constructed to deliver the necessary power to the new WSM transmitter. One 11,000 volt circuit carried power from the eastern network of the Tennessee Electric Power Company. A second 13,200 volt circuit brought electricity from Muscle Shoals, Alabama, north to the the WSM tower site. Two geographically separated circuits were chosen to protect WSM from loss of power during localized storms. An outdoor substation was built at the tower site utilizing two banks of single phase transformers which step the power down to 2,300 volts. A reduction in power would throw control relays to switch to the spare voltage source. Red monitor lights would tell the transmitter operator that the lines had been switched, but listeners to WSM would be unaware of the switching since the system was designed to work without causing a break in program transmission (Hay, 1933).

### Economic Impact of 50,000 Watt Operation

WSM's \$243-thousand investment to upgrade to 50 KW operation came in the midst of the Great Depression, at a time when WSM was showing rather substantial

financial losses. The following information on WSM's gross income and expenses was found in the FCC's WSM station files (File 3-R-B-483):

| PERIOD ENDING: | AVERAGE<br>MONTHLY INCOME | AVERAGE<br>MONTHLY EXPENSES      |
|----------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Sept. 8, 1929  | \$1,000                   | \$1,000 (TALENT)                 |
| Dec. 3, 1931*  | 8,600                     | 7,500 (TALENT)<br>4,600 (OTHER)  |
| June 29, 1932  | 8,000                     | 8,000 (TALENT)<br>4,700 (OTHER)  |
| Aug. 1, 1933   | 6,810                     | 5,000 (TALENT)<br>8,312 (OTHER)  |
| Feb. 2, 1934   | 7,000                     | 4,500 (TALENT)<br>9,500 (OTHER)  |
| Nov. 1, 1935   | 15,000                    | 8,000 (TALENT)<br>12,000 (OTHER) |

\*(11 employees, not including staff musicians)

The above income figures reflect gross income. WSM's net income figures are more indicative of WSM's financial condition. Stone's report to the FCC's Clear

Channel Hearings in 1947 showed that WSM incurred substantial net losses in the prior to 1935:

|           |                         |
|-----------|-------------------------|
| 1925-1929 | (Loss) \$228,542.02     |
| 1929-1934 | (Loss) 450,748.65 (p.2) |

Why would WSM's parent company continue to invest in a losing venture? The answer is obvious when one considers the reason National Life and Accident Insurance Company got in the radio business in the first place. The National Life board of directors saw WSM as a "toy" for Edwin Craig, who was a vice-president of the company (Peterson, 1975). However, Craig saw significant possibilities for selling insurance through the station (DeWitt, 1972). Craig realized that WSM could be useful in "extending company identity, service to the community, the influence of public relations, and supporting the company's field men in their relations with both prospects and policyholders" (Stamper, 1968, p. 121). In other words, WSM could help National Life sell a lot of insurance to its listeners, even if the station operated at a loss.

### Fiddles and Life Insurance

In its first few years of operation, WSM did not "advertise" National Life Insurance with commercial announcements. However, it is important to note that the first words spoken on WSM's debut broadcast in 1925 were: "This is WSM, We Shield Millions, the National Life and Accident Insurance Company of Nashville, Tennessee." That exact station identification was to be heard hourly by the WSM audience from that day on. The importance of mentioning the company in the station break was pointed out by long-time WSM announcer David Cobb (1983) who remembered being told by Edwin Craig, "the most important thing you do all day is the National Life station breaks, don't forget it."

National Life's insurance salesmen, (or field men, as they were called by the company), were able to capitalize on the WSM connection. Especially important was the recognition of the Grand Ole Opry among the working class people who were targets of the weekly-premium insurance field. As early as 1928, National Life began to sell life insurance on a monthly installment plan to rural and working class people who were not interested in buying life insurance with large

lump sum payments (Wolfe, 1975). These were the same people to whom the Opry had its greatest appeal. Shelton and Goldblatt (1966) note that agents often identified themselves as being from the Grand Ole Opry Insurance Company. Salesmen gave out pictures of Opry performers and invited their customers to come visit the Opry. National Life published a picture-book of the early Opry called Fiddles and Life Insurance (Wolfe). Peterson (1975) described the Opry identification as a great "door opener" for the insurance salesmen.

Not long after WSM began 50 KW operation, commercials for National Life began to appear on WSM. The exact year is in question. Stamper (1968) lists 1933 as the beginning of National Life commercials on WSM. Stone's 1947 testimony at the FCC Clear Channel Hearings puts the date at 1934. Reacting to the economic crunch of the Depression years, National Life had launched a insurance sales campaign which coincided with the New Deal. Stamper notes: "For the first time, station WSM went to work right on the debit (insurance) with programs and commercial messages designed to help field men establish company identity and back up their selling efforts." (p. 161)

According to Stamper (1968) the sales campaign led to a 27.8% increase in National Life's total life insurance in force between the end of 1929 and the end of 1934. He notes that this came at a time when the total life insurance in force nationwide was less at the end of 1934 than it had been at the start of 1930.

Peterson (1975) points out the difficulty in statistically proving that the Grand Ole Opry increased insurance sales. However, insurance salesmen in the field apparently understood the value of the Opry connection and especially the tickets to the show which they were giving away. Admission to the Opry was free, but a ticket was required.

The popularity of the Opry also created problems for National Life. It had already outgrown the 15 by 20 foot Studio A on the fifth floor of the National Life building and the 50-60 person capacity Studio B (Tassin & Henderson, 1975). The Opry was then moved to an auditorium studio with a portable stage, Studio C. This arrangement also proved unsatisfactory due to the hundreds of fans who jammed the halls of the National Life building. The situation came to a head on a Saturday night in 1935 when two National Life executives trying to get to their offices were

prevented from doing so by the throng of Opry fans waiting to be let into WSM's 500 seat Studio C. This led National Life president, C. A. Craig, to ban the live audience, altogether (Wolfe, 1975).

Field agents quickly complained about no longer being able to furnish their customers with Opry tickets; and George Hay complained that a live audience was necessary for the Opry (Peterson, 1975). WSM soon moved the Opry to the Hillsboro Theatre, located at Hillsboro Road and Acklen Avenue to accommodate a live audience. The relatively small capacity of the theatre caused the Opry to schedule two performances every Saturday night. Then in 1936, the Opry was moved back to east Nashville to the Dixie Tabernacle on Fatherland Street (Wolfe, 1975). Tassin & Henderson (1975) list the move to the Dixie Tabernacle as 1937.

After a two year stay at the Fatherland Street location, the Opry was moved to the 2,200 seat War Memorial Auditorium in downtown Nashville, where tickets were sold for the first time (Wolfe, 1975). Hay (1958) notes that the ticket price of 25 cents was charged to better handle the crowds. In 1943 the Opry was moved to the Ryman Auditorium where the show stayed until it moved to Opryland in 1974 (Wolfe, 1975).

The 1930s featured growth in the popularity of the Opry, increases in National Life's insurance sales, and growth in promotion and income for WSM radio. However, we were unable to determine when WSM became a profitable station. In an effort to attract advertising dollars WSM was heavily promoted in national magazines designed to reach the advertising community. (See Appendix E for promotional advertising for WSM).

In the years following WSM's inauguration of 50,000 watt service, WSM's increased commitment to public service was also evident. This commitment is most apparent in WSM's extraordinary service during times of emergency. Less sensational but of great importance is the development of specialized programming to serve the rural audience now reached by clear channel 650. It was service to the rural areas of the nation that led the FRC to create clear channels in 1928 and to authorize sufficient transmitter power to reach those areas. In Chapter VII we will examine the important service provided by WSM to meet its obligation as a clear channel station.

## CHAPTER VII

## WSM CLEAR CHANNEL SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC

In its regular programming, WSM provided ongoing daily public service to its audience with entertainment, news, weather, market reports. WSM had been broadcasting with the 50,000 watt, clear channel signal only five years when the station provided an unprecedented act of public service to the region. The disastrous Ohio Valley flood of 1937 gave WSM the opportunity to demonstrate to the nation the public service value of high power, clear channel broadcasting during times of emergency.

Radio to the Rescue

The combination of thawing winter snows and fifteen inches of rain created a natural disaster when the Ohio, the Tennessee, the Cumberland, and the Mississippi Rivers over ran their banks creating the worst flood in the area's history. According to the United Press, "The Flood of 1937" was to turn the Ohio

River into a 30 mile wide gulf leaving more than 100,000 persons homeless in Kentucky alone (Evansville Press, January 23, 1937).

Radio stations throughout the affected area aired up to the minute flood advisories, weather reports, and, later, the names of missing persons. WSM's extraordinary role in this dramatic role in broadcast history is detailed in the trade publication Broadcast News (May, 1937), in WSM's 25th Anniversary publication, WSM Radio News (October 16, 1950), and in the January, 31, 1937, edition of the Louisville Courier-Journal. A detailed account of WSM's broadcast efforts during the Flood of 1937 is found in WSM general manager Harry Stone's presentation to the FCC Clear Channel Hearings of 1947. The FCC presentation includes excerpts from various newspaper's coverage of WSM's role in the flood relief.

It should be noted that, with the exception of the Louisville Courier-Journal articles, each of the above accounts was written or edited by WSM or National Life personnel. In fact, Harry Stone is author of the cited article from Broadcast News. By modern standards of objective journalism the telling of the story might be somewhat suspect, by reason that the story teller

could have something to gain in the way the story was told. The veracity of Stone's story is enhanced by the fact that no contradictory accounts have been located.

Drama on the Air: January 24, 1937

WSM was doing what Stone called a "more-or-less routine remote pickup" from Clarksville, Tennessee, about fifty miles north of Nashville on Saturday night January 23, 1937. The broadcast was prompted by the fact that Clarksville was experiencing its worst flood in its history. WHAS, some 150 miles from Nashville, was also broadcasting flood reports that night. The urgent flood rescue bulletins from the Louisville station were heard by WSM employees who learned that the Kentucky city was being rapidly flooded by the rising waters of the Ohio River (Broadcast News, May, 1937).

Bulletins were pouring out of WHAS: the Ohio was rising three-tenths of a foot each hour, the railroad station had to be abandoned, scheduled trains were cancelled and Louisville Mayor Neville Miller took to the air to urge residents to keep calm (WSM Radio News, October 16, 1950).

WSM offered help to Lee Coulson, WHAS Manager. He declined, noting that WHAS had the situation in hand and stated he would contact WSM if they were needed. In less than 24 hours, the call for help would come. The manner in which WSM responded serves as an example of the effectiveness of clear channels in emergencies.

Announcer David Stone (Harry Stone's brother) was on duty the next night at WSM when an emergency message from Lee Coulson came in over the teletype. It read:

IS ED CRAIG OR HARRY STONE THERE. THIS IS WHAS  
NEITHER HR [sic] THIS IS DAVID STONE  
DAVID THIS IS VITAL LEE COULSON TALKING  
LOUISVILLE POWER GOING OFF AT EIGHT O'CLOCK WHAS  
STUDIOS MUST STAY ON AIR FOR RELIEF WORK CAN U  
GIVE US THE ENTIRE FACILITIES OF WSM THRU MUTUAL  
LINES TO CARRY ON THIS WORK OVER YOUR TRANSMITTER  
WE WILL GLADLY PAY ALL COMMERCIALS YOU MISS WE  
MUST SERVE THESE PEOPLE TONIGHT PLEASE ADVISE RUSH  
AND WE WILL HOLD THIS WIRE  
LEE WILL GET HARRY IN JUST A MINUTE AND CALL YOU  
QUITE SURE IT IS OKAY  
OKAY WE WILL WAIT WE ARE HOLDING ON  
GOOD FOR YOU WE WILL DO ALL WE CAN TO HELP WILL  
HAVE HARRY CALL IN WAIT HERE HE IS ON THE PHONE

OK HARRY SAYS WE WILL JOIN YOU AT EIGHT O'CLOCK  
WILL YOU ORDER FACILITIES OR WILL WE HAVE TO  
YES WE WILL GET IN TOUGH WITH TEL CO  
BUT U CONFIRM WITH THEM FOR US  
WE ARE ORDERING CIRCUIT NOW  
IF WE SHOULD HAVE TO GO OFF EARLIER THAN EIGHT CAN  
YOU PICK US UP WHERE WE LEAVE OFF  
YES WE WILL TAKE IT ANYTIME  
WE ARE MAKING ANNOUNCEMENTS ON AIR TO THAT EFFECT  
AND U MIGHT MAKE SIMILAR ANNOUNCEMENTS  
WE WILL BE GLAD AND SAY, IF YOUR POWER FAILS CAN  
YOU SET UP BATTERY AMP IN PHONE OFFICE  
YES WE SURE CAN AND WILL HAVE A BATTERY AMP AND  
MIKE IN PHONE OFFICE SHOULD OUR LOOP FAIL  
MR. COULSON SAID GOD BLESS YOU. ("Radio to the  
Rescue", WSM Radio News, October 16, 1950; Exhibit  
28, WSM presentation to FCC Clear Channel  
Hearings, 1947).

