

The Radio Atmosphere in Wellington

Pleasant Gathering Tenders Farewell to Mr. J. H. Owen

UHL complimentary dinner tendered on Wednesday evening last to Mr. J. H. Owen, president of the Wellington Amateur Radio Society, on his departure on a trip to England, was the occasion of a very interesting evening's speech-making on a number of aspects of broadcasting. The dinner was attended by, not only the executive of the society, but by a number of representative dealers and others interested in broadcasting. Mr. Ivan M. Levy, vice-president of the society, officiated as chairman.

Mr. Owen Honoured.

To Mr. W. S. Roche fell the honour of proposing the toast of Mr. Owen's health. Since Mr. Owen became president of the society it had increased, not only in membership, but also in prestige, and the speaker hoped they had been able at various times to give a good account of themselves, and be of some assistance to the Broadcasting Company. Mr. Owen had always been very energetic and most enthusiastic in the performance of his duties as president. When he visited England before he returned with a very interesting report of his experiences, particularly in relation to broadcasting, and he trusted he would do the same thing again, and that his trip would prove most enjoyable.

Mr. R. Leslie Jones, secretary of the society, read the text of an illuminated address, signed by members of the society, expressing appreciation of Mr. Owen's services in the cause of radio, and as president and chairman of the society, and wishing him and Mrs. Owen a pleasant trip. Messrs. T. McGinn and C. E. Grounds also spoke appreciatively of Mr. Owen's work.

Mr. Levy also endorsed the great interest Mr. Owen had taken in radio, and the benefit his active interest had been to the society. As they knew, broadcasting had just emerged from the crystal stage, in which connection they had had some important conferences, at which Mr. Owen's presence had been very valuable.

In Retrospect.

Mr. Owen feelingly responded to the presentation. He appreciated the honour done him to the depths of his heart. Mr. Owen proceeded to refer to the rapid advance made by broadcasting since twenty-four years ago he first encountered its magic when travelling across the Atlantic, and his vessel had been kept in touch with England and the United States by Morse. Ten years later, in the war years, wireless telephony became prominent, and subsequently the British Broadcasting Company sprang into existence, and was subjected to criticism (mostly adverse), from which it was not free till this day, for it still had its critics, and plenty of them, but they all knew the service given by that corporation was very remarkable. Since his visit of two years back, he was informed, the service had improved out of all recognition. This seemed to him to be impossible, but he would have the opportunity of testing the statement for himself in the very near future.

Mr. Owen proceeded to refer to the early days of broadcasting in Wellington, and his tremendous excitement when he first heard three words from Sydney. Subsequently sets had improved and the broadcasting field had rapidly developed. He considered the Broadcasting Company, in the short time they had been on the air, had done a great deal for broadcasting in New Zealand. (Hear, hear.) Their club had been critical, and sometimes

possibly a little too critical—perhaps a little harsh. Perhaps they were getting a little wiser in their generation now.

They recognised fully that they were row getting a very good service—(hear, hear)—and a service which was getting better every day. It had improved enormously since it first started.

He would not say there was no room for improvement, as they would all agree there was, but they must be kindly in their criticism and constructive. Mr. Harris had met them both privately and publicly, and had requested their assistance. The scheme recently outlined, by which the Broadcasting Company would be advised by service committees on various topics, was all to the good, and was splendid evidence of the desire of the Broadcasting Company to associate themselves with the clubs of New Zealand and get all the good advice they were able to give them. There should be the best of feeling between the club and the company, and any criticisms or views they had in regard to programmes should be advanced in a reasonable way. (Hear, hear.) During his absence he sincerely hoped the society would keep the good work going. It was a great pleasure to hear from their very energetic secretary that the membership of the club was advancing in leaps and bounds. Personally he did not expect that the club's membership would reach anything phenomenal—it did not seem to him that these clubs in any part of the world became very large—nevertheless, whatever their membership might be, it would be admitted that the members had the welfare of broadcasting thoroughly at heart. They desired all the good possible for the Broadcasting Company, and he was sure that if the clubs carried out their duties as clubs as they should do, they would encourage other members of the community, not only to join the club, but to become licensed listeners as well. In conclusion, he was sorry to be leaving the club temporarily, but he promised that he would be only too pleased to advise them of anything he saw or heard that would be to the benefit of radio.

The toast of Mr. Owen's health was then drunk with musical honours.

Amateur Radio Society Honoured.

Mr. G. G. McQuarrie proposed the health of the Wellington Amateur Radio Society and paid a tribute to the activities of the society in promoting better broadcasts. With all due respect to the Broadcasting Company, he thought the Amateur Radio Society had had a good influence and probably had given a bit of a fillip in keeping things up to the mark. The speaker also referred to the activities of the society's energetic secretary.

