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Radio and Television in the Life of Rochester

By **BLAKE MCKELVEY**

As a center of specialized industries Rochester played an important role in the early years of the telegraph and the automobile and an even more crucial role in the development of photography and xerography. These and other inventions have exerted a considerable influence on the city's history, but few technological advances have had a more sudden or far reaching effect than the development of radio and television. In less than a half century these new instruments of communication have brought a succession of new personalities to the fore, opened new opportunities for self expression and advancement, created new fortunes, posed new dilemmas between public and private interests, and transformed the life styles of the great majority of the city's residents. Yet these marvelous technological improvements, by increasing man's self-awareness, have raised serious questions concerning his proper objectives and the community's well being. And whether for better or for worse, they have become a part of the city's history.

The Beginnings of Radio

Although Rochester, despite its industrial proficiency, was not a leader in the development of either radio or television, its

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innovations in the latter field were considerable and its interests, both technological and cultural, made it an eager market for both services. One local firm, Stromberg-Carlson, early won a share of the production of these instruments, but for the most part Rochester's role was that of a consumer and its experiences resembled those of many other cities.

Rochester's pioneer in the radio field was Lawrence J. Hickson, an ingenious electrician who built the first receiving and sending apparatus in this area. He had begun his experiments as a lad and to pursue them had enrolled in successive evening courses at Mechanics Institute. After completing Electrics I and II there in 1911 and 1912, he secured a job at the Wheeler-Green Electric Co. on St. Paul Street, the local distributor for the General Electric Co. Starting a decade after Marconi had successfully spanned the Atlantic with a wireless signal in 1901 and five years after Professor Fessenden had made his first spectacular radio broadcast on Christmas Eve in 1906, young Hickson soon became the most active local representative of the increasing host of amateurs who were sending and receiving signals across the land. All such activity was brought to a halt during the war, but Hickson eagerly resumed his experiments after its close. He was no genius, such as Edwin H. Armstrong another youthful experimenter whose invention of the regenerative system made radio commercially practicable, but by December 1920 Hickson had assembled sufficient apparatus at his home on Ridge Road in Irondequoit to enable him to commence broadcasting a phonograph record once a week, thus following the example of Dr. Frank Conrad who had started the pioneer record broadcasts from his home in Pittsburgh only six months before.

Among those who drove out to see his equipment the next spring was Frank E. Gannett. The dynamic publisher, who had come to Rochester two years before to merge the old *Evening Times* with the still older *Union & Advertiser*, was

intrigued by the possibility of developing a broadcasting station downtown, as Westinghouse had done the previous fall in Pittsburgh, where it was successfully broadcasting nightly programs under the country's first commercial license as KDKA. With Gannett's backing, Hickson installed his apparatus the next winter in the Times-Union building at 22 Exchange Street and erected an antenna on its roof. Together they secured a license from the Secretary of Commerce to operate as WHQ, which however was already the 26th commercial license granted, for radio was sweeping the country that year.

The potentialities of the new medium, which thus made its official bow in Rochester on March 1, 1922, quickly attracted the interest of George Eastman. Rochester's leading industrialist was in 1922 rushing preparations for the formal opening in September of his new Eastman Theater. Reports of the broadcast by WJZ in New York of a performance of Mozart's comic opera, "The Impresario," revealed possibilities that prompted Eastman to invite Gannett to move his station into the new theater in order to take advantage of its unique facilities for the broadcast of live programs. William F. Butler, city editor of the *Times-Union*, doubling as program director for WHQ, had scheduled daily weather reports and news summaries and had alternated occasional talks on health by Dr. George Goler, and on world affairs by Professor Dexter Perkins, with a selection of musical records. When the *Democrat & Chronicle*, impressed by the news potentialities of radio, announced plans to erect a rival station on its roof, Gannett persuaded his competitor to join in establishing a stronger station in the Eastman Theater where the programs could be more adequately presented under the supervision of the University of Rochester. New instruments ordered from the Western Electric Company were installed in June and the new station, backed jointly by the *Times-Union*, the *Democrat & Chronicle*, and the University of Rochester, was ready for its first broadcast on July 11, 1922. The chance visit

of Vice President Coolidge to Rochester, for a speech at the Chamber of Commerce, prompted a last minute effort to include his address in the inaugural program. An unfortunate failure in the connections defeated that plan, and the radio program opened with the broadcast of a piano concert by Raymond Wilson at 8:30 that evening from the newly completed but as yet undedicated Kilbourn Hall.

Lawrence Hickson, Gannett's former partner, who had become restless and sold his interest in WHQ to the *Democrat & Chronicle* a month before, now watched with interest as the two papers collaborated with Eastman in opening at the new location, where regular programs commenced under the new call letters WHAM on July 31. Hickson was soon involved, however, in new ventures. First he assisted the Lake Avenue Baptist Church in installing equipment in 1923 that enabled it to broadcast a service every Sunday under the letters WABO. Having helped to launch that first local series of religious broadcasts, Hickson proceeded in 1925 to develop another station at his shop on South Avenue and secured permission from the Seneca Hotel to locate his broadcasting studio on its mezzanine floor. Taking its name from his company, WHEC broadcast for its first program on March 26, 1925, a recorded performance by the United State Band. Gunnar Wiig, who became program director, sharing the duties of announcer with Joseph Hitchcock, scheduled programs three hours each evening during the first two years. When Hickson secured permission in 1927 to increase the power of his station from 100 to 500 watts, WHEC announced plans to join the projected Columbia Broadcasting System and to undertake a full schedule of programs. The link with CBS was not finally secured for another two years because of a delay in the establishment of that chain, but WHEC nevertheless expanded its schedule.

