DuMont: The Original Fourth Television Network

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Although the "big three" television networks are facing continued decline in audience share—losing viewers to cable TV and VCRs—the Fox Television Network appears to be headed toward artistic and financial success. In the beginning, press baron Rupert Murdoch purchased and organized a solid network foundation consisting of 20th Century Fox and its production facilities, and seven stations previously owned by Metromedia (Sterling and Kittross 471). From this starting point in the mid-1980s, his network has grown rapidly. With local independent UHF stations on the rise, and Fox-generated programming increasing annually, Murdoch has had little trouble convincing more and more independent stations who are looking for a way to counter-program both cable and the other broadcast networks.

The future was not so bright for the original—sometimes forgotten—fourth network, which officially ceased operations 30 years before Fox would begin.

DuMont Builds a Network

Allen Balcom DuMont began a career in electronics after receiving a degree in electrical engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1924 (White 107). He worked for a period at Westinghouse Lamp Company before joining the De Forest Radio Company as chief engineer in 1928 where he became interested in the cathode-ray tube. Before the depression closed the company in 1931, he had been promoted to vice-president (White 108).

In 1931, Allen B. DuMont, with $500 of his own money and $500 from a friend, started the Allen B. DuMont Laboratories, Inc., consisting of a small research facility in his garage. During the late 1920s the cathode-ray tube (CRT) became an important instrument to American electronic researchers, enabling them to see electrical impulses graphically displayed (Rice 35). From 1931 to 1936 the DuMont organization was virtually the only company in the United States that

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mass produced cathode-ray tubes ("DuMont, Allen Balcom," 1946). Most of the rapidly growing company's profits, earned during its first five years, were reinvested in new research and production facilities. The 1930s were to become the means of financing DuMont's eventual entry into the field of television (Rice).

In 1937 DuMont turned his attention from the manufacture of industrial components to consumer products. Using the research and production experience he gained while producing CRTs, he began making television sets that could receive signals from the experimental television stations in the New York City area. As he experimented with producing television receivers and as the quality of television reception increased, DuMont committed his company to a crash program of manufacturing television receivers. The NBC-RCA announcement that television would be put on public display during the 1939 World's Fair probably gave DuMont some reason to rush production. DuMont sets were reportedly the only ones available for installation in hotels, bars, and other public areas so that the World's Fair broadcasts could be seen outside the Fair display area; DuMont Laboratories may have been the first American company to market a television receiver ("DuMont, Allen Balcom," 1946). As of May 15, 1939, six manufacturers had sets for sale—RCA, Westinghouse, DuMont, Andrea, American Television, and R. H. Macy ("Television at Fair" 65). These early television sets were designed to receive 441-line transmissions. Allen DuMont was one of the few outspoken opponents of the 441-line standard (used in the United States until 1941) and he officially stated on the second day of the World's Fair that the standards used were too low for what was then called "high definition television" ("Film Industry" 45).

Although DuMont had realized his goal of manufacturing television sets, the venture proved to be a heavy drain on his company's capital resources. Because of television set manufacturing costs and the cost of research and development, Allen B. DuMont Laboratories, Inc. lost $95,000 in 1939 (Rice 48). DuMont felt that his company should produce its own television transmission equipment if it was to compete with other companies such as Westinghouse, General Electric, and RCA. He tried to raise funds to provide needed capital for research and expansion of production facilities by mortgaging his factory and equipment—but this only raised an insufficient $35,000. In order to bridge the gap, DuMont's company in 1938 created a new stock, class B common, which was all sold to Paramount Pictures, Inc., at one dollar per share. By selling the shares to Paramount, DuMont relinquished half interest in the company. Paramount made a good financial investment;
over the next decade, DuMont Labs expanded and the stock split ten for one. The 1938 $56,000 investment was valued at $7,560,000 on the market just 10 years later—exactly 135 times what it cost (“Prospects of Par” 31; Thompson 18). Paramount, believing their investment was worth at least $10 million, never offered to sell the stock (Thompson 18), and the estimated value of the stock rose to $10.5 million several years later (Rice 48).

Paramount did not purchase the stock simply as a financial investment—the company desperately wanted to be in the television business. After an aborted attempt to work with CBS and a cold-shoulder from established electronic firms, such as RCA and AT&T, Paramount decided to enter the fledgling industry through DuMont (White 114).

The stock sale would help DuMont Laboratories weather the pending $95,000 1939 debt. In addition to loans and money generated from stock purchases, Paramount appears to have suggested that it would provide the DuMont Television Network with original programming of a quality that only a film studio could produce at that time. However, Paramount never came through with such programming—apparently due to the fact that, at the time, advertising would not generate enough revenue to make TV programming profitable to a big studio (White 119-20).

