

# RADIO BROADCASTING:

## A DYING ART?

BY NICOLE KUIKEN



<http://www.prins.net/radios/index.html>

“Without ratings, the radio station can’t afford to stay running and often shut down or is taken over by another radio station. Are these signs that radio broadcasting is going to disappear?”

A family is surrounding an antique wooden radio as the mystery play continues on in the night.

*Clip, clip, clip, clip.* (The noise stops, a gunshot goes off,) *BANG!*

Woman: (Screams) “Eeeek!” (With an urgent, desperate tone) “Larry, Larry what are you doing?” (Running of heels and another gunshot is heard and something heavy falls. Shuffling of a heavy object in the background, a grunt is heard.)

Man: “*Ergh,*” (With an unfeeling tone) “It was too much to handle Cecilia, you just wouldn’t understand.” *Clip, clip..., clip..., clip....* (Steady footsteps fade into the distance.)

The play is on every Saturday evening from eight to nine pm and it is the last act for the night. The family wonders if Detective Roberts will be able to discover who the culprit of the St. Louis Murder is as nine o’clock nears.

Radio plays and dramas were entertaining family activities in the evenings during the 40’s and 50’s. The news, fireside chats, sports games and music were also popular for family evenings together. Radio was one of the biggest entertainments that came about after the World Wars. It became a public entertainment instead of just governmental purposes during the time of war. Since then radio has become a more personal level of tuning in while driving in the car to listen to a favorite beat or a place of relaxation. Where have the suspenseful evenings, or the advice of our President gone? Is radio broadcasting a dying art or has it taken a different path and staying strong? It all starts with the beginning of radio waves.

Radio waves were first discovered in 1886 by a German physicist, Heinrich Hertz (Thomas White). The popularity of radios began to rise until the First World War, when the government shut all radio lines down so as to not have interference from “amateurs.” It went back and forth till the end of the WWII, with fireside chats becoming a regularity in the household

as President Franklin D. Roosevelt would advise and give comfort to his listeners. Soon the development of music broadcasts, sport games, radio dramas and news on weather and daily living became added bonuses to the listening audience.

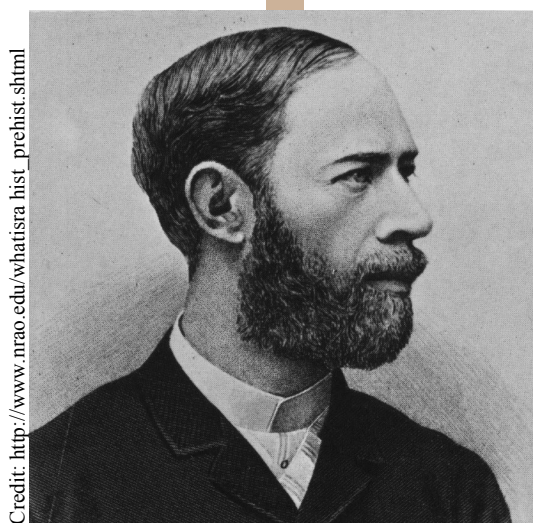
Since then, dramas especially have disappeared into the background, and music stations have boomed. In an interview with BYU-Idaho's radio news broadcaster, Mark Bailey stated, "There used to be half an hour radio dramas that I would listen to like *The Lone Ranger* or *Gun Smoke*." He further discussed how the drama has gone and now is taken up with a variety of "specialty stations" for music such as country, modern, classical, and so on. The phrase "out with the old and in with the new" demonstrates perfectly the adapting art of radio.

Many radio stations in the past five years have also been disappearing. So advertisement and public ratings play a big part in keeping the radio stations alive. The art of broadcasting plays a role in this area. "Everyone can hear you, and your mistakes, so there is a high level of concentration needed..." said Bailey when asked how difficult broadcasting was. He continued on, "...you are always watching the clock, making sure to end at the right time so the next show can start on time and not be cut off. Sounding professional and not making mistakes help keep good credibility with the listeners..." which in turn keep the ratings up. Without ratings, the radio station can't afford to stay running and often shut down or is

taken over by another radio station. Are these signs that radio broadcasting is going to disappear? Mark Bailey would have to disagree. "No," he stated straight away, "...because people still want something to listen to..." Many listeners enjoy their home stations because they are familiar with them and know which ones to turn to if they want a different selection of music or news to hear. Yet most stations don't always play exactly what the listener wants to hear or there are too many commercial interruptions.

So they turn to the satellite or online stations.

