

EARLY BROADCASTING

Radio and Marjorie Lee Dodd

BY JERRY BERG

It's a pleasure to those interested in old radio when the executor of a will recognizes that something radio-related might be of historic interest. When we received photocopies of the notebooks kept by a lady radio listener of the 1920s, which were not in article form, we were not sure how to handle them. Of course, we turned to Jerry Berg, whom we like to call "the official storyteller of the history of shortwave radio." Jerry graciously agreed to look through the material and turn it into this informative article. (Editor)

What would you expect to be the late night pastime of an attractive young wife in 1927 Hollywood, California? If you are a long distance radio fan, the obvious answer would be "DXing." And in the case of Marjorie Lee Dodd, you would be right.

The late 1920s were the "in between" years for DXing broadcast stations. In the early part of the decade, everyone seemed to be a DXer, staying up late at night to seek out signals from far away cities and towns. By 1927, the fad had subsided, and shortwave broadcast DXing had not yet arrived. But radio in all its forms held great fascination. Stations had their own personalities, announcers had their own followings, and many listeners were still captivated by the prospect of "distance." There were many reasons to "listen in," as Marjorie Lee Dodd no doubt discovered.

Marjorie Dodd (her maiden name was Shearer) passed away in 1979 in Southgate, California, where she had moved after the war. Her interest in radio surfaced when the executor of her estate, Patti Kodel, her aunt by marriage, discovered her radio notebook, a combination of a log book of stations heard and a scrapbook of memorabilia received from the stations. It is a small looseleaf notebook, 5" x 7", where she made notes of reception and kept records of her listening accomplishments.

Serious listeners kept such logs in those days, especially if they wrote to the stations, which Marjorie did. Then, as now, you sent a reception report containing date, time, and frequency of reception, details of the programs heard and the quality of the signal, as well as some comments about the programs (such "applause" was important to stations in those days). You requested a QSL-card as an official verification of your reception, and then you moved on to the next station. Typically, it was hearing a new station, rather than listening to program content, that was the DXer's main motivation.



This photo of Marjorie Lee Dodd, the keeper of the radio log and notebook which is the subject of this article, was probably taken around 1927.

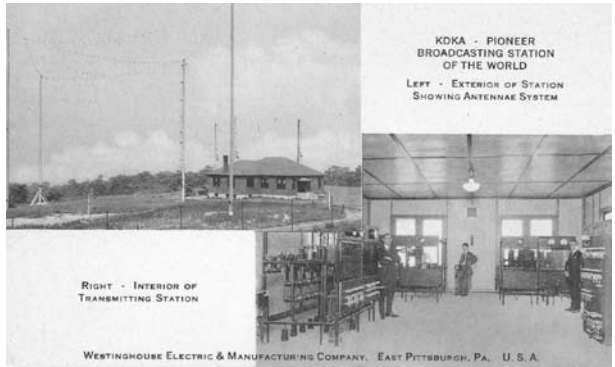
Marjorie's neat penmanship makes her notes easy to read. At the top of the each page she gave the station's call letters and location, and then the station's frequency in "kilocycles" and the wavelength in meters. She also made a note of the power of the station and its distance in miles, a common measure of DXing achievement in those days.

Although we don't know what kind of receiver Marjorie used, it must have been of better than average quality, for her notes describe good reception even from distant stations of modest power. Thousand watt KGW in Portland, Oregon, was "very clear," and like-powered KWKH in Shreveport, Louisiana was rated "clear, good volume." Even 500-watt WDAE in Tampa, Florida was heard "very clear and loud." Not all reception was strong. WORD, a 5 KW station in Batavia, Illinois, was received "faint but clear." And the fading that is common in broadcast band DXing is evident in her notes. KTHS ("Kum To Hot Springs"), the well-known 1 KW station in Hot

Springs, Arkansas, was "very faint at first, later clear and good volume."

