

From the Rockefeller Center to the Rocky Mountain Margin: Shifting Patterns of RF and GEB Support for School Broadcasting and Educational Radio, 1930-1940<sup>1</sup>

*by William J. Buxton*

My recent research on the Communications Program of the RF Humanities Division has focused on how initiatives in this area began to emerge as a community of shared interests through the process of Rockefeller officers identifying projects, communicating with those projects' representatives, and providing guidelines and suggestions about how the projects might best be implemented. In particular, I am interested in the extent to which Rockefeller officers attempted to create sustainable networks of knowledge by bringing together promising practitioners, encouraging them to interact with one another, and providing them with the means and resources to do so. Rather than concentrating on how Rockefeller philanthropy has influenced knowledge and practice through the provision of funding for designated projects (as many have done), I wish to understand how particular Rockefeller officers were able to shape specific fields of interest through selecting and integrating a variety of ventures into a collective endeavor. The extent to which these emergent areas conformed to their initial design was, of course, very much affected by the goals and aspirations of those involved in the projects, as well as by the broader political and social context in which the practice of philanthropy operated. I have found this approach fruitful in making sense of Rockefeller-funded programs in film, drama, the humanities, and librarianship, and, more recently, in the area of educational radio.

This approach has allowed me to demonstrate how and to what degree community-building was a key aspect of the communications program of the Humanities Division. However, it has largely failed to examine the extent to which the prevailing identification of officers and trustees with particular interest groups and discourses may have affected the process of community formation. That is to say, without an understanding of how the decisions about funding and programs made by trustees and officers drew upon largely unstated assumptions about which groups were deserving of support and what ideas mattered in making these decisions, one would have a tendency to over-estimate the degree to which the actions taken by officers and trustees were autonomous and spontaneous. In what follows, I would like to trace out some of the background to the HD and GEB programs in educational radio, giving particular attention to some of the key actors and discourses involved in giving initial impetus to the support of radio by various Rockefeller philanthropies. I will then examine a particular aspect of the GEB program in radio, namely the cluster of projects related to the evaluation of educational broadcasting, indicating how the evolution of the program was heavily inflected by the identification of RF officers with particular groups and discourses.

The policies that were developed in relation to educational radio very much reflected the broad concerns about the *business* of radio as evidenced in John Rockefeller Junior's (hereafter, Junior) commercial dealings. At almost precisely the same time that he had begun to support educational radio, Junior had become closely involved with a venture in the business of radio that was of unprecedented scale and significance, namely what the media and public had dubbed "Radio City" ( which officially came to be called the Rockefeller Center ).

One can safely say that quite suddenly in the late 1920's, the radio industry became one of the defining features of Junior's life. To be sure, as his son David pointed out, Junior had little use for mass entertainment, and would allow a radio in his 54<sup>th</sup> street mansion only under the condition that it would only be played at low volume. He did, nevertheless, recognize the capacity of radio to spread religious ideas and to increase understanding of global affairs. To these ends, he not only provided yearly support for Harry Emerson Fosdick's Vespers broadcasts (which eventually emanated from the Riverside Church, whose construction during 1927-30 Junior funded), but also underwrote the broadcasts of James G. MacDonald (an active member of Foreign Policy association) on matters related to world peace. But it was the development of the Rockefeller Center located in mid-town Manhattan, that came to focus Junior's attention on matters related to the business of radio. The original project had been centered on the building of a new home for the Metropolitan Opera company on land (known as the "Upper Estates") owned by Columbia University in the area bordered by 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> avenues and by 48<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> streets. Representatives from the Company approached Junior (through his trusted advisor, Ivy Lee) with a request to acquire the land from Columbia and donate it to them so that they could build the new opera house. While Junior was attracted to the prospect of contributing to the civic and cultural life of New York through such a deed, he also saw the possibilities of considerable financial gain in the transaction; he had been assured by a reputable real-estate assessor (Todd & Brown) that he could realize as much as \$ 5.5 million a year in rent from the property. Accordingly, after an intense period of negotiation, he signed a contract with Columbia in October, 1928, leasing the property for a 24 year period (with the help of a sizable mortgage from Metropolitan Life). However, when the stock market crashed in 1929, the

