On the Air

Posted July 1, 2022 – Heritage Square History Blog Written by Heather Roberts

Did you know...

While doing research for our May blog article, we discovered that the 1930 Census asked if households owned a radio (our favorite census question to date!). At Heritage Square, the Gammel family (Rosson House) is recorded as having a radio set, along with Marguerite Haustgen (Stevens-Haustgen House) and the people who were renting the Stevens House from her. About 40% of the population was recorded as having a radio set in the census. The cheaper of the two shown here, sold in the 1930 Sears Roebuck fall catalog, cost \$21.50 (approximately \$376 today), so still a sizable investment, particularly during the Great Depression.



The Marconi radio (patented in 1899, but possibly based on Nikola Tesla's design) was the first telegraph that could operate wirelessly, sending transmissions in Morse code across bodies of water to other countries and to/from ships at sea via sound waves. Though the first sound broadcast was in 1906, it wasn't until 1920 that the first commercial radio newscast took place, from station 8MK in Detroit, communicating live local election results as they happened instead of people having to rely on reading the news in the paper the next day. They were followed later that fall by a station in Wilkinsburg, PA (KDKA), who also broadcast the results of an election – this time the 1920 presidential election (spoiler alert – Harding won). Less than a year later, KDKA would broadcast play-by-play of the first baseball game (the Pirates came back from behind to beat the Phillies 8 to 5) and the first football game (West Virginia University lost to the University of Pittsburgh, 21 to 13).

One hundred years ago last month (June 21, 1922), Phoenix's first radio station (KFAD) went on the air. Their broadcast signal was 100 watts (compared with modern radio signals broadcast at 50,000 to 100,000 watts), and programming included opera, classical music, lists of stolen cars with their description and license numbers, as well as mining news (market reports, price changes, etc), and live performances from the Arizona School of Music. That fall, they brought their equipment to the State Fair to give a radio concert where a loud speaker was set up so that the music could be heard "in every section of the grandstand." That same year, public buses in Oakland, CA were equipped with radios for riders to enjoy, and a hotel in San Francisco installed radios in their restaurant for diners to listen while that ate.

It didn't take long for radio programs to become more scripted and commercialized. The first radio ad was broadcast on August 28, 1922 at station WEAF (New York), owned at that time by AT&T. By the 1930s, ads were so prevalent many programs were created solely to promote sponsors' products!

Music of all kinds – jazz, blues, country (the first Grand Ol' Opry broadcast was on November 28, 1925), classical music, opera, show tunes, and more – were popular radio content in the Golden Days of Radio (before, as they say, video killed the radio star). So were lectures, readings (some stations even did a children's bedtime story each evening), news updates and politics, household hints like *The Wife Saver*

