

"Minnesota's-first radio station was 9SV, owned and operated by 19-year-old Robert Witschen, who broadcast phonographic music in 1920 to the few who could pick it up on their cat's whiskers sets. Schilpin hired Witschen in 1922 to build a station and give the Times a voice, WFAM. But the lack of advertisers---due to a lack of listeners with sets---forced the station to close down five years later.

When Schilpin decided to try again in 1938, Witschen became the Chief Engineer for KFAM (the original call letters had been taken over by another station, and Schilpin's second choice, KSTC was, according to the FCC, too similar to St. Paul's KSTP)." KFAM-AM came on the air in 1938 and KFAM-FM was added a decade later...among the pioneer FM stations in Minnesota.

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JOHN DOMINIK 1983

## **Radio in Minnesota**

**Radio in Minnesota, as in other parts of the country, began with experimental broadcasts in the 1910s. These often originated in the physics or engineering departments of colleges and universities. The University of Minnesota made its first radio transmissions in 1912, and in 1915 broadcast an entire football game with a spark gap transmitter. The University received a license for experimental station 9XI in 1920. Similar stations at St. John's University and St. Olaf College also began during this period.**

**Station 9XI at the University of Minnesota eventually was replaced by WLB, which became the state's first licensed AM station on Jan. 13, 1922 (twenty three years later WLB would change its call letters to KUOM). At least fourteen stations were licensed in Minnesota in 1922. Nearly all of them were assigned to share time on 833 kilohertz, with power ranging from 50 to 500 watts. Stations were operated by the Findley Electric Company (WCE), Dayton's (WBAH), The Minneapolis Tribune (WAAL), Commonwealth Electric Company (WAAH), and Dunwoody Institute (WHDI), among others. St. Cloud, Duluth, Hutchinson, Collegeville, Moorhead and Northfield also had stations in 1922. WLAG signed on in 1922 as well. Stanley Hubbard began station WAMD in 1923, and Hubbard Broadcasting was born (WAMD merged with KFOY in 1928 and became KSTP). By the mid-1920s, such mainstays as WCCO and WDGY were on the air in the Twin Cities, as well as WEBC in Duluth and KBRF in Fergus Falls.**

**With the popularity of radio growing and radios being fairly simple to build, radio manufacturing and sales companies sprang up by the hundreds across the country. Minnesota was no exception, with over 60 companies in the Twin Cities alone trying the radio business in the 1920s. Some of the familiar local companies included Northome, Northland, Roycraft, and Cutting & Washington (Cutting & Washington also operated station WLAG, which was eventually sold to the Washburn Crosby Company and became WCCO in 1924).**

**With the growth of radio stations came increased use of the airways, and sharing frequencies became unworkable. Frequency reassignments happened throughout the 1920s and 1930s, but came to a head with the adoption of the North American Regional Broadcasting Agreement of 1941. On March 29, 1941 nearly 800 U. S. stations changed to new frequencies. WCCO moved from 810 to 830, KSTP from 1460 to 1500, WDGY from 1180 to 1130, and WLB and WCAL from 760 to 770.**

**The 1930s saw several new stations take to the air in Minnesota. Rochester, Duluth, Hibbing, Albert Lea, Winona, St. Cloud and Mankato all had one or more stations by the end of the decade. WLOL in the Twin Cities and KWLM in Willmar went on the air in 1940, the last two stations in Minnesota until after World War II. In 1946 there were 18 stations on the air in the state, six of them in the Twin Cities. By 1950 there were 43 stations. Today there are over 200 stations in Minnesota.**