Metropolitan Real Estate Company pulled out of the deal, leaving the Junior with a lease of \$3.8 million a year on a property that was generating only around \$300,000 annually in rent.<sup>2</sup> After carefully considering his options in consultation with his financial advisors, Junior decided to proceed with the development of the property without the opera house. It was not long before he was approached by a group that was looking for a site to consolidate its operations and to build up-to-date facilities. This was the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) that had been formed on October 17, 1919 largely through the efforts of Owen D. Young. It brought together the assets and patents of General Electric (GE), the American Telegraph and Telephone Company (AT&T), Westinghouse, and the United Fruit Company. RCA, in effect, was given a virtual monopoly in telecommunications by President Wilson in a bid to wrest control in this area from the British.<sup>3</sup> The new organization had grown and thrived under Young's deft leadership; in 1925 it spawned the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) which quickly made its mark on the expansion of commercial radio. The addition of NBC to its roster added further to RCA's increasing complexity and unwieldiness. It was, therefore, not surprising that towards the end of 1929, Junior was approached by his friend, Edward Harden, who raised "the possibility of RCA 'making this new site the center for their entire broadcasting and radio operations and offices'." Junior was evidently pleased with this overture, which "seemed ... to be well worth looking into."<sup>4</sup> Looking into the prospect of an RCA tenancy involved meeting several times with representatives of the RCA organization. Junior was particularly swayed by the interventions of Owen Young, the director of both the RCA and of GE. Young was recognized as the leading American industrialist of the day.<sup>5</sup> Like his colleague, David Sarnoff, he had become something of a visionary on matters related to radio. According to Young, radio would be at the center of a new complex of culture, information, education, and information, and would

reconfigure time and space in new ways. Evidently, Young's views had considerable impact upon Junior, who was prepared to allow the RCA to become the leading tenant in the emergent Rockefeller development, embodying Young's business-centric utopian vision of how a privately owned and operated telecommunications company, with radio broadcasting at its center, could not only have great commercial success, but could advance the educational and cultural development of the public. Moreover, according to Young, radio would become the point of anchorage for a new cultural constellation, allowing the public to have access to modes of expression -- such as classical music, opera, fine literature, and intellectual debate -- that had traditionally been only open to members of the elite. In effect, the Rockefeller Center -- and particularly its entertainment and broadcasting sector that had retained the name of "Radio City" -- was premised on the assumption that educational and cultural development could best be left to the private sector. This meant that the public was to be firmly located in the private, rather than having any sort of independent status. This privately conceived notion of the public underlay the characterization of the Rockefeller Center as "a city within a city." This suggested that a vibrant public life -- mirroring that of New York City -- had been created within a privately owned and operated complex of businesses, offices, services, stores, and spaces for circulation. From the standpoint of the Rockefeller Center planners, the area of houses and businesses that was demolished had little in the way of redeeming features. This sector was viewed as rife with speakeasies, prostitution, and crime: in destroying it, then, the Metropolitan Square Corporation would be contributing to the wellbeing and progress of New York. While Junior and his advisors saw themselves as both conservationists and preservationists, they showed no interest whatsoever in the possible architectural heritage of the area. Evidently, unlike Williamsburg (for which Junior committed enormous funds and resources to "restore" to

its colonial state), the patchwork of businesses, dwellings, and institutions that comprised the upper estate were deemed to have no historical value or significance. It was evidently not within their frame of reference to view this area as a neighborhood, where residents and workers had the right to live, work, and be considered as members of a public. In effect, any views that the residents had about the future of their community were given no consideration whatsoever and no efforts to consult with them during the planning process were made. Instead, it was felt that something much closer to a public could be constituted through destroying the buildings and infrastructure of the area, dispersing those who lived there, and building a new “city within a city” after the rubble had been cleared. This was to take the form of a privately owned, conceived, and administered space – centered on a commercial mass communications complex -- secured with the Rockefeller fortune and operated by large corporations.

This vision of commerce as the progressive *Zeitgeist* of cultural and intellectual history was inscribed in the bountiful artwork and sculpture of the Rockefeller Center (such as the works of Lee Lawrie, Paul Manship, Frank Brangwyn, and Jose Maris Sert), which presented the ethos of commerce as recognizing its duty to deploy communications technology in a moral and responsible manner for humanity thereby ensuring stability and direction during challenging and unstable times.<sup>6</sup> Within this commercially conceived Garden of Eden, there was, of course, no place for Diego Rivera’s snakish Lenin, nor for the spontaneous dissent that the act of portraying the revolutionary on the Rockefeller-owned wall represented. While American at its core, the Rockefeller Center – reflecting the League of Nations globalism that was dear to Young, Fosdick, and Junior – was heavily inflected by internationalism; the second wave of construction featured not only separate edifices for Great Britain and France, but an International Building as well (which included, as an extension, the Palazzo d’Italia). Finally, the Rockefeller Center

