



**The
Architecture
and Art
of the
National
Broadcasting
Company
(NBC)
Network
Radio Studios
1926-1991**

**By
Ronald Kramer**

The Architecture and Art of the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) Network Radio Studios

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Building Name	NBC Properties			Opened
	City	Address		
AT&T Bldg	New York	195 Broadway		Nov. 15, 1926
Hunter-Dulin Bldg	San Francisco	111 Sutter St.		Apr. 5, 1927
Columbia Pictures Bldg	New York	711 Fifth St.		Oct. 1, 1927
Lake Michigan Bldg	Chicago	180 N. Michigan Ave.		Nov. 1, 1927
National Press Club	Washington	529 14th St. NW		Jan. 16, 1928
		222 W. Merchandise		
Merchandise Mart/Radio City Chicago	Chicago	Mart Plaza		Oct. 10, 1930
Rockefeller Center/Radio City New York	New York	30 Rockefeller Plaza		Nov. 15 1933
NBC Building/Radio City Denver	Denver	1625 California St.		Dec. 15, 1934
		14th St. betw. H St and		
Trans-Lux Bldg/Radio City Washington	Washington	New York Ave.		Jul. 22, 1937
Cleveland Discount Building (now Superior Bldg)/Radio City Cleveland	Cleveland	815 Superior Ave.		Feb. 19, 1938
NBC Building/Radio Center Philadelphia	Philadelphia	1619 Walnut St.		May 1, 1938
Radio City Hollywood	Hollywood	Sunset and Vine Sts.		Nov. 1, 1938
Radio City San Francisco	San Francisco	Taylor and O'Farrell Sts.		Apr. 26, 1942

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Cover Art — Cardboard microphone used as a ticket for members of the public purchasing a tour of NBC Radio City New York. These tickets were used between the mid-1930s and approximately 1960. [Collection of Ronald Kramer]

A New Industry...A Striking Vision

When radio began in the early 1920s, it involved Rube Goldberg technology and was generally hastily exercised from non-descript store front studios with much the same casualness that had characterized motion pictures first being shown in nickelodeon storefronts. And just as motion pictures graduated from utilitarian storefronts to evolve the grand architecture of the 1920s movie palaces, the burgeoning radio industry developed a need for studio quarters befitting the industry's growing stature.

The most significant step in radio's evolution to that prominence occurred in 1926 when the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) came into existence as a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) upon RCA's purchase of the broadcasting properties of American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T). Using its long-distance telephone circuits, in 1924 AT&T had founded the United States' first radio network by linking several radio stations the company owned. Just two years later, AT&T concluded that broadcasting was too different and problematic compared to the company's central telephone business and decided to exit radio. Its sale of the AT&T radio network, and its radio stations (WEAF, New York, and WCAP, Washington D.C.) to RCA, allowed RCA to form a broadcasting division, which it called the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), to operate these properties. RCA had previously, and generally unsuccessfully, attempted to operate its own radio network in competition with AT&T by linking the RCA-owned stations using telegraph circuits. However, RCA's purchase of the AT&T radio property allowed the new NBC to combine the AT&T network with its own, using AT&T leased circuits



for both networks, which were then respectively renamed the NBC Red and Blue networks. Supposedly, the colors derived from a map on which an engineer had hastily sketched the newly formed network's line structure using those two colors to differentiate between the two networks and their respective local radio stations.

RCA's vice-president and general manager at the time was David Sarnoff, who eventually became that company's president and chairman. Sarnoff's background in radio dated back to the days of "wireless" telegraphy and he was, throughout his career, a spearhead of technological progress in electronic communication. Much of the development of television in America resulted from Sarnoff's dogged pursuit of "radio with pictures." Sarnoff also spearheaded the development of color television and propelled RCA into the role of a major equipment manufacturer. In contrast to William Paley, who founded the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) in 1927, Sarnoff essentially saw himself as an industrialist where Paley was more consumed with artistic endeavor and the programming side of radio.

The architectural style which NBC gradually evolved for its studio properties developed alongside parallel artistic and architectural evolution. Some of the resulting structures involved imprecisely attributed architectural styles definitions



as having been conceived with differing styles including *art deco*, *art modern*, *streamline moderne* (sometimes rendered as *streamline modern*) and *industrial modern*. Since this is the only publication which has sought to collect, identify, picture and analyze NBC's various studio properties, I also hope to help minimize that confusion.

The term *art deco* is generally credited to a style which originated at the great Paris *L'Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* from which *art deco* derives its name. The resulting French high style, which involved rich colors, bold geometric shapes and decorative splendor, was applied to both architecture and consumer line products and was considered *avant garde* in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It was distinguished from its predecessor, *art nouveau*, by its use of hard-edged, mechanical elements as opposed to art deco's flowing, natural forms. *Art deco* was, as a result of its "flash" and high level of ornamentation, seen as more modern and ideally suited to the Jazz Age of the 1920s.



Essentially contemporaneous with the emergence of *art deco*, another loosely styled architectural branch was developing under the name *moderne*. A response to society's increasingly early twentieth century industrial structure, it used a lack of adornment along with a fascination with the complex mechanics of evolving technology. The style often used poured concrete but featured rectilinear patterns and extreme simplicity in design along with somewhat minimalist ornamentation.

Art deco and *moderne* architecturally blended in buildings for the transportation industries, bus, train and gas stations, airline terminals, trains, buses and the like. The concept of motion, however, was carried into these projects with flowing lines which often curved over a long expanse – thus conveying the sense of "motion." Borrowing some elements from *art deco* and others from this modified adaptation of industrial design, the resulting style was alternatively called either *streamline moderne* (or *streamline modern*) or *art moderne*. The major element which defined *streamline*



[above] Greyhound terminal, Greenwood, MS
[below] Streamline Moderne Pioneer Zephyr train, 1936

as distinct from *art moderne* was the greater accentuation of the former's flowing "motion" or "speed" lines as they were called by Walter Dorwin Teague.

Radio virtually defined its era in much the same way that the post-World War II period was defined as the "atomic era" and the late twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries, have been called the "digital



ing to connect them to the bold, modern “flash” that “radio” connoted. Thus, radio afforded an interesting architectural opportunity to connect one of the era’s most influential technologies, a heritage of the *modern industrial* machine age, with its symbolism of towers and electricity, with the *art deco* world of culture and the *streamline moderne* symbolism of radio’s pervasive, invisible atmospheric “motion” that miraculously connected all peoples.

NBC’s birth also drew architectural direction from new technology. For most of the period prior to the dawn of the 20th century, architecture had revolved around largely horizontal structures with the sole exception of churches, whose verticality sought proximity to the heavens. The invention of safe elevators and steel frame buildings made “skyscraper” designs feasible and, for the first time, commercial applications challenged religious structures in soaring skyward. Radio, by its nature, traveled in that lofty atmosphere and so it likely wasn’t accidental that NBC installed virtually all of its regional production centers in high-rise skyscrapers, often on their uppermost floors. Perhaps to David Sarnoff radio seemed uniquely worthy of such elevation. NBC’s sole exception to placing its studios atop buildings, which often ranked among the nation’s tallest structures, was to be Radio City Hollywood — a building which celebrated its horizontality just as southern California, itself, seemed to appreciate its sprawling abundant use of available land.

The *art deco* era was just dawning when NBC began operations on November 15, 1926 from hastily assembled New York studios in the American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) Building (which was located at 195 Broadway and West 42nd Street). AT&T provided NBC a short-term lease of a studio (described in a New York Landmarks Preservation Commission monograph as “a single little room”) as part of the sale of its broadcast properties to RCA. The July, 1928 *Architectural Record* quotes founding NBC President Merlin Aylesworth indicating that the radio network business was so new, that no one could be confident of its profitability when NBC was launched — which militated the economy of a short-term studio lease in the AT&T building. Thus, while NBC inaugurated operations in AT&T’s 1913 building, it almost immediately apparent that larger studios were warranted and economically feasible — and planning for them began quickly.

At the time NBC was launched, AT&T lacked facilities to provide leased circuits that spanned the entire country. During NBC’s initial months, its programs could be distributed only to stations east of the Mississippi.

Essentially concurrent with NBC’s launch, the network began planning for a West Coast facility. In the early years of the 20th century common wisdom held that San Francisco would become the principal West Coast city and, AT&T according, installed its central trunk lines which would feed the West Coast there. Los Angeles was still thought of as somewhat a backwater, so it is likely that perceptions of San Francisco’s larger future and its telephone circuit centrality led NBC to select San Francisco for its West Coast headquarters. It selected the newly completed Hunter-Dulin Building, located at 111 Sutter Street. An elegant *art deco* building which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, its design was entire-



NBC quickly began exploring West Coast affiliates for the network and its West Coast network branch the NBC Orange Network (distinguishing it from the NBC Red and NBC Blue networks in the Eastern and Midwestern states).

In order to begin originating programming for the Orange Network NBC needed new studios located in the west. While still operating the NBC Red and NBC Blue networks from the 195 Broadway AT&T studios, NBC leased space in San Francisco on the 22nd and 23rd floors of the stylish Hunter-Dulin Building (located at 111 Sutter Street) which was constructed for the Hunter-Dulin Los Angeles-based investment firm. The New York architectural firm Schulze and Weaver, whose principals had also designed New York's Grand Central Terminal and numerous hotels, including the Waldorf-Astoria and the Sherry Netherlands, designed the NBC facilities. NBC additionally leased the building's second and third floors for lobby, reception and executive office spaces. The Hunter-Dulin building was, and remains, a dramatic, elegant architectural statement with styling reminiscent of a French chateau. Its copper mansard roof strikes a bold contrast with neighboring buildings. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the building remains a prominent San Francisco architectural landmark. Yet, having leased this space in a new, although preexisting, structure, and, therefore, not under NBC's control, the Hunter Dulin building's design was complementary to the architectural style which NBC was evolving on its own. NBC's San Francisco headquarters began operations on April 5, 1927.

Apparently essentially concurrent with leasing the San Francisco space, NBC leased space for more permanent New York quarters in January, 1927. The quarters which would replace its AT&T studio in an elegant building located at 7111 Fifth Avenue which was designed by the Bethlehem Engineering Corporation,. Under the lease's terms the building was to be known as the National Broadcasting Company Building but, in practice, it became known as the Columbia Pictures Building (now known as the Coca-Cola Building). Since the building's general design was well-underway, NBC again had little influence on its basic design. However, NBC's leased areas included space for eight studios spread over the top 5 floors of the 15-story building. Floors 11 and 12 were used for both offices and artist "green rooms", with studios commencing on the 13th floor. The NBC areas were designed by noted American architect Raymond Hood, America's "star" in skyscraper architecture, whose work was centered in *art deco*. Surviving floor plans for floors 13, 14 and 15 suggest that each NBC floor was a "double floor" to give studio areas requisite height.

While preparing the Fifth Avenue facilities for NBC, Hood told the *New York Times*, in April, 1927, that he was unhappy with the drabness of typical radio studios and that he was, therefore, designing NBC's various studios with multiple personas. His vision included studios which, individually, were stylized as a Gothic church, the Roman forum, a Louis XIV room and, in a space devoted to jazz, something "wildly futuristic, with plenty of color in bizarre designs." His most elaborate studio design was NBC's fabled "Cathedral Studio" – Hood's homage to Gothic church design – which quickly became the Fifth Avenue studio's most prominent programming origination point. On the studios' floor plan, the Cathedral Studio is identified as Studio H (although it never seems to have been referred to that way in



The completed facility, which featured eight broadcasting studios, was of uniformly modernist design and was inaugurated on October 1, 1927. The largest and most sumptuous, the Cathedral Studio, was the setting for NBC's largest programs. Reportedly, NBC adopted its signature chime sound logo at the time it relocated to Fifth Street. While NBC didn't commence regular television broadcasting until 1939, by which time it had departed its Fifth Street location, these studios were nevertheless the location for NBC's first experimental television transmission which occurred there on January 16, 1930.

It must have been a frenzied time for the young network which, responding to the same issues which drove establishing the San Francisco facilities, NBC set about opening a Chicago headquarters. Quickly established in the Lake Michigan Building located at 180 N. Michigan Avenue (named for its location on Lake and Michigan Avenues rather than the Lake), NBC Chicago commenced operation on November 1, 1927 just a month after NBC's New York move to 711 Fifth Avenue.

NBC was clearly beginning to appreciate its own growing scope and prominence, a sensibility which was reflected in its evolving use of the name "Radio City" for its regional studio production centers. It's important to note that, while NBC purchased stations in various cities — such as WTAM, Cleveland and KQV, Pittsburgh — it was the local stations and their associated studio facilities that the network acquired. WRC, in Washington, was a "special case," in that it was owned by RCA and only managed by NBC, which didn't purchase the station until 1932.



Implicitly, NBC apparently decided to install one regional network production center in each U.S. time zone. NBC's existing New York facilities vastly overshadowed the network's need for Washington more modest studios. Thus, it was for NBC's other regional focal production points that NBC began to evolve the name Radio City.

As a result, in 1927 NBC moved WRC from its earlier home to the National Press Building where the network and WRC shared what were originally 20 offices located on the 12th and 13th floors. NBC spaces on the two floors of the National Press Building, which had been designed by George Rapp and Company of Chicago, were modified to create one large 20 foot by 30 foot studio, two stories high, which used 6 of those spaces, with the remainder devoted to two smaller studios and offices. Washington not being seen as an entertainment capitol, the studios were largely used for news — which was itself a relatively minor element of radio programming at the time — and NBC seems to have devoted less attention to the Washington installation than to the San Francisco facilities which were essentially contemporaneously established.

Interestingly, while NBC was a leader in establishing television (having begun experimental activities as early as 1930 in its Fifth Street studios, the network apparently had given more thought to the technology of television transmission as opposed to the imperatives of television production. As a result, none of the NBC studios designed in the 1930s had ceilings high enough for hanging the lights needed for TV programming. That shortcoming led to the need for extensive remodeling when the NBC facilities were called upon for conversion to television after World War II and the challenges associated with such conversions led to a dimis

In most instances, during NBC's early years NBC installed network regional production centers in buildings which were either quite new or were then under construction. As a result, NBC was limited in its ability to adapt its own architectural sensibilities to relatively new facilities or directly influence the design of buildings into which they were moving. While the term "Radio City" is generally thought to have first been used in connection with NBC's 1933 Rockefeller Center complex, a press photo of the newly-opened Merchandise Mart's Studio A, issued by NBC's Midwest press relations department, refers to "...the world's largest radio studio - one of the six most modern ones in the National Broadcasting Company's new Midwest radio city in Chicago."

NBC's own view of its regional pantheon of Radio Cities was perhaps best expressed in its 1947 "NBC's Air Castles" publication which identified New York, Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Washington, Hollywood and San Francisco as Radio Cities. Philadelphia, apparently of lesser status, was identified in a Radio Center.

While NBC had inaugurated its Midwest operations from the Lake Michigan Building, it was almost immediately apparent that larger facilities were needed. By 1930, radio seemed to be a depression-proof business and increasingly prosperous stimulating NBC to decide it needed regional production centers which reflected the company's grand vision of its future. With the network's cramped New York studios limited programming originations, NBC set about developing vastly larger quarters in Chicago and moved into Chicago's vast, newly-constructed Merchandise Mart, on October 10, 1930.

The Merchandise Mart, whose architect was Alfred Shaw, was designed in a general *art deco* style and, again, NBC was in the position of leasing space in a building which had been designed for more general uses. In moving to the Merchandise Mart, NBC President, Merlin H. Aylesworth, announced that "Three years ago, I said that Chicago would be the radio center of the United States. Today, from the National Broadcasting Company facility and studio standpoint, that prediction has come true. In a few months, more programs will originate here than in New York."

NBC's Merchandise Mart spaces were designed by Graham, Anderson, Probst and White, and NBC's 65,000 square feet occupied the building's 19th and 20th floors, the latter reserved for visitors' galleries where the public could observe NBC's production studios (which were located on the 19th floor along with network administrative offices). NBC's own art director, Gerard Chatfield, designed the NBC interiors, which were produced by Marshall Field and Company. At the time the Chicago facilities were opened, they boasted the largest radio studio in the world. In 1935, NBC leased an additional 11,500 square feet (in the previously unutilized building "tower) for studios F, G and H. In 1944, the Blue Network leased an additional 3,700 square feet on the 18th floor as a result of the pending realignments in connection with that network's separation from the NBC Red network. While NBC's uses for the Merchandise Mart studios evolved over the years, radio properties remained active in the Merchandise Mart until 1989 when they moved to the newly-



NBC-TV continues to operate studios on the 19th and 20th floors of the building.

RCA's visionary president, David Sarnoff, predicted a huge future for broadcasting and was already operating the country's major broadcasting enterprise. When the Metropolitan Opera's plans to construct a new opera house in John D. Rockefeller's Manhattan Rockefeller Center project collapsed, Sarnoff took over the Met's portion of that project and had a huge broadcasting complex designed to reflect the grand destiny he envisioned for NBC. One of his terms with Rockefeller was that NBC could name the portion of Rockefeller Center it would occupy. Sarnoff promptly renamed it "Radio City," a name with sufficient power that it came to define the entire Rockefeller Center complex.



*President Roosevelt's
Fireside Chat RCA*

Rockefeller Center was, and remains, one of architecture's *art deco* gems. Now generally regarded as one of the twentieth century's most important and successful buildings, its design was broadly lambasted initially. The *New York Herald Tribune* found it an "affair of bald cubes assembled in expressionless order." Frank Lloyd Wright termed it "the last atrocity committed upon a people already about to revolt." Another architect, Lewis Mumford, who designed New York's Chrysler Building, belittled "If Radio City is the best our architects can do with freedom, they deserve to remain in chains."

But Radio City had been designed for its owner, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., by a contingent of architects loosely assembled under the rubric Associated Architects, who boldly stepped forward to design the largest development ever planned by then. The architectural group's principals consisted of Raymond Hood, who had earlier designed the NBC spaces in 711 Fifth Street, and W. K. Harrison. Hood was an unconventional architect with a huge flair for design and a distain for convention. In describing skyscraper design, Hood once observed "For the client, building a skyscraper" is a chance for a return on his money, for the manufacturer a chance to sell his product, for the contractor a chance to make a profit. There remains the architect, the building's only friend."

Rockefeller envisioned the Center which bore his name as a place where people could come and surround themselves with art and motifs that celebrated the best of the human spirit. Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal had begun stimulating significant government construction projects in an attempt to try brunt the effects of the Depression. These buildings, constructed under the government's Works Progress Administration (WPA), typically used Art Deco motifs of progress, industry, machinery, technology, transportation, etc. and led to development of the term WPA Art. WPA Art blended almost seamlessly with Art Deco and Streamline Moderne, and helped describe that style. Prominent Mexican painter and muralist Diego Rivera, who sought to make art that reflected the lives of the working class, painted several murals in the United States in the 1930s and was commissioned to create a mural for Rockefeller Center's main lobby. For Rockefeller Center's main lobby Rivera began painting the mural, known as "Man at the Crossroads," which included an image of Russian Communist leader Vladimir Lenin. That was apparently too much for the Rockefeller family who had the mural destroyed when Rivera refused to remove the Lenin portion. The mural's destruction, and its replacement by Catalan artist Jose Maria Sert's "American Progress," created a major controversy.

Sarnoff's own vision for his Radio City.

Radio City's inaugural broadcast occurred on NBC's seventh anniversary, November 15, 1933. The network's 22-studio Radio City facility embodied a fusion of the stylish, new *art moderne* design, the latest construction technology, and specially commissioned art which expressed the nation's high expectations for the social, educational and artistic attainment which radio seemed to offer. While relief sculptures like "Wisdom" (over the RCA building main entrance), and the inside murals of Juan Sert, depicted the story of a communications revolution in the making, must have been the result of Rockefeller's own artistic plan, they nevertheless blended virtually seamlessly with NBC's own sensibilities. To a far greater than typical degree, the completed Radio City New York became an iconic advertising image for both NBC specifically, and the radio/communications industry generally.



Sarnoff, whose electronic media career began as a telegrapher for American Marconi when he was just a youth, was in London at the time Radio City New York was inaugurated. Harkening back to his telegrapher days, he used a telegraph key to flash the letters "R C A" to New York to signal the building's formal inauguration while narrating the ceremony on a transoceanic circuit. The building was renamed the GE Building in 1986 when that company purchased RCA (although it is still referred to as the RCA building in this publication.) While colloquially called Rockefeller Center, NBC's 2013 sale to Comcast brought about another name change to the Comcast Building.

Next, NBC next designed new quarters for station KOA, Denver CO, which the network purchased in March, 1930. Opened on the Tenth Anniversary of KOA's first broadcast, December 15, 1934, the new studio complex—called Denver Radio City—occupied the fourth, fifth and sixth floors of a building at 1625 California Street. Walter H. Simon was the architect. While NBC sold KOA in 1952 to a company owned by Bob Hope, KOA (joined by its TV counterpart) occupied Denver Radio City until August, 1959. The building was demolished in the early 1960s.



