

The Smaller Picture: Warren P. Williamson Jr. and the Age of Broadcasting in
Youngstown, Ohio, from Wireless Radio to Television

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ABSTRACT

In the first half of the Twentieth Century, in Youngstown, Ohio, competition between two local media moguls – a radio broadcaster and a newspaper publisher – resulted in the establishment of two major television operations almost simultaneously. This thesis will illustrate how that development mirrored what was happening in broadcasting on the national scene; in fact, the establishment of broadcast stations in Youngstown and other medium- and small-sized cities became the foundation on which a massive industry was built.

Only one broadcaster was first in the Mahoning Valley, however, and that was Warren P. Williamson Jr. Born in Youngstown in 1900, he developed a fascination with the wireless telegraph as a youth that eventually led him into the radio and television business. In turning his hobby into a career, he pioneered in an unknown field and earned a place in broadcasting history.

Using a vast archive of personal and corporate records preserved by Williamson himself over 75 years, this project illustrates how his accomplishments were influenced by events happening nationally in the new industry, including technological advances, changing government regulations, and audience demand. The thesis explores Williamson's motivation for expanding into television and his strategy for making that plan work. Finally, the climax of this thesis will be the critical period in the early 1950s when WKBN aired the first local television broadcast. and introduced the community to the smaller picture.

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INTRODUCTION

Youngstown residents lucky enough to be in front of one of those new-fangled television sets on January 11, 1953, witnessed an unprecedented event: the first televised picture ever broadcast from a station in Youngstown, Ohio. The station was WKBN, owned by local businessman Warren Pyatt Williamson Jr. Residents were familiar with Williamson, whose AM radio station dominated the Youngstown market since he founded it in 1926, but television was yet a novelty.

That first television broadcast was much simpler than what people in Youngstown had been listening to on the radio airwaves; it was also clearer than what they had seen – through snowy reception – on Pittsburgh and Cleveland television channels.¹ The WKBN picture on UHF Channel 27 in January of 1953 was a colorless test pattern – no sound, no people, and no moving pictures (figure 1). Yet the black and white slate marked a victory for Williamson, and the beginning of an era in Youngstown that was already underway in other cities in the United States. WKBN-TV was the first UHF station in Ohio, and only the sixth in the nation.² The smaller picture had finally reached Youngstown, and the people there officially became part of the massive group known as the television viewing audience.

¹ Sara Cart, Betty Jagnow, and Robert McFerren. *These Hundred Years: A Chronicle of the Twentieth Century As Recorded in the Pages of the Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown: The Vindicator Printing Company, 2000), 62.

² *The Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio), January 12, 1953.

At the advent of the broadcasting boom in the 20th century, those who took the lead found themselves in a position to utilize the inventions of the previous century. Samuel F.B. Morse was the original pioneer of the communications industry with his invention of the telegraph in 1835. That milestone was followed by decades of trial and error as inventors attempted to improve the system of dots and dashes – to transmit music, sounds, and the human voice not only through telephone lines, but through the “ether.” In the late 1800’s Guglielmo Marconi emerged as the victor when he demonstrated a telegraph that used no wires to transmit a audio signal. The century would change before voices were heard via the wireless, but that happened in 1906, and modern radio was born.³

Inventors, businessmen, and U.S. military leaders had varying opinions of how the new medium should be used, and commercial broadcasting was not everyone’s first choice. Warren Williamson was a small boy when these early debates were played out, but by the time he was old enough to build his own wireless, the industry was taking off at a rapid pace. Amateur operators – or hams – were the first to demonstrate the potential of radio, while the federal government and large corporate interests were struggling to catch up.

Large corporations also became interested in radio. For the most part these companies had ties to the telecommunications or electronics industries. To AT&T, General Electric (GE), Westinghouse, and Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company., the patents for inventions connected to radio, and later television, were like gold, and the competition to obtain them was fierce. To gain control of the patents, GE acquired

³ Erik Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 9.

Marconi and formed the Radio Corporation of America (RCA). By 1920, RCA was a major player in the new industry. To stop the costly feuding, RCA, GE, and AT&T agreed to a cross-licensing pact that enabled them to share the patents they controlled, and, after a time, competitor Westinghouse joined them. The patent agreement enabled each corporation to develop its own radio stations. In some cases, the corporation operated several stations, which became known as chain broadcasting, a precursor to networks. By 1926, RCA did form a network – the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) – which developed and supplied programming to smaller stations via telephone lines. NBC had so much success that it operated two networks called Red and Blue, respectively. The Columbia Broadcasting System, born in 1926 of a merger of two weaker entities, was an underdog, but shrewd decisions by leader Williams S. Paley and aggressive programming soon had CBS neck-and-neck with NBC. It was a competition that lasted for decades – well into the television era.⁴

Early broadcasting was a time of limited or nonexistent government regulations, making it an exciting place for amateur broadcasters, such as Williamson, to be. At first, radio fell under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Commerce, but the industry was soon large enough for its own governing body. The Federal Radio Commission was formed in 1927, and was replaced by the Federal Communications Commission in 1934.

The technology was changing daily, and while the government struggled to control the growth of radio, the amateur wireless operators found it thrilling and challenging to keep up with. Across the United States during the 1920s, many of them turned the hobby into a business, as they discovered the potential for commercial

⁴ Robert L. Hilliard and Michael C. Keith, *The Broadcast Century: A Century of American Broadcasting* (Boston: Focal Press, 1997), 26.

broadcasting on the airwaves; such a phenomenon as radio had to be worth something. Would they be able to find out just how much it was worth before the government stepped in and imposed rules and regulations?

Warren P. Williamson Jr. was one of the amateurs asking that question in 1925, even as his own father asked him when he was going to put his wireless “plaything” away and find a legitimate livelihood.⁵ Like many hams, he pursued the hobby and the dream as far as it would go, and in doing so, pioneered an industry. His role – along with others like him in other cities – is an important one. While the big corporations fought over patents, the small broadcasters had to deal with limited funds, untrustworthy investors, building their own equipment, a lack of programming, and navigating new federal regulations. The task must have seemed impossible, but Williamson was among the small broadcasters that succeeded. They built stations, small fortunes, and in the end, they built an industry.

Since the first radio broadcasts on the Westinghouse-owned KDKA in 1920, the major broadcasting companies of CBS, Dumont, and NBC had established a chain of networks linking U.S. cities via the airwaves and attracting listeners and major advertisers alike.⁶ Radio programming was in demand, quickly produced, and aired on affiliate and owned-and-operated stations. The networks enabled the public in Schenectady, N.Y., Cleveland, or Chicago to hear “Your Hit Parade,” “Texaco Star Theater,” or NBC’s “National Barn Dance.”⁷ As the decade of the 1950s approached, the networks were working on plans to do the same for television.

The 1950s are labeled “The Golden Age” for television, and what was

⁵ Warren P. “Bud” Williamson III, e-mail correspondence with Tricia Perry, June 23, 2008.

⁶ Hilliard and Keith, 32.

⁷ Ibid., 75.

happening nationally certainly earned that description. Television needed programming, too, and at first, much of it was live. Once Youngstown stations WKBN and WFMJ began broadcasting, they produced a majority of the programming locally. For those who worked in the business in the early 1950s, those days when equipment was newly invented, talent performed live, and productions were unpredictable and could never be duplicated. Jasper Grier, who worked as a director for WFMJ radio and television, recalled, “That was the early days when no one knew what they were doing. We did 50 hours of [live] programming a week [including] variety shows in the afternoon and evening.”⁸ The uncertainty of it all – combined with the conviction that they were part of something great – made for heady work. That period was brief, however, due to the influence of Hollywood.

Executives in Hollywood watched the development of television throughout the 1940s with dread. The number of “television cities” (those cities with one or more operating stations) was relatively low, but experimental programming aired between 1948 and 1952 hinted at the television boom on the horizon. In 1951 almost all television cities reported a 20 to 40 percent drop in movie attendance, while movie attendance in cities without television remained the same. Restaurants, clubs, sporting arenas and radio stations also felt the impact of television in those cities.⁹ At the same time, advertisers were looking at the new medium with interest, and predicting correctly that television was the future. When the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the big movie studios to relinquish control of their theaters, Hollywood artists

⁸ Jasper Grier, interview by Charles Kelso, 2006, DVD, Part 2, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, Youngstown, Ohio.

⁹ Barnouw, 114.

and executives turned to television as well.¹⁰

The biggest impact for the networks and the local broadcasters, once Hollywood got involved, was that film was introduced as a way to record programming to be aired later. At first, television followed radio's lead by airing news, variety shows, and dramatic programs live or as they happened. But in 1951, when Lucille Ball and husband Desi Arnaz began producing the series *I Love Lucy* on film, it changed television production formats forever. The show was an enormous hit, and with television stations and markets starting up all over the world, television producers saw the value in film production over the "dead-end risks" of live production.¹¹ WFMJ's Grier remarked about the change that came with pre-recorded television programs. "Some of the fun went out of it. [Producing programming was] not so challenging anymore," Grier said.¹² Film removed the live element, and some of the intensity, that made early television production so fulfilling for television employees on the local level.

To fully understand how the broadcasting industry developed so rapidly into a massive commercial system, the role of the local broadcasters must be studied. From the pre-radio days of the wireless telegraph to the controversial birth of UHF television, the local pioneers made an impact on the broadcasting world. During the 1940s, when plans for television gained momentum, smaller radio stations such as WKBN and WFMJ made their mark by investing in the new medium and joining the big chains or networks. It was in the best interest of the networks to reach those communities large enough – and solvent enough – to make television happen, and

¹⁰Ibid., 116.

¹¹ Ibid., 134.

¹² Grier, 2006.

they did that through the affiliates. In 1951, Youngstown was the 57th largest city in the United States, with a population of just under 170,000.¹³

Warren P. Williamson Jr. and William F. Maag, the owner of *The Youngstown Vindicator* daily newspaper and WFMJ-AM radio, were both determined that Youngstown was a city worthy of television – a city that could support not one station but three (figures 2 & 3). Although each approached broadcasting from very different career backgrounds and economic bases, they put equal effort into bringing television to their industrial Midwestern city. This project will cover the history of both efforts and how the success of each contributed to the establishment of the industry; but it is Williamson’s story – with its beginnings in a boyhood hobby and conclusion in a prosperous career – that will be the focus.

The story of Warren P. Williamson Jr. and his vision is special to the Mahoning Valley, but it is not unique to the era. Like many who experimented with broadcasting in the early 20th century, his life and work encompassed the birth of the wireless phenomenon, the rapid growth of the radio industry, and the advent of television. Many of the smaller markets had someone like Williamson who led the way: Cincinnati had Powell Crosley, Louisville, Kentucky, had the Bingham family, and Seattle had Dorothy Bullitt, to name just a few.¹⁴ Williamson’s commitment to bringing a broadcasting station of quality to Youngstown was solidified in 1926, when WKBN-AM went on the air. Not once in the next seven decades did he default on that commitment. As the power increased for his radio station, his vision for WKBN expanded – a vision that wisely recognized television as the next invention to

¹³ Hilliard and Keith, 61.

¹⁴ Gary Hanson, e-mail correspondence with Tricia Perry, May 12, 2008.

become an integral part of American life.

Several factors were in place that made Youngstown ripe for television. In the 1940s, the city, together with its surrounding suburbs, was the third largest metropolitan area in Ohio.¹⁵ Despite the hardships of the Depression and international conflict, Youngstown was a city that was finding ways to grow and break ground. In January of 1940, the first federal housing project in the country was completed on West Federal Street (now Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard). Westlake Terrace Gardens offered low-income housing to tenants who paid up to \$22.50 a month.¹⁶

Also by 1940, Youngstown's finest were leading the nation in safety equipment. The city's police and fire departments were among the first in the United States to be equipped with radios in every vehicle. The communications equipment was available largely due to the pro bono efforts of Warren P. Williamson Jr. He and his engineers built the system at the request of Police Chief Paul Lyden.¹⁷

When World War II began, Youngstown experienced more growth. The Mahoning Valley was prepared to step up efforts to produce steel for the war. A relatively new continuous-strip mill and cold-metal rolling process at the Youngstown Sheet & Tube Co. aided these efforts.¹⁸ At Youngstown College, enrollment stood at roughly 1,700 in the early 1940s. The school gained accreditation in the mid-1940s, adding an engineering program to the curriculum. The GI Bill enabled returning veterans to attend college for free and further boosted enrollment to 3,500 students by

¹⁵ Cart, Jagnow, and McFerren, 47.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Warren P. Williamson Jr., interview by David Allen, August 24, 1991, transcript, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, Youngstown, Ohio, 42.

¹⁸ Cart, Jagnow, and McFerren, 47.

1946.¹⁹

Finally, the war had a profound effect on the way news was reported and received by the public. Accustomed to the comprehensive news coverage from the warfront, people wanted more detailed reports on other issues as well, and they wanted them fast. Radio would always be faster than newspaper in getting updates to the public. Those in the print and broadcast news industries accepted that, and in fact embraced it.²⁰

As the heads of the two most powerful media outlets in Youngstown in the 1940s, Williamson and Maag recognized these factors as evidence that the city was ready for television. They also saw themselves as the leaders who would make television happen. Once both men decided (nearly simultaneously) to pursue television, they found themselves on a course – and on a mission – that business leaders in other cities in the United States had already chosen to pursue.²¹ Histories of those small-market stations like WKBN are scarce, however. While the stories behind the development of the major television networks in New York have been documented many times over, only the KDKA-TV story has generated a book devoted to the history of a (relatively) smaller broadcasting operation.²² Lynn Boyd Hinds' volume *Broadcasting the Local News: The Early Years of Pittsburgh's KDKA-TV* is a detailed account of that station's early efforts at televised news coverage (KDKA radio had been on the air since 1920). The radio and television

¹⁹ Ibid., 51.

²⁰ Cart, Jagnow, and McFerren, 50.

²¹ Gary R. Edgerton and Peter C. Rollins, eds., *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001) , xi.

²² Lynn Boyd Hinds. *Broadcasting the Local News; The Early Years of Pittsburgh's KDKA-TV* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), xii.

news powerhouse that developed in Pittsburgh is comparable to that of WKBN Broadcasting, but Hinds' book is valuable to the WKBN story primarily for context.

In many ways, the beginnings of KDKA radio in Pittsburgh in 1920, and WKBN-AM in 1926, are similar. By 1919, Westinghouse engineer Dr. Frank Conrad had developed experimental radio station 8XK in Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Pittsburgh. He was broadcasting a few hours each day by filling airtime with commentary he provided himself and music from phonograph records. The programming was popular enough with the public to attract the interest of a department store which ran advertising "spots" on air for radio sets costing \$10 each.²³ The idea emerged that establishing a broadcast station could stimulate merchandise sales, and KDKA-AM was built on that revenue. Six years later and 65 miles away, Warren P. Williamson Jr. and his then business partner established a radio station for much the same reason -- to promote their radio service business in Youngstown.

Williamson's WKBN went on the air in 1926, at a time when radio was loosely controlled by the government and still securing its place in the popular culture with hit-and-miss broadcasts of chatter and music.²⁴ It was an outlet that required a set of rules and regulations, but it also needed people like Williamson who spent time, money and effort to develop programming that served the community – to go beyond the noise and meet the needs of the listening audience.

KDKA and WKBN also shared similar stories of first broadcasts. The election of November 2, 1920, has been dubbed KDKA's official first broadcast. In

²³ Ibid., 2.

²⁴ Ibid, xi.

those early days, news on the airwaves was still a fresh concept. Election results came from the print media, which already had established relationships with the newswire services. Reporters at the *Pittsburgh Press* relayed the results of the Harding-Cox presidential election via telephone to KDKA.²⁵ Likewise, the second broadcast on WKBN radio in November 1926 involved the phoning of election results from *The Youngstown Vindicator* to WKBN, then located in Williamson's home. The WKBN and KDKA stories are just two examples of what must be countless untold tales of broadcast pioneering. To preserve them is to prove that the pioneers were earning the title by figuring out how to navigate new territory and make a living at it.

In the 1940s, the Maag and Williamson operations began to place large amounts of time and energy into planning for television, and both recognized the importance of being the first on the air with sound and pictures. This was a progressive point of view, since few in the decades before television could imagine that it would ever replace radio as a popular form of entertainment. Many leaders in the broadcast industry, including the owner of KDKA-TV's predecessor, WDTV, thought that television profits would mainly come from the sale of sets and equipment. Allen B. Dumont was an engineer who had developed the cathode-ray tube, an essential component in early televisions, in his basement and is credited with getting the first television set on the market.²⁶

DuMont's television station, WDTV, was the first to broadcast in Pittsburgh on January 11, 1949. DuMont never saw it as a moneymaker, however, saying,

²⁵ Ibid., 3.

²⁶ Ibid., 5.

“This is just a little experiment here in Pittsburgh. We aren’t here to make money. This is just an installation so we can sell some television sets.”²⁷ In 1955, DuMont sold his station for \$10 million to Westinghouse, and WDTV became KDKA-TV.²⁸

In Youngstown, Williamson and Maag were not as shortsighted as Dumont about the lucrative possibilities of broadcasting pictures. Both Youngstown men invested in radio when profits were at the highest. In 1939, the year Maag established WFMJ-AM, radio revenue from advertising sales reached \$170 million nationwide, an increase of \$150 million since 1920.²⁹ Instead of focusing on those profits, Williamson and Maag looked ahead, and took a risk with television when others were hesitating. They took the new medium seriously, and as a result, the course they shared in strategizing for television quickly became a heated race of tower construction and transmitter building in Youngstown. Ultimately, Maag would accept second place when WKBN’s Channel 27 successfully aired pictures and sound in January 1953, just a few days ahead of WFMJ’s Channel 73.

Williamson’s victory with television was perhaps sweeter because he did not have a powerful newspaper establishment behind him as Maag did. Williamson had built his broadcasting business out of nothing but an idea, and although he had the support of a wealthy family (Warren P. Williamson Sr. was a successful real estate developer in the area), WKBN suffered through many lean years before radio’s Golden Age brought profits in the 1930s. That Williamson Jr. was willing to stake that livelihood on television – a seemingly huge risk with an uncertain bottom line – says something about his pioneering drive and his entrepreneurial spirit.

²⁷ Ibid., 21.

²⁸ Ibid., 22.

²⁹ Ibid., 18.

While the hundreds of start-up stations across the country proved that many shared that spirit, the histories of those broadcasters are scarce. Early local broadcasts were often live and rarely recorded; station records, documents, and equipment were destroyed or discarded in the wake of new technology. Williamson was unique in that he saved nearly everything that crossed his desk and aired on his stations, both radio and television. In doing so he became an unofficial archivist for the history of broadcasting in the Mahoning Valley – a history that mirrors the national story of the broadcast industry.

By examining three pivotal eras in Williamson's life, this project will explore the ways in which his accomplishments locally were influenced by his position in a smaller metropolitan market, while also reflecting what was happening on the national broadcasting scene. The first chapter in the Williamson story will focus on the events that transpired in the first three decades of his life (1900-1929), which ultimately pushed him to build a broadcasting empire in Youngstown. Being one of the first in the United States to officially succeed in the field of radio and television broadcasting earned Williamson the status of pioneer, but he had been compiling his resume, so to speak, since childhood, when the wireless caught his attention and sparked his creativity and imagination. His determination to turn his youthful ventures in wireless radio into an overwhelmingly profitable livelihood is a fascinating story in itself and one that has become part of local lore; it was during Williamson's early years of struggle that his love for broadcasting became tightly entwined with a love for making money at it. By taking on partners, moving

locations, and working for little compensation at times, Williamson was able to expand WKBN-AM from 7 ½ to 5,000 watts of power in just a few years.

More power meant more audience, and more revenue. Those circumstances attracted outside interests looking to profit from WKBN's early success. The first chapter of this thesis will also focus on Williamson's early partners – among them, those who helped to grow the business, and one who nearly separated him from his “love.” As radio swept the nation, WKBN had become a dominant force in the local entertainment culture. Williamson felt he was a leader in the right business for him, at the right time, and he fought to stay there.

The second critical period in Williamson's career encompasses the years from 1929 to 1941. During that time span, despite being dominant in the Youngstown radio market, WKBN-AM 570 was never a full-time operation with regard to the hours spent filling airtime. At the genesis of WKBN-AM, Williamson entered into a license agreement with the U.S. Commerce Department (the Federal Communications Commission was not organized until 1934) that required WKBN to be off the air during the hours that a southern Ohio radio station was broadcasting on the 570 AM band. For the first few years of broadcasting, this was not a tremendous hardship, as programming was in short supply; but Williamson was soon dissatisfied with sharing his time. By the 1930s radio was experiencing the peak of its reign as a mass medium, and WKBN was more popular than ever. Williamson's competitive nature and desire to please his audience allowed for only one solution: to broadcast on the 570 band full-time. It would take 15 years, and several rounds with the Federal Communications Commission, before he won that struggle. By 1941, he amassed

enough resources to buy out the other station, and Youngstown listeners finally benefited from full-time programming on WKBN-AM 570.³⁰

In the context of the entire early history of WKBN Broadcasting Corporation, the shared-time story serves as a preview of what was to come a decade later: the race between the WKBN and WFMJ operations to bring television to Youngstown. That race – and Williamson’s determination to win it – is the focus of the third chapter in this thesis project.

By the 1940s, both Williamson and Maag were exploring the technology of television, and money was not an object for either party. The history of both operations will be included here, as both represent local developments in broadcasting; but the greater emphasis will be on Williamson’s role. As in the shared-time situation, Williamson spared no expense or effort to obtain his objective of being the first to broadcast television in Youngstown.

