

# BROADCASTING

HOW TWO AUTOMOBILE TITANS BUILT

The background stories of Don Lee & Earle C. Anthony • By Bob Burchett

BY NOW many of you know that my dual passions bridge TV and radio communications along with vintage cars, so when I recently acquired some related items to stuff into the Museum and had a chat with the all-knowing cousin Bill Burchett who really has great insight here, I decided to share the wealth. This is the result, as I try to merge these seemingly unrelated interests of two famous industry leaders into an article.

HOLLYWOODLAND



1 Don Lee, founder of Cadillac (and later LaSalle) dealerships in Los Angeles bought out the Earl family coach building operation, the origin of his lucrative car sales operation. Over time, his Cadillac dealerships spread to the Bay Area where many prominent buildings bearing his name still remain. In parallel time-frame, Earle C. Anthony commanded the Packard sales empire covering essentially the same territory from 1915 to 1958 and his buildings also still stand as proof of the foundation he built.

2 Lee and Anthony gravitated towards broadcasting early in their careers, both flush with cash from the Hollywood stars and other heavyweights that flocked to their dealerships. Both entered the fledgling radio broadcasting world and built radio stations using their building tops as transmitting tower locations.

Anthony used revenue from Packard sales and powered up the massive 50,000 watt "Clear Channel Station" KFI on AM 640 in Los Angeles around 1923. The FCC later decreed that Anthony had become one of only two frequency owners (still held to this day) which are "clear channels" so as to not be replicated for at least 1,000 land miles and eliminate co-channel interference. The small marker carats on your AM broadcast dial shows 640 and 1240 as these special CONELRAD and Civil Defense alerting stations. For more than 50 years the booming station announcers' voice in Los Angeles proudly stated, "KFI 640 Earle C. Anthony Incorporated".

3 Not to be outdone, Lee bought the defunct KFRC radio station from San Francisco in 1926 and moved it to his Cadillac building on Van Ness in Los Angeles to break into broadcasting from the opposite direction. Like Anthony, he affiliated with the big guns early on by hooking up with CBS, brilliantly using midget car racing employees Frank Kurtis and Bob Swanson to promote the stations he owned and operated.

Both Anthony and Lee saw a bright future for information broadcasting by radio, but Lee took it one step further at his 7th and Bixel building, erecting a massive television transmitting tower on top of it in 1931. We all know the higher the antenna the farther it transmits! >>>



1 Packard license plate frame



2 See the two 'Carat' marks at 640 and 1240 on the dial?



3 Cadillac dealership at 7th and Bixel, Los Angeles



4 The author has two of these 1930s-era radios in the Museum.



5 Radio dial



6 Hollywoodland second sign

4 Philo T. Farnsworth gained fame with his new image system that was first sent by wire in 1927 and later via radio. Lee then got his first TV license W6XS in 1931 from the newly minted Federal Communications Commission under terms of an amateur communications license that saw few restrictions except no transmission on Sunday. The Department of Commerce issued wireless licenses after Congress won the fight over the Navy who wanted to manage all radio frequencies and in the 1926-1930 timeframe migrated the infant amateur radio “ham” operator service from their call sign that had a single number (the ham radio ‘district’ or ‘zone’ number) followed by 2 to 3 letters (for example 6CPY) over to a prefix letter followed by a number from 1 to 0 designating the call sign district then suffixed by 2 - 3 letters. Call letter districts numbers were 1 through 9 and zero (not 10). This will become important soon...hang in there with me.