In addition, Allen DuMont began losing control of his company. Paramount Pictures gained a substantial degree of management control with the stock purchase; Paramount was entitled to appoint four of the eight directors on the DuMont Laboratories Board of Directors. Paramount's board members were not allowed to hold the positions of president or vice president, but Paramount officers did attain the positions of secretary and treasurer (Rice 47). Paramount gained a strong measure of "negative" control. While their board members could not necessarily generate and carry a motion to its fruition, Paramount was able to veto motions that required consensus and could withhold payment of funds as a Paramount appointee was treasurer (White 116).

DuMont Labs continued to expand horizontally. Part of the new funds received from the Paramount Pictures financial agreement were used to construct DuMont’s first television station, W2XVT. The experimental station—which was located in his Passaic, New Jersey, television set production plant, a converted pickle factory—began transmitting in February, 1939. Both NBC and CBS were already broadcasting experimentally in New York in 1937 when DuMont had applied for the experimental TV station license. W2XVT was authorized
by the FCC to broadcast between midnight and 9 a.m. The station, equipped with only a low power transmitter and low antenna, was primarily used to test transmissions and studio equipment. Its signal rarely was received in the New York City area (Rice 50).

In April, 1940, DuMont was given a construction permit for a second experimental television station, W2XWV, in New York City, later to become the flagship station in the DuMont Television Network (Dunlap 129). W2XWV was also authorized to broadcast only between midnight and 9 a.m. Although World War II necessitated the conversion of DuMont's television manufacturing facilities to wartime electronic production, experimental television broadcasts continued intermittently during the war. However, because of a concern that the war would affect the television industry, Paramount ceased financially supporting DuMont in 1941—and would never do so again (White 122). Station W2XWV's first experimental program was broadcast on June 28, 1942 (Dunlap 129).

On July 1, 1941, the first non-experimental television broadcasting began when NBC station WNBT began broadcasting commercial television in New York City (Rice 50). Prior to this, the FCC was still considering the complex question of technical standards for television. By 1943, DuMont owned three of the 13 authorized television stations in the United States—the Passaic, New Jersey and New York City stations and station W3XWT in Washington, D.C. But all three DuMont-owned stations were classified—along with five other stations—as experimental, meaning that commercial sponsorship was not permitted. As the end of the war became more imminent, proponents of commercial television broadcasting, including DuMont, decided to form an association to promote their interests. On January 17, 1944, the Television Broadcasters Association was formed in New York City with Allen B. DuMont as President (Dunlap 129).

In 1944, the FCC gave the New York station commercial authorization and the call letters were changed to WABD ("Television Stations" 418). In spite of limited postwar power rating and a smaller antenna than other transmitters in the area, WABD delivered a signal over a 50-mile radius. Fan mail came in from viewers up to 100 miles away (Lescarboura 30). The DuMont corporation used WABD as a test station for "...gauging the artistic and commercial potentialities of telecasting" ("DuMont, Allen B[alom]" 163). The staff at the cramped 515 Madison Avenue studio and transmitter complex continued to develop increasingly ambitious live presentations. In December, 1944, WABD offered a two-hour presentation of Dickens' Christmas Carol which "...set new standards for lighting, camera angles and telecast
performance" (Lescarbourea 30). Programming, innovative or average, was produced on a very modest budget. Newscasters stayed in the studio, using charts and maps to describe events; remote pickups were limited primarily to sporting events. Close-ups were heavily employed in dramatic programming to disguise the fact that very few characters and props were used (DuMont & Ream 26).

The New York station became the outlet for many of DuMont’s television research efforts including the first television camera in the United States to have an electronic viewfinder and a television camera featuring major electronic components housed in the camera dolly instead of the camera head (“Television is Coming” 30). This innovation was later abandoned when electronic equipment associated with the camera became smaller and lighter. DuMont’s “dolly-housed” equipment was suitable for studio use only and had to be used on the studio floor as it was too heavy for camera cranes.

After World War II ended DuMont was the first United States manufacturer to have a television set on the market. However, the rapid transition from wartime electronics to peacetime television set production resulted in a heavy strain on the company, and a $1.5 million loss for 1946 (Rice 49).

DuMont expanded the studio facilities of WABD in 1946. Although the transmitter remained at its pre-war location at 515 Madison Avenue, new studio facilities were provided by remodeling the auditorium of the Wanamaker Department Store at Ninth and Broadway. The new facility had three studios with separate control rooms, as well as space for administrative offices, and talent dressing rooms—adequate facilities for network productions (“Problems Encountered” 16).

By 1946, DuMont had invested $115,000 in his experimental station in Washington, D.C., W3XWT—later WTTG in honor of Dr. Thomas Toliver Goldsmith, DuMont Lab’s director of research (“Washington” 37). In 1946, DuMont applied for station licenses in Cleveland and Cincinnati, Ohio, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. As the company had discontinued operation of the Passaic, New Jersey, experimental station, DuMont hoped to interconnect the three stations with his New York and Washington stations to form the basis of a television network (“Washington” 37).