His determination paid off, with credit for the first successful signal (with picture and sound) going to WKBN-TV 27 in 1953. This project will illustrate how the television victory was a product of Williamson’s desire to be a part of the industry that had fascinated him since youth. He was taking his cues from the network leaders – namely at Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) – who were always looking for ways to reach more people, expand broadcasting power, and make more money, all while doing it before anyone else, especially the competing NBC network.

The majority of scholarship on the history of broadcasting has focused on the establishment of the large networks. American Marconi became RCA. General Electric,

³⁰ Warren P. Williamson Jr., interview by Hugh Earnhart, 30 September 1988, DVD 1, Part 19, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley and Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Youngstown, Ohio.

Westinghouse and RCA formed NBC. The Blue Network owned by NBC became ABC, and so on. Volumes have been written on those intricate (and often tedious) early corporate strategies and mergers, but the volumes leave a key part of the broadcasting story untold. The local broadcasters had less transmitting power, but no less importance in the development of the industry.

The Williamson story is worth preserving because it illustrates the importance of local entrepreneurs – the little guys, so to speak – and their role in establishing broadcasting as a permanent and welcome part of people’s lives. The local broadcasters had their own technologies to master. They had stations to build, and towers and transmitters to construct in order to reach the local audience before anyone else did. They had drive and they had a connection with the community. Far away from the big networks, people – the listeners and the viewers – identified with the station in their own backyard and the broadcasters, such as Williamson, who did it “for the love of it.”³¹ In 1953, it was a golden victory for WKBN and Warren P. Williamson during a Golden Age for television and for Youngstown.

³¹ Warren P. Williamson Jr., interview by James Manross, 10 December 1975, O.H. 351 transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program.

CHAPTER I

A chicken coop; a boy full of wonder; an invention called the wireless; these unassuming parts provided the foundation for what would one day become WKBN-TV. The man behind WKBN, Warren P. Williamson Jr. was born May 10, 1900, in Youngstown, Ohio. His boyhood home (now gone) was at the corner of Warren Avenue and Market Street on the city's south side. The home was more of a farmhouse than a city dwelling, sitting on acres of undeveloped land on both sides of Market Street all owned by the Williamson family. Warren's father, Warren Sr., owned the land between Market and Hillman. Warren Jr. remembered when relatives sold the land across Market Street for the construction of South High School in 1911. The development of the Williamson land was his father's project and did not greatly interest Warren Jr. However, the business provided a comfortable life for the family and many opportunities for young Warren.¹

Williamson recalled his early childhood as one filled with close relatives and typical boyhood adventures in Youngstown. He spent Sunday afternoons in Mill Creek Park, climbing trees, and playing "Kick the Can." He recalled buggy rides to town via South Avenue and Market Street and baseball games at the field at Hillman and Warren

¹ Warren P. Williamson Jr., interview by Hugh Earnhart, September 30, 1988, DVD 1, Part 3, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley/Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Youngstown, Ohio.

Avenues. He spent a lot of time at his grandfather's house next door where two maiden aunts lived. His mother taught him to sing and sent him to Sunday school. When he was old enough, he rode a motorcycle to the Yale School on the north side of town. But it was another activity that he associated most closely with his first home. "My first interest in radio developed when I was living on that corner," Williamson said. "I was 12-years-old at the time."²

At that time, Warren Sr. was a manager at the Youngstown Carriage and Wagon Company – a downtown business adjacent to a company that made small flashlights and electric lights. Young Warren's interest was peaked by what he saw at these two companies, prompting him to dismantle the electric doorbells at the family home and execute other experiments on Warren Avenue. "I always put them back, because Father was not too pleased with the whole idea," Williamson said. That interest in all things electrical encompassed wireless radio and young Warren eagerly joined the ranks of the wireless enthusiasts – also known as "ham" operators.³ (The wireless was a relatively new invention that allowed a signal to be transmitted and received without the use of telegraph lines or wires, hence the name "wireless" or "wireless radio.") One of his wireless experiments sent him to the chicken coop behind the house. He recalled, "I had a spark coil which we used in those days to create the wave that transmitted. It was out of an old Ford spark coil set. I used that until I talked Father into the idea that I needed a little more power."⁴ More power would mean transmitting a stronger signal that could reach farther, the goal of every ham operator.

² Ibid., DVD 1, Part 2.

³ Jesse Walker, *Rebels on the Air: And Alternative History of Radio in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 15.

⁴ Warren P. Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 1, Part 2.

Soon young Warren was tinkering with a ½-kilowatt transmitter which he kept in his mother's pantry. With his homemade contraption and "cat's whiskers" receiver he was able to contact another amateur operator on the other side of Youngstown. Such connections, no matter how crude, continued to fuel his interest in wireless communication.⁵ The noise and sparks from the wireless disrupted the peace in the Williamson home, however, and the device was barely tolerated by Mrs. Williamson. The straw that broke the camel's back came one evening when young Warren's parents were sitting in the library, trying to enjoy some peaceful reading. Williamson explained:

I was running the transmitter, and for no reason at all sparks started to fly out of the central light in the room. Father then agreed I should keep the transmitter outside the house...there was an old chicken coop out behind the garage.⁶

Such were the beginnings of the long and prosperous broadcasting career of Warren P. Williamson Jr. From that point he graduated to a "one-kilowatt outfit with rotary gaps and fine equipment."⁷ Bud Williamson described his father's early transmitter as "very noisy and very broad band in spectral terms. Their radio signal would today be considered like a pollutant as it covered whole bands of the spectrum."⁸ In those days, however, amateur operators were not as concerned with frequency as they were transmitting a signal, but the younger Williamson speculated that his father did have an antenna which was most likely supported by a tree or pole in the yard and attached to the transmitter inside the chicken coop with wires.

Williamson was part of the growing network of "hams" that formed a society around wireless communication in the early 1900s. Clubs of young hams – and adult

⁵ *The Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio), October 7, 1953.

⁶ Warren P. Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 1, Part 2.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Warren P. "Bud" Williamson III, e-mail correspondence with Tricia Perry, June 23, 2008.

amateurs, too – sprouted up across the United States and Europe beginning in 1896, when Italian inventor Guglielmo Marconi introduced his device for transmitting signals without wires.⁹ The transition from the grounded telegraph to wireless communication was slow to develop – nearly 50 years. When Marconi used his invention in 1899 in New York to successfully report the results of the America’s Cup Yacht Races – a transmission that spanned 40 miles – the world was hooked.¹⁰ Marconi had found a way to link science and the public.

Warren Williamson was born the year after Marconi’s demonstration. By the time he was five-years-old, the public began to embrace the wireless as part of the popular subculture. By 1905, the United States had 150 active amateur stations – meaning stations that were not commercially operated nor controlled by the government. By 1910 there were 600 such stations; and in 1914, when Williamson was 14, there were 10,000 ham stations operating.¹¹

Just as Williamson was not unique in his childhood fascination with wireless communication, he was not the first Youngstown amateur to utilize the new system. The first reported wireless communication in Youngstown came in 1911, when Rayen School student Ethelbert Blair made contact via homemade wireless with his friends Clarence Andrews and Harold Craven.¹² Published reports say Youngstown’s first official communication by wireless came on December 12, 1913. The coded message was sent from a naval station atop Cleveland’s Schofield Building to Roy Biddle, a wireless operator in Youngstown. Biddle received the message – directed to the *Youngstown*

⁹ Susan J. Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting: 1899-1922* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 17.

¹⁰ Douglas, 21.

¹¹ Walker, 16.

¹² *The Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio), November 11, 1948.

Vindicator – on his wireless station at John Logan’s Oriole farm.¹³

Professional communicators were catching on to what individual “tinkerers” like Williamson and his wireless colleagues already knew: there were uses for wireless transmissions that would soon change the world.

In the second decade of the century two major developments affected wireless communication: commercial or professional wireless stations began broadcasting, and the U.S. Navy took an interest in the system, believing it should be solely the military’s property.¹⁴ Because the airwaves – or “ether” as the hams called it – were largely unregulated at that point, signals from both commercial and ham stations often overlapped, creating overwhelming noise or interference. “Lip,” “buzz,” and other pranks plagued communications on both sides. The hams were often blamed if a communication went awry, such as the night of the *Titanic* disaster in April of 1912, but in reality, the amateurs knew the system much better than the professionals in most cases.¹⁵ The federal government passed the Radio Act of 1912 in August, and among the new guidelines was a provision requiring amateurs to be licensed.

Williamson was one of those amateurs who knew a lot about the wireless by the time he entered the newly-constructed South High School in Youngstown. In 1916, as a member of the American Radio Relay League, he applied for and obtained a license for his first station, 8KT (figure 4).¹⁶ While Williamson was devoted to wireless communication, his attention to his education was lacking.

Overshadowed by his brother Joe, who was three years older and an excellent

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Walker, 19.

¹⁵ Walker, 21.

¹⁶ Williamson III, June 23, 2008.

student, Warren engaged in a series of “pranks” at South High School that eventually led to his departure. “He was either asked to leave South High, or was strongly encouraged to seek education elsewhere,” Bud Williamson remembered.¹⁷

Young Warren’s situation concerned his parents, who enrolled him at a private school in Valpariso, Indiana. There, at age 16, he enrolled at Dodge Institute of Technology and attended courses on telegraphy. At Dodge, he became “reasonably good” at radio, and his new set of skills led to a job offer from a Chicago shipping company that needed a wireless operator to work on a vessel in the Great Lakes.¹⁸ But young Warren refused the offer. His behavior at Valpariso University was less than satisfactory to his parents as well. “I wasn’t doing too good,” he admitted at age 91. “I was more interested in amateur radio.”¹⁹ Warren Sr. called his son home to Youngstown where his old wireless hobby was waiting.

With the start of World War I, however, two outside forces again interrupted Williamson’s amateur career. First, the United States government issued an order that all amateur stations be disbanded for fear that classified information would be transmitted by wireless radio. Young Warren signed off and stored his wireless equipment in the attic. He also signed up, enlisting in the U.S. Army in 1918. He was 18-years-old.

Stationed in Pecos, Texas, along the Mexican border, Williamson had an experience that would stay with him for the rest of his life. As a wireless operator for the Army Signal Corps he received encoded transmissions – “all dots and dashes” – and relayed the dispatches on to Washington, D.C. One morning as he was listening to an

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Warren P. Williamson Jr., interview by David Allen, August 24, 1991, transcript, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, Youngstown, Ohio, 3.

¹⁹ Ibid., DVD 1, Part 9.

encoded transmission, a human voice interrupted his work. Williamson recalled the incident this way:

For no reason at all a voice came on the air. This lady had picked up her telephone and called her butcher, ordered her meat for the day, and hung up her telephone. Now this is the first voice transmission I ever heard, which came over the system for dots and dashes.²⁰

Williamson was stunned by the broadcast and determined to learn how it was possible. Eventually he found an explanation that satisfied him. “Her phone had a grounding system on the line. It was arcing and creating a continuous wave. She modulated the wave, and we were close enough to the energy that we heard it,” he explained.²¹

His experience hearing a voice transmission was no doubt similar to that of the sailors who heard the very first broadcast of violin music, poems, and prayers orchestrated by Lee de Forest on Christmas 1906.²² For Williamson, the mysterious woman and her meat order would linger in his memory and eventually change the course of his life. No scientific explanation could erase the wonder of the first transmitted voice to reach his ears via wireless radio. The next few years detoured him onto a different path, but it would not be long before Williamson returned to the wireless and broadcasting.

Several of those detours happened after Williamson was discharged from the army in 1919. He was an Army sergeant, but had never finished high school. In an attempt to get his degree, young Warren and his mother traveled to Boston, where he enrolled in Chauncy Hall, a finishing school.²³ The trip did not produce the desired

²⁰ Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 1, Part 8.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Robert L. Hilliard and Michael C. Keith, *The Broadcast Century: A Century of American Broadcasting* (Boston: Focal Press, 1997), 8.

²³ Williamson Jr., 1991, 15.

results for Warren, however. His penchant for trouble – and a subsequent interruption of funds from Youngstown – brought mother and son home.

Williamson was again detoured. He explained, “Maybe I was doing things in Youngstown that father and mother thought I shouldn’t be doing, and probably it might be well if Warren wasn’t around.” Along with a friend, Dal Nutt, Williamson set off in a Studebaker to see the United States. Living on money Williamson had earned in the Army, the friends traveled 17,500 miles, visited every national park, and picked up odd jobs, like wiring houses for electricity.²⁴ Reaching Hollywood, Williamson became fascinated with the motion picture industry. Displaying a good eye for investment even at that young age, Williamson pitched the idea of investing in the new industry to his father back in Ohio, but, “Father was at home selling farm acreage and real estate and wasn’t interested in going to Hollywood, and so forth.”²⁵ If nothing else, Williamson’s trip west served to feed his interest in the developing industries of broadcasting, communications and sound technology.

Eighteen months later Williamson made his way home with the idea that it was time to find a wife and settle down. He decided rather quickly on Isabel DeNio of New Castle, Pennsylvania, a woman he had met at a party in Ashtabula most likely during the summer of 1923.²⁶ The two were married February 6, 1924, in Evanston Illinois, while Warren was attending college. (As a veteran, he was admitted to the University of Michigan in 1922. According to Bud Williamson, he transferred to University of Wisconsin at Madison within the year for unknown reasons. The elder Williamson never finished his degree.) With the marriage question settled, the career question was still to

²⁴ Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 1, Part 10.

²⁵ Williamson Jr., 1991, 26.

²⁶ Williamson III, June 23, 2008.

be answered. Warren Sr. stepped in and secured an office job for his son at Republic Iron and Steel in Youngstown. At that time the steel producer was one of the most powerful companies in the United States, and a position in the employment office was considered a very good one. Williamson took the job, but was not stimulated by the work. Later in life, he often remarked that it was “a great experience because I learned how to play checkers and sleep sitting up.”²⁷ Under such tedious working conditions his interest in the exciting new frontier known as broadcasting did not fade.

Nevertheless, Williamson spent the next few years working outside of the radio business. The Williamsons welcomed a daughter, Barbara, in 1925, and the couple moved to a new home at 26 East Auburndale Avenue on the newly-developed south side of Youngstown. (Son Warren P. “Bud” Williamson III was born in 1930 and Joseph “J.D.” Williamson came along in 1945.)

Williamson was tired of radio after his stint in the Army, but by the mid-1920s, he was feeling that he “had an idea to get back into radio again.” He noticed the attention that radio was getting in the early 1920s and its appeal to a post-WWI public hungry for entertainment and escape.²⁸ In the early part of the decade four interested parties in the Mahoning Valley successfully applied for radio operating licenses. They were Wayne Shaffer of Youngstown (WMC), Robert Phillips of Youngstown (WDBF), Hutton & Jones Electric Co. of Warren (WLAZ), and the Yahrling-Rayner Piano Co.(WAAY). However, these ventures were not successful and the licenses eventually expired. By mid-1925, no local station was holding a commercial radio license.²⁹ That did not discourage Williamson; he eyed the backyard at the Auburndale house, where they “didn’t have

²⁷ Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 1, Part 11.

²⁸ Hilliard and Keith, 24.

²⁹ *Sight and Sound*, exhibit, 2006, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, Ohio.

anything but space,” and his mind began to formulate a plan. It was the perfect place to build a radio antenna.³⁰

To cover the expenses that he knew would be generated by such a plan, Williamson partnered with a new associate to start a radio service business. Creed Chorpening was an engineer from West Virginia who had attended the Marconi Institute in New York City and had extensive knowledge of wireless radio equipment. Chorpening was about 27-years-old when he arrived in Youngstown in 1924 (fig.5). His knowledge of radio equipment landed him a job with a radio service business already established in the Erie Terminal building downtown. In his memoirs Williamson describes how he and Chorpening met:

We met because we were both interested in amateur radio. And, as our acquaintance developed, I was able to interest him in joining us in a similar radio business, which we chose to call Radio Electric Service. Both he and I held government commercial operator licenses – which later we found important in the operation of our broadcast station when the U.S. government [Department of Commerce] enacted a radio control bill and created a Federal Radio Commission.³¹

Williamson also found Chorpening to be “an intelligent fellow and a good person.”³² The new partners agreed that the Radio Electric Service Company would be headquartered in Williamson’s home. Chorpening did the more difficult work of radio service and repair, while Williamson “kept the books, sent out the bills, and banked the money – what little of it there was.”³³ He continued to work at Republic Iron and Steel while the company got off the ground.

³⁰ Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 1, Part 13.

³¹ Warren P. Williamson Jr., unpublished memoirs 1988 – 1993, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, Youngstown, Ohio, 20.

³² Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 1, Part 13.

³³ Warren P. Williamson Jr., televised interview by Norm Berger, 1966, transcript, WKBN 40th Anniversary Broadcast, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, 3.

The business did make money through the servicing of radio sets, but the partners never stopped looking for new revenue. Similar to radio enthusiasts throughout the country at that time, Williamson and Chorpening were excited about wireless radio, but did not yet see the money-making potential in broadcasting full time.³⁴ Taking a cue from developments on the national level, Williamson began to see other possibilities for radio.

In the early 1920s, the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), General Electric (GE), and Westinghouse were manufacturing radios, radio parts and equipment; to generate sales these powerful companies formed the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and starting their own chain of broadcast stations in cities such as New York and Pittsburgh (KDKA). They held the patents to the equipment and the first radio receivers were selling for about \$75. At that price, Williamson figured when radios wore out, people would want to repair them rather than buy a new radio. He believed he could use his broadcast station in Youngstown to sell something, too; instead of merely selling parts, he could sell the actual repair service. In 1925, he asked Chorpening to join him in forming a broadcasting business. Williamson described his pitch this way:

I said to him one day, ‘Chorp, you know what? We ought to go into the broadcasting business, because if we got into the business, we could use it for publicity for our [radio] service business. . . . If people would know that we could run a broadcasting station, why, certainly, they would let us fix their receivers.’³⁵

His argument won Chorpening over, and the partners set about obtaining a license to broadcast programming. Williamson recalled the licensing step as the easiest part of the process. “[These are] the days when broadcasting was just beginning,” he said, “and

³⁴ Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 1, Part 13.

³⁵ Williamson Jr., 1966, 3.

you could get a license for asking for it for it!”³⁶ The partners applied to the U.S. Department of Commerce, obtained a license, and set to work searching for a band.

In the mid-1920s, Youngstown residents were familiar with radio, even though the city had no station of its own. Both WTAM in Cleveland, and KDKA in Pittsburgh, were broadcasting not far away, and listeners in Youngstown were able to pick up the programming on their radio sets. Youngstown’s two newspapers, *The Youngstown Vindicator* and *The Youngstown Telegram*, published the program schedules of those stations as well as opinions about radio and the possibility of a Youngstown station. While no one thought the idea impossible, the newspaper writers believed a Youngstown station would cause interference problems. In his memoirs Williamson explained:

This idea of a local station for Youngstown raised questions of possible blanketing of these stations – and others that could be heard – with heterodyning interference...It was the feeling of radio editors of the papers that Youngstown’s new station would create new problems for listener reception that [were] not now present, and the merit of a hometown station was questionable.³⁷

Not to be deterred, Williamson did his homework. He recalled, “Creed and I, of course, had researched reception in the area to determine the best spot on the dial for our transmission with the least interference from other stations...” The partners moved forward with their plans for a broadcast station.³⁸

The might, money and accomplishments of RCA and other powerful corporations in much larger cities energized and motivated Williamson. Far from being intimidated, he saw the possibility of establishing a quality radio station in Youngstown. He said, “So we hopped on to 360 meters – we didn’t have kilocycles then – and we broadcast with

³⁶ Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 1, Part 14.

³⁷ Williamson Jr., unpublished memoirs, 1.

³⁸ Ibid.

this little [transmitter].”³⁹ First things first; a tower and antenna had to be built.

Williamson connected with his ham friends to get the job done, choosing the backyard for the location, and improvising as he went along.

So I built the antenna out of rain spouting and in order to reinforce the rain spouting I soldered and wrapped wire around each end. And then we stacked those radio things one on top of the other and built an antenna. We set it on an insulator and tied it down and that is how the antenna was [built] (figure 6).⁴⁰

The spouting was light enough to lift, so the crew was able to construct a 60-foot antenna from the ground up. Later Williamson concluded that a second, 20-foot wooden antenna was needed, and that was constructed on the roof of the house as well.⁴¹

With the tower constructed and a 7 ½ watt transmitter situated in the upstairs sewing room of the Auburndale house, Williamson and Chorpening conducted several test broadcasts in the summer of 1926. WKBN Radio officially broadcast for the first time on the evening of Saturday, September 26, 1926.⁴² Williamson recalled the broadcast in his memoirs:

Not having a microphone with good quality response we borrowed a Western Electric 100A microphone from Walter Seifert, a young man of our acquaintance who had public address equipment which he rented for local affairs. And with this, on Sept. 26, 1926, we were on the air with our transmission in the early evening for an hour or two...The first reports of our transmission were good with no blanketing and sharp tuning, and though our 7 ½ watts did not reach very far, we did provide coverage of a fashion to a limited Youngstown area.⁴³

He said the AM signal reached listeners as far as 10 miles away, and provided “pretty good reception.”⁴⁴ Walter Lee Kaufmann, a Youngstown resident and school teacher,

³⁹ Williamson Jr., 1966, 3.

⁴⁰ Williamson Jr., 1991, 12.

⁴¹ Williamson Jr., 1991, 32.

⁴² Warren P. Williamson Jr., televised interview, 1976, on DVD, WKBN 50th Anniversary Broadcast, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, Part 2.

⁴³ Williamson Jr., unpublished memoirs, no page.