**Some notable facts about Minnesota radio: KUOM, when traced back to its beginnings (9XI-WLB-KUOM), is the country's oldest licensed non-commercial radio station; KSTP claims to be the first station ever meant to exist solely by advertising revenue; WCCO was one of 21 stations that participated in what is considered the first network radio broadcast, the March 4, 1925 inaugural address of President Calvin Coolidge (the stations were linked via telephone lines); WCCO claims to have aired the first singing commercial, a barbershop quartet singing "Have You Tried Wheaties," in 1926; Charles Persons built a station in Duluth in the late 1930s that became WEBC-FM and is claimed to be the first FM station west of Chicago; WDGY had the first television license in Minnesota (it experimented with mechanical television broadcasts between 1933 and 1938).**

# Minnesota Call Letters

All radio and television stations in the United States have call letters, a three or four letter identification assigned by the Federal Communications Commission (or its predecessors). Many of these call letters are simply random combinations of letters, and have no meaning. Others, however, were requested by the station and actually stand for something. Below are some local examples.

- KAUS Austin
- KCLD St. Cloud
- KDHL Palmer Dragsten, Jack Hyre, Herb Lee (founders of the Faribault radio station)
- KFAI Fresh Air Incorporated
- KFOY Kind Friends of Yours (merged with WAMD in 1928 to form KSTP)
- KISD Iowa South Dakota (Pipestone)
- KMSP Minneapolis St. Paul
- KRSI Red Owl Store Incorporated *or* Radio Suburbia Incorporated
- KSTP St. Paul
- KUOM University Of Minnesota
- KWAD Wadena
- WAMD Where All Minnesota Dances (Stanley E. Hubbard's first station)
- WCCO Washburn Crosby Company (the original owner of WCCO radio)
- WDGY Dr. George Young (founder of the station)
- WEVE Eveleth
- WFTC Fox Twin Cities
- WHDI William Hood Dunwoody Institute (one of the early radio stations in Minnesota)
- WLOL Land Of Lakes (originally); Lady Of Lourdes
- WMFG With Many Friendly Greetings (Hibbing)
- WPBC People's Broadcasting Company (WPBC-FM eventually became KDWB-FM)
- WRHM Welcome Rosedale Hospital Minneapolis (begun by Dr. Troy Miller, Pres. of the hospital)
- WTCN Twin City Newspapers (the Minneapolis Tribune and St. Paul Pioneer Press formed a joint venture in 1934 and bought radio station WRHM, renaming it WTCN)
- WWTC World Wide and Twin Cities *or* Wonderful World of Twin Cities (successor to WTCN)



# St. Louis Park Historical Society

## TWIN CITIES RADIO TIMELINE

*St. Louis Park is fortunate to be the home of the [Pavek Museum of Broadcasting](#), located at 3515 Raleigh Avenue. Much of the following information was provided by the Museum.*

*Another good source of information on the history of local radio stations can be found in [Minnesota Airwaves, 1912 through 1939](#) and [Radio Trivia](#) by Charles W. Ingersoll.*

*Also see the [Hennepin County Library's Radio and Television](#) site.*

1912

The Radio Act established that radio was to be monitored by the Secretary of Commerce, who was Herbert Hoover at the time. The Act authorized the Secretary to issue licenses to every applicant, and did not provide him with any regulatory powers.

The North American Regional Broadcasting Agreement established the protocol for call letters. Stations east of the Mississippi started with K, and those west started with W. Canadian stations started with C, and Mexican stations started with X. At first call letters had only three letters, but they were quickly exhausted in the 20's and a fourth was added.

1920

The very first active commercial radio station in the nation is thought to be KDKA in Pittsburgh, which got its license in October 1920. The first broadcast was the Harding-Cox Election returns on November 2.

The first transmitter for public broadcasts was set up at the University of Minnesota, and its first broadcast was a football game in 1921.

