

KMA RADIO

**The
First Sixty Years**



by

Robert Birkby

KMA RADIO

The First Sixty Years



by

Robert Birkby

Dedicated to the radio listeners of the Midwest.
Their loyalty to KMA has made this story possible.

KMA RADIO: THE FIRST SIXTY YEARS

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“The story of a big radio station like ours is fascinating, and I think we can give it to you if you’d like to read it. The story isn’t too technical when it’s told right, either, because the story of radio is necessarily a story of people, and people are always interesting.”

Earl May

KMA Guide, 1945

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PREFACE

Researching the story of KMA has allowed me to enjoy a rewarding journey through the history of the Midwest. The radio station does not lift cleanly from the past, but rather reveals itself to be an integral part of the region, tightly woven into the fabric of the society that supported it and which it helped shape. In the last sixty years there have been few events in southwest Iowa which were not touched by KMA, and few developments which did not, in turn, affect the radio station. In many ways, KMA has been a mirror reflecting the experiences of the people it has served.

I am especially grateful to Ed May for his encouragement and support throughout the completion of this project. His interest in a true account of KMA and his willingness to allow me access to the resources of both the May Broadcasting Company and the May Seed & Nursery Company have added immeasurably to the thoroughness of my work.

I also appreciate the tremendous contribution made by the dozens of people who have shared their memories. Listed at the end of the book, they have entertained and enlightened me with a wonderful verbal history of radio in Shenandoah. Station manager Andy Andersen and the rest of KMA's present staff have been equally generous with their time and their observations about the present radio scene.

Librarian Gerry Rowland and the staff of the Shenandoah Public Library have exhibited great diligence in satisfying my appetite for obscure materials, and great patience in accepting my virtual residency in their archives. I am also indebted to Raymond Nemec and Nadine Dreager for their help in assembling the appendixes, and to the Driftmier Company for permission to use excerpts from *Kitchen-Klatter Magazine*.

Finally, I wish to extend a special thanks to C. W. Fishbaugh. His devotion to the story of Shenandoah and his contagious delight in documenting one of the Midwest's most historically significant towns have done much to encourage my own writing.

Sidney, Iowa
May 20, 1985

Robert Birkby



Barton Studio

Edward May

FOREWORD

On August 12, 1925, KMA radio first began broadcasting programs to the people of the Midwest. With the celebration of the station's 60th anniversary on August 12, 1985, I'm very pleased to share with you a complete history of KMA from its beginnings to the present.

I have frequently made the statement, "It is a shame my father Earl May didn't keep a diary or write his memoirs prior to his death in 1946." He was a pioneer in the field of broadcasting, and pioneers have many remarkable experiences. A pioneer like my father also leaves a trail that others may follow and perhaps even extend. That is exactly what we have attempted to do at KMA.

The history of KMA closely parallels the development of radio in the United States. Like most stations, KMA has experienced both good times and bad, but it has endured and continues as always to be a unique, outstanding radio station.

I was a small boy when KMA began broadcasting, and I literally grew up at the station. I have vivid memories of early programs such as the Country School, and of musical groups such as the Blackwood Brothers, the Stump-Us Gang, and the dozens of others who sang and played before the microphones of KMA.

Through the years it has been a great pleasure and has given me much personal pride to have been a part of the growth of KMA and the May Broadcasting Company. If Earl May were alive today, I'm sure he would be proud of the company and its achievements, and he would know as I do that the the success of KMA and the May Broadcasting Company has been accomplished through the tremendous efforts of the many fine individuals whose stories are contained in these pages.

I hope you enjoy reading the story of radio station KMA. I particularly want to thank Bob Birkby for stopping by a year ago to visit about KMA's past and then agreeing to research and write the station's history.

Sincerely,

Edward May

Chapter I

SOWING GOOD SEED

On a warm spring night in 1920, the sky over Shenandoah, Iowa, was spangled with stars. A few gas lamps flickered along tree-lined streets paved with bricks or with creosoted wooden blocks. Apple trees were in blossom, and the scent of tulips and new-mown grass sweetened the still air. In those homes wired for electricity, light bulbs illuminated a room or two. Beyond the city limits in farmhouses scattered alongside muddy roads, the only light came from the glow of kerosene lamps burning just long enough for farm families to find their ways to bed. The night was quiet and dark, and the sky silent and clear. But the silence was about to be broken.

There were lights shining from the windows of the seedhouses of Shenandoah's great nurseries as employees worked late to fill the rush of springtime orders. E. S. Welch's Mount Arbor Nurseries, David S. Lake's Shenandoah Nurseries, and the Henry Field Seed Company had been Shenandoah enterprises since before the turn of the century. Founded by Iowa pioneers and the sons of pioneers, these institutions had their roots deep in the good black soil of southwest Iowa's Nishnabotna River valley. Slowly growing into stable, reliable institutions employing hundreds of workers, they had satisfied so many thousands of

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customers across the nation that Shenandoah was becoming an important center of wholesale and retail seed and nursery stock.

The richness of the soil and the successes of the nurseries encouraged many men to seek their fortunes in seed. In addition to the companies of E. S. Welch, Lake, and Field, Shenandoah over the years saw Ratekin's Seed House, the J. C. Welch Nursery, the Iowana Nursery, the Jackson Nursery, the Farmers' City Nursery, and the Armstrong Seed Company. In Hamburg, fifteen miles to the southwest, the Sjulín brothers established the Interstate Nurseries. In Clarinda, fifteen miles to the east, the Berry family had built up the Berry Seed Company. Some of these nurseries struggled a few years and then sold out to the more established firms. Others are still thriving today. Of those that survived, one seed company not only matched the success enjoyed by its predecessors, it has also left an indelible mark on the lives of nearly everyone in the Midwest. That firm is the May Seed and Nursery Company.

Born on March 21, 1890, in the short-grass range country of western Nebraska, Earl Ernest May grew up on the ranch his parents had homesteaded near Hayes Center. Like many energetic youngsters, young Earl



The view looking north on Elm Street in 1909 suggests the prevalence of seed businesses in Shenandoah a decade before the founding of the May Seed & Nursery Company. At the head of the street is Ratekin's seedhouse, eventually replaced with a Field Company warehouse. To the left of the photograph is the building of J. J. Armstrong & Sons, Seedsmen. That lot was to become the site of the May seedhouse and Mayfair Auditorium, and today of the May company corporate offices. Across the street and near the buckboard wagon is the current location of the KMA studios.

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had big plans, not the least among them a desire to attend college. Unfortunately, there wasn't much money in the May family for such a luxury. Determined to earn his own way, Earl raised turkeys, trapped animals, hunted wolves for bounty money, and even skinned out cattle that had died in the harsh Nebraska blizzards and sold the hides in town.

When he graduated from high school, Earl still lacked sufficient funds for college, but his diploma did qualify him to become a country school teacher near Wauneta, Nebraska, for \$50 a month. That wasn't a great deal of money even in those days, but it certainly paid better than wolf hunting, and it was no doubt a vast improvement over skinning frozen cattle. Although Earl was only a year or two older than his oldest students, he was a husky young man with a commanding voice, and he quickly learned to hold his own in a prairie classroom.

The next year he enrolled at Fremont Normal College, Fremont, Nebraska, to study education. After completing his training, he went home to become principal of Hayes Center High School. He was twenty years old, he was earning seventy dollars a month, and he was restless.

In 1911, Earl May left Nebraska and entered the University of Michigan law school. Perhaps more importantly, he spent the next few summers working for the D. M. Ferry Seed Company, traveling the eastern United States on horseback as a salesman. Going door to door, he learned to think on his feet as he attempted to gain the trust of potential customers and persuade them to purchase Ferry seeds.

One of the stories he enjoyed telling of his days on the road concerned the sweltering afternoon he rode into a little village in Kentucky. Earl was tired and dusty, and he was eager to find a hotel where he could take a bath and rest. "Pardon me, sir," he said to a man standing on a corner, "where is the best hotel in town?"

"Well," the man replied, "there ain't no best, but the least worst is two blocks down the street!"

Due to the death of his father, Earl left the University of Michigan after his second year and returned to Hayes Center to help run the family ranch, but he didn't stay long. Soon he had enrolled in the University of Nebraska where he continued his law studies. He also met a student from Shenandoah, Iowa, named Gertrude Welch, the daughter of Edward S. and Ida Welch.

As a youngster growing up on a farm northwest of Shenandoah, E. S. Welch had tended fruit trees and other nursery stock for David Lake's Shenandoah Nurseries. Nine years later in the fall of 1891, Welch bought a small concern called Mount Arbor Nurseries. That same year, his wife gave birth to Gertrude. The nursery company steadily expanded, and by the time Gertrude had completed her course work at the University

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of Nebraska, Mount Arbor had become one of the more successful wholesale nurseries in the nation.

With their college degrees in hand, newlyweds Earl and Gertrude May made their home in Shenandoah. Despite his recently completed studies, law did not particularly interest Earl, especially in Shenandoah where the name of the game was the nursery business. The sons of David Lake were running the Shenandoah Nurseries well, and Henry Field, a contemporary of E. S. Welch, was known throughout the Midwest for his honesty, folksy charm, and newsy *Seed Sense* catalogues. Catalogues and mail-order merchandising were opening the world to the Shenandoah nursery companies. For a man of vision, a life spent poring over legal briefs in a stuffy office could seem very dull indeed. Earl sized up his options and got a job in his father-in-law's nursery.

A naturally quick learner, Earl May's childhood experiences had also made him a hard worker. For several years he threw himself into the task of mastering the nursery business, and he could have had no better teacher than E. S. Welch, a man known in his industry as "the dean of American nurserymen." In 1919, with the financial backing and advice



Newlyweds Gertrude Welch and Earl Ernest May made their home in Shenandoah.

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of Mr. Welch, Earl founded the Earl May Seed and Nursery Company. E. S. Welch and Gertrude May were both members of the board of directors.

For five lean years the business struggled. While the “Seedhouse Folk” working at the Henry Field Seed Company numbered in the hundreds, Earl could afford only a handful of employees. They put in long hours preparing catalogues, writing letters, soliciting customers, and filling orders. Gradually the mailing lists grew, and at last the company showed a small profit. Earl, Gertrude, and E. S. Welch must have breathed sighs of relief. With a little luck and a lot more hard work, the new company should continue its slow growth. Perhaps someday, years down the road, it might even taste the successes of the Mt. Arbor Nurseries and Henry Field’s operation. Of course, not even men of foresight could have imagined the power of that new-fangled thing called radio.

The night skies over Shenandoah were silent and clear, and the stars sparkled. In 1920 only KDKA, a tiny station in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, which broadcast for an hour each evening, held a radio license. Ships were using radios, and a number of amateurs were experimenting with



E.S. Welch, founder of the Mount Arbor Nurseries.

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primitive transmitters and receivers, though radio waves seldom wandered into the pristine air over the American heartland. Midwesterners had few radio receivers with which to capture the faint, distant voices, but that's not to say they weren't excited about the possibility of hearing sounds riding magically through what many were calling "the heavenly ether."

In June of 1922, the Department of Commerce listed ten broadcasting stations licensed to operate in Iowa:

<i>Station</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Controlled By</i>
WOI	Ames	Iowa State College
WOC	Davenport	Palmer School of Chiropractic
WGF	Des Moines	Register and Tribune Company
WEAB	Fort Dodge	Standard Radio and Equipment Co.
WHAA	Iowa City	State University of Iowa
WGAI	Shenandoah	W. H. Gass
WEAU	Sioux City	Davidson Brothers
WHAE	Sioux City	Automotive Electric Service Co.
WEAZ	Waterloo	Donald Redmond
WHAC	Waterloo	Cole Brothers Electric Company

Among them was WGAI, constructed by a young Shenandoah radio enthusiast named Harlan Gass. Harlan operated the station in the home of his parents, using a hundred watts of power. During the irregular hours he was on the air, Gass gave weather forecasts, played phonograph records, and recited poetry. Since so few people had radio receivers, Harlan strung a single-strand wire antenna across the interior of the Empress Theater in downtown Shenandoah and hooked it to loudspeakers he had built and mounted on the stage. On an appointed evening, curiosity seekers jammed the theater to hear Harlan broadcast from his house a few blocks away. "This is Harlan Gass at 603 7th Avenue," he announced, and then he read a poem. The listeners in the theater, most of whom had never heard a radio transmission, were thrilled.

As excitement about radio grew, many people made their own crystal radio sets. With a copper wire wrapped around an empty Quaker Oats box, a forty-foot antenna wire leading out the window to a tree or post, a battery for power, a set of headphones for listening, and a thin wire called a *cat's whisker* touching a piece of mysterious crystal that no one ever did quite understand, a lucky listener could sometimes pull in a program from Pittsburg, Philadelphia, or even New York. The voices of Rudolph Valentino and Al Jolson sang through the headphones. A number of stations broadcast Hawaiian music, perhaps because its distinctive twang carried well over crude equipment.

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By the end of 1922, over 500 stations across the nation had turned on their transmitters and let their signals fly, all of them on about the same wave lengths. Powered by 500- or 1000-watt transmitters, they were owned by department stores, stockyards, newspapers, hotels, and just about anyone else able to afford the \$3000 minimum start-up costs of a modest station. Crystal radio sets appeared in more and more homes, especially those which housed youngsters who had found instructions for making the radios in magazines and Boy Scout manuals. Some concerned parents banished receivers to the attic or the back porch so that if one of the contraptions blew up, it would take out only a portion of the house. (Their concerns were not totally unfounded. When the aerial they were trying to erect touched some overhead wires, two young men in Nebraska disrupted electrical service to three towns. The power company politely requested that they have the courtesy not to do that again.)

Hardware and appliance stores began stocking crystals, copper wire, and batteries, and businesses like Shenandoah's Benedict Piano Company started selling tube radios with dials that allowed for more accurate



Henry Field's seed company was among the largest in the country.

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tuning. "Cruising and perusing the airwaves" became a favorite pastime as folks stayed up far into the night fiddling with their crystal sets and adjusting the dials on their tube radios in order to hear the faraway places.

By 1923, the places were no longer so distant. A station at the University of Nebraska broadcast classes for credit and charged \$12.50 per student. WAAW, a tiny two-watt transmitter, was used once a day by the Omaha Grain Exchange to broadcast market information. And the Woodmen of the World, a combination fraternal organization and insurance company, established 1000-watt radio station WOAW in Omaha, Nebraska, just sixty-six miles by dirt roads from Shenandoah.

While the big stations in New York and Chicago could attract famous entertainers to perform in their studios, the hundreds of stations in the hinterlands had to make do with whatever was available. Dubious federal regulations discouraged them from playing phonograph records, and they did not pay performers for their services. Yet when it came to finding talent, no station experienced much difficulty. It seemed as though everyone wanted to go on the air.

On September 3, 1923, "Appearing under the auspices of the Benedict Piano Company," a group of Shenandoah citizens journeyed to the WOAW studio in Omaha and broadcast a two-hour program of band numbers, fiddle music, old-time hymns, and a talk by Henry Field on the advantages of his hometown. The program was such a success that others in Shenandoah were quick to oil their instruments, rosin their bows, clear their throats, and begin practicing. A few weeks later on September 16, the Shenandoah Congregational Church sponsored a WOAW program that included vocal selections by Gertrude May, bank tellers Floyd and Jessie Young, high school principal Grady Fort, dentist J. D. Bellamy, postmaster Harry Day, and piano teacher Ruth Farnham. Congregational minister H. H. Pittman delivered a sermon entitled "A Working Faith for Today," but found it unsettling to preach to listeners he could not see.

Since so few people in Shenandoah owned radios, Worley Benedict of the Benedict Piano Company placed a receiving set in the Congregational Church for the convenience of those who wished to hear their friends on the air. The church was packed, and the broadcast was deemed a great success. The roads were so muddy that the new radio performers did not get home until 5 o'clock the next morning, but not even that could dampen their exuberant spirits.

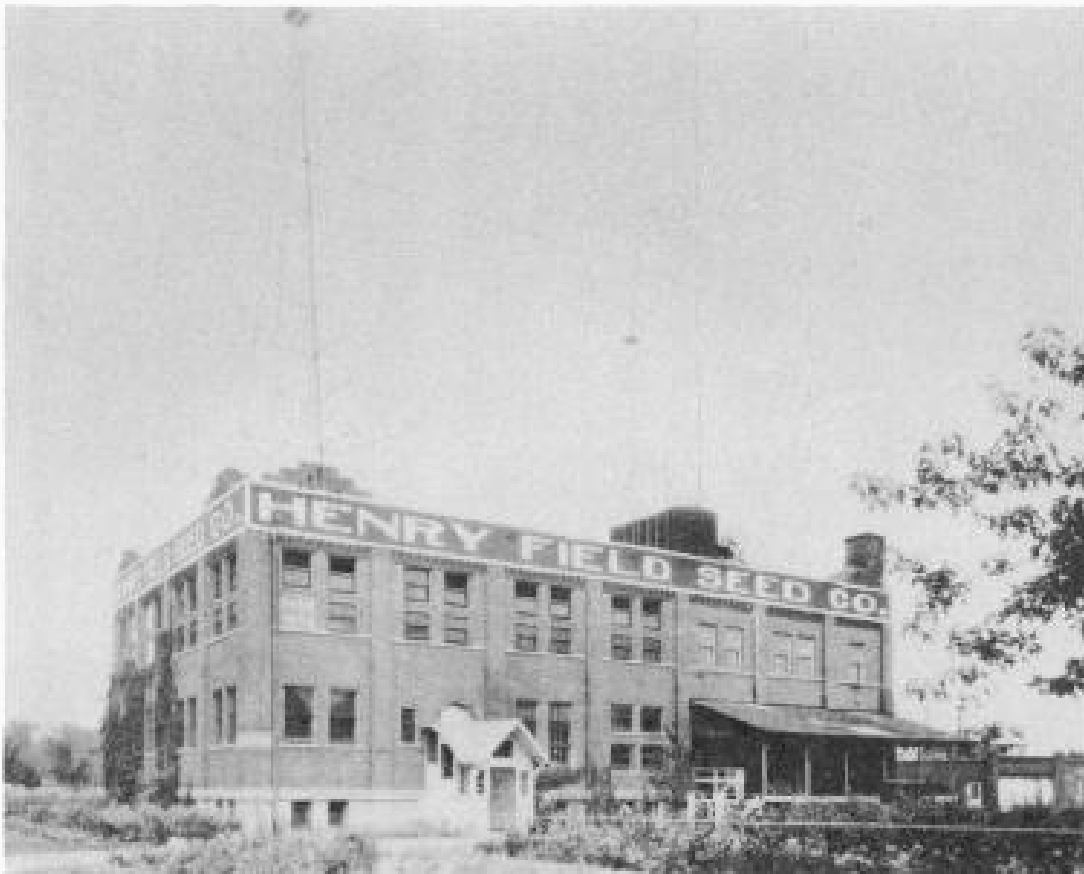
In the months that followed, Henry Field and his Seedhouse Folk drove to Omaha several times to broadcast, as did the Shenandoah Men's Gospel Team, the Glenwood Commercial Club, most of the town of Farragut, and a good share of the rest of the populace within a sev-

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enty-five mile radius of Omaha. (Farragut's program was highlighted by J. J. Whisler's talk on driver safety, which garnered telegrams of congratulations from as far away as Vermont.)

Gene Rouse, the cordial WOAW announcer who was known over the airwaves simply as "G.R.", introduced each group of artists and helped them maintain an appropriate air of decorum. Henry Field's fiddlers notwithstanding, radio was serious business. Most of the music consisted of classical and religious numbers or old-fashioned favorites, and speakers did their best to match the formal modulations of "G.R."

In Shenandoah, Earl May listened to the programs. Gertrude had surely told him how much she enjoyed singing over WOAW, and everywhere he went, people praised the programs of the communities, the clubs, and the Henry Field Seed Company. The more Earl heard, the more eager he became to take to the airwaves himself.



"Seed House No. 1" contained the offices of the Henry Field Seed Company.

Chapter II

THE OMAHA CONNECTION

By the beginning of 1924, the skies of America were alive with the signals of hundreds of broadcasting stations, but for the people of a little farm town in southwest Iowa there was more in the air to think about than music and voices. The ZR-1, the Navy's newest giant dirigible, had just been christened *The Shenandoah*. Secretary of the Navy Marion Thurber Denby informed the city council that the name had probably been selected at the suggestion of Shenandoah attorney Earl Ferguson, and a wave of community pride swept through the town. The Kiwanis discussed purchasing a silver service to present to the officers. Women's clubs baked cookies for the crew of the airship its admirers called "The Daughter of the Stars."

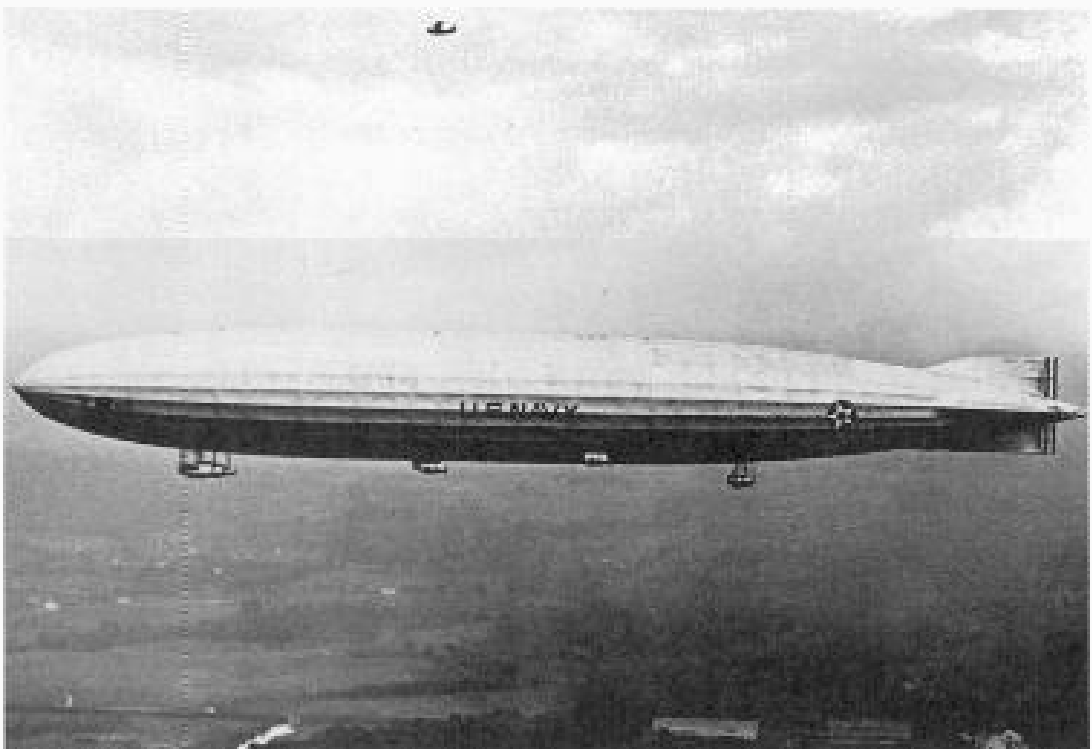
A member of Shenandoah's chapter of the Woodmen of the World organization, Earl May was busily arranging to have some of his employees and friends broadcast a program of music and talks over radio WOAW. As he prepared for the May Seed and Nursery Company's radio debut, he sent a note to the Navy Secretary's wife, the woman who had christened the dirigible, and informed her that Mrs. May would dedicate a song to her during the broadcast. Mrs. Denby promised to tune in.

On the afternoon of January 17, 1924, the May Seed and Nursery Company performers climbed aboard the Farmer Brothers' bus for the

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bumpy ride west to Sidney and then north through Tabor, Glenwood, and Council Bluffs to Omaha. The group included a number of veterans of the previous September's Congregational Church broadcast. When they reached Omaha, Earl treated them to a steak dinner at the King Fong Chinese restaurant, and then they made their way to the WOAW studio for the 9–11 p.m. program. The Page County Farmer Band of Clarinda was just finishing its 7–9 p.m. broadcast as the May group arrived.

Back in Shenandoah, a receiver placed in the May company seedhouse attracted a hundred people who sat on folding chairs and ate Jonathan and Delicious apples while they waited for the program to begin. Two hundred more gathered to listen at the Benedict Piano Studio, seventy-five at the Shenandoah Woodmen of the World hall, fifty at the Delmonico Hotel, forty-six at the Earl Fishbaugh residence, forty at the home of Duane Redfield, and twenty at the Henry Field seedhouse. According to the Shenandoah *Sentinel-Post*, "The receiving sets in Shenandoah were all busy snatching the music from the ether waves and making it audible to mortal ears."



The dirigible Shenandoah played a role in the first radio broadcast sponsored by the May Seed & Nursery Company.

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At 9 p.m., "G.R." introduced Mr. May, and Earl came on the air to convene the first Radio Camp of the Woodmen of the World—essentially a lodge meeting of the air, complete with the reading of minutes, a roll call of officers, reports by committees, a ukelele solo, and the installation of Earl May as Consul Commander of the W.O.W. World Radio Camp. It's difficult to imagine what the apple munchers down at the seedhouse thought of all this carrying on, but over at the Shenandoah W.O.W. hall there was fervent hope that having a local fellow serving as Consul Commander of the World Radio Camp would provide a welcome boost to lagging membership rolls.

With the completion of his official duties, Earl got the entertainment started. Gertrude sang "Rose in the Bud" and dedicated the song to Mrs. Denby. With Worley Benedict accompanying on the piano, Jennie Gottsch, Mrs. George Baker, Ruth Farnham, and Harry Day each sang solos, followed by the Masonic Quartet. Earl May discussed the christening of the dirigible *Shenandoah*, and "G.R." read the letter Mr. May had received from Mrs. Denby. Prohibited from airing advertisements, Earl nonetheless offered to mail iris roots suitable for spring planting to the first 10,000 listeners who sent him a card. No doubt he included a seed catalogue with each gift, and added the names to his mailing lists.

He also announced that the Shenandoah National Bank was offering a prize of fifteen dollars to the listener who sent the studio a telegram from the most distant point. Nearly a thousand telegrams had arrived before the broadcast ended, one from a listener in Melrose, Montana. A number of the messages were read over the air. The program concluded with the singing of "Nearer My God to Thee," and then "G.R." closed by bidding, "Top of the morning to London, and a good night to Hong Kong!" It was 11:21 p.m.

The next day, "G.R." proclaimed that more telegrams and telephone messages had been received in response to the May company presentation than for any program WOAW had ever broadcast except for the results of the 1923 World Series. The final tally of congratulatory messages was 17,840, and the fifteen dollars was won by former Shenandoah resident Mrs. Frank Buntz, who, in Blythe, California, had heard familiar voices coming over her radio headphones.

A month later on February 22, Earl May and his radio entertainers returned to WOAW to broadcast again. The roads were very muddy, and sleet so completely obscured the windshield of the bus that the driver could only manage the final miles by sticking his head out the side window. Skipping their supper, the group reached the studio just in time to take to the airwaves at 9 p.m. The program was similar to the first May broadcast. Earl convened the World Radio Camp, then Gertrude opened the entertainment portion of the program by singing

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“The Star-Spangled Banner” in honor of George Washington’s birthday. Due in part to the enormous response drawn by the previous May company broadcast, “G.R.” explained that WOAW would no longer allow the reading of telegrams on the air, though the performers were welcome to dedicate songs to listeners who wired their congratulations.

At the conclusion of the program (“Top of the morning, London! Good night to you, Hong Kong!”), “G.R.” joined the May entertainers for a midnight dinner and then sent them out into the night for the long drive home. With two successful broadcasts under his belt, Earl had good reason to feel some confidence in his skill at the microphone and in that of the people who spent so much time preparing vocal and instrumental selections. Letters praising the broadcasts continued to pile up at WOAW and at the May seedhouse, and many of the listeners were requesting catalogues. Add to that the fact that broadcasting was just downright fun, and it must have been obvious to Earl that owning a radio station was the key to the future. But seeing the future doesn’t necessarily mean getting there first.

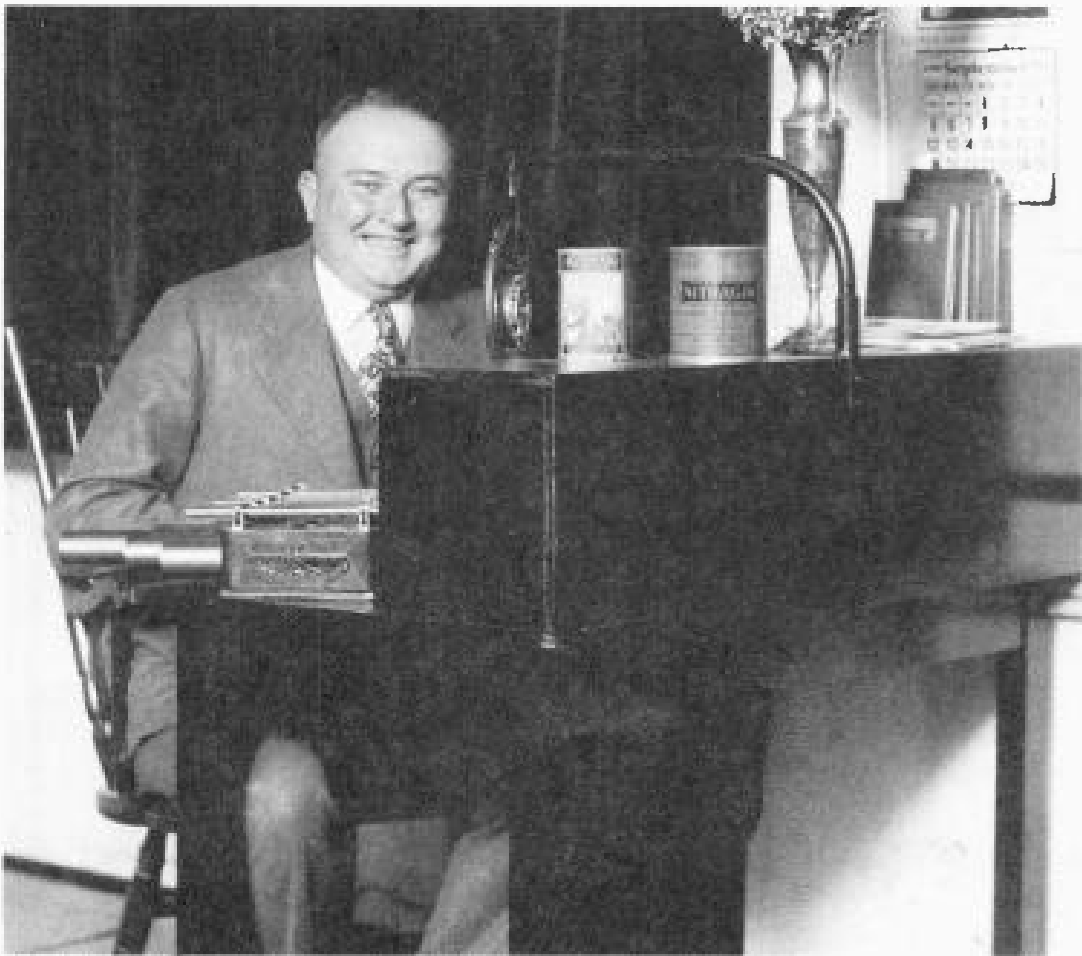


The May seedhouse studio had the feel of a comfortable parlor. Lina Ferguson. “The KMA Flower Lady,” broadcast many talks about gardening.

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On February 22, 1924, Henry Field and his Seedhouse Folk began daily broadcasts from Shenandoah over KFNF, the new 500-watt station of the Henry Field Seed Company. Listener response to “The Friendly Farmer Station” was immediate, enormous, and overwhelmingly favorable, and May’s once-a-month programs from WOAW paled in comparison to the daily offerings of the station Shenandoah could call its own. Transmission towers rising above Henry Field’s seedhouse symbolized his dominance of the airwaves, and in the May seedhouse three blocks away, Earl must have wondered if he would ever gain ground on so successful a competitor.

The monthly May-WOAW broadcasts continued, though the content of the programs gradually changed. There were fewer World Radio Camp rituals and a greater number of instructive talks. In addition to Earl May’s observations, an evening of music might be interspersed with a short talk entitled “Agriculture” by the president of a stock powder company, a discussion of home gardens by Lina Ferguson, and a discourse on the raising of baby chicks by E. A. Leacox, secretary of the May company.



Earl May's announcer's desk stood in one corner of the May seedhouse studio.

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Experience had also taught Earl the perils of bad weather and slippery roads when there were broadcasting deadlines to meet. The dinners at King Fong's restaurant were scheduled for after the WOAW appearances rather than before, and whenever the weather was stormy, the party would forsake the bus and travel to Omaha by train. In Shenandoah, interested listeners were cordially invited to hear the broadcasts over the radio at the May seedhouse where the *Sentinel-Post* promised that "delicious homemade candy will be passed around if the program gets monotonous or even if it doesn't."

As far as WOAW was concerned, monotony never seemed to have entered the minds of the management. In fact, officials of the Omaha station were eager to expand the role the May company played on their schedule. Through the spring of 1924, fans of the Earl May programs had sent in 66,000 letters and telegrams full of praise for the selections of the musicians and the helpfulness of the speakers. As a result, WOAW asked the May company to become the Agricultural, Horticultural and Poultry Division of the Omaha station, and Earl began a series of ten-minute horticulture talks at 7:30 p.m. on the evenings of the monthly 9 to 11 p.m. May-WOAW broadcasts.

In June of 1924, WOAW announced that the May Seed & Nursery Company would construct a studio in its own administration building in Shenandoah. The studio would be connected to the WOAW transmitter in Omaha via sixty-six miles of telephone line, possibly the longest remote radio hookup of its time. Rather than traveling to Omaha, Earl's musicians and speakers could broadcast over microphones in the May seedhouse, and the signal would be transmitted from the WOAW towers. In addition to a monthly two-hour evening program, the Earl May organization would also broadcast one hour each week.

It was a good arrangement for both WOAW and May's. The Omaha station envisioned the Shenandoah hookup as the first of many remote studios wired to the WOAW transmitter in order to provide listeners with programs of local origin from throughout the region. As head of a small business that as yet had neither the resources nor the personnel to support a radio station of its own, Earl saw the new arrangement as at least a major step in that direction. A studio in the seedhouse would give him the prestige and independence of being in control of an hour or two of airtime each week, and yet he would not have to sustain the overhead of transmitters and towers, or supply the amount of programming required by stations like WOAW and KFNF.

That summer, Earl May and E. S. Welch attended the American Nurserymen's Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Carrying a letter of introduction from WOAW, they visited the big radio stations in Chicago and observed how the studios were designed and how the programs

THE OMAHA CONNECTION

were run. When they got home they watched Northwestern Bell Telephone install the line from Omaha, and supervised the transformation of the flower and garden seed room on the second floor of the May Seed and Nursery Company into a studio.

A desk in one corner of the new studio held a microphone, and another mike stood on a wooden pedestal beside a grand piano. Thick carpets, which had been spread on the floor to muffle the sounds of footsteps, combined with overstuffed couches and potted plants to give the room the atmosphere of a large, comfortable parlor. A window had been installed in one wall of the room, and an audience of twenty-five people seated on folding chairs outside the studio could watch the proceedings through the glass.

On September 4, 1924, the first program was broadcast from May's Shenandoah studio. At 7 p.m., "G.R." switched on the microphone in WOAW's Omaha studio, explained to the listeners they were going remote to Shenandoah, and turned the evening over to the May studio. Announcer Grady Fort, who proudly referred to himself on the air as "G.F.", introduced each musician and speaker. Radio operator Red



Gertrude May often sang on the May-WOAW broadcasts, accompanied by Louise McGlone.

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Dryden, “a weaver of speeches who puts them on the wires from whence they are shot to Omaha,” sat by the studio controls and hoped the experiment worked.

It did. Even without the promise of free candy and apples, 300 people came to the seedhouse to listen. Bundles of telegrams piled up at the studio. WOAW praised “G.F.’s” choice of words and pronunciation, and the clarity of his voice “which deflects the modulation curve on the average of 96 percent.” Fans wanted to know more about Lina Ferguson, “The Flower Lady with the Million Dollar Voice,” and Earl was so pleased with the whole affair that after the program he took all the participants downtown to Shenandoah’s Mizpah Hotel for a late-night supper.

The two-hour October broadcast was equally successful. The musical numbers were interspersed with a talk by Earl May on “The Liming of Your Yard,” and a visit by Helen Field Fischer, Henry Field’s oldest sister, on “Flowers and Their Influence on the Home.” Four weeks later, May’s Mandolin Musicians, a sextet of mandolin and guitar players who were to become a mainstay of May broadcasting for years to come, were



Many community musical ensembles performed before the May company microphones in the 1920's and 1930's. In 1926, the Essex Municipal Band aired a program the last Friday of each month. Its members were, front row left to right: McMaster, Brookes, Lundgren, Sar, Okerlin, McCall, Moore, Johnson, E. Nordstrom, Hanson, Dunmire, Sederberg, Anderson. Second row: Kinney, Palm, V. Almquist, Brandt, Sherman, M. Hillman, Borland, E. Almquist, W. Carlson, Tavener, C. Hillman, W. Nordstrom, Bengston, Hipwell. Back row: E. Carlson, Shelstrom. Front and center, director Dr. Joy Rotton.

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the highlight of the November 4th program during which WOAW reported election returns and the May company served cider, crackers, and cheese to a seedhouse crowd of 500.

Among the letters of congratulations was a note from Henry Ford of Detroit, who thought "the flower and garden talks are wonderfully instructive." Theodore Roosevelt wrote to tell Earl, "Have enjoyed your programs immensely," especially the numbers the performers had dedicated to the ex-president. Officials of the Canadian National Railways reported that the October program had been heard by passengers aboard a radio-equipped transcontinental express, and they had enjoyed it all, even the talk on yard liming.

As the performers became more at ease before the microphone, the programs settled into a fairly regular mix of music and prepared talks on farm and garden concerns. With gardening authorities Lina Ferguson, June Case, and Helen Field Fischer, with E. A. Leacox on poultry, and with Earl May and E. S. Welch discussing seed and nursery matters, the May Seed and Nursery Company really could boast what WOAW called "a corps of experts."



E. A. Leacox, supervisor of the May Seed & Nursery Company hatchery, shared his expertise with radio listeners.

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There were also local musicians who appeared frequently enough to be considered May regulars. Among them were Ruth Farnham, Lavone Hamilton, Worley Benedict, Harry Day, Jennie Gottsch, Dr. Bellamy, Bobby Ross, Gertrude May, and May's Mandolin Musicians. They took themselves seriously, and yet it was very exciting. When Earl spoke, when the Mandolin Musicians strummed their instruments, and when Grady "G.F." Fort deflected the modulation curve at ninety-six percent, they had good reason to believe their voices and music were traveling thousands of miles across the land and being heard by millions. The Canadian National Railroad might be listening. So could Henry Ford and Theodore Roosevelt. The whole nation might be tuning in, for heaven's sakes, as Earl May suggested in promising to fulfill a request to have the May musicians perform the official alfalfa song of Pennington County, Minnesota. "Notify all the listeners in your territory through the papers and otherwise," Earl urged the residents of the Pennington area. "We will step on the song good and hard for you. It will give you national publicity."

But most importantly, it was the people of the Midwest who listened, people on the farms and in the small towns of what broadcasters were beginning to call "Radioland." If they were satisfied even after the novelty of radio listening had worn off, the May company's foray into broadcasting might be a success. If not, the studio in the seedhouse would probably join the hundreds of stations across the land that each year in radio's formative days fell silent for lack of an audience.

Chapter III

THE CORNBELT STATION

Encouraged by the success of the May Seed and Nursery Company broadcasts, WOAW tripled the number of programs it requested from the May studio in Shenandoah. May's Mandolin Musicians began appearing every Tuesday evening. Grady Fort gave up the initials "G.F." and joined Dr. Bellamy to form a singing team called The How-Do-You-Do Boys. Harp player J. V. Barborka, whose renditions of "Glow Worm" had met with wild acclaim, enjoyed his first appearances on the air so much that he announced he might move from Denison, Iowa, to Shenandoah in hopes of becoming a regular on the radio. The Page County Farmers' Band and similar groups from Tarkio, Rock Port, Tabor, Lenox, Coin, and other towns in the vicinity unleashed all manner of amateur music and dramatic readings in the general direction of the May studio microphones.

Many of the entertainers also broadcast from KFNF, where the Seedhouse Folk were celebrating the first anniversary of "The Friendly Farmer Station." In the year that KFNF had been on the air, the business of the Henry Field Seed Company had more than doubled, and the popularity Henry had long enjoyed throughout the Midwest seemed to explode. Every day, hundreds of visitors toured Field's seedhouse and

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One of the original towers of radio station KMA rose above the roof of the seedhouse, while the other stood west of the building. Four wires suspended between the towers completed the array.

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the studio of KFNF. Thousands wrote letters applauding the fiddling contests, religious services, songs by the Cornfield Canaries and the Seedhouse Girls, and the daily Letterbasket visits of Henry himself. As KFNF's success proved the feasibility of a small radio station appealing directly to a farm-oriented audience, Earl May could hardly wait to sever his dependence upon WOAW and strike out on his own.

In the spring of 1925, the Earl May Seed & Nursery Company received a license to operate a radio station, and Earl arranged to have Western Electric install a 500-watt Class B transmitter in the seedhouse. *K-M-A*, the call letters assigned to the new station, had been used during World War I by the U. S. merchant fleet. Broadcasting over the wire to WOAW, Earl May announced a contest to give KMA a slogan. First prize would be fifty dollars in gold, and the only qualification for entering the competition was that sloganeers indicate whether they would like to receive a catalogue. The first entries were not especially promising ("*K* for corn, *M* for May, and *A* for the last thing in Iowa!"), but it would be autumn before KMA went on the air.

Plans for the station required few alterations in the existing May seedhouse studio and reception room. Outside, though, the changes were dramatic. The parts for the two 150-foot towers arrived in July. Workmen from Omaha raised one on a six-foot thick concrete pad just south of the seedhouse, and the other on the roof of the building itself. They assembled the tops of the towers first, then constructed forty feet of scaffolding and employed block and tackle to lift the frameworks toward the sky as they built more of the towers underneath.

Cy Rapp, a radio operator who had helped establish a station at Atlantic, Iowa, arrived in town to serve as KMA's first engineer. Elsie Farnham, whose sister Ruth had sung on many May-WOAW broadcasts, came armed with a degree in music and liberal arts from Northwestern University to direct KMA's musical programs and to sing with Ruth and May Whitney Farnham as the Farnham Trio. Grady Fort agreed to alternate with Earl May as announcer. A new baby grand piano was moved into the studio in preparation for the dedication of KMA, and all over the countryside, musicians practiced their songs and radio fans watched the towers rise.

"Radio is the greatest factor in modern life today," Earl May declared in one of his last WOAW broadcasts as he discussed what listeners could expect from KMA. "The names of many of our radio entertainers are household words. Agricultural and horticultural talks will be based upon actual knowledge of information given over a period of years from growers and distributors of seed and nursery products.

"National news will be given during various periods of the day as well as baseball scores and a children's hour, and every effort will be made

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to give accurate and reliable information to thousands of listeners of KMA." The formal dedication was set for September 1, 1925. KMA would broadcast over wave 252, a frequency it would share with the fifty-watt Western Union College station in Le Mars, Iowa, which planned to broadcast only once a week. Although the May studio had the equipment of a class B station (the designation of mid-sized operations such as WOAW), the Commerce Department had assigned KMA the class A hours of smaller outfits. KMA would be on the air daily for an hour at noon, an hour in the evening, and two hours on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. At least that was the official schedule.

Late on the night of August 3, insomniacs tuning to wave 252 heard familiar Shenandoah voices and a few minutes of piano music coming over their radios as Earl and Cy Rapp ran a test of the transmitter. A few nights later, May's Mandolin Musicians played, and Gertrude May and Jennie Gottsch sang several solos. For the benefit of those without radios, Earl had a "broadcast cone," or loudspeaker, turned on in the street outside the seedhouse.

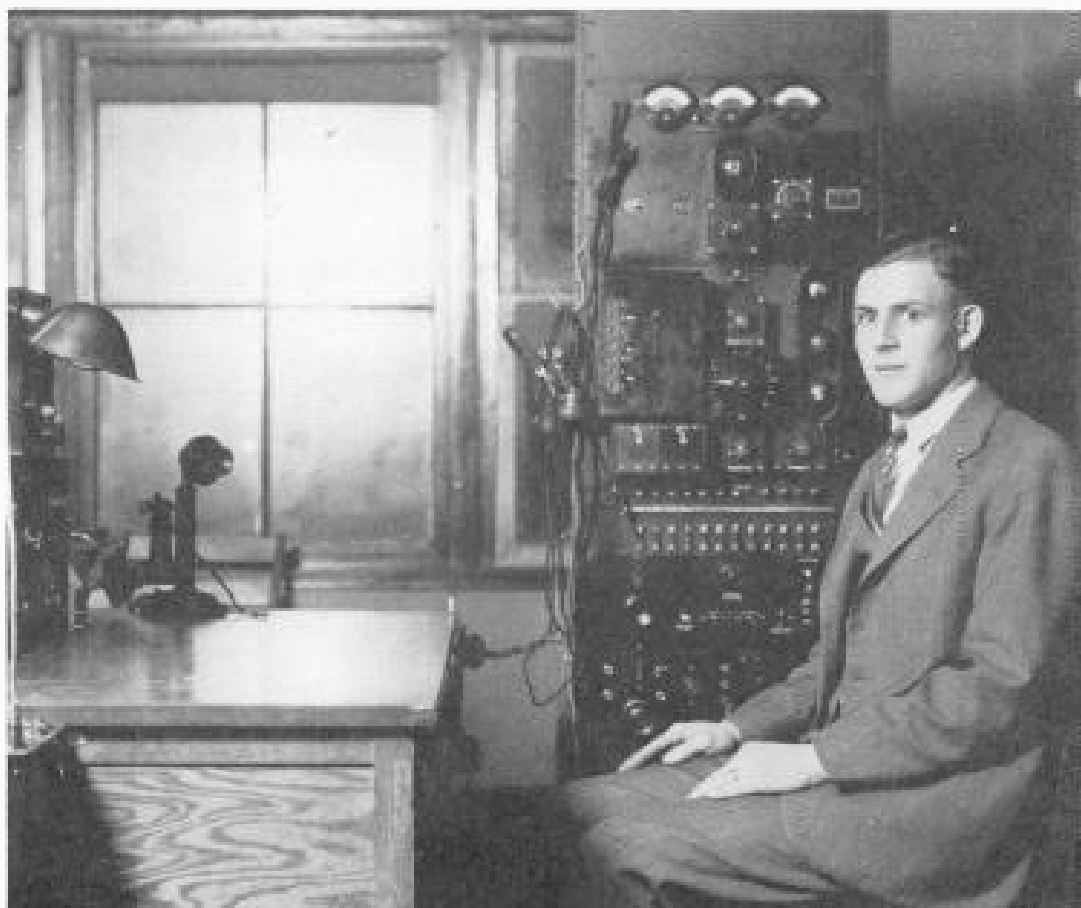


As KMA's first engineer, J. C. "Cy" Rapp directed the installation of the original transmitter.

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By August 12, the station was broadcasting with some regularity, and letters were beginning to arrive. A listener in Atlanta, Georgia, wrote to say he was “pleasantly surprised at the volume and clearness of your station.” Another in New Orleans claimed, “Your station coming in beautifully,” and a man in Philadelphia requested that someone at KMA “send me a stamp of some sort to show that I received your station.” No doubt Earl May sent him a seed catalogue instead. Meanwhile, entries in the KMA slogan contest were improving (“Kulture *Midst* Agriculture,” and “Kovers *Many* Acres”), but until somebody came up with a slogan he could live with, Earl was in no hurry to close the competition.

