



# Our Times

Volume 5 Issue 3

THE PEOPLE, HISTORY, AND CULTURE OF LOGAN COUNTY, ILLINOIS

Fall 2000

## What's on the Radio?

One Saturday morning in the '60s, when Betty Loeffler Williams and Earle Layman were the only two people working at WPRC radio station, Betty took a frantic phone call. It was an elderly woman, a loyal listener who didn't have any family in the area, and she needed to talk to Earle *right now!*

"Honey, he's on the air," Betty replied. But she spoke to Earle, who promised to return the call as soon as he was off the air. The call left Betty with a "funny feeling," so she called Larry Shroyer to ask him to have the police go over and check on the lady.

As it turned out, she had fallen and broken a bone and hadn't been able to get to the phone for three days. When she finally did, she called her minister and Earle Layman.

"Those people all dearly loved Earle Layman," remembers Betty. "Some of those older women thought Earle Layman was the radio station." Over the years, Earle and other WPRC personalities became part of the Logan County family.

Beginning with amateur operators, through WBBM, WPRC, WLCC, and WLNX, the airways of the county have

hummed with radio broadcasts. Today, Zion Lutheran Church of Lincoln's Sunday morning services are all that remain of the golden age of radio in Logan County.

### There's Something "In the Air" Tonight—Radio Waves

Gertrude Sparks Munsch says that the first time she ever heard the radio "it was quite thrilling, because it was one of those newfangled inventions."

The year was 1924 or '25, and the Sparks family had been invited to the home of Dr. Lewis Rhoads on Peoria Street in Lincoln. There the little girl took her turn passing around the headphones that were necessary to hear anything at all.

The very first radios were crystal sets, with which kids like Herb Alexander could listen to programs that came all the way from Havana, Cuba.

Later, listening to the radio meant hanging an antenna between the big Elm trees or (after the 1924 sleet storm) in the attic.

Cal and Lark Wasson thought they'd get better reception and less interference from buildings if they could get their antenna higher in the air. So they put it on a six-foot kite, which they flew in the open area between Sangamon Street and the railroad tracks (across the tracks from the depot).

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Lincoln mayor Alois Feldman greets Adlai Stevenson as he stops in Lincoln, July 28, 1952. Earle Layman at right. Courtesy Larry Shroyer Photographic Collection/Lincoln Public Library District.

# Our Times

The People, History, and Culture of  
Logan County, Illinois

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## Publisher's Notes

Judy Busby was the first celebrity I ever knew. I came close to meeting another celebrity once, but things just didn't work out. When I was five, my aunt took me on a train trip to California. Before we departed, she sent a letter to Hopalong Cassidy to tell him that we would like to meet him. Hoppy wrote back, explaining that he wasn't planning to be home when we were going to be there. So he sent me a picture of Topper and a lucky coin. Dam. I had to wait another twenty years for a chance to meet a media star.

As a newcomer to Lincoln, I listened to *Viewpoint* on WPRC and became familiar with the Minnesota lilt in Judy Busby's voice. I learned a lot about my new hometown from Judy, and thought of her much as I had once thought of Hoppy—a nice person who occupied a sphere of life far removed from my own.

I had never lived in a town with its own radio station, so it came as a huge surprise when Judy's daughter answered roll call in a high school swimming class I taught. I went home that night and told my wife, "You'll never believe who's in my swimming class. It's Judy Busby's daughter." Not long after that, I met Judy herself. It was my first personal encounter with a media celebrity, and Judy did not disappoint me. Little did I know that someday my own daughter would be in the

same kindergarten class as Sam Madonia's daughter, and Sam was the voice of the Railers. Sam was probably the second celebrity I ever knew.

I have vague childhood memories of a radio in the kitchen of our home in Kansas, where Fibber McGee and Molly, Amos and Andy, and the Lone Ranger entertained us. The memories are vague because my dad was given a 12", round-screen Zenith television set in return for preparing someone's income taxes, and the radio took a backseat to Howdy Doody, Pinky Lee, and Gabby Hayes. When we moved to Illinois, we discovered that our Zenith received only one channel, so my brothers and I went to a neighbor's house every week to watch Walt Disney. That's about the time I got my coonskin cap.

Radio became important again when I practiced being a teenager in sixth grade: WPEO in Peoria played Pat Boone and Chubby Checker and Fats Domino. By high school I had turned the dial to WLS, listening to Dick Biondi and other rock jocks whose names I don't recall. My parents and all other adults in McLean County tuned into WJBC, and they still do.

Then I grew up and came to Lincoln, where I met Judy and later Sam. My real radio hero, though, was Brayton Danner. I hope I'm not betraying my educator colleagues by suggesting this, but I suspect that college kids at LC learned more about life working in Brayton's little radio station in the basement of University Hall than they did in most classrooms. Some of Brayton's disciples were techies—guys with horn-rimmed glasses who knew about diodes and transistors and could make antennas out of baling wire. Other Dannerites were organizers: they planned the programming, scheduled the on-air talent, and nagged at the DJs who showed up late. A few of the kids were real personalities, with golden voices, quick minds, and encyclopedic knowledge of music history. All of the WLNK staffers knew that Brayton lived only a few blocks from campus, listened to their shows, and would be there in a minute if something was amiss.

