

## WTIC: Hartford's Historic Radio Station

By Brian Belanger

*[Past Dials and Channels issues have included brief histories of historic radio stations. In this issue WTIC, Hartford, Connecticut's well-known station, is featured. One of our Museum members, Dick Bertelmann (radio name Dick Bertel) was an important personality at WTIC. We are grateful that Dick was willing to share his recollections with us about what it was like to be a WTIC employee in "the good old days." I am also grateful to Museum member Ludwell Sibley who provided a copy of a WTIC promotional booklet and other material about the station from his collection. (Unless otherwise noted, photos are from the publication WTIC: Radio to Remember) - Editor]*

### WTIC Takes To The Air Waves

In the mid-1920s radio stations were springing up around the country like mushrooms on a spring day. The list of organizations that created early radio stations is surprisingly diverse. It includes radio manufacturers and dealers, newspapers, churches, universities, department stores, and even dairies and funeral homes, all hoping to cash in on this new way to create good will and favorable publicity.

As Detroit is noted for auto production, and Houston for oil production, Hartford, Connecticut, is noted for insurance. The Travelers Insurance Company has been a mainstay of Hartford's economy for more than a century, and it is responsible for having created WTIC.

Walter G. Cowles, a Travelers Insurance Company vice president, saw radio as a way to attract new customers and create a favorable impression for his company in the minds of the public in New England. Cowles researched the experiences of other companies that had established radio stations and spoke with knowledgeable individuals, including officers of the American Radio Relay League (ARRL), a nationwide organization of amateur radio operators headquartered in the Hartford area. ARRL's leaders were particularly well informed about this new technology, and when Cowles sought their advice, they enthusiastically encouraged him to proceed.

In 1924 Cowles made his pitch to Travelers' president Louis Butler. Sensing that Butler might not have been fully convinced by his arguments, Cowles presented him with radio apparatus to try out at home. The story goes that when Ms. Butler viewed the complicated unsightly array of speaker, radio, tubes, multiple batteries, and a rat's nest of connecting wires, and learned that Mr. Butler would need to climb up on the roof to erect an antenna, she suggested that the infernal device belonged in the attic or the garage rather than in the family living room.



Walter Cowles—the man who convinced the Travelers Insurance Company to create a radio station.

Nevertheless, Butler *did* begin to listen, and after hearing interesting and entertaining programs from faraway cities, he was hooked. Butler agreed that Travelers should create a radio station. A subsidiary, the Travelers Broadcasting Service Corp., was ultimately established to operate the station. The station went on the air early in 1925. (WTIC was not the first radio broadcasting station on the air in Hartford—that honor goes to WDRC, launched in 1923.)

Cowles expressed the purpose of the Travelers Company station thusly:

*This service has been installed purely and simply as a new means of publicity. It is a method by which we are able to come into close personal relationship with the public . . . The hope and constant aim of this station will be to earn the goodwill, friendship, and confidence of those who hear us.*

New radio stations often requested call letters that reflected the name or slogan of the station's founder. For example, the Chicago Tribune's radio station call was WGN, standing for "World's Greatest Newspaper." Sears-Roebuck's Chicago station call letters WLS stood for "World's Largest Store." The Travelers Insurance Company asked the Department of Commerce to issue call letters with the company's



Two towers on the roof of the company's Grove Street building supported a "flat-top" or T-shaped wire antenna, commonly used at the time.



WTIC's elegant main studio at the time the station opened in 1925. It was draped with deep blue velvet for sound absorption. The wooden microphone stand was hand-turned polished mahogany.

initials, and was grateful when the station was given the call letters WTIC.

### WTIC In Its Early Years

The station's studios were installed on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of the Travelers building at 26 Grove Street in downtown Hartford. The station purchased a 500-watt Western Electric transmitter (considered a high-power transmitter at the time). In 1925 radio stations often had to time share. WTIC was assigned to share the frequency of 860 kilohertz, broadcasting three days per week. The station's frequency was shifted several times during its first few years.



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WTIC had a truck equipped to handle remote broadcasts from day one. In fact, the first night's broadcast, on Feb. 10, 1925, was actually a remote from the Hotel Bond in downtown Hartford. It lasted from 7:45 p.m. until 10:24 p.m. As was typical at the time, the program consisted mostly of live music (e.g., a male quartet, a contralto, and a trio). In 1925 the sound quality of non-electrically recorded phonograph records was sufficiently poor that most radio stations opted for live music. Because radio was such an exciting novelty, local musicians were eager to get air time on the smaller stations, even without pay. But like other "high-class" stations, WTIC quickly added musicians to its paid staff rather than rely on amateurs. Laura Gaudet was hired as the staff pianist, and Norman Cloutier to lead the station's dance band, "The Merry Madcaps," as well as another smaller combo, "The Travelers Jongleurs." In 1926 the station added a thirty-plus-member symphonic ensemble.



WTIC had this mobile unit in service from day one.

Making good use of its remote broadcast truck, WTIC did remotes from local spots such as the Capitol Theater as well as from more distant locations such as Yale University in New Haven. WTIC reported the 1928 Yale/Harvard regatta using NBC's famous announcer Graham McNamee.

WTIC claimed to be the first station to broadcast vaudeville performances (in 1926). Some vaudeville stars who later became famous on network radio,

e.g., Jack Benny, were heard on WTIC from the Capitol Theater even before they had network radio programs and became household names.

