

## News on the Air: The *New York Herald*, Newspapers, and Wireless Telegraphy, 1899–1917

By Noah Arceneaux

*In 1899, the New York Herald used the wireless equipment of Guglielmo Marconi to cover the America's Cup yacht race. This event, which has been referenced by numerous radio historians, was the first major demonstration of Marconi's technology in the United States and was closely monitored by the US Navy. Very few historical studies, by contrast, have noted that the Herald continued to experiment with wireless telegraphy. This study is the first comprehensive account of the Herald's use of wireless telegraphy, and it seeks to bridge the gap between prior works that have looked at newspapers and telegraphy and those that have examined newspapers and radio. In contrast to popular perspectives that the Internet is a revolutionary new technology, this study also emphasizes that newspapers have been dabbling with "new media" for more than a hundred years.*

In September 1917, the Bureau of Navigation wrote to the *New York Herald* inquiring about the paper's coverage of the America's Cup yacht race eighteen years earlier.<sup>1</sup> In an ambitious move, the paper had equipped ships with wireless transmitters built by Guglielmo Marconi that sent updates to receiving stations on shore. The *Herald* displayed the information on billboards around the city and distributed the news across the globe via the Associated Press. According to the 1917 letter, the Bureau believed that the operation signified the "first radio station in the United States." This particular claim does not correspond to contemporary usage of the term "radio station," since Marconi's equipment did not disseminate voice or music transmissions to a dispersed audience, nor did it provide a

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<sup>1</sup>A. J. Tyrer, Acting Commissioner, Bureau of Navigation, to *New York Herald*, September 14, 1917, National Archives, Record Group 173, Federal Communications Commission, General Records, 1910–1934, box 56, file 840.

continuous service.<sup>2</sup> The first generation of wireless transmitters used sparks to generate bursts of electrical waves, and they were limited to the dots and dashes of Morse code.

Even if we acknowledge, however, that this use of wireless telegraphy does not conform to our conventional understanding of what constitutes a “radio station,” this one newspaper’s early adoption of a new media technology warrants serious investigation. The wireless coverage of the 1899 yacht race was the first major demonstration of Marconi’s invention in the United States and attracted significant attention from the public and the US Navy.<sup>3</sup> The *Herald* had orchestrated a number of publicity stunts over the previous decades, and this motivation should not be overlooked. Wireless telegraphy would eventually give rise to broadcasting—one of the defining technologies of the twentieth century—and one newspaper’s desire for publicity introduced wireless to much of the American public.

Numerous historians have noted the *Herald*’s coverage of the 1899 America’s Cup, though only a few have referenced the paper’s continued use of the technology.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the newspaper demonstrated a sustained interest in wireless telegraphy for almost twenty years. From 1901 to 1904, the *Herald* operated wireless stations on Nantucket Island, using the technology to communicate with vessels sailing to and from Europe. In 1909, the paper established another wireless station, known as WHB, on the southern tip of Manhattan and broadcast news to ships twice a day.

It should be clarified that, like the coverage of the 1899 yacht race, the *Herald* was not transmitting voice or music signals over the airwaves, but

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<sup>2</sup>Historians have long debated the identity of “first radio station,” and the answer to the question depends on how one chooses to define “broadcasting.” There is general agreement, however, that the term *radio station* pertains to voice or music transmissions rather than Morse code signals. For one discussion, see Christopher Sterling and John Michael Kittross, eds., *Stay Tuned: A History of American Broadcasting*, 3rd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 63.

<sup>3</sup>Prior to providing news coverage of the yacht race, Marconi’s equipment was used to transmit a signal from the steamship *Ponce* to shore on September 30, 1899. This event is cited in L. S. Howeth, *History of Communications—Electronics in the United States Navy* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1963), 27. An article in the *New York Herald* also noted this event, though it did not provide any specifics; “Marconi Is Ready for Yacht Races,” *New York Herald*, October 1, 1899, section II, 2.

<sup>4</sup>The works that mention the *Herald*’s use of wireless telegraphy after the 1899 America’s Cup include Susan Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899–1922* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Michael Stamm, *Sound Business: Newspapers, Radio, and the Politics of New Media* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Noah Arceneaux, “Wanamaker’s Department Store and the Origins of Electronic Media, 1910–1922,” *Technology and Culture* 51, no. 4 (2010): 809–828; Alvin Harlow, *Old Wires and New Waves* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1936); Elizabeth Kruse, “From Free Privilege to Regulation: Wireless Firms and the Competition for Spectrum Rights,” *Business History Review* 76, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 659–703; Queene Hooper Foster, “James Gordon Bennett Leads Yachting onto the Transatlantic Scene,” *Sea History* 89 (Summer 1999): 23–27.

simply Morse code. The cultural practice of “broadcasting,” however, and even this specific word, were used in the nineteenth century when telegraph networks disseminated single messages to dispersed receivers.<sup>5</sup> With wireless telegraphy, the *Herald* was continuing this practice and, rather than simply delivering news on printed pages, was now sending information to vessels at sea. This particular initiative concluded when the Navy assumed control of the station, as it did with all commercial wireless operations when the United States entered World War I. The *Herald*’s use of wireless thus began with the earliest phase of radio history and continued until the technology was on the cusp of its next major evolutionary development, the broadcasting boom of the 1920s.

There is, as yet, no comprehensive account of the early intersection of newspaper and radio history. Historians, by contrast, have studied newspapers in relation to both telegraph and radio, though the interim technology of wireless has received scant attention in this regard.<sup>6</sup> This research operates from the perspective, taken from the social construction approach to the history of technology, that “new technology . . . typically emerges not from flashes of disembodied inspiration but from existing technology.”<sup>7</sup> With this observation in mind, this present research establishes a connection between journalists’ use of the telegraph and their use of radio by focusing on the era of wireless telegraphy.

This present research focuses on the *New York Herald*’s various experiments with wireless telegraphy, though other papers are mentioned to provide the fullest picture possible. The research is motivated not only by the lack of prior research on the topic, but also by the contemporary relationship between

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<sup>5</sup>Menaheim Blondheim, “When Bad Things Happen to Good Technologies: Three Phases in the Diffusion and Perception of American Technology,” in *Technology, Pessimism, and Postmodernism*, ed. Yaron Ezrahi, Everett Mendelsohn, and Howard Segal (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 86.

<sup>6</sup>For studies of the newspaper in relation to the telegraph, see, for example, David Hochfelder, *The Telegraph in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012); David T. Z. Mindich, “Edwin M. Stanton, the Inverted Pyramid, and Information Control,” *Journalism Monographs* 140 (August 1993); Horst Pottker, “News and Its Communicative Quality: The Inverted Pyramid—When and Why Did It Appear?,” *Journalism Studies* 4, no. 4 (2003): 501–511; James Carey, “Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph,” in *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Donald L. Shaw, “News Bias and the Telegraph: A Study of Historical Change,” *Journalism Quarterly* 44 (Spring 1967): 3–31; Menaheim Blondheim, *News over the Wires: The Telegraph and the Flow of Public Information in America, 1844–1897* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). For radio, see Stamm, *Sound Business*; Randall Patnode, “Friend, Foe, or Freeloader? Cooperation and Competition between Newspaper and Radio in the Early 1920s,” *American Journalism* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 75–96; Gwenyth Jackaway, *Media at War: Radio’s Challenge to the Newspapers, 1924–1939* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995).