⁴⁴ Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 1, Part 14.

served as announcer. Kaufmann's first words to the listening audience were reported to be, "This is WKBN, Youngstown. Irm...please stand by."⁴⁵ The latest news followed.⁴⁶

After an evening of musical programming using phonograph records, news, and conversation, the new station signed off at 2:10 a.m. It was back on the air again Sunday at 11 a.m. with more of the same.⁴⁷ Later that day, *The Youngstown Vindicator* reported:

The new station came through with a wallop, the volume was not overwhelming. It was sharply tuned....The bugbear of new stations, especially small ones – a hum in the transmission – appeared in WKBN only to a negligible extent.⁴⁸

With the first successful broadcasts under his belt, Williamson was not about to stop. Each time WKBN went on the air, public interest was stirred and new challenges born. Williamson's recollections of those earliest days were fond ones:

As one might expect, our activities interested radio hams of the listening fraternity, and we had many of our friends and acquaintances stop by to see what went on....Our living room contained no piano or musical instruments, so voice transmission was our main programming. But we soon found out we must augment it with other programming. Among our friends who stopped by and contributed their talents was Sgt. Gene Murphy of the Youngstown Police Department who, with his tenor voice, sang for us, while Walter Lee Kaufmann II, with a pleasing melodious voice, announced the programming and read the evening newspaper news.⁴⁹

The new station was not a full-time operation at that point, which suited the new broadcasters and their limited programming resources. They often relied on records for musical programming.⁵⁰ Williamson recalled, "A need for music being recognized, we

⁴⁵ *The Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio), September 27, 1926.

⁴⁶ *The Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio), November 11, 1948.

⁴⁷ *Sight and Sound*, exhibit, 2006, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, Ohio.

⁴⁸ *The Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio), September 27, 1926.

⁴⁹ Williamson Jr., unpublished memoirs, no page.

⁵⁰ Warren P. Williamson Jr., interview by James Manross, 10 December 1975, O.H. 351 transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, 2.

traded with the Yahrling Rayner Music Co. for the use of an Edison phonograph and a number of Edison thick 78RPM phonograph records.”⁵¹

As devoted as he was to wireless radio, Williamson was not sure how successful his venture would ultimately be. He regularly studied reports by radio columnists in the local newspapers for clues as to how WKBN was doing. Williamson said, “As George Madtes, Radio Editor of *The Vindicator*, reported WKBN’s transmissions with compliments now and then, we were stirred to believe that there was space for a broadcasting station in Youngstown.”⁵² It would be years before WKBN-AM 570 dominated the airwaves, but Williamson had planted seeds of possibility, and every small success fed that growth.

This was reinforced for Williamson when William F. Maag Jr. and *The Youngstown Vindicator* came to the partners in the fall of 1926 and proposed a collaboration of sorts. Maag wanted help in broadcasting election returns; his goal was to reach more people, and, therefore, sell more papers. Newspaper publishers were beginning to acknowledge the new medium as a potential competitor for advertising dollars. In the 1920s strong radio news operations had not yet been established, so a joint effort between *The Vindicator* (which needed more exposure) and WKBN (which needed informative programming) seemed mutually beneficial.

Williamson and Chorpening took on the challenge.⁵³ For a fee paid by *The Youngstown Vindicator*, they started up the transmitting equipment at 26 East Auburndale

⁵¹ Williamson Jr., unpublished memoirs, no page.

⁵² Williamson Jr., unpublished memoirs, 6.

⁵³ Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 1, Part 14.

on election night. “We were pleased, naturally, that WKBN would be asked to provide this service and relished the opportunity to do it,” Williamson reflected.⁵⁴

Technically, it was a process that involved creativity and ingenuity at the Williamson household. With no employees assigned to the local boards of elections to obtain voting results, the source of the returns would have to be the newspaper’s wire service, United Press International. The plan to get that wire service to the south side of Youngstown was elaborate, but not impossible. The crew of engineers ran a direct telephone line from *The Vindicator* offices downtown to 26 East Auburndale – terminating in the bathroom of the house. Williamson recalled:

So, we put in the bathroom on the second floor a telephone which was connected with *The Vindicator* by a direct wire. The transmitter was just around the corner from the bathroom on a back sewing porch. There wasn’t too much room in the bathroom. As a matter of fact the telephone was as big as the wash basin. It was one of these tall affairs...with a crank on the side of it. So, we set the phone up in the wash basin and sat on the side of the bath tub. We got the election returns and ran them downstairs and put them on the air, courtesy of *The Youngstown Vindicator*.⁵⁵

Radio announcers were stationed on the first floor ready to read the results. The broadcasts began at 8:30 p.m. on November 2, and the returns were announced every half hour until after midnight.⁵⁶ It was the first time Youngstown residents did not have to wait for the next newsprint edition to know the outcome of the election, and that fact was not lost on them. The following day, *The Youngstown Vindicator* printed a glowing report of the momentous broadcast:

Hundreds of fans called up *The Vindicator* Tuesday night and Wednesday morning complimenting the success of the first election broadcasting here and

⁵⁴ Williamson Jr., unpublished memoirs, 11.

⁵⁵ Williamson Jr., 1966, 4.

⁵⁶ Sarah Cart, Paul Jagnow, and Robert McFerren, *These Hundred Years: A Chronicle of the Twentieth Century As Recorded in the Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio: The Vindicator Printing Company, 2001), 29.

complimenting the Radio Electric Service Company on the efficiency of the service....Mr. Youngstown, who in years past put on his overcoat and muffler and shivered for hours on the Public Square to see the old-fashioned lantern slides, last night put on his slippers, drew an easy chair up to the gas grate, turned a few knobs on a mahogany box, lit a pipe with satisfaction and learned just who would rule the political roost in the coming year.⁵⁷

It was just the beginning of this type of coverage, but the public quickly became accustomed to it.

William F. Maag could not have predicted in 1926, that his newspaper would never triumph over the immediacy of broadcasting. The late 1920s saw a press-radio war in many major American cities, which often resulted in publishers buying or establishing their own stations. By the end of 1928, 13% of radio stations in the U.S. were owned by newspapers. Eventually Maag would take that route, establishing WFMJ-AM in 1939. As the power of radio – and WKBN – grew, joint projects between Williamson and Maag would become a distant memory.

More improvising on the part of Williamson and Chorpening came in late November of 1926 with the broadcast of the football match between The Rayen School and South High School. Played each year on Thanksgiving Day, the game was the climax of a season-long rivalry between Youngstown's north and south side teams. Attending the holiday game was a tradition (now defunct) for many city residents, and the event drew as many as 25,000 people.⁵⁸ Broadcasting the game meant those who could not make it to the field could listen to that action at home.

According to Williamson, Chorpening moved the transmitter and equipment to the third floor of The Rayen School on Benita Avenue. Williamson said, "A single wire

⁵⁷*The Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio), November 3, 1926.

⁵⁸ Steve Grzevich, "Chapter V" (unpublished paper, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, circa 1985), 56.

antenna was strung outside the building, so at game time, we were on the air.” The microphone and announcers were on the field. Arthur Brock, a local businessman in radio sales, acted as sports announcer for the first half of the game.⁵⁹ Williamson handled the announcing during the second half. He remembered the broadcast as one that was less than perfect:

I must confess, it was not a very professional performance, nor would I consider the transmission up to our usual standard, for the long lead to the microphone [at] the sideline of the game, to the transmitter upstairs in the school house (where the speech input equipment was located) produced poor voice quality.⁶⁰

Still, Williamson was pleased with the overall product, and the progress it represented.

The broadcast on November 26, 1926, was the first live play-by-play sports program produced in Youngstown. Williamson believed it to be one of the first ever to air in the United States as well.⁶¹ He was just four years off. In 1922, WEAJ in New York aired the football game between Princeton and the University of Chicago from Stagg Field in Chicago – believed to be the first live remote broadcast of a sporting event.⁶² Still, the broadcast of the small-town match between South and Rayen was significant. It marked the moment of change for the field of sports reporting which exploded as it transitioned from newsprint to airwaves. It also illustrated how even the smaller broadcasters could succeed on the cutting edge of the new medium as it expanded to reach a greater audience.

Broadcasting trials in cities large and small pushed the new industry forward in the 1920s. Sales of receivers increased rapidly as more people attempted to tune into the live action. Technological advances and transatlantic broadcasts fed the momentum of

⁵⁹ Williamson Jr., 1966, 2.

⁶⁰ Williamson Jr., unpublished memoirs, 13.

⁶¹ Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 1, Part 16.

⁶² Hilliard and Keith, 32.

radio and the belief that there were no limits to the new medium. As Westinghouse vice-president H.P. Davis stated, “A receiving set in every home, in every hotel room, in every schoolroom, in every hospital room...it is not so much a question of possibility, it is rather a question of how soon.”⁶³

The WKBN operation was part of that momentum in 1926, but it was clearly not money-driven at that point. Like many of Williamson’s early forays in broadcasting, covering a high school football game cost “no amount at all.”⁶⁴ To this point in his career, Williamson really did seem to be pursuing broadcasting as if he was mastering a curious new toy. No matter what the programming, he seemed to be taken with the fresh adventure of broadcasting, and delighted to be trying something new that would entertain and amaze people. In reminiscing about the big game he summed up his feelings by saying, “That was something in those days.”⁶⁵

Quite soon after WKBN’s first broadcasts in 1926, however, money became a major factor in the WKBN story – in the form of advertising revenues. As the popularity of radio expanded, revenue began rolling in, removing some of Williamson’s financial worries while creating new ones. The problems that plagued the expanding broadcasting industry permeated his world, too, in the form of network affiliation, investors, and divided time. Williamson dealt with these problems in a dogmatic fashion with one goal in mind – to do his best for WKBN and for Youngstown.

The listening public was on his side, deeming the initial WKBN broadcasts successful. Williamson concluded that it was a good time to look for a new location and a

⁶³ Ibid., 33.

⁶⁴ Williamson Jr., 1988, Disc 1, Part 14.

⁶⁵ Ibid., DVD 1, Part 16.

new partner to invest in WKBN.⁶⁶ He found that partner in Arthur Brock, a local merchandiser who sold radios and owned the Brock Radio Shop on the corner of Phelps and W. Federal Streets in downtown Youngstown. He had an idea for an exhibit that would highlight radio equipment and promote his business. Believing WKBN was a good fit for this type of show, Brock invited Williamson and Chorpening to “bring the station down to the Fitch Garage.” The 7 ½-watt transmitter (which was in a wooden box about two square feet in size) along with the amplifier was easy to transport, so the partners agreed to move it from the south side to downtown Youngstown (figure 7). However, Williamson saw Brock’s invitation as an opportunity to gain something for WKBN as well – more power. Williamson explained the deal he worked out with Brock:

I said to Arthur Brock, we ought to have more power than 7 ½ watts if we are going to do this [radio show]. We ought to go up to 50 watts of power. I don’t have any money. So if you buy me a vacuum tube – a 50 watt RCA vacuum tube which costs about \$38.00 – we’ll give you half interest in the station.

In other interviews, Williamson stated that Brock actually purchased two vacuum tubes at \$38 apiece.⁶⁷ The details of the arrangement (and other matters between the new partners) became a source of conflict between Williamson and Brock years later. In 1926, however, the agreement suited the three businessmen well. Brock paid for the necessary vacuum tube(s), and his radio show had the green light; Chorpening and Williamson rebuilt the station for the higher power, and WKBN became a 50-watt operation.⁶⁸

The First Annual Radio Show took place from September 30 to October 1, 1926. The Fitch Garage (later called the Strouss Garage) was located on the northwest corner of

⁶⁶ Ibid., DVD 1, Part 15.

⁶⁷ Williamson Jr., unpublished memoirs, 3.

⁶⁸ Williamson Jr., 1976, Part 3.

Wick Avenue and Commerce Street, a prominent downtown intersection. Moving the transmitter there benefited Williamson and Chorpening in two ways: the orchestra and other talent at the show provided programming for WKBN, and the exhibit provided a way to advertise both the station and the radio service company.

Williamson said, “With other radio dealers and radio parts suppliers, we dressed our space up with proper signs and equipment to look the part of a successful business, which we were now getting to be.”⁶⁹ In exchange, Brock’s sponsorship gave him the chance to publicize his radio sales business on the WKBN frequency.⁷⁰

The show was a hit – a success measured by the number of new radio dealers drawn to Brock’s business. Williamson agreed it had gone well for WKBN, too, with a few minor problems noted:

The radio show was a success – but our electrolytic rectifier which gave us necessary direct current for our transmitter did require tender loving care, for it did get to the boiling stage during our broadcasts of the orchestra and we had some trouble getting it to cool down between transmissions of the orchestra.⁷¹

Brock stayed with WKBN, becoming the first station manager and later contributing \$500 to cover new fees for the use of copyrighted music.⁷² The new broadcasting business appeared to have three partners, but the good relations were in short supply.

According to Williamson, they did not charge Brock for airtime during the First Annual Radio Show. Williamson was comfortable with this arrangement at the time, perhaps because increasing power and expanding station operations were more important than any profit at that point. But as WKBN continued to broadcast advertising for

⁶⁹ Williamson Jr., unpublished memoirs, 9.

⁷⁰ Williamson Jr., 1976, Part 3.

⁷¹ Williamson Jr., unpublished memoirs, 11.

⁷² Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 2, Part 1.

Brock's shop, Williamson viewed it differently. He believed that programming produced by Brock to promote his radio business was the same as advertising, and as such, it had a price. Brock disagreed, saying his \$500 had bought an interest in WKBN; as part-owner, Brock believed he should not have to pay for airtime for his business. Williamson felt he needed a legal answer to the question, "Who had what interest in the operation of WKBN?"⁷³ He retained attorney Andrew Anderson, and the parties went to court over the matter.

The decision that resulted was not entirely good news for Williamson and Chorpening. The court determined that the two original partners did indeed own 60 percent of WKBN Broadcasting, but Brock owned 40 percent. That meant he could advertise his radio company on WKBN-AM at any time, free of charge. "This did not sit well with yours truly," was Williamson's understated recollection, but there was little he could do about it. He later remembered Arthur Brock as "a fine gentleman," but at that point in WKBN history, he had become a necessary evil.⁷⁴ While Williamson appreciated the money Brock contributed to the early operation of WKBN, he clearly did not feel comfortable with anyone besides himself calling the shots – especially when those decisions involved giving away airtime for free.

As 1930 began, Williamson felt it was time to officially incorporate the young business, and on January 31, WKBN Broadcasting Corporation was established.⁷⁵ Williamson, Brock, and Chorpening were the founding partners; however, Brock's involvement did not last long. By the end of 1930, he sold his interest to a man named Clayton C. Townes, a businessman and former mayor of Cleveland. Townes was

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 2, Part 7.

⁷⁵ Williamson Jr., 1991, 30.

affiliated with Forest City Publishing Company, which owned *The Plain Dealer* newspaper of Cleveland. As a result of Townes's investment, Forest City Publishing would retain a minority interest (between 20 and 40 percent) in WKBN Broadcasting until 1958, when Williamson bought out that interest.⁷⁶

Until that time, Williamson had controlling interest in WKBN and use of the publishing company's attorneys. Bud Williamson claimed the relationship worked well, despite the fact that Townes turned out to be untrustworthy and Forest City never really had much of a return on its investment.⁷⁷ The business agreement with Forest City finally ended when WKBN Broadcasting was preparing to make a substantial financial investment in television in the 1940s. Williamson bought out the Forest City interest keeping the majority of ownership in his own hands.⁷⁸

In the early 1930s, Williamson and WKBN suffered another loss – the departure of Creed Chorpening as a partner. More of an engineer than a broadcaster or a businessman, Chorpening's interests led him away from WKBN. Unlike the partnership with Brock, the relationship between WKBN's founding partners ended amicably, and Chorpening went on to establish the Astatic Corp., a microphone manufacturing company, in 1933.⁷⁹ Williamson was in control of the station, but he was by no means on easy street.

After Chorpening's departure, Williamson looked to the partnership with Clayton Townes as a means of growing the business. Townes formed the Ohio Broadcasting

⁷⁶ Richard James, "A Historical Analysis of the Development of UHF in the Youngstown Area" (master's thesis, Kent State University, 1982), 26.

⁷⁷ Warren P. "Bud" Williamson III, phone interview with Tricia Perry, April 23, 2008.

⁷⁸ Warren P. *Williamson Jr.: Mahoning Valley Broadcast Pioneer*, produced by Lowry Stewart and Gary Hanson, 60 min., WKBN Broadcasting Corp., 1996, videocassette.

⁷⁹ Obituary of Creed Chorpening, *Ashtabula Star Beacon*, October 19, 1993.

Company and had a plan to aggressively sell time on WKBN-AM to advertisers; he claimed the revenue from selling advertisements would make both Williamson and himself very rich.

Seeing a way to put WKBN securely in the black, Williamson entered into a risky “buy-sell” agreement with Townes in February 1931. This meant that if one party wanted to buy the other’s interest, the only way to retain that interest was to buy the station outright.⁸⁰ In 1991, Williamson said of the partnership, “Townes came into WKBN and worked as a partner. [He was] a super salesman. I gave him a job selling time...I remember he sold time and put it on the air, but we never got any money.”⁸¹ WKBN records from those years indicate that radio time was sold to Townes’s clients, and spots aired, but no money was collected on those accounts. As a result, the deal with Townes would nearly take control of WKBN Broadcasting out of Williamson’s hands forever.

The buy-sell crisis came to a head in 1931 when Townes offered to buy Williamson’s interest. Williamson did not want to sell but did not have the financing to purchase the station in full. Forced to accept Townes’s check, he stated, “You just bought yourself a radio station.”⁸² Williamson did not want to lose what he had worked so hard for, but, as a business man of integrity, he felt he must honor the agreement with Townes. He also did not trust the man. Suspecting the check was bad, Williamson’s next move was to call Townes’s bluff by attempting to cash it. Driving to the issuing bank in Cleveland, Williamson turned the check over and it did, in fact, bounce.

In Williamson’s mind, the deal was off. Townes later challenged him in court and

⁸⁰ Williamson III, phone interview with Tricia Perry, April 23, 2008.

⁸¹ Williamson Jr., 1991, 29.

⁸² Williamson III, April 23, 2008.

lost.⁸³ A *Youngstown Vindicator* article described the \$1,750 lawsuit:

The [Ohio] broadcasting company which is controlled by Clayton C. Townes, former mayor of Cleveland, alleges it purchased from the Williamsons 17 ½ shares of WKBN stock for \$200 a share, with the agreement that if either party wished to sell its stock, it must first offer it to the other party. The company asserts that Oct. 26, 1931, it offered to buy the 87 ½ shares of Williamson stock at \$200 a share or to sell its 87 ½ shares to the Williamsons at \$200 dollars a share and sent a certified check for \$1750 or 10 percent of the total price. The company alleges the Williamsons cashed the check but refuse to turn over the stock.⁸⁴

In fact, the check did not clear, and the court ruled in Williamson's favor. WKBN was his.

According to Bud Williamson, this was a defining moment in his father's career and in his life. It reveals several things about Warren P. Williamson Jr.: that his character was such that he would honor a business deal that could have cost him everything; that he was a risk-taker; that his intelligence and shrewd business sense led him to a decision that corrected a bad deal. How long the drive to Cleveland must have seemed that fall day in 1931, with the loss of a livelihood and the failure of a dream possibly waiting at the end of the road. Bud Williamson said his father's clash with Clayton Townes is indicative of the struggles and precarious situations many pioneering broadcasters endured in an effort to advance the young industry and their own part in it. "It fits the bill," Bud Williamson said, the "bill" being stories of the men and women, with little financing and a lot of instinct and ingenuity, who pioneered the broadcast industry. Williamson was a young man among many who nurtured the business and grew old with it.⁸⁵

Warren P. Williamson Jr. and his early partners held such varied philosophies concerning the station and its operation that severing connections must have been easy in

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ *The Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio), January 15, 1932.

⁸⁵ Williamson III, April 23, 2008.

a way for Williamson. There is no question, the partners all wanted to be successful at WKBN, but Williamson wanted success *for* WKBN as well. Recalling the company's early years, Williamson said, "We were working for love – for the love of something to do and the fun that was in it."⁸⁶ Many times over his long career Williamson would refer to "love" as the motivating factor behind his early broadcasting efforts. He admitted that cash was often in such short supply that he and Chorpening worked without compensation.⁸⁷ As a businessman, Williamson recognized the partners who did not share his vision – his love – for WKBN, and he realized that money was the key to keeping what he loved close at hand.

Williamson was similar to other early pioneers of television in that radio was his first love, as well as a means of making his fortune. Among the handful of documented histories of local stations, the story of WLW Radio (later including WLWT-TV) in Cincinnati, parallels the Williamson story. Founder Pat Crosley Jr. was an inventor who, in 1921, built a radio for his son for about \$20. He called the device the Harko, and from that invention, launched a company and a radio station. Station 8RC went on the air September 21, 1921, with 50 watts of power. By 1925, the station was at 50,000 watts and was as powerful as KDKA in Pittsburgh. Crosley did not stop there, winning approval from the FCC in 1934 to go to 500,000 watts. Although it was located in a Midwestern city, WLW was considered by the FCC to be a "superstation," and as such it was a means of gauging audience growth and habits for the entire industry.⁸⁸ That was a designation WKBN in Youngstown would never have, but while the station histories

⁸⁶ Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 1, Part 16.

⁸⁷ Williamson Jr., 1975, 3.

⁸⁸ Michael D. Murray and Donald G. Godfrey, eds., *Television in America: Local Station History From Across the Nation* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1997), 156.

follow different paths, the personalities of the founders do not.