Mr. G. R. McCarthy (Mack's Radio), in seconding the toast, said that such a society was of the greatest possible use to dealers. He had realised this both in Europe and America, where he had had extensive experience. A well-organised and established league, to represent the listeners and approach the Broadcasting Company, was highly desirable. Such a society was required to deal with three major points: (1) Howling valves; (2) induction noises; and (3) broadcasting itself.

With a full knowledge of what had been done in Europe and America, he would like to say definitely that, considering the conditions obtaining in New Zealand, Mr. Harris had done exceptionally well.

He knew when London started with 2LO it was considered an absolute

feat to bring in Hamburg at a difference of 60 metres from 2LO's wavelength. Here listeners could bring in Australia while 2YA was operating, and in his opinion listeners did not realise how important that was and how much technical skill lay behind it. When he was in London he had sold four-valve sets at ninety guineas, and it was absolutely impossible to get anything else but 2LO, but here they could now cut out 2YA and bring in Australia. This was a tribute not to the set, because it was made to do that, but to the absolute efficiency and technical skill with which 2YA was operating.

Only a few weeks ago, for a wager, he had taken a set up to within 200 yards of 2YA's aerial and had completely cut out 2YA and brought in 2FC. This was due to the high efficiency at the back of 2YA's transmission, and this was an absolute tribute to the Broadcasting Company in the short time they had been on the air.

Mr. McCarthy proceeded to voice his one grievance, which was that during afternoons between three and five o'clock, when dealers were desirous of selling sets by demonstrating music, they would frequently have prospects disappointed through hearing a solemn voice saying "Take 1lb. of flour, etc." It was impossible to sell sets on a voice demonstration, and he did think the hours from three to five should be devoted to music, in order to help the dealers.

The Programmes Discussed.

Mr. Byron Brown (who also fills the role of Uncle Sandy in the Children's Hour), speaking as a newly-joined member, said he thought such a society was good, provided they offered their views from the point of view of constructive criticism, rather than destructive. He had been on the air for the last few months as an Uncle, and from his home at Otaki listened consistently to both Australian and American stations; and he said, without fear of contradiction, that 2YA's programmes gave them better stuff than anything in Australia. (Hear, hear.) He did like good programmes, and he did not like cheap matter, and 2YA on the average, and comparing it with all the Australian stations, on the basis of the average man of taste, and not that of a high-brow, definitely gave them better matter than Australia. He had been listening in to "Frisco a few nights ago, and had a beautiful reception, when he heard a Yankee give a lecture on "Handwriting and Character," in which he said, with a strong nasal twang: "If you have a name with two initial letters, and you habitually write the first larger than the second, then, ladies and gentlemen, and my friends throughout the atmosphere, you can feel assured that you have some stability of character." Mr. Brown said he had heard a few lectures from 2YA that were not of a very high standard, and one or two which he had shut off; but he had never heard anything as low down as that American station. (Hear, hear.)

"And I will tell you another thing that you never hear from any New Zealand station," said Mr. Brown, "and that is, you never hear any suggestion of filth, and you do hear that from Australia—suggestions that are not elevating, are not artistic, and are anything but pleasant to listen to. It is the sort of thing that attracts people to vaudeville shows night after night to hear, and we don't want it in our radio. I have not got any brief for 2YA—I could criticise it if I wished—but I do think it has tried, and I do think it is constantly improving. I will admit that, as far as the trio goes, it is very fine music indeed; but I will admit it is a little too highbrow, and there is a little bit too much of it. They should give us the sort of stuff people can get down to; we are not all highly educated. If they would only play down to the public there would not be this criticism, but I am not saying anything against them."

The Children's Sessions.

Mr. Brown went on to cite some of his experiences as an uncle. It was very difficult at first speaking through the microphone, and feeling a complete lack of response. As time went on, however, he came to visualise the homes into which his voice carried, and received many letters, as did other uncles and aunts, from children and their mothers. In one particular case he received a letter from a mother whose little girl was lying in an up-country hospital suffering from infantile paralysis. This letter asked him to put over some special little message for the invalid, which he did to the best of his ability. The lady wrote in a few days afterwards, saying that she had listened in at home, and on hearing the message slipped down to the hospital to see her girl. She found the little girl lying in a state of blissful beatitude, full of the message that "Uncle Sandy" had sent. "And," she exclaimed, "mother, I know I'm going to get better!" These were the little things that came to the uncles and aunts, said Mr. Brown, and showed them how their work was appreciated, and he mentioned it only to draw their attention to an amateur radio club to the kind of work that was being done by the radio uncles and aunts. This made him regret very much the loose criticism that he heard in the streets. Any man who criticised should first inform himself on the subject; by calling a man a scoundrel they could not make him one, nor did a man become inefficient

simply by calling him so. They should treat the performers as decent triers doing their best over the air. He had himself spoken for the British Broadcasting Company in England, not only on Empire subjects, but also in Shakespearian work, whenever he could fit in the time.

In the course of that work he had taken particular notice of the standard of work being done there; and, with the exception of one or two men who were outstanding, the work there was no better on the average than 2YA was producing every night of the week. He said this quite definitely—the average work there was not one iota better than 2YA was giving at the present time.