<sup>7</sup>Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman, “Introductory Essay,” in *The Social Shaping of Technology: How the Refrigerator Got Its Hum*, ed. Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1985), 10.

new media and journalism. Electronic methods for delivering news are becoming more popular with each passing year, and newspapers as a physical, printed artifact may become a thing of the past (or perhaps a luxury reserved for only the wealthiest of readers). Given this ongoing transition within the journalism industry, it is useful to step back and recognize that newspapers have been dabbling with “new media” for well over a hundred years. An increased awareness for historical precedents reminds us that technologies themselves do not transform journalism, and we must be cognizant of the cultural forces that motivate and drive technological development itself. In this case, one newspaper wanted to receive and deliver news as quickly as possible, though the desire to acquire a competitive publicity edge over rival papers was an equally significant motivation.

Along with the *Herald*, other newspapers also sponsored their own wireless telegraph stations, suggesting a wider usage of the technology during this era than has previously been depicted. Rather than viewing the development of radio broadcasting as a dramatic paradigm shift—a perspective contained in much of the radio literature—this study emphasizes the long genesis of broadcasting. The most often cited text for pre-1920s radio, Susan Douglas’s *Inventing American Broadcasting*, devotes significant attention to amateur operators before World War I and claims “the corporate sphere publicly expressed indifference towards the invention.”<sup>8</sup> Although it may be true that the major corporations, such as General Electric, Westinghouse, and AT&T, were not actively pursuing radio as a means of mass communication, the current research adds to our understanding that many groups were broadcasting over the pre-WWI airwaves, beyond simply the amateurs.<sup>9</sup>

This research also indicates the “interpretative flexibility” of early wireless communication, as its ultimate place in society was not apparent or established at the outset.<sup>10</sup> The primary motivation behind the *Herald*’s use of the technology, based on all available evidence, would seem to be as a means of publicity. The number of listeners who actually heard the Morse code signals from WHB, for example, was no doubt quite small when compared to those who read the newspaper. The paper was vocal, though, about touting its achievements with this form of “new media,” and the towering antennas at the southern edge of Manhattan were themselves an

<sup>8</sup>Susan J. Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899–1922* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 194–195.

<sup>9</sup>Other works that explore this early period in radio include Hugh Richard Sloten, *Radio’s Hidden Voice: The Origins of Public Broadcasting in the United States* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), and Gordon Greb and Mike Adams, *Charles Herrold, Inventor of Radio Broadcasting* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003).

<sup>10</sup>Trevor J. Pinch and Wiebe E. Bijker, “The Social Construction of Facts and Artifacts: Or How the Sociology of Science and the Sociology of Technology Might Benefit Each Other,” in *The Social Construction of Technological Systems*, ed. Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor J. Pinch (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 40–41.

advertisement for the paper, even for those who never experienced wireless firsthand. Additionally, the paper offered individuals the opportunity to use its wireless apparatus to send direct messages to passengers at sea; this endeavor indicates a blurring of the distinction between point-to-point communication and broadcasting, a distinction that was not at all clear at the dawn of wireless. Mass communication would eventually become the dominant use of wireless, with the development of radio broadcasting, though this research is an illustration of the flexible nature of nascent technologies.

Given the lack of prior research on this particular topic, and the fragmentary nature of evidence from this era, it is difficult to produce an exhaustive exploration of the relationship between newspapers and wireless telegraphy. Indeed, the 1917 letter cited at the beginning of this essay speaks to the vagaries of the historical record. The Bureau of Navigation, which was part of the larger federal agency originally charged with regulating wireless—the Department of Commerce, felt compelled to write to the *Herald* as it had little information itself on the earliest period of the technology’s development.

As noted earlier, a number of newspapers dabbled with early wireless, though most of these operations were short-lived. These other instances are mentioned here to provide some context, and to indicate that other publishers also experimented with the new form of communication. In August 1899, for example, the same month in which the *Herald* used Marconi’s equipment to cover the yacht race, the *San Francisco Call* also used wireless to receive information from a ship.<sup>11</sup> In this instance, the paper scooped its rivals by announcing the imminent arrival of a long-awaited naval vessel returning from the Philippines. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* installed equipment in its newsroom in 1904 to receive daily updates from Lee de Forest during the World’s Fair.<sup>12</sup> Several years later, the same famous inventor worked with the *New York American* to broadcast results for the 1916 presidential election.<sup>13</sup>

There were also at least two examples of “island-newspapers”; in these instances, a newspaper transmitted information to a printing press on an island, with wealthy vacationers as the intended audience. The *Los Angeles Times* began the first such operation on Catalina Island in March 1903 with a publication known simply as the *Wireless*.<sup>14</sup> A few months later, the

<sup>11</sup>Bart Lee, “Wireless Comes of Age on the West Coast,” *Amateur Wireless Association Review* 24 (2011): 243.

<sup>12</sup>Lee de Forest, *Father of Radio* (Chicago: Wilcox & Follett, 1950), 165.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>14</sup>A copy of the first page of the first edition reprinted in Thorn L. Mayes, *Wireless Communication in the United States: The Early Development of American Radio Operating Companies* (East Greenwich, RI: New England Wireless and Steam Museum, 1989), 216; the *Los Angeles Times* also printed a number of very positive articles about the publication. See “The Wireless Is a Winner,” March 26, 1903, 6; “Ether Wings the Wonder,” March 27, 1903, 11; “Great Is the Wireless,” March 30, 1903, 13.

*Providence Daily Journal* began a similar operation on Block Island. The front page of the *Block Island Wireless* included the latest stock market quotations, leaving little doubt as to the demographics of the presumed readers.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to these other examples, the *Herald's* use of wireless telegraphy was not short-lived or incidental. The *Herald* was also the only paper identified (by the US government) as the bona fide owner of a wireless station after the Radio Act of 1912, the regulation that established the licensing provision.<sup>16</sup> On a methodological note, this is the only newspaper for which significant historical evidence has been uncovered regarding its use of wireless telegraphy; future research may uncover additional, lesser-known publications that were equally active.

The evidence is drawn from the National Archives, specifically the files of the Federal Communications Commission and the Department of Commerce. Additional information was found in the Smithsonian's George C. Clark Collection of Radioana, and the Lee de Forest papers, part of the Perham Collection at History San Jose. Articles from era newspapers and trade journals, along with prior historical scholarship, provided additional details on key events. Beyond a few letters from the National Archives and one magazine article, no other firsthand accounts of the *Herald's* wireless operations have been uncovered.<sup>17</sup> The internal logic of various actions can thus only be theorized from the limited evidence.

