Preserving the Story of Greater Boston’s Pioneering Broadcast Stations 1XE and WGI

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Station 1XE, later known as WGI and then WARC, was also known as “the AMRAD station.” But by any name, it was one of the first radio stations in the United States to broadcast voice and music, beginning in 1916. It had one of radio’s first women announcers; it offered some of the first regular newscasts; and in early 1922, it began providing college courses by radio. The AMRAD station was also home to many of greater Boston’s best-loved entertainers and announcers, some of whom went on to national fame. Yet today, this pioneering radio station is all but forgotten. Media historian Donna Halper takes a closer look at the AMRAD station’s history, discussing its important role in early broadcasting, and why it deserves to be remembered.

Station 1XE, later known as WGI in 1922 and WARC in 1925, was a pioneering radio station and one of the first in the United States to broadcast voice and music. The station was often called the “AMRAD station” because it was owned by the American Radio and Research Corporation, which manufactured radio receivers and other amateur radio equipment, and had roots that could be traced back to 1915. Some people who worked there believed it was the first station, and during the early 1920s, the station often used the slogan “Where Broadcasting Began.” While historians continue to debate which station was the first commercial station ever to broadcast, it is a fact that this station was one of the first licensed stations in greater Boston, and it is believed to be the first station in Boston to broadcast voice and music. This often comes as a surprise, because when most people think of Boston’s radio history, the name of WBZ-AM immediately comes to mind. Certainly, WBZ is a station with a storied history, and its longevity is impressive (it went on the air in mid-September 1921, and still uses the same call letters), but it was not the first station in the greater Boston area. Back in 1921, WBZ was nowhere near Boston; it was located at the Westinghouse plant in East Springfield, Massachusetts, more than eighty miles away, and it did not open a Boston studio until early 1924.

A timeline of key dates in AMRAD’s broadcasting history is shown in the accompanying sidebar (see next page). The AMRAD station opened its studio facilities in late 1915, on the Tufts College (today Tufts University) campus at Medford Hillside, (see Fig. 1), about six miles from downtown Boston. According to Radio Service Bulletins,
AMRAD TIMELINE: KEY DATES IN BROADCASTING

Fall 1910: Tufts freshmen Harold J. Power and Joseph Prentiss create the Tufts College Wireless Society.

Fall 1911: Tufts Wireless Society opens its first station with equipment donated by the Signal Corps.

June 1914: Harold Power and Joseph Prentiss graduate from Tufts College; they will become the founders of the American Radio and Research Corporation (AMRAD).

June 1915: Incorporation of AMRAD.

August 1915: Agreement signed between Harold Power and Tufts College for construction of AMRAD/Tufts shared facility.

November 1915: AMRAD’s first research laboratory completed; first broadcast tower in operation.

March 1916: First documented broadcasts of voice and music at the AMRAD station.

February 1917: Call sign 1XE first appears in the Radio Service Bulletin.

May 1918: Eunice Randall is hired by AMRAD as a “draftslady”; she will become 1XE’s first female announcer and one of the first in New England.

August 1920: New and expanded AMRAD plant is completed.

September 1920: 1XE is broadcasting sporadically; first documented mention of the AMRAD station’s call letters post-war, in the “calls heard” section of QST.

February 1921: Call sign 1XE first appears after WWI in the Radio Service Bulletin.

May 1921: Station 1XE begins regular schedule of daily broadcasts.

November 1921: Eunice Randall gives her first radio bedtime story.

December 1921: Boston Mayor James Michael Curley gives his first political talk by radio; economist Roger Babson gives his first radio business talk.

February 1922: 1XE becomes WGI, per order of the Department of Commerce.

April 1922: Tufts College professors begin a series of educational courses by radio; noted black actor Charles S. Gilpin gives his first radio dramatic reading; WGI broadcasts its first commercials, but Radio Inspector orders the station to stop.

January 1924: “Big Brother” Bob Emery debuts popular children’s show, the Big Brother Club.

March 1925: WGI changes its call letters to WARC.

April 1925: News reports announce AMRAD is going through bankruptcy proceedings.

May 1925: Without warning, the AMRAD station ceases to broadcast.

December 1925: Powel Crosley Jr. announces he has purchased AMRAD and WARC, says manufacturing of radios will continue; promises WARC will return to the air (it never does).

1930: Crosley abandons plans to keep AMRAD factory going, shuts it down.
Fig. 1. The first AMRAD research laboratory, complete with a 300-foot radio tower, was built in 1915 on Medford Hillside, just north of the Tufts college buildings. (Miller, *Light on the Hill*, p. 393)
The AMRAD station was first licensed as 1XE in December of 1916 or January of 1917. However, newspaper articles attest to the fact that, with or without a license, the AMRAD station began broadcasting voice and music as early as March 1916, and sporadically thereafter. And there is further evidence in newspaper archives that 1XE began a regular broadcast schedule by May of 1921.

The AMRAD station never had opulent studios or a big promotional budget, and it rarely operated with more than 100 watts. Yet despite frequent financial problems, it managed to broadcast for nearly a decade, and during that time, it had many unique accomplishments. For example, the station hired Eunice Randall, one of radio’s first female announcers, who also helped with engineering, read bedtime stories to young listeners, and was a licensed ham radio operator. It broadcast a morning exercise-by-radio program aimed at helping listeners to lose weight. It pioneered some of the earliest on-air adult education courses, featuring Tufts College professors. The station aired daily newscasts with reporters from a Boston newspaper, which included the latest police reports of stolen automobiles. In addition, the well-known economist Roger Babson hosted a weekly program in which he offered his perspectives on business. Station 1XE/WGI was home to the “Big Brother Club,” the most popular children’s show in town. The AMRAD station may also have been the first to run paid commercials, much to the consternation of the Federal Radio Inspector. Some of its performers, including Joe Rines, Bob Emery, and Hum & Strum, went on to earn national recognition. Yet today, few people know that the AMRAD station ever existed.

**Challenges in Researching Early Radio**

There are several possible explanations for why other early commercial stations are much better known. One has to do with longevity; two of the earliest stations, KDKA in Pittsburgh and WWJ in Detroit, are still broadcasting, and thus still able to promote their claims to having been the first commercial station in continuous operation up to the present day. While 1XE/WGI was also broadcasting at that time and could join them in laying claim to being first, it went off the air in April 1925. And while many people whose careers began in Medford Hillside remembered the experience fondly even decades later, as the years passed, few were left to tell the AMRAD station’s story. As might be expected, most radio fans were more interested in current stations, rather than remembering stations from the early 1920s that were long defunct.

The partial loss of the station’s archives (including correspondence files) after its bankruptcy, and the change of ownership in mid-1925 also made it difficult to keep the 1XE/WGI story alive. The building that once housed the station was destroyed by a fire in 1972, and all that survives from the AMRAD station today are some individual pieces of correspondence between station management and several Tufts’ deans and professors, as well as some exchanges (many related
to the state of the station’s finances) between AMRAD’s owner Harold J. Power and the president of Tufts (all preserved in the university’s archives). Additionally, there are a few memos and letters that were saved by people who worked for 1XE/WGI. (I was fortunate to talk with several former “Amradians” before they died; their recollections were invaluable to my research.)

