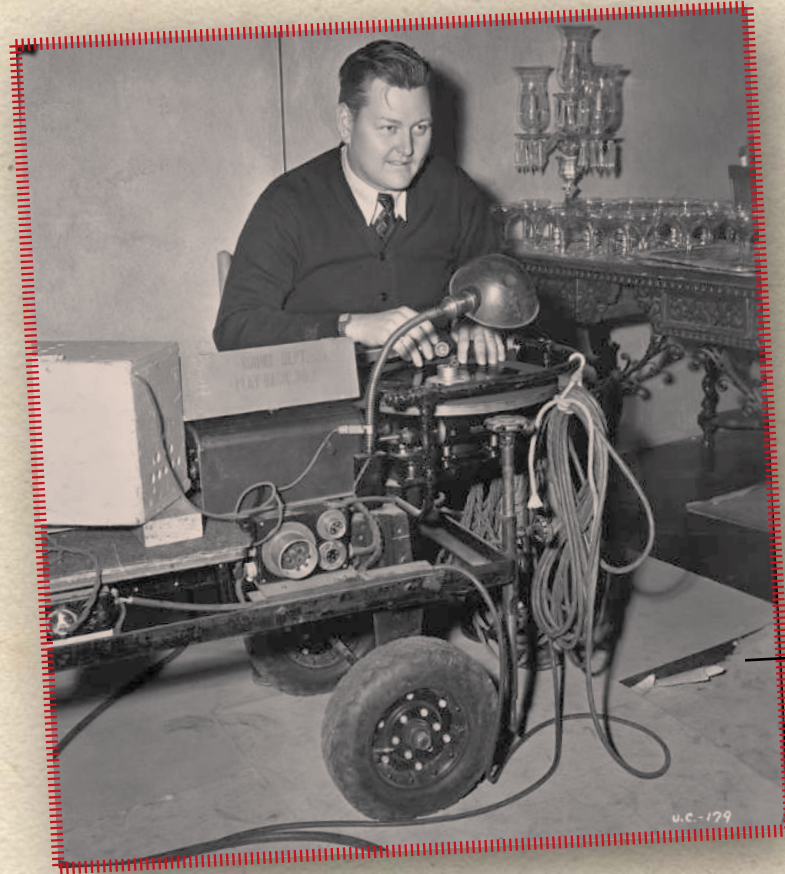


Beginnings of Local 695

by Scott D. Smith, CAS



Playback operator at Universal Studios ca. 1930, cueing up a wax disk for on-set playback. (Photo courtesy of Universal Studios)

Author's note:

As current members continue in their struggle for recognition during an equally challenging period, it is instructive to look at the battles fought by our membership 80 years ago. While most members were gainfully employed when accepted for membership into the Local, this did not necessarily mean that they would remain so, especially as the effects of the Depression dragged on. Given the terrible conditions following the crash of the stock market in 1929, even those lucky enough to be working often found themselves struggling to make ends meet. Union organizing during in the 1930s entailed considerable risk. No doubt, many men

lost their homes, family (and sometimes their lives) in their efforts to organize our craft.

By no means is this article all-encompassing. To cover the entire history of Local 695 would literally require a book. Likewise, although I have made every effort to corroborate the information presented in this piece, it is inevitable that there will be some errors. Any corrections and clarifications are most welcome. Finally, any opinions stated herein are strictly mine, and do not necessarily reflect those of the IATSE or the Officers of Local 695, and should not be construed as such.



Group of men outside the office of IATSE Local 37 on Cahuenga Boulevard, ca. 1935. Local 37 was the Hollywood Studio Mechanics "Superlocal," which was the umbrella for a number of crafts before they were split into smaller Locals. (Photo courtesy of Gregory Paul Williams, photo by Cliff Wesselmann)

In the Beginning

The year was 1930. On a mild Saturday evening in mid-September, a small group of sound technicians convened at a meeting hall in Los Angeles (most likely the headquarters of IATSE Studio Mechanics Local 37). Their goal was simple; their task was not: to gain recognition for a craft that only three years earlier did not even exist. These would be the pioneers of sound recording for motion pictures...

Hollywood in the '30s

To understand the events that led to the formation of Local 695, one must look at larger picture of both the film industry and the country during early 1930s. On the day of the first recorded "Special Meeting of Sound Men" (as it was referred to in the meeting minutes of September 13, 1930), the country was still reeling from the effects of the Great Depression (the cause of which eerily mimics our current economic situation). The Dow stood at 241.17 (down from a high of 381.17 just one year previously) and stock prices for manufacturing, commodities and virtually every other industry in the U.S. were still on the decline.

Although only 70% of the country's population had electricity, the growth of radio broadcasting was on the rise, with almost half of the country owning at least one receiver. This led in turn to the popularity of such comedians as Jack Benny and Fred Allen, and made newscasters of the era (such as Walter Winchell) household names. Although accurate unemployment figures for this period are hard to come by, it has been estimated that by 1932, nearly 28% of the population was without any income.