Now I'm back to WLS. No more rock jocks: today's WLS is a talk station. I wake up every morning to Don Wade and Roma, catch Rush over the noon hour, and chuckle with Roe and Garry in the afternoons. My nighttime favorite is Milt Rosenberg on WGN, but he is too often interrupted by Cubs games. Sorry, but I am too hyperactive to settle in with a four-hour play-by-play of a perennially-losing team.

Looking back, I miss the old WPRC. Living near its stars somehow elevated my sense of personal worth. Living in a town with its own radio station made me think I had arrived. SR

(Continued from page 1)

Radio buffs got used to fiddling with the three dials to get the right frequency and recharging the big storage batteries from time to time.

Herb's dad's first set was built by Dick Purinton, the son-in-law of Dr. Rhoads; its cabinet was a simple wooden box. Elsa Richardson also built radios, building the cabinets and assembling the parts.

In fact, according to an April 30, 1924, editorial in the *Courier*, "The great majority of radio receiving sets are those made at home or assembled out of parts." Little boys could buy radio parts at the five and ten cent store.

At first, people who didn't have radios had to rely on the few who did. In July of 1923, Boy Scouts camping at Sugar Creek gathered around the radio and loud speaker the Wasson Motor Company had set up in their bunkhouse and listened to the Willard-Firpo fight.

Earlier that month, the company's garage display rooms (present site of Lincoln Medical Equipment and Supply) had been packed with sports fans, who hung onto every word coming out of the big horn set up to broadcast the results of the Dempsey-Gibbons fight.

Over at the *Courier*, hundreds of people crowded around the window to read the details of each round, posted as they came in on the newspaper's set.

By October of 1923, Lincoln had about 200 radio owners, many of whom planned parties to hear Governor Small speak about hard roads on station WJAZ, broadcasting from the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago.

In January of 1924, the *Courier* reported that the number of receiving sets had climbed to four or five hundred, and by December of 1925, John Zurkammer, Jr. was selling Atwater Kent radio sets at his De Luxe Radio Shop on Clinton Street in Lincoln.

Farmers sat up late listening in on the outside world, and young boys at the Chautauqua watched their language—afraid their voices might be picked up by the radio. ■

# We Broadcast Better Music

Had you been out and about in November of 1923, you might have spotted the first car radio on the streets of Lincoln.

To be sure, it was a homemade affair: a short antenna strung under the top of an open car, a receiving set grounded to the car's frame, and at the wheel, Earl Wasson—wearing a pair of headphones.

Luther Anderson was back at the Wasson garage, transmitting on amateur radio station 9DMU, and his voice came through nice and loud.

The radio department of the Wasson garage was an important part of amateur broadcasting in Lincoln.

Back in June, for example, the Hewitt Storage Battery Company of Taylorville had ordered 500 feet of aerial wire by radiophone.

The order was taken on a receiving set, the reply was sent back by Luther Anderson over the transmitting set, and the whole transaction was accomplished without the need to pay any telephone tolls.

Nor was Taylorville as far as the station could transmit. In September of that year, Luther Anderson received a postal card reporting that he had been heard in Westerly, Rhode Island. That month, he also talked by code to an operator in Palmetto, Georgia.

By December 21, 1923, the garage's "spark set," or amateur transmitting station, was one of seven in Lincoln. The others were operated by Byron Mowrey, Richard Purinton, Carl Yarcho, H. L. Atlass, Raymond Purviance, and Raymond Knochel.

Lincoln's first amateur station was Richard Purinton's 9CXT, which broadcast in code on January 21, 1923. Purinton's first voice transmission was on February 7th.

H. Leslie Atlass, produce dealer with his father, Frank, owned the second amateur station in Lincoln.

Born in Lincoln in 1894, Atlass attended Lake Forest Academy near Chicago. In 1911, he and his brother, Ralph, began operating a crystal radio set in the family home at 325 North Logan Street in Lincoln. At that time, radio signals were only sent in code.

After serving in World War I, Atlass returned to Lincoln to work in his father's business. He married Harriet Marks on June 26, 1917, and the couple moved into their new home at 110 Park Place.

By the time Atlass started his amateur station 9DFC in March of 1923, his parents and younger brother had moved to Chicago. He used the station as a substitute for the telephone, transmitting business messages to his father.

Before long, he was doing more. On election night in April, the staff of the *Courier* telephoned Atlass as soon as they had results from each ward. Atlass broadcast the numbers to George Newcomer of Mt. Pulaski; hundreds of people tuned in.

In August, Atlass upgraded his transmitter from 10 to 200 watts, theoretically making it possible to broadcast to both coasts.

