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Haydn Evans Retirement Announcement and Recollections

WBAY-TV

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FULL CBS SERVICES - TV•AM•FM

WBAY

115 SOUTH JEFFERSON STREET

• GREEN BAY

• WISCONSIN 54301



TELEPHONE 432-3331

FOR RELEASE TUESDAY, JANUARY 10, 1967

Haydn R. Evans, General Manager of the WBAY Stations is retiring January 10th according to Rev. I. M. Gosz, Managing Director. Mr. Evans came to Green Bay in 1939 to manage the radio station then known as WTAQ. He was responsible for securing the present call letters, WBAY, in 1949. In addition to his radio activities which included program concepts and writing, he was active in the development of Television and FM. WBAY-TV was the first "post-freeze" station on the air in Wisconsin, commencing its programming in March, 1953. Seven years later the present FM station began its fine music service. In the 27 years of his management, the WBAY stations have grown to one of the largest broadcast operations outside a major metropolitan area in the midwest. Evans will continue his many civic activities with the Green Bay Chamber of Commerce, the Oneida Country Club and other organizations.

Succeeding Evans as General Manager for radio, television and FM is Robert C. Nelson who joined the operation in 1953 as Television Sales Manager. He was promoted to Assistant General Manager in September, 1965. In assuming his new duties, Nelson also confirmed other recent promotions on the stations' executive staff. Greg McElrone is Manager of the Stations for TV, AM and FM, C. Richard Burnton is now Television Sales Manager and Robert Vandersteen is Radio Sales Manager. Earl Huth, who has been National Sales Manager for Television since 1955 has assumed a similar assignment for radio.

Our staff consisted of 9 or 10 people. Val Schneider and Syd Rich were salesmen; Al Michel was traffic manager; Billy Burt and Syd Rich were announcers. Agatha Beemster was bookkeeper. Ann Coleman was switchboard operator. Wally Stangel was chief engineer and Father Wagner was Managing Director. My job was that of General Manager and Sales Manager, with Marge Opland (imported from Yankton, South Dakota) as my secretary.

Such was our basic staff in 1939. In addition, Wally had an extra engineer or two at the transmitter in De Pere.

Side lights of those early days:

1) Wally and I used to chuckle over the condition of our ground system. It seemed that farmers had ploughed and re-ploughed the entire area. So we carefully refrained from checking conditions around the transmitter.

One of our members
2) ~~Al Michel~~ was inclined to drink a wee bit too much in those days. And usually after a few drinks, at Mike Carrigan's Tavern, he'd seriously tell two or three people that he was afraid he'd have to let the General Manager go. Later in the day when I trotted down for a drink, my friends and acquaintances would tell me they'd heard the bad news and wished me luck in getting a new job. This same routine happened at least 20 times. We finally had to ask ^{him} ~~AF~~ to look for another job -- he did so -- stopped drinking -- and today has a very responsible position.

3) Our 7:30 AM News was our No. 1 feature. Our newscaster was Billy Burt, who was ^{a bit} ~~likewise rather~~ fond of alcohol. I'll never forget the morning Billy fell asleep right in the middle of the 15-minute segment. His delivery became slower and slower - and gradually faded into nothing. By luck, our Operator, Charlie Chase, was on duty at the time -- so he slowly faded up music.

4) Mike Carrigan's Bar (or Tavern) was located right across the alley from the Bellin Building on what is now a Parking Lot. It was a rather oldfashioned Bar, part of the second-rate Milner Hotel. There were scores of Milner Hotels throughout the country, all of them seemingly second or third-rate. But there was nothing second-rate about Mike Carrigan's Bar. Mike had been Western Sales Manager for a National Spark Plug Company, and had been stricken with a heart attack while visiting a distributor in Green Bay. After several months of recuperation in Green Bay, he decided to stay here and leased the Milner Tavern. It was a very popular place for businessmen, including doctors and lawyers. But as the Milner gradually went to rack and ruin in the early 1950's, so did Mike's clientele. I could write a book on some of Mike's customers, but no one would believe my story. Anyway, Mike's Tavern was Studio "X" to those of us at WBAY during the entire 40's and very early 50's. Mike finally died along about 1955 -- and the entire building was torn down shortly thereafter.

The Press-Gazette was our bitter competitor -- and I do mean "bitter" in those early days. A man named Robinson was Press-Gazette Advertising Manager, and he seldom missed a trick in trying to prevent a Green Bay merchant from using Radio.

Example: Pat McGoldrick, of Baum's Department Store, had had a set position on the back page of the Paper for 25 years. He started to use WBAY. The Paper frankly told him if he didn't cancel immediately, his position would be taken away.

Surprisingly enough, it was the Jewish merchants of Green Bay who kept WBAY going in those days. We always had trouble meeting the payroll -- and more than once a Green Bay merchant would pay us ahead of billing date.