The timeline of events is fascinating, chronicling the evolution of several keystone industries as the 2 megacycle band (just above your AM broadcast radio 540-1750 Mc frequency range) became cluttered by pioneers of radio. Everyone wanted a piece of the bandwidth action so sandwiched in there was Don Lee’s 1931 very low resolution television signal in Los Angeles broadcast by W6XS on 2.2 Mc. Notice that this is a true ham radio “experimental wireless” license with a letter and a number followed by letters and not a 3 or 4 letter ‘fully licensed’ broadcasting station. That level of license was only being granted to commercial radio stations and these pioneers were relegated to second-class citizen status. The single numeric digit

designated the call sign ‘zone’ and 6 happens to be California so you can tell where it comes from while the common W or K prefix in 3 or 4 letter commercial stations designates W for ‘east of the Mississippi’ and K for west. That convention still exists to this day.

Also worth noting is that William Lear (o Lear Jet and 8-Track tape fame) built his “Learavian” hand-carried, battery-operated radio that you brought with you when piloting a plane by tossing a wire antenna out the window and plugging in a microphone to talk on a thin slice of that overburdened frequency band.

5 Everyone had to compete for bandwidth including ships, amateur radio “ham” operators, short wave stations (like Voice of America) and even the police were there with the “Calling All Cars” one-way radio. The author has examples of the rare early Motorola “Police Cruiser” radio in the 2 mc band as they were in there with everyone else as seen on the Zenith dial below in the yellow colored band.

6 While the jam-packed 2-3 Mc band was the initial home for these early TV imagers, they soon learned that they needed more bandwidth to get any resolution at all and the quest for higher frequencies plus broader bandwidth came to the door of the FCC. Frankly they too wanted to get TV out of the crowded lower frequencies and up into that “useless territory” of VHF or Very High Frequencies that didn’t really carry signals very far as it was essentially confined to a citywide audience. Get them out of the lower frequency, long distance, high rent district says the government; dump them into the uncharted wasteland of the unused frequency bands up yonder and be done with them.

Soon the FCC would no longer issue TV experimental licenses on the 2 Mc band and so in December 1931 Lee got his second license, W6XAO on 44-1/2 megacycles (TV channel 1) becoming the de-facto pioneer in Los Angeles with all other stations following his lead. Lee was among the very first to drag TV out of this low frequency tightly-packed narrow bandwidth spectrum into the VHF wide-bandwidth spectrum and built up a west coast string of Cadillac dealerships that had antennas sprouting off the rooftops...such a great way to use real estate twice and the “two-fer” allows you to advertise your cars on the TV, to boot.



8 W6XAO TV Camera Flyer



9 Look closely—Can you see the Cadillac in the front window?

Lee started out with Cadillac then brought the LaSalle name onto the building tops after 1927 when Alfred Sloan of General Motors introduced that marque. Lee had ample tower space on the rooftops and so the transmitting antennas became the perfect brand-recognition point for the dynamic duo of top dollar GM automobiles which now sported both Cadillac and LaSalle cars for sale from the tops of the radio/ TV transmitting towers. You can see how Lee retrofitted the towers by adding the LaSalle name there later.

But it wasn’t all great and Lee had such a meager group of viewers who complained that the rooftop-based

transmitting station failed to reach much of an audience so he took the advice of his engineer and bought the hilltop in Griffith Park to place his transmitter and antenna there. This prized location sat above the famous “Hollywoodland” sign, he called it Mount Lee and that is still the name of this broadcast site to this day.

7 Of course Lee needed new TV cameras to create his productions and RCA produced the first imaging vacuum tube for him called the Iconoscope from which Harry Lubke (chief engineer) made the first Don Lee TV camera and the author is enormously proud to own one of them. >>>



7 The author’s RCA Model 1849 Iconoscope Imaging Tube

**8** TV cameras were a formidable monster in the day: the dollies to truck them around in the studios were a cross between a Mack truck and a forklift. Here is a flyer showing a W6XAO TV camera in action that utilized the famous RCA Iconoscope tube shown above.