Radio was also a do-it-yourself medium in the first decades of the Twentieth Century; people had to tinker with building radio sets, they had to tune them by turning a dial or moving an antenna, and they had to use their imaginations when listening to the programming.⁸⁹ No wonder, then, that it was pioneered by amateurs, inventors – rebels, even – who were always pushing for radio to travel farther, sound better, and offer more than what corporate America was putting on the airwaves. And no wonder, then, that Warren P. Williamson, a do-it-yourself young man in the 1920s, was in love with radio and eager to see what was ahead as the medium exploded in the 1930s.

⁸⁹ Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1999), 3.

CHAPTER II

It should be no surprise to anyone studying local station history that the broadcast industry had great appeal to Williamson from its earliest days. As broadcasting historian Susan J. Douglas has said, radio remains one of the most important inventions of the last century for many reasons. Technologically, radio set the stage for television; culturally, it drew people together in a unique way. Because it never became completely centralized by the large broadcasting corporations, radio created pockets of similar listeners throughout the country. The people in these niches (and Youngstown was one of those niches) shared attitudes and desires, as well as geographical location. Families and friends listened to the radio together and became “mass-mediated” humans together.¹ This, along with the drama and immediacy of live broadcasts, added romance and nostalgia to radio listening. While no one disputes his sharp business skills, Williamson was also a man who recognized the nostalgic lure of the new medium well before it became a commercial and cultural force in the American household. That clear vision of radio’s potential pushed him on during WKBN’s early days.

Just a few weeks after the first WKBN broadcasts in the fall of 1926, Williamson and Chorpening found a permanent location for WKBN in downtown Youngstown. At that time, the station was broadcasting up to 18 hours a day, and aside from Arthur

¹ Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1999), 5.

Brock's radio shows, finding local programming to fill that time was a monstrous challenge for the small operation. So when Leonard T. Skeggs, the YMCA General Secretary, offered to provide space for the transmitter and studios at the Y in November 1926, Williamson agreed. In exchange for the space on the third floor of the YMCA building at 17 N. Champion Street, WKBN would air "civic programs" provided by the YMCA, including morning religious services, exercise programs, and membership-related events. Perhaps this was not the most interesting or ideal programming schedule for all listeners, but it was a trade-off Williamson could live with. He had found a downtown space for the station at an economical price; he had also found additional programming to air during those hard-to-fill WKBN hours.²

While the space was prepared, the transmitter was stored in the basement of the Y, so that "no one would bother it." WKBN officially moved into its new home in January 1927.³ As a Youngstown businessman who was civic-minded, Williamson saw the benefit of locating in a building that was "one central point where most activities in Youngstown took place in those early days."⁴ He agreed to pay \$150 per month in rental fees to the Y. The first transmission from the Y took place on December 28, 1926. The partnership lasted for 25 years (figs. 8a-c).⁵ The move to the YMCA pleased Williamson tremendously in that it gave his new company the room to experiment and expand. Williamson was excited by the prospect of "getting something worthwhile on the air,

² WKBN Promotional Material, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, 1945.

³ Warren P. Williamson Jr., televised interview, 1976, WKBN 50th Anniversary Broadcast, DVD, Part 3, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley.

⁴ Warren P. Williamson Jr., interview by James Manross, 10 December 1975, O.H. 351 transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Youngstown, Ohio.

⁵ WKBN Corporate Report, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, November 1, 1939, 1.

instead of playing around on it at home.”⁶ He said, “If, in those days, we hadn’t [found] a spot there that we could put this station, we probably wouldn’t have been in business. We had no money.”⁷ At this time Williamson was so confident in WKBN’s success that he began to think about leaving his job at Republic Iron and Steel. Williamson recalled the period of the Y partnership as the “real beginning” of WKBN, even though the broadcasting corporation would not be formed until 1930.⁸

During the Y years, the station marked many firsts, including contracting with the first official commercial sponsor. The arrangement grew out of a need for better acoustics in the Y studios. The downtown location was in close proximity to the Erie Terminal. In those days, rail service was hectic in Youngstown, with trains pulling in and out of the city several times per hour. The roar of passing locomotives often made it onto the air on WKBN-AM. Former WKBN Sports Director Don Gardner recalled how warm the studios became with the windows forever closed to block the noise:

You could not open the window, because if you did, Erie [Railroad] trains would go past, and you would hear “clang!” and “toot!” And it sounded as if you were in a railroad terminal instead, rather than a broadcasting station. So you would come out of there and you wouldn’t have a dry stitch on you.⁹

Williamson found a positive side to the situation. “Many people knew if [the train] came on time because it always blew the whistle when we were making a station break,” he said. Even so, WKBN Radio was in need of some noise insulation, and Williamson looked for a solution. Most stations in those days used drapes of monk’s

⁶ Warren P. Williamson Jr. Interview by Dr. Hugh Earnhardt, 30 September 1988, DVD 1, Part 16, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley and Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Youngstown, Ohio.

⁷ Warren P. Williamson Jr., televised interview by Norm Berger, 1966, transcript, WKBN 40th Anniversary Broadcast, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, 7.

⁸ Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 1, Part 17.

⁹ Don Gardner, interview by Norm Berger, 1966, transcript, WKBN 40th Anniversary Broadcast, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, 10.

cloth in the studio to muffle noise, but finding that too expensive for WKBN's budget, Williamson made a smaller investment:

In its stead I purchased rolls of burlap, which we hung in draped form around the walls and ceiling of the room. [That] corrected the acoustic problem but provided another. Unfortunately, my experience with [the] purchase of burlap in this quantity was not good, for the material we received had been preserved with fish oil and the odor of our studio was not too attractive. With time, however, this disappeared....¹⁰

Enter the Yoho Lumber Company of Youngstown. Much like the arrangement with the YMCA, Yoho Lumber offered a product in exchange for airtime. The company agreed to build acoustic treatment for the studio in the form of "beaver board which we stacked round the walls." The wooden planks muffled the sound to Williamson's satisfaction, and WKBN had a soundproof studio and a paying advertiser.¹¹

The first news broadcasts also took place at the YMCA studios. Without a news service of their own, WKBN announcers were forced to get information from the local newspapers which received transmissions of national and international news via newswire services. Williamson made a deal with *The Youngstown Telegram*, *The Vindicator's* newsprint rival, to provide WKBN with news copy.

The *Telegram* [employees] used to bring copy from the teletype – news bulletins – to us in the YMCA in the morning. I think it was 8:00 a.m., if I recall, that we had the news. We read the copy that was given to us from the *Telegram*, and the *Telegram* was compensated by the publicity we gave to it, as a supplier of news.¹²

It was truly a pioneering business in those days, as employees tackled the problems that came with the fledgling broadcasting industry. When live talent was not available, Williamson and his crew played phonograph records. When the records ended,

¹⁰ Warren P. Williamson Jr., unpublished memoirs, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, 19.

¹¹ Williamson Jr., 1966, 7.

¹² Williamson Jr., 1975, 4.

Williamson improvised. “Frequently, I ran downstairs and out and around the corner to the Wurlitzer Music Company, which was then in the old Capitol Theater Building,” he recalled. “And I got the girl who played the piano to come over to the station and play the piano for us, so that we could stay on the air. Alice Lindburg was the pianist.”¹³

Williamson did not forget those who worked to get the company off the ground in the early days. The years of the YMCA/WKBN partnership saw the hiring of the first employee, Irma Brundage. She was the first paid program director, but left the company after a few years in a dispute over a pay raise. As Williamson recalled, she asked for a raise, and he denied her request based on the limited finances of the new company. “Irma just couldn’t understand that perhaps she shouldn’t have a raise, so she went on.”

Williamson did not hold a grudge; in later years, he remembered Irma Brundage as “a fine little person.”¹⁴

With new studios, Williamson was eventually able to court new and bigger talent. Many famous and soon-to-be-famous names in broadcasting came through the doors. One of these was Jack Paar, a native of Canton, Ohio, who later gained acclaim as a television talk show host. Williamson recalled Paar worked at WKBN briefly in the 1930s, and he paid Paar “22 or 23 dollars a week.” Alan Freed worked at WKBN as sports announcer in 1942.¹⁵ He would go on to fame as a disc jockey in Cleveland, and be credited with coining the name for “Rock and Roll” music.¹⁶ Almost from the beginning, Williamson’s efforts were contributing to the appeal of the new industry by uncovering talent looking for an outlet.

¹³ Warren P. Williamson Jr., 1966, 8.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Alan Freed Biography, <http://www.history-of-rock.com/freed.htm> (accessed June 20, 2008).

¹⁶ Williamson Jr., 8.

All of these factors encouraged the partners to keep moving forward with the broadcasting company, and that meant increasing transmitting power. “We had gone beyond the point we thought of originally,” Williamson said.¹⁷ With Chorpening leading the way, the partners rebuilt the transmitter within a year of the first broadcasts, increasing it to 100 watts of power. In his unpublished memoirs, Williamson credits Chorpening with much of the success of the WKBN signal. He wrote, “In reporting these historical facts, full credit for the technical success of our venture should be given to my business partner, Creed Chorpening. For, it was due to his professional knowledge, electronic experience, and ability that the performance of our transmitting success in each of our adventures succeeded.”¹⁸

Williamson knew his own strengths and limitations. He could manage people and finances, but to build the technology for a broadcast station he would have to rely on someone with different talents. Choosing Chorpening as a partner was a wise move. The engineer was the first of many excellent associates and employees courted by Williamson, whose talent contributed to WKBN’s growth and reputation.

The combined work ethic of Williamson and Chorpening was reflected in a 1927 contest to find a slogan that would match the WKBN call letters. Since the letters had been assigned randomly by the government, they had no personal meaning for either partner. The winning slogan submitted by a listener suggested that the letters stood for “Work Keeps Business Normal” – a conservative mantra that matched the partners’ management style.¹⁹ Williamson in particular did not shy away from work, and in WKBN’s early days, he enforced a six-day work week for employees.

¹⁷ Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 1, Part 16.

¹⁸ Williamson Jr., unpublished memoirs, 20.

¹⁹ *The Youngstown Vindicator*, (Youngstown, Ohio), January 19, 1927.

The broadcasters had barely settled in at the YMCA when two outside forces pushed the partners toward a sink or swim situation: competition from a second radio station, and the involvement of the United States government. After Brock's radio show, others wanted to try their talents in the new medium. The owners of the Yaw Battery Company in Youngstown applied for a license and went on the air with WMBW in March of 1927.²⁰ According to Williamson, the 50 watt signal was never very strong, and interference from WMBW's signal was constant on WKBN. The owners did not have the engineering background to correct the problems, and as a result, the station did not attract a large audience or provide a major challenge to WKBN.²¹

The greater hurdle for WKBN, however, emerged two months later in the form of orders from the newly formed Federal Radio Commission. In February 1927, just five months after the first WKBN broadcast, the U.S. Congress passed the Radio Act. One purpose of the new law was to establish the Federal Radio Commission (FRC), a board of five people that would be the regulatory body overseeing the radio industry. Another purpose of the Radio Act was to establish the AM band (550 – 1500 kilocycles), including 96 frequencies and 40 clear stations²² The Radio Act also required stations to operate for the public good. Williamson had no problem complying with these guidelines; he viewed WKBN as a radio station for the people of Youngstown. However, he found one aspect of the Radio Act more difficult to accept.

Sixty days after Congress passed the law, all existing broadcasting licenses were voided, forcing those stations that wanted to remain on the air to re-apply. Both

²⁰ Warren P. Williamson Jr., interview by David Allen, 24 August 1991, transcript, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, Youngstown, Ohio, 108.

²¹ Williamson Jr., DVD 1, Part 17.

²² Robert L. Hilliard and Michael C. Keith, *The Broadcast Century: A Century of American Broadcasting* (Boston: Focal Press, 1997), 50.

Youngstown stations – WKBN and WMBW – were among the 174 stations disbanded in May of 1927. As part of the plan to establish an orderly system, FRC did not renew every license for every station.²³

When it became clear that only one station would be allocated to Youngstown, Ohio, Williamson aggressively campaigned for WKBN. By this time he had many connections throughout the local business community, and he called on these leaders for help. A group headed by Leonard Skeggs, Williamson’s close associate from the YMCA, banded together to purchase the WMBW stock. A WKBN report from 1939 described the strategy this way:

[The civic leaders] agree that if Youngstown could retain one full time (sic) broadcast station, application for renewal of the WMBW license would not be applied for (sic), thereby returning to the Government a broadcast frequency and relieving the congested radio condition that existed at the time. This action was subsequently carried out and the frequency 279 meters [or 1,075 kilocycles] was relinquished.²⁴

Skeggs also testified in support of WKBN’s devotion to the public interest. As a result, WMBW was out of business after just a few weeks on the air, and WKBN resumed broadcasting in Youngstown (on 360 kilocycles or 833 meters) on August 18, 1927.²⁵ Free of competition for the moment, the station shouldered the responsibility of being the primary listening source of news, music and entertainment for the Youngstown audience.

Again, Williamson and Chorpening hit the ground running, planning ways to improve transmission for WKBN. In October 1927, they succeeded in increasing WKBN’s broadcasting power to 500 watts, and they chose the top of the Stambaugh

²³ Hilliard and Keith, 52.

²⁴ WKBN Corporate Report, 1939, 2.

²⁵ Steve Grzevich, “Chapter V” (unpublished paper, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, circa 1985), 84.

Building in downtown Youngstown as the new location for the antenna. The lofty spot was secured with help from the Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company, which had offices in the building. Williamson recalled:

We had an antenna to erect outdoors. This antenna was a single wire strung from the top of the Stambaugh Building to a pole erected on the roof of the YMCA building, fed by a lead down the side of the building to the third floor where the transmitter was located. I am sure permission was obtained by Mr. Skeggs from his friend, Mr. Leroy Winchester, counsel for the Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company, which had their home offices in the upper three floors of the [Stambaugh] building.²⁶

For Williamson, who left the engineering of the tower and transmitter to other more qualified engineers, more power meant more listeners. Listeners attracted advertisers, which funded more growth.

Williamson's approach to the FRC decisions and the WMBW issue indicated that he was completely invested emotionally and financially in his radio venture early on. The aimlessness of his youth retreated and was replaced by an unwavering drive to make WKBN a success – HIS success. With that self-imposed responsibility on his shoulders, Williamson paid close attention to what the public and the critics were saying about WKBN. In the summer of 1927, just after the WKBN/WMBW controversy ended, *Vindicator* radio columnist George Madtes wrote the following about the radio scene in Youngstown:

We might as well be frank about it, most of the programs put on by Youngstown stations are mediocre. The program directors will be the first to tell you so; they can't help it. There just naturally isn't the talent available for hour after hour programs, night after night. The use of phonographs records would increase the audience of local stations immeasurably.²⁷

Williamson responded to this criticism immediately. On September 1, 1927, he added an

²⁶ Williamson Jr., unpublished memoirs, 13.

²⁷ The Youngstown Vindicator, (Youngstown, Ohio), August 31, 1927.

hour of phonograph music to WKBN's program schedule.

A more effective and long-lasting solution to the programming problem came in the form of network affiliation. On September 7, 1929, WKBN joined the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) network. In joining CBS, WKBN became one of 16 stations in the United States under the watchful CBS "eye."²⁸ It was a mutually beneficial arrangement in that WKBN would receive CBS programming to air for local listeners; in exchange it would promote the network and help to extend its reach. This was key to network development. Long before "interactive" was a catch word for the broadcasting industry, local programming generated interaction between communities and their local stations and parent networks.²⁹

With WFMJ-AM 1390 still a decade away from its first broadcast, Williamson could have chosen instead to affiliate with the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) which at that time operated two networks. When asked about his choice, Williamson indicated the decision was based partly on the competition from nearby stations. NBC programming could already be heard by Youngstown listeners via stations in Pittsburgh and Cleveland. Akron's WADC had joined the new CBS network. The decision also seemed to be influenced by Williamson's opinion of CBS network president Williams S. Paley.

The two men met on occasion, and although their relationship did not go beyond a business association, Williamson noted that the young executive was just a year his junior, and Williamson, as the local broadcaster, "thought very well of Paley."³⁰ Paley,

²⁸ Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 2, Part 2

²⁹ Gary R. Edgerton and Peter C. Rollins, eds., *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001), xxiv.

³⁰ Williamson Jr., 1991, 105.

who had made his fortune in the cigar industry, had big plans for CBS, which was struggling in the mid-1920s. Williamson liked what he saw and put his trust in CBS and Paley.³¹

For a small broadcast station like WKBN, the biggest benefit of CBS affiliation was quality programming. The enormous burden of producing local programs to fill airtime was relieved when CBS began supplying as much as 60 percent the programming from New York. That left 40 percent of the week to be filled with local news and entertainment programs. As part of the CBS “chain,” the network paid stations like WKBN to air the network programs.³² Promotional material for WKBN during the peak years of radio stated:

The high standard of the programs and the volume of the listening audience are attested by the fact that sponsors spent several million more dollars with the Columbia Broadcasting System last year than with any other network. Many of the WKBN-CBS programs were placed at the top in drama, news, music and education by several national polls. WKBN and CBS never cease to search for the best for their millions of listeners throughout the nations, and millions of dollars are invested week after week to see that they get the best in network and local programs.³³

The network/affiliate relationship was far from harmonious, however. The CBS programming was sent through telephone lines to the various affiliate stations in the United States. The lines were extended to Pittsburgh and Cleveland, but WKBN would have to pay for “a loop” to Youngstown. The charge for that line was billed to WKBN and resulted in a fee of \$150 per week to CBS. That amount was offset by the payments coming from CBS for airing programs, but it was not an even exchange. Williamson recalled that WKBN often owed CBS as much as \$10,000 in payments, and CBS was

³¹ Hilliard and Keith, 54.

³² WKBN/CBS Contract, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, 1930.

³³ WKBN Public Relations Material, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, 1944.

vigilant about collecting as per the agreement.³⁴

The contract itself was a point of contention for both companies. In a July 1934 letter to CBS, Williamson expressed his frustration:

In reviewing our situation, in the five years of our affiliation with Columbia, not one cent in revenue had come back to us for time devoted to your commercials, and in addition to that, we have spent approximately \$8,000 per year for lines. You can well realize that this situation cannot continue to exist, and those who are interested in this station have given me to understand that Columbia must pay its way, in fact make a little money, or we must do without it, as much as we hate to think of it.... This situation is anything but pleasant, I assure you, as far as we are concerned. The continual necessity of asking for consideration and the fighting for an equitable arrangement is quite disappointing.³⁵

Despite Williamson's strong words – or maybe because of them – CBS pushed for payment of line fees. In October, Williamson wrote:

We are very much aware of our Columbia situation and thoroughly conscious that it costs us 150.00 (sic) a week to keep you happy in New York. However, this 150.00 (sic) isn't as easily forthcoming as one might expect and especially when my bank account never shows any revenue from the Columbia commercial end.³⁶

Part of the problem for WKBN was that for the first 12 years of CBS affiliation, the station could not accept programming around the clock (and, therefore, get the most revenue from CBS) because it was not broadcasting full time. It was a handicap that would take Williamson more than a dozen years to correct.

The problem had its origin in the late 1920s, when Williamson and Chorpening first applied for a license to broadcast. The U.S. Department of Commerce granted the license to WKBN, also assigning the frequency to a Dayton, Ohio station, WSMK. The idea was that the two stations were small enough that it would serve both to divide the airtime; one station signed off the air when the other had scheduled programming, and so

³⁴ Williamson Jr., 1991, 106.

³⁵ Warren P. Williamson letter to CBS, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, July 31, 1934.

³⁶ Ibid.

on. “We didn’t get along too well with that!” Williamson said of the shared time order.³⁷ Still, he and Chorpening put up with the situation.

There was one good reason for tolerating shared time: it alleviated a programming shortage. Radio time was not always easy to fill, so signing off for part of the day or evening did eliminate some headaches for the Youngstown broadcasters.³⁸ Williamson also believed that as the WKBN operation expanded, the problem of divided time would eventually resolve itself. However, this did not happen as quickly as he would have liked.

When the FRC granted WKBN’s power increase to 500 watts and assigned a new frequency of 570 on October 15, 1928, the order again included sharing time with the Dayton station. This was just the beginning of a 15-year battle for Williamson. His refusal to give up his goal of broadcasting full time was another example of his determination to maintain – under his control – what he had built in Youngstown.³⁹

In June 1929, the FRC allocated the 570 frequency to WEAO Radio (later WOSU) in Columbus, Ohio, which again divided time with WKBN. This did not improve the situation for WKBN, as the Columbus station eventually became the property of The Ohio State University. With Monday, Wednesday, and Friday nights going to WOSU for broadcasts of college games, programming became a nightmare for WKBN. “We were trying to make a living!” Williamson said (figure 9).⁴⁰ He claimed that “building and releasing” the audience each day made it impossible to adequately

³⁷ Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 1, Part 19.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Williamson Jr., 1991, 110.

serve listeners in Youngstown.⁴¹

The divided time problem persisted throughout the 1930s. In 1934, a concept known as the “Ohio Shift” was proposed to government officials (organized as the Federal Communications Commission in 1934) in an effort to resolve the problem. The proposal involved shifting three stations, one each in Youngstown, Cleveland, and Columbus, to different frequencies that did not conflict. This would eliminate shared time and improve coverage.