not only contained an enormous concentration of media; its administrators gave considerable attention to how it was represented to both the immediate and media publics. From the outset, it had a public-relations office that endeavored to cultivate particular meanings for the Rockefeller Center in the public mind. Initially, this was done through the management team, in conjunction with long-time Rockefeller publicist, Ivy Lee. It later was taken over by Merle Crowell, under the direction of a sub-committee chaired by Nelson Rockefeller. The major public relations coup of the latter organization was the lighting of the behemoth tree at Christmas time, (accompanied by live radio broadcasts of this event along with a series of choral recitals on NBC throughout the week). Evidently, it wasn't simply the infectious holiday mood that led the management of the Rockefeller Center to engage in this annual Christmas ritual; the whole series of highly mediated events was to draw shoppers to the lower concourse of stores, and to make sure that the radio audience was aware of the abundance of seasonal shopping possibilities that the Rockefeller Center offered. Mirroring these efforts to put the Rockefeller Center before the public eye in the most flattering matter, the Rockefeller Center began to publish its own magazine in 1934. It featured, among other things, a testimonial from Helen Keller about the wonders of the Rockefeller Center. This was excerpted from a letter that Keller had written to Junior, in which she described in some length how impressed she was by what she had experienced at "Radio City." (Her plea elsewhere in the letter that the mural by Diego Rivera be restored obviously had fallen on deaf ears). In the published version of the excerpt, Keller's references to "Radio City" were changed to the "Rockefeller Center" The publicity activities of the Rockefeller Center served notice that the public was little more than a target to be manipulated and enticed, rather than a body having its own integrity and a capacity to reason, deliberate and act. By extension, the place of radio within the Rockefeller Center -- as embodied in

the immense complex of RCA offices and studios -- was very much stitched into the fabric of the broader array of commercially driven public relations and media.

It is arguable that Junior's involvement with Rockefeller Center -- as given form by its major tenant, RCA -- set the terms for his support of educational radio. The advisory group for which Junior provided the initial sustaining funding (along with the Carnegie Corporation of New York), namely the National Advisory Council on Education in Radio (NACRE) was established by the American Association for Adult Education (AAEA) in 1930 "to provide a liaison between education and industry" reflecting its commitment to "cooperation between educators and the industry."<sup>7</sup> Much of the impetus for the founding of NACRE came from Carnegie Corporation President Frederick Keppel working in conjunction with AAEA (established in 1926 with Carnegie support) officials along with NBC executives and Owen Young. Junior, following the advice of his key advisor, Raymond Fosdick,<sup>8</sup> agreed to underwrite NACRE for an initial period. Indeed, Fosdick prepared a lengthy report on the radio situation for Junior, in which he made the case that educational radio could best be developed within a commercial framework, and that NACRE was the best vehicle for advancing the cause of educational broadcasting. Fosdick included as an appendix in his report a glossy brochure prepared by Gross Alexander on behalf of the Pacific-Western Broadcasting Foundation (PWBF). The latter organization, in opposition to the position taken by NACRE, advocated a form of non-commercial educational radio and sought to provide "disinterested, cultural broadcasting." In this sense, the position of the Foundation was quite close to that of the National Committee on Education by Radio (NCER) that had been founded in 1930 with support from the Payne Fund. The latter organization maintained that cooperation between broadcasters and educators was not fruitful because of their opposing interests. Accordingly, the founders of the NCER believed that

educational broadcasting needed to be autonomously organized through non-commercial stations if it were to progress. It was quite in line with NCER principles, then, that one of its stalwarts, Joy Elmer Morgan, viewed the PWBF as the “brightest prospect for a large use of radio directly for the public good” that he had ever seen.<sup>9</sup> Fosdick cautioned Junior against supporting the PWBF on the grounds that its ideals were vague and difficult to realize. In this respect, Fosdick’s views mirrored those of NACRE’s director, Levering Tyson, who viewed Alexander as a “pest” who was “against the commercial broadcasters.” Given the trust that Junior had in Fosdick’s views, it was not surprising that he threw his support behind NACRE, and evinced little interest in the activities of its rival, the NCER. In making the decision to underwrite NACRE for the initial period of its operation, he was also very much influenced by the views of the ubiquitous Owen Young who at the time was serving as a trustee on both the GEB and the RF (chosen by Junior, who was chair of the Board of Trustees nomination committee).

