R.J. McELROY

Robert Neymeyer

R.J.McELROY TRUST INFORMATION

The R.J. McElroy Trust assists non-profit, tax-exempt organizations, which provide educational services to deserving youth. It is preferred that these organizations be located in the KWWL viewing area, and organizations located in Black Hawk County and the rural counties in the viewing area receive higher priority. No grants may be made directly to individuals.

The Trust gives higher priority to grants which fund "programs" rather than "capital projects." The Trust also prefers to have funding for new projects viewed as seed money. The Trust will often fund a project for a given period of time – one to three years. During this time it is expected that the project will build a firm financial foundation from the Trust.

Finally, the Trust has a tradition of approving challenge grants. This type of grant serves several purposes. Ideally, it leverages many more dollars for the organization, and enables the recipient to go to other grantmakers with tangible proof of the Trust's interest. It also assures the Trust that other appropriate funding sources are sharing the costs.

Submission deadlines are March 1, June 1, September 1, and December 1.

All requests for funds are voted upon by the Board of Trustees, and the Trust will send written notice to all applicants informing them of the Trustees' decision.

On those grants which are approved, the Trust requires the grantee to sign and accept the terms of the Agreement of Donee. The Trust also requires an annual report due one year after the date of the grant. The grantee must allow access to its books and records by the Trust and its agents. Furthermore, the McElroy Trust reserves the right to terminate funding at any time if funds are not being applied in accordance with grant purposes or procedures.

For further information and application guidelines contact:

R.J. McElroy Trust
KWWL Building, Suite 318
Waterloo, Iowa 50703
319-291-1299 Fax 319-291-1260

R. J. McElroy was an exceptional person. He overcame a difficult childhood and poor educational background to become a successful salesman, the founder of Black Hawk Broadcasting, and a civic leader. A man with tremendous drive and motivation, enhanced by his charm and good looks, he worked long hours to achieve his goals. "Mac" was a popular radio announcer whose man-on-the-street interviews were a favorite of generations of listeners in northeast Iowa. His determination and salesmanship enabled him to start KWWL radio with only a small investment. His toughness and good fortune resulted in his winning the right to establish KWWL-TV. The backing of community leaders and a loyal audience made both a success. Throughout his life R .J. McElroy worked to improve the quality of life in the metro area to repay the community for its support. He made arrangements to continue these efforts after his death in a will that provided financial assistance to deserving youth through the R. J. McElroy Trust. When Black Hawk Broadcasting was sold, the Trust received a portion of the proceeds. In the years that followed, thousands of young people in northeast Iowa have been given an opportunity to develop their own exceptional lives through programs supported by the Trust. R. J. McElroy's greatest success was his contribution to future generations.

Author Robert Neymeyer received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Iowa. He has taught at the university level and worked as a public historian. He is the founder and publisher of Mid-Prairie Books.

R. J. McElroy

A BIOGRAPHY

Robert Neymeyer

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Several organizations assisted in locating materials for this project: The Grout Museum of History and Science, KWWL-TV, The Waterloo Courier and the R. J. McElroy Trust. Court and local government records were also consulted. Photographs are from Jeanne McElroy Hughes, Betty McElroy Fullar, R. J. McElroy Trust and the author. Warren Mead's *Black Hawk Broadcasting Company, The McElroy Years* was also a valuable resource.

Writing a biography is a unique challenge. The temptation is to emphasize the positive and downplay the negative. R. J. McElroy's very active life certainly had elements of both. While this is primarily the record of an outstanding career in both the commercial and public sectors, aspects of his private life are included to explain some of his shortcomings and his desire to leave a legacy to benefit deserving youth. This interpretation is the responsibility of the author, as are any errors or omissions.

Robert Neymeyer

Introduction

Most towns in Northeast Iowa have R. J. McElroy's name on one or more public works. It takes real effort to find an organization, school or program that has not benefited from Mac's foresight. Yet today, only 32 years after his death, most of Mac's fellow Iowans know almost nothing about their benefactor. So we have commissioned this biography of R. J. McElroy with the hope it will enlighten this generation and inspire generations yet to come.

Mac's story deserves retelling, but not just because he started out poor and made it big. That's a fairly common story in America, and it's usually a good one. But what makes Mac's story special is what he dreamed and what he did to make it happen long after his death. Mac left his fellow Iowans the R. J. McElroy Trust, which has grown to be a major force for the education of deserving young people. In doing so, he also left us a clear example of just how much difference one person can make in this world. It's a lesson worth learning.

Mac lived and believed in self-sufficiency, but he also believed in helping people learn to help themselves. He left us the means and the mandate to do just that, and as Mac's successors and admirers, we commend his story to you.

The R. J. McElroy Trustees

Some facts you have to know
To make your daily grind.
But there are facts you ought to know
To broaden out your mind.

Michael McElroy

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M
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CHAPTER ONE

The Eau Claire Years, 1910-28

Ralph McElroy encountered many difficult experiences in the first eighteen years of his life. After a pleasant childhood, as a teenager he saw his father become an abusive drinker, his family separated and his hopes for an education lost. By 15, he was working to help the family stay together and two years later was ready to forge ahead on his own. The only stable factor in his life during this difficult period was his mother. She provided him with encouragement and support even though her resources were limited. It was a debt he was determined to repay.

The McElroy and Bovaird families moved to the Eau Claire area in western Wisconsin during the economic boom years of the 1870s. Both were families whose parents had fled the poverty and famine of Europe to settle in the United States in the pre-Civil War years. The McElroys had been farmers living west of Milwaukee while the Bovairds (also spelled Bavairds) had settled, and most remained, in eastern Pennsylvania.

Eau Claire was a thriving city located on the Chippewa River. It had the good fortune to be situated on the edge of the great northern pine forest and on the banks of the river which served as a highway for delivering the logs to the lumber mills. Eau Claire became the largest milltown on the river and the most important service point for supplies, equipment and food for the logging companies. In addition to the lumber mills, related industries were created: furniture factories, sash and door plants, pulp and paper mills and carriage and wagon factories. When the lumber industry began to decline in the 1890s, as the white pine forests disappeared, these new industries, plus several breweries, absorbed the surplus labor.

The growth of the city stimulated agricultural growth. Farmers came to buy the cheap, cutover land left by the logging companies.

The area south of Eau Claire had some of the best land available in the region. Part of the northern coulee area, the terrain was rolling hills and long ridges bisected by small streams flowing into the Chippewa River. Large number of Germans and Norwegians settled here in the 1870s, followed within a few years by other ethnic groups. After wheat failed as a crop, most turned to dairy farming and livestock. By the l880s the countryside was full of small farms supplying milk to local cooperatives which processed much of it into butter and cheese for sale in Eau Claire.

It was into this environment that James Henry McElroy moved in 1881. As a young man he had worked on a railroad construction gang building the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul line between Milwaukee and Eau Claire, and then stayed on as a logger with the mills. But life in the logging camps was not to his liking. The long hours, indestructible lice, and dangerous log drives down the river drove him into farming. For a time he and his wife Lydia tried their luck on the newest frontier, North Dakota. But by 1890 they had returned to Brunswick Township southwest of Eau Claire where they purchased 160 acres of rolling, partially wooded farmland. There James developed a good dairy herd and made his own butter which he sold house to house in the city. An affable and outgoing man, he was elected township supervisor and was active in the local Methodist Church, a reflection of his Scotch-Irish heritage. Healthy and prosperous, he lived to age ninety. The marriage produced five children, four daughters—Cora, Minnie, Iva and Mabel—and one son, James Henry Jr., born in July 1889. James grew to be a large, robust young man who joined his father working on the farm. The elder McElroy regularly took his son to Eau Claire on his deliveries where James learned the talents of selling and the ways of the city.

The Bovaird family had its origins in Edinburgh, Scotland. John Bovaird migrated to Bradford, Pennsylvania where he served as a schoolteacher. After the Civil War, he and his wife Elizabeth moved to Milwaukee, and when they found the city too congested, on to a farm near Eau Claire. But the family soon broke up when John died, his end precipitated by heavy drinking. One daughter, Ida, returned to live with family in Pennsylvania while the oldest, Annie, married and lived on a farm in the area. One son, William, became an itinerant logging camp cook, working as far away as Alaska, while James worked as a chauffeur who later died in a car

accident. The youngest child, Margaret Louise, born in November, 1882, moved with her mother to Eau Claire where Elizabeth worked as a live-in housekeeper after her husband died. At times Margaret had to live in a childrens home when her mother's employer would not allow dependents to live in the household. By age twelve Margaret began to work as a housekeeper herself. She had the good fortune to be hired by the minister of the First Baptist Church located at the corner of 4th and Niagara across from Randall Park. The area, largely middle class, was situated between the wealthy Lake Street corridor and the Water Street neighborhood business district. Relatively safe and secure, and far from the rough working class districts, the area became Margaret's base for most of her life.

The Baptist minister recognized in Margaret a strong desire for self improvement and a willingness to work hard to accomplish this. While continuing to work for the family, she also became a member of the household and was able to graduate from high school. She continued her education and received a diploma from the Eau Claire Teacher's College in 1905. She taught for a year in Eau Claire, then took a job in a country school in Brunswick Township at the corner occupied by the Woodmen Lodge and Methodist Church. As was the tradition in rural areas, she boarded with a family that had students in the school, in this case with the McElroy family who lived near to the school. It was there she met James Jr., seven years younger than her, who was now farming with his father. While there is no recorded memory of why the two were attracted to each other, it could be assumed the jovial personality and apparent economic stability of James Jr. were factors for Margaret. For James, perhaps it was her pleasant but quiet demeanor and her willingness to work hard to make their life a success. They were married in April, 1908 in the parsonage, rather than in the sanctuary, of the First Baptist Church, perhaps in deference to the non-membership, or non-interest, of James towards religion. The couple made their home on an 80 acre farm immediately north of the Woodmen Lodge and adjoining his parents' place. Family accounts indicate the early years of the marriage were happy ones. Active in the Lodge, they traveled the countryside performing in plays to recruit new members. Family visits were common. Margaret, no longer able to teach due to her marital status, worked for a time at the Eau Claire Creamery Company but spent

most of her time on the farm with James. She helped clear more land for crops and grazing. Together they were able to attain substantial financial success with their dairy herd.

Three children were born to the marriage. Their first child, Ralph James, was born March 6, 1910. Daughter Eileen arrived in September, 1912 and another girl, Marjorie Jeanne, was born in September, 1920. The two older children never developed a close relationship. But Ralph and Jeanne, as she was known, would form a close bond with Ralph becoming the protector and, occasionally, the provider for his little sister. Farm life and country school often resulted in an isolated lifestyle for children. Both Ralph and Eileen were expected to contribute to the farm work in addition to attending school and taking care of Jeanne. Eileen was particularly resentful of the fact she did not have a life of her own. Ralph, too, found farm life harsh, but he was able to find some escape fishing and hunting along the nearby Chippewa River. He also spent time at his grandparents house, playing cards and helping them with odd jobs. Ralph was also able to expand his world through trips to Eau Claire with both his grandfather and father on their sales trips. The entire family had regular contact with aunts and cousins. Particularly popular was Aunt Minnie Stetzel who worked as a department store clerk. She always had a surprise for the children and was willing to help if times were a little difficult or money was short. By most accounts it was a normal childhood for kids growing up in the country. It is not known what expectations Ralph and Eileen envisioned as teenagers. It is not unlikely that, with their mother's strong interest in education, they anticipated going to Eau Claire to attend high school in hopes of finding jobs in the booming local economy. However, their lives would be rudely disrupted by their father's financial and personal failings in the years after 1922.

It was in that year that James decided the present farm was not large enough. Often given to impractical and grandiose schemes, he convinced a much more conservative Margaret they should sell the farm and rent a larger, more modern place, near Fall Creek, 15 miles east of Eau Claire. It was the beginning of several years of personal and financial crisis for the family and a period that would alter Ralph's life.

There is no recorded or personal account of exactly when and how the marriage of James and Margaret began to unravel. However, the few pieces of known evidence suggest the culprit

was James and his weakness for alcohol. Over the next few years excessive drinking resulted in the loss of several jobs and the start of an extra-marital relationship. In Fall Creek he renewed a childhood friendship with a man who was a well known drinker and party goer. Soon the two men were spending time in the back rooms of roadhouses where liquor and gambling were readily available despite prohibition laws. Exactly what prompted this change is unknown, but both Margaret and his parents objected strongly, though without any success. Since so much time was spent away from the farm, James failed to recognize that the landlord, a doctor from Eau Claire, was only collecting the rent and not paying his share of the farm expenses. Soon the family faced a shortage of money. Anxious to remove James from this perilous situation, Margaret convinced him to move the family into Eau Claire in March, 1923. The move would be the first of several unhappy observances of March 1st, the traditional renter moving day. They found an apartment on Barland Street, in a working class neighborhood, and James got a job as a teamster. For a short time life returned to normal. By summer, however, he had resumed his heavy drinking and carousing with his friends. This time it was more serious as he met and began a relationship with Ethel Jensen. Meanwhile the surplus funds from the sale of the farm had been exhausted and Margaret was forced to find work. Aunt Annie had recently purchased a restaurant in the nearby village of Altoona and Margaret moved there to manage the place. James, now mostly unemployed, went along though he contributed little and continued his affair. About this time Ralph, tired of the family fighting and wanting to help his mother pay the bills, traveled to Montana to work in the wheat harvest. While he was no doubt proud of his independence, he did not particularly like the work which aggravated his sinus problems and he returned to rejoin the family. When the restaurant failed in early 1925, the family moved to a rented farm south of Eau Claire.

Ralph had started to assume some of his father's responsibility. In the summer he contracted with a local pickle factory to raise several acres of cucumbers. Along with his mother, Eileen and even Jeanne, he spent long hours in the spring and summer planting and tending the field. At harvest, James delivered the crop to the factory and then drank a large portion of the proceeds. Father and son engaged in a loud and long argument which ended in pushing and

shoving before they were separated. This marked the permanent disruption of relations between the two. Soon thereafter, apparently at the insistence of Margaret who feared further trouble, James moved out of the house. Ralph took over the farm work as well as trying to take care of his sisters. Later in the year, when the house caught fire, it was Ralph who got his sisters out safely. The following March the family moved again, this time to a farm near the McElroy grandparents.

It was in early 1926 that Margaret decided it was necessary to break with James. In addition to her husband's alcoholism and infidelity, there was Ralph's anger towards his father and the continual turmoil was having a negative impact on Eileen's high school career. In August, Margaret moved the family into Eau Claire, probably living for a time with relatives before renting an apartment on Water Street. She found work stuffing horse collars in the building next to them. At night she attended bookkeeping classes at a nearby business school and soon was able to get a job as a bookkeeper at the Eau Claire Ice Company owned by the Kelley family. But employment did not solve the problems. Eileen, desperate to escape the family troubles, got married at age 17 and left school although she did remain in the area. Ralph tried to attend high school while working at the same time. He got a job as a street cleaner, but it lasted only until his mother found out and made him quit. Her son was destined to greater things than sweeping streets. But she was distressed that she could not help him stay in school. He worked for a time in a hotel in exchange for room and board and a small wage. Meanwhile his school career was not going well. His attendance was irregular and, being old for his grade, he did not fit in well. Finally he abandoned school and looked for a permanent job. In 1927 he got a position as stock boy in the local F. W. Woolworth store.

Meanwhile the family, now reduced to Margaret and Jeanne, continued to be faced with adversity. In 1929 James petitioned for a divorce, but Margaret resisted, saying she still loved him even though she knew they would never be together again. James refiled in October, 1930 and this time she did not oppose it. The divorce was finalized in June, 1931 and as part of the settlement, James was directed to pay $17.50 per month to help support Jeanne. However, although he had been employed as a moulder at an iron and steel works and by 1933 owned his own soft drinks

works, reputed to have been a front for a bootlegging operation, James claimed he was nearly destitute and made few payments. The situation was made worse when Margaret first lost her job at the Ice Company and then, after obtaining a temporary position with a private charity dispensing welfare, lost that position too. By March, 1933 she was officially unemployed and asking the court to force James to make good on the defaulted payments. Although James was brought into court on several occasions, he continued to claim insufficient resources and avoided payment. However, Margaret was able to realize a small amount of revenge at his expense. For years in the city directory, the annual compilation of persons, addresses and employment of the city's population, she listed herself as the widow of James even though he was clearly listed as being alive in an entry only a few lines above hers.

The events of these years had a profound impact on Ralph and his relations with his family. As an adult he had no contact with his father and he almost never spoke about their relationship to anyone other than Jeanne. At the same time he revered his mother and appreciated her sacrifices to keep him in school as long as possible. His relations with Eileen, always difficult, did not improve when she continued to be in contact with James. In contrast, he combined the roles of big brother and father in his relations with Jeanne, providing her with financial support, advice and friendship. The years of economic hardship spurred him to achieve financial success. Once he found his calling in sales, he allowed no obstacle to deter him from reaching his goal. But there were ominous factors as well. His failure to complete high school resulted in a sense of inadequacy. While he was able, through reading and some night school, to continue his education, he was often embarrassed by his lack of a diploma and, on several occasions, found it severely limited his opportunity to improve himself. He would always remember that poverty and a broken family had denied him the education he needed. Finally, these same memories seemed to discourage him from entering into any permanent relationship for many years. Even though Jeanne's marriage was very successful and he enjoyed the company of his nieces and nephew, the scars from the battles with his father and the unhappiness his mother experienced seemed to dissuade him from considering marriage himself. For the next 25 years his work would be his only constant companion.

CHAPTER TWO

The Woolworth and WMT Years, 1928-41

The years between 1928 and 1941 were ones of dramatic transformation. Ralph, or Michael as he would become known, would elevate himself from stock boy to sales manager. He would become prosperous and prominent, exceeding the hopes of a boy who thought his inability to complete high school had destined him to failure. He was able to assume leadership of his family, build a lovely home and promote his adopted city. Yet there were problems. His unpredictable personality could change from charming to malevolent and he drank sufficiently for it to be a potential problem. And there was always that sense of insecurity that seemed to limit his personal relationships and make him defensive about his lack of a formal education.

At the age of seventeen, Ralph decided to take control of his life by applying for a job at F.W. Woolworth, the national "Five and Ten" variety store. Misrepresenting himself as being a year older, in order to circumvent state child labor laws, he became a stock boy in the downtown Eau Claire store. The company was an ideal place for him to begin. Woolworth trained their own managers so there was opportunity for ambitious young men to advance up the ladder. Indeed, the founder provided the model when he began as a stock boy himself and eventually created his own company. This "rags to riches" ideology was part of the management training as was the commitment of managers to contribute to the betterment of the local community. With chain stores expanding rapidly in the 1920s, there was every expectation on Ralph's part that success was possible.

The Woolworth in-house manager training plan had different evaluation points built into it. Ralph's promotion to assistant manager by 1929 indicated he learned the system quickly and well; normally it took longer to reach that level. During the first two years

he worked by day and took night school courses to complete his education, receiving a certificate, comparable to today's GED, in 1928. His primary area of concentration was English, no doubt part of his plan to improve his communication skills.

The record of the next few years is not precise. In 1930 he worked in Milwaukee as an assistant manager. It was here he became overly confident in his ability and challenged the decision of a supervisor. His assertiveness, perhaps even arrogance, led to his dismissal. It also precipitated a financial crisis and he was forced to ask his mother for money, something he was reluctant to do knowing she had very little herself. He received five dollars, saved in a pocket in her coin purse for such emergencies, and advice to make amends. As Warren Mead cryptically noted, "Then Mac did something which didn't come naturally. He went back to the Woolworth Company [and] apologized. . . ." It was accepted and he was given a position in Madison where he remained for another two years.

In 1933 he was assigned to the Cedar Rapids store. Here he became friends with members of the WMT radio staff and began to take an interest in radio broadcasting. However, in June, 1934 he was reassigned again, this time to become the manager of a small store on the western edge of Minneapolis. A very proud Ralph wired his mother: "Have been promoted to manager of store Minneapolis, Love Son." His responsibilities included being in charge of sales, serving as purchasing agent and verifying inventory in addition to supervising a staff of approximately twenty persons. For this he received $50 per week. That Christmas he invited his mother and Jeanne to visit to show them the store. His sister recalled her surprise that a manager's salary did not go very far as they had their holiday dinner in a rather plain cafeteria in downtown Minneapolis.

By 1935 Ralph was considering a career move. Advancement at the managerial level in the Woolworth Company was slow. He faced the prospect of several more assignments before receiving a choice location. Also, the inflexible salary scale provided limited incentive for managers. Having learned the basics of floor salesmanship and having obtained considerable management experience, he was ready to move into a profession where his ability would dictate salary and advancement. The broadcasting industry seemed to offer these opportunities.

