UTAH BROADCASTING HISTORY

Heber J. Grant on KZN radio, 1922

In this wide-angled view of Utah broadcast history we have tried to describe the reasons broadcasting developed as it did, and to identify Utah broadcasting’s early pioneers and contributors.

The amateur efforts of wireless telegraphers - mostly teenaged boys - in the early 1900s gave rise to national and local radio clubs throughout America. In fact, the first local wireless radio club in the United States appeared in Utah - the Radio Club of Salt Lake, founded in September 1909. Utah youngsters were among the first experimental broadcasters in the nation to transmit voice and music over the air waves as technology made radio voice transmission possible.

Historians often point to KZN and KDYL, both of which went on the air in May 1922, as the only two pioneer Utah radio stations, when, in fact, there were eleven. KDZL in Ogden, licensed to Rocky Mountain Radio Corporation, and KDYV in Salt Lake City, licensed to John N. Cope and Lionel Cornwall, and broadcasting from Cope’s parents’ home at 1138 Michigan Avenue, both began broadcasting within a month of the original two. By February 1923 these stations were joined by Ogden’s KFCP and Salt Lake’s KFLH. During the next two years, KFUR and KFWA appeared in Ogden. KFXD went on the air in Logan, and KFOO, KFUT, and KFPH could be found in Salt Lake.

Only KZN (now KSL), KDYL (later KCPX), and KFUR (now KLO) survived the 1920s. All eleven stations were historically important, but these three stations provide the clearest explanation of why some stations survived while others disappeared. The survival of KZN, KDYL, and KLO
was a function of the economic and promotional backing each had at various stages in their development from three Utah newspapers: the Deseret News, the Salt Lake Telegram, and the Standard-Examiner, respectively. Initially, the newspaper owners saw the fledgling stations as little more than devices to promote subscriptions through crystal-set give-aways, but the evolution of broadcasting as a viable financial enterprise of its own led to a genuine symbiotic relationship.

While there were many amateurs who tinkered with radio equipment, one particularly bright and highly motivated young man stood above his peers. Ira J. Kaar, born in 1902, obtained his first regular amateur radio license in 1916 and a Special-Land-Station license, 6ZA, in 1919. Also in 1919, he constructed what became KFOO, the nation’s first radio station licensed to an educational institution - the Latter Day Saints University. Kaar built KDYL for A.L. Fish and the Salt Lake Telegram in 1922, and helped H. Carter Wilson, Telegraph Department manager for the Deseret News, solve technical problems at KZN. In 1923, Kaar erected KFUT (later KUTE) at the University of Utah while pursuing his electrical engineering degree. After leaving his mark on more early radio stations than any other individual in the state, Kaar went on in 1925 to begin an illustrious thirty-one-year career at General Electric.

Commercial radio’s feasibility was demonstrated by Utah’s second wave of broadcast engineers, who began their work in the 1920s. Eugene Pack, Harold C. Mailander, Everett J. (Hap) Seeley, John Baldwin, and W. D’Orr Cozzens are perhaps best representative of this group. Mailander, Seeley, and Baldwin followed Ira Kaar at KDYL. Cozzens succeeded in the construction of KSUB in Cedar City and KALL in Salt Lake City, among other stations. Pack engineered KSL through several power increases, including its move to 50 kw in 1932, and Baldwin constructed Utah’s first television station (KDYL, now KTVX, Channel 4) in 1948. With others, this collective of broadcast engineers led Utah broadcasting from its amateur beginnings into its commercial era.

The first two great Utah commercial broadcast entrepreneurs were Sidney S. Fox and Earl J. Glade. Fox was as rough and unpolished as Glade was smooth and sophisticated, but both understood the essentials of financial investment and exhibited a keen business sense. Fox, a truly flamboyant character, made his way to Salt Lake City from St. Louis via Denver, where he generated travel money by selling business cards to prostitutes in that city’s red-light district. Fox took over KDYL in 1926, and later invested in the construction of KDYL-FM and KDYL-TV. He eventually sold all three stations in 1953 to Time-Life.
Corporation for $2.1 million. Glade joined KFPT (soon to be KSL) in November 1924, a few months after John N. Cope took over the station from the Deseret News Company and the LDS Church. During Glade’s first year, control of KSL was taken by the Radio Service Corporation of Utah, another LDS Church-owned company. Glade guided KSL’s operations for the next fourteen years, until Ivor Sharp arrived to manage the station in the late 1930s. Glade stepped aside as station manager but remained on the board of directors, and Sharp guided KSL through the next two decades.