Lincoln's very first broadcasting

station went on the air on Wednesday, February 6, 1924, operating under a broadcasting license with the call letters WBBM.

The station aired from the Atlass home on Park Place. Several times during the broadcast, announcer Richard Purinton repeated its slogan—"We Broadcast Better Music."

The owner of the license was the Frank Atlass Produce Company, "The Home of the Egg," and Purinton offered three dozen eggs to the first person from each state to respond by telegram.

The offer kept Atlass busy sending out eggs the next day. People from fifteen states had replied, the furthest being from New Orleans.

That first program included a concert by Ryan's Orchestra, and people from Springfield, Bloomington, and Decatur called in with their requests. Fred I. Edgell gave a short talk announcing his candidacy for state's attorney.

The next night's broadcast featured both tenor and whistling solos by Tommy Davis, a solo by Miss Hazel Young (an Atlass employee), and trios by the Young sisters and Miss Theobald.

(Continued on page 9)



[Harry] Ryan's Orchestra performed on the first WBBM broadcast. This picture was taken in 1922. History of Logan County 1982.

# Little Station. . .Loyal Audience

First of all, let's get one thing perfectly clear. The call letters WPRC do *not* stand for "We play records constantly!" No, the PRC refers to the Prairie Radio Corporation (Ray F. Knochel, Dr. Lee N. Hamm, and John H. Deal), that owned and operated Lincoln's only area radio station from 1951 to 1969.

The 1370-kilocycle, 500-watt station opened in its own little building on the Route 66 Belt Line on the edge of Lincoln on April 26, 1951.

Although it was licensed to broadcast only from sunup to sundown, it nevertheless had a full staff, consisting of program director Bill Brady; news director Jim Crowell; ladies' program director Mary Lotta; farm features director Tom Campbell; and announcers Kenn Lisle, Boyd Roche, and Earle Layman.

Earle Layman had been an announcer for WFTA, an Armed Forces Radio station in New Guinea, in World War II; other people had radio experience, too.

Engineers were Don "Chuckles" Thompson and Keith Mason. Marian "Mimi" Gordon [McCann] assisted sales manager Saunders Devine and kept the office running smoothly.

Betty Loeffler [Williams] came to work at WPRC as a secretary after she graduated from high school that May and stayed 15 years—but was never on the air.

"I'd get in front of the mike, and I'd want to laugh," she says.

Instead, she worked behind the scenes, eventually doing everything from writing up ads, to bookkeeping, to acting as traffic manager (scheduling the programs and commercials).

Larry Shroyer gathered news round the clock, usually writing his own stories and bringing them out to the station, where Bill Brady and announcers like Earle Layman put the broadcast together.

"We had to write commercials and read them or put them on tape," Betty says. "In that kind of business, you really have to do a little bit of everything. If someone can't come, somebody else has to fill in, because it has to go on."

Because it had a daytime license, WPRC sometimes had to sign off as early as

4:30 in the afternoon, so it didn't broadcast sports for years. Still, Betty says, "The guys would go to the sporting events and have plenty of news."

Music was a staple of the station. And when a '50s homemaker wiped her hands on her apron, picked up the phone, and called in to request a special number on Earle Layman's popular show, the 78-rpm record spinning on the turntable would very often feature a big band.

In fact, she could come home from church on Sunday, fix dinner to the music of Wayne King, and serve it to the strains of Guy Lombardo.

Monday morning, our housewife might answer the phone to find that "Whoople," as Earle Layman was nicknamed, had picked her name from the phone book to ask her a question on *Calls for Cash*.

In later years, her women's programs were hosted by Marlene Reinhart Schrader. Her husband listened to Clem Garton on *East O' Town*.

Many people thought of the staff at WPRC as their friends. Betty Williams remembers Jennie Kleinman, who used to bring home-baked cookies out to the station in a taxicab.

## Sales & Promotions

Paul Rankin replaced Saunders Devine in 1952; he was WPRC's only salesman for more than 25 years.

Paul spent most of his day calling on business people in Lincoln and the surrounding towns. He brought the information back to the station, where Marlene Schrader or one of the other girls wrote up the copy.

"A lot of salesmen go in with jokes . . .but I never did," says Paul. "I'd just go in and tell them what I had, and they trusted me."

WPRC ran the Logan County Fair Queen Contest for years, and it was Paul's job to get the prizes—often trading them for commercials.



Jimmy Powell and his Hillbilly Ramblers in 1956. They played Saturday mornings on WPRC. Front, from left, Eddie and Carol Powell. Back, Shirley Powell, Fritz Brading, Jimmy Powell, Jim Boward, Boyd Ott. Courtesy Jim Powell.

Lincoln had three jewelry stores, and the queen received a diamond ring, diamond necklace, and diamond earrings. She also got a lot of other prizes, like Gladstone luggage, a trip to Chicago with a companion, and “I don’t know what all,” Paul says.

The station hosted a dinner for the queen and the other finalists at the Colonial Inn or the Tropics. The night of the judging, the finalists rode in front of the grandstand in convertibles provided by local car dealers.

