

Journalism Milestones

—Arnold Cheyney

Judith Cary Waller

Judith Cary Waller was born on February 19, 1889. She was the oldest of four daughters born to Katherine, her mother, and John Waller, a physician and surgeon. After Judith graduated from high school, a wealthy aunt rewarded her with a year's tour of Europe.

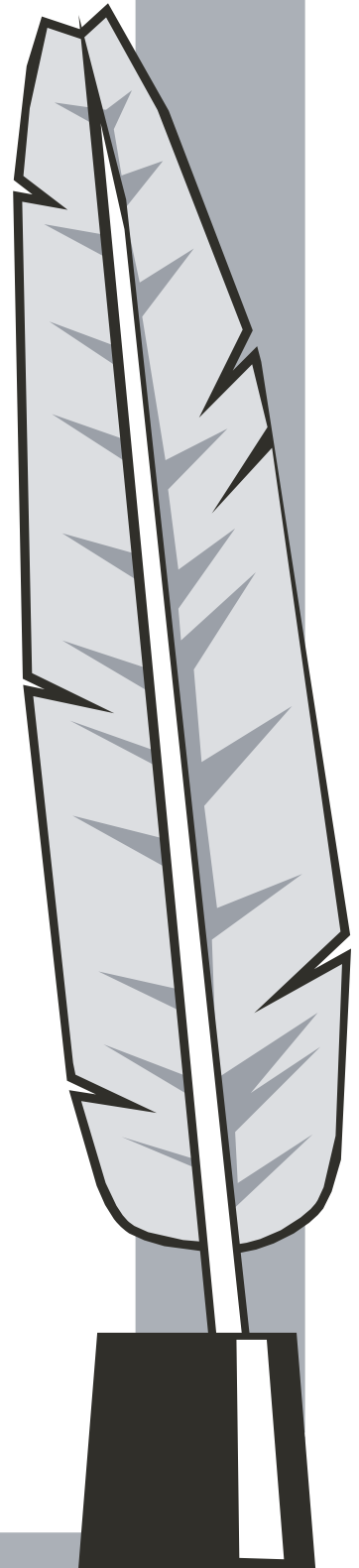
When Judith returned to the United States, she continued her education in a business college and worked in an advertising agency in New York and Chicago. This work led her into radio broadcasting in 1922. The business manager of the Chicago Daily News, who had met her on her European tour, told Judith the newspaper had just purchased a radio station, and he wanted her to be its general manager. Judith told him she knew nothing about radio. He said neither did he nor anyone else since it was such a new medium for dispersing information and various forms of programming.

Judith took the job. She decided the WMAQ radio station should arouse thought, discussion, and provide entertainment for the general public. WMAQ had a number of firsts to reach listeners in the mid 1920's: a football game between the University of Chicago and Brown University; a major league baseball game; the inauguration of President Calvin Coolidge in 1925; and news from London. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra was the first to play on radio at WMAQ. In 1925, the Chicago Cubs baseball team was the first to have their games broadcast for an entire season.

In 1928, Judith helped bring a program to WMAQ under a new title, the "Amos 'N Andy" radio show. Later, it continued as a popular television show. WMAQ also provided the Midwest with classical music as an alternative to the popular music and jazz being offered at that time.

Judith produced and directed the programs as well as announcing them. She could not offer many of the performers and speakers much money, but she was able to get them free publicity – she wrote advertisements about the programs. These were carried in the *Chicago Daily News*.

Lectures were offered by a professor from Northwestern University on the "American School of the Air." Miss Waller saw that those who listened could get course outlines and guides. Even elementary schools had geography lessons broadcast into their classrooms, supplementing their regular classroom lessons.



WMAQ joined the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and Judith was named the public service director for the Midwest United States. She set up a university training program for those interested in seeking a career in broadcasting. Her textbook *Radios, The Fifth Estate*, was published in 1946.

Television viewing became popular in the 1950's and radio listening lost much of its appeal. Judith began an educational program for children called "Ding Dong School," which became very popular and won a Peabody Award. She retired in 1954 but remained active in television workshops at Purdue University and Northwestern University.

In 1973, Judith Waller died of a heart attack in a home she shared with a sister in Evanston, Illinois. She was 84 years old.

Learning Activities

Language Arts

- If a wealthy person offered to support you for a year after high school or college, what place on earth would you choose? Write in fifty words or less what you would do at that place for twelve months. Share with your classmates.

Social Studies

- Search in an encyclopedia for ten interesting facts about radio. Compare your list with those of your classmates.
- Discuss with older friends or relatives (grandparents or great grandparents) what they remember about listening to the "Amos 'N Andy" show. Talk to your classmates and share with them what you learned.

Adult Reference

Waller, Judith C. *Radio: the Fifth Estate*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1946.



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