

# The History of Omaha Radio

An Inside Look At The Evolution Of Broadcasting

CARL MANN



**Volume Two 1945 - 1979**

**The Music and News Era**

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First Edition 2020

**This work is dedicated  
to the two men who gave their all  
to make AM, FM, and TV a technical reality:  
Edwin Armstrong and Philo T. Farnsworth.**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The workhorse sources of this project were the archives of the *Omaha World-Herald* and the dozens of publications preserved in David Gleason's amazing website AmericanRadioHistory.com, especially *Broadcasting Magazine*, and *Billboard Magazine*.

Other publications include:

*Creighton Magazine*, spring 1996, Fremont Valley Museum, Norfolk, NE, Georgia Radio Hall of Fame, *Hamilton Tip Sheet*, *Hitmakers* 1984, *Lincoln Journal Star*, Nebraska Broadcasters Assoc., Omaha Central High School Archives, Pottawattamie County Historical Society, Purdue University for 2002 thesis by Steven Robert Scherer, *Sponsor Magazine*, *Television Magazine* 1957, *Time Magazine* of June 4, 1956, and *WOW Tower* monthly publication 1940s

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*Turn It Up! American Radio Tales 1946-1996* by Bob Shannon

*Unauthorized Biography of Johnny Carson* by Smith, Corkery

*Council Bluffs Broadway* by Richard Warner, Ryan Roenfeld

Photo and illustration sources outside the author's collection of paraphernalia and brochures are credited to their source, particularly to the *Omaha World-Herald*.

Most importantly are the individuals whose contributions are acknowledged with gratitude:

Michelle Gullett of the *Omaha World-Herald*, Chuck Hoffman, Deane Johnson, Steve Brown, Erik Foxx/Alan Cain, Ernest J. Wesolowski, Frank Merrill, Gary Emenitove, Gregg Ottinger, John Erling, John Menzies, Kris Erik Stevens, Larry R. Jansky, Lyle Davis, Mike Shane, Phil Robbins, Janet Conry Mohring, Roger W. Morgan, Ron Ugly Thompson, Steve Taylor, Tom Barsanti, Jim Timm and Marty Riemenschneider both of the Nebraska Broadcasters Association, David Gleason, webmaster of American Radio History dot com, Dick Warner of the Pottawattamie County Historical Society, and radio historian Mark Durenberger.

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**By Richard Warner**

I'm a disc jockey. I still remember saying that, the first time someone asked me what I did after I landed my first radio job. I wasn't sure what reaction to expect. I braced myself for that askance look typically reserved for ex-convicts and winos on welfare. I was quite aware my gig was nothing more than an overnight shift once a week on the least listened to station in the market. Instead of disdain, the response was an enthusiastic, "Oh, really?" And that's the reaction I noticed for the next twenty years.

Those two decades at KQKQ were indeed interesting. That underdog station managed to pull off what has to be one of the most astonishing "rags-to-riches" stories in the city, transforming itself into the incredibly popular and profitable "Sweet 98," and carrying me into morning drive as the half of the original "Breakfast Flakes." Eventually I became a dentist. People would say, "That's nice. But weren't you once a disc jockey?" There's just something especially alluring about radio.

I first encountered Carl Mann the way thousands of other local people did; I listened to him on KOIL. I wouldn't actually meet him for another thirty-five years. Radio people love to tell stories, so I was quite eager when we planned lunch. Carl told me he was writing a book on local radio history, so I figured he'd have plenty of stories to share.

Carl had more than stories. He had facts. Lots of facts, neatly organized in notebooks. We've all known people who said they were "going to write a book" about one thing or another. Almost none ever do. When I saw the information he collected there was little doubt in my mind Carl's book would come to fruition. I also discovered he's one of the most meticulous researchers I've ever encountered. I've spent many years as an officer of the local historical society, and fancied myself something of a local radio historian. After a few minutes talking to Carl I discovered how little I knew, and of that, a good deal of what I thought I knew wasn't correct anyway. They say nothing is truly lost until it is forgotten. Thanks to Carl's collection and preservation of these details, the history of this important industry that sometimes mirrored and sometimes shaped our lives won't be left behind.

One last thought. Who is this book for? I think it will find a niche at several levels. Everybody likes a good story, and this one is particularly captivating. The era opens with the foregone premise radio is dead, killed off by the advent of television. Yet the most insanely profitable years of radio were just ahead. Just how could that happen? It's a tale of imagination, risk, and skulduggery, with Omaha right there at ground zero.

Obviously these pages are an essential read for radio history buffs, regardless of which market they are interested. Omaha impacted all, be it as a stepping stone for personalities on their way up to the bigger cities, or the genesis of Top 40. Listeners will be interested as well. During this era the question wasn't, "Do you listen to the radio?" but rather, "What station do you listen to?" Everybody listened to the radio, and Carl's chapters will fill in behind-the-scenes details of the stations, the personalities, and promotions to complement listeners' recollections.



For those of you whose contact with radio was as a listener, open the book and dive in! I hope it brings back some warm memories of a time my colleagues and I sent you snuggling back under the covers when we told you school was closed, set the tone for a positive day that got you going in the morning, or were there for you those times when you just badly needed a friend.

As for you radio folk, grab some coffee and get comfortable, because once you start you won't put this book down. It's a flashback of our lives, an inside personal look at how we tick, because, like it or not, it's in our blood. A general manager of mine once explained it this way: "The hours are lousy, the work hard, the demands high, and many times the pay not enough. There's a lot better ways to make a living. You're here because you've been bitten by the bug. Even if you find work in a different industry someday, inside you'll never lose that irrational dedication to this medium. You're a radio person for life." Amen.

## INTRODUCTION

Radio emerged from WW II fearing near extinction with the oncoming and relentless invasion of television. Programmers were at a loss, stubbornly clinging to their ideas of a broad variety of block programming.

In retrospect, formatted radio may seem an obvious transition from network block programming. But, it was a huge leap, requiring courage and ingenuity. How the medium reinvented itself to enjoy another three decades of new success is covered here. These are the Music and News years, those that many recall as the FUN years of radio.

Radio became intimate and local. As listeners became more individualized, radio stations became more personal. The audience shifted from favorite weekly or nightly programs to the station itself. Listeners bonded with their favorite stations and spent longer times listening, enjoying its companionship in the kitchen, on the road, at the beach, or late night alongside the pillow.

This was accomplished through locally produced formatting, where a station programs in a structured way around the clock devising its own music playlist and using its own air personalities to create a persona that can best be called “station-ality.” It was brought home by personal appearances and community involvement.

It was a fun time to be in radio. Air personalities became local celebrities. The hours were long and the pay not so great, but the perks came in the recognition: meeting with record promoters and music artists, getting free concert tickets and first-release records, and even groupies.

In following Omaha’s stations decade by decade, the emergence of music and news radio is laid out here. Most appropriately, it’s described in the very city where it began: Omaha.

America’s heartland was a natural cross-section for the birth of formatted radio, the perfect melting pot of American values, desires, and economics. Omaha was the right size in which to experiment; big enough for competitive ideas, small enough so that it could take chances.

While facilities developments are covered as an important part of this history, it’s the people who made it happen. The innovators from the Midwest who helped shape radio’s reinvention include Don Searle, Ralph Beaudin, George Armstrong, Lyle DeMoss, Sandy Jackson, Johnny Carson, Don Burden, Steve Brown, John Gillen, Lyle Bremser, and most importantly, Todd Storz.

Besides these ground breakers, memorable personalities are mentioned along the way and more will be inadvertently left out. Some are natives of Nebraska and Iowa, others are those learning their craft while passing through a market that proved to be a valuable training ground. Full disclosure, the author includes himself in the third person during several events while at KOIL in the 1970s.

Meet these people. Onward, to Chapter ONE.

## CHAPTER ONE – THE POST WAR YEARS

Within weeks of the war's end, the construction freeze on radio stations was lifted. Expansions and upgrades could begin and new stations could be built.

KFAB increased to 50-thousand watts and moved from Lincoln to Omaha. KBON built a new tower and moved to new studios. A Council Bluffs station would sign on bringing the market's total to six.

But more importantly came a revolution, ignited in Omaha, sparked by the new threat of television.

Television and FM radio were positioning to broaden electronic competition. FM stations would light up a new band as television screens lit up Omaha's living rooms.

By the end of the decade, all AM stations in the market will have sought an FM license, all but two reaching the air. Two AM stations will win a TV license (WOW, KMA) and a couple more (KOIL, KFAB) will vie for the third remaining TV channel availability.

Through it all, Todd Storz and his 500-watt Omaha station would take root to grow and nationally become radio's friend in need.

### **FEDERAL REGULATIONS TIGHTEN FURTHER**

On the heels of the 1941 regulation limiting ownership to one station per market in each service (AM, FM, TV), regulations regarding network influence on affiliates arrived in 1943. The rules called for more local programming. Limits were set up for network option times.

Affiliates could option a maximum of three hours of network time in each of the four dayparts. This resulted in each of the four networks selecting their blocks of time from 9:45 am to 12:45 pm, 1 to 3 p.m., 5 to 6 p.m., and prime time 7 to 10 p.m. The ruling presented a problem for nearly 50 dual-network stations. That list included KMA Shenandoah and KFOR Lincoln each carrying NBC Blue and Mutual Broadcasting.

This resulted in a typical network affiliate signing on with a farm show, music, and news with a personable announcer, then taking some mid-morning network shows, like Don McNeil's *Breakfast Club* on ABC and *Arthur Godfrey* on CBS. After a local noon newscast, afternoon net offerings would

be soap operas in the early afternoon segment. Featured crooners like Kate Smith and Frank Sinatra would appear in the dinner time segment of net offerings, perhaps with a mix of news and commentary features. Then stations would take over locally until the network prime time line up of drama, variety shows, and sitcoms. National radio personalities at the time were Bob Hope, Jack Benny, Fibber McGee and Molly, and Walter Winchell.

More federal regulation came In 1949 with the Fairness Doctrine, requiring broadcasters to give equal time to contrasting views on controversial issues. Radio stations since 1941’s Mayflower decision already were required to remain neutral in matters of news and politics, unable to support any particular position or candidate. With the new ruling most political debate was driven off the air except for a few carefully crafted management editorials. It would remain that way for decades until lifted in the 1980s ushering Rush Limbaugh and his ilk.

### THE BOOM YEARS BEGIN

Here’s a picture of the Omaha market at the war’s end:

- WOW 590, with the city’s best signal was carrying NBC Red.
- KOWH 660 had NBC Blue but was limited to daytime operation.
- KFAB 1110 ran CBS on its 10-thousand watt signal from Lincoln.
- KOIL 1290 also aired CBS but very soon will switch to ABC (ex-NBC Blue).
- KBON 1490 the newcomer with only 250 watts, was airing music blocks and MBS.

### WOW 590 Omaha

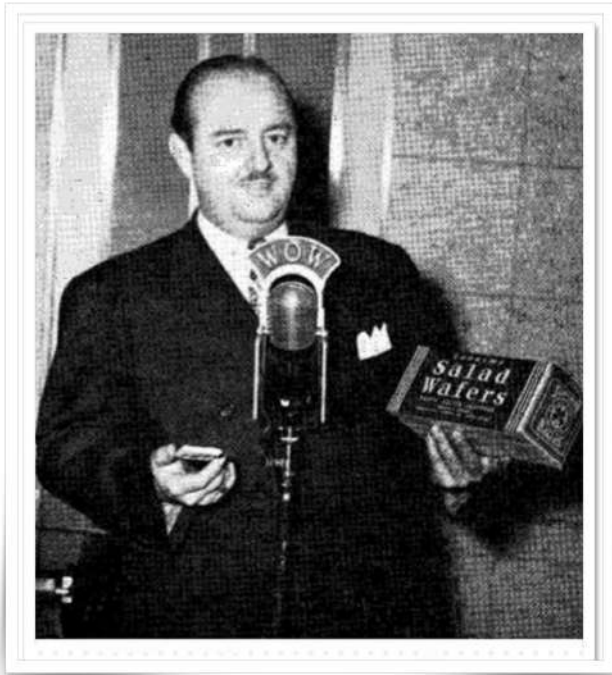
WOW 590 in the remainder of the 1940s developed strong local personalities and programming ranging from informational Home and Agriculture programming to personalities Jolly Joe Martin and Johnny Carson.

By 1946, WOW had five staff members who had been in radio for at least twenty years. They included program manager Lyle De Moss, Tom Chase who joined WOW in 1931, Bill Wiseman who was promotion manager, and John Gillin president and general manager.



WOW print ad promoting NBC shows.

William O. "Bill" Wiseman's overall media career spanned 44 years, beginning in the 1920s when he was at the *Omaha Daily News* writing a column devoted to the new medium of radio. Additionally, Wiseman during his WOW tenure helped design audience measurement techniques in a period when little was known about radio audiences and helped to promote their use. Wiseman would stay with Meredith Broadcasting another 20 years, taking his responsibilities into television heading up WOW TV 6.



*Lyle DeMoss selling saltines on Lunch Time Serenade, 1944.*

The fifth long-time WOW member was chief engineer William Kotera who was witness to the advances in broadcast technology since operating his amateur station in 1921. Kotera joined WOW in 1925 when it was in its original headquarters at the top of the Woodmen of the World Building. He was instrumental in developing WOW TV in the late 1940s.

A valuable addition to the announcing staff came in 1945. Merrill Workhoven joined WOW after spending a few years in Hollywood where he worked in a bank while performing in some Little Theater productions and a few Columbia picture "shorts."

Workhoven's radio resume included KSCJ Sioux City, KSOO Sioux Falls and KTAR Phoenix. He became chief announcer at WOW and later added WOW TV to his duties. His signature sign off at WOW was, "My time is up, thank you for yours."

Merrill Workhoven stayed at WOW until retiring in 1975. His daughter Melanie followed in his footsteps, becoming a stage performer and doing radio work at KOIL in the 1970s and later at KQV Pittsburgh and WHO Des Moines.

Bill McBride came to WOW in 1947, and with Ray Clark, pioneered television news on WOW TV. McBride became the WOW TV 6 program director in 1953 and stayed with the station another 17 years.

John L. "Tip" Saggau was WOW's first Sports Director, hired away from KBON 1490 in 1947. He began as a vocalist on KBON in 1945 but was an athlete at heart. Saggau was a premiere sprinter at Thomas Jefferson High School in Council Bluffs and a halfback for Creighton University. Tip Saggau

called Husker football on WOW in 1949 and 1950. He did the play by play while Merrill Workhoven provided the color.

(As a side note, WOW-TV did a live pickup of a Husker game in 1950, but it was just a novelty, the money side being in radio. The booth announcers for that TV pickup were William Keough, later president and CEO of Coca-Cola, and Johnny Carson.) (OWH Feb 25, 1988).

Tip Saggau was a charter member of the Omaha Sportscasters Association formed in December 1947. Other charter members included KFAB's Lyle Bremser, Bob Steelman of KOIL, Jack Sandler from KOWH-KOAD, Ed Morgan at KBON, and Hugh Carlisle of KSWI-KFMX. (OWH Dec 24, 1947).

WOW's feature shows included those for the housewife and the agriculturists. The ubiquitous Martha Bohlson continued with *Martha Bohlson's Cupboard* since beginning at WOW in 1938. Bohlson had a degree in nutrition from the University of Chicago and spent eleven years with the Nebraska Electric Power Company as a home economist.

Bohlson's shows were paid for by the power company before she finally went out on her own. For 15 years Bohlson appeared on two AM radio stations in Omaha. On KOWH it was *The Homemakers Club*, mid-mornings as early as 1946. On WOW it was *Martha Bolson's Cupboard*, late mornings, for a while airing adjacent to CBS' *Arthur Godfrey Show*.

Bohlson's show continued into the 1950s on both stations. It was later syndicated by Tidy House Company of Shenandoah, eventually running on 90 stations. Bohlson's kitchen show even went to television during WOW TV's first month of broadcasting in 1949.

Sally Dee's midday show, listed at various times as *Sally Dee* or *Aunt Sally* on the schedule and airing on WOW since the mid-1930s, was much different from household tips and recipes. Dee's bright, chatty show developed the "Sunshine Chain" which was a letter-writing operation for invalids and shut-ins. In the 1940s she added "Aunt Sally's Dog House" that covered topics from pet care to helping find homes for strays.



Sally Dee, WOW. 1941 photo.

One memorable Saturday in the 1940s “Aunt Sally’s Dog House” had no dogs to offer, just “several kitties,” so Dee suggested the segment name for the day should be “Aunt Sally’s Cat House.” Her control room engineer Bob Rudd broke into laughter temporarily distracting the show’s presenter, later explaining to the innocent Aunt Sally the meaning of Cat House (*OWH* Nov 25, 1977).

Dee’s show was sometimes aired in the early morning and some late nights during the 1940s. Dee retired from WOW in 1951 but continued to unite homeless pets with owners for many more years.

WOW’s big signal with its rural coverage was a moneymaker for the station. Farm and agriculture reporting had long been big business for radio with its intensely loyal rural audience and Omaha being central in corn and beef country. Omaha’s importance in farming is underscored by the Omaha Stockyards overtaking those in Chicago in 1955 to become the biggest in the country. Huge meatpacking plants transformed South Omaha into being called "Magic City." Reaching farmers and ranchers with sponsor's agriculture-related products translated into big dollars for WOW, and for KFAB as well.

One agriculture reporter who embraced becoming a personality for that audience was Mal Hansen. He joined WOW in 1945 as Farm Service Director, coming from WHO and KSO/KRNT in Des Moines where he gained his farm reporting experience. Hansen left broadcasting in 1959 but still did occasional gardening shows on local TV.

As the 1940s were drawing to a close, Johnny Carson moved to Omaha to begin his announcer/personality career in 1949 on WOW. He was hired on August first at 50 dollars per week by PD Lyle DeMoss. Carson’s only radio experience had been as a writer for KFAB’s *Eddie Sosby Radio Rangers* in Lincoln while attending the University of Nebraska.

Carson’s first on-air work at WOW included everything from station breaks to hosting his own shows. His morning show, *The John Carson Show*, was on 8:15 to 9 a.m. debuting in October 1949 and running for just over two years. He also did numerous magic show appearances for extra money which in turn promoted his radio show. (*Unauthorized Biography of Johnny Carson* by Smith, Corkery)

Carson Lived in the Drake Court Apartments at 22nd and Jones Streets. He married his first wife, Jody, in North Platte a month after getting the WOW job. On November 7, 1950, Johnny Carson's first son was born while the Carsons were still residing at Drake Court Apartments. (Smith, Corkery bios)

WOW Engineer Percy Ziegler joined WOW in 1949, the same year as Johnny Carson, and the two began working together on the air. Ziegler’s past included KOIL in 1936 as an engineer where

hehelped produce the station's drama series *Krime Klan*. He also was at KFAB working with Lyle Bremser for some time.

Ziegler ran the sound effects for Carson's radio show. One on-going bit was running thunder and rain over weatherman Ed Stapowich while he was predicting fair skies and warmer temps. Percy retired from WOWT channel 6 (formerly WOW TV) forty years later, then went to work at KLNG 1490.

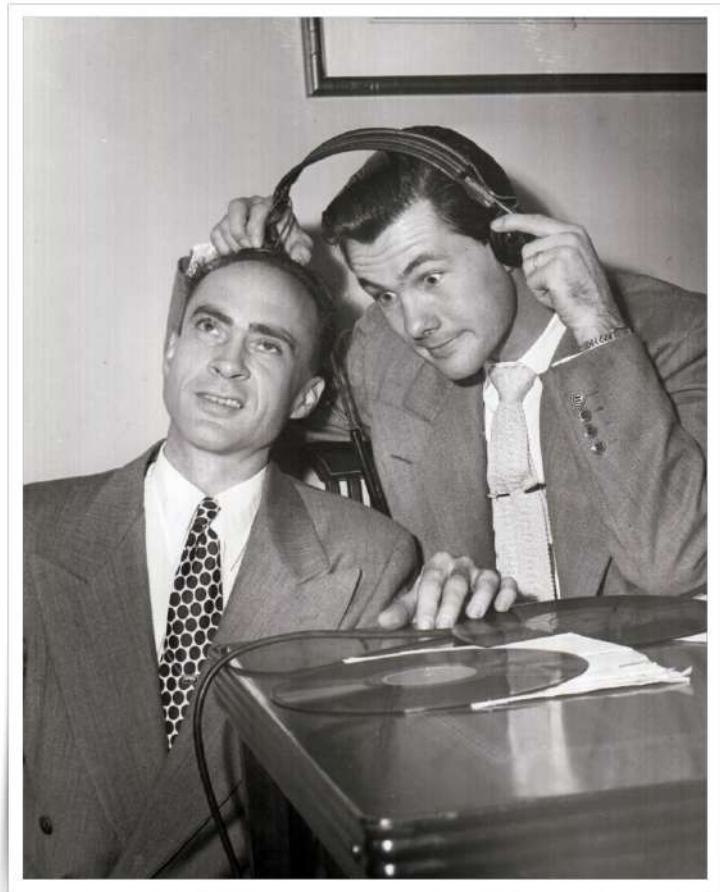
Carson's morning show with its off-beat and irreverent humor was highly rated during his two-year run until he left seeking television fame in California in 1951. Carson's show was replaced by *The 590 Hour*. In another decade Carson would take over NBC TV's *Tonight Show*.

Besides Percy Ziegler, WOW's Merrill Workhoven also became life-long friends with Johnny Carson. Some speculate that it was Workhoven's Hollywood experience and advice that inspired Carson to make his move to the West Coast.

On the technical side, WOW's facilities were already first-rate ever since its mid-1930s facilities upgrade. Now, management was pursuing expansion into FM and Television.

On the FM band, The *World-Herald's* KOAD had been on the air for nearly a year by the time all remaining stations in the market had made their bids for FM in 1947. WOW applied for 21-thousand watts on 99.9 that year with the calls KWOW. Management announced that the AM tower would be used to support the FM antenna.

A 10-thousand watt transmitter was ordered. But, the FM plans went no further as management's attention was diverted to television. It's no secret that NBC's David Sarnoff disregarded FM radio, instead urging his radio affiliates to seek television licenses.



*Johnny Carson and Percy Ziegler at WOW, 1949.  
(Courtesy: Fremont Valley Museum, Norfolk, NE).*



WOW TV was awarded channel 6 in January 1948 and signed on 18 months later in 1949. Though television would soon become radio's nemesis, it's notable that most TV outlets were born out of a radio-TV combination like WOW's. The stable of talent on AM would prove very useful, though somewhat wary and reluctant, in parenting this new medium during its awkward infancy.

## 660 KOWH Omaha

A 500-watt daytime-only station, the *Omaha World-Herald's* KOWH 660 struggled in the programming battle, though it won the prestigious George Foster Peabody award in 1944 for its *Town Meeting of the Air*.

The major strides KOWH made in the late 1940s were on the technical side. The station built a new tower and transmitter plant that housed not only the AM station but a new sister FM that would be Omaha's first, KOAD 92.5.

KOWH was affiliated with NBC Blue. The network was the least popular of the major three networks but still had some well-liked shows, most notably *Don McNeil's Breakfast Club*. NBC had divested the Blue network two years before the war's end but retained the name while negotiating rights to be called the American Broadcasting Company.



1947 KOWH print ad  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

KOWH's major drawback was that the station had to sign off at sunset each night. For NBC Blue prime time network offerings, Omaha listeners were forced to tune in KMA 960 in Shenandoah. Summertime was an exception when longer daytime hours permitted KOWH to air NBC Blue's evening lineup past 8 p.m.

Things changed in 1945 when the net finally became ABC in June and full-timer KOIL 1290 picked it off from KOWH in November.

Now fully independent, KOWH in 1946 underwent a major programming shift with a new policy of "extensive music programming." The change was especially noticeable during the morning hours with a music mix ranging from waltzes and show tunes to classical and light concerts, notably eschewing "tin pan alley" music. After a while, daily music programming settled into a collection of concert arrangements and operettas.

Local feature programming included lots of morning newscasts, major league baseball, Orville Weimer's racing results from AkSarBen, and Jack Sandler's *Man On The Street* interviews Monday through Saturdays.

Sandler was the station workhorse who also did play by play American Legion Baseball as well as re-creating "telegraphic play by play" major league baseball games and even hockey matches "by direct wire." By 1947 Sandler had a nightly *Sports Trail* sportscast simulcasting on both KOWH and sister FM KOAD.

Jean Sullivan's *Women In The News* enjoyed a long run well before women's lib. Beginning on KOWH in 1941, the "special newscast for women" ran six days a week in various midday slots, then moved to 11:30 a.m. in 1945. It stayed middays until July 1948 when Sullivan was moved to mornings at 7 a.m.

Sullivan ended her run in late 1950 quickly moving into television. She co-hosted coverage of the splashy AkSarBen Ball on WOW TV channel 6 in 1950 and later showed up in 1952 with her own daily show called *Women's View* on KMTV channel 3. Later, when heading her own ad agency, Sullivan would appear in her client's TV spots, most visibly for the "bargain-loving" Nebraska Furniture Mart.

The omnipresent Martha Bohlson hosted a 15-minute show twice weekly in the late 1940s on KOWH, focusing on menus and recipes. Hers was a lead-in to Jean Sullivan's show on Wednesdays and Fridays.

By 1948 and her tenth anniversary of being on the air, the busy Bohlson was not only on KOWH Wednesdays and Fridays, but also on KOIL Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, KBON Monday mornings, and WOW Saturday mornings.

Joining the KOWH women's shows line up in 1948 was *Leanna's Kitchen*, also billed as *Kitchen Klatter*, weekdays from the Shenandoah home of Leanna Driftmeier, whose family now syndicated the pioneer broadcaster's show that had been running since the 1920s.

**Now Heard  
At 10:45 A. M.**



**JEAN SULLIVAN**

Miss Sullivan's "Women in the News" program will be heard at a new time—10:45 a. m., starting tomorrow. For the news from a woman's point of view—local, national and international—tune in Jean Sullivan each week day morning at 10:45.

**KOWH**

*Jean Sullivan, KOWH News from a Woman's Point of View, 1944 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).*

Big Band leader Lee Barron (Elroy Vernon Lee) brought his two-year-old radio career from KOIL 1290 to KOWH 660 in 1948. His *Lee Barron Show* played records afternoons at 4 p.m. for 55 minutes on KOWH 660, simulcasting on FM KOAD, featuring “background stories of the selections.”

It was a significant programming shift, as Barron’s was a record show with a host involved in the presentation rather than simply announcing. Equally important is that his identity appeared in the show’s name as opposed to the generic names given to record shows.

Barron was a man with many hats. Besides his newfound radio career, he continued as a big band leader making local and regional appearances, was track announcer at Council Bluffs’ Playland Park stock car races, and was the enrollment supervisor for a broadcast school in Minneapolis.

With so many financial interests, Barron wasn’t beholden to radio’s fickle ratings or a programmer’s mood swings. Barron’s KOWH show ran only six months until December 1948 when he returned full time to big band management for some time. But he wouldn’t be gone from radio for long. Barron showed up on KBON 1490 in 1950 then on various other stations in the region in a radio career that lasted well into the 1980s.

Record shows identified by the DJ personality were cautiously beginning to emerge. As another example, KOWH’s afternoon *Club 660 with Bud Armstrong* began in 1949 (also simulcast but mostly unheard on KOAD 92.9). This, while the all-important morning show remained the *Kolache Klub* airing polkas, waltzes, and mazurkas, all presented by the announcer du jour. The young Bud Armstrong will soon be known as the right-hand man to Todd Storz in radio’s major evolution coming in the early 1950s.

Almost as an eerie omen to that coming revolution was KOWH’s 30-minute Saturday morning show in 1948, *Top Ten Tunes*, featuring "Omaha's Ten Top-Selling Records." Differing from the national *Hit Parade* show ranking popular songs since the 1930s, this radio show was a *local* Hit Parade program rating popular *records*.

Note the emphasis on *local* instead of national, and *records* instead of songs. KOWH unknowingly was toying with the formula to become an industry innovator even before Todd Storz came along.

Meanwhile, some major technical facility advances were taking place. First was the addition of a sister FM station, KOAD on 92.5 signing on July 1, 1946. It was Omaha’s first FM station.


KOAD FM received full promotional support from its newspaper owners, World Publishing, operators of the *Omaha World-Herald*. The owners ambitiously launched separate programming from that on the AM side as much as possible. They then published numerous stories heralding the new and improved static-free medium, along with ads for FM receivers.

Second was the AM technical upgrade in 1947, KOWH 660 being the last of the four 1920s stations to do so. WOW 590 and KOIL 1290 had completed major upgrades in the 1930s and KFAB 1110 was just putting the finishing touches on its 50-thousand watt power increase coinciding with its move to Omaha. KOWH obtained FCC permission in early 1947 to move its transmitter site from 60th and Girard to 60th and Redmond Avenue where a tall 500-foot tower would go up. It would be suitable for KOWH's low frequency and the height would be a major benefit for sister FM station KOAD. The 40-acre site was about a mile and a half north of Benson and six miles northwest of downtown Omaha.

Construction of a new \$80 thousand building began, designed to house two transmitters, one each for the AM and the FM stations. Outside, the new tower rose with FM bays secured to the top and the tower itself becoming the radiator for the AM signal. Station manager and technical supervisor Frank Shopen announced the new transmitter site would increase the range of both stations. The new site went into operation in August 1947.

The tower was less than a half-mile from the WOW 590 tower at 56th and Kansas Streets. WOW engineers commented that at night after KOWH had left the air they could sometimes see electricity arcing at the silent station's tower base, the arcing created and induced by WOW's signal.

By 1949 it's apparent the *Omaha World-Herald* felt ready to leave the radio biz after running a struggling AM daytimer and seeing FM growth non-existent. An agreement to sell the stations to Robert and Todd Storz was reached in April 1949.



**Gaylord Avery**  
JOINS KOWH AS PROGRAM  
DIRECTOR

KOWH is pleased to announce the appointment of Gaylord Avery, popular midwestern radio personality, as program director effective September 19th.

For new programs, new features and a new approach to the business for broadcasting, keep tuned to KOWH.

Listen to the News with  
Gaylord Avery on

**KOWH**  
660 ON YOUR DIAL

1949 Gaylord Avery from KFAB joins KOWH  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

Robert Storz was head of Storz Brewery, makers of Storz Beer which had been a local top seller since the war. The brand owned about 50 percent of the Omaha beer market and made up about one-third of Nebraska's beer sales. Todd Storz was a salesman at KFAB 1110 following a stint spinning records on KBON 1490.

The price for the AM and FM was \$75 thousand. Days later on April 28, Mid Continent Broadcasting was incorporated by Storz as the new owners-to-be waited for FCC approval on their purchase. The approval came in July.

Robert stepped back and let Todd run the show. Studios remained on the eighth floor of the Kilpatrick Building at the NW corner of 15th and Farnam. (KOWH remained in the Kilpatrick Building until the 1960s. The Kilpatrick Building was demolished in the 1980s.)

Todd immediately applied to the FCC to double the power of KOWH from 500 to 1000 watts, which he felt was “virtually assured” (*OWH* July 29, 1949). The power increase was denied.

In September Todd hired longtime KFAB newscaster Gaylord Avery to become his program director. Avery had been at KFAB since 1946 and was doing the 10 p.m. news there when he left. Avery, along with KOWH's Bud Armstrong who was inherited with the station purchase, will become instrumental in Todd Storz's legendary programming changes, a story that unfolds in the coming decade.

### **KFAB 780 Lincoln becomes 1110 Omaha**

KFAB in Lincoln was Nebraska's most powerful with 10-thousand watts on 780 kHz, still synchronizing its night time signal with that of WBBM Chicago.

The station emerged from the war years as a stand-alone, no longer part of the Central States Broadcasting System's duopoly that had included KFOR 1240 Lincoln and KOIL 1290 Omaha, thanks to newly established ownership limits set by the FCC.

The new limits were one AM, FM, and TV station per owner per market. Central States kept KFAB Lincoln but harbored plans to move it to Omaha, so both KFOR Lincoln and KOIL Omaha had to be sold off.

Manager Don Searle headed up the Central States Broadcasting duopoly until leaving for a position with ABC on the West Coast in 1943. He was replaced by Hugh Feltis, stations relations manager for the Blue Network in New York. Feltis had gained his radio experience at several stations in the Pacific Northwest.

In April 1944 the group sold KFOR Lincoln (technically operated by subsidiary Cornbelt Broadcasting), for \$100 thousand. It was a package deal that included Omaha's KOIL for another \$250 thousand, both stations going to investors Charles and James Stuart of Lincoln.

KFAB, now operated by KFAB Broadcasting Company (the Central States Broadcasting moniker went with KOIL's sale), moved out of the studios it had been sharing with the other two stations. Vacating the Lincoln Hotel at, 9th & P Streets, KFAB moved to the fourth floor of the downtown Sharp Building at 206 South 13th Street (constructed 1927, sixteen floors) leaving the hotel studios to KFOR.

KFAB's Omaha studio was also moved, going from the Omaha National Bank Building that it shared with KFOR and KOIL since 1932 to the sixth floor of the Farnam Building, 1613 Farnam. At the same time, KFOR's new owners closed their Omaha studios leaving the entire Omaha National Bank Building sixth floor to KOIL.

KFAB Broadcasting Company was now the sole operation headed by former Central States manager Hugh Feltis, who could now focus on KFAB's plans for a change in frequency, higher power, and a move to Omaha. The approval for higher power had come just a few months earlier.

The CBS-backed plan was to move KFAB to 1110 kHz and share the channel at night with CBS-owned WBT Charlotte, North Carolina. Both stations would need to build a night time pattern array that would beam signals away from each other to prevent interference. The KFAB move from 780 would leave the channel to Chicago's CBS affiliate WBBM, the two stations no longer having to synchronize signals while sharing 780 during night time hours.



*KFAB, still 10-thousand watts on 780, 1944.*

A third station as part of the plan was WJAG 1080 in Norfolk. WJAG's owner feared interference from being so close on the dial to KFAB's 1110, so it was agreed that WJAG would move to KFAB's old channel of 780 with operating hours restricted to daytime only. CBS would pay for the move.

During the war, KFAB's authorization for its power increase was put on hold then dismissed. When revived in January 1944, CBS added a financial twist to the deal. CBS and KFAB formed an agreement where CBS would get 45 percent interest in KFAB while KFAB would get 55 percent interest in CBS' WBT (Jan 30, 1944). KFAB Broadcasting Company would then operate both stations.

The FCC approved the technical aspects of the plan for the KFAB and WJAG frequency shifts but indicated they would not look favorably on the financial portion of the deal. Though no regulations on ownership limitations were yet written at the time, some federal commissioners felt CBS ownership should be limited to at most one-third.

CBS withdrew its application for transfers and the financial changes in the deal were dismissed (*Broadcasting* Sept 18, 1944). With the authorization for 50-thousand watts remaining intact, the CBS-engineered construction permits were secured for a shuffle that would improve the network's Chicago coverage and its Omaha signal at the expense of WBT in Charlotte.

WBT was downgraded to class I-B and KFAB upgraded to the same class. (Class I-A clear channels allowed one station on the frequency while I-B permitted two.) Both stations would build a three-tower array for night use in beaming their signals away from each other. KFAB would have the added benefit of being able to go non-directional at Charlotte sunrise, more than an hour before Omaha's sunrise.

KFAB also had to protect KXLA, a new Pasadena, California station that was running 10-thousand watts. This required KFAB's night pattern to be a north-south figure-eight pattern, with signal nulls in the directions of North Carolina and Southern California.

While still in Lincoln with 10-thousand watts, KFAB moved to 1110 kHz on October 7, 1944. WJAG Norfolk received its construction permit to move to 780 on November 13.

(WJAG soon built a new tower and building at a site three and a half miles west of town after receiving FCC permission in 1946. The tab was picked up by CBS as part of the agreement for switching frequencies.

(It's presumed that WJAG owner Gene. Huse took up the issue to move WJAG away from 1110 because the equipment of the day was less stable and receivers were much less selective. Today, KFAB's neighbor on 1080 is a 500-watt daytimer in Red Oak, Iowa, less than half the distance than that to Norfolk, with neither station complaining of interference problems.

(Also, by moving to 780, WJAG would not only escape the nearby dial position of KFAB but would have a clear channel with better protection from adjacent channels. In addition, 780 provides a better ground wave than 1080 by virtue of its lower frequency. On the downside, moving to the clear channel as a daytime-only station very likely eliminated any chance of an upgrade to full time.)

KFAB's October 7, 1944 move to 1110 kHz was made at 10 p.m.

Leading up to the frequency switchover, KFAB aired a variety show from the University of Nebraska coliseum. Former KFAB announcer Gayle Grubb, known to thousands of radio listeners as "Gloomy Gus" during his earlier years at KFAB, returned from his management position at WKY Oklahoma City to be master of ceremonies. Foster May, by this time a freelance correspondent following an unsuccessful run for the Senate, conducted a series of interviews.

(Gloomy Gus continued his successful career after WKY. He was lured away from Oklahoma a year after hosting the KFAB frequency switchover by former Central States Broadcasting manager Don Searle who was familiar with Gus' work as a competitor during the 1920s. By this time Searle was the head of ABC's West Coast operations and brought Gus in to manage ABC's KGO San Francisco.)

At 10-thousand watts from Lincoln, KFAB now had its semi-clear channel and full-time operation, no longer synchronizing with a Chicago station. However, for now the KFAB-WBT signals were unprotected from each other, a problem that will be solved with the next step of moving to Omaha and building a new transmitter plant there.

The KFAB petition to move its city of license to Omaha along with the higher power and directional antenna system was authorized the following year, in October 1945.

CBS sold off WBT in August 1945 for \$1.5 million to Southeast Broadcasting, a subsidiary of Jefferson Pilot. By that time WBT had already been downgraded to Class I-B with its KFAB signal protection plan intact. The sale was the result of an FCC regulation that disallowed network ownership

**WJAG**  
**NEW SPOT on Your Dial**

550 600 700 800 1000 1200 1500

**780 KC**

**NORFOLK, NEBRASKA**

Covers Northeast Nebraska like a blanket. Primary area increased 40% by change in wave lengths—1,000 watts on 780 kilocycles is equivalent to 6,000 watts on previous frequency.

**JOINS MUTUAL SUNDAYS, 3 - 3:30 P.M.**  
 In order that the Union Pacific employees in northeast Nebraska may hear their own show—"Your America."

**JOINS REV. EPPS SPECIAL NETWORK**  
 To broadcast "Back to the Bible" every weekday morning at 8:30 o'clock.

**Listen to the Voice of the People 10:15 A.M. Weekdays**  
 Advertisers who wish to reach northeast Nebraska listeners on their favorite radio stations—one of the first in the West—are invited to write for availabilities and rates to WJAG, Norfolk, Neb.

*WJAG announcing its dial position move, December 1944 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).*



in localities where stations are so few that competition would be restrained. The May 1943 regulation had been under appeal for two years so it came as no major surprise for CBS.)

KFAB became an Omaha station but continued to share broadcast time from its Lincoln studio in the Sharp Building for three more years. The downtown Omaha studios on the sixth floor of the seven-story Farnam Building, 1613 Farnam Street, were used for originating two daily newscasts and Lyle Bremser's *Man On The Street* interview show.

KFAB and KOIL both had been CBS affiliates during this time. With KFAB now an Omaha station, KOIL dropped CBS for the new ABC network in November 1945. KFAB then announced with great fanfare that they were Omaha's sole CBS outlet. (ABC had been identified as The Blue Network since its 1943 split from NBC until formerly renamed June 5 of this year.)

The only remaining task was to build the 50-thousand watt transmitter plant and a nighttime directional tower system to protect WBT Charlotte. KFAB mentioned in their print ads that construction was underway and WBT interference would be lessened soon.

Manager Harry Burke in November 1945 outlined the \$400-thousand expansion. It was for a one-story brick building to house two transmitters and a power plant along with three 440-foot self-supporting towers. The new 50-thousand watt transmitter would be accompanied by a 10-thousand watt unit as auxiliary, though the backup would be licensed to run only 5-thousand watts.

The transmitter site selected was on several acres of farmland about ten miles south of Omaha at 60th Street and Capehart Road near Papillion, It was on the Lincoln side of Omaha to best serve both cities as well as a large rural area.

The following year construction for KFAB's new plant began. A 95-thousand dollar Westinghouse transmitter was ordered. (The order was the second of two orders in KFAB's power increase effort. The first was in 1941, but with the declaration of war the transmitter shipment was stopped en route by government and sent elsewhere. -*Broadcasting* Jan 13, 1947).

Three self-supporting half-wave towers each rose 440 feet in an alignment and spacing that would create a nearly north-south directional pattern at night. The towers line pointed toward Charlotte, North Carolina to give WBT maximum protection.

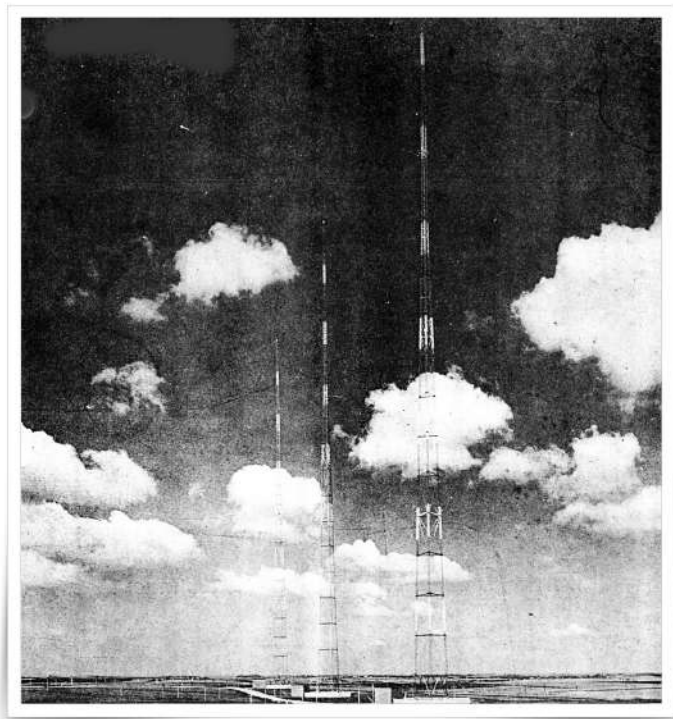
The single-story brick transmitter building was designed to include quarters for the engineering staff. Surrounding the main transmitter room were two transformer vaults, a power room, tube storage room, a fan room, and two repair shops.

The 50 thousand-watt signal debuted on Christmas day, 1946. KFAB was the first new 50-thousand watt installation in the country to reach the air after the war.

The directional array was not yet intact, so the non-directional signal from the center tower was powered down to 10-thousand watts at night. For directional operation, the three towers all needed to receive signals in specific and precise phases and power levels in order to achieve the desired pattern. Adjustments at the phaser unit and the field measurements checking the pattern progress were tedious and took weeks.

Authorization to use the new Sarpy County transmitter site full power full-time came on March 31, 1947.

KFAB was guided by three managers in its move to high power. It was begun by Don Searle who soon left for ABC on the West Coast in 1943. His replacement, Hugh Feltis, oversaw the duopoly breakup.



*KFAB's three towers, Sarpy County site, 1947.*



*KFAB Manager Harry Burke, 1945.*

After just two years Feltis, already a pioneer in radio audience measurement, left to head the Broadcast Measurement Bureau of the National Association of Broadcasters. Harry Burke took over in April 1945, having begun his career at WJAG in 1928 and coming to KFAB from a WOW sales position. Burke was the general manager when the 50-thousand watt transmitter finally went into service.

For a while, KFAB Broadcasting Company fell behind in payments for its expansion. It faced a lawsuit from Westinghouse in 1947 for 77,800 dollars. Besides the transmitter, management had purchased another 21-thousand dollars of additional equipment from Westinghouse, for a total bill of 111-thousand. (*OWH* July 23, 1947)

At the same time, KFAB owners were launching a sister FM station in Lincoln. KFAB FM 97.9 signed on from the Sharp Building in Lincoln in August 1947 with 3-thousand watts at 192 feet, and a signal not strong enough to reach Omaha. Plans for covering Omaha must have been in the original plans, however, as unused circuit breakers at the new AM site in Sarpy County were already labeled for KFAB FM.

WBT suffered consequences from the changes to accommodate KFAB. There were coverage problems afterward, primarily in areas west of Charlotte, a problem compounded by the city's suburban growth in that direction. Despite attempts at using a synchronous booster in Shelby 50 miles west of the city, the problem existed until 1995 when WBT bought an FM station to fill in.



Meanwhile, WJAG in Norfolk remained a daytimer, but with loosening FM rules decades later it was authorized a low-power FM translator with unlimited operation allowing it to program to the community at night while the AM is off.

Now the sole CBS outlet for the Omaha market, KFAB soon benefited from William S. Paley's notorious talent "raid" of NBC talent in 1948–49. Paley pirated numerous high-profile popular personalities from NBC. His roster soon included Red Skelton, Jack Benny, Al Jolson, George Burns & Gracie Allen, and Kate Smith.

KFAB's local talent roster was also quite strong. Eddie Sosby and the Radio Rangers began their successful morning show in 1946, airing from 8:15 to 9 a.m. Their appearances and live broadcasts at the Nebraska State Fair were a popular draw. Future *Tonight Show* star Johnny Carson was a writer for the Rangers in 1948 while a student at the University of Nebraska. He earned 10 dollars a week before moving to WOW Radio the following year.



*Johnny Carson on KFAB set of Eddie Sosby's Radio Rangers, 1948.*

Texas Mary Marsich who had been with KFAB since 1938 joined the Radio Rangers in the mid-1940s. A popular country-western singer and yodeler, she and the Rangers did radio shows three times a week.

The Radio Rangers left in 1950 after signing a deal with Four-Star records. Texas Mary remained as a mainstay for KFAB, her solo show airing middays at 11:45. Mary would sometimes perform as many as three shows a day when the schedule needed filling before being moved to mornings for two daily shows in 1950.

After her musical career at KFAB, Texas Mary stayed on as the station's receptionist until retirement in the 1980s. Mike Shane of KFAB's later years recalls, "Mary Marsich was still crooning Happy Birthday's over the PA system at 5010 (Underwood Street studios) when I began working there in late '82."

The announcing staff had its share of headliners. Farm Service Director Bill MacDonald since 1944 became well-known to farmers and ranchers served by KFAB's big signal.

Newscaster/Announcer Gaylord Avery had been an announcer at WOW since the mid-1930s but left for KMOX St. Louis about ten years later. It was a brief stint and he returned to Omaha and KFAB in 1946.

Upon Avery's return, his former employer Lyle DeMoss at WOW sent him a congratulatory telegram, which Avery acknowledged on the air. KFAB General Manger Harry Burke in jest sent DeMoss a notarized affidavit of performance billing him 20 dollars for the WOW mention. (*Broadcasting*, Sept 12, 1949).

Besides doing news, Avery was pressed into hosting a women's show competing with Jean Sullivan's *News For Women* on KOWH and *Shopping with Polly* (Belle West) on KOIL. In 1947 Avery's *Kitchen News Time* featured "World headlines of special interest to women" along with shopping and cooking features.

Lyle Bremser, KFAB Voice of Husker Football, Oct 15, 1948  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

Avery's 10 p.m. KFAB newscasts capping the CBS prime evening lineup were followed by *Sports by Bremser*, featuring Lyle Bremser, the voice of Husker Football. Avery held that position until leaving to become program director at Todd Storz's new station KOWH 660 in September 1949.

(After his Omaha career concluded at KOWH, Avery hit the "big time" in the mid-1950s when he went to CBS Radio as an announcer. He did some newscasts and also was the voice replacing Jack Lescoulie for the Jackie Gleason "Honeymooner" TV series show open.)

Lyle Bremser was the KFAB workhorse who would rise to management and then ownership at KFAB. He bravely continued to call Husker football on game days in the fall, telling the *World-Herald*, "During war years and early 50s we lost so many games it was pretty discouraging to keep your enthusiasm." (*OWH* Sept 5, 1971)

Bremser would also announce races at AkSarBen and called boxing matches which were still highly popular in the 1940s. A boxing match that came to Omaha on April 11, 1949, featuring Sugar Ray Robinson and Don Lee was carried on *three* Omaha stations with Bremser handling the KFAB duties. Sharing ringside was Ed Morgan for KBON, and Bob Steelman on KOIL.

Bremser also handled KFAB's noon hour Man on the Street interviews, a program feature popular on numerous stations at the time including WOW and KOIL. Foster May handled WOW's street interviews until 1942, and KOIL's Byron Head was the "Umbrella Man" with his microphone on a downtown street corner during the noon hour through the 1940s.

KFAB ended the decade well-positioned to take on the growing competition that would include Television.

## **KOIL 1290 Omaha**

By war's end, the 1944 Duopoly ruling that limits ownership to one AM, FM, and TV per market forced Central States Broadcasting to sell off one of its Lincoln properties. Central States owned KFOR and KFAB in Lincoln and KOIL in Omaha. With plans to move KFAB to Omaha, its Omaha property had to be sold off as well.

In April that year, it sold KFOR 1240 Lincoln for \$100 thousand and Omaha's KOIL 1290 for \$250 thousand to Lincoln investors Charles and James Stuart. The Central States subsidiary name stayed with KOIL while KFOR stayed under Cornbelt broadcasting and KFAB's operator became the KFAB Broadcasting Company.

With the sale, KFAB moved out of the Omaha studios it shared with KFOR and KOIL and into the sixth floor of the Farnam Building, 1613 Farnam. The Omaha studios for KFOR were shut down, its equipment moved to the Sharpe Building in Lincoln. That left KOIL with the studios and offices on the 11th floor of the Omaha National Bank Building all to itself.

The studios were spacious. Studio “A” was the largest in the state. There were two supplemental studios, one of which was large enough to handle a full orchestra. The studios could handle any type show from a full-scale production of live talent to a recorded show using up to five turntables.

The studios were home to KOIL’s weekly drama *Krime Klan*, by this time in its fourteenth year and earning a strong Hooper rating of 15.0. The show aired on KOIL as late as 1947.



*KOIL live drama production, 1945.*

*Krime Klan* was locally produced, some scripts written by KOIL staff announcers over the years such as Harvey Twyman and Twyman’s wife, Arlone, herself an experienced actor. Other local announcers performing in the series were Virgil Sharpe, Henry Kelpel, and Charlie Dugdale, all often doing multiple roles within a show. It’s no surprise that many Omaha announcers were also active in the Omaha Community Playhouse, one of the largest community theaters in the nation.

Charlie Dugdale, a 23-year-old Omahan just out of the Navy, began his fast-moving broadcast career at KOIL in 1946. He stayed only three years before moving to KFOR Lincoln, then to the West Coast where he was a staff announcer at the CBS station, KNXT Los Angeles. That position was a springboard for voice work and then acting in TV series, including *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, *McHale’s Navy*, *The Fugitive*, *The Doris Day Show*, *Bewitched*, and *The Odd Couple*.

But radio was beginning to see a shift to recorded music. Announcers came to the forefront with various record shows, block programmed with generic names related to their content.



KOIL morning show, 1944.

KOIL cultivated its share of announcers/personalities in the 1940s and 50s.

Byron Head came to KOIL from KOWH in the mid-1940s and scored the highest ratings ever for a local radio program with his morning show, *Coffee Club* at 7:15 to 8 a.m. six days a week.



Byron Head, KOIL 1944.

It was In 1948. KOIL's morning show reached a whopping 48.1 in the May-June Hooper rating that turned out to be the highest morning audience share for any station in the country according to a story in *Broadcasting* magazine (Aug 16, 1948).

In 1949 Head hosted the mid-morning *Grocery Boy Show*, a 15-minute mainstay on KOIL (though briefly on KOWH in the 1950s) that aired well into the 1970s. The show was presented by a conglomerate of food product companies and featured a daily call-out giveaway.



Henry Kelpé, KOIL, 1944.

Byron Head also handled the KOIL *Man on the Street* show during the noon hour. Stationed at a kiosk under an umbrella and accompanied by his morning newsmen Bill Talbot, he was known as the "Umbrella Man." Head's KOIL career ran from 1942 to 1957, after which he worked out his pre-retirement years at KSWI 1560.

KOIL newscaster Bill Talbot, a Benson High School graduate who attended Creighton University, joined KOIL in 1945 to do the morning news leading into ABC's *Breakfast Club*. Talbot was promoted to PD in 1952 but soon left for news positions at KFAB and KMTV 3.

Henry Kelpé, announcer and drama performer for KOIL since 1940, was promoted to KOIL PD upon Talbot's departure. Kelpé, active in Community Theater, also went into television on KMTV Channel 3 in later years.

Big Band leader Lee Barron (Elroy Vernon Lee) started his Omaha radio career at KOIL in 1946, occasionally leaving to take his band on the road. Besides his band, Barron also was involved with promotions at Council Bluffs' Playland Park amusement center and did marketing for a broadcast school in Minneapolis.

The radio facet of Barron's career, begun earlier at KTUL Tulsa and WDGY Minneapolis, was more of a hobby than a living. Barron freely bounced around in Omaha radio as opportunities arose. He went to KOWH in 1948 and was soon at KBON, then KSWI by 1950. He would remain on various Omaha area stations well into the 1980s.

As CBS affiliate KFAB prepared its city of license move to Omaha, KOIL dropped CBS and picked up ABC on November 1, 1945, taking it away from daytimer KOWH 660. With that, KFAB heavily promoted itself as Omaha's only CBS source, while KOIL promoted the nighttime ABC line up that daytimer KOWH had been unable to carry.



ABC promoted its new affiliate by originating several shows in Omaha during the first week of November. Don McNeill's *Breakfast Club* was the biggest, originating from the Paramount Theater, 20<sup>th</sup> and Farnam Streets, on KOIL's first day of affiliation.

As the third-ranked network, ABC soon distinguished itself by hiring popular singer Bing Crosby to perform on a weekly variety series. As a precondition for his employment, Crosby required that he be allowed to record his program before broadcast rather than deliver it live. Crosby's interest in delayed programming was underscored by his financial interest in the development of magnetic tape recording. He and ABC became pioneers in the field of tape recording, a technology that would move into homes by the end of the coming decade.

On the technical side, KOIL and Central States Broadcasting under Stuart's ownership set out with ambitious plans during the post-war years. The Stuarts commissioned a study to increase KOIL's power to 50-thousand watts, applied to build a sister FM station, and sought Omaha's third television channel availability. *None* of these efforts came to fruition. Even a plan for a \$150-thousand building for KOIL "facing Turner Park" announced in May 1947 evaporated.



**Featured at Midwest Electrical Exposition**

Here is Martha Bohlsen, well known Home Economics Director of the Omaha Public Power District. She will be heard over KOIL tomorrow at 3:45, broadcasting direct from the stage in Ak-Sar-Ben Coliseum.

Plan to attend the Midwest Electrical Exposition tomorrow. You will enjoy seeing and hearing Martha Bohlsen.