According to Harry Stone (1947), WSM began  
carrying the Louisville flood bulletins at 7:30 Sunday  
night, January 24, 1937 and continued without  
interruption until early Thursday morning.

Stone (1947) pointed out that:

"not a single thing went out over WSM's transmitter during that 82 hours except flood message and warnings sent direct from Louisville, with interruptions at intervals from Nashville to direct the Government's fleet of boats on the several rivers or to give out highway information to rescue workers, doctors, fire engines, ambulances and the like. Every program, both sustaining and commercial, was cancelled and even the name of our company was removed from station identification." (p. 140)

Stone (1947) estimated that well over 5,000 long distance telephone calls and telegrams came in to the WSM studios during the period from areas reached by WSM's clear channel signal. Included among the offers for help were typhoid serum offered by the mayor of Philadelphia to boats from the Coast Guard in Florida.

During the 82 hours WHAS announcers worked by the light of kerosene lamps to read rescue bulletins which traveled by phone wire to Nashville where they were broadcast live over WSM. Other stations requested and

obtained permission to rebroadcast the WSM signal. They included WCFL, Chicago and WJSV, Washington, as well as several stations located throughout the flood stricken area which had been set up to serve as the Volunteer Inter-City Network for Flood Relief in the Ohio Valley (Louisville Courier-Journal, January 31, 1937, p. 12; Shurick, 1946).

By Monday, January 25, CBS, NBC, and the British Broadcasting Corporation were carrying Louisville flood bulletins and information. Combined with approximately 5,000 short wave stations throughout the world, the effort amounted to the largest radio network ever established (Shurick, 1946).

For 82 continuous hours rescue boats were dispatched, warnings were broadcast to alert listeners to the dangers of polluted drinking water, floating gasoline spills, leaking gas mains, and buildings in danger of collapse. Medical personnel and supplies were directed by radio. Food shipments were coordinated. Highway closings were announced as were train cancellations and cancelled airline flights in and out of Louisville's Bowman field (Stone, 1947).

Louisville was not alone in its suffering. Small cities located on the Ohio River needed help. Stone

recounted how a call came in from the mayor of a Kentucky town complaining that his city had been overlooked by relief organizations. The mayor "broke down and cried" when he explained how badly his city needed help (Stone, 1947).

Similar calls prompted WSM to send John H. DeWitt (at the time WSM Chief Engineer), his assistant Battle Klyce and Chief Announcer Jack Harris to help. The three men carried a two-kilowatt generator, a 20-watt transmitter, amplifier, and other technical items aboard a train and headed for New Johnsonville, Tennessee. There, two riverboats from the U. S. Engineers' Office, the Jayhawker and the Lockandam, were equipped to broadcast directly to WSM from various points on the Tennessee and the Ohio Rivers. Harris broadcast flood reports for four days and nights bringing aid to Eddyville, Smiths Grove, and Gilbertsville, Kentucky along with other small communities along the flood path. After the flood subsided, DeWitt, Klyce, and Harris boarded a train in Evansville, Indiana, and carried the radio equipment back to WSM (Broadcast News, May 1937; WSM Grand Ole Opry History Picture Book, 1969).

In the flood's aftermath, WSM set up a Bureau of Missing Persons for flood refugees separated from family or friends. WSM cataloged some 15,000 persons whose names were read over the air. At the request of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the files were sent to Louisville to be added to the Missing Persons Bureau which had been set up there (Stone, 1947).

#### Recognition and Appreciation for WSM's Efforts

WSM's flood coverage prompted favorable comments from newspapers including the New York Times, Milwaukee Journal, Birmingham Age-Herald, Charles City (Iowa) Press, Herkimer (New York) Telegram, as well as the Louisville Courier-Journal which carried WSM's program schedule for many years afterwards in respect for its assistance to the Courier-Journal station, WHAS (Stone, 1947).

Stone's (1947) account also notes that on January 31, 1937, FCC Chairman Anning S. Prall, told America, via NBC,:

"May I take this opportunity of stating again that radio in this national crisis, was called

upon and was not found wanting. To the loyal men and women who have and still must remain at duty I offer my most sincere appreciation. They were quick to sense their responsibilities - they have won the grateful thanks and the commendation of the Nation." (p. 147)

WSM was honored locally for its part in the heroic effort. In February, 1937, the Tennessee General Assembly passed a Joint Resolution expressing gratitude to WSM for "this high and unselfish service" (Joint Resolution No. 15, Acts of the 70th General Assembly).

WSM's commitment to public service did not end with the "Flood of 1937." Chapter VIII will examine the development of WSM's farm programming and the station's support of the United States war effort during the 1940s.

## CHAPTER VIII

## WSM AND PUBLIC SERVICE IN THE 1940s

The late 1930s to the early 1940s were a period of growth and change in the radio industry. The number of radio stations grew from 583 in 1934 to 970 in 1944. Radio advertising grew from \$72.8 million in 1934, to \$393.5 million in 1944 (Sterling and Kittross, 1990).

Many industry milestones were reached. In 1934 Congress established the Federal Communications Commission to oversee broadcasting on a permanent basis, replacing the temporary Federal Radio Commission. Orson Welles's "War of the Worlds" was broadcast in October, 1938 which demonstrated radio's powerful impact on the public. Commercial FM and commercial television operations were authorized and begun in 1941. The same year, America listened as President Franklin D. Roosevelt took to the radio to announce a declaration of war on Japan.

The period was the setting for noteworthy advances in the area of public service broadcasting by WSM to meet its obligation as a clear channel station.

### Farm Market Reports and Extension Broadcasting

Stone (1947) notes that during its first four years of broadcasting, WSM's service to the farm audience was essentially limited to the broadcast of farm market quotations within morning and noon hour newscasts and the reading of farm news distributed by the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Realizing the importance of the rural listeners, particularly in light of National Life's efforts to sell life insurance to the rural folk, WSM quickly moved to expand its service to the farm audience.

In an early move (1929) to meet its clear channel obligations to the rural audience, WSM set up a special studio in the offices of the Tennessee Division of Markets in Nashville to broadcast daily farm market quotations at 11:45 a.m. each weekday (Stone, 1947). The unsponsored, public service broadcast reached an estimated 100,000 listeners with livestock and produce market information providing what Tennessee's Commissioner of Agriculture, C. C. Flanery, later called a "profound benefit" to area farmers (Stone, 1947).

In 1937, after obtaining 50,000 watts of power on its clear channel, WSM began a regular series of "farm talks" with authorities from the various fields of agriculture. Included were William A. Burnett of the Nashville Union Stockyards, along with various county agents and agricultural extension agents (Stone, 1947). Baker (1981) notes the twice-weekly programs were produced as as a public service for the WSM farm audience and were not offered for sponsorship.

The same year WSM arranged with the University of Tennessee Division of Extension to broadcast a weekly series of programs sent from the Knoxville campus to WSM by phone lines paid for by WSM (Scroggins, 1981). The station also paid for an engineer for the program in the Knoxville studio which was furnished and maintained by WSM. Typical topics included "Home Grown Fruits for Amateurs," "Bug Bombing with DDT," and "Boosting Farm Income with Hybrid Seed" (Stone, 1947).

WSM's efforts to expand farm programming did not go unnoticed. In 1938 WSM received the Variety (Magazine) Showmanship Award as the "Farm Service Station of the Year." Previous farm service award winners included clear channel stations WLS, Chicago, and WHO, Des Moines (Variety, December 14, 1938).

WSM's three weekly programs from the University of Tennessee, heard on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, were soon joined by a "Homemakers Chat," a home economics program for farm women which was broadcast at 8:45 a.m. on Saturday (Stone, 1947). The programs garnered mail from Tennessee, Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas prompting University of Tennessee President James D. Haskins to estimate that by the late 1940s the programs were reaching "a million or so listeners" (Stone, 1947).

The programs later evolved to become the "Campus of the Air" which featured University of Tennessee faculty appearing on WSM with poetry readings and intellectual discussions as well as farm and homemaker news. In 1947, Kenneth D. Wright, the University's Specialist for Radio Education, persuaded eight other radio stations in Tennessee to broadcast the Campus of the Air programs after they had appeared on WSM. Wright's efforts marked the beginning of the University of Tennessee Tape Network (Scroggins, 1981).

Like many other clear channel stations, WSM carried NBC's Monday through Saturday "National Farm and Home Hour." Although WSM continued to carry the program after it was cut to a thirty minute daily

offering titled "Farm and Homemakers," the demise of the hour long program for farmers led WSM to expand its own farm service to meet the continuing needs of the rural audience and to fulfill its own clear channel obligations.

1945: John McDonald and "Noontime Neighbors"

When the "National Farm and Home Hour" was discontinued in 1945, WSM began airing "Noontime Neighbors" in the 12:30 to 1:00 p.m. Monday through Friday time slot (Stone, 1947). WSM announcer Louie Buck had been assigned to read farm and extension news since 1944, but the station lacked a farm director who would be in charge of developing local farm programming (Baker, 1981).

In September 1945, WSM hired John A. McDonald a Vocational Agriculture teacher in Ashland City, Tennessee, to be its first farm director. In addition to thirteen years experience teaching agriculture, McDonald had a farm background. He was born in Hardin County in West Tennessee on a dairy farm and had received a degree in Agriculture from the University of Tennessee in 1932 (Baker, 1981).

"Noontime Neighbors" which enjoyed a 27 year run on WSM, featured McDonald reading farm news and interviewing prominent speakers from the field of agriculture. But in its early years, the program also featured music from a 26 piece orchestra with a live studio audience (The Nashville Tennessean, October 5, 1980, p. 1-F.) WSM arranged with the Nashville office of the Weather Bureau to provide a specially-written weather forecast for "Noontime Neighbors" (Stone, 1947).

McDonald also traveled out into the fields to produce wire recording interviews with farmers for broadcast on "Noontime Neighbors." On the scene broadcast included coverage of events like "Mule Day" when on the first Monday in April, Columbia, Tennessee, became the world's largest mule market. Other WSM on the scene broadcasts were held at "Tobacco Festivals," "Sweet Potato Festivals," "Crimson Clover Festivals," and the like (Harris, 1939). Such live broadcasts were expensive. In its second year of broadcasting the nonsponsored "Noontime Neighbors" program, WSM was spending \$750 per week for talent, production, salaries, and travel expenses for the program which ran on WSM until 1972 (The Nashville Tennessean, October 5, 1980, p. 1-F).

WSM's commitment to public service broadcasting from 1925 through the Depression years would soon be expanded to meet broadcasting's greatest challenge thus far: promoting the cause of freedom in World War II. Three areas of WSM's wartime operations will be examined: radio programs dealing with the war, the Camel Caravan, and special drives to collect materials and funds for the war effort.

#### The Radio War: WSM Programming and WWII

Americans heard the news on the radio when the United States was abruptly drawn into World War II December 7, 1941 with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. WSM, like other stations, broadcast President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Day of Infamy" speech the afternoon of Monday, December 8. It was official, the United States was at war. The assault on Pearl Harbor was a surprise attack. The war, however, was not a surprise. Unlike in the pre-radio years which proceeded World War I, America's radio stations had worked to keep the public informed of the spreading War in Europe since September, 1939 (MacDonald, 1979).

The evening of Sunday, September 1, 1940, WSM presented a locally written and produced, thirty minute program entitled "The First Year." The script opened with an announcer noting that "Today...marks the first anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War...a Titanic struggle between to diverse political philosophies...democracy and totalitarianis [sic]." The anti-Nazi program combined recorded excerpts of speeches by Adolph Hitler, Neville Chamberlain, and King George VI, with an assortment of sound effects of exploding bombs and marching soldiers. A prohibition against using such sound effects would be implemented following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (NAB, December 21, 1992). "The First Year" also featured dramatizations of actual events including the sinking of the steamship Athenia off the coast of Scotland, complete with sound effects of explosions and screams.

