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REMINISCENCES

OF

TONY GATES

Gates, Robert A.

*Tony (R.A.) Gates*

Interview by  
Richard L. Elliott  
September 29, 1976

Prepared by the Rodman Public Library  
for the Oral History Project, Alliance, Ohio.

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ELLIOTT: Now that was sort of a converter type of thing wasn't it?

GATES: No. There was also a Pilot converter. But that was

ELLIOTT: This is an interview with Tony Gates, manager of radio station WFAH. And we're going to talk a little bit about the history of WFAH radio. And Tony when did the radio station get started?

GATES: We went on the air first March 26, 1947, and it was an FM only at the time.

ELLIOTT: Now WFAH was one of the first FM's in Ohio wasn't it?

GATES: That's right. One of the first commercial FM stations in northeastern Ohio. In fact we like to think it was the first because of the date and if you go checking some of the other dates of early FM's around here you'll find that we were right up there among the first, at least.

ELLIOTT: Now FM was sort of a new thing and I can remember down at Sears and Roebuck they had a big blue radio with a silver cloth cover over the speaker and they were selling FM radios. Because FM was very new. Did you have very many listeners when you went on the day?

GATES: We had very few listeners. As a matter of fact the only way we could get any listeners was to kind of promote the sale of FM radios. And I remember the old Pilot radios seeing a telecast in Princeton New Jersey where RCA had it's that Cope Electric, we bought them and provided them to Cope research and development program going. I remember seeing Electric to sell so they promoted them so that people would buy them and we would have listeners.

ELLIOTT: Now that was sort of a converter type of thing wasn't it?

GATES: No. There was also a Pilot converter. But that was a Pilot radio itself. One of the first. I guess Pilot was really a pioneer in the FM receivers.

ELLIOTT: I remember my neighbors had an FM and we would go over to the neighbors' house, and listen to the high school band and some of the programs that were local.

GATES: Yeah, yeah. Well you see what happened, before the war there was FM. Major Armstrong developed the FM system. And before the war they had set aside a certain band for FM. After the war they decided to change that. And the FM's that had been on the air prior to the war then had to convert and change frequencies. Naturally the people that had bought any kind of a set, radio, that had the old frequency for FM on it, they could no longer get it because the frequency was changed. We had a real problem. And it was right after the war and not much had been done to develop FM.

ELLIOTT: Of course TV wasn't around at that time.

GATES: No it wasn't.

ELLIOTT: Radio was still pretty big.

GATES: I remember though that TV was in the experimental stage when I was in college back in the 30's. I remember seeing a telecast in Princeton New Jersey where RCA had it's research and development program going. I remember seeing, they had a television set set up in a store, I think it was in



1937 and here was a wrestling match. And they had it in the window of this store, I remember seeing that, so it was under development even before the war. But after the war it hadn't yet taken hold.

ELLIOTT: Now Tony you're not an Alliance native, well you are now but you weren't originally from Alliance. You were from over in Pennsylvania. Maybe you could tell us a little about how you ended up here in Alliance and became the manager of the radio station.

GATES: Well I was born in Hanover, Pennsylvania which is in the old Pennsylvania Dutch area in southeastern Pennsylvania. I went to Westminster Choir College in Princeton, New Jersey during the 30's. I graduated from there as a choral director and had a job in Wooster, Ohio directing church music at the Wooster Methodist Church. Then the draft came along and that's where I ended. After the war I found that I could no longer support a family on what the Wooster Church was able to pay. So I looked around for further job which ended me here in Alliance at the First Methodist Church here.

I lived with that for about a year. And then the new FM station was starting and I applied for a job, I got it. It was kind of interesting, Mrs. F. A. Hoiles was chairman of the music committee at the church and she was also President of the Review Publishing Company which was starting the radio station. It was a little delicate switching from one job to the other with her at the head of both places.

ELLIOTT: The boss of both places.

GATES: She was lovely lady and we got it worked out and it's been, I've been with the company ever since.

ELLIOTT: Some people might be interested in knowing what WFAH stands for.