**Enjoyable KOIL Programs Tonight**

8:00—Ted Lewis  
 8:30—"Go for the House"  
 9:00—"Texaco Star Theatre"  
 9:30—"On Trial"

**DIAL KOIL 1290**

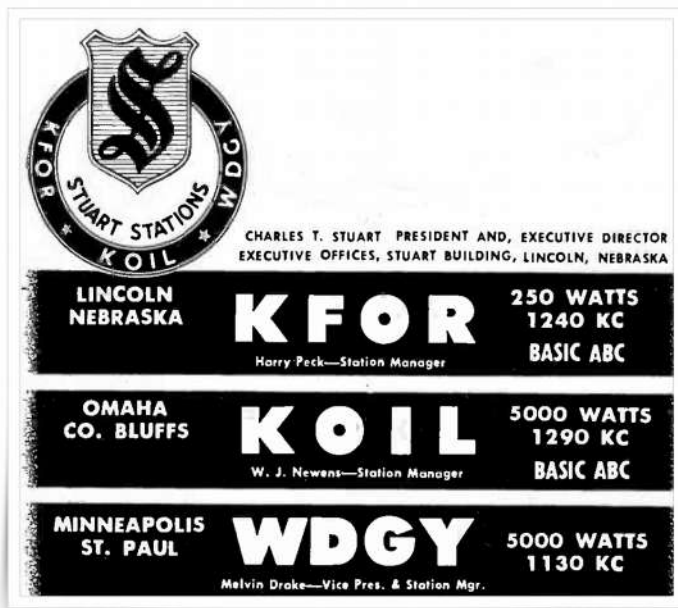
Martha Bohlsen. KOIL was one of four Omaha stations on which she regularly appeared. (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).



Central States Broadcasting first applied for an Omaha FM station in January 1945, seeking 47.7 MHz in the old FM band. After the new band was federally designated, a second application for KOIL FM in 1947 received authorization for 104.1.

The target sign-on date was announced for January 1948. The KOIL 1290 center tower was to be used for mounting the FM antenna. But, FM broadcasting was doing a fast fade and it's unlikely that equipment was even ordered. KOIL FM was a no-show.

The plans for KOIL-TV started in 1948. The first television channel sought by the Stuarts that year was for channel 3, but it went to May Broadcasting in Shenandoah. With channel 6 already won by WOW 590, they turned to a third channel that was still available. Central States became a contender for the remaining allotted channel 5. When the FCC changed the channel availability table which shifted channel 5 to channel 7, applicants were required to re-apply. KOIL along with KFAB did so, but KOIL soon dropped out of the race after the *Omaha World-Herald* entered the contest.



The 50-thousand watts idea in 1948 went as far as a full study by a consulting firm. 880 kHz was selected, the clearest channel in the region except at night when it was a clear channel for WABC (the forerunner to WCBS) New York.

The study came up with a pattern that would protect the east coast at night by aiming the signal north-northwest. To best cover Omaha, a transmitter site to the south-southeast was selected in Iowa near Pacific Junction, 30 miles away. The plan went no further, most likely because the FCC was dragging its feet on loosening rules for clear channels, the decision still years away.

A contributing factor to these plans going south may have been that the owners were already involved in a very expensive battle to upgrade their Minneapolis station.

Stuart Broadcasting had purchased WDGY 1130 Minneapolis in October 1945, and a year later sought to upgrade it from 5-thousand watts, 500 at night, to 50-thousand watts, 25-thousand at night. The high power authorization finally came in 1949 but required a signal pattern design that involved a very pricey directional array.

The plan called for two different patterns for the day and night signals, needing a total of nine towers to accomplish. Charles Stuart got out after this, selling his shares of Central States to his co-owner brother James, the pair by now having spent a fortune.

(Ironically, Omahan Todd Storz expanded his empire in the 1950s by purchasing the high-powered WDGY. This was financed by the success of his new Top 40 station in Omaha, KOWH 660.)

Despite this stall-out, KOIL would have new owners and new plans in its future. It will once again become a top-rated station in the market before the coming decade is out.

### **KBON 1490 Omaha**

KBON 1490 with 250 watts initially signed on during the war, its construction underway in time before the FCC freeze on new stations. Operating from the Central Club Building at 2027 Dodge with its tower on the building's roof, KBON promoted itself as *Omaha's New Radio Voice* and was affiliated with the Mutual Broadcasting System.



*KBON, 1945.*

Programming was the typical mix of music, news, sports, and Mutual network shows, all presented in blocks, and except for sports play by play, each ranging from 15 minutes to an hour.

KBON started its broadcast day late by modern standards, at 6:30 a.m. The day dawned with local record shows, each block with its own identity such as *Sunrise Serenade*, *Morning Melodies*, and *Tune Time*.

Tip Saggau joined KBON in 1945 as a vocalist with his own afternoon show of songs at 4 p.m. For a while, in 1946 he was on opposite Texas Mary, KFAB's well-established local singing talent. That same year Saggau, with a background in high school track in Council Bluffs and college football at Creighton, began delivering a nightly sportscast. As records began taking over live music, Saggau left singing for a career in sports broadcasting, joining WOW in 1947.

From the Mutual network, after-school favorites were *Tom Mix* (played by actors as the real cowboy Tom Mix died in 1940), *Superman*, *Buck Rogers*, and *Captain Midnight*. Later in the evening came the likes of *Charlie Chan*, *The Falcon*, and singer Kate Smith, and after 10 p.m. the dance orchestras. The net was the home for conservative commentator Fulton Lewis and the popular Gabrielle Heatter whose war years show opening "There's good news tonight" became his catchphrase.

KBON unknowingly was becoming the proving ground for Omaha's first DJ of any lasting popularity. Sandy Jackson started part-time on KBON 1490 in 1944 with a one hour show, *Moonlight Serenade*, 11 p.m. to Midnight.

Jackson's job became full-time when *Serenade* evolved into *Swing*. Jackson's *1490 Swing Club* debuted in 1946 running late nights to sign off. Even though in a buried time slot, the show proved popular and spawned the afternoon *Rhythm Inn* later in the year running from 3:30 to 4:00 p.m. Both shows grew longer by 1949, given earlier start times. *1490 Swing Club* opened at 11 p.m. and *Rhythm Inn* at 2:30 p.m.

Jackson met a young Todd Storz while at KBON as Todd arrived to DJ in 1946. Storz was returning to Omaha after a stint in the Army that was followed by a radio job in Hutchinson, Kansas where he did sales, announcing, and engineering.

In 1946 Todd Storz took over the *1490 Swing Club*, 11 p.m. to 1 a.m. nightly, while Jackson worked his afternoon show. Storz lasted a year, getting fired for reminding a listener who complained about his taste in music, "your radio has an off switch." From there, Storz worked in sales for another year at KFAB 1110. It was there he learned of a local station that was for sale that will soon become a separate story of its own, KOWH 660.

Sandy Jackson, meanwhile, in true DJ fashion raised his profile by making appearances. In 1947 he was emceeding fund-raisers and once introducing Woody Herman at the Orpheum Theater. He also did remote broadcasts, even airing his *Rhythm Inn* show from the lobby of the Omaha Theater that same year.

Jackson's high profile and his focus on popular records with listener's tastes in mind was the right combination to be recognized as Omaha's pioneer disc jockey. Indeed other personalities played records, notably Lee Barron during his brief tenure on KOWH, but they either picked their own music following their own tastes or were limited to the station's library following strict station or program director rules. Jackson, instead, paid attention to audience favorites.

Jackson was on a path to local stardom during the radio revolution that was to come under Todd Storz in the following decade. It wouldn't be long before shows would be named after the personality rather than having generic music-related names like *1490 Swing Club* and *Rhythm Inn*. It would be *The Sandy Jackson Show* on KOWH 660 in just a matter of months.

On the technical front, KBON was ripe for an upgrade. With the war's freeze lifted on construction materials, KBON Manager Paul Fry announced plans for a new tower. The city council gave KBON approval for a 500-foot tower on the south side of Dodge Street between 22nd and 24th

Streets. Fry said the station had tentative plans to build studios there as well. It was noted how the tower would be much higher than the 227-foot tower at the Northwestern Bell Telephone building. (*OWH* March 15, 1946).

The tall tower was likely planned with an FM station in mind. KBON along with all the Omaha and Lincoln stations had applications in for an FM frequency by the following year.

Plans for the tall tower never materialized. 500-foot towers would nonetheless become part of the downtown Omaha skyline in a few more years with the arrival of television in 1949. And, KBON would still get its FM sister station on the air before the end of the decade.

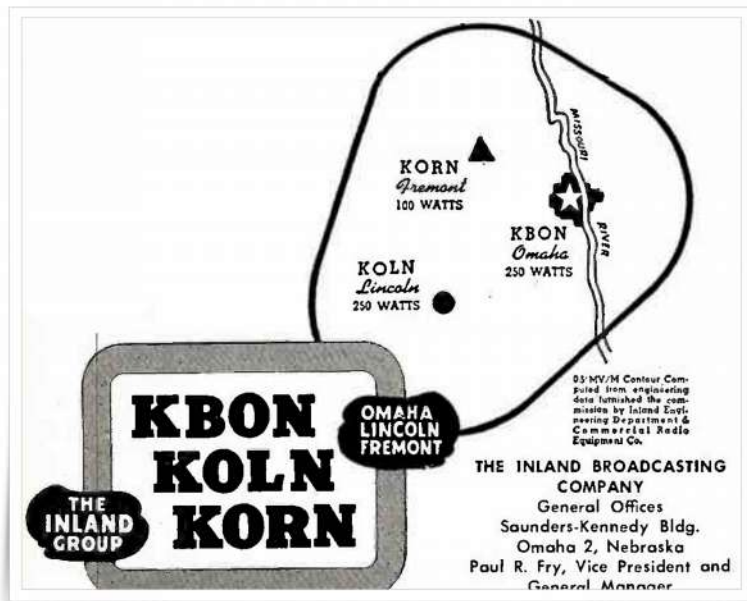
The tall tower plan likely took a back seat to ambitious expansion plans that were underway. KBON owners Inland Broadcasting were seeking to expand their coverage.

KBON's lowly 250 watts could cover Omaha and surrounding counties during the day and was just enough to cover the city at night. Work began on setting up a trio of stations that would serve Lincoln and Fremont as well.

To accomplish this, Inland's plan was to purchase Fremont's KORN 1400, move it to Lincoln, and then launch another Fremont station on 1340 with 100 watts.

The Fremont purchase was made in 1947. Making the move to Lincoln required some finesse with the FCC and the promise of replacing Fremont's station.

After some petitioning and denials, the FCC was finally won over. KORN 1400 moved to Lincoln and changed call letters to KOLN, signing on with 250 watts on August 11, 1947. Studios were on the second floor of the Federal Securities Building at 13<sup>th</sup> and N Streets. When the new Fremont frequency was granted some weeks later, the KORN calls returned, this time on 1340 with 100 watts.



*Inland Broadcasting promotion piece, 1948.*

For the next year, Inland promoted its three "hometown" stations of KOLN, KORN, and KBON as a package reaching a rich farm market. The three relatively low-power stations claimed to reach 64 percent of the buying power in the state of Nebraska. VP/GM and major stockholder Paul Fry presided over Inland's sales from offices in the Saunders-Kennedy Building in downtown Omaha.

The troika was short-lived. KORN 1340 in Fremont was sold in late 1948 and changed calls to KFGT the following year. Inland later sold KOLN 1400 Lincoln to Cornhusker Radio and TV in 1952.

The 1948 sell-off coincided with plans for a new sister FM and new AM transmitting facilities. Just weeks before the KORN sale, a construction permit was secured in July for KBON FM to operate on 98.7.

The new transmitter site would be in a residential area south of downtown at 38th and Wright Streets. A new 212-foot tower went up, topped with a pylon antenna for the FM.

The KBON 1490 transmitter was moved to its new location in 1948 sharing space with the KBON 98.7 FM transmitter. The old tower on the American Legion roof was dismantled and sold to a Mississippi station. (*OWH* Aug 10, 1948). KBON FM signed on some weeks later, on December 5, 1948.

The station's studios were also moved, joining the KBON offices on the 6th floor of the Saunders Kennedy Building also known as the World Insurance Building, 18th and Douglas (constructed 1912, seven stories). KBON continued operations from there until well into the 1960s.

Two events in 1949 demonstrated how KBON strove to remain at the forefront with its lowly 250 watts.

One event on May 7, 1949, was an overnight radiothon for the American Cancer Society featuring "virtually every radio personality in Omaha." Names from KOIL, KFAB, WOW, and KOWH joined those of KBON, along with talent from the Musicians Local No. 70.



*KBON promoting its upgrade, August 1948  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).*

Another happened in October as KBON personalities Sandy Jackson and Don Perazzo promoted the new RCA 45 rpm record by giving out free 45 rpm records at Hospe Piano Company, 1512 Douglas Street. Hospe's was hawking the new RCA 45 rpm record player/changer that holds up to 10 records.

(The recorded music workhorse for radio had been 78 rpm platters making up music libraries for years. Columbia Records just introduced the micro-groove long play 33 1/3 rpm albums in 1948. RCA countered with the 45 rpm single in 1949. Large, heavy, and breakable, the old 78s would eventually be replaced by albums and 45 rpm singles in the 1950s. One can imagine how much time and space was required to maintain station libraries before long-play albums and 45 rpm singles arrived.)

Though with comparatively miniscule power, KBON's on-going and spirited competition was contributing to the growth of radio programming in the coming decades.

### **KSWI 1560 Council Bluffs**

Council Bluffs was left without its own station when KOIL moved its city of license to Omaha in 1936. That changed in the post-war years with the arrival of the market's first new AM station since the war. With it came Iowa's first commercial FM station as well.

It was the Council Bluffs newspaper that dipped into the Fourth Estate following the lead of the *Omaha World-Herald* which had purchased KOWH 660 in 1939. The *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* formed Nonpareil Broadcasting in 1946, then set out to seek licensing.

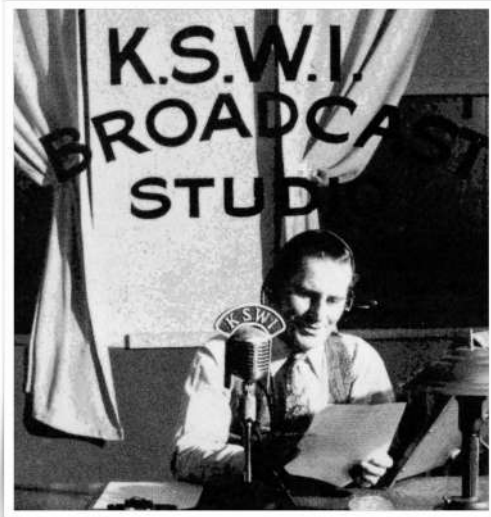
Filings began in September 1946. After a series of applications that began with seeking full-time five thousand watts on 1590, the final application by December settled for a daytime-only operation on 1560 with 500 watts. That application was granted the following February. The requested calls were KSWI, for *Key to Southwest Iowa*.

The transmitter site selected was near the Missouri River bridge on the South Omaha Bridge Road. A tower and Quonset hut were built on the site. It was just a couple of miles west of KOIL's Lake Manawa transmitter and towers. Both sites were on the river's flood plain and indeed KSWI would be subjected to Omaha's flood of 1952 just five years later.

KSWI 1560 signed on Sunday, June 1, 1947. A sister FM station quickly followed as the *Nonpareil* had applied for an FM frequency just weeks after the AM station construction permit was approved.

KSWI FM 107.9 shared the Quonset hut and tower (the FM pylon topping the AM-radiating tower), signing on in July. It simply simulcast the programming from the AM side until sunset, then

continued on its own to a 10 p.m. sign off. (KSWI FM moved to 96.1 that September, and changed call letters to KFMX just weeks after that.)



*KSWI Farm Director C. W. McManamy at KSWI Livestock Building Studio 1948 (Courtesy: Pottawattamie County Historical Society).*

KSWI 1560 Studios were on the mezzanine of the Strand Theater, 120 South Main, downtown Council Bluffs. It's not believed the station remained there for long, however. Council Bluffs historian Richard Warner notes, "At some point, they operated out of a small building adjacent to the *Nonpareil's* main building. The *Nonpareil* building at that time was a block wide, thus being on Pearl Street and South Main Street; I believe the small adjacent building was on the Main Street side."

(Operations weren't moved again until new owners took over in 1963. The 92-year old Strand was gutted by fire on December 11, 1974. The glazed-tile façade remained after the fire but was unstable and was demolished. [*Council Bluffs: Broadway* by Richard Warner, Ryan Roenfeld].)

The newspaper's announced goal was to provide programming for farmers. Indeed, the owners began seeking a farm director before the station even signed on to the air. Once on, KSWI joined the Iowa Tall Corn Network, a group of smaller Iowa stations that began a few years earlier in Dubuque.

The broadcast day began at 6 a.m. with news and *Musical Reveille*. Various record and feature program blocks made up the rest of the day, with *Nonpareil News* at noon and the *South Omaha Hour* of polkas at 2:30 p.m.

Additionally, livestock reports from Omaha's Union Stockyards were aired four times a day. Omaha's Stockyards being the second largest in the country at the time. Daily livestock reports were also being aired on KFAB, WOW, and KOWH.



*KSWI's Ralph Carey 1948*

One notable show in 1948 was *Jazz from 1560* hosted by Ralph Carey at 5 p.m. His banter and knowledge of music made even teens take notice. Carey was a native Omahan who got into radio while in the Army, announcing for the American Forces Network in Europe during the war. Carey took his teen appeal to KOIL in 1950 but moved into television in 1951 working at both KMTV 3 and WOW TV 6 until the mid-1950s. Carey was hosting a Teen Dance show Saturdays on WOW TV by 1955.

KSWI program listings were found only in the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*. The *Omaha World-Herald* didn't include KSWI in its daily listings for another ten years.

### **OMAHA FM- PIONEERING A NEW BROADCASTING BAND**

Omaha and much of the country lay outside the center of FM development during its earliest stages in the pre-war years. Early FM experimentation resided in the Northeast U.S. where FM's developer, Edwin Armstrong, was setting up his Yankee FM Network.

Eighteen FM stations were on the air with experimental licenses in 1940 with 120 more waiting for licenses. Pressure for commercial authorization of FM was growing. The FCC on May 20, 1940, allocated forty channels in the 42 to 50 MHz band for such operation to begin at the start of 1941.

In Omaha, one station applied for FM during the medium's developing years. WOW 590's owners in June 1941 announced plans for an FM station that would offer "static-less" reception.

Meanwhile, Omaha was learning about FM in *World-Herald* newspaper stories and, surprisingly, in ads offering FM receivers for receiving yet-unavailable stations. A 1941 ad in the *OWH* placed by Schmoller and Mueller Pianos featured a Stromberg-Carlson AM-FM-Phonograph floor model for 395 dollars, while a neighboring ad offered receivers with a plugin for FM and TV adapters. The ads along with the stories heavily promoted the benefits of FM (*OWH* Oct 30, 1941).

In 1941, when commercial broadcasting began, the westernmost FM station reaching the air during these pioneering years was in Chicago. Before the year's end, the war intervened and further FM growth was put on hold. 120 applications including that of WOW's FM were eventually dismissed.

As the war was winding down, plans were underway for the resumption of FM (and for TV, also on hold) development. Omaha's first FM application since 1940 came from Central States Broadcasting seeking 47.7 MHz for KOIL in January 1945.



KOIL's application became moot a year later when the FCC moved the FM band (42 to 50 MHz) to higher frequencies (88 to 108 MHz) rendering all earlier FM receivers obsolete.

In the two years that followed, all Omaha and Lincoln AM stations filed applications for a sister FM station. The status as of 1947 per *Broadcasting*, September 15:

KOAD Omaha 92.9	World Publishing- Construction Permit Only
KWOW Omaha 99.9	WOW Inc.- Construction Permit approved
KBON FM Omaha 98.7	Inland Broadcasting- Construction Permit Only
KOIL FM Omaha 104.1	Central States Broadcasting- Conditional Grant
KSWI FM Council Bluffs 107.9	Nonpareil Broadcasting- Conditional Grant
KFAB FM Lincoln 97.9	KFAB Broadcasting Co.- Construction Permit Only
KFOR FM Lincoln 102.9	Cornbelt Broadcasting- Construction Permit Only

### KOAD 92.5, to 92.9, Omaha

Omaha's first FM station was sought by the newspaper, the *Omaha World-Herald*, owners of KOWH 660. The 1945 application was among the first ten new FMs in the country since the war to receive a conditional construction permit (*OWH* Nov 2, 1945), conditional meaning the permit could possibly be withdrawn based on findings or rulings that were yet being determined.

(Counting the number of stations already on since or before the war, the conditional grants total was 65. Among them in the region were KFOR Lincoln and the *Cedar Rapids Gazette's* KCRG in Cedar Rapids, IA. KFOR's FM held on until the early 1950s when the owner's attention turned to television. KCRG's KCRK 96.9 suffered the same fate, its license given up by 1955.)

The *World-Herald* opted for FM call letters different from its AM sister. KOAD was selected from a contest run in the newspaper, with no explanation of the meaning as to why or what it stood for.

KOAD's first transmitter was a thousand-watt unit from Federal Telephone and Radio along with an eight-element single-bay square loop antenna that would be hoisted to 100 feet. The installation was added at the WAAW transmitter site at 60<sup>th</sup> and Redmond Streets. It would be used as a test unit during the conditional phase of the station license.



KOAD 92.5 sign on ad, 1946 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

Almost simultaneously a GE 59-thousand watt FM transmitter was ordered with a target date set for about 12 months later, the wait due to manufacturers having to gear up and for post-war material to again become available (*OWH* June 18, 1946).

Technical Director Frank Shopen built KOAD in eight weeks. Some equipment was home made by Shopen and his staff due to the scarcity of manufactured items.



*KOAD Sportscaster Floyd Olds, 1947  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).*

KOAD 92.5 signed on at 7:45 the evening of July 1, 1946. Governor Dwight Griswold spoke on the inaugural broadcast, with music provided by the Paul Moorehead Band from the Paxton Hotel. Also entertaining was pianist Walter Scott and Organist Eddie Batter.

Omaha's first FM station had few listeners that night. Only an estimated 20 FM receivers existed in the city. By December that number was estimated at 700 according to a report from Omaha radio distributors and dealers (*Broadcasting* Dec 9, 1946).

Regardless of the dearth of receivers, an ambitious 16-hours per day schedule was begun with original programming until 7 p.m. except for a few afternoon hours filled with a simulcast from the AM.

Original programs would include *Amateur Playhouse* that August beginning a six-week run on Sundays featuring local talent. In January 1947 *Fun With Funnies* aired dramatizations of parts of comic strips.

KOAD's first program director was Harvey Twyman, who was a KOIL announcer, personality and *Krime Klan* performer from 1938 to 1942. In the intervening war years, Twyman had been a radio correspondent for the Coast Guard and received a purple heart at Iwo Jima. Frank Shopen, technical director for the newspaper's radio operations, was made station manager.

The first thing programmers noticed was that with its superior audio, FM broadcasters must now seek scratch-free recordings and rebuild music libraries. Also, background noises and paper shuffling that weren't noticeable on AM were problematic on FM (*OWH* June 26).

After the conditional phase of the station license, KOAD signed Nebraska's first FM client in May 1947. It was the J.L.Brandeis department Store sponsoring a daily hour targeting housewives at 9

a.m. Monday through Saturday (*Billboard* May 17, 1947). A citywide survey just completed in April showed 1664 FM sets in the Omaha area by this time.

KOAD 92.5 soon scheduled an afternoon news program in June. The station's "pioneer FM sponsors" were heavily promoted. Among them were Storz Brewing, Metropolitan Utilities District, Orchard & Wilhelm Dept. Store, Borsheims Jewelry, and Wolf Brothers Clothing (*OWH* June 29, 1947).

Other programming included sports with Jack Sandler, and Harvey Twyman calling Aksarben Knights hockey games. By 1948, play by play included Omaha Cardinals baseball plus some high school football matchups. A 30-minute newscast from *World-Herald* resources aired nightly at 9:30.

A major upgrade authorized in February 1947 would give KOAD a much bigger signal. KOAD would broadcast from atop the new KOWH 660 AM tower at 500 feet with a power upgrade to 380 thousand watts ERP. The power increase required a frequency shift from 92.5 to a new dial position of 92.9 MHz. The new FM antenna on order was an eight-bay square loop.

Construction of the 500-foot tower at a new transmitter site for KOAD and sister station KOWH began immediately at 60<sup>th</sup> and Hartman Streets. KOWH 660 would use the tower itself as the antenna radiator. \$80 thousand of the \$400 thousand upgrade would be used on a new building to house the two transmitters.

KOAD now at 92.9 along with KOWH 660 began operations from the new site on September 3, 1947. KOAD's eight-bay antenna was the highest in Nebraska. Callers reported reception from Wahoo and Bancroft, Nebraska to the west and from Adair, Iowa to the east (*OWH* Sep 3, 1947).

The *World-Herald* consistently and heavily promoted the benefits of FM during KOAD's early years, writing in 1948 that FM receivers in the city had grown from the twenty when it signed on to about twelve-thousand (a questionable number), and that some experts predicted an FM takeover in five years. KOAD newspaper ads often limited the copy to the virtues of FM with no mention of programming offered.

Also left out was the sister AM station. KOWH 660 received nary a word in the newspaper coverage detailing the new tower's first day.

KOAD 92.9 kept its programming separate from the AM through 1947 but that ambitious effort was showing signs of exhaustion by early 1948. PD Harvey Twyman seeing the writing on the wall had already left for greener pastures in November 1947 moving to the West Coast where he opened a production office and later joined KGO San Francisco.

KOWH 660 and KOAD 92.9 then began simulcasting until sunset with the FM continuing in the evening hours airing blocks of recorded music, such as *Golden Melodies*, *Meet the Maestro*, *FM Club Car*, and *Starlight Rendezvous*. On weekends the broadcast day for KOAD was shortened to a 3 p.m. sign-on.

In 1949 the weekday schedule was also shortened, signing on at noon and off at 10 p.m. Evenings were given over to "Fine Music" except for play-by-play sports such as fall football or Omaha Cardinals baseball, the Cardinals also being carried at the time on KBON AM and FM.

The *Omaha World-Herald*, possibly and rightfully frustrated with radio by this time, sold KOAD 92.9 along with KOWH 660 in July 1949. The buyers were Robert and Todd Storz. Todd would go on to become a highly successful broadcaster with the AM station but saw no use for an FM station with hardly any listeners. KOAD 92.9 was silenced in February 1950. After three years and seven months of giving its best, Omaha's first FM was gone.

### **KSWI FM 107.9, to KFMX, to 96.1 Council Bluffs**

Iowa's first FM was in Council Bluffs, KSWI FM reaching on the air in July 1947. Owned by the local newspaper the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, the FM license was sought in April right after the sister AM KSWI 1560 construction permit was granted.

KSWI FM first sought 102.1 but that was changed to 107.9 a month later. The station debuted on that frequency with 17 thousand watts ERP just weeks later at 6 a.m. on July 26, 1947. The programming was a simulcast of the AM KSWI 1560.

Operation on 107.9 was described as "interim," the frequency apparently subject to change. The dial position was omitted in initial promotions.

In September the frequency indeed was changed, to 96.1. A few weeks after that, the owners changed the call letters to KFMX.

**K S W I**

Building Hooper, Making Sales With  
News—Sports—Special Events  
and  
Good Music

*More Market Coverage than all Omaha  
Stations Combined*

Council Bluffs **OMAHA** South Omaha

**KSWI-FM**

**Iowa's First Full-Time Commercial Station**

Interim Operation 17,000 Watts ERP	📡	Granted 1113' Tower 400,000 Watts ERP
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**NONPAREIL BROADCASTING COMPANY**

Wm. E. Ware Gen. Mgr.	Iowa Tall Corn Network	Represented by Taylor-Howe-Snowden
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1947 ad announcing KSWI's FM, omitting the dial position (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

GM William Ware boasted the new frequency is "almost the center of the dial." Ware became a staunch supporter of FM and was later president of the FM Association that was active in the late 1940s.

The calls were switched back to KSWI FM in late 1951 and the license went through renewal the following spring. The station left the air in 1953, the last FM in the Omaha-Council Bluffs market to do so.

## **KFAB 97.9 Lincoln**

The KFAB Broadcasting Company filed early for an FM station. The effort began immediately after the war in 1945, seeking 99.9 on the new FM band (88-108 MHz) that was to go into effect the following year. Manager Harry Burke announced land for the transmitter was purchased near Crete, Nebraska and the company was waiting for post-war material to become available.

A conditional construction permit was issued in April 1946. The class of service was M for Metro with a possibility for R Rural. (The third FM class at the time was C for Community, the lowest power. Rural permitted the widest area of coverage.)

By 1947 the plan for a transmitter at Crete was abandoned and the assigned frequency was changed to 97.9 MHz, the result of new FCC separation rules requiring a minimum four-channel same-city separation.

KFAB FM signed on the afternoon of August 27, 1947, operating 12-thousand watts from a 192-foot tower mounted on the Sharp Building. KFAB FM became Lincoln's first FM station, licensed to Lincoln even though KFAB 1110AM had already received approval to become an Omaha station two years earlier. The daily schedule was from 3 p.m. to 10:40 p.m. (Lincoln's second FM arrived in 1948. It was KFOR FM on 102.9 running 22-thousand watts.)

KFAB FM aired Nebraska's first FM regional network broadcast just weeks later, on October 24, 1947, when KOAD and KFAB FM broadcast the Omaha South and Lincoln Central football game from Creighton Stadium.

It's not certain exactly when in 1948 KFAB FM 97.9 left the air. A 1948 "construction permit to modify" was given an extension to January 1949 but apparently wasn't acted upon and went no further, so it can be presumed the station was off by the end of 1948.

## KBON FM 98.7 Omaha

Inland Broadcasting received a conditional construction permit for KBON FM in 1946.

It led to ambitious plans to build a 700-foot tower at 44th and Grover Streets, but went no further. Attention was likely diverted from FM as Inland Broadcasting was busy with an expansion at the time.

Two years went by before KBON FM reached the air. The KBON 1490 AM tower was used, the FM antenna placed atop the tower at 38th and Wright Streets. The FM pylon remained on the tower's top until 2016.



*KBON FM 98.7 sign on announcement, 1948  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).*

KBON FM 98.7 signed on with 3000 watts at 2 p.m. on December 5th, 1948.

An affiliate of the Mutual network, KBON FM ran a newspaper ad that day announcing its being “Omaha's only National Network FM Station.” Programming was a simulcast from the AM side.

With no original FM programming, KBON FM's only effort to stand out was by initiating "bus radio" in March 1950. The station outfitted Omaha's buses with FM receivers.

The idea of transit-radio was developed a couple of years earlier by a Cincinnati station seeking a way to find revenue. By the time KBON FM launched the service, 18 cities including Des Moines and Kansas City were offering transit-radio.

Some appreciated transit-radio service, but there was push back from those who resented being a captive audience. Federal court cases were filed questioning the constitutionality of transit-casting.

The revenue remained thin, lacking particularly from national sponsors. The bus radio effort lasted nearly two years, ending on January 15, 1952. With that, KBON FM signed off for good.

## THE FM EXODUS

More FMs were promised for 1948. FM applications were in play for the remaining AM stations in Omaha: KOIL 1290 and WOW 590.

Through it all, FM stations found a minuscule audience and few sponsors. Programming was perceived as snobbish classical music or seen as the unnecessary simulcasting of a sister AM station. The mass audience already had its well-established AM stations and was excitedly turning its attention to “radio with pictures,” television.

The FM slowdown was underway. The first 11 months of 1948 saw no new stations in the Omaha and Lincoln markets. Only KBON FM 98.7 a with a last-minute sign-on in December. It joined the four FM stations broadcasting in the region: KOAD 92.9 Omaha, KFMY 96.1 Council Bluffs, and from Lincoln KFAB FM 97.9 and KFOR FM 102.9.

KOIL and WOW slowly abandoned their plans to build. KOIL’s assistant manager Virgil Sharpe had announced a start date of January 1, 1948 for KOIL FM and even received permission that year for 13.5-thousand watts on 104.1 using KOIL 1290’s center tower at its Manawa site. Permission was conditional, with the stipulation that the AM signal would be unaffected.

KOIL FM was abandoned before reaching the air. Interest instead was turning to television. KOIL owner James Stuart launched a market and engineering study for a bid seeking channel 5 for KOIL TV.

WOW’s FM was to be KWOW, its October 1946 application seeking 94.1. Exactly one year later in 1947 WOW Inc. reapplied for 99.9 MHz seeking permission to use WOW 590’s 450-foot AM tower for the FM antenna and going so far as to order a 10-thousand watt transmitter. The grant was received with a power increase to 51 thousand watts ERP weeks later, in December 1948. But KWOW was another FM no-show.

The FM collapse took place in 1949 with owner-requested deletions of 209 FM construction permits and a few FM licensed stations as well. KFAB FM (already on the air) was formally deleted in May, KWOW in June, KOIL FM in October. Even Shenandoah’s KFNF seeking an FM gave it up in April.

The KWOW deletion request summed it up, stating the reasons: “reluctance of public to accept FM” and “greater opportunities in field of television presented themselves.” (*Broadcasting* June 27, 1949)

KFOR FM 102.9 in Lincoln went the same route as KWOW, though much later. It wasn't until 1951 when KFOR FM left the air, Cornbelt Broadcasting turning its attention to building KFOR TV the following year.

The FM exodus of the Omaha-Council Bluffs stations that were already on-air began in 1950, the year after television's arrival in Omaha. KOAD was silenced by new owners Robert and Todd Storz in February. Todd Storz focused on his KOWH 660 making it into the nation's pioneer Top 40 station.

KBON FM tried a new idea equipping Omaha buses with FM receivers in March 1950. "Bus radio" lasted nearly two years, ending on January 15, 1952. With that, KBON FM left the air.

Omaha's last to give it up was KSWI FM (formerly KFMX) in Council Bluffs, going dark in 1953. Omaha's FM band fell silent for the next six years.

## **THE ENTRY OF TELEVISION**

The interest in television was renewed as World War II showed signs of an Allied victory. As with FM, it was mostly the AM station owners who forged the way. WOW was the first, filing for a license to establish a TV station in 1944 (*May Tower*).

Station President John Gillin, Jr. said the decision to enter the television field "at the earliest opportunity" has been the subject of intensive study for many months, both by WOW's engineering staff and its Board of Directors.

Gillin secured assurances from NBC that the station would be a charter member of that network's Midwest television network. This was not difficult, as NBC and RCA President David Sarnoff was aggressively behind the push to develop television, even at the expense of FM radio development and Sarnoff's friendship with FM inventor Edwin Armstrong.

However, it would be another five years before television signals would emanate from Omaha towers.

In 1946, 40 thousand dollars of new TV equipment for experimental purposes arrived at WOW just before Christmas that year. Two RCA Image Orthicon cameras, four standard receivers, and other equipment were set up at the Creighton University auditorium for use in training personnel for TV engineering. There, engineers experimented over closed-circuit television. The engineers practiced by televising Creighton basketball games to students on campus.



WOW was awarded channel 6 in January 1948 for WOW TV. KMA's May Broadcasting Company was awarded channel 3 in May of the same year for KMA-TV. (May was forced to change the calls to KMTV just before sign-on in 1949.) The CBS TV and NBC TV networks were locked into these two pending stations

KOIL made a bid for Omaha's third allotted channel and the yet-unclaimed ABC TV network. KOIL and Central States Broadcasting presented a market and engineering study for the station, the allotted channel at the time being channel 5. Also in the hunt for that third television outlet was the KFAB Broadcasting Company.

Meanwhile, KBON's Inland Broadcasting Company applied for Lincoln's channel 10 in 1951 competing with Cornbelt Broadcasting, operators of KFOR. Channel 10 would be the first television station for that city.

The overwhelmed FCC put a freeze on new TV licensing in September 1948. 108 VHF stations were on or were soon to be on the air, while over 700 applications were placed on hold. The six-month freeze stretched to four years, partially due to the Korean War.

Two Omaha applications beat the 1948 freeze: WOW and Shenandoah's KMA. By 1949 only 24 cities, one being Omaha, had two or more stations on the air. Some, such as Denver and Austin, oddly had none.

Joe Herold was WOW's chief technical supervisor. WOW initially selected the top of the Blackstone Hotel at 26th and Farnam for a television transmitter site, but soon decided on something bigger. A 500-foot tower was built at 35th and Farnam while KMTV was constructing its 521-foot tower at 2615 Harney Street.

It was July 1949 when the first official test took place. WOW TV broadcast for 15 minutes on channel 6 with newsman Ray Clark taking part. John J. Gillin flipped the switch to "on" that evening at 9:45. With less than 400 sets in the viewing area, good reception was reported as far away as Lincoln and Shenandoah. Gillin announced that 28 hours of programming per week would start by the first of September.

Both WOW TV channel 6 and KMTV channel 3 signed on within days of each other in 1949. John Gillin, WOW TV station manager, again pushed the button, this time officially signing on Omaha's first television station on August 28. Johnny Carson recalled being in the announcer's booth that day.

Just three days later May Broadcasting of KMA Shenandoah fame signed on KMTV 3 on August 31. Ed May Sr. And his mother pushed the button energizing KMTV's signal to the air.

The original call letters for KMTV were to be KMA TV and signs promoting those calls were already posted. However, Shenandoah was not considered part of the Omaha market and the KMA TV calls were denied by the FCC. The change to KMTV came just before sign-on.

CBS TV and NBC TV were immediately locked in at Omaha's two television stations while ABC TV waited for the city's third channel to arrive. In the meantime, ABC shows via kinescope recordings were supplied to the two stations, squeezed into broadcast schedules where possible, along with shows from the DuMont TV Network.

(Dumont Television, regarded today as the "Forgotten Network," operated 1946 to 1956. It was home to *Rocky King Detective*, kid's sci-fi series *Captain Video*, Fulton J Sheen's devotional program *Life Is Worth Living*, and was the proving ground for Jackie Gleason who would move to CBS in 1952.)

It was a long wait for ABC TV. The FCC freeze was lifted after over three years in April 1952, but the battle for Omaha's third channel lasted yet another five years.

The channel assignment table was changed when the freeze was lifted and channel 7 became Omaha's open slot replacing channel 5. Would-be licensees had to re-apply. Contenders KOIL and KFAB refiled in 1949 but KOIL later dropped out.

Entering the competition was Inland Broadcastings's KBON in July 1952 and the *Omaha World-Herald*. KBON dropped out of the race in November 1953 leaving it to the newspaper and KFAB to battle it out for channel 7.

FCC hearings were held in September 1954. The FCC examiner cited the far greater overall public service record of the World Publishing Company as the leading contender. The *Omaha World-Herald* won recommendation from the FCC on April 7, 1955.

KFAB protested, noting among their reasoning that the *World-Herald* suppressed comic strips favorable to TV and excluded a news story about radio and TV recipients of a safety award (*OWH* May 15, 1955).

As ABC TV was successfully getting on its feet, Omaha was still without an ABC TV affiliate for nearly two and a half more years. The *Omaha World-Herald* won the channel in 1957. A third 500-foot

tower joined the downtown skyline from new KETV studios constructed at 2665 Dodge Street, just blocks from the KMTV studios and tower.

KETV Channel 7 signed on September 17, 1957 taking over the schedule of ABC TV programs. The network still had no daytime offerings so daily sign on the first year wasn't until 1 p.m. The broadcast day would begin with a movie to fill time until the network's schedule began with *American Bandstand* at 3 p.m.

## **RADIO PERSONALITIES ARE THRUST INTO TELEVISION**

Network television wouldn't arrive in Omaha until the fall of 1950, and programming was scarce. To fill the void, AM radio personalities, some reluctantly, were pressed into service on television.

On the national level, that entertainers reached fame and fortune via radio was gratefully acknowledged, but most viewed a leap to television as disastrous, some even calling the new medium a passing fad. Bing Crosby called it "theatrical quicksand for any entertainer," saying occasional appearances would be alright, but weekly appearances would doom the star "physically as well as professionally."

On the local level, it was a new, nerve-racking experience for most radio announcers who had to appear on camera. Adding the camera to the microphone added tons of pressure, with hot lights, a studio full of clunky equipment, and a staff of technicians and producers that was necessary for assisting the announcer's presentations.

Johnny Carson recalled how TV was a totally different medium. "My experiences in radio didn't help me in TV at all." In explaining how his television career began, Carson said he was thrust into it. "You know how I learned about it? I saw a notice posted there saying I was to do a show. That's how I found out."

(Technically, Carson's first TV exposure came in 1948 at the University of Nebraska, appearing as a milkman in a filmed documentary on the safe handling of milk products, stated on an appearance on the *David Letterman Show*, CBS).

Johnny Carson, still doing his morning show on WOW 590, was on channel 6 from day one, in the announcer's booth the first day. He went from there to his own 3-3:15 afternoon TV show, *The Squirrel's Nest*, where he honed bits that would later be recognizable as his style on national television.

An example, when pigeons were being outlawed from their roosts at the Douglas County courthouse, Carson brought in a pigeon for an on-camera interview, ad-libbing the pigeon's responses for its side of the story.

Other Carson shows on Channel 6 included *Carson's Corner*, *Uncle Ank and Andy* and *Coffee Break*.

Carson shared the studio space with a set for *Martha Bolton's Kitchen*, the news set, and Mal Hansen's farm set. Hansen pioneered farm service programs on WOW TV also from day one.

There were some direct hires for the television station, notably Creighton graduate Donald R. Keough who was brought in at 55 dollars a week. Keough did some selling and also produced *Carson's Corner*.

(Keough didn't stay in broadcasting finding it too demanding for family life. He left, joining Coca-Cola in 1950 where he rose to president of the company. Keough presided over the disastrous Coke formula switch in the 1980s that led to the product's return as "Classic Coke." From there he went into investment banking.)

Before leaving, Keough along with Johnny Carson was involved in a notable first in Nebraska television. According to Merrill Workhoven in a February 25, 1988, *World-Herald* interview, "Carson and Keough worked the first televised football game in Nebraska --and maybe the first west of the Mississippi.

"It was the fall of 1950. The station's engineers beamed a signal from the top of Memorial Stadium in Lincoln to the head of "The Sower", the sculpture on top of the State Capitol. From there the signal was beamed to Omaha by way of a relay station at Gretna.

"Keough did the play-by-play of the Nebraska games, and Carson did color commentary. Can you imagine what it would cost today to get those two guys to work a football game?"

Workhoven and WOW Sports Director Tip Saggau aired the Husker games on radio, which was then still "the money side" of game coverage. Workhoven continues, "I did color, but I was also responsible for commercials for both radio and TV. The TV commercials were on film, but I was busy as a beaver." (*OWH* Feb 25, 1988)

The days were long for the WOW staff. Merrill Workhoven announced from 5 a.m. to noon on radio and 6 p.m. to sign-off on the TV side.

Other WOW personnel doing radio and television duty included reporter Ray Clark, who joined WOW from WNAX in 1940 and covered the war for the station. Clark pioneered the local nightly newscast on WOW TV well into the 1950s, preparing the 10:00 newscast at the radio studios downtown then rushing with the copy to the TV studios at 35th and Farnam.

Former KSWI and KOIL DJ Ralph Carey was hosting shows on WOW TV Ch 6 in 1953 and had his own Saturday afternoon Teen Dance Show by 1955. Carey was a native Omahan who got into radio while in the Army, announcing for the American Forces Network in Europe during the war.

KMTV Channel 3 recruited radio people as well. KOIL's Henry Kelpel and Bill Talbot became familiar faces. Jean Sullivan of KOWH and KOIL became well known for doing television commercials for clients of her ad agency.

Double duty on radio and TV lasted well into the 1950s. WOW announcer Tom Chase hosted an afternoon television kids show, *Trail Time*, introducing vintage western movies in serial form.

Jolly Joe Martin, who had a daily show on WOW 590 with pianist Al Lamm in the early 1950s, also hosted a daily show on camera, *Snicker Flickers*, where he would do funny dialogue and sound effects to go along with old silent movies. The noontime show was scheduled for the many elementary school kids who came home for lunch. The film and banter were provided by a syndicated service.

Omaha North High graduate Richard Palmquist joined WOW 590 and WOW TV 6 at age 19. On TV he played "Major Action," presenting after-school Sci-Fi serials on *Stand By for Action*. Palmquist later headed up the Nebraska Association of Broadcasters.

Lyle DeMoss, WOW program director, also segued to TV, reinventing himself and becoming visibly present with cooking shows. It began with *Lyle's Patio* on WOW TV 6. Focusing on grilled foods, the show began almost as a lark in 1960 and ran to 1965. DeMoss published several cookbooks well into the 1970s.

## **SIDEBARS AND FOOTNOTES**

### **THE STANDINGS, 1949**

Besides ratings, a station's standings in a market can be roughly determined by its rate card, the price guide for air time on the station. Based on a 60-second spot, the 1949 leader was WOW at \$25 per minute. This was followed by KFAB at \$20, KOIL at \$12.50, and KOWH at \$10. KBON followed KOWH at \$6.50 per 60-second spot noting its KBON FM was a free bonus (the AM and FM were simulcasting.) KOAD FM charged just \$2. (*Broadcasting* Aug 5, 1949)

## JOHNNY CARSON AND MERRILL WORKHOVEN

Merrill Workhoven joined WOW in 1945 and became a familiar baritone voice for both the AM and TV stations for more than 30 years. He was widely known for his friendship with Johnny Carson, who got his start at WOW under Workhoven.



*WOW's Merrill Workhoven, 1953 photo.*

In 1970's California, Johnny Carson had lunch with his former WOW Radio co-worker Merrill Workhoven who drove out to Los Angeles to visit his daughter Melanie. When Carson learned Workhoven's car broke down twice on the way out, Workhoven was later surprised by a gift from Carson, a new Buick Skylark for the return trip. (*OWH* story Jan 24, 2005). Workhoven retired from WOW in 1975.

## FM PIONEERING IN OMAHA

Interestingly, Edwin Armstrong's new technology did indeed arrive in Omaha during FM's formative years, though not in the broadcast service. FM was selected in 1940 for the Douglas County Sheriff radio communication system. The agency constructed a new 150-foot tower at Clearview home on West Maple Road housing the first FM law enforcement system in the country. The calls were W9XAD and five cars were FM equipped.

Clearview, a 1931 home for the aged, was on one of the highest points in Douglas County, about ten miles west of Benson. (*OWH* Aug 27, 1940). Coverage during the tests was reported as good, even including much of Council Bluffs.

## THE DOWNTOWN NEWS TICKER

In 1947, WOW and US National Bank set up a lighted ticker-tape news banner on the side of a downtown building displaying news headlines much like that at Times Square in New York City (March 10, 1947). It was called, "The Flashcaster," and was on the US National Bank building on the northwest corner of 16th and Farnam.

840 bulbs flashed forming a moving line of letters and words. The 61-foot news sign went around the corner at its midway point and operated daily from 8 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. The "newscasts" ran about 5 to 8 minutes and were updated hourly from the WOW newsroom and United Press wires.

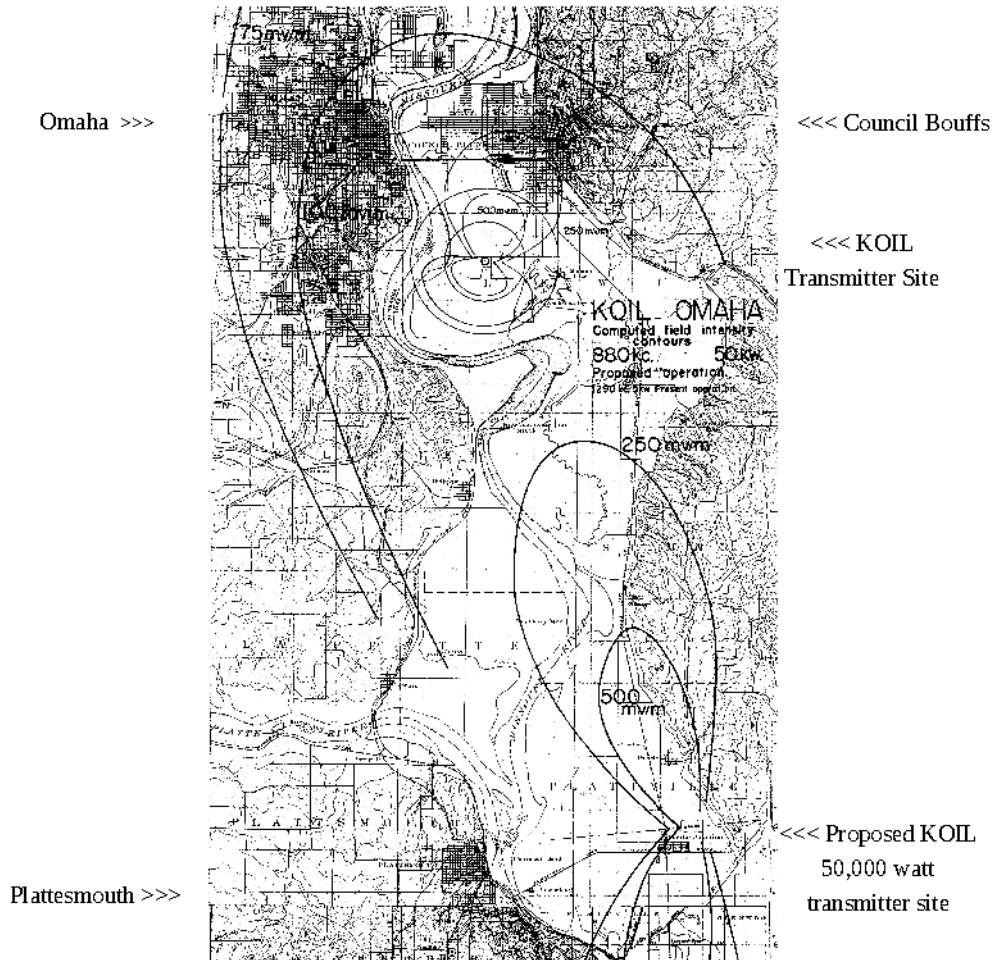
### KOIL's 50-THOUSAND WATT WISH

An engineering study concluding in 1946 proposed to move KOIL to clear channel 880 kHz for a power upgrade to 50 thousand watts. The plan called for five towers with one pattern for both day and night operation.

As shown on the engineer's coverage map proposal, the consultants selected Pacific Junction, Iowa for the transmitter site where it could send a major lobe toward Omaha. The null on the right side of the pattern would protect the Class I clear channel outlet for 880, WABC (the precursor to WCBS), New York City.

The plan went no further, likely due to ongoing FCC clear channel hearings that dragged on into the next two decades.

It wasn't until the 1960s that the FCC finally FCC loosened rules on clear channel operation, breaking up the clears and allowing secondary full-time stations to move onto those frequencies but with necessary restrictions. In 1972 KRVN Lexington, in Central Nebraska, moved from 1010 kHz to take over 880 with 50-thousand watts. Its nighttime pattern is beamed westward covering much of the western U.S.



## **1370/1400 KORN, 1340 KFGT- THE FREMONT STATIONS- PART ONE**

In 1940 Fremont got a radio station of its own. The town of about 12 thousand on the north bank of the Platte River is 30 miles WNW of downtown Omaha and is within near-local range of the Omaha stations.

Clark Standiford, a former co-owner of KGFW Kearney, formed the Nebraska Broadcasting Company and built KORN 1370 in Fremont, signing on with 100 watts full time on December 22.

He used a Gates 250-A transmitter feeding into a 179-foot tower broadcasting from the residence of two station managers who also worked as the engineers.

The NARBA Treaty frequency shift of 1941 moved the station to 1400 kHz in March 1941. An increase in power to 250 watts was granted that May.

Standiford and other shareholders were involved at the time in putting an Omaha station on the air. They were granted a construction permit in 1940 for a 250 watt station on 1500, selecting the calls KONB. That station signed on as KBON in 1942, the frequency having shifted to 1490 by this time due to the 1941 NARBA Treaty.

Arthur Baldwin took over controlling ownership of KORN in October, 1944. He and other businessmen soon laid out ambitious plans to transfer KORN to the larger market of Lincoln. This involved a 20-thousand dollar sale of KORN from Nebraska Broadcasting to Inland Broadcasting, owners of KBON 1490 in Omaha. Inland would then move KORN to Lincoln while applying to build another Fremont station on 1340.

It was a struggle with the FCC, but the plan came to fruition in August, 1947 when Lincoln got the station just in time to replace KFAB 1110 which had moved its city of license to Omaha. KFAB's move was likely a factor in the government decision.

The calls were changed from KORN to KOLN when 1400 lit up from Lincoln on August 11. Some weeks later the Fremont 1340 frequency was permitted to sign on with 100 watts and the KORN calls were again on the air in Fremont.



The troika of KORN, KOLN, and KBON sold air time as a “hometown” package network, but not for long. Inland Broadcasting found the Fremont station to be more of a burden than it was an asset. Inland sold KORN 1340 to Walker Newspapers for 22 thousand dollars in 1948.

Walker jettisoned the KORN calls in favor of KFGT 1340 in March, 1949. The new calls stood for Walker’s local publications, the *Fremont Guide and Tribune*. The old KORN calls were soon picked up by a station in Mitchell, South Dakota, home of the famous Corn Palace.

Inland Broadcasting kept KOLN 1400 in Lincoln for several more years and sought to add KOLN TV channel 12 in 1949.

KFGT’s new owners later attempted to upgrade the signal from 100 watts to 250 watts. After months of battle, the request was ultimately denied in June 1951 due to objections from co-channel KGFW 1340 in Kearney claiming the higher power would cause them interference.

The 1950s were rather uneventful for the 100-watt station. The only major programming the station promoted outside of Fremont was major league baseball in 1950, including the World Series in 1949.

General Manager Bill Baldwin, except for his years in the service, had been an announcer and engineer at the station since it signed on as KORN in 1939. He moved into sales at KBON 1490 in 1950.

Walker Newspapers assigned their license to Walker Radio Inc. in 1953 to separate the broadcast interests from those of the newspaper.

Having hit a wall on upgrades, the station downgraded to save money, gaining approval in 1956 to operate for specified daytime only hours instead of full time. KFGT ‘s new schedule would be from 6 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sundays.

At about the same time in June 1956 Walker sold the station to Snyder Enterprises for \$36 thousand. Snyder was a father and son duo, Leroy and Harry Snyder. Harry had already worked for the station, having been its chief engineer at age 16.

After a few years, Snyder Enterprises changed the call letters and began seeking upgrades. The calls were changed to KHUB on the first day of 1959, signifying Fremont as a “hub” market for the region.

For radio talent, its proximity to Omaha made the station a stepping stone to the larger market, and at times a safety net for Omaha radio personalities who might find themselves suddenly unemployed.

KHUB 1340 was on the path for a signal upgrade and would become an established hometown station even gaining an Omaha audience with its polka shows.

## CHAPTER TWO- NETWORKS OUT, DJ'S IN

### THE GOLDEN AGE FADES

The 1950s. Radio's Golden Age was past, vanishing in the glow of television screens across America. A re-imaging of the radio industry was needed.

As the decade began, network affiliations remain unchanged. KFAB airing CBS, KOIL carrying ABC, and WOW still with NBC. Omaha radio stations, like those elsewhere, worked hard to remain relevant in the first half of the 1950s.

Programmers stubbornly stuck to block programming. But under their feet natural evolution slowly inched forward. Records were overtaking live music programming. The radio networks' grip on radio entertainment was loosening. Localized entertainment began taking the stage as network radio programs decreased.

Alongside a station's newsmen, sportscasters and farm reporters were local personalities playing records between a mix of features, interviews and weather reports. This would lead to a revolution that would save radio, a revolution that emerged from Omaha.

Other shifts in the 1950s were station ownership changes, studios being moved, and the addition of a new AM station taking to the air.