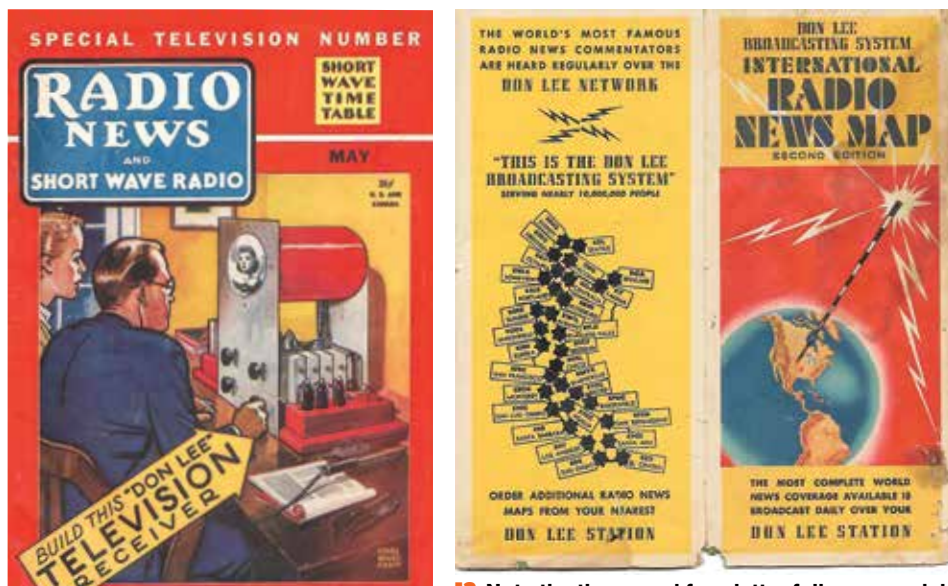


**10** Scene from "Sage Brush and Oley"

**9** So where to make TV shows? A new studio, of course! Lee built new buildings almost frantically as he expanded his network to keep ahead of his friend and contemporary Earle C. Anthony and here is one of his earliest and largest studios enshrined on a postcard in the Museum.

**10** Never one to miss an opportunity to advertise his Cadillacs at his radio/TV studios, Lee blended the business models of the day but abruptly passed away in 1934 leaving his son Tommy who was skilled at managing dad's extensive holdings. Don himself and ultimately the extended Lee family produced many programs and the author proudly owns only one 1940s-era 8" x 10" glossy of an original W6XAO production with this cheesy western of "Sage Brush and Oley. Just look at that camera by modern standards!

**11** Tom Lee and Harry Lubke knew that few people could actually watch their shows and they wanted to advertise their Cadillacs plus run other programming so they worked with the Don Lee engineering staff to craft a home-built TV receiver and published the entire schematic with parts list in Radio News magazine in 1937. Here is the image of the front cover in the author's collection showing how that early TV set looked.



**11** Radio News magazine, 1937

**12** Note the three- and four-letter full commercial call signs for radio stations.

**12** Under the stewardship of Tom Lee, the dual Cadillac and radio empire of his father kept growing and The Don Lee Mutual Broadcasting System grew just as Earle C. Anthony did the same. Here is a front and back view of one of the flyer/ handouts showing the extensive radio network the Lee family created from San Diego to Seattle. Note the faded pencil writing that says it is 1941 vintage.



**13** Another Don Lee studio building

**13** Tom appears to have never stopped using the Don Lee name as he built up more studios, dealerships and TV stations along the coast, trying to blanket the early viewing audience with good programming from the studios that from this second postcard look remarkably similar to the first building.

**14** The Lee family worked with TV manufacturers to insure that modern sets would have their pet Channel 1 on them and get wide distribution and in 1949 Packard Bell dipped a toe into this hot water by venturing into the new uncharted world of set manufacturing. Before this they had never made a TV but after being prodded they made this very first set that had 'all the bells and whistles' as it was said.

