A HISTORY OF TELEPHONE TALK RADIO
IN WILMINGTON, DELAWARE:
1950 - 1983

BY
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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication.

August, 1983

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with total sincerity that I thank those individuals who were so kind to share their knowledge, time and experience with me. My special appreciation is extended to the staff of radio stations WILM and WDEL, and, in particular, the local ex-telephone talk moderators.

To Dr. Douglas Boyd I am particularly indebted, for through his guidance I became more aware of the precise meaning of the written word and more critical of my performance. However, his most important contribution to this work was his encouragement during a period of profound depression when I had destined this study to the farthest corners of the attic. His advice, humor and assistance brought me and these pages back to life.

To Jeannie Miles, my typist, who continually assured me she could complete this work on time, I extend my thanks for a job well done.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife for her encouragement and understanding during the five years that I have worked toward this degree. Without her these pages would be blank.

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ABSTRACT

In 1950, Wilmington radio station WILM offered its listeners a new program—"It's Your Nickle." This call-in telephone talk show was the first in the area, and among the few in the country at the time, which allowed listeners to call the station and have their comments reported over the air.

During the next three decades, Wilmington's two-way telephone talk programming changed, developed and matured. What in 1950 was a format which seemed to cater to controversy and entertainment is in 1983 more interested in addressing the issues and helping solve community problems.

This study provides an historical record of the telephone talk development in Wilmington, Delaware, at radio stations WILM and WDEL. In addition, substantial changes in the format—caused by political, social and economic factors, as well as the individual desires of the various moderators and station managers—during its 33-year local history are discussed and analyzed.
Initially, radio held its own against television. National advertisers were still dependent upon radio—mainly because of the limited number of television stations and the small number of sets in use—but national radio advertising declined, from $134 million in 1948 to $103 million in 1952. Television network advertising during the same period grew phenomenally, from $2.5 million in 1948 to $172 million in 1953.

In five years' time radio had fallen, from what was termed its "Golden Age," to a point where many of its technicians, managers, advertisers and stars had scrambled to the new medium, which was growing at a tremendous pace and needed experienced broadcasters and entertainers. Consequently, radio, the once-stable industry which depended heavily upon network programming, was hurt seriously by the collapse of radio drama.

The radio industry's eventual response to its predicament was adaptation. Instead of comedy, drama, the theater and sports—which had been a major portion of its programming—radio developed new formats or expanded others, which had been used less frequently in the past. Disc jockeys, top-forty programming, local public service broadcasts, informational features, easy listening shows, all-classical, all-country and all-news stations, and
telephone talk programs were but a few of the unique ideas which were aired in an attempt to recapture the radio audiences being seduced by the home screen.

As broadcasting scholar Sydney Head explains:

Radio, especially in its dominant form—network radio—had been based on the premise of being a family medium—a rounded program service aimed at a broad spectrum of audience interests and offering a little bit for everybody in the family circle. Television preempted this bland, mass-oriented role, driving radio out of the living room and into the kitchen, the bedroom, and the car. Radio became personal and mobile.

Through trial and error, radio emerged with a fresh new identity, or more correctly a series of identities which have been described as "formula" radio, that "... selected a well-defined target audience and programmed to please the audience exclusively."  

As previously noted, national radio advertising decreased, but local and regional advertising increased. In fact, overall radio industry advertising revenues actually rose—from $417 million in 1948 to $473 million in 1952—even as radio's "Golden Age" began to tarnish. Some of the reasons for this apparent contradiction are:

1. The increase in community-oriented shows,

2. The addition of regional and formula programming,
3. The governmental regulations freezing the increase in television outlets from 1948 to 1952,\(^7\) and

4. The drastic modifications in the size and increase in the versatility of the radio itself (clock radios, portables and table models).

With reductions in size and expansion of its purpose, radio was becoming a mobile, diverse and personal friend. Its role was changing dramatically.

Just as radio was frantically searching for a new way to attract attention, so too was a new style of music—rock and roll—seeking acceptance. In the early 1950s, popular music was largely divided into three groups: Pop, Rhythm and Blues, and Country and Western.\(^8\)

However, by the mid-1950s Elvis Presley, Bill Haley and the Comets, the Everly Brothers, and Buddy Holly were pulling a large, new teenage audience to radio. "When rock emerged in the middle of the 1950s," said historian Carl Belz, "it was accompanied by important changes in the style of radio programming and by a new relationship between the disc jockey and the music he played."\(^9\)

Rock and roll became intertwined among the D.J., the recording artist and the record company. And for teenage listeners the rock and radio connection has continued, in
varying degrees, into the '80s.

Adults, to a certain extent, surrendered their radios to the teens, for television provided many of the same dramatic and comedy programs which they had known on the radio. Also, the new medium even featured many of the same stars. But when the older audience decided to listen to the radio, and they did so more selectively, there was programming designed specifically for them—news, sports and even controversy, from telephone talk.

The Talk Radio Format

Telephone talk radio was one of the new formats which developed during radio's search for new and novel programming. Its procedure—allowing a host or moderator to accept incoming calls at a particular station and discuss the topic with the caller over the air—is one of the novel uses of radio. However, contemporary telephone talk programming is quite different from the way it was conducted in the "call-in" format's early days.

During the "first generation" of call-in telephone talk radio (approximately 1945 to 1960), the radio station's talk moderator would report or paraphrase the comments called in by the citizens to the listening audience. This was done to prevent callers' comments of a questionable or
distasteful nature from being aired by the station—which could ultimately be held responsible.

The "second generation" of telephone talk radio arrived sometime after 1960, when a tape delay system was developed which conveniently provided talk show hosts the ability to delete any obscenities or libelous comments from the airwaves. Thus, the caller's voice could be allowed over the air because technology, and the host's experience, enabled the moderator to control what was broadcast with relative ease. 11

For the purposes of this paper, the term "call-in" talk radio refers to that programming which only featured the voice of the host. "Two-way" talk radio will be used to discuss all talk programming utilizing the time delay, which aired the voices of both the caller and station moderator.

In addition to the technical distinctions of talk radio explained above, the programming is usually divided into three main categories:

1. Interviews with notable guests, where callers are able to join in the questioning;

2. Advice shows, where experts answer listeners' questions; and
3. Open-forum or wide ranging call-in shows, where listeners can talk about any topic.\textsuperscript{12}

The format, however, offers a number of disadvantages as well as advantages. Telephone talk radio:

1. Builds strong links to the community by providing a forum for local issues.

2. Allows the station to demonstrate its community public service commitment.

3. Caters to an adult audience.

4. Is an alternative format which stands out dramatically among music formats in crowded markets.

5. Attracts loyal listeners.\textsuperscript{13}

6. Posters individual and community involvement.\textsuperscript{14}

However, the telephone talk format also:

1. Is far more expensive and requires a larger staff than music programs.

2. Creates on-air controversy, which tends to scare away some potential sponsors.

3. Involves participants (callers), who are often untrained and tend to become boring.\textsuperscript{15}
4. Tends to cause difficulty in finding a talented talk host, as opposed to finding competent disc jockeys.

5. Sometimes allows a small number of callers to initiate a disproportionate number of calls to the program.\textsuperscript{16}

6. Can be dangerous. As one experienced Philadelphia talk moderator explained:

A talkmaster can, in a few seconds, undo years of patient image-building by the station management. By a flare of anger, or a lapse of memory, or a loss of nerve, or a sudden attack of bad judgement, a talkmaster can lose a vital sponsor, bring on a libel suit, and endanger or even lose a license. An owner or manager might well ask: 'Who needs it?'\textsuperscript{17}

But need it they must, for throughout the country station owners and programming directors have accepted talk as a popular alternative format and have recognized its ability to serve the community, reinforce a station's public service commitment before the Federal Communications Commission (which encourages community public service programming), boost ratings and deliver an audience to the advertisers. The ultimate goal of radio, like television and all other business, is to realize a profit.\textsuperscript{18} In the radio industry this is done by selling advertising time, based on the station's ratings, to interested sponsors; thus, the larger the audience, the higher the ratings and
If there was ever any doubt about telephone talk's ability to deliver an audience, the following should satisfy any questions. Arbitron figures in 1976 show talk radio stations throughout the country commanding top overall ratings in their respective markets with KABC (Los Angeles), first; KGO (San Francisco), second; KMOX (St. Louis), first; and WOR (New York City), second.

In 1978 the Bob Grant Program, broadcast every weekend over WOR, held a hefty 17.2 in the ratings. Further, Larry King, who started a five and one-half hour, early morning, syndicated telephone talk program in 1978 with 28 stations, grew to 130 outlets by 1979 and had over 250 participating stations over the Mutual Broadcasting Network by 1982. In addition, "When the CBS network hosted President Carter's first call-in show on March 5, 1977, more than nine million people tried to call (although only 42 got through). And in the polls, an overwhelming majority said they liked the show." The President's first call-in program was so successful that a similar talk show took place on October 14, 1979, this time produced by National Public Radio (NPR).

Although there is general agreement on the popularity of telephone talk radio, there is little concurrence about
the format's origin. Many stations throughout the country claim to have aired the "first-ever" telephone talk call-in program or been the originator of the format, but it is impossible to determine where or when the first call to an on-the-air radio program actually took place.\(^\text{24}\)

However, based on a special report on telephone talk radio in the June 1966 issue of *Broadcasting*, WILM--with its premier of "It's Your Nickle" talk program in 1950--certainly has the right to claim it was a "pioneer" station in this area. According to the article, the following stations reported to have been among the early users of telephone talk:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Station</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WOR</td>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>1946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KMOX</td>
<td>St. Louis</td>
<td>1956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNX</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>1958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KTLN</td>
<td>Denver</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>KCBS</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>1959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KABC</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEEI</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KLAC</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>1965(^\text{25})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WILM</td>
<td>Wilmington, DE</td>
<td>1950(^\text{26})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since its beginnings in the late 1940s and early 1950s, audience acceptance of talk radio and participation
in the format have continued to grow. By the mid-1960s, with the ability for time-delay and the numerous sophisticated electronic advances, "'talk radio' has ascended to a prominent position in U.S. broadcasting. As early as 1966, Broadcasting magazine estimated that over 80 percent of all standard (AM) radio stations included some form of talk format in their regular broadcast schedules."²⁷

Justification/Purpose

This paper records the origin, development and highlights of the telephone talk radio experience in Wilmington, Delaware--a pioneer telephone talk radio site--during a 33-year period, from 1950 to 1983. It is important to record Wilmington's telephone talk experience because:

1. Radio station WILM was one of the earliest stations to use the telephone talk format and has used it continuously.

2. The community reaction to telephone talk programming was enthusiastic and oftentimes explosive.

3. Competition among stations in the Wilmington radio market was affected by the talk format.

4. Wilmington's talk experience is an example of
what happened to the radio industry throughout the country in the wake of television's arrival.

5. Joe Pyne, WILM's most outspoken and famous host, used Wilmington as his training ground, and as a result of his popularity and talent went on to become a nationally-known TV and radio personality.

6. Since there has been a small number of studies conducted on telephone talk radio, this historical record will be available to those who desire to do further research on the telephone talk format.

In addition to the presentation of an historical record of Wilmington's telephone talk radio development, this study is specifically designed:

1. to show that Wilmington's residents became involved in and reacted to local telephone talk programming,

2. to examine the talk programming on radio stations WILM and WDEL, and to show how the different station philosophies and styles were reflected in the respective telephone talk programs, and

3. to study the style of the Wilmington's telephone talk show moderators—especially Joe Pyne—and see how these individuals influenced their contemporaries and
Only two Wilmington radio stations, WDEL (est. 1922) and WILM (est. 1928), have had talk radio programming on a consistent and long term basis. Therefore these are the only stations examined in this study. Only open forum or general discussion telephone talk programs are examined, as opposed to those dealing with specific topics like sports, real estate and gardening. In addition, many people have been identified—through newspaper accounts, interviews, station records and magazine articles—as having some connection with telephone talk radio in Delaware's largest city. These individuals include station managers, owners, technicians, sponsors and moderators from these two broadcasting outlets.

An effort has been made to include comments and information from only those sources which were determined to offer the greatest potential for providing valuable and useful material. However, in many instances, statistical data from past years have not been retained by the respective stations, also some files have been destroyed while others are not available for publication. The passing of time has had a detrimental effect upon the memories of many early talk moderators and death has silenced a number
of Wilmington's talk pioneers. Thus, a large portion of this study's research has been accomplished through interviews with those who have been, and in some cases still are, the prominent local personalities and decision-makers in the telephone talk radio field.

In any effort of this type, a line must be drawn between who or what is to be included and who or what is disregarded. An important consideration was accessibility. Of those persons who were connected with telephone talk programming and also remained in Delaware, the majority were contacted and their observations included in this study.

However, certain hosts of WDEL's "Voice of the People" were not included because the author was able to secure comments from other station employees which corroborated earlier testimony and made further investigation unnecessary.

In the case of WILM, which had a more moderator-oriented philosophy, the majority of living and accessible hosts were interviewed and their information was incorporated into this work.

Method

This study uses the historical narrative approach,
relying upon the definitions advanced by James Davidson and Mark Lytle in their book, *After The Fact--The Art Of Historical Detection.*

The period of study is examined in a chronological fashion. However, the body of facts is not merely presented, leaving the reader to his or her own conclusions. Instead, the information has been collected, examined, selected, analyzed and presented to show how certain historical events related to other incidents during the period being examined.

Vital to both the recording of history and its analysis is corroboration. Since individuals tend to see the past from their own perspective, it is necessary that the historian compare and verify written and oral findings. Finally, it is essential that those recording history make an effort to appreciate another's opinions and points of view, for only then will the attitudes and opinions of the time be included in the study and be appreciated by the reader.  

This historical narrative records the facts. But it also explains why certain events occurred, how these developments related to a specific period and what impact they have had.
Even though telephone talk radio has been a part of Delaware's broadcasting scene for over thirty years, there has been no systematic or in-depth effort to record the format's local beginnings and development. Scattered articles have appeared in the Wilmington newspapers about talk radio, but no thoroughly researched historical record of local talk radio is available. In addition, there has not been any extensive examination of the historical aspect of call-in or telephone talk radio on the national level.

More correctly, this section shows a lack, rather than a wealth, of literature about the historical aspects of talk radio. The periodicals and books examined have provided an overview and general background on the subject of telephone talk radio, rather than the historical facts necessary to record Wilmington's talk radio story.


There are numerous features on telephone talk radio
in general interest magazines. In June 1965, *Time* published an article entitled, "The Hot Hot-Line"; a 1969 feature in *Nation* discussed the cancellation of a Portland, Oregon, talk program because of monopolization by bigots; *New York* magazine, in May 1978, profiled Bob Grant, WOR's talk host; "Radio's Gabfest" was the title of a 1979 *Newsweek* article on telephone talk moderators; in October 1979, *Nation's Business* discussed the attraction of talk radio for both listeners and advertisers; in June 1981, *Esquire* examined the topics discussed on various talk programs; and *Today*, the Philadelphia Inquirer's Sunday magazine, featured a lengthy piece on Dominic Quinn--a Philadelphia moderator--and his regular callers.

Most of the articles in these periodicals profile a particular moderator or highlight unusual incidents associated with the shows. However, while none address the topic in a scholarly manner, their presence reinforces the popularity of the talk format. In addition, since many of the articles are moderator-oriented, they point out the importance of the program host.

*Sydney Head's Broadcasting in America* provides an ample volume of facts about the background of the radio industry, but devotes only two paragraphs to the specific subject of telephone talk programming.
Other books about radio advertising, broadcasting and programming likewise devote limited space to the topic of telephone talk. In Radio Programming in Action the comments of Dominic Quinn, a former WEEI (Boston) "talk jockey," are examined in a three-page profile. Similarly, all-talk station, KABC (Los Angeles), is the subject of a chapter in Modern Radio Station Practices. In Radio In The Television Age a four-page summary of the talk format is detailed and informative, pointing out both the positive and negative aspects of the programming, a brief outline of the format's history and some of the more spectacular uses of telephone talk.

Broadcasting magazine featured a thirty-page section about telephone talk radio in its June 27, 1966 issue. This in-depth feature spotlighted 18 stations, located throughout the country, which have added talk programs or switched to an all-news format which includes telephone talk programming. In most of the examples the format was shown to be working well, expensive to operate, more difficult to conduct than music programming, but according to the various station managers and officials, well worthwhile.

The central library of the News-Journal Papers contains files on the various Wilmington radio stations.
Included in these folders was information on local radio history and some feature articles about the Wilmington talk radio scene and its moderators. For the purposes of this study, which is primarily interested in recording the local events associated with the development of Wilmington's telephone talk programming, the local newspaper files were the greatest source of printed material on the subject.

Format

As the actual history of Wilmington's talk experience begins in Chapter II, it is fitting that a substantial amount of space be devoted to the "call-in" format's local originator, WILM's Joe Pyne, for whom the famous retort "go gargle with razor blades" is associated. He, more than any other telephone talk show personality who followed, left an impression on the local scene by using a style which has often been imitated but never equaled. As the reader will see, Pyne was one part showman, one part hustler and two parts genius, who perfected his brand of caustic entertainment, and succeeded in becoming a nationally-known interviewer/performer. The growth of talk and its acceptance and effect upon the community from 1950 to 1960 are also examined.

WDEL's commitment to talk radio--beginning in 1962 with its "Voice of the People" program--the station's
talk philosophy and its moderators are examined in Chapter III.

WILM and its talk programming after Joe Pyne are the subjects of Chapter IV. Although Pyne was gone, the stage had been set and WILM continued to inform and entertain its listeners through its telephone call-in programming. The moderators and the management are discussed, as is the future of talk on WILM.