Here's a good description of a crystal set from Ish Kabibble::

*There was a new thing you could build that could pick up music right out of the air. For three or four dollars you could buy a kit downtown that consisted of several items, including a crystal – a little square piece of white crystal with an “energy source” in it and a little pinprick needle with a spring on it. The kit provided directions on how to make what was called a radio out of wire and other materials. You got a Mother's Quaker Oats round box – waiting till it was empty, naturally – about four inches in diameter and seven inches long. You skinned copper wire and wrapped it around the box, keeping the wires close together and gluing as you wrapped. The kit gave you a little gimmick that rode across the top of the box. You could slide this gimmick back and forth across the copper wire that was wound around the box. Its purpose was to tune in different stations. The kit also contained a set of earphones and all the little switches and other necessary dealiebobbies.*

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1922

Minnesota's first authorized radio station was KUOM, going on the air on January 13, 1922 from the University campus.

Minnesota's first radio station, WLAG, went on the air on September 4 at 9 a.m. from its studios on the sixth floor of the Oak Grove Hotel in Minneapolis. The Cutting and Washington Radio Corporation of Minneapolis had formed earlier that year with the goal to start a 500-watt station. Its slogan was "WLAG, Your Call of the North Station." This station eventually became WCCO. (Station WLB, broadcasting from the UofM in 1921, doesn't count.) New tube radios were available for about \$90.

Radio ownership increased from about 50,000 to upwards of 800,000 in 1922.

The earliest country music was broadcast by Atlanta's WSB.

1923

Optometrist George W. Young started a radio station in 1923, first known as "George Young's Twin City Station, Inc." (also the "Jewelry and Optical Station), later to become WDGY (Doctor George Young). Young first broadcast from the living room of his house at 2219 North Bryant Avenue in North Minneapolis in late December 1923. The station was first called KFMT, then changed to WHAT in 1925, and WGUY in 1926. Finally on March 22, 1926, the station's call letters became WDGY. More information on this station is available at [www.earlytelevision.org](http://www.earlytelevision.org)

1924

WLAG went off the air on July 31, as did rival WBAH, founded by the Dayton Company. The Northwest Radio Trade Association worked to revive WLAG, and found a buyer in the Washburn-Crosby Company. The station recommenced on October 2 as WCCO ("The Washburn Crosby Company"). It was promoted as "The Gold Medal Station," after the company's major product.

The first radio news department in Minnesota and across the nation was WAMD, the forerunner to KSTP. WAMD also aired the first play-by-play hockey game in 1925.

1925

The Twin City Barber College first aired station WAMD on February 3. It broadcast from the Marigold Gardens dance hall in Minneapolis. This station became KSTP in 1928.

A radio license was issued to Dr. Troy S. Miller, President of Rosedale Hospital, located at 4429 Nicollet Avenue in Minneapolis. The station was first called WRHM ("Welcome Rosedale Hospital, Minneapolis") on August 10. In 1927 the transmitter was moved from the hospital to Fridley. It became part of the CBS network in 1929. The Rosedale Hospital Company sold the station to the Minnesota Broadcasting Company (President: Troy S. Miller) in 1930 and moved the studio from the hospital to the Wesley Temple Building at 115 East Grant Street in Minneapolis. This station became WTCN (Twin Cities Newspapers) in 1934.

Crystal sets could not pick up the stronger signals of the growing stations – 12,000 listeners complained that they could not hear the broadcast of Calvin Coolidge's inaugural address. The rush was on for "tube sets."

1926

WDGY got approval for its final name change on March 22, 1926 and the studio was moved from Dr. Young's house to the West Hotel in Minneapolis.

WCCO became an NBC affiliate on November 15. The first singing commercial was broadcast by the Wheaties Quartet.

1927

In August 1927, WDGY's transmitter was moved to Superior Blvd. and Falvey Cross Road [Wayzata Blvd. and Louisiana] in St. Louis Park. [The address in 1955 was 7401 Wayzata Blvd.; most likely where the Louisiana Transit Station at 394 is today] This was on the grounds of the [U.S. Silver Fox Farm](#), at the very northern border of the Village. In late 1935 a new non-directional 226 Truscan Steel Vertical Radiator (tower) was erected at the site. In 1949, the station moved its transmitter to a new multi-tower array at 103rd and Lyndale Ave. So. in Bloomington.

