

“Rise of Frank Stanton to CBS”

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On March 20, 1998 Frank Stanton, former President of CBS (1946-1973), turned ninety. Rather than attend a gala birthday party in Manhattan he returned to his beginnings in Muskegon, Michigan. "I was curious to see where it all began." He visited the hospital where he was born, the high school where his father landed his first teaching job, and even found "the site of my parents' first apartment, now a Methodist Church." He did not linger. "A fascinating day: out before breakfast and back after an airport birthday dinner.ⁱ At ninety Stanton retained the curiosity and independence that characterized his behavior almost from the beginning. At his death on Christmas Eve 2006 Stanton was a legend within the media industry, a boy wonder who assumed the Presidency of a major network at thirty-eight, began what became the basis of the Neilson ratings, and defined the standards of what was known as the "Tiffany Network" He was called "the conscience of American broadcasting" and once risked jail for defending the First Amendment against a hostile Congress in 1970.ⁱⁱ Where indeed did it all begin? This essay explores the contingencies that shaped the early years of a great American.

Stanton's rise is pure Americana—a relative nobody became somebody, not quite Horatio Alger's rags to riches but from the middle class in the nation's heartland to notoriety and wealth in Manhattan. Moreover, Stanton rose to CBS during the Great Depression in contrast to millions of others who lost their jobs, roamed the land in search of work as hobos and found themselves in dire straits. His opportunism and ability to sense where the future of American advertising was extraordinary.

Before little Frank's first birthday his parents, Frank Cooper Stanton and Helen Josephine Schmidt, moved back to Dayton, Ohio where they had married. His father wanted to move west to Portland, Oregon, but his mother missed Dayton.

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That thriving heartland city of nearly two hundred thousand was the home of Orville and Wilbur Wright and their bicycle shop on Third Street. The Wright brothers had made their historic flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina four years before Stanton was born. Dayton would become known as "the Birthplace of Aviation," with the first solo instrument landing, the first parachute jump, and the beginning of aerial photography. Dayton was also the home of National Cash Register and Frigidaire, the makers of the "electric ice box," soon to be called the refrigerator.ⁱⁱⁱ Frank Stanton Sr. taught woodworking and mechanics in various city high schools. Helen Stanton's family lived in Dayton and her father was the treasurer for the Dayton public schools. Helen had attended a Dayton normal school and taught briefly in public school. She had missed being near her parents in Muskegon, and back in Dayton with a child to raise, she soon stopped teaching.

Young Frank enjoyed a stable middle class boyhood, attending Dayton's Ruskin Elementary School and Steele High School. The Stanton family lived in a modest two-story frame house at 921 Chester Avenue on the western side of the city during his boyhood.^{iv} Two early events were memorable. When he was four, his parents took him on a trip to New York City in a Ford roadster. His father built a small chair that faced backward to accommodate Frank. In 1913, when he was five, a devastating flood killed almost four hundred in a few hours in the low-lying areas of the city. The Stantons, along with others on higher ground, opened their houses to homeless flood victims.^v Young Frank spent considerable time helping his father with wood and metal crafting in the basement.^{vi} Both parents were skilled with their hands, and his mother was a descendent of a family of Swiss weavers. Stanton still treasures a beautiful Helen Stanton inlaid brass plate. His paternal grandfather, Curtis Stanton, had been a Navy engineer at Newburgh, New York and his ancestors were English ship builders. Frank developed the skills of an excellent craftsman. Later he would exhibit it, perhaps most dramatically, by rebuilding Lyndon Johnson's oval office desk so the President could stretch out his long legs.^{vii}

When he was six Frank's younger brother, John, "Jack" Stanton was born. Jack was diagnosed with diabetes. There was yet no insulin treatment and Helen Stanton had to carefully choose and weigh food for her youngest son's every meal. Frank was never neglected, but Jack's illness allowed him more independence.

Frank was fond of his brother, but they were not especially close because of the age difference. Even before adolescence he had the freedom to begin developing another life outside family and school.

First he sold the *Saturday Evening Post* door to door, making sure sales with Stanton family neighbors and friends. Next he had a paper route, covering it on a home made bicycle, he fashioned from junkyard parts. He traded customers with other newspaper carriers to gain the largest possible market in the smallest area. One of the establishments he delivered papers to was an apartment/hotel that was a house of prostitution. Frank remembers manicuring the toenails of one of the girls; the first woman he saw naked. On another occasion he delivered to an organist of a local church, an older man who offered to drive him home. Once in the car the man who "could have been anywhere between thirty and fifty" asked if he could see his penis. Frank declined and quickly escaped the car and ran home. He never told his parents about these early quasi-sexual experiences.^{viii}

His interests broadened along with his independence. Cameras fascinated him and he became skilled taking snapshots with a "Brownie" and then a "Kodak." He excelled in the Boy Scouts, attaining Eagle Scout rank. He gained a reputation at Ruskin school for his drawing and lettering ability, which may have been encouraged most by his mother. He has a vivid memory of her drawing on the ironing board, often to scale sketches of house interiors. He took piano lessons, but never developed into an accomplished pianist. He liked to read and remembers enjoying adventure books such as *The Swiss Family Robinson* and *Robinson Crusoe*. As with drawing, his mother nurtured young Frank's reading. Occasionally the Stanton family would have family outings, but only in the Dayton area. Jack's strict dietary needs curtailed out of state vacations. On the other hand, limited family mobility probably promoted Frank's tendency to strike out for himself.

Stanton remembers that his parents got along "great." He also recalled that his father went off to speaking engagements on "school matters" many evenings. His brother's illness shifted parental attention away from Frank. If Frank had a close relationship with either of his parents it was with his mother. She was the moral beacon of the Stanton family--not unusual in middle class American families in the early 20th century. Helen was a strong advocate of prohibition while his father was neutral on the issue. There was no liquor in the Stanton household. In conversations about his boyhood there are infrequent references to his parents, but more about his mother than father.

