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## WXBC: A Cycle of Collapse and Rejuvenation

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WXBC: A Cycle of Collapse and Rejuvenation

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
Tamar Faggen

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
May 2023



*To past, present, and future members of WXBC*



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## Introduction

My relationship to WXBC, Bard's student run radio station, begins when I was quarantined in a hotel in Kingston, New York. I had made the decision to transfer to Bard in the fall of 2020 from Simon's Rock. While picking up one of the precooked meals provided by the college I ran into a friend from Simon's Rock, Ziv, who had transferred the year prior. From a six-foot distance we discussed the impact of the pandemic on our education, our mutual status as history majors, and discovered that we would even be in the same history class, European Diplomatic History, with Sean McMeekin. Ziv and I both had expressed an interest in journalism while at Simon's Rock and I asked him about the various opportunities on campus, including the campus radio station, which I had noticed had not been active on their Instagram since 2018. As it so happened, Ziv was one of three people who had been hastily passed down a leadership position at WXBC at the start of the pandemic. At the time, he was not sure how WXBC was going to operate given the Covid-19 policies on campus, but he would keep me updated.

Several weeks later, I began my first radio show. Though the station had only seven DJs and an outdated audio server to which nobody seemed be able to connect, I was hooked. Despite all the technical difficulties and the loneliness of the pandemic, I didn't feel alone in the studio. I couldn't be sure if someone was listening, but the idea that there was someone on the receiving end, even if it was just one person, brought me comfort. Spending two hours alone in the station, I began to wonder about its history. How did WXBC begin? Have we always been in the basement of Manor? Why were we on the internet and not broadcasting through the airwaves?

At the time, what I knew about its history was based upon rumors. One rumor was that WXBC had its broadcasting license revoked. I was told that the filing process was complex and that WXBC was banned by the FCC from every trying to get a license in the nineties due to

indecentcy. Another variation of this, held that a student had said a swear word on air, and in response, the school had decided to sell the license to avoid legal action. I discovered that most of this history was false, although with a grain of truth to it.

After some searching on the internet, I was able to find an article from a blog called *Radio Survivor*, a site dedicated to highlighting “radio’s past, present and uncertain future,” where it reported that Bard was selling its FM license after being unable to procure enough funding to go on air. There was a radio project at Bard, separate from WXBC, that obtained an FM construction permit in 2007 and sold it to a station in Connecticut in 2012. It is also true that a lack of knowledge of FCC policies played a role in WXBC’s choice to do away with the carrier current transmission method in 2008, a method that had been employed by generations of station engineers at WXBC, and to only broadcast on the internet. At the time, I could hardly have imagined that my quest for these answers would become the basis for my senior project. It was not until the fall of 2021, while starting my position as General Director, that I started to get a better sense of the station’s history.

In the fall of 2021, WXBC was selected to participate in a special global broadcast for World College Radio Day. Program Director Ray Camp ’24 and I decided to use the opportunity to relaunch the station on a new broadcasting software Mixlr. Ray and I would co-host the first broadcast on the new software and usher in a new era of WXBC. We thought it was important to highlight stories from the station’s past and so we put a call out to WXBC alumni/ae to share stories about their involvement to broadcast on air. Three days before our World College Day broadcast we received an email from Roger Isaacs ’49 who wrote the following message:

We started the station. I do have stories and even a program roughly recorded from that first year, but don’t have time to meet your deadline. – Email September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2021

About a month after our launch, I finally spoke to Isaacs on the phone. He recalled his memories of WXBC as if they had happened yesterday. This struck me, not only because his involvement with the station during his time at Bard meant so much to him, but also because it became clear that there were more WXBC memories from alumni/ae still out there. It was also during this conversation that Isaacs informed me that he had a box of WXBC files that he wanted to send to the station. I insisted that instead of sending them to the station he should donate his materials to the Bard Archives, in the hopes that they would be looked after with care.

While studying abroad, in the Spring 2022, I received two emails that influenced my decision to write about the history of WXBC for my senior thesis. The first was an email from the director of an upcoming documentary on college radio history, asking if there was any archival material and information about the station's history, and would I be willing to include anything that could be featured in the film. The second email was from Roger Isaacs, notifying me that the materials I encouraged him to donate to the Bard Archives from the station's early years were being processed.

The first email forced me to recognize how little archival and historiographical material about WXBC was available. The second email made me realize that it was 2022, the year in which WXBC was turning seventy-five, and there wasn't any comprehensive history of the station that included Isaacs' materials. By focusing on the cultural and technical aspects of the station's history, this thesis serves to demonstrate WXBC's cycle of collapse and rejuvenation.

Since the 2000s, there has been a growing interest in radio and its place in cultural history.<sup>1</sup> In *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination; from Amos 'N' Andy and Edward*

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<sup>1</sup> Michele Hilmes, Review of *Is There a Field Called Sound Culture Studies? And Does It Matter?*, by Jonathan Sterne and Emily Thompson. *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005): 249–59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40068259>. Accessed May 1, 2023.

*R. Murrow to Wolfman Jack and Howard Stern* (1999), American cultural critic, Susan J. Douglas explores the relationship between radio and listening in America as it relates to the development of sound. Following this, Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio's compilation of essays by leading radio scholars in *Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio* (2002) traces the history of radio as a broadcasting medium in American culture from the 1920s to the rise of internet radio. It serves as an insightful basis for American radio history. Other works that have contributed to the study of radio and its place in cultural history include Jesse Walker's *Rebels on the Air: An Alternative History of Radio in America* (2001), Jonathan Sterne's *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (2006), Marc Fisher's *Something in the Air: Radio, Rock, and the Revolution That Shaped a Generation* (2007), Christopher H. Sterling and Michael C. Keith's *Sounds of Change: A History of FM Broadcasting in America* (2008), and *Sound Streams: A Cultural History of Radio-Internet Convergence* (2020). However, while many of these books mention college stations, none of them provide an in-depth history of college radio or of any individual stations.

In her paper advocating for a more complete historiography of college radio, Professor of ethnomusicology and radio researcher, Laura Schnitker argues that many stories of college stations remain untold, resulting in a dearth of knowledge about college radio within broadcasting history.<sup>2</sup> Schnitker aptly points out that a significant portion of academic work on college radio involves its relationship to the music industry from the seventies onward, in which many groups had their songs first heard on college radio. Through Schnitker's role as a DJ at

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<sup>2</sup> Laura Schnitker. "Archives, Advocacy and Crowd-Sourcing: Towards a More Complete Historiography of College Radio." *Journal of Radio and Audio Media* 23, no. 2 (July 2, 2016): 341-48. <http://dx.doi.org/10.108019376529.2016.1224427>.

WMUC and an audiovisual archivist at the University of Maryland, Schnitker helped establish a WMUC archives collection to emphasize the role of the station within campus history.<sup>3</sup>

Through this project, Schnitker recognized that primary sources were not preserved, scattered, and inaccessible. This is one of the greatest challenges for researchers. To fill in the gaps in academic scholarship, Schnitker suggests utilizing archiving, advocacy, and crowdsourcing to better preserve college radio's history and the accessibility to its materials. In my conversation with Schnitker about the challenges within her own work with the WMUC archives, she stated that "So much of the station's history had survived but was in the hands of alumni/ae who were scattered all over the world."<sup>4</sup>

Although academic literature on the history of college radio is still marginal, it is important to recognize existing literature. College Radio Historian and co-founder of the *Radio Survivor* blog, Jennifer Waits, has written extensively about college radio history, producing work about the station at her alma mater Haverford College. In addition, for the *Radio Survivor Blog*, Waits has conducted over one hundred and seventy college station tours across the U.S and Ireland. In her history of radio at Haverford College, *From Wireless Experiments to Streaming: The Secret History and Changing Role of College Radio at Haverford College 1923–2014*, Waits covers over ninety years of operations emphasizing the role it played in early college radio in the 1920s as well as its carrier current operations in the early 40s into the 2000s.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Schnitker. "Archives, Advocacy and Crowd-Sourcing: Towards a More Complete Historiography of College Radio." *Journal of Radio and Audio Media* 23, no. 2 (July 2, 2016): 341-48.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.108019376529.2016.1224427>.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Schnitker, videoconference interview by the author, February 10, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer C. Waits, "From Wireless Experiments to Streaming: The Secret History and Changing Role of College Radio at Haverford College," *Interactions: Studies in Communication and Culture* 6, no. 1 (2015): 65-85.

Although WXBC got its start in the late 1940s, it shares a similarity to Haverford, in its operation as carrier current station from the 1940s until the 2000s.

Carrier current broadcasting is outlined in Louis M. Bloch's *The Gas Pipe Networks: A History of College Radio, 1936-1946*, which explores how Brown University developed a new type of radio transmission. Carrier current transmission differs from both AM and FM in that it's an antenna, is an electrical system wired throughout a building, rather than an antenna that transmits a signal into the air.<sup>6</sup> Bloch, provides a history of what he calls "The Gas Pipe Networks," a network of college stations that modeled their carrier current system after Brown's before the war.<sup>7</sup> WXBC, was not one of these stations; however, it did become a member of the Intercollegiate Broadcasting System (IBS), another project led by Bloch and other students at Brown.<sup>8</sup> Bloch's book is important as it serves as an example of early college radio history.

To understand college radio history, it is important to clarify radio terminology and to provide some background on the relationship between the FCC, college radio, and how the FCC governs the spectrum. It is challenging to define college radio, as the operation of each station varies between colleges and can be unique. It is wise not to limit a definition of college radio based on a station's method of transmission as this delegitimizes their activity. In my conversation with Waits, she described college radio as being a student-led audio activity rather than merely a method of sound transmission.<sup>9</sup> This definition of college radio can be applied to WXBC, where it's method of transmission and programming changed, but it has always remained a station on Bard's college campus operated and maintained by its students.

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<sup>6</sup> Louis M. Bloch, *The Gas Pipe Networks: A History of College Radio, 1936-1946* (Cleveland, OH: Bloch and Company, 1980).

<sup>7</sup> Bloch, *The Gas Pipe Networks: A History of College Radio*, 45.

<sup>8</sup> Bloch.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Waits, telephone interview by the author, Kingston, NY, March 17, 2023.

The FCC was formed in 1934 with The Communications Act. This act gave the FCC the power to issue broadcasting licenses for “public convenience, interest, and necessity” and to regulate broadcasting by making it “available to all the people of the United States a rapid, efficient, nation-wide, and worldwide wire and radio communication service.”<sup>10</sup> The FCC’s rules fall under Title 47 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). Shortly after the act was codified, the FCC set aside certain channels on the AM band for educational use, which would be the first time in history that the government allowed airspace for higher educational institutions.<sup>11</sup> AM or Amplitude Modulation was the first method of radio broadcasting in which the radio waves are transmitted using open circuit antennas. FM or Frequency Modulation emerged in the 1930s as a new method of transmitting, invented by Edwin Armstrong, using a wider bandwidth. Although FM broadcast range was shorter, it carried a higher fidelity sound, with less static.<sup>12</sup> By 1940, the FCC began allocating select channels for non-commercial educational use.<sup>13</sup> In 1948, following the development of low power FM transmission by Syracuse University at just 2 ½ Watts, the FCC made a new ruling that low power educational FM stations were to operate at no more than 10 Watts.<sup>14</sup>

As outlined earlier, the carrier current method of transmitting differs from both AM and FM in that the antenna, is an electrical system wired throughout a building. A common misconception of carrier current transmission is that it is free from FCC regulation. Title 47 CFR Part 15 (also known as the Part 15 Rules) first established the regulation of certain unlicensed

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<sup>10</sup> Communications Act of 1934, ch. 652, 48 Stat. 1064, 73rd Cong., 2d Sess. (1934) codified as amended at 47 U.S.C. §151 et seq. (1937).

<sup>11</sup> Billy G. Brant, *The College Radio Handbook* (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: TAB Books, 1981), 17.

<sup>12</sup> AM operates on a medium frequency and FM operates on a very high frequency.

<sup>13</sup> Five out of forty channels selected by the FCC were allocated for educational use.

<sup>14</sup> Federal Communications Commission, *Fourteenth Annual Report*, comp. Commissioners, 41, <https://www.fcc.gov/document/14th-annual-report-fcc-1948>. This would be the first example of a noncommercial class D educational station.

devices in 1938, so that if the physical radiation of a device had limits and could not cause interference with other radio frequencies. Carrier current stations are required to comply with the rules and regulations of Part 15. While carrier current stations do not need to register with the FCC for a license, the Part 15 rules maintain it can only operate on an AM band and cannot carry further than 300 feet from the electrical line.<sup>15</sup> This information is important to keep in mind when addressing technical and regulatory changes within WXBC's history.

One of the main problems that emerges in the study of college radio history is the lack of effort to preserve that same history. This is partly because the preservation of radio poses many challenges including frequent changes in the audio format over time, media quality deterioration, inadequate support from institutions, and even lack of interest. David Seubert, Curator of the Performing Arts Collection at UCSB, explains that smaller institutions often struggle with their radio preservation effort due to the lack of staff, knowledge, and resources to properly manage and process materials.<sup>16</sup> In her analysis of the state of radio preservation, Preservation Assets Coordinator Laura J. Treat identifies that in the past, archivists have failed to make an effort to preserve the radio medium and that only within the past decade has there been progress.<sup>17</sup> This is true of WXBC. There was no library guide on WXBC or public information on the materials available.

Before the donation of Roger Isaacs archival material, the WXBC file in the Bard Archives, was contained to a single manila folder and included no audio. Other than the manila

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<sup>15</sup> Kenneth Carter, "Unlicensed to Kill: A Brief History of the FCC's Part 15 Rules. info, Vol. 11, No. 5, pp. 8-18, 2009." *SSRN*. Last modified April 16, 2008. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1120465>.

Until 1989, no major revisions were made to the original Part 15 Rules.

<sup>16</sup> David Seubert. "Preserving Radio Broadcasts: Thoughts on Future Directions." *Journal of Archival Organization* 17, nos. Issue 1-2: Special Issue on Radio Preservation (July 20, 2020). Accessed April 12, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332748.2020.1787657>.

<sup>17</sup> Laura J. Treat, "Introduction: The State of Radio Preservation." *Journal of Archival Organization* 17, nos. 1-2 (July 6, 2020). April 12, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332748.2020.1787657>.



folder, there were photos uploaded to the digital collection New York Heritage. Between the time Isaacs collection arrived at Bard and my first visit to the archives in September of 2022, the two recordings that are currently in the collection were added. One of those recordings belonged to Isaacs and the other was found in an environmental service closet, which served as a storage unit. Through my research I identified three factors that contributed to the lack of archival information on WXBC.

One factor, similar to Schnitker's findings, was that the information and materials about the station remained in the possession of alumni/ae who were involved. A second factor was there were several occasions in which alumni/ae did not make an effort to record or preserve the work that they were doing at the time. As one alum remarked, "I mean, the history is long, but how much is there? [Is there] enough material around? Because, you know, like in our day we didn't bother. Nobody documented anything. We didn't take pictures and write stuff down or, you know, we were just fooling around."<sup>18</sup> The third, was that because the Stevenson Library at Bard does not have the physical capacity to crowdsource a large collection. In fact, the Library until recently only had one Archivist to oversee all collections at the college.

I approached these challenges by compiling an inventory of station materials in the archive and creating an annotated bibliography of digitized student newspapers available on Bard Digital Commons. From this I was able to identify that for most of the years WXBC was operational, the archives had no station related materials. This history draws heavily from printed primary sources, such as station files, program guides, local newspapers, photographs, and miscellaneous student archival materials. The student newspaper archives serve as the backbone of this project. To fill in the gaps in areas where I found inconsistencies or little to no archival

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<sup>18</sup> Fishel Michael Bresler, telephone interview by the author, Tivoli, NY, March 14, 2023.

information, I conducted oral and email interviews with several alumni/ae and staff involved with the station.

The title of this thesis takes its name from an email exchange I had with former Station Manager, Nick van der Kolk '05, in the fall of 2022, after finding a brief overview of the station's history that he had written.<sup>19</sup> van der Kolk expressed that he was, "obsessed with breaking the cycle of constant collapse and rejuvenation of the station."<sup>20</sup> In piecing together a more comprehensive history of the station, it is clear that WXBC has experienced a cycle of collapse and rejuvenation in the seventy five years since its founding. This cycle of collapse and rejuvenation is built into the very nature of college radio at Bard, with its student leadership cycling through the college every two to four years. And yet, I argue because of the cycle of collapse and rejuvenation WXBC proves to be the birthplace for many creative projects. This thesis is separated into three chapters covering WXBC from 1947 to 2017.

Beginning with the station's formative years, from 1947 to 1956, the first chapter reveals how a group of young men who served in World War II created the first radio station at Bard, WXBC. To understand the carrier current operation, this chapter reflects on the senior project of station engineer John Marshall Gillin '47. Utilizing programming material from Roger Isaacs' collection in the archives, I argue that within a year of operation WXBC has grown to be an outlet for many creative projects at Bard and served as a training ground for future talent. A close inspection of WXBC from 1947 to 1956 reveals that even in an era of innovative programming, the nature of WXBC as a student run operation ultimately leads to its collapse.