**Network and Industry Expansion**

The DuMont organization is said to have been the first broadcaster to televise a commercial network program (“Pioneer of TV” C4). This may have involved only two stations, WABD in New York and WTTG in Washington, D.C. The first network program was probably Faraway
Hill—the first network television soap opera. It only lasted for three months, running from October to December of 1946. Faraway Hill was the first of many DuMont Network programs produced on a shoestring budget—$300 per week (Brooks and Marsh 273). The first commercial DuMont network program apparently was not supplied through a network at all. It may have been a simultaneous transmission in New York and Washington of a program filmed in the DuMont New York television studios.

Whether Faraway Hill was transmitted by coaxial cable or not, it was in 1946 that AT&T opened two television transmission channels on their cable between Washington and New York on an experimental basis (Hess 139). Rates for use of this and additional coaxial cable channels were finally set in 1948, after over a year of haggling with the television industry. Networks could buy time on an occasional basis or a continuing contract. DuMont, like the other networks, chose the contract service. Although the contract service provided a much better value, it was prohibitive to the DuMont Network and appears to have been set up for the convenience of NBC and CBS. The structure required the purchase of a minimum of eight hours of video and sixteen hours of audio time. This worked well for NBC and CBS, that had radio networks and were beginning to invest in television programming. DuMont, however, was only using ten to fifteen percent of what they were paying for (Hess 139-40).

In 1947 DuMont was granted a station license in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—thus giving the organization three owned-and-operated stations. In 1948, DuMont was told by the Federal Communications Commission that his company could not own more than three television stations because Paramount had control over DuMont Labs. The two Paramount-owned stations, one in Los Angeles and one in Chicago, were grouped by the FCC with the DuMont stations bringing the total to five—the maximum number of stations which one organization could own at that time. On May 11, 1948, DuMont testified before the FCC that Paramount did not control his company and that DuMont therefore should be allowed to own five television stations. The FCC ruling to consider DuMont’s and Paramount’s stations as one entity under the ownership rules was based on both companies’ applications for a television license in Boston in 1945. The FCC maintained that DuMont had withdrawn its application in order to give Paramount a better chance of obtaining a license. This, according to the FCC, constituted control by Paramount (“Prospects of Par” 31).

The sale of television transmission and receiving equipment proved to be profitable for DuMont Labs in the post-World War II boom years.
Sales rose from $2,290,000 in 1946 to $55,000,000 in 1949—the largest growth rate and highest profit margin of any television equipment manufacturer of the day (Thompson 19).

In early 1948 the DuMont Television Network advertised in Broadcasting magazine that the network was ready for coast-to-coast programming via kinescope recording. In fact, Allen DuMont predicted in 1949 that the DuMont-developed process of “teletranscription” or the filming of TV programs directly from a monitor (kinescope), would contribute much needed variety to smaller and more isolated television stations (DuMont “TV Predictions” 92).

All four networks were expanding. In 1948 a total of 19 stations were operating in 12 cities. NBC's network had grown to five stations—with 26 more scheduled to open by the end of the year (“Teevee Pains” 97). The other networks were close behind. CBS, which had a four-station network, was rushing to catch up after cutting back on TV expansion when the FCC refused to approve the CBS color system. An estimated $70,000 was being spent by CBS to finish what network president Frank Stanton called “the nation’s largest television studio plant”—two studios in Manhattan’s Grand Central Terminal Building. CBS had also attempted to strengthen its hold on sports programming by purchasing a 3 percent interest in Madison Square Garden Corporation (“Teevee Pains” 97).

The DuMont Television Network’s monthly advertising revenue jumped from $7,000 to $50,000 over the last six months of 1948. Nearly half of all available television time—still a very limited amount of the day—was sponsored in 1948. DuMont projected that his network would reach the break-even point by the end of the year (“Teevee Pains” 97). Other sources predicted that DuMont’s network would lose as much as $1.5 million of the television manufacturing division’s profits by the end of the year, however. All the networks were losing vast amounts of cash at this stage. “For a rookie in the big leagues, DuMont seems to be doing all right” (Thompson 19, 42).

DuMont offered a full evening schedule of network television programs by 1948. During 1948 and 1949 the DuMont network offered more hours of programming to affiliates than did the other networks. DuMont predicted that the big, expensive radio shows would eventually turn to TV exclusively—causing the break up of the national radio networks (“DuMont the Pioneer,” 1949). DuMont began network programming at 6:00 P.M. Eastern Standard Time, Monday through Friday. CBS began at 6:30 P.M., and NBC and ABC began at 7:00 P.M. (“Current Network” 24).
A Network in Decline

By the end of 1949, the DuMont Network ranked second in the number of affiliates but tied for last place with ABC for the number of sponsored programs ("TV Networks" 55). One external reason for this is that AT&T was having problems meeting the demand of all four networks on an equal basis—as a common carrier is required to do. Thus Bell spoke with the individual stations (not the networks) to see how they could best be served. Because most of the stations were related to CBS and NBC radio affiliates, they asked that the bulk of AT&T service be allocated to these two networks, putting ABC and DuMont at a further disadvantage in supplying programming (Hess 143).