With two local stations broadcasting programs daily, an increasing number of residents were acquiring radios. The Hick-

son Electric Co., which was the only shop listed in the directory of 1921 as a radio supply firm, had fifteen competitors in the 1925 directory. A newly formed Rochester Radio Trade Association held a modest show at Convention Hall that year and promptly booked the hall for a second annual show in October 1926 at which radios valued at \$150,000 were displayed, attracting 8000 visitors on the first night. One of the chief exhibitors on this occasion was Stromberg-Carlson, a local firm which had previously specialized in the manufacture of telephones but was now shifting to radios. As further evidence of the importance of radio, the Chamber of Commerce decided that winter to subsidize a series of concerts by the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra over WHAM and arranged for a hookup with the WGY chain to carry the program to Buffalo, Syracuse, and Schenectady as well.

WHAM had a few months before carried a Rochester Philharmonic program from the Eastman Theater over a nationwide hook-up with WJZ in an experimental test in January 1926 that also brought a London orchestra to Rochester listeners. But the day-to-day activities connected with a broadcasting studio were taxing the facilities of the Eastman Theater, and its management welcomed an offer the next year from W. Roy McCanne, president of Stromberg-Carlson, which soon bought the interests of Eastman and the two publishers and in August 1927 moved the offices and principal studios of WHAM into the Sagamore Hotel. McCanne and Ernest E. Chappell, who became manager of the station at this point, announced an affiliation with the National Broadcasting Co., which would supply 20 per cent of the programs from its Blue Network; another 20 per cent would be drawn from the Eastman Theater where the equipment would be maintained, but most of the programs would now originate, he declared, at the station's main studios on East Avenue. WHAM had secured permission to increase its voltage to 5000 watts at this time, and when the FCC

endeavored a year later to reduce that power, an appeal by the station brought a flood of 30,000 petitions in support of its wider coverage, a response that forestalled any curtailment.

The onset of the depression checked the expansion of the radio market and late in 1932 prompted the restless Hickson to sell his interests in WHEC to Frank Gannett, and, in a fit of despondency, to shoot himself the next March. Gannett proceeded to expand his radio holdings to include WORK in Albany and WESG in Elmira, an extension that followed the growth of his newspaper chain to include 16 links. Leroy E. Snyder, his chief advisor on social and cultural matters, prompted Gannett to undertake an elaborate canvass of public preferences in radio programs. Under Snyder's direction, WHEC broadcast a series of 21 different types of programs in December 1932 and invited listeners to express their preferences. Dr. Howard Hanson and the Eastman School cooperated in presenting varied musical programs ranging from classical numbers to jazz offerings; professors from the university and city school administrators participated in educational programs; civic leaders appeared in various public affairs programs. The experiment continued for ten days, but the response must have been too little or too disappointing, for no conclusions appeared in the local press

Although radio faced, in addition to the depression, the uncertain threat of television in the early thirties, the promoters of WHAM pressed ahead courageously. Its principal owner, the Stromberg-Carlson Company, was in fact endeavoring to perfect a joint radio and television receiver of its own, and in November 1931 the company helped to welcome the first convention of television experts who met at the Sagamore Hotel and contributed to a program in its studios. The prospects for successful developments in the television field were far distant, however, and WHAM proceeded to expand its radio facilities by building twin antenna towers, each 225 feet high, in Victor.

When at its request the FCC granted permission to increase the power of its broadcasts to 25,000 watts, William Fay, the station manager, announced the addition of several new programs.

The capacity of the new towers proved greater than expected, and WHAM requested and received permission to increase its voltage to 50,000 watts, which gave it clear channel status and placed it in the class of the nation's leading stations. In addition to Al Sigl, its pioneer newscaster, and Charles Siverson, its program director, both of whom had joined the station in 1930, the staff now included Al Sisson and Homer Bliss as full time announcers plus several who had charge of special programs. The cooperation with the Eastman School remained close, and when WHAM replaced one of its twin towers with a more substantial tower 450 feet high in 1938, the Eastman Theater provided the setting for a gala party on January 25 at which representatives from other stations affiliated with NBC joined leading Rochesterians in celebrating the tenth birthday of Stromberg-Carlson's management of WHAM. Four months later William Fay announced that WHAM was ready to offer programs from NBC's Red network as well as from its Blue network.

The increased offerings were prompted in part by the appearance of several potential new competitors. A committee appointed by Paul Reed of the city schools was investigating the possibility of establishing a public station to supply the city's educational needs. The managers of WHAM and WHEC, who had cooperated with Reed and Superintendent Spinning in establishing the Rochester School of the Air, responded by increasing the facilities for broadcasting from school auditoriums and studios. On the licensing a year later of WSAY, a third commercial station, Mort Nusbaum, its manager, welcomed local and out-of-town dignitaries who responded to the invitation of Gordon P. Brown, the station's owner, to attend festivities on February 1, 1940, at the Hotel Rochester. Located

in the Taylor building on East Avenue, the new station commenced evening broadcasts that month. WHEC, the Gannett station, erected a new and more powerful transmitting tower on Mount Read Blvd. in 1938, and rumors of the establishment of still a fourth station began to circulate that year. The outbreak of World War II again put a check on the expansion of domestic radio facilities, however, and prompted WHAM to install an iron gate at the entrance to its studio in the Sagamore in order to guard against any sabotage. New developments in radio as well as television awaited the return of peace.

