

# Radio's Golden Age

## A Stroll Down Memory Lane – With Stops Along The Way

BY ALICE BRANNIGAN

Last September we looked into the history of CBS' Los Angeles powerhouse KNX. That brought in a big response, like the note from Ray D. Ferguson, retired from NBC in Los Angeles, and now living in Lake City, FL.

Ray said we did a "great job" with KNX, and mentioned that NBC's studios in Los Angeles were only a block away, on Sunset and Vine. Even so, he said the NBC and CBS staffers seldom visited back and forth between the two facilities.

We thought, then, we might peek in on the early days of NBC's primary Los Angeles outlet, KFI. This station, which was the second station to begin operating in Los Angeles, started up on April 16th, 1922. Its first broadcasts were via a homemade 5 watt transmitter on 833 kHz, although within a few months the station had increased power to 500 watts on 640 kHz.

KFI was put on the air by Earle C. Anthony, who owned the local dealership for luxury Packard cars at 1000 South Hope St. Station KFI was also licensed as Experimental station 6XY. KFI was an immediate success, and found that its opera broadcasts (begun in 1924, and sponsored by Standard Oil) attracted a wide audience. Other early KFI program sponsors included General Mills, Owl Drug Stores, and Walter Murphy Motors.

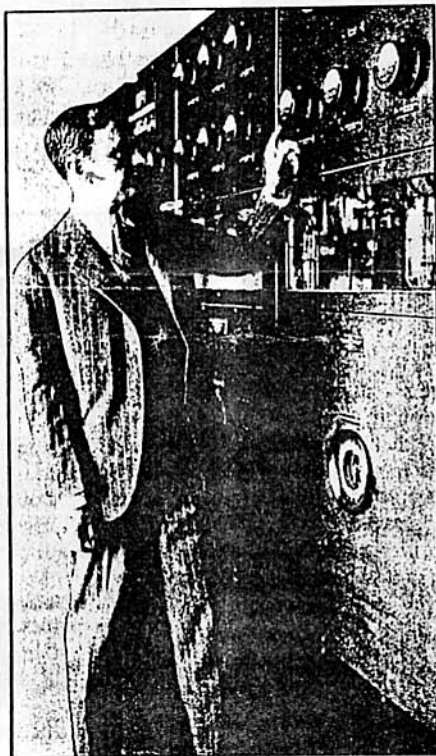
In 1926, KFI's full-length broadcast of the opera *Die Walkure* attracted considerable attention because it was networked to KPO, San Francisco, for live simulcasting.

The year 1926 also saw KFI increase its power to 5 kW, although its 500 watt signals had been reported in both England and Australia. But the best was yet to come!

In July of 1931, KFI upped its power to 50 kW and became the first 50 kW broadcaster west of Chicago. The new KFI 50 kW transmitting facility was a superb engineering feat, the talk of the broadcast industry, and the envy of most stations.

The transmitting site was set up on a 30 acre tract near Buena Park, 21 miles southeast of Los Angeles. A pair of 400 ft. high steel frame towers were constructed, 700 ft. apart. The two-story brick transmitter building was located 475 ft. from the midpoint of a line joining the two towers, so that the building and two towers formed an approximately equilateral triangle. The radiation pattern was circular.

The transmitter itself was a 37-tube RCA 50-B type. The final amplifier unit of this



The 5 kW transmitter of KFI is checked out by movie producer Sol Lesser in the late 1920's.

transmitter was designed around two UV-862 100-kW tubes arranged in a linear balanced power amplifier circuit. The UV-862 was run with 17,500 volts (at 4.2 amps) on the plate in the RCA 50-B. Mercury vapor rectifier tubes were employed, and the rectifier was designed so that when the voltage is first thrown on the tubes it was only 10,000 volts, after which the regulator automatically brought it up to the full 17,500 to protect the tubes.

A two-wire line connected the transmitter with the antenna coupling and tuning apparatus. This was located in a separate building directly beneath the antenna itself. The transmission line had nearly 100% efficiency, with negligible loss in the conductors.

The results from this installation were immediately successful for KFI. Later in the 1930's, NBC would further enhance KFI's image and reputation by constructing the network's western headquarters and studios as an imposing structure on the busy corner of Sunset and Vine.

Earle C. Anthony, KFI's founder, also ran Los Angeles station KECA, which had 1 kW on 1430 kHz, then moved to 790 kHz with 5 kW in 1941. When ABC was formed as a split off from NBC, KECA became the ABC outlet in Los Angeles. This is the present KABC. KECA began operation in Hollywood, April 15, 1925 on 1440 kHz as Clarence Juneau's station, KFVF. It was acquired by Anthony in November, 1929 and owned by him until the formation of ABC. Earle Anthony was 81 when he died in 1961.