As the first born son with a sickly baby brother a half dozen years his junior Frank naturally not only became independent, but accepted leadership roles more readily. Then, too, without a demanding, especially ambitious father, young Frank was more apt to look to the outside world for role models. One forms a picture of a well-behaved bright young man, but one who did not want to emulate his father.^{ix}

At thirteen Frank took a part time job that became pivotal in shaping the direction of his future. The Metropolitan Men's Store was the largest department store in Dayton, and sold the best quality male clothing in the city. Through an acquaintance that worked at "The Store," as it was called, Frank got a job selling boy's clothing. The best quality clothes were specially marked. Stanton implemented an idea for increasing sales that drew the attention of other employees, including the Metropolitan's director of art and advertising, Richard Meyer. Frank sent questionnaires to purchasers of the pricier clothing, inquiring about customer satisfaction and encouraging customer return purchases. Meyer moved him from the boy's to men's section as a window trimmer. Twenty three display windows were designed in the basement at night and moved to street level for customer viewing. "I became involved in display advertising . . . [The Metropolitan] became a home away from home for me . . . and I did my [high school] homework and a lot of work at the store --frequently after midnight. It was a career in itself."^x Stanton came to know most facets of the business, working after school through high school and periodically during his undergraduate years at Ohio Wesleyan University.

As the head of art and advertising, Meyer was impressed with Stanton's window trimming as well as his typesetting and proof reading for store advertising. Meyer also remembered that, "we used to get into arguments about religion and sex--on a very serious plane. Most fellows his age didn't worry about those things in that day."^{xi} His senior year in high school Frank learned about a material for window backdrops called flexiwood, originally from Germany and sold in Chicago. Thinner and more pliant than conventional backdrops, it could showcase clothing displays more attractively. It was a modern material, and Frank was becoming ever more fascinated with modern fabrics and designs and advocated them for the Metropolitan. Meyer sent Stanton to Chicago to purchase some flexiwood. "I went alone to Chicago, expenses paid. This was pretty heady wine for a senior in high school."^{xii} It was also Stanton's first business trip--the prototype of hundreds that followed through his years at CBS and even afterward into his mid nineties.

Frank convinced Meyer he could demonstrate the showcasing superiority of the new material. He oversaw the construction of several displays on a nearby lot. By the time Frank graduated from high school in 1925 he was earning \$90 a week at the Metropolitan--\$40 more per week than CBS offered in 1935. Asked what best prepared him for CBS Stanton replied, "When I walked into 485 Madison Avenue [the old CBS headquarters] it was a new life for me. If I brought anything with me besides the best partner a guy could have [his wife, Ruth] it was my experience as a high school part-time worker in a Dayton, Ohio clothing store."^{xiii} Stanton could have easily made his career at the Metropolitan, with an excellent opportunity of eventually taking Richard Meyer's post as director of art and advertising. He had gained invaluable experience in marketing a product, learned how to work for and oversee employees and saw the advantage of taking the initiative. While still in high school Stanton had gained reputation in a sizable company, one that recognized his marketing savvy. Unlike many teenagers Frank did not seem uncertain, rebellious or introspective. One former CBS vice president suggested that Stanton's character was probably "fully formed" well before he left high school.^{xiv}

Despite his long working hours, Frank maintained great grades in high school--so good that he never remembered having to take an examination. Although not an athlete, he was respected, and used his photographic skills to film the opposition for Steele High School football games. He learned to play the saxophone, but not nearly as well as his best friend, Robert Klintz, whose talent and style were then incomparable. Stanton was elected senior class president, and remembers campaigning by personally contacting every class member. He was chosen to go to Helsinki, Finland as one of the Ohio representatives of the Young Men's Christian Association--his first trip abroad, opening his eyes to young men with different backgrounds and perspectives. Cornell University offered him a scholarship to study architecture. Frank excelled in drawing and lettering, and had once left "The Store" for a short period to draw and letter for an architectural firm in Dayton. He read books in the field, and was especially attracted to the looming skyscraper drawings of Hugh Ferriss. So why not enroll at Cornell?

A respected high school friend, Chadbourne "Chad" Dunham, was a year ahead of Frank and encouraged him to come to Ohio Wesleyan. The state's leading Methodist institution of higher learning was in Delaware only ninety miles northeast of Dayton. Dunham was, strikingly handsome, outgoing, bright and athletic.

Chad's father was editor of *Good Housekeeping* magazine. He was a fraternity man--both social and honorary--had a fine academic record and played football. "When he had selected Ohio Wesleyan that rang a bell for me," Stanton recalled.^{xv} Then, too, his mother preferred Wesleyan to Cornell. Perhaps because she seemed more concerned with his behavior. As a strict Methodist, she believed the university would have a healthy moral influence on Frank. His parents offered to pay part of the tuition. But neither Duham's presence on campus, his mother's preference, or tuition was the deciding factor.

He was in love. When they were both fourteen or perhaps as early as twelve (he can't be sure) he met Sarah Ruth Stephenson, at the Raper Methodist Church in Dayton. He asked her father--an engineer for General Motors who developed a compressor for Frigidaire--if he could take her to a movie matinee. "We went to a movie on New Year's Day. I went to her house on the streetcar, and we went downtown on the streetcar, and came back on the streetcar."^{xvi} That was the beginning of a relationship that led to sixty years of married life. Ruth, as she was called, was tall, slender and athletic (she played tennis) and had long dark brown hair, almost down to her waist. She was the middle child between two brothers. Intelligent and maintaining high marks, she was named valedictorian of her graduating high school class. She aspired to be an actress and later became a member of the Stewart Wright Repertory Theatre that played in Dayton, Cincinnati, and Lima. She loved to read and seemed to always have a book in hand. She was also mechanically inclined, and could disassemble and reassemble a four-cylinder engine. When Frank's model A Ford needed a tune up, she knew which spark plug to replace. She always wanted to make the repairs, but in those days it was not proper for a woman to be seen working on a motor in the street. As the middle child and only girl, she learned to be independent and adventuresome--qualities she and Frank shared. They attended separate high schools--she Stivers and he Steele--but both lived on the eastside of the city. The Stantons had built a house at 130 High Street to be closer to Helen's parents, especially her mother whose health was failing. Ruth enrolled as English major at Western College for Women, then part of Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

"I could easily have gone to Miami University [but] the people I knew who had gone there didn't impress me," he remarked. Stanton already had a sense of who and who did not have the qualities to be successful. But he did not want to be far from Ruth. "I wanted to remain relatively close to Dayton. Not for family purposes but because I was in love with a girl who lived there."^{xvii}

In hindsight, he regretted not taking the Cornell scholarship. "I might have taken the wrong turn," he later admitted.^{xviii} "If I had it to do over I would have taken a different track and become an architect, one of the noblest professions."^{xix} Yet Stanton showed remarkable restraint in not following Ruth to Miami. Being in love did not mean living together in the same town. A possible slip in social standing must have factored into Frank's decision.

