



The DX'ers Notebook #7028

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We continue our summer vacation trip down Memory Lane.

Randy Stewart <jrs555t@smsu.edu>: As a sickly little kid in the early 1960s, I did a lot of listening to the only radio we had in the house at the time, a little ca.1950 Arvin tube rig with a foot-long hank of wire coming out the back for an antenna. My earliest memories of radio listening, ca.1962 or so, were of the network affiliates in town--KWTO-560 (ABC), KGBX-1260 (NBC) (now KSGF), and KTTS-1400 (CBS)(now KGMV). We also had a 24-hour top-40 station, KICK-1340 (now KIDS), but at age 5 or 6 I wasn't into that as much as my sister, who's 8 years older than me. I fondly remember all the daytime network programming at that time--Arthur Godfrey, Don McNeill's Breakfast Club, NBC's Monitor on weekends, the audio track of Art Linkletter's House Party. Also some of the local radio personalities, like the late Bill Ring (some of you with LONG memories who were country-music fans in the 1950s may remember Bill from the "Ozark Jubilee/Jubilee USA" ABC-TV show, which was telecast live from Springfield 1955-61)... some of them have become friends and colleagues of mine. DXing, at least in terms of nighttime skywave reception, didn't mean all that much to me as a small child--after all, I was put to bed at 7 or 7:30 every night (and the radio was usually in my sister's room)!

But I do remember hearing KAAY-1090 and their "Silver Dollar Survey," which confused me at the time--I thought I heard them say "Silver Dollar CITY", but my sister insisted it was just a theme park and not a *real* town, and didn't have its own station! And I can recall being intrigued by the Mexicans that were audible all over the dial on sunrise skip (some things never change!).

I didn't really discover DXing until about 1966-67, when I received a 6-band shortwave portable for my 10th birthday (I *really* wanted the big, shiny Zenith Transoceanic 3000 that was prominently displayed at the local K-Mart, but it was far too expensive!). A couple of years after that I began reading the DXing columns in "Popular Electronics" and "Electronics Illustrated," and learned more about long-distance AM-band DX, tried it, liked it, and the rest is history...

Up to that point I hadn't heard FM except at other peoples' houses, and I must admit I wasn't that impressed with it, at least on this cheap Japanese-made multiband set. The only local FMs at the time were KTTS-94.7--don't even remember what they played--and KTXR-101.5 (now 101.3), which was E-Z listening/"beautiful music" all the way. KWTO-FM 98.7 came on the air about 1968 and was all country at that time. In 1972 I acquired my first stereo (a little J.C. Penney compact unit with a built-in BSR minichanger and separate speakers), at the same time that KWTO-FM was changing to a Drake-Chenault automated Top 40 format. By this time Baptist Bible College had put their station on the air, KWFC-97.3 (now on 89.1; 97.3 is KXUS, classic-rock "U.S.97"), and on May 7, 1974, the station where I've worked for a quarter-century, KSMU-91.1, signed on at Southwest Missouri State

University. On the AM side, KBUG-1060 (now KTOZ) and KLFJ-1550 came on in the early '70s as well.

Rick Dau <rdau1965@yahoo.com>: The ones I grew up listening to as a kid were KMA-960 (especially on snowy winter mornings to find out if school had been canceled for the day), KFAB-1110 (most notably on 5/6/1975, when it provided extensive news coverage of an F-3 tornado that had hit Omaha and killed 3 people that afternoon), and WOW-590. The last of those, in the mid-1970s, was a terrific Top 40 station whose jock lineup included, among others, Jimmy O'Neill (yes, THAT Jimmy O'Neill) as midday personality. Later in the 1970s, Jimmy and a couple of others moved over to KOIL-1290, which was WOW's main competitor back then.

Doug Smith <w9wi@earthlink.net>: (hopefully not too much FM in here!) In our home in suburban Milwaukee, there were only two radio stations: WTMJ-620 and WFMR-96.5. The former was a NBC-affiliated general service station; information, sports, light music. Sunday mornings Dad always listened to "Invitation to Beauty", their light classical program. Yes, on AM.

WFMR was all classical, all the time.

In school, teachers would occasionally bring in a FM radio to listen to educational programs on WHAD-90.7.