FM and TV

If the war checked the expansion of commercial broadcasting, it speeded the progress of technological research and created a great demand for new facilities. The first local hint of new developments came in February 1945 when Stromberg-Carlson unveiled plans for its new Radio City headquarters to be erected on Humboldt Street after the return of peace. Some five years before it had backed the establishment in 1939 of WHFM, Rochester's first FM (frequency modulation) station, in a separate studio on East Avenue. Now with the collaboration of the University, WHAM offered a course in radio broadcasting in the fall of 1945, and Dr. Hanson won the Peabody Radio Award the next spring for outstanding broadcasts in music. The growing popularity of FM prompted the organization of the Rochester Broadcasting Company with George P. Kelly as president and Robert G. Whele as treasurer, who sought and secured a license in 1948 to establish a fourth AM station, WRNY, and a second FM station, WRNY-FM. A group of returning servicemen, headed by Ervin F. Lyke as president, organized still another radio station that September to be staffed entirely by war veterans. WVET, with its headquarters on Clinton Avenue, took its bow in November, and a sixth station WARC, with S. W. Townsend as president and Stewart M.

Frame as treasurer, made its appearance the next February when it took over the abandoned studio and equipment of WHAM in the Sagamore Hotel as that pioneer station moved at last into its new "million dollar" Radio City headquarters.

The ceremonies marking the opening of Rochester Radio City surpassed any the city had witnessed for many years. Free tickets for public tours were issued, several hundred a day for over two weeks, as thousands of visitors crowded in to see the six studios, one with seats for 400 viewers, where live and recorded programs were frequently in progress. Dr. Hanson, in an address at the dedicatory dinner, called William Fay the "inspiration and guiding genius" of WHAM, but the former director, now vice-president of Stromberg-Carlson, shared the credit for the company's achievements with several of his associates. Among these were Jack Kennedy, the business manager, David E. Kessler, the news director, Jack Ross, the news editor, as well as Al Sigl, the veteran newscaster, George Driscoll, engineer in charge, and Charles Siverson who had been made program director of WHFM the year before. Among the newcomers at WHAM was Jack Hooley, a radio pioneer from New York, who had "set his feet and his mike on every shore where war and post-war history was being made" from Pearl Harbor on.

Despite its rich and powerful voice, WHAM faced increasing competition. Gannett's station had a smaller staff and less power, but Gunnar Wiig, as general manager of WHEC, had the resources of CBS and was able to call on his colleagues in five other Gannett stations to strengthen his offerings. Coleman Scott, program director of WVET, announced a firm contract with the Mutual Broadcasting System and proceeded to bring "Information Please" to Rochester. The Rochester School of the Air after 14 years of broadcasting in cooperation with WHAM, secured a hook up with the Empire State FM School of the Air in November 1947. A University of Rochester station made its

bow the next February broadcasting a program of classical and jazz music from the Eastman School with the call letters WRUR. Nevertheless WHAM was able to clinch its leadership with the launching of WHAM-TV in June 1949.

Almost everybody had realized that the Rochester Radio City headquarters was not designed solely for radio. Stromberg-Carlson had been working on television for over a decade. It had conducted a preliminary demonstration at the Sagamore Hotel late in 1939 and had set up an exhibit at the Rochester Home Show the next spring. It was ready to sell deluxe models priced from \$425 up to \$940 by April 1949. And while few residents rushed forward to buy such expensive sets, Stromberg like other producers was working on more economical models. Another Rochester firm, Distillation Products, had in fact developed an aluminum coating process which helped to effect a drastic reduction in the cost of TV tubes, bringing the price of some table sets down by \$50 or more. Although, according to a careful count, there were only about 1200 sets in the Rochester area when WHAM-TV went on the air in June 1949, six months later the number was reliably estimated at 15,900 with the sales over the holidays at a record level.

Rochester's first television station, WHAM-TV, the 68th in the nation, might have been launched sooner had it not been for the opposition of residents in the Pinnacle Hill area to the erection of a TV tower on its crest. A neighborhood association, formed to oppose it, delayed action in 1947, and WHAM built a new radio tower on Brooks Road in Chili to reduce the size of the TV installation, which it was finally able to erect on Pinnacle Hill in the spring of 1949. Granted an FCC license to broadcast over Channel 6, the Stromberg station devoted a month to the careful testing of its television equipment. For its first show it installed mobile units in the Chamber of Commerce banquet hall where 700 local members and guests, who gathered at an inaugural banquet on June 11, were treated to

live video reproductions on a battery of sets of scenes taken in the room, in the kitchen, and at the Radio City studios. To assure a wider reception, the Electrical Association of Rochester installed 200 sets of various makes in the Columbus Civic Center where citizens were invited in to watch WHAM-TV's programs throughout the following week. Only twenty-two local advertisers hastened forward to back programs that week, leaving ample time for unsponsored programs, but six months later, in the first week of December, 65 advertisers bought time for 58 programs and 103 announcements, Manager Fay reported, adding that the recent completion of a new cable between Cleveland and Erie had considerably relieved the station's network problems.