GATES: Frank Austin Hoiles. And the W of course everything east of the Mississippi River the call letters start with W. Everything west is X, right?

ELLIOTT: Right, or K.

GATES: Or K, yeah I don't know what I was thinking. Yeah K, that's right.

ELLIOTT: Let's talk a little bit about some of the personnel with the radio station and who's been in charge through the years.

GATES: I think we ought to say that the Review Publishing Company applied for the license to put in this station. They felt it was a natural adjunct to the newspaper. Paul Reed had returned from the war as a major in the army. He had been with the Review Publishing Company prior to entering the service. When he came back Arthur Hoiles was President of the Review Publishing Company and he got Paul and they developed this FM application and put the station on the air.

They used the old Hoiles home at the corner of South Union and Milton. The only way they could, after the war, the only way they could get authorization to build anything commercial

was to provide veterans housing with it. So they put housing for veterans on the top floors. And remodeled the bottom so that they could have the radio station in there.

ELLIOTT: Now the tower was there also, the transmitting tower.

GATES: Well it was an FM and a single tower and that's right. They put the tower right in the back.

ELLIOTT: Do you recall the first day that WFAH was on the air?

GATES: I sure do. Well as I say Paul Reed was our manager of the station and Bob Hanson who came here from Marshfield, Wisconsin was the Program Director. He was a very good radio man. He had not a whole lot of actual experience but he went to the University of Wisconsin in their radio department and came out and came to Alliance.

ELLIOTT: Now those days they didn't just play records and give the news and that sort of thing did they?

GATES: Well no, you see what we did, everything was formal. And it had to be written out ahead of time. I recall starting to work the first of January but we didn't go on the air until March 27th. And I had plenty to do writing scripts. In those days we had rental libraries of music. There was the World Library and the Langworth Library for instance that we had. And they had the big sixteen inch records. Then you'd go and pick out the songs that you wanted to play but you wrote out everything that the announcer was going to



say. And we wrote scripts for three months there before we went on the air so that we had a good backlog. Well they would be fifteen minute to a half hour programs. Not like today, where we start at 6:00 in the morning and it's one program practically all day long with little features thrown in. We didn't do it that way. For instance we started out at 10:00 in the morning the first day with the world news resume. And that was a fifteen minute news presentation. It came off the Associated Press Wire Service. Then we had music for Wednesday, that first day.

ELLIOTT: That must have signed on on Wednesday, right?

GATES: Right. And it was a half hour. We then had a fifteen minute program, Less We Froget. This was a public service feature, Institute for Democratic Education. Then we had a little feature story off the wire service. And then we had a program called Moments of Melody. That was a twenty-five minute program. Then headline news, and if we had a program that we couldn't think of any other title we called it Little Show. And it was all just music off these big records you know and with a script to go with it. Then Elizabeth Larson who became Stevenson later on had a program which was called Stairway of Stars. And that was sponsored by Cope Furniture Company by the way. We had the Ohio Farmer in those days off the wire service too and that was a fifteen minute program. No, that was only five minutes. On the Farm Front followed and it was fifteen minutes. And we had a little bit of country music too Old Chisholm Trail, sponsored by the



camera shop. You remember Pinkie on Main Street?

ELLIOTT: Pinkie's Camera Shop.

GATES: Yeah. And then Elizabeth Larson had Here's to the Ladies. Jim Burnett was one of our first day people.

ELLIOTT: Now he's news director at WHBC, in Canton.

GATES: WHBC, that's correct. So we had, the people on the air were Elizabeth Larson, Tony Gates, Jim Burnett and Bob Hanson. But everything was kind of blocked out in fifteen or half hour segments. We signed off then later in the day at 2:00 and came back on at 5:00. That is we would go four hours and then we'd lay out and then we'd come back for four hours. We couldn't afford to go all day.

ELLIOTT: You couldn't write scripts fast enough.

GATES: And it's kind of interesting that the first days revenue was \$31.80. I know it didn't pay for all the salaries.

ELLIOTT: I know one of the interesting programs over the years that you had was called Breakfast With Your Neighbor. Is that what it was, is that the name of the program?

