

4/1/1939

# STATION PIONEER IN THIS SECTION; HISTORY TRACED

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Ashe-City  
Progress And Popularity  
Have Grown Steadily  
Since Founding 4/1/39

"Serving Western North Carolina since 1927."

That is one of Radio Station WWNC's most potent identifications. It is a short summary of a progressive program of which it is proud.

A pioneer in this portion of the country, WWNC has an interesting background, a continuity of gradual progress and popularity, and a future assured of increasing influence and scope of service, highest of air entertainment officials have said.

Although the letter identification—WWNC—was first thrown on ether waves a dozen years ago, there is an interesting story about its origination and subsequent use. Stars in the realm of radio shine through magic call letters, and WWNC had its incipency under a lucky one—WABC.

In an eight-by-twelve foot room, in the back portion of the old Asheville Battery company, at 19 Haywood street, in 1923-24, there was a broadcasting unit of 20-watt power known as ABC. It was operated by "Gosh and his Gang" (G. O. Shepherd and artists) and was primarily on the air for the pleasure of shut-ins here. The American Business club, with the same initials, developed a band known as the WABC band. This band became identified with ABC and the little station adopted the full call letter identification of WABC. Later these letters were transferred to the Atlantic Broadcasting company, and subsequently were taken over as the key station letters of Columbia Broadcasting company, of which WWNC became a subscriber in 1929.



**FIGURED IN START OF WWNC**—Holmes Bryson, left, was president of the Asheville chamber of commerce when the chamber began operating Station WWNC in 1927. Frank A. Barber, right, was chairman of the chamber's radio committee, and did much work in getting the new station started.

### Permit Taken Out

The original permit for the call letters WABC was taken out by the little station and when the chamber of commerce established the station here in 1927 the letters were changed to WWNC—Wonderful Western North Carolina. It just so happened that these assigned letters fitted the occasion and location, since radio station call letters do not always signify a "full name." The home of WABC now—the Columbia Broadcasting company—is on Madison avenue at 52nd street, New York city. The magic call letters of WABC have risen from an eight-by-twelve foot room here on Haywood street to the largest radio broadcasting institution in the world.

The original WABC was built by E. H. Jackson, Jr., pioneer radio man in the South. Among the first WABC entertainers on Saturday nights were George Bertram, Harry Noland, J. F. Shepherd, Arthur Wenige, Mr. Jackson, Mr. Shepherd, Frank Mulvaney, Mrs. Frank Ivey, Mark Wooding, Jr., Joseph DeNardo, Mrs. Mae Woodall Allen and Dr. F. E. Davis.

Radio entertainment continued an intermittent and desultory sort of thing here until 1927, when the Asheville chamber of commerce, with the assistance of other interested persons and agencies here, purchased a transmitter from Radio Station WSM in Nashville, Tenn., and established WWNC. A report of the station's

### Times on Tuesday, February 22, 1937.

"The voice of WWNC, hurtling down out of the Land of the Sky in its inaugural program Monday night, paid Western North Carolina's respects to North America.

"An official welcome on the part of the United States department of commerce was extended the new broadcasting station at its christening by Major W. N. Van Nostrand, federal supervisor of radio for the territory south of the Ohio and east of the Mississippi rivers, who came to Asheville especially for that purpose."

### Comments On Opening

Of the station on the event of its opening program, Major Van Nostrand said: "The entrance of this new station on the already over-burdened ether seems to me to be fully justified, not only by the fact that WWNC will serve a locality not heretofore covered by the existing stations, but because this is the first and only broadcasting station in the state of North Carolina employing standardized transmitting equipment of sufficient power to make it one of international scope."

WWNC's christening program began at 7 o'clock when a dinner program and concert was broadcast from the ballroom of the George Vanderbilt hotel by Spencer's orchestra. The Times of the next day reported. The reporter then observed promptly at 8 o'clock, the new

began its career."

At the time of the station's inauguration here, it broadcast four nights a week, full programs being given on Mondays, Tuesday, and Thursday, with a slightly different program on Sunday nights. The first remote control broadcasts were from the George Vanderbilt hotel and Kenilworth inn, with the Langren hotel joining the group early in the station's existence. J. Dale Stentz was director of the station for the chamber of commerce.

Artists on the air during the first year of the station were as follows: Dr. and Mrs. Crosby Adams, Charles E. Burnham, C. H. Crawford, Arnold Dann, Joseph DeNardo, Mrs. William Ray Griffin, Dorothy Hancock, Frank Jackson, Martin Perry Jones, Maud Kilgore, Alvah H. Lowe, Bascom Lamar Lunsford, Mrs. Frank LaBar, Mrs. Lucille McInturff, Horace Seeley, Marguerite Smathers and Harry Snodgrass.

#### Telephones Kept Busy

When Station WWNC opened, four telephones and one telegraph wire were kept busy most all night February 21, 1927. More than 500 persons visited the studio on top of the iron building during the evening more than 1,000 messages and telephone calls were received. Telegrams came from more than 100 cities at least 25 states. Three came from provinces of Canada. A cash prize of \$25 was awarded to J. V. Knight, London, Ontario, the first response from outside the United States. Telegrams came as far south as Brownsville, Texas, on the Mexican border, and as far north as Quebec, Canada. They came from as far southeast as Orlando, Fla., and as far west as Denver, Colorado. From the northwest messages came from as far as northwestern Minnesota.

