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University of Maine Raymond H. Fogler Library Special Collections Department

Transcript of a sound recording in MS 608, WLBZ Radio Station Records, Bangor, Maine, 1931-1973

Title: Copy of Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History Interview with Irving Hunter

Recording numbers: Copies of Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History na856, mfc_na0856_t0805_01.mp3, mfc_na0856_t0805_02.mp3, mfc_na0856_t0806_01.mp3, mfc_na0856_t0806_02.mp3, mfc_na0856_t0807_01.mp3

Part 1

Date: March 12, 1975

Length of recording: 52:15

[transcript begins]

FOLKLIFE CENTER staff member: Northeast Archives of Folklore in Oral History, accession number eight five six, a series of interviews with Irving Hunter of Bangor, Maine, concerning his experiences in broadcasting in the 1930s. This is done as part of the Country and Western Music Project for AY 123, Seminar in Folk Song. Tape number 856.1, an interview with Irving Hunter of Bangor, Maine, on March 12th 1975. The interviewer is Sandy Ives and Lisa Feldman.

IVES: This is Wednesday, March 12th 1975, and Lisa Feldman and I are going in to see Mr. Irving Hunter in Radio Station WLBZ in Bangor of which he is now the Manager. We're going to talk to him about our project connected with Country music. This is Sandy Ives. [sounds of testing microphone] You got that list that we sent you the other day.

HUNTER: I just cleaned my desk off.

IVES: [Both laughing] We can give you a copy of it. I was wondering what names on there really struck you as familiar.

HUNTER: Oh, yes. Waity Aikens, of course, is very familiar. And incidentally, I was talking with Norm Lambert and you're going to talk with him.

IVES: That's right.

HUNTER: Norm was very close to Waity and he can tie in some of the information you wanna know very quickly and readily. Waity Akins had his own band of course and he also wrote many arrangements. He was very talented and Norm, as you may know, has some of these arrangements in his collection of memorabilia.

IVES: Yeah.

HUNTER: And so Norm worked very closely with Waity and I know he was a very colorful musical personality. His orchestra was very popular. As I say, Waity was very talented, not only in working with musicians but in writing arrangements which were unique. And back in those days, arrangements were

quite one of the major facets of any popular orchestra. This is what made them, as you know. They all had their style and it was the arranger who made the style. So that was pretty much the story of Waity.

IVES: One question I ought to ask you before we go on any further. Mr. Guernsey said that you started working for WLBZ way back in the early '30s, is that right?

HUNTER: 1930, that's right.

IVES: What position?

HUNTER: I was a licensed radio operator and on the same location that we as we are right now, on Broadway. All that was out here then was the transmitting station with the antenna system building and the transmitter inside. This was simply the means of getting the programming on the air. And it would be of some interest, maybe, to pull your thoughts together, when I came to Bangor in 1930, I came up at the request of Tom Guernsey who was the owner, managing director, and all these things.

IVES: And he lived in Dover-Foxcroft?

HUNTER: Dover-Foxcroft. He started the station there originally. You may know this too, Sandy. This was prior to... 1926 it was incorporated as WLBZ. Prior to that, it was W1EE, if I remember correctly, an experimental station, experimental broadcast station. And that was in Dover-Foxcroft. But he moved it to Bangor. He was very far seeing and ambitious and very much interested in radio and so he moved to Bangor and started the first commercial radio station. And they operated on the local basis for quite some time. In 1930 they had just gone on the CBS network. This was the first network program that was ever brought in to Bangor.

IVES: I believe the date was January 15th

HUNTER: This is... I'm not sure, because this is prior to my time and you've done some research.

IVES: I admit we've done, I've been looking through old newspapers from 1930 and happened on that, that's all.

HUNTER: That's interesting, because as I say and you'll notice I I'm not a great one for remembering dates exactly, this sort of thing. I grew up in the business with the station and it was all a matter of course. And I wasn't putting things in my mind chronologically. It was day to day work. But I did come up here because at that time they were expanding their hours on the air and they decided to go on the air from I believe was 8:30 in the morning until midnight. They had only one licensed radio operator. Well obviously, he couldn't tend to the station in all those hours. You had to run to FCC rules even in those days, have a licensed operator manning the broadcast station transmitter. So they got in touch with me. I had a license and in those days there weren't too many people licensed for this sort of thing. It was a federal license, of course, Communications Commission. That is, the early days of the Communications Commission. And so anyhow I came up because of this.

IVES: Where did you come up from?

HUNTER: Oh, from Boston. Might as well call it Boston, it was Quincy, actually, but just outside Boston. So what? That was in 1930. It was in the spring of 1930 so it was... this this figure, I know. It was 45 years ago. [Laughs] The idea was Mr. Guernsey got in touch with WNAC in Boston. He, of course, was familiar with people in in radio throughout this part of the country because he was beginning to get organized and as I say he bought CBS programming up here. And later on he brought programming

from WNAC in Boston, Yankee Network. So he knew these people and that was why he talked with them and they in turn got in touch with me and it was rather interesting. I got a phone call. This will be interesting from one point of view, see how things happened in those days and how Tom Guernsey worked. So this was in the evening at home in Quincy and a fellow called and introduced himself. He said he was Tom Guernsey, owner of the station in Bangor, Maine, and my name had been given to him through WNAC and did I have a license, and so forth, and so forth, and could I come to Bangor to work for him? And a few necessary details, the weekly wage and this sort of thing. And I had no idea until his phone call came of getting into broadcasting. I was going to go aboard ship and as a licensed radio operator, and was licensed to do that, of course. So anyhow, as he talked, he spun this yarn about the station being a couple miles out of town and they had an old Model T Ford for transportation and it sounded like somewhat of a lark. And so I thought, well, you know, why not try it? Here's a chance to gain some experience and why not? So I told him yes, I was interested. Well, with that, that's all he needed. He said, alright fine. Can you come to work right away? He said there'll be a train out of Boston at 9 o'clock in the morning. Can you be on that train? [Laughs] So again, I get a little quick thinking of course. And I figure well, you know, if I'm going, what difference does it make whether I go tomorrow morning or next week? I can get ready rather quickly. So, I said yes. So the next morning, I was on the train to Bangor and I started to work the next day. I got up here and saw the station, and so forth. That's, so that gives you an idea of how Mr. Guernsey worked. Which is quite interesting. If he got his mind on something, he wanted to do it and he would do it as quickly as possible and this is the way he operated. So that was the start of it. And in those days we had two big windmill towers out here on Broadway with an antenna stretched between them. This was the antenna system. And the transmitter was entirely composite, which is a classic word for homemade. So that was the start of it, as far as that's concerned. But that clues you into the fact that in early days, of 1930, Thomson Guernsey brought CBS programming to Bangor, Maine. And this of course was very much of a step forward for this area. I was astounded when I came to Bangor and in many ways but the town was bigger than I thought it was going to be, actually.

IVVES: Wow.

HUNTER: But when I turned on the radio, after I'd been here a few days and started to try to get some radio stations, which in in the Boston area, it was no problem, there was several right in Boston of course and many in the immediate neighborhood so you could pick up quite a number of stations. Well, here the only station I could get was WLBZ, except, well you could tune up and down the dial if you went the whole bit you can get some sort of a station in the background with a great deal of static.

IVVES: What about ABI? Wasn't that...?

HUNTER: This is, this is my point. So I asked, I said, you know, what's wrong with the set or what's going wrong here? There's nothing. And he said, that's all you can get. And I said you mean that there's just, just one local station, is all I can get? Well, that's all. I said I thought there was another local station and they said, well there is. It's WABI, and they're only on Sunday morning with a church broadcast. So this was the radio picture in those days. So WLBZ was the first commercial radio station. And at that time, as I say, they had CBS network. I can't remember the dates, but from that they went in a Yankee Network, Mutual Broadcasting System, they took programs from there. We were a full-time radio station, licensed as such to broadcast in a non directional pattern. In those days, we didn't have to have a directional antenna as we have now. So it was a very powerful station and it really was quite something.

IVES: What was the power of the station? The wattage?

HUNTER: Pardon? Oh, the wattage was, I believe, it was 500 watts in the early days and then it went to a thousand. I can't remember the dates, but as I say, Tom Guernsey was continually improving and stepping up and adding and moving ahead. So it went through those stages. Well that's, that gives you the background. I won't remain on that, but I thought I'd touch on that quite quickly, give you the background. Then we can get back to some of these things. The local programming, of course, fitted in around the network programming and in those days we used very few phonograph records. This was considered something you did when you couldn't do anything else. And in in the Bangor area, there was considerable amount of top talent available. Waity Aikens, as you say. He was at one of a number of orchestras who were very good. And of course there was the Conservatory of Music and we used to have string ensembles and symphony orchestras that we broadcast. They would come right up to the studio. We had big studios on Main Street. And so there were many live broadcasts and you'll notice from some of the old logs that they were sold in blocks of time, usually 15 minutes, the bigger programs were half hour. And you had a sponsor for these. Some of them were put on a sustaining basis. But it was live talent mostly. And as I say, very good. Now, let's get back to your list of things, because this is what you're interested in particularly. Bangor Hydro Rangers. I'm not positive. 1935. What the group would be. In many cases, I know I was around at that time, of course, but I was not quite in touch with it. I was out here at the transmitter for a number of years and in many cases what would probably happen they got a group together just from the local musicians. It wasn't a band set up as such but they said well we need, you know, a trumpet, a violin, drums, piano, whatever, and they pick a group and give them a name, which was the thing in those days. The A and P Gypsies, and so forth. So the Bangor Hydro Rangers was kind of a natural. I presume the tie-in with Range and Bangor Hydro, you know, real clever in those days. Bar L Orchestra, played at the Blue Moon in Hartland. There again, we did have groups come in of this nature that were organized for other reasons, but... they would like to get on the radio. It was great publicity for them and a great opportunity, of course. As time went on, even in this period we did what we called pickups. Remotes today, this sort of thing. You go out and set up the orches, well in a sense you set up the orchestra, you had it placed about the way you thought it was good because you'd use one microphone in those days. That's all you had. And the equipment was all battery-operated and you lugged, we had three boxes. This was our pickup equipment. One box had an amplifier in it. The second box had a storage battery. The third box had B batteries. So this this gave you your power.

IVES: B batteries you say?

HUNTER: B, these are the big batteries that were the so-called high voltage for the plate to voltage on the tubes. Of course, everything was vacuum tubes in those days. So you had a considerable amount of equipment to lug, and very heavy, cumbersome.

FELDMAN: Would you only do remote broadcasts for groups that were very popular, because it was expensive?

HUNTER: Well, in those days we did everything because this was the way the station operated under Mr. Guernsey. He was very forward-looking and if he thought that something would be of interest to the listeners, he would bring it to them. This, this was the idea. He brought them all these things. The first network. Some of the old programs will show you that we brought the first baseball into this area. This was a tremendous first. The baseball fans were ecstatic, of course. They could hear the, we carried all the Red Sox games from the Yankee Network, for a number of years. We brought the first soap operas in. Of course, when we started there was no such thing as soap operas. And they finally got

started and then they caught on like wildfire. And we were the ones who had them on CBS. This was the only network that came into Bangor for a number of years. And to that we added, as I say, the Yankee Network and then we added the Colonial Network, which was an offshoot of Yankee, and the Mutual Broadcasting System. So we fitted them all together in that fashion.

FELDMAN: ...ask you a stupid question...

HUNTER: Oh, it won't be stupid.

FELDMAN: I don't know very much about the technical things, but when you did a pickup from the network station, would it come over your antenna, or would you have to get one of these big records, an ET...

HUNTER: Let's see, I guess they know all the answers for all those questions. When you say pickup, let's see, let's take the network, first. The network came to us over telephone lines right out here to Broadway. So it was merely a matter of connecting to those telephone lines and running it through our equipment. This the way it was done all over the country. This is why it was called a network.

IVES: Over the telephone lines?

HUNTER: Telephone lines, that's right. And this, these, of course, were hired, leased, rented, or whatever you want to call it, from the telephone company. And in those days they had special lines. They gave them a great deal of attention, because radio was very, very big in those days. It was the form of entertainment that was new and exciting and different.

IVES: I remember that.

HUNTER: It was, even more than television. When television came along, it actually was secondary, from the point. Of course, it was fantastically different, because you could see the entertainers instantly. But radio had done it all before so it took away the first idea of television. It's the first time you could see them, but it was not the first time that you heard these entertainers from all over the country and all over the world. They added another dimension, this sight, which of course was very very important. But radio, this was the first anything like this had ever happened. You could sit in your own home and you could hear plays, you could hear music, you could hear speeches, you could hear fights. The heavyweight fighting game in those days was not in the stage that it is now. It was very exciting and so I recall the first fights that were put on a radio, everything came to a halt, you know, all the men stood around and sat around radios, listen to the fight. And they get it instantly. You know, this was fantastic. You didn't have to wait 'til the next day to read the paper. You could hear it as it was happening. And this was true of everything in radio. You could hear it as it was happening. Whether it was in California, New York, Chicago. So this is how the networks became so popular. And they called them a network because they were connected by a network of wires throughout the country. And this is how it came about. Now the same thing was true when we talk about a pickup. If we were to do, which we did, a broadcast from the Chateau Ballroom, we hired telephone lines from the telephone company. We went down, hooked our equipment to the end of these telephone lines. The other end of course was hooked up near the studio. And it was merely a matter of switching from a network line to the telephone line that went to the Chateau at the correct time, and the fellow down there, of course we got worked on a time basis and we also used cues that we could talk back and forth on the line. But at the given time we would go ahead on the stopwatch basis. And this is how it operated. But it was all hooked up with telephone lines.

