

MAHANOY CITY CHRONICLES

Radio came to town 62 years ago

By BILL O'BRIEN
Herald writer

THE ERA of local radio broadcasting will mark its 62nd anniversary in Mahanoy City next Monday.

The historic event began at 9:40 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 5, 1926, when the voice of Sydney Shepard declared, "Station WKBG of the Record-American broadcasting directly from the stage of the Hippodrome Theatre."

There followed seven days which opened the eyes, the ears, the minds and the hearts of the region to the marvel of radio. From Sept. 5 to 11, every set in town and others for miles around were tuned to the 215-meter wavelength to hear WKBG present a continuous stream of local personalities over the air waves. There were clergymen, orators, vocalists, musicians, recitators, comedians all doing their thing for the unseen audience.

Few of the town's 15,000 residents owned radios in 1926, but those who did own sets were good enough to share them for the historic week. Relatives, friends and neighbors were invited to gather round and listen to the big show on WKBG — a forerunner of the Super Bowl video parties now in vogue six decades later.

It may also have been an historic first for the media — the first joint venture between local newspaper and broadcast journalism.

IN DESCRIBING the first evening of broadcasting, the Record-American reported: "Mahanoy City's incipient entrance into the radio world was made Sunday evening and was greeted with an almost unbelievable amount of success.

"Shortly after Sydney Shepard announced, 'Station WKBG of the Record-American broadcasting directly from the stage of the Hippodrome Theatre,'

congratulations began to pour in. "The program itself would have done credit to any of the large broadcasting stations in that its quality was excellent and it ran along with a smoothness that might have been expected from a group of experienced broadcasters.

"Some of the town's finest talent participated, and with the help of the various ministers and musicians, the program was such as might have been heard from any New York station.

"Scores of tributes came in over the telephone wires, many of them congratulating individual artists. They were all announced directly into the microphone and those who telephoned in their congratulations had the pleasure of hearing their messages broadcast."

THE IDEA of bringing a local broadcasting station to town was conceived by the Record-

American as a public relations promotion. The Carroll Broadcasting Agency of Chicago was engaged to take care of the technical details. Harley D. Edwards came to oversee the engineering and Sydney Shepard, a professional emcee, handled the microphone.

In a gesture of respect for the Sabbath, the opening program on Sunday evening was sacred in nature.

The first performer at the 9:40 p.m. start was Joseph Davies, then of New York City, who sang "God Is My Strong Savlation." Maryann Williams provided accompaniment.

The remainder of the program included: Chief Burgess W. C. Edwards, address of welcome.

Rev. S. H. Heckler, Salem United Evangelical Church, prayer.

Joseph Davis, "My Country." Rev. W. H. Diehl, Saint Paul's Reformed Church, Scripture reading.

Miss Josephine Petrusawich, soprano, "Ave Maria." Accompanist Mary Naomi Phillips.

Rev. Dr. I. H. Kern, Christ Lutheran Church, sermonette.

Miss Ellen Smith, soprano, "On the Steppe" and "The May Night."

Rev. W. Sands Fox, First Methodist Church, sermonette.

Misses Ethel and Mae Harlor, soprano-alto duet, "He Will Show Me." Accompanist Betty Harlor.

Joseph Davies, "Enthroned in Light."

Miss Mae Harlor and David B. Davies duet, "In The Garden." Joseph Davies, "Hard Trials."

THE FIRST PHONE call during the broadcast came from the Mansion Hotel to report the sound "Coming in strong."

A total of 51 calls were recorded, including one from Philadelphia where William Weber and John Murray were listening on Market street and reported clear reception.

Other out-of-towners reporting good reception were Joe Malone of Park Crest, Charlie Augustine of Hosensock and Mr. Lowell of Shenandoah. Gomer Edwards of Coles called to say the reception was "equal to WJZ" (the major east coast station beaming out of the metropolitan New York-Newark area).

Andrew Koenig of East Centre street reported "Radio fine on radiola inside loop."

Several callers praised the Harlor sisters' vocal performances.

LABOR DAY programming began with a short talk by Joseph Ferguson, cashier of the Union National Bank. He was followed by:

Marian Ferguson, Weatherly, soprano solo "In the Garden of Tomorrow," accompanist Ann Edwards, Lansford. Plane Band, "Gallop March,"

four Mundys: Edward, Charles, Thomas and Mary.

William Haughney, tenor solo, "Am I Wasting My Time on You?" accompanist Mr. Mundy.

Mildred Llewellyn, dancing the Charleston, accompanied Mr. Mundy.

Wilmer George, Reevesdale, baritone solo "A Night of Love," accompanist Paul Rice, Hometown.

Mary Swank, Tamaqua, soprano solo, "If Winter Comes," accompanist Ella Young.

Harold George, Reevesdale, tenor solo "Give Me Back the Rose," accompanist Paul Rice.

Frank Conrad, baritone solo, "Mine," accompanist Mr. Mundy.

