

# historical papers

## THE HOUSTON PROJECT: AFTER SEVEN MONTHS

~~THE~~ Despite the fact that Pacificats advisors and two full-time staff members in Houston consider the station project here quite close to making FCC application, lack of cash and expertise and a plethora of poor advice have done mayhem to a good deal of the necessary enthusiasm at the top of the effort, and, indeed, may well have served to ~~cripple~~ do damage that cannot be undone.

I am preparing this report so that the national board members can give it some thought before the March 8 meeting. In it, I propose some minimum goals the project is trying to reach by that time. If they are not met, I shall cheerfully go along with board's decision to stop the effort.

This is a long report, luxuriously long in terms of the time ~~skasasakshk~~ which ought to be spent in making it, but I think that Houston's and Pacificats ideas of each other need clarifying, and I won't argue that I've failed at half that task so far.

For those local board members unfamiliar with what has been happening in Houston, I'll give a brief summary.

The Houston station was the idea of Texans living in Austin. It was proposed informally two years ago. The idea was revived a year ago with a visit to Texas by Dr. Stuart Cooney, then the foundation's executive vice president. After a little wait on both sides, Stuart won the national board's approval to move in June, 1968, and, as I had proposed to do, I returned to Houston, my home, from a film-making job in Boston, to join Stuart in laying the groundwork.

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With the help of John Henry Faulk, the Texas folklorist and entertainer who was a resident of New York City until last month, Stuart and I secured oral and written pledges for startup costs. I was joined by Don Gardner, like myself, a journalist, who left The San Antonio Light to work for Pacifica.

With Stuart's guidance, we had devised a four-month fund drive which concentrated on benefit events and the sale of subscriptions at the ten and fifteen dollar rates.

The project rested upon the expectations that our early and extremely wealthy allies would be of great help in reaching others of similar wealth, as they themselves proposed at the beginning.

At mid-August, when we began, we considered ourselves to hold firm oral agreements for ~~NY~~ \$8,000 of a \$12,000, three-month, startup budget, and that the principal donors would assist us in quickly securing the rest and moving on to capital pledges.

This was not the case. One startup donor paid his \$3,000 pledge in full. Another \$3,000 donor paid \$2,000 against his written pledge and refuses to explain about the other \$1,000, despite his willingness to contribute a further \$10,000 to the construction of the station, should the present public drive succeed to the tune of \$55,000. The third startup donor completely reneged, although the project now holds a fresh pledge, signed this week, for \$1,400 in immediate cash to sustain the effort.

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Not surprisingly, most of the major contributors also were extremely active in the Kennedy, McCarthy, McGovern and, eventually, Humphrey campaigns. J. Howard Marshall, the acting chairman of the Houston project's advisory board, was a leader in the Texas Humphrey effort, which was crippled severely by the forces of Gov. John Connally. Since the election, Mr. Marshall has attended ~~many of the local board's~~ only one of the local board's meetings. Only one of the original principal contributors has participated in money-raising. This is Major J.R. Parten, who called upon the only startup donor who paid his pledge in full and asked him for more money for station construction.

At the lower giving levels, Don Gardner quickly constructed a superb volunteer organization intended to ;man the pre-air subscription drive and to manage the proposed benefit performances.

We failed in several attempts to secure nationally-known talent for Houston benefits, ~~SHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH~~ quite mistakenly assuming that Pacifica and friends of the Houston project had access to such resources. The biggest disappointment was our inability to sponsor the only Houston concert of Big Brother and the Holding Company with Janis Jpplin. We did not have the capital necessary, but those who did made at least \$20,000 from her two performances.

Despite what we understood to be the startup experience of KPFK, we quickly discovered the absolute impossibility --I repeat it, impossibility--of selling subscriptions to a radio station which cannot yet be heard and, should it be, could be heard for free. The principal ~~problems~~ difficulty was our inability to make a firm prediction of on-air date and to say what the call-letters would be. In addition, the direct subscription rates are gift expectations far too low for the



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extremely tedious job of explaining the project over and over to potential friends.

In November, as our budget for salaries and materials dwindled to zero, the working members of the original advisory board reached out for new colleagues, meeting nightly when necessary. These extremely difficult sessions resulted in the point of view we have maintained since, and which is the heart of the present drive. Let me summarize some main points.