Cabinet radios were operated by plugging them into a light socket.

1928

On April 28 (March 29?), KSTP radio started life, a combination of WAMD and KFOY. The 2,000 watt station began its career with a seven-hour program that ended at 2 am. The station became an affiliate of the NBC Blue network in the fall. In 1930 it switched to NBC Red.

1929

General Mills (newly formed in 1928 from the Washburn Crosby Co.) sold one third of WCCO to CBS. The station became a CBS affiliate on December 30, 1930. General Mills sold the remaining shares to CBS on November 1, 1931 for \$300,000.

RCA sold 3.75 million radio sets in 1929.

1934

In September, WRHM's call letters were changed to WTCN ("Twin Cities Newspaper"), as a result of the purchase of the station by a joint venture of the publishers of the St. Paul Pioneer Press and the Minneapolis Tribune. In December KSTP was elevated to a Red network Basic or Key station status. NBC Blue went over to the new WTCN. The move was so important that Jack Benny welcomed Minneapolis listeners to his December 16, 1934 broadcast. The station was affiliated with the NBC Blue Network in 1936, and remained when Blue became ABC in 1945.

The town of Westcott, southeast of St. Paul, changed its name to Radio Center, as it was the location of the KSTP towers.

1936

Furniture retailer Edward Hoffman began to broadcast his station WMIN in the summer.

1937

"Because their young voices registered well at a WTCN audition, the 24 members of the [Fern Hill](#) Glee Club won a chance to sing over the radio station on June 13." The *Minneapolis Tribune* ran a picture of the kids, and their director, E.M. Martinson.

1941

The North American Regional Broadcasting Agreement of 1941 required most North American radio stations to change their frequencies. This affected all seven Twin Cities radio stations. The deadline was 3 am on Saturday, March 29.

Thomas J. Casey, 3908 Kipling erected his own radio station in September 1941. The Village took him to court, objecting to the poles, antennae, and wires.

1942

Armed Forces Radio began.

1945

[Joe Billman's](#) [St. Louis] Park Mortuary sponsored a radio program of Bible dramas on WLOL at 6:15 pm each Saturday.

WDGY founder Dr. George W. Young died on April 27, 1945, leading to a series of sales of the station.

1946

The modern FM-stereo band came to be in 1946.

Mrs. Ed. C. Colosky, 4107 Colorado Ave. was a guest at the Don McNeil Breakfast Club when the genial Don broadcast from the Minneapolis Auditorium for the Aquatennial, according to the *Dispatch* of August 1, 1946. Although from St. Louis Park, her husband headed the Dahlberg Bros. car dealership in Hopkins so she used the opportunity to plug the Hopkins Raspberry Festival. "The broadcast was slated for seven a.m. Mrs. Colosky did not mention what stimulus nerved her to the ordeal of getting up early enough to make the show, but it must have been a strong one." Questionnaires were distributed to the audience before the show, and Mrs. Colosky's mention of the Raspberry Capital of the World caught Mr. McNeil's attention. The lady reportedly had no mike fright, as she had previously been on the Darragh Aldrich show.

1947

The first FM stations appear: WTCN-FM in Minneapolis and KSTP-FM in St. Paul. WTCN-FM folded in 1954. KSTP-FM changed frequencies and resumed in 1967 after a hiatus.

In October 3M used WMIN's studios in the Ham Building as the site of tests on the practicality of recording radio broadcasts with magnetized tape. Lanny Ross's voice was transcribed via audio tape on ten recorders installed there.

The transistor debuted on December 27, 1947 at New Jersey's Bell Laboratories. The transistor replaced vacuum tubes, facilitating the miniturization of electronic devices. Transistor radios were first marketed in 1953. By 1965, 12 million transistor radios were being purchased each year.

1948

Station KQRS was established in May, with studios in St. Louis Park.

