

Radio Station KYA – First Transmitter?

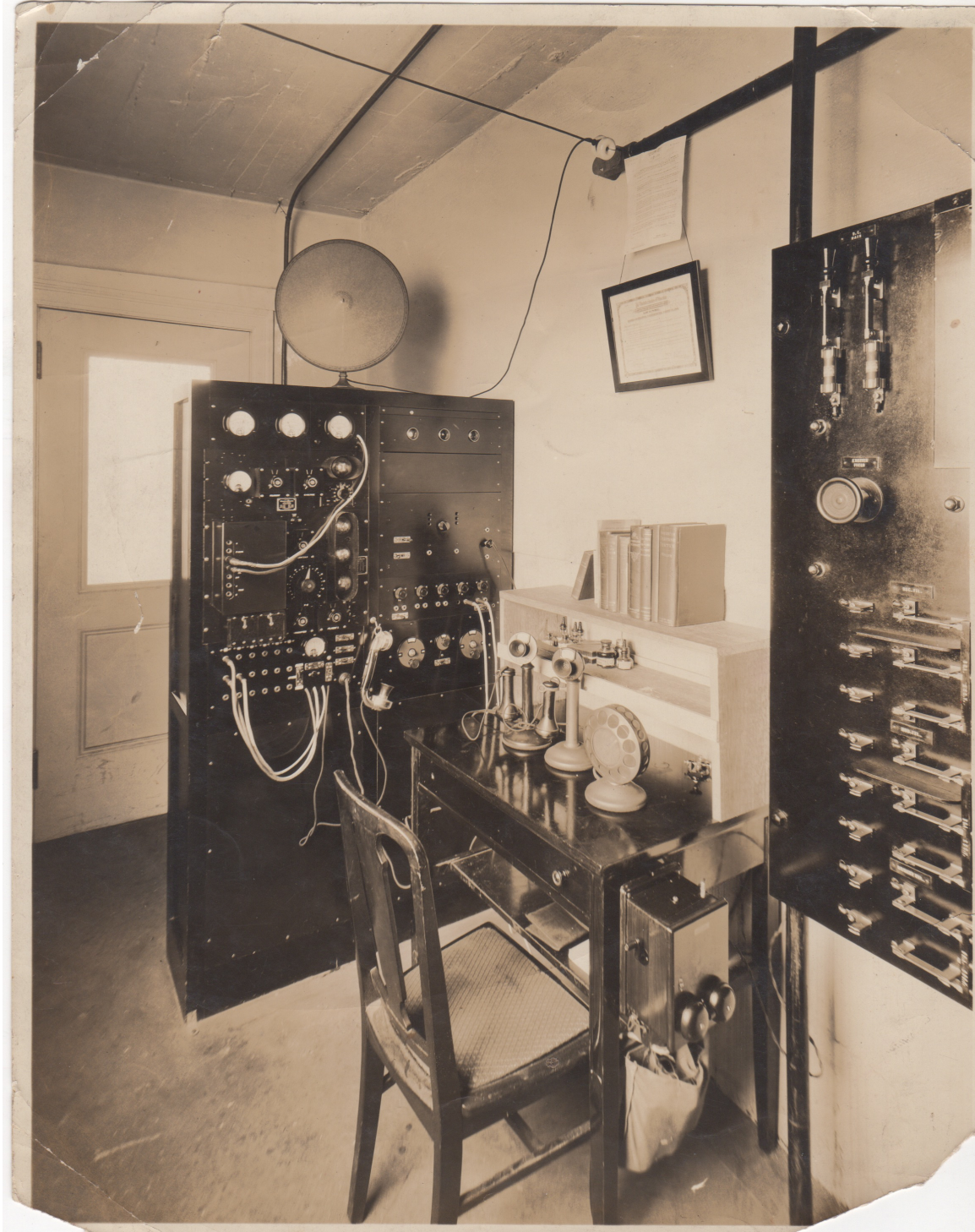
By Bart Lee, K6VK, CHRS Archivist

The CHRS Archives are acquiring two very early photographs* of what looks to be San Francisco radio station KYA's first transmitter, circa 1926.



Bart Lee archival collection: "KYA Main Transmitter"

Bart Lee archival collection "KYA Speech Input Equipment"



The CHRS program, The Bay Area Radio Museum (BARM), tells us about KYA:

1260 AM in San Francisco: Historical Timeline: The 1920s



Vincent I. Kraft

In October of 1926, the Pacific Broadcasting Corporation was formed as a subsidiary of the Seattle-based Northwest Radio Supply Company. Co-owners were Vincent I. Kraft of Seattle and Frederick C. Clift of San Francisco. In 1920, Mr. Kraft (photo, right) went on the air with a station that would become KJR, one of the first stations in Seattle. Also in October, equipment of KFOB at Burlingame was acquired, with the expectation that this gear was to be used for the new San Francisco station.