Tonight's Radio

TONIGHT'S SUGGESTIONS A Cappella chorus of First Con-gegational church. Washington. D. C., in concert over CBS network. Walter Damrosch's orchestra over Walter Damrosch's orchestra over NBC network. "Miner's Sweetheart." play in Hank Simmon's Showboat Hour over CBS network. Winnie Lightner, Joe E. Brown in Hold Everything" over NBS net-work. 483.6-KTAR Phoenix-620 Morning 7:00-Early Peptimists program. 7:20-Inspirational period. Gov. John C. 7:20—Inspirational period. Gov. John C Phillips. apeaker. 7:30—Optimists keep fit class. 7:50—Kiddles health class. 8:00—Col. C. H. Rutherford. 8:05—Musical program. 8:30—Pipe organ recital. George Weiss. 9:30—Musical program. 10:00—Housekeepers' period. 10:45—The Arizona Republican radio news-paper (15 m.) paper (15 m.) Afternoon And Night 12:01—Musical program (1 hr.) 3:00—Musical program. 3:45—The Arizona Republican radio newspaper (15 m.) 4:30—Stock market quotations. 4:40—Better English Episode. 4:45—In Storyland with Big Sister. 5:00—Business announcements. 6:00—Newsacting. 6:05—Musical program. 7:00—Kay Robinson and his music. 8:00—One act radio skit. direction of Dorathy Seifert Dodge. 8:30—Navy talk by Chief Yeoman F. G. Hunter. 8:40—Musical program. 0:00—Cecil and Sally in "The Funniest Things." Things." 3:10—Mike Seidel and his orchestra. 10:00—Harry Owens and his band. 11:00—The Arizona Republican radio newspaper (15 m.) 215.7-KOY Phoenix-1390 7:00-Tomorrow's Outing. 7:90—Tomorrow's Outing. 7:30—Huffograms. 8:90—Book Man. 8:95—"Good Morning, World." 8:30—Radio varieties. 9:00—Shopping suggestions. 9:20—Opening stock quotations. 9:30—Homemakers' hour. 11:90—Music and poetry appreciation. 11:30—Tom and Wash. 11:30—Tom and wash. Afternoon And Night 12:01—Closing stock quotations. 12:30—Valley farmers, radio service. 1:30—KOY's kiddles' party (1 hr.) 4:00—"We suggest..." 4:30—Request program. 5:00—Progressive merchants' hour. 6:30—Arizona entertainers. 7:15—Five Pointers. 7:30—Baseball results. 7:30—Baseball results. 7:35—Old time fiddlers' contest. 8:30—Tom and Wash. 9:00—Specialty program (1 hr.) SOUTHERN CLEAR CHANNEL STATIONS 8:90—Hour from WABC. 9:00—Night club hour. 374.8—WFAA Dallas—800 8:00—One hour from WEAF. 9:90—Orchestra (30 m.): WJZ. 10:00—Quartet and orchestra (1 hr.) 288.3—KTHS Hot Sprinsg—1040 6:00—Hour from WEAF. 7:00—Orchestra; singers; orchestra.

```
405.2—WSB Atlanta—740
6:30—From WEAF (2½ hrs.)
9:00—Feature (30 m.); WJZ (30 m.)
                               NATIONAL NETWORKS
                                       Far West NBC Chain
                         Walter Damresch's orchestra over
KGO, KSL, KOA, KGW, KFL,
KOMO.
                          B. A. Rolfe's orchestra over KOA.
KGO, KFI. KSL. KGW. KOMO.
KHQ.
                        KHQ-Amos 'n' Andy over KOA, KSL.

KECA, KGO, KHQ, KGW, KOMO.

Prohibition Poll over KOA, KSL.

"Hold Everything" over KGO.

KOMO, KFI, KGW, KHQ (repeat).

Penrod Stories from KGO.

-Spotlight review from KGO.
                                    Far West CBS Chain
Capella chorus over KLZ. KVI.
     6:30—A Capella Chorus over KLZ.

KFPY.
7:00—Hank Simmons' Showboat over KLZ. KDYL. KVI. KFPY.
8:00—Movies bour over KLZ. KDYL KHJ. KFRC. KNX. KOIN. KFPY.
9:20—Guy Lombardo over KLZ. KDYL.
                                    FAR WEST STATIONS
     468.5—KFI Los Angeles—640
7:00—NBC programs.
9:30—Robert Hurd, tenor.
   10:00-NBC program.
10:30-Mixed quartet with James Bur-
   roughs.
11:00-Wall Perrin's orchestra.
   285.5—KNX Hollywood—1050
7:45—KNX string quintet.
8:00—Studio program.
9:00—Musical comedy hour.
10:00—Russian-American Art club.
 10:00—Russian-American Art club.
10:45—Studio program.
315.6—KFWB Hollywood—950
10:00—The Aristocrats.
10:30—Dance music.
440.9—KPO San Francisco—680
9:00—NBC program.
10:15—KPO salon orchestra. Do:
Lewis contralto.
11:00—Dance music.
265.3—KSL Salt Lake—1130
7:00—NBC programs.
10:15—Organ recital.
11:15—Vasabond of the Air.
12:15—Midnight review.
361.2—KOA Denver—830
6:30—NBC programs.
                                                                                   orchestra. Dorothy
    6:30—NBC programs.
10:00—Harry Halstead and his orchestra.
   10:30-Penrod stories.
11:00-Spotlight review.
                      CENTRAL CLEAR CHANNEL
293.9—KYW Chleago—1020
7:30—WJZ (30 m.); orchestra.
8:15—Miss Ad Taker; orchestra.
9:00—News; State Street; WJZ.
9:45—Dance music (4½ hrs.)
344.6—WENR Chicago—870
11:00—Dance frolic (1 hr.)
416.4—WGN-WLIB Chicago—720
8:00—Hour from WEAF.
9:00—News; feature; dance (4¼ hrs.)
344.6—WLS Chicago—870
8:00—Sociability Time.
8:30—Barn dance (2½ hrs.)
447.5—WMAQ Chicago—670
7:00—WABC (1 hr.); Home Hunters.
8:30—Talk; orchestra: Water Boys.
9:30—Amos-Andy; concert orchestra.
10:00—Dance music (3 brs.)
370.2—WCCO Minneapolis-St. Paul—810
7:30—Music (30 m.); WABC (1 hr.)
9:00—Two hours of dance music.
275.1—KMOX St. Louis—1090
6:00—Piano dues; feature; baritone.
6:15—Same as WABC (2½ hrs.)
9:00—Willie and Lillie; news.
9:30—Dance music (2 hrs.)
428.3—WLW Cincinnati—700
7:30—WJZ (30 m.); Honolulans.
8:30—Cossacks; Murdock Williams.
9:15—Organ and dance; Doodlesockers.
11:00—All night party (3 hrs.)
                               293.9-KYW Chlcago-1020
```