Another sidelight of our Press-Gazette competition: When the Texaco Company bought an ad in the Paper ballyhooing their new Radio Show, the mat listed the words "insert name of local Station here". The Paper listed WBBM, Chicago -- and when later questioned by the Texaco Agency, explained with a straight face that people dialed a Station 200 miles away rather than listen to WBAY.

But after Mr. Robinson's death, our relations with the Paper improved a thousand per cent -- and by the early 1950's we were bosom pals, which we've been ever since.

I hope I'm not being immodest when I say WBAY created many new types of Radio programs. In 1939, we began a daily Telephone Quiz. To the best of my knowledge this was the "first". Ten years later, in 1949, we started a program called Party Line. Five years later there were hundreds of imitations and variations throughout the country. But perhaps the most popular Show we ever created was called "Armchair Detective". This Show was broadcast one hour nightly, from 10:30 to 11:30 P.M.

If we weren't so darned busy today, I'd bring that Show to life again. It was a delightful piece of Showmanship, tailor-made for the Green Bay market.

WBAY made itself quite a reputation in the 40's with its unusual air Personalities. One of our outstanding performers was Johnny Olsen, who not only conducted the finest of interviews, but gave his Record Shows real meaning. Johnny was acquainted with all the big Band Leaders and most of the composers of that era. He left us to go to New York -- where today (1963) he handles the warm-up Shows for such outstanding

CBS hits as the Jackie Gleason Show -- To Tell The Truth, etc. It's said that Johnny literally commutes between Chicago and New York...leaving New York each Friday afternoon for his home in southern Wisconsin -- and flying back to Manhattan each Monday morning.

Allen Franklin was another of our outstanding Personalities. He had been fired from big-time Stations like WLW and WMAQ for the usual "occupational disease". Strangely enough, he behaved quite well during his 4-year stint with us in the mid-40's. Allen gained fame over night when he started lambasting Curly Lambeau and the Packers on his nightly Sports program. He also built a tremendous following for his "Cozy Corner" poetry program, which was aired each afternoon along about 2 o'clock. His most ardent fan was Davvie Ackerson, who played the soft background organ music for Allen during the Show.

A third outstanding air Personality was Michael Griffin. Mike, too, had been fired from two or three very big jobs. He had been Paris correspondent for Associated Press -- and one of the New York feature writers for United Press. He took over our News Department in the late 40's. He, too, gained fame by blasting another sacred cow, the Green Bay City Government. His news ratings were enormous -- but no Sponsor would touch his programs with a 10-foot pole.

And there was Hal O'Halloran, who drifted our way ~~ms~~ along about 1950. Hal had been strictly big-time...but had been passed up for younger men after reaching the age of 60 or $\bar{7}$ so. He did a beautiful daily Children's Show, and was a completely big-time announcer.

And we had a writer named Bob Shaw, in those early 40's. Bob usually came to work around noon, but was still hammering away at his typewriter after midnight. His salary wasn't large, but his total income was very healthy because he free-lanced Network Shows. Bob eventually left when he was hired to do a Network series called "Mr. District Attorney". As of last year (1962), Bob had an estate on Long Island, next to that of the Broadway Star, Tallulah Bankhead. Last year his writings included such Network Television Shows as Surfside 6.

From 1939 till 1948, Father James Wagner was our Managing Director. His work at the Station slacked off after he was placed in charge of St. Willebrord's Church and Parish. He had a dog named Skippy, whom he loved dearly. Each week day noon as our Farmhand Orchestra began its opening theme, Skippy would dash from Father Wagner's office -- through the General Office -- up a flight of stairs and into the Radio Studio, where the door was always left open for him. His loud barking in front of the microphones was part of the theme!

In those mid-40's, our Noon Show, featuring the 8-piece Farmhand Unit was our biggest effort -- and we always had a studio audience of anywhere from 10 to 30 or 40 people. And while the music was good, Skippy's performance was better.

Our manner of obtaining the Call Letters WBAY is interesting. Needless to say, when we bought our Station from Gillette Tire & Rubber Company, in Eau Claire, our Call was WTAQ. (WHERE TIRES ARE QUALITY) . The letters obviously meant nothing to us as far as identification was concerned. Naturally, the perfect Call Letters for a Green Bay Station would be W'BAY. But our Washington attorneys soon killed off our hopes of obtaining them by stating that the letters were then (in the early 40's) assigned to some type of Station in the Panama

Canal Zone. But something happened, and by 1946 a new Station in Coral Gables, Florida (Bay County) popped up with the Letters we so badly wanted. However, two years later came our good break. I was reading a Broadcasting trade paper at home on a Saturday afternoon, when a half page advertisement hit me right in the eye . It read.... "WBAY now becomes WTTT" -- the three T's standing for Time, Temperature and Tunes. Needless to say I had our Washington attorney on the phone by 9:00 A.M. Monday morning. He merely phoned the FCC and said that WTAQ wished to change to WBAY. That very same afternoon came the wire authorizing the change, to start immediately. While it's obviously difficult to put a value on Call Letters, I'd say that the letters BAY have meant a fortune to us. We surely wouldn't change for any other combination in the alphabet.