Overnight programming increased. KOIL and WOW began running 24-hour schedules in the mid-1950s, joining KFAB that had begun doing so several years earlier.

Radio, no longer the technical marvel of the 1920s and 30s, was facing its first major challenge in keeping its audience. Television was taking over. Something had to be done to make radio great again.

It was a 500-watt daytime-only station that found the way, pioneering a successful music and personality format under the direction of Omaha's own Todd Storz.

By the end of the 50s, broadcasters all around the country will find that music programming is the answer and is relatively cheap to produce; no big productions or scripts, just announcers and records.

The program director's duties will change from overseeing public service programming and setting up announcer schedules to designing formats, tabulating the hits, and leading the DJs.

## THE TELEVISION BOOM

David Sarnoff of NBC was keen on developing television as the next medium and advised his affiliates to apply for television licenses. Network radio at the time was holding steady in revenues. With much of that cash being poured into television, the newer medium was finally taking off after years of legal wrangling and a world war.

After TV signed on in Omaha in 1949, the shift to television was swift. KMTV Channel 3 and WOW TV Channel 6 each broadcast about 20 hours per week. The cable carrying the networks arrived a year later, just in time for the 1950 World Series. For a while the two stations had to share one network line taking turns on alternate nights to air network programming. The off station filled with kinescope delays, a rather clunky filming of a TV screen, the only way at the time networks could record a live show.

WOW TV increased power to 100 thousand watts on February 24, 1953, becoming Omaha's first and the country's sixth station to reach the maximum permitted power.

That same year, just four years after the two Omaha television stations first signed on, a vast majority of homes in the city had a television set. Radio was losing out, particularly during prime night time hours.

Video news coverage was slow, limited by the immobility of television equipment and the slow process of film processing and delivery. In 1950 KMTV 3 hired 26-yr-old Floyd Kalber as its first news person to join the newsroom staff of one. The following year his resourcefulness resulted in the only video of the 1952 Kansas City flood to be seen by viewers.

Kalber borrowed a film camera from a local detective agency, flew to St. Louis in a SAC jet, then returned and persuaded rival WOW TV to process his film, and aired the raw footage on KMTV. Floyd recalls it was an experience that taught him what television could do, that it could educate and inform, and go beyond Arthur Godfrey, Ed Sullivan, and Playhouse 90.

TV news development slowly inched along as the 1950s progressed. Floyd Kalber of KMTV 3 caught the attention of NBC with his coverage of the 1958 Starkweather murder spree resulting in his move to NBC-TV's Chicago station in 1962 replacing long-time newsman Alex Drier. In the meantime Kalber became a mentor for 21-yr-old Tom Brokaw who joined KMTV from KTIV Sioux City in 1960.

Color television was quick to follow though slow to develop, not approaching mainstream for another ten years. NBC affiliate WOW TV 6 was one of 21 stations nationally that carried the first

coast-to-coast color broadcast, the Rose Parade in Pasadena in 1954. The 90-minute NBC TV program was watched by about 400 people on four 14-inch receivers in the Paxton Hotel ballroom (OWH Jan 2, 1954).

KMTV, the CBS TV affiliate, became the color television leader the following year after swapping networks with WOW TV.

## **RADIO NETWORKS FADE TO LOCAL PROGRAMMING**

As radio network dominance decreased, radio station growth slowed and new ways were sought to stay viable. FM wasn't yet the answer.

Network entertainment programming dwindled. Some network radio shows would cross to television, a few of those such as the game show *Strike It Rich* and the sitcom *Ozzie and Harriet* even hanging on to their radio roots by simulcasting on both mediums for a while.

New shows would occasionally appear, like NBC in 1955 with *X-Minus One*, a Sci-Fi anthology series that enjoyed a three-year run. Stan Freberg's short-lived summer fill-in program on CBS in 1957 is considered network radio's last comedy production.

Most remaining CBS and NBC radio dramas were canceled by 1960. The last network radio dramas that originated during American radio's Golden Age, *Suspense* and *Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar*, ended on September 30, 1962.

Among the last of the network shows was *Don McNeill's Breakfast Club*, a mid-morning show on ABC that began in 1933 when the net was still NBC Blue. The show lasted an astounding 35 years, concluding its run in 1968.

The only real network success during the television age was a weekend magazine show that didn't require appointment listening. Affiliates loved NBC's *Monitor* for filling in those weekend hours normally occupied by part-timers, replays, and secondary shows. *Monitor* debuted in 1955 and aired on KFAB 1110 until fading out 20 years later.

Local programming was taking over the radio networks' air time. Transcription programs that could air at the station's discretion and phonograph record shows presented by announcers were being scheduled.

More local newsreaders and DJs gained recognition as personalities. They included Henry Kelpe, Bill Talbot, and Byron Head at KOIL, Bud Armstrong, Jim O'Neill, and Jean Sullivan at KOWH,

Sandy Jackson and Dick McCann at KBON, Bill McBride and Ray Olson at WOW, and Lyle Bremser and Gaylord Avery at KFAB.

Though programming was becoming more local, stations continued to use the network model. Record shows were aired in program blocks of 15 minutes to an hour, sometimes two hours, sandwiched between newscasts and transcription recordings. A mix of music blocks besides pop standards or show tunes would include multiple genres, such as country, gospel, and even polka, all scheduled individually for appointment listening. Any variation from block programming seemed too radical and alien for broadcasters to even envision.

## **THE DAWNING OF DJ'S**

The 1950s saw the rise of the DJ's, though the seeds had been planted years before. DJ's began appearing after the war (the term Disc Jockey first appeared in a *Variety* magazine headline in 1941) playing phonograph records, but only within those block segments on the program schedule, usually 30 minutes in length.

A music program spawning Omaha's first listener-supported DJ first emerged on KBON 1490. Sandy Jackson joined KOWH in 1943, but for extra money the following year he worked at KBON playing pop 78s on a live one-hour request program buried in late nights called *The 1490 Swing Club*. This listener-oriented approach was relatively new in a time when most record presenters picked their own favorites or played what was directed by the PD.

Sandy Jackson's successful show prompted his move to weekday afternoons (Todd Storz took over *The 1490 Swing Club* in 1946) calling his show *The Rhythm Inn*. Before the end of the decade, his afternoon show at 2:30 and 4 p.m. garnered him the reputation as "Omaha's Number 1 disc jockey."

The DJs were emerging. Sandy Jackson was sharing Omaha's airwaves with WOW's popular new radio personality, Johnny Carson. During the 1949 through 1951 period, mixed in with Arthur Godfrey, the soap operas, and local block programs, it was Carson in the mornings on WOW 590 and Sandy Jackson afternoons on KBON 1490.

Then came KOWH 660. Station owner Todd Storz by 1952 would show the radio industry that pop music and localization was radio's salvation in the face of television's onslaught. The last of the popular national syndicated shows *Make Believe Ballroom* and *Your Hit Parade* were dropped in favor of the local DJ and locally-researched record sales.

## OMAHA'S RADIO DIAL-- 1950s

590	WOW	5000 watts, CBS.
660	KOWH	Daytime only, 500 watts, no network.
1110	KFAB	50,000 watts, NBC.
1290	KOIL	5000 watts, ABC.
1420	KOOO	Sign on 1957, daytime only, 500 watts.
1560	KSWI	Council Bluffs, daytime only, 500 watts

### FM Band:

#### Initial round-

92.9	KOAD	Silenced February 1950
96.1	KSWI FM	Council Bluffs, Silenced 1953.
98.7	KBON FM	Silenced January 1952

#### Renaissance-

94.3	KQAL	Signed on April 1959
96.1	KCOM	Signed on September 1959
99.9	KFAB-FM	Signed on December 1959

## 590 WOW Omaha

Changes marked the beginning of the new decade for WOW. Frank Fogarty took over WOW's management reins in August 1950 succeeding the late John Gillin. With that came the resignation of Joe Herold, WOW technical engineer who was instrumental in the development and construction of WOW TV.

In October, Woodmen sold off sister station KODY 1240 North Platte which it had owned since December 1943.

WOW ownership changed early in the new decade. Woodmen of the World sold its broadcasting assets in September 1951 after nearly 30 years of ownership that began when the station first signed on. The station, along with sister WOW TV channel 6, was sold for \$2.52 million.



*1950 WOW ad showing co-ownership with KODY North Platte.*

The new owner was Meredith Engineering. Seven years later, in what was basically a transfer of assets while the station remained under the Meredith umbrella, WOW 590 in 1958 was purchased by

Meredith Corporation for 1.2 million by paying a rental fee of \$140 thousand per year as a deferred payment until 1976. Meredith was a publishing firm in Des Moines behind the successful magazine *Better Homes and Gardens*. Radio staff received free subscriptions to the magazine for years afterward. Frank Fogarty remained at WOW's helm while rising to VP of Meredith Broadcasting in the coming years.

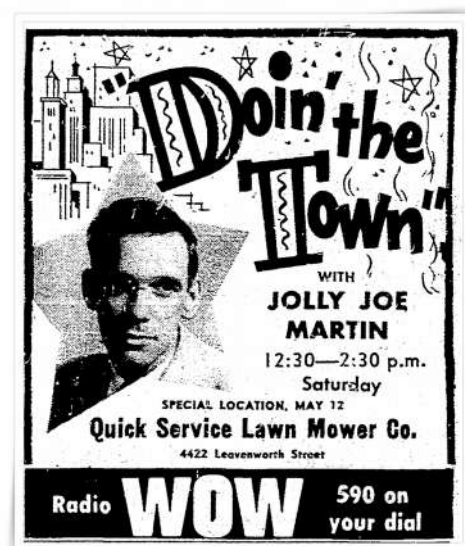
The 1950s was a decade of metamorphosis for radio programming, and WOW, well behind the curve although still with decent ratings, slowly went through the changes.

Johnny Carson had a morning block as the new decade began. The *Johnny Carson Show* aired following *Breakfast Bandstand*, 8:15 to 9 a.m. Midday shows followed including *Martha Bohlson's Cupboard* at 10 a.m. NBC network programming offered afternoon soap operas and prime evening hours filled with music, drama, and variety.

Jolly Joe Martin was passed the baton when Johnny Carson left WOW in 1951. Martin had been with the station since 1948 and took over Carson's morning show, renamed *The 590 Hour*.



WOW's Jolly Joe Martin, 1954  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald)



Jolly Joe Martin, WOW 1956  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

Martin would spend hours going through newspapers seeking show content. Martin's *Breakfast Bandstand* segment with sidekick Al Lamm at the keyboards at times claimed 53 percent of the radio audience in the early 1950s ( *OWH* Aug 4, 1979, Interview).

Joe Martin became the station's major air personality, working hard and doing multiple shows. Besides his morning show he would sometimes host a daily late-night show and on weekends hosted Saturday's *Breakfast Bandstand* at 7:30 a.m. followed by his *Doin' The Town* noontime show.



Local singing talent still appeared on WOW's roster in the 1950s. Slim Everhart, "The Singing cowboy from Texas," joined the WOW line up in 1947 coming over from KFAB where he began his radio career in 1936.

Everhart gained a higher profile on WOW in the early 1950s with various shows of his own. He headlined the *WOW Jamboree Saturday nights* in 1953 and 54 along with pianist Al Lamm. Everhart additionally performed the songs on the Saturday afternoon *Western Hit Parade* and was among the line up for the 12:30 p.m. *WOW Calling* show 1955 and 1956, and was even the wake-up talent following Arch Andrews overnight show at 5:30 a.m. in 1957. Everhart wound down his career as a DJ on KOOO 1420 in the early 1960s.



Ray Clark, WOW, 1946 photo.

All through the 1950s, radio news was a major element. In Omaha, the big names in news were at WOW with Jim McGaffin and Ray Clark, KOIL with Byron Head and Bill Talbot, while KFAB had Walt Kavanaugh and Lyle Bremser.

WOW's Ray Clark was an Omaha pioneer in transitioning news from radio to television. Until the TV station got its newsroom, Clark worked out of the downtown WOW radio newsroom in the Insurance Building and would travel with scripts 17 blocks west on Farnam Street to do the 10 p.m. TV news from the new WOW TV studios at 35th and Farnam Streets. WOW radio didn't move into the new quarters with TV until about 1960.

Jim McGaffin returned from the service rejoining WOW as news director for both WOW 590 and WOW TV in 1950, remaining in that position until 1968.

McGaffin was instrumental in both the AM and TV coverage of the Omaha 1952 flood. WOW's personnel picked up the flood in North Dakota following it southward with airplanes, cars, a helicopter, and by telephone. WOW produced taped recordings of up to ten minutes length describing the scene along the river at disaster points, averaging about 18 a day. As many as 35 newsmen, announcers, and

WOW News 1954  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

engineers were operating from the station's newsroom while more news was being picked up from other reporters along the river. (*Broadcasting* Apr 21, 1952)

NBC sent newscaster Morgan Beatty to the flood scene at 6:30 a.m. Wednesday as a passenger on the Presidential plane's special flight over the devastated Omaha area. Mr. Beatty's reports, airing on WOW Omaha, were broadcast on his regular 7:30 and 11:15 p.m. network broadcasts. (*Broadcasting* Apr 21, 1952)

For sports, Jack Payne came to Omaha from Oklahoma in 1951 replacing Tip Saggau as sports director for WOW radio and television. Payne called Husker games on Saturdays for WOW all through the 50s and 60s. Payne later joined KFAB's Husker broadcasting team in 1970.

Farm news was a mainstay. WOW's rural audience was well-served by the station's far-flung and unwavering signal. Omaha being centered in beef and corn country guaranteed the importance of farm and market reporting. The Omaha Stockyards overtook those in Chicago in 1955 to become the biggest in the country. Reaching farmers and ranchers with valuable information along with sponsor's agriculture-related products translated into big dollars for WOW, and for KFAB as well.

WOW had not one but two farm directors responsible for early morning agriculture news and market reports. Mal Hansen was WOW farm director and Arnold Peterson the associate farm director both started their days well before the 6 a.m. reports.

Arnold Peterson was teamed for a while in 1953 with Martha Bohlson for a gardening show, *Martha's Garden* airing middays.

With Bohlson so busy doing her show for so many other stations, WOW added its own Home Economist in 1957. Connie Cook provided recipes and home tips on *Connie's Cupboard* afternoons at 2. Cook, as did many WOW radio personalities, also did double duty with a show on WOW TV Ch 6.



Mal Hansen, WOW 1954 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).



Arnold Peterson, WOW 1953.

Further evidence of the audience shift to television: WOW and WOW TV found itself airing some NBC programs simultaneously on the two mediums. Notably, *The Bell Telephone Hour* was on radio and TV as early as 1949 and 1950, and Herb Shriner's *Two For The Money* game show ran for several seasons over both TV and radio starting in 1952.

Radio's Golden Age was drawing to a close. NBC by 1954 began replacing the comedy and drama of Groucho Marx, *The Great Gildersleeve*, and *The Big Story* to a mix of music shows that included *The Voice of Firestone* (classical), *The Bell Telephone Hour* (classical and Broadway), *Cities Service Band of America* (variety) and the *Grand Ol' Opry* (country).



Frank Allen, WOW 1954  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

Locally, WOW 590 began to acknowledge the DJ in the mid-1950s as KOWH 660 was succeeding its a pop music format. WOW programming, though stubbornly clinging to block programming with generic show titles and establishment recording artists, was beginning to credit the personality involved in the shows.

In 1954 Frank Allen was advertised as the host on *Morning Mixer* at 9 to 9:45 a.m., *All Set For Music* afternoons from 4:30 to 5:30, and on *Cloud Nine* at 9:15 p.m. as well.

Also that year, WOW began broadcasting on a 24-hour schedule starting in December. The overnight show mentioning Arch Andrews in the ads was *All Night Starland*, another nod to recognizing the personality as an important part of the program.

A network switch came in 1955 and WOW's *Breakfast Bandstand* soon was a two-hour lead-in for Arthur Godfrey on CBS. The network affiliation from NBC to CBS took place on June 19. It was a swap with KFAB, the result of a deal WOW's owners made with the network so that all of the company's TV stations in its group would be with the same network. WOW 590 had been with NBC since 1927.

WOW's slow acceptance of recorded music becoming the star also was increasing. The station the same year promoted a "High Fidelity quality" of its signal, citing its audio range of 30 to 15-thousand cycles.

The WOW music library was filled with show tunes, light classics, and artists appealing to grown-ups, but no rock and roll. Any music with teen appeal was grudgingly vented in short, 30-minute blocks on Saturdays, with *Teen Tunes* at 11, and by 1957, *Top Tune Tally* at 4, though the latter may have omitted teen tunes..

Arch Andrews along with Frank Allen would leave to become well-known DJs at Top 40 KOWH 660 before the end of the decade.

WOW by then also made a major change. A “new, brighter sound” with news every hour on the hour was promised in 1959. It was a prelude to 1960’s announcement of a “completely modern radio service” when CBS canceled its remaining afternoon radio soap operas moving them to TV.

But the growing pains for WOW 590 will continue into the 1960s.



Arch Andrews, WOW Overnight Show 1954  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

## 660 KOWH Omaha

After years of being an also-ran station since the 1920s, this little 500-watt daytime-only station became a game-changer in the 1950s. Not just for Omaha, but for the radio industry nationwide. It would be the birthplace of locally formatted music and news radio.



It wasn’t that DJs and top tunes shows were especially new to radio by this decade. It was making those shows into a continuous all-day format getting rather than appointment programming that was untried and quite unthinkable. Stringing a series of DJ shows together all playing the hits from a

common Top Tunes playlist repeatedly for the full broadcast day just wasn't on the radar. Even the simple idea of repeating a song within 24 hours was alien to radio programmers, believing that variety was the key to successful music shows.

Even though seemingly obvious in retrospect, the move from block programming to continuous music and news required genius and courage. It wouldn't come as a sudden epiphany on the part of KOWH owner Todd Storz, but merely a determination to find a way.

Storz paid close attention to research, which at the time was basically limited to ratings. He keyed on the winning programs, taking note of what was being aired then expanding on it. It was basically, "give the people what they want," a very established rule in marketing today.

Thus begins the story of an Omahan who loved radio, dared to make changes, and knew how to monetize his results. It was all experimental. With programmers firmly entrenched in the old and only known model of programming, such fooling with the formula was risky.



*Todd Storz, KOWH 1952.*

Todd was part of the famed Storz family that ran Omaha's top brewery. Storz Beer owned almost half the Omaha market and a good share of Nebraska beer sales overall. Todd Storz was on track to take over the family business, but his interests lay in broadcasting, not brewing.

Raised in the now-historic Storz Mansion at 3708 Farnam Street, Todd listened to distant stations on his crystal set at age eight and was a ham radio operator at 16. At the University of Nebraska, he toyed with the student radio station, boosting the signal enough so that a complaint filed by an Ohio station resulted in a visit from the FCC. In the Army, he was in the Signal Corps.

After the Army came a stint at a Hutchinson, Kansas station where he did sales, announcing, and engineering. Storz returned to Omaha in 1946 to join KBON 1490 where Sandy Jackson was showing success with his pop music program *1490 Swing Time*. Storz took over the 11 p.m. show when Jackson began his afternoon *Rhythm Inn* show, but was fired for reminding a listener who complained about the music that her radio "has an off switch."

Todd's next stop was at KFAB selling air time. His mentor was KFAB Sales Manager Harold Soderlund. While at KFAB Storz learned of a local station for sale. With his father financing most of

the buy, they purchased KOWH 660 and its FM sister KOAD 92.9 from the *Omaha World-Herald* in April 1949 for \$75 thousand.

The father-son duo formed Mid-Continent Broadcasting. Upon FCC approval of the sale, Todd took control of the station while his father, though retaining a 60 percent majority interest in the stations, stepped back and returned to looking after the brewing operation.

Todd hired Gaylord Avery from KFAB in September 1949 to become the KOWH program director. Avery was an announcer and newscaster who had worked at WOW and at KFAB since the 1930s.

Just weeks into the new decade, Todd silenced KOAD 92.9 for lack of listeners, the move coming on February 28, 1950 just eight months after the purchase.

Storz then trimmed the staff to a smaller but better-paid group of professionals. It included engineer Dale Moudy and announcers Jim O'Neill, Jack Sandler, and George "Bud" Armstrong.

All were strong professionals, but it was Armstrong who would evolve into Todd's right-hand man. George "Bud" Armstrong was an Omahan who got his radio start at WOW at the age of 16. He had graduated from Creighton Prep High School then earned a degree at Creighton University. From there he went to Northwestern University for a master's degree in broadcast journalism before returning to Omaha. His business and broadcasting acumen would serve Storz Broadcasting well into the 1970s.

Upon taking the keys to KOWH, Todd's innovative ideas were yet unformed. All he knew for sure is that he had to find out exactly what listeners want to hear.

He became a proponent of research, following the C. E. Hooper ratings closely to see what programs were popular. He also bought a listener survey conducted by a professor at the University of Omaha that concluded radio listeners tuned in mostly for music.

PD Gaylord Avery's first task was to go to New York and monitor WNEW, a station that had engineered a recorded music and news format since 1934.

As an independent with no network, WNEW had to find a way to carve a niche for itself in the most competitive market in the country. It was accomplished by playing pop phonograph records, putting together a news department, and expanding its broadcast day to 24-hours, something unheard of in the 1930s.

It was WNEW's Martin Block who was playing records while waiting for updates in the Lindbergh kidnapping trial. This led to his successful *Make Believe Ballroom* program, copied from a show of the same name developed on the West Coast by Al Jarvis at KFWB. In 1950, *Make Believe Ballroom*, by this time syndicated to stations by Martin Block, was picked up by KOWH and aired in various slots for the next two years.

(Al Jarvis is considered by many broadcast historians to be America's first DJ. Starting in the early 1930s on Los Angeles area stations Jarvis would add details about songs, singers, and bands in place of the stiff announcing of title and artist that was common in 1920s and 1930s radio. His last air position was at KFWB continuing to play records even as late as 1958 during that station's Top 40 "Color Radio" years.)

What next evolved was Todd's revolutionary philosophy that instead of selling air-time to sponsors, he would sell an audience to sponsors.

In Storz's first year of ownership, the program schedule contained individual blocks of shows with an assorted appeal, mostly produced by the sponsors who bought the air time.

The Hooper ratings were showing the listening audience would come and go with individual program blocks according to the show's popularity. The music programs were the ones showing the highest numbers of listeners (*The Birth of Top 40 Radio*, Richard W. Fatherly and David T. McFarland).

The listener study Todd purchased backed this up. The Omaha University professor used material from a psychological test bureau. Its numbers showed that music was the primary reason for radio listening tune-in. This, along with Avery's positive report from New York and the C. E. Hooper ratings of KOWH individual programs showing a spike of interest for the record shows, convinced Todd to drop network and transcribed programming in favor of recorded music. He started by expanding the popular music shows that were showing the best ratings.

It wasn't just "music" that made such listening preferable. Broken down, the music was more than the song, it was the artist and production. In the 1930s *Your Hit Parade* could count down the top songs using a house orchestra and various vocalists; the song was the star. In the 1940s, musical arrangements for recording artists began to strongly link the artist and the song.

The record was becoming the star player, the standard music experience replacing what was once solely the song. With records emerging as the listener's standard of appreciation, hit records had taken over the live performance on radio by 1959, the final year for *Your Hit Parade*,

In the latter half of 1950, Storz hired Sandy Jackson away from KBON. Jackson took afternoons at two with his own show, *The Sandy Jackson Show*, a two-hour lead-in for Jim O'Neill. Jackson's friendly chatter and popularity led to more shifts in 1951 with the addition of occasional slots such as mid-morning's *Time Out With Sandy*, a noontime *Luncheon With Sandy*, and *Sandy's Choice* late afternoons following Jim O'Neill. Jackson was recalled by many co-workers over the years as always friendly; a man who spoke smoothly and dressed nicely.



1950, Sandy Jackson moves from KBON to KOWH (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

As contracts expired, block programming over the next three years was slowly dropped from the KOWH schedule. (*Burnishing the Brand* by Tom McCourt and Eric Rothenbuhler, 2004). Music was fit in around those program blocks that remained; *Back To The Bible* and *Kitchen Klatter* were among the last to go.

When Todd Storz tabulated his weekly Top 20, local record sales were the primary source in gauging popularity. Record stores cooperated, noting that sales increased. Todd avoided the national charts using them simply as reference material.

Jukebox plays were factored in after Storz finally convinced the rack jobbers of the same synergy seen by the record stores. Record requests also became a factor after Sandy Jackson brought his request show over from KBON in 1950.

The Top 20 gained dominance on the station as the ratings rose. The occasional pop standards mixed in from the music library began to disappear.

The move to music may have been gradual but the rise in ratings came quickly. KOWH was in the black within six months. In 1951, the C.E.Hooper rating service announced KOWH was #1 in the USA for the largest percentage of audience of any independent (meaning non-network) station in the country (*OWH* June 15).

KOWH promoted itself on-air as "America's Most Listened To Independent Station," and retained this title for the next six years.



(The Hooper Report for radio began in the 1930s. C.E.Hooper was the first to start a radio rating service, an outgrowth of his Starch Report which did readership studies for magazines.)

**A NEW RECORD!**

**These 8 KOWH Personalities  
Have Made Your Station  
NO. 1!**

HOOPER SURVEY OMAHA - COUNCIL BLUFF  
December, 1951

MORNING 8 A.M. - 12 Noon Monday-Friday	<b>33.5</b>
AFTERNOON 12 Noon - 5 P.M. Monday - Friday	<b>47.8</b>
SATURDAY 8 A.M. - 4 P.M.	<b>41.9</b>
TOTAL 8 A.M. - 6 P.M. Monday-Saturday	<b>42.1</b>

**TWICE CLOSEST COMPETITOR!**

- Largest total audience of any Omaha station in every time period — weekday morning — weekday afternoon — all day Saturday — and Sunday!
- Largest share-of-audience, in any individual time period, of any independent station in all America!

**Kowh**  
**OMAHA**

**660 ON YOUR DIAL**

*"America's Most Listened-To Independent Station"*

\*Based on the latest available Hooper share of audience for unaffiliated stations including the Omaha and Council Bluffs market (December, 1951) ... 12 Noon through 6 P.M.

KOWH takes the lead, February 17, 1952. Note future KFAB legend Walt Kavanaugh as staff member (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

The on-air product was in place, but it's nothing unless listeners know about it. Storz used stunts to get attention and unique contesting to get the audience involved.

In March 1952 DJ Jim O'Neill tossed cash from a treetop perch creating a riot and was later arrested. Seemingly spontaneous, the promotion was planned to the last detail beforehand and shared in a memo to all staff. The KOWH "Money DOES Grow On Trees" promotion began with DJs mentioning some money was missing from the vault and Jim O'Neill was gone from the station (Purdue University, 2002 thesis, Steven Robert Scherer).

Probably the most successful audience involvement came from the KOWH Treasure Hunts, creating a frenzy by setting a time limit for a 105 thousand dollar prize. It had to be found in ten days, or its value would be reduced to 500 dollars.

The cost to Storz was just 500 dollars plus the premium paid to an insurer betting the big prize would not be found in time.

In addition to Treasure Hunts and stunts, hourly on-going cash prize promotions were going on. Lucky House Numbers and Lucky License Numbers were announced with the jackpot growing each time until a winner called in. Storz patented and licensed these promotions to other stations around the country for 600 dollars a week.

KOWH personalities had few rules and no critiques. They were encouraged to be themselves. But the music was on a tight leash. The list was limited to the most popular hits of the week.

Todd understood that morning shows had a big tune-in tune-out factor due to the rushed morning routine of listeners. He also knew that as mornings succeeded, chances were good for the rest of the day. His strongest and most consistent personalities were placed there—Johnny Pearson, and later Jim O’Neil.

The *Johnny Pearson Show* (pronounced PEER-sun) replaced *Kolache Time* in 1952. It followed an hour of news at sign-on. Pearson’s personable patter included voicing his own co-host Amanda, a character he with which he’d converse.

Pearson’s show ran two hours, concluding mid-morning for *Kitchen Klatter* followed by the Noon News, after which Sandy Jackson took over. *Make Believe Ballroom* was still plugged in where needed.

The morning show music was a mix of popular up-tempo selections and hit ballads by artists such as Patti Page, Les Paul & Mary Ford, the Weavers, Dinah Shore, Perry Como, and Frankie Laine. Polkas from the former *Kolache Time* show were also in the mix, the up-tempo polkas a perfect fit for mornings and South Omaha’s heavy Eastern European audience. Jolly Joe Martin’s popular morning show on WOW 590 was soon facing a storm.

Hooper ratings for KOWH by 1952 exceeded 36 percent of the audience toppling the market leader KOIL 1290. KOIL had been top dog in the market with a 37.4 Hooper as late as 1949 while KOWH was last with a 4.2. Todd’s station had gone worst to first and was still growing.

Pop music filled nearly the full day, with the Top Ten hits forming the basis of the format. (*The Birth of Top 40* by Richard W Fatherly and David T MacFarland, 2013).

KOWH still played 78's until 1954 or 55 because Todd believed they sounded better. As more and more record companies switched to 45s, they had to make special ET recordings just for the Storz Stations. The practice eventually ended. (Phil Robbins via Deane Johnson).

News was also an important factor in the programming. In 1951 Todd countered traditional top-of-the-hour newscasts by running his newscasts at five minutes before the hour. Calling it "Live at 55," this made KOWH "first with the news," but also had the benefit of returning to music just when competitors was stopping down for their top-of-the-hour news. With that, KOWH would grab the non-news, music-loving listener for the next 55 minutes.

The KOWH newsroom was well-equipped. On the street, a 1952 Dodge Sierra station wagon served as the station's mobile unit equipped with a 100-watt transmitter on 166.25 MHz. The link went to a receiving point atop a building at 39th and Dodge Streets, a mile and a half from the studio. The talk-back and cue transmitter operating on 1622 kHz was at the main transmitter tower site, controlled remotely from the studios. A "handie talkie" in the field could connect with the mobile unit for re-broadcast.

The mobile news equipment was put to work during the 1952 Omaha flood using tape interviews and live remotes to bring listeners to the scene. KOWH was given special FCC permission to continue broadcasting all night until the flood crest reached the Omaha-Council Bluffs area and the clean-up began. During the flood's approach, the station recruited trucks and drivers to evacuate families from the potential flood area. (*Broadcasting* Apr 21 and 28 1952)

In April 1953 Sandy Jackson aired a 25-minute re-broadcast of the previous year's call for emergency workers due to the Missouri River flood. Though disclaimers were aired at the beginning and end of the broadcast, public reaction included emergency workers showing up to help and some people leaving work to move their belongings to higher ground. The station, when asked to explain, said the broadcast was "to keep people awake to the ever-present threat of an emergency."

The KOWH news department raised its profile further with investigative reporting. In 1953 illegal gambling operations in the city were revealed when newsman Don Laughnane recorded voices and events from after-hours drinking spots and illegal gambling joints using another high-tech device for the time, a hidden microphone and book-sized recorder (*OWH* July 10, *Time Magazine* July 27). The sounds of clicking dice and tinkling ice from inside illegal gambling joints were aired on KOWH's *Omaha After Dark* program.

These innovative devices, mobile units, small tape recorders, and handie-talkies were made workable by Storz' engineer Dale Moudy. Todd was a technophobe and was fortunate to have inherited Moudy, a highly-qualified engineer, when buying KOWH. Moudy joined KOWH in 1946 as a control room operator, rising to engineer supervisor, then chief engineer. He was promoted to VP and director of engineering by Storz in 1955. Both men were gadget-friendly. Todd, an active ham radio operator, had his ham gear set up at the KOWH tower site with remote control operation from his desk.

Bill Stewart became KOWH PD in 1954. His job was to mix the music with personality, creating the synergy that was KOWH. Personalities had freedom as long as they didn't deviate from the playlist and had something useful to say—no rambling. One rule was, it's OK to just introduce a record.

Much of the personality's air time was spent promoting the station and cross-promoting fellow DJ's shows. No "blue" material was permitted, which could get the offender fired and off the air even before the end of his show.

The type of air person KOWH sought was described in *Billboard* ads posted by Storz: "Top pay for hotshot personality D.J.s, preferably with show biz or musical background." Other ads called for "smooth selling ability," and, "Personality identity ...singing, voicing characters, impersonations."



KOWH's Kent Burkhart, Todd Storz, and Bill Stewart, 1956  
(Courtesy: Georgia Radio Hall of Fame).

Air talent by the mid-1950s was increasingly being identified within the name of the show. Jim O'Neill was doing his morning show in 1954.

At 10 came *Time Out With Sandy*, segueing into the 11:00 *Grocery Boy* show, then the *O'Neill Showcase*. Don Laughnane did noon to 2, followed by Sandy Jackson's regular two hours.

Midday personality  
Sandy Jackson with his adult

appeal hosted *Your Grocery Boy Show*, a 15-minute segment each morning at 11 that was sponsored by a conglomerate of grocery stores and food products. The show aired a phone callout with groceries and food products as the daily prize for identifying the Grocer of the Day. *The Grocery Boy Show* originated on KOIL in the 1940s. It went to KOWH in 1954, then returned to KOIL in 1960 where it continued its run until 1976.

Jim Price was added to the staff later in 1954 doing shows where needed in middays. Price replaced Johnny Pearson on the morning show in 1955. Pearson was sent to WHB, Storz' station in Kansas City, a common practice in the Storz chain of moving proven talent to where needed in its larger markets.

(Price held a Masters's degree in music from the University of Nebraska, and for decades was a member of the Omaha Symphony [Omaha Central High School Archives, May 2, 1973]. Price in the 1970s was the founder of the Omaha Public Schools non-commercial KIOS FM.)

As Todd's empire expanded, KOWH continued as his flagship station. Viewed as the Storz "home office", it was often used as a training or prep center for newly hired talent. Some would be brought in to work only briefly at KOWH before being sent to another station in the Storz group of stations.

KOWH air talent in 1955 saw the arrival of Bob Stricht taking over mid-mornings following O'Neill's morning show, and Kent Burkhart, who went on in the 1970s developing satellite-delivered live formats and running a radio consultancy, Burkhart-Abrams.

With the emergence of rock and roll, there was much discussion in the KOWH offices about whether or not to play it. Rock began infiltrating the playlists in 1956. Kent Burkhart recalls Todd wasn't particularly in favor of it.

The decision was made that the softer side of Elvis Presley such as "Love Me Tender" would be OK, but no "Jailhouse Rock." But, the phones went wild for Elvis and all bets were off. This marked the beginning of what would be full-blown Top 40 on KOWH (*Turn It Up! American Radio Tales 1946-1996* By Bob Shannon). Teen tunes like *Be-Bop-A-Lula* by Gene Vincent were on the playlist alongside Dean Martin and Doris Day.

The venerable Top Ten music list each week had been the programming basis for years. It would expand to the Top 40 thanks to Bud Armstrong and a programming decision he made at Todd's new station in New Orleans, WTIK in 1954.

WTIK competitor WDSU was doing a Top 20 countdown each afternoon between soap operas, so Armstrong figured 40 would be better. He instituted a Top 40 countdown on WTIK that began an hour earlier and ended an hour later than the countdown on WDSU.

The Top 40 playlist at record stores became iconic from that point as stations began publishing their weekly music survey of hits for the public. Stations already had been reporting at least their top ten lists to record companies and trade publications in order to maintain record service.

A published Top 40 list on record store counters each week became a valuable promotional tool. For most stations the count went to 40 songs, though some went with a Top 20 or 30 and others up to a Top 60 and even top 100. However, the format label "Top 40" encompassed all stations playing the hits of the day regardless of playlist size.

KOWH incorporated its Top 40 Countdown show into afternoons in the latter part of 1956. Unfortunately, it revealed a station weakness. The countdown led to the number one song being played just before sign off and listeners were left hanging.

Air personalities would continue to come and go. Arrivals in 1956 included Graham “Crackers” Richards taking over the morning show with *Richard’s Record Reveille*, and Al Lohman, and Bob Lyons doing early afternoons as Sandy Jackson's lead-in. Richards would later replace Bill Stewart as Storz's national program director.

One stable voice was Omaha’s most well-known DJ of the 1950s, Sandy Jackson, continuing to develop his legacy in Omaha radio. Jackson's 15th year as DJ in Omaha was celebrated with a free KOWH Appreciation Night at the Civic Auditorium in August 1956.

Entertainment included Russ Carlyle and his ABC-Paramount Orchestra, the Diamonds, Omaha native Jeri Southern, and Georgie Shaw. The DJ staff also sang together. They were Bob Lyons, Chuck Dougherty, Al Lohman, Graham Richards, and Kent Burkhart along with Jackson.

The Treasure Hunts continued. Kent Burkhart, KOWH afternoon jock in 1955, recalls a treasure hunt during his show when he gave the final clues. The prize was buried in Council Bluffs. Says Burkhart, “We had buried it in a farmer’s field in a lipstick tube under some hay, in the ground. By the time they were through with the field, the farmer never had to plow it again.”

Burkhart continues, “The police were banging on the door and Todd had told me not to let them in. They called on the phone and asked where he was. I told them probably over in Council Bluffs. Off they went to arrest him.” (Kent Burkhart comments, *Radio & Records, Greatest Radio Promotions of All Time*, 1981)

After a June 1956 Treasure Hunt clue mentioned a book as a hiding spot, the Omaha Public Library suffered extensive book damage from enthusiastic treasure seekers. Storz freely accepted the notoriety and paid for the damage, but the incident contributed to Treasure Hunts soon becoming outlawed as a public nuisance.



1956 concert ticket for Sandy Jackson event commemorating his 15th year in Omaha radio.

Some on-air stunts bordered on silly. In 1956 when the planet Mars was to make its closest approach to earth since 1924, KOWH promoted plans to make contact with life on the planet. When the closest approach hour arrived, the personality stopped programming for “calling Mars” dialogue lasting a few minutes.

On the technical side, the transmitter with its 500-foot tower and far-reaching signal was in place when the station was purchased. Todd could turn his attention to upgrading the studio with top quality gear which was soon installed by Dale Moudy. Todd’s idea was that, after the station sign-off, the studios would be taken over for quality production of announcements and spots. More complex sound mixing and better sounding audio increased the station’s production quality, and also brought in cash for studio rental time to advertising agencies.

This resulted in live spots being replaced with heavily-produced presentations, using sound effects and music beds.

Singing jingles, being developed and introduced as station image-builders by Gordon McLendon in Dallas, were purchased to give an image to the station and were used to introduce DJ shows, weather, and even the hourly newscasts.

These heavy production elements were carried over into the newscast itself, with tones, voice filters, and background teletype effects mixed in. The news was dramatically delivered rapid-fire, with Morse code-like separators between stories. Newscasts would include lots of street news and celebrity gossip to add to the entertainment value.

Weekly cash prizes were offered for the best news tips. The tips would produce five to eight stories on a quiet day, with over 50 calls coming in some days.

In 1956 KOWH had 39 percent of Omaha’s listeners just as the Rock Revolution was igniting. The high ratings were due in part to a lack of competition. The stubbornness displayed by the majority of radio broadcasters who shunned the music and personality format led them to ridicule rather than meet the competition.

Calling them “teen stations,” many competitors overlooked the invisible older demographics who wouldn’t admit listening though they would curiously tune in or at the very least tolerate listening when the youngsters had control of the radio.

Storz understood that young people set musical tastes for the wider listening audience. He would keep hits past their peak allowing older listeners the extra time to absorb the music. He was selling the ideal of youth to a mass audience.

When teens were in school, the housewife was the target listener. The playlist would be adjusted for more adult appeal, leaving out the pick hits and the most teen-oriented songs.

The “establishment,” from parents to Madison Avenue, for years overlooked the fact that teens were not conquered followers but had sought out this format and made it their own.

Nationally, the music format was hungrily copied by numerous desperate station owners and programmers. National networks were being unceremoniously dropped. Elvis and other rock artists began appearing on playlists alongside Nat King Cole, Frank Sinatra, Peggy Lee, and other establishment artists. Todd’s format was leading the way into America’s rock and roll years.

There quickly were "co-pioneers" working the Todd Storz principals. Gerald Bartell headquartered in Milwaukee switched several of his stations to Top 40, as did Harold Krelstein of Plough Pharmaceuticals in Memphis, and most notably Gordon McLendon of Dallas, Texas who is credited with pioneering the use of jingles.

All four worked independently from each other. Numerous other stations copied the best they could. Some pirated professionals away from Storz stations, a problem Todd had to accept when one develops a winning formula.

Additionally, another problem was emerging. KOWH had an Achilles heel: the station was restricted to daytime operation. Full-time competition arrived in 1955 when Don Burden's KOIL 1290 copied the Storz formula and one-upped it on nearly every front.

Storz was tipped off by Burden himself in 1954. Burden invited Todd Storz to lunch and told him how highly vulnerable KOWH was without a nighttime signal. Todd downplayed the night time audience saying they were owned by television. Burden then announced that he was “...going to go full time” right against him. (Burden interview, *Hitmakers* 1984)

**THE OFFICIAL KOWH GUIDE**  
To the Top Tunes in the  
**OMAHA-COUNCIL BLUFFS Area**  
**The KOWH FABULOUS FIVE**

Week of May 3-9, 1958		Last Week	
1--	ALL I HAVE TO DO IS DREAM EVERLY BROTHERS	Cadence	3
2--	TWILIGHT TIME THE PLATTERS	Mercury	1
3--	WITCH DOCTOR DAVID SEVILLE	Liberty	5
4--	HE'S GOT THE WHOLE WORLD IN HIS HANDS LAURIE LONDON		2
5--	RETURN TO ME DEAN MARTIN	Capitol	9

JACK MERKER—6 to 9    ARCH ANDREWS—9 to 11    SANDY JACKSON  
11 to 12 — 2 to 4

FRANK ALLEN—12 to 2    HENRY (Heavy Hank) BUSSE— 4 to 7:30

1958 KOWH music survey. While many Top 40 DJs were quite itinerant, Sandy Jackson and Frank Allen had local careers.



KOIL didn't make its move until August 1955, dropping ABC in favor of a music format. After that, the ratings shift was slow, but evident.

Todd Storz could see the writing on the wall. Realizing that he couldn't keep a lead against a 5000-watt full-time station, he got out while the station's numbers were good.

Storz sold KOWH in June 1957. It was the only station Storz ever sold, and ironically, it was the one station that launched his empire which by this time was up to five stations before the sale.

KOWH went to *National Weekly* owned by William Buckley. It sold for \$822,500, the highest price ever paid for a daytimer station at the time and an astronomical profit for a \$75-thousand purchase just eight years earlier. Todd also agreed to a six-year clause forbidding him to compete within 100 miles.

KOIL's lead was already underway, as shown by the numbers at the start of 1958. It had a Trendex 43.2 share, 40.8 Hooper Share, and 7.1 Pulse rating, per its ad in a February *Broadcasting* that year.



The new KOWH owners were not radio-savvy and naively believed the battle with KOIL could be won. Keeping the format intact, they launched into a furious fight with KOIL, possibly the first Top 40 battle in radio.

To reinvigorate Top 40 KOWH, the new owners implemented a programming stunt. One day in 1959, KOWH repeatedly played a minor Top 40 song at the time called "The Revolution/Teenage Bill of Rights," over and over, all day long. The lyrics began, "Should we start a revolution, or should we leave things like they are."

The DJs announced various regular record titles acting like nothing unusual was happening. It created some short-term buzz, especially among teens who already were switching back and forth between KOWH and KOIL on their car radios to and from school.

(“The Revolution/Teenage Bill of Rights” by Robby John & The Seven-Teens on DelFi, was released in 1959. Don Burden used the same stunt at his new station in Portland, Oregon, when flipping KVAN to KISN Top 40 that year, but it’s not certain which of the two station owners did it first.)

Then came the contest wars. Burden was a fearless promoter. With each KOWH contest that came on, KOIL immediately designed an identical contest with a similar name and a noticeably bigger jackpot. Each contest was designed to require on-going listening to win. Contestants had to accumulate clues given out randomly to make sure the dial is never changed.

KBON 1490 jumped into the middle of the fray to grab KOIL and KOWH listeners who wanted to play both station’s contests at once. KBON hired interns to monitor both stations, then would broadcast each station’s clues immediately as they were aired, even interrupting commercials to do so.

(KBON 1490 played the middle man with "instant radio prize information" again in 1966 saying, “KBON people know what’s going on... even on the other radio stations.” Other station’s secret words, magic money words, and Cashline Jackpot info were aired “instantly” on KBON. “No need to dial around...”)

But it was no contest at night. With KOWH having to sign off each day at sunset, KOIL was automatically the leader until the next sunrise when the battle would resume.

KOIL frequently ran the liner, “The station that doesn’t rundown at sundown,” infuriating those at KOWH. The best counter KOWH had to offer was its nightly sign off announcement, “You may now turn your radio off. But don’t touch that dial...”

A later KOWH sign off announcement went further, exhorting listeners to do anything but listen to the radio during the evening hours, suggesting television, and, “. . .read, relax, work crossword puzzles. Spend time with your family.”

**THE NEW KOWH 6 HANDEL**  
**COLOR RADIO**  
 AS IT SHOULD BE... IN OMAHA

SAVE THIS SURVEY SHEET THIS NO. COULD WIN **NO 41436**

**the FABULOUS 40\***  
**PIC HIT OF THE WEEK**  
**YOUNG IN YEARS**  
 THE DIAMONDS

1. MACK THE KNIFE.....BOBBY DARIN
2. Teen Beat.....Sandy Nelson
3. Sleepwalk.....Santo & Johnny
4. Gonna Get Married.....Lloyd Price
5. The Three Bells.....The Browns
6. Hey Little Girl.....Dee Clark
7. Somethin' Else.....Eddie Cochran
8. You're A Big Girl Now.....The Bell Notes
9. Pelson Ivy.....The Coasters
10. You Better Know It.....Jackie Wilson
11. Til I Kissed You.....The Everly Brothers
12. Primrose Lane.....Jerry Wallace
13. And The Angels Listened In.....The Crests
14. Red River Rock.....Johnny And The Hurricanes
15. Okefenokee.....Freddie Cannon
16. Gay Man.....Be Diddy
17. Kissin' Time.....Bobby Rydell
18. Love POTION No. 9.....The Clovers
19. Morgan.....Ivo Robic
20. Shout—Part 1.....The Isley Brothers
21. The Mummy.....Bob McFadden & Dor
22. Growin' Prettier.....Johnney October
23. Perky.....Nina Simone
24. You Were Mine.....The Fireflys
25. Put Your Head on My Shoulder.....Paul Anka
26. Lonely Street.....Andy Williams
27. Fools Hall of Fame.....Pat Boone
28. Just Ask Your Heart.....Frankie Avalon
29. I Really Want You to Know.....The Iveys
30. In the Mood.....Ernie Fields
31. Like I Love You.....Ed Burns
32. Linda Lou.....Ray Sharpe
33. Come On and Get Me.....Fabian
34. Broken Hearted Melody.....Sarah Vaughan
35. Deck of Cards.....Wink Martindale
36. Mr. Blue.....The Fleetwoods
37. Battle Hymn.....Mormon Choir
38. Poco Loco.....Gene & Eunice
39. Some Kind of Earthquake.....Duane Eddy
40. It Was I.....Skip & Flip

The entire Fabulous 40 Survey given away every hour Sat. Morn beginning at 10 a.m. When you hear the number at the top of this Survey call us at AT. 2228 and skillfully answer a question and we give you the entire Record Survey.

WEEK OF SEPT. 26-OCT. 3—SURVEY REPORT

1959 KOWH Music Survey.  
 One of the Last.

KOIL solidly took over the market by 1959, the Feb-March Hooper putting it at #1 with a 32.5 average, compared to KOWH's 30.9. It was then that VP and GM Virgil Sharpe left the station. Sharpe had been with KOWH since 1951 when he left KOIL to join Todd Storz in developing the music radio format.

*National Review* owner William Buckley braved the Top 40 battle for two and a half years. Then listeners awoke January first, on the dawn of a new decade, shocked to hear soft pop orchestral music on 660 instead of Top 40. 660 had re-launched with new calls and a lush orchestral format as KMEO 660, *Cameo Music*.

Program Manager Bud Curry had made a low-key announcement about the changes the day before. The station had given away its five-thousand rock and roll record library the day before that (OWH Dec 31, 1959).

KOWH was gone. KOIL was king.

### 1110 KFAB Omaha

Though its programming still resembled that of the fading Golden Age, KFAB entered the 1950s in a position of strength. Its powerful signal covered a wide swath of the region.

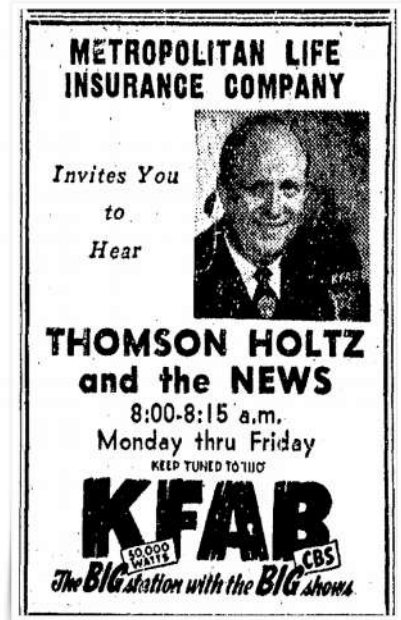
With its new transmitter plant in Sarpy County just a few years old and the move from Lincoln still fresh, management forged ahead, feeling its way through post-war adjustments.

Its Lincoln studio remained active but more primary functions were coming from the Omaha studios and offices downtown in the Farnam Building at 1613 Farnam.

KFAB in 1950 was airing popular CBS programs. Among the most popular was Arthur Godfrey mid-mornings. Godfrey's popularity resulted in an additional afternoon time slot.



1950 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

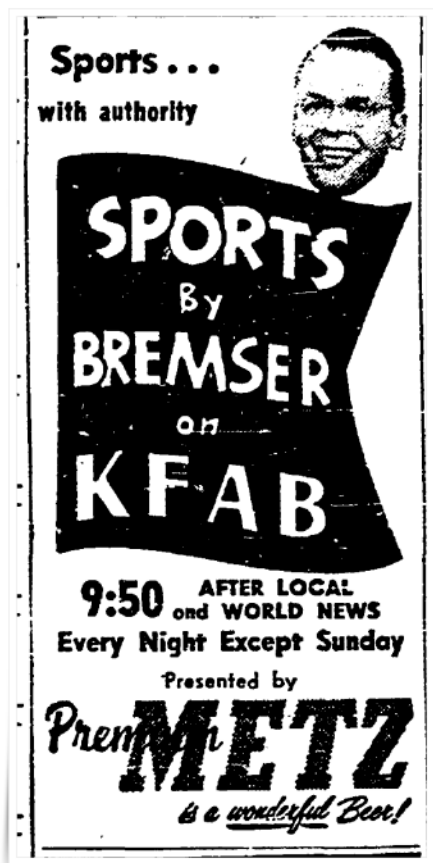


1950 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

Also strong on CBS, legendary newsmen Lowell Thomas and Edward R. Murrow, and the star-studded prime time lineup at night. Following prime time came KFAB's local news, then the ballroom orchestras that at times included the Paul Moorhead Orchestra from Omaha's Paxton Hotel.

With a big signal serving a wide rural area, KFAB was well-known to farmers and ranchers. KFAB's Farm Service Director Bill MacDonald was a pioneer in farm reporting, in his 24<sup>th</sup> year by 1950. He brought those skills to KFAB in 1944.

In 1950 MacDonald's programs *Down To Earth* and *The Farming Biz* ran daily. MacDonald also was a regular in the dawn and pre-dawn morning blocks, a normal time for farm listening. By 1952 he was given a 30-minute block of his own at 6:30 a.m.



Lyle Bremser, KFAB 1954  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

KFAB's Texas Mary and the Radio Rangers still worked a wake-up block in the mornings until about 1952.

Bob Jones hosted *Musical Doorbell* at 4 p.m. daily, a typical record show with a generic name omitting the presenter. Jones would finally be identified on a show by the mid-1950s with *Jones' Junction*, evenings.

Thomson Holtz with his seven years of experience at WOW including being part of the Announcers Quartet crossed over to KFAB in 1950 for another six years in Omaha radio. Besides newscasts, Holtz hosted his feature shows, *Helpful Holtz* mid-mornings and *Here's Holtz* later in the day, for much of that time.

In 1951 KFAB became Omaha's first station to broadcast overnights. Manager Harry Burke on June 4 announced that "KFAB will start 24-hour operations becoming the only station in the entire area broadcasting around the clock."

Harry Packard who had been with KFAB since its Lincoln years took the overnights until 1955 when automated tape technology advanced enough to replace the live announcer.

Lyle Bremser had been with the station since the 1930s and continued to do sportscasts, some newscasts, and of course Husker Football in the fall. He was made program director in 1950,

continuing to be part of the news image for the station which by 1951 was boasting 17 newscasts daily and a new liner, *You're In Tune With The World*.

Senator Joseph McCarthy brought his anti-communist crusade to Lincoln on August 24, 1951 with a nationally broadcast radio speech from the Lincoln studios of KFAB. He appeared in Omaha the following night to sparse crowds and was denounced in a *Lincoln Journal Star* editorial.

A year later Omaha made national news when the Missouri River left its banks threatening Omaha and Council Bluffs. KFAB coverage of the 1952 Omaha flood began as early as the snowmelt threat getting underway upstream in Montana. KFAB also set up a temporary studio in Council Bluffs.

As the river crested in Omaha, a pinch point for the waters, KFAB was feeding reports to CBS for its national newscasts as station staffers assisted the Red Cross and Salvation Army. (*Broadcasting* Apr 21 and 28, 1952)

One of KFAB's legendary newsmen joined KFAB that year. Walt Kavanaugh came over from KOWH in 1952. Kavanaugh, a Creighton grad, got his start at KFJB Marshalltown, Iowa, before returning to Omaha and the Todd Storz station in 1950. He went on to become part of the KFAB morning team in 1954 rising at 3:30 a.m. each day until his retirement in 1992. Kavanaugh's winter school closings were the absolute authority and a huge draw for the youngster demographics, probably the only time they dialed 1110 during their youth.

Meanwhile, KFAB was involved in a competition with the *Omaha World-Herald* for television channel 7 in Omaha. The last of three allocated television channels for the market, the battle for channel 7 was intense. Both KOIL and KBON were initially in the competition but dropped out by 1952. Hearings and appeals would continue for another five years. The Herald Corporation won out over KFAB and placed KETV on the air in 1957.

1952 is also regarded as the sunset year for radio's Golden Age. KFAB benefited the longest with CBS radio shows owning all but one of the top ten programs for the 1952-53 season.



KFAB 1955 News promo

As ABC and NBC were decreasing evening programming that year, only CBS was providing a full three hours of sponsored prime time programming to KFAB and affiliates while growing its television network. The popular *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts* show Monday nights was even simulcast on both mediums during the transition of radio shows to TV.



Ken Headrick, KFAB  
(Courtesy: Nebraska Broadcasters Assoc).

A management shift in April 1954 came when four KFAB 1110 employees bought into KFAB. It was a \$39 thousand stock purchase from Sidles Company and the *Lincoln Journal Star* by Lyle Bremser, Harold Soderlund, William MacDonald, and Harry Burke. With that buy, Sidles and the *Star* were voluntarily relinquishing negative control to the new stockholders. This put the foursome in charge.

In the summer of 1956, Program Director Lyle Bremser became KFAB's general manager. He then brought in Ken Headrick from KFGT Fremont who rose to program director just months later.

