

I noticed recently that Michigan State University has posted an online copy of "WWJ, 'The World's First Radio Station': A History", a 1963 Master's thesis by Robert Preston Rimes. (Rimes unfortunately died 2 1/2 years ago). His review is generally well researched, and provides some useful additional background information about the genesis of 8MK/WBL/WWJ as the "Detroit News Radiophone" service. (And, as is usual in these cases, some of this additional information raises additional questions.) The full Rimes thesis can be downloaded at:

<https://d.lib.msu.edu/etd/15131/datastream/OBJ/view>

Particularly interesting is information from a memo summarizing the original proposal that William J. Scripps and Thomas E. Clark made to the board of directors of Evening News Association (owners of the Detroit News) in 1919. (Rimes couldn't determine the exact date for this meeting, although I assume it was some time after the October 1, 1919 lifting of the wartime ban on civilian radio stations).

According to this memo, Scripps initially had much more ambitious plans than the 20-watt DeForest transmitter that 8MK/WBL would use for the first year-and-one-half of its existence. The memo proposes that Thomas E. Clark's firm, The Tecla Company (which still exists(!): <https://teclausa.com/>) would construct a 3,000 watt transmitter, that would be based on the design of General Electric's Type CG4000 transmitter. (Clark had worked for G.E. in the 1890s according to a biography at: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=miun.bad1127.0001.001;view=1up;seq=776>) A review of this transmitter, which was one of the most powerful vacuum-tube units of this era, appeared in the April 1920 issue of The Proceedings of the Institute of Radio Engineers: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=chi.101889327;view=1up;seq=134>

This review gives a specification for the unit of "3.5 kilowatt (input)" and "750 watts to the antenna", and if I understand the engineering involved, I believe the latter figure is what would be listed nowadays as its power output. The Scripps memo also proposed operation somewhere within the government longwave band of 600 to 1600 meters (500 to 187.5 kHz), which would have provided tremendous coverage on what was effectively a clear channel.

According to Cynthia Boyes Young, in "WWJ--Pioneer in Broadcasting", after gaining approval from the board, Scripps "proceeded to send Clark to New York to purchase a transmitter. However, he was unsuccessful in obtaining one..." This is one of the areas where the information is somewhat vague, but I suspect what happened is that Clark went to General Electric headquarters in Schenectady, and was told they were unwilling to give him the plans for building his own CG4000 transmitter. Or maybe they just couldn't agree on a price. In any event, this marked the end of "Plan A" and Clark's involvement with the project.

The (ultimately successful) "Plan B" was leasing a DeForest OT-10 transmitter through Radio News & Music of New York City. However, because 8MK was originally licensed under a standard amateur license, instead of a wide-open longwave wavelength, the station had to make do with broadcasting on the very congested amateur station assignment of 200 meters (1500 kHz).

The origins of Radio News & Music, and how exactly they met up with the Detroit News, is another area that is unfortunately vague. The company was founded around March 1920 by Clarence "C. S." Thompson and John F. Hubbard. One of the individuals listed for the 1902 founding of the Thomas E. Clark Wireless Telephone-Telegraph Company was "John Hubbard". Is there any chance that this John Hubbard was related to the John F. Hubbard of Radio News & Music?

In any event, according to Rimes, Radio News & Music made an initial transmitter shipment on May 28, 1920. Which was lost in the mail. So a replacement was sent from New York on July 15th. Rimes also notes that a second transmitter was obtained, for use at the family home by William E. Scripps son, William J. Scripps. The younger Scripps is listed in the 1921 annual list of amateur stations with the call sign of 8CS, and a power of 20 watts.

Moreover, Rimes mentions an additional, albeit obscure, potential source of information about Radio News & Music and its relation to the Detroit News. In late 1930, C. S. Thompson announced a limited edition run of 150 copies of his new book titled "The Life and Works of Dr. Lee De Forest". (Page 64 of the January, 1931 issue of "Radio Engineering" has an advertisement for the book, with the not-very-subtle-teaser: "This book should be suppressed!":

<https://www.americanradiohistory.com/Archive-Radio-Engineering/30s/1931/Radio-Engineering-1931-01.pdf#page=66>) The only review of the book I could find was "Life of DeForest Gives WWJ as First in Field" by L. L. Stevenson in the December 21, 1930 issue of the Detroit News. One interesting fact that this review mentions is that in addition to the Detroit News, the Kansas City Star, Pittsburgh Sun, Louisville Courier-Journal, and Baltimore Sun were also interested in working with Radio News & Music in setting up their own stations, but the company didn't have the needed financial backing needed to continue.

It would be nice to know if there is any additional background information about the company in this book. Hopefully a forgotten copy sits on a bookshelf somewhere.

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