Against this grim backdrop, a small number of businesses would continue to thrive, seemingly unaffected by the general malaise hanging over the rest of the country. Out in Hollywood,

Technicolor and Fox Film Corporation both recorded stunning amounts of income during a period most other industries were experiencing mind-numbing losses and complete failure.

For example, on June 14 of 1930, Fox reported earnings of \$5.7M for the quarter ending April 26, compared with \$3.9M for the same period in 1929. Two days later, they announced plans to invest an additional \$5 million in their "Movietone City" operations in Westwood, billed as "the largest talking picture studio in the world." This would include adding 36 new buildings to the existing facilities, for a total of 75 permanent buildings in place by the beginning of the year. Clearly, Fox executives were bullish, perhaps too much so.

Likewise, on the same day, Technicolor announced they would be forced to stop accepting new contracts for film processing. With their facilities in both Hollywood and Boston operating 24-hour shifts and employing at least 1,100 technicians, they had already outstripped the 700% additional capacity added during the past year. Clearly, this was a great time to be in the film processing business!

These two bright spots would appear to counter the trend of most of the industry however. As overall theater attendance declined, studios and theater owners (frequently one and the same), scrambled for ways to improve their audience numbers. They lowered ticket prices, offered matinees and midnight screenings and added cartoons and "B" movie fare, as well as contests for door prizes. Despite all these efforts, many theaters still failed.

Projectionists in New York were forced to take a 25% pay cut over two years. Paramount discontinued showing its films in RKO theaters. William Fox, the head of MGM's parent company, was forced out as president of Fox and was eventually sued by the managers of Fox Film and Fox Theater chain for stock manipulation. Clearly, this was not a business for the faint of heart.

Still, the film business was far from being completely down and out. According to the International Trade Organization (ITO), overall capital investment in the film industry stood at \$4 billion. In the U.S. alone, the industry had a workforce of approximately 225,000, not including about 30,000 extras and several thousand actors. Predictably, the number of people employed both in front of and behind the camera provided a fertile ground for various individuals and organizations who would seek to control the new medium of sound motion pictures.

Hollywood Unions and the Coming of Sound

In retrospect, it is difficult to comprehend the wrenching changes that took place in the space of just three short years subsequent to the release of *The Jazz Singer*. After being hailed as a revolution by many, the arrival of sound would irreversibly change the landscape of the film industry overnight.

Musicians were the first to be affected. Represented by the American Federation of Musicians (AFM), their ranks were drastically reduced nationwide as theaters eliminated piano players and organists, as well as the full orchestras that would frequently accompany screenings of films in major metropolitan movie houses. Although the wholesale elimination of musical accompaniment nationwide was compensated for somewhat by the introduction of film scoring for movie soundtracks, the number of musicians employed in Hollywood was a tiny fraction of those who had previously been employed on a daily basis in the theaters. Most of the players working outside of Hollywood and New York would eventually be forced to seek other employment.

Likewise, stage performers, who already suffered from chronic insecurity, saw their jobs disappear along with those of the musicians. The only group to benefit from the advent of sound in theaters was the projectionists, who demanded (and frequently were granted) additional staff for the handling of the Vitaphone discs. They also argued that they deserved higher pay for dealing with the tasks related to keeping the discs in sync with the picture, and controlling the volume level during performance.

The installation and maintenance of sound equipment for theaters created new jobs. Predictably, this led a series of jurisdictional disputes among projectionists, electricians and IATSE stage employees. For example, at the premiere of the movie *Lilac Time* in October of 1928 at the Central Theater in New York, theater management resorted to using orchestral accompaniment rather than sort out a dispute among various unions claiming jurisdiction over sound reproduction.

A similar scenario would play out on the production side of movie business, which, even without the introduction of sound, was already contending with variety of different groups seeking to organize studio labor.

Despite the achievements made during the late 1920s with the introduction of sound, working conditions during this time period were still abysmal. It was not unusual for crews to work a seven-day week, with long hours (sound familiar?). Frequently, it was only because the actors could no longer function that a halt would be called to shooting. Although some unions had been able to negotiate somewhat improved salaries for their members, labor was, for the most part, still at a disadvantage when it came to dealing with the studios and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Film Sound Recording: The Early Years

With the Great Depression continuing to stifle growth over most of the country, technicians engaged in the new craft of film sound recording demonstrated considerable resolve in their efforts to gain recognition for their craft, as well as improve wages and working conditions. Although their labor and ingenuity had created record profits in the years immediately following the debut of *The Jazz Singer*, they nevertheless struggled for recognition from both producers and their peers.