Call letters KYA were reserved on November 30, 1926, for use by the Pacific Broadcasting Corporation, which scrapped the old KFOB equipment and purchased a new 500-watt transmitter. It was installed atop its proposed studio location, the Clift Hotel. On December 17, 1926, the Radio Division of the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Navigation granted its authority for KYA to operate on 970 kilocycles with 500 watts of power. KYA went on the air Saturday, December 18, 1926, broadcasting from the Clift Hotel, San Francisco. Its license was received December 18th.

KYA was re-assigned to operate on 850 kilocycles with a power of 1,000 watts in November of 1927. By January of 1928, studios

were moved from the Clift Hotel to the Warfield Theatre Building, 988 Market Street, and it then adopted the air slogan “West Coast Theatres Studio.” Its transmitter remained atop the Clift Hotel.



The Clift Hotel

In the major frequency reallocations taking place November 11, 1928, which affected the dial position of most United States broadcast stations, KYA found itself reassigned to 1230 kilocycles. In late November 1928, the station joined the Columbia Broadcasting System as that chain's San Francisco affiliate. Manager of KYA at this time was Clair E. Morrison. [End] https://bayarearadio.org/history-index/timeline_kya-koit

The *CHRS Journal* also tells of KYA:

The Boss Of The Bay And Beyond: A History Of San Francisco's KYA Radio

by John F. Schneider with epilogue by David Ferrell Jackson

One of San Francisco's earliest and most popular stations faded into the ether many years ago, but it left behind a colorful and turbulent legacy that included personalities as diverse as newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst and the innovative programmer Bill Drake. CHRS History Fellow John Schneider provides this rich history of KYA, adapted from his popular collection of articles on early broadcasting, which can be found at TheRadioHistorian.org.

Beginnings: 1926—1928

Vincent I. Kraft [above] was a Seattle radio pioneer who operated a radio parts distributor called the Northwest Radio Supply

Company. In 1919, he turned his personal amateur radio station into experimental broadcasting station 7XC, which in 1921 was relicensed as broadcasting station KJR. Not content to operate just one radio station, he soon went on to construct additional stations in Portland, Spokane and San Francisco. Kraft formed the Pacific Broadcasting Corporation and planned to connect the stations with telephone lines and create a new Western network.

In 1926, Kraft acquired the equipment from the defunct station KFOB in Burlingame, planning to use the equipment for his new station. But the equipment was not found to be usable and was scrapped. It's most likely that Kraft himself built the San Francisco transmitter.

His San Francisco station, licensed under the call sign KYA, went on the air December 18, 1926. Kraft's partner was Frederick C. Clift, owner of the Clift Hotel in San Francisco, and so the station was installed at the hotel.

KYA first broadcast on 750 kHz with a 1,000 watt transmitter. Kraft had applied for 1,000 watts, but the license issued by the Department of Commerce did not specify a power level. Kraft told the press he planned to increase the power to 20,000 watts. On Christmas day, his two other Northwest outlets, KEX in Portland and KGA in Spokane, also went on the air, each with 20,000 Watts. A Los Angeles outlet, KPLA, was also planned to go on the air within the next several months.

KYA's first studios were on the fifth floor of the Clift Hotel ... at Geary and Taylor Streets, with the transmitter on the sixteenth floor. The inverted-L antenna was supported from wooden poles on the roof of the hotel. Claire E. Morrison, KPO's engineer and principal announcer, was hired as manager, and Edward Ludes of KJBS became the chief announcer. ***

When the responsibility for radio licenses was shifted from the Department of Commerce to the newly-formed Federal Radio Commission (FRC) in 1927, a period of frequency "musical chairs" began as the FRC moved stations around the dial to try and create order out of the chaotic broadcast spectrum. As a result, KYA operated on several different frequencies over the next two years....

KYA moved into new studios in the Theater Building ... at 988 Market Street. The new studios were elaborate and well-decorated, designed to be a showplace for theater-goers that might amble down the staircase before a

performance. The agreement with the vaudeville theater chain also provided a ready source of entertainment for KYA's broadcasts, as performers only had to walk down to the basement to broadcast a program. KYA adopted the slogan "West Coast Theatres Studio." A postal loop hookup was established with KPLA in Los Angeles and sponsored programs were exchanged between the stations. An agreement was also made with the San Francisco Examiner that provided for the exchange of news bulletins and publicity, and KYA became the Examiner station. [End] *CHRS Journal* Fall/Winter 2013, p. 22.

There are beginnings and then there are ends. Near the end, the KYA tower, just south of San Francisco at Candlestick Park, toppled. It was quite a sight for those of us going down Hwy 101!



"The photo ... shows the original KYA self supporting tower after it fell to the ground on February 14, 1986 in 115 mph winds. It was determined that the cause of the failure was a faulty tower section. Thanks to Tom Mourgos of San Francisco for supplying the photos."

(www.olderadio.com/archives/stations/sf/kyatwr.htm)"

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* KYA Photos – "Hayden Lothers (-1938) and Ralph Young (1882-1943) operated a commercial studio, Lothers & Young Studios, at 165 Post Street in San Francisco, California. They later moved to larger quarters at 251 Post Street." (<https://digital.sonomalibrary.org/documents/detail/57977>). The main transmitter photo is studio # W19216 and the speech board #W19217.