So in August 1926 Frank enrolled at Wesleyan as zoology major, intending to go on to medical school. He continued working part time at The Store, and did not depend on his parents for any spending money. Occasionally he would "bum rides" to and from New York City--a place to which he was increasingly drawn. By hitchhiking--in those days perhaps less dangerous--he had more money to explore and enjoy Manhattan. He stayed at the Y. M. C. A, took long walks, marveled at the skyscrapers and probably passed CBS headquarters at 485 Madison Avenue--but would have no reason to remember doing so. He recalled browsing but not buying in Willoughby's camera store on west thirty second street (still there), pursuing his interest in photography.^{xx} He maintained high grades despite his part time work and forays. His freshman year he took an advanced physiology course open only to juniors and seniors. He convinced Dr Edward Rice, one of Wesleyan's most esteemed professors, he could continue to do as well as he had done in high school. His junior year Frank became Rice's laboratory assistant and made first rate drawings of microscopic slides. His reputation for excellence in drawing spread across campus: "I had skill with my hands and could do posters and art work and illustrate and so forth," he recalled. "A lot of people took advantage of that as every club wanted a poster."^{xxi} He joined two fraternities, one social (Phi Delta Theta), the other honorary (Omicron Delta Kappa)--eventually becoming President of the former. Chad Dunham belonged to both, and in 1927 he became editor of *Le Bijou*, the Wesleyan yearbook--a position Stanton would also hold.

Stanton was never at odds with mainstream American culture in the sense that he attacked American business leadership and practices. He did not identify with intellectuals, once remarking, "not being an intellectual, I have not known many." He was drawn to power and fully engaged in social affairs.^{xxii} "I was not an introspective individual."^{xxiii} He certainly did not identify with Gertrude Stein's "Lost Generation" in the 1920s, and never considered expatriating to Paris.

He danced the Charleston and occasionally turned a blind eye to Prohibition, but that hardly qualified as cultural alienation. He did not seem in any general way angry at the powers that be, although he would confront authority at on various occasions regarding specific issues and broader principles. There was a difference between addressing a wrong and embracing an anti-establishment ideology. Being successful in high school, at the Store and in higher education reinforced behavior within institutions, and institutions found themselves needing Frank Stanton. He was already within the power structure, comfortable being there and ambitious for further opportunity and advancement from within.

Frank's ability to draw and design--along with his friendship with Dunham--helped land him the job of editing *Le Bijou* in 1928, his junior year. The yearbook for "The Class of 1929" had color prints, drawings not by Stanton but by another Dayton Steele High School friend, Milton Caniff. Caniff later created the syndicated cartoons "Steve Canyon" and "Terry and the Pirates". Stanton cleverly packaged *Le Bijou*, combining traditional black and white photos of administration, faculty and students with vivid color prints--bright reds, blues, greens and yellows--showcasing "Weslyan Women," "Wesleyan Life," and "University Organizations." The black and white photographs were offset as circles, ovals and rectangles, often touching in an attractive arrangement--a favorite Stanton design.^{xxiv} *Le Bijou* caught the attention of art director Charles T. Coiner of the large Philadelphia advertising agency, N. W. Ayer, who offered Stanton a job as an assistant art director at the end of his junior year in 1929. The offer came not only because of the unusual yearbook, but because Frank was already experienced in innovative display designing at the Metropolitan.

His senior year Stanton produced the homecoming play, as his honorary fraternity Omicron Delta Kappa was charged with arranging homecoming activities and Frank had proven his productive talents as editor of *Le Bijou*. The play *1984* (no relation to the 1949 George Orwell novel), was a lighthearted revue containing several seemingly risqué jokes that a faculty committee, after attending dress rehearsal ordered removed. Frank spread the word the play had been censored, but hinted to fraternity members that one suspect scene might remain. Opening night was a sell out, and the questionable scene nearly prematurely ended Stanton's undergraduate career. A co-ed and her boyfriend had found an attic trunk of mementos that included a nude baby photograph of the boyfriend. The boyfriend, upon discovering the unadorned photo tried to hide it from the co-ed by turning it upside down. The audience never saw the picture, but Wesleyan authorities were not amused. Stanton was put on probation and told to leave the campus.

His behavior was unacceptable, especially for a student who earlier had been recognized in *Le Bijou* as one of the junior class's "Representative Men."

Frank went to visit his friend Milt Caniff who was now a cartoonist for the *Columbus Dispatch*. Caniff put Stanton in touch with an associated press reporter. Frank wondered why the university had kept profits from 1984 if the nude baby scene was so offensive as to get him expelled. The contradiction circulated back to Wesleyan officials and he was quickly reinstated. Ruth never forgave Wesleyan for its shabby treatment of her future husband, telling him much later never to "give a nickel" to the school.^{xxv} The incident was an early example of Stanton's strong reaction to abridgement of first amendment freedom. It was also an encroachment on artistic freedom, something that he valued perhaps even more deeply. If Stanton was not an intellectual he had great respect for the artist, and had more than a touch the artist in himself.

