

= Harold A. Lafount =

Harold Arundel Lafount (January 5 , 1880 ? October 21 , 1952) was an American businessman who served on the Federal Radio Commission from 1927 to 1934 . He was the father of Lenore Romney ; the father @-@ in @-@ law of businessman and politician George W. Romney ; and the maternal grandfather of businessman and politician Mitt Romney .

English @-@ born , Lafount moved to the United States as a teenager and grew up in Utah . He managed several local businesses and was active in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter @-@ day Saints . Appointed to the Federal Radio Commission by President Calvin Coolidge , he was in charge of the zone covering the Western United States . Lafount played an important part in developments and decisions regarding the regulation of the broadcasting industry in the U.S. , favoring perspectives that saw radio broadcasting as a fundamentally commercial enterprise . He was also an early influence in making radio airtime available to political candidates and parties .

Lafount later managed a number of well @-@ known radio stations in the northeastern United States on behalf of Arde Bulova and served as president of the National Independent Broadcasters . A licensing issue regarding a station Lafount co @-@ owned resulted in a protracted regulatory and legal matter that was finally decided in the U.S. Supreme Court .

= = Early life and education , marriage and family = =

Lafount was born in Aston town within Birmingham , England , on January 5 , 1880 , the son of Robert Arthur Lafount , originally from Belbroughton , Worcestershire , and mother Emily . He had at least one sibling , a sister called Elsie . The family came with Mormon missionaries to the United States in 1893 and settled in Utah .

Lafount gained a degree in civil engineering from Utah State Agricultural College . He returned to England as a Mormon missionary himself , arriving in Liverpool in August 1902 and being dispatched to Sheffield . However , he returned to the U.S. from Sheffield ahead of schedule in May 1903 due to illness .

On October 28 , 1903 , Lafount married Alma Luella Robison (born in Montpelier , Idaho , in 1882) . They had four daughters : Elsie (born c . 1906) , Lenore (born 1908) , Constance (born c . 1911) , and Ruth (born c . 1913) .

= = Early career = =

Lafount first worked as an assistant in his father 's hardware store in Logan , Utah , known as the Lafount Hardware Company , and then worked as its manager . He was in the hardware business for twelve years starting in 1903 .

Beginning in 1909 , while still living in Logan , Lafount held the position of general manager at the newly founded Pacific Land & Water Company of Salt Lake City , which acquired and developed land for agricultural and mining purposes . The company also had offices in Logan ; on one trip between the two cities , he escaped with only bruises when the gasoline tank of his automobile exploded , hurling him some forty feet . Lafount worked at Pacific Land & Water for ten years . He was then a receiver for the Sevier River Land and Water Company from 1923 to 1927 . By the mid @-@ 1920s , he was a manufacturer of earphones for crystal radio receivers . He knew prominent people socially , including LDS Church President Heber J. Grant and U.S. Senator from Utah Reed Smoot .

During the 1910s , the Lafount family had moved from Logan to Salt Lake City , where they lived in a large brick house located at Fifteenth South and Ninth East . From 1919 to 1924 , Lafount was bishop of the ward (ecclesiastical and administrative head of his congregation) in the same area where he lived . His wife worked for the church , was a leader in social charities , and gave well @-@ received dramatic readings . Daughter Lenore later described Harold as " a man of temper and drive " who was prone to angry outbursts .

= = Federal Radio Commission = =

Upon the recommendation of Senator Smoot , in November 1927 , President Calvin Coolidge appointed Lafount to the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) , a new federal body created by the Radio Act of 1927 to regulate radio use in the United States , and the first such separate agency . The commission had gotten off to a slow start earlier that year due to problems with vacancies ; Lafount was slotted for the Fifth Zone of the new entity , to replace original commissioner John F. Dillon , who had died shortly after taking that position . News of the appointment came as a surprise to the other members of the commission , since Lafount had little presence in the radio industry .

Upon arriving in Washington , D.C. , for his new position , Lafount wanted to thank the president personally . Told by an appointment secretary that he would need a new morning suit , Lafount spent \$ 175 to get one . After Lafount went to the White House and gave a brief speech of thanks , President Coolidge in response said only , " In case of doubt read the law . Good @-@ day , sir . " Lafount began traveling and working for the commission right away . The United States Senate subsequently confirmed Lafount by voice vote on March 30 , 1928 . Three other commissioners were confirmed at the same time , two by voice votes .

