

by Guy Rocha, former Nevada State Archivist

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Few persons re



call the days before radios. Fewer yet remember Nevada's first radio station. Was it really KOH of Reno as we've been told over the years?

The technology dates back to 1895 when Guglielmo Marconi became the first person to send radio communication signals through the air. Eleven years later, Reginald Fessenden first transmitted voice and music by radio. By 1910, experimental radio broadcasts were coursing over the airwaves, and the Radio Act of 1912 called for the federal licensing of radio stations. Stations WWJ of Detroit and KDKA of Pittsburgh made the first regular commercial broadcasts in 1920. Licensed radio stations came to Nevada during the "Roaring 20s."

Contrary to popular belief, KOH was not the first licensed radio station in the Silver State, although it was the longest continuously running radio station in Nevada. The first official broadcast was transmitted from the Elks Building in downtown Reno on October 27, 1928. In pre-broadcast tests conducted by the small, 100-watt station, the signal had been heard clearly and distinctly in San Francisco.

However, there were radio stations before KOH in Nevada and some were licensed. Among the

earliest was a wireless station at the University of Nevada in 1916. In April 1922, the university was issued a license to operate radio station KOJ, however the station never officially went on the air. In addition, radio hobbyists had small transmitters that could be heard over short range by the growing number of crystal sets.

According to the *Nevada State Journal*, "Nevada's first radio broadcasting station, KDZK, officially started operations last night [July 21, 1922]. . . . The first program was broadcasted from the Majestic [T]heater between the hours of 8 and 9 and from reports from radio enthusiasts, the program was heard very easily." Credit electrical engineer Frank O. Broili and his brother Julius, who owned Nevada Machinery and Electric Company in Reno, for recognizing the potential of radio for entertainment and news, and underwriting the station's operation.

Initially, the 20 watt station broadcast phonograph music, but soon aired only live music. "The musicians' union was strong enough to prevent the transmission of any music other than that performed by live orchestra," wrote June Broili in "Frank Broili: The Transformer" (*Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, Spring 1975). KDZK increased its output to 50 watts and its air time to three hours per day. Boosting the station, the newspaper claimed that the normal broadcast radius was 500 miles during the evening. KDZK also expanded its format to include a 30 minute news program and featured interviews of guest speakers at the university.

In spite of all KDZK's efforts, competition for the airwaves proved to be its undoing. A rival station, KFAS of Reno, was issued a license on July 7, 1922 and soon competed for listeners. Hadley S. Beedle owned and operated the station.

Beginning in April 14, 1923, Sparks High School, known then for its manual and technical training, operated a licensed station with the call letters KFFR. As the radio industry dramatically grew, and more powerful stations in California provided enhanced programming through network broadcasting, the Nevada audience expected better programming than KFFR or KDZK could afford to produce.

KOH, 1370 AM, filled the void locally after KDZK left the air. University of Nevada football was first broadcast on September 28, 1929 (BYU 10 - Nevada 7). The station affiliated with the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) the following year and moved its studio and 500 watt transmitter to the north side of Reno. KOH also changed its location on the dial to 1380AM. In

1931, KOH affiliated with the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), switching back and forth between NBC and CBS over the years until its current affiliation with the American Broadcasting Company (ABC). The station relocated again in 1940, increased its broadcast output to 1000 watts, and moved to the other end of the radio dial at 630 AM where it remained until 1994.

Today 50,000 watt super station KOH is now licensed as KKOH, 780 AM, and is no longer the longest continuously operating radio station in Nevada because it was issued a new license in 1994.

Photo: Nevada Historical Society

[Western Historic Radio Museum](#)

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