GATES: That's right. Breakfast With Your Neighbors was an in the home kind of broadcast. We bought a mobil unit from WJW up in Cleveland, an old unit that they had. I remember Artie McCracken, who was one of our engineers, and I used to go out every morning to somebody's home or sometimes we went like to the fire department, various places for six months, six days a week we had breakfast somewhere.

ELLIOTT: This was all live.

GATES: And it was live. Mostly all live, a few that we had to tape ahead of time because it just didn't fit in with the whatever we were trying to do. But mostly it was live and I do recall Artie McCracken saying that one morning and I believe that we were out at McCarty's place, Bill McCarty. And after the program he told me that during the broadcast there had been a river boat down on the Mississippi River calling Memphis right in on our frequency.

ELLIOTT: So you had "Calling Memphis" all through out the program.

GATES: Yeah, that's right.

ELLIOTT: You mentioned Jim Burnett's name and Jim is over at WHBC. I know that over the years that WFAH for many years fed personnel to WHBC in Canton. And it got to the point where just about their entire staff came from Alliance. And I think you gave them some buttons or something, some name tags or something.

GATES: Well one time I kind of got sick of their raiding our staff so I had name tags made up for all the people who were then at WHBC who had been an alumni of this station, and sent them over and put on them WFAH alumni. They had the name and WFAH alumni on it.

ELLIOTT: Most of the staff wore those probably.

GATES: There were a lot of them I know, seven or eight I

think at the time. Well Paul Gilmore who is now Presidnet of the company over there and manages WHBC had been a sales manager with us and not exactly right at the beginning. Fred Joseph had been in charge of sales for us when we first started on the air but soon afterward they got Paul in and he stayed with us a couple of years. And then, oh there were so many people, Jim Burnett and Bob Krahling and Ed Krahling and oh gee you know it was....

ELLIOTT: Bill Steffy and Bill Glasser.

GATES: That's right. And so over the years, I wish I could remember them all but there were many, many that have gone over there.

ELLIOTT: Early management of the station or early people that have worked for the station you mentioned a few of them and then....

GATES: Well Dick Propst was our chief engineer and got us on the air. And I mentioned Artie McCracken, he was one of the first ones. Gertrude Pearson was our book-keeper and secretary and she stayed with us until 1962, she got married and moved away. And we lost her. I think that was just about the staff then.

ELLIOTT: Now the station started out on South Union Ave. in the Hoiles home and that was in the 40's and then in the 50's then you started as an FM you started an AM station. When did this take place?



GATES: The AM went on the air September 3, 1953 and of course we used, we bought the property from the Smyth farm on Smyth Ave.; nine acres in the plot here where we are currently. We couldn't put up an AM station inside the city. We had to have three towers erected in order to get a pattern for our AM. So they bought this just outside the city and eventually we put the FM in with it on the center tower. Right.

ELLIOTT: And then did the studios and everything move out to Smyth Ave., out to that location?

GATES: Not until 1962. We had two what we call balanced telephone lines to send our programing. The reason for two was that in case something went bad with one we had a stand-by.

ELLIOTT: Let's talk a little bit about the first studio in the Hoiles home. Maybe you could give us a little tour of what facilities there were.

GATES: Well we had two studios. The large studio, Studio A, that's always called studio A your largest one, had been sunken from, that isn't the way I want to say it but the dining area of the old Hoiles home was sunken in, down to four or five feet below it's level. And that formed studio A. Gave the ceiling height, what we felt we needed. There was a smaller studio which was used as a utility practically all the time when we weren't doing some live programing or whatever in the other studio. And we had a control room.



The living room and front entrance way were made into offices and lobby. The kitchen was turned into an office for the manager. And the garage was turned into working area for the staff, news room etc....

ELLIOTT: It was a pretty good studio, very nicely done.

GATES: Yes, yes, the company spent a lot of money for the architectural design on it. However it got too costly.

Eventually when we had the AM out here so we decided to combine the two and bring the studio, bring the offices out here too.

ELLIOTT: And what year did that happen did you say?