Headrick helped establish KFAB's strong agri-business position with Nebraska's farming and ranching communities. This was a money-maker with KFAB's strong, rural signal and Omaha being the top livestock market in the nation during this period.

A network affiliation change in 1955 came with no warning. It began with a surprise severance notice from CBS handed to Manager Harry Burke early in the year. CBS was switching to Omaha's NBC affiliate WOW 590, part of a deal that WOW's owners made with the network to gain CBS TV for all three of its television stations. Burke immediately began negotiations for NBC affiliation (*Broadcasting* Jan 24, 1955).

The network swap with WOW took place in June 1955, though the accompanying television networks swap with KMTV and WOW-TV didn't happen until January 1, 1956. CBS' popular Arthur Godfrey went over to WOW 590, but KFAB in gaining NBC got in on the ground floor of that network's new weekend offering, *Monitor*.

It was a shift from appointment programming. NBC's *Monitor* was a weekend magazine show the network called "a new concept in all-day programming" that could be tuned in at any time. Moreover, it was weekend scheduling relief for local talent on-air talent.



1957 KFAB Hotline News promo  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

Monitor debuted on June 12, 1955, just days after the network switch. The soon-familiar "Monitor Beacon" sounder aired on KFAB for the next 20 years. Comedy and drama were all but gone on the radio networks by the following year, but Monitor went on to be a network radio success for 20 years.

KFAB 1110 moved from the sixth floor of the Farnam Building to its Dundee studios at 5010 Underwood in 1956 where it would remain for decades. The Lincoln studios were closed some months earlier, its nine employees relocated to Omaha.

Much of the aging equipment in the move remained but new automation technology was brought in replacing Harry Packard on the overnight show. A tape cartridge carousel and associated tape decks were installed that used plastic chips stacked in formatic order giving commands for queuing and start/stop functions. Thus began KFAB's long-running *Serenade in the Night*.

With its soft "It's the Nightwatch" jingle, KFAB provided a reassuring, continuous presence for its listeners, many remaining unaware they were without live company.

**you've heard - about the BIG CHANGE**  
**Now listen to it... ON KFAB**

**ALL THIS WEEK THESE FAMOUS STARS from our studios IN PERSON!**

**TOP OF THE MORNING 6:00-7:00 A.M.**  
 Farm Service Director Bill Mendenhall and Farm Field Director Lloyd Olson, with the help of Ken Heasbick, wrap up the full hour of selected music for morning listeners: Market reports, news, weather forecasts and farm news.

**KFAB'S MORNING NEWS 7:00-7:45 A.M. and 8:15-9:00 A.M.**  
 Ken Heasbick anchors Omaha's largest morning live radio show — the award-winning musical for appreciative ears everywhere. Ken masterfully paces a program of live tunes by the Dave Lovato Trio and blends them with specially selected recordings. Light tips, weather news, a little philosophy and perhaps a joke or two accent the musical portion to make the best listening available.

**THE JOHNNY CARVER SHOW 9:05-12:00 Noon 3:30-6:00 P.M. (Mutual)**  
 Omaha's finest musical variety with its bright new show for the home-state: in this sparkling three hour, Johnny Carver's Grade A music selected for the home-state. With the help of his girl friend, Cora, a lot of features are added, too.

**MONDAY... GOGI GRANT!**  
 Leading all the star people of the week, and helping us give KFAB's new programming a big boost, is the party's first lady of song Gogi Grant. Her songs for her "Raymond" show will be in the KFAB studio from 1:30-2:00 p.m. throughout the day.

**TUESDAY... CATHY CARR!**  
 Another of the week's new female stars is making an exclusive KFAB appearance in Omaha. Dr. Cathy Carr, beautiful and talented actor who originated the role with "They Sings" Cathy too, stands out unlike to KFAB and would like to see you about 3:30-4:00 p.m.

**WEDNESDAY... RUSTY DRAPER!**  
 A favorite with our people in this area is Rusty Draper... why has a lot of his records in his car? Including "Shining Whispers" show. Rusty will be looking forward to seeing his old and new friends.

**THURSDAY... DON CHERRY!**  
 One of the week's favorites with our people as well as across the state, is Don Cherry. Don will be in the KFAB studio all day Thursday and will be appearing on all KFAB shows. Don's music is the best in the Midwest and all together enjoy his music and singing with his friends in the area.

**FRIDAY... BOB MANNING!**  
 One of the top radio singers in a recent poll is Bob Manning who is appearing on the Johnny Carver Show, Dave Lovato and many others. Many of his records have been in the top 10. Bob means an attraction to you all, too.

**KEN'S PLACE 1:30-2:30 P.M.**  
 We'll Keveragh and Ken Heasbick again anchor the big show with songs, fun and music. Originated and produced by KFAB over a year ago, "Ken's Place" proved so popular it remains as part of the lineup to stimulate and entertain a five-state audience.

**THE BODY HADAD SHOW 4:05-5:45 P.M.**  
 The favorite band leader in the Omaha area turns to spinning records to make one of the finest, most entertaining musical shows heard anywhere. Easy to top with the tangos... and a "leading man" with Marm and Doc.

**ROB JONES 10:00-11:05 P.M. (Monday, Wednesday, Friday)**  
 KFAB's nationally known disc jockey Bob Jones anchors... hosted by Variety Magazine as the best "platter picker" in these parts... edited by Billboard and featured in other national magazines, Bob is on the "Casey" with the popular "Jones Junction."

**NORMAN 10:00 P.M. to Midnight, Tuesday and Thursday**  
 Don Norman says, "Doing records and doing nothing," but thousands of fans say he is the finest man with the disc and the night... the best they've heard anywhere. Don's the originator of the much copied "Color Radio" and is best known for his "fantastic features."

**More News**  
 Five minutes of news on the hour! Quarter hour newscasts at key time periods! All gathered and reported by the Midwest's best news staff.

**DIAL 1110 KFAB 50,000 WATTS - OMAHA**

KFAB Big Change, 1956 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

Along with new studios came a “New Sound” campaign beginning in August. It was a nod to the changing face of radio brought on in recent years by Todd Storz’ KOWH 660. At KFAB, it meant increased localization and personality but with a major focus on news and information.

The already-aggressive news image was showcased with Walt Kavanaugh and the crew on the morning show, the *Kay-Fab Koffee Klub*. Sprinkled in was recorded music and the in-studio Don Larsen Trio.

The major emphasis continued to be news, weather, and farm and market reports along with network news featuring Alex Drier. Weather was treated as especially important due to the region’s agricultural economy being dependent upon weather challenges.



Joe Patrick, KFAB 1958

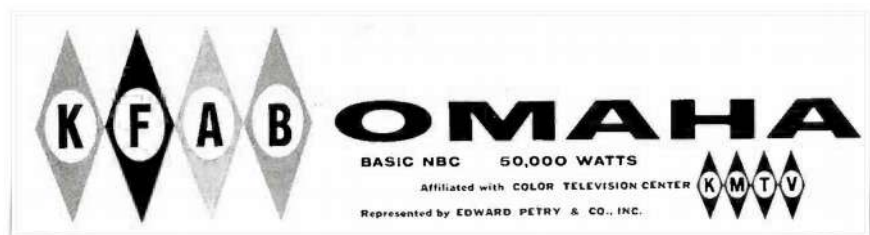
The rest of the day mixed features into personality air shifts. Patter included lots of time and temperature with frequent weather.

Music was a mix of non-offensive pop and standards. Air personalities were Johnny “Mr. Music” Carver mid-mornings, Ken Headrick and Walt Kavanaugh with “games, fun, and music” on *Kens Place* at 1:30, and even local bandleader Eddy Haddad spinning records at 4 p.m. All this with five minutes of news per hour plus quarter-hour newscasts at featured times.

Later in the year, Johnny Carver was moved to 2 to 4 p.m. and sports reporter Joe Patrick was given an air shift 4 to 6 p.m. Bob Jones followed with *Jones’ Junction*, evenings.

In 1957 Shenandoah’s Earl May Broadcasting, owners of that town’s KMA and Omaha’s KMTV channel 3, bought 49 percent of KFAB from Sidles Company. The *Lincoln Journal Star* owned another 49 percent while the remainder belonged to three long-time employees of KFAB, including Lyle Bremser.

May Broadcasting made the purchase as a show of commitment to the Omaha market. After WOW TV channel 6 grabbed the CBS TV affiliation away from Earl May’s KMTV 3 the previous year, NBC was wavering on its deal to stay with channel 3.



KFAB, 1958, showing its relationship to KMTV Channel 3.



KETV Channel 7 was just preparing to sign on and had the edge in winning NBC by virtue of its being owned by the *Omaha World-Herald*. With the KFAB investment, May's new commitment to the market plus his heavy investment in color television gear for KMTV was enough to win NBC over. KETV was left with the still-developing ABC television network.

(As a side note, May's 49 percent ownership raised the question of a duopoly rules violation as both KFAB's and KMA's 2 mv/m signal contours covered the other station's city. The issue came up in 1960 at license renewal time for KMA. The station argued at its hearing that its programming does not serve Omaha and that minority interest was not sufficient to violate the mileage separation rules. The FCC relented and KMA renewal was granted in early 1961.)

KFAB by this time had evolved into a stable foundation for what would become an institution. Soon the *Koffee Klub* morning show became *The Morning Watch*. News was promoted as *Hotline News*.

*The Morning Watch* was promoted as the "radio news center of the Midwest," featuring two "fully equipped" mobile units, NBC personalities, solid reporting from Walt Kavanaugh, and police reporters Tom Henry and Glenn Desmond. Tom Henry was from KOWH and later went into television at KMTV in 1959.

KFAB's growth continued with the addition of the Muzak franchise in 1958 and the launch of a sister FM station in 1959.

As the decade drew to a close, KFAB was developing into a ratings leader with its format of light pop music, live announcers, frequent weather, and hourly news. Along with Cornhusker football, KFAB continued to develop into one of the premier radio properties in the country. Good management and stable personnel led by Lyle Bremser and Ken Headrick were key factors.

## 1290 KOIL Omaha

KOIL1290 entered the 1950s owned by Lincoln investor James Stuart and was running 5-thousand watts day and night. The directional signal pattern that was required for full power at night went into service several years after the KOIL transmitter site was constructed near Lake Manawa. This



*Bill Talbot, KFAB 1958. A long-time KOIL news personality, Talbot left for KMTV and KFAB in 1953. Most of his work was on TV, but he was also a reporter and newscaster on KFAB in the 1950s.*

resulted in an unfortunate null in the direction of mid-town Omaha. Though not necessarily detrimental to the station's immediate urban coverage, it was a thorn that would not be fixed until a transmitter relocation in the 1960s.

1950 was spent making plans to move from the top floor of the Omaha National Bank building to new studios in the Aquila Court Building at 17<sup>th</sup> and Howard Streets. The four-story U-shaped Aquila Court Building was built in 1923 as a mixed-use building with landscaped gardens in the courtyard.

(After several renovations, the Aquila Court Building was converted into a hotel. In 1972 the gardens were removed and completely covered with marble slabs and fountains.)

KOIL began operations from its new studios at 511 South 17th in January 1951, the staff now getting a street-level view of the courtyard. Programming consisted of a successful series of morning blocks with Byron Head and newsman Bill Talbot hosting *The Alarm Clock Club* and *The Coffee Club*. ABC's *Breakfast Club* followed. Head would return as the *Umbrella Man* for his *Man on the Street* segment in the noon hour, still teamed with Bill Talbot as his "funnyman" sidekick.



1952, Henry Kelpé, KOIL  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).



KOIL's Bob Steelman, 1944.

Belle West's *Polly The Shopper* remained until 1954. West also hosted KOIL's coverage of the high society Aksarben Coronations in the early 1950s, joined by Steve Shepard in 1953 during her 13<sup>th</sup> year of coverage.

*Your Grocery Boy Show* with its daily call out offering food product prizes from the show's sponsors since the 1940s aired in the 11 a.m. hour until moving to KOWH in 1954. The program would return to KOIL after four years and continue there until 1976.

*The Grocery Boy* was followed in the noon hour by *Omar's Jackpot Quiz* call out show, a daily quiz with Henry Kelpé, a KOIL talent and announcer since 1940. Kelpé also had an early afternoon show, *Here's Henry Kelpé*. (Omar was a local baking company that sold tempting baked goods door to door. The "Omar Man" was regularly welcomed much like the milkman deliveries.)

Sports was handled by Bob Steelman, a KOIL regular since 1945. He was scheduled adjacent to newscasts and for sporting events, plus he had a regular show of his own in 1951 at 4:30 p.m.

Late-night big band pickups from hotels were still airing in 1951. Notably in December Henry Kelpel emceed a nightly pickup of *Hotel Blackstone Serenade* at 11 p.m. just opposite KFAB's pickup of the Paul Moorehead Orchestra, a regular at the Paxton Hotel.

KOIL experimented with 24-hour broadcasting in November 1951 with overnight programming on Sunday nights into Monday morning. Virgil Sharp hosted on Sunday nights until two, followed by three hours of nearly uninterrupted music until the Monday morning lineup with Bill Talbot at 5 a.m.

Why a series of Sunday nights was selected for an all-night show can be explained by the fact that Omaha is very busy early Monday mornings. The South Omaha stockyards employed a huge segment of Omaha's workforce. Monday mornings are when the livestock trucks arrived in the pre-dawn hours from many miles around, lining up on L Street from 24<sup>th</sup> Street westward past 72<sup>nd</sup> Street.

Overnight broadcasting was still quite new, generally reserved for radiothons or emergency news coverage. KFAB had just become the first regularly scheduled 24-hour station in the region and this may have been KOIL's response.

24-hours even once a week didn't last long on KOIL. It wasn't until 1955 that KOIL, under new ownership, adopted a regular 24-hour schedule.

A year later, a local emergency brought KOIL back into a temporary 24 hour schedule. It was the 1952 Omaha flood, making national news as the city was the choke point for the river's high waters. KOIL, along with all the other stations in the market, stayed on the air around the clock providing news and information.

KOIL Engineer Jerry Weist worked the technical details of flood coverage so that KOIL announcers could broadcast live from the scene. He maintained three mobile units in the flooded areas, one of them brought down from sister station WDGY Minneapolis. (*OWH* Apr 20, 1952). .

KOIL's Byron Head and Bill Talbot described the high waters, destruction, and sandbagging. In boats and airplanes and where the mobile unit couldn't get in, portable tape recorders were used in describing the scenes for later broadcast. Highlights of the flood from Virgil Sharpe were fed to ABC in Chicago (*Broadcasting* Apr 21, 1952).

KOIL remained on air round the clock until the crest had passed.

1940s-oriented KOIL was beginning to feel the pinch from music-oriented KOWH 660 by 1952. Byron Heads's *Coffee Club* show remained in the mornings but the midday *Henry Kelpie Quiz* and the *Umbrella Man* interviews were out, replaced in December 1951 by Head staying in the studio with a second record show, *By's Bandwagon*. Head's two shows remained in place until 1956 well after KOIL's two ownership changes.

As for the popular audience-driven music of the day, it was recognized but buried in late nights with *Music You Want* at 11 p.m. and *Top Tune Time* at 11:30.

All the while, ABC's entertainment line up was diminishing as popular radio shows moved to television. Hanging on were Walter Winchell, on ABC at the time, and after-school programs that included *Tom Corbett Space Cadet*, *The Lone Ranger* and *Big Jon and Sparky*, the Sparky character a sped-up recording voiced by the host.

When ABC's popular sitcom *Ozzie and Harriet* moved to television its presence on radio was maintained with a simulcast of the television audio. The radio series lasted another two years; the television series then went another twelve. Radio's Golden Age was clearly coming to a close in 1952.



*Don Burden, 1954.*

Ownership changes were in store for 1953. Stuart Investments was ready to sell KOIL and found the opportunity early in the year when Nebraska Rural Radio came calling. The organization was a co-op of Central Nebraska farmers and ranchers. The company's flagship station was KRVN 1010 Lexington.

Calling itself the *Rural Voice of Nebraska*. KRVN had a wide-ranging signal and keyed on weather and market reports on which its rural listenership depended. The purchase of KOIL was part of its plan to extend such coverage eastward.

Bill Talbot was named general manager of KOIL during the pending sale. Approval of the sale for \$189 thousand came in March. KRVN's founder and manager Max Brown took the reins and brought in Don Burden as sales manager.

Burden, a native of Bertrand, Nebraska, was sales manager at KEIO in Pocatello, Idaho when he was offered the position at KOIL. After getting assurances that KOIL had adequate financing, Burden accepted a five-year contract as sales manager and moved to Omaha.

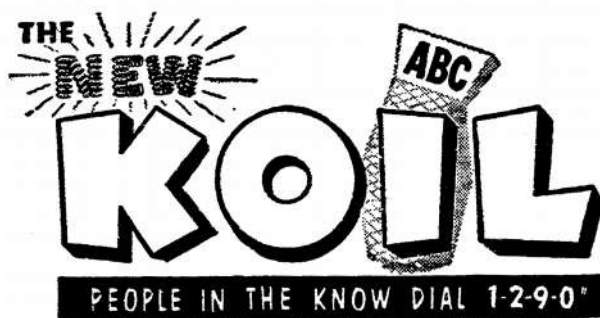
Burden brought Pocatello colleague Steve Shepard with him. Shepard hosted a daily record show at 4 p.m. and handled sports play by play for the newly-added Cardinals Baseball home and away games. Shepard would remain with Burden holding executive positions from general manager to VP of the Star Stations over the years into the 1970s, and was the last voice on KOIL before its infamous blackout in 1976.

The Nebraska Rural Radio Association quickly found urban radio to be a poor fit into its business plan. A few months into his new contract, Burden learned the station was encountering financial difficulty and was going to be sold to WLS in Chicago.

Burden went to KOIL's mortgage holder in Lincoln, James Stuart, and announced he wanted to buy KOIL himself. Stuart said if Burden could put a group together that had 50-thousand dollars operating capital, he would rather sell to him because he was already in place.

Burden got backing from his Idaho connections, formed Central States Broadcasting, Inc. (not to be confused with the Central States Broadcasting System that owned KOIL until 1944), and bought KOIL for \$161.5 thousand. The deal gave him 26 percent ownership along with Pocatello's former general manager Chic Crabtree who had another 26 percent, giving the duo majority control.

The newly-formed Central States Broadcasting took over KOIL upon FCC approval at the end of the year, December 30, 1953. Burden and Crabtree became co-managers, with Chic as PD and Don as sales manager, though Burden was the driving force in programming.



*KOIL's new logo, 1954.*

Burden's program changes were immediate. The station was re-christened *The New KOIL* in early 1954. The *Grocery Boy Show* went to KOWH, though Belle West as *Polly the Shopper* remained for another year. Also staying was *By's Bandwagon*, but Byron Head would later leave in a dispute with the new management.

KOIL aired Paul Harvey's beginning years on ABC. *Paul Harvey News and Comment* replaced Walter Winchell in July 1955 after Winchell fell out of favor with the network.

The major change under Burden's and Crabtree's tutelage was the addition of recorded music. Most shows were generically-named. program blocks. It started with *Tune Time* in mid-mornings, then

the syndicated *Martin Block* which had been airing on KOWH and moved to KOIL running from 1 to 3 p.m., *Round And Round With Randall* followed to 5 p.m. An afternoon drive block *Rhythm of the Road* was added for drive time. After the evening news came *Melody Man*, 7 to 9 and *Pleasure Tunes*, 10:30 to Midnight.

Burden's sights were set on the KOWH audience. He said so directly to KOWH's Todd Storz over lunch one day in 1954, telling him how highly vulnerable KOWH was without a nighttime signal. Todd downplayed the night time audience saying it was owned by television. (Burden interview, *Hitmakers* 1984).

Burden couldn't yet afford the Hooper ratings service. He first became aware that he was beginning to beat Storz when the Plough Pharmaceuticals account manager in Memphis called to buy spots on his station for the first time, telling Burden he "had the numbers."

Storz always bought the Hooper ratings service and, according to Burden, "he used to come out with it every month and spread copies all over town and all of a sudden it disappeared, he stopped waving the Hooper around." (Burden interview, *Hitmakers* 1984)

By the end of his initial year of ownership, Burden was claiming KOIL had taken over the morning show audience according to the Hooper survey ratings. The survey period was October and November, weekdays only.

The battle intensified in 1955. Don Burden's KOIL dropped ABC on August 24 in favor of continuous music and twice hourly news, but was still locked in to Omaha Cardinals baseball. Also, the broadcast schedule went to 24 hours a day.

Filling the network-vacated hours were disc jockeys playing music. Byron Head continued with a morning block to 9 a.m. plus his midday *By's Bandwagon*. That was followed by *Cash Box Review*, a music trade magazine's top tunes taking over until noon. Afternoons had *Dale's Record Room*, *Jack's 1290 Club*, and in the evenings 30 minutes of *Top Tunes*, then *Johnny Carver*, a talent hired away from KBON, until 8 p.m. Rounding out the evening hours was *Just Mitchell* 8 to 10 and *Pleasure Time* to Midnight. Personalities were emerging as the stars, their names beginning to appear in the program block names.

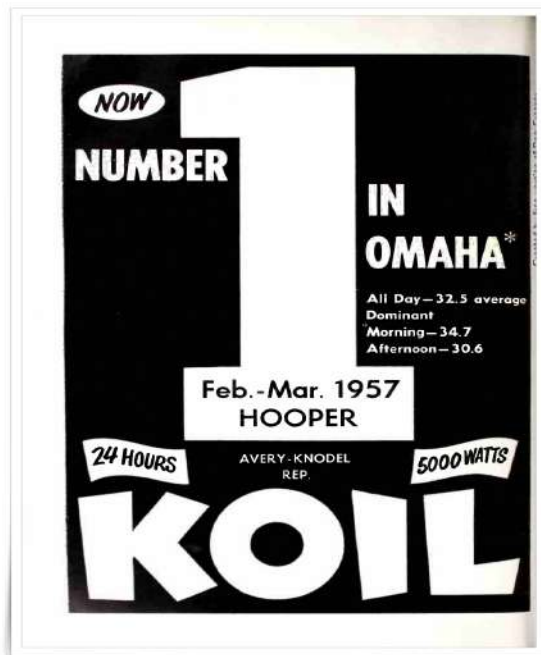
Among the personalities passing through KOIL's Aquila Court studios at this time was Gary Owens of NBC's *Laugh In* fame. Owens joined KOIL starting as a newsreader on the 8 to 10 a.m. shift. He was pressed into taking over the morning show by PD George Dunleavy in October 1955 when the talent, a disgruntled DJ (the long-popular Byron Head according to listings), failed to show up.

Owens kept the morning show, nervously developing his wordplay humor on air. It's said that Burden didn't care for Owens' air work, but never told him so. However, legend has it that Todd Storz thought Owens was enough of a threat to get him out of the market. Storz secretly sent out audition tapes of Owens to other markets, eventually getting him hired away by KIMN in Denver.

Gary Owens (real name Altman) left KOIL in February 1957 going to Denver, then on to legendary status in Southern California radio. He was a regular on NBC TV's *Laugh In* in the late 1960s.

Bob Cain joined KOIL at the beginning of 1956. Cain came from a newsman background at the *Council Bluffs Non-Pariel* and at that newspaper's station, KSWI. Being a DJ was very temporary, his time at KOIL lasting only until July. Cain went back into news, moving to WJW Detroit, then in 1958 to WHK Cleveland. He went on to become an NBC Radio correspondent based in New York City in the 1960s and 70s, then joined CNN in its dawning years, retiring from there as an accomplished anchor in 2002.

Also in 1956 KOIL's air staff saw the addition of Jim Price who had a classical music background and would go on to found Omaha's public radio station KIOS in the 1970s. Other music blocks besides that of Price included *JP's Matinee*, *Let George Do It* (KOIL PD George Dunleavy), and continuing in afternoon drive, *Rhythm of the Road*.



*KOIL, making a claim for the top in a May 1957 trade ad.*

Don Burden aggressively copied the Storz format with a music playlist of fifty records to outdo KOWH's forty. Eight-tenths of the station's playlist by this time was from the *Billboard* Hot 100 according to Cain in a note to *Billboard* magazine.

In late 1956 Dr. Don Rose worked a three-hour evening show for a brief time at KOIL. His show preceded that of Mike Bradley who came over from KOWH.

Don Rose was given his name (shortened from Rosenberg) by KOIL co-manager Chick Crabtree, who added the "Dr." as it was his initials. Rose lasted only four weeks at KOIL and kicked around various markets until finally becoming a legend in San Francisco at KFRC for 13 years.

Burden's promotions began to match those on KOWH. In May 1956 KOIL's Bob Cain assisted in a \$30-thousand completely furnished "Dream House" contest, where the winner was to guess a "Mystery Personality." The entry blank had space to vote for the favorite KOIL DJ, the winning jock getting a trip to Las Vegas. Storz countered with a 105-thousand dollar treasure hunt.

Storz at KOWH was running an on-going "Lucky House Numbers" promotion. The numbers and streets were picked randomly on the air. The resident had a set amount of time to call in and claim the cash prize, a jackpot that grew each time it went without a winner. Don Burden dissed the contest saying, "Every time we'd trace down the winning numbers we'd find they'd be in cemeteries and vacant lots." (The numbers being random would likely have these results from time to time but were hardly intentional.)

Burden countered with "Lucky Telephone Numbers." The listener had 60 seconds to call in and get the accumulated cash in the jackpot. It was later dropped after phone company complaints of overloaded circuits. (Burden interview, Hitmakers 1984).

Like most Burden promotions, it was not an original. KOIL ran Lucky Telephone Numbers as early as 1952 while still an ABC affiliate before Burden ownership. Called the "We've Got Your Number" contest, \$10 thousand in prizes were offered. Popular local personalities Byron Head, Henry Kelpo, Bob Steelman, Bill Talbot, and Belle West were pictured in the promotional print ads.

KOIL's effort at toppling KOWH solidified in 1957. The station hired a new program director, Bob Wilson who took the in midday show, moving Mike Bradley to mornings. KOIL continued to be the outlet for Omaha Cardinals baseball until 1958.

KOIL and KOWH battled for listeners on the air and for clients in trade magazines. KOWH bought ad space on the cover of *Sponsor* magazine to reprint a letter Manager Virgil Sharpe had written to KOIL Co-Manager Chic Crabtree calling out KOIL's claims to "a strong number two position with local advertisers buying more time than all other stations combined."

In the letter dated February 16, 1957, Sharpe used Hooper and Pulse numbers noting that KOIL was a "very weak" third in the market to KOWH's top spot. (*Sponsor Magazine*, Feb 16, 1957).

During this radio war, Burden in 1957 was making enough money to buy the Pocatello, Idaho station where he got his start for 33-thousand dollars. Mr. Burden says he sold it 18 months later for 160-thousand dollars.

Burden also sank his money back into KOIL. He replaced KOIL's aging RCA transmitter at Lake Manawa with a Gates BC-5P in 1957. The old RCA was kept as a standby transmitter.



Todd Storz also made big money in 1957, but he did it by getting out while the getting was good. Seeing that he was losing the battle with KOIL, Storz sold KOWH to William Buckley and his *National Review* magazine. Storz would successfully parlay that money into further expanding his empire, which by this time was up to five stations before the sale.

KOWH's format didn't change with the new owners. The ferocious battle with KOIL continued.

Whenever KOWH launched a big-money contest, KOIL would immediately counter with an identical contest with a similar name and bigger prize. The contests required listening to collect clues to identify the secret to win the prize.

At this point KBON 1490 entered the battle from the sidelines by hiring interns to monitor both stations and immediately flash the clues on air so listeners could play both contests.. The Top 40 stations did some monitoring of their own, trying to give clues during KBON paid commercials, but found that KBON would even interrupt client messages to announce clues.

Then came the KOIL slogan, *The Station That Doesn't Run Down at Sundown*, infuriating daytime-only KOWH. That meaning was reinforced by KOIL's 24-hour schedule begun two years earlier.

The emergence of 24-hour schedules hastened the position of the combo jock in broadcasting. This is a DJ who holds a federally-issued radiotelephone operators license, a requirement for operating broadcast transmitters and associated directional antenna systems. Transmitters and directional phasers required close monitoring with readings that are taken hourly, and only by a licensed technician. Having a DJ on the site running a show who is licensed to take transmitter readings became a cost-saving move that in turn became an inroad to broadcasting for many DJ wannabes.

Schools sprang up offering quick courses to pass the FCC exam for a First-Class Radiotelephone license, the "First Phone" license being the only class of three that allowed broadcast equipment operation. The First-Phone became an easy ticket into radio for star-struck newcomers.

Combo DJs were particularly employed for nights when stations are more likely using a directional system. At KOIL, a combo DJ was only used on the overnights, a good training ground for DJs just starting out. The evenings also required transmitter monitoring of course, a technician baby-sitting on site while programming came from a more experienced talent at the downtown studio.

The Lake Manawa transmitter site was equipped with a small mixer board, mic, and turntables. Among the first First Phone overnight personalities at KOIL was Jim Dandy (Jim Dahlmeier) coming

from KMNS Sioux City in 1958. Jim Dandy was a popular air name at the time thanks to a 1956 LaVerne Baker hit by that name.

After Dahlmeier left for KBUZ Phoenix, KOIL simply automated, hiring an overnight licensed “babysitter” with no on-air experience necessary except to run the record player and to playback hourly newscasts recorded from the evening show.

The record player was a simple Seeberg 100 record changer, an in-store music player used for background music for shoppers. It simply segued records and was referred to on air as “Silent Sam.” The Seeberg unit held up to a hundred 45 rpm singles and played them one by one. Scratchy fadeouts dissolved into dead air between songs until the needle could be heard plopping down on the next 45.

“Silent Sam” was retired in 1960 when the next combo jock arrived taking the overnight shift live once again. That was Joe Light who became one of the station’s most famous air personalities of KOIL’s music and news years.

Other air personalities who honed their craft on KOIL in the late 1950s include Bobby Dale, who replaced Gary Owens around 1957. Dale soon worked at famous Top 40 stations in St. Paul, Los Angeles and San Francisco for the Crowell-Collier chain of stations.

Jim Hummel was at KOIL in 1959. His claim to KOIL fame was a promotion stunt in August that year, broadcasting while living in a car suspended by a giant crane some 70 feet high for three weeks. It was at Calandra’s Camera Store in a high profile location at 42<sup>nd</sup> and Dodge Streets.

Bobby Dale recalls a late night out partying where he crawled up the crane and knocked on Hummel’s car window startling him, asking, “Hey Jim, can you give me a ride home?” (*The Hits Just Keep on Coming* by Ben Fong-Torres 1998).

Hummel went on to become legendary South Florida DJ Rick Shaw, joining WCKR Miami in 1960. He retired in 2006 after a 46-year career in the Miami market.



*Don Burden renamed his group the Star Stations in 1958. He had controlling interest at 59 percent at the time.*

A long-time personality whose career was tied to KOIL was Steve Brown. He came to KOIL from KOOO in 1958 and moved up quickly becoming Don Burden's right-hand man. Brown was national PD by 1960, Vice President a few years later, and became a key player on the KOIL management team in the coming decade.

By national PD, it should be noted that Don Burden's empire had been growing. In 1959 Burden's Star Stations owned KICN 710 Denver and KISN 910 Portland, Oregon. He had just spun off KWIK Pocatello, Idaho, the station where he first worked before coming to Omaha.

KISN's success equaled that of KOIL. It's beginning was in 1959 when Burden bought KVAN 910 Vancouver, Washington across the Columbia River from Portland. He changed the calls to KISN for "Kissin' Radio", moved the studios to downtown Portland, and launched big promotions. Burden confessed he had long coveted the KISN call letters and finally negotiated ownership of the calls from a retired tugboat.

KICN also was dubbed "Kissin'," but the Denver station faced formidable competition. Turning out to be Burden's only swing and a miss, it was quickly sold off.

Burden's empire further expanded in 1964 with the purchase of WISH 1310 Indianapolis, changing the calls to WIFE.

Besides air personalities, KOIL was a nurturing ground for other talents and skills such as sales and engineering. Though Burden himself wasn't particularly a good mentor, his hard-driven station was a good platform that provided a valuable training ground and jumping off point.

Omaha native Ralph Beaudin worked sales for Burden in 1954 before moving over to KOWH a year later. Beaudin went on to ABC Radio and is credited with flipping WLS 890 to Top 40 in 1960, and later masterminding the network's reorganization into four distinctly separate services to serve more stations.

Among KOIL engineers in the late 1950s was a young Charlie Goodrich. Just three days after graduating from high school in 1959, Goodrich got a job at KOIL as summer relief engineer watching over the Gates BC-5P transmitter at night when licensed personnel were required on-site to monitor



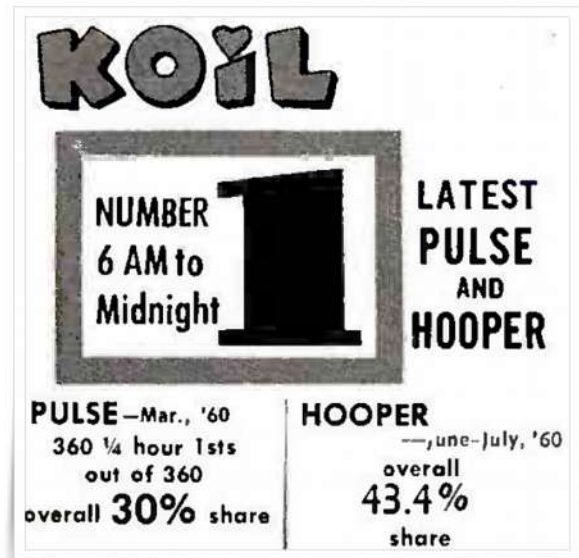
*Charlie Goodrich at KOIL transmitter site, 1960.*

directional antenna arrays. While continuing studies in college, Goodrich remained with KOIL under long-time Chief Engineer Gerry (Gerald) Weist.

Goodrich left KOIL in 1966. After a brief fling at Lockheed in California, he returned to Omaha to join McMartin Industries as an electronics design engineer. McMartin grew to produce a line of broadcast products that included transmitters, audio consoles, and modulation monitors.

Gerry Weist had been with KOIL since the early 1950s. Weist continued to oversee all of KOIL's engineering and soon became a Burden confidante and VP. He eventually was awarded partial interest in Burden's stations.

KOIL's on-air battle under Don Burden's leadership claimed victory on January 1, 1960. That morning KOWH 660 gave up the fight and flipped its format to Beautiful Music.



*KOIL claims the lead, 1960.*

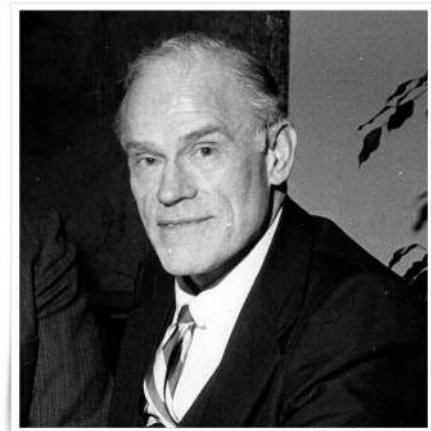
An extremely lucrative decade lay ahead for KOIL 1290.

## 1420 KOOO Omaha

Even though television was forcing change on American radio, more small stations were signing on. The FCC had relaxed distance requirements, meaning more stations could be authorized which in turn means more audience fragmenting.

The 1420 kHz slot left vacant in 1933 by the short-lived KICK in Carter Lake, Iowa, was again filled in the Omaha market in 1957. A proposed directional signal pattern allowed a new station to be squeezed in, but just for daytime-only operation.

KOOO was built by Harold Soderlund, general sales manager at KFAB. He also was an early mentor to Todd Storz while both were at KFAB. Soderlund formed Central Plains



*Harold Soderlund , KOOO founder (Courtesy: Nebraska Broadcasters Assoc).*

Broadcasting owning 65 percent percent majority interest and received approval for his station in October 1956.

The daytime-only station lit up March 7, 1957. Its transmitter site was surrounded by corn fields, located about a mile off the South Omaha Bridge Road in Iowa not far from the KSWI 1560 tower. Its twin-tower array beamed 500 watts northwest toward the city, making it particularly strong in South Omaha. Studios were at 2321 M Street, just a block off the busy South 24<sup>th</sup> Street corridor of the South Omaha business district.



Initially, KOOO aired a mix of music programming that even included some current pop tunes along with news at five minutes before each hour. The first year was difficult, the operation even seeking FCC permission to sign off early during the summer months of 1958 due to economic and manpower problems (*Broadcasting*, May 12, 1958). One major problem was hiring a licensed body to babysit the directional transmitter all day.

KOOO PD Deane Johnson recalls, “He (Soderlund) was trying to make it a South Omaha station with lots of block ethnic programming and just plain ran out of money.”

Soderlund cashed out in July of that year, selling KOOO for 200 thousand dollars. The new owners were a group of investors in Sioux City, Iowa headed by J. J. Fenlon. The group also owned KPIG 1450 in Cedar Rapids and KTRI 1270 in Sioux City.

Fenlon moved to Omaha to take over as KOOO’s general manager. He then hired Deane Johnson as Program Director. Johnson flipped the station to country, calling it *Town and Country* music.

Johnson recalls, “I hired a couple of kids from UNL that were broadcasting addicts. Their first jobs. One was Steve Brown of Burden fame and the other was Peter McLane who became a big name in Des Moines.

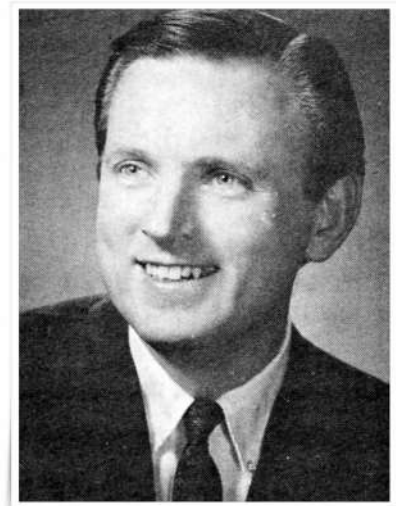


*KOOO Studio, Livestock Exchange Building, 1959  
(Courtesy: Deane Johnson).*

Since neither I nor Steve or Peter cared that much for country, we made it modern country, one of the first in the nation. We went from unrated to #2 in one book." Like with the market leader at the time, KOWH on 660, it was a rare daytime-only success story.

KOOO underwent some upgrades the following year. The station increased power to 1000 watts by July 1959.

Then, studios were moved in November from its M Street location to the Livestock Exchange Building, smack in the center of South Omaha’s busy stockyards.



KOOO “Swing Western 40” playlist, March, 1958.

Note how Top 40 tunes by The Virtues and Rick Nelson are mixed in to “modernize” the country list.

Deane Johnson, KOOO. Johnson went to KOMA, then returned to Omaha’s KOIL in the mid 1960s.

The Livestock Exchange Building (4920 South 30th Street, built in 1926) was the centerpiece of the Union Stockyards. It is large, ten stories, and at the time housed a bank, bakery, cafeteria, soda fountain, cigar stand, clothing store, telephone and telegraph office, apartments, and sleeping rooms. It has two elegant ballrooms on the top floor with 22-foot ceilings. Since the stockyards closed in 1999, it remains a mixed-use building with apartments, with the ballrooms still available for special occasions.

KOOO 1420 ironically had no agriculture-related reasons to select the stockyards site for studios. PD Deane Johnson says, “There was no reason for that location other than it was economical and available. We were modern country at the time, but didn’t do any livestock market reporting.” Johnson adds, “We had no budget for the move. The old used furniture from the M street location was

moved in and the place looked more like one of the cattle pens than it did a radio station.” However, Deane says, the studios functioned well.

Deane Johnson went on to program KOMA Oklahoma City in the early 1960s, coming back to Omaha and KOIL in the mid-1960s, ironically working for Steve Brown whom he first brought into radio in 1958.

KOOO, though only a daytime station, remained Omaha’s first and only country station for over five years.

Fenlon’s group kept the station exactly two years. KOOO again changed hands in July 1960 when Mack Sanders and Webb Pierce, owners of Pier-San Broadcasting, bought the station for 275 thousand dollars.

Pier-San Broadcasting was owned by country music singers Webb Pierce and Mack Sanders, both experienced in country radio. The duo already had a success story in Wichita where they signed on KSIR 900, that market’s first full country music station, it too, just a daytimer. They were entering the 1960s with intentions of expanding their empire into Omaha. KOOO will be another success story for the pair.

## 1490 KBON Omaha



*KBON, 1953.*

music evolution in Omaha.

With a mere 250 watts, KBON 1490 worked hard in keeping competitive. The programming was stuck in the 1940s with a variety of entertainment and news blocks, the music staying with the establishment artists and standards. Still, unknowingly, the station made some contributions to radio’s

Programming primarily was a mix of record shows, lots of sports coverage ranging from high school games to the Omaha Cardinals and major league baseball, plus programs from the Mutual network. The station's music offerings were of a wide variety but carefully avoided the "dark side," teen-oriented rock and roll.

Along the way, KBON management was the last to jettison FM, making a last-ditch effort to save KBON FM 98.7 by starting "bus radio" in March 1950. The station outfitted Omaha's buses with FM receivers that piped in a simulcast of KBON 1490 programming.

FM revenue remained thin, particularly from national sponsors, and listenership was equally thin. On January 15, 1952, KBON FM was silenced.

KBON programmed from downtown studios at the World Insurance Building, 18th and Douglas. The transmitter and the 212-foot tower was located in a residential area south of downtown at 38th and Wright Streets, the now-silent FM antenna on top remaining in place for another five decades

The personality and platter show was becoming a staple in radio. KBON's record shows were in blocks of one hour or less except for Sandy Jackson's popular *Rhythm Inn*. Jackson's popularity stemmed from his late-night request show in 1949, soon moved to afternoons, then expanded to two hours.

Unsurprisingly, Jackson was pirated away in early 1950, joining Todd Storz at KOWH 660 where he remained for a decade.

Replacing Jackson in the 2 p.m slot in October 1950 was burgeoning radio personality Lee Barron. The Big Band leader was given a mid-afternoon two-hour show called *Hello Beautiful*, aimed at homemakers. Barron would pick the music and add his patter and knowledge to the presentation.

*Hello Beautiful* was promoted with gardenia corsages sent to the wives of 100 potential clients accompanied by a card signed by Barron dedicating his show to them.

The show had a short five-month run as Barron quickly moved on. Besides radio, Barron was busy doing appearances with his band as well as other odd jobs. Radio was simply one of them, and Barron would continue to be heard on various Omaha area stations well into the 1980s.

**SPEND *the* DAY  
... WITH OLD FRIENDS**

**Mayme Allison Shops "ROUND THE TOWN"**  
... for Mrs. Omaha every week day at 11:30 a. m. Mayme's decorating, cooking and homemaking hints have helped thousands of women in the past four years. She is a delightful combination of busy housewife, professional club manager, civic leader and news woman with an accent on special events.

**Meet "MR. MUSIC"—7:30 to 10:15 P.M.  
MONDAY THRU SATURDAY**  
KBON brings you the brightest star on the musical horizon, Jim Harker! From Joplin to Jive, from Beethoven to Boogie . . . and from Handel to Hillbilly, Jim provides you with 18 hours of music every week for your listening pleasure. PLAYING ALL RECORDS . . . BREAKING ALL RECORDS—that's Mr. Music's record. From the tender age of five as a saxophonist, MR. MUSIC has participated in . . . studied . . . or been associated with music in all its phases.

**Don Perazzo's "SUNRISE SERENADE"  
"DUDE RANCH"**  
Wake up and get rolling every morning with Perazzo's SUNRISE SERENADE. News, Weather, Time and Temperature, Scores, AND Good Music from 7:00-7:45 a. m. Cowboy Don's back after the news with DUDE RANCH every morning at 8:00. Really good western, hill-billy . . . and lots of news for and about Benson.

**Dick McCann "SOUTH OMAHA SALUTE"  
"DICK McCANN SHOW"**  
Ten years of SOUTH OMAHA SALUTE every Monday through Friday from 4-5 p. m. and Saturday mornings at 9-10 a. m. have made Dick McCann Omaha's Mr. Polka. His completely different week day morning hour, THE DICK McCANN SHOW starts at 8:30 a. m. and includes good popular music and old favorites, lots of interesting guests, special programs by Omaha school kids, the Public Library series, club notes, a "helping hand" feature and off-the-cuff conversation by Mac.

**1490 ON YOUR DIAL** **Mutual**  
**KBON**

KBON lineup 1953  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).



Otherwise, KBON had a rather stable announcing staff. Don Perazzo, with the station since 1942, hosted the morning shows *Sunrise Serenade* at 7 followed by “western and hillbilly music” on *Dude Ranch* at 8. When KBON adopted an earlier sign-on in 1953, Perazzo came in at 6 for *Don Patrol* as the lead-in to his *Sunrise Serenade*.

Perazzo was pretty much a “lifer” at KBON, his morning show lasting nearly the entire decade. He later added duties as sales manager in 1964 and assistant general manager in 1970.

Dick McAnn joined KBON in 1943. His 8:30 a.m. show was a mix of music, guests, and features. Afternoons he ran *South Omaha Salute* playing polka music from 4 to 5 p.m.

For the women, Mayme Allison was brought on board in 1949 to launch the midday *Round The Town* homemakers show. Allison also hosted coverage of the annual Aksarben Coronation for KBON, an event popularly carried on KOIL 1290, WOW 590 and WOW TV channel 6 as well. Mayme’s past included managing the Happy Hollow Country Club, and during the war, was manager of the Service Men’s Club at Union Station.

Ed Morgan, with KBON for over ten years, did high school sports and Omaha Cardinals play by play plus his own evening sports scoreboard show. (Cardinals baseball went over to KOIL in 1953, returning to KBON in 1958.)

As the 1950s progressed and KOWH was making waves with its non-stop music, news, and promotions, KBON continued with block programming. *Auto Radio News* was added at 5 and 5:15 p.m. daily. It was two back-to-back 15-minute newscasts for the drive home.

Other local programs included Art Stanley with two hours of afternoon requests, the first hour for pop music, the second hour for classical requests.

Johnny Dickson hosted *What’s Your Bid*, a telephone auction show daily at 9:30 a.m. Dickson also hosted *Luncheon With Johnny* at noon followed by *Birthday Train*, a show for toddlers. Dickson, once a member of the Blackwood Brothers Gospel Quartet, built a resume that would eventually include KOIL, KSWI, KOOO, KMA, and KFNF.

The record shows were getting longer as network shows became fewer. In 1953 Jim “Mr. Music” Harker arrived and was given the evening 7:30 to 10 p.m. Monday through Saturday shift. But unlike the music at KOWH, offerings were pretty much dictated by management’s beliefs rather than audience research. The show played everything from “Handel to Hillbilly, Beethoven to Boogie.” Variety with no repetition was the rule.

Harker was also a thespian who sometimes performed at the Omaha Community Playhouse. In June 1955 he appeared in a fund-raising production of "The Country Girl" that also starred Omaha native Henry Fonda, daughter Jane Fonda, and Dorothy McGuire.

During the springtime 1952 Omaha flood, KBON aired nightly "flood reports" at 6:45 p.m., supplementing regular newscasts with flood descriptions from "three remote units" (*Broadcasting* Apr 29, 1952).

KBON began its "The New Listen in Omaha Radio" campaign in 1954. Block programming was loosening, but still prevalent.

Mixed in with a few net programs in midday and the cowboy serials for kids in the 5 p.m. hour were longer shifts for the announcers. They played a variety of adult-oriented music.

Perazzo's *Sunrise Serenade* was a staple by this time, Johnny Carver ran Noon to 2, Jim Harker to 4, then came the polkas on *South Omaha Salute*. *Auto Radio News* followed, then the kids shows.

Evenings had Johnny Carver return from 7 to 9 followed by a one-hour return of "Mr. Music," Jim Harker. Saturday evenings were occupied by *Jukebox Saturday Nights*, 6:45 to 11 p.m. with "music for your house parties."

ABC was added in 1955, picked up when the net was dropped by KOIL. Don McNeil's *Breakfast Club* on ABC then became a regular following Don Perazzo's *Sunrise Serenade* morning show. Also from the net KBON aired the *Martin Block Show* from 1:30 to 3 p.m. Block had left his syndicated *Make Believe Ballroom* show in 1954 and now had his own record show on ABC.

KBON "New Listen" campaign 1954  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

KBON also became the new home for *Paul Harvey News & Comment*, his show just five years old at the time. Harvey's run on ABC continued for a total of 58 years. However, KBON dropped the ABC network just two years later, in October 1957, in favor of news and "good music." Mutual remained with the station.

The new programming campaign this time was "The Big Change in Omaha Radio," with "more listenable music day and night." The music consisted of standards, show tunes, and "modern favorites—no rock and roll tunes." Two minutes of news was delivered three times an hour. Sports coverage continued and the Omaha Cardinals with announcer Don Hill returned to KBON in 1958 after a five-year run on KOIL 1290.

A Stan Freberg tribute was aired all day on Tuesday, July 22, 1958. Freberg was a brilliant nationally-known comedy satirist who truly understood radio. Freberg had great success with commercials, one in particular with an Omaha client leading to his release of a six-minute musical, "Omaha!" on Capitol Records. It began as a radio commercial for Omaha-based Butternut coffee with the sponsor mentioned at the end. After quadrupling sales in California, the jingle was re-written without the sponsor mention and released as a novelty record.

KBON's salute to the satirist on "Stan Freberg Day" featured cuts from a Freberg interview along with tracks from some of his successful commercials and his comedy albums that featured numerous segments of his *The Stan Freberg Show* that ran on CBS as a 1957 replacement for Jack Benny. His radio show failed to get a sponsor and left the air as the last comedy show on network radio.

(Freberg in the 1960s produced a series of spots for the National Association of Broadcasters promoting the benefits of radio over T and newspapers, especially demonstrating radio's theater of the mind. The spots all concluded with a jingle by Sarah Vaughn singing, "Who listens to radio? Only 150 million people, that's all.")

In 1959 KBON jumped into the middle of the Top 40 battle between KOWH 660 and Don Burden's KOIL 1290. Both Top 40's were frantically trying to outdo each other with "it pays to listen" contests giving out clues at random times. The clues led to a grand prize for the first listener who called in with the contest solution.

KBON hired interns to monitor both stations and aired the clues from each station immediately as they were aired so that KOIL and KOWH listeners could play both contests. The Top 40s sometimes tried to trip up the announcements by giving clues during KBON commercial breaks but even those were interrupted to immediately air the time-sensitive clues.

A little later in 1959 KBON surprisingly flirted with modernizing its music playlist by adding Top 40 songs that were being played on KOIL1290 and KOWH 660. It didn't last long. By August, management realized the mistake and placed an ad in the *OWH* admitting they had played a "lot more of that rock music," and due to listener response would return to "better pop music."

The Top 40 experiment may have been an effort to boost the station's value. Just weeks afterward in September, KBON was sold by Paul Fry of Inland Broadcasting to Goldenrod Broadcasting. An entirely new chapter for KBON lay ahead in the 1960s.

### KSWI 1560 Council Bluffs

By 1951 KSWI promoted "pleasant programs" of music and five minutes of hourly news, calling itself "Omaha's Only Music Station." It continued into 1952 with the line, "Music all day, news every hour." One ad proudly proclaimed, "No disc jockeys."



KSWI 1952

Indeed, few name-announcers appeared, although the ubiquitous Omaha band leader Lee Barron briefly held a show in 1950. He had already done brief stints at KOWH and KBON by that time.



KSWI 1951 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

After that, it wasn't until 1956 when local personality Byron Head arrived to work out his pre-retirement years on KSWI. Following years of being a driving force at KOIL, Head left KOIL the previous year in an apparent dispute with the new management, namely Don Burden. It's likely that Head disagreed with the new era of rock music that was gaining strength.



KSWI 1952 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald)

KSWI's shining moment of the 1950s came during the 1952 Omaha flood. In providing continuous coverage during the emergency, the station received special permission from the FCC to remain on the air during night time hours. KSWI joined the Omaha stations in broadcasting reports around the clock.

Staff at the station was doubled to meet the emergency. KSWI reported that the station's request for volunteer help brought people from within a radius of more than 70 miles. (Broadcasting Apr 28, 1952)

Being owned by the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* was a big advantage in covering the flood news. KSWI also maintained a broadcasting crew at the Mayor's office and disaster headquarters at City Hall feeding news bulletins continually.

All the while, the KSWI AM and FM transmitter site on the Missouri River flood plain was being threatened by rising waters. Sandbags were piled around the transmitter building to keep waters at bay. An emergency transmitter was readied in downtown Council Bluffs. But, the sandbags held, the transmitter remained dry, and the broadcasts continued uninterrupted. (KOIL's transmitter site was over a half-mile east of KSWI's and less threatened.)

A year later KSWI shut down its FM station, the last to abandon the band during FM's first attempt at becoming viable. KSWI FM 96.1 had mostly been simulcasting the AM until the end. KSWI 1560 will remain a stand-alone AM until late into the FM renaissance of the 1960s.

In the mid-1950s, KSWI's primary push for music was reinforced. KSWI called itself "Your Easy Listening Station" by 1957 when Top 40 was firmly taking root on KOWH. By 1959 KSWI promoted "Great albums of music."

During this time, KSWI was involved in Omaha's first stereo broadcast experiment. For the two separate channels, two individual stations were required. Technology for two channels on one signal didn't arrive until the early 1960s on FM and the late 1970s for AM.

On September 28, 1958, KSWI 1560 and KBON 1490 scheduled an event from 3 to 5 p.m. instructing listeners to use two radios, one on each side of the room, tuned to the two stations at equal volume. With each station airing a separate channel, a demonstration using stereo records of sound effects and music were played. A ping pong ball going back and forth and trains and race cars speeding by were followed by stereo music to the end of the demonstration.

The broadcast was repeated during the late-night hours with KSWI getting special permission to operate after hours for the broadcast. A similar broadcast was aired in Lincoln over KOLN TV and KFMQ in October.

## **SIDEBARS and FOOTNOTES**

### **THE TODD STORZ "WAITRESS AND JUKEBOX" MYTH**

A popular radio urban myth for years was that Todd Storz and his PD Bill Stewart hit upon the Top Tunes format in 1951 while in an Omaha bar watching a waitress repeatedly spend her hard-earned tips on the same jukebox songs that had been playing all day. The story has been disputed by Storz

executive George Armstrong and mentor Harold Soderlund, though lives on likely because it's based somewhat on fact.

Todd Storz explained that he was convinced of music's role in the format during the Second World War, at various restaurants seeing customers throwing their nickels into the jukebox repeatedly coming up with the same tunes. The Juke Box story sprang from this series of observations that came from earlier and elsewhere. (1957 *Television Magazine*, "The Storz Bombshell")

## **THE KOWH SALE TO WILLIAM BUCKLEY**

Todd Storz could see that his daytimer couldn't hold on to an audience in the face of full-time competition in the new Top 40 arena. As Don Burden's KOIL targeted the KOWH audience, Storz sold while his numbers were still good. The buyer was a non-broadcaster, conservative author and commentator William Buckley, founder of the *National Review*. He paid an astounding \$822,500 for the station and its healthy profit and loss sheet, but apparently was left unaware of the limits of a daytime-only station.