At noon on September 1, 1925, KMA officially took to the air. The drum, banjo, and piano ensemble of Mary Crandall and her cousins from Riverton, Iowa, kicked off a week of dedicatory programs, and in the days that followed, 175 performers passed before the May studio microphones. Among the vocalists were the How-Do-You-Do Boys, Floyd and Jessie Young, Louise McGlone, and Ormah Carmean. The Municipal Band, May’s Mandolin Musicians, and the eight members of Walt Nixson’s newly-formed Delmonico Hotel Orchestra played their



Arthur Rydberg, chief operator of KMA radio in 1926, sits before the radio transmitter equipment in the May seedhouse.

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hearts out, as did young Bobby Ross on saxophone, Lucile Driftmier on piano, and trombonist Earl Butts. There were speakers, too—Shenandoah mayor H. E. Deater, Judge G. H. Castle, Helen Field Fischer, June Case, and many others—talking on everything from community betterment to domestic science.

The wire connecting the May studio with WOAW was still in place, but now it could be used in reverse to transmit programs from the Omaha station over KMA's equipment. During the autumn of 1925, KMA used the line to air WOAW coverage of a speech by President Coolidge and portions of the Omaha American Legion Convention.

KMA also joined with KFNF to bring listeners the play-by-play of the World Series. Since neither station was licensed to be on the air all afternoon, KFNF would broadcast the first innings, then listeners would switch to KMA for the completion of the game. "Pate" Simmons, Henry Field Seed Company vice-president and "official ball game announcer," did the broadcasting for both stations, recreating the game from telegrams which kept him abreast of the progress of each inning.

With so much attention being directed toward the Shenandoah stations, it was natural for the broadcasters to wonder just how far their signals might carry. Despite the proliferation of new radio stations, the skies were still relatively uncluttered, and the static of city lights and neon signs was not yet a factor. At KFNF, Henry Field said that, "On a good clear night we would pour on the kilowatts and really tear a hole across the Midwest." Letters would come from listeners in all forty-eight states, Canada, Puerto Rico, and ships at sea.

Earl May was eager to flex the muscle of his station, too, and one crisp evening in late October he fired up the KMA transmitter and began an all-night broadcast in an effort to hurl a radio wave to Australia. No one was quite sure why the goal was Australia, except that it was about as far away from Shenandoah as anybody could possibly imagine. Earl did all the announcing for the Mandolin Musicians, the Delmonico Hotel Orchestra (which had begun calling itself "The Delmonico Dreamers"), and the Bedford, Iowa, band. Bill Garrison kept his cafe open so the performers could eat waffles through the wee hours of the morning, and farmers began calling the station at 5 a.m. to complain that they could not leave their radios long enough to milk their cows while the How-Do-You-Do Boys were singing.

Several days later, a cablegram arrived from a man in Haiku, Hawaii, who reported that the program had reached him fine, and that the music of the Delmonico Dreamers had been heard in Honolulu. The Shenandoah newspaper speculated that, "No doubt the little Hula maids had a merry evening dancing to the snappy music made by Walt Nixson and his merry makers." In fact, the little hula maids probably thought

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it more than a tad bit strange to hear a small-town band of businessmen and farmers attempting to play “Aloha, Oe” over the air from a place called Iowa, 3600 miles away.

While radio stations like KMA and KFNF were quickly gathering thousands of loyal fans, the broadcasting companies were restrained from selling advertising time even to defray their operating expenses. Based on a 1912 law hopelessly outdated for the broadcasting situation of 1925, federal regulations governing radio advertising were vague and open to interpretation. Still, a sort of gentlemen’s agreement existed among station owners to refrain from direct solicitations over the air. That’s not to say one couldn’t give away seed catalogues left and right, or encourage listeners to write in for prizes and, of course, add their names to the company mailing lists. Performers such as the Delmonico Dreamers were not paid for their time before the microphone. Nor did they pay, and yet everyone who heard their programs learned about the comforts of the Delmonico Hotel.

Some broadcasts were presented “Under the Auspices of Gauss & Simons Drug Store,” “Under the Auspices of the Frank Anshutz Jewelry



Among the first voices heard regularly over KMA were, from left, Jessie and Floyd Young, Earl and Gertrude May, LeOna Teget, Louise McGlone, Elsie Farnham, and the Honorable George Van Houten.

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Store,” or under the auspices of any of a number of other Shenandoah businesses. The programs could be anything from a concert by the Mandolin Musicians or Mrs. Dwight Nichols telling “Pollyanna Stories” for the children, to the Benedict Piano and Radio Company playing a few records on its new Orthophonic Victorola, a practice recently allowed. Some of the businesses may have made financial contributions to KMA for the privilege of having programs associated with their names—what would later be called “promotional considerations.”

As 1925 drew to a close, the May company was still working out the bugs at KMA, and yet the personality of the station was becoming obvious. From the beginning, KMA had encouraged talks on farming, gardening, agriculture and horticulture. The line to WOAW provided the first link in KMA’s eventual hookup with the national networks. The World Series broadcasts and the occasional readings from newspapers and telegraphed reports of current events were KMA’s first tentative efforts at sports and news coverage. “Domestic Science Talks” by LeOna Teget, Ormah Carmean, and June Case were forerunners of the famous KMA radio homemakers. Yet even while attempting to come



“The How Do-You-Do Boys,” Dr. J. D. Bellamy (left) and Grady Fort, were heard by listeners as far away Australia.

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across with a little more of the formality of "G.R." and WOAW than the absolutely down-home folksiness of Henry Field and KFNF, KMA chose programs that would satisfy the simple tastes of listeners whose lives centered around farms and small towns.

The slogan contest finally ended, and Earl May announced that KMA would be known as "The Cornbelt Station in the Heart of the Nation." And at long last a letter arrived from station 3LO in Melbourne, Australia. It informed KMA that on the night of October 30, several Australian radio operators had reported hearing over their headphones the faint but distinct voices of Doc and Grady, the How-Do-You-Do Boys, singing at the May studio 10,000 miles away.

Chapter IV

GOLD CUPS AND CONTROVERSY

In the clear darkness of a night in 1926, the citizens of Shenandoah could look up at the shining sky and imagine it extended far beyond the horizon encircling their little town. The invisible ether that carried radio signals radiated out from Shenandoah all the way to Australia, and to Alaska, Maine, Georgia, and all the other places from which radio listeners had sent letters proclaiming that they'd heard Shenandoah's radio stations.

On April 1, KMA broadcast a second all-night program of vocal and instrumental music, and a special contest feature. A typewriter was placed before the microphone and Mary Chase, a secretary at the Mount Arbor Nurseries, typed on it for three minutes. The listener who telegraphed in a message guessing the nearest number of strokes and words Mary had typed would win a cash prize. Everyone else would get a seed catalogue.

Weeks later, KMA received a letter from a listener in Balclotha, New Zealand. "You are coming in strong, even though we have static," he wrote. "Listened to you for one-and-a-half hours. Mayflower Trio, Mrs. May, and especially enjoyed Mary Chase on the typewriter."

But the big story in Shenandoah in 1926 was a race that would bring more prestige to KMA than anyone could possibly have imagined.

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Through the spring and summer of the previous year, *Radio Digest* magazine had conducted its first nationwide poll of radio listeners to select "The World's Most Popular Radio Announcer." That autumn, a gold cup purportedly worth \$5000 was presented to winner Graham McNamee, who reported everything from national political events to the World Series for WEA, the big powerhouse station in New York City. In second place and closing fast as the balloting ended had been Henry Field, who covered old-time fiddling, local weather, and gardening suggestions for KFNF, the little 500-watt Friendly Farmer station in Shenandoah, Iowa.

With the 1926 *Radio Digest* National Announcers' Contest balloting about to begin, both Earl May and Henry Field appeared to be serious favorites among the 129 contenders for the top honor. Then Henry did something that was remarkable, and yet in keeping with the spirit of Midwestern radio. He withdrew from the competition and threw his support behind Earl May so that, as Henry explained, "Earl may have a clear field to try his luck at lifting the gold cup this time."



With a May Seed & Nursery Company catalogue before him, Earl May broadcast farm and market reports. At his left stands the Radio Digest "World's Most Popular Radio Broadcaster" gold cup.

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Cooperation was essential on other fronts, as well. The national radio situation was in a constant uproar. The Federal Radio Commission in Washington had neither the power nor the ability to impose much order upon the chaos that the hundreds of stations were creating on the air waves. For a while, both KFNF and KMA were required to use the same frequency, wave 461. Each station would broadcast for an hour or two, then go off the air while the other got in some programming.*

Cramped by the limitations of sharing a frequency and aware of the inability of the Radio Commission to enforce its own regulations, KMA and KFNF joined dozens of other stations that had taken matters into their own hands. Without the approval of the Radio Commission, Henry moved his broadcasts to 360 meters and Earl, finding almost no interference at 460 meters, made that the new KMA frequency. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover chastised them along with other broadcasters he called "air pirates" because they had left their assigned frequencies, and warned that when and if the Commission was empowered to act, he would deal harshly with stations that had flaunted the regulations that did exist.

Hoover's threats seemed idle enough to a town that had Earl May leading the *Radio Digest* contest. And lead it he did, all through the summer and into August when the magazine announced that with 452,901 votes, Earl May had been declared "The World's Most Popular Radio Announcer." Over his own protests that everyone should back Mr. May, Henry Field finished the contest in 6th place with 153,783 votes.

"We sincerely congratulate him," the *Radio Digest* said of Earl. "Last year Henry Field, from the same little loyal community of Shenandoah, Iowa, almost kept Graham McNamee from winning. This year Mr. Field shunned votes himself but cast his support to Mr. May. Henry Field's spirit is commendable. The world has beaten a path to Shenandoah."

Upon hearing of the victory, thirty members of the Shenandoah Chamber of Commerce beat a path to the KMA studio, crowded around Earl May as he attempted to broadcast his evening radio visit, and sang "The Gang's All Here." Somewhat flustered, Earl promised that, "When

*In mid-1926, twenty stations were licensed to operate in Iowa:

WOI	Ames	WHO	Des Moines	KFMR	Sioux City
KOIL	Council Bluffs	KMA	Shenandoah	WJAM	Cedar Rapids
KFHL	Oskaloosa	WIAS	Burlington	WSUI	Iowa City
KFLZ	Anita	KFJY	Fort Dodge	KSO	Clarinda
WOC	Davenport	WEAU	Sioux City	KTNT	Muscatine
KFNF	Shenandoah	KWCR	Cedar Rapids		
KFGQ	Boone	KFQP	Iowa City		

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I receive the cup I'll fill it with cold tea or coffee or some sort of liquid and invite you to visit me again and I'll fry flapjacks for you with my own hands." He probably did not realize that he would soon be frying flapjacks for KMA listeners by the thousand.

It was, after all, the listeners who had cast their votes, and the listeners who were making KMA a success. Broadcasting to New Zealand was a real thrill, but it was the people in little Midwestern towns and on the farms of Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, and Missouri who regularly tuned their radio receivers and crystal sets to Shenandoah. They were the ones whose purchases from the seedhouse kept the station on the air.

"In presenting Mr. May with this cup which has come to mean a true expression of popularity in the hearts of radio listeners, we feel that the agricultural population of the Middle West has welded itself into a united expression the significance of which may be indicated in future political events," declared E. C. Rayner of *Radio Digest* as he presented the gold trophy to Earl in Chicago. "Ballots came in with letters signed by whole communities of people. One thousand votes came by one mail from one community in northern Iowa where there had been an organized



To celebrate his triumph in the Radio Digest contest, Earl May hosted a Gold Cup Jubilee and invited all his listeners to enjoy free pancakes.

GOLD CUPS AND CONTROVERSY

effort on the part of citizens, especially farmers, who knew Mr. May only by his voice on the air and in whom they recognized a farmer representative of this section of the country.”

The presentation ceremonies were broadcast over Chicago’s WHT and over KMA. For several days the gold cup was displayed in downtown Shenandoah for all to see in the window of the Leacox and Redfield Drug Store.

Shenandoah was a community accustomed to organized celebrations. Each summer a city fair drew hundreds of visitors to the fairgrounds to see exhibits and competitions, and a chautauqua brought educators, lecturers, and vaudeville entertainers to town for a week every autumn. At the Henry Field Seed Company, the KFNF second anniversary celebration the previous February had attracted 10,000 out-of-town guests to enjoy studio tours, free food, the performances of over a hundred old-time fiddlers, and thirty-six straight hours of radio broadcasts. Surely the winning of the gold cup warranted an extravaganza of equal proportion.

During the first three days of November, KMA held its first Jubilee. The station was on the air nonstop from Monday through Wednesday, and in addition to the usual performers and speakers, there were special appearances by the Pleasure Palace Orchestra from the Brandeis Department Store Tea Room in Omaha, and the Southland Jubilee Singers from Mississippi. There were also the Dixie Girls Hawaiian Musicians, advertised as “Two handsome young women, the Misses Alta Poff and Opal Webb, from Oklahoma City, and musicians that will outclass the native Hawaiians any time.” Alta and Opal were apparently going through the ukelele phase of their careers before settling on the country music that would later make them regular favorites at KMA.

People descended upon Shenandoah from all over the Midwest. They camped in the city park, rented rooms in private homes, and slept in their cars. On the first day of the Jubilee, 6,100 people visited the seedhouse and the studio, and most of them had a taste of what were to become the trademark of KMA Jubilees for years to come—free pancakes.

A large room in the seedhouse was designated the “pancake room,” and set up with serving lines and griddles big enough for cooks to fry sixteen pancakes at once. In exchange for having their names mentioned on the air and displayed in the seedhouse, various companies donated pancake flour, syrup, butter, honey, sausage, breakfast cereal, and even the cups in which to serve the “Mamma’s Choice” coffee. The cooks turned out ten hotcakes a minute for hours on end, and people kept lining up for more.

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Meanwhile, the broadcasts continued. Iowa's governor, a senator, and a crowd of other politicians addressed the radio audience, their eagerness to be on the air spurred in part by the fact that the off-year elections fell on the second day of the Jubilee. M. M. "Incubator" Johnson, whose chicken hatchery operated station KMMJ in Clay Center, Nebraska, brought his entertainers to broadcast for a few hours over KMA. KFNF remained silent in the evenings as a courtesy to KMA and to allow the Seedhouse Folk the free time to enjoy the fun down the street at May's.

When it was over, the cooks tallied up the numbers. In three days they'd served 25,000 people a total of 52,800 pancakes, ninety gallons of syrup, seventy gallons of honey, and 450 pounds of sausage. In one of its more astute observations of the event, the Shenandoah *Evening Sentinel* pointed out that "if the syrup was strewn out in the form of taffy, the cakes laid side by side and the sausages linked together, they would extend a long ways."

The effects of the Jubilee were felt beyond the seedhouses. In downtown Shenandoah, Goldberg Clothing reported the three busiest days they'd had in a long time. The Leacox and Redfield Drug Store declared that the Jubilee had brought in a lot of extra business, and that "one lady from Missouri bought twelve fountain pens for Christmas gifts." Conservative estimates suggested that the 25,000 visitors to Shenandoah had each spent \$2.00 while they were in town, no small change in Iowa in 1926.

As a final Jubilee contest, Earl May offered prizes to listeners who sent in the best poems written about the celebration. The winning entry was pleasant:

Earl May laughs and laugh he may,
He's going good on closing day;
Program good, reception fine,
Congratulations all down the line.

But it was a runner-up poem that caught the real spirit of KMA's first pancake celebration:

This Jubilee of Mr. May's
Has kept me up three nights and days.

Despite the success suggested by the Jubilee and the *Radio Digest* prizes, the Shenandoah radio stations were in trouble. Their difficulties had nothing to do with their popularity, for regional polls indicated KMA and KFNF had developed large, extremely loyal audiences. The

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Alta Poff and Opal Webb, "The Dixie Girls," performed during the early KMA Jubilees. In the years that followed, they often returned to Shenandoah to entertain crowds which delighted in their music.

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Nebraska Farmer's Radio Questionnaire listed KFNF and KMA as far and away the Midwestern stations "doing the most for the farmers." In an *Omaha World-Herald* poll to rank the stations of the region in order of popularity, KMA squeaked ahead of KFNF for first place, while in a similar contest run by the *St. Joseph Gazette*, KFNF edged KMA for second behind St. Joseph, Missouri, station KGBX. While it was true that rural listeners were more likely than urban audiences to participate in these contests and to organize unified support for their favorite stations and personalities, the evidence indicated a support for KMA and KFNF that ran very deep.

The threat to these stations lay not in the Midwest, but rather in Washington, D.C., where Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover and the Federal Radio Commission continued their efforts to rein in the runaway radio industry. Powerful forces were at work, and the stakes were extremely high. The National Broadcasting Corporation was linking together America's larger stations into two networks, NBC Red and NBC Blue, with programs originating from New York. The stations chosen to become links in the networks were primarily those with the strongest transmitters and the higher, more favorable frequencies. That left over 600 non-affiliated stations to battle one another for air time in the narrow range of the lower bands to which they were all confined. Finding it increasingly difficult to make their signals heard in the enormous clutter of transmissions jamming the assigned airwaves, many of the smaller stations did what KMA and KFNF had done in the summer of 1926—they defied the wishes of the Federal Radio Commission and moved their signals to higher, less crowded frequencies.

In the spring of 1927, Congress gave the Federal Radio Commission sweeping new powers, and Hoover again warned that unless the "wave length jumpers" took immediate steps to abide by the rulings of the Commission, they were in danger of losing their right to operate. Among the culprits in the Midwest, he specifically cited KMA and KFNF in Shenandoah, and KOIL in Council Bluffs.

Earl and Henry were no fools, and when the Commission assigned them both the relatively weak frequency of 270 meters, they resigned themselves to accepting the ruling. If the Commission had intended to deal harshly with them for their wave jumping ways, it had accomplished its intent, for, in addition to sharing time with one another, the Shenandoah stations also suffered occasional interference from other stations using the same frequency; one each in Texas, Oregon, and Hawaii, two in Georgia, and two in Pennsylvania.

Believing their rights were being infringed upon, both stations sent attorneys to Washington to lobby for better wave lengths. The commissioners felt little sympathy for reformed wave jumpers now claiming

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they were being harassed by new wave jumpers, and at first the Commission turned a deaf ear to their pleas. Then in August of 1927, the Commission offered Earl May a frequency of 760 kilocycles (394.5 meters) with the stipulation that he agree to split time with station KWKH, Shreveport, LA. KWKH had been using the frequency for some time, and KOIL in Council Bluffs had asked for, but had been denied, permission to share it. The manager of KOIL was Don Searle, a reasonable and accommodating man. W. K. Henderson, the owner of KWKH, seemed to be neither.

Famous for opening his programs with a hearty, "Hello World, this is station KWKH! How about a drink?" and punctuating his programs with "Doggone!" and an occasional profanity, W. K. "Hello World" Henderson was a familiar presence on the radio dial. He had little use for the Federal Radio Commission, and had flaunted his independence by becoming not only a wave jumper, but also by transmitting at three times his allotted power and using frequencies assigned to Canadian broadcasters. In the jargon of the day, that made him a wave length pirate, a power jumper, and a wave poacher. Earl May, who was accustomed to dealing in radio matters with his neighbor Henry Field,



"Harness Bill and the Harness Makers" performed many times over KMA. Harness Bill was Bill Kalash (right), president of the Omaha Tanning Company. "I can't sing or play, nor can I talk like Earl talks," he liked to say, "but I sure make good harness!"

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sent a friendly letter to this triple threat of the southern airways and asked Henderson how KWKH wished to comply with the orders of the Commission.

W. K. Henderson was not particularly inclined to comply at all. Nor was he interested in responding to communications from KMA, but that doesn't mean Earl didn't hear from him. Night after night, "Hello World" throttled up KWKH and loosed a fierce tirade aimed at KMA and KOIL, stations he assumed were trying to encroach upon his territory. While he was at it, he expressed his contempt for the Radio Commission, the Commerce Department, Herbert Hoover, chain department stores, and whatever else happened at the moment to offend him.

"They don't know as much about radio as a pig does about Sunday!" he thundered about commissioners. "I'll wager that not over one or two of them ever operated a receiving set before they got to be members of the Commission so what can you expect from them?"

"Let those two seed house stations up in Shenandoah divide time with each other," he said of KMA and KFNF. "KWKH doesn't want to be on the air with either one of them. Our business is to give the public good, wholesome entertainment and not to sell horse collars, seeds and prunes. And every time I think of KOIL I get a pain in the neck."

KOIL manager Don Searle charged that Henderson was a "radio Bolshevik," and the war was on. Had it not been for the Mayfair Auditorium, KMA might have experienced a good deal more difficulty weathering the fray.

Chapter V

MAYFAIR

In February of 1927, Henry Field announced the construction of the KFNF Auditorium. Citing the fact that 40,000 people had visited Shenandoah in the preceding year, he expressed an eagerness to erect a broadcasting studio spacious enough to accommodate a large crowd. The building design was simple and unassuming, and Henry planned to have all the work done by local construction firms and members of his own seedhouse force.

In May of 1927, Earl May announced the construction of the KMA Auditorium. As with other developments in the early radio history of Shenandoah, Henry Field had been the first to envision a new scheme; Earl May had reached the same conclusion soon afterwards, but with a greater willingness to invest the capital necessary to develop the idea to its full potential.

According to blueprints drawn up by designer W. H. Raapke and architect George L. Fisher of Omaha, the \$100,000 KMA auditorium would seat 900 on the ground floor and 100 in the balcony. Equipped to serve as a broadcasting studio, the stage could be made soundproof by lowering an enormous sheet of glass which would separate the performers from the audience. Six feet high and twenty-four feet long, the

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glass weighed three tons and was thought at the time to be the largest single piece of glass ever made. A screen could also be lowered in front of the stage for the showing of motion pictures. The curved ceiling would be painted dark blue, and electric lights embedded in it would twinkle like stars. A special machine would create the illusion of clouds moving across a night sky, and the motif of the auditorium would be that of an open-air Moorish garden. If all went well, the building would be completed in time for the KMA Jubilee in the fall.

The Earl May Seed & Nursery Company was able to finance the auditorium because its business had increased 425% over the previous year. Sales receipts of the garden seed department were fourteen times greater than those twelve months earlier; those of the nursery department had been multiplied by seven, and the number of employees had tripled. The meteoric rise of the firm was due almost solely to the influence of KMA. In the first year the station was on the air, Earl May estimated that the company's mailing lists had grown by a million names. "It is the most phenomenal and substantial growth I have ever observed in business," E. S. Welch proclaimed, and he had good reason to be de-



Encouraged by the success of radio station KFNF, Henry Field constructed the KFNF Auditorium near the broadcast tower.

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lighted. His own financial backing of his son-in-law's venture was proving to be a sound investment.

Through the spring and summer, workmen swarmed over the construction site adjoining the seedhouse, and the great steel framework that would support the domed roof gradually took shape above the 132 x 61-foot concrete floor. By August, the building was far enough along for Earl to host a party. Two Omaha bands--The Pleasure Palace Orchestra, and Harness Bill and the The Harness Makers--joined the local Ruby Trio and two square dance callers to entertain anyone who wished to come. The guests used the new auditorium floor for dancing, and as they twirled and spun and promenaded beneath the open sky, they looked forward to the November completion date of the Mayfair Auditorium.

Meanwhile, "Hello World" Henderson continued his rants from KWKH in Shreveport, the Federal Radio Commission continued its deliberations in Washington, and the fate of small stations like KMA was anything but settled. The signals of fully 730 stations were flooding the skies, and some of the largest stations were agitating to have the smaller operations banned from the airwaves altogether. About this time Harry A. Bellows, a member of the Radio Commission, announced that he would visit Shenandoah the first week in October to see KFNF and KMA for himself.

Earl May and Henry Field had both proven themselves to be master showmen. On his own, Henry had staged terrific celebrations at KFNF, and Earl's KMA Jubilee had been an unqualified success. With Commissioner Bellows on his way to town and the futures of the stations perhaps hanging in the balance, Henry and Earl united their forces and pulled out all the stops. Shenandoah had never seen the likes of what followed.

Workmen rushed to finish the KMA auditorium, but progress was slowed when a heavy rainstorm flooded the basement, undermined the foundation, and caused half the floor to collapse. Fortunately, the broken concrete had not supported any of the steel superstructure, and by the first of October with temporary seating in place, the building was sufficiently completed to allow an audience to watch radio entertainers broadcasting from the stage.

On October 3rd, Earl and Gertrude May met Commissioner and Mrs. Bellows in Omaha and drove them to Shenandoah where ten days of joyous Jubilee activities had just begun. On the tracks near the May seedhouse stood a boxcar full of pancake flour, and two refrigerator cars, one loaded with sausage and bacon, the other with butter. Twenty-two tables had been set up in the basement of the auditorium, and four men were baking pancakes at the rate of fifty every three minutes. Identified

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by white ribbons bearing their names, fifty women from the May seed-house staff were greeting visitors, distributing gifts, and directing traffic. Dozens of musicians waited their turns to appear before the KMA microphones, and at the KFNF Auditorium, the scene was just about as wild.

When Earl May and his party reached the KMA studio, Mrs. Bellows was given a dozen roses and the commissioner was invited to help broadcast the official dedication of the new Mayfair Auditorium. He also visited KFNF and walked about in the crowds filling the buildings and the streets. The next day, Henry Field and E. S. Welch joined the Mays to host a luncheon for the Bellows, and then the commissioner departed for Washington. Had he enjoyed himself? Fine. Was he under the mistaken impression that there was always such a lively uproar in Shendoah? If so, no one felt the need to tell him any differently.

The Jubilee continued to pick up steam for another week despite rains which made the dirt roads leading into town almost impassable. Old-timers who had watched crowds come and go claimed they'd never seen such mobs jamming the streets. One salesgirl at May's sold



The May Seed & Nursery Company complex in late 1927 included the seedhouse and, sporting a Moorish minaret, the new Mayfair Auditorium. The rumble of trains on the tracks west of the building sounded in the microphones on the Mayfair stage.

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one-and-a-half tons of California prunes, a few pounds at a time. The stairway leading to the Mayfair basement proved far too narrow to handle the crowds eager for pancakes, so the big double doors of the service entrance were flung open.

Upstairs, crowds flowed in and out of the auditorium. A thousand visitors would watch an hour's broadcast, then clear out to make room for the next program's thousand spectators. May company guides kept the people moving, and when they discovered a woman with year-old twins named Earl and May, they ushered the family to the stage where Earl May put his tiny namesakes before the microphone to coo and cry.

An estimated 65,000 visitors came to Shenandoah during that 1927 Jubilee, and they ate 100,000 pancakes. In Washington, D.C., Commissioner Bellows reported that:

The stations at Shenandoah presented an extraordinary example of the place a broadcasting station can hold in the lives of people on the farms and in small towns, not as distinct sources of entertainment, but of a close-at-hand center of actual life. Commodities are purchased through these sta-



The largest radio hall between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains, Mayfair Auditorium resembled an outdoor Moorish garden.

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tions, and visitors flock to them by the hundreds of thousands.

While in Shenandoah I spoke in the opening program of the new broadcasting studio of KMA. Here they have a theatre holding 1,000 persons. Underneath the theatre they serve free pancakes and sausage, and it requires ten to fifteen girls to handle the job.

W. D. Jamieson, the lawyer handling matters in Washington for both KMA and KFNF, wrote to tell Earl and Henry that, "I had a conference with Commissioner Bellows this morning. He was bubbling over with enthusiasm about Shenandoah and you two people and the two radio stations."

In addition to the construction of Mayfair, the May Seed & Nursery Company had invested more than \$90,000 in its radio operations, and keeping KMA on the air was costing \$1000 a month. Earl May traveled to Washington in late October to attend a hearing of the Federal Radio Commission and see what he could do about protecting his investment. "Hello World" Henderson planned to be there, too. The time had come for the two men to thrash out their differences.

In the early days of radio, the voices of the most colorful broadcasters were familiar to vast listening audiences. Along with Graham McNamee of WEA, New York, there were Leo Fitzpatrick, "The Merry Old Chief of the Kansas City Nighthawks"; Lambdin Kay, "The Little Colonel" of WSB, Atlanta; Harold Hough, "The Hired Hand" of WBAP Fort Worth; and George Hay, "The Solemn Old Judge" of WLS, Chicago. Even H. H. "Incubator" Johnson at Clay Center, Nebraska's little KMMJ enjoyed a good deal of popularity. And, of course, there were Earl May and Henry Field of Shenandoah, and W. K. Henderson of Shreveport, Louisiana.

Some broadcasters were not as scrupulous as others, and used their enormous influence in ways which may have taken advantage of trusting listeners. Among the most successful of that lot was Dr. Brinkley, the self-styled physician who owned station KFKB ("Kansas First, Kansas Best!") in Milford, Kansas. Six nights a week, Brinkley hawked his mail-order patent medicines and surgical "goat-gland treatments" as wonder cures for everything from prostate problems and frigidity to old age. A fanatically loyal audience believed his every word. As testament to his powers of persuasion and to the loyalty of gullible listeners, Brinkley's station KFKB won the 1930 *Radio Digest* vote and was declared "The World's Most Popular Radio Station," beating out the likes of Henry Field's KFNF, which was awarded the silver cup that year as "The Midwest's Most Popular Station." Six months later, the Federal

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Radio Commission stripped KFKB of its license, and Brinkley fled to Mexico with much of the American medical establishment in hot pursuit.

Their motives notwithstanding, every popular broadcaster could count upon his listeners to support him with letters and telegrams, especially if the fans feared their favorite was in danger of being banned from the airwaves. Letters appearing in the *Des Moines Register* suggest the vehemence of sentiment among the audiences of KFNF and KMA:

--Certainly there are tens of thousands of listeners in the larger towns who are not interested in farm stations. Why should they be? We do not wish the chain stations or other big stations kicked off. We do not wish to deny these people their choice of entertainment...but let me just say that if either Mays or Fields or possibly both are put off the air there certainly is going to be some hullabaloo. The farmer of the middle west simply will not stand for it...

--A farmer may have to make his living with pitchforks and shovels--as long as it's an honest living whose business



"The Cornpickers" were Earl King (left), Bernard Ruby, and Paul Crutchfield.

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is it? I'll wager the farmer musicians have more listeners than some of these folks who are telling the world how to play cards or screeching like a hoot owl all over the dial.

(Not everyone agreed all of the time, not even in Shenandoah. Mack's Radio and Electric advertised the New Electric Radiola 60 with a tuner so accurate a listener could cut out the broadcasts of either KMA or KFNF "within two points of the dial.")

To further show their support of the Shenandoah stations and their disdain for the growing influence of the chains of powerful stations forming the national networks, Midwesterners established listener leagues with the expressed purpose of protecting "the freedom of the west against the trusty east." Those who favored KMA were to be the "Trust Busters," while the fans of KFNF called themselves "The Independents." Members were encouraged to write to the Federal Radio Commission and let the commissioners know how much the rural audiences appreciated the farm-oriented stations.

The fans of W. H. "Hello World" Henderson were just as numerous as the followers of Earl May, and just as quick with a penny postcard. By the time the two men appeared before the Radio Commission to plead their cases, their supporters had sent a blizzard of letters and telegrams to Washington. However, the mailings probably had little impact on the deliberations of the four overworked commissioners. Since the previous summer, they had conducted hearings on the affairs of hundreds of stations and had occasionally received up to 500,000 letters from the audience of a single station. Packing cases full of letters piled up in the hallways outside the hearing rooms.

When the KMA-KWKH hearings began, Earl May testified that he had never asked to share the same frequency as that used by W. K. Henderson's station, but rather had simply been assigned it by the Radio Commission and had begun using it. He also strongly defended direct advertising on the air, a practice some members of the Commission strenuously opposed.

The presentation seemed to convince Henderson that he and Earl had a great deal in common. Putting aside their antagonism, they took a liking to one another. They both possessed the confident independence of successful entrepreneurs, and that may have contributed to the beginnings of the curious friendship that developed. Realizing that KMA was not interested in forcing KWKH off its frequency, and seeing in Earl's defiant stand on the issue of advertising a comrade-in-arms in his own dislike of the Radio Commission, Henderson accepted the ruling that he share the frequency with Earl May. He also invited the Iowa broadcaster to come to Shreveport soon and pay him the honor of visiting KWKH.

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A few months later, Earl and Gertrude took the train to Louisiana. The foundation of W. K. Henderson's wealth was an iron works, and he was pleased to show the Mays around his factories and his expansive home. That evening, the broadcasters at KMA and KWKH talked back and forth to one another over their shared frequency, sending greetings and dedicating songs.

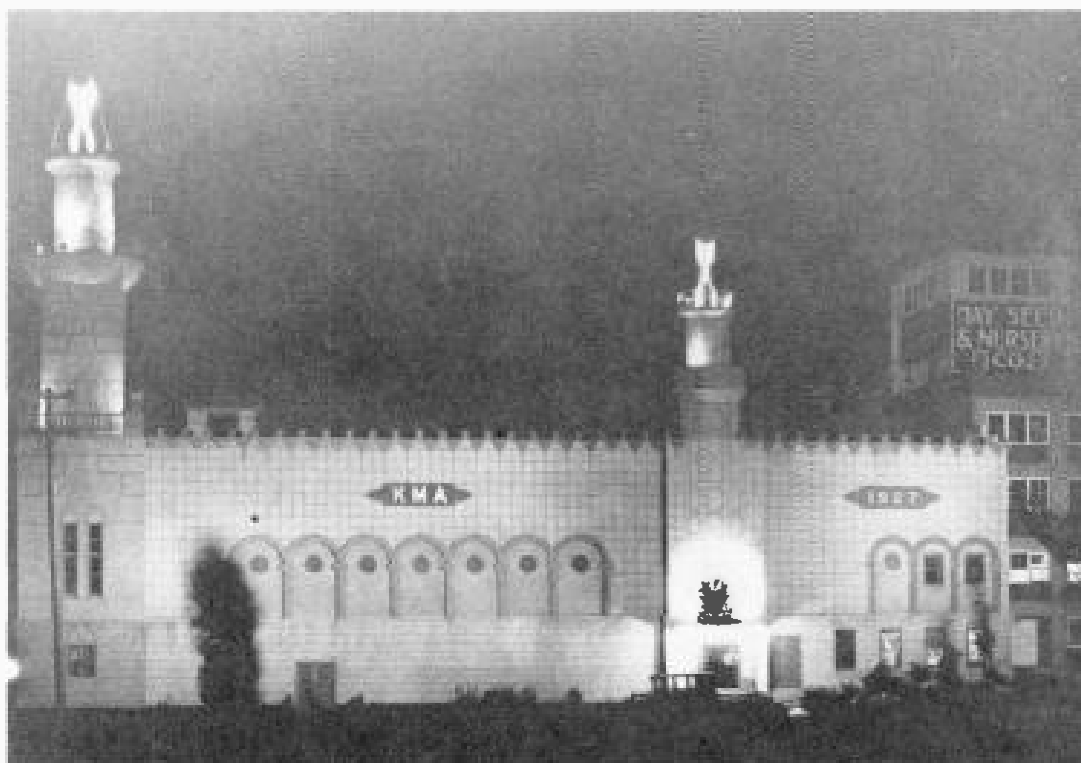
Not long afterwards, Henderson and his wife, "Miss Josie," were guests of the Mays in Shenandoah. Seven thousand curious fans came to hear them broadcast from Mayfair and, later, from KFNF. After his visit, he sent his hosts a telegram:

E. E. May, wife, children, Shenandoah and Middlewest:

Home. Earl you do not know how I enjoyed the visit. I want you all to know I had the best time of my whole life. Miss Josie and I send love to you all, Shenandoah and the middlewest. Dog gone it we must have freedom of the air. Hello world. W.K. Henderson speaking.

Dog Gone

Ten months later, the Commission assigned KMA the lower frequency



After dark, the illuminated Mayfair Auditorium was a spectacular sight. To the right stands the seedhouse of the May Seed & Nursery Company.

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of 322 meters and instructed it to divide time with station KGBZ in York, Nebraska. KWKH in Shreveport, Louisiana, was ordered to share a frequency with a station in Hollywood, California. As anyone might have guessed, "Hello World" Henderson found this turn of affairs highly unsatisfactory, and he let his listeners know what he thought. The members of the Federal Radio Commission listened too, and were so impressed with Henderson's characterizations of them that they suspended for sixty days his license to operate a radio station. Doggone.



In 1929, W. K. "Hello World" Henderson (left of center in three-piece suit) visited Shenandoah at the invitation of Earl May (holding his Radio Digest trophy). KMA engineer Cy Rapp looks on between the two station owners.

Chapter VI

TALKERS, PLAYERS, AND “THE COUNTRY SCHOOL”

Like many young people who made their ways to Shenandoah in the early years of this century, Jessie Susanka found a job in a seedhouse. Raised by a Bohemian immigrant mother in the predominantly Swedish village of Essex seven miles north of Shenandoah, Jessie spent several years as one of Field’s Seedhouse Folk before becoming a stenographer and then teller at a Shenandoah bank. She married fellow bank employee Floyd Young, and as members of the Congregational Church they went to WOAW in Omaha in 1923 to help make the first radio broadcast by a group of Shenandoah musicians.

During the months of the WOAW–May Seed Company broadcasts, Jessie frequently sang alone and with Floyd, and they appeared occasionally in the first year KMA was on the air. “Mr. May decided since my maiden name was *Susanka*, I had to sing Bohemian songs even though I didn’t know the Bohemian language at all,” she remembers. “I’d lived around Swedes in Essex all my life. But my mother taught me some songs, and I played the accordion. I didn’t know the meaning of anything I was singing, but some of the listeners did. They’d write

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me fan mail in Bohemian, and I couldn't understand a word of that either."

In 1926, the bank where Jessie worked was closed, and she was without a job. As she left the bank and walked slowly down the street, she met Earl May.

"Jessie," he said as he neared, "I hear the bank's closed. What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know," she told him. "I'm befuzzled."

Earl scratched his chin. "You come down to the studio in the morning. My program director's going on vacation for a month, and you can take over the work."

"I don't know anything about program directing!"

"Oh, you know a lot," Earl assured her. "And what you don't know, you can learn."

Well, a job was a job. Jessie agreed to try it for a month. She stayed at KMA for the next seventeen years.

Live radio required live talent. As the length of time KMA stayed on the air each day increased, more and more performers were needed.



"Gypsy John" was Eddie Forrester. In addition to playing flamingo guitar, he was a KMA announcer and manager of the Mayfair Theater.

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There were no broadcasting schools and very little tradition of radio broadcasting, so each artist came to KMA in his or her own fashion. Some schemed their ways onto the air, and some arrived by accident. Some needed the money while others wanted the fame. Few of them had much formal training in music or speaking, but that was all right. The rural audiences were sympathetic to performers who were a little nervous or who mispronounced words. However, they would not tolerate insincerity.

"I sold everything on the air," Jessie Young recalls. "I sold cosmetics, prunes, roses, fish, horse collars, harness, jackets, boots, hams, tires, blankets, and dress goods. I don't think you can mention anything I didn't sell. But I never sold anything I didn't believe in. Listeners could tell right away if someone wasn't being honest with them."

A large percentage of KMA's performers were local people, some of whom exhibited surprisingly polished talents. Others came from far away. Gretta Taylor arrived at the station from Chicago, able to sit down at the piano or the Gertrude May Pipe Organ in the Mayfair Auditorium and play almost any piece of music in any key. In addition to her duties on the air, Gretta played the organ to accompany the silent films shown in Mayfair. She married Dr. J. D. Bellamy and stayed with KMA for thirty years. Although listeners sent her thousands of musical requests, she was seldom unable to play the tunes.

To increase their time on the air without wearing out their welcome, many performers appeared in a variety of guises. Dr. Bellamy and Grady Fort sang together as the How-Do-You-Do Boys, as The Applesauce Twins, and as Doc's Red Hot Serenaders. Many of the hometown ensembles were staffed by various shufflings of the same dozen or so musicians who appeared at various times as May's Mandolin Musicians, the May Flower Trio, the May Tire Orchestra, the KMA Coffee Orchestra, the Jig and Reel Orchestra, the Old Time Orchestra, the Elysian Symphony Orchestra, and the Cornpicking Gang.

The lure of a vast listening audience and the excitement of a new medium also drew many vaudeville and chautauqua entertainers to the microphones of the radio stations. Singers, musicians, mind readers, lecturers, comedians, pranksters, dancers--radio helped them keep alive the crafts that were no longer in vogue in the theaters once motion pictures began to talk. KMA proved to be especially inviting not only because of its radio signal, but also because of the Mayfair Auditorium. Anyone could wander in off the street, take a seat in the auditorium free of charge, and watch as the KMA staff went about the daily business of broadcasting programs. Often the great glass curtain was lowered to soundproof the stage and allow the broadcasters to work without interruption from their live audience. But other programs lent themselves



Resplendent in Spanish finery and a mysterious past, Rosa Rosario was typical of KMA's colorful entertainers.

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to audience participation, and then the glass would be raised. Listeners at home could hear what was going on upon the stage as well as the reactions of the Mayfair audience.

Professional entertainers often came to KMA through booking agents, or on their own directly from Shenandoah's annual chautauquas. The Dixie Girls, who had been so popular during the 1926 Gold Cup Jubilee, signed a contract to appear on KMA two weeks out of every six for the following year. The Ray-O-Vac Twins arrived in Shenandoah to represent a Madison, Wisconsin, battery company, then stayed on as the KMA Farm Belt Paint Boys. The three Haliolo Hawaiians from Wailuki, Maui, were enormously popular, especially when the shapely young Mignon donned her grass skirt and did the hula on the Mayfair stage while her parents Samuel and Coral strummed their ukeleles. The Mahaj, Son of India, had appeared on sixty-seven radio stations before coming to KMA, and claimed to be the first person ever to conduct a radio seance. His successor, The Great Kharma, advertised himself as "the original mystery man of India," master of the Bombay Seance and an expert at radio hypnosis.

The list of professionals (a term which should be applied loosely and with kindness) who passed before the KMA microphones is long and colorful. A sampling includes the Garay Sisters from Hungary, the Royal Hungarian Fiddlers from Budapest, Count Von Elsky from Russia, Johnnie Sloan from Scotland, and Fui Low from China. Most of them, like the father, mother, and two daughters whose trombone, mandolin, coronet, and violin ensemble made up the Di Giorgia Orchestra of Italy, appeared at KMA for a week or two and then moved on. Others stayed for months and even years. Among the most sensational was Rosa Rosario, the Spanish singer and dancer with a mysterious past.

Attired in full Spanish regalia and laden with ornate, dangling jewelry, Miss Rosario cut a striking figure on the streets of Shenandoah where cotton print dresses were the normal rule. She was said to have been born into a wealthy family in Spain, though her parents had died when she was quite young. Educated in Europe and America, she had become an entertainer and toured extensively. Asked by a reporter to reveal her ambitions in life, she laughed and replied, "They may sound foolish to you, but one is to appear in the Movietone films and the other is to raise chickens." While there wasn't much chance of a film career in southwest Iowa, Shenandoah was certainly the right place for a flamenco-dancing, Spanish-singing radio entertainer with a passion for poultry.

Earl May announced many of the KMA programs, gave market closings, predicted the weather, and reported on farm and garden topics. Others who made up the foundation of KMA's information staff came primarily from the May company itself—among them Harold Case,

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“Alfalfa John” Nicholson, and Frank Coykendall speaking on farm crops; Fred Greenlee and Mrs. A. R. Perkins on poultry; Burke Schriver on farm seeds; and station manager Cy Rapp on radio matters. Shenandoah’s preeminence as a center of the seed and nursery world allowed Earl to find extremely well-qualified agricultural experts all around him. On the other hand, the lecturers who came from beyond Shenandoah usually spoke of other things.

For many years, a rugged, buckskin-clad outdoorsman named James W. Whilt had spent his summers as Guide Number One in Montana’s Glacier National Park. He wrote poetry as a sideline, and in the winter when there were no park visitors to guide, he toured the country delivering lectures to church and civic groups, and at high school assemblies. Advertising himself as “The Cowboy Poet,” and “The Poet of the Rockies,” Whilt thrilled his audiences with tales of his adventures in the wild, and he sold copies of his poems in small books with titles like *Mountain Memories* and *Rhymes of the Rockies*. As he passed through Shenandoah in 1926, he read his poetry over KMA, and the listeners loved it. During the month he was in town, he sold over \$2000 worth of his books, and Jim loved that. The next year he was back for a longer stay, and his “Life in the Wild” broadcasts became a regular winter feature at KMA.

Another wanderer was the Honorable George Van Houten, a stately, white-bearded sage who seemed to have visited every corner of the globe. A veteran of Company E of the 4th Missouri Cavalry, he proudly wore a GAR Civil War veteran’s pin on his lapel. He had also served in the 26th Iowa Legislature, and was believed to have been a secret agent for the government of Hawaii. In 1925, Van Houten stopped at KMA on his way to Honolulu, broadcast a lecture entitled, “Canton, China,” and enjoyed himself so much that he announced he would make Shenandoah his headquarters. He came back the next year and spoke frequently over KMA and KFNF on everything from “China and Japan for the School Children,” and “History of the Children of Israel,” to “The Wonders of Radio.” For several years, his granddaughter Lois Van Houten also appeared on KMA.

While Earl May had been a student at the University of Nebraska, he had become acquainted with a woman named Bernice Currier who was majoring in music, and she had introduced Earl to his future bride, Gertrude Welch. Bernice’s father, G. A. Chambers, was one of the first managers of the May Seed and Nursery Company and had helped design and build the big seedhouse. In 1927, as KMA’s need for performers increased, Earl invited Bernice to become a member of the KMA Orchestra. A competent violinist, she joined Dr. Bellamy on cello, the ever-present Earl Butts on trombone, and six others under the direction

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of Dr. Leo Sturmer. Soon she was playing in the Jig and Reel Orchestra as well, her violin becoming a fiddle whenever the music required it.

One day during a break in the music as Mr. May was advertising the clothing the May company had for sale, he called to her across the stage. "Bernice, what do you think of the work shirts we are displaying in the front store?"

Bernice had two young sons, and she thought quite a bit of the shirts. "Personally, I like them fine," she said as she came to the microphone. "My two boys Red and Ed wear them, and the shirts are very easy to launder. They wear well and, what is important to a mother, they make the boys look neat and clean." Soon she was announcing as well as playing her violin, and doing whatever else she could to keep the station running. She gave recipes, too, and her "Home Hour" program of household hints appeared with increasing regularity in the daily radio schedules.

Jessie Young's duties also continued to expand. Her daily visits were at first called "The Stitch and Chat Club," though they consisted of a good deal more chatting than stitching. Like Bernice, she talked about what she planned to fix for supper and what her family was doing. They were neighboring on the air, visiting one-to-one with women listeners who found in these visits the same trust and satisfaction as the men of the countryside had discovered in KMA's farm and market reports.

As individual broadcasters, the KMA personalities of the 1920's and early 1930's provided listening audiences with an astonishing variety of talent and information, and they displayed an enthusiasm that more than made up for shortcomings of skill. But of all the entertainment programs broadcast from Shenandoah, the most popular and most original had just begun—"The KMA Country School, District No. 9."

Inspired by Earl May's experiences as a school teacher on the plains of western Nebraska, "KMA Country School" provided a format which showcased the talents of many entertainers. In the early years, Earl May served as the schoolmaster, maintaining a bare minimum of order over a rambunctious class of rustics portrayed by the folks of KMA. Six days a week, the backdrops of the Mayfair stage were made to resemble the walls of a small country school, and the costumed class members took their seats in school desks. The boys wore baggy overalls, floppy shoes, and work shirts. The girls were attired in print dresses and had hats on their heads and ribbons in their hair. In many ways they were caricatures of the very audiences they were entertaining, and the content of the programs allowed listeners to see the humor of Midwestern life. A typical program began with the singing of the Country School song:

School days, school days,
Dear Old KMA School Days.