Near the end of his junior year Frank had finished most of the course and lab work for his zoology major and wanted to try something different. He was increasingly interested in marketing--an effect of his Metropolitan experience. Looking through the Wesleyan catalogue he found a seminar in the business school that attracted him. Students did not attend class but researched and wrote a term paper on a topic of interest. In a meeting with "the man that ran the department" Stanton indicated he preferred advertising as a research topic, but the department head did not share his enthusiasm. Then, "I said that radio was just coming on the horizon and . . . I'd like to do some reading and perhaps some writing about that." That was more interesting to the professor, as few people knew much about the new medium. Although the nation's first commercial station, Pittsburgh's KDKA had gone on air in 1920, not many American households had radios in the late twenties. Stanton recalled that, "in my undergraduate years, I didn't know anybody who owned a radio, except the fraternity had a big radio in the playroom."^{xxvi}

So with his seminar paper, Frank began his research on radio, and in a broader sense his career in the media. He wrote the marketing people that used radio, the advertisers. What did they think about radio as a marketing tool? Did it increase sales? Would they continue to use it? He typed his final paper on yellow paper thinking that the color would set it apart from the others. Yet, "I never got any reaction from the professor at all. It was not a distinguished piece of writing."

He received an A- grade. What he did learn, however, from his contact with advertisers was that radio "was the greatest thing since sliced bread." They were enthusiastic about it as a boon to successful advertising. Though Stanton "didn't touch radio again" at Ohio Wesleyan, the paper made him aware of the growing nexus between advertising and radio, a connection he later developed to the great advantage for CBS.^{xxvii}

Near the end of his junior year Frank visited the University of Michigan and successfully applied for admission to medical school. In those days it was common for good students to leave their undergraduate institutions and enter another university's medical school without a diploma. While in Ann Arbor he investigated what it would cost, determined the hours he would need to work to meet expenses, and reluctantly concluded he would not have the time to do well in his studies. There were few grants and no G. I. Bill. He does not remember being so much attracted to practicing medicine, as to medical research and even envisioned becoming "a young Pasteur."^{xxviii} Then, too, Ruth was not enthusiastic about her future husband--there was never any doubt they would eventually marry--being constantly on call, as house calls were the norm for physicians.

Intending to enroll in medical school, he had set aside the offer from Ayer. Now he saw it as a great opportunity to pursue his keen interest in and art, design and advertising. He decided not to return to Wesleyan for his senior year anyway. He went to Philadelphia and spoke with Coiner in the new downtown N. W. Ayer building. Coiner had suggested he travel to Europe to familiarize himself with the world of European art and design. Frank accepted an invitation from his maternal grandfather, Conrad Jost Schmidt, to take a summer trip to Europe, thinking it would be just what Coiner had recommended. In early June 1929 they left New York on the S. S. Arabic of the Red Star Line and spent two months touring England, France, Germany, Switzerland and Italy. Frank collected bills of fare, menus, and tour brochures and took dozens of photographs--mostly of his grandfather--and produced two large scrapbooks, called "The Trip." Each page was beautifully arranged with expertly printed explanations and/or funny comments on photos and keepsakes. But the excursion was not a foray into the art of Europe, certainly not the kind of experience Coiner had recommended. His grandfather was pleasant enough, but straitlaced. He did not especially like any place but Switzerland, the country from which he had emigrated. "I was kept on a short leash, and seldom allowed to be alone," Stanton recalled.^{xxix}

Upon disembarking in New York in August 1929, Frank and his grandfather stayed at the Statler Hotel (now the Hilton) near Penn Station (now long gone). Stanton phoned Coiner to make final arrangements for immediately joining the company. Tired of his grandfather's leash, he was ready to go to Philadelphia the next day. But Coiner was far less enthusiastic. "He said that business had soured. They'd lost some of their big accounts, and while he would respect the commitment [the offer to be assistant art director], he wanted me to know before I came that I would be the first one to be laid off if business continued to slide." Stanton paused: "Gee, if I get to Philadelphia and I lose my job, what am I going to do in Philadelphia?" Coiner suggested he complete his undergraduate degree, and by then the outlook at Ayer would be better. No one was predicting the stock market crash just two months away, or, far worse, the deep and protracted depression of the 1930s. Nonetheless, he was not willing to risk taking a job that might soon evaporate. "So I hightailed it back to Dayton and announced that I would go back and finish my senior year," much to the delight of his parents.^{xxx}

The immediate problem was what to do his senior year. Psychology was a field growing in popularity in the twenties in part do to the influence of William James and Sigmund Freud. Behaviorism and John B Watson were also drawing attention. Frank decided to get a psychology major even though he had not taken the required basic courses. He nonetheless convinced a reluctant psychology professor Floyd Dockery--who later came to Ohio State during Stanton's time there--that he would be able to cram requirements for the major into one year's work. His excellent record with "Patron Saint" Professor Rice in Zoology convinced Dockery to let him proceed. Again, as with Rice, Stanton persuaded someone with academic authority that he could succeed when they were doubtful. His confidence grew with each successful challenge to established academic rules. He read voraciously in experimental psychology, and was most impressed with the behaviorists--especially intrigued with Watson because he had left an academic post for a career in advertising in New York. "Watson captured my attention because I was still flirting with going back to Philadelphia."^{xxxi}

Even as Ohio fell on hard times in 1930, and Frank turned toward psychology, he interviewed for a job with Hallsey brokerage in Chicago. "[I had] been encouraged to think that all I had to do when I finished my degree was to get on the train and come to Chicago and I'd have a good job there."^{xxxii}

But the brokerage job never materialized. The economy was increasingly showing signs of entering a depression. So after graduating in June of 1930 he got a nine-month job teaching drawing at Roosevelt High School in Dayton. He also decided to go to graduate school at nearby Ohio State. "We were two years into a frightful depression. Unemployment in Ohio was over 16 percent, the bank where I had my savings closed, two significant promises of jobs were withdrawn [Ayer and the Hallsey]. I chose not to continue trade school teaching [at Roosevelt High School] or department store advertising [at the Metropolitan]. The bottom line for Stanton was a shrewd hunch about what would be needed in post-depression America: "I figured a graduate degree might be useful when the worm turned."^{xxxiii} The premonition about what would be required in the future, however, did not mean he had decided to make a career as a professor.

