

Radio's Archives Preserved Online

David Gleason's website *americanradiohistory.com* preserves long-forgotten historical gems

BY **KEN DEUTSCH**

Say you want to find out what year WJZ(AM), the forerunner of WABC(AM) in New York, went on the air. Simply go to the FCC archives online and do a search, right? Just one problem: The FCC well might not have what you want.

Instead, try visiting a free, public site called *www.americanradiohistory.com*, which is created and maintained by radio fan David Gleason.

There you'll find back issues of well-known publications like *Broadcasting* magazine and "The Broadcasting Yearbook," as well as less familiar titles like *Sponsor*, *Television/Radio Age*, *Radio Daily* and many others.

Also to be found are obscure technical publications featuring equipment that hasn't been in use since the potted palm era, and even station ratings not just from Arbitron but from the all-but-forgotten Pulse and Hooper. Near-complete collections of the FM Atlas, White's Log, Radex and Vane Jones' Log are there.

This collection comprises a narrative of our industry that no one else has taken the time to preserve.

"I started out with a personal collection going back 10 or 15 years," said Gleason, who spent more than 50 of his 66 years in radio.

"I found that I was becoming a source of answers for people who could not find this material elsewhere. Then I decided that I would upload it all as copy-protected, non-printable PDFs so that anyone could have access, just like a library."

Gleason scans all the material himself and makes most of his documents searchable. His archive now dates back to the 1920s.

"I bought some discontinued university library publications and got most of my *Broadcasting* magazines from an Air Force base in Alabama that was closing down its library. Since the word has spread, people just donate their collections and the more I put up there, the more I get offered."

BUSINESS MODEL, SCHMUSINESS MODEL

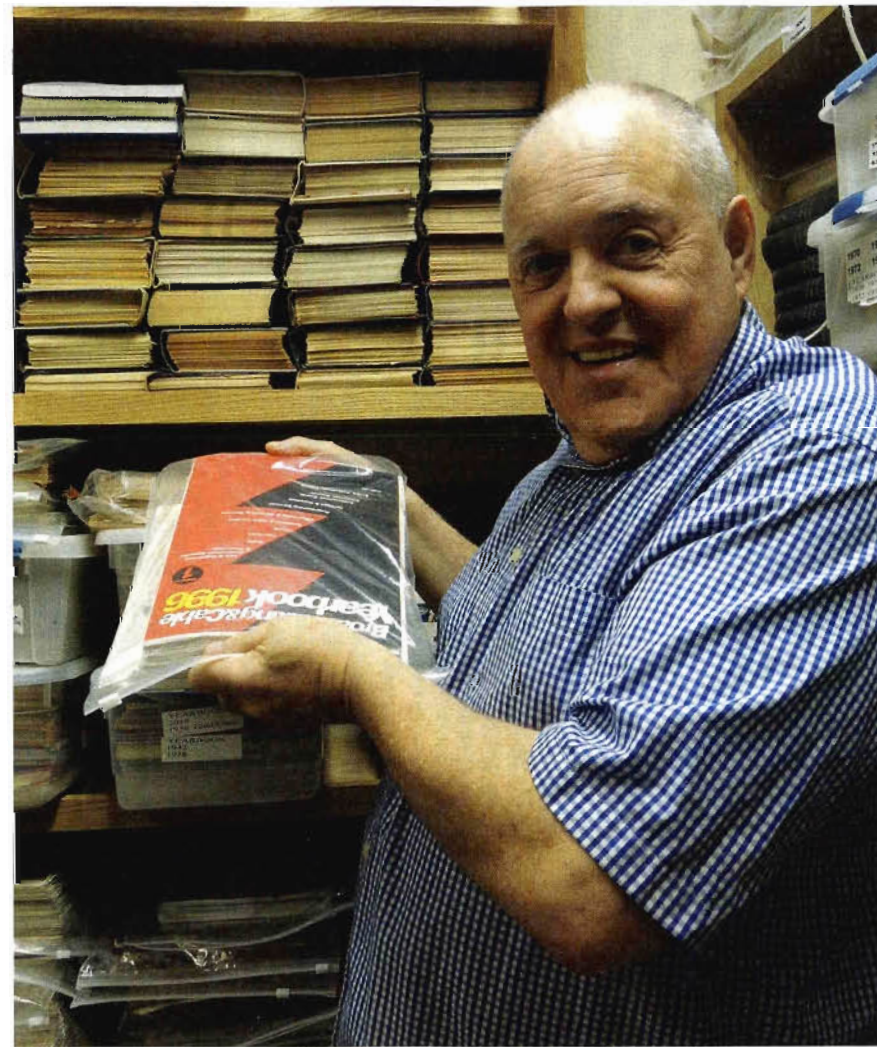
For Gleason, there's no plan for making money with this site.

