Document 53

First Trans-Atlantic Commercial Radio Broadcast

belfast history

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Ron Brown <ron@ronaldobrownconsulting.com> Mon, Oct 28, 1:30 PM (10 days ago)

to heritage

Dear Sir or Madam,

I was referred to you by Peter Machett of the BBC Enquiries Team. I hope that you can help me. I am the IEEE (the world-wide electrical and computer engineers professional organization) Historian for the Region 1, the Northeastern United States.

I am working to memorialize the first trans-Atlantic commercial radio broadcast which took place on March 14, 1925 at approximately 6:15PM, New York time, between London's Savoy Hotel and WJZ New York and WRC Washington where it was broadcast to their listeners.

I have significant documentation from the US side, but little from the UK side. The *New York Times* reported extensively on it on March 15, 1925. To summarize the event:

- The BBC's 2LO London broadcast the program from the Savoy Hotel.
- The broadcast was carried from London to overseas broadcast station 5XX in Chelmsford, England.
- The signal was broadcast using long wave from Chelmsford over the Atlantic Ocean
- The signal was received by the Beverage (Wave) antenna and associated receivers at RCA's receiver facility in Belfast, Maine.
- This signal was rebroadcast by short wave by 1XAO, Belfast to an experimental receiver in Van Cortlandt Park, New York.
- Western Union landlines transmitted the signal to WJZ New York and WRC Washington, DC for broadcast to listeners, among them was RCA's David Sarnoff who listened at his home in Mt. Vernon NY.

The event was an early example of coordinated systems engineering between engineers on both sides of the Atlantic.

There is some evidence that the broadcast from Chelmsford was received by General Electric's WGY Schenectady NY and rebroadcast live to its listeners. I am still researching this.

To be recognized by the IEEE as an historic milestone, I require additional information. Specifically, frequencies, power, and any design details of the equipment used. I hope that you can help me with some of this information as well as any other information and/or photographs that might be relevant.. Of course, you will be given full credit for whatever you provide. We also plan to work with the IEEE UK and Ireland Section to similarly commemorate the event in the UK with a ceremony and plaque at a suitable location.

If you cannot provide information, I would be appreciative if you would provide me with names of persons who might.

If you are interested in the documentation that I have collected about this event in which the BBC was an equal participant, I would be pleased to provide electronic copies for your records.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Ron Brown

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10:02 AM (4 hours ago)

Sean Vis <sean.vis@bbc.co.uk>

to Ron

Dear Ron,

Thank you for your enquiry.

The Radio Times listings for the 2LO station on 14th March 1925 indicate that the programme *The Savoy Opheans* was broadcast at 22:30 from the Savoy Hotel. I assume this is the programme you are referring to?

I was pleasantly surprised to see that some material on the 5XX station at Chelmsford has survived. The technical information that I was able to find is listed below:

- It appears to have been a 'high powered' 25kW station which operated on a wavelength of 1600 metres.
- The aerial system was facilitated by two 450ft steel masts.
- Four large valves in the master oscillator circuit operated at a potential of 9000 volts.

- The equipment was built by the Marconi Company.

Hopefully this information is of some use – let me know if you have any further queries.

Kind Regards,

Sean Vis
Archivist, Written Archives Centre

BBC Archives
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Ron Brown <ron@ronaldobrownconsulting.com> 2:14 PM (38 minutes ago)

to Sean

Dear Sean,

Thank you the information you sent. This is the type of important 'meat' that the evaluation panel will be looking for. I have already incorporated it into the draft proposal. Importantly, the footnote referencing the source of the information reads: *Private email dated November 7, 2019 from Sean Vis, Archivist, Archive Centre, BBC Written Archives, , Caversham Park, Reading England, RG4 8TZ.*

If you find additional information about this ground breaking event, I would be appreciative if you would pass it on to me.

Thank you for your efforts.

Regards,

Ron Brown