

# TV-Radio

Robert Lewis Shayon

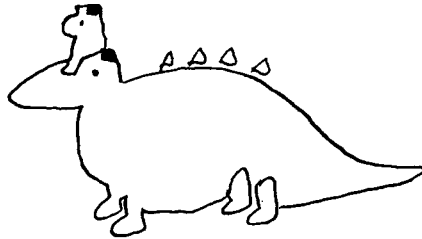
## Guarding the Goodies

IF YOU LIVE in Cheyenne, Wyoming (population: 50,000), more than 100 miles from Denver—the nearest major market—virtually all your local news, advertising, and programing would come courtesy of the McCracken family, predominant owners of media in southern Wyoming. That family's Frontier Broadcasting Company, either directly or through its principals, owns KFBC-TV, the only TV station in the city; controls the only full-time Cheyenne AM radio station; operates the only FM station and expects to put a second FM station on the air early this year; controls the only two daily newspapers in the Cheyenne area and the only Sunday newspaper; and has been granted by the City Council what amounts to an exclusive franchise for a cable television (CATV) system.

KFBC-TV's three-year license expired last October, and Frontier's application for renewal was challenged by Cheyenne Enterprises, Inc., a CATV applicant, combining local and multiple business interests, that lost out to Frontier in competition before the City Council for the CATV franchise. Said the loser to the FCC: Frontier's exceptional dominance of the media in Cheyenne violates antitrust and public interest standards; please don't renew their TV license unless they give up their CATV franchise. The FCC, upon receipt of the petition to deny, routinely deferred Frontier's license renewal; but in the normal course of events, the Commission probably would have granted the renewal eventually.

The FCC is notorious for treating broadcast licenses as virtually vested property rights, despite the fact that renewals regularly clash with Commission policies on the maintenance of diversity in communications through limitations on monopoly and cross-ownership of newspapers and radio and TV stations. Commissioners Nicholas Johnson and Kenneth A. Cox might have raised questions about Frontier's concentration of media control in Cheyenne, but the FCC staff and a majority of the Commission probably would have shrugged off the protest of the losing CATV bidders as a case of sour grapes. Attorneys for Cheyenne Enterprises, Inc., however, were smart enough to anticipate such an outcome; and consequently they filed a copy of their petition with the Antitrust Division

of the Department of Justice. This division has been a major irritant to FCC Chairman Rosel H. Hyde, thanks to its watchdog policy of fighting giant mergers in the communications field that involve broadcasting interests, and of opposing radio-TV license renewals where cross-ownership of news-



papers and broadcasters is a significant factor in concentration of media control. Washington communications lawyers say candidly that Justice has been doing the FCC's work. The antitrust people did it in the famous ABC-ITT merger attempt; and more recently in stopping cross-ownership in Rockford, Illinois, and Beaumont, Texas. They intervene in FCC proceedings and they go to court, over the FCC's head, forcing consent decrees and divestitures, even after the Commission has approved renewals.

The Justice people operate on anti-competitive and monopoly principles; they continually urge the FCC to oppose mergers and cross-ownership of media on the much broader grounds of the public's interest in diversity of control of media that serve local communities with news, advertising, and programing. Commented one Washington attorney: "FCC and Justice play Alphonse and Gaston, and meanwhile everybody runs off with the goodies." In the Cheyenne (KFBC-TV) case, the outgoing Democrat at Justice, Assistant Attorney General Edwin M. Zimmerman filed a petition with the FCC on December 30, 1968 (three weeks before President Nixon's inauguration), asking that Frontier Broadcasting be granted only a qualified renewal, to give it time to sell its TV license. When Justice speaks in broadcasting, the FCC cannot escape paying attention: One may presume that the Commission will hold a hearing on the Cheyenne renewal. Thus, what was an economic struggle between two profit-oriented entrepreneurial groups has now become an important case that may open up a new frontier—re-examination on a substantive level of monopoly situations in newspaper-broadcasting com-

mon ownership, as well as cross-ownership within the broadcasting media.

The Cheyenne case is just a scratch—a mere beginning. The Senate's Antitrust and Monopoly Subcommittee has called attention to what one expert termed "a jungle of corporate incest." In Salt Lake City, San Francisco, Fort Smith, Arkansas, and in dozens of other cities, large communications combines completely dominate local media. Not only non-broadcasting giants are involved, but also the three networks and smaller groups. Pending are great mergers—as examples, Metromedia-Transamerica, Westinghouse-MCA, National General-Warner Brothers-Seven Arts, and St. Regis Paper-RCA. J. B. Sinclair, president of The Outlet Company, a merchandising-broadcasting group, commented recently, "... broadcasting generates cash, and when it piles too high, you have to do something with it. ..."