## Judy Busby Gets an Education

Judy Busby first went on the air in November of 1969, when the station began broadcasting under its new owner, Virginia Broadcasting Corporation.

She had sold an ad for the Lincoln Jr. Woman’s Club Follies to station manager Jim Mudd and sales manager John O’Donnell, and they offered her a job on their new interview program, *Viewpoint*.

Judy worked with Earle Layman, and “he was my hero,” she says.

Earle “had a lovely speaking voice and really cared about people,” Judy recalls.

*Viewpoint* “was my higher education,” she says, and program ideas were no problem. Lincoln was the county seat, and Judy also had the resources of two colleges, law enforcement people, ministers like Wally Reifsteck, health experts, and politicians like Ed Madigan. Paul Beaver and Les Sheridan were always glad to talk history.

One of Judy’s most startling experiences occurred when Governor Walker’s bodyguards preceded him into the interview room with their pistols drawn.

“It took us so aback,” she exclaims. “I’d never been in a room where people came in with pistols at the ready. I’d seen other governors, but never with bodyguards like that.”

In her later years at WPRC, Judy had a half-hour open line, a half-hour

with a guest, and a half-hour of *Radio Trader* (735-2337 and 735-2338).

Of the open line, she says, “There’s nothing ever new . . . I remember people complaining about the snowplows blocking their driveway. That was a big one every winter, and it still is.”

Some faithful listeners would call every day, and “you really kind of felt that you got to know them,” says Judy. “And I think the reverse was true.”

In the grocery store, while Judy was talking to someone, she says, “somebody would walk by and recognize my voice and say [to her friend], ‘Mabel, that’s Judy Busby. I thought she had dark hair. I thought she was taller.’”

Judy and her last partner on *Viewpoint*, Marian Fuller, left WPRC in 1984, so she’s startled—and pleased—when people she meets still recognize her voice.

## A Woman Salesperson?

Jan Hoepfner Loeffelholz started at WPRC in 1974 as a secretary and receptionist. When a sales job opened up, she “begged and begged” for it—but WPRC had never had a woman salesperson, “so they were a little reluctant.”

Finally, John O’Donnell gave her a rate card and a list of people to call on and said, “Do it.”

“I guess I did all right,” she says, because she did the job for ten years and ended up as sales manager.

Except for the little towns near Lincoln, “we would not accept any advertising from out of town,” Jan says. “The big push has always been, shop at home.”

As she went about her morning sales calls, every store she went into had the radio on—and people were listening to *Viewpoint* with Judy Busby.

Not only that, but “we absolutely owned the fair,” remembers Jan. She and Judy were there from six in the morning until 11:00 at night, doing four reports an hour—going out with tape recorders to talk to everybody from harness race drivers, to kids in the barn, to people who entered their cakes.

WPRC was “very big on farming,” holding a *Salute to Farming* every winter, with ads for implement dealers and interviews with area farmers.

Jan also did the *Radio Trader*, filled in on *Viewpoint*, and even did color commentary with Sam Madonia on the girls’ ball games.

A small station has a real family feel, she says, and she made lifelong friends in her years at WPRC: co-workers like Judy Busby, Gene Warfel, and Steve Berger at the station, and business people she called on like the Deckers. ■



Judy Busby and Earle Layman on *Viewpoint*. Courtesy Judy Busby.

# Sports, News, and More Talk

Sam Madonia was hosting *Swap Shop* on WPRC one Saturday morning, when a lady called offering to trade a house in Middletown for a riding lawn mower.

That may have been one of the more unusual calls that Sam took over the years. He had another Saturday morning call-in show: an hour of sports, often with a Lincoln high school football or basketball coach on hand to talk to the fans.

Sam's first Saturday sports show was broadcast June 30, 1973, after station manager John O'Donnell hired him to do the play-by-play of all Lincoln Community High School football and basketball games.

Sam says the previous sports announcer, the popular Lanny Slevins, "had laid a great foundation, so it was easy for me to come in."

On a typical Friday night, Sam would come home from teaching at Lincoln high school; his wife, Alice, would pack up their daughters, Stacey and Ann Marie; and the family would drive to Mattoon to broadcast a game.

"Lincoln radio probably held the record for broadcasting local high school games," says Sam. "We didn't miss one . . . every high school game was heard on the radio—both football and basketball."

Sam retired from WPRC in June of 1995. Some of his special memories include: coaches Gene McDonald, Loren Wallace, Cal Hubbard, and Neal Alexander . . . the playoff football game between Lincoln and Griffin in 1975 . . . Bill Hurt writing in his later years, "Sam, you are my eyes. You bring me the picture as I sit at home."

In 1975, Sam asked Bob Verderber to broadcast a game with him at the Rockford Christmas tournament. Bob spent the next 19 years working with Sam—keeping the scorebook and doing the color.

"A tip Sammy gave me early on was not to bring any notes," says Bob. "Over the years, people would say, 'How do you remember that?' You just did. It was more spontaneous that way."