The newly minted Telecaster was introduced to the world in early 1949 and was one of the first with an FM broadcast radio tuner built right into the TV set along with the television tuner making the amplifier do double duty. Sets including Channel 1 sputtered and fizzled early when the FCC cancelled the use of Channel 1 a few months later to give it over to public safety in the name of the 'State Police' for their radios. To this day the frequencies are used by them and in California we call users of the 42-45 mc band the "Highway Patrol".

**15** Not to be outdone, Anthony did the same thing with his Packard line of cars sporting that one in seven of all Packards sold were marketed by Earle C. Anthony at its peak. This image of his San Francisco Packard dealership tells a lot.

**16** In 1938, Anthony decided to follow Lee into TV and built W6XEA in Los Angeles. Notably this is the same year and location that another industry pioneer, Howard Hughes decided that he too needed to get into TV broadcasting with W6XHH. All "experimental" call signs still were required to have that "X" in the suffix so everyone would catch the stigma; that got fixed later on. Note the vanity call sign of "HH" suffix for Howard Hughes while Anthony had EA as his suffix for Earl Anthony. W6XEA would later be traded in to become a fully licensed station as would W6XAO which became KTSN and later KNXT Channel 2 in Los Angeles.

KTLA Channel 5 in Los Angeles (note the "LA") often tells folks they were first and now you are informed they were formerly W6XYZ affiliated with the likes of Howard Hughes and Don Lee when they started up in 1941, but both Lee and Anthony predate them. Sorry about that KTLA!

So onward they went, up and down the coast leapfrogging each other with combination dealership and broadcast stations copying the same format time after time. This successful combining of talents and harvesting otherwise unused rooftop

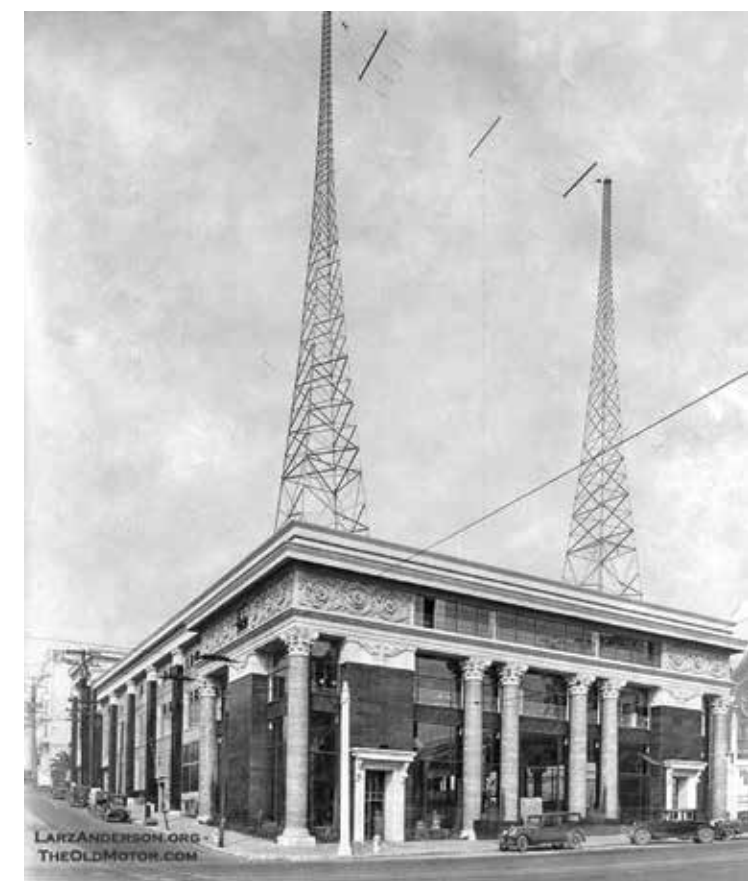
space gave each of these automotive kings the bejeweled crown that sported the talents below by choosing the top brands in the car world.