Frank enrolled in graduate school at Ohio State in the fall of 1931 and married Ruth on New Year's Eve in Middletown, Ohio twenty miles south of Dayton. The Methodist minister there was a family friend. Ruth had left Western College for Women without a degree to care for her ailing mother, and the couple--after a courting a decade--decided to set a wedding date so Ruth could join Frank in Columbus. "It was a simple ceremony. Just four of us huddled around the altar of the Methodist Church. Ruth's brother [James Robert Stephenson] and a friend [of Ruth's, Virginia Mattern]." A big wedding, given the economic situation was not an option, especially since Frank had lost \$3,000 in the Columbus bank that had failed the previous year. The new Mr. and Mrs. Stanton drove to an apartment north of the Ohio State campus: "Rent \$20 per month; with garage \$22." It was hardly posh, but at least they had privacy. "Except for the second floor quarters, the building was unoccupied. Boy was it cold. The furnace was obviously in the basement. The only access was by an outdoor stairway. That was our honeymoon." Nonetheless, "It was [the beginning of] a wonderful life with the best friend I ever had."^{xxxiv}(FS to DB January 15, 2000)

Frank did not initially intend to continue in psychology at Ohio State, and explored doing graduate work in other fields. When the chairman of the department in the School of Business asked him what he was interested in, Stanton said radio. "The chairman spun a top on his desk and waited a moment for it to wind down. 'That is what will happen to radio,' he said. It was a fad that would soon lose momentum just like the top."^{xxxv} Next he tried sociology, but the man he talked to could not see any connection between sociology and radio, nor was there an available stipend.

The reaction of these professors to radio was similar to early resistance to computers, of not being able--in the broad sense--to discern the future importance of seemingly fantastic technological transformations that were just around the corner. It is all the more remarkable that Stanton was thinking about a future in radio, given that the bleak economic outlook made landing a conventional job seem fortunate indeed.

Despite the onslaught of the Depression, psychology was increasingly popular at Ohio State. While student enrollment decreased from around thirteen thousand in 1928 to just over eight thousand in 1931, undergraduate and graduate enrollment in psychology rose.^{xxxvi} Finding nothing in business or sociology Frank, "wrote everybody I could find listed that gave scholarships or anything else in psychology and got a telegram from the Dean of the College of Education offering me a teaching assistantship in psychology. The wire said 'stipend -- \$750.'" He rather brashly phoned the Dean, former psychology department chair George F. Arps, and said he did not think he could live on \$750, mentioning that he was making more than that doing odd jobs. Arps reminded him that, "dozens of other people . . . would like this job."^{xxxvii} After nearly hanging up, he agreed to see Stanton in his office an hour later--curious about a young man who would not immediately embrace a stipend offer. He also had his impressive undergraduate Wesleyan transcripts on his desk. Arps offered Stanton one of two teaching instructor appointments available in psychology in 1931--still at \$750 a year. One was in the clinical area, the other in experimental. Frank chose the latter because he knew the experimental side "like the back of my hand" after studying it so intensively his senior year at Wesleyan.^{xxxviii} He spent four years in the psychology department at Ohio State, three at \$750 and the fourth at \$999^{xxxix}. He continued to supplement his income, one summer crisscrossing the state to sell color plates for college yearbooks--a market of over forty institutions of higher learning.

Ohio State had twenty full time psychology faculty, a dozen tenured, and several with national reputations in their fields. Henry Goddard coiner of the word "moron" and author of *The Kallikak Family* (1912), which made a case for inherited feeble-mindedness, was perhaps the best known, but had few doctoral students. Sidney Pressey, an educational psychologist who had invented a teaching machine, was also a notable figure and directed far more graduate students. Exceptional--although she was not well known--was A. Sophie Rogers, an experimental psychologist and the only female professor in the department, who also had a medical degree and pioneered pre-school facilities in Columbus.

Stanton had little contact with Goddard, remembering him only as "a legend." Pressey seemed, "quiet, and learned, a bit precious and very professional." Rogers, "was a delightful, up front person, and in today's world she would be a tiger in the NOW movement."^{xI}

Then there was Harold Burt. His influence on Stanton in the early 1930s was considerable. Burt described himself as an industrial psychologist, was a second-generation pioneer in the field, and had a national reputation. He authored two widely used industrial psychology textbooks--*Principles of Employment Psychology* (1926) and *Psychology and Industrial Efficiency* (1929). He was unconventional and had interests that were unusual for a professor. He drove a Harley-Davidson to campus, complete with goggles and gauntlets. He played and coached polo and fencing and was a fierce handball competitor. He operated a short wave ham radio and taught undergraduate psychology over WOSU radio. Burt's radio classes were huge, five hundred students, and among the most popular on campus. He banded tens of thousands of birds, much later publishing a book on bird behavior, *Psychology of Birds* (1967). A fun-loving prankster, he once disguised himself as an African American butler who greeted unsuspecting guests at the Burt residence, and later astonished them by removing his makeup. He taught psychology at Ohio State for 41 years (1919-1960), chaired the department for 22 years (1938-1960) and directed 28 doctoral dissertations, including Frank Stanton's on radio listening behavior. He lived to be 101 years old.^{xii}

"I liked the guy" Stanton recalled, "Burt was direct, friendly, down to earth, and practical."^{xiii} He had a humane touch with students: "I have a very warm spot in my heart for Pro. Burt. Just before I took my orals for my PhD, he took me aside and said that I was much too serious and that I needed to smile. He told me to tell myself a funny joke or he would kick me in the rear."^{xliii} Burt also gave Stanton a personal loan that enabled him to continue graduate school. The latter never forgot. On the occasion of his professor's centenary birthday in 1990 Frank and Ruth Stanton donated \$1.25 million to establish the Harold E. Burt Chair in Industrial Psychology. "I have always regarded you as one of my most loyal students, but this is extreme," Burt exclaimed.^{xliiv}

Stanton believed Burt was pleased he had left the sheltered environs of academe for the broader, open and competitive world of New York City and major network broadcasting--although his professor never told him so. "I believe [Burt] was on my side and quietly proud of the fact that I jumped the traces, got a job on my own and took on the big city, so to speak.

