



HCJB 1931 - 1991

A Celebration of Beginnings

Story and photos by Kenneth D. MacHarg

Quick! Which station is celebrating 60th, 50th, 40th, and 30th anniversaries this year? If you answered HCJB, the Voice of the Andes, you are absolutely correct.

HCJB has been spending the year celebrating several important developments in its history. 1991 is the 60th anniversary of the radio station's first broadcast, the 50th anniversary of the first Russian language transmission, the 40th anniversary of the popular "Musical Mailbag" letterbox feature, and the 30th anniversary of HCJB's television ministry and the famous "DX Party Line" program.

The beginning of one of today's best known international shortwave radio stations goes back to Christmas Day, 1931, in a sheep shed located in the capital city of Ecuador in South America. There, founder Clarence Jones tuned up a primitive 250 watt transmitter and offered the first programming in Spanish and English on 4107 kHz. With only 17 receivers in the country, listenership was limited, but the early broadcasters received several reports from local residents.

Over time, HCJB developed programming in other languages, including Quechua, the dialect of today's descendants of the ancient Inca Indians of South America. Only two international

stations broadcast in this dialect, HCJB and Radio Havana Cuba. (Other local tropical band stations in the Andean region carry Quechua programming.)

Officials of the Slavic Gospel Association were skeptical when they initiated broadcasts from HCJB in June of 1941. Yet the first broadcast was heard well in the United States and the Soviet Union. Within two years, the Russian service expanded to a daily 30-minute program, and Constantine Lewshenia arrived to prepare the broadcasts.

Lewshenia was recently honored for 50 years of service in broadcasting. Now 72, he continues to record Russian programs for hours of Russian programs per week. "We received more mail from Russia in 1990 than in the past several years combined," says Wally Kulakoff, a current Russian broadcaster in Quito.

Kulakoff is optimistic about the continued use of shortwave to reach Soviet listeners. He says it is a viable means of bringing the gospel, especially to residents in isolated areas or cities where the cable radio service carries only government stations.

"Radio will never die," Kulakoff says. "I expect more and more Russian Christians will

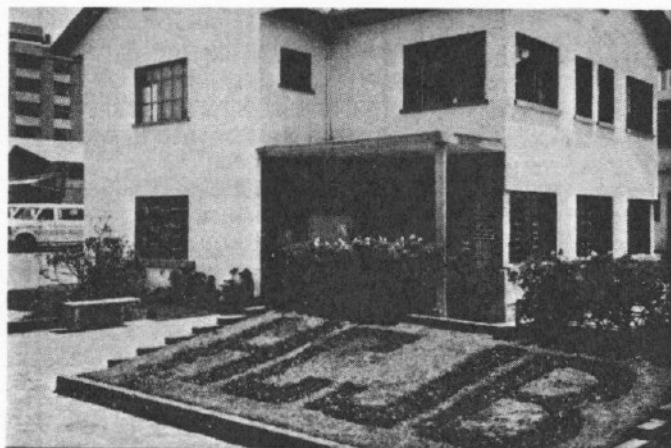
produce radio programs in their own country for broadcast to their own people via HCJB."

Television Comes to Ecuador

Ten tons of donated equipment were what gave the initiative to HCJB to establish Ecuador's first television station in 1961. The cameras, control board, and other material came from a defunct station in Syracuse, New York, and were used to put HCJB-TV, Channel 4 on the air.

Eleven years later the cost of operating and upgrading the station was more than HCJB wanted to spend, thus the station was sold. Today, Channel 4's studios are only a block from the HCJB facilities in Quito.

