

My Memories of 2CA by Ruth Roffe (nee Mason)

I was interviewed and hired by AJ Ryan (Jack) in December 1941 as an office assistant. At the time I lived at Crawford Street, Queanbeyan. I was fifteen years old. I remained in this position until October 1943. Almost immediately after joining the radio station AJ joined the air force and left 2CA which was taken over by Macquarie Broadcasters (2GB) Ltd Sydney. (No doubt the station was sold to the firm but I have no idea of these details.) 2CA then became *Canberra Broadcasters Ltd*. Two gents came regularly from Sydney. They were Messrs AJ Stone and (Clive) CO Ogilvy.

George Barlin, he had worked for AJ Ryan as a lad at his Kingston Shop in the thirties, was made assistant manager. Sydney office sent a Miss Peg Chiswick (about twenty years of age) to be his secretary and tutor for the business side.

Actual broadcasting hours were limited on account of it being war time. There was a Breakfast Session, a mid morning session till about one or two pm, then recommenced about five pm till close - but not past - to midnight.

Announcers:

Alan Light mainly did the breakfast show. He was a singer of some note in the Canberra area. Others were John Stevens and Des Benjamin (from Sydney), Len Mauger (a local family) left 2CA to join the air force and now has a high position in Melbourne in the TV industry. Jean Senger (lived locally) did the morning and Women's session. After Jean a Miss Gloria Van Boss came from Sydney. She boarded opposite 2CA at the Hotel Civic. Phil Furley, a well known entertainer, was the Sales Representative. He travelled the area for advertising business and at week ends did announcing. His wife Peg was employed as a copy writer. Phil Furley later went to the Newcastle area and was often heard on radio conducting Old Time dances. His place was taken by a Mr Barry McDonald and wife. Marie Gibson was also office staff. She was a local.

Technicians:

Head Technician, Tom Beazley (lived in the flat on the second floor of the 2CA building), Eric Taylor and the third I can't recall his name.

Transmitter:

This was situated on the left side of the road going to Yass - almost opposite the 2CY transmitter - a few miles from Civic. The transmitter was set a fair way from the front fence as I recall - a small rectangular building with vines on a trellis along the front. There was also transmitting equipment in the 2CA building in a room next to the broadcasting studio.

Following is an extract from a copy of *The Canberra Times* article (10.12.1984) on AJ Ryan.

Canberra's first radio station began broadcasting on November 14, 1931. Ryan operated the station from his Kingston electrical shop for two years before moving to a larger site between

My Memories of 2CA by Ruth Roffe (nee Mason)

Canberra & Queanbeyan.¹ He held controlling interest in the station until 1937 when it was bought by Denison Estates, part of the Meyer empire of Sir High Denison which later became Macquarie Broadcasting...

[Ryan spoke then continued with information about the setting up of the station and] He then turned his attention to acquiring equipment and it turned up in the most unlikely places. Radio masts came from the Royal Military College, Duntroon, a two-kilowatt, 5,000-volt transformer was bought from the former Department of Interior 'for a song' and steel cable was salvaged from a rain making balloon experiment.

The Institute of Anatomy even chipped in with a large glass jar to hold a handmade variable condenser after Ryan had broken two during a trip from Melbourne. 'In desperation' he said, 'they took a body or something out of one of their jars and lent it to me until my third jar successfully arrived unbroken.'

As far as programming was concerned the station 'grabbed everything local it was possible to get, musically, topically and to an extent - politically. We did quite a few shows from the Albert Hall, the aerodrome whenever there happened to be a pageant - and there were quite a few - Hotel Canberra and elsewhere,' Ryan recalled... The Melbourne Cup was another feature which was unethically acquired. 'I used to go out a few miles into the bush away from all interference,' Ryan said. There he would pick up an appropriate station, dial our number at 2CA, leave the receiver off and clip the output of the set across the telephone line which of course we picked up at the other end and put over the air. 'No noise, no interference... A lot of stuff I'm spilling now I suppose could put me in jail but as I have passed the eighty mark they wouldn't have me for long...'

But in those pre-war radio days, Ryan said 'There were virtually no laws or regulations to be observed, there were very little things with which we had to comply such as modern radio stations have to and our job was to concentrate on making as good a technical outfit as we could...

2

¹ Molonglo near the Reservoir. This area today is called Fyshwick.

² The 2CA building was at Civic near the site where the Civic Theatre was built. It was in the Art Deco style.