Ralph had become acquainted with the business while in Cedar Rapids. He had known Art Shepard of WMT radio who did a man-on-the-street interview program in front of the Little Flower Shop on Third Avenue near the Woolworth storefront. When Shepard, known as the "Voice of Eastern Iowa," could not find an interesting person to question, he would get Ralph out of the store to impersonate some passing salesman. Ralph was a natural in front of the microphone and the two men became friends. Before Ralph left for Minneapolis in 1934, Shepard had encouraged him to consider radio broadcasting and sales as a profession. In mid-1935 Ralph decided to make the change and, with a recommendation from Shepard, got a job with WMT in its Waterloo office.

Radio had come to Waterloo in 1930 when Harry Shaw, publisher of the Waterloo Morning Tribune, bought station WJAM and relocated in the city. The new call letters, WMT, taken from the first letters of the newspaper, and the easy-to-remember broadcast band number, 600, were promotional gimmicks to attract listeners. However, the Depression forced the paper out of business in 1931 and in the following year the Cowles family of Des Moines bought the radio station and moved the headquarters to Cedar Rapids. The Waterloo office, located on the mezzanine of the Russell Lamson Hotel, continued to operate with its own manager, sales staff and production unit. Part of the broadcasting day originated from either Waterloo or Cedar Rapids and the balance came from the Mutual Network which provided national programming including the popular soap operas like "Our Gal Sunday" and the "Romance of Helen Trent." While some broadcasts were identifiable as being from one or the other city, such as the man-on-the-streets shows or the sports programs, the intent was to run shows appealing to the common interests of both communities.

Radio in the 1930s differed dramatically from the modern version. Most shows were presented in 15 minute segments. The block of time was defined by the number of one minute advertisements allowed by the Federal Communications Commission during a 60 minute period. Programming was varied. The news and weather always drew high ratings. But most of radio was entertainment. Locally, this meant music and comedy. Thousands of people started their day with The Singing Cowboy. Noontime programming included the Les Hartman Band and Joe Doakes and his accordion. Fran Allison, who grew up in LaPorte City, developed a popular

character called Aunt Fanny, a country girl who looked at the world in a common sense and amusing manner. Her show combined music and "downhome" humor, captured in one of the more memorable lines used to promote her sponsor's product, the Galloway Company manure spreader: "We stand behind our product!" Stations and entertainers sought to develop listener loyalty which made it easier to sell advertising. Many performers became closely identified with their advertisers such as Joe Doakes and Hubbard Sunshine Feeds. On air personalities were expected to work at other jobs at the station. Many doubled in sales; others collected and presented the news or served as announcers. Other personnel included the contingency staff who wrote copy for productions and ads, the traffic department which scheduled the ads and the engineer who ran the control room.

There was a chaotic rhythm to the radio business and, by most accounts, WMT in Waterloo was a prime example. It was a frantic place with bands entering and leaving, copywriters making last minute corrections on ads, the traffic department scheduling the upcoming hour, announcers practicing and, of course, the live show going on in one of the two studios. People either learned to cope with the high pressure environment or they left. Entertainers with fragile egos did not survive. People who did not produce or meet deadlines were fired. It was into this madness that Ralph McElroy arrived in 1935. Not only did he manage to survive, but he thrived on it.

Mac, as he was now known to most people, had two roles at WMT. His primary job was selling advertising but he also did some broadcasting, mostly for a man-on-the-street program but also for special events. Mac had showed up at a relatively good time. The worst of the Depression had passed for Waterloo. Rath Packing had kept most of its 6000 workers on the payroll and was adding new buildings in 1936. The John Deere Tractor Works had nearly closed down in the early 1930s, but by mid-decade the assembly line was operating and the company had a payroll of $6,000,000. Smaller manufacturers like Galloway and Chamberlain were struggling, but at least they were employing some workers. The wholesale trade, which depended in part on the economic strength of small merchants, had experienced a substantial downturn and had not fully recovered. But the retail trade in Waterloo had survived the troubled years quite well and by 1937 onwards was actually robust.

Building permits were up, banks were solvent and loaning money and there was a general confidence on the part of the consumers. This translated into potential sales, but only if the customers were reached. With no other radio station serving the area, WMT had only to compete with the Waterloo Courier for the advertising dollar.

As the economy began to revive, WMT manager Sumner Quarton began to add new salesmen to meet the growing demand for advertising time. Acting on Art Shepard's advice, he hired McElroy who had already developed a reputation at Woolworth for being a persistent and effective salesman. In fact, Mac was the prototype for salesmen. Gregarious, glib, quick with a smile, always ready to banter, Mac always had a response to any situation. He was undaunted by rejection and appreciative of success. His favorite sales tactic was to enter a store with a completed ad agreement, lacking only the customer's signature. A handshake and slap on the back, a quick joke or comment on how busy the store was, a signature and he was gone. For many businessmen Mac's knowledge of their clients and efficient manner made buying advertising one less thing to worry about. There were, of course, those who did not like Mac's style, who found him abrasive, loud and overbearing. A few would not even have him in their stores. But even for Mac, selling advertising was hard work. Often he and Fran Allison would work Fourth Street from Washington to Franklin. A representative selection of the stores reflects the diverse size and type they had to deal with. On the West Side: Hummel Cigar, Marsh Cafe, Enderlein Clothes, Waldens Photos, Loomis Flower Shop, Montgomery Ward, Sears and Roebuck, Cownie Fur Store, and Davidson Furniture. On the East Side: Paramount Theater, JC Penney, Friedl's Cafe, Enzler's Luggage, Cutler's Peoples Store, Walker Shoe Store, Woolworth, Ford Hopkins Drugs, Black's, Sweeney's, Kresge, State Theater, New York Fashion, Fox Shoes, Martin Bros., Black Hawk Grocery, Sherwood Florist, Dotson Clothing, Strand Theater and Miller Motor Company.

In time, Mac developed several large accounts that virtually guaranteed success. Two of the most important were Rath Packing and Altstadt and Langlas Bakery. Mac was able to develop a friendship with R.A. "Rube" Rath who was in charge of sales in the 1930s. Given Rath's importance and stature in the community, the

relationship was not based on the "slap on the back and how are you anyway" technique. Rather he worked with Rath and his sales staff on the best way to market locally the different ham, bacon, lard and dozens of other products produced under the Rath and Black Hawk trade names. Mac was most closely identified with the Altstadt and Langlas Baking Company and its Kleen Maid Bread. It sponsored his long-running "Voice of Iowa" show and Mac did countless remote broadcasts for them in the cities and towns in northeast Iowa. Both companies were owned by local families who were active in civic, cultural and recreational activities.

Many customers would become lifelong friends and financial backers. Bill Bolster, who ran Sweeney's, was the one who provided Mac with a blank ad contract for him to use whenever the sales manager threatened to dump salesmen in the country if they did not produce that day. Others were Bob Young of Young Coal Company, Louis Walker of Walker Shoes, and Harry and Bob Dunkelberg of Cedar Valley Lumber. Again, the common denominator was family owned and operated companies that were active in the community.

By any measure, Mac was very successful. Starting in 1938 he regularly surpassed the magical $100,000 advertising sales plateau. That was a large amount when a time slot could be sold at $2. By 1939 he was earning $5500, a substantial amount when a bottle of Pepsi was a nickel, Rath ham 25 cents/pound, a new suit $19, a refrigerator $140, a new Hudson $704 and a new house $2500.

Mac was also a broadcaster. His primary job was the "Voice of Iowa," a daily interview done on the Black's corner at East Fourth and Sycamore. Starting on October 1st, 1935, it became enormously popular at the 12:05 or 12:20 time slots. Mac, who by now had changed his broadcasting name to Michael, would arrive, usually at the last minute, with someone to handle the remote equipment. He would always be met by a crowd, even in inclement weather. "The most curious man in the world," as he billed himself in the early days, would select several people and engage them in the standard conversation: "Who are you and where are you from? What are you doing in downtown Waterloo? Would you like to say hello to anyone?" After greetings to folks in Frederika or the neighbors on Vermont Street, Mac would ask his question. Unlike most programs that dealt only with personal information, he incorporated his concern for continuing self education. At a time when most

people considered memorization and recall as a measure of intelligence, Mac's focus was on facts and figures. For example:

Q. Is the normal temperature of humans or birds higher?
A: Birds

Q: What parts of the human body sound like electrical attachments?
A: Sockets

Q: Would a spiritualist, diviner, carpenter or bartender be most like to complain: "I cannot find my spirit level."
A: Carpenter

When the person answered, or guessed, correctly, Michael McElroy would respond, "Right as Kleen Maid" and deliver a miniature souvenir loaf of the Altstadt and Langlas product. But even the wrong answers were rewarded with bread, so no one left unhappy. The format represented a motto he had on his business card, one that exemplified his own education:

"Some facts you have to know
To make your daily grind.
But there are facts you ought to know
To broaden out your mind"

The show made Mac's mellow baritone voice one of the most recognized in northeast Iowa. When the show went on the road, there was always a large crowd to greet him. During a publicity campaign in 1941, WMT estimated over 14,200 had been interviewed on the "Voice of Iowa." More impressive was an offer in March 1940 of a free loaf of the souvenir bread and 100 questions to anyone who sent in a request. Over 14,000 loaves were mailed out to Mac's fans, a record for any WMT promotion to that date.

Mac had other broadcast duties. He covered special events such as visiting dignitaries, public meetings and even occasionally accidents and fires. He also did live broadcasts from the golf course during tournaments. As much as the cables would allow, he followed the players, describing the shots and updating scores. There were live remotes from the baseball park during playoffs and cov-

erage at basketball tournament time. But he was always at his best during the broadcasts from the National Dairy Cattle Congress. Microphone in hand, Mac would walk along the line of cars waiting to pass through the main gate. "Who are you and where are you from?" "What is your favorite part of Cattle Congress?" Sometimes his presence slowed the already snail-like pace as people waited to talk with him. A 1940 photograph shows Mac doing his "Voice of Iowa" show in the midst of a sea of people. But whether it was on the street or in the WMT studio in the Flower and Garden Show, visitors flocked to see him. In turn, he relished the personal contact with the public. Whether it was a Rath worker, a school teacher or a Parkersburg farmer, he knew how to relate to common people.

Mac's celebrity status created a demand for him as an after dinner speaker. He was booked for weeks in advance on the banquet circuit. He was particularly fond of speaking to church youth groups, scout meetings and sports clubs. Here he would make a pitch for personal self improvement and education. Often using his own situation as an example, though omitting any reference to his father, he would encourage young people to persevere during hard economic or personal times.

From his arrival in Waterloo in 1935, Mac developed a fondness for the community of Waterloo. Acquaintances at the time remember his statement that Waterloo had given him an opportunity to be a success and, in the tradition of F.W.Woolworth, he intended to repay the favor. He joined several service groups and was actively involved in promoting sports and recreation programs. It can be argued, of course, that such activity was part of the formula for a successful salesman. But most people who knew him recognized his motivation went beyond the contacts and networks such efforts provided. For him, boosterism and civic involvement were repayment for the success he had achieved. It was a philosophy he would follow for the rest of his life.

Boosterism implies enthusiastic public support. Mac used the "Voice of Iowa" to promote the city: "Broadcasting from the sunny side of the street in lovely downtown Waterloo, the heart of northeast Iowa." He would brag about Rath, the largest privately owned packing plant in the nation, or he would extol the beauty of lovely tree-shaded streets, good schools and great shopping. But his real

involvement was at the civic level, helping to build organizations and improve the quality of life. At the same time he also believed one of the responsibilities was criticizing when he saw something wrong. In these early years he found himself in trouble with individuals or groups, and occasionally with his boss, for his outspoken comments. One of his first friends in Waterloo, Don Graham, counseled him on this, but with only marginal success. Graham, part of the family who owned the Black's Department Store, realized Mac's impatience would get him in trouble with the older and more traditional leaders in the community One result was Mac rarely was elected to be president or serve on the boards of the groups he belonged to. Over time he would adopt a policy of working behind the scenes, letting others take the credit but having the satisfaction of being involved. This style was patterned, in part, after R. A. Rath's low-visibility profile. Mac had developed a great amount of admiration for Rath and recognized that one did not always have to receive public recognition for stewardship.

Mac's involvement in baseball was a good example of his contribution and commitment to improving the status and image of the city. In 1935 a group of business leaders led by Rath began an effort to return minor league baseball to Waterloo. The game had been introduced in 1904 by several businessmen to show the city had "come of age." During the 1920s, under the management of Cletus Dixon, Waterloo won several Mississippi Valley League championships and was able to dominate its traditional rival, the Cedar Rapids Bunnies, to the delight of the entire community. The crowds were large and the games entertaining. With the arrival of lights in June 1930, compliments of the leading businessmen, fans continued to attend until the ravages of the Depression caused the locally-owned franchise to close shop in 1932. In March, 1933 most of the stadium was destroyed by fire. As the economy began to improve in the mid-1930s, there was popular support for bringing baseball back. R.A. Rath and Jackson McCoy, Managing Editor of the Waterloo Courier, worked to find investors and in late 1935 sold the idea to a businessman with a team in St. Joseph, Missouri. Meanwhile Mac helped raise money to rebuild the stadium. It was built across the river from the National Dairy Cattle Congress grounds, in clear view of the newly constructed Hippodrome auditorium on that site. After a year of independent status, the franchise was purchased by the Cincinnati Reds in 1937. One of the first

players assigned to Waterloo was a future major leaguer, Harry "Tex" Craft.

The ballpark provided examples of Mac's effectiveness and combativeness. He served as the public address announcer from 1937 to 1942. During a game in 1941 with Evansville, a Bee player hit a Waterloo player with a pitch. Tensions ran high as the second game of the doubleheader started and local fans seemed ready to jump the fence and fight. Mac convinced the Evansville manager to write an apology which Mac read on the public address system so convincingly that the fans erupted in cheers and the game went on. But Mac was not always victorious. One season the third base hecklers were riding the hometown players, mired in a terrible slump, particularly hard. Mac admonished them to practice a bit more charity, upon which they turned on him. For several games he returned their jeers with barbs of his own over the PA. But they were able to overwhelm him with numbers and he tossed in the towel, unable to reform the Waterloo fans whose reputation for meanness continued untarnished.

Mac also did sales and promotional work for the team. In 1940, the franchise was sold to the Chicago White Sox and the quality of baseball improved. Mac organized an annual banquet in November to sell season tickets for the upcoming year. Sales were good and the attendance broke a record in 1941. One of the reasons for success was the work of the General Manager, Joe L. Brown. He brought his father, famous comedian Joe E. Brown, to the ballpark for a promotional night. Mac and Joe E. traded wisecracks in an onfield interview and for once, Mac was thoroughly upstaged.

Ed Moore, longtime Courier sportswriter and himself actively involved in keeping baseball in the city, wrote the following about Mac as he left for the Army in 1942:

> "We'll miss the guy because he is a swell friend and because his voice was virtually standard equipment at a sporting event. He's unpredictable as all get out but he's the kind of guy that would give you the shirt off his back, asking no questions, and defend a friend to the last chord of his vibrant voice even tho feeling that his friend was wrong and far off the beam. The Army is getting a lot better than an average recruit."

High praise from a caustic sportswriter who once refused to write

an account of a poorly played game because his language could not be printed in a family newspaper.

Mac was involved in many service groups over the years. One of the first he joined was the Jaycees. There he worked with Don Graham and quickly learned the lessons of the East Side versus the West Side. Waterloo was divided into two distinct shopping districts by the Cedar River and there was a long and intense rivalry between the two. Mac was considered too favorable to the West Side by several large merchants across the river. For that they denied him the honor of becoming an officer or director.

Business and civic life occupied much of Mac's life, but there was also a very personal side. From the time he arrived in Waterloo he found a comfort zone, one in which he could enjoy himself. But he lived so much of his life in public and was so well known, and often controversial, that he was often caught up in the swirl of gossip and rumors. Later, when people would recall his life, often it would be for some outrageous action that had been the topic of discussion for days. For many, an outrageous story about Mac, whether true or not, was likely to be believed. Soon a reputation had evolved and, since Mac did little to discourage it, the image grew until the reality was compromised by the myth.

The two characteristics that most people remembered were his drinking habits and his love for food. There is no memory of when he began to consume alcohol in substantial quantities. However, given the alcoholism of his maternal grandfather and probably of his father, he was certainly predisposed to falling prey to drink. How much and how often are unknown. By the late 1930s he had developed a favorite, one that would stay with him for most of his life. He drank a whiskey called Old Guckenheimer. Sold in a fancy bottle with a blue ribbon, by all accounts it was one of the worst whiskies on the market. Indeed, when he offered people something to drink, he would purposefully serve a quality liquor. But he developed a taste and perhaps a tolerance for Old Guckenheimer.

Food provided a special enjoyment for Mac. He enjoyed good beef and could consume a double sirloin or an entire roast, complete with sides, after a long day of work. Nearly all his meals were eaten out. During the day he ate at nearby Friedl's Coffee Shop or in the little cafe in the Russell Lamson; on the East Side it would be Entz Cafe or perhaps the Bishop Cafeteria.While young and active,

he managed to keep his weight constant. However, by age 32 he was becoming stout, even heavy. His nearly 5′ 10″ had a difficult time absorbing his 191 pounds, and much of it had gathered at his waist.

Drinking and eating were often associated with a nightlife that Mac soon came to find routine. Often the day would not end until 8 o'clock at night and the sales and broadcasting staff would then head out for dinner and drinks. Waterloo was an exciting town in the late 1930s. There were many good dining places and most served setups to accommodate drinkers since direct alcohol sales were illegal. Bottles could be brought in and served with the mixes. A bottle in a brown sack on a table was typical at most spots. Mac became particularly fond of the Colony Club and the Chesterfield Club. He enjoyed listening to the music (but he was not an avid dancer) at the Tavern-on-the-Green at Electric Park and the night could be ended, or more precisely the morning greeted, at Spider Kurth Gardens on Saxon. Apparently it was not unusual for Mac to make the rounds at all these places. Yet he was able to be at work by nine the next day without any serious side effects from the night's activities.

There were also women in Mac's life. When his family visited Minneapolis in 1934, there was a serious girlfriend in the picture. In Waterloo there were a series of girlfriends with several relationships becoming quite intense. But none would result in marriage until 1956. There is only speculation as to the reason. Perhaps he enjoyed the freedom of playing the field. Or he feared marriage might interfere with his career. Or, maybe he too vividly remembered the agony of his parents' separation and did not want to experience that. For whatever the reason, he maintained his bachelor status. But he was seldom without female companionship. His handsome looks, Chicago tailored suits and expensive shoes (Don Graham got him to give up the spats) and his charming personality made him an attractive companion. There were rumors about indiscretions, but Mac was discrete and able to avoid any scandal that might have arisen out of his personal relationships.

Once Mac's income allowed, he became very attentive to the needs of his mother and younger sister Jeanne. He revered his mother, including this dedication in his book of questions for the "Voice of Iowa": "To my Mother, who has been an ingenious source of information in answering the perplexing questions of my life. . . ."

Fortunately for her and Jeanne, Mac's financial support came at the time she lost her job and James had declined to pay child support. But there was more than gifts of cash. When they visited Mac in 1935 and again in the following year, there were parties in their honor and the mandated visit to Sweeney's to buy a new dress. In 1937 Mac convinced his mother to bring Jeanne to Waterloo to finish high school. He believed the quality of education was superior and he felt there would be more opportunities in Waterloo for Jeanne than in Eau Claire where the effects of the Depression persisted. He rented a house in Highland, an exclusive neighborhood out on Independence Avenue and home to the Rath family. Mac's intent was to have Jeanne be able to socialize with the children of Waterloo elite. While Jeanne enjoyed the area, her mother found it difficult to meet people and did not particularly enjoy her stay.

Mac then decided to build on Forest Avenue in a new West Side subdivision. He was able to manipulate a government housing program to generate enough cash to cover the down payment on several lots. He then convinced his WMT colleagues to build and soon "Radio Row" was created. Mac, Margaret and Jeanne were joined by Howdy Roberts, Lyle Harvey, Don Inman and Jack Comfort from the station as well as his friends Don and Lorraine Graham. The little community was much more congenial for his mother. It was also Mac's first real investment. The completed house, finished in 1938, cost $4850 and had monthly loan payments of about $40. He furnished it lavishly including entirely new bedroom furniture for Jeanne. They entertained, as a family, and Margaret became active in local Baptist Church activities. But when, later in the year, Jeanne went off to Lindenwood, a women's college in St. Louis, Margaret decided to return to Eau Claire. She lived with Eileen who needed her for emotional support after having gone through a recent divorce. Mac continued to provide support and talked with her weekly by phone. Margaret was always proud of Mac's success and appreciative of his support, but she maintained her frugal habits. At the time of her death in 1957 Mac found $500 in her special coin purse pocket, saved in case Mac might again need some help. He learned of her death while en route to Chicago. He caught a train back to Waterloo, stopped at Sweeney's to buy a new dress and went back to Eau Claire to bury his mother. His father did not attend the funeral.