Sam and Bob had to be spontaneous at the Mattoon-Lincoln basketball game that took place after a major snowstorm and power outage.

Remote broadcasts are sent through telephone lines, but when they got to the gym in Mattoon and plugged into the phone line, it was dead.

Finding a pay phone in the hallway, Sam made a collect call to the station. Bob stood 50-75 feet away in the doorway to the gym, yelling to Sam to tell him what was happening so Sam could recreate the game over the pay phone.

## News—and Talk

Roy Frankenhoff was news director at WPRC from about 1976 until 1984.

Stopping by the sheriff's department on his news run one day, he heard an interesting tale. A big bird had swooped down on a youngster in Lawndale, picking him up by his tank top and carrying him for a while before dropping him.

"That bird got bigger by the hour," remembers Roy.

After he reported the incident on the noon broadcast, it quickly became a nationwide story.

Radio stations from California to Hawaii called, and reports came in that people were sighting big birds in Grundy County. State ornithologist Vernon Kleen came on the air and decided the bird was a turkey vulture.

Jim Ash followed Roy Frankenhoff as news director. He worked at WPRC for 19 years, beginning as a part-time news reporter in 1980,

taping interviews at city council meetings.

At one time, WPRC had three newsmen, but when Jim was news director, his was a one-person shop.

He needed to be at the station at 5:30 a.m., so instead of going to council meetings, he had to "scramble the next day and talk to people to find out what happened."

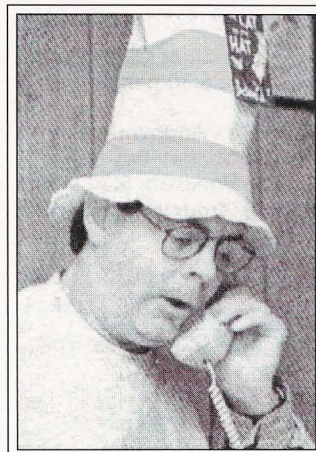
Jim says that after *Viewpoint*, WPRC didn't have a formal talk show until manager Jerry Schnacke started *AM Lincoln* in the mid-nineties.

What it *did* have was Mickey Lee, who began by taking calls between songs in the eighties and eventually hosted the popular *Mick and Dick* show with station manager, Dick Grogg.

Jeff Benjamin took over in the mid-'90s with *AM Lincoln*. Mark Grote was the last on-the-air personality.

After being on *AM Lincoln* and talking to some callers every day for "I don't know how many years," Jim says that missing everybody was the hardest thing about leaving WPRC when Saga Communications closed the station on June 30, 1999.

On July 1st, WLLM (Lincoln Land Memories) began broadcasting taped



Jim Ash reads *Dr. Seuss* on *WVAX*, broadcast from Northwest School in Lincoln. The Courier, March 3, 1999.

programming fed via satellite from Springfield.

Carol Hoffmann Brainard was a salesperson at the station from 1991 to 1999, setting up the Secretary's Day and lawn and garden shows with salesman Larry Jones.

She says, "There's a big hole in the community without a local radio station bringing the news, weather, sports, and school closings. When we had a snowstorm or ice storm, we would get calls from all the clubs that would need cancellations."

Salesman Larry Jones worked under four owners and "umpteens bosses and with umpteens salespeople" between 1985 and 1999. Over the years, it was the core of WPRC staff who lived and worked in Lincoln that kept the local flavor. ■

### For Your Information

WPRC was owned by **Prairie Radio Corporation** (Ray Knochel, Dr. Lee Hamm, and John Deal) when it began broadcasting on April 26, 1951.

Other owners were:

**Virginia Broadcasting Corporation** (Tex Holt & Richard Fister—station managers: James Mudd, John O'Donnell, Steve Berger) 1969

**Capitol Broadcasting Corporation** Bill Wheeler & Jack Hoskins 1983

**L&M Broadcasting Co., Inc.** (Steve Lovellette—station manager, Dick Grogg) 1990

**Central States Network** (station manager, Jerry Schnacke) 1994

**Saga Communications of Illinois, Inc.** 1996 Call letters changed to WVAX in 1996, WLLM in 1999.

**Thompson Broadcasting Company** is currently buying the station.

The FM station has had several call letters over the years: WPRC, WLRX, WESZ, WWTE, and now WYXY. Steve Lovellette developed it into a 25,000-watt station by building a tower just south of Elkhart on I-55. The dial position was moved from 100.1 to 93.9. The signal is sent from Springfield to the tower; from there it broadcasts to a large area.

## A Lutheran Hour that Airs from Lincoln, IL

It's 7:58 on a Sunday morning, and Robert Miller is checking the clock at radio station WLLM (formerly WPRC). In exactly two minutes, he'll flip the switch that turns off the station's easy listening program and turns on this morning's services—live from Zion Lutheran Church in Lincoln.

Ever since Saga Communications closed the Lincoln station in 1999 and began sending a preprogrammed signal from Springfield, someone from Zion has had to serve as "flip switcher."