The acquisition game will grow hotter in 1969; and against the FCC's apathetic track record, the future of the Department of Justice policies is crucial to the public interest. The broadcasting industry is praying that President Nixon will "cool the Antitrust Division, and stop its forcing of the FCC to action." The outcome is by no means certain one way or another. The Antitrust Division was tough in Eisenhower's Administration. In any event, the Justice Department's filing in the Frontier Broadcasting renewal, at the very last moment before the Administration changed hands, may well have caught the McCracken family in a national spotlight from which there is no escape.

## ARE YOU A UNITARIAN WITHOUT KNOWING IT?

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2. Do you believe that man is capable of self improvement and is not condemned by original sin?
3. Do you believe that deeds are more important than creeds?
4. Do you believe that religion should be concerned with the quality of life before death rather than after?

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# The Fine Arts

Katharine Kuh

## What Makes Dutch Art Dutch

DURING A TRIP to Holland last month, I was struck by the indelible imprint this small country produces on its native painters. Environment has always, I suppose, played a strong role, but surely nowhere more effectively than in the Netherlands. Why I am not quite sure. Possibly because Holland remains a land where continuity has resulted in a recognizably indigenous personality which still persists, a fact that does not necessarily imply isolation from the rest of the world but rather the presence of a national individualism rare in our times.

Though one can lavishly admire Vermeer, Saenredam, Rembrandt, Van Gogh, and Mondrian without knowing the land that produced them, still to

know it is to understand them better. And by knowing I do not mean merely a nod to the country's more obvious physical characteristics, important as they are. After all, the Lowlands are so named for good reason; they are low, wide, and flat. The cities, if never precipitous in a modern skyscraper sense, have a rectangular verticality resulting from densely organized architecture. In my memories of Holland, steep, narrow staircases are a constant leitmotif.

The lucid angularity that permeates cities like Amsterdam and The Hague encouraged those so-called seventeenth-century Little Masters who painted affectionate small canvases devoted to the activities of a burgeoning middle class. But Saenredam and Vermeer, despite the modest size of their pictures, were far more than "little masters." They

transcended purely visual experiences, while using such experiences as points of departure. With pearly light and structured space, they gave daily scenes a noble permanence.

To travel from Amsterdam to The Hague in less than an hour—the train stopping at Leyden, Haarlem, and several other important towns—is to understand why homogeneity pervades this compact nation. No mountains, no plains, no changes in climate, no vast dimensions divide the country. It is all of a piece. As the fields stretch out toward low unobstructed horizons, they allow the skyscape to become more pronounced than the landscape, a phenomenon frequently exploited by such master cloud-makers as Jacob van Ruisdael and Hercules Seghers. The latter also appreciated the boundless space an open sky provides.

During most of the winter Holland is sunless. The mists, which have a strange, remote transparency, seem less gray than a muted ivory gold. And it is exactly this elusive color coupled with an uncompromisingly pure design that turns what otherwise might be a fine architectural composition by Saenredam into a unique masterpiece. The same, of course, is true of Vermeer's paintings. They could end up as little more than exquisite genre scenes, but their indomitable structure and controlled light cause the immediate facts of life to retreat. And yet, it is the simple facts of life that are their source material.

What then made Saenredam and Vermeer different from most of their contemporaries? It was, I think, their ability to abstract, to take solely what they needed from what they knew, to extract only the kernel from the commonplace. A plump Dutch girl, a map on the wall, a jug on the table—these are the superficial accouterments of Vermeer's paintings. In his hands familiar forms assumed a serenity, a balance, and silence so complete as to create another world. Because tradition played a strong role in Dutch seventeenth-century painting, men like Vermeer and Saenredam could adhere to the past while yet drastically restructuring it. For them, the episodic, so popular with artists of their period, was sacrificed to more timeless investigations.

Saenredam's views of church architecture were less concerned with churches than with what today we might call minimal structures. To humanize his immaculate designs, he used neither people nor events but instead a pervasive, tender luminosity. The light plays across his complex spaces like a living force. Other Dutch artists of the period, notably de Witte, also specialized in church scenes, frequently producing limpid white-pillared perspectives, but they



—Worcester Art Museum.

**The St. Bavo Church in Haarlem by Saenredam—"... the impersonal majesty of Saenredam's flawless classicism."**