The six and one-half years in Waterloo had been good, even exhilarating, ones for Mac. He was a professional and financial success. He was respected by many leaders in the community and had developed some close friendships. His public service was recognized and acknowledged. He had taken care of family responsibilities. He was in control and enjoying life. But just when things appeared to be ideal, the war intervened and his next four years would be in sharp contrast to his situation in December, 1941.

CHAPTER THREE

The War Years, 1942-45

The war years brought both frustration and maturity for Ralph McElroy. He quickly learned that his civilian success could not be translated into immediate military status. Yet, over time, he proved to be an efficient non-commissioned officer, one who related well with the troops. This was done at the same time he developed a strong antipathy toward his superior officers. As the pace of the war slowed towards the end of 1945, Mac had an opportunity to reflect on life and its meaning.

For Mac, the arrival of World War II disrupted a successful career. He was already 31 when the nation went to war in December, 1941. In the draft lottery he received a low draw but his dependent mother mitigated an early call for induction. Mac was willing to enlist, but only on his terms, that he receive a commission as an officer. As Warren Mead quoted him: "Any man who can make $5000 a year at my age deserves a commission." It was simply a matter of being rewarded for his personal and financial success. Clearly he did not understand the principles of Army logic and rules. But most of 1942 was spent trying to convince the Army and Navy they were wrong in denying him officer status. He was supported in this effort by his boss, Sumner Quarton, who was desperate to hold as much of his staff as long as he could. If Mac could get a commission as a publicity officer in the region, or better, in Iowa, he would still be able to utilize some of his skills. Top-notch salesmen and popular on air personalities were hard to replace.

With typical self confidence, Mac enthusiastically applied in early 1942 to the Recruiting Publicity Bureau of the United States Army, only to be summarily rejected with a form letter. Recognizing the need for "insider" assistance, he turned to his girlfriend's father, Clifford Niles of Anamosa. Niles was a state senator and political operative who had contacts nationally. In addition to

Mac being a potential son-in-law, the senator had a strong personal affection for Mac. He learned of a public relations position with the U. S. Naval Aviation Pre-flight School located at the University of Iowa. In early April, Niles wrote University President Virgil Hancher that Mac would be ideal for the job: "If it can be sold, Mac can do it." Accompanying support came from several prominent people including Charles McKinstry of the National Bank of Waterloo and the President of the Waterloo Chamber of Commerce. Sumner Quarton, delighted with the prospect of having Mac so close, wrote that the Iowa Broadcasting Company was willing to lose Mac only to the United States Navy. Within two weeks the Acting Commander of the school, John Bloom, recommended Mac to his superiors at the Great Lakes facility near Chicago. It appeared Mac was destined to spend the war in Iowa City recruiting pilots for the war effort and probably broadcasting university athletic events on the side. But the end of April brought an abrupt end to his hopes and the first of several bitter disappointments which he was to blame on insensitive government officials and unrealistic bureaucratic rules. In order to consolidate the appointment of specialists and to remove the selection process from local political influence, control of the Aviation Pre-flight School was transferred to the Bureau of Aeronautics in Washington D.C. Mac's name was dropped from the list of appointments because of defective eyesight. The decision was made by some faceless bureaucrat with no appreciation for the talents of R.J. McElroy. Niles then turned to his national contacts, asking Iowa Congressman Bill Jacobsen to intercede on Mac's behalf with the Undersecretary of the Navy, a "former Clinton boy." But there was no reversal possible and the decision stood.

Undaunted, Niles tried to get a commission in the Naval Reserves, in publicity but without a specific assignment. This time he turned to the Democratic Senator from Iowa, Clyde Herring, asking him to go all the way to the President if necessary. Herring gave his support, though it was unclear how far the request really went. Later Mac would claim it made it to the White House before being denied though there is no proof of that. In the end the rules were again literally interpreted. Mac was ineligible for a position in the Reserves because he did not meet the primary prerequisite, a college degree. All Mac's experience counted for nothing.

Senator Niles did not surrender easily. When a public relations

spot came open at the Naval Air Station in Ottumwa, Niles wrote to a friend of Herring asking him to press the Senator to do more. When action was slow and nothing had been done by October, Niles wrote he was ". . . sick and tired of the buck passing" and wanted to see something done. Finally Mac was considered and again he failed to meet the minimal education criteria. At this point Mac realized not even a Senator could circumvent the rules and he became resigned to the inevitable. In a program radio script, he was quoted as saying by mid-October: "Oh well, Kids, what's the use? I'll just have to wait until they take me." He asked to be moved up on the draft list and in late November he was notified he would be inducted into the Army.

The year was not without its positive side. Mac lent his name and talent to many fundraising activities on behalf of the war effort. He publicly supported the sale of war bonds, contributed to the blood drives and used his radio show to promote other similar activities. Perhaps his most notable appearance was at a Red Cross basketball game. Mac was the master of ceremonies at the presentation of the colors and, as usual, had not had time to prepare a statement. While waiting to be announced, he glanced through a newspaper and read the news about the fall of Corregidor and the capture of a large number of American troops. In an emotional address, he talked about the valor and the need for sacrifice and closed with the statement that the Americans there were now ". . . in the hands of God." The speech was the center of discussion for days thereafter. During the summer, in his capacity as President of the Iowa Golf Association, he organized the state tournament in Waterloo under difficult wartime conditions. He continued working with the baseball team as well, though the season was a financial disaster and the league suspended operations in September. He continued as sales manager at WMT; however, the "Voice of Iowa" was suspended because of wartime regulations which banned curbside broadcasts. It was replaced by a studio show called "The Bureau of Facts and Figures."

Finally, on the 19th of November, 1942 the orders to report for induction were issued. Actually the local draft board inducted Michael, not Ralph, McElroy but the U.S. Army quickly rectified the error. In preparation, he sold the house and all the furnishings. The auction sale bill reflected both his success and his personal interests: two complete bedroom suites, expensive 8 piece Credenza style oak dining room suite, lounge chairs, Oxford universal table top gas

range with oven, 100-lb Coolerator, horse blankets, fruit jars, rubber hip boots, 15 duck decoys. The sale drew a large crowd. With his mother in Eau Claire and sister Jeanne married to George Hughes of Cedar Falls, there was no reason to maintain the house any longer. The day of departure for the Army was December 12th. After a whirlwind of goodbye parties, Mac reported for service to his country. He was placed in charge of the Waterloo contingent enroute to Camp Dodge near Des Moines. On arrival he went through processing, signed over his allotment to his mother and put money aside to buy war bonds.

Although Mac had failed to get his commission, he continued to maneuver to get into a publicity position. On his entry interview, he listed his profession as a writer, someone who wrote and assembled advertising and entertaining materials including radio scripts. Salesman was added at the end. The truth was most scripts were written by the contingency department (copywriters) from barebones outlines Mac provided. But ever the optimist, he continued to plot and plan. However, first there was basic training which he survived remarkably well. He was assigned to a service company of the 409th Infantry at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana near Shreveport in the northern part of the state. The army recognized his organizational ability, giving him the responsibility for the distribution of rations for the entire regiment. By May he was promoted to Private First Class and reassigned as a records clerk. Photos showed a trimmer, less flamboyant McElroy but nonetheless looking confident and assured.

It was difficult for Mac to leave the Waterloo limelight. There were regular updates on his welfare on WMT. Also, for the first months he reported on his condition to Howdy Roberts, his replacement, and to another friend and announcer, Red Rowe. The patriotic, yet blatantly self promotional, epistles were read on the air as part of WMT's contribution to the war effort:

> "I hope you all keep buying Kleen Maid and listening to Howdy and Red so that the program will still be on the air when the war is over and I can come back and spend happy hours with you again. You have a great army, friends, made up of the boys from your home and your friends' homes. Support them in every way you can as they are doing their best to make this world a safe place for good Christian people to live in."

When Mac complained he could not find a collapsible drinking cup, it was mentioned on one of the broadcasts. Listeners from across northeast Iowa sent cups to the radio station to be forwarded to him in Louisiana. Even at a distance he still had the old magical appeal.

Mac did get a brief opportunity to show his talents at Camp Claiborne. In June the camp public relations office organized a radio variety show called "Rhythm Reveille." Mac was selected by competitive audition to be the announcer while fellow Waterloo native, By Gosden, was the emcee. The show, broadcast by an Alexandria station, was a success and continued through the summer. The high point was a visit to the show by MGM star Ruth Hussey in late July. But soon the real world of the army intervened and Mac moved on to other duties.

There was a brief furlough in May during which he visited his mother and then spent several days in Waterloo, complete with another round of parties. On his return to the 409th, he was rewarded for his good work by being promoted directly to Staff Sergeant. Soon he was on maneuvers with the 3rd Army at Camp Howze in Texas, serving as a Battalion Supply Sergeant. He continued to receive high marks for his work, both in the garrison and on the field. He was commended for administrative skills, his ability to take, and give, an order, his courage and exceptional physical stamina. Referred to as "old Mac," he was one of the most popular men in the regiment. Encouraged by such high praise, Mac decided he wanted to again try to obtain a commission, this time through Officer Candidate School. He applied for a slot and was accepted for the class starting in February 1944. The recommendation by his Commanding Officer in the 409th was glowing: "McElroy will be an asset almost without parity in any endeavor he may undertake." After another quick visit to Waterloo in January, but with fewer parties, he reported to Fort Benning, Georgia for OCS.

Something happened at OCS that prevented him from obtaining a commission and, in fact, alienated him towards the officer corps for the rest of his tenure in the army. He spent six weeks in OCS and did well. However, he dropped out of the program shortly before completion. There are no records to indicate the exact reason. His sister remembered him wanting to prove to the Army that he was officer material but not really wanting to make the com-

mitment. One piece of correspondence from one of his officers suggests there was another reason. The early termination had something to do with Mac's unwillingness to accept orders from leaders he believed incompetent. How exactly this evolved is unclear, but it soured his enthusiasm and made him a sharp critic of military leadership.

He returned to the 409th infantry but was unhappy there. He was moved to the 574th Engineer Light Equipment Company as a temporary measure before being reassigned to a new unit, the 762d Engineer Light Equipment Company. This would be his "home" for the duration of the war.

The 762d was activated on August 15th, 1944 at Camp Butner, North Carolina as part of the 1167th Engineer Combat Group. It was then transferred to Fort Jackson near Columbia, South Carolina in December. Mac, by now a 1st Sergeant, was initially in charge of records and administration. The company spent the next six months building an air strip, a dam and pontoon bridge and, somewhat appropriately, a baseball diamond. Mac maintained his reputation as being popular with the enlisted men. After a brutal session of basic training, he welcomed them back with beer. Again, after the dam had been built, he entertained them with a party on the site, only to be repaid by being tossed into the lake. He was also known as a sergeant who could manipulate the system, deviously if necessary, to get what he wanted.

The company knew they would be assigned to overseas service. When Germany surrendered in early May, it became obvious they would soon be shipping out to the Pacific Theater. Mac, recognizing overseas duty would extend his service indefinitely, tried to obtain an early discharge. He reported aches and pains in the left shoulder and chronic headaches, both conditions being at least 12 months old. The doctor's report noted his condition seemed to be aggravated by exertion, fatigue and slight alcoholic excesses. A complete physical found nothing organically wrong and Mac was informed he remained capable of serving. He then tried to use external pressure to gain his release. Sumner Quarton's brother, Bill, now in charge of WMT, wired his commander that Mac was needed on the radio to continue the war effort. Another former associate, Don Inman, now at WNAX, a Cowles station in Yankton, South Dakota, cited the many hours his station had given to promoting the war and that McElroy was needed to help support the war as well as

prepare for the rehabilitation of soldiers. Inman even got the Senator from South Dakota, Chan Guerney, to support Mac's release. But the Army was no more impressed with these pleas than it had been with his efforts to obtain a commission and on June 28th, the request for discharge was disapproved. Or, as the 762d company historian noted, all his applications "bounced back."

No sooner had Mac's appeal been denied than the company shipped out for the West Coast and points beyond. After a long train ride, inaugurated with a bottle of whiskey, Seattle was reached and they boarded the *USS Fergus* in early July. Mac was the first to stride aboard, ready to see the world and have an adventure. The ship departed on July 8th for Okinawa by way of the Marshall Islands. It was a quiet ride, one full of leisure activities such as cards, craps, conversation, sunbathing and letter writing. Mac's letters were secretly mailed out rather than submitted to the censor, an infraction by the book and one which Mac put a soldier on KP for violating. When the need for laundry facilities became evident, Mac started an unofficial one that yielded some extra spending money. The ship arrived at Okinawa on August 12th, only a month after the capture of the island and a few days after the Japanese surrender to end the war. Their status immediately became one of an occupation force rather than an invasionary army. And with the war over, Mac's hopes for release were revived.

The trip across the country and the Pacific provided Mac with time to reflect, perhaps the only extended period in his life when he had no immediate goals or deadlines. He grew a mustache, which turned out to be red, a sharp contrast to his blue eyes and slightly greying hair. He also wrote home to Jane Niles and his friends. The letters provide, if only for a brief moment, an insight into his views on the war and politics, commanders and life. Like many soldiers, Mac was concerned about the impact of the war on the future cooperation of world powers. Would the victory won at great sacrifice be lost in the celebration of victory and return to normal? He wrote:

> "Now that the war is over and common cause that unites men and women and gives them inspiration to work together is gone, are they going back to their respective little worlds and pursuing again their objectives or are they filled with the collective spirit that carried them through this crisis? Are they

pledged to supporting the international plan to eliminate war with their financial and moral aid or has the gas rationing being lifted changed the focus from the graves on this hillside of Okinawa to the green valleys and pleasant recreation areas of their own localities?"

Mac's growing antipathy towards the officer corps extended all the way to the highest ranks. In placing blame for Pearl Harbor, leaders should be held accountable:

"I would relieve Kimmel and Short [in charge of Pearl Harbor's defense] completely and put the blame where it belongs. . . at the top. We in Iowa knew that an attack was evident and were aroused, why, then, didn't the men in possession of documents that contained information . . . take action to protect our men and property. I think they should court martial the whole gang. It is the beginning of the end when those at the top are allowed to "arrange" their errors . . . . They have been willing to court martial the GI for little or no reason, why not take a bit of their own medicine."

The brief visits to idyllic Pacific islands contrasted sharply with the violence the war had brought to the area. For a moment the tranquility of a sunset aroused a sense of inner peace and hope for a rough old sergeant:

"Saw the sun set on the water last night and it was a thing of beauty. A group of clouds shaped like trees sat in a row on the horizon. Like a row on a lane.

A lane that one would like to travel about the time of night—twilight. The sun was setting behind them and they caught and reflected the rays, changing colors, transfiguring themselves into an exhilarating sight. As I watched, dreaming of other lanes and other sunsets, the view faded and it was night.

Soon, however, the moon came around the boat and cast a gleaming, shimmering path before it on the water. The skies were studded with stars making a complete breathtaking sight. Tis hard to think of war at a time like this and one wonders why man doesn't make a greater effort to live in peace with God and nature."

There were other commentaries dealing with issues of the day. He could not understand why American workers were striking. And if they had reasons to complain, why should not American soldiers strike as well, given their terrible conditions? Contact with black soldiers tested his sense of racial equality, though he did not elaborate on the reasons. And there was his continual strong dislike for incompetent officers whose excesses resulted in ". . . expensive, decadent, worthless units." Whatever had happened at OCS certainly remained a thorn in his flesh. There was also a quiet sense of satisfaction in his letters. He had been ordered to do a job and he had done it very well. Despite the frustrations of the war, he recognized he had been as successful in the military as he had been in civilian life.

Even though the war was over, Mac still had to await his discharge. This was arranged by age and length of service and he carefully measured the progress of those with birthdays higher than his. His last weeks in Okinawa were memorable. There were two typhoons, an unhappy company with a new commanding officer that put Mac in the middle of trouble, and a bed visit by a large grey rat. Finally in late November, just as his unit was packing for an assignment in Korea, orders arrived for his shipment home. After more waiting for a ship that did not arrive, he departed on December 2nd via the *USS Ormsby*. It arrived in Portland on December 20th. There was a mad race across the country by private conveyance (Mac no longer trusted military transportation) to get to Eau Claire on Christmas Day. He was mustered out at Fort Sheridan in Illinois on January 18, 1946.

During his thirty seven months in the Army, Mac's life seemed to parallel his earlier civilian life, especially after reaching the rank of 1st Sergeant. The 762d company historian's last entry for him captured his personal style, regardless of the circumstances:

> "1st Sgt. McElroy was the iron hand of the 762d. He had become an integral part of the unit during his stay as 1st Sgt, which began on his arrival on cadre in August 1944. His final words to the unit were, 'This is my outfit.' Truer words were never spoken, for he gave and took in equal proportion and shared the fortunes of the 762d Engineers. The Editor looks back to many a happy drunk with the genial—off

duty—McElroy, and we may hope to meet him in circumstances that will allow us to see a little more of his innate good nature and a little less of the blazing six stripes."

Years later Mac's friends and employees might have said something very similar in describing their relationship with him.

CHAPTER FOUR

The KWWL Radio Years, 1947-52

The six years, after returning from the service, were critical for Mac. He started his own radio station and managed to survive against strong competition. His tough and austere management style almost proved to be his undoing, however. Eventually he learned to moderate his behavior and to delegate authority. His station, KWWL, was known for its excellent news programs and public interest features. Mac himself continued to be involved in civic betterment. His focus was on improving the Hippodrome and making it a community auditorium. His interest in sports, especially baseball, also continued. The busy work schedule encroached on his personal life, but he remained the charming and popular bachelor he had always been.

The year 1946 was one of transition and uncertainty for recently retired ex-sergeant McElroy. As late as September 1945 he had been unsure of where he would settle or what he would do. But radio and sales were what he knew best and January 1946 found him back at WMT in sales and reviving interest in the "Voice of Iowa." There were also visits to Eau Claire to spend time with his mother, to Eire, Pennsylvania to see Jeanne and her family and several stops in Cleveland to see his girlfriend, Jane Niles, who had taken a job with a newspaper there.

During the year he began to investigate the possibility of starting his own radio station. It was a logical step. From his pre-war years he knew about radio operations and he certainly knew about selling advertising. His wartime experience provided him with management skills. And then there was this desire to be his own boss. His service under unappreciative and incompetent officers had spurred him to launch his own business. Finally, Waterloo had an expanding economy, one which offered new opportunities. John Deere had recently added 1500 workers and was continuing to hire

for its new foundry. Chamberlain was increasing its work force as were several other smaller industries. Rath was experiencing a dramatic jump in profits and continued to provide one in every seven families in the city with a paycheck. Retail sales were up 150% over 1939 activity. Everywhere there was confidence the "boom" would continue.

The problem for Mac was that there were already three stations in the city. WMT was still the established station in the market. But it was being challenged by KXEL, a powerful 50,000 watt clear channel owned by Joe DuMond. A third station, KAYX, was a low power 1000 watt operation with limited hours. Mac discovered through his contacts that WMT was interested in consolidating its activities in the Cedar Rapids facility. As he discussed the situation with his friend, Lyle Harvey, better known by his stage name Joe Doakes, in late 1946, a plan began to emerge. Harvey knew where to locate a 1000 watt transmitter, something to get a station on the air. However, Mac recognized the range would be too limited and the larger advertisers would not buy time in such a small market. He argued it had to be 5000 watts. In the process of making that judgment, the decision to go ahead with the station was also finalized. After months of indecision, he now had a goal and he threw all his energy into the project.

Mac had two major hurdles to cross before the station became a reality. First he had to raise the necessary capital and then he had to get Federal Communications Commission permission in the form of a construction permit. Mac began to do his homework. In discussions with Bill Quarton he determined it would take $50,000 for start up and operating costs until advertising revenues were sufficient to run the station. Mac's resources were limited to the money he saved from the sale of his house and furnishings, approximately $2500. Clearly no bank would provide a loan for the balance on a proposal that was short on property equity and long on personal potential. The solution was to create a corporation and sell shares to capitalize the project. This led to the creation of Black Hawk Broadcasting. The stock issue was organized around Mac's investment and his desire to control 50% of the voting stock. 100 shares of common voting stock were issued at $50 par with Mac purchasing 50 shares. There were 900 preferred non-voting shares issued at the same $50 par. These would receive dividends. An additional 100 shares of common and 900 shares of preferred were

outstanding. The establishment of the corporation, completed by Glenn Beers, was the easy part; selling the stock was the critical part.