The National Broadcasting Company was established in November 1926, and WTIC was the fourth station to formally join the network. It carried the NBC inaugural broadcast, and now and then originated programs broadcast over the network. Later, during the "Golden Age of Radio," WTIC's evening audiences enjoyed popular network shows such as *Fibber McGee and Molly*, *Bob Hope*, and *Jimmy Durante*.

In 1926 WTIC arranged to have a reporter in an airplane flying over Hartford with Connecticut's governor John Trumbull and aircraft builder Igor Sikorsky. A small battery-powered shortwave transmitter on board transmitted the report back to the station. Because of this event, WTIC claims to have



WTIC's dance band—"The Merry Madcaps," led by Norman Cloutier.

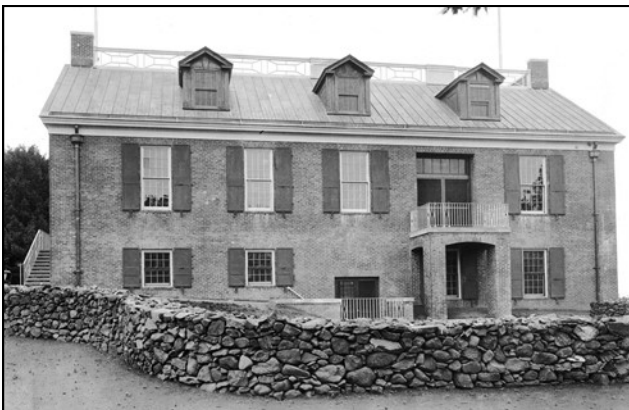
made the first broadcast to the public from an aircraft in flight. (Radio stations are notorious for claiming “firsts,” that upon careful investigation turn out to be false claims. WTIC may *well* have been the first station to air such a broadcast, but even if it was not the first, this event demonstrates that WTIC was striving to be innovative from the very beginning.)

### WTIC Opts For High Power

In the late 1920s, the Federal government made it possible for radio broadcast stations to apply to increase power to 50 kW. While WTIC was not the very first station to broadcast with 50,000 watts, it was one of the first to request permission to do so. Crosley-owned Cincinnati station WLW purchased a 50 kW Western Electric transmitter and had it in operation late in 1928. WTIC purchased RCA’s first (serial number 1) 50-kW transmitter (it was actually designed and built by GE), and had it on the air in August 1929, giving WTIC one of the strongest signals in the nation. It could be heard over most of New England, and when propagation conditions



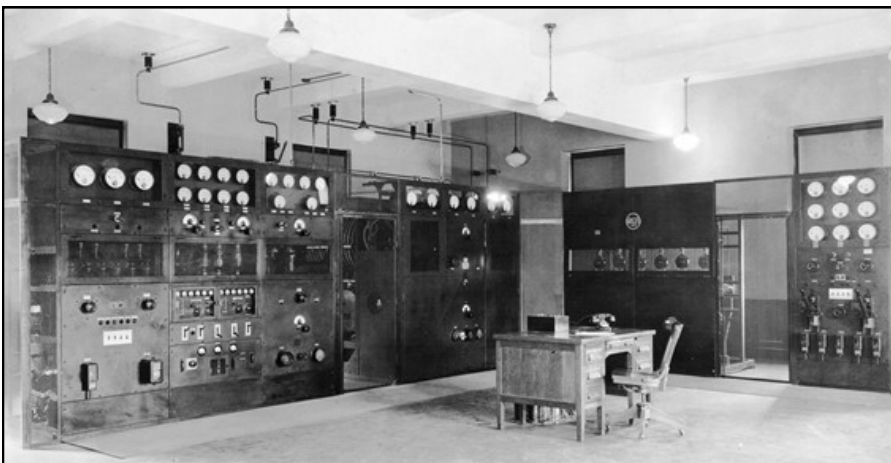
Most likely this is WTIC engineer H. M. O'Neill holding one of the huge water-cooled transmitting tubes. (From the WTIC promotional booklet.)



The building housing WTIC’s 50-kW RCA transmitter. (From the WTIC promotional booklet.)

were good, much farther than that. Listeners as far away as Europe, Australia, and New Zealand sometimes wrote to the station to report hearing it.

The transmitter used RCA’s high-power (100-kW) water-cooled transmitting tubes, (type UV-862), as well as RCA’s UV-857 mercury rectifiers in the power supply. Cooling the two final amplifier tubes required 1200 gallons per hour of distilled cooling water circulating around the jackets of the tubes. The station’s chief engineer had to know plumbing as well as radio circuitry.



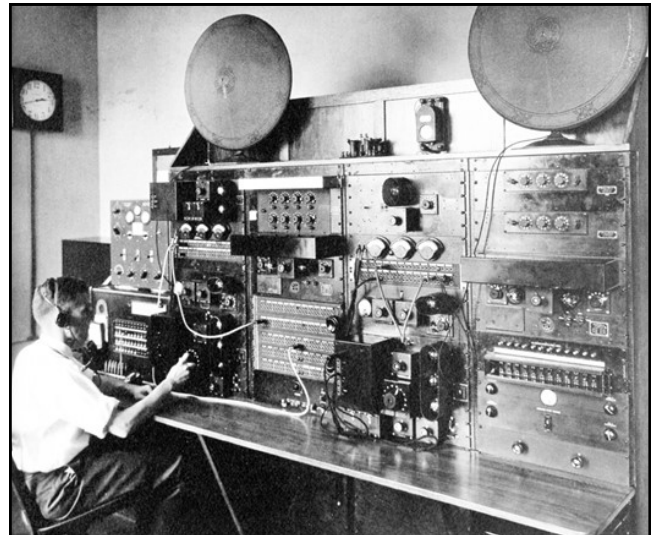
The new RCA transmitter. (From the WTIC promotional booklet.)