DuMont’s low ranking could also have been due to its penchant for low-budget productions that often failed to be successful with critics or audiences. Occasionally programs were successful, despite limited budgets, but these shows were often lured to a larger network with a promise of more money. The Original Amateur Hour—DuMont’s most popular program to date, a show that was actually competitive with NBC and CBS—moved to the NBC network in 1949 (Brooks and Marsh 634).

In 1949 one of DuMont’s most popular—and least expensive—programs started its run. Captain Video saved the solar system every week without spending more than $25 to do it:

The sets and props on Captain Video were constructed on the smallest possible budget. Most of the controls in the captain’s spaceship, the Galaxy, were painted on, and one suspected that a single swift kick at his master control board would destroy the entire headquarters. The unkindest limitations were on the network of Video Rangers, whom the captain would look in on, using his Remote Carrier Beam, once during each telecast. Most of them looked exactly like cowboys in the Old West—DuMont was running pieces of ancient Westerns to pad out the half hour! (This practice ceased after a time). (Brooks and Marsh 144-45)

Captain Video ran from 1949 almost to the last days of the network in 1955. Although it was one of the most popular children’s television shows of the 1950s, it was not lured away from DuMont by ABC, CBS, or NBC.

In 1950, Rocky King, Inside Detective—what may have been DuMont’s most popular continuing drama—began airing. Ratings were low because of DuMont’s limited affiliate lineup and the small production budget destroyed any possibility that the show would get a big-name guest star. Nonetheless, it attracted a loyal band of viewers that helped it stay on the air until 1954. Rocky was one of the few examples
where the requisite low budget was used to the program’s advantage. Rocky’s off-screen family—a gimmick originally developed to save money (actors played several roles)—intrigued viewers (Brooks and Marsh 718).

AT&T’s inability to provide equal access to their relay system came to a head in 1950 when they filed an allocation schedule with the FCC that broke up available prime time into four unequal shares. NBC was allotted 167 hours of prime time (8 to 11 PM). CBS was given 121-1/2 hours. Fifty-three and one-half went to ABC while DuMont only received 37 hours of prime time per week (Hess 143). DuMont filed a protest with the FCC, but before they could rule, the networks and AT&T agreed to a plan that would allocate time on a quarterly basis—with the caveat that when conflicts occurred about allocation, the five organizations would meet and discuss the matter. It was decided that the smaller networks would be allowed reasonable access to transmission facilities even if they only had one affiliate along a line that passed through several cities (Hess 144-45).

The financial apex for all divisions of the DuMont Company occurred in 1951; Allen B. DuMont Laboratories grossed $75,000,000, earning a pre-tax profit of $6,900,000 (“Bypassed Pioneer” 33; Rice 35). DuMont balanced the losses of the broadcast network against profits earned on “fairly expensive receivers” (“DuMont, the Pioneer” 67). But the DuMont Television Network was facing increasing difficulties in securing affiliates, as well as in creating and producing shows that attracted sponsors.

It was at about this time that Paramount again chose to undercut the company that it had invested in by starting up the Paramount Television Network (White 125). Not a true broadcast television network, which both provides programming and sells advertising—it operated more like some of today’s syndicators, selling programming to any station interested. It, in essence, was competing directly for the air-time that the struggling DuMont Network was fighting for (White 126).

The FCC “freeze” from October 1948 to April 1952 clearly hampered the DuMont Television Network in its efforts to expand. DuMont was further handicapped by only being allowed to own three television stations while the other networks each owned five—denying his network two additional major market outlets for its programming. Even if additional affiliates had been available by 1951, it is doubtful that DuMont could have financed further network expansion.

Also—unlike ABC, CBS, and NBC—DuMont did not have a radio network. The other networks were able to use their radio resources as a basis of administrative support from which their television networks
could draw in the early and expensive years of television network expansion. The networks had encouraged their radio affiliates, particularly those in major markets, to apply for television licenses. These stations, by adding television facilities to existing radio facilities, were put in a favorable financial position from the beginning—they had a successful radio network-affiliated station from which to draw financial support until the television operation became profitable. They also had the promise of network affiliation from an established broadcasting organization that had under contract popular radio performers who could be featured on the parent television network. This was not true in the case of DuMont.

On June 29, 1951, Allen B. DuMont announced to the company’s stockholders that television set production for the second half of 1951 would be cut back by 60 percent. Some set manufacturers were hurting DuMont set sales by producing cheaper sets than DuMont could or would not produce (“Bypassed Pioneer” 33). The report issued in connection with the stockholders’ meeting showed the declining profit picture of the company. For the first six months of 1950, the company earned an after-tax profit of $2,380,886. For the first six months of 1951, after-tax profits were only $487,618 (“Big Defense Order” 23).