WTMJ seemed to have all the sports contracts, but (especially after the Seattle Pilots moved to Milwaukee) conflicts were common. Some were solved by moving to the other general service station, WISN. Others would occasionally end up on WTMJ-FM 94.5. (now WKTI)

I remember Dad being VERY concerned one afternoon when he got home from work and found me listening to WAWA-102.1. (parallel to now-defunct 1590AM) WAWA was the "Negro" station. (I seem to recall an excellent blues program)

In 1966, when I was seven, our suburb got its own radio station: WZMF-98.3. Studio and transmitter in a regular ranch house about a mile from our house. (but on the other side of a large swamp, so it took a four-mile trip to get there.) Sometime in their first two years on the air as a general-service station, I got a tour. I remember thinking "they get 3,000 watts out of *THIS*?" - the transmitter was about the same height I was, not the rows of 10-foot racks I expected. An exclamation I'd repeat when WNPL-106.7 installed a 1kw transmitter in about 2 feet of 19" rack space a few years back...

WZMF switched to progressive rock in 1968. In 1980 they went off the air for a few weeks (a wake spontaneously developed in the parking lot during their special signoff show) before returning as easy-listening WXJY.

I had a standing offer from Dad: earn your ham radio license and I'll buy you a rig. First step in learning Morse Code was a shortwave receiver - Knight Star Roamer. Didn't really listen to much shortwave on it. (and no Morse at all because the oscillating-IF-amp BFO didn't work) I would tune in WTMJ before going to bed, listening to a Brewers night game. Mom would come in and turn it off before she went to sleep.

One night, after about 4 innings, it started raining and the game was postponed. The substitute program was boring, so I decided to get out of bed and switch to WISN. Never got that far. Tuning past 920, I heard what sounded like someone singing from the bottom of a well. Weirdest thing I'd ever heard on the radio.

It was WOKY-920 playing Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love".

I was hooked. First WOKY. Then WLS, and KAAY. CKLW when you could get it. WRIT. WZUU. Not as a DXer, just tuning around looking for something interesting.

That lasted a few years, before I discovered FM and rode the "progressive rock" wave into oblivion. Kinda got into DXing through the back door - looking for distant underground FM stations.

John Sampson <jnsampson@earthlink.net>: I first started to enjoy "distant stations" when I was 6 or 7 and we lived in Des Moines. I listened to KMA and KFNF, both of which were in Shenandoah (SW Iowa) and were like daytime locals, since KIOA wasn't on the air yet). The DX bug started several years later when I went to summer camp in northern Wisconsin; I could hear stations like WLIN, Merrill, on 550, WOBT, Rhinelander, on 1240 and WIND, Chicago (at night). When I returned to DM, I tried (needless to say, unsuccessfully for several years) to hear these stations but I was able to hear lots of others and away we went!

Doug Smith: (WILN's) another one I never knew about until well after the fact. My mother grew up about 5 miles east of Merrill (and her sister still lives there) so I know the area well. I had no idea the station now known as WJMT-730 once resided on 550 until I got my hands on a 1947 station list. I have a vague recollection of it being W*X*MT for awhile - calls that later ended up on the UPN TV station here in Nashville.

I also recall my cousins being excited that there was finally going to be a rock station in Wausau... (WRIG-1400)

Charles Hutton <charlesh3@msn.com>: A lot of the people on this list seem to have gotten interested in radio to listen to music or sports. Me, I was always only interested in the faraway-ness of the stations. It was endlessly fascinating to me that you could eavesdrop on Boston or Los Angeles. The music was never much of a factor for me as I never was interested in DJ's and Top 40 music of the period when I was growing up (the 60's). That's not to say I was not a music lover - I've been interested in almost everything you can imagine musically - but AM T40 was never on the list.

As for sports, I was never that crazy about listening to sports as a kid, except for occasional bits of the Pirates on KDKA - my family was raised and lived in Pittsburgh and that period was really something for the Pirates with the likes of the '60 World Series championship, Roberto Clemente and my favorite the slow unknown catcher Smoky Burgess. Go figure.

Anyhow, my interest was always just to tune around and hear what there was to hear. My interest in radios eventually lead me to electrical engineering and latin music and engineering has shaped my life to a large degree and also latin music; a chance conversation with a Cuban fellow where I worked at

the time (Scientific Atlanta) about latin music led to a bonding that eventually found me in Spain working for him. One of my best friends for a long time gave me a tape of Colombian music (Los Carrangueros de Raquira) that led me to another of my best friends (a Colombian) and gave me an interest in travelling through Latin America although never to Raquira. Some day, maybe, if the kidnapping probability falls below 50%....