KFI continues on 640 kHz with 50 kW and a talk format. Since 1973, it has been owned by Cox Enterprises, which operates the station from 610 South Ardmore.

We have a couple of interesting old cards from KFI, including ones displaying the special verification stamps the station issued and affixed to its QSL's. One stamp is for KFI alone, while the other is for KFI/KECA.

### Verification Stamps?

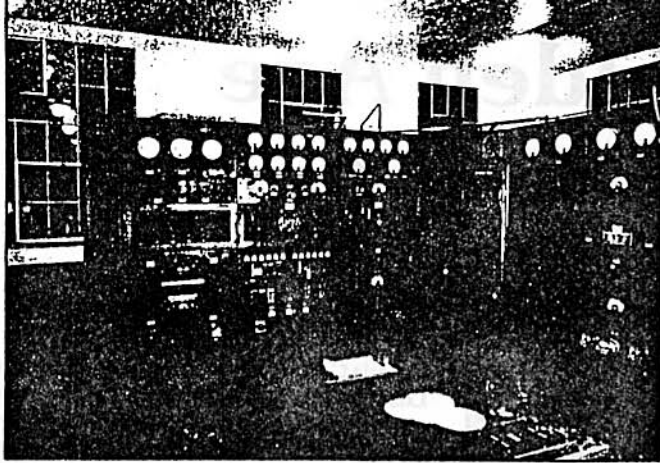
The use of stamps in connection with QSL's brings us mail from time to time, and the KFI veri stamps offer a good opening for an inquiry from R. A. Gove, Clarksville, MD. R. A. writes that his dad, Leroy Gove, was an active DX'er in the 1920's when he lived in Lynn, MA. After his father passed away in 1984, R. A. was sorting through some of his dad's old radio papers and came across an EKKO stamp album.

R. A. has been in and out of DX'ing himself for a number of years, but he admits to being stumped by the EKKO stamp album, since his father had never mentioned it to him. He hopes we can shed some light on the subject.

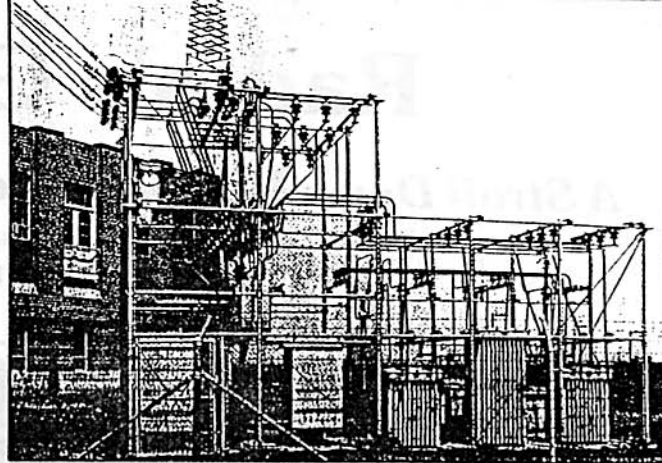
The EKKO album was filled with stamps of various colors which bore the call signs of American and Canadian broadcasting stations. The album, which is dated 1924, had blank spaces marked with the call letters and locations of stations where the stamps were to be pasted into the album.

Stamp designs were mostly identical, although different for stations of American and Canadian origin. The American stamps all showed an eagle between two antenna towers, while the Canadian version showed a beaver between two towers. The letters EKKO appeared in the four corners, with the call signs appearing as a black overprint on the stock designs.

