Radio & Television Excerpts

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Valley radio began in 1922 when KWWG Brownsville went on the air. By 1927 it was under the control of the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce.

Organized on 3/18/27, KHMC begins broadcasting in Harlingen on 10/14/27. The call letters come from the Harlingen Music Company from whose backroom the broadcasts emanate. Dick Niles is its manager. With its 100 watt signal it can even be picked up 40 miles away in McAllen.

1/11/29 KRGV builds a three-room frame studio atop the Baxter Building. When it starts broadcasting from it on 2/22 it has five times (500 watts) the power it had when it commenced at 100 watts as KHMC. M.S. (Dick) Niles is president/manager while Judge H.L. Chapman is vice president of the “Valley Voice”, 1260 kilocycles.

1931 Robert W. Baxter is president of the Rio Grande National Life Insurance Co. organized in 1928 and has renamed his 9-story Baxter building to that company's name. The radio station KRGV, "the Valley Voice", is located in the top floor of the building, with its roof top garden, and has two antennae to transmit signals from its spacious studio. M.S. "Dick" Niles is president and general manager of the station. C.J. Niemann is secretary-treasurer, George Parker vice-president in charge of mechanical operations, Warren Reitz is musical director, and Mrs. Ernest Wright is staff pianist. Jack Negley, an ex-vaudevillian, is studio director and announcer. A KRGV survey of 108 Harlingen homes visited reveals 57 radios owned or 52% of those surveyed.

It is this year that the Harlingen Star becomes the Valley Morning Star. The Valley Morning Star's plant and office is located at 118 North A Street, a site later occupied by Luby's New England Cafeteria. A small photographer's studio stands between the VMS and Junkin's Furniture to the north. The VMS is owned by the March-Fentress Group but in 1933 is sold to McHenry Tichenor, who came to the Valley from Oklahoma. Tichenor, who came to the Valley in 1930, served as an administrator for the VBH and was a member of the Elks and Rotary. It was his purchase of a radio station here from Judge Hofheinz of Houston that sent him on the road to becoming a multi-millionaire. Several years later Hubert Hudson, father of the 1930s state senator from the area, purchases the VMS along with the Brownsville Herald and McAllen Monitor. Tichenor is said to have paid $50,000 for the VMS and sold it five years later for $125,000. Soon after Hudson builds a new newspaper plant at 213 South 2nd Street and installs an efficient rotary press to supersede the flatbed one.

9/33 After the 1933 Hurricane destroys the rooftop Baxter Building studios of KRGV, "Kum to the Rio Grande Valley", the Weslaco Chamber of Commerce entices the radio station to move to that city where it did so in 1934 and upped its power to 1000 watts. In 1934 Moulton "Ty" Cobb, former newspaper man wins the KRGV talent contest with an imitation of Will Rogers. He then goes on to a career at this station and becomes one of the most recognized and successful radio personalities in the Valley.
1941 KGBS (later KGBT) radio owned by the Harbenito Broadcasting Co. opens with a 250 watt signal and a staff of eleven. By April 1960 McHenry Tichenor is president of the corporation; J. C. Looney of Edinburg, who became a stockholder in 1953, is vice president; while Troy McDaniel, who joined the organization in 1942 is secretary-treasurer and general manager of the station. In January 1944 it will become an affiliate of the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) and also have ties with ABC.

1950 KGBS becomes KGBT. Popular belief is that McHenry Tichenor gives its call sign the initials of his wife, Genevieve Beryl Smith. GBS however is also George B. Storer, founder of Storer Communications which got its start when this chain service station owner purchased his first station in Toledo, Ohio. After selling the local station he wanted to retain the call sign, so KGBS was exchanged for the call sign of a Storer station in San Diego. KGBT becomes a 50,000 watt radio station and the first with full time Spanish language programming after a series of transactions. In 1953 it expands with the acquisition of radio station KSOX in Harlingen. On 1530 kHz, this first 50,000 watt station in the Valley was originally constructed by former Harris County Judge and Houston Mayor, Roy Hofheinz. McHenry Tichenor, whose original radio station KGBS was on 1240 kHz, purchased KSOX from Hofheinz and moved into the studios and offices at 1519 West Harrison and used the frequency 1530 kHz. A different KSOX was later to start up in Raymondville. Its call letters were later returned to the FCC. In 1957 a new TV studio was added to the radio building by chief engineer Alfred R. Beck of the station. He was succeeded by Jim R. Mattison who was then chief engineer from 1964 until March 1979.

Johnny Goodman came to the Valley in June 1952 to help launch KSOX. He had been working in the Houston station owned by Judge Roy Hofheinz. When KSOX closed Johnny went to work for KGBS.

10/53 KGBT sends out its first television signals. Since 1958 its studios are on West Harrison and the number of employees has risen to 55. In the 1990s it builds a new enlarged facility on Expressway 83 just east of Bass Blvd. By this time it has been sold to the Liberty Corp., a company headquartered in Greenville, SC and which, by 2004, owns 15 television stations. KGBT will service the Harlingen-Brownsville-McAllen area utilizing 88 employees by 2004.