Metropolitan Studios sound truck ca. 1929. This truck, equipped with a Western Electric optical sound recording system, was typical of those in use at many studios in the early 1930s. Note the fire extinguisher at the rear—a handy thing to have when working with nitrate base film. No wireless mikes here!! (Photo courtesy of International Photographer)

Early sound recording techniques employed for production would frequently earn soundmen the wrath of the camera department and other crew members (including directors). However, given the staggering box-office receipts many talkies generated, crew members and producers alike were forced to accept the intrusion of the technology onto the set. It was no surprise, then, that the men who helped create so much wealth for studio owners would expect some recognition and decent compensation in return for their work.

Since jobs related to sound recording for motion pictures did not even exist until 1927, the men recruited into the craft came from a variety of related backgrounds from all across the country. Some had worked in broadcast operations, others had been trained in radio operations during WWI. There was also a significant amount of influence from the telephone field, especially due to Western Electric's early involvement in sound recording. Individuals employed in sound equipment manufacturing frequently left for the higher pay offered by Hollywood studios.

However, despite the impressive technical knowledge exhibited by many early sound crews, the fact was that sound recording for the medium of film was still in its infancy, and would prove to be a tough taskmaster for those who made the choice to enter this newly created field. Not the least of what early crews had to deal with was the fact that equipment was bulky, typically involving the use of a dedicated sound truck for location work. Cables were heavy and equipment had significant power requirements. Even working on the stage, however, could be a challenge. Early microphone and amplifier design virtually negated being able to obtain decent sound pickup if the talent was not within close pickup range.

Many actors and actresses who had come out of the silent era were completely flummoxed by the added requirements of doing both dialog and acting, leading to the cancellation of their contracts by studios that now saw them as expendable. This, of course, did nothing to endear the sound engineers to those who worked in front of the camera. Frequently, they were deemed to be the enemy, part of an "evil cabal" who were out to destroy the art of the motion picture. Eighty years later, some sound crews would say that little has changed!

The fact that very few members of the production crew (as well as the producers themselves!) understood how sound worked was cause for further hostility on the set. Because early sound techniques imposed tough limitations on production, members of the sound crew were quickly deemed to be overly demanding and the cause of production slowdowns. Unit managers, always eager to point the finger at someone when things would go wrong, found an easy target with the sound crew.

Already having to contend with the constraints of a bulky and unforgiving medium, early sound engineers were not especially in the frame of mind to deal with the additional grief of recalcitrant actors, crew members who derided them at every turn and studio bosses who frequently considered them "excess baggage," simply a price to be paid in order to keep pace at the box office.

Given the state of the business and the increasing number of men (there were no women employed in sound during those years) entering the field, it was felt by many this was a propitious moment to organize their craft. While studio heads had established the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in May of 1927, this was largely a ploy by Louis B. Mayer and others to control labor union negotiations, doing nothing to improve the plight of sound technicians. Despite receiving training from Academy sponsored classes, sound engineers were still lumped into IATSE Local 37.

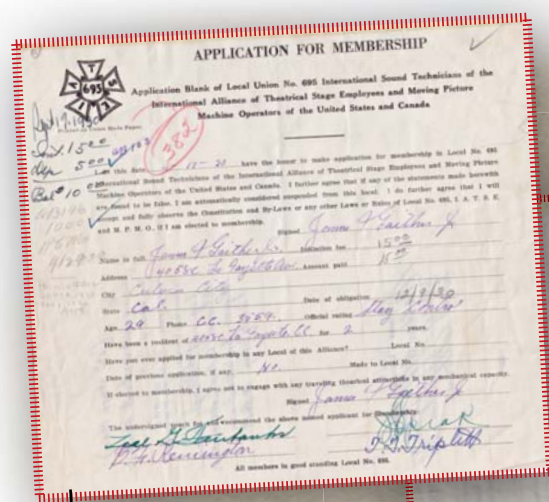


Production still from Von Stroheim's RKO production "Lost Squadron". Note member of sound crew in lower left corner. Very likely, this was for picture purposes, with the real sound crew located off-set somewhere. (Photo courtesy of International Photographer. Photo: Fred Henderson)

This "super local," which served as the umbrella local for a variety of crafts, was beginning to make both producers and the International Union nervous. Despite these factors, it was ultimately the decision of sound technicians, bound together by the unique and crucially important technological contributions they brought to the industry, to seek a charter of their own.