In some sense, Junior’s support for educational radio may have represented an effort to provide a corrective to the tendencies of commercial radio to overemphasize mass entertainment to the detriment of education and cultural uplift ( a position that Owen Young eventually was to take). The reputation of RCA – widely known as the “radio trust” -- was not entirely pristine. It was not only under investigation for anti-trust violations but was viewed by many as monopolistic and rapacious. Junior received a good deal of correspondence -- from persons such as the prominent journalist H.W. Kaltenborn -- expressing displeasure at Junior’s decision to allow the RCA to become the major tenant in the Rockefeller Center. It may have been the case that Junior gave his support to educational broadcasting because he was not entirely comfortable with the kind of broadcasting that the commercial broadcasters were offering.

This same ambivalence about the private broadcasters' ability to offer educational programming came to characterize the program in radio developed by the RF Humanities Division and the GEB in the mid 1930's. Building on the foundations of the support for NACRE provided by Junior (who also happened to be chair of the RF Board of Trustees!) the HD and the GEB embarked on a program that emphasized the cooperation between advocates of educational broadcasting and the commercial networks. Indeed, it would be safe to say that the officers of the GEB and the HD held closely to NACRE's position on educational broadcasting. At the same time, however, some validity was given to the position taken by NCER and its advocates, and an effort was made to provide support for those who sought to develop educational radio outside of a commercial framework. As we will now examine, the GEB program in school broadcasting was marked by a tension between the dominant NACRE approach and a minority position that was closer to that of the NCER. It was within this matrix that the RF officers sought to develop a community of shared interests – with results, however, that proved to be quite at odds with their initial designs.

The nucleus of this set of initiatives was the Evaluation of School Broadcasts (ESB) project located at the Bureau of Educational Research of Ohio State University. National in scope and wide-ranging in the subject fields that it addressed, the ESB project was viewed as potentially having an enormous impact upon educational broadcasting in the United States. It involved an evaluation of the school broadcasts by NBC and by CBS and was able to generate a good deal of interest from both networks. This venture was complemented by three other more circumscribed projects, namely, various activities related to school broadcasting organized by the Progressive Education Association (PEA), the Study of School Broadcasting initiated by the Cleveland Board of Education, and the Research Project in School



*Students from John Adams High School broadcast a discussion over the Cleveland Public Schools' radio station, WBOE, as part of the Cleveland Public Schools Experimental Radio Project in 1939.*

*From the General Education Board Archives*

Broadcasting undertaken at the University of Wisconsin. Judging by the exchanges between GEB officers and representatives of these four projects, the ESB was intended to provide the overarching framework for the theory and practice of school broadcasting, with the other initiatives examining more specific ancillary issues.

In selecting these four projects for funding, the GEB officers were obviously seeking to minimize their risks; all four ventures were linked to institutions with impressive track records in educational broadcasting.

Faculty at Ohio State University had developed the extremely successful school broadcast, "Ohio School of the Air" (which first aired in 1929) and had taken a strong leadership role in advancing educational broadcasting and evaluating school broadcasts. The university had begun hosting the annual Institute for Education by Radio (IER) in 1930, which brought together academics, commercial broadcasters, and other interested parties to discuss issues related to educational radio.

The PEA had been founded in 1919 by educational reformers who promoted ideas such as the development of education oriented towards children, active participation by

citizens, the democratization of public life, as well as the cultivation of cooperative social skills and critical thinking. In this regard, the principles of the PEA closely corresponded to those of the general education program of the GEB. While the PEA had just begun to show an interest in radio, by virtue of its size, scope (it comprised numerous commissions who regularly engaged in research and produced reports) and reformist zeal, it was thought that the organization could have an important impact upon educational broadcasting. In effect, these four projects addressing various aspects of school broadcasting were considered by the GEB officers to comprise an emerging network, with the capacity to play a leadership role in adapting radio to educational usage.

The State Broadcasting Station at the University of Wisconsin (WHA) had been the first college radio station in the United States (established in 1916) and its then current director, H.B. McCarty (a former GEB fellow who had been trained at the BBC) was the president of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters. Moreover, the educational programs that WHA had developed – such as “Wisconsin School of the Air” (1931) and “Wisconsin College of the Air” (1933) – were highly regarded.