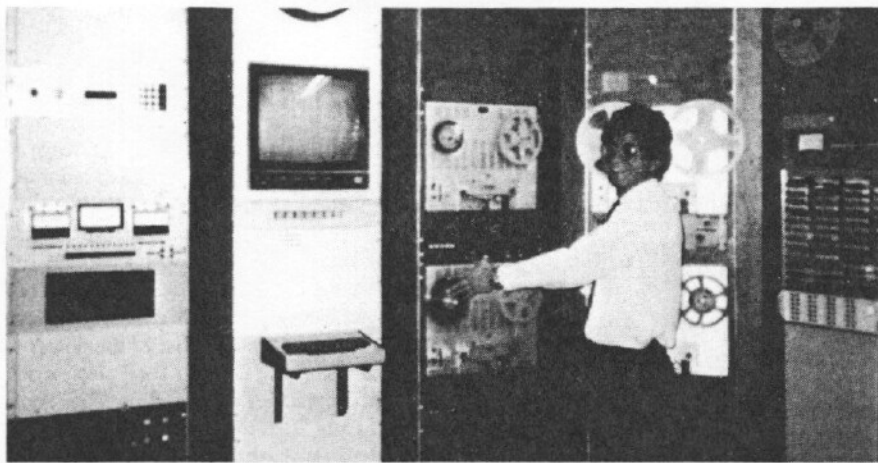
Meanwhile, HCJB continues with television production in the Clarence Jones studio at the Quito facilities. In recent years, Televozandes has produced an award winning series of youth programs, a dramatic children's series, and in 1990, "Cancion de Navidad" (A Christmas Carol) which won two television awards in the United States and is broadcast each year throughout Latin America and on Spanish cable systems in the U.S.



The original building on HCJB's compound housed all studios and offices. Today it is the accounting center for the entire mission.



Wally Kulakoff is one of HCJB's Russian Language broadcasters.



Jorge Narvaez is director of HCJB's Program Automated Control System (PACS). PACS is the nerve center of the HCJB radio program operation, handling up to ten different languages or programs at one time. Computer controlled, it also sends HCJB's AM and FM signals to their appropriate transmitter sites.

Multiple Beginnings

Radio listeners are most aware of the programming anniversaries this year. "Musical Mailbag" might be described as one of the most unusual letter-box programs on radio anywhere. An eclectic mix of letters, humor, good natured banter, and food bring the listener into a fiesta every week.

It was thirty years ago that Hardy Hays (who still works with HCJB's stations in Texas) began to fill a time slot by offering an informal program of radio listening tips whenever there was a fifth Sunday.

Not long after, an HCJB engineer, Clayton Howard, developed the program into a weekly affair called the "DX Party Line." Over a period of 20 years, Clayton built his program into one of the most popular DX programs ever aired. Many DXers today learned the ropes of the hobby from Clayton's simple tips, his features on constructing antennas, and his promotion of hobby clubs around the world. An important part of each program was his "Tips for Real Living," a short feature on the Christian faith which he shared with his wife, Helen.

Since Clayton Howard's retirement in 1985, the program has been hosted by John Beck, Brent Allred, and Rich McVicar.

Current host, Canadian Rich McVicar, has expanded the program to 50 minutes each week, and tries to combine information for new listeners with DX news and tips to challenge the most experienced hobbyist.

A Gift For Innovation

When Clarence Jones decided to establish HCJB in the high Andes mountains of Ecuador, U.S. engineers scoffed at his idea. The mountains, the altitude, and the location on the equator were all seen as negative factors in the success of any such operation.

While the remoteness of Ecuador in the early days, and the effects of the altitude on high power transmissions have led to some problems, HCJB

has in fact proven to be highly successful. Over the years, HCJB has led in technical developments. For example, the widely used cubical quad antenna was first designed and built at HCJB. Engineers today know of the "Quito effect," a phenomenon which indicates that, contrary to original predictions, the equator is one of the best places in the world from which to broadcast on shortwave.

Programmatically, HCJB has led the religious world in developing programming with mass appeal. Rather than offer continual teaching and preaching features, HCJB provides a broad range of presentations which attract a wide audience, Christian and non-Christian, who tune in for features on Latin America, science, hobby material, and other topics. This low-key philosophy has permitted HCJB to reach a vast worldwide audience and to rate as the most popular privately owned shortwave station in many polls over the years.

USA Today said, a few years back, that HCJB is the seventh largest radio station in the world. While it is the oldest Protestant Christian shortwave station on the air, it has also been one of the most innovative and ambitious.