TV's immediate success was demonstrated as Rochester area residents purchased a total of 57,982 television sets in the first eleven months of 1950. The comparable success of television throughout the country prompted the FCC to relax its restraints against a too rapid development. In August 1951 WHAM-TV received permission to increase the wattage of its broadcasts to reach a distance of 43 miles. Finally in April 1952, when the FCC restructured its regulations to permit the distribution of some 2000 new channels throughout the country, the FCC assigned a total of five to the Rochester area. Under its direction WHAM-TV was to shift from Channel 6 to 5 and a new Channel 10 was made available to the city, as well as three ultra-high frequency channels—15, 21, and 27. Four candidates for Channel 10 quickly submitted applications—WHEC, WARC, WVET and WSAY. Both Gunnar Wiig for WHEC and Ervin F. Lyke for WVET presented plans for the use of surplus facilities already provided at the WHAM-TV tower on Pinnacle Hill. A year later, when the crush of applicants seemed to call for a protracted hearing, these two managers, revising their applications, requested permission to operate Channel 10 jointly on a share-time basis, and won a tentative indication of approval

from the FCC.

An appeal by Gordon Brown of WSAY, who protested that he had not had time to change his application after the institution of a shared-time ruling, prompted the FCC to postpone its final decision on Channel 10. Instead it granted the uncontested application of WRNY for the ultra high frequency Channel 27. After further consideration the FCC late in July, 1953, passed over the WSAY protest and granted the Channel 10 license to WHEC & WVET. The 118 kilowatts authorized for the new channel assured it a 50-mile radius, somewhat broader than that previously assigned to WHAM-TV, which however was increased to 100 kilowatts on the shift to Channel 5. Under the terms of their applications, WHEC-TV brought to Rochester the national program of CBS, and WVET-TV those of ABC, to counterbalance those of NBC supplied over WHAM-TV. Shortly after the announcement of the FCC decision, work commenced on the installation of a new antenna on the existing tower on Pinnacle Hill. Fortunately, the technology had reached a point that permitted rapid progress, and the dual stations were able to launch broadcasts on November 1, 1953, a full month ahead of schedule.

With two television channels and nine radio stations, three of them FM, Rochester in 1954 was, in the opinion of their managers, adequately served. That it was not over supplied was evident, however, in the healthy profits of the participating companies and in the continued prosperity of the supply houses. Although the census of 1950 had reported the presence of radios in 95.5 per cent of the city's homes, while only 14.6 per cent possessed TV sets, the 20,000 sets of that year in the county had increased to 150,000 by the end of 1952 and would continue to mount to a total of 360,000 in the Rochester area by 1956.

The market was unmistakably good, but debate over the adequacy of the programs began to mount in the middle fifties. Widespread criticism of the content of some of the national

offerings and repeated pleas for more local and documentary materials brought periodic efforts by the several companies to meet this demand. The directors of both the radio and television stations scheduled educational, religious, and other public-service programs as their licenses required. But the recurrent agitation for separate public educational facilities demonstrated the inadequacy of these voluntary measures.

Rochester's major stations had prided themselves from the beginning on their services to the public. The early cooperation with the Eastman School, at which several of the program announcers had been trained, was continued, especially by the Stromberg-Carlson stations. Thus WHAM, which featured several public service programs, received a plaque in 1955 from the Monroe County Medical Society at the completion of the first 25 years of weekly broadcasts of its "Speaking of Health" talks. WHEC marked the 25th anniversary that February of its Sunday broadcasts of "Central Church on the Air." When a year later the Rural Radio Network, which had maintained the Empire State FM School of the Air for several years, was forced to suspend, Paul Reed of the Rochester schools managed to secure the cooperation for a season of WHFM and negotiated a lease of its facilities for morning broadcasts the next year.

WHAM-TV likewise offered public programs. It scheduled a series of interviews by Sol M. Linowitz, current president of the City Club in 1951-2, with the Saturday noon speakers at the club, a program that soon acquired fame as the "Court of Public Opinion" and became an established feature program for successive winter seasons. Interest mounted in October 1955 when Linowitz staged a political debate among four leading local candidates for public office. The same station had launched a special program in 1954 called "What D'Ya Know" by James M. Spinning shortly before his retirement as superintendent of schools. Its success in the prime hour of 7 on Saturday nights assured its continuation and prompted other local programs.

Spinning's successor as superintendent, Dr. Howard C. Seymour, moderated "Youth Asks the Question," while Milton L. Grossman conducted a series on family problems, and the University sponsored still another on "Your Money." Dr. Hanson, a frequent contributor, was scheduled for an extended series on "Music is a Language," which the Radio Center in Ann Arbor acquired for national distribution.

Rochester's TV stations hastened to add broadcasts in color shortly after it became available. WHAM-TV began to run some rebroadcasts of RCA color tapes on February 1, 1954, and installed several color TV sets in the Chamber of Commerce in March and in Sibley's store in June to let Rochesterians, who had few such sets, see for themselves. Channel 10 was ready with similar reruns in September. Eastman Kodak developed a new kinescope recorder for color TV broadcasters the next year, and the Radio Corporation of America announced a 43 per cent reduction in the cost of its color TV tubes, but the prices of color sets still exceeded \$1000 and few were sold locally. Robert C. Tait of Stromberg had assured the public a few years before that black and white broadcasting was far from finished, and most Rochesterians still purchased such sets. The station managers were more concerned by the new threats posed by toll television, which was first discussed in Rochester in June 1955. If the "pay as you see" plan or toll TV, as introduced experimentally in the Rocky Mountain States in the late forties, should take hold, the investments in local stations, many feared, would be undermined.