Today Robert is at the radio station. When he gets a signal from the church, he'll flip the switch to turn off the Springfield signal and turn on the one from Zion.

As the taped sounds of Zion's Glory Notes singers go out over the air, Robert can feel proud that the church has been broadcasting its services every Sunday since the station opened in April of 1951.

The station's founders were surprised when Walt Ebel and Vernon Gehlbach approached them about broadcasting Zion's services on their future radio station. And more surprised that Zion meant to pay.

But Walt, Vernon, and Pastor Arthur Neitzel thought broadcasting was a mission opportunity. Church members have continued to think so ever since, donating the broadcasting cost and serving as technicians, announcers—and flip switchers.

It's more sophisticated today than in 1951. The big microphones that left "dead spots" in parts of the church have been replaced by individual mikes. The metal preamp box that the mikes plugged into has been replaced by a sophisticated preamp mixer. And a closed circuit TV lets the technician and announcer see what's going on from their places in the church vestry.

"Back in the old days," says Dennis

Knauer, "you had to peek through the crack in the door, and half the time you didn't know what was going on."

The services *have* reached beyond the congregation. For instance, Pastor Mark Carnahan will visit someone in the hospital who is not a member, and they'll say, "Zion is my church. I listen to you on the radio."

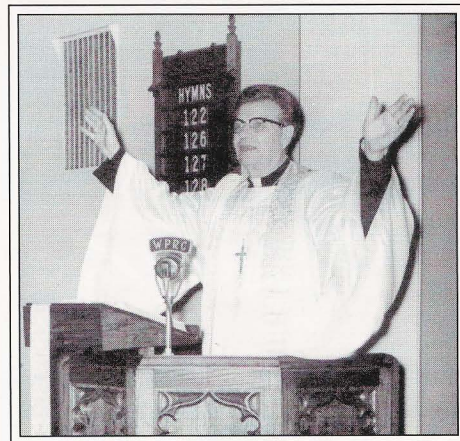
The radio congregation has ranged from travelers on Route 66/I-55 to shut-ins. These days, Zion members also videotape their services for broadcast on cable TV.

Funny things have happened. One Sunday, years ago, Dee Ebel was about to start playing the organ when Pastor Neitzel signaled to her to wait. The radio station wasn't ready.

Little Becky Logeman saw the pastor stick his head out the door, turned and saw Dee sitting at the pipe organ, and said in full voice, "What's the matter? Isn't God here yet?"

Pastor Carnahan says that the minister soon forgets he's on the air. Once, when one of his own kids was acting up, Pastor Carnahan stopped the service and said, "Mother, would you control that child?"

Everyone inside the church knew it was a joke, but he got a lot of questions from listeners at home, who didn't know he was talking to his own wife. ■



*Pastor Arthur Neitzel in the early days. Courtesy Marlin Roos.*

# College Radio Stations

Every New Year's Eve, for three years running in the seventies, Patsy Wilson and John Young's interview of Guy Lombardo aired on National Public Radio.

Granted, NPR didn't broadcast their voices—only Lombardo's responses. And granted, they were paid just \$20 each year (which they split), but still . . . they were proud.

Broadcasting Community Concerts and meeting stars like Guy Lombardo and Mitch Miller were part of what made Patsy Wilson's time at Lincoln Christian College's WLCC "such a significant part of my life," she says.

WLCC began in 1967 as an AM station that served only the campus. On January 20, 1969, it began broadcasting as a 10-watt FM station at 88.7.

By 1971, the college had built a broadcasting tower next to the administration building; increased the station's power to 5,000 watts; and begun broadcasting to listeners in a thirty-mile radius, this time at 88.9 FM.

Patsy Wilson joined the staff on November 7, 1970, serving as traffic director and helping host a live inter-



Station manager John Young checks the readings before going on the air. Lifeline, 1970-71.

view program, *Coffee Time Conversation*, with station manager John Young.

One of their first guests was Carl F. Henry, editor at large of *Christianity Today*. He soon set Patsy at ease by acting like they were at an elegant tea party as they sat across from each other at an old linoleum-covered biology table.

LCC professor Alan Kline served as news director at the station, doing "the old rip 'n read off the United Press," he remembers.

As the yellow paper came off the teletype, he would rip it off in two to three-foot lengths, lay it on a bare table, and organize the stories.

The Rev. Daryl Gehlbach worked at the station when he was in high school. He remembers that programming included *The Art of Gardening with Art Gimbel*; Lincoln City Council meetings; Lincoln Christian Church Sunday worship; religious music programs; a Saturday late-night jazz show; *Opera for Everyone*, hosted by an LCC professor; and LCC classes.

The station served primarily as a teaching tool for students. (Ron Jarrett was the first student station manager.) Chief engineer Dave Copeland taught students how to operate the control board, switching between National Public Radio (NPR), remote lines, and the studio.

Students like Randy Whitehead did the play-by-play for Olympia and Railsplitter basketball games. Students also ran the evening music programs.