Former KOIL Newsman Bob Benson recalls a speech Buckley gave on a visit to Omaha after Todd Storz had died in 1964. This is his recounting:

*Buckley: "Thank you all for coming. I hope you know how much I enjoy visiting...Omaha...because, as many of you know, I have a business connection with your fine community.*

*"While I was on the plane headed here...thinking about what fine people populate the middle of our nation...I was saddened to think of the passing of one of your native sons, the late Todd Storz. I became disconsolate at the thought of his passing so early in life. So, to cheer myself up, I pictured him bounding up those golden stairs toward those pearly gates to which we all aspire. And I pictured him saying to St. Peter, in the ebullient manner for which we all know him... 'Hi, I'm Todd Storz.'*

*"And in my reverie, I could hear St. Peter reply...' I know my son. Welcome. By the way, how could you screw a nice guy like Bill Buckley?'"*

## **HOW THE LABEL "TOP 40" WAS BORN**

The label "Top 40" lasted three decades. It was born at Todd Storz's station in New Orleans. Upon the 1953 purchase of WRIX 1450 in New Orleans, Todd sent George "Bud" Armstrong to the Crescent City to program the station, implementing the top tunes format developed in Omaha.

In New Orleans, Armstrong found competitor WDSU already airing an afternoon Top 20 countdown. He decided to make WTIX's countdown bigger, doubling it to 40. By adding 20 songs to the list, the countdown started an hour earlier and ended an hour after WDSU's countdown ended. WTIX soon owned the market. Top 40 was born.

## THE STORZ STATIONS EMPIRE



From his 500-watt daytimer, the Todd Storz empire quickly grew. Storz bought WTIX New Orleans in August 1953 for 25-thousand dollars. He sent his right-hand man, George Armstrong to the Crescent City to implement his high energy format in place of symphonies and sonatas. WTIX went from eleventh to first place in less than a year. During that time Storz improved the station's signal by moving it from 1450 kHz to 690 kHz.

Then came WHB 710 Kansas City, purchased for 400-thousand dollars in 1954. In went George Armstrong as the GM. WHB went to first place in six months and became the biggest moneymaker for the Storz group, grossing 2-million dollars a year by 1956 (*Time Magazine*, June 4, 1956).

WDGY 1130 Minneapolis followed in 1955, perhaps the most challenging new asset with its high-maintenance nine-tower directional array and strong competition from the well-entrenched heritage station WCCO 830.

WQAM 560 Miami came in 1956, the purchase approved only after Todd pledged to refrain from airing his well-known stunt promotions. Todd Storz then moved from his Omaha home at 401 Fairacres Road in Omaha to Miami, bringing the Storz offices to the station.

In 1958 KOMA Oklahoma City was purchased, having a nighttime signal covering nearly everything west of the Mississippi. It was here Todd tried out automation, too soon to be workable.

The clunky technology in the pre-computer era just couldn't provide the spontaneity to connect with listeners. George "Bud" Armstrong also became executive VP of all Storz stations that same year,

but left the automation at KOMA alone until it was turned off by Omaha's Deane Johnson, KOMA PD at the time. Armstrong learned of the shut down at dinner with Johnson during a market visit. Johnson recalls Armstrong asking him about the automation and having to nervously respond that it's gone. Armstrong replied, "Good, it's about time."

Huge money-makers don't come without problems. Todd was losing key personnel to other stations, pirated away taking format secrets with them. Also, critics, while admitting Top 40 saved radio in the dawn of the TV era, criticized Storz for abdicating control of pop music to teens. To adults, particularly the parents of teen listeners, the DJs appeared out of control, allegedly involved in drugs and prostitution with record promoters. Indeed the Payola scandals of 1959 were hastened by these developments.

KXOK St. Louis was the last purchase, in 1960. But growth in the Storz era was soon to end. Todd died of a stroke in 1964, at the age of 39.

Todd Storz is buried in Forest Lawn Cemetery in Omaha. In his memory, his father, Robert Storz, raised funds to build the Storz Pavilion at Clarkson Hospital, now the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

It was a painful period for Todd's father who was left to take control of the Storz Stations even though he already owned 60 percent of the operation. Robert Storz had already sold his interest in the brewery to his partners/brothers in 1959 but would now focus on the broadcast properties as Chairman and President of Storz Broadcasting.

Robert Storz moved the group's headquarters back to Omaha in August 1966 while maintaining an office at the Miami station and keeping a home at Delray Beach where he spent about two months each year. Bud Armstrong also returned from Miami, staying on as Executive VP.

Storz Broadcasting headquarters settled in Kiewit Plaza, a high-rise office building at 3555 Farnam Street. Operations for the chain of six AM stations, all outside of Omaha, were centralized in Kiewit Plaza, including central accounting. Paychecks for DJs and management in the far-flung chain were all issued from the building's eighth floor at 35<sup>th</sup> and Farnam Streets.

Robert Storz ran the chain very conservatively into the 1980s, never acknowledging the rise of FM. That's when the empire began to crumble and the stations were sold off one by one, the last going in 1988.



## **THE STORZ BREWERY**

The money to purchase KOWH came from beer sales. Storz was Omaha's top seller from World War II into the 1960s. Storz beer sales had a 51 percent share in 1951 and was one-third of all beer sales in Nebraska in 1960.

The brewery was started in 1876 by Gottlieb Storz and was owned by the Storz family for nearly a century. Sons Arthur C. Storz and Adolph Robert Storz took over in 1939. Arthur's son Robert Storz was president of the company in the 1950s and 60s. Broadcast pioneer Todd Storz was Robert's son.

The plant was at 1807 North 16th Street, a six-story building constructed from brick, stone, and cement that was over 200 feet long. It had red-tiled floors, walls with burnished stainless steel, and copper fixtures. Storz installed new equipment throughout the building, as well as an ice plant, cold storage, a bottling shop, a machine shop, and a restaurant. Eventually, the entire facility occupied more than 15 buildings.

The Storz Brewery included hospitality rooms, one called "The Frontier Room," the other a hunting lodge-style venue with stuffed heads of big game on the walls called "The Trophy Room."

Major beer competitors were Krug, Willow Springs, and Metz breweries. Krug was purchased by Falstaff in 1936 and operated its brewery in South Omaha near 24<sup>th</sup> and Deer Park Boulevard until it closed in 1987.

Storz production capacity was 600 thousand barrels per year when the family sold it in 1966. Operations ended in 1972.

## **THE OTHER PIONEER- GORDON MCLENDON**

Gordon McLendon owned several Texas stations that he developed into Top 40 leaders during the format's early years. They included KLIF Dallas, KILT Houston, and KTSA San Antonio.

Known as the Old Scotsman, McLendon was a sportscaster who re-created baseball games, getting his play by play information from a news ticker, the only way live game coverage was reaching the Southwest in the early 1950s.

While Todd Storz developed the pop music rotation format, McLendon also experimented with other formats including Beautiful Music on KABL San Francisco and All-News on WNUS Chicago.

His showmanship style crossed into creative station promotion and helped develop Top 40 radio in the coming years. McLendon's cash giveaways likely inspired Todd Storz to do the same and later influenced KOIL's Don Burden, with whom Gordon would later become close friends.

McLendon was instrumental in the development of radio jingles. Because of McLendon in Dallas, a number of the most successful jingle companies remained headquartered in the Big D for years afterward.

## **THE OVERNIGHT SHIFT**

Until the early 1950s, all but a very few radio stations would leave the air at around midnight. Overnight broadcasting generally happened only during special events or extended news coverage such as Radiothons to raise money for a charitable cause or emergencies like the Omaha flood of 1952.

The common practice at sign off would be the announcement, "We now end our broadcast day..." continuing with station details such as frequency, power, ownership, and the studio address. This would be followed by good night wishes and the National Anthem. Then, the quiet carrier would switch off giving way to static and distant signals. Most stations returned to the air at around six the next morning, again with the *Star-Spangled Banner*.

Round-the-clock operation began in Omaha with KFAB 1110 in 1951. WOW 590 followed in 1954, KOIL 1290 in 1955, and KBON in 1959.

Stations still needed to sign off as often as once a week for transmitter maintenance, most choosing the sleepy hours of early Monday morning (Sunday night at midnight). Omaha was an exception, choosing early Sunday mornings due to Monday's pre-dawn hours being busy with livestock deliveries at the South Omaha stockyards.

Eventually, as aging transmitters were being replaced by newer units, they would become auxiliary transmitters allowing stations to stay on 24/7. KFAB was the first to boast a "No Silent Period." Most station's "overnight downtime" now is limited to rare air personnel shortages or tower maintenance.

## **EDUCATIONAL STATIONS RETURN, USING CARRIER CURRENT**

At Creighton University, the Rev. R. C. Williams, S.J., faculty advisor, started KOCU to prepare students for broadcasting careers.

Williams had been a pioneer in the use of closed-circuit television to teach multiple sections of large enrollment classes in the medical and health sciences. This was in conjunction with training for WOW engineers in the new medium of television.

WOW set up the TV equipment in the Creighton auditorium in 1946. Williams' closed-circuit TV pickups operated as early as 1947, two years before Omaha's TV stations signed on. Besides showing medical operations from St. Joseph's hospital, it once carried a closed-circuit broadcast of Creighton vs. Wichita basketball.

Carrier current broadcasting uses a building's electrical or similar infrastructure system for low power broadcasting, the signal range confined to a small area such as a college campus. The KOCU transmitter emanated signals from the campus steam system.

KOCU's radio carrier-current transmitter reached the final stages of adjustment in February 1948 and soon signed on at 620 kHz (other sources indicate 640 kHz). In later years it moved to 550 kHz. Any radio on the campus was able to hear KOCU.

The Creighton University radio station in its early years aired newscasts, talent shows, and live drama from studios in the basement of Wareham Hall and variety from the Creighton auditorium. In the late 1960s, a clash developed between Fr. Williams and students who wanted to change to a rock music format.

Two major air personalities teamed up during those tumultuous years—Jim Celer and Doug Wesselmann, both going on to commercial radio success as Diver Dan and Otis Twelve. The duo achieved high ratings on KEZO 92.3 in the 1970s and 80s.

This Week		Last Week	Weeks on Chart
1	I'VE GOTTA GET A MESSAGE TO YOU - Bee Gees/Atco	3	6
2	FIRE - Arthur Brown/Atlantic	2	6
3	HEY JUDE/REVOLUTION - The Beatles/Apple	1	6
4	PIECE OF MY HEART - Big Brother & the Holding Co./Columbia	4	5
5	IN-A-GADDA-DA-VIDA - Iron Butterfly/Atco	5	5
6	OVER YOU - Gary Puckett & the Union Gap/Columbia	16	5
7	MIDNIGHT CONFESSIONS - The Grassroots/Dunhill	10	6
8	THOSE WERE THE DAYS - Mary Hopkin/Apple	13	5
9	ELEANOR - The Turtles/White Whale	9	5
10	TIME HAS COME TODAY - Chambers Brothers/Columbia	6	6
11	GIRL WATCHER - The O'Keaysions/ABC	12	5
12	SUZIE Q - Creedence Clearwater Revival/Fantasy	14	6
13	STREET FIGHTING MAN - The Rolling Stones/London	7	6
14	MY SPECIAL ANGEL - The Vogues/Reprise	23	5
15	SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME - Max Frost & the Troopers/Tower	30	5
16	HUSH - Deep Purple/Tetragrammaton	11	6
17	MAGIC CARPET RIDE - Steppenwolf/Dunhill	25	6
18	SLEEP AWAY - Clarence Carter/Atlantic	15	6
19	ON THE ROAD AGAIN - Canned Heat/Liberty	8	6
20	HELP YOURSELF - Tom Jones/Parrot	18	6
21	SAY IT ALOUD - James Brown & His Famous Flames/King	24	5
22	DO THE CHOO CHOO - Archie Bell & the Drells/Atlantic	26	5
23	POOR BABY - The Cowells/MGM	27	5
24	I SAY A LITTLE PRAYER/FLIP - Aretha Franklin/Atlantic	20	6
25	WHITE ROOM - Cream/Atco	28	4
26	WHO IS GONNA LOVE ME?/FLIP - Dionne Warwick/Scepter	17	6
27	GREENBURG, GLICKSTEIN ... & JONES - Cryan' Shames/Columbia	33	5
28	SWEET BLINDNESS - Fifth Dimension/Soul City	34	3
29	YOU GOT THE LOVE - Professor Morrison's Lollipop/Whale	32	6
30	HITCHCOCK RAILWAY/FLIP - Jose Feliciano/RCA	37	3
31	SPECIAL OCCASION - Smokey Robinson & the Miracles/Tamla	21	6
32	FOR THE LOVE OF IVY - Mamas & Papas/Dunhill	36	4
33	BABY, COME BACK - Equals/RCA	38	4
34	CHEWY CHEWY - Ohio Express/Buddah	43	3
35	I MET HER IN CHURCH - Box Tops/Wala	39	5
36	LOVE CHILL - Diana Ross & the Supremes/Motown	HB	2
37	LALENA - Donovan/Epic	41	3
38	CINDERELLA SUNSHINE - Paul Revere & the Raiders/Columbia	-	1
39	KEEP ON LOVIN' ME - Marvin & Tammi/Motown	HB	2
40	RUN TO ME - The Montanas/Independence	-	1
41	HEY, WESTERN UNION MAN - Jerry Butler/Mercury	HB	2
42	ALL ALONG THE WATCHTOWER - Jini Hendrix Experience/Reprise	42	4
43	ABRAHAM, MARTIN AND JOHN - Dion/Laurie	HB	2
44	PORPOISE SONG - The Monkees/Calgems	45	3
45	CINNAMON - Derek/Bang	HB	2
HB	FIRE - Five By Five/Paula	-	1
HB	POOL FOR YOU - The Impressions/Curtom	-	1
HB	SHAME, SHAME - Magic Lanterns/Atlantic	-	1
HB	RIDE MY SEE-SAW - The Moody Blues/Deram	-	1
HB	HOLD ME TIGHT - Johnny Nash/Jad	-	1

HB denotes HIT BOUND.  
 #1 THIS WEEK IN HOMETOWN HOUSTON:  
 "Hey Jude" (KILZ).

**KOCURADIO 55**

KOCU music playlist 1969, showing an eclectic mix of psychedelic rock, pop, and soft adult contemporary. (Courtesy: Gregg Ottinger collection).

A feature that gained popularity in the early 1970s created by manager John O'Meara was *Rumor Line*. Calls poured in, and even off-campus students dropped by to see if they got mentioned

KOCU later moved to the Hitchcock Communications Arts Building. Besides more space including offices and a music library, equipment was upgraded through used gear donated by commercial broadcasters.

A second educational broadcaster signed on October 14, 1951 from the University of Omaha at 60<sup>th</sup> and Dodge Streets (the school later to become the University of Nebraska at Omaha). It was KWOU by carrier current on 550 kHz, operating on Mondays and Wednesdays. KWOU was founded by Robert Stratbucker and Stan Davidson who built the transmission equipment. It operated until 1954, then returned after year's absence on October 14, 1955.

From 1959 to 1961 KWOU was illegally transmitting an over the air signal running 10 watts on 880 kHz. 880 was the clearest daytime frequency available in Omaha at the time, popular with amateur pirate experimenters of the day. The outlaw station covered a good portion of what then was Omaha's city limits, apparently never triggering complaints that would bring it to the attention of the FCC.

As FM developed, the low portion of its band was being reserved for non-commercial broadcasters where educational radio could again blossom. KWOU left the air when the Omaha Public School's station KIOS 91.5 signed on in 1969.

KOCU radio on the Creighton campus continued operating, but by the 1980s equipment was deteriorating and staffing was more difficult as students became increasingly disinterested. KOCU finally closed down in May 1989 after the spring semester. (*Creighton Magazine*, spring 1996)

One more school carrier current station signed on in January 1977. KTEC at Tech High School operated on 560 kHz. It was set up to complement the school's non-comm FM, KIOS 91.5.

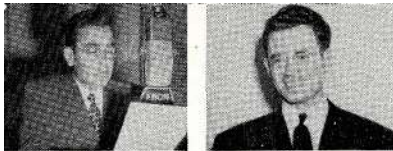
The KIOS format with its basic breaks and long-form music was too simplified for students to gain commercial radio experience, so KTEC was designed to run with a more intense, DJ-involved Top 40 format. Its signal was localized to the building and was likely heard over the PA system more than over radios.

The station was shut down along with Technical High in 1984, the building converted to Omaha Public Schools headquarters. KIOS 91.5 soon moved studios into the building from its original location at Central High School.

## MUSIC PLAYLISTS, 1952

An illustration of how record shows were emerging in the early 1950s is this 1952 “Hit Parade” listing of Omaha station’s playlists along with the personalities who presented them.

WOW 590 had the most conservative playlist, omitting popular artists of the day, most notably Eddie Fisher, Johnnie Ray, and Les Paul. Also notable is that KOWH is playing an off-version of the popular “Wheel of Fortune,” the hit version showing up elsewhere by Kay Starr.



**JOHNNY DICKSON** **KBON** **DON FERRAZZO**

1. Wheel of Fortune, K. Starr, Capitol
2. Blue Tango, Les Baxter, Capitol
3. Tell Me Why, Four Aces, Decca
4. Life's Companion, Mills Bros., Decca
5. Anytime, E. Fisher, Victor
6. Stolen Love, G. Lombardo, Decca
7. Broken Hearted, J. Ray, Columbia
8. Tenderly, Vaughn Monroe, Victor
9. Cry, Johnny Ray, Columbia
10. Tiger Rag, Les Paul, Capitol



**BOB STEELMAN** **BY HEAD** **HENRY KELPE**

- KOIL**
1. Cry, Johnny Ray, Okeh
  2. Blue Tango, Les Baxter, Capitol
  3. Wheel of Fortune, K. Starr, Capitol
  4. Anytime, E. Fisher, Victor
  5. Stolen Love, E. Howard, Merc.
  6. Bermuda, Bell Sisters, Victor
  7. I Wanna Love You, Ames Bros., Coral
  8. Winoweh, Weavers, Decca
  9. Please Mr. Sun, T. Edwards, MGM
  10. The Noodlin' Rag, P. Como, Victor



(Each week our Record Column is written by the contributing editors whose pictures grace these pages. Weekly, we poll these radio personalities to determine what ten tunes were most played by them on their stations in the preceding seven days. In addition, they predict what tunes will eventually become top tunes in this area. Through the generous co-operation of these personalities TV SHOWTIME is able to offer you a clear and accurate listing of the popular tunes in the Omaha area.)

By Bob

Reports that the great classical musician Spike Jones would disband his “City Slickers” for the newly organized “Country Cousins” is false. It would appear that Spike intends the “Cousins” as a supplement to his present crew . . . Norman Granz, who achieved universal fame for his “Jazz at the Philharmonic” allowed Slim Giallard to wax two ballads, “I Only Have Eyes For You” and “As You Are.” Rumors have it that Granz will allow more commercial works later in the season . . . As of this writing Kay Starr and her fabulous “Wheel of Fortune” have passed the half-million mark. This is the most phenomenal climb in recent Capitol history . . . The Nation’s top tunes from an overall basis are: Cry, Tell Me Why, Slow Poke, Any Time, Little White Cloud, Wheel of Fortune, Please Mr. Sun, Tiger Rag, Bermuda, and Blue Tango . . . LeRoy Anderson’s hit, “Blue Tango” occupies the last slot on the top ten nationally, yet Omaha fans place it right up there on



**SANDY JACKSON**  
**KOWH**

1. Wheel of Fortune, A. Pryssock, Decca
2. Anytime, E. Fisher, Victor
3. Blue Tango, Leroy Anderson, Decca
4. Stolen Love, E. Howard, Merc.
5. Winoweh, G. Jenkins-Weavers, Decca
6. I Wanna Love You, Ames Bros., Coral
7. Cry, Johnny Ray, Columbia
8. Tiger Rag, Les Paul, Capitol
9. Unforgettable, King Cole, Capitol
10. Please Mr. Sun, P. Como, Victor

**Predictions**

1. Hambone, Phil Harris
2. Pittsburgh, Penn., Guy Mitchell
3. Tulips and Heather, Fred Waring



**KEN CASE** **WOW** **CAROLYN COVERT**

1. Blue Tango, H. Winterhalter, RCA
2. Wheel of Fortune, K. Starr, Capitol
3. Blacksmith Blues, E. Morse, Capitol
4. I Wanna Love You, K. Starr, Capitol
5. I Wanna Say Hello, Four Knights, Cap.
6. Would You?, LeRoy Holmes, MGM
7. Please Mr. Sun, Alan Dale, Columbia
8. Baby Doll, E. Fitzgerald, Decca
9. Hell's Bells, Clyde McCoy, Capitol
10. Be My Life's Comp., M. Carson, RCA

**Predictions**

1. Blacksmith Blues, E. Morse
2. Play Me a Hurtin' Tune, P. Como
3. Noodlin' Rag, G. Lombardo
4. Tulips and Heather, F. Waring
5. Hell's Bells, Clyde McCoy

1952 Playlists from Showtime magazine, Omaha edition, March 10, 1952 (Courtesy: Frank Merrill collection).

## ROCK AND ROLL ROOTS IN OMAHA

It's well documented that Top 40 radio was developed in Omaha. The roots for rock and roll music are a bit more cloudy, with several artists laying claim to the title of making the first such record. But Omaha is in on this title claim as well .

In 1947 native Omahan Wynonie Harris at age 32 recorded what by some accounts was the first-ever Rock and Roll record, "Good Rockin' Tonight." It was recorded at King Records in Cincinnati on

December 28, 1947. Only one viable claim that's earlier would be, "That's All Right, Mama" by Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup in 1946.

Others that followed Wynonie are "Rock This Joint" by Jimmy Preston and his Prestonians (1949), "Saturday Night Fish Fry" by Louis Jordan & The Tympany Five (1949), and the song popularly believed to be the first, "Rocket 88" by Jackie Brenston and his Delta Cats (1951). "Rock Around The Clock" by Bill Haley And The Comets (1954) was the first to reach the pop music mainstream.

Born in 1913, Wynonie was always an extrovert performer, working in Omaha clubs as a dancer and MC from his late teens. By the early 1940s he was working in Harlem where he began blues singing. His string of hits on King records lasted into the early 1950s.

Omaha airplay of Wynonie's songs is not documented and probably didn't happen. His rock style was described as "hot and raunchy," too risque for radio, but his records were certainly jukebox favorites at the time.

Wynonie was a graduate of Omaha Central High School, and his picture is displayed at Central High's Hall of Fame.



*Omaha native Wynonie Harris.*

## CHAPTER THREE- MUSIC AND NEWS

*Everybody has a favorite radio station. They have a personal and meaningful relationship with that radio station. Nobody else has that. Nobody else can replicate that.*

--NRG Media CEO Mary Quass upon receiving the NAB National Radio Award, Dallas, 2019.

What took root in the 1950s became the new radio of the 1960s and beyond. Stations became personal favorites, no longer mere delivery tools for the networks and various local program blocks. Appointment radio listening shifted from the programming on the station to the station doing the programming.

Personal involvement with stations was ushered in by the transistor that made radios smaller for individual listeners, discovered by trend-setting teens with their increased spending power.

### THE NETWORKS TURN TO NEWS

With the advent of music radio formats, network radio was morphing into a news and features service by the 1960s. Hourly national newscasts plus commentary by the likes of Walter Cronkite, Harry Reasoner, Paul Harvey, and Chet Huntley were interspersed into affiliates' local music and news.

Broadcast journalism by now demanded a new label. Omaha's City Hall radio and TV reporters refused classification as members of "the press," and demanded the label be replaced with "news media." (*OWH* June 2, 1965)

CBS hung on to old-school radio the longest. Though the CBS soaps were dropped from radio and moved to television in 1960, Arthur Godfrey continued his mid-morning radio show to 1972. CBS then kept the Golden Age alive for old-schoolers a bit longer with the *CBS Mystery Theater* weeknights from 1974 to 1982.

NBC enjoyed success in the post-Golden Years with a unique weekend feature, *Monitor*. Begun in June 1955, *Monitor* was a long-form magazine show with news, music, comedy, sports, variety, remotes, and live interviews that aired weekends for nearly twenty years. It started with an ambitious 40 hours per weekend but settled in at 16 hours per weekend by 1961. It helped fill the Saturday and Sunday schedule that's normally regarded as downtime for local staffing.

The show's signature logo, the "Monitor Beacon" sounder, became familiar to KFAB's weekend listeners as well as to the nation. Over the years, the show and its Beacon reached millions and was fondly recalled long after music radio finally won out, ending *Monitor's* run in January 1975.

ABC successfully recognized the changes radio was experiencing. Under the direction of Omahan Ralph Beaudin, ABC met the shift to music radio formats in 1968 by splitting into four distinctly separate news services, each styled to dovetail into different format presentations. The network staggered four newscasts on its one feed line-- ABC Contemporary was at :55, ABC Information on the hour, ABC Entertainment at :30, and ABC FM at :15. This permitted the network as many as four affiliates per market. The four-network debut on January 1 had about 600 affiliates.

First, our programming is designed to fit your station's audience. It's not common programming for everybody like the other networks.

And we offer more quality programming and less fill. We give you prestige people like Harry Reasoner, Howard K. Smith, Paul Harvey, Edward P. Morgan, Louis Rukeyser, Frank Reynolds and Bob Wilson. In sports we have Howard Cosell, Jerry Coleman, Lou Bada, Keith Jackson and Jack Drees.

Ever so--our commercial inventory is only half as much as the old-fashioned networks.

And we give you twice as many news actualities as other networks. And the 24-hour Newswatch, plus 8 news coils a day and two weekend sports coils.

All of which is why such stations as WCBM, Baltimore ... WEZE, Boston ... WRIT, Milwaukee ... WKRC, Cincinnati and KPOW, Denver have joined the ABC Demographic Radio Networks in the past 6 months.

Also why KFRE, Fresno ... WOW, Omaha ... WRNL, Richmond ... WDCK, Lexington ... WKBO, Harrisburg ... and WGR, Buffalo have joined us recently.

We hope you'll talk to some of these people who have joined us about the service they are getting from the ABC Demographic Radio Networks.

Because after you've talked to them, we think you'll want to talk to us.



Omaha native Ralph Beaudin, who took ABC's O&O stations Top 40 and later developed the four networks for ABC Radio.



**The Four ABC Demographic Radio Networks.**  
**Any resemblance to traditional radio networks is purely coincidental.**

The American Contemporary net was for rockers with concise news, sports and features appealing to younger demos. American Information was for talk and MOR stations offering a deeper treatment of news, detailed sports, and news analysis. American Entertainment (originally called Personality) was for MOR stations that combined news and music, offering a strong emphasis on personalities and commentators. It included the *Breakfast Club* which was continuing to a 35-year

run. American FM was a news and public affairs service.

The mastermind behind this ABC reorganization was Omaha native Ralph Beaudin, who spent five years working in radio sales. He worked for Don Burden at KOIL in 1954 and Todd Storz at KOWH in 1955. Beaudin was impressed with the local impact of radio sales, noting, "I learned you could create response immediately with radio even on a small budget" (*Broadcasting* Nov 11, 1963).



Beaudin went on to a huge career with ABC. It's likely Beaudin put some of the Storz teachings to work. He started with KQV Pittsburgh in 1958, flipping the station to Top 40, the first in the ABC chain of stations. He was moved to head up WLS Chicago in 1960 and along with Sam Holman did the same thing there. He was promoted to VP of ABC Radio in 1966.

Beaudin returned to Omaha in 1987 working out his pre-retirement years as VP and General Manager of John Mitchell's Omaha stations.

## 590 WOW Omaha- STAYS OLD-SCHOOL

In October 1960 WOW 590 moved from the Omaha Bank Building to newly-built quarters at 3501 Farnam Street where it joined its sister television station, WOW TV 6, already established there.

A new FM station was added the following year. WOW FM 92.3 signed on the air with 21 thousand watts from atop the AM tower on May 15, 1961.

William O. Wiseman was appointed assistant general manager in 1960.

Wiseman's career spanned the industry from its beginning all the way through the development of television. In the 1920s Wiseman started out as one of the very first print journalists to have a column devoted to radio. He joined WOW in 1937 serving as promotion manager and later sales manager before retiring from WOW radio and TV in 1966. Even more unique, his initials matched his station's call letters.



Martha Bohlson, WOW 1953.

Local programming carried over from the 1950s included *Breakfast Bandstand* with Joe Martin, Martha Bohlson's homemaker show mid-mornings, Gene Piatt afternoons, *Cloud Club* evenings, *All Night Starland* at midnight, and Husker football in the fall.

It wasn't long before WOW 590 announced a "completely modern radio service." It came in November 1960 when CBS canceled its remaining afternoon radio soap operas moving them to TV. One of the canceled soapers earlier that year was *The Romance of Helen Trent*, which had a total run of over 7-thousand episodes since debuting in 1933.

The "modern" radio service continued to be aimed at adults with little to no young adult appeal. Gene Piatt went to mornings when the former morning personality Joe Martin and sidekick pianist Al

Lamm were moved to afternoons to replace the daytime dramas. The duo aired music and schtick following the noon markets until 4 p.m. After 6 p.m. the station played dinner music and stuck with easy listening into the night.

Despite dropping the soap operas, CBS kept an entertainment presence longer than the other national Networks. Godfrey continued as a mid-morning regular on WOW all through the 1960s until the net ended his run on April 30, 1972. He shared mid-mornings for much of the 1960s with the ubiquitous Martha Bohlson and her local show for homemakers

As a CBS affiliate, WOW 590 loyally aired the network's newscasts. Through the 1960s this included *The World Tonight* (the temporarily renamed *CBS World News Roundup*), the morning's *World News Roundup*, and news and comment features by Lowell Thomas, Mike Wallace, Edward R. Murrow, and Murrow's boys, Howard K. Smith, Robert Trout, and Charles Collingwood.

Promoting ten-minute newscasts, CBS news was followed by five local minutes from WOW's 20-man news staff, AP, and UPI. Some of that news staff included announcers Merrill Workhoven and 7 to 10 a.m. morning show host Gene Piatt.

Ray Olson was WOW's news director for much of the decade. Olson joined WOW in 1937. He had a music background as a vocalist and trombone player but found greater radio success becoming an award-winning announcer and newsman.

Olson was with WOW for most of his career except for a four-month stint with NBC in Chicago. He quickly resigned and returned to Omaha. He gave his reason that he could not find a suitable home for his family, but it may have been big-market culture shock as well.

responsible news.

**ON-THE-SCENE COVERAGE  
FROM EVERYWHERE**

	
Anchorman Gene Piatt	Farm Director Arnold Peterson
	
Sports Director Jack Payne	Police Reporter Tom Murray
	
Features Marilon Thibault	Mobile Unit Reporter Joe McCartney

**PLUS CBS WORLD  
CORRESPONDENTS AND  
MORE THAN 75 REGIONAL  
CORRESPONDENTS**

**WOW**  
RADIO **59**

\*Winner of the Omaha Radio-TV Council's "Gold Frame Award" for best news presentation.

WOW 1965 picturing local staff  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

Sports editor Jack Payne continued to call Husker football games all through the 1960s as he had since 1950. Merrill Workhoven provided color for much of the decade. Payne also produced two major sportscasts in the 5 p.m. hour. Payne was named Nebraska Sportscaster of the Year in 1966. In 1968 when Payne left, Russ Baldwin and Dennis Claridge took over until Joe Patrick grabbed the reins. Payne called the games over KBON that year.

Joe Patrick, born Joseph Phillipson, was a sports anchor for KMTV from 1960-63, and later for KETV. He did play-by-play for Creighton University basketball, Omaha Knights hockey, and UNO football. He also hosted an Aksarben racing prediction program and the Bob Devaney and Tom Osborne shows during football season.

Farm and market news was a major money-maker for WOW with its broad signal matching that of powerhouse KFAB. Farm Director Arnold Peterson became known as “Mr. Farm Broadcaster.” He and Frank Arney hosted the *Farm Hour* at 6 each weekday morning with market reports and five-state weather forecasts.

WOW's new FM station on 92.3 was briefly promoted with a music preview in May 1961. Upon sign on, the FM programming was kept separate from that on AM except for certain news blocks amounting to only about 10 percent of the FM schedule.

In 1965 while KFAB worked to establish itself as a morning news leader, WOW countered with promotions, the first being a transistor radio giveaway during its *Morning News Roundup*. A few months later 30 diamonds were the prize in a “listen for your name” contest where names were drawn from the phone book. Winners were required to call from home so that a call back would verify the winner.

Promotions grew more intense the following year with a Pontiac LeMans as the grand prize in a callout contest. In May 1967 four paid vacations for two were offered as sweepstake prizes. Later that year weekend getaways plus game tickets were the prizes in a Huskers-related sweepstakes called “Wonderful October Weekend.” In 1968 it was turkey giveaways at Thanksgiving followed by a Mystery Christmas Angel contest.

Exclusive! **Football Double-Header**  
every week on **WOW**

**SATURDAY AFTERNOONS**

**MONDAYS 6-P.M.**

Jack Payne, the Midwest's favorite sportscaster, and Merrill Workhoven bring you Nebraska football games every Saturday beginning with this week's South Dakota game. This is their 13th consecutive season broadcasting Husker football.

... and for ten consecutive Mondays beginning this coming Monday, Nebraska's popular coach, Bob Devaney, will review the previous game and tell you what to expect in the upcoming contest.

Brought to you by Metropolitan Utilities District State Farm Insurance

Brought to you by Nebraska Savings & Loan

**ON YOUR "SPORTSTATION"**  
**WOW RADIO 59**  
Coming ... all Creighton basketball games, home and away exclusively on **WOW**

WOW Husker game coverage 1963 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald)

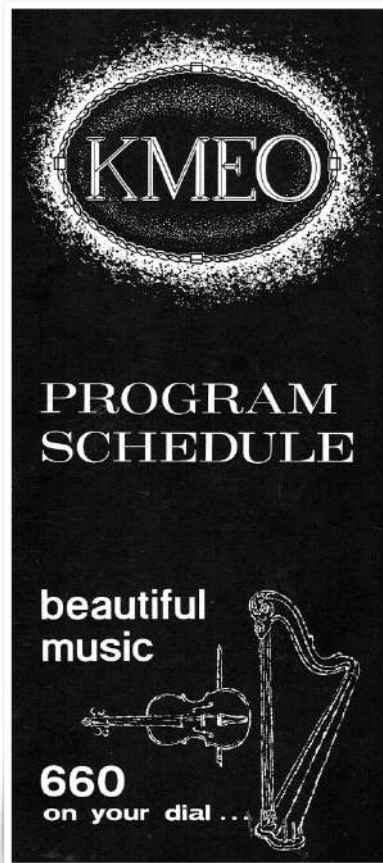
The music playlist had been acquiescing to the more contemporary artists by 1967 with adult-contemporary releases by the likes of Glen Campbell, Brenda Lee, The Vogues, The Classics IV, and Dionne Warwick.

Perhaps the biggest nod to WOW's gradual direction to contemporary programming was bringing Sandy Jackson on board for the morning show in July 1969. Jackson was a well-known personality from Top 40 KOIL and before that at KOWH and in the late 1940s at KBON. He had been off the air for several years having left KOIL in 1965 to run a teen club that by this time was on the verge of shutting down.

It was the beginning of major changes for old-school WOW, now looking for a younger audience. The 1970s would prove to be a pivotal decade in achieving those goals.

## 660 KMEO, KOWH, KOZN- AFTER THE HEADY TOP 40 YEARS

After its decline as KOWH 660, *National Review* owner William Buckley took the station a full 180 degrees in seeking a new identity. Top 40 listeners were surprised on New Years' morning 1960 when 660 was re-launched with new calls and a lush orchestral format as *Cameo* KMEO 660.



"Cameo" KMEO 660, 1960.

Calling it *Cameo Music* and using an ivory cameo piece as a logo, KMEO did its best to appeal to adults by using moody daypart titles. They were *Morning Overture*, *Mid-Morning Moods*, *Noon Intermezzo*, *Afternoon Tea and Crumpets*, and *Early Evening Candles and Wine*.

This was the as-yet-unnamed Beautiful Music format in its early years, believed to have started in Dallas by KIXL 1040 as early as 1947 and developed formed by Gordon McLendon in San Francisco on KABL 960 in the late 1950s.

The *Metropolitan Opera Broadcast* on Saturday afternoons was immediately added to the schedule, simulcasting on KQAL 94.1 FM until the broadcast moved to WOW 590 in 1963.

The Mutual Broadcasting System was picked up in 1961, though apparently for airing just a few programs, notably conservative broadcaster Fulton Lewis, Jr.

After a year in the new format, KMEO studios and offices were moved from the Kilpatrick Building to the station's transmitter site at 60th and Hartman. Four rooms were remodeled. The sales manager was Richard Palmquist. Jay Spurgeon was general manager.

Spurgeon came from a production background at WOW TV. He and his wife Betty, Miss Omaha 1950, occasionally did remote broadcasts together on KMEO. Spurgeon left for the GM position at KRCS 1560 Council Bluffs in 1964. He and his wife later co-hosted AkSarBen Coronation Ball coverage in 1967 for KETV Channel 7.

The staff at KMEO included some well-known names. Joe Martin, a longtime WOW radio and TV personality, joined in 1961.

Martin briefly left in 1962 for KGO in San Francisco, moving his family there, only to learn he was on a 90-day probation at KGO when getting fired. After returning to Omaha he sued KGO and settled out of court for 5 thousand dollars and legal costs.

Mike Bradley, a veteran from Top 40 stations KOWH and KOIL, joined as news director and air personality in 1963, staying for the rest of the 1960s even during 660's four-years as a country station. Bradley remained in news for the remainder of his radio career, going to KBON 1490 then to WOW 590 until retirement.

Bradley had replaced News Director Frank Bramhall who was moved up to PD. Bramhall was on the path to a varied and colorful career. He later left for KOIL where he did overnights as Frank Hall, then went to WOW radio and TV where he was the weatherman on the Channel six 10:00 news. After that, Bramhall became a fixture on fine arts non-comm KVNO 97.7.

Feature programming included *Travel Tips* three times a day with Mal Hanson and Belle West. Martha Bohlsen's daily homemaker's show was added in 1962, temporarily leaving its long-time home at WOW 590.

For a contracted number of weeks in 1962, Bill Delzell hosted the hour-long *Kameo Koffee Klub* live from the Crossroads Shopping Mall cafeteria at 10 a.m. It featured interviews, prizes, free coffee and donuts for shoppers, and fashions.

Little is known with certainty about Delzell, but he appears to be an actor from Central City, Nebraska who had a role in Bill Haley's film "Round Up The Rhythm" in 1954. From there he went into radio and after a couple of years in Omaha went on to WCAR and a broadcast career in Detroit.

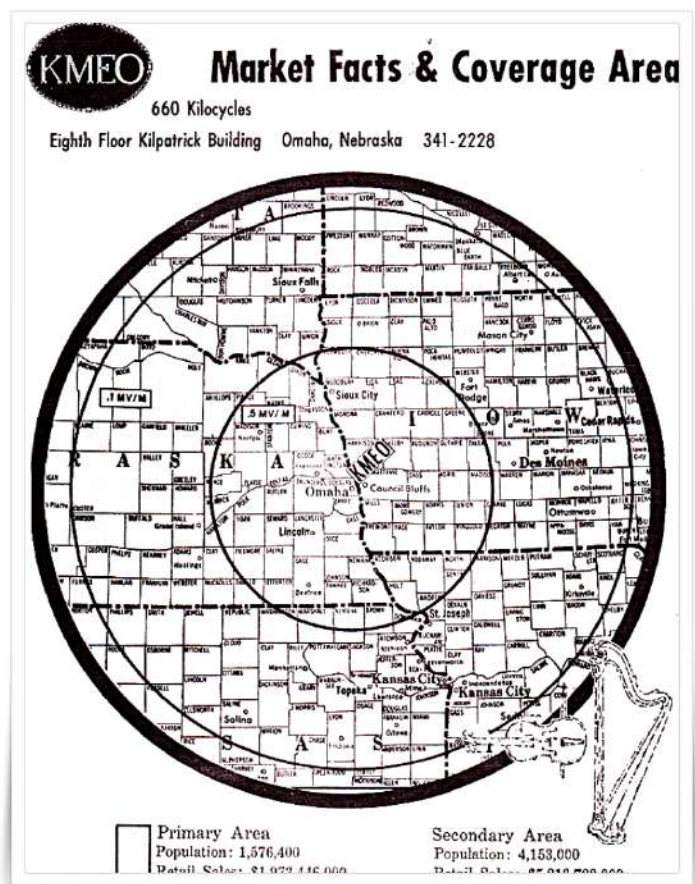
KMEO acquired a sister FM in 1962. Jack Katz, who was GM at KMEO for a brief period in 1960, sold his KQAL FM to Buckley and the *National Review*. KQAL kept its calls until 1965 finally changing them to KOWH FM. Katz moved on into real estate and later was PD at KMA 960 Shenandoah.

KMEO gave it four years. The Beautiful Music format failed to take root on AM radio and in May 1964 the calls reverted to KOWH. Classic and semi-classical music was replaced with soft pop in the vein of Barbra Streisand and Ella Fitzgerald.

The FM shifted to a soft orchestral format featuring 90 percent orchestra and string music. KOWH 660 began a simulcast of its FM on February 28, 1965.

Also in 1965 came a power increase to 1000 watts. The FCC gave daytime AM's operating on class I-A channels, which included KOWH 660, ninety days to file amendments updating requests for higher power. Some requests had originally been filed as far back as 1947.

The clear channel policy of permitting only one station to operate at night on each of the twenty-five clear channels had been the subject of proceedings since 1945, not concluding until 1961 with the breakup of 13 of the 25 clears. Not only were new, distant stations permitted on those 13 channels (reclassified to class II-A), the Feds briefly toyed with the idea of allowing 750 thousand watts maximum power to clears on the other twelve remaining class I-A's.)



*KMEO 660 coverage in 1960 before the power increase, its 500 watts still impressive by virtue of its lower frequency.*

KOWH was one of seven daytime stations on a clear channel, the 660 kHz night time belonging to New York's WNBC. In bringing its application up to date, the daytimer was allowed to double its power from 500 watts to 1000 watts, the last of Omaha's lower power stations to do so (*Broadcasting* May 24, 1965).

More changes were on the way. *National Review* owner William Buckley had hired Peter H. Starr as a KMEQ salesman in 1964. After noticing Starr's sharp and driven business acumen, Buckley promoted him to general manager the following year.

In 1966 Starr and Buckley's *National Review* threw in together and formed Starr Broadcasting with Peter Starr as president. Technically it was a sale of the AM and FM, with Buckley selling to Starr Broadcasting for 475 thousand dollars. In the completed deal on July 22, Buckley owned two-thirds of Starr Broadcasting, Starr getting the other third.

The duo then went on an acquisition spree, which soon included KISD Sioux Falls and KUDL Kansas City. Starr Broadcasting went public in 1969, by then already owning the full legal complement of seven stations.

KOWH and its sister FM finally moved out of the transmitter site studios into new digs in June 1967. The stations set up in the Prom Town House, a motel and dinner lounge complex on the north side of 70th and Dodge Streets. KOIL had done some nighttime remote programming from that site in earlier years, so some of the radio-friendly requirements for a studio were already in place.

(The Prom Town House was heavily damaged in Omaha's 1975 tornado and demolished shortly afterward. No radio station facilities were on the premises at the time.)

The FM adjusted to a Fine Arts format ending the simulcasting with KOWH in October 1967. KOWH 660 continued to air "popular music with news on the half-hour." Some Husker football aired on Saturdays and blocks of religious programming continued on Sundays.

A dramatic format change came in 1968. KOWH prepared to flip to a country music format. It was labeled *Countrypolitan* to shift the genre's image away from hillbilly. Its target was KOOO 1420, also a daytimer, that had owned the country audience since before the decade began.

A "What's Buzzin' Cousin" promo campaign emerged, designed around new calls for *Country*

**kozn KOUNTRY SIX-60**  
660 Kc Sheet No. 26

WEEK OF AUGUST 23 Thru AUGUST 29, 1968

Last Week	This Week	TITLE	ARTIST	Last Week	This Week	TITLE	ARTIST
3	1	MAKA TREE-Redd Niggard		22	21	SHE THINKS I'M ON THAT TRAIN-	Henson Cargil
2	2	ONLY DADDY THAT'LL WALK THE LINE-	Waylon Jennings	27	22	YOU CHANGED EVERYTHING ABOUT ME-	Porter Wagoner
1	3	BIG GIRLS DON'T GET ON A FURNIN'-	Lynn Anderson	28	24	WHAT IS THIS-Boyz n' Invites	
4	4	LET THE WORLD KEEP ON A FURNIN'-	Quincy Jones	31	25	THREE PLAYING LOVE-Charley Peale	
7	5	I'VE TAKEN CARE OF ME-Just Gems		36	23	WHAT CAN I SAY-Ariana Haden	
11	6	A LITTLE BIT LATER DOWN THE LINE-	Robby Stone	38	24	WHAT IS THIS-Boyz n' Invites	
17	7	HAPPY STATE OF MIND-Bill Anderson		43	26	GO ON AT THE LAUGHIN'-Willie Burges	
5	8	ALREADY IT'S HEAVEN-David Houston		46	27	THE GREAT WAY-Just Gems	
14	9	WE'LL GET AWAY SOMEDAY-	Wagoner James	44	28	HEAT IN LINE-Carolee Twitty	
20	10	HARBOR VALLEY-Don-Johnnie C. Riley		47	29	BRAND NEW AND BEEP-Donny Osmond	
6	11	AUTUMN OF MY LIFE-Reddy Anderson		50	40	JOHNNT ONE TIME-Willie Nelson	
21				52	41	THEN YOU CAN TELL ME GOODBYE-	Boyz n' Invites

**YOUR KOUNTRY KOZNS**  
are what's "Happening"  
**TOM RAMBLER**  
7 a.m. to 10 a.m.  
**MIKE BRADLEY**  
6 a.m. to 7 a.m.  
and  
10 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
**JOE MARTIN**  
1 p.m. to 4 p.m.  
**RICK STEWART**  
4 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.  
**THE KOZN KRUISER**  
IS ON THE MOVE  
Get Full Details on  
Giant Radio "660"

**YOUR GIANT COUNTRY COUSIN**  
**kozn** SIX "60"  
SURVEY  
OMAHA  
A STARR GROUP STATION

**WELCOME TO**  
  
**KOZN COUNTRY**

KOZN 660 music surveys, 1968.

*Cousin*, KOZN. It was soon discovered that the KOZN call letters belonged to a ship in the Pacific setting off concerns, but further research determined the ship had been sunk during World War II

Omaha's *Country Cousin* KOZN 660 launched on January 22. KOZN maintained a 60-song Modern Country playlist. Its personalities included KOWH holdovers Mike Bradley and Joe Martin.

KOOO was entrenched with a loyal audience which proved too much for a takeover. KOZN gave it up in early 1971 and that March returned to the KOWH calls for a third time. By this time the station had entered the new decade with new owners poised to take over, and even more changes to come.

### **1110 KFAB- ESTABLISHES A FIRM FOOTING**

KOIL owned the younger demos with its Top 40 personality and promotions format, but the older audience was owned by the market's other major success story, KFAB 1110.

Entering the 1960s, KFAB sought its market dominance through news and information, interspersed with non-offensive music that was a secondary element, the announcers paying little attention to the artists and more to the hourly temperatures in Omaha and Lincoln.

Music did take center stage at one point in 1960 when Program Director Ken Headrick developed the first regular stereophonic program in the Midwest. It involved the two-station method of stereo listening. Separate receivers, one for each station placed on each side of the room, were required for stereo listening. Audiophiles had stereo in homes, available through tapes and records, but stereo broadcasts for the masses was yet a novelty.

Enlisting KFAB AM 1110 and KFAB FM 99.9, the two stations began a regular stereo broadcast of adult-appeal music from 6 to Midnight weekdays. Lyell Bremser announced KFAB was the first station in the Midwest to go into stereo broadcasting on such a wide scale. A three-hour Sunday program was also being planned. (*OWH* Feb 22, 1961).

The two-station stereo effort was short-lived. FM stereo diplexed on one signal became a reality a short time later, in June. Omaha's first stereo FM station arrived that November. KFAB's stereo programs were discontinued by the end of the year.

With its well-planned ascent to a maximum power of 50-thousand watts, KFAB had the most powerful signal in the market.



A new 100-thousand dollar transmitter was purchased and installed in 1962 replacing the mid-1940s Westinghouse. It was a 50-thousand watt RCA Ampliphase transmitter, promising a “richer, fuller sound” (*Lincoln Journal Star* March 6, 1962)

KFAB’s programming provided likable and reliable companionship. Announcers gave frequent time and temp checks for both Omaha and Lincoln while playing carefully selected non-offensive music in between features and newscasts.

Even the overnight *Serenade In The Night* program was perceived as a security blanket in the wee hours, most listeners never realizing that there was no live body beyond a babysitter for the equipment. It was simply automated music interspersed with, “It’s the Night Watch” jingles. *Serenade In The Night* was simulcast on KFAB-FM *Cloud Nine Stereo* at 99.9.

Cementing the companionship was the familiarity of a stable air staff. The *Good Morning Show* in the early 1960s followed a farm hour, then featured Don Cole, with newsman Walt Kavanaugh plus NBC News. Cole remained with KFAB through most of the decade except for a brief stint in Denver in 1967. Hal Rogers joined KFAB in 1961 and did late mornings up to the noontime farm features and livestock markets report. Rogers later left for Des Moines KRNT before returning to Omaha doing some air work and opening a donut shop.

Program Director Ken Headrick, who had been with KFAB since 1954, did the afternoon show. He was followed by Hal Rogers and Walt Kavanaugh who returned for late afternoon music and news.

**KFAB** PROUDLY ANNOUNCES  
ANOTHER LEADERSHIP FEATURE

# WIDE RANGE SOUND

OVER \$100,000 INVESTMENT IS BEING MADE TO INSTALL THE LATEST IN RADIO ENGINEERING: THE NEW RCA AMPLIPHASE 50,000 WATT TRANSMITTER, AND YOU, THE LISTENER, WILL REAP THE DIVIDEND IN RICHER, FULLER SOUND

The KFAB Broadcasting Company is proud to announce that the Federal Communications Commission has granted permission to install the newest type equipment available in the radio electronic industry... RCA's AMPLIPHASE 50,000 Watt Transmitter. Engineers are already at work... and the installation will be complete in the very near future.

KFAB Radio has always been a quality leader in broadcasting for nearly 38 years... thus it naturally follows that KFAB would be alert to the very latest in electronic research and development. Therefore, the transmission of radio information, service, and entertainment should be the product of our progress in its latest form.

This means that the 1110 signal you have so faithfully received for so many years will be greatly improved. The music, news, and information you now enjoy will be made even more enjoyable through KFAB's new WIDE RANGE AMPLIPHASE 50,000 Watt transmitter. From the lowest tones to the highest, you'll experience a richer, fuller, more life-like sound... the ultimate in pleasurable radio listening. Yes, you'll soon agree that there is a greatly improved difference in KFAB's unsurpassed SIGNAL FIDELITY... Exclusive in the Midwest!

THERE'S ALWAYS MORE TO LISTEN FOR ON  
**RADIO KFAB 1110**

*KFAB promoting its technical upgrade, March 1962  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald)*

Kavanaugh awoke at 3:30 a.m. every day for four decades to inform people of the latest news of the morning. He established himself among school kids on snowy mornings as the absolute voice of school closings. Kavanaugh stayed with KFAB until retirement in the 1990s. It is believed Kavanaugh's nearly 42 continuous years of delivering regularly scheduled newscasts was a broadcast record.

Nebraska Cornhusker football further reinforced KFAB's solid image. General Manager Lyle Bremser called the Husker Football games on KFAB for 45 years, having started at KFAB when it was still in Lincoln in 1939. Bremser recalled his most exciting Husker game was the 21-19 comeback win over Colorado in 1966 (*OWH* Sept 9, 1971).

Husker football was so entrenched that it bumped a World Series baseball game in 1965. KFAB was carrying the Series from NBC but on October 9, game three conflicted with the Huskers schedule. KFAB ran with the Huskers that day while KOOO 1420 was given the World Series game.

Indeed, the Huskers program during the 1960s was building under coach Bob Devaney, who also starred on KFAB's pre-game show. Nebraska was on the way to a national championship by 1970. KFAB enjoyed the halo effect of Husker football year-round.

An NBC affiliate since the mid-1950s, KFAB carried the network's hourly newscasts along with commentary features by Morgan Beatty, Chet Huntly, Joe Garagiola, and David Brinkley. On weekends KFAB carried NBC's *Monitor*.

KFAB would continue to grow into the 1970s reaching stratospheric rating numbers that would gain national attention.

## **1290 KOIL Omaha- THE GLORY YEARS**

By the 1960s Don Burden had already acquired a majority interest in KOIL. It was on October 3, 1959, just weeks before the demise of his competition on New Year's morning 1960 when KOWH turned to a format of strings and sonatas. KOIL then turned into a money machine using the Top 40 KOWH Storz formula.

KOIL had won by virtue of being a full-time Top 40 station, mocking daytimer KOWH by calling itself "the station that doesn't run down at sundown." The mocking continued even after the win, with the hook from Harry Belafonte's hit song "All Day All Night, Marianne" reworded for KOIL's all day and all night on-air presence.

Two of KOWH's personalities showed up on KOIL: Frank Allen and Omaha's first DJ, Sandy Jackson. Allen joined late, having bailed on KOWH four months before its format switch and spending nine months at KFAB before joining KOIL. The remaining KOWH jocks moved on--Arch Andrews, Jack Merker, and Henry Busse finding air work in the Denver market.

KOIL Program Director Bob Wilson worked the morning show then later moved to middays. He stayed with KOIL until 1967. Wilson was later quoted as saying, "Other than low pay, the atrocious hours and constant disparaging remarks from those who wouldn't say 'I listen to Rock 'n Roll' to save their lives...we had fun. And it showed in the ratings and the response."

Indeed, Top 40 stations of the day fought the youth image. One way was to point out that parents were already familiar with the station thanks to their kids' musical tastes. The "My Mommy Listens to KOIL" phrase became a regular image liner.

KOIL1290 reinforced the phrase by placing a long-standing billboard on the road from the airport into downtown, reading, "Welcome home. While you've been gone, KOIL has been spending night and day with your wife." National PD Steve Brown is credited with the idea, which he carried over to Burden's other stations in Portland and Indianapolis as well.

Bob Wilson also recalls Burden's early years with his new FM station. Burden purchased a five-month-old local FM, KCOM 96.1, for 25-thousand dollars in 1960 re-christening it KOIL FM. He simulcast KOIL AM programming on the FM, but without ceremony or promotion. It was simply to keep it on the air for the minimum legal hours required by federal regulations.

FM drew very little attention during its early years. Bob Wilson while in morning drive had the duty of powering KOIL FM on at 6 each morning but would forget, sometimes several times in one week. No listeners ever called, but Burden sometimes checked and called with angry reminders.



Front cover of a 1961 KOIL music survey. Don Steele on afternoon drive called himself "The Car Tune Kid."

Some prominent personalities worked the KOIL magic in the 1960s, starting with Omaha's own Sandy Jackson. Jackson had a warm and friendly delivery oozing with smiling confidence. His air shift was primarily afternoons, aimed at housewives before school let out.

In the summertime, Sandy Jackson would do his show “poolside” with the sounds of splashing and shrieks of delight in the background. It sounded authentic. One could almost see Jackson lying in the sun wearing shades and a hat.