With the launch of its new high-power transmitter, WTIC’s frequency was shifted to 1060 kHz. It had to time share with powerful Baltimore station WBAL. But, during its hours of operation, it had 1060 kHz to itself. (Later WTIC ended up at 1080 kHz and WBAL at 1090 kHz.) WTIC operated on 24-hour periods starting at 7 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and Sundays from 8 p.m. to midnight. While the station’s studios remained in downtown Hartford, the antenna supported by the towers atop the

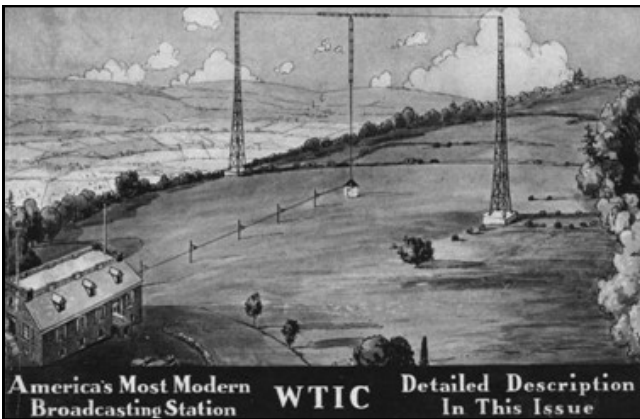
Travelers building was retired in favor of a new “T-cage” antenna on Talcott Mountain, where the new transmitter facility was also located. The new antenna utilized two 200-foot steel towers. The studios were linked to the 200-acre transmitter site by 150 tons of wide-bandwidth cable. Unlike earlier smaller stations whose transmitter frequencies tended to wander, WTIC’s new transmitter used the latest technology—a temperature-controlled crystal oven—to hold its frequency to within 20 Hertz of 1060 kHz.

### WTIC In The 1930s and ‘40s

WTIC developed a number of innovative programs. “The WTIC Playhouse” began airing live drama in 1931. Actor Ed Begley, who later became nationally known, was one of the cast members.



WTIC’s new 50-kW transmitter was located on Talcott Mountain, about twelve miles from the downtown studios, which remained at their previous location. This is the control room adjacent to the studios, with engineer Bob Coe operating the controls. From here, programs were sent via cable to the transmitter site.



This picture of the new antenna system on Talcott Mountain, erected to accompany WTIC’s new RCA 50-kW transmitter, is from the cover of the October 1929 QST magazine, published by the American Radio Relay League.

“The Wrightville Daily Clarion” was a folksy New England drama that continued though much of the 1930s. Musical groups such as Hank Keene’s Connecticut Hillbillies, as well as more classical-type selections, occupied much of the daily schedule.

In 1932 WTIC joined with WEEI (Boston), WCSH (Portland, ME), WTAG (Worcester, MA), and WJAR (Providence, RI) to form a New England Network to share programs. In 1936 WTIC dropped



WTIC produced live drama. The station’s sound effects department shown here was capable of creating almost any sound needed, ranging from police car sirens to a cash register ringing up, and with transcription disc recordings, a baby’s cry or an airplane flying overhead.



This is one of the popular musical groups that appeared on the station regularly in the early 1930s—Hank Keene and his Connecticut Hillbillies. The station received 6,000 favorable letters after their first broadcast.

out of the New England Network and joined a different regional network—the Yankee Network. According to Alexander Russo, during the 1930s there was serious consideration of moving WTIC to Boston, but nothing ever came of that.

By 1935 WTIC was on the air 17½ hours during the week and 14 hours on Sundays. (At that time, most radio stations went off the air during the middle of the night.)

### WTIC's People

A number of memorable executives and personalities shaped the character of the station during its 90-plus years on the air. A couple of examples:



Fans of early rock 'n roll music will recall Bill Haley and His Comets and their hit song "Rock Around the Clock." Long before that, Haley led this musical group called the The Downhomers that performed on WTIC.

With WTIC for more than five decades, Leonard Patricelli was hired by the station in 1929. He had worked for Travelers previously in the company's boiler insurance department, but was fascinated by radio. He pleaded with Walter Cowles to give him a chance to write for the station. According to the station, he was the first person in New England to have a full-time job as a continuity writer. ("Continuity" is the material that goes between programs, e.g., station and program announcements, merging commercials smoothly into the flow, etc.). In 1943 Patricelli became the station's program manager, and created a number of unique WTIC programs. He rose through the executive ranks, eventually becoming Chairman of the Board of the 1080 Corporation, the entity that operated the station in the 1970s and '80s.

