Radio at Saint John's University: Antennas to Long-Playing Legacies

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RADIO AT SAINT JOHN’S UNIVERSITY:
Antennas to Long-Playing Legacies

Bonnie Finn | Fine Arts Librarian
College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University
Saint Joseph and Collegeville, MN
ARSC Annual Conference
Friday, May 17, 2024
Land Acknowledgement

Both the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University occupy the original homelands of the Dakhóta and Anishinaabe peoples. We honor, respect, and acknowledge the Indigenous peoples forcibly removed from this territory, whose connection remains today. St. Benedict’s Monastery and St. John’s Abbey previously operated boarding schools for Native children. Now, students, faculty, and staff are working to repair relationships with our Native Nation neighbors.

CSB+SJU Indigenous Student Association
• 2 institutions (each has about 1375 students), jointly share curriculum, IT, and library services
• 2 campuses, 5 miles apart (bus shuttles students)
• 2 main libraries – 1 on each campus, plus a music library in the Arts Center @ CSB
EARLY INNOVATIONS

Antennas and Radio
Beginning with interest in “wireless telegraphy,” in the early 1900s, CSB+SJU has been a place of innovation utilizing new technologies. Early influencers include monks from the Order of Saint Benedict:

- Fr. Hilary Doerfler, physics instructor
- Fr. Peter Engel, physics instructor, abbot
- Fr. Colman Barry, SJU president

According to Gary Eichten, “The Benedictines had this tradition of going into the broader community and taking the word to the people. Fr. Colman decided a great way to literally and figuratively spread the Gospel is to have a radio station.”
Father Peter Engel, OSB
- Abbott from 1894-1921
- Scientist, fascinated by wireless telegraphy

1914
- During Christmas break, Fr. Hilary Doerfler, a physics instructor, purchased a wireless apparatus
After Fr. Engel erected the 80-foot radio tower (red) next to campus science building, it did not work
- Erected 2nd tower on the science hall (yellow)
- Headquarters for the wireless department in room on the first floor

1915 Dec 18
- First message went out announcing SJU basketball victory over Melrose

1917
- Radio operation ordered closed down by the war department when US entered WWI
  - Saint John’s was heavily German
  - Anti-German opinions after a German sub sank the Lusitania
1922 November 30
- High winds took the tower down
- Replaced with a larger tower, which was removed in 1938
1923
- Father Hilary, OSB organized and moderated a radio club which communicated with stations throughout the US and Canada
  - Equipped with a radio-phone in order to send both code and verbal messages
- 1st concert came from Schenectady, NY
  - So loud listeners could hear 50 feet from the phone
  - Vocal messages could be sent 500 miles
  - Listened to concerts, lectures, and news reports
- “Radio Notes” was a regular feature in The Record (student newspaper) during these early years
- Minutes of College Radio Club skip from 1928 to 1948 without missing a page
- Radio Club appears to disband until its 1948 return focused on ham radio as Station W-Zero-OEZ
1925
- Under direction of Fr. Hilary, WFBJ Radio Station broadcasted from science hall
- Radio station with two transmitters installed on the first floor.
- Radio WFBJ one of the pioneer stations in the Upper Midwest
- Minnesota received W call signs from 1912 until January 1923, when a boundary shift to the Mississippi River transferred it to K territory.
- WFBJ weekly broadcasts included sacred concerts, band programs, orchestra concerts, lectures, and games, often a lecture prefaced with an instrumental number
- 1928 technical details: wave length was 272.6, which corresponded to 1100 kilocycles.
- 1928 October 4: *The Record* column “Ether Etchings” stated that the radio apparatus had broken but would be rebuilt
- Mention of WFBJ disappears from *The Record* after Feb 21, 1929 when it stated the repairs needed were waiting on a part.
The Years of SJU Radio Alternatives

- 1939 December 7
  - SJU began broadcasting weekly series, “Johnnies on the Air” on KFAM in St. Cloud
    - KFAM donated ¼ hour of free time each week
  - Sometime shortly before 1950, broadcasts moved to KASM Albany
- 1951 September
  - Moved to station WJON St. Cloud
  - “St. John’s on the Air” expanded to a weekly ½ hour program
    - broadcast of life and activities at SJU
- 1952 November
  - New sound-proof studio complete
  - Added 2 recorded classical music programs with student announcers
  - Still aired programming on WJON
- 1953 September 25
  - The Radio Workshop 4th year opening broadcast of “St. John’s on the Air” featured Father Colman Barry, OSB speaking on his forthcoming book about the history of Saint John’s.
  - Fr. Colman commented on wide variety of programs given by “St. John’s on the Air” over the past 3 years, beginning in the fall of 1950
  - Fr. Colman features prominently in continuing radio at SJU