Lest we think that hearing stations was easy in those days, keep in mind that, although 24-hour operation and the RF pollution of today were still in the distant future, interference from other stations and noise from local electrical devices were standard problems. And the receivers of the day had many limitations. Distant reception was still a challenge, but that was DXing's great attraction.

Marjorie's notebook contains entries for 39 stations that she heard during the six months from September 1927 to February 1928, plus a few loggings thereafter. I checked the powers against some old station lists, and her numbers checked out in all but a few cases. Of the 36 stations where the power could be ascertained, 11 were 500 watts, seven were 1,000 watts, and 10 were 5,000 watts. Only three were more than 5,000 watts. Many are stations with a well established place in broadcast history; e.g.,



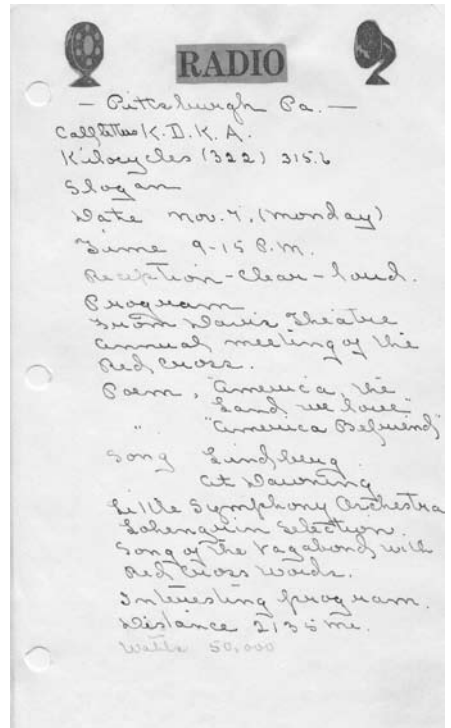
This KDKA QSL shows early views of the transmitter plant.

KDKA, KOA, WGN, WOAI, PWX. The complete list is shown in Table 1.

Marjorie wrote to the stations she heard, and she must have written good reports, for of the 39 stations in her log, she received replies from all but five. Most of the responses are QSL cards or letters or the like, or EKKO stamps. Typically, she pasted the cards into her log book, and she cut out station names and graphics from the letters or envelopes, together with the text of the letters



Marjorie cut out various parts of the reply from KWKH and put them in her notebook.



KDKA (notebook page) — As this notebook page shows, Marjorie kept good details of the program items she heard.

and the postmarks from the envelopes, so they would fit on the pages. She also decorated the pages with small newspaper cutouts of microphones and the word "Radio."

In addition, Marjorie's book contains a carefully written list of "Distant Stations," which includes those she had heard plus some others. There are lists of stations in Los Angeles, San Francisco and other parts of California, as well as Oregon and Washington. These include call letters, wavelengths, and, for some, slogans. Perhaps these were targets that she was listening for. There are also a few newspaper-style photos of radio personalities.

Several of Marjorie's loggings are noteworthy. One is 3XN in Whippany, New Jersey, on 484 meters. (I believe the station's actual wavelength was 475.9 meters, or 630 Kc) 3XN was an experimental Bell Telephone Laboratories station, and Marjorie has two form letters from Bell Labs stating that "the program to which you listened is a part of our development work on a 50 KW radio transmitter intended primarily for broadcasting applications, and it is helpful to us to know how its signals were received in your locality."

An interesting logging is 6XAN, which Marjorie indicates to be a portable "aeroplane" station affiliated with KMTR, a

500-watter in Hollywood. Although she has no verification for this one, her notes say that the plane was flying at 2,000-2,400 feet at a speed



This is Marjorie's QSL-card from WBBM, Chicago, attached to a page in her notebook.



KLZ-KLZ operated on 1010 Kc with 750 watts.