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Clowning and dancing and having things fine
Back here in School District Number Nine.
Tune in our bell on your radio
So you won't miss any of the show.
We'll get to our desk
Teacher says let's go...
And we'll all be a couple of kids.

After Earl May called the roll, the pupils would sing a song, something along the lines of "Take Me Back to Colorado," "Sidewalks of New York," or "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean."

"That's a fine song," Earl would proclaim as he began working into the banter that was the glue of the program. "Now let's get busy with our lessons. Stubby, I hear that your dog died."

STUBBY--"Yes sir, teacher. My poor little dog is dead."

TEACHER--"That's too bad, Stubby. Was it a Lap dog?"

STUBBY--"Yes sir, Teacher, it would lap anybody."



Members of the 1931 KMA Country School were, standing left to right: Alfsa John Nicolson, Opal Webb, Frena Ambler, Janie Mae Crutchfield, Burke Schriver, Fred Greenlee, William Powell, Raymond Shumate, Grady Fort, Ormah Carmean, and teacher Earl May. Seated left to right: Donald Shumate, Lois Van Houten, Paul Shumate, Phyllis Brownell, Jim Whilt, Earl King (on floor), George Nichols, Alta Poff, Paul Crutchfield, Gretta Bellamy, and Lewis Shumate.

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TEACHER—"Now, Stubby, what did it die of?"

STUBBY—"It died of the thirteenth of September."

TEACHER—"No, no, Stubby, I mean how did the dog meet its death?"

STUBBY—"It didn't meet its death; death overtook him."

TEACHER—"Well, what was the complaint?"

STUBBY—"No complaint at all. Everybody was satisfied."

TEACHER—"Tell me, what disease did the dog die of?"

STUBBY—"Oh, he swallowed a tape measure."

TEACHER—"Then he died by inches, I suppose?"

STUBBY—"No sir, he went outside and died by the yard!"

It was vaudeville, pure and simple, infused with the energy of veterans of the stage and given direction by Earl May's instinctive feel for the patter and pace of the prairie classroom. The students constantly tried to put one over on the teacher, and the teacher used his quick wit to defend himself and maintain control of proceedings that were always on the verge of getting out of hand. At times, though, the program did take on the guise of serious teaching:



In 1935, Toby Stewart (in checkered suit) served as teacher of the KMA Country School. Class members were, standing left to right: Lewis Shumate, Faylon Geist, Mickey Gibbons, Bill Alexander, Edith Jennings, Frank Jennings, Twyla Danielson, and Jerry Smith. Seated left to right: Donald Shumate, Gretta Bellamy, Paul Shumate, Kay Stewart, Raymond Shumate, Lindy Stewart, and Fred Greenlee.

KMA RADIO: THE FIRST SIXTY YEARS

TEACHER--“Let’s have a few facts.”

JERRY--“More than 300 different kinds of insect pests prey upon oak trees.”

MARY JANE--“The value of poultry and eggs in the United States exceeds that of all grains put together.”

CARL--“Barbers make an average of about 450 snips with their scissors in cutting a man’s hair.”

BACHELOR--“Yawning is caused by a lack of oxygen in the blood.”

Earl occasionally challenged the pupils to the old school game of mental arithmetic and met his match in Gretta Bellamy, the KMA pianist who was known on the Country School as Geraldine.

TEACHER--“Geraldine, come up here. Don’t act so afraid. Why, you’ve seen worse looking men than me, haven’t you?”

(Geraldine coyly gives no answer.)

TEACHER--“I say, you’ve seen worse looking men than me, haven’t you?”

GERALDINE--“I heard you the first time. I was just trying to remember.”

TEACHER-- “All right, then, what’s twelve times eight minus six divided by fifteen?”

“Six!” she would snap back. Earl would give her another problem, and another and another. The routine was never rehearsed, the problems were never the same, but Earl could seldom stump her. The other students were not so bright:

TEACHER--“Mick, I want you to find the greatest common denominator in this problem.”

MICK--“My gosh, ain’t they found that yet? My Dad told me that they were huntin’ for that when he was a kid!”

Prompting a pupil staring out the window, Earl asks, “What are you looking at, Strizzy?”

“See that dog out there, teacher?”

“Why, yes, but what about it?”

“Well,” Strizzy replies, “I was just a wonderin’ if that dog’s tail got broke off or did somebody drive it in.”

The foolishness gave way to more songs, some by the whole class, others by soloists or groups such as the Dixie Girls. Many of the programs ended with a pantomime lasting five minutes or more, or a long, slapstick prank which depended upon a visual punch line. One involved a blindfold, a funnel, a bucket of water, and an unsuspecting passerby:

MICK--“Say, Isaac, have you ever seen Niagara Falls?”

ISAAC--“Nope, but I’d sure like to.”

MICK--“Well, then put on this blindfold.”

TALKERS, PLAYERS, AND "THE COUNTRY SCHOOL"

Isaac is blindfolded and Mick slips the end of a large funnel into the top of his pants.

MICK—"Can you see the falls, Isaac?"

Mick lifts a bucket of water and pours from it into the funnel, and Isaac runs off disgusted, his pants soaked. Toby wanders in, and Mick decides to play the joke on him, but no matter how much water he pours, Toby seems unperturbed. Then, at the last moment, Toby reaches into his pants and pulls out a hot water bottle into which the water from Mick's bucket had been flowing. It leaves the audience in hysterics.

During skits like this and during the pantomimes, radio listeners at home would have little idea what was happening on the Mayfair stage, and would hear nothing for long periods of time but the laughter of the audience. Likewise, when the dancers danced, the magicians performed their tricks, or the Haiole Hawaiians played their ukeleles while young Mignon did the hula in her rustling grass skirt, those following the proceedings over their radios had to rely upon their imaginations. It was brilliant programming, for not only did it keep listeners close to their receivers, it made them eager to travel to Shenandoah and watch the



The 1938 Country School included, standing left to right: Frank Jennings, John Swanik, Glenn Long, Curly Bray, Speed Foreman, Buster Fellows, Faylon Geist, Mickey Gibbons, Twyla Danielson, and teacher Earl May. Seated left to right: Toby Stewart, Paul Roscoe, Lindy Stewart, Carl Haden, Mary Jane Haden, and Fred Greenlee.

KMA RADIO: THE FIRST SIXTY YEARS



In 1927 at age eight, Ed May enjoyed the company of the "Poet of the Rockies" Jim Whilt (right) and Walter Heacock, the 1927 World's Champion Bronco Rider.

TALKERS, PLAYERS, AND “THE COUNTRY SCHOOL”

shows in person. In the eighteen years the Country School appeared in Mayfair Auditorium, there was seldom an empty seat in the house. As audiences departed at the end of each program, ushers directed them through doors leading into the Earl May Seed and Nursery store, and many stocked up on home and garden needs before they left. When its first run of nearly 4,000 performances was finally curtailed in 1942 by the gas rationing of the World War II, the show had been seen by almost five million people.

“KMA Country School” appeared every day but Sunday, and the performers went through a tremendous amount of material. They wrote much of it themselves, and fans sent in thousands of jokes, poems, stories and songs. Often, though, the entertainers depended upon their wits, ad-libbing their way through long portions of the program. The most popular routines, like the Niagara Falls skit, were repeated many times.

The Country School came into being during those early days of KMA when there seemed to be no limit to what radio performers could do. Everything was fresh, optimistic, and charged with energy. By the 1930’s, the program was rolling along as the most successful and innovative on the KMA schedule. It brought great joy to its listeners, and in Mayfair it provided live entertainment at a price many people could just barely afford—free. As the weight of the Great Depression settled heavily upon the farms and towns of the Midwest, anything more expensive was usually beyond their means.

Chapter VII

HARD TIMES

While not as dramatic as the stock market crash had been on Wall Street, the Great Depression's effect upon the farmlands of the Midwest was just as devastating. Farmers continued to produce bigger and better crops, but the prices for their commodities declined--from a dollar for a bushel of corn in 1923 to twelve cents in 1933. Iowa farmland that had sold for an average \$225 an acre in 1920 brought only \$100 in 1931. Conditions on the farms became so desperate and money so scarce that a hired man near Shenandoah agreed to take as pay his room, board, and 160 bushels of corn a month, an amount he could sell for about \$19.00.

In a town whose fortunes hinged in large part on the mail order business of its seed and nursery companies, the Shenandoah postal receipt totals served as a barometer of the city's fiscal health:

1921---\$76,554.61
1922--\$103,531.61
1923---\$95,231.14
1924--\$108,070.08
1925--\$134,203.08
1926--\$211,340.66

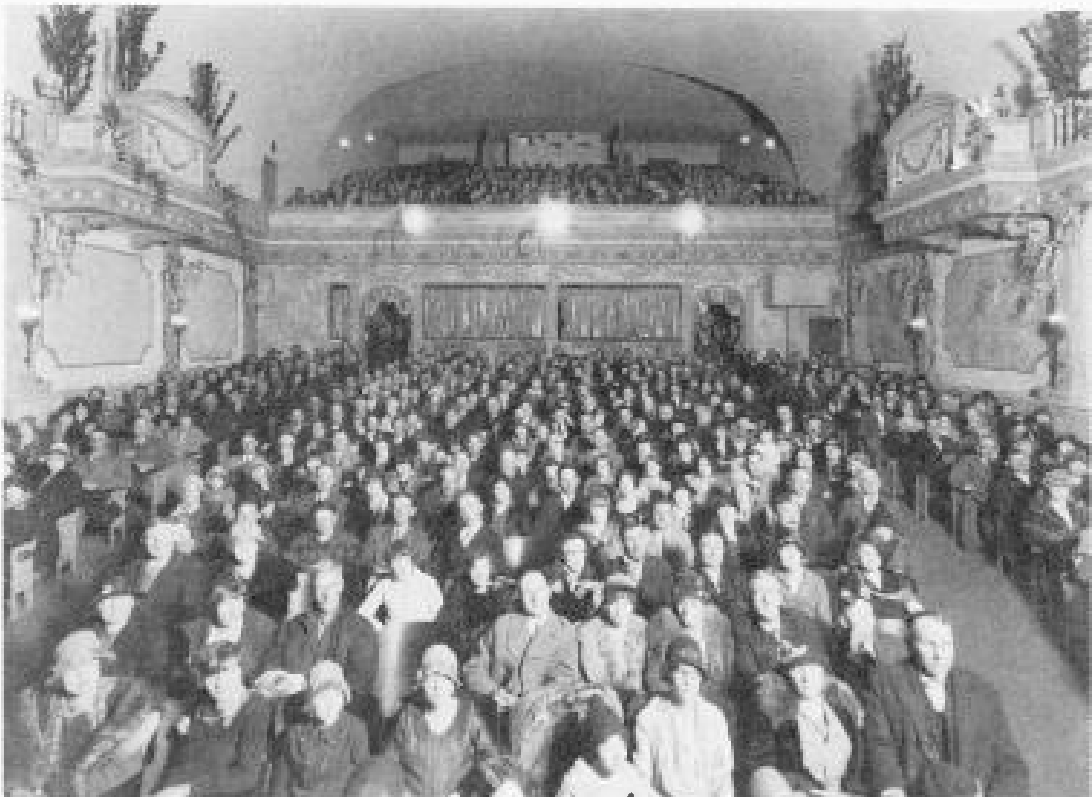
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1927--\$242,823.66
1928--\$272,649.09
1929--\$309,109.11
1930--\$272,133.96
1931--\$162,212.53

Of the 1930 amount, mailings by the Henry Field Seed Company accounted for 56% of all of Shenandoah's postage. But in the years that followed, customers who had by their loyalty made Field's and May's into thriving businesses found they had little money to spend on the products the companies were offering. The seed firms and their radio stations were once more in a fight to stay alive.

As in the early days of his own company, Earl May was again fortunate to be able to fall back upon the resources of his father-in-law E. S. Welch. Welch's Mount Arbor Nursery was also feeling the effects of the Depression, but the firm's size, stability, and focus gave it a strength the smaller, more thinly spread May firm did not enjoy.

As money became scarce, customers beyond the boundaries of Shenandoah were reluctant to use precious gasoline to drive to the seedhouses



Crowds filled Mayfair Auditorium to enjoy performances of the KMA entertainers conducting live radio broadcasts. Doors at the back of the hall led into the seedhouse store.

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to make their purchases. To help address that problem, both Henry Field and Earl May opened branch stores in towns beyond a reasonable driving distance of Shenandoah.

Henry Field acted first, establishing retail outlets in 1931 in Norfolk and York, Nebraska, and leasing broadcast time from Norfolk radio station WJAG. Grady Fort, formerly of KMA, moved to Norfolk to oversee the airing of 4 1/2 hours of daily programming. In addition to several KFNF regulars who relocated in Norfolk to produce programs in the KFNF style, others from the Shenandoah station occasionally commuted to Norfolk to lend their expertise to the broadcasts.

Several months later, the Earl May Seed & Nursery Company opened a store at the corner of Eighth and Washington in Lincoln, Nebraska. Earl May's Nebraska Trading Post was intended to be as much like the Shenandoah operation as possible, complete with broadcasts by KMA personalities over station KFOR in Lincoln. Eighteen freight cars full of merchandise were shipped to Lincoln to stock the new outlet with a selection similar to that available at the main store in Shenandoah, and the Trading Post was equipped to purchase poultry, cream, and eggs from the farmers, just as produce was handled in Iowa. (In addition to buying up to 600 gallons of cream each day at the Shenandoah store, May's also bought poultry and the pelts of muskrats, mink, racoons, and skunks for shipment to processors in the East.)

To celebrate the opening of the store, Earl May took the Country School entertainers to Lincoln along with the Dixie Girls, Gretta Bellamy, Bernice Currier, and even E. S. Welch. So many people attended the inaugural broadcast that they overflowed the store's small auditorium, and the program was moved to the Lindell Hotel, which served as the home of KFOR.

In the next few years, the May company opened additional branch stores in Omaha and South Omaha in Nebraska; Council Bluffs, Cedar Rapids, Des Moines, Ottumwa, Waterloo, Fort Dodge, and Sioux City in Iowa; Minneapolis and St. Paul in Minnesota; St. Joseph, Missouri; and Sioux Falls, South Dakota. During the same period, Henry Field stores sprang up in Cedar Rapids, Fort Dodge, Mason City, Waterloo, Marshalltown, Ottumwa, and Des Moines, all in Iowa and many initially under the supervision of Henry's oldest son Frank.

While some of these stores were intended to mirror the atmosphere and offerings of the seedhouse stores in Shenandoah, others were seasonal. Left empty by the many businesses that had failed during the Depression, buildings could be rented cheaply, and the stores were opened just during the late winter, spring, and early summer when farmers and gardeners were doing most of their buying. Offering seeds and nursery stock, the seasonal stores did a good business until



The Jig and Reel Orchestra was known for its old-time dance music. From left, they were Phyllis Brownell, Bernard Ruby, Earl King, King, Francis Clatterbaugh, Bill Powell, and director Bernice Currier.

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mid-summer. Then, to reduce overhead expenses, they would be closed until the next spring rolled around. These branch operations of the May company were the beginning of the network of Earl May Garden Centers that today numbers fifty-six stores in five states.

Realizing the importance of satisfying more than just farm and garden needs, managers of the Shenandoah store in the May seedhouse made special efforts to maintain enough volume of business to stay open all year. For instance, the men's clothing department, leased to a man named Joe Nefsky, ran a special deal for many months of the Depression. For just \$12.50, a customer could buy a suit of clothes complete with shirt, tie, belt or suspenders, socks, shoes, and underclothes, in addition to which he would receive a free five gallons of gas to replace the fuel he had burned driving to Shenandoah and back home again. Hallie Johnson, a salesman for Nefsky who would later have his own clothing store in downtown Shenandoah, recalled selling sixty-three of the suits in a single day, "and I was just one of seven clerks working in the department on that particular day."

As the Depression deepened, the company did what it could to help farmers overcome their financial handicaps. "Don't be fearful and tremble," Earl May announced in 1933 when area banks closed. "Things look a bit gloomy right now, but the banks will open and your checks are good with me. Order what you and your family need and I will accept your checks." In all, the Earl May Seed & Nursery Company received over \$47,000 worth of momentarily non-redeemable checks. Customers eventually made good on all but a few hundred dollars' worth.

The expansive Henry Field Seed Company was especially hard hit by the financial crunch. In 1931, the company was reorganized as the Henry Field Company, run primarily by a group of seedhouse officials. Stock in the new firm was sold to raise operating capital. Still, cash flow became so constrained that the company was forced for a period of time to issue scrip to its employees in lieu of paychecks--"Field Bucks" with which they could purchase goods from any of the departments in the Henry Field stores, but paper which was worthless anywhere else. Although he continued to be an influential spokesman for the firm, Henry Field was losing control of the business he had founded forty years earlier.

At the radio stations, the battles for better frequencies, more power, and extended broadcasting hours continued. KMA had been operating since November of 1928 on an assigned frequency of 930 kilocycles. It shared the frequency with KGBZ in York, Nebraska, a station the Henry Field Company used in 1931 to broadcast programming in conjunction with its branch store in York.

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In 1934, the newly-formed Federal Communications Commission (FCC) assumed the responsibilities of the Federal Radio Commission. KMA appealed to the agency for a new frequency and, much to Earl's surprise, was granted permission to operate at 710 kilocycles. Since no other stations shared the 710 setting, KMA suddenly found itself the proud possessor of what every radio company was eager to have—a clear channel frequency.

“A million more people in the 75 to 100 mile additional radius will be able to hear KMA now,” Earl May announced with justifiable pleasure. “It will be free from all interference. . . . We are extremely pleased about this new wave length.” In short, KMA had risen above the pack of small stations scratching and clawing about in the lower frequencies, and had been elevated to clear channel status like a few of the big operations in the cities. Unfortunately for KMA, it didn't take long for the powerful stations to complain.

A week after KMA began its clear channel broadcasts at 710 kilocycles, Chicago station WGN filed an objection with the FCC. WGN broadcast at 720 kilocycles, and its operators disliked being elbowed by the new,



The Haiole Hawaiians from Wailuku, Maui, were Sammy, Coral, and their daughter Mignon.

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nearby signal of KMA. Although no hearings were held, the Commission capitulated to WGN's wishes and instructed KMA to return to its previous 930 kilocycle frequency. The station was allowed to remain on the 710 setting the rest of the month, but on May 1, KMA's euphoric experience with clear channel broadcasting came to an end.

Not every FCC ruling was unwelcomed. In June of 1934, KMA was granted a license to operate at 2500 watts during the day and 1000 watts at night, more than doubling its former output of 1000 watts daily and 500 watts after dark. In 1936, the May Company was relieved of the irritation of sharing time with KGBZ when the FCC denied that station's license renewal request. KMA did purchase the facilities of KGBZ, but made no effort to reinstitute its broadcasts. Soon thereafter, the FCC permitted KMA to operate full time, and at an increase of daytime power to 5000 watts. To produce the additional power, KMA constructed a new RCA model 5-C transmitter north of Shenandoah, complete with a 488-foot Truscon tower that was at the time Iowa's tallest self-supporting structure. A triangular affair, the base supports were 24 feet apart, tapering at the top to a triangle 36 inches on a side. In strong winds, the tip swayed four feet. The facility included housing for an engineer on call at a moment's notice to activate the transmitter.

In 1937, the radio stations of the United States came under the provisions of the North American Radio Broadcasting Agreement intended to sort out the frequencies, make room for some new stations, and protect the signals of others. As a result, on March 1, 1941, KMA changed its frequency from 930 to 960, the position on the dial it has maintained to this day.

While the Depression caused certain financial difficulties at the May Seed & Company, the success of KMA did not go unnoticed by parties interested in purchasing the station. In 1938 and 1939 particularly, representatives of companies including the *Omaha World-Herald* and *The Des Moines Register* made overtures of one kind or another to the May company to acquire KMA or to exchange its facilities and frequency for those of other broadcast operations.

Pressure to make substantial changes also came from the Blue Network of the National Broadcasting Company, which KMA had joined in 1938. NBC wanted KMA to move its studios and transmitter to Council Bluffs in order to tap the large, urban Omaha-Council Bluffs market. Network pressure became even more pronounced when, in 1942, NBC declared that KMA would have to move to Omaha to be of use as an affiliate. In testimony before the FCC, lawyers for the May company reported that "As an inducement, KMA was promised an NBC affiliation if it so moved. . . . KMA, for sentimental or other reasons, did not try to move its transmitter to Omaha, but chose instead to serve

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the rural and small-town listeners in and around Shenandoah...a substantial audience in which the population of Omaha in no way figures." By electing to stay in Shenandoah, KMA lost an estimated \$48,000 in potential revenues from additional network programming and spot business, and in 1943 did lose its NBC affiliation. The station then joined the American Broadcasting Company, which had recently acquired the NBC Blue Network.

Like KFNF, KMA had in its earliest years served essentially as a house organ of the seed company which owned it. The bulk of its advertising promoted items sold by the company itself, and the billings and payments for advertising time were transacted within the books of the May Seed & Nursery Company. In the late 1920's, KMA still had no rate card setting the price for selling airtime. When an outside advertiser who wished to broadcast over KMA was asked what he believed he should be charged, his estimate was agreed upon as the going rate of the moment.

As the radio industry grew more sophisticated and competitive, income from commercial advertising became increasing important to the



The Maytore Orchestra musicians were, from left: Gretta Bellamy and Lewis Shumate (seated), Bernard Ruby, Raymond Shumate, Francis Clatterbaugh, Paul Shumate, Don Shumate, and Jimmie Fitz.

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vitality of the station. By 1939, KMA's annual advertising revenues had reached almost \$100,000. The great majority of that amount came not from national or regional advertisers, but rather from accounts in the vicinity of Shenandoah. In addition to constant concern about finding sufficient capital to keep the station on the air, Earl May was also worried that advertisers might be wooed from KMA by stations serving the larger market of Omaha and Council Bluffs, particularly KOWH and NBC affiliate KOIL. In 1939, he settled on what seemed to be a solution to both problems by accepting an offer from the Central Broadcasting Company to purchase 25% of KMA.

The president of Central Broadcasting was chiropractor and Iowa radio pioneer B. J. Palmer, who had founded the Palmer School of Chiropractic and station WOC in Davenport. Central Broadcasting was also the licensee of radio station WHO in Des Moines, a clear-channel operation. Under the purchase agreements, Central obtained a one-quarter interest in KMA for \$75,000, of which \$25,000 was paid immediately. The agreement further stipulated that WHO would help KMA obtain an additional \$30,000 of advertising business yearly for a period of ten years.

B. J. Palmer believed the May Seed & Nursery Company was willing to sell a minority interest in KMA in order to raise necessary operating capital. The setbacks of Henry Field's firm were ready proof that no seed company was immune to financial difficulties. In addition to selling a share of KMA to Central Broadcasting, Earl May also added Raymond Sawyer to the board of directors, a respected Shenandoah banker determined to stabilize KMA's somewhat precarious financial situation.

Central Broadcasting was interested only in acquiring a portion of the radio station, not in purchasing part of the seed and nursery firm, and so the sale necessitated the restructuring of the May Seed & Nursery Company. To that end, the May Broadcasting Company was incorporated on December 5, 1939, by E. S. Welch, Earl May, and Gertrude May. They were also directors of the new company along with H. S. Welch, R. M. Gwynn, C. J. Wolford, R. H. Sawyer, and assistant manager of the stores division J. D. Rankin Jr., who had recently married Earl May's daughter Frances. Company officers were Earl May, president; E. S. Welch, vice-president; and Raymond Sawyer, secretary and treasurer. The creation of the May Broadcasting Company effectively separated the activities of KMA from its parent firm, the May Seed & Nursery Company, and allowed Central to purchase a minority interest in May's broadcast holdings without becoming involved in the seed and nursery business.

Officials of Central Broadcasting were convinced that KMA served a unique and important service to a rural audience, and that it had the

MAYFAIR

Introduced and Sung by
Prof. E. Evans Engberg from K.M.A.

Words and Music by
Dr. Leo Sturmer

Intro.

Voice

A wel-come to you, A wel-come that's true, A
A-bove the blue sky, With clouds rol-ling by, The

place where you'll leave cares be-hind; The
beau-ty of out-doors with-in; The

twink-ling of the stars, Both Ve-nus and Mars, A
tints of the brush make faint col-ors blush, All

play-house, the fai-ry land kind. Piano
grand-eur and splen-dor a-kin.

May-fair, Piano Oh! It's

May-fair, Piano Just a place you'll

like to roam; Just a spot that seems like

home. Piano May-fair

Oh! It's May-fair, the nest for the West The

day when you're drea-ry, Just drop in where it's chee-rie, May-fair, the

1st mo 2nd mo
flo-wer of Shen-an-do-ah.

The Mayfair song appeared in a 1928 souvenir booklet given to visitors of the auditorium.

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potential of becoming the nation's number one farm station. Still, Central expressed no desire to influence the operation of KMA, and in the two decades that it owned a portion of May Broadcasting, Central held fast to that policy.

With the formation of May Broadcasting, the little seed firm Earl May had founded twenty years before had, without yet realizing it, laid the foundations for the development of a strong and innovative communications company of the future. At least that might happen if its officials were able to hang onto what they already had and then be willing to risk it all not too many years down the line.

Chapter VIII

JUBILATION AND JEOPARDY

Although KMA experienced varied success as it grappled with the financial difficulties of the Depression, the popularity of its radio personalities was never in doubt. Furthermore, the arena in which some of them operated occasionally expanded beyond the Midwest and took on a national scope. But success can be a mixed blessing, and those in Shenandoah who felt the bright glow of fame were not always immune to the dark shadows at its edge.

The great Jubilee celebrations of KMA and KFNF, so popular during the 1920's, sustained much of their appeal through the decade of the 1930's. For the families of the farms and the small towns, the Jubilees provided days of entertainment, contests, speakers, and food, and all of it was free. The Jubilees were so popular that they became Shenandoah institutions--lavish annual events that local residents began to take so much for granted that the editor of the Shenandoah *Evening Sentinel* occasionally took his readers to task for what he saw as insufficient appreciation of such unique events. And there was certainly a lot to appreciate.

The sizes of the crowds that poured into Shenandoah for a week during each Jubilee were estimated at anywhere from 30,000 to well over

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100,000. Although there was no accurate way to count bodies, the May company carefully tallied the pancakes that went into those bodies. In 1928, 138,624 pancakes browned on the griddles in the big tent across the street from Mayfair Auditorium. By 1930, the number had grown to 439,200, a total which did not account for Jubilee attendance by members of the Shenandoah High School football squad who, according to the student paper, were forbidden from indulging themselves with pancakes during the gridiron season. As financially pressed farmers became less able to drive to Shenandoah even for free entertainment, pancake consumption fell in 1933 to a low of 85,000, and stayed at about that level in the years that followed until the gas rationing of World War II and increased overhead forced the discontinuation of the Jubilees.

Every Jubilee featured contests, and fans of both KMA and KFNF were urged to bring in their best fruits and vegetables, flower arrangements, roosters and hens, eggs, and ears of corn. Besides produce and horticultural displays, competitions at KFNF leaned toward musical expertise, especially that of fiddlers, harmonica players, and masters of



Crowds packed the streets of Shenandoah during the annual Jubilees. This scene includes the circus tent where pancakes were served.

JUBILATION AND JEOPARDY

the accordion. At the KMA Jubilees, the contests demanded a bit less skill—husband calling, nail pounding, egg throwing, potato peeling, and the like. In 1938, a Glenwood man took top honors in the pancake eating contest by downing twenty-five of them in ten minutes. Two years later his record was shattered by a fellow Glenwood contestant who put away twenty-three pancakes in only five minutes.

In addition to food, the Jubilees featured exhibits and carnival rides. Just west of KMA's Mayfair auditorium was a lighted eighteen-hole miniature golf course called Mayfairways. And there were animals—three elephants one year named Anna Mae, Ted, and Jennie; a white ox the next, advertised as "The Sacred Ox of India." (Properly awed and mildly confused, the children of Shenandoah referred to the animal as "Reverend Ox" despite the fact that the sign identifying the beast had been accidentally misprinted and read, *THE SCARED OX*.)

The huge crowds drawn to Shenandoah by the Jubilees were themselves a magnet to politicians in search of an audience. Many spoke at the Jubilees, both over the radio and from wooden platforms built in the streets near the studios. It was rare to have a Jubilee without a state



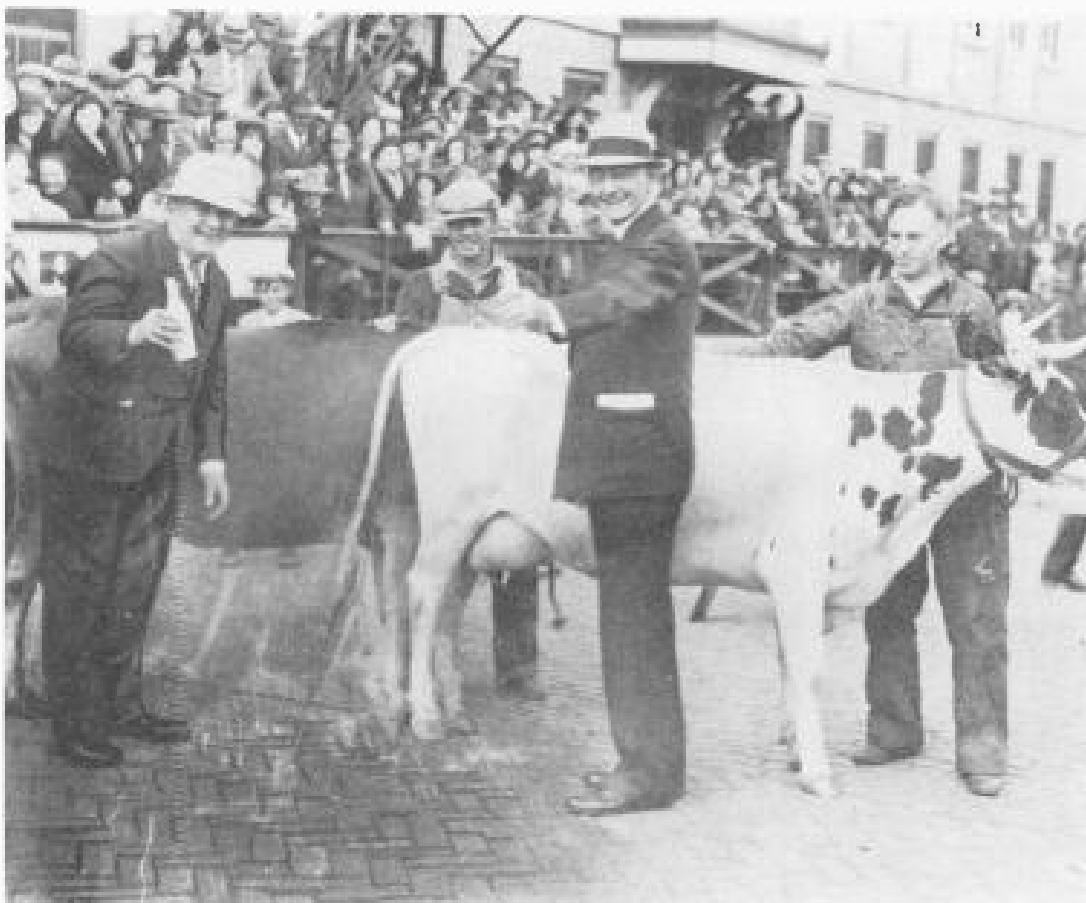
Lining up for pancakes. Jubilee-goers on Elm Street pass the old Earl May Cafe and Dining Room, today the site of radio station KMA.

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governor or two in attendance as well as congressmen, high officials from the Department of Agriculture, and any number of would-be office holders.

The politics mingled easily with the festive nature of the Jubilees. A competition featured during the 1932 Jubilee was a milking contest which required each contestant to hunker down beside a cow and fill a pop bottle with milk as quickly as possible. Challenged to show his stuff, Earl May beat Shenandoah Chief of Police Wallace Reed with a winning time of 16.8 seconds, and defeated farmer Jack Clark in fifteen seconds flat. Flushed with victory, Earl then took on Jubilee keynote speaker Arthur M. Hyde, the United States Secretary of Agriculture, and beat him, too. It was an event of sufficient import to garner mention in *Time* magazine.

Earl did not always have complete control over everything that went on during the Jubilees. Visitors to the radio station were sometimes allowed to broadcast for a moment over the air. Often shy, they would usually just tell where they were from and what they were doing in town, then step aside.



A highlight of the 1932 KMA Jubilee was a milking contest in which Earl May (left) tested himself against U. S. Secretary of Agriculture Arthur M. Hyde.

JUBILATION AND JEOPARDY

One stranger, however, approached the microphone and announced, "This is KMA, Shenandoah, Iowa, Earl May's station, and for every person that calls in long distance between now and midnight--and Earl May will pay for the telephone calls--Earl May will send you free a five-pound box of chocolates."

Calls poured in from everywhere, and it became obvious to Earl that to buy and mail the chocolates and cover the cost of the calls would run somewhere in the neighborhood of \$5,000. "I regret we did not discuss this situation ahead of time," Earl told the stranger. "However, since the information was given over the air, we are going to stand behind what was said. But who is going to furnish the \$5,000 to pay for the telephone calls and the cost of the chocolates?"

"Don't worry, Mr. May," the stranger replied. "Here is my I.O.U. for \$5000. Just send it to that address in Duluth." It was signed only with the initials T.M.

The I.O.U. was honored, and Earl later learned that T.M. was Tom Merritt, one of the developers of the Mesabi Iron Range near Hibbing, Minnesota. According to Merritt's lawyer, "Tom Merritt was a wealthy man, and what Tom Merritt did in Shenandoah was his idea of strictly having fun."

Perhaps the greatest Jubilee attractions were the programs broadcast live from the stages of the radio auditoriums. Fans could see their favorite performers in person, and the interest in the broadcasts was so enthusiastic that programs like the Country School were presented three or more times daily. Even that did not always satisfy the crowds.

"There would be a thousand people there to watch, and more standing in the aisles," recalls Jessie Young, who broadcast her daily homemaker program from the Mayfair stage during the Jubilees. "We'd let them sit there for an hour, then we'd try to get them to leave so another thousand could come in for the next show, but they wouldn't go! They were there and they didn't want to move. Finally we'd pull the curtains down in front of the glass and turn off the sound. The audience would think the programs were over, even though we were still broadcasting behind the curtains. At last they would leave, and after we got them out one door, we'd let the next batch come in the other door, then open up the curtains and put on another hour's program."

When she wasn't on the air, Jessie joined other radio personalities on a platform in the May store selling Earl May coffee, Earl May harness, Earl May bananas, and Earl May brand everything else. By the time she finally went home, her clothing reeked of pancake and syrup smells, and her feet ached. More often than not, some of the Jubilee crowd followed along behind her. "I used to look out in my yard, and there'd be people strung all over with their tablecloths and their food and the

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family and kids, just picnicking because they wanted to do it on my lawn.”

But the familiarity of listeners could go too far. “I came home from the studio one day,” Jessie remembers, “and here was a great big fat lady in the yard, and in her arms she had my son Ronnie. I’d told my mother never to let anyone hold the baby, but I guess she couldn’t help herself. I took the big woman inside, and I took the baby to my mother and said, ‘Scrub him up! Scrub the baby up!’ She didn’t smell any too clean, that big woman didn’t.

“Anyhow, she sat down in the rocking chair across the room from me, and every once in awhile she’d go to scratching herself. She did that four or five times, and I thought, what is the matter with this woman? Is she going to have a fit in my living room? Finally she walked right over to me and she flipped up her dress and said, ‘I’ve got a corset stay itching me up here. Will you pull it out for me?’

“And when she flipped her dress, I saw she’d made herself big panties out of bright yellow Nutrena feed sacks. There across her rear end in big black letters was the word *NUTRENA!*”



Using a microphone installed in her kitchen, Jessie Young broadcast programs from her home.

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(Although it was not unusual during the Depression for people to make clothing from feed bags, a good washing or two usually took out the printing. In fact, a 1942 issue of *Kitchen-Klatter Magazine* published these instructions:

To Remove Print From Feed Or Flour Sacks

In 1/2 boiler of water put 1/4 bar of soap, 1 tablespoon kerosene, 2 tablespoons washing powder, 1 tablespoon lye. Boil sacks in this for 20 minutes and there is seldom even a trace of print left.)

The popularity of the broadcasters led some of them to try their hands at politics. In 1932, Henry Field ran as a Republican for the office of U.S. senator. It was his first and only foray into the political arena, but the public response was overwhelming. In the spring primaries, Henry defeated the incumbent, Smith W. Brookhart. Brookhart continued the race as an independent, and although Henry again beat him soundly in the general election, the Field campaign was itself overwhelmed by Franklin Roosevelt's landslide sweeping Democrats into office from the presidency down through nearly every state election in Iowa. (Commenting several years later on his defeat, Henry observed that he was rather glad he'd not won. "The way things are in Washington these days," he said, "if I'd gone down there I'd be dead or crazy by now.")

Although encouraged by many to run and offered a position in the management of the Works Projects Administration, Earl May satisfied his political aspirations with years of service as president of the Shenandoah Park Commission, but he did enjoy dealing with those in high public office. Not long after F.D.R.'s election, Earl, Gertrude and their daughter Frances (who was at the time attending college in a Washington suburb) took a hundred choice rose bushes to the White House and gave them to Eleanor Roosevelt so that she might have them planted in the Rose Garden. After the presentation, Earl had meetings with the new Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace. It is not known if the Secretary was aware that this was the Iowa seedsman who had outmilked his predecessor at the previous year's Jubilee.

Mr. May was also ushered into the Oval Office to meet with Franklin Roosevelt. For the first and probably only time in his life, Earl suddenly found himself at a loss for words. Acting on instinct, he reached into his back pocket for an Earl May Seed & Nursery Company catalogue and pressed it into the surprised President's hand.

Years later during one of Roosevelt's cross-country campaign trips, Earl took advantage of an opportunity to board the presidential train at one stop and ride it to the next. While aboard, he was again introduced

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to F.D.R. "Ah, Mr. May," the President said, "have you got any more of your catalogues for me?"

As a public personality whose name was familiar in nearly every Midwestern household, Earl had many opportunities to meet people of influence. In an age when accounts of the Lindbergh baby's kidnapping filled the newspapers, Earl's fame also left him open to potential disaster.

During the summer of 1934 while the May family was relaxing at their vacation home near Mercer, Wisconsin, a letter arrived in Shenandoah demanding \$6000 from Earl May. If he agreed to the terms, he was to run an ad in the Omaha newspapers saying, "Okey, Earl." If he didn't comply, the letter warned that Earl could expect the bombing of his home "to endanger the life of the ones you hold dear."

The deadline had passed before the Mays returned to Shenandoah and Earl received the letter. Greatly concerned, he notified the FBI. A second note arrived, setting a new deadline for Earl to come up with the money and warning ominously, "Listen sap, you are going to get this one chance to kick thru. Have you any idea how much hell one little pint of nitroglycerine makes? If you are curious ignore this letter



On a visit to Washington, D.C., the Mays presented Eleanor Roosevelt with 100 Earl May rose bushes to be planted in the White House rose garden. From left, Earl May, Congressman Otha Wearin, Frances May, Eleanor Roosevelt, Gertrude May, Mrs. Wearin, and Marion Christenson, secretary to Mrs. Roosevelt.

JUBILATION AND JEOPARDY

and see.” A thunderstorm drenched Iowa the night of the new deadline, and although FBI agents followed the letter’s instructions, they saw no sign of the extortionist.

A few days later, Earl received a third letter:

Omaha, Nebr.
June 20, 1934

Earl E. May:

Due to circumstances over which we had no control, we were unable to contact you Tuesday p.m.

Understand you were on the road, so credit you with trying to fill your part of the bargain.

Now on Thursday, June 21, you are to leave Shenandoah at 8:30 p.m. over route No. 3 to Sidney, No. 275 to the Blind Institute south of Council Bluffs. From there you are to turn back if you find no stop signals and retrace your route holding road speed of not more than 25 miles per hour and avoid any bunching with other cars. Watch at all times for red stop signal on right side of pavement, your car to be identified by green right-hand headlight, six-inch squares of white paper on door glass both sides your car. Manage also to light the inside of your car so we can recognize you readily. Follow instructions as given other letters regarding to money, \$6,000, six thousand dollars in used currency broken series, \$5.00 and \$10.00 notes, 80% to be in \$10.00’s. Insert in personal column all Thursday p.m. editions the following: All set for Thursday--Earl.

The FBI sent to Shenandoah an agent named Joe “Killer” Burke, who possessed a striking physical resemblance to Earl May. “I saw my father out in the yard one evening,” recalls Ed May, who was fourteen at the time. “But when I went to talk to him, it was the FBI man. He looked just like my dad.”

After masking the headlights and windows of Earl’s car according to the instructions in the letter, agent Burke put on one of Earl’s suits and his hat. Two other agents armed themselves with machine guns and crouched on the floor of the car’s back seat. Looking for all the world like Earl May, “Killer” Burke drove west to Sidney and then north to Council Bluffs, but saw nothing along the road. On the way back, though, he noticed a red light glowing in the ditch.

Burke stopped the car, got out, and found a red-lensed flashlight mounted on the fork of a stick whittled from a plum tree. Attached to

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the flashlight with a rubber band was a note ordering Earl May to take the flashlight, the note, and the money to the opposite side of the road and leave everything beside a telephone pole. Burke followed the instructions, but left a dummy package rather than real money. Returning to the car, he drove away slowly enough to allow the other agents to slip out of the automobile and into the overgrown ditch alongside the road. A few moments later, Burke turned around and sped back to the telephone pole where he saw a man standing near the packet.

“Raise your hands!” Burke shouted as he leaped from behind the wheel and drew his .32 revolver. Unknown to Burke, his fellow agents hidden in the grass were already training their guns on the suspect and had warned the man not to move his hands at all. Burke fired a shot over the suspect’s head, and the other agents shouted that everything was under control. “It’s all right! Who am I?” Burke yelled back, worried about being caught in an ambush. The agents called Burke’s name and came out of hiding. The arrest was made, and the May family was notified that they were out of danger.

The suspect was held on three counts of extortion, one for each of the letters. Found guilty on all charges, he was convicted under the recently-enacted federal Lindbergh Law, which made him liable for a maximum twenty years’ imprisonment and a fine of \$10,000.

Even though the extortionist was behind bars, life at the May home was a long time in settling back to normal. Earl had floodlights installed around the house and hired a watchman to keep an eye on the place. Young Ed was encouraged to take his large dog with him whenever he went downtown, and from time to time he would notice a man following him wherever he went, looking after his welfare.

Chapter IX

DEDICATION TO SERVICE

“**T**he farmer considers radio an investment instead of a luxury,” proclaimed a 1925 editorial in the Shenandoah *Evening Sentinel*. “He farms better when he knows what is going on around him; he is in closer touch with his country’s problems, and with weather and market conditions. We hope to see the day when the radio set will be found in almost every farmhouse, and we don’t believe that time is going to be so very far off, either.”

May company records of 1941 show that 62% of KMA’s listeners lived on farms, 25% in small towns, and 13% in cities. The typical farm family went to bed at 9 p.m. and was up by 5 or 6 the next morning. “Many of them enjoy rural electrification, but even if not, a radio set, be it battery or power-operated, is considered almost as essential as the dining room table.” Sixty percent of the children attended rural schools, as had a majority of their parents.

“On the whole,” the report concluded, “the KMA family likes only what has been tested and tried. They have little desire for the novel or the sensational. They like old-fashioned music and prefer ballads to lyrics in song. It takes eight to ten weeks for a talent group to become established on KMA, and then that group must be sincere and capable

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performers of the music the KMA family likes. To be popular, an announcer need not have perfect diction or an eastern accent; his voice does not have to have perfect timbre in the bass range, but his voice must have sincerity, conviction, pleasantness, and calm when he talks on subjects with which he is familiar. When he treats one of his specialized subjects, an announcer can never be smart-alecky or sophisticated. He cannot wise crack or even slightly scoff. His plain, simple statements of the truth only will get him by.”

It was an audience that wanted good farm and market news, the daily visits of radio homemakers, and simple, delightful entertainment. From its very inception, KMA radio had tried to provide them with the programming they wanted and needed.

As he had driven to Omaha in the pre-dawn darkness in 1925, Earl May had noticed the lights burning in the farmhouses and realized that a radio station might be of help to farmers by broadcasting agricultural news and market reports in the wee hours of the morning. On October 30, 1925, soon after KMA had gone on the air, Earl broadcast a 5:30 a.m. farm program which was a clear sign of the station’s intention to serve its farm audience in useful, effective ways. Arrangements were made to acquire grain and livestock quotations from markets in Omaha, St. Joseph, Sioux City, St. Paul, Chicago, Kansas City, East St. Louis, and the smaller interior markets. For poultry raisers and dairymen, KMA provided market reports on eggs, butter, and other produce.

That same year, Earl May was contacted by Sam Pickard, an assistant to the Secretary of Agriculture, concerning the feasibility of having KMA carry news releases about federal farm programs. Earl agreed, believing it would add another dimension to the already popular weather, crop, and market reports that then constituted the backbone of KMA’s service to farmers.

Another indication of the station’s growing importance to agriculture occurred in 1928 when publisher George M. Cantrill moved the offices of *The Swine World: The National Poland China Journal* from Des Moines to Shenandoah. “One of the deciding factors in moving this publication to Shenandoah is the radio stations,” he explained. “KMA and KFNF are the strongest in the United States with the farmers and progressive livestock breeders, and I feel it will be a great benefit to have their influence and co-operation.”

In 1933, the Roosevelt administration and the Congress enacted sweeping new farm programs to cope with the financial crises gripping the agricultural industry. Chief among those affecting Midwestern farmers were the Corn-Hog Adjustment Act, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, and the Soil Conservation Act. In the blizzard of new legislation

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directed their way, farmers turned to the farm-oriented radio stations for clarification and guidance.

Thanks to his long-standing contacts with government officials and his understanding of the local farm situation, Earl May had a particularly clear perception of the developing legislation and its impact. Throughout 1933 and 1934, his broadcasts explaining the new farm recovery programs averaged 45 minutes every day, and drew praise from the Department of Agriculture for the service his efforts provided the farmers. At company expense, he spelled out the major provisions and ramifications of one of the acts in *Earl May's Corn-Hog Booklet*, and distributed 20,000 copies free of charge.

Following a suggestion by Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace, Earl May invited farmers to come to Shenandoah in late 1933 to discuss farm problems and possible solutions. Ten thousand attended, resulting in the formation of the Central West Livestock Feeders Association. The organization held its annual meetings in the Mayfair Auditorium for many years, and gave farmers a united voice in presenting their concerns to government officials.

KMA's dedication to quick and complete coverage of farm-related legislation continued throughout the years of the Depression and beyond. Although he had long since passed the early morning microphone to others (station owners do have certain perquisites), Earl May's fifteen-minute farm news broadcasts were still heard three times daily, at 10:15 a.m., 12:30 p.m., and 6:45 p.m. In 1941, upon hearing that the Agricultural Adjustment Act would undergo radical alterations to satisfy new national defense needs, Earl contacted officials in Washington, D.C., got explanations of the changing situation, and gave his listeners a full picture of the pending legislation and its anticipated impact upon the Midwest. Farmers praised the reports, thanking Earl because he had "made it so plain."

While farm and market news was of concern to the long-range planning of listeners, weather reports were of immediate interest. As a whole, a rural audience is much more affected by fluctuations in the weather than are city dwellers, and the importance of good forecasts was obvious to KMA. In September of 1934, KMA established its own United States Cooperative Weather Station, one of 120 such stations in Iowa. With it and with the information shared by other weather stations, KMA was able to make fairly accurate forecasts of weather conditions that would affect farmers. On a September morning in 1935, for instance, KMA predicted a heavy, killing frost would occur that night, and warned farmers to get out in the fields and select their seed corn before dark.

