

The banner features a wood-grain background with a yellow central bar. On the left is a circular image of a globe, and on the right is a small image of a laptop displaying a radio dial. The text "The Alabama Historical Radio Society Newsletter" is centered in the yellow bar.

The Alabama Historical Radio Society Newsletter

February 2008



A NOTE FROM THE PREZ

Even though we had to start our 2008 with the moving of our great library exhibit and the Ron Westbrook funeral, the new year is looking very bright.

We were the program for the Birmingham Amateur Radio club on the 17th of January. Our radio history, old radio shows, and radio exhibit were enjoyed by about 50 BARC club members and guests.

It took two attempts to give our program for the Homewood Historical Society. We were 'snowed out' on Saturday the 19th and almost 'iced out' on the 26th. The weather man may have thinned the crowd a little, but we had a good, enthusiastic group of folks attend.

Robert Frye's class on February 2nd started off very, very well with a few re-takers and many new students. About 16 people attended and told me they really enjoyed the class.

I have included an article this month from another one of our member/authors, Don Keith. Don has been in radio for many years and can write with authority on the subject. Don has several books in print (see donkeith.com).

That's all for this month. Please get your dues in and come out to our Saturday 'fun time'.

Dave

Please save the date, Saturday, April 12 on your calendars! We are going to Montgomery to help Pete Sides celebrate his 100th birthday at an Alabama Power facility. We will leave Birmingham via chartered bus about noon and return about 6 PM. Since Pete has done so much for our group, we hope many members and spouses will make the trip for this special occasion.



DEE'S RADIO SHOWS

Hi Radio Listeners!

To continue my quest to know everything about OTR (Old Time Radio), I am reading about the radio network. AT&T started the first network in 1923, with two stations, WEAJ and WNAC on the East Coast of the United States. AT&T decided they could share the cost of originating certain programs by connecting the two stations with special, high-quality telephone lines and broadcasting the same program at the same time. Of course, since they owned the telephone lines, there was no real problem.

And now, one giant leap to the last of the networks:

Here is a web site for what was probably the last of the network ventures. It was called "Monitor," and it ran weekends on NBC from 1955 to 1975. Go to this web site to read all about it and hear some audio clips: <http://www.monitorbeacon.net/index.html>

Do you remember the Monitor Beacon? Well, it's there if you want to listen. While we are handing out web sites, here is a video of how sound effects men and actors produced an old western serial on the radio back in 1938. I know you will enjoy this one: <http://www.archive.org/details/Backofth1938>

We showed the above clip during our presentation for the Homewood Historical Society at the Homewood Library on January 26, 2008. The presentation was a big success. Dave and I just keep getting better and better. Thanks to Theo Humphries, Tom Killian, and John Outland for your help. It was good to see Ed Farrell getting around with the help of a walker since his foot surgery.

Before I say so long for this month, here is a final comment. It looks like Dave and I are getting more and more "dog and pony" shows in our schedule. Looks like the next few months will be very busy, with at least two shows in February, and who knows how many in March. And, don't forget about the BIG party in April.

"Remember the weed of crime bears bitter fruit. Crime does not pay." "The Shadow Knows."

Dee Haynes

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Don Keith, N4KC, has graciously provided this month's article for the newsletter.

RADIO: THE MOST RE-INVENTED MEDIUM

By Don Keith N4KC
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Those of you who appreciate and love to restore vintage radios may not be aware of how radio broadcasting as a medium has re-invented itself on a regular basis—each time out of sheer necessity! In its very beginnings, commercial radio stations were typically owned by telegraph or telephone companies. Those signals were used for what was termed “toll transmissions.” It was actually a form of point-to-point communication, not broadcasting, and was a forerunner of long-distance telephone communications.

Stations began broadcasting speeches and short music programs between those messages around 1920, but there were few radio receivers to hear them. Most of those were built by amateur radio enthusiasts, called “hams.”

In 1922, a real-estate company in New Jersey approached AT&T, the owners of WEAJ in New York City, with a novel idea. They wanted to purchase ten minutes of time to talk about an apartment development across the Hudson River. The first re-invention of radio took place with that transmission. It was the first commercial! And, as we know, the idea stuck.

The radio business boomed in the '20s and '30s—the “Golden Age of Radio”—but local stations in places like Birmingham had trouble coming up with enough programming to fill a full day's schedule. It was expensive to produce locally and there was a lack of top talent. That's when big station owners in New York City introduced networks, in many cases using telephone lines they already owned to wire up stations all over the country. High quality programming could be broadcast on many stations at once, scattered all around the country, providing those stations with compelling content and advertisers with a large, eager audience of potential customers. CBS, ABC, Mutual, and two NBC networks (Red and Blue) were soon competing for the ears of America. Radio had once again found necessity to be the mother of invention.

It was after World War II that radio faced its biggest threat—television! Radio with pictures! Many predicted the demise of the all-audio medium, even as the top-rated radio shows migrated to video. But times were changing, and radio took advantage of several fortuitous developments to once again re-invent itself.

First came the transistor, which permitted radios to become smaller, more portable, and even more reliable. People no longer needed the big tube-type radios (much as we all love them!) and a tether to a 110-volt power supply. A radio could fit into a shirt pocket and be taken far from AC power. America had become a very mobile society and loved to take its entertainment wherever it went. Radio was perfect for that!

Secondly, a new kind of music emerged in the 1950s. It appealed especially to young people who always seemed to prefer music their parents hated. Elvis and other non-conformist stars ushered in a whole new type of entertainment. And it came just in the nick of time for a medium that needed that shot in the arm. But it took one more chance discovery to seal the deal.

A radio station owner in the Midwest named Todd Storz happened to be in a diner one day and noticed people feeding coins into the jukebox. They tended to play their favorite songs over and over. He went back to his station and almost immediately created top-forty radio. Other “formats” followed, offering listeners a variety of music, news and other types of programming, carefully targeted to specific audience segments. Listeners loved it and so did advertisers who wanted to hone their messages to particular age or lifestyle groups. Again, radio was forced to innovate and it flourished because of it.

Today, radio broadcasters face even more daunting competition for the ears of listeners, from satellite radio, Internet streaming, iPods, and all the other audio choices people now have at their fingertips. The marketplace is also confused by the introduction of digital signals (dubbed “HD radio”) being transmitted by current radio stations, a change that will create up to three times as many stations from which listeners may choose on the current AM and FM bands. In an effort to cut expense, many station owners have taken away the strong, local personalities with whom listeners identified. Instead, syndicated shows are piped in from distant locations. The programming is canned and, to some ears, too repetitious and bland.

Will the medium once again re-invent itself or will it fade into the ether like a distant, weak signal?

As they say, stay tuned!

MEETING TIMES

We meet nearly every Saturday of the month at 09:00 at the Alabama Power Building on Parkway East (aka Centerpoint Parkway) in Huffman. The organization's space is accessed from the rear of the building, so park around the back (by means of Huffman Road, which runs parallel to the Parkway). Entry is via the door on the right.

Come to the Monday Night Meetings, TOO, on the 4th Monday of the month at 7 PM!

FREE ELECTRONICS CLASSES

The first Saturday of the month, there are electronics classes free to members. Topics include test equipment, Resistors and Capacitance testing, Inductors and coil winding, to name only a few subjects!

We hope to see you there!



WE ARE STILL ACCEPTING DUES!

Membership dues are \$25 a year, payable beginning in January. If you have questions about the dues, you can contact Julian at 205-879-3619.

Dues can be mailed to AHRS @ P.O. Box 130307, Birmingham AL 35213.

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