The DuMont Network was struck another serious blow when the FCC ended the six-year freeze on license approvals by introducing a new allocation plan. Under the FCC’s Sixth Report and Order, few cities were allocated more than three VHF stations. Since CBS and NBC radio affiliates had obtained most of the VHF affiliates prior to the freeze, ABC and DuMont were left at a disadvantage in many cities. At the time, most television sets were equipped to receive VHF signals only and required expensive upgrades to receive UHF stations. The resulting low audiences scared off advertisers which, in turn, meant that production budgets were low. Thus, viewers had little incentive to pay up to $75 to have their televisions upgraded (Hess).

**DuMont Programming Problems**

For the 1952 season, the DuMont network introduced a number of new programs that cost “video peanuts” to produce. One such show was *Dark of Night*, a weekly dramatic anthology costing under $5,000 per week to produce—one quarter of the price tag of such shows as *The Big Story* (NBC) and *Lux Video Theater* (CBS) (“How to Save” 53). *Dark of Night* was inexpensive to produce because DuMont never hired big-name writers or actors (Brooks and Marsh 201). But more importantly, the show did not use studio sets—all shows were broadcast live from actual locations in the New York City area. According to DuMont
program and production chief James L. Caddigan, this provided the show with “the additional scope, dramatic value, and atmosphere of motion pictures—without spending the money for film” (“How to Save” 53). The show’s major production cost was getting equipment to the evening’s location. Unlike most programs which determined where to shoot or what sets were necessary based on the script, *Dark of Night* plots were generated from potential locations. Script clearance did have to be gained before permission to shoot at a location was granted (“How to Save” 53). Over its short run, *Dark of Night* broadcast from a Navy salvage station, a beer-bottling plant, an airline maintenance hangar, a veterans’ hospital operating room, a switchyard of the Erie Railroad, as well as several stores and factories (Brooks and Marsh 201; “How to Save” 53). Ironically, the program’s final telecast was from DuMont’s Passaic, New Jersey, television set factory on May 1, 1953—just three years before the network itself would end (Brooks and Marsh 201).

The extremes to which DuMont would go to save money are exemplified by two 1952 daytime programs seen only on WABD in New York. *One Man’s Experience* and *One Woman’s Experience* completely did away with scenery and almost eliminated actors. Although each 15-minute program was broadcast five days a week, together they only cost $5,000 to produce (“How to Save” 54). Each program consisted of one performer who acted out a plot by talking to him or herself, responding to stream-of-consciousness speeches recorded earlier, talking to the TV audience, and conversing with off-camera imaginary people. A *Newsweek* article noted that “the idea is a natural for daytime programming, where sponsors are relatively few” (“How to Save” 54).

After only three years on the air, 1952 was a bad year for *Cavalcade of Stars*—“DuMont’s answer to such hits as NBC’s *Texaco Star Theatre* and CBS’s *Ed Sullivan Show...*” (Brooks and Marsh 150). Host Jackie Gleason was lured to CBS by a production budget four times that at DuMont as well as the CBS network’s potentially larger audience (“Keep It Corny” 66). CBS reportedly offered Gleason a personal salary of $8,000 per week plus backing to expand the program. After Gleason left *Cavalcade* to host *The Jackie Gleason Show* at CBS in the fall of 1952, he was replaced for one season by comedian Larry Storch. The show never got over the loss of the charismatic Gleason. It ended in September, 1952 (Brooks and Marsh 150).

Ironically, while DuMont was cranking out cheap programming and struggling to keep successful stars and shows from being lured away from the network, Allen DuMont predicted that all four networks would be spending much more on programming in the near future:
With all the new stations going up within two or three years, the networks can afford to spend more money for programs because if they can distribute programs widely enough the cost per listener [sic] is decreased and this will mean vastly better programs throughout the country.... I think the public can look for greatly improved programs over the next five years. (DuMont “What’s Ahead” 254)

Although the number of network affiliates increased following the end of the FCC “freeze,” some stations claimed to be affiliated with the DuMont Television Network while they, in fact, were not able to receive live network feeds from DuMont headquarters in New York. Many stations, while maintaining primary affiliation with a major network such as CBS or NBC, received one or two programs per week via kinescope recording. DuMont apparently listed these stations as affiliates. For this reason, although DuMont in 1953 was listed second in number of affiliates with 133 (after ABC which also sometimes listed “second-hand” affiliates), NBC and CBS enjoyed larger audiences and higher earnings (“Network Affiliations” 383).

According to one source, the DuMont Television Network supplied a total of only one-dozen shows per week to affiliates during the 1953-54 season. This declined to only three or four shows per week the following season (Summers & Summers 75). The DuMont Network is credited with first introducing the idea of co-op or network participation programs to television (“Allen Balcom DuMont” 91). The concept, which originated with the Mutual Broadcasting Service in the mid-1930s, enabled a local affiliated station to sell spot announcements to local sponsors to be included or “cut-in” on scheduled network programs.

**DuMont Gets Out of Network TV**

As the DuMont Television Network steadily lost programs and sponsors, often to other networks, Allen DuMont became increasingly concerned about the future of television networks in the United States and on one occasion stated that the government should regulate networks since NBC and CBS were becoming programming monopolies. He also stated that there was enough advertising money to support four television networks in the United States (“DuMont Asks U.S.” 9X).