[left] CBS medal, 1931.
[above] NBC medal, 1936.

Following Denver Radio City, NBC sailed into an impressive program birthing new Radio Cities in a number of regional production center communities. First, it moved its Washington facilities from the National Press Club Building to the elegant art deco movie theatre/office complex known as the Trans-Lux Building. Located on 14th Street between H Street and New York Avenue, along with administrative offices NBC and WRC shared use of 7 studios in the 20,000 sq. ft. leased areas on the building's top floor.

President Franklin Roosevelt participated in the new Washington complex's July 22, 1937 saying the new facility "seemed to him to "symbolize the onward march" of radio."



RCA 88A studio microphone, late

NBC next decided to construct a new western facility, known as Radio City



RCA even carried its streamline moderne styling to its line of transmitters, as is evident in this RCA high-power shortwave transmitter circa 1940.

Francisco. Designed for the corner of Sunset and Vine Streets in Hollywood it was a huge complex on a historic location, the site of Hollywood's first motion picture studio. While industrialists had originally believed that San Francisco would be the West Coast's most prominent metropolis, a western equivalent of New York City, but by the mid-1930s that prophecy clearly had not been born out. It had become clear that Los Angeles would surpass its northern rival in prominence and the decision to construct NBC Radio City Hollywood reflected that understanding.

While NBC was certainly not the first to utilize *streamline moderne* styling for a radio broadcasting property, the Hollywood project provided NBC with its first opportunity to design a complex “from the ground up” and the resulting structure became one of the nation's most elegant, and iconic, applications of that style in radio.

Designed by John C. Austin (who also designed the Griffith Park Observatory, the Los Angeles City Hall and other major area buildings), the massive, pale green and creamed *streamline moderne* Radio City Hollywood was, in many respects, NBC's crowning architectural achievement. Constructed at a cost of \$2,000,000 (the equivalent of \$32.2 million in 2012), NBC designed Radio City Hollywood with stunning attention to detail including entirely floating studios in which each studio was actually a separate building standing on its own, separate foundation), construction which used no rivets (to avoid any motion in wall surfaces) with the corridors adjacent to studios featuring cork flooring to reduce sound noise. Studios were constructed with no two walls being parallel and each of the four audience studios featured a slightly different color scheme. Radio City Hollywood's impressive lobby stood three stories tall, featured a terrazzo floor in which lightning bolts pointed to the building's Master Control, which was situated behind what NBC termed “invisible glass” to facilitate public viewing. “Invisible glass” reportedly was achieved by constructing the window in such a way “that the surfaces of the glass are curved to a continuously different radius from front to back so that reflections are directed away from the observer to an absorbing surface” providing a view unobstructed by reflections. Featuring four large audience studios — each of which seated 340 persons — and four studios without audience spaces, the lobby's crowning achievement was a huge 20 foot by 40 foot mural. “The Spirit of Radio,” designed by Edward Trumble, spanned the lobby's eastern and southern walls above the visible Master Control's location over which the mural was centered. Radio City Hollywood opened on October 17, 1938 but lasted barely a quarter of a century before, in recognition of the vast decline in network radio programming operations, it was demolished in 1964 to make way for a bank.

The *streamline moderne* style was well-suited to NBC's self-concept and David Sarnoff's own vision for NBC and radio. Where CBS displayed a strong artistic flair, in the *art deco* style, NBC fully embraced the industrial, transportation-evolved *streamline moderne* style. The two networks' differing self-concepts are quite clearly illustrated in two commemorative



NBC Usher Uniform Patch

was created in 1931 to honor individuals who had made “distinguished contribution to the radio art,” was designed by noted American sculptor Gaetano Cecere and featured a flamboyant, flowing *art deco* design. Almost in direct reactions, in 1936 NBC struck a medallion to commemorate the network’s 10th anniversary. Strongly *machine age* in design, the NBC medallion was made of pewter where the CBS medal was cast in bronze. The NBC medal must have been conceived in 1935 or early 1936, and would have thus been a precursor to the looming serious design work for Radio City Hollywood. NBC’s evolution from *industrial modern* to *streamline moderne* thus came quickly, and from a distinctly different vision, than that of the network’s principal rival, CBS.

In San Francisco, NBC’s Hunter-Dolin Building facilities seemed both inadequate to the times and ill-located to the major entertainment industry, and personnel, which had developed in Los Angeles. Not yet fully appreciating the degree to which network radio production would migrate to Hollywood, NBC began planning for a new San Francisco facility immediately upon completion of Radio City Hollywood.

Radio City San Francisco was designed by Albert F. Roller, again in *streamline moderne* style, and opened in 1942. Legend has it that, belatedly understanding Hollywood’s rise in prominence, NBC tried at the last minute to cancel construction of the San Francisco facility but the cancellation order contained in a wire, arrived slightly too late to be implemented. In some eyes, that made the building a “white elephant” from the day its doors opened. At Radio City San Francisco, NBC continued its investment in art representing the importance of radio with a main façade fired tile mural, designed by C. J. Fitzgerald, which remains a San Francisco artistic and architectural landmark. NBC abandoned Radio City San Francisco when its 25-year lease expired in 1967. However, the building returned to broadcast usage when Field Communications’ KBHK-TV, Channel 44, took over much of the former NBC space in the late 1970s. Field lovingly uncovered and restored the Fitzgerald façade mural, which had earlier been covered over.

NBC’s last opportunity to design a facility occurred following the radio operation’s departure from Chicago’s Merchandise Mart which occasioned the construction of the NBC Tower in 1989. The Leeds Silver 37-story NBC Tower was constructed at 455 N. Cityfront Plaza and, interestingly, the building – albeit over fifty years since the network’s last architectural commission -- was again designed utilizing the *streamline moderne* style which had become NBC’s architectural signature.

NBC’s *streamline moderne* studios in Hol-



tion. A significant percentage of local radio station studios designed immediately before and following World War II very consciously emulated the NBC designs. RCA's own manufacturing division, which was a major supplier of radio (and early television) studio and transmission equipment carried the *streamline moderne* styling into the equipment it sold, which was heavily used in local station's studio interiors across America.

In architecture, broadcasting science and artistic content, NBC created facilities which made bold statements about the company's vision of broadcasting and its future. Spanning the nation, these buildings express a sense of mission and place unequalled in American communications architecture.

In 2023, only Radio City New York, and the 1989 Chicago facility, remain in operation as broadcast facilities (although, notwithstanding its name, Radio City ceased to be home to any NBC **radio** enterprise with the sale of WNBC-AM on October 8, 1988 and the sale of the NBC Radio Network, and that name, to General Electric in 1989). Radio City Hollywood and Radio City Denver were demolished long ago and Radio City San Francisco now boasts only its exterior fired-tile mural as homage to the building's broadcasting past. Yet, the style, form, content and art embodied in these buildings all strikingly continue to transmit the passion, vision and sense of innovation which gave them birth.

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New York

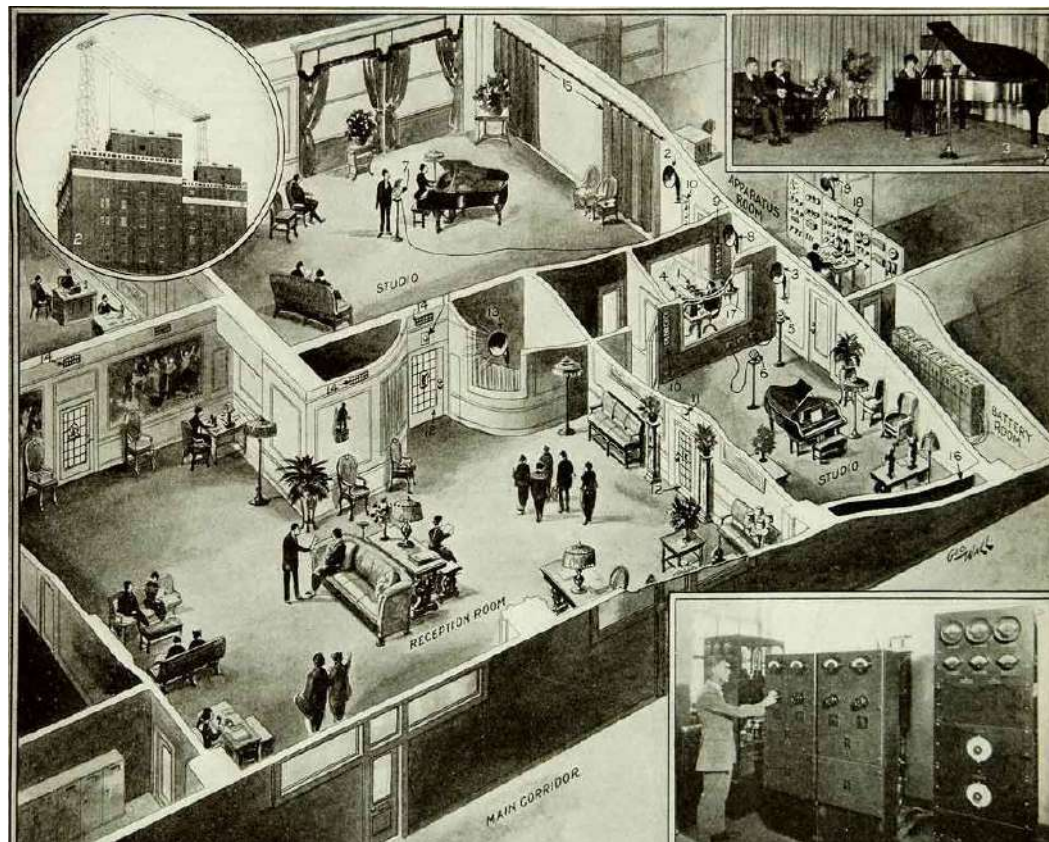
195 Broadway





NBC occupied the AT&T headquarters building for only 11 months so it can be assumed that the network largely inherited the WEA/AT&T studio facilities as they had existed prior to NBC's launch. Both the photo at left, and the floor plan, date from the pre-NBC ownership era but are likely reasonably accurate reflections of NBC's brief tenancy prior to the network's move to 711 Fifth Avenue.

[Above] Main studio during broadcast [postcard, Ronald Kramer collection]
 [Below] Floor plan of WEA studios, 1924. [Scientific American, May, 1924]

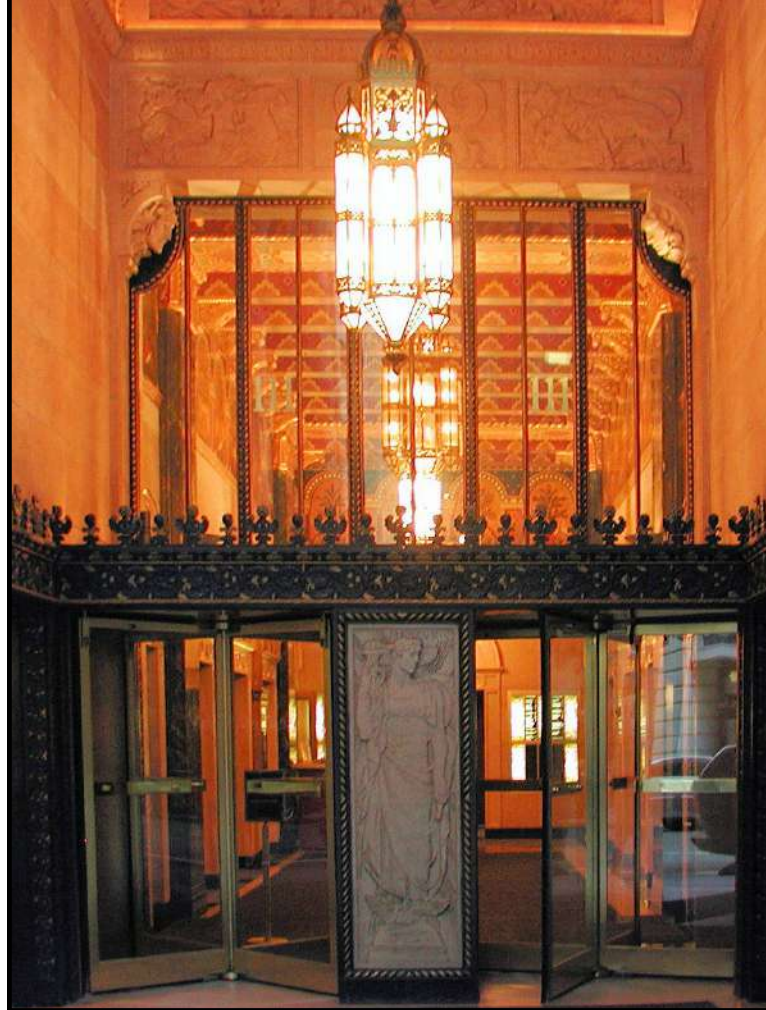


San Francisco

111 Sutter Street



*Hunter-Dulin Building
[postcard, Ronald Kramer collection]*



A National Landmark, 111 Sutter Street retains its distinctive Romanesque character.

(Above Left) Building main entry decorative panel

(Above Right) Main entrance

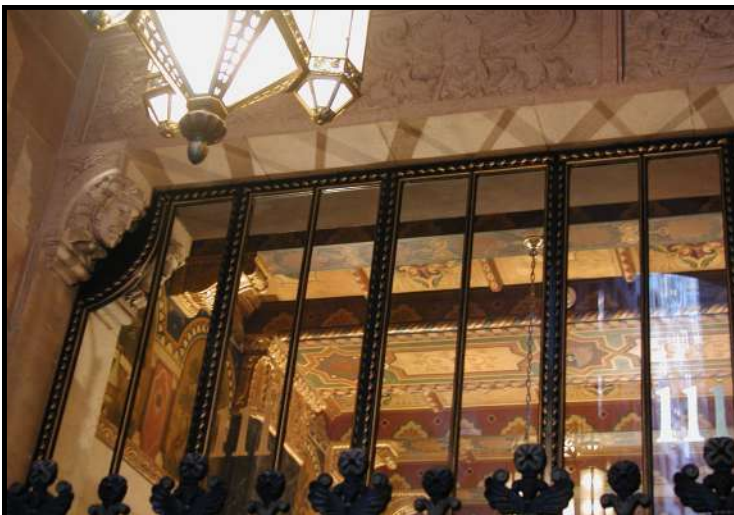
(Right) Main Entrance column

[photos by Ronald Kramer]





(Above) Main entry [Courtesy of Anomalous_A]



(Left) Entry ceiling close-up [Photo by Ronald Kramer]



(Left) Lobby [Courtesy of SF Uncovered]

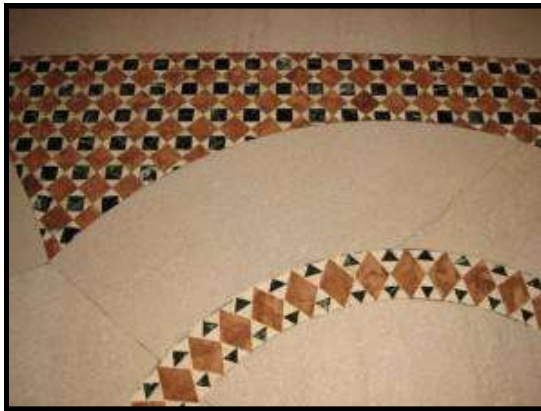
(Below Left) Lobby tile

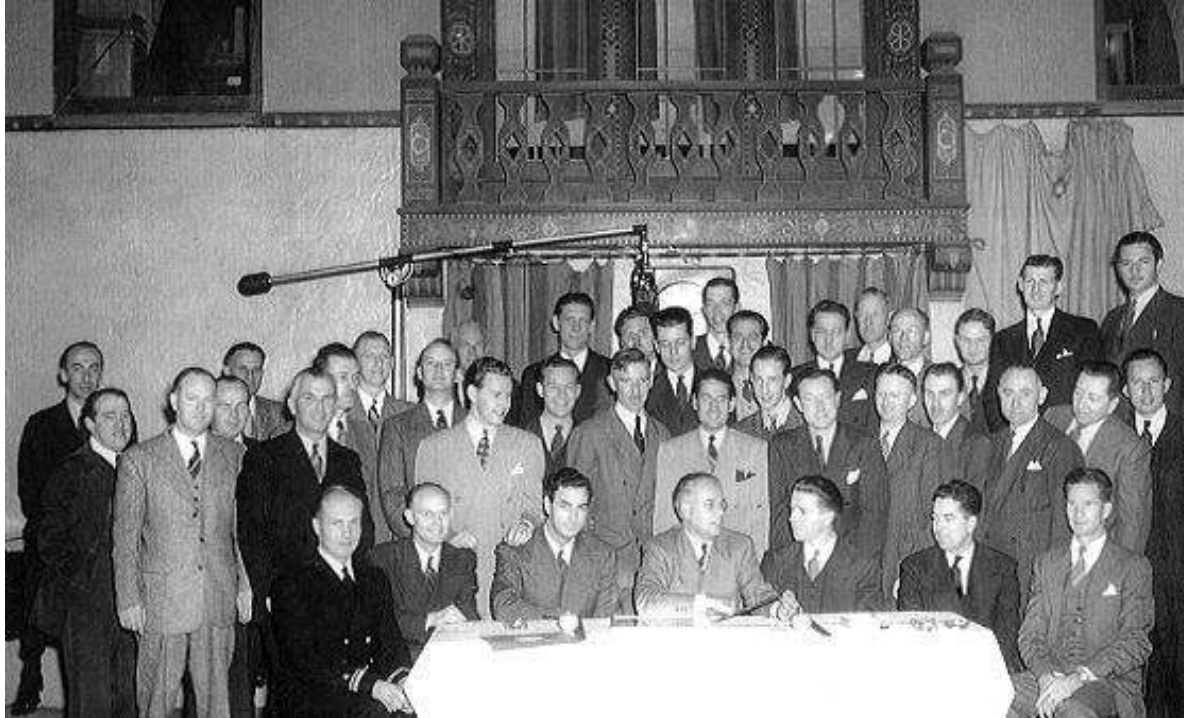
(Below Right) Exterior entry arch

(Bottom Left) Elevator detail

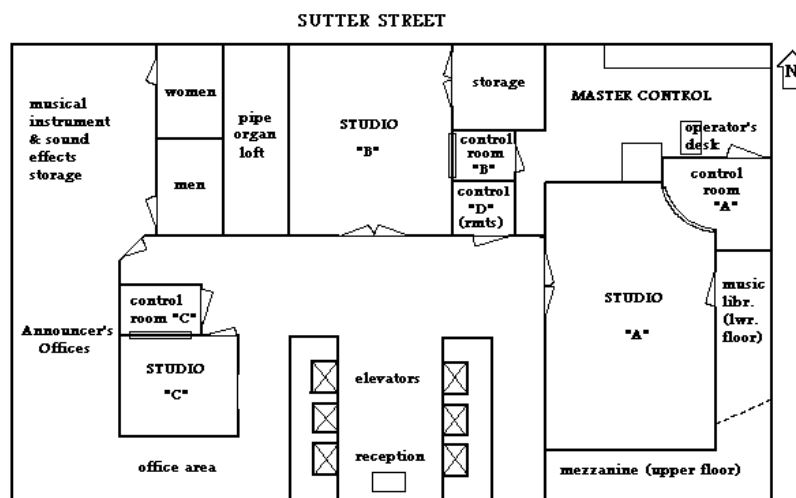
(Bottom Right) Lobby ceiling detail

[Courtesy of Traveling with Sweeney]

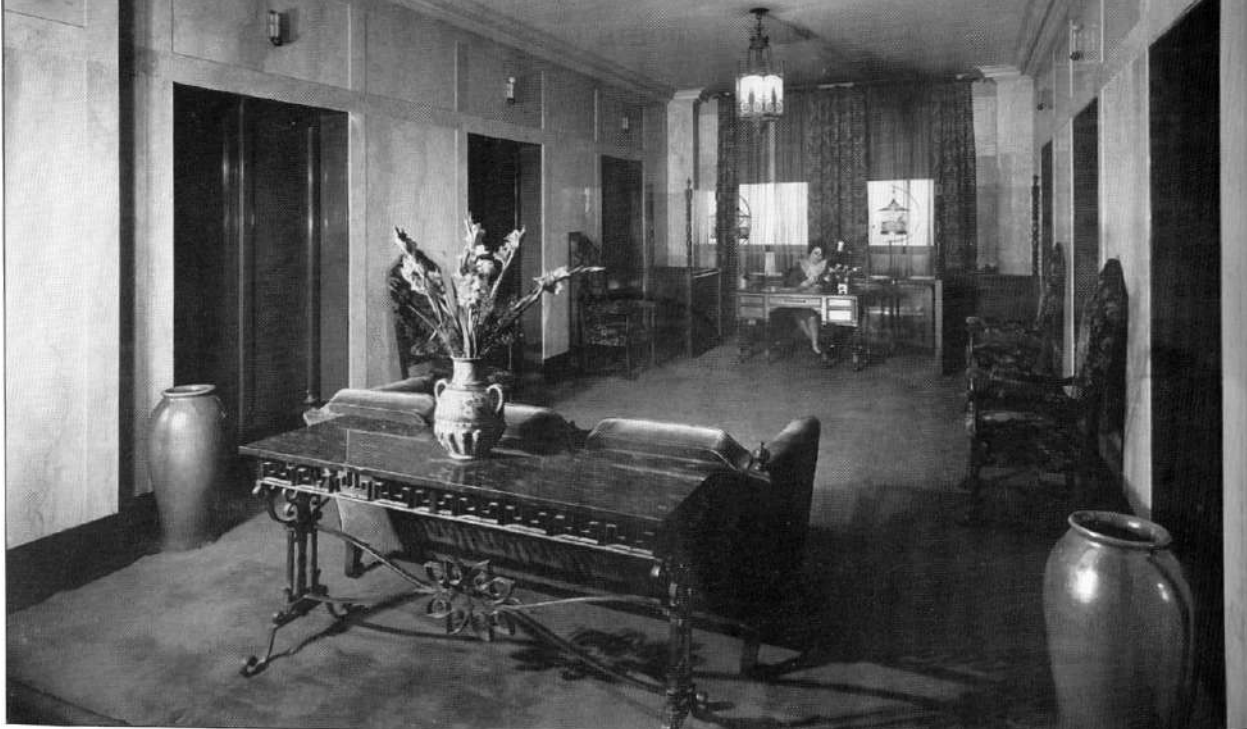




Announcers, engineers and other staff of the NBC San Francisco operations in Studio A in 1941. The occasion was the last day as an announcer of Bill Wood, preparing to enter active service as Lt. j. g. Bill Wood. There are several men from NBC New York in the photo, perhaps because of the then-current construction of the NBC Radio City building.



