



Shannon's Broadcast Classics

a look back at radio & TV's golden years

Albany's X-File AM Station

When a 1950s, high-powered, AM network affiliate in a major state capitol vanishes without a trace during amplitude modulation's heyday, it's really time to open our "Kilocycle X-File"! Witness the strange tale of WXXW 850, formerly of Albany,

New York. It's a story that would never had made these pages had not a thoughtful friend found what I believe to be one of the only surviving promotional documents from this doomed 10,000-watt operation.

"I think it said *WX-something*," Jennifer, my old college sorority sister remembered. We were on the phone enjoying one of our annual catch-up sessions when she told me about a faded brochure that she spotted while hunting for antiques with her husband in some quaint Massachusetts Berkshire Mountain curio shop. "Aren't you doing some writing for a radio magazine?" Jen asked, and then surprised me when that vintage flyer arrived in the mail a week later. Her note suggested that I might be able to come up with an article from it.

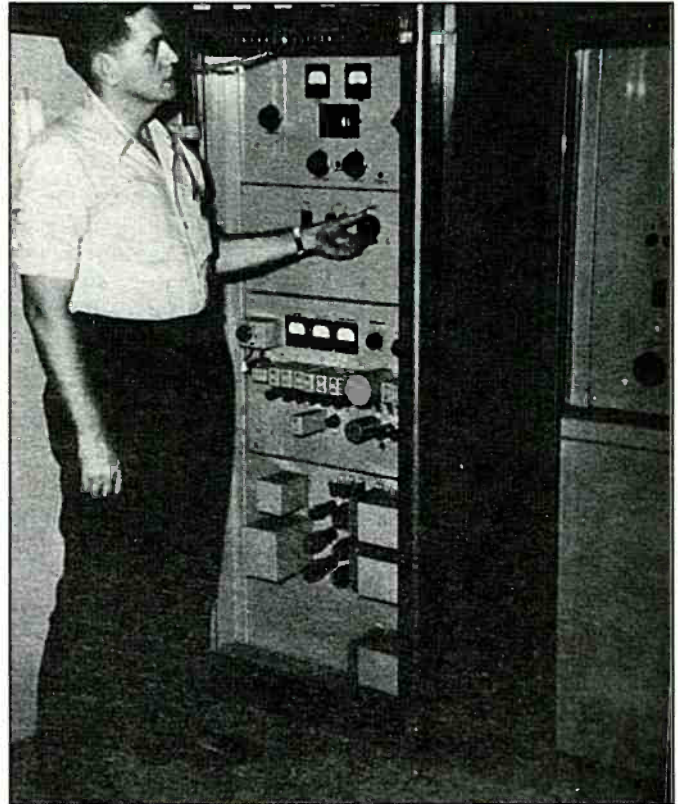
By the middle of my first glance through the 1948 booklet, I knew that the brief frustrating life of WXXW 850 should be chronicled. Actually, the brochure was very upbeat, even featuring a picture of an 'XKW engineer happily mowing the transmitter site's lawn. But any big station in New York's Capital District that only managed a five-year existence must have intrigue woven into its saga.

As a bonus to the WXXW 850 mystery are stories about an equally short-lived FM outlet and UHF-TV project, as well as a smaller, daytime-only successor that also seemed to be cursed with misfortune.

Going To The Historical Source

Our good friend Jan at *Broadcast Pro-File* dug into vintage FCC paperwork detailing WXXW's origins. He uncovered the station's construction permit dated April 28, 1947. It was assigned to the Champlain Valley Broadcasting Corporation and granted permission to build a 10-kW, directional daytimer on 850 kilocycles. At first, principal owner Stephen Rintoul requested the call letters WRWR for this new venture. His company already held a CP for WRWR-FM (95.5 megacycles), also licensed to Albany.

Two days after the Commission's grant, an *Albany Times-Union* piece appeared, entitled *FCC Permits New Station for City*. Readers learned that in 1946, Champlain Valley Broadcasting (highly confident of receiving an FCC go-ahead)



An Albany newspaper reported that WXXW's frequency modulation outlet, WRWR-FM, was to be built in the Helderberg mountains "near the GE television transmitter." This shot of engineer Bill Spratt, though, doesn't indicate where he's adjusting the WRWR-FM transmitter. Nor does the original caption confirm Broadcasting Yearbook listings that WRWR-FM (later dubbed WXXW-FM) generated 9 kW on 95.5 megacycles. Reportedly, parts of this GE, serrasoid-modulated FM unit were donated to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute when RPI installed an FM station on campus in the early 1950s.

had made the \$18,000 purchase of the Steven Miller Farm in Selkirk, New York, some 10 miles south of Albany. There, "a large brick farmhouse [was slated] to be used for the engineers' quarters [and] a smaller house [would] be used for generator equipment." The famed Blaw-Knox tower company was said to be sending a crew to the farm with plans to begin erecting a line of six "sticks" for the new facility's antenna array during early May of 1947. ABC Network officials readied the paperwork for an affiliation agreement with the soon-to-be-unveiled big AM.

Also bubbling behind the scenes was a Modification of CP application seeking FCC permission to convert the daytime-