Following a sequence on the Battle of England, the program concluded with the following announcement:

"Throughout this first year of the war WSM has provided a complete news coverage of these epochal events. Latest news bulletins have been presented several times daily and many special coverage features have been offered. Now as the

war goes into its second year WSM has completed plans to continue this service, presenting latest news developments as provided for the WSM new [sic] room by International News Service [a newswire service operated by the Hearst Co.] With analyses of these events by staff commentators and by direct pickups from Europe on WSM's powerful short-wave sets. And now...from the WSM news room Jack Harris brings the very latest reports on the great battle now under way on this the first anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War." (pp. 23-24)

Another example of the impact of the war in Europe on WSM's program content may be seen in the inclusion of war-related subjects in the dramatic series "Radio Patrol." "Radio Patrol" was a locally written and produced program "for young America" whose listenership was encouraged to join the "Radio Patrol." The fifteen minute program, sponsored by the National Life and Accident Insurance Company, was broadcast on WSM from 5:15 to 5:30 p.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays during the early 1940s (WSM Program Release, 1940-1942).

The November 30, 1946, script of "Radio Patrol" included a special Thanksgiving prayer delivered as the program's characters gathered around the dinner table to offer thanks. The prayer, found on page 9 of the script included the following:

"...today we do come to Thee with sincere gratitude, that Thou hast permitted us to live in the land of freedom and of peace, that Thou hast saved us from the scourge of war which afflicts so many of your peoples. We thank Thee that we are Americans and that we are allowed to travel through our daily lives without fear from sudden death or pestilence; that we may go our ways in freedom, without feeling that tomorrow may be the end of all things for us. We thank Thee that our young men and young women do not have to go forth to kill and to be killed, but they they are permitted to live in health and security and happiness..." (p. 9)

The feeling of peace and security being acknowledged on WSM Thanksgiving Day 1940 was in a precarious position, as many persons in the United States already understood.

When the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor came, the United States War effort was already underway, supplying arms to the Allies. The army had been conducting large scale maneuvers in Louisiana since the summer of 1941. When the troops moved into Tennessee, heading to Louisiana, WSM instituted a series of live broadcasts to bring the listening public news of what was happening (Stone, 1947).

In an innovative move reminiscent of WSM's early coverage of the 1937 flood from a boat on the Ohio River, WSM came up with a way to move its field units with the troops as the maneuvers progressed into other areas. A private car rented from the N.C. & St. L. Railroad was used by WSM to broadcast from the scene of the Second Army's exercises and maneuvers near Tullahoma, Tennessee. WSM fed the final broadcast of the Tennessee maneuver series to the NBC network. The program broadcast from the railroad car parked on a siding near Manchester, Tennessee, featured interviews with General George Patton and other top Army officers (DeWitt, 1986).

WSM also used its 50,000 watt signal for less exciting broadcasts of war preparations. A prime example is the twice weekly, thirty minute Officer Orientation Lectures, featuring Major James

Bellah, reading from the Army Training Manual. The material described as "dry" was broadcast over WSM to help the Army teach its officers in a period when they lacked sufficient instructors to do so live and in person (Stone, 1947).

Following the broadcast of the Army maneuvers in Tennessee, WSM moved its coverage of war preparations to Louisiana. In covering the Second and Third Army's maneuvers in Louisiana, WSM utilized a portable FM transmitter mounted on a trailer to follow movements of the troops from one end of the state to the other. From Louisiana, WSM moved its coverage to the Carolinas. All told, WSM's coverage of Army maneuvers in the Southern States lasted for three to four years (Stone, 1947).

#### Entertaining the Troops: WSM and The Camel Caravan

As soldiers, many of them young men who had never traveled outside the rural environs into which they were born, were sent to camps around the country, the military brass recognized the need for entertainment to boost the morale of the troops. In August 1941, WSM and the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company formed the Camel Caravan to tour army camps promoting country music and Camel cigarettes (Tassin & Henderson, 1975).

WSM and Reynolds had already developed a business relationship built around the popularity of country music. Reynolds had been an advertiser on the "Prince Albert Show", a portion of WSM's Grand Ole Opry carried on the NBC network since 1939 (Tassin & Henderson, 1975).

The Camel Caravan became the first all-free talent show to tour army camps (Stone, 1947). The country version of the caravan (there were also two popular music versions) featured Minnie Pearl, Pee Wee King, and Eddy Arnold along with seventeen other musicians, singers, and dancers. The group traveled more than 50,000 miles in nineteen states and the Republic of Panama giving some 175 shows by 1942 (Malone, 1985). The tour not only entertained as many as 20,000 persons at a time promoting Camel Cigarettes, it also helped expose non-rural soldiers to country music which may explain, at least in part, the expanded popularity of country music in the post-war years.

#### Special Drives: WSM and War Bonds

The radio industry and WSM had tackled many issues for the common good prior to World War II. One of the radio industry's first public service campaigns

attacked the problem of juvenile delinquency. In 1933, behind the leadership of the NAB, broadcasters had rallied support for President Roosevelt's National Recovery Act (NAB, December 14, 1932). To show support of the National Recovery Act (NRA), WSM joined other stations in displaying the NRA's blue eagle insignia in promotional materials and program guides.

When the War brought an abrupt end to the official United States position of neutrality, the radio industry was mobilized to sell War Bonds to finance the war effort and to collect scrap metal and rubber for war material. WSM assumed an active role in both efforts.

WSM harnessed the popularity of the Grand Ole Opry to sell more than \$150,000 worth of War Bonds. Two telephone booths were installed on the stage of the Opry. Any person calling could speak personally with an Opry star of choice by agreeing to purchase a War Bond. A certificate signed by the star was mailed to the bond purchaser. WSM dedicated one hour of the live Opry broadcast to the selling of War Bonds and received pledges from 39 states (Stone, 1947).

WSM raised an even larger sum in a bond rally at the Ryman which was not broadcast. The War Bond Rally starred a former WSM vocalist, Dinah Shore, who, as

Fannie Rose Shore, had joined WSM while a Vanderbilt University co-ed in 1935. Admission to the rally was based on each member of the audience purchasing at least one dollar in War Stamps. Reserved seats went for up to \$500 in War Bonds. WSM furnished a 33 piece orchestra, four vocalists, writers, promotion and publicity, and production for the two hour performance. The project, in cooperation with the U. S. Treasury Department, raised \$650,000 (Stone, 1947).

WSM completed other projects supporting the Allied War effort. These projects included donating use of its studios, orchestra, and talent for production of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's four short features that promoted the sale of War Bonds. WSM manager, Harry Stone, toured the Cumberland River from Nashville to Carthage collecting two tons of scrap metals and rubber for a WSM salvage drive. WSM boosted enrollment of women in the Navy Waves by donating an office, studio space, and airtime for recruiters. The recruitment quota was met in three days due to WSM's efforts (Stone, 1947).

WSM's public service efforts in the war years did not go unrecognized. In April of 1942, WSM received a special citation from the BillBoard Awards Committee for "outstanding exploitation related to the war effort (WSM Program Release, May 3, 1942).

In 1948, WSM was awarded another honor based on its service to the public. Variety magazine cited WSM with the "How to Run a Radio Station" award. The prestigious showmanship award complemented WSM's ability to "inject real life in its public service projects" and noted WSM's "enviable roster of public service programs" (Variety, March 17, 1948, p. 26).

WSM's successes in serving the farm audience and, later, in aiding the war effort was recognized and applauded both locally and nationally. As impressive as these achievements in public service were, it must be noted that WSM was at the forefront of the industry in other areas. Chapter IX will focus on WSM's role in developing commercial FM service and bringing television to the region, while simultaneously fighting before the FCC to protect WSM's clear channel coverage.

## CHAPTER IX

## INNOVATIONS AND CHALLENGES

World War II had a powerful impact on broadcasters. Radio news brought the war home to the American public like never before. Broadcasters harnessed the popularity of radio in support of the war effort. The war had some negative effects on some areas of broadcasting, most notably, FM and television service. The war also contributed to a long drawn out process in which the FCC delayed action on requests for increased power for clear channel AM's, including WSM. This chapter will examine WSM's role in developing FM, bringing TV to the region, and its founding of the Clear Channel Broadcasting Service.

Frequency Modulation Broadcasting: W47NV

Frequency Modulation (FM) was introduced in 1933 by inventor Edwin H. Armstrong who was working to develop a radio broadcast technology that would be free of static and atmospheric disturbances. In 1940, Armstrong's new technology received FCC approval to

occupy channels in the 42 to 50 megahertz portion of the broadcast spectrum. WSM wasted no time in securing a license for an FM facility.

WSM's engineers had been experimenting with forms of broadcasting other than AM since March 1939. W4XA, a 1,000-watt short-wave facility was put on the air to serve Nashville and the surrounding area Monday through Friday with classical music and children's programming. The ultra high frequency station operating on 26.15 megahertz was reportedly heard in Arizona, California, and Montana, and as far away as Australia. Distant listeners to the non-commercial station heard static and interference, but the local reception was reported to be clear with "remarkable clarity and excellence of tone" (WSM Opens Short-Wave Station, Rural Radio, May 1939, p. 10). W4XA was abandoned in 1941 when WSM began regular FM broadcasts (DeWitt, 1986).

WSM general manager John H. DeWitt, an accomplished engineer, had led WSM engineering efforts experimenting with FM since 1935. DeWitt knew Armstrong, having met the inventor of FM at a radio engineering conference in New York. DeWitt later visited Armstrong's pioneer FM facility in Alpine, New Jersey, to see and hear the new technology firsthand

(DeWitt, 1986). In December 1940, WSM's parent company, The National Life and Accident Insurance Company, received FCC authorization to operate station W47NV as a commercial station on 44.7 megahertz (FM Bulletin, December 18, 1940).

WSM had already moved to the forefront in promoting the development of FM when in August of 1940, WSM founded FM Broadcasters, Inc., a 57 member, national, non-profit organization with headquarters in Nashville. The group's purpose was "representing the concentrated efforts of all leading proposals to see that FM advances in a coordinated, logical manner" (FM Bulletin, August 15, 1940).

By February, 1941, some 34 commercial FM's had been authorized by the FCC (FM Bulletin, February 14, 1941). Ten-thousand-watt W47NV had its antenna mounted atop WSM's 878 foot AM tower (WSM Station Archives, Nashville, TN). The station began regular operation on March 1, 1941, as the first commercially licensed FM station in the country to actually begin commercial operation (DeWitt, 1993; Baird, 1963; FM Bulletin, April 3, 1941).

Like short-wave station W4XA, W47NV was targeted to a different audience than that of WSM. W47NV broadcast opera, classical music and other programs

targeted to an affluent and educated audience. John H. DeWitt, at the time WSM General Manager, noted that the owners and founders of National Life were opera fans and may have been embarrassed by comments from their peers who did not appreciate the Grand Ole Opry's music. The new FM station was obviously programmed to appeal to a more educated and affluent audience than the rural Opry fans (DeWitt, 1986).

In March of 1941, DeWitt attended a New York City meeting of representatives of FM stations from around the country. The purpose of the gathering was to consider topics pertinent to the growth of FM service (FM Bulletin, April 3, 1941). A few months later, National Life became an investor in the American Network, Inc., a network that had plans to link FM stations in 40 cities (FM Bulletin, October 6, 1941).

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December, 1941, and America's subsequent entry into the global conflict interrupted the plans of the American Network. At a meeting in August, 1944, stockholders of the American Network met and voted unanimously to dissolve the Network. The group, meeting in Chicago, took the action due to the halt in the manufacture of civilian radio receivers. The radio factories were forced to shift to the production of war goods, including

military radio equipment (FM Bulletin, September 14, 1944). With no new sets capable of receiving FM signals being built, the potential audience was severely limited. The next year, in a related move, the FM Broadcasters group, founded by WSM in 1941, became the FM branch of the National Association of Broadcasters (FM Bulletin, November 26, 1945).

Like the other FM stations in operation after World War II, WSM was forced to change frequencies when the FCC moved the FM band from 42-50 megahertz to the present 88-108 megahertz. The FCC's action was brought on by mounting pressures for more spectrum space for television. W47NV (later called WSM-FM) was reassigned from 44.7 megahertz to 100.01 megahertz and was reduced in power from 20-thousand watts to 8.5-thousand watts (Journal of Frequency Modulation, February, 1946). WSM continued to operate the FM station until March 28, 1951, at which time it ceased operating the facility which was losing around \$10,000 a year (WSM Station Files, FCC, Washington, DC.). WSM was, at that time, directing considerable resources toward construction of the first TV station in Nashville.