The study begins with an overview of newsgathering methods of the nineteenth century, particularly in relation to the *New York Herald*. The paper's use of wireless communication technology is then presented in chronological order, beginning with the 1899 yacht race and concluding with the closure of WHB during World War I. Along with integrating the historical evidence into a cohesive narrative, this study illustrates how each development was an incremental step, building on previous practice.

### Lightning Lines and the Penny Press

The wireless telegraph stations the *Herald* established in 1901 were, in one regard, a bold, innovative approach to newsgathering, though they can also be seen as a culmination of ongoing trends. This brief summary of the *Herald's* earlier history reveals a continued emphasis on adopting new technologies, aggressive publicity, as well as prominent attention given to

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<sup>15</sup>Clark Collection of Radioana, Smithsonian, National Museum of American History, box 378, folder 3.

<sup>16</sup>US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Navigation, *Radio Stations of the United States*, editions for 1913, 1914, 1915, and 1916. The publication did not appear in 1917 and 1918, due to the wartime restriction on radio activity, and resumed in 1919.

<sup>17</sup>R. Ernest Dupuy, "WHB," *Radio News*, October 1924, 498–505.

shipping news. The wireless telegraph activities of the early twentieth century touched on all these trends.

The *New York Herald* began in 1835 and grew into “the most successful and widely circulated newspaper in mid-nineteenth-century America.”<sup>18</sup> In contrast to most other publications in the city, which catered to a relatively small group of merchants and businessmen and cost six cents per issue, publisher James Gordon Bennett filled his pages with sensational stories (sometimes based purely on gossip), used informal, conversational language, and charged a penny per copy. Bennett was not the first to charge such a low rate, but his aggressive self-promotion propelled the *Herald* to great popularity and encouraged others to imitate the new style of journalism. Under Bennett’s guidance, the paper continually adopted the latest and fastest printing techniques, and the *Herald*’s building was repeatedly remodeled to make room for new presses.<sup>19</sup> Another particular claim made about the *Herald* was that it pioneered the use of foreign correspondents. In a study that challenged and clarified this claim, Ulf Jonas Bjork wrote that the paper was “less a definite break with the past than the evolution of American journalism.”<sup>20</sup>

The same quotation applies to the establishment of the 1901 Nantucket wireless stations. For decades, New York papers had relied on ships coming from Europe for overseas news. Financial speculators were particularly interested in prices for various commodities, as even a slight time advantage allowed them to buy or sell at the best prices. In the 1820s, the *Journal of Commerce* operated a visual telegraph on Sandy Hook, the tip of a peninsula jutting off New Jersey.<sup>21</sup> This vantage point is an ideal place to spot incoming vessels; symbols flashed from Sandy Hook could be seen in New York, which offered an early announcement of arriving vessels. One contemporary account noted that, in addition to giving the *Journal* advance notice, this system also functioned as a publicity vehicle, as anyone could see the telegraph.<sup>22</sup> The *Herald*’s later wireless stations would also serve this dual purpose.

Bennett was particularly insistent when it came to acquiring news as early as possible, and he funded a small fleet to intercept ships before his rivals. European newspapers would be dropped onto the smaller vessels, which then raced back to shore. The publisher was so insistent on this competitive advantage that he paid entrepreneur Daniel Craig five hundred

<sup>18</sup>James L. Crouthamel, *Bennett’s New York Herald and the Rise of the Popular Press* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1989), ix.

<sup>19</sup>Crouthamel, *Bennett’s New York Herald*, 43–44.

<sup>20</sup>Ulf Jonas Bjork, “Commercial Roots of Foreign Correspondence: The *New York Herald* and Foreign News, 1835–1839,” *American Journalism* 11, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 115.

<sup>21</sup>Menaheim Blondheim, *News over the Wires*, 24.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

dollars for each hour that the *Herald* received European news in advance of other publications.<sup>23</sup> Along with small intercept boats, publishers relied on specially chartered trains, pony expresses, and even homing pigeons to race the news to their newsrooms.

As part of Bennett's desire to offer the most up-to-date news, he was particularly supportive of the emerging technology of the telegraph. He lavished praise on the invention in an editorial in 1844 and was an early investor in Magnetic Telegraph, the company created to commercialize Samuel Morse's patent.<sup>24</sup> Two years later, the *Herald* helped to found the Associated Press, an organization orchestrated to share telegraphic dispatches from the war with Mexico. The paper did, however, have a contentious relationship with Western Union, the dominant telegraph company in the nineteenth century. Breaking ranks with his fellow publishers, Bennett warned of Western Union's excessive influence over communications technology.<sup>25</sup>

After Bennett's death in 1872, his son inherited the publishing duties, and the *Herald* remained an enthusiastic supporter of the telegraph. As part of this continued effort, Bennett Jr. joined with John Mackay, a "fabulously wealthy silver miner," to fund a transatlantic telegraph cable, and the two formed the Commercial Cable Company.<sup>26</sup> Another indication of the *Herald's* embrace of the technology was a summer news service for hotels around New York City. Under this system, any hotel willing to pay telegraph tolls could receive bulletins twice a day to display to vacationing residents.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to the publishing duties and massive wealth, Bennett Jr. also inherited his father's penchant for publicity. It was reportedly his idea to send Henry Stanley on the famed expedition to locate Dr. Livingstone. He later funded a doomed expedition to explore the Arctic in 1878, which was conducted by the US Navy. One of his greatest passions, however, was yachting, and under his editorial reign, the *Herald* "always carried a detailed shipping news section."<sup>28</sup> Within this section, the paper had a column dedicated to news received via the eponymous Herald Cable. Given Bennett Jr.'s background and interests, his patronage of the inventor Marconi was perhaps a logical development.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 41; Richard John, *Network Nation: Inventing American Telecommunications* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>25</sup>John, *Network Nation*, 144, 146.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 178; Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting*, 9.

<sup>27</sup>This service is described in "Herald Bulletin Service for Summer Resort Hotels," *New York Herald*, October 8, 1899, 3, and also an article with the same headline from July 7, 1901, 3.

<sup>28</sup>Queene Hooper Foster, "James Gordon Bennett Leads Yachting onto the Transatlantic Scene," *Sea History* 89 (Summer 1999): 26.



## Ship to Shore

In 1898, one year before bringing Marconi across the Atlantic, Bennett Jr. utilized the telegraph to cover the annual America's Cup yacht race. His own yacht, the *Mackay-Bennett*, was anchored off the coast of New Jersey and was linked to the transatlantic cable that he had helped fund years before. In this manner, observers were able to transmit a limited amount of live updates back to the shore.<sup>29</sup> After learning that Marconi's wireless had been used to cover an 1898 yacht race for the *Dublin Daily Express*, Bennett offered the inventor five thousand dollars to do the same for the *Herald*. The US Navy took an immediate interest in this development and selected a group of officers (knowledgeable in electrical engineering) to observe the race coverage.<sup>30</sup>

The first race updates appeared in the *Herald* on October 4 under the hyperbolic headline "Wireless Bulletins Worked Like Magic."<sup>31</sup> The steamship *Ponce* was equipped with one of Marconi's transmitters and provided regular updates on the race, with a receiving station located in Navesink, New Jersey. At the time, Marconi was willing to work with wireless equipment made by other engineers; the *Mackay-Bennett*, for example, as well as another nearby vessel, the *Grand Duchess*, had wireless apparatus that had been made by the US Electrical Supply Company.<sup>32</sup> Articles in the *Herald* indicate that both of these vessels heard the updates from the *Ponce*, with the *Mackay-Bennett* also able to relay them to the US mainland and Europe via the underwater cable.