Studio Operations

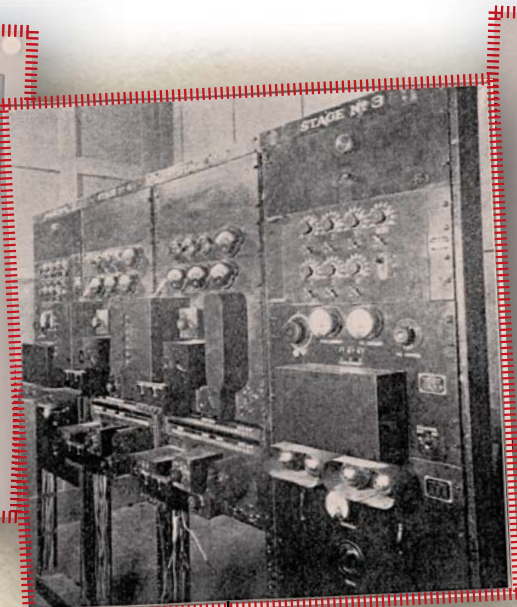
At the end of 1928, there were 16 sound channels operating in Hollywood (the term "sound channel" usually implied at least one recorder and input mixer). By the end of 1929, the number had grown to at least 116! By the mid-1930s, every major Hollywood studio (as well as most minors), had sound recording operations of some sort. These early efforts were no small feat—Fox alone dumped \$10 million into their newly constructed sound facilities in Westwood, which opened in October of 1928. This plant, built in a record four months, employed 1,500 men working in three shifts, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Similar efforts were undertaken at Warner Bros., RKO, Universal, MGM, Columbia, Pathe and others. The speed these various facilities were constructed helps to highlight the extremely competitive nature of the film business during this period. Although studio accountants were horrified at the costs, any studio that could not keep pace with the advent of sound would quickly find their box-office receipts reduced to virtually zero. There was much at stake for the studios during this transition period, and literally, every day counted.



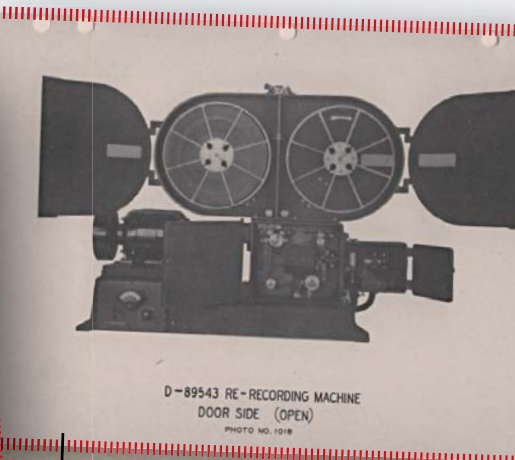
Local 695 application from 1930. Note the experience as wax recorder, along with three years' architectural drafting experience at MGM. (695 Archives)



Typical portable monitor booth as used on stage. (From Western Electric/ERPI Manual ca. 1930)



Typical central amplifier room as used at Fox in 1930. (From 1930 Academy Technical Digest article by E.H. Hansen, head of Fox Movietone Division)



Typical Western Electric optical recorder used in re-recording operations in the 1930s. (From Western Electric/ERPI Manual ca. 1930)



Optical Recordist at Universal Studios ca. 1930. (Photo courtesy of Universal Studios)

Formation of Local 695

Undoubtedly, many lengthy private conversations had taken place among those employed at various studio sound operations from the period 1927 to 1930. Many of these men were also involved in training organized by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Technical Committee, and were probably in frequent contact.

During a four-hour-long “Special Meeting of Sound Men” (all of whom were members of Local 37), which took place on September 13, 1930; acting Chairman Harold V. Smith alluded to “a review of events of the past few months,” indicating that prior discussions had certainly taken place. As it will be seen however, once the blueprint for action had been laid out, these members of the Sound Committee wasted no time establishing their new Local.

Following the first recorded “Special Meeting” on Saturday the 13th (which ended at midnight); a second “Joint Meeting” was called the very next day (Sunday) at 10:20 a.m., chaired by D.H. Lilly. Clearly, things were moving very quickly!

It was at that meeting that they drew up the Charter application to the IATSE. They also discussed requirements for those members who wished to transfer into the new Local from Local 37 (695 did not yet have a Local number designated to it). A set of temporary officers for the new Local were duly nominated and approved by those present, as officers needed to be in place at the ratification of the new Charter. The initial Charter application was duly signed by the thirteen of the members of the Sound Committee present, with eight additional members (for a total of 21) signing at a later meeting.

It is interesting to note that Stagehands Local 33 had loaned \$500 to aid the Sound Committee in their quest to establish a Local. In addition, Local 37 had donated \$1,000 outright to aid in the effort. The actual Charter application fee to the International cost \$100 at that time.

After some discussion, it was moved that the new Local should print and distribute cards to the various studio sound personnel, announcing a meeting to take place the coming Wednesday evening. It was also noted that members transferring from Local 37 would need to make a new application to the Sound Local and pay a \$5 transfer fee.

On Wednesday of that same week, another Special Meeting was called to order with eighty paid members present. The minutes of Sunday's meeting were read and discussed. A telegram from IATSE General Secretary-Treasurer Fred J. Dempsey was read, authorizing Charter #695. It was also moved that eight additional Committee members were to be added to the thirteen other names on the Charter.

It is interesting to note a vote taken during this meeting to establish a nine-member Examining Board, which would draw up an examination for all new applicants.