GATES: 1962.

ELLIOTT: 1962.

GATES: Right.

ELLIOTT: And maybe you could give us a little visual tour of the studios on Smyth Ave.

GATES: Well we, to begin with, when we put the AM out here we just had to have a transmitter shack. Well the company built more than a shack, it was about a 30 by 30 one room building really. So when we decided to move our studios and offices out here we hired an architect to design from our drawings effective studio and office space. And I think that most people have been in it, been through our station but in the front all the offices are located on the Smyth side of the building and the working area is combined.

We have one, two, three, three studios, one control room and a news room that are all in a very close area for ease of operation. The old building was used then mostly as a transmitter building and combined with the newer offices.

ELLIOTT: Now, 1962 was the date on that and the company was still owned at that time by the Review Publishing Company. Then it changed hands later on right?

GATES: In 1967, D. A. Peterson Inc. was given the opportunity of buying the radio stations. Donald Peterson had been President of the Review Publishing Company. The Review had sold its interest, or was selling its interest in the newspaper and was about to divest itself of other properties, but they gave Don Peterson the chance to buy it. So in 1967 D. A. Peterson Inc. became the owner of both stations.

ELLIOTT: Now how did he get involved in the radio station to have this opportunity to purchase the station? Did he work at the station or the Review?

GATES: Well he had earlier been the manager of the radio stations in 1953 to 1959. Prior to that Frank Hoiles, young Frank, Frank Jr. had been manager from 1949 to 1953. But later on Don Peterson became President of the Review Publishing Company as well. And that's why he had the opportunity to buy the stations.

ELLIOTT: And then you became Manager in what year Tony?

GATES: 1960.

ELLIOTT: 1960. And in 1967 the station changed hands, became

owned by D. A. Peterson Inc. The next significant event I would think would probably be the addition of the stereo to the FM station.

GATES: Well yeah. Stereo was becoming big with FM along about the time that D. A. Peterson bought it. And so we began to make plans immediately for adding stereo to our FM. So in July 1, 1967 we finished all the work that was necessary and started on FM stereo.

ELLIOTT: Now this also split the programming. Prior to that the programming on AM and FM was the same.

GATES: Right. We at the same time automated the FM so that we could split and play different kind of music on FM, because it was stereo. We had to, we couldn't play the regular mono music on it since it was already stereo. So we separated the programming most of the time. Not all the time. We stayed on together in the morning for about four hours I think. And then split away.

ELLIOTT: And then more automation came in later years on the AM side of things.

GATES: In 1972 we decided to automate the AM as well and that created a further split in our programming between AM and FM. So that now we are combined only for news, sports and special features. But all the music is separate.

ELLIOTT: Let's talk a little bit about the music from 1947 up to the present time here in 1976.

GATES: Of course in 1947 Dick it was all big band sound.



ELLIOTT: Uh huh.

GATES: And our libraries were full of the big band music. And so much different from today, people liked little insignificant songs like Maresy Doats and Dosy Doats....

ELLIOTT: Little lambsy divey....

GATES: Right. Songs of that nature and they liked the Andrew Sisters and what a change from today with the more what I call the beat music. The melody is gone, the beat had come to the fore. When we first started on the air it was melody that counted a good deal. Oh it didn't, wasn't all true entirely but mostly, right. And today it's mostly beat music I call it.

ELLIOTT: And the mid 50's, mid and late 50's, rock and roll became a significant part of the music scene. Did WFAH get involved in that at all?

GATES: We tried a few times but it didn't work. There was one Cleveland station that seemed to have all the rock audience and no matter what one would try to do he couldn't fight it. And so we went back away from it for a time.

ELLIOTT: I remember you had some actually broadcast live from some of the schools with Coco Cola as the sponsor.

GATES: Yeah, we did that. Speaking of live broadcasts when we first went on the air we had a lot of live programs right out of the studio too. And anybody that had a little bit of talent was invited to come in. We didn't pay anybody you understand, except Tony Rose who was our staff



pianist. And we put fifteen minute, half hour, hour programs together. Oh we had game type shows that we ran, give away prizes and we'd ask questions, you know. I remember bringing in a litter of pups one Saturday morning for a live audience and anybody that answered these questions right would get a pup. I was glad to get rid of the pups you know.