(Left) Floor plan of Sutter street studios



(Above) Second floor lobby/reception area

(Below) Main transmission room through which all network feeds were controlled
[Courtesy of John Schneider]





The Sutter Street studio's predominant Spanish Mission design is apparent in this 21st floor view of the entry to Studio A (to the left) and the staircase to the 22nd floor viewing area which "flew" above the studio floor. [Courtesy of John Schneider]



(Above) The popular program 'One Man's Family' is being broadcast from Studio C, in 1934. The program was heard on the NBC Pacific Coast Network. Shown are (left to right:) Kathleen Wilson (Claudia); Barton Yarbrough (Clifford); Bill Andrews (announcer); sound effects man Ed Ludes and his water effects machine; Bernice Berwin (Hazel); Mike Raffetto (Paul Barbour); Minetta Ellen (Mother Barbour); Page Gilman (Jack); J. Anthony Smythe (Father Barbour).

(Right) Max Dolin conducting NBC Orchestra in Studio A, 1929. [Ronald Kramer collection]





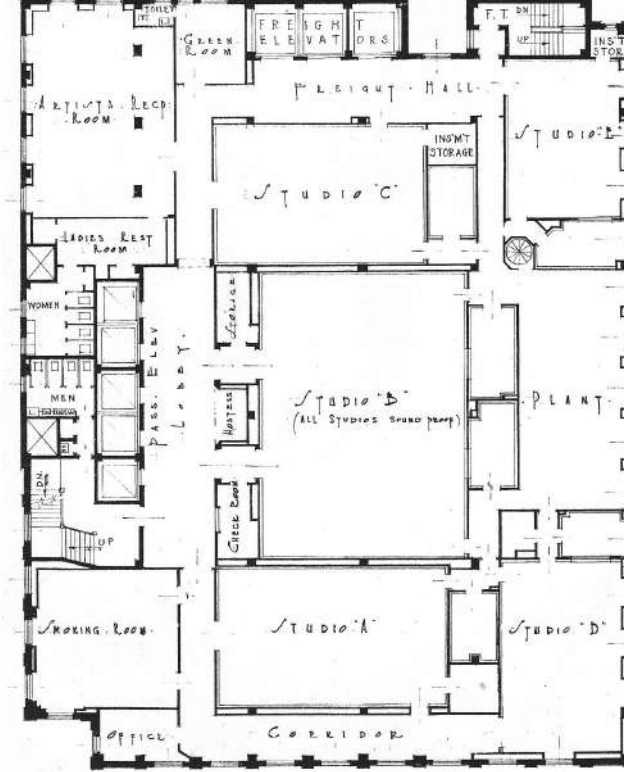
*(Above) Another view of a broadcast of 'One Man's Family'. in Studio 'A' sometime in the mid 1930's.
(Below) Max Dolin conducts NBC Firestone Group in Studio A., 1929..*



New York

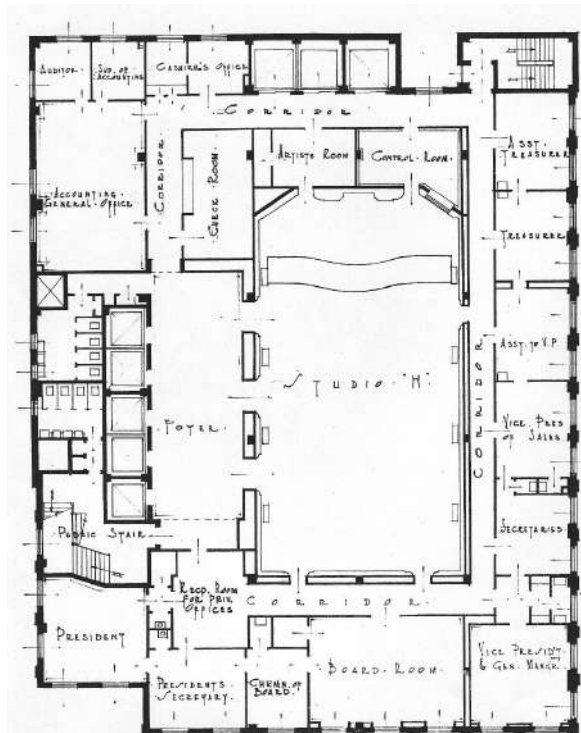
711 Fifth Avenue





[Above] 13th Floor plan; studios are 2 floors high with "viewing rooms" for Studios A, B and C located on the 14th floor. Contemporary press accounts report that NBC installed 8 studios although these published plans show only 5.

[Right] Plan of 15th floor. Floor description from Radio Digest, October, 1928. [Architectural Record, July 1928]



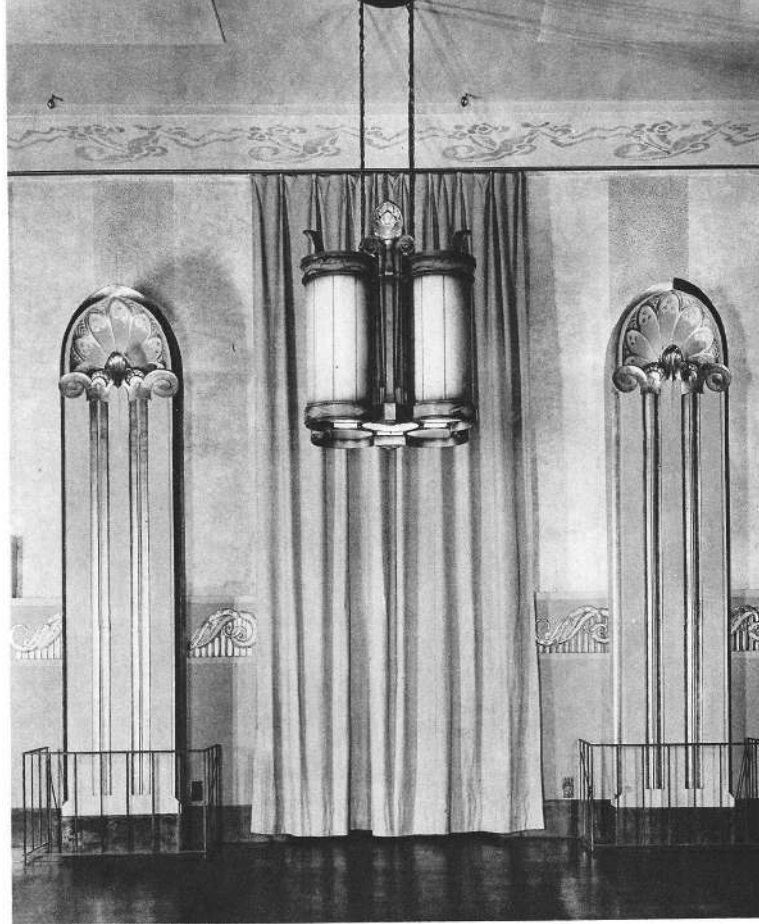


(Above) Studio H—Cathedral Studio [Architectural Record, July 1928]

*(Left) Cathedral Studio
chandelier and pedestal detail*

(Below) Conference room

*[Architectural Record, July
1928]*





Corridor with elevators

*[Architectural Record
July 1928]*

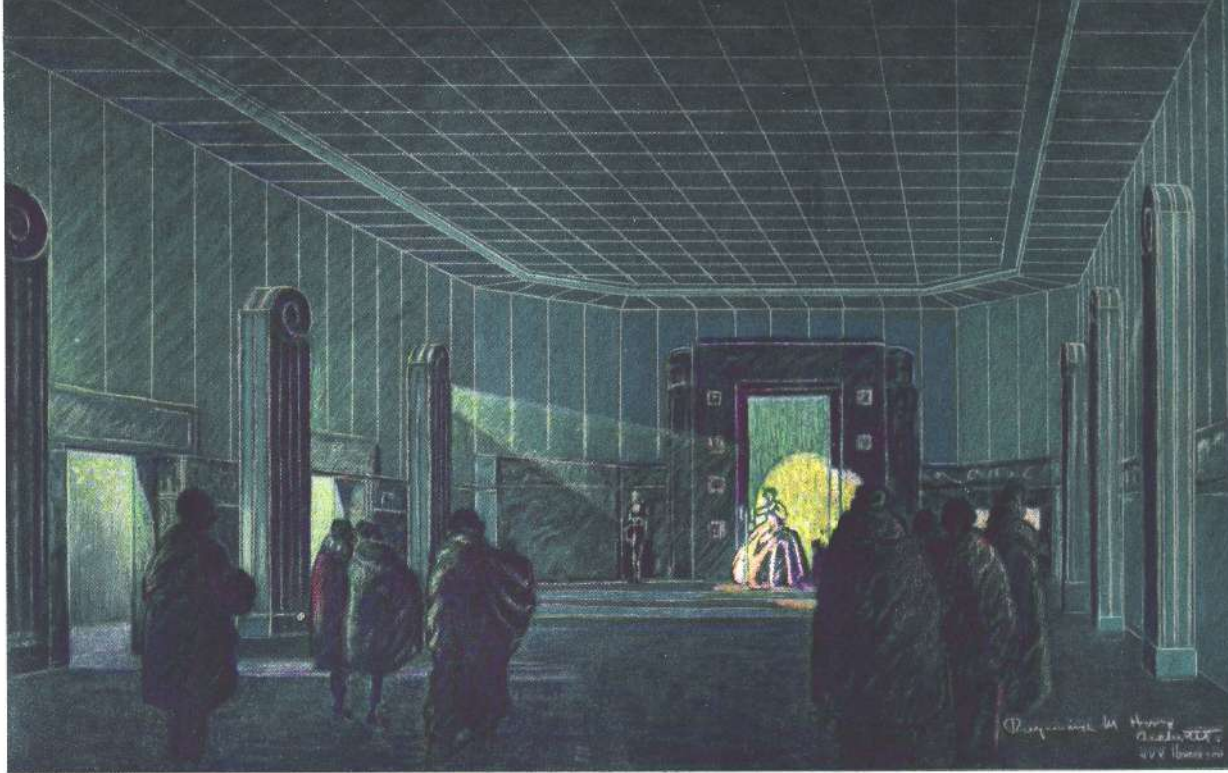


Elevator detail close-up

*[Architectural Record , July
1928]*



Another studio [Architectural Record July 1928]



*(Above) Cathedral Studio during a performance; (Below left) Sitting area; (Below right) Lounge
[Architectural Record, July 1928]*



Chicago

180 N. Michigan Ave



*Chicago's First Network Radio studios
NBC, Lake Michigan Building*

Little Information is available about this NBC Facility

PICK-UP NETWORKS AS, WELL AS BROADCAST NETWORKS

WIRE facilities are employed just as much for extending the pick-ups or program gathering facilities of the national broadcasting systems as for broadcasting or propagating the programs themselves. In fact, every station that forms part of a network system is likewise a pick-up station if need be. There is no more reason why New York City should be the originating studio for a national network than any other leading city, except that this city is the headquarters for the musical, theatrical and educational activities of the nation.

In order to extend the program gathering facilities, however, the National Broadcasting Company is to open a Chicago studio on or about November 1. Engineers have been at work during the entire summer, building and equipping the company's new studios which, with its general Chicago offices, are located in an office building on North Michigan Avenue in the very heart of the city, thus making it convenient for artists and others who must come to the microphone.

The National Broadcasting Company will not operate a station of its own in Chicago, but will serve programs, however, to four Chicago stations—KYW, WEBH, WGN and WLIB. Radio presentations for dissemination to the entire United States are being prepared and when ready will place Chicago in the same position as New York as a point of origin for national radio broadcasts.

In addition to the contemplated feature programs, regular broadcasts will be given from the Chicago studios each night and sent over that part of the NBC networks which cover the Central Time Zone. These programs will follow those originating in New York, which necessarily end earlier because of the time difference.

Chicago, with its wealth of talent, according to an NBC official, will have an opportunity to serve the entire territory covered by this chain. Daytime broadcasting, which will include, in addition to musical programs, educational features of all kinds, will also play a prominent part in the work of the National Broadcasting Company from Chicago. Agricultural programs are likewise to be given special attention.

* * * * *

Washington, D.C. National Press Building



*National Press Building, 1930
[postcard, Ronald Kramer collection]*



*NBC opens new Washington studios,
1928. [Courtesy, Library of Congress]*



*NBC 5th Floor Lobby, National Press Club Building.
[Courtesy, Library of Congress]*

Radio City Chicago

Merchandise Mart



Merchandise Mart at night [postcard, Ronald Kramer collection]



(Above) Studio A (original) was the largest, and most elegant, radio studio in the nation until that distinction was taken by Studio 8H at NBC's Rockefeller Center studios in 1933. (Below) Household Finance Orchestra performing on Blue Network from Studio A, c. 1930. [Ronald Kramer collection]

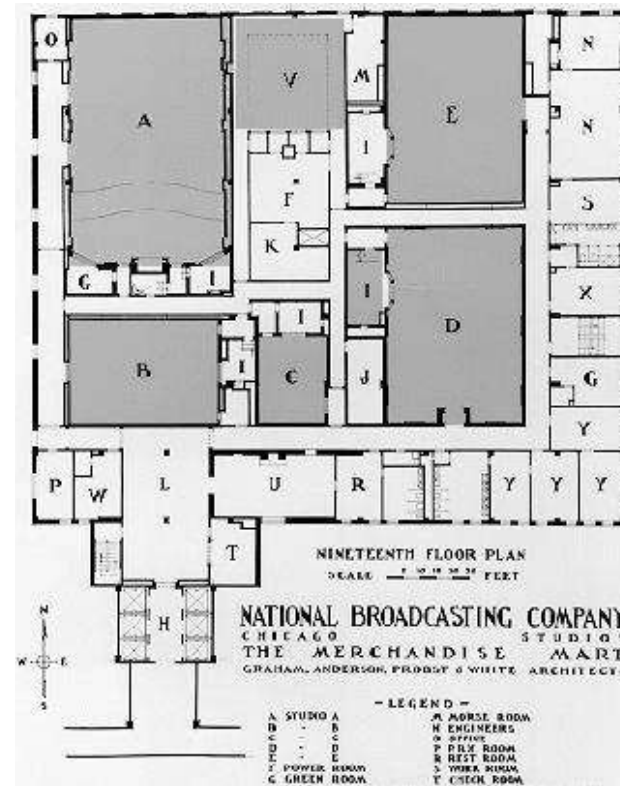




Studio A (remodeled) [Courtesy Rich Samuels]

(Right) NBC Merchandise Mart studios 19th floor (comprising 65,000 sq. ft) plan showing all of the original studios (with the exception of the original Studio F which was located on the 20th floor. Which, beginning in 1935, also housed an organ chamber and two echo rooms). Not shown are three studios built in 1935 (the "new" Studio F, Studio G and Studio H) in an area of the 19th floor not shown on this plan; and three additional studios (Studio T, Studio U and Studio V) built in the southeast corner of the 19th floor several years later.

[Courtesy of Rich Samuels]





*(Left) Studio B
[Courtesy Rich Samuels]*

*(Below) Merchandise Mart
NBC Master Control
[Ronald Kramer collection]*





[Above left] Merchandise Mart NBC Master Control showing full wall of patch panels at left.



[Above right] Master Control showing a wider view. [Courtesy of Rich Samuels]



(Left) Studio C (original) The black panel next to the door on the rear wall was likely the “announcers delight” — a switching control panel that allowed announcers to route the studio’s signal to the appropriate leg(s) of the NBC network(s).

(Below) Studio C (remodeled)

[Courtesy Rich Samuels]





[Above] Studio D [original]

[Below] Studio D [remodeled] [Courtesy of Rich Samuels]





*[Above] Studio D after remodeling
(Below) Studio E [Courtesy of Rich Samuels]*





Studio E (remodeled) [Courtesy of Rich Samuels]

[Right] Glen Webster at the Studio E control room mixing console. Each control room had an identical 4-fader console which, as radio evolved, became inadequate for more complex productions. In the 1940s, they were replaced with larger, more flexible units. [Courtesy of Rich Samuels]





Studio F, which was quite unlike the other Chicago studios, was reportedly built especially for the Amos 'n Andy program and was designed to provide the feeling of an elegant, contemporary parlor with its use of rich woods walls.