KOIL PD in the 1980s, Terry Mason, recalled how surprised and disappointed he was during his first visit to KOIL's Aquila Court studios one summer day in the 1960s. There he saw Sandy doing his show comfortably from the studio, with a tape of the poolside action rolling in the background whenever the mic was on. It was true “theater of the mind.”

Sandy Jackson opened a teen club on New Years' Eve 1964. Sandy's Escape at 6031 Binney Street became quite popular but was deemed a conflict of interest while he was an air personality at KOIL. Jackson left the station and focused on his new business, later opening a second venue in 1967, this one for adults. It was a "sing-along" club called Swinging Doors, at 7768 Cass Street. When live bands became too expensive and teenage crowds became rowdy, the clubs closed down in March 1970. Jackson returned to radio afterward, this time at WOW 590.



*Paul Oscar Anderson in KOIL Aquila Court studio 1962  
(Courtesy: Deane Johnson collection).*

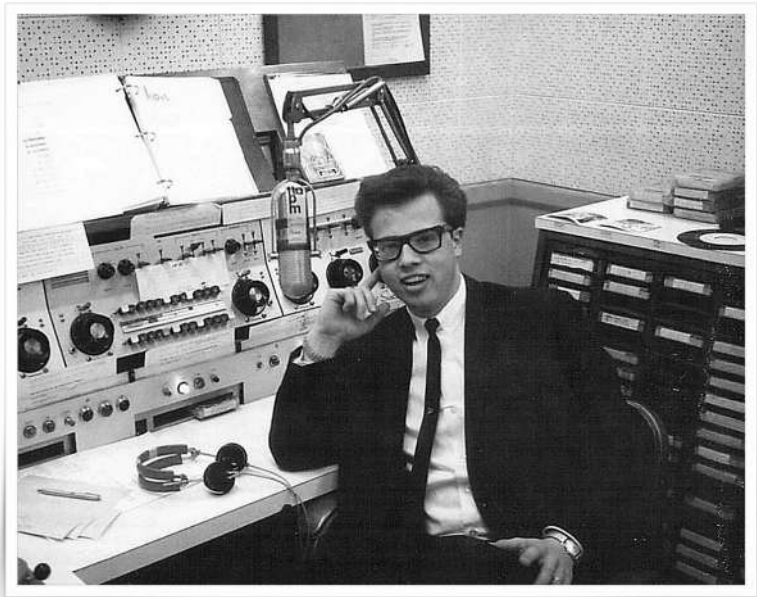
Joe Light, perhaps the closest thing to a shock jock at the time and the most polarizing of KOIL's personalities, started on overnights from the Manawa transmitter site in 1960. He came from Denver where Steve Brown had hired him for Burden's KICN. Light went from overnights to evenings, and later, afternoons. He also did stints whenever needed at Burden's other stations, KISN Portland, and WIFE Indianapolis.

Paul Oscar Anderson (real name Paul E. Brown) was the booming voice on KOIL's morning show in 1962. POA, as he was sometimes called, got his start in Iowa at KJFJ Webster City and KWMT Ftort Dodge. From

KOIL he worked the other Don Burden stations in Portland and Indianapolis before going on to WMAQ Chicago, NBC New York, KCBQ San Diego, then KRLA and KROQ Los Angeles. POA says, "I worked at 37 broadcasting facilities in a little over 35 years."

A young Don Revert came aboard in 1962, renamed The Real Don Steele by KOIL National Program Director Steve Brown. He held court afternoons as “The Car Tune Kid.” Steele later became a legendary jock in Los Angeles on KHJ.

DJ Hal Widsten, Jim Hunter on the air, recalls upon his arrival the staff did three-hour shifts. “I was hired by KOIL Program Director Mike McCormick (Hankins) to be the production director at KOIL in 1964. The studios were in the Aquila Court building in downtown Omaha.”



*Johnny Mitchell (Kris Erik Stevens) and the new board at KOIL Aquila Court studio 1965 (Courtesy: Kris Erik Stevens collection).*

Widsten lists the line up at the time starting with morning drive 6 to 9 Bob Wilson, 9 to Noon Frank "Coffee Head" Allen, Noon to 3 Johnny Mitchell (Kris Erik Stevens), 3 to 7 Gary Mack (Gary Gears), 7 to Midnight Todd Chase, and Midnight to 6 in the morning Frank Hall. Widsten later went to KGW Portland, Oregon and programmed Top 40 directly against Burden’s KISN.

Kris Erik Stevens, using the house name Johnny Mitchell at the time, went on to WLS Chicago before opening his own successful voice work studio in Los Angeles.



*Todd Chase, KOIL 1964.*

Gary Gears was drafted into the Army and replaced by Gene Okerlund, who would become announcer Mean Gene for the World Wrestling Federation. Gears went to WLS Chicago after returning from the service.

Night jock Todd Chase (Bill Neeck) whose midnight sign off, “Good night, Lovey” kept many a girl up past her bedtime, moved to KQV Pittsburgh, WQAM Miami, and later became a station owner in the St. Louis area.

Frank Hall (Bramhall) went into TV weather on Channel 6 and later became a fixture on non-commercial stations KIOS and KVNO.

PD Mike McCormick went on to program KQV Pittsburgh then to WLS Chicago as PD of that Top 40 powerhouse.

Using different air names for one's own moniker took root in the earlier years of personality radio. One reason was for easy listener recall. If a listener being surveyed couldn't recall what station was a favorite but remembered the program or DJ, that station would receive proper credit.

An additional reason was the practice of using "house names" for DJs, mainly because a jingle was already produced with that name. Kris Erik Stevens recalls being given the name Johnny Mitchell because there was already a KOIL jingle from an earlier jock with that name.

The practice even followed Mitchell to Detroit. At CKLW 800 he was given the air name Billy Mack to match a house name and jingle on hand. It wasn't until his next gig at WQXI 790 Atlanta that he could become Kris Erik Stevens.

Another instance happened when Bob Wilson was moved from mornings to middays. Jim Hunter was brought in from KISN to take over mornings. Hal Widsten was already using the Hunter air name at KOIL, so the second Hunter was renamed Roger W. Morgan.

The Morgan name was patterned after a successful morning personality on the West Coast, Robert W. Morgan, at KHJ 930. Program consultant Drake-Chenault was riding high with KHJ in Los Angeles and several other stations around the country.

Steve Brown readily admitted stealing ideas from the trend-setting Drake formats, a practice quite common in radio. Brown made no secret of this when initiating the Morganizing stunt on KOIL, quoted years later as saying, "...the fact that we stole, the germ of the idea from KHJ, L.A., is 'immaterial, your honor'. Hell, it was only fair...we gave THEM, The Real Don Steele!"



*Roger W. Morgan and Don W. Burden, 1968  
(Courtesy: Roger W. Morgan).*

Roger W. Morgan began doing what he calls "the Morganizing stuff that Burden and Steve Brown were stealing from Drake," making it into a high profile a morning feature.

Morganizing was a prank phone call to people who were set up, nominated by friends or relatives. The "victims" would be phoned and unknowingly recorded during the put-on, then let in on the joke at the end. Most were good sports about it, though some calls that went wrong went un-aired. Morgan recalls one in particular:

"When we reached the point that it was difficult to reach a 'victim,' I began searching for known names OUTSIDE of the Omaha market to 'Morganize.' Both Johnny Carson and Dick Cavett have strong ties, as you know, to Omaha. Dick had recently taken over a nighttime TV position and Johnny wasn't pleased with the competition.

"On a long shot of actually being able to reach Dick Cavett, I placed the call to his network studio, posing as a Hispanic cargo flight employee at Epply Airport. I briefly gave details about the nature of the call to the young voice on the other end...we had received a shipment of 'birds of paradise' from a 'Johnny Carson,' delivered by cargo plane in Omaha to the attention of Dick Cavett. MAJOR PROBLEM...the birds had broken out of their cages and nearly destroyed the inside of the plane! That's as far as I got...Dick Cavett was on the line almost immediately, obviously very concerned and noticeably shaken by the news. The bit seemed to be going almost TOO well...heartfelt apologies from Dick Cavett followed by a promise to pay for whatever cleanup was required.

"What I DIDN'T KNOW when I placed the call was that Dick Cavett received the news of the birds on the plane while sitting in the office of network executives who were giving him the sad news...'Your show has just been canceled by the network!'"

"The bit was becoming terribly uncomfortable as I tried to giggle my way into the inevitable line, "You've just been Morganized". By that point, I sensed that Dick Cavett was on the verge of a total breakdown and what COULD have become the funniest Morganizing EVER, turned into a back and forth between Don Burden and TV network attorneys trying to sort through why ANYONE would call Dick Cavett with such an outlandish message!

"Needless to say, 'Morganizing' was a double-edged sword for me...took me to new heights and frightening moments, simultaneously."

Recording phone calls before disclosing that it was being recorded was later deemed a nuisance and outlawed by the FCC. But Morgan's "Morganizing" lived on in taped replays.

KOIL took on the “Good Guys” imaging in 1963, an idea perfected by Todd Storz protégé Ruth Meyer at WMCA 570. With the teamwork and shenanigans of the KOIL personalities, National PD Steve Brown admitted “our stealing ‘The GOOD GUYS’ from PD Ruth Myers' WMCA New York, was a NATURAL.”

Along with it came the smiley “Happy Face,” the phrase and logo together becoming ubiquitous on station promotional pieces such as music surveys, stickers, caps, and T-shirts.

The Good Guys made numerous personal appearances. There were record hops for client events, schools, and station promotion events. Kris Erik Stevens fondly recalls his Johnny Mitchell Pool Parties with "Life Girls" in place of lifeguards. He also was the prize in the “Win A Date With Johnny Mitchell” contest. The date, complete with a tux, corsage, and flowers included a chauffeured ride in a white Rolls Royce to dinner at an upscale restaurant



*Johnny Mitchell (Kris Erik Stevens), emcees a KOIL concert. The KOIL Good Guys logo is displayed on the stage backdrop (Courtesy: Kris Erik Stevens collection).*

In 1964 it was Beatlemania. Promotions connected with the Beatles were everywhere. KOIL General Manager Steve Shepard noted that with five hits on the playlist at once, the group would receive airplay on the station upwards to 20 times a day.

When the Beatles’ *Hard Days Night* film premiered in Omaha, a KOIL DJ was stationed at each Omaha theater that was playing the movie. They reported back that most in the theater audience never heard the film’s dialogue because of the screaming fans.

The Beatles never came to Omaha, but KOIL did send ten contest winners to Indianapolis to see the Beatles perform on September 3, 1964.

KOIL arranged the next best thing to a Beatles concert in Omaha, bringing in the Beach Boys for a performance at Rosenblatt Stadium in July 1964. They were equally huge artists during the British Invasion years and shared the Capitol Records label with the Beatles.



(Those two rock groups were a bonanza for Capitol Records. DJs would comment among themselves how they could always immediately find a Beatles or Beach Boys record in a stack of 45s by just pulling out any one that was slightly warped. It reinforced a belief that Capitol Records feathered its profits by using cheaper vinyl on its two sure winners.)

The KOIL News Department also had its share of stars: Some of the big names were Lyle Dean, later of WLS Chicago and ABC News fame, Bob Benson who later headed ABC News, and Fred Winston who became a zany WLS Chicago morning personality.



*KOIL Aquila Court newsroom with Chuck Hoffmann 1967  
(Courtesy: Gary Emenitove, Chuck Hoffmann).*

News Director Bob Benson (Bengsten) was brought in from WIRE Indianapolis in 1965 to create a news department at KOIL and develop some credibility for what had basically been a “rip and read” wire copy news operation.

Making the job somewhat easier for him was the fact that Burden and another radio pioneer, Gordon McClendon, were good friends. One of the things that Don Burden wanted for his stations was the kind of news image that McClendon had created at his Dallas and Houston stations, KLIF 1190 and KILT 610.

Burden was a big fan of the McClendon style of action reporting with mobile units cruising the city and going on the air to report breaking news. For Benson, the corporate checkbook was open to acquiring the equipment needed to do the same in Omaha.

For KOIL, Benson launched two well-marked mobile units named after the Nebraska Football Team, "Big Red." They were station wagons, each fully equipped with a two-way radio system and police monitors for every frequency in the area. Burden loved to hear both units reporting on the air back-to-back

Says Benson, "I generally worked 12 hours a day, six days a week, and spent most of the rest of the time talking radio and drinking beer at The Brothers Lounge with the other members of the staff. At one time, KOIL was able to say that-- even though we were a rock and roll radio station-- we

provided the Omaha community with the most news provided by the largest radio-only news staff in the market."

PD Deane Johnson recalls a story that describes Benson's tenacity: "Richard Nixon was due to arrive in town. Burden assigns Bob Benson the task of getting Nixon to record promos for KOIL. Now, most of us would have quit our jobs before trying such a task. But not Benson. He actually got through to Nixon and got him to record 'This is Richard Nixon urging you to be a KOIL Good Guy and drive to arrive alive'. We played the heck out of it."

Benson went on to WLS Chicago and KGO in San Francisco, and in 1974 founded AP Radio's bureau in Washington, DC. He didn't stop there, becoming VP of News and soon Executive VP at ABC Radio in 1978 until 1993.

The Burden-McLendon friendship resulted in national news when the pair were expelled from Bertrand Russell's "War Crimes Tribunal" in Stockholm, Sweden in May 1967. They had been filing news reports for their stations and were thrown out for taking pictures.

The two were photographing North Vietnamese waving red flags in the audience. At issue was that Burden alleged the tribunal was meant to embarrass the U.S. and was staged by North Vietnam.

Burden was a promoter more than a programmer. He had pros to handle the music and news but never let go of the promotions. When asked what makes a good promotion, Burden singled out audience involvement. "You've got to get the audience involved, and once you've got them involved, you've got your hands in their pockets." (Don Burden interview, *Hitmakers*, 1984)

Burden always sold these promotions to advertisers though they were staged as *his* station event. Some successful KOIL promotions included:

- The Big Black Box on a big trailer was hauled all over town for a month, with on-air clues as to what was inside.



*KOIL News Director Bob Benson returning from assignment, January 1966 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald)*

- The Big Kahuna, where DJ Don Walker was disguised as a tall Polynesian chief who made appearances at events and remotes. Walker's makeup was so good at one appearance that as a joke he hit on a close friend's girl while his pal stood by slowly simmering to a boil.
- The KOIL Bubblemobile, parked outside during remotes, creating a bubble display. It was found the bubbles would leave a stain when they burst on cars, resulting in some claims for damage.
- The KOIL Trick or Treat House at Halloween. KOIL gave out transistor radios to kids who would ask, "Is this the KOIL Trick or Treat House?" The radios were distributed to sponsors to take home and give out. The added benefit to Burden was impressing the sponsor by witnessing KOIL's reach.
- The KOIL Easter Egg Hunts replaced the outlawed treasure hunts.
- The Mystery Santa Claus was a top businessman, spelled "client," in town with clues aired until he was identified, the prize winners announced on Christmas Day.
- The Fourth of July entertainment and fireworks at Rosenblatt Stadium became a KOIL tradition into the mid-1970s.
- The KOIL Fumble-Foot Five basketball team, made up of KOIL's personalities (and occasional ringers), would play high schools and/or faculty, scoring and clowning around on the court for charity.

One of the most unique KOIL traditions was at Christmas with the KOIL Carol Tree debuting in 1961. A large evergreen tree was festooned with light globes, flickering together in time and brightness with the music, various colors flashing in accordance with the notes.

The Carol Tree lights were a thing of beauty, attracting listeners to park and watch while listening on the car radio. The tree would be located at a high traffic site, usually at a large shopping center parking lot, client-involved of course. The first location was at Skagway at 72nd and L Streets. One year the lights adorned small trees on downtown lamp posts on 16th Street between Douglas and Harney Streets.

The lighting system was leased from Mobilcolor of New York and was quite pricey. In 1965 the Star Stations designed and built its own systems and continued the tradition, that is, when they worked.

KOIL engineers Jerry Weist and Charlie Goodrich hated the lights, as the electronics sometimes died and they had to go out on cold Nebraska nights to troubleshoot and make repairs. Don Burden would drive by the tree every night on his way home. If it wasn't working perfectly, which was much of the time, the engineers got a call. On top of that, they had to re-bulb the 450 globes with red, green, and blue lights every year.

After a number of seasons the engineers won, and the tree lights went into storage in the KOIL basement. They were brought out once more in 1988 when new owners tried to bring back the nostalgia. True to form, they were a pain to keep functioning properly, and it was their last appearance.

KOIL engineering also dealt with a nighttime signal problem that distressed Burden. KOIL's pattern that allowed for its 5000 watts full power operation at night was designed when the station's new transmitter site was just a few years old. The pattern that would be needed was unforeseen at the time. As luck would have it, one of the two suppressed signal nulls in what became the required night pattern went right through Omaha. In reality, this was a minor problem little noticed by most city listeners, though listeners in Fremont would hear KOIL's signal drop out at each sunset and were forced to tune in KOMA 1520 Oklahoma City or WLS 890 Chicago for Top 40 at night..

The popular story is that the final straw came when Burden learned the null went right through Tiner's Drive-In at 42nd and Dodge Streets. Tiner's was the city's number one teen hangout with traffic that surpassed the scenes in "American Graffiti." It was the place to see and be seen for the high school set, buying burgers and malts, their car radios all blaring rock and roll. It was usually KOIL's music and DJs, so it's not clear that reception was ever a real problem at Tiner's, but it was at least the principal that rankled Burden.

To remedy this problem, Burden moved the transmitter site westward from Iowa into Nebraska on the city's southern edge where the northwest-directed null would safely pass west of the city limits. A site was found at South 60th and Harrison Streets right on the county line between Douglas and Sarpy counties. A new three-tower array for KOIL was built along with an accompanying small cinder-block transmitter building.

It was a much lesser facility than its former home where three self-supporting towers were fed from a roomy two-level brick transmitter building. The new site had three simple guyed towers with a tiny building for the transmitter. There was just enough space to install a small mixer board, tape decks and turntables for an overnight DJ.

KOIL temporarily used its old 1000-watt RCA transmitter while moving the Gates transmitter to Omaha. The RCA afterward was kept for standby use at KOIL's new studios well into the 1980s.

The new transmitter site received FCC permission to light up in January 1966. The Lake Manawa towers were dismantled and the building was sold and turned into a tavern, then ironically, a church.

As transmitters and directional phaser units became more stable, the FCC began approving remote control operation for directional systems, meaning a First Phone license holder/DJ required for

directional operation was no longer needed at the transmitter site itself but could instead work from the studio site.

KOIL received permission in September 1970 to operate remotely while directional at night. The nighttime DJs, no longer marooned at the lonely and cramped transmitter site, could finally broadcast from the main studios.



*KOIL AM and FM new building near 90th and Dodge Streets 1968. The two poles on top support a long wire for the auxiliary transmitter, KOIL's old 1000 watt RCA transmitter from the 1930s now housed at the studio site for backup. (Courtesy: Deane Johnson collection).*

By this time KOIL's studios were at 8901 Indian Hills Drive, near 90th and West Dodge Road, not far from Burden's home at 2040 South 85th Avenue. The transmitter and tower site may have been spartan, but the opposite was true for Burden's new studios that opened in 1968.

Burden spared little expense in building his 1.5 million dollar showcase headquarters. Just like KOIL's first building in Council Bluffs in 1925, the structure was built exclusively for broadcasting, and with much more space.

The showcase three-story building was sleek and modern, designed by nationally-known HDR, Inc., an Omaha-based architectural, engineering, and consulting firm. The structure had prominent white concrete squared columns all around, set off by floor-to-ceiling dark glass windows in between.

The main floor held studios and offices for the AM and FM, the second floor was corporate offices for the Star Stations, and the basement level held a computer room, Bridal Fair offices (another Burden enterprise, on over a hundred stations), storage space, and on the east end, a spacious indoor multiple vehicle garage

A long terrace along the building's front led from the west parking lot to the building entrance on the north side. The terrace route would pass the floor-to-ceiling studio windows that faced north over the terrace with a view of the busy 90th and Dodge Streets intersection. Listeners could come up and wave to the on-air personality, holding up signs for requests.

The October 16 grand opening for the new KOIL/Star Stations Building was in a typical Burden festive style. It began with a celebration for 700 invited guests at the Happy Hollow Country Club. Comic impersonator David Fry opened for Harry Belafonte at the event.

Steve Brown describes picking up the headliner: "When I met Harry at the airport, on the drive into town, he read me a letter of complaint from Bob Gibson's wife, saying he shouldn't be appearing at a segregated country club like Happy. So Harry asked me if there would be 'any Negroes' in the audience, and I was proud to answer, 'yes, several', including my friend the veterinarian Dr. Art Pittmon, and quite a few others. Harry asked why will THEY be there? I replied: 'Because they're our friends, TOO.' That closed the subject, and Harry, at Happy, was terrific."



*KOIL Building, view from its northeast corner, 1968.*

(Bob Gibson formerly of the St. Louis Cardinals was part owner of KOWH 660 and KOWH FM 94.1 at the time, bitterly struggling with an African-American format.)

Brown also reveals Don Burden's generosity before the party. "The formally attired at a 'pre-party' at Don's house, all the wives of our executive employees were invited to 'go over there to the coat closet, and pick something out, and KEEP it!' (the coat closet was FILLED with mink stoles!)"

Because it was the *Star Stations*, William Shatner of TV's *Star Trek* worked as the building's doorman for the open house event. As visitors entered, they were greeted in the lobby with large

backlit pictures of the station's personalities on the far right wall. An elevator for the three-level building was on the left. The door straight ahead to the hallway was secured, its lock controlled by a button on the receptionist's desk. The carpeted hallway led to offices and conference rooms to the left, and AM and FM operations to the right.

One office for public affairs included a plush couch and chairs and a small recording booth with a microphone for guests to come in and record their scripted public service announcements. The amateur voices provided by the likes of kids, state patrolmen, and leaders of the Junior League would describe their charitable events or simply beseech safe driving. The finished spots were tagged with KOIL's deep-voiced image announcer, "KOIL cares when it counts." The impact of airing listener's voices greatly enhanced the station's perceived involvement in the community and hopefully would impress the FCC which by now was scrutinizing Don Burden's operations.

Upstairs were the corporate offices. The one directly above the lobby and control room was Don Burden's massive office with its own restroom facilities, real currency embedded in the toilet seat. Burden's desk was illuminated by a huge circular light sunken into the ceiling directly above. Behind the desk were windows with the view northward to Dodge Street.

One DJ remarked about the large sunken overhead light during an intense management meeting in Burden's office. Burden was temporarily called away leaving the sweaty group behind to sit in silence. Looking up at the circular light, he broke the quiet with, "I thought that thing followed him when he left the room."

The computer in the bottom level was to handle traffic, program logs, and billing. Computers were in the early stages of development at the time, huge, with racks of equipment and reels of tape taking up a full room. Also, they were far from trouble-free.

Deane Johnson says, "Burden wanted to computerize. Nothing was yet available for broadcast, so he had a huge room built for computers with special air conditioning and static proof floors. There were a couple of programmers in there all the time I was there, but they never got anything going. They would come out once in a while and ask a question about spots on the log, or something else stupid, but never produced anything." By the early 1970s the computer was functional, but with its share of glitches.

There were five rooms in a row for the studios. Going westward from the receptionist desk where a door led to the first room was the FM automation. The receptionist was responsible for changing tapes and loading spots. A soft alarm bell would signal when a tape was nearing its end.

From the FM room, all the studio walls had large soundproof windows with a view to the next studio all the way down to the last studio.

The KOIL control room was next to the FM room. The control board fronted the seated personality in a wrap-around island in the middle of the room.

Three cart machine slots for music were at tabletop level just below the board, two more cart machines were above a turntable on the right. Another turntable and the record bins were to the left of the operator.

The next room adjacent was the newsroom, equipped with police scanners and teletypes. The board was set up for call-out interviews, taking feeds, editing, and delivering live newscasts.

Two production rooms were at the end, the far room eventually converted to an FM studio for live operation in the 1970s.

There was yet another production room across the hall from the first two. Going back up the hall, came the music library that was equipped with phones for music research and the request line extension used by the request line girls tabulating incoming calls.

The break room was next, directly across from the control room. It became a popular place for coffee and gossip.

Also hidden away in the building was the old 1000-watt RCA transmitter from 1937 that had been in regular use up to 1957. It was now an auxiliary transmitter, with a single wire antenna running the length of the building's roof, pressed into service on rare occasions when the main transmitter went down.

The auxiliary transmitter coverage was poor and its audio on the DJs monitors was annoyingly distorted, but coverage was believed by management to be good enough to continue airing spots at the full rate, keeping fingers crossed that sponsors wouldn't notice and complain.

On the other end of the building was the driven and hard-working KOIL sales staff. They had a good product to sell and their commissions were lucrative. Sales meetings were twice daily, at the start and end of each day, and many evenings were spent entertaining clients on the station trade outs. Burden gave a gold watch to salesmen who reached the million-dollar mark in sales.

KOIL was riding a crest. At one point KOIL had three people on duty during the dead-quiet overnights: the on-air personality, a request line girl, and a newsman.



The zaniness of the air-staff resulted in pranks both on and off the air. One of the off-air pranks was Roger W. Morgan bringing a huge, live buffalo into Burden's prized KOIL building late one Saturday afternoon. Morgan recalls, "Don Burden had published a book of 'do's and don'ts,' and since none of them included any restrictions on buffaloes, I felt that I wasn't out of line to have the bison delivered to the KOIL lobby for a brief photo with a small, brave (and somewhat petrified) group of KOIL employees."

"After a quick photo in the lobby," Morgan continues, "We put the buffalo on the elevator for that short but shaky ride to the upper floor offices of Don Burden where I managed one more quick photo of the buffalo behind Mr. Burden's desk."

I think Don Burden may have been shown the picture some years later, but I'm not sure."

Another prank was at the expense of Joe Light during a promotional event he was emceeding at the 76th and Dodge Drive-In Theater. Roger W. Morgan recounts, "I arranged for a concrete truck to come into the drive-in and pull up beside Joe's car and fill it with concrete. Joe commented on the concrete truck when it entered the drive-in theater...he was a brilliant ad libber. As the truck circled the drive-in, it pulled up beside Joe's car and again, Joe commented on the fact that the driver had pulled 'pretty close' to Joe's pride and joy."

"At that point, the driver lowered that long tube into Joe's open car window and hit the switch. Joe watched in absolute horror as the car began to fill with cement. One of the coolest things was watching the tail lights come on as the cement hit the brake pedal. Then, one by one, the tires exploded."

"Perhaps the greatest moment, though, came when I was forced to call a trucking company two days later to remove the car from the drive-in. By that time, the car weighed several thousand pounds and the concrete had hardened to stone. We were listening to the police monitor in the KOIL newsroom when the police radioed in that a truck carrying a car filled with cement had broken the trailer in half at 72nd and Dodge."

Morgan says Joe's car was valued "high side"...maybe \$400. "I replaced the car with one that I bought from Nathan Novak for \$1000.00... Joe came out WAY ahead on that deal."

Burden's empire continued to grow in the 1960s. In November 1964 he bought WISH AM and FM Indianapolis for 1.25 million. Calls were changed to WIFE AM and FM, a nod to the targeted housewife listener.

But, expansion soon stalled out. Burden sought to buy WIST Charlotte in 1964 but withdrew when it became apparent the FCC scrutiny he was drawing would be a problem.

The WIST offer was for 225 thousand dollars. Burden was listed for 74% interest in the purchasing group. Among the other parties were KOIL employees Steve Brown, Steve Shepard, and long-time engineer Gerald Weist. The deal went no further when the FCC requested a hearing based on Burden's past penalties. Burden declined and dropped the purchase plan. (*Broadcasting* Jan 11, 1965)

Storm clouds were forming on the horizon. Don Burden had run-ins with the FCC as early as 1963. That year, a two-thousand dollar fine for KISN Portland was levied for improper station identification. The hourly legal ID, the requirement being call letters followed immediately by the city of license, was hidden in the weather forecast introduction, "KISN Vancouver Radar Weather." It was ruled that there was not enough of a pause between the city of license and the rest of the sentence to qualify as a legal ID.

Burden paid the fine, then angered the FCC with an ad he placed in *Broadcasting* magazine headlining it, "The most expensive pause that refreshes." Burden later admitted the ad was a mistake.

Several years later in December 1967, his Indianapolis station WIFE was given a shortened renewal for improper use of broadcast ratings.

More alleged misconduct charges followed, all a prelude to the 1970's events resulting in KOIL's stunning fall from the top.

## **1420 KOOO Omaha- MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE RANCH**

Country-formatted KOOO 1420 entered the 1960s getting new owners. Just two years old, the station owned by James Fenlon was airing its "Swing Western 40" when purchased by Pier-San Broadcasting for \$275 thousand, the deal closing on June 23, 1960.

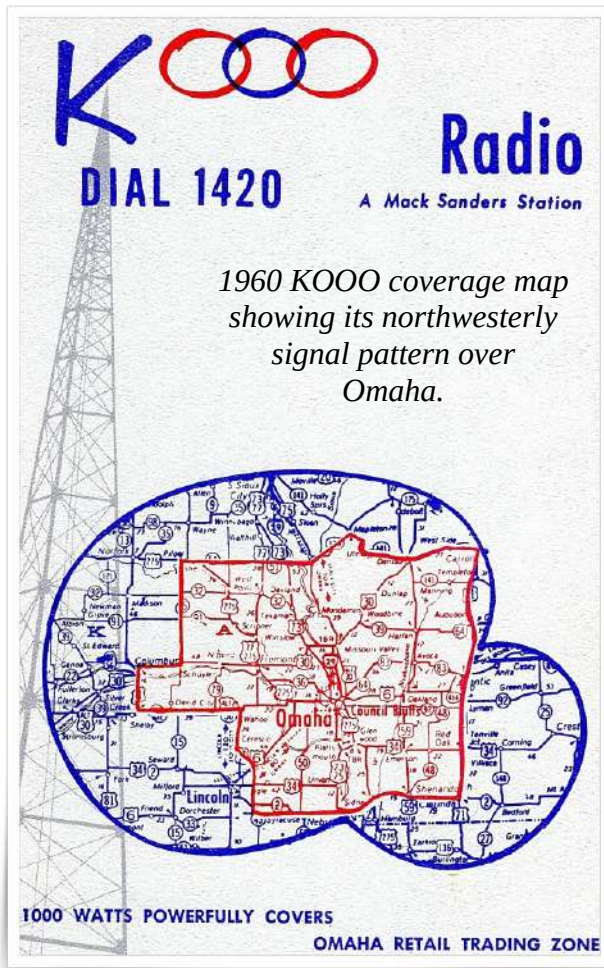


KOOO 1962.

Pier-San was country music entertainers Webb Pierce and Mack Sanders who found earlier success with a country music station in Wichita.

Sanders was a disc jockey, bandleader, and singer who began his country career as a radio personality in Birmingham, Alabama. By 1951, he was a country disc jockey at KFH 1330 in Wichita, Kansas.

Pierce was a well-known country artist dating back to the 1950s. He was described as an American honky tonk vocalist, songwriter, and guitarist, charting number-one hits during the 1960s. Pierce was the busy recording artist while Sanders headed up Pier-San Broadcasting.



KOOO was the second station for the duo. Their station KSIR 900 in Wichita was the first, having started up just two years earlier. It, too, was a daytime-only station finding success with a country format. Sanders eventually created a radio empire that included stations in nine markets, including Lincoln and Nashville.

Mack Sanders brought in air talent that had a good understanding of country music, starting with well-known country DJ and former bandleader Lee Nichols as DJ and General Manager. Nichols stayed until leaving for KRMG Tulsa in 1962, but rejoined Mack Sanders at his Kansas stations, KFRM Concordia and KSIR Wichita, later in the 1960s. Pier-San partner Jim Treat took over management of KOOO in 1964 for the next 12 years.

Other air personalities included Buddy McCall, Ezra Hawkins, and Slim Everhart "The Singing cowboy from Texas" who began his radio career in 1936 on KFAB then joined WOW in 1947 with various shows of his own. Hawkins had

performed on KMA in 1950, part of that station's live music line-up that also included Mack and Jeannie Sanders and the Everly Brothers' family.

Engineer Don Denver joined the station in its first year with Pier-San becoming a popular personality and staying with KOOO for 18 years. In the early years, Denver did a combo shift, DJing his show from KOOO's cinder block transmitter building while manning the directional broadcast equipment. The site and its two towers were isolated in an Iowa cornfield, about a half-mile south of

the South Omaha Bridge Road. Listeners are often surprised about how often DJs work in such solitary and lonely environments.

Another lasting element at KOOO was its hour-long polka show weekdays at 4. The station's signal was particularly strong in South Omaha, the center of the city's Eastern European population.

KOOO's office and studios later left the Livestock Exchange Building in the busy South Omaha Stockyards for new quarters at 1910 California Street, formerly the site of a recording company. Studios and offices moved once again around the mid-1960s to 102 North 48th Street, near 48th and Dodge Streets.

Mack Sanders continued to make public appearances with his band at country shows. In 1963 he hosted a weekly television show on KETV channel 7, *Country Music Jamboree*. By 1965 he was no longer calling his band the Ranch Boys but the KOOO Band.

Sanders and his country music contacts in 1965 further reinforced KOOO as Omaha's Country & Western station with live concerts featuring well-known acts, Sanders often including himself on the playbill.

**Coca Cola PRESENTS KOOO Top Tunes**

BUDDY McCALL      LEE NICHOLS      DON DENVER

March 19, 1962  
"IN ORBIT"

1. You Are My Life - All My Love	W. Pierce
2. Willingly	S. Coley - W. Nelson
3. Little Bitty Tear	W. Jackson
4. Unloved, Unwanted	K. Wells
5. She Got You	P. Cline
6. Misery Loves Company	P. Wagoner
7. 20 Miles From Shore	H. Hawkins
8. Aching, Breaking Heart	G. Jones
9. That's My Pa	S. Woley
10. Loosing Your Love	J. Reeves
11. I Let It Slip Away	F. Young
12. Charlie's Shoes	B. Walker
13. Sometimes I'm Tempted	M. Robbins

KOOO 1962 top songs playlist. Co-owner Webb Pierce unsurprisingly at number one.

He brought in friend Jimmy Dean to the Civic Auditorium in May for a show that sold out despite inclement weather. In a September 1968 show the headliners were Buck Owens and Merle Haggard, plus Bonnie Owens, Charlie Pride, and Freddie Hart.

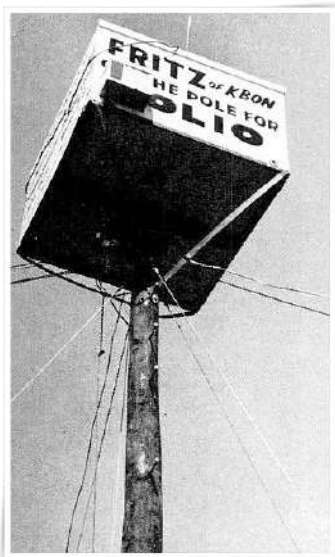
Competition for KOOO arrived in 1968 when KOWH 660 changed calls to KOZN 660 on January 22, becoming *Omaha's Country Cousin*. KOOO was ready, having already tightened its playlist the previous March from 40 to 30 records.

KOOO immediately picked up the Mutual Broadcasting System when 660 dropped the network in its move to country. For the rest of the decade KOOO ran the net's newscasts on the half-hour, supplementing its local top of the hour newscasts.

KOOO was well established among country fans. KOZN's "Modern Country" proved no match for KOOO's Traditional Country. The competition lasted three years ending in February 1971 when KOZN dropped the format and went back to its KOWH call letters. KOOO would continue into the 1970s soon adding a sister FM station.

### 1490 KBON- TALK RADIO COMES TO OMAHA

KBON 1490 entered the 1960s with new owners. Goldenrod Broadcasting had just purchased the station from Inland Broadcasting in September 1959. KBON had the reputation of playing adult pop and standards music with twice-hourly newscasts. The station was affiliated with the Mutual Broadcasting System and had picked up Omaha Cardinals baseball called by Don Hill in 1958 when it was dropped by KOIL.



*Fritz' home atop a pole in downtown Omaha 1959.*

KBON was broadcasting around the clock, having already joined the move to 24-hour broadcasting in 1959 with the hiring of a charismatic bartender from Ross' Steak House, Fritz Johnson. Simply known as Fritz, he was hired to jock the new overnight shift, *Milkman's Matinee*, a show name copied from WNEW New York.

To promote its move to overnight broadcasting, KBON did a well-publicized stunt by having Fritz take up round-the-clock residence atop a pole in front of the Douglas County Courthouse. The promotion was "Fritz of Omaha's KBON, On the

Pole for Polio," a fund-raiser for the 1959 Polio Drive. Fritz spent two weeks in the box, doing broadcasts and live check-ins from time to time.



*Fritz "Johnson" Bader at KETV in the early 1960s.*

There was a payphone at the bottom of the pole so listeners could stop by, put money in, and talk to Fritz while he stayed in his little house. A mini-scandal erupted when it was reported that Fritz's bartender friends were sending up cocktails via rope and basket.

Lyle Davis, just out of the Army and seeking a career in radio, was hired to assist Fritz during the stunt. Davis recalls Fritz as quite a character: "He wore a beret, close-cropped hair, mustache, was muscular, was something of a hippie, into jazz; drove a hearse (favorite saying, 'you haven't lived till you've been laid in a hearse')."

"He kept piranha fish in an aquarium at his apartment, smoked marijuana, was a great ladies man . . . lived the life of a bachelor with a glamorous life. He was also an excellent archer... They needed someone to spin records while Fritz slept on the flagpole. That was me and my introduction to radio."

Fritz gained notoriety several years later when it was discovered he had a double identity. He had married while in Omaha, and by that time was a news/sports announcer at television station KETV 7. Fritz was discovered to be Larry Bader of Akron, Ohio, and he still had a wife there. Bader had vanished on a fishing trip four days before "Fritz" arrived in Omaha. With no signs of criminal intent, Fritz escaped bigamy charges. Larry/Fritz died in 1966.

Lyle Davis continued on KBON's *Milkman's Matinee* airing from midnight to 6 a.m., then did news twice an hour until 8 a.m., followed by doing the police beat known as the "cop shop" from downtown police headquarters. He then went to classes at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, worked another part-time job, and slept a few hours until repeating the cycle.

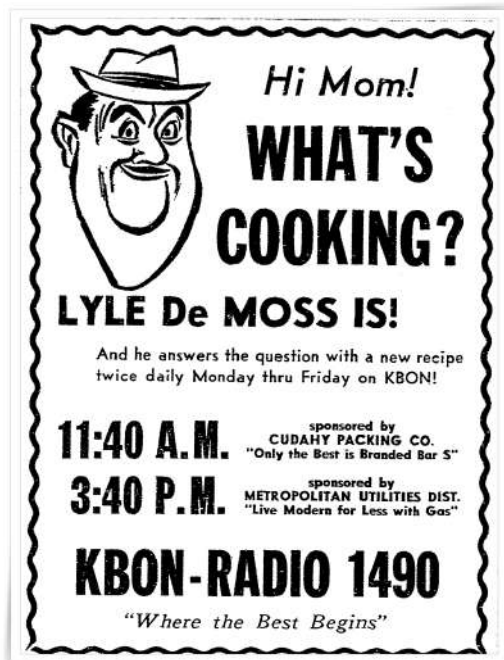
KBON's emphasis for the 1960s would be news. The identifier line "KBON People Know What's Going On" was begun.

Omaha native Frank Scott returned to Omaha in 1960 from KVOA TV in Tucson to become news director at KBON 1490. He had earlier been a news reporter for KMTV Channel 3 while studying at UNO.

KBON's program director was Jim Price, who joined the station in 1959 after a short stint at Omaha's newest station, KOOO 1420. Price had earlier worked for Todd Storz' KOWH and Don Burden's KOIL. Price held a Master's degree in music and did side work with the Omaha Symphony for years. He left KBON toward the end of the 1960s to start work on establishing an FM station for the Omaha Public Schools. Price became the founder, and later manager, of that station, KIOS FM 91.5.

Meanwhile, owners Goldenrod Broadcasting made some upgrades to KBON's signal. Since signing on during WW II the station had been running a lowly 250 watts. A power increase to 1000 watts was granted in late 1960 when most Class IV stations were permitted to do so but for daytime operation only. A new transmitter was installed in April 1962.

The station rejoined the ABC network in June 1962 when the net was dropped by KSWI. With it came Paul Harvey, Alex Drier (having joined ABC after 21 years at NBC), and Don McNeil's *Breakfast Club*.



*Lyle DeMoss KBON 1964 re-invents himself as a culinary host (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).*

Goldenrod tried to sell the station in 1963.

Information Radio of Nebraska offered \$325 thousand which included a no-compete for the owners. Information Radio was a subsidiary of Profit Research, a New York corporation that also owned a Connecticut station. Sale approval from the FCC came the following January but the deal failed to close.

The by now legendary Lyle DeMoss came over from WOW 590 in 1964. Within a few years, another former WOW personality joined him, Jolly Joe Martin. Martin also freelanced in various commercials and emcee jobs, and for a while worked for the Mayor Leahy administration.

That same year Frank Scott took over the PD reins, Jim Price was Music Director, and the news director was Bryce Brasel who remained with the station for the remainder of the decade. Frank Scott would be promoted to General Manager in 1967.

KBON began money giveaways with the "\$5000 Cash Contest" in 1964. Lyle Demoss would announce the Lucky Number for listeners with the numbered Cash Contest Cards, the cards made available at participating sponsors.

DeMoss also ratcheted up the culinary phase of his career with *What's Cookin'*, a new twice-daily recipe feature. The following year as a contest prize he hosted a BBQ for the winner and 49 friends.

1964 is also when Goldenrod finally sold KBON. It went for \$325 thousand that June to new owners, Blaustein Industries of Baltimore, owned by 72-year old Jacob Blaustein.

Blaustein was a multi-millionaire who founded the American Oil Co. in 1910 with his father. Jacob started out at age 18 with father Louis selling kerosene in Baltimore from a horse-drawn tank wagon. Their business grew into the huge Amoco which was acquired by British Petroleum in 1998.

KBON was Blaustein's first entry into broadcasting. His confidantes revealed that the 72-year-old philanthropist wanted to get into a business that could contribute to public good (*Broadcasting* July 6, 1964).



KBON November 1965  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

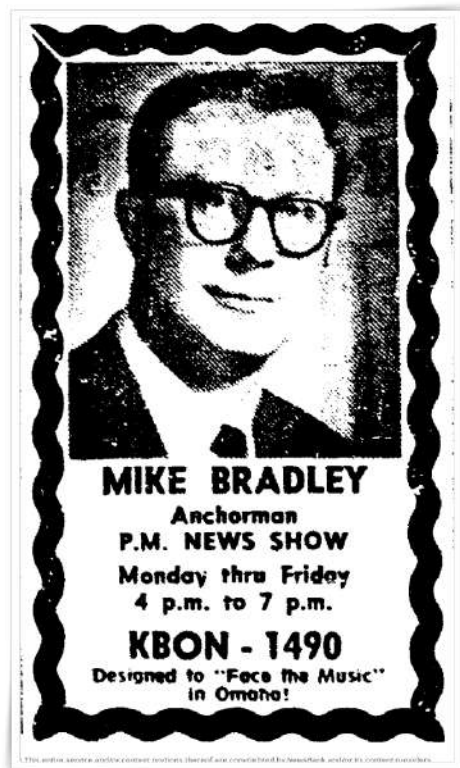
All-talk block programming was scheduled, with shows such as *Home Makers Party Line* with Lyle DeMoss, *Ask the Expert*, *Tradio* (an on-air sell and trade call-in show), *Ask the Newsmaker*, *the Commentators* (a block of network offerings), *Editorial Opinion*, and most unique, *Ask the Teenager* hosted by “Top 40 addicts.”

The station continued to play contest middle man as it did during the Top 40 contest wars of the late 1950s. It offered "instant radio prize information" saying, "KBON people know what's going on... even on the other radio stations." The competition's secret words, magic money words, and Cashline Jackpot amounts that needed to be tracked were aired “instantly” on KBON. “No need to dial around...”

Studios were upgraded in 1968 when the station left 308 South 18th and took up residence in KOIL's old studios in the

KBON doubled-down on its news image in 1965, going up against market leader KFAB with two solid hours of morning news. An *Open Line* talk show was added to three dayparts, 8:30 in the mornings, 12:20 in the noon hour, and 6:30 in the evenings

The transition was completed the following year. KBON became Omaha's first news-talk radio station in June 1966, stating in advertisements that "We've stopped the music in favor of more provocative get-together-radio."



Mike Bradley, afternoon anchor KBON  
1969  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).



Aquila Court Bldg, 511 So 17th. KOIL had just vacated the site for its new showcase building at 8901 Indian Hills Drive, near 90th and Dodge.

KBON carried some Husker football in 1968 with Joe Patrick (Phillipson) and Tom Hedrick. Patrick had been the sports anchor for KMTV from 1960-63 and later would join KETV.

The 1960s concluded with a station line up of local and network personalities that ranged from Lyle DeMoss to Paul Harvey, all delivering news and talk. Local news anchors were Duke Snyder in the mornings and Mike Bradley afternoons.

Talk programming on KBON was promoted as “Designed to Face The Music.” It would be further refined with major changes that lay ahead for 1490 in the coming decade.

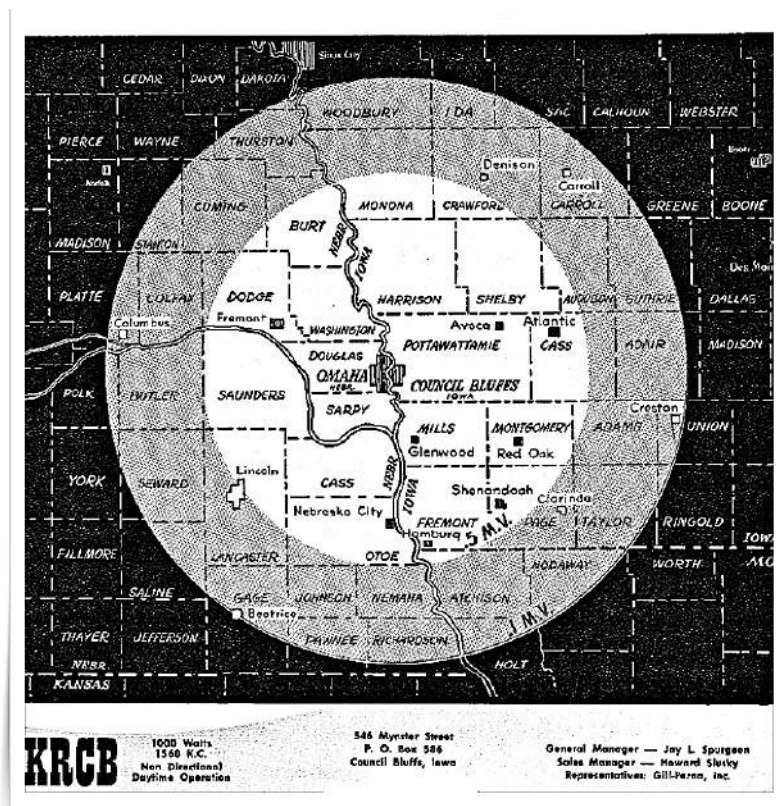
### 1560 KSWI, KRCB- STRUGGLES ON

Across the river, KSWI Council Bluffs at the start of the 1960s was affiliated with Mutual (MBS) and ABC Radio.

When ABC switched to KBON 1490 at the end of 1962, KSWI programmed “album music” and frequent newscasts. News was on the hour and at :20 and :40.

Walt Gibbs was the news director for the station all through the 1960s. Gibbs moved to KBON 1490 in the early 1970s when it became a news station. He worked his way up to Omaha’s heritage station KFAB 1110 before retirement.

A signal upgrade from 500 to 1000 watts came in August 1962 about a year after its initial application. Though now with



KRCB coverage map 1963.

twice the power, KSWI 1560 remained a non-directional “one stick” (single tower) daytime-only station.

KSWI changed hands in November 1963 when the *Nonpareil* sold it for \$50 thousand to the Council Bluffs Broadcasting Company. The new owners were Clair Gross and Abe Slusky.

Gross was a TV sales consultant and VP at Bozell and Jacobs Advertising. Slusky was in real estate and the operator of Council Bluff's Playland Park.

The calls were immediately changed to KRCB for *Radio Council Bluffs*. Jay Spurgeon from KMEO came on board as general manager. Programming, including the rather frequent newscasts, remained pretty much unchanged.

Immediately after the sale KRCB studios were moved from the *Nonpareil* at 120 South Main Street to 546 Mynster at Scott Street, a converted home rented out to KRCB by the nearby First Christian Church. A studio at the tower site Quonset hut was also believed to have been set up by this time.

Calling itself *Demand Radio KRCB*, cash contests began. A \$100 thousand Sweepstakes contest in 1964 ran three weeks with the station placing 100 one-dollar bills into circulation and announcing serial numbers four times an hour. A bill turned in within an hour would be worth 100 dollars.

Radio Bingo was aired at 10 a.m. for thirty minutes in 1965 with listeners picking up playing cards at station sponsors. The \$100 thousand Sweepstakes returned in 1966 running for four weeks.

Horse racing coverage aired in the mid-1960s with race predictions, the Daily Double, and the Feature Race from the Aksarben track.

Big Joe Siedlik began his polka music run on KRCB Sundays in 1966, his show bringing in a huge audience and good revenue for the next 16 years. Raised in South Omaha with its Eastern Europe population, Big Joe didn't play in a band like other polka hosts in the region but was a polka historian with reputedly one of the largest collections of polka music in the country.

Joe began his radio career on KOOO 1420 with a 30-minute Sunday show, later going to KTTT Columbus, Nebraska, then adding KRCB to his network. His KRCB Sunday show in 1967 ran 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. (*OWH* Dec 2, 1967).

Big Joe's show on KRCB 1560 was 90 percent prerecorded on reel-to-reel tape shipped in from his home studio in Columbus, usually arriving just before showtime.

Dick Warner details the tapes' arrival: "It was the responsibility of the KRCB disc jockey that would run the tapes to rush to Greyhound to pick them up then straight to the radio station, usually arriving just minutes before air time. A few close calls in which the baggage staff couldn't find the package of tapes prompted Big Joe to start wrapping the entire box in the most brightly colored polka dotted paper he could find. In a storage room filled with nondescript brown boxes no baggage man could miss the polka show with the polka dots." (Pottawattamie County Historical Society member newsletter, August 2003)

For a while in the 1970s *Big Joe's Polka Show* (Joe Siedlik) ran from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. As one KRCB jock described it, "Joe's audience blew up the phone lines. As Joe taught us, it was all about selling -- selling himself, selling the music, and selling the ads. I imagine the station at certain times earned more on Sunday mornings that it did much of the rest of the week. No wonder they were willing to break format!"

After just four years Sluskey and Associates sold the station in July 1967 to KRCB Inc. for \$175 thousand plus \$25 thousand for a non-compete clause. KRCB Inc. was headed by James Conroy, a retired attorney from Madison, Wisconsin.

Conroy immediately set out to further improve the station. KRCB 1560 was granted pre-sunrise operation with 132 watts in November 1967. This allowed limited coverage with low power as early as 6 a.m., then powering up to its full 1000 watts at local sunrise.

**OFFICIAL BIG 15-6**

THIS WEEK	AUG 2 THRU AUG 9, 1969	LAST WEEK
1	*I'D WAIT A MILLION YEARS Grass Roots	2
2	JACK & JILL Tommy Roe	7
3	HONKY TONK WOMEN Rolling Stones	14
4	BREAK AWAY Beach Boys	5
5	SWEET CAROLINE N. Diamond	1
6	*LAUGHING Guess Who	3
7	*I'M FREE The Who	8
8	BIRTHDAY Underground Sunshine	11
9	CRYSTAL BLUE PERSUASION Tommy James & Shondells	4
10	SHARE YOUR LOVE WITH ME Aretha Franklin	13
11	*MARRAKESH EXPRESS Crosby Stills & Nash	12
12	POLK SALAD ANNIE Tony White	--
13	TRUE GRIT Glen Campbell	15
14	GROOVY THING STH Dimension	--
15	LAY LADY LAY Bob Dylan	--

\*Former Boss Jox Pic Hit

**BOSS BOUND**

COMMOTION/GREEN RIVER  
Creedence Clearwater Revival  
CHANGE OF HEART  
Classics IV  
BARABA JAGAL  
Donovan  
TRACY  
Cuff Links  
HAYRIDE  
Gary Lewis & Playboys  
HUMMIN'  
Majic Ship

**BOSS JOX PIC HIT**

EASY TO BE HARD  
3 Dog Night  
HEAR THE OFFICIAL BIG 15-6  
COUNTDOWN SATURDAYS TEN - NOON

RECORD RANKINGS BASED ON LOCAL SALES AND TELEPHONE REQUESTS

**AM 15-6 KRCB FM 98**  
OMAHA - COUNCIL BLUFFS

KRCB music survey, August 1969

Conroy also applied for an FM for KRCB, receiving the grant in November 1967 and the KRCB FM call letters in December. However, construction will take another 18 months.

Newscasts were five per hour. The Metropolitan Opera from New York aired on Saturday afternoons in late 1968 and into the next year.

KRCB DJ Chuck Hoffman recalls his first job at the station as a news reporter. He notes, "At that time, KRCB was a 1000 watt daytimer that played an awful mix of swing, big band, and middle of the road standards sprinkled with a few light contemporary hits. New owner Jim Conroy finally was convinced that Top 40 was the way to go and we made the format switch." (WMPT radio blog).

The program director was Buddy Scott. Hoffmann was given a new air name, J. Charles Hoffman. It was changed again to Jay Charles when he took over the morning show.

By January 1969 KRCB 1560 had adjusted to a self-labeled "Maximum Music" format of pop music described as contemporary. ABC News ran at :55 with local news at :15 and :25.

Meanwhile the FM construction was delayed by a fire that also took the AM station off the air. The blaze on January 27, 1969 created \$60 thousand in damage in the transmitter building. The yet uncrated FM transmitter was the major loss.

A pair of new transmitters arrived for the AM and FM. KRCB FM was able to sign on in May from 175 feet atop the AM tower on the South Omaha Bridge Road. The damaged AM transmitter was repairable and authorized for standby use in October. The FM simply simulcast the AM until sunset, then continued the same programming until midnight.

## **FM RETURNS– AND SOON GOES STEREO**

It was 1959 before the future of FM appeared promising enough for another run, but the going proved to be slow. The 1960s were a struggle, and by the end of that decade, it would be yet another ten years before FM would reach parity with AM.

Music would be FM's primary forte. Static-free high fidelity was FM's strength, and the later addition of stereo would become a major catalyst in its development.

Record companies had been developing and marketing stereo technology and improved fidelity since the 1950s. It began with stereo tape offerings. By the late 1950s mass-produced stereo records became affordable.

The home audiophile who splurged on a high-fidelity amplifier, quality speaker, turntable, and FM tuner would now go further, upgrading to stereo amps and two speakers. When FM stereo was finally approved on June 1, 1961, those serious listeners needed only to add a stereo tuner.

Before 1961, stereo broadcasting was a novelty, requiring two radio stations and two receivers, one each for the left and right channel. The first such broadcasts date back to the 1920s by the BBC in England.

