



The

# Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

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... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

## Broadcast History

### **Towers in the Sand**

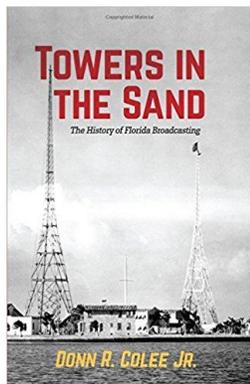
**Keeping Florida Informed and Entertained for over 90 years**

[September 2017] Here is a good book for your bookshelf. A look at how broadcasting grew and stays relevant in Florida.

Telling the history of broadcasting is a difficult task at best.

Do approach it from the standpoint of what was broadcast on the air – the personalities? Or do you merely recite the order stations came on the air? What about the social and technical issues that the early broadcasters faced?

From this vantage point of some 90 years later, relatively few remember – or even know – the names of the people that pioneered broadcasting in the country or the local market. Sadly, many stations have even lost their own history, as they were consolidated into larger groups over the past two decades.



It is a pleasure to report that, in overcoming these challenges, Florida broadcaster Donn R. Colee, Jr has produced a very readable account of Florida Broadcasting in his book “*Towers in the Sand.*”

#### **A VERY ENJOYABLE READ**

Collee, son of the WLOF, Orlando Station Manager, has deftly integrated the basic data facts of the pioneer stations, with the story

behind them – the people who built them and brought them to life – in a way that is quite readable and entertaining.

*Towers in the Sand* is organized chronologically, capturing the essence of the early broadcasters who bonded the stations to their communities, and their contribution to the social history of the state.

#### **WELL RESEARCHED**

A good deal of research is evident, both on the national and state-wide level, presenting a pretty accurate look at the growth of the broadcast industry while focusing on Florida itself.

And to ensure all readers follow the history, the author took care to explain various terms for non-broadcasters, giving them a little “look behind the curtains” of the industry.

Along the way, it is illuminating to read about factors that provided the impetus for the new broadcast stations. While the earliest stations were built to advertise land to Northerners looking for a warm sunny climate – and were instructed not to mention bad weather! – the growth of broadcast stations soon developed solid and needed weather reports that saved lives, especially during hurricane seasons.

Actually, it was especially interesting watching Hurricane Irma attack Florida while reading how Florida stations developed better and better ways to inform the public of the dangers and ways to survive hurricanes. Of course, the

stations had to figure out ways to survive themselves – many lost power in the storms and some lost towers as well.

Overall, from the radio only era to the television and now the Internet era, Florida broadcasters have been in the lead in developing systems to provide excellent and accurate weather reporting.

## **GROWING PAINS**

As in any industry, especially one part of the entertainment industry, a lot of egos were involved – some justified, some not.

Florida broadcasters have had to contend with pressures from local bureaucrats as well as the FCC more than once, dealing with changing political winds almost as dangerous to business as the hurricanes themselves. Some of the results changed FCC Rules to this day. The author carefully noted the various changes in regulation and presentation as they entered the story.

On the station front, there were good managers and some who nearly destroyed their station by stubbornly refusing to acknowledge the times. Florida also had its share of interesting stories of staffers who saw more clearly what was going on than some of the managers and owners.

For example, one of the first females to do sales got her job by not allowing her manager to fire her nor push her around. In fact, she essentially *fired her manager* by showing how valuable she was to the station.

Among staffers at stations who would become nationally known included learn-earn announcers like Red Barber. Bob Barker and Morey Amsterdam were others who got their start at Florida stations.

And the battles between hard charging news departments and bureaucratic incompetents were as keen as anywhere in the US. Elections, police corruption, even highway construction projects felt the spotlight of broadcast news investigators, changing outcomes.

## **TELEVISION TAKES OVER**

For most people, the growth of the television industry brought both visual looks at local news as well as the people who read the news. Especially from the early 1950s, TV seemed to push radio into the background.

For that reason, as the years passed (and the narrative in the book), TV took more attention from the public, so the book tends to follow, as well as spending more time on the larger cities and their stations. The key radio changes were mostly noted, but as one interviewee noted, the industry had changed over the decades.

A commonality, throughout the book, was the weather, especially tropical storm and hurricane reports that were so important to the state and its residents. The public service commitment is always in the mix of the history. Standing outside to report on storms is definitely a Florida thing!

All in all, *Towers in the Sand* is an enjoyable read, as well as a reference book for Florida broadcasting. - **BDR**

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*The book Towers in the Sand and an e-book version can be [purchased here](#) or the book's Facebook page: @towersinthesand. This way the majority of the money goes to the author.*

*A personally inscribed paperback is \$29.95 plus tax and \$5.00 shipping/handling; e-book is \$8.99. Email: [donn@towersinthesand.com](mailto:donn@towersinthesand.com)*

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