The *Herald* maximized the publicity from the event and distributed the yacht updates to audiences across the United States and Europe. The news was also shared with the Associated Press, though articles in the paper continually reminded readers as to whom they could thank for this latest technological wonder. The paper displayed the results on large bulletin boards outside its main office, as well as in other locations around the city, and impressed the cheering crowds with a steady stream of updates (at least, according to the *Herald's* laudatory coverage).<sup>33</sup> Newspaper offices had long served as physical focal points for news dissemination, a dynamic that was magnified when papers became connected to the telegraph network in the mid-nineteenth century. One biography of James Gordon Bennett Sr., for

<sup>29</sup>Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting*, 19.

<sup>30</sup>Howeth, *History of Communications—Electronics in the United States Navy*, 26.

<sup>31</sup>"Wireless Bulletins Worked Like Magic," *New York Herald*, October 4, 1899, 6.

<sup>32</sup>Howeth, *History of Communications—Electronics in the United States Navy*, 26–27; see also "Marconi Ready for Yacht Race," *New York Herald*, October 3, 1899, 6.

<sup>33</sup>"Herald's Bulletins to Inform All Europe," *New York Herald*, October 3, 1899, 6; "Crowd Cheers News Sent without Wire," *New York Herald*, October 4, 1899, 8.

example, referenced the “milling crowds” that congregated at the *Herald’s* office to hear the latest updates of the 1856 presidential election.<sup>34</sup>

If we consider these bulletin boards, which were used to display regular updates on the yacht race, and the use of Marconi’s wireless telegraph to transmit the information over the airwaves, the origins of radio broadcasting are complicated. The formal definition of broadcasting is a single message distributed indiscriminately to a dispersed audience, though was not this the ultimate effect achieved by the *Herald*? Only a few wireless receivers actually picked up Marconi’s signals, though the information was then displayed quite broadly, to individuals across the globe. This observation is not meant to claim that the *Herald* was, in fact, conducting “radio broadcasting” in 1899, but the event does force us to consider the nature of technological innovation. Each step of development inevitably builds on prior practice, and the exact moment when we declare something to be truly “new” is thus a somewhat arbitrary decision. In this regard, the distinction between radio broadcasting and the public display of information via newspaper bulletin boards is less dramatic than might appear on first consideration.

Marconi’s technology quickly proved its value, beyond being a tool for sports coverage, when the *Ponce* collided with another vessel on October 7. Thanks to the wireless transmitter, a rescue operation was put into motion immediately, since “news of the collision . . . [was] telegraphed while it was happening.”<sup>35</sup> The Marconi equipment was subsequently transferred to the *Grand Duchess*, which covered the remainder of the yacht race. And, as another way to garner publicity for the technology, the inventor provided real-time stock updates to the passengers on the *Grand Duchess* and even issued a few “sell orders” from the ocean.<sup>36</sup> The Navy was sufficiently impressed and organized a later demonstration to further evaluate the technology.<sup>37</sup>

A history of New York newspapers by Hy Turner claims that Bennett’s interest in wireless then waned when he realized that it might interfere with his Commercial Cable Company’s business.<sup>38</sup> This assertion may seem logical, though the stunt was repeated two years later, with Marconi working again for the *Herald* and the Associated Press.

On this second occasion, however, a transmitter operated by a rival wireless company caused severe interference, and Marconi’s signals could

<sup>34</sup>Oliver Carlson, *The Man Who Made News: James Gordon Bennett* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1942), 264, cited in Ira Chinoy, “Battle of the Brains: Election-Night Forecasting at the Dawn of the Computer Age,” PhD dissertation, University of Maryland, 2010, 98.

<sup>35</sup>“The Herald’s Wireless Telegrams Again Triumph,” *New York Herald*, October 8, section I, 5.

<sup>36</sup>“Marconi Acts as Magnet on Crowd,” *New York Herald*, October 13, 1899, 7.

<sup>37</sup>Howeth, *History of Communications—Electronics in the United States Navy*, 28–30.

<sup>38</sup>Hy Turner, *When Giants Ruled: The Story of Park Row, New York’s Greatest Newspaper Street* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 164.

not be received. Lee de Forest attempted to use his system of wireless to cover the same event for the Publishers' Press Association and was likewise thwarted.<sup>39</sup> The earliest wireless transmitters were essentially "untuned," and they broadcast over a wide swath of the electromagnetic spectrum. In contemporary terms, this would be as if one radio station broadcast its signal across the entire AM-radio band. This situation made it impossible for two different transmitters to operate in any given area.

The claim that Bennett Jr. lost interest in the new technology is similarly contradicted by the establishment of two wireless stations in 1901. Whereas the coverage of the yacht race involved only a temporary operation, the *Herald* later installed Marconi equipment on Nantucket Island, approximately thirty miles south of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. A wireless transmitter also was placed aboard the Nantucket Shoals lightship, a vessel anchored forty-three miles farther offshore that functioned as a lighthouse. Linking a submarine cable to the lightship was not possible, because the ship dragged its anchor along the ocean floor and occasionally broke free. Wireless was thus the only way to send messages to Nantucket Island. J. D. Jerrold Kelley, a retired US Navy commander, oversaw the construction of both stations; Kelley remained employed by the *Herald* for many years and was closely involved with the ongoing wireless activities.<sup>40</sup> These two installations were the "first regularly operated radio stations in the United States," claimed Richard Pfund, a radio engineer with the *Herald*.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the Marconi Company would not establish its own station in the United States until late in 1902.<sup>42</sup>

The lightship could pick up signals from Marconi-equipped vessels and then relay the information to the island. From there, the news would be sent through a combination of telephone and landline telegraph to the paper's office.<sup>43</sup> Thanks to this system, ships could announce their arrival more than ten hours before they reached New York harbor; prior to this innovation, it was impossible to know with any certainty when vessels would arrive. According to the paper's coverage, "Many vexatious delays will be obviated."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup>de Forest, *Father of Radio*, 123–126.

<sup>40</sup>Richard Pfund to A. J. Tyrer, Bureau of Navigation, September 20, 1917, Record Group 173, Federal Communications Commission, General Records, 1910–1934, box 56, file 840.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup>Elizabeth Kruse, "From Free Privilege to Regulation: Wireless Firms and the Competition for Spectrum Rights," *Business History Review* 76, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 675.