I loved and respected the man, would have done anything for him."^{xlv} Burt may have had an especially memorable reason to believe something special was in store for Stanton. Before receiving the doctorate, Stanton refused an offer of a teaching position at Indiana University after visiting the campus. He faced the wrath of several senior faculty as well as Dean George F. Arps who had not forgotten Frank's initial reluctance to take the \$750 stipend offer. "It would be a long time before the Dean would support this brash young man for another teaching post if another arose."^{xlvi} Deep in the depression any sensible graduate student should have been overjoyed to receive an offer from a first rate university.

Burt, more than any other Ohio State psychology professor, stimulated Stanton's mechanical talents. He was ingenious in developing psychological experiments that had practical application. As a member of the university's athletic board as well as fencing and polo coach, he was interested in early identification of exceptional athletes for Ohio State--especially in fencing. Burt enlisted Stanton's help to determine which youngsters had the required hand/eye coordination to be considered good prospects for the fencing team. "[Burt] came up with the idea of taking a large can . . . [and] putting a hole in the bottom of it [and] putting a piece of very thin tubing up into that hole, [and] putting the can [filled with water] on a swing at the top of the equipment, [and] giving the prospective kid a little cup and say, 'As this swings, catch the water.'" All the students caught the water. "But then we made the cup ultimately just slightly bigger than the spigot so that you had to be right on target. It was one thing to catch it in a bushel basket, it's another thing to catch it in a thimble." Frank recalled this as "just donkey work." Nonetheless, Burt introduced him to the department's shop where, "they made some crazy instruments." One not so crazy device was a radio frequency recorder Stanton later invented which became the mechanical basis for his doctoral dissertation.^{xlvii}

Stanton had his own ideas about what to pursue in experimental psychology, even to what he later referred to as "that crazy little master's degree" he received in 1932. Frank was interested in the, "legibility of type on various paper stocks." He believed that glossy paper diminished legibility. "This was just about the time that the paper manufacturers . . . were making a stock for the *Vogues* and *Vanity Fairs* and magazines of that kind that had a dull coating but still allowed you to reproduce half-tones beautifully."^{xlviii} His Master's thesis documented the superiority of dull over glossy paper as a print medium allowing for more rapid reading.^{xlix}

The thesis grew out of Frank's acute awareness of print quality, beginning with his skill at lettering and drawing, and continuing with his production of *Le Bijou*. Yet even before Stanton completed his thesis he never abandoned his interest in radio, especially the relationship between radio sets and radio audiences.

With the large exception of Burt, most psychology faculty--like the business and sociology professors he had met--were not enamoured with the new medium. "[They] looked down their noses at radio." Yet Frank knew that some of the faculty that scoffed at radio, were listening to it anyway. "There were things that would sneak out in their conversation that suggested to me that they knew more about what was on the air than they were telling." He also knew that students in the classes he taught were getting information from radio. "I could tell from the talk and everything else that there was a lot of rub off from radio. But it didn't rub up-- it just rubbed down or sideways." There was little realization of the power of the connection between radio and public opinion.

Stanton knew from his undergraduate seminar paper that a few advertising agencies-- J. Walter Thompson, Young & Rubicam--already had "research departments". And he also learned that several companies--one, General Motors--were mailing out crude questionnaires on buying habits. How could a company determine accurately what their customers wanted to buy? "One thing led me to another and that was you can't be sure what people tell you they do." In the classes he taught to undergraduates he would, "ask the kids what magazines they read." He discovered that if you took their answers as the truth in some cases you knew it wasn't so. "*Atlantic Monthly* was way out ahead and you knew damn well that they weren't reading it." ¹ The realization that you could not necessarily trust the validity of verbal responses to questions about the media--print or radio--was the germination of Stanton's idea for the new research technique that brought him to CBS.

"I had this idea that there ought to be a little recorder that you could put on the radio that would record when the set was on," he recalled. Frank was familiar with "Brass Instrument" psychology, a prominent school in the experimental area that used instruments, especially the kymograph to obtain a visual record of physiological activity such as reflex. The kymograph was a smoked drum with a stylus that marked the darkened drum paper with a white line when humans reacted to a stimulus. Burt administered lie detector tests using a kymograph to measure and record reactions to questions--reactions from real criminals loaned out to the psychology department laboratory from the state penitentiary. ⁵¹

He asked Stanton to assist him with the testing. "That's probably where I got the idea that if you had something like that that you could use on a radio set, you could find out when the set was turned on and so forth."⁵²

Someone could determine objectively what audiences were really listening to with a recorder that incorporated the kymograph technique. It was no longer necessary to depend solely on what people said they listened to. Frank used something other than smoked paper on a drum to record radio responses. "Typewriter ribbons came on spools [of] silk ribbon that you literally typed through. I thought if I had two of these spools and a piece of something that I could move at a constant speed, then I could record what happened when the switch turned on the radio set." At this time, American radio sets were huge, "the size of small refrigerators." It would be relatively easy to install a recording device in the back of the set. "You could . . . record over a long period of time exactly what people did and then get the [paper] tape [off the spools] out and look at it and question people, and see how what they remembered checked with what the record showed. That was the beginning."⁵³

He found a synchronous motor, one that operated at a constant rate, that would drive the tape at a constant speed. He eventually had fifty motors built, which originally powered electric clocks that were just coming on the market. He purchased the clock motors from wherever he could buy them locally. He contacted a company in Indianapolis that made wide strips of paper for the kymograph. The paper was red and its waxed coating required a heated stylus. But a heated stylus was potentially dangerous when attached to somebody's radio. "No one would let you do it. I had trouble enough getting them in anyway." So Frank made a stylus with a point that was sharp enough to cut through the wax and mark the paper. There was another difficulty. A device moved the stylus down, but how did you move it up? Ruth, with her knowledge of physics knew immediately how to solve the problem. "What you need is a solenoid," she said. "It's the magnetic field that pulls something up. All you do is wrap the wire around a spool of thread, there's a hole in it, and you put a little piece of metal in it, and when you put the current on that field, it'll pull the metal plunger up."⁵⁴