Chapter V provides an analysis of the facts discovered in this study and presents the major similarities and differences of WILM and WDEL, as they pertain to telephone talk radio.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I


2 Ibid., p. 4

3 Ibid., p. 3-6


5 Ibid., p. 154.

6 Fornatale, p. 4.

7 Head, pp. 162-167.


9 Ibid., p. 45.

10 Until the late 1970s, telephone talk radio was the only way in which two-way communication was expressed through a mass electronic medium. However, new technology such as Qube, the interactive cable system in Columbus, Ohio, is becoming available to an increasing number of viewers and listeners.

11 In an interview with Roy Sullivan, ex-WILM employee and manager, held on July 29, 1982, he claimed that WILM had the technical ability to provide a tape delay system by using two tape records during the time that Pyne was broadcasting the "Nickle" program. But Pyne refused to
use it. However, widespread and convenient use of the tape delay system did not occur until the mid 1960s.

12 Fornatale, p. 82.

13 Ibid., p. 83.


15 Fornatale, p. 84.


17 Internal Philadelphia radio station memorandum about talk programming from an experienced host. The information was directed to the station owner. Since this document was provided without the author's consent, the anonymous donor recommends that names and station identification be deleted.


19 "What's all this talk about?" Broadcasting, September 27, 1976, p. 76.


22 Fornatale, p. 85.


24 During an interview conducted on July 29, 1982, with Roy
W. Sullivan, ex-employee of WILM radio, he recalled the earliest instance of call-in radio as 1945, when comedian Morey Amsterdam, while hosting a night club interview program on WOR in New York City, had a telephone brought to his table and invited listeners to call in their questions and comments.


26 Sullivan interview.


29 These features have often been written by ex-hosts who also happen to be journalists.


33 Heimel.


35 Tuthill.

36 Adam Smith, "What Are They Saying Out There?" Esquire, June 1981, pp. 31-33.

38 Head, pp. 148-149.


41 Fornatale, p. 82-85.

CHAPTER II

WILM'S JOE PYNE AND "IT'S YOUR NICKLE"

When native Wilmingtonians, over the age of 35, speak about telephone talk radio, there's a good chance that the name "Joe Pyne" is included in their conversation. Pyne was one of the national pioneers of call-in talk radio and many of his local fans still claim that he has been "imitated but never bettered."

This chapter of Wilmington's telephone talk radio history concentrates on Joe Pyne, a very colorful and controversial character and one of talk's pioneer hosts.

Joe Pyne

Joe Pyne, the subject of this chapter, was born in Chester, Pennsylvania on December 22, 1924 (according to the Chester Times) or December 23, 1925 (according to Pyne's obituary in the News-Journal Papers). His parents were of Irish, Catholic descent and his father earned his living as a bricklayer.

Some of Pyne's acquaintances referred to him as a
high-school dropout, but according to one published inter-
view he graduated from Chester High School in 1942. That
same year he enlisted in the U.S. Marines and served 35
months in the Pacific during World War II. During a beach
landing he was hurt when an explosion caused a log to fall
on his left leg. Pyne recalled that the leg was stiff for
five days. Four-and-a-half years later it showed up as
cancer.

After his discharge in 1945, the six-foot, blue-
eyed, brown-haired ex-Marine drove a cab in Chester at
night and went to dramatics school during the day. He
taught himself broadcasting by talking into record-making
machines at amusement parks—pretending he was a news
announcer. Later, Pyne mailed out cardboard demonstration
records trying to get into the broadcasting business.

His first radio job was in Lumberton, North Carolina,
where he made $25 a week and Pyne remembered being the town
oddity, because of his Northern accent. After a year he
returned to Chester where he worked for a year-and-a-half on
stations WPWA and WVCH. He then spent some time in Wiscon-
sin before going to WFPG in Atlantic City.

While Pyne had little formal education, he apparently
worked hard to better himself by reading extensively. Among
his favorite authors were Nietzsche, T.S. Eliot, Kipling,
Thomas Wolf and James Jones.

Pyne was married twice. He had two children by his first wife and a daughter by his second wife, Britt Pyne of Hollywood, California. He died of cancer in 1970.

**Wilmington in 1950**

Just as it is important to understand the background and personality of Joe Pyne, it is also necessary to be aware of the setting in which Pyne operated in the 1950s—that setting was the city of Wilmington.

Wilmington lies in the northernmost portion of the state of Delaware. It was, and is, Delaware's only metropolitan area of any appreciable size. According to U.S. Census Bureau statistics, the population within the city limits in 1950 was 109,907. (Not surprisingly, a number of factors including racial strife, worsening economic conditions and a growing suburban sprawl contributed to Wilmington's steady population decline—95,827 by 1960 and only 80,386 by 1970.)

Another item to be considered is Wilmington's location. It is literally in the shadow of Philadelphia, which lies only 28 miles to the north. The larger metropolis, across the Pennsylvania state line, attracts a large number of Wilmington's populace to its athletic events,
entertainment and shows, and Philadelphia's radio and television broadcasting also serves its Delaware audience.

In 1950 four radio stations were licensed to Wilmington: WDEL, WILM, WTUX and WAMS. By 1983, only one remained in the city limits-WILM-the rest broadcast from suburban locations and WTUX became WJBR.

In the early 1950s, television was not yet the absolute ruler of entertainment and radio still shared a good portion of the market along with ballrooms, restaurants, theaters and movie houses. In 1950 nearly 10 movie theaters operated within Wilmington's city limits; by 1983 none are open and many have been torn down. During this period of early television development, corner bars and restaurants were places which not only provided drinks and meals, but in addition served as havens from one's job, from problems at home, from aggravation and life's daily concerns. Television had not yet provided this service, as it appears to do today. In addition, bars and private social clubs were among the first to purchase televisions, in order to attract clientele who could not yet afford a set of their own.

Wilmington's population was similar to that of other eastern U.S. cities. A sizeable portion was black and a large number of first and second generation immigrant families from southern and eastern Europe-Italians, Poles,
Germans and Jews (from various countries)—lived in the thousands of row houses which extended from one end of the city to the other.

Most of these families arrived in the Delaware area in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, during the heaviest waves of immigration into the United States. Having little in the way of skills, most were ideally suited for the railroad, shipbuilding and leather-factory type jobs which made up much of Wilmington's industrial base. As in other larger cities, each ethnic group tended to reside in communities where they felt most comfortable and were able to preserve their language and traditions. Even into the 1980s certain areas of Wilmington are still identified with these different ethnic groups. 11

By 1950, many descendants of Delaware's earliest settlers—the English, Dutch and Swedes—had family histories in the area dating back nearly 200 years or more. Thus, they were already in established positions in farming, industry, education and business, as well as politics. And many families of Irish workmen, who began appearing in the area as early as 1790, were firmly established with the state's most famous employer, the du Pont Company. 12

Particular attention should be paid to this well-known family, for from the time that E.I. du Pont built his
powder mills on the banks of the Brandywine River in 1802, the du Pont family and its extensive business interests have had a profound effect upon Wilmington, in particular, as well as the entire State of Delaware.

Many visitors to the Wilmington area, especially the rolling hill country north and west of the city, are impressed by the palatial estates owned by the relatives and descendants of the du Pont family. Not without reason, this area is often referred to as "chateau country." 13

This chemical corporation giant placed its international headquarters in Wilmington's downtown business district, and many of its world-wide operations are carried on from plants and centers in the Delaware area which employ thousands of blue and white-collar workers.

As early as 1934, Fortune magazine came to Delaware to study the relationship between the state and its leading family. 14 This was probably brought on by such interesting facts as: du Pont family members owned the Delaware Trust Company and the Wilmington Trust Company (banks), both city newspapers, the city's finest hotel and its playhouse/theater. In addition, the du Ponts had endowed the area's hospitals, expanded the state college and the chemical giant's family members were active in politics and on the boards of directors of nearly every prominent institution.
and other major businesses in the state.\textsuperscript{15}

According to University of Delaware historian Carol Hoffecker, "The [\textit{Fortune}] magazine writers did conclude that, 'the logical social result of American capitalism--an aristocracy of great wealth--has been more clearly achieved in Wilmington than anywhere else in the U.S....' \textit{Fortune} found the juxtaposition of an industrial giant in a pigmy state strange, if not slightly immoral.\textsuperscript{16}

In later years other investigators would examine the du Pont-Delaware connection and proclaim that time had only slightly reduced the company's influence. "By 1971 when Nader's Raiders came to Delaware, the company employed 25,000 Delawareans, comprising 11 percent of the state's work force." In the introduction to \textit{The Company State}, Nader concluded that, "Du Pont dominates Delaware as does no single company in any other state."\textsuperscript{17}

In 1950, Wilmington had diverse ethnic groups, a low, middle and upper class social system, a central downtown business district, established theaters and radio stations, local daily newspapers, television programming, the YMCA, different religious denominations, the Red Cross, the Boy Scouts, two major political parties, a minor league baseball team, the annual United Fund drive and the Salvation Army red kettle bell-ringers. In these ways Wilmington,
Delaware, was a typical American city, just like hundreds of others throughout the country.

But Wilmington was also different. It was the home of a benevolent corporate industrial giant which controlled the town's newspaper and employed a substantial portion of the area's citizens. It exerted its control into banking, politics, education, industry, government and the print media.

On the other side was a large lower middle class black and ethnic population. Some were employed by the du Pont Company, but others worked for the railroad, at automobile assembly plants, or for trade unions and small businesses.

Many of these workers resented the giant. They were jealous of its family and its inherited wealth and they disliked having du Pont Company representatives and employees make decisions affecting public works, housing, education and politics. Since the company controlled the newspaper, there were limited outlets for citizens to voice their complaints. At least they were limited until 1950, and the arrival of Joe Pyne and "It's Your Nickle."

"It's Your Nickle"

The mike is open. My name's Joe Pyne, I
guess you know yours. This program is dedicated to the free exchange of ideas and to differences of opinion. I don't promise to have all the answers, but I do promise to talk about things that interest you.

Pyne's standard opening statement on "It's Your Nickle".

The beginning of Wilmington's call-in radio experience can be traced to Atlantic City, New Jersey. It was there that a few chance remarks in 1949 over WFPG radio served as a launching pad for Joe Pyne's move to WILM, his Wilmington and Hollywood success stories and his eventual national syndication.

In a 1959 interview, published in the Chester Times, Pyne described the earliest days of his radio call-in career. "I made a few remarks one night between records about the crooked politics in town. The manager ran in and said, 'Quit playing records, just talk.' I didn't play anymore."

According to Carl Jones, himself an ex-talk host on WILM radio and the station's sales manager since 1968, Pyne was among the first to use the telephone for call-in radio conversation, and in Atlantic City, about 1949, there was a lot of very controversial things happening. "In between playing records, Pyne would say, 'What do you think about so and so? or 'Let me know. Give me a call, we'll discuss it.'"
Jones remembered that this only lasted about four weeks "... then the politicians got hot on him and he got fired, or he was advised to leave town. Ewing Hawkins hired him to come to WILM to do a program which was not talk radio."^20

The late Ewing Hawkins, in 1949 owner and General Manager of WILM, decided to air a syndicated program called "Home Town America" over his station. Pyne was hired primarily as a part-time host on the new show. He would go to local supermarket sponsors, and interview shoppers, asking them questions about their purchases, awarding prizes and reporting these activities over the air.^21

Sally Hawkins, General Manager of WILM since 1972 and wife of Ewing Hawkins, worked with Pyne on "Home Town America." Part of her responsibility on the program was interviewing women shoppers and asking them what brands they purchased in the stores.

According to Mrs. Hawkins, Joe was "quite shy," and they argued over who was going to do the interviews. "I mean, he was as bad as I was," she said, smiling. "Joe didn't really enjoy doing that. His forte ... was rather as a catalyst, of commenting and throwing things around, of getting things started."^22

It has been impossible to find an exact date for the
start of the "It's Your Nickle" program. The best estimates of several call-in show colleagues place its beginning between late 1950 and early 1951. The title of the show refers to the "five cent" cost of a telephone call. Additionally, the phrase, "It's your nickle," was often used as a popular, but flippant, expression of greeting by the recipient of a call.

It was on this show, on weekday evenings from 10:30 P.M. to 12:30 A.M., that Joe Pyne began "getting things started" in Wilmington. Initially, the "Nickle" program was not a commerical success.

According to Carl Jones, it was a failure for the first 13 weeks. "The station was getting good reaction, but it was not a commercial success because no one would buy it--in other words, sponsor it." After the first few months one sponsor came in, and then another, and according to Jones, ". . . it [show] became sold out solidly, basically until Joe left." \(^{23}\)

In April 1959, Pyne was the subject of a four-part feature in his hometown newspaper, the Chester Times. In part one, the interviewer reported Pyne's income as a radio moderator in the 1950s at $42,500.\(^{24}\) Even by 1980 standards, that figure is quite high for Wilmington radio hosts. However, the amount gives a clue to the popularity of the "Nickle" program and Pyne's ability as a salesman.
Carl Jones was not surprised at the $42,500 figure because he recalled that a staff announcer made between $75-$100 a week during the 1950s, and Joe, working on "Home Town America," was getting $125 a week. Jones explained, that Pyne started doing the "Nickle" program and no one thought it was going to be successful, so he worked on a commission basis. "If it sold he got a certain amount, and if didn't sell he didn't get anything. And it started to sell and Joe made a great deal of money in this little town, more than any radio announcer's made before or since."25

According to Jones, the $42,500 figure was not unreasonable, because Pyne sold out the advertising spots on his two-hour evening talk program and had other sponsors waiting in line. So with the overflow, he switched them to his 4:00 to 6:00 P.M. afternoon record program until a commercial slot opened on his "It's Your Nickle" program. Pyne did all his ads himself, making them very personal and very attractive to the advertisers.

Sally Hawkins also felt that Pyne's earnings estimate was not totally unreasonable. "Let me say to you that I've heard that figure before and it sounds a hair high to me. But he worked on a percentage. Maybe that's why we never had anyone quite like him again, because I said it [percentage] was too high. I think it's very
possible that he made close to that."26

In the Chester Times piece, Pyne made a passing reference to his income while leaving a caustic remark to one of his favorite targets, the DuPont Company:

'I would go out of my way on something to needle the ancient and hallowed traditions of Wilmington. I said over the air that DuPont employees live by a creed which is summed up in these words: Early to bed and early to rise or you'll be reported by the company spies.'

Two months later, Joe said he was offered a job in the DuPont publicity department. 'I turned it down,' he laughed. 'Not enough money.'27

Call-In Radio Techniques

In 1950 telephone talk radio was conducted much differently than it is in 1983. At that time, only the voice of the moderator was heard and he was required to paraphrase the comments phoned in by the caller. Therefore, the audience heard only one voice (moderator's) giving two sides of an issue.

Pyne was very adept at this style of interviewing. Carl Jones, who also hosted call-in programs and had to paraphrase in the same manner, mentioned that one could become very experienced at this sort of conversational technique. The host could even give the inflection of the caller's voice and imitate it over the air--changing back to
the host's own voice to give his response.

Jones felt that it makes for a faster program "... because it's very difficult to be rude to someone (or cut them off) when they're on the air in two-way conversation and they drag and drag. If you're talking for them you can say, 'Don't be nervous. What do you really want to say?' And while you're talking for them over the air, they have a chance to think." 28

Years later, after Pyne went to California, Jones claimed that Pyne said he was uncomfortable doing shows where both sides of the conversation were heard. Pyne also felt such programs moved much slower and that a moderator could handle 40 percent more calls when the host had complete control.

Control, however, was never in doubt when an experienced host was in command of call-in radio. If the moderator didn't like a caller's attitude or what he or she was saying, it was simple to cut that individual off the program and the audience would never know what actually occurred.

Roy Sullivan, current Executive Director of Central Wilmington Business, Inc. and former WILM employee from 1956 to 1976, recalled that Pyne did a lot of editing of
the conversations and "... whether he was editing to our [audience] benefit or his, we were never quite sure."²⁹

Bob Cunningham, a WILM talk moderator in 1974 and 1975, mentioned that the worst problem facing any talk host was being on the air and having no telephone calls to answer. Cunningham recalled that on one evening, when he was a guest on the Pyne program, he realized how Joe solved this problem. "Joe was quite a showman and I really believe that some of the calls and conversations he was having were fictitious."³⁰

When the tape delay system came into use and the voices of both the host and caller were broadcast over the air, moderators would no longer have the opportunity, literally, to create controversy. Instead, the host would be subjected to public floundering over the airwaves, awaiting the incoming calls.

Pyne's Style

One of Pyne's closest Wilmington associates was Bill Frank. Frank, a local newspaperman for decades, was WILM's news director in 1947.

He and Pyne often worked together and some describe them as continuously involved in a love-hate relationship. In a Wilmington Morning News article following Pyne's death
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personal style of each moderator which makes his/her program unique.

