



The Alabama Historical Radio Society Newsletter

March 2008



A NOTE FROM THE PREZ

February was an especially busy month, beginning with Robert's new class on the 2nd. Johnny Outland and I made the trip to the Orlando Hamfest on the weekend of the 9th and got to visit with member Paul Rinehart, who now lives near Orlando.

Dee and I spoke to the Young Men's Business Club (they aren't that young anymore) on the 11th at the Redmont Hotel and to the New Horizons club at UAB on the 28th. We are getting the AHRS name out to more interested groups. We have one program scheduled in March and one in April.

The 13th we had a group of 16 mostly NE Alabama hams to tour the AHRS and APCO museums. They really seemed to enjoy the visit. We then had to move all the radios out of the museum on the 14th so APCO could re-carpet the area where we have our cabinets.

Our 99-year-old member Claude Gray has had to move to a nursing home. When I get an address, I will put it in the newsletter so we can send him a card or letter.

I have included an article from another of our members, David Black. Many of you will remember David as the weatherman on Channel 13 several years ago. David shares with us how he got his start in radio and TV. I will continue these articles, but, please, everyone needs to contribute.

That's all for now, Robert has his class scheduled for the third Saturday. We still have our regular Saturday work/play sessions every week....come join the fun.

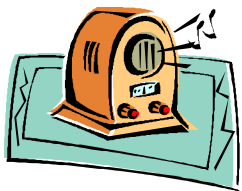
Don't forget to send your dues to Julian.

Dave

Editor's Note:

I am again including the reminder about Pete Sides' party on April 12, just in case you missed it in last month's newsletter.

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!

On a warm spring day, to be exact April 26, in the year 1936, the little town of Waters, Arkansas did the unthinkable. It happened a few miles to the East on the steps of the capitol in Little Rock. Governor Janius Marion Futrell made it official--the Town of Waters would from this day forward be known as Pine Ridge.

Among the Attendees at the festivities were Chester Lauch, and Norris Goff, stars of the show *Lum and Abner*. Also attending was Dick Huddleston, owner of a local grocery store in Waters, who was the inspiration for the character by the same name in the show.

If you would like to hear the festivities, you can go to the following site:

<http://www.archive.org/details/LAPREAS1>

Scroll down to near the bottom of the page and find the show title that begins with LA360426. The MP3 file is about 14 minutes long and ends with the playing of the theme song for *Lum and Abner* by the Little Rock High School Band. By the way, the internet archives web site is one of the best sites on the internet for listening to or downloading old shows. Their address is:

<http://www.archive.org/index.php>

Just type in the name of the show you are looking for in the search box near the top of the page.

Well, that's all for now, I've got to get back to my MP3 player and see if Squire Skimp is cheating Lum and Abner out of their life savings.

Dee Haynes

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Thanks to David Black for this month's guest article:

The Alamobile by David Black

Anyone in their right thinking mind would have decided it was way too cold to stand in the discount store parking lot, while a blast of Arctic air chilled my Texas hometown. But I was mesmerized. And though I was shivering, too, on that late afternoon about forty years ago, it was worth it.

Others, anxious to go into the store where it was warm, probably wondered what had a boy of around ten so fascinated that he would remain alone out in the cold for so long. But they didn't understand. I was getting to watch the coolest thing in the world. I was standing next to the Alamobile in the Alamo City.

So, while my parents and others hustled inside the Gulf Mart store on Broadway in San Antonio, I remained in the parking lot, watching intently, as the DJ inside the large camping trailer that had been converted into a mobile on-air studio, did his show on "the big 86." He talked. He laughed. He answered the request lines. He played Top 40 records, commercials and jingles for KONO, one of San Antonio's top rated radio stations. The Alamobile, hauled out on location as part of station sales events and other promotions, was on the air. It was a great chance for listeners to come see their favorite DJs at work.

Through the Alamobile's floor-to-ceiling windows surrounding the front end of the trailer, I could see almost everything that went on. I watched closely every second ... as the DJ cued records on the turntables built in to the cabinet that surrounded him as he sat ... as he loaded "carts" in the triple stack of cart machines ... and as he "ran the board," a Gates Yard broadcast console full of rotary pots, left/right throw switches and a single VU meter on the right.

Every time the DJ opened his microphone and talked, every time he threw a switch that caused some type of sound to generate, I knew how badly I wanted to be in radio. Even though my mother—who sold advertising for the station and had arranged for the Alamobile's presence that weekend—could have pressured me to go into broadcasting, she did nothing of the sort, and neither did my father (who, by the way, met my mother while working at WBAP radio in Fort Worth). All the fascination and eagerness to learn more was mine.

Those years were such a completely different time in broadcasting that it's hard now to imagine they even existed. AM radio was king. Just like WVOK in Birmingham from decades past, residents in my hometown regularly tuned in "the big 86" featuring KONO's on-air personalities, famous throughout the city, or to arch ratings rival, KTSA, a 5,000 watt Top 40 station at 550 KHz.

The 60's were still the days of enthusiastic audiences eager to hear the music and the people playing it. When the DJ announced that requests were being taken, all of the station's multiple request lines began flashing. Calls to the DJs came in almost constantly throughout the day, putting me in awe of the people who ran the controls and made sound and music happen for who knows how many thousands of avid listeners.

In today's broadcasting world, they're called 'board ops.' They occasionally get to mention their names and perhaps the forecast or a pre-written promo line if the rigid format rules allow it. Some radio stations today don't even have board operators, but instead are run totally by computers.

But in the days of 'the big 86,' that didn't happen. Radio was hot. The on-air people were "jocks." They were personalities with personality. Each one brought his own unique style and antics to the air, sometimes with sound effects, and sometimes getting in trouble for going too far.