[Above] Studio F [Ronald Kramer collection]

[Bottom] Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll (Amos 'n Andy) in Studio F looking into the control room in the mid-1930s. [Courtesy of Rich Samuels]



*[Right] Studio G
[Below] Studio H
[Courtesy Rich Samuels*



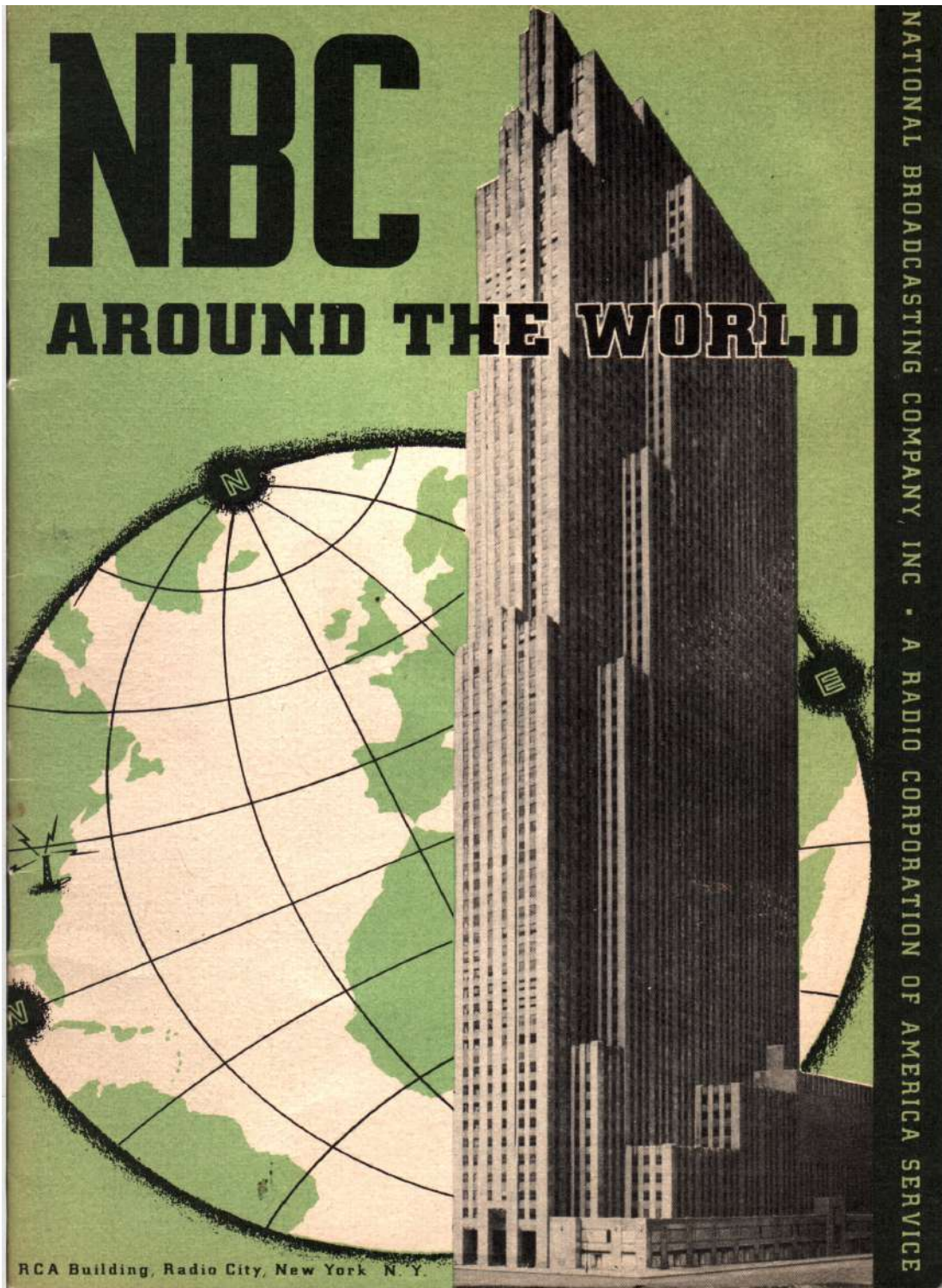
New York

Radio City Rockefeller Center



*View of Rockefeller Center at
night, 1933*

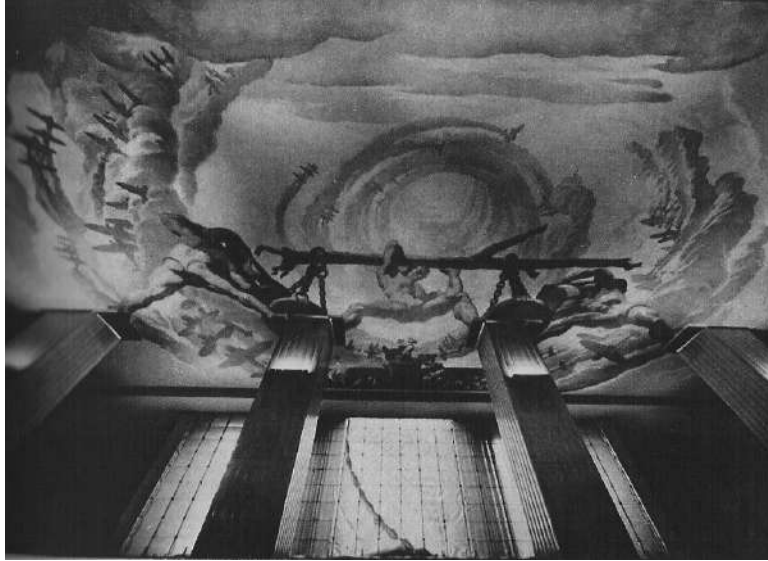
[Courtesy of Wikipedia.org]



*NBC Radio City tour brochure
[Ronald Kramer collection]*



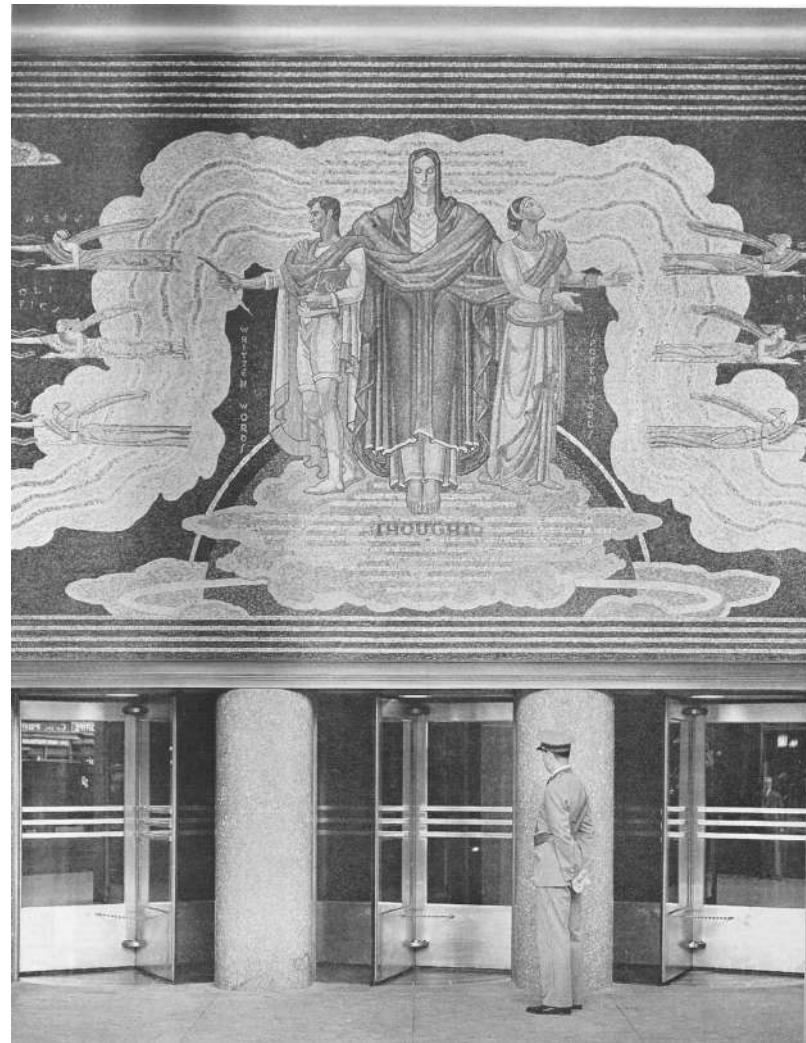
RCA Building, North Entrance, deep-relief sculptures by noted art deco artist Leo Friedlander, symbolic of radio.



[Left] RCA Building Main Lobby south wall ceiling monochrome mural, by Jose Maria Sert, showing titanic figures of the Past, Present and Future against a spiral of planes in flight.

[Below] RCA Building, West Entrance at 1250 Avenue of the Americas, exterior mural by Barry Faulkner Intelligence Awakening," mosaic frieze. [RCAT fig 287]

According to Raymond Hood biographer, Walter H. Kilham, Hood entered the lobby of the RCA Building during construction and concluded that the vast space was too barren. When his proposal for including a large statue was rejected because of its predicted weight load, Hood recommended the creation of large murals which led to commissions from the noted Communist painter, Diego Rivera, Jose Maria Sert and Frank Brangwin. Rivera was reportedly insulted by the others' presence, whom he considered inferior. His 1100 foot mural, "Man at the Crossroads," became controversial and, when he refused to remove a likeness of Lenin's head from his work, the mural was ordered to be replaced with another Sert work which included Abraham Lincoln. The destruction of Rivera's mural is considered to be one of the most controversial events in twentieth century art history.



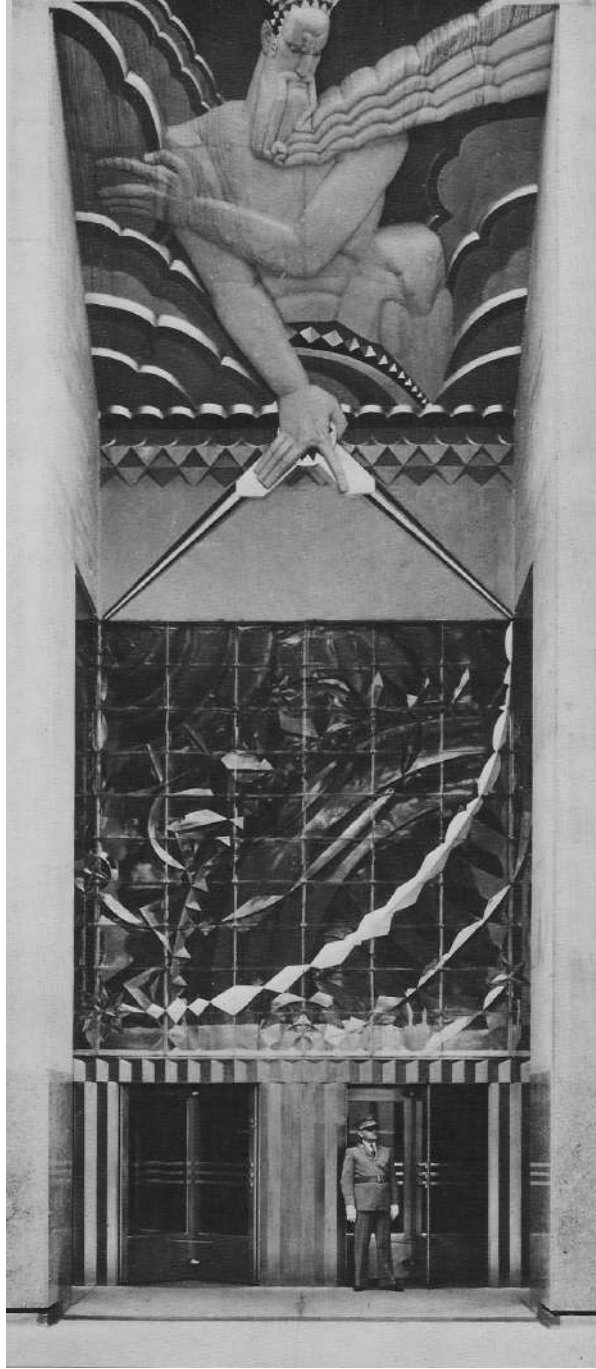


RCA Building north lobby elevator bank wall, four-panel mural — Main the Creator, Man Laboring, Man the Master and Sermon on the Mount — by Frank Brangwyn [Ronald Kramer collection]





Jose Maria Sert's "American Progress" occupies the space — which originally was to have been filled with Diego Rivera's "Man at the Crossroads" — behind the RCA Building's main lobby reception desk, [Courtesy of Diane Bondareff]



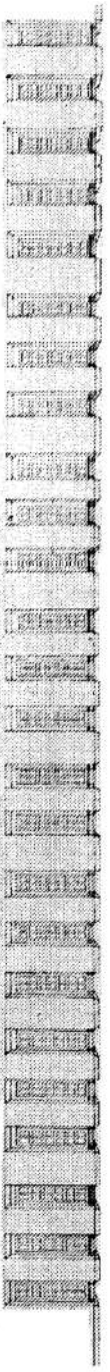
(Above) RCA Building Main entrance, Lee Lawrie sculpture "Wisdom: A Voice from the Clouds" (more popularly known as "Wisdom"). [RCAT interior cover page and fig 273] "The central figure represents genius, which interprets to the human race the laws and cycles of the cosmic forces of the Universe and thus rules over all man's activities. The compass marks on the glass screen below reflect the cycles of Light and Sound."

number of works for the Rockefeller Center complex. Besides the "Wisdom" entry panel, he also created the Prometheus statute outside the main RCA Building entrance as well as prominent pieces for the International Building.

According to Rockefeller Center biographer, Daniel Okrent, Lawrie adapted "Wisdom" from the frontispiece drawing for a 1790s William Blake work.

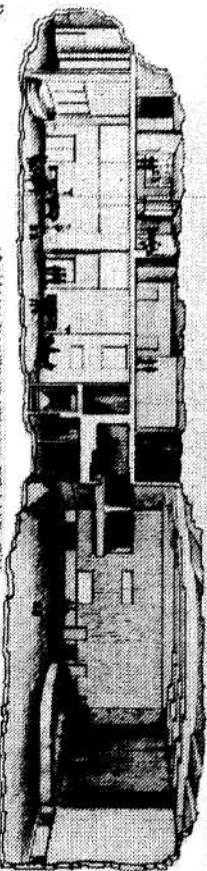
The Rockefeller family's offices were located in the RCA Building and reportedly John D. Rockefeller, Jr. — who committed the family fortune to Rockefeller Center's creation — paid special attention to "Wisdom" because it was the only entrance to the building he was willing to use (arising from the fact that he disliked the Friedlander sculptures adorning the building's north and south entrances).

Floor Plan of NBC Radio City Rockefeller Center
[Broadcasting Magazine, November 15, 1933]



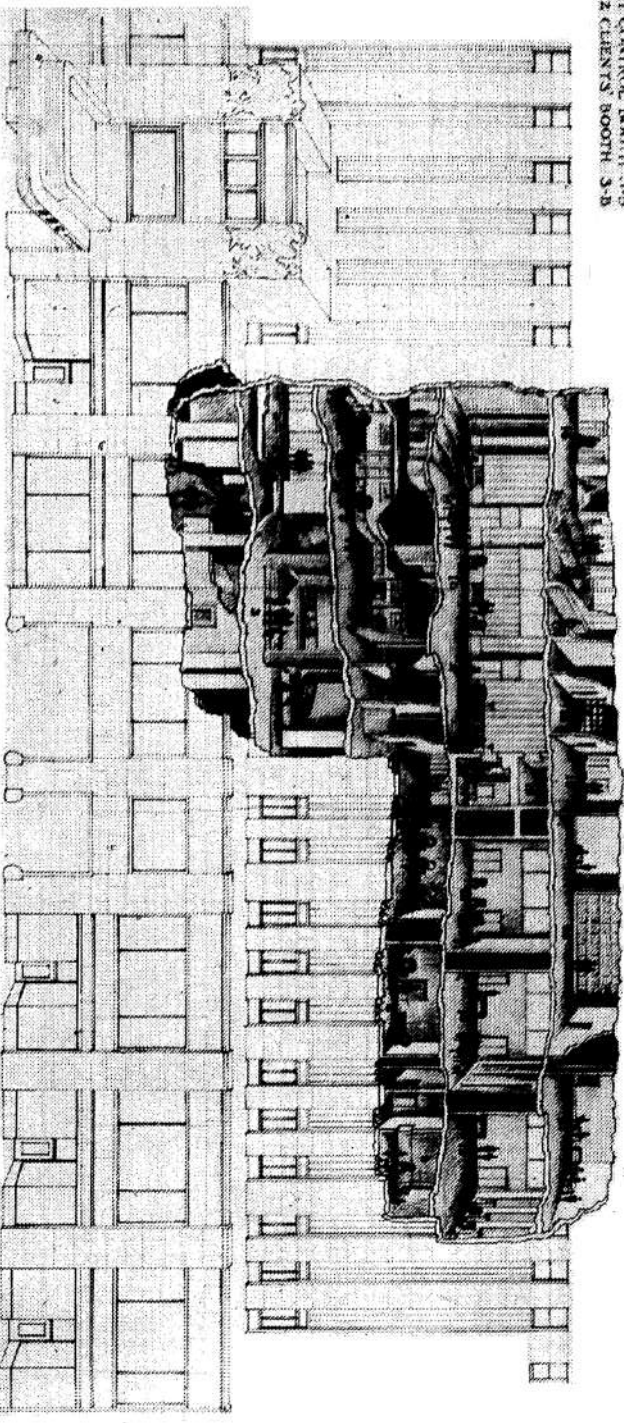
N.B.C.
BROADCASTING STUDIOS
RADIO CITY

- 1 N.B.C. ENTRANCE, 30th STREET
- 2 N.B.C. STUDIO ELEVATOR LOBBY
- 3 MEZZANINE, GUESTS' RECEPTION ROOM
- 4 SECOND FLOOR ELEVATOR LOBBY
- 5 ARTISTS' RECEPTION ROOM
- 6 STAFF ELEVATOR LOBBY
- 7 STAFF DRESSING ROOM
- 8 MURKIN'S LOUNGE
- 9 AIRLIFTON STUDIO
- 10 STUDIO 3-B
- 11 CONTROL BOOTH 3-B
- 12 CLIENTS' BOOTH 3-B



- 13 STUDIO 3-A-B
- 14 STUDIO 3-F
- 15 STUDIO 3-H
- 16 BROADCAST EQUIPMENT OBSERVATORY
- 17 MASTER CONTROL ROOM
- 18 MAIN DISTRIBUTING FRAME R.M.
- 19 STAFF ELEVATOR LOBBY
- 20 MAIN EQUIPMENT ROOM
- 21 SOUND'S EFFECTS
- 22 RADIO GRID STUDIO 8-G

- 23 AUDITORIUM STUDIO 0-H
- 24 OBSERVATION GALLERY STUDIO 0-H
- 25 AIR CONDITIONING EQUIPMENT OBSERVATORY
- 26 AIR CONDITIONING CONTROL ROOM





*(Above) Main
entrance foyer
[Courtesy NBC fr
New York Radio]*



*(Above) Main
reception area
[Blast from the
Past, p 246]*

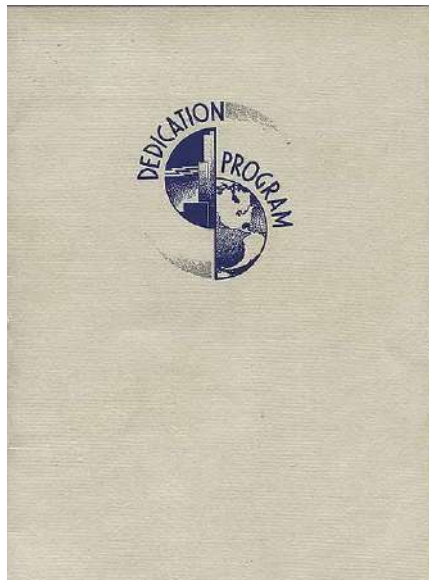


*(Right) Lobby
[Margaret Bourke
White photo,
Library of
Congress
cph.3a49993]*



*Two lobby views
(Above) [Courtesy of New York Public Library
1558105]; (Below right) [Courtesy of Library of
Congress]*

*(Below left) Radio City New York 1933 dedication
program [Ronald Kramer collection]*



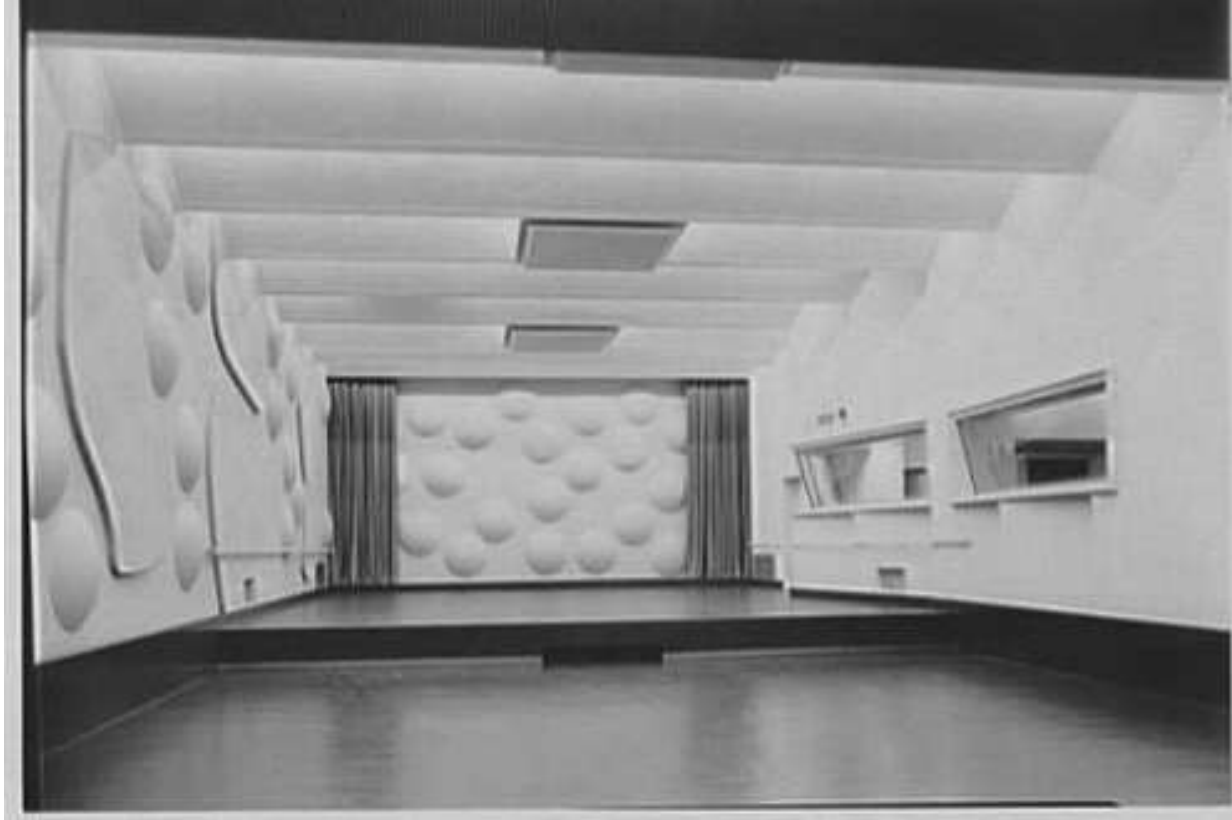


(Above) Second floor lobby [Ronald Kramer collection]

