

H. Leslie Atlas



Radio and television broadcast pioneer H. Leslie Atlas began his career in 1911 when he and his brother, Ralph, began operating an amateur radio station, 9DFC, in the basement of their family home in Lincoln, Illinois.

His involvement in radio expanded during World War I service as a signal corps officer.

On November 14, 1923, while president of his father's meatpacking business, the Frank Atlas Produce Company was granted the license for a 200 watt radio station. Its call letters...WBBM. When the business was sold to Armour & Co., the family kept the radio license and moved to a home in Chicago on Sheridan Road. WBBM was eventually moved from the home's basement to the Broadmoor Hotel and then to the Wrigley Building.

Atlas is credited with bringing revolutionary ideas to radio in the 1920's. His was the first radio station to broadcast church services, dance music, and to introduce remote pickups throughout the city. WBBM radio joined CBS, as an affiliate, in 1928 and was bought by the CBS network in 1933. Atlas became network Vice President and General Manager of WBBM and CBS Network's Western Division. At one time, Atlas also held interests in radio stations WIND and WJJD.

He assumed management of Channel 2, WBBM-TV in 1953, when CBS bought WBKB-TV from the Balaban & Katz Corporation. In 1956, after two years of remodeling the Chicago Arena, CBS moved the network's radio and television operations to 630 N. McClurg Court.

At Random, Lee Phillip Show, In Town Tonight and Susan's Show were just some of the live programs created under his watch. A news staff that included Julian Bentley, John Harrington, Fahey Flynn, Frank Reynolds, and various staff announcers, writers, editors and film crews created over 65 news broadcasts a week. The Atlas commitment to public service programming featured such shows as *Looking Forward, Operation New Horizons, This Way Up, This Is The Midwest, Choose Your Career, What Do You Want To Be?* and *Farmtown, U.S.A.*

His impeccable zest for style manifested itself in his dress and everything that surrounded him. Most of all, he had an uncanny ability for finding, understanding, developing and appreciating great talent. He is credited with discovering the Doublemint Twins and furthering the careers of Gene Autry, The Andrew Sisters, Fran Allison and Dale Evans, just to name a few.

H. Leslie Atlas was a founding member of The Chicago Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. WBBM-TV televised the very first TV Academy Show in 1958. The remote, broadcast from the Chicago Hilton, featured among others: Ed Sullivan, Jack Benny, Dave Garroway, Mike Douglas, Mary Hartline, Jack Brickhouse, Bob Bell, Clint Youle, P.J. Hoff and Frank Reynolds.

A yachtsman, he loved taking his yacht, "Sis," one of the largest in Chicago, down the Mississippi to Florida each fall. He was also an accomplished equestrian who rode his own horse in many shows across the country.