Mac started promoting the idea in late 1946. Overtures were made to friends and potential investors even before the formal solicitation meeting. His pitch was that the city needed a radio station interested in local affairs. WMT clearly had developed a Cedar Rapids focus and KAYX did not have the on air time nor staff to commit to local affairs. That left KXEL and its owner Joe DuMond. A native of nearby Finchford, he had worked in radio in Chicago, developing a folksy country character named Josh Higgins of Finchville. The program had a national audience and had made DuMond both famous and prosperous. He returned to Waterloo in 1942 and started a new radio station which was located on the 4th floor of the Insurance Building at the corner of Franklin and E. 4th Street. Using connections in the industry, he was able to obtain a 50,000 watt clear channel station which could be heard from the East Coast to the Rockies and from the Rio Grande into Canada. This allowed him to attract national advertisers which, in turn, influenced the content of his non-network programming and news. KXEL, part of the ABC network, was more likely to feature regionally generic shows during its local schedule rather than performers known to northeast Iowa. Likewise, the news did not focus only on Waterloo but rather had a broader focus. Finally, because of the network commitments, the station could not easily breakaway to do local stories or cover emergencies. It was not that KXEL ignored the area. It broadcast East-West football games, had a contract to cover the Waterloo White Hawks in the Three-I baseball league and cooperated with Iowa State Teachers College on a radio education extension course. But there was the perception on the part of many community leaders that DuMond was not as aggressive as he could be in promoting Waterloo. This was exacerbated by his haughty and sometimes arrogant personality. The combination of these factors allowed Mac the opportunity to recruit support based on civic pride and growth.

There were many people who responded positively to this sales pitch. In the years immediately following the war, an informal group of younger business and professional men began to meet to discuss the future of the city. Many came out of the Jaycees movement which tended to be move involved and energetic than the

staid and traditional Chamber of Commerce. Others were new to the community and anxious to become integrated into its activities. There was no announced agenda but there were some general policies the group wanted to implement. One was to reorganize the form of city government. They favored the council-manager system which was believed to be more efficient and reduced the power of the mayor. The group wanted to create commissions to investigate how the city might better deliver its services and make itself more appealing to potential investors. For most, there was a desire to improve relations between the business and management sector and the growing influence of the labor unions. A national strike of the meat packing industry in 1946 by the Packinghouse Workers had shut down Rath for a month and left 4200 workers without a paycheck, plus all those households whose income came indirectly from Rath. Other interests included lobbying the state and federal governments to upgrade the highways that linked Waterloo with Dubuque, Cedar Rapids and Des Moines.

The progressives were able to achieve some success. They replaced the five term incumbent mayor in 1946 but failed in the vote for council-manager reform. A commission was established in 1947 to look into all aspects of city government and recommend changes and future policy direction. A subsequent commission worked to implement these ideas. They were able, for a time, to forge better relations with union leaders but much of that success disintegrated in the Rath strike of 1948. They were not very successful in improving highway linkages with the region or beyond due to the tight-fisted policies of one of their own, Congressman H.R. Gross.

Certainly not all those involved in these efforts invested in Mac's project or even looked favorably on it. There were those who still found Mac too abrasive and aggressive; some had already invested in KXEL while others did not think another radio station was a good investment. But the group did provide a pool of possible investors. In January, 1947 Mac invited many of them to a meeting of potential stockholders to sell the idea as well as the shares. That meeting, along with the television franchise battle, would become one of the defining events of his life.

The meeting was held at the Russell Lamson Hotel. In attendance were 30-40 prominent leaders in the community. Mac had a prepared statement ready. His sister Jeanne had come out from

Pennsylvania to help write the speech, making sure there were no embarrassing grammatical errors that might detract from the presentation. No written account was kept but those in attendance remember Mac being at his salesman best. His appeal for a radio station that would meet the needs of Waterloo appealed to many in the progressive group. In the discussion that followed those who had already committed to the project, like Bill Bolster, Don Graham and Glenn Beers, helped swing most of the rest to invest. The offering was nearly fully subscribed (a few backed out after talking with DuMond) with the largest investor, after Mac, being his friend Les Hartman who would become the station's musical director. Bill Bolster of Sweeney's was also a major investor. Many, like Bob and John Young, the Dunkelbergs, Harry Walden and Burton Fields, had been customers of Mac in the past and had confidence in him. All, except Cedar Falls banker Vivian Johnson and Jeanne's in-laws, the Hughes family, were from Waterloo. Most were either in the professions or in business and nearly all, if not all, were Republican. An estimated average age would be around 40. The presence of Rueben Rath and A.D. Donnell of the Rath family and Jackson McCoy from the Courier provided a great deal of credibility. McCoy, when asked why three members of the Courier, the opposition media, were investing, reportedly quipped: "We want to keep track of the competition." While the names would change somewhat over the next 18 years, most would remain supportive of the effort even though, during this early period, there was little financial return on their investment. In fact, most considered their return would be improved broadcasting service to the community.

The application for the license went equally as smoothly. Mac first hired a local lawyer, Robert Buckmaster, to represent the corporation. A native of Dunkerton, Buckmaster had been an attorney in Waterloo since 1938. After military service in both the Army and Marines during WWII, he was again practicing law as a partner in Harris, Van Metre and Buckmaster. About the same age as Mac, they would become close friends as well as business associates. Their common love of hunting and fishing also drew them together. Buckmaster, through his Amvet connections, learned of a Washington D.C. law firm that specialized in communications. After the two men visited the firm, Black Hawk Broadcasting hired Colonel William Roberts of Roberts and McInnis to represent them before the FCC. Within less than 5 months the construction permit

was issued to station KWWL to operate on frequency 1320, initially at 1000 watts during the day only. Mac accepted this lower power level in order to get on the air as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, he also applied for frequency 1330 at 5000 watts which was allotted and would be available when KWWL had the transmitter capacity.

Once the money was raised and the license was in hand, Mac began preparations to go on the air. One of the first things he did was wire Harvey, who was on the road with his band, to return to help with the organization. Meanwhile the station began to acquire space and equipment. WMT officials had notified Mac in March that they would be leaving Waterloo and were willing to lease their studios to him. The Quartons preferred dealing with someone they knew and trusted rather than have yet another station step into the market. Some $12,000 was spent on a used transmitter, a tower and equipment from Collins Radio Company in Cedar Rapids. Land was broken in September near Evansdale for a 187 foot tower. With only a skeleton staff, KWWL made its first broadcast on November 4, 1947.

The day was full of pomp and pageantry as well as some comedy. Mac and Harvey jointly threw the switch to launch Mac's dreams. Mac then spoke about the origins of the station:

> "KWWL is owned by thirty-one civic minded and public spirited citizens of Waterloo and Cedar Falls. It is their desire that I dedicate this station to the service of all those within hearing of its voice to a better way of life. . . through enlightenment. It is only because we live in a free country that we are able to keep that freedom alive. KWWL pledges to serve its listeners by presenting all sides of all issues at all times.
>
> One of the precepts of freedom is the right to worship God as we see fit. As we face the future we turn to God for inspiration and guidance. We invite you to join with us as Reverend Buck leads us in a word of prayer."

And then, a final comment which reflected his own feelings:

> "It takes more than tubes, wires etc to make a radio station. It takes emotion, laughter, love, dreams, ideas; it takes people."

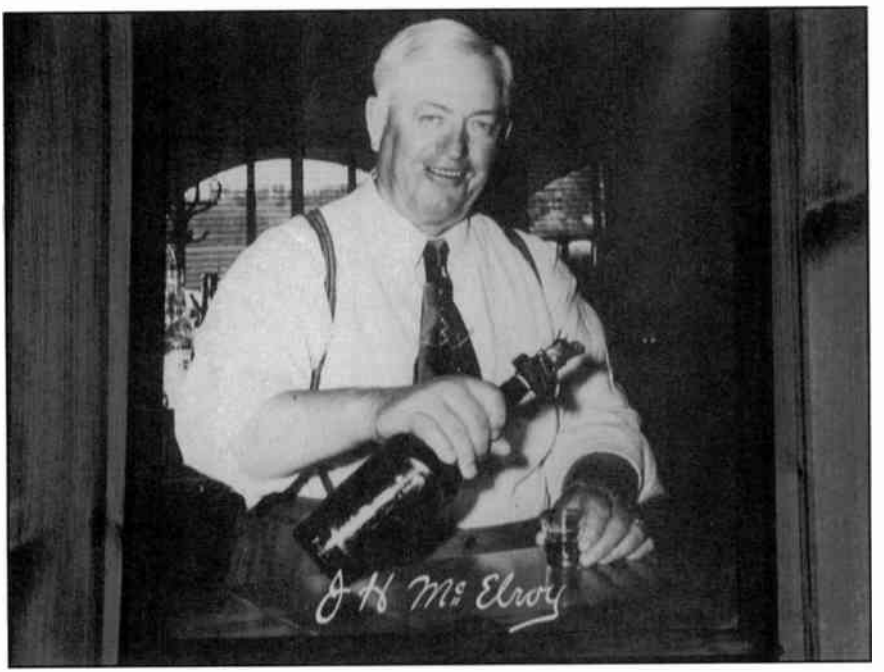
Later the Mayor of Waterloo, Robert Buckmaster, who was also a stockholder and legal counsel for the station, spoke eloquently about the value of KWWL to the region. Others who stepped before the microphone were State Representative Arch McFarlane, Mayor of Cedar Falls John Latta, and representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, the Ministerial Association, the Waterloo White Hawks Baseball Club, Commander of the Amvets, General Secretary of the YMCA, Superintendent of Schools and the President of the Jaycees. All this was designed to show KWWL was dedicated to supporting local organizations. The day was not without its problems. When the announced speaker for 3 o'clock, Governor Blue speaking from Des Moines by transcription, did not happen, Margaret Dravis, who accompanied vocalists on the organ, was told to play a short interlude. Instead she played for nearly 30 minutes, constantly looking for the sign that the next speaker was finally ready.

Once broadcasting had started, Mac continued to assemble his staff. Here his comment about emotion, dreams and people came into sharp contrast. Mac believed in his dream and he assumed those who worked for him should feel the same. But while he was willing to work 10 hours a day, seven days a week to realize his goal, his employees were never as committed to the dream, in part because he never paid them fully for the time they gave. While he himself drew only a modest salary from the company, it was definitely more than the $15 per week he paid to some. Even he could not sell the idea that it was a privilege to work in broadcasting and that the popularity and experience were adequate compensations. Workers had families, bills and personal lives to contend with. Mac either never fully understood this or refused to accept it.

Mac also had great difficulty developing a rapport with his staff. "Bulldog" was a common term used to describe his behavior. He remained the 1st Sergeant; authoritarian, loud, demanding and unforgiving. He tended to push people as hard as they could be pushed, then would let up for a time, only to begin the process over again. For some it meant achieving their very best work, but for most, who had a life outside the studio, it meant additional family and personal pressures. In a short biography of his boss, Warren Mead described Mac's managerial mistakes. Even in summary form, they are substantial. Mac was known to hire two persons for the same job, telling them one would be let go after a trial period. He manipulated salaries and timesheets to avoid paying overtime.

Margaret Bovaird McElroy

Ralph and Jeanne McElroy



James H. McElroy

Eileen, Ralph, Jeanne and George Hughes
Patty, Margaret, Leslie, Michael

Margaret, Ralph and Betty on their wedding day.

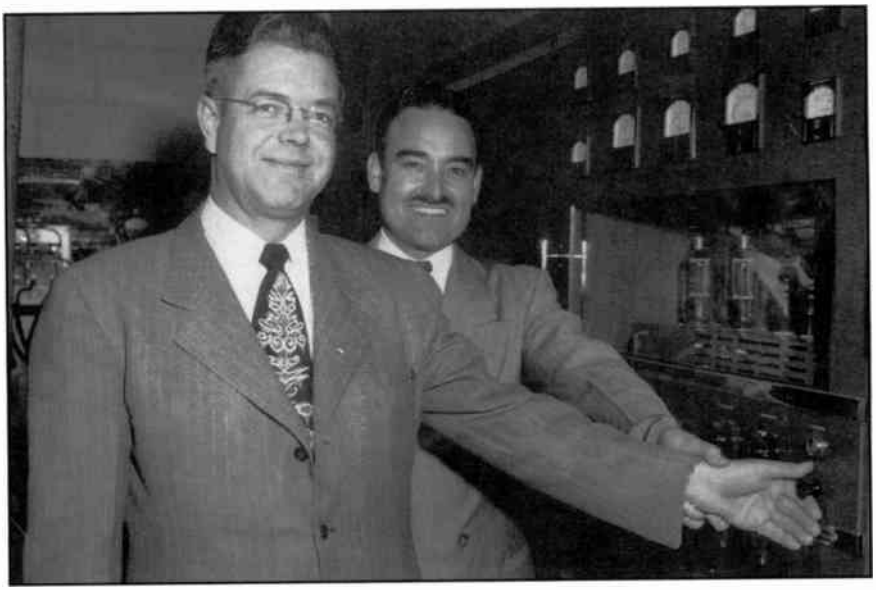
"Voice of Iowa" for WMT radio.

Joe E. Brown at the baseball park.

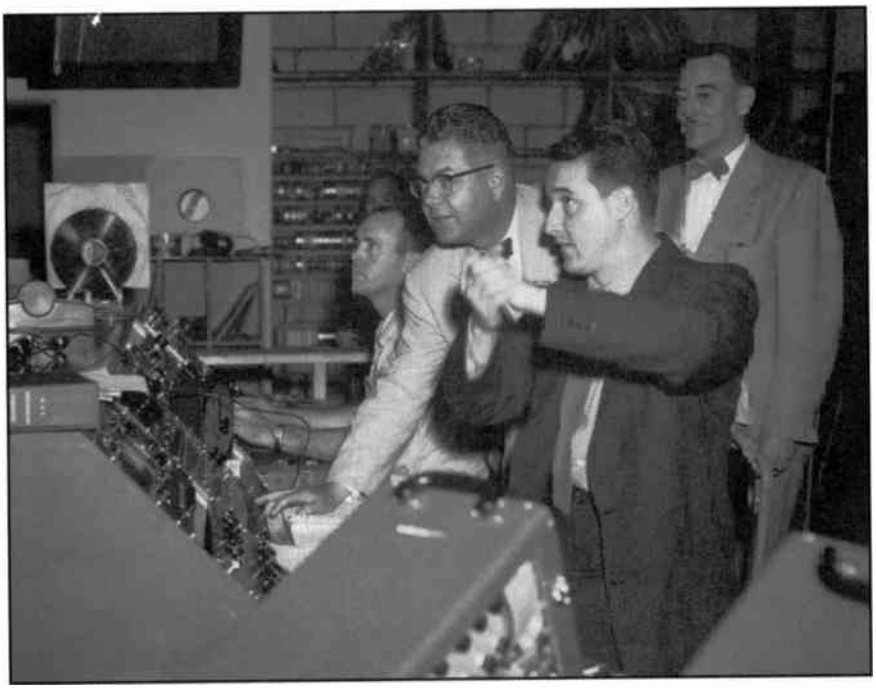
MC at Sports of Sorts honoring Nile Kinnick.

Announcer at Camp Claiborne variety show.

Home on leave with Lyle Harvey and friends.



Throwing the switch with Lyle Harvey to start KWWL radio, 1947.



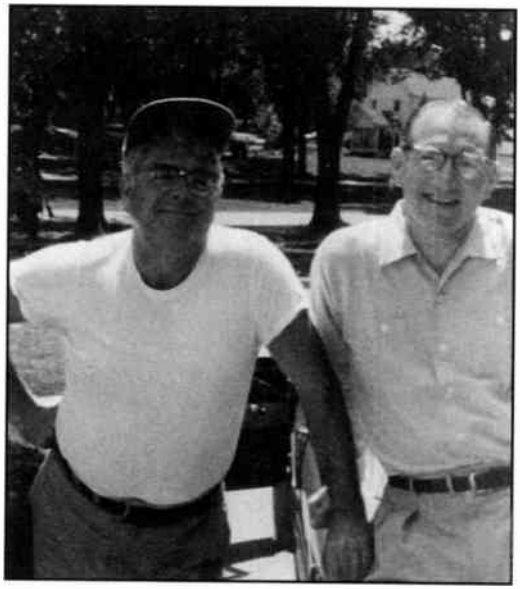
Throwing the switch to connect with NBC network with Tex Kirksey (front) and Don Inman (rear), 1955.

Mac as "Voice of Northeast Iowa".

Mac interviewing on Black's corner.

Mac, Robert Buckmaster and Colonel Roberts (left).

Mac, Betty and Ita Young meet Dan Blocker of Bonanza *at NBC affiliates convention.*



Mac and Bob Young.

Fishing with Tommy.

McElroy Trust Board, 1986. (front) Robert A. Young, Robert Buckmaster and Harry Slife. (back) Rick Young, Linda Klinger (Executive Director), Jim Waterbury, Dorothy Drilling (Administrative Assistant), Raleigh Buckmaster.

McElroy Trust Board, 1994. Jim Waterbury, Ross Christensen, Rick Young, Raleigh Buckmaster and Linda Klinger.

Neil Deaton of the Smithsonian Institution with McElroy Board at University of Northern Iowa Museum, 1987.

McElroy Scholars at Wartburg College, 1995.

Gold Star Teachers Award winners, 1995.

Village Initiative wins J.C. Penney Golden Rule Award, 1996.

Creatvie Arts Therapy for special needs students at John Cline Elementary School in Decorah.

Center City Strings, 1997.

He established a bonus system that kept salaries low while entrapping workers to stay on the job to receive the incentive. When business slowed at the end of the year, he would maintain only the most essential employees and fire the rest, often serving notice just before Christmas. At the same time he would advertise for the same position with the new person joining the staff in early March when the business climate improved. The revolving door got so bad that the staff kept a count of the number of persons fired in the control room. For every person dismissed a paper clip was added to an already long chain. Mac never figured out what it meant. His secretary prided herself on at least meeting every employee until one day she was gone for the morning and missed someone who lasted only an hour! In addition to these tactics, he could be verbally abusive and offensive. It took months for his secretary, who eventually stayed eleven years, to adjust. Even then she would become so upset that she would submit her resignation. Mac would not accept it, tone down his language and ease up on the pressure and things would be back to normal for a time. After a time it became a standing joke as to which previous resignation letter she wanted to submit for her most recent effort at leaving.

Mac could be charming and generous. When business was good and deadlines were being met, Mac was congenial and even complimentary. Or better yet, he was gone, off to the golf course. After hours he was known to pay for dinner or extend other considerations. But this side of him affected only the few who frequented the same spots as he did; for most the image of the bulldog remained.

The most notable casualties of Mac's temperament were Lyle Harvey and Les Hartman. Both had been good friends with Mac and had helped get the station started. Both left over disagreements on how KWWL should be run. And both sold off their stock, with much of it being purchased by Robert Buckmaster. Even the most durable staff, like Ed Falk and Clare Rampton, did not last forever.

It took Mac several years to realize that saving a few dollars by continually rotating staff was actually costing him listeners and ad revenue. Both WMT and KXEL emphasized in their promotions that their announcers and on air personalities were established performers. Familiarity kept listeners. It was not until television that Mac accepted the fact that he had to pay good money to keep good

people around which, in turn, helped with ratings. Having a different newscaster or weatherman every month was disconcerting to the viewing and listening public.

There was considerable speculation as to why Mac drove his people so hard. Some believed it was pure greed, an attempt to maximize profits. Others found in Mac a desire to dominate, to be able to make everyone jump at his command. Later, others would see it as compensation for his sense of insecurity. While all were partially responsible for his behavior, the most satisfactory explanation is his vision of having a successful station. For him, the dream was more important than the people.

The programming department was better served than the personnel department. Initially Lyle Harvey was in charge and the challenge was of staggering proportions. It took several months before KWWL became affiliated with the Mutual Network and was then able to draw on its lineup of shows. In the interim Harvey had to occupy 9 hours and 30 minutes of air time, nearly all of it originating live in the studio. The strength of the station was the news, designed to meet local interests. The news director was Ed Falk who came on a promise of a job from California. He was on the air at 7:30, 9:50, 12:30 and 4:15. During the intervals he was expected to go out on interviews, collect news off the teletype and write feature stories. Despite the demanding schedule, Falk established KWWL as a leader in the field. Sports were also emphasized. Al Laval covered area and national sports twice a day and then doubled on the news twice more. Again, local sports were always covered. Feature spots included a movie news segment from Gene Loffler; the "Strong Points for the Weaker Sex," a general interest program for women with Joan Cole; Dick Nehlson's guide to dining, dancing and other entertainment; and Erma Brown with her "Brown's Opera House," reminiscences and recordings of people who had played the grand old building on the corner of W. 3rd and Commercial. Mac continued his man-on-the-street program, now the "Voice of Northeast Iowa" in deference to KWWL's limited range. He also did special interviews with visiting dignitaries like Gloria Swanson and general interest issues such as talking with Russell Lamson on the development of Russell Heights subdivision. There was an emphasis on public service programming. Best known was Ed Falk's "School of the Air" which featured Waterloo area schools broadcasting special presentations from the classroom

or the studio. It was a innovative concept, one that won national acclaim. Another popular show was "Dollars for Scholars," raising funds for projects in the public schools. And there was music, lots of music, some via transcription and some live. Les Hartman and Joe Doakes were weekday regulars with weekend slots filled by the likes of George Timm from the Cedar Falls Accordion House. The Sunday lineup played to the religious theme, including services from the Burton Avenue Baptist Church along with 2 hours of devotional meditations. Sunday features were the "Salute to Farmers" and news from the Cedar Falls studio, appropriately called "Postmarked from Cedar Falls." Ed Falk only had to do the news twice on Sundays!