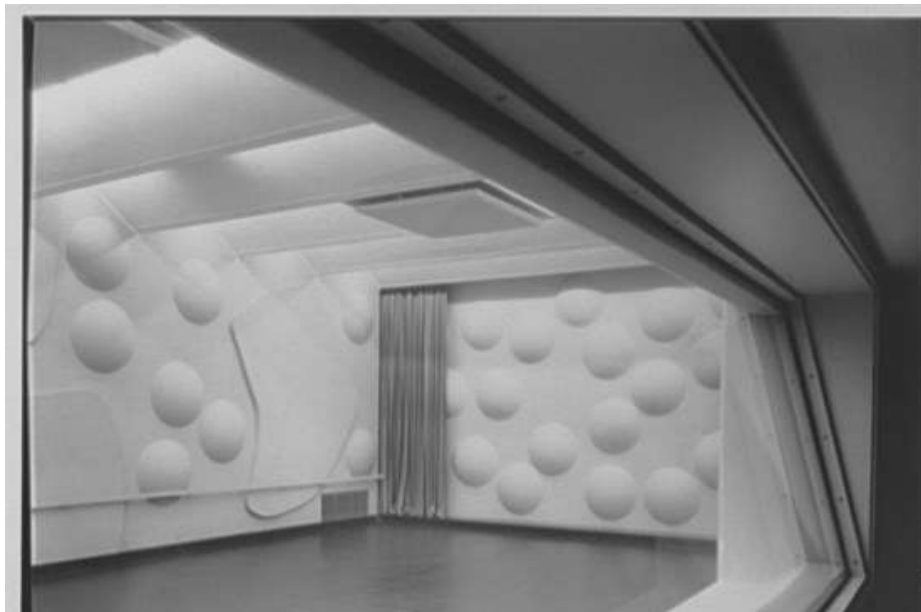


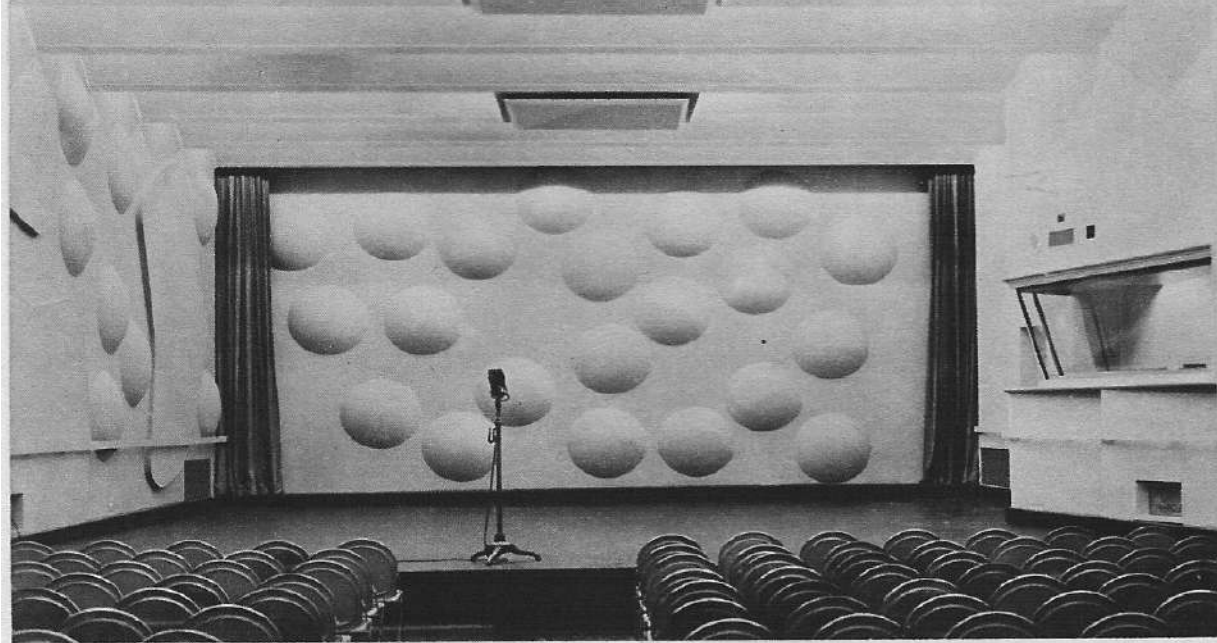
*(Above) Studio 3A, following its 1948 television conversion, looking toward stage.
(Below) Studio 3A side wall showing acoustic tuning panels.
[RCA AM-FM Broadcasting magazine, September, 1948]*



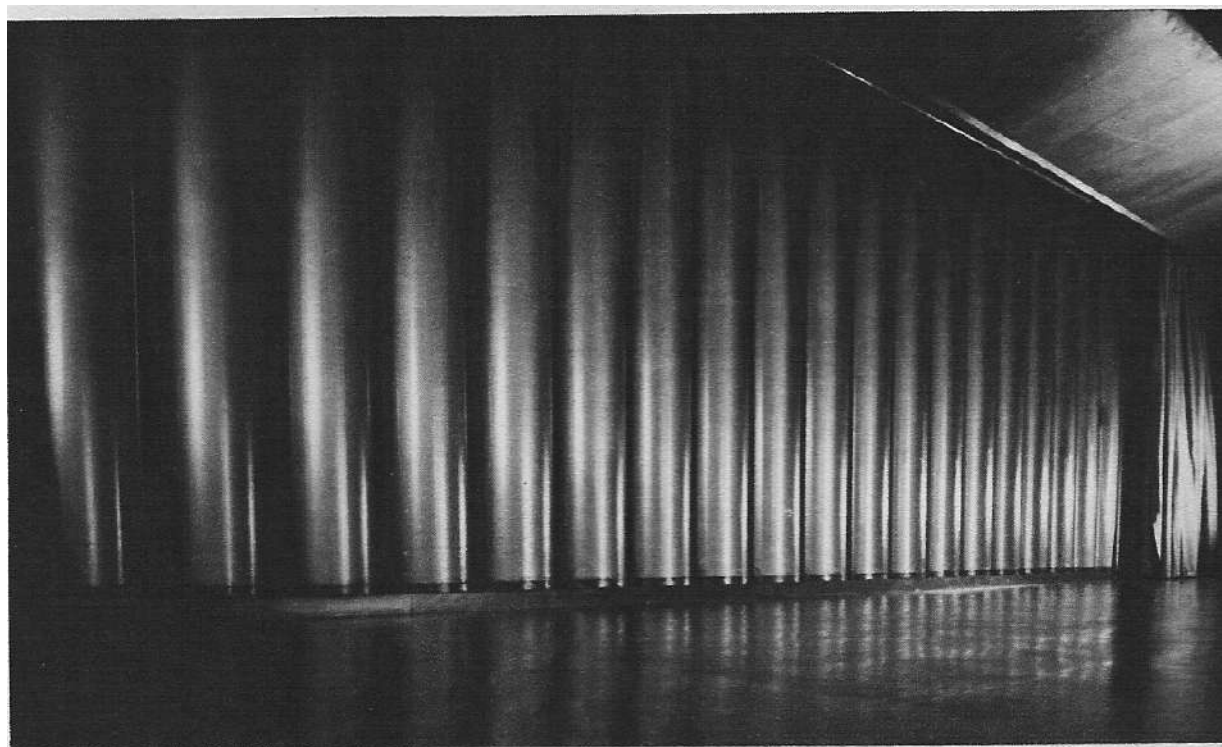


*[Above] Sixth Floor studio
[Below] View into studio from control room [Courtesy of Library of Congress]*





Small studio



(Left) Studio 6A back wall



(Left) Studio 8H (originally just called Studio H, which is located on Radio City's eighth floor), originally held an audience of 1250. [Courtesy of Hagley Museum and Library OCLC 488708123]



(Right) Eighth floor lobby outside studio 8H (the studio doors are in the distance in the center (Ronald Kramer collection))



(Above) Radio Guild Studio (also known as 8G). Note the glass "curtain" which separates the audience from the cast on stage. Studio 8G was converted for television in 1948, the first TV studio conversion which NBC made. 8G was selected for that purpose because its two-story height made it ideal for the addition of the necessary TV lighting grid. 8G's "flying control room," above the studio floor, also allowed the director to be located above the studio for the best sight lines on floor action. [Ronald Kramer collection]



(Left) Smaller studio, seating 250, 1936. [Ronald Kramer collection]



*(Above) Studio 8E [Courtesy NBC fr
New York Radio]*



*(Left) View of Radio City New York
Master Control [Courtesy of Smithson-
ian Institution]*



*(Above) Prometheus fountain [RCAT
fig 323]*

*(Right) NBC letters above main net-
work studio entrance [RCAT fig 108]*





Staircase railing [RCAT fig 109]



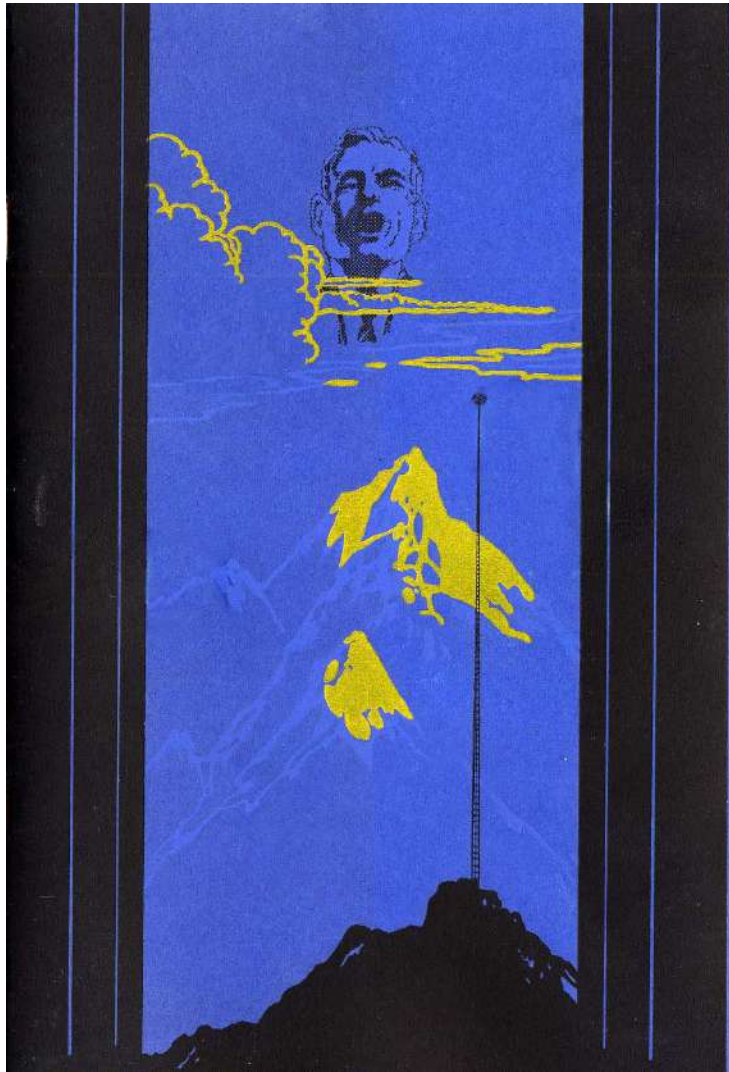




*(Above) NBC main entrance at night [NBC/NBCU
NUP_141759_0001.jpg]*

Denver

Radio City 1625 California St.



*Denver Radio City
Cover, Opening Night Program
December 15, 1934 [Ronald Kramer
collection]*



*Radio City Denver—Exterior View
Opening Night*

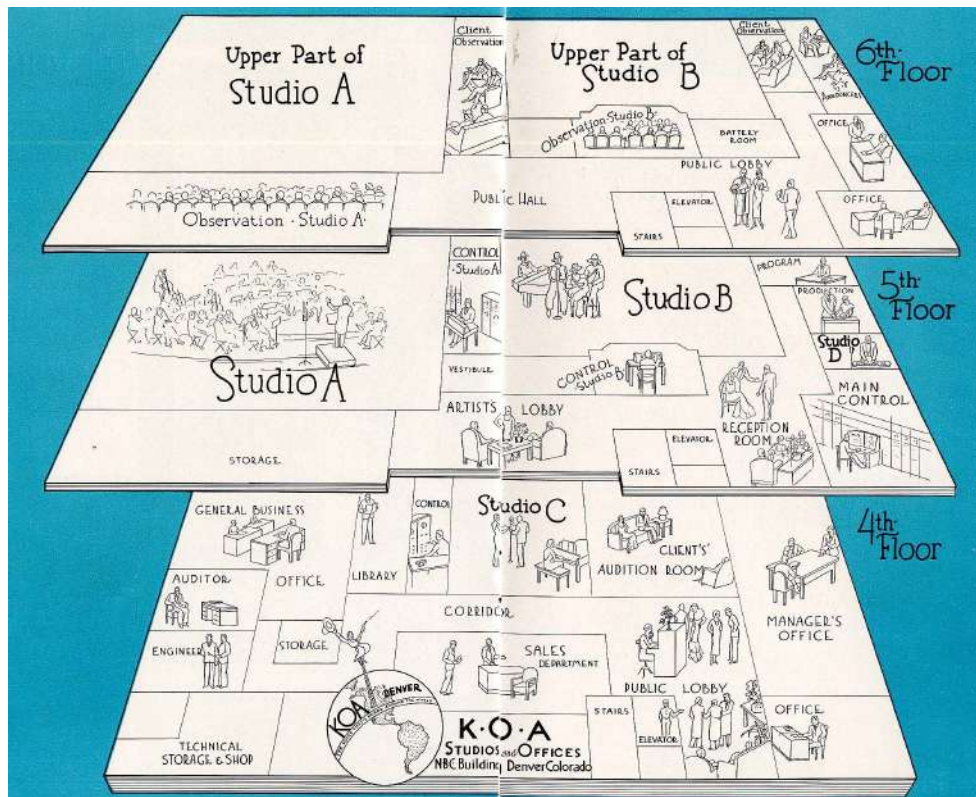
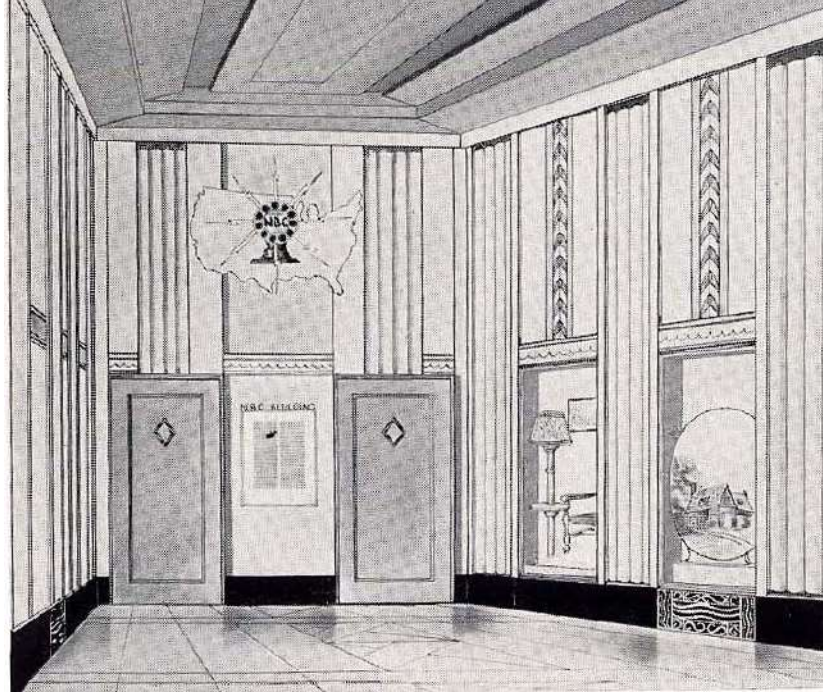
[Ronald Kramer collection]



Main Entrance [Ronald Kramer collection]

First floor lobby
Illustration, Opening Night
Program

[Ronald Kramer collection]



Building Floor Plan from Opening Night Program [Collection of Ronald Kramer]

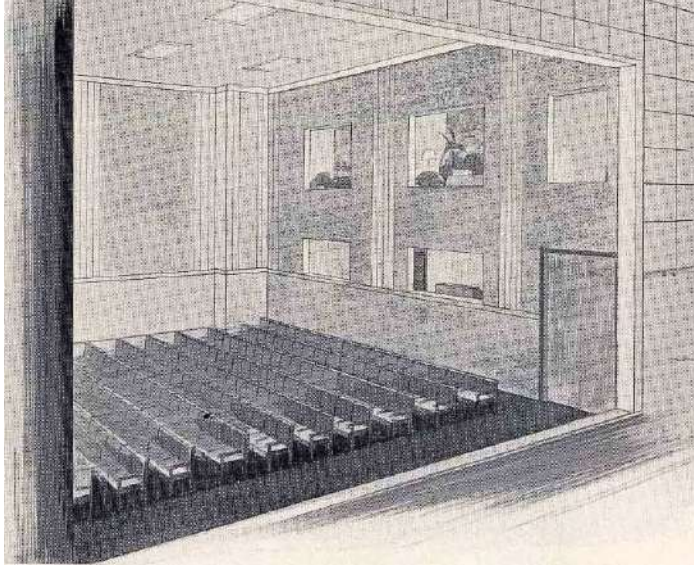


Main Reception area—fourth floor.

[Courtesy Denver Public Library Western History Collection]



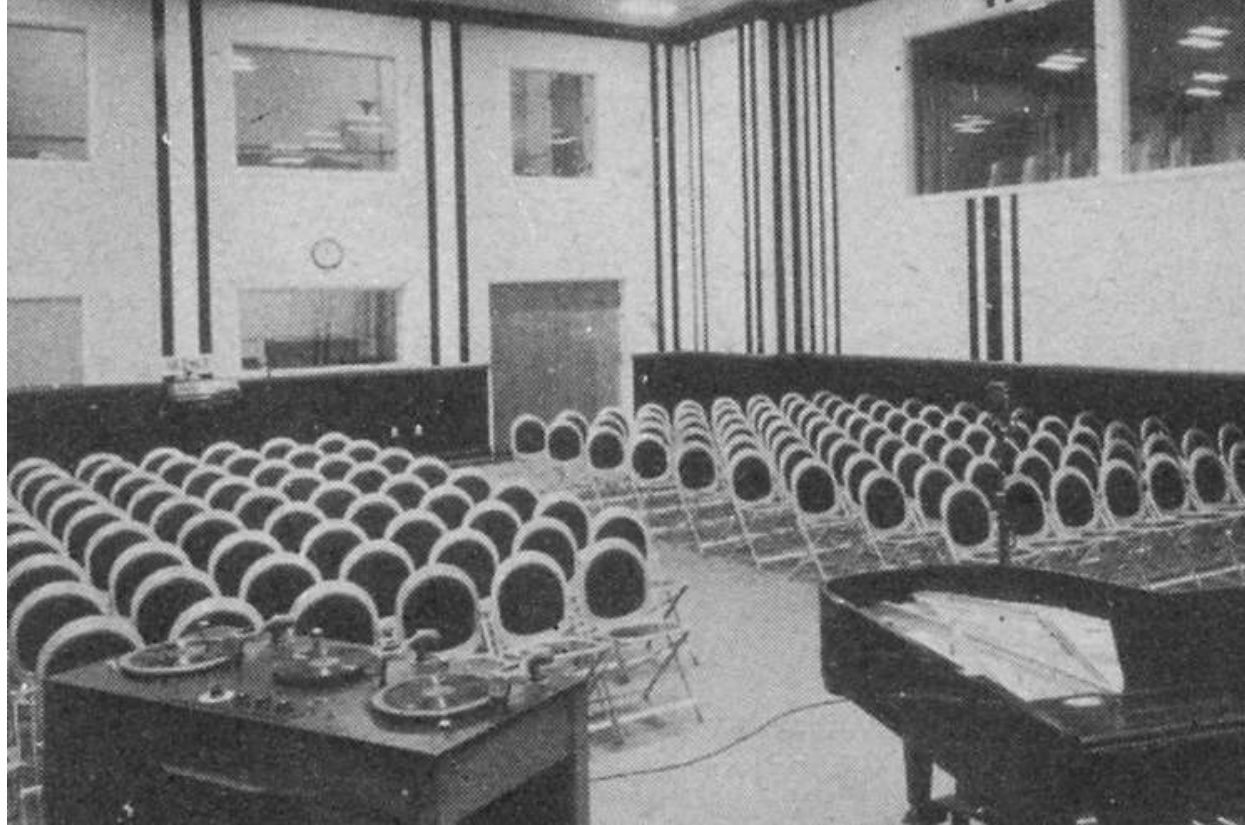
Studio A - Fifth floor [Courtesy Denver Public Library Western History Collection]