Since 1927 The Cleveland School Board had been using the facilities of local private stations to carry broadcasts to some of its schools. It was now looking to develop its own radio station, making use of one of the ultra-high frequencies that would be coming available.

The first two projects, the ESB project at Ohio State and the activities of the PEA, were very much in line with the position on educational broadcasting taken by NACRE. In the aftermath of the Communication Act of 1934, this perspective had become enshrined in the Federal Radio Education Committee (FREC) which had been established to encourage cooperation between broadcasters and educators through various research projects. This body was directed by the “Committee of Six”, consisting of three

broadcasters and three educators, whose responsibility was to review, revise, and approve the projects coming before the FREC. Given that the FREC was to represent the interests of the foundations as well, it was not surprising that the GEB took a very active interest in its operations, as evidenced by the role that the Rockefeller body played in the process through which the ESB was established.

The ESB effort had originated in a project entitled “Problems and Methods of Broadcasting to and by Schools” that I. Keith Tyler of Ohio State had submitted to the FREC. However, John Marshall (assistant director of the GEB) encouraged Tyler to submit an application to have a similar project funded by the GEB. Marshall then informed the directors of the FREC that the GEB would provide the funding for this project, along with the Princeton Radio Research project, if FREC would give it official approval. FREC gave the project (as well as the Princeton project) its support and the GEB agreed to provide \$69,000 for a two-year period beginning on July 1, 1937. The project was to be reviewed during its second year and a request for further funding would be considered if solid progress was evident. It was stipulated that the project would have an advisory committee selected by the Committee of Six, and that all of the publications coming out of the ESB project would be under the auspices of FREC.

The ESB project was under Tyler’s directorship with J. Wayne Wrightstone serving as assistant director. It covered four urban areas – Chicago, New York, Cleveland, the bay region of California – and worked cooperatively with school broadcasters in Rochester and Detroit as well. Four subject areas were given attention, namely, social studies, English, music, and science. For each of these areas, research associates were chosen to provide expertise and advice about evaluation. The overall

intent of the project was to gather evidence on the effectiveness of school broadcasts on a cooperative basis involving interested teachers in the four selected centers, along with the broadcasters, and the staff members (including the research associates). The ESB project, then, linked closely to FREC, was very much in line with the view that educators and broadcasters could work in tandem to further the ends of educational broadcasting.

The same considerations underlay the support of the GEB for the activities in radio undertaken by the Progressive Education Association. Like the ESB, the PEA contended that the interests of educational broadcasting could be reconciled with those of the private networks. In particular, it believed that through research projects and consultation, influence could be brought to bear on the networks to develop more enlightened educational programming.

Throughout the 1930s the PEA received a number of grants for radio from the GEB. The first of these was a one-year grant of \$5,000 awarded in March of 1937 to allow Margaret Harrison, a lecturer at NYU, to examine memoranda prepared by the various PEA Commissions and to make suggestions and recommendations for a program in radio education. The report was submitted in March, 1938 and led to the establishment of a Committee on Radio Education, which was to explore further possibilities in the field of radio education.

The other two ventures in school broadcasting supported by the GEB, the Cleveland School Board project and the University of Wisconsin project, were not at all oriented towards the cooperation between educators and broadcasters. Rather, both ventures were much more in accordance with the position on educational broadcasting developed by the National Committee on Education by Radio (NCER) in direct

opposition to NACRE's point of view. Such thinking was evident in a project organized by H.B. McCarty, program director of station WHA at the University of Wisconsin. McCarty, an outspoken opponent of both NACRE and FREC, approached the GEB with the idea of developing school broadcasts to meet the needs of classroom teachers. This would involve a study – hopefully leading to an authoritative report – on how school broadcasting might best be encouraged within a state school system.

In cooperation with H.L. Ewbank, Professor of Speech at the University of Wisconsin, McCarty submitted a proposal to the GEB which was accepted in February of 1937. A sum of \$43,500 was approved, to run over two years, beginning in the fall of 1937. Unlike the PEA and Ohio State initiatives, the University of Wisconsin project did not involve cooperation between private broadcasters and educators; it was focused exclusively on educational broadcasting within a state-wide public system.