The loss of the original files, including station logs, is especially unfortunate since radio editors of that time were familiar with the information they contained. Lewis Whitcomb (better known as “Whit”) was the radio editor for the Boston Post until he joined WEEI radio in late 1924. Writing for the Chamber of Commerce’s journal Current Affairs in 1925, Whit claimed that these original files documented that the Medford station, then known as 1XE, began broadcasting before station KDKA did on November 2, 1920: “. . . [It] appears from records available at WGI that the Medford station was broadcasting regular programs at least a month before . . . KDKA . . .” The “Calls Heard” feature in the October 1920 issue of QST provides definitive proof that station 1XE was transmitting as early as September 1920. Other reporters of the mid-1920s also alluded to the station’s files; I only wish they had been saved.

And then, there is the problem of not knowing what kinds of programs were on the air in those early days. Since neither transcriptions nor audiotape had been invented, historians are unable to form any opinions by listening to what early broadcasts sounded like. I do have a rare transcription that was made in 1937 for an anniversary celebration at Boston’s WEEI; it contains a re-creation of a typical 1921 broadcast featuring Eunice Randall, one of 1XE/WGI’s original announcers. While it is an interesting artifact, it would have been amazing to hear radio as it was being performed back in those early years. And although station program listings (printed in many newspapers during the 1920s) can be helpful, they do not reveal whether the program that was scheduled actually was aired, and if so, how it sounded. In later years, radio critics like Robert Landry of Variety or Howard Fitzpatrick of the Boston Post gave their assessment of the programs; but few radio critics existed in broadcasting’s formative years. Further, some station listings in the newspapers only said “music” or “phonograph records,” which doesn’t reveal which selections the station was playing, or who announced the program. Thus, given the lack of actual broadcasts from 1919–1928 (some of the first transcriptions did not begin to appear, or get utilized by radio, until 1929), and the lack of in-depth information about early programs, most of what we know about those early days mainly lives on in the writings of those who were there, as quoted in books, newspapers, and magazines, as well as whatever correspondence has survived.

Another challenge in researching the earliest stations is that much of what was covered in those formative years focused almost exclusively on the technology. This is understandable, since magazines such as QST (which debuted in 1915) and Radio News (which debuted as Radio
Amateur News in July 1919, as we see in Fig. 2) were founded by individual entrepreneurs or by companies that were either involved in amateur radio or sold electrical supplies and equipment. If you read newspapers and magazines from this era, you will also notice there were many names for the new wireless

Fig. 2. Cover of the first issue of Radio Amateur News. (Courtesy of the American Radio History website)
apparatus—and even for radio broadcasting itself. Some newspapers, for example, tended to speak of the “wireless telephone.” As the name indicated, it was envisioned as a new kind of telephone service, one that could transmit voice messages across the ocean without the need for wires. But by late 1919, a station that sent out the voice messages or music was called a “radiophone station,” and the apparatus that was associated with the ability to transmit voice and music in a broadcast was called a radiophone; clearly, it did not refer to a person-to-person telephone conversation. Gradually, as more commercial stations came on the air in 1921, “radiophone” and “wireless phone” became the most commonly used terms when discussing a broadcasting station; this would not change until the height of the “radio craze” in 1922–1923, when the word “radio” finally came into common use.

But by whatever name, there was not much coverage of the development of radio broadcasting in the period from 1910–1920. Oral histories, often compiled decades later, are certainly useful. But they can also be unreliable, given people’s tendency to get certain dates wrong or make themselves seem more important than they really might have been. The few newspapers that did report on wireless telephony experiments in that era generally did so by profiling the inventor or experimenter. However, there was little ongoing coverage in the mass-appeal newspapers and magazines. Sometimes a newspaper would have a piece about a local amateur radio operator, or report on what the local college wireless club was doing. But if you did not subscribe to a ham radio publication, or if you were not well versed in engineering, you would not have found very much about radio in the typical newspapers and magazines of that time.

Impact of the “Radio Craze”

During 1920 and 1921, only a few commercial stations were broadcasting; in February 1922, there were still no more than thirty-five. But by mid-1922, the “radio craze” had begun. Suddenly, interest in “radiophone broadcasting” expanded dramatically, with hundreds of new stations going on the air—people of all ages were eager to have a set of their own. Mentions of radio could be heard in popular songs, seen on greeting cards (see Fig. 3), and even President Warren G. Harding had a radio set installed at the White House. While broadcasting was now reaching the masses—as opposed to being perceived as just a hobby for amateurs—it did not necessarily result in more coverage from the press. In fact, reactions were decidedly mixed. Some publications added a radio page (like the Boston Herald) or a radio column (like the Boston Traveler and the Boston Globe), but many others decided to completely ignore the radio craze. These editors regarded radio as competition, and they feared that writing about it would encourage people to stop buying their publications. While most magazines were weeklies or monthlies, the daily newspapers felt they were especially at a disadvantage. Although they published numerous editions throughout the day, there was still a lag time between when an event occurred...
and when the reporting reached the public. Radio did not have this problem; it was the first mass medium that could bring people to an event in real time. And so, in cities where newspaper editors believed radio was a threat to circulation, we find little information about the local stations that were on the air. Even the Medford Mercury, the newspaper nearest to where 1XE/WGI broadcast, was slow to report very much about what the station was doing.

Fortunately for researchers, there were more and more newspapers that decided to report on radio. Some even hired a radio editor to talk about the announcers and entertainers (who were often one and the same). In that era of live radio, if a guest didn’t show up, the announcer would fill the time somehow, often by singing or playing the piano. One of the first newspapers to cover radio, the Detroit News, had an excellent reason for doing so. The Detroit News put its own radio station on the air in August 1920 using the amateur license 8MK, which later transitioned to WBL and then WWJ after receiving a broadcasting license. The News was the first newspaper to own a radio station, and anything that was on 8MK received thorough coverage, including a page-one report of election returns. Even in cities where no newspapers owned a station, some newspaper editors saw an opportunity to make their readers happy. These editors understood that readers were fascinated by radio; and rather than ignoring it, some decided to embrace it, not only by writing about it, but also by providing a daily news broadcast, as the Boston Traveler did as early as April 1922 (see Fig. 4).

Modern researchers have been further aided by all the new magazines that emerged beginning in 1922. The “radio craze” resulted in numerous publications...
that were aimed at radio listeners as well as experimenters who wanted to build their own equipment. A good example of a mass-appeal magazine was *Radio Digest*, which featured station listings as well as stories about key stations, profiles of some of the performers, and descriptions of unique programs.\(^{33}\) Another interesting publication was *Radio in the Home*, which combined reporting on new and more stylish receiving sets with stories about the celebrities who enjoyed using them. While not every issue of these magazines has survived, many have been digitized (a great benefit for scholars of early broadcasting). One excellent repository for old radio magazines in digital form, including many technical publications and a wide variety of mass-appeal magazines, is the website AmericanRadioHistory.com.