Omaha's first broadcast experiment was over two AM stations in 1958 (*OWH* Sept 28). KBON 1490 and KSWI 1560 scheduled the event from 3 to 5 p.m. instructing listeners to use two radios, one on each side of the room, tuned separately to each station at equal volume.

The stations then played stereo recordings, from a ping pong ball going back and forth and race cars and trains speeding by to music selections. The broadcast was repeated during the late-night hours with KSWI getting special permission to operate after hours for the broadcast. A similar broadcast was aired in Lincoln over KOLN TV and KFMQ in October.

Regular stereo broadcasts using the two-station model began in Omaha in 1961 over KFAB 1110 and KFAB FM 99.9. The programming ran 6 p.m. to midnight weekdays with a Sunday program in the plans (*OWH* Feb 22, 1961). Listeners not bothering with two receivers would only hear one channel of the music, but there's no record of complaints.

KFAB's AM and FM stereocasting was gone by the end of the year. FM stereo had been approved in June, and KQAL 94.1 launched stereo broadcasting several months later on November 23.

FM programmers found that many hours could be filled with inexpensive recorded albums and a minimum of announcers. Album buyers were adults, so the product was very adult-oriented, ranging from orchestras to established vocalists. Thus, FM developed a reputation for standards, jazz, classical music, and lush background music, the last genre later solidifying into a Beautiful Music format that lasted into the 1980s.

Since most early FMs were placed on the air and operated by AM station owners, program duplication from the AM side was widespread. This kept expenses down but did little to promote the FM band.

Such duplication was varied in Omaha. WOW and KFAB kept much of their programming separate, duplicating usually no more than 25 percent of the time on FM, mainly newscasts or features.

KQAL 94.1 was a stand-alone but later was bought by KOWH 660 becoming KOWH FM 94.1. It didn't begin simulcasting sister AM KOWH 660 until 1966.

KICN FM 96.1 never offered original programming, instead duplicating the AM's Top 40 KOIL 1290 programming until 1967. Switching calls to KOIL FM, 96.1 then became the first automated Beautiful Music formatted station in Omaha.

KRCB FM 98.5 signed on in 1969 simulcasting KRCB 1560 during the day continuing with original programming at night.

Simulcasts were seen by the Feds as a waste of spectrum space. In 1967 the FCC limited this duplication to 50 percent of the broadcast day for markets of over 100 thousand population. This spurred the development of new formats to compete with the mainstream formats on AM.

To succeed, the new formats had to be innovative and to differ from what was already available on AM. As the 1960s progressed and FM stations slowly began to fill the dial, educational, ethnic, religious, and the more mainstream country, rhythm and blues, and progressive rock formats emerged.

By 1970 FM was still working to gain respect, painfully still another ten years away from becoming equal with the AM giants. Even with Omaha's FM receivers penetration at 61 percent that year, FM programming produced creativity but limited revenue, and the going was rough.

#### **94.1 KQAL, KOWH FM Omaha**

KQAL 94.3 was the first Omaha station to return to the FM band after the early 1950s failures. Owned by Jack L. Katz, KQAL signed on April 12, 1959 from 230 feet, the tower atop the City National Bank Building downtown at 405 South 16th Street. The transmitter was a new GEL (General Electronic Laboratories) 15 thousand watt unit, serial no. 1. The director of engineering was William L. Dunbar.

(The City National Bank Building, also known as the Orpheum Tower that houses the theater of the same name, was built in 1910. It was the city's tallest building until the Woodmen of the World Building went up two years later.)

KQAL 94.3's initial schedule was 6 p.m. to midnight with a noon start on weekends. The station played music ranging from classical to modern jazz, throwing in two hours of Opera on Saturday afternoons.

A frequency change to 94.1 was authorized and implemented in August 1960 to allow a power increase from a thousand watts to 60 thousand watts.

KQAL Owner Jack Katz had been named GM of KMEO 660 in April 1960, though Jay Spurgeon soon took over that spot while Katz was seeking to sell his FM. Katz found a buyer in March 1961. For 59 thousand dollars the station would go to a family that owned an FM station in Des Moines. However, the deal failed to close.

Later, on November 23, 1961, KQAL 94.1 became Omaha's first FM Stereo station. The stereo pilot light came on within 24 hours of Katz receiving the stereo exciter unit from GEL.

The following year in October 1962 Katz finally sold KQAL to the Omaha station he once managed. William Buckley and his *National Review*, the owners of KMEO bought KQAL for \$69 thousand,

With that, KQAL moved studios and offices into the KMEO 660 facilities at the AM transmitter site, 60th and Hartman Streets. Despite KMEO 660's high tower, the FM transmitter remained at the Orpheum Building downtown. KQAL 94.1 continued with separate programming in stereo, ranging from Classical music to Show Tunes.

In 1964 KQAL's new manager, Dick Drury from KGB San Diego announced a re-focused program plan to begin September 1. It began with the broadcast schedule expanding to a full day, starting at 7 a.m. rather than at 4 p.m.

Music was still varied. There would be a daily concert of classical music afternoons, an hour of jazz at night, with the remainder of the schedule serving up light pop music in the Andre Kostelanetz and Percy Faith mold. Saturday afternoon broadcasts of the Metropolitan Opera from New York were added later in the year.

On February 16, 1965, another programming adjustment was announced, shifting even more toward a Beautiful Music format. Starting March 1, music would be 90 percent full orchestra and string music. The commercials would be clustered on the quarter hours, and small talk by the announcers would be eliminated.

The new sound would be simulcast on KOWH 660 AM, and to match, KQAL changed calls to KOWH FM by the end of the month.

The AM and FM station's simulcast was cut back following the FCC 1966 ruling limiting program duplication. With that, the simulcasts would air regular light music morning and middays but separated programming afternoons and evenings

Reorganization shuffled the AM and FM ownership to the *National Weekly* from the *National Review*, and a year later to Starr Broadcasting, primarily a partnering to include Peter Starr with one-third ownership. Peter Starr was a Buckley protégé who began as a salesman for KMEO just two years earlier. William Buckley remained the principal investor.

Around this time KOWH FM was granted a permit for 100 thousand watts at 600 feet, the increase granted in May 1966. This permitted the move for the FM transmitter from its long-time downtown site atop the Orpheum building to the AM site at 60<sup>th</sup> and Hartman. Programming continued with a classical/jazz “Fine Music” format.

A lightning strike in June 1967 caused enough damage to take the station off the air for a few weeks in August. The outage delayed the start of the new format planned for September 1. After returning to the air, the program change was further delayed until October 1 while waiting for new stereo tape equipment to arrive.

KOWH FM returned to the air with a classical/jazz Fine Arts format featuring light classics during the day with jazz at 8 p.m. and symphonies from 9 p.m. to midnight. Joe Martin was given an afternoon show, "Martin at His Best," afternoons from 1 to 3 p.m. He featured poetry readings and interviews with fine arts personalities.

With the new format, KOWH FM and its sister AM in June moved studios out of the 60th and Hartman transmitter building to new digs at the Prom Town House, 70th and Dodge Streets. The hotel/restaurant complex was already radio-friendly having been the venue for occasional KOIL remote broadcasts in earlier years.

KOWH FM began seeking listener-funded support. Selling “subscriptions,” the public fund drive sought \$12,000. It raised just \$900. After an extension, the drive still fell short.

After about a year, a frustrated Art Skalak, station general manager, said, “People who favor fine arts music are very loud in their complaints when upset but they wouldn’t donate enough money to keep their kind of music on the air.” (*OWH* Sept 9, 1968).

In frustration, programming was drastically changed. The light jazz and orchestral music were gone. With it went the Metropolitan Opera Company broadcasts on Saturday afternoons.

The changeover took place on October 1, 1968. First came a simulcast of country music from its sister AM station from 6 a.m. until 2 p.m., Omaha’s first full country format to air on FM. (The AM on 660 by this time was *Country Cousin* KOZN, having switched the previous January.)



Then, when programming separated at 2 p.m., the original KOWH FM audience was further shocked with an experimental format of progressive rock and jazz. They heard a mix of rhythm and blues, traditional blues, folk music, international music, hard core rock, and jazz running until 1 a.m. It was free form rock, a format developing on the West Coast. Here, it became known as *Radio Free Omaha*. It was yet another first for Omaha FM.

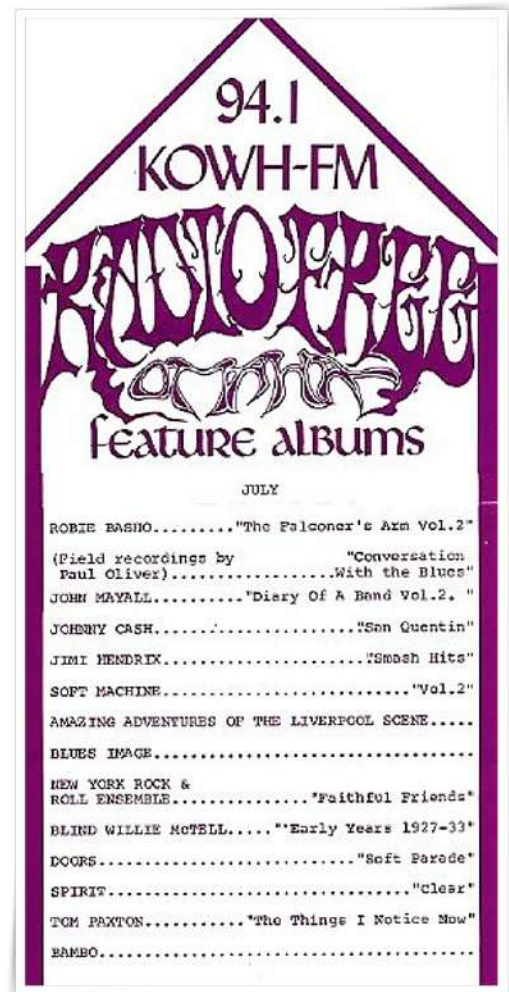
Former KOIL DJ Rick Stewart was program director for Radio Free Omaha. Stewart was already with Starr Stations doing afternoons on the AM's Country Cousin KOZN 660.

When taking over the FM's new afternoon and evening format, Stewart's approach was to get away from the hype, commercials, and bubble-gum music of KOIL. Instead, KOWH FM 94.1 would offer a wide variety of alternative music presented by laid back announcers as was being done on the West Coast. DJs were Harold Lee Roberts, John Mainelli, and on weekends, Kevin Clark.

*Radio Free Omaha* sponsored the Grateful Dead appearing at the Music Box in February 1969. (The Music Box was a popular live music venue with dance floor and a bowling alley at 118 North 19th Street. It closed in 1980, the building demolished to become a parking lot.)

An unusual feature was added in September 1969 when Bandleader and announcer Lee Barron began *Airport USA*, a short-lived midday hour from Hayden's Coffee Shop at Eppley Airfield. In a call-back to radio's earlier days, Barron interviewed guests and celebs/VIPs who passed through the airport. The show was simulcast on both KOZN 660 and KOWH FM 94.1 until January 1970, then continued until May on AM after the 660 format flip and call change to KOWH.

*Radio Free Omaha* was the market's first taste of free-form rock radio and made some inroads, particularly well-received by young males. But, it was short-lived. Word soon leaked that the AM and FM combo was up for sale. Negotiations were underway with Reconciliation Broadcasting, a group of black businessmen made up of sports figures and investors.



1969 KOWH FM "Radio Free Omaha" album music playlist. An eclectic mix, from John Mayall to Johnny Cash.

The final sale of the stations was months away, but KOWH-FM ended the AM simulcast on the last day of 1970 and the progressive rock segment a few weeks later. A soul music format was introduced on January 1, 1971, a new format that would take the station well into the 1970s.

When KOWH FM dropped the progressive rock format, it was quickly picked up by KRCB FM 98.5 Council Bluffs, airing it during nighttime hours when done simulcasting its daytime-only sister station KRCB AM 1560. KRCB FM was still quite new, having just signed on in 1969.

KOWH FM 94.1 had gone through a decade of meeting challenges, airing Beautiful Music, Country, Free Rock, and finally Soul. For all the innovations tried on 94.1, the operators saw less than satisfying results. There will be more struggles in the coming decade, but 94.1 will eventually emerge a winner.

### **96.1 KCOM, KOIL FM, KICN, return to KOIL FM Omaha**

KCOM was Omaha's second FM to sign on during the renaissance years. From its application in February 1959, the station lit up on 96.1 MHz as KCOM the following September.

The station was set up in the Rorick Apartments, a moderate high rise on the south edge of downtown at 22nd and Saint Marys Avenue. The schedule was just six hours a day, from 5 to 11 p.m.

The two owners, Edward Pontes and Dale Applegate, were more hobbyists than businessmen.

They played classical music, show tunes, and light classics during the evenings from a thrown-together studio in a street-level room in the apartment building.

Their Gates transmitter fed 3500 watts to the antenna atop a 60-foot tower on the roof of the Rorick Apartments building.

The duo, operating as Delta Broadcasting Company, sold KCOM just months after signing on. Don W. Burden from KOIL 1290 showed interest right away. Burden was an early believer in FM, even arguing with Todd Storz in the 1950s that it will become lucrative one day. Storz was anti-FM, a mindset that doomed Storz Broadcasting after Todd's death in later years.



*KCOM 96.1 letterhead 1959*

Burden offered \$25 thousand for KCOM in January 1960 with approval coming the following month. The calls were switched to KOIL FM the month after that.

After the first few months, KOIL FM's now day-long programming schedule of *Morning Bouquet*, *Afternoon Musicale*, *Sterling and Strings* for the dinner hour, and evening's *Gas Light* was gone. In its place was a simulcast of the Top 40 programming from sister station KOIL 1290.

The simulcast was Omaha's first full-time Top 40 on FM, but the much improved fidelity was not enough to draw interest to the new band. Stereo FM was not yet a reality, and KOIL 1290 had no plans to upgrade its studio to stereo for its arrival in 1961.

Burden changed the calls to KICN, in July 1961, but only to keep possession after giving them up at his Denver station. Burden's KISN 910 in Portland was doing well, but KICN 710 in Denver fought a losing battle with firmly-entrenched KIMN 950. Upon throwing in the towel and selling off KICN, Burden held on to the KICN calls by parking them on his Omaha FM property. Burden just loved the Kissin' identity and harbored hopes of using them again one day elsewhere.

KICN 96.1 continued to simulcast AM KOIL 1290 never mentioning a *Kissin' Radio* identity on air. KOIL's engineers did the hourly KICN legal ID with a live cut-in.

KICN at just 3.5 thousand watts was given full power authorization of 100 thousand watts in 1966. The transmitter site remained at 275 feet above average terrain atop the Rorick Apartments using the old 60-foot tower. The site was kept in use well into the 1980s when the tower was toppled by a storm.

Burden, apparently giving up on finding a station to purchase to take over the KICN call letters, gave up the calls in March 1967. The KICN call letters didn't reappear until a Spokane station picked them up in 1975.

With that, Burden separated the programming from that on KOIL 1290, re-launched the FM in stereo with the old call letters KOIL FM, and began a 24-hour schedule. The programming was an automated Beautiful Music format. KOIL FM became Omaha's first Beautiful Music FM, in "Living Stereo."

The lush Beautiful Music format was a natural for FM, a band already known for soft pop music. The format can trace its origins to AM radio where broadcast pioneer Gordon McLendon introduced Beautiful Music as a format in 1959 on KABL 960 San Francisco. Some say he merely refined the

format of an earlier pioneer station in Dallas, KIXL 1040. In 1960 the format had been tried in Omaha on KMEO 660, lasting about four years.

(McLendon also can be credited for any All News formats that followed, as his XETRA San Diego, "Extra News over Los Angeles," perfected the format in 1961. XETRA 690 was a high-power station on the Mexican side of the border, its signal well-heard up the coast and covering Los Angeles.)

*another charter advertiser . . .*

**KOIL FM 96.1**  
**LIVING STEREO**



Mr. John Merkel, president of John Markel Ford, holds a KOIL-FM-Stereo charter advertiser contract, with KOIL-FM-Stereo sales manager W. O. "Bill" Johnson looking on.

**KOIL FM 96.1**  
**LIVING STEREO**

Omaha's only 24-hour FM Stereo station blankets 24 thousand square miles in the Midwest with fine music, news, weather and stock market reports. Hear the best of Broadway and Hollywood, the finest works of American composers and artists, with just the proper amount of important information scheduled conveniently for the discerning listener.

*KOIL FM selling "charter clients" 1967  
 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).*

The mid-1960s saw the Beautiful Music format being refined to orchestral music produced exclusively for Beautiful Music stations.

Syndicators were springing up producing ten-inch reels of tape filled with orchestra-produced covers of familiar songs from standards to pop, designed to be run on their own provided automation systems. The early syndication format suppliers included Bonneville, Schulke, IGM, and Drake-Chenault.

Automation, like the one already in use for years by KFAB for overnights and elsewhere running "jukebox" style formats, was too clunky and unreliable to replace the personality and fast-paced formats of Top 40 or country. However, for the Beautiful Music format, it was a natural. The problems of dead air and slow pacing that plagued early systems weren't noticeable on such a relaxed format, and in many cases were desired program elements. (Drake-Chenault later developed automation that would handle tighter, faster-paced pop, rock, and country formats in the 1970s. Personality was still missing, however.)

KOIL FM's music tapes and automation system were provided by IGM, International Good Music, in Bellingham, Washington. IGM was founded by Rogan Jones Sr. who developed his automation system to use reel to reel tapes that would sequentially trigger other machines for the next programming element. IGM had been a music

programming service since 1959 and had been emphasizing the equipment side of its music business for just four years when KOIL FM bought into its system.

KOIL FM's automation equipment in the new building at 8901 Indian Hills Drive was located adjacent to the lobby, separated by a door to the receptionist desk in the lobby. The tapes were all handled by a staff of receptionists and request line girls, rotating their positions as needed. KOIL DJs handled the tape loading responsibilities late nights and overnights.

Toned-down newscasts for KOIL FM were provided by the KOIL news department. Burden's Beautiful Music format complemented the Top 40 on his AM station, serving the older audience. Direct competition wouldn't arrive for another five years when WOW FM 92.3 will flip to Beautiful Music in late 1973.

## **99.9 KFAB FM Omaha**

KFAB management had an Omaha FM in mind as early as 1947 when building the new AM site outside Omaha in Sarpy County. Former KFAB engineer Mike Shane recalls that the power panels of the main circuit breakers had one breaker labeled "50 thousand watt FM Transmitter." The FM-labeled breaker was used instead for a second AM transmitter that was purchased and installed in 1962 but remains labeled for FM.

KFAB FM indeed signed on in 1947 but as a Lincoln station on 97.9 from a tower on the Stuart Building. FM broadcasting failed to gain traction and KFAB FM in Lincoln was gone late in the following year. Fast forward to ten years later: KFAB applies for a new Omaha FM during that band's comeback in 1958, signing on late in the following year.

KFAB FM returned to the air on December 30, 1959, this time in Omaha on 99.9 MHz. KFAB's was the most ambitious return to the FM band, with 58 thousand watts on a new 440-foot tower at the AM transmitter site south of the city.

Much of the programming was separate from the AM. Going one step further, the station immediately went to a 24-hour schedule while other FM newbies were signing off at midnight, some even limiting operation to evening hours. Omaha's second overnight FM station wouldn't arrive until years later in 1967 when KOIL FM 96.1 expanded its schedule to 24 hours.

KFAB AM and FM broadcast the first regularly scheduled stereo programming to air in the Midwest using the two stations/two receivers model. The two stations began regular *Stereo Concert*

programs on Sunday evenings from 9 to 11 p.m. in January 1960, each station airing a separate right or left channel.

Lyell Bremser announced a stereo schedule of 6 p.m. to midnight weeknights and possibly a three-hour show on Sundays, saying KFAB was the first station in the Midwest to go into stereo broadcasting on such a wide scale. (*OWH* Feb 22, 1961).

The novelty broadcasts were short-lived. Single-signal stereo using a sub-carrier for the second channel was approved for FM stations in June 1961. KFAB discontinued its two-station stereo concerts at the end of October.

Omaha's first FM to go true stereo, KQAL 94.1, followed in just weeks on November 23. Single signal stereo was to be FM's catalyst to success. (AM stereo wouldn't happen until 1979.)

It was around this time KFAB FM was upgraded to 115 thousand watts, approved in May, the highest allowable power for FM. (The FCC has since limited maximum power for FM's to 100 thousand watts. KFAB FM was "grandfathered in" to keep its higher power and remains as Omaha's most powerful FM station.)

The new KFAB FM 99.9 transmitter was required to be housed in a separate structure at the base of a fourth tower that was erected in line with the AM's three towers at the site. This was required to avoid an overlong transmission line due to the distance from the main building. The FM studio was added to the AM studio and offices at 5010 Underwood Street.

Calling itself *Cloud Nine Stereo*, KFAB FM 99.9 programmed light classical and pop music with a simulcast of the newscasts and an overnight simulcast of *Serenade in the Night*, the automated music from the KFAB 1110 AM side.

### **92.3 WOW FM Omaha**

Though Meredith Broadcasting applied for an FM as early as July 1959, WOW FM 92.3 reached the air many months later on May 15, 1961. It was Omaha's fourth FM during the band's renaissance.

Using the WOW TV tower behind the studios at 3501 Farnam Street, WOW FM aired with 40 thousand watts at 481 feet.

Programming began with a self-described "good music" format. It began with a daily schedule of 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. (*Broadcasting* May 29, 1961)

One of the engineers putting the FM on the air had been with WOW since its pioneer days. William J. Kotera began in broadcasting in 1922 as an engineer and announcer for WIAK.

Mr. Kotera joined WOW as an engineer when the calls were still WOAW in 1925. He assisted in later years with putting WOW TV on the air. (*Broadcasting* Sept 28, 1964)

WOW FM aired "Fine Music," including orchestral music on the pop side such as the Boston Pops Orchestra. Simulcasts of the AM were limited to 25 percent of the broadcast day, often much less at 10 percent, generally confined to newscasts and features.

**SNEAK PREVIEW TONIGHT**

**WOW-FM**

**On Radio WOW  
59 on Your Radio Dia.  
7:30 to 9 p.m.**

The Preview Program will include:

"It's so Peaceful In The Country" Joe Weber, Trumpet and Group	"So Rare" Los Brows Band
"The Love Year" Judee George Orchestra	"Strictly Instrumental" Warren Covington Orchestra
"The Rain In Spain" Leroy Holmes Orchestra	"Flower Drum Song" Orchestra Cast
"The Last Time I Saw Paris" Mandelita Strauss and Orchestra	Selections from "Aida" Romana Jechlik
"When You Wish Upon A Star" Frank Mackintosh Orchestra	"Minor Mist" J. L. Robinson Sextet
"You Took Advantage of Me" Paul Weston Orchestra	"Big Noise from Winnetka" Pete Fontaine

**An hour and a half sample of the glorious music programming you will hear daily on WOW-FM starting Monday, May 15-3 to 11 p.m.**

**WOW-FM 92.3 megacycles**  
for pure listening pleasure

WOW 590 promotting its new FM on 92.3, May 1961 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

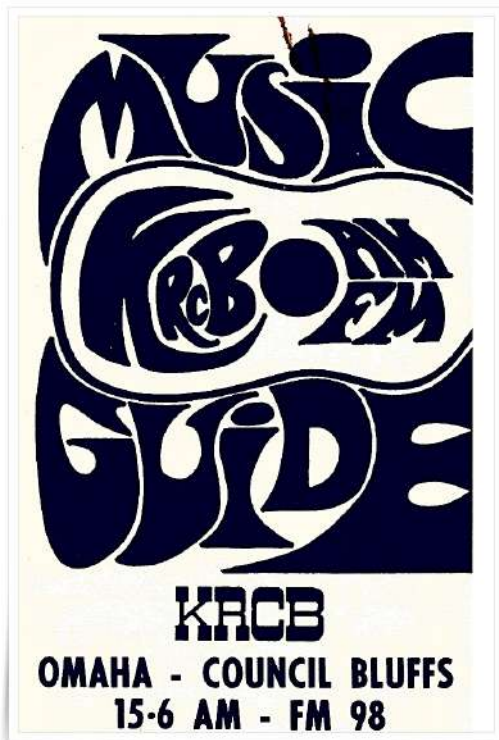
### 98.7 KSWI FM Council Bluffs- Construction Permit Only

The *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* sought a return to FM in 1959 on KBON FM's old frequency of 98.7 getting as far as receiving authorization for 3 thousand watts on May 27. Omaha and Council Bluffs were both officially the city of license, a rare occurrence in FCC records (*Broadcasting*, June 8, 1959). The call letters KSWI FM were approved in July (*Broadcasting*, July 27, 1959). For reasons unknown, construction of this station went no further.

### 98.5 KRCB FM Council Bluffs

KRCB FM was the third attempt at a lasting FM station in Council Bluffs.

The first was in 1947 when KSWI 1560, owned by the *Nonpareil*, signed KSWI FM 107.9 on the air. After moving to 96.1 and using the calls KFMX for a while, KSWI FM left the air in 1953. The second try by the *Nonpareil* came in 1959, never reaching the air, going only as far as approval for 98.7 with Omaha included in the official city of license.



*KRCB AM and FM music playlist front page with psychedelic artwork,, 1970.*

A decade passed and 1560 eventually did get another sister FM in 1969 but by this time the old KBON 98.7 dial position was no longer workable. Other nearby stations by then had claimed channels adjacent to 98.7 making the frequency unusable in the Omaha-Council Bluffs market. Also in the past decade, KSWI FM's old 96.1 FM dial position was taken by KCOM, later KOIL FM.

The 1560 AM station had been sold twice and became KRCB since its beginnings. Now owned by KRCB Inc. and headed by retired attorney James Conroy, a new FM was granted in November 1967 just four months after the AM purchase closed. The KRCB FM call letters were approved the following month.

Conroy's new FM was authorized for 100 thousand watts on 98.5 MHz and would transmit from 175 feet atop the AM tower on the South Omaha Bridge Road. (*OWH* Jan 3, 1969).

KRCB FM 98.5 encountered a major delay when the AM transmitter building caught fire on January 27, 1969. Damage to the FM transmitter still in its shipping crate amounted to 60 thousand dollars.

Several months later in May 1969, KRCB FM 98.5 reached the air. The new station simply simulcast the AM from the Mynster Street studios until sunset, then continued with the same programming until midnight. The format by then had been adjusted since the start of the year to what was labeled as *Maximum Music*, pop music with ABC Contemporary news.

When KOWH FM dropped progressive rock at the end of 1969, KRCB FM picked up the format, running it after the AM sign off. A year later the FM expanded to a 24-hour schedule. From there, KRCB FM was destined to become Omaha's new progressive rock station, and a decade after that, Omaha's top hits station.



## **101.7 KGBI, Omaha- Grace Bible Institute**

Religious station KGBI 100.7 was put on the air by the Grace Bible Institute in 1966. Though planning to operate as a non-commercial station, GBI applied for and won a commercial frequency.

Grace Bible Institute began its Omaha school in 1943. As an outreach, students and the music department produced a weekly radio program called *Grace Notes* in 1952 and received free air time on KOIL. A year later the program moved to KFAB and was also airing in other states where alums were helping support the costs.

In 1963 Grace's president Waldo Harder began an effort to build the school's own FM station to cover the Omaha area with Bible teaching and inspirational music. After gaining the permits and securing a license, KGBI signed on with 29-thousand watts on the afternoon of May 17, 1966.

Studios and the small 165-tower were all on the Grace Bible Institute campus at 1515 South 10th Street. The air schedule was quickly expanded to a 17-hour day from the original 3 to 10 p.m. offerings.

Programming on KGBI-FM consisted of religious and secular news, classical and religious music, plus what was called "inspirational programming." The 1970s would see strengthening support and expansion of the station, poised for the Christian Contemporary music explosion of the 1980s.

## **91.5 KIOS Omaha- Omaha Public Schools**

The Omaha School District brought KIOS 91.5 to the air on September 15, 1969. School officials emphasized it would be used to train students in broadcasting and radio engineering and not for promoting school administration policies.

KIOS originally applied for a commercial frequency, 104.5, the only channel remaining in the Omaha market. Engineers feared that on a lower frequency in the 88 to 92 MHz range set aside for non-commercial stations that KIOS might interfere with WOW TV channel 6. The channel 6 audio frequency was nearby in the radio spectrum, at 87.7 MHz. The FCC held up the application for more than a year, then convinced OPS to go on the non-commercial portion of the FM band. KIOS was authorized 91.5 MHz with 26 thousand watts of power.

A 210-foot tower was built at Central High School in downtown Omaha. The basement of the school was remodeled into a studio for students. Educational programming was featured with concert hall music during the evenings. The schedule was 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. weekdays, silent on Saturdays, and a light schedule on Sundays.

As feared, complaints of interference to WOW TV channel 6 immediately began in the downtown area. The problem wouldn't be fully solved until the early 1970s when the transmitter site is moved west into the Benson area. It will be just one of the changes for the better as the station grows in the coming decade.

## **SIDEBARS and FOOTNOTES**

### **THE PAYOLA SCANDAL**

The November 1959 Payola hearings in Washington primarily targeted figures in the Northeast but were watched closely by broadcasters across the country.

Playing for pay was nothing new since the early days of sheet music promotion called "plugola," but the rise of teen rock, its influx of black music, and the image of out-of-control promoters and DJs led to a Congressional crackdown on radio.

Technically, paying to air records is legal if it's a station transaction and the sponsor is fully identified during each airing. But otherwise, it's DJs on the take and a conflict of interest.

The hearings had minimal effect in Omaha. Managers at all Omaha stations shrugged off the hearings saying their DJs only play from a station-approved list of records and that Omaha was too small to make a difference in record sales anyway. (This proves untrue in coming years where Omaha record sales are carefully tracked for inclusion in national surveys that in turn influence major market airplay.)

Only KOIL seemed nervous. Unsure of where to draw the line, KOIL management reacted for a short period by requiring their DJs to back-announce every record by full title, artist, and label, a rather cumbersome requirement for personality DJs. After confirming that free promotional records for airplay did not constitute free consideration for plugging a song, announcing went back to normal.

### **KOIL'S LEGENDARY PLAYERS OF THE 1960s**

Legendary career DJs who honed their craft in Omaha or even just passed through are sometimes tricky to trace. Air talent would often have an "air name" much like an author's *nom de plume*. Some

air names were designed to be cute, like Jim Dandy (Jim Dahlmeier) at KOIL in 1958. Other air names would be shortened and simplified into something easy to remember. Names were important for recall, as rating companies would credit a station even if a listener remembered only the personality's name.

Sometimes a talent would have to change to different air names because either someone else in the market had the same or a very similar name or because the station wanted to use a "house name." Jingle intros with house DJ names were purchased and often re-used as new talent arrived.

Some names proved difficult to fit into a jingle that would match the call letter musical logos. That problem was solved with "jock shouts." Shouts, where the jingle singers would simply and enthusiastically shout out the DJ's the name in unison, began appearing around 1970.

Numerous high-profile personalities worked at KOIL. Their career paths were often seen going to WLS Chicago or the West Coast. Here are some of those talents during KOIL's lucrative years in the 1960s:

- Kris Erik Stevens was Johnny Mitchell while at KOIL in the 1960s before legally changing his name to Kris Erik Stevens at WLS. After KOIL, Stevens worked some major markets like Detroit and Atlanta before arriving at what many consider a pinnacle of success, WLS in Chicago. Stevens later opened his own voice talent business in Los Angeles.
- Newscaster Lyle Dean (Lyle Dean Lebsack), was earlier with Burden's Indianapolis station WIFE. After KOIL, Dean went to WLS Chicago and later joined the ABC Information Network, before settling down in 1985 as "the Dean of American Newscasters" at WGN Chicago.
- Dave Diamond got his start at KFOR Lincoln then got his air name at KOIL in 1961. He went through a series of famous stations, most notably in Los Angeles as an original "Boss Jock" when Drake-Chenault flipped KHJ to Top 40.
- Guy Williams (L David Moorehead) at KOIL in 1965, started at KUDY and KTLN Denver, went on to KRIZ Phoenix, KFI and KMET Los Angeles, then became GM at KEYV Las Vegas.
- Gary Mack on KOIL in 1965 went on to become Gary Gears at WLS Chicago.
- Newsman Fred Winston soon excelled as a major air personality at WLS, WCFL, and other Chicago stations.
- Bob Benson, mid-1960s news director, later worked his way up to news director for the four-network ABC Radio networks.
- Mike Hanks in 1965 (J. Michael Hankins) also went to Chicago as Mike McCormick to successfully program WLS.
- Deane Johnson returned to Omaha from KOMA Oklahoma City in the mid-1960s as PD. He left KOIL in 1968 moving on to management at KDWB in St. Paul. It's been observed that KDWB was a set of call letters likely coveted by Don W. Burden, who owned DWB monogrammed shirts, cuff links, and belt buckles

## **BUT IT SOUNDS SPONTANEOUS...**

Being a personality DJ in the days of Top 40 wasn't just coming in, being funny while playing records, then going home. Listeners often believe it's all off the cuff, and of course, it's supposed to sound that way. But, it requires lots of show preparation and hard work between the daily air shifts. Some jocks scour the newspapers and trade magazines for bits. Others hit the concerts and night spots to get to know their audience up close. Still others like Roger W. Morgan hunker down in the production room and prepare bits for the next day. He describes how it went for him at KOIL 1290:

*If we did a "bit" on the air that required production effects, we had to produce the effects, ...cart them...then, practice the bit over and over so we could pull it off smoothly on the air.*

*"Morganizing" was a major daily task...I recorded at least 5 calls a day to get the one that I could work with...then, I had to secure permission from someone who was facing the embarrassment of their lifetime...then, I spliced the living daylight out of the call to get the perfect effect. I usually worked with not less than 10 minutes of tape and cut it down to just over 4 minutes. My fingers looked like they'd been through a meat slicer from razor blades and I usually showed up at home with tiny bits of splicing tape still attached to places where I could attach half-inch long pieces to cover over a hundred splices per call.*

*Then, I faced Don Burden who regularly said, "Cut two more minutes out of the bit." Those Morganizing calls lasted less than four minutes apiece, and anything over two minutes drove Burden to the edge. The entire process took at least two hours a day to complete...five days a week.*

*OK, that took care of two minutes of each of my four hours a day on the air....the question was, "What do I do with the remaining 55 minutes each hour?" We were doing a modified Drake format, so talk segs and intro's were limited to 5 seconds...lots of music; be clever every time we opened our mic.*

*I purchased a small library of books by people including Orban, Bennet Cerf and a host of people who wouldn't elicit even a smile today, but whose works were necessary to compile 12 "clever" breaks and segs per hour. (x's 4 = 48 per show.)*

*I wrote out the majority of my ad libs, then practiced them so they would sound spontaneous. I placed each "record" (remember those) on the turntables, slip-started each to achieve what the computer does most of the time today, then "pulled carts" for each and every spot I ran (4 per stop set). Then, I had to make sure each cart re-cued so the next guy in line didn't think I was a prima donna. We just worked harder to achieve much of what a computer is designed to do today. And from time to time, we wonder why all the work that was replaced by computers, can't today be replaced with additional creativity.*

## THE STEVE BROWN LEGACY

Steve Brown, a 1957 Omaha Tech High graduate, attended the University of Nebraska for three semesters before getting his first radio job at KOOO 1420. He then jumped to KOIL when the station was battling KOWH for the Top 40 crown in 1958. Within two years he was Vice President of Don Burden's KOIL 1290. Brown worked occasional air shifts at KOIL and for a while in 1959 had a regular air shift at KISN Portland

Historically, it appears Brown was the right man in the right place at the right time. Burden was a hard-driving broadcaster who sought good ideas and needed a right-hand man to make them happen. Brown filled the bill. It required courage and ingenuity to keep Burden happy and successful. Former KOIL PD Deane Johnson noted that Brown would achieve the nearly impossible whenever handed a task by Burden.

Steve Brown recalled years later in a 2004 web posting how it was during those heady years at KOIL: "I was VP for programming for Don Burden when I was barely 20, and everybody, everybody who worked for me, in four markets, was older than I was. Plus, Deane (Johnson) was the first PD to hire me in commercial radio. And Roger (Morgan) was one of the first truly spectacular talents I found, in tiny Bend, Oregon.



*Steve Brown at KOIL, 1962  
(Courtesy: Deane Johnson collection).*

Brown ran the Star Stations and came up with air names for some memorable personalities. He was the originator of legendary names like The Real Don Steel (Don Revert), Joe Light (Charles Springer), and Roger W. Morgan (Jim Hunter).

"I was both overly managed myself, directly and sometimes brutally, but always beautifully, by Don W. Burden.

"I think what I got to do, on good days, was almost like working for myself. That's how easy-going ('Hell, if it ain't FUN, we ain't DOIN' it') and desperately serious ('if we don't get WIFE off the ground in six months, the damn BANK will take over') it was!

"People ask me, 'What drove the Star Stations?' THAT is what DROVE the Star Stations. Fun...WITH money!!"

Steve Brown is the man who introduced the Beatles to the Beach Boys. It was the top British group meeting the top American group, and it happened at a Portland concert in 1965.

Brown got to know a lot of rock stars, including the Beach Boys, as the Star Stations promoted many of their appearances. KISN Portland (part of the KOIL chain) was sponsoring a Beatles appearance there in 1965. Brown said he received a call from Carl Wilson of the Beach Boys asking if they could meet the Liverpool lads when they arrived in Portland.

Brown recalls in a Nov 16, 1995, *OWH* interview, "Some people are skeptical, but I know it happened because I remember parts of it vividly." He continues, "It was backstage at the Portland (Oregon) Coliseum. I do wish that I had made some contemporaneous notes."

Brown said he gave no guarantees. The Beatles were to play matinee and evening shows that Sunday in the Portland Coliseum. The Beach Boys, except for Brian Wilson, showed up in Portland Saturday night. Between shows, Brown says, he approached Beatles Road Manager Derek Taylor and said: "I have some guys who'd like to meet the Beatles." Taylor responded: "Wouldn't everyone?" "Yeah," Brown said. "But these guys are the Beach Boys.

"They met in a backstage room and exchanged pleasantries but didn't dwell on music, Brown said. "I didn't have a tape recorder. But I remember that they talked about what most young guys talked about. Girls and cars."

From the *Ultimate Beatles Encyclopedia* on page 65: "The Beatles and the Beach Boys actually became quite good friends. Carl Wilson and Mike Love visited the Beatles backstage at their Portland Coliseum concert on Aug. 22, 1965, and when the Beach Boys toured England, the Beatles rang them up at their hotel."

Steve Brown stepped down around 1969 to run Burden's subsidiary Star Concerts in Los Angeles. After a few years in that competitive, high pressured and constantly shifting business, Brown returned to Omaha resuming his role as Burden's national program director in 1973. But he couldn't reclaim the lofty level of success he once enjoyed, due to the shifting fortunes of Burden's Star Stations group.

Brown was replaced as the national program director in 1975 but remained in an operational capacity with Burden until KOIL's forced blackout in 1976. He stayed in Omaha working for KOIL's new management upon its return to the air, but as the radio business changed, his peak had passed. After managing the new KOIL for a while, Brown joined Mitchell Broadcasting in the late 1980s and switched over to becoming a talk show host at KKAR and later part-time at KFAB.

## **JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME—CARSON REFLECTS**

Johnny Carson returned to Omaha to open a planned string of restaurants called Here's Johnny's in March 1969. The first eatery was in Omaha at 1818 South 72nd Street near Mercy Road. Carson was Board Chairman, primarily for publicity purposes, of what was hoped to be a large chain by the end of the year. The president and largest shareholder was Gilbert Swanson Jr.

During his Omaha visit, Carson revisited his apartment at Drake Apartments at 22nd and Saint Marys Avenue where he lived twenty years earlier while working at WOW. Carson's first son was born while residing there. Carson told reporters he painted the apartment, even pulling off some curling paint revealing the color he painted.

The Carson/Swanson restaurant venture failed miserably. Franchisees complained of poor support and shabby equipment and hires. Here's Johnny's went into Chapter 11 bankruptcy by 1975. The Omaha restaurant closed in September 1976.

## **THE TELEVISION ANTENNA FARM**

Omaha's three television stations were broadcasting from downtown on individual towers about 500 feet high. A Federal directive in 1964 encouraged stations to group towers in approved areas to protect aircraft, thus permitting much taller towers.

The three stations got together. A site on the north side of Omaha was selected along North 72nd Street, between Hartman Street and Crown Point Avenue. It was across 72nd on the west side from the then-popular Skyview Drive-In Theater.

Though a single "candelabra-top" tower for all three TV stations was discussed, it was decided things would be simpler, and some say cheaper if each station had its own tall tower.

The 1365-foot towers were erected 725 feet apart in a straight line. WOW TV was on the north, KMTV on the south, and KETV in the center. Heights topped off equally, but not all towers are of equal height above ground due to terrain differences. The middle tower for channel 7 was the one in a depression.

(A new KETV 1324-foot tower following the original tower collapse during an HDTV antenna install in 2003 is now offset to avoid guy lines of neighboring towers.)

Between the three stations, a million dollars worth of equipment was purchased from RCA, including a new transmitter for WOW TV.

After going through the usual FAA, City, and Federal approval processes, the 55-acre TV antenna tower farm fired up in November 1966. The three TVs moved transmissions from the downtown/midtown towers to the antenna farm.

The Tower Farm or Antenna Farm, as it was called, was a major boost for Omaha's FM stations, as nearly all would eventually rent space on them. The three in-line towers become a landmark visible for miles around.

The three towers were later joined by a fourth tall tower in the 1990s belonging to Journal Broadcasting and WOW FM 94.1. It's not located on the tower farm property but is the odd tower nearby on the south, out of line with the original three.

(Side note on the WOW FM call letters: Originally on 92.3, the WOW FM calls were discarded in the 1970s for KFMX, then KEZO. In the 1980s when Great Empire Broadcasting bought WOW AM 590, it had already owned the FM on 94.1, KYNN. With the AM purchase, the 94.1 FM calls were changed to WOW FM, those calls returning on a different frequency.)



## CHAPTER FOUR- FM CLAWS ITS WAY UP

*When I was little I went to my father and said, “Dad, when I grow up I want to be a disc jockey.” He said, “Son, you can’t have both.”--Anonymous*

### **THE 1970S—AN OVERVIEW OF A FAST-MOVING DECADE**

As the Seventies developed, music was fragmenting into separate genres and news/talk was making a tentative debut as a format. The primary music formats at the start of the decade were Top 40, Country, Beautiful Music, and the newer Progressive Rock and Soul/Rhythm & Blues formats.

News was a regular on the network stations and still an FCC requirement for all. The music stations treated their news commitment as either a major part of their image or disguised in a manner to simply fit or hide into the format, sometimes even buried in overnights.

AM radio remained strong and FM was showing growth, though at a glacial pace. After ten years of existence, FM penetration in Omaha was 61 percent at the start of the decade according to a 1969 Pulse survey, still far from parity with AM and even trailing other Midwest markets. Des Moines was showing 73 percent and Kansas City was at 70 percent.

KFAB 1110 was the market leader with adults, particularly in the gray-haired end of the demographic. It ran hourly NBC news and network features, had a reputable local news department, and its announcers gave frequent time, temp, and weather checks for both Omaha and Lincoln. Music was a non-offensive filler of carefully chosen adult-oriented pop and even some light country-pop.

At the other end of the spectrum was KOIL 1290, feeding the teens and young adults a diet of pop and rock, also with a strong news staff that included Mike Aulabaugh, Sherm “Man On The Move” Meyers, and Brian Jordan. KOIL put mobile units on the streets, primarily for traffic reports but great for image enhancement. For a while during its height, KOIL staffed the overnight show with three people: the on-air personality, a newsman, and an overnight request line girl to answer the phones.

Those adults who outgrew rock or pop tended to drift towards country music, available on KOOO 1420 and later on KOOO’s FM on 104.5. KOOO’s country format faded before the end of the decade, overtaken by Great Empire Broadcasting of Wichita, a country giant making inroads with its newly purchased KYNN 1490. By the early 1980s, the Kansas newcomers had converted no less than three Omaha stations to their brand of country. Along the way, KEFM 96.1 briefly adopted country in mid-1978, but never became a contender in the race.

FM still had the image of classical and soft pop instrumental music, perceived as romantic or background product. This format evolved in the direction of easy listening soon becoming the Beautiful Music format with soft-voiced announcers. It spawned syndicators such as Schulke and Bonneville that provided lush music on reels of tape for automation systems that they also engineered and supplied. KOIL FM went this route, as did KESY AM and FM and WOW FM/KEZO.

There was one brave exception to this FM direction: live personality Top 40 on FM, tried by KFMX 92.1 for about six months in 1972, but it proved too soon to be viable.

The Seventies saw some major events in Omaha radio. KOIL was riding high before taking a nose dive due to increased competition and a legal battle fighting alleged improprieties by owner Don Burden.

Stodgy WOW 590 went Top 40 and took the crown from KOIL when the latter was finally silenced by the FCC.

Council Bluffs' KRCB 1560 went through several identities while its KRCB FM gained footing to eventually become Omaha's contemporary music leader in the next decade.

Beautiful Music on KESY AM and FM morphed into Soft Pop.

KBON dropped music entirely, beefing up its news department while opening its phone lines giving Omahans a voice on the air.

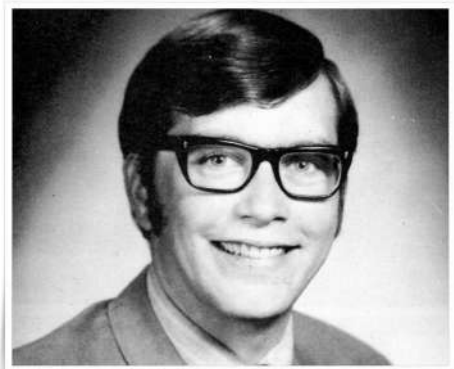
Omaha programming was primarily local, and the stations were growing, shifting, and competitively positioning for the advertising dollar.

Ownership was still private business and publishing firms. In the field of publishing, the few left included Meredith of Des Moines owning WOW, The *Omaha World-Herald* owning channel 7, and the *Lincoln Journal Star* with 48 percent of KFAB. The *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* had just sold off KSWI to private interests.

The rest were headed by businessmen, most of whom knew, understood, and even loved radio. This would be their last decade, as ownership would begin shifting to bankers, investors, and corporations.

## 1290 KOIL GOES DARK, RETURNS TO A NEW LANDSCAPE

KOIL was Don Burden's money machine, entering the 1970s as a ratings leader owning the younger demographics.



*Ron Ugly Thompson, KOIL 1970. "Ugly" was added to make his name memorable. It created a curiosity that could only be accomplished on radio.*

Burden was a risk-taker, and liked those on his staff who would do the same. In 1971 the evening jock, Ron Ugly Thompson, launched an impromptu fundraiser during the racial unrest in North Omaha one night when a police officer was shot. He began a collection for the family of the slain officer, Larry Minard, Sr.

Thompson recalls, "Within a few hours we had more money in the studio, cash, and checks than we thought it safe without security present. We called the Omaha Police Department to ask for an officer to stay with us until the end of my shift and then be responsible for delivering the donations to the Minard family.

"Before the night was over, Buddy Squirrel (Buddy Scott, acting Program Director), who's actual talent could never possibly live up to his ego, walked in the studio screaming that I had not gotten permission for this deviation from KOIL's format and that I would probably get fired."

When the story of the donations made the newspaper the next morning, 2500 dollars by Thompson's count, Don Burden was pleased. Thompson continues, "The next afternoon Burden came looking for me. Joe Light and I were sitting in the break room when Burden walked in. 'Thompson, good job,' he said and began to walk away. Burden stopped, turned around and said, 'Oh, and cut your hair; you look like a woman.' ... I never heard a squeak from Buddy Squirrel again."



*Buddy Scott, KOIL 1971, holding an award.*

It should be noted that Buddy Scott (Mike Bothell) was an accomplished broadcaster. Thompson's recollection exemplifies the often contentious relationship DJs had with management, even one of their own in a mid-level position. Scott went on to success as

general manager at a couple of California stations, then joined Drake-Chenault Programming Services before becoming VP at TM Productions in Dallas.

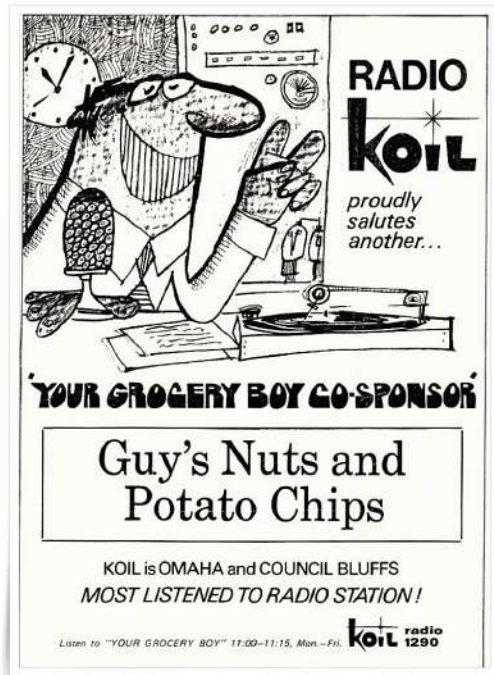
Early 1970s KOIL talent included morning man Roger W. Morgan, whose "Morganizing" bits each morning were entertaining recordings of prank phone calls made to unaware people. These "victims" were nominated by friends and relatives. This activity was outlawed later by the FCC with new rules requiring the full identity of the caller to be made before such calls could be recorded for airing.

DJ Charlie T. Stone became KOIL PD in 1971 after he was injured in a station promotion. Says Stone, "We were premiering the movie 'On Any Given Sunday' with Steve McQueen and he was there in person. He and I and an ad agency guy were racing motorbikes around the yard at the Golden Spike Drive Inn. I hit a



Charlie Stone, KOIL 1972.

chuckhole and slammed into the bottom of the screen and broke my leg and was laying there on the ground. McQueen came up and had a pack of Pall Mall cigs in his pocket. I bummed one from him and took a couple of drags and passed out. Didn't wake up for two weeks. They told me the phones in Omaha jammed for hours with people trying to call and see if I was alive. Burden came to the hospital and made me PD so I wouldn't sue him. That's how I got to be PD. True story."



KOIL 1972 ad for Your Grocery Boy, a 15-minute daily show begun on KOIL in 1940, running until 1976.

Stone proved to be a competent PD, plus he took over the morning show with his strong, deep voice and good old boy charm when Roger W. Morgan left. Burden later wanted Stone to take over a similar programming position at KISN in Portland. When Stone refused to move to the Northwest, he was fired, replaced by Production Director Bill Stevens.

Stone remained in radio going into station ownership several years later. Stevens left for XEROK 800 Juarez in 1973, replaced by Shotgun Tom Page (Tom Koepplin).

It was during this period when evening jock Richard Clear married Melanie Workhoven, daughter of WOW's longtime talent Merrill Workhoven. Melanie was a part-time actress who worked at KOIL as a female voice talent. Besides performing in dinner theater, she later did occasional on-air work including co-hosting a morning show at KQV 1410 Pittsburgh and a show with Dave Wingert at WHO 1040 Des Moines.

National PD Steve Brown left for Southern California in 1972 to pursue concert management. He loved interacting with music artists during station promotions and was experienced with Star Concerts in Beverly Hills.

Brown's spot was filled in April 1973 by Gary Allyn from San Diego. Allyn cut the Star Stations' playlists to 25 with heavy rotation on the top 10. He also eliminated hitbounds and extras.

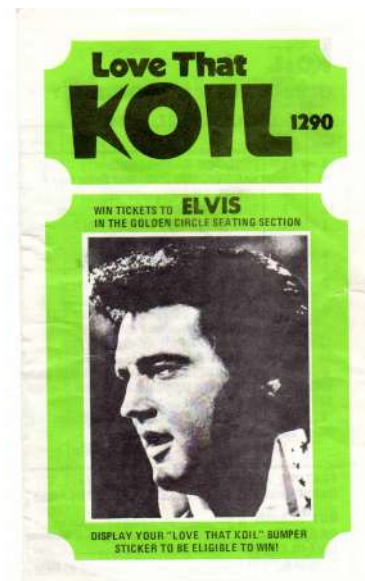
The same month, Music Director Scott Carpenter left for WHBQ 560 Memphis and was replaced in that position by morning DJ Carl Mann (*Hamilton Tip Sheet* May 7, 1973).

In less than a year Allyn was followed by J.J. Jordan from WRKO Boston. The super-tight playlist was returned to 50 records. When Jordan left for a job in record promotion, Gary Martin of WRKO was brought in for the position, but his tenure was brief as Steve Brown returned in 1974.

One of Brown's first efforts upon his return was to score Elvis Presley tickets for a scheduled appearance in Omaha. Presley was still a major concert draw even during and after the Beatlemania years. Stations would trip over each other to get tickets for on-air giveaways. When Elvis Presley announced his June 30, 1974 appearance at the Civic Center, Brown snatched up as many tickets as he could.

The quickly sold-out show led to a second, also selling out. The on-air giveaway of tickets was somewhat diminished by Brown's decision to award them individually rather than in pairs, to make the giveaway last longer.

(Elvis first appeared at the Civic in 1956. After 1974, Elvis made subsequent appearances in Omaha on April 22, 1976, and performed his last Omaha concert on June 19, 1977. At that show, taped for a CBS TV special, an overweight Elvis, forgetting some lyrics along the way, performed for a sold-out crowd at the Civic Center.



KOIL Elvis tickets giveaway 1974.

(Elvis played at the Pershing in Lincoln the following night. Two months later his death shocked the music world. KOIL was swamped with calls. Even Ken Headrick at KFAB reported the station was “flooded with requests for Presley tunes and information” (OWH Aug 17). Rather than make headlines as it would today, Elvis’ passing as a national story was buried three or more stories deep. CBS’ Walter Cronkite later admitted his underplay of the story was a mistake.)

One of Steve Brown’s prouder moments came when he broke a national hit record on KOIL, C.W. McCall’s “Convoy,” in late 1975. Local ad man Bill Fries recorded the song, an outgrowth of his commercials for Old Home Bread. Brown recalls it received its first national airplay on Carl Mann’s midday show in late 1975 with Brown and the record promoter eagerly and almost proudly looking on. The song went on to sell two-million records and was the major catalyst for the Citizens Band (CB) craze of the 70s.

KOIL TOP 30 FOR THE METROPLEX KOIL NEW MUSIC SURVEY WEEK OF JANUARY 20-26, 1976			
Last Week	This Week	Title	Artist
	1	CONVOY	C W McCall
1	2	I WRITE THE SONGS	Barry Manilow
2	3	EVIL WOMAN	Electric Light Orch
6	4	FOX ON THE RUN	Sweet
7	5	LOVE ROLLERCOASTER	Ohio Players
17	6	THEME FROM MAHOGANY	Diana Ross
3	7	LOVE TO LOVE YOU	BABY - Donna Sommers
5	8	SATURDAY NIGHT	Bay City Rollers
9	9	WALK AWAY FROM LOVE	David Ruffins
4	10	BREAKING UP IS HARD TO DO	Neil Sedaka
20	11	THEME FROM S.W.A.T.	Rhythm Heritage
8	12	FLY AWAY	John Denver
18	13	50 WAYS TO LEAVE YOUR LOVER	Paul Simon
12	14	YOU SEXY THING	Hot Chocolate
<b>FEATURE ALBUM</b>			
MUSIC MAESTRO PLEASE . . . . . Love Unlimited Orch			

*Convoy tops the charts.*

New challenges were plaguing KOIL 1290 at this time. Its format was facing increasing competition from both AM and fast-growing FM stations. But that was the least of Don Burden’s worries. Ongoing legal problems were snowballing.

