

RADIO . . . "is of course a business. But for the most of us who are making it our life's work, it is much more than a great economic enterprise. We regard it likewise as a magnificent opportunity to help make people wiser and happier, whatever may be their station in life."

The words "magnificent opportunity" in this statement by William S. Paley, which was made during a talk in 1934 before the Federal Communications Commission, seem today like the perfect summary of their author. This opportunity is to be traced to September, 1928, when he became president of the Columbia Broadcasting System, then a network without a station of its own. The combination of prophetic vision and an enterprise which in anyone else would be called daring has enriched a career in a pioneer field that is scarcely less than unique.

Today Columbia is the world's largest single network with 113 stations from coast to coast linked to its New York key station. Its record of achievement runs parallel with Mr. Paley's life of crowded, progressive activity and of quick intellectual ripening. But, about the origin of that life:

Paley was born in Chicago September 28, 1901 and grew into a youth of average interests whom other North Shore youngsters knew they could depend on to bat out a few good ones on their sand-lot baseball diamonds.

He attended Chicago's public grammar schools and then went to the Western Military Academy in Alton, Ill., from which he was graduated in 1918. He served as a lieutenant brevet in the Illinois National Guard and that fall matriculated into the University of Chicago.

His father, Samuel, was president of the Congress Cigar Co., makers of La Palinas, and during summer vacations young William joined him. One year the junior Paley was sent to Cuba to study the foreign tobacco market.

At such a vacation time in 1919 he went to Philadelphia with his father to open a branch factory. Just as the plant was got under way Samuel Paley was called back to Chicago by his father's death. William was left behind, dramatically placed in full charge of a new tobacco factory.

That was his first real business experience. It thrust upon him a sudden and weighty responsibility relatively not unlike those into which he was deliberately to plunge himself in later years.

Paley then entered the Wharton School of Finance of the University of Pennsylvania. There he distinguished himself in school activities by managing the swimming team, and in his studies by earning the Bachelor of Science Degree in Economics with which he was graduated in 1922.

He returned to his father's business as production and advertising director. As advertising director he sponsored a radio program for his product, which gave him an opportunity to study the infant broadcasting industry and foresee its tremendous possibilities. When he learned that the interest of Jerome Louchheim, a family friend, in the Columbia Broadcasting System was for sale, the new career of William S. Paley was assured.

A PERSPECTIVE OF WILLIAM S. PALEY



WILLIAM S. PALEY

President, Columbia Broadcasting System

His aims in buying it, however, amounted to what seem today like a paradox. He figured it as a job of reorganization that might take six months, after which it should be able to take care of itself. Twenty-one days later a different realization dawned on him.

"I was in radio about three weeks," he has said in reviewing the circumstances, "when I decided that that was my career. My imagination went wild over the possibilities of radio. But wild as it went, it didn't go wild enough to keep up with the realities."

Columbia under its new president began with two studios in Steinway Hall, offices in the Paramount Building, and a network of twelve leased stations. There was no key station until three months later, in December, 1928, when Mr. Paley purchased WABC from Alfred Grebe, the radio set manufacturer. The development of Columbia since then to a nationwide network of 113 stations is a separate story.

The intervening years have spelled for Paley a story of courageous ventures and startling innovations as he has watched for his "magnificent opportunities . . . to help make people wiser and happier." By far not the least of these was the revolutionary statement of new Columbia policy effected July 30, 1935. By this he reduced to a maximum of 10 percent of the broadcasting period sponsors' commercial announcements on programs after 6 P. M., and to

a maximum of 15 percent during day time sponsored programs.

The second of three points in this pronouncement set a new standard in children's programs by prohibiting certain types of treatments unhealthful to juvenile minds and engaging a child psychologist, aided by an advisory board of qualified experts, to interpret this policy. The final point banished from Columbia all programs advertising products for the relief of human ailments not considered acceptable topics in social groups.

PIONEER IN ARTS

▣ Paley has been a radio pioneer in the arts by maintaining as a sustaining program the Sunday afternoon concerts of the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra, taking two good hours out of sale for the purpose in the early days of radio when the popular appetite for such fine things was a doubtful quantity. For eight years he has maintained these broadcasts and the public response is classic proof of mass capacity for good things as well as trivial ones.

Paley took another noteworthy step in the realm of fine music when Columbia endowed a group of prominent contemporary composers to write especially for radio.

A dozen young men have been seeking new forms in the art of dramatics in the Columbia Workshop, and for eight years millions of chil-

ren have been finding history brought to life through the new artistic forms of Columbia's School of the Air.

In January, 1938, Paley named Lyman Bryson, professor of education at Teachers College, Columbia University, chairman of the Adult Education Board which now has three separate weekly evening programs in process, embodying a new concept of learning for men and women through the medium of radio.

Personally, Paley has a gift for working and an equal skill in making others work and enjoy it. His ability to drop things with amazing speed, however, gives him also the gift for playing. He likes travel, motoring, cameras, the theater, motion pictures music, and any number of novelties which appeal to him today and are abandoned tomorrow.

He has the executive's share of nervous energy and a knowledge of how to control it. Sometimes he is a farsighted planner; now and then he follows a hunch. When it turns out wrong, as many do, he is the first to realize it. His average, however, weighs heavy on the successful side.

He is an inexhaustible listener, even to things he knows all about. Because he likes to get the complete view of another man he will allow him to talk himself out on a subject and often never reveals that he was well acquainted with it in the beginning. He is an unusually fast thinker and a genius at figures. His aptitude for detecting flaws at a glance in long columns of numerals is almost uncanny.

His youthful appearance sometimes embarrasses him. He has been addressed as "son" by important clients who asked to see his father. Once a former college classmate, spying him in a restaurant, robustly slapped his back and invited him to share his passes to a Columbia broadcast.

Particularly humiliating was his interview, back in those pioneer days, with a dairy executive whose account he sought. After a long discourse, elaborately detailed with diagrams on a luncheon tablecloth, the dairy chief blandly inquired which network Mr. Paley represented, the red or the blue.

His office, in Columbia's present headquarters at 485 Madison Avenue, which he rarely leaves before seven o'clock, reflects the hand of an interior decorator in its pine paneling, its fireplace, its well-placed, deep-cushioned furniture. The recesses in the wall at either side of the fireplace were meant to hold books but he has filled them with the microphones of the original stations of the network.

The Beekman Place house where he lives with Mrs. Paley is one of Manhattan's finer residences. Among his more simple pleasures is entertaining friends there, seeing carefully to it that they are shown the only tree in that street, which is in his back yard.

Theoretically, he clings to the established rules of good living: early hours and a balanced diet. In practice, as do all men, he follows his own code.

At least in one instance even his own regulation has been violated. He had planned to retire at 35. Then he changed the deadline to 40.

He doesn't talk about that any more.