Mr. Harris, he knew, appreciated constructive criticism. No one in the Broadcasting Company knew everything about catering for the public—no one would ever know that—but any reasonable requests that were made would, he was sure, be met.

Another Point of View.

Mr. J. Ball, announcer of 2YA, spoke appreciatively of the society as a valuable accessory to broadcasting. He had been impressed, since his association with broadcasting, by the opportunity presented radio as a national service. He never spoke into the microphone without visualising the people in distant country homes in the heart of the backblocks, people in hospitals, etc., and feeling that by conveying to them something of the news of the day, something of the brightness of music, they were giving a service which warranted the co-operation of citizens.

As an illustration of the different points of view, Mr. Ball, referring to Mr. McCarthy's comment on the "1lb. of flour, etc.," said that he was recently in Wanganui and encountered a tailor whose workshop adjoined a radio dealer who had installed a loudspeaker. "—you and your radio," said the tailor. "I employ a dozen girls and pay them good money to sew, and the other afternoon, on going upstairs, I found every one of them busy, not in sewing, but in taking down your wretched recipes." (Laughter.)

Tribute by the Secretary.

Mr. R. Leslie Jones, secretary of the society, first paid a tribute to the work done by Mr. Owen as president in connection with the society. He was quite satisfied that, as the result of recent interviews with Mr. Harris and Mr. Bellingham, the listeners of New Zealand would receive substantial returns for their fees, and the programmes would be more in line with the desires of the public. The monotony of some items—although it was not actually monotony—would not be in evidence, and the trio would be given, as he had suggested, a frame of other music to bring out its own merit. A first-class orchestra was being formed, and he had stressed to the company the desire of listeners for first-class gramophone records to be put on the air. Listeners would have no cause for complaint in a few weeks' time.

He must confess to feeling guilty of saying some very hard things in the past regarding the company, and writing some very stiff letters, but he was very happy to say that he really believed that the future would be bright.

Mr. Harris had told him that the company now had the stations and staff, and purposed concentrating on programmes. He felt sure the future would bring forth good fruit.

The society had seven canvassers seeking members, and they were meeting with a good response. The society also desired a closer co-operation with dealers in connection with their regular meetings, and in interesting buyers in becoming members of the society, etc. In order to co-operate with this campaign, the "Radio Record" had donated 20,000 leaflets to be distributed by dealers to customers featuring the work of listeners or radio societies. Mr. Jones said he was satisfied that the public relations scheme, as submitted by the company, would be a wonderful thing when it was in full working order. These committees would make recommendations which would be a big help. The children's sessions were absolutely excellent; on the technical side the modulation in some cases might be improved, but the transmission of 2YA was not bad. The plant embodied the very latest features available up to the time of its shipment. He did not think the public realised what it fully meant to get a team of artists together. The Broadcasting Company was doing its best, and he thought it desirable that statements should not be allowed to go unchallenged which continually belittled the performers. Such practices would check people from going before the microphone to be pulled to pieces by every Tom, Dick, and Harry. The society would be doing good service in backing up the artists who came before the microphone to entertain the public.

Reasonable Criticism Welcome.

In responding to the toast, Dr. Robertson said there had been a lot of carping criticism lately, but no one could accuse the Wellington society of carping criticism, as their suggestions had been constructive, and put forward in a reasonable manner. He considered this was bearing fruit in the present satisfactory state of the company's performances and the prospects of better. There was always room for improvement, and the society, quite rightly, adopted the attitude that they must point out how to improve things. He would like to put on record the appreciation of the society for the work done by Mr. Billing at their meetings.

The "Radio Record."

Mr. J. H. Owen proposed the toast of the "Radio Record." He thought the "Radio Record" had filled a very much needed position in the radio world of New Zealand. It had consistently been fair in all its remarks. He had read it from the first number down to the last with the very greatest pleasure, and thought that in all its phases it reflected very great credit indeed upon the Editor. He meant every word that he said, and regarded it as a particularly well compiled journal. Its technical articles, he was sure, were very highly appreciated by a great many radio enthusiasts throughout the country; he had nothing to suggest in the way of improvement, but trusted that every listener would become a subscriber. It was quite in its swaddling clothes, but he wished it long life and prosperity, and should be in the hands of all.

Mr. G. R. McCarthy, on behalf of the dealers, said he would like to stress the point that the dealers could derive very great advantage and benefit from

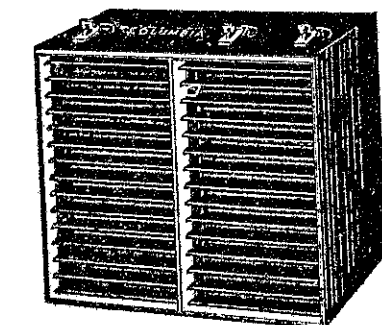
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