Pyne's style was sarcastic. Frank reported that Pyne's "... sarcasm had the cutting effect of a Toledo rapier. It was this that won for him hundreds of thousands of listeners. They all liked to see someone else fall on that banana peel and they loved Joe because he could topple the best of his adversaries." 33

Carl Jones, who spent six years behind the call-in microphone in the 1960s, corroborated Frank's opinion of Pyne's distinctive style, explaining that Pyne would always try to throw people off balance by using gruff and snappy and insulting remarks. He was brash and punchy and always the aggressor, Jones recalled. "One of his key phrases was, 'Be careful when you go out hiking, if you pick up a rock you might find your mother under it.' Or he'd call people he didn't like, 'meatheads.'" 34

Bill Frank mentioned that one of Pyne's responses was, "Your mother is a female dog under the steps," or he'd call people "fishheads" or "meatheads." 35

But it seems that people loved to hear a battle and, as a result, Pyne had the listeners. Roy Sullivan mentioned that Harvey Smith, a former member of WDEL
radio's management, was reported to have said that in the mid to late 1950s, when Pyne was at the height of his popularity, he clearly had the majority of the area radio listening audience. This statement was reported to Mr. Smith in a subsequent interview with the author. Mr. Smith agreed that such was probably the case.

Harry Themal, an ex-WILM news director, a former host of "It's Your Nickle" and veteran associate editor of the News Journal Papers, remembered Pyne very clearly,

You wouldn't get a very unbiased viewpoint of Pyne from me. I hated his guts. He and I had screaming battles when I was news director. He didn't work for the news department--he worked independently. I thought his techniques were not very journalistic. I thought there were a lot of unsubstantiated things that he said. There was a lot of controversy for controversy's sake. . . . I thought that his techniques were not honest techniques. I thought they were listener's techniques, which could get people outraged at him and at the subject. I thought that did not represent either good journalism or good radio. So he would do things and I would just scream at him. He and I came close to fisticuffs several times.

But whether he was respected by his peers or not, Pyne had the audience. In addition, he had the tacit support of his employer, WILM's owner Ewing Hawkins. In person and in his articles on Pyne, Frank claims that Hawkins contended he had a difficult time keeping Pyne
restrained. But Frank and others feel that Hawkins also enjoyed the ratings. 38

"He [Hawkins] enjoyed the ratings," agreed Themal. "Ewing Hawkins liked the way Pyne was stirring people up, calling them 'meatheads' and 'cottonpickers' and... screaming at the listeners. And the listeners ate it up. They loved it!" 39

Sally Hawkins, Ewing's wife, recalled that her husband loved Pyne's antics, while she was at times "outraged" to have such an unbridled person on the air. But after ten years as WILM's General Manager, she could now view Pyne a bit differently,

I understand a great deal more today about the way my husband handled a lot of things... I don't think Joe would have gotten away with anything my husband thought was really going to produce a problem... But you'd never know it, and Joe probably never knew it. Everyone loved the excitement of Joe stirring everything up. He had a great sense of showmanship. 40

One of Pyne's most useful techniques, and one which would serve him well in later years, was his ability to handle controversial issues in an inflammatory manner--often sounding as if he had committed libel or slander. Carl Jones commented on Pyne's ability to enrage the audience but stay within legal bounds.
Joe had a knack for being able to ride a rail. He knew how far to stretch a rubber band before it broke. . . . You have to know how far to go before you're gonna blow it, and he had this knack. I think there were only two or three times in all that he did anything that we [station] were called up on anything, but we never lost a case.41

Public Incidents Related To Call-In Radio

In the 1950s, call-in radio was still in its infancy. Therefore, no one, not the listeners, not Hawkins, and not even Pyne could have been aware of the effects that certain topics discussed on the "Nickle" program would have on the community. As the broadcasting station's management and the listening audience were to learn, Pyne and "It's Your Nickle" had the capability of contributing to people making threats, committing acts of violence and initiating legal battles.

Bryant Bowles

On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court, in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, rendered a unanimous decision that separate educational facilities were unequal and declared that racial segregation in public education was unconstitutional. The Court went on to state that the various states' segregation statutes violated the guarantee of equal protection of the laws under the
Fourteenth Amendment. 42

Delaware was one of the states which was affected by the Supreme Court decision and, by the fall of 1954, was making plans to integrate its public schools. According to Roy Sullivan and Bill Frank, an ex-Marine named Bryant Bowles arrived in Milford, Delaware, a rural southern Delaware community, to rally the populace to oppose desegregation.

Pyne's discussion of what occurred, printed in the Chester Times story, is essentially the same as Sullivan's and Frank's interpretations of the events. A portion of Pyne's remarks follows:

'A few years back...a man [Bowles] came into Delaware for the National Association for the Advancement of White Peoples...He favored the KKK, white supremacy...organized rallies downstate and sold membership cards...

'I got tired of listening...called him America's most outstanding merchant of hate...called him a carpetbagger, trying to make money out of hate.

'One night he came to the show and started to bait me...I told him to come back tomorrow night and bring your mouth with you...he came back.

'The place was jammed...plain clothes dicks around...looked like Friday night shopping time...police outside...we began a three hour debate...made some kind of local history.

'Tension abounded...he called the President and the Supreme Court Communists...I went to work on him...I did everything but curse him out...he started on
the Jews. . .

'Afterwards, outside the crowd was controlled, but like an animal, just waiting, waiting...finally a young Negro of excellent reputation...smashed him [Bowles] in the mouth...'

'The police grabbed him [the Negro] and the next day he was fined $10. . .15 prominent businessmen jumped up and paid the fine...'

Three days later, Joe said, a crude homemade bomb was tossed inside his parked car blowing out the interior.

The next night, a bomb was thrown on the lawn of his home in Fairfax. A week later, four men waited for Joe after the program.

A friend got a gun from his car, a small automatic, and gave it to me. The four converged on me, I palmed the pistol. They said, "Mr. Pyne, we're going to take you for a ride." I said, "I don't mind going if I can take this with me," showing them the gun.

'A look of terror came on their faces and they jumped in their car and screeched off. I went home and got a shotgun and went looking for them'

Joe said he finally gave up trying to find them and waited all night on the front steps of his home, but they did not come back.

'Then, the city put a police escort on me for some time,' he laughed. 'From that time on, public sentiment turned against him [the segregationist], and he finally left the state.'

Frank's account of the Bowles affair credited Pyne's staunch anti-segregation stand and remembered that Bowles was an adequate match for Wilmington's master of insult. Frank also contends that Pyne made a mistake by having Bowles as a "live" guest, whose remarks could be heard over the air, rather than by Pyne repeating them.
As a result, Bowles opening statement to Pyne was, "Joe, why are you ashamed of your Negro blood?" According to Frank, Pyne's listening audience heard him falter for the first time—he was flustered. "He found himself on the defensive as he tried to explain he had no black ancestors. . . . For a while, Bowles had the master of insolence on the ropes."44

Eventually, Pyne recovered and after the first break in the program he tore Bowles apart.

Bingo and the State Attorney General

In 1955, all forms of lottery type gambling were illegal in Delaware. This restriction included bingo, which is and was, a well-known fund raising activity, often identified with those conducted by the Catholic Church.

In April 1955, State Attorney General Joseph Donald Craven directed police detectives to arrest individuals involved in an illegal bingo game at St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church. This occurred, according to the Wilmington Morning News, after Craven's office "... was advised by the assistant pastor of the church that the games were legal and he would welcome a test in the courts."45

Following is a summary of Joe Pyne's involvement in the aftermath of this incident, as described in an
interview with Roy Sullivan, who was working at WILM at the time.

Roy Sullivan was a WILM employee during the bingo affair and referred to it as Pyne's "biggest controversy." According to Sullivan, Pyne did two things that got him into trouble: He told people that the laws prohibiting bingo were stupid and, second, he called Craven the "head meathead."

Sullivan recalled that one night Pyne was particularly annoyed about the whole bingo situation and went on a rampage, devoting the entire show to the problem. And as Carl Jones said, and Sullivan repeated, "Joe was very skillful. He could say things that sounded like slander, but they weren't. He was very good about walking the tightrope. You could swear what he said was slanderous, but it wasn't."

On this particular evening, Pyne let Craven have it over the air. Although the Attorney General was not in town, one of his aides, who was listening to Pyne's program, was. When Craven returned to the city, the Deputy Attorney General wrote a note to his boss, referring to the program and saying, "I think we've got Pyne."

Sullivan mentioned that Craven didn't like Pyne
and he decided to subpoena the tapes of the show. But, "WILM's Ewing Hawkins decided that nobody was going to subpoena his tapes. So he gave them over to the keeping of Tom Herlihy, Sr., the Family Court judge, who at that time was WILM's lawyer. . . ."

Unfortunately, for Craven, the aide placed the wrong date on his original memo when referring to Pyne's program. WILM, however, realized this and, complying with the subpoena, they saved the "wrong tape"—the tape the Attorney General's office had requested. WILM knew there wasn't anything that could be used against them, but they still wouldn't let Craven have them.

Craven finally got the tapes, but it took months of legal maneuvering through the courts. Then, remembered Sullivan:

Now the tape was on a 12-inch reel, which is a broadcast station tape, and nobody could play it. And, obviously, WILM wasn't going to play it for him. So he had to go out and have the thing re-recorded, pay for it, then take it to somebody and have it transcribed. They got the whole thing done, sat down and listened, and realized they didn't have a damn thing!

Apparently, the News-Journal Papers followed the story, said Sullivan. "They didn't like Pyne either. He used to say, 'Their comics are sad and the editorial page
is funny.' On page one they said, 'Craven is going to take Pyne to court and make him pay.' When Craven admitted he had no case, it was in some small paragraph on page 34."

Pyne's remarks about the case were recorded in a 1959 interview by Don Murdaugh in the Chester Times:

A former state attorney general and Joe got into a feud. Joe said he was defending a Catholic church and upholding the right to play charitable bingo, then against the law.

'The attorney general attempted to conduct a program of harassment against me and one time subpoenaed three days of tapes for the purpose of bringing criminal charges against me. He said I called him an idiot and the cops stupid.

'He charged I was the spokesman for gamblers and racketeers in Delaware. I challenged him on the floor of the state legislature.

'The state supreme court finally decided he could hear the tapes. He heard them, then publicly apologized for his remarks."

At the time of this writing, former Attorney General Joseph Donald Craven is residing in Florida, where he has completed one book, All Honorable Men, about the history of the anti-Vietnam War movement in Delaware, and continues his writing. In a letter to this writer concerning his part in the bingo affair he explained that bingo was and is considered a lottery and at that time was illegal. He felt he could not pick and choose which offenders of the laws he should prosecute saying, "In good conscience, I
could not have the police arrest bookies and numbers
writers and ignore the flagrant violation of the law by
otherwise respected Delaware institutions."

Craven recalled being able to turn on the radio
at "any time of the day or night" and find either Pyne or
Harry Themal or Bill Frank denouncing him publicly, "and
often in a very personal way." Craven continued:

On one occasion, that I did not
hear, several listeners called and told me
of the violent language used by Pyne, of an
incendiary nature.
I was afraid that parishioners of
the church would attack the police and some-
one would be seriously hurt. I, therefore,
issued subpoenas to Pyne and the station,
directing them to turn over to me the tapes
made of that particular program.
Pyne and his station resisted; the
case was tried before the Supreme Court
and my right to issue the subpoena was
upheld by a majority vote of the justices.
When the tapes were produced and examined,
I found that they had been doctored and most
of the taped material was undecipherable.
That is why there was no prosecution. . . .

Admitting that the subject of Pyne brought up
"unpleasant" memories, Craven went on to write that, "Pyne
was a dangerous demagogue" who "would take advantage of any
situation to increase his listening audience. . . .and
the [bingo] situation was made to order for him."

Craven concluded that, "My opinion is that talk
shows have little value, except to furnish employment to
those who run them and a chance for publicity for those who like to hear themselves talk."

Somewhere in the midst of these three versions of the bingo case lies the truth. However, there is no doubt that call-in radio over "It's Your Nickle" had the ability to stimulate its audience and have far reaching effects upon the community.

Broadcasting From Local Restaurants

One interesting aspect of the "Nickle" program was that it was often broadcast away from the WILM studios, then located in the Odd Fellows Building at 10th and King Streets in Wilmington.

According to Frank, the reason the shows were performed at various sites was because the proprietors were some of the program's chief sponsors. As best can be determined, all of these places were restaurants--The Hotel Rodney, 1101 Restaurant, Mascagni's, Leoune's Towne Talk, Town House and, Pyne's most popular site, The English Grill.

The English Grill was located in the 900 block of Market Street, next to Wright & Simon's clothing store and across from the Hercules Tower. The Grill's Dover Room was where Pyne held court. The restaurant's location was ideal, especially since it was within a block of the
Playhouse, Wilmington's best theater which was frequented by show business stars from New York and Hollywood.

It was here that Pyne interviewed his guests—many of them entertainment's greats. Roy Sullivan remembered, "The English Grill was where everyone went after the shows and Pyne would talk to the stars. The back room was filled with pictures of Pyne with people like Victor Borge and Tallulah Bankhead."

It was through an arrangement between WILM and the Playhouse that Pyne was able to view many of the visiting celebrities. And because Wilmington was used to try out new productions prior to their Broadway debuts, many big-name stars did perform in the town.

As a result of Pyne's program being on the premises, people would stop into the Grill for dinner and then remain to be entertained by his show, which, by this time aired from 9:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. five nights a week. Unfortunately, added Sullivan, the Grill didn't realize it was providing "entertainment" for its clientele. But the Internal Revenue Service did. It "came down" on the restaurant and charged it with four years worth of entertainment excise taxes on food and drinks. As a result, the Grill added a 10% excise tax on all food and drink served while Pyne was on the air. As a joke, they placed
cards on the tables which read, "This is entertainment."\textsuperscript{50}

The Other Side of Joe Pyne

Up to this point it is quite likely that the reader might have an image of Pyne as a four-headed monster, spouting obscenities in every sentence, and a satisfied curmudgeon who hated all things upon the face of the earth. Such was not the case.

Frank described Pyne, immediately following his death in 1970.

Contrary to what some people thought, Joe Pyne was not always callous or cruel or sarcastic. There were many times when he was soft as putty in a bake oven; as easy a pushover as a weepy-eyed drunk; as kind as Scrooge on Christmas morning.

In a crowd, Joe lost all his personality. He never stood out in a group of 10. He was part of the woodwork then. But in front of a microphone with the red light on in the broadcasting studio, Joe was like a war horse who has just heard the booming of a cannon.\textsuperscript{51}

Sally Hawkins said that away from the radio, Joe was quite different and "quite shy."\textsuperscript{52}

Harry Themal remembered Pyne as "intelligent" and well-read, a moderator who was ". . . up to date on what was going on locally. He knew, when the people called, what the answers were."\textsuperscript{53}
Roy Sullivan found Pyne, 

... pretty quiet spoken off the air. Pyne was the kind of guy who suffered from some type of inferiority complex. He was a high school dropout and was in the Marines—that's how he developed cancer and later had his leg amputated. . . .

Joe was sort of bothered by his lack of education but he was very well-read. To listen to Joe talk... you never knew his education was as sparse as it was. But he was never at a loss for words. If you talked about a subject he knew nothing about, he'd fake it for the moment. But you could be sure he'd do some research and the next time it came up, he'd know everything about it. So his education was very much self-made.

Pyne summed up his verbal approach to his callers in this way, "If they wanted to be courteous, I was courteous. If they insulted me, I insulted them. I'd give them what they wanted." Not only was Pyne the master of abuse. He was also an individualist and a grass roots philosopher, who often tempered his beliefs with humor as well as sarcasm. These statements, taken from a series of interviews with the outspoken host, provide a glimpse of the other side of Joe Pyne:

'I believe radio can be a real entity in the lives of people. I don't think it has to be merely a juke box sending forth music as if it were coming from a bunch of savages.'

'Radio today [1959] sounds like it's
geared to the 13-year-old mentality and I resent that. I believe radio is a very useful medium of comment for democracy."58

'The biggest mistake we all make is in seeking perfection in others while lacking it in ourselves... or while failing to accept the fact that we, ourselves, are imperfect...."59

'I don't have the herd instinct at all, I never joined a club in my life, I go along with Groucho [Marx], I'd never join a club which would have me for a member."60

'I don't like the apathy in America today. I'm definitely concerned between the disparaging of the intellectual in schools and the worship of the athletic hero."61

'I don't give a damn about baseball and resent the opinion that I should...."62

'People resented the fact I didn't say anything about baseball. One asked me if I was worrying about the Phillies moving. I said I didn't care if the Phillies went to Formosa!"63

'The show [Nickle] was predicated on this: About 50 percent of the audience felt I was saying what they would say if they had a microphone. The other 50 percent would listen to hear me make my big mistake, the one which would make me fall, which would knock me off the air."64

'My role was one of instant reaction... give them an answer whatever it might be.... and I would also editorialize."65

'If you want your prayers answered, get up off your knees and hustle."66

'Man should lift himself up from the aural bilge to which he has stooped."67

Pyne's Last Program

Pyne left WILM in May 1957 for a short time and soon thereafter achieved success on KTLA-TV in Hollywood.

"I was in the big time," said Pyne, "had my name in lights on Sunset Blvd.... moved into Morey Amsterdam's spot...."
my name was above his and finally was on top alone."
However, illness in his family brought him back to Wilmington and WILM six months later.68 He eventually resumed hosting the "Nickle" program. According to WILM's records, the last night Pyne sat behind the "It's Your Nickle" microphone was on February 5, 1960. The location was the Town Talk restaurant at 913 Shipley Street in Wilmington.

While listening to the tape of Pyne's final Wilmington broadcast, one could picture the crowd, the festive atmosphere and the underlying sense of melancholy. Many of Pyne's friends and associates were present and those who could not attend called to wish him well.