Bob Steele was another mainstay of the station. Hired as an announcer in 1936 to read station breaks and commercials, he was on the air for WTIC for a remarkable 66 years, for much of that time, six days per week. Steele hosted a 5:30 a.m. Monday through Saturday show for 55 years, without a format change. (His program included music, farm news, and jokes and puns.) In addition to his morning show which entertained more than two generations of New Englanders, Steele was the station's sports director for years, and he did an evening sports show. Steele received hundreds of letters per week from listeners who loved him. A street in Hartford was named for him in 2011.



Leonard Patricelli, who began as a continuity writer and rose through the ranks to become chairman of the board of the company that operated WTIC.



Bob Steele had a remarkable career at WTIC, spanning 66 years.

At a time when relatively few women occupied important positions in broadcasting, WTIC featured Jean Colbert, who received frequent kudos for her skill as an interviewer. She joined the station in 1947. Her programs were a class act.

Radio stations can be a tremendous asset to any community in times of emergencies. When there was a flood, hurricane, fire, or other disaster, WTIC was there to broadcast important news to Hartford's citizens. During its visit to Hartford in 1944 the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus had a



Jean Colbert (left) hosted "Radio Bazaar," and later, "The Jean Colbert Show." Here she is interviewing Eleanor Roosevelt. Her big-name guests also included people such as Winston Churchill, Fidel Castro, and Princess Margaret.



A 1938 hurricane caused massive flooding, and here WTIC announcers are describing the extent of the flooding from their vantage point atop the Travelers Tower.

disastrous fire that WTIC covered in depth. In 1955 Hurricane Connie did massive damage in the Hartford area, and again, the station was there to keep the community informed. And, whenever there was a disaster, the station collected money to help victims.

Museum member Dick Bertel, whose article about his recollections of working at WTIC follows, was a popular announcer and station personality at WTIC Radio, and later, at its TV station. In 1970 Dick created, "The Golden Age of Radio." It featured interviews with performers and others involved during the "golden age" of radio. Those of us who love radio history are thankful for such contributions, and especially thankful that recordings of these shows can still be listened to on the Goldenage website listed under Sources.

A colleague of Dick's, Arnold Dean, created a big-band music show that listeners also loved, called "A One Night Stand with the Big Bands." Recordings of it are also available on that same website.

### WTIC Evolves Into A Modern Station

By the late 1940s, station management concluded that the 50-kW RCA transmitter that went on line in 1929 was obsolete. The station purchased a new

Westinghouse 50-kW transmitter that was turned on for the first time in July 1947. The old serial number 1 RCA transmitter was retained as a backup unit. The Westinghouse transmitter was replaced in 1971 by a more modern transmitter made by Continental.

Like most radio stations during the 1930s, WTIC used transcription discs for recorded music and program material, and played the discs on turntables like the one in the foreground of the picture to the right. But technology was evolving. Tape recording began to replace transcription discs in the postwar era. Then reel-to-reel tapes gave way to cartridge tapes. (Today's radio stations have digital memory storage to take the place of these former recording technologies.)

WTIC had to change its transmission frequency many times over the years. It moved to 1040 kHz in 1935, and to 1080 in 1941, the frequency it still uses. But like many stations today, WTIC has phased array antennas so that its coverage pattern shifts at night.

Early in 1940 WTIC engineers built an FM transmitter and added FM station W1XSO (1 kW on 43.7 MHz). In 1942 that became W53H, and after WWII, WTIC-FM on 93.4 MHz, and in 1948, 96.5 MHz. Like many other early FM stations, for a time, WTIC-FM used simulcasting of AM programs over its FM station.

During WWII WTIC produced the program "The United States Coast Guard on Parade," broadcast over NBC. Like many other stations, WTIC encouraged its listeners to buy war bonds.



The Westinghouse 50HG-1 fifty-kW transmitter purchased in 1947 to replace the original 50-kW RCA transmitter. (From hardfordradiohistory.com.)

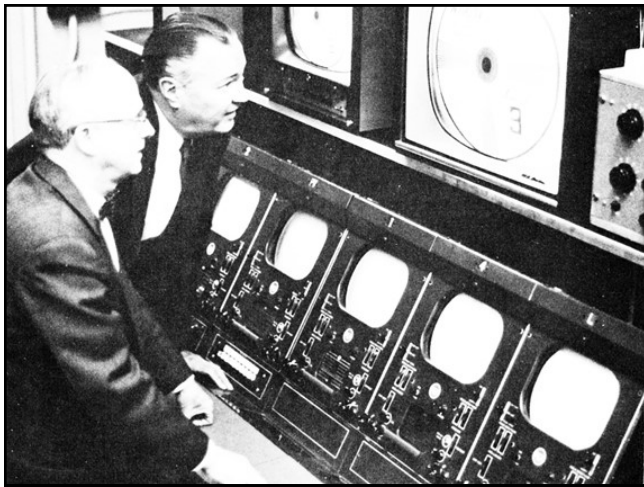


The rack at the left of the photo is a new tape recording system that WTIC purchased in 1949. Al Jackson is the engineer in the picture.

In 1954 WTIC began to carry NBC's famous weekend program called "Monitor." When the major radio networks began to focus their attention on television and neglect network radio, WTIC and other stations had to scramble to retain audiences. New formats needed to be found. In 1954 WTIC launched a phone-in talk show called "The Miller Party Line" with hosts Ross and Betty Miller. By interviewing interesting celebrities such as Liberace and Norman Rockwell, the station was able to retain a dedicated audience. Tape recording and delaying slightly the live airing allowed the station to screen out obnoxious callers, an often-used technique in the industry. Other talk shows followed, and the station was able to adjust to changes in the radio industry.