IVES: And then there were the transcriptions. Those are things you were thinking of. The great big old disks.

FELDMAN: Yeah.

HUNTER: Yes. Well, the transcriptions came into play, and they use this phrase, of course you could look it up in the dictionary and the transcription was a record, and so forth, and so forth. But it was a much more glamorous sounding name than just "record," and it was a little bit unique. It wasn't like the 78 records. It was big and you could put a quarter hour of programming on one side. And many of the programs came through from advertising agencies. A quarter hour program would be complete on a transcription and it would be numbered and so forth, and to go on such-and-such a day.

FELDMAN: Would that be more or less expensive than going through the telephone lines?

HUNTER: Different, I think. It wasn't matter of expense. It got to be a matter of expediency. In other words, on the network everything had to be done at the same time. At eight o'clock, a certain program would be on all stations throughout the country. However, when it began to try to buy time on various stations, at different times because that's all it was available, they could have the eight o'clock on one station out the Midwest, seven o'clock in the east and what all. So, they found out that by sending transcriptions around the country in advance, there was no problem getting on the program, and at the time that would fit the station's schedule. So this is how transcriptions came into being. Then came the idea of what we call today delayed broadcasting. Of course, today we put it on tape. Well there was no such thing as a tape recorder back in those days. The first thing of that nature was a wire recorder and that didn't come till later. The first wire recorder that we ever used was at the time of the Bar Harbor fire. And this was very new to this area. And we used the wire recorder and those were creations of the devil and they went wrong. Because that wire would start to spill and you can imagine a big snarl of wire, you couldn't do anything with it. It was complete loss. If it if it didn't work right, it got out of control. But when it worked right, it was fine. And we used it, as I say.

IVES: The quality was extremely good

HUNTER: Yes, it was. It was very, very good. And of course it was extremely portable as a small unit and this was much in its favor. We had at that time what we called a remote, wagon I suppose, a station wagon with all this equipment in it. Even a transmitter. We could go to any given site and pick up, like the Bar Harbor fire, walk around, we might say, with this wire recorder where we had to go without the wagon and interview people. Then we'd go back to the wagon, play the wire recorder back through the transmitter, transmit it to Bangor where they would pick it up here and then put it through the equipment here to rebroadcast it. This is how it was done. And of course we could, we had microphones and so forth with the wagon. If we could get people to come to the wagon, where it was parked, we could interview them directly, or live, as they say. So we had, this was part of the business in those days. We've jumped a considerable number years from what we were talking about, but I started to say, the delayed broadcast. The first we got into that really in a big way was, as I say, we were broadcasting the baseball games. Well, we also, at that time, were broadcasting, as it developed, soap operas. The soap operas throughout the afternoon were very, very popular. And each day, of course, was an episode and nobody wanted to miss an episode of their favorite soap opera, or soap operas. Many of them followed more than one, of course. So when the baseball season came along here we were faced with afternoon baseball games and soap operas all at the same time. There was a demand for both. The men loved the baseball and hated the soap operas, the women loved the soap operas and hated baseball. So what we did, we bought some equipment to make our own transcriptions, the big

quarter hour disks and we could cut the program. So, we'll say, say two o'clock in the afternoon, we had a soap opera that was going to be on the network. We would put that on transcription. We would record it in its entirety. Meanwhile, the baseball game would be on the air, and of course this was pre announced, that the baseball game with be on today and the programs that were preempted, we didn't use the word preempted, but would be heard later.

FELDMAN: So, you made a big [inaudible] disc of the soap opera

HUNTER: They, not exactly. This is how they made discs as masters and so forth in, for music. No, these were instantaneous. You can play them back instantaneously. Originally they were on an aluminum base with a coating and you cut the, it was very shiny surface, almost like a mirror, but black. And the needle would cut a groove in this surface and at the same time it also put in the sound. In other words, it would be vibrating and cutting the sound into the discs at the same times making the groove. So when you got through you had a disc that had been grooved and recorded at the same time and the minute it was done, you could play it back instantly, it was all ready to go. And it would last quite a quite a long time.

IVES: What happened to the discs after you got through with them?

HUNTER: Well eventually, of course, we had to get rid of them. All is all these things were done on a daily basis and you can see it would pile up. In some cases, we could sell some of the discs for scrap. They could be reused, especially aluminum ones. During wartime, aluminum became,

IVES: Oh, gold.

HUNTER: You couldn't get it. So we had, of all things, glass base. And these were of course very fragile and you had to be careful. If you dropped one of those, this was the end. It didn't bounce back or anything. It just shattered.

IVES: When did you get your transcription equipment here, so that you could you make your own? Do you remember?

HUNTER: When? I don't remember the year and maybe the old logs would give a clue to it, but it was when, when baseball and soap operas were going together. So it probably was in

IVES: Mid 30s, perhaps.

HUNTER: Well, I was thinking possibly as late as the forties, but it could be the late thirties and the forties. Because originally, when we took baseball, there were no soap operas. I think they came later, in a big way, when they began to bother each other. So was in that general era. And this was very expensive equipment, this RCA equipment, and we had two units so we could broadcast, we could record a half-hour. You finished one quarter hour and you switched to the second table and continued with the second quarter hour. So we could do, in fact we could do an hour, if we had to. But you could do a half hour without turning discs at all. And you had to watch them like a hawk. We had a microscope to watch the groove and that little thread as it was cut would spin on to the side and if it got in under the needle and tripped the needle, you'd have a problem with your recording, a skip or something of this nature. And it could even go completely to pieces so you'd miss quite a bit of the recording.

IVES: So you couldn't go in the other room while you were doing it.

HUNTER: No, that's right. Somebody was on duty standing right there and making sure that it worked 100% correctly. And we had very good luck it. It was expensive equipment, as I say, RCA. It worked well but it did need constant supervision and attention. So that, let's see, that gets us way ahead of our [inaudible], really.

IVES: How about local programming, now? How would you get ahold of people, or how would, Mr. Guernsey, for instance, mentioned a Wednesday night amateur hour.

HUNTER: Yes, this of course was very, very popular. In those days, particularly, there were many people who had quite an amount of talent. They weren't star quality, to be sure, although now and again, of course, you'd come across somebody who had a great deal of potential. This is how everybody starts. So we would announce that we would have an amateur hour and of course people would get all excited about it from the point of view of listening or participating. And they would come in for an audition and we would listen to them. They'd tell us what they could do, or would do, and whether they had an accompanist and of course if they didn't, we had one to accompany them.

IVES: You had a studio accompanist?

HUNTER: Yes. Norm Lambert was our musical director. any name you want to give him, he was Mr. Music with WLBZ for years and years. Very, very talented and an amazing person. And I can remember all kinds of anecdotes about these people, and you could go on forever, which I won't do but Norm, for example, as I say, was our musical director. That was the general term. So anything to do with music, Norm procured. And in the amateur days, as I say, if somebody needed an accompanist, he would accompany them. Well, on another vein, take, for example, when we did the Sportsman Show, which we did way, way back when the old auditorium was still in one piece. The old auditorium had wonderful acoustics.

IVES: Boy, weren't those [inaudible] great?

HUNTER: Oh, a shame they couldn't have been kept forever because it's just like a mellow, old violin or cello and they were marvelous.

IVES: Probably the most attractive building in town.

HUNTER: It was a big barn, but the acoustics were something else. Well, of course many acts coming up to Bangor wouldn't, wouldn't bring an accompanist because of the economics, I presume. Whether they were the star or they were from an act, and wherever they went, when they came to Bangor, of course they were pretty far afield. I suppose in nearer the big centers it was easy to get somebody with talent. Well, they played many other small communities like Bangor and they would run into trouble. Have to get a pianist the best they could get and they do the best they could. Well, in many cases, of course, it didn't work out that well, so they were always on their guard. So they'd come up and they'd want to know who the pianist was going to be for the Sportsman Show. And they'd introduce Norm Lambert to him. So then they'd start questioning Norm, they'd say yeah, well, here's my sheet music and so forth. Now, this is how it goes they give him a little rundown on the act and Norm would take it. Of course, he played to so many people, so many years, and as I say, he had a tremendous amount of talent, it was a natural with him. Well, they would say, for example, now this particular number, we have to change keys. Could you possibly change keys, you know, and Norm would say, sure. Well the fellow would say, well could we run through a little bit of it and let's see how it goes. And Norm would sit down at the piano and start in, and he would play along, and all of a sudden the fellow would say, well can we do this in this different key? Norm would switch to the second key, no problem at all, and the fellow would

look at him with amazement and say, what, you live around here? Or where are you from? You from New York or something? Norm would say no, I came from Waterville originally, and I live in Bangor. Well, gee, how come you can do this?

IVES: Pretty incredulous about that, aren't they?

HUNTER: Yeah, they couldn't believe it, couldn't believe it. But norm was so talented that way. No problem. He could play anything in any key, it didn't make any difference. He could transpose left and right. He just thought musically. He was a musician, in all understanding of the word. So this, this was quite interesting. And so then, of course, the people working with him would begin to get relaxed a little bit and they'd run through their act and they always had a little audition and planned things out and Norm would make notes, how they would come on stage and what they wanted to do, when, from one number to another, and the whole bit. So Norm was always in charge of all the musical things we did from the early years. Not originally, I don't think. I don't know exactly when Norm came to the station. They had other musicians prior to that, that played piano and this sort of thing.

FELDMAN: [inaudible] say a really good local band was playing a lot of dances or anything, [inaudible] invitation to try and get them on the radio, or would you wait until the band came to you?

HUNTER: Usually, we went out after them. The one that comes to mind, I guess is the Chateau. Of course it was a benefit to both. The station was trying to bring all sorts of entertainment to people and this was as varied as possible, so they were always on the lookout for anything new, different or otherwise. And by the same token, the Chateau, we'll say, was running dances and any publicity they could get to swell the crowds, so much the better. So if you got on the radio, this meant that you were quite a bit up the ladder as far as prestige was concerned. It was a dance hall that had a great orchestra that you would listen to on the radio. And so you'd think, boy, this is the place to go, the Chateau, this is the one you hear on the radio, you know.

IVES: Of radio fame, I remember the phrase.

HUNTER: Yeah, of radio fame. And of course the same thing was done throughout the country. All the big hotels, the dining rooms had dance bands and all the big bands in those days got into prominence this way. Anyone that you name, it's the same way, Lawrence Welk, all of them. Vincent Lopez, they played in a very lush dining room of some swank hotel and they were hired for a period of some duration, months. And then, of course, the networks would pick them up, put them on the air, in other words. And you could listed here in Bangor and 11 o'clock at night here Vincent Lopez from some great ballroom and you could hear all the background noise they played their bit. They always had a theme song. It was very colorful and give the atmosphere and then following that they might get switched to a hotel, instead of in New York, they'd switched to one in Chicago and you'd hear maybe Guy Lombardo. Of course he was at the Roosevelt usually, in New York. But they would move from place to place. And all over the country they'd pick up these dance bands. We did the same thing on local scale, same way. We would pick up these bands and let the people hear them. And as I say, fine publicity for the place that we were working with. There were some nightclub sprang up the in Bangor, down on Exchange Street. I can't remember the names of some of them, but one on Main Street I do remember. I think they called it the Rose Garden. This was up over the..

IVES: Roseland?

HUNTER: No, the Rose Garden. This was up over the new Atlantic Restaurant, so called. It was the Atlantic Restaurant that Mr. [Mercus?] ran, Tom Mercas, who just died. Right. So he had this restaurant

on the street floor and eventually he went into a night spot up above. And I can't remember the sequence of events, but you could drink beer at this particular time, so they serve beer there. And they had a dance band and we used to do pickups from there. And in another case, on Exchange Street, I can't remember, I think it was we're Dunnett's finally had a showroom. But prior to that was an empty place and somebody took it over and made a night spot out of it.

FELDMAN: [Asking a question, but not audible.]

HUNTER: Well now, this, I don't really know. But this this particular one brought talent from Boston. They had a combo, maybe five or six pieces and they were really good. They played the dinner type music, the dance music. And we used to broadcast from there. And I remember, I used to go down and do those. Take the equipment, set it up, check it all out and talk with the bandleader and he'd finally give me a list of what he's gonna play for the quarter hour and all he'd give me was a list of numbers. And then we'd talk it over and find out what highlights that he was interested in. In this case I think he believe, he played the piano and used to do piano solos in all the different numbers. So then I just worked up the introductions for the numbers and set the scene and just

IVES: You'd announce them as well

HUNTER: Oh, yes. I did both I set up the equipment and did the announcements.

IVES: A Jack of all trades.