Local 695—The First Sound Local

Another 12 days would elapse from the Wednesday meeting, until the actual installation of the Charter, on Monday, September 29. This would turn into a very long day for those involved, comprising three consecutive meetings lasting until 1:15 the next morning!

Of these, the “Special Meeting for the Installation of the Charter” called by Brother L.C.G. Blix at 9:10 p.m. is certainly of some note. Brother Blix read a telegram from IATSE Vice President Cleve Beck, authorizing the installation of the Charter of Local 695. It was noted that Cleve Beck was in Sacramento dealing with strike trouble and was unable to attend personally.

At the invitation of Brother Blix, a number of representatives from sister Locals were also present. These included Brother Roy Klaffki (Cameramen's Local), Brother J.W. Gillette (American Federation of Musicians), Brothers Eckerson and Sands (Projectionists Local), Brother Carl Kountz (Film Technicians), Brother Alvin Wykoff (President of the Cameramen's Local), and Brother William Scott (Business Representative of Local 33).

The remarks offered by some of these men during the meeting indicate the tenor of the times. William Scott gave a word of warning to “keep plans quiet” and to be cognizant “of the plans of the M&M which you will encounter.” He goes on to say that “members should get behind their officers and support them, and not go behind their backs and chisel.” He further states that members should “keep their business to themselves and not argue unionism or union business on the lots or other places of employment.” These remarks and others help to highlight just how tenuous the situation was on the studio lots when it came to organizing. Studio management made every effort to discourage organizing and would go to great lengths to dissuade individuals from engaging in union activities.

The remarks given by J.W. Gillette of the American Federation of Musicians, who spoke at length on the conditions of the day, were perhaps the most telling sign of the times. After congratulating the members on their new Charter, he went on to state that “conditions generally were bad and that there were 9 million men out of work in the United States, regardless of all the propaganda by the Los Angeles Times-Chamber of Commerce and others to the contrary.” He said that “the situation is critical and breadlines are being filled to greater length every day.” It is “up to the unions who can and must remedy the conditions peacefully.” Stated “every man who is working now should take stock of himself and see what he is doing for the Brother who is out of work.” Spoke on “the control of machines which are so rapidly replacing man power” and “believed organized labor must overcome the situation.” Said that “if a question is not answered within the next two years, one-half of the men sitting in this room will be replaced by machines.” Said that “out of a membership of 4,000 in the Musicians, 2,000 were out of work and he had personally aided men financially whose feet were actually on the ground, that they might take bread home to a hungry family.” Spoke of “the close affiliation of organized labor through the American Federation of Labor and the American Legion, the greatest political power

in the country today and one that can bring about the results for economic betterment of the country.” In closing, asked that “the Brothers seriously consider the machine problem” and wished them the greatest success in the world.

Following additional remarks by others present, it was moved that the temporary officers who had previously been voted on be placed in office for a term of one year. These were as follows:

Charles O'Loughlin - President
William Lindsey Jr. - Vice President
Dean Daily - Financial Secretary
W.C. Smith - Recording Secretary
Harold V. Smith - Business Representative

After some discussion, it was moved that the 21 original members of the Sound Committee should function as members of the Executive Board until such time as the Constitution and By-Laws were drawn up. These were:

Charles O'Loughlin (Pathé)	Walter C. Smith (James Cruze Prod.)
William Lindsay Jr. (Fox)	Karl Zint (M-G-M)
Thomas Lambert (Wesley Ford)	William Hedgcock (Universal)
Dean Daily (Columbia/Tiffany)	Jesse Moulin (Universal)
Al Blodgett (Columbia)	Neil Jack (Trem Carr Pictures)
Bruce Peirsall (Sol Lesser/Columbia)	Zeal Fairbanks (M-G-M)
Franklin Hansen (Paramount)	Arthur Blinn (Sennett)
Harry D. Mills (Paramount)	M. McCarroll
Martin M. Paggi (Paramount)	Willard W. Starr (Fox)
Bernard Freericks (Fox)	M. Utterback (Metropolitan)
	Ben Winkler (Pathé)

Following this, nominations were added to those names already appointed for the Constitution and By-Laws Committee, as well as for the Wage Scale and Working Rules Committee.

Immediately following this meeting, an Executive Board meeting was called to order at 11:00 p.m. During this meeting, the subject of initiation fees and salary for the Business Agent were discussed. It moved that the initiation fee be set at \$15 until October 31, at which time it would be advanced to \$50. It was also moved that the Business Agent be offered a one-year contract at a salary of \$75 per week, plus expenses, with the option to renew for a second year. After some discussion, the Business Agent stated he would like time to consider the offer, and would give his thoughts at the next Executive Board meeting.

Further motions were made and approved regarding decisions on office space, as well as the setting of future meeting dates for the first Thursday of each month. At 1:15 a.m., the last meeting of the day was adjourned. No doubt, everyone was happy to get some sleep before reporting for work in a few hours!