1949

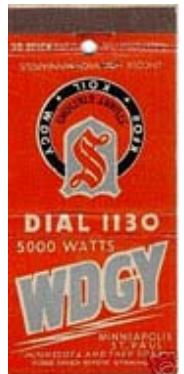
Skippy Peanut Butter, a new St. Louis Park manufacturing concern, sponsored the "Skippy Hollywood Theater" every Wednesday evening at 9:30 on WCCO radio.

In 1949, WDGY increased power to 50,000 watts by day, 25,000 by night.

The precursor to KDWB was founded in 1949 [the summer of 1951] by the three Tedesco brothers in South St. Paul. One brother wanted to call it WPIG, another protested the barnyard connotation, but the third prevailed with WCOW. This was appropriate, since they played hillbilly music.

1952

WTCN was sold and relocated to the Calhoun Beach Hotel, along with WTCN-TV. Both were sold again in 1955 and again, to Time, Inc. in 1957.



1956

Omaha businessman Todd Storz purchased WDGY on February 6, 1956 for \$35,000. It was at this point that the station adopted the "Top 40" format that characterized Storz stations. It was Minnesota's first rock'n'roll station.

WCCO experimented with subliminal messages but only managed to annoy people.

1957

The station that would become KDWB was renamed WISK, and in 1958 it was moved to 630 kc ("Channel 63"). But the station was not exactly viable, and was sold to Crowell-Collier, owner of the legendary KFNB in Los Angeles. Chuck Blore was Crowell-Collier's national program director, and ran a disc jockey school that the DJ's at KDWB attended.

Two 260-ft radio towers in Eden Prairie tumbled to the ground in early 1957. The towers, owned by Radio Suburbia, Inc., would, when reassembled, transmit KRSI radio.

1957

KRSI Radio ("Request Station Inc.") was located at 4500 Excelsior Blvd. in St. Louis Park from 1957 to October 1972. It was owned by Radio Suburbia. KRSI FM was started in 1967.

1959

KDWB (Channel 63) went on the air on October 1, 1959. John McCrae was the first General Manager, and original DJ Sam Sherwood held that position throughout the 60's. The FCC required that the station identify itself as "KDWB - Lake Elmo, also occasionally serving Minneapolis and St. Paul."

WPBD-FM was licensed in August 1959. It became WRAH, then WYOO, and then KDWB-FM on November 1, 1976.

WTCN asked the City Council if it could lease city property at 4240 Colorado for radio transmitting facilities but was denied. This is basically vacant swampland, owned by the City, abutting Meadowbrook Golf Course.

1960

Congress amended the FCC Act in September 1960 to provide penalties short of license revocation for violations of FCC rules. The first station in the country to receive disciplinary action was KDWB. The Twin Cities rock'n'roll station was fined in March 1961 for exceeding its authorized power in nighttime operations. Although authorized for only 500 watts from midnight to 4am, it had been broadcasting at full 5,000 watt strength since it went on the air in 1959.

WTCN (Twin States Broadcasting) requested permission to erect four 200 ft. high towers at the Lithium Plant: east of Edgewood, north of the Great Northern tracks. A Mr. Baldwin, representing Twin State Broadcasting, Inc. appeared before the City Council, and the name Art Weisberg was somehow attached. Elsewhere it says that WTCN received a construction permit on September 26, 1961 for a "new site."

1961

Golden Valley radio station KUXL went on the air on December 8, 1961, 13th in the market. Its frequency was 1570.

1962

WTCN dropped its ABC affiliation on December 31.



WMIN adopted an all news format in mid-July. In November, call letters were changed to KWTN. They were changed back the following August.

1964

WTCN was sold once again. On October 2, the station debuted with its new call letters, WWTC (Wonderful World of the Twin Cities or World Wide Twin Cities News, take your pick). Early in 1965 the station moved from the Calhoun Beach Hotel to 609 Second Ave. So. in Minneapolis. The station did not broadcast 24 hours a day until 1970.