1. Cash flow. Despite the necessity of demonstrating to the FCC our ability to operate the station for a year without ~~further~~ income beyond that demonstrated on the application, the board chose to bring its reasonable fund-raising expectations in line with a rock-bottom budget for station building and operations. This was a vote of confidence in our expectations of station income. It was bolstered by the fact that Pacificats pending Washington application was supported only by modest bank accounts which are, in fact, not available to that project. Stuart Cooney's advice, "Get \$100,000 and file" was shelved in favor of looking at what we needed in terms of time. The board said \$10,000 from November 15 through March 15, to support a coherent fund drive. It said, \$24,000 or so for technical down payments and conversion of donated or rented station facilities. It said \$5,000 the first month and for each month thereafter to support employes and operations.

2. Drive planning. The board decided that the fund drive should ~~inspire~~ adopt as its goal a \$150,000 budget, representing the total construction cost of the station without taking into account our ability to pay for the equipment over three years, and without making any estimate at all of what subscription revenues would



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reach within the first year of operations. It also chose to blur the unfortunate ~~distinction~~ distinction between public and private monies, choosing instead to think in terms of source and size of gift. The heart of the campaign would be to concentrate on the notion that every donor--even those at or below the basic subscription rates--~~would~~ ought to consider himself as someone building the station. Before moving ahead with the drive, we consulted informally with a professional fund raiser, who pronounced the goal too low for the pros to bother with although, perhaps, too high for us to achieve. The final decision was to move ahead with the drive, keeping our eye on our ability to pare the technical budget, hold salaries at the lowest possible levels and ~~move ahead~~ go on the air with a spit-and-baling-wire operation which could make maximum use of the tremendous reservoir of energy and talent listed on the rolls of Don Gardner's volunteer committees.

At a final, pre-drive meeting, the advisory board voted itself into advisory committee status, agreeing to seat as members the leaders of a new, much bigger and far broader station-building group, called the Committee of Sponsors. This committee was~~x~~ drawn from our lists of those who had expressed great interest in the project, but were lost somewhere between the tight and virtually useless advisory board and the individual workers who were soliciting their friends for thirty or forty dollars a week.

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Invitations went out to slightly more than one hundred persons, including, in some cases, both members of a marriage. On December 6, sixty of those persons attended the organizational meeting at the University of St. Thomas and agreed to devote time, beginning in the middle of the holidays, to seeing the station on the air. Another thirty who were invited chose the opera or the Chamber of Commerce banquet or an egnog party, but telephoned to offer their services. The group itself pledged \$3,400 that evening during an almost terrifying demonstration of fund-raising techniques, conducted by an attorney with long experience at it. The new committee moved immediately toward construction of the Founders Fund Drive which began Thursday, January 7, and is intended to end February 16. Their knowledge and enthusiasm were the product of tireless and careful groundwork laid through the difficult election autumn by Don Gardner and Mrs. Marks. It is impossible for me to give you an adequate idea of the thoroughness of their dedication and procedures.

Along the way, we had acquired a talented chief engineer, Glenn English, who drew up the equipment lists, prepared the technical pages of the FCC application and knowledgeably assisted in talking Collins radio into a flat 10 per cent discount on our contracts with them. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

The new Committee adopted the full budget as its fund-raising goal and split it, 50-50, between two campaign divisions under vice-chairmanships. The artlessly named Big Gifts Division is responsible for pledges of \$1,000 or more from ~~invited~~ individuals, corporations and foundations. The General Gifts Division is organized to solicit in pledge categories drawn by profession,

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neighborhood and age.

Mrs. Marks' husband, the president of an advertising agency, secured donated printing and himself gave editing and composition services for a small brochure which would become the main campaign piece. A copy is enclosed with this report. It seeks to answer the questions we heard most often through the fall, to catch the spirit and possibilities of the idea through a condensation of Hallock Hoffman's explanation, and to show the wide range of gifts being sought.

It was decided that the campaign would succeed only through individual solicitation, and so the project ~~XXXXXXXX~~ began acquiring mailing lists from a variety of causes and organizations. Not surprisingly, the most valuable has been the 4,500-name list of contributors to the McCarthy campaign.

During the Christmas holidays, Don assembled a small army of students and housewives who manned the office every day from 10 a.m. until midnight, or later. Even Christmas and New Years' day. They ~~collat~~ began collating the cards into a master file which was checked against city directories to indicate the occupation of everyone listed. This master file is now growing to include such lists as those of the major Jewish charities, the local Montessori schools, the Art Guild, Symphony League, the Mental Health Association and, finally and ~~a~~ potentially most valuable of all, the 27,000-name list of backers of the Alley Theatre, ~~the Houston Paper~~



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Prospect cards are being nominated weekly from the master file and sent to committee chairmen. In committee sessions, the prospect cards are distributed to individual workers, a firm goal or guess is listed for the size of each person's gift, and the prospect is sent a copy of the brochure wrapped in a letter proposing the personal talk. A major effort in the early days of the campaign is to expand the rolls of volunteer workers from the present 200 or so to more than 500. Two committees are doing valuable, but extremely difficult, cleanup work. ~~THE XXXX ORGANIZATION COMMITTEE~~ The neighborhood and student committees move out with the same techniques to secure contributions from prospects they have never seen before. The leadership and membership of these two sections are particularly strong, and they are the ones who make the system workable.

