

2/22/1962

Radio Station WWNC Reaches Its 35th Year Of Service

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The "Pioneer Voice" of Western North Carolina reaches its 35th year Thursday morning.

Radio Station WWNC, originally an arm of the Asheville Chamber of Commerce, can look back with pardonable pride over those years of service to a listening family now estimated to number some 550,000 persons.

Instead, however, it will be primarily business as usual for the radio folks on the third floor of The Citizen-Times Building. Others will do the back-patting in a series of 12 tape recordings to be aired during the day.

Three of the dozen tapes will be by early performers, pianists Mrs. Mary Glass and Frank Jackson plus orchestra leader Al Dunn. Both Mrs. Glass and Jackson performed at opening ceremonies on Feb. 22, 1927.

Others who'll offer congratulations during the day include Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners Coke Candler, Mayor Earl W. Eller, City Manager Weldon Weir, Chamber of Commerce President Jack Barfield, Julian B. Stepp, district manager of Carolina Power & Light Co.; J. Gerald Cowan, retired executive vice president of Wachovia Bank & Trust Co.; John Spicer, Wachovia senior vice president; James Glenn, First Union National Bank executive vice president, and Leroy Collins,

president of the National Assn. of Broadcasters.

The story of WWNC is practically the story of radio in Western North Carolina. Today, the 5,000-watt transmitter on Emma Road is the most powerful day-and-night voice in the area.

In addition to WNC, the signal serves upper South Carolina and eastern Tennessee.

After 35 years of service, some might sit back and bask in past achievements. But Cecil B. Hoskins, general manager and program director, took advantage of the occasion to announce the recent addition of \$2,000 worth of cartridge type recorders and the granting of a Federal Communications Commission permit to add a mobile unit to the news department. He has been with the station 32 years.

A truck has been purchased and equipment is being shipped here to outfit the unit. It should be in operation by April first.

"The use of the mobile unit will provide better news service and coverage to allow WWNC to continue its leadership as the news and informa-

tion media center of Western North Carolina," he said.

In 1923, a tiny 20-watt station had been set up at 19 Haywood St. in an eight-by-twelve room in the rear of a battery shop, using the call letters of WABC which were later to become the key New York station of Columbia Broadcasting System. It was built by E. H. Jackson Jr., a pioneer radio man in the South.

On an intermittent basis, radio entertainment continued until 1927 when the Chamber of Commerce, aided by other interested persons and agencies here, purchased a transmitter from Radio Station WSM in Nashville, Tenn., and set up WWNC.

A dinner program and concert broadcast from George Vanderbilt Hotel highlighted the christening ceremonies and the newspaper report described it as. "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."

Maj. W. N. Van Nostrand, federal supervisor of radio for the territory south of the Ohio and east of the Mississippi rivers, came to Asheville for the event.

"The entrance of the 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," Major Van Nostrand said.

Congratulatory messages flowed in following the opening broadcast. Listeners from 25 states and Canada had heard the infant station. WWNC was airborne.

First broadcasts were four nights a week, with full programs on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays. First remote broadcasts were from the Vanderbilt and Kenilworth Inn with the Langren Hotel soon joining. J. Dale Stentz was station director.

In early years, WWNC operated as a local station, giving weather reports, road information and a limited number of musical programs. Local artists contributed heavily.

With growth came difficulties, however, and the Chamber of Commerce finally decided that operation as a private enterprise would be more workable.

Another radio pioneer, Asheville advertising man G. O. Shepherd, purchased the station, then located atop the Flat-iron Building.

And the station moved forward.

In January, 1929, WWNC affiliated with CBS, then switched to the National Broadcasting Co. from 1931 until 1939, when the station moved to its present home and, at the same time, reverted to CBS affiliation.

Another reason for the steady growth of the station was the naming, in 1933, of Don S.

Elias, former vice president of The Citizen-Times, as general manager of WWNC.

In 1947, the present RCA transmitting plant on Emma Road was built for \$140,000, adding still further impetus to the station's power.

Uncounted hours of news, entertainment and public service programs have been aired by WWNC. It has spanned the gap from Lindbergh's flight to Glenn's orbit.

On opening night in '27, Texas Guinan's night club in New York 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 for a concert.

And Pollock's Shoe Store offered "black bottom" shoes for girls. Clara Bow was featured in a film called "It." Norma Shearer starred in "The Latest From Paris" and Greta Garbo was seen in "The Divine Woman."

It was big news in that time, dwarfed and forgotten with the passage of the years.

Today, the WWNC staff continues its programming as the "Pioneer Voice of Western North Carolina."

There are others who have been around through much of the station's history, including control room supervisor James M. Lorick, 33 years; Jimmy Hagan, sales manager, and a veteran of 24 years; salesman J. Mack Arnette and Ralph Hoilars, with 18 and 17 years respectively, and chief announcer Read Wilson, 22 years.

Other staffers include Chief Engineer Harry Nations, News Director Si Becker, Scotty Rhodarmer and Dell Wilkerson announcers; Mrs. Helen Jacobs, in charge of traffic; Miss Melba McCall, secretary; Mrs. Lucille Lowry and Miss Lula Lewis, copywriters; Miss Frances Nelson and Daniel Burns,

control room engineers; John R. Dickerson and John Chandler, transmitter engineers and Mrs. Betty Brown, record librarian.