Father Cuthbert and chief engineer Floyd Gilien peer through the glass window of the control room of the new radio studio as announcer Tom LaValle emotes into the mike. The Record 1952 December 12.
1954 September 24
- Radio Workshop auditions held
  - 40 candidates attended tryouts
  - 10-man staff developed the year’s workshops
  - 35 weekly programs consisted of dramatics, music, and convocation talks over WJON
- Out of this group came skeleton staff to operate Station KSJU, St. John’s local broadcasting center in Mary Hall

1954 December 6
- KSJU began operation
  - Frequency 1000 kilocycles
  - Operated 4pm-5:30pm and added Sunday morning broadcast
  - Built by Fr. Casper Keogh
    - Operated on 25 watts
    - Located in the quarters of the Radio Workshop
    - Closed-circuit station
      - Only broadcasted on SJU’s campus
  - KSJU provided practical experience opportunities to the new radio speech class taught by Fr. Cuthbert Soukup, OSB.
- WJON weekly programs will continue as well

1957 December
- KSJU added a radio console, additional broadcasts for news, and new staff members
- Received regular shipments of 45rpm and LPs
- No antenna, only heard on radios plugged directly into wall sockets
- Frequency 660 kilocycles

1958 September
- Installed a satellite radio transmitter to extend coverage to St. Ben’s
- Added teletype and line running to St. Ben’s

1958 November
- 1st station in Minnesota to add stereophonic sound
  - only available at SJU
  - 2 radios – one tuned to KSJU radio 660, the other to 1610
  - Radios placed 4-6 feet apart to obtain proper contrast between speakers
KSJU Growth

- 1960 Feb
  - Record library contained 83 LP classicals and 80 LP regulars in stereo
- 1961 December
  - Record library exceeded 2000 LPS of nearly all types of music
  - Added complete coverage of Johnnie football and basketball games
  - Complete coverage of SJU and CSB on 2 channels – 660 and 870 – KSJU Stereo Radio
- 1962 November
  - 9th year grew to an 83-hour week
  - Featured popular, jazz, and classical music
  - KSJU moderated by Fr. Daniel Durken, OSB
  - Gar Mulrooney, manager; Mike Obler, assistant manager; Bill Kling, chief engineer; Paul Hamann, sales manager; Dick Jessen and Mick Markson, program directors
  - 28 other staff members
- 1964
  - Bill Kling, acting manager and chief engineer
  - 38 staff members
  - Kling states there were about 2400 stereo albums
    - Largest collection in Stearns County
    - Added an FM receiver to receive Twin City FM stations
    - World’s only AM stereo station

John Anderson, classics director looks on as Dave Ploumen, ad man, explains the accounts to acting manager and chief engineer Bill Kling, in the station’s new office in the basement of the auditorium. The Record 1964 March 20

Foreign students John Cheung and Dominic Chow discuss the problems of Chinese refugees in their home city of Hong Kong with Dr. Ron Hornig in preparation for KSJU’s “International Corner.” The Record 1962 November 16
KSJU Goes CoEd

- 1965
  - CSB students (Bennies) DeeJay at KSJU
    - 5 junior Bennies organized inclusion of women in the operation of KSJU
    - Staff members from CSB wrote Bennie news, copy for ads, served as deejays and engineers
  - 11th year - continued growth
    - Programming in jazz, pops, classics (did not program rock and roll)
    - Added equipment to be a stronger AM station
      - School of Nursing in St. Cloud as new listening audience
    - Staff doubled in 4 years

The voice of Terry Moudry is one of the increasing number of feminine voices heard over KSJU. The Torch 1965 November 5

Cahil and Murray, Emcees...KSJU: Service with a smile. The Torch 1965 February 5
KSJU changes

- 1975
  - 22nd year
  - Began looking at broadcasting FM
- 1977
  - KSJU finally operating FM educational station 89.1 MHz
  - Delivered quality signal within a 20-mile radius
    - Potential audience of almost 60,000 people
- 1978-1985
  - KSJU broadcasted at 96.5 FM
- 1985
  - STAR 96 (KKSR) from St. Cloud came on air at 96.7 FM
    - Broadcast at higher wattage and blocked KSJU signal
- 1990
  - Access to KSJU only by cable connection hooked to radio and tuned to 99.9 FM or Ch. 6
- 1992
  - Added fiberoptic line to CSB
  - Tried to apply for FCC licenses to become a public station again
    - Cost was prohibitive, paperwork extensive
    - Did not receive
KJNB

- 1993
  - To acknowledge the participation of CSB in the radio production, KSJU changed its call sign to KJNB
- 1997
  - Online streaming format through Real Audio
- 2000
  - Moved to Guild Hall basement
  - Could also be heard on Ch 6 through cable
- 2003
  - 19 executive members and over 30 DJs
  - Played range of music from alternative and rock to old-school hip-hop and reggae
- 2005
  - Began airing on the web in addition to Ch 6
- 2008
  - Combined resources with The Record student news for streamlined online services
- 2014
  - Streamed Johnnie sports live
    - Initiative headed by former SJU President Michael Hemesath