Top 40 pioneer Todd Storz died in 1964 at age 39. The Storz Broadcasting Company owned WDGY.

KSTP began airing "Quality Music" – presumably as opposed to rotten music.

On December 16, 1964, KUXL, 1570 am, changed its religious format to Rhythm and Blues. The station sponsored dances at the Marigold Ballroom, and brought in the likes of Ike and Tina Turner, the Four Tops, BB King, Solomon Burke, Chuck Jackson, the Temptations, Jimmy Reed, Jr. Walker, the Impressions, and Fats Domino. In the mid-1960s, the station was operated by Marvin Kosofsky, who hired Bob Smith (a.k.a. Wolfman Jack), who relocated from Del Rio, Texas, to run the station. Also at KUXL at this time were Art Hoehn (a.k.a. Fat Daddy Washington) and former KDWB personality Ralph Hull (a.k.a. Preacher Paul Anthony and The Nazz). It was this trio of broadcasters who took control of "border blaster" station XERB 1090, in Baja California, in 1965. They operated the "Big X" from Minneapolis initially, then relocated to Southern California in 1966. KUXL went to all religious programming in the 1970s. The call letters of KUXL changed to KYCR in 1988. (From Wikipedia)

1967

KQRS-FM made its debut in 1967. In 1968, DJ Alan Stone would begin a nighttime program that would evolve into a "deep cuts" progressive rock, independent format.

WMIN took on the country music format it had dabbled with since 1964.

1969

On November 30, 1969, fire spread through the KDWB studio, shutting it down for two days. DJ Ron Block, the only one in the building at the time, announced "We're on fire! Somebody call the fire department!" before hurriedly signing off. Depending on the teller, the song "Na Na Hey Hey, Kiss Him Goodbye" (by Steam) had been playing, or the DJ put it on to commemorate the event. One story says that the next day the record was found melted to the turntable, but DJ Barry McKinna/Siewert says that the top was badly charred while the flip side was perfect - and that he has it on his wall. The fire damaged much of the station's record collection.

1972

WMIN changed its call letters to KEEY, discontinued its country format, and began playing "Beautiful Music. In 1982 the call letters were changed once again, to KLBB.

1973

KSTP began an adult contemporary format. In January 1974, it ended its 46-year association with NBC.

1979

WWTC began a golden oldies format that lasted until November 1984, when the station went into freefall. The nadir was in September 1985, when the station went to an ill-conceived all-weather format.

1985  
KQRS went to its Classic Rock format.

1991  
WWTC was sold to Christopher Dahl in 1990, and Radio AAHS, with programming for children ages 12 and under, went on the air in October 1991. The studio was established in the old First Federal Bank building at Highway 100 and Excelsior Blvd. in St. Louis Park. The station was so successful that Disney stole the format. The station went off the air in 1997.

1997  
Catholic Family Radio was the next disaster for WWTC-AM. *StarTribune* columnist Noel Holston described the station in a July 29, 2000 article:

It's unlikely that many Twin Cities listeners will miss Catholic Family Radio. It never generated enough measurable audience hereabouts to be listed on one of Arbitron's quarterly surveys of radio listening.

It is not difficult to grasp why so few listened, either. The "Family" thing was a misnomer. There was virtually no programming for youngsters - unless their parents already had made them paranoid about the evil workings of the Tri-Lateral Commission. With only a few exceptions - such as a call-in show that often sounded like George Carlin's "Stump the Priest" routine - the network broadcast talk shows with hosts farther to the right than Rush Limbaugh and no trace of his showmanship or humor.

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This information comes from a variety of sources: newspapers, books, yearbooks, phone directories, interviews, etc. Given the varied sources, we cannot guarantee that all of this information is correct, and welcome any additions and corrections. Please [contact us](#) with your contributions and comments.