

A Notable Woman – Gertie Hanson Halsted

It was a woman who pioneered instruction in radio and broadcasting at UWSP.

Gertie Hanson, a native of Richland County, was recruited in 1920 from a position at the Baraboo City Grade School to be a teacher in the training school program here.

Her involvement with the new, fascinating world of radio came shortly thereafter.

In 1924 the State Department of Agriculture established a radio station in Stevens Point's Hotel Whiting to serve farmers in this part of Wisconsin. The station management encouraged faculty and students at the Stevens Point Normal School to develop programs, and Hanson was among the early participants. The studio for WLBL was later moved to the Fox Theater and then in 1937, to campus.

Meanwhile, Hanson did graduate study in radio at UW-Madison, and as a project, did a program for WHA's school of the Air series entitled, "Neighbors 'Round the World." Nearly 34,000 state children from 1,726 schools enrolled.

In 1940 after completing a graduate program in geography and broadcasting, she was involved in the establishment of the campus radio workshop.

During World War II, Hanson tapped the talents of men in the Army Air Corps who were stationed here, and featured them in "The 97th Is On the Air."

In 1950 she marked a special high point in her career as recipient of one of the top prizes given by the National Education Conference for her program, "The Half Way Mark." That same year, WLBL became part of the state radio network with a transmitter in Auburndale, and Hanson and her students continued to produce programs for that outlet as well as for commercial stations in the area.

Hanson also made a mark on this institution for her role in faculty governance. She was chair of the geography department, and in the 1920s, was one of the first women in the history of the school to serve as chair of the faculty.

After her retirement in 1953, she became Gertie Hanson Halsted, marrying a longtime friend, Harry Halsted, from her home area of Baraboo. The couple moved to Florida, where she lived until her death at age 92 in 1982.

A few years before she died, the UWSP Alumni Association honored her at a dinner and program at which time the chancellor, Lee S. Dreyus, dedicated the campus radio station WWSP-FM in her honor.