Program scheduling improved by 1950. KWWL had contracts with the Mutual Network for general programming and with the Liberty Network for sports. During the baseball season, afternoons were the domain of the Chicago White Sox, parent club of the local minor league team. To make the game fit the tight schedule, the games were sometimes delayed. This meant recording and then playing the game when convenient. If the announcer was not diligent, the wrong tape might be played, leaving the fan to wonder what happened to the third and fourth innings. There was also coverage of the University of Iowa and Iowa State Teachers' College football. Mac would personally cover the game from the sidelines and send it back via the telephone to the studio. With the arrival of more sports, there was less local entertainment. But there was still a demand for the likes of Whoopy John and his polka band or "Shopping Basket," live remotes from grocery stores in neighboring towns.

After three years of managing the station and supervising sales by himself, Mac realized he needed help. The need to improve staff and personnel relations plus the desire to increase sales prompted Mac to hire several persons to whom he delegated some authority. The result was improved working conditions and increased sales. The first person to fill this category was Warren Mead. A tall, quiet, well-educated man with a dour sense of humor, he was a sharp contrast to Mac. Over the years they would establish a good working relationship, though not necessarily a harmonious one. Mead learned how to tolerate his boss and Mac, in time, came to respect and trust him. In fact, Mac was somewhat intimidated by Mead's educational accomplishments and his professorial demeanor.

Mead's primary job was programming but he also became the person who handled FCC correspondence and completed the burdensome governmental forms. Working with Falk and sports reporter, Clare Rampton, Mead continued to expand KWWL's public service involvement in the community.

Mac also brought in help with marketing and with sales. He hired a grocery retailer, Virgil Clark, to do the merchandising. Clark was responsible for arranging promotions that would feature KWWL customers' products. He and the announcers prowled the grocery stores giving away free baskets of food. They passed out Rath wieners at football games. They pumped gas to promote D-X Sunray and milked cows for the Hubbard Feed Company. No gimmick was too embarrassing if it generated publicity and increased sales. It was also in 1951 that Mac convinced an old friend, and his former boss, Don Inman, to take over the sales department. It was a successful move, though sometimes a difficult one given the reversal of relationships. Inman continued to struggle with salesmen turnover. For most, the low salary meant the station became a temporary stop, a training ground for experience. But he was able to increase the sales volume and bring on new advertisers.

By 1952 KWWL radio could be considered a success. It had survived the difficult startup years, had developed an audience and played an important role in the community. There are no financial reports for Black Hawk Broadcasting for the 1947-52 period, but it is generally thought the station was at the break even point. Despite the negative aspects, Mac's frugality had its benefits. But no one can remember dividends being paid to stockholders during this time. KWWL still was third in the race with WMT and KXEL but was increasingly competitive, especially in Waterloo proper. The station's commitment to public affairs was one reason. People turned to 1330 for the local news, when there was an emergency or for school and business snow closings. Visiting dignitaries and politicians could always be heard on KWWL. For many, it was Waterloo's station. But just at the time when conditions had stabilized, competition from television arrived. It was Mac's good fortune to have a healthy and reputable station in place at this transition time.

The years between 1946 and 1952 were particularly busy ones for Mac and he had less time for civic involvement compared to the

years before the war. He remained involved but was more selective in the projects he supported. Sporting activities continued to be of interest. Mac had never competed in athletics and yet believed they were an important part of a city's personality. That was especially true in a blue collar town like Waterloo. Working people needed a place to enjoy themselves. But equally important, when they supported the White Hawks or another local team, they became more tied to the community; it gave them a sense of pride and association. In his years at the baseball park he observed that baseball developed city loyalty and identity, even among the third base hecklers. Mac was not longer directly with the team, but he did help sell season tickets and promote the team, even though KXEL did the play by play of the games. He was part of the Waterloo Fan Association formed in 1951 by Spider Kurth. He also emceed the annual Rath banquet for the members of the Chicago White Sox management and team which was held in Waterloo. This promotion, with speakers like Ty Cobb, raised funds to maintain Municipal Stadium and show appreciation to Comiskey family, owners of the White Sox. Tom Rigney, a son-in-law of Charles Comiskey, had his office down the hallway from Mac. That meant good tickets for a ball game when Mac went into Chicago on business.

Mac helped behind the scenes to bring professional basketball to Waterloo for several seasons between 1947 to 1951. The first season Waterloo was part of a league owned entirely by Maurice White of Chicago. The team was never a financial success and the franchise folded after a year. Pinkie George, the Cedar Falls native and grand promoter in Des Moines, brought a National Basketball Association franchise to town for the next two years. The Jaycees bought a wooden floor which was put in the Hippodrome at the National Dairy Cattle Congress. Here teams from New York and Minneapolis came to play Waterloo teams manned by Charlie Shipp, Johnny Orr, Don Dutcher, Buckshot O'Brien and local favorite Murray Wier. But even though Waterloo drew crowds in excess of 2500 most of the time, the big cities dropped Waterloo from the league, citing travel costs and low revenue as reasons. As the 1949-50 season came to a close, a civic corporation, with Mac involved, bought the team to keep it in town. The final year of basketball was in the National Professional Basketball League which disintegrated before the season was completed.

Mac's interests went beyond sports. He became involved in the Amvets organization at the initiative of Robert Buckmaster. The ex-sergeant believed some of the returning veterans needed a place to fraternize as well as a place were they could learn to be good citizens. Mac was an important fundraiser for Post 19 as it got itself organized after 1945. He also helped raise funds for the YMCA and several local charities. Mac joined the Chamber of Commerce as well. Again, certain animosities prevented him from being elected an officer, but he was content to work behind the scenes. Mac seldom got involved in partisan politics but he did support the council-manager initiative publicly. He was also helpful to the Republican Party when candidates were in town and desired a public forum.

There was one project that Mac did support enthusiastically, the establishment of a city auditorium. The Mayor's Citizens' Action Committee was established in 1947 by Mayor Robert Buckmaster to make a survey of the needs of Waterloo to facilitate long-range planning. Mac was head of the sub-committee in charge of establishing a public auditorium, that is how to convert the Cattle Congress Hippodrome into a more usable and desirable building. At the time it was used for a few weeks during the annual show and for the occasional special event, and then turned over to the pigeons for the rest of the year. Mac's attention was caught when the building was used for professional basketball. But the condition of the structure, even though it was only 11 years old, was poor due to neglect and disuse. He became obsessed about the potential and would drag people, at the slightest excuse, to the site and prowl around the building, showing how it could be improved and used for everything from sporting events to musical concerts. The City Council approved his sub-committee's recommendation and entered into a lease agreement with the Cattle Congress to use the building. As its part of the arrangement the city made several structural and seating changes to accommodate larger crowds.

Mac continued to be the optimistic booster when speaking at public events, doing interviews and, as usual, on his "Voice of Northeast Iowa." He was still talking from the sunny side of the street in downtown Waterloo. The show continued to attract a large audience. By the early 1950s Mac was not using the facts and figures routine as much, preferring to ask people how they would respond to certain unique situations. One response from a farmer

in bibb-overalls was remembered by Mac and his listeners:

Q: What would you do if you found a wallet with lots of money but no identification?
A: I would keep it unless the rightful owner showed up.

Q: How would you know who the owner was?
A: He would be the man whose name was "Genuine Leather."

Mac greatly enjoyed the interaction with people and continued the show until April 1959, long after such programs had disappeared in other cities.

Mac's business schedule also intruded on his personal life. With his mother back in Eau Claire and Jeanne in Pennsylvania, there was no need to buy a house and so he returned to the Russell Lamson to live after a short stay at the YMCA. Now he was always within a few minutes of the studio, a fact that aggravated many an announcer or performer who made a mistake or missed an assignment on the air. Room 528 was the starting point of his business day. He would summon various staff members to his room while he was getting dressed and having coffee. Discussions would be held and agendas planned while he picked out his suit for the day or shined his shoes. As one employee noted, it was like being a courtier to King Louis XIV at Versailles in the 18th century. Increasingly he spent his entire day in the office and remained there until late. Then it was off to the Chesterfield Club, Hickory House or the old favorite, the Colony Club, to eat and relax. His alcohol consumption seemed to increase during the postwar years, perhaps due to the pressures of ownership or because neither Margaret nor Jeanne were around to disapprove.

There continued to be many girlfriends despite the greying hair and expanding waistline. No longer was he the dashing, handsome Michael McElroy of WMT days, but he still had the charm, the charisma, to attract women. His long relationship with Jane Niles had ended over the problems of a permanent commitment (his fear of making one) and her strong Catholicism (his lack of interest). There would be other relationships, some mere dalliances, others more serious. None, however, took on a permanent character.

There were some escapes from the business world. Mac found

in Buckmaster a kindred spirit who liked to hunt and fish. It was a startled porter who saw, for the first time, Mac in his canvas jacket and red plaid hat carrying a shotgun to the car to go hunting on the Cedar. There were football weekends in Iowa City, too often in the accompaniment of Old Guckenheimer. Most enjoyable were visits from Jeanne and her children, Leslie and the twins Michael and Patricia. Jeanne's arrival in town was an excuse to drop even the most important work and enjoy their company. He was generous to a fault in making sure there was always something special for the Hughes family during the holidays. In contrast to his relations with Eileen, Jeanne and Mac were very close. His offer of "Let's take a ride" was an indication to Jeanne that Mac had something on his mind. He consulted her on most of the important decisions he made and was sure she was present on those special occasions in his life. And, as always, he talked with his mother weekly, sometimes having to cajole her into cashing the checks he sent her.

By 1952 Mac had reached a comfortable level of success. His station was doing well, he continued to be involved in community activities, and his personal life, while not always peaceful, was at least not in disarray. But it was not a time to become complacent, for the communications world was about to undergo a profound change with the granting of television frequencies around the country. Mac faced the prospect of starting over again, this time in the new medium of TV.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Television License Battle, 1952-53

The contest for the right to operate television channel 7 was the most critical competition Mac would be involved in his career. After starting late and at a decided disadvantage in the license battle, he was able to emerge the victor through the intervention of good fortune and some excellent legal advice.

The coming of television posed both an opportunity and a dilemma for Mac and Black Hawk Broadcasting. Interest in television had swept the nation in the years after 1950 when the technology and cost began to make individual sets more accessible to the general public. The major hindrance was the Federal Communications Commission which licensed the stations, or more specifically, issued construction permits to start building a station and acquiring equipment. The process was very slow and many areas across the nation were outside the range of an existing station. As the industry, the business community and the public impatiently waited for more channels to be approved, potential station owners made plans to present their proposals before the Commission. As early as 1948 Mac recognized television offered him a chance to expand his operation and profitability. But there were major obstacles to overcome. He had strong competition, needed more capital to underwrite the new equipment and would have to hire more professional staff. But Mac and his advisers felt they had no option but to attempt to make the conversion. Television was clearly the wave of the future.

The process of granting a license was cumbersome and heavily regulated during the early years of television. The FCC had made some preliminary arrangements as to the distribution process in the 1930s but did little more until after the war was over. After 1946 an allocation plan was developed to assign both VHF (Very High Frequency) and UHF (Ultra High Frequency) channels to specific

cities. However, within a short time it became evident the mileage separation between the proposed stations was not adequate and in 1948 a temporary freeze was put in place while the problem was studied. During this time no new applications were accepted though applications could be filed. Unfortunately this corresponded with the dramatic growth in the demand for television. Finally, in April, 1952 the FCC unveiled a new formula for the number of stations per area and again began to accept applications. There was a flood of new applications and modifications of applications filed earlier. In 1952 the FCC granted 120 permits to stations to begin the start up process. In 1953 they would issue 334 construction permits and have 224 pending. The standards used to determine who received the license included local ownership, integrated ownership and management, diversification of media, previous performance, proposed programming and broadcast experience. By 1953 there was also an unofficial political criteria. After the Republicans swept the Presidency and gained control of Congress in 1952, they were anxious to fulfill the "needs" of their business constituency.

In order to control the rate of growth and expansion, the rules specifically stated no company could commence building or collecting equipment before a construction permit was granted. That is, an applicant could not attempt to influence or pressure the FCC by having everything ready to broadcast except for the license itself. The construction permit gave the FCC time to study all applications to make sure the stations would be viable and that there would not be any frequency overlap or other forms of interference.

The FCC allocated a certain number of stations per geographic area. Based on population and distance, larger Iowa cities like Des Moines and the Quad Cities received two stations while other cities, grouped together in an extended territory, shared three channels. Cedar Rapids and Waterloo plus Dubuque were linked in a common market area. Three VHF channels (2,7 and 9) were available and at least two UHF channels (16 and 40). But the latter were never popular because of the higher costs of setting up a UHF station, the technical inferiority of its signal and the fact that too few television sets could receive the signal. At the same time VHF antennas were cheaper and in most cities only "rabbit ears" were needed. Very quickly VHF became the most sought after license.

In Iowa, most of the competition for channels came after 1952. Only two stations had been able to submit applications before the

FCC freeze and receive a license. WOC in Davenport went on the air in October, 1949 and WOI in Ames in February, 1950 although at a lower power level. As in most parts of the nation, a majority of the applicants for Iowa television stations came from existing radio stations. In Des Moines KRNT and KSO radio competed for channel 8 while KIOA and WHO, the Palmer family, vied for channel 13. There was usually only one applicant in the smaller markets such as Fort Dodge, Ottumwa, or Mason City. In the Cedar Rapids-Waterloo market, the city of Cedar Rapids received two channels, 2 and 9. WMT radio and the Cedar Rapids Gazette both wanted the more identifiable channel 2 but the Gazette Company eventually decided to settle for channel 9 rather than have a contested hearing before the FCC. No other group applied. Waterloo was allotted channel 7 (originally it was channel 3) as well as the unwanted UHF channel 16. However, unlike the rest of the state, there would be a vicious and prolonged battle for it. KXEL and KWWL would both apply for the license and, for a short time, there was a third competitor from Cedar Rapids, the Hawkeye Television Company. The battle over who would receive authority to operate the channel would dominate discussions in the Waterloo community for 15 months.

Television became a consuming passion for the Waterloo public in 1952 once the FCC ended its freeze on station permits. In part it was the result of a desire to highlight the importance of the city. As with baseball teams and highways, it was an indicator the city was mature and sophisticated. Another stimulus was personal, the desire of the population to see programs like "Superman", "Topper" or "Mama" or to be able to actually see the local news. There was also intense pressure from the television dealers in the city. There were at least 15 dealers, ranging from Black's to TV Kelly, many already selling sets and wanting to sell more. Finally, the commercial sector wanted local television as quickly as possible. To acquire a station before Cedar Rapids meant their advertising would reach more customers while facing less competition. This was also true for the small towns and rural markets located in Benton and Buchanan counties.

In 1952, local television reception was inferior. Most Waterloo homes, even those with an antenna, could only get a low quality picture from WOI or, when there were atmospheric abnormalities, perhaps WCCO out of Minneapolis. The intense demand almost

guaranteed that the Waterloo franchise would be a success. Likewise, any delay in obtaining a station would mean an unhappy public that would turn to one of the two stations in Cedar Rapids stations expected to start in late 1953.

Enter Joe DuMond and KXEL. DuMond was confident he would be able to serve the public's needs. His clear channel station was locally owned and operated, experienced, and profitable. Anxious to begin, he filed an application in March, 1951 even though he knew no action would be taken. In May, 1952, as soon as the FCC began to accept applications for construction permits, KXEL refiled a modified request. DuMond was certain no one would have the courage or resources to challenge him, so certain in fact, that he began to construct a new television facility and order equipment. In doing so, he committed several crucial errors. The FCC rules clearly stated no preemptory work was to be done in advance of the permit being issued. It would not be taken into consideration when an application was discussed. Yet DuMond did just that, making only a modest effort at best to mask his efforts. In early 1952 he began building a new facility and tower on Independence Avenue on the east end of the city at a site called Windy Hill. It was to house the AM station and a proposed new FM station. The structure was completed by mid-1952 and KXEL moved from its offices in the Insurance Building. The 500 foot tower with the FM antenna was to be done in April, 1953. But the 800 square foot studio and the 250 seat theater were far in excess of the needs of a radio station. Also, during the spring of 1952 assorted television equipment started arriving at the address. The initial contention that the larger facility was needed for FM was quickly replaced by DuMond's vision about the future of television. In a newspaper story about a speech given to the Oelwein Rotary, he was quoted: "We have everything now. We are confident we will get channel 7."

Exactly why DuMond made such a risky move is unclear. Certainly he wanted to place any competitor on the defensive, but it placed KXEL in obvious violation of the rules. The most logical explanation was his arrogance. He was the "king on the hill" who wanted to be the "media czar" of Waterloo. DuMond was so certain he would get the permit that he did not want to waste any time in getting set up once the FCC made its favorable decision. His radio persona, conservative Josh Higgins from Finchville, would

not have agreed with such a gamble, but Joe DuMond seldom took advice from anyone.

Once DuMond had made his move, Black Hawk Broadcasting had to decide whether it would make a formal application.. Actually there was little to be debated. For KWWL it was a matter of survival. Not to apply would mean KWWL would be faced with competition from three television stations with one of them, KXEL, also a radio rival. KWWL's numbers had been good in the Waterloo market. During this time it had been able to dominate the morning market easily (KWWL - 31 share, KXEL - 24, WMT - 23 and WHO - 15) and were doing even better in the afternoon (KWWL - 35, KXEL - 10, WMT - 24 and WHO - 20). But this share superiority would be measured in the future on a declining number of listeners as it was anticipated many would move over to television, and with them, the advertising dollars. Mac also knew it would be a difficult contest. On paper and in performance, KXEL met the FCC criteria much better than did KWWL. And then there was the political influence DuMond had in Washington D.C. (reputed to be none other than the vice chair of the FCC) which would tilt the process in his direction. So not to apply meant a future of limited growth and profits; but to go ahead with the application would be expensive with a good chance of failure. It could also be a public relations disaster since a contested license would delay the arrival of television to the area, angering a public that wanted action. With more than a little concern and anxiety, Black Hawk Broadcasting filed its application in December, 1951.

If DuMond made a mistake in starting the construction process, he made a second in attacking KWWL once it had expressed its intent. He spent much of 1952 speaking to groups and associations about how he would deliver television to the city. In fact he claimed he could be on the air within 6-8 weeks once the construction permit was issued. But now that KWWL had also applied and there would be a prolonged FCC hearing, the future of television in the city was not nearly as bright. DuMond placed the responsibility for the delay and the solution to the problem squarely on Mac. In a radio broadcast in June 1952, DuMond repeated an earlier challenge while using Mac's "local pride and public service" tactic against him:

"You might be interested to know that when our new Radio-

Television Center is completed and we are operating a television station, that the investment will represent in the neighborhood of three quarters of a million dollars. Yes, we do have faith in Waterloo. We are confident that, ultimately, we will have one of the most outstanding Radio-Television operations in the nation. Anything less would be short changing our city and, you, as its citizens, most certainly have the right to expect the best.

Last week, I made a public challenge to those who would delay television service to you. . . . As things stand now, since those who would delay have applied for the same channel which KXEL is prepared now to utilize, we must, according to FCC, undergo a long, expensive hearing. The delay might well run two years and cost from thirty to fifty thousand dollars. To avoid this delay of service to you. . . last week I publicly challenged those who delay service to you to forego the hearing and, according to FCC rules, submit their application along with that of the Josh Higgins Broadcasting Company and leave the entire decision to the members of the FCC. . . . It is the kind of action characteristic of the pioneers of Waterloo who put their town's interest above selfish interests. Have I heard a reply to that challenge? Indeed not. And, I regret to state, that I do not expect a reply so long as certain interests dominate."

The joint application idea would have the FCC grant one station the VHF license for channel 7 with the other receiving the less desirable UHF channel 16. It was an effective tactic and one that Mac had difficulty responding to, especially since DuMond repeated the challenge in different forums for the rest of the year.

Mac, not easily intimidated, remained in the race and began to counter DuMond's attacks. To show he was a legitimate contender, he took an option on the Galloway Club as a site for a television studio. The building had served the Galloway Company as an office, exhibit hall and hotel for visiting salesmen and for farmers visiting Waterloo to buy manure spreaders and other equipment. It was old and not really suited for the project, but it had some potential and made KWWL appear to be moving forward. Mac also started to use his contacts to get the message out that DuMond was in violation of FCC construction rules and might be jeopardizing Waterloo's chances of getting any license. Most importantly, Mac wrote the

FCC to inform them of improper actions on DuMond's part:

> "Josh Higgins Broadcasting Company, through Mr. DuMond, has misused their licenses and its broadcasting facilities to disseminate misinformation to the public to achieve selfish and personal objectives. The use of its licensed facilities thus to malign and to attempt to bring into public disfavor a competitor, at the same time deceiving the public it is licensed to serve, cannot be considered in the public interest by any stretch of the imagination."