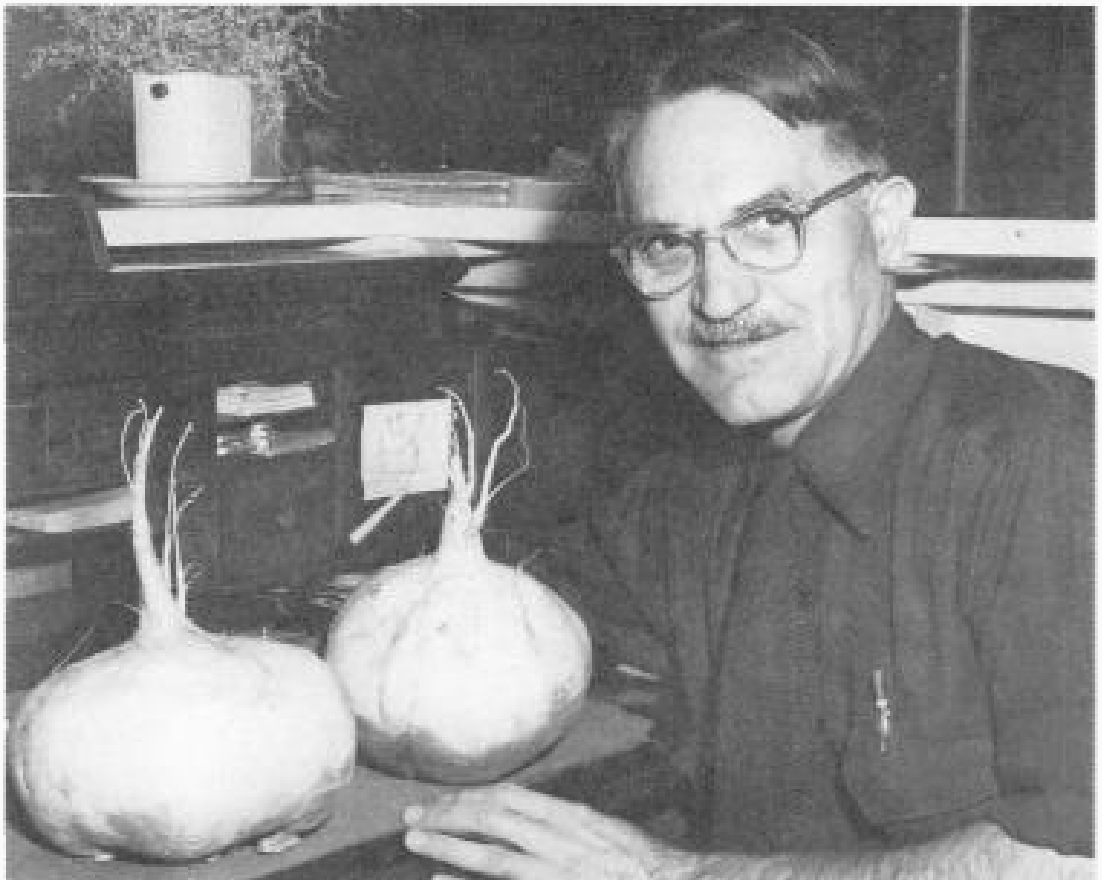
In fact, the KMA weather station consisted of little more than a barometer, a thermometer and a rain gauge. Then in 1940, KMA aug-

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mented it with one of the best-known weathermen around. That was Frank Field.

Frank Field was the eldest of Henry Field's eleven children. Born in Shenandoah in 1894, his natural aptitude with plants was nurtured by the days he spent in gardens and farm fields with his father. He graduated from high school in the same class as Gertrude Welch, then completed a two-year horticulture course at Iowa State College. After trying the plumbing trade for a few years in Council Bluffs, Frank returned to Shenandoah and took a job in his father's seed company. When KFNF went on the air in 1924, Frank broadcast an occasional short talk and sometimes served as announcer. Two years later, he began a regular 10 a.m. program, reading government weather bureau forecasts, giving his own local predictions, and visiting about gardening. During the 1930's, Frank served as manager of a number of the Henry Field Company's new branch stores. He also increased his time on KFNF to two daily programs, and never missed a scheduled broadcast.

By 1940, KFNF's fortunes were waning. The structure of the Henry Field Company left little room for Frank to advance, and after many



Frank Field's morning weather and gardening programs drew thousands of letters and an occasional surprise such as these giant turnips grown from Earl May seeds.

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years with the firm, he was in need of a change. He joined the staff of KMA and began two fifteen-minute morning broadcasts at 7:15 and 8:15. Sponsored by the May Seed & Nursery Company, they were to become Midwestern institutions. The programs were so popular and had such a large and loyal listenership that advertisers studying the surveys of program popularity could not believe Frank's drawing power.

The trademark of the 7:15 broadcast was the sound of the "Wooden Axle," Burlington train number 101 rolling into Shenandoah from Essex. Scheduled to arrive at 7:22, the engineer always blew the train's whistle as the locomotive and its two cars full of freight, mail, and passengers commuting to work in Shenandoah approached a crossing near the KMA studio. Sometimes the morning newsman would kick open the studio door so that the radio audience could better hear the sound of the train rumbling past.

The train had been given its nickname by KMA singer Lem Hawkins, whose musical program had filled the 7:15 time slot before Frank Field arrived. Rather than be interrupted in mid-song by the sound of the train, Lem would stop singing until, as he told his listeners, "That wooden axle has gone by."

But it takes more than train whistles to keep listeners tuned in year after year. A self-taught meteorologist, Frank made regional weather forecasts which were often better than government weather bureau predictions. He could also answer almost any gardening question. By his second year on KMA, he was receiving over 200 letters a day asking questions about farm seeds, baby chicks, flowers, and nursery stock. Ninety percent of the letters could be answered with leaflets sent out by Frank and his secretary Ethel Baldwin, while the most interesting of each batch were handled on the air. "My chicks have the gaps. What should I do about it?" a letter might ask. "What variety of hybrid corn is best for gumbo land in Atchison County, Missouri?" another would inquire. "My rose bushes look as if they had been scalded by fire. What is causing it and what can I do to stop it?"

When logic and experience failed, Frank turned to his Moonsign Dates—a leaflet listing the days most favorable for performing various tasks as determined by the location and phases of the moon. The Moonsign Dates gave guidance on the timing of shingling, slaughtering, weaning, planting, fishing, cutting timber, making soap, and pruning shrubs, as well as optimum dates for cutting hair to increase growth, and cutting it to make it grow more slowly. (Moonsign Dates continue to be as popular as ever. In 1985, the May company printed 300,000 copies of the Moonsign Date leaflet for free distribution to store customers and KMA listeners.)

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“I never attempt an answer unless I have the full facts,” Frank explained, and the full facts were usually packed away inside his head. With an ever-present and seldom-used pencil in his hand, he sat before the microphone each morning answering dozens of queries, selling Earl May’s wild bird feed and Earl May’s “Popperized” popcorn, and urging listeners to get out and plant gardens with Earl May seeds. “If I didn’t have that pencil in my hand, I couldn’t go on the air,” he declared. And, of course, his fame spread.

One day while Frank was driving to Omaha, a highway patrolman passed him, then motioned for him to pull over to the side of the road. Afraid he was about to get a ticket for some driving offense he could not remember having committed, Frank watched the officer approach. “The patrolman walked over and stuck his head down to the window,” Frank remembered, “and he asked, ‘What do I do about box elder bugs?’”

In addition to farm and market information and weather forecasts, KMA provided listeners with regularly scheduled news reports. The first wire service line, United Press International, was probably not installed until 1935. Before that, news was collected wherever an announcer might find it. The experience of Doris Murphy was not uncommon.

Doris had grown up in Shenandoah and had worked for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and the *Shenandoah Evening Sentinel*. “I was sitting next to Earl May at a dinner party one night, and he suggested that I give news on the air. That was before we had the press services. I gave a thirty-minute newscast on Sunday night, and I had to go through all the Sunday papers to get the news. It was really a big job.” Later, KMA’s association with the NBC Blue Network, with ABC, and with the Mutual Broadcasting System provided the station’s news department with national and international information.

Among those broadcasters most closely associated with KMA’s news department was Ralph Childs, who joined the station in 1939. Raised in Waterloo, Iowa, Ralph had studied English and speech at Iowa State Teachers’ College, taught high school in Aplington, Iowa, and in 1933 earned a masters’ degree at the University of Iowa. He joined WMT in Waterloo as a writer and producer. As the winter holidays approached, the station manager asked him to play the part of Santa Claus for thirty minutes a day. From that inauspicious beginning, he was hired as a part-time announcer “back in the days when an announcer not only did microphone work, but also wrote continuity, acted as engineer, and swept the floor.” After stints at KWBJ in Hutchison, Kansas, and KXEY in Kansas City, Ralph came to KMA, and before long his name had become synonymous with news.

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The 1941 program log suggests the importance KMA placed upon news, and Ralph's part in its reporting:

6-6:15 a.m.--Weather & News by Jack Kelly

7-7:15 a.m.--NBC News with Captain E.D.C. Herne

7:15-7:30 a.m.--Frank Field

8-8:15 a.m.--Weather, News & Markets by Ralph Childs

8:15-8:30 a.m.--Frank Field

10-10:15 a.m.--News, Weather, & Markets by Earl May

10:15-10:30 a.m.--Earl May's Farm News

12:30-12:45 p.m.--News, Weather, & Markets by Earl May

4:30-4:45 p.m.--Weather & News by Ralph Childs

5:30-6 p.m.--NBC's Drama Behind the News

6:30-6:45 p.m.--News, Weather, Markets by Earl May

6:45-7:00 p.m.--Earl May's Farm News

10:15-10:30 p.m.--News and Weather by Glenn Law

11:50-12:00 p.m.--News and Weather by Glenn Law

Throughout the years of World War II, Ralph pieced together wire service reports and local coverage to give listeners a Midwestern per-



Program director Fred Greenlee (left) and newsman Ralph Childs study wire service reports of World War II troop activities.

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spective of international developments, and in 1944 he covered the Republican and Democratic National Conventions from Chicago. Editing copy with a stub of a pencil and habitually wadding sheets of paper in his hand and squeezing them while he broadcast, Ralph brought the world to the listeners of KMA. But even with his skill and insight, Ralph's news prognostications could at times still be upstaged by an old master like Earl May.

As Ed May tells the story, his father went to a Shenandoah barber shop for a shave almost every morning. "One day in 1945, the barber asked him how he thought the war was going in Europe. Dad said, 'Well, it's awfully tough to tell, but Tuesday's going to be a big day.'

"Tuesday happened to be the day of the Normandy invasion. 'My god,' the barber thought after hearing the news. 'Earl May knew about the Normandy invasion!'

"In fact he didn't know, but at KMA they'd planned to unplug and move one of the wire service machines. However, when they informed the Associated Press that they would be off the air for the day, the word came down from A.P., *do not turn off that machine! Do not move it on Tuesday!* So Dad knew something was up.

"Sometime later, the same barber asked my father how things were going in the war with Japan. Dad said, 'Well, the war's going to be over in five days.' The next day they dropped the atomic bomb, and you can imagine what the barber thought.

"Of course, my father didn't know about the atomic bomb, but our attorney in Washington was apparently close to the atomic bomb situation. Without saying we'd drop the bomb, he'd told my father the war would be over in five days, and it was."

In addition to farm service, market, news, and weather reports, religious programming and welfare services had been features of KMA's radio offerings from its earliest days. Not long after the station opened, Gertrude May had taken charge of a regular Sunday morning inspirational program on which she sang German folk tunes and visited about her garden. Later, the services of various Shenandoah churches were aired via microphones wired directly to the KMA transmitter.

In 1930, a young woman named Edythe Schwartz was hired to direct KMA's welfare efforts. Raised in Kansas by a sister and brother-in-law who were both ordained ministers, Edythe had become a school teacher and then the secretary to a minister of a large church in Washington, D.C., where her duties included overseeing the welfare work of the parish. She returned to the Midwest and joined KFEQ in St. Joseph, Missouri, as a hymn singer. She was ordained as a minister in the Christian Church, though as she explains, "I serve as minister to all churches." She came to Shenandoah in 1929, married Carl Stirlen of May's furniture

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department, and was heard first as religious director at KFNF, then as the KMA director of welfare.

Edythe was soon broadcasting two daily fifteen-minute programs over KMA, and a thirty-minute Sunday program. She established an organization called the S.O.S. Club ("Send Out Sunshine") for listeners who were shut-ins. Known as "the Little Minister," a nickname given her by Earl May, Edythe developed the club and her daily broadcasts into The KMA Radio Church, complete with Sunday School, Cradle Roll, Shut-In Club, morning prayer service, Sunday evening vesper service, and a very large roster of listeners who considered themselves loyal members. The *S.O.S. Signal*, the official periodical of the KMA radio church, was edited and published by the Reverend Stirlen, and at ten cents a copy went to an S.O.S. Club membership of over 30,000. It contained photographs, poems, and letters from members, and encouraged listeners and readers to become pen pals with shut-ins whose addresses were listed in the pamphlet and over the air. Edythe's broadcasts and publications also served to alert the public to the needs of shut-ins, and concerned listeners responded by sending in eye glasses,



"The Little Minister" Edythe Stirlen was KMA's director of welfare and founder of the Send Out Sunshine (S.O.S.) Club.

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crutches, wheelchairs, and blankets for invalids, and radios for those confined to their homes. The club was instrumental in locating families for homeless children, and finding jobs for the unemployed. Edythe also organized annual S.O.S. Club conventions, usually held in a Shenandoah city park. The yearly events were designed to allow shut-ins to meet one another.

In conjunction with her KMA Radio Church duties, the Little Minister performed hundreds of weddings, sometimes before the KMA microphones. James Pearson, best known as “the KFNF Newsboy,” was also an ordained minister, and he broadcast many marriages over KFNF. Sometimes he aired open invitations to any couples who wished to be married to come on down to the studio. On one occasion, six couples arrived, marriage licenses in hand, and Pearson united them in a mass ceremony in the KFNF auditorium.

As for other humanitarian gestures, KMA spearheaded many fund-raising campaigns over the years, collecting \$5000 in a four day Red Cross drive following a Mississippi River flood, \$1200 in 1935 after a flood ravaged McCook, Nebraska, and another \$5000 to help victims



The Reverend Stirlen performed hundreds of weddings. Many, such as this one uniting Cleil Ostrander of Sterling, Nebraska, and Ilah Funk of Glenwood, Iowa, were conducted on the stage of Mayfair Auditorium where the proceedings could be aired over KMA.

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of a 1936 Ohio River flood. When a 1928 ice storm downed telephone and electrical lines throughout the Midwest, KMA stayed on the air for forty-eight hours, relaying train orders and forwarding messages to public service companies involved in repairing the wires. On-the-scene coverage of the 1939 Nishnabotna and Missouri River floods helped enlist volunteers with boats and high-wheeled tractors to evacuate the people of Hamburg, Iowa, from flooded homes.

In terms of public service, though, no other event brought quite the pleasure and goodwill to KMA's listeners as the Iowa Rural School Graduation Program. The program was a natural for a station like KMA, whose audience was composed in large part of farm families. In 1940, the majority of Iowa's farm children attended the more than 9000 tiny, rural grade schools scattered across the state. The schools had small enrollments and no auditoriums, and lacked the resources to stage proper graduation ceremonies. Working in cooperation with the Rural Section of the Iowa State Teachers' Association, KMA set aside May 17, 1940, as Rural School Graduation Day to honor those students completing the eighth grade.

Throughout the state, students with musical abilities auditioned to be part of the Shenandoah broadcast. With the help of county school superintendents, an essay contest was conducted and the winner was declared the state country school valedictorian, eligible for a free trip to Shenandoah to join hundreds of other rural students eager to attend the ceremonies broadcast live from the Mayfair Auditorium. Outlines of the program were distributed ahead of time to the teachers of students unable to come to Shenandoah so that in each rural schoolhouse, students could tune a radio to KMA and go through the graduation ceremony along with their peers from all over Iowa. They heard addresses by the governor, various educators and Earl May, and then joined together to sing the chorus of "America."

KMA's service to its audience did not go unnoticed. In 1939, the station was awarded the *Variety Magazine* showmanship plaque in the farm service category, an honor won in previous years by large stations such as WLS, Chicago; WLW, Cincinnati; and WHO, Des Moines. In 1946, KMA was again the recipient of a *Variety* showmanship award, this one engraved, "For Outstanding Service to the Farmer."

Variety noted in its 1946 presentation that:

KMA is a farmer's station--body, soul, and gaiters. It serves up daily farm fare as hearty as noonday dinner at harvest time, starting with plenty of newscasts, weather and market reports, interviews, specialized scientific farm info, features for the farmer's wife, and human interest material in abundance. ...KMA puts itself at the farmer's service

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whether to find a stray calf, a new bell for the church, or a school teacher for a remote village. Premeditatively agricultural in everything it does, KMA wins a bow for knowing exactly what audience it wants, and serving it with solid corn-belt show management.

And as if that weren't enough, a 1946 team of KMA employees led by secretary Evalyn Saner won the Shenandoah Women's Bowling League championship for the second year in a row.



June Wilson of Curlew, Iowa, accepts the valedictorian trophy from Earl May during the 1941 Iowa Rural School 8th Grade graduation exercises broadcast from Mayfair.

Chapter X

THE GOLDEN AGE OF LIVE MUSIC

For many years, farm-oriented programming filled about a third of KMA's air time. Another third came from network offerings--"The George Burns Show," "Fibber McGee and Molly," "The Lone Ranger," and other programs that many stations throughout the country made the heart of their entertainment fare.

That left another third--four or five hours daily--and as it had done since the 1920's, KMA relied heavily on musicians to fill the airwaves and entertain its audience. Producing so much live music every day required quite a large staff. A few musicians, like Gretta Bellamy, became fixtures at the station, staying with KMA not just for years, but for whole decades. (Although her performances were few in later years, Gretta did not leave the KMA until 1959 when she moved to Ames and became housemother of an Iowa State University fraternity.)

More often, though, the entertainers who appeared on the Shenandoah station stayed for only a few months or a few years and then moved on. Unlike the KMA performers of the 1920's and early 30's who were generally local amateurs or veterans of vaudeville and the chautauquas, the entertainers of the 1940's and early 50's were professional musicians

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whose beginnings had been in radio. Among them were some very gifted musicians and a few barely able to carry a tune. They came from the Ozarks, the bluegrass country of Kentucky, and from Tennessee, Texas, Alabama, and even Shenandoah. Representative of their collective experience was a family named Everly.

Ike Everly had been raised in the little town of Brownie in the coal country of Kentucky, a village long ago scraped from the earth by strip-mining machinery. Ike was the son and grandson of coal miners, though his father had also played the old-time fiddle and his mother could sing. In addition to coal, Muhlenberg County had produced quite a few musicians, some of whom played the guitar with a unique thumb-pick style. As they grew up, Ike and his three brothers played music together, and Ike mastered the thumb-pick. He would walk many miles to hear good thumb-pickers—an old black man named Arnold Shultz, for instance, or Kennedy Jones, who drove mules in the mines and wrote “Cannonball Rag.” As they got better, Ike and his brothers traveled to radio stations in nearby cities in Kentucky and Indiana and offered to perform for free on the off-chance they could play and sing on the radio. Eventually Ike went to Chicago and worked in small night clubs and taverns, and with a fellow who called himself the North Carolina Boy, he formed a duet that broadcast over Chicago station WJJD.

Margaret Embry grew up in Brownie three doors down from the home of Ike’s parents. “We would go to church and Ike would walk home with me,” she remembers. “He’d been out of Kentucky, and I thought he was a man of the world. I was fifteen and he was twenty-six. When he went back to Chicago, he wrote to me and asked me to marry him. We got married and went to Chicago.”

Margaret had never been very far out of Brownie, but she was tough and adaptable, and felt as though she fit into the Chicago scene of struggling musicians. She and Ike did move back to Kentucky for a short time, but there was no future for them there, and they returned to the city. Their son Don was born when Margaret was seventeen, and Phil came along two years later. While Chicago might be all right for a musician, Ike and Margaret wanted someplace quiet and stable in which to raise their family. In 1945, they took the train west to Waterloo, Iowa, and Ike auditioned at the radio stations there.

“We had two little boys,” Margaret recalls. “Don was in school and Phil was getting ready for kindergarten. Ike and I had come from a little town, and we wanted to raise those boys in a small town. But Waterloo wasn’t the right place, either. Ike talked to some people who had worked in Shenandoah at KMA, and they said that if we’d go down there, we’d be sure and get a job. It reminds me of a song, ‘We Didn’t Find It There,

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and We Moved On.' Ike called Terry Moss, the KMA program director, and got hired."

The Everlys had never been to Shenandoah. Other than Chicago, they'd barely been out of Muhlenberg County. "For us, the starting of taking chances was leaving Chicago and going to the unknown," Margaret remembers. "I never will forget coming to Shenandoah on the train. We were at a depot somewhere in Iowa waiting to transfer. It was night and there wasn't anyone on the platform except maybe the man that sold tickets. There were a million flies around this street light, and I thought, 'What a setting this is! Here we are with two little boys in a place we'd never been.' We were going toward the unknown, and it was scary and exciting."

Ike joined KMA as a staff musician. As in the early days of KMA when the same small handful of musicians appeared as everything from the Maytore Orchestra to the KMA Cornpickers, Ike and his fellow entertainers organized themselves into ensembles with names like the Utah Rangers, Nishna Valley Neighbors, Goodwill Minstrels, and Ozark Mountain Boys. One of the most popular was the Stump Us Gang,



"The Morning Round-Up" hit the airwaves as listeners were rolling out of bed. The 1945 musicians were, from left: Ralph Hunt, Little Joe Parrish, Ike Everly, Curly McDonald, and Bob Stotts.

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which aired from 1944 until 1953. Listeners were invited to send in the titles of songs they'd like to hear, and they responded by asking for everything from "Strawberry Roan" to Mendelssohn's "Spring Song." If the Stump Us Gang could play the music (and they almost always could), the listeners enjoyed the melodies. When a listener stumped them though, as did the one who requested "The Cat Meowed When Grandpa Threw His Shoe," he would receive prizes ranging from a set of china to a chrome bathroom scale. The entertainers also had an opportunity to perform again on the KMA Country School. With the gas rationing of World War II lifted, the program returned to the air for several more years, appearing every Saturday afternoon in the Mayfair Auditorium, and Saturday evenings in Council Bluffs.

Personal appearances at concerts and programs beyond the KMA microphones were very important to many of the musicians. Some, like the Blackwood Brothers Gospel Quartet, sang and played over KMA at no cost to the station. The Blackwoods' income came almost solely from ticket sales to concerts they performed throughout the region, and that meant they were on the road thousands of miles a year. Arriving at



Musicians performing as the St. Joe Gang were, standing left to right: Jimmy Morgan, Oma West, Eddie Comer, Joan Williams, Elmer Axlbender, Mae West, and Wayne Van Horn. Kneeling, left to right: Harpo Richardson, Jerry Fronck, Zeke Williams, and Steve Wooden.

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KMA in the fall of 1940, the Blackwoods ranged over an area extending 150 miles in every direction from Shenandoah, driving a big Buick large enough to carry them all comfortably. Their popularity was so great that for a number of years there were two Blackwood quartets.

Some musicians had contracts with companies that paid them fees to promote their products. "Spark-O-Lite," "Vita-Mix," and "Crazy Water Crystals" were all nutritional supplements which listeners came to identify with certain performers. Two other products frequently advertised by KMA singers were "Wait's Green Mountain Cough Syrup" and kerosene lamps made by the Aladdin Company.

Those entertainers who got by just on the salaries they drew from the station often found themselves barely able to make ends meet, especially if there were hungry mouths at home to feed and a family to house. "When we first got to Shenandoah, we spent a lot of time trying to find a place to live," Margaret Everly says. "We found a little trailer first, and then we found a house out in the country."

Pleasant as it was, country life brought up a difficulty Ike had not foreseen. Although he now needed to drive to work, he'd never operated



KMA listeners often responded to the programs they heard by sending letters to the station. Here, a day's mail is sorted by Irene Johnson (left), Ruth Maher, and Mary Ellen Anderson.

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an automobile. He bought an old clunker, got himself a license, and began commuting to the radio station in Shenandoah. "That car shim-mied and did a little of everything because I don't think he gave over ten dollars for it," Margaret laughs. "Of a morning, the happiest moment of my day was when that car got out of hearing distance. I knew that if I heard it stop, I'd have to go help Ike get it going again. I was elated when it was beyond earshot."

At the end of the day, the other KMA performers would help Ike get the car running and point him toward home. He was so nervous about driving, though, that rather than risk making a turn, he sometimes drove clear to Clarinda, twenty miles the wrong direction from his house.

Eventually the Everly family moved back into town to a little house they rented for twelve dollars a month. "It was one big room and a bedroom and a bath, but it was nice," Margaret says, smiling. "If you wanted to go into the bedroom, you could almost get there by just staying where you were. And if you wanted to go into the kitchen, you could still just stay where you were."



Entertainers of the late 1940's revived the KMA Country School. Standing, left to right: Jerry Fronek, Zeke Williams, Ike Everly, Marge Parker, Bob Stotts (behind blackboard), Joan Williams, Elmer Axelbender, and Merl Douglas. Seated, left to right: Steve Wooden, Eddie Comer (with glasses), Mack Sanders, Glenn Harris (teacher), Jeanie Sanders, Harpo Richardson, and Wayne Van Horn.

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While Ike was content with his role as a KMA entertainer, Margaret had a larger vision of the future. “KMA had Mack and Jeanie Sanders as a duet, Zeke and Joanne Williams as a duet, and the West Sisters as a duet. Since Ike’s salary wasn’t too high, I would go out and work at a restaurant. I told him that instead of doing that, we ought to get us a duet and sing, too. Ike laughed, but that just fanned the flame more. Every time I’d ask him how I was doing on my singing, he’d pick out somebody really tacky and say I sounded about like that.”

Nonetheless, Margaret ordered a little Wilcox–Gay recording machine from Montgomery Ward. With the microphone hanging on the wall, she and Ike practiced their songs, and sometimes Don and Phil joined in.

Though they were still very young—ten and twelve when the Everly Family Program began on KMA—Don and Phil had long been steeped in the music of their father and of the other KMA entertainers. Ike taught them to play guitars, and they often went to the station where they could hear the likes of Jerry Fronek on accordion, Eddie Comber on clarinet, the singing of Al Sloey before he joined the Riders of the Purple Sage and went to Hollywood, and the rich gospel harmonies of the Blackwoods.

The Everly Family Program was a long time in the making. Ike had a fifteen-minute Saturday afternoon show with Little Joe Parrish. Don was becoming a good musician, and occasionally he would appear as a guest with Ike and Little Joe. He also sang now and then on the KMA Country School. The station paid him five dollars for each appearance, and afterwards he could sell photographs of himself to the fans. Phil appeared on the Country School, too, first to tell jokes and later to sing duets with his brother.

When Little Joe left the Saturday afternoon program, Margaret began appearing with Ike on the broadcasts, though not as a singer. “I read the mail over the air at first, just to get my foot in the door. Then we sang as a duet later.” After she and Ike had sung a few times and listeners had written to praise the broadcasts, Ike took the letters to the program director and talked to him about giving the whole family a shot at a show of their own. He was agreeable to the proposal, and “The Everly Family Program,” aired weekdays at 5:30 in the morning, had its start.

“Early in the morning Ike would go out to start the car and get it warm while I’d make hot chocolate for the boys,” Margaret recalls. “In the winter it might be sixteen below zero outside, but we never missed a show. I think we would have crawled to the studio to put that show on.”

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With Ike, Margaret, Don and Phil all in the studio, a typical program might begin with the singing of an inspirational song like "The Old Rugged Cross." Then Ike would greet the listeners:

IKE--"Thank you, and we'd like to know that you good neighbors joined in with us on singin' that good old song."

MARGARET--"And I'd like to tell the folks about some of the nice offers we have on our program. Be sure and send two dollars for *XIT*. Now, that's *x, i, t*. It'll get rid of all those rats on your place. And be sure, if you have corns and callouses, send for *Foster's Thirty-minute Wonder Corn and Callous Remover*. One dollar will bring you a big one-ounce bottle, guaranteed to get rid of at least a dozen corns and callouses. Get that order in the mail today to the Everly Family."

IKE--"Donnie, I feel another guitar tune comin' on. Let's get into gear and see if we can play another old favorite, called 'Stealin' the Blues.' "

And away they would go, singing morning after morning while the farmers pulled on their overalls and headed for the barns, and the farm-



Phil Everly (left) and his brother Donnie were joined on the Everly Brothers Show by clarinetist Eddie Comer, Ike Everly on guitar, and accordion expert Jerry Fronck.

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Don and Phil Everly pose with their parents about the time "The Everly Family Show" aired on Shenandoah radio.

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ers' wives fired up their ranges, booted the kids out of bed, and got breakfast on the table.

Since the whole family was working, the Everlys were able to rent another farmhouse and move again to the country where they had seven acres of fields and woodlands in which the boys could play. They saved their money and bought a new car and, because they'd all helped earn it, they tore off the window stickers together and agreed each of them owned one of the tires. At school, Phil sang in the glee club. In addition to working at KMA, the boys had paper routes and lemonade stands, and joined hundreds of other youngsters detassling corn in the fields owned by Earl May.

"Look at what we had going for us," Margaret points out. "We had come to a nice place to raise the boys and let them go to school. With our program, we felt like we were going somewhere, that we were working all together as a family toward something important. The boys weren't making any money for their future, but they were learning and developing their talents. And how could they miss, with all that talent rubbing off on them? Every day they heard Bob Stotts singing western, Jimmy Morgan doing Southern-type country, the Blackwood Brothers doing gospel--the boys' music came as natural as eating. And KMA gave us the opportunity to perform."

While the Everlys were content to stay in Shenandoah as long as they could, other radio entertainers came and went. Some had small repertoires, and, after they'd been on the air a few months, listener interest as measured by incoming mail began to wane. The audiences at personal appearances shrank, and with them went the entertainer's income. When that happened, it was time for a musician to move on to greener pastures, tapping a new audience from a station in South Dakota, eastern Iowa, Kansas, or southern Missouri.

When entertainers came to Shenandoah looking for work, Ike would sometimes bring them home for a meal. If they looked down and out, he and Margaret loaded them up with food and encouragement before sending them on their way, perhaps suggesting another station where they might audition. The entertainers were a family among themselves, especially because they often were not around long enough to really settle into the communities in which they lived.

"But we didn't plan on being transient," Margaret insists. "We wanted to stay in Shenandoah and give a stable quality to our children. It turned out about eight years we spent there, and that was a good base for Don and Phil. The Midwest is a special place. Added to their Southern background, that Midwest training at KMA helped the boys' music. And they got to go to school with the other kids and be a part of things."

THE GOLDEN AGE OF LIVE MUSIC

For awhile it looked as though the Everlys would stay at KMA for good, and that Shenandoah would become their permanent home. But the comings and goings of entertainers are not always by choice. Unfortunately for every one of KMA's musicians, there were forces at work in the radio industry and changes in the May Broadcasting Company that were soon to have profound effects on their lives and careers, and there was not a thing any of them could do about it.

“As long as there was hope, we kept on trying,” Margaret says. “But one day the hope played out.”

Chapter XI

PASSING THE TORCH

On December 19, 1946, Earl May died from the effects of a heart attack. In his 58 years, he had seen the Midwest undergo enormous changes. A territory once dominated by small, isolated farms worked with horse-drawn plows and steam-powered threshers had become a unified region woven together by good roads, better modes of transportation and cultivation and, in no small part, the voice of radio.

Henry Field passed away in 1949, and as the first half of the twentieth century drew to a close, so did a remarkable era in the history of Shenandoah and the Corn Belt. Earl and Henry had been known throughout the farmlands of middle America. Each had established a major seed and nursery company, and each had sensed the potential of radio and explored its possibilities. As competitors, they had spurred one another on. As friends, they had shared the dream of how seed companies and radio stations could serve the families of the farm and the small town with openness and understanding. They had been innovative men willing to take risks and bear the brunt of setbacks and discouragement. And with their foresight and fortitude, they had helped shape farm radio and infuse it with a legacy of trustworthiness that still exists today. The

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Earl May's death in 1946 brought to an end the career of one of radio's true pioneers.



In a familiar scene at the Field seedhouse, Henry and his wife Bertha visit with a customer.

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void left at their passing seemed almost too large to be filled, but of course it was.

On January 21, 1947, Edward Welch May became president of both the Earl May Seed & Nursery Company and the May Broadcasting Company. In addition to the thirty-six members of the KMA staff, the seed company had 138 employees. Gertrude May continued her duties as a director of both companies, providing a calming influence and business instincts that cannot be underestimated. Raymond Sawyer and J.D. Rankin Jr. also continued their service on the May Broadcasting board, and at KMA, station manager Owen Saddler and program director Terry Moss helped make the transition as smooth as possible.

The only son of Earl and Gertrude May, Ed had spent most of his life around the seed company and the radio station. "Frankly I was not exactly unprepared for these great responsibilities," he wrote in the *KMA Guide** at the time he became president of the companies. "Dad saw to that. He started training me in early childhood. He gave me all sorts of little jobs to do. He watched me closely, told me when I did wrong and explained why something I did was right. After church on Sundays, we would have long talks on why every good business must be honest and how treating people fairly and helping them meet their problems are the only way to earn friends."

Ed's career in radio went back to the earliest days of KMA. "I can remember that when I was in grade school I would hurry down to the station after school was out to watch what was going on and maybe even broadcast myself. Sometimes they would put me on a program to help sell garden seeds." It was an exciting activity that Ed's daughters Annette and Karen and his son Edward Jr. would also one day enjoy.

Earl had been a firm believer in education, and had seen to it that both Ed and his sister Frances completed their college studies. Ed earned a degree in economics from the University of Nebraska and took courses in botany at Iowa State College. While at Nebraska, he met Eleanor Jean Petty of Red Oak, Iowa. They were married in 1942, and spent several years in Lima, Peru, and Mexico City where Ed served as a junior agricultural economist in the U.S. Agricultural Foreign Service.

In addition to assuming the duties of head of the nursery and radio station, Ed also took over the daily 12:15 and 6:15 p.m. radio visits his father had conducted for more than two decades. He often broadcast from a microphone in his home so that his radio duties would interfere as little as possible with his family life. Like Earl, Ed aired news of

*Founded in June of 1944 at the suggestion of Owen Saddler, monthly issues of the *KMA Guide* gave readers news of developments at the station and features about their favorite broadcasters, as well as listings of upcoming programs.

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interest to farmers and gardeners, told of his own gardens, shared his observations of the current farming scene, and enlivened the programs with features like his annual Early Bird Gardeners' Club. To join the club, listeners were asked to send Ed a note the day their gardens produced the first peas, beans, sweet corn, or tomatoes. The earliest reports from each county would win a dollar, while everyone else received an Early Bird membership card. More than 12,000 listeners responded annually with letters telling of their gardens and, to the pleasure of the May Seed & Nursery Company, the quality of Earl May seeds.

But there were much bigger things on Ed's mind than gardeners' clubs, for just as the familiar voices of Earl May and Henry Field were fading from the air waves, there were new sounds in the skies over the Midwest. And this time the sounds were accompanied by pictures flung through the sky by an astonishing new technology called television.

In 1948, the May Broadcasting Company applied to the FCC and received a license to construct and operate television station KMTV in Omaha, Nebraska. There were no television stations in Omaha, though future NBC affiliate WOWT was granted an operating license about the



As the young, new president of the May Seed & Nursery Company and the May Broadcasting Company, Ed May hoped to maintain the standards set by his father and to move ahead with ideas of his own.

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same time May Broadcasting received theirs. Transcontinental facilities that would make network broadcasting convenient were not yet in place, and establishing a television facility was a costly and speculative venture into an unproven medium.

“At that time, anybody who put a television station on the air was taking a risk,” Ed May explains. “No one knew what television was going to amount to. It was so unknown and so expensive. In our case, it meant taking all the credit that had been built up over the years by the company under my father and making a big gamble. If we’d lost, if television hadn’t turned out to be what it is now, we just might have lost everything.”

Making the decision to seek a license for a television station was only the beginning of the battle. “When we decided to go into television, we had to be very quiet about it,” says Ed. “The FCC had allocated three channels for Omaha. We knew WOW radio was going to seek one and that radio station KFAB would want one. We also knew that the minute we filed for the third, the other Omaha radio stations would get their applications in, too.” As had happened in the early days of radio, the rapid increase in the number of new television stations threatened to overwhelm the FCC’s ability to regulate the young industry. Rather than let matters get completely out of hand, the FCC put a freeze on the issuance of new licenses, but not before May Broadcasting had received permission to go ahead with the construction of KMTV.



Members of Ed May's Early Bird Gardeners' Club received membership cards.

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Continuing a tradition begun when he had broadcast as a child with his own father, Ed May shared the microphone with his son, Ed May Jr.

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There are striking parallels between the establishment of KMA under Earl May and the beginnings of KMTV under Ed May. In both cases, a large share of the May company's resources had to be expended. In both cases, the eventual success of the stations repaid the risks many times over. And in both cases, there were astute businessmen who helped foresee the promises and the pitfalls of the new stations. Ed cites KMA station manager Owen Saddler as particularly reassuring. "He helped us make the decision to go with television, and he gave us a lot of confidence that we were doing the right thing." In order to run the Omaha operation, Owen left his position as station manager of KMA. As general manager of KMTV and then as a vice-president of May Broadcasting, Owen has made a strong and lasting imprint upon radio and television broadcasting in the Midwest.

KMTV went on the air on September 1, 1949, as the CBS affiliate for the Omaha area. Ray Schroeder, KMA's chief engineer, also became chief engineer for KMTV. A number of KMA broadcasters and engineers commuted from Shenandoah to help make the first television broadcasts and to guide visitors through the new facilities. Some stayed in Omaha



With the establishment of television station KMTV in Omaha, Frank Field aired daily programs on both radio and television.

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and became KMTV regulars. Others, whose skills were better suited to radio or who preferred the small-town atmosphere of Shenandoah, stayed with KMA. A few, like Frank Field, split their time between KMA and KMTV. Frank's "Over the Garden Fence," a television show very much like his radio program, aired once a week in the early years of KMTV, expanding by 1953 to five days a week. Pencil in hand, Frank sat before the cameras and answered letters for fifteen minutes every noon, a little picket fence on the desk in front of him.

The first image KMTV put on the screen was that of a woman wearing a white, lacy veil. "If you live within a reasonable distance of Omaha, you will want to start thinking of buying a television set because you will not be able to see or hear television programs on your radio," Ed May instructed the readers of the 1949 *KMA Guide*. "Television should bring members of every family closer together. Instead of the children



In 1950, the KMA staff gathered for a holiday photograph. Left to right, back row: Lois Jean Peterson, Monica Martin, Evalyn Saner, Mabel McFarland, Ina Burdick, Bill Bailey, Virginia Agnes, Howard Peterson, Doris Murphy, Gayle Maher, Helen McCullough, J. E. Van Ness, Inez Keeton, Merl Douglas, Midge Diehl, Max Olive, and Ralph Childs. Second row: Jonny Dickson, Laurence Parker, Chick Martin, Edward May, Owen Saddler, Glenn Harris, Jim Kendrick, Ray Schroeder. Third row: Roy Blackwood, Bill Lyles, James Blackwood, R. W. Blackwood, Hilton Griswold, Doyle Blackwood. Front row: Bob Stotts, Ike Everly, Jerry Fronck, Marge Parker, Wayne Van Horn, Jeanie Sanders, Elmer Axelbender, Mack Sanders, Eddie Comer, and Steve Wooden. Absent were Ralph Childs, Larry Parker, Wayne Beavers, Max Olive, Edward May, and Evelyn Birkby.

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going to one place during the evening and the parents another, the entire group can gather around the TV screen for a night's entertainment. We have always operated a family radio station, so this transition will be easy for us."

While the May Broadcasting Company had the expertise and determination to guide KMTV through its formative years, the adjustment to the new age was anything but easy for KMA. Like radio stations everywhere, the Shenandoah broadcast facility was once again struggling to survive.

"Television was the new kid on the block," Ed May points out. "If you had a television, you'd sit there and watch anything. People would watch a test pattern. TV was such a red-hot new thing that live talent on radio couldn't compete, and people turned off their radios. On the radio, you were hearing the same people, the same type of music, and the same songs, while on TV you could see presidential inaugurations, football games, and famous entertainers. Radio was hit extremely hard by television, and for awhile it looked as if television was going to kill radio."

For awhile, it almost did. Many of the big entertainers whose radio programs had for years been standard network fare retooled their acts for television and abandoned the radio studios. Without the strong draw of George Burns, Jack Benny, and the dozens of other popular performers tempted by television, radio stations found themselves with hours of time each day which had to be filled in other ways. For many stations, that meant turning immediately to disk jockeys and phonograph records.

The large staff of musicians at KMA continued into the early 1950's to broadcast their programs from the studio on the Mayfair stage. The station was very reluctant to replace them with recorded music, but as the success of television grew, their fate was sealed. In 1953, KMA employed sixteen musicians. By 1956, there were almost none. The changes in the way KMA was operated were as abrupt, far-reaching, and difficult as any the station experienced in its entire history. If there had been any doubt that the death of Earl May had signaled that an era was coming to an end, the dismissal of the live musicians completed the change.

Chapter XII

PROGRESS AND CHANGE

Warren Nielson arrived at KMA in 1945, just in time to watch the end of one age and the beginning of another. A native of Yankton, South Dakota, he had been working as an announcer at KSCJ in Sioux City, but longed to return to a small town. KMA station manager Terry Moss responded favorably to a letter from Warren and invited the young broadcaster to Shenandoah for an audition. "I remember driving down the hill into the Nishnabotna Valley," Warren says. "It was fall. I could see the geese rising off the river, and I thought, 'Boy! This is as close to paradise as you can come!'"

Warren's first impression of KMA, however, was not quite as enthusiastic. "At KSCJ we were a little bit sophisticated," he recalls. "We depended on the network, we played records, and timing was important. Commercials were exactly thirty or sixty seconds long.

"I walked into KMA to watch the live talent for awhile, and the Blackwood Brothers were on. The end of the hour came, and James Blackwood was still talking. A few more minutes went by, then he said, 'Well, our time is gone.' They sang 'Give the World a Smile,' and the next show started three minutes late.

"I saw announcer Paul Oliver do a commercial, but he didn't just read it. He had a piece of paper all right, but he just sat there and talked.

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I thought, 'What in the world is going on here?' It was very folksy, and it was a type of radio I didn't know anything about. They didn't worry about the clock or the length of commercials; they just got in there and talked."

Despite his misgivings, Warren accepted a position helping Ralph Childs read the news, and within a month he was learning the KMA skill of visiting on the air without a script. "The person who drove home the point about ad-lib was Frank Field," Warren says. "Here was a man whose delivery wasn't light and bright and tight like I had been taught it should be, but he really knew what he was talking about. He was communicating."

There was a definite technique to the friendly, easy style of the KMA broadcasters. Some, like Frank Field and Earl May, had come by it naturally. Others, like Warren, worked hard to master it, and took pride in their growing abilities. A few never did grasp the secret, and they moved on to stations with formats more suited to their talents.

"Not everyone could sit down and be a pitch man," Warren explains, "and that's what I was. It was a skill and it was fun. A page of copy for a firm's advertisement might have to last you a month. After you read it straight a few times it got boring, so you started to work around the edges. It's similar to a jazz musician improvising on a tune." The day after a broadcast, an announcer would know by the volume of favorable mail how well he had done. If the mail dropped off, he knew he'd better find a new way to pitch the product.

Throughout the late 1940's and early 1950's, Warren served as the morning announcer, opening the station at 5 a.m. and broadcasting until 10 or 10:30 a.m., six mornings a week. There were usually two announcers on duty, alternating in front of the microphone every fifteen minutes. "The copy I used for the commercials for that shift would be maybe an inch thick. Every commercial was live--there were no tape recordings--so I needed those fifteen minute breaks to catch my breath and figure out what was coming up next. When I got through with a shift, I knew I'd been through the mill."

The announcers would banter with the musicians they were introducing, building up the images of the entertainers and developing a rapport that allowed them to work off one another as a team. "Some of them were good at talking, and some weren't," says Warren, "but sometimes the mistake was mine. I was on an onery streak for a few days, and when musician Fred Warren (who called himself 'Elmer Axelbender') tried to tell jokes, I'd steal his punch lines. The next day, he just didn't have anything to say on the air, which left me in a real bind. 'If you're going to tell the punch line,' he warned me after his show, 'then you just tell the whole joke.' I learned pretty quickly that I'd

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overstepped my bounds, that we each had a role to play and I'd better stick with mine."

With the establishment of KMTV, much of the attention of the May Broadcasting Company focused on Omaha, and as other television stations sprang up in the Midwest, KMA found itself struggling to retain its listeners. Not only were the most popular national radio programs switching over to television, rising salaries and production costs were making it increasingly difficult for a small station to justify retaining so large a staff. Furthermore, the recording industry had developed sufficiently to provide stations with a wide variety of offerings that approached the broadcast quality of live studio music.

Records crept slowly into the KMA schedule. "Hillbilly Jamboree" began in February of 1951, a half-hour afternoon program hosted by Lee Sutton and featuring recordings of country music. About the same time, a forty-five minute "disk program" took to the air, hosted by Don Soliday. According to the *KMA Guide*, "His program is rising quickly in popularity because it brings the listener strictly music instead of ancient puns, slapstick and other detractions that are shunned like the



Warren Nielson at a record turntable, the machine that helped spell the end of the live music era at KMA.

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plague by those who really appreciate good popular music.” The days of the KMA Country School were numbered.

One by one, stations that had featured live musicians let their entertainers go and switched to a format that revolved around the turntable and that new entity, the disk jockey. At KMA, where live music had for decades been a trademark and the pride of the company, the change was inevitable, but it was delayed as long as possible.

“We stayed loyal to a stable of musicians as long as we could,” says Warren who, by remaining at KMA rather than going to KMTV, eventually served as everything from announcer and production manager to promotion director, program director, and farm director. “My job in the early 1950’s became trying to find some way for us to justify keeping our live format. Instead of just playing guitars and singing, we came up with shows that featured audience participation—anything to help the musicians keep their listeners. We didn’t want to see the talent staff go, but the cards were stacked against them.”

They did not leave all at once, but gradually they all had to leave. As the musicians were dropped from KMA, they looked to other stations for work. Those who found it continued for awhile to play and sing. Some, like Ezra Hawkins, became disk jockeys themselves. Some, like Mack Sanders, became station managers and owners. Others, like Merl Douglas Roulstone, turned to announcing or farm broadcasting. The rest disappeared from the air.

In 1951, Ike Everly and his musical family were crossed off the KMA payroll. They went down the street and for several years were featured on KFNF. “At KFNF, we had a morning show and another show about noon,” says Margaret Everly. “When we weren’t on the air, I worked at the candy counter out in the Henry Field seedhouse. Ike worked with the shrubbery and seeds. The farmers and their families who had heard us on the air would come into the store and buy shrubbery from Ike and candy from me.”

By now a much smaller operation than KMA, KFNF was not immune to the pressure to switch from live talent to recorded music. The Everlys were among the last musicians employed by KFNF, and when the station could no longer afford to keep even one duet on the air, the family was forced to make some difficult decisions.

