

Mr Ken R. Dyke

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PUBLIC EXPLOITATION OF
NBC CHIMES

Answering your request for a brief history of the use of our chimes in various cities, the first time I suggested their use was when we were building the new studios in Cleveland, which must have been in 1936 or 1937. There was a skeleton framework on the roof of the building, left from a large electric sign used by the previous occupant, and it was proposed to place a neon clock on this sign, bearing the call letters WTAM and the initials NBC. When Vernon Pribble was in town talking about their plans for the new studios, I suggested to him that we have the chimes hooked up with a large and powerful loud speaker on the roof of the building, and synchronized with the clock. For some reason this idea was not carried out.

On June 22, 1938, I authorized the Engineering Department to go ahead with the manufacture of special equipment for the clock on the International Building overlooking Rockefeller Plaza.

On August 15, 1938, the Rockefeller Plaza chimes commenced operation and I had a memorandum sent out to all branch offices by our Engineering Department explaining just how this equipment was designed. For some reason the branch office engineers did not take any action at the time, with the exception of those at KYW who were, I believe, Westinghouse men. While I have no record of the date, it must have been toward the end of 1938 that chimes were set up on the KYW studios in Philadelphia operating in synchronization with the clock on the face of the building.

On April 27, 1940, we officially inaugurated chimes on the Gillette Razor clock at 47th Street and Broadway.

On July 1, 1940, we learned that our Chicago engineers had installed chimes on the top of the Merchandise Mart. Apparently this action was the outcome of the memorandum which had been sent to Chicago on August 17, 1938.

On August 15, 1940, we installed chimes on a temporary basis in the main waiting room of the Grand Central Station.

On October 7, 1940, I wrote to the Hollywood studios and gave them full details of the equipment we have here in Rockefeller Plaza, with the idea that they should make a similar installation on the NBC building at Sunset and Vine. I do not know whether this suggestion is being acted on or not.

Summarizing all of the above, we have had the chimes ringing on public clocks in Rockefeller Plaza, Times Square and Grand Central in New York, the Merchandise Mart in Chicago and the Westinghouse-KYW Building in Philadelphia. At present however, the installations at Grand Central and Times Square are

not operative. We had only temporary equipment in Grand Central and some of the equipment needs replacing on the Times Square Chimes, involving an expense which we are not willing to undertake at this time.

My feeling is that further use of this idea depends entirely on the value to NBC of the chimes themselves. If we really want to continue plugging them as a musical trademark, then I am sure it will not be difficult to have these chimes installed in many other public clocks.

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During the winter of 1937-1938 we worked out a deal with NuTone Chimes of Cincinnati for manufacturing NBC chimes in a table model, making them available to the public through consumer advertising in "Listen" and selling them through department stores. In the period from March 1938 to January 1941 we purchased a total of 4300 table chimes from NuTone and I understand they also sold several gross to department stores.

On July 15, 1938, I obtained a "go ahead" to supply table chimes in quantities to the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad for their dining cars. On August 8 we equipped the New York Central System's dining cars. Shortly afterwards the Pennsylvania Railroad and several other railroads and coastal steamship lines were likewise equipped.

I might add that I have been dickering with Sessions Clock Company with a view to having electric clocks, suitable for home use, equipped with the NBC chimes. So far they have not been very interested, however, because it would involve the manufacture of several thousand before they could be economically produced.

E P H James