

## THE LEGEND AND THE LEGACY

By Don Jensen

### RADIO STATION DIRECTORY

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Broadcasting was America's newest and fastest growing craze when Charles DeWitt White brought out his first radio log book in 1924.

In the nearly 60 years since, the world has changed more than a little. But, here and there, bits of the past survive, timeless, because they remain relevant, even as we rush full tilt toward the 21st Century.

White's Radio Log is one of those survivors. Then and now, the world of broadcasting is a complex and confusing place. And White's still offers an accurate, up-to-date guide to that world — domestic AM radio, foreign shortwave, TV and FM.

In the beginning, way back when, broadcasting was anybody's game. Major manufacturers and small businessmen alike could, with minimal licensing formalities, set up their own stations, providing entertainment and, not incidentally, advertising their wares and services.

By the end of 1920, the federal government had authorized 30 broadcasting stations. KBZ (today's WBZ, Boston) in East Springfield, Massachusetts, and KDKA, Pittsburgh were among the earliest. So were WJZ and WEAJ in New York City, Chicago's KYW and the General Electric Company's WGY, in Schenectady, NY.

Two years later, more than 200 radio stations were licensed in the US. In 1923, the number had jumped to nearly 600.

The first radio network dates to December 6, 1923, when a telephone line linkup joined WEAJ with a Washington, DC outlet, WCAP, and WJAR in Providence, Rhode Island.

It was also in Providence, just a few months later, that 33-year-old Charlie White had a bright idea. He looked at the growing radio phenomenon and recognized the unmet need for an accurate list of stations and frequencies.

White was just the man to provide the list for DXers — a new term for the ranks of American listeners who, just for fun, tuned in to as many distant stations as they could hear.

He had followed his father in the family publishing business in Providence. The firm specialized in printing city directories, municipal tax tables and street guides for various cities.

Compiling a list of active radio stations was no small task in the years before 1927, when Congress passed the first federal legislation regulating the fledgling broadcasting industry. But White's background in the field of publishing statistical information and governmental directories led him in the right direction. It was a smart move, one that would make a name for White, even though he already had a pair of rather distinguished names.

He was a direct descendant of DeWitt Clinton, once New York governor, US senator, presidential hopeful and the "father" of the Erie Canal. He also traced his lineage to Peregrin White, the first child born during the Mayflower's crossing to the New World.

His first log, issued in 1924, was called **The Rhode Island Radio Call Book**. Not long afterwards, he followed up with a more comprehensive log book — **White's Triple List of Radio Broadcasting Stations**.

In time, other publishers marketed radio logs, but White's original "triple list" of AM broadcasting stations — by frequency, by call letters and by city — kept it out in front.

Surely it was not its beauty that kept radio listeners buying the slim volumes which appeared on the newsstands quarterly. The little magazine, though loaded with interesting and useful data, had perhaps the ugliest black and white covers in the history of publishing! But its circulation regularly topped the million copy mark.

In the years that followed, White added related radio magazines — **Sponsored Radio Programs**, the **Radio Announcer's Guide**, **Short Wave Schedule Guide** (later incorporated into the regular **White's Radio Log**) and a special Canadian listing (also subsequently added to White's).

White's competed successfully with other published sources for broadcasting information. Most major newspapers had regular daily or weekly columns for radio listeners. There were magazines such as **Radio News**, **Radio Craft**, **All-Wave Radio**, and, in 1929, **What's On The Air**, a guide to radio programming, with feature articles on early radio stars and broadcasts.

"If your mood calls for a symphony concert," its promotional material promised, "**What's On The Air** tells you where to look for a symphony concert; if your guests want to dance, it immediately gives you a list of dance orchestras on the air at the time — in short, it tells you where to find exactly what you want, exactly when you want it."

This was a tipoff that things were changing in radio listening habits. For many, the novelty of radio was wearing off. Listeners were more interested in entertainment programming — much of it from the new radio networks — than in simply hearing distant stations.

But there remained, as there does today, a hard core of DX fans who get their kicks from tuning in signals from across the continent or half a world away.

**White's Radio Log** catered to these listeners. In some years, the log appeared under the sponsorship of various commercial products. It was the **Enna Jettick Radio Log** in 1929-1931, when it was sponsored by the shoe manufacturer of the same name. It was called the **General Electric Radio Log** in 1938-1939, promoting the "sensational 1939 receivers with pushbutton tuning." In time, with the success of his radio publications, White sold his street guide and city directory business. In about 1936, he moved his publishing firm from Providence to Bronxville, a suburb of New York City, where it operated as C. DeWitt White Co., for two more decades.

White still headed the firm on April 6, 1957, when he died at the age of 76. After his death, his daughter, Mrs. W.R. Washburn sold all rights to **White's Radio Log** to Science & Mechanics Publishing Co., a Chicago-based publisher, who subsequently sold the publishing rights to Davis Publications Inc. Davis revived the "triple-list log" as a section in its **Radio-TV Experimenter** magazine. White's name, of course, was retained, as was a portion of the familiar cover logo, a drawing of a listener with headphones, tuning a '20s vintage receiver.

**R-TV Experimenter** went bi-monthly in 1964, and that led to a major format change for the included **White's Radio Log**. The triple listing was subdivided into three parts, with a different section presented in each issue of the magazine. This meant that two complete and revised White's logs were published each year in the six bi-monthly magazine issues.

With the growth of radio broadcasting in the US, the list of stations lengthened. Magazine space requirements forced further format changes. In 1969, White's was divided into six sections, with each bi-monthly issue containing a major listing for either AM broadcast stations, FM or TV outlets, plus a list of shortwave broadcasters of the world.

It was in 1971 that Davis Publications, headquartered in New York, inaugurated a semi-annual magazine aimed specifically at the radio listening hobbyist — **Communications World**. It was a natural home for **White's Radio Log**, and the complete log once again appeared between the covers of a single magazine issue.

**Communications World** — each issue containing a White's Log — was published through 1981. Then it ceased publication. And with its demise, it seemed, so died White's log.

But Don Gabree, former Circulation Director of **Communications World**, realized that listeners sorely missed their longtime log-book. He bought the rights to the magazine and log.

So here we are again, continuing what Charles DeWitt White began back in 1924, compiling the world's best known, authoritative station list and guide — **WHITE'S RADIO LOG**.