Radio as well as television continued, however, to attract competitive enterprise throughout the fifties. A newly formed Star Broadcasting Company, headed by Maurice R. Forman, acquired control of WARC in the summer of 1953, changed its name to WBBF, and joined the Mutual Broadcasting System. An Albany firm tried unsuccessfully the next year to purchase WRNY, but the Buchman interests, which had ac-

quired it from the Monroe Broadcasting Company of George Kelly in 1952, held on and in fact extended the classical music programs of its FM outlet. In 1957, however, a more attractive offer from the State Broadcasting Company prompted a sale that changed the station's name to WRVM, which continued its predecessor's emphasis on classical music. WBBF, which, under the leadership of Robert Kieve as station manager, featured popular music on its AM channel, launched in 1960 a second and exclusively classical music program over its FM affiliate and won enthusiastic approval from a specialized audience, which was also attracted by its weekly cultural calendar. Neither the Star Broadcasting Company nor the State Broadcasting Company was able, however, to develop its claim to the ultra high frequency TV channels 15 and 27, respectively. WHEC experienced changes too, but in personnel not ownership. When Gunnar Wiig resigned in 1953, after a service of 25 years, to become general manager of the Allegheny Broadcasting Company of Pittsburgh, the Gannett Company brought Glover DeLaney from its Hartford Station to become general manager of WHEC. William J. Adams, brought to Rochester from Charleston, West Virginia, as program director in 1943, became director of the WHEC-TV in 1955 when Warren S. Doremus, formerly an announcer, acquired similar responsibilities over its radio programming. Lowell MacMillan, formerly a sportscaster, succeeded DeLaney in 1958 as the station's manager.

The big turnover, however, came at the Radio City headquarters of WHAM and its affiliates. In a major industrial shuffle in 1955, Stromberg-Carlson was absorbed and became the Rochester division of General Dynamics, which directed it to dispose of its broadcasting subsidiaries and to concentrate on production. An offer from the newly formed Transcontinent Television Corporation of Buffalo, with the General Railway Signal Company of Rochester holding a major interest, resulted in its purchase of the Rochester Radio City structures

and franchises in August 1956 for a total of \$5,100,000. Transcontinent had already agreed to sell its radio stations WHAM and WHFM to Riggs and Green of Elmira, who three years later sold these outlets to the Genesee Broadcasting Company of which Richard Shepard of Rochester was general manager. Transcontinent retained William Fay as manager of its television station, now renamed WROC-TV and located in the eastern half of the building on Humboldt Street. On Fay's retirement a year later, WROC-TV brought Gunnar Wiig back from Pittsburgh to become the new general manager of Channel 5 in August 1954. While a few of the old favorites shortly resigned to take other jobs—David E. Kessler to join the Chamber's staff for example—others such as Jack Ross and Louise Wilson carried on into the sixties.

The familiar roles played by radio and television announcers in the homes of most Rochesterians assured a keen interest in their affairs. Labor difficulties had increased in intensity with the wider organization of the communication workers during the fifties, and strikes by the announcers in 1958 and again in 1959 required the intervention of the State Board of Mediation to secure a settlement at Channel 10. Published reports of the profits reaped by the two stations jointly operating that channel added to the popular resentment against TV programing, which boiled out in a Linowitz interview with Professors John R. Slater and Katherine Koller, former and current heads of the English Department at the University of Rochester, on his new "Opinion" program over WHEC-TV in 1960. The characteristic TV shows were judged by these discriminating critics to be "terrible, unbearably dull, unbelievably repetitious" and "going from bad to worse"; only the classical music on two FM stations received their praise.

The Battle for Educational Television

Television had from the beginning brought fears, hopes, and

disillusionment to educators in Rochester as elsewhere. The early fears that its programs would absorb the attention of children to the detriment of their school work, and of teenagers and adults to the exclusion of any reading, periodically gave way to hopes that this vivid means of communication could be enrolled in new educational endeavors both for juveniles and adults. Unfortunately, the commercial triumphs television enjoyed raised economic obstacles that frustrated successive efforts to convert its cultural potentialities to the service of the public. The possible benefits were, however, sufficient to produce renewed attempts, which ultimately brought Channel 21 into being as a creative new cultural institution.

Long before the advent of television the Rochester schools had made use of audio-visual instruction. Earlier lantern slides had given way to motion pictures, and phonograph records to radio at some schools in 1930, and every public school in Rochester had a movie projector and one or more radio receivers by September the next year. These facilities made it possible to organize the Rochester School of the Air, frequently noted above, which by 1936 reached over a fifth of all Rochester children as well as many in the surrounding towns. The creation of an audio-visual department at the central office in 1937 and the appointment of Paul Reed as its director provided leadership that soon brought the Rochester schools into an active relationship with radio programmers similar to that enjoyed as we have seen, by the Eastman School and other branches of the University of Rochester in the early days of WHAM.

Because of these pioneer activities, few were surprised in April 1951 when the Board of Education first declared its interest in public television. A resolution adopted on April 26 directed Superintendent Spinning to file with the FCC "an expression of strong interest on the part of the Board of Educa-

tion in the availability for educational purposes of a television channel in Rochester." Spinning, a member since its establishment in 1944 of the Voluntary Education Council, which had resulted from the deliberations of the Council on Postwar Problems, enlisted the cooperation of its chairman Dr. Mark Ellingson, president of the Rochester Institute of Technology, in securing simultaneous statements from the Institute and the University of Rochester, supporting the Board's request for an educational channel. A week later the State Board of Regents, with Mrs. Frank Gannett representing the Rochester area, filed preliminary comments with the FCC on a projected chain of eleven educational TV stations for New York State. Spinning, among others in Rochester, testified at the hearings conducted by the State Commissioner of Education that summer, and the Rochester Board formally endorsed the Regents plan. When it was shelved for further study by a governor's commission, the Board directed the Superintendent to give continued support to any measures designed to provide educational television for Rochester.