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<sup>19</sup> "WXBC Website 3/31/04," WXBC, Bard College Archives, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY. This five-page document, compiled by van der Kolk in 2003 for the station website, provides a brief and witty history of the station from 1947 to 2003. van der Kolk used the student newspaper archives to create the document.

<sup>20</sup> Nick van der Kolk, e-mail message to author, September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

The second chapter covers a much wider period of WXBC's history, from 1960 to 1996, to prove that the cycle of collapse and rejuvenation is unshakable from the station's operations. During this time span, WXBC remained a carrier current station. Rather than a close inspection of its history, this chapter weaves together changes in radio regulation with the continued operation as a carrier current station, to highlight why WXBC was never successful in changing its method of broadcasting from carrier current. To do this, I explore the different periods in which the station's leaders expressed interest in expanding its operations and compare them with the FCC policies that limit college radio. I pay close attention to when the FCC ceased allocating educational FM licenses, known as Class D licenses, which impact a significant portion of the period covered. The gaps in primary sources such as student newspaper archives and station materials in the latter half of the twentieth century required taking a step back to analyze how FCC policy changes impact both programming and technical operations at WXBC.

The third chapter follows WXBC into the new millennium, from 2000 to 2017, as it transitions from carrier current operations to internet broadcasting. This chapter asserts that new creative projects emerged from WXBC as it entered the digital era and made changes to its space in Manor basement. Continuing the topic of FM educational license from the previous chapter, I discuss how a new class of license, known as the Low Power FM license (LPFM), influenced the station's choice to broadcast online. This led to the emergence of two radio projects, Free Radio Annandale and WLHV, both separate from WXBC at Bard. I also address the formation of the rumors mentioned in the introduction, noting how the research provided in this thesis can be used to deconstruct it as just that, a rumor.

## **Chapter 1: WXBC The Early Years**

THIS IS ROGER ISAACS INVITING YOU TO GO BACK A FEW YEARS AND  
 LISTEN TO SOME TUNES THAT OUGHT TO MAKE YOU SAY----- `SURE, ----  
 ----I REMEMBER!"  
 - Roger Isaacs Script from *Remember* March 9, 1948

What we know about the formation of WXBC is largely thanks to John Marshall Gillen '47, who designed and constructed the electronic equipment for the station as part of his senior project submitted to the Science Divisions Electronic Course. Efforts to begin a radio station at Bard were led by Elie A. Shneour '47, alongside a group of fellow World War II GIs, who started WXBC. It is important to note that WXBC did not begin as a senior project but became a senior project. This chapter is a close inspection of the station's formative years, chronicling its foundation by a group of GIs laying out its initial infrastructure as a carrier current station and organization. These GIs not only brought with them technical skills that built the station, but they also spurred a remarkable wave of creativity.

Detailed program guides, paint a picture of the dedication to high level programming produced by students over a nine-year period. It will show that even within the first year of operations, the station's programming, was equal to that of a commercial station, with additional programming unique to the college. As early as 1949, WXBC sought to expand its already impressive programming by collaborating with a local station in Poughkeepsie. Even as television started to make its way into American culture during this time, it did not have an immediate impact on WXBC's operations. However, cycle of collapse and rejuvenation was evident in the station's infancy.

According to Gillin, the idea of a Bard radio station was sparked by Shneour. Gillin claims that in the fall of 1946, "a small group of students led by, inspired by, and driven by the

dynamic activity of Elie A. Shneour started making preparations for campus radio station.”<sup>21</sup> The following students were named by Gillin as the original members: Shneour (Chairman) Kyle Steele (Secretary), Benjamin Heller (Treasurer), Albert Stwertka (Technical Director), William Frauenfelder (Faculty Adviser), Cyrus Bently, Arthur De Baun, John Bishop, Thomas Marshall, Donn O’Meera, and John “Chick” Steketee. It was this group of young men, who with their passion for radio, founded the Bard Broadcasting Association.

In addition to their love for radio, having recently served in World War II, these twelve young men, shared a special connection.<sup>22</sup> Whether they had fought in the Pacific Theater or on the Western Front, several of these GIs had technical experience with radio during their military service which they brought to create WXBC. These GIs not only constructed the technical foundation of the station, but they were also passionate about building a space for students to produce radio shows. This spawned what can only be described as a remarkable wave of creativity that emerged in the beginning of WXBC.

The Bard Broadcasting Association made its home in the basement of North Hoffman Hall and by spring of 1947 construction had begun on a transmitter. Gillin and William Schenker ‘48 supervised the construction and the installation of audio equipment for the station, while Steele set up transmission lines. When it came to designing the technical setup of the station, WXBC’s audio and studio equipment were like that of commercial stations at the time. Where it differed from commercial stations was in its method of transmission.<sup>23</sup> The principal concept of radio is transmitting signals into free space by modulating electromagnetic waves. Commercial stations transmitting over the air utilize antennas for the process of transmitting signal into free

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<sup>21</sup> John M. Gillin, "Untitled Senior Project" (Undergraduate Thesis, Bard College, 1947), 25-28.

<sup>22</sup> "New Radio Station at Bard College," *Rhinebeck Gazette* (Rhinebeck, NY), October 1948.

<sup>23</sup> Gillin, 24-27.

space. Having an antenna allows the signal to travel and be received at a longer distance. The design for WXBC, however, did not include an antenna, but rather it was a wire-based system of transmission.

WXBC transmitted a modulated carrier wave via wired transmission to different campus buildings where the frequency is attached to the buildings lighting system. In Gillin's design, the transmission lines had coupling boxes at the end to transfer the energy from the lines to the lighting system. A student was then able to connect their radio via the lighting system. This low power method of transmission, utilizing only six watts, made WXBC what is known as a carrier current station.

Bard was certainly not the first college to utilize the carrier current method. The method was developed at Brown University in 1936. Louis Bloch, in his book on the history of college radio, outlines how the practice of a low power radio frequency was pioneered at Brown:

A new transmission system was developed using low power ... programs were carried over 30,000 feet of wire strung through steam tunnels and over the roofs of buildings into the dorms and fraternities. Since the network did not radiate beyond the buildings, it needed no license. In some cases, the transmitter was coupled to the heating system, or the electric light system, or in other cases a small remote transmitter in some of the buildings.<sup>24</sup>

In WXBC's case, it is unclear approximately how many feet of wires were used for transmission, but its network was expansive. The original transmission lines set up in the following locations show that WXBC wanted people to be able to tune in throughout the campus:

#### Original Transmission Lines

1. Stone-Row Aspinwall Ludwick-Ludlow line which connected at a switch box in WXBC studios.

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<sup>24</sup> Louis M. Bloch, *The Gas Pipe Networks: A History of College Radio, 1936-1946* (Cleveland, OH: Bloch and Company, 1980), 14-15.

2. Hegman-Albee-Albee Annex line which connected at a switch box in Hegman.
3. The Veterans Housing Unit line which connected to a power transformer located between North Barracks and an apartment unit.
4. Warden Hall-Faculty Circle line connected to a power transformer behind Warden Hall.
5. Kapp House line which connected to an outdoor lighting system that illuminated the pathway to Kapp house.
6. South Hall line which connected to the main switch box located in the basement of south hall.

Although work on the transmitter began in the spring of 1947, it would not be till the end of the semester that WXBC would go on air for the first time with a series of test broadcasts. A feature of the test programming was the inclusion of a dedication done by Bard's recently appointed president, Dr. Edward Fuller. According to Gillin, they created a temporary audio facility for the trial broadcast. Permanent equipment for the station was still being constructed in the first part of the semester in the fall of 1947.<sup>25</sup> Although Gillin never mentions the exact day the first trial broadcast occurred, a cassette tape found in an environmental service closet in the spring of 2022, manages to give us that exact answer.<sup>26</sup>

The cassette tape found in the closet belonged to Shneour, the man who was responsible for bringing WXBC to life. Following his time at Bard, Shneour would go on to become a notable Biochemist. However, before he left Bard, he had taken it upon himself to record the following message over the initial broadcast, perhaps to explain the contents of the recording to

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<sup>25</sup> Gillin, 25.

<sup>26</sup> In July of 2022, I got a text from WXBC Program Director Ray Camp with a picture of a cassette tape. Their friend Eddie who works in the Bard Archives was copying it into an MP3. It was of audio that supposedly contained the first broadcast of WXBC. The cassette had been discovered in an Environmental Services closet on campus alongside other archival recordings. The library has used environmental service closets as storage because they do not have enough space to store all their archival material. Prior to this, I had only known of one audio recording from the station to exist which had been donated by Roger Isaacs '47 in the spring along with several valuable documents relating to the station. I met with Palash Bolsang, the Digital Projects Coordinator for Archives & Special Collections at Bard in September 2022, after which she shared the initial broadcast in MP3 form.

future Bardians. Shneour, whose thick European accent commands your attention, said the following:

On 17 June 1947 Radio Bard on WXBC had its first and successful trial broadcast. It was heard throughout the extended Bard college campus. WXBC had by then a professional studio in Hoffman Hall's basement with dual viewing windows. Many students contributed to building WXBC...President Edward Fuller and I spoke the following recorded words into WXBC microphone... WXBC stands as a luminous beacon of hope for the future of Bard College as it stands today. I am Elie A. Shneour, class of 1947, the first WXBC chairman. Now Listen.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the audio being technically enhanced, it is hard to make out all the words spoken by Fuller and Shneour on this first trial broadcast following Shneour's introduction. What is clear, however, is WXBC's purpose. Shneour emphasizes that college radio is the only "organized training ground for broadcasters of the future" and how students that year had "proven that it can be done regardless of the odds." WXBC may have been experimental, but it was by no means a joke. It had the full support of Bard's President Fuller, whose presidency, like WXBC, was still in its infancy. Dr. Fuller made the following remarks for the trial broadcast,

I know I speak for the faculty and trustee's when I say that the opening of the campus radio station marks a conspicuous milestone in the history of student-centered education at our college. It is most gratifying to us that the radio Bard was planned by students, announced by students, and completely operated by students.<sup>28</sup>

From its inception, the station was meant for all members of the Bard community and to serve as a training ground for aspiring creatives in the radio industry. In the fall of 1947, the first article in *The Bardian* to mention a radio station at Bard, claims that the purpose of Radio Bard

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<sup>27</sup> *Bard College WXBC Initial Broadcast*, hosted by Elie A. Shneour and Edward C. Fuller, aired June 17, 1947, on WXBC. This is a written transcript done by the author. This version had been altered by Elie Shneour to include a later recorded introduction of which the date is unknown before the initial recording.

<sup>28</sup> *Bard College WXBC Initial Broadcast*.



is to serve as training for people interested in the field of commercial radio and to have programming equivalent to that of a commercial station.<sup>29</sup>

Gillin noted that on November 22nd, 1947, WXBC became a full member of the Intercollegiate Broadcasting System (IBS). The IBS emerged from Brown University in 1941, after the success of their own carrier current station, to teach other colleges how to achieve a similar setup. Bard was not a part of the initial group of colleges who followed in the footsteps of Brown's network known as the "Gas Pipe Networks" that were involved with carrier current transmission before the war.<sup>30</sup> But by becoming a member of the IBS, WXBC was part of a network of collegiate stations that had access to national advertisers and participated in programming exchanges with other colleges.<sup>31</sup> IBS membership was by all means street cred amongst college stations at the time. It meant the station was more than an experiment. They were new, fresh, and exploring the world of college radio.

Because permanent equipment for the station was still being constructed in the first part of the fall semester, it would not be till the end of fall of 1947 that WXBC was fully operational. One of the earliest scripts from WXBC in the archives is from *Music for Meditation*. The November 17th, 1947, program focuses on Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5 and Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 9. The script references Shostakovich's 4th symphony manuscript, which at the time was still only a work on paper.<sup>32</sup> While Shostakovich's 4th symphony would go on to be

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<sup>29</sup> Patricia, Dillion. "Bard Radio Reports." *The Bardian* (Annandale-On-Hudson, NY), November 14, 1947. <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/bardian/74>. Article referred to WXBC as Radio Bard.

<sup>30</sup> When WXBC celebrated its seventy fifth anniversary in the fall of 2022, there was confusion about the date in which the station began broadcasting. This stems from a date in Gillins senior project that has been misinterpreted.

<sup>31</sup> Bloch, *The Gas Pipe Networks*, 26.

<sup>32</sup>"Music for Meditation." November 17, 1947. WXBC Files: Roger Isaacs Collection. Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

recorded, what we know of WXBC's early history, and its programming remains largely on paper.

Although programming had begun in mid-November, WXBC's full programming schedule appeared in Bard's student newspaper for the first time in December of 1947. Broadcasts took place Monday through Saturday. Programming in the fall of 1947 had a mixture of music shows such as *Jazz Selections*, which highlighted rare recordings from prominent jazz musicians such as Duke Ellington and Bix Beiderbecke, *Musical Comedy Hits* and *Record Rarities*, news and talk programming with *U.N News* and *Attitudes towards Art*, and dramatic programming such as Roger Isaacs show *Presenting Moonshine*.<sup>33</sup> Weekday mornings kicked off with *Popular Music*, a popular music show hosted by freshman Peter Stone '51. Stone, who was actively involved in the station during his time at Bard, would go on to write the playbook for the Broadway musical *1776*. Mid-week programming would go till 10:30 p.m., concluding with *Music for Meditation* a show focusing on recorded classical music. Shows broadcast Thursday through Sunday ended with *The Midnight Special Show* taking listeners into the witching hour.<sup>34</sup> Between the fall semester of 1947 and the spring semester of 1948 WXBC's programming and operations grew twofold.

By 1948, the most documented year in the archives, WXBC's programming expanded, and operation was in full swing.<sup>35</sup> The programming that occurred in 1948 proved that in the year since the station's founding, WXBC had surpassed its goal of having programming

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<sup>33</sup> The Bardian (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY). "WXBC Standard Program Schedule." December 9, 1947. <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/bardian/73>.

<sup>34</sup> Formatting of WXBC show titles throughout this paper are based on their original format in different material. Author has chosen to not adjust capitalization to reflect the choices made by students at the time. Example here being *Attitudes towards Art*.

<sup>35</sup> This year is particularly well documented thanks to the donation of primary source material by Roger Isaacs '49.

equivalent to that of a commercial station. When reflecting on the programming, Isaacs believed it was the creativity of fellow veterans that made the station so unique:

The thing that absolutely impressed me about the whole thing with the station starting in 1947/48 is the, just the enormous creativity of, I would say the kids. Well, none of us were kids. We were all veterans. But that certainly had to do with the development of the station and the carrying through with the programs. The creativity was beyond belief. The number of the different kinds of programs that we had, were almost number less. There were so many of them, and so many people had terrific ideas to put things onto to the air.<sup>36</sup>

WXBC's music programming included a mixture of live and recorded music. Programs such as the classical *Music for Meditation* program and *Jazz Music* continued from the fall of 1947 into spring 1948. *Popular Music*, hosted by Stone, became a self-titled show in which, Popular Pete brought, "mad ravings about campus personalities (mostly himself), dramatizing for special effects, throws in a potpourri of anything and everything to make this a real laugh show."<sup>37</sup> In addition to his self-titled show, Stone and Steketee, one of WXBC founding members, alternated as hosts on an evening record variety show called *Moonglow*.<sup>38</sup> Isaacs began a new show called *Remember?* where he played recorded songs of yesterday such as Larry Clinton and Bea Wains 1939 tune "Deep Purple" and Chick Webb and Ella Fitzgerald's 1938 track "A Tisket A Tasket."<sup>39</sup> Other new recorded music programs that began in 1948 were *Supper Club* which played dinner music Monday, Thursday, and Friday at 7:00 p.m. as well as *Songs of Broadway* hosted by Janet Goldberg featuring music and commentary from various musicals.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Roger Isaacs, zoom interview by the author, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, November 30, 2022.

<sup>37</sup> "Program Schedule." Fall 1948. Roger Isaacs Collection. Bard College Archives, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

<sup>38</sup> Weekly Program Week of April 19, 1948. April 19, 1948. Roger Isaacs Collection. Bard College Archives, Annandale-On-Hudson, NY.

<sup>39</sup> Roger Isaacs, "Remember?" March 9, 1948. Roger Isaacs Collection. Bard College Archives, Annandale-On-Hudson, NY.

<sup>40</sup> "WXBC Newsletter March 15 to March 19th." March 1948. Roger Isaacs Collection.

WXBC's music programming also had shows where students played live music on air such as *Ozark Jamboree*, a show where a live band consisting of Ted Thieme, Randy Reynolds, and Bob Townsend played Hillbilly and Western tunes; Sheli Arnason hosted *Syncopatin with Sheli* in which she performed her own piano arrangements of music on air; and Ray Eisenheardst would sing songs from "out of the west" as part of his show *The Big Coral*.<sup>41</sup> Dick Sherman, one half of the Sherman brothers songwriting duo, who would go on to write the music for *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* and *Mary Poppins*, had his own show in which he performed original musical compositions.<sup>42</sup> Music was not the only type of programming that blossomed at WXBC in 1948. Evidence suggests that the programming at WXBC that year was influenced in part by a commitment to engaging with the campus community.