(1929-43), variety programs like *The Jack Benny Program* (1932-55), crime stories like *The Shadow* (1937-54) and *Perry Mason* (1943-55), and sports. Unfortunately, many of these shows, like the popular Amos 'n' Andy show and serialized Westerns like The Lone Ranger, were based on racist African American and Native American stereotypes, which prevailed in movies and later in TV, too. Chicago's WSBC finally broadcast the first radio show in the US with an all-Black cast in 1929 with their "All-Negro Hour," a variety show devoted specifically to Black performers that sought to stop the spread of negative racist stereotypes. Its host, Jack L. Cooper, continued to create radio programming for WSBC centered on the Black experience, including Search for Missing Persons (1938), a show that reunited African American migrants from the South with lost friends and relatives. In 1948 the first Black-owned radio station (WERD) began broadcasting in Atlanta, GA. It would take over 20 years for the first Native American-owned and operated radio station to open in Alaska (KYUK-AM).

Despite the Great Depression, radio ownership grew in the 1930s. The 1930 census recorded radio sets in about 12 million households. By the 1940, that number had more than doubled, with 28 US million households owning radios. President Roosevelt's Fireside chats, which he began just after his first inauguration in 1933, would carry over from an economic crisis to a world war. During the war, radios were essential to people on the homefront, as they waited for updates about the war and their loved ones who were serving overseas. After the war, however, production of appliances soared, including the manufacture of the televisions (developed in the 1920s, but put on hold during the war). Though radios were everywhere you could imagine – in planes, trains, and automobiles, in homes and buildings all over - by 1955 about half the American population had TVs, and radio programming was being replaced with television programming. Some radio shows would successfully bridge that gap, including The Adventures of Superman (moved to TV in 1952), Dragnet (moved to TV in 1951, but continued on the radio as well until 1957), and I Love Lucy (known on the radio as My Favorite Husband; moved to TV with the new name in 1951). Today, the vast majority of American households have multiple televisions in their home instead of just one. Though much of our entertainment comes in video form these days, there are still over 15,000 radio stations in the US, with approximately 88 of them in the Phoenix listening area. And

streaming services give local radio stations an even wider range.

MORE INFO: This Means War!

'Twas the night before Halloween in 1938, when many Americans had the tradition of relaxing in their homes and listening to their radios after a big Sunday dinner. This time, though, when they turned on their radios they heard, to their horror, that a Martian cylinder had crashed into a field in New Jersey. Martians erupted from the crash site, firing a heat ray that killed 7,000 members of the National Guard. It was terrible! Some people began to panic, particularly after learning that more cylinders were crashing across the nation. They called police stations, newspaper offices, radio stations, fire stations – anyone who they thought might

Power Failure Brings Terror

CONCRETE, Wash., Oct. 30
(AP)—Women fainted and
men prepared to take their
families into the mountains for
aarckeeping tonight when electrie power failed during a nationwide radio dramatization
of H. G. Wells' "War of the
Worlds."

Worlds."
At a highly effective point in the program, when all sorts of monsters were flocking down on New Jersey from the planet Mars, lights went out in most of the homes of this town of 1,000. For a time the town verged on mass hysteria.

Because of the power failure many persons actually thought the invasion had reached Washington state.