In 1959 Darrell Davis goes to work at KRGV as a news announcer, then years later will anchor the TV news. He left radio to attend law school but in 1969 returned to the media, practicing law by day and broadcasting in the evening.

In July 1965 Fausto Yturria Jr. represents Southwest CATV. On 8/5/65 San Benito calls a franchise election for Southwest CATV, Inc. This is despite objections from McHenry Tichenor, president of Valley Microwave, Inc. It holds an inactive franchise for the city.

In February 1968 staff reporters for KGBT-TV cause legal and public relations problems for manager Mel Kasanoff when they show how easy it is to purchase marijuana in Brownsville and do so.

4/29/68 Jerrold Electronics Corporation, based in Philadelphia, announces plans to operate cable TV across the Valley. It has had a system in McAllen since 1966.
The C of C establishes a Harlingen Historical Hall of Fame to recognize distinguished Harlingenites. McHenry Tichenor is one of the 20 individuals honored.

Leo Garza and two associates incorporate a company which will eventually become KMBH-60, the local PBS affiliate. Garza came to the Valley in 1969 from the San Antonio area. He served as executive director for charities with the Catholic Diocese of Brownsville. As an activist he would become involved with and help to evolve Su Clinica Familia in Cameron and Willacy counties, the Hidalgo County Health Care Corp., Amigos Unidos Credit Union, and the Amigos Unidos Development Corp. By 2004 Mr. Garza and his wife Carmen own the Jackson Street Antiques and operate an estate auction service business. He also acts as marketing director at Camelot Retirement Village.

McHenry Taylor Tichenor, Sr., son of McHenry Tichenor, moves Tichenor Media System in buying spree of radio stations and changes their format to Spanish language. McHenry Tichenor Sr. is one of three individuals eulogizing Lon C. Hill, Jr. at the funeral service.

The Catholic Diocese of Brownsville founds RGV Educational Broadcasting, Inc., a non-profit corporation. It purchases the debt-ridden PBS affiliate station KEDV Channel 60 located at North New Hampshire, Harlingen. It assumes the same channel number—60—which the San Benito-based KZLN-TV once occupied. This station with monetary and management problems left the air in mid-July 1983 after a May 1982 start. The Diocese had supported it with $500,000. The Diocese has pledged $1.2 million of the $1.3 million promised the new station and committed to the $200,000 annual operating expenses. Heritage Cablevision's general manager, Neil Haman, indicates that the cable system would carry any local public station as required by law. With the new call letters KMBH-TV, its broadcast facility will debut in October 1985. PBS programming has been lacking in the area since mid-July 1983. In 1991 it is to expand into KMBH-FM 88.9 to serve the lower Valley and a year later KHID-FM to serve the Upper Valley. The non-profit institution is funded primarily by grant monies, secondly by public membership and underwriters, and thirdly, in a small amount, by government funding. By 2004 it has 2,000 contributing members but could use greater community support, namely in the range of 8,000 contributors.

Tichenor Media System merges with Heftel Broadcasting Corp. and by 1999 changes name to Hispanic Broadcasting Corp. (HBC). In 2004 HBC merged with Univision Communications. McHenry Tichenor, who was born 12/21/97 in Morganfield, KY, is to die at age 98 just before 10/25/96. Starting with one radio station in 1940, he grew the company to 20 stations at the time of his death. Here he founded KGBT AM, KELT FM, and KGBT-TV 4. This Baptist left his son Mac as his heir. McHenry (Mac) Taylor Tichenor Sr., while born in Boulder, CO, grew up in Harlingen. He received a BBA degree from UT and after serving in the Navy during the Korean conflict returned there to earn a law degree. He would marry in 1954 and have four sons with his first wife and another son with his second wife. In 1956 he worked at various capacities for KGBT. In 1967 at the age of 35, he would become president of Tichenor Media System and oversee its great expansion including its growth to a 38-station Hispanic group. In
his latter years he was involved in quiet philanthropy. Dying in Round Rock, TX at age 76 on 1/3/09 he was brought home to rest in the Mont Meta Memorial Park, San Benito. His five sons with numerous grandchildren survived him as well as a devoted companion.

A 2003 KMBH brochure proclaims that the TV station reaches up to 1.2 million viewers and its radio 88FM KMBH and KHID 350,000 listeners. By 2009 the PBS affiliate is receiving up to $700,000 in annual grants to operate its TV and radio productions. In 2008 KGBT-TV Channel 4 faces declining ad revenues. It unceremoniously terminates reporter Jamie Reyes and the long-running, knowledgeable, and very popular weatherman, Larry James. In early 2009 10 staffers are let go along with weatherman Romeo Cantu.

A later addition to the Harlingen TV scene was KLUJ-TV 44. Its parent is Community Education TV Inc. of Houston. It broadcasts religious programming, much being produced by its affiliate, the Trinity Broadcasting Network of San Diego, CA.