Problems began to emerge back in 1970 when the FCC scheduled hearings on the renewal of his five licenses (KOIL AM/FM, WIFE AM/FM Indianapolis, and KISN Portland, OR). The issues were “contest irregularities, political favoritism, and slanting the newscasts to favored candidates.”

The allegations, according to insiders, were brought to the attention of the FCC by a disgruntled employee at the Portland station. Burden responded that he was a victim of “political and bureaucratic harassment.” The hearing was set for December 2. Subsequent litigation lasted for over five years.

Meanwhile, Burden doubled down on working to keep KOIL the top dog. Major promotions were launched.

“The Last Contest,” developed by Jack McCoy at KCBQ 1170 in San Diego was arguably the biggest and most exciting contest drawing attention at the time. The concept relied on promotional drama and high production values.

KOIL picked it up in 1973. The Last Contest offered a multitude of lucrative prize packages, ranging from cars and home furnishings to exotic travel. Dozens of prize packages were all lavishly

described in heavily-produced spots. The spots for each numbered prize package were individually crafted by KOIL Production Director Dale Nixon, a master at utilizing the theater of the mind using music, sound effects, and fast-paced production, along with his soft, confident voice describing the packages.

The promotion sounded huge over the weeks leading up to the drawing. In the end, only one of the prize packages was given away, and the contest was suddenly over.

Bigger promotions would be on the way as Top 40 competition ratchets up. KRCB 1560 had been making noise with Top 40 but with a daytime-only signal failing to sufficiently cover the western reaches of the market, it had little effect. It was Meredith Broadcasting and its stations WOW 590 and WOW FM 92.1 that grew into a major competitor for KOIL.

Meredith Broadcasting was already seeking claim to some of the younger listeners in the market by modernizing the music of WOW 590, but remained non-aggressive. The aggression was channeled to FM, flipping WOW FM on 92.1 to a full-blown Top 40.

The WOW FM call letters were changed to KFMX 92.1, those calls an echo of Iowa's first FM station in Council Bluffs that aired in the early 1950s. Live jocks and stereo Top 40 took to the air introducing *Stereo Rock KFMX 92.1* on December 1, 1971.

KFMX took on-air jabs at KOIL. The station would send a bouquet of black funeral carnations to new KOIL personalities as they arrived. KOIL personnel simply let it all slide, giving no recognition of this new onslaught.

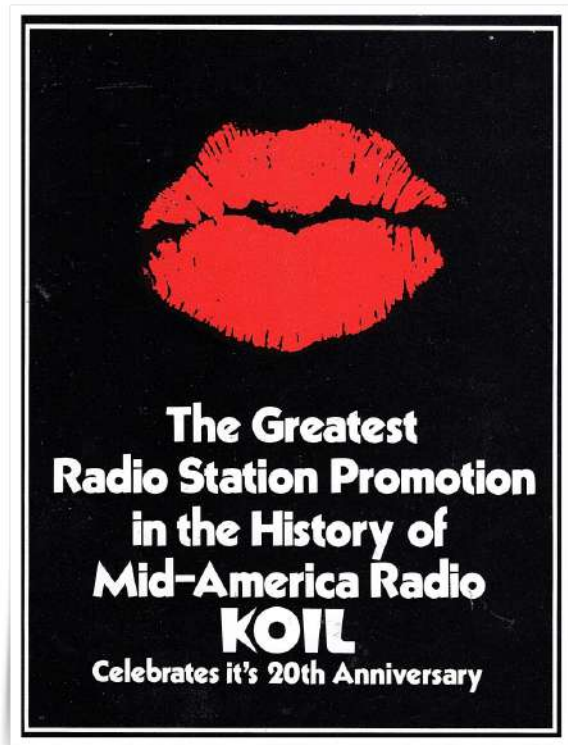
KFMX lasted just six months. The staff was fired and the format was flipped to automated Beautiful Music with new call letters, KEZO.

It was a bitter day for the KFMX crew. The air staff played air checks of famous Top 40 stations of the day, supplied on a LP disc recently sent to stations by a record promotion company. The collection of tracks were played and pushed on-air as "rock radio, sounding as it *should* be..." a dig at the heritage Top 40 KOIL. Unmentioned was that a KOIL aircheck also made the disc but would remain unplayed.

After that loss, WOW 590 took off the gloves. The AM station took direct aim at KOIL with an unmistakable switch to Top 40 music and personality in 1973. Though its DJs were less outlandish than those at KOIL, WOW started making inroads by simply having fewer commercials and playing more music.

The gauntlet was thrown. In 1974 Don Burden responded by launching what was described as “The greatest radio station promotion in the history of Mid-America Radio.”

The “Love That KOIL” campaign was two-pronged for home and car listeners, one featuring bumper stickers with a big kiss mark on a black background that could land a cash prize for the car’s driver, and the other a DJ call-out with cash prizes for those who would answer their phone, “Love That Koil.”



Topping it off was a concurrent contest offering one of the biggest prizes ever, a 100-thousand dollar "Dream Home." The house was under construction at 11310 Sahler Street and would come fully furnished by co-promoter Brandeis department store. Listeners were to call in after hearing the "secret word" of the day to qualify for the drawing.

The Dream Home created lots of buzz—at first. Naysayers began complaining about the huge tax bill the winner would have to pay. Then the contest soon lost its freshness as it dragged on. The contest continued well past the scheduled mid-summer giveaway, with “construction delays” given as the reason. Meanwhile, listeners were aware the eligibility pool was growing larger.

The drawing was finally held in November 1974. Steve Brown announced the winner from the home's site in front of a gathered crowd. The event was aired live over a problem-plagued radio link.



The winner was not required to be present, and indeed at drawing time was absent from the crowd. The contest ended in anti-climactic fashion as the crowd slowly dispersed leaving Brown to ad-lib with no excited winner to interview.

During this period, the rift between staff and management grew. Burden was brusque and known as a taskmaster. He admitted in a 1968 interview with Peter Citron in the *South Omaha Sun* that he's "fairly intense," saying, "I can't stand things not being done properly or not on time."



Burden's corporate culture was contentious. This only added to the staff's paranoid environment in an insecure business where personality clashes, fickle changes, and abrupt firings are almost the norm.

This corporate culture of Burden's had been noted as early as 1962. On Don Steele's sample tape when trying to land a job elsewhere, he ad-libbed at the beginning of his tape that he was making the audition at home rather than at the station because "...there is a certain Gestapo element there."

Burden's "Gestapo" was primarily upper management, but chief engineer Jerry Weist was most visible as "the lookout." Weist was inherited with KOIL when Burden took over but was fully on board by the 1970s with partial ownership. By 1975 he owned nearly four percent of the Star Stations. He became KOIL's "hall monitor," keeping watch on the behavior of what was likely viewed as an adolescent air staff.



Jimmy Fox (Alan Cain), KOIL 1972. AKA Erik Foxx, WOW in 1974.

Burden understood radio sales and promotion but never seemed fully in tune with the music or personalities. Ron Ugly Thompson observed that successful jocks at any of the Starr properties performed their wildest and best ratings-grabbing bits whenever Burden was out of town. Says Thompson, "Burden didn't understand the 'sausage' being made step by step; he only understood the numbers. So with him at the other end of the control room phone, it wasn't any fun." It's not that Burden was a tyrant. 1972 evening jock Jimmy Fox recalls, "One time I had just bought a new 1971 Corvette, and I called him to ask if I could keep it in the garage. He said no problem, so I did."

The chasm between Burden and much of the air staff deepened in the 1970s. When News Director Mike (Roger) Aulabaugh left for an opportunity at WOW, it was discovered that his no-compete contract was mysteriously gone from the personnel files on the second floor. KOIL still filed suit to keep Aulabaugh from employment at WOW while seeking 35 thousand dollars in damages from the offending station (Aug 18, 1973).

The court ruled within weeks that the contract was nonetheless valid and Aulabaugh couldn't take broadcast work within 35 miles of Omaha for 12 months. Aulabaugh left the market, soon going to Associated Press.

Popular and outrageous personality Joe Light (Charles Springer) abruptly left KOIL in June 1973, fired for an early morning prank.

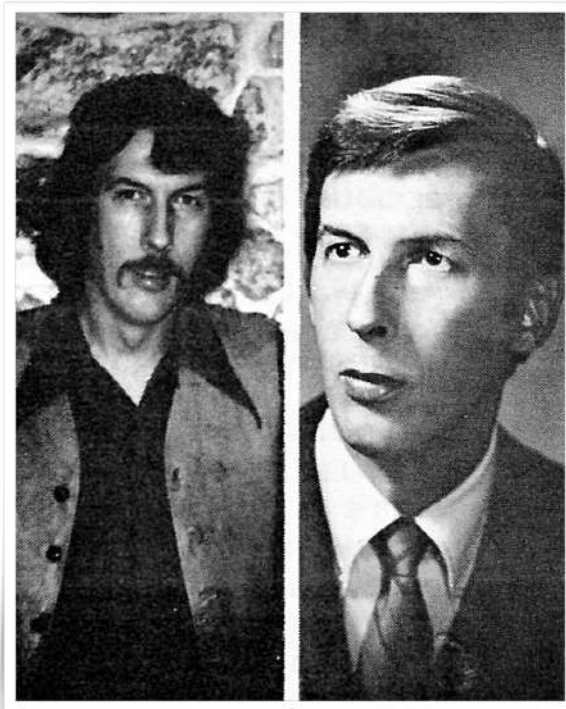


*Mike Aulabaugh, at work in the KOIL newsroom, 1972*

After a late night out, an inebriated Light came into the station during Scott Carpenter's (Steve Taylor) overnight show at around 2 a.m., telling the part-timer to move over.

Light commandeered the show for the next few minutes posing as an amateur-sounding version of Carpenter, scratching the needle over records and begging listeners to call the GM and make him full time with his own daytime show.

Carpenter happened to be running an aircheck tape at the time. He recalls, "...instead of physically preventing Joe from taking the mic...which might've resulted in damage to the studio and myself...I simply stepped out of the way and let him have his say. Then, I left the aircheck of the incident on (National Program Director) J.J. Jordan's desk." Joe, a popular though sometimes polarizing personality at KOIL off and on since 1960, was gone the next day.



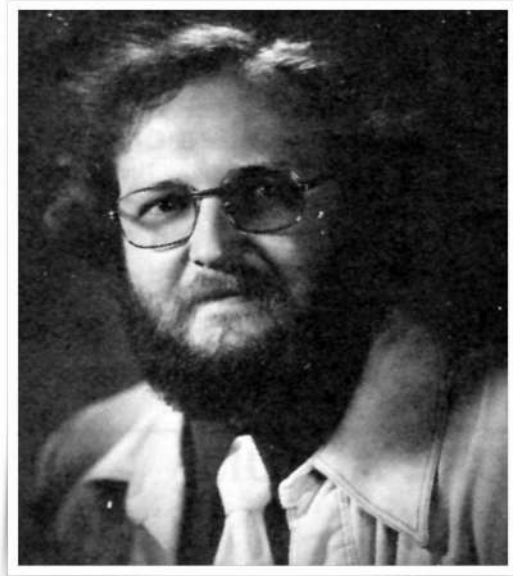
*Joe Light, KOIL 1971 and 1960s.*

The rift between KOIL staff and management reached a peak when surveillance equipment was discovered in the station coffee lounge on New Year's Day, 1974. It was well-known that the station lounge was a popular and oft-frequented place of gossip by the staff.

That morning PD Tom Page, having coffee and casually looking up at the ceiling, noticed a shadowy object in a ceiling vent. When he went up to inspect, he found it to be a microphone.

Pulling the mic's cable, something fell with a clunk in another nearby ceiling vent. The on-air DJ Carl Mann went up to the second vent standing on a chair and to the gasps of the small group of staff that by this time had gathered, pulled out a small TV camera.

Management admitted it to be a video closed circuit to the GM's office, displaying a small, fuzzy picture on a monitor in a pull-out drawer in the GM's desk. They explained that it was for security reasons after a series of thefts a year earlier, and had been off since then. Few, if any, employees accepted the explanation, believing it was for management's paranoid eavesdropping. Newsman Sherm Meyers immediately resigned and complained to the ACLU.



*Tom Page (John Koeplin), KOIL 1973*

More staff vs. management issues would follow, but in the meantime shoring up programming against WOW 590 was the business priority. In 1974 John Erling came over from WOW where he had been fired for upsetting a sponsor with a joke. Erling passed on an opportunity at KFAB because "They rotated their morning people and I wanted to have my own morning show."

Erling was hired by Steve Brown as a newsreader for KOIL, the position being a place holder for Erling until the launch of KEFM 96.1 where he would do mornings. Not long after taking the FM morning show, Erling proved himself more suitable for a higher profile and was moved to mornings on KOIL 1290.

Erling brought along something he learned from Jimmy O'Neill at WOW. Says Erling, "Jimmy taught me the phone...I realized I liked the phone in Fargo (Erling's previous market)...and did opinion shows with it. But Jimmy used the phone for fun... all new to Omaha by the way....did polls, listener interaction..."

(Jimmy O'Neil, WOW's morning personality, gained fame as the host of TV's "Shindig" in the 1960s and was a DJ in the Los Angeles market. His tenure at WOW and KOIL is covered elsewhere in this volume.)

Indeed at this late stage of KOIL's charismatic run, "working the phones" on air was something new and just right for this problem-plagued station. Erling's show did well and he was the last in a line of high profile personalities to pass through KOIL before the station's problems took their final toll.

1975 was KOIL's most tumultuous year. Burden brought in Pioneer Top 40 programmer Sam Holman to take over as Star Stations National PD and Steve Brown was assigned to other projects. Holman had worked for Burden DJing at his Indianapolis and Portland stations.

Holman had highly impressive credentials. He worked Top 40 in the late 1950s, at KQV Pittsburgh under Ralph Beaudin. He assisted flipping WLS Chicago to Top 40 in 1960, burying that station's image as *The Barn Dance Station* to become a nationally-known Top 40 powerhouse. He then did the same for WABC New York, both stations soon owning their massive markets.

Sam was an outgoing, often smiling person who seldom raised his voice even when angered. When a jock did something wrong, he was firm, but more likely would just laugh about it knowing the DJ already learned his lesson.

There were exceptions. KOIL morning man John Erling remembers, "Sam would come to work at 8:45, come into the studio and tell me about the things I had done wrong...while still on the air...ended up in a shouting match...Other than that we got along...I was in awe of his New York radio experience."

Holman seemed to know everybody. Erling recalls, "One day he said, Ronald Reagan is in town.. 'do you want to meet him.' Which we did...I was surprised Reagan was shorter than me...."

During Holman's tenure as National PD at KOIL, the station was flailing for survival. Burden was facing legal problems plus direct competition from WOW. The legal battle was up to the lawyers, but how to handle WOW? Pirating its morning man seemed to be the immediate answer.



Sam Holman, KOIL 1974

Sam Holman called WOW's morning man, Jimmy O'Neill of 60's *Shindig* fame and offered him afternoons on KOIL. O'Neill was making 23 thousand a year at WOW and seemed ready for a change. He accepted what was undoubtedly a better paying offer.

But Jimmy's move to KOIL didn't come without a fight. WOW served a restraining order on his first day at KOIL. Litigation followed as to whether O'Neill was fired from WOW or quit, the latter meaning a no-compete clause in his contract would kick in. WOW claimed KOIL induced Jimmy to break the contractual terms by calling WOW PD Tom Barsanti late one night in an effort to be fired.



*Jimmy O'Neill and his California Cool, on air at KOIL 1975  
(Courtesy Larry R. Jansky).*

KOIL eventually won the judge's ruling and O'Neill started afternoons on 1290.

Holman's problems continued. The staff was persuaded to join AFTRA. When AFTRA had enough interested personnel, it sprung the surprise on the station management, which by this time included O'Neill in management as PD.

A legally-protected union vote was scheduled. Holman and Burden in the time leading up to the election campaigned for employees to reject the union. But, in the sanctity of the voting booth that summer, the vote to join turned out to be unanimous.

Four air people were fired afterward. Three of the four who were let go won a settlement the following April after alleging they were fired for their union activities--Brian Jordan, Steve Sandahl and John Koeplin (Tom Page). They received lost wages but chose not to be re-instated. The fourth had been reinstated months earlier.

Jimmy O'Neill's much-publicized move to KOIL had little effect on listeners. Ratings for KOIL and WOW showed very little difference from earlier numbers.

But FM competition increased as KGOR passed up KOIL to become third in the market, following KFAB and WOW. KOIL's strongest daypart was John Erling mornings, third in the market.

Through it all, ratings and revolt turned out to be the least of Burden's problems. Running out of appeals, the KOIL and KEFM license renewals were denied at the beginning of 1975, along with those for his other stations in Portland and Indianapolis (Jan 13). The FCC said, "serious misconduct occurred." Charges included double billing and political favors for Indiana Sen. Hartke.

Though the alleged misconduct centered on Burden's Portland and Indianapolis stations, KOIL hadn't escaped scrutiny. Two of KOIL's DJs who had close relatives working for the Internal Revenue Service, Carl Mann and Bob Dean, were questioned by FBI agents, presumably investigating whether there was some sort of collusion. That investigation went no further.

License denial meant the stations were to be silenced and licenses deleted, meaning in turn that Burden couldn't sell his stations, but other broadcasters could seek new licenses for his frequencies.

In the days leading up to the shutdown, competing applicants were already showing up, filing for the facilities. Burden began running editorials at the start of KOIL's hourly newscasts calling the applicants "carpetbaggers." One casualty of this move was newsman Chuck Schramek, fired for refusing to start his newscasts with the editorial as directed.

Burden's final appeal went to the US Supreme Court. It was denied, and the FCC ordered the stations off the air in ninety days (ordered June 2, 1976).

Even some FCC Commissioners referred to it as a death sentence. Commissioner Robert E. Lee dissented saying, "...we are effectively bankrupting the licensee and probably denying him a livelihood in his field of expertise."

Commissioner James H. Quello reluctantly concurred with the decision. In his statement, Quello said that if there were "indications of simple error or isolated lapses in judgment" he could not assent to this. But the record "shows patterns of misconduct over a considerable period of time which justify the conclusion reached by a majority of the Commission."

KOIL 1290 and KEFM 96.1 were ordered to close down on Sept 2, 1976, at 12:01 a.m.

As the shutdown approached, sponsors defected and a few more staffers bailed to other jobs. On the night of the shutdown, a number of the remaining staff assembled at Arthurs, the favored watering hole nearby, for a "wake," while at the KOIL building, reporters, television cameras, and about 40 people appeared on the veranda outside the huge windows looking into the studio.

Jimmy O'Neill in a bitter on-camera television interview chastised the FCC for putting the employees on the street. Over 100 employees at Burden's chain of stations were affected.

DJ Gene Shaw was on the air that night. He back-timed his music selection, Simon and Garfunkel's "The Sounds of Silence," to conclude just before midnight. Engineer Don Eliason stood by the remote controls for the two transmitters, eyes glued on the clock, his hands on the two remote-control switches for the AM and FM transmitters.

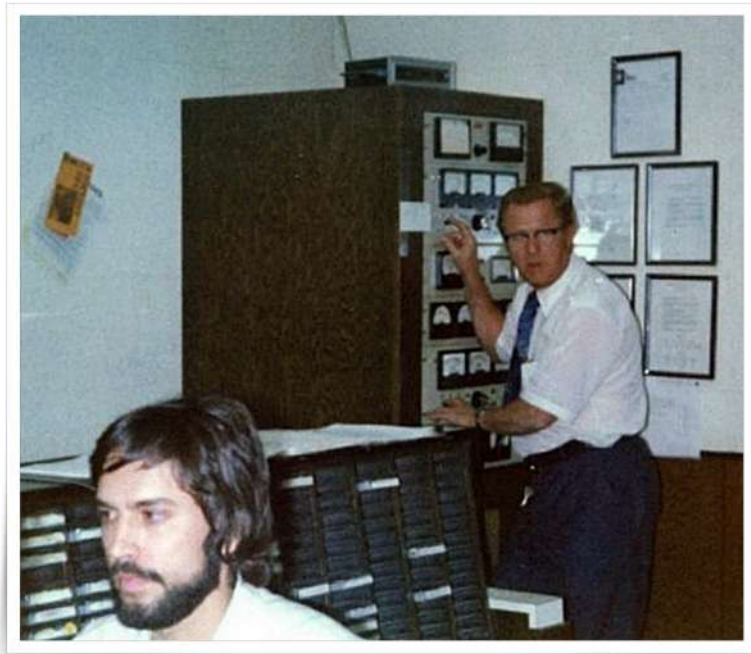
A farewell message by GM Steve Shepard followed the Simon & Garfunkel song, thanking "the thousands of people who have enjoyed and depended upon this radio station for the past 51 years."

A final station ID, then Eliason flipped the switches shutting the stations down. KOIL and KEFM along with KISN, WIFE AM and FM were silenced that night, their licenses and call letters deleted by the FCC. Thus went down the biggest FCC penalty in broadcast history.

Listeners the next morning, some still thinking it was all a publicity stunt for which KOIL was well-known, were greeted with silence and occasional static bursts on 1290. At night, a jumble of distant stations skipped in.

The shutdown made national news the next day. Roger Mudd, filling in for Dan Rather on the CBS TV nightly newscast, introduced a packaged report by Morton Dean that included O' Neill and his comments. Dean concluded his report with, "Serves as a reminder to broadcasters, the government gives broadcast licenses but can also take them away."

The KOIL jocks at the time scattered for better pastures, some already having left in the days or weeks leading up to the blackout. Evening personality Bob Dean went to evenings at WHB Kansas City, John Erling to mornings at KRMG Tulsa, Carl Mann to PD at KCRG Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Blue Gene Shaw to KKKL Grand Forks. Only Jimmy O'Neill remained in the market, going to KRCB Council Bluffs and later trying his hand in his own business, opening an ad agency in Omaha.



*Gene Shaw on air in foreground with engineer Don Eliason at the transmitters remote control switches, eye on the clock, leading to the midnight blackout (Courtesy: Larry R. Jansky).*

The charges against Burden were never proven. In the book, *FCC: The Ups and Downs of Radio and TV Regulation*, author William B. Ray says the FCC was easy prey for political pressure, and cites (among other citations) the "historic decision of February 7, 1975, in the Don Burden case." Ray says Burden lost his five stations following lengthy hearings that turned upon the mysterious disappearance of evidence. Involved were political favors given to Sen. Vance Hartke of Indiana in his 1964 campaign.

Don Burden's facilities were idled. They were costly to keep and no money was coming in. He continued efforts to get the lights back on by leasing the facilities to a temporary licensee and operator.

Before the end of the year, the stations did indeed return to the air. An agreement was set up where Nathan Novak, who owned a car dealership in Omaha among other enterprises, would operate the station with all proceeds going to a charity.

Novak was a friend of Don Burden and was given close scrutiny by the FCC, but no improprieties were found. Thus was born Beneficial Broadcasting, an entity that would run the stations until competing applications for 1290 and 96.1 were sorted and determined.

KOIL returned to the air on December 16, 1976, after nearly three months of silence. KEFM also came back, returning to its automated Beautiful Music format.

In typical KOIL fashion, big-name personalities were brought back for the return. 1960's favorite Roger W. Morgan was hired for mornings, and Joe Light, preferring Top 40 to country at KOOO, returned to do afternoons. Bruce Vidal (later hitting the big time as a KIIS Los Angeles jock) was hired for middays and his wife Laurie was soon added for evenings. Jimmy O'Neill declined an offer to return, remaining at KRCB.

The general manager was Gary Fries who got his start in sales at KFOR Lincoln. He stayed at KOIL for about a year. By the mid-1980s he was president/CEO of Transtar Radio Network for six years before heading up the Radio Advertising Bureau.

Roger W. Morgan made the first greetings upon KOIL's return at 9 a.m. playing John Sebastian's, "Welcome Back," a hit from a few years earlier. The station slogan was, *On For Good*, used in print ads as well as on-air.



*KOIL and KEFM return to the air, December 17 ad (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).*



The zany antics of the air staff were also back, thanks to the strong talents of Roger W. Morgan and Joe Light. Light got "Morganized" in a prank call one morning, setting off a brief on-air feud that listeners love.

Light soon got revenge one weekend evening at Caniglia's Drawing Room restaurant where Roger W. Morgan was spinning records in the disco lounge. It was the old pie-in-the-face stunt, delivered by Joe, who calmly walked out after leaving Morgan a sticky mess.

But, things were different now. In the Spring 1977 ARB ratings KOIL rebounded only to number three, behind KFAB and Top 40 WOW. The sole demographic where it reached #1 was among teens at night, and even then, inconsistently.

KOIL's ratings would range from a 7 (6th place) to nearly a 10 (third place) during the remainder of the decade. Even more telling, record promoters commented that KOIL never again regained the influence in record sales that it once enjoyed.

Roger W. Morgan and Joe Light quit KOIL over a money dispute in October 1977, apparently involving the lack of talent fee opportunities. Joe Light finally left the market moving to California, where he would do two stints at KIQQ in Los Angeles, five years at KCBQ San Diego, then move to KRIZ Phoenix, before briefly returning to Omaha in the late 1980s.

By March 1978, Jimmy O'Neill gave it up at KRCB and returned to KOIL as PD and Morning personality. He announced plans to soften the music, making it more "Adult Rock or modern middle of the road." (OWH March 21, 1978)

Roger W. Morgan, on KOIL in the Morgan, 6 to 10 AM, is back in town for good to Morganizate the midwest.

Joe Light, on KOIL in the afternoon, 3 to 7 PM, has come home for good. Light's on everybody.

Sam Stewart, KOIL's and KEFM's News Director and morning anchor man. Sam's your man for the news.

**KOIL 1290**  
The New 1290 on your AM dial  
The natural place to be

**KEFM 96**  
96 on your FM dial  
The beautiful place to be

**\*WE'RE ON FOR GOOD**  
KOIL-KEFM is operated by Beneficial Broadcasting Company under interim license by the Federal Communications Commission with profits going for community good.

*KOIL-KEFM return. On for "good" having a double meaning-- the stations' proceeds would go to charity. (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).*



*KOIL air staff with studio guest Wolfman Jack 1978.*

Former KOIL jock Jim Morgan, who by this time owned a studio (Digisound) and ran his own lucrative voiceover business, was hired for afternoons in 1978. The following year he was fired mid-shift by GM Larry Campbell, apparently for negotiating employment with other stations (*OWH* Aug 9, 1979). Within days after his firing, Morgan appeared on-air at KESY AM, doing mornings.

Besides Jimmy O'Neill, KOIL had competent on-air talent that by 1979 included Chris Collins in the evenings. He was replaced by Mark Todd from Rapid City when Collins moved on to San Diego. Scott Deuel was bumped from overnights to a day shift by September.

Two notables to join KOIL in 1979 were Steve Lundy and Terry Mason, both from WOW 590. Lundy replaced former WOW jock Eddie Hudson on middays. Lundy went on to become a well-known talent at various stations in Omaha and Lincoln. Terry Mason would become KOIL's program director in 1980 when Jimmy O'Neill is inexplicably fired.

1979 marked the beginning of a successful weekly event for KOIL, the Peony Park dance. KOIL hosted and aired the live outdoor dance at the Royal Grove in Peony Park, North 78th and Cass Streets. It was in the park's open-air venue boasting a white orchestra shell. KOIL had once hosted a concert there in 1973 with Clint Holmes and headliner Rick Nelson.

(Peony Park opened in 1919 and was a popular 35-acre park at 78th and Cass Streets that included amusement rides, a 4.5-acre swimming pool with beach and water slide, plus the Royal Terrace Ballroom that billed itself as "one acre under one roof." The park closed in 1994. It was demolished and a strip mall and apartments now occupy the space.)

The Peony Park event began during the Disco Era. KOIL had been airing a Thursday night disco show from Cuzz's in the Old Market but moved it to Peony Park when tying in with "Disco Rondo," a short-lived citrus soft drink.

Terry Mason recalled, "Disco Rondo..with Scott Duell as host. We moved the Thursday night dance party from Cuzz's in the Old Market to Peony Park in the summer of '79. Sprite took over sponsorship the next year when Rondo was dropped from the Coke line-up. And then...Fight, er, Sprite night took on its own personality!"

KOIL DJs such as Chris Collins, Chris Moreau, and Bill Mattson hosted the event until 1981, even after KOIL softened its music mix. KQKQ 98.5 took over Sprite Night after KOIL was dropped.



*Terry Mason, KOIL PD 1978.*

Meanwhile, the competition for ownership of 1290 and 96.1 dragged on. In November 1978 applicants for KOIL and KEFM asked to be considered separately. KRCS sought the AM to be licensed back to Council Bluffs. Three others, Webster-Baker, Omaha Broadcasting Service, and Nebraska-Iowa Broadcasting, all sought both the AM and FM, while Nebraska Communication and KYLE Broadcasting sought only the FM. The final determination was still a few years off.

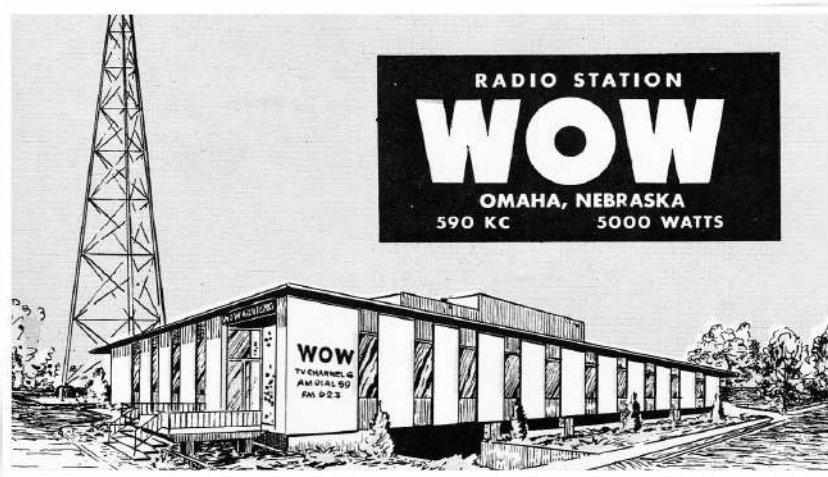
Beneficial Broadcasting's charity was decided to be Creighton University, but the school as late as 1983 claimed it never saw a dime from the operation even though Beneficial says it finally showed a profit in 1979. It was later learned profit was allowed for use in making up for deficits from earlier years before going to charity.

KOIL would never return to those heady years of the 1960s. New owners will come in and new formats will emerge, but FM's victory dance in the coming decade will spell the end of personality music and news while the corporate-centric radio takeover of the 90s is being spawned.

## **590 WOW Omaha**

WOW 590 decided early in the 1970s to go for a younger audience, starting out cautiously. After decades of carrying CBS, WOW dropped the historic network for ABC in 1971 and began tentatively playing pop music with DJ personalities. Under Program Director Andy Bickle the music was pop/contemporary songs "having a beat" mixed with "selected memorable tunes."

Bickle went heavy on the oldies at first, carefully mixing in some of the current hits. Omaha's First DJ, Sandy Jackson, took over AM drive. Sandy had been out of radio since leaving KOIL and starting his teen club in 1965, closing it down in 1970 after too many brawls and the live bands became expensive.



*WOW AM/FM/TV studios, 35th and Farnam Streets 1970. The tower was the original for TV (1949-1966) and for WOW's FM (1961-1973) until the moves to the Crown Point TV Antenna Farm.*

WOW ratcheted things up a couple of years later following a six-month attempt at stereo top 40 on WOW's sister FM, KFMX 92.1. When KFMX failed,

WOW's programming went from soft rock to Top 40 in early 1973 with new Program Director Tom Barsanti. He had been brought in earlier as news director, coming from Albuquerque where he held the same title at KGGM.

Barsanti was promoted to PD upon Bickle's departure in 1973 and began studying what it takes to make WOW into a top-rated contemporary station. He picked the brains of other PDs, traveled, and listened.

Becoming a contemporary music station meant clearing out the old-line program elements. With support from GM Steve Shannon, farm reports were cut back while others were dumped. The Arnold Peterson farm reports, a half-hour in the mornings and an hour at noon, were buried along with about 150 thousand dollars in agricultural business.

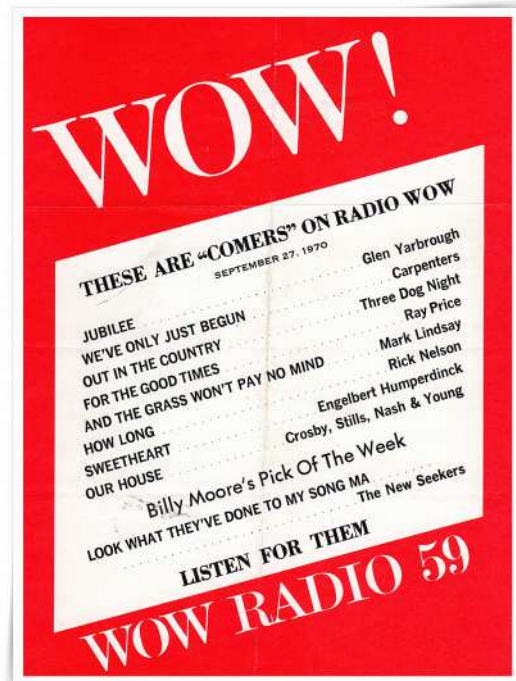
Sports was dropped enraging hockey fans, including one vocal engineer at WOW who didn't mind speaking his mind each time his path crossed that of Barsanti.

Barsanti remembered hearing Jimmy O'Neill in Albuquerque on KOB. He reached out and hired O'Neill to take over morning drive at WOW, sending Sandy Jackson to the FM side where he was already handling PD duties for the now-automated Beautiful Music FM, KEZO.

O'Neill was well-known as the host of television's *Shindig* in the mid-1960s, but he had dwindling success afterward. He was always the first to admit his career was "front-loaded," going from national television to the two top-rated Los Angeles stations, then leaving for smaller markets. He landed in Albuquerque, on which he put a positive spin calling it an escape from "the smog, traffic, and crime" of LA.

O'Neill's Omaha arrival was meant to coincide with a "WOW Has Gone Bananas" campaign promoting the station's switch to Top 40 gearing up in February 1973.

A phone call-out promotion commenced in April with a \$1000 prize to the first person to answer the phone with the phrase, "WOW Has Gone Bananas." DJ Eddie

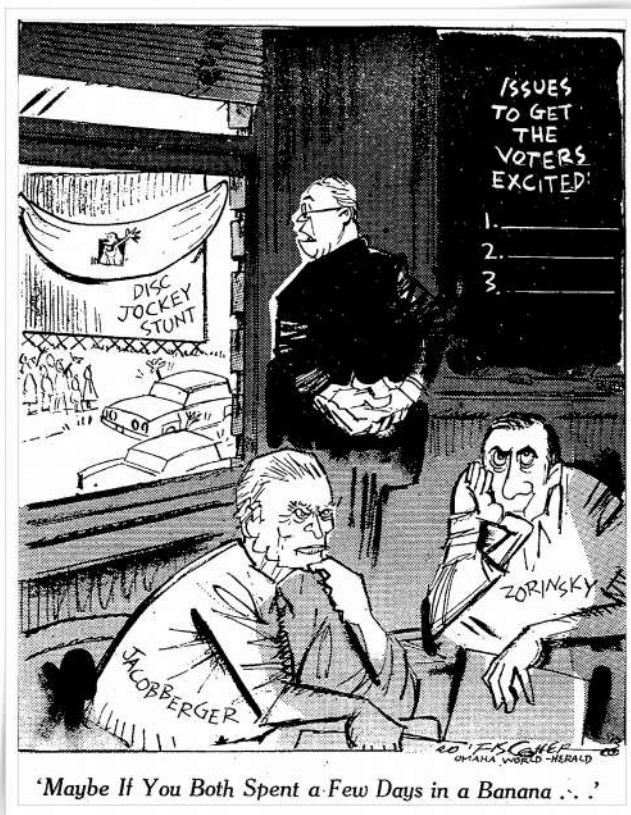


1970 WOW cautiously dipping into contemporary music with a "safe" softer songs list. Billy Moore is the former KOIL DJ Bobby Noonan who will head up KFMX in 1972.

Hudson took up residence in a huge banana on a billboard at 72d & Pacific until the station got a winner. O'Neill and other staff members would pass out bananas at appearances.

Hudson's quarters on the billboard were almost big enough for visitors, measuring about 10 feet at its widest. He had a foam mattress that served as a couch during the day, and a table with a TV, radio, and telephone. Horns consistently honked as traffic went through the busy intersection.

Hudson was fed well with meals from various Omaha restaurants and daily banana splits from Goodrich Dairy. He was protected by Pinkerton security. But, the event nearly took a toll on Hudson.



Political cartoon by World-Herald cartoonist Ed Fischer, April 22, 1973 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

It was eight days and five hours before the station scored a winner in the phone call-outs lengthening Hudson's imprisonment beyond original expectations. Barsanti recalls sending up a doctor and psychologist to help Eddie through cabin fever.

Immediately after the "Bananas" promotion, WOW sponsored an Oldies show at Peony Park. About 1700 people came out to see Chubby Checker and the Platters perform. It was an older crowd, as expected (*OWH* April 8, 1973).

WOW's promotions and personalities were quite reserved compared to those of KOIL. This worked to WOW's advantage, introducing a more mature element into the Top 40 presentation.

It was particularly effective that WOW played more music with much less clutter. KOIL's listeners had been growing weary of the heavy spot load and hyped promotions on the aging market leader. The young audience was drifting from 1290 to 590, all the while noticing the increased offerings on FM, namely KGOR and its automated Top 40..

News at WOW was hourly and treated as an important element. WOW's news came from the well-established newsroom of its sister television station in the same building. In 1970, associate News Director Steve Murphy was named news director for both WOW Radio and WOW-TV channel 6.

Murphy's entire career was spent at the Meredith stations since joining in 1951 two years after graduating from Creighton University. When the television station was sold and separated from radio in 1976, Murphy stayed with the television news operation. Murphy was later recognized as one of the key leaders of Freedom of Information causes in Nebraska.

By this time most stations recorded songs on to tape cartridges as a matter of convenience and preservation. 45 rpm records would wear out or get scratched. In radio, 45's also suffered from "cue burns," damage created by the DJ locating the beginning of the song on the record in order to have an instant start when the turntable starts its spin. While listening on a cue monitor, the record is played to the song, then with the turntable off, manually backed up to the beginning. The needle does the damage on each backup leaving a permanent hiss sound at the song's beginning. Columbia Records produced the worst vinyl leading to cue burns according to some DJs, one who claimed, "You can only cue a 45 from Columbia once."

Barsanti would slightly speed up the records when recording to the tape cartridge so that they would sound brighter against KOIL's airplay. The slower, original recordings in comparison would sound like they were dragging. Some vocalists were sped up nearly to the point of sounding like a

chipmunk, but for most songs it was a subconscious but positive difference to the listener. This practice also slightly shortened the songs, allowing more programming content to be squeezed in.

Dubbing music to cart also allowed editing. Barsanti immediately edited out “goddamn” from the new Eagles release when it arrived, “Life In The Fast Lane.” Erik Foxx also guiltily remembers being ordered to edit Led Zepplin’s classic “Stairway to Heaven” to three and a half minutes.

Erik Foxx (Alan Cain, formerly Jimmy Fox spelled with just one X when at KOIL in 1972) returned to Omaha from gigs in Buffalo and Pittsburgh in 1974. He replaced afternoon jock John Erling who was fired by GM Steve Shannon for making a joke that upset a sponsor. Foxx later was upped to PD when GM Steve Shannon moved to KCMO Kansas City taking Barsanti with him. Foxx’s new boss replacing Shannon was Jim Eddens.

John Erling’s comment was about Blue Cross, a major insurance company. Erling joked that Blue Cross once failed to raise premiums because the execs were out of town and forgot. Blue Cross has a large office in Omaha and the national execs happened to be in town that day. They quickly voiced their displeasure. Erling, who came to the station from Fargo in 1972, was out. He soon was snatched up by KOIL.

Inroads against KOIL were being made. Consultant George Wilson of Bartell along with Jack McCoy was retained by WOW to help keep the momentum going.

WOW’s ratings were eating away at KOIL in late 1975 when KOIL’s National PD, Sam Holman, hired away morning man Jimmy O’Neill to do afternoons on 1290. WOW fought back, delaying O’Neill’s debut on KOIL with a court’s restraining order on his first day there.

Litigation followed as to whether O’Neill was fired from WOW or quit, the latter meaning a no-compete clause in his contract would take effect. WOW claimed KOIL induced Jimmy to break contractual terms by his calling Tom Barsanti late one night in an effort to be fired. KOIL eventually won the judge’s ruling and O’Neill began afternoons on KOIL 1290.

Jimmy O’Neill’s replacement for WOW’s morning position was Dave Wingert, a native of the East Coast who would stay to become a long-time Omaha radio personality. Wingert’s theater background was a natural for his on-air work, and it aided his appeal at personal appearances. It was the start of a long relationship with Omaha radio for the East Coast thespian.

One Wingert appearance was tragically marred in 1977 when a lone gunman entered Club 89 at 4515 South 89th at H Street. and opened fire. Wingert was on stage as emcee at the time and was struck in the shoulder. One person was killed and dozens more wounded.

Listeners were unimpressed with the O'Neill defection. In the fall 1975 rating period neither station appeared affected. By spring 1976 the effect was still minimal, with only Wingert showing a slight increase from a year earlier. It was KOIL's last ratings period before its blackout.

KFAB and WOW were numbers one and two in the market, together holding almost half the listenership. KFAB's audience was in the upper demographic, WOW's, on the younger side.

The KOIL blackout in September 1976 effectively ended the Omaha Top 40 battle of the 1970s. WOW took over in the Top 40 arena reaching a 23 share in the ARB, nearly matching KFAB's 27. WOW maintained much of the Top 40 lead even after KOIL's return three months later keeping a 15 share to KOIL's 9.

WOW was riding high. PD Erik Foxx recalls WOW had a \$100,000 promotion budget. He traveled for air check trips and to radio conventions in Dallas, Los Angeles, and San Diego. He was assisted by national programming consultant Jack McCoy.

WOW had a mobile unit sponsored by Wendy's, calling it, the "Hot N Juicy Wagon." It was a new 4x4 Ford Bronco, red, with a black top and big wheels, equipped with a two-way radio for storm reports, news, and remotes. It went everywhere, making appearances, passing out bumper stickers for cash, along with T-shirts and concert tickets.

Foxx recalls the station's Rosenblatt Stadium 4th of July event, once a tradition owned by KOIL. That year the Beach Boys were brought in for a free concert followed by fireworks. It went well, except for one giant fireworks display Fox had designed in the form of the WOW logo. After the Beach Boys finished, it was set off. It fizzled and smoked. Fox recalls sweating the failure but found his management wasn't concerned and actually got a laugh from it.

Other big show tie-ins included Billy Joel, Foreigner, the Bee Gees, and ELO, with WOW insisting on exclusive rights to emcee and promote the concerts, leaving KOIL in the cold as much as possible.

Memorable personalities who went through WOW 590 in the 1970s include Larry Moffitt from KWK St. Louis, Roger Davis who came over from Iowa's KCRG Cedar Rapids, Eddie Hudson, and Steve Lundy who later moved to KOIL in 1979.

Mike Rivers was a longtime night personality, and Rod Meyer did overnights. John Driscoll was the production director. News people included Richard Prichard, Pat Kelly, Joni Hoffman, and News Directors included Mark O'Brien and Chuck Wolf.



At about the time WOW took KOIL's crown in 1976, it was moving time. Sister station WOW TV Channel six had been sold by Meredith to Chronicle Broadcasting of San Francisco. The change of ownership meant that the two companies could no longer share radio and television facilities.

WOW TV kept the building and studios with the 500-foot tower in the back parking lot that was the original TV tower (never used for AM or FM) and changed calls to WOWT. WOW radio moved out keeping the old call letters.

WOW 590 and KEZO 92.1 (the former WOW FM at this time airing an automated Beautiful Music format) packed up and settled into new quarters in the Empire Building at 11128 John Galt Boulevard, located in a newer part of West Omaha just off the interstate.

The new studios were spacious. As Burden's battles at the KOIL Building were continuing, WOW was building a showcase operation of its own. GM Jim Eddens announced 70 percent of the equipment was new. PD Foxx had a big office with windows and his own secretary.

Before the end of the decade, the staid old-line broadcaster that turned to the younger audience and took over the Top 40 crown went one step further. It would become the first AM station in Omaha to broadcast in stereo.

It was a FCC-approved test of one of the five competing systems, the Kahn-Hazeltine system. WOW was one of 14 stations to receive such permission and it cost the station nearly 20 thousand dollars to set it up.

The Kahn system used the upper and lower sidebands of the station for right and left channels. No AM stereo receivers were yet on the market, but the curious could listen to a rather primitive form of WOW's AM stereo by using two receivers on each side of the room, one tuned to the high side of 590 and the other to the low side. The Kahn system was the only one of the five to use this peculiarity.

The audio range was improved and the stereo separation was good. PD Erik Fox recalls, "I had a unit in my office and my car. I liked it, but it was not as clear as FM."

WOW 590 ended the decade riding high, though numbers were slipping. The station dropped about a full share point during each six-month rating period since Spring 1978. On its heels was automated rock at KGOR 99.9. Still, WOW 590 was behind only KFAB 1110.

But change was in the air, and the 1980s held some big surprises for WOW.

## 1110 KFAB BECOMES THE HERITAGE LEADER

The older end of the demographics was ruled by KFAB. As the 1970s got underway, KFAB was the city's companion with hourly news from NBC, a local news staff, and regular weather and temperature reports that carefully included Lincoln. The station was the one bastion of stability in the Omaha market.

KFAB music was non-offensive, described by some as insipid, and could almost be perceived as simple interludes between the more important newscasts and weather updates.

Even management's description of the music was trite, saying it's "a little bit of everything that's not extreme, with an accent on what's new." Announcers showed hardly any interest in the music, at times misstating song titles without apology. But, this formula worked.



*KFAB transmitter building and one of its three towers in Sarpy County, 1970  
(Courtesy: Ernest J. Wesolowski).*

The all-night show was automated but still part of the strong companionship that KFAB cultivated. *Serenade in the Night* was mostly a mix of easy instrumentals and soft vocals, with no live announcer except for whenever NBC newscasts might be aired. Few listeners were ever aware that they were accompanied overnight by a mere robot.

KFAB was early with automation, using it for the overnights for over a decade. The favored system was SMC's Sono-Mag that employed a few carousels filled with tape carts, a few open-reel machines, and a time announce system. The system would follow a format that could be setup through the use of heavy-duty plastic chips. Each chip contained a specific command (music, jingle, commercial, station ID) and the chips would be stacked in formatic order. They would sometimes break and get spewed out of the sequencer leading to problems for the engineer on duty.

On the weekends KFAB carried NBC's long-running *Monitor*, with its iconic "Monitor Beacon" sounder. *Monitor* was launched in 1955 and remained the air until 1975.

KFAB's decade began with a weather event striking the station in 1970. A late summer storm of rain and high winds swept through the metro on Sunday night August 2<sup>nd</sup>. Northern Sarpy County bore the brunt, with the most damage being in the little town of Springfield. KFAB's transmitter and its three tall, self-supporting towers were about eight miles east of the town. The station's two western-most towers buckled under the force of the winds, collapsing to the ground shortly after 10 p.m. taking KFAB off the air.

Engineers returned the station to the air by 5:45 a.m. using the remaining tower. The FCC was notified and the station was permitted temporary authority to run non-directional day and night until new towers could be erected.

In time, the two downed towers were replaced by a pair of guyed towers, altering the symmetry of the site's long-time profile, but getting KFAB's nighttime pattern back in place.

Lyle Bremser and Ken Headrick professionally steered KFAB into the 1970s. Bremser became program director for KFAB in 1950 and a KFAB co-owner in 1954, then rose to KFAB general manager in 1956.



*KFAB sign above its second floor studios at 5010 Underwood in the Dundee neighborhood of Omaha, 1970.*

Ken Headrick was hired by Bremser in 1955 and was named station manager in 1969. Together, the pair built a stable and reliable on-air staff, a comfortable broadcast team making KFAB a ratings leader.

Bremser didn't establish policies. He said that having a policy means, "you're against something." Bremser's idea of tight control meant that when mistakes were made, he keyed on finding out what went wrong and how it could be corrected, rather than reprimanding the announcer.

KFAB's neighborly style generated feelings of loyalty and trust. The music, news, agriculture reports, weather alerts, sports coverage, personalities, and corny banter became familiar, comfortable touchstones. The on-air slogan was, "Leave it on Eleven."

Adding tremendously to the station's prestige along with the strong news and weather presence was that KFAB was the voice of the Nebraska Cornhuskers, Lyle Bremser had been calling play by play for Husker football on KFAB since 1939. Ratings during football season were always high, and the station enjoyed the halo effect all year round.

Through the 1970s Husker football on KFAB was delivered to fans by KFAB's Big Three: Bremser, Jack Payne and Dave Blackwell, plus T.J. (Tom Johnson) doing the scoreboard show.



*Sportscaster Jack Payne (Courtesy: Nebraska Broadcasters Assoc).*

Payne joined the Husker football team in 1970, coming from WOW where he had worked since 1951. He kept busy elsewhere as well, announcing the Nebraska State High School Track & Field Championships from 1971-2000 and as the public address system voice for the College World Series until 2000.

Blackwell, sports director at KMTV, succeeded Don Cole on the broadcasts in March 1967. He remained in the broadcast booth until 1973 when he moved to Salt Lake City. He was succeeded by Kent Pavelka.

In late 1970 sports writer Don Gillen of the *York News-Times* nominated Bremser, Blackwell, Payne, and "man woman and child" (Bremser's trademark exclamation during great plays) as the best football broadcasting "sixsome" of the year. Bremser's enthusiasm also included numerous cries of "Holy

Toledo."

Tom Johnson came from KBON where he had worked his first year in radio. Johnson started as Sports Director. He was made KFAB program director in 1969 during his second year there and stayed with KFAB for a total of 24 years.

On football game days Johnson would go down the list of scores, starting with the Big Eight, then the Top 20, then "Games of Interest," which was code for bettors to go down their lists.

Johnson says, "Once we said, 'games of interest' it was like a morgue in the newsroom." He remembers, "Bremser once called me in his office and curtailed 'the games of interest,' because it promoted 'gambling.' When we dropped the 'interest games' our phones rang off the hook." The feature soon returned after some convincing of Bremser.

The scoreboard show always had rousing college fight songs from just about every college campus playing in the background on big 15-inch reels of tape.

One of the Saturday helpers rounding up scores on game day was a youngster from Junior Achievement, Alexander Payne. As Johnson later says, “Yes, that Alexander Payne” who went on to a successful Hollywood career as a film director.

KFAB was strongly identified with Husker football, but it wasn’t the sole voice of the Huskers until 1983.

In the 1970s, the Nebraska Cornhuskers multi-station policy for broadcasting Husker Football was bucking a national trend that favored exclusive rights to one station and/or network. WOW carried many of the games since the 1950s. KBON even carried Husker football in the late 1960s.



*1940's Husker ad showing three Lincoln stations each doing its own on-site game coverage before Cornhusker Football exclusive rights were awarded in 1983. WOW later joined these three.*

From 1974 to 1983 four stations were originating Husker coverage from Memorial Stadium in Lincoln: KFAB with Lyle Bremser, WOW with Joe Patrick and Bob Devaney, joined by Dave Blackwell in 1979, KFOR with Dick Perry, and KLIN with Don Gill.

On game days, of Nebraska’s 50 stations, all but 11 were carrying Big Red, picking up coverage from one of the originating stations. KFAB always remained the ratings leader among the four networks on game days.

KFAB, Nebraska’s most powerful and listened-to station, had established itself as the 50-thousand watt heritage station for Omaha.

## **THE SMALLER STATIONS STRUGGLE**

Omaha’s remaining stations with less than 5-thousand watts power went through various formats and call letter changes in their search for an audience and viability.

For radio, higher power means more than just an increased coverage area. On AM it means overcoming electrical noise inside the major market core and more easily penetrating large downtown

buildings. This differs from FM where stations are nearly impervious to electrical noise but need the power to overcome attenuation in the shadows of tall buildings and hills.

The Big Three players on AM were the higher powered stations. KFAB was the most powerful at 50 thousand watts. KOIL 1290 and WOW 590 each were running a significant five thousand watts. Despite the identical power output of KOIL 1290 and WOW 590, WOW's signal is the superior of the two as its frequency is lower with inherent characteristics favoring a longer ground wave reach.

The four remaining AM stations in the Omaha market all ran a kilowatt and only one of them was licensed for full time. KBON 1490 could operate around the clock, but until 1983 had to drop power to 250 watts at night.

The other three, KOWH 660, KOOO 1420, and KRCB 1560 (the former KSWI) were all daytimers operating only from sunrise to sunset. But, these stations at least had sister FM stations that were full time.

## **660 KOZN, KOWH, KCRO- FROM COUNTRY TO CHRISTIAN**

660 entered the 1970s as KOZN, but its owners, Starr Broadcasting, were in negotiations to sell. KOZN had been country but just switched to a Soul and Rhythm and Blues format at the start of 1970, likely because of these negotiations.

Both KOZN 660 AM and its sister KOWH 94.1 FM occupied studios on the second floor of the Prom Town House, a hotel and restaurant complex near 72nd and Dodge Streets. One of the staff benefits there was free use of the hotel pool.

The would-be buyer was Reconciliation Broadcasting, a group of mostly black businessmen headed by president Rodney Wead and sports figures and Omaha natives Bob Boozer of the St. Louis Cardinals and Bob Gibson of the Seattle Sonics.

After nearly a year and a half of negotiations, Reconciliation closed the deal in 1971, paying 475 thousand dollars for KOZN 660 AM and a lease-option to buy KOWH 94.1 FM. The company assumed ownership in January 1971 dropping the KOZN calls on AM 660 a few months later in March, bringing back the KOWH calls for the third time.

The soul music format was adjusted to what station GM and head of Reconciliation Broadcasting Rodney Wead called "Sock n' Soul" on both stations. The music was a mix of soul, blues, and jazz. Wead went on to say the FM would incorporate more jazz while the AM would concentrate on rhythm

and blues. KOWH FM had already been airing Soul music full time since dropping the overnight Progressive Rock a year earlier.

The stations moved from the Prom Town House to new studios at 3910 Harney Street in late 1971. News and Gospel music was added to the AM mix at about the same time, and both stations added the newly-formed Mutual Black Network in November 1972.

**SOUND OF SOUL**

**KOWH** February 7-18, 1972  
**HOT SOUL 45's**

**SOUL MEN** February 7-18, 1972  
**HOT SOUL 45's**

1. LET'S STAY TOGETHER-----AL GREEN-----HI  
 2. CLEAR UP WOMAN-----BETTY WRIGHT-----ALTON  
 3. SUGAR DADDY-----JACKSON 5-----MOTOWN  
 4. DROWNING IN A SEA OF LOVE-----JOE SIMON-----SPRING  
 5. MAKE THE WOMAN-----CLAYDS REIGHE/PIPS-MOTