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Ask the Abbot

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5-2017

I heard that the Norbertines started WBAY-TV. Is that true?

Ivy Summers

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May 2017

Question:

Dear Abbot Pennings,

“I heard that the Norbertines started WBAY-TV. Is that true?”

Ivy Summers (Financial Aid)

Answer:

Dearest Ivy,

I absolutely delight in this topic, as it perhaps is one not known to all that many! Prior to the age of television, the first commercial radio station in northern Wisconsin, WHBY, was built on the St. Norbert campus by student engineer and inventor Cletus Collom '34, in the mid-1920s. He was supported by the Rev. Ignatius Van Dyke, O.Praem., Coach George Carey and a Norbertine seminarian, the Rev. James Wagner, O.Praem., '24.

Young James the student, who had always enjoyed experimenting with crystal radio sets and ham radios, applied for the permit for a campus radio station. The call letters, WHBY, were said to have stood for “Where Happy Boys Yodel.” (You may want to tuck that bit of trivia away to share with friends another time!)

We Norbertines also have a connection to the storied Bellin Building in downtown Green Bay, which played a pioneering role in early radio and television. Perhaps you’ve heard the urban legend that I, myself, financed the expansion of that building in 1923 for its use by WHBY Radio Studio B. Over



Ask The Abbot

As the founder of St. Norbert College, and having a prime seat in the center of campus throughout the years, I, Abbot Bernard Pennings, hold the answers to many of your burning questions about the college.

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the years, many Norbertines and students hosted radio shows from both downtown Green Bay locations. Father Wagner functioned as general manager of WHBY until 1939.

Alas, the dawn of the television age then arrived! The ninth floor studio of the Bellin Building was rumored to have been used to broadcast television trials to two television sets from 1946 to 1951. WBAY-TV, owned by the Norbertines, first signed on the air in the 1950s. WBAY-TV, WBAY-Radio and WHBY-Radio were owned by the Norbertines until they were sold in the 1970s.

Responses to “Ask the Abbot” questions are penned by St. Norbert College staff in the name of Abbot Bernard Pennings, O.Praem., who founded St. Norbert College in 1898.

St. Norbert College

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