Finally, though unorchestrated, there were the jokes about what DuMond was using the large studio at Windy Hill for. Responses ranged from a stable for his prize horses to a garage for his expensive Jaguar (which really was the case for many months). Mac might not have been the most popular man along Fourth Street, but DuMond's inflated ego and ostentatiousness did little to endear him to community leaders.

Towards the end of 1952 DuMond began to turn up the pressure on KWWL. It is unclear why he embarked on a risky plan that would ultimately result in the loss of the license battle. Some have argued that it was his arrogant belief that he could do whatever he wanted without worry of repercussion. Others have suggested that he began to lose his nerve in the face of a strong KWWL counter-offensive. This seemed to be confirmed by several initiatives made by KXEL stockholders in late 1952 to members of the Black Hawk Broadcasting Board to investigate a merger of the two companies. They were firmly rejected. But for whatever reason, he deviated from his game plan, turning to an illegal tactic to attain his goal. In early 1953 he quietly began to encourage a boycott of KWWL to force it to withdraw its application. Once KWWL began to lose advertising customers, upset over its role in delaying the arrival of television, Mac would be forced to bow out. The plan was started at DuMond's initiative and, as it gained momentum, continued to have his support even though he recognized the dangers involved.

The boycott was a gift from heaven for Mac and KWWL. Now the primary issue became one of unfair marketing practices and a violation of the restraint of trade provision of the federal anti-trust law. If enough evidence could be collected to verify this, a lawsuit could be instituted against KXEL. Then the entire license issue

would be suspended while a federal court heard the case. If DuMond could be shown to have violated federal law, he would no longer be eligible as a licensee, leaving the field open for KWWL. In other words, Mac could, in effect, win the license battle without competing with KXEL before the FCC. This was incredibly good fortune for an applicant whose odds for winning were not very good.

The key to success for Mac was obtaining proof the boycott actually existed and was being implemented. Warren Mead, who by now had become Mac's trusted aide in such delicate matters, was given the responsibility for documenting the "devastating financial losses" KWWL had sustained and to catch someone actually involved in the boycott. When the bookkeepers failed to substantiate any extraordinary losses, Mead did some creative accounting to demonstrate the negative impact. But what was really necessary was to find a "smoking gun," a statement or incident linking DuMond to the boycott. Mead and Falk actually spied on potential defendants to obtain this information, only to have it literally delivered to them by DuMond.

Lyle Harvey, after attending a service club meeting addressed by DuMond, had alerted Mac that DuMond was now very close to publicly supporting a boycott of KWWL and the firms of the stockholders who had an interest in the station. A decision was made to tape record DuMond and use it as evidence that he was involved in restraint of trade. What followed was pure "cloak and dagger" action. Mead and Falk learned that DuMond was speaking to the Waterloo Exchange Club on the same April evening that Black Hawk Broadcasting Corporation was having its annual stockholder meeting. At Mac's direction and with the assistance of the Hotel President manager, a microphone was concealed in the draperies of the Exchange Club meeting room with a line running to the tape recorder in the adjoining room where Mead and Falk surreptitiously waited. DuMond was at his persuasive best, arguing that his station, having been first to apply, having spent more money and being better equipped, deserved to receive the channel 7 allocation. He also ridiculed Mac's alternatives and made the point, on several occasions, that KXEL could be on the air within a short period, giving Waterloo business first access to the Cedar Rapids market because WMT was still months away from start up. It was not until late in the session, during the question and answer segment, that

DuMond made his slip. From the transcript made by Mead and Falk:

> "Voice: Joe, I don't think this would be apt to happen but just say that it might happen. The advertisers, of course, pay the freight. Suppose the advertisers with one mind, would decide they wanted TV, too, and they were going to place their advertising where they would be apt to get TV sooner. Wouldn't that have something to do with it? (Laughter)
>
> Voice: (Continuing) I don't expect you to answer that.
>
> DuMond: (Laugh) Yes. Did you check into Austin, Minnesota? I would just like to say this, gentlemen. Today, we have 72% more advertisers on KXEL than we did December 31. (Applause)."

That very brief, gratuitous reference to Austin was critical. There the threat of a boycott by advertisers had been used to influence the withdrawal of a license applicant. The implication from DuMond was that it had worked in Austin and was already working in Waterloo!

The tape was meticulously transcribed, then dubbed and the original placed in a safe deposit box. Meanwhile, information on specific advertisers being approached to change their advertising was collected. Then, in a meeting with Buckmaster, Washington D.C. counsel Roberts and Mac, the decision was made to sue KXEL for the loss of trade from the boycott and DuMond's violation of FCC rules which adversely affected KWWL's chances for a license.

The action was filed in federal court on July 6, 1953. The suit claimed a conspiracy to violate the Sherman Anti-Trust Act on the part of Josh Higgins Broadcasting and a list of eight defendants who were party to the effort. Triple damages of $500,000 were asked as compensation. In addition, a preliminary injunction was requested to restrain the defendants from continuing to establish a television monopoly in the Waterloo area. The specific charges were the encouragement of a boycott against KWWL and its stockholders; an attempt to develop popular opposition to KWWL by misrepresenting the validity of its stock subscription and the competency of KWWL staff to operate a television station; and the circulation of petitions aimed at forcing KWWL to withdraw from the

license race. The trial began in the upstairs court room of the Federal Court Building (now the public library) on July 17th. Judge Henry C. Graven, a no-nonsense jurist originally from Greene, Iowa, presided. The hot courtroom was full every session and one of the defendants, the chief engineer for KXEL, fainted due to the heat. Roberts and Buckmaster were determined to bring a flood of evidence to prove their case. They had 90 witnesses who filled some 2000 pages with depositions. They took the first three days of the trial to present their case. DuMond was represented by the local firm of Swisher, Cohrt and Swisher and two Washington D.C. firms, represented by Clair Stout and Thurman Arnold. The latter's involvement reflected the seriousness with which DuMond's counsel viewed the case. Arnold was nationally known for defending persons and companies in anti-trust cases. The July sessions ran into the evening and on Saturday, much to the dismay of DuMond's Washington defense team. The progress was slow with ten lawyers representing the various defendants, each having an opportunity to question. Much of the initial activity revolved around the testimony and credibility of the KWWL witnesses who substantiated the existence of the boycott. Mac also spent Saturday afternoon on the stand in defense of his company's financial and professional ability to operate a television station. On the following Monday, Joe DuMond was questioned at length as to the real intent of his new facility. Colonel Roberts pressed him as to whether it was a television station "ready to go." DuMond denied it was solely built for television, but admitted its design and the equipment would allow KXEL to be on the air within a short period of time.

The Exchange Club tape was finally introduced Monday evening. The script had been carefully compared to the audio to verify its authenticity. The entire one-hour tape was played to a standing room only crowd. DuMond then was called to defend his assertions about the uniqueness of KXEL in starting a television station and then Mac was brought in again to testify about the ability of KWWL to do likewise. Then the Austin reference was carefully listened to in order to determine the level of involvement and support DuMond had given to the boycott idea.

The trial was adjourned to August 25th to allow Judge Graven to handle cases in other parts of his judicial circuit. In the interim more depositions were taken. The consensus of Mac's legal team was that things were going well. They had been able to control the

pace of the trial and had presented strong testimony with only limited rebuttal.

When the trial resumed on August 25th, the Josh Higgins forces took the offensive. A counterclaim was filed against Black Hawk Broadcasting charging KWWL had engaged in an illegal effort to harass and injure KXEL so that it would be forced to withdraw from the license competition. Specifically KWWL misrepresented the intent of the Windy Hill building, offered secret rebates to advertisers to take business from KXEL and falsely represented its ability to operate a television station. In the witness chair, Mac engaged in several heated discussions with Thurman on these issues. But Mac was able to withstand the attacks on KWWL while continuing to make the point that DuMond had violated FCC rules.

That evening the two opposing legal teams had a late dinner in the same restaurant. DuMond's counsel was overheard arguing that the case was lost, that the evidence against KXEL was both overwhelming and credible. The next morning, after a series of meetings between the two sides and the judge, KXEL agreed to drop the counterclaim and to ask for a postponement of the trial. The reality was that KXEL had given up. It was left to McElroy and DuMond to "take a ride" to discuss the settlement terms which were incorporated into a memorandum of agreement signed on the 26th of August and announced on the 1st of September. The agreement, subject to the FCC granting KWWL the license to operate channel 7, provided KXEL would withdraw its application. In turn, Black Hawk Broadcasting would pay Josh Higgins Broadcasting $25,000 for the antenna tower, $25,000 for rental of the "television" facility over a three year period and $50,000 to cover legal, engineering and other costs incurred by KXEL in the process of trying to obtain the license. Also, Black Hawk Broadcasting would drop its lawsuit.

It remained for the FCC to issue the construction permit. On the 24th of August the FCC had released a new priority list of cities which would be considered; Waterloo was suddenly 14th on the "A" list. Years later A.D. Donnell would note that a cousin by marriage, who was a Congressman from New Jersey, served on the FCC committee and was in a position to use his political influence to assist Waterloo. Perhaps this sudden elevation was a response to Donnell's request to the congressman that he help Waterloo. On September 2nd it was suddenly all over. The FCC granted the per-

mit to KWWL which triggered the terms in the memorandum. Mac packed his bags for New York to arrange network affiliation and purchase "the most modern equipment." A KWWL official announced the station should be on the air with a test pattern by Christmas. Plans were also in place to begin remodeling the Galloway Club for future use as a television facility. Joe DuMond was not available for comment.

The entire license battle consumed 15 months, starting with the filing of the revised application in June, 1952 to the settlement in September, 1953. During that time the KWWL management and staff expended an enormous amount of time compiling information for the application, collecting information for the anti-trust suit and then handling the stressful work surrounding the trial itself. For Mac, it was another measure of a successful career. Yet the real challenge would be the operation of the television station which, Mac and his staff would find out, would make those 15 months seem relatively peaceful.

CHAPTER SIX

The Television Years, 1953-65

The transition from radio to television was much more difficult than Mac or his staff had anticipated. Network relations, government regulations, new managerial demands and capital needs all differed from what had been the norm in radio. Yet, even as Mac struggled to make the transformation, there were television and radio station additions to the Black Hawk Broadcasting Company. Through the pressure of these changes, Mac continued his hectic lifestyle. Time spent in civic activities actually increased and in 1956 he married Betty Craft. Then, at the time when Mac should have been thinking about retirement, he died suddenly in February, 1965.

In retrospect, putting KWWL-TV on the air Thanksgiving Day was one of the easier tasks in establishing television in Waterloo. The equipment at the new station at Windy Hill was, with a few exceptions, adequate to starting broadcasting. And DuMond had been right; it took about eight weeks to get on the air. The event that Mac, the stockholders, staff and most of Waterloo had been waiting for, became a reality on November 26, 1953. There were speeches and a tour of the building plus a greeting from an old friend, Fran Allison, now a television personality. This was followed by an episode of "Kukla, Fran and Ollie" featuring the girl from LaPorte City who had made it to the bigtime. The day ended with a film feature on Jack London. Yet, by comparison to the launching of the radio station, television's beginnings were modest. It was a harbinger of the problems the station would face in the months and years to come.

Mac encountered many problems in his desire to make Channel 7, as the station was now sometimes called, a commercial and civic success. It was his ultimate challenge, one he was not totally prepared to handle. Many of his radio strengths were transferrable to the new media. He knew how to sell advertising for a

station, understood the news priorities, could manage a tight budget and was good at negotiating contracts and terms with networks like Mutual who supplied news and other programming. He was, as one of his contemporaries described him, "a good radio man." But television was a much larger and vastly more complicated venture, full of relationships that small affiliates such as Waterloo had very little ability to control. Mac and Warren Mead would learn that the networks always had the advantage over the local stations in the areas of programming and shared advertising revenue. In fact, besides the news there was little air time the station could control. Beyond the networks, the federal government demanded its rules and regulations be precisely followed at the risk of losing the license. Even at the station level there were increased demands on management. Larger studios, higher towers, expensive equipment and more professional staff were some of the new problems Mac had to confront. After a decade in the business, Mac acknowledged this in a moment of reflection with Warren Mead. Mac observed: "The man who can build a business like this is usually not the best man to run it after it's built."

Television was undergoing a transformation during the years KWWL-TV was established. The "Golden Age" of the 1950s had started with the emphasis on live, hour long dramatic productions and variety shows produced mostly in New York. Top-ranked "Texaco Star Theatre" and "Philco Television Playhouse," both NBC shows, provided exciting drama. The competition came from "Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts" and Ed Sullivan's "Toast of the Town," from CBS, as well as from boxing and a few musical shows. By the mid-1950s the shift had been made to 30 minute comedy sitcoms, produced on film in Hollywood, and the (supposedly) unrehearsed quiz shows. Now it was CBS leading with "I Love Lucy" and "The $64,000 Question" while NBC countered with "Life of Riley" and "Dragnet" along with comedy from Bob Hope and George Gobel. ABC finally became competitive in 1955 with the introduction of "Disneyland" and its popular spinoff for kids, "The Mickey Mouse Club." After being dominated by NBC and CBS, network parity was reached in the early 1960s with the arrival of the westerns. "Wyatt Earp," "The Rifleman," and "The Texan" all rode on ABC horses. At the same time, taped sitcoms, like "My Three Sons," and the occasional drama series, like "Ben Casey," competed for the viewer's attention. The changes in programming

were based on the crucial ratings system. The network affiliates had little voice in what was presented during the prime time evening hours and increasingly less time to fill during the day after the arrival of the daytime quiz shows and soap operas. The success of a small market station like KWWL was greatly influenced by the decisions and actions of the network moguls.

Another new reality for Mac was governmental rules and regulations. The FCC, at the direction of Congress, designed codes for indecency and anti-social behavior, overcommercialism, public service announcements, equal time doctrine, advertising, contest giveaways and religious presentations, to name but a few. A violation of any might be grounds for the loss of license. Copious records had to be kept to insure the requirements were satisfied and to answer any public challenge that might arise. The job of "protecting the license" was one of the most critical, and time consuming, at the station. In addition, the trade organization, the National Association of Broadcasters, had its own edicts and guidelines for members to follow. By contrast, radio had been relatively free of bureaucratic intrusions.

To be competitive within this framework, the station had to maximize several factors: site facilities, staff, news and local programming and sales revenue. Here was the challenge to the new managers of KWWL-TV. There were many instances when Mac did not always make the best decisions.

In early September 1953, KWWL was a television station with a building, an assortment of equipment, an untrained staff and a surly public. Mac promised a test pattern by Christmas, though he knew that the KWWL logo would hardly compete with WMT's offering of "Our Miss Brooks." The trial had allowed Channel 2 to take the lead, going on the air September 30th at full power, the first station in the nation to do so. WMT reception in Waterloo was a dramatic improvement over that of WOI. KCRG followed on October 15th at lower power, but with plans to build a 1080 foot tower northwest of the city in 1954. Mac knew he had to move quickly in order not to lose any more listeners. His trip to New York was to purchase cameras from Dumont Manufacturing to supplement the equipment inherited from KXEL. In all, the station operated for the next twelve years with the same two studio cameras plus a 16mm Bell and Howell (no sound) to shoot local film, a 4 x 5 speed graphic and several black and white film polaroids.

Initially the film was processed at the police station until a makeshift processor was put together. In fact, many technical items were "invented" from miscellaneous parts and lots of ingenuity. There was a single film projector, again locally adapted, for use with the news and ad "stills." When Iowa State Teachers' College upgraded its production unit, KWWL got its sound equipment, already obsolete but an improvement. It was with these items, and others of similar vintage and quality, that KWWL produced its news, ads and local programs. In the annual Television Age Yearbook, a comparative equipment description always showed Waterloo near the bottom among the regional stations, along with Fort Dodge and Austin, Minnesota.

If the equipment was not the best, the facilities at Windy Hill were good, although expensive. DuMond had allowed for a spacious studio and ample office space. However, the working environment was very tense, given the bitter license fight. DuMond built a massive barrier to separate the companies as well as a new entrance. Even after he sold out to a Chicago company in 1956, relations between the two companies remained difficult at best. The memorandum of agreement had provided for a lease extension option, allowing KWWL a lengthy stay, but the $1000 per month rent was more than Mac wanted to pay. His option was to renovate the Galloway Club with its small rooms and five fireplaces, but the cost was prohibitive. When the ground floor of the Insurance Building, at East 4th and Franklin, was vacated by a car dealership in 1958, Mac seized the opportunity to move. The radio station occupied the basement while the television studio was on the ground level, along with the offices. The expansive showroom windows were great for promotion but the street noise was a constant nuisance in the studio. But Mac enjoyed the irony of occupying, and later owning, the building KXEL had gotten its start in.

The key to making KWWL a success was the tower. The Cedar Rapids market had to be penetrated to be competitive. The rented tower at Windy Hill proved to be inadequate to reach Cedar Rapids because of the hilly terrain. Plans were made in 1955 for the erection of a tower and transmitter site near Jesup that Mac bragged would be the highest in the state. Mac and his engineer, Tex Kirksey, surveyed the area and, pressed by the need to be ready for the 1956 World Series, finally decided on a location. The tower turned out to be identical to the one KCRG had earlier erected so,

in order to fulfill his promise, Mac had his engineer build it on a concrete pedestal, making it 1083 feet and the tallest in Iowa. Cost apparently was not an issue when it came to maintaining his public image. However, the hills remained a problem. When the tower was operational, it was found the hill to the northwest of Cedar Rapids impeded KWWL's transmission. The error, which Mac never admitted to be party to, meant the station could not realize its full potential.

Personnel and the management thereof also posed continual problems for Mac. He had stabilized his radio staff in the early 1950s with the addition of Warren Mead, Clare Rampton, and Don Inman who, along with Ed Falk, had placed KWWL first in the Waterloo market. But television placed new demands on these people. There was additional on air time plus the comfort factor of being in front of a camera. New photographic skills were needed to prepare material for the news or for ads. And there was substantially more need for technical support in television. Mac did not always spend the time to find the best persons and, as with radio, there was a revolving door before the staff finally reached some stability.

Jack Turley came to Waterloo from a Chicago station to become a producer and director. He personally filmed the first in-house ads while he trained people how to use the camera. Pat Siefert was one of the early photographers who learned it was sometimes convenient to lift photographs from Life magazine for use as backdrop illustrations. Charles Freeburg, who was lured away from WOC, was also " present at creation" to help in training a studio crew.

But it was in front of the camera that continuity was really necessary. Unlike radio, where voice recognition was not always so critical, the face and personality counted for everything in television. No station did it better than WMT. There the evening news draw was the weatherman, Conrad Johnson. Johnson compensated for his lack of personal magnetism with an array of charts, graphs and respectably accurate forecasts. To provide some charismatic balance, Tait Cummins handled the sports. No matter that he sometimes forgot the Dodgers were no longer in Brooklyn, Tait was adored by his fans and was a tremendous radio and television attraction. The news itself was handled by Dave Shay or later Bob Bruner in a competent manner. So formidable was this team that KCRG did not have a 6 o'clock news segment for several years,

opting instead to run programs like "Kit Carson." In contrast to WMT, Mac found it difficult to assemble a permanent and identifiable team for any length of time. Ed Falk initially handled the news but preferred radio to television, so a variety of persons filled in as a news anchor. One, Nick George who covered both radio and television, did a credible job but left after several years on a matter of principal when Mac refused to give him any raise at all. Clare Rampton did both radio and television as well but left broadcasting in 1958 for a different job. Weathermen in the early years were mostly forgettable. After there had been another turnover in news staff, Mac finally was able to hire, and keep, good people. Tom Miller did the news and Jym Ganahl, looking like he was barely out of high school, handled the weather. During the early 1960s KWWL finally won the Waterloo news market away from WMT. But given the lock KWWL radio had had on the news, the nearly ten years it took television to achieve the same feat highlighted the personnel problems.

During this same period most of the "old guard" departed. In 1958 Ed Falk left to follow new opportunities. Naomi McElhinney, Mac's longtime secretary who had been with him since 1947, moved over to J.S. Latta in the same year. Both felt a need for change after years of long hours with disproportionate pay. Lyle Harvey, who had been in sales, and Don Inman, the business manager, left in 1959 over a disagreement with Mac's management style. Both were popular in Waterloo and their departure in less than pleasant circumstances hurt the station's image. It also marked a final break with Mac's associates from the prewar WMT radio days. Their replacements lacked the familiarity with the market and sales declined, compounded by the bad year the entire industry had in 1958. Others arrived and departed, no longer counted on any paper clip chain. One announcer had a stutter which led him to ad lib most of the advertising text. A woman in the traffic department was arrested for marijuana possession while another simply did not show up for work, leaving a note saying the job made her too nervous. A member of the crew was arrested for lifting clothes from the studio mannequins. Yet another left town quickly after selling ad time at a 90% discount, yet drawing a commission on the full amount. But the most unusual departure was a former announcer who, before leaving town, slipped into the radio studio late in the evening, tied up the disc jockey and left after

putting a record on the turntable. It played the final groove for 15 minutes before someone managed to get to the studio. The radio side still maintained its zany characters. Mac's explanation for the rapid turnover was that these people were performers or groupies who wanted to be close to the excitement. They were temperamental and undependable and could not be expected to stay in one place very long. He justified their low pay, the cause of most departures, by arguing they were compensated by the work experience or personal satisfaction they received from being in this exhilarating atmosphere.