In all, 91 FM facilities went dark (ceased broadcasting) in the fiscal year ended June, 30, 1951, amid complaints from broadcasters that the small number of radios able to receive the new FM band hindered audience development (FCC Annual Report, 1951).

WSM-FM reappeared in 1968 on 95.5 megacycles when WSM bought WLWM-FM (WSM Station Files, FCC, Washington DC.). The facility, which now programs country music, is among the top rated stations in the Nashville market with a 100,000 watt signal.

#### TV Comes to Nashville

The seeds for WSM-TV were sown in 1947, when General David Sarnoff, president of The Radio Corporation of America, told a convention of broadcasters in Atlantic City, New Jersey, that all NBC radio affiliates should make every effort to obtain a channel and get into television broadcasting. Edwin Craig, president of the National Life and Accident Insurance Company, was rather critical of the TV idea, and wished it would just go away (DeWitt, 1986). Craig and others at National Life did not see how owning a TV station could be much benefit in selling insurance due

to tv's smaller coverage area, compared with that of a clear channel radio station (DeWitt, 1993).

Twenty years later, Irving Waugh, president of WSM, told reporter Cathy Sawyer about Craig's reaction to a plan to build 7 microwave towers necessary to carry network programs from Louisville to Nashville:

"Craig questioned us sharply. He wanted to know what we could provide in the way of news and programs of interest; he wanted to know the feasibility of building seven towers, between here and Louisville and he wanted to see maps of the areas we would cover.

He looked at those maps and considered them. And he looked at us and said, "This proposed television station will reach only seven-tenths of one per cent of our field force. The economics of it doesn't make sense.

But, we've always pioneered in broadcasting and now we owe it to the community to give them television. And while you're at it, build that microwave link-up so I can see something live."  
("How Nashville got TV", Nashville Tennessean, October 4, 1970. p. 2).

WSM spent more than \$150,000 to construct the steel towers atop the hills between the Louisville Courier-Journal Building and the 500 foot WSM tower located behind Ward-Belmont College. WSM's total technical expense for the first 10 months of operation was \$128,000 (WSM Station Files, FCC, Washington DC.).

On September 30, 1950, at 1:10 p.m., WSM brought television to Nashville. Test patterns and music had been broadcast over channel 4 for several weeks to stimulate the sale of sets in the area. When David Cobb appeared before WSM-TV viewers on the debut telecast, there were only a few thousand sets operating in Nashville. Following a variety show hosted by Dottie Dillard, WSM-TV joined the NBC network for the North Carolina- Notre Dame football game which was beset with both video and audio problems (Nashville Tennessean, October 4, 1970).

A few months later, in January, 1951, WSM-TV received a boost by telecasting the Southeastern Conference Basketball Playoffs from Louisville. The tournament which was won by Vanderbilt helped sell "a lot of TV sets in Nashville" (DeWitt, 1986). For the next three years, WSM-TV was to remain the sole television outlet in the area.

By June 30, 1951, WSM-TV was making a profit. The station recorded a net income of almost \$40,000 for the period January 1, 1951 through June 30, 1951. This compared to a net income of more than \$120,000 for WSM-AM. Clear channel 650 was still main profit center for the WSM operations (WSM Station Files, FCC, Washington, DC.).

#### Clear Channel 650 in Jeopardy

During the time that WSM was pioneering (and then abandoning FM broadcasting), and was beginning television operations, a battle was being waged to increase WSM's power from 50,000 watts to 500,000 watts. This power output had been authorized, from 1934 to 1942, as an experiment for WLW, Cincinnati (Lichty, 1964). While working to obtain higher power, WSM was also fighting to preserve the station's clear channel status in the wake of pressure on the FCC to allow other stations to operate on the clear channels.

### The Challenge to Clear Channels: Background

In 1934, several stations applied for full time operation on clear channel frequencies. KCCP, Seattle, Washington, applied for full time operation on 650 kilohertz, a channel cleared for exclusive use by WSM. The application was denied but many operators of clear channel stations became concerned about mounting pressure to break down the clear channel system (Eagan, 1956).

WSM president, Edwin Craig, called a meeting of clear channel stations in May of 1934, at which time attorney Louis G. Caldwell, a former FCC counsel, urged that a petition be filed with the FCC requesting an investigation to determine the degree to which rural audiences depended on the clear channel stations for service. The study made the case that clear channels and high power would best serve the rural audience of America. Craig was elected chairman of the group which became known as the Clear Channel Broadcasting Service (Eagan, 1956).

In reaction to the petition filed in August of 1934, the FCC announced that a "survey will be made for the purpose of determining the service available to the

people of the United States and the type of station that the listeners in rural areas are dependent upon for their service" (FCC Release 11326, October 30, 1934).

In January, 1937 the FCC's engineering department released a report advocating retention of no fewer than 25 clear channels. A Commission report on "Social and Economic Data" was submitted in July of 1937 recommending retaining no fewer than 25 clear channels but also recommending that the Commission consider each application for power in excess of 50,000 watts on its own merits, rather than authorizing even higher power for the clear channel stations (Eagan, 1956).

In June, 1938, Senate Resolution 294 was passed limiting the power of stations to 50,000 watts (Congressional Record, 8944, 1938). Although the resolution was not legally binding, six months later, the FCC moved to end WLW's 500,000 watt operation. WLW ceased its "super-power operation" in March, 1939, after losing an appeal. In November, 1939, a writ of certiorari filed by WLW was denied by the Supreme Court thus ending WLW's experiment with super-power (Brown, 1975).

In June 1939, the Commission announced new rules providing for 26 Class 1-A clear channels. In 1941, the number was reduced to 25 with the removal of KOA, Denver from the list. The freeze on station allocations brought about by World War II prevented additional changes. But, WSM's protected signal would face new challenges after the war. The lifting of the freeze coincided with increased demands for local radio service as 60% of the area of the United States lacked primary signal coverage. This push led to the licensing of an additional 580 AM stations between 1946 and 1947, most of which were low power stations (Brown, 1975). Small town radio had arrived and the FCC was beginning to feel pressure to reduce the coverage area of the clear channel stations.

Although outside the time-frame for this study, we should note that the fight to seek more power for the clear channel stations and to prevent smaller stations from using the clear channels for daytime service caused some strain in the relationships between the two groups. At one point a resolution came before the Tennessee Association of Broadcasters to oppose WSM's drive for higher power but was never passed. In 1962, the FCC rejected WSM's bid for higher power.

The Federal Communications Commission voted May 29, 1980, to reduce the protected coverage area for Class 1-A stations including WSM. The Commission voted to protect the signals of the Class 1-A clear channel stations from nighttime interference within a radius of 750 miles. The Commission's reasoning in allowing more stations on the clear channels was to allow additional stations to serve local populations who were distant from the clear channel stations and still not interfere with the daytime coverage of the clear channel stations. The FCC also hoped some of the new stations would be owned by minority group members.

The FCC's decision came on the heels of an on air campaign by WSM and "Friends of the Grand Ole Opry" urging listeners to write to the FCC expressing their desire for the retention of WSM's clear channel status.

The decision made in 1980 climaxed proceedings begun some 35 years earlier. For a detailed description the proceedings, from 1945 to 1972, the reader is directed to Brown, 1975.

## CHAPTER X

## WSM PROGRAMMING EVOLUTION

Several significant changes in radio programming occurred over the 25 year span encompassing this study of WSM, as a clear channel station. Perhaps the most significant change effecting the radio industry was the birth and rise to dominance of the national radio networks. This chapter will examine the impact on WSM programming brought about by affiliation with NBC. We will also look at the impact of electrical transcriptions during the same era.

National Network Programming

The National Broadcasting Company began in 1926 and the Columbia Broadcasting System was started one year later. This increased the supply of quality programs available to the broadcaster. The networks also brought about the development of radio as a commercial medium by developing a mass audience for the network programs. The nighttime signal of powerful clear channel stations made network radio available to almost everyone.

With network programming available, radio stations no longer had to rely on local talent to fill the airwaves. High quality live programming was supplied by the networks. Variety shows, comedies, dramas, talk programs, orchestras and concerts, and news commentaries became available with network affiliation. Networks also allowed stations to increase their operating hours due to readily available programming to fill those hours.

WSM was affected by network affiliation in several ways. WSM was no longer dependent on the supply of talent in and around Nashville and the station began to increase its hours of operation almost immediately upon its affiliation with NBC. And like most other stations, WSM began to accept local advertising after becoming an affiliate. Network affiliation combined with a power increase to 50,000 watts helped WSM increase monthly revenue from \$1,000 a month in 1929, to \$8,000 a month in 1932 (WSM Station Files, FCC, Washington DC.).

Being affiliated with NBC's Red and Blue networks was also important in that it allowed WSM choose the best from both networks and to feed its own programs to the network for national distribution. By 1940, WSM was feeding four shows to NBC each week: "Sunday Down

South", "Magnolia Blossoms", "Francis Craig's Sunday Nite Serenade", and the "Grand Ole Opry" (WSM Program Release, November 24, 1940).

To better understand the impact of network affiliation on WSM programming, a content analysis was done on WSM program listings as published in The Nashville Tennessean from 1925 to 1950. One week was chosen at random from every fifth year during the period in an effort to determine: (1) the total weekly broadcast hours of WSM; (2) the percentage of local WSM programming, and (3) the percentage of WSM programming that was supplied by NBC. (See Table I).

The listings were then analyzed to determine the hours each week that were devoted to the following categories of programs: (1) news; (2) agricultural and homemaker; (3) educational, and (4) religious. These categories were used by the FCC on its license renewal forms as examples of public service programs. Each of the categories was then broken down into local or network supplied. (See Table II).

Table I: WSM program hours shown as total hours, percentage of network and percentage of local.

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Total hrs. per week</u> | <u>% Net</u> | <u>% Local</u> |
|-------------|----------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| 1925        | 32                         | 0            | 100%           |
| 1930        | 116                        | 66%          | 33%            |
| 1935        | 121                        | 71%          | 29%            |
| 1945        | 131                        | 67%          | 33%            |
| 1950        | 131                        | 66%          | 34%            |

Table II: WSM program hours shown in hours of network (Net) and hours of local (L) by specific program category.

| <u>Year</u> | <u>News</u>                         | <u>Agriculture/<br/>Homemaker</u> | <u>Educational</u> | <u>Religion</u>  |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| 1925        | 0 L<br>(before network affiliation) | 0 L                               | 0 L                | 4.0 L            |
| 1930        | 1.5 L<br>0 Net                      | 4.5 L<br>1.0 Net                  | 0 L<br>0 Net       | 2.5 L<br>2.0 Net |
| 1935        | .25 L<br>0 Net                      | 3.5 L<br>3.5 Net                  | .5 L<br>1.0 Net    | 4.0 L<br>1 0 Net |
| 1940        | 5.0 L<br>.5 Net                     | 2.5 L<br>3.5 Net                  | 0 L<br>.5 Net      | 4.0 L<br>2.0 Net |
| 1945        | 5.5 L<br>8.5 Net                    | 2.5 L<br>2.5 Net                  | 0 L<br>0 Net       | 4.0 L<br>1.0 Net |
| 1950        | 5.0 L<br>2.5 Net                    | 4.0 L<br>.5 Net                   | 0 L<br>0 Net       | 3.0 L<br>1.0 Net |

\*Sources: WSM program listings, The Nashville Tennessean. Weeks of: November 1-7, 1925; October 25-31, 1930; March 2-8, 1935; September 8-14, 1940; December 16-22, 1945; February 1-7, 1950.

Our analysis of WSM programming found that between 1930 and 1950, WSM ran approximately one-third local programs and two-thirds network programs. The greatest amount of local programming generally ran on weekends. This was due to the Grand Ole Opry and Vanderbilt University football games on Saturdays and local church services on Sundays.

WSM news programming averaged about 15 minutes a day in the 1930s but increased to between 90 minutes to 120 minutes per day average during the 1940s. The increase in news coverage coincided with the interest in war coverage during the period. By 1950, WSM averaged approximately one hour of news per day.