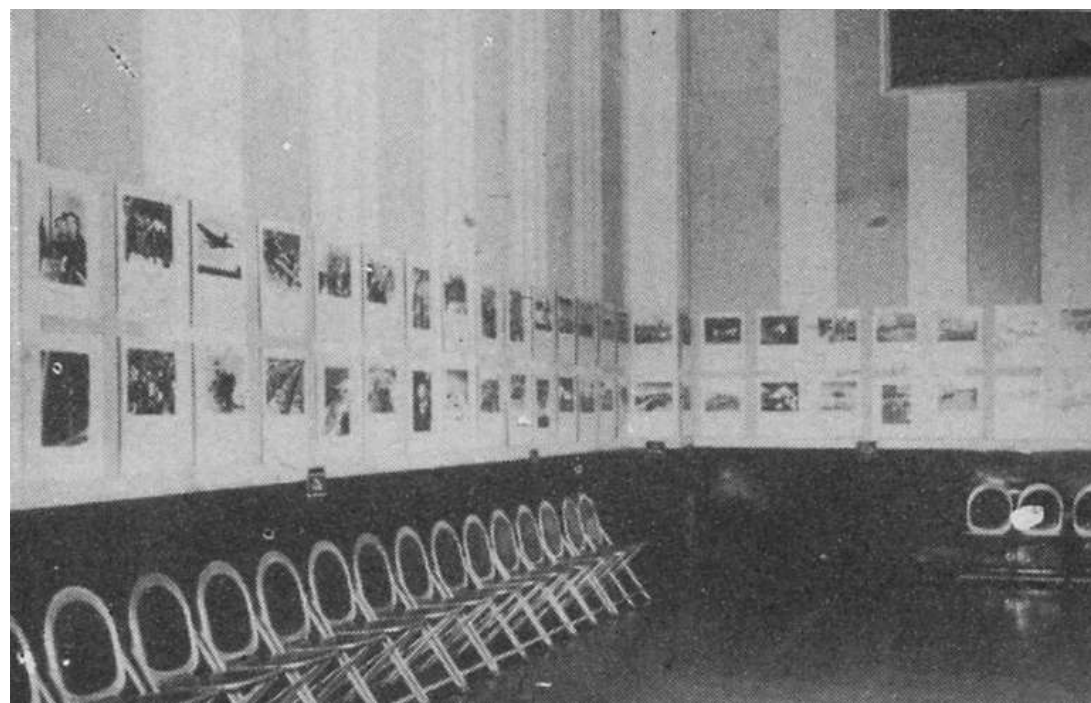
Studio C, fourth floor—Audition studio, illustration. Opening Night program [Ronald Kramer collection]



Studio C—fourth floor [Courtesy Denver Public Library Western History Collection]



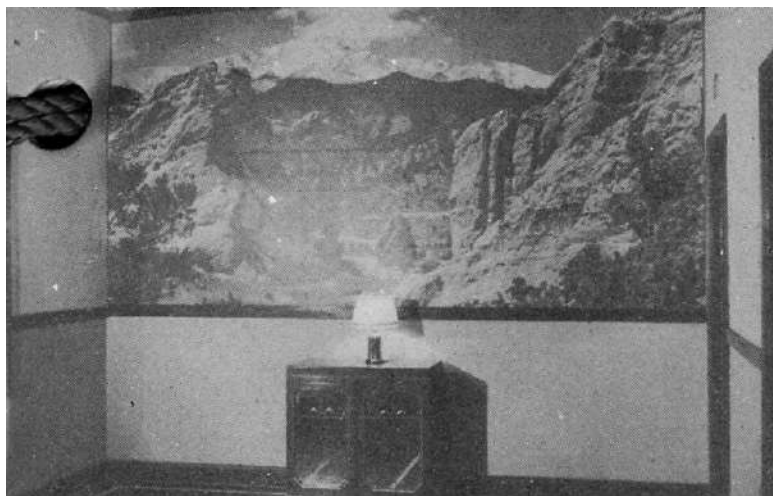
*(Above) Studio A - fifth floor
[Below} Studio B—fifth floor [Collection of Ronald Kramer]*





*Three views of Fifth Floor lobby near
Studio D*

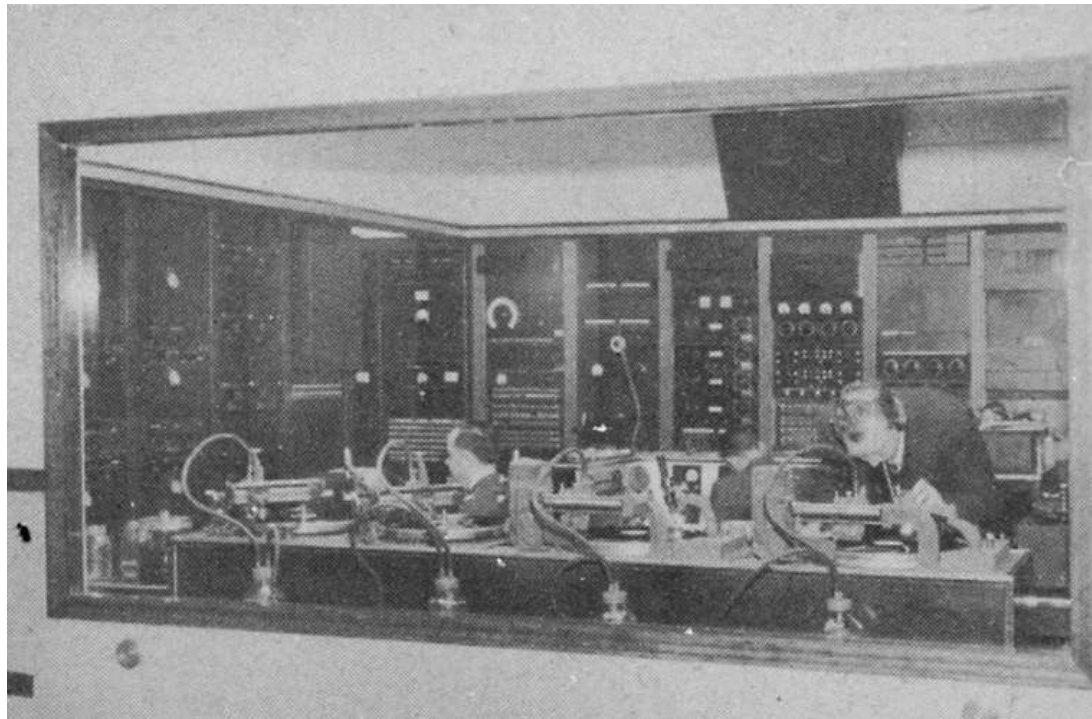
[Ronald Kramer collection]





(Above) Clients booth above Studio A; (Below) View into Master Control—fifth floor.

[Collection of Ronald Kramer]





[Left] Radio City Denver (also later known as the Wells Music Building) exterior

[Below] Radio City Denver — Opening Night, December 15, 1934. [Courtesy Denver Public Library Western History Collection]



Cleveland

Radio City 815 Superior Ave.



Contemporary view of Superior Building, 815 Superior Avenue (originally NBC Building)

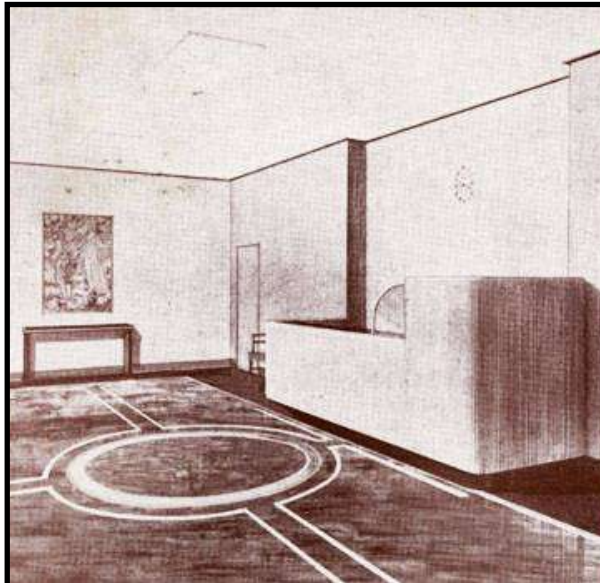
[Courtesy of Alamy]



Inauguration the NBC Building - Feb. 21, 1938

[(left) Mayor Harold Burton installing building plaque]

[(below) Crowd at Building inauguration]



ONE OF THE NATION'S foremost radio stations, WTAM Cleveland, will move its studios into spacious new quarters in the National Broadcasting building—formerly the Guarantee Title Building—at Ninth and Superior.

The architects' drawing shows the entrance foyer and information desk. From this dignified entrance-way, visitors will be welcomed into the beautiful new studios, each seating an audience of 300 people.

Another forward step in the progress of WTAM is the construction of a vertical antenna at Brecksville, Ohio, which will insure clearer reception of the station's programs. These extensive improvements will cost approximately \$350,000.00.



*(Left) Studio B] smaller studio, seating 250,
[Courtesy Cleveland Memory Collection]*



(Lobby)



*(Left) SBC Orchestra
[Courtesy Cleveland Memory Collection]*

*(Right) Administrative offices
[Courtesy Cleveland Memory Collection]*



(Left) Staircase

*[(Right) Lobby
[Courtesy Cleveland Memory Collection]*





*(Right) Announcer at Announcer's Delight
[Courtesy John Schneider]*



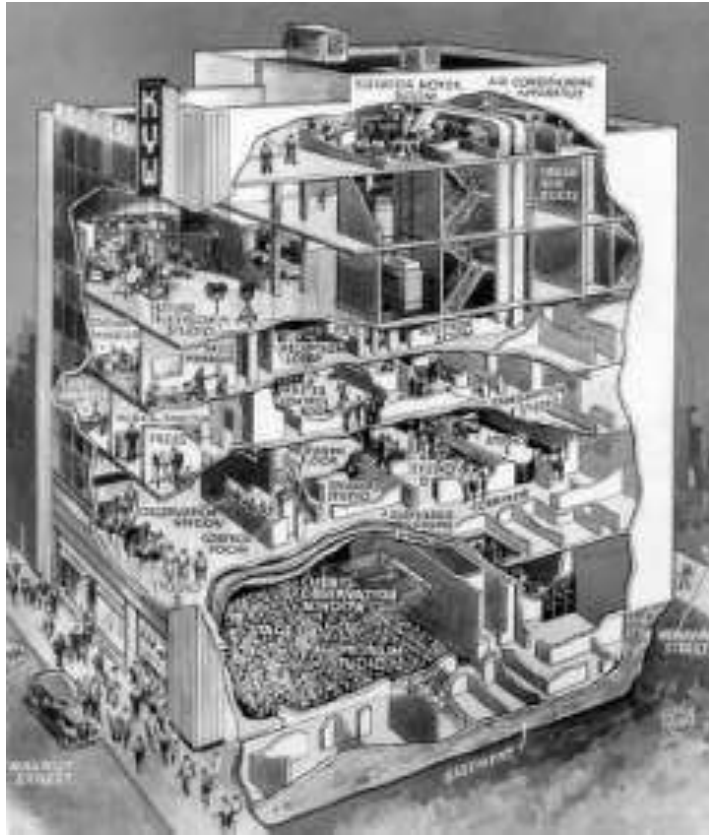
*WTAM/NBC Cleveland Manager Pribble
welcoming Ohio State University FM
Workshop studs. [NBC Transmitter, Sept.
1945]*

Philadelphia

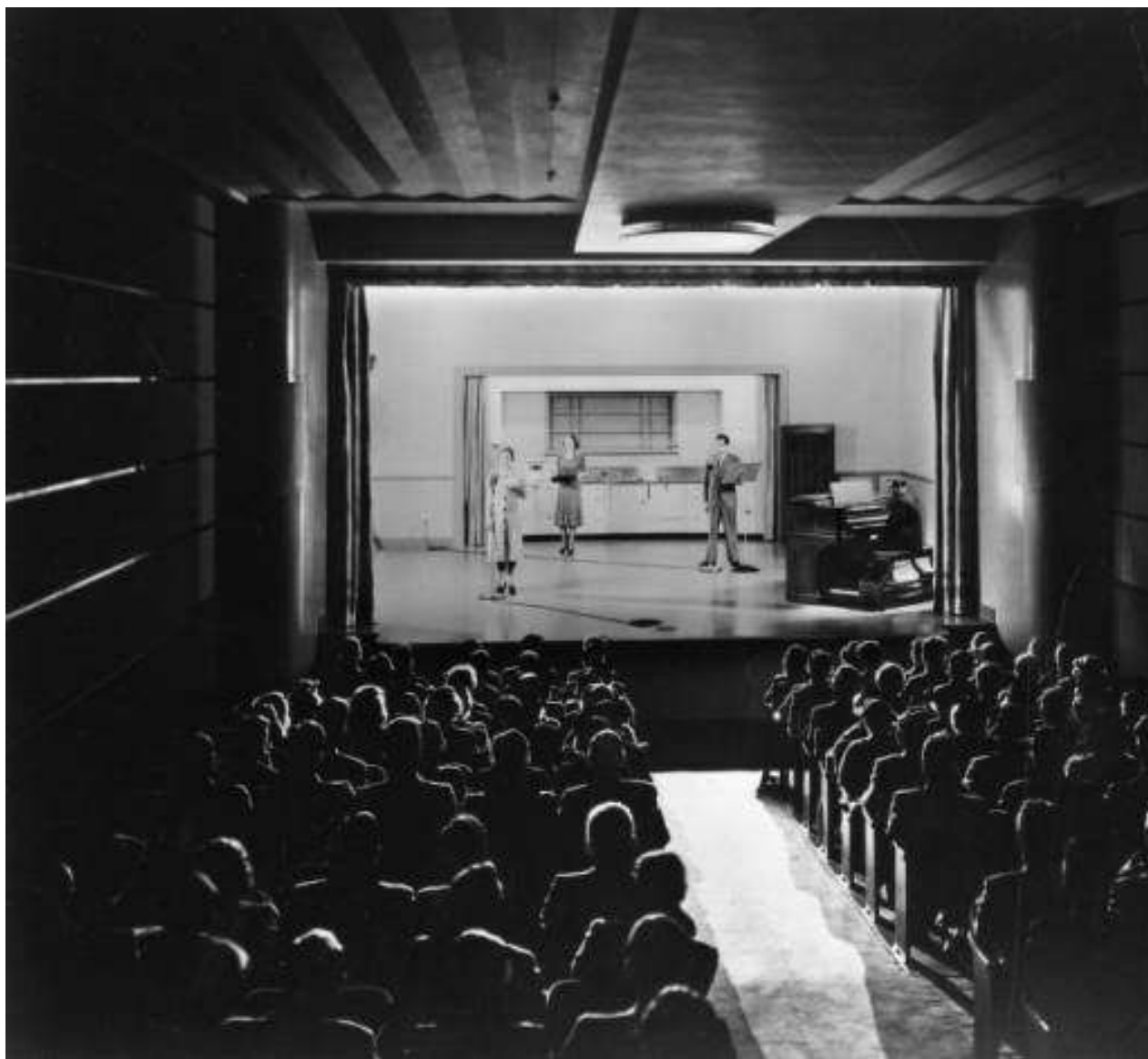
Radio Center



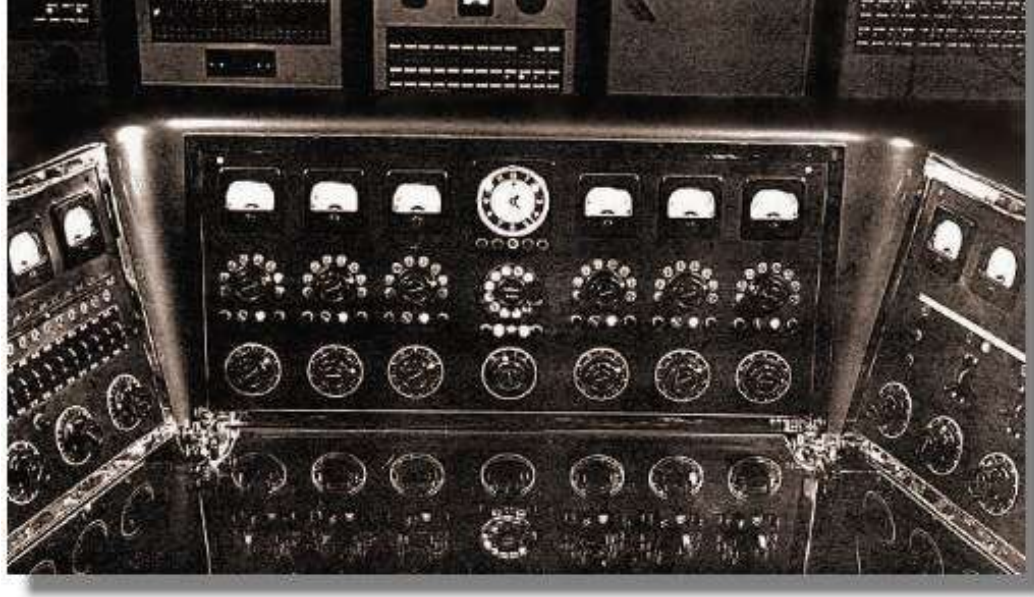
*NBC/KYW Building
Radio Center
1619 Walnut St.
Courtesy of Broadcast Pioneers*



Courtesy Temple University Urban Collection



Studio Broadcast
[Temple University Urban Collection]



Master Control



Studio Recording



Washington

Radio City Trans-Lux Building

*Trans-Lux Building
Courtesy of Library of Congress*





*Built on a slope, the Trans-Lux building had three floors at one end sloping toward the theatre area which intruded into a portion of the second floor.. RCA leased the majority of the second floor and NBC and WMAL occupied the entire third floor.
[Courtesy of the Library of Congress]*



*Trans-Lux Building, view from the Northeast.
[Courtesy: Library of Congress]*



*Third floor NBC foyer.
[from NBC Transmitter,
1937]*





Hollywood

**Radio City
Sunset & Vine Sts**



[Above] Tour brochure

[Right] postcard

[Ronald Kramer collection]



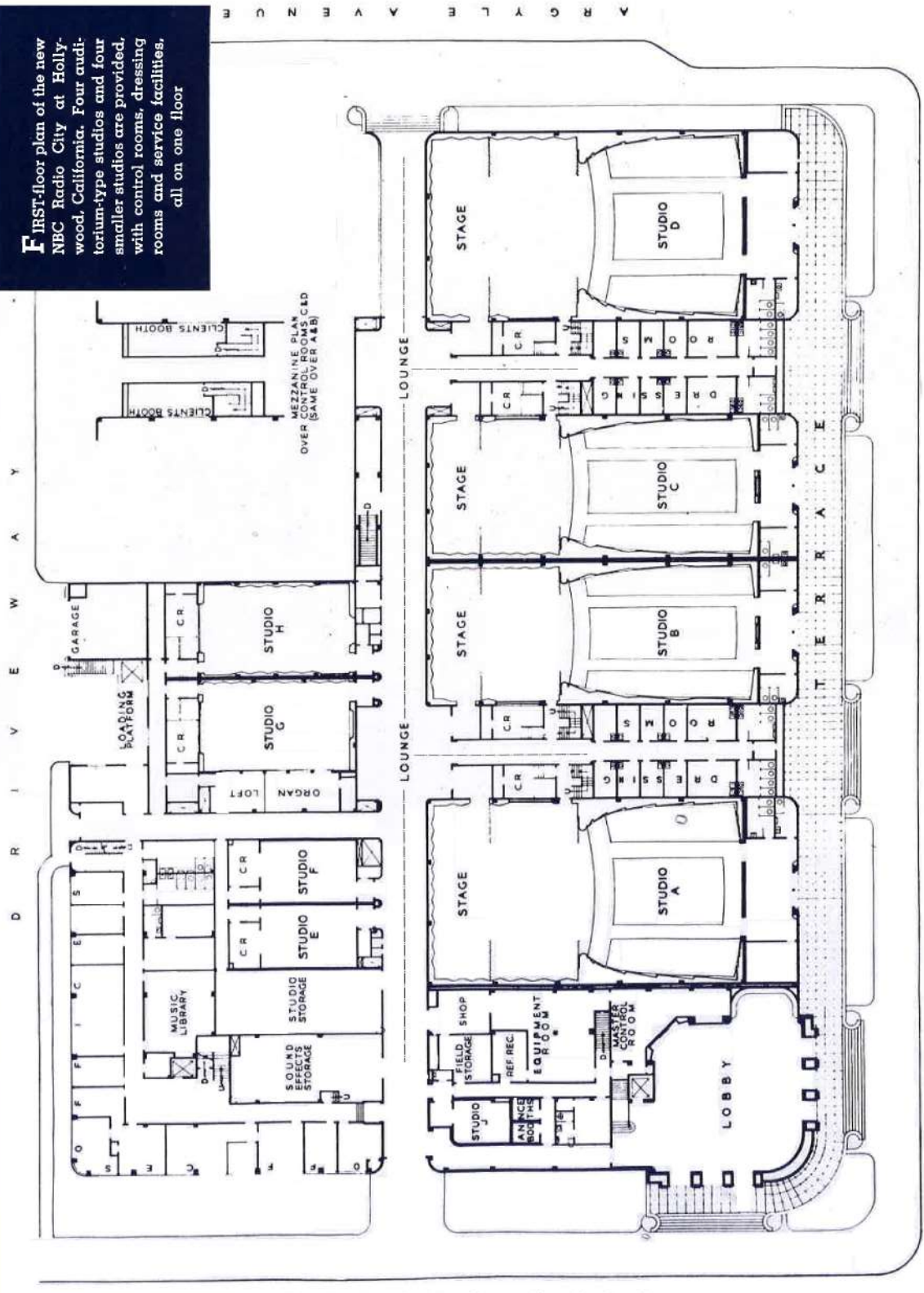
*(Left) [Courtesy of
Flickr photo sharing]*

*(Below) Exterior view
of exit staircase from
Studios C and D.*

*[Ronald Kramer
collection]*



FIRST-floor plan of the new NBC Radio City at Hollywood, California. Four auditorium-type studios and four smaller studios are provided, with control rooms, dressing rooms and service facilities, all on one floor.