WTIC had actually applied for a television station license in 1939 when electronic television was just beginning, but WWII came along and quashed those plans before a station could be built. But after the war WTIC again began planning for adding a television station. It wanted a VHF channel, but at the time, UHF channels were easier to come by. VHF channel 3 had been assigned to New London, and WTIC had to jump through hoops to convince the Federal Communications Commission that Hartford would be a better location. That appeal finally paid off and WTIC was authorized to use channel 3. The station was in operation from 1957 until 1974, when in March, Travelers decided to get out of the broadcasting business and sell its radio and TV stations. The TV station was purchased by Post-Newsweek Stations, and became WFSB TV3. WTIC managers such as Leonard Patricelli desperately wanted to keep the AM and FM radio stations under local control. He talked local businessman David Chase into establishing a new corporation—The 1080 Corporation—to purchase





Paul Morency (left), who joined the station in 1929, and eventually became the station's president, with Chief Engineer Herman Taylor in WTIC's television station control room. Taylor started at WTIC when the station first began. Morency was enthusiastic about getting the station into the television business.

and operate the AM and FM stations. The new company retained the call signs.

In 1957 WTIC AM and WTIC-FM broadcast their first stereo broadcast. (As was common at the time, listeners who wanted stereo reception received one channel on an AM receiver and the other channel on an FM receiver.) By the early 1960s, FM multiplex stereo had made that approach obsolete.

In the 1980s, Arnold Chase, whose father David owned WTIC radio, started a UHF television station, Channel 61. He asked his father to allow him to use WTIC's call letters for the TV station and the FCC



By the early 1960s WTIC had an AM radio station, an FM station, and a channel 3 television station, and operated out of this modern building called Broadcast House. (Photo from wticalumni.com.)

approved the deal. The new WTIC-TV began in September 1984. Bob Steele was one of the personalities who appeared during the launch.

WTIC-TV later became a Fox affiliate, and nearly went bankrupt in the late 1980s. In October 1987, Chase Broadcasting, the company that owned the radio stations, took over WTIC-TV. In the 1990s the station was sold to Renaissance Broadcasting.

Today the FM and AM radio outlets are owned by CBS-Connecticut. The station is located in Farmington, Connecticut, with its radio antennas in nearby Avon. The station is called "WTIC NewsTalk 1080."

The station has won many awards over the years. Examples include the Ohio State Broadcasting Award for most outstanding youth broadcast in 1950. In 1984 the Associated Press awarded WTIC five awards, for Best Newscast, Best Feature Story, Best News Story, Best Editorial, and Best Sports Show.

As Dick Bertel notes in his article, WTIC's former employees remember the station fondly, and have established an alumni association. Its website is listed below. The additional websites listed contain a wealth of historical information.

In my judgment, WTIC deserves to be included in any list of memorable U.S. radio stations.

### Sources

\_\_\_\_\_. *WTIC: Radio to Remember*, undated WTIC publication, circa 1985.

\_\_\_\_\_. *WTIC 50,000 Watts*, Promotion Booklet, circa 1929 (photocopy provided by Ludwell Sibley).

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Alexander Russo, *Points on the Dial*, (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2010).

### Websites

[connecticut.cbslocal.com/station/wtic-news-talk-1080](http://connecticut.cbslocal.com/station/wtic-news-talk-1080)

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[WTIC\\_AM.php](http://WTIC_AM.php)

[wticalumni.com](http://wticalumni.com)

[wtic.com](http://wtic.com) ■

# WTIC Recollections

## By Dick Bertel

[Being an announcer at a radio station today is a very different kind of experience than it was a half century ago. We are grateful to Dick Bertel for sharing his recollections of what it was like at WTIC in "the good old days." - Editor]

WTIC in the 1950s was still the gold standard of broadcasting for those of us in southern New England hoping to make radio a career. It was my goal to work there as an announcer and to become part of that great station. Even the audition was unique. Instead of placing you in a studio by yourself, they would bring in one of their own announcers to interact with you to determine whether you fit their style.

I was hired in May 1956 at the age of 25. The first thing that was explained to me after I filled out my application was the retirement package I would receive when I reached 65. In those days they expected you to spend the rest of your career with WTIC.

I didn't utter a sound on the air for at least a week after starting. The managers simply wanted me to observe. When my turn finally arrived, I gave my first station break: "WTIC, the Travelers Insurance Company, Hartford." It was still permissible in those days to identify the station's owner in the break.



Four WTIC announcers: Bob Ellsworth, myself, Ed Anderson, and Bruce Kern, circa 1960. (From the website [wticalumni.com](http://wticalumni.com).)

WTIC occupied the entire sixth floor of the Travelers Grove Street building. Down a long, wide hallway were the large audience participation studios, each equipped with a grand piano, now all but unused. I was told that, in the heyday of network radio, WTIC would feed NBC about eighteen hours of live programming a week from those studios. Most programming now originated in studios B, D, E, and F (the announce booth). Each studio had its own control room from which a studio engineer would open the mics and play recorded material, while a producer sat at a table or stood behind him to cue the talent and watch the clock.