In a similar manner, the Cleveland School Board project was oriented towards how a citywide program of school broadcasting could operate. Previously, the Board had made use of private stations for its broadcasting, an arrangement that proved to be unsatisfactory. The GEB grant of \$42,600 was to allow short-wave broadcasting (to be matched by an expenditure of \$30,000 by the Board) within the Cleveland school system. To this end, the Board requested – and was granted – a construction permit for a new non-commercial educational broadcast station (which became WBOE), on the frequency of 41,500 kilocycles. Dr. William D. Levenson was enlisted to serve as director of radio activities for the project, which ran from July 1, 1937 to June 30, 1939. Broadcasting began on October 3, 1938 and eventually served 147 schools with eight hours of broadcasting each day.

The cluster of projects in the emergent GEB program of school broadcasting could thus be seen as an effort to both reconcile different visions about educational

broadcasting and to provide the basis for a new community in the area. While support was tilted in favor of those who advocated cooperation between educators and broadcasters, those who believed that educational broadcasting should largely be in the hands of non-commercial entities received a respectable amount of support. The projects funded represented the full continuum of scale, from a city-wide system, through a state-wide system to a national system of educational broadcasting. All of these were considered to be experimental projects with the potential to serve as models for other ventures. Efforts were made to involve a broad range of interests, including teachers, program evaluators, creative personnel (such as script-writers), university administrators, broadcasting executives, not to mention school children themselves. Finally, a good deal of attention was given to providing the means for mediating between the various stake-holders with a view to forging a new network of practitioners applying the principles of general education to school broadcasting.

This concern by GEB officers to cultivate a new community along these lines was evident in a conference on broadcasting for schools that was organized once all of the new projects addressing this issue were up and running. Its purpose was to “effect a closer liaison” among these ventures in terms of their relation to general education. Representatives of the four main school broadcasting projects were invited to attend, along with those involved in related RF ventures, namely, Paul Lazarsfeld of the Princeton Radio Research Project; Loring Andrews, Director of the World Wide Broadcasting Foundation; Allen Miller of the University Broadcasting Council; and Charles Hoban, an associate at the American Council on Education Motion-Picture Project.

The conference was held at the Westchester Country Club in Rye, New York from January 27-29, 1938. Participants were encouraged to submit accounts of their projects

for distribution and to suggest topics in advance to be addressed by the conference. The latter were incorporated into an agenda to guide the discussion. In addition to the exchanges among the participants, the larger setting of general education was addressed in a panel consisting of GEB officers John Marshall and Robert Havighurst, along with Karl Bigelow of the University of Buffalo and Alice Keliher, Director of the Commission of Human Relations of the Progressive Education Association. The intrinsic properties of radio – with particular reference to its use in education – were also explored. The participants in the conference were encouraged to collectively produce a memorandum which could be made available to all who took part in the meeting and to the staffs of the various projects represented. Given that the list of invitees was so carefully selected and that the conference itself was so tightly framed by the general-education agenda, it was evident that the GEB officers felt the need to build a more closely-knit community among those involved in school-broadcasting as well as others who had relevant expertise.

In his initial negotiations with those responsible for the various school-broadcasting projects, Marshall encouraged them to make connections with others (usually, recipients of GEB funding) who were engaged in the same pursuit. Aside from a few sporadic attempts, the contacts between the representatives of the GEB-sponsored school broadcasting initiatives remained limited in the early period of their operation. However, in the aftermath of the conference at Rye, an increase in interaction among the projects was evident. A. S. Barr, professor of education at the University of Wisconsin (as well as a member of the research project's executive committee) and Margaret Harrison of the PEA both served on the reviewing committee for the Ohio State Radio evaluation project. Harrison and I. Keith Tyler of the ESB jointly organized the 1939 PEA summer radio workshop held in Bronxville, New York. The Cleveland School

Board project drew on the expertise of those involved with the Ohio State initiative, particularly Tyler, W.W. Charters, and “Mr. Higgy.”

