

The College Component

{ Jeff Stein (2004). Making Waves: The People and Places of Iowa Broadcasting. WDG Publishing. p. 11. }

While many ventured into operating radio stations as a way to promote business, much early experimentation in the field occurred in the physics and engineering departments of the state's major public universities. The State University of Iowa (now the University of Iowa) and Iowa State College (now Iowa State University) had the first licensed radio stations in Iowa. WSUI in Iowa City and WOI in Ames had begun experimental broadcasts and claim their origins pre-date World War I.

In 1911, an Iowa State College physics professor, "Dad" Hoffman, set up an experimental transmission line stretching from the campus water tower to Engineering Hall and asked for money from the college to establish a wireless telegraph station; the first transmission from campus in Morse code occurred a year later.

All amateur radio stations were shut down during World War I, but once the government approved transmissions again in 1919, the experiments quickly resumed.

The first "wireless telegraph" station in Iowa officially licensed by the federal government was owned by what was then known as the State University of Iowa. Given the call letters 9YA, the station was approved in the fall of 1919. The station operated with a voice transmitter built by a student, Carl Menzer. Menzer would manage the station, which would



WSUI founder Carl Menzer

become WSUI, his entire professional career, until his retirement in 1968.

On November 21, 1921, Iowa State College became the first station in America to be licensed by the federal government as an educational radio station, and was given the call letters 9YI. The first non-code broadcast originating from 9YI occurred on that day, when an hour of concert music was presented. Then on April 28, 1922, the FCC granted the station a license with the call letters WOI, and the first regular voice transmission was broadcast.

Soon after, on June 26, 1922, Iowa's first radio station, 9YA, was

granted a license with the new call letters WHAA. The station would assume its familiar call letters of WSUI (for State University of Iowa) in 1925.

WSUI can claim a number of "firsts"—it was the first educational station on the air west of the Mississippi River (although it held a "general" station license), the first radio station to broadcast live from a university classroom, and the first station in the country to offer a radio-only course for university credit. A Burlington man, Clifford Lideen, was bedridden but continued his studies via the radio courses. In

June of 1925, he became the first person to complete his college degree through radio instruction. WSUI's "radio courses" lasted for only three years, due to other commitments by faculty members, but the station continued broadcasting lectures from classrooms on a regular basis.

Even before WSUI's predecessor, 9YA, was on the air, the University of Iowa conducted a course on radio theory and electricity transmitted solely by code sent through the air, which Carl Menzer listened to as a high school student in 1917 from the wireless receiver he built at his home.

The station also presented a series of programs entitled "Radio Aids for High Schools," designed to help secondary schools in their work, as well as the "Iowa School for the Air," a program designed for elementary students which allowed college students the ability to act as part of the programs.

"Radio was such a startling thing at the time. People looked for ways to use it and many people were indifferent to it, including many people in government who never thought it would catch on," said University of Iowa researcher Von Pitman, Jr., who has written about the early days of broadcasting at the university. "But it was the dreamers and visionaries and tinkerers in the best American tradition who made this into something, and colleges provided a home for it."

Many years later, in 1959, the