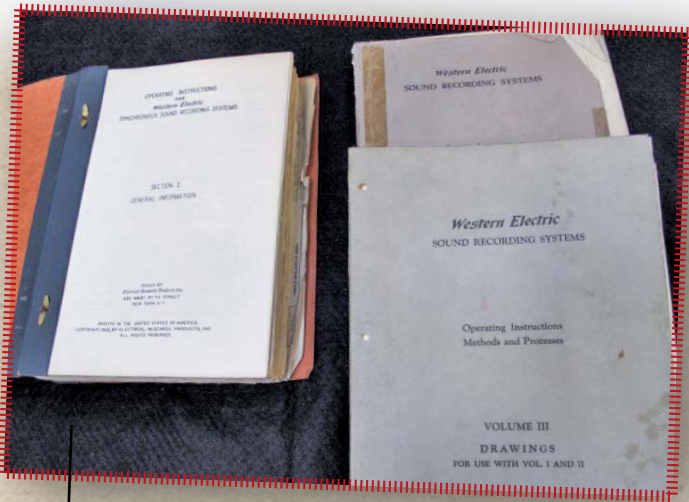
The Challenges of the '30s

Once the Charter was in place, the newly established Local wasted no time in moving forward. Three Executive Board meetings were held in October of that year, mostly to approve transactions pertaining to the establishment of the business office. Space was rented at 1605 N. Cahuenga, and Business Agent Harold V. Smith was given a two-year contract at a salary of \$100 a week. A typist/office assistant was also hired at a salary of \$25 a week. The first five membership cards were issued to the officers of the Local, with the next group of numbers going to the Executive Board members and then to the 21 members who signed the Charter. By the end of November, it would appear that the office operations were up and running.

Things were far from peaceful, however. There were still a significant number of qualified sound engineers out of work in the Hollywood District, and tensions were rife. One of the first issues to come up at the November 1930 Executive Board meeting was related to the jurisdiction over Sound Grips and Cable Men who were still under Local 37. It is also interesting to note that members who were designated as First Recordists would be required to have worked on three pictures, as well as having six months of production experience prior to September 15, 1930. It was also moved and accepted that any man who accepted another man's position for less money be fined \$100.

Despite rather poor employment conditions during 1930, in January of 1931, the Local added additional office space and joined the Federation of Motion Picture Studio Crafts. Further rules regarding member initiations, transfers and withdrawals were added.

Jurisdictional issues continued to arise in 1931 over the operation of sound "dummies" (the optical reproducers used in dubbing). Due in large part to these issues, at the February 20, 1931 Executive Board meeting, a motion was made that the Local should claim jurisdiction over "everything pertaining to sound since the advent of sound in the making of motion pictures in the industry." Clearly,



Light reading; a typical assortment of manuals for the operation and maintenance of Western Electric film sound recording equipment from 1930. The manual for the first sound channels comprised about 600 pages! (Authors Collection)

battle lines were being drawn, especially in regards to IBEW Local 40, which apparently still maintained jurisdiction over installation and initial testing of sound systems.

By April of 1931, the Local had approximately 625 members, most of whom found employment at the various studios (a figure which would indicate that nearly two-thirds of those working in Hollywood sound operations were now members of the Local). However, there was some concern voiced that membership to the Local be curtailed, given the general employment problems of the time. A further jurisdictional issue arose in regards to the loading of film magazines for the optical sound recorders. While it would appear that Local 695 tried to maintain control over loading of magazines for sound recording operations, it is unclear if this was achieved at all studios.

Crew Compositions and Working Conditions

As sound recording was still a relatively new craft, actual job titles and responsibilities were still in a state of flux. The architecture and operations at various studios varied greatly. Some employed central machine room and amplifier operations, while others used independent sound channels. Crew size and positions varied, especially when location work was involved. Many studios interchanged crews assigned to dubbing and production, as it was deemed that many of the positions (such as that of Recordist) were similar. Crews were also moved from picture to picture as needed, which made for some challenging transitions.

A typical production unit in 1930 consisted of a *First Recordist*, who basically functioned as the mixer, an *Assistant (or Second) Recordist* would be assigned to operate the recorder, either in a truck or in a central machine room. Additional *Second Sound Recordists* were assigned to the stage, in charge of communications with *First Recordist*, and also included the boom operators and cable men.

Depending on how production was carried out, there might also be a *film loader* assigned to the sound crew. There were also crew members known as "*sound grips*," who were typically responsible for the hanging of microphones under the direction of the *Stage Recordist*. With the later advent of perambulator microphone booms, they were designated as "*boom pushers*."

JOB CLASSIFICATIONS—THE WHY'S OF THE Y'S

In the early years of the Local, many job descriptions were somewhat fluid, more indicative of the level of experience, as opposed to a defined task. Typical job descriptions in the early 1930s were: 1st Soundmen, 2nd Soundmen, 3rd Soundmen, 4th Soundmen, Sound Film Loaders, Sound Public Address Operators, Newsreel Soundman, etc.