I'll never forget the first time I did *Medley Time*. The show consisted of live organ music at noontime. Fred Wade, the senior producer, walked me down to studio D, an audience participation studio filled with folding chairs, where Hal Kolb, the organist, was rehearsing. I was directed to step onto a small stage, at which point the engineer flipped on several ceiling-mounted spotlights. Fred took his place in the control room and suggested that Hal and I rehearse the opening of the show. As I recall there was an organ flourish at which point I said, "It's Medley Time," followed by another flourish and the words, "with Hal Kolb." He would then finish the opening, and I would be cued to read the introduction to the first song. By the way, the show was only ten minutes long.

Of course, most of the music played on the station was recorded. Gone were the live orchestras of the 1930s and '40s. The record library was huge and held thousands of 78s and LPs. Two librarians, when not filing or cataloguing records, auditioned and programmed almost all of the recorded music played on the air. A third librarian handled only transcriptions. There were several listening booths off to one side where you could audition records.

One Sunday, while on my lunch hour, I decided to wander down that long, wide

hallway. I walked past studio C on the right, the record library, the newsroom, and the FM studio adjacent to it. A few feet further down on the left was a door I had not noticed before. It was unlocked so I opened it and turned on the light switch. There, stacked on shelves from floor to ceiling, were hundreds of 16-inch acetate transcriptions of shows the station had produced over the years that were being retained for legal protection purposes. I often wonder today whatever became of that invaluable collection.

WTIC featured a half-dozen or so fifteen minute newscasts each day. There were no actualities so the announcer assigned to the newscast would read a full fifteen minutes of copy. You were not expected to fluff or mispronounce a word, and if you did, you usually heard about it. Therefore, an announcer was given a half hour before airtime to go to the newsroom and rehearse. Any words of questionable pronunciation were to be looked up in the dictionary provided.

There was a special desk where the announcer would sit, mark his copy and read it aloud—a requirement. Two news writers were assigned to the newsroom at any one time. They used candlestick telephones with headphones clamped to their heads to talk to their sources, thus freeing up both hands to attack the keys on the typewriter. Teletype machines and an old fashioned ticker tape printer covered by a glass dome chattered away in the background.

In 1956 WTIC was still a fulltime NBC network affiliate. There was live big band music in the morning, soap operas in the afternoon and a bevy of dramatic shows at night, including *Dragnet* and *X Minus One*. The announcer on duty would be expected to do one thirty-second station break per half hour and to stand by the rest of the time in the event there was a network failure. The engineer in master control could then press a button and a pre-cued phonograph record would begin to play.

One morning, shortly after I started, the staff was ushered into one of the large studios to hear an important announcement. Paul W. Morency, the general manager, told us that the FCC had finally approved the station's TV license after years of litigation. Channel 3 was going to become a reality. I realized I would be in on the ground floor.

Construction on the new television facility began shortly thereafter. One of the large (and largely unused) studios was demolished, and the area converted into office space for the incoming, newly-hired, TV staff. Space on the far end of the floor had, years earlier, been reserved for television in

anticipation of a favorable decision by the FCC, so it was simply a matter of constructing two state-of-the-art studios and a master control along with several small film screening and editing rooms.

The week before its on-air debut, we began full scale rehearsals. Whole segments of programming, including films, syndicated shows and live news, weather and sports were generated while Leonard J. Patricelli, WTIC veteran and just appointed Channel 3 Program Director, sat in his office watching and taking notes.

Because the three networks were already affiliated with other outlets in the market area, Channel 3 officially went on the air in September, 1957, as an independent station. However, within a year or so CBS, which owned UHF Channel 18, shut it down and affiliated with the much more powerful VHF Channel 3. That affiliation has endured for almost 60 years.

Fortunately, WTIC Radio continued to maintain its high standards, despite the attention being lavished on the new television station. It continued to build its programming around the NBC Radio Network, although fewer and lesser quality programs were now being offered.

Finally, in late 1959, NBC announced that it would cease all entertainment programming as of January 1<sup>st</sup>, and present only news, sports, and occasional information programs. The one dramatic show that would survive for many more years was *The Eternal Light*, produced by the Jewish Theological Seminary.

WTIC Radio was suddenly on its own. At first it subscribed to syndicated programming supplied on 16-inch transcription discs, but it quickly became apparent that this was not going to be the future of AM radio. Soon, blocks of time were opened for announcers to create their own recorded music shows. *Morning Drive* with Bob Steele was expanded from a little over two hours to four hours. *Afternoon Drive* filled a like amount of time from 3 to 7 p.m. A non-controversial talk show with listener comments and questions was created for early afternoon listening, and another one was generated for the evening hours. WTIC affiliated with the Boston Red Sox baseball network to carry their full schedule, and on its own began play-by-play coverage of the UConn Huskies basketball games. Within a few months, WTIC had become a full-service radio station playing Middle of the Road (MOR) music, although I'm sure those terms did not exist then.

A year or so later, WTIC AM, FM, and TV moved into its own building, a brand new facility on Constitution Plaza in Hartford called Broadcast House. It truly was a showplace. Full-time guides in specially designed uniforms regularly conducted tours of the radio and television facilities, often stopping at a glass window to peer into a radio studio as a program was in progress. There was still one large studio, capable of accommodating an orchestra, if necessary, but I don't recall it ever being used for that.