He directed the assembly of the motors, styluses, spools and waxed tapes. They were produced in the psychology department's mechanical and electronic shop and put into fifty black boxes. Then he asked randomly chosen Columbus homeowners--who by the early thirties were much more likely to have radios--if he could attach the device, "a little black box," to their radio sets. He did not tell them he was measuring radio frequencies. Instead he posed as an engineering student simply measuring electrical current, a deception that insured more objective results. People would have no reason to change their normal listening habits. Before retrieving a recorder, he visited a family and asked what they had listened to the previous evening. He found what he had suspected: the memory of what was listened to was often not the same as the taped record in the little black boxes. Stanton's dissertation discussed the relative unreliability of questioning radio owners about their listening habits, versus the objective advantage of having a taped listening history. The entire project required extraordinary ingenuity and determination and persistence--qualities that later earmarked Stanton's career at CBS.

Under great pressure to finish his dissertation before the deadline, Frank found Ruth indispensable. "I was so dog tired, trying to teach and finish my course work . . . she took the bull by the horns, wrote the final chapter, typed it, and when I got up in the morning it was all piled up on my table." In fact Ruth had helped decipher the data Frank gathered from the recorders. "I'd bring them [the recorders] home in the evening, she'd open them up, take the tape out and spread it on the table and she could decode it."⁵⁵ She was essential to the success of the project from start to finish, and would be just as vital to her husband's success at CBS.

Harold Burt approved, "A Critique of Present Methods and a New Plan for Studying Radio Listening Behavior" in 1935, but early into the project, probably late 1932, Stanton saw a future for himself in the radio industry. "I think my ambition was to have a hundred of these little recorders that I could put in various places. And they weren't cheap to make and I needed help. So I wrote to NBC and wrote CBS."⁵⁶ He had been willing to go to Ayer in Philadelphia, but New York was the great national hub of advertising, and radio was becoming increasingly connected with advertising success. Obviously, Stanton's interests and ambitions lay outside the university; his graduate degree provided an opportunity for access to a new sector of American business which was moving rapidly into the electronic world.

NBC politely but negatively replied, saying you are doing interesting work but we are not interested. Then Stanton received a three paged letter from CBS's vice president in charge of advertising and sales promotion Paul Kesten, expressing enthusiasm for his approach to a marketing problem that the company had been concerned about--how to accurately determine who listened to CBS programming. Frank could tell Kesten composed the letter himself as some of the typing ran off the page.⁵⁷ In early 1933 Kesten invited him to New York to demonstrate his recording device. CBS paid for the railroad trip and hotel. Frank and Ruth--now more inseparable than ever--decided to drive, saving CBS expense money for Manhattan. They stayed at the New Yorker,⁵⁸the largest hotel in the city with 2,500 rooms, five restaurants, forty-two barbers and twenty manicurists. Big bands like Benny Goodman, the Dorseys and Woody Herman played the New Yorker. The couple especially enjoyed Manhattan as it was Ruth's first visit. They breathed in the big city atmosphere, gazed at shops and sipped cocktails--prohibition had just ended. However, when Frank showed the recorder to several CBS executives, only Kesten was impressed. The chief engineer, Ed Cohan "banged it on the table" to show his disregard for the contraption.⁵⁹

The Stantons returned to Dayton, but Frank and Paul Kesten kept in touch. Stanton sent him a paper discussing the superiority of radio over the printed word as an advertising medium--an idea that was first suggested, if not confirmed in his Wesleyan paper on radio as an advertising medium. He called it, "Memory for Advertising Copy Presented Visually vs. Orally." Kesten knew after reading it that he needed to hire Stanton. He was "good red meat for my grinder."⁶⁰ On August 29, 1935 Frank received a telegram that both flattered and enticed: "I don't know of any other organization where your background and experience would count so heavily in your favor or where your talents would find so enthusiastic a reception."⁶¹ In early October Dr. Frank Stanton, now twenty-seven, moved to New York. Beside him were Ruth and their wire-fox terrier, Skipper. He had landed a job in the research department of Columbia Broadcasting System. "It was 1935, the dark days of a terrible depression. I had lost my savings. Gasoline was 11 cents a gallon. I reached for the future and came to New York City at 55 dollars a week."⁶² He never imagined what his reach "for the future" would grasp. But he was on his way to the top of an emerging major network.

So Frank Stanton came to CBS with work experience selling upper end men's clothing and designing store window display arrangements with "modern materials."

Charles Coiner of NW. Ayer Advertising was especially impressed with Stanton's graphic design abilities and had offered him a position in the Philadelphia Company's art department. But when Frank became a graduate student at Ohio State and developed an objective device for measuring radio listening behavior—distinguishing between what people said they listened to and what they did listen to—CBS, pointedly Paul Kesten, offered him a job in radio research. Stanton understood that it was “research” for CBS and that it was related to the sale of radio time, but he was unprepared for the aggressive tactics CBS employed to challenge NBC, the network with the best (lower) radio frequencies and whose parent company RCA monopolized radio set manufacturing. “I was excited about radio” Stanton recalled, “but there were some things about the commercial world [of CBS] that I found totally foreign to anything that I was prepared to deal with. Nothing sinister . . . , it was just that I was naïve and couldn't comprehend some of the things that people in business took for granted.”⁶³ Obviously Dayton was not New York City and the Metropolitan Men's Store was not CBS. More pointedly, on a day to day basis Stanton worked with a young Jewish New Yorker Victor Ratner, his immediate superior, who in turn reported to Vice President of sales Paul Kesten.