“We debated whether to stay at Henry Field’s and work in the seedhouse,” says Margaret. “We could have kept our jobs there, me working at the candy counter and Ike in shrubbery, so we could have stayed in Shenandoah and let the boys finish high school there. But we decided to go to Tennessee and see if we could find work on another radio station. I told the Shenandoah newspaper that we had a job in Knoxville. Ike asked me why I’d told them that since we didn’t really have a job. I told

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him we'd find one. I wanted us to save face. I didn't want anyone to think we were a failure."

The Everlys packed up their belongings and spent their last night in Shenandoah at the home of KMA announcer Merl Douglas. "You could see that they were going to make it big," Merl says of the boys. "They were just so doggone good, and so determined."

After a few years in Knoxville, the Everlys moved to Nashville where Margaret and Ike supported the family by working as a beautician and a barber. Then Don and Phil made their first records, "Bye, Bye Love" and "Wake Up, Little Susie." Because of their dedication to their music and their support of one another through the years, the Everlys were anything but failures.

In addition to trimming the number of musicians it employed, KMA looked for programs sufficiently unique in flavor or enough like television productions to keep some of its audience from defecting to the small screen. The staff tried house party programs, call-in programs, community calendars, penny auctions, quizzes, contests, beauty pageants, fashion shows, and anything else that might attract listeners. Some programs, like "Uncle Warren's Kiddie Corner" for children, were successful. Others, like "Talk of the Town," were not.

"I got the idea for that program from a little station in Vernal, Utah," Warren Nielson explains. "When we were on vacation near there, I'd tuned them in and heard the most interesting show—a man interviewing people having breakfast at a local cafe. I talked to Chuck Simpson at his cafe in downtown Shenandoah, and he agreed to let us do a program like that from his place on Saturday mornings.

"We got along fine the first Saturday. I went from booth to booth with a microphone and talked to people about anything and everything. The next Saturday as I talked to people, I noticed that folks would come in the door, look around, and run right back out again. The third Saturday, Chuck said, 'I hate to mention it, but you're driving my business away.'

"We pulled the program, and at first I blamed myself for its failure. But then I realized that Vernal, Utah, is on a major transcontinental highway. Every morning there were different people coming into that cafe, and they didn't know enough to turn around and get out. In Shenandoah, we were talking to the same coffee crowd every Saturday, and they got tired of it real quick."

Despite the efforts to hold back the future, the practicalities of the radio business could not be denied, and recorded music took an increasingly prominent place on the KMA schedule. "We were one of the last stations to go that way," Warren says. "We didn't play records. We had live talent, we had farm, market, weather, and news, and we had

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the homemakers and the network programs, and that was it. But when the networks started failing, there was just too much air time for the live talent to fill, so we had to play records.”

It wasn't as simple as that. For one thing, KMA didn't own many records. More importantly, the loyalties of long-time listeners were at stake. As production manager, Warren Nielson was given the difficult task of finding a disk jockey who not only had his own records, but could also sooth the feelings of disgruntled listeners. In Des Moines, he found Dick Mills.

Mills came to KMA in the spring of 1954, bringing with him his collection of 5000 records. He had been a night club performer in the 1930's and 1940's, and he continued to sing with a dance band called “The Rhythmaires.” His weekday program of recorded music and comment, introduced by the theme song “I'll Get By As Long As I Have You,” ran from 1 p.m. until 3:30, and from 4:00 in the afternoon until 6:00 in the evening. It effectively replaced fully half the remaining KMA musicians, and paved the way to the dismissal of the rest. The *KMA Guide* described the program as “. . . an invitation to a variety of melodies, and it doesn't mean the top ten popular tunes played over and over and over again all afternoon long. Rather it means the gay, cheerful tunes that were popular in the past as well as some of the current favorites.”

“He had everything against him,” says Warren. “He faced the animosity of the old-line KMA listener who blamed him for making all those entertainers lose their jobs. But he won them over. He was folksy enough, yet he was polished, too. He was himself an entertainer and musician. He'd known Skitch Henderson and people like that, so he had plenty to talk about. He was our break from the Nashville sound of the live musicians to contemporary recorded music.”

A disk jockey more conventional in approach, Tommy Burns joined KMA in 1956 and alternated with Mike Heuer in broadcasting a record show called “Club 960.” On warm summer evenings, they organized KMA-sponsored record hops at the Shenandoah Rose Garden, and Burns himself was known to lead the dancers in the Bunny Hop.

As a February feature of “Club 960,” Burns conducted the “Tommy Burns Blind Date Contest,” open to “all single gals from eight to eighty.” To enter, each contestant would in twenty-five words or less complete the sentence, “I would like a blind date with Tommy Burns because. . . .” Escorted by Burns, the winner would tour KMA, select an album from the record store Tommy and Ralph Childs were operating downtown, have her hair fixed, enjoy dinner at the American Legion Club, and attend a triple feature at the Page Theater.

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Among the entries were two from twin sisters age 88. While they didn't win the blind date, KMA did discover that their birthday fell on the day before Valentine's Day. The twins were brought to Shenandoah, interviewed on the air by Bernice Currier and Warren Nielson, and feted at a Delmonico Hotel dinner hosted by Ed May.

Tommy Burns had come to KMA from South Dakota. At his suggestion, Terry Moss invited another South Dakotan, Gary Altman, to Shenandoah for an audition, and hired him as an announcer. His air name was Gary Owens, and his booming voice filled the KMA announcing booth for a couple of months before he moved on to Omaha, Denver, and eventually Hollywood where he appeared as the announcer on television's "Laugh-In."

The impact of the change to recorded music was felt by more than just the entertainers. "I joined KMA in 1949, when we liked to say the station needed nine engineers and one salesman," explains current chief engineer Norm Kling. "In those days, an engineer had to monitor the equipment constantly, and when records were needed on the air, the engineers played them on turntables out at the transmitter." In addition



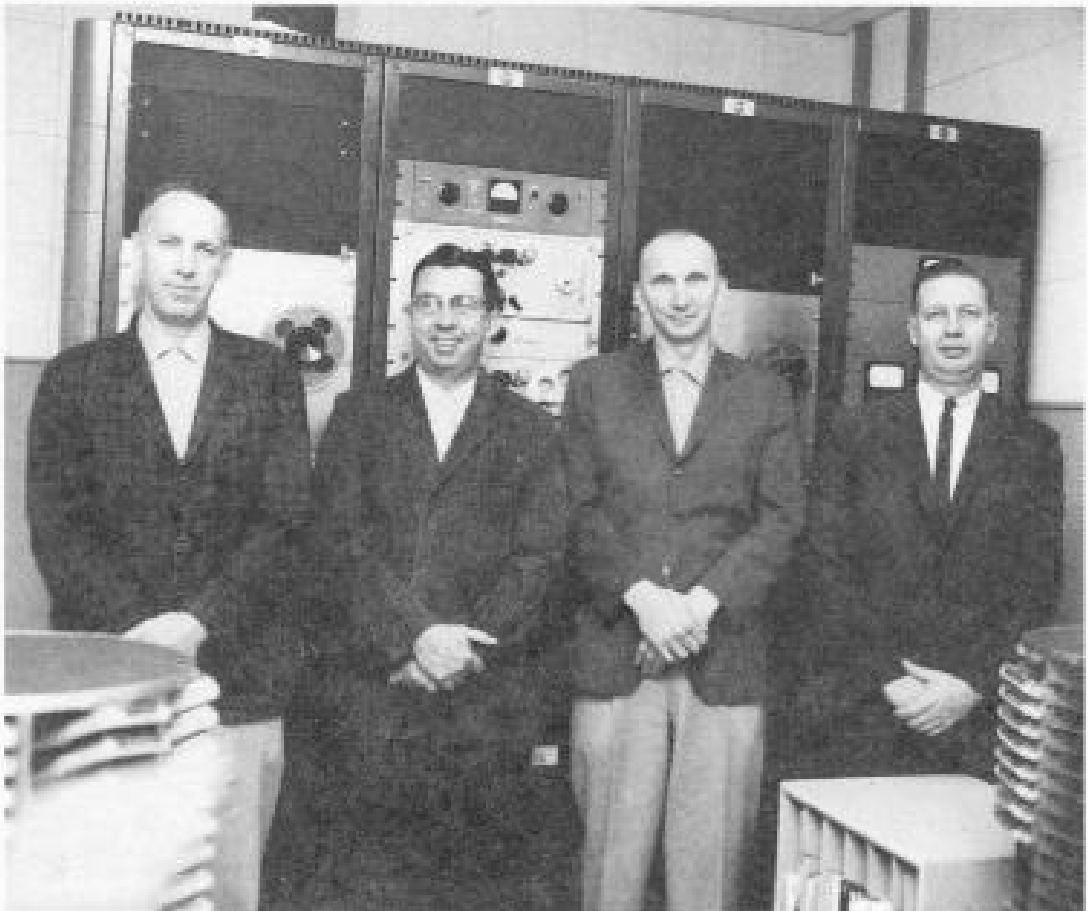
Tommy Burns, an early disk jockey, conducted "Blind Date" essay contests. Hundreds of entries were submitted by women eager to spend a night on the town with Tommy.

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to an engineer on full-time duty in the transmitter building, another manned the control board in the studio. Entertainers and broadcasters making wire recordings and remote broadcasts also required the services of an engineer or two to handle the heavy equipment.

But with disk jockeys like Dick Mills spinning their own records, and announcers gradually assuming the task of running their own control boards, fewer engineers were needed. As technology improved, the KMA transmitter was refitted for remote control operation during daylight hours, and eventually allowed to operate automatically both day and night. Each development decreased the need for engineers, and today the KMA engineering staff is composed of Norm Kling and Ron Erickson. Norm predicts that within a few years a single engineer will be able to manage all the technical duties at the station.

Another casualty of the switch to recorded music was the Mayfair Auditorium. As the live entertainment staff shrank in size and there were fewer musical programs broadcast from its stage, a building of such size was no longer needed. The symbol of KMA and a showplace of radio broadcasting for more than three decades, Mayfair had become



Automation reduced the number of engineers required to operate KMA. From left, engineers Jack Josephson, Don Burchter, Norm Kling, and Ralph Lund.

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expensive to heat and difficult to maintain. “Back in that north studio, I would sit there with my coat, earmuffs, and overshoes on, and an electric heater going full blast under the desk, trying to keep warm while giving a newscast,” says Warren. “The windows fitted so loosely that sometimes snow would drift in onto my desk.”

“My office was in the northeast corner on the second floor,” remembers Bill Overbey, May’s advertising manager. “In the summer, the ivy grew in through the open windows, but in the winter, snow piled up on the windowsills. We’d work in our coats and hats. Nobody mourned the passing of those offices. They may have missed the theater, but not the offices.”

In 1963, modern studio facilities were constructed across the street from Mayfair, and KMA moved into its present home. “It had become just a big old barn,” Ed May says of the once-spectacular auditorium. “After the live talent was discontinued, we really didn’t need it, especially after we moved into the new studios. We only used it four or five times a year. It was a difficult decision to do away with it, but we tore it down on January 10, 1966, and built our corporate offices in its place.”



Mayfair Auditorium, symbol of KMA for over 35 years, was demolished in 1963 to make room for the new corporate offices of the May company.

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When it had been erected thirty–six years earlier, Mayfair had marked the emergence of radio as the dominant communications medium. Its construction had represented the end of the age of vaudeville and chautauquas just as certainly as its destruction symbolized the emergence of television as the king of entertainment. The radio business was changing dramatically, though there were some things that radio could still do very well. Farm, market, and weather coverage, news of local and regional importance, and special programs tailored to a rural audience continued, as always, to be the real backbone of KMA.

And there is one popular KMA feature that is today little changed from the way it was in the early years of the station. That program is the daily visit of the radio homemaker.

Chapter XIII

THE RADIO HOMEMAKERS

From the earliest days of KMA, women have played important roles on the air and behind the scenes. As continuity writers, promotional personnel, office managers, entertainers and company executives, they've helped shape the station and keep it running. As radio homemakers, they've provided KMA with some of its most popular and enduring on-air personalities.

The radio career of Gertrude May began before those of her husband Earl May or her father E. S. Welch. In 1924, a year prior to the establishment of KMA, Gertrude had gone to Omaha to sing over station WOAW with members of the Shenandoah Congregational Church. In the months that followed, she helped organize the talent for the monthly May company broadcasts over WOAW and sang on every program. During the first years that KMA was on the air, she sang songs in German, broadcast a Sunday religious program, served as an announcer and an answerer of letters, an occasional radio homemaker on the "Home Hour" program, and an advertiser of everything from horse collars to bunches of bananas. "I can remember one day in particular, shortly after I joined the staff of the station," Bernice Currier recalled. "Earl May had received a large shipment of prunes at the store. Gertrude

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and I got on the air to sell those prunes. We talked about prunes, we gave special prune recipes, we even ran a contest for the best prune recipes sent in by listeners.”

Gertrude May’s influence upon KMA extended far beyond her time behind the microphone. Along with Earl May, E. S. Welch, and Earl’s brother-in-law Carl Wolford, she served as a member of the board of directors of the May Seed and Nursery Company, and in 1929 became a vice-president of the firm to replace Harold Case, who was devoting most of his time to the Mount Arbor Nurseries. She was also on the boards of directors of the Mount Arbor Nursery and of the May Broadcasting Company. Not as gregarious as her husband or as well-known in nursery circles as her father, Gertrude nonetheless knew a great deal about managing seed companies and radio stations. After the death of Earl May in 1946, she became the major shareholder of both the seed firm and the broadcasting company, and at board meetings of May Broadcasting it was Gertrude who voiced the vote representing the 75% share of the company owned by the May family.

“Although we didn’t see her very much at the station, Gertrude May helped hold the company together a lot more than people give her credit for,” Warren Nielson says of her impact on KMA in later years. “We always felt that as long as Mrs. May was there, nothing really bad would happen. She was a very stabilizing force.” One of the true pioneers of Midwestern radio and television broadcasting, Gertrude May died in 1973 when fire swept through her Mercer, Wisconsin, summer home.

For longevity of service to KMA, Doris Murphy’s career ranks near that of Mrs. May. As well as reading the news in the early 1930’s, Doris was the station’s first director of women’s programs and the feature editor of the *KMA Guide*. She feels, though, that her main contribution to the station was her work as continuity director and a writer of commercials.

“Earl May would come into the radio station and say, ‘Doris, can’t you find time to write me some commercials? I can always sell with anything you write for me,’ ” Doris says in speaking of her first years at KMA. “I’d write him talks to sell flowers and the nursery stock and canned fruit shipped to Iowa from the Welch orchards in California. For his evening programs, I saw that Earl May’s commercials were ready for him, and took news from the Teletype and got it in shape for his newscasts.”

As an energetic advocate of women broadcasters, Doris helped smooth the way for the radio homemakers. She did much of the work required to arrange their programs and public appearances, and to promote their accomplishments. Her dedication to the advancement of women broadcasters was recognized far beyond the Midwest, and in 1949 Doris was

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invited to New York to help shape the new American Women in Radio and Television organization. She became its first national membership chairman and later formed the Midwest Chapter of AWRT, serving as its founding president. Her work at KMA continued until the death of her son's wife forced her to resign in order to help him raise his family.

The contributions to KMA by other pioneer women broadcasters including "KMA Flower Lady" Lina Ferguson and the Reverend Edythe Stirlen with her "Send Out Sunshine" club have already been noted. Ormah Carmean was KMA's first "studio manager," a job which included everything from directing programs to cleaning up the studio at the end of the day. LeOna Teget, Mamie Miller and June Case had occasional programs listed in the KMA schedules as "Domestic Science," while a more regular offering was Jessie Young's "Stitch and Chat Club" which began in 1926. Within a few years it was known as "A Visit With Jessie Young," and had taken on the trappings of a radio homemaker program.

"Starting in 1932, Jessie Young concentrated her efforts on a special women's feature," a KMA report explained. "This program provided



In her decades at KMA, Doris Murphy served as a broadcaster, salesperson, women's director, and a constant supporter of the radio homemakers.

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further service for homemakers in the field of kitchen helps and recipes that were practical for Farm Belt housewives to use. This feature was broadcast from the kitchen of Jessie Young's home in typical home surroundings and with no artificial sound effects.

"The broadcast reflects the ups and downs, the good and not-so-good behavior of the family, the parties, the special musical programs, and the 'at home' programs which are interspersed with the regular home-making feature. On Saturdays when all four of the Young children are home from school, musical numbers are featured, including selections played by Robert, the fourteen-year-old son, on the Novachord. The popularity of the program can be best judged by the fact that the average listener mail received by the Homemaker's Program runs between 3,000 and 4,000 letters every week."

KFNF was also quick to put women on the air. After all, Henry Field had five sisters, four of whom had a significant influence in furthering the visibility of women at both KFNF and KMA.

Helen Field Fischer, the eldest of the five, was the wife of Shenandoah's Judge Frederick Fischer, and a gardener of wide acclaim. In the mid-1920's, her programs of gardening hints were carried at times over both Shenandoah stations. In 1926, she began a daily program on KFNF called "The Mother's Hour," designed, as the name implies, for listeners with children.

Jessie Field Shambaugh, Henry Field's sister who founded the 4-H Clubs of America, used her KFNF broadcasts in the 1920's to further her 4-H work. Henry's youngest sister, Susan Field Conrad, was a regionally respected potter who frequently broadcast with her sisters.

A fourth sister, Leanna Field Driftmier, was the mother of a large family. Late in the winter of 1926, Helen asked Leanna to appear on "The Mother's Hour" and tell about a party she had conducted for her children. Leanna was not completely unfamiliar with radio broadcasting. In 1924 when KFNF was first on the air, she had gone to the studio one night to sing "I Love You Truly" in hopes her husband Martin Driftmier, who was on a business trip in California, would hear her. Still, she was unsure of her ability to fill thirty minutes of air time just talking.

"Why Leanna, don't be nervous about it," Helen told her. "Just talk as though you were sitting in your own living room talking with friends who have just dropped in." Unconvinced, Leanna wrote out every word she intended to say and rehearsed her lines. After the broadcast, letters of appreciation arrived at the studio. The next time Helen asked her to broadcast, she did not hesitate, commenting, "I was happy to have the opportunity to chat with people who had written to me."

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Before long, Leanna had a program of her own and, as was the habit of Fields and Mays alike, ran a contest to name it. The winning entry came from a Nebraska housewife who suggested it be called "Kitchen-Klatter."

In 1930, Leanna was seriously injured in an automobile accident. Since she was unable to come to the studio during her recovery, Henry ran a line from the studio to the Driftmier residence, and had a microphone installed beside Leanna's bed. Once she was up and around again, Leanna moved the microphone to the kitchen and broadcast her daily programs from there.

The idea was a good one, and by 1932 Jessie Young also had a microphone in her kitchen. A precedent had been established, and for years to come one of the trademarks of the radio homemakers was that they were speaking from their own homes. It was not unusual, as air time approached, for Jessie or Leanna to chase the kids out of the room, lower the fire under a pot on the stove, wipe their hands on their aprons, and sit down in the middle of working kitchens in the middle of a working day to visit half an hour with listeners engaged in exactly the



Loyal listeners often accepted the radio homemakers' open invitations to tour their Shenandoah homes. Above, a busload of women from Galt, Missouri, visits Leanna Driftmier (seated at left in her wheelchair).

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same sorts of activities. "They were in their own homes talking to women who were also at home," observes Warren Nielson. "Listeners would know they were hearing someone much like themselves. The identification was very strong."

The success of the radio homemakers was large and steady. They talked about the day-to-day events in their families with such regularity and familiarity that a listenership followed the real-life developments with a loyalty much like the fervor of fans of today's soap operas. As Jessie Young came to be recognized as the KMA homemaker and Leanna's "Kitchen-Klatter" became the primary program for women on KFNF, both Jessie and Leanna began publishing magazines to help them answer listeners' letters and to help satisfy the interest their audience had in them and their families.

In 1939, as the reins of the Henry Field Company slipped from Henry's grasp, Leanna and her husband sold their interest in KFNF. Free to broadcast from any station, Leanna moved "Kitchen-Klatter" to KMA. The May station had more power than did KFNF, and was willing to give Leanna more time on the air each day. For the several years that



Dubiously dressed for the occasion, announcer Tim George joined Leanna Driftmier on a "Kitchen-Klatter" program broadcast from her kitchen.

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followed, KMA had the good fortune of airing the programs of both Jessie Young and Leanna Field Driftmier, two of America's most experienced and most popular radio homemakers.

Jessie Young left the station in 1942 and moved to Colorado where she continued her radio work. Pleased with the two-homemaker format, KMA replaced Jessie with Edith Hansen. Born in Iowa and raised on a prairie homestead in northeastern Nebraska, Edith had taught in rural South Dakota schools, then married and raised two sons. In 1940 she had tried her hand at broadcasting over WJAG, a small station in Norfolk, Nebraska, where she was known on the air as "Mary Moore." "I was frightened and nervous," she said of her first programs, "and I would declare each day that never again would I go back. But the natural understanding and friendliness of radio neighbors soon made me feel at ease. I learned to enjoy my radio visits, and I came to feel as if I were sitting right in the kitchen exchanging recipes and ideas with my neighbors."

When Jessie Young's departure left a vacancy at KMA, Edith brought her "Kitchen Club" program to Shenandoah. Three years later, she left



Edith Hansen's "Kitchen Club" was heard on KMA live and in transcription for over twenty years.

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the air for eighteen months to be with her husband, who had taken a job in a California shipyard. During Edith's absence, her place at KMA was taken by Susan Field Conrad. Ill health forced Mr. Hansen to leave the shipyard, however, and when he returned to Shenandoah to work at the Mount Arbor Nurseries, Edith resumed her KMA broadcasts.

As with the other radio homemakers, Edith spent a great deal of time preparing for her programs. She felt an obligation to do them well. She received hundreds of letters a week and, unable to type, replied to many with notes written out by hand. The mail piled up on her kitchen table, and Edith, who had no secretarial help, often worked late into the night to answer questions, send out recipes, and respond to the needs of her listeners.

In terms of favorable mail, the radio homemakers of the 1940's consistently topped KMA's surveys. For the six months of 1945 during which results were published, the most popular broadcasters on KMA were, in descending order, Leanna Driftmier, Edith Hansen, Frank Field, and Lina Ferguson. The "Kitchen-Klatter" program was so well known that in 1941 when a post card was mailed in Atlantic, Iowa, sixty miles from Shenandoah, with no address other than the word "Leanna," it was promptly delivered to the Driftmier home.

Due to their wide popularity, the homemakers were in danger of being lured away from the KMA studio by home products companies in need of highly visible spokespersons. The Tidy House Company was such a firm. Founded in 1940 by Cy Rapp (KMA's first engineer and a long-time station manager) and his partner Al Ramsey (a KMA advertising salesman), Tidy House had grown into a strong Shenandoah industry. In 1948, the company began to syndicate Edith Hansen's program over a number of Midwestern stations as a means of promoting Perflex all-purpose cleaner and the other Tidy House products.

Tidy House also contracted with Martha Bohlsen, an Omaha home economist whose "Homemakers' Club" program, sponsored by an Omaha power company, had begun on radio station WOW in 1938. In 1949 she had pioneered a televised cooking program over station WOWT. Tidy House retained her services and sponsored her television show on May Broadcasting's KMTV, as well as arranging for her to share a syndicated radio program with Edith Hansen. Each woman broadcast a fifteen-minute segment of the half-hour program. Transcribed onto large metal or vinyl records and, in later years, onto magnetic tape, the programs were eventually heard over ninety stations from the Rockies to the Atlantic coast.

The same year that Edith Hansen joined Tidy House, Leanna Driftmier and her daughters Lucile Verness, Margery Strom, and Dorothy Johnson began syndicating the "Kitchen-Klatter" program, too. And

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like Tidy House, the Driftmier Company developed a line of products--food flavorings first, then various home care products.

Although KMA continued for several years to air transcriptions of "Kitchen Club" and "Kitchen-Klatter" (The syndicated "Kitchen-Klatter" program left KMA in 1948 and did not return to the schedule until 1972.), the station no longer considered Edith and Leanna as its own homemakers. To rectify that situation, they again called upon Bernice Currier, and upon KFNF homemaker Adella Shoemaker.

Bernice was no stranger to KMA, having appeared on the air as a violinist and as a radio homemaker in the early days before the KMA homemakers had become such regional institutions. In addition to noting her musical activities, the 1928 schedule also listed "A Visit With Bernice Currier," an occasional half hour during which she talked about her family and home, meal preparation, and household hints. She left Shenandoah in the early 1930's for radio stations in South Dakota and Texas. Arthritis in her hands forced her to curtail her musical performances but, as she liked to say, "Not before I'd put four children through



Bernice Currier first appeared on KMA as a violinist. Her homemaker programs aired from 1948 until 1973.

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college with that violin.” In 1938, she became program director and traffic manager at a Cairo, Illinois, radio station managed by one of her sons. A decade later, Bernice returned to Shenandoah to care for her ailing father. Easing behind the KMA microphone again seemed only natural.

Like the other radio homemakers, Bernice broadcast her program from her home. And like the others, her friendly and informative programs created an enormous following. “I enjoy your program so much, it is really the thing that starts my day right for me,” proclaimed the writer of a typical letter. “It is just like visiting with a good friend. Although I have not met you personally, I wish to be counted as one of your most devoted radio friends.” The only time Bernice was not warm and open was during the World Series. She was an ardent baseball fan who followed every inning of every game on the radio or, later, on television. To interrupt her then was to risk her ire. During close games, she would ignore knocks at her door, though if visitors came between innings, she was known to shout, “Come in, sit down, and be quiet!”



Adella Shoemaker had been a homemaker on KFNF before coming to KMA.

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Adella Shoemaker had been raised in Manti, a little village southwest of Shenandoah that had once been populated primarily by Mormons. While raising two sons in Shenandoah, she had lived across the alley from Leanna Driftmier. In 1939 when the "Kitchen-Klatter" move to KMA left a vacancy at KFNF, Leanna suggested that Adella be hired to take her place, and Adella's radio career began. When "Kitchen-Klatter" left KMA in 1948, she joined the May station, once again as Leanna's replacement.

Adella took her work very seriously. She read constantly to find new program ideas and tested all the recipes she intended to broadcast. She seldom listened to the other radio homemakers' programs for fear she might repeat on her own show something they had said. Perhaps the warmest of the radio homemakers, a "Happy day to you!" at the close of each of her programs summed up her bright, cheerful manner on the air. The program was called the "Kitchen Klinik," and, of course, it was broadcast from her home. "I have known Adella for many years," Ed May said at the time she joined KMA, "and introducing her is like welcoming an old friend into the family."

There were many listeners who also considered Adella and the other homemakers to be family members, and they came in droves to Shenandoah to see the homes of their favorites. "Stop by any time," Leanna Driftmier encouraged her listeners. "The latchkey is always out." KMA sponsored caravans of automobiles and buses that originated at the station and wound through the streets past the broadcasters' homes. The *KMA Guide* proclaimed that "Within one month, over 1200 visitors have registered for the tour, coming from 130 different towns in Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, and Kansas."

"I would see those busloads come and think, oh, my word!" remembers Adella's friend Bernice Hovenden, who lived across the street from the Shoemakers. "Adella was always so glad to see them. She would invite them in and try to have something cold for them to drink and a little snack. Sometimes two or three busloads at a time would pile in there." So many devoted fans visited the homemaker's homes that KMA was occasionally obliged to replace living room carpets worn thin by the heavy traffic.

In 1950, when Evelyn Birkby began broadcasting a program over KMA called "Down A Country Lane," the KMA schedule was loaded with radio homemakers. A typical day's offerings included:

- 9:00-9:25 a.m.----"Homemaker's Visit" with Bernice Currier
- 9:25-9:45 a.m.----"Betty Crocker" (syndicated)
- 10:00-10:30 a.m.--"Kitchen Club" with Edith Hansen
(syndicated)

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11:30–11:45 a.m.—“Down A Country Lane” with Evelyn Birkby

2:30–2:45 p.m.——“KMA Party Line” with Doris Murphy

3:30–4:00 p.m.——“Kitchen Klinik” with Adella Shoemaker

“Doris Murphy was the one who got me interested in radio work,” Evelyn recalls. “In 1950, I had begun writing a column called “Up A Country Lane” for the Shenandoah *Evening Sentinel*. Doris had read it and liked it. She suggested I share with the KMA audience the experiences of a young mother living in the country.”

With two babies to raise on the farm she and her husband operated south of Farragut, Evelyn found it increasingly difficult to commute the sixteen miles into Shenandoah six days a week to broadcast, especially when the long lane leading from the farmhouse to the road was a sea of mud. The KMA engineers had been so successful in placing microphones in the homes of the radio homemakers within the city limits of Shenandoah that the obvious answer seemed to be equipping Evelyn’s kitchen for broadcasting. However, the distance and the expense were too great, and the effort failed. KFNF also asked her to join their staff,



“Down A Country Lane,” Evelyn Birkby’s homemaker program, began in 1950.

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and raised an antenna at the Birkby farm in order to beam Evelyn's morning program to the KFNF studios. That, too, proved unworkable. Later, Evelyn joined "Kitchen-Klatter," and for twenty-five years was frequently heard broadcasting with members of the Driftmier family.

Eventually, KMA did succeed in hiring a homemaker who could broadcast from a farm. In November of 1952, Adella Shoemaker had become director of women's activities for the Georgie Porgie Company, a manufacturer of breakfast food. Her program was syndicated and continued to be heard from KMA, but as had happened when Leanna Driftmier and Edith Hansen syndicated their programs, KMA no longer considered Adella exclusively its own and began the search for a replacement.

On June 6, 1949, a tornado had thundered across the Nishnabotna Valley between Shenandoah and Essex, and roared toward the farm of Byron and Florence Falk. Byron had seen the twister coming—a broad, black cloud that seemed to roll along the ground rather than dipping a tail from the sky—and had gotten his family into the car and driven at right angles away from the storm's path. When they returned a few hours later, they found nothing. The tornado had hit the house so squarely that little remained but the hole in the ground that had once been the basement. The barn had disappeared too, every board, hinge, and bail of hay. The large pine trees lining the lane were gone, radishes in the garden had been pulled from their rows, and flying debris had killed the animals. The family's piano was never found.

As part of KMA's coverage of the storm and its aftermath, Bernice Currier invited Florence Falk to be a guest on her morning homemaker show. Florence exhibited a natural aptitude for broadcasting. She talked with the folksy, colorful charm that was the mark of a good radio homemaker, and she had so much energy that she seemed destined to run the countryside ragged. When KMA needed a homemaker to replace Adella Shoemaker, the station turned to Florence.

In the months before Adella began her syndicated Georgie Porgie program, Florence appeared with her on the "Kitchen Klinik" to give recipes, talk of her family, and build up an audience of her own. By the time Florence's program took to the airwaves in September of 1952, the KMA engineers had installed seven miles of wire from the studio to her house, making "The Farmer's Wife" the first regular radio homemaker program to originate from a farm home.

Broadcasting live from a farmhouse created interesting and unexpected opportunities. If someone knocked on the door while Florence was on the air, she would shout, "I'm broadcasting! Come on in!" Sometimes she would have her surprised visitor sit down at the microphone and join in the conversation. If the buzzer on Florence's stove went off,

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listeners would hear her say, “Be right back. Gotta open the oven door, oven door, oven door...,” her voice trailing off as she hurried across the room to tend to her baking. “Well, the old sow went berserk and had baby pigs all over the place,” she might say of the latest event on the farm, or, “It’s raining and the ducks look like they’re wearing their flat, black overshoes.”

Perhaps more than any other radio homemaker, Florence was the master of the signature--the phrase or recurring theme that stamped a program as unique. She seldom mentioned her husband by name, referring to him as “The Farmer” and sometimes using her program to relay messages to him. “If anybody sees the Farmer in town, would you remind him to bring home a loaf of bread?” A red rooster that had hatched from one of her children’s dyed Easter eggs frequently wandered near enough the open kitchen window for radio listeners to hear it crowing. Florence conducted a contest to select a name for the bird. The winning entry was, not surprisingly, “The Red Rooster,” and it became a fixture on the program much as the train whistle of “The Wooden Axle” signaled Frank Field’s morning program. Listeners also



Florence Falk's "Farmer's Wife" was the first radio homemaker show broadcast live from a farm home.

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heard about Tippy, the Border collie of the Falk children Karenann and Bruce. When Tippy was killed by a car, he was replaced by Tippy Two, and Tippy Two eventually gave way to Tippy Three, Tippy Four, and Tippy Five. All the dogs were similar in appearance, and all died in accidents save for Tippy Five, who mercifully survived to a ripe, old age.

Through the late 1940's and the early 1950's, a clear indication of the homemakers' popularity was the response to the KMA Homemaker Days conducted in the Mayfair Auditorium or the Shenandoah Armory. Held as frequently as once a month and often attracting audiences numbering well over a thousand, the programs usually had themes. In 1948, for example, the July Homemaker Day presented the General Electric Farmland Home Show, August was Wallpaper and Paint, September highlighted Fall Cooking, October featured Adella Shoemaker with meat-stretching recipes employing soda crackers, and the November show hosted an International Harvester Company expert with new ideas for using home freezers. In addition to their educational offerings, the Homemaker Days also included appearances by all the KMA radio homemakers, by many of the KMA entertainers, and usually the popular Penny Auction with announcer Glen Harris. Many of the activities were broadcast live.

In 1955, Bernice Currier announced the first annual KMA Cookie Tea. Doris Murphy had come up with the idea and encouraged the radio homemakers to promote it. Listeners were invited to come to the Shenandoah Armory, each bringing a dozen of her favorite homemade cookies and the recipe. Although the weather was stormy, 534 women attended the tea and sampled 427 dozen cookies.

And if imitation is the truest form of flattery, the radio homemakers had that, too, when KMA announcer/entertainer Merl Douglas began a program in 1948 called "Man In The Kitchen," which the station advertised as a male homemaker show. A few months later, Claire Gross took over the program, and in 1953 it was hosted by Larry Parker. "He prepares recipes that appeal primarily to the man of the house," the *KMA Guide* said of Parker's presentations, "and he is doing a tremendous job in giving the housewife an insight on just what hubby might want for dinner in the evening."

Bernice and Florence remained on the air as the featured KMA homemakers until 1963, their programs essentially unchanged through the years. Their delight in their chosen profession seemed never to diminish. "If I had it all to do over again I would certainly choose a career as a radio homemaker," Bernice said on the occasion of her retirement at age 73. "There can't be a grander bunch of persons anywhere in the

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Billie Oakley's radio career started at a KFNF Jubilee singing contest.

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world than my listeners, many of whom seem like such close personal friends to me today.” Due to revisions in the KMA schedule, Florence Falk took “The Farmer’s Wife” to KFNF. When both veteran broadcasters left the station, Billie Oakley joined KMA with her program, “It’s A Woman’s World.”

Like so many of the radio homemakers, Billie Oakley’s radio roots were deep in Shenandoah’s broadcasting history. In 1931, playing a guitar and singing “Lonesome Road,” she had won an amateur vocal contest at the annual KFNF Harvest Jubilee celebration. Henry Field hired her to sing on the air at \$15 a week until she returned to Nehawka, Nebraska, to begin her junior year of high school.

As the oldest child in a farm family working 360 acres, she was needed at home to help with the chores. Still, during the next summer she traveled to Shenandoah as often as she could, lived at Ma Purcell’s Boarding House along with many of the KFNF and KMA entertainers, and sang in the KFNF studio. The summer after that she performed at both KFNF and at KMA.

In 1934, Billie graduated from high school and auditioned at KMMJ in Clay Center, Nebraska, the station owned by M. M. “Incubator” Johnson. “Dad wanted me to go to college and study home economics,” she remembers, “but the radio station offered me \$17.50 a week. Higher education had to take a back seat.” At KMMJ, Billie sang on the early morning show in a group called, inappropriately, “The Old-Timers.”

During the next seven years, Billie followed the pattern of many radio entertainers hopping from station to station. From KMMJ she went to WIBW in Topeka, a station owned by her shirt-tail relative Don Searle. After Topeka came a brief stint with Chicago’s “WLS National Barn Dance Road Show,” then a year at KFAB in Lincoln, Nebraska, one at KWTO in Springfield, Missouri, and another at KMMJ (which had moved to Grand Island, Nebraska). In 1937, she arrived at WNAX in Yankton, South Dakota, the station of the Guerne Seed Company.

“I went to WNAX as an entertainer, but that’s where I did my first homemaker show,” Billie explains. “They had a homemaker whose program was called ‘Tips by Taylor,’ and sometimes I substituted for her when she was gone. I also got interested in writing copy and doing commercials, which was fortunate because to tell the truth, I couldn’t sing worth a hill of beans. I was never going to make it as an entertainer.”

She did, however, give singing on KFNF one more try, moving to Shenandoah in 1941. “Eloise Redfield Sullivan was playing vibes, Johnny Dixson was singing, Curly Dale was playing guitar, and Buck Dilley was on fiddle,” she says of the KFNF entertainment staff. “I sang and did some copy writing.” In 1942, she left the station so she would

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have more time to be with her children, but she kept her hand in radio by doing a little copy writing at KMA.

Several years after the death of Henry Field in 1949, KFNF had been sold to Capital Broadcasting of Lincoln, Nebraska, and then to Farm and Home Radio. Billie told the new station manager she wanted to do a radio homemaker program. “He wasn’t convinced,” she says. “KMA had Leanna and Bernice, and he thought they were ‘homemaking’ people to death. I said I would do it for two weeks for free to prove it would work, and it did. I called my program ‘It’s A Woman’s World.’”

In 1963, after nine years on KFNF, Billie brought “It’s A Woman’s World” to KMA. Three years later, ex-KMA salesman Chuck Bunn, who had become manager of KLOL in Lincoln, invited Billie to move her program to his station. She worked there a year and moved once again to WMMJ, then owned by Don Searle. Searle was actively developing the talk radio format, and gave Billie an hour each afternoon to do what she did best—talk.

That led to a position as consumer director for Gooch Foods, an eleven-year hitch which enabled her to broadcast on a forty-station



Considering herself a broadcaster rather than a homemaker, Joni Baillon changed the role of women at KMA.

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network. "I went into that job knowing nothing about a noodle," she says of her work for a company built on flour and water. "Minnie Carter was my assistant, and she taught me everything. I always signed off my programs with 'Min says...' and then some thought for the day." She also appeared as a television homemaker on KOLN-KGIN in Lincoln and Grand Island.

When Billie left KMA in 1966, station manager Norm Williams hired Joni Baillon to take her place. A native of Minnesota, Joni had been working for a little radio station in Madison, South Dakota. "I did almost everything there," she recalls. "I was on the air 3 1/2 hours a day doing news, markets, interviews, and a Top 40 show. I wrote most of the copy for my commercials, ordered music, and became the program director."

Joni brought a new perspective to the role of women at KMA. "I did not go into broadcasting to be a radio homemaker," she explains, "but I do like to talk to people about issues which concern them. Women are interested in far more than just food and families, and I felt that women's programming should be much more. We've gotten away from a lot of old stereotypes, and that's good."

Broadcasting her program from the KMA studio rather than from her home, Joni also hosted "KMA Open Line," an early listener call-in



Jo Freed (left) hosted "Today's Woman," and was succeeded as women's director by Brenda Kay McConahay with "Living Today."

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program originated in the 1950's by Warren Nielson. As a young, single woman, she gave both programs a special freshness and vitality. "The Open Line was a bear to do," she remembers, "because sometimes people just wouldn't call and I would have to fill the time by talking. And when they did call in, it was sometimes a hot potato to handle." In 1969, Joni moved to KMTV to host and produce "Conversations," a mid-day, televised interview program, and then to co-host KMTV's "Today" show.

Joni was succeeded at KMA by women's directors Jo Freed with "Today's Woman," and then Brenda Kay McConahay with "Living Today." "Jack Mahall was the program director when I started," Brenda says. "He told me that when I went on the air, I should picture in my mind one person to whom I was talking." In addition to her own program and the Open Line, Brenda added a Saturday feature called "KMA Feminine Focus," during which she highlighted the activities of outstanding women in the KMA listening area. She also revived KMA-sponsored women's days with events such as the 1974 Women's Exposition. Held at the Shenandoah Armory, the event attracted a crowd of 700 who viewed displays and enjoyed presentations by radio homemakers and home economists.



Barton Studio

Colleen Ketcham runs the control board as well as broadcasting.

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Billie Oakley returned to KMA in 1976 to resume her duties as director of women's activities. "It's A Woman's World" is today KMA's primary radio homemaker program.

And, as always, new generations of women are finding places for themselves before the microphones of KMA. Monica Morris has been a member of the KMA news staff since 1981. Susan Cochran airs the Saturday evening programs. Colleen Ketcham joined KMA full-time in 1980, working the afternoon shift at the control board. Her responsibilities have expanded to include hosting the "Elephant Shop," a call-in program for wheelers and dealers in the area to buy and sell everything from baby buggies to tractor tires. (Begun in late 1972 by announcer Dave White, the program was originally called "The Dave White Elephant Shop." It followed in the footsteps of "KMA Classified," a similar call-in program that aired in the 1950's and 60's.) She also has a weekend program called "Saturdays With Colleen" that is evolving into a women's program not unlike those once hosted by Joni Baillon.

Chapter XIV

FARM BROADCASTING

In its ability to serve the farmer, radio has always had advantages over television. A farmer can listen to the radio while he's dressing in the morning and having his breakfast. He can hear broadcasts over a radio in the barn as he does his chores, and over a speaker mounted on his tractor as he works the fields. Furthermore, farm broadcasters operate under fewer constraints than do their television counterparts. They have more time to develop stories, and the freedom of many hours on the air each week.

During the early decades when KMA was still a department of the May Seed & Nursery Company, the station's farm broadcasters generally came from the ranks of the seedhouse staff. E. A. Leacox, Frank Coykendall, Harold Case, Earl May and others had primary responsibilities in the company beyond their radio duties. Still, the ties between their agricultural work and their daily broadcasts kept them in constant touch with the latest farm developments, and with the immediate needs and concerns of Midwestern farmers.

In 1937, KMA hired Carl Haden to serve as "farm service announcer and music production manager." In his dual role, Haden took charge of all the programming between 4:30 and 6 in the morning. The Haden

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family, including Carl's wife Mary Jane and their children Charles Jr., Mary Elizabeth, James Lowell, and Charles, joined other staff entertainers to provide the music. Carl interspersed the entertainment with suggestions for farmers and the answers to some of the 1500 letters he received each week. From 6 a.m. on through the day, other farm-oriented broadcasts were still conducted by Earl May and the employees of the May Seed & Nursery Company.

Even today, KMA maintains the tradition of drawing upon seedhouse staff for informed agricultural information. Frank Field, John Topham, Wayne McManama, Bill Overbey, Ed May, and Ed May Jr. have all split their radio time with May Seed & Nursery Company work. In the mid-1940's, however, it was becoming apparent that if KMA were to sustain its position as the voice of agriculture in the Corn Belt, the station would require the services of a full-time farm director. In Merrill Langfitt, Earl May found the man he wanted.

Trained at Iowa State College as a vocational agriculture teacher, Merrill had become the Page County extension agent in the early 1940's. As part of his duties, he would occasionally broadcast over KMA, talking



In the late 1930's, Carl Haden produced many of KMA's early morning farm programs. Including Carl's wife Mary Jane and older children Mary Elizabeth, Carl Jr., James Lowell, and James Edward, the Haden family also constituted a significant portion of KMA's musical entertainment staff.

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about farm issues. "Stations like KMA were a real direct line from the agricultural colleges to the farmers," says Merrill. "KMA conveyed a lot of beneficial information to the farmers—new methods of farming, news of tillage tools, insecticides, varieties of crops. The station itself was like an extension service, but it was able to get information to the farmers faster than the county agents could."

Station manager Owen Saddler suggested Merrill give regular radio work a try and scheduled him to go on the air with Earl May once or twice a week at noon to see how he liked it. "Earl told me I talked too fast," Merrill remembers. "He said to slow down, that farmers don't think as fast as I was talking. He was a good teacher."

In 1946, Merrill began full-time work at KMA as the station's first farm service director. His "RFD 960" program continued the early morning farm-oriented programming that Earl May had initiated many years before. "Every morning from 6:00–7:00 we talk about you folks and with you in our 'on-the-spot' interviews," explained a 1946 program announcement. "We give you music, markets, weather, announce your farm meetings, and bring you the latest farm news."

As in the days of Carl Haden, the musical segments of the show were provided by KMA entertainers, though there was barely room in the hour for all the material Merrill wanted to cover. Before long, the musicians were omitted from "RFD 960," leaving that hour strictly for farm and market reports, news, weather, and recorded interviews.

"I was on the road all the time making recordings, traveling thirty to forty thousand miles a year by car," says Merrill. "I'd be on the air in the morning, do interviews during the day, go to farm meetings at night, and get up at 5 a.m. to go back on the air." He covered stories ranging from the Iowa and Nebraska state fairs and the Iowa Plowing Contest, to a Hereford cattle sale in Wyoming, a racoon hunt in Missouri, the National Western Livestock Show in Denver, and the birth of quintuplet calves on a farm in Nebraska. In the 1940's, the recordings were made with a magnetic wire recorder, a machine which used spools of wire rather than reels of tape. The quality was not very good by today's standards, and the equipment was heavy and awkward. In the field, Merrill and an engineer carried converters in order to use the battery in their car to power the recorder.

"RFD 960" reports were not limited to the Midwest. In 1947, under the auspices of the United Nations Rehabilitation and Relief program (UNRAR) helping Europe recover from World War II, farmers sent hundreds of head of livestock and tons of hay across the Atlantic aboard liberty ships. Accompanied by engineer Don Burrichter and eight or ten heavy pieces of equipment to make wire recordings, Merrill sailed on a relief ship bound for Italy.

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“We were gone for three months, though we didn’t intend to be,” says Merrill. “We signed aboard the ship as cattle handlers so we could have free passage. We hadn’t taken much money or letters of credit or anything, and when the UNRAR wanted us to stay over there and do reports from Greece as well as Italy, we had to make do as best we could. Fortunately, before we’d sailed from Newport News, Virginia, I had bought a dozen pair of nylon hose. I’d heard you could trade them over there for anything. In most of Greece, Don and I lived on those hose.” Interviewing everyone from small-time Italian farmers to Sir John Boyd-Orr, director of the World Food Conference, Merrill and Don sent hundreds of hours of recordings to Shenandoah, and eventually made their own way home.

The May company’s international concern extended beyond interest in European relief. Before his death, Earl May had donated \$75,000 to Iowa State College to establish the Tropical Research Center in Antigua, Guatamala. The facility was designed to study different varieties of corn, isolate those strains with favorable characteristics, and cross-breed them with strains used by farmers in the Midwest. Gertrude May flew to



A highlight of Merrill Langfitt’s 1947 European trip was an interview with Sir John Boyd-Orr, director of the World Food Conference.

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Guatemala in 1948 to take part in the formal dedication ceremonies along with Dr. Charles Friley, president of the college, and Dr. I. E. Melhus, head of its botany department. Merrill Langfitt and engineer Ray Schroeder also went to cover the proceedings for both KMA and the ABC radio network. Instead of flying with Mrs. May, however, they traveled from New Orleans to Central America by banana boat.

In 1949, Ed May outlined an ambitious "Six Year Farm Program." With a budget of \$65,000, he announced that the KMA farm department would focus its attention each year upon a special problem confronting farmers: weed and insect control the first year, livestock improvement the second, then land use, mechanized farming, farmstead and farm life improvement, and, finally, human and animal nutrition. In addition to broadcasting many programs dealing with the topic of the year, KMA also intended to host four Farm Field Days annually, inviting farmers to Shenandoah to hear agricultural experts and see demonstrations of new farming techniques.

The Field Days were often sponsored in conjunction with fertilizer firms and implement companies. "In the spring, we had a day when



Merrill Langfitt (at left with microphone) and engineer Ray Schroeder (at right) record an on-the-spot farm interview for later broadcast.