Although a fire on July 31, 1973, did extensive damage, the station was back on the air that evening.

Concerns about NPR programming, FCC hiring requirements, and budget issues led to WLCC's going off the air at the end of February, 1975.

## WLNX

Lincoln College chemistry and physics professor Brayton Danner was also advisor for the school's radio station, WLNX, and taught the broadcast classes.

A Certified Radio Engineer, Brayton liked to attend meetings of the Society of Broadcast Engineers. Sooner or later, talk would turn to the latest technology in antennas.

Brayton would "always get a chuckle," says former student Lloyd Kirby, when he brought up *his* big problem: how to get pigeons off the WLNX antenna, which was installed in the cupola of University Hall.

His solution? A pigeon alarm.

When he'd look at the meters and see the power dropping, he'd turn on a switch—and a loud, piercing alarm would go off near the antenna.

"Hopefully, that would scare them away," remembers Lloyd.

WLNX had gone on the air February 18, 1974.

Lincoln resident and retired radio engineer Ray Knochel bought the school a used, 10-watt transmitter and antenna and filed an application with the FCC for an educational FM station.

With Brayton Danner's encouragement, students Walt Jones, Rob Boyle, and Claude Meier did the construction work necessary to build a studio in University Hall. Soon WLNX, 90.1 FM, was on the air.

In Brayton's broadcasting classes, students learned how to write copy and handle the technical details of broadcasting.

In 1982, when the station's power was increased to 225 watts and its position on the dial changed to 88.9, Brayton explained his thinking.

"Being a disc jockey involves a lot more than just having a pleasant



voice and speaking into a microphone," he said.

"At Lincoln College, our broadcast students soon learn that every Larry Lujack and Wolfman Jack first had to learn how to run a control board" (*The Lincoln Courier*, September 1, 1982).

The station was staffed both by students and by volunteers like Jerry Dellinger, Bill Tubbs, Ken Watson, and Ruth Hill [Neal].

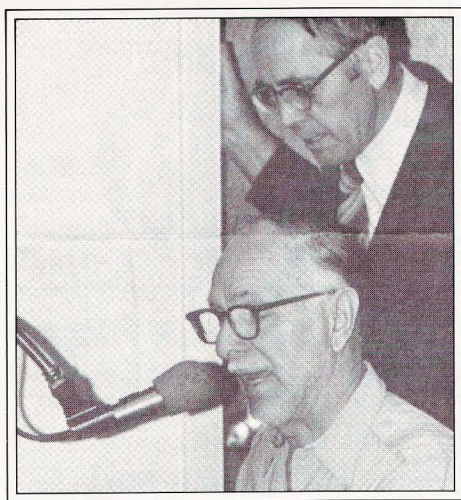
Ruth worked at WLNX for almost ten years, starting in 1982 as a DJ and soon becoming station manager. On her show, *Rock 'n Roll Granny*, she played everything from classical to R&B and light rock.

Ruth says students learned from Brayton Danner to "think on your feet and innovate."

They got plenty of experience doing play-by-play of Lincoln College sports, remote broadcasts like the art fair, and top 40 music.

Sunday mornings, the station broadcast Lincoln Christian Church's two services.

After Brayton Danner retired in 1988, Jim Ash filled in until Loyd Kirby took over as general manager and faculty advisor in 1989. When he left Lincoln College in 1998, the station went dark. ■



Brayton Danner, right, with Lincoln College student Alton Rich. *The Log*, December, 1975.

(Continued from page 3)

Jerry Ryan played the piano accompaniment and several solos. A schedule of weekly evening concerts was set up.

By Saturday, between 300 and 400 letters and postal cards had arrived from 32 states.

Among other comments reported by the *Lincoln Evening Courier* on February 12th was one from a Mississippi listener, who wrote, "all [whistler] Tommy Davis lacks to be a real mocking bird is the feathers."

The first regular weekly concert, on February 11th, featured Ryan's Orchestra and Logan County Circuit Clerk and Recorder Vincent Jones, who sang several solos and spoke to his parents in Fort Madison, Iowa.

A Scouting anniversary program later that week featured Melvin Clayton and Richard Jacobs.

The next challenge was to do a remote broadcast.

A stage play at the Lincoln Theater was to be presented as if it were a live radio broadcast. Atlass had a special telephone line installed at the theater. The performance was sent to WBBM and then broadcast over the air—just as it's done today.

When the district high school basketball tournament was played March 6-8th at the Lincoln College gym, WBBM broadcast all the games (except for a brief period one afternoon to allow the equipment to cool down). The play-by-play was done by Earl Wasson.

Residents of the Central Illinois towns represented in the tournament were thrilled, as were former residents who heard the tournament in Chicago and eight states in addition to Illinois.

An Atlanta, Illinois, native living in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, followed the home team's progress through the tournament right up to its defeat by Beason.

The station could be heard in much

of the United States and in several Canadian provinces, but its days in Lincoln were numbered.