My Dad had some electronics blood in him (never a ham), but had built an audio amplifier, designed some speakers, and thought it would be interesting to build a kit. That led us to buying a Knight StarRoamer and also a CB kit back when no one knew what that was. Back then, the CB band was so empty you sometimes doubted if your radio was working. The CB wasn't used much but the StarRomaer was my teenage DX receiver and got me started in the hobby with a lot of the clears and the mysterious Spanish stuff from the Caribbean. Too bad you couldn't tell where you were at the top end of the band and had to always count up or down from a known station. And there was the problem of being two streets away from the towers of a 5 kW local.

Nonetheless, I heard hundreds of stations and became aware of White's Radio Log that appeared quarterly (?) in Popular Electronics. That was a prized possession until I somehow found a Vane Jones log which was the best thing going at the time. It was a small softcover book that listed AM, FM and TV by frequency and location and was quite good until the NRC blew it away with their first log. More on that later.

So hearing all those stations with a longwire and a Star Roamer and a Vane Jones log, I started writing letters to stations. I don't think I knew what a QSL was and just thought it would be interesting to write to the stations. I did this sporadically for a few years until some time around '66 or '67 this fat envelope arrived from a place called the National Radio Club at PO Box 99, Cambridge MA 02138 if my memory serves me well. It turned out that one of my letters to an unknown AM station had resulted in my name being passed along to the NRC. Later I learned that there was a relationship in place between a few stations (clear channels no doubt) and the NRC and that the names of all reception reporters were passed along. Whoever it was, thanks if you are still around and still reading...

I signed up and began receiving the weekly envelope of mimeographed sheets from the NRC. All I can remember were that often the sheets were of different colors, the international stuff seemed exotic and impossible and I didn't understand half of what was being said by the likes of Gordon Nelson. As a teenager, Musings and domestic logs were more digestible so I read them from beginning to end, usually by sliding them under my spiral notebook and sneaking them out during boring classes. I refined that to an art several years later when I decided I needed to have a copy of portions of the amazing NRC Log, and hand copied huge chunks of it during a particularly boring 3rd period class. My other entertainment during that class consisted of repetitive calculations (by hand) to find the square root of 10. I don't understand why I was doing either of them...

Ronald C. Gitschier <wgsr1570@nrcdxas.org>: The first DX stations I've recognized are either 1540 WPTR Albany, NY or 1520 WKBW Buffalo, NY both in the 70s. Top 40 - my format of choice (I was 13 or 14 years old) over a couple of 50kw powerhouses that seared a signal beamed in my direction at Lowell, Mass.

I thought it was pretty fascinating these signals came from such a distance. I thought WPTR was "WBGR" through my pocket radios... and happened across White's Radio Log in Communications World Magazine. Sure enough there was a WBGR in Kentucky somewhere... it took a little while before I figured out as the frequency wasn't even close. A Grand-Uncle turned me on to White's Radio Log. He was a casual DXer with some antique looking radio by his bedside, with a cardboard-sort of collar attached around the rotary tuning dial. He made reference marks for different stations he's DX'ed. Some stations were from Europe and Africa on this AM only radio...

When I saw the Communications World magazine with "White's Radio Log" I went right for it. I still have it today. It was a nice reference. The first Vane Jones Log I came across was in 1985 when I lived in Hawaii. It was in a used book store. I got a new one from a regular book store shortly after... now that was the cat's meow... for referencing stations. Around 1989 Popular Communications Magazine turned me onto Bruce Elving's FM Atlas, another great pub (Mark Mauncy of MD was the editor of the broadcast radio column. I had NO idea of the NRC until I did a search on the internet keyword "aircheck" and I came across Fred Vobbe's write-up of his airchecking experiences/philosophy. After some clicking around I found my way to this list and then after a year or so I joined the NRC, enjoying the DX Audio Service.

Kevin Redding <amfmdx@fastq.com>: The first station I can remember was as a little boy. I was in Monroe, LA at my grandmothers house. I must have been 3 or 4. I remember a snowstorm and the clock radio woke us with KNOE 540 every morning at 6 playing DIXIE first and then the SSB. I remember hearing the announcer talking about snow and had no idea what snow was. My mom told me that it was ice and to go look out the window.

It sure was a strange thing for a southern boy to see for the first time. I went out and the stuff was cold. Soon we moved to Reno with lots of snow and the radio welded to KOH. But KNOE was the first station I can remember.

Mark Connelly <MarkWALION@aol.com>: Mark Connelly's early radio memories (excerpted from a much longer article at "http://www.qsl.net/wal1ion/wal1ion_history.htm").