Religious broadcasting on WSM averaged from 4 to 6 hours per week during the period 1925-1950. Most of the religious programs ran on Sunday and most were of local origin. WSM did not appear to run a significant amount of educational programming during the period. This could have been a result of homemaker's programs and cooking shows having being counted as in the category of agriculture/homemaker rather than educational. Agricultural programs of an educational nature included the National Farm and Home Hour, and programs supplied by the University of Tennessee Extension Service.

### Electrical Transcriptions

In 1929, WSM was one of the nation's first stations to record programs on electrical transcriptions (ET's). WSM had installed the equipment necessary to record 15-minute programs on electrical transcriptions (Broadcast Advertising, December, 1929). The large (16 inch diameter) discs soon became a popular way of recording 15-minute programs for distribution among stations.

Thus, ET's allowed smaller stations and non-affiliated stations to feature top-notch productions from the networks and from individual stations, such as WSM. Electrical transcriptions also allowed advertising agencies to control the content and quality of a program by recording the feature in its entirety rather than trusting the program to a local station.

Although the networks and many of their affiliates (including WSM) resisted the use of ET's on their own stations in favor of live broadcasts, NBC gave approval in 1931 for its clients to record network programs for spot use (Broadcast Advertising, March, 1931). By 1945, the WSM Program Release denoted which programs were on ET, as opposed to live broadcasts.

WSM also used ET's to record programs on discs for other stations. At one point WSM produced and recorded a syndicated soap opera called "A Second Spring" and sold the discs for \$3 each (Cobb, 1983). In 1940, WSM also transcribed the Prince Albert portion of the Opry for placement on 5 stations which were not picking up the 30 minute program from NBC (McDaniel & Seligman, 1952).

#### Changes to Come

The decade that began at the end of 1950 would see a decline of radio as the dominant electronic medium. Network audiences would decline, affiliates would defect, as radio adjusted to the television boom.

As noted by Howard and Kievman (1986), the end of the period would also see advances in audio tape recording that would cause a decline in live musical broadcast in favor of recorded music. Disc jockeys would soon appear even on network radio. Format radio would arrive in the late 1950s. The shift of advertising dollars to TV would lead to a more local emphasis in radio. Radio stations, including the nation's clear channel stations like WSM, would be called upon to respond to new challenges.

(Author's note: The National Life and Accident Insurance Company merged with Houston based American General Insurance Company in 1983. The same year, American General sold WSM-AM, WSM-FM, WSM-TV, and other properties to Gaylord Entertainment Company of Oklahoma City. Gaylord then sold WSM-TV to Gillett Broadcasting which changed the call letters to WSMV-TV before selling it to the present owners, Cook Inlet Inc.).

## CHAPTER XI

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the twenty-five year period covered in this study, WSM has been a leader in the broadcasting industry. Beginning with its initial broadcast on October 5, 1925, WSM demonstrated an ability to quickly eclipse existing Nashville stations in technology, power, programming, and publicity. Indeed, WSM's influence in the broadcast industry has been very significant.

#### Financial Strength and Political Influence

WSM's parent company, the National Life and Accident Insurance Company, entered the field of radio broadcasting at the urging of Edwin W. Craig, who was not only an avid fan of radio, but was also vice-president of the insurance company. E. W. (Ed) Craig, the son of the insurance company's president and one of its founders, Cornelius A. Craig, envisioned WSM as a means to increase the identity of the insurance company, to provide service to the community, and to

help the company's insurance salesmen throughout the seventeen state area served by National Life. This led National Life to invest some \$50,000 (in 1925) to equip WSM with the latest technology.

The fact that WSM studios were opened on the top floor of the National Life building is evidence of the close relationship between the insurance company and the radio station. This relationship was found to exist throughout the twenty-five year period encompassing this study.

When WSM began broadcasting in 1925, the station was one of only two facilities in the South using what was then considered high power, 1,000 watts. WSM's power, its state of the art transmitter, and the station's well appointed studios received much attention in local newspapers. The coverage was bolstered by a special multi-page, WSM Section, sponsored by National Life, which appeared in both Nashville papers in conjunction with WSM's debut broadcast in 1925.

National Life vice president Edwin Craig was the first voice heard on WSM's debut broadcast. Other important figures, including Tennessee Governor Austin Peay, also took part on the first WSM broadcast.

Most noteworthy may have been the on-air praise of WSM delivered by David B. Carson, Federal Commissioner of Navigation, who served as overseer of radio regulation in the pre-FRC days and by Maj. Walter Van Nostrand who supervised government regulation of radio in the region. Van Nostrand later operated a prestigious engineering consulting business for radio and TV stations. The participation of top federal government broadcast regulatory officials attests to the perceived importance of WSM and to the powerful influence of National Life.

The financial strength of National Life and its commitment to WSM is evidenced in the financial figures showing an annual operating loss for WSM for each year prior to 1935. As this study indicates, those losses were substantial. National Life, in effect, subsidized WSM some \$679,000, to cover losses incurred from from 1925 to 1934. The continuing investment in WSM by National Life attests to the public relations value of the radio station. Like other stations of the era, WSM was owned by a company whose financial strength helped support radio broadcasting. Other stations were built and supported by insurance companies, newspapers, radio manufacturers, and department store owners, who funded the stations because of the public relations benefits

afforded by radio. It must be noted that National Life did no advertising on WSM during this period with the exception of station identification announcements which identified WSM as the National Life station.

During the period of these financial losses, WSM received favorable frequency changes and several grants for increased power. These actions resulted in WSM being granted the only 50,000 watt clear channel in the state of Tennessee. WSM was aided by the influence of Rep. Edwin L. Davis of Tennessee. Davis, who chaired the House Committee charged with extending the Federal Radio Act of 1927, wrote the Davis Amendment which gave more frequencies and higher power to the South and to several Western states. This study suggests that Davis' pressure on the Federal Radio Commission was, at least in part, responsible for WSM obtaining clear channel, 50,000 watt status.

WSM's 50,000 watt, clear channel service was inaugurated in 1932, requiring an investment of \$243,000 by National Life. Within a year or two (accounts differ), National Life began an advertising campaign on WSM to sell life insurance to working class people on a weekly premium basis. National Life's income increased due to the campaign, but WSM still lost money. WSM's average monthly income was \$15,000 in

1935 compared to \$1,000 per month in 1929, but expenses still exceeded income. WSM was losing around \$5,000 a month in 1935. However, insurance sales were up.

Clear channel status for WSM received almost as much publicity as did the debut broadcast in 1925. Much of the focus was on the new WSM tower which at 878 feet was the tallest in the nation. The clear channel ceremonial broadcast of November 19, 1932, was carried live on NBC, of which WSM had become an affiliate in 1927. Like the initial WSM broadcast seven years earlier, many dignitaries participated. They included National Life and WSM personnel along with executive from NBC and the Radio Corporation of America. The acting Chairman of the FRC, Harold A. LaFount, praised WSM's new power and equipment, which he noted would serve the rural audience of America. Serving rural America would latter become a battle cry in an unsuccessful effort to obtain super power status for WSM. The "rural audience" argument would, however, be successfully harnessed to protect WSM's clear channel coverage area from government efforts to allow new stations to use the frequency.

### Programming Evolution

When WSM began in 1925, the first permanent network was yet to be created. WSM, therefore, relied on local musicians and singers to supply broadcast material. Although the appearance of "Old Time" or country music on early WSM broadcasts is widely known, WSM also furnished listeners with other forms of entertainment. College choirs (such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers), local church pastors, various local chamber music groups, and visiting musicians and vocalists were heavily featured on WSM's pre-network schedule, as were popular local orchestras led by Beasley Smith and by Francis Craig. Several WSM performers went on to achieve national stardom. They include non-country music artists like Dinah Shore and Snooky Lanson along with a large number of artists from the country music field. A variety of local performers would furnish the bulk of WSM's programming until affiliation with NBC in 1927 made other choices available.

Becoming a network affiliate changed the content of WSM programming. In 1928 WSM carried 19 hours per week of network (NBC) programming out of a 50 hour broadcasting week. By 1931, network programming had grown to more than 50% of WSM's 55 hour broadcast week.

From 1931 throughout the remainder of the time frame used in this study, the majority of WSM's programming was supplied by the network. But WSM continued to produce programming featuring local talent and became a significant "feed" station to NBC. In addition to the Grand Ole Opry, WSM furnished NBC with such programs as "Sunday Down South" with the Fisk Jubilee Singers.

#### WSM's Obligations as a Clear Channel Station

Listeners to WSM were presented with much more than the station's entertainment programs and network features. WSM's view of its obligation to public service was evident during the Mississippi-Ohio River floods of 1937 at which time its broadcast facilities were turned over to WHAS, Louisville. The unprecedented action allowed flood refugees and rescue workers in the Ohio and Tennessee River Valleys to hear weather bulletins and other emergency announcements over WSM's 50,000 watt clear channel signal for the 82 hours that WHAS was without electricity. WSM gained national recognition for exceptional service.

In addition to such activities during times of emergency, WSM also developed a nationally recognized broadcast effort to serve the farmers and other rural listeners reached by its signal. Beginning in 1929, WSM broadcast live, daily farm market reports, and weather.

In the mid-1930s, WSM worked with the University of Tennessee to present listeners with live programs from the Knoxville campus. These weekly farm and homemaker programs marked the beginning of what would become "The Campus of The Air," later evolving into "The University of Tennessee Tape Network." In 1938, WSM was awarded the Variety (Magazine) "Farm Service Station of the Year Award." WSM further advanced their programming service to the farm audience with the hiring of WSM's first farm director, John McDonald. McDonald took his "Noontime Neighbors" program to many cities and towns in the WSM listening area to educate the audience on various agricultural subjects. "Noontime Neighbors" remained a daily feature on WSM until 1972.

World War II brought additional opportunities for WSM to serve its listeners. Prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, WSM provided live, on the scene, coverage of military maneuvers that were taking

place throughout the South. WSM engineers arranged a live feed to NBC of one such program featuring General George Patton, among others. All told, WSM's coverage of military maneuvers in the South lasted for almost four years.

Other WSM programs reflected the need to serve the public during war time. Many locally written and produced WSM programs incorporated the theme of military preparedness and support for the war effort. Most notable of these was "The First Year" broadcast in September, 1940.

WSM used its stable of country music stars to begin the first all-free talent show to tour Army camps, the Camel Caravan. The group, featuring such stars as Minnie Pearl, traveled some 50,000 miles by 1942 to provide some 175 shows for military personnel. In addition to entertaining the troops, the shows gave exposure to the Opry and to country music, in general.

Another example of WSM's commitment to the war effort was the various war bond drives sponsored by the station. WSM dedicated one hour of its popular Grand Ole Opry to the sale of War Bonds. More than \$150,000 worth of bonds were sold on the Opry. WSM also produced a War Bond rally starring Dinah Shore that raised some \$650,000.

These efforts combined with WSM's various salvage drives and recruitment programs led to national recognition in 1942 when WSM was awarded a special citation from Billboard Magazine praising the station's contribution to the war effort. Then in 1948, WSM received Variety's "How to Run a Radio Station Award" in recognition of WSM's many public service projects.

#### New Technologies: Frequency Modulation and Television

WSM began experimenting with FM in 1935, just two years after inventor Edwin H. Armstrong introduced the new static-free radio technology. WSM founded the non-profit FM Broadcasters, Inc. in 1940, the same year that WSM's FM station, W47NV, received FCC approval to operate as a commercial station. Commercial operations on 44.7 megahertz began on March 1, 1941, making W47NV the first FM station in the country to actually begin operations under the FCC's new commercial authorization.

Like the experimental short-wave station WSM had operated experimentally prior to starting W47NV, the new facility broadcast opera and classical music to appeal to a different audience than the rural listeners attracted to the Grand Ole Opry.

W47NV, became WSM-FM when the FCC moved away from the alphabet/number call signs to the current all alphabetical designation. National Life continued the FM station until March 28, 1951 when it ceased operation amid operating losses of around \$10,000 per year. WSM was out of the FM business until 1968 when WLWM-FM was acquired and began operation as WSM-FM.

National Life was not alone in abandoning FM broadcasting in the early 1950s. In 1951, some 91 FM stations ceased broadcasting as owners increasingly turned their attention and their investment capital to television. WSM-TV, Nashville's first television station debuted September 30, 1950. Even though it had significant construction and technical expenses, WSM-TV showed an operating profit within its first year of operations.