A visit to the HCJB studios in Quito and the transmitter site 20 miles away at Pifo is a fascinating experience. In the center of Quito, north of the downtown area, a square block is devoted to HCJB's broadcasting operation. Walk down the hallway of the studio building and, as you pass by the studio windows, you can see in one a Japanese programmer preparing a program for his audience. Next door, representatives of the Russian service are taping. Throughout the building, one can find German and Portuguese, French and Arabic, Czechoslovakian and Spanish FM, all under production for later release to the world.

Upstairs, the Spanish AM and shortwave offices and studios turn out more than 24 hours per day of programming. While much of the AM and SW programming is duplicated, there are separate periods of broadcasting.

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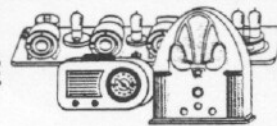


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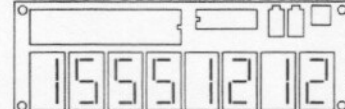
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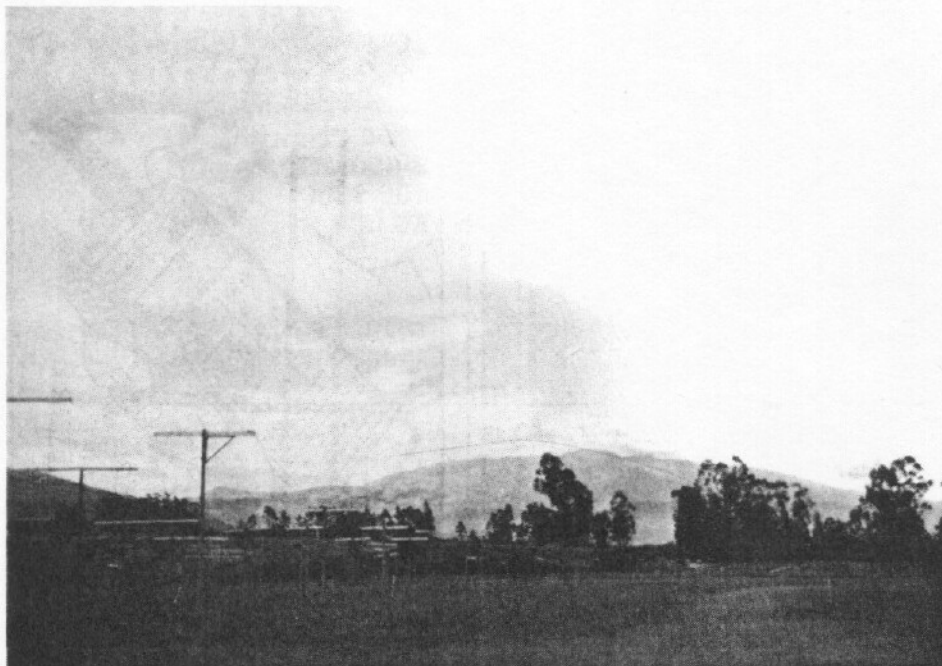


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HCJB's huge curtain array which beams the signal to Europe.

Some language departments provide only 30 minutes of programming per week, while others fill most of the day. The German language service finds itself in the unique situation of developing broadcasts for two very different audiences. The German-speaking listeners in South America, in general, are second and third generation Christians who want programming of an educational and nurturing nature. In comparison, most of their listeners in Europe are non-Christians who are more interested in the culture of South America and DXing topics. Thus, the service must provide two very different releases to serve both areas.

Next door, in a two-building complex, one finds technical services, the folk who maintain the studios, provide telephone service throughout the mission, support computers, and operate a host of other technical complexes. Adjacent is the TV department, master control, and offices and studios for English and Nordic languages.

The PACS (Program Automated Control System) is a complex room which is the nerve center of the HCJB broadcast operations. Here a bank of tape machines send the programs in multiple languages to the various transmitter sites. As the world famous "pitada" (time tone) sounds, computers switch lines and tape decks, as over a half-dozen languages are coordinated and sent out. Should some breakdown occur, carts of emergency music automatically start to fill the void. On the half hour, other prerecorded station identification messages begin at the behest of the computer to offer a smooth transition from one program or one language to another.

