

The Sun – Roxy Radio Fund

Within two years of the start of radio broadcasting in the USA (1920) enthusiasts were installing radio receivers in hospitals for the purpose of entertainment of patients. (Fig. 1) Sometime by 1922, the United States Veterans Bureau had received federal allocations to install radios in the hospitals they operated. A article in *Wireless Age* for July 1924 describes the program in greater detail.

In the Great War (World War I), Samuel L. Rothafel had been a Marine Corps private and later a major in the Marine Corps Reserve; an enthusiastic Legionaire and member of the National Press Club Post at Washington, DC.

Rothafel, nick named “Roxy”, was said to be the single greatest American promoter of the concept of lavish ‘movie palaces’ during the Teens & 1920’s. His N.Y.C. establishment, the Capitol Theater, opened in 1919. These movie houses also featured “high class” vaudeville acts before the movie. In 1922 he began to broadcast, over WJZ, a program of entertainment from the stage of the Capitol Theater every Sunday night. The program was dedicated to the enjoyment of disabled veterans of The Great War.

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25 Cents

RADIO



An Independent Magazine Serving the Needs of the Radio Amateur and Commercial Operator

Figure 1 - Within two years enthusiasts were installing radios in hospitals and sanatoriums.



Figure 2- Roxy and his Gang distribute bedside crystal sets early 1924.

The troupe was known as “Roxy and his gang”. His program in mid-1925 was carried on a network of seven stations and it was said that 20 million had tuned into the programs. The largest radio audience in history at the time. This program continued to gain notoriety throughout the decade as the first broadcasting networks were formalized. While Roxy’s Capitol Theater is long gone, one monument to this impresario remains..... The great Radio City Music Hall...

entertainment for disabled men in New York. Before that time, he had been in the habit of giving away radio sets with a lavish hand (Fig. 2), but these were purchased out of his private funds. One day his bookkeeper said to him: “Look here, Roxy, do you realize how much it is costing you to give away these sets? If you want to give radio sets to all the veterans in the United States, why don’t you take up a subscription?” “I will,” said Roxy. And he did.

Rothafel’s big idea came in the spring of 1924 when he was involved in giving an

As reported in *Radio News* for October 1924, Rothafel teamed with the *New York Sun* newspaper in founding the Sun – Roxy Radio Fund. The stated objective was a \$500,000 program to install a radio

outfit in every military service hospital and a set of headphones at each bedside for the entertainment of veterans. In practice the fund was to be applied only to “contract and general (army, navy and marine) hospitals in which disabled veterans are patients.” Allocations from the fund were limited specifically to purchase of the radio receiving equipment. The facility operators were to assume the expenses of set installation, audio distribution and maintenance as required.

The American Legion Weekly of August 7th, 1925 reports that 50,000 ‘buddies’ in Uncle Sam’s hospitals in the North and East of the United States now listen to afternoon and evening programs. “Music, news, vaudeville, education, information, all were available for the mere effort of putting on a head-set and sticking in a couple of plugs.”

That same issue announces: “THE AMERICAN LEGION WEEKLY has assumed charge of the distribution of the Sun-Roxy Radio Fund, totaling at present more than \$80,000, which will hereafter be known as the Sun-Roxy Radio Fund of The American Legion Weekly. As in the past, this fund will be devoted exclusively to the purchase of radio equipment for disabled World War veterans. Effort will first be directed to equipping hospitals, on the theory of the greatest good to the greatest number, and once this goal has been achieved it is hoped to furnish small receiving sets to individual disabled men who are taking treatment in their homes. The Sun-Roxy Radio Fund of The American Legion Weekly is controlled by a board of trustees which will act on all applications for radio equipment received by the Weekly.”



A Sun-Roxy Radio Fund receiver still survives.



In 2005, I was able to acquire this Freed-Eisemann Model NR-5 from the estate of Larry Boyer who had been a long-time employee of RCA in Harrison, NJ. Note the engraving in the top-right corner of the front panel. It states that it was donated to the patients of St. Lawrence Hospital by the Sun – Roxy Radio Fund. (The St. Lawrence Hospital was in Ogdensburg, New York. In that area, the St. Lawrence River forms the border between the USA and Canada.) At over 250 miles from New York City, daytime reception from a station running about 5,000 Watts (super power for those days) was probably a little noisy but reliable. At night, reception was probably quite good.

I have yet to gain access to the Ogdensburg newspapers of the day to see if it is possible to determine the type of amplifier that may have been used with this radio to distribute the audio to many pairs of headphones in the patient wards. However, there are articles in various radio magazines of the day that show Magnavox and Western Electric amplifiers being used for similar service.

The Western-Electric Model 7-A amplifier exhibited with my receiver was used for public address announcements at Monroe High School, Monroe, NC about 1923. There would have been a Western Electric Type 518-W horn speaker in each classroom. The 7-A amplifier could have driven a few hundred earphone headsets.

The Freed-Eisemann NR-5, used the radio frequency amplifier stabilization circuit named the *Neutrodyne*. It's inventor, L. A. Hazeltine, first demonstrated this radio at the regular meeting of the Radio Club of America on the 2nd of March 1923. For the average broadcast listener, this circuit was considered superior to the regenerative circuit whose patents were controlled by the RCA. By the end of 1924, over 100,000 of this model had been built each one costing the consumer about \$150. The quality of construction was first class. I know of no other surviving examples of receivers branded with the Sun-Roxy Radio Fund attribution.

This set certainly met the specifications outlined in the *Wireless Age* article. Towards the end of 1924, other companies designed and brought to market sets selling for \$100 to as low as \$60. They did not employ the neutralized R.F. amplifiers and the components were of light weight materials and they did not perform quite as well; but they quickly captured a lot of Freed-Eisemann's business. Alan Douglas tells us that there was eventual recognition of excess production of the NR-5. It could be that the Radio Fund was able to negotiate substantial discounts for bulk purchases. The Freed-Eisemann brand continued until late 1928 when the Freed family members decided to sell out to the owners of the Charles Freshman Company.

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