ELLIOTT: I thought maybe they would answer all the questions wrong.

GATES: Well it was kind of interesting.

ELLIOTT: Do you recall some of the people who entertained live on the radio?

GATES: I'm afraid to start mentioning any because I might skip somebody. But I do recall we had such things as the Carpenter girls, Carpenter sisters from Sebring, we had a harmonica quartet from Mount Union College. Al Nash was a member of the harmonica quartet. And they were good too. They really played good stuff. We had a polka band from Salem, Karan, Al Karan, not Al but, oh I can't hitnk of it but Karan was his name. And I think Dale Wright was a member of that organization for a while. They came in on Sundays and had a big time.

ELLIOTT: Dale Wright has a polka show now but of course it's all done with records.

GATES: With records, right.

ELLIOTT: Also I recall as a youngster, I always enjoyed the story lady.

GATES: Yeah, we had that on Saturday morning and we'd probably give ice cream and cookies to the kids from the sponsors and the story lady would read stories to the children. That was a big thing, today wouldn't it be interesting. You couldn't get three children out to hear a story hour I don't think.

ELLIOTT: Not today I'm afraid. So most of the early programming, well a lot of it was live. We were talking about music and I think we left off in the 1950's with the rock. Would you say during the 1960's the music was pretty well adult oriented type of thing, programming.

GATES: Yes, I would very definitely say it was until about mid 60's and starting out. And then it began to go more to the teenagers right, until today our AM is strictly teenage music.

ELLIOTT: And when the split came between the two stations then one leaned toward adults....

GATES: What we call wall to wall kind of programming and music, something anybody can listen to and not get to upset about it.

ELLIOTT: I think WFAH was involved with some early experiments with stereo. I don't know what year that would have been but maybe you could....

GATES: Well Frank Hoiles was station manager at that time and we had....

ELLIOTT: That would have been in the early 50's then probably.

GATES: Yes, I'm sure it was, I don't really know what time. But we did set up a program where you could tune your AM station and your FM station and get the stereo effect.

ELLIOTT: Get half of the program on AM and the other half on FM.

GATES: That's right. That's right. And boy we had some big advertising on it how, just how to go about doing this you know. Yeah, it was experimental but not until stereo records became important did stereo really take hold. But the only time, when we were experimenting with it we had to buy tape and that was the only kind of music that was available for stereo.

ELLIOTT: Earlier when we were talking about Breakfast With Your Neighbor program you said once in a while you taped that program but I don't think you taped it did you? You re-corded it probably.

GATES: We did have, we had paper tape and early, the earliest recorders that we had were Wire and they were a mess. Because if the wire broke or anything happened to the machine you'd have nothing but spaghetti. It was springy. And that wasn't very satisfactory, those wire recorders. And then the brush company came out with a tape which was, they used paper back tape with some kind of coating on it and, but we did, we cut a lot of records too. We had two record cutting machines and we did a lot of those in fact we still have some of those



in fact we still have some of those old records we cut here on file. Not many, we couldn't save them all because they were heavy and very difficult.

ELLIOTT: So it moved from the wire to the paper and then to the Mylar and back to where we are today.

GATES: Right.

ELLIOTT: I don't know what we'd do without that tape today.

GATES: I don't either.

ELLIOTT: Maybe you could explain a little bit about the automation and what that does for the station as far as the staff is concerned and then what it does for the listener too because there's some very good advantages to the automation.