Typically, 1st Soundmen would be assigned duties as a Recordist, Mixer, or Transmission Engineer. 2nd Soundmen were usually Stage Men or Mike Boom Operators, 3rd Soundmen were Service or Maintenance. The 4th Soundmen usually served as cablemen and utility.

By 1939, these classifications had been codified into a more defined set of job descriptions, as outlined below.

Y-1 Music Mixer – Mixer for scoring, pre-scoring and post-scoring music as assigned. (Music only)

Y-2 Re-recording Mixer – Mixer responsible the re-recording assigned to him. (Re-recording only, not including music)

Y-3 Unit Mixer – Mixer assigned to the recording on a production unit. Production only. (Now referred to as the Production Mixer)

Y-4 Operative Supervisor and/or Engineer – Engineer in the Sound Department assigned to operate and be responsible for sound systems and other electronic equipment, and those operative functions, requiring the service of a fully qualified transmission engineer. This engineer may advise in the proper operation of equipment by men performing work in a lower "Y" classification, provided that he does not replace a man in the lower classification.

Y-5 Amplifier Room Operator – Soundman in a centrally operated plant assigned to the operation and maintenance of proper condition of sound equipment in and associated with the main amplifier room.

Y-6 Technical Testing Engineer and/or Gang Boss – Soundman assigned to precise technical testing and adjustment of sound channels and amplifiers and of such items as light valves, galvanometers, microphones and other similar optical-electrical, mechanical and/or audio frequency equipment; and/or is in charge of setting up, testing and

maintaining sound equipment. Includes maintenance, testing, repairs, shop work, installation, supervision of installation, maintenance of projection equipment, and work on all other types of electronic devices, providing there is no replacing of other "Y" classification men.

Y-7 Service Recorder and/or Location Engineer – Soundman assigned to service, operate and maintain sound channels and associated equipment. Includes all recording equipment, such as dolly and portable equipment, stationary channels on stages, sets and locations.

Y-8 Microphone Boom Operator – Soundman assigned to operate a microphone boom and associated equipment, also handle cables and associated equipment includes fishpoles, stands, boom extensions. Also portable booms, microphone accessories. Does not include public address or playback equipment.

Y-9 Recording Machine Operator – Soundman assigned to set up, test, and operate recording machines. Operation within central recording plan only. Direct supervision with limited responsibilities. No dolly channels. No playback equipment. No stationary channels on stages.

Y-10 Journeyman Soundman – Soundman assigned to operating service and running repairs of all sound equipment. Routine central position includes shop work, generators, batteries, installation. Assists Y-4 man in handling heavy equipment repair and maintenance of all motor, power and transmission cables.

Along the way, these classifications have changed somewhat, reflecting changes in technology and job descriptions. For those who have never worked in a traditional studio setting, some of these job descriptions will be completely foreign. It is remarkable to note however, that very little has changed over the years when it comes to most of the basic job categories.

As noted in the Work Classifications as defined by the National Labor Relations Board in September of 1939, Local 695 was responsible for **all** sound-related work. Per the NLRB document: "This certification by its terms includes all 'Y' classifications and the installation, construction, operation, maintenance, and repair of all sound equipment, including television equipment." (Emphasis mine.)

Y-11 Cableman – Soundman assigned in the handling and connecting of cables and sound equipment. May also handle second mike in emergencies when given emergency permission by the Union, and offered minimum guarantee the Y-8 daily rate and/or a new Y-8 guarantee is given. "Emergency" defined as one scene until replaced by a Y-8 man from department or Union, whichever procedure takes the least time.

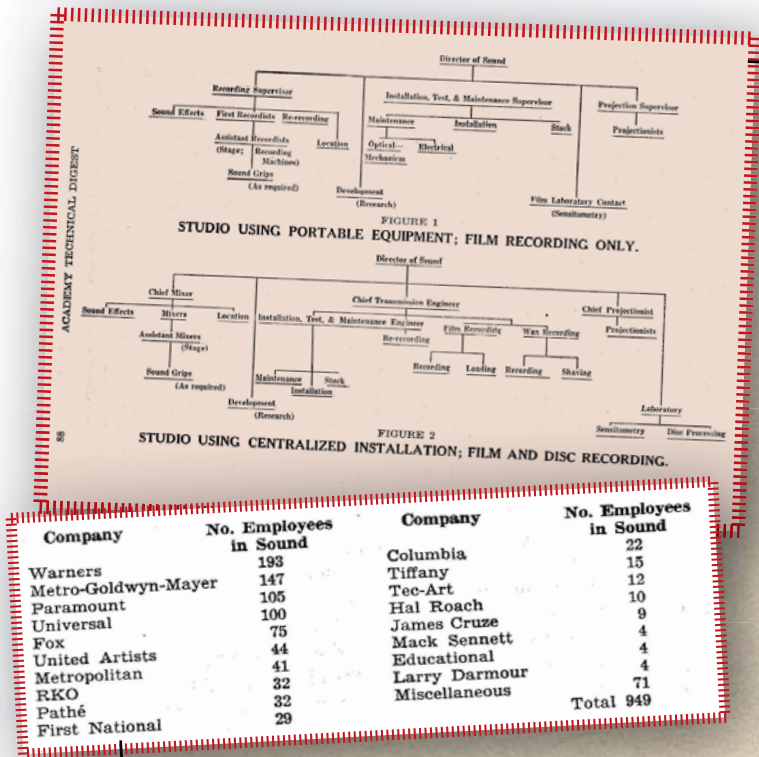
Y-12 Playback Operator – Soundman assigned to set up and operate playback equipment. No servicing or maintenance of equipment.