Stations 1XE and WGI received a few mentions in these publications (their call signs appeared in program listings, and certain announcers or guests were the subject of occasional articles); the AMRAD station was also written about in some of the Boston newspapers).\(^{34}\) But the station’s accomplishments were quickly superseded by the stories of stations owned by bigger companies, especially stations that could afford to pay for big-name talent. In 1921 and 1922, when broadcasting was still new, the dominant style of reporting focused on stations that were the first to do something (such as broadcasting a World Series game or airing a talk by a famous celebrity). Also popular were stories about how amazed the listeners were to hear such wonderful programs. The reporters who covered radio commonly referred to it as a “marvel,” “a wonder,” and a “miracle.”\(^ {35}\) But as radio ceased to be a novelty, listeners increasingly developed favorite stations and favorite programs, and they wanted to know more about the performers and announcers they were hearing. They also began to expect consistent, high-quality programming. This trend was accelerated when the National Broadcasting

![Fig. 4. Announcement of daily radio newscast.](Boston Herald, Mar. 31, 1922, p. 19)
Company came along in 1926, followed soon after by the Columbia Broadcasting System. The existence of networks made it possible for famous performers and popular programs to be heard from coast to coast. Meanwhile, many small stations that had been popular in the early 1920s, 1XE and WGI among them, were unable to compete. These stations gradually faded from the public’s memory.

As a media historian, I believe studying pioneering stations like 1XE and WGI can provide an important opportunity to explore how smaller radio stations, especially those not owned by deep-pocketed corporations, tried to find creative ways to stay on the air. After all, this was a time when “direct advertising” (what we now call “commercials”) was frowned upon. Herbert Hoover, then the secretary of the Department of Commerce, believed broadcasting should be a public service, and as such, stations should not air any direct advertising at all. This put smaller stations at a disadvantage as they tried to generate the revenue to pay the bills each month. What ultimately doomed AMRAD was its inability to remain financially solvent. It is worth noting that another researcher, the late Alan Douglas, has written eloquently about the business and manufacturing side of the American Radio and Research Corporation. He discussed in great detail the financial dilemmas faced by AMRAD, and the reasons for them. But rather than researching the technology or the business aspects, my focus has always been on social history: how early radio affected (and changed) people’s lives, and how certain previously unknown local performers became household names, or even national celebrities. Station 1XE/WGI was the launching point for so many entertainers and announcers. Listeners were eager to learn more about the voices they heard, and the station issued promotional materials, usually post cards or pamphlets, to show the audience what the performers and announcers looked like. One example from 1923 appears in Fig. 5. Identifying who owned these radio voices and what their role was at the station is an essential part of the history of broadcasting.

The Man Who Founded 1XE/WGI

By all accounts, the idea for what became 1XE originated with Harold J. Power. Born in Everett, Massachusetts, in 1892, he fell in love with wireless telegraphy and amateur radio when he was a young boy, and by the time he was eleven, he had built a back yard shed where he could send and receive Morse code messages. He also built a rudimentary receiver, but it worked only sporadically; he would eagerly hurry home from school to try to improve its reliability. After graduating from Everett High School in 1910, Power entered Tufts College. By then, he was already an experienced ham radio operator, one of the many boys and young men fascinated by wireless technology. Power had also made progress in building receiving equipment, and he was considered enough of an expert on wireless telegraphy that Everett High School hired him to teach an evening school class on the subject. He later told an interviewer that at first, he taught
for free because the school was not sure there would be enough interest to sustain the course. But when it proved to be very popular (thirty students signed up immediately), he was officially hired as an evening school instructor, and the money he earned helped pay for his college education.40

One of the students in that class was Guy R. Entwistle, who became Power’s classroom assistant. Entwistle subsequently enrolled at Tufts, where he continued to work with Power while studying engineering. In 1914, while still a student, Entwistle joined the newly-founded Amateur Radio Relay League, and he went on to serve as the organization’s New England Division Manager.41 After graduating from Tufts in 1918, he became the director of the Boston-based Massachusetts Radio and Telegraph School (later renamed the Massachusetts Radio School).42 He remained there for more than four decades and was well known in the field of vocational education, training students for jobs in all aspects of broadcasting. In the early 1920s, he occasionally went on the air at 1XE/WGI to give talks about the latest trends in technology.

Lest this biographical sketch seem like a digression, Guy Entwistle is an important part of the 1XE story. For one thing, as the President of the Tufts Wireless Association, he was responsible for the operation of its amateur wireless station (1JJ), which occupied the same building as the AMRAD station when AMRAD made its first broadcasts in early 1916. And for another, he was able to tell that story to a mass audience. In mid-February 1921, he was hired as the amateur radio reporter for the Boston Traveler newspaper, where he wrote a column three
days a week, and in addition to reporting what local amateurs were doing, he also covered 1XE’s programming. By 1922, he became the Traveler’s radio editor, and he increasingly wrote about the area’s commercial stations. But it was Entwistle’s 1921 reporting that turned out to be so invaluable. He was an eyewitness to the growth of broadcasting in Boston as it transitioned from amateur experimenters to commercial broadcasting. And he was also one of the few reporters who personally knew the staff of 1XE/WGI. Interestingly, it was thanks to his radio column that I first encountered the name of Eunice Randall in a column about the positive reception she was receiving as an announcer for 1XE. Wanting to know more about her led me to research broadcasting’s women announcers and performers, and later, that led to a book—Invisible Stars: A Social History of Women in American Broadcasting, the second edition of which was published in 2014.

How AMRAD and 1XE Began
Encouraged by physics professor Henry G. Chase, Harold Power and fellow Tufts student Joseph A. Prentiss, who was also a fan of ham radio, co-founded the Tufts Wireless Association in 1911. Power told a reporter for the Boston Post that the association intended to conduct ongoing experiments in wireless telegraphy and to develop “a sending station with a radius of 100 to 200 miles that was capable of receiving messages from any distance.” The new Tufts wireless station would be one of the best and most up-to-date in the country. One thing I noticed when reading local newspaper interviews with Power—he was not lacking in self-confidence. He wanted reporters, many of whom knew little about wireless technology, to see him as an expert, so that they would quote him when they needed explanations for current trends. And when quoted, he often used hyperbole, asserting that his latest technological innovation would be bigger than anything that had come before it. Reporters seemed happy to go along with this. In one article about the Tufts wireless station, the writer says that Power was “known as the pioneer wireless operator of New England.” In another article, the reporter noted that Power had just invented a device that would make messages audible, even if there were electrical interference during storms. The reporter helpfully agreed with Power that this new device was “the biggest invention in wireless telegraphy since Marconi’s discovery.”