They discussed his sponsors, his friends and enemies, and the good old days. Bill Frank was there, but one of the people in the audience gave him a hard time and Frank left, supposedly thinking Pyne had set him up. The tenor of the evening was festive and positive--only once did the legendary Pyne show his true colors. That was when a listener called in and said he was glad to see Pyne go. Pyne's response, "Well, I'm glad I've done something to please you. Good night, you alcoholic creep!" and down slammed the phone.69

No more would the moderators of Wilmington's telephone talk program utter such responses as "creep," "meathead," "drop dead," "S.O.B.," "idiot" and "dopes." The
"fist in the mouth" critic was leaving for good.

In the years to follow, Pyne would gain both fortune and fame as a result of his work on radio and television. And national publications would speak of his techniques with astonishment and disdain.

Time magazine wrote of "lava-tongued" Joe Pyne on Los Angeles' KLAC radio in 1965. The article stated that Joe would tell his callers to "go gargle with razor blades," or "take your teeth out, put 'em in backwards and bite your throat."70

The New York Times referred to Pyne's "electronic peepshow" being syndicated on over 200 stations throughout the country. The author further called Pyne "the ranking nuisance of broadcasting."71

A United Press International release in 1966, wrote of Pyne's "acerbic attitude" on his half-hour television program "Showdown."72

"Joe Pyne: Anatomy of a TV bully," was the title of an October 1966 Look magazine article on the ex-Wilmington star. Included in the article which described Pyne's weekly syndicated TV talk show, was a typical Pyne retort: "Oh, put your thumb in your ear and go bowling." In the article, Pyne mentioned his latest income at over $400,000.73
Joe Pyne had certainly taken himself, and his sarcastic rudeness, a long way from Atlantic City, New Jersey and Wilmington, Delaware.

In 1970, Joe Pyne died of cancer. *The Morning News* headlined the obituary, "Joe Pyne, 44, titan of talk shows, dies."74

Following is Joe Pyne's closing statement on his final "Nickle" program in February 1960. You will note that his reference to the future of telephone talk radio and his joking remark concerning his own prospects were quite prophetic. A form of the program has continued, even to the present, and has generated many imitations. Pyne likewise succeeded, possibly more than he may have anticipated.

In the two minutes remaining, I'd like to say thanks to Wilmington, Delaware. It's been very good to me and I have no squawk. I think that this program will be a very definite force for good. I know the station is planning to continue it. . . . I want to thank all of the sponsors who stayed with me right up to the end.

I want to thank the station for putting up with me. And I think the station ought to thank me for putting up with them. (And I only say that because the manager's in the room.)

So long until I'm doing station breaks on the Jack Parr Show, or something.

This is Joe Pyne. Good night. Good morning. And straight ahead.75
Chapter Conclusion

If the well-known adage, "He was in the right place at the right time," applied to anyone, it applied to Joe Pyne.

Pyne's ascension from an unknown Chester cabbie to a wealthy Hollywood star was a credit to both sheer determination and luck—and any Horatio Alger story usually has a good bit of both. In one interview, Pyne mentioned that, "When I was a kid, I used to press my nose against the windows of exotic cars. That was my dream." The article added that Pyne had a Rolls Royce, a classic Triumph and an Aston Martin, plus a house in Hollywood Hills, a swimming pool and a blond, 21-year-old Norwegian wife. He certainly exceeded his own expectations.

Attorney General Joseph Craven stated that Pyne lived "by his wits and the gift of gab." Nothing could be closer to the truth. Pyne himself acknowledged this. "The way I talk is what I come from. I'm Irish. I've listened to my family yelling all my life. I like to fight."

More important than Craven's observation and Pyne's statement is the fact that Joe Pyne was smart enough to take advantage of his natural gifts, his family training,
his bravado, his daring and his ability to speak, at a time
when the broadcasting entertainment business was in a state
of upheaval.

In 1950, radio was both floundering and on the
decline; at the same time, television was struggling but on
the rise. During radio's frantic search for a new identity,
novel gimmicks, a real purpose, or anything which would
attract a large audience--in walks Joe Pyne, with a tongue
that wouldn't stop.

Pyne helped prop up radio for a time and, more
importantly, entertained Wilmington's populace during those
early years when television was experimenting to establish
itself.

Often it's been mentioned that Pyne's audience
"loved" his caustic responses, his cutting wit, the insults
and quick, almost unthinking, retorts to his callers. And
why shouldn't they have?

It was pure entertainment at its best. Pyne knew
this. So did Ewing Hawkins and Bill Frank.

However, this should not lead the reader to believe
that Pyne conducted his program and never discussed anything
of substance. Quite the contrary, Joe Pyne had very strong
convictions about racial equality, society's overindulgence
of athletes, questionable political practices, the apathy of the average citizen and a person's unwillingness to better him/herself.

Probably the most surprising aspect of "It's Your Nickle" was the extent to which the program had the ability to directly involve its audience. This was obviously expected to some degree, no doubt Pyne and Hawkins believed that the interchange of ideas would be beneficial, interesting and entertaining. But, one must wonder whether either the station owner or star of the show realized that the program would eventually cause threats, acts of physical violence and lawsuits, and be so entertaining that sponsors would literally be waiting in line for a piece of the action.

The next chapter looks at WDEL and "Voice of the People." This program did not begin until 1962, more than 12 years after "It's Your Nickle" started and over two years after Pyne left Wilmington for good.

However, the rival station's philosophy, its guidelines for its telephone talk show hosts and its overall approach to call in radio, is a definite contrast to the free-wheeling days when Pyne stood Wilmington on its ear.

No doubt, the owners and management of WDEL took note of Mr. Pyne's antics and their effects, and decided
that similar actions would not be appropriate on "Voice of the People," that station's contribution to local telephone talk radio.

Two years after his departure from Wilmington, Joe Pyne was already setting the future course for Wilmington's telephone talk radio programming.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER II


3 Murdaugh, "Joe Pyne Saw Tobacco Juice Fly."

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.


12 Ibid., p. 113.
13 Ibid., p. 199.


15 Hoffecker, p. 199.


19 Murdaugh, "Joe Pyne Saw Tobacco Juice Fly."

20 Carl Jones, former "It's Your Nickle" talk show host, interview held at WILM studios, Wilmington, Delaware, July 20, 1982.


22 Sally Hawkins, WILM President and General Manager and wife of the late station owner Ewing Hawkins, interview held in WILM studios, Wilmington, Delaware, July 27, 1982.

23 Carl Jones interview.


25 Carl Jones interview.

26 Sally Hawkins interview.

27 Murdaugh, "Joe Pyne Felt His Program Reflected the Middle Class," Chester Times, April 21, 1959, p. 13.
28 Carl Jones interview.

29 Roy Sullivan, ex-WILM employee, interview held at the offices of Central Wilmington Business, Inc., July 29, 1982. Sullivan claimed that Pyne also refused to use an early tape delay device available at WILM because he had encountered a bad experience with a similar system in New Jersey years earlier.

30 Bob Cunningham, ex-WILM talk show host, interview held at the offices of U.S. Senator Joseph Biden, Wilmington, Delaware, August 5, 1982.

31 Bill Frank, "Joe Pyne was a talk-show moderator like no other," The Morning News, March 27, 1970, p. 10.

32 Bill Frank, Wilmington journalist, ex-WILM news director and ex- "It's Your Nickle" host, interview held at the office of the News Journal Papers, April 7, 1982.

33 Frank, "Joe Pyne was a talk-show moderator like no other."

34 Carl Jones interview.

35 Bill Frank interview.

36 Roy Sullivan interview.

37 Harry Themal, ex-WILM news director, ex-talk show host and current associate editor of the News Journal Papers, interview held at the office in the News Journal building, Wilmington, Delaware, July 26, 1982.

38 Bill Frank interview.

39 Harry Themal interview.

40 Sally Hawkins interview.

41 Carl Jones interview.


43 Murdaugh, "Joe Pyne Felt His Program Reflected the Middle Class."


46 Roy Sullivan interview.

47 Murdaugh, "Joe Pyne Felt His Program Reflected the Middle Class."

48 Joseph Donald Craven to Edward M. Okonowicz, November 19, 1982.

49 Ibid.

50 Roy Sullivan interview.

51 Frank, "Joe Pyne was a talk-show moderator like no other."

52 Sally Hawkins interview.

53 Harry Themal interview.

54 According to Roy Sullivan, Pyne's amputated leg is buried in a Catholic cemetery in Wilmington. A telephone call to the office of the Cathedral Cemetery in Wilmington—the only Catholic establishment open in 1955 when Pyne's leg was removed—produced no positive results. In fact, the secretary curtly informed me that they "do not keep records of the resting sites of limbs." I was hurriedly cut off and told to track down the attending mortician, for, "... you can't just drive in here and drop off a leg or an arm, without going through a funeral director."

55 Roy Sullivan interview.

56 Murdaugh, "Joe Pyne ... A Microphone Maverick."

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Murdaugh, "Joe Pyne Felt His Program Reflected the Middle Class," p. 13.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Murdaugh, "Joe Pyne Saw Tobacco Juice Fly."

Joe Pyne, a tape recording of his last program on "It's Your Nickle," at the Town House restaurant, February 5, 1960, Wilmington, Delaware.


Gould.


"Joe Pyne, 44, titan of talk shows, dies."
Joe Pyne, tape recording of his last program.

Rollin.

Joseph Donald Craven.

Rollin.
CHAPTER III
WDEL AND "VOICE OF THE PEOPLE"

On July 31, 1922, radio station WDEL (originally known as WHAV) went on the air. Its studios and transmitter were located at 705 N. Adams Street in Wilmington, the home of Willard S. Wilson the founder and president of "The Wilmington Electric Specialty Company." Wilson's enterprise was the first radio station in Delaware, a distinction which WDEL proclaims even today in much of its promotional activity.¹

Throughout its over 60-year career, WDEL has maintained a strong public service commitment to its listening area. In 1972, on the occasion of its 50th anniversary, the station issued a souvenir booklet which reviewed WDEL's history and highlighted those programs which were most successful and of which the station was most proud. One entry stated:

In 1962, the very popular "Voice of the People" program was instituted. It is a telephone-call-in program which creates a most important forum for discussion of public issues. Guests are often invited to the studio to discuss, in detail, a topic which had prompted much discussion during
previous programs or which is of current interest to the community.  

"Voice of the People"

Harvey C. Smith retired from WDEL after a successful career which included 49 years in the Wilmington broadcasting business. While in high school he started working at WILM radio, then owned by Steinman Stations, and in the early 1930s he moved to WDEL, which was also a Steinman operation. When he retired in 1978, Mr. Smith was President of Delmarva Broadcasting Company and General Manager of both WDEL-AM and its sister station WSTW-FM.

"Voice of the People" was first broadcast on January 2, 1962. Previous to that date, there was an earnest effort by WDEL's owners, management and staff to formulate guidelines for its telephone talk programs which would coincide with the station's conservative attitude. The program hosts were specifically instructed on how to conduct WDEL's entry into telephone call-in programming—an area of local broadcasting which had been dominated by WILM for over 12 years. By offering a similar program, WDEL thought it could attract some of the audience that was listening to and participating in WILM's call-in programs. However, the main reason, according to Smith, was to provide a public service and at the same time satisfy that portion
of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requirement that the licensee operate his station in the public interest and discover and fulfill the tastes, needs and desires of its service area. Telephone talk radio could provide a forum for open expression of diverse community views and conveniently enable the station to ascertain some of the community's concerns.4

Smith recalled the main point concerning policy which came out of the discussion with the owners: The call-in host should not editorialize or express his views on the air. Basically, the moderator was to perform as a "devil's advocate" who tried to generate comments and discussions. "To one person," Smith explained, "he'd try to stimulate talk and to the next person he would take an opposite view, so the listeners would never know exactly where the host stood."5

Smith added that the station also felt that if too many calls expressing one point of view got through on the air, it would be the host's responsibility to try to stimulate comments from those listeners holding opposite opinions.

Richard "Dick" Aydelotte joined WDEL in 1942 as a part-time announcer. He has since served as a staff announcer, program director and, at this writing, is Promotions and Public Affairs Manager. In 1962 he was program
director, and recalled that because Joe Pyne's program had received a good audience response, WDEL became aware that it ought to have a call-in, public affairs type program of its own. Adding to WDEL's interest was the fact that in Easton, Pennsylvania, WEST—which like WDEL was owned by Steinman Stations and was an NBC affiliate—had been doing a similar call-in program for years and it had proven very successful. Therefore, Joe Mosbrook, the telephone talk show host on WEST, was brought to Wilmington and became the first host of "Voice of the People" in January 1962.6

Aydelotte, too, mentioned WDEL's talk programming philosophy, which was designed to minimize the station's direct involvement in or fueling of controversy.

The moderator of "Voice of the People" was there to do just that—to moderate—to take opinions pro and con from various elements of the population who wanted to talk about a particular subject. He was not there to interject his own opinions. The only time that would happen was when somebody might get too violent or start going too far, and you'd have to shut him off.7

The only time, recalled Aydelotte, that he lost his composure was when a student called in during the Vietnam conflict and advocated urinating on the American flag. "I finally got fed up with him and said, 'Drop dead!' and hung up. I did a Joe Pyne on him, which I felt sorry for afterwards."8
But WDEL's "even-handed," or more correctly, "moderator's closed-mouth" approach to opinion and comment was not appreciated by all of the station's listeners, especially after a ten-year diet of Joe Pyne and controversy.

Aydelotte agreed, "Sometimes we got criticized by people saying, 'You never really take a stand.' But our answer to that was, 'That's really not our purpose. Our objective is to open our airwave, our frequency, to people to express their opinions, and then to take those opinions and ask other people what they thought about them.'"

In comparing "Voice of the People" with "It's Your Nickle," Aydelotte highlighted the main difference between the two programs and the contrasting policies of the competing stations.

Our program was called "Voice of the People" and was exactly that, whereas Joe Pyne was there for the express purpose of getting people mad, getting people upset. It was entertainment! And he didn't under any stretch of the imagination, try to give you the idea that this wasn't so. I knew Joe pretty well and he loved it.

Political Pressure

While "Voice" was intended to be less controversial than "Nickle," WDEL's call-in program became involved in some disputes as well. One of the most prominent episodes
involved a confrontation (along with other local radio stations) with Delaware Governor Russell Peterson, the state's chief executive from 1969 to 1972.

To understand fully Governor Peterson's concerns about telephone talk radio, the reader must keep in mind that a year earlier in April 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated. This act had a devastating effect upon inner-city Wilmington. Riots, looting, fire bombings, destruction and tension caused then Governor Charles L. Terry to activate units of the Delaware National Guard. Military personnel imposed an immediate curfew and after it was lifted, citizen soldiers, with weapons and in jeeps, patrolled Wilmington's streets for several months.

In September 1969, nearly a year-and-a-half after King's assassination, racial relations in the community were still very strained. In the latter part of that month, a fight occurred between black and white students in Wilmington High School. For the next several evenings the talk programs--which by this time were equipped with tape delay systems allowing the moderator several seconds to react to the callers' comments before they were broadcast over the air--were deluged with calls. However, many of the listeners, including some public officials, considered a majority of the callers' comments "inflammatory" and
harmful to the community. The following comments were advocated by participants over the area's various telephone talk programs:

* That trouble-making black kids be made to work in the parks and on the streets and sidewalks;

* That their families be taken off welfare;

* That the National Guard be returned to the streets; and

* That uniformed police patrol the school halls.

Governor Peterson responded to the situation in general, and these comments, in particular, by issuing a statement critical of the "way talk shows are conducted during periods of tension." According to a September 30, 1969 Bill Frank column, the Governor did not say the moderators were irresponsible, but was concerned that the "talk shows give the mikes to irresponsible people." Frank's piece went on to note how the chief executive's statements were poorly received by the majority of station managers and talk show hosts.

In a News-Journal story by Norm Lockman on the same subject, the author labeled talk shows "popular--and currently dangerous." He stated that the "moderators' rule
of thumb is to be emotionless, well-informed but not opinionated, and above all agreeable, thus placing abusive callers at a distinct advantage." Lockman also added that the shows are "touted as some kind of 'public service,' but are basically another form of entertainment. To make them pseudo-news, or pseudo-information, or pseudo-opinion polls is to irresponsibly inflate them beyond their worth."\(^{15}\)

Siding with the Governor, Lockman instructed the hosts to take another look at their community responsibilities or "be held responsible for aiding and abetting hate mongering on the public airwaves in a city already racially tense."\(^{16}\)

Harry G. Haskell, Jr., then mayor of Wilmington, agreed to be a guest on "Voice of the People" to answer callers' questions during the troubled time. Aydelotte was the host of the 90-minute program in September 1969 and was asked by a News-Journal reporter about the Governor's comment that, "They give a mike to some of the most irresponsible members of the community." Aydelotte responded to the reporter, "As a person who conducts a show, I would have appreciated it more if he would have contacted us earlier, before he made those statements."\(^{17}\)

However, problems associated with major issues were not the only thing which caught the Governor's attention.
Being a prominent politician, the Governor was often the subject of criticism, and what easier way literally to "air" one's complaints than by using the convenient vehicle, telephone talk radio.

On one occasion, recalled Aydelotte, Peterson was upset because someone called in to complain about the Governor's car, which the caller claimed had been speeding on the highway at 75 m.p.h. Apparently, the unnamed talk show host allowed the comment on the air, but didn't pursue the possible reasons for the speeding to have occurred. And the Governor wanted more follow-through. About this Aydelotte said, "When you're at the microphone, snap decisions are sometimes hard to come up with. But, I'm sure that hosts would not let nuts on the air and spout off things which are not true." 18

In 1972, Governor Peterson would again blast Wilmington's talk show programming; however, at that time his attack would be more specifically aimed at WILM and its host Tom Pritchett, who made the Governor a target of his criticism. This episode will be related in more detail in Chapter IV.