Getting the Signal Out

HCJB operates two transmitter sites in the Quito area, plus several relays of the FM station around Ecuador. High on Mount Pichincha over-

looking the city, HCJB has its directional 50 kW AM transmitter and the FM tower. Here also is a passive microwave reflector which bounces the signal from Quito to the shortwave site at Pifo.

To visit the Pifo site is an awesome experience. From here, the signal and message of HCJB is beamed around the world. Just over 100 acres are filled with huge antennas, each directed toward a particular part of the world. Over 30 separate antennas, ranging from a simple dipole, through curtains and a cubical quad, to the world's largest broadcast antenna—the steerable—are used around the clock.

In the transmitter hall, 12 shortwave transmitters ranging from 10,000 to 500,000 watts hum with activity. Some of those transmitters involve interesting stories. Two of them, low power, are actually owned and operated by the Quechua Indian churches of the Andes. HCJB engineers built them during spare time, and maintain them for the churches. These broadcast only Quechua language programs. In another part of the building are two Siemens single band transmitters which HCJB recently obtained from the Swiss government. Using a minimum carrier, transmissions from these transmitters have been well received throughout the world, and are opening a door to future experimental broadcasts.

Within the hall are also two HCJB-built transmitters, one of 500 kW and the newest, 100 kW. Constructed at HCJB's transmitter engineering facility in Elkhart, Indiana, they provide good service at a lower cost than a commercially purchased unit. Among HCJB's older antennas are one from RCA and one from the Harris Corporation. There is also a stand-by 25 kW mediumwave transmitter at Pifo for use when the Pichincha site is out of service.

Outside are two of the most unique swimming pools in the world. Surrounded by snow-

capped volcanoes and HCJB's massive antenna farm, the pools are heated by an exchange system which provides cooling for the transmitters and enjoyment for HCJB personnel.

To the east, over the continental divide where water begins its long flow through the Amazon basin to the Atlantic, is the Papallacta hydroelectric generating plant. This facility utilizes two generators to provide most of the power for the Pifo transmitting facility. Total electric output is 6 million watts. The powerline from Papallacta to Pifo runs 25 miles, passing over the continental divide through altitudes up to 14,000 feet.

A "Listener-friendly" Station

Many DXers will say that their first QSL card came from HCJB. The Voice of the Andes has a very generous QSL policy which offers six cards per year. The 1991 theme for the cards features the equipment of HCJB. For 1992, HCJB will feature the children of Ecuador on its QSL cards. In addition, during 1991, two special cards were offered, one in May honoring the 30th anniversary of the *DX Party Line* program, and one in July for reception of a special "Studio 9" call-in originating from Mt. Cayambe, a snow-capped volcano located exactly on the equator.

While HCJB is easily heard in the Americas at night after 00:30 on 9745 and 15155 kHz, and 21455 single side band, a more interesting challenge is to hear the 10 kW Quechua broadcasts on 3220 kHz from 08:30 until 14:30 UTC.

HCJB is celebrating almost a half-dozen anniversaries this year, but it continues to look ahead. A new 100 kW HCJB transmitter is due to come on line late in the year, and others are under construction. The station also owns separate local stations in Guayaquil, Ecuador, Panama, plus several AM and FM facilities along the Texas-Mexican border.

In addition, HCJB is involved with FEBC, Trans World Radio, and ELWA in a project called "World by 2000." This cooperative effort will expand facilities, add new broadcast sites, and increase the number of languages offered by the four broadcast entities. The goal is to allow all people of the world the opportunity to hear the Gospel broadcast in their own language by the year 2000. Toward this end, the group has identified around 150 languages of over one million people who currently do not have Christian broadcasts in their own language.

From the high Andes Mountains of South America, the Voice of the Andes HCJB continues to broadcast to the world. Known as a friendly station to listeners and DXers, it will probably continue to be one of the most popular broadcasts on the air in the next 60 years.



Consult the Shortwave Guide on page 62 for a complete schedule of HCJB's English broadcasts.