While Power quickly mastered the art of self-promotion, it was also true that he had some very real accomplishments. For one, thanks in large part to his skill with the wireless, he was able to work for several of the most important business leaders of his day. In the summer of 1911, while still a college student, he served as the wireless operator on the Nora, the private yacht of wealthy business executive John Jacob Astor. Tragically, Astor was one of the people who died the following year when the Titanic sank. Power remembered him as “one of the finest men . . . that I ever met.” Then, in the summer of 1913, Power served as the wireless operator on the Corsair, the private yacht of financier J. Pierpont
Morgan’s son Jack (J. Pierpont Morgan, Jr.). This relationship would later prove helpful, as Jack Morgan, who was put in charge of his father’s financial empire when the elder Morgan died, agreed to provide financing for Power’s broadcasting and manufacturing venture.

Undoubtedly, one factor that influenced Morgan’s decision was when Power gave him an impressive demonstration of wireless telephony. In mid-March 1916, Power transmitted his second experimental broadcast from AMRAD’s studios at Medford Hillside. Power’s first music broadcast had taken place at the beginning of March, and some local amateurs who were accustomed to Morse code, were surprised to hear music.\textsuperscript{49}

For this particular broadcast, Power had one person he wanted in the audience, and so he notified Morgan beforehand to invite him to listen in. Morgan was heading home from England on a ship and was about seventy-five miles southeast of Cape Cod Massachusetts, but as requested, he went into the ship’s wireless room. To his surprise, he was able to hear a three-hour broadcast of voice and music—various phonograph recordings that included marches, opera, and popular vocals.\textsuperscript{50} Power’s stunt had the desired effect. He had already discussed his dream of performing important experiments with wireless technology, and now Morgan had heard for himself what wireless could do. Although few people knew it at the time, it was Morgan’s money (by some accounts, $350,000,\textsuperscript{51} and by others, as much as $850,000 before all was said and done\textsuperscript{52}) that turned Power’s vision into reality.

Several well-respected historians believe that AMRAD transmitted this broadcast under the special license 1XE. For example, ‘Tufts’ historian Russell E. Miller writes in his book \textit{Light on the Hill}: “Radio communication was made on the Tufts campus on the evening of March 18, 1916, when AMRAD, working with the Wireless Society as Station 1XE, broadcast three hours of phonograph music picked up in an area of over 100 miles, and interspersed with the customary code of ship to shore messages.”\textsuperscript{53} However, Miller does not cite any authority supporting his assertion that the AMRAD station used the 1XE call sign in this broadcast. To the contrary, the \textit{Boston Globe} reported a week later that the source of this broadcast had been “Classified as a Mystery,” and a great effort went into determining that it was the AMRAD station. If AMRAD had been using call letters, the source of the transmission would have been no mystery. Supporting the postulate that 1XE had not been assigned to the AMRAD station at that time is \textit{Radio Stations of the United States}, published by the Department of Commerce in July 1916,\textsuperscript{54} which listed all the known radio station call signs circa the publication date. Conspicuous by its absence from the list of radio stations of the United States in this document is 1XE. However, it does list the Tufts Wireless Society station under the call sign 1JJ, with Guy R. Entwistle listed as the owner.\textsuperscript{55}

Harold Power graduated from Tufts in 1914 with a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering.\textsuperscript{56} By the summer of 1915, he and fellow grad Joseph
Prentiss had founded the American Radio and Research Corporation (soon to be known as AMRAD). Located on the Tufts campus, the company’s building included a laboratory for scientific work and an adjacent room that could be used either for classes in wireless technology or to hold meetings of the Tufts Wireless Association. And a huge steel tower was also under construction, with plans for it to reach 304 feet.\textsuperscript{57} Harold Power became the president of AMRAD, and he was soon featured in several favorable profiles in the Boston newspapers (see Fig. 6). Most members of his team were Tufts graduates, current students, or family members (including his older brother John). Unfortunately, not long after the tower was completed it came right back down again. In late September, a severe storm with intense gusts of wind caused it to fall, nearly resulting in a train accident. The tower came to rest across the Boston and Maine Railroad tracks, and only quick action by the engineer stopped the train and prevented a catastrophe.\textsuperscript{58} The people who lived nearby had been concerned about the huge wireless tower, and when it fell, they undoubtedly hoped it would not be rebuilt. But it was—and this time, more precautions were taken to secure it.\textsuperscript{59} AMRAD was officially ready to embark upon manufacturing equipment and performing wireless experiments.

“Listening in” in 1921

Although its location was close to many of Tufts College buildings on the north side of College Hill, station 1XE was not a college station. Harold Power had obtained permission from the then-college president Hermon C. Bumpus to lease a plot of land and build the AMRAD laboratory and factory.\textsuperscript{60} He successfully made the case that AMRAD’s radio experiments would be of great practical benefit to Tufts students studying physics and engineering, as well as to the professors who were teaching these subjects. And during World War I, as historian Alan Douglas has pointed out, there was plenty of work. Manufacturing equipment for the military

Fig. 6. This photo of Harold J. Power was included in his profile that appeared in the Boston Post. (Sept. 25, 1915, p. 4)
became very lucrative for the new company, to the point where AMRAD had to hire more staff. By 1918, seventy-five people were working at the Medford Hillside factory.\textsuperscript{61}

Ultimately, a new and larger plant was necessary, and it opened for business in the summer of 1920 (see Fig. 7).\textsuperscript{62} The war had required that manufacturing for the military take precedence over experiments with voice and music, and amateur stations were not allowed to broadcast until the war was over. By 1919, the war had ended, and radio experiments resumed. However, there is little contemporaneous information about events from that time period. From correspondence written by former AMRAD employees years later, they recall the occasional broadcast of phonograph records or sports scores, and there was one time in late February 1919 when AMRAD installed a “wireless telephone” so that greetings to President Woodrow Wilson could be sent by Boston dignitaries as the ship he was on was approaching the harbor.\textsuperscript{63} Unfortunately, we do not know if this experimental transmission was successful. An AMRAD timeline of historical achievements claims it occurred, but I have found no verification in newspapers or other documents.

In the period from 1919–1920, much of what 1XE seems to have transmitted was in Morse code, with the objective of sending messages to more and more distant locations. According to employee Eunice Randall (later Eunice Randall Thompson), it wasn’t until early 1921 that some actual (and regular) programs were

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\caption{Construction of a new AMRAD factory and research laboratory was completed circa September 1920; the 300-foot 1XE tower appears in the background. (Author’s collection)}
\end{figure}
being broadcast. Eunice was in her late teens when she joined AMRAD in 1918. It wasn’t something she had planned to do; she had come to Boston from her native Mattapoisett, about 70 miles from Boston, to attend art school. When she ran out of money and needed a job, she found one at a company that normally would not have hired her. Most of the men were overseas during WW I, and AMRAD was desperate for someone who knew how to make technical drawings and blueprints—even if that someone was female. Eunice turned out to be a capable draftsman (or a “draftslady,” as she wanted to be called), and when 1XE went back on the air, she also turned out to be a capable announcer. In addition, she was an extremely versatile employee. She studied amateur radio and obtained her first-class license (her call letters were ICDP, and later W1MPP), and she knew how to do basic studio repairs. She could also demonstrate AMRAD equipment at trade shows and conferences. For example, we see her in Fig. 8 along with her AMRAD colleagues, Ken Thompson and Howard Tyzzer, at the New York Radio Show in March 1922. Eunice became well-known in greater Boston as the “Story Lady,” reading bedtime stories to children—and thanks to

