Radio Classes

Abbot Relates Radio History At University

Michigan Pioneer In Field Of School Broadcasting; Station Opened In 1923

The University was a pioneer in the field of educational broadcasting and its career on the air dates back almost to the beginning of radio, when in 1923 a group of engineering students set up the University station WCBC, according to Prof. Waldo Abbot, director of broadcasting.

With the rapid technical advance of broadcasting the University facilities soon became antiquated and WCBC's license was removed when the Board of Regents decided not to invest in the necessary but expensive equipment. Michigan was not long off the air, for Dean Edward Kraus acquired WJR as an outlet for University programs. The University has taken a leading role in educational radio broadcasting since then over WWJ, WJR and WMBC.

In contrast with the modern, up-to-date facilities of Morris Hall, the University's set-up in those early days was almost primitively crude. A long, narrow classroom on the fourth floor of the old University Hall served as a studio. Its acoustics were particularly bad; the only reason for its selection was its convenient shape.

It had other disadvantages as well. Two thousand mice used in President Clarence Cook Little's cancer experiments were kept in the next room and proved to be capable competition with the dissemination of education going on in the studio. University "piano carriers" were kept busy because of the necessity of carrying equipment up four flights of stairs for each broadcast. Moreover to ask such men as President Hutchins to climb four flights of stairs for a four-minute broadcast was a great imposition.

The result was the acquisition of Morris Hall, formerly the residence of Prof. George Morris, for the broadcasting station. Since the acquisition of Morris Hall, Professor Abbot, of the speech department, has served as director of broadcasting.

The success of the broadcasting service, according to Professor Abbot, has been in large measure due to the unflagging interest of the faculty in making the influence of the University felt in every home in the state. No faculty member has refused to speak on one of these programs and their subjects have been as varied as the instruction offered in the classrooms.

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