Many talented performers began their careers in early radio with Glade’s help. Irma Bitner and Josephine Goff performed and directed at KSL, and Louise Hill Howe directed the "KSL Players." Alvin and Lena Marie Pack benefited from Glade’s guidance. Beginning in the early 1930s, this husband and wife team added zestful advertising promotions to their live programs. Alvin Pack later managed KDYL and KALL.

In the early 1930s, A.L. (Abe) Glasmann, owner of the Ogden Standard Examiner, took over the faltering KFUR and changed the call letters to KLO. Glasmann formed the Interstate Broadcasting Corporation as parent to KLO in 1934 and hired his son-in-law George Hatch to manage the Ogden station in 1941.

Glasmann’s establishment of George Hatch in broadcasting is typical of the histories of several Utah pioneer broadcasting families. In Price, KEUB - Eastern Utah Broadcasting - opened in 1936. It was owned by Sam Weiss and funded by his father’s Uintah Basin hide and pelt business. Frank Carman was the engineer at the station. Jack Richards became a principal owner of KEUB in 1950 and the call letters changed to KOAL. Richard’s son, Tom Anderson, now owns and operated KOAL. Cache Valley Broadcasting Company put Logan’s KYNU on the air in 1938, and Herschel Bullen and his son Reed joined with Dan B. Shields, a Salt Lake attorney, in 1944 to purchase the station. Reed Bullen and his son Jonathan are still involved in Logan radio broadcasting but have sold their cable television holdings. Howard Johnson - engineer at many Utah stations and originator of KNAK, Utah’s first rock n’ roll station - began his Utah radio career in the early 1940s. He later joined forces with his sons, and the Johnson family continues to own and operate KSUB in Cedar City. In Provo, Alma Van Wagenen established his sons, Frank A. and Harold E., in broadcasting. They put KCSU on the air in 1946. Cutler R. Miller, a respected Utah engineer, helped the Van Wagenens technically with KCSU. In Richfield, KSVC - "The Voice of Scenic Utah" - began broadcasting in September 1947 under the
guidance of William L. Warner, Sr., with the operational assistance of his son William. Brigham City’s first radio station, KBUH, was started in 1947 by retired contractor Samuel L. Stephens and his son Samuel, Jr. Also in 1947, Ogden’s KVOG was put on the air by Arch Webb, who went on to own an Ogden TV station. Webb’s sons, John and Richard, now own Ogden’s KLO/KXAN stations. These are representative of the numerous Utah families who became early participants in the emerging broadcasting industry.

In addition to family operations, radio’s commercial potential was demonstrated by other pioneers as well. In southern Utah, Leland Perry and Harold Johnson founded KSUB in Cedar City in 1937 with studios located in the Escalante Hotel. Arch L. Madsen, who would later achieve worldwide stature as Bonneville International Corporation’s visionary leader, was KSUB’s first station manager. Madsen also contributed to broadcasting in Utah’s central region. In 1939 he became the first manager of KOVO, Clifton A. Tolboe’s Provo station. Madsen also helped form the Intermountain Network, which joined KOVO with KALL, KLO, and KOAL. Frank Carman put Salt Lake’s KUTA on the air in 1938. In 1945 George Hatch and Robert and Abrelia Hinckley put KALL on the air. In Vernal, James C. Wallentine put KJAM on the air in 1947. He had to put the complete KJAM operations in the Hotel Vernal because land surrounding the city of Vernal was unavailable and too expensive due to oil speculation.

Recognizing a market interdependence, these Utah broadcast pioneers and others founded the Utah Broadcasters Association in 1952. The UBA has been a unifying force helping to shape the Utah broadcasting industry for more than four decades.