#### The Fight to Save the Clear Channels

Although WSM abandoned FM for TV, it did not turn its back on Clear Channel 650. In fact, WSM-AM was in the forefront of a 35 year battle to protect clear channel AM broadcasting. In 1934, WSM President Edwin Craig led an organization of clear channel broadcasters in fighting to maintain radio service to rural America.

Under Craig's leadership, the Clear Channel Broadcasting Service (CCBS) was unsuccessful in persuading the FCC to give the clear channel stations power increases to match or exceed the experimental 500,000 watt level used by WLW, Cincinnati, from 1934 to 1942.

The CCBS was more successful in persuading the FCC to preserve the nighttime coverage provided by WSM and the other clear channel stations in the face of efforts to allow new stations to operate on the clear channel frequencies. When the FCC finally decided the issue in 1980, WSM and the other Class 1-A clear channel stations retained protection from nighttime interference within a 750 mile radius.

#### Major WSM Figures and Their Contributions to Radio

Several key figures in the development of WSM have emerged from this study. Chief among them is John H. DeWitt, Jr., whose many contributions span the decades from broadcasting's infancy, through the war years and beyond. "Jack" DeWitt threw the switch to begin the inaugural broadcast of WSM in 1925. DeWitt's engineering expertise was later crucial in WSM's

obtaining 50,000 watt, clear channel status in 1932. As Manager, then President of WSM, DeWitt led the station into the fields of Frequency Modulation broadcasting and, later, into television broadcasting.

DeWitt is also to be recognized for his engineering developments including work to improve the fidelity of radio transmitters. He is credited with being the first person to bounce radio waves off the moon.

Harry Stone, like DeWitt, was active in Nashville radio in the early 1920s. Stone managed WSM from 1932 until DeWitt became President of WSM following WWII. Stone headed WSM during the era of growth that began with clear channel status in 1932. Under Stone's leadership, WSM's achieved national recognition for public service in the flood of 1937, on through the years of World War II.

Stone's major contribution to radio is his defense of clear channel broadcasting in the 1940s. His efforts helped insure the viability of many of the nation's pioneer stations in an age dominated by FM broadcasting.

George Hay, one of the nation's most popular announcers in the early years of radio, was instrumental in beginning the Grand Ole Opry. Hay

brought his experience with "old time music" from WLS, Chicago, to WSM where he inaugurated and named the show that has become the longest running live radio program in the nation.

Hay's belief in and support of what he called "old time music" may be, at least partially, responsible for the success of the Opry today. .

The initial key figure in the development of WSM was Edwin H. Craig. Craig's vision of the public service and public relations benefits of radio spurred National Life to begin WSM in 1925. Had it not been for Craig's influence, National Life might never have entered the broadcasting business and there might not have been a WSM story to tell.

### Conclusions

This study has led to the following conclusion as to why WSM has been the important station we have shown it to be. A large degree of WSM's success can be attributed to some key elements: WSM's parent company, service to the public, a clear channel, network affiliation, and the Grand Ole Opry. Take away any one of the key elements and the story might have been very different.

The financial strength and political power of the National and Accident Insurance Company enabled WSM to rise from the ranks of more than 500 stations on the air in 1925 to be the owner of one of only 40 clear channel stations in the United States three years later. Then in 1932 the FCC authorized clear channel stations to operate at 50,000 watts to better reach the rural and remote listeners they were created to serve in 1928. WSM quickly moved to full power broadcasting relying on the financial resources of National Life.

The support of a strong parent company was one thing that WSM had in common with the other clear channel stations. Another commonality is network affiliation. By the early thirties, only two of the clear channel stations lacked network affiliation.

The fact that WSM was required to offer service to both its local audience and the rural audience served by its nighttime clear channel may have led WSM to offer a higher degree of public service than otherwise would have been seen. Or, perhaps the desire to serve a large audience to facilitate insurance sales would have been sufficient cause for WSM's motivation to become a station nationally recognized in the area of public service. However one chooses to speculate, this study

of WSM as a clear channel station reinforces a belief held by the author at the beginning of this work. The belief is centered on the concept that service to an audience leads to audience development, which can lead to profitability, which can be reinvested in audience service. WSM has made millions of dollars. As this study has shown, WSM has also provided extraordinary service to both its local audience and its rural audience through entertainment and information programs. Perhaps there is a causal relationship.

The dominance of network programming in the thirties and forties was evident at WSM. However, WSM did not simply broadcast network programs, WSM became one of the leading suppliers of programs to the NBC network. It also continued to carry an impressive schedule of local programs. WSM's technical facilities allowed the feeding of local programs to a national audience via the network. While the Grand Ole Opry was not the only WSM program to be heard on the network, it remains the best known.

Would there have been a WSM story had it not been for the Opry? Yes, but it would be a different story. Unlike typical clear channel stations, WSM does not have a "hometown" major league baseball franchise to broadcast. KMOX has the St. Louis Cardinals. WSB has

the Atlanta Braves. WGN has the Chicago Cubs. But, WSM does have the Opry to reach its vast nighttime audience.

Without a major league baseball team or other professional sports of national interest, a clear channel station may find its nighttime skywave signal wasted on programming of local, therefore limited, appeal. The distribution of fan mail to the Opry has demonstrated the program's wide appeal since its inception in 1925. The national appeal of the Grand Ole Opry was also evidenced by the vast outpouring of mail encouraging the FCC to maintain WSM's clear channel status. Today the Opry is widely promoted on television (especially on The Nashville Network) but it is still heard live on WSM, as it has been each Saturday night for almost 70 years.

This brings us to our next conclusion. The need remains for clear channel AM radio. Even with the proliferation of FM stations and low power AM outlets, there are still many places where a motorist can receive no audible signal except for clear channel skywave reception. In our opinion, listeners served by clear channel stations should not be denied the opportunity to hear national news, regional weather reports, professional sports, or the Grand Ole Opry.

A final note. This study has concluded that WSM was what is known in the broadcasting business as a "clean operation." In our researching the WSM Station Files at the FCC, we found no evidence that WSM had ever been fined or censured by the FCC. We must note that some of the WSM files are reported missing.

#### Suggestions For Further Research

This study has attempted to explore the history of one of radio's leading stations, WSM, Nashville, Tennessee. This undertaking has brought to light several areas for future research, including the contributions of the important figures mentioned in this study. Key among those worthy of the broadcast historian's attention are John H. DeWitt, Jr., Harry Stone, and George Hay.

In addition to the WSM notables discussed in this study, we must add to the list of potential research subjects Edwin L. Davis, U. S. Congressman from Tennessee. Davis is widely known for the "Davis Amendment" to the Radio Act of 1927. However, his other broadcast related work on the House Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries remains unresearched.

Also worthy of future research are the histories of several other radio stations of the decades encompassing this study. They include WNOX, Knoxville, Tennessee's first station; WMC, Memphis, another pioneer station in the South; and WHAS, Louisville, a station with close ties to WSM.

Other research possibilities may lie in radio's role during natural disasters. Important examples include the coverage of the 1937 floods by WSM and WHAS. Modern day examples would include hurricane coverage by major coastal stations such as WWL, New Orleans, and Hurricane Hugo coverage by WBT, Charlotte. Research possibilities also include the role of radio in the San Francisco earthquake of 1989 and in the unusual "Blizzard of 1993."

The current status of clear channel AM stations during the recent dominance of FM broadcasting also offers areas for possible research. Some clear channel stations (KDKA, Pittsburgh; KMOX, St. Louis; WGN, Chicago) continue to be among market leaders. Many others continue to be viable broadcast properties. Among these are WSM, Nashville; WSB, Atlanta, WBT, Charlotte; WHAS, Louisville; WJR, Detroit; and WLW, Cincinnati.

Also among the several areas of additional research suggested by this study, the Grand Ole Opry remains a subject fraught with potential for scholarly research. While much popular literature has been published on the Opry, the definitive scholarly history remains unwritten.

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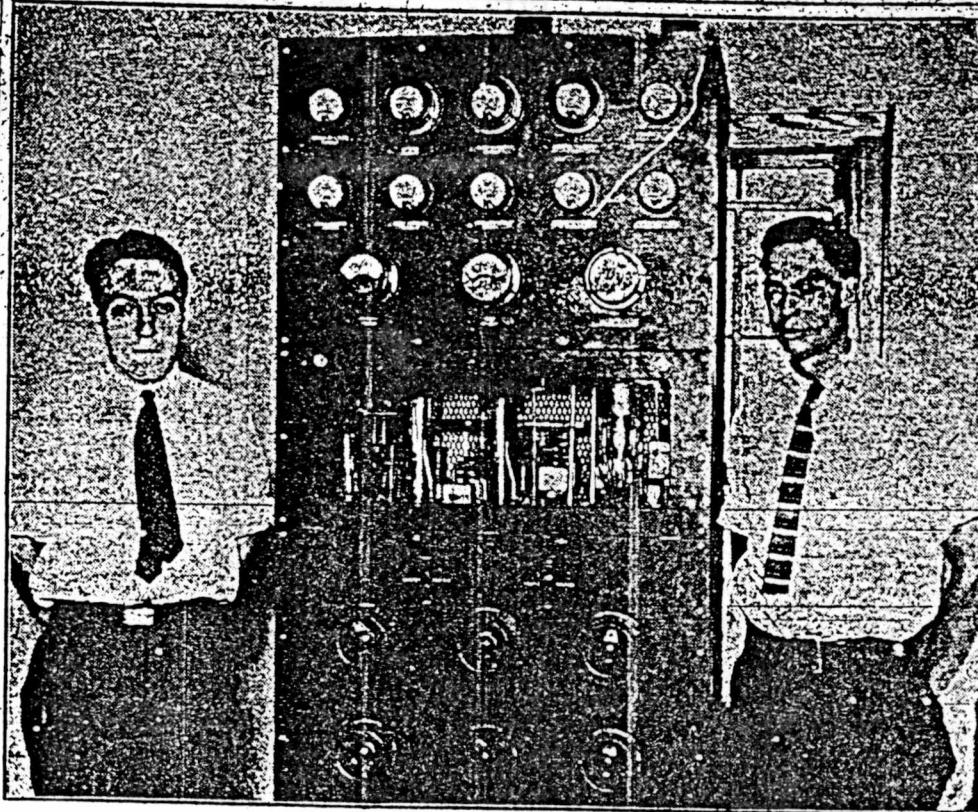
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

# WSM'S Big Transmitter and Men Who Installed It



—Photo by C. J. Burnell, Tennessean Staff Photographer.

Last word in radio broadcasting transmitters, Western Electric Type 6-A, which will send out the programs of WSM, Nashville's great radio station to be opened Monday night by the National Life and Accident Insurance Company, stand-

ing ready in place at the operating station, Fifteenth avenue, south, with the two men who installed the complicated maze of mechanism. At left, John C. Herber, radio engineer from the Bell Telephone Laboratories, New York, in charge of the

installation; at right, Thomas L. Parke, I. R. E., resident engineer, who will have direct charge of the transmitting unit.

In the photo, which shows the transmitter ready to operate, the four huge transmitting tubes can

be seen through the open panel in the instrument board. Left to right, they are: 50 watt speech amplifier tube; 250 watt modulator; 250 watt rectifier and 1,000 watt water-cooled radio frequency amplifier tube. The latter is the "grand daddy" of them all.

## LOOP AERIALS

From the experience of radio engineers throughout the country it has been found that the average loop aerial is about five per cent as efficient as the average outdoor aerial. Indoor aerials are from ten to fifteen per cent as efficient.

## ENAMEL WIRE AERIAL

Enamelled wire has been proved the best for use in building aerials. Bare wire becomes coated with soot, which causes certain electrical losses, and fabric covered wires absorb moisture, which has the same effect.

## GOOD SETS FOR SWISS

Static, caused by the many high tension power lines in Switzerland, necessitates the use of receiving sets which will minimize this disturbance. This means that only the highest type of radio set can find a market in the mountain country.

## Radio Singer

## To Send Nashville's Greetings From WSM



## DERELICT ROOMS SEAS TWO YEARS

Last Definite Report of Ship Received About Year Ago.

(By Associated Press.)  
Washington—Men who go down to the sea in ships are speculating about the early appearance in West Indian waters of one of the most noted derelicts of modern times. While the Navy department's hydrographic office considers it unusual in these days of rapid radio communication and special coast guard patrol for a derelict to remain afloat longer than a week, the four-masted British lumber-laden schooner Governor Parr has been rowing the high seas for nearly two years.