The hearings on the Regents plan continued throughout 1952 and may have influenced the announcement by the FCC late that year (and after its grant of Channel 10 in Rochester to two commercial stations) of a policy of reserving for educational purposes any third VHF channels assigned to cities that already had two commercial outlets. That prospect seemed illusory in Rochester, however, and throughout New York State where major cities crowded each other closely, thus limiting them to two VHF channel assignments. As a result the Governor's Temporary Commission on Educational Television recommended the reservation of UHF channels for educational use throughout the state and the formation of non-profit bodies to operate them. When the FCC responded by designating ten channels for such use, one in Rochester, the Voluntary Education Council created a Committee for Public Information on

Educational Television to promote the cause. City Manager Robert Aex responded by appointing a City-County Citizens Educational Television Committee to study the problem. The Citizens Committee, headed by Jack Knabb, an advertising consultant, estimated that the capital investment for a separate station would run between \$150,000 and \$750,000 and that the annual expenses would vary, depending on the extent of the operation, between \$75,000 and \$400,000. Such outlays appeared too much for a UHF venture, which would at best reach only a very small fraction of the public, and the committee in February 1955 recommended further study of possibilities for future action.

The Voluntary Educational Council devoted most of its efforts in the next two years to the promotion of educational programs on the existing channels. WHAM-TV had granted sufficient time in 1951-53 to enable five local educational institutions to produce 142 programs over a two-year period, and the experience gained in this activity encouraged further programming. It was, however, not enough, and in November 1957, at the motion of the Board of Education, Superintendent Howard C. Seymour made a new effort to draw all the educational institutions of the Rochester area into a concerted movement to activate Channel 21 as a first step towards the operation of an educational TV station. That move was inspired by news that the FCC was about to shift Utica's VHF Channel 13 to Albany, which suggested the possibility that a new Channel 13 might become available in the Rochester area. To be ready for such a contingency, the new committee appointed by Dr. Seymour drafted a constitution and by-laws and applied for incorporation as the Rochester Area Educational Television Association (RAETA). Chartered by the Regents and formally organized on February 24, 1958, at a meeting of representatives from all the educational institutions of the nine-county Rochester area, RAETA was officially launched early in March. With the elec-

tion of Dr. Seymour as its president, it encouraged its member organizations to write the FCC urging that any future VHF channel available in the Rochester area be reserved for educational purposes and assigned to RAETA. Meanwhile it engaged Lloyd E. Kaiser as its full time director and undertook to produce educational programs for presentation over Channels 5 and 10. RAETA prepared and presented forty programs during its first year, most of them designed for in-school use and paid for by contributions from boards of education based on per-pupil assessments.

The task of organizing, staffing, and financing an independent non-commercial station called for long and painstaking effort by unpaid volunteers dedicated to the public interest. Thus the original program committee of interested educators soon required the services of trained technicians and the budget had to be expanded to include them. The fees from the per-pupil payments by school districts kept the association solvent and enabled it to approve a budget of \$31,000 for 1960. RAETA continued to provide limited programming on the commercial stations in subsequent years as its budget grew moderately. In 1962 it acquired its own production center in converted space in old East High School. The production studio was made possible by a grant of equipment from WHEC and of capital for its installation by the Rochester City School District.

But the larger costs of a full time station seemed so formidable that RAETA responded with interest when early that year the Veterans Broadcasting Company, joint holders of Channel 10, offered to join with RAETA in a share-time operation of the projected Channel 13, an arrangement that would give WVET-TV full time divided between two channels. Both groups soon lost interest in such a joint venture, however, though for different reasons. An offer by the Transcontinent Television Corporation to sell its Channel 5 franchise and its Rochester Radio City properties promised to give the Veterans

Broadcasting Company full control of one station, enabling it to sell its share of Channel 10 to WHEC-TV. That arrangement was finally approved by the FCC in November 1961. Ervin F. Lyke, president of the Veterans group, adopted the WROC-TV call numbers and continued its NBC affiliation, while WHEC-TV under Lowell MacMillan assumed full operation of Channel 10 as a CBS station.

Meanwhile RAETA's prospects had likewise changed drastically. The number of educational television stations in operation had increased to 54 and, while a few of them were on UHF channels, at least 39, including the first at Houston in 1953 and a most dynamic one at Pittsburgh, were successful VHF stations. Moreover, the formation of an Eastern Educational Network, linking Boston, Philadelphia, and Buffalo in cooperative broadcasting programs, promised vital assistance to an educational station in Rochester. This regional support, together with that available from the National Educational Television and Radio Center, with its backlog of educational video-tapes available at a modest charge, made the assumption of a full schedule of programs more feasible.