According to the “Ohio Shift” plan, WKBN would be moved to 610 on the dial, getting it away from the WOSU frequency. When the FCC denied the proposal, it was most likely a mixed blessing for Williamson. Changing the WKBN frequency was an option he was never sold on. “Of course, we were always hunting a [new] frequency, but I had enough knowledge that I knew the value of a longer wave length [as compared to] a shorter wave length.” He explained, “I wanted to retain the [570] frequency I had, because of the efficiency of coverage of the longer wave length.”⁴²

Williamson’s determination to stick with AM 570 wavered only once. In the late 1930s, he entered negotiations with the government and WOSU to get full control of the 570 frequency, but the talks lagged. Williamson claimed the delay was due to the fact that a member of the government panel was “close to Columbus.” For three years, the divided time/frequency issue was “kicked around and nothing happened.”⁴³

Frustrated and wanting to level the playing field, Williamson turned to the Forest City Publishing investors in Cleveland. They convinced Williamson to accept another frequency, which would finally bring an end to sharing time with WOSU. Williamson

⁴¹ WKBN Corporate Report, 1939, i.

⁴² Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 1, Part 2.

⁴³ Ibid., DVD 2, Part 2.

agreed, but soon had a change of heart. In a 1988 interview, Williamson recalled he posited, “I’m for Youngstown, and I don’t think I want to give it away. So I hang on.”⁴⁴ Finally, an exit strategy presented itself, but it was a costly one.

Williamson was serving as president of the Ohio Association of Broadcasters in the late 1930s, and his position enabled him to finally establish meetings with the government officials in charge of station allocations. During these meetings, an agreement was worked out in which WKBN would pay for a new 5 kilowatt RCA transmitter for WOSU – a \$25,000 price tag.⁴⁵ In exchange for the transmitter, WOSU would broadcast on AM 640, leaving the 570 frequency to WKBN.

Convincing the Cleveland newspaper shareholders to financially support the plan took some salesmanship on Williamson’s part, but he got some assistance from a competitor in Youngstown. In his search for financial support, Williamson had approached *The Youngstown Vindicator*. Williamson explained his proposal:

...one day I said to Mr. Will Maag, [who] was a good friend of mine...“Why don’t you buy interest in WKBN?” But *The Vindicator* was not interested in getting into WKBN in those years.... Well, then, he got into the business and made application for a license in Youngstown that operated a broadcasting station.⁴⁶

Maag rejected Williamson’s request for financial support, but the publisher’s next move indirectly helped to bring about a solution to WKBN’s problem. Williams F. Maag applied for a license to operate WFMJ-AM 1390, which went on the air in Youngstown in 1939, while Williamson was still wrangling with WOSU and the FCC. The government had removed restrictions prohibiting ownership of multiple media outlets by

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., DVD 2, Part 3.

⁴⁶ Williamson Jr., 1991, 31.

a single business, allowing the newspaper to operate a radio station. When the license was granted, Maag was ready for radio. He had built studios, a tower and a transmitter with the potential for 1000 watts of power, and he had chosen call letters that reflected his own initials.

WFMJ started out with 500 watts of power, but Maag's winning card was in his airtime. WFMJ was a full-time operation with an affiliation with the NBC network and round-the-clock programming. Williamson knew if WKBN continued to go off the air for hours each day, it could not compete with WFMJ, and Maag knew it, too.

Using the threat of competition in Youngstown as leverage, Williamson appealed to the Forest City investors, who eventually agreed to fund the WOSU transmitter. The FCC approved, and on April 18, 1941, WKBN was finally free of the divided time handicap. WKBN was full-time operation broadcasting on AM 570.⁴⁷

From a distance of many decades, Williamson described the resolution to the irritating divided time problem as "hunky dory," and more than satisfactory for WKBN; but the description belies the tedious struggle that won him the prized position of full-time broadcaster. Bud Williamson, born in 1930, remembers his father as "being away from home more than he was home" during the 1930s. The elder Williamson was in Columbus or Washington, D.C., fighting for full-time broadcasting rights for WKBN. The battle became legendary in the Williamson family and is an example of the tenacity of Warren P. Williamson Jr.'s character. Bud Williamson recalled that one family story – never documented but often repeated – had his father paddling a rowboat across Buckeye Lake near Columbus to get the attention of an OSU official instrumental in the shared

⁴⁷ Williamson Jr., DVD 1, Part 19.

time decision. Williamson had no appointment, but felt he had gotten “a run-around” by the official. Ambushing him, so to speak, was a last resort for Williamson Jr. The younger Williamson does not know the outcome for the meeting, but recalled, “I believe the reluctance of OSU was softened not long afterward.”⁴⁸

During his first decade of full-time broadcasting, Williamson remained aggressive in planning for the future. A priority was finding more space. He knew that his time at the YMCA must come to an end for a couple of reasons: WKBN needed room to expand, and there was a growing conflict of interest in the partnership between the nonprofit organization and the profitable radio station.⁴⁹ As much as he was devoted to the YMCA and its directors, Williamson admitted, “A commercial enterprise didn’t belong in that kind of institution.”⁵⁰

Williamson began expanding WKBN’s horizons in 1935, when he purchased property on the south side of Youngstown (figure 10). The radio station offices and studios remained downtown on the third floor of the YMCA, but in 1937, Williamson and his employees constructed a new transmitter building and tower at 3930 Sunset Boulevard (figure 11a-b). In 1942, four directional antennas were added at that site, as was a fifth tower for the FM radio antenna and, in the not-so-distant future, a television antenna.

The 60-acre property offered plenty of room to expand offices and studios, but Williamson resisted the idea of moving those facilities out of Youngstown’s central business district. Sunset Boulevard and the newly-developed south side neighborhoods

⁴⁸ Warren P. “Bud” Williamson III, phone interview with Tricia Perry, April 23, 2008.

⁴⁹ Warren P. *Williamson Jr. :Mahoning Valley Broadcast Pioneer*, produced by Lowry Stewart and Gary Hanson, 60 min., WKBN Broadcasting Corp., 1996, videocassette.

⁵⁰ Williamson Jr., 1975, 6.

seemed rural in the 1930s, so he spent years looking for the right space downtown.

In 1944, Williamson noted details of his search for a new location in his personal diaries. His focus, from October 1944 to June 1946, was the Central Tower (now the Metropolitan Tower) in downtown Youngstown. At the time, the building was owned by the city and was for sale. It was considered a skyscraper in the early Twentieth Century, and is to this day Youngstown's tallest structure.

Williamson had dozens of meetings and phone conversations with Henry Church of the Youngstown City Law Department concerning the rental or purchase of the building. Calling the matter "confidential" in his diary, Williamson wrote, "I explained that we were doing some post-war planning now. That we didn't know whether we could use space in the tower but would like to investigate possibilities."⁵¹

Williamson attended these meetings with Church in private, and his diaries indicate that no one on his staff knew of the discussions. He also indicated concern for possible embarrassment should the YMCA people learn of his plans to move WKBN operations, given the friendly 18-year history between the organizations.

The discussions for the possible purchase of Central Tower got as far as negotiating a price. Church said the city wanted \$750,000 for the building; Williamson was prepared to pay no more than \$450,000 considering he would have to make expensive renovations (costing \$50,000 to \$75,000) to accommodate radio studios and offices. Williamson wrote, "I told [Church] I wasn't getting myself into debt for the rest of my days." Ultimately, the Central Tower went to local businessman Sam Miller, who paid \$602,000 for it in June of 1946.

⁵¹ Warren P. Williamson Jr., personal diary, 1944, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley.

Williamson continued to negotiate a rental agreement with Miller that included entire floors and a new name – WKBN Tower.⁵² But he had a backup plan ready if the deal fell through, which it eventually did. Williamson turned his focus toward his south side property and expanding the facilities there to accommodate all WKBN studios and offices. This included FM radio.

Promoted by inventor Edwin Armstrong, FM had several advantages over AM radio, including a lack of static, no interference with other FM signals, and comparable reach using less power. However, for years it had been pushed to the back of the technology line by RCA and NBC executives who did not want competition for AM radio and television.⁵³ By 1946, when Williamson was constructing an FM tower at WKBN, the technology was finally taking off. WKBN-FM 98.9 went on the air in 1947, the first FM radio presence in the Youngstown area. Again, the broadcast pioneer made the right decision at the right time.

The new facility on Sunset Boulevard – dubbed “Radio Youngstown” by Williamson – would take another decade to build, but it was clear by the late 1940s that the WKBN Broadcasting Corporation was a force with great momentum in the local community and in the broadcasting industry. Williamson weathered the Great Depression and World War II to emerge a major player in the business world with a vision for the future. Dominating that vision was television.

⁵² Williamson, Jr., personal diary, 1944.

⁵³ Hilliard and Keith, 74.

CHAPTER III

In the weeks prior to the January 1953 broadcast on WKNB-TV 27, the Youngstown community was witness to a race that has become local legend – the race to bring television into their homes. Residents had been reading in *The Youngstown Vindicator* about plans for another television station – WFMJ-TV. William F. Maag Jr., the owner and publisher of *The Youngstown Vindicator*, was behind that effort, and he believed WFMJ-TV would be the first television station in Youngstown. It had taken Maag two decades of competing with radio to come to that conclusion. Like other newspaper giants in the early Twentieth Century, Maag initially thought wireless broadcasting was secondary to, and separate from, newsprint. While many publishers did invest in radio stations in the 1920s, Maag resisted until 1939, when he put WFMJ-AM on the air in Youngstown. Even then, he saw radio primarily as a tool to promote readership of the newspaper. Developing technology – and the public’s demand for it – changed that.¹

By the mid-1940s, Maag believed television would not only be a promotional tool for him, but the next step in the quickly developing mass communications industry. It

¹Sarah Cart, Paul Jagnow, and Robert McFerren, *These Hundred Years: A Chronicle of the Twentieth Century As Recorded in the Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio: The Vindicator Printing Company, 2001), 37.

was a step he planned to make first, and he wanted the people of Youngstown to read about it in his newspaper.

To completely understand the relationship between Maag and Williamson as businessmen, friends, and rivals, it is necessary to include a brief history of *The Youngstown Vindicator* and its parent company, The Vindicator Printing Company. Originally called *The Mahoning Vindicator*, the newspaper was first published in 1869 by J.H. Odell, an independent journalist. In its earliest days it was a weekly publication that changed ownership several times before the operation was devastated by fire in 1887.² Later that year, what was left of the newspaper and its presses was on the auction block when Maag's father, William F. Maag Sr., made a bid to purchase it. At the time, the senior Maag was the successful editor of the *Rundschau*, a German weekly publication, and his management skills would serve the failing paper well (figure 12).

Maag Sr. immigrated to the United States from Germany in 1867, and was described as a man of "courage, enterprise, and industry."³ He began printing the paper at 12 Phelps Street, changed the name to *The Youngstown Vindicator*, and hired John M. Webb, an established writer, to join the staff. The paper's main competitor was *The Youngstown Telegram*, an evening paper that began publication just two years before Maag purchased the *Vindicator*. Maag knew his paper had to be printed daily to compete, so he gathered investors to make it happen. In September of 1889, the *Youngstown Vindicator* became a daily paper.

Under Maag's leadership as treasurer and general manager, the paper thrived. In 1893, Maag constructed new offices at Boardman and Phelps Streets (now the home of

² Cart, 124.

³ Ibid., 125.

WFMJ-TV 21), and the organization supported such community projects as the construction of the local opera house and the establishment of both the Mahoning Valley Historical Society and the Butler Institute of American Art.

When Maag Sr. died in 1924, his Harvard-educated son, William F. Maag Jr., stepped into a leadership role at the paper. He proved to be an effective leader as well. It was under Maag Jr. and his sister Alma's husband, William O. Brown, that the paper ultimately eliminated the competition, purchasing *The Telegram* from Scripps-Howard in 1936.⁴ While the banner for *The Telegram* would remain as a subheading on page one for 22 years, the *Youngstown Vindicator* would be the sole pervasive source of news and information for area residents.

Maag did not take that power for granted, however. An editorial published in July of 1937 stated the publisher's resolve to serve the community. It read: "Those directing the *Vindicator's* policy realize that although Youngstown has only one paper, it cannot rest on its past achievements or rely on its monopoly, either as a matter of ethics or of practical success."⁵ Maag did not rest for long, making the decision to expand into radio two years later.

Former WFMJ Employee Jasper Grier recalled that Maag would make a daily trip from the newspaper offices at Vindicator Square to the WFMJ building at Boardman and Phelps Streets. He kept a second office there and spent about an hour a day at WFMJ. While the radio station was not his priority, Grier called him a "courteous" boss who gave out Christmas bonus checks and provided food for employees working long hours.⁶

⁴ Cart, 130.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Jasper Grier, interview by Charles Kelso, 2006, DVD, Part 2, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, Youngstown, Ohio.

WFMJ-AM 1390 was not the first radio station in Youngstown, of course. It arrived on the air at the end of radio's golden decade; but it came at just the right time, when the public was thirsting for more news of world events. World War II was gaining momentum as Adolf Hitler advanced his Nazi forces across Europe. Newspapers provided the most current information in morning, evening and extra editions, but the immediacy of radio reports, which were often live, appealed to the public. People did not want to wait for the next edition to be written, printed, and distributed; they wanted updated reports hourly, or even by the minute, and they got that just by turning on the radio.⁷

When Youngstown residents tuned in, Warren P. Williamson Jr.'s station was already there. By the late 1930s, he was well established as a local broadcaster and WKBN-AM 570 was an overwhelming success in Youngstown. The paths of Williamson and Maag Jr. likely crossed for the first time in the late 1920s, when the two men combined efforts to broadcast November election returns and the Rayen-South football game. Both men were young leaders in the community, with business ventures aimed at serving the public. The broadcasts were successful, and a partnership made sense, but it was to be temporary. The two leaders spent the remainder of the 1920s and the 1930s providing news to Mahoning Valley residents. Competition intensified when the Maag operation established a radio station of its own to rival WKBN.

By the time WFMJ-AM 1390 went on the air in 1939, the groundwork was in place for a lively competition between the two businesses.⁸ The rivalry between two radio stations would be fueled by the prospect of television on the Youngstown horizon

⁷ Cart, 131.

⁸ Cart, 37.

in the mid-1940s. With Williamson actively pursuing a television license, Maag recognized the potential of the new commercial medium and got on board much sooner than he had with radio.

Warren P. Williamson was ahead of Maag in his exploration of television and had his own motivations. First to establish commercial radio in Youngstown, Williamson was determined to be first to introduce the next medium to the city. WKBN-AM 570 was a powerhouse by the 1930s, but as Williamson succinctly said, “We looked ahead to television, and we started to plan.”⁹

That plan would take more than two decades and would be driven in part by competition with Youngstown’s most powerful publisher. When Maag’s plans for establishing a television station became clear, the activities of both operations – WKBN and WFMJ – accelerated. These bigger-than-life businessmen strategizing in the same direction resulted in a race that would become broadcast legend in Youngstown.

According to Bud Williamson, his father had been interested in television since 1930. The elder Williamson was corresponding with manufacturers about television transmitters even as he was maneuvering to make WKBN radio more powerful (figure13). The Federal Communications Commission was planning for television and had established 12 VHF (Very High Frequency) channels, numbered two through 13. “[The FCC] had to decide where they could use these channels throughout the United States, so that they would not interfere with each other – so you didn’t put a Channel 2 in New York City right next to another Channel 2 for several hundred miles,” Bud Williamson explained. “The bigger cities had the economic base from which to start these

⁹ Warren P. Williamson Jr., interview by Hugh Earnhart, 30 September 1988, DVD 2, Part 7, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley and Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Youngstown, Ohio.

stations.”¹⁰

By 1947, Youngstown was one of 20 larger U.S. cities to earn one channel allocation by the FCC.¹¹ At the advent of television, the government had first attempted to assign television stations in the same way radio had been handled in the 1920s – by asking that owners show their financial ability to support a station, as well as demonstrate a commitment to the community. “You had to show that you would be a good servant of the community, [that you would] do a good job of broadcasting in ways that were in the interest of the local population,” Bud Williamson said. His father was certainly up to the task, but so was Maag, and only one license could be handed out for each channel.

On December 30, 1947, it was Maag who first applied for a license to operate a television station on VHF Channel 13, the only station assigned to Youngstown.¹² A few weeks later, WKBN also applied for a license. A third party, the Mansfield Radio Company of Toledo, Ohio, applied as well. Several months later, however, Mansfield Radio sold its license application to the Lyden Oil Company of Youngstown. The three organizations prepared to battle for the right to broadcast on Youngstown’s only television channel, but before the competition escalated, new developments removed Channel 13 from the Youngstown market.

Cities across the United States experienced similar struggles as many applicants attempted to obtain the few television licenses available. The FCC had assigned four VHF channels to the city of Cleveland, but interests in that city appealed to the FCC to

¹⁰ Warren P. “Bud” Williamson III, interview by Tricia Perry, 17 July 2006, transcript, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley and Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Youngstown, Ohio, 6.

¹¹ Richard James, “A Historical Analysis of the Development of UHF in the Youngstown Area” (master’s thesis, Kent State University, 1982), 4.

¹² WKBN Corporate Records of Comparative Press, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, circa 1940.

move Channel 13 to Cleveland as well, leaving Youngstown with no television allocation.¹³ The FCC held competitive hearings to decide these matters, but they were inconclusive and often ended up in court. In fact, the hearings dragged on so long that the government concluded it would be difficult to provide adequate television service for the entire country with just 12 channels.

Declaring the process at an impasse, the FCC froze all allocations in September of 1948. Ultimately, Youngstown lost its VHF channel.¹⁴ This was disappointing to Williamson and Maag, who shared the belief that Youngstown could support at least one television channel, but it was not their last chance. As the government continued to establish regulations for television, additional UHF (Ultra High Frequency) channels became available.

The freeze did not stop the popularity of the new medium from growing, however. Broadcasting industry analysts measured that growth by the number of television sets finding their way into Youngstown homes. At the end of the 1940s, *The Youngstown Vindicator* reported that as many as 15,000 sets had been purchased in the tri-county area of Mahoning, Trumbull and Columbiana (radio sets numbered 200,000 in at that time).

However, *The Vindicator* also reported that as a “fringe” area for TV, “[the city] does not enjoy the reception found in cities where television stations have been set up.” Youngstown viewers used antennas to tune into VHF signals from Cleveland, but really good reception would be possible if and when a television station was established in the

¹³ James, 6.

¹⁴ Williamson III, 2006, 12.

Mahoning Valley. The smaller – clearer – television picture remained elusive to the Youngstown audience until the freeze ended in 1952.¹⁵

Three years before the FCC lifted the freeze, the commission released a new table of allocations that included the 12 VHF channels, as well as channels 14 – 69 on the UHF band. (Channels 70 – 83 were assigned to special and safety purposes). This was good news for both Maag and Williamson. At that time, the government allocated three UHF channels to Youngstown, and one UHF channel each to nearby Warren, Ohio, and Ashtabula, and to the Pennsylvania cities of Sharon, New Castle, Butler and Meadville.

Officials at both WKBN and WFMJ were anticipating the lifting of the ban, but as WFMJ's chief engineer Frank Dieringer observed, "This only means that the commission will begin to accept officially applications for permits or modifications of existing applications to construct new TV stations."¹⁶ In other words, the wait for television was far from over.

On April 14, 1952, the FCC issued the Sixth Report and Order, which included a table of VHF and UHF allocation for the United States. The plan assigned three UHF stations to Youngstown – Channels, 27, 33, and 73. Channel 21 was allocated to Warren, Ohio, Channel 45 went to New Castle, Pennsylvania, and Sharon, Pennsylvania, was assigned Channel 39.¹⁷ When the freeze was finally lifted that year, there was "quite a rush," by those who had the means to apply for those licenses.¹⁸

Warren P. Williamson was ready for the green light. In the mid-1940s, Williamson had made the decision to expand operations on Sunset Boulevard and the

¹⁵ *The Youngstown Vindicator*, from WKBN records at Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, no date.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ James, 11.

¹⁸ Williamson III, 2006, 12.

property was already equipped with a television tower. New studios were completed during the FCC licensing freeze, and WKBN operations were moved from the YMCA downtown during the summer of 1951. In his personal diary, Williamson documented the move, declaring on July 3 that the first program out of the new studio was “very good.” On the morning of July 7, all operations had been moved to the Sunset facility with “no hitches.” Finally, on July 10, Williamson wrote, “Last equipment moved from YMCA building to new building. We are at home but not quite settled.”¹⁹ A year before the freeze was lifted Williamson was ready for what was to come next.

The television industry had grown dramatically during the eight-year freeze, and so had Youngstown. By 1952, the potential viewing audience in the Youngstown market included half-a-million people.²⁰ Bud Williamson said, “We were anxious to get on the air, as were the people at *The Vindicator* who wanted to do that.”²¹ As Williamson applied for Channel 27, the owners of *The Youngstown Vindicator* applied for Channel 33, later amending that request to apply for Channel 73. (The Lyden Group later relinquished its application for a license due to location restrictions.)²² Both were granted construction permits on July 11, 1952.²³

Further moves by the FCC during this time cancelled the Channel 33 frequency in Youngstown and reassigned Channel 21 from Warren to Youngstown. *The Vindicator* immediately took action to change its application to Channel 21, which had better reception than Channel 73. However, it would be some time before that request

¹⁹ Warren P. Williamson Jr., personal diary, 1951, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley.

²⁰ *The Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio), January 10, 1953.

²¹ Williamson III, 2006, 12.

²² James, 15.

²³ *The Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio), January 10, 1953.

succeeded.

In the meantime, both WFMJ and WKBN began major construction projects as they prepared for television broadcasts. At WKBN, extensive plans were drawn for a tower tall enough to transmit a television signal (figure 14). Bud Williamson recalled that it was as if “someone blew a whistle somewhere in 1952, when a very large number of licenses and construction permits were granted.”²⁴ For the Williamson and Maag organizations, this meant competing to get their facilities completed, and it also meant vying for parts that were in short supply, or, in some cases, not yet designed or manufactured. With all applicants across the country needing the same equipment, time was of the essence.