The last definite report received of the Governor Parr's whereabouts was in October of last year, when she floated crewless down along the coast of Africa, not the British

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APPENDIX B

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 4, 1925.

## BEASLEY SMITH'S ORCHESTRA TO PLAY

Andrew Jackson Hotel Musicians Will Assist in WSM's Inaugural Monday Night.

Beasley Smith and his Andrew Jackson orchestra, augmented and strengthened by star members of two bands formerly under his direction, will serenade its wide circle of admirers in Tennessee and outside with a sample of its unique harmony between 8:30 and 9 p. m. during WSM's great inaugural broadcast Monday.

The Beasley-Smith organization has attained an unusually high rank with other popular dance orchestras throughout the country.

The orchestra is under contract with the Andrew Jackson hotel to supply the music for its dinner dances, a new innovation in Nashville which is gaining the widespread approval and patronage of the social set. From 6:30 to 9 p. m. every evening the musicians under the guidance of Mr. Smith, entertain the hotel diners at the dinner hour, and since the installation of WSM their melodies will enter a greatly increased circle for it will be broadcast on alternate evenings with Francis Craig's orchestra playing at the Hermitage hotel.

The Smith brigade is equally capable of playing either the classic harmonies or popular tunes in the approved syncopated style, and their selection of the mammoth dedication program Monday night is sure to be one of the most attractive features.

Members of the Beasley Smith orchestra are: Mr. Smith, himself, director and pianist; Leon Franklin and Shirley Franklin, both of Louisville, Ky., saxophones; Percy Carson, tenor banjo; Bill Scott, trumpet; Julian Matlock, saxophone; Tom Carter, trumpet, and Johnny Reynolds, drums, and WSM fans will have their first opportunity to check up on the Nashville musicians Monday night during the 8:30 to 9 period.

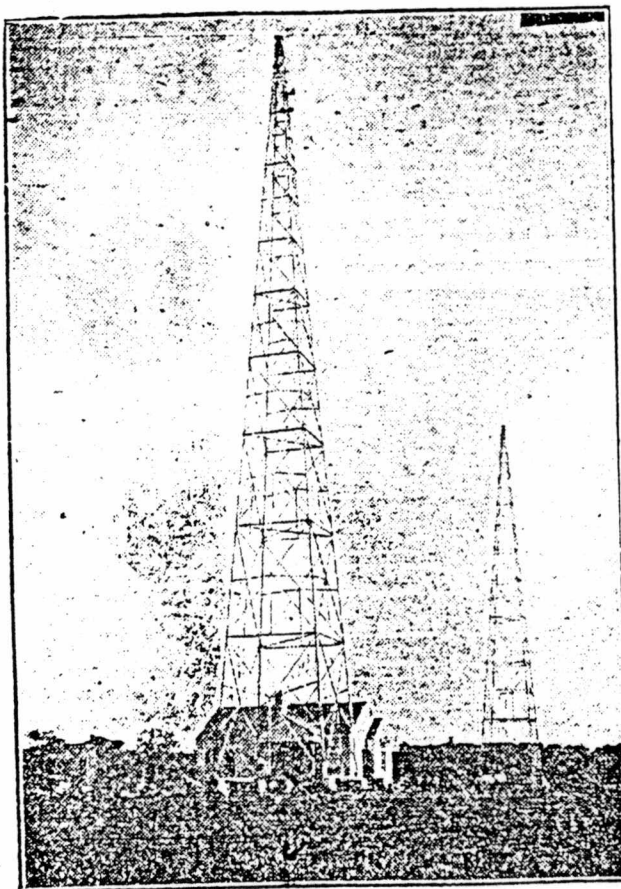
## ATWATER KENT HAS NEW MODELS

Five-Tube Set Operated on Dry Cells and Cone-Type Speaker in Demand.

Philadelphia, Oct. 3.—The wheels of production are spinning in the plant of the Atwater Kent Manufacturing company, on Wissahickon avenue, according to officials of the concern. Coincident with this report a new five-tube set operating on dry cells was announced by the company.

## WSM Broadcasting Towers

\$25



These graceful towers are located about two miles from the broadcasting studio in the National Life building. The entire mechanical equipment of Station WSM is of the latest type.

## POWER COMPANY EXTENDS SERVICE

Albany-Decatur, Ala., Oct. 3.—(Special).—Electric lines of the Alabama Power company are being extended in a southerly direction here, toward the Wilder place. When the line is completed many additional homes in the neighborhood of the Benevolent hospital can be served with city current.

The Alabama Power company has

in the past few months been making an effort to extend its services to as large an area as possible. Already the Valley Country Club is equipped for light, and within the next year it is thought likely that a number of residences and buildings just outside the city limits will enjoy the comfort of electricity.

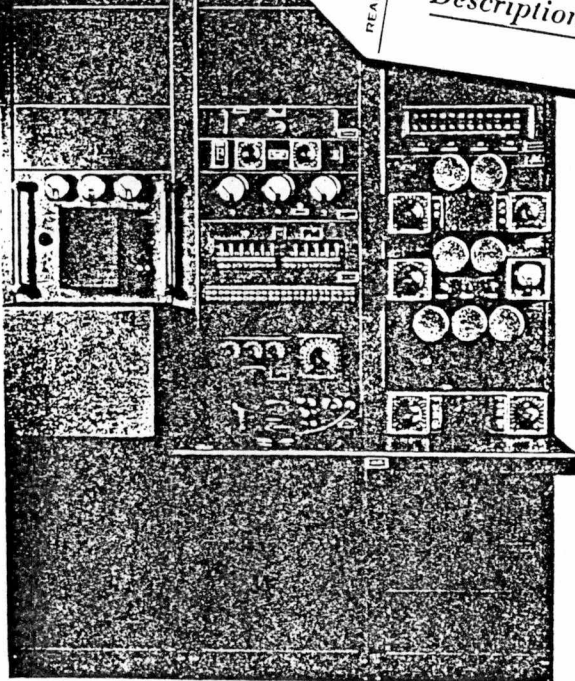
In one of the clubs at Elizabethtown, the popular French resort, there is a wonderful glass floor illuminated from below. This gives all the light necessary for dancing.

APPENDIX C

# "RADIO HEADQUARTERS"

From  
*RCA Victor Company, Inc.*  
 Camden, N. J.  
 TO *Radio Station WSM*  
 Nashville, Tenn.  
 Description *Speech Input Equipment for transmitting station*

READ IMPORTANT NOTICE ON BACK



WSM at Nashville, owned and operated by the National Life and Accident Insurance Company, has had an enviable record as one of the pioneer broadcast stations. On a cleared-channel and centrally located, it has a nation-wide audience. The owners of WSM have an equally far-flung business. Realizing the value of the prestige attached to a "national station" they have striven to maintain for WSM that reputation. At the present time work on the installation of a new fifty kilowatt transmitter is nearing completion. It will provide WSM's audience with maximum dependability. To go with this new transmitter an RCA Victor Type R-2 Speech Equipment has been ordered. This equipment will insure that WSM's new signal in addition—will have increased tonal range and quality—will be free from extraneous noises, blasting, and distortion—will, in short, be capable of almost perfect reproduction fidelity.



TRANSMITTER SECTION

**RCA Victor Company, Inc.**

CAMDEN, N. J.

"RADIO HEADQUARTERS"

New York: 153 E. 21th St.  
 CHAS. H. L. CO.

San Francisco: 235 Montgomery St.  
 Dallas: Santa Fe Bldg.

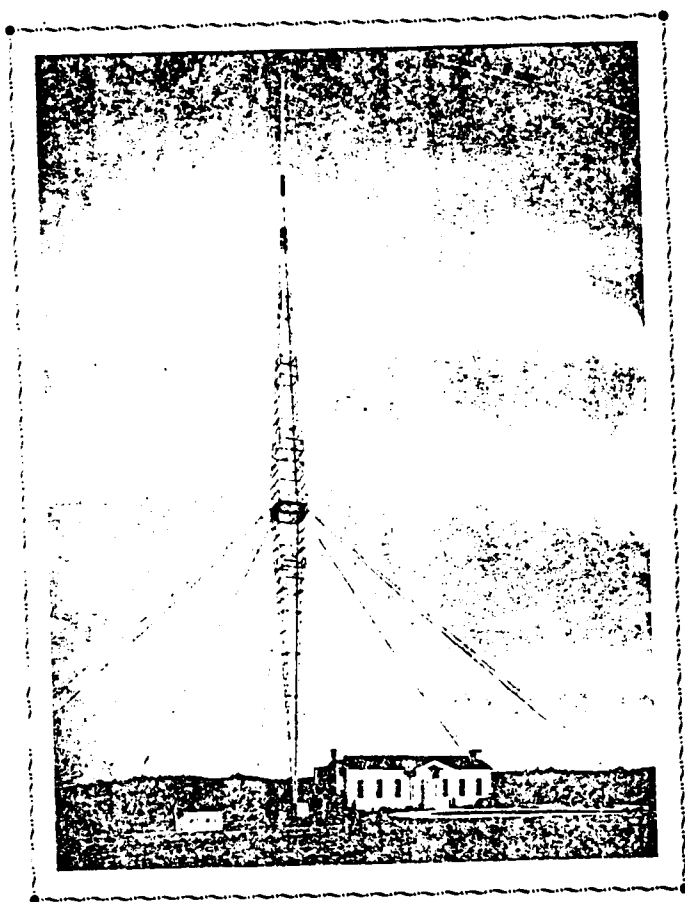
APPENDIX D

# DISCLOSURE NEWS

Edited by  
E. JAY QUINBY

NUMBER 6

JANUARY, 1933

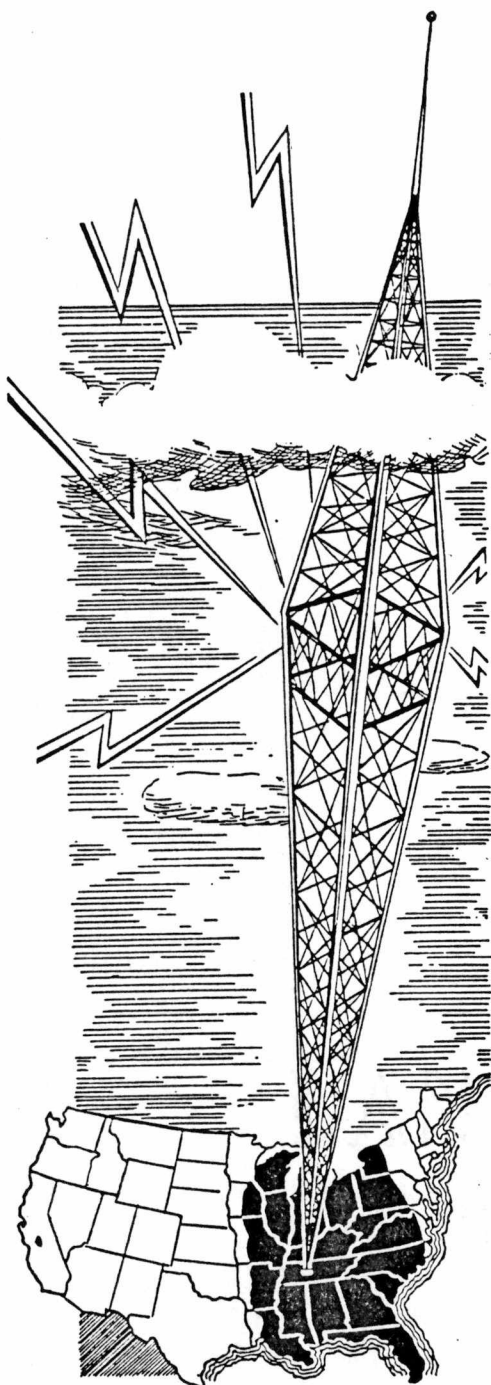


THE TALLEST RADIO TOWER IN AMERICA

AT THE BASE OF THIS 875' ANTENNA MAST MAY BE SEEN THE BUILDING IN WHICH THE NEW 50,000 WATT RCA TRANSMITTER HAS BEEN INSTALLED FOR STATION WSMV, OF THE NATIONAL LIFE AND ACCIDENT INSURANCE COMPANY, NASHVILLE, TENN.

Published Occasionally and  
Copyrighted 1933 by  
RCA VICTOR COMPANY, INC.  
CAMDEN, N. J., U. S. A.