Like many in government and the television industry, DuMont was worried about the future of UHF. In 1954, Sen. Charles E. Potter (Michigan) chaired hearings to look into the future of UHF and the FCC’s station allocation plan submitted in 1952. Although debate was
heated, no change was made in the original *Sixth Report and Order* allocation plan (Hess 173-80).

During 1954, Allen B. DuMont Laboratories stockholders became increasingly concerned about the financial position of the company. Major stockholders were publicly questioning the soundness of decisions made by DuMont and other company officers. Although DuMont did not own a controlling interest in his company, proxies owned by friends and stockholder-employees often gave him the 51 percent control needed to execute decisions (Thompson 44). Decisions were not entirely in his control, however. Discussions with ABC concerning a possible merger appear to have been unofficially vetoed by Paramount-installed board members (White 127). In 1955, concerned holders of large blocks of DuMont stock began to wrest control from the company founder.

At the stockholders’ meeting during the first week of May, 1955, the New York investment firm of Carl M. Loeb, Rhodes and Company, which represented 20 percent of the class A common stock of DuMont, made four demands of DuMont management. One of the demands was the elimination of the television network because it was a “drag on the company’s financial resources” (“DuMont Faced” 94). During the same meeting it was revealed that the DuMont Network had lost a total of $16 million from 1947-1955 although profits from the three owned-and-operated stations had cut the total broadcasting loss to $5.5 million (“DuMont Faced” 94). As of February, 1955, only 29 stations remained in the DuMont Television Network (“DuMont Live TV” 127).

As network programs and the number of network affiliates continued to decline, the representative of Loeb-Rhodes who had been elected to the DuMont Laboratories Board of Directors publicly hinted that some of the board members doubted Allen DuMont’s financial judgment in connection with the network and DuMont-owned broadcasting stations. After the May, 1955, stockholders’ meeting the Loeb-Rhodes board representative stated that one objective of the proposed company realignment program was to “relieve Dr. DuMont of most of the load of administrative details and release him for creative work in the electronics field” (“DuMont Live TV” 128). This move to remove DuMont from the network and broadcasting divisions’ decision-making process may have been prompted by DuMont’s hesitancy to stop network operations as far back as 1953. Even then it was obvious that the network was in serious financial trouble and that the future financial gains were doubtful in light of the superior competitive position of CBS and NBC.

On April 6, 1955, the DuMont Television Network terminated its contract with the American Telephone and Telegraph Company for
leased network lines to its affiliates. It cost the network $3,000,000 to lease the connecting lines from AT&T in 1954, an expenditure that yielded a profit of only $150,000. Allen DuMont defended his decision to “let the network die” in 1955 rather than quit in 1954, stating that it would be cheaper in the long run. If the network had quit, DuMont predicted that it would have had to face numerous breach of contract suits from its affiliates (“DuMont Live TV” 127). For the first six months of 1955, the DuMont Network had gross billings of only $3 million. ABC, CBS, and NBC had $25 million, $108.3, and $90.7 million in gross billings respectively (“Network 6-Month” 208).

The last two regularly scheduled series carried over the DuMont Network were Studio 57 and What’s the Story. Studio 57 has been described as simply another weak attempt by the DuMont Network to produce a dramatic series. What’s the Story—a fairly successful quiz program last telecast on September 23, 1955—was the final entertainment show broadcast over the DuMont Network (Brooks and Marsh 916).

The DuMont Television Network continued operation through the summer of 1955. Programs were supplied to stations on film or through lines rented from AT&T on a per-program basis. During the summer of 1955, the total number of network hours per week offered by DuMont was 5-1/4—3-1/2 co-op, 1/2 hour sustaining, and 1-1/4 hours sponsored (“DuMont Network to Quit” 64).

Also during the summer of 1955, DuMont sold its Pittsburgh television station to Westinghouse for $9,750,000 (“DuMont Faced” 94). Business Week commented that with the revenue from the sale of the Pittsburgh station “DuMont was getting out of telecasting pretty clean” (“DuMont Will Spin” 115).

The DuMont Television Network officially ceased to exist on October 10, 1955, when DuMont stockholders voted in favor of restructuring the company by creating a separate corporation, the DuMont Broadcasting Corporation. This entity would manage the remaining broadcasting facilities of the DuMont organization including the New York and Washington stations and the DuMont television production center in New York (“DuMont Meeting Votes” 55). During the stockholders’ meeting, Bernard L. Goodwin was elected President of the new corporation and Allen DuMont was elected Chairman of the Board. Goodwin had been a DuMont board member since 1939, representing one of the board seats allotted to Paramount. He was also in charge of Paramount production interests at KTLA, the paramount television station in Los Angeles (“DuMont Broadcasting Officers” 100).
DuMont Broadcasting Corporation floundered due to the lack of resources after eliminating the network; since DuMont was no longer in the program production business, stations WABD and WTTG struggled to find television shows and sponsors ("When Radio Comes" 68). Goodwin stated after he became president that DuMont would enter the radio broadcasting field and purchase additional television stations ("Broader Network" 47). The DuMont Broadcasting Corporation did enter the radio broadcasting business one and one-half years after the corporation was formed. In April, 1957, Goodwin announced that his organization had purchased WNEW radio in New York City for $7.5 million. ("When Radio Comes" 68). Goodwin hoped that WNEW's financial and programming success would rub off on the television operation. He planned to use the skills of radio programming personnel to program his television stations ("When Radio Comes" 68), but the attempt was too little, too late.