Ratner had experience as a copy editor and responded in person to Kesten's 1930 Ad in *Printers Ink* seeking an assistant in sales at CBS. He brought with him, a sample of his work, an explicit pornographic poem, *Rhadsodia Sexuals* which Kesten, soft-spoken and gentlemanly, was not only not shocked by, but saw immediately that Ratner was a risk-taker and had, even if prurient, a flare with the written word which would be valuable in sales. Kesten was not looking for conventionality and he certainly did not get it with Victor Ratner: “the two men operated on the old advertising theory that things are not so much what they are in fact, but rather what they seemed to be.”⁶⁴ And this *modus operandi* flew in the face of what Stanton had focused on in his radio research—finding out what people really listened to as opposed to what people said they listened to. When Stanton arrived at CBS in September 1935, Ratner introduced him to a new way of thinking that was indeed “foreign.” “Interesting things happened to Frank psychologically” Ratner recalled. “He began looking for data that could be used by salesmen. It was quite a different thing from looking for data showing the facts as they really were.”⁶⁵ The bottom line in CBS sales was to create presentations that would sell an advertiser airtime, not make presentation that you necessarily believed were true. “In time Stanton would urge those that worked for him, ‘don't buy it, sell it.’

By that he meant, don't write a presentation that you yourself believe in, but a presentation that will sell the costumer." ⁶⁶ But was Stanton really "naïve"? Did Ratner in retrospect see him so because he was a native New Yorker his immediate superior, and five years older? Frank had taken a photograph of Victor that revealed a rakishly handsome, mustached dark haired young man. Stanton was blond, smooth faced and clean cut with a mid-western accent, on that was still in place after sixty years in Manhattan. Stanton's recollections of Ratner reveal his rising status in CBS sale of airtime. "My initial employment [at CBS] was suggested by a senior officer [Kesten] and not embraced with any enthusiasm by the executive to who I reported [Ratner]. Nor was my peace of mind improved when the senior [Kesten] would turn to me without going through channels [without consulting Ratner]." ⁶⁷ \

Stanton became more valuable to CBS's future, in terms of what he could bring to sales than Ratner, who despite his savvy and resourcefulness could not tap into the kind of research that Stanton was developing. Within two years Frank had a map in his office that showed the broadcast frequencies for every county in the United States that CBS radio signals reached. Hence, if an advertiser called and wanted to know if his commercial could be heard in Lucas County, Ohio (the Toledo area), Stanton could instantly give an answer by referring to his map; he had readily objective data on radio audiences across the United States that no one else at CBS had--data that persuaded advertisers to buy CBS airtime. By 1940 Frank Stanton headed CBS's Research Department of approximately one hundred employees. Five years later at only thirty seven, William Paley, CBS's founder, CEO and major stock holder, named him President of the company.

ⁱ Frank Stanton to Daniel Bjork March 30, 1998

ⁱⁱ See *In All His Glory: The Life of William S. Paley* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 152-153, 393-395

ⁱⁱⁱ Part of General Motors

^{iv} See Photo [to include later]

^v Conversation with FS August 16, 2001

^{vi} See Photo [to include later]

^{vii} See Photo [to include later]

^{viii} Conversation with FS December 16, 2003

^{ix} *Ibid* October 23, 2002

^x FS interview with Mary Marshall Clark, Columbia University Oral History Collection March 5, 1991

^{xi} *Time*, December 4, 1950, 270

^{xii} FS interview with MMC March 5, 1991

^{xiii} FS to DB October 1, 1998

^{xiv} Conversation with David L. Blank November 5, 2002

^{xv} FS interview with MMC March 5, 1991

^{xvi} *Ibid* MMC, April 2, 1996

^{xvii} MMC and FS interview March 5, 1991

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- xviii Smith, In all his Glory, 127
 xix Conversation with FS, August 9, 2002
 xx Ibid.
 xxi FS interview with MMC March 5, 1991
 xxii FS to DB October 1, 1998
 xxiii Ibid., November 24, 1998
 xxiv See Photo [to include later]
 xxv Conversation with FS September 12, 2002
 xxvi FS interview with MMC March 5, 1991
 xxvii Ibid.
 xxviii Ibid.
 xxix Conversation with FS August 9, 2002
 xxx FS interview with MMC March 5, 1991
 xxxi Ibid.
 xxxii Ibid.
 xxxiii FS to DB June 1, 1998
 xxxiv Ibid., January 15, 2000
 xxxv Conversation with FS May 13, 1999
 xxxvi Presidents' Annual Reports, OSU Archives
 xxxvii FS and MMC interview, March 5, 1991
 xxxviii Conversation with FS August 16, 2001
 xxxix The University was taxed higher at stipends over \$1000
 xl FS to DB December 19, 1997
 xli James T. Austin and Paul W. Thayer, "Harold E. Burt 1800-1991" American Psychologist, December, 1992, 1677
 xlii FS to DB, December 19, 1997
 xliii "Prof. Burt Turns 90" Ohio State University Monthly, June 1980, 19
 xliv "Endowed Chair is Gift for Century-Old-Professor" Ohio State Alumni Magazine, June 1990, 21
 xlv FS to DB October 1, 1998
 xlvi Ibid
 xlvii FS interview with MMC, March 5, 1991
 xlviii Ibid
 xlix FS, "The Influence of Surface and Tint on the Speed of Reading" OSU, 1931
 l FS interview with MMC March 5, 1991
 51 See Photo [to include later]
 52 FS interview with MMC March 1, 1991
 53 Ibid., March 5, 1991
 54 Ibid..
 55 Ibid., MMC April 2, 1996
 56 Ibid March 5, 1991
 57 Conversation with DB August 9, 2002
 58 Closed in 1972, but reopened in 1994
 59 Smith, In all His Glory, 130
 60 Time, December 4, 1950, 27
 61 William S. Paley, As it Happened: A Memoir (New York: Doubleday, 1979) ,88
 62 FS to DB February 4, 1998
 63 MMC, March 14, 1991
 64 Robert Metz, CBS: Reflections in a Bloodshot Eye, New York: New American Library 1975, 53.
 65 Ratner, as quoted in Metz, 59.
 66 Ibid
 67 FS to DB, April 6, 2001