Fig. 8. Eunice Randall was often called upon to demonstrate AMRAD equipment at trade shows. This photo shows (l-r) Eunice, Ken Thompson, and Howard Tyzzer at the New York Amateur Radio Show March 7, 1922. (Author’s collection)
how far AM signals carried, Eunice was soon receiving fan mail from listeners throughout the eastern United States.66

Eunice became so popular that everyone wanted to listen to the “OW from 1XE,” as she was called in newspapers. The phrase also appears in this very rare response postcard that AMRAD created for the 1921 Radio Show in Chicago (see Fig. 9). In ham radio, a male operator was jokingly called an “OM”—old man, an affectionate term derived from British slang. When a few women became ham radio operators, at first the term “OW”—old woman—was used; hence, Eunice was called the OW of 1XE. But in a culture where aging was perceived as something negative for women, who were even encouraged to lie about their age, it quickly became apparent that a better term was needed. By the 1930s, OW had been changed to YL—young lady.

In an era when more women were entering the workforce or attending college, it must have been inspiring for female listeners to learn about all of Eunice Randall’s accomplishments in broadcasting. Radio reporters were also fascinated by the idea of a “lady announcer” (even in 1922, nearly all announcers were men). A number of articles were written about Eunice, and they often included photographs of her in the studio. A photograph of her broadcasting in the AMRAD studio appears in Fig. 10. There is some evidence that this photograph was staged for the cameras, but her many fans were just happy to see what she looked like. Her radio work certainly kept her busy; in addition to the bedtime stories and fixing studio equipment, sometimes she reported the news or read announcements of local civic events. At other times, she

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**Fig. 9.** A rare promotional card handed out at the Chicago Radio Show in September 1921. Note that Eunice is referred to as the “OW of 1XE.” (Author’s collection)
announced the police reports of stolen cars. And when she had a day off, it was Howard Tyzzer, one of AMRAD’s best engineers, who read them. But whoever read these reports, this feature got results. The newspapers noted that because the license plate numbers of stolen cars were broadcast, some eagle-eyed listeners saw the car in question and reported it to the police, who were then able to recover it. In addition to fighting crime, Eunice could also perform. As mentioned earlier, when guests didn’t show up, announcers had to fill the time, and she and one of her AMRAD colleagues sometimes sang duets. Radio back then was still primarily a volunteer activity. Eunice was paid for her work at AMRAD during the day, and she pitched in at night for no additional pay, just to assist in keeping 1XE on the air.

If you had “listened in” to the AMRAD station, or most of the other stations on the air in 1921, you would not have heard the types of formats we have today, or in some cases, any format at all. Stations back then had no official rules about consistency, and with few exceptions, they did not restrict themselves to just one genre of music. Station KYW, then located in Chicago, created an all-opera station in November of 1921, but
most stations preferred to broadcast a wide range of entertainment. What was on the air depended on which performers they were able to find. The programs were usually broadcast in fifteen-minute blocks of time, giving listeners plenty of variety. On 1XE, one sometimes might hear a concert consisting of phonograph records (bartered from a Boston record shop in exchange for some promotional mentions), along with sports scores, inspirational messages from local clergy, an educational talk, Morse code practice for amateurs, and live performances by vocalists or bands. To my knowledge, only a couple of playlists from the AMRAD station’s early days have survived, such as the one from 1921 reproduced in Fig. 11.

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**Wireless Telephone Concert, Wednesday Evening**

Nov. 9, 1921

Victor Records obtained through the courtesy of M. Steiner & Sons, 35 Arch St., and 162 Boylston St., Boston, Mass.

1. President Harding March  
   United States Marine Band  18768-A

2. Nightingale and the Rose  
   Soprano Mabel Garrison  64976

3. Humpty Dumpty  
   Comic Duet - Billy Murray-Ed Smalle  18810-A

4. Scherzo (van Goens)  
   Cello Victor Herbert  64296

5. The Want of You  
   Tenor Edward Johnson  64985

6. Hungarian Rhapsody, No. 2  
   Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra  
   Leopold Stokowski, Conductor  74647

7. Virginian Judge, Part 1  
   Walter C. Kelly in Southern Court Scenes  
   All characters which you hear in these two numbers are impersonated by Walter Kelly alone  45250-A

8. Virginian Judge, Part 2  45250-B

9. When It’s Springtime in Virginia  
   Women’s Quartet  17437-B

10. Tuck Me to Sleep in My Old ‘Tubby Home  
    Fox Trot- Benson Orchestra of Chicago  18829-A

11. Drowsy Maggie- Medley of Reels  
    Irish Pipes, Patrick J. Touhey  16639-A

12. Love Sands a Little Gift of Roses  
    Baritone- Reinald Werrenrath  64964

Fig. 11. Rare playlist of Victor phonograph records played by 1XE, November 9, 1921. (Author’s collection)
By this time, there were some familiar voices making the announcements. While Eunice’s was the most recognizable, 1XE was increasingly able to count on a group of regular announcers (a majority of whom, like Eunice, were AMRAD employees during the day), as well as a growing number of regular entertainers. Most of the performers back then were local; some came from area music schools and a few played at area clubs. One popular entertainer was E. Lewis Dunham, a Medford-based organist and choir director at Grace Episcopal Church. On air, he sometimes accompanied the vocalists, and at other times he gave solo organ recitals. Sometimes he also announced the programs. Dunham used the pseudonym “Uncle Eddie” when helping with children’s programming; the remainder of the time, as was the custom back then, he used his initials, E.L.D. This custom came from amateur radio, and many announcers continued to use it well into 1925. For example, station announcer Herbert D. Miller, a Tufts College professor of English, was known on the air as H.D.M. It is also worth noting that the use of pseudonyms was common for the hosts of children’s shows—Eunice Randall may have used her own name because reading stories to children was expected of a woman, but it was considered more unusual for a man in those days. Whatever the reason, the male announcers who read the bedtime stories on Eunice’s day off or hosted a children’s show of their own at 1XE/WGI, rarely used their real name. In addition to “Uncle Eddie,” another popular announcer was known as “Uncle David.” His real name was David M. Cheney, and like his colleague Herb Miller, he was an English professor at Tufts when not on the air.

Also heard more often was a young vocalist named Claire Robins Emery (or Claire Robert Emery), who was becoming a listener favorite. He had been employed by Gilchrist’s Department Store in Boston, but since he could sing, he became part of a vocal quartet the store used. At that time, many companies were building camaraderie through such activities as talent shows and outings, and it was common to read about employees who entertained at these events. The Gilchrist vocal group performed for 1XE, and soon Emery was in demand. He went on to become a popular announcer and singer on the station. A rare photo of him in those early days is reproduced in Fig. 12. Emery also spent some time as the program director of the station, and in early 1924 he debuted a children’s show called the “Big Brother Club.” Bob Emery became a beloved figure in Boston. His career in children’s programming lasted nearly fifty years, first on radio, including network radio, and then on Boston television.

