

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

WFMJ Radio Project

WFMJ Radio in the 1940's

O. H. 236

BILL CROOKS

Interviewed

by

James Manross

on

December 1, 1975

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: BILL CROOKS

INTERVIEWER: James Manross

SUBJECT: WFMJ Radio in the 1940's, History of Radio
in the Youngstown area

DATE: December 1, 1975

M: This is James Manross of the Oral History Program.
The date is December 1, 1947. I am interviewing Mr.
Bill Crooks of WFMJ Radio. He is a newsman.

When did you start with WFMJ?

C: The radio business started to get pretty important
as far as news is concerned. News started to pick up
greatly previous to the Second World War in the late
1930's. When I arrived here, the news was pretty
important. As the war went on, there was a pickup
in the number of newscasts here. When I first arrived,
I think we were doing about three to four newscasts a
day. We raised up to eight shortly after I arrived.
You could get news almost any time on the hour when you
wanted it.

M: Has the role of the radio-news man changed through the
years?

C: Yes, through the years the newscasts have gotten shorter.
There is not so much detail in the radio news. Mostly
there are just short newscasts. In the earlier days,
the news had to run fifteen minutes, "fifteen and five."
Now they run "five and two." However, they do have some
stations that run all day on news only, not here though.

M: How many news stations were there in Youngstown when you
arrived?

C: There were only two.

M: WFMJ and WKBN?

C: Yes.

M: When you started during World War II, what was a typical working day like?

C: It hasn't changed considerably. The idea was to begin early in the morning running up the news, deciding what news was available, and what news you were going to use. It's still the same way. That's the idea of news, gathering the news, and then presenting it.

M: What would you say were some of the more memorable things that you covered in your career?

C: As far as Youngstown was concerned?

M: Yes.

C: We used to have a show we fed the network on Saturdays, it was called Our Town. I remember we did a piece with the Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company, one of the industries here. It was over the network that I interviewed Mr. Frank Pernell who was then the head of Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company. That was one tape. Then, of course, there had been a number of presidential candidate, and presidents, and so forth, political big-wigs, and small ones. Later in the 1930's we did a piece on a shooting incident. We called it the Stop Five Shootout, but that was later on.

M: In covering things, has your personal life ever been threatened. Did you ever risk your life?

C: I had a few telephone threats not to use a certain story or something like that, but nothing serious.

M: When you arrived in Youngstown, what would you say was the primary source of news for people, the newspaper or the media?

C: When I arrived it was probably the newspaper, but that changed as the War went on. There was a great percentage increase. The radio became the outstanding news source, then newspapers, and then magazines.

M: Could you relate a little bit of the history of the development of the radio stations in Youngstown?

C: I don't know exactly what you mean by the development.

M: I mean, when did the station start?

C: WFMJ started in 1939. This was the second station here.

M: How have the formats of the stations changed since World War II? Is there much difference?

C: In news?

M: Yes.

C: The newscasts have grown shorter.

M: The rest of the radio station broadcast, has that format changed?

C: I wouldn't say the format has changed in any great way. It's still news and music, music and news. There has been a difference in some of the programs that originally were on radio. They've shipped them over to television now. That's the ladies programs, and different questions and answers, and so forth.

M: Does it take the same requirements today as it did back in the 1930's and 1940's to become a newsman?

C: No. I would say they're a little more lenient now than they were in those days. In those days, you had to have a little experience someplace. The only experience you could get, of course, was to go to a small radio station, and work your way up from there. That still holds, but sometimes they'll bring a man in to a radio station, and train him without any previous experience if they have other qualities like journalism, a good speaking voice, and education.

M: What would you consider as the highlights of your career as a newsman?

C: I really don't recall any great highlights in my career. I don't remember anything that would really stand out as a great thing. Usually I just plodded along doing the daily news.

I remember one thing, it was the death of President Kennedy. We got on the air first with that. Some of the major firsts, and so forth, but nothing else. It was just a daily routine more or less.

- M: Who were some of the pioneers in the Youngstown area in the news industry when you came here? Was there anybody called a pioneer?
- C: There were others here that arrived before me, but they're not here now.
- M: What I'm getting at, is there anyone that comes close to your longevity as a newsman in the Youngstown area?
- C: I don't think so.
- M: I think we've covered this before, but as you said you can't think of any particular dangerous event that you covered?
- C: No, nothing dangerous that I can think of outside of the Stop Five shooting. That was a little dangerous.
- M: What do you see in the future for radio industries and newsmen in particular?
- C: There are very good opportunities in it if you follow through on it.
- M: What would you like to change about your career, anything?
- C: What would I have liked to change?
- M: Yes. Is there anything you would have liked to change in the past?
- C: No, not particularly. Maybe, I would have liked to make more money.
- M: In comparison to the times, were the salaries greater for a starting newsman then or today?
- C: Comparatively, I would say they're about the same. The buying power would be lower, of course, in those days. They would have been about the same.
- M: Have you been really satisfied with your career as a newsman?
- C: Yes, quite.
- M: What one thing or continuing thing are you most proud of that you accomplished in your career?
- C: I don't recall any one thing. We've done several things, and I couldn't take full credit for them. The shows, presenting newscasts, some of the network shows we did

here, our regular Saturday shows, those were pretty outstanding things for us.

M: Is there anything about your personal life, or the history of the news industry that you would like to add to this tape?

C: No, nothing that I would like to add except to say that it's a good business to get into. It's a little hard work. Stick to it, and you'll be rewarded to see your satisfaction in working.

M: We've been talking to Mr. Bill Crooks, pioneer of the news industry in the Youngstown area, and of WFMJ. Thank you Mr. Crooks.

END OF INTERVIEW