The station ventured into broadcasting live events on campus. When Ohio Senator Robert A. Taft, a rising star in the Republican party, came to Bard as part of the Robert R. Livingston Lecture Series, WXBC broadcast the event with Isaacs serving as announcer:

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, this is Roger Isaacs speaking to you from memorial gymnasium located on the picturesque campus of Bard College at Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. On this occasion of the first chancellor Robert R. Livingston lecture we are about to hear the honorable Robert A. Taft, United States Senator from Ohio. Mr. Taft, presently campaigning as an aspirant for the Republican presidency in the fall elections, will speak this evening on the foreign policy of the United States.....ladies and gentlemen United States senator Robert A. Taft.<sup>43</sup>

A significant portion of the programming was dedicated to shows I would describe as Bard College centered talk shows. These shows not only focused on interests and subjects

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Bard College Archives, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

<sup>41</sup> "WXBC Newsletter Week of November 8." November 1948. Roger Isaacs Collection. Bard College Archives, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY; "WXBC Newsletter March 15 to March 19th."

<sup>42</sup> "WXBC at 630 On Your Dial." Fall 1948. Roger Isaacs Collection. Bard College Archives, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

<sup>43</sup> Robert A. Taft Broadcast. Roger Isaacs Collection. Bard College Archives, Annandale-On-Hudson, NY. Original document is in all caps.

relating to the Bard community, but also carried with them the distinctive ethos of Bard.

*Attitudes Towards Art*, which began in the fall of 1947 and continued into the spring and fall of 1948, was a talk show that discussed a different ‘phase or problem’ in the field of art. The show featured students, faculty, and members of the art department. *Bard Forum on the Air* ran the entire year in 1948 as a discussion-based show and collaborative effort between students and faculty that tackled weekly controversial issues or topics of heated debate such as “Should The Communist Party be Outlawed in the U.S.A?” or “The Question of the Conflict in Berlin.”<sup>44</sup> The latter show had notable Professors Heinz Bertelsmann and Stefan Hirsch.<sup>45</sup> A similar show, *Books on the Air*, discussed important written works, such as the April 19th show, which discussed love in Plato’s *Symposium*.<sup>46</sup> Another Bard centered talk show was *Bard Behind The Scenes* a description of the show from an undated Newsletter summarizes it best,

Each week a personality either from the Bard campus or from the neighboring communities, a person who we see everyday but who has an unknown and intriguing story of some sort to tell is interviewed. We all know the nightwatchman, the librarian, the B&G workman, but we seldom know of what these people have done or where they have been before they reached the Bard scene.<sup>47</sup>

Even the news programming at the station reflected the academic environment at the College. WXBC’s news show, *NEWSCOPE*, blended the presentation of newspaper editorials and community member discussion, to create a “program designed to provoke thought and conversation.”<sup>48</sup> It is worth noting that although WXBC was operating as a student run organization, those who contributed to its programming were not just students.

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<sup>44</sup> Show titles were spelled with different capitalization. Author has recreated those titles as close to original as possible and is not a reflection of the author's grammatical or editorial capabilities.

<sup>45</sup> WXBC Newsletter April 9th," April 1948, Roger Isaacs Collection, Bard College Archives, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

<sup>46</sup> Weekly Program - Week of April 19,1948, Roger Isaacs Collection, Bard College Archives, Annandale-On-Hudson, NY.

<sup>47</sup> “Untitled Newsletter,” Roger Isaacs Collection, Bard College Archives, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

<sup>48</sup> Weekly Program - Week of April 19,1948.

Faculty and staff often made guest appearances or hosted special shows. Some examples include professor of economics Adolf Sturmthal, who hosted the *Adolf Sturmthal Commentary* or German language professor William Frauenfelder's *Bard Schnitzelbank Theater*, a show hosted entirely in German.<sup>49</sup> There were also notable guest appearances on many student shows. Celebrities found their way onto the Bard airwaves. Actress Tallulah Bankhead, who starred in Alfred Hitchcock's *Lifeboat* made a guest appearance on WXBC in April of 1948.<sup>50</sup> Folk Singer Josh White made at least two in person appearances that were wire recorded on the show *A Date with Trudy* in December 1948.<sup>51</sup> While most shows were recorded live and produced in studio, WXBC also ventured outside its own produced programming.

During the spring semester of 1948, WXBC found itself filling airspace with several pre-recorded programs including *Sorry Wrong Number*, a famous old radio program from Agnes Moorehead, which was broadcasted in March of 1948 instead of the "regularly scheduled" *Bard Behind the Scenes*; "A Lost Father" presented by The American Friends Service Committee; and a four part series presented over the week of April 9th from the National Mental Health Foundation called "For Those We Speak."<sup>52</sup> Without a doubt, in the first year of operation, WXBC cultivated programming that connected to the college's academic culture and went beyond its commercial aspirations. The level of programming documentation for the years that followed is not as comprehensive as it was in 1948. Nevertheless, from 1947 to 1954, it is

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<sup>49</sup> "Week of November 15," November 1948, Roger Isaacs Collection, Bard College Archives, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

<sup>50</sup> Weekly Program Week of April 19, 1948. April 19, 1948. Roger Isaacs Collection. Bard College Archives, Annandale-On-Hudson, NY.

<sup>51</sup> This show was a play on *A Date with Judy* an Old Time Radio Show and later film that aired from 1941 to 1950.

<sup>52</sup> See WXBC Newsletter March 1948, Roger Isaacs Collection, Bard College Archives, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY; "WXBC Newsletter April 5th to 9th," April 1948, Roger Isaacs Collection, Bard College Archives, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

evident that there was a dedicated effort to include Dramatic Programming and Radio Theater at WXBC.

The Bard Radio Theater and The Bard Playhouse were two outlets in which students presented theatrical works in 1948. In April of 1948, Bard Radio Theater began, with a four-week presentation of various works by Shakespeare such as *Henry V* and *Macbeth*, with commentary from Richard 'Dick' Amero '50.<sup>53</sup> In addition to his contributions to The Bard Radio Theater, Amero also had a show called *Amero Muses* in which he read different works of literature such as T.S Eliot's *The Wasteland*.<sup>54</sup>

The Bard Playhouse did several all-student productions live on air starting on November 15, 1948 with an on air performance of the tea party scene from *Alice in Wonderland*.<sup>55</sup> Other productions that semester included Stephen Vincent Benet's short story *Elementals* adapted for radio programming by Isaacs and a production by Arch Obler, who notably created the radio horror program *Lights Out*, called "The Ugliest Man in the World."<sup>56</sup> A WXBC programming newsletter had the following comment on The Bard Playhouse, "We at WXBC feel that this particular series is one we definitely are going to continue next term. Listener response has been most gratifying."<sup>57</sup>

Like Amero, Isaacs had a show dedicated to radio storytelling that he had been doing since the fall of 1947. It was called *Presenting Moonshine*, and it was first story show on

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<sup>53</sup> "WXBC Newsletter April 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>," Weekly Program - Week of April 19, 1948.

<sup>54</sup> "Program Guide: WXBC at 630 on Your Dial." December 13, 1948. Roger Isaacs Collection. Bard College Archives, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY. A typo in the program guide misattributes T.S Eliot as reading the poem.

<sup>55</sup> "Week of November 15," November 1948, Roger Isaacs Collection, Bard College Archives, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

<sup>56</sup> A recording of The Elementals Broadcast was donated by Isaacs and is available for listening through the archives.

<sup>57</sup> "WXBC at 630 On Your Dial."

WXBC, which he had adapted from the John Collier short story of the same name. Using Bartok's Fifth Quartet 4<sup>th</sup> Movement as the theme song, Isaacs read a number of short stories and poems on air like Edgar Allen Poe's *The Raven* and *The Cask of Amontillado*. Isaacs recalled his goal with *Presenting Moonshine* was to "pick up the scariest stories possible by fine writers."<sup>58</sup> It was only after he graduated that he realized the show might have had a minor following thanks to his cousin Nancy,

She said, do you know what we did when you read Presenting Moonshine? I said, I don't have any idea. She said her and her friends would get into the dorm room and shut off all the lights and make it pitch dark. And they would sit there and listen to me reading for Presenting Moonshine. It was obviously a group of people who were interested in the show. We did not do any polling at the time.<sup>59</sup>

In October of 1949, WXBC began a collaboration with the commercial radio station WKIP in Poughkeepsie. According to the *Red Hook Advertiser* the program, *The Bard Radio Workshop*, was to take place over a period of ten weeks concluding in December, where WKIP would broadcast weekly drama and variety shows produced by WXBC.<sup>60</sup> The program was a collaborative project between different members of the Bard community. *The Advertiser* makes note of the impressive nature of having WXBC broadcast programming on a commercial station, given the small size of Bard at the time.

Students would record these performances in the studio located in North Hoffman or The Orient Hall.<sup>61</sup> This allowed WXBC to expand their broadcasting range for the first time outside

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<sup>58</sup> Roger Isaacs, zoom interview by the author.

<sup>59</sup> Isaacs, zoom interview by the author.

<sup>60</sup> "Bard Students to Start Weekly Radio Program Over WKIP October 12," *Red Hook Advertiser* (Red Hook, NY), October 6, 1949, <https://news.hrvh.org/>.

<sup>61</sup> Elie Shneour, "The Bard Band with Judy Diamond Performing on Air," New York Heritage - Digital Collections, 1949, <https://nyheritage.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/bard/id/335/rec/11>. Some photograph descriptions included on the New York Heritage site have descriptions with information in which it is not clear what the source is. This one being an example in which a quote is used in the description, but it is unclear what newspaper it comes from. Archivists at Bard were unable to verify its source.



of the Annandale-on-Hudson area. While there are currently no copies of program guides or scripts from the collaboration, in *The Bardian*, a student newspaper, Mona Pine praised a variety show broadcast on October 19th as “one of the finest shows done since the station's inception.”<sup>62</sup> In addition, photographs from the collaboration, taken by Shneour following his graduation, show students performing with a special banner that included the IBS logo and both WXBC and WKIP’s call letters.<sup>63</sup> The collaboration was significant not only because WXBC’s audience was previously only those who could receive the carrier current signal, but also because it showed a commitment to dramatic programming. Further, it allowed students to experiment with their work outside of the college radio setting. The station’s devotion to dramatic programming extended beyond this collaboration.

There was a strong interest in dramatic programming that continued into the early fifties. In Bard’s yearbook *The Sketchbook* published in 1950, the dramatic and variety programming is described as an “outstanding feature of the year.”<sup>64</sup> Just as Isaacs had produced a few years earlier, in 1951, a new group of students performed Steven Vincent Benet’s *Elementals*. After six years of broadcasting, in 1953, Miles Kreuger hosted a radio drama hour as part of his senior thesis and Claire Shatraw directed *The Glass Menagerie*.<sup>65</sup> In the spring of 1954, an article, written by Kreuger, highlights the dramatic programming planned for the final weeks of the semester which included performances by the WXBC Playhouse of *The Man Who Could Do No Wrong*, *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, a double bill of *Purgatory* by Yeats, and an original radio

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<sup>62</sup> Mona Pine, "WXBC Variety a Success," *The Bardian* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), November 6, 1949, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/bardian/57>.

<sup>63</sup> Elie Shneour, “Students Read On Stage with Band in Background” New York Heritage - Digital Collections, 1949, <https://nyheritage.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/bard/id/330>.

<sup>64</sup> *The Sketchbook* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Bard College, 1950).

<sup>65</sup> Miles Kreuger, "In the Limelight," *The Bardian* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), October 28, 1953, 6, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/bardian/20>; WXBC Starts 6th Year," *The Bardian* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), October 14, 1953, 6, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/bardian/21>

play titled, *Encore*.<sup>66</sup> Kreuger also reported that Station Manager Roger Calkins had recently acquired transcriptions from BBC plays and upcoming productions of *Uncle Vanya*, *The Tempest*, and *She Stoops to Conquer* would be heard over the coming weeks. Following his contributions to WXBC and Bard, Kreuger would become a prominent theater historian and found the Institute of the American Musical.<sup>67</sup> In its early years, WXBC devoted a considerable amount of time to dramatic programming. It should also be noted that at the same time a new broadcast technology was becoming more and more common in American households.

Television.

As WXBC's programming continued into the fifties, the development of television technology was beginning to impact commercial radio. Professor of American Studies Martin Halliwell argues that radio struggled with the emergence of television in the 1950s.<sup>68</sup> However, in the early fifties, television technology did not affect WXBC's radio activities.

Cynthia Dantzig time at Bard was brief. She arrived in the fall of 1950 to study Art and was determined to transfer to Yale.<sup>69</sup> At the time, Yale would not accept female high school graduates. In her two years at Bard before Dantzig transferred to Yale, she not only studied under Harvey Fite, but also hosted her own radio show on WXBC called *Cynthia Presents* where she interviewed Bard faculty members including Professor Claire Leonard and Heinz Bertelsmann. Dantzig's show was not limited to guest interviews, but also often included live music and

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<sup>66</sup> Miles Kreuger, "In the Limelight," *Communitas* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), May 13, 1954, 2, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/communitas/5>.

<sup>67</sup> Jan Herman, "Port of Call : When 'Show Boat' Pulls into Costa Mesa on Tuesday, It Will Be Duly Noted by Theater Historian Miles Kreuger, Founder of the 25-Year-Old, L.A.-Based Institute of the American Musical.," <https://www.latimes.com/Archives/La-Xpm-1997-Aug-23-Ca-25023-Story.html>, August 23, 1997 , <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1997-aug-23-ca-25023-story.html>.

<sup>68</sup> "Music and Radio." In *American Culture in the 1950s*, Edinburgh University Press, 2007, 119–46. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0b2tf.10>.

<sup>69</sup> Cynthia Dantzig, telephone interview by the author, Tivoli, NY, January 13, 2023. Dantzig noted that Yale at the time would not admit female high school students.

performances. After recording in the station, Dantzie would sit with her friends in a coffee shop on campus and listen to her show being rebroadcast on air.

Recalling her experience hosting a show on WXBC, Cynthia pointed out how the idea of having a radio show felt like something advanced, “We thought of it as being very modern. It was the height of being as you know, sophisticated as you could get with technology, wow you know, it was just considered amazing. There was no television back then there was no T. V. I mean I know I sound like Martha Washington practically here but there was no television.”

This shows us that although television was becoming more popular within American culture, radio still was a powerful medium for Bard students. The station’s commitment to its innovative programming was impressive. It allowed for students to explore their creative ideas, while working to maintain a level of professionalism comparable to commercial stations. However, as a student run radio station, there were challenges. In its early years.

While that era saw a remarkable wave of creativity, WXBC faced numerous setbacks. In the spring of 1949, there was trouble with transmission lines and WXBC had to pass a field test before returning to air. This forced the station to cease operations for many weeks during the semester. WXBC was given permission to broadcast, pending the station's ability to pass a field strength test. An article in *Bard Week* states that in order to pass the test the station had to prove that it does not transmit outside of the area it was designated by the FCC.<sup>70</sup> Although the station did not need a license to operate, changes to FCC regulations would become a barrier in future years to the growth of the station. By 1951, problems with the carrier current system forced the station to cease operations for a full semester. A description of WXBC in *The Sketchbook*,

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<sup>70</sup> "Radio Bard to Resume Operation at 7:30; Program Plans Revealed. Station Manager for 1949-50 Appointed," *Bard Week* (Annandale-On-Hudson, NY), April 25, 1949, [https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/bard\\_week/7](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/bard_week/7).

Bard's yearbook, claims that "The halls of WXBC were dark during the first semester. Many hours of entertaining and imaginative programming were locked behind the door marked 'technical difficulties'."<sup>71</sup> Even earlier than this its leaders recognized the challenges of faced by student run radio stations.

In an article written by Program Director Peter Stone in the fall of 1949 before the WKIP collaboration, he reported that the degree to which the station had begun operating was unrecognizable. Both Stone and Station Manager Don Lasser '51 discussed WXBC's failed purpose in appealing to both students working at the station and listening to its programming.<sup>72</sup>

They concluded that "a horrible cycle" nearly ruined the station. As a new station, it appealed to the students, but its experimental programming resulted in fewer outside listeners. Decreased numbers of listeners, Stone argues, led to the station's staff losing interest. He wrote that this cycle looked hopeless at first until they realized two things: first, the staff outlook should not have been based on measuring WXBC by listening attendance, and second, he claimed that they were shutting people out by not allowing the space to be more accessible to those not involved with the station. Stone reported that WXBC was changing "slowly and methodically."<sup>73</sup> The cycle that is described by Stone, would be a recurring pattern throughout WXBC's history.

In 1955 there is no archival evidence of any activity at WXBC. This is the first year in which there is a notable gap in archival information. One could surmise that based on Stone's statement in his 1949 article, that the same factors were applicable to the lack of the station's

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<sup>71</sup> *The Sketchbook* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Bard College, 1951).