Because there was no money to pay for talent, the people who began to broadcast over 1XE were happy just to get some exposure. Although radio was still new and not everyone had a receiver yet, participating in this cutting edge technology was a great way to get some publicity. Despite the fact that there were no ratings services, that didn’t stop the newspapers from guessing the size of the audience based on the number of
Fig. 12. Bob Emery and his ukulele at the WGI microphone in early 1924. (Author’s collection)
letters, telegrams, and phone calls the station received, and the size of the cities the contacts came from. By that metric, some broadcasts were heard by audiences estimated to be in the thousands. A good example was a performance in early November by concert pianist Dai Buell. She not only played famous classical works but spoke to the listeners in between songs, explaining each piece. The photograph in Fig. 13 was taken in the special studio constructed for

Fig. 13. Concert pianist Dai Buell entertained the “invisible audience” in an AMRAD studio specially constructed for musical performers. (Author’s collection)
performances such as hers. Response was very positive; one reporter estimated that about 25,000 people had heard the program. Station 1XE received post cards and long-distance telephone calls from as far away as Canada, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia. There were also ships at sea that listened in. And best of all for 1XE, the station received much favorable attention from the newspapers and magazines.

Another well-respected person who debuted on 1XE in 1921 was economist and statistician Roger W. Babson, founder of the Babson Institute (today Babson College) in 1919. He gave his first live talk on the AMRAD station on December 19, 1921. As with Dai Buell, his reasoning was probably that it was beneficial to have a potential audience of thousands of listeners (some of whom might never have had the opportunity to hear him), as opposed to renting out a hall and reaching a much smaller audience. In reporting on his talk, the Boston Herald said it was “the first business address ever given over the radiophone, and probably the largest audience which ever heard a business talk.” In addition to becoming a source for hearing famous people, the station was also a source for “wireless music.” When people wanted to hold a dance but couldn’t afford to hire a band, they would set up a receiver and speakers and dance to the music they heard on the AMRAD station. Sometimes a local orchestra would come to the studio and play, giving listeners, wherever they might be, the opportunity to dance. In fairness, other stations, including KDKA in Pittsburgh, also found that listeners enjoyed dancing by radio. But 1XE/WGI took it one step further—by March 1922, the station was offering dancing lessons by radio, conducted by Prof. William H. O’Brien.

The Arrival of WGI
In 1921, 1XE had Boston radio all to itself. WBZ went on the air in mid-September from Springfield, but its signal did not reach Boston with any regularity. While a few distant stations could be heard in Boston on some evenings (most radio stations only broadcast during the evening hours at this time), people came to rely on their local station, 1XE. Although station personnel did their best to rise to the challenge, ongoing technical difficulties plagued the AMRAD station—equipment was constantly breaking, as Guy Entwistle frequently noted in his Boston Traveler columns. These problems meant broadcasts were often interrupted, much to the annoyance of the listeners. Fortunately, at that time, amateur operators were continuing their experiments with voice and music, and on occasions when 1XE couldn’t broadcast, local amateurs frequently stepped in. But this practice was finally forbidden in early 1922 by the Department of Commerce (predecessor to the Federal Radio Commission), ostensibly because the broadcast band was becoming increasingly chaotic and there was too much interference from the amateur stations, which made it difficult for the commercial stations to be heard. Harold Power always disagreed with this decision, not just because he had a good relationship with many of the
local amateurs or because his company sold ham radio equipment, but because he failed to see any harm in letting amateurs broadcast. He also disagreed with the 1921 requirement that broadcast stations had to obtain a “limited commercial license,” which he believed was unnecessary.

But despite how Power and some of the local amateurs felt about it, as of the first week in February 1922, amateur stations were no longer interchangeable with commercial stations, and could not broadcast "weather reports, market reports, music, concerts [or] speeches . . ." Each would have different and distinct functions, as well separate locations on the dial. As part of this government-mandated change, 1XE had to give up its experimental calls, and join the growing number of commercial stations at 360 meters (833 kHz). By February 8, 1922, 1XE became WGI. Interestingly, listeners were very worried; they had heard rumors that 1XE would be leaving the air, and they did not understand the station was simply transitioning to new call letters and a new dial position. The AMRAD station had to run frequent announcements on air, as well as in newspapers and magazines, letting everyone know 1XE, now WGI, was still broadcasting.

Meanwhile, WGI was still greater Boston’s only radio station, although two smaller stations, WAAJ and WFAU, came and went. In early April 1922, the AMRAD station earned national praise for creating a unique educational program in which Tufts College professors and other local educators offered a weekly lecture series on such topics as “The Story of Engineering” given by Tufts’ Department of Engineering Dean Gardner Chace Anthony, a big supporter of the AMRAD station; “The Story of Money” given by Dr. Harvey A. Wooster, head of the economics department; and “Changes in Europe” given by Professor Arthur Irving Andrews, head of the history department. Additional lectures were given on conservation, architecture, modern drama, athletics, music, and other topics. While this may not sound very exciting in our Internet era of “googling,” in the early 1920s, few people were able to attend a university, and the opportunity to listen to well-known scholars was not widely available. This was one of the many ways radio changed people’s lives. It brought news, sports, music, dramatic performances, comedy, religious services, and now educational courses, directly into the home, and anyone with a radio set, whether rich or poor, was able to benefit.

Radio also impacted greater Boston’s minority community. While much of the programming reflected a segregated society (the announcers and most of the talent were white, as were the people who owned the stations), some stations, 1XE/WGI among them, broadcast songs by black vocalists (gospel choirs were always popular). These stations also provided occasional in-studio performances by black entertainers. There were also dramatic performances; one of the earliest that we know about occurred at the AMRAD station and featured the famous black actor Charles S. Gilpin, then starring in the stage presentation...
of *The Emperor Jones*. He came to the studios at Medford Hillside in April and performed some dramatic readings from the play.\(^8^2\) Black newspapers were especially pleased, saying this was the first time a minority actor had ever broadcast.\(^8^3\) Four months later, a new and well-funded radio station, WNAC, owned by department store magnate John Shepard III, went on the air in Boston, and it also provided a performance by some famous black entertainers—Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle, along with Lottie Gee and other cast members of the hit play *Shuffle Along*.\(^8^4\)

Having an actual competitor, especially one with money to spend on the best equipment and salaries for top performers, would soon become a problem for the AMRAD station. But most fans of WGI were probably unaware that there were financial issues behind the scenes at the AMRAD plant. Trying to bring in some on-air revenue in a time when the Department of Commerce opposed the broadcasting of commercials meant that stations had to be creative. According to Eunice Randall’s recollections, her bedtime stories program was briefly sponsored by *Little Folks* magazine, but this does not seem to have been an especially lucrative arrangement, and it did not attract the attention of Charles C. Kolster, the District 1 radio inspector. However, another attempt at sponsorship did.