Lafount 's zone covered the Rocky Mountain and Pacific states as well as the territories of Hawaii and Alaska . He traveled frequently , as part of visiting all kinds of radio stations in his large territory . At one point during 1927 ? 1928 he took an 8 @,@ 200 miles (13 @,@ 200 km) trip in the zone , where he interviewed over 700 people , including over 100 listeners , representing over 100 radio stations . At another time during 1930 he climbed to high elevations in southern Colorado to hear the reception that ranchers , shepherders , and rangers received . Some smaller radio stations had unsponsored time available , and he proposed the creation of citizen @-@ based advisory boards to create programming for the benefit of community interests for such stations . Overall , however , he felt that too many small stations with weak signals were blocking reception of larger stations , and came to the conclusion that the number of stations should be reduced and the signals of the larger stations strengthened .

Over time , the commissioners ' activities became less bound to their particular geographies . Accordingly , Lafount became responsible for coordinating FRC activities with other government agencies and entities . Lafount was in the public eye ; The New York Times ran 140 stories that mentioned him during his stint on the FRC .

During his first months on the commission , Lafount was an informal member of the allocating committee that led to the FRC 's 1928 reallocation of the commercial broadcast radio spectrum under General Order 40 . Lafount subsequently supported the action , which enabled the growth of advertiser @-@ based broadcasting but was criticized by some as a giveaway of a public resource (in the form of clear @-@ channel frequencies) to large business and media interests . By 1931 , Lafount was referring to General Order 40 as " the structure or very foundation upon which broadcasting has been built , and upon which the success or failure of every branch of the radio industry must depend . "

Lafount believed that radio could help bring about a sense of national unity , which he favored , and that " common sources of entertainment " were among those characteristics that " constitute [d] bonds for making our people homogenous . " However , he believed that radio programming should be based upon what listeners in the mass wanted to hear , and not upon what some central authority (such as the BBC in the English model) thought they would be best off hearing . Overall , Lafount was quite satisfied with the work of the FRC , writing in 1931 that " experts everywhere " agreed that the U.S. broadcasting system " is as perfect as it could be made . "

The question of the educational value of radio was a constant issue , and by 1931 Lafount was strongly in the camp of those who believed that educational programming was on the increase . He said that there were adequate frequencies and hours for such content and defended the FRC 's role in this regard . But he stressed that radio was fundamentally an instrument of commerce and that the FRC should take no action that might imperil that . In an oft @-@ quoted 1931 statement , Lafount said , " Commercialism is at the heart of the broadcasting industry in the United States . What has education contributed to radio ? Not one thing . What has commercialism contributed ?

Everything ? the lifeblood of the industry . "

However , the extent to which broadcast radio was dominated by advertising and by commercial interests became a hot topic , with members of the public requesting that Congress step in and take action . Lafount often warned commercial broadcasters that they faced a dismal future unless they mended their ways in this regard . In a 1932 speech before a St. Louis meeting of the National Association of Broadcasters , he said that " overcommercialization " was indeed a problem , and that radio broadcasters were " selling their birthright for a mess of pottage . "

After witnessing early mechanical television in action , Commissioner Lafount said that the FRC was doing all it could to help develop the still @-@ infant technology in terms of regulatory issues . He wrote in 1931 that , " I believe that television is destined to become the greatest force in the world . I think it will have more influence over the lives of individuals than any other single force . " This remark has been quoted in several books about the history of television . He at the same time proposed the censorship of television , in order that objectionable images not be seen and the amount of advertising not be excessive .

Lafount became acting chairman of the commission during the latter part of 1932 . Believing that the radio broadcasting system in the U.S. was " typically American " and " suits our democratic temperament as no other system I have yet encountered would , " he urged broadcasters to air political programming and advertising during the 1932 U.S. presidential election . He thus became influential in the development of federal regulations specifying that candidates and parties receive equal airtime . Although a Republican , Lafount told broadcasters that they should supply free airtime and publicity to the subsequent Roosevelt administration 's programs created under the National Industrial Recovery Act , in an effort to help the nation recover from the Great Depression . He refuted Republican accusations in 1933 that the Roosevelt administration was trying to censor radio broadcasts .

= = Subsequent radio industry career ; second marriage = =

Lafount stayed on the FRC until its replacement by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 1934 , but was not appointed to that body . The FRC role had enabled Lafount to know not just many government figures but also the people running the growing broadcasting industry . Upon leaving the FRC , he became head of the broadcasting interests of the Bulova Watch Company . Arde Bulova , chairman of the company , either owned or partly owned several radio stations .

