

WCAU-TV STATION  
393 City Line Avenue  
Bala Cynwyd  
Montgomery County  
Pennsylvania

HABS NO. PA-6046

HABS  
PA  
46-BALA  
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 37127  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WCAU RADIO AND TELEVISION STUDIOS

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PA  
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Location: 393 City Line Avenue, Bala Cynwyd, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

Significance: The WCAU building was the first structure in the United States built specifically as a television studio. It was also one of the first commercial structures on the now highly developed City Line Avenue, and one of the final designs of architect George Howe.

Description: This International Style studio sits close to the western corner of the intersection of City Line Avenue and Monument Road. Between the streets and the building is a narrow lawn, and a parking lot is located behind the building. The property slopes gently away from City Line Avenue, though the grade is less noticeable since the parking lot was expanded to the west.

The original building was a rectangle whose corners faced the four compass directions. The eastern half of the 1952 building has two stories and a basement, while the northern has one exceptionally tall level used for television studios. In 1983 a one-story ell was added to the northwestern side to provide more studio space. The original main entrance, a revolving glass door, was set near the eastern end of the southeastern wall and faced City Line Avenue. There are other original entrances on the northwest side, including overhead metal garage doors, and double metal doors opening into the addition. This door was replaced with metal fire doors without exterior handles in 1982, with the main entrance moved to the back of the building. A steel and glass curtain wall starts above the door and wraps around to encompass the entire northeast and a small part of the northwest wall. There are three bays on the southeastern side, eleven on the northeast, and one on the northwest. All have sixteen lights except for one on the northeastern side, which has twenty-four. Below the bays is limestone facing; above is a flat overhanging roof. The rest of the building also has a flat roof, and the remaining exterior is unornamented concrete. When the studio opened the words "WCAU The Bulletin Radio and Television" ran along the top of the southwestern wall, and a sign extended from the wall near the main entrance on which "WCAU" was written with neon letters. Both signs been removed; there is now a concrete slab just in front of the eastern corner which has the CBS "eye" insignia and "10" written above "WCAU-TV WOGL-FM".

The interior of WCAU illustrates the earliest attempt to meet the special needs of television production. The Austin Company, the project's engineers, introduced a 60' "Teletruss," an adaptation of the Vierendeel truss, to allow lights and microphones

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uninterrupted movement across the top of the studio. Separating the studios in the western section of the building from the offices and operations in the east allowed the station to control the movement of visitors and to close most sections of the station overnight. The original design also left a service corridor along the northwestern wall, so that adding more studio, as was done in the 1980s, would not require expensive relocations.

Much of this design remains. The ramp which used to run from the rear to the main entrance along the curtain wall was removed, and that space is now used for offices.

History: The WCAU studio is located along a section of City Line Avenue which began to develop commercially in the 1930s. A building boom began even before the extension of the Schuylkill Expressway after World War II eased access to the area, growth which led to the area being called the "Golden Mile."

The Philadelphia Evening Bulletin newspaper started WCAU radio in the 1930s at studios at another location avenue in Philadelphia. WCAU-TV came on the air in 1948 as the first affiliate of the CBS network. Howe had a long-running connection with the Bulletin, renovating their downtown offices between 1936 and 1941 and designing their new headquarters not long before his death in 1955. Construction began in 1951, and the station opened in May of 1952 as one of the first buildings in the area. In the early days, WCAU produced live afternoon dramas in the area behind the station. CBS bought the station in 1958, though a sale is now pending.

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