Phoenicians Feel Hysteria

The half-attention with which many individuals listen to the radio was never better illustrated than last night during the Orson Welles broadcast of "The War of the Worlds," by H. G. Wells.

orids, by H. G. Wells,
Several score Phoenicians
called the Arizona Republic
asking, "Is it true that meteors
have wiped out 5,000 persons in
New Jersey?" and, "Please give
us all the details of the catastrophe in the East."

One in the Fast."

One inquirer belligerently declared the news department was "deliberately lying" because editors insisted there had been no untoward incidents in New Jersey.

Mars Invasion Radio Play Terrorizes East

NEW YORK, Oct. 30—(AP)— Hysteria among radio listeners throughout the nation and actual panicky evacuations from sections of the metropolitan area resulted from a too-realistic radio broadcast tonight describing a fletitious and devastating visitation of strange men from Mars.

Excited and weeping persons all over the country swamped newspaper and police switch-boards with the question:

"Is it true?"

It was purely a figment of H. G. Wells' imagination, with x o me extra flourishes of radio dramatiza-tion by Orson Welles. It was broad-cast by the Columbia Broadcasting System.

But the anxiety was immeasur-

New York police were unable to contact the Columbia Broadcast-ing System studies by telephone, so swamped was its switchboard, and a radiocar was sent there for in-formation.

A woman ran into a church in Indianapolis ac re a m ing:
"New York destroyed; it's the end of the world. You might as well go home to die. I just heard it on the radio." Services were dismissed immediately.

Five boys at Brevard (N. C.)
College fainted and panic gripped
the campus for half an hour with
many students fighting for telephones to inform their parents to
come and get them.

Tears Are Shed
At Fayetteville, N. C., people
with relatives in the section of New

NEW YORK, Oct. 30-(AP)- switchboards were deluged with

switchboards were deduged war calls from frightened people. "End of World" Feared In Atlanta, there was worry in some quarters that "the end of the world had arrived."

It finally need so had in New Jer-

It finally got so bad in New Jer-sey that the state police put re-assuring messages on the state teletype, instructing their officers what it was all about.

And all this despite the fact that the radio play was inter-rupted four times for the an-nouncement: "This is purely a fictional play."

nouncement: "This is purely a fictional play."

Newspaper switchboard operators quit saying, "Hello." They merely plugged in and said: "It's just a radio show."

The Times-Dispatch in Richmond, Va., reported some of their telephone calls came from people who said they were "praying."

Queries Received

The Kansas City bureau of the Associated Press received queries on the "meteors" from Los Angeles, Sait Lake City, Beaumont, Tex., and St. Joseph, Mo., in addition to having its local switchboard flooded with calls.

One telephone informant said he had loaded all his children into his car, had filled it with gasoline, and was going somewhere.

"Where is safe?" he wanted to know.

Residents of Jersey City, N. J., telephoned their police frantically, asking where they could get gas masks. In both Jersey City and Newark, hun-dreds of citizens ran out into the streets.

have answers about what was going on. But what was actually happening was...Nothing! There were no Martians, no heat rays, no cylinders, nothing. There was no attack whatsoever. It was all a work of fiction, based on a book by HG Wells written four decades prior, and turned into a radio program by Orson Welles and his team – writer Howard Koch, producer John Houseman, and veteran radio actor Paul Stewart.

There's no definitive answer as to how many people were fooled by the broadcast, but the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) did field many complaints about the broadcast, which they investigated to see if any laws were broken (there weren't). Even as far away as Phoenix, the newspaper reported people calling in to learn about the "catastrophe in the East."

Was the program that good? You be the judge! You can listen to the entire <u>War of the Worlds radio</u> <u>broadcast</u> from the Internet Archive.

Learn more about old radios from the <u>Vintage Radio and Communications Museum of Connecticut</u>. Explore the origins of Spanish-language radio here in the US from the <u>National Museum of American History</u>. Discover the Golden Age of Black radio from the <u>Archives of African American Music & Culture</u>.

Information for this article was found in the Arizona Republic (June-December 1922); <u>PBS</u>; the <u>FCC</u>; the <u>Hancock Historical Museum</u>; the <u>Nobel Prize website</u>; the <u>Archives of African American Music & Culture</u>; the <u>Southwest Museum of Engineering, Communications and Computation</u>; <u>History Hub</u>; <u>Smithsonian Magazine</u>; the <u>Digital Public Library of America</u>; White House History; the Baseball Hall of Fame; History; MeTV; Statista; and Nielsen.