Russell Peterson was not the only politician who was concerned and at times aggravated by telephone talk radio. According to Harvey Smith, Governor Charles L. Terry
(Peterson's predecessor) called in WDEL's host Jim Lindley over a different type of matter. Lindley made some comments over "Voice of the People" about a National Guard airplane which was used to transport a group of state politicians to Augusta, Georgia, for a conference. But Lindley stressed that it just so happened that the conference took place during the Master's Golf Tournament, a popular event. Lindley described it as, 'The Governor got his hand caught in the cookie jar.' Well, that really upset Governor Terry very much and he had us in his office and wanted to know Lindley's source of information. . . . But we never told him. We were protected by the First Amendment.19

According to Aydelotte, only one moderator was ever asked to leave the program, and that was Jim Reeves. In that instance it was "because he was getting a little opinionated." It seems the station had received a number of phone calls and correspondence because Reeves was getting a number of people in the conservative element of the community angry. "We didn't bow to the conservative element, necessarily," added Aydelotte, "but we thought he was getting away from the WDEL approach to talk radio.20

It is also important to note that all of WDEL's talk show moderators were station employees, whereas many of WILM's call-in hosts were free-lance broadcasters who
Robert Taylor, at this writing president and general manager of WDEL-AM/WSTW-FM and associated with the stations since 1966, mentioned that there is no written policy on how a moderator should conduct him/herself on a telephone talk program. However, they are well-briefed by the people they work for--the program director and news director--and the hosts are very familiar with station policy and attitudes. "You don't get on our talk shows unless you've been around here a long time," he added.

The Problem With Open Forum

Often telephone talk programs tended to open their phone lines and airwaves, encouraging listeners to "call up and tell us what's bothering you," thereby inviting complaints and unstructured discussions on any topic whatsoever. Unless the host was talented, or one of those rare individuals who knew a lot about everything, he/she would be unprepared to competently handle all the questions about every topic. Ultimately, the host, in such a no-win situation, would appear to be unprepared or just plain stupid to the listening audience.
In addition, repeat callers, or "old faithfuls" as they are sometimes called, tend to monopolize the phone lines and use the program as a soapbox to spout off their pet peeves and projects, especially on open forum talk shows. The result is that these people bore the rest of the listeners and drive them to tune in elsewhere, since that particular call-in program has become a private outlet for a small, shameless, unyielding group.

To solve this problem, structured telephone talk programs were developed to satisfy the needs and interests of those listeners who wanted to use talk radio for more constructive purposes than a complaint outlet or electronic soapbox. Shows devoted to home care, gardening, finding lost pets, sports information and medical help were aired, and allowed members of the audience to call in and question the experts who were featured as guests.

In some cases, programs on gardening, sports, etc., were eventually provided a weekly time slot of their own if the topic was seen to generate sufficient listener interest.

For a year-and-a-half, during 1980 and 1981, "The Dick Aydelotte Show" aired from 11:30 A.M. to noon and featured a different guest each day. Aydelotte explained, "It was a highly structured talk show and its whole purpose..."
was service. One day we would have a doctor, the next day a lawyer. Other topics dealt with Social Security, cosmetics, home decorating, etc." Aydelotte felt that his morning program was one which spotlighted the best use of telephone talk radio, that is, having a guest on a given subject and then letting the audience question the featured individual. "This was much more worthwhile than just opening up your microphone to any nut who wants to call in and complain about something."23

Aydelotte recalled one somewhat humorous incident which points out the structured service-related potential of talk radio:

I'll never forget one woman who called and said she had trouble with weeds or roots in her sewer pipes and somebody told her to put a certain quantity of a certain chemical in the toilet tank to overcome the problem. Well, you won't believe it, but we had calls on that for over a three-week period. In the midst of discussions on Watergate, capital punishment, crooked politicians, we'd get a rash of calls saying, "What's the name of that substance you put in your toilet tank?" This is a perfect example of what I was trying to say: People are oriented toward service.24

"Voice of the People" (1962-1982)

In August 1982, after over 20 years of continuous community service, "Voice of the People" was taken off the air. According to Dick Aydelotte there was a number of
valid reasons for this decision including:

* The annoying repeat callers who constantly took over the program, some calling every night of the week. One WDEL employee jokingly referred to the program as "Voice of the Person," making reference to both the frequent repeat callers and the fact that other listeners seemed never to call.

* The proliferation of other all-talk and all-news stations in the same market area, such as WCAU-AM and WWDB-FM in Philadelphia and WILM in Wilmington. These stations and others helped to saturate the airwaves with talk opportunities and the management of "Voice of the People" decided the program was not as essential as it once was.

* WDEL was trying to change the makeup of its listening audience by trying to attract listeners in the 25 to 54-year-old age group, with more emphasis on the 25 to 44-year-old segment. "Voice" was considered a program which appealed to the station's older listening audience, and this was extremely evident when the station analyzed the program's callers.

* During the 6:00 to 7:00 P.M. time period, "Voice" was in direct competition with television news, therefore, a high portion of the show's potential audience had been pulled away by television. This was also believed to be a
reason for the lack of telephone calls to "Voice of the People."

* An attempt was made a number of years earlier to move "Voice of the People" to 10:00 P.M. This was a miserable failure and the station moved the program back to its original time slot. In addition, because of the station's commitment to certain sports programming, a shift in the show's time would not have been possible. 25

According to Harvey Smith, "Voice" was taken off the air because of a more serious reason—the inability of the station to find a moderator who was capable of doing a good job and who wanted to do the program. "You have to have a good host," he explained. "We wanted that person to be a member of our staff. Now there was Mosbrook, who was outstanding, and Dick Aydelotte, who was absolutely the finest, but the others were not of the same caliber. Even in my later days, as I was getting ready to retire, that was one of the big problems." 26

Concerning "Voice's" demise, Aydelotte did mention, "Strangely enough, we haven't had that much of a reaction to taking it off." 27

Is There Talk After "Voice"?

In the summer of 1982, WDEL introduced a national
"Talk Net," hosted by Bruce Williams, was broadcast over WDEL from 10:00 P.M. to midnight five nights a week and a toll-free telephone number enabled listeners to call the host directly and share their questions and concerns with a national audience. Williams' program dealt primarily with answering financial and economic issues. However, the response to the show was so positive that WDEL added Williams' counterpart, Sally Jessy Raphael from midnight to 2:00 A.M. nightly. The focus of her program is of a more personal and problem-solving nature. In April 1983, the Bruce Williams portion of "Talk Net" was expanded from two to three hours (8:00 P.M. to 11:00 P.M.), as was Raphael's portion of the program (11:00 P.M. to 2:00 A.M.).

When "Talk Net" was added to WDEL's late evening programming in the summer of '82 there was no indication that the new show might be used to replace "Voice of the People," but such had been the case. However, other changes in WDEL's late-afternoon and early-evening programming had a more direct impact upon the station's telephone call-in program, which originated from NBC radio in New York City. The new program, "Talk Net," had been broadcast throughout the country for a number of months, but WDEL waited to see the reaction to the program before the station made a commitment to air it.
talk radio approach, which had previously remained constant for over 20 years.

Pete Booker, at this writing, Operations Manager of WDEL-AM/WSTW-FM, worked for the station as a disc jockey and sports announcer from 1972 to 1975. He then spent several years working in Philadelphia and Detroit, and returned to the DelMarVa Broadcasting Company in 1980. Booker's objective was, simply, to change WDEL's image from a station catering to an audience which was steadily growing older, and hence smaller, to a full service broadcasting operation. To do this, a conscious attempt was undertaken to attract a wider and younger audience. As Dick Aydelotte had mentioned earlier, the station was diverting its attention away from the over 55-year-old market and directing it toward the 33 to 54-year-old audience. By doing so, added Booker, WDEL would complement the 18 to 32-year-old audience being served by its sister station WSTW-FM.

Booker explained that the four areas affected were: music, news presentation, promotion, and other programming. Under the news presentation section was the long-established late-afternoon/early-evening drive-time news block known as "Information-95." And immediately following "I-95" was "Voice of the People."

Both programs would succumb to Booker's axe of
broadcasting modernization, but neither would be decapitated smoothly. Instead, "I-95" and "Voice of the People" would linger and flinch for months, like comatose patients with periodic lapses back into consciousness.

Booker attempted to replace "Information-95" (4:30 to 6:05 P.M.) and "Voice of the People" (6:05 to 7:00 P.M.) with a news magazine style program (4:00 to 7:00 P.M.), which would contain news, weather, sports, features, interviews and a telephone talk segment. The new three-hour drive-time program was called "P.M. Delaware." Booker explained, "We hoped it would be up-tempo enough to appeal to the 33 to 54-year-old audience who are active, affluent and want to be entertained. We envisioned them calling the station and talking about interesting topics, and the entire program would be held together by the host." 28

Unfortunately, the main ingredient, a capable host, was the only thing missing when "P.M. Delaware" premiered. Booker admitted that "Voice" was taken off the air in August 1982 so it could, to a certain extent, be erased from the listeners' minds. This would allow the telephone talk segment of "P.M. Delaware" to replace "Voice" smoothly, when the news magazine show premiered on the Tuesday following Labor Day. But when a suitable host could not be found and other station personnel were unable to take on the extra
duty as the "P.M." host, the program's target date was rescheduled to November 8, 1982.

During the three months, from August to November, the 6:00 to 7:00 P.M. "Voice of the People" time slot was manned by disc jockey John Wilson who played records and periodically invited listeners to call in if they had anything they wanted to talk about--quite similar to the way Joe Pyne started his talk career in New Jersey 33 years earlier.

The premier host of "P.M. Delaware" lasted all of three days because, according to Booker, "The fellow couldn't devote enough preparation time to the show." Booker himself, and News Director Robert Mercer, a former "Voice of the People" host, alternated on the program until January 1983. Immediately after the New Year, Craig Butcher, another ex-"Voice of the People" moderator and an ex-employee of then recently defeated U.S. Congressman Thomas Evans (R-DEL.), took over the three-hour program, which included a nightly one-hour telephone talk segment.

Eventually, Booker explained the new telephone talk portion of "P.M. Delaware" will provide structured information to the listening audience in an organized fashion.

We'll be going into areas and discussing subjects which will be helpful to people.
The call-in segment of "P.M. Delaware" will be involved in presenting subjects in an interesting fashion and not just a complaint session for the same 15 or 20 callers. We'll be getting legislators and politicians to take calls; we'll bring in accountants and veterinarians. The possibilities are endless. It's really talk radio in an intelligent rather than in a haphazard fashion. We also hope to employ the ABC "Niteline" concept. When some breaking news event of importance to our listeners occurs, we'll devote time to it in our 6 to 7 P.M. hour, with the newsmakers themselves and allow the listener the opportunity to call in.29

Booker's goal was the same as any member of a station's management team, or any talk show host, "What we want is a new person on every call. We no longer feel it's in anyone's best interest to provide an outlet for people who only want to blow off steam."30

Changes In Local Radio

WDEL was not the only Wilmington radio station making changes over the last five years. Others, including WAMS, WILM and WTUX (renamed WJBR-AM in 1978) have been trying to find a new identity and secure as large a share of the listening audience as possible.

Radio station WAMS, which for years had been a haven for teeny-bopper, top-40 listeners, has made a number of format changes. Its decision to deliver "That Great Country Feelin'" to Wilmington--with a majority of country music
plus those pop and middle-of-the-road (MOR) songs which have crossed over into country—has proven successful. 31

Wilmington's only all-news station, WILM, made the switch from music to all-information in 1976 to stand out in a crowded music market and feels it has made gains in all its audience areas. In a 1981 Arbitron survey, WILM was fourth out of a dozen Wilmington and Philadelphia stations which were examined. 32

The area's most sedate station WTUX "died," according to an observer quoted in a Wilmington newspaper article, "because 'most of its audience did.'" But in 1978 it was resurrected from 1290 to 1300 on the AM dial as WJBR-AM. 33 At this writing, this new station delivers "vocal nostalgia" which according to Chief Engineer Dave Mackenzie, is a mixture of hits from the '50s through the '70s. However, Mackenzie added that this is WJBR-AM's third format since 1978, the earlier two being "easy listening" and "soft rock." Pre-packaged "beautiful music" with a 60-40 percent instrumental-vocal split is played over WJBR-FM. 34

In the 1981 Arbitron survey, mentioned above, WSTW-FM was obviously successful in attracting younger listeners, for it was rated number one among the Wilmington and Philadelphia stations examined in the survey. 35 If WDEL is able to attract the 34 to 55-year-old audience, the AM
outlet could complement WSTW-FM, thus giving the Wilmington Steinman operations exposure to a large portion of the Wilmington radio market—WSTW-FM (18 to 33-year-olds) and WDEL-AM (34 to 55-year-olds).

Whenever major programming changes occur, the smaller segments and shows which are part of a station's offerings are affected. Such was the case with both WDEL's "Voice of the People," and WILM's "It's Your Nickle." This latter telephone talk program will be examined in Chapter IV.

WDEL's Telephone Talk Commitment

When "Voice of the People" was taken off the air, the author, like many Delawareans who were familiar with the program, assumed that the show's absence indicated a lack of commitment of the station management, especially to those in the community who felt strongly about telephone talk radio and the purpose it served.

Apparently, such was not the case. The addition of six hours of "Talk Net" nightly and the structured one-hour local telephone talk show on "P.M. Delaware" have resulted in increased air time devoted to talk radio. But more than the additional hours (from one to seven) the organized approach to "P.M. Delaware's" talk program shows
insight and sensitivity by WDEL's management.

Robert Taylor, the station's General Manager, mentioned that two-way telephone talk radio was an interesting format, but it wasn't always easy to use as a public service function, mainly because it brings in the unknown participant—the caller. And often, even when talking about a specific topic, the host and guest might receive numerous calls repeating the same question.

Taylor viewed new approaches to talk as being able to take the repeated questions, which were obviously of interest to a large number of listeners, and tape them and their answers. Later, a special program could be built around the topic, including the most asked questions and recorded comments from selected callers, which would help stress the main points of the discussion. 36

"What I'm saying," added Taylor, "is there are other ways to use talk. This is what I'm looking for from a management standpoint. We would not consider using it as a total format, but we use it as an element of our programming." 37

To those who bemoaned the demise of "Voice of the People," "P.M. Delaware" seems to have the potential to overshadow its predecessor. This is especially true if it
fulfills Taylor's approach to the telephone talk program, "To shed light on the subject, as opposed to adding more heat to it and getting it more controversial."
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER III


2 Ibid., p. 27.

3 Harvey C. Smith, ex-President of DelMarVa Broadcasting Co. and General Manager of WDEL/WSTW, interview at his home, Wilmington, Delaware, September 27, 1982.

4 Head, p. 252.

5 Smith interview.

6 Richard C. Aydelotte, Promotions and Public Affairs Manager of WDEL/SWTW, interview held at WDEL's studios, Wilmington, Delaware, August 24, 1982. Originally "Voice of the People" aired from 6:05 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., except during the Phillies baseball season when the program extended to the pre-game baseball show which aired at 7:20 p.m. An attempt to move the "Voice" show to 10:00 p.m., years after its start, failed.

7 Aydelotte interview.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 WDEL staff members disagree as to when the tape delay system went into effect. Some state it was in use in 1962, others recall it being started around 1965. However, all agree that by the mid '60s it was in use.
Pete Booker, Operations Manager of WDEL/WSTW, interview held at WDEL studios, November 24, 1982.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid., p. G-1.

Ibid., p. G-1. Also, in a telephone interview with WJBR-AM Manager Charles Tomlinson on March 28, 1983, he stated that WTUX was bought by WJBR in 1976. In 1978, WTUX assumed the new call letters--WJBR-AM--and continued operation without an interruption.

David Mackenzie, chief engineer at WJBR. Telephone interview on April 5, 1983.


Taylor interview.

Ibid.

Ibid.
CHAPTER IV

WILM AND "IT'S YOUR NICKLE" AFTER JOE PYNE

A great deal of the success of a talk program depends upon the moderator. . . . It's very difficult to find someone who is a real showman, is bright enough to know what they're talking about, is smart enough to keep the radio station out of trouble and has a real sense of balance. The people who are good at it are not sitting around looking for jobs.1

--Sally Hawkins
WILM General Manager

Chapter III examined WDEL's conservative, organized and calculated approach to telephone talk radio. In this section, WILM's talk commitment after Pyne is discussed. Whereas WDEL's talk experience was viewed primarily through the eyes of that station's management, WILM's talk programming, instead, is examined through the comments of "It's Your Nickle's" moderators.2

Radio Station WILM

In 1928, Brandt Boylan was WDEL's chief engineer. In an unpublished interview, a few years before his death, Boylan noted, "I was fed up with their [WDEL's] format and told the program director that without half trying I would
So, at age 18, Boylan quit WDEL, filed for a license with the U.S. Federal Radio Commission and in November 1928 received a license for WTBQ, Wilmington's second radio station. "[It] made no sense at all," said the original owner, "so I reapplied and got 'WILM,' for Wilmington, as call letters in December [1928]."³

Brandt and his brother, Dana, began broadcasting from the third floor of the Bendheim Building at 8th and Market Streets in Wilmington. Later they moved to a three-floor building four blocks away at 1217 Market Street.

In the early 1930s, tiring of the broadcasting business, the Boylans sold their station. It eventually was purchased by Steinman Stations, the same company which bought WDEL in 1931 and still owns it at this writing. According to Robert Taylor, WDEL's General Manager, WILM was owned by the Steinman family until around 1940.⁴ By 1948, however, WILM was bought by Ewing Hawkins, President of Delaware Broadcasting Company. In 1972, his wife, Sally, succeeded her husband as President and General Manager.