Interspersed in prior text is Anthony's startup with radio which connected him to a lifelong partnership with Walter O'Malley. This gave him the strategic alliance to exclusively broadcast the Dodger games on KFI 640 and later on using his TV skills and licenses after getting into W6XEA which then became KFI-TV Channel 9. O'Malley became a board member of the Earle C. Anthony Incorporated operation and that further cemented the long-standing relationship.

A master of advertising and merchandising, Anthony brought neon signage from the inventor in France and applied it to the automobile world in Los Angeles. Soon gracing the rooftop of a prominent hotel with what nearby residents called "liquid fire", the word Packard was spelled out around 1925 when completed. Anthony has long been credited with being one of, if not the very first to bring neon signage to the American landscape and he used it quite well alongside of the radio/ TV media he dominated. >>>



**14** Want to see the original telecaster TV? Come to the author's Museum.



**15** The Earle C. Anthony Packard Building

**17 The Packard Radio Hour:** Anthony made sure to promote the Packard name over at every opportunity, so here is one of many playlists showing his prowess in making Packard prominent in the ear of every listener:

Series: **"THE PACKARD HOUR"**  
**NBC PACKARD MOTOR CARS**  
Tuesdays 9:30-10:30 pm  
Host: Fred Astaire  
Music: Johnny Green Orchestra  
With: Charles Butterworth  
Announcer: Ken Carpenter

Radio was truly king in every home and these episodes were featured by Anthony on every station he owned. Check it out: you can

even buy the vintage Packard radio episodes from the archival media vendors on CD today if you do a quick search on the Internet.

Anthony was thoroughly into radio by this time and commissioned a most unique radiator mascot antenna in 1938 (supposedly only six exist). As a big time radio guy I can almost bet that it didn't work well at all but it sure looks good.

Ask the 'MAN' who owns one? Not Anthony! He often promoted women in every avenue he controlled this has been cited by perhaps his foremost female on-the-air personality, Virginia Mansfield who confirmed in an interview that he used licensed female engineers at his radio stations during World War II. Anthony was ahead of his time, ladies!

The radio stations came first of course, but when TV became the dominate media format, Anthony made great use of both to promote the Packard name over which he had dual control. When Packard acquired Studebaker in 1954 the Studebaker Museum records the fact that they both began a partnership of Packard and Studebaker sponsored films to keep the names prominent in the advertising media. With ownership of TV stations Anthony certainly utilized these features to keep the flame burning long past his 1961 year of leaving us and these episodes are available from the Studebaker Museum.

When Mercedes-Benz sought expansion in the U.S., the Packard-owned Studebaker shops were there to support it with the contract that gave them visibility beyond Europe and the author owns a 1960 Mercedes 190D that has the original Studebaker-Mercedes sales brochure with it.

So Don Lee and Earle C. Anthony found fame and fortune under more than just one hood and running board, promoting several preeminent car marques and using their marketing skills. Cross-platform building and advertising with little guidance and zero history of success in the industry, they invested in the totally unknown world of first broadcast radio and then television before the timid followers who mimicked their footsteps.

#### Still want to know more?

YouTube has a video about Don Lee recapping essentially the same story with a cute British accent and more photos. You can watch it at: [youtu.be/QV3YXCrTW7M](https://youtu.be/QV3YXCrTW7M) Just key the link into your browser.

Not as well known is that Anthony also had Essex-Terraplane dealerships and like with the Packards, he used his radio and TV medium to show off cars with more advertising stunts. You can see a really nice newsreel done by Anthony with lots of credit for his name at: [youtu.be/sRbOCJTynP0](https://youtu.be/sRbOCJTynP0)

Hats and antennas off to Don Lee and Earle C. Anthony. They gave us great cars, superb service and the foundation of today's mass media in two industries which exist in essentially the same form they created for us 80+ years ago.

#### To tour the Museum

> Call: **310-534-4456**  
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**16 Packard neon sign**



**17 Of course the rods are nowhere near the proper wavelength, but who cares?**