GATES: Well there are very few stations that are as highly automated as we are. Now I'm talking about for on air production. Both our AM and our FM are automated. Practically 100%. Of course the news is live and certain broadcasts are live but fully automated and this is done by computer. We have a memory which we have fed certain information and which pushes buttons for us so to speak. Automation with the advent of the cartridge tape which people are familiar with I'm sure. Because they have them in the homes. With the advent of cartridge tape it became possible for us to record practically all of our commercial announcement ahead of time so that there wasn't an opportunity for a flub on the air. And further more you could give more time for pro-



duction, you might want to add some music or sound effects and so forth. And with the cartridge tape you can do a lot of this. Get it perfect. If it's not right the first time you erase the cartridge and start over and do it right. So I think this has been a tremendous thing for the public, in that now they get a perfect spot every time rather than a flub. And they get more interesting kinds of spots. So that was a start of it but then it became possible for a man to sit in the studio and push buttons. You push a button and play a record, you push a button to play a spot, you push a button for this and a button for that. And so we say why do we need this guy sitting in there spilling his coffee over his copy. Why not put him to work somewhere else and doing some good production. So we automated. A machine can push buttons quite as well as a person and sometimes better. We get better control and it just has been tremendous all the way.

ARMSTRONG, MAJOR.....	Gates 2
ASSOCIATED PRESS WIRE SERVICE.....	Gates 6
BREAKFAST WITH YOUR NEIGHBOR (RADIO PROGRAM).....	
.....	Gates 7, Gates 17
BURNETT, JIM.....	Gates 7, Gates 9
CARPENTER SISTERS.....	Gates 15
COPE ELECTRIC COMPANY.....	Gates 1
FIRE DEPARTMENT.....	Gates 7
FIRST METHODIST CHURCH.....	Gates 3
GILMORE, PAUL.....	Gates 9
HANSON, BOB.....	Gates 5
HERE'S TO THE LADIES (RADIO PROGRAM).....	Gates 7
HOILES, ARTHUR.....	Gates 4
HOILES, FRANK AUSTIN.....	Gates 4, Gates 17
HOILES, FRANK AUSTIN, JR.....	Gates 12
HOILES, MRS. FRANK AUSTIN.....	Gates 3
HOILES HOME.....	Gates 10
JOSEPH, FRED.....	Gates 9
KARAN POLKA BAND.....	Gates 15
KRAHLING, BOB.....	Gates 9
KRAHLING, ED.....	Gates 9
LANGWORTH LIBRARY.....	Gates 5
LARSON, ELIZABETH.....	Gates 7
LESS WE FORGET (RADIO PROGRAM).....	Gates 6
LITTLE SHOW (RADIO PROGRAM).....	Gates 6
LIVE RADIO BROADCASTS.....	Gates 14
MCCARTY, BILL.....	Gates 8
MCCRACKEN.....	Gates 9
MCCRACKEN, ARTIE.....	Gates 7
MOMENTS OF MELODY (RADIO PROGRAM).....	Gates 6
MUSIC.....	Gates 13
NASH, AL.....	Gates 15
OHIO FARMER (RADIO PROGRAM).....	Gates 6
OLD CHISHOLM TRAIL (RADIO PROGRAM).....	Gates 6
ON THE FARM FRONT (RADIO PROGRAM).....	Gates 6
PEARSON, GERTRUDE.....	Gates 9
PENNSYLVANIA (HANOVER).....	Gates 3
PETERSON, D. A., INC.....	Gates 12
PILOT RADIOS.....	Gates 1
PINKIE'S CAMERA SHOP.....	Gates 7
PROPST, DICK.....	Gates 9
RADIO CALL LETTERS.....	Gates 4
RECORDING (RADIO).....	Gates 17
REED, PAUL.....	Gates 4
REVIEW PUBLISHING COMPANY.....	Gates 3, Gates 12
ROCK AND ROLL MUSIC.....	Gates 14
ROSE, TONY.....	Gates 14
SEARS AND ROEBUCK.....	Gates 1
SMYTH AVENUE RADIO STATION.....	Gates 11
STAIRWAY OF STARS (RADIO PROGRAM).....	Gates 6
STEREO RADIO.....	Gates 13
STORY LADY (RADIO PROGRAM).....	Gates 16
WFAH AM RADIO.....	Gates 10
WFAH RADIO.....	Gates 1
WHBC (CANTON).....	Gates 8
WJW (CLEVELAND).....	Gates 7
WRIGHT, DALE.....	Gates 15