<sup>43</sup>"The Herald to Report Steamships at Sea by Using Marconi's Wireless Telegraph," *New York Herald* (Paris edition), June 9, 1901, section III, 2.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*

Businesses had pressing reasons for such information, and the *Herald* shared the updates with the Associated Press for circulation across the country.<sup>45</sup>

The *Herald* touted the imminent opening of the Nantucket stations in June 1901 with a lengthy article that portrayed them as the latest act in its long history of innovative newsgathering techniques.<sup>46</sup> Additional articles about the wireless stations in the following weeks continued this theme, and on June 17, the paper even announced that it had successfully transmitted an image “through a brick wall.”<sup>47</sup> The *Herald* predicted that in the future, its wireless coverage of yacht races could be supplemented by illustrations. This particular prediction never materialized, though it does indicate an enthusiastic attitude toward the new technology.

In mid-August, the *Herald* devoted almost two full pages to the “inaugural message” received by the lightship; communication had been established with the *Lucania* while it was 72 miles away.<sup>48</sup> The same issue of the paper informed readers that they could send their own wireless messages, for a requisite fee, to incoming or outgoing vessels. Another newspaper that experimented with wireless telegraphy, the *Providence Daily Journal*, offered the same service to its readers in 1903. This Rhode Island paper, perhaps in imitation of the *Herald*, established a wireless telegraph station on Block Island, located approximately thirteen miles offshore. This facility was also used to provide updates on arriving vessels to the newspaper.<sup>49</sup> Ads in the *Providence Daily Journal* informed readers that, for a fee, they could send their own “wireless aerograms” to Block Island.<sup>50</sup> Corresponding ads in the *Block Island Wireless*, the newspaper published via wireless telegraphy, informed residents that they could likewise send “aerograms” back to Rhode Island.

Although newspapers have a long history of quickly adopting new technologies of communication, it was an anomaly for these newspapers to engage in this type of service. If print publications had followed this

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<sup>45</sup>*Wireless Telegraphy: Report of the Inter-Departmental Board Appointed by the President to Consider the Entire Question of Wireless Telegraphy in the Service of the National Government* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1904), 27.

<sup>46</sup>“The Herald to Report Steamships at Sea by Using Marconi’s Wireless Telegraph,” *New York Herald* (Paris edition), June 9, 1901, section III, 2, online at <http://earlyradiohistory.us/1901.nan.htm>.

<sup>47</sup>“Pictures Sent without Wireless and through Walls,” *New York Herald*, June 17, 1901, 3–4.

<sup>48</sup>“Nantucket Lightship Picks Up *Lucania* 72 Miles Away and News Reaches New York,” *New York Herald*, August 17, 1901, 3–4.

<sup>49</sup>Regular wireless communication between Block Island and the *Providence Daily Journal* began in June 1903 and continued to at least May 1904. During this timeframe, the newspaper often featured a column, “Block Island News by Wireless Telegraph.”

<sup>50</sup>These “aerogram” ads appeared frequently in the newspaper in July and August 1903. For two specific examples, see *Providence Daily Journal*, July 1, 1903, 6, and August 3, 1903, 1.

business model, and continued to offer direct, personal communication services to their readers, we might today be faced with a situation in which the local newspapers double as the e-mail service provider for the community. In instances such as this, historical research can offer parallels with the present day as well as intriguing, alternative paths of technological development that were not pursued.

The Lighthouse Board, part of the Department of Commerce, had granted the *Herald* permission to install the Nantucket equipment, though this approval was eventually withdrawn. The friction with the government was triggered by the Marconi Company's policy against "interoperability." Echoing similar claims made by telegraph and telephone companies years before, the Marconi Company claimed that its own wireless system would not function effectively with equipment from rival systems. Under this policy, the *Herald* stations were permitted to report news of all passing vessels but were instructed to communicate only with those equipped by the Marconi Company.<sup>51</sup>

This police of non-interoperability outraged a German prince in 1902 after he found himself unable to communicate with Marconi stations in England or the United States.<sup>52</sup> His indignation directly inspired the International Wireless Conference of 1903, with seven nations meeting to propose regulations. The policies recommended at the 1903 meeting were not enacted, though they did impress upon American observers that some regulation was necessary. Then, history repeated itself and the *Herald's* lightship station (which used Marconi equipment) refused messages from a German ambassador's ship in February 1904.<sup>53</sup> Germany protested to the US State Department, and the Navy took control of the lightship's operation.<sup>54</sup>

In *Sound Business*, Michael Stamm wrote that newspaper publishers have been instrumental in shaping government policies for broadcasting.<sup>55</sup> This dynamic actually predates the development of broadcasting, with origins in the era of wireless telegraphy. The international conflict involving the *Herald's* lightship station was a motivating factor behind the first serious attempt by the US government to regulate the new technology. In June 1904, President Theodore Roosevelt appointed the Interdepartmental Board

<sup>51</sup> Typed note from Clark Collection of Radioana, box 120.

<sup>52</sup> Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting*, 119–120.

<sup>53</sup> This incident is documented in a series of letters of memos, from National Archives, Record Group 40, General Records of the Department of Commerce, 1913–1917, box 130, file 67032/9. This incident is also discussed in Howeth, *History of Communications—Electronics in the United States Navy*, 78–79.

<sup>54</sup> It is not clear when the Navy assumed control of the lightship operation, but a typed note from Rear Admiral R. D. Evans, dated December 12, 1904, states that the Navy was in control of the equipment by this point. In National Archives, Record Group 40, General Records of the Department of Commerce, 1913–1917, box 130, file 67032/9.

<sup>55</sup> Stamm, *Sound Business*.

of Wireless Telegraphy, drawing most of its members from the Navy. The policy recommendations in the final report were not surprising. Private wireless companies should be allowed to operate, though the Navy should have supremacy and was to establish a network along the coasts. The report singled out the *Herald's* wireless stations for their refusal to accept the German message.<sup>56</sup>

This incident ended the *Herald's* working relationship with the Marconi Company, at least for several years. In the summer of 1907, the paper conducted a wireless publicity stunt called “Wall Street Afloat,” although this time, it worked with the United Wireless Telegraph Company.<sup>57</sup> This stunt was an intriguing example of a hybrid system—it blended technologies of the past with the newest media of the day. During a nine-day yacht race in August 1907, the *Herald* transmitted stock-market news to the passengers at sea. None of the yachts in the event, however, were equipped with wireless receivers. The newspaper rather transmitted the news to its own boat, the *Moran*, which, in turn, used a complex array of signal flags to communicate to the other vessels. A detailed chart printed in the *Herald* explained the myriad of signals that could convey information about specific stocks, fluctuations in the currency market, and other details of interest to the wealthy yachtsmen.<sup>58</sup> In contrast to the repeated references to the America’s Cup race of 1899, this later event has been almost entirely overlooked in the historical record.<sup>59</sup>

As the yachts sailed up the coast of Long Island and stopped at Martha’s Vineyard, they were able to keep abreast of the latest financial news, which happened to be quite volatile. Transmitters in New York as well as Connecticut and Rhode Island delivered the news, and while the passengers were on Martha’s Vineyard, provided the only way to receive news.<sup>60</sup> Operators of landline telegraphs were on strike at the time, though the wireless continued to function. Accounts of this event note that some of the yachtsmen interrupted their voyages to rush home upon hearing distressing news. Some

<sup>56</sup>*Wireless Telegraphy: Report of the Inter-Departmental Board*, 7.

