

Harry Phillips Davis
Enshrined in Broadcasters Hall of Fame
Akron, Ohio on October 3, 1990

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IN TRIBUTE TO H. P. DAVIS

Charles A. Ruch, Westinghouse Historian

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It was the last day of September, 70 years ago, when H. P. Davis arrived at his office in the Westinghouse plant in East Pittsburgh. Two years had gone by since the Armistice ended World War I and life for H. P. Davis was considerably less grim. In the war years he had headed the war production activities of Westinghouse, and he had done that job well.

Despite the enormous quantities of shells and other munitions ordered by the government...despite short time limits..despite rigid specifications which changed with bewildering frequency...despite shortages of materials and lack of competent help, the war work of Westinghouse was done properly and on time. Every promise made by H. P. Davis to the government was kept.

Moving fast-forward to that day in September 1920, when Vice President H. P. Davis arrived at his office, his secretary sensed he was excited about something. In the same sentence he said, "Good morning," he added, "ask Frank to come in."

Frank, as you likely have guessed, was Frank Conrad, assistant chief engineer of Westinghouse. In the war years, Frank Conrad's special assignment was radio work, coordinating closely with the U. S. Signal Corps. By special license from the government, Westinghouse had been permitted to build and operate a transmitting station and a receiving station. One was located at East Pittsburgh, the other was above the garage at the home of Mr. Conrad, four or five miles away. With not much imagination, they were 2WM and 2WE.

When the war ended, Frank Conrad had continued to experiment from his transmitter station above his garage. After government restrictions on amateur radio operators were removed, Frank spent many evenings operating his radio telephone transmitter. When he grew tired of talking, he moved his Victrola to the microphone and played records. To supplement his own collection, he borrowed

from a local records store, the Hamilton Music Company. In exchange he mentioned the name of the store on the air. So here we have the Hamilton Music Company as the first "advertiser" on radio and Frank Conrad as the first disk jockey.

Fast-forward again to the last of September, 1920, with Conrad being summoned to the office of his boss at Westinghouse, H. P. Davis. The first words to greet him were: "Frank, I'm going to close your station." History does not record Frank's reaction. But we assume he noted a bit of a smile on the face of his boss as H. P. Davis pulled from his pocket a clipping from the last night's newspaper. It was an advertisement that said radio sets could be purchased in the basement of Horne's department store, in downtown Pittsburgh. Buyers of the sets, at \$10 and up, could listen to the wireless concerts sent out by Frank Conrad.

Dr. Davis then told Mr. Conrad of his vision. He saw that all the efforts being made to develop radio telephony as a confidential means of communication--which is what the military wanted--was all wrong. Radio telephony was an instant means of communication that could go everywhere. As Dr. Davis himself later was to say, "We had in our hands, in this idea, the instrument that would prove to be the greatest and most direct mass communicational and mass educational means that had ever appeared."

Ladies and gentlemen, I am not going to bore you by continuing with the early history of broadcasting. It is all spelled out here in a reprint of a talk made by Dr. Davis to the graduate school of business administration at Harvard in 1928. We have one of these booklets for each of you, a present from Westinghouse. You will have the very words of the man who set in motion the business of broadcasting, the man to whom each of you in the business may wish to make a slight bow every time you open your pay envelope.

Because the little booklet doesn't tell you a word about the background of H. P. Davis, let me say briefly that he was born in Summersworth, New Hampshire, on July 31, 1868. He died in Pittsburgh September 10, 1931, at the age of 63. He received his technical training at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. He joined Westing-

house 99 years ago and worked on what they called "detail apparatus" --the smaller items like controllers, which helped the big generators and motors to do their thing. He had 77 patents and was made head of the Detail Department in 1896. By rarest chance, we have found a letter telling him of his new salary at that point, a handsome \$300 a month, and any patents he developed in line with his work belonged to Westinghouse. In 1911, he was now Dr. Davis, he was made Vice President in charge of engineering and manufacturing; presumably, his salary increased somewhat.

I hope you will take the time to read Dr. Davis' address on the history of broadcasting. I might tell you that Jean Hartz will announce later the date on which you will all have a quiz on this. But for just a moment or two I would like to leaf through the booklet and give you a few anecdotes you won't find there.

Dr. Davis says the first broadcast was from a rough box affair, on the roof of one of the taller buildings at the East Pittsburgh Works. It was known as the K Building. When Westinghouse was assigned call letters for the pioneer station, it came out KDKA. This came from a roster of letters assigned to ships and marine shore stations. The relation to the K Building was merely a coincidence. If that ever comes up in Trivial Pursuit, you are ready.