Pyne's First Departure

As noted in Chapter II, Joe Pyne left Wilmington in
May 1957 for approximately eight months. According to a Chester Times interview, Pyne worked at a Riverside, California, radio station and then went to his first TV station, KTLA in Hollywood. He seemed to have experienced some success but, as Pyne explained, "I . . . was just starting to move when illness in the family brought me back."5

After he returned to Wilmington, Pyne landed his own show on WVUE-TV—Wilmington's Channel 12 (formerly WDEL-TV and WPFH-TV).6 Unfortunately for Pyne, who claimed his program a "fantastic" success, the station closed down after only 12 weeks of "The Joe Pyne Show."7

In February 1959, Pyne returned to WILM as a disc jockey. He did not resume his work behind the telephone talk microphone until late in 1959.8 During this two-year period of "Nickle" without Pyne, the audience was treated to a pair of new moderators—Bill Frank and Harry Themal.

Bill Frank, at this writing a News-Journal Papers reporter and columnist, and Harry Themal, veteran associate editor with the same newspaper, served as "Nickle's" hosts during the 1957-1959 period when Pyne was not on the show. However, the confusion regarding who followed whom became quite apparent when the author was interviewing Frank in his News-Journal office.
Frank had just claimed to have succeeded Pyne as moderator when Themal, who happened to be walking by, was drawn into the conversation and replied, "No, Bill. I followed Pyne. The day he left I took over when he was in the Hotel Rodney."\(^9\)

According to Roy Sullivan, an ex-WILM manager and local radio buff, Themal was the primary replacement and Frank more intermittently hosted the "Nickle" program. Even though the exact dates and sequence are lost because of faulty memories and inadequate records, there is no doubt that these two were the primary recipients of community opinion on WILM's evening call-in program from mid-1957 to sometime in 1959.

**The Moderators**

**Bill Frank**

Frank recalled that he hosted the "Nickle" program to earn extra money to pay his daughter's college tuition. By late 1957 he had already worked as WILM's News Director and had been a Wilmington newspaper reporter and columnist for approximately 30 years.

The call-in program was broadcast from a number of area restaurants—a practice started by Pyne—or from the WILM studios, then located in the Odd Fellows Building at
10th and King Streets in Wilmington.

While admitting that he tried to "stir up some interest," Frank added that he didn't think he handled his callers in the same way that Pyne did. While the newspaperman's personal preference was to be more courteous and businesslike than Pyne over the telephone, there was another more important reason. "At that time I was moving around the public areas as a news gatherer and Pyne wasn't. So he could afford to be nasty and I couldn't. I still had to keep my channels of communication open."

As well as Frank could remember, the major issues raised on his talk program in the late 1950s were desegregation, fair housing and the problems associated with equal access to public accommodations, such as restaurants.

One racially-related community incident involved Frank while he was hosting "It's Your Nickle." A black man bought a home in Collins Park, then, and still at this writing, a predominantly all-white neighborhood south of Wilmington near New Castle. The man was the object of demonstrations and after a short time his home was dynamited.

Frank described himself as arguing against the "rednecks" and segregation on his talk show. One night, just before the 11 p.m. news break, a group of men broke
into the radio station and threatened Frank. The host
alerted an assistant to call the police, but by the time
they arrived the men had left, following a heated argument
with Frank who later noted that, "A couple of people who
were sponsoring the show canceled because of my desegrega-
tion views. But the show went on. One thing about Ewing
Hawkins, he didn't let that phase him."

But apparently Frank was, at times, phased by the
barbs of his audience when the "Nickle" show was broadcast
from Wilmington restaurants. "I remember doing the show
from Leounes' Restaurant on 11th Street. And one of the
people at the bar came over to me and was rather nasty.
And I told him to sit down and mind his own business. And
then the owner came over and told me not to be so nasty to
her customers, so I got mad and shut the show off and went
back to the studio." 10

Interestingly, during Pyne's last broadcast, from
the Town House Restaurant on 9th and Shipley Streets, Frank
was supposed to be the guest of honor, but walked out in the
midst of the program after calling one member of the
audience a "goon." The customer was said to have claimed
that he lost his job because of one of Frank's editorials.

Later in the evening, however, a caller telephoned
Pyne to claim that he "was the one who caused Frank to
leave the other restaurant [Leounes']." The caller added,
and Pyne repeated, that the man sent Frank a note asking if
his mustache was false. When Frank did not respond, the
customer kept sending notes until "the waste basket was
filled." The caller reported that Frank became so angry
that he stormed out of the restaurant and left the micro-
phone open. And for ten minutes restaurant noise went out
over the air.11

When asked if he considered call-in radio of any
practical value or thought it was instrumental in solving
any problems, Frank responded, "No. I think it just gave
bed-ridden people, old people and people who have nothing
else to do . . . a chance to air their views."12

In a 1978 article about Pyne, Frank summed up his
and Pyne's opinion of telephone talk radio and why the
format was becoming boring and overdone.

Today, radio and television show
moderators are a dime a dozen. Very common-
place, most of them. Dull as yesterday's
dishwater chiefly because they don't seem
to understand the basic principle of Pyne's
operation: "Talk shows are part of show
business." He instinctively knew that
people like to see the other guy fall on
a banana peel. He realized that people
just love to see someone else squirm under
pressure or severe castigation.13
Harry Themal

Following and in the midst of Frank's tenure as talk moderator was Harry Themal, a News-Journal Papers employee since 1959. He recalled hosting the talk program for about a year and broadcasting from the Hotel Rodney--torn down many years ago, but then located at 12th and Market Streets--the English Grill, and most of the time from the WILM studios. In 1949, Themal followed Frank as WILM's News Director and was also in charge of the station's special events department. He stayed at WILM for 10 years, where one of his final responsibilities was hosting "It's Your Nickle," which for a short time had its name changed to "Pulse."

According to Themal, there are two primary purposes of talk radio: first, as an interview show it can cover a topic in-depth and second, it is a good outlet for people to voice their opinions about everything. He added that one gets a feeling of the community's mood on certain issues rather quickly, but it's not a very scientific method. "In fact, in listening to talk radio you might get a false impression of what the community issues and opinions are, because of repeat callers." 14

Themal found hosting "Nickle" interesting because the moderator never knew what to expect or what would happen
next. "But the toughest part of the job was when there were no calls." Overall, however, he found the job troublesome:

I just didn't get any sleep. I went home at night and these calls would continue to go through my head all night long. That's one of the reasons I eventually got off the program. It just really got to me and it wasn't necessarily that they [listeners] were beating on me and it wasn't that complicated or difficult a job. I just couldn't get the stuff out of my head. And I did not like it.15

Pyne returned to "Nickle" sometime in 1959 and remained until his last program on February 5, 1960. On that show he reported that Tom Donahue, a disc jockey from Philadelphia, would be the program's new host. However, according to Carl Jones who became one of "Nickle's" longest running moderators, Donahue did the show for a while, "Then he left a note saying he was taking the day off, and he never did come back. So I sat in for him for the few days he was supposed to be off, and I ended up doing the show for over six years."16

Carl Jones

Carl Jones started working at WILM in 1954 as a part-time announcer; since 1968 he has been the station's Sales Manager. Jones described himself as a "public advocate" during his nights as a talk moderator. Stressing
that his approach was quite unlike Pyne's, he added he could make his guests uncomfortable if it became necessary.

"I was more of a gentle inquisitor. But there were times when I would get very rough and kick people in the gut. You just couldn't have it like a tea party. So you had to ask questions that would bare peoples' souls."

One practice Jones felt strongly about was his refusal to do any pre-interviewing of his guests before a show, because he believed that the program would turn out dull, "like the boxer who left his best fight in the training camp." He always wanted his shows to be fresh and spontaneous. "I felt the vitality of the question being asked for the first time was very important."

Among Jones' more prominent subjects, and one who objected very strongly to this practice, was the controversial black leader Malcolm X. But by the end of the evening, Jones remembered, "He said to me, 'If you weren't white, I'd really like you. I get along with you.'"

Reflecting on his nights at the "Nickle" microphone, Jones said,

When you're doing a show for five or six years it's amazing what you know. You're talking to doctors, lawyers . . . . I feel stupid today as compared to then, because I knew where all the political
bodies were buried. I knew all the politicians. And I attended everything to find out what was going on.17

Carl Jones was the last "Nickle" host to do remote broadcasts from Wilmington restaurants. Because of the city's social and economic decline, combined with racial tension and competing forms of entertainment in the mid-1960s, people avoided downtown at night. Also, suburban shopping centers were being built, providing restaurants, stores and movie theaters outside of the city. As a result of these factors, the telephone talk program was discouraged from continuing its remote broadcasts.

One of the last participating restaurants was Mascagni's, then on 7th Street, operated by Bob Piane, a Wilmington caterer and restauranteur. The sponsoring eating places often put special items on their late night menus and at Mascagni's, Jones remembered, "Bob Piane would set up a big piece of beef and a crowd of about 250 would be there. On other nights you'd have 50 or 75, depending upon your guest, and the people would eat a late dinner and stay for the show."18

But changing public attitudes, the late hours and increasing sensitivity caused Jones to turn the show over to Jim Termine in 1967. Jones explained,
After six years, the show had changed from being a kind of fun thing, where you had people on and you could kid them and they would kid you—even though you had some very serious subjects—to a point where people were very thin-skinned about racial issues and other topics. You found it very difficult to give opinions. 19

Jones was threatened a number of times. Late one evening the moderator left the station and while driving toward his home he was run off the highway into a field. Following the highway incident, he received a phone call saying, "We were out to get you that night."

"It had gone from, 'Isn't it fun to be here and talk about this and that,' to where people couldn't take anything. It was a very uptight situation." 20

Jim Termine

In 1968, when Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated, Jim Termine, who followed Carl Jones, was the moderator of "It's Your Nickle."

Sally Hawkins was not very active in the station's business operations at the time and was unable to contact her husband, who was out of town when the assassination occurred. She remembered that "the whole town went crazy." 21

Wilmington Mayor John Babiarz called her at home and informed Mrs. Hawkins that he didn't feel Termine should go
on the air, because as she described the host, "Jim was very definitely right wing and slightly 'redneck' and the mayor felt it was dangerous to have him on the air."

Not being able to contact Ewing Hawkins or the station's lawyer, Sally Hawkins didn't know how to respond to the situation. "I knew philosophically that Ewing Hawkins would not have bowed to outside pressures to do something he felt was wrong. But he also felt, very strongly, about the importance of our commitment to public service and doing what we told the FCC we would do."

Finally, she was able to contact Judge Herlihy, who told her she had the authority to ask Termine not to go on the air and to tell him the show was not going to be aired because there was concern that it might further inflame an already delicate situation in the city. "In those days talk radio was not quite so genteel as it is today. It was rough and ready!" she added.

Mrs. Hawkins was unable to get in touch with Termine, who she assumed had gotten the word about her intention to cancel the show and responded by going into hiding. So she went to the radio station and waited for him to come in for his—program. "And it was terrible...I was really nervous and Termine was just furious."
According to a Bill Frank article, WILM kept the show off the air for several nights. To the best of her recollection, Mrs. Hawkins thought WILM also had community leaders and politicians on the show for several nights to help calm the disturbances which were taking place.

When she finally got in touch with her husband, she said,

Oh, we're just having this terrible, terrible crisis here and the city is burning down. . . . And I was unable to get you. And he said, "Oh, just screw the mayor. You don't have to pay any attention to him." And I said, "Thank you for your advice. I'm sorry, I don't agree with you." 23

Tom Pritchett

Following Jim Termine on WILM's talk program was Tom Pritchett, who was on the air from 6:10 to 9:00 p.m. weeknights. By this time, WILM had extended its talk programming into the early evening but still had late evening telephone talk shows which aired until midnight. 24 Also during Pritchett's term as evening weeknight talk host, the station carried two local black leaders as talk moderators on the weekend. These hosts were Wendell Howell and Herman M. Holloway, Sr. and the program lasted about four months. 25
A News-Journal Papers article in June 1972 described Pritchett as a "stirrer-upper" and a "man of opinion" who enjoyed when people said his style reminded them of Joe Pyne. But the main reason for the half-page feature was the moderator's battle with Delaware Governor Russell W. Peterson. Roy Sullivan, WILM's Operations Manager in 1972, remembered that "Pritchett didn't like Peterson," and Pritchett was not bashful about saying so over the air. On April 3, 1972, Peterson was the featured guest on Pritchett's talk program. The following day the Wilmington newspaper stated that Peterson, "Said a code of ethics is needed to prevent radio talk show moderators from distorting the truth. The Governor directed his remarks at Tom Pritchett... calling him irresponsible and a distoster of the truth." Pritchett responded by accusing the Governor of making many erroneous statements over several months. The News-Journal added that Governor Peterson said, 'I believe people who have the privilege of broadcasting over the air have a great responsibility. They can create a climate to help people live together and solve their problems together, or they can create a climate that brings out the worst in human beings. That's how Tom Pritchett operates and I think it's an irresponsible way that he runs this show.'
Pritchett's opinion of the feud was, "I'm polite to everyone. I even called the Governor, 'sir.' But he wasn't nice to me. He called me irresponsible. Actually, he made an ass of himself." 30

Murry Frymer, the News-Journal reporter added, "For responsibility, you listen to Walter Cronkite. For some good old-fashioned barroom discussions, you listen to talk shows." 31

This was, at least, Governor Peterson's second major confrontation associated with telephone talk radio. Three years earlier, as noted in Chapter III, the Governor had been critical of the manner in which Wilmington's talk radio hosts handled telephone comments concerning a racial incident at Wilmington High School.

In both instances, his demands for control over the format produced no meaningful results. However, the following comment by Carl Jones is worth noting and is applicable to all politicians who happen to hear their name over talk radio's airwaves.

"I always told Peterson, 'When people were calling up and saying nice things about you, you never asked for an investigation.'" 32
In 1976, WILM radio moved from the Odd Fellows Building, at 10th and King Streets, to 1215 French Street, where it remains as the only radio station within downtown Wilmington. Bob Cunningham was "Nickle's" host during the relocation, working five nights a week from 6 to 9 p.m. as a free-lance host. Cunningham came to the position with two years of experience hosting a similar program on WNRK in Newark, Delaware. During his tenure the name of WILM's talk program was changed to "It's Your Turn," and the station switched to an all-news and information format in an attempt to stand out among Wilmington's music-oriented radio stations.

At this writing Cunningham is a staff assistant in the office of U.S. Senator Joseph Biden. The ex-moderator was proud of the fact that he had an opinion about almost everything on his program. Though he was not combative, like Pyne, Cunningham left no doubt in his callers' minds as to where he stood on a particular issue.

The main topics during his year-and-a-half on the program were Watergate and the New Castle County school desegregation issue. "I thoroughly enjoyed the program. My lifelong work had been in communications and public affairs and I'm really a 'news junkie.' So, I didn't have
to spend hours preparing for the show, I was usually up-to-date on most major issues as a matter of course."\(^35\)

When asked about the most difficult part of the show, he echoed the comments given by other talk moderators, "When the phones don't light up." Cunningham believed that if a telephone talk show is properly managed it can be as useful as a newspaper's "Letters to the Editor" section, providing the public an avenue for meaningful discussion and learning.

Regarding local talk radio shows, Cunningham felt that WDEL--Wilm's competitor--employed moderators who were exclusively full-time members of that station's news staff and that it had a totally different philosophy regarding talk programming. "They [WDEL] imposed restrictions on their staff, instructing them to avoid taking a definite stand or make sure their opinions were at a minimum. "But," he stressed, "that has a deadening effect on the talk program. You get a much livelier product on talk radio when you have a discussion that involves active participation by both parties."\(^36\)

Sharon Baker

People today are reduced to a number and polarized. When the attitude used to be, "All for one and one for all," it's now, "Every man for himself," and has been that
way for years. The talk show is an oasis. It allows people to be human and to have contact with a warm body they can unload on. And it's somebody just like them. The program host isn't one of the beautiful people, but a real person who is battling for economic survival, disillusioned about the political scandals and apprehensive about the future.37

Thus Sharon Baker described her talk philosophy in an unpublished 1979 interview. She was, next to Pyne, the longest-running host of WILM's telephone talk program. During her seven-year tenure, from 1975 to 1982, the show's name was changed to "NEWS TALK" and that label continues at this writing.

The self-described "fiscal conservative and social liberal" started hosting the program three nights a week, sharing the microphone on the two alternate evenings with Frank Herron. Later she became the sole host and the station reduced the program's length to two hours. Eventually, because of WILM's increasing commitment to sports, "NEWS TALK" was limited to one hour, four nights a week.

Reflecting upon her years as a talk moderator, Baker criticized WILM because it didn't do all it could to publicize her show. "They never made an effort to sell the show. It was the only personality type program they had on an all-news station."38 The last comment referred to WILM's decision to become an all-news station in January 1976.
Baker added, "I also thought that since I was one of the few female talk show hosts in a field dominated by men, it was unusual that I got the program and was able to maintain it for over seven years."39

Her style was never intentionally to aggravate her callers, but she added that she always expressed exactly what she believed. "In other words, I was never putting the audience on." But she did not wholeheartedly go along with the popular notion that WILM's moderators were able to have free reign to espouse their opinions.