Originally I lived in the Allston section of Boston. An early radio memory was listening to WBZ-1030 during the big hurricanes (Carol and Edna) and hearing of how the WBZ-TV mast had toppled. This tower was about a mile from where I was living. The first time my family took a trip to Cape Cod was in 1957. The only radio-related memory from that initial trip was some of the music ("Whispering Bells" by the Dell-Vikings, etc.) that I heard in stores, at the beach, and blasting out of convertibles. In 1958, my family moved from the urban Allston location to single-family-house "suburbia" in Arlington, MA. Numerous interests could flourish in this new setting. The back of the property abutted Menotomy Rocks Park, a 35-acre partially-wooded town-owned recreational area. Aside from being a great play area, it would prove beneficial later when antennas became an interest.

In 1959, I received a tenth birthday gift of a 5-tube AM table radio. Initially I just used it listen to the Red Sox games (with Curt Gowdy announcing) on WHDH-850 and to the classical music my parents liked on WCRB-1330. It didn't take too long to discover rock 'n' roll on WCOP-1150, WHIL-1430, and WMEX-1510. There were also "middle of the road" pop stations WBZ and WHDH. Soon I became

familiar with the local Boston on-air personalities such as Carl DeSuze, Dave Maynard, Bruce Bradley, Dick Summer, Jay Dunn, Jefferson Kaye, Arnie Ginsberg, Dan Donovan, Don Parker, Melvin X, Ed Mitchell, Dex Card, Bob Clayton, Fred B. Cole, Jess Cain, Bill Marlowe, and others. Beside Top 40 rock there were talk shows (Jerry Williams was the best known; Larry Glick came along a little later) and a few of the left-over old network radio dramas such as "Johnny Dollar": relics of an earlier era.

Kenny Mayer had a great comedy show on old WBOS-1600 (I think on Sunday night) with recordings of famous Las Vegas and Hollywood nightclub performers. Though I watched a fair amount of TV (sci-fi, spy, and detective shows/ movies mostly), radio became my main entertainment medium. By early 1960, I was noting other sources of rock 'n' roll: the "stations between the stations", the nighttime skip signals. Many were from New York City (WMCA, WABC, WINS, and WMGM come to mind); others included WPTR-1540 Albany, WKBW-1520 Buffalo, and WLS-890 Chicago. I was intrigued not only by the distances involved (and the "weird" fading) but also by mixes of music that sometimes differed considerably from what the Boston locals were playing. NYC stations, in particular, played a lot more black R&B. These tunes were only available here a few hours a day between assorted foreign-language and religious shows on WILD-1090, a 1 kW daytimer.

By summer 1960, I set up a workshop in the basement in a room directly below my bedroom at the back of the house facing the woods. This was my first "DX Lab" where I tried various tricks to increase the sensitivity of the 5-tube radio. Moving the radio's rear-mounted oval loop a certain distance (frequency dependent I guess) from a metal window screen jacked up the levels of marginal daytime signals from Providence, Worcester, et al. I could now comfortably enjoy the zany Chuck Stevens show on WPAW-550, Salty Brine on WPRO-630, and Bob Garcia on WORC-1310. I got a kit consisting of a pegboard and components you could clip together to make a 1-tube radio, among other things. This was my first introduction to shortwave since, besides the AM coil, there was one that allowed tuning of about 6-12 MHz.

Getting BBC, Radio Moscow, etc. (with a short wire running from the "Lab" window to a tree) seemed like true magic. It was music listening coupled with a general scientific inclination that got me started in DXing, unlike sports that hooked some others. Still I enjoyed the Red Sox games and the Celtics basketball announced by "crazy man" Johnny Most.

In 1960, I took the 5-tube radio to Dennisport, Cape Cod on our annual 2-week family summer vacation. I was "blown away" by the stuff I was hearing! There were booming daytime signals from Maine, NYC, Long Island, and the NJ coast. These stations could only be heard in Arlington at night if at all. Night receptions on the Cape were even wilder: foreign languages and heterodynes from "splits" were very apparent. Initially I had no clue as to what most of it was. Some time later, I figured that 908 was BBC, UK. Within 6 years I'd be sending reception reports to the Transatlantic DX stations and papering the bedroom wall with QSL cards. (By 1972 or 1973, I'd joined NRC after hearing about it from local DX honcho Gordon Nelson.)

Russ Johnson <k3pi@radiointel.com>: How about the WBZ news with Streeter Stewart (not sure of spelling). I was a big BZ listener down in Maryland. They were "The Spirit of New England..."