As we look back to that first broadcast, we imagine there must have been a lot of excitement. Not quite. In fact, after going to all the trouble of setting up the broadcast, Dr. Davis began to wonder if anybody would be listening. He says in the booklet that they did pass around a few simple receiving sets to top executives of Westinghouse. They also took another precaution. A whole group of Westinghouse managers and spouses was invited--you might say encouraged--to spend the evening at a local community club to hear the broadcast over loudspeakers. Naturally, the company wanted to be able to say that "hundreds heard the broadcast." As it turned out, the audience was many hundreds, with cards and calls from as far away as Kentucky.

At East Pittsburgh, the approach to this historic occasion was somewhat low-key. No one thought to get a photographer. Most likely you have seen the picture of the four men in the makeshift studio. By noting the light from outside, you realize the picture must have been made the next day, when it suddenly dawned on someone, "We made history last night!" One of the four men wasn't available the next day. The man at the left is a sit-in; the other three, including the famed Leo Rosenberg, first announcer, are legitimate.

Later on, Dr. Davis tells about the announcers school they started. They even had a professional critic, Marjorie Stewart, whose handicap of being blind possibly made her even more astute in evaluating the spoken word. One old-time KDKA engineer, who now happens to be the oldest notary public in Pennsylvania, will never forget Marjorie Stewart. In the early days, announcing was no big deal, and the pay was not great, either. So anybody with a voice was pressed into service, particularly on weekends. That's when Herbert Irving got his change. One Saturday evening he was going along nicely, reading the football scores, until he came to Yale 13, DartMOUTH 7. He got a note from Marjorie Stewart and his announcing assignments tailed off after that.

It was a natural, I suppose, that after the death of Dr. Davis, Westinghouse would come up with an award in his name for outstanding announcers. It is a happy coincidence that the very first winner of this award is one of your members, and he is with us tonight-- Ken Hildebrand. And Ken has told me there's a story that goes with the presentation of that first award. As the widow of Dr. Davis made the presentation and handed Ken the award envelope, she whispered to him, "Don't be surprised that there's nothing in there. I left the check at home." We're glad that Ken later got the check.

It is also said that Mrs. Davis had a thing about saxophones. For several years, because of her aversion, no saxophones were played over KDKA. Fortunately for Rudy Vallee, he came along somewhat later.

When you read the booklet you may note that Dr. Davis took a bit of orator's license. He implies that the ad which triggered his

decision came early in the year 1920, but there is no doubt that the date on the newspaper was late September. We can assume that the idea of broadcasting service was in his mind early in the year, but it was the ad that sparked his action. You will also see in the booklet that the post-war call letters of Conrad's station read 8XX. Dr. Davis would have known this was 8XK, so we will assume a typographical error. Aside from this, you can believe in the gospel according to H. P. Davis.

As you would expect, Dr. Davis--being a self-effacing man--makes no reference to the fact that when the National Broadcasting Company was formed, he was its first Chairman. He held that position, along with his title at Westinghouse, until his death

It is evident that broadcasting--the infant to which he had given birth--became the life of Dr. Davis. Early in his career, he enjoyed playing golf. According to one of his golf buddies, after the broadcasting business began, Davis was no fun anymore. He would rush from hole to hole, just so he could get back to the business. So, if any of you folks have found that the broadcasting business has shortened your golf hours, maybe H. P. is watching.

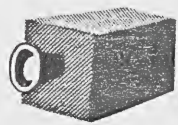
From what you have heard about Dr. Davis, and the more you will know after reading the booklet, there can be no doubt that he would be tremendously proud of the honor you have bestowed on him tonight. For H. P. Davis...broadcasting was his personal "Field of Dreams." It would not surprise me...if somehow...he is in this room tonight, sitting in one of those few empty chairs. On the slight chance that this might be true, I would like to propose a toast:

To H. P. Davis, the Father of Broadcasting

Your vision went beyond by far
The wireless link of man to man;
Because your concept was so broad
A great new enterprise began.

That enterprise still grows and grows
Though few there are who know your name;
From the day you made your dream come true
Our world would never be the same.

God bless you, Dr. Davis! God bless you all!