Of the opening of the station, The Times says: "Groups of listeners gathered in Asheville at the Plaza, the George Vanderbilt hotel, the Asheville-Biltmore hotel, Pennell's cigar store, at Kenilworth inn and at the studio to hear the program Monday night. Special arrangements for broadcasting the program to crowds were provided at Morristown, Tenn., Tryon and a dozen other towns in East Tennessee and Western North Carolina.

During the early years of Radio Station WWNC, it was operated purely as a local outfit, giving weather reports, road information and a limited number of musical programs.

Gradually, however, the popularity of the station began to grow, but the task of maintaining it involved difficulties that appeared insurmountable to the directors of the chamber of commerce. Then it was in August, 1928, that G. O. Shepherd, well

known Asheville advertising man and pioneer in the realm of radio and radio writing in the South, proposed that he lease the station.

#### Proposition Leased

The chamber of commerce accepted Mr. Shepherd's proposition and turned the operation of the station over to him after a year and a half of effort to serve the community as a local station. One of the first steps taken by Mr. Shepherd, after he leased the station, was to investigate the possibility of chain programs with a view to bringing a greater measure of service to the community through the station. As a result of this investigation, the Young Men's Democratic club of Buncombe county was induced to sponsor the first chain program heard in Asheville.

On the evening of August 22, 1928, the acceptance speech of Governor Alfred E. Smith, candidate for the presidency of the United States, was broadcast through the National Broadcasting company hookup.

Mr. Shepherd then devoted his time to developing local commercial programs, something that was badly needed in the continuous and successful operation of the station. The beginning in this field was small because the business people of the community were not familiar with the possibilities of the new field. Then in December, 1928, the next step in the development of the station occurred when it was purchased by The Citizen Broadcasting company of the Asheville chamber of commerce. Mr. Shepherd remained as director and immediately set about the task of increasing the scope of service for the station.

The work of getting the station linked up with national commercial programs required a great deal of attention, but it was accomplished, bit by bit. The first commercial program was the Majestic hour, which was presented between 9 and 10 o'clock on Sunday evenings. This program started on January 6, 1929, and marked a new departure for Station WWNC.

The development of other programs through the Columbia chain took weeks, and then on March 4, 1929, the full broadcast of the inauguration of President Herbert Hoover was heard over the network.

The next big step occurred several month later when on October 8, 1929, the station began its full program of musical and information periods, as well as the Columbia Broadcasting system programs. This part of the station's schedule was financed by the inauguration of the Columbia club composed of individuals and firms in the community who were interested in the national hookup programs.

During the next few months, the station continued to grow in popularity until it ceased to be recognized as a local station and became one of the key stations of the country, reaching an important territory and serving a vast audience of loyal fans.

It was the loyalty of these fans, their willingness to write letters proving their interest in the station and the service it was rendering that enabled the management of the company to form a later connection with the National Broadcasting company. The first program the station broadcast from the NBC hookup was on October 10, 1931, which climaxed four and a half years of growth and development.

Twelve years of service is a long time. It is now 12 years and a bit more since Radio Station WWNC "hit the air." To make it easier to realize the passage of time, simultaneous with Radio Station WWNC's inaugural program on the night of Feb. 21, 1927, Texas Guinan's night club in New York city was raided; Mae West was thrown in jail after a theater raid; the Moffat tunnel was completed in Colorado; Mme. Ernestine Schumann-Heink appeared here in concert; Pollock's shoe store was featuring the "black bottom" shoes for girls; Clara Bow was playing at the Imperial theater in a film called "It"; Norma Shearer was here in a film called "The Latest From Paris" and Greta Garbo was being seen in "The Divine Woman." That was 12 years ago.

When WWNC was born through WABC at 19 Haywood street, it was to be a literal gift by Mr. Jackson to the city of Asheville through the chamber of commerce. Just two years ago, on the tenth anniversary of Radio Station WWNC, Mr. Jackson and many other pioneers in the radio field here were heard over a station celebration broadcast. Among them were Mrs. Louise Lorick, coloratura soprano, and her husband, James Lorick, remote control engineer of the station, representing the longest family association with the station.

#### Elias Named Manager

In January of 1929, WWNC became affiliated with the Columbia system, with which the station was affiliated until October 10, 1931, when it officially joined the network of the National Broadcasting company. Late in 1933, Don S. Elias, vice-president of the Asheville Citizen-Times company, became general manager of the station. Through his foresight and vision, the station made rapid progress in the art of salesmanship, production and operation in what is known best in radio as "public interest, convenience and necessity." Mr. Elias continues at this next great step of the station as its executive

director and as vice president of the Citizen-Times company, with Ezra McIntosh as program director, a position he has held several years.

The two latest forward steps left to report in this brief sketch of the station's very active life happened in the past few weeks. The first was when the station moved from the Flat Iron building to the new Citizen-Times-WWNC building between the Arcade building and the post office on Battery Park plaza. The second is its resumption of affiliation on April 1 with the Columbia Broadcasting company, a natural "WABC" connection in spirit and in truth.

Radio Station WWNC has grown from a few hours on the air a few times a week to a full-time business and entertainment medium, not only for Asheville, but for all of North Carolina and this section of the United States. It now occupies the entire top floor of the new building and is one of the best equipped stations in the South. The transmitter remains on the top of the Flat Iron building and plans are being made for still further development in the station arrangements, both as to equipment and service on the air.