

Radio Drinks, Radio Smokes

By Bart Lee, CHRS Archivist & Fellow, AWA Fellow

NBC flourished in San Francisco in the 1930s, with its West Coast studio at Taylor and O'Farrell Streets. John Schneider, CHRS, "The Radio Historian" has provided CHRS with several masterfully colorized radio images, including the NBC facility (recently posted).

That plant had an unofficial auxiliary across the street, The Radio Club Bar and Grill.



This is a postcard image; the back of the card says:



The Radio Club is long gone. But one of its ashtrays lives on cyberspace:

TUESDAY, MAY 3, 2011

RADIO CLUB SAN FRANCISCO CALIF.

Ashtray from the Radio Club, SF CA

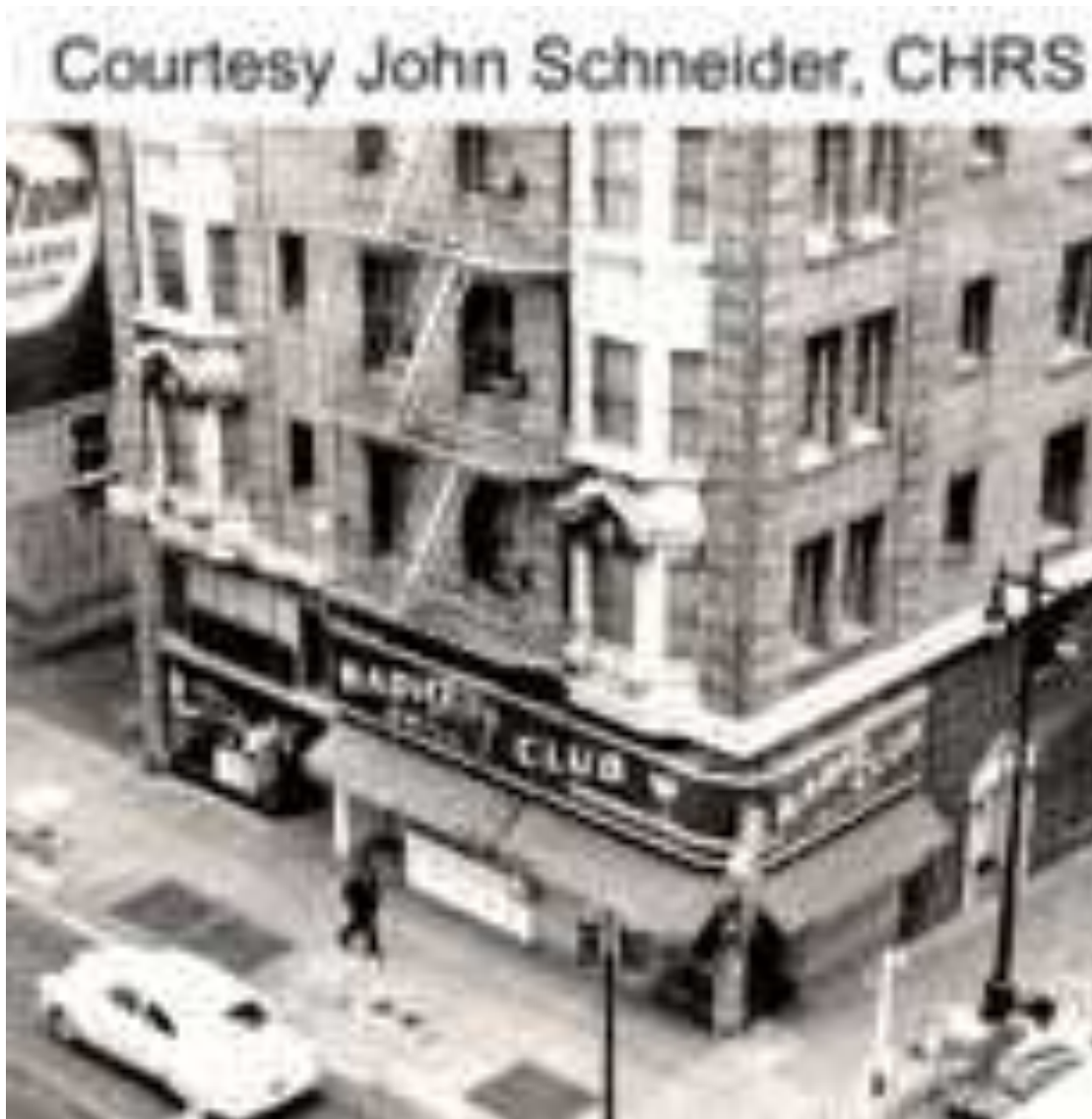


RADIO CLUB SAN FRANCISCO CALIF., a photo by ustelegraph on Flickr.

Posted by Game Recognize Game at 8:26 PM

“Rendezvous of the Stars” [!] with a sphinx speaking into a microphone, radiating away — and a martini on top! And “Opposite ‘N.B.C.’”

And in those days, more than 80 years ago [!] everybody smoked, at least cigarettes – well, almost everybody. A man’s white-collar workday meant drinking coffee all day, and smoking all day at his desk (no smoke-breaks needed). Then at 5 o’clock, or the end of the shift, it was off to hoist one (or two...) with the boys, before going home. For NBC staff and visitors, not to mention The Talent, the Radio Club offered the perfect place to unwind and socialize.



And smoke, of course.



This is the cover of a promotional matchbook for radio station KSJO. Inside it says “Call Bill Gillis about your KSJO Sales Plan.” Making a radio-time sale often meant smoking and drinking, the custom of the country at the time.

In our progressive era, we smoke a lot less tobacco — and a lot more dope. Until recently we drank less booze, but circumstances beyond our control have driven us from our desks and into the clutches of Demon Rum (and his many relations, such as Jack and Jim, not to mention Ms. Merlot). But the idea of The Radio Club resonates through the decades for radio enthusiasts.

Maybe someday the old neon sign will show up at a flea market. Or maybe we could reproduce it, and hang it on the front of Radio Central, honoring the local radio industry, as an historic and thematic marker, lit up promptly everyday at 5 PM.

Assistant CHRS Librarian Dave Harris found a similar joint in Los Angeles (Hollywood).



From: Eric Lynxwiler of the Museum of Neon Art:

[The photo depicts] “ ...Hollywood and a long lost bar on Vine Street. It was across from NBC radio and south from ABC radio.”

John Schneider (CHRS) notes:

“I’ve seen pictures of the Hollywood bar before. Both of them clearly identified their target clientele. It was

probably also a place that prospective actors, announcers and musicians also hung out, hoping to get hired.”

John’s insight adds another dimension to the San Francisco Radio Club: it also likely functioned as a hiring hall. Technicians, talent, wannabes and the like could stop in, buy a drink (or two) for the producers present, and hope to get a gig, or even a permanent position – maybe the next day.

These bars (and likely their like in other cities) enabled a good deal of radio industry interaction in congenial, customary, convenient and centrally-located settings. Probably few knew everybody, but probably everybody knew somebody. That’s all it would take to get a conversation going...

(11 IV '21, v3, de K6VK) ##