One way to keep a radio station going is through its commercials. But those who tune in to a music station don't want to hear the advertisements and be interrupted. Satellite stations such as *Sirius*© is one way to get a commercial free station, that plays what the listener wants; giving the opportunity of listening in the car, online, or even the I-phone. A popular online radio is *Pandora*©. This station has similarities to *Sirius* but is free. A user can create multiple stations based around music they enjoy, then it plays other music that is similar to the category that was chosen. *Pandora* is a popular online music player that most teenagers and college students have an account with. "I think it's a great advantage. If they like a specific format [or station from your hometown], now you can keep it on the same line instead of having to try and turn to another station that might be similar to the other, or not find another station [at all]," Bailey replied. Then he remarked that even though many might switch over to



Picture Credit: [http://www.nrao.edu/whatisra/hist\\_prehist.shtml](http://www.nrao.edu/whatisra/hist_prehist.shtml)

*Heinrich Hertz demonstrated the existence of electromagnetic radiation.*

*(Compiled by F. Ghigo, National Radio Astronomy Observatory, Green Bank, West Virginia.)*

## Interesting Facts:

Q: What type of radiation are radio waves considered to be?

A: Electromagnetic radiation

Q: How long is an AM wave?

A: As long as a football field.

Q: The term "broadcasting" comes from which industry?

A: Agriculture, as in 'broadcasting' seeds on a plowed ground.

Q: Who invented the FM band?

A: Edward Howard Armstrong

## “Many will conform to the new style of radio, giving radio broadcasting in that area a lift.”

the online or satellite while they are away, they will come back to the radio from their town because it has a “local flavor.” Many will conform to the new style of radio, giving radio broadcasting in that area a lift. Despite the popularity of online and satellite, local broadcasting will still have high ratings. As the varieties of radio style changes, so do the technologies.

The turn tables sit there as a collection of records, spilling out of their casings, as they cover the shelves of the local radio station. The broadcaster quickly sets the tuner on the record so he can start the next song before the hour is past, and the six o’clock news report begins.

Records are now a collector’s item; the technology now used for the radio is a computer system holding all of the records, advertisements, interview clips and other media that is used within a station. The process of setting up a record and getting it to the correct spot by back tracking, took time and concentration for each song or recording that was played on the radio in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Now with a few clicks of the mouse, the next five or more songs will play and the broadcaster could get a cup of coffee before the set is done. A concern of Bailey’s with the new equipment is the ever-changing technology and not knowing where it’s going to take them.

So, is the radio becoming obsolete or is it still strong? “Yes, it is still strong.” Bailey said confidently. “I would say that it’s even stronger now, especially after the attack of 9/11. It kept people informed and even made listening to news broadcasts come back,” since they were better detailed than the snippets that were viewed on the television. Radio is changing and the old dramas may disappear, but the radio still plays it’s selections of songs, news and sports reports, with the occasional talk shows. It is an ever growing media that will continue on.

The family grows impatient as the trial for the murder takes place and the end of the hour is close at hand. The listeners wait as the judge determines if he is guilty or not guilty.

(Shuffling of paper stops)  
Judge: “I have looked through the jury’s decision, and have come to a conclusion...” (A pause) “Larry Phillips is hereby committed to a life-time of prison for the murders of Jack Levitt and his wife Celcilia Levitt.” (The gavel is stuck) *Whack*. “Court adjourned.” *Do-da, do doo...* (The closing music slowly fades in as the narrator concludes the story.)

Narrator: “Detective Roberts once again

“...it’s very rare to see a turntable or even a tape machine in a radio station.”

- Gary Avey



tech-notes.tv





Left to right-Three young boys with their radio system; A modern turn table; A senator and family waiting to hear the election results.

cracked the case of the murder in St. Louis.” (With a more serious tone) “Yet, what happened to the missing heirloom that was never found in Mrs. Levitt’s room? We may never find out.” (The music starts to fade out) *Dee dee, do-da, doo...*

The children head off to bed as the station is switched, and the parents stay behind to hear the news report hoping that the little ones will be able to stay in their beds and not be wakened if they have nightmares from the evenings show.

*Written and Designed by: Laine Rian*

*(Laine Rian is an aspiring writer, with a MA in English from Stanford University. And hopes to continue and receive her doctorate in Linguistics, fall 2011).*

“...they will come back to the radio... because it has a ‘local flavor’.”  
-Mark Bailey

#### Sources:

Avey, Gary. “The Microphone Man.” Modesto Radio Museum. 2004. Web. 18 March 2011.

Bailey, Mark. Personal interview. 2 March 2011.

Fun Trivia: Radio History. “Interesting Questions, Facts, and Information.” 2010. Web. 14 March 2011. <<http://www.funtrivia.com/en/Entertainment/Radio-History-14818.html>>.

Ghigo, F. “Pre-History of Radio Astronomy.” National Radio Astronomy Observatory. 27 March 2003. Web. 18 March 2011.

White, Thomas H. United States Early Radio History. *Early Radio History*, 30 Sept. 1996. Web. 10 Feb. 2011. <<http://earlyradiohistory.us/index.html>>.