KJNB is dedicated to the roots of college radio. That is, we take pride in playing all music worth merit. We don’t confine our range to one musical format or to a few sounds played over and over. The popular sounds of tomorrow are played on KJNB today. We have the flexibility to experiment with new bands and new sounds; we take risks that commercial radio would never take. KJNB promotes the knowledgeable consumption of music. This is a standard we try to live up to each and every broadcast day. Speak. Listen. Get involved. KJNB is looking for DJays – stop by the station (basement, Mary Hall) and pick up an application. In the meantime, stay tuned to the Channel 6 announcements for what goes on and all that matters on KJNB. Listen. All the time.
Student Media at CSB and SJU: KJNB to Johnnie Bennie Media

- 2015
  - KJNB was called Johnnie Bennie Radio
    - Provided an alternative for promoting students in CSB+SJU community
  - Podcasts had become more popular and went live on the radio.
  - Still located in Guild Hall basement
  - Johnnie Bennie Media became a student organization
    - Advanced audio (such as radio, podcasts, music), campus news, video production.
    - Located in Colman Barry Creativity Center

ASHLEY GROEBNER • agroebner@csbsju.edu
Molly Kleuver and Tom Hawkins host “Off the Record” on Mondays at 5 p.m.
Colman Barry Creativity Center

- 2017
- Opened in the Learning Commons attached to Alcuin Library

- Colman Barry Creativity Center
  - Kling Media Lab
  - Armstrong Video Studio
  - Interest in new technologies at CSB+SJU still evolving

Armstrong Video Studio

Recording chamber

Kling Media Lab
KSJR-FM
KSJN-FM

Origins at SJU
KSJR-FM Beginnings

- Fr. Colman Barry '42, SOT '47, OSB
- Offered to pay for Bill Kling’s '64 grad school if he came back to SJU to start a radio station – he agreed!
- On-air broadcasting started January 27, 1967
- Began as 40,000 watt, but after a few months moved to 150,000 watts, with a gift from Dr. Wenner.
- Brought classical music, lectures, jazz, poetry, live broadcasts of SJU football to a 70-mile radius
- Music came from transcriptions of concerts around the country and a library of LPs that grew rapidly.

- Original staff: Bill Kling '64, manager; Gary Eichten '69, announcer (started as sophomore); Dan Rieder, engineer; Tom Kigin '70, monthly program guide (started as freshman); Michael Obler '64, program production director

- Kling stated it was a success despite “intermittent on-air time because of static electricity in the studio carpet and gophers gnawing through the power line to the distant transmitter, but little audience and little financial support.” (Kling, SJ at150)
- Financial support was an on-going challenge in the early years
Wimmer Hall (1901)
Home of KSJR-FM Radio

- Named for Abbot Boniface Wimmer, OSB (1809-1887)
- Designed by Charles R. Aldrich (1866-1939) of Minneapolis
- Originally designed to serve as SJU library
  - Alcuin Library completed in 1966 and left Wimmer Hall
- Fall 1966
  - Wimmer Hall third-floor reconstructed as a radio station
  - Included a good-sized soundproof studio for live music broadcasts
KSJR-FM/KSJN-FM Early Years

- 1968
  - Saint John's applied for KSJN-FM
    - 3,400-watt station in New Brighton
- 1969
  - Fr. Colman, Fr. Gordon Tavis, Abbot Baldwin gave assets to a community corporation
    - First named Saint John's University Broadcasting, Inc.
    - Changed to Minnesota Educational Radio (MER)
- 1971
  - MER was one of 27 founding members of National Public Radio (NPR), which first aired in 1971.
- 1975
  - Evolved into Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) January 1, 1975
    - Gradual transfer of headquarters and operations to Saint Paul was beginning by 1974
    - Music was last to move – Collegeville record library had grown to 30,000 LPs
    - In Saint Paul, the collection continued to grow and size almost doubled

1967: Fr. Colman Barry '42, SOT '47, OSB and station manager Bill Kling '64

Gary Eichten '69 reads news off the United Press International ticker at the KSJR studio in Collegeville. Eichten began working for MPR on April 1, 1967, during his sophomore year at Saint John's.
Fr. Colman Barry

- Fr. Colman Barry '42, SOT '47, OSB
  - MA Fordham University '49
  - Doctorate Catholic University of America '51
- 1956: St. Cloud Junior Chamber of Commerce named him outstanding young man of the St. Cloud area
- Saint John's University president from 1964-1971
- Persuaded monastic community to fund the KSJR-FM project
- Legacy includes creation of MPR, Hill Manuscript and Museum Library (HMML), and Jay Phillips Center for Jewish-Christian Learning (now Interfaith Learning)
- Passed away in 1994
- 1995 Colman J. Barry Award began