<sup>57</sup>The first articles about the event in the *Herald* claim that Lee de Forest’s company was behind the operation, though by this date, de Forest’s company had been absorbed by United Wireless. The inventor also fails to mention the event in his autobiography. Given his penchant for self-promotion, he likely would have done so had he actually been part of this stunt.

<sup>58</sup>“Brokers Who Will Go on New York Yacht Club’s Cruise Thank the *Herald* for Wireless Wall Street Service,” *New York Herald*, August 7, 1907, 3–4.

<sup>59</sup>In the course of researching this project, only one secondary source was found that even mentioned this particular event; Queene Hooper Foster, “James Gordon Bennett Leads Yachting onto the Transatlantic Scene,” *Sea History* 89 (Summer 1999): 27.

<sup>60</sup>This information comes from a series of undated *New York Herald* clippings kept by Lee de Forest in one of his many scrapbooks. From the Clark Collection of Radioana, box 38.

passengers also lamented that too much attention was devoted to the wireless instead of to the actual sailing. A similar stunt was repeated in 1908.<sup>61</sup>

### Station WHB

Following the “Wall Street Afloat” stunts from previous summers, the *Herald* established a permanent station in 1909.<sup>62</sup> This section provides, to the fullest extent possible, a history of this station and also illustrates some of the difficulties the government initially faced when trying to control the flow of information over the airwaves.

The station, known first as OHX, broadcast news twice a day, with each transmission lasting approximately fifteen to twenty minutes, and claimed that its signal extended 1,500 miles.<sup>63</sup> Following the Radio Act of 1912, the government began to assign call letters to stations, and WHB became the new moniker.<sup>64</sup> (The H did not stand for the *Herald*, however, as other New York stations were also assigned call letters that began with the WH prefix.)

A book on wireless telegraphy published in 1912 contains two photos of the *Herald* station.<sup>65</sup> One shows an unnamed operator inside the control room; another shows the exterior of the station, located at the Battery, the southern tip of Manhattan. Two massive horizontal antennas dominate the skyline. The book provides no additional information on the *Herald*, though one paragraph addresses the general phenomenon of press-wireless stations:

Several enterprising newspapers have recognized the value of wireless telegraphy in collecting shipping news and have installed outfits for the assistance of their reporting bureau. This innovation in modern journalism has quickly developed into a useful feature of those publications who have seen fit to adopt it. When the baseball season is under way every steamship within calling distance wants the latest baseball scores or sporting results.<sup>66</sup>

As no other newspapers are mentioned by this source, this is additional evidence that the *Herald* was at the fore of this practice.

<sup>61</sup>“Herald’s Wireless News Arrangement Complete,” *New York Herald*, August 2, 1908, section II, 1.

<sup>62</sup>Dupuy, “WHB,” *Radio News*.

<sup>63</sup>Radio Inspector L. R. Krumm to Commissioner of Navigation, December 9, 1916, in National Archives, Record Group 173, Federal Communications Commission, General Records, 1910–1934, file 192, box 19. The claim of 1,500 miles is from a clipping from the (*Herald*’s) *Evening Telegram* entitled “Herald’s Wireless Call Now WHB,” from the same set of FCC Files, file 64344.

<sup>64</sup>“Herald’s Wireless Call Now WHB,” *Evening Telegram* (see note above).

<sup>65</sup>A. P. Morgan, *Wireless Telegraphy and Telephony* (New York: Norman Henley, 1922), 94, 96.

<sup>66</sup>Morgan, *Wireless Telegraphy and Telephony*, 95, 98.

This research has uncovered other press stations, though few details are known (beyond the fact that they did exist). The names of the newspapers are provided here, along with corresponding citations, primarily as inspiration and reference for future studies. A government listing of wireless stations, as of September 1, 1909, indicates stations for the *Boston Herald* (BH) and the *Detroit News* (CJL).<sup>67</sup> The corresponding document from October 1910 includes these two press stations, with OHX from the *Herald* also appearing for the first time.<sup>68</sup> A magazine article from January 1910 lists a number of newspapers that installed equipment from the United Wireless Telegraph Company: the *Boston Herald*, *Baltimore American*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Grand Rapids Press*, *Los Angeles Examiner*, and the *Tribune* of Aberdeen, Washington.<sup>69</sup> Two of the papers from this group, the *Boston Herald* and the *Baltimore American*, had worked with de Forest equipment as early as 1906.<sup>70</sup> The *Buffalo Evening News* also worked with United Wireless; a front-page story from the paper in 1909 claimed that wireless would be a “permanent adjunct.”<sup>71</sup> There is also evidence that the *Salem Evening News* had its own station.<sup>72</sup> As previously noted, however, the *New York Herald* is the only newspaper that appears in the annual lists of wireless stations that the government issued after 1912. This observation should not be construed as evidence that the others ceased operation, since these stations may have been licensed to some other entity (such as United Wireless) and thus cannot be distinguished in the government lists.

In 1924, R. Ernest Dupuy wrote a brief history of the *Herald* station, offering a useful firsthand account of its operation.<sup>73</sup> Dupuy had been the editor of the Ship News section of the paper and was closely involved with

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<sup>67</sup>Department of the Navy, *Wireless Telegraph Stations of the World* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909), online at <http://earlyradiohistory.us/1909stat.htm>.

<sup>68</sup>Department of the Navy, *Wireless Telegraph Stations of the World* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1910), online at <http://earlyradiohistory.us/1910stat.htm>.

<sup>69</sup>“Hotels and Newspapers Install United Wireless,” *American Globe, Independent Illustrated Monthly*, January 1910, 5 (accessed via Google Books). A photo of the *San Francisco Chronicle* station, along with a brief discussion, appears in Mayes, *Wireless Communication in the United States*, 60. The Clark Collection also contains a handwritten note claiming that United Wireless had installed transmitters for a few of these newspapers, Clark Collection of Radioana, box 379, folder 1B.

<sup>70</sup>“News by Wireless,” *Baltimore American*, April 6, 1906; “First Wireless News to Boston,” *Boston Herald*, February 4, 1906; both of these clippings are from one of Lee de Forest’s notebooks, part of the de Forest material in Perham Collection (History San Jose), box 8.

<sup>71</sup>“Complete Wireless Plant Is Now a Permanent Adjunct of the Evening News,” *Buffalo Evening News*, May 17, 1909, 1.

<sup>72</sup>An index card in the FCC archives lists the licensing of the *Salem Evening News* on September 16, 1912, but the file to which this index card referred could not be located; see National Archives, Records of the FCC, General Subject Index 1910–1927, box 1.