Y-13 Public Address Operator – Soundman assigned to connect and operate public address equipment. No servicing or maintenance of equipment.

Y-14 Dubbing Machine Operator – Soundman assigned to operate dubbers (or other reproducing) machines.

Y-15 Film Loader – Soundman assigned to load, unload, break down and patch sound raw stock. (Our jurisdiction agreement with the cameramen provides sound film shall be handled by soundmen.)

In later years, additional categories would be added, and some categories (such as Unit Mixer) were re-classified. However, most basic job descriptions have remained the same. In later years, when members engaged in re-recording operations were moved to Local 700, many of the classifications related to these operations were dropped.



Studio sound department employment as of January 8, 1930.
(Variety magazine, January 8, 1930)

If onset playback was called for, a *Playback Operator* would be hired. Similarly, if a PA system was required for set operations, a *PA Operator* would be assigned for setup and operation.

Every studio had their own sound maintenance shop and personnel as well, which typically were separate from production units. However, a unit working on location might employ an additional crew member to handle maintenance during location shooting.

A *Chief Transmission Engineer* would typically oversee all plant operations, with essentially the same responsibilities as those of today's Chief Engineer.

In studio operations, a Recording Supervisor was also employed, who was responsible for overseeing the recording activities on one or more pictures.

The Decline Continues

With the effects of the Depression still at work, July of 1931 brought further salary cuts and changes in working conditions at various studios. How to deal with the situation was a growing concern to the Local. The Local drafted a letter to its members notifying them that they should not work more than fifteen consecutive hours and should not return to work without a period of eight hours' rest.

On July 23, 1931, the first strike action took place, related to conditions at the Pathé studios. This was due to the studio forcing a 695 member to work below the minimum salary scale established for the position of First Soundman. Complicating matters, it was apparent that members of Local 37 did not honor the strike action, causing further tensions with the I.A. At R-K-O pictures, a strike action was called in relation to the working day and hours, which were being cut to six-hour days in response to the slowdown in production.

Typical organizational chart for film sound department.
(From 1930 *Academy Technical Digest* article by Carl Dreher, Director of Sound at R-K-O Studios)

At this point, despite the growing membership in the Local, there was still no independent agreement of any kind with the studios. This meant that the Local had no way to enforce wages or working conditions at studio facilities. The only real "enforceable" agreement at this time was the Hollywood Studio Basic Agreement, a simple two-page document signed in late 1926 by nine production companies and five unions.

One year later, conditions were no better. Salary cuts continued at various studios but the Local had very little to bargain with. Finally, in July of 1932, the Local was able to sign a contract with one of the smaller independents (Like Ltd.) This contract called for a wage scale of \$225 per week for a three-man sound crew, working on a seven-day basis without overtime. While the deal could hardly be termed a victory, it did help gain recognition for 695 during extremely difficult times.

By 1933, with the country still mired in a deep depression, the studios were beginning to feel the pinch. Many of them (Fox in particular) had over-leveraged their positions with the acquisition of theater properties during the real estate boom of the 1920s, and with box-office receipts in rapid decline, now found themselves saddled with mortgage payments they could not meet. When newly elected President Roosevelt instituted a Bank Holiday on March 8, the studios suffered a further hit to their cash flow.

Desperate to find some way to stay solvent, in March of 1933, the five major studios announced an eight-week salary cut of 50%, applied to all workers earning \$50 a week or more, regardless of talent, skill or position. The minimum income was set at \$37.50 a week. The reaction from both labor and above-the-line talent (mostly AMPAS members) was swift. Although it was reported that a significant number of actors and directors, as well as some other crafts, were willing to go along with the cuts, the majority of the IATSE membership was adamantly opposed. So began the strike of 1933, one which cost Local 695 (and the rest of the Hollywood IATSE locals) dearly.

To be continued...

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Posthumous thanks must also be given to recording secretaries during this era, without whose efforts we would know virtually nothing about the formation of the Local. Finally, as always, many thanks to David Waelder for making it appear that I actually know how to write!

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