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farmers could come and see crops being planted on a farm near Shenandoah,” says Warren Nielson. “Then all summer we would do programs from the farm on the conditions of the crops. During the fall Field Day, the machinery companies would come in and harvest, and the chemical people would discuss how well their fertilizers and herbicides had performed. It was exactly what a farm station should be doing.”

The schedule of a typical Field Day was that of the 1952 event when the topic of interest was cloud seeding:

KMA FARM FIELD DAY

Mayfair Auditorium

10:00 a.m.--Welcome by Edward May. Explanation of rainmaking by Tom Swearingen, Water Resources Development Corp. Presentation of sound films, “Pipeline To The Clouds” and “Seeding the Clouds to Increase Rain.”

11:00 a.m.--“Forecasting the Weather,” with Frank Field.

11:30 a.m.--KMA entertainers.

Noon Recess

Shenandoah Airport

1:30 p.m.--KMA entertainers

2:00 p.m.--Actual demonstration on rainmaking by Mr. Swearington.

3:00 p.m.--“The Weatherman,” with Ed Stapowich, Omaha, representative of the United States Weather Bureau

3:45 p.m.--Washington Rough Riders--Rodeo events, stunt riding and horse demonstrations.

In addition, commercial exhibitors set up booths in the airport hangers to display their wares. Fifteen hundred farmers attended the day-long affair. Although Mr. Swearington was unable to coax any rain from the empty sky, many farmers stayed until dark watching him try.

In 1956, the KMA farm staff helped organize the Midwest Livestock Breeders Association. Meetings held in Mayfair Auditorium were broadcast by the station, and the organization was designed to find solutions to the problems of surplus hogs and low prices. That first year, the association adopted a resolution calling for a direct subsidy payment of 100 percent of parity on livestock, and asked that the Secretary of Agriculture budget \$240 million at once to purchase surplus pork and cattle.

“We were frequently doing things like that,” says Merrill. “We had the advantage of the KMA Auditorium, and we could bring people in to speak at meetings. We had the first liquid fertilizer institute held

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anywhere, and out of it grew the National Liquid Fertilizer Association.”

Perhaps the most interesting project KMA initiated during the 1950's was an extensive cloud seeding operation. Farming is, of course, extremely dependent upon sufficient moisture. The possibility of exerting a measure of control over the clouds created tremendous interest among area farmers.

Dr. Irving P. Krick headed the Denver-based Water Resources Development Corporation. Krick was a respected meteorologist whom Merrill Langfitt believes was involved in predicting weather conditions for the D-Day invasion of Normandy. At a Mayfair meeting in the spring of 1956, Dr. Krick told farmers that for the coming summer they could expect rainfall slightly below normal. With cloud seeding, however, he assured them they could look for 125 percent of normal rainfall from April through August.

The project required that interested farmers set up silver iodide generators at thirty specific locations throughout the region. When Krick's computer-equipped organization believed conditions were favorable, he would alert the farmers to turn on the generators which would use foundry coke to heat the silver iodide to 2800 degrees. “The theory was that every drop of rain needs a nucleus,” Merrill explains. “If you send extra nuclei into the air in the form of silver iodide, your chances of forming more droplets of water and getting more rain are pretty good.”

Rather than trying to run the whole operation itself, KMA encouraged the formation of a volunteer organization to enlist the help of farmers and manage the program. Called the Iowa and Missouri Weather Modification Group, it eventually involved farmers in twenty-five counties who were willing to pay ten to fifteen cents an acre for the privilege of joining.

“The Weather Bureau thought the program was a lot of balony,” says Langfitt. “I went to Washington, D.C., to testify before a Congressional hearing on the whole subject. I'd done quite a bit of research, taking weather records back about twenty years, and the testimony I gave was that our cloud seeding program the previous year had increased the rainfall by ten or eleven percent. Of course, it just could have been that kind of year, but I'm sure we squeezed some rain out of some clouds we might not have gotten otherwise.” In 1958, the third year the program was in operation, July rainfall at Shenandoah totalled sixteen inches, making it the wettest and coolest July since 1915.

As with many KMA-sponsored organizations and programs, the station itself did not receive any monetary reimbursement for its encouragement of cloud-seeding, but there were benefits. “Things like that program happened because we made them happen,” says Langfitt. “Our whole devotion was to farmers. We needed the public relations that

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showed we were with them. That got us listeners, and that got us income.”

“I’ve often wondered why more stations have never taken on that kind of a project,” says Warren Nielson. “It was a public service. We’ve had some dry years when it would be a natural for some station to generate interest that way. I’m convinced the system works.”

To help Merrill Langfitt handle KMA’s coverage of agriculture, the farm department was expanded in 1953 with the addition of Jack Gowing. Raised on the Gowing family farm near Essex, Jack had attended Iowa State University and then become a vocational agriculture teacher in the Shenandoah school system. “Merrill and I used to do a lot of talking while I was a teacher, and he got me interested in radio,” Jack remembers. “In 1952, I got a job on a St. Joseph, Missouri, station to get some experience. I was on my way to WHO in Des Moines to see about broadcasting there, but I stopped in at KMA and discovered they were looking for help.”

Like Merrill, Jack covered the territory with his recorder and microphone to bring the stories and sounds of the region to the listeners of KMA. “My approach to farm broadcasting was that if I was interested in something, surely somebody else would be, too,” Jack explains. “The story didn’t have to be strictly about a farm. It might be about someone taking a trip to Alaska or finding something unusual in the Rockies. Farm listeners are interested in many things.”

When Merrill Langfitt left Shenandoah in 1959 to enter private business, Jack Gowing became KMA’s farm service director. Tom Beavers,



Farm director Jack Gowing (left) was aided in the early 1960's by Tom Beavers.

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another Iowa State agriculture graduate, was brought in to round out the department.

In 1964, KMA sponsored the last of the huge farmer gatherings in Shenandoah. The beef feeders of the Midwest were finding themselves in a not uncommon situation--big inventories, low market prices, and millions of tons of beef coming into the country from abroad. "I had done a series of programs on the beef farmers," Jack Gowing recalls, "and I was always coming up with this depressing story of imports really taking money out of their pockets. Tony Koelker, the station manager, wondered if we could put something together to help the farmers."

After weeks of preparation by much of the KMA staff and committees of farmers from throughout the region, the radio station hosted the Beef Imports Day in Mayfair Auditorium. The event drew coverage by the three national television networks and featured appearances by the governors of Iowa and Nebraska, and by an assistant Secretary of Agriculture. So many farmers attended that the Shenandoah Armory was pressed into service to accommodate the overflow. The gathering was the last of any kind held in Mayfair. In fact, the auditorium had been closed for some time, and was reopened just for the Beef Imports Day. Due to the rickety condition of the building and the concerns of the fire marshal, smoking was strictly prohibited.

As a result of the meeting, representatives went to Washington, D.C., to plead the case of the farmers. Participants in the program believed that their efforts were helpful in creating the interest in the farmers' difficulties that eventually led to the passage of the Beef Import Quotas legislation.

Tom Beavers left KMA in 1965, and his place in the farm department was taken by Jim Ross Lightfoot, who had joined the station four years earlier. Raised on a farm near Shenandoah, Jim's first radio work had been as an announcer on KSSS in Colorado Springs. When that station was sold, he lined up a job at a station in Denver, though on a visit to Shenandoah he left an audition tape at KMA. Afternoon announcer Al Austin had recently resigned, and Jim was hired to replace him.

"Merrill Langfitt hadn't been gone very long when I came to KMA," Jim recalls, "and Dean Naven, the program director, thought there might be some confusion with the names *Lightfoot* and *Langfitt*. So on the air I used the name *Jim Ross*." When Tom Beavers left KMA, Jim drew upon his own agricultural background and his abilities as a broadcaster and switched to the farm department where his programs were aired until 1969, when he also left KMA.

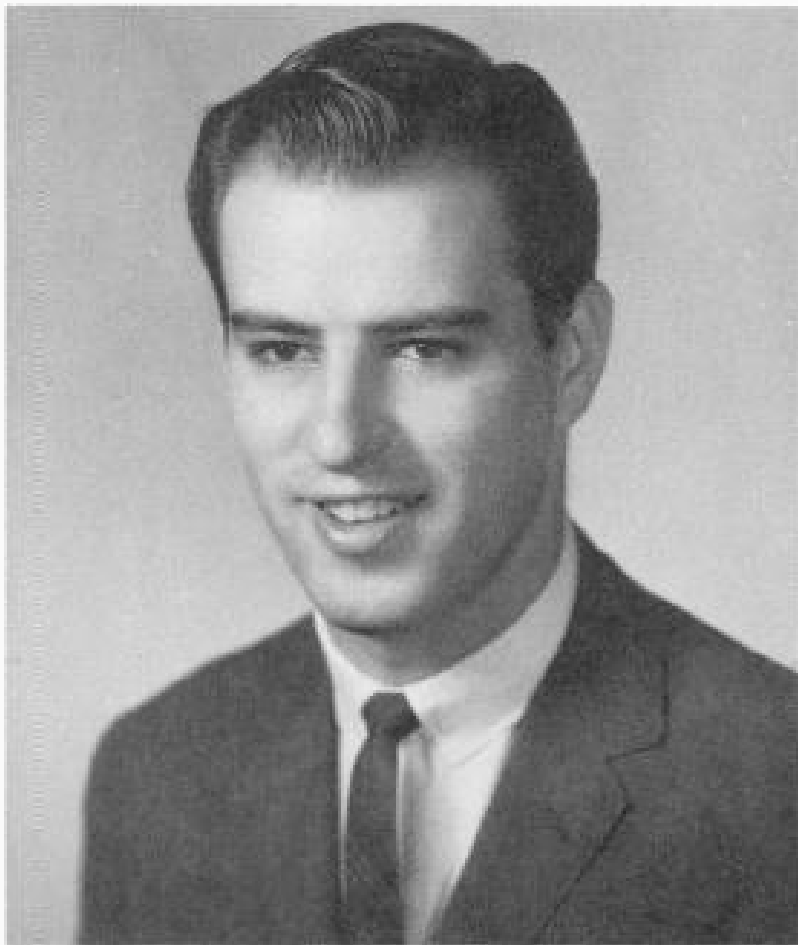
Warren Nielson, who in twenty-five years at the station had served in nearly every capacity, officially joined the KMA farm department in

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1969. “I have been pinch-hitting for the farm men—Gowing, Ross, Beavers, and Langfitt—whenever the need arose, so KMA farm service is not a new field to me,” he told the listeners. He had also been commuting to Omaha since 1963 to serve as KMTV’s farm director. One of his first duties as a KMA farm broadcaster was to interview the new Secretary of Agriculture, Clifford Hardin. Then, in 1970, he moved to Omaha and became farm director at radio station KFAB.

After nearly two decades on the air, Jack Gowing left KMA in 1971 to go into banking. The station struggled for several years to find an agriculture staff with the expertise that had exemplified KMA’s commitment to farm broadcasting for nearly half a century. There were four farm directors in almost as many years, and then in 1976, the job was given to Craighton Knau. That same year Jim Ross Lightfoot returned to the station, first on a part-time basis, then as a full-time farm broadcaster. KMA again had the farm department the station management wanted.

Jim Ross Lightfoot believes that KMA today carries more farm broadcasting than any station. “When Craighton and I were working, we had



Jim Ross Lightfoot joined the KMA farm department in 1965.

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twenty-two hours a week that was completely dedicated to agriculture. Add to that the weather and other farm related programs, and it's a considerable part of the day's broadcast."

Both Lightfoot and Knau continued the tradition of overseas travel begun in the 1940's by Merrill Langfitt. In 1981 and 1982, Jim made trips to Japan and the Philippines to report on the Oriental market for American farm products, and in 1983 he accepted an invitation to be part of the press corps covering the farm-related aspects of President Reagan's visit to South Korea and Japan. Craighton's most recent forays abroad have taken him to Brussels, Belgium, to report on talks between representatives of the European Common Market and members of the Corn Growers' Association of the United States, and on a trade mission to Mexico with Secretary of Agriculture John Block.

Jim Ross Lightfoot continued his service to the farm department until early 1984, when he resigned to begin a successful campaign for election as U.S. Congressman from Iowa's 5th District. His place at the station was taken by Mike LePorte who, like so many of KMA's farm broad-



Barton Studio

A respected agriculture commentator Craighton Knau directs KMA's farm department.

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casters, brings to the microphone a wealth of agricultural experience and broadcasting expertise.

Current surveys by independent agencies studying the listening habits of farmers indicate that in the twenty-nine county, four-state Omaha listening area, KMA is far and away the station of choice for farm and market reporting. According to the 1983 CAMS Comprehensive Report prepared by the Doane Marketing Research, KMA dominates the other twenty-one stations in terms of appeal to farmers. During the weekday hours of 5-8 a.m., over half of all farm listeners are tuned to KMA, a fact that would not have surprised Earl May one bit.



Barton Studio

In addition to his farm broadcasts, Mike LePorte airs the 7:15 a.m. weather and gardening program.

Chapter XV

NEWS, WEATHER, AND SPORTS

KMA has never had a more loyal, expectant, and emotional audience than the youngsters listening on snowy winter mornings for school closing announcements. As rural schools disappeared and the smallest of the small town schools consolidated, reliance on buses to bring farm children to town left schools at the mercy of the weather. For the latest news, information, and road reports, children--and their parents--have always turned to KMA.

Frank Field's 7:15 a.m. weather program drew a heavy listenership for thirty-four years until his retirement in the spring of 1974, the culmination of a broadcasting career that spanned almost half a century. "Over the Garden Fence," his noontime television program, had aired over KMTV from 1949 to 1969. Frank was succeeded on the radio by Wayne McManama, manager of the farm seed division of the May Seed & Nursery Company. "Mac" was not unknown to KMA listeners, for along with John Topham and Bill Overbey, he had over the years substituted for Frank on the morning show, and for Ed May on the 12:15 weather program.

"Of all the shifts I worked at KMA, the best time slot was that 7:15 a.m. program," remarks Jim Ross Lightfoot, who took it over full time

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in 1976. “Listeners look at this station as a friend, and they depend on us for good news and weather information. We always put that ahead of everything else, even commercials. There were lots of stormy mornings on the 7:15 program that I didn’t give a single commercial for Earl May’s. By the time I’d gotten through the road conditions and several hundred school closings, there wasn’t time, but KMA has always put service first.”

Mike LePorte, who currently broadcasts the 7:15 program, discovered early that the audience paid careful attention to what he had to say. “Frank Field reporting the weather was such an institution when I was growing up that I was nervous when I took over the program,” he explains. “After the first few months, I got letters from listeners who wanted to know why I didn’t do the weather just like Frank and Jim had done it. I wasn’t giving the information in exactly the same order as they had, and that troubled some of the audience. I talked to Bill Overbey about it, and he helped me learn how to organize the program.”

To improve upon its weather reporting, KMA in 1955 set up checkpoints throughout its listening area. Most were all-night service stations



Ed May and Frank Field reminisce at the microphone on the day Frank retired from KMA.

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and cafes where truckers and motorists were likely to stop. Station operators and cafe owners were urged to call KMA with road information they had gleaned from their customers. "Such information will tell us whether chains are needed, what hills are jamming up traffic through ice, how many cars are in the ditch, whether truck drivers are having difficulty with their big rigs on the ice and how the average motorist finds conditions," the *KMA Guide* explained. Furthermore, by 1966, 141 schools in Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, and Missouri had each received a special KMA code so that the station could be sure that closing announcements were legitimate.

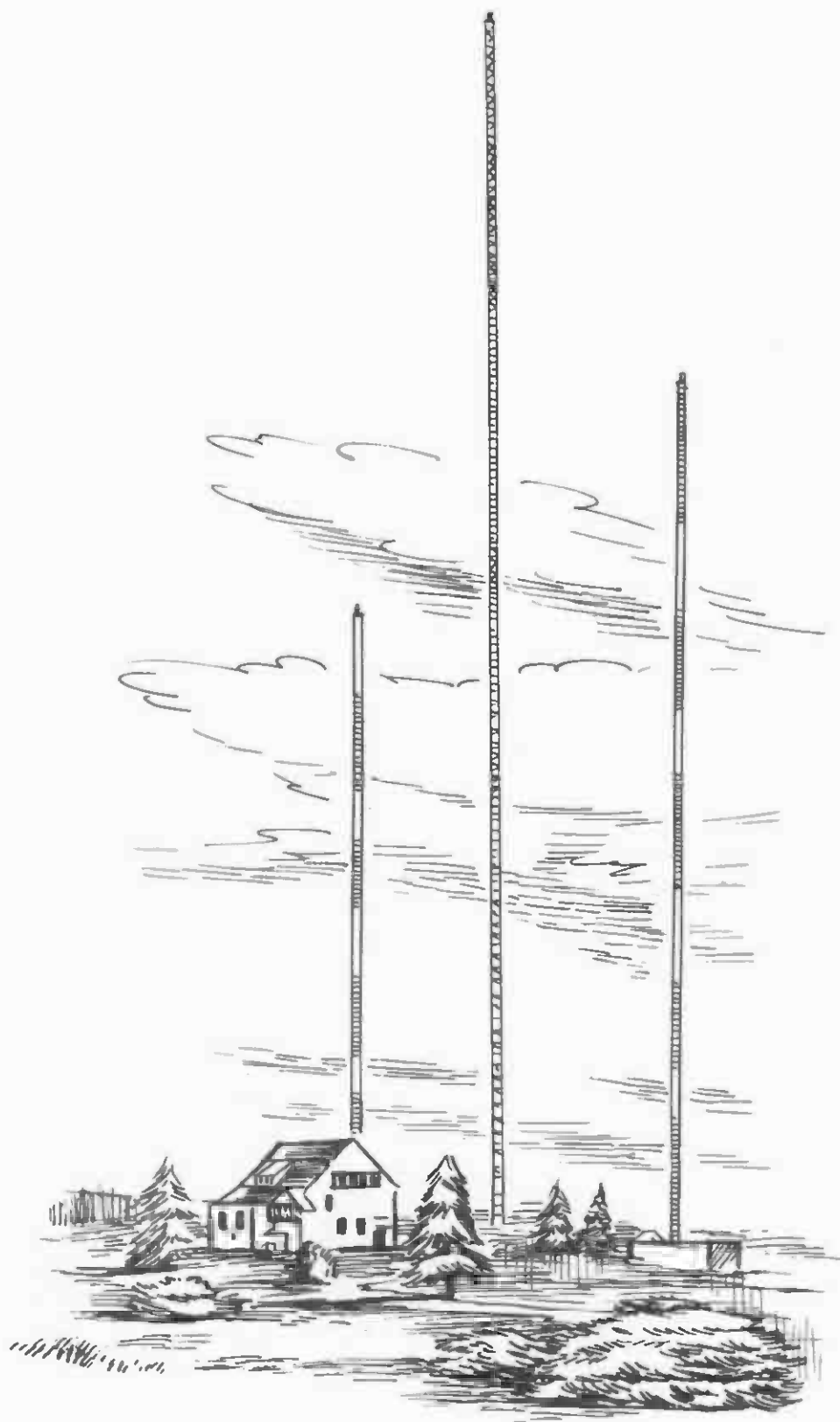
Another KMA news gathering service was a tornado reporting network, established in 1966. Composed of ham radio operators, highway patrol officers, sheriffs, county engineers, utilities companies and civil defense stations, the network was designed to give accurate information on tornados within a fifty-mile radius of Shenandoah.

KMA was especially sensitive about tornados. On May 18, 1959, while Wayne McManama used the 12:15 weather program to warn listeners about a storm brewing over the area, heavy doors in the studio began swinging back and forth on their own. Then the lights went out and the station went off the air. Engineers Ralph Lund and Norm Kling drove north of town to check the condition of the transmitter and the triple towers. "As we got close, I looked out through the rain and said, 'Ralph, the center tower's gone!'" Norm exclaims. "And then I saw that the north tower was gone, too! We called Don Burrichter, the chief engineer, and told him, but at first he couldn't believe it." In fact, a tornado had felled the main, 488-foot KMA broadcast tower, and as the big, free-standing structure had buckled and collapsed, it had struck the guy wires supporting one of two 240-foot directional towers, snapping it into three pieces and carrying it to the ground. The south tower was undamaged, and by mid-afternoon the engineers had used it to put KMA back on the air, though at a greatly reduced power.

Replacement towers were constructed before the end of the year. About the same height as the original, the new center tower weighed nine tons, sat upon a single ceramic insulator and, unlike its predecessor, had guy wires improving its stability. The equipment used to raise the new tower sometimes rectified the strong radio waves radiating from the south tower, and workmen could hear music pulsing from their pulleys and cables, and from the wire fence surrounding the transmitter building.

A few years later, a partially buried shelter was constructed near the tower in hopes of providing safety for engineers and broadcasters during emergencies ranging from bad storms to nuclear fallout. The structure has walls and a ceiling eighteen inches thick. A generator inside will still

KMA RADIO: THE FIRST SIXTY YEARS



The KMA broadcast towers and transmitter building, sketched by Shenandoah artist Larry Greenwall.

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allow KMA to maintain emergency broadcasts twenty-four hours a day for two weeks.

Although KMA strived to provide effective weather coverage, the organizational plan of the National Weather Bureau left the station at a disadvantage. According to federal tariff regulations, a station must draw most of its data from the weather bureau located in its own state. Thus, KMA received its reports from Des Moines even though Shenandoah is just beyond the range of the Des Moines weather radar. Since most storms roll in from the west and southwest, important atmospheric developments had often already passed over Shenandoah before they appeared on the Des Moines radar screen.

"A radio station in Spencer, Iowa, had a radar that was really helping them, but it didn't have a digital readout," Norm Williams says in discussing KMA's decision in the early 1970's to invest in a radar system of its own. "They had to stare into the scope and try to translate the little blips on the screen. We needed a radar, but we wanted one that was more convenient to read." May Broadcasting eventually purchased a radar from a station in Fargo, North Dakota. Originally designed for use in an airliner, the new KMA radar produces a full-color, televised image which shows at a glance the amount and intensity of precipitation anywhere in the KMA listening area.

"With the radar on a hundred-mile scan, we can accurately predict how much rain is falling within any five mile area," news director Ned Dermody explains. "Although it can't see a tornado, it can indicate the conditions most likely to produce a twister." The radar itself is mounted under a white dome atop the old May seedhouse, and monitors are located in the newsroom and studios of the station. The radio company that for so many years had relied upon the reports from a distant weather bureau and local spotters, and upon the instincts of Frank Field had acquired a weather-watching instrument unmatched almost anywhere in the nation.

KMA's news staff has also kept pace with other technological innovations. One of the most visible was the acquisition in 1952 of a Beechcraft Bonanza. Capable of a cruising speed of 165 miles an hour, the plane allowed KMA broadcasters ready access to the scenes of fast-breaking stories. A few months after the plane arrived, the Mississippi River spilled from its channel near Sioux City. In the days that followed, Ralph Childs coordinated day and night coverage of the flood as it progressed south all the way to Kansas City. Flying low over Blencoe, Iowa, Merrill Langfitt reported on the explosions of metal grain bins bursting from the pressure of the wet, swelling corn inside.

The plane was replaced in 1958 with a new Twin Bonanza piloted by Gene Racine. Among Gene's first duties was to take Ralph Childs of

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KMA and a team of KMTV reporters and cameramen to Douglas, Wyoming, to cover the arrests of murderers Charles Starkweather and Caril Fugate. Ralph stayed on the scene several days and telephoned his observations to KMA for broadcast.

A decade and several aircraft later, Ned Dermody flew to South Dakota to report on the occupation of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation by members of the American Indian Movement. "As we were starting to land, a plane behind us radioed that they'd been shot at, so our pilot pulled up and we landed in Alliance, Nebraska," the KMA news director recalls. "We drove to Pine Ridge and covered the story for a week. I was astonished, amazed, and appalled by what I saw there." Each day, Ned's on-the-scene reports were conveyed by telephone to KMA.

Ned came to Shenandoah as news director in 1971, joining Ralph Childs who, with over thirty years of experience, had no title. "He was just Ralph," says Bill Bone, who became part of the news staff in 1973. "He was never in a hurry, and he had that great voice."

"I've never known anyone who could read news like Ralph could," Ned Dermody explains. "He had a beautiful voice, and he played it like



Barton Studio

With Bill Bone (left), Monica Morris, and Ned Dermody, KMA boasts a talented and respected news team.

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an organ. And if something he was reading on the air really interested him, he sometimes forgot to talk. You might hear him go, 'Hmm,' for awhile. He used to mix in poetry now and then. He came right out of an older tradition of broadcasting."

Ralph Childs left full-time radio work in 1973. "I don't mind our small town concept of the fire whistle and siren," he said upon his retirement as he reflected on KMA's dedication to effective regional news coverage. "I think that relates us to other small towns. We're a small town radio station relating to small towns and the rural population for 150 miles around us."

While Ralph made occasional broadcasts over KMA for several more years, his successors in Ned Dermody, Bill Bone, and Monica Morris have helped KMA take advantage of changes in the ways news is gathered and reported. "When I came here in 1971, we were getting forty-five words a minute over the old UPI and AP wire machines, and we had one machine for each of the four states we covered," Ned points out. "Now the news is delivered by satellite at 1200 words a minute to a single machine." Today, two large satellite receiving dishes stand behind the KMA building, and a healthy crop of smaller dishes has sprouted



Barton Studio

The radar monitor behind news director Ned Dermody gives weather information when storms threaten the KMA listening area.

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Before KMA employed a full-time sports director, coverage of athletic events was conducted by announcer Jim Kendrick or anyone else at the station with the time and inclination.



Don Joe (left) and newsman Dean Naven interview cowboy clown Buck LeGrande during KMA's coverage of the Sidney, Iowa, Championship Rodeo.

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on the roof. Add to that the small recorders, two-way radios, and radio-equipped vehicles, and KMA reporters have the tools to cover stories anywhere in the region with speed and efficiency.

Of course, not all the advances have been technological. "Listeners' expectations have changed, too," Ned says. "They want more information. They want to know what's going on. The farmer isn't just concerned with the prices of commodities. He's also concerned about national and overseas events that affect those markets."

As the inflow of information continues to increase in volume and complexity, the KMA news staff talks of a time not far in the future when computers will play a large role in storing news items and preparing them for broadcast. "In fact, we used a computer for the first time to cover the 1984 elections," Ned says. "It was fantastic."

As a station which prides itself on providing its audience with the information it needs, KMA has also gradually increased its commitment to sports coverage. As early as 1930, the station was airing accounts of World Series baseball games recreated by announcers reading from telegrams highlighting the action in each inning. By 1940, KMA was also carrying telephoned play-by-play broadcasts of University of Iowa football games, and an occasional contest involving Creighton University.

In 1939, KMA was chosen along with WOI in Ames and WSUI in Iowa City to broadcast coverage of the Iowa high school basketball championship tournament. The Iowa Dairy Commission, which was in charge of arranging the programs, determined that KMA and the two college stations had sufficiently strong signals to serve the entire state. Soon the station was also offering live broadcasts of area high school football games. Transmission lines installed at the playing fields in Shenandoah, Clarinda, Massena, Red Oak, Corning, and Creston enabled Ralph Childs and Mott Johnson to air the play-by-play of Friday night games. Fred Greenlee had charge of special broadcasts from Sidney, Iowa's rodeo, and in 1936 directed live reports from the Shenandoah performances of the Ringling Brothers Circus.

Through its network affiliations, KMA carried a variety of 1940's sporting events including Madison Square Garden boxing (NBC) and the World Series (Mutual). Live coverage of high school games and of the Sidney rodeo continued through the 1950's even though the station did not have a sports director. Area athletic events were covered by anyone at the station with an understanding of the sport in question and a free evening to do a game. Over the years, Dean Naven, Jack Rainbolt, Don Tebbe, Don Joe, Andy Andersen, Bruce Pilcher, and a host of others took their turns behind the KMA sports mike! KMA salesmen sold advertising to businesses in the two towns furnishing the teams, and the KMA announcers did their best not to show any par-

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Nancy Jean Norman, Miss KMA of 1955, reigned as Queen of the Kansas City Athletics Network. Nancy is pictured with Lou Boudreau.

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tiality. "After all," Andy Andersen laughs, "people bring their portable radios to the games, so there are witnesses."

KMA began carrying the full schedule of the Kansas City Athletics baseball team in 1955, and Nancy Jean Norman, Miss KMA and a former Miss Iowa, reigned for the year as Queen of the Kansas City Athletics Network. The station's coverage of A's games continued until 1967 when the team moved to Oakland. Two years later, KMA signed on with the newly-formed Kansas City Royals, and continues today to air their games.

By 1961, KMA was also providing its own play-by-play coverage of Iowa high school boys' and girls' sectional, district, substate, and state basketball tournaments. A service still provided by the station, the broadcasts mean an exciting and exhausting six-week siege for the KMA sportscasters. "In one basketball season, Dean Naven and I worked 180 hours of overtime driving to and broadcasting games," Andy Andersen remembers. "We had great fun doing it, and we really became part of the teams. We were on a first name basis with half the kids who played, and with all the coaches."

When Norm Williams became KMA's station manager, he realized that the importance of regional sports reporting required more than part-time effort. He hired Warren Swain as sports director in August of 1970, and encouraged him to build a strong sports department. A veteran sports announcer from KHAS in Hasting, Nebraska, Warren



Barton Studio

Warren Swain (left) was KMA's first full-time sports director. That post is filled today by Chuck Morris.

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proceeded to do just that. In addition to covering high school sports events throughout the KMA listening area, he also arranged to have KMA originate the broadcasts of all Creighton University Bluejay basketball games and feed them to the six-state Bluejay Basketball Network. The university chose Swain to be the “Voice of the Bluejays,” and he broadcast the play-by-play coverage of twenty-eight games each year.

“We are elated to have this radio coverage because it will carry Bluejay basketball further than ever before in the school’s history,” exclaimed Creighton coach Eddie Sutton. “Radio KMA is one of the Midwest’s top sports stations, Warren Swain is an exciting announcer, and the network stations provide wide coverage to our fans.” Assisted in later years by Mac MacDonald, Warren also did the play-by-play of Iowa State University games, and of hundreds of high school contests.

Swain and MacDonald left KMA in 1981, and Chuck Morris became KMA’s sports director. Aided at first by program director Del Epperson and today by Lee Hughes, Don Hansen, and Darrell Murphy, Chuck has maintained the station’s commitment to effective coverage of sports events throughout the region. “I’m a big supporter of high school athletics, and so is this station,” Chuck explains. “Most kids on the teams



Barton Studio

KMA’s current sportscasters include, from left: Don Hansen, Lee Hughes, sports director Chuck Morris, and Darrell Murphy.

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won't go on to play in college, but they will learn so much about getting along with others, about competing, and about themselves. The school is the center of social activity in many rural towns. As a station serving those communities, we want to do all we can to encourage the healthy growth of school athletics."

As media liaison for the Iowa High School Athletic Directors Association from 1980–1984, Chuck has gained a state-wide perspective of athletic programs. "The bottom line is that athletics are important for youth," he insists. "Because of that, we're going to keep getting involved any way we can to promote the school's programs and help make them even better than they already are."

KMA is still the only radio station in the region with a full-time sports director. And yet, as with all positions at the station, titles only tell part of the story of a staff dedicated to keeping listeners informed. Their reputation for airing accurate, timely information is a source of real pride among KMA's broadcasters. "Now and then, listeners might turn to other stations for entertainment," says program director Don Hansen, "but when the weather gets bad or when something happens, they all turn to KMA."

"If there are storms in the area, or if big stories are breaking, everyone becomes a newsperson," says Monica Morris. "Even people who are off-duty come down to the station to help out. There are three of us on the full-time news staff, but there have been times when it seems as though there are twenty."

"KMA works because everyone on the staff can do his job well, and we all respect the talent and dedication of the others," adds Darrell Murphy, who at one time or another has filled nearly every time slot at the station. "You see that especially when there are big stories breaking and off-duty people show up. There are no titles then; there is just a real strong family of KMA staff doing whatever's necessary to cover the story. Whoever is running the control board runs the show. If I'm broadcasting tornado warnings and I need someone to run off somewhere and make a remote broadcast, it doesn't matter if it's a high school intern or Ed May himself--I say go and he's on his way. And I know that he'll get the job done right."

Perhaps no coverage of an event better typifies the current KMA staff's dedication to serving its listeners than the efforts they made on a stormy June night in 1982. Heavy rains were causing rivers and streams already dangerously high to overflow their banks. KMA stayed on the air several hours beyond its usual sign-off time so Monica Morris and Clark Hart could broadcast the latest bulletins on the progress of the storm. Among the flooded streams they mentioned was Indian Creek,

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which was inundating the town of Emerson, not far north of Shenandoah.

At 2:30 a.m., KMA left the air. Thirty minutes later, a westbound Amtrak passenger train rounded a curve near Emerson, plowed into the waters of Indian Creek, and derailed. KMA was soon back on the air, and much of the staff pitched in to help cover the fast-breaking story. Jim Ross Lightfoot went up in a plane to provide an aerial perspective. Bill Bone traveled to Nishna Valley High School where the train's passengers were being sheltered. Chuck Morris covered the hospitals admitting the victims of injuries. At the station, Ned Dermody monitored the phones and the wire service reports. Throughout the next day and into the night, the rest of the staff helped out wherever they could.

It's easy for a radio company to advertise itself as a reliable source of news and information. But when the chips are down, whether it's accurately predicting the weather, conveying the excitement of a high school game, or effectively reporting storms, floods, and accidents, KMA shows the stuff of which it is made. Time after time, it proves itself to be as good as its word.

Chapter XVI

TODAY AND BEYOND

On warm summer nights in 1985, the sky over Shenandoah, Iowa, is still spangled with stars. Bright lights illuminate the streets, and paved highways lead into a countryside dotted with the mercury-vapor lamps of farmyards. But the air that sixty years ago was silent now dances with radio and television transmissions, short-wave signals, and the powerful pulses of satellites. It is a different world than the one known by the pioneers of Midwestern radio. It is different in large part because of them.

The radio business has never been an easy one. Earl May understood that when he switched on the new KMA transmitter in 1925. The broadcasting industry has always been highly competitive, and a successful station must be adaptable to changes in the economy, in the nature of the area it serves, and in the composition and tastes of its audience. A radio company is susceptible to the variables of federal regulation, to the great expense required to stay abreast of new technologies, and in recent decades to the popularity of television and other entertainment alternatives.

For a radio station simply to survive long enough to celebrate its sixtieth year on the air is cause enough for admiration. For a broad-

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casting company to remain within the ownership of the same family for all those years is remarkable. For that firm to endure with essentially the same intent, commitment, and basic format as those laid out by its founder is astounding. It is also the story of KMA.

KMA and the May Broadcasting Company are today stronger than at any time in their history, but achieving that stability has required careful management. Among the most important decisions which have helped ensure its health and prosperity has been the company's determination to expand its holdings.

When it went on the air in 1949, May Broadcasting's television station KMTV served as the main CBS affiliate for Omaha. Owen Saddler, vice-president of May Broadcasting, was a member of the CBS affiliate's board, and the May company was pleased to be associated with what they believed to be the best of the national networks. KMTV also carried programming from the short-lived DuMont Network, and from ABC. At that time a fairly recent spin-off of NBC, ABC was a relatively weak network still in its formative stages. WOWT, the only other Omaha television station then in existence, had signed on with NBC.



KMA station manager Andy Andersen has been at the helm since 1971.

TODAY AND BEYOND

In the mid-1950's, the Meredith Group, which owned WOWT, purchased two additional television stations outside the Omaha market and asked that all three be granted CBS affiliation. Impressed by the scope of the Meredith Group's communications holdings, CBS granted Meredith's request by ending its seven year relationship with KMTV and granting its Omaha affiliation to WOWT.

In need of a new primary network affiliation, May Broadcasting Company approached NBC, the network recently discarded by WOWT. Omaha's third television station, KETV, was being constructed by the *Omaha World-Herald*, and KETV was also petitioning NBC for an affiliation. Due to the fact that KETV was owned by Nebraska's largest newspaper, that station appeared to have the inside track. Lacking a strong, second voice within the Omaha market, May Broadcasting was finding itself in a weak bargaining position.

In order to increase its Omaha leverage, May Broadcasting in 1957 purchased the 48.86% share of radio station KFAB previously owned by the Sidles Company of Lincoln and Omaha. The Journal-Star Printing Company of Lincoln owned another 48.86%, and three long-time employees controlled the remainder. Chief among them was Lyell Bremser, who is today still station manager of 50,000-watt KFAB. Because Central Broadcasting Company, which operated a number of strong Midwestern stations, had since 1939 owned 25% of the May Broadcasting Company, obtaining FCC approval of the KFAB purchase involved lengthy and complicated governmental deliberations.

KMTV also installed the equipment necessary to broadcast all its programs in color, the first station in the Omaha market with that capability. The station's dedication to full color and the broadening base of the May Broadcasting Company as represented by the acquisition of a large share of KFAB convinced NBC that KMTV should be its Omaha affiliate, an arrangement still in force. May Broadcasting further consolidated its operations in 1959 by buying back the 25% share in the company controlled by Central Broadcasting. The May company was once again wholly owned by members of the May family.

For the next ten years, May Broadcasting concentrated its energies and its finances upon strengthening its radio and television stations. Then, in 1968, the company purchased television station KGUN in Tucson, Arizona, from the Gilmore family of Kalamazoo, Michigan. "Jim Gilmore Jr. was the one with whom we dealt," says Ed May. "We never knew quite why they wanted to sell, except that at that time Tucson was a place where people went in the winter, not to live all year around. The Gilmores may have wanted to buy a station in a bigger market." Since then, as Ed May had hoped it would, Tucson has become one of

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those bigger markets. "Buying KGUN turned out to be one of the smartest moves we ever made."

May Broadcasting's pattern of careful expansion continued in 1984 with the acquisition of a radio station in LaCrosse, Wisconsin--WKTY-AM/WSPL-FM. The AM side has had a country music format; the FM offerings lean toward easy listening. While keeping the basic appeal of the programming, May Broadcasting is hard at work upgrading the LaCrosse operation, increasing its capacity for quality news and information coverage, and drawing upon the experience of sixty years at KMA to make WKTY/WSPL a strong, regional voice for the corners of Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and Illinois.

"Today we're not looking for another television station," Ed May says in discussing May Broadcasting's plans for future expansion. "The prices are just astronomical, and it costs almost as much to operate a station in Omaha as in Chicago or New York. For half what it would cost to buy a TV station in a reasonably-sized market, you could buy quite a few good radio stations."



Barton Studio

Program director Don Hansen and many other Shenandoah broadcasters learned the basics of radio work in the KMA practice studio.

TODAY AND BEYOND

Ed also points out that these are decisions that will be made by the next generation of the May family to direct the firm. “The way things are lining up, Ed Jr. will be heading up the broadcasting company.”

Ed Jr. began his own broadcasting career as a high school intern at KMA, then studied radio and television journalism at the University of Nebraska. “I enjoyed the on-air work, but I knew in the long run I wanted to grow into management responsibilities,” he says of his growing role in running the company. “My father’s never been pushy about me staying in the family business, and I’m sure he would have supported me if I’d chosen another career, but this is where I want to be. Today we share two strong relationships--that of father and son, and that of business associates.”

Like his father, Ed May Jr. sees the wisdom of gradual expansion of the company. “May Broadcasting’s first priority is to always run the company’s radio and television stations as efficiently and effectively as we can. The second priority is growth, and we’re very excited about the possibilities. We’re very bullish on broadcasting, and we hope the



Barton Studio



Barton Studio

Evalyn Saner (left) has been with KMA since 1941. Mary Williams is in charge of promotion.

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Ed Jr. and Carolyn Lueder May

TODAY AND BEYOND

LaCrosse station is just the first of a number of well-planned acquisitions to come.”

While perhaps not as glamorous as the television stations or currently receiving all the attention of the station in LaCrosse, KMA remains the flagship of the May Broadcasting Company. It is KMA that dates to the very beginnings of the firm and formed the foundation upon which May Broadcasting has been built. It is KMA which made possible the construction of KMTV. And it is KMA which maintains the heritage of service that has been the true secret of success for both the radio station and the broadcasting company as a whole.

“When I came to the station, they had radio homemakers, long news broadcasts, and fifteen-minute weather reports,” Norm Williams says. “That kind of radio had disappeared thirty years earlier everywhere else, but we not only continue to do it, we’ve actually increased the number of news programs. That’s unheard of today, but we were determined to tailor our programming to meet the needs of our listeners.”

“Our philosophy is pretty much unchanged from what Earl May’s was, and that’s keeping people advised,” adds current station manager Andy Andersen. “We’re a service organization.”



Barton Studio

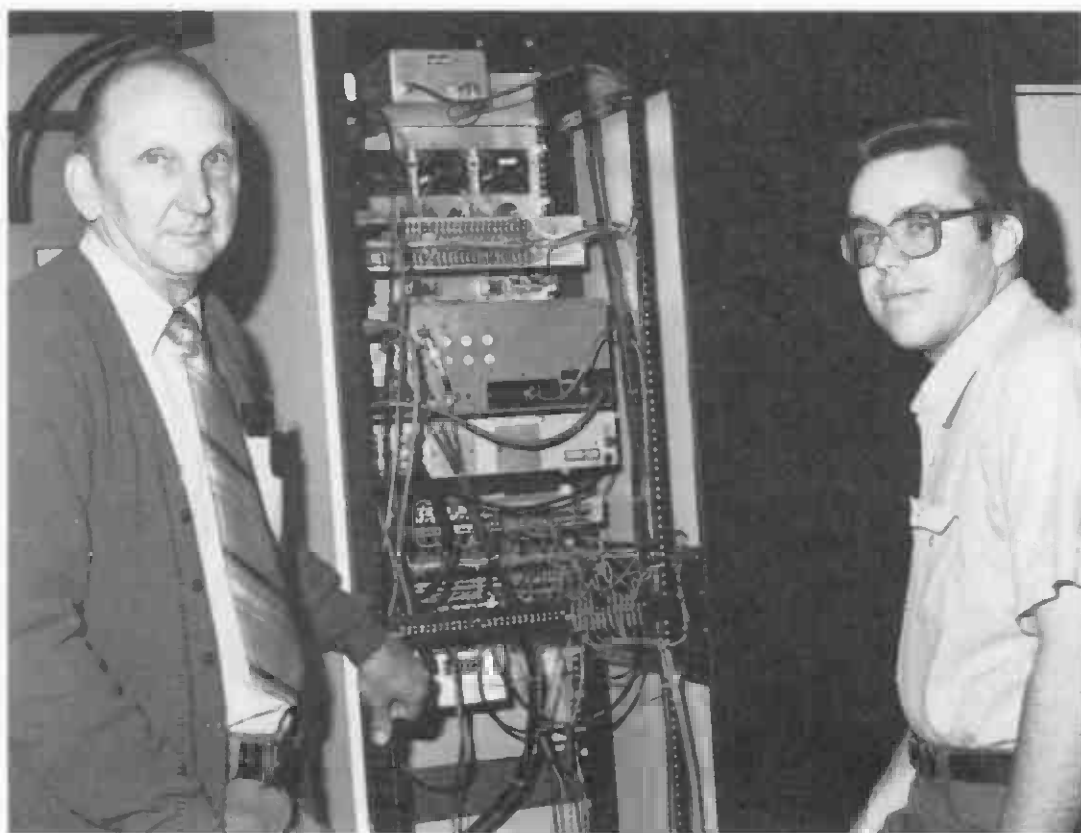
KMA's account executives are, from left: Tom Beavers, Larry Grebert, Duane Young, and sales manager Bill Selby.

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Barton Studio

Lynn Padilla is KMA's continuity director. She was joined in 1985 by copywriter Judi Glasgo. Chief engineer Norman Kling and engineer Ron Erickson watch over broadcasting equipment.



Barton Studio

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Barton Studio

The station would not be on the air long without the support of traffic director Nancy Stotts (left), account clerk Pat Barr, systems manager Nadine Kelsey, and Earle Crowley, who heads KMA's accounting department.



Barton Studio

KMA's announcing staff includes, from left, seated: program director Don Hansen, Colleen Ketcham, Susan Cochran, and music director Tim Wayne Krein. Standing: Lee Hughes, Pat Hurley, Mike McGinness, Darrell Murphy, and Clark Hart.

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KMA operates today as if it were in an urban area with a population of 500,000 to a million. The size of the staff, the five production studios, and the revenues involved are all on a scale comparable to big city stations. The total population of the twenty-eight counties comprising KMA's primary area of coverage is about 340,000, and their radio tastes differ greatly from those of listeners in urban markets. The focus of KMA's attention continues to be upon an audience living on the farms and in the small towns.

Attuned to rural life, the KMA staff has always had its roots solidly planted in the Midwest. While broadcasting has become a profession and many of KMA's current broadcasters have formal training in radio and television techniques, they are all Midwesterners. They were raised on those farms and in those small towns they now serve, and most of them grew up listening to KMA. Their values are those of their listeners, their interests parallel those of the region, and when they talk on the radio, they are talking to their own people.

Earl May believed that the story of radio is a story of people, and he was right. He also believed that KMA could be a success if its broad-



The 1985 KMA staff includes, front row left to right: Colleen Ketcham, Judi Glasgo, Nancy Stotts, Susan Cochran, Lynn Padilla, Evalyn Saner, Pat Barr, Nadine Kelsey, Monica Morris, Billie Oakley, Bill Selby, Evelyn Birkby, Ned Dermody, and Bill Overbey. Back row: Tim Wayne Krein, Earle Crowley, Tom Beavers, Dennis Grebert, Duane Young, Bill Bone, Lee Hughes, Chuck Morris, Clark Hart, Don Hansen, Andy Andersen, Darrell Murphy, Ron Erickson, Mike McGinness, and Pat Hurley.

TODAY AND BEYOND

casters thought of their listeners as close neighbors. It was his hope that the radio station would be an open and honest enterprise, and that it would provide the information and entertainment the people of the farm belt really wanted.

Much has changed in the last sixty years. Thousands of good people have had their moments before the microphones, their voices booming for awhile from the KMA towers and then fading from the air and from our memories. The Mayfair Auditorium and the broadcasting studios have been the scenes of great joy and excitement, and have felt the warmth of many friendships. The streets of Shenandoah still echo with the footsteps of the hundreds of thousands who poured into town for the Jubilees and in so many ways were touched by KMA.

Much has changed, and yet, for all that seems different, KMA is still the same station it was sixty years ago. It is still what Earl May had hoped it would be, and what Ed May has helped it become—a radio company that maintains the trust of its audience. It is a station that always puts the needs of listeners ahead of everything else.

And at its heart, KMA is still nothing more than neighbors talking to neighbors. In the long, colorful history of radio, there has never been a simpler goal, nor one so difficult to achieve. But in the history of radio, there has never been another station like KMA.



While in high school, Ed May Jr. worked as an intern at KMA.