In 1959, the stations owned by the DuMont Broadcasting Corporation were purchased by Metromedia. Ironically, these stations would later become the foundation of the Fox Network when Metromedia sold them to Rupert Murdoch in the 1980s. Prior to the Metromedia take-over, the name of the DuMont corporation was changed to the Metropolitan Broadcasting Corporation reportedly because advertising agencies were "sensitive" to the DuMont name (Gelman 46).

Even early in 1955, when it was obvious that the DuMont broadcasting organization would not continue with its existing financial and administrative structure, Allen DuMont was busy introducing an innovation in the television industry that he hoped would save his network even if it were a film network. In April, 1955 almost simultaneously with the announcement that the AT&T leased lines were being discontinued, DuMont Laboratories announced it had perfected a method of filming and televising programs at the same time. The invention, known as Electronicam, consisted of a television camera and a film camera mounted on the same base, using a common lens system that split the full image into the two cameras. By using the Electronicam recording process a show could be "filmed" in a matter of hours instead of days. When the production was completed it could be edited together rapidly because it was shot in sequence. In announcing the new system, a DuMont spokesperson stated, "We have effected an economically and esthetically sound marriage of television and motion pictures" ("DuMont to be Film" 28). The Electronicam system did attract some attention in the television industry, particularly from advertising agencies and sponsors. By June, 1955, several agencies had produced commercials
using the system in the DuMont studios in New York. Those agencies that had used the system reportedly were impressed with the speed and economy with which commercials could be filmed ("DuMont Electronicam" 55).

The Electronicam system was never put into widespread use by DuMont. It seems that once again DuMont was unable to foresee technological advances which were being made by his industry competitors. Bing Crosby Enterprises and Ampex had been experimenting with videotape since 1951 and the Ampex videotape system was formally demonstrated to the National Association of Broadcasters convention in 1956. RCA had also been experimenting with videotape in the early fifties and in 1955, in cooperation with Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company, demonstrated its half-inch videotape recorder ("Ingredients" 65). In a speech in September, 1955, the vice president of Young and Rubicam outlined the importance of videotape to the television industry particularly where networks were involved ("Ingredients" 65). Although the Electronicam system was introduced prior to videotape, the latter’s imminent introduction drew attention from the former.

After the DuMont Television Network and its owned-and-operated stations were "spun off" into a new corporation, there remained two major divisions of Allen B. DuMont Laboratories, Inc.—the consumer products manufacturing division and the oscillograph and cathode-ray tube manufacturing and research divisions. In fiscal year 1958-59 Allen B. DuMont Laboratories lost $16 million. The company was faced with selling its existing assets or going into receivership. In 1958, Emerson Electric Company purchased the DuMont consumer products manufacturing division ("Bypassed Pioneer" 33). The oscillograph and cathode-ray tube manufacturing division became part of Fairchild Camera and Instrument Corporation on July 5, 1960 (Fairchild Camera and Instrument Corporation 16). Allen B. DuMont was no longer employed by his own company when the last division was sold to Fairchild. DuMont was hired by Fairchild as group general manager of the A. B. DuMont Division of Fairchild Camera and Instrument Corporation until his death on November 15, 1965 ("Allen B. DuMont is Dead" 42).

In 1962, DuMont was asked by an interviewer from Forbes if he was pleased with his contributions to the television industry. He replied, "I've seen my ideas accepted in the American home" ("Bypassed Pioneer" 33).

After the DuMont Network folded, most observers said that there were not enough major markets to support a fourth television network.
Despite this claim, several serious attempts have been made to form a fourth commercial network. In July, 1966, Ohio warehouse owner Daniel Overmyer and former ABC-TV president Oliver Treyz started up the Overmyer Network, signing up 85 affiliates by autumn (Sterling and Kittross 388). A West Coast syndicate gained control of the network, the name was changed to the United Network and it began broadcasting a two-hour program from Las Vegas. The United Network broadcast to 125 stations for one month, but despite their 13 advertisers it was unable to pay AT&T line interconnection charges. It disappeared, never to return (Sterling and Kittross 388). Another full-fledged attempt to start up a broadcast network wouldn’t occur until the mid-1980s when Rupert Murdoch began the now flourishing Fox Network.