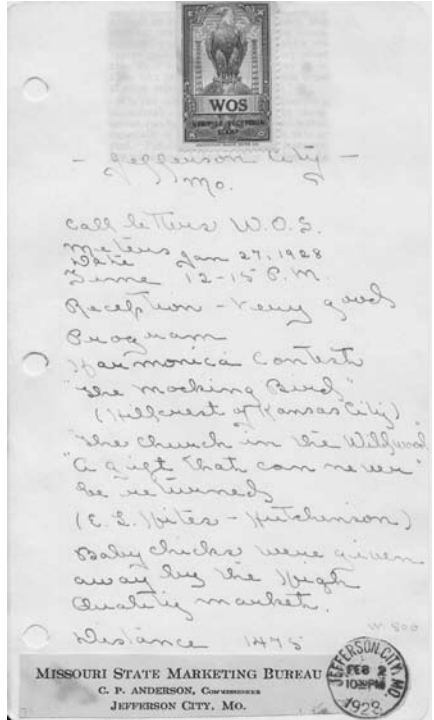
Table 1. A list of the stations logged by Marjorie Lee Dodd

3XN	Whippany, New Jersey	KTHS	Hot Springs, Arkansas
6XAN	California	KWKH	Shreveport, Louisiana
6XT	Probably via KFWO,	KWWW	Brownsville, Texas
	Avalon, California	PWX	Havana, Cuba
CFAC	Calgary, Alberta	WBAP	Fort Worth, Texas
CNRV	Vancouver, British Colombia	WBBM	Chicago, Illinois
CZF	Chihuahua, Mexico	WCCO	Minneapolis, Minnesota
KDAE	Tampa, Florida	WDAE	Tampa, Florida
KDKA	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	WEAR	Cleveland, Ohio
KFAD	Phoenix, Arizona	WGN	Chicago, Illinois
KFBU	Laramie, Wyoming	WIBO	Chicago, Illinois
KFDL	Oklahoma City, Oklahoma	WLIB	Chicago, Illinois
KGW	Portland, Oregon	WLW	Cincinnati, Ohio
KJR	Seattle, Washington	WOAI	San Antonio, Texas
KLZ	Denver, Colorado	WORD	Batavia, Illinois
KMA	Shenandoah, Iowa	WOS	Jefferson City, Missouri
KMOX	St. Louis, Missouri	WOW	Omaha, Nebraska
KOA	Denver, Colorado	WREN	Lawrence, Kansas
KOB	State College, New Mexico	WRR	Dallas, Texas
KOIL	Council Bluffs, Iowa	WTAM	Cleveland, Ohio
KSL	Salt Lake City, Utah		



An autographed photo of announcer John Harwald at WRR, which was operated by the City of Dallas, Texas.

of 85-125 mph, and that the program included a description of the city by night, the names of many musical selections, and the reading of a telegram from Indiana (apparently she was not the only one listening that night). This was at 7:00-8:00 P.M. on January 27, 1928. Marjorie was probably listening to a broadcast of the plane's signal over KMTR. A 1927 issue of RADEX, an early magazine for DXers, lists 6XAN as being affiliated with KRLO in Los Angeles. Marjorie gives no frequency for her reception, but RADEX indicates that it was licensed to operate on one of the shortwave frequencies allotted for early shortwave broadcast relaying in the 2,750-11,400 Kc range. Was Marjorie branching out into shortwave? Probably not, as this would

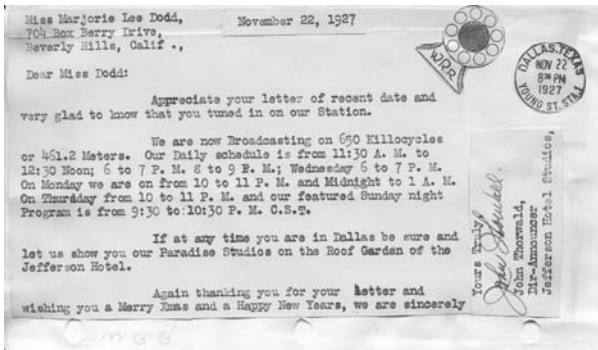


A WOS page in the notebook — If Marjorie received an EKKO stamp from a station, she pasted it on to the station's page in her notebook.

have required special equipment.