In 1942 WTIC's top of the hour time signal was cleverly redesigned to consist of three dots and a dash to mimic Beethoven's four note opening of his Fifth Symphony, and also, to signal, in Morse code, the letter "V" for victory. It was a symbol of World War Two, of course, but it became so popular with the listening audience that the station has retained it to this day. When the radio station moved to Broadcast House, however, the engineers devised a slower and much mellower tone, still using the three dots and a dash. Audience reaction to the new sound was so negative that they abandoned it after just a few weeks and reverted to the original.

Of course, the station had a dress code. All of us—announcers, producers, and engineers—were expected to wear a suit and tie while on duty, even on weekends—and even on the radio. Sometime after I was hired, I casually discussed the dress code with my colleague, Bruce Kern. He laughed and then recalled that when he joined the WTIC announcing staff in the mid-30s he was required to wear a tuxedo and tails after 6 p.m.! I realized at that moment that I had very little to complain about.

It must be difficult for contemporary broadcasters to envision what it was like to work in a somewhat rigid and highly structured environment where you were expected to conduct yourself with decorum at all times—after all, they reminded you, "You represent the Travelers Insurance Company every time you go on the air."

After almost fifty years of ownership, the Travelers decided to divest the company of its broadcast component. Times had changed. Audiences were becoming more vocal about programming decisions. A minority group had, for the first time, challenged the renewal of the station license, and pressure was mounting to diversify the staff, which, by the way, the company made every effort to accomplish. And so, on March 8, 1974, WTIC-TV, Channel 3, became WFSB, as ownership was transferred to Post-Newsweek. The radio station was purchased by a company created by WTIC management personnel

and Hartford real estate developer David Chase. Although I could have gone to work for Post-Newsweek, I decided to stay with the radio station instead.

After 21 years I left WTIC to work for The Voice of America here in Washington, one of the best decisions I ever made. Commercial radio was undergoing great change. Even staid WTIC had turned to a rock music format in an effort to attract younger listeners.

However, I still keep in touch. Every two years or so, the staff that was in place before the stations were sold, holds a reunion in Hartford. And colleagues come from all over the country to be there and reminisce about the good old days. The turnout is getting smaller however, as time takes its toll. Last June there were only about thirty of us there.

Every month I get a small pension check from WTIC, just as they promised when I was hired in 1956. It acts as a constant reminder of my years with one of America's great stations. What a privilege it was to work there. ■

## **Donations Of Artifacts, Books, Tubes, Parts, etc.)**

**October through December 2016**

Brian Belanger  
Fred Blonder  
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Barry Cheslock  
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Stephen Dombkowski  
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The Thurber Family  
Univ. of MD – Special Collections  
Neil Waldman

# The British Vintage Wireless And Television Museum

*By John Anderson*

While visiting my daughter and her family in the UK, I had the opportunity to tour the British Vintage Wireless and Television Museum (<http://bvwm.org.uk/>) located at 23 Rosendale Road, West Dulwich, London SE21 8DS. (For information on West Dulwich, check: <https://www.kfh.co.uk/south-east-london-and-north-kent/west-dulwich/>).

The museum was founded in 1974 by Gerald L Wells, whose personal collection of vintage radios and televisions still form the heart of its 1500-plus item collection. It is housed in the home where he was born and lived his entire life until he died in 2014. (Wells apparently got his start in radio by salvaging gear from bombed homes during the Blitz).

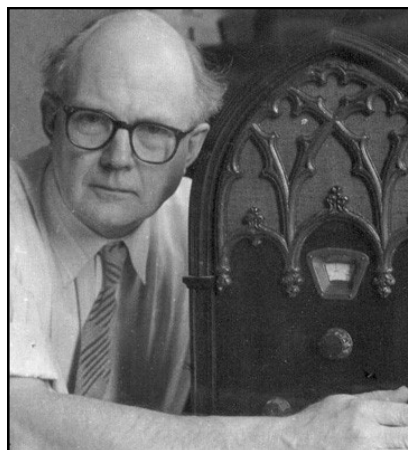
It is now the only active vintage radio and TV museum in the entire UK.

In addition to Wells' home, the collection is also housed in a series of greenhouse-like outbuildings Wells constructed over the years, including repair shops and a valve [vacuum tube] and component warehouse.

The museum is open by appointment only by calling +44 020 8670 3667. The docents I met, Phil and John, were a retired electrical engineer and a television repair expert, respectively. They were extremely knowledgeable about the history of the items in the collection and the technical aspects of the radios and TVs. Both were friendly and chatty and very interested in the NCRTV museum and its operations.



This section of the museum features American radios.



Gerald Wells, whose personal radio collection accounted for the major part of the collection of the museum, and whose home now houses it.



Panorama of one of the exhibit rooms, with Phil Ross seated at the right.



An annex building; Phil and John at the left.



The workshop where radios and TV sets are restored.



A Nazi radio. This deluxe model would likely have been used by a military officer or government official.



Like our Museum, this museum also needs to keep vacuum tubes (or valves, as they are called in the U.K.) on hand for repairing radios and TV sets. Here is a portion of their valve inventory.



This corner of the museum houses a large number of restored television sets, many of which are turned on when visitors are present.