Story of Radio Broadcasting



THE ROMANCE of radio broadcasting—from its beginning in the Wilkinsburg garage where the late Dr. Frank Conrad played phonograph records in front of a converted-telephone transmitter—is told in five-star fashion in the new motion picture, "On the Air," produced by Paramount Studios for Westinghouse Radio Stations, Inc.

The film will be shown throughout the Company, under a schedule arranged by the Westinghouse Motion Picture Bureau at Pittsburgh.

With a cast of more than 100 persons, and featuring Bob White, KDKA Program Director, in the narrator's role, the 30-minute movie records the swift rise of the radio industry from the days of wireless telephony to a billion-dollar enterprise reaching into virtually every home in the nation.

For good measure, "On the Air" goes behind the scenes in a modern broadcasting studio to tell how a radio show is whipped together, rehearsed and put on the air; how sound effects are created for broadcasting; how voices and music get from the broadcasting studio to the radio receiver in your home (see next page); how the nation's 900 stations can be on the air at the same time without interfering with one another, and how broadcasts from various stations are artfully beamed to cover only clearly defined areas.

Highlights of the historical portion of the film (see montage on opposite page) show Dr. Conrad working in his garage laboratory (which was faithfully recreated, even down to the soap boxes that formed the base for some of his equipment) . . .

The clerk in a Pittsburgh department store listening in and getting an idea that if more people knew about the Wilkinsburg scientist's putting music on the air it would boost the store's sales of crystal-set receivers . . .

H. P. Davis, then Vice President at Westinghouse, catching from the resulting store advertisement a vision that radio was an instrument of public rather than private communication, and convincing the Company heads that his hunch was worth a trial . . .

The resultant birth of Station KDKA, and radio's overnight

NEW RADIO PROGRAM

In addition to the Westinghouse Sunday afternoon program (2:30, Red Network), the Company will inaugurate on March 13 a brand new radio program.

The new show, basically a musical program, will be on the air from 10:15 to 10:30 every Monday, Wednesday and Friday evening, over the 159 stations of the Blue Network.

Make a date now with your easy chair and radio for the premiere March 13.

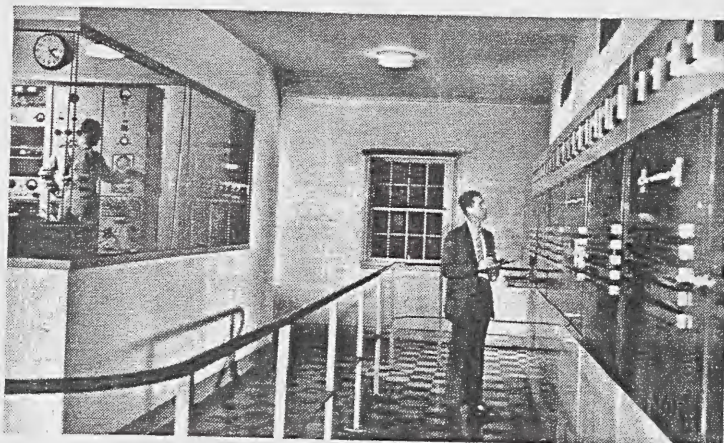
growth from a hobby to a national institution.

"On the Air" has a number of pleasantly nostalgic scenes showing the first tube-type receivers which replaced the home-made crystal sets, and there's even one sequence showing how a set of earphones was placed in mother's mixing bowl to amplify for a roomful of guests the sounds that came from the air.

The wonders of modern radio broadcasting are shown in a behind-the-scenes trip through Station KDKA's Allison Park transmitting station, the KYW news room as an important news flash goes on the air, and through other studios where orchestras play and actors speak.

AT ITS CONCLUSION, "On the Air" looks to the future, a future in which new chapters will be written in radio's history—in radiophoto transmission, in frequency-modulation (FM) broadcasting, in television and in international short-wave broadcasting.

"As each radio day brings information, entertainment and education to your home," concludes the film's narrator, "scientists continue to reach into the future . . . planning and developing new services that will make your street, your home, the center of the universe . . . so that the whole wide world of pictures and colors and sounds will be as close to you as your radio."



A far cry from the two-story garage where broadcasting began is KDKA's million-dollar transmitting station at Allison Park, a suburb of Pittsburgh. At the extreme right is the 60-ton, 718-foot steel transmitting tower.

KDKA's Chief Engineer, T. C. Kenney, records data from dials at the transmitter station. Behind these metal walls are wires, vacuum tubes, electrical condensers, coils, switches, relays and much other complex apparatus representing years of research.