<sup>72</sup> Peter Stone, "WXBC Reports," *The Bardian* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), October 4, 1949, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/bardian/58>.

<sup>73</sup> Stone, "WXBC Reports."

activities, on record. However, in previous years, such as in 1949 and in 1951, WXBC's challenges, were recorded. In cases where there are gaps in archival information about college radio activities, rather than assume there was no activity, it is important to remember that students are at the heart of the operations. Student run radio stations are completely dependent on the passion of individual students and without an interest in managing and operating the college station, it ceases to exist.

However, it is without a doubt that even in its infancy, WXBC proved to be a fruitful experiment. Led by Shneour and designed by Gillin, a group of GIs worked together bringing a shared passion for radio and utilized their technical skills in a creative environment to found Bard's first radio station, WXBC. In just a year after its launch, the station's programming grew and flourished. The station's operations, although limited to the campus through the carrier current system, expanded to the surrounding area through its collaboration with WKIP. Many of its early participants such as Dick Sherman, Pete Stone, and Miles Krueger made names for themselves in the world of entrainment following their contributions to the station. WXBC provided fertile ground for a wave of creative minds and innovative projects at Bard.

On September 16, 1956, *The New York Times* reported on a fire started in the basement of North Hoffman at WXBC. The fire, which occurred the morning prior, was thought to be caused by a cigarette that was left in the studio.<sup>74</sup> An article in the *Red Hook Advertiser* reported that the college's volunteer student fire department, were the first on the scene. This incident would result in an estimated \$10,000 in damages.<sup>75</sup> The fire was not the end for WXBC, but rather a new beginning. Like a Phoenix rising from the ashes, WXBC would be rise again, and again, and

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<sup>74</sup> "Fire Damages Bard College," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), September 17, 1956, 18, accessed April 30, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/1956/09/17/archives/fire-damages-bard-college.html>.

<sup>75</sup> "\$10,000 Fire at Bard; Fireman Are Praised," *Red Hook Advertiser* (Red Hook, NY), September 20, 1956.

again. This cycle of collapse and rejuvenation will become a recurring theme within the history of WXBC and the following chapter.

## Chapter 2: WXBC's Midlife Crisis

Dear Listener,  
 WXBC is an educational, commercial free radio station broadcasting from the basement of Ward Manor. Each program is different and usually very innovative; each DJ has the freedom to do whatever he or she pleases. Since its inception, the station has grown steadily in both equipment and talent, and we hope this trend will continue throughout the coming years.  
 - Program Guide April 1979

The volunteer student fire department may have killed the flames in North Hoffman in 1956, but WXBC did not die in the fire. The station resumed broadcasting the following year.<sup>76</sup> In the spring of 1959, an article in *The Bardian* remarked that “WXBC is not dead it is very much alive” and reported the past two years have been dedicated to rebuilding the station in a new location, Kappa House, where it later broadcast from the third floor.<sup>77</sup> However, it ceased operations after Kappa House was converted into a girls’ dorm. This chapter covers over 35 years of the WXBC’s operations revealing the cycle of collapse and rejuvenation entrenched in its history.

The chapter is largely a chronology, to highlight the station’s successes and challenges. To demonstrate this, I will give an overview of the station’s activities and address its inactivity from 1960 through 1996. First, this chapter will provide a brief history of the period in which FM radio shifts to become the dominant radio broadcast medium preferred over AM and how the history of freeform radio is intertwined with operations at WXBC. While there are several cycles of collapse and rejuvenation that occur during this period, the chapter also focuses on the

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<sup>76</sup> "WXBC Plans Year's Work," *The Bardian* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), November 26, 1958, 3. <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/bardian/17>.

<sup>77</sup> "WXBC Resumes Broadcast Next Term," *The Bardian* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), June 5, 1959, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/bardian/15>.

station's continued operation as a carrier current station. In doing so, this chapter also seeks to examine the many attempts made by students to improve the station's carrier current operations. By weaving together regulatory changes made by the FCC with WXBC's attempts to make changes to its broadcasting method, this chapter highlights the many of challenges faced by college stations in the late twentieth century. Further, it points out the factors that contributed to why it remained carrier current station.

Before delving into the station's history in the mid to late twentieth century it is important to understand how freeform programming on FM radio emerged. Although FM radio was invented in the 1930s, it would not be until the 1960s and 1970s in which underground and later commercial FM found a home in American culture. Cultural critic Susan J. Douglas argues there had been a growing interest amongst GIs in the late 1940s and early 1950s about pursuing high fidelity sound through tinkering with FM sets during the post war years. The post-war boom culture, embodied by the GIs search for a high fidelity sound, a new form of media, and a fantasy for radio without the commercial troubles of AM in the fifties, had inspired a new generation of audio programming in the sixties and seventies.<sup>78</sup> When the FCC placed restrictions on simulcasting, broadcasting audio over more than one medium, by license holders of both AM and FM stations they hoped it would, "give new impetus to FM."<sup>79</sup> And it did.

This policy, put in place in 1964 went into full effect the following year. Known as the non-duplication rule, coupled with the countercultures rebellion against the over commercialized

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<sup>78</sup> Susan Jeanne Douglas, "The FM Revolution," in *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination; from Amos 'N' Andy and Edward R. Murrow to Wolfman Jack and Howard Stern* (New York, NY: Random House, 1999), 266-68.

<sup>79</sup> Commissioners Federal Communications Commission, *30th Anniversary Report For the Fiscal Year 1964*, 75-76, December 31, 1964, accessed March 15, 2023, <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-308697A1.pdf>.



AM radio industry, would spur what is known as freeform radio. Longtime freeform station WFMU, gives the following definition of freeform:

An approach to radio programming in which a station's management gives the DJ complete control over program content. Freeform shows are as different as the personalities of DJs, but they share a feeling of spontaneity and tendency to play music that is not usually heard.<sup>80</sup>

By the 1970s, freeform would become WXBC's preferred radio format. One of freeform innovators, Larry Yurdin, got his start in radio reviving WXBC in the early sixties.

By 1962, the remnants of WXBC's brief stint in Kappa House, had been carted off and stored in the basement of Blithewood.<sup>81</sup> It was there that Lane Sarasohn '63, recalled Yurdin discovered the old radio equipment.<sup>82</sup> Sarasohn first became involved with WXBC as the student body president and senior class president, back when there were only 250 students at Bard. He also briefly served as the station manager before graduating. Sarasohn remembered Yurdin, who was just a freshman, as having a deep passion for radio and was determined to get the station up and running again. By November of 1962, Yurdin found WXBC a new home in the basement of the gym.<sup>83</sup>

At 6:00 p.m. on December 17, 1962, a new era of WXBC had its first trial broadcast from the basement of the gym on 630 AM. It was supposedly heard by Albee, South Hall, and Stone Row dorms. Planned programming for the evening included *The Un-Bard Hour* which was described as "things decidedly un-Bardian in nature." The program included an interview with Harlow Shapley (who was a Bard science guest lecturer) by Professor Charles Tremblay and

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<sup>80</sup> "Freeform Timeline," WFMU, 1998, <http://www.wfmu.org/LCD/21/timeline.html>.

<sup>81</sup> *Bard Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), October 29, 1962, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/29>.

<sup>82</sup> Lane Sarasohn, telephone interview by the author, Tivoli, NY, December 22, 2022.

<sup>83</sup> "Bard Radio to Resume Operation," *Bard Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), November 12, 1962, 3, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/28>. The gym is now referred to as the old gym.

concluding with a broadcast of *The Investigator*, a play by Reuben Ship lampooning the HUAC Committee.<sup>84</sup> This play was a rare recording. It aired on KPFK, a Pacifica Foundation station, the same year and led to the FCC withholding their license renewal for “communist affiliation.”<sup>85</sup> However, WXBC did not have any fears about the materials it was broadcasting, as its carrier current operation meant that it could broadcast without a license. The downside was that broadcast barely reached the walls outside the gym.

Sarahson remembered that the station’s carrier current system was not working very well during its brief period in the basement of the old gym. The gym was not an ideal location for the studio according to Sarahson, “because it was in the basement of the gym every time, they dribbled basketball's upstairs and made the turntable needles jump in the studio.”<sup>86</sup> He recalled the antenna wire wrapped around the girl’s dorm next door to the old gym which was the only dorm Sarahson believed could reach the broadcasts.

The station was on air briefly in the spring of 1963, before ceasing operations. During this spring lapse, Yurdin passed on his responsibilities as Program Director to Geoffery Welch. An article written by Yurdin published in the fall of 1963, describes the station under new direction and the recent construction of a control board.<sup>87</sup> It’s unclear at what point Yurdin leaves Bard, but after the Pacifica Foundation acquires WBAI in New York, he got a job splicing tapes. It was there where he connected with Bob Fass and served as the first producer of Fass’s show

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<sup>84</sup> "WXBC Begins Trial Run Today to Test Reception," *Bard Observer*, December 17, 1962. <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/26>.

<sup>85</sup> "Pacifica History: From KPFK, Los Angeles," Pacifica Foundation, accessed April 17, 2023, [https://pacifica.org/about\\_history.php](https://pacifica.org/about_history.php).

<sup>86</sup> Sarasohn, telephone interview by the author, Tivoli, NY.

<sup>87</sup> Larry Yurdin, "WXBC Returns!," *The Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), November 18, 1963, vol. 6, No. 4, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/16>.

*Radio Unnamable*.<sup>88</sup> What is clear, is that Yurdin's revival of WXBC, would lead him to a long and successful career in radio.<sup>89</sup> Although Sarahsons involvement was brief, he too found success in broadcast entertainment, as one of the writers of the TV show *The Groovy Tube*.

By the time Walter Becker and Donald Fagen of Steely Dan arrived at Bard in 1967, there were no reports from the student newspapers of activity at WXBC. However, in 1969, WXBC went on air as part of a two-day preview to show how radio could serve the Bard community. There are several programs mentioned including a two-hour interview with Allen Ginsberg presented by Billy Prescott and Robert Wesson as well as a jazz and a rock show.<sup>90</sup> The station had hoped to begin operating the following semester six days a week at 640 AM on the dial.<sup>91</sup> It is unclear if WXBC went on air that spring or where broadcasting took place. However, by the following year, a program guide in Bard's archives, gives a brief glimpse of station activities.

A program guide from the spring of 1970, reports WXBC operating at 635AM from Albee basement, functioned primarily as a music station.<sup>92</sup> There is sporadic WXBC activity in Albee basement from 1970 to 1972. Artist Duncan Hannah makes WXBC the subject of a 1971 cartoon that appeared in the student newspaper *Red Tide*.<sup>93</sup> Fishel Michael Bresler '72, who studied music during his time at Bard, described WXBC as being in a closet in Albee and

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<sup>88</sup> Jesse Walker, *Rebels on the Air: An Alternative History of Radio in America* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2001), 71-73. Yurdin would also go on to work at KMPX in San Francisco, WFMU in New Jersey, and organize the 1970 Alternative Media Conference at Goddard College.

<sup>89</sup> Walker, *Rebels on the Air*.

<sup>90</sup> The interview with Ginsberg was prerecorded and based on an interview for a Bard literary magazine following a poetry reading done by Ginsberg in October of 1969. Confirmed by Pierre Joris.

<sup>91</sup> "WXBC," *The Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), December 10, 1969, 2, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/154>.

<sup>92</sup> "Program Guide," April 3, 1970, WXBC, Bard College Archives, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

<sup>93</sup> Duncan Hannah, "WXBC BLUES," cartoon, *Red Tide* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), November 4, 1971, 8, [https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/red\\_tide/5](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/red_tide/5).

broadcasting through the electrical system of that building. Bresler, alongside Bard students James Bradley Putney, and Frances Conover Fitch, did a Sunday night radio drama show called *The Zeldebar's Tuna Hour* where they did dramatizations of comic-book stories. He does not remember much about their individual shows, but there was at least one where Captain America was in Harlem. Bresler doesn't believe that anyone outside Albee could have picked up the station and that when it came to the technical capabilities of the station, they had to get creative:

I don't really know if it was actually possible to pick it up at all. We sat in that room and did our thing. I remember for special effects when a character was thinking when you have characters thoughts, their internal, internal dialogue, we wanted reverb. So we didn't have any reverb equipment. So we brought somebody's guitar amp into the little closet. They plugged it in, you know, and spoke through the guitar amp with the reverb turned on, you know, that went into the microphone. It was all pretty basic, pretty primitive.<sup>94</sup>

Like the late 1960s, the information surrounding WXBC's operation in the early to mid 1970s is scarce. In fact, from 1973 to 1975 there is no mention of WXBC in any student newspaper. It is unclear whether WXBC simply was lying dormant, or its students failed to record its activities, but the decade would bring radio regulation changes and programming format shifts that would impact many future iterations of WXBC.

In 1978, a landmark Supreme Court ruling, known as the *FCC v Pacifica Foundation*, would forever change how indecency was regulated in broadcasting. A man in New York was driving with his fifteen-year-old son when he heard comedian George Carlin's "filthy words" monologue on WBAI.<sup>95</sup> In Carlin's monologue he uses seven words that cannot be said on television.<sup>96</sup> After hearing the broadcast, the man filed a complaint to the FCC. The FCC

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<sup>94</sup> Fishel Michael Bresler, telephone interview by the author, Tivoli, NY, March 14, 2023.

<sup>95</sup> Adam M. Samaha, "The Story of FCC v. Pacifica Foundation (And Its Second Life)," SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY, August 16, 2010), <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1660004>.

<sup>96</sup> "Filthy Words by George Carlin," Exploring Constitutional Conflicts, accessed April 17, 2023, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/conlaw/filthywords.html>.

responded by notifying Pacifica Foundation, who owned the station, that it had violated their policy on indecent broadcasting. After the court of appeals ruled in favor of Pacifica, the FCC appealed to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ruled that although the broadcast was not “obscene” it was “indecent” and that the government could regulate indecent speech in broadcasting.<sup>97</sup> In the same year as this ruling, a new era of WXBC, and one its founder embraced as being the most indecent, began at Bard: WANK Radio.

If WXBC was the brainchild of Elie A. Shneour in 1947, then certainly, the WANK era of WXBC, was the brainchild of Charles Moore '79. Moore was in his junior year during the fall semester of 1977 and fed up with the structure of the school's music department, when he decided to undertake a more creative project, a campus radio station.<sup>98</sup> The choice to call the station WANK radio, according to Moore, was because of the arrival of a new and quite young president of Bard College, Leon Botstein, during Moore's freshman year in 1975. Despite being relatively close in age to the students (Botstein was just 27), Moore recalls students regarding Botstein as a cardboard character and deciding to name the station after a rather unsavory nickname for him at the time. When naming the station Moore had no knowledge of their being a prior campus radio station.

It was Mike Intocosta, who only attended Bard briefly and was a former roommate of Moore's friend Rob Leder, who had been compiling information on past iterations of the station. Through Intocosta, Moore learned that the station that existed was once called, WXBC.<sup>99</sup> In an attempt to appease the administration, the station publicly reverted to WXBC, when it began

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<sup>97</sup> David L. Hudson Jr., “Federal Communications Commission v. Pacifica Foundation,” Federal Communications Commission v. Pacifica Foundation, accessed March 15th, 2023, <https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/113/federal-communications-commission-v-pacifica-foundation>.

<sup>98</sup> Charles Moore, telephone interview by the author, Tivoli, NY, March 7, 2023.

<sup>99</sup> Charles Moore, Telephone Interview.

broadcasting in the fall of 1978 in the basement of Manor at 620 AM but continued to be referred to amongst its participants as WANK radio.<sup>100</sup>

Even thirty years after Gillin's senior project outlining the station's carrier current operations, Moore noted that the carrier current method was still the easiest way for the station to operate without having to comply with FCC regulations, "Can you imagine us guys trying to get a license? We would never have gotten one with what we had on air," Moore said.<sup>101</sup> A program guide published in the spring of 1979 claims that the lack of restrictions allowed for, "some very weird and dubious stuff (going) on air, much of it pertaining to sex, drugs etc. the kind of materials that do not cater to either local listeners of the FCC."<sup>102</sup> It is true that, carrier current stations have a degree of freedom when it comes to FCC regulations. In *The College Radio Handbook*, author Billy Brant points out that because carrier current stations can choose their own call letters, place on the dial, and the type of programming that goes on air, they have more freedom than the typical AM or FM station.<sup>103</sup> In the 1960s, the freeform format, had gained a following amongst youth on underground FM. However, by the 1970s as FM became more popular, there was an increasing push for underground radio to become more commercially viable to advertisers.<sup>104</sup> It is with this sense of freedom that, in the late seventies, WANK undertook a reactionary attitude towards the commercialization of FM.

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<sup>100</sup> Charles Moore, "WXBC Program Guide Spring 1979," April 1979, WXBC Radio at Bard, Bard College Archives, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

<sup>101</sup> Moore, Telephone Interview.

<sup>102</sup> "WXBC Program Guide Spring 1979," April 1979, WXBC Radio at Bard, Bard College Archives, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

<sup>103</sup> Billy Brant, *The College Radio Handbook* (Blue Ridge: Summit, PA: TAB Books, 1981).