The situation suddenly became fluid when, in December 1960, the FCC announced that a new Channel 13 would be available at Rochester. That announcement brought a flood of applications from varied groups in Rochester, each eager to reap the profits to be derived from the operation of a new television channel. RAETA for its part prepared an extended petition urging that Channel 13 be reserved, as directed under the FCC's 1952 policy statement, for educational use. That policy, which had benefited several communities in the interim, had never been revised, but a concerted drive by backers of ABC to make it a fully operative third national network encouraged hope among business groups that a third commercial station could be secured for Rochester. As a result of this pressure, the FCC responded, in July 1961, rejecting

RAETA's petition that the channel be reserved for educational use; it, however, promised the public group a fair hearing in competition with the commercial applicants.

The departure of Dr. Seymour from Rochester early in 1961 brought the election of Harold Hacker, director of the Rochester Public Library and former secretary of RAETA, as its new president. Aably assisted by Mrs. James Reddig of the League of Women Voters as vice-president, by Tom Hawks, president of the Rochester Savings Bank, as chairman of the finance committee, and by John Porter the new executive director, President Hacker rallied community support to prove that RAETA was financially capable of operating the station. To do so it was necessary to secure the written pledges of contributions from local industries and over 2000 individuals, supplemented by a promise of a bank loan of \$350,000 to guarantee its capital requirements of over \$800,000. It also had to secure written pledges of annual operating revenues from school districts, the Monroe County Board of Supervisors, the State Education Department, and other sources. With the aid of dedicated members of RAETA's board, this was accomplished.

The refusal of the FCC to reserve Channel 13 for educational purposes and its demand that RAETA prove its financial capacity revealed an unexpected FCC preference for commercial operations. Convinced that the backers of ABC had won the support of the FCC, the board of RAETA reluctantly considered a compromise proposal. Several of the competing applicants had made such proposals in the summer of 1961, but only one, the Rochester Telecasters, Inc., headed by George Mercier with the backing of Joseph Wilson and Robert Wegman, offered a shared-time arrangement that assured RAETA a portion of the prime evening time as well as of the daytime hours—44 hours in each week. After much deliberation the board accepted this offer and, in order to give assurance that ABC as well as the Educational Television circuits would

have an outlet in Rochester, submitted a revised application on October 6, 1961, requesting joint operation of Channel 13 with Rochester Telecasters, Inc.

The hearings before Mrs. Annie Neal Hastings, Hearing Examiner for the FCC, opened at Washington in June 1962 and continued after a break in August, and again in October, until they finally reached a conclusion in December. President Hacker, who with his aides had assembled eleven exhibits, comprising 620 pages of carefully notarized evidence, spent nine days on the stand answering the questions of the attorneys of the eleven contesting applicants. Ably supported by Arthur Hughes the treasurer, Mrs. Reddig, Dr. Mark Ellingson, and Monsignor William Roche, representing the board, and John Porter of the staff, Hacker presented RAETA's claims with sufficient force to win a favorable recommendation for RAETA and Rochester Telecasters from the examiner when her opinion was released in January 1964, more than a year after the hearing had concluded. That, however, was only the first step, for the FCC had to approve the award. The disappointed applicants immediately filed briefs asking a rehearing by the full commission, which had earlier granted them permission in the fall of 1962 to activate Channel 13 as a joint operation on an interim basis. Since the station was already in operation with a full use of ABC, the FCC was in no hurry, and after a delay of eleven months it conducted a new hearing, granting 20 minutes to each applicant, and then in May 1965 called for a complete review of the entire case.

Convinced at last that the FCC had decided to give Channel 13 to an ABC representative and was only seeking a more acceptable excuse for rejecting educational television, RAETA registered a formal protest but determined to undertake the alternate task of implementing Channel 21. Several developments since 1961 had made such a course more acceptable. An act of Congress adopted in 1962 had required that all new

television sets manufactured after June 1, 1964, would have to be equipped to receive UHF programs. Moreover the federal government had made capital funds available, for use with available matching state funds, for the assistance of public non-profit television. Finally, in their desire to speed the withdrawal of RAETA from the contest for Channel 13, the eight contestants which were cooperating in its operation offered to reimburse their educational opponent for its out-of-pocket expenses in the hearing. That payment, which came to \$68,000, made a modest contribution towards the implementation of Channel 21. More important was the receipt of \$250,000 from the State Education Department, and of another \$154,000 from the federal government, and of \$425,000 from local industry and individuals for capital investment to equip the station. These funds and the assurance of operating funds enabled RAETA to commence independent broadcasting on its Channel 21 on September 6, 1966.

Radio and TV in Rochester Today

The successful launching of Channel 21 by RAETA was only the most dramatic accomplishment of the sixties, for the mass media have experienced other challenges and made other developments during the decade. New entrepreneurial and personnel shifts occurred, and new technological innovations developed, as well as new sociological dilemmas, each of which has had an impact on the role of radio and television in Rochester.

The first dramatic entrepreneurial shift came in 1964 with the sale of WROC-TV to the Rust Craft Broadcasting Company of New York. That firm, which had already acquired stations in Buffalo and Pittsburgh, continued Ervin F. Lyke in his capacity of manager of WROC-TV and absorbed most of its staff. The channel number had been shifted from 5 to 8 two years before on the implementation of Channel 13. When the

transfer was completed early in 1965, the Veterans Broadcasting Company, formed eighteen years before, closed its books with a distribution of \$85 for shares originally sold at \$5 each. An even more dramatic shift occurred in 1967 when the FCC finally awarded Channel 13 to the Flower City Television Corporation, one of the eight applicants that had been operating it jointly for five years. The Flower City group, headed by John L. Wehle and Harper Sibley, Jr., fought the court appeals of several of their rivals in cases that were not finally settled until October 1969, when the Supreme Court refused to review a lower court decision upholding the FCC action. Nothing was done to correct the procedures that resulted in the "intolerable delay" complained of by one commissioner, and no effort was made to determine the reasons for the selection. Thus the battle for Channel 13, which had involved many community leaders as principals among the competing applicants, concluded after over eight years of litigation. The stakes were very high, estimated at a value in excess of \$7,000,000.