In early April 1922, Harold Power sold some advertisements to a Boston auto dealer, Alvan T. Fuller of the Packard Motor Company. According to Power’s recollections, he charged $1.00 per minute, and if this worked out well, he planned to sell more sponsorships.\(^8^5\) Unfortunately for Power, he never got the chance. Within several weeks of the first commercial, some anonymous person complained to the radio inspector. By late April 1922, radio inspector Charles Kolster had sent a cease-and-desist letter to AMRAD.\(^8^6\) Many at AMRAD suspected the complaint had come from someone at AT&T, which was in the process of getting permission to experiment with “toll broadcasting” at WEAF in New York. Several months later, AT&T was able to conduct their experiment. But the fact that one company received permission to experiment with advertising didn’t do AMRAD much good. Ideas about how to bring in money without incurring the wrath of the radio inspector continued to be discussed, but WGI continued to rely on AMRAD’s manufacturing arm, which would soon prove to be problematic.

During 1922, WGI’s programming became more consistent. Weekdays, there were regular weather forecasts, market reports, and programs for homemakers. Among the experts were Doris H. Goodwin of the Massachusetts Division of the Department of Agriculture, who gave helpful tips on how to spend money wisely when shopping for food, and Harriet E. Ainsworth of Filene’s Department Store, an expert on clothing and trends in fashion. The station created the AMRAD Women’s Club, with its blend of recipes, household tips, and guest speakers of interest to housewives. Since women had only recently been granted the right to vote, some speakers...
discussed current events or politics. In the evenings, in addition to music concerts from choirs or glee clubs or local bands, sometimes there was a unique guest, such as in early September, when Amy Lowell read some of her poems. Few listeners had an opportunity to attend a poetry reading, so these broadcasts were always well received. Occasionally one might hear someone from the vaudeville stage like the popular singer and humorist Jimmy Gallagher, or someone like journalist and raconteur Joe Mitchell Chapple might stop by to give his observations on current issues.

And then, there was the exercise program, which began in September 1922. There was a fitness craze in the early 1920s, and many radio stations decided to offer health talks, along with exercises that people could perform at home. At WGI, health talks were a frequent feature, usually hosted by someone from the Red Cross or a local health department official. But this time, there was a before-breakfast program of setting-up exercises, hosted by Arthur E. Baird, who at one time had attended Tufts. Baird worked at the Caines College of Physical Culture, and he claimed to be a fitness expert; he also claimed to be a Tufts graduate, but when I did some research in the college archives, I found this assertion was not true. However, the 1920s were a much less skeptical time, and it is doubtful that fans of his program saw him as anything other than an expert. Eventually, the exercise craze ended, and so did exercise-by-radio shows. Years later, Baird changed his name to Craig Earl and had a successful career on network radio as “Professor Quiz.” By then, he told everyone he had both a Ph.D. and a medical degree. I have found no evidence that he had either.

The Beginning of the End for WGI

While WGI had many loyal fans, AMRAD’s finances were worsening, and Jack Morgan was having grave doubts about investing more money into the company. Harold Power was known for having visionary ideas, but he was also a micro-manager, which often resulted in delays getting products to market while there was still demand for them. AMRAD engineers like Howard Tyzzer came up with some highly creative designs for equipment, but the company failed to reliably deliver the products on time, which caused endless problems; AMRAD also failed to effectively publicize them. For example, despite having receivers that could have been marketed to the general public, it wasn’t until mid-April 1922 that promotional efforts aimed at the mass audience began in earnest, as evidenced by the brochure in Fig. 14. And even though AMRAD’s products were good, it became increasingly difficult to compete with larger and better-organized companies like Westinghouse and RCA. By 1923, AMRAD was deeply in debt.

To make matters worse, the equipment failures that had plagued the station in its 1XE days persisted; but this became more of a problem in 1923 as new stations were going on the air in Boston and other nearby cities, and listeners now had other choices. As mentioned before, WNAC, the Shepard
Stores station, went on the air in late July 1922. WGI and its team of volunteers were able to compete for a while, even though John Shepard III paid for famous stars to perform at his station. Fortunately, many of the entertainers who got their start at WGI remained loyal. While they performed for other stations, they still came back to Medford Hillside. And WGI still had its own unique (some might say “quirky”) performers that audiences loved. One good example was Charles L. H. Wagner, known as the “radio poet.” A sign painter by profession, his other skill was an ability to create poetry on the spot—listeners sent in suggestions from current events, and he came up with a poem. He also composed humorous observations about life, and by popular demand, his radio poems ended up in a book. Wagner is pictured in Fig. 15 standing in front of...
a microphone at WGI reading poetry to his radio audience from his book of poetry, Cradled Moons, which was published in 1919. I had the opportunity to read it, and while he does not make one forget Shakespeare, his verses are a fascinating look at society in the early 1920s.

In early January 1924, the popular broadcaster by then known as “Big Brother” Bob Emery officially inaugurated the Big Brother Club. Aimed at boys and girls from 9–12 years old, it was an actual club, with dues (but not monetary dues), an official membership card, and the opportunity to attend special events sponsored by WGI. To join, all the prospective members had to pledge to do a good deed and write a letter to Big Brother each week. The program featured a combination of music, educational features, storytelling, comedy skits aimed at kids, and interviews with interesting guests. It also gave young performers a chance to be on the air. The Big Brother Club was an immediate success, popular with parents and kids alike, and it brought WGI (and AMRAD) some much-needed positive attention.90

In late February 1924, Westinghouse station WBZ, located in Springfield, Massachusetts, opened a Boston studio at the Hotel Brunswick, not far from the Theater District in Boston, a great place to find talented performers who might be willing to go on the radio. Having a Boston location, as well as an agreement with the Boston Herald and its sister newspaper the Traveler to provide news, gave the Westinghouse station a local presence. In an era when radio was live, this really mattered. WBZ (and its Boston station, then called WBZA) had greater access to Boston-based entertainers they could not have gotten in Springfield. WGI was now competing with two stations that had big budgets, beautiful studios, and the ability to compete for the biggest names. WGI soldiered on, and it continued to be known as a station that nurtured up-and-coming talent. That meant plenty of entertainers were still willing to broadcast from the AMRAD station, even if they didn’t get paid much for doing so. Among the local performers winning many fans in 1924 were Bernie and his Bunch, a five-piece band led by piano player Bernard Eyges. The band’s official publicity shot is reproduced in Fig. 16. Bernie wanted to go to law school, and his success as a bandleader helped him to pay for it.

Also doing well at WGI were a vocal duo who met in high school in Boston and began to perform—their real names were Max Zides and Tom Currier, but on
Halper

In mid-1924, an announcement was made by another large corporation, the Edison Electric Illuminating Company, that they planned to put a new station on the air in late September. The station had the call letters WEEI, and fans of the AMRAD station were undoubtedly surprised when Big Brother Bob Emery announced that he was leaving WGI to go to work there. Perhaps he sensed that WGI’s finances were shaky, or perhaps he felt that being at a larger station like WEEI would take the Big Brother Club longer. She too noticed that AMRAD’s fortunes did not look bright. Eunice ultimately found a job in drafting at the New England Power Company, and she also remained active in amateur radio for many years, as we see in the early 1960s photo taken at her home in Maine (Fig. 17).