Not only did the school-broadcasting projects occasionally make use of the expertise available through the RF-funded Princeton radio research project, but they were staffed by former GEB fellows, such as Lester Parker and H.B. McCarty. Finally, the projects served as a resource for expanding the school-broadcasting network. For instance, John Marshall, in assessing the potential for educational broadcasting in Texas (following a visit there in February of 1938) had concluded that funding for a proposed radio-council venture would have been premature. He felt, nevertheless, that some of the radio personnel in Texas exhibited promise. Accordingly, he made GEB funding available so that two employees of the University of Texas radio station, A.L. Chapman (radio-research director) and J. Howard Lumpkin (program director), could have fellowships to study educational broadcasting. Lumpkin spent his fellowship at CBS and then worked on the radio-evaluation project at Madison. Chapman held his fellowship at the University of Wisconsin. Another Texan, Hugh Masters of North Texas State Teachers College, along with T.W. Thordarson, state director of correspondence study in North Dakota, were funded by the GEB to attend the PEA radio workshop held during the summer of 1938 at Sarah Lawrence College. Thordarson also paid visits to both the ESB and to the Ohio State project as part of a study of broadcasting correspondence courses he was conducting. Another GEB Fellow, Ralph Stettle of Louisiana State University (who was later to become a leading figure in educational broadcasting), visited the Wisconsin project. Moreover, T. H. Shelby, the Dean of Education at the University of Texas, was funded by the GEB to conduct a study of radio in education. This involved visits (during 1938 and 1939) to various venues, including the Cleveland School Board, the University of Wisconsin, Ohio State University, and Los Angeles city

and county schools. The annual summer institute held at Ohio State served as a clearing house for finding candidates to take up positions with the various projects, and for arranging short-term visits to learn about the practice and evaluation of school broadcasting.

Judging by the limited duration of the projects and the emphasis placed upon interaction between them, it was evident that one of the main goals of the GEB was to quickly generate a network of committed activists that could make the school-broadcasting movement self-sustaining. Indeed, John Marshall was quite pleased that the emphasis of the PEA workshop of 1939 was on creating leadership in the field. The particular constellation of projects that were supported bore an uncanny resemblance to the model of communication that emerged around the same time at the RF-sponsored Communication Seminar of 1938-39. The members of this seminar (organized and led by John Marshall) viewed communication as an ongoing process linking media production with transmission and reception. Along the same lines, each of the various school-broadcasting projects funded by the GEB had an emphasis corresponding to particular aspects of the model. The PEA projects were oriented towards production. The Cleveland School Board and the Wisconsin projects focused on how transmission to specific audiences occurred. Finally, the more broadly conceived ESB explored how the link between production and reception could be facilitated through effective evaluation. Whether the school-broadcasting projects had a bearing on the model that emerged in the Communication Seminar, one can only speculate. But there does seem to be some affinity between the network of initiatives in this area that emerged, and the way in which communications as a field came to be conceptualized in the Communication Seminar of

1938-39.<sup>10</sup>

Of the four projects, only the ESB was viewed as more than a short-term venture. After an initial two-year grant, it was subject to a review, which proved to be quite favorable. The project was provided another three years of funding (\$172,000) under the provision that its focus be sharpened. While representatives of some of the other projects tried to make the case for additional funding, they were turned down, even though their accomplishments were recognized. It may have been the case that the GEB officers, having created the network that they wanted, now wished to consolidate the ESB as the center for leadership in the area of school broadcasting, particularly as it related to how children used radio. In this sense, it was to parallel the Princeton radio research project (renewed at the same time with a substantial grant), which was to give its attention to the place of radio in the lives of adults.

As a result of what was demonstrated by the various school-broadcasting projects, the GEB and RF officers might also have rethought their priorities and shifted their program in radio accordingly. When considered as a whole, the set of projects served to call into question the deeply-held assumption of Rockefeller officers (as embodied in NACRE and FREC) that the best way to develop educational broadcasting was through projects centered upon the commercial networks. The school-broadcasting ventures demonstrated that this was not necessarily the case. The ESB project – along with the activities of the FREC – revealed the indifference of broadcasters to educational radio. While staff members and teachers generally responded enthusiastically to the project, broadcasters never became very involved. Indeed, the ESB researchers were continually taken to task by the broadcasting representatives for their critical stances. This

antagonism towards the ESB project reflected the overall lack of support by broadcasters for the FREC, as evidenced by their failure to provide the funding for the research projects that they had promised. Along the same lines, in her work for the PEA, Margaret Harrison encountered great difficulties in convincing the networks to include programs that espoused progressive ideals. Moreover, the PEA summer workshops, which had been designed to bring together broadcasters and educators, were poorly attended by network representatives. The failure by broadcasters to support educational radio and school broadcasting foreshadowed what was to come; the so-called “sustaining programs” ( i.e., those designated as educational) did not continue past the Second World War.