<sup>104</sup> Marc Fisher, *Something in the Air: Radio, Rock, and the Revolution That Shaped a Generation* (New York: Random House, 2007), 178-79.

WANK's programming embraced the freeform style of programming, that was pioneered in the previous decade. This was because, freeform was something that WXBC's participants resonated with in their youth. Rather than play records topping the charts, the programming was decided entirely by the DJ. One example of this can be found in show done by Arthur Carlson '79. Carlson got involved with WANK Radio through his "total gearhead" roommate and founder Moore.<sup>105</sup> Despite being an English major, many of Carlson's years at Bard were spent involved in the campus music scene. Name a Bard band from the late seventies and odds are Carlson was either playing with or rivaling them. It was Carlson, who founded Bard's first punk band Virus in the fall of 1977, inspired not by Richard Hell and the Voidoids performance at Spring Fling, but by the Sex Pistols who had recently released a studio album *Never Mind the Bollocks*.

Carlson described his Thursday night radio show, *Art Carlson Drug Rehabilitation Hour*, as a freeform show featuring music of artists ranging from Ornette Coleman, Sex Pistols, and Karlheinz Stockhausen, with the occasional oddball interview.<sup>106</sup> Since there was no record library and only a few shelves to hold equipment, Carlson had to bring his own records to the station for his show. One alum remembered listening to Carlson's show when he interviewed the Dean of Students, "[Carlson was] asking why there was no good ACID on campus. His answer was incredibly blunt and accurate, 'Arthur there hasn't been any good ACID on campus since

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<sup>105</sup> In the fall of 2022, I began working at Tivoli Bread and Bakery, a place that I would describe as a local news hub and pastry haven. Located just across the street from the Tivoli Post Office, the two dollar coffee and scone rotation attracts a wide range of customers. One of those customers is Arthur Carlson. I was first introduced to Arthur (known to many as Art) by my boss Mikee the baker, who knowing my involvement with WXBC, explained that Art had founded Bard's first punk band Virus. Ray had posted a Virus poster from the Bard Makes Noise Website when we made a new station Instagram in 2021. I told Art this and asked if he knew about WXBC during his time at Bard. As it so happened, Art had hosted his own show and informed me that it had been his roommate that had started the station.

<sup>106</sup> Arthur Carlson, telephone interview by the author, Tivoli, NY, March 12, 2023.

1968.”<sup>107</sup> There was a bigger mission for WANK radio than simply allowing DJs to say and play whatever they pleased.

Carlson described the station culture as part party and part “serious music nerd.” He also saw WXBC as an act of defiance against the corporate and commercial FM stations, whose arena rock music tormented the airwaves,

It was anarchy. It was just like everyone do your own thing and the more people doing their own thing, the better because commercial radio at the time was very homogeneous. The top 40 radio was really not very good playing a lot of crap. And this is like in the seventies and then it just completely ossified into classic rock. WXBC came along at a time when all of this was happening when commercial radio was really turning the ship definitely, we saw ourselves as an alternative to that.<sup>108</sup>

Another example of WANK radios embrace of the freeform format is through Moore’s show.

Moore hosted a show called *Original Bard Music* on Saturday nights, where he played original recordings from Bard bands like Virus, but also included pre-recorded interviews with major artists like Todd Rundgren and Orleans. While the studio space was small and had no direct sunlight, it did have a reel-to-reel machine, which Moore used to record many of his shows.<sup>109</sup>

WXBC carrier current system operation enjoyed many freedoms, however it was not without its problems.

These problems were largely technical. Carlson remembered WXBC as a carrier current station with equipment so old it had to be held together by “rubber and chewing gum.” Ken Koskoff ’81, who served as Technical Engineer from 1978 to 1979, noted that the operation of WANK radio on the carrier current system would not have been possible without the

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<sup>107</sup> Ken Kosakoff, e-mail message to author, March 28, 2023.

<sup>108</sup> Arthur Carlson, telephone interview by the author.

<sup>109</sup> Moore has recordings from his show but was unable to convert into a shareable format at the time of the interview.



collaboration of the Red Hook Phone Company and B&G.<sup>110</sup> However this collaboration, was shorted lived, after an incident during the winter of 1978. Moore recounted sitting in Kline Commons during the winter break, when one of the transmitters began smoldering, “we got this really bad buzz on the air.”<sup>111</sup> Moore, who used the budget to purchase various pieces of used radio equipment for cheap from another upstate college and local WKNY Kingston, remembered that the transmitter, when set up by the station engineers, was put on pieces of cardboard scrap rather than a table. This coupled with the high voltage going out the phone circuit on the transmitter, made them more prone to melting. According to Koskoff, the transmitter caught fire and melted the phone circuit. The disturbance to the phone lines angered the Red Hook Phone Company.<sup>112</sup> It wouldn’t be until the spring of 1979 that WANK radio would begin operating again. After Moore graduated, his work creating WANK, got him a job at NBC as a radio producer, although he admitted that he left out some of the station’s more radical activities on his resume.<sup>113</sup>

It’s true that shows like Art Carlson’s *Drug Rehabilitation Hour* on Friday nights and *Music To Drive Your Parents to Suicide* might not have complied with the FCC’s recently reinforced power in regulating indecency, but there were other challenges that a newly established station would face. Especially station’s like WXBC, which expressed interest in making the switch to FM in 1979, following a year of WANK operations.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ken Kosakoff, e-mail message to author.

<sup>111</sup> Moore, Telephone Interview.

<sup>112</sup> Kosakoff, e-mail message to author.

<sup>113</sup> Moore, Telephone Interview.

<sup>114</sup> "WXBC Program Guide Spring 1979," April 1979, WXBC Radio at Bard, Bard College Archives, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

The seventies proved to be a challenging decade for college radio following the founding of National Public Radio (NPR) and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), when the CPB requested that FCC cease their allocation of Class D educational licenses to educational institutions.<sup>115</sup> This was because the CPB wanted to grow a national noncommercial radio organization and they argued that Class D educational stations, with their low wattage, were an inefficient use of the spectrum.<sup>116</sup> By 1978, the FCC had put a freeze on all new Class D stations and in 1979, the FCC made changes in the rules of non-commercial educational stations, which asked currently operating Class D 10 Watt stations to either move to a commercial channel or move to a new FM channel.<sup>117</sup> With the Class D license being the least expensive method of obtaining a non-commercial FM license, these changes effectively prevented WXBC from being able to make the transition from carrier current to FM for decades to come.

The station has had an interest in expanding beyond the carrier current system throughout its history. As early as 1960, the small station was looking to expand. During the spring semester, WXBC had revived itself after a temporary lapse the previous semester. An article in *The Bardian* reports on WXBC plans to present the FCC with a proposal, alongside several other colleges, to allow regular AM operation at a power of 50 watts, without the regular license and without strictly defined times of operation. This would make WXBC a test case in governing

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<sup>115</sup> See Alan G. Stavitsky, Robert K. Avery, and Helena Vanhala, "From Class D to LPFM: The High-Powered Politics of Low-Power Radio," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (June 2001) <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900107800209>; and Schnitker, "Archives, Advocacy," 334.

<sup>116</sup> Christopher H. Sterling and Michael C. Keith, *Sounds of Change: A History of FM Broadcasting in America* (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2008), 146-147.

<sup>117</sup> Federal Communications Commission. "In Re Application of Quinnipiac College Hamden, Connecticut For a Construction Permit to Modify the Facilities of Noncommercial Educational FM Station WQAQ." 8 FCC Rcd No. 18 Federal Communications Commission Record FCC 93-414, 1993. <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-93-414A1.pdf>. See *Noncommercial Educational FM Broadcast Stations, 70 FCC 2d 972 (1979) ("Educational FM Changes")*, *Changes in the Rules Relating to Noncommercial Educational FM Broadcast Stations [Docket 20735, First R&O, FCC 76-386]*. Freeze on new NCE FM Class D stations (1978), Schnitker, "Archives, Advocacy," [344], And Walker, *Rebels on the Air*, 145.

campus radio. The article also reports that there had been trouble with the carrier current system. If the request was granted, the article claimed that WXBC would be able to have a 15-mile listening range as well as an audience of up to 10,000 people.<sup>118</sup> It's unclear whether WXBC went through with the proposal, but the FCC's Annual Report in 1960 noted the growing interest amongst college carrier current stations to increase their power. In response, the Commission reaffirmed the rules of radiation outlined in Part 15.7 and showed concern about how to regulate these stations,

Operators have been warned of the consequences that could result from excessive radiation, but there is particular difficulty with colleges because of changing student bodies in charge of so-called "campus" broadcast systems. Lack of personnel has made it impossible to investigate the carrier current systems at all colleges.<sup>119</sup>

An article in the *Gadfly Papers* in the spring semester of 1966 reported that the station planned to file for an FCC license in the coming weeks to operate an FM educational station with a 10-Watt transmitter and a two-gain antenna.<sup>120</sup> This is the first time the station expressed an interest in operating as an FM educational station. The location of the station was undecided with proposed locations including the library basement, Kappa house basement, and Manor basement. The Station Manager, Glenn Pomerance, had first expressed interest in reviving the station in 1965 as a commercial AM station with the call sign WBCR.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> "WXBC To Act As A Test Case For College Radio Stations," *The Bardian* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), June 7, 1960, 1, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/bardian/7>.

<sup>119</sup> Federal Communications Commission. 26th Annual Report. By Commissioners. December 31, 1960. Accessed March 20, 2023. <https://www.fcc.gov/reports-research/reports/annual-reports-congress/26th-annual-report-congress-1960>.

<sup>120</sup> "WXBC," *The Gadfly Papers* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), May 3, 1966, vol. 1, No. 10, 3-4, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/gadfly/14>.

<sup>121</sup> "Station WBCR Formulates Plans," *Bard Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), April 2, 1965, 1, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/84>. *Bard Observer* has variations to its name over time that include *The Bard Observer*, *The Observer*, *Observer*, and *Bard Observer*. Authors' citations reflect the name used at the time.

During the fall semester of 1966 an article in the *Bard Observer* noted the recent failure for the station to obtain a commercial license from the FCC.<sup>122</sup> Despite some discouragement from Dean Hodgkinson, who cited many failed radio stations at the college, the station still planned to apply for a non-commercial educational license. However, these plans never came to fruition.

One factor that played a role in the station being unable to obtain a license is that in 1966, the FCC began looking to revise their allocation of FM 10-Watt stations and invited comments on putting a moratorium on further authorizations of FM 10-Watt educational stations. In a Notice of Inquiry adopted November 9th, the Commission Secretary Ben F. Waple summarized the Commission's view that, "The time may well be at hand when the proper use of the increasingly crowded educational FM band requires restrictions on further authorization and continuance of 10-W operations."<sup>123</sup> The passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 would bring further challenges to small campus radio stations like Bard's, however it is unlikely that it directly impacted WXBC activity, given that it never gained a non-commercial FM license.<sup>124</sup>

WANK, despite its enjoyed freedoms of the carrier current system, showed an interest in FM.<sup>125</sup> Yet, the year of WANKs founding is also the same year the FCC stops allocating Class D educational licenses. Almost, a decade after WANK and after three years of hibernation in the eighties, an article in *The Bard Observer* from 1988 claimed that junior Jeremy Berkovitz

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<sup>122</sup> Joan Marla Kaye, "Bard Radio Group Jammed by Dean and FCC," *Bard Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), October 4, 1966, vol. 9, No. 2, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/68>.

<sup>123</sup> FCC, Before the Federal Communications Commission Washington, D.C. In the Matter of Revision of FM Broadcast Rules, Particularly as to Allocation and Technical Standards (Educational FM Channels) - Notice of Inquiry (Adopted November 9, 1966), H.R. Doc. No. FCC 66-1007. Accessed March 23, 2023. <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-66-1007A1.pdf>.

<sup>124</sup> From 1967-1968 there is no written station activity in the archive.

<sup>125</sup> See 1979 Program Guide.

expressed interest in restarting a radio station at Bard as an FM station.<sup>126</sup> \$3,100 was obtained through trustees of the college to take the first step in the FCC's lengthy allocation process, a consultant to check for airspace.<sup>127</sup>

When the station was brought back as a carrier station in the 1990, an article in *The Observer* in the fall of 1992, claimed that after the ACC Long Distance Phone Company had disconnected transmitters while rewiring the campus phone system. WXBC had then ordered an FM transmitter and upon its arrival would test to find airspace.<sup>128</sup> The Station Manager, Michael Beattie had hoped to switch to FM that semester and an advertisement from October 28th, 1992, claimed that WXBC would be going FM in two weeks.<sup>129</sup> However, a report in the *Bard Observer* from the following semester in 1993, claimed that FM plans were being "shelved indefinitely" after the purchase of the FM transmitter failed to take into account the additional money that would need to be used to hire an FCC frequency consultant. The failed FM attempt ended up harming the station's ability to get funding and station asked for less money from the convocation fund due to "past failures."<sup>130</sup>

Not every iteration of radio at Bard had an interest in expanding from its carrier current operations. By 1976, WXBC had mostly given up on expanding its broadcast range, despite the challenges of operating the carrier current system. An article in the *Bard Observer* noted a senior who serving as an advising engineer, who thought that the carrier current system was

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<sup>126</sup> Kristan Hutchison, "Radio Bard!," *The Bard Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), September 29, 1988, vol. 94, No. 4. <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/268>.

<sup>127</sup> It is unclear what comes from this project and no current records indicate filings with the FCC.

<sup>128</sup> Michael Porrier, "WXBC on the air ----again," *Bard Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), October 7, 1992, 2, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/400>. Corin See had revived the station as a carrier current in 1990. The station was operating on 540 AM on the dial as the carrier current looking to transition to FM.

<sup>129</sup> WXBC is on the air," advertisement, *Bard Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), October 28, 1992, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/396>.

<sup>130</sup> "WXBC ready to crash the airwaves at 540 am," *The Bard Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), February 10, 1993, 1, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/391>. It's likely that the purchase was made without this in mind.

“uneconomical” given how far spread apart each dorm is.<sup>131</sup> In 1984, Station Manager Scott Thomas felt that going FM at that point was too costly, despite the frequent equipment failure from the carrier current station, after yet another resurrection of radio at Bard.<sup>132</sup> As early as the sixties and into the nineties, there was an interest in expanding the station’s broadcasting abilities, but the station was plagued by challenges from the FCC. However, there is more to the story of WXBC during the period covered, than its attempts to expand the broadcasting range.

Following the WANK era, the eighties are relatively bumpy for WXBC. In the year after WANK, the Red Hook Telephone Company installed new phone lines which hindered the carrier current system connected to the old lines. It briefly returns broadcasting at 620 AM.<sup>133</sup> When Station Manager Spike Henderson graduated in 1981, the station suffered several setbacks including stolen equipment, unpaid phone bills, and technical failures.<sup>134</sup> It’s unclear exactly what happens between 1982 and 1983 as there are no student newspaper articles, but we do know that Beastie Boys founder and Bard alum Adam Yauch, threw a smoke bomb into WXBC’s studios during his freshman year. This resulted in a, “two minute cursing rampage” from the DJ about Yauch.<sup>135</sup> In 1984, WXBC continued operations before having \$800 of equipment stolen over the summer.<sup>136</sup> When nothing comes of Jeremy Berovitz’s attempt to

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<sup>131</sup> Gail Levenson, "What Ever Happened to the Bard Radio Station?," *Bard Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), May 19, 1976, 1, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/185>.

<sup>132</sup> "620 AM on Your Dial," *Bard Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), March 9, 1984, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/238>.

<sup>133</sup> "WXBC," *Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), October 1, 1980, 5, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/218>.

<sup>134</sup> "620 On Your AM Dial," *Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), March 9, 1984, 1, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/238> From this article we know there are operations between 1982-1983 however it is unclear what the extent of these operations are.

<sup>135</sup> Dimond, Michael, and Ad Rock. *Beastie Boys Book*. (Random House Publishing Group, 2018), 117.

<sup>136</sup> Juliana Spahr, "Theft Curbs WXBC," *Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), September 20, 1984, 6, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/235>.

create an FM station in 1987, two freshman from Brooklyn, Corin See and Matthew Schickele, were determined to resurrect WXBC at Bard.

When Matthew Schickele arrived at Bard in the fall of 1987, he doesn't remember there being a radio station. Hailing from Brooklyn, he had listened to the freeform New Jersey station WFMU, which then was still associated with Upsala College.<sup>137</sup> When fellow Brooklynite and childhood friend Corin See, found out that there was once a station at Bard, the two were determined to bring WXBC back from the dead. They researched different ways for the station to operate and decided that the carrier current method would be the most cost-efficient way to be on the air. By the spring of 1991, they had purchased transmitters with the station's limited budget. Although a *Bard Observer* article from March 1st, 1991, written by Schickele himself, claimed that WXBC would be on air in three weeks, Schickele recalled not being on air till the fall of 1991.<sup>138</sup>

Despite purchasing the transmitters, they were not allowed to install the transmitters themselves. It had to be done by B&G, who were busy throughout that semester. See and Schickele got permission to stay on campus that summer and supervised the transmitter setup. Schickele recalled it being one of the best summers of his life. When WXBC finally went on air in the fall, it was located in the basement of the Manor. Within weeks of the station broadcasting, equipment had been broken and the small basement with no natural light had developed a beer stench. But these obstacles if anything, perhaps allowed for more unique programming.