To Sally Hawkins and Ewing Hawkins' credit, in the beginning I really was a free agent. But several times over the years they'd call me in and say that people had called and didn't like something I'd said. And they'd say, what I always felt was their big mistake, "You're just there to listen to the callers' opinions and move on to the call." And I always said, "But really that's not what a talk host should do. The host is an agitator, or a person who is supposed to facilitate communication, but at the same time cause the listener to think and by doing so, create enough interest so that person is motivated to call the program."40

Baker added that after seven years behind the talk microphone she felt she knew her audience and a large part of it looked upon talk radio as a vehicle to provide information in an entertaining manner. "Which is why I always tried to maintain that if the moderator is not
controversial--and therefore entertaining--you're going to lose a large part of your audience."

She felt the reason WILM's management didn't support her program more was because they backed off from anything controversial.

They shy away from the very thing that talk radio is supposed to do and that is, take a stand! For years they promised me that they'd start to take editorial positions on things, but they never would do it. And if they called me into the office, it was because I had taken a stand on something.

In spite of her inability to have the station provide "NEWS TALK" with publicity, Baker managed to drum up a bit of press on her own, by sponsoring a series of Joe Pyne masquerade parties.

As a cooperative effort to raise funds for the Delaware Alcoholism Council, Baker and a few friends organized a Halloween-style costume party in the Hotel duPont's Gold Ballroom, featuring a 46-piece orchestra and a professional cabaret singer. In 1977, the first Talker's Anonymous Costume Charity Ball sold nearly 500 tickets. Baker's main participants were her talk show listeners, whom she encouraged to attend, in costume, so they could hide their identity as they did when they called her program.

The highlight of the 1978 affair was the awarding
of the "Joe Pine," a potted plant, to one of "NEWS TALK's" most well-known repeat callers Mrs. "S." Baker further arranged to have Joe Pyne's wife and daughter present to give out the award. Even though she enjoyed conducting the two extravaganzas, a number of problems made it impossible to continue the event, chief among them was a lack of participation by the station. "WILM could have gotten a thousand miles of publicity out of it, but they did not support it," said Baker, who attended the masquerade dressed as "Mighty Mouth." "Some station people came, but not in costume," she added. 42

Sharon Baker left "NEWS TALK" voluntarily in April 1982 to spend more time in her husband's radio commercial business and start a private video production enterprise. At this writing she is producer of WHYY-TV's program "This Week."

While serving as "NEWS TALK's" host she was threatened, received calls and letters from the Delaware State Correctional Institution in Smyrna, and had the station broken into more than once while on the air. Claiming she was not overly concerned about physical harm, she remembered that during the first five years on the program she made it a point not to have her full face photographed in any article. "I guess I was a little paranoid. But I didn't want some
weirdo to take off with one of my kids."

When asked if she ever missed hosting her talk program, Baker provided this response: "I do miss the show. I miss making people think. I had a number of dear friends on that show that I'd never met and who I never will meet--little old ladies and little old men. And they're the ones I miss." 43

Susan Williams

In April 1982 Susan Williams replaced Sharon Baker as "NEWS TALK's" host. Williams had worked at WILM for three years as a reporter and felt that the most enjoyable part of the talk program was having the time to explore a topic in depth. "The trouble with reporting is that your voice cuts 44 have to be 40 seconds long and you only have two or three lines to explain a topic. So you're just really hitting the surface. Telephone talk lets you get into the topic and give callers a chance to comment. And I like to hear their comments." 45

But, unlike many of WILM's previous moderators, Williams felt that her most important role as moderator is informing the listeners, rather than stirring up controversy. "I don't think that giving my opinion is what people want to hear. We'd rather let them know what's going on and
what the major issues are. Then let the listeners converse with people who know the subjects." 46

To accomplish this end, Williams decided to devote more of "NEWS TALK's" evenings to structured programming with selected features and guests, rather than the earlier practice of having a majority of open forum programs. Williams set up periodic dates on which professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, antique dealers, etc., would answer questions called in by her listeners. In addition, she is investigating the possibility of getting entertainers from Atlantic City to be her guests, by telephone. The last idea isn't as difficult as it might first seem.

"It's surprisingly easy. I thought I was going to have a lot of trouble arranging something like that, but the stars' and casinos' public relations people are very cooperative."

A show on vampires and another on ghosts were two of her most successful programs. But, she stressed, her goal is to have a mixture of entertaining and hard-hitting topics. "I'm trying to get people to tune into the show to listen to the issues and not necessarily to me." 47

Williams feels the one-hour length of the program is perfect. "The show used to be two hours long, but I'm
not sure you can drag a topic out that long and still make it interesting. I've found that all the questions I wanted to ask and all the information is usually able to be covered in an hour. So I'd rather not pad it and drag it out."

When asked about the station's guidelines or talk policy, Williams recalled no restrictions or limitations. "As far as dealing with the callers . . . we're free to cut our callers off anytime. I think that after working as a reporter for three years, you start to learn what a station wants and what they don't want." Williams added, "Our General Manager, Sally Hawkins, feels that talk radio is one of the most important functions of the station. She and I have met a number of times concerning how we can best serve the public."48

The Management

Drew Angeline

In July 1982, WILM's Operations Director Drew Angeline was interviewed for this study. He had been with the station since 1976, serving as a reporter and news director.49 At this writing he is no longer at WILM, having left in late 1982 to take a position in a department of New Castle County government.50

According to Angeline, WILM felt strongly about talk
radio's ability to satisfy a portion of the station's public service commitments required by the FCC. Also, it was a way to get a real response from the grass roots element of the community. "One of the easiest ways for a radio station to communicate with the general public and afford them the opportunity to say exactly what is on their mind, is through talk radio."51

Angeline explained that based on the callers' reactions to certain issues, the station would be able to ascertain the public's needs and develop special reports in the news department, thereby producing programming based partially upon the interest and responses to certain talk show topics. "We're never completely happy with how ascertainment52 is done . . . . But in a marketplace of this size we can get a little deeper, go to the grass roots level and talk directly to the people."

He felt that telephone talk's biggest problem, "Was finding those topics that interest the most people and utilize them without beating them into the ground. Certainly we could bring the vampire guy, who was on Susan's show, on the program every Monday night. But after a while it's going to get to be routine."

Claiming there had never been, to his knowledge, any list of "do's and don'ts" or restrictions on moderators,
Angeline felt they simply had to conduct themselves in a professional manner and keep the conversation in good taste. He also stressed, "I feel our talk show hosts should return their opinion in the conversation. That's what it's all about. It's two-way conversation. If our hosts disagree they can tell the callers why and the result is, I hope, stimulation for someone else to pick up the phone and call in and give their opinion to the host." 53

Angeline explained that the decision to reduce the early evening talk programs to an hour was because of WILM's increased sports programming, which extends through baseball and basketball seasons. For the sake of consistency, "NEWS TALK" was limited to the 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. hour. However, since January 1978, WILM has also carried Larry King's early morning national talk program, thus providing five additional hours of telephone talk radio from midnight to 5 a.m., six days a week. 54

WILM continues to do talk radio, he added, because it is a community-oriented station and it feels that talk radio is probably the most ideal opportunity for the listeners in a community to express their opinions. "I feel very strongly about the statement made in the station's license, 'that we are here to 'serve the needs of the community.' And there's no better way to find out the needs than
to have people open their minds and tell each other what's bothering them."^{55}

Sally Hawkins

Mrs. Hawkins has been associated with WILM and Delaware Broadcasting Company since 1948, when her husband Ewing bought the station. However, her active role in station management began in 1972 when she assumed the post of General Manager.

Like Angeline, Mrs. Hawkins felt strongly about the ability of talk radio to provide public service to the community and serve as a convenient tool to ascertain the public's concerns. "You get more of a gut response from people on talk radio than you do in any other way. It's so easy for someone to pick up the phone and say, 'By God, I hate that.' "^{56}

She talked fondly of Joe Pyne, who had worked so long and so closely with her husband. Recalling the fantastic reaction the station received when Pyne was on the air, "He was so volatile ... so audacious. Oh, but they loved him. They either hated him or they loved him."

But she admitted she would have difficulty dealing with someone like Pyne today, because she is more interested in covering the issues and making sure that all sides of a
topic or event are expressed. But at the same time, "I think I could deal with someone who was flamboyant and outspoken and opinionated, as long as he or she was fair."  

While mentioning that talk radio will always have some place in WILM's programming, Mrs. Hawkins stressed that a great deal of a program like "NEWS TALK's" success depends upon the moderator. And that success depends upon whether the host is able to create a stimulating and informative discussion, by being thoroughly prepared and willing to ask the right questions that get to the meat of the subject.

Many of WILM's moderators were not full-time station employees, admitted Mrs. Hawkins. "Some had done interviews or been guests on the station and others came in and approached us about doing the show." But apparently being a telephone talk show moderator isn't as easy as some might think.

"You get some people who have a real desire, but what they find out is, that sitting behind that microphone four or five nights a week is a real damn grind. It's tough. It really is tough! You have to be on your toes every minute."

She recalled that Frank Gallagher, who had worked...
at the station for a number of years, came back in 1982 to do a Friday evening talk show, once a week, for senior citizens. "We though it was just wonderful. But after three months Frank was just a basket case."^58

As Carl Jones had said earlier, "The show had changed,"^59 and Sally Hawkins agreed,

You had a different type of entertainment in bars in those days . . . . And it was in the early years of television, so it didn't have the hold on people that it does now. So people went out in the evenings . . . . But it was a different atmosphere. An evening out was the English Grill for dinner, then drinks, then be part of the Pyne show. And Joe had a following and Carl had a following. But it was a more intimate following.^60

Chapter Conclusion

No more does Wilmington experience the remote broadcasts of telephone talk programs as WILM had done so successfully from area restaurants in the 1950s and 1960s. Economic considerations (long term commitments by sponsors and the expense of remote telephone lines), social changes (people afraid or unwilling to go downtown after dark), and other forms of entertainment and recreation (television, home video recorders, computer games, suburban malls and health clubs) have all helped to ensure that evening telephone talk will never again be as viable a form of entertainment, as existed
in Wilmington for a 10-year period.

Instead, today's radio management is coldly calculating the best ways to deliver meaningful "information" to its listeners to satisfy "public service" requirements and, at the same time, secure the largest possible share of the audience.

The free-wheeling days of "entertainment" talk radio over WILM are probably gone forever. But at least for a time, in the early 1950s, Wilmington was treated to a new, experimental radio format which helped bridge the widening gap between network entertainment radio and the offerings being developed by the new medium, television.

In 1983, entertainment talk radio as it once existed has no place on Wilmington radio. Community standards and management oversensitivity to controversy have squeezed it out of existence. But those steady talk show junkies are occasionally treated to an "off the wall" comment or unscheduled outburst by an outspoken caller or frustrated moderator, who accidently let down their guard and make the rest of us believe that, at least for a few fleeting moments, there are real human beings--not packaged beautiful people--on the opposite end of the line.

When tempers flare, insults reign and blood boils,
thoughts turn to memories of yesteryear in Wilmington, Delaware, on WILM, when such was the course rather than the exception. And the audience loved it.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER IV

1 Sally Hawkins interview.

2 It has proven impossible to focus upon the events and activities associated with all of WILM's talk show moderators. Some were not as prominent as others, many were unable to be contacted and space alone dictated that the author exercise his own judgment in selecting those who were representative of their time. Following are the names of some of the other telephone talk show hosts who were on "It's Your Nickle" or WILM's other telephone talk programs: Sid Shaw, Jack Barry, Burke Hully, Roy Sullivan, Jack Hunter, Msgr. Paul Taggart, Frank Gallagher, Adjt. Gen. Joseph J. Scannel, Tom Rettew, Bill Tudor, Jane Harriman and Bill Hayden.


4 Robert Taylor, President and General Manager of WDEL/WSTW and Delmarva Broadcasting Company, telephone interview, January 24, 1983.


6 Richard Aydelotte, second interview, April 5, 1983.


8 Roy Sullivan interview.

9 Bill Frank interview. Mr. Frank still broadcasts a daily commentary on WILM radio.

10 Ibid.
Joe Pyne's last "Nickle" program tape recording.

Bill Frank interview.

Bill Frank, "Meet Joe Pyne."

Harry Themal interview.

Ibid.

Carl Jones interview.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Sally Hawkins interview.

Bill Frank, "There's a lot wrong with radio talk shows."

Sally Hawkins interview.


Frymer.

Roy Sullivan interview.


Ibid.
30 Frymer.
31 Ibid.
32 Carl Jones interview.
33 Bob Cunningham interview.
34 Susan Williams, host of WILM's "NEWS TALK" from April 1982 to the time of this writing, interview held in the WILM studios, Wilmington, Delaware, December 7, 1982. Second interview.
35 Bob Cunningham interview.
36 Ibid.
37 Sharon Baker, host of WILM's "NEWS TALK" from 1975 to April 1982, unpublished interview held at the Baker home, Newark, Delaware, October 8, 1979, by Ed Okonowicz.
38 Sharon Baker, interview held at the University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware, September 14, 1982. Second interview.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Portions of tape recorded interviews which are later broadcast over radio station news broadcasts.
45 Susan Williams, host of WILM's "NEWS TALK" from April 1982 to the time of this writing, interview held in the WILM studios, Wilmington, Delaware, July 15, 1982. First interview.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Call-in radio, which evolved into two-way talk radio—or more simply, "talk-radio"—has been broadcast continuously in Wilmington, Delaware, since 1950.

There are some claims that forms of telephone talk programming existed in isolated instances in the 1930s. However, most evidence indicates that the telephone talk format began to develop in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and then grew in earnest during the mid-1960s. With the arrival of television after World War II, radio's Golden Age began to decline. But the established medium tried to hold on to its listeners by providing new programming, which included popular music shows, sports, news and the novel experiment designed to get listeners involved—telephone talk.

Radio station WILM was one of the pioneer stations in the country to adopt the telephone talk format. For over 30 years, since the debut of Joe Pyne's "It's Your Nickle" in 1950, the station has broadcast some form of telephone talk programming. When reading about telephone
talk radio, one is often reminded that the success or failure of such an undertaking depends primarily upon the program's moderator. In the case of "It's Your Nickle," its first host, Joe Pyne, unknowingly set a standard that has never been equaled by his successors.

Pyne was primarily a self-taught, self-made man with a gift of gab, who captured the fancy of the community by providing call-in talk radio in an entertaining fashion, five nights a week. But while Pyne provided entertainment, he did it in a sarcastic fashion. His grand design was to draw the telephone caller into a confrontation, no matter how bland or innocent the topic might seem, and, in the end, make the participant the victim of the call that he/she had initiated.

While this might seem cruel or unfair, it is essentially the same style of entertainment which has made Don Rickles one of show business's most successful and popular comedians. Bill Frank, the News Journal columnist, wrote in a 1970 article that Pyne's audience loved his sarcastic style, "Joe Pyne usually gave them [callers] hell just for calling--and while the callers didn't like it, the audience was quite beside itself with giggles. People loved to hear Pyne tear a caller apart."^2

Since call-in radio was a new and experimental
format in Pyne's early days, WILM's management, the local politicians, the sponsors, the audience, and even the moderator had no definite idea of how Wilmington's radio audience would react to the new offering. As the programs continued and the phone lines remained busy, Wilmington's premiere telephone talk program increased in popularity, and "Nickle's" host was the recipient of physical threats, lawsuits and even a car bombing. If success is measured by the ability of a station and its programs to attract attention and listeners, then WILM's "It's Your Nickle" was a triumph.

In 1962, approximately 12 years after WILM first aired "It's Your Nickle," WDEL introduced its own telephone talk program, "Voice of the People." While the two programs were somewhat similar, there were some major differences. Bill Frank, Sally Hawkins, Carl Jones, Sharon Baker--associated with WILM's talk shows--described that station's telephone talk programming with such words as "entertainment," "fun," and "show business," but at the same time stressed that they also covered some very serious issues.  

On the other hand, WDEL's management referred to its talk format in more conservative, sterile and-businesslike terms, stating that while providing an outlet for its
listeners' opinions the station consciously attempted to keep its own moderators' personal comments to a minimum. To understand this difference, one can compare the origins of the two telephone talk programs, "Nickle" and "Voice." Joe Pyne, the original host and originator of "It's Your Nickle," was variously described as an entertainer, a demagogue and an agitator. "Voice of the People's" first moderator, Joe Mosbrook, was considered "the professional newsman and journalist" by WDEL's General Manager Robert Taylor.4

In 1949, Ewing Hawkins, WILM's owner, brought Pyne to Wilmington with full knowledge that he was asked to leave Atlantic City. Associates at WILM, as well as Hawkins' wife Sally, have admitted that Ewing delighted in Pyne's antics and his ability to stir up the community; for Ewing Hawkins never shied away from controversy and, frankly, Pyne was good for business.

In an April 1983 article following Ewing Hawkin's death, Bill Frank stated,

He [Ewing] made it plain from the start that the broadcasters, commentators and even disc jockeys, were to have independence as long as they didn't push him into a libel suit. . . . Ewing believed in Horace Greeley's rule, "The job of a newspaper is to print the news and raise hell." With Ewing's encouragement, WILM kept broadcasting the news and raising hell.5
In addition, Pyne and Hawkins had something in common: they were both ex-Marines and had both served in combat in the Pacific Theater during World War II—Pyne as an enlisted man and Ewing Hawkins as an officer. Perhaps Hawkins, because of his combat experience, knew how to handle the ex-Marine Pyne, and this officer/enlisted man relationship carried over into a parallel employer/employee association at radio station WILM, where Ewing commanded his broadcasting outlet and Pyne served as one of his most able and gifted soldiers.