1967: President Fr. Colman J. Barry and Bill Kling examine an early program guide from KSJR-FM

Bill Kling

- Bill Kling '64, SJU; Boston University '66
- “KSJR shouldn't have succeeded, but it did because neither Colman nor I understood that it shouldn't have.”
- Founder and president of MPR until retirement in 2011
- Designed studio complex in Wimmer Hall
- Bill Kling helped found National Public Radio
  - Served on first Board of Directors
  - Kling also created American Public Radio (APR 1983) (worked with BBC),
    - National public radio network serving over 900 public radio stations
    - Broke off to become PRX and PRI
      - PRX and PRI merged in 2018
    - Became APM
- Numerous awards including
  - Edward R. Murrow Award (1981)
  - Colman J. Barry Award (2007)
  - One of 204 people elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2014)

Bill Kling '64 works the phones from his Collegeville office during MPR’s early years.
KSJR-FM/KSJN-FM
Quick Mentions

- **Gary Eichten ’67**
  - Worked as a news director, special events producer, station manager
  - Host of MPR's "Midday" program.
  - Retired in 2012 after 45 years

- **Tom Kigin ’70**
  - As a freshman, he began working at MPR before it went on air
  - Became network's executive vice-president, chief administrative officer and general counsel

- **Michael Barone became 1st music director**
  - Fr. Hilary Thimmish and Michael Barone did a half-hour prime time poetry and music program for a few months in 1969.
  - Host and senior executive of Pipedreams, distributed by American Public Media

- **Garrison Keillor, morning disc jockey/classical music announcer**
  - Known for “A Prairie Home Companion”

- **Mark Zdechlik ’87**
  - Covered MPR health care and state government for the last three decades
1968
- Twin Cities station began construction of transmitter for KSJN-FM
1970s
- Needed greater exposure and funding
- Music brought back and forth between SJU and Saint Paul
- Fr. Colman saw that MPR needed to be independent
  - Saint John’s gave up two-years of operating expenses, the studio, and the investment in Kling’s education, although they were later repaid the start-up expenses
1980
- MPR’s Saint Paul headquarters opened
1983
- MPR also formed the basis for American Public Radio (APR), which in 1994 became known as Public Radio International (PRI).
2004
- MPR left PRI and formed American Public Media (APM), of which Bill Kling was president.
1995:
- With conversion to digital audio, MPR donated 20,000 LP records to CSB and SJU
- Donation ranged from sacred music and operas to traditional Bahamian folksongs.
- Over 5,000 jazz albums came from the Ray Marklund Archive
  - Supported the Leigh Kamman show, *Jazz Image*
- Donation included MPR card catalog
  - Consisting of 93 linear feet of boxed index cards.
LPS at CSB+SJU today

- 20,000 albums tucked into cabinets throughout the Benedicta Arts Center at CSB in Saint Joseph, Minnesota.
  - One room of shelves contains opera recordings, possibly more than 500.
  - Another locker opens to reveal 230 Soviet LPs, with recordings by orchestras such as the USSR Symphony Orchestra and the Moscow Philharmonic
- Over 5,000 jazz albums in BAC Music Library include a recording of the 1965 Moscow Jazz Festival.
CSB+SJU and MPR Relationships
Gary Eichten began 50-year MPR career at KSJR in 1967 as SJU sophomore

- His legacy continues with the Gary Eichten Fellowship, originally a paid, 10-week summer internship program for CSB+SJU students
  - Students learned the basics of news writing, reporting and production work with goal to write and produce material for MPR newscasts.
- Now open to general public and called MPR internships

Mark Zdechlik ’87 began his three-decade reporting career with MPR while still an undergraduate at Saint John’s.

Gary Eichten ’69 explains the functions of the control board in the KSJR-FM studio to former Eichten Fellowship interns Michael Swearingen ’17 (center) and Jake Schultz ’15.

Still Involved

- Although it is impossible to list everyone and their involvement, other MPR personnel remain involved as well, such as Michael Barone, who spoke at the dedication and blessing of the Saint John’s Abbey organ expansion in 2021.

- 2013
  - Hosted by the McCarthy Center, Gary Eichten ‘69, spent a week at CSB+SJU as the sixth annual scholar-in-residence
  - In addition to other activities that week, several students were able to meet with him for informational interviews

- 2016-17
  - Kristi Booth and Gary Osberg from MPR have mentored KJNB general manager Nick Kazeierczak, meeting with him several times during his tenure at KJNB.
A century of radio!

SJU Abbey Church


THANK YOU!

QUESTIONS?

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