There's no daylight and you're by yourself and you have no idea if anyone's listening. You know, people just got weird. A lot of the shows were really, just ended up being friends hanging out and talking and sometimes playing music. It was really freeform, like with several exclamation points. We didn't insist on anything from DJ. They could just do

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<sup>137</sup> Matthew Schickele, telephone interview by the author, Tivoli, NY, March 14, 2023.

<sup>138</sup> Bard College, "Bard Observer, Vol. 98, No. 20 (March 1, 1991)" (1991). *Bard Observer - All Issues (1956 - 2008)*. 363. <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/363>.

whatever they wanted. And because it was carrier current, we didn't technically have to follow FCC rules.<sup>139</sup>

Schickele's position at the station, in his words, was as See's "right hand man," but his official title was Music Director. After registering the station with the *College Music Journal*, WXBC was flooded with promotional CDs, and it was his job to go through these and build a music library for the station. Being Music Director at the height of the grunge genre's commercial success Schickele recalled the following,

When I was music director, I got a sampler from a record company and I was listening through it like for what was new and such and there was this song called Smells Like Teen Spirit from a band I've never heard of. And I just got so excited and I started going around and playing it for all my friends. And it was like, it was, it was like one of those moments like, and then Nirvana happened and you know, the rest is history but it was like, it was just like that song just hit all of us the second it went on, you know, it just let us all on fire.<sup>140</sup>

Corin See '92 did not know much about the history of WXBC when he decided to revive the station. It was growing up listening to WFMU that inspired him to recreate it as a freeform station.<sup>141</sup> They chose to operate as a carrier current station because the signal strength requirements of a non-commercial FM station were too costly. In a *Bard Observer* article, he outlined how WXBC would operate as a carrier current station and hoped that carrier current operations would train students in the skills, they need to one day make the switch to FM.<sup>142</sup> Looking back, even FM was not ideal as See believed that the logistics of where to place the antennas was too complex for the small station. Settling on an old transmitter that had been

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<sup>139</sup> Matthew Schickele, telephone interview by the author, Tivoli, NY, March 14, 2023.

<sup>140</sup> Matthew Schickele, telephone interview by the author.

<sup>141</sup> Corin See, e-mail message to author, March 17, 2023.

<sup>142</sup> Corin See, "WXBC," *Bard Observer* (Annandale-On-Hudson, NY), October 5, 1990, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/290>.



passed down, he and Schickele hooked it up to a radiator and a Walkman, to get what would be the first trial broadcast in 1990.

When See got permission from Bard to operate WXBC from the basement of Manor, remnants of WXBC's past had stood the test of time, a collage wall once present during the WANK era, which See remembers included inside jokes, photos of unfamiliar faces that, to See, "felt like company and history" in a room that he described as "not safe for escaping a fire."<sup>143</sup> The station's equipment consisted of a dual tape deck, turntable, a CD player, two mics that were held together by duct tape, and a four track which served a mixing board. There was even a device to record shows but See claimed it didn't work very well. Even in the 1990s, the carrier current setup that See described, had not altered much since Gillin first outlined it in his senior project.<sup>144</sup>

In each space we'd have a phone line from the studio to the transmitter, which was I think a 3 to 5 watt AM transmitter. Mono. The transmitter would then connect to a second device (a coupler) that allowed the radio signal to connect to the live electrical wiring of the dorm, and the signal would pass throughout the building, radiating a weak AM radio signal from all the wiring. It was a very fussy yet charming system, as changing the current too much (for instance, by plugging in a toaster oven) would help or hinder the signal--usually the latter. The signal would carry along until it hit a transformer, so some transmitters actually went further than anticipated based on the electrical grid.<sup>145</sup>

In the fall of 1990, WXBC requested \$12,000 from the convocation funds and held an additional fundraising event in the Old Gym featuring music groups Agitpop and Soothing Sounds for Baby. However, it would not be till the fall of 1991, after See and Schickele had supervised the installation of the carrier current system by B& G over the summer, that WXBC restarted its operations at 540AM on the dial. See recalled the culture of WXBC as being, "fun

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<sup>143</sup> Corin See, e-mail message to author, March 17, 2023.

<sup>144</sup> A copy of See's proposal was found in Manor basement in the fall of 2021.

<sup>145</sup> Corin See, e-mail message to author.

and silly.” This is evident from a program guide with shows like *Tours of the Black Clock*, *Jazz Massage*, and *Get Drunk To The Funk and Some Noisy Junk*.<sup>146</sup> When WXBC first went on air from the basement of Manor their inaugural song was “And Your Bird Can Sing” by The Beatles and whenever a DJ had finished their set and were waiting for the next DJ to arrive they would play a *Simpson’s* song CD to fill the dead air.<sup>147</sup>

After See and Schickele graduated, the station suffered from technical difficulties with its carrier current operations and equipment theft. In 1993, former Station Engineer Emily Glick became station manager before passing the position to Michael Poirier. Glick had wanted to use the station's limited budget to renew a subscription to the *College Music Journal*.<sup>148</sup> Porrier writes in the spring of 1993, that “Like a Phoenix from the ashes, WXBC will take wing once more,” at 540 AM on the dial.<sup>149</sup> This demonstrates that even during period of success at WXBC, in which years of work is devoted to building a station, the cycle of collapse, is due in part to the short term in which a student is involved with its leadership. 1993, would also be the year in which a new technology was on the horizon, the internet.

At a time when the world wide web had just begun to involve graphics and the mp3 file had yet to be developed, radio stations had not thought to use the world wide web to share their programming. However, it is that year in which American Technologist Carl Malamud hosted the first radio show to be available on the internet, *Geek of the Week*, in Washington, D.C.<sup>150</sup> It is also the same year in which Sam Provost ‘97 arrived at Bard for Language and Thinking.

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<sup>146</sup> "WXBC 540 AM Program Guide," *The Bard Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), November 13, 1991, 10, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/341>.

<sup>147</sup> See says many late-night DJs would flake and this CD would get played into the afternoon the following day.

<sup>148</sup> "WXBC ready to crash the airwaves at 540 am," *The Bard Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), February 10, 1993, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/391>.

<sup>149</sup> "WXBC ready to crash the airwaves at 540 am."

<sup>150</sup> Andrew J. Bottomley, *Sound Streams: A Cultural History of Radio-internet Convergence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020), 27.

When Provost arrived in the summer of 1993, WXBC was not operating. The idea of the internet at Bard was light years away. Provost began “hounding” Station Manager Michael Poirier, upon his return in the fall, on how he could get involved. It wasn’t long before Poirier gave him the key in the fall of 1994.<sup>151</sup> Professor of Media Studies Andrew J. Bottomley, argues that it would be in the fall of 1994 that three college radio stations began experimenting with internet radio broadcasting.<sup>152</sup> WXBC was not one of those stations. At the time, Provost was more concerned with getting the station back on air and having a signal that stretched farther than 300 feet, than the idea of internet radio. His biggest obstacle was figuring out how to get a stronger signal as a carrier current station without violating FCC rules.

Provost recalled that it was Station Engineer Hans Steiner ’96, who had served in the role since ’93, who helped get the transmitter serviced and built a new antenna that Provost said they put in the trees to expand the range.<sup>153</sup> In the spring of 1995 Provost, alongside Program Director Caylor Rollins, began recruiting DJs. In an article published in the *Bard Observer* in 1995, Provost considered the newly allocated higher 1600-1700 AM band for WXBC. Provost had considered FM and even had consulted with an FCC consultant but had the following to say about obtaining an FM license in 1995, “Maybe with the new student center being built out of their \$6 million budget, \$30,000 isn't too hard to find. But that's years from now.”<sup>154</sup> Provost’s prediction in 1995, wasn’t too far off, WXBC would make another attempt to go FM. What he certainly couldn’t predict, was its transition to the internet.

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<sup>151</sup> Samuel Provost, e-mail messages to author, February 4 - March 25, 2023.

<sup>152</sup> Bottomley, *Sound Streams*, 45.

<sup>153</sup> Samuel Provost, e-mail message to author.

<sup>154</sup> Linnea Knollmueller, "Radio Bard College: WXBC is back on the air," *The Bard Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), May 10, 1995, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/454>.

The cycle of collapse and rejuvenation at WXBC is evident from the numerous iterations of the station that emerge from 1960 to 1996. WXBC has had many beginnings in different locations such as Kappa house, the old gym, Albee basement, and Manor basement. WXBC gave Larry Yurdin his radio start in the early sixties. After leaving Bard and abandoning WXBC, he went onto a successful radio career. His involvement at WXBC, proves that the success in management and operations of college radio station, are often rely on the current students' individual passion to run it. This is exemplified through this chapter with Moore, See and Schickele, and Provost. Students who ran WXBC were never afraid of taking risks with its programming, a freedom enjoyed by its carrier current operations. However, because of the broadcasting limitations, in particular the range in which one could receive the station, there is a continued desire to expand WXBC's operations that runs throughout its history. By threading together FCC policy changes with WXBC's plans to expand operations, one can see how radio regulation and the financial restraints of obtaining a license led to the station remaining a carrier current station for the thirty-five-year period covered. Despite the station's inability to expand its operations during this time, the next chapter will show how WXBC begins to transition to a different medium in the new millennium.

### Chapter 3: WXBC Comes of Age on the Internet

In the spring of 1998, the well-established cycle of collapse and rejuvenation at WXBC continued as three freshmen Scott Stanton, Matt Hayes, and Pete Rinko decided to revive the station. With student activities director Allen Josey serving as club advisor, a role he would undertake on and off until his departure in 2005, the station received a donation from Ed Coaster '54 to fund getting the station operating in the fall of 1998.<sup>155</sup> Soon after, they encountered problems with the theft of recently purchased equipment, but still had plans to operate as a carrier current station as FM was too costly.<sup>156</sup> Josey recalled that the station struggled a lot in part because of the low power nature of the carrier current station but also because the carrier current technology was ancient. Even some of the equipment, like the sound board, which he remembered was rescued for cheap from a barn at an apple orchard, had to be bought second hand. because there simply was not enough funding allocated to the station.<sup>157</sup> By the spring of 1999, WXBC was back on the dial at 540 AM.<sup>158</sup>

But, as WXBC transitioned into the new millennium, a new class of licenses known as the Low Power FM license (LPFM) were being issued by the FCC. The LPFM license inspired a renewed FM interest at the station and played a role in its shift to a new medium, broadcasting on the internet. The effects of this new class of licenses would also lead to two separate radio projects at Bard in the new millennium, Free Radio Annandale and WLHV. This chapter covers

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<sup>155</sup>Michael Haggerty, "The New Calling of WXBC," *The Bard Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), September 25, 1998, 7, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/472>.

<sup>156</sup> Ciprian Iancu, "WXBC Snags on Tech Complications," *The Bard Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), November 18, 1998, 5, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/470>.

<sup>157</sup> Allen Josey, videoconference interview by the author, Tivoli, NY, November 18, 2022.

<sup>158</sup> "WXBC 540 Programming Schedule Spring 1999," *The Bard Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), April 22, 1999, 13, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/467>. WXBC was featured in the College Music Journal's Directory in 1999 (see Internet Archive).

WXBC over a seventeen-year period to highlight WXBC's transition to the internet and its phasing out of the carrier current system. It also discusses programming in the digital age and the creative projects that emerge from changes made to WXBC's physical space in the basement of Manor.

By the time computer and internet technology had become a part of people's everyday lives, the world was worrying about its future. The idea that two digits of computer code would somehow end all humanity resulted in the y2k bug. Even Mr. Spock himself, Leonard Nemoy, was providing Americans with *The Y2K Family Survival Guide* on VHS. And yet on New Year's in 2000 the world did not stop turning. Back at Bard, the failure to obtain the new class of LPFM license in 2000, coupled with computers becoming a more accessible technology led to the station looking to an alternative method of broadcasting. Internet radio.

In October of 2001, the *Bard Free Press* reported WXBC had plans to buy a G4 Macintosh to broadcast on the internet that semester.<sup>159</sup> The Budget Committee gave WXBC "a generous sum to the radio station's fund, in recognition of its progressive attitude and the many needs that come with the changes in that attitude."<sup>160</sup> February of 2002, the *Free Press* reported that listeners could tune in to the station through both AM and the 'ethernet' as WXBC created a website that had been designed by student Adam Conover.<sup>161</sup> However, WXBC was not broadcasting on the web that spring. Jane Gilvin '02, who was serving as General Manager, could not recall if WXBC was broadcasting on the internet before she graduated, but it was

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<sup>159</sup> The author has chosen to use web broadcasting and internet broadcasting interchangeably, due to terminology used by subjects interviewed. Both refer to the form of broadcasting that was transmitted through the Ethernet system used by Bard at the time. Receivers may have utilized internet and not ethernet.

<sup>160</sup> Ben Wadler, "The New Face of WXBC," *Bard Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), October 4, 2001. <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/537>.

<sup>161</sup> "WXBC Update" *The Bard Observer* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), February 13, 2002, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/observer/534/>.

unlikely as Gilvin did not believe Bard had particularly good internet access when she was a student.

When Adam Conover '04 first began hosting a show on WXBC, the station was not webcasting yet. Students could tune into the station by plugging a radio into the dorm's power grid.<sup>162</sup> But just because the station was AM didn't mean there were many listeners. In fact, Conover recalled it was a while before he realized that nobody could hear his show. Conover was interested in radio long before he got to Bard as a fan of Long Island's WUSB.<sup>163</sup> When Nick van der Kolk took over the station following Gilvin's departure, Conover was commissioned by van der Kolk to build WXBC's first website [wxbc.bard.edu](http://wxbc.bard.edu). Conover enjoyed building the site from scratch,

Honestly, it was fun - I had taught myself web design and had gotten pretty good at it. This was the blog era, when a lot of people learned HTML and coded their own weblogs. So it was natural to do. However, we didn't have the capability to do anything dynamic - no way to, say, maintain a database of shows and auto-update it when something changed - instead you had to edit the HTML file by hand. And there was no social media, so there was no way to get the word out about it - you just had to hope someone found it via Google or by emailing the site to someone else!<sup>164</sup>

Since designing the WXBC site and graduating from Bard, Conover has gone on to a successful career as a TV host and comedian. Although Conover built the site that WXBC still takes its domain from today, he claimed he was not the one to introduce the internet broadcasting capabilities to the station.

When Nick van der Kolk '05 started at WXBC in the spring semester of '02, the station hadn't figured out how to begin internet broadcasting. Besides the 5-watt transmitter, van der

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<sup>162</sup> Adam Conover, e-mail message to author, March 19, 2023.

<sup>163</sup> Like WXBC, WUSB began as a carrier current station.

<sup>164</sup> Adam Conover, e-mail message to author.

Kolk recalls being in the gym, it was impossible to listen to the station given the limits of the carrier current method.<sup>165</sup> By the fall of 2002, van der Kolk had taken on the role of both Program Director and Station Manager and oversaw the station launch of the station's first operational webcasting server.<sup>166</sup>

Even with the new technology, the web server was not without its faults. One of its greatest challenges was that people who lived off campus were unable to tune into the web stream.<sup>167</sup> This was because the site was connected to Bard's Ethernet system. In some ways, ethernet functions like the carrier current system. The ethernet uses physical cables to connect to send a signal to carry information over a short distance.<sup>168</sup> Those who were not able to connect to the ethernet on campus, often had trouble receiving the station. The new web server however, may have worked better than the carrier current system.

While WXBC was simulcasting, providing service both on the website and through the carrier current system, Adrienne Mathiowetz '05, who got involved with WXBC her junior year, said many thought of the 5-watt transmitter as a joke. By the time Karen Soskin '07 was Program Director in 2005, she believed that even with the carrier current system still operational, most of the listenership came through the website. WXBC simulcasted on the website and through the carrier current AM system at 540AM from 2002-2008, before the decision was made to broadcast online only.<sup>169</sup> The changes in technology during the digital era made room for new types of programming at the station while maintaining a freeform ethos. Despite technical

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<sup>165</sup> Nick van der Kolk, telephone interview by the author, March 13, 2023.

<sup>166</sup> Nick van der Kolk, telephone interview by the author.

<sup>167</sup> This was a problem even when the author started at WXBC in the fall of 2020.

<sup>168</sup> "Ethernet," in *PCMAG*, accessed April 25, 2023, <https://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia/term/ethernet>.

<sup>169</sup> The Internet Archive 2008 website of [wxbc.bard.edu](http://wxbc.bard.edu). The website does not state why the decision was made.



challenges, WXBC's shift to web broadcasting would bring a newfound audience of listeners. No longer was the station listenership confined to the range of the carrier current system.