Harold George, harmonica playing and whistling "Mocking Bird," accompanist Wilmer George.

Piano duet, "Old Time Medley," Russell Kirschner and Paul Fink, Tamaqua.

PHONE CALLS on Monday included various requests for encores.

J. Frank, 308 E. Centre St., said he had a large crowd listening and they wanted Haughney to sing again. Another request for a Haughney encore came from Gomer Edwards of Coles who wanted to hear "Just A Cottage Small."

Haughney later became a professional vocalist in vaudeville and radio as "Jim Grady, the Singing Miner."

OTHER ACTS during the week included the Eagles Band directed by John Unsinn; the American Legion Band directed by William Becker; the Lithuanian choir of Saint Joseph's Church; the American Carpatho-Russian Singers from Saint Mary's Church; the Junior Choir of Christ Lutheran Church.

Dominic Tadisico, a talented harmonica player from town, made a favorable impression which prompted Manager Fobia of the Mansion Hotel to telephone compliments to the station for presenting Italian talent. He suggested, "You should do that every night in order to have a real show."

Another Italian act featured Phil Marzullo, Joe Ricchiutti and Rocco Dasey as an accordion-guitar trio who played a snappy version of "Roll 'em Girls, Roll 'em."

Another threesome, billed as "The Inimitable Trio," acted out some comedy in the persons of Tony Gallagher, Ambrose McCoog and Leo Derrish.

Also in a humorous vein was Leo Birmingham's rendition of "When the Moon Shines on the Moonshine."

From Ashland came Jim and Joe Noon blending baritone and tenor tones in "Suppose I Met You Face to Face."

Charlie Bowman, the "whispering baritone" from

Shenandoah, sang "I Love You."

Other vocal offerings included "Pal of My Cradle Days" by Tony Carey, "An Old-Fashioned Town" by Mrs. Thomas Perry, "Wonderful One" by Ruth Goodman and "Somewhere A Voice Is Calling" by Martha Adamson of Saint Nicholas.

The art of elocution was demonstrated by Claire Hostler of Frackville.

THROUGH THE years, the electronic media, which had its start in radio, has been an important aspect of life in Mahanoy City.

The pioneering work of Luther Holt in his little electronics shop on East Spruce street at the bottom of the Pottsy Hill, and later in the former Lincoln School between Morea and New Boston where he still conducts operation, broke ground with technical gadgetry that opened the way for the cable TV industry to get develop into the advanced state it enjoys today.

And there to take advantage of the opportunity when it presented itself was John Walsonavich, a patch boy from Patriotic Hill who, in boyhood often had to chase the family cows to bring them home from their wanderings to adjoining villages in search of grazing. John became a student of electricity, slowly build his cable television network and today can sit back at the pinnacle of his field. His Service Electric cable company, like John Walson himself, has done more for his home town and his native coal region that most residents will ever realize.

AND IT ALL goes back to those early days when radio was a new wonder that fascinated a community when brought to town by the local newspaper.

Although Station WKBG Mahanoy City lasted but a week, its impact was far-reaching. The weeks that followed saw various radio manufacturers begin competing for the local market with advertisements in the local papers.

The rest is history, as you realize when you see teenagers walking down the street with jamboxes blasting in their ears, or grandma shuffling about the house with vacuum cleaner humming but oblivious to the noise because she has her Walkman Stereo plugged into her ears listening to Glen Miller's "Moonlight Serenade," Tommy Dorsey's "Getting Sentimental Over You," Artie Shaw's "Begin the Beguine," Jimmy Dorsey's "Maria Elena," Benny Goodman's "Let's Dance," Sammy Kaye's "Harbor Lights," Vaughn Monroe's "Racing With the Moon," Count Basie's "One O'Clock Jump," Woody Herman's "Woodchoppers' Ball," Charlie

GO To The HIP

FOR THE ENTIRE WEEK

SIDNEY SHEPARD

FAMOUS ANNOUNCER AND COMEDIAN

The 1926 Sensation

Disclosing the Mysteries of Radio in an Entertaining Stage Presentation.

BROADCASTING STATION -- WKBG --

Licensed by the U. S. Government

More Talent Than a 20-Act Vaudeville Show.

Actually Broadcasting on 215.7 Meter Wavelength.

See How Broadcasting is Done

Actual Broadcasting on the Stage in Full View of the Audience. Come and See Your Friends Go on the Air.



Atwater Kent

SEE THE NEW PRICES

4 Tube Set \$88.00
Were \$110.00

5 Tube Set \$118.00
Were \$150.00

6 Tube Set, Single Dial .. \$150.00
Were \$185.00

These prices include installation and full equipment ready to use.

E. F. GRUBER

New Balkite "B" Eliminator \$27.50

RADIO'S FOOTHOLD — These two ads from the 1926 Record-American tell the story of how radio got its foothold in Mahanoy City.

Spivak's "Stardust." A salute to the memory of "Station WKBG of the Record-

American broadcasting directly from the stage of the Hippodrome Theatre."