The General Gifts Division is chaired by a professor of economics at the University of Houston. His ~~subcommittee~~ teachers and professors committee is systematically reaching, in person, every professor at the three largest universities in town, and every schoolteacher whose name appears in the master file as a supporter of another community project. The professional committee is organized to reach a high percentage of the city's lawyers and ~~all the physicians and~~ many of the physicians and medical educators in the city's ~~XXXX~~ huge Texas Medical Center.

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The business committee is organized to allow each solicitor to consider the entire prospect list. A regional committee is working to reach the western suburbs, where the transmitter will be located, and the coastal suburbs, which include the NASA Manned Spacecraft Center, a good reservoir of highly educated people with high discretionary income. The chairman of the organizations committee is the local executive of national AFL-CIO, whose high goals for union contributions should start being reached once ~~the~~ current port and refinery strikes are settled. His co-chairman is active in a variety of social ~~organizations~~ welfare organizations, and is working with him ~~on~~ an ambitious group subscription drive.

The chairman of the Big Gifts Division is a wholesale drug distributor. A cancer researcher and professor at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Hospital and Tumor Institute chairs the foundations committee, which ~~is~~ is hurrying to prepare an application for HEW monies. The foundations committee is soliciting a variety of small local foundations and is handling the station's proposed medical radio project, which will seek money from drug manufacturers and the National Institute of Health. A medical professor assisting the project sits on the grants committee of the NIH. The corporate gifts drive is chaired by a marketing executive of Carnation Dairies who, himself black, is enlisting the aid of ~~a~~ a very active new organization of black executives.

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On paper, the Founders Fund Drive looks excellent. In practice, it remains somewhat hamstrung by our meager office budget and our dismally slow start on the Big Gifts side, made worse by the dismaying number of cop-outs among the very rich, about whom Scott Fitzgerald was absolutely right.

The seven-month start has allowed the notion of the station's potential to become clear to a great many people who will be useful to the on-air enterprise. Unlike the other station cities, which have a comparative wealth of minority media, Houston is ill-served by its newspapers and broadcasters. The educational television station is instructionally oriented. The University of Houston FM station is, without question, one of the worst university-owned stations in the country, serving as a laboratory for an almost pathological brand of top-40 rock programming, punctuated by screaming, student-produced commercials for charities and military service and by news bulletins read with nasal urgency. The Houston Chronicle, the evening newspaper, is owned by a tax-free foundation which expends less than 5 per cent of its annual income on charity, and which has editorially opposed college bond elections and strict enforcement of air pollution statutes. The morning paper, the Houston Post, is owned by Oveta Culp Hobby, Eisenhower's secretary of HEW, whose son refers to Pacifica as "dirty radio" and whose television station removed from our advisory board one of its employees, a popular sportswriter who would have been of great value to the project.

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Neither of these papers makes any effort to cover the ~~area~~ black subcity of 350,000 which lies in the northern and eastern wards. They ~~are~~ hold joint editorial meetings and reach agreements, before the event, on what coverage they'll give to ~~events~~ <sup>things</sup> like Stokely Carmichael's visit. (Eight paragraphs, no pictures.)

As those of you at the November meeting of the national board heard me explain, the advisors and Gardner and I view investigative journalism and, sadly, simple reporting as principal functions of the Houston station. Certainly, the prospect of this free voice in Houston is what has energized the Committee of Sponsors and, to a great degree, is what informs the present contributors. We are, naturally, seeking to make clear the possibilities the station brings to those who want to hear jazz and operas and plays and talks about movies and books. ~~BUSINESS IS BUSINESS~~ But Houston ~~doesn't~~ hears even less of itself than it does of the outside world. Pacifica Houston will go on the air, if it goes on the air, because there are people who want to know of what the city is beyond the Astrodome and River Oaks and the precincts of its present, blindered media. This is good work for an outfit like Pacifica to try. There might be places where the station could happen more easily, but there are precious few where it would mean more. That's the source of the necessary guts and adrenalin, and if the accompanying condensed summaries of income and expenditures seem appallingly anemic, let me tell you that the balance in our ledgers of heart and drive stand high enough to do this thing. We intend to go on.