Gilvin originally tried becoming involved with WXBC her freshman year in 1998. The station had recently been restarted, but she was never told much about its previous history.<sup>170</sup> At the time, WXBC had developed a rigorous DJ application including interviews and a vetting system based on a DJ's CD collection because the station had yet to build a music collection. In the year of *napster*, DJs still needed to supply their own CDs to have a show. Unfortunately, Gilvin had lost her entire collection while shipping it to Bard and was ultimately rejected based on this. When Gilvin joined the Executive Team in 2000, CDs were still commonly used by DJs for programming. Despite being in an era when many people were looking towards an increasingly digital future, Gilvin still recalled there being a strong preference for analog music formats such as vinyl and cassette amongst DJs while she served as General Manager from 2001 to 2002. It is worth noting that Gilvin's position as General Manager, would eventually help her land a job at NPR.

By the spring 2002, renovations made to the studio space allowed for a larger CD music library with a mixture of music, comedy, and talk shows planned on air for the semester.<sup>171</sup> There is not much archival information about shows in 2002. But that spring, —van der Kolk infused new energy into the station, expanding both the staff and programming. van der Kolk expanded the staff to include Program Director Julian James, Music Directors Jesse Crooks and Akie Bermiss, Publicity Directors Blake Malin and Matt Wing, Technical Director Abe Jellinek

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<sup>170</sup> Jane Gilvin, e-mail message to author, October 3, 2022.

<sup>171</sup> "WSEXBC Lives," *Bard Free Press* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), February 19, 2002, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/bardfreepress/21>.

with Allen Josey serving as Faculty Advisor.<sup>172</sup> Information obtained from the Internet Archives gives a taste of WXBC's early programming, where visitors to the station's website could click on a show and it would reveal a description. *Dude Radio* hosted by Julie Rossman and Elyssa Hess, *Eli and Adam Play for You* hosted by Adam Conover and Eli Lerhoff, *Michaelangelo 's Experimental Dance Party* hosted by Nate Bush and Joe Stewart, *The Outside World Radio Project* hosted by Howard Megdal and Nick van der Kolk, and *Professional Hot Girl Radio* hosted by Karen Trindle and Adrienne Mathiowetz were just a few of the many programs hosted on WXBC during the spring semester of 2003.<sup>173</sup>

Adrienne Mathiowetz got involved with WXBC her junior year in 2003 as a DJ. She co-hosted a show with her friend Karen Trindle called *Professional Hot Girl Radio*, which consisted of playing what Mathiowetz described as "ridiculous music" without any particular flow.<sup>174</sup> Mathiowetz was an indie head and Trindle loved Disney musicals and pop. Their Schtick? Two Professional Working Women discussing music, their love life, and Cosmo articles. Each week A highlight of Mathiowetz and Trindle's show was labeling a "cutie of the week" on campus.

Mathiowetz noted the tremendous effort made by van der Kolk to promote programming at the station including organizing a photoshoot for all the DJ's shows that they would then use as flyers to post around campus. Mathiowetz remembers having to bring book bags filled with CD's and manually choosing tracks or suffer the consequences of dead air if you didn't scramble to press the play button.<sup>175</sup> When Mathiowetz got a first-generation iPod her junior year in 2003, it was able to create a playlist in advance, and hitting play and pause on a whim made hosting a

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<sup>172</sup> "WXBC Website 3/31/04," WXBC, Bard College Archives, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

<sup>173</sup> "Shows," WXBC, June 2003, April 3, 2023, <http://wxbc.bard.edu>. Archived at <https://web.archive.org>

<sup>174</sup> Adrienne Mathiowetz, "WXBC," e-mail message to author, March 21, 2023.

<sup>175</sup> Adrienne Mathiowetz, e-mail message to author.

show a lot less fun. But iPod technology would popularize a new digital file format known as podcasting. The emerging podcasting format would find a home at WXBC through van der Kolk and Mathiowetz's show *This One Time*.

In 2004, journalist Ben Hammersley coined the term 'Podcast' to describe the audio format that one could download as an RSS feed.<sup>176</sup> In the fall, the same year the term podcast was coined, Adrienne Mathiowetz and Nick van der Kolk began working on *This One Time*. Both Mathiowetz and van der Kolk described the show as being made in the vein of *This American Life*. Unlike most show's at WXBC at the time which were live, *This One Time* was prerecorded and produced for the air. Mathiowetz recalled how van der Kolk approached her with the idea for the show,

I had zero qualifications for this other than being his friend: he said he would teach me how to edit sound in Pro Tools, how to use a recorder, how to interview, how to get room tone, how to use music beds, how to cut tape when someone was talking so that it didn't sound edited (it's all in the breaths), how to make transcripts. Where did Nick learn all of this stuff? I have no idea... At first we thought of general themes and then asked around to find people willing to share their stories. I think our first theme was "Losing Virginity." We interviewed our friends, we interviewed each other, and then we started interviewing professors for stories too. Our slot on WXBC was an hour so we tried to make each themed episode about an hour long. It was a lot of work! I did a lot of transcribing.<sup>177</sup>

van der Kolk claims that it was his friend Adam Conover, who first introduced him to the world of podcasting. He explained how *This One Time* took off through the podcasting medium,

And the only people who were listening at that time were nerds who had like developed very highly specific podcast apps that were completely independent. And of course, it was called podcasting because the idea was you would transfer all of those podcasts onto your iPod. There was no streaming or anything. It was just you download MP3 and the MP3 gets automatically added to your iPod and then you can listen that way.... the show

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<sup>176</sup> Ben Hammersley, "Audible Revolution," *The Guardian* (London, UK), February 11, 2004, accessed April 17, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2004/feb/12/broadcasting.digitalmedia>.

<sup>177</sup> Adrienne Mathiowetz, e-mail message to author.

I was doing with Adrienne thirty people would tune in on the RSS feed, which was like, pretty good for at the time. But then we put it in the podcast feed...and we were getting like two hundred and fifty downloads, you know. So, it's like all of a sudden to go from thirty to two hundred and fifty. It was like, oh my God, imagine that many people like standing in a room like that's a real audience, you know.<sup>178</sup>

*This One Time* gave WXBC its largest audience yet through the podcasting medium. The success of the show continued beyond the walls of WXBC. Following Mathiowetz and van der Kolk's graduation from Bard, the pair got an internship at PRX, a public radio organization in Boston, where they developed *This One Time* into *Love + Radio*. *This One Time* would become one of the station's first podcasts and a pioneer of what is now referred to as non-narrative podcasting. van der Kolk continues to host *Love + Radio*, which he refers to as the largest remaining non-narrative podcast.

Karen Soskin '07 got involved in WXBC her freshman year. Her time at WVFS Florida State University in Tallahassee got her interested in being part of college radio when she arrived at Bard. When Soskin was involved with the station, WXBC still had a carrier current operation, but she recalled that people mostly tuned in online. Soskin co-hosted a show called *Q104.4 The Beagle* with Stephen Kristen. The name was a parody of patriotic and macho classic rock stations like "The Eagle." During her time at WXBC, Soskin recalled the station being fragmented with station leadership only meeting every so often. Despite this DJs would just do their own freeform thing, proving that thirty years of freeform programming was still the preferred format at the station.<sup>179</sup>

Soskin served as Music Director of WXBC, a role that required sorting through the music, mostly indie and metal, sent by radio promotion companies making music available to

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<sup>178</sup> Nick van der Kolk, telephone interview by the author.

<sup>179</sup> Karen Soskin, e-mail message to author, March 3, 2023.

DJs, and reporting the station's charts to the *College Music Journal*.<sup>180</sup> In her first semester as Music Director in the fall of 2004, Soskin re-established a relationship with the *College Music Journal* (CMJ). By the spring semester of 2005, WXBC had over 72 DJs comprised of a mixture of students and staff. Starting with Schickele's involvement in the early nineties, WXBC would have an on and off relationship with reporting their weekly charts to the CMJ over its many iterations. Soskin recalled the importance of submitting the charts to the CMJ, as it helped WXBC stay on promotions mailing lists and kept the station "on the map." In 2006, after regularly submitting charts to the CMJ, WXBC received a nomination for 'Station of The Year' and 'Best New Station' at the College Music Journal Awards in New York City.<sup>181</sup>

The nomination for Station of The Year was monumental. Other nominees for Best New Station that year included KCMP St. Paul, internet station WOXY, KDXM St. Louis, and KEXP Seattle. What was impressive about this feat was not just that WXBC was the only student-run freeform station nominated for Station of the Year, but they were the only station with a broadcast range of 5 watts nominated. While WXBC lost the award to KEXP, the nomination proved that WXBC's internet activities were reaching a wider audience. The development of WXBC's programming was also influenced by the changes made to the WXBC space over the years.

In the fall of 2001 alongside the purchase of the Macintosh, B&G began station renovations which the station staff had anticipated would be completed by October. Prior to these renovations WXBC was confined to a small room in the basement. One of the major renovations made to the studio space was the addition of music shelves for CDs and vinyl. By

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<sup>180</sup> Karen Soskin, e-mail message to author.

<sup>181</sup> Jen Holup and Karen Soskin, "Report From CMJ," *Bard Free Press* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), November 6, 2006, 6, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/bardfreepress/61>.

the spring of 2002 renovations had been complete and WXBC was making plans to transition to internet broadcasting. An article in the *Bard Free Press* reports on WXBC's intent to make the switch to internet broadcasting that semester and the recent renovations, "the Bard radio station itself has undergone a notable clean-up and remodeling. The station now has two separate booths, a new lounge/performance space, and an improved library space complete with an expanded and updated music collection."<sup>182</sup> In 2003, WXBC was going to be evicted from the basement of Manor to accommodate for more office space for the newly built fisher center, when van der Kolk rallied and convinced Bard VP Jim Brudvig to let the organization stay.<sup>183</sup> After surviving a near eviction in 2003, Mathiowetz recalled the station's setup as having two rooms, the first for broadcasting equipment with a sound board, two office chairs, a blue iMac that could show how many listeners were tuned in, a CD player, and two mics.<sup>184</sup> The second room was a hangout space with couches and CDs.

When Shannon Thomas '13 started at WXBC in 2009, she recalled there were two rooms. The main room, also referred to as the club room, with CD's and a smaller office space. Thomas remembered the technical setup consisting of a computer monitor, phone line, and a large vintage mixer.<sup>185</sup> When Thomas studied abroad, someone damaged the mixer and they shut down the booth so no further damage would occur.<sup>186</sup> By Thomas's senior year, the technical

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<sup>182</sup> "WSEXBC Lives."

<sup>183</sup> Nick van der Kolk, telephone interview by the author.

<sup>184</sup> Mathiowetz, telephone interview by the author

<sup>185</sup> Shannon Thomas, "WXBC Bard," e-mail message to author.

<sup>186</sup> A photo provided by Adrienne Mathiowetz shows this same mixer in use in 2003. It is currently being stored in an AV closet.

setup of the station consisted of a small mixer, some mics, and an old PC to host the stream. Students provided music with their laptops and its activities were confined to a single room.<sup>187</sup>

Thomas recalled WXBC being a bit of a 'boys club' before she took over and having to do a deep clean of the station. It was around this time that she discovered documents in the station from 2006 showing WXBC's CMJ charts and rankings, which were still a big deal. The entire time Thomas was involved with WXBC it was a two-person operation handling applications, programming, funding, and events. A deep dive into WXBC's tumblr and one will find many cat gifs and the promotion for a "weed baby" mascot t- shirt, which was designed to raise funds for new equipment. A few years later, Holly Herzfeld '17, would oversee the station's lounge converted into a live room.

Herzfeld first got involved with WXBC in 2014 as a guest DJ before hosting her own show and quickly moved into the role of programming director. Several upgrades were made to the space during Herzfeld's involvement including painting WXBC's doors pink. Herzfeld felt it was important to have a nice space student were inspired by and would respect. Herzfeld transformed the smaller office/lounge space into a live performance space in the fall of 2016 inspired by KEXP. While Herzfeld was Program Director, WXBC put on Glitz Fest, a festival showcasing local talent including Waxahatchee and started a WXBC Zine called Placenta.<sup>188</sup> This goes to show that in just a few years both the technical and physical setup the change. By the time Herzfeld or Thomas got involved with WXBC, the idea of going FM seemed like a distant future, rather than a very recent past.

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<sup>187</sup> In an email exchange with Thomas she explained passing on the mixer to advisor Labarbera in the hopes it would be fixed, but never got the original mixer back. In conversation with Labarbera in November when showing the author the AV storage, the mixer was beyond repair and it now sits in the AV closet as a relic of WXBC's past.

<sup>188</sup> Holly Herzfeld, e-mail message to author, March 31, 2023.

Part of WXBC's decision to broadcast on the internet came after the creation of a new class of licenses by the FCC in 2000 known as Low Power FM or LPFM licenses and the challenges the station faced when trying to obtain one. Following the FCC's decision to end class D licenses in 1978, a license which allowed stations to operate at a low power of just 10-Watts, micro radio activists began to push back against the FCC's restrictions on the spectrum.<sup>189</sup> The pressure from activists to allocate a new class of low power licenses for community and educational radio mounted following The Telecommunications Act of 1996, which got rid of previous restrictions on station ownership allowed for cross media ownership by large companies.

In January of 2000 the FCC created a new class of license called the Low Power FM license or LPFM. These licenses were split into two groups: 100-Watt stations and 10-Watt stations. The eligibility for these groups included nonprofits, educational institutions, federally recognized tribes, and public safety and the FCC would take applications for these licenses in windows. However, heavy lobbying from an unlikely alliance of commercial and public radio groups, The National Association of Broadcasters and National Public Radio, as well as intergovernmental squabbling over if the FCC had exercised too much power in making this decision led to the creation of The Broadcasting Preservation Act of 2000.<sup>190</sup> The Broadcasting Preservation Act of 2000 made its way into a spending Bill signed by President Clinton in

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<sup>189</sup> Andy Opel, *Micro Radio and the FCC: Media Activism and the Struggle over Broadcast Policy* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), 6-11. The Micro broadcasting movement also referred to as the low power movement following the creation of the LPFM class of license by the FCC began with Mbanna Kantako's Black Liberation Radio in 1986. The work of activists done pre LPFM is generally referred to as micro radio or micro broadcasting.

<sup>190</sup> "From Class D to LPFM: The High-Powered Politics of Low-Power Radio," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (June 2001). <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900107800209>.



December of 2000. This bill limited the eligibility of applicants and led to a decreased number in licenses allocated by the FCC that year.

In early 2000, *Bard Free Press* reported that Station Manager Chris Pappas told the paper of plans for WXBC to finally go FM. According to the article by that point WXBC had filed with the FCC and Pappas hoped the station would be FM by the fall of 2000. To do this WXBC would move from its location in Manor to one close to the library.<sup>191</sup> WXBC at this point was still broadcasting as a carrier current at 540 AM on the dial. In May of 2000, WXBC still was set on going FM the following year according to a *Free Press* article. The article claimed the station needed to receive more funding, to obtain an FM license, new equipment, and relocate the station.<sup>192</sup> However as Gilvin said, the idea of Bard finally making the switch to FM, might have been more of a fever dream after rereading the articles from the *Bard Free Press*, “I think we were like yes this is a sure thing and it just wasn't.”<sup>193</sup> In prior attempts in which WXBC tried to make the transition to FM, factors such as lack of funding and student disorganization, were at play. In the case of the LPFM movement in 2000, the results of the Radio Preservation Act may have dealt a more striking blow for WXBC’s latest attempt to go FM. However, the work of micro radio activists would inspire a separate radio project at Bard, Free Radio Annandale. Additionally, when a new LPFM filling window opened up in 2007, there was an interest by the colleges staff in creating a non-commercial radio station separate from WXBC.

On April 23, 2003, Peter Tridish, Radio Engineer and founder of the Prometheus Radio Project, a non-profit organization dedicated to advocating for Low Power FM stations, gave a

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<sup>191</sup> Chris Downing, "WXBC to Go FM," *Bard Free Press* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), March 14, 2000, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/bardfreepress/1>.

<sup>192</sup> David Hassinger, "Bard Radio, WXBC, Goes FM (For Real)," *Bard Free Press* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), May 3, 2000, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/bardfreepress/4>.

<sup>193</sup> Jane Gilivin, telephone interview by the author.

mini workshop on democratization of the airwaves at Root Cellar.<sup>194</sup> That summer, Katherine Jacoby '05, got an internship with the Prometheus Radio Project, sponsored by the Human Rights Department. Jacoby recalled that it was during this time she familiarized herself with legal and illegal methods of broadcasting as well as the history of community radio. Jacoby had previously hosted a show called the *Ring of the Revolution* on WXBC which had inspired her to “push the boundaries of what radio was at Bard.”<sup>195</sup> To Jacoby, the digital era felt “nascent” at the time, and FM radio was a more accessible medium than the internet-based station WXBC was gearing up to be.