<sup>73</sup>Dupuy, “WHB.”



the wireless activity. The steel tower that supported OHX's antenna was next to the Ship News office at the Battery, with a direct wire linked to the *Herald's* main offices. OHX began with equipment from the National Electric Signaling Company, using the inventions of Reginald Fessenden. The station later switched to the apparatus from another company, though Bennett Jr. was opposed to working with the Marconi Company at this time. Dupuy wrote that Bennett Jr. had been embroiled in a feud with Marconi. Another source also claims that tension existed between the publisher and Marconi; according to Alvin Harlow, in 1913, a Marconi station located atop the Woolworth Building would begin broadcasting at the same time the *Herald* was scheduled to deliver its early morning newscast. The resulting interference completely drowned out the *Herald's* signal. With the start of war in 1914, however, the Marconi Company was occupied with more pressing matters and gave up "trying to kill competition."<sup>74</sup> Though Dupuy does not indicate the reason for the Marconi-Bennett feud, the dispute over the Nantucket lightship may have been the reason. Recall that years before, Bennett Sr. had objected to Western Union's dominance over the telegraph industry, and perhaps the younger Bennett likewise objected to allowing someone else to control such a powerful means of communication.

This feud ended in the fall of 1916 (reportedly at the suggestion of Dupuy), and WHB became an integral part of the American Marconi network. In November 1916, the original station was dismantled and the facilities moved to a location atop the US Barge Office in New York.<sup>75</sup> New transmitting equipment and an antenna were also installed, which would allow the *Herald* to transmit on the longer wavelengths specified by the government. According to the *Wireless Age*, the new WHB would send out news twice a day to vessels across the Atlantic, along with another station in Massachusetts.<sup>76</sup>

David Sarnoff, then the commercial manager for the Marconi Company, sent out the ceremonial first message from the new transmitter. The Coast Guard supplied honor guards for the event, "in recognition of the close alliance between the station and the Coast Guard service."<sup>77</sup> Dupuy's own recollections similarly stated that WHB "was hand in glove with the Navy and was on particularly close terms with the Coast Guard."<sup>78</sup>

The FCC files, however, suggest that the relationship between the *Herald* and the military was not always so harmonious. This is to be expected, given the nature of the evidence in question. Friction inevitably generates more bureaucratic paperwork than amicable operations, and the government faced

<sup>74</sup>Harlow, *Old Wires and New Waves*, 468.

<sup>75</sup>"Re-equipment of the Herald Station," *Wireless Age*, April 1917, 460-461.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup>Dupuy, "WHB," *Radio News*, 499.

great difficulty in trying to enforce the spectrum allocations that had been established with the Radio Act of 1912. The crippling interference problems that plagued the earliest wireless systems had been partially resolved, and transmitters could now generate radio waves of different wavelengths. Receivers could thus be tuned to the appropriate frequency, and multiple transmitters could operate (in theory) in the same area. With the 1912 Act, the Navy had been granted exclusive use of wavelengths between 600 and 1,600 meters (which were the easiest ones for the era's transmitters to generate). Other users, including amateur operators and commercial stations, were assigned to the shorter and longer wavelengths, though users frequently operated outside their boundaries. Many of the FCC memos and letters relating to the *Herald* station pertain to interference, and due to the limited technology of the time, even broadcasting on an *assigned* frequency could sometimes cause interference.

The thickest of the FCC files regarding the *Herald* relate to its rescue work of December 24, 1912.<sup>79</sup> On that day, the SS *Turrialba*, a vessel of the United Fruit Company, was engulfed in a violent windstorm. The *Herald* station responded to the distress signal and coordinated a successful rescue effort. The paper emphasized its heroic effort the following day on the front page.

Commander S. C. Hooper of the US Navy wrote a letter of protest to the Secretary of the Navy, arguing that the *Herald* should have allowed the Navy's own station to coordinate the rescue. This letter offers a glimpse into negative feelings that were no doubt shared by others besides Hooper. In the past, the newspaper had criticized the Navy's radio service, arguing that its own technology was superior. Hooper disagreed and cited the *Herald* as "one of the worst sources of radio interference in the vicinity." According to Hooper, the *Herald* should have been classified as an amateur station and relegated to a different portion of the spectrum. Its daily newscasts were also redundant, as other stations offered similar information. For Hooper, "the main benefit derived from the *New York Herald* station is to the *New York Herald* as an advertisement."<sup>80</sup>

Based on this complaint, the local radio inspector investigated the matter. In contrast to Hooper's complaints, W. D. Terrell wrote that the *Herald* station "could not in any way be considered amateur class."<sup>81</sup> The station employed

<sup>79</sup>National Archives, Record Group 173, Federal Communications Commission, General Records, 1910–1934, file 64479, box 215.

<sup>80</sup>S. C. Hooper to Secretary of Navy, January 3, 1913, in National Archives, Record Group 173, Federal Communications Commission, General Records, 1910–1934, file 64479, box 215.

<sup>81</sup>Radio Inspector W. D. Terrell to Commissioner of Navigation, February 25, 1913, in National Archives, Record Group 173, Federal Communications Commission, General Records, 1910–1934, file 64479, box 215.

three full-time operators who were well qualified and was the only one able to maintain consistent contact with the sinking vessel. The letter exonerated the station and concluded with the observation that any credit the paper claimed “appears to me to be due to them.”

Another small controversy with the Navy occurred in September 1913. An operator at the *Herald* station picked up a message about a search mission for three people missing after an accident involving a naval vessel.<sup>82</sup> The newspaper reported on the event on September 22 and was charged with violating the law by publicly disclosing a private wireless message. J. D. Jerrold Kelley defended the paper in a letter to the local radio inspector, stating that the original message was thought to be a distress call rather than private communication. Satisfied with this explanation, the Navy dropped the issue, though the event does reveal the difficulty in evaluating what was and what was not allowed over the airwaves.

The most dramatic clash with the government occurred in October 1916. After war erupted in Europe in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson ordered that all wireless stations refrain from transmitting “un-neutral” messages.<sup>83</sup> WHB thus found itself in a dilemma when it learned that a German submarine was lurking off the coast of Rhode Island.<sup>84</sup> According to Dupuy, he fully realized that warning other vessels would constitute a violation of this neutrality policy.<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, he claimed that he was the one who instructed the operator to immediately transmit a warning to ships, and to repeat the message every thirty minutes. The German submarine ultimately did sink a few ships, though Dupuy believed that the casualty count would have been far higher had larger passenger vessels not heeded the warning.

Secretary Josephus Daniels of the Navy then threatened to close down the station in light of this neutrality violation. According to Dupuy’s later recollection, he concocted a scheme to avoid the retribution. From David Sarnoff, Dupuy received the logs from several Marconi stations along the Atlantic coast. The Navy’s Arlington, Virginia, station had also broadcast a warning of the German submarine, which was clearly noted in the various logs. If the Navy indeed carried through on its threat of closure, Dupuy stated that the *Herald* would reveal that the Arlington station had likewise violated the neutrality provision. Daniels reportedly backed down, and he compromised by installing military censors at the station.

On October 16, 1916, the *Herald* printed a lengthy letter from Secretary Daniels that emphasized the president’s policy of neutrality and explained

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<sup>82</sup>All details in this paragraph from National Archives, Record Group 173, Federal Communications Commission, General Records, 1910–1934, file 70087.

<sup>83</sup>Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting*, 269.

<sup>84</sup>This event is discussed briefly in Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting*, 274.