Appendix A

MAY BROADCASTING COMPANY BOARD OF DIRECTORS 1985

Edward May--*president*
Owen Saddler--*chairman of the board*
Frances May Rankin--*vice-president and treasurer*
Eleanor May--*vice-president and assistant treasurer*
James Shaum--*secretary*
Norman Williams--*vice-president and general manager*
Ed May Jr.--*vice-president*
John Kidd--*vice-president*
Bryce Pringle--*vice-president*

PREVIOUS BOARD MEMBERS

- Gwynn, R. M.--1939. When the Mount Arbor Nursery was incorporated in 1916, Gwynn became its secretary and treasurer. In 1939, he was appointed to the board of directors of May Broadcasting.
- Maland, J. O.--1939. Manager of Central Broadcasting stations WHO and WOC, Maland became a member of the board of May Broadcasting in order to represent Central's interests after that company purchased 25% of the May firm. He was succeeded as Central's representative on the May board by Ralph Evans and then William Wagner.
- May, Earl--1919-1946. Founder and president of May Seed & Nursery Company, and of May Broadcasting Company. In 1938, Tarkio College conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws for his outstanding contributions to education and agriculture.
- May, Gertrude--1919-1973. In her long career as a radio broadcaster and business woman, Mrs. May served on the boards of Mount Arbor Nurseries, May Seed & Nursery Company, and May Broadcasting. Her many civic duties included offices in the Ladies' Aid Council, Shenandoah Garden Club, Daughters of the American Revolution, P.E.O., Women's Christian Temperance Union, and the Eastern Star.
- Rankin, J. D., Jr.--1938-1983. Rankin joined the May Seed & Nursery Company in 1938, was elected to the board of May Broadcasting in 1939, and became assistant manager of the stores division in 1940. During his many years in Shenandoah, he became executive vice-president of May Seed & Nursery Company, and vice-president of May Broadcasting. His wife, Frances May Rankin, is the daughter of Earl and Gertrude May.

- Sawyer, Raymond H.--1939-1961. In 1938, Sawyer left his position as assistant cashier of Shenandoah's City National Bank to become assistant to the president and business manager of May Seed and Nursery Company. He was elected in 1939 to the board of directors of May Broadcasting.
- Schroeder, Ray--1950-1975. A native Nebraskan, Ray joined KMA as chief engineer in 1937. He was instrumental in putting KMTV on the air, and served on the boards of May Broadcasting and KFAB until his retirement.
- Welch, Edward S.--1919-1951. The founding spirit behind Mount Arbor Nurseries and the father of Gertrude May, E. S. Welch served on the boards of May Seed & Nursery Company and May Broadcasting. He was elected president of the American Association of Nurserymen and in 1926 received "The Certificate of Eminent Service" from Iowa State College.
- Welch, Harold S.--1939-1949. Welch became a member of the board of May Broadcasting upon its creation in 1939. He had for many years been a vice-president and board member of the Mount Arbor Nursery, and a director of the May Seed & Nursery Company. He was a nephew of E. S. Welch.

Appendix B

KMA STATION MANAGERS 1925-1985

1925-early 1930's--Ormah Carmean

(While the title "Station Manager" does not appear in the early records of KMA, Miss Carmean's responsibilities and influence indicate she held a position that combined many of the duties of later station managers and program directors.)

1927-1945--Cy Rapp.

(From 1927-1935, Rapp served as "Operations Manager." After 1935, his title was "Station Manager.")

1945-1953--Owen Saddler.

1953-1966--Tony Koelker.

1966-1971--Norman Williams.

1971-present--Carl "Andy" Andersen.

Appendix C

KMA STAFF 1985

ANDERSEN, CARL "ANDY"--Station Manager. Andy's radio career began in the farm department at KWWL, Waterloo, Iowa. Coming to Shenandoah, his wife's hometown, he worked as a salesman at KFNF until that station was sold in 1956. In 1961, after several years with Farmmaster Products of Shenandoah, he joined KMA as a salesman and sportscaster. He became local sales manager in 1964, then was promoted to regional sales manager and general sales manager. In 1971, he succeeded Norm Williams as KMA station manager.

BEAVERS, TOM--1960-1965, 1984. Account Executive. Tom first came to KMA in 1960 as assistant farm director. He returned to the station last year as a member of the sales department. For more on Tom, see Chapter 14.

BONE, BILL--1973. Associate News Director. A native of Prairie City, Iowa, Bill worked as an intern at KMA while earning a broadcasting degree at Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville. After graduation, he worked a few months at KTTN in Trenton, Missouri, then in 1973 accepted a position in the newly-expanded news department of KMA.

COCHIRAN, SUSAN--1985. A native of Salina, Kansas, Susan learned about KMA while working with Bill Bone and Colleen Ketcham in Southwest Iowa Theater Group productions. She became a part-time announcer in 1982, and joined the station as full-time night announcer in April of this year.

CROWLEY, EARLE--1956. Head of Accounting Department. From LeMars, IA, Earle's responsibilities include supervising the accounts of all the radio and television stations of the May Broadcasting Company.

DERMODY, NED--1971. News Director. A graduate of the University of Missouri with a major in journalism and marketing, Ned joined KMA as news director in August of 1971. An experienced newsman even then, he had previously been news director at KFEQ, St. Joseph, Missouri, and had worked in the news departments of KWTO, Springfield, Missouri; KFTM, Fort Morgan, Colorado; and KXEO in his hometown of Mexico, Missouri.

ERICKSON, RON--1977. Engineer. Raised on a farm near Essex, Iowa, Ron attended Iowa Western Community College in Clarinda, and Gateway Electronics in Omaha, Nebraska.

GLASGO, JUDI--1985. Copywriter.

GREBERT, DENNIS--1981. Account Executive.

HANSEN, DON--1974. Program Director. As youngsters, Don Hansen and Ed May Jr. had shared an interest in model trains. Later when Ed Jr. began coming to KMA to practice announcing in an empty studio, Don would tag along. Program director Mike Goodin told Don that as long as he was hanging around, he might as well learn broadcasting, too. "Getting started on the air wasn't always easy," Don remembers. "One day while I was doing a newscast, Ned Dermody brought in a late-breaking bulletin about a couple that had been found dead in their car. I read the copy cold, and it said they had *asphyxiated*. I'd never seen that word before, and I announced over the air that the couple had *exasperated* to death. Ned was laughing so hard there were tears in his eyes."

After high school, Don attended the Radio Engineering Institute, then returned to KMA as night announcer. In 1981 he became program director. He is the grandson of former KMA radio homemaker Edith Hansen.

HART, CLARK--1981. Night Announcer. A veteran of KMA's internship program, Clark began radio work when his high school drama teacher suggested he give broadcasting a try. "They put me on the weekend shifts where I could do the least damage," Clark says of his first months on the air. His part-time broadcasting continued while he finished high school, earned a degree at Iowa Western Community College, and then completed his studies in broadcasting at Northwest Missouri State University. He joined KMA full-time a month after graduation.

HUGHES, LEE--1981. Morning Announcer. "When I was a sophomore in high school, my mom forced me to take a speech class. My speech teacher forced me to come down here and apply for a job, and they hired me. They were obviously desperate." That's how Lee describes his first encounter with broadcasting. After high school he attended the Radio Electronics Institute in Omaha, then for eight years worked as morning man at KABI, Abilene, KS. As KMA's morning announcer, he opens the station each day at 5:00 a.m.

KELSEY, NADINE--1967. Systems Manager. Nadine joined KMA as a general secretary and *KMA Guide* clerk. Today she runs the computers that run the business.

KETCHAM, COLLEEN--1980. Announcer. Born and raised in Coin, IA, Colleen was working as a salesperson for a small radio station in Clarinda when KMA offered her a part-time position. A year later she moved to full-time work, taking the afternoon board shift. Today she runs the board from 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m., hosts "The

Elephant Shop," and airs her own weekend program, "Saturday with Colleen."

KLING, NORMAN--1949. Chief Engineer.

KNAU, CRAIGHTON--1976. Farm Director. A veteran of thirty years in farm broadcasting, Craighton is past-president of the National Association of Farm Broadcasters. His service to farmers has been recognized with awards from the Iowa Department of Soil Conservation, American Soybean Association, Iowa Broadcast News Association, and the Iowa Cattlemen's Association.

KREIN, TIM WAYNE--1981. Music Director. Known on the air as "Tim Wayne," Tim Krein was raised in Hot Springs, South Dakota. After completing a broadcasting course in 1976 at the Brown Institute in Minneapolis, Tim worked at stations in Nevada, MO; Lovington, NM; and Pierre, SD, before coming to KMA.

LEPORTE, MIKE--1966, 1984. Associate Farm Director. A native of Shenandoah, Mike began his broadcasting career at KMA, then served as a newscaster and news director at WREN in Topeka, Kansas, and as anchorman at KHAS-TV in Hastings, Nebraska. Returning to Shenandoah in 1974, he became involved with his family's farming operation, and today brings a wealth of practical farming and broadcasting experience to the KMA microphones.

MORRIS, CHUCK--1980. Sports Director. From Salsbury, Missouri, and a graduate of Northwest Missouri State University's broadcasting program, Chuck worked at KNIN in Maryville, and KWRT in Booneville, Missouri, before coming to Shenandoah. He is a member of the Iowa High School Athletic Directors Association, and for four years served as their media liaison.

MORRIS, MONICA--1981. News Reporter. In 1978 as a senior broadcasting major at Northwest Missouri State University, Monica served an intern at KMA. She returned to KMA as a member of the news department in 1981. Raised in Essex, IA, she had become interested in radio through a high school speech class. Monica researches and airs many of the "KMA Focus" segments, covering topics of interest to listeners.

MURPHY, DARRELL--1969-1971, 1974. Announcer. A veteran of KMA's internship program, Darrell served for several years as an announcer. He currently takes time out from farming to work part-time as an announcer, farm broadcaster, and master of weekend music.

OAKLEY, BILLIE--Women's Director. For Billie's radio history, see Chapter 13.

OVERBEY, BILL--1949. As advertising manager for the May Seed & Nursery Company, Bill came across the street to fill in for Ed May

on the 12:15 p.m. weather program whenever Ed is out of town. He retired from the May company in 1985.

PADILLA, LYNN--1971. Continuity Director.

SANER, EVALYN--1941. Secretary to the Station Manager.

SELBY, BILL--1975. Sales Manager. A graduate of Farragut High School. Bill attended Iowa Western Community College and the University of Northern Iowa before enrolling in the San Francisco College of Mortuary Science. After several years as a funeral director in Denver, he came to KMA as a regional salesman, and in 1980 became KMA sales manager. "We're not here just to sell commercials," he says of his department. "We're here to help a businessman stay in business. We'll analyze his company, determine his advertising budget, and put together an ad program that will best serve his needs. We are consultants as much as account executives, and we really do care about the businesses we serve."

STOTTS, NANCY--1974. Traffic Director.

WALLER, RON--1980-1985. Account Executive. Ron left KMA early this year to take a position as spokesman for Congressman Jim Ross Lightfoot.

WALTER, PAT--1982. Account Clerk.

WILLIAMS, MARY--1976. Promotions Director.

YOUNG, DUANE--1972-1974, 1975. Account Executive.

Appendix D

FORMER KMA ANNOUNCERS, BROADCASTERS, ENGINEERS, AND SALESMEN

In its long history, KMA has aired the voices of hundreds of people and relied on dozens more to keep the transmitters humming and to sell advertising. While it is impossible to cite everyone who contributed to the station's success, the listing below suggests the number and diversity of those who worked for KMA. A single date indicates the year in which an employee joined the station.

Alan, Dave--1955. Announcer and continuity writer.

Ambler, Frena--1925. A "story lady," Frena read children's stories over the air. She also sang vocal solos, and was one of the first members of the KMA office staff.

Bailey, Bill--1947. KMA public service director.

Baillon, Joni--1966-1969. Women's director.

Bargar, Darel--1966. Announcer and disk jockey.

Bauer, Art--1959. Night announcer.

Bauer, Russ--1951. Announcer.

Beavers, Wayne--1948-c. 1950. In addition to announcing, Beavers served as the teacher on the KMA Country School and as program director.

Brawner, Paul Oliver--1944. On the air he was known as Paul Oliver.

Burns, Tommy--1956-1959. Announcer.

Carl, Leonard--1951. Announcer and sportscaster.

Carmean, Ormah--1925-1930's. Announcer and program director.

Case, June--1920's. Aired "domestic science" programs.

Conrad, Sue--1920's-1940's. Henry Field's youngest sister, Sue occasionally aired programs on both KFNF and KMA as a lecturer and radio homemaker. She was most frequently heard with her sisters on "Kitchen-Klatter."

Currier, Bernice--1948-1973. Radio homemaker.

Davis, Chuck--c. 1946. An early morning announcer, he also sang with the Green Mountain Gang and on the "Stump Us" program.

Davis, Jim--1968. News announcer.

Driftmier, Leanna Field--1939-1948, 1972-1976. Radio homemaker.

Eichor, Dale--1963-1967. Announcer.

Elliot, Forrest--1952. Announcer.

Eppersen, Del--1977. Announcer and program director.

Falk, Florence--1952-1963. Radio homemaker.

Fleming, Grace--1925. KMA's first "studio hostess."

Fort, Mrs. Grady--1926. As "Auntie Blossom," Mrs. Fort read children's stories over the air on Friday evenings.

Foster, Mary--1948. The *KMA Guide* reported that Mary "wanders the countryside doing interviews, Monday-Friday at 11:30 a.m."

Freed, Jo--1969-1970. Women's director.

George, Tim--1944, 1946. Announcer.

Goodrich, Bill--c. 1941. Announcer.

Goodin, Mike--1967. Announcer and program director.

Gross, Clair--1948. Announcer.

Haines, Wes--1953. Night announcer.

Hansen, Edith--1942-1948. Radio homemaker.

Hare, Bill--1951. Announcer and sportscaster.

Harris, Glenn--1947. Program manager, teacher on "Country School," and creator of "The Penny Auction."

Hedeman, Terry--1967. Newscaster.

Heuer, Mike--1950's. Announcer.

Hopkins, Eva--1920's. She aired programs on beauty, and advertised the cosmetics she made in her home.

Jeffrey, Lew--1949. Announcer.

Johnson, Bess--1949. Serving briefly as a KMA homemaker, she was described in the *KMA Guide* as "broadcasting direct from her home, giving helpful hints about hobbies and the fun of making a good home."

Kendrick, Jim--1944-1950's. In addition to announcing, Kendrick played old-time and hillbilly songs, and also modern swing music on the "Cornland Lyrics" program.

Kort, Page--1959. Announcer.

Lahader, Joe--1953. Announcer.

Lippincott, Edgar--1939-1959. His transcribed "Bible Truth" program aired over KMA for many years.

Limbacher, Fritz--1968. News announcer.

McConahay, Brenda Kay--1972-1978. Women's director.

Merriott, Ray--1949. Announcer.

Mihall, Jack--In 1971, Mihall was KMA's operations director.

Miller, Larry--1969. News director.

Miller, Mamie--1920's. She broadcast "Domestic Science" programs.

Mills, Dick--1954. An announcer and KMA's first real disk jockey.

Monroe, Don--1968. Sports director.

Moss, Terry--1943. An announcer and program director, he came to KMA from KWTO, Springfield, MO.

Murphy, Doris--1931-1966. Newscaster, women's director, and radio homemaker.

Nickols, Mrs. Dwight--1920's. Read "Children's Pollyanna Stories," under the auspices of the Shirley Leavitt Tire Shop.

Nielson, Warren--1945-1970. Warren served in many capacities at the station, including announcer, program director, and farm broadcaster. Beginning in 1963, he was also farm director at KMTV, and in 1970 he left KMA to become farm director at KFAB.

Palm, Ruth--1969. Broadcast "Community Calendar" weekdays at 6:40 p.m.

Parker, Larry--1947. Announcer and newsman.

Parker, Pegge--1966. Pegge Parker, the wife of KMTV news commentator John Hlavacek, was described by the *KMA Guide* as "a noted world traveler, author, foreign correspondent, and lecturer." Her weekday program, "Pegge Parker's People," aired at 10:15 a.m. and 7:45 p.m.

Paulson, Norman--1944-45. Morning announcer.

Pilcher, Bruce--1968. Sports director.

Pippert, Paul--c. 1951. A KMA announcer, Pippert is currently farm director for KCMO in Kansas City.

Rainbolt, Jack--1958. Announcer and sportscaster.

Schnoor, Henry--1967. Local farmer and Sunday afternoon radio host.

Shiple, Gene--1937-1938. KMA morning announcer, he came to Shenandoah from KMMJ. Later, Shipley served at WIBW as the first radio farm director to cover his territory by plane, a craft he christened *Red Rooster*. He was killed in a 1949 plane crash.

Shoemaker, Adella--1948-1952. Radio homemaker.

Simmons, Harry "Pate"--1930. A former big-league ball player, Simmons was closely identified with the Henry Field Seed Company and broadcast for many years from KFNF. During 1930, however, he joined the May Seed & Nursery Company as director of policies and sales. He broadcast daily farm discussions over KMA and served as substitute teacher on "Country School." Simmons left KMA after a few months, tried broadcasting over KGO, San Francisco, then returned to work with Henry Field for the next two decades.

Soliday, Don--1951. Announcer and newsman.

Springer, John--1957-1958. Night announcer.

Stauffer, Edward C.--1928. Announcer.

Stirlen, Rev. Edythe--1929. "The Little Minister" was KMA's long-time welfare director.

Stookey, C. A.--c. 1930. KMA announcer.

Sutton, Lee--1950. An announcer, he came to KMA from Springdale, Arkansas.

Swain, Warren--1970. Sports director.

Taylor, George--1967-1968. Sports director.

- Teget, LeOna--1920's. An announcer who also gave talks on flowers and domestic science.
- Todd, Rev. John William--1926. Assisted by his daughters Florence and Sara, and his son Jack, The Reverend Todd broadcast "The Todd Sacred Service" Sunday mornings at 8:30.
- Ullrick, D. S.--1926. Announcer, singer, and instrumentalist.
- Van Houten, George--1926-1930. A native of Lenox, Iowa, the Honorable Mr. Van Houten's colorful adventures formed the basis of his many KMA lectures.
- Van Houten, Lois--1929. The granddaughter of George Van Houten, Lois aired lectures of her own world travels and appeared on the "KMA Country School."
- Verness, Lucile--1920's, 1948-52, 1972-1985. As a member of the Kitchen-Klatter family, Lucile's voice is known throughout the Midwest.
- Wanek, Jerry--1966. Sports announcer.
- White, Dave--1972. Announcer and originator of the "Dave White Elephant Shop" program.
- Wilkins, Kay--1951. She was heard on Edith Hansen's "Kitchen Club."
- Wilson, Carmaleta--1969. An assistant in the continuity department, she broadcast the "KMA Classified Show."

NEWSCASTERS

- Childs, Ralph--1939-1973.
- Coons, Bert--1951.
- Davis, Jim--1968.
- Dobbs, Guy--1951.
- Hedeman, Terry--1967.
- Joe, Don--1954.
- McLeod, Howard--1968.
- Naven, Dean--1954. A respected newsman and sportscaster, Naven was appointed program director in 1956.
- Oellermann, Bill--1973.

FARM BROADCASTERS

- Adams, Cliff--1971-1975.
- Beavers, Tom--1959-1965.
- Case, Harold--1925.
- Coykendall, Frank--1920's-30's.
- Gowing, Jack--1953-1971.
- Haden, Carl--1937.
- Hunter, Joe--1936. For many years the general office supervisor of the May Seed & Nursery Company, Hunter occasionally alternated

- with Wayne MacManama substituting for Ed May on the 12:15 p.m. weather program.
- Johnson, Mott--1939. Mott's father was H. H. "Incubator" Johnson of Clay Center, Nebraska, inventor of "The Old Trusty Incubators and Brooders" and founder of radio station KMMJ where Mott was program director before coming to KMA.
- Langfitt, Merrill--1946-1959. Farm director.
- Leacox, E.A.--1925. Manager of the May hatchery, Leacox was the KMA poultry expert.
- Lightfoot, Jim Ross--1961-1969, 1977-1984. Joining KMA as an announcer, Jim Ross became associate farm director in 1965. He left the station in 1984 to run a successful campaign to become U.S. Congressman from Iowa's 5th District.
- Mains, Mel--1950. Mains was a member of farm service department and a newscaster.
- McManama, Wayne--1933. The manager of May's farm seed department, Mac served as a pinch-hitter for Earl May and, later, for Ed May on the noon and evening farm and weather broadcasts. Upon Frank Field's retirement in 1974, Mac took the 7:15 and 8:15 a.m. weather programs.
- Overbey, Bill--1949-1985. For many years May's advertising manager, Bill often substituted on the air for Ed May when Mr. May was away from Shenandoah.
- Topham, John--1932-1971. Long-time manager of the garden seed department of the May Seed & Nursery Company, Topham also filled in for Ed May on the 12:15 p.m. weather program, and for Frank Field at 7:15 a.m.

GARDENING EXPERTS

- Ferguson, Lina--1925-1947. Lina was known as "The KMA Flower Lady."
- Field, Frank--1940-1974.
- Fischer, Helen Field--1926-1930's.
- Welch, Marian--1940's. Marian succeeded Lina Ferguson as the KMA Flower Lady.

ENGINEERS

- Allely, Darrell--1952.
- Benjamin, Bill--1953.
- Bowmans, Wayne--1953.
- Bundgaard, E.--1941
- Burrichter, Don--1938-1977. Engineer and chief engineer.

Cherny, Franz--1947. Franz and his family lived in an apartment on the upper floor of the transmitter building north of Shenandoah. Marooned in 1947 by the flood waters of the Nishnabotna River, Cherny watched as his fellow engineers commuted to work by rowboat.

Cook, Harold--1941.

Dobbins, Blair--1941.

Ely, Walt--1950.

Jennings, Roland--1951.

Josephson, Jack--late 1940's.

Kirk, Bill--1953.

Latta, Lloyd--1946.

Lund, Ralph--1940-1977.

O'Day, Glenn--1946.

Peters, Roger--1949.

Peterson, Howard "Pete"--1945.

Pfeiffer, Charles--1941.

Ramsey, Al.--1944.

Rowley, Vern--1927-1929.

Rydberg, Arthur--1926.

Schroeder, Ray--1937-1975. Chief engineer for KMA and, later, vice-president in charge of engineering for the May Broadcasting Company.

Siewart, Al--1927.

Van Ness, J. E.--1947.

Weisenberger, Necomb--1941.

SALES STAFF

Arkoff, Harold--1950. Sales manager and *KMA Guide* editor.

Anderson, A. R.--1944. Salesman.

Boldra, Dennis--1968. Salesman.

Katz, Jack--1966. Sales manager.

Patterson, Pat--1966. Salesman.

Ramsey, Al--1944. Salesman.

Ramsey, Keith--1969. Salesman.

Tiernan, Tom--1959. Salesman.

Warren, Chuck--1966. Regional sales manager.

Appendix E

KMA MUSICIANS

Live musicians were for many years a trademark of KMA. Once popular on stations throughout the country, the music of radio entertainers has faded almost completely from the airwaves. The listing below, compiled with the kind assistance of Raymond Nemeč and Nadine Dreager, is intended to help keep alive the memory of those who were once known to nearly every radio listener in the Midwest. The dates indicate the years each person performed at KMA.

Abercrombie, Grace--1920's. Pianist and organist.

Aspinwall, Hugh ("Chick Martin")--1945-1949. Known on the air as Chick Martin, Aspinwall started in radio in 1925 on Chicago stations WJJD and WLS. In 1935 on WCCO in Minneapolis, he had a program called "Down A Country Lane." On KMA he aired "Down a Country Road" and "Time Out."

Austin, Don--1941. Austin played banjo, guitar, and wind instruments. Before coming to KMA he played and recorded with Al Clauser and his Oklahoma Outlaws, and may have appeared with them as a singing group in western movies. He left KMA for WIBW, Topeka, KS.

Barborka, J. V.--1926. Called the "Bohemian Harpist," the most popular tune of this Denison, Iowa, resident was "Glow Worm."

Barry, Bob--1950-1951. Barry was a veteran of an Army Special Service unit that had toured the South Pacific with comedy skits and shows.

Bellamy, Gretta Taylor--1928-1959. A gifted pianist, Gretta came from Chicago to KMA where she met Dr. J. D. Bellamy of the "How-Do-You-Do Boys," married him in 1930, and made Shenandoah her home. In addition to her many programs of keyboard music, she was Geraldine Hanson on the "KMA Country School."

Bellamy, J. D.--1925-1930's. A Shenandoah dentist, he and Grady Fort sang duets as "Doc and Grady," "The How-Do-You-Do Boys," and "The Applesauce Twins." He also played the cello in a number of KMA ensembles.

Black, Lou--1943, 1946-1947. Black sang, played guitar, and served as an announcer.

Blackwood Brothers--1940-1954. One of the most durable and popular groups to perform at KMA, the quartet was formed in 1936 and made its first appearance over WJDX, Jackson, Mississippi. They came to KMA under the sponsorship of the Stamps-Baxter Gospel Music Company. In addition to airing daily programs of inspirational music, the Blackwoods sang hundreds of concerts through-

out the Midwest. In 1948, they hosted the Blackwood School of Music, a three-week course of musical study for 159 hopeful young gospel singers.

The composition of the quartet changed from time to time, and for awhile it took two Blackwood Quartets to fulfill all their concert dates. Members who appeared on KMA included James, Roy, Doyle, and R. W. Blackwood; Don Smith; Bill Lyles; Garland 'Cat' Freeman; Alden Toney Jr.; Dan Huskey; and pianists Hilton Griswold, Harold Bell, and Jack Marshall.

Bowman, Becky--1951. She played guitar, bass fiddle and clarinet, and sang gospel and hillbilly songs. She was featured on her program, "Becky and the Blue Sky Boys," and on "Half Past Noon," "Hawkeye Rangers," "KMA Hillbilly Hits." After leaving KMA, she sang and performed at times with the Maybelle Carter Family.

Bray, Alger "Curly"--1937-1938. Along with Floyd "Speed" Foreman, Bray formed a popular duet known as "Speed and Curly." Speed and Curly also performed with Glen Long, Frank Jennings, and Johnny Swanik as The Pals of the Prairie.

Brown, Nellie--1943. Nellie appeared on KMA with Ted West.

Campbell, Aaron and Caroline--c. 1937. Aaron played violin. During a live Mayfair performance, Aaron left his instrument on a chair behind him. Glen Long and Jerry Swanik, who had crawled along a catwalk over the stage, lowered a small hook and line, snagged Aaron's violin, and levitated it out of his reach. The next day, program manager Fred Greenlee posted a notice forbidding horseplay during broadcasts.

Clatterbaugh, Francis--1930. Entertainer and "KMA Drummer Boy."

Clites, Minor--A blind pianist most closely associated with KFNF, Clites performed on both Shenandoah radio stations throughout the 1920's, 30's, and 40's. He worked for WAAW in Omaha from 1930 or 1931 until 1939, for KFEQ until about 1946, then KRES, St. Joseph, MO. Minor still enjoys playing the piano.

Cloworthy, John--1930. Cloworthy sang at KMA with Paul Crutchfield, then left KMA to become studio director at WGST, Atlanta, GA.

Combs, Hance and Vance--1920's. As The Combs Brothers, the twins performed on guitar and violin.

Comer, Eddie--1946-1952. An ace clarinetist, Comer played on many programs including "Stump Us," "Mainstreet," and "Goodwill Minstrels" and his own "Clarinet Capers." His young son Donnie occasionally sang on "Country School" and with the "Nishna Valley Neighbors." He started in radio in 1935, working at stations in Tulsa, Kansas, and, from 1942-46, KOAM, Pittsburg, KS.

Conrad, Mary--1941.

- Cook, Bobby--1946, 1948. A popular entertainer who appeared on many stations, Bobby Cook sang at KMA with Bobby Richardson. In 1948, Bobby returned to KMA without Richardson.
- Cottey, Mickey--1951-1952.
- Cross, Clifford "Skeets"--Late 1938 or 1939-late 1941 or 1942. A musician and entertainer for many years before he got into radio, Cross wrote scripts for and appeared on "Country School."
- Cross, Patricia--An entertainer married to Clifford Cross.
- Crutchfield, Paul--1929-1930. As "Cousin Paul," he sang with Gretta Bellamy. One night during an on-air endurance contest, he sang 101 songs from memory. Crutchfield also worked as an announcer. He left KMA to become manager of station KGIZ, Grant City, MO.
- Cummings, Ira--1926-1928. Piano accompanist and a member of the Ruby Trio.
- Cuniff, Romelle Fay--1936. Former accompanist for Smilin' Ed McConnell at Chicago's WLS, Romelle came to perform on KMA when her husband Ed became the station's commercial manager.
- Dale, Curly--1951. Curly's guitar, banjo, mandolin, bass fiddle and singing voice were heard on "Ozark Mountain Boys," "Nishna Valley Neighbors" and "KMA Cowboys," and in duets with Ernie Frost. After KMA, Curly appeared at KFNF. His wife, Hazel, was a member of the Maxwell Sisters duet, also heard on KFNF.
- Daniels, Howard and Louise--c. 1940.
- Davis, Chuck--1936, 1942-1943, 1946. Davis played accordion and fiddle on a number of stations throughout the Midwest. At KMA he was one of the Utah Rangers. He left the station to join the "Oklahoma Round-up" at KMOA, Oklahoma City.
- DeVincent, Sam--1940-1941. A member of The Melody Rangers, Sam was married to Nancy Lee Gross, vocalist for the group.
- Dickerson, Judy and Jean--c. 1945, 1948-1949. A sister duet known as "The Harmony Team," Judy and Jean had been on KFNF in 1943.
- Dickson, Jonny--1938, 1947-c. 1949. Dickson's broadcasting career began in 1936 when third place in an amateur contest at a Salina, Kansas, station brought him a radio job as a masked singer. Coming to KMA in 1938, he sang on "Country School" and soon became a featured artist. He recalled that two of Earl E. May's favorite songs were "Blue Hawaii" and "The Yellow Rose of Texas."
- Dilley, Buck--1953-1954. Buck began his radio career in Tijuana, Mexico, in 1933 with a group called "The Old Timers" consisting of his brother Cleo, Harry Mack, and Curly Dale. Before coming to

- KMA, he had for seven years been program director at KFNF. Known as a fiddler, he could also play guitar.
- Dinning Sisters—1949–50.
- Doll, John—1940–1941. He appeared with his brother Ned as a member of The Melody Rangers. When they left the group to go to California, their places were taken by Al Sloey and Jerry Osborne.
- Doll, Ned—See *John Doll*.
- Douglas, Merl—1946–1977. Following Terry Moss from KWTO to KMA, Merl was a popular and enduring entertainer-turned-announcer.
- Driver, Lucille and Kenneth—c. 1940.
- Embree, Doc & Esther—1942–44, 1951–1952. A married couple, Doc and Esther both played guitar and bass, and sang many of their own songs including, “When Daddy Read the Bible To Us All,” and “Ridin’.” Before coming to KMA, they were heard over a number of stations in the West. While at KFBI in Wichita, they worked with Zeke Williams and Steve Wooden. Doc and Esther were hired at KMA to fill the spots left when Connie and Bonnie Linder joined the WLS Barn Dance.
- Irwin, Ish—1944–1945. A guitarist and singer from Texas, Ish performed many Mexican songs.
- Evans, Pat—c. 1946. Pat was a singer married to entertainer Lou Black.
- Everly, Ike—1947–1954. The story of Ike Everly, his wife Margaret, and their sons Don and Phil, appears in Chapter 10.
- Fellows, Buster—1937–1938. Buster joined with Carl and Mary Jane Haden to form a trio called “Carl, Mary Jane & Buster.” An excellent fiddle player, Fellows also played guitar. He left KMA for KFNF, then went on for a long stay at KWTO.
- Fellows, Burton—1945–1946. Guitar player.
- Fitts, James, Jr.—1945–1946, “Fiddlin’ Slim” played fiddle, bass, and guitar.
- Forrester, Eddie—1927–1930. “Gypsy John” of the Gypsy Trio, he also appeared with Rosa Rosario, served as an afternoon announcer and, for a time, managed the Mayfair Theater.
- Fort, Grady—1925–1930. A former principal of Shenandoah High School, Grady in the guise of “G.F.” served as KMA’s first announcer. For several years he teamed with Dr. J. D. Bellamy singing duets. He left the station in 1930 to become manager of the new Henry Field branch store in York, Nebraska.
- Fox, Joe—1926. A concertina player, Fox was a veteran of vaudeville and chautauqua circuits.
- Fronek, Jerry—1945–1948. Fronek was born in Pleteny, Ujezd, Czechoslovakia, and had come to America at age three. He got his start

in radio as a singer and accordion player in 1940 with a small band in St. Louis. He came to KMA from KWTO.

Frost, Ernie--1951-1952. Frost formed a team with Landon Hale, with whom he'd grown up in the Missouri Ozarks. As "The Ozark Mountain Boys," they sang and played popular and classical songs as well as hillbilly folk tunes.

Gardner, Robert--1938-1939. A blind musician, Bob joined Lester McFarland, a fellow student at an institute for the blind in Tennessee, as the duet "Mac and Bob," appearing from 1930-1938 on the "WLS Barn Dance" where they enjoyed great popularity. As "McFarland & Gardner," they recorded a number songs including, "'Tis Sweet to be Remembered," "The Two Orphans," "You'll Never Miss Your Mother 'Til She's Gone," "The Cross on the Prison Floor," "The Hut at the Back of the Lot," "When the Candlelights Are Gleaming," and "She's More to be Pitied than Censured." Earl May said that during their time at KMA, they drew more requests for May Seed & Nursery seed catalogues than any entertainers except Bob and Jim Raines. After a year and a half at KMA, they returned to WLS where they remained until 1950.

Gaddis, "Kentucky Jess"--1942-1943. A widely traveled radio musician, Jess Gaddis appeared on radio stations all over the Midwest, including KMMJ, WOW, KSCJ, KFAB, and KWTO. He often appeared with his brother "Fiddlin' Bill." His brother Herbert ("Curly McDonald") played guitar and bass at KMA for a few months in 1945. Jess had a 7:45 a.m. KMA program which featured his thirteen-year-old niece Carleen Gaddis. Jess continued to wander from one station to another until 1950, when he joined KFEQ in St. Joseph, MO, for a ten-year stand sponsored by Quaker Oats.

Gay, Dorothy--1941.

Geist, Faylon--1934-1942. While still in high school, Geist joined KMA as an organist and pianist. He continued his musical studies with coursework at the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago, and the University of Colorado. In 1937 he became KMA's music director.

Greenlee, Fred--1927-1930, 1932-1934. Fred and his brother Harold joined KMA in 1927 as a vocal duet. Fred's duties were expanded the next year to include announcing and production work. In 1931, he went to KFOR in Lincoln as program director for that station. He returned to KMA in 1932, and in 1934 became program director.

- Gross, Agnes--1941-1942. As a member of the Melody Rangers, she was known as Nancy Lee Ross.
- Haden Family--1936 or 1937-1939, 1940. In addition to Carl Haden, who was both a musician and a farm service broadcaster, the Haden Family consisted of Carl's wife, Mary Jane, and their children Carl Jr.; Mary Elizabeth; James Lowell; and Charles Edward. As individuals and as a group, family members broadcast religious, western, and hillbilly music. They left KMA in 1939 for a year at KWTO in Springfield, MO. Wait's Green Mountain Cough Syrup sponsored some of their programs.
- Haines, Wes--1953. "Happy" Haines started radio work in the 1930's at WHBF. At KMA he was an announcer and singer.
- Hagglund, Eugene--1926. A tenor soloist from Essex, Iowa.
- Hale, Landon--see *Ernie Frost*.
- Hart, Dick--c. 1944. Of Hart, the *KMA Guide* said, "He's a trick rider, cattle roper, expert rifle shot, a graduate taxidermist, and on top of all that, a fancy knife thrower."
- Hawkins, Ezra--1950-1951, 1951-1953. Breaking into radio in 1927, Ezra was well known throughout the Midwest for his comedy routines and skill with fiddle and mandolin. He was heard on KMA's "Stump Us Gang," "Half Past Noon," and "Hawkeye Rangers." When the musicians were dropped from the KMA schedule, Ezra became a disk jockey at WHOW, and then KOOO in Omaha.
- Heifner, Ann--1941. "Melody Ann."
- Helgerson, Ruby & Ruth--1941. A sister duet.
- Heyn, Hugo--1926-1927. A Monday night marimba and xylophone artist from Omaha, Hugo commuted to Shenandoah in a silver plane the Shenandoah *Evening Sentinel* proclaimed looked "just like Lindy's."
- Holstein, Chick-1940. A popular KMA vocalist and guitar player, he sang alone and as a member of the Golden River Boys. At one time he had a program sponsored by Crazy Water Crystals.
- Housh, Herman--1951-1953. Master of the mandolin, banjo, guitar, bass fiddle, and fiddle, Housh was featured on "Nishna Valley Neighbors."
- Howie, William--1926, 1928. Pipe organist.
- Hunt, Ralph--1944, 1945. Ralph played the banjo and sang.
- Jennings, Frank--1935, 1937-1938. In 1934, Jennings joined KFNF, then came to KMA where he sang with The Pals of the Prairie. He left KMA for WHO where one of his announcers was Ronald Reagan, and returned to KMA in 1937 with a group called "The Plow Jockeys" composed of Jennings, Speed and Curly, and Jerry Swanik. Earl May changed the group's name to "The Pals of the

- Prairie." A fiddle player, Jennings switched in the mid-1940's to the accordion, and eventually became a Shakey's Pizza Parlor banjo player.
- Jones, Morris--1944-1945, 1952-1954. A singer and guitar player from Indiana.
- Kammers, John--1940-1942. From Chicago, Kammers joined KMA with The Melody Rangers, then left the station to enter the armed forces. He is still playing professionally today.
- Kendrick, Jim--1944-1947, 1948. Primarily an announcer, Kendrick also served as a sportscaster, newsman, and as a hillbilly vocalist. He sang occasionally with Bob and Jim Raines, and left KMA for KWTO.
- King, Earl ("Lem Hawkins")--Mid-1920's, 1940-44. Lem Hawkins was one of the first broadcasters on KMA. After his first stint at KMA, he went to Fargo, North Dakota, and spent a decade at station WBAY where he had his own hillbilly band. Doc Embree said of him, "Lem's ability to make people laugh has won many friends, theater managers, and audiences as well. They know they will have a good show with Lem on the bill." In 1944 he left KMA for Sacramento, CA, where he worked as a fireman on the railroad.
- Krause, Kit & Kay--Dates at KMA unknown (possibly early to mid-1930's). According to the *KMA Guide*, they were "one of the first sister acts to appear on KMA."
- Layman, Ray--1942, 1946. With Ken Massengill he sang as one of the Harmony Boys. Ray was also heard with "the Green Mountain Boys," "the Utah Rangers," and on "Cargill Calling."
- Leatherland, Dave--1946. Dave played violin, five-string bass, and guitar on "Mainstreet," "Cornbelt Jamboree," and "Goodwill Minstrels."
- Lee, Virginia--See *Zeke and Joan Williams*.
- Linder, Bonnie and Connie--1942. Sisters who performed as a duet, they had a program called "The Rangerettes." They left KMA to become members of the "WLS Barn Dance." Connie eventually married Rex Allen, who at the time was also at WLS.
- Linderman, Francis "Jeep"--1951-1952. Accordionist.
- Marshall, Joey and Jerry--1945.
- Mays, Debs Eugene "Slim"--1938-1939. After having appeared on over twenty other stations and making records for the Victor label, Slim Mays joined KMA as a vocal soloist and aired 15 minute programs three or four times daily. He left KMA for WMMM, Fairmont, West Virginia.
- Martin, Walter "Coy"--1950-1953. Steel guitarist, bass fiddle player, and vocalist.

- Mason, Clyde--1940. "The Bachelor Boy."
- Massengill, Ken--See *Ray Layman*.
- Mattson, Howard "Froggy"--1942-1943. A left-handed bass player and vocalist, he performed with the Utah Rangers.
- McFarland, Lester--See *Robert Gardner*.
- McGlone, Louise--1925-1930's. Shenandoah pianist who accompanied Gertrude May.
- McIlvain, Sid--1930. "Willie Whistle" on the Country School, Sid was heard over KFNF for many years.
- Miller, Alice and Helen--1944-1945. Alice strummed a guitar while Helen played the piano accordion. Helen's three-year-old daughter Jo Lene sometimes sang with them. Before KMA they were at WNAX, Yankton. They left Shenandoah for KFEQ, St. Joseph.
- Mishler, Embert--1953. Known on the air as "Cowboy Em," Mishler was a vocalist, musician, and square-dance caller.
- Morgan, Jimmy--1942-1943, 1944-1947. Singer and guitar player from Kentucky, Morgan was a radio veteran who played old mountain and hillbilly songs. Shenandoah radio station schedules of 1942 indicate that he worked for KFNF and KMA at the same time, broadcasting a half-hour show at 10:30 a.m. from Field's station and a half-hour show at 3:45 p.m. from May's. He left Shenandoah in 1943 to work in a war plant in Indianapolis, then returned to KMA. In 1947 he joined WNAX.
- Morgan, Vern--1942-1943. His 7 a.m. program of music was the last program in that time slot before the establishment of the morning news reports still heard today.
- Morris, Buddy--1948-1950. Morris was a fiddle player on "Stump Us," "Country School," "Hawkeye Rangers," and "Mayfair Swingtet." The *KMA Guide* said, "Buddy has 16 ways to play fiddle. He may put it between his knees; he may hold the bow in his teeth; he may put it over his shoulder...but regardless of how he plays it, the result is always the same--good music."
- Murray, Estella--1926. According to a 1926 KMA brochure, "Her trumpet solos and whistling numbers are novel and pleasing and her offerings have 'taken' with the radio listeners very well."
- Murray, Julie and Sophie--1936.
- Nylin, Carl "Tiny"--1949-1950. Accordionist.
- Oliver, Paul--1942-1946. Oliver had been at KFNF before joining the May station.
- Osborne, Jerry--1940-1942. Jerry played guitar and sang as a member of the Golden River Boys and Melody Rangers.
- Owens, Dusty--1948-1949. Accordion player.

- Parker, Marge--1947-1950, 1952-1954. Margaret Jane Mahaffey Parker was the KMA studio organist married to announcer Larry Parker.
- Parrish, "Jolly" Joe--1944-1945.
- Payton, Dusty--1947. Wearing fancy, handmade western shirts, a five-gallon hat, and cowboy boots, Payton appeared on "RFD 960," and "Country Folks." He came to KMA from KFEQ.
- Peregrine, Carl and Corey--1926. Brothers from Essex, Iowa, they performed piano duets, playing entirely by ear.
- Pierson, Delores--1949-1951. A sister of entertainer Jeanie Sanders, she was a KMA vocalist.
- Pierson, Jeanie--1945-1946, 1947-1951. A vocalist married to entertainer Mack Sanders.
- Poff, Alta--1927-1929. She and Opal Webb appeared on KMA as the popular Dixie Girls. Their first Shenandoah performances were during the 1927 Jubilee celebrating the opening of the Mayfair Auditorium.
- Powell, William--1926-early 1930's. Iowa's champion fiddler, Powell broadcast programs of old-time favorites. He was "Willie Powell" on the Country School.
- Raines, Jim and Bob--1931-1932, 1942-1945. Jim and his son Bob appeared as The Gully Jumpers. Natives of the Virginia Blue Ridge Mountains, they were so popular that during their time at KMA, Earl May declared that they had the best mail pull of any entertainers. Some of their programs were sponsored by Spark-O-Lite, a nutritional additive that could be sprinkled on breakfast cereal.
- Richardson, Hartwell "Harpo"--1946, 1946-1948. Born in eastern Kentucky near Lexington, Harpo was formerly part of "Harpo and Tiny" on WLW, Cincinnati, and on NBC network on "Boone County Neighbors." An expert on harmonica and fiddle, he also sang tenor solos and played bass. In 1943, Harpo met Bobby Cook in Indianapolis at WIBC where Bobby aired "Texas Saddle Pals." Eventually they teamed up and came to KMA as "Bobby and Harpo."
- Robertson, Lonnie and Thelma--c. 1930's, 1942. Teamed with Roy McGregor, Lonnie Robertson sang old country songs and hymns on many Midwestern stations including KMA. Lonnie returned to Shenandoah with his wife Thelma and their three-year-old son for about six months in 1942. All three performed on the air, with Lonnie singing as "Either Ham Hobbes" on his "Fiddle Dusters" program.
- Rosario, Rosa--Late 1920's. Miss Rosario's story is contained in Chapter 6.

- Ruby, Bernard and Floyd--1926-1930's. Joining with Ira Cummings to form the Ruby Trio, the Ruby brothers of Weeping Water, Nebraska, were among the most popular and enduring of Shenandoah radio musicians. Floyd Ruby continues today to play for dances and special gatherings in southwest Iowa.
- Rucker, Stan and Helen--1920's-1930's. Along with Helen's sister Margaret and Margaret's husband Pete Tavora, the Ruckers appeared on the air as The Cornhuskers, a name given their group by Earl May. Helen and Margaret had sung on KMA in 1926 as the Carter Sister Duet, and with Stan in 1927 as the Cornhusker Trio. Pete joined the group in 1929. Helen played bass, Margaret handled the piano, banjo and accordion. In 1934 the group went to Tulsa, OK, returning to KMA in 1938. From 1943 through 1958, they performed for the USO.
- Randall, Tex--1944. Tex played mandolin and guitar at KFNF before coming to KMA.
- Roberts, Bud--1940. Fiddler.
- Sanders, Mack--1945-1946, 1947-1951. From Alabama, Mack sang on many KMA programs, and performed duets with his wife Jeanie. He left KMA to manage and then own radio stations throughout the Midwest.
- Seymour, Slim--1950. Steel guitar player.
- Shumate, Donald; Lewis; Paul; and Raymond--1928, 1931-35. During the 1920's, the Shumate Saxophone Quartet was one of the most popular groups on KMA. In addition to their musical programs, they appeared on "Country School" as "Ole" (Donald), "Isaac Jones" (Lewis), "Strizzy" (Raymond), and "Henry Spickelmaeier" (Paul).
- Sloan, Johnny--1928, early 1930's. The "Scottish Tenor" sang with Eddie Dean.
- Sloey, Al--Late 1939 or early 1940-1942. Al Sloey grew up in Tarkio, Missouri, and had been a childhood friend of J. D. Rankin Jr., a future vice-president of the May Seed & Nursery Company. Sloey joined KMA and, after the Doll brothers left, became a member of The Melody Rangers. He moved to Hollywood and joined The Riders of the Purple Sage.
- Smith, Jerry--1934-1935. A yodeling cowboy singer, Smith had made films with Monogram Pictures. He left KMA for WHO, where he was a very popular entertainer.
- Soflin, Betty & Lyn--1951-1955. Veterans of the "Ted Mack Amateur Hour," the Soflin Sisters sang western, hillbilly, and spiritual songs. They were the last full-time entertainers employed as entertainers by KMA.

- Starcher, Buddy--1943-1944. The *KMA Guide* called him "The 'Gene Autry' of KMA." He was sponsored by Spark-O-Lite. Buddy started in radio in 1928 in Baltimore, Maryland, and had appeared on KXEL, Waterloo, before coming to Shenandoah.
- Starr, Patrick--1952. Accordionist and pianist.
- Stewart, Kay--c. 1930's. The daughter of Lindy and Toby Stewart, Kay sang and danced on "Country School." Later she became a Hollywood actress.
- Stewart, Toby and Lindy--c. 1930's. Both were entertainers. Toby occasionally served as the teacher on "Country School."
- Stotts, Bob--1945-1946, 1947-1954. A veteran of the rodeo circuit as both a bronco rider and a singer, Stotts had his own morning program on KMA and also appeared on "RFD 960," "Country Folks," and "Hawkeye Rangers."
- Swanik, Johnny--1937-1938. Swanik was a member of the Pals of the Prairie. He also appeared on "Cottonwood Corners," and "Trapper Trio." (For more on Swanik, see *Frank Jennings*).
- Van Horn, Wayne--1942-1944, 1945-1948. An electric and steel guitarist, Wayne performed with the Utah Rangers. He left KMA in 1944 for a short stint at KMMJ.
- Warren, Fred--1946-1950. As "Elmer Axelbender," Warren appeared on Country School dressed in clown shoes, 44-inch trousers, yellow suspenders, and a red and white striped T-shirt. He also hosted a daily program of music and foolishness. Born in 1899, Warren had begun radio work in 1932, and had been at KWTO for a number of years before coming to KMA.
- Webb, Opal--See *Alta Poff*.
- Weldon, Ken--1951-1952. Weldon was a banjo, guitar, and mandolin player and singer with the Ozark Mountain Boys.
- West, Mae and Oma--1945-1947. A popular sister duet, they now live in Unionville, Missouri, and continue to perform. The West sisters married brothers Bob and Pat Corder who performed as the Black-hills Boys but were never heard over KMA.
- West, Ted--1943. West was a member of the 101 Ranch Boys.
- Williams, Zeke and Joan--1944-1945. Zeke and Joan Williams were often heard as a duet, on Country School, and as members of many of KMA's musical groups. They were occasionally joined by their daughter Virginia Lee. A veteran performer, Zeke started in radio in 1927 in Chickasaw, Oklahoma, where he had a band called The Rambling Cowboys.
- Wooden, Steve--1944-1951. At KFBI, Wichita, Wooden worked with Zeke Williams, and the two came to KMA about the same time.