On the other hand, the non-commercial ventures at Wisconsin and Cleveland were both quite successful; they were judged to be highly effective demonstration projects that could be replicated elsewhere. The Cleveland School Board experiment resulted in what was the first ultra-high frequency broadcasting system in the United States. Moreover, in addition to organizing a successful conference on high-frequency broadcasting in city systems, the Board communicated the results of its experiment to other educational systems planning to use such channels in their work. In a similar manner (but on a more modest scale) the Wisconsin project made an effort to disseminate its findings.

The non-commercial centers, moreover, had shown themselves to be effective resources for training, largely supplanting CBS and NBC, whose mentorship was increasingly viewed as less relevant to the educational sector. This was evident in the extent to which they began to host GEB fellows and other interested visitors with RF and GEB connections. In effect, during the late 1930s, it became increasingly evident to GEB and RF officers that the private networks could no longer be seen as the primary vehicles for educational broadcasting. In light of the evidence provided by the school-broadcasting projects, buttressed by the GEB-funded reports by Charles

Siepmann (on college radio stations) and by Geoffrey Gorer (on various RF/GEB-sponsored radio and film projects), Rockefeller officers began to believe the most effective approach to educational broadcasting was one that was centered in the educational sector itself, organized on a local and regional basis. While the GEB and RF officers felt that the ESB had done excellent work and was deserving of further support, they also recognized the limitations of the industry-based model upon which it was based, and now moved in a direction more in concert with the shifting position of the NCER. One of this organization's firmest advocates, Arthur Crane, had suggested at the annual IER meeting at Columbus, Ohio in 1935 that there ought to be a federally funded national system of regional and state radio councils, supplementing rather than supplanting the commercial system that had become dominant. This point of view seemed to strike a responsive chord with GEB and RF officers, whose own experience tended to confirm the merits of Crane's standpoint.

In view of the increasingly apparent shortcomings of the industry model, the growing strength of the non-commercial sector, and the potential of non-centralized regional broadcasting, it was not surprising that the GEB and RF shifted their support for radio more towards initiatives based on these principles, such as the Rocky Mountain Radio Network and the World Wide Broadcasting Foundation, both of which received extensive funding from the late 1930s through the mid 1940s. Indeed, with their emphasis upon largely non-commercial educational programming organized through local and regional radio councils, these ventures arguably provided the foundation for the American variant of public broadcasting that was to emerge a decade or so later.

The re-orientation of program in school broadcasting evaluation serves to underscore the fundamental shift in orientation of the RF and GEB in relation to radio that occurred between 1930 to 1940. Initially, it was a largely unchallenged assumption that educational radio could best be developed within a commercial broadcasting framework. However, by the end of the decade, RF and GEB officers were now of the view that the future of educational broadcasting lay in the formation of regional networks of independent stations collectively sharing their resources. More fundamentally, this shift represented the disavowal of a discourse about the relationship between radio, culture, education, and the public that had gained ascendancy among Foundation officials by the early 1930's. In effect, the Archimedian point for the RF and GEB programs in radio had been dispersed from the Rockefeller Center to the regional margins of the United States.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was published in the *Rockefeller Archive Center Newsletter*, Spring, 2004: 8-14. I wish to thank the staff of the Rockefeller Archive Center, particularly Darwin Stapleton, Irwin Levold, and Tom Rosenbaum, for their helpful assistance in revising the earlier work.

<sup>2</sup> Carol von Pressentin Wright, *Blue Guide: New York*. London: A & C. Black Limited, 1983, p. 285.

<sup>3</sup> Erik Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States to 1933*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966: 57-61.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Okrent, *Great Fortune: The Epic of the Rockefeller Center*. New York: Viking, 2003: 135.

<sup>5</sup> He had been selected as *Time* magazine's man of the year for 1929.

<sup>6</sup> See Steven Gertner, "Imagining Rockefeller Center", unpublished honours thesis, Department of History, Williams College, 2001: 61-90.

<sup>7</sup> Robert McChesney, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for the Control of U.S. Broadcasting, 1928-1935*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993: 52.

<sup>8</sup> He was the brother of Harry Emerson Fosdick, minister of the Riverside Church, whose Vespers radio broadcasts Junior supported from 1927-1945.

<sup>9</sup> McChesney, 1993: 77.

<sup>10</sup> The same pattern could be detected in the area of film. See William J. Buxton, "Rockefeller Support for Projects on the Use of Motion Pictures for Educational and Public Purposes, 1935-1954." *Research Reports of the Rockefeller Archive Center*, Spring, 2001.