During the January intersession of 2004, Jacoby and Kiernan Rok obtained an apprenticeship with Free Radio Berkeley. Free Radio Berkeley began as an unlicensed FM radio station (also known as micro broadcasting), created by Stephen Dunifer as an act of “electronic civil disobedience”.<sup>196</sup> At the time the FCC was not giving licenses to stations at less than 100 watts. Although Dunifer was forced to cease broadcasting operations in 1998, the demand from grassroots organizations such as Prometheus and Free Radio Berkeley for low power use of the spectrum, led to the creation of LPFM service by the FCC in 2000. In 1994, Free Radio Berkeley, began distributing micropower transmitters through its International Radio Action Training Education program (IRATE) and offering workshops on how to set up similar micropower stations.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Katie Jacoby, e-mail message to Thomas Keenan, April 22, 2003.

<sup>195</sup> Katie Jacoby, e-mail message to author, April 4, 2023.

<sup>196</sup> Stephen Dunifer and Ron Sakolsky, *Seizing the Airwaves: A Free Radio Handbook* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1998), 4.

<sup>197</sup> “Free Radio Berkeley,” Freeradio.org, accessed April 17, 2023, <https://freeradio.org/index.php?pagename=frb/irate.html>.

Through the apprenticeship Jacoby and Rok brought their newly acquired micro broadcasting skills to Annandale and started Free Radio Annandale 92.5. In an article written by Jacoby in February of 2004, she outlines the intention for the project, “it will provide the Bard Community with only 8 watts of broadcasted eclectic music styles and themed shows, it will also become part of a larger media education project.”<sup>198</sup> Jacoby recalled the following of Free Radio Annandale’s setup,

It took us about a week to solder all the microelectronics components needed to create the radio station. I believe we also formed a student club and were able to get a budget for a mixing board and mics. Initially we tested out its range at the southern end of the campus (at Fietler Coop), we might have hung it in a tree but we were able to move it to the Root Cellar (when they shut down the old gym) having the antennae secured to the fire escapes of the stone dorms giving us a little more range, it was only 5 watts.<sup>199</sup>

Free Radio Annandale began shortly after van der Kolk had taken over WXBC. He recalled things between WXBC and Free Radio Annandale as being cordial, with van der Kolk even giving advice to co-founder Jacoby.<sup>200</sup> This shifted following tension at a budget forum in the spring of 2004. The tension, which the student newspapers coined a “blow out”, about which station gets the bigger budget, even led to a staff meeting with the two campus organizations to smooth things over. But van der Kolk was relatively uninterested in campus drama. Looking back, he realized it wasn’t really drama at all, but rather the result of living in a hermetically sealed environment in which everyone is fighting over a “small slice of pie”.

Free Radio Annandale gave its first broadcast in the spring of 2004 and by May the project had caught the attention of WIRED magazine, who profiled Jacoby's work.<sup>201</sup> The profile

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<sup>198</sup> "Free Radio Annandale to Hit the Airwaves" *Bard Free Press*, February 17, 2003, 2, <https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/bardfreepress/38>.

<sup>199</sup> Katie Jacoby, e-mail message to author, April 4, 2023.

<sup>200</sup> Nick van der Kolk, telephone interview by the author.

<sup>201</sup> Jason Silverman, "Stealing Back the Airwaves," *Wired Magazine*, May 7, 2004, accessed January 19, 2023, <https://www.wired.com/2004/05/stealing-back-the-airwaves/>.

caught the attention of the FCC, who swiftly sent a cease-and-desist letter to Jacoby. Jacoby claimed they didn't operate the station enough to "warrant all the fuss." In any case Jacoby and the Free Radio Annandale project had the support of both Bard Security and Human Rights professor Tom Keenan. Professor Keenan remembers a phone call he received from the head of Bard Security Ken Cooper that spring:

[Cooper's] voice was dripping with irony when he said to me 'I just got a call from an Agent Smith from the FCC who was concerned that Katie Jacoby was running an unlicensed broadcast at Bard College ... I told Agent Smith that I was quite sure that was an academic research project she was involved in and it was supervised by a faculty member and the FCC has no business interfering with the academic research of our students and that his time would be better spent going off and catching some terrorists'. And I told him you are completely right. It is an academic research project supervised by a faculty member and I am grateful you are sticking up for our students.<sup>202</sup>

Free Radio Annandale was a short-lived endeavor. A couple years later, another radio project separate from WXBC would emerge at Bard from the Human Rights Project, although the plans for this station were less radical. In 2007, two staff members at Bard, Danielle Riou and Max Kenner would come the closest in Bard radio history to getting an FM license.

A new 100-Watt LPFM application window had opened and Riou, who had recently returned to Bard to work for the Human Rights Project, applied for a construction permit, the first step one needs to take in becoming a station. Riou, a self-described radio-head, thought it was odd that many college campuses had obtained non-commercial licenses but not Bard. Riou remembers there being an interest among administrators in the early stages, which is uncommon. After being required to consult with an FCC lawyer and engineers, Riou was able to successfully acquire a construction permit for WLHV 88.1. In acquiring the construction permit, the school had beat out a number of applicants. "FCC Real Estate is a weird thing," Riou exclaimed to me

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<sup>202</sup> Tom Keenan, interview by the author, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, March 29, 2023.

when we met in March.<sup>203</sup> As it turned out, getting the construction permit would be the easiest part in the lengthy process.

The project faced several challenges with how the college wanted to proceed with the project and changes in government legislation, but at the heart of these problems was one thing. Money. The cost of constructing the station was around \$150,000. Riou had hoped that the school would be able to get a grant from the Public Telecommunications Facilities Program (PTFP), a grant from the government for new public radio construction. Wave Farm, based in Arca, NY had also successfully filled in the window and received funding eight months earlier. However, in 2011, Obama signed H.R.1473, which cut funding for the PTFP. This piece of legislation marked what Riou described as a “big blow” for the project.

Riou was fighting off frequent calls from Christian evangelical radio networks who wanted the permit. When it became clear that there was no hope for WLHV at Bard, Riou requested a six-month extension on the permit from the F.C.C to allow it to be handed over to Robin Hood Radio in Sharon, Connecticut. It was important to Riou that the permit was given to an organization, with democratic ideals.<sup>204</sup> By the fall of 2012, WLHV had sold its license to Robin Hood Radio.<sup>205</sup> With the FCC closing their last LPFM filing window in 2013, this would be the last attempt by a radio project at Bard to obtain an FM license. During the period in which both projects were underway at Bard WXBC was still operational.

When I first became involved in WXBC, there had been a rumor that WXBC had been banned from obtaining an FCC license. The research thus far has shown that WXBC never

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<sup>203</sup> Danielle Riou, interview by the author, Annandale-On-Hudson, NY, March 15, 2023.

<sup>204</sup> Danielle Riou, interview by the author.

<sup>205</sup> Zappa Graham, "Effort for Bard FM Radio Station Fails," *Bard Free Press* (Annandale-On-Hudson, NY), April 19, 2012, accessed August 31, 2022, [https://issuu.com/bardfreepress/docs/aprilissue\\_2012](https://issuu.com/bardfreepress/docs/aprilissue_2012).

obtained any license from the FCC, therefore would have been unable to be banned.<sup>206</sup> A couple years after Allen Josey left, Paul LaBarbera became a club advisor to WXBC. He had become familiar with the space having assisted with various audio issues over the years. He did not know much about the station's history, but he was there in 2003, when WXBC almost lost their space due to the new offices being built in the basement of Manor to accommodate for the new Fisher Center staff. LaBarbera assisted Thomas in fixing the vintage mixer and was there when Herzfeld setup the live room. He was also there when students voted in 2008 to move the station online.

LaBarbera recalled that this choice happened because WXBC was simulcasting on the internet and operating as a carrier current station, when he received an email complaint from a Red Hook resident about profanity on air claiming it was a violation of FCC rules. However, it would have been impossible for someone from Red Hook to listen to the station on the dial.<sup>207</sup> They would have only been able to access the broadcast through the off-campus stream available online. A stream that is not regulated by the FCC. The students then voted to get rid of the carrier current system. Thomas stated that when she first got involved with the station there were a lot of rumors about the station becoming a wireless station following the vote to operate online only, but that the station had somehow lost their license due to too many FCC fines.<sup>208</sup> A trip to the Internet Archive will show that WXBC's website in 2008 claims that for "For the convenience of all listeners, WXBC broadcasts online at wxbc.bard.edu." It's not quite clear how this rumor began, but it was fueled by a lack of knowledge of both WXBC's history and of the history of

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<sup>206</sup> Paul LaBarbera, e-mail message to author, March 31, 2023.

<sup>207</sup> Paul LaBarbera, e-mail message to author.

<sup>208</sup> Thomas, "WXBC Bard," e-mail message to author.

the FCC's allocation of the spectrum. Serving as station advisor for over ten years, LaBarbera observed that in his role he has noticed a cycle every two to four years depending on what student is in charge at the time. The station either falls apart or starts up again.<sup>209</sup>

The transition from carrier current to internet broadcasting did not happen overnight. The station spent several years simulcasting, before making the switch to operate solely as an internet station. The choice to begin broadcasting on the internet came at a time when computer technology had become a part of daily life. It was also influenced by WXBC's failure to obtain a LPFM license. The creation of a website and internet broadcasting led to new creative projects such as *This One Time*, which found success as *Love + Radio* after Bard. Many of its participants such as Conover, Gilvin, Mathiowetz, and van der Kolk continue to participate in creative fields. Even in the digital age, there are gaps in archival information. Nevertheless, station program guides, provide a glance of the station culture.

Additionally, it allowed WXBC to have an audience outside of campus for the first time since the WKIP collaboration in 1949. Without transitioning to internet broadcasting, WXBC likely would have not been nominated for station of the year in 2006. Although WXBC had previously been in the basement of Manor as early as 1978 and again in the nineties, it is not until the aughts where we see the station undergo significant spatial changes. By highlighting these changes, it is easy to see how the construction of space, influenced new creative projects such as the live room. The success of the LPFM movement in the aughts, inspired two separate radio projects at Bard outside of WXBC. Understanding that the choice to operate as an internet station in 2008 was in part due to a misunderstanding about FCC regulations, highlights another

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<sup>209</sup> Paul LaBarbera, interview by the author, Manor Basement, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, November 20, 2022.

challenge faced by student-run radio stations like WXBC. Finally, by acknowledging the rumors that come from this event, the history provided easily deconstructs them as just that, rumors.



## Conclusion

From its start in 1947, WXBC has been a student-led experiment. Although Gillin never stated that the X stood for experimental in his senior project, a 1951 yearbook gives the call letter that title. Like any experiment, the station had different variables that affected its success. The first variable and by far the most important: students. Student-run radio stations depend on individual student interests and passion to operate. It is evident that at WXBC there have been many creative and passionate students who have been involved. However, the student's relationship with the station is temporary and based on how many years they are at college. WXBC never has had student leadership for more than three years. Although this has resulted in periods of inactivity, these periods are short-lived. A new group of students has always come along within a few years to express interest in creating or restarting the station. While the lack of consistency in operations has led to many setbacks, both technically and structurally, from this one can see that WXBC has developed a unique and highly creative culture.

The second variable: the college. This variable is largely controlled, as the station has always been a part of Bard College, although its financial and social interests in supporting the station, can affect its operation. This is true especially when it pertains to the expansion of the station. The third variable: the station. The station is a means by which students broadcast and reach an audience. This variable for most of WXBC's history remained the same, as a carrier current station, for almost sixty years. There had been an interest in changing this variable since the sixties, although it would not be until the aughts in which we see WXBC change from carrier current operations to internet broadcasting. Remember that WXBC is a student-led audio activity on a college campus, rather than a method of transmission. Understanding changes in broadcasting technology should be acknowledged but must not be used to delegitimize a college

station's past or present form. What I have summarized, can be applied to WXBC as it stands today.

WXBC has grown tremendously in the three years I have been involved in the station both as a DJ and General Director, but there has been no regular student newspaper to document its history. Student-run newspapers and student-run radio stations share a common labor force. During the first year of the pandemic, station leadership was passed onto three students Freya Hatch-Surisook '23, Kai Parcher Charles '23, and Ziv Barancik '21. All three students were in their positions for a year or less. Because WXBC gets its funding as a campus club, they used the term "club head" to describe leadership positions at the station. When Ziv graduated, I was passed on the club head position. Freya did not want to be involved with leadership and passed other club head position to Ray. Both Ray and I decided that it would be better for the station if we structured its leadership similarly to a radio station, rather than a club. We then created our roles of General Director and Program Director at WXBC.

By the fall of 2021, the station's executive team expanded to include Technical Director April Giom '23 and Station Manager Claire Sullivan '24. The station grew from seven DJs to over 45 in the first semester. We were one of two U.S. college stations selected to participate in World College Radio Day and hosted a Halloween masquerade ball at SMOG. In our first year on Mixlr, we had 50,000 visits to the page. In the fall we celebrated 75 years since WXBC's founding with a birthday bash in Manor. Our programming has continued to grow, with shows now not only hosted by students but by Bard faculty and staff as well as special slots for more members of the community to experiment with WXBC. This past year, WXBC alums Adam Conover '04 and Martha Hart '05 recorded a reunion show as part of special programming. Additionally, Art Carlson made a special programming appearance where he played original

recordings from Bard bands and discussed his memories of WXBC. Notable additions to the space include a station couch from the Waterhouse family in Tivoli, station lamps, and streamers. After removing equipment to save it from mold and mildew last year, we hope to bring the live room back to life in May.

Writing this, I am reminded of the many student newspaper columns by WXBC staff reporting updates on the station. Like, any other iteration of WXBC, we have had our challenges. During the summer of 2021, rain flooded the basement of Manor, where WXBC studios suffered additional damage from a missing ceiling panel. Luckily, there was minimal equipment damage, but the station had to dispose of pieces of furniture that had mold. Its members were saddened by the loss of a beloved car seat couch. In the spring of 2022, WXBC did not receive a charter club budget after confusion over the submission date. This past winter, newly purchased equipment was stolen from the station. We started a station Substack, for music reviews and to publish weekly program guides, but struggled to get DJs to submit descriptions of their shows on a weekly basis. Only through studying WXBC's history, is it apparent that none of these challenges are new. As a student who was serving as the General Director while writing this thesis, I have spent countless hours trying to think of ways in which I can prevent the cycle of collapse and rejuvenation from continuing. And yet, I am not as worried as I once was about the future of WXBC. I recognize now that this cycle of collapse and rejuvenation, allowed me to become involved with the station in the first place.

As a senior, both Bard and WXBC will become my past in less than a month. But the future looks bright. Just this year we have added Assistant General Director Liam Dwyer '26, Assistant Program Director Ethan McKaig '26, Station Manager Cora Clum '26, Substack Editor David Nicholls '26, Live Room Coordinator Kay Flynn-Murry '25, and Technical Director Elias

Bachner '25. I cannot ensure that WXBC will be the same a year or even four years from now. In many ways, I hope it does not remain the same. I hope WXBC continues to evolve and grow. With a new LPFM application window on the horizon and a new campus center, who knows what the future holds for WXBC. As for its past, this thesis only scratches the surface of the history of WXBC.

There are more stories and materials that are out there waiting to be explored. I have identified three areas in which the research for this thesis can be extended further. First, there are the sound recordings of WXBC. As of now there are only two audio recordings in the Bard Archives. Building a collection of audio recordings, could reveal more of the station's history that cannot be ascertained through documents. Further, the history of WXBC in the last two decades is largely digital and scattered across the corners of the internet. Digital libraries like the Internet Archive can be used to trace lost audio that was once published on the website. Additionally, crowdsourcing from alumni/ae, regardless of the year of their involvement, may yield more results. Given the limited physical space of the Stevenson Library at this time in storing archival materials, if older audio recordings are made available in mp3 form, it may be easier for the archives to store. With 1,422 mp3 files containing show recordings from the past three years on the station computer, I intend to oversee that these files are transferred onto a hard drive and given to the Bard Archives before graduating.

A second area that can be explored further is the student newspaper archives. Without a library guide, I compiled a forty-page annotated bibliography of student newspaper sources from 1947 to 2007 that mention WXBC. This bibliography was a critical research tool, that I intend to share with the Bard Library. Yet, there are more student newspaper archives that mention WXBC that were not available while I was conducting research that are available now. Notably

missing from the Bard Digital Commons are *Bard Free Press* articles. The library has struggled with access to *Bard Free Press* articles as the newspaper ISSUU site, where many of the papers were uploaded, claims to not have the license to enable download. Slowly, but surely the library is getting access to these newspapers. Even a week before this thesis was due, I was receiving email notifications about newly digitized *Bard Free Press* articles containing the term ‘WXBC’ available on the Bard Digital Commons.

Third, this thesis does not present audio and visual material other than in written form. Moving forward with the written history presented in this thesis, I propose creating a website compiling written, visual, and audio materials. This website would not only tell the story of WXBC in an easily accessible format but also provide an opportunity to continue to work towards a more complete historiography of WXBC. Information that could be added to this site includes a research guide for archival material on WXBC and resources that are available for undergraduate students to compile their own station history. This website would be in a similar vein to Bard Makes Noise and should be a collaborative effort between Bard Archives, Alumni/ae Affairs, and both current and past members of WXBC. I suggest that in five years this site be created to honor the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of WXBC and showcase an effort to preserve college radio history in America.

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