VINE STREET

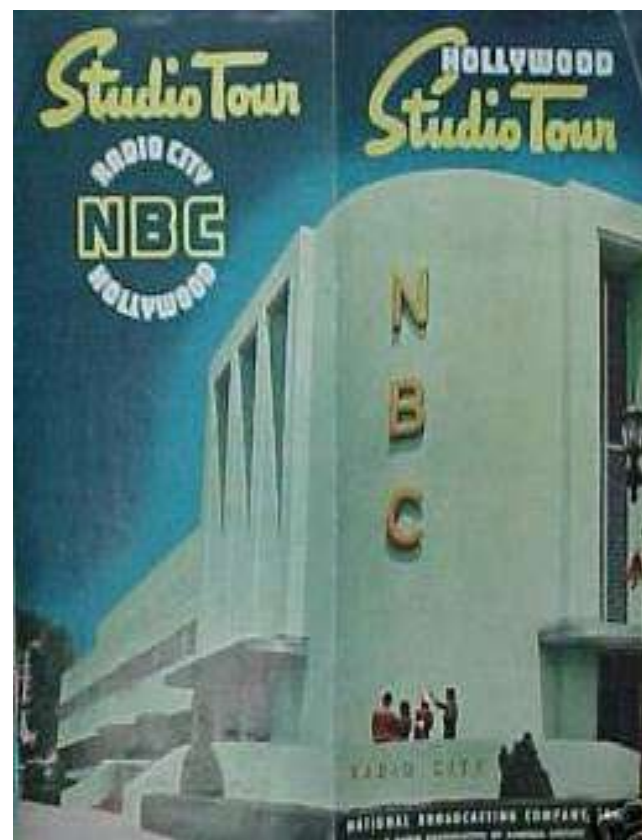
SUNSET BOULEVARD

ARGYLE AVENUE



(Above) Aerial view, which includes the addition to Radio City Hollywood for KNBH-TV's studios, which were constructed in 1948 in the two rectangular structures — shown with the arrow — at the top rear of the main structure. NBC moved KNBH-TV and its TV network facilities from Radio City Hollywood to the newly-constructed NBC Color City, in Burbank, in March, 1955. [NBC Hollywood Property Inventory, 1953, Ronald Kramer collection]

(Right) Studio tour brochure [Ronald Kramer collection]

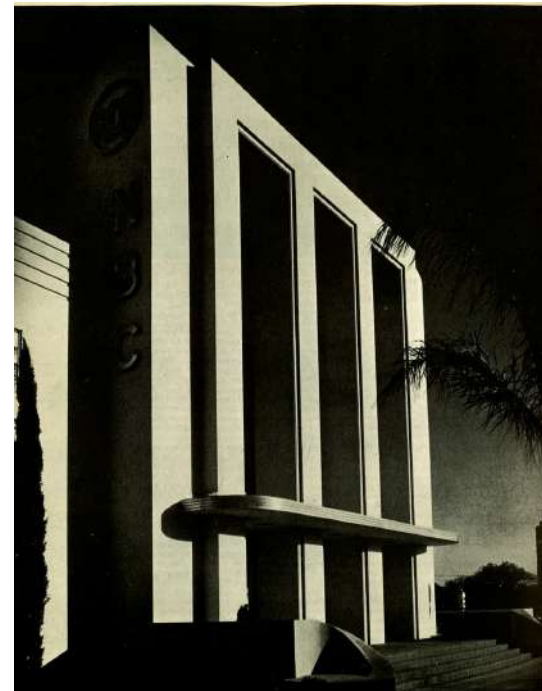
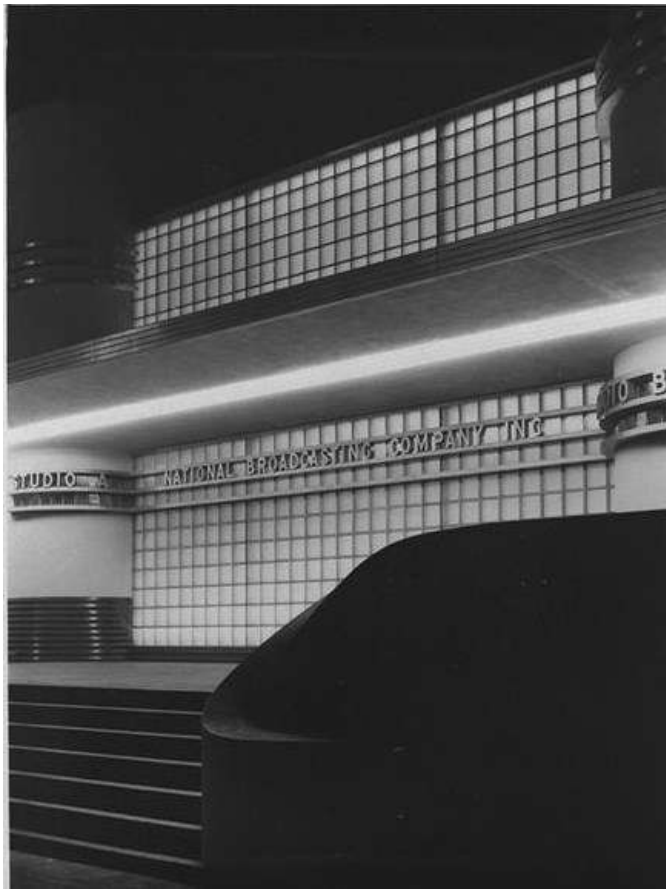




View of main entrance showing corporate logo. [Los Angeles Public Library, LAPL00032789] also NBC Listen, February 1939



*(Above) Staircase at night [Architectural
Concrete "A Radio City for Hollywood,"
Vol. 5, No. 2]
(below left) façade
(Below right) Vine Street entrance
[Architectural Concrete, Vol. 5, No. 2]*



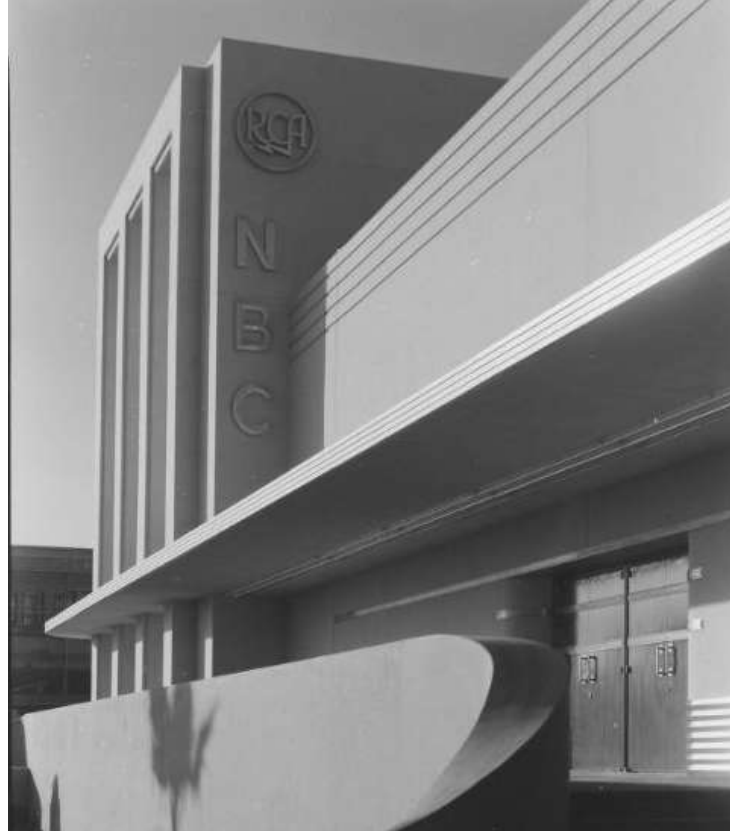


*Exterior seen from Argyle Street [Los Angeles Public Library, LAPL00012874]
Bottom) Studios A and B exit staircase at night, postcard.
[Ronald Kramer collection]*



*(Right) Courtesy of Huntington
Library]*

*(Below) View from Vine Street.
1941. [Ronald Kramer collec-
tion]*





*(Left) Main lobby interior facing west toward Sunset Blvd.
[Architectural Forum, March, 1939]*

(Below) Broadcast master control booth with “invisible glass” window on lobby southeast wall [Courtesy of Huntington Library image photCL_MLP_0045_042]





(Above) Main Lobby mural, 1938, "The Spirit of Radio" by Edward Trumble, a Connecticut artist whose most famous surviving mural is the New York Chrysler Building's massive "Energy, Result, Workmanship and Transportation." This Radio City Hollywood mural stood atop the building's master control room, through which the public could observe through the invisible glass window, on the lobby's southeast wall..

(Right) Main lobby staircase and elevator, 1939. [Courtesy of Huntington Library, photCL_MLP_0045_037]





(Above) Main entry lighted at night seen from Sunset Blvd.



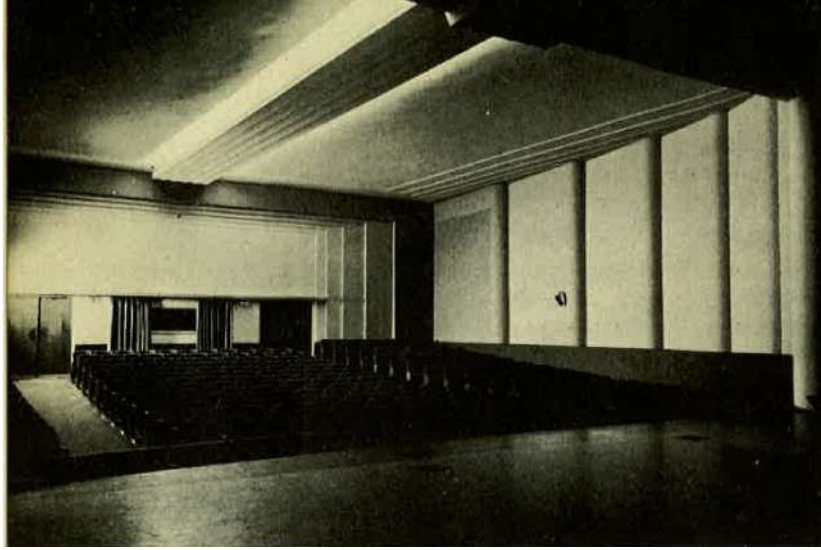
(Above Right) Studio D stage seen from audience [NBC Air Castles, Courtesy of Mike Henry]



(Center) Another view of Studio D looking toward audience [Los Angeles Public Library, LAPL00012860]

*(Below) Studio A
{Courtesy Early Hollywood by Arcadia Publishing}*





*(Left) Studio B seen from stage
[NBC Hollywood Studios, Cour-
tesy of Mike Henry]*

*(below) Corridor [NBC Air Cas-
tles, Courtesy of Mike Henry]*

*(Bottom) Corridor leading
to studios , over 50 feet in
length, indirect ceiling lighting
and floor covered with rubber-
ized material for sound deadening,
1939. [Courtesy of Los An-
geles Public Library 00012880]*





(Above left) Artists Lounge

(Above right) Executive office

(Left) Control room

[Collection of Ronald Kramer]

*(Below Control Room 1938
[Los Angeles Public Library])*





(Above) Radio City at night. {Courtesy Los Angeles Public Library, LAPL00012878}

(Below) Sunset and Vine, at night [Hollywood, Land of Legend, p. 177]





[Above] Radio City view Sunset Street view from Argyle Street corner. [Courtesy Los Angeles Public Library, LAPL00012873]

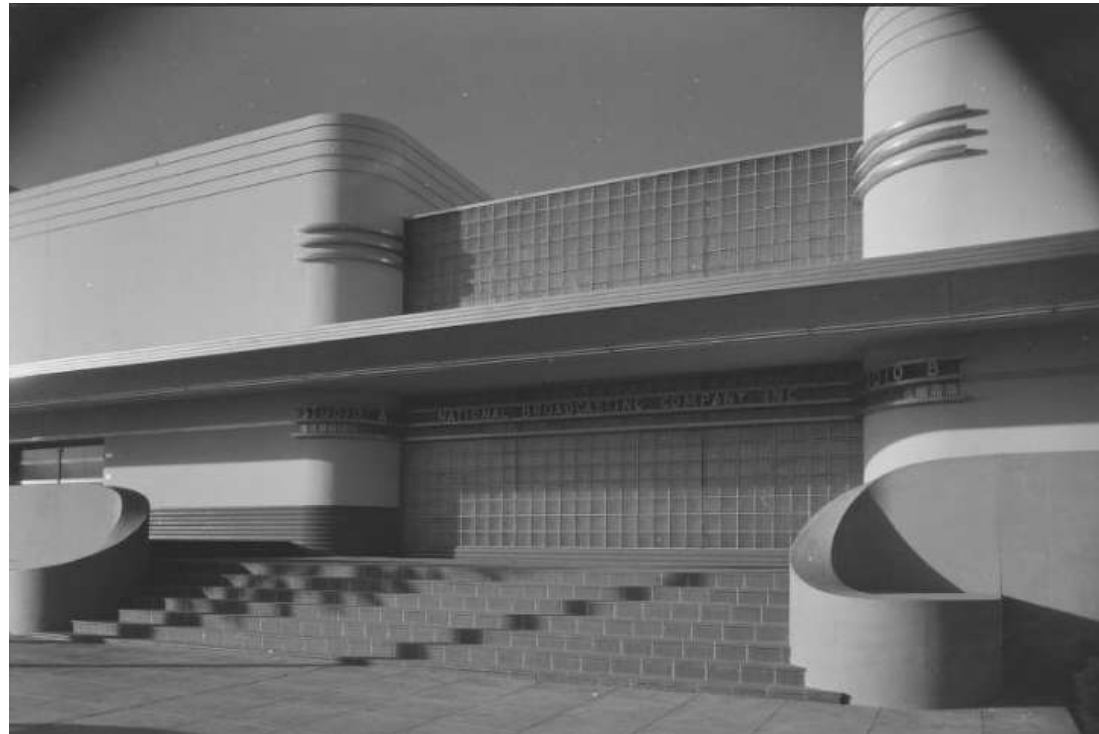
[Below] Close-up of doors, Sunset Boulevard side, photo from Maynard Parker photo, Huntington Hartford library]





(Above) Radio City from corner of Sunset and Vine.

*[NBC Inventory of West Coast properties, 1954,
Ronald Kramer collection]*





(Left) Main entrance, Sunset and Vine corner, after arrival of KNBH television. [Courtesy of University of Southern California, digital library image]

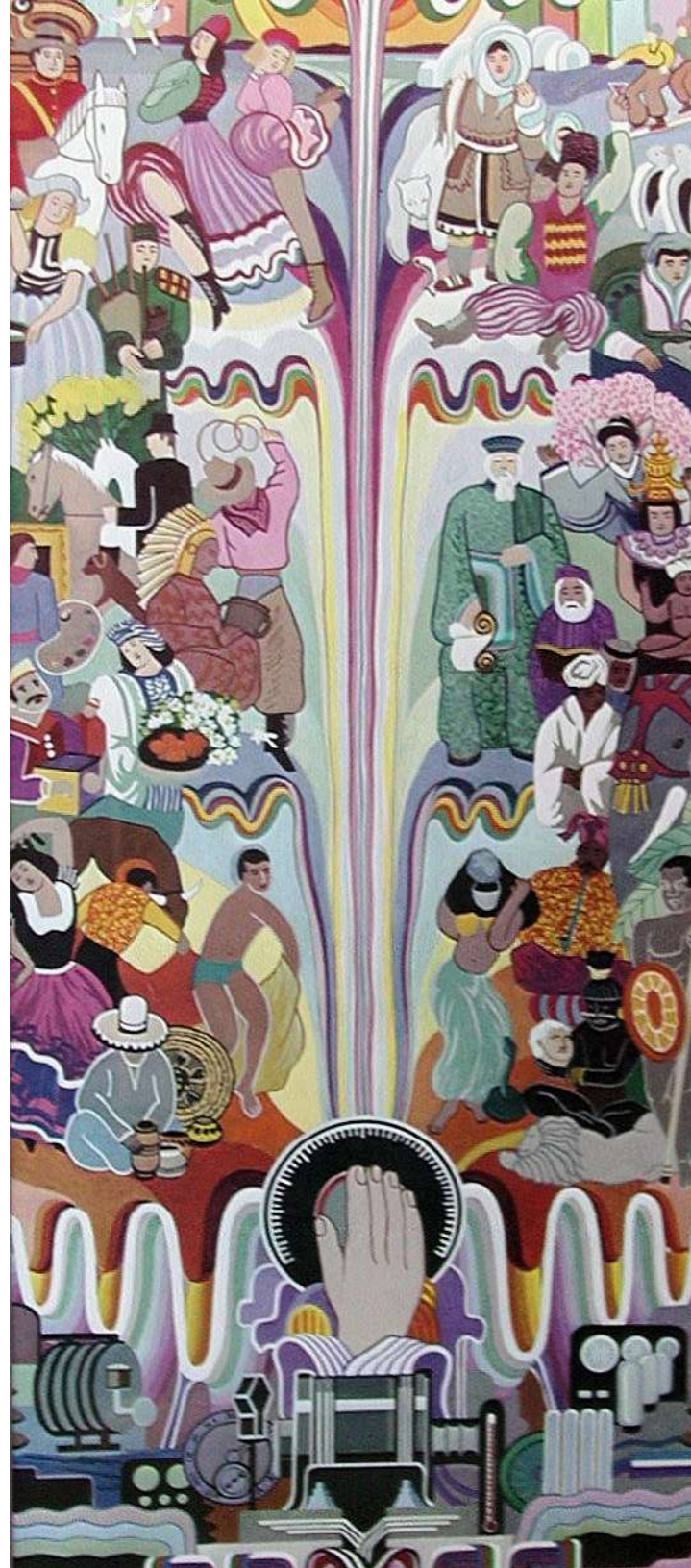
(Bottom) Main entrance, Sunset and Vine corner, when NBC's owned-and-operated Los Angeles TV station had call letters KRCA, 1958. [Courtesy Los Angeles Public Library, LAPL00012993]



San Francisco

Radio City Taylor & O'Farrell Sts





*Exterior mural designed by
C. J. Fitzgerald*

*[Lithograph in Ronald Kra-
mer collection]*



(Left) Main entrance of Radio City. [Courtesy John Schneider]

*(Below) Main lobby
Courtesy Barry Mishkind*





Main Lobby

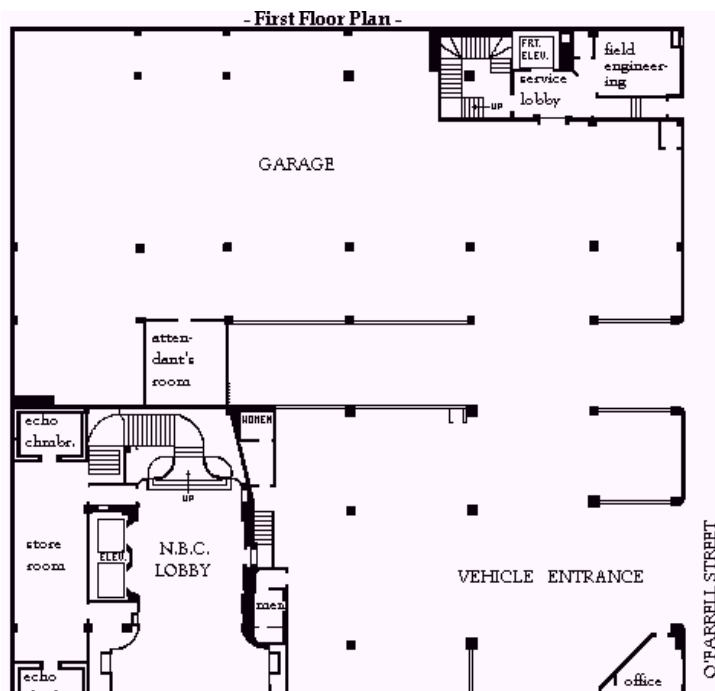
[Courtesy Barry Mishkind]

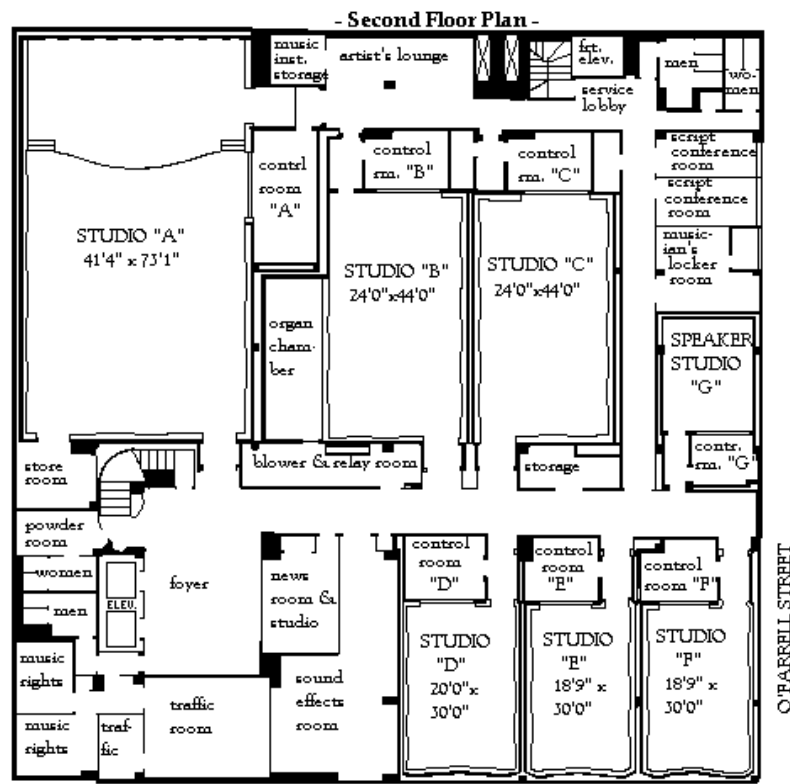


(above) Staircase at main lobby rear .