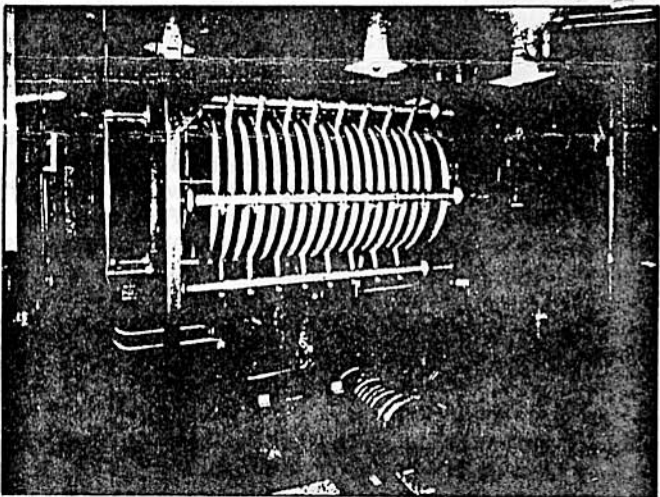
EKKO was a company that supplied these



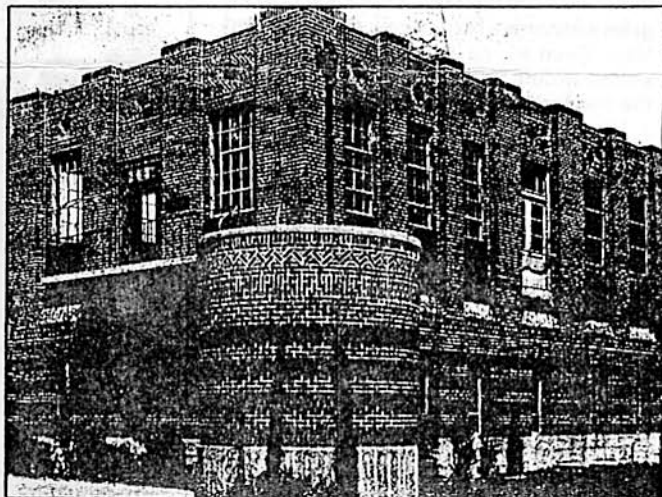
The RF units of KFI's 50 kW transmitter, installed in 1931.



The KFI power distribution frames with one of the 400 ft. towers in the rear.



One of KFI's tuning capacitors used in the final stage of the 50 kW transmitter.



Transmitter building for the 50 kW KFI installation built in 1931.

stamps to broadcasters in the 1920's, and into the 1930's. Stations sometimes sold them for a dime each with their QSL's, and many DX'ers attempted to fill their albums with the stamps. Not that a full album attested to anything in particular, since many stations didn't offer the stamps. DX'ers didn't need to get the stamps from the stations, anyway. The EKKO company would sell the stamps directly to DX'ers to cover stations that refused to carry them. Also, as in the case of KFI, WSB, WDAE, etc., there were numerous stations that bypassed the EKKO company and printed QSL stamps of their own design (at times, looking similar to the EKKO stamps) for sale (or to be given at no cost) to DX'ers.

This is a brief summary of EKKO stamps. A complete, in-depth look at the EKKO stamp collecting fad that swept the DX'ing hobby in the 1920's was the subject of a *POP' COMM* feature that appeared in our April, '86 issue.

### **Catching Up On Old Business**

In the October issue, we discussed the four AM high fidelity stations that were establish-

ed in the 1930's. One of these was W9XBY, in Kansas City, MO on 1530 kHz, with 1 kW. We mentioned that the station was operated by First National Television, Inc., which later obtained commercial license KXBY for the station, and eventually operated it under the call letters KITE, although it was a short-lived operation. First National operated a radio and TV school for technicians, in addition to their own broadcasting stations.

One of the students at First National in 1939, was Nick Ferrari, who is now a retired research engineer in industrial electronics. Nick lives in Canton, OH and is a *POP' COMM* reader, who enjoyed reading about KITE in the October issue, also about W9XAL, which was First National's early TV station (discussed in our July, '91 issue). Nick was 23 years old in 1939, and he put in some time working in the KITE studios, as well as at the transmitter. He also worked at W9XAL, First National's TV station.

Nick was kind enough to share with us photos taken in May of 1939. One shows the exterior of the KITE transmitter building and tower. The other photo shows Nick, himself,

operating one of the TV cameras at W9XAL.

Also, in the October issue we ran a photo of the 450 ft. wooden radio tower used in 1934 by the 100 kW broadcaster in Hamburg (904 kHz), Germany. We speculated that the signals were radiated by a wire element inside the tower, but wondered if anybody knew the reason for the unusual use of wood in constructing the large tower.

That brought in a letter from Guenther Daub, KC6TWP, an electronics engineer from Redondo Beach, CA. Guenther told us that during the 1970's, he read an article in a German publication that discussed the use of a wooden broadcast tower at *Heissischer Rundfunk*, and its main transmitter near Frankfort am Main, Germany during the 1930's.

He tells us that the German broadcast service (Rundfunk), prior to WWII was providing extended service coverage using a few primary, high-powered mediumwave transmitters. Normally, towers associated with the primary mediumwave transmitter sites consisted of self-supporting steel towers. As the power and the ground wave coverage service area of the mediumwave transmitters increased