APPENDIX E



## The SOUTH is in the *saddle* and leading the parade

Business economists agree that the South is leading the Nation in recovery.

Present indications point to greater business activity in the South during 1933.

During the past three months construction awards were greater than during the same period of last year.

Textiles are heading the list in increased production, and more than 70% of cotton textiles are made in southern mills.

These facts are indicative of the progress and recovery of the southern states, and within these states WSM is dominant.

Unlimited Time **WSM** Cleared Channel  
50,000 Watts

— of, by and for the South is the medium which reaches this chosen territory.

Lowest Rate of any 50,000 Watt Station  
Write for breakdown of WSM Mail

# WSM

Owned and Operated by

THE NATIONAL LIFE & ACCIDENT INSURANCE COMPANY, INC., NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

*Gentlemen Be Seated!*



TO THE SWELLEST MINSTREL SHOW ON THE AIR, NOW  
AVAILABLE FOR SPONSORSHIP AT A SURPRISINGLY LOW COST

# LASSES WHITE

All Star Minstrels

ORIGINAL  
AUTHENTIC  
PROVEN POPULARITY

- Lasses White, himself, assisted by Honey Wilds and a smart supporting cast, including, Tiny Stowe, The Vagabonds, John Lewis, Claude Sharpe, Beasley Smith and his orchestra, and many others with a proven record of heavy mail response and tremendous following.

## TESTED MERCHANDISING PLANS READY NOW

This program not only entertains, but lends itself to adroit merchandising: a "workable" mailing list; contagious point of sales material and features; Publicity, and happy hearted identification with the product. Plans and complete cooperation from our own merchandising department.



HONEY WILDS



LASSES WHITE

Forbes Magazine's Fourth Business Pictograph (Oct. 15th) shows the South still leading the way toward business revival. Concentrate here where your sales potentialities are greater and immediate!

For details and quotations wire or write

# WSM

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

Now 50,000 WATTS  
UNLIMITED TIME  
CLEAR CHANNEL

Owned and Operated by the NATIONAL LIFE AND ACCIDENT INSURANCE COMPANY, INC.

**Radio's Most Powerful Voice!**

**W S M**

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

**50,000 WATTS**

NATIONAL CLEARED CHANNEL  
650 KILOCYCLES

To the advertiser W S M guarantees intelligent and efficient sales and merchandising cooperation.

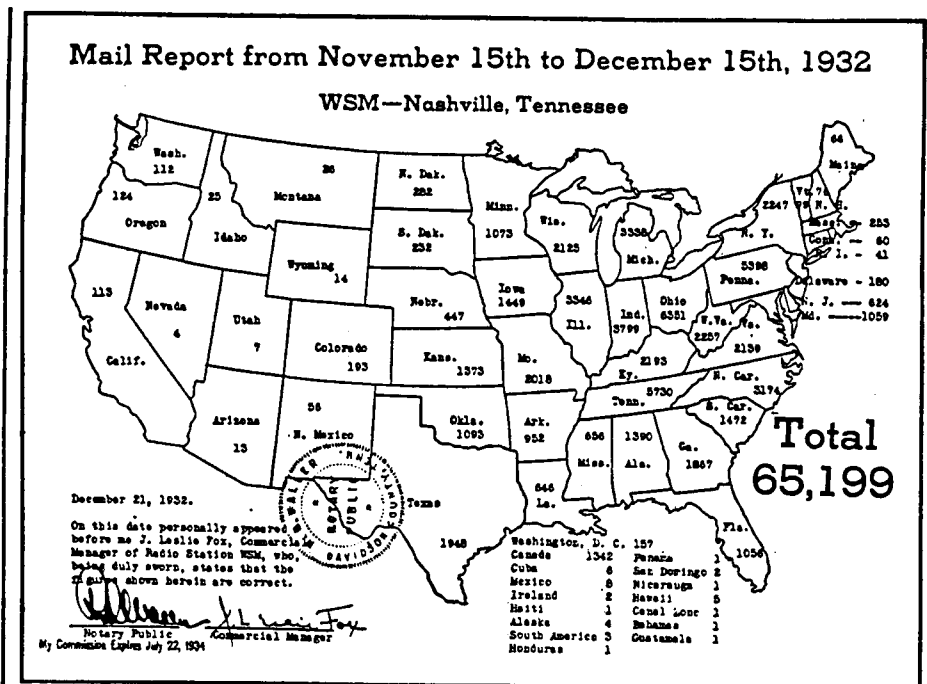
In the interest of the listener W S M continues the same friendly, high-class program which has made it "The Favorite Station of the South."

**W S M**

50,000 Watts    650 Kilocycles    N. B. C. Network

Owned and Operated by

**The National Life and Accident Insurance Company**  
INC.



## We sell the South . . .

**T**HE rates of WSM are based on selling the South, not the nation—the lowest of any 50,000 watt station.

The additional coverage you obtain from WSM is free.

See for yourself. Above is the mail return for the first thirty days after our new 50,000 watt station went on the air!

Outside our regular marketing area, this **ADDED** coverage has

Weekly mail reports and merchandising information available to all executives upon request.

been contributed **VOLUNTARILY** by thousands of people who have been attracted to WSM since the new 878 foot tower pointed itself skyward.

Our job is to sell the South. That is what you pay for. You get it. All else is free.

# W S M

**50,000 WATTS**

CLEARED CHANNEL      UNLIMITED TIME  
NBC AFFILIATION

Owned and Operated by THE NATIONAL LIFE & ACCIDENT INSURANCE COMPANY, INC., NASHVILLE, TENN.

## BACK of the CONFEDERATE MEMORIAL



We are proud of the statues that stand in our "squares." They represent a heritage that should mean a good deal to marketing men. A heritage of gentility that expresses itself in nice things—well-appointed, well-run homes. A background that makes a unique market for merchandise.

And we have the money to indulge these tastes—because the ground costs less, the home costs less to build, the maintenance, at any given social level, costs less. That leaves money over for the things you sell. It makes the South a much better market than bald income-statistics would make you think.

That is the market on which WSM's low rate-card is based. The national market you cover at the same time, because of our great 50,000-watt signal, is our gift to you.

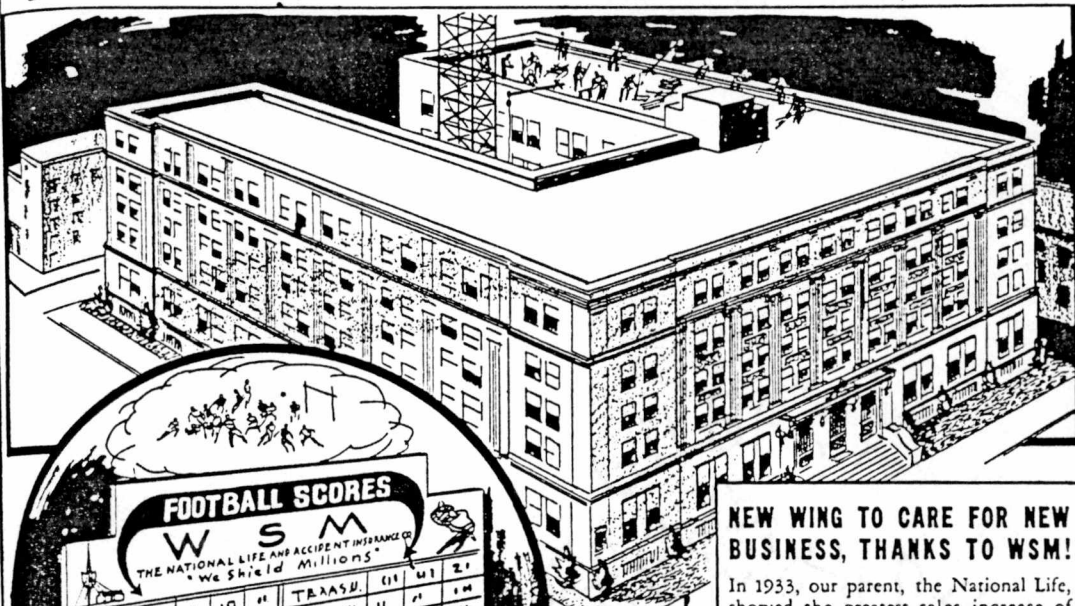
WSM has only one rate card for all comers. You don't have to be shrewd to buy it, but it is shrewd to do so.

Owned and Operated by  
THE NATIONAL LIFE & ACCIDENT INSURANCE COMPANY, INC.  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

EDWARD PETRY AND COMPANY  
Exclusive National Representatives  
NEW YORK, CHICAGO, ATLANTA, SAN FRANCISCO

|                     |                   |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| Cleared Channel     | Unlimited Time    |
| <b>WSM</b>          |                   |
| NBC<br>Affiliate    | 650<br>Kilocycles |
| <b>50,000 WATTS</b> |                   |

# STRANGE FACTS ABOUT RADIO



**Scoops the Papers!** WSM BROADCAST FOOTBALL SCORES ARE TUNED IN EVERY SATURDAY EVENING AND POSTED ON 15,000 SPECIAL-BUILT WSM MUSICAL SCORE BOARDS LOCATED IN DRUG AND GROCERY STORES IN 21 STATES!

**MERCHANDISING SPOT BROADCASTS IN 500,000 HOMES A WEEK**

EVERY WEEK 5000 REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NATIONAL LIFE AND ACCIDENT INSURANCE COMPANY GET APPROXIMATELY 500,000 HOMES BY SHOWING THIS BOOK AND TALKING UP WSM INSTEAD OF INSURANCE SCHEDULES. INTEREST SHOW PROGRAM SCHEDULES, TIME, AND TRADE NAME OF SPOT BROADCAST ADVERTISERS. AT NO EXTRA COST TO ADVERTISERS THIS IS AVAILABLE THROUGH WSM ONLY. WRITE FOR COMPLETE DETAILS. OR SEE AN EDWARD PETRY MAN.

**25 GALS. (H<sub>2</sub>O) per Minute**

CIRCULATE AROUND THIS TUBE, ONE OF TWO TUBES USED TO AMPLIFY WSM'S RADIO WAVE FROM 5,000 TO 50,000 WATTS. IT COSTS \$16.50. USES ENOUGH CURRENT TO HEAT 125 ELECTRIC FLAT-IRONS

**NOT STRANGE** IS THE FACT THAT WSM-MERCHANDISED PROGRAMS CONSTANTLY PROVE THEIR SUPERIORITY. FRANKLY DISSATISFIED WITH RADIO STEREOTYPE MERCHANDISING, WE ARE CONSTANTLY TESTING, REVISING, REACHING OUT FOR NEW METHODS. OUR MERCHANDISING ADVANTAGES ARE UNIQUE AND EFFECTIVE - YOU OUGHT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THEM. FOR COMPLETE DETAILS WRITE WSM OR EDWARD PETRY & COMPANY.

650 Kilocycles NBC Affiliate

**WSM**

50,000 Watts! Cleared Channel

Owned and operated by

THE NATIONAL LIFE & ACCIDENT INSURANCE COMPANY, INC.  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

EDWARD PETRY & CO., New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Detroit, Exclusive National Representatives

A new factor in the movement of merchandise.  
3,000 Field Men in 21 states are pulling for you!

## NEW WING TO CARE FOR NEW BUSINESS, THANKS TO WSM!

In 1933, our parent, the National Life, showed the greatest sales increase of any life insurance company in America or Canada! And it is still leading the field with such an increase that a new wing had to be added! This year!

And the only new ingredient in the company's sales kit was the *direct use* of WSM for the *specific* selling problems of the company's 3000 agents in 21 states!

You ought to know the WSM story.

A Petry man will tell you.

(WSM's new auditorium studio seating 500 people occupies entire top floor of the new wing.)

## VITA

Jerry Wayne Rinks was born in McNairy County, Tennessee on December 30, 1946. He attended public schools in Columbia, Tennessee and graduated from Columbia Central High School in 1964. He worked in commercial radio and television from 1964 until 1989. He graduated with an Associate of Arts degree from Columbia State Community College in 1973. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from Memphis State University in 1976. He attended graduate school at Memphis State University from 1976 to 1978. In 1989, he entered the graduate program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He received his Doctor of Philosophy degree in August, 1993.

He is presently employed as Assistant Professor at the University of Southern Indiana, in Evansville, where he teaches radio and TV in the Department of Communications.