In February, the *Courier* had reported that Armour and Company of Chicago had purchased the Frank Atlass Produce Company.

By May 23, 1924, the station had been dismantled and the equipment shipped to Chicago, where Atlass had bought a home near his parents'.

During WBBM's brief time in Lincoln, listeners had been treated to music by Ryan's Orchestra, the Lincoln College Glee Club, the Glee Club's "Ye Olde Tyme" Orchestra and Quartet, and the Betz Imperial Orchestra from Clinton.

They had also heard numerous solos—including one by Jumbo, Atlass's Airedale.

On the air one April evening, the dog sat near the microphone during a harmonica solo and "set up a doleful howling that could be heard in all parts of the United States, provided thunder and lightning did not spoil the canine solo" (*Lincoln Evening Courier*, April 9, 1924).

After moving to Chicago, Atlass first broadcast from his parents' basement at 7421 Sheridan Road.

Then, on February 24, 1925, radio listeners in Lincoln heard WBBM broadcast from the Broadmoor Hotel on Chicago's North Side.

Broadcasting jazz three nights a week and considered something of a "richman's hobby station," WBBM nevertheless joined WGN, WLS, and WMAQ in the radio listings of the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Daily News*.

The station joined the CBS network in 1928. When Leslie Atlass was made district manager for CBS in 1930, WBBM (managed by Leslie and Ralph Atlass) was still considered an independent station.

In 1941, after WBBM established a 5,000-watt FM station, Leslie Atlass returned to Lincoln for a remote broadcast from the Grand Theatre. ■

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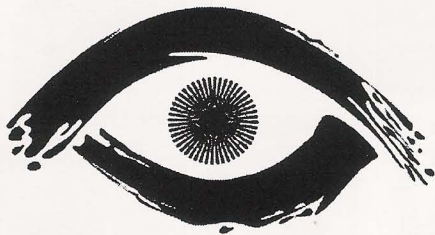
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Our collection includes local history / genealogy of Logan County as well as local newspapers back to 1859.

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### In Memory of "E.O." Senf

**Oscar Edmond "E. O." Senf** born 15 May 1878, Dresden, Saxony, Germany was the son of Oscar Maxmillian and Ida Karoline Emilie (Grosskopt) Senf. E. O. Senf arrived at the age of 14 years in Lincoln, IL by train during May, 1893, to live with his mother's childless sister and husband, George & Augusta (Grosskopt) Ruder. Previously, his widowed grandmother, Ulrieke Henritte (Ipson) Grosskopt had immigrated to Lincoln with her daughter and son-in-law, Charles F. "Carl" & Amelia (Grosskopt) Krusemark. Having been raised in a large city, E. O. was unable to adjust to farm life and ran away from his uncle's and ended up in Ft. Madison, IA, where he married and raised a large family. Today, a great-grandson resides in Lincoln, IL.

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Vaughn De Leath. Courtesy Mt. Pulaski Twp. Historical Society.

**Vaughn De Leath** was born Leonora Elizabeth Vonderlieth on September 26, 1896, in Mt. Pulaski, IL.

Her father died in 1901. At age 12, she moved with her mother and sister to California. She began writing songs at age 11; her first two songs were published in 1912. She was a concert singer in her early teens.

She surprised her instructors at Mills College in San Francisco with

her three-range voice (contralto to soprano).

Moving to New York in 1919, she began making phonograph records. In 1920, she sang "Swanee River" over Dr. Lee De Forest's experimental wireless telephone, the first woman to sing on the air. She was called "The Original Radio Girl."

A soprano's high notes could shatter an expensive transmission tube, so she learned to sing softly and delicately in a contralto voice—originating the style of singing called "crooning."

She was manager-director and chief entertainer of New York radio station WDT and a regular on the *Voice of Firestone* radio program.

She recorded for the leading phonograph record companies of the time and wrote almost 500 songs.

She died May 28, 1943, and her ashes are buried in the Mt. Pulaski Cemetery. Her recording of "Ukulele Lady" (by Whiting and Kahn) was used in the 1999 movie, *The Cider House Rules*. ■

## Our Times

The People, History, and Culture of Logan County, Illinois

### Inside This Issue

There's Something in the Air Tonight—Radio Waves

We Broadcast Better Music

Little Station. . .  
Loyal Audience

Sports, News, and More Talk

A Lutheran Hour that Airs from Lincoln, IL

College Radio Stations

Vaughn De Leath

Material for this issue came from *History of Logan County Illinois 1982*; the *Courier* under its various names; Lincoln city directories; *Mt. Pulaski Times-News*; including the sil-tenial edition; and Walsh, Jim. "The Original Radio Girl—Vaughn De Leath." *Hobbies—The Magazine for Collectors* April 1958: 30+. William B. Tubbs lived in the house on Park Place where Les Atlass started radio station WBBM. His article, "We Broadcast Better Music," in the *Illinois Historical Journal* (Autumn 1996) was quite helpful. The memories of our friends are invaluable.

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