

## WSY – Alabama's First Licensed Radio Station

"This is WSY, the radio-phone broadcasting station of the Alabama Power Company, located at Birmingham, Alabama. To enable you to tune your instruments, we will now play a phonographic record selection." So began the broadcast day for Alabama's first radio station. The station began broadcasting on Monday, April 24, 1922, just two years after the first "radiophone" broadcasts in the United States and England. It was a voice capable of reaching listeners across the nation. Station WSY inhabited tiny quarters first located at the Powell Avenue Steam Plant and later at the Loveman, Joseph & Loeb department store in downtown Birmingham. Alabama Power didn't just stumble into the radio broadcasting business. The original purpose of the station was keeping in touch with line crews in isolated regions, but the public's interest in radio was so great that the equipment was converted to broadcast entertainment programs.

Operation of the station was strictly an Alabama Power responsibility. "Telephone Department" employees outfitted and maintained the station. Among them were George Middlemiss, B.F. Burch, George Miller, W.J. Baldwin and Dick Johnson. Some of the equipment they designed during the life of the station became standards of the broadcasting industry.

Broadcasting equipment was in one of two rooms at the station. The other room was the sparsely furnished studio which had a sofa, piano, Victrola and a large fanlike microphone on a wooden stand. The day's programming might feature market and farm reports, a Bible discussion or an organ recital. What today we would call talk shows might be broadcast in the afternoon or evening. The WSY orchestra, composed mostly of Alabama Power employees, became a regular on WSY.

But it was the daily serving of entertainment that both nurtured the station's popularity and ironically, forced the company to get out of the radio business in late 1923. By the fall of 1923, the company felt that its mission in pioneering radio broadcasting in the South had been accomplished. The company made known its intention to get out of the radio business when it became necessary to hire full-time talent for the station.

In January 1925, the company donated the then-idle radio station equipment to the Alabama Polytechnic Institute (now Auburn University). The new station, WAPI, served the region for a few years but before the decade was out the station returned to Birmingham where it became a leading broadcaster as WAPI-TV 13 and AM-FM radio.