HUNTER: Yes.

IVES: I guess you had to be here.

HUNTER: Well, you did. That's right, and radio is still somewhat that way. And in those days it was even more so, I guess. As I say, I started out in the technical end of it, so it was no problem to set up the equipment and test it out this sort of thing, and then do the announcing which I had gotten into by that time. Oh, yes. Yeah. It was very exciting and colorful. I mean you were always doing something from somewhere. Very, very unlike radio today, let's say. Radio today is more an information type of medium, where back in those days it was information, of course, but primarily it was entertainment. All these things we brought were what you would call entertainment. It brought things to the home no matter what it was. Basketball games, we did the first basketball games that any station ever did in this area. I think we, we used to go up to Dover-Foxcroft, Milo, places like this in the Town Hall. We'd broadcast from the City Hall in Bangor. That's where they did the basketball games and the big, that was sort of an auditorium type thing.

IVES: Did they have a basketball in there, too? They used to have concerts there.

HUNTER: They had concerts there, that's right. And as I recall, we did basketball there. I think they could remove the seats. I think there were removable seats, big long sets of benches that, you know, you fold the things up and they could just move them out of the way. And it was, of course, a wooden floors as they all were in those days, ideal for basketball. And then basketball got more and more prominent and the games were held at the auditorium. And in many cases they were done from Town Halls and so forth. So we were getting the basketball quite early. And this again, you know, people were just amazed that they could turn on the radio and get these things. It had never been done before. And the travel was not quite as easy in those days, either, you see. The roads weren't as good and people didn't have the cars that they have now. Some people didn't have a car. You could in those days

go someplace on a trolley car. They had those, see. So it wasn't like you could hop in your car and go anyplace you wanted to for entertainment. So radio was, it filled a very important need. And, as I say, it was colorful to people who could turn on the radio and all of a sudden you'd say, hey, it's a basketball game from up in Dover, or wherever it was. And here's a dance band from the Chateau downtown. And then of course they're the most colorful, I suppose, where the broadcasts from all around the country. Championship boxing matches, dance bands, speeches, and all sorts of special entertainment made just for radio purposes, the A & P Gypsies, this sort of thing. All these big companies got their own band together, the Clicquot Club Eskimos. They just make a group up, as we did locally. They'd take what top musicians they had available and work them into a group, whatever size or type group they wanted, and it ranged from popular right through to classical.

IVES: How about the, we were looking for a term to use for them. I've been using the term Country and Western. And Mr. Guernsey ...

HUNTER: Said "Hillbilly"

IVES: Yes [both laugh]

HUNTER: Because that's the term. That's right. It was, everything was classified as Hillbilly in that type of music. And that was very big around here, too. Well, again this was before TV, you understand, and before many of the types of entertainment that we now have, and people used to like to be able to go to their Town Hall or whatever was available, to go to a dance by a live group, a Hillbilly group. Well the Hillbilly music was very popular. You could square dance to it. They played all types of square dance music, and this sort of thing. And these people actually became, famous is the word you might as well use, if they got on WLBZ radio. People heard them in all the surrounding towns. As I say, we were the only radio station doing this.

FELDMAN: How far did it reach, was the range?

HUNTER: We practically, well, we practically covered all the counties because there were no interfering stations and no little stations in these towns. There was absolutely no other stations available when during this period. There were stations in Portland, in Bangor, I think Augusta came along fairly early, and one, when you said that, that was it. So you could hear these stations and as I say, we broadcast in a non directional pattern, so there was no interference, really. We would have a very good spot of the dial, we still do, 620, way at the bottom of the dial and that signal carries better than signals on the high part. That is, much less interference of any type there. So we covered all the counties in this area and if people want to get us, they could. And they would put up with a little static because this was all they could get. And if they could hear the Bangor station with all this tremendous amount of entertainment, they would put up with static, you know.

IVES: How did you know where your radio reaching?

HUNTER: Oh, in those days people responded. We got cards and letters from... oh, this of course has been cleaned out, but we had great big boxes of cards and letters. People just responded so, well, they were so thrilled with this sort of thing. They would write in and they'd have all kinds of questions and or just to say that they enjoyed these programs. It was part of their life and a very important part. And they participated that way. Well, they used to visit the studio when they came to town. This was a big thing. When the people came into town, you know, they'd come up and all wide-eyed and, you know, want to see a broadcast. Well, we had what we called an observation room, behind a big long spread of glass. They could sit there and watch and talk among themselves and not interfere with the program

that was going on the air because of the glass petition. So they could see everything and of course there was a loud speaker out there they could hear it. But by the same token, they didn't have to sit there quietly. And then we had programs and a big upstairs studio that would hold, I'm not sure, maybe 200, 300 people, an auditorium type studio, in which they were part of the broadcast. They would applaud and the applause would go on and they would, you know, react vocally, which screams or whatever you know and this would all be part of the broadcast.

IVES: This was in the building right here?

HUNTER: This was 100 Main Street, 100 Main Street. We started on the ground floor in the back of a store, the back of, I think was the Bessie System Company. Andrews Music House was upstairs in those days. Then Andrews Music House moved, we moved up onto the second floor, and then we took the third floor. We had the second and third floors. And the second, ah, the third floor, our second floor, the third floor of the building, was where we had this tremendous auditorium type studio. And this is where we put on the Blue-Ribbon Minstrel Show. This is where we put on Uncle Hezzie. This was again a character. The fella was very talented. His name was Gil Snow. He went by various names depending upon what he was doing in the entertainment field but Uncle, Uncle Ezra, and he I think he changed... at one time he had to change the name because there was a national character by the same name. So he switched and but he always had this this stage name.

IVES: What did he switch to?

HUNTER: I think Uncle Hezzie, because Uncle Ezra was the national character, am I right? Yeah. So he switched to Uncle Hezzie. Well, he would get up in complete costume even though it was radio, because I say, we had these crowds who came in to watch it. He had the old duster, a beard, the whole bit. Spectacles, the old type spectacles, with the wire rims, and he talked in the Downeast twang and he was good at it. He was very, very good at it. And the people loved him. He'd sing and tell stories and he was an entertainer. And he also put on a series of children's programs. And he put on amateur programs. He would give people a chance to display their talents in front of the microphone. So he did all sorts of things of this nature, and you, the mail that came in to him was fantastic. Piles and piles of it.

IVES: Where was he from. Was he a Bangor boy, or...

HUNTER: He was around this area for a long time. Originally, I think he came from one of the smaller communities around but he settled here and was here for a number of years, lived right here, of course.

IVES: Is he still around?

HUNTER: I believe he died. Yes, he did. He had a heart condition and he was the type of fellow who went all out and he burned himself out. He had a tremendous amount of talent. He went on the Arthur Godfrey show at one time. And he could have been a national entertainer if he had the right type of management and so forth because he had the talent. And as I say, many of the people who came along could have gone higher because they had a great deal of natural talent. And it was a case of, they liked the area or they didn't have the enough push or enough connections to go higher, or even the desire. Many of them didn't want to go to a big city, so we had a great deal of real fine entertainment. And it doesn't make any difference what you talk about it. We got talking about Hillbilly, and it all went haywire here, but Hillbilly outfits used to come up as a sign of spring. They would come from further south and of course, all winter they'd play in these southern areas where they could move around and put on vans and they made a lot of money because they were popular. Well then, they'd come to Maine and in the spring and they come to the station and want to know if they get in the program and we

arranged it, yes okay, they could have a program. So they's put on, we'll say, a half-hour program at a certain time of day during which they would announce they're playing dates. And they would set up dates all around the area and announce them on the air and so when they went out to a certain Town Hall to put on an act or a show for the people, the people were swarming with the place, you know. They were there in big numbers and they'd charge so much per person and they made considerable money. Well, of course, it took a bit of money to run the operation. It wasn't all profit. They had a group to pay and their transportation and they had to stay in hired rooms, this sort of thing. But they did very well and then from here some of them would go up into Canada because we're very popular there. But they're all called Hillbillies. This was the general term.

FELDMAN: Do you remember the names of some of the ...

HUNTER: Yes, the one who strikes me quickest is Ray Little. He was very, very good. He was very talented, played banjo. And I can hear him now. He'd play Under the Double Eagle, and boy, would he pull all the stops on that. Wow, he all he was really talented and it was Ray Little and Ann, that was his wife, Ray Little and Ann, the girl from the Rio Grande. That was that that was one of the phrases they used. And then he had other stars. He had a fiddler with him and he had another girl singer and from time to time, he used to come back season after season and sometimes with the same group, sometimes one would drop out and go some other way of life or with some of the band or who knows and he'd have a new person in his group. And, oh, the people would love them. I think when they would go out in these smaller communities, some of the people would invite them into their homes. They would say, now after the show, come over and have supper with us, or something like this, or maybe before the show. But they'd arrange some time to sit down because here was a chance for these people to sit down with stars. And oh, they all got along so well together and enjoyed each other so much. So this was quite a colorful era. And they varied tremendously, big groups, little groups and some with a great deal of talent, some with a medium amount of talent, but they were all good in their way, and they were all quite popular.

IVES: Any of them get their start on this Amateur Hour, let's say, would people go from that and do anything?

HUNTER: Well, I can't think of anybody who went to great heights from the Amateur Hour. Some of them, of course, did move up in the entertainment field and probably get jobs around in the other localities as singers and so forth. And some, well we picked up some ourselves from amateur hours, if they were good. We were always in need of talent because as I say programming was done in blocks, usually quarter hours, a half hour would be a quite a show, sometimes we had an hour program. We'd need a girl vocalist. The Maine Central program, for example, Norm Lambert would have a group and they would play the popular music of the day and if we could get a good girl vocalist, for example, she'd sing one or two songs and be paid, of course. So this was a chance for them to get paid for what they liked to do and also let their talent be heard throughout this part of the state. So it did lead in some cases to maybe some additional revenue for these people and this sort of thing. So we were always having people come in who are interested in getting on the radio, as they said.

[end of part 1]

Part 2

Date: March 12, 1975

Length of recording: 10:56

[transcript begins]

HUNTER: So it did lead in some cases to maybe some additional revenue for these people and this sort of thing. So we were always having people come in who were interested and get getting on the radio, as they said. You probably have questions. I shouldn't banter on completely, I get carried away.

IVES: Oh, hey, you know, you've probably got work to do.

HUNTER: Well, yes, there's still work in the station.

IVES: Why don't we, I've been thinking, some of this has just been so wonderful. As matter of fact, it has all been, as far as I'm concerned.

HUNTER: Well, of course, much of this, you can boil down, but I thought if I could just get going and...

IVES: What we want to do, we, you see I fun an outfit up there called the Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History. And what we want to do is, right now, I've been working on country music, and so much of what you've said has relevance way beyond that, just in the history of radio

HUNTER: Oral history, yes. Ah, this is it.

IVES: Yes, and your reminiscences of these things is great. And I'm wondering, I hope you, may we put this material in our archives up there?

HUNTER: Oh, certainly, sure.

IVES: I'll ask, I'll have a, in radio, this is probably familiar to you, we've got a regular release form that allows us to put it in there, and all that. What we'll do, I think, it go home, and ingest what we've talked about and if we could come back sometime...

HUNTER: I think this might be a good idea. I'll clue you into something here that would be a value to you, I'm sure. I'm retiring this month. I've been in the business 45 years this spring and so I am retiring and I will have more time. This business, of course you and I've been just chatting here it's like we have all the time in the world, which it's not true far as I'm concerned. I don't mean that this has been a big problem to me. I have very capable people here. But this type of business is very demanding. Well it's just the basic facts make it obvious. We operate seven days a week, we run from 6:00 in the morning till midnight every single day, so this takes a bit of doing. It isn't like the average business from 9:00 to 5:00, five days a week, you know. It goes on continuously and we're regulated by the federal government. We have to watch all sorts of things very carefully. We have to keep the records as many businesses do, I realize, but in other words, most people don't, you know, radio, they think oh, somebody gets up in front of the microphone and they say what they want they play what records they want and it's more fun. Well, this is not true. It's a job. Now you watch the fellow on duty, he has more things, he sits in the midst of all this equipment and it's asking all time out. It has to go exactly according to the log, the spots that are purchased have to go on at a certain time, they have to go on correctly. It

has to be logged according to the federal government and the whole thing all fits together. So he's busy when he's in there 100%. He doesn't sound like that on the air because he's a professional and he can make it sound like he's pretty relaxed. And to all intents and purposes, he is. But this is radio, and it takes a bit of doing today, even more so than it used to. We we did unbelievable things that you would think would be impossible with the crews that we had in those days. But there, it was a little bit more relaxed, I guess. Although we were under constant pressure because you still had your time involved. The network program started on time and you had to end on time, whatever you were doing locally. And we, this was a religion with us. We never ran over onto programming. We always did it right. Timing was, we think it got to be a part of you after a while. And of course we always what worked with stopwatches and Western Union clocks that set themselves every hour and had this sweet second hand, absolutely the right time, this sort of thing. But I've again digressed, which I like to do because I don't get this opportunity very often. All this is stored up inside me.

IVES: We could give you more opportunity, believe me.