Young, Floyd and Jessie--1925-1930's. In 1926, the couple presented a regular Friday evening program of vocal solos and duets. Both were also listed as "assistant announcers." Jessie became KMA's first full-time radio homemaker, staying at the station until 1942. Floyd was also part of the KFNF Symphonic Orchestra.

Appendix F

KMA MUSICAL GROUPS

KMA's entertainers banded together into many different groups. Some ensembles lasted for decades, while other musical gatherings were little more than regularly scheduled programs on which the same core of entertainers appeared each week. A sampling of sixty years of KMA's groups follows. Dates indicate their time at KMA.

Bar Nothin' Ranch Hands--1950. A sort of country-and-western version of the "KMA Country School," the ranch hands who sang and wise-cracked their way through the programs included Wilber Numby (Coy Martin), Sam Leatherberry (Eddie Comer), Timothy Longacre (Steve Wooden), Charlie Smartshopper (Mack Sanders), Lee Sutton, and Ezra Hawkins as the ranch boss. The group's theme song was "Arkansas Rag," written by Hawkins in 1932.

Bohemian Band--1930. Jim Hovorka, Gretta Taylor, Earl King, Bernard Ruby, Francis Clatterbaugh.

Camp Meeting Quartet--1951. Ed May, Mel Mains, Paul Pippert and Lee Sutton were the foursome who performed at the company Christmas party.

Cargill Calling--late 1940's-early 1950's. Ike Everly, Jerry Fronck, Steve Wooden, Wayne Van Horn, Slim Fitz, Mack Sanders, Hugh Aspinwall, and announcers Merrill Langfitt and Warren Nielson.

Cornbelt Jamboree--c. 1950. Originated on the stage of the Council Bluffs City Auditorium, the Saturday evening broadcasts consisted of 90 minutes of music and comedy. Jamboree members included Fred Warren (Elmer Axelbender), Virginia Lee Williams, Joan Williams, Zeke Williams, Jimmy Morgan, Wayne Van Horn, Harpo Richardson, Pat Evans, Donnie Everly, Ike Everly, Eddie Comer, Lou Black, Merl Douglas, Jerry Fronck, Oma West, Mae West, and Steve Wooden.

Cornhusker Trio--1938. Stanley Rucker, violin; his wife Helen Carter, piano; her sister Margaret Carter Tavora, banjo. Pete Tavora also played with the group.

KMA Country School District No. 9--

1929: Frena Ambler, Phyllis Brownell, Ormah Carmean, Janie Mae Crutchfield, Paul Crutchfield, Grady Fort, Fred Greenlee, Earl King, George Nichols, John Nicolson, Alta Poff, Willie Powell, Burke Schriver, Don Shumate, Louis Shumate, Paul Shumate.

Raymond Shumate, Gretta Taylor, Opal Webb, Jim Whilt, Lois VanHouten, and Earl May as the teacher.

1935: Bill Alexander, Gretta Bellamy, Twyla Danielson, Faylon Geist, Mickey Gibbons, Fred Greenlee, Edith Jennings, Frank Jennings, Don Shumate, Louis Shumate, Paul Shumate, Raymond Shumate, Jerry Smith, Kay Stewart, and Lindy Stewart, with Earl May and Toby Stewart as teachers.

1940: Del Lee Anderson, Skeet Cross, Sam DeVincent, Bud Doll, Ned Doll, Faylon Geist, Carl Haden, Mary Jane Haden, Lem Hawkins, Patty Hewitt, Chick Holstein, Mott Johnson, John Kammers, Jack Kelly, Nancy Lee, Peggy Maddex, Jerry Osborne, Al Sloey, and Fred Greenlee as the teacher.

1948: Eddie Comer, Merl Douglas, Ike Everly, Jerry Fronek, Marge Parker, Harpo Richardson, Jeanie Sanders, Wayne Van Horn, Fred Warren ("Elmer Axelbender"), Joan Williams, Zeke Williams, Steve Wooden, and Glenn Harris as the teacher.

Delmonico Dreamers--1925-1930's. Walt Nixson, Ted Howard, Rollo Jones, Earl Butts, Art Flyn, Lowell Johnson, Paul "Swede" Arvidson, Jerry Stucker. They were originally known as the *Delmonico Hotel Orchestra*.

Disciples of Harmony--1929-1930. John Haley and Paul Crutchfield.

Dixie Four--1955. Gospel singers from Indianapolis, they were Joe Thomas, Norman Wood, Melvin Reed, Tony Mitchell, and pianist Wayne Griffin.

Doubledaters--1953-1955. Lyn and Betty Soflin, Merl Douglas, and Curly Dale, they were sponsored by Hy-Vee Food Stores and were one of the last groups of live musicians to appear on KMA.

Ed May Quartet--1958. Ed May, Bruce Jones, Wayne Stevens, Glen Sheirbon. They sang at the company Christmas party.

Elmer and His Axelbenders--c. 1948-1949. The ensemble featured on the daily program of Fred Warren ("Elmer Axelbender") included Eddie Comer, Marge Parker, Jim Kendrick, Steve Wooden, Tiny Nylin, Buddy Morris, Dee Pierson, and Jeanie Sanders.

Elysian Symphony Orchestra--1920's. Dr. Leo Sturmer, director; Bernice Currier, violin; C. E. Engberg, vocalist; Poe Jones; Mrs. C. E. Engberg, piano; Floyd Young, saxophone; Harry Day, trumpet; Earl Butts, trombone. Their most popular selection was "The Mayfair Song," composed by Dr. Sturmer.

Eye Opener Gang--1954. Marge Parker, Morrie Jones, Bob Stotts, and Merl Douglas.

Farnham Trio--1925-1930's. May Whitney Farnam, piano; Ruth Farnam Ullrick, violin; D.S. Ullrick, baritone horn.

Fremont Harmony Four--1926. Raymond Peterson, Harold Youngberg, George Peterson, Raymond Nelson. Emil Youngberg served as accompanist.

Golden River Boys--c. 1941. Chick Holstein, Jerry Osborne, and Al Sloey.

Gospel Legion Quartet--c. 1948-1950. Arriving at KMA from the Stamps Quartet Music School in Dallas, TX, the group was at times composed of Richard Crow, Don Randall, Everett Linville, Verdel Sorenson, Lindsey Reast, Warren Holms, and pianist Kenneth Apple.

Gypsy Trio--1927-1928. Peggy Doolen, Eddie Forrester ("Gypsy John"), and Margaret Peterson.

Harness Bill and the Harness Makers--1920's. Frank 'Pete' Peterson, Gus Swanson, Fritz Carlson, "Harness Bill" Kalash and others, this Omaha group made many appearances at the Shenandoah station.

Hawkeye Rangers--Late 1940's, early 1950's. Ike Everly, Jeanie Sanders, Buddy Morris, Jimmie Kendrick, Eddie Comer, Bob Stotts.

Jig and Reel Orchestra--Late 1920's. Phyllis Brownell, piano; Bernard Ruby, banjo; Earl King, guitar; Francis Clatterbaugh, drums; Bill Powell, violin; Bernice Currier, violin and director.

KMA Symphony Orchestra--1927. Mrs. F. M. Carpenter, Bernice Currier, Mrs. D. S. Ullrick, Dr. A. Van Sassehofen, violinists; Dr. J. D. Bellamy, cello; Mrs. C. E. Engberg, piano; Florence Crane, organ; Earl Butts, trombone; Dr. Leo Sturmer, director.

Little Joe Gang--Mid-1940's. Little Joe Parrish, Mrs. Joe Parrish, Jerry Fronek, Bob Stotts, Slim Fitz, Mae and Oma West.

Mayfair Swingtet--Late 1940's. Jerry Fronek, Harpo Richardson, Mack Sanders, Eddie Comer.

Mayflower Trio--1926. June Taylor, piano; Jim Taylor, violin; Bobbie Ross, saxophone and clarinet.

Maygold Trio--1946. Steve Wooden, Fred Warren, Zeke Williams.

May's Mandolin Musicians--1925. One of the first musical groups associated with the May company, the musicians were Aleck Bollinger,

Isaac Jackson, Duane Redfield, Glenn Beach, O. D. Ford, Dr. R. E. Gidley, Dr. Leo Sturmer, and director Harry Day.

Morning Roundup--Late 1940's. Ish Irwin, Joe Parrish, Ike Everly, Morrie Jones, Bob Stotts.

Nishna Valley Neighbors--1948. Steve Wooden, Eddie Comer, Dusty Owens, Mack Sanders, Ike Everly.

Pals of the Prairie--1937-1938. Glen Long, Floyd "Speed" Foreman, Alger "Curly" Bray, Frank Jennings, Johnny Swanik.

Pancake Sisters--1926. Presenting vocal solos and duets, the "sisters" were LeOna Teget and Birdie Baldwin.

Ruby Trio--1925-1930's. Bernard Ruby, banjo; Floyd Ruby, trumpet; Ira Cummings, piano. They were occasionally joined by Geraldine Dolph, a school teacher from Randolph, Iowa.

Shumate Quartet--1920's-1931. Saxophonists and singers, the quartet members were brothers Raymond, Paul, Lewis, and Don Shumate.

Southland Jubilee Singers--1926-1928. Spiritual singers from the Deep South, they first appeared on KMA in 1926 and returned for several years. Oliver Childs, Maceo Johnson, Charles Clinkscale, Herman Hughes.

St. Joe Gang--Late 1940's. Harpo Richardson, Jerry Fronek, Zeke Williams, Steve Wooden, Jimmy Morgan, Oma West, Eddie Comer, Joan Williams, Elmer Axelbender, Mae West, Wayne Van Horn.

Stump-Us Gang--1942-1952. Begun in 1942, the program was originally sponsored by Waldorf Crackers. Listeners eager to win prizes sent in odd song requests intended to stump the musicians.

1944: Paul Oliver, Tex Randall, Steve Wooden, Zeke Williams, Ish Irwin, Morrie Jones.

1946: Wayne Van Horn, Ike Everly, Eddie Comer, Terry Moss, Steve Wooden, Dave and Ray Lehman, Paul Oliver.

1952: Curly Dale, Morrie Jones, Pat Starr, Coy Martin, Ezra Hawkins, Bob Stotts, with Warren Nielson as "Quizmaster." (That year the program was sponsored by the Manchester Biscuit Company.)

Trappers' Trio--1930-1931. "Lem Hawkins" (Earl King), "Isaac Jones" (Lewis Shumate), and "Henry Spickelmeier" (Paul Shumate). The popular trio entertained each morning with music and a continuing tale of their escapades and woes.

Utah Rangers--1940's. Al Sloey, Chick Holstein, Chuck Davis, Wayne Van Horn, Howard "Froggy" Mattson, Vern Morgan, and Doc & Esther Embree.

Appendix G

SELECTED KMA SCHEDULES
1925-1985

AUGUST 31-SEPTEMBER 5, 1925
KMA INAUGURAL DEDICATION PROGRAMS

Monday, August 31:

11:45 a.m.-12:45 p.m.--

Mary Crandall and cousins, Riverton, Iowa, on drums, banjo and piano

6:00-7:30 p.m.--

Solo, Kenneth Lewis; Instrumental, Grace Allen; Duet, Ormah Carmean and Grace Fleming

9:00-11:00 p.m.--

Elk's Municipal Band; Solo, H. J. Becker; Solo, Ormah Carmean; Talk, Mayor H. E. Deater

Tuesday, September 1:

11:45 a.m.-12:45 p.m.--

Vocal, "How Do You Do Boys," Grady and Doc; Instrumental, Marcella Todd; Solo, Kenneth Lewis; Solo, Ormah Carmean; Talk, R. G. Berry

6:00-7:30 p.m.--

Solo, Louise McGlone; Solo, Jack Todd; Talk, Shirley Leavitt; Saxophone solo, Bobby Ross; Talk, Mrs. Paul Ferguson; Solo, Louise McGlone; Duet, Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Young

9:00-11:00 p.m.--

Vocal, "How Do You Do Boys," Grady and Doc; May's Mandolin Musicians; Solo, Bobby Riddle; Duet, Ormah Carmean and Harry Day; Reading, Caroline Cooper; Solo, Ormah Carmean; Talk, Judge G. H. Castle; Solo, Mrs. May

Wednesday, September 2:

11:45 a.m.-12:45 p.m.--

"How Do You Do Boys," Grady and Doc; Instrumental, Alta Royer; Solo, Muriel Taylor; Instrumental, Salome Ripley; Talk, Jim Ahlgren

6:00-11:00 p.m.--

Violin, Dr. Leo Sturmer; Instrumental, Wm. Howie; Talk, Rev. J. A. McKenzie; Solo, Bernice Behm; Instrumental, Marianne

Benedict; Solo, Miss LeOna Teget; Talk, Denver Wilson; Solo, Mrs. J. L. Crone; "How do You Do Boys," Grady and Doc; Solo, Ruby James; Duet, Mrs. E. E. May and Mrs. Henry Read; Talk, Rev. J. L. Howie; Instrumental, Doris Davenport, Tarkio, Missouri; Solo, Jack Todd; Talk, Oscar Rutledge; Flute, guitar and violin, J. P. Nye and F. Anshutz and Dr. Sturmer, the "Venetian Trio"; Duet, Helen Ness and Jennie Clark; Solo, Marion Moore; Reading, Maxine Allen; Instrumental, Mrs. Emory; Bass Cello solo, Dr. Bellamy; Violin, Mrs. Fleming Carpenter; Solo, Clara Topham; Instrumental, Mrs. Ben Brower; Solo, Mrs. Oscar Rutledge; Instrumental, Mrs. R. K. Tindall; Talk, Rev. J. W. Snowden

Thursday, September 3:

11:45 a.m.—12:45 p.m.—

Solo, Mrs. Truman Galt; Instrumental, Lavone Hamilton; Instrumental, Harold Howland; Instrumental, Carl Trullinger; Talk, John Cutter

Matinee, 4:00—5:15 p.m.—

Tarkio Musical Club, Tarkio, Mo., under direction of Mrs. Williams

6:00—7:30 p.m.—

"How Do You Do Boys," Grady and Doc; Solo, Ormah Carmean; Talk, Grover Brown; Instrumental, Elizabeth Webster; Solo, LeOna Teget; Instrumental, Lenore McGlone; Instrumental, Wm. Howie

9:00—11:00 p.m.—

Major Landers Farmer's Band, Clarinda, Iowa; Solo, Eugene Hagglund, Essex, Iowa; Talk, Blaine Archer, President Chamber of Commerce; Delmonico Hotel Orchestra; Reading, Katherine Simons; Violin, Louise Moyle

Friday, September 4:

11:45 a.m.—12:45 p.m.—

Instrumental, Marian Benedict; Solo, Eleanor Fishbaugh; Saxophone, Marjorie Lynn; Trombone, Earl Butts; Talk, Rev. L. A. Lippitt

Matinee, 4:00—5:15 p.m.—

Mrs. A. J. Stickler and entertainers from Red Oak, Iowa

6:00—11:00 p.m.—

Talk, Lina Ferguson; Instrumental, Florence Crane; Instrumental, Harold Howland; Duet, Mr. and Mrs. Cole Berry; Solo, Robert Berry; Talk, Mrs. Frederick Fischer; "How Do You Do Boys," Grady and Doc; Kiwanis Club; Instrumental, Mrs.

Abercrombie; Violin, Mrs. Fleming Carpenter; Solo, Mrs. E. J. Gottsch; Reading, Florence Gowing; Solo, Marion Moore; Talk, Father Melville; Solo, Mrs. Alex Robertson; Reading, Catherine Saylor; Solo, Naomi McMahill; Talk, Rev. L. R. Goodwin; Duet, Mrs. Read and Mrs. May

Saturday, September 5:

11:45 a.m.–12:45 p.m.--

“How Do You Do Boys,” Grady and Doc; Violin, Louise Moyle; Solo, Mrs. J. L. Crone; Solo, Kenneth Lewis; Reading, Tracy Bess Owen

6:00–7:30 p.m.--

Solo, H. J. Becker; Solo, Mrs. Wm. Brown; Reading, Jane Lewis; Instrumental, Marcella Todd; Reading, Edith Replogle; Solo, Miss Irene Ross

9:00–11:00 p.m.--

Mrs. Youngberg and entertainers, Essex, Iowa; “How Do You Do Boys,” Grady and Doc; Talk, Rev. Alex Robertson; Solo, LeOna Teget; Violin, Louise Moyle; Instrumental, Lavone Hamilton; Duet, Mrs. May and Mrs. Henry Read; Solo, Grady Fort; Solo, Dr. J. D. Bellamy; Reading, Caroline Cooper

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 1926

5:30-7:00 a.m.	Talk, G. H. Van Houten Music, Louise McGlone Morning News and Farm Talks, Earl May and others
9:00-10:00 a.m.	News, D.S. Ullrick Flower Talk, Lina Ferguson Markets, Weather
11:30-12:30 noon	Markets, Weather Music, Ira Cummings Vocal Solos, Frena Ambler Vocal Solos, Lillian Paul, Omaha, Neb.
5:30-7:00 p.m.	Horticultural Talk, G. H. Van Houten Markets, News, Weather Baseball Scores by Burke
7:00 p.m.	SIGN OFF

FRIDAY, JANUARY 6, 1928

6:00-7:00 a.m.	Songs, Floyd and Jessie Young Fidelity Accordion Man
9:00-10:00 a.m.	Poultry Talk News and Weather Accordion Music
11:00-1:00 p.m.	Songs, Bernice Behm Cornhusker Trio Dwarfie Kids Markets, News, Weather
2:00-3:00 p.m.	Home Hour, Bernice Currier Sewing Circle, Jessie Young
5:00-6:00 p.m.	Sunday School Lesson, Rev. J. A. Mc- Kenzie Kiddies' Stories
6:00-7:00 p.m.	Fidelity Accordion Man News, Weather, Markets
7:00-8:00 p.m.	May Tire Orchestra
8:00 p.m.	SIGN OFF

FRIDAY, JANUARY 29, 1932

6:00 a.m.--Cornhusker Orchestra and Shumate Quartet
7:00 a.m.--Old Man Sunshine and Cajon
7:15 a.m.--Morning Watch. Edythe Stirlen
7:30 a.m.--Silent
9:30 a.m.--Flower Talk, Lina Ferguson
9:45 a.m.--Songs, Mrs. Earl May
10:00 a.m.--Hymns, Shumate Brothers
10:20 a.m.--Songs, Gretta Taylor and Lewis Shumate
10:30 a.m.--Pa and Ma Comedy Skit
10:40 a.m.--Pipe Organ, Gretta Taylor
11:00 a.m.--Silent
12:30 p.m.--Markets, News, Weather
12:40 p.m.--Cornhusker Orchestra
1:00 p.m.--Service Talk, Earl May
1:20 p.m.--Musical Variety Program
2:00 p.m.--Silent
3:30 p.m.--Cornhusker Orchestra
3:40 p.m.--Country School District No. 9
4:10 p.m.--Old Man Sunshine and Cajon
4:30 p.m.--Pipe Organ, Gretta Taylor
4:45 p.m.--Songs, Edythe Stirlen
5:00 p.m.--Silent
6:30 p.m.--Shumate Brothers
6:45 p.m.--Markets, News, Weather
6:50 p.m.--Trappers' Trio
7:00 p.m.--Shumate Saxophone Quartet
7:15 p.m.--Dwarfies' Entertainers
7:30 p.m.--Service Talk, Earl May
8:00 p.m.--Cornhusker Orchestra
8:10 p.m.--Talk, Dr. Skeffinton
8:30 p.m.--Silent
10:00 p.m.--Music, Gretta Taylor
10:15 p.m.--Flowers, Gertha Edgerton
10:30 p.m.--Music

NOVEMBER, 1941--DAILY DAYTIME PROGRAMS

MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY

4:30 a.m.--The Sunny Risers
5:00 a.m.--Haden Family
5:30 a.m.--Haden's Hillbillies
5:45 a.m.--Golden River Trio
6:00 a.m.--Ralph Childs--News
6:15 a.m.--Breakfast Belles
6:30 a.m.--Hour of Morning Worship ##
7:00 a.m.--Clifton Utley--News
7:15 a.m.--Stamps' Quartet
7:30 a.m.--Frank Field
7:45 a.m.--Haden Children
8:00 a.m.--Morning Headlines
8:15 a.m.--Green River Hillbillies
8:30 a.m.--Lem Hawkins Western & Hillbilly
8:45 a.m.--Send Out Sunshine Club, Edythe Stirlen
8:55 a.m.--Midmorning Devotions
9:00 a.m.--Jessie Young--Daily Homemaker Visit
9:50 a.m.--Melody Ann
10:00 a.m.--Earl May--News/Weather/Markets
10:15 a.m.--Earl May--Midmorning Visit
10:30 a.m.--Lone Journey
10:45 a.m.--Ma Perkins
11:00 a.m.--Frank Field, The Gardener
11:15 a.m.--Toby & Susie ##
11:30 a.m.--KMA Country School
11:50 a.m.--Earl May's Visit
12:00 noon--Earl May--News
12:15 p.m.--Market Reports
12:30 p.m.--On Parade
12:35 p.m.--Midday Melodies
12:45 p.m.--Number, Please
1:00 p.m.--Blackwood Brothers
1:15 p.m.--The Bronc Busters
1:30 p.m.--Kitchen-Klatter
2:00 p.m.--Back to the Bible
2:30 p.m.--Utah Rangers
3:00 p.m.--Ozark Opry
3:30 p.m.--Real Jig Time
3:45 p.m.--Girls of the Ozarks
4:00 p.m.--Jack Kelley--News

4:15 p.m.--Hymns of All Creeds
4:30 p.m.--News, Here & Aboard
4:45 p.m.--Wayne Van Dyne, tenor #

MONDAY EVENING

5:00 p.m.--Adventure Stories
5:15 p.m.--Secret City #
5:30 p.m.--Jack Armstrong #
5:45 p.m.--Capt. Midnight #
6:00 p.m.--Chick Holstein
6:25 p.m.--Globe Sportsman's Timetable
6:30 p.m.--Earl May--News
6:45 p.m.--Earl May's Visit
7:00 p.m.--Shenandoah Town Hall
7:30 p.m.--Food Will Write the Peace
8:00 p.m.--National Radio Forum #
8:30 p.m.--For America We Sing #
9:00 p.m.--Russ Morgan's Orchestra
9:30 p.m.--News, Here & Abroad
10:00 p.m.--Larry Clinton's Orchestra
10:15 p.m.--Newstime ##
10:30 p.m.--Glenn Miller's Orchestra
11:00 p.m.--News #
11:05 p.m.--Lou Breese's Orchestra
11:30 p.m.--Stan Kenton's Orchestra
11:50 p.m.--Midnight News
12:00 midnight--SIGN OFF
(# = NBC and MBS Network programs.)
(## = IBS Network programs.)

OCTOBER, 1945--DAILY DAYTIME PROGRAMS

MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY

5:45 a.m.--Church of the Air
6:00 a.m.--KMA Roundup
6:30 a.m.--RFD 960
7:00 a.m.--Ralph Childs, News
7:15 a.m.--Frank Field
7:30 a.m.--Blackwood Brothers
7:45 a.m.--Green Mountain Gang
8:00 a.m.--Morning Headline
8:15 a.m.--Mack & Zeke
8:30 a.m.--Breakfast Club
9:00 a.m.--Homemaker's Visit
9:30 a.m.--Hymns of All Churches
9:45 a.m. (Mon.)--One Woman's Opinion
9:45 a.m. (Except Mon.)--Listening Post
10:00 a.m.--Breakfast in Hollywood
10:30 a.m.--Gil Martyn
11:00 a.m.--Stump Us
11:15 a.m.--Frank Field
11:30 a.m.--Glamour Manor
12:00 noon--Earl May, News
12:30 p.m.--Home Folks
12:45 p.m.--Market Reports
1:00 p.m.--Rambling Cowboys
1:15 p.m.--Blackwood Brothers
1:30 p.m.--Kitchen-Klatter
2:00 p.m.--Zeke and Joan
2:15 p.m.--Mack Sanders
2:30 p.m.--"Ladies Be Seated"
3:00 p.m.--Jack Berch Show
3:15 p.m.--Steve Wooden
3:30 p.m.--Little Joe's Jamboree
3:45 p.m.--Jeanie Pierson
4:00 p.m.--Lina Ferguson
4:15 p.m.--Jimmie Morgan
4:45 p.m.--Hop Harrigan
5:00 p.m.--Terry and the Pirates
5:15 p.m.--Jack Lellman, News
5:30 p.m.--Jack Armstrong
5:45 p.m.--Tennessee Jed

THURSDAY EVENING

6:00 p.m.--Fulton Lewis, Jr.
6:15 p.m.--Goodwill Trio
6:30 p.m.--Earl May, News
7:00 p.m.--Lum n' Abner
7:15 p.m.--Earl Godwin
7:20 p.m.--Am. Town Meeting
8:30 p.m.--Detect and Collect
8:55 p.m.--Modern Melodies
9:00 p.m.--One Foot in Heaven
9:30 p.m.--Woody Herman's Band
10:00 p.m.—Jack Lellman, News
10:15 p.m.--Frank Singiser
10:30 p.m.--Louis Prima's Band
11:00 p.m.--Newstime
11:30 p.m.--Johnny Long's Band

OCTOBER, 1950--DAILY DAYTIME PROGRAMS

MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY

5:30 a.m.--Blackwood Bros.
5:50 a.m.--News and Weather
6:00 a.m.--Ike Everly Family
6:30 a.m.--Sweet Lassy Time
6:45 a.m.--Fertilime Time
7:00 a.m.--Mel Mains, News
7:15 a.m.--Frank Field
7:30 a.m.--Gospel Legion Quartet
7:45 a.m.--Morning Headlines
8:00 a.m.--Breakfast Club
9:00 a.m.--Homemaker's Visit
9:25 a.m.--Betty Crocker
9:45 a.m.--Victor H. Lindlahr
10:00 a.m.--Edith Hansen
10:30 a.m.--Quick As A Flash
11:00 a.m.--Luncheon Club
11:25 a.m.--Edwin C. Hill
11:30 a.m.--Down A Country Lane
11:45 a.m.--Stump Us Gang
12:00 noon--Ralph Childs, News
12:15 p.m.--Edward May
12:30 p.m.--Half Past Noon
12:45 p.m.--Mel Mains, Markets
1:00 p.m.--Eddy Arnold
1:15 p.m.--Jack Hunt
1:30 p.m.--John B. Kennedy
1:45 p.m.--Peace of Mind
2:00 p.m.--Chance of a Lifetime
2:25 p.m.--One Man's Opinion
2:30 p.m.--KMA Party Line
2:45 p.m.--Bob Stotts
3:00 p.m.--Mack and Jeanie
3:15 p.m.--Steve Wooden
3:30 p.m.--Kitchen Klinik
4:00 p.m.--Dee Pearson Sings
4:15 p.m.--Mack Sanders
4:30 p.m.--Ralph Childs, News
4:45 p.m.--Hawkeye Rangers
5:00 p.m.--Jimmy Wakeley (M,W,F)
5:00 p.m.--Modern Romances (T, Th)

5:30 p.m.--Space Patrol (M, W, F)
5:30 p.m.--Superman (T & Th)
5:30 p.m.--Blackhawk (F)
5:55 p.m.--Falstaffs Fables
6:00 p.m.--Sports Parade
6:15 p.m.--Meredith Willson
6:30 p.m.--Ralph Childs, News
6:45 p.m.--Edward May, Mkts & Weather
7:00 p.m.--Lone Ranger
7:30 p.m.--Ozzie and Harriet
8:30 p.m.--The Sheriff
9:00 p.m.--Boxing Bout
9:30 p.m.--Am. Sports Page
10:00 p.m.--Ralph Childs, News
10:15 p.m.--Stars On Parade
10:30 p.m.--Girl Friend Lorraine
11:00 p.m.--Newstime
11:15 p.m.--Dance Orchestra
11:55 p.m.--News

OCTOBER, 1955--DAILY DAYTIME PROGRAMS

MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY

5:00 a.m.--Town & Country Hour
6:00 a.m.--News & Weather
6:15 a.m.--Rural Electric Reporter (Tu & Th)
6:30 a.m.--Merrill Langfitt
7:00 a.m.--Dean Naven, News
7:15 a.m.--Frank Field
7:30 a.m.--Markets
7:35 a.m.--Betty & Lyn
7:45 a.m.--Morning Headliners
8:00 a.m.--Breakfast Club
9:00 a.m.--Bernice Currier
9:25 a.m.--Whispering Streets
10:00 a.m.--Kitchen Club
10:15 a.m.--Tennessee Ernie
10:30 a.m.--Florence Falk
11:00 a.m.--Back To The Bible
11:30 a.m.--Companion
11:45 a.m.--Morning Markets
12:00 noon--Dean Naven, News
12:15 p.m.--Edward May
12:30 p.m.--Jack Gowing
12:45 p.m.--Markets
1:00 p.m.--Dick Mills
2:30 p.m.--Party Line
3:00 p.m.--Dick Mills
5:45 p.m.--Bill Stern
6:00 p.m.--Farm Bulletin Board
6:15 p.m.--Andy Parker
6:30 p.m.--Ralph Childs, News
6:45 p.m.--Edward May, Mkts & News

TUESDAY EVENING

7:00 p.m.--Club 960
7:30 p.m.--Life Is Worth Living
8:00 p.m.--Club 960
10:00 p.m.--Ralph Childs, News
10:15 p.m.--Club 960
11:00 p.m.--News
11:05 p.m.--Music In The Night
11:30 p.m.--Back To The Bible

OCTOBER, 1960--DAILY DAYTIME PROGRAMS

MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY

5:00 a.m.--Town & Country Hour
6:00 a.m.--News & Weather
6:15 a.m.--Western Star Time
6:30 a.m.--RFD 960
7:00 a.m.--Dean Naven, News
7:15 a.m.--Frank Field
7:30 a.m.--Markets
7:35a.m.--Let's Go Visiting (Tues. & Thurs.)
7:35 a.m.--Lawrence Welk's Show
7:45 a.m.--Morning Headlines
8:00 a.m.--Take 30 for Music
8:30 a.m.--Bernice Currier
9:00 a.m.--Breakfast Club
10:00 a.m.--Martha Bohlsen Show
10:15 a.m.--Housewives Serenade
10:30 a.m.--Florence Falk
11:00 a.m.--Back To The Bible
11:30 a.m.--Informacast
12:00 noon--Dean Naven, News
12:15 p.m.--Edward May
12:30 p.m.--Tom Beavers
12:45 p.m.--Markets
1:00 p.m.--Gary Hall Show
4:00 p.m.--Alan Austin Show
5:55 p.m.--Paul Harvey
6:00 p.m.--John Daly
6:10 p.m.--Speaking of Sports
6:15 p.m.--Sports
6:25 p.m.--As Naven Sees It
6:30 p.m.--Ralph Childs, News
6:45 p.m.--Mkts. & Weather

WEDNESDAY EVENING

7:00 p.m.--Edward P. Morgan
7:15 p.m.--Night Flight
10:00 p.m.--Ralph Childs, News
10:15 p.m.--The Late Show
11:00 p.m.--News
11:05 p.m.--The Late Show
11:30 p.m.--Back To The Bible

APRIL 1965--DAILY DAYTIME PROGRAMS

MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY

5:00 a.m.--Morning Guard Music
6:00 a.m.--News/Weather, Dean Naven
6:15 a.m.--Morning Guard Music
6:30 a.m.--RFD 960, Jack Gowing
7:00 a.m.--Dean Naven, News
7:15 a.m.--Frank Field
7:30 a.m.--Markets
7:35 a.m.--Morning Guard Music
8:00 a.m.--Morning Headlines/Weather
8:15 a.m.--Martha Bohlsen
8:20 a.m.--Morning Guard Music
8:55 a.m.--News
9:00 a.m.--Breakfast Club
9:55 a.m.--News
10:05 a.m.--Community Calendar
10:10 a.m.--Morning Guard Music
10:20 a.m.--Tater Quiz
10:30 a.m.--It's A Woman's World, Billie McNeilly
11:00 a.m.--Back To The Bible
11:30 a.m.--Morning Guard Music
11:45 a.m.--Markets
12:00 noon-- Dean Naven, News
12:15 p.m.--Edward May
12:30 p.m.--Midwest Farmer, Tom Beavers
12:45 p.m.--Markets
1:00 p.m.--Paul Harvey
1:15 p.m.--Afternoon Action Music
2:15 p.m.--Martha Bohlsen
2:20 p.m.--Afternoon Action Music
4:15 p.m.--Martha Bohlsen
4:20 p.m.--Afternoon Action Music
5:40 p.m.--Tom Harmon Sports
5:50 p.m.--Bob Considine
6:00 p.m.--Life Line
6:15 p.m.--Schenkel on Sports
6:20 p.m.--Paul Harvey
6:25 p.m.--As Naven Sees It
6:30 p.m.--Ralph Childs, News
6:45 p.m.--Mkts./Weather, Warren Nielson

EVENINGS, MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY

7:10 p.m.--Night Flight
10:00 p.m.--Ralph Childs, News
10:15 p.m.--Night Flight
11:00 p.m.--News
11:05 p.m.--Night Flight
11:30 p.m.--Back To The Bible

OCTOBER, 1970--WEEKDAY PROGRAMS

MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY

5:00 a.m.--KMA News
5:05 a.m.--Music
5:30 a.m.--Network News
5:35 a.m.--Music
5:45 a.m.--KMA Sports
5:50 a.m.--Music
6:00 a.m.--KMA News/Weather
6:15 a.m.--Music
6:30 a.m.--RFD 960
7:00 a.m.--KMA News/Weather
7:15 a.m.--Frank Field
7:30 a.m.--Markets
7:35 a.m.--Paul Harvey
7:40 a.m.--KMA Sports
7:45 a.m.--KMA News/Weather
8:00 a.m.--Music
8:30 a.m.--Network News
8:35 a.m.--Music
9:00 a.m.--KMA News
9:05 a.m.--Music
9:30 a.m.--Back To The Bible
10:00 a.m.--KMA News
10:05 a.m.--Community Calendar
10:15 a.m.--Billie Oakley
10:30 a.m.--Music
11:00 a.m.--KMA News
11:03 a.m.--Open Line
11:30 a.m.--Music
11:45 a.m.--Markets
12:00 noon--KMA News
12:15 p.m.--Ed May/Weather
12:30 p.m.--Midwest Farmer
1:00 p.m.--KMA News
1:05 p.m.--Network News
1:10 p.m.--KMA Sports/Weather
1:15 p.m.--Paul Harvey
1:30 p.m.--Network News
1:35 p.m.--KMA Classified/Music
2:00 p.m.--KMA News
2:05 p.m.--Music

2:30 p.m.--Network News
2:35 p.m.--Music
3:00 p.m.--KMA News
3:05 p.m.--Music
3:15 p.m.--World Of Business
3:20 p.m.--Music
3:30 p.m.--Network News
3:35 p.m.--Music
3:45 p.m.--Network Features
3:50 p.m.--Music
4:00 p.m.--KMA News
4:05 p.m.--Music
4:30 p.m.--Network News
4:35 p.m.--Music
5:00 p.m.--KMA News
5:05 p.m.--Stock Market & Commodity Report
5:10 p.m.--Tom Harmon
5:15 p.m.--Hunting/Fishing Report (Friday)
5:30 p.m.--Network News
5:35 p.m.--KMA News
5:45 p.m.--Life Line
6:00 p.m.--KMA News
6:15 p.m.--Farmer's Market
6:30 p.m.--Network News
6:35 p.m.--KMA Commentary
6:40 p.m.--Community Calendar
6:45 p.m.--Edward P. Morgan
6:55 p.m.--Joseph Harsch
7:00 p.m.--KMA News
7:05 p.m.--Music
7:15 p.m.--World of Sports
7:20 p.m.--Music

7:30 p.m.--Network News
7:35 p.m.--Music
8:00 p.m.--KMA News
8:05 p.m.--Music
8:30 p.m.--Network News
8:35 p.m.--Music
9:00 p.m.--KMA News
9:05 p.m.--Music
9:30 p.m.--Network News
9:35 p.m.--Music
10:00 p.m.--KMA News/Weather/Sports
10:15 p.m.--Music
11:00 p.m.--KMA News/Weather
11:05 p.m.--Music
11:30 p.m.--Network News
11:35 p.m.--Music
11:55 p.m.--KMA News/Weather
12:00 Midnight--SIGN OFF

OCTOBER, 1975--WEEKDAY PROGRAMS

5:00 a.m.--KMA News
5:05 a.m.--Music
5:30 a.m.--AERN News
5:35 a.m.--Music
5:45 a.m.--Markets
5:50 a.m.--Music
6:00 a.m.--KMA News/Weather
6:15 a.m.--Music
6:30 a.m.--RFD 960
7:00 a.m.--KMA News
7:15 a.m.--McManama/Weather
7:30 a.m.--Paul Harvey-AREN
7:35 a.m.--Markets
7:40 a.m.--KMA Sports
7:45 a.m.--KMA News/Weather
8:00 a.m.--Music
8:30 a.m.--AERN News
8:35 a.m.--Music
9:00 a.m.--Kitchen-Klatter
9:30 a.m.--Back To The Bible
10:00 a.m.--Mid-Morning Report
10:15 a.m.--Music
10:30 a.m.--Brenda Kay
11:00 a.m.--KMA News
11:05 a.m.--Elephant Shop
11:30 a.m.--Farm Features
11:35 a.m.--Omaha Market Reports
11:45 a.m.--Markets-Steve Hoefing
11:55 a.m.--Captain Stubby
12:00 noon--KMA News
12:15 p.m.--Ed May-Weather
12:30 p.m.--Midwest Farmer Steve Hoefing
1:00 p.m.--KMA News/Weather
1:05 p.m.--AERN News
1:10 p.m.--KMA Sports
1:15 p.m.--Paul Harvey
1:30 p.m.--AERN News
1:35 p.m.--Music
2:00 p.m.--KMA News
2:05 p.m.--KMA Markets
2:10 p.m.--Music

2:30 p.m.--AERN News
 2:35 p.m.--Music
 3:00 p.m.--KMA News
 3:05 p.m.--Music
 3:30 p.m.--AERN News
 3:35 p.m.--Music
 4:00 p.m.--KMA News
 4:05 p.m.--Music
 4:30 p.m.--AERN News
 4:35 p.m.--Music
 5:00 p.m.--KMA News/Weather
 5:15 p.m.--Stock Market Final
 5:20 p.m.--Commodities Report
 5:25 p.m.--Harry Reasoner
 5:30 p.m.--KMA Sports
 5:40 p.m.--Keith Jackson-AERN
 5:45 p.m.--AERN News
 5:50 p.m.--Agenda
 5:55 p.m.--Focus '75
 6:00 p.m.--KMA News/Weather
 6:15 p.m.--Farmer's Market
 6:30 p.m.--AERN News
 6:35 p.m.--Community Calendar
 6:40 p.m.--Music
 7:00 p.m.--KMA News
 7:05 p.m.--AERN Commentary
 7:20 p.m.--Music
 7:30 p.m.--AERN News
 7:35 p.m.--Music
 8:00 p.m.--KMA News
 8:05 p.m.--Music
 8:30 p.m.--AERN News

8:35 p.m.--Music
9:00 p.m.--KMA News
9:05 p.m.--Music
9:30 p.m.--AERN News
10:00 p.m.--KMA News/Weather/Sports
10:15 p.m.--Music
11:00 p.m.--KMA News
11:05 p.m.--Music
11:30 p.m.--AERN News
11:35 p.m.--Music
11:55 p.m.--KMA News
12:00 Midnight--SIGN OFF
(*AERN* = American Entertainment Radio Network, ABC)

JANUARY, 1985--WEEKDAY PROGRAMS

5:00 a.m.--AIRN News
5:05 a.m.--Music/Weather/News
5:55 a.m.--KMA Markets
6:00 a.m.--KMA News/Weather
6:16 a.m.--RFD 960/Pro Farmer
7:00 a.m.--News
7:15 a.m.--Weather
7:30 a.m.--Paul Harvey
7:35 a.m.--KMA Sports
7:45 a.m.--KMA News/Weather
8:00 a.m.--AIRN News
8:05 a.m.--Sporting News
8:10 a.m.--Music/Weather/Williams
8:30 a.m.--Opening Markets
8:32 a.m.--Music/Weather
8:42 a.m.--Community Calendar
8:52 a.m.--Focus
8:58 a.m.--KMA Markets
9:00 a.m.--KMA News
9:03 a.m.--Billie Oakley Show
9:30 a.m.--KMA Markets
9:32 a.m.--Billie Oakley "Open Line"
9:58 a.m.--KMA Markets
10:00 a.m.--Kitchen-Klatter
10:30 a.m.--KMA Markets
10:35 a.m.--Elephant Shop
11:05 a.m.--Paul Harvey
11:20 a.m.--Markets/Farm News
11:30 a.m.--Pro Farmer
11:35 a.m.--Omaha Market Report
11:45 a.m.--KMA Markets
12:00 noon--KMA News
12:15 p.m.--Edward May/Weather
12:30 p.m.--Midwest Farmer
1:00 p.m.--Pro Farmer
1:05 p.m.--KMA News/Weather
1:15 p.m.--KMA Sports
1:25 p.m.--KMA Markets
1:30 p.m.--Music
1:45 p.m.--KMA Markets
1:47 p.m.--Music

1:58 p.m.--KMA News
2:00 p.m.--AIRN News
2:05 p.m.--Music/Gordon Williams
2:58 p.m.--KMA News
3:00 p.m.--AIRN News
3:05 p.m.--Music/Gordon Williams
3:58 p.m.--KMA News
4:00 p.m.--IRN News
4:05 p.m.--Music/Weather/Williams
4:25 p.m.--Howard Cosell
4:28 p.m.--KMA Weather
4:30 p.m.--Music/Weather
5:00 p.m.--AIRN News
5:05 p.m.--KMA News/Weather
5:15 p.m.--KMA Sports
5:30 p.m.--Stock Market Final
5:35 p.m.--Commodities Report
5:40 p.m.--Rest of the Story
5:45 p.m.--Community Calendar
5:50 p.m.--Jennings Journal
5:55 p.m.--Focus
6:00 p.m.--AIRN News
6:05 p.m.--KMA News/Weather
6:15 p.m.--Pro Farmer
6:20 p.m.--Farmers Market
6:30 p.m.--Music/Weather
7:00 p.m.--AIRN News
7:05 p.m.--Music/Weather/News
8:00 p.m.--AIRN News
8:05 p.m.--Music/Weather/News
9:00 p.m.--AIRN News
9:05 p.m.--Music/Weather/News
10:00 p.m.--AIRN News

10:05 p.m.--KMA News/Weather
10:15 p.m.--Music/News/Weather
11:00 p.m.--AIRN News
11:05 p.m.--Music/News/Weather
11:55 p.m.--Music/News/Weather
12:00 midnight--SIGN OFF

(*AIRN* = American Information Radio Network, ABC)

Appendix H

Words and Music
by
CARL J. PETER

The Earl E. May Song

(A Fox-Trot Song)

IF THERE'S AN--Y THING YOU NEED FROM CLO--THING ON TO SEED JUST SEND YOUR OR--DERS
WHY NOT PACK THE FAM--LY GRIP AND TAKE A LITT--LE TRIP. COME DOWN AND VIS--IT
NOW OUR LITT--LE PRO--GRAM ENDS WE HOPE WE'VE MADE NEW FRIENDS AND PLEASED OUR OLD ONES

DOWN FROM CI--TY FARM OR TOWN BE --- CAUSE HIGH STAND--ARDS WE MAIN--TAIN WE
US BY AU--TO TRAIN OR BUS. AND WHEN YOU COME YOU'LL WANT TO STAY MUCH
TOO. THAT'S WHAT WE TRY TO DO. IT SURE WOULD MAKE US ALL FEEL FINE IF

BUILT UP OUR GOOD NAME, OUR SPLEN--DID REP--U--TA--TION IS KNOWN THRU--OUT THE NA--TION THIS IS,
LONG--ER THAN A DAY IF YOU WANT A M--CA--TION THIS IS YOUR IN--VI--TA--TION THIS IS,
YOU'LL DROP US A LINE, YOU ALL KNOW OUR LO--CA--TION, WE'RE KNOWN THRU--OUT THE NA--TION THIS IS.

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CHORUS

K. M. A. AT SHEN--AN--DO-- AN IT'S EARL E. MAY YOU'RE LIST'NING TO ---

ALL WE DO IS TRY TO SERVE YOU PEO--PLE OF THE U. S. A. IF YOU LIVE

NORTH, SOUTH, EAST OR WEST, EARL E. MAY CAN SERVE YOU BEST THIS IS K. M. A. AT

SHEN--AN--DO-- AN, IT'S EARL E. MAY YOU'RE LIST'NING TO.

Printed in the U. S. A.

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Baillon, Joni*--Omaha, NE
Birkby, Evelyn
Bohlsen, Martha--Omaha, NE
Bone, Bill
Bredensteiner, Vera
Crowley, Earle
Dermody, Ned
Dreager, Nadine--Council Bluffs, IA
Driftmier, Mae
Driftmier, Howard
Erickson, Ron
Everly, Margaret--Nashville, TN
Field, John Henry--Denver, CO
Field, Phillip--Tucson, AZ
Fishbaugh, C. W.
Gowing, Jack--Essex, IA
Hansen, Don
Hanson, Rena
Harshbarger, Gretchen--Iowa City, IA
Hart, Clark
Hovenden, Bernice
Hughes, Lee--Sidney, IA
Ketcham, Colleen
Kling, Norman
Krein, Tim Wayne
Langfitt, Merrill--Mesa, AZ
LePorte, Mike
Lightfoot, Jim Ross
Logan, Flo
Logan, L. A.
Manley, Karenann Falk--Essex, IA
May, Edward
May, Edward, Jr.--Omaha, NE
McConahay, Brenda Kay*
Morris, Chuck
Morris, Monica
Murphy, Darrell
Murphy, Doris--Phoenix, AZ
Nemec, Raymond--Naperville, IL
Nielson, Florence--Omaha, NE
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Oakley, Billie
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Roulstone, Merl Douglas--Rogersville, MO
Ruby, Floyd
Sanders, Mack--Nashville, TN
Saner, Evalyn
Schroeder, Ray--Omaha, NE
Selby, Bill
Stirlen, Edythe
Tavora, Margaret Carter
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(*--Interview conducted by Evelyn Birkby.)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Birkby was born in Shenandoah, Iowa, and raised seventeen miles west near the lesser metropolis of Sidney. In 1972, he earned a B.A. from Morningside College, and in 1976 graduated Phi Beta Kappa with an M.A. in English from the University of Arkansas. After three years as an instructor of English at Southwest Missouri State University, he began writing full-time. In addition to publishing many articles and essays, he served as editor of the 3rd edition of *The Fieldbook*, published by the Boy Scouts of America.

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