(below) First Floor Plan

[Architectural Record, November 1942]





*(Above) Studio A
[Courtesy John Schneider]*

*(Left) Second Floor Plan
[Architectural Record, November 1942]*



*[Above] Organ Baffle [Architectural Record, November, 1942]
[Below] Organist playing in Studio B [Courtesy of John
Schneider, oldradiohistorian]*







*[Above Left] Control room for studio A
[Above Right] Control Room for B or C
[Courtesy of John Schneider, the oldradiohistorian]*

*(Below) View into news wire service room.
[Courtesy of Huntington Hartford Library].*





(Above left) Studio A



(Above right) Studio C. Studio B was nearly identical.

(Right) Studio D. Studios E and F were the same size and nearly identical.

[Courtesy Barry Mishkind]

[Right] Program in Studio D. Studios D, E and F were the same size and nearly identical.

[Courtesy of John Schneider, oldradiohistorian]

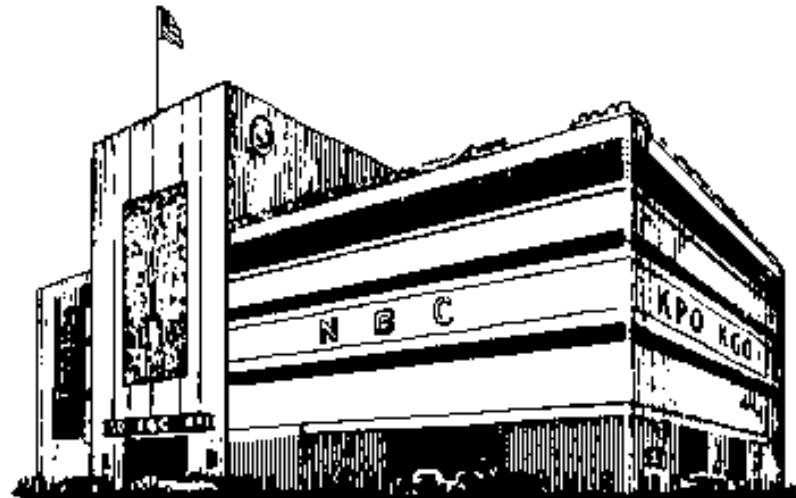






[Above] Studio G which was designed with an informal atmosphere resembling a typical living room. [Courtesy John Schneider, oldradiohiostiran]

(Below) Artists sketch of façade.



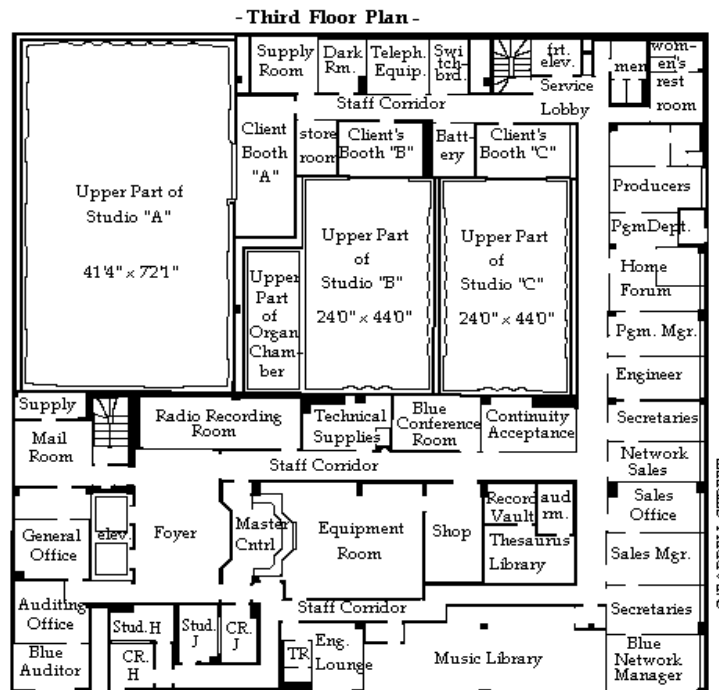


[Above] Third floor Blue Network (and KGO) lobby with Recording Room in left rear.

[Right] Recording Room looking into Blue Network lobby.
[Courtesy of John Schneider, oldradiohistorian]



[Below] Third Floor plan [Architectural Record, November 1942]



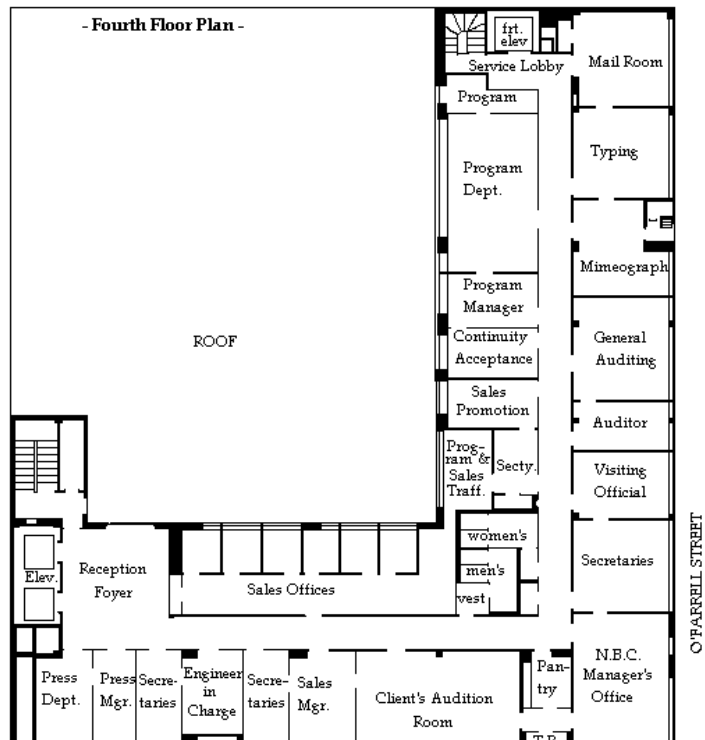
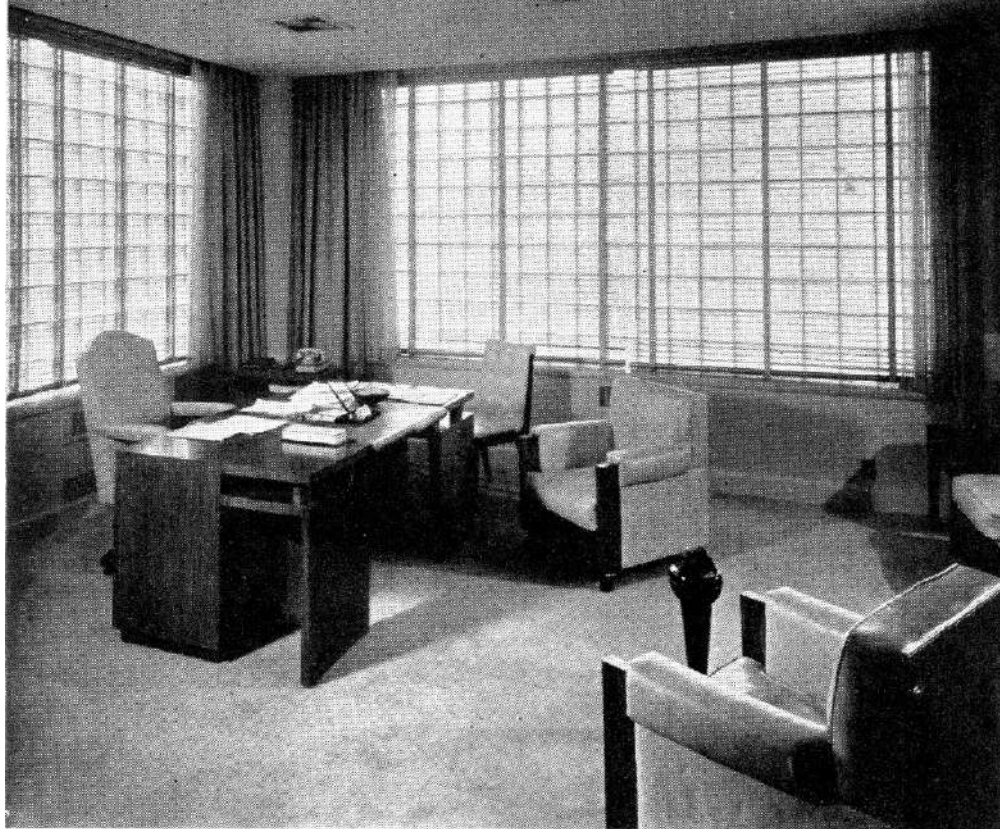


[Above] Studio A clients booth. [Courtesy of John Schneider, oldradiohistorian]

*(Below) Clients booth
[Courtesy of Huntington Hartford Library].*







*[Architectural Record
November, 1942*



Chicago

NBC Tower



Photo courtesy of A. C. Miller Photography



Two views of the NBC Tower, Chicago, constructed in 1999. [Architecture Today, Flickr]



ALL NBC RADIO CITIES

The Announcer's Delight



*George Ansbro at Announcer's Delight,
Radio City New York
Courtesy of George Ansbro*

The Announcer's Delight

All of the NBC buildings portrayed here, regardless of whether they were designed by and for NBC in *streamline moderne* design or were early studio locations, have on thing in common – the Announcer's Delight. A Delight was located in every NBC Radio facility including with the first -- 195 Broadway. No one knows how the Announcer's Delight name originated but it was entirely facetious. Announcers had the ordeal of learning to use it and the responsibility which that then entailed which created little love for the device.

Role of Announcers: Announcers at the time were of a different breed. Held in high public esteem, similar to airline pilots, announcers were public figures and, in any respects, the “face” of a network to the world. Becoming an announcer required much more than a pleasing voice. A college degree was essential and linguistic facility and broad travel helped. For an announcer was in many respects the “glue” that held broadcasts together since all radio was originally performed “live” which meant many things could go wrong – and an announcer was on hand to fix them as best he (there were no female network announcers) could..



NBC detailed its expectations for announcers as follows:

An announcer in the N.B.C. is expected to average well in the following: a good voice, clear enunciation, and pronunciation free of dialect or local peculiarities; ability to read well; sufficient knowledge of foreign languages for the correct pronunciation of names, places, titles, etc.; some knowledge of musical history, composition, and composers; ability to read and interpret poetry; facility in extempore speech; selling ability in the reading of commercial continuity; ability to master the technical details in operating the switchboard; a college education.

It's ironic that at radio's inception stations to pains to disguise announcers' identities fearing that they would command higher salaries if they come too popular. For example, Milton Cross was AJN as far listeners were concerned. Yet announcers played a broader, more important role than just “announcing.” In the helter-skelter world of live radio if something went amiss they needed to spring into action and be able to speak intelligently, and sensitively, to both address whatever had occurred as well as hold listener interest.

The more an announcer knows of music and language the better he is able to handle a musical program; the more he knows of history and economics the better he is able to interpret a newscast; the more he knows of English and literature the better he is able to interpret his announcements; and the more he knows of business, marketing, merchandising, and salesmanship the better he is able to serve the sponsor and his employer.

One writer likened an announcer to a “stage manager” over whatever live production with which they were involved. Reflecting their esteemed position, they were required – at least at NBC – to for a tuxedo. In Chicago, Milton Cross, the first male announcer to wear a tuxedo, was the first to wear a tuxedo to work.



An early version of the Announcer's Delight, 111 Sutter St. San Francisco

studio audience, they needed to reflect the importance of the network, the program and their own responsibilities. Hence, formal dress. Reportedly the tuxedo rule was abandoned in San Francisco in 1938 but endured in Chicago and New York for many years thereafter. But being a network announcer brought status and public appeal. [insert NBC announcers publication]

So the announcer played a very different role in network radio's early years than one might now have understood and the Announcer's Delight was a part of the formality invested in the network announcing staff.

Network Telephone Circuits: The radio networks consisted of a number of circuits leased from AT&T and the various ways in which they could be connected controlled which NBC location was feeding program to variously assembled constellations of stations. For example, a program from New York could be fed to all Red Network stations (which NBC still retained ownership of the Blue Network), or just the East Coast Eastern Time Zone stations or to just the network's local Network-owned stations like WEAJ in New York. A program that went to the entire country was referred to as a Transcontinental feed. Lesser configurations of assembled stations were in various degrees Regional feeds.

At least at NBC announcers played a role beyond announcing and stage managing. They were responsible for the executing pushing the buttons which assembled these varying configurations of affiliated stations using the Announcer's Delight.

Network Line Switching: Since the various AT&T circuits (called telco circuits) came into each NBC facilities Master Control one might have expected the Master Control engineers would be responsible for such switching (and, indeed, in later years of at least at ABC Radio Network, before the telco circuits were replaced by satellite feeds, those switch functions were handled in Master Control. But at NBC, from 1927 until likely the 1970s, responsibility for that necessary switching work – which preceded and followed every program – was the announcer's.

Some of this switching activity was more than just maintaining regional network cohesion. Network sponsors purchased time on the network for the programs which the sponsor (or in reality the sponsor's advertising agency) produced. And the price of network airtime was an aggregation of the air time cost for each of the affiliated stations carrying that program. Sponsors could choose which stations they wanted to have carry their program, decisions which could be influenced by a sponsor's products not being available in certain cities or a desire to minimize their budget for purchase of airtime. In the latter years of telco-fed network radio things were simpler. When the network were principally producing newscasts, such programs became "spot carriers." Network affiliates which, for example, were playing rock found the hourly network newscasts



Interior view of Announcer's Delight, 111 Sutter St.

sound and they might carry some, or none, of the newscasts. But by then the practice of the network's purchasing airtime on its local affiliates for the programs network sponsors were presenting had disappeared and the newscasts became a vehicle for delivering the commercials it contained to the affiliate which had an obligation to incorporate them into their local programming within a specified maximum delay time. Thus, the need to individually configure stations for network feeds, which had earlier been the case, disappeared.

All of the NBC Radio facilities portrayed in this publication, however, required that capability and that precision and the Announcer's Delight, and the announcer who ran it, performed that function.



ABC RADIO OPERATIONS SCHEDULE . . . LOS ANGELES THURSDAY, JULY 25, 1971					
CIRCUIT	HOURS (PDT)	COL	LAF	NEV	24 HOUR BASIS
COL	-	300-304.00	INFO NEWS LAF NEV		
COL	-	304-30-350	NSA LAF NEV		
COL	-	330-335.00	ENTER NEWS LAF NEV FORD PARTS		
COL	-	335.30-350.00	GEN NEWS CALL #1 LAF NEV EIS./L		

THURSDAY, 7/29/71				
IP	D	1035.15-1050.15	ENTER HARVEY LAF EIS./L BANKERS	END POSITION: CERTIFIED LIFE CENTER TO CALIF
IP	E	1035.15-1050.15	ENTER HARVEY NEV BANKERS	
COL	-	1035.30-1050.00	NSA	
-1050.20 - "E" CONTROL - SWITCH ON NEV SPOTTER				
COL	-	1050.30-1053.00	NEWS PRQ10 WOMANS DAY/MLCL/LYSOL/:30/:30/:30	
COL	D	1050.30-1053.00	NEWS PRQ10 LAF	CLOSE PROXIM "21" :60 CUTIN

This ABC log from 1971 would have been a duplicate of Master Control's log for that day. It shows program originating from the East (either Chicago, New York or Washington) arriving on the COL circuit and passing through to the West Coast stations on the LAF and the Mountain State stations on the NEV. When Los Angeles was required to intervene, such as in Harvey, it shows a control room assignment (studios D and E) for inserting of commercial to those legs. Similar logs from 40 years earlier would likely have been much the same.

The Announcer's Delight at Work: Master Control engineers would have been provided a daily transmission log which identified the use of all network program circuits throughout the day and, for programs originating in their facility, which studio they were to broadcast from and what combination of network affiliated station were to receive that particular program. From that it seems likely that the Master Control engineers would have bundled the various circuits needed for a given program and then routed that bundled feed to buttons on the Announcer's Delight from which that program would be presented.

While that aspect of network routing is not covered, a 1927 article in the Washington Evening Star gave a fairly precise description of how the announcer, and the Announcer's Delight, handled the responsibilities for the broadcast from that point forward.

The announcer in charge of the program is the stage manager. When the special circuits which will carry the program to the stations of the National Broadcasting Co.'s red or blue networks have been tested and the studio is ready to go on the air he takes charge of the control box in the studio. Buttons mounted on the front panel of this box control various combinations of stations, and by pushing the proper buttons the announcer connects the studio with the proper special circuits to transmit the music and speech to the broadcasters who have signified their intention of broadcasting the feature.

In an adjoining studio radio performers are finishing another program which may have a different audience from the one which is about to go on the air, for it is highly probable that it

The announcer marshals the artists about the microphone. He stands, watch in hand, close by the control box. The hour arrives, a light flashed on the panel of the box indicating that the program in the adjoining studio is finished and that this studio is on the air. The announcer throws a switch and speaks into his microphone to the assembled listeners of the network stations. He remarks that WEAF and associated stations of the National Broadcasting Co.'s Red network are about to broadcast a feature from New York.

In the studio of every network station connected with WEAF an announcer with headphones on ears, is listening to the words from New York. The announcer at 195 Broadway completes his introduction and throws another switch, releasing the out-of-town stations and, without perceptible pause the various announcers in different parts of the country speak into their own microphones stating their own call letters.

Fifteen seconds later the WEAF announcer has finished his local announcement. He throws his switch once again, once more linking up the network. If the out-of-town announcers have not finished their words are lost. Time is the all-important element and chain broadcasting must go forward on schedule.



A late (perhaps last?) version of the Announcer's Delight.
[Courtesy of John Schneider]

The announcer at New York opens the program, introducing the performers, and stating the first number to be heard. He throws another switch cutting out his microphone and throwing in the studio microphones.

Every 15 minutes during the course of the program, the same general routine as that which opened the program allows each of the out-of-town announcers to state the call letters of his station to his listeners while the WEAF announcer is giving his particular audience similar information.

In 1927 the Federal Radio Commission had, in fact, stipulated that stations needed to identify themselves (broadcast their call letters and city of license) every 15 minutes. This requirement was relaxed in 1931 to 30 minutes and, later, to hourly which currently remains the case.

Former San Francisco NBC engineer Fred Krock described the Announcer's Delight's physical characteristics as follows:

The front panel of an Announcer's Delight contained indicator lights, push buttons, and switches to control program routing. Relays which actually did the switching were located in master control. When Radio City, opened the announcer could:

Turn microphones on and off or use a microphone to talk to the control room.

Turn transcriptions on and off.

Join or drop either the Red or the Blue Network.*

Turn a remote line on or off.

Feed the program to either KGO or KPO.*

Feed the program to either the Red or Blue Network *



NBC logo lighted at night atop Radio City Hollywood main entrance facing Sunset Blvd.