HUNTER: But I was thinking, you know, this is not ideal for you people because I do have a limited amount of time while I'm here.

IVES: Sure.

HUNTER: When I'm retired, I won't have these things that I have to think of. When you came in this morning, I had to get the payroll out. I've got the mail that I have to go through. I can do it, it's no problem and meanwhile the rest of the crew is carrying on with things that have to be done, but... [inaudible]

IVES: Well, when are you retiring?

HUNTER: The 28th.

IVES: Of this month?

HUNTER: Yeah.

IVES: Well, why don't we get in touch with you some time in early April and have another, perhaps.

HUNTER: Yeah, I think this would be fine.

IVES: At your home, or meet mhere, or up with us?

HUNTER: Well, we can work this out at the time but meanwhile I think your idea is fine. You can digest this and also it give you an idea of what you really want, what you don't want. I thought if I just let it flow, this would touch a lot of areas, you know. They will make you think. You might think, like this is, we ought to go into depth in this, and this we could leave out, and so forth. But at least you know the background there.

IVES: What was this think that Mr. Guernsey was mentioning there, the Maine Broadcaster?

HUNTER: That's something that I will see if I can find for you. Unfortunately, like I presume every operation and every line of endeavor, you don't save everything. You can't. You have limited space, you're continually getting new things in, you file things away, files get pulled, you clean out, you have to. And sometimes things get put aside and to wonder what to do with them they get dirty and finally somebody throw something out because it's been there for 10 years, nobody's used it. Well 10 years later, you wish you had it. But we do have tucked away in different places some of these things like the Maine Broadcaster you mentioned. This was a sort of a magazine type thing that does have some things for the record. It would give you dates. These logs that I have dragged out. Incidentally, we're getting together, trying to very desperately, for our 50th anniversary, incidentally. The station was incorporated in '26, so next year is going to be the 50th anniversary. We're only half, we're half as old as the country. The country's only celebrating, no bicentennial.

IVES: A quarter.

HUNTER: A quarter. So, but it's, radio's been around quite a long time when you stop and think about it. Of course, we're not the start of radio, either. It predates us. But 50 years

IVES: Well, some of the data we come across might be grist for the crew here.

HUNTER: It could be. The crew here is working on it some, you know, what they can. We'd like to get some old equipment, have a display of that, have some of these logs for observation. These, of course, are irreplaceable. I don't think, well some stations might have them, but most stations do what we do. They put things aside, they get up in the attic, they get dirty, they get destroyed, and so forth. But these, I haven't found any 1930 yet. '31 is the oldest I can find, but as you see, there all written in longhand and some years later they, we typed.

IVES: Are these just samples, or are these all that you could find?

HUNTER: There are more. That was dug out, but what I want to do is go over them and get them into some sort of, because they were just thrown in heaps and mixed up. Some were torn and covered with dirt and this sort of thing. The reason I let you look at them this morning, I didn't know where you had some time, that you might make some notes. They're not very good for Xeroxing because of the lightness. They we're written in pencil and the paper is yellow so it would be hard to get a good copy. But I'll get some of this material together when I have more time and organized a little bit and when we get together you could draw from this. Because this, of course, actual dates and times, that nobody's gonna remember exactly, but it's all in black and white. In fact, even in these days when we put on the log what we call a station break. You have to identify the station. We were required to write down, actually write the words that were said. In fact, you will say, it will say, This is WLBZ Bangor, This is the Maine Broadcasting Company, Station WLBZ, Bangor. And we wrote it down so it's right there exactly what was said. Somebody might forget, but there it is in black and white. And all the names, I'm sure some of these, we'll, might pick up in there, if we can find enough of these old things.

IVES: Could some, as we go along here, could students come down and say, Lisa come down, and sit off in a corner sometime and go through some of this material, these logs?

HUNTER: Well, this is a possibility. You know what I'm thinking. We are trying to clean up, well, for one very important reason. Material of this type becomes a fire hazard, unfortunately. So we are cleaning out. Every once in a while, we clean out. Now we're cleaning out the attic at the present time. Much of this is from the attic. So I think what I will do, is I don't think I want to leave it strewn around the building. I think what I will do is gather it into piles take it home, and then we can get together. I will organize it in some way. Rather than come out here. They don't want to keep it here too long. And I don't I don't dare to leave it here and let something happen to it.

IVES: I'm going to kill this thing. That's the end of the recorded part of the interview with Mr. Irving Hunter.

FOLKLIFE CENTER staff member: End of tape number 856.1. End of original tape. End of the March 12, 1974, interview with Irving Hunter by Sandy Ives and Lisa Feldman.

[end of Part 2]

Part 3

Date: April 13, 1975

Length of recording: 52:15

[transcript begins]

FOLKLIFE CENTER staff member: Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History, accession number 856, a series of interviews with Irving Hunter of Bangor, Maine, concerning radio and country music in the Bangor area, done as part of the country music project for course number AY 123, Folklore Fieldwork. Tape number 856.2 a class interview with Irving Hunter, the former Manager of WLBZ Radio who talks to them about radio and country music in the Bangor area.

IRVING: Needed more room and land and so forth. So quite often they set that up outside of the city limits just so they could have more land and no room and so forth to operate. Then they set up studios and offices more or less in the central part of the community and all they had to do was hire telephone lines between the studio and transmitter, And whatever took place in the studio just traveled through the telephone lines out to the transmitter into the transmitting equipment and up into the air. So they were separated in our case by a couple of miles. Now, of course, at the studio they had to have something, they had a rough idea what they were going to do. But, this log here was for the purposes of the Federal Communications Commission. We had to keep a log of what actually went on the air. So, like, this this particular thing, uh, I did some of this, and you will see...

STUDENT: Down to the quarter- second. That's pretty precise.

HUNTER: Oh, yeah. Yes, indeed. You see, there were two of us who operated the transmitter back in 1931 and this fellow, by the name of Kellom, see these are last names, he got the station on the air. The first program was started at 8 30. So he was on the air until this particular time, up until noon time. At noon time, I came on duty and I worked until one o'clock, I guess. I guess somewhere in that area, it did

very from time to time. It looked like two o'clock there, doesn't it? I guess I worked 'til two. Yes, I did. I worked two hours, twelve to two.

STUDENT: You probably waiting for him to come in.

HUNTER: That's true. Now he forgot to sign here. He finished here and then I took over and finished up the day. Kellom was here uh when I arrived in town so he was top dog and so he had rather work mornings and that left me working evenings. So that is how that part of it, there were two of us on duty.

FELDMAN: This is Tuesday morning, April 13th, 1975. It's 9 30 a.m. This is AY 123 and as a guest in class we're having Mr. Irving Hunter. He's just retired as General Manager of WLBZ in Bangor.

STUDENT: This is a broadcast.

HUNTER: They're single sheets and it was all hand written. There were two of us on duty in those days. This was made up at the transmitting station out on Broadway where we now are located, incidentally. But only the transmitter was there then and whoever was on duty at the transmitter kept this log. This is exactly what went on the air and the time it all took place and this was, government regulation required we do this. So that was how that

IVES: Do they still have to do that now or do they have

HUNTER: Yes, we do. We have to keep a complete station log.

IVES: By hand or do they

HUNTER: Oh, no. Times have changed. No, what we do, we, of course we're all in the same building now which makes it a little bit easier. The fellow on duty, in a sense takes the place of the people who did this. But I'll say myself, I won't complicate it, there were tools, but say I did this. I was at the transmitter all by myself. Now we have a man who has a third class license so he's under government regulation and so forth. He does the announcing but he also can make readings of the transmitter like these readings here. He does this business here. So he's doing the same job in addition to doing announcing. So he sits there and keeps a log, however he doesn't write it by hand. Because we provide him with a log all pre-done. What we do is we use so-called inserts these forms that you can type out, business ones. They use them all kinds of businesses. They come on a sheet, and there are little strips and you can type anything you want. For example, any of these things, we'd type right down when you come to, well let's see, Columbia Salon Orchestra. We'd have on this insert that we now have, but we'd probably say 2:45. We don't write down the quarters and all that, we'd say 2:45, Columbia Salon Orchestra, classical music, whatever else we want to put on this insert. Then we can tear this insert off the sticky paper that it's on and we put it in a metal container, a board, I guess you'd call it. So that we can set that in. In other words, piece by piece, we build up a log that looks like this, except it's all typed. And the reason we have it on inserts is that if we get a notice from the network that this orchestra is not going to be on at 2:45, it's going to be a talk by President Ford, you just pull out that insert, put it aside, make a new one says President Ford. You slip that into the thing.

IVES: Oh, so the guy is on duty only has to make up corrections then.

HUNTER: All he does, the log today has all this information here, and then there's a space here. And he puts down, if this Columbia Salon Orchestra did start at 2:45 and a quarter he would put that notation down here it might say 245 out here, but the exact time that it starts, he writes in his own handwriting.

IVES: I see.

HUNTER: And if it doesn't go on, as I say, the President talks instead, he crosses this out and he makes a notation that the President spoke instead. So he can change the log. It's all pre-arranged and any changes that are made while he's on duty he has to make note of them. But in the old days, as I say, we'd wait until the thing went on and wrote it down. So it was the same process, in a sense.

IVES: Except you spent a lot more time writing, huh?

HUNTER: Yes. Well, of course, this is all we had to do. All I had to do was sit there and make, of course the transmitter, in those days, wasn't as stable as they are today. You had to keep watch over them and keep them on the air and when there's trouble you have to tinker with the thing, and this sort of business. So you were constantly watching the thing, and we did some other things too. So we had plenty time to write, other than that. I was going to see if there was another local program here anywhere. Oh, incidentally, this is kind of interesting, I think. Here's Kate Smith.

STUDENT: Kate Smith, yeah.

HUNTER: At seven o'clock. This was 1931. This was when she was just getting started and this general area, is when many of these stars started. Bing Crosby started, 7:15 on CBS in the evening. And I think he went on for Cremo Cigars at that time. And then as he became more famous his series ended and they replaced him with somebody else. And in this case, it was Kate Smith. I think she was next in line and then eventually Perry Como came along and he took a spot right around this, seven or seven fifteen. It varied some depending on their programming but it was that general time of evening and Perry Como was in there. Morton Downey, the famous tenor, started there. So it's interesting looking back to see how these people who became so famous, they just had a little 15-minute program, and they sang a few songs and they had a studio orchestra with them, this sort of thing.

STUDENT: Here's someone local. Pearly Reynolds?

HUNTER: Pearly Reynolds, yes. I'm glad you saw that, 6:30 in the evening. Pearly Reynolds had a, it was a dance band, and it was a very famous one. He traveled quite a bit around the state of Maine and I have a note here somewhere that I will tell you about. Are you recording now? Probably have been for some time.

FELDMAN: Yeah.

HUNTER: What I will do, I was just starting this explanation. I didn't mean to get involved.

FELDMAN: Well that's why I turned the tape recorder on it was so interesting i figured we might as well get it.

HUNTER: Well, I'll tell you what I'll do, after I explain this business, as long as I'm on the subject of Pearly Reynolds, I'll tell you this. If I can find my little note here. I don't remember all the exact dates and so forth. So, somewhere between 1926 and 1930, at which time the station was called WLBZ, as it was founded in 1926 as WLBZ, but it was in Dover Foxcroft. And at that time one of the orchestras was John Fogg and his Doctors of Rhythm. Good morning.

FELDMAN: This is Mary Beth Argentieri, our last class member.

HUNTER: Mary, nice to meet you.

MARY: Nice to meet you, too.

STUDENT: I've heard of him.

HUNTER: Yeah, John Fogg and his Doctors of Rhythm. Now they broadcast from the Goodwin Pavilion in Dover-Foxcroft. That was a swinging place in those days. And this was before the station moved to Bangor, obviously. Pearly Reynolds was a member of the Fogg Band back in those days. So he was just getting started, you see. And then as time went on, this well this is 1931. He had his own dance orchestra, you see, and he was one of the stars on WLBZ in Bangor, at that time, broadcasting out of Bangor. Big time. So that's that's how it went. Okay, now, tell you what, what would you like me to do, Lisa? What you're interested in primarily, uh, is folk music and so forth?

FELDMAN: Well...

HUNTER: Do you want to get me, do you want to ask questions in order to keep this... if I start, I'm going to ramble. And anytime that you want me to start on a subject, I'll start it and ramble until you think I got far enough off course. But you do have this this sheet with many of the...

FELDMAN: Yeah.

IVES: What I've been doing with the interviews I've been doing, I just, I have people go through the list of names and anybody that they recognize tell me, you know, anything they know about them.

HUNTER: Okay, that's a good suggestion.

IVES: It's a good way to start, I figured.

HUNTER: All right, let's do that. Waity Aikens, 1945, played at Lincoln side, Lakeside in Lincoln. He did show up at the station time and time again with his own dance band, and we talked about him a little earlier. And he had a very good dance band. It was very popular and he wrote many of his own arrangements and was very good at it. S good, in fact, that Norm Lambert used to have him write special arrangements when he wanted something, because Waity was just a natural. He was very, very good.

STUDENT: Excuse me.