Locally the race was on, and as the television parts and pieces fell into place in Youngstown, they indicated what a close race it would be. Both operations were feeling the pressure to be first on the air in television when, on New Year’s Day 1953, the *Vindicator* reported that transmitters for both WKBN and WFMJ had departed RCA’s New Jersey plant the day before, headed for Youngstown.

In an attempt to put WFMJ in the lead, the paper printed a photograph of what appeared to be a transmission from the WFMJ-TV studio. The photograph actually depicted a television monitor showing a still photograph of Youngstown Mayor Charles P. Henderson. The caption under the picture stated that the mayor had been at the WFMJ studios the previous evening for a broadcast of “In Our Town.” The caption went on to explain, “He consented to a pose while the station tried its TV cameras. This is a photograph of the image received on a monitor set. It is the same picture a home set

²⁴ Williamson III, 2006, 12.

would show.”²⁵

An interesting stunt, but this was not a victory for WFMJ as it was not an actual televised transmission. The two 1,000-watt transmitters were needed for that, and they were in transit from Camden, New Jersey. *The Vindicator* article read:

The transmitters were designed and manufactured by the Radio Corporation of America and are the first ultra-high frequency transmitters to be shipped to Ohio. Each transmitter will deliver 1,000 watts of power. Each was designed especially for the channel on which it is to broadcast. WKBN will be on Channel 27, and WFMJ on Channel 73.²⁶

A day later WFMJ seemed to have gained the lead. The Friday, January 2, 1953, edition of *The Youngstown Vindicator* ran three photographs on page 13 showing the arrival of the WFMJ-TV transmitting units. They arrived on time at the WFMJ transmitter site on Mabel Street in Youngstown, where chief engineer Larry Olson and his team unloaded them.²⁷ Once installed, the equipment was capable of transmitting both sound and pictures.

On Sunday, January 4, 1953, local television news had moved to the front page with a *Vindicator* story devoted to WFMJ technicians and their “painstaking” work installing four TV cameras, a boom microphone, and a control room at the downtown station. On page B7 of the same edition, a photograph of the “new kind of tower” ran the length of the page (figure 15). The caption read:

This is the guyed tower which WFMJ-TV has erected in Mabel Street to broadcast television programs within the next few weeks. The tower is for temporary uses only, until the Truscon Steel Co. can turn out WFMJ-TV’s permanent tower later this year. The permanent tower will be one of the tallest in the United States. It will be 1,000 feet in height and the tip will be the highest point in Ohio.²⁸

²⁵ *The Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio), January 1, 1953.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *The Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio), January 2, 1953.

²⁸ *The Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio), January 4, 1953,

The Mabel Street tower was 335 feet tall and only temporary. Eventually, that 1,000-foot tower was erected on Maag's Mabel Street property, adjacent to the temporary tower.

However, WKBN already had a television tower located on property just south of Midlothian Boulevard, at 3930 Sunset Boulevard. At 540 feet, that tower was constructed to support WKBN's FM radio antenna. It had the capacity to hold a television antenna as well (figure 16). Williamson knew he would not beat WFMJ in constructing a 1,000-foot tower, but he could be first on the air with what he had, and that was his goal in January 1952.

On Saturday, January 10, 1953, the *Vindicator* reported that as an NBC affiliate, WFMJ-TV, would soon air top NBC television shows in Youngstown. WFMJ business manager Leonard Nasman made appearances around the community to promote the network programming, which included viewer favorites such as *TV Playhouse*, the *Milton Berle Show*, *Your Show of Shows*, and *Hit Parade*. Nasman also promoted WFMJ-TV 73, pointing out that the station applied for a permit in 1948, before any other local station, and quickly thereafter put a down payment on transmitting equipment from RCA. Nasman added that the WFMJ building had been constructed with television in mind in 1939, when the AM radio station went on air.²⁹

For several days after that story, there was no more mention of WFMJ-TV in the newspaper. However, on January 11, a small image just two columns wide appeared on page A8. It was the image of "Youngstown's First TV Picture" – as seen on WKBN-TV 27. A schedule was included, telling people with television sets when to "tune in" to see it. WKBN programming and production chief Don Brice confirmed that the station

²⁹ *The Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio), January 10, 1953.

transmitted its first picture with sound at 2:20 p.m. on January 11. A newscast aired at 4:15, followed by CBS network programming. On January 12, a small article on page seven of *The Vindicator* announced that WKBN-TV had begun regular programming on Sunday evening and was planning to continue that throughout the week.³⁰ By January 20, the station was prepared to handle a major broadcast, and carried the live coverage of President Dwight Eisenhower's inauguration.

For residents of Youngstown who had access to television sets, a local station connected them to the rest of the world. They were now part of WKBN's viewing audience, and they were exposed to the programming, advertising, and general allure of the new medium. Television was no longer a mysterious new invention to be viewed at special exhibitions; it was in their homes and a permanent part of their culture.

So what happened to the Youngstown station that had applied for the first license and seemed to have everything in place to broadcast the first television pictures? The answer, while far from simple, came down to a race against the clock, a difficult UHF frequency, and a key piece of equipment. At first, the equipment required to broadcast on channels 27 and 73 did not work very well, according to Bud Williamson. The higher frequency of those channels presented a problem, more so on channel 73 (later WFMJ would move to Channel 21, where it remains today).

At the time, RCA was the principal seller of transmitting equipment, and had taken orders during the FCC freeze for parts that were still in the design and development stages. This meant receiving the parts was often uncertain; delivery, at best, was slow. Both WFMJ and WKBN were pushing to get the equipment first, and, once getting it, to

³⁰ *The Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio), January 12, 1953,

make it work.³¹ Television history in Youngstown, Ohio, depended on their success or failure. “*The Vindicator* and ourselves...we tied into each other. It was a competitive situation,” Warren P. Williamson Jr. recalled in 1988. “Who got on television first would be something we would always want to say – ‘I was *first* in the business.’”³²

To broadcast television, two transmitters were needed – one for the sound and one for the picture. Both of these signals were combined in a device called a filterplexer, for broadcast through a single antenna. At the advent of television, the filterplexer was in demand by WKBN engineers and others like them who were building television stations across the United States. The purpose of the filterplexer was to act as a “combining device” for the picture and sound signals. Bud Williamson called it “an unusual piece of plumbing” with coaxial lines that brought the two signals in, joined them, and sent them out without interfering with each other; each device was constructed and tuned for the operating channel. At this early point in the development of television, sound technology was much more reliable than picture transmission. “You could always pick up the sound, but [at times] you could hardly see the picture,” Bud Williamson recalled.³³ In what must have been a frustrating situation, WKBN built a transmitter for broadcasting sound a television picture, but could not broadcast both simultaneously – not without the filterplexer.³⁴

A company called Dielectric Products in Ramond, Maine, (now owned by Sola Basic Industries) manufactured the filterplexer and only had so many of them. With many new stations needing the device, Bud Williamson said it was a bit of a scramble to obtain

³¹ Williamson III, 2006, 12.

³² Williamson Jr., 1988, DVD 2, Part 7.

³³ Williamson III, 2006, 12.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

one. Not willing to leave much to fate – or a delivery service – Warren Williamson Jr. approved the purchase of a pick-up truck. Two employees (including long-time sports announcer Don Gardner) were told to take the truck to Maine. Their goal was to pick up the filterplexer and bring it back to Youngstown as quickly as possible, greatly reducing delivery time. This was in early January of 1953. As the story goes – according to WKBN records – the two-man mission was accomplished, and the filterplexer installed a few weeks ahead of WFMJ’s first television broadcast.³⁵ Youngstown residents saw television pictures and sound first on WKBN-TV 27 on January 11, 1953.

The competition did not end there. According to Bud Williamson, the rivalry between the stations continued over the other equipment necessary for broadcasting in the new medium. He described the cavities in the transmitter that were the tuning devices for the final amplifier in the transmitter. “They were like a little box that you could split in and out of,” Williamson said. “And there was also a competition to get the right cavities and the right devices to work on these two channels.” Simultaneously, stations all over the United States were vying for the same parts, mainly from RCA, “because everyone wanted to beat someone else and be first.”³⁶

Once WKBN and WFMJ had the necessary equipment, the Channel 73 frequency delayed operations at WFMJ. Williamson said, “One of the reasons they did not beat us on the air, the tuning cavities did not work [very well] for that high frequency.”³⁷ WFMJ Channel 73 finally aired a successful test pattern on February 9, 1953, with regular NBC programming airing beginning on the evening of Sunday, March 8, 1953. Youngstown officially had two UHF television stations.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Warren P. “Bud” Williamson III, phone interview by Tricia Perry, April 23, 2008.

Being first was a monumental victory for WKBN and for Williamson, who continued his dominance on the local television scene as he had in the radio market. Bud Williamson recalled that the competition with WFMJ was “a self-imposed thing.” He said, “You wanted to be able to wave your flag and [WFMJ] did as well.”³⁸ The “flag” in this competition took the form of a television tower. Building a tower to surpass all others – by transmitting the strongest signal the farthest distance – provided another outlet for the competition between the Maag and Williamson operations.

During the competition that followed the first broadcasts, the Maag operation made some very good decisions, including changing their allocation from Channel 73 to Channel 21. Maag also enlisted experts at Truscon Steel in building the 1,000-foot television tower. Williamson explained:

The Vindicator had to work very hard to get themselves moved from a channel which really didn't work very well for them... They did two very good things. First of all, they managed to get Channel 21 moved from somewhere else into this market. They got it assigned to them, and they got a construction permit for it. Then they went to Truscon Steel in Youngstown and they had a tower – a very large tower – designed... It was a 1,000 foot tower, a very substantial structure at that time. That was a very controversial thing.³⁹

It was controversial because in the early 1950s, a 1,000-foot tower would be the tallest tower in the U.S. As such, it would violate government regulations on airspace.

The Vindicator's solution to the problem would ultimately benefit both operations. Bud Williamson explained the solution:

...Channel 21's tower had been built first, and it had an antenna on the top of it that was 50 or 60 feet high. The result... was that the elevation for aeronautical purposes was as high as they could get in what is called a cardinal altitude for flying. As the development came along... one of the ways we raised power at that point was to put up a larger antenna [which]

³⁸ Williamson III, 2006, 14.

³⁹ Williamson III, 2006, 15.

had more gain and double the amount of signal. And those antennas were then 120 feet long. Instead of 60 [feet], they were twice as high. It created no problem on the top of our tower, because we were out of those elevations. But when it came to raising the height of the 21 antenna by another 50 feet, it went into the next cardinal altitude, which would have made every airplane that flew over Youngstown avoid another 500 feet of elevation. They went by 500 feet at a time. So that was the point at which the real political pressure had to be used, in order to get the FAA to approve that change in elevation.⁴⁰

The government would have to be petitioned to change the regulations. Warren Williamson Jr. knew that only Maag and his newspaper had the political influence to do that.⁴¹ Once the government opened up the airspace, WKBN would also be able to utilize the space. Bud Williamson said it was his father's plan to build an even bigger tower:

WFMJ had the political clout to break this altitude by 50 feet. That meant the next 450 was free. Once the airline routes had been raised by 500 feet, anyone could build within those 500 feet without creating any new interference. When we came to build our own tower, we built a 1,400-foot tower instead of a 1,000-foot tower. And so we gained that height advantage over Channel 21, but not before we suffered a lot of competitive disadvantage for many years.⁴²

In 1953, a 1,000-foot tower was no small task or expense. At \$225,000, the cost was so high that the Maag operation felt inclined to justify the expense even after the project was completed. An August 1953 article in *The Youngstown Vindicator* outlined the technical challenges of building such a tower:

[The height] is required because TV radiation, like light, travels in straight lines. Thus the transmitting antenna must be set above such obstacles – between itself and the viewer's antenna – as hills, buildings and trees. ...the tower must be virtually rigid: it cannot be designed to sway in the wind like a skyscraper. Movement that can be tolerated in the Empire State Building would spoil WFMJ-TV's picture.⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁴¹ Ibid., 15.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ *The Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio), August 29, 1953.

The article goes on to explain in the most basic of terms how a television tower is constructed to eliminate movement:

For example, the nine cables to guy the tower must be as thick as a man's arm. They will carry 30 insulators, each weighing 500 pounds. Some of these will be nearly 1,000 feet in the air. Each set of three cables is to be anchored in a great underground block of reinforced concrete, as big as the living room of a home.⁴⁴

The \$225,000 cost included the antenna and power lines. The signal was carried from the transmitter up to the antenna by a copper tube called a "waveguide." The equipment was designed to prevent the "elusive" signal from leaking or weakening on the way up. In case viewers were still confused by the television jargon, the article bluntly pointed out that the high cost of the tower illustrated the great financial risk in operating a television station.⁴⁵

It was true that compared to radio, television seemed like an enormous challenge. When the FCC made Youngstown a UHF market, many residents had to invest in converters for their VHF sets in order to get a picture. Bud Williamson recalled that the vacuum tubes in these converters did not work well, especially on WFMJ's Channel 73. Even with a working television in the home, it took years for viewers to make watching it part of their daily routine. Because television was expensive for broadcasters, advertising rates remained so high that many sponsors could not afford them. For these reasons and more, *The Vindicator* reported in 1953, "All the new TV stations are losing money, leaving the industry to wonder how its economic problem is to be solved."⁴⁶

Williamson and Maag were both in the position to take on the risk of investing in television. As competitors and businessmen, they had one key characteristic in common:

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

They believed in Youngstown. Williamson believed entertainment and local news on the radio airwaves and on television would improve life for Youngstown residents. Maag believed that although Youngstown was a smaller city, it was a multiple-station market, and he fought for that. Both men created impressive, world-class UHF television facilities in Youngstown to rival those in much larger cities. They devoted money, time, and a great portion of their lives to Youngstown television; they had only to wait for it to catch on. As they waited, the competition between the two continued in earnest.

CONCLUSION

During the summer and fall of 1953, Maag continued to use his newspaper to tout the accomplishments of NBC and WFMJ TV 73. Williamson did the same on WKBN. As local broadcasters, they were both responsible for supplying original programming. As a result, shows and characters were developed on the local airwaves that Youngstown viewers of that generation remember fondly. This was important, because in order to make television viewing a habit, Youngstown residents had to become attached to their sets. Many were still in the habit of watching programming out of Cleveland and Pittsburgh on their VHF sets. WFMJ promoted such characters as “Suzy Sidesaddle,” who hosted a show at the studio featuring cartoons and features for children. The “Adelaide Snyder Show” was for homemakers, and “Sketchbook” was a one-hour program that featured events in and around Youngstown. Eugene Donahay, former WFMJ Program Director, said, “We were always looking for things to fill the time periods, and if someone had a good idea, we’d give it a try.”¹

At WKBN, the stars of early local programming included Elaine Carrol, the host of “This is Our Life,” Don Gardner of “Sports Review,” and “Grizzly Pete” who hosted a western show for children. Such programs were popular with viewers, but Williamson believed that local news would be the drawing card for Youngstown viewers. Building a

¹ Richard James, “A Historical Analysis of the Development of UHF in the Youngstown Area” (master’s thesis, Kent State University, 1982), 48.

strong local news department was a huge challenge, since WFJM already had an established news organization behind it; but following CBS strategy, which was to compete with the stronger NBC by developing an aggressive news reporting base, Williamson grew his news department (this included adding a helicopter to the fleet of news vehicles for a brief period in 1962).² He made news coverage a priority long before it became profitable for stations in the 1960s and 1970s.³ Williamson's persistence paid off as it had so many times before. For four decades, WKBN-TV dominated local news ratings with personalities (mostly in the news, weather and sports departments) such as Don Gardner, Stu Wilson, Don Guthrie, Tom Holden, and Ode Aduma.

Williamson also kept track of every programming decision made by the competitor, filling dozens of large scrapbooks with clippings of WFMJ broadcasting schedules, promotions, and press coverage. The scrapbooks also included WKBN press coverage. As early broadcasters, the WKBN and WFMJ operations had to closely track the changing technology and media trends in order to carefully calculate the next investment. In 1953, this involved color television. The Federal Communications Commission was considering a new system for color broadcasting, but the Youngstown TV stations were not yet ready for color, technically or financially. When NBC offered a color broadcast of the "Kukla, Fran and Ollie" program, WFMJ chief engineer Frank Dieringer felt the need to defend the station's situation. The program aired in black and white on Channel 73, and Dieringer noted in *The Youngstown Vindicator* that reception

² WKBN Promotional Material, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, 1962-63.

³ Michael D. Murray and Donald G. Godfrey, eds., *Television in America: Local Station History From Across the Nation* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1997), p. xxv.

was of a ‘better quality than regular black and white broadcasts.’ (Viewers said the broadcast was equally ‘good or better’ than previous broadcasts).⁴ Why all the fuss? Local television executives wanted the viewers to know that a new color system would not make their sets obsolete. By 1953, 50 television stations – including WFMJ and WKBN – had contracts to handle colorcasts, but the huge expense was not expected to be shouldered by the local stations. A *Youngstown Vindicator* article predicted, “The cost of [color] receivers is estimated at \$800 to \$1,000...many persons will feel that such advantages as color provides are not worth the price. In any case, as RCA and NBC observe, no one need hesitate about buying a black-and-white receiver.”⁵

For Warren P. Williamson Jr., 1953 was the best year of a string of good years. He was in his mid-fifties, and in many ways, he was just hitting his stride as a successful broadcaster and industry leader. He had celebrated his silver anniversary on the air in 1951; he had successfully battled the FCC on the divided-time issue and won; and he had brought UHF television to the Mahoning Valley. He matched the money and prestige behind the WFMJ operation with hard work, a reliable staff, and an excellent product. A conservative decision maker, he decided in 1953 that it was time for some extravagance. He planned a gala event celebrating WKBN’s accomplishments and, in particular, Radio Youngstown, the name he gave to the WKBN complex on Sunset Boulevard.

In the fall of 1953, Williamson planned an open house at Radio Youngstown. Station records (saved by Williamson) show that between October 9 and October 11, nearly 10,000 people came through the doors. Most of those people were members of the general public curious to see the new facility. A total of 916 guests (contractors, members

⁴ *The Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio), August 31, 1953.

⁵ *Ibid.*

of the press, advertising executives and clients) also attended a formal affair hosted by Williamson. A canopy was built on the front lawn to accommodate the long lines (figures 17a-b). There was much to marvel; Radio Youngstown had been built at a cost of \$1.5 million under the direction Williamson's brother Joseph Williamson, an accomplished engineer. The state of the art facility included a 131-room main building, an array of four radio towers and a television tower, all on 60 acres (figure 18).⁶ Published reports at the time listed amazing facts about Radio Youngstown, including the number of clocks in the building (66) and the miles of wiring (40). Artist Russel Sutherland was hired to create a 16-foot mural for the front lobby depicting the development of communication from the days of the horse and carriage to modern times (figure 19). Neon lights spelled out Radio Youngstown across the top of the building. As for his role in these advancements, Williamson was called "the guiding genius," and none would argue.⁷

Williamson's notes and correspondence indicate that he had a hand in planning every detail of the gala, from the guest list and the formal dress code to the simulcast of the dedication ceremony on both WKBN-TV and radio. The events included many of Youngstown's most wealthy and powerful society people, who showed up at the gala or sent personal messages congratulating Williamson on his success.⁸ A telegram from Dora Schwebel, owner of the Schwebel Baking Company, to Williamson, read:

From one pioneer and neighbor to another I heartily congratulate you and your entire organization on the wonderful achievements you have accomplished. Youngstown can certainly be proud for having you and WKBN as part of [the community]. To me this is only your beginning, and I know that you will go on to greater success...in the years to come. Your success makes me very

⁶ WKBN publicity clippings, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley 1953.

⁷ *The Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, Ohio), October 7, 1953.

⁸ WKBN gala memorabilia, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, 1953.

happy (fig. 20).⁹

A congratulatory plaque given by the South Side Merchants simply stated, “Ever forward,” encouraging Williamson to continue his efforts in the field of broadcasting, and the world of business.¹⁰ Certainly, Williamson did not deny his place in vast landscape of broadcast history, nor did he deny the title of industry pioneer. During the 1950s a cartoon caricature of a young pioneer became a mascot for WKBN.

Radio was still powerful in the early 1950s, but for Williamson and WKBN, the focus had expanded to encompass the building of a television tower that rivaled the competitor’s. A 1,000-foot tower was built within the decade, but, as Bud Williamson explained, the plans for a 1,400-foot structure would take 20 years to complete.

...we were more than 20 years operating with a facility that wasn’t as good as – in terms of transmitting systems – our competitor’s [facility]. I think we made up a lot of the difference in the interest in our programming, because we did pretty well in ratings. But we always had the competitive disadvantage of not having the height. We put new transmitters in to increase power, and things of that kind, to do what we could without changing the tower situation.¹¹

Ever a competitive broadcaster, Williamson made the most of what he had a few years later when videotape impacted the television industry. In 1959, all film technology changed over to the use of videotape. WKBN was the first in the Mahoning Valley to use tape on December 31, 1959.¹²

During the next decade, WKBN-TV 27 increased transmitting power to 1 million watts. It was 1963, and the television station had operated successfully for 10 years and was commanding a substantial lead in the ratings. Taking advantage of the tools at hand,

⁹ Telegram from Dora Schwebel, owner of Schwebel Baking Co., telegram, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley October 9, 1953.

¹⁰WKBN gala memorabilia, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley, 1953.

¹¹ Warren P. “Bud” Williamson III, interview by Tricia Perry, 17 July 2006, transcript, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley and Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Youngstown, Ohio, 17.

¹² *Sight and Sound*, exhibit, 2006, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, Ohio.