The collection is predominantly British. Ecko (Eric Kirkham Cole Limited) and Phillips, UK, were the most common radios, and Pye and Phillips the most common television sets. I was struck by how often nearly identical-looking radios were either TRFs (tuned radio frequency types) or superheterodynes.

There is also an amazing collection of home-built radios that Wells and his associate, Eileen Laffey, built themselves.

John seems to be a wizard in vintage TV repair as nearly every set in the collection is functional. (He was envious of our small collection of disc TVs, and very knowledgeable of the legacy of scanning disc TV pioneer John Logie Baird.)

There is a small collection of vintage American radios, and even Nazi-era radios designed to receive only German stations.

It is well worth the visit for any member of MAARC and/or the NCRTV museum. I had only two hours, but I'd recommend planning for half a day. Getting there from mid-town London took nearly 45 minutes by car. A subway ride from Westminster would take 45 plus minutes and two changes. Note that there is no sign outside to identify the museum. ■

# From The Director's Desk . . .

By Karen Whitehair

Can you believe it? It is now 2017. And with a new year comes new opportunities. I would like to share with you some of those possible opportunities and how you might be able to help.

But first, I want to thank everyone who so generously supported our Museum through the 2016 End-of-Year Campaign. We managed to bring in almost \$8,000! This is extraordinary! THANK YOU!

Opportunities always exist, but sometimes we do not see what is directly in front of us. We hope that down the road something good will happen, forgetting that the sign that leads to opportunity reads "Push." If we stop and look around, we find we have some pretty amazing things going on within our little Museum. The problem is only a select group even knows it exists. Some of the most important programming opportunities we have come in the form of K3RTV, our amateur radio station, and the work the radio repair crew does. For so long, they have worked diligently in the Annex with very little fanfare. In 2017, we would like to change that.

We have already set into motion ways in which these two key components can be presented to the public, pending approval from the city and our board of directors. We would like to create programs featuring our ham radio station that will take it directly to our visitors and into the community. How else can our visitors see how much fun

it is to communicate with people all over the world via ham radio? We would also like to build community partner-ships with local emergency responders and be a resource for them when all other communication systems fail.

In addition, we want to create programming around the work the radio repair crew does in ways that are very similar to what you might see at museums that have window walls where you can watch staff clean dinosaur bones or restore a Monet painting. Some avenues for this include Podcasts and YouTube videos as well as monthly on-site specialty programs that feature the work they do.

I think the theme for 2017 should be "We Are All in This Together!" This Museum operates almost exclusively on volunteer labor. We need to utilize that passion and energy to help make the Museum stronger. Some of you may not have that much time to help directly at the Museum, but you can help in small ways such as dropping off rack cards at hotels near your home or talking to businesses you frequent to see if they might want to become a Booster of the Museum, or talking to your local community center manager to see if they would like to have a STEM program featuring radio technology come to their facility. If you have other ideas for how you can help, I would love to hear from you. My e-mail address is [kwhitehair@nrcrtv.org](mailto:kwhitehair@nrcrtv.org).

## Thanks to our Major Donors

The following individuals have provided major financial support to the Museum during the past twelve months (January 1 through December 31, 2016)

Without their generosity, the Museum could not function.

(Does not include tickets or tables purchased for the Fall Fundraisers.)

### **Benefactors (\$2,500 to \$9,999)**

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Arthur Tanner  
Ray Tulley

# Museum News

## Radio Repair Classes

The Museum's vintage radio repair classes continue to draw enthusiastic students. Congratulations to our Executive Director, Karen Whitehair, and her two daughters, Malory and Nicole, all three of whom are taking the class. It's great to see younger people learning about how vacuum tube radios work. They have also pitched in to help the crew that handles our vacuum tube inventory. Sorting dirty old vacuum tubes in our Davidsonville tube building, which is cold in winter and hot in summer, is not the most pleasant task, but they have rolled up their sleeves to help, and we are grateful!

If you have an interest in learning to repair old radios, notify the museum, and we will alert you to when the next classes will begin. Instructor Oscar Ramsey teaches on Saturday mornings, and Dick Maio teaches on a weekday evening, so you have a choice of class times. The tuition of \$250 for members includes a textbook and handout materials.

## New Items on Exhibit

Three interesting newly-acquired items are currently on exhibit in the Museum's "New Acquisitions Corner:"

1. WBJC's chief engineer Bob Lenio donated an RCA CONELRAD receiver. CONELRAD was a Cold War-era system to shut down radio broadcast stations when there was a threat of Russian bombers coming over the North Pole to bomb the United States. The December 2014 *Dials and Channels* included an article explaining the CONELRAD system. (Note that Museum members can access all back issues of *Dials and Channels* by going to the Museum website, [ncrtv.org](http://ncrtv.org), going into the members-only section, and clicking on Newsletter Archives.)

2. Last year the Federal Communications Commission donated a large quantity of artifacts to the Museum, including a rare World War I-vintage Navy direction-finding receiver. Our assumption about its provenance is that after the war, the Federal Radio Commission probably acquired military surplus radio equipment. Direction-finding receivers would have been used by the FRC to locate clandestine unlicensed transmitters.

3. The iconic National Model SW-3 shortwave receiver was very popular with shortwave listeners and ham radio operators in the early 1930s. It was inexpensive, but performed remarkably well.

If you have not been to the Museum recently, pay us a visit to see these items. ■

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