HUNTER: Sure.

STUDENT: Something that might be helpful to us is that, well, we started off we thought this was going to be a country music thing, but you know we've since found out that that the country and pop have been, you know, they've been like this pretty much in Bangor all along, so it's especially, like the bands that would have continued, like the old-time dance, dance music, old-fashioned stuff. Or just cowboy stuff, or actually anything you can tell about, but uh

HUNTER: Yeah, Paul Barrows is one of course that you have checked off and that was 1935. That is typical of what happened in those days. As it says here in your notes, he played old-time dances, but he was on the radio Sunday nights. This of course is how they got publicity and brought them fame, you might as well call it, in the area. They became well known so there became a demand to have them play dances. So the whole thing tied together. Well almost any group that came to the area, and there were so many of them. In the spring, like the birds, they would come north. And sooner or later somebody would walk into the studio and say I'm so-and-so and I got a dance band or a old-time band or whatever you might call it. A group, country and western group, and we'd like to see if we can get a broadcast on your station.

FELDMAN: So usually the group would contact you?

HUNTER: Yes, that's right. And what we would do, usually Norm Lambert, he was the Musical Director, of course, and he'd set up an audition and listen to them and make some sort of judgment. Well, most of them were reasonably good. So, if we had the time, and we could usually make time, we'd pick a slot. We'd say, well, we have a time Sunday afternoon when you could broadcast or it might be a time during the week. And we'd talk it over and they decided they could do it, fine. Now quite often, they would not like a broadcast on a Friday night or a Saturday night because this is when they're out playing their engagements.

STUDENT: This is interesting. I always thought that a group would go to a sponsor first and the sponsor would try to get it

HUNTER: No. No, usually the station would take care of working up the sponsorship. The station would rather have complete control of it. In almost every case, as far as I know, there would be an exception, I presume, somewhere along the line, somebody might know a sponsor might be a relative or something and they could work it that way and so the sponsor would say, you know, gee, I've got my cousin. He's got a little band and he's pretty good and if you put him on the air I'd like to sponsor it. Well, of course, you'd sit up and take notice and chances are, you'd follow through. But that was the exception rather than the rule. They would come in and get broadcasting, become known, and then the sales department could go around to various clients, prospective sponsors, and say, we have this group that's good and we get a lot of mail, because in those days you got mail. Quite a bit of it. And we'd like to have you sponsor, maybe a quarter hour every Sunday, or whatever and when they talk it over then they begin the old sales pitch, you know. It's a selling job from that point on.

FELDMAN: So they had a free ride for a little while before you

HUNTER: Yes, we put them on what we call on a sustaining basis. They were either commercial or sustained. And when they came to town, they asked to go on on a sustained basis. Which of course they were very willing to do because as far as sponsorship is concerned, they didn't get paid all that much money. On a national level, you know, you think today, of course, a great deal of money when they sponsor a program. But in those days, and it was only a local deal, of course, it was not that much money involved. But this gave them the publicity that they needed. It was better than money in many ways. All over the northeastern section of Maine, people would tune in and hear so and so in his Hillbilly Rascals. And they'd be going to run an event, so they'd say, hey, write to the station, see if we can get them. How much it's going to cost for them to come up the Town Hall, put on a dance? So this is how they would get their engagements.

IVES: Now, when a band first came on, into the station, you know, and had a broadcast, did you pay them for that first broadcast?

HUNTER: No.

IVES: It was all gratis?

HUNTER: It was all gratis. It was free.

FELDMAN: And if you couldn't find a sponsor for them, then they were dropped?

HUNTER: No, no, not necessarily. It was not that greedy back in the old days, for two reasons. Number one, we wanted to get as much variety in programming as we could get. Very simple, it sounds a little corny, I suppose, but we wanted to broadcast what the people wanted to hear.

FELDMAN: So that if they were getting good mail and you couldn't find a sponsor for them, you would keep them?

HUNTER: We'd keep them on, definitely. Besides you always have the possibility that somewhere, somewhere along the line, you would pick up a sponsor. It takes time. It doesn't happen overnight, you see.

IVES: Didn't these people get kind of tired of broadcasting on the radio and not getting any more than advertising out of it?

HUNTER: Oh, no. This was their lifeblood. Without radio, they were nothing.

FELDMAN: Even when they had a sponsor they didn't get paid, did they?

HUNTER: Oh, yes. But not a great deal of money. It was a nominal amount.

FELDMAN: And that would be the sponsor that paid them?

HUNTER: The sponsor would pay them, that's correct. The sponsor would pay the group whatever they demanded. It wasn't a great deal, as I say. Then the sponsor would also pay the station for the time involved. It cost so much to broadcast a quarter hour, a little more to broadcast a half hour and so forth. So there were two payments to be made, in one lump sum, to be sure. But this is how the sponsor worked. But you see, this is the key to the whole matter. A group coming into Bangor, Maine, from anywhere. You know, from South Carolina, Virginia. They come to Bangor, Maine, who knows them? No, nobody ever heard of them. So, but they maybe played all the engagements they wanted in their area, and maybe they didn't like the summer heat in the south, so they move up to Maine, new worlds to conquer, and besides, distance lends enchantment. It always does. You say, here's a group from South Carolina, you know. Big time. Here's a Hillbilly group right from the South, so you put them on the air and people hear it and you build them up a little bit, and if they do sound reasonably good, which they did, they knew what they were doing, so then people, as I say, would say, hey, that's a good group. Let's get them to do our dance come the first of May, or whatever. So this was the way that they got jobs. And of course they could charge, the station had no control of what they charged. We never asked any questions. If they went out and said, you know, we want a hundred dollars to play this engagement tonight. We've got five of us in the group, and this is our price. If it was two hundred dollars, didn't make any difference to us. They made the deal with whoever was putting on the dance. And the people loved them. And they would get, well, they were stars. They were radio stars for one thing. And then here they were on stage. They were live personalities, again stars. And people would dance and listen to the music and applaud. When it was all over, they go up and talk with them. And somewhere along the line, the old Maine hospitality, in spite of the fact that they say Maine is cold and so forth, but the country folk are not. They'd say, you know, why don't you come up the house and have supper with us? And so they'd invite the group into a meal and they'd come back to the station after their trip, you know, and they'd say boy, what a time we had up there in, wherever it was. They were all over the place, up in Dover, for example. Yeah, we had a venison feed and the whole [inaudible]. Great people. So this is a background of how it all went.

FELDMAN: We went down and interviewed Ray and Ann Little, and that's exactly what they did, step by step.

HUNTER: Yes, that's true.

FELDMAN: When they came up here.

STUDENT: This might be getting off a little bit, but on these broadcasts, say from the dance hall, would the sponsor take care of the expenses, or the dancehall was hiring the band?

HUNTER: In most cases,

STUDENT: It was, you know, over the radio.

HUNTER: Yes. For example, we used to broadcast from the Chateau. Now the Chateau was in business to run dances and make money. And they had different groups there. They'd run one for a while and then they'd run another one, just to keep the interest up, of course. And on occasion, we made

arrangements with the people at the Chateau to broadcast from the hall. And again, it was not sponsored, as such. We would go on the air and say, good evening ladies and gentlemen. From the Chateau in Bangor, on the mall, you know, so-and-so in the orchestra, and then they'd swing into their theme and a whole bit. And then we'd announce the numbers. Or if they had an emcee, he'd get in the act, too. And we put on a half hour broadcast right from the Chateau, without a sponsor, as such. But the Chateau, of course, would be mentioned all through it. And people would hear the band there and around in all the towns they'd say, hey, you know, why don't we go down? That's where the action is. Of course they didn't say that, but this is what they meant. Down here in Bangor, you know, why don't we, next time, why don't we get a gang and we'll go down. And this is what they would do.

FELDMAN: So the regular sponsor, if that group was on the radio anyway, wouldn't be involved in that?

HUNTER: No, that right. In that case, there really was no sponsor involved. And I did many of those broadcasts myself and this is how it was done. I'd just go there and set up the equipment and we put it on. You didn't stop for a commercial or anything else. You'd just talk about the Chateau and the group and the whole bit. And that's how it worked.

STUDENT: Taken advantage of, really.

HUNTER: Pardon?

STUDENT: It seems like the station was, I don't know what, just because you're growing, that it seems like you're being exploited?

HUNTER: Oh, no. We were not exploited, definitely not. Uh, no, we knew what we were doing. And, as I said, the idea was to get listeners and build. Get as many listeners as you possibly could. Get people in the habit of listening to your station. And the secret was to broadcast what they wanted to hear.

STUDENT: So in that perspective everybody was getting a good deal.

HUNTER: Absolutely.

FELDMAN: Well, would the Chateau take care of your expenses for coming down there and setting up and moving the equipment and all that? No.

HUNTER: No.

IVES: The station would take care of that?

HUNTR: Oh, yes.

IVES: And yet the station wouldn't take any in any, you know, I guess, hard cash during the night?

HUNTER: In, no, in the early days, they did not.

FELDMAN: How much extra expense would be involved in doing these remote things, to give us an idea?

HUNTER: Very little, very little. I would go to the Chateau, for example, and I would take three boxes and a microphone. The three boxes all work together to provide the amplifier, so-called, the pickup equipment. And just set that up, hook the microphone to it, walk out on the front of the stage and set the microphone up. Test it out and check back to the studio and make sure that they were getting the test all right. And then come the proper time, everything was done on a time basis and a cue basis, the studio could feed me a program, so I could hear when the other program ended. Or, if necessary, they could just speak over the line and say, okay, in 10 seconds you're on. And 10 seconds later, I'd go on. Simple as that.

FELDMAN: One thing we were wondering about the Chateau broadcast, is that sometimes, I guess it was Littlefield's Hillbillies had a regular show and it said, "Live from the Chateau" and it was Wednesday nights, but it was too early to have been part of their regular dance. It was something like 6:30.

STUDENT: That was Uncle Ezra.

FELDMAN: Uncle Ezra.

STUDENT: Thursday nights, they say 6:30 from the Chateau, but the dance didn't start until 8.

FELDMAN: Would you do a remote early because you had equipment that got in the way or just because your later time was all booked up?

HUNTER: Probably. I think that would be the answer, yes. Back in those days radio was the entertainment medium.

FELDMAN: Prime time.

HUNTER: That's correct. All the all the big time radio shows were on in the evening. It started at seven o'clock, you can even see from that old log. So, you would never replace a commercial from the network with a local program, for two reasons. Number one, the commercial programs from the network were so star studded, you had the top entertainment people of the country on them. And this is what people wanted to hear. They liked the local programming, of course, but they would rather hear Bing Crosby, Kate Smith, and so forth, because they were the stars. So you moved your other your local programming into places where you did not have network programming available. This is how you put it together. And the second reason, of course, is the network program would pay you handsomely for the quarter hour, or half hour, or whatever was involved.

FELDMAN: They paid you? How did the financial arrangements with the network work?

HUNTER: Oh, beautiful. Well, let me say this. Just to give you an idea, without throwing figures around, we, the station, the radio station, made enough money back in the network days to live pretty high off the hog. The gentleman who owned the station, this was a single ownership back in those days, he made enough money to have a couple private airplanes, to redo the studio downtown, with paneling using walnut wood, and so forth, velvet on the walls, the whole bit. So, and also sink a small fortune in into television experiments.

FELDMAN: This was this Mr. Guernsey. He must be an amazing man.

HUNTER: Well, he was. He really was. But he was very far-thinking. But I guess we're getting off the beaten path here.

FELDMAN: Well, could you explain, I always thought that the local station kind of you know rented the network and so that you would pay them, but I don't understand how it is that they would pay you?

HUNTER: Well the only way a network could operate, you see, could be able to have, we will say the network headquarters was in New York. So they go to an advertiser, like Gillette. They say we can deliver your program throughout the country with, say, well just say 48 stations, or one in every state. We'll just make it simple. And it will cost you x thousands of dollars to broadcast on our network and have all this nationwide coverage and so the Gillette people say, great [inaudible], for x thousands of dollars we can be in all the homes all over the entire country, so this is, is a good, economical buy. We'll take it. We'll sign up. So then the network alerts all the stations. They alert Bangor, Maine, that they're going to have a broadcast at 7:30 every Friday evening, we'll say, and each station had its own rate. A rate card. So our rate was so much for a half hour.

FELDMAN: And would that be based on the amount of area that you could cover?

HUNTER: Yes, your market, is what it amounts to. Of course Bangor, Maine, was a relatively small area compared to Philadelphia or any of the big cities. So the rate would be, accordingly, their rate would be much higher than ours. But still ours, compared to the local economy, was we were making good money. So this is how it was done.

IVES: Is that your only source of income for the station or did you have advertisers in the local outlet?

HUNTER: We had local advertising also, yes.

IVES: And those two, that was your complete intake?