"Today, not everyone can say radio is good to them," he said. "But it was good to me, and this is kind of a payback."

As public libraries routinely jettison hard copies of seldom-referenced material, many of these artifacts are being

consigned to landfills. Gleason became concerned that much of the history of radio was going to be lost forever.

"I have talked to people who sought information on the Fairness Doctrine, for example. They couldn't find much on the famous 'Red Lion' case of the '60s. By making what I have available, these people are able to research things like that," Gleason said. (Red Lion



Radio fan David Gleason stands in front of the *Broadcasting Magazine* section of his archive.

Broadcasting Co. vs. FCC was a case in which the FCC ruled in 1968 that the Fairness Doctrine enhanced the freedoms granted by the First Amendment. This ruling was repealed in 1987, meaning that broadcasters no longer had to provide both sides of an issue to maintain their licenses.)

There are now about 1 million pages on *americanradiohistory.com*, representing almost 189 GB of files. Not every publication is represented; there are permissions to consider, and not every company responds to his requests,

even when a given publication is no longer in business.

WHERE IT BEGAN

In the early 1950s, Gleason's favorite radio shows included "Jack Benny," "Fibber McGee and Molly" and "The Lone Ranger."

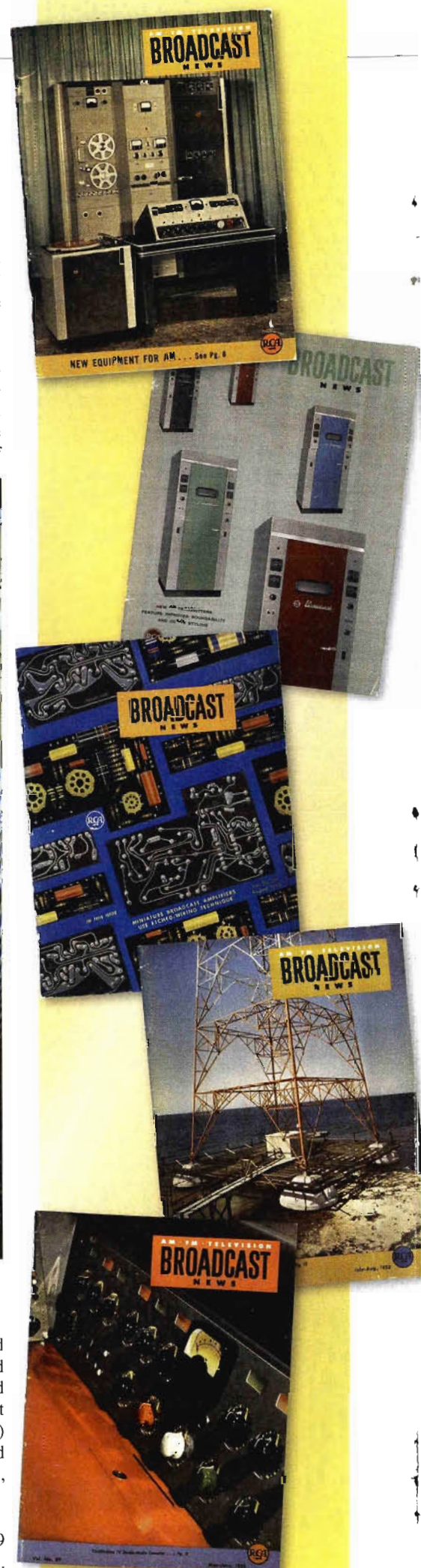
"It was back when we lived in Cleveland and our family had this humongous mahogany radio in the living room. My father was involved in investing and, with his guidance, one of my first holdings was a couple of

shares of Storer Broadcasting. I wanted to listen to every station they owned so I got into DXing. Then I started visiting stations, which led to my first radio job, at WJMO(AM)/WCUY(FM) in Cleveland, where I filed records and cleaned bathrooms. After a year of that, I started getting paid."

And what was he paid for?

"We had a personality around 1959 who liked to scream on the air," he said. "And every time he did it he knocked the transmitter off the air, so I'd turn it

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These RCA *Broadcast News* covers are examples of the archival treasures found in Gleason's collection, stored at *americanradiohistory.com*.