Williamson himself appeared on camera on Thanksgiving Day to make the announcement and televise the landmark event:

On January 11, 1953, Channel 27 first brought television to Youngstown. The first UHF station in the state of Ohio and only the sixth UHF station in the nation...and now, we enter another phase of our pioneering. For as I push this button, Channel 27 will increase its picture power to over one million watts for better picture service. Only nine other stations in the U.S. operate with a million watts of power or more. We want to thank you...for your loyalty and interest in WKBN, making this fine improvement in our technical facilities. And now, Channel 27 will go to one million watts of power. Please stand by (figures 21a-b).¹³

Again, Williamson was staying miles ahead of the competition. Not only had he beaten WFMJ to the million watt mark, but he was miles ahead of the newest television station in the Youngstown market. WKST-TV began broadcasting on Channel 45 on October 30, 1957. Owned by Sam Townsend of New Castle, Pennsylvania, the station became WYTV, an ABC affiliate, in 1964.¹⁴

For the most part the secondary sources devoted to the development of radio and television are missing that part of the broadcasting story – the part about what the small broadcasters were doing in the years when radio became very lucrative and television made them rich. *Television in America* by Murray and Godfrey provides a handful of histories of local stations by region. The stories of Pat Crosley in Cincinnati and Dorothy Bullitt in Seattle exist, but they are short and do not flesh out the personalities behind the local broadcasting efforts. The fact that a few stories are preserved serves only to emphasize the hundreds that are not. Countless books on broadcasting history illustrate the bigger picture, but they overlook stories of how the broadcasting industry was built station by station in the smaller communities like Youngstown. Fortunately, the

¹³ Warren P. Williamson Jr. :*Mahoning Valley Broadcast Pioneer*, produced by Lowry Stewart and Gary Hanson, 60 min., WKBN Broadcasting Corp., 1996, videocassette.

¹⁴ *Sight and Sound*, exhibit, 2006, Mahoning Valley Historical Society, Youngstown, Ohio.

gaps can be filled by a vast treasury of primary sources. *The Vindicator's* archives tell the story and oral histories from Williamson, his family members, and several current and former employees of both WKBN and WFMJ are available to provide the details of what came before and after the first radio and TV broadcasts.

If the competition with WFMJ distressed Williamson, he never revealed those feelings publicly. On the contrary, he spoke highly of William Maag Jr. and *Vindicator* business manager William O. Brown. Brown's son, Bill Brown, became business manager after his father died in 1956. Bud Williamson says the father-son teams at WKBN and WFMJ respected each other tremendously. When a newspaper guild strike paralyzed operations at *The Vindicator* in 1964 and dragged on for eight months, Warren P. Williamson Jr. offered his south side home as a secret meeting place for negotiators. The strike was resolved in April 1965. Bud Williamson says his father's involvement remained secret for decades, but it speaks to his level of commitment to Youngstown and his respect for fellow business leaders in the community that he was willing to help "the competition" resolve the strike and resume business as usual.¹⁵

When it came to his own company, Williamson was protective. As WKBN Broadcasting Corporation grew larger and more lucrative, Williamson eventually extricated himself from every partnership and deal that would obligate him to "share" his company. It was wholly his, and that of his family. He was a man who liked to manage everything; today, he might be called a micro-manager. But when the array of radio towers had to be moved to a new location to make way for the television tower on Sunset Boulevard, he delegated that role to his eldest son.

¹⁵ Warren P. "Bud" Williamson III, phone interview by Tricia Perry, April 23, 2008.

In 1976, Bud Williamson was in his mid-forties. He recalled that his father told him, “I am not going to get involved and interfere with you. Just take care of this.” Bud did so, including finding property on Western Reserve Road for what would later be called “The Antenna Farm,” buying the antennas, purchasing the towers, and laying the ground wire system. “Now [my father] did kind of run around and watch this whole operation, because he couldn’t stand to have anything built that he didn’t have his eye on,” Bud recalled. “But he didn’t really pay much attention to the technical side of doing it.” The elder Williamson would not stay on the sidelines for long, however.¹⁶

The project required that 325,000 feet of copper wire be put into the ground, using plows. The ground was difficult, but Bud had a solution:

I went out and bought a tractor – a big diesel tractor – that had a vibrating plow on the back of it that I knew would be able to put this stuff in and hopefully relieve the problems of putting that wire into the ground. And somewhere in the process of doing this my father found the plow that HE had used in 1935, to put the wire in for the old antenna on Sunset...And the next thing I knew, he was out there plowing wires into the ground. And he had commandeered some of my technicians to work with him, and was actually riding on top of the plow itself to hold it down! My dad would have been 70-years-old at the time, but that didn’t seem to slow him down.¹⁷

It was the only time father and son clashed over a station project. After protesting his father’s involvement, Bud Williamson left the Antenna Farm project and focused on the construction of the new television tower on Sunset. This time, his father left him alone.

This anecdote illustrates Warren P. Williamson Jr.’s commanding personality; it also tells us something about how his employees (including his family) perceived him and how they respected him. In a 1974 interview, long-time WKBN executive secretary

¹⁶ Williamson III, 2006, 18.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Ruth Cruikshank said of Williamson, “He is a perfectionist, and he demands that the people under him produce their best.”¹⁸ Early on, he was called “The Boss” by the WKBN staff, and even his son could not argue with the title. Of the antenna project Bud said, “I just said it can only take one boss. And if he decides he is going to be it, he IS the boss.”¹⁹

In 1993, Warren P. Williamson’s health began to fail. At 93, he still made daily trips to the station on Sunset Boulevard, although the operation of the corporation was now the responsibility of his sons, Bud and J.D. (Williamson’s oldest child and only daughter, Barbara, died June 20, 1966.) A year after Williamson’s death in 1996, at age 96, the corporation’s board of directors (made up mostly of Williamson family members) voted to sell the radio (both AM and FM) and television operations in separate transactions. The decision marked an end to an era of local broadcasting history by severing it from the era that was to follow. WKBN Radio is currently owned by Clear Channel Communications; WKBN TV has changed hands several times since 1997, and is currently owned by New Vision Television. Neither company is Youngstown-based.

While new technologies have replaced old, and new faces appear on air and in the hallways and studios on Sunset Boulevard, the essence of Williamson’s vision has been preserved physically and spiritually in a collection now called the Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley (BMAMV). Entrusted by the Williamson family to the Mahoning Valley Historical Society, the collection includes Warren P. Williamson Jr.’s corporate and financial records, correspondence, documents, personal diaries, and artifacts from all decades of his lengthy career. The collection is stored and maintained in

¹⁸ Ruth Cruikshank, interviewed by Frank Quartini, 12 March 1974, O.H. 33, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Youngstown, Ohio.

¹⁹ Williamson III, 2006, 19.

Youngstown for students, historians and the curious to study. Perhaps more than the WKBN operation that currently broadcasts daily, the BMAMV is Williamson's true legacy. It is both a detailed account of a Youngstown company and a valuable historical record of the broadcasting industry from a local perspective. Where so much broadcasting history has faded away or waits to be documented, the Business and Media Archives is a tribute to the industry in the Mahoning Valley and beyond.

As a broadcaster in the early Twentieth Century, Williamson was in a unique position. He was young enough to get into the industry when it was new and to grow with it. It was a position only a handful of people ever experienced, and it required ingenuity, intelligence and a little luck to make it a success. While Williamson approached every decision with careful consideration and a mind to protecting the interests of WKBN, he also took many risks. He has been described as both a conservative optimist, and an optimistic conservative for the way he handled the many challenges and decisions that came with his career of choice.²⁰ To be a successful pioneer in broadcasting, perhaps he had to be a little of both. In the 1970s, as the 50th anniversary of that first radio broadcast from Auburndale Avenue approached, Williamson became fond of a certain observation: that he and the broadcasting business had grown up together (figure 22). "It has been a very satisfying thing to me," he remarked, "to grow up with an industry at the same time that the industry was developing, so that a young man's hobby became a business venture."²¹

In 1976, at age 76, Williamson made a rare television appearance to talk about the

²⁰ Gary Hanson, e-mail correspondence with Tricia Perry, 12, 2008.

²¹ Warren P. Williamson Jr., interview by James Manross, 10 December 1975, O.H. 351 transcript, Youngstown State University Oral History Program.

early days of WKBN Broadcasting. As always, he became animated as he described his career, saying it was “never a dull moment. There has never been one, and I don’t think there ever will be.”²² Perhaps that is the nature of broadcasting in any era, but another statement provided the appropriate “outcue” for Williamson. During that anniversary broadcast when the interviewer asked, “Would you do it all over again?” without a breath of hesitation, Williamson answered, “Yes, I would.”

²² Warren P. Williamson Jr., televised interview, 1976, WKBN 50th Anniversary Broadcast, DVD, Part 5, Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley.

APPENDIX A: ILLUSTRATIONS

The Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley contains hundreds of photographs from Warren P. Williamson Jr.'s personal collection, as well as art and images used by the WKBN Broadcasting Corporation from 1926 to 1996. All are included here with permission from the Archives.



Figure 1: WKBN test pattern, January 11, 1953. Collection of the Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley (BMAMV).



Figure 2: Warren P. Williamson Jr., circa 1927. BMAMV Collection.



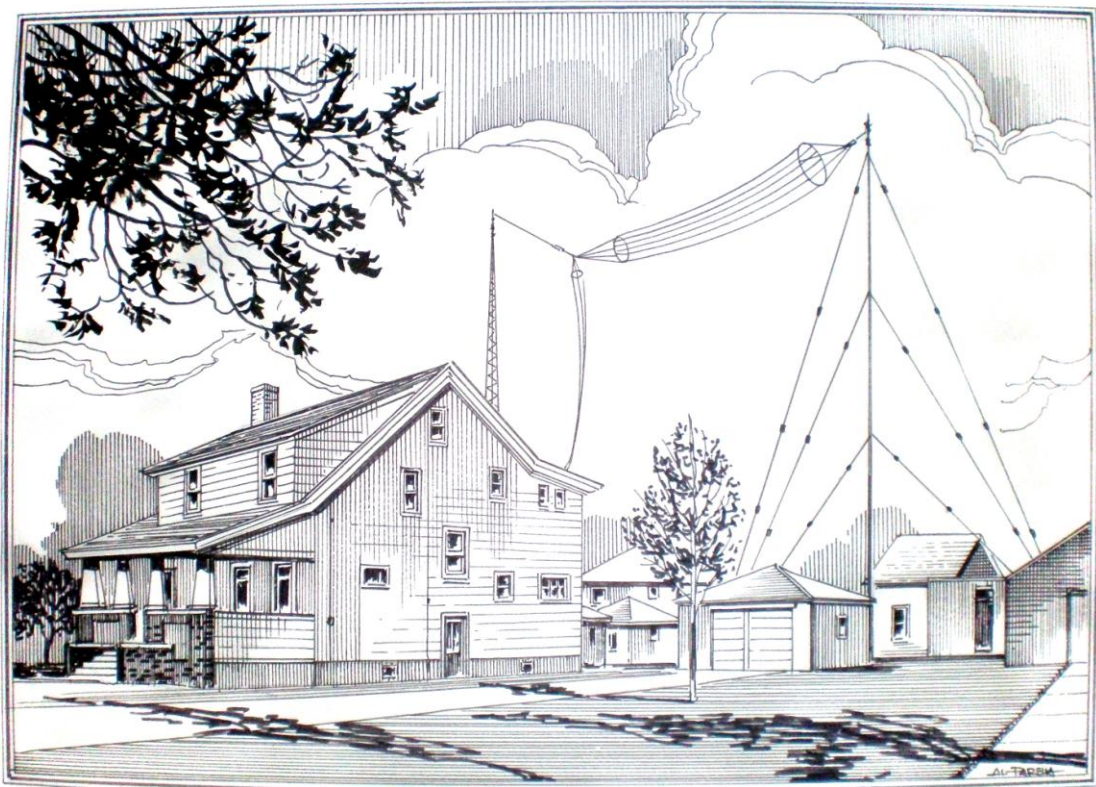
Figure 3: William F. Maag Jr., courtesy *The Vindicator*.



Figure 4: Warren P. Williamson Jr.'s license to operate an amateur radio station in Youngstown, Ohio.



Figure 5: Creed Chorpening, circa 1927. BMAMV Collection.



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Figure 6: Williamson's home at 26 E. Auburndale Avenue, Youngstown, Ohio, the site of the first broadcast on WKBN radio, September 26, 1926. BMAMV Collection.

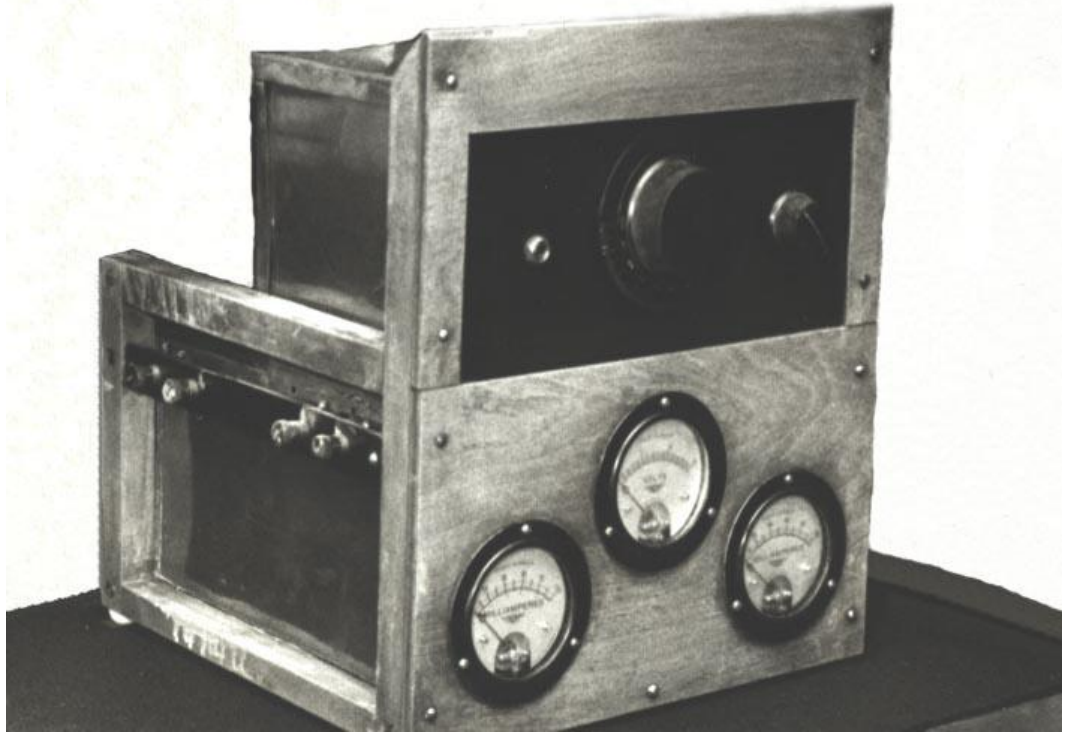


Figure 7: Original 7½-watt transmitter used by Williamson and Creed Chorpene for the first broadcast on WKBN on September 26, 1926. Property of BMAMV.

Fig. 8a.



Fig. 8b.



Fig. 8c.



Figure 8a: WKBN lobby at Central YMCA, Youngstown, Ohio, circa 1937.
 Figure 8b: Warren P. Williamson Jr. in studio, YMCA location, circa 1941.
 Figure 8c: WKBN talent and spectators at YMCA location, circa 1937.
 All from the BMAMV Collection.

All

WKBN BROADCASTING CORPORATION
YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO
OPERATING HOURS (SHADED)

TIME	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	HOURLY DIVISION	COMMENTS
MORNING									
7	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded		
8	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded		
9	Shaded	Blank	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded		
10	Shaded	Blank	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded		
11	Shaded	Blank	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded		
NOON									
12	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded		
1	Shaded	Blank	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded		
2	Shaded	Blank	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded		
3	Shaded	Blank	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded		
4	Shaded	Blank	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded		
5	Shaded	Blank	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded		
EVENING									
6	Shaded	Blank	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded		
7	Shaded	Blank	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded		
8	Shaded	Blank	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded		
9	Shaded	Blank	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded		
10	Shaded	Blank	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded		
11	Shaded	Blank	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded		
MIDNIGHT									
12	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded		

Figure 9: Schedule of radio programming hours available on 570 AM. Shaded areas indicate hours filled by WKBN. Note blank areas on Friday and Saturday night to be filled with WOSU programming. BMAMV Collection.



Figure 10: WKBN transmitter site and tower array at 3930 Sunset Boulevard, Youngstown, circa 1945. BMAMV Collection.



Figure 11a: Architect's rendering of WKBN transmitter building at 3930 Sunset Boulevard, Youngstown, Ohio, circa 1936. BMAMV Collection.



Figure 11b: WKBN AM Transmitter building, 3930 Sunset Boulevard, Youngstown, Ohio, November 1, 1936. BMAMV Collection.



Figure 12: William F. Maag Sr., courtesy *The Vindicator*.

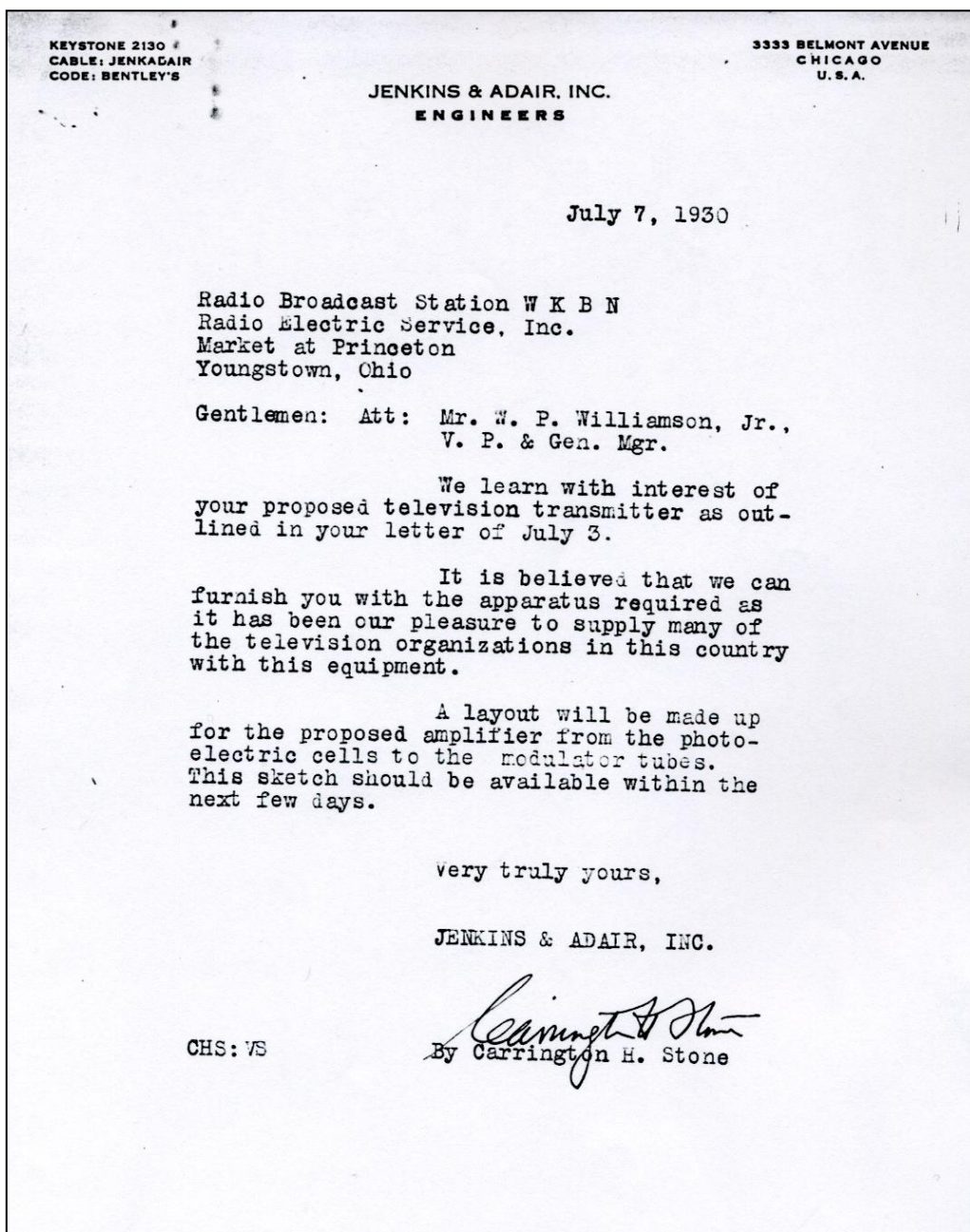
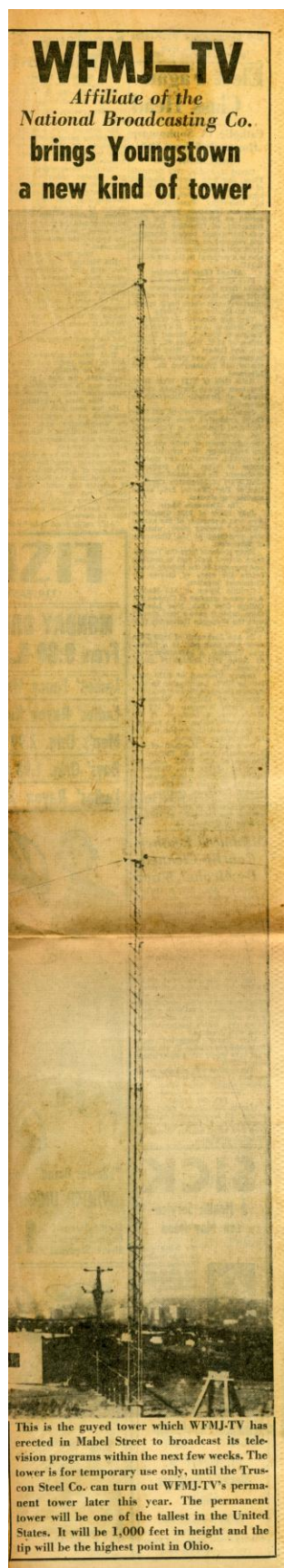


Figure 13: Letter from BMAMV Collection indicating Warren P. Williamson Jr.'s plans for television in 1930.