HUNTER: Oh, yes. This is this is the only way a radio station could make money then and can make money now. We, as I say, we're in a very good position because in 1930 we joined the Columbia Broadcasting System. That was the first network programming in Bangor. We also joined the Yankee Network, which was a Boston oriented or based network and we could use them both. Again it's like a patchwork quilt. When we didn't have CBS programming, we could work in Yankee Network programming. So we had both, so we had revenue from New York and from Boston. Then we had our local sales department going, selling local programming. Ray Little, let's take Ray Little, for example. Let's get back onto your beat a little bit. When Ray Little, broadcast for a number of years, now like many others, as you already learned, Ray Little breezed into town, came up to the station, wanted to know, could he get some time on the air. We went through the usual process. We said fine. So it was set up and he went on as a sustaining program. And he became very well known. So much so that eventually, we were able to sell the program to sponsors. So that's how that developed. So we actually paid him. And of course we charged a sponsor, so from the sponsor we collect money for the station time and for the group that's doing the broadcast. So this is how it was done. Now Ray Little, he was

with us sometime during the 30s. Originally he came to us in the 30s, the first time around, and he did, during the war time period, I guess he was in the service, and so he was not available. And then he returned after the war was over and made a very successful comeback, as they said in show business. But, somewhere along the line it was Ray Little and his wife Anne, Anne, the girl from the Rio Grande. Ray Little and Anne from the Rio Grand. And they had Champ, the fiddler. And they did have, they had another gal with them the first time around. I can't think of her name.

FELDMAN: Helen. She was Anne's cousin.

HUNTER: Helen. That's right. Yeah, they were both dark, and Anne was quite attractive. Helen was very attractive. She was attractive and cute, so they made good stage appearance. Ray was rather handsome and he wore a flashy diamond ring and he played banjo, of course. And he could play the banjo very, very well and you can just picture him up on stage with his banjo and the group around him, strumming on the banjo and with this diamond ring throwing fire all over the place. So it was quite spectacular and the people loved it. He was the star in in the area. They had a bass fiddle player, Dusty. They called it the dog house, of course, that was the language. He played the dog house. And there was a Gene, and I'm not quite sure, it might have been Gene Hooper, who joined up with him somewhere along the line. He's sang easy ballads, and this sounds like Gene Hooper to me. This sometimes happened. A fellow would join a group and work with them and eventually he'd get his own group. And I think this is what was the case of Gene Hooper. I'm not positive, but I think so. But the rest I know, that Champ and Ray and Helen and Anne, and they were very, very successful. So they were in the 30s and the 40s and they were typical, I think, of the group and one of the most successful.

FELDMAN: Somebody who was playing around the same time we haven't been able to find too much information about us is Lone Pine, and he started off, I guess in the mid 30s.

HUNTER: Oh, Pine started in the 30s, that's right, 1935. I have a notation. So he was that that early at least, 1935.

FELDMAN: He must have been really young then

HUNTER: Oh, he was.

FELDMAN: Do you remember him back then?

HUNTER: Oh, definitely. He was young and he was a handsome looking fellow. Black hair. And he used to yodel. And he was at it for a long time. He started as a single. Then, and I'm not quite sure of the order, but he had a gal with him. And I don't know whether she joined him after she married him or before and the marriage came somewhere along the line. But they became a team and were very successful. Now Long Pine, when he started, as a single, I don't believe he was sponsored at the very first of it. But he was sponsored soon afterwards and he was sponsored by Firestone at one time, the Firestone dealer located at the Bangor end of the Brewer bridge. And that was, oh, I was going to tell you the name, but I can't think of it now, but it's that old building that was there for years. And they

sponsored Lone Pine. And some years later, Rappaport Auto Company sponsored Lone Pine and he was around for a long time. I have a notation here in 1946 that he was on the station.

FELDMAN: And what was his image? Was he as theatrical as Ray Little?

HUNTER: Yes, he was. He always had a costume as Ray Little and his group did. Ray Little, of course, was the Western costume bit and Lone Pine was uh pretty much the same idea. Well, they wore fancy shirts and the whole bit and had hats, the Western type hats. Guitars that were quite flashy and they were really show people and they got to be professional, really. They actually did because they just learned by experience. Which, I guess is probably the best way to ruin anything. Okay, throw some questions at me.

FELDMAN: When they first came to you at the station, how did they describe themselves as singers? Did they say they were Western singers, or what? Or did they just say, I have a banjo and fiddle?

HUNTER: I think we used to call them all Hillbillies. This was the general term. We'd say to a whole bunch of Hillbillies are coming up north. Or one was in today and wanted to set up an appointment, this was if Norm wasn't around, and so forth. And they'd say they'll be coming back, you know. But this was the conversation, a bunch of Hillbillies.

FELDMAN: Did they call themselves Hillbillies?

HUNTER: In some cases, they did, but I think, like in in Ray Little's case, he had the Western atmosphere right from the beginning. Well, it was Ray Little and Anne from the Rio Grande. This was the touch, the Western motif that they built in right from the start. Lone Pine Mountaineer, well there's the hillbilly bit. He was more or less the Hillbilly type. Although they all use Western songs because they were popular. So they wanted to present whatever the people wanted. This this only makes sense. They weren't out to present a message or or get across any type of music in particular. It was what the people wanted and again the word request, I think, was a key to the whole thing. The minute they got on the station they'd get requests. People would write in, say oh, my favorite number is so-and-so. Could you possibly do this? And they got a tremendous amount of mail. Let me tell you about mail in the context of Gil Snow's career. Gil Snow, of course, was Uncle Hezzie, Uncle Ezra, Paul Gil, and various other names. He came from Mount Desert Island, or Mount Dessert, depending on what style you like. And he started in 1936 at WLBZ. This was his first beginning as a professional. He was a Down East old timer. This again was a little bit Hillbilly, but he was a state of Mainer, this type of Hillbilly. His costume was the rube, so-called. These phrases are all old-fashioned and so forth but they would they were used not in a derogatory sense at all, in any case. Even the word Hillbilly didn't mean it was derogatory. It was just a phrase that was a descriptive word. And Gil was a Rube. He wore a little goatee, that's a false one, and a duster and big leather boots, the country type boots.

IVES: Are dusters overalls?

HUNTER: A duster is a coat.

FELDMAN: Like a lab coat.

HUNTER: Like a lab coat, yes, that's right.

IVES: Is it the kind of usually blonde colored, kind of

HUNTER: Yes, like a like a raincoat color.

FELDMAN: You used to wear them when you had all open cars

IVES: That's right

HUNTER: Yeah, and of course, as I say, Uncle Hezzie was supposed to be a country character and he did wear overalls, definitely. He wore overalls, too, and in the country they wore overalls and a frock, or in some cases a duster, so-called, and suspenders and the goatee. And he had the whole bit. And not only that, but he would play on a washboard, as you may know, with thimbles on his fingers. And he'd have two or three people with him providing the melody and so forth and Gil would sing and play the washboard. And he was good at it. This was an art in a sense. He was, he was, had the rhythm part of it, and oh, the people loved this, of course, too. This was quite something.

FELDMAN: Did he tell sort of dialect stories like Marshall Dodge?

HUNTER: Oh, he was very good at dialect. He was excellent. In fact, he was a very good imitator of many types of dialects and voices and styles. He could take off Arthur Godfrey so you'd think it was Arthur Godfrey himself. In fact, he was on the Arthur Godfre show as a guest. And he could do innumerable characters, but his Uncle Hezzie one was the one of course that caught on, the one that brought him success and fame and fortune, you might as well say. Because in his way, this was, he made a very good living out of it. And he was very successful and went, there I come right back to how he was successful. I started this whole conversation about Uncle Hezzie, Uncle Ezra, when we're talking about mail and requests. And when Uncle Hezzie got going and really was at his peak, he received over 20,000 letters in one single year from WLBZ. That mail came into WLBZ, addressed to Uncle Ezra. So you can see the reaction and you can see also how they'd know what the people wanted. The people told them what they wanted. And when they gave the people what they wanted, these letters would come in thanking them and asking for more and the whole bit. And of course, they get the same thing when they went around and played all these dance halls, town halls, and you name it. Uncle Hezzie, Uncle Ezra played many old-time dances. He'd have a group with him, and of course he was the master of ceremonies and the whole bit. He was the he was the star. But he'd have his group with him. And they could play for the old time dances.

FELDMAN: What about the birthday greeting show?

HUNTER: Oh, that was fantastic, too. This was when radio was at its peak and you see, it provided people who had very little entertainment, in a sense, with instant entertainment, in the home. They could switch on the radio and get all this sort of entertainment. And they loved it and the greetings program, Uncle Hezzie would talk, and he could ramble on. He was a natural showman. He'd tell stories and sing songs and kid around and then he'd open the mailbag and he he'd say, well so-and-so up in old [inaudible] is having a birthday, you know, and he'd tell the whole story, as only he could do it, in this

dialect form of his. And so people would not only write in for their own birthday so they could hear themselves being greeted over the air, but of course, as people will do, they'd get all excited or they'd write in for their grandmother, you know old grammy, or she's going to get a big kick hearing her name on the radio. So they'd write in and say, now granny you want to be sure to listen Uncle Hezzie tonight. Something special's going to go on. And she'd sit there, you know, and the minute her name came on, well she was an ecstasy and then they did the same thing for kids in the family and this whole bit. And the mail would just pour in. That went on for the long, long time. And again, Uncle Hezzie, Uncle Ezra, he ran a children's program. And he'd, and amateur shows, he conducted this sort of thing. And the kids loved him. And we had a studio that would seat 250-300 people and on a Saturday, they just jammed that place and he'd put on his show and he really got to be well loved by all the youngsters as well as the older people because of this sort of thing. He was as a natural. He could make people happy.

FELDMAN: What did he do under the name Paul Gil?

HUNTER: He was an announcer under the name of Paul Gil.

FELDMAN: He was straight then?

HUNTER: He was straight. He went to WCSH in Portland and used the name Paul Gil.

IVES: Was he, while he was at ABI, was he paid by the radio station or was he?

FELDMAN: LBZ.

IVES: That's right.

HUNTER: Yeah, I was going to correct you there, but I was going to wait to see if there was something I didn't know about. He was strictly WLBZ from start to finish until he went to WCSH.

IVES: Yes, was he paid by the radio station, or was it one of these sponsored deals or ?

HUNTER: He was sponsored in many cases and somewhere along the line he was paid by the station because he became a valuable property and we wanted to keep him. But also that was just part of it. He was free to freelance, which they all did, and make his own money with personal appearances whenever and wherever he wanted. So this is how it worked out.

IVES: A little of everything, then.

HUNTER: Yes.

FELDMAN: Was there anyone else to do the same kind of thing that he did?

HUNTER: Nobody did, nobody did it as well in his line. He was tops with this character.

FELDMAN: How about Deacon Hand? Reed Hand?

HUNTER: I don't recall him. Was he...

FELDMAN: He dressed up in the deacon's outfit he had to go [inaudible], too. I think he was on WLBZ.

HUNTER: Well, he might have been. If so, he was completely overshadowed by Uncle Hezzie. He might have been earlier, Deacon Hand. I believe you're correct. Yes, now I recall. He was, he did very well. And he was popular and had quite a following. But Gil Snow happened to, his timing was better, it just worked out that way. He got to his peak about the time that radio got to its peak, as far as local programming was concerned. The two went hand in hand. So he really hit the heights.

FELDMAN: Do you remember what exact year it was, or when around it was, that he had that children's show on?

HUNTER: No, I don't. One thing that I want to do, now that I have a little time, I have access to many of these programs, the logs. And by going through those, I can pinpoint some of the years. It becomes so hazy, as I said. Uncle Hezzie, he started like in the '30s, '35, something like that, was still going strong in the 40s and some of them did come and go, what with the wartime activity and so forth. So there was, there were two sessions that they had in many cases. And it becomes a little bit confusing to try to pinpoint it from memory. But it is in the records, and it would take quite a bit of time to dig it out, but it could be done.

STUDNET: When did LBZ begin local broadcasting?

HUNTER: Local broadcasting? WLBZ went on the air, when you say local broadcasting, let's take it this way. It started out as an amateur station in Dover-Foxcroft in 1921. This was on the property of Thompson Guernsey. It was in a shed out in the backyard, as I recall it. And it was, it was, an amateur station, W1EE. Then in 1926, it became WLBZ, still in Dover-Foxcroft and it was 250 watts power in those days. And if it started was an amateur station, I presume it would have to do some local broadcasting, but it was very amateurish, and on for a few hours and whatever they wanted to do, they would do. There's no rhyme or reason to it, particularly. It was just experimental, amateur, whatever you want to call it. However, in 1926, it became an official, professional, commercial radio station with the call letters WLBZ, and then in 1927 it moved to a bank building in Dover-Foxcroft. And this was the first, more or less professional approach because meanwhile it was in a shed back in on Mr. Guernsey's property. But in '27, it did to move to a bank building in Dover-Foxcroft, and then in 1928, it moved to Bangor on Broadway. This was when it arrived there. And it was still 250 watts. It was a small station.

STUDENT: Bangor got the signals, though, fine, from Dover-Foxcroft?

HUNTER: Yes. There wasn't much interference on the radio waves because there were very few radio stations in those days.

FELDMAN: When did they assign the you know the bands? When did the FCC? Do you know what I mean? That was about 1928, sometime?

HUNTER: Well, oh, in the 1920s, they were assigning radio stations bands or frequencies they called them then.

