

Happened to the Old Broadcast Team!

By Ed Corcoran and Steve Lewis

t came and passed quietly, but for many central Connecticut residents, the date Jan. 15, 1973, marked the end of an era. I was on that date that the Travelers Insurance Cos. announced the sale of their holdings in radio and television station WTIC. Travelers decision to leave Hartford broadcasting not only changed the lives of the staff workers of the station, but the listening habits of long tradition for a large share of the public as

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they came with it, going on the air in September 1957, on Channel 3. The call letters, the proud monogram of the Travelers Insurance Company, were naturally carried over from radio, marking the birth of WTIC-TV.

Then in 1973, the combination was broken up. The radio stations, now two, one on AM and one on FM, went to the Ten Eighty Corporation, then headed by Leonard Patricelli, who before the sale had also been president of Broadcast Plaza Inc. The publishing conglomerate owning the Washington Post and NCwsweek, among other properties, including other television outlets across the country, took over WTIC-TV. Shortly thereafter the call letters were changed to the present WFSB-TV, after Frederick S. Beebe, a Newsweek executive large responsible for the acquisition of their new television station. He had passed away shortly prior to

Before the split, most of the announcing staff had divided their duties between the radio and television studios. When the new ownerships took over, many employes were pressed to make a decision, to stay with one or the other. And thus

the actual sale.

many of whom had been with the station for more than two decades.

Few people in the listening or viewing audience ever have the chance to meet broadcasters personally, but to the many who had welcomed WTIC personnel into their homes, their living rooms, their kitchens, their bedrooms, via the magic of electronics and broadcasting, over a period of many years, they were considered friends, if not members of the fami-

With the new ownerships, formats were changed, to attract new, and younger, audiences, and new and younger faces and voices have come onto the scene. Some familiar personalities have retired, others have found work on other stations, many in Connecticut. A few of the old WTIC hands have passed away.

It may come as something of a surprise, but only two performers still remain where they were in the Travelers days: the legendary Bob Steele, and Arnold Dean. Both of course are on radio. There are no survivors on TV.

A number of personalities made WTIC radio and television what it was back in 1973, and before. We thought it might be interesting to see where they are now, six years

state who is as well-known and well-liked as is Bob Steele. His corny jokes and his predictions of sporting events are as much a local tradition as were Fibber McGee's closet or Jack Benny's violin solos the pre-television days of network radio. Steele's morning show, which dates back to 1943, has continually been among the highest rated shows in Connecticut ever since. Given Oct. 1, 1936, as the date he began his duties as a staff announcer for radio station WTIC, you can figure it out yourself. Bob Steele's been on the air in the Hartford area for more than 42 years.

The other "survivor," Arnold Dean, is also extremely wellknown, even if he hasn't yet been around for quite so long. Dean joined the station in 1965 and has filled a variety of different roles on both radio and television. He has done a noon-time radio show on Constitution Plaza, and he hosted "One Night Stand with the Big Bands," which once a month featured both music and interviews with stars of the past. Currently the area's sports fans most easily recognize his name. Dean is a first-rate play-by-play announcer for live sports events, and now as sports di-

rector for WTIC radio, his early

public and (most importantly) with advertisers.

In terms of seniority, however, it is interesting to note that Arnold Dean was only five years old when Bob Steele first came to WTIC!

Two of the station's former top personnel have died. Bruce Kern was the familiar face of Channel 3's evening news, but he logged many hours on the radio microphone as well. Kern also had talent as an actor, and he often performed with the Guy Hedlund players during the station's heyday in dramatic

The Guy Hedlund players, incidentally, were a wholly local repertory company, performing many radio plays and sketches on WTIC in the early and middle 1940's. Other members of the troupe during various years of its existence include Ed Begley, who later went on to Hollywood as a character actor and wound up winning an Oscar as Best Supporting Actor in 1962; Michael O'Shea, former husband of movie actress Virginia Mayo and star of his own brief TV series, "It's a Great Life"; and ubiquitous TV funnyman, Louis Nye.

Toward the end of Kern's stay at WTIC radio, as were so many of the station's staff announcers, he was

swering non-controversial questions from the radio audience, which at that time of day consistedly largely of housewives with every-

day household problems.

Robert E. Smith, who died in April 1978, was WTIC's expert on classical music. His weekend show "Box at the Opera" and the daily "Theatre of Melody," which featured semi-classical music and show tunes for an hour every morning, were both hosted by Smith for more than 20 years. The musical portions of each show were augmented by Smith's own enormous collection of music on record. After his death, the collection was donated to the University of Hartford, where it's still in use by the college FM radio station.

Virtually every young adult in central Connecticut grew up watching Ranger Andy and "Hap" Richards on TV. Both hosted children's shows on WTIC, Channel 3, for many years. Ranger Andy, who as Andy Andrews had previously been a member of Al Pearce's gang on network radio, died some years ago, but Floyd Richards is doing well in a new career as anchor man and writer for Pratt Whitney's Aircraft Group's closed circuit TV system. His department prepares news

views, and gathers other information about the company, does interviews, and gathers other information about P&W employes, then broadcasts it all throughout the company via in-house "information centers." The concept is a new one, but it's growing nationwide as an efficient means of improving employe relations.

George Ehrlich was a sports comcovered all the major sports as a top-notch play-by-play man, from football, basketball and golf to regatta racing. When Bob Steele decided to give up his "Strictly Sports" program he'd had for many years, it was Ehrlich who took over. Since leaving WTIC, Ehrlich has become the sports director for WINF radio in Manchester, where he can be heard nightly beginning at 6:15. He also has appeared with Ken Coleman, the new Red Sox announcer, doing live coverage of several sporting events on Connecticut Public TV.

One of the earliest changes made by the new management of WTIC radio after the sale went through was the cancellation of the "Jean Colbert Show." The program was still popular with a large segment of the radio audience and the cancellation took many people by sur-

of several changes made to attract new listeners. Over the years Miss Colbert's show had attracted guests and celebrities, from all over the world - writers, artists, stars of the theater, movies, radio and television, even royalty. Soon after leaving WTIC, Jean Colbert did return to Connecticut airwaves, again on

station WINF. Ed Anderson, who first began at WTIC radio back before World War II, will be best remembered for his participation on "The Jean Colbert Show," "Sports Talk," and "Mike Line." For a number of years he was a newscaster on TV as well Anderson retired in 1976 and is kept busy now doing church work and contributing his time to other social agencies. "Those last few years at WTIC were tough," Anderson recently said. "You worked all sorts of odd hours, which is hard to do as you get older." He went on to add, "Even though I've been off the air for several years, people seem to remember my voice more than my face. They look at me and ask, 'Don't I know you from somewhere?' When I tell them who I am, they always have good things to say. It's nice to be remembered."

During his 21-year career at WTIC, Dick Bertel was perhaps the most versatile man on the staff. He prise. It proved to be only the first hosted such shows as "Americana,"