In WDEL's case, its venture into telephone talk radio was quite different. Dick Aydelotte, a station employee for over 40 years and at this writing WDEL's promotion and public affairs manager, recalled that Pyne first approached WDEL with the idea of a telephone talk program. However, he was turned down because of WDEL's conservative attitude. Aydelotte added, "And telephone talk was kind of an innovative idea, and we were afraid that with Joe's abrasive manner he would alienate a lot of people." 6

When WDEL decided to begin its own talk program, 12 years after Pyne started "Nickle" on WILM, WDEL's owners and management held detailed discussions and established strict guidelines prior to airing its first telephone talk show. Chief among its rules was that the talk program
moderators should refrain from giving their own opinions about the issues. To tighten further its control over its talk hosts, WDEL used only full-time employees with considerable experience as "Voice of the People" moderators. Robert Taylor, WDEL's General Manager at this writing, stressed, "You don't get on our talk shows unless you've been around here a long time." While ensuring the station's control, it also enabled WDEL management to feel that such an experienced person was thoroughly familiar with WDEL's telephone talk radio philosophy. As a result, "Voice of the People" ended a 20-year run in August 1982 with considerably less controversy than "It's Your Nickle," or its WILM successors "Pulse," "It's Your Turn," and "NEWS TALK."

As opposed to WDEL's practice of hiring full-time moderators, WILM had a record of liberally interspersing free agent hosts with its full-time employees in talk moderator positions, and the result was more controversy.

Remote broadcasts of WILM's "Nickle" show were commonplace in Wilmington restaurants during Pyne's tenure and the practice was continued, to a certain extent, by Frank, Themal and Jones. But "Voice of the People" was primarily broadcast from WDEL's studios and rarely, if ever, was it aired from a restaurant or public site. This
might possibly be interpreted as another example of WDEL's desire to maintain complete control over its moderators and the "Voice" program. With the host and program originating from the confines of the station's studios, it was much easier to maintain managerial control.

Carl Jones, an ex-WILM talk show host, commented on how the changing social climate had a direct effect upon call-in radio. Jones recalled that by the mid-1960s doing the program was no longer "fun" and his audience and participants were becoming very "sensitive." It was during this time that the remote "Nickle" broadcasts were discontinued. Social and economic changes, fear of crime, and new forms of entertainment eliminated the necessity or desire for people to travel into downtown Wilmington after dark. As center city theaters and department stores closed and moved into suburban shopping centers, so too was the microphone silenced on WILM's remote "Nickle" broadcasts.

By 1966, interviewing visiting show business stars and providing late evening entertainment were no longer the primary attractions of talk radio. Instead, it was more frequently being used to voice complaints, and a large number of the problems discussed centered around racial issues. While varied topics and concerns were aired on the call-in programs since their inception, almost
overnight, in the mid-1960s the emphasis on community racial problems began to increase in frequency and in intensity. Also, by this time, a new element of call-in radio was becoming commonplace and changed the way a program was conducted and how the caller's would have to be treated. That element was the callers' voice.

When Joe Pyne began broadcasting "Nickle," he repeated and summarized the comments of his callers for the listening audience. He, as well as some of his successors, did not have to be concerned with the callers' voices being heard by the listening audience. Thus, the moderators could edit as they felt necessary, and the callers' comments could be altered according to the hosts' desires. But with the callers' voices being heard over the air, at times shouting and arguing with the host, control of the microphone and likewise the entire program became more difficult. The eight-second tape delay was available for the host to maintain the program in good taste and delete obscenities. The "kill switch" was not designed to be used by the moderator for self-protection from criticism, or to avoid debating issues where he/she might be ill-prepared or hold the minority opinion. Therefore, the talk show moderator was placed in an audio fishbowl, under constant scrutiny, and the position, more than ever, demanded a host who was psychologically well-balanced,
well-read, and well-prepared.

Still, through the 1960s and 1970s, WILM permitted its hosts to trade opinion for opinion with the evening callers. Jim Termine was so outspoken that Wilmington's mayor requested the moderator be taken off the air during a time of heightened racial tensions; Tom Pritchett took on Delaware Governor Russell Peterson; and Bob Cunningham boasted that he had an opinion on every subject and was quick to give it out. Meanwhile WDEL continued its opinionless moderator policy and the management even instructed its "Voice of the People" hosts that it was their responsibility to encourage opposite views on their programs, if too many comments favoring one side of an issue were voiced by the program's callers.

However, after leaving WILM, in 1982, Sharon Baker made a number of revealing comments about certain managerial pressures she experienced, especially in her latter years as a host on "NEWS TALK." She spoke of being berated by the station management because of opinions she stated over the air. How often these sessions occurred is not known, but the incidents raise the question: How much independence is still being given to the hosts of WILM's telephone talk programs? Sally Hawkins, who knew Pyne when her late husband operated the station, stated that she might have
trouble with Joe Pyne if he were to work for her in 1983, because of her desire to cover all sides of an issue. 10

Conveniently, for WILM management, the 1983 host of "NEWS TALK," Susan Williams, does not want to give her opinions, and dislikes the open forum concept. Instead, she is attempting to structure each of her one-hour shows, thereby trying to increase the chances that her listeners will have learned something at the end of each program. While Williams' method is less organized then WDEL's latest approach, it is similar. Both concepts--fostered by WILM's Williams and WDEL's Operations Manager Pete Booker--are designed to inform rather than strictly entertain, to eliminate repeat callers, and to minimize contacts by those listeners who call the two talk shows only to satisfy their own problems or voice complaints.

The management at WDEL has another motive for its talk programming modifications--to attract a new, younger audience. However, this objective is part of an overall station philosophy which has been developing over the last few years. As WDEL Operations Manager Pete Booker explained, the over 55-year-old audience, which had been WDEL's primary constituency, was not growing in size and the station was not appealing to a younger, much larger segment of the population. Therefore, a concentrated effort was launched
to attract the 33-54 year-old audience, which has more spendable income, is more mobile and makes up a larger segment of the population. Since "Voice of the People" was a part of WDEL's programming, it too was affected and modified into the one-hour telephone talk block on "P.M. Delaware."¹¹

In the talk show days of Joe Pyne, and even in the early days of Joe Mosbrook on WDEL, telephone call-in radio was unique. It did not saturate the airwaves, but was an alternative to the music programming which dominated many radio stations. Eventually, a majority of stations added some form of telephone talk program and many broadcast more than one show. In 1970, Bill Frank questioned in one of his columns the need for so many talk programs and wondered how long it would be before they became stereotyped and dull and undone.¹²

At this writing, the two stations are examining their telephone talk programming to answer the same general question: How do we use telephone talk radio to serve the public in a meaningful fashion and make our station stand out in a market saturated by similar programming? Interestingly, both Wilmington stations each have one hour of local talk programming. But they have extended their overall, two-way commitments by providing late evening and early
morning network talk shows for the local audience. Larry King's national program is aired each weeknight from midnight to 5:00 A.M. on WILM, and WDEL broadcasts NBC's "Talk Net" five nights a week from 8:00 P.M. to 2:00 A.M.

It would be wrong to assume that two-way talk radio is dead or dying on either local radio outlet. Rather, the programming is being modified to achieve better results. On WDEL the changes have been more dramatic, on WILM they are proceeding more subtly.

When Joe Pyne started "It's Your Nickle," an overwhelming portion of his audience was comprised of people who did not own a television set. His listeners were products of a radio age and television was both alien and a luxury, and to some even a passing fancy.

Eventually the same people would see that television could do more and deliver more than their radios, but they also felt an attraction and loyalty to "The Shadow," "Gangbusters," "The Lone Ranger," Jack Benny and Bob Hope. They had grown up around the huge living room Philco and for decades it had been their friend. They were comfortable and secure with radio. They knew what to expect.

By 1955 there would be many more television sets and stations and programs. Many of radio's stars would move to the new medium, and by the late 1950s radio drama and
comedy would be gone. But in 1950, when Joe Pyne started a show that allowed, and at times even encouraged, the listeners to call up the host and say that the mayor was a bum—that new kind of entertainment was also unique. And it was on radio.

Joe Pyne took on the state attorney general, Wilmington's mayor, carpetbagging racists and anyone who was brave enough to call him, and he won all his fights because he was gifted and because he owned the telephone—both ends of it. Pyne used his wits and his natural gift of gab and made Wilmington his private training ground during the years when television was in its infancy.

Then, in 1957 and again in 1960, Pyne moved to the West Coast, where, by 1966, he attained national success. Whether Pyne was clever enough to see the eventual end to his style of "entertainment" telephone talk radio, or whether his change was simply the "luck of the Irish," will never be known. No doubt, his 1957 Los Angeles television experience and his short-lived "Joe Pyne Show" over Wilmington's WVUE-TV in 1959 had a strong influence upon his future development. Perhaps it was during this exposure to television that Pyne realized the tremendous potential of the new medium and aimed in that direction. In a Chester Times interview in 1959, immediately after the demise of his
Wilmington TV program, the interviewer noted that Pyne was out of the controversy business and simply spinning records on WILM. However, the reporter added that upon questioning Pyne further, the ex-talk host replied with a knowing smile, "'I have plans.'"14

Looking back at the development of Pyne's career after that 1959 interview, there is little doubt that he was aiming for the bright lights of television, having tasted success through the medium twice, once in California and again in Wilmington.

During his quest for success, Pyne treated Wilmington-area radio audiences to an entertainment experience the likes of which it has never heard again. While others have tried to imitate Pyne, the results have never been the same. But even if Pyne himself sat behind the "NEWS TALK" microphone in 1983, it is doubtful that he would be able to bring back the free-wheeling days of entertainment talk. Joe Pyne was in the right place at the right time, and he was perceptive enough and clever enough to take advantage of his chance for greatness.

Two questions, however, remain:

1. Would talk radio have developed in Wilmington without Joe Pyne?
2. Could Pyne have existed, with as much controversy as he generated in Wilmington, in any other city?

Without any hesitation, it is safe to say that telephone talk radio, in some form, would have developed in Wilmington even without Joe Pyne. Radio stations in St. Louis, New York City, Denver and Boston did not wait for Pyne to arrive to institute the format. There was some other innovator in those areas who recognized the potential for the combination of the telephone and the microphone, and the existence of the average listener's desire to air a gripe or to seek advice. Just as other persons initiated telephone talk radio in cities throughout the country, so too another station owner or manager or moderator eventually would have brought the format to Wilmington. For with or without Pyne, two-way telephone talk radio's time had come.

However, would the amount of controversy have been the same in Wilmington without Pyne? The answer is, probably, no. As has been stated over and over again—when considering talk radio, the host is the show. Since no local telephone talk host has ever come near to matching Pyne's ability to raise anger, and do it in such a skillful fashion, controversy would never have reached the volatile and entertaining proportions that it did without Pyne behind
the "Nickle" microphone. Bill Frank often described Pyne's successors as "too danged polite," or as "dull as dishwater," and "too bent upon pleasing audiences."15 This was not Pyne's style and that is why he was so successful.

Could Pyne have existed, with as much controversy as he generated in Wilmington, in any other city in America?

At the right time, in the right place, with the right circumstances and a dash of luck anything can happen. This is what occurred to Joe Pyne. He was a vocal missionary in a company town, with access to a microphone and the will and ability to use it. Ewing Hawkins, his employer, was delighted with Pyne because the moderator's controversial antics helped increase WILM's popularity. Finally, Pyne was making an excellent income because he had arranged to receive a share of the advertising time sold to "Nickle's" sponsors.

DuPont, the community's dominant business, also owned the local newspapers. So the city's blue-collar audience, many believing Pyne to be a folk hero, flocked to his program and used it as a vehicle to air complaints against authority and the company's tendency to dominate the community and its affairs. In addition, television was still a new diversion which was experimental and, to
many of Pyne's listeners, unaffordable. So while the auto workers and bricklayers and bus drivers and office clerks and homemakers wanted a television set, they had Pyne to entertain them until they could buy one.

Ex-talk moderator Bob Cunningham said that telephone talk radio reminded him of an electronic "Letters to the Editor," and that's exactly what some of Pyne's listeners considered "Nickle" in the company town of the 1950s. The program was used to vent frustration and serve as an outlet to air one's concerns. It was the place where the thoughts, and opinions of middle, working-class America could be heard, but it also served Pyne well.

While television was taking its first halting steps, Pyne sharpened his interviewing and intimidating techniques. Then, when the time was right in the early 1960s, he took his knowledge and skill to a major radio market and by 1966 he became a national radio and television success. In that year his "Joe Pyne Radio Show," which originated in Los Angeles, was syndicated by Harvest Productions, Inc. to 176 stations nationwide (including WNBC in New York). One year earlier, in early 1965, Pyne's West Coast program was purchased for a 13-week run on Wilmington's WDEL radio, the conservative station which turned him down in 1950.

Yes, Pyne would have made it in another city. But
to what degree the station or the politicians or the audience would have accepted him are unknown. Given a similar company town with a like populace, his telephone talk program might have been much like "It's Your Nickel." But each city is unique, and the circumstances and issues, while often parallel, are never duplicated. Joe Pyne would probably have made a success of himself anywhere. But Wilmington--and the local issues concerning race and gambling and politics in the 1950s--no doubt, helped Pyne along, for he had a good number of controversial topics into which he could sink his very capable mouth.

Wilmington's telephone talk history is interesting because many of telephone talk's local moderators were colorful. Also, in the case of WILM, its owner, Ewing Hawkins, enjoyed a good fight and gave his employees a great deal of freedom. Without Ewing Hawkins, Joe Pyne probably would have had to peddle his acid tongue elsewhere; and the results might not have been as positive as he experienced in Wilmington.

In addition, Wilmington radio in the 1950s was not run by college graduates or a cadre of specially-trained program personalities. Operations managers, program directors, newsroom personnel and disc jockeys--gained their experience on the streets and through on-the-job training.
No course on talk radio programming prepared Pyne or Jones or Aydelotte for their evenings behind the talk radio microphone.

Today, radio is run strictly as a business. No doubt it has always operated as an economic venture; but during the early days of Wilmington's talk radio history, in the 1950s, it was also fun. In retrospect, one gets the impression that economic factors were not the only ones considered when programming was being decided. There was room for entertainment and controversy, even if a few sponsors were lost along the way; and, yes, even if Ewing Hawkins had to go to court against the State Attorney General—the show would go on.

The listening audience loved to hear Pyne slam down the phone and tell the caller he/she was an "alcoholic creep," and it enjoyed when Jones "kicked his guests in the gut" to make them respond to a question or come off dead-center in an interview. Those were the days when radio was experimenting and call-in telephone talk was one of the medium's great discoveries. There were no rules other than the restrictions of the particular station management, and the moderators could use their respective personalities, philosophies and show business techniques—within the station's limitations—to attract and keep their audience.
In 1983, telephone talk radio is no longer designed to be entertaining or to encourage controversy. After interviewing the management and moderators of both WILM and WDEL, the author sincerely doubts whether a talk moderator who even slightly resembled Pyne in his or her approach to the callers would return to the program after the first commercial break. In the 1980s, aggressive, young, broadcasting executives examine statistics in an attempt to attract a specific segment of the audience and increase ratings, so the station can secure businesses willing to spend money to advertise their goods and services. And if the audience is not listening to a particular program—thus hindering the sale of station advertising—that show is modified or cancelled, such was the case with "Voice of the People."

In Pyne's day, a successful talk moderator had to have a quick wit, a glib tongue, a sixth sense to avoid libel and a feud with the mayor to keep the audience entertained. In 1983, the ideal radio station talk host should have a college degree, precise diction, be non-committal, avoid topics such as religion and politics and accede to the demands of the station management—which lives by the rule, "Keep it light and airy and move on to the next call."
This study principally concentrated on the historical aspects of local telephone talk radio. However, there are a number of other studies which have been suggested by this work and may be worthy of investigation.

1. To what extent is WILM's management still committed to telephone talk controversy? Does the distinction between WILM and WDEL—that the former encouraged controversy and that the latter avoided it—still exist or has this major difference disappeared over the last 15 years?

2. In light of Joe Pyne's successful national career, are there other talk program hosts or entertainers who have modeled themselves after Wilmington's most outspoken talk moderator?

3. Who are the callers to radio talk programs—be they regulars or first-time participants—and why do they participate in two-way telephone talk radio?

4. Which telephone topics have proven to be the most successful? Also, are the listeners interested in topics which help solve their respective personal problems or those issues which address community concerns?

5. What is the background of the successful telephone talk host? A study could examine the education, the
interests and the social, cultural and family background of local or nationally-known talk moderators.

These are only a few of the areas which offer potential to those interested in doing further investigation of the telephone talk format. During the past 33 years, this type of radio programming has changed considerably. At times it has served to inform, at other times to educate and entertain. The program topics have been selected to address community problems, to educate the electorate and to soothe a racially-aggravated audience.

If talk radio is to remain in Wilmington's future—and that certainly seems likely—it will undoubtedly continue to mature, and, at the same time, adapt to the demands placed upon it by listeners, moderators and management.
FOOTNOTES
CHAPTER V

1 Fornatale, p. 82.


3 Bill Frank, Sally Hawkins, Sharon Baker, Carl Jones interviews.

4 Robert Taylor interview.


6 Richard Aydelotte, WDEL Promotion and Public Affairs Director, telephone interview, April 6, 1983. Second interview.

7 Robert Taylor interview.

8 Carl Jones interview.

9 Sharon Baker, second interview.

10 Sally Hawkins interview.

11 Pete Booker interview.

12 Frank, "Talk shows boom along."

13 Murdaugh, "Joe Pyne Saw Tobacco Juice Fly."

14 Ibid.
Frank, "Talk shows boom along."

Bob Cunningham interview.


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