The one constant during this period was Warren Mead. His value to KWWL went far beyond his job as program director. He was the balance to Mac, the alter ego who provided calm and reason. Quiet and personable, he was educated at the University of Wisconsin where he played oboe in the University Symphony. During his tenure in Waterloo he was active in the arts, helping to organize the Waterloo Arts Council. He was also involved in a number of local charities and religious groups. Considered by some to have been a "gopher" for Mac, those on the inside recognized that he knew how to deal with Mac's aggressive and oft-belligerent manner. Some believed Mac was actually intimidated by his professorial manner; a reminder of his own eighth grade education. It was Mead who provided the transition for the new people, handled the reams of government reports to maintain the license, and who got Mac to agree, on occasion, to change his mind. It was Mead who realized the need to have consistency on the news team and worked hard to find the right chemistry. He also handled public affairs, finding new ways to reach out to the Waterloo-Cedar Falls community. His ecumenical program, "New Frontiers of Faith," was an example of his efforts. While he would later write a somewhat acerbic and mildly critical account of the McElroy years, he gave every indication he enjoyed his work as well as being in the presence of Mac, at least most of the time.

There were some positives in the personnel story. From the television station in Austin that Black Hawk Broadcasting bought came Tommy Young. He had transformed the station into a profitable operation within two years. In 1961 he moved to Waterloo to work as program manager. He and his wife Ita quickly became involved in local society and volunteer organizations and were very popular. His organizational skills and efficient managerial

style did much to improve the workings of the station and led to Mac delegating some authority to him and others. He also knew how to work with Mac. Having heard how Mac could manipulate a salary, Young had him sign a contract with a fixed annual amount plus a 5% bonus payable monthly. He remained with the company until 1970 when he moved to Napa Valley, California to start his own very successful radio station.

Programming was another area in which Mac and his staff had to learn anew. Establishing a relationship with a network was one of the most critical factors in the success of the station. On that initial trip to New York, Mac talked with both NBC and the Dumont Network. NBC and CBS were the leaders in the industry, but WMT had already made arrangements with the latter. Apparently NBC's terms were not as lucrative as those from Dumont and Mac signed with them. Had Mac taken a longer look, or sought out expert advice, he would have realized Dumont was nearly defunct. The network charges were lower, but there was also much less shared national revenue. By 1953 the lead series for Dumont was "Captain Video" and the boxing card. The network struggled through 1954 and collapsed early in the following year. Mac was left to negotiate the best terms possible with NBC.

It was difficult to fill an entire broadcasting day in the first few months. With a limited feed from Dumont, Mead resorted to running (free) industrial films like "How to make shoes" and "The Marvels of Grand Rapids, Michigan," no doubt early versions of infomercials! An alternative to these exciting offerings was to invite elementary school classes from the nearby towns to visit the studio and be on TV. An hour could be easily filled while each member of grades three through five would step before the camera and say their name. The audience was probably better too. Even when NBC came aboard, KWWL did not have a live feed because the local phone company had not yet finished its relay towers at Vinton and Raymond. For a time the network programs came as kinescopes, films made from a monitor in New York. The quality was poor and since they came by mail, any special holiday program was observed at least a week late. By the mid-1950s, some programming was produced in the station, usually as part of the public affairs program. Most notable was the Open Forum series in which important community issues were presented and discussed by local officials, outside experts and citizens. Topics included crime,

education, health care, right to work laws and agriculture. However, there was nothing to compare with the prestigious Peabody Award WMT won for its production of "Secrets of Flight." KWWL and Mac did receive a great deal of local praise for its warnings for and coverage of the floods of 1961 which nearly inundated the downtown business district. When it became clear the flood crest would be higher than expected, Mac went on radio and television to appeal to the young people of Waterloo to help sandbag. Their involvement prevented millions of dollars in damages. There was, however, one KWWL programming event that outdistanced the competition. In February, 1956 while Mac was in Hawaii, his secretary, Naomi McElhinney, organized a "Sadie Hawkins Day" to celebrate leap year. What started out as a short segment joke turned into a role reversal for the entire day as women ran the entire station. The entertainment magazines picked up the story and it received national attention. When Mac stopped in Los Angeles on his way home, Red Rowe informed him of KWWL's publicity coup. Mac could only applaud and wonder if there should not be some management reversal as well.

Ratings measured the success of the station and helped determine the advertising rates. They were more critical in television than radio and were constantly watched by the sales staff. The WMT-CBS combination dominated both other stations in the Cedar Rapids-Waterloo-Dubuque market during the 1950s. This included winning the local Waterloo market at the expense of KWWL. In the early 1960s the KCRG-ABC team was able to dominate the prime time evening schedule while the daytime was more equally shared. KWWL was now able to win the Waterloo news market but made very little headway in the Cedar Rapids area. On average, from 1957 onwards, KWWL got about 20%-23% of the total market. This was reflected in the rates the stations charged their customers. In 1957 a live hour ad rate on WMT was $625, on KWWL $400 and on KCRG $385. By 1963 KWWL's rates were the lowest. In March 1965, KWWL's share of the entire market revenue remained at 20%, much below the 35% share an average NBC affiliate competing in a three station market would be expected to receive. By any measure, KWWL was a weak third in the region.

One explanation for the persistence of the problems was the lack of capital to make improvements or purchase new equipment. Black Hawk Broadcasting records are not available for the period,

but it appears Mac was reluctant to raise money by issuing new stock. He may have done this in 1953-54 to cover the start up costs. Previous to that time he was listed as owning 50% of the common stock, but by 1957 his share had dropped to 31% while several new names appeared as stockholders. It appears the number of common shares increased during the same time. There were further common stock issues later but these were sold to Mac in order to regain his 50% ownership status, the highest level the corporation allowed. All this suggests he preferred to operate on a very frugal budget, in the process not updating equipment and running the risk of losing good people. Also, some of his operating capital was used to make several broadcasting purchases.

As early as 1954 the owners of KMMT-TV in Austin approached Mac about helping them manage their station. A group of civic-minded businessmen, concerned with providing the city with the necessary amenities, started the station but knew little about the industry and were losing money. By 1956 KWWL had agreed to operate the station with the option to buy. Mac evaluated the situation, fired the manager, drastically lowered operating expenses and then brought in new leaders like Tommy Young. But the station suffered some of the same problems Waterloo did. It was in a very competitive market with KGLO in Mason City and the powerful KROC in Rochester. It lacked a good transmission tower which limited its range, viewer numbers and revenue. Mac's austerity move meant the needed new equipment (they had only one studio camera) was not forthcoming and even though the new management kept the station going, there was a limit to their success. The situation was further complicated by a call for a vote to unionize in October, 1958. Mac visited with staff on the issue and in a low key, but persuasive speech, convinced a majority that the only way a small station would survive was to remain a "happy family." Although he said he was willing to work with the union, the implication was that it would split the ranks and cause the station's position to deteriorate even further. The purchase was finalized in 1959, delayed by an attempt of the original owners to back out of the deal. But once it became part of Black Hawk Broadcasting, Mac did little to improve it and by 1965 KMMT was a weak third in the ratings. A small AM radio station, KAUS, was also part of the sale. It too was poorly managed and undercapitalized and made little headway in its market during the time Mac

owned it.

The radio side of Black Hawk Broadcasting received much less attention after 1953. The studios and staff remained at the Russell Lamson until the 1958 move to the Insurance Building. The news remained its strong feature. Sportscaster Clare Rampton reported on most of the local sporting events and did live broadcasts of the White Hawks after 1952. He even covered the Waterloo Wildcats, a short-lived semi-pro football team. Ed Falk continued to cover the news with his usual professionalism. The major change was in programming. By the mid-1950s the accordions were gone, replaced by disc jockeys playing Top Forty records. The music was making the transition from Rosemary Clooney to Elvis, but doing so very slowly under the careful direction of Forrest "Frosty" Mitchell whose afternoon entertainment hour always had a large following. However, the pace changed dramatically with the arrival of Bill Baldwin, described by Warren Mead as ". . . crew cut, gray-haired banty rooster." With experience in Milwaukee and Des Moines, he recognized the future of modern radio. Soon the studio was overrun with "whooley hair jocks" (Mead's term) playing rock music. Once the salesmen recovered from the dramatic audience transformation, the station did very well with the change.

The feud over the television license spilled over into radio. Joe DuMond had sold his station to a Chicago company who assumed control in January, 1955. The new general manager, Egmont Sonderling, was anxious to regain some of the ratings and accounts lost to KWWL over the previous five years. In a letter to KXEL customers, he played to the criticism that KWWL was always in a state of change:

> "We believe in stability, as far as personnel and rates are concerned, subject to constant, deliberate and gradual improvements to conform to the change of the times. When you do business with KXEL, you are not dealing with an erratic organization with an inconsistent rate policy of high rates one week, lower rates the next. . . .KXEL is a stable organization. . . our employees are not floaters, but substantial citizens in this community."

From mid-1955 through 1958, Sonderling and his station engaged in an ongoing battle with KWWL radio over unfair rate charges,

the misrepresentation of its advertising coverage and misinterpretation of radio listener ratings. At times it was fought by ads in the Courier, at others times by hand bills mailed to customers and, on several occasions, face to face meetings to discuss the charges. When one Pulse survey showed KXEL actually leading KWWL overall (but not in the news area), its newspaper ad prominently featured a play on Mac's motto: "Here are some facts you should know." A weary McElroy would respond to the charges, which were always unfounded, and await the next round. KXEL did make some headway in the ratings war during the period due to the popularity of performers like By Gosden, George Patrick and Grant Price. But by 1960, with the changing program format, they were targeting different audiences and the competition lessened.

Black Hawk Broadcasting made one other media purchase. In 1962 it bought a small Cedar Rapids station, KPIG. The ratings were low and the audience largely older people who liked preferred Sinatra over Fats Domino. When Bill Baldwin unleashed his Top Forty rock format on the new call letters KLWW, there were howls of protest followed by a mass exodus of adults and the arrival of teenagers. A news department was added. The station performed well in a very competitive market.

There was one non-broadcasting purchase. In 1962 Black Hawk purchased the Coca-Cola Bottling Plant in Waterloo. Included in this was a vending service operation. The existing manager remained in charge and it remained outside the scope of daily interest for Mac.

At the time of Mac's death in February, 1965, Black Hawk owned two television stations and three radio stations. The two KWWL facilities were Mac's creations, ones that he was justifiably proud of. They were profitable and the management worked hard to serve the community's interest. But there were some glaring deficiencies. In television, the low ratings, especially when compared with similar NBC affiliates in other cities, indicated the full potential of the station was not being realized. The ratings also resulted in lower ad revenue. Another weakness was the failure to modernize the station, so vitally important in the changing world of television. A measure of the desperate state of things was the immediate move to update the facilities implemented by the new President, Robert Buckmaster, and the Black Hawk Broadcasting Board of Directors. Within 18 months the obsolete Dumont equip-

ment was replaced with RCA solid state color equipment. The station studio and offices were remodeled and the noisy window areas closed in and soundproofed. An application for a new 2000 foot tower was made to the FCC and FAA in order to reach the Cedar Rapids market. At KMMT a new tower was built and the old transmitter replaced. Orders were placed for new equipment. Plans were also made for an FM station to be added at both sites. The impact at both places was immediate and welcomed. A third problem was Mac's management style. It was too often abrupt and short-sighted, too frugal and too concerned with the day to day operations. This resulted in high employee turnover and the loss of good managers. Conditions at the television stations were repeated to some degree in the radio facilities. Although two of the three were profitable, none were attaining their full potential.

There is no explanation why Mac did not recognize or act on these deficiencies. There was no indication in 1965 he was overly concerned about these issues or planning to address them. Perhaps the visionary in him was already looking ahead to the next challenge (he was interested in cable television). Perhaps he was more concerned about conserving his financial resources. Or maybe he was losing interest in the business. Whatever the reason, had Mac lived another three years, he would have had to deal with these issues in order to have the broadcasting company survive.

Mac's continued to be involved in civic affairs during this period. His interests ranged from sports to his favorite project, the Waterloo Industrial Development Association or WIDA. In addition he was asked to give his support to many different organizations and to sit on the boards of service and social groups.

By 1961 Mac again was a member of the Board of Directors of Professional Baseball in Waterloo. After the Three-I League failed in 1956, Waterloo was without a minor league team. Various groups within the city, from the Chamber of Commerce to the Sports of Sorts Club, worked hard to bring baseball back to the city. In 1958 they were able to obtain a franchise in the restructured Midwest League. Mac helped raise funds to do some work at the stadium and made sure the team was promoted on the air. Mac was also involved in the coming of an ice hockey team which played at the Auditorium.

Mac supported WIDA as much as he could. The group had

been formed in 1954 and had helped several small businesses either get started or remain in the city. Their big project was purchasing 120 acres east of the airport for an industrial park and then putting in water and sewer. WIDA reorganized in 1961 under the new leadership of Robert Buckmaster. A $300,000 fundraising effort was launched to further develop the industrial park and attract new businesses to, or keep existing businesses in, Waterloo. One of the first helped was the Jerald Sulky Company which relocated to the park. Mac was on the Executive Board and active in fundraising. He was instrumental in helping keep the Alstadt and Langlas Bakery in the city after it got into financial troubles and he helped to locate public funds to reorganize the city bus company. He worked with the city and railroads to relocate some of the tracks that clogged downtown traffic and supported the Schukei Plan to build a shopping mall on the west side of the river, though that effort failed when a few landholders refused to sell the necessary land for the project.

As the years went by, Mac joined many different organizations. He was a member of the Chamber of Commerce and was asked to head the Youth Recognition Committee, established to find a way to repay the countless young people who helped sandbag to hold back the 1961 flood. Mac was active in the Izaac Walton League, United Sportsman and his favorite, the Sports of Sorts Club. He was a member, though not necessarily an active one, of the Kiwanis, Elks, Moose, Rotary, American Legion, Amvet, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Masonic Order and the Knife and Fork Club.

A survey of his activities would suggest he had become a highly respected member of the community and one of the "insiders," a part of the powerful circle who informally gave direction to the city. This was confirmed by a social science researcher from the State College of Iowa who made a careful study of the power structure in 1963. Mac was included in a list of 17 which included bank presidents, physicians, construction company owners, businessmen and his own lawyers, Robert Buckmaster and Louis Beecher. These were the people who initiated and worked on projects for the improvement of the community. Proposals which did not have their support usually did not get very far. But in this study, the researcher also found a disconcerting trend. Most of the leaders preferred working quietly behind the scenes because of unfavorable public sentiment or comment. They were sensitive to the

charges that somehow their stewardship was motivated by profit, power or personal gain. Mac had learned this lesson early and seldom sought the limelight or personal acclaim. But he firmly believed, regardless of how it might be accomplished, that anyone who benefited from the community had a responsibility to return something to it. Whether through financial contributions, professional leadership or simple volunteerism, a person needed to work to improve the condition of the society. While some would construe that to mean control of the economic or political process or to maintain the status quo, Mac and most of that 1947 generation of businessmen who had matured with him saw nothing malevolent in their actions. It was what earlier leaders like Rube Rath or Art Young had done to make Waterloo a great city. But this public cynicism was a signal that times were changing and that the old leadership networks were being challenged.

Just as there were profound changes in his professional career, there were dramatic changes in his personal life. The most notable was his marriage to Betty Craft in 1956. They had been dating for several years but Mac was reluctant, as ever, to make that marriage commitment. Pressure was applied by Betty and Buckmaster. The Black Hawk Board was becoming a bit concerned about the image Mac projected. Apparently there were those who preferred a more "domestic" president and general manager. The private ceremony took place in his mother's church in Eau Claire.

Marriage transformed Mac's life. Betty had been married before, to the baseball star Tex Craft, and had a teenage son, Tom. Mac made every effort to play the role of father for Tom. There were family and father-stepson boat outings to Pine Lake, hunting trips and baseball games. But, at a time when Mac was working long hours to develop the station, it was difficult to meet all his needs and Mac's efforts were not always appreciated. The marriage also brought new social demands, now that he had more than a hotel room. The new couple entertained friends at their Belmont Court Apartments and then at their home at 204 Lillian Lane. The latter was purchased at the suggestion of the Board which felt the apartments were not appropriate for their social status. The marriage, by Betty's admission, had its turbulent periods. Mac's work habits were still demanding and he could be difficult when things did not go well at the station. And there certain expectations she

had of him that he could not, or would not, meet. But they remained together and by the 1960s, Mac had become somewhat domesticated, raising a huge garden and roses as well as becoming a chef and entertainer. In 1963 he added an indoor swimming pool to the house that included a kitchen, bar, and changing rooms. He delighted in the pool, in part to get the exercise he needed to lose weight. But what swimming took off, the nearby kitchen restored. There were also business trips, a honeymoon in Hawaii (but not until the tower was finished), Mutual Affiliate conventions in Jamaica and Nassau and National Association of Broadcasters meetings in Chicago. Later there would be winter trips to Florida. Providing for and keeping his "child bride," the term he often used to describe his younger and petite wife, happy certainly altered Mac's lifestyle.

Both of Mac's parents died within a few years of each other. His mother died in 1957, leaving Mac without the one inspiration in his life. His father was killed in a tractor accident in May, 1961. After his divorce from Margaret, James had spent most of his life running taverns. During the war he served soldiers from nearby Camp Perry. In 1958 he had purchased a roadhouse on the southeast edge of Eau Claire and renamed it McElroy's Tavern. He also had a small farm east of the business where the accident happened. Mac attended the funeral but did not take part in the service. He spent some time with his sister Eileen, who had remained in touch with James, and other family members before returning to Waterloo. He had not forgiven his father for what he had done to Margaret or to the family.

It was his sister Jeanne and her children who provided a sense of family for Mac over the years. Born to Jeanne and George Hughes were Leslie and the twins, Michael and Patricia. "Uncle Ralph" was a familiar and welcomed figure. Gentle and generous, he was a purveyor of gifts, travel and surprises for the children. But he also made sure they understood there was no free lunch: "I didn't make all this money so my nephews and nieces could drive Cadillacs." When Leslie decided to join the Dominican Sisters, he treated her to a trip to New York before she entered the convent. When the family came to Iowa, there were trips to Clear Lake and visits to the television studio. His close relationship with Jeanne continued even though distance separated them. There were weekend trips for her and George when Mac was on a business trip close

to where they were living. There were gifts and money to help out when needed. In return, Jeanne served as a confidant, even at long range, for Mac and there was the obligatory "Let's take a ride" invitation when they got together. For her, his legacy was a matter of great concern; she would not accept the interpretation that Mac was nothing more than a "colorful character" who was only interested in his personal welfare or some manipulative taskmaker without sensitivity.

But in some respects, he was a character, someone with just enough idiosyncrasies to make him interesting, yet not eccentric. One of his most well-known characteristics was his bad driving. Being busy, he was always behind schedule. He would dash out of the Russell Lamson Hotel, late for his radio show, race across the Fourth Street bridge, park illegally in front of Black's and then wonder why he got a ticket. One of his staff's responsibilities was to negotiate unpaid parking tickets with the police department. He considered any vacant spot close to the hotel his personal parking place. Warren Mead's first encounter with Mac was at a stop light in front of the Russell Lamson. Mead was waiting on a red light when a car pulled around him on his left, briefly stopped and then pulled in front of him and parked in a "no parking zone." He once fought, unsuccessfully, a speeding ticket on the radio. A letter to the Waterloo police department captured his dislike for anything that impeded his driving style:

> "Every time I drive down Eleventh Street and I have to stop at Jefferson and wait for the light and then again I have to stop at Commercial and wait for the light, I wonder why the very able Captain Parker, head of our Traffic Department, doesn't synchronize the lights so I can go straight across and get to work on time. My boss has been complaining because I am late."

In 1960 he had KWWL editorialize in favor of the City Council modernizing (increasing) the in-town speed limit. His driving did not improve when Black Hawk Broadcasting bought him a large Lincoln as a company car. The Board felt the old red station wagon he drove did not look very distinguished. But the Lincoln seemed to encourage him to drive even faster. One of the great frustrations in his life was having to wait for the many slow-moving trains that passed daily through both sides of downtown Waterloo. Hearing a

whistle he would either race through the intersection or dash down a side street to the next crossing to get ahead of the engine.

Mac also stayed in his "Voice of Northeast Iowa" character. The show remained on the air until April, 1959, long after most other similar programs had finished. To the end he was getting better ratings than his competition, Paul Harvey.