The ownership of several of the radio stations was in flux, too, and plans developed for the activation of new FM radio frequencies and new UHF television channels. For the sixth time (the third in a decade) WHAM changed hands in 1962 with the sale of both its AM and FM outlets by the Genesee Broadcasting Company to the Rust Broadcasting Company of York, Pennsylvania. Four years later, on the announcement of the availability of an additional radio frequency in the Rochester area, four groups submitted applications, which led to the licensing of WNYR, AM and FM, and increased the number of radio stations to six AM and seven FM outlets. Three other applicants sought the two unassigned UHF channels 31 and 61. Among the latter was a group of leading backers of the Rochester Urban League who sought to establish an inner-city station to activate Channel 61 for community improvement, while one of the four FM applicants was the Monroe County

Broadcasting Company headed by Andrew A. Lanston who also proposed to establish an inner-city station.

These applications, while still in the preliminary stage, reflect the development of new highly charged issues on the Rochester scene. Further evidence of the awakening social concerns of the media was the adoption of a new practice by several stations of delivering radio and television editorials in addition to news broadcasts. Some of the commentators, notably Dick Tobias on WHAM, who took an outspoken stand against the booking of Saul D. Alinsky by the Board of Urban Ministry of the Rochester Area Council of Churches, stirred controversies that had far reaching results. When in March 1965 WHAM carried its protest to the point of levying a fee of \$275 for church service broadcasts previously carried free, the Council of Churches shifted its programs to WROC at a more modest fee of \$75. To escape a charge of being anti-religious, WHAM gave free time to "The Bible Speaks to You," a program prepared by the Church of Christ of Boston, Massachusetts.

The dissatisfaction that had recurrently focused on the national networks finally reached the management of local radio stations in the late sixties. Thus WHAM decided to terminate its affiliation with ABC in 1967 when that network divided its programs into four packages each with limited offerings but increased fees. A year later WHEC dropped its CBS lines for similar reasons and joined the new American Information Network. The hold of the national networks over their TV affiliates was much more secure, but the practice of switching to motion picture reruns during labor strikes against the networks revealed a possible course for by-passing the chains if that became necessary.

A more immediate challenge to the entrenched networks and the major stations developed at Rochester in 1968 with the arrival of an agent for cable television. An applicant for a license to introduce cable television (CATV) in Rochester

made a tentative approach to the City Council in April, but the D'Amanda firm, which at first represented it, quickly withdrew when the City Manager warned of improprieties as some public officials were involved. A lower court decision in New York City upheld the right of CATV companies to contract for local telephone facilities without interference by the city, but the United States Supreme Court in June maintained the power of the FCC to regulate cable television.

Despite these restraints, five groups were soon actively applying for cable television rights in Rochester, and three were seeking similar franchises in suburban towns. One, Monroe Cablevision Inc., was said to be controlled jointly by the Channel 8 and 10 interests, but a new FCC regulation that fall prohibited the dual ownership of TV and cable franchises in the same area. A revamped People's Cable Corporation quickly appeared, free of all radio and television associates, and hastily procured a non-exclusive license from the Perinton Town Board in July 1969. Another local group, the Monroe Cable Company, secured the promise of a hearing on its application in Perinton and successfully negotiated a joint bid with the People's company in Pittsford and secured an independent franchise in Greece. Still another group, Cable Television of Rochester, organized by former Democratic County Chairman Charles T. Maloy, was pressing for a license from the City Council. When the Republican triumph at the polls in November 1969 threatened to blight its prospects in the next council, the Democratic directors of Cable Television of Rochester added a few Republicans and successfully pressed for a grant of a license by the lame-duck council. The People's Cable Corp. vigorously protested the council's action and brought suit against both the city and Cable Television of Rochester, asking that the State Supreme Court revoke the license.

While the possibility that cable television might make a wider and perhaps richer selection of programs available to local

viewers at a modest charge has been obscured by the smoke of a new battle for profits, RAETA has proceeded to demonstrate the quality of its services, winning new viewers for Channel 21, especially for its adult programs. Yet mounting pressures on the school districts throughout the Rochester area have reduced the number able and willing to renew their per-pupil contracts. Even the Rochester Board of Education discontinued its payments in order to maintain its own separate closed-circuit television operations; that program was, however, finally suspended and the schools returned to their former reliance on RAETA in 1969. Although most of RAETA's individual members renewed their pledges each year, the need for increased funds called for renewed efforts. In an imaginative attempt to arouse new interest, RAETA staged its first auction in April 1969. Over 2000 volunteers participated in the week-long auctions, which produced gross sales totaling \$75,000 and attracted many new friends to Channel 21. The venture proved so hilariously successful that it was eagerly repeated the next April with substantially greater financial success. More important was the discovery that TV could contribute to the development of community camaraderie. That had been true at the start of radio when its programs were community based, and the hope was renewed that community oriented television by restoring that emphasis might achieve its own great potentialities. That at least seemed a worthy objective as Rochester prepared to celebrate the semicentennial of the first public broadcast from Pittsburgh in the fall of 1920.