Figure 14: WKBN's Radio Youngstown and television tower at Sunset Boulevard, Youngstown, circa 1953. BMAMV Collection.

Figure 15: Original WFMJ television tower at Mabel Street in Youngstown, circa 1952. Courtesy *The Youngstown Vindicator*.



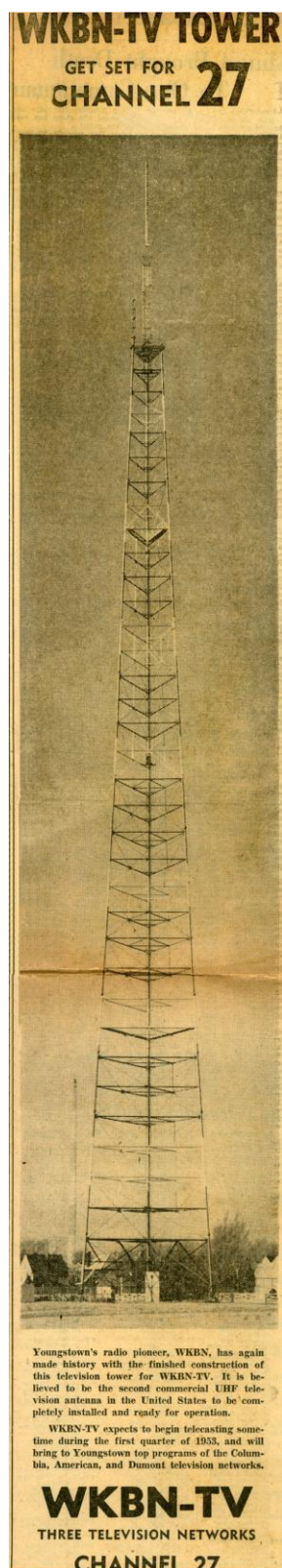


Figure 16: Original WKBN television tower at Sunset Boulevard, Youngstown, circa 1952. Courtesy *The Youngstown Vindicator*.



17a.



17b.

Figure 17a-b. Radio Youngstown during the dedication of the new building, October 9 -11, 1953. BMAMV Collection.



Figure 18: Artist rendering of Radio Youngstown, including four radio towers and television tower, circa 1953. BMAMV Collection.



Figure 19: Mural in lobby of WKBN Broadcasting Corporation, 3930 Sunset Boulevard, Youngstown, Ohio, circa 1950. BMAMV Collection.

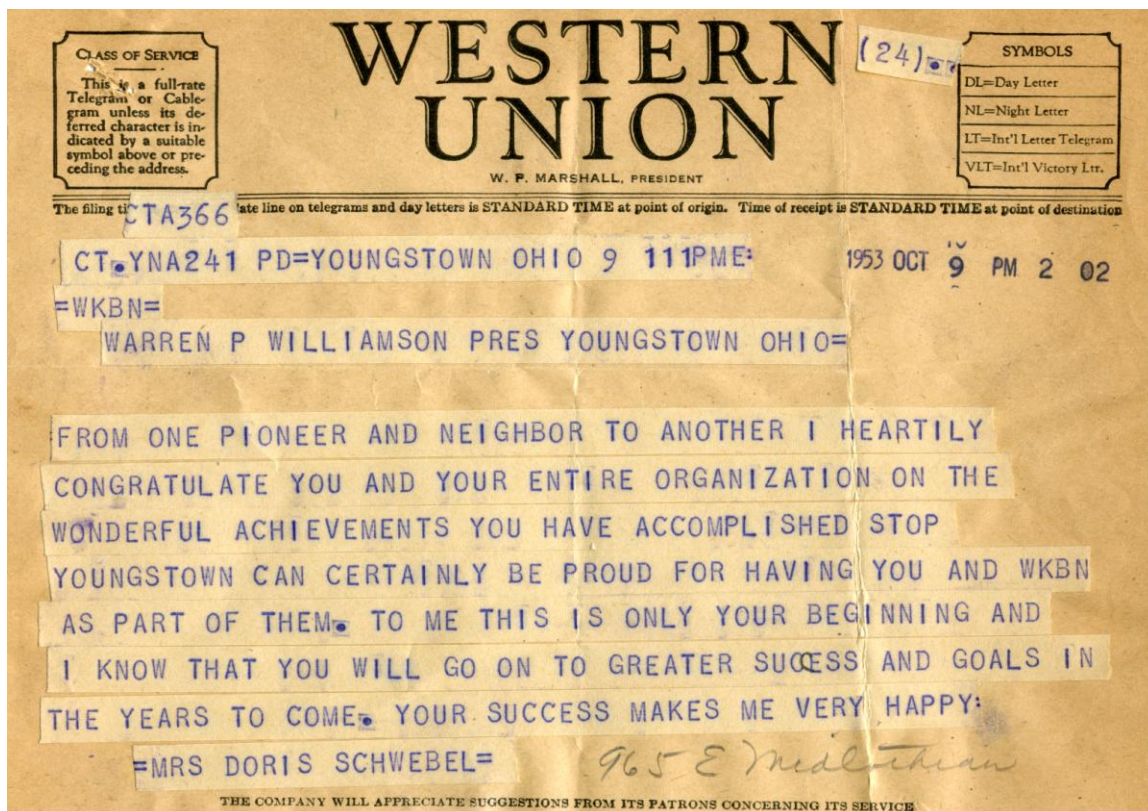


Figure 20: Telegram from Doris Schwebel to Warren P. Williamson Jr. BMAMV Collection.

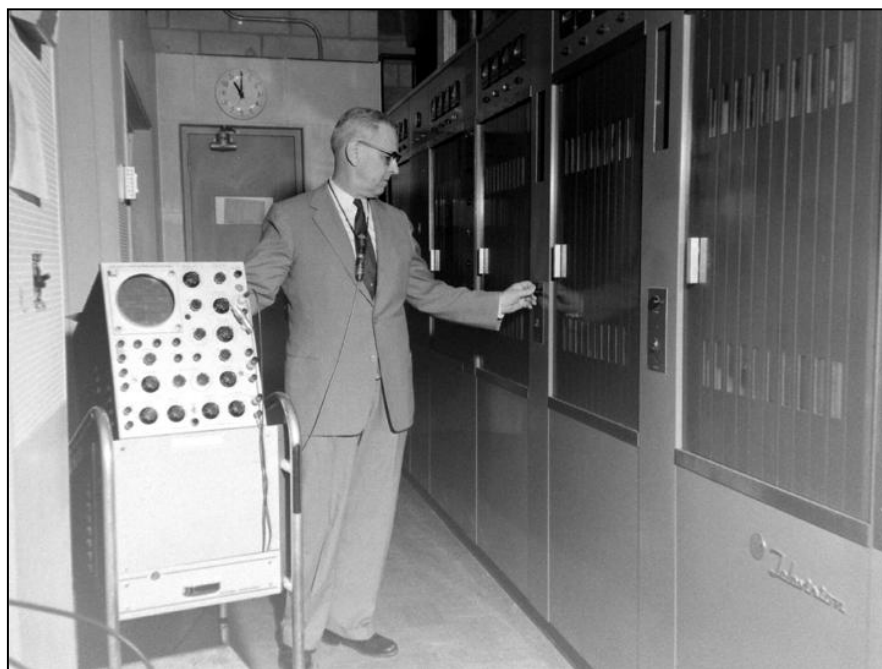


Figure 21a: Warren P. Williamson Jr. takes WKBN to 1 million watts of power with the push of a button, November 29, 1963. BMAMV Collection.



Figure 21b: Warren P. "Bud" Williamson III and Warren P. Williamson Jr., November 29, 1963. BMAMV Collection.



Figure 22: Warren P. Williamson Jr., 1939. BMAMV Collection.

APPENDIX B: CHRONOLOGY

This appendix is a combined timeline of the developments in the communications industry and of the life and accomplishments of Warren P. Williamson Jr. The chronology begins with Samuel Morse's invention of the telegraph in the 19th Century and continues through the advent of television in Youngstown, Ohio, in 1953. The events pertaining to Williamson and WKBN specifically are in bold type. Technological developments in the industry beyond the 1960's are not included in detail in this timeline. However, it does illustrate the final decades of Williamson's long career, and the establishment of the Business and Media Archives, which preserve much of what took place within the walls of WKBN Broadcasting Corp. from 1926 to 1996, the year of Williamson's death.

1835: Samuel F.B. Morse invents the electromagnetic telegraph.

1895: Guglielmo Marconi sends and receives a wireless – or radio – signal.

1899: Marconi sends a wireless telegraph signal across the English Channel.

1900: Warren P. Williamson Jr. is born May 10, in Youngstown, Ohio.

1906: Lee de Forrest creates the audio tube.

On Christmas Eve, Reginald Fessenden sends voice and music over the wireless.

1912: The sinking of the *Titanic* demonstrates the importance of the wireless.

Congress reacts by passing the Radio Act of 1912, establishing licensing requirements and rules for wireless operators.

1914: Patent wars begin between American Telephone & Telegraph (AT&T), General Electric (GE), Westinghouse, and the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Co. over control of the new technology.

1916: Williamson, a 16-year-old South High School student, applies for his first license to operate wireless radio station 8KT.

1917: The U.S. Government shuts down all amateur radio stations (including 8KT) for security purposes during World War I.

1918: Williamson enlists in the U.S. Army Signal Corps and is stationed along the Mexican border in Pecos, Texas. It is here, while monitoring transmissions, that Williamson hears human voices over the airwaves.

1919: Williamson attends Chauncy Hall in Boston, in an attempt to finish his high school education.

GE acquires the assets of the American Marconi Co. and forms Radio Corp. of America.

1920: Regularly scheduled radio programming is offered by KDKA, owned by Westinghouse.

AT&T joins cross-licensing pact with GE and RCA.

1921: Westinghouse joins the licensing pact.

Westinghouse station WBZ is the first station to officially be licensed by the federal government.

- 1921:** Philo T. Farnsworth, age 15, conducts experiments with television.
- 1922:** As a veteran of the U.S. Army, Williamson is accepted at the University of Michigan and enrolls as a student.
- 1923: Williamson meets Isabel DeNio in the summer; in the fall he transfers to the University of Wisconsin at Madison.**
- First chain broadcast takes place as WEAJ in New York and WNAC in Boston air the same program simultaneously via telephone wire.
- 1924: Williamson marries Isabel DeNio on February 6, in Evanston, Illinois.**
- 1925: Williamson's daughter Barbara is born.**
- 1926: On September 26, Williamson and business partner Creed Chorpene use a homemade transmitter to broadcast the first commercial radio signal in the Mahoning Valley on WKBN. The station is located in Williamson's home at 26 East Auburndale Ave. in Youngstown.**

From September 30 to October 1, the partners move the transmitter downtown to be part of the First Annual Radio Show. Sponsor Arthur Brock invests in WKBN, enabling Williamson and Chorpene to increase power to 50 watts.

On November 2, Williamson and Chorpene partner with *The Youngstown Vindicator* to broadcast election returns from 26 East Auburndale.

Thanksgiving Day, Williamson, Chorpene, and Brock use the transmitter to broadcast the Rayen vs. South High Football Game from Rayen Field in Youngstown. This is one of the first play-by-play sports broadcasts in the United States.

RCA creates the National Broadcasting Co. (NBC), and AT&T abandons all involvement with broadcast station operations.

- 1927: In January, WKBN studios and offices move to the third floor of the YMCA in downtown Youngstown. Station is at 360 meters on the AM dial and 50 watts of power.**

Congress passes Radio Act of 1927, creating the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) to regulate the new commercial radio industry

Columbia Phonograph Company merges with United Independent Broadcasters to form Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) to compete with NBC.

WKBN increases power to 100 kilowatts.

In March, the Yaw Battery Company of Youngstown applies for a license to broadcast on WMBW, a 50-watt operation.

In May, the FRC voids 174 commercial radio licenses in an effort to regulate the airwaves. Both WKBN and WMBW must reapply for a license. Only one will be granted.

Thanks to the support of community leaders, the FRC gives the license to WKBN, which resumes broadcasting on Aug. 18; however, they must share the frequency with another Ohio station.

1928: WKBN increases power to 500 kilowatts, and move antenna to the top of the Stambaugh Building in downtown Youngstown. The FRC sets the WKBN frequency at AM 570, keeping the shared time agreement in place.

The CBS network is purchased by cigar tycoon William S. Paley.

The first televised drama is aired by an experimental GE station.

1929: On September 7, WKBN joins the CBS radio network.

1930: WKBN Broadcasting Corp. is established on January 31.

Williamson's son, Warren P. "Bud" Williamson III is born on May 14.

NBC begins regular news broadcasts.

1931: In an effort to increase revenue at WKBN, Williamson enters a buy-sell agreement with Clayton C. Townes, a Cleveland businessman. Townes sells radio airtime to advertisers.

1932: Patent allies – RCA, GE, and Westinghouse – break pact.

1933: Chorpening leaves WKBN to develop his own business interests.

1934: The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is established to take the place of the FRC.

Inventor Edwin Armstrong demonstrates FM radio for RCA.

1935: Williamson purchases 60 acres of land on Sunset Boulevard on the south side of Youngstown to be used for future expansion of WKBN.

1937: A new transmitter building is constructed at the Sunset Boulevard site.

1939: On September 7, WFMJ-AM 1390, a new station owned and operated by William F. Maag Jr., publisher of *The Youngstown Vindicator* newspaper, goes on the air in Youngstown.

Television makes a public debut at the World's Fair in New York City.

1940: FCC authorizes commercial FM broadcasting.

1941: On April 18, after 15 years of sharing radio airtime with other stations (most recently with WOSU in Columbus), the FCC grants WKBN a license to broadcast full-time on 570 AM.

1942: Williamson constructs four directional radio antennas and a fifth tower for an FM radio and television antenna.

1943: NBC, which has two networks – Red and Blue, is forced to sell one. NBC Blue becomes the American Broadcasting Co. (ABC).

1944: Williamson begins negotiation with the city of Youngstown over the possible purchase of the Central (now Metropolitan) Tower as a new home for WKBN Broadcasting Corp.

1945: Williamson's third child, Joseph "J.D." Williamson is born.

1946: The deal for the Central Tower falls through. Williamson plans to expand WKBN operations at the Sunset Boulevard location. The new facility will be called "Radio Youngstown."

1947: WKBN-FM goes on the air at 98.9 on the dial.

The FCC assigns VHF Channel 13 to Youngstown.

On December 30, William F. Maag of *The Youngstown Vindicator* is the first to apply for a license to operate a television station in Youngstown.

1948: The FCC freezes all television station allocations.

1949: The FCC releases a new table of allocations which includes VHF Channels 2 through 13, and 70 UHF channels.

1951: On July 10, after 25 years at YMCA in Youngstown, Williamson moves WKBN offices and studios to the new \$1.5 million facility on Sunset Boulevard.

1952: On April 14, the FCC issues the Sixth Report and Order, which includes a table of UHF and VHF television station allocations, including three UHF stations for the Mahoning Valley.

On July 11, both WKBN and WFMJ are granted licenses to operate UHF television stations.

1953: On January 11, WKBN broadcasts a television signal on Channel 27 in Youngstown. Not only is this the first television station in Youngstown, WKBN-TV is the first commercial UHF station in Ohio and the sixth in the nation.

On January 20, Youngstown residents see the inauguration of President Eisenhower live on WKBN-TV 27.

On February 9, WFMJ-TV 73 goes on the air.

October 9 through 11, Radio Youngstown, WKBN's new state-of-the art radio and television facility, officially opens at 3930 Sunset Blvd. in Youngstown.

1966: Barbara Williamson dies.

1963: WKBN-TV increases power to one million watts.

1964: Warren P. Williamson Jr. aids in the settlement of the labor strike at *The Youngstown Vindicator*.

1974: Williamson retires from WKBN.

1976: Williamson and WKBN celebrate 50 years on the airwaves.

1981: Isabel DeNio Williamson dies.

1994: The Williamson family puts the funding in place to establish the Business and Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley. WKBN Broadcasting Corp. begins to donate corporate archives to the Business and Media Archives.

1996: Williamson dies July 27. He was 96.

1997: The WKBN board of directors votes to sell WKBN-AM/FM and WKBN-TV in separate transactions.

Key Terms*

ABC – American Broadcasting Company; a television and radio network in the United States, originally created out of one of NBC's two networks.

Affiliate – An independent radio or television station (local) having a program contract with a national studio or network.

AM – Amplitude modulation; in radio broadcasting, a method of impressing a signal on a radio carrier wave by varying its amplitude.

American Radio Relay League (ARRL) – This club of amateur radio operators preceded government regulations and still exists as the central organization representing amateur interest.

Band – Frequency band; the range of frequencies within two definite limits. The standard radio broadcast band extends from 530 to 1600 kHz; television bands – VHF and UHF – extend from 41 to 850 MHz, and are divided into five ITU regulated groups.

Bandwidth – Also called channel width. The limit of the frequency spectrum, expressed in Hz (kHz or MHz), assigned to a specific channel (station).

Broadcasting – Refers to any medium that is disseminated via telecommunications.

Call letters – The official, legal name of a radio station; for example: WKBN or WFMJ.

Cathode ray tube – The principle tube in television receivers that changes electrical energy into light.

Cat's whiskers – Slang term used to describe the antenna and tuning devices on a wireless receiver.

CBS – Columbia Broadcasting Company, a television and radio network in the United States.

Clear Channel Station – 1. A radio station operation at maximum power (50,000 watts) on an exclusive frequency, designed to serve large areas. 2. Referring to any radio station owned by Clear Channel Communications, the largest radio company operating in the United States, based in San Antonio, Texas.

Coverage – The percent of radio or television households that can tune to a station because they are within the signal area.

Ether – another word for “airwaves.” Often used by amateur wireless operators.

FM – Frequency modulation; in radio broadcasting, a method of impressing a signal on a radio carrier wave by varying the frequency of the wave.

GE – General Electric.

Ham – Slang term for an amateur wireless operator.

Heterodyne – having alternating currents of two different frequencies that are combined to produce two new frequencies, the sum and difference of the original frequencies, either of which may be used in radio or television receivers by proper tuning or filtering. In other words, two frequencies that are too close together, causing noise or interference.

Hertz (Hz) – International unit of frequency; one hertz equals one cycle per second; named after Heinrich Rudolf Hertz (1857-1894), German physicist.

Inductor – A conducting coil, a circuit element, in which electromagnetic force is generated by electromagnetic induction.

Interference – the noise that interrupts radio programming when signals overlap.

ITU – International Telecommunication Union.

Joule – the International System unit of electrical, mechanical and thermal energy; a unit of electrical energy equal to the work done when a current of one ampere is passed through a resistance of one ohm for one second.

Kilocycle – Also kilohertz (kHz); a unit of frequency million equal to 1000 cycles per second. kHz is used to measure mediumwave and shortwave frequencies.

Kilowatt – A unit of power equal to 1000 watts.

Live – Any programming which is broadcast immediately as it is being delivered (a live report); performed (a live concert or show); or captured (live news or sports coverage). A live requires an unbroken communication chain without any intervening recording or storage technology. The broadcast is delivered “as it happens.”

Megahertz – Also MHz; a unit of frequency equal to one million cycles per second.

NBC – National Broadcasting Company; a television network in the United States. Formerly also a radio network.

Network – A system which distributes programming to multiple radio and/or television stations simultaneously, or slightly delayed, for the purpose of extending total broadcast coverage beyond the limits of a single station signal.

RCA – Radio Corporation of America.

Spot – A paid advertisement on television or radio.

Telegraph – An apparatus for communication at a distance by coded signals (Morse code), especially: an apparatus system or process for communication at a distance by electric transmission over wire.

Telegraphy – The use of a telegraph apparatus or system for communication.

Tower Array – A physical configuration of several radio antenna towers. Some radio signals are directional, or confined and restricted in the pattern they may be broadcast. This is done to protect other radio broadcasts in other geographic areas that used the same frequency. A combination of the tower array and station wattage is a way engineers control the coverage of a particular station's broadcast.

Transmitter – A device which converts video, audio, and/or data signals into modulated radio frequency signals and transmits them as radio waves; the source or generator of any signal on a transmission medium.

UHF – Frequencies between 300 MHz (wavelength 1 meter) and 3.0 GHz (wavelength 10 centimeters), used for television broadcasting. In reference to television, ultra high frequency channels established by the Federal Communications Commission included channels numbered 14 to 80.

VHF – Frequencies between 30 MHz (wavelength 10 m) to 300 MHz (wavelength 1 m), used for radio and television broadcasting. In reference to television, very high frequency included channels from 2 to 13.

Vacuum tube – A multi-electrode valve which controls the flow of electrons in a vacuum from electrode to electrode.

Watt – Abbreviated form of kilowatt; a unit of power equivalent to one joule per second.

Wireless – A device operating by means of transmitted electromagnetic waves to send a signal.

Wireless telegraphy – Also called radio telegraphy; the transmission of coded messages (Morse code) via radio waves and without connecting wires.

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