The 1980s saw a surge in corporate broadcast ownership in Utah. Station transfer regulations were relaxed and Ogden and Provo became part of the Salt Lake market. This allowed FM stations licensed in Ogden and Provo to put their transmitters in the Oquirrh Mountains and thus reach the Salt Lake radio audience. The Salt Lake market became attractive to investors and to large corporations, which brought in corporate management and programming teams and infused cash into the market. As a result, the Salt Lake market became among the most competitive in the country, with more than forty radio stations. To try to differentiate themselves from the Ogden and Provo stations, the Salt Lake County broadcasters formed the Salt Lake Market Radio Broadcasters Association, which caused industry tension until the late 1980s when the Association was changed to the Salt Lake Area
Broadcasters Association and was then opened to all Wasatch Front broadcasters.

Also in the 1980s, several stations became the property of non-Utah corporations and owners. The most significant was Frank Carman’s sale of KLUB/KISN to Sun Mountain Broadcasting. In 1988 Citadel Communications Corporation bought KCNR and KLZX. The KMGR stations were purchased in 1988 and later sold again. KKAT was sold to the Brown Broadcasting Group in 1986. Using a modern country-and-western format, Brown made KKAT number one in the Salt Lake market and then sold it to a San Francisco financial group for $12 million, the highest price ever paid for a Utah radio station.

Nevertheless, many stations stayed in Utah hands or were acquired by Utahns in the 1980s. George Hatch’s Communication Investment Corporation and the LDS Church’s Bonneville International Corporation continued as Utah corporate owners of KALL and KSL, respectively. David Williams, owner of General Telephone, a Utah paging company, purchased KFAM. The KCPX stations were purchased in 1983 by Salt Lake developer John Price. Simmons Family, Inc., under the direction of banker Roy Simmons, purchased several Utah stations, including Salt Lake’s KDYL/KSFI and KDXU/KZEZ in St. George.

The 1990s began as a shake-out period for Utah broadcasting. The FCC changed its long-held regulations against the ownership of more than one radio station of a kind in the same market. Under the new ruling, the George Hatch stations, the John Price stations, and several others were acquired by outside corporate owners. When Hatch sold 80 percent ownership of KUTV television in 1993, it represented a significant erosion of the long-standing local ownership of Utah broadcasting stations.

Cable television in Utah has expanded since the 1980s, largely under the leadership of Telecommunications, Inc., the largest operator of cable systems in the world. Independent television stations were also started during this period. Long-time Salt Lake City television stations KTVX, KSL, and KUTV were joined by KSTU and KXIV. Ogden’s KOOG and Park City’s low-power Channel 45 also went on the air in the 1980s. In radio, public stations KBYU-FM in Provo, KUER-FM and KRCL-FM in Salt Lake, KUSU-FM in Logan, KPCW in Park City, and later KCPW in Salt Lake City provided viable alternatives to commercial radio. In television, KUED at the University of Utah and KBYU at Brigham Young University achieved national recognition as public stations. The
University of Utah was awarded a license for an unprecedented second VHF channel in order to offer education programs on KULC, Channel 9 - "Utah’s Learning Channel." In the early 1990s, the new Dolores Dore Eccles Broadcast Center at the University of Utah brought KUER-FM, KULC-TV, KUED-TV, and the Utah Education Network together in a single location. In 1990, Philo T. Farnsworth, the native Utahn who invented an all-electronic television system in the 1930s was given immortality when his bronze image was added to the historic figures in Statuary Hall at the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C.

From its very humble beginnings in the basements and attics of Utah’s amateur operators, radio and television have prospered throughout the state. The engineers who gave Utah broadcasting its start in the 1920s were replaced in the decades to follow by savvy radio pioneers and business entrepreneurs. In more recent years, corporations from beyond Utah’s borders have been actively charting the course of broadcasting’s future.

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Article is from the Utah History Encyclopedia. Powell, Allan Kent, ed. Salt Lake City, Utah : The University of Utah Press, 1994

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