On September 8 , 1938 , Lafount 's wife Alma died in Washington , D. C. at the age of 56 . He then married Gladys MacDonald on September 6 , 1939 , but she died in New York on June 14 , 1943 , at the age of 40 . During these years , Lafount split his time among residences in New York , Washington , and Salt Lake City .

By 1941 , Lafount was president of the National Independent Broadcasters , which represented some 200 radio stations (out of 800 total in the nation) , focusing on those that were not affiliated with any network . During World War II , Lafount served as chairman of the radio committee within the New York City War Fund and subsequently was a member of the radio committee within the National War Fund .

In 1942 , Lafount became president of the newly founded , New York @-@ based Atlantic Coast Network , a regional network of radio stations , most of which Arde Bulova had an interest in . These included the well @-@ known stations WNEW in New York , WPEN in Philadelphia , WELI in New Haven , WNBC in Hartford , WFCL in Providence , and WCOP in Boston with WFBR in Baltimore and WWDC in Washington soon joining . He maintained this position through at least the late 1940s . He served as vice @-@ president of the Wodaam Corporation , which ran WOV , and the Greater New York Broadcasting Corporation , which ran WNEW ; both were part of the larger Bulova interests . He was also vice president of WNBC , a different station with those call letters in New Britain , Connecticut , and the Fifth @-@ Forty @-@ Sixth Corporation .

Lafount was also president of the Broadcasting Service Organization in Boston , which ran WORL . As such , he was a principal in a long @-@ running regulatory and legal case . In 1937 , Lafount and two others , Sanford H. Cohen and George Cohen , had acquired 70 percent of WORL , a

radio station in Boston , with Lafount becoming president . Accordingly , effective control of the station passed to Bulova . But Lafount and the others allegedly concealed the transaction from the FCC . During 1943 and 1944 , the United States House Select Committee to Investigate the Federal Communications Commission , commonly referred to as the Lea Committee , held hearings on various aspects of broadcasting regulation . Lafount 's matter was the subject of several days ' investigation by that committee in Spring 1944 . By late 1945 , the FCC was threatening to not renew the station 's license . The three co @-@ owners said they had not consciously violated any regulations , because they thought FCC notification was only necessary if a single person gained more than half @-@ control of a station . The commission claimed that deception and false reports had continued throughout the 1937 to 1943 period .

In April 1947 , the FCC denied the license renewal , saying that Lafount and the other owners had shown " gross carelessness and willful disregard [of facts] " in giving false information about the ownership structure and financial status of the station . The agency sought other applicants for the 950 AM band frequency , while Lafount appealed their decision in federal court . In December 1948 , the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit overturned the FCC on a 2 ? to @-@ 1 decision , saying that the FCC had acted " arbitrarily , capriciously , and unreasonably " in refusing the renewal . The U.S. Justice Department appealed , however , and in May 1949 , the United States Supreme Court handed down a brief , unsigned , unanimous decision that overturned the appeals court and stated that the FCC acted within its power when it refused the license renewal for Lafount and the other owners . The station , which had stayed on the air via temporary licenses , went off the air on May 30 , 1949 . (The station returned in October 1950 , under new ownership .)

= = Death and family legacy = =

Lafount died in Detroit , Michigan , on October 21 , 1952 , at age 72 in the home of his daughter Lenore . He was survived by his mother , his sister , and his four daughters . Broadcasting magazine wrote upon his passing that " Lafount was an important influence in the early development of radio regulation . "

George Romney had first moved to Washington , D.C. , in 1929 in order to remain near Lenore Lafount following her father 's appointment to the FRC . They married in 1931 . Social connections through the Lafounts enabled George to gain greater visibility in Washington business and political circles during the 1930s . By the late 1940s , Harold Lafount had been so impressed with his son @-@ in @-@ law that he asked lawyers to investigate whether the latter 's Mexican birth would still make him eligible to run for president ; they reported in the affirmative .

Following Lafount 's death , George became chairman and president of American Motors Corporation and Governor of Michigan . He did indeed run for president in 1968 , but the campaign was unsuccessful , after which he became U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development . However , George 's son , Mitt Romney (of whom Lafount is the maternal grandfather) , became cofounder and CEO of Bain Capital , president and CEO of the Salt Lake Organizing Committee for the 2002 Winter Olympics , and Governor of Massachusetts , and was the nominee of the Republican Party in the 2012 U.S. presidential election .