

CASE STUDY TWO: WOAP-FM IN OWOSSO

The *Owosso Argus Press* debuted WOAP on New Years Day, 1948 as a 250-watt non-directional daytimer at 1080 KHz. That they almost went with FM exclusively is a testimony to the confidence that broadcasters had in FM at that time. An article in the April 9, 1948 *Owosso Argus Press* stated: "When the Argus-Press Company first became interested in radio, the attention was directed towards the field of FM radio. In fact its application for an FM station was among the early ones to be filed from Michigan. Then it was decided that application should also be made for AM radio...."

The original WOAP-FM followed WOAP because of delays getting their transmitter (most likely a GE model 503A-1) delivered from General Electric. The FM station began operations on April 12, 1948 at 103.1MHz with 1 kw. The plan was for the station to allow WOAP to continue to broadcast after sunset. However, unlike both Muskegon stations, WOAP-FM heavily promoted the sound quality of FM. At night, programs focused on music with names like "Curtain Call", "Music by Martin", "Salon", and "Make Believe Ballroom". Besides local shows, WOAP-FM tied in with the Michigan FM Network, which by then included WPAG, Ann Arbor (the flagship station), WTTH, Port Huron, WHAL, Flint, WMLN, Mt. Clemens, WJJW, Wyandotte, and WBCM, Bay City. Programs on the network originated among the member stations and from the University of Michigan (see more about this network in the WJJW Case Study below).

The Owosso area had 12,485 radio families (source: *Broadcasting Magazine*). Based on newspaper reports however, WOAP estimated that only 175 (or about 1.5%) had FM radios. The station knew it had a challenge ahead of it and threw down the gauntlet to the radio dealers. In an article introducing FM to Owosso, it stated: "With an FM station right in the city local dealers face an opportunity of selling numerous FM receivers—that is, if they can obtain the sets from the factories." In addition, the paper complained about "the refusal of FM set manufacturers to produce lower-priced FM models." Interestingly, that issue of the *Argus Press* was stuffed full of ads for FM radios that would let listeners "hear FM on WOAP". This was a continuing theme in their ads for WOAP-FM. Comments like "we have paved the way" conveyed the clear meaning that WOAP took a big risk with FM and now, in their view, it was up to the radio dealers to get product out the door at reasonable prices and to promote what one article called "the joys of FM reception". As in so many other cases in Michigan and elsewhere, the gambit failed. By 1953, WOAP-FM dropped from the radio logs and *Broadcasting Yearbook* and was gone.

In September 1963, the *Argus-Press* applied for a license for a new FM station and the second incarnation of WOAP-FM signed on the air at 4:55pm on December 2, 1965 at 103.9MHz with 2.85 kw. It was a simulcast operation that allowed the station to continue operations after sunset. WOAP-FM carried local high school sports starting with the Owosso-Flushing basketball game on Friday December 3rd. Today WOAP-FM is known as WRSR and is a classic rock station owned by Cumulus Broadcasting, while WOAP is part of Detroit-based Michigan Catholic Radio.