

## **WRUL and *The World Wide Listener***

by

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Boston's WRUL was certainly among America's most famous international shortwave stations, maybe its most famous. Its origins go back to 1931, when Walter S. Lemmon, originally the engineer for *Radio News* broadcast band station WRNY in New Jersey, and by then the general manager of the bankrupt station's successor project, Aviation Broadcasting Corp., which included a shortwave station, W2XAL, bought Aviation and moved the shortwave station to Boston under new call letters, W1XAL. The station operated under the name Shortwave Broadcasting Corp. It was on the air intermittently, often relaying local BCBer WEEL.

In 1934, Lemmon established a non-profit educational organization, the World Wide Broadcasting Foundation, to produce educational programming for his station. This was the beginning of a rich heritage for WRUL, which featured serious educational programming, most of it developed specifically for a shortwave audience, and which also gave strong support to the Allied war effort (and, in particular, Europe-bound "freedom" broadcasts). Much of the Foundation's programming was produced under the name "World Radio University" or "World University of the Air." "Dedicated to Enlightenment" became the station's motto. WRUL's programs were by far the best of any of the American shortwave broadcasters. (The call letters were changed to WRUL in 1939 when the United States replaced the international shortwave broadcasters' experimental "X" calls with traditional four-letter call signs.)

One of Lemmon's outreach (and fund raising) strategies was the station's World Wide Listeners' League (earlier "Club"), which by April 1940 had members in 30 countries. For \$2 a year, a member received a good-looking monthly magazine of 20 pages or more called *The World Wide Listener*. It appears that the magazine was published from October 1938 to December 1941. We have posted two copies of *The World Wide Listener*, one from [October 1939](#), the other from [January 1940](#).

*The World Wide Listener* reflected the station's high-brow mission. Typical content included articles on topics such as democracy, world peace, international confederation, astronomy, authors and literature, sports, aviation, and poetry; and news of "goodwill" programs in languages other than English, church services, and special "courses" on music, radio technology, and basic English. Often the courses were supplemented by written materials. Also found in *The World Wide Listener* were time and frequency schedules, descriptions of upcoming programs, photos of the WRUL programming and broadcasting facilities, and letters from listeners.

As a serious print vehicle for effective, program-focused communication between shortwave station and listener, *The World Wide Listener* set a standard that few others have matched.

### **Reference:**

Andre J. E. Mostert, Jr., *A History of WRUL: The Walter S. Lemmon Years, 1931–1960*, Master's thesis (Salt Lake City, UT: Brigham Young University, Communications, 1969).