**Conclusion**

Beginning with his crucial enhancements of the cathode-ray tube, DuMont pioneered many important elements necessary to the growth and development of the television industry. His engineers also developed the kinescope process, the “magic eye” cathode-ray radio tuning indicator, and the first electronic viewfinder (“DuMont, Allen B[alcon]” 162-63; Lescarboua 30). The DuMont studios also pioneered many program effects, such as fadeouts and lap-dissolves which were created by adding or simple dimmer switches to the control board (Lescarboua 31).

In this same spirit, DuMont achieved a number of firsts in commercial television practice, but with little success. He tried to expand his network too rapidly both in the number of affiliates and the number of hours of programming available to affiliates each week. While DuMont was busy becoming the first commercial television network, the other networks, most notably CBS and NBC, were preparing for the time when rapid network expansion was most feasible. In the meantime they were experimenting with various program formats and securing talent for a period when coast-to-coast network connection was possible.

Prime time programming was a major problem for DuMont. A vicious cycle had developed at DuMont. The network wouldn’t or couldn’t pay for expensive shows that would deliver large audiences, thereby attracting powerful sponsors. When a quality show drew a large audience in spite of its budget, it was snatched by CBS or NBC. DuMont had the occasional successful show, including *Cavalcade of Stars* (before Gleason left), and Bishop Fulton J. Sheen’s *Life is Worth Living* program. The network never seemed to generate enough popular programming to keep it afloat, however—possibly because it lacked the backing of a radio network.
The radio networks that each major television network but DuMont possessed were advantageous to them for several reasons. The radio network provided financial support while television was growing—and requiring large amounts of capital—"an ironic situation in which one communications medium financed the development of its competitor" (U.S. Federal Communications Commission 44). Radio networks also provided their respective television network's administrative and program talent from which to draw. The other networks reportedly encouraged their most prestigious and financially successful radio affiliates to apply for television licenses. This situation seemed to be mutually advantageous to stations and networks. The station was assured of network affiliation, and the networks were assured of a well established and financially successful broadcasting organization for local affiliation.

The FCC "freeze" from 1948 to 1952 hurt the DuMont Network because during a period when the company was financially capable of expansion, 1948 to 1950, it could add few additional affiliates. The network did have a large number of affiliates compared to the other networks, but many of these appear to have taken only a few shows per week from DuMont and relied primarily on an affiliation with CBS and NBC. According to various issues of Broadcasting Yearbook, DuMont reported 45 affiliates in 1949. This figure increased to 62 by 1952, more than doubled to 133 in just one year, and peaked at 195 in 1954. It seems unlikely that these were actually primary affiliates, however. For the network's final year of operation DuMont still reported 158 affiliates (Sterling and Kittross 637). Analysts have suggested that DuMont's lack of primary affiliates was a key factor in the network's demise ("Allen Balcom DuMont" 91; "Lining Up" 70).

The FCC's 1948 ruling that DuMont and Paramount must combine the number of stations they owned under ownership rules hurt DuMont's ability to secure exclusive network owned-and-operated programming outlets. One question that remains unanswered is the amount of control Paramount actually did have over the DuMont organization. In 1949, the number of Paramount-controlled DuMont Board of Directors positions was reduced from four to three, but the FCC decision on Paramount control was not reversed ("The Hollywood TV" 87). Paramount may have had some degree of influence over management in the DuMont organization but Paramount apparently did not control the company.

It can be argued that the FCC played a major role in the death of the DuMont Network, and almost killed off ABC as well. Analysts have suggested that the FCC created more problems than it solved during the three-year freeze ("Lining Up" 70). It was decided that station licensing
should be done on a priority system, which completely ignored population density, requiring station allocation to be based solely on a “fair geographic apportionment” (Sterling and Kittross 300).

One important factor contributing to the demise of the DuMont Network was Allen B. DuMont himself. Many people thought of him as “…an inventor living in a cloud and an absent-minded-professor type to whom a dollar doesn’t mean a thing” (Thompson 19). DuMont was an intelligent and energetic engineer who, in the best tradition of American business, was willing to take risks and, in the face of formidable opposition, strike out on his own. During the 1930s when he started his business, he took risks and profited financially from them, but he also had the advantage of dealing in a relatively exclusive and unexplored area when making cathode-ray tubes and oscillographs. This was not the case with television—DuMont had to compete with financially successful organizations with considerable experience in broadcasting.

DuMont had been successful in business—he became history’s first television millionaire. But he was not always successful in managing his various business interests. Forbes noted in 1962 that “DuMont pioneered a vast new industry, only to end up as an outsider watching other men reap its success” (“Bypassed Pioneer” 33).

Business Week stated that DuMont was forced into television programming during the postwar years in order to provide a market for his television receivers (“DuMont Will Spin” 116). No evidence has been found to support this claim, however. In markets where licenses for television stations were being granted during the postwar period, there were sufficient license applicants to provide audiences with programming to stimulate set sales. DuMont became involved in television programming because he believed in its future. He may have remained in television broadcasting in order to uphold the title once given him, “the father of commercial television.” Perhaps if Paramount had been in a position to exert more influence over DuMont policy decisions, the company might not have died what some think was an untimely and unfortunate death.

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