FELDMAN: Frequencies.

HUNTER: Now it's channels for television and but it was a frequency that they referred to, or wavelengths, originally. But frequency for radio, and that was in the 20s. Well, as I say, in '26 WLBZ became WLBZ so that gives you some idea. But before that, of course there were stations in the bigger centers like in Boston and Philadelphia and this was in the 20s. And they were assigned a frequency.

STUDENT: They'd just set up the FCC in what 20... '26, or something like that?

HUNTER: I was

STUDENT: Being studied, I think, in '25

HUNTER: Yeah, I think it was under a different name, originally. I don't think it was the Federal Communications Commission. I'd have to delve into that go back into some of my old records, but it was, you know, the federal government. And somewhere along the line, it became the Federal Communications Commission. But they did license stations, the government, back in the 20s. And, as I say, LBZ was '26. And then to begin to give you another date, 1928 it did move to Bangor, as I told you, and it operated for two years as a local station so there was local programming only. And in 1930, it took on the Columbia Broadcasting System, became an affiliate station and the Yankee Network. So in that case, it was mostly network programming with the local programming worked in.

STUDENT: Were you there in '28, '29?

HUNTER: No, I arrived in 1930. And the reason I arrived is because they had just gone network and they were starting to broadcast for a complete, long broadcast day. In other words, they went until midnight. They went on, I think, at 8:30 in the morning and ran until midnight, so it took two men to operate the transmitter because of the number of hours involved.

FELDMAN: Did your wattage increase at that point?

HUNTER: Yes, it went up to a thousand watts and eventually went to somewhere along the line, it went to...

[end of part 3]

Part 4

Date: April 13, 1975

Length of recording: 12:19

[transcript begins]

HUNTER: They went on, I think, at 8:30 in the morning and ran until midnight, so it took two men to operate the transmitter because of the number of hours involved.

FELDMAN: Did your wattage increase at that point?

HUNTER: Yes, it went up to a thousand watts and eventually went to, somewhere along the line, it went to, it was a thousand watts when we were CBS. And in 1938, when we switched to NBC, in that period, we went to 5000 Watts. So that's how it all developed, grew step by step.

FELDMAN: Did your proportion of local programming increase during the thirties, would you say?

HUNTER: That's a little bit hard to say, in a sense, because I presume overall it might have kept about the same. It might have been a slight increase but before '30. it was all local programming, and it was only about a half a day of broadcasting, but it was all local. When we went to the network, you can see from this log, that there was a great deal of national programming. But, of course, we did have many more hours. And then it changed from time to time. Like Sundays, we did a lot of local programming.

FELDMAN: It was good economics to have local programming in your off times.

HUNTER: Yes, that's true. You built up your local programming when network was not available, and you sold it whenever and wherever you could to bring in the revenue. The radio station, getting back to economics, and then we can get right off that again, but it does answer a question from way, way back somewhere. As I said, they made a great deal of money, and Mr. Guernsey had a couple of private airplanes and the whole thing. And he used to entertain the brass from NBC. They'd come up and spend time up on Borestone Mountain in a mountain retreat.

STUDENT: Is that on that lake there?

HUNTER: Yes.

STUDENT: That's his place? Guernsey's?

HUNTER: He leased it. This will give you some idea of the money was involved. He leased it for the whole summer season for several summers I guess.

STUDENT: That's a gorgeous place.

HUNTER: Oh, I guess it is. Beautiful, big log building. It wasn't a log cabin by any manner of means, a building, with a sort of a hexagon shape dining room area. And servants, the whole bit. Caretaker.

STUDENT: Seaplane. Well, there is one now.

HUNTER: Yeah, Mr. Guernsey had, well, he had a seaplane based on Sebec Lake. Well, he had a couple of them. One was an end amphibian plane. It was like, built like a boat, and carrying up with passengers, it was a two motor job. And then he had a smaller plane like a Piper Cub at one time and we used to do a lot of things. On Sebec Lake, we'd use it for taking off with skis in winter. And we'd take off that way and in the summer with pontoons, so it was quite a lot of fun involved in those days.

And I was going to say that the money that was made, even after Mr. Guernsey sold the station, we were on the network for a long period of years before television became so important and began to drain revenue from radio. Of course, it switched over. All the entertainment programming switched to television because it was a whole new medium. And so they did that and radio revenue went down, of course. But prior to that time WLBZ Radio made enough money and put it in the bank to buy the television station, Channel 2, which was quite a little bit of money.

FELDMAN: Can I ask you, do you recognize the name Green Valley Boys?

HUNTER: I recognize the name, but

FELDMAN: They were on in 1940

HUNTER: Unfortunately, there are a lot of names, they came and went. But many of them were not

FELDMAN: I had a feeling they lived right around here somewhere because they played at parties and things up in Old Town.

HUNTER: Yeah, I'm sure you're correct and there were many like that who did not make a career of it.

FELDMAN: Oh, you have the names written down, Roland White, Edward , Lillian Mackalin. Montana Ed, [inaudible] costume and Yodeling Wil. Those were their names.

STUDENT: That was Uncle Zeb, I guess.

FELDMAN: Oh, that was Uncle Zeb? Had another one. Here are the Green Valley Boys. Donald Laplant, Clarence Petri, Henry Duschene, and John Benoit. There are a bunch of Petris up in Old Town.

HUNTER: Yeah, this does sound familiar and those names do, too, and this is typical of what also happened. In addition to people like Uncle Ezra and Ray Little and Lone Pine Mountaineer, who stayed with the station on a quite a permanent basis for a number of years, these other groups came and went. And so they did not get as well established and they didn't make as much an impression on those of us with the station because it was a constantly changing thing, a new Hillbilly group, you know, moved in and stayed for a while, and went on.

STUDENT: They sound like a bunch of lumbermen.

FELDMAN: One thing that really impressed me about Ray Little was that he seemed to be a very astute businessman. You know, he really has things all figured out.

HUNTER: Oh, yes. He made a lot of money.

FELDMAN: And he, he has a beautiful house, and you can see that that there might have been other musicians who were maybe as good musicians but just didn't have that good strong business sense.

HUNTER: Possibly. Ray was excellent when it came to playing the banjo. He was outstanding. And he used to do, let's see, what was one of his, he did many numbers that were quite flashy. One of them

was For Stars and Stripes Forever. And he used to pull out all the stops and really let it go. And it was quite something to watch and hear. And he did other numbers of a similar type, but that one I remember very, very well. And every once in a while, of course he'd get requests for it and he'd throw it in and boy, it was something. Bring the house down.

FELDMAN: In regard to dance bands, we know some of them by names are more country oriented. But, say, Waity Aikens, now he was pretty much a popular

HUNTER: He was definitely popular.

FELDMAN: Right, but even so, would the demands of the dance audience like mean that he would play maybe one or two numbers that were country oriented during an evening, or not at all?

HUNTER: I would judge, and I'm not a hundred percent sure, but I would judge he would not play what you'd call country music for square dancing, or a thing of this nature. He was strictly ballroom dancing, for another general term. He was the dance band type. Of course, that was when all the big dance bands were getting started, and again, from all these program logs, we used to broadcast, over from the network of course, from many of the hotels throughout the country, New York, Chicago, out in California. And Tommy Dorsey, just getting started, was a regular, and so were any of them that you can name, I guess. Don Redman, Will Osborne. I don't know, you could go on naming the big bands and they brought Guy Lombardo. They would play in a hotel for a period of a year, probably, or even more because they sometimes renew contracts again and again. And from time to time, throughout an evening, CBS, and later NBC, would pick up these dance bands. They'd switch to the hotel Taft in New York and to some hotel out in Chicago with another dance band, so they all became popular. Well, this of course, is reflected in the local bands. They too were playing for this sort of thing, the ballroom dancing was so popular. And they were developing styles similar to Tommy Dorsey, to Benny Goodman, and any that you name. In some cases, they would copy a little bit of it, of course. It was only natural and normal. So, but they did, in many cases have quite a bit of originality, and Waity Aikens is one who did. Pearly Reynolds was another band of the same type. They were the sort of the big band type of operation.

FELDMAN: And would they mostly be brass instruments, then, and stuff like that?

HUNTER: Yes, the typical dance band, saxophone, trumpet combo, of course, the drums and the rest of it. But some of the other ones, like Paul Barrows, I presume, is in there somewhere, and they'd have the fiddles. And of course Ray Little, he had the Fiddler, Champ. And they could play, would play the square-dancing, old-fashioned dancing. So there were two different types entirely.

FELDMAN: Well, one thing that this really impressed great in me is the tremendous popularity of all kinds of dancing and I guess that was a nationwide phenomenon, but it seems, you know, in in the late 20s we sense there was with this kind of explosion. You know, dance pavilions, and things like that around here. And one thing that occurred to me that I wanted to ask you about was that there was at that point it seemed to be kind of an entertainment vacuum because for some reason vaudeville was on the way out when the talkies were just starting, and radio hadn't really gotten very big here until in the

late 20s, you know, these others say, a period say, 1928, 1926, there wouldn't be that much competition. People seem to have gotten in the habit of going dancing a lot.

HUNTER: Well that held true even later than that, through the '30s, I would say. Undoubtedly, it did get started in the 20s, you're right, because, well there was no radio up here, as such, not really. '26, as I said, LBZ, but it was local and it really wasn't bringing entertainment like it did later when we got on the network. Then people got a taste of national entertainment and national dance bands and the whole bit, so it did change things considerably. But, yeah, looking at the dance bit now, there were many dance halls around and it did get very popular and it did go, start in the 20s, and go through the 30s. And somewhere there in the 30s, the marathon dance craze came along. Now there was the Paradise Pavilion down in Hampden.

FOLKLIFE CENTER staff member: That is the end of side one of the original tape. The class interview with Irving Hunter will be continued on tape number 856.3. End of tape number 856.2.

[end of part 4]

Part 5

Date: April 13, 1975

Length of recording: 24:10

[transcript begins]

FOLKLIFE CENTER staff member: Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History accession number 856, a series of interviews with Irving Hunter of Bangor, Maine, former manager of WLBZ Radio concerning radio and Country Music in the Bangor area. Done as part of a project to study country music for course number AY 123, Folklore Fieldwork. Tape number 856.3, a continuation of the April 15, 1975, class interview with Irving Hunter.

HUNTER: In a sense, sort of a night club. On Exchange Street, there was one, and I think it might have been called a Casino or something like that in which they had a dance group from the Boston area. And that went for quite a while and it was very popular. And somewhere along the line this craze of marathon dancing got going and the most important spot in this area seemed to be the Paradise Ballroom, or Pavilion, some such name. Paradise, anyhow, in Hampden. They'd go, we used to broadcast from there, and we had a set up. We set up the equipment and left it there and we could turn it on at various times and of course it went on and on and on this marathon. So, we'd broadcast a little bit from there, and then we'd switch to something else.

STUDENT: May not be the most exciting.

FELDMAN: So, at that point, you'd have several remote units that you could operate.

HUNTER: Yes, that's right. But unfortunately, it caught fire and burned down and this was at the height of the whole business and I believe, at the time, that that they were actually dancing there when the fire

started they had to clear out and the whole thing was destroyed and that was the end of marathon dancing at the Paradise. But it was quite a thing.

FELDMAN: Now, some of the dance pavilions, had, you said that Goodwins was a wild place? Did they have reputations as being more wild than others and did that make them more popular, or less popular?

HUNTER: No, maybe I misled you. I said that was where the action was, maybe, at Goodwins. But I didn't know much about that. We did broadcast from there, that's about all I know about that. The Chateau was probably the most popular one here in town. It was big and lent itself to various types of dances, square dances, old-time dances, ballroom dances. It was for hire and for rent and this is what went on there.

FELDMAN: Who ran the Chateau?

HUNTER: This I do not know. No, I'm not sure. It'd be interesting.

FELDMAN: Was it, um, okay for single women, safe, to go down to the Chateau for a dance, or would they have to be escorted?

IVES: In other words, how wild was the place?

HUNTER: It wasn't that wild, and my recollection of those days, no, I presume mostly they went in couples.

FELDMAN: But, in those days anyway, single women didn't usually go places all by themselves. Maybe a bunch of girls might go together.

STUDENT: Well, single men had to dance with somebody.

HUNTER: Yeah, a group of girls would go and there'd be no danger, no problems.

FELDMAN: How about some of these smaller dance halls and pavilions, out in the country? Did you ever do remote broadcasts from places like Pea Cove, or the Gypsy in Bucksport, or the one here in Veazie, the Midway?

HUNTER: No, to my knowledge, we never did. What we did in the case like that, if one of the bands was going to play at one of these places, they'd come into the studio and put on a program there. Which again, gave them the publicity they wanted, and it saved us running around and they could select a few numbers and put it on to best advantage rather than be in the middle of a dance.

FELDMAN: And then they'd say, we're going to be at such-and-such a place Friday night.

HUNTER: That's right.

IVES: That would hold true for like the Auto Rest Park, and stuff like that.

HUNTER: Yes.

FELDMAN: Did you ever do remote broads from Auto Rest Park?