One station I cannot account for is KFDL, the location of which Marjorie gives as Oklahoma City. She shows the station on 284 meters. There was a KFDL in Denver on the all-purpose 360 meter channel (833 Kc), but it had disappeared from station lists several years earlier. Could she have meant Oklahoma City stations KFJF, 272.6 m. (1100 Kc), or WKY, 288.3 m. (1040)? Whatever it was that she heard on October 28, 1927, at 6:20 P.M., she reports reception as "clear, loud" and describes the program from the Liberty Theater as including the songs "Me And My Shadow" and "Under the Moon." A quick internet search reveals a Liberty Theater in Hartshorne, Oklahoma, that opened in 1919. Hartshorne is about 125 miles from Oklahoma City.

One of the most interesting items in Marjorie's collection is a postcard dated January 15, 1928, seemingly from a station 6XT, Stoke-on-Trent, England. There is nothing in Marjorie's notes about this station save for a page headed "London, England (?)" to which is pasted an



This letter from WRR, Dallas, invites Marjorie to visit their "Paradise Studios on the Roof Garden of the Jefferson Hotel."

envelope with the handwritten return address, "London, Eng. W.C., 6XT Stoke-on-Trent." A card, originally contained in the envelope, is headed "The Carlton Hotel, Pall Mall, S.W." and contains the following message in very small handwriting:

Dear Miss Dodd: It's jolly ripping of you to make us aware that your radio or wireless contraption supposedly or apparently tuned in our majesty's broadcast in the wee small hours. How topping and all that sort of rot! Now we must release the feline from the sack! With titters we must let you in, ha! ha! bah jove, how can we keep it, it's too royal really you know. To abbreviate a lengthy tale, one of H.M.S.s - a seagoing tug of sorts picked it up on a Magnaformer [a receiver of Radiart Laboratories in Chicago] and re-broadcast it from K.F.W.O. Regretting that we must withhold our reception stamp and thanking you for your ambitious dial twisting, We are, Most respectfully yours, 6XT by Tom Thumb.



This is the card from "Tom Thumb" of 6XT.

KFWO was a 250-watt station at Avalon, Catalina Island, about 22 miles from Los Angeles, which Marjorie should have been able to hear. I can find no record of a 6XT in England, but lists of that era do show a 6ST in Stoke, 1020 Kc, 200 watts. Marjorie could easily have misheard the call letters. However, surely no ship could have picked up 6ST and arranged for a real time rebroadcast on KFWO. Might KFWO have been broadcasting a recording of 6ST made some time earlier? Or was 6XT a Ham call? Or does the name "Tom Thumb" and the small handwriting on the card suggest that it was all some kind of spoof of 6ST by a "pirate" 6XT? We will probably never know. (For some fascinating reminiscences of 6ST in the 1920s, see the audio file "6ST Calling" at www.bbc.co.uk/stoke/content/articles/2006/03/13/history_radio_stoke_documentaries_feature.shtml).

While the pastime of scrapbooking had passed its heights by the 1920s, many people still kept scrapbooks, and radio is a theme that I have seen in other scrapbooks of the era. However, most fans focused in on radio personalities; Marjorie's interest was DX. Whether her interest in radio was short-lived, or whether this is but one of other notebooks that might have existed, we don't know. What is clear is that Marjorie had caught the same infectious DX bug that had delighted so many earlier listeners during radio's first generation, and would continue to do so in the future.

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Marjorie added the 1927 postmark from the envelope in which this card from W.L.W. was mailed.

Jerry Berg has been DXing on shortwave for over 50 years. He is the chair of the Committee to Preserve Radio Verifications, and he has written three definitive books about shortwave broadcasting history: *On the Short Waves 1923-1945., LISTENING on the Short Waves 1945 to Today, and BROADCASTING on the Short Waves 1945 to Today.* More on his doings can be found at www.ontheshortwaves.com.