<sup>85</sup>Dupuy, “WHB.”

why censors had been installed at WHB.<sup>86</sup> In subsequent days, the *Herald* reprinted editorials from two other publications that condemned the Navy's actions.<sup>87</sup> As part of this effort to resist military control, the paper also quoted a few passengers who had been at sea when the German submarine made its surprise visit. Businessman Edmund Carpenter claimed that the policy against submarine warnings made as much sense as "the Police Department putting a fence around my house to prevent my getting my groceries."<sup>88</sup>

Another conflict between the Navy and WHB occurred at the beginning of the following month, November 1916; this event suggests that at least one Navy officer may have been retaliating against the *Herald* in response to the negative press coverage. On November 5, the *Herald* picked up a distress signal from a vessel off the coast of Florida, then attempted to relay it to the Navy station in Arlington.<sup>89</sup> The response, however, was unexpected. The operator in Arlington stated that, per the Radio Act, using wireless for interstate commerce was forbidden. The *Herald* was instructed to give the message to the local Coast Guard, which could then send it via landline telegraph to Arlington. Dupuy was so incensed that he wrote an angry letter to the Navy on the same day, arguing that a distress signal should "in no way" be classified as interstate commerce.<sup>90</sup> The sinking vessel was eventually saved, and the *Herald* blasted the Navy's bungling of the message in its reporting.<sup>91</sup>

Months later, the Navy took even stronger action against WHB and assumed complete control of the station. When Congress declared war in April 1917, President Wilson invoked a clause of the Radio Act and granted the Navy authority over all wireless stations, and many were closed immediately. The *Herald* station remained in operation, though it was now part of the Naval Communication Service.<sup>92</sup> In sharp contrast to the previous incidents, in which the *Herald* was not timid about critiquing the Navy, the paper was noticeably quiet about this dramatic development. On April 3, the

<sup>86</sup>"Mr. Daniels Tells Why He Placed Censor at Herald Radio Station," *New York Herald*, October 16, 1918, 8.

<sup>87</sup>"Not Good Sense—Editors Say of Daniels Radio Censorship," *New York Herald*, October 17, 1916, 8; "An Ungrateful Act," *New York Herald*, October 21, 1916, 8.

<sup>88</sup>"Incoming Passengers, Learning of Work of U-Boat, Condemn Wireless Censorship," *New York Herald*, October 18, 1916, 2.

<sup>89</sup>All details in this paragraph from National Archives, Record Group 173, Federal Communications Commission, General Records, 1910–1934, file 965.

<sup>90</sup>Letter from R. E. Dupuy to Commander, US Navy, New York Navy Yard, November 5, 1916, in National Archives, Record Group 173, Federal Communications Commission, General Records, 1910–1934, file 965.

<sup>91</sup>"Halt on Herald's Mercy Message Denounced" and "No Excuse for Action by Navy Department," undated *New York Herald* clippings, in National Archives, Record Group 173, Federal Communications Commission, General Records, 1910–1934, file 965.

<sup>92</sup>Secretary of Navy Josephus Daniels to Secretary of Commerce, June 25, 1917, National Archives, Federal Communications Commission, General Records, 1910–1934, box 32, file 535.

paper announced that it would cease providing wireless reports about ships, at the request of the Navy.<sup>93</sup> The paper did continue to provide limited news on ships, but all mentions of WHB were dropped from the shipping news section soon after.

Following the war, wireless stations were returned to their original owners, though the *Herald* station never reopened. In 1920, a radio inspector wrote to the Department of Commerce, requesting confirmation that the *Herald* had abandoned its wireless station.<sup>94</sup> The request was motivated by the fact that the call letters WHB had since been reassigned to another entity. According to this document, the inspector stated that the *Herald* station had existed “partly for advertisement, and partly for the collection of ship news.” The story of the *Herald* itself concluded at approximately the same time, a situation no doubt exacerbated by Bennett Jr.’s death in 1918. The paper was printed from its presses for the last time in 1920, then eventually merged with the *New York Tribune*.<sup>95</sup>

## Conclusion

Although the focus of this research has been on the *New York Herald* and its use of wireless telegraphy, the details shed light on broader issues. The difficulty in regulating the airwaves before World War I, and the confusion as to what types of messages were permissible, for example, reveal just how difficult it can be for regulators to stay abreast of a rapidly emerging technology. The repeated intersection of financial news and wireless telegraphy was also an unexpected, though not entirely surprising, discovery. It would be an overstatement to say that the desire for up-to-date financial information was a primary motive behind the development of wireless technology; the evidence does indicate, however, that wealthy businessmen were one of the first “target audiences” for wireless messages, and information tailored to their needs was therefore a priority.

The evidence also calls into question the revolutionary image that is often associated with new media technologies in public discourse. Radio broadcasting, for example, which became a popular technological and cultural practice in the 1920s, was depicted at the time as a transformative force that would influence every aspect of American life.<sup>96</sup> Similar sentiments resurfaced with later technologies, such as television; the technological miracle

<sup>93</sup>“Shipping News,” *New York Herald*, April 3, 1917, 17.

<sup>94</sup>Radio Inspector R. L. Krumm to Commissioner of Navigation, March 18, 1920, in National Archives, Record Group 173, Federal Communications Commission, General Records, 1910–1934, file 192, box 19.

<sup>95</sup>Don C. Seitz, *The James Gordon Bennetts, Father and Son: Proprietors of the New York Herald* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1928), 378.

<sup>96</sup>Catherine Covert, “‘We May Hear Too Much’: American Sensibility and the Response to the Radio, 1919–1924,” in *Mass Media between the Wars: Perceptions of Cultural Tension*,

*du jour* is social media. New media technologies indeed come with their own range of capabilities and affordances, though a comprehensive understanding of their impact must include an awareness of the continuity with earlier media. The practice of broadcasting via wireless telegraphy, for example, was influenced by news dissemination practices that had been employed with the telegraph; radio broadcasting, in turn, was influenced by the practices and regulations that had been established for wireless telegraphy.

The *Herald's* use of wireless telegraphy additionally sheds light on the complex relationship between journalism and new media technologies, a current topic of intense debate. Beginning in 1899 with the America's Cup yacht race, the *Herald* saw the new technology both as a means of gathering news and as a way to garner publicity. The paper consistently emphasized its role as a "wireless pioneer" in its own press coverage, and the massive aerials above WHB reminded observers (even those with no access to wireless receivers) that the *Herald* was the source for timely news. This "publicity motive" was no doubt shared by some of the other newspapers mentioned within this study, indicating that radio has always functioned as an advertising medium in some way (at least in the United States). The role of the US Navy in developing wireless technology has been well documented, but it is worth emphasizing that it was the *Herald* and its desire for publicity that introduced Marconi's wireless to America. From this, we can conclude that the newsgathering or news dissemination capabilities of new media technology are not always the reasons that journalists adopt the latest innovation. The desire for publicity and the competitive edge may be the determining factor.

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1918–1941, ed. Catherine L. Covert and John D. Stevens (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 199–220.

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