There were some things in Mac's character that few people saw. He was concerned that his poor education would adversely influence people's impression of him. As a young man he read whenever time allowed and constantly worked to improve his vocabulary. While more self-assured in later years, there were instances when he was confronted with his fears. While at a meeting in New York, the conversation over drinks turned to college. One person mentioned his Princeton education and asked where the others had gone. When the question reached Mac, the answer was "Wisconsin." The implication, of course, was that he had attended the University of Wisconsin. Months later he would recount the story to Jeanne, embarrassed even then at his duplicity. His concern that bright young people, like himself, were denied the opportunity to attain an education would be a driving force in his decision to establish the McElroy Trust.

The other "silent" side to Mac was religion. He was tolerant of his mother's devout Baptist faith and he was baptized in her church at age 19. But he found the church too constraining for his lifestyle. There was a period during his Army years when he appeared to have an interest in religion, but on his return there was no time for religion in his life. Jeanne married into a Roman Catholic family and tried to convert him. However, for most of his life she had to be content with the belief that, deep within him, he was a believer. During the last years of his life Mac did show some interest in Catholicism. There was the St. Patrick's prayer that he carried and his pride in Leslie's decision to join the Dominican Sisters. And he spent considerable time with the local monseigneur, although that might have had more to do with golf and clubhouse conversation than spiritual matters. But Jeanne was consoled that, as he was dying, he had requested a priest to administer the sacrament of last rites. Perhaps her prayers, and all that golf, had had an impact.

The death of Ralph J. McElroy came as an unexpected shock to his family, friends and the Waterloo community. Mac had been

concerned about his weight and a 1961 visit to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester had resulted in an order to lose 35 pounds. He did, for a short time, and then put 25 pounds back on. But there had been no indication of other medical problems. While on vacation in Florida in early 1965, he began to experience severe stomach pains. Thinking it was the flu, Betty and Mac returned to Waterloo where he visited his doctor. What still appeared to be nothing more serious than a bleeding ulcer suddenly turned deadly. In reality he had suffered a gastro-intestinal hemorrhage, a rupture of a blood vessel in the abdomen. He was moved to the Mayo Clinic for immediate surgery. For a few hours it appeared he would recover, but the loss of blood had taken its toll and he went into cardiac arrest, dying 25 minutes later. It was February 16, 1965 and he was 54 years of age.

The public tribute was emotional and overwhelming. Services took place in the First Congregational Church, selected for its capacity but many people were unable to get into the sanctuary. Black Hawk Board members served pallbearers and Warren Mead gave the eulogy. Mac was remembered for his service to the community, for his friendship and for his family. Tributes came from all parts of the nation. The President of the Mutual Network made reference to his being a ". . . champion of good broadcasting practices." Several mentioned his unpretentious manner of serving Waterloo: ". . . without fanfare or publicity," and ". . . would neither seek nor accept any acclaim." United States Senator Bourke Hickenlooper referred to him as personal friend and a leader in the broadcasting industry. The Courier referred to him as the "chronic optimist." A few months later Waterloo Auditorium would be renamed McElroy Auditorium and he would be enshrined in Waterloo's Hall of Fame. But his death was also a loss to the 45,000 or more who were interviewed by him on radio and the countless number who regularly tuned to hear the show. For twenty two years he really had been the voice that people associated with Waterloo and northeast Iowa.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The McElroy Trust Years, 1965-1996

In the years after 1965 the Black Hawk Broadcasting Company experienced a major transformation. Mac had left the company in a less than competitive situation. It fell to Robert Buckmaster to infuse new life into the company and eventually negotiate its sale in 1979. While the success of the company was important to stockholders, ultimately it had the greatest impact on the McElroy Trust. The sale provided the Board of Trustees with the necessary resources to establish one of the most successful foundations in Iowa. Mac's goal to repay the community through its youth was fully realized.

The death of Ralph McElroy created a difficult situation for the Black Hawk Broadcasting Company. Mac had run the company as if it was his own personal business and had not involved the Board of Directors except for the occasional report and annual meeting. The one exception was Robert Buckmaster who, as legal counsel and corporation secretary, was kept informed and was consulted with on policy issues. Within a week of Mac's death, the Board elected Buckmaster as president. The choice was obvious for most. The two men had been associates for years, Buckmaster knew the company reasonably well and Mac had not publicly named or trained a successor. Buckmaster initially stated he would place the daily operations of the television and radio stations in the hands of the management committee he had helped to establish in 1964. He would direct the non-media divisions while continuing his law practice. However, by 1966 Buckmaster had become more actively involved in the television station, believing his presence was needed while improvements were being made. His management style, however, continued to allow the committee to handle daily affairs.

This policy greatly improved relations with the staff and the resulting harmony helped develop an employee enthusiasm and commitment that had not been present during the McElroy era.

Buckmaster continued as head of Black Hawk Broadcasting until 1975 when he moved to CEO and Chairman of the Board and Harry Slife, who had been in charge at Rath Packing, assumed the presidency. During these ten years the reputation and ranking of the television station improved dramatically. An aggressive program was launched to make KWWL competitive in the eastern Iowa market. Color was added (NBC had been pressing for this), a new tower was built to extend coverage to Iowa City, Dubuque and northeast Iowa and new equipment and videotape facilities were ordered. The KWWL building was remodeled and improvements were made at the other broadcasting divisions as well. New on air staff was added and personalities like Tom Peterson quickly became popular with the viewing audience. There was also new management with fresh ideas. Jim Bradley signed on as general manager and Grant Price as news editor. One of the innovations was the creation of Carnaby Square Teleproductions. Originally an advertising agency, it was reorganized into a production unit to broadcast University of Iowa mens' basketball. As a part of the Iowa Television Network, a consortium of five Iowa stations established by KWWL, it transmitted Hawkeye basketball statewide from 1978-87. Another feature was the expanded commitment to local issues and problems. Grant Price was brought in from Cedar Rapids to head the news department. He established news bureaus in Cedar Rapids and Dubuque to strengthen viewership as well as to continue Ed Falk's emphasis on local coverage. Bradley introduced a community quiz program and, along with Price, featured the activities and accomplishments of metro organizations on a Sunday morning discussion show. Special programs were produced on issues such as race relations and urban development while Buckmaster wrote and presented editorials on topics of community concern. The end result was KWWL winning the ten o'clock news over WMT in 1974 and becoming the leading news station in eastern Iowa at both the 6:00pm and 10:00pm slots in the years after 1975. This was a tremendous change from the mid-1960s when WMT's share was often three times larger. Other additions to the company included FM radio stations in Waterloo and Cedar Rapids and the purchase of six cable franchises in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

The value of Black Hawk Broadcasting grew as well. At the death of McElroy, the book value had been estimated at approximately $700,000 and the market value would have been perhaps as much as $4,000,000. Had the capital, personnel and programming improvements not been made, the television station probably would have been bought up by a larger regional station, much the way KWWL picked up KMMT (renamed KAAL) in Austin and later KTIV in Sioux City. But the $1,400,000 in KWWL improvements in the late 1960s and the inflationary market of the 1970s resulted in the value of Black Hawk Broadcasting increasing tenfold.

The stockholders were the first to benefit from this escalation in value. For years they had not received dividends on their holdings. What profits were made had been retained for company growth. However, by 1959 Mac decided there was sufficient revenue to start paying preferred shares dividends of $2.50 retroactive to 1956. Common stock received $1.00 per share in 1961, $6.00 in 1962 and $8.00 in the following year. But the critical factor was the value of the stock. For years common stock had been bought and sold for $50, the par value. At McElroy's death, the value had to be determined for tax purposes and initially was estimated to be $205 per share. The Internal Revenue Service valued it at several times that rate and taxed it accordingly. After nearly four years of negotiation with the IRS, the final figure was determined to be $934 per share. While there were few, if any, willing to buy at that amount, the new figure gave Buckmaster a working idea of the value of the corporation when a purchase offer was made.

The bid to buy Black Hawk Broadcasting in 1979 was unsolicited. It came from American Family Corporation whose major business was selling cancer insurance policies through American Family Life Assurance Company (AFLAC). The company had been started in 1955 by John Amos who continued as CEO. Amos, whose successful career paralleled McElroy's, wanted to diversify operations. In 1978 he bought three smaller television stations and added KWWL and another station in Georgia in 1979. The merger, which involved the exchange of AFLAC stock for Black Hawk Broadcasting shares, was approved by the Federal Communications Commission in 1980. The total value of the transfer was reported to be $45,000,000. The sale was negotiated by Buckmaster and approved by the Board of Directors. Black Hawk Broadcasting became a division of AFLAC

with Harry Slife as president. No changes in management or policy were written into the sale agreement.

The sale marked an end to one part of Mac's dream. In 32 years McElroy and Buckmaster had accomplished far more than anyone would have envisioned. Black Hawk Broadcasting had gone from a radio station that had to borrow to meet its first payroll to a company composed of three television stations, four radio stations, a syndicated sports broadcasting company as well as cable franchises, a realty company, a food distribution operation and a sign display company. Rarely do entrepreneurs start with so little and achieve so much. But the sale also allowed for the fulfillment of Mac's other goal, repaying Waterloo and northeast Iowa for all it had done for him. The dividends from, and sale of, the AFLAC stock would generate revenue to benefit young people in the area. But the transformation of the McElroy Trust into the charitable foundation took several years to accomplish. As with the radio and television stations, Mac's vision did not materialize overnight.

Mac had always felt an indebtedness to the region. It had provided him with a pleasant and receptive environment in which to live and work. His constant contact with the public endeared him to them, and vice versa. His dream of a radio station was realized through the support of local business leaders and he was able to sustain it through the ads they bought. This continued with the television station. In addition, Mac had done so much within the community that he felt he had a vested interest to make sure it continued to progress after he was gone.

In 1954, after the establishment of KWWL-TV, he drew up a will which would return something to what he considered the most important asset of the area, the youth. After making provisions for his mother and sisters Jeanne and Eileen, he directed that any revenue not used for family purposes be set aside to benefit young people:

> "It is my intention that the use of such income shall be generally limited to the educational and research fields but this limitation shall be broadly interpreted. It may be used for scholarships, tuition payments, board, room, supplies, books, clothing, transportation and any other costs connected with educational training or research. Such income may also be used for grants

for research and related projects in which a young person or persons might be engaged. The determination of the Trustees as to 'deserving young people' shall be conclusive."

Mac's lifelong search for education culminated in this generous bequest. If some youth, who found themselves in the same difficult situations he had experienced, were helped to improve themselves, then the money would be well spent.

The will was modified to accommodate the death of his mother and his marriage. The last version, given in 1961, provided for two trusts, the R.J. McElroy Trust and the Betty McElroy Trust. All the stock from Black Hawk Broadcasting was to go to the former while assets of the estate went into the latter. Both trusts were to be administered by Robert Buckmaster, Robert A. Young and Thomas Trunnell who would serve as trustees. Buckmaster was also to be Executor. Estate expenses were to be paid from the R.J. McElroy Trust. In addition, the needs of Betty and Tom and Jeanne and her children were to be met from this fund. Sister Eileen and his mother-in-law were included later. An important codicil was added in 1962. The provision for his family was limited to maintaining a reasonable standard of living and for medical and other special needs. For the children, Mac made it clear they were to receive support for their education and any medical needs that might arise if the Trustees thought it in their best interests. But the money was not to be used for pensions or annuities. As one of the beneficiaries observed later, Mac did not earn all that money so his family could live an opulent lifestyle. It was consistent with his philosophy that anyone might need some help to become a success, but that too much assistance would make them dependent.

The R. J. McElroy Trust was established in 1965 to facilitate the handling of the estate. However, the Trustees were unable to initiate any programs because of extended litigation with the Internal Revenue Service over the valuation of the estate for tax purposes. When the estate was finally settled in 1971, and all the expenses levied against the assets, there was virtually nothing left for the R.J. McElroy Trust. It was funded over the next few years by the dividends from the common shares, most of which was distributed to family members. The remaining balance was so small that only an occasional project was funded. This situation continued until the AFLAC sale. In the exchange of stock, the assets of the Trust sud-

denly exceeded $10,000,000 and by January, 1984 the market value of all holdings was approximately $14,000,000. Along with the private stockholders who had held their shares, the Trust had acquired a windfall beyond expectation.

However, there was a downside. Since private beneficiaries had been provided for in the Trust, it could not receive tax-exempt status. The payment of federal and state taxes greatly reduced the funds available for distribution. In addition, the Trust was virtually restricted from diversifying its holdings due to capital gains taxes. The alternative was to make the Trust a tax-exempt foundation by buying out the family beneficiaries. The savings were estimated to be very substantial. The Board acted on the basis of the 1962 codicil which stated that once the children had become adults, it was expected they would be making only limited demands on the Trust. Family members were offered a settlement, mostly in the form of AFLAC common stock, to meet any special needs they might incur in the future. Negotiations began in June, 1984 and by December of that year all parties had come to an agreement. By 1985 the R.J. McElroy Trust's only responsibility was serving the needs of deserving young people. The Board felt confident that Mac, knowing his family was provided for, would have approved of the transformation of the Trust.

The new circumstances required an organizational restructuring. Previously the Trust met only occasionally and worked without a staff. But with more money to distribute and more requests for those funds, the Board formalized its operations. In February, 1981 Roger Lynch, longtime treasurer for Black Hawk Broadcasting, was appointed Executive Director. With his retirement in 1986, Linda Klinger was selected to replace him. Dorothy Drilling, Mac's secretary, served as Administrative Assistant. The composition of the Board also changed. Two close friends and associates, Robert A. Young and Buckmaster, continued as a personal tie to Mac until their deaths in 1990 and 1993 respectively. In 1981 Harry Slife replaced Tom Trunnell and served until his death in a car accident in 1994. Building on Mac's vision, they were able to convert the Trust into one of the premier foundations in the state and region. Theirs was an activist and aggressive philosophy, one that sought to address potential problems rather than waiting to react to a situation that was beyond resolution. To continue this strategy and to provide a younger perspective, three successor

trustees were selected in 1981 to advise the Board - Raleigh Buckmaster, Rick Young and Bill Bolster, Jr. In 1985, Jim Waterbury, the new General Manager of KWWL, replaced Bolster, who would move on to phenomenal success in New York as General Manager of WNBC and President of CNBC Cable. In the same year the three became regular members of the Board. Ross Christensen became a trustee in 1993.

Once the sale to AFLAC was completed, the Board moved expeditiously to improve its capital situation by liquidating some of the new stock and to identify groups that were already serving young people. The first three grants gave an indication of the Board's future direction. The Grout Museum of History and Science received funds for its youth programming. The Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation was given money to develop a conservation curriculum and the Iowa College Fund received funds to be used for scholarships. General educational programming, environmental education and scholarships would regularly receive support in the years to come. These allocations were consistent with McElroy's interests in education and hunting and fishing. Robert Buckmaster often commented, after approving a grant, that ". . . this would be about what Mac had in mind."

One of the most important and popular grants was the R.J. McElroy Scholarship program to deserving graduates of northeast Iowa high schools. Initially, more than 200 scholarships of $500 each were made available to 150 public and private schools in 27 counties. The criteria was merit (3.25 GPA minimum) and outstanding qualities of leadership and citizenship. There were two important administrative rules. First, the school principal, with the help of a local committee, would be responsible for the selection. The Trust was not interested in micro-managing the award process. Second, private schools would benefit on an equal basis with public schools. The Board remembered the support and sympathy Mac had exhibited towards the parochial schools in Waterloo. Another project that had a strong association with Mac was the pledge of $150,000 towards the construction of a new YMCA. This would have pleased the man who had lived in the old YMCA after leaving the Army.

Broadcasting was also included in the early round of funding. An internship program was established at both KWWL and KTIV. The University of Northern Iowa received $350,710, the largest gift

to date to that institution, for an instructional broadcasting program in the Department of Speech. KBBG-FM, the African American radio station in Waterloo, received $5000 to train students in broadcasting techniques. A pledge of $400,000 was made to Wartburg College to establish its first endowed chair, the R.J. McElroy Chair in Communications. Later, the McElroy Trust joined with the Quarton-Iowa Broadcasters Association Trust to help fund scholarships for students entering the news field. Bill Quarton, who had been both Mac's boss and later his competition, noted that Mac's interest in broadcasting journalism would be well served with this pledge.

The most ambitious effort to assist students with their education was launched in 1982. The McElroy Trust pledged a total of $3.75 million to establish student loan programs at fifteen private colleges over fifteen years. Each school would administer an endowment of $250,000 from which to make loans at a low rate of interest. The institutions, all in the viewership area of KWWL and KTIV, were selected because of their commitment to a strong liberal arts education and the difficult economic times they were enduring. Others benefited from the Trust as well. Hawkeye Institute of Technology received general and minority scholarship support and Western Iowa Technical School was given money for student loans. The nursing programs at Allen Memorial Hospital and St. Francis Hospital received funds for the same purpose.

Not all funds went to secondary and post-secondary education. The Waterloo-Cedar Falls Symphony Orchestra received support for youth chairs. The United Way was given a grant to help several youth groups that had experienced budget cuts. The Board, reflecting both a concern about unemployed young people during the summer and also wanting to encourage a sense of personal self esteem, funded the Youth Conservation Corps summer program for several years as well the Gates Park Youth Basketball League. Youth educational funds were channeled through the YMCA and the Martin Luther King Center while some residential programs, like Quakerdale and Bremwood in Waverly, were also assisted. Youth leadership was supported through the Leadership Investment for Tomorrow (LIFT) project.

An evaluation of the early years of the Trust provided the Board with an analysis of its impact. First, there was a clear need for continued foundation support for youth programs. With the

economic recession and limited funds available from local and state government, private groups had to help fill the gap. Second, the support was both appreciated and provided positive results. Articles about and letters from recipients indicated the Trust funds were being applied responsibility. Third, there was much to be done. Once the Trust changed its legal status, there was substantially more money available for distribution. Finally, in order to meet increasing demands and to provide a broader vision, the Trust needed to restructure itself. That was accomplished with the administrative modifications between 1984 and 1986. In the latter year, with the knowledge and the experience of five years, the Trust began to move in some new directions.

The Executive Director, Linda Klinger, expanded the Trust's visibility through meetings with potential grant recipients and a media campaign to familiarize the public with the work of the Trust. Internally, funding priorities were established which resulted in an expanded mission. While remaining committed to funding academic education, primarily through scholarships and internships, the Board began to look at some of the root causes of youth problems. Under the priority designation of behavioral and attitudinal education, grants were given ". . . to modify behavior and attitudes and expand the horizons of young people so that they might more fully reach their potential." Under this heading, money was given to Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Family and Children's Council, Boys and Girls Club and groups involved in substance abuse education, social services, latchkey programs and programs promoting self esteem and leadership. In the 1990s the Trust became more proactive by looking at the social and emotional health of entire neighborhoods. In helping to found "It takes a Whole Village to Raise a Child," it sought to empower neighborhoods through community collaboration to create surroundings in which children and families could thrive. Recognizing that students cannot fully realize their educational potential while living in unstable and dangerous situations, grants were given to preschools and recreational organizations to assist in establishing a healthier and safer living environment.

Another new direction was the inauguration of the Rural County Outreach Program. Most rural counties had very limited access to any foundation support. The Trustees targeted several counties annually to receive funds. Typically, money went to recre-

ational facilities, library support, cultural and historical projects and special needs programs. With an average grant of $8000, the impact on small communities was substantial. The Silos & Smokestacks initiative, which received support for several years, reflected an interest in economic and cultural development for youth in both the rural and metro areas.

The Trust continued to support the traditional programs as well. The fine arts and environmental projects remained priorities. Those ongoing programs that had shown a proven record of success, like the Grout Museum and the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, continued to receive support. Another area of consistency was the preference to make program grants rather than capital grants. While most funding now went to organizations, the McElroy Scholarship in Excellence, and the Gold Star Award for Outstanding Teaching were examples of awards going to individuals. As in the beginning, the Trust was not involved in the administration of the grants but it did require annual reports from the grantees. Site visits by the Trust staff to monitor progress became a common practice.

The McElroy Trust has had a significant impact in northeast Iowa. During the sixteen years since the first grants were made in November, 1980, it has distributed in excess of $20,000,000 to individuals, groups and institutions. Each year literally thousands of young people participate in educational programs funded by the Trust. With the assets as of December 31, 1996 reported to be $41.2 million, there will be funding for the educational, social and cultural needs of area youth in the years to come.

Were R. J. McElroy to return today, there is little doubt he would be genuinely pleased with the activities of the McElroy Trust. It has fulfilled his vision of helping deserving young people. It has done so in an unassuming manner that responds to the needs of the community rather than dictating what should be done. And it has enabled so many to realize their full potential, even when circumstances seem to work against them. Thousands have had the opportunity to "broaden their minds" through the vision and generosity of a man who preached that education was a lifelong pursuit.