HUNTER: Not to my knowledge. I never did personally. As I said, the Chateau, the Casino, the Atlantic Night Garden upstairs on Main Street. I did broadcast from all those places.

STUDENT: I dug up some ads for these evenings where they had boxing matches followed by dancing. That seems like it would be a hot item for radio. If the boxing was popular.

HUNTER: We never did anything of that nature. When we joined Yankee Network, we used to cover the, we used to carry, the wrestling matches out of Boston. And I don't where they originated at that time. It could have been Mechanic's building, or some such place. It probably doesn't make too much difference, but wherever they held this series of wrestling matches in Boston, and they were quite popular, and had big crowds there, Yankee Network did a hold by hold description. And it was quite interesting, and of course it's like wrestling today, in a sense. They had the good guys and the bad guys. Oh this, the crowd used to go wild. And then the people loved it on radio, this is the funny part of it. Of course, there was no way of comparing radio with television because there was no television. So all the sporting events, people would sit glued to the radio and stare at it. This was the thing. It was a psychological thing. Everybody always looked at the radio, when there was something that they really liked. You'd get the radio going and if it was a soap opera or a boxing match, you'd sit, and you look right at it. And wow, you could see the whole action. The sound was coming there, so you looked for it, and your mind provided all the pictures. And so you had television, in a sense, in those days. And you reacted just the same way. So, as I said, getting back to wrestling, you'd sit there and stare at the radio and the announcer would describe the wrestling. One name I remember was Dick Lutz, L-u-t-z, I think, and he described this fellow as, like a Greek god. He was beautifully built. He had great big shoulders and he tapered right down. And he used to spend time on the beaches around in Boston, Nantasket and the South Shore, any place like that. Had this gorgeous tan. He was a handsome, masculine creature and well developed as a wrestler, of course. Great big muscles and he was the good guy. Well, he'd be matched against any of the bad guys, and there were innumerable ones. And they'd get going, you know, and pretty soon they'd get a hammerlock on Dick Lutz. And the announcer would describe it, you know. "Oh, looks like foul, look looks like a foul." And you'd hear the crowd starting to boo, and then you'd say, well, he just gave him the elbow and he knocked Dick Lutz across the ring. Lutz is coming back. Now they're maneuvering. Lutz gets a hammer lock on him, and you say, oh, the hero! He's done it. And the crowd would cheer. It was fantastic. Well, just, it was what it was, it was the good guy and the villain. And of course, it was showmanship, right from the word go. But they'd throw each other out of the ring and everything else. But it was always the good guy, he played good clean wrestling. When they'd tell him to let go, you know, he'd have to let go the hold because it was illegal, or something. The good guy immediately would release.

FELDMAN: Like Joe Palooka.

HUNTER: Yeah, but the bad guy, no, he's hang on and they'd have to, you know, pry him loose, with the referee pulling him away. And now he's let him go. So this was a very colorful part of radio broadcasting, too.

FELDMAN: One other thing about, the used to have amateur shows? At the theaters?

HUNTER: Yes. At the Park Theatre.

FELDMAN: Did they broadcast those?

HUNTER: Oh, yes. Doc Dwyer was one of the emcees. And they'd get the whole group up on stage and have a big audience and Doc Dwyer would introduce the contestants. And one by one, they'd put on their act and the crowd would applaud and so forth, a lot or a little, whatever they felt like, depending on the act. Doc Dwyer had one or two phrases to use over and over and over again. And especially with any young people, when they'd get through, he'd say, well that was little Johnny Jones. You done good, Johnny, you done good. And he'd use that phrase over and over again. You done good.

FELDMAN: Now was this instead of a movie?

HUNTER: Oh, yes, this was the Amateur Hour, I don't know if they ran movies before or afterwards but that was incidental. The big thing was the Amateur Hour.

FELDMAN: I see.

IVES: That was very popular show then. I remember a lot of people went and saw it.

HUNTER: Yes, it was. And amateur shows were popular because, again, radio coming along as it did it was a vehicle for people who thought they had talent, or did have talent, to get some exposure. So we used to run our [vanity?] shows at the studio. Time and time again we had amateur hours. And I can remember, they'd come in, and Norm Lambert would set up appointments for our auditions. They had to be auditioned on this particular type of show. They just couldn't come on and do their thing. They'd be auditioned and be selected and try to get some variety. And of course you have a factor built in there so that somebody comes along and they're there no earthly good, you could say well, you know, we have a full show this week and next week and we don't need any jugglers. Jugglers were never very good on the radio, of course. [Group laughs]

STUDENT: The singing juggler, perhaps. [More laughter]

HUNTER: Of course, they'd come from various towns. Well naturally, if somebody comes from a small town and it's known that they're going to be on the Amateur Hour, all their friends and neighbors would listen, so you'd build up all these areas where people were listening for their amateur performers. So it was very popular.

FELDMAN: Would there usually be maybe one or two people who would sing Hillbilly songs? During a night, say?

HUNTER: Yes, this is true. That's a very good point. Hillbilly music was very popular and Western so-called, which was a sort of an offshoot of it. And the two intermingle a little bit. Old-time fiddle playing amateurs, they'd stand up and play fiddle, you know, so you did get a lot of folk music, in a sense, on amateur hours. Because many of them, of course, were amateurs. They might play for a dance in their

neighborhood, but they weren't really professional, as such. Here was a chance to get on an amateur hour and be heard all over this part of the state of Maine. So this is, of course, was a quite an important factor and unfortunately all the all the names and the people who took part in this are long-since forgotten. Because there were hundreds of them. And they'd come and go. And some you hear about again. They'd come back, or they'd get a group together and show up as semi-professional sooner or later. Others, you'd never hear from again.

FELDMAN: Did they ever hope to get a spot on the program? The regular programming?

HUNTER: Yes, they did, and now and again we would get some talent this way. Once in a while, somebody would show up who would be pretty good and we keep in touch with them and they in touch with us. And they'd be used as a as a soloist with one of the studio orchestras, or maybe one of the local dance bands would want to hire them, this sort of thing. So they would have an opportunity to move along in their line of endeavor. And innumerable people did come into the studio, not only as amateurs, but we'd hear about them some way or another and get in touch with them, or they with us, and they'd come in and run off an audition. And we had girl vocalists and male vocalists who'd take part on a program that was sponsored by Maine Central, was one sponsor. Had a series of programs of various types, so you would get a lot of local involvement this way.

FELDMAN: You'll have to excuse me. I have to go to another class.

HUNTER: Well that's, the days do move on. Classes don't wait for students.

STUDENT: I would think a fiddle contest would be a natural for radio. Did that ever occur back then?

HUNTER: I think it did, No I don't believe so on our station. Maybe a part of amateur contests but I'm positive than they were old-time fiddler's contests, and that they were broadcast.

STUDENT: In Maine?

HUNTER: I think this was more like on a regional basis, possibly on Yankee Network or the Colonial Network. And this would bear looking into because I'm sure that this was done. I have a vague recollection of hearing about it.

STUDENT: Who was the Colonial Network?

HUNTER: That was an offshoot of Yankee Network. Many networks got big and decided to have a branch to cover certain areas that seem to be a little more specialized. And they would do it this way.

FELDMAN: You mean geographical areas, or areas of programs?

HUNTER: Areas of programs.

FELDMAN: Thank you.

HUNTER: I'm glad I had a chance to meet you this morning, and you're very welcome. If you think of any other questions, get in touch with Lisa, and maybe she can move them along. Sometimes I think after things are all over you think of things that we should have asked. Yeah.

FELDMAN: O.K. Bye.

HUNTER: Yeah, the networks are various areas of entertainment, I guess. Yankee Network was started and became a regular network, a New England network, and Yankee Network became involved in baseball. And then, as I recall it, baseball became quite popular. And I think Colonial Network was formed to do much of the sports broadcasting, where as Yankee Network stayed with entertainment and talks and so forth. Like the Marjorie Mills program that went on for so many years. Cooking, this sort of thing. So they would spit more or less, it was easier to handle that way, it didn't become so cumbersome.

STUDENT: So, to find something like that in your logs

HUNTER: Yes, you'll find Yankee Network and then later on, Colonial Network would show up. We also carried Mutual Network because Mutual had no outlet here, and we were a network station and they did business with us. So we had all those networks. And the same thing happened on a national scale with National Broadcasting Company. It grew so big that they had a Red and a Blue Network, and we carried both of those, Red and Blue.

STUDENT: I thought you had a class.

FELDMAN: Well, class is really over.

HUNTER: Incidentally, I was going to say, let you people do what you want. You probably have other things to do and I don't want to keep on talking...

FELDMAN: Well, did you have anything else... I see you have all these carefully prepared notes. Did you have anything else in here that you...

IVES: Well, what I was thinking was, would be a good thing to do...

STUDENT: Would anyone like a refill? Coffee, Mr. Hunter?

HUNTER: I guess not, thank you. I had some earlier and it stayed by me very well.

FELDMAN: Yeah, Mr. McKay's coffee does that.

IVES: When you, when you leave this morning, would you mind just leaving your notes with us so that we could enter them into the file with the tape and everything?

HUNTER: Yeah, that's a good idea. Why don't I do that?

IVES: Anything you missed talking about would be there on the notes.

HUNTER: Yeah might I ask that you copy these anyway you want, so what you want with them, but if you would return them to me, or get them back to me, or I could pick them up at some time, or whatever.

FELDMAN and IVES: Sure.

HUNTER: What I'm trying to do, and I did this a little bit, is to go through some of these things. Which is a ponderous task and pick up some of the information. And the more I go at it, the more I can pick up. And it's gonna take a bit of doing. This note on here that you'll see, and I won't have to go into it, because I'll leave it, that's a good suggestion. But I thought you would be interested in in this because I don't know how far afield folk music goes. And how far your studies and things carry. This you probably know about anyhow, in one form or another. I know, of course, you're interested and completely familiar with the Maine Stein Song, but I didn't happen to run across in some of my material the fact that in May of 1938, WLBZ originated a broadcast from the by the University of Maine band on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Maine Stein Song. And it was broadcast over the Columbia Broadcasting System, nationwide. Now this was quite a thing. I mean, in a sense, here was a song written right here in the state of Maine by who was it? Lincoln Colcord and Adelbert Sprague, and it was given, of course Rudy Vallee gave it a big shot in the arm, but here was an another chance to get quite a bit of exposure to it. It was the 25th anniversary which gave an occasion and it was broadcast coast-to-coast by the University of Maine band at that time. Whoever was in that band was on coast to coast.

IVES: Wow, that's really big time.

HUNTER: Well, it was. It was, and these things, I think, are kind of interesting, because they become forgotten and you know a network broadcast from the University going coast to coast is pretty big thing. You're looking at it from the other point of view, something in of the country somewhere in the Midwest or California might not be so shook up about this, but they'd be interested in the Maine Stein Song, of course, because it's so well known. But from this angle, well, it was a big venture. Another thing that happened, and I'll just touch on this, this is not in any if the notes. From time to time, some of the big sponsors used to like to make personal appearances by their groups that they were sponsoring. In this case I'll tell you about was the dance band. I think was Buddy Morrow and his dance band that was being sponsored coast-to-coast by Coca-Cola. And somewhere along the line, or course they broadcast from the studios ordinarily, but they decided to have sort of a road tour thing and they broadcast from various campuses and one of them was the University of Maine. So they came up here to the university and I presume it was in the gym. I'll show you what happens to memory. I was there but I presume that's where they would had to have it in. And this, of course, was all arranged ahead of time. And this was Mutual Network, by the way. They got in touch with us, we were a member station of Mutual at that time, among other networks. They told us they wanted to broadcast on a certain night Buddy Morrow's band. Could we do the preliminary work and so forth? And I was the station announcer involved, which meant simply that I opened and closed the broadcast coast-to-coast. Sort of a big deal, but of course they had their own announcer, who announced the numbers in the band and did the commercials. They set the whole thing up so the Buddy Morow dance band, sponsored by Coca-Cola, originated at the University of Maine on campus here back in the, I don't know, thirties, forties.

Somewhere, must have been the '40s, I guess. Somewhere in that era. So the University of Maine got national publicity now and again on various occasions through the station and through the networks with which we were affiliated.

IVES: Buddy Morrow, that was a big band.

HUNTER: Oh, yes. Buddy Morrow was a big band and very popular at that time. This was the era of the big bands, they were still going strong. They went strong for good many years and they really were fabulous. When you when you hear some of the arrangements, of course, today reproduction is so much improved you can't appreciate some of the earlier recordings as compared to modern reproduction. But they were so professional and so talented. And of course many of them went on and did get recorded to the best advantage of later years. Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, and the rest of them finally hung around long enough so that their bands got really good recording sessions in the modern vein. So you could appreciate it more. Well, you people have things to do.

IVES: Might be time for lunch.

FELDMAN: Thank you very much.

FOLKLIFE CENTER staff member: That is the end of the April 15, 1975, interview, class interview with Irving Hunter.

[transcript ends]

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Fogler Library Special Collections
5729 Raymond H. Fogler Library
Orono, ME 04469-5729
207.581.1686
um.library.spc @ maine.edu