If you were a serious radio groupie, you knew not only the name of every DJ on the air, but also when their shift took place. I knew that and, thanks to my Mom's inside information, much more—like some of the jocks' real names and other tidbits about their lifestyles few others were privy to. There were people like Charlie Scott who was always saying something funny, or playing his signature soundtrack of crazy sound effects. Little did I realize at the time that Charlie Scott—whose real name was Steve Sellers—would play a key role in my future in broadcasting.

My mother's connections in the business came in handy. She made it possible for me to meet several of the DJs, and to even sit in during some of their shows, a risky venture, given management's strict orders against control room visitors. But I was as quiet as a church mouse and well behaved. And I'll never forget one late Saturday night when Mom sneaked me in to the KONO control room to spend time with Terry Lee, the night shift jock who said I was welcome to come down and watch him do his show.

The control room was so small and had so much equipment crammed inside that it could really only hold one person. In one of the most exciting nights of my life, Terry adjusted the microphone boom while he stood behind me, and let me sit down in THE DJ's chair. THE chair that all the other famous names sat in. THE chair from which I heard so many voices, jingles and music controlled. THE chair from which it all happened, and an entire city listened. Never mind that Terry had to stick a couple of telephone books in the chair so that the kid would be more level with the equipment.

In front of me lay the massive, sprawling ten channel Harris Executive console, full of switches, lights and buttons, large, round black pots and two big VU meters in the middle. "How about if you run the turntables for me?" Terry asked. I was almost speechless. On Terry's cue, I would flip the rocker switch that would start a turntable and bring a new song to the late night audience. Terry didn't know it at the time, but he was only pouring gasoline on my broadcast fire. I had to get in to the business.

My first job as a DJ came while living with my grandmother in Plainview, a small town in the Texas panhandle. The station manager agreed to hire me the day I turned 14 (but not a day sooner because of fear of getting into trouble over child labor laws). I spent the summer of 1971 working for KVOP-AM, "the big 1400," doing my own show and reading news and weather, and riding my bicycle back and forth to work. My hourly wage was \$1.65, and with no overhead whatsoever, I was "raking it in." But the truth was that I would have gladly paid them to let me work there.

In later years, I wound up getting hired as a DJ for KONO and its sister FM station, KITY. The control rooms for each station were in the same building, separated only by a hallway.

Since there was another DJ with the last name of Black already on KONO, I took my middle name, Roger, and made it my last name—David Rogers—when doing my AM shift, and used my real name when doing FM. I even managed to adapt fairly well to one significant technical challenge that always presented itself when I worked an air shift for either station. The Program/Audition switches on the two stations' broadcast consoles were reversed; to throw a channel into Program on KONO, the switch on the Gates Executive had to be thrown to the right, while the older RCA board in use on KITY required a left throw. Every shift was a challenge not to mess up switch throws—or my name.

The offer to do the afternoon drive shift and be Music Director for KITY was too much to turn down in the mid '70s. It came at a time when AM's dominance was sliding, giving way more and more to FM, the newer, hotter medium with its crystal clear stereo sound that was immune to the static crashes and noise on AM.

My boss at KITY, “Y-92,” was Steve Sellers, and during the time I worked with him, I found that he was every bit as much fun to be around in person then, as he was to listen to as Charlie Scott on the air many years earlier. My tenure at KITY taught me that you can have some jobs that are almost more fun than the law should allow. Steve and I remain in touch today—he still works as a DJ in San Antonio, on of all stations, KONO-FM, which is now owned by Cox Radio.

I’ve worked in radio in other markets since then, but none have ever been as much downright fun as those days in Texas. I feel blessed to have been able to work in radio in an era when it was so fundamentally different. I marvel that so many of the people listening today have little idea of how fun and creative radio used to be.

As a kid of around nine or ten, I would play DJ on the home stereo, spinning 45 rpm records on a single Garrard turntable and recording myself on a Wollensak reel-to-reel recorder. I even pretended I had the overnight shift sometimes, recording a show from midnight until 6 a.m. Without a second turntable to mix with, I became pretty good at the gift of gab, filling the time needed to load a second record and get it playing.

As a teenager, I purchased two Gates CB-77 turntables and wired them into a Bozak CMA-10-2-D mixer. Since a real radio mixer was out of my budget, I bought two VU meters from Radio Shack and wired them in-line. With the ability to mix and cue separate audio sources plus a microphone, I took full advantage of the setup, adding in two Sony TC-355 reel-to-reel tape recorders. With hundreds of 45 rpm records already in my music arsenal, all I would have needed to be on the air would have been a license and a transmitter.

By my freshman year in high school, I had landed a gig as an announcer at KQXT, San Antonio’s top rated FM station, playing ‘beautiful music’ (or elevator music, as most people called it). KQXT was semi-automated, using three Scully reel-to-reel playback decks. ‘Announcer’ was the correct term here — there was no opportunity whatsoever to chat or show personality on the air, but the experience helped me, nonetheless. I learned a lot more about the industry, and got a great education in older music and popular show tunes...after all, how many high school kids were familiar with artists like Mantovani, George Shearing or The Three Suns or tunes like ‘I Can’t Give You Anything But Love’ or ‘Some Enchanted Evening?’

How much of a broadcast nut are you dealing with here? Up until only a couple of years ago, I had a Harris Executive console — yep, just like the one I sat before at KONO — wired to my personal home stereo system. Today, I mix using an AudioArts R5 radio console. And I still have all my records.

This would seem to prove that you can take someone out of radio, but you can’t necessarily take radio out of them.

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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