No longer being the only station in town was taking its toll. Not only did WGI still have periodic technical problems, but now it began losing some of its on-air personalities. It also lost several of its best engineers, and when they left the station they were often hired by WNAC or WBZ for much more money. In late 1923, Eunice Randall was no longer on the air at WGI, although she continued to work at AMRAD for a while longer. She too noticed that AMRAD’s fortunes did not look bright. Eunice ultimately found a job in drafting at the New England Power Company, and she also remained active in amateur radio for many years, as we see in the early 1960s photo taken at her home in Maine (Fig. 17).

In mid-1924, an announcement was made by another large corporation, the Edison Electric Illuminating Company, that they planned to put a new station on the air in late September. The station had the call letters WEEI, and fans of the AMRAD station were undoubtedly surprised when Big Brother Bob Emery announced that he was leaving WGI to go to work there. Perhaps he sensed that WGI’s finances were shaky, or perhaps he felt that being at a larger station like WEEI would take the Big Brother Club

Fig. 16. “Bernie and his Bunch” in the WGI studios in early 1924. (Author’s collection)
to the next level. Whatever the reason for leaving, it was a huge loss for WGI, and one from which they never fully recovered. Bob Emery was one of the few well-known air personalities who had remained for so long, and now he too was leaving.

In March 1925, for reasons that have never been clear, WGI changed its call letters to WARC (AMRAD Radio Corporation). By now, most of its best-known announcers and performers were heard on other stations, and WARC was not even able to broadcast on a regular schedule any more. One day in late April, with no warning or explanation, the AMRAD station simply vanished from the airwaves, and AMRAD itself went into bankruptcy. The station that was one of the radio pioneers, which used the slogans “where broadcasting began,” and “AMRAD: the voice of the air” (implying that if you were listening to radio, you were probably listening to the AMRAD station) was gone from the dial, leaving listeners to wonder what had happened.

Station correspondence from Eunice Randall and Ken Thompson (the two had worked together at AMRAD, and many years later, they got married) indicated that Harold Power hoped to find
a buyer and put the station back on the air again, but it didn’t happen. Eunice had also heard that John Shepard III of WNAC expressed an interest in buying the station, but Shepard wanted total control, and he would only agree to buy it if Power resigned. Power refused, and the deal fell through. Although Power continued to renew the license and hope for the best, at some point it seems that he resigned himself to the fact that the radio station would not return to the air.

As for the company he had founded, AMRAD went into bankruptcy, creditors fought over the company’s assets, and Tufts reacquired the land.92 In late 1925, Power was able to sell what remained of those assets to Cincinnati-based equipment manufacturer and executive Powel Crosley. There was talk that Crosley might revive the radio station and continue to manufacture equipment under the AMRAD name.93 Unfortunately, Crosley decided not to put WGI back on the air, and while the AMRAD name was used on equipment for a few more years, the manufacturing operation went out of business in 1930.94 And as for Harold Power, he ultimately left Boston and started an engineering firm in Washington, D.C. In the summer of 1964, former members of AMRAD and 1XE/WGI held a reunion in Winchester, Massachusetts, at the home of James Jenks, who had been an engineer at the station. Harold Power was among the attendees, along with Eunice Randall Thompson, Bob Emery, and many others.95

It would be easy to dismiss the AMRAD station as one of the many small stations that was beloved when radio was still a novelty, but which lacked the consistent professionalism (and big-name talent) the networks could offer. For me, however, the story of 1XE/WGI is a fascinating look at radio’s formative years: how a new station emerged, thrived for a little while, and then disappeared, still remembered by fans and former personnel years later, but ultimately forgotten. Despite the challenges of preserving the AMRAD story, I have persevered with my research for more than two decades, periodically finding new information to add to my understanding of who worked there and what the station meant to the audience. Keeping the story of 1XE/WGI alive is my way of saying thank you to the innovative and talented people who helped to create broadcasting in Boston.

Endnotes

5. This was not only a claim made by station management; it was also believed by local musicians and a few reporters who had been aware of 1XE/WGI since its inception. For example, William Arms Fisher, “The Radio and Music,” Music Supervisors’ Journal (Vol. 12, No. 3), Feb. 1926, p. 10.
Greater Boston’s Pioneering Broadcast Stations 1XE and WGI

14. “Review of Last Night’s Radio,” Boston Herald, May 3, 1924, p. 6. Also, Joe Rines, quoted in endnote 10, reported that more than 40,000 “Big Brother Club” fans showed up for a station outing and a chance to meet Bob Emery.
17. For example, bandleader and songwriter Joe Rines, recalling more than two decades later the fan mail he and another WGI station personality, “Big Brother” Bob Emery, received, and the surprisingly large crowds that showed up for station events. Quoted by Jack Hellman, “Light and Airy,” Variety, July 11, 1946, p. 8.
24. “Local Amateur Hears Carols by Wireless,” Ann Arbor (MI) News, Dec. 24, 1919, p. 8. This article referred to how Christmas music was “sent broadcast” by a “radiophone” at a local university.
33. For example, the AMRAD station’s first college courses by radio received praise from Radio Digest: “New Music of the Spheres, Wisdom of the Ages, Free to All by Air,” Radio Digest, Apr. 22, 1922, p. 4.
34. Boston at this time had nine dailies, but only a few of them covered radio in the early 1920s.
39. For more on the phenomenon of “boy engineers,” a 1992 volume called Possible Dreams: Enthusiasm for Technology in America, published by the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, contains two informative essays that not only discuss the popularity of new media such as wireless telegraphy and telephony, but also examine how these new technologies became gendered spaces from which women and girls were excluded: Carroll Pursell’s “The Long Summer of Boy Engineering,” and Susan J. Douglas’s “Audio Outlaws: Radio and Phonograph Enthusiasts.”
40. John B. Chapple, “Radio Broadcasting to Millions,” The National Magazine, Mar.--Apr. 1922, p. 494. Note that in this article, Power is referred to in extremely positive terms; one photo of him is captioned “The Man Behind
Radio Broadcasting.” This favorable perspective is not entirely surprising—the magazine was based in Boston and the editor, Joe Mitchell Chapple, was undoubtedly familiar with Power’s work.

50. Ibid.
55. Ibid., pp. 78, 85.
70. Ibid.
79. For example, “Radiophone 1XE Now WGI,” Radio News, Apr.–May 1922, pp. 967, 1010; “AMRAD Not Likely to Be Shut Down, Jersey Journal (Jersey City, NJ), Feb. 8, 1922, p. 6; and “Medford Hillside Station Expanding” Boston Herald, Feb. 19, 1922, p. D9. In each daily newspaper listing of station programs, the entry for WGI began “Station WGI (formerly 1XE).”
80. “Lecture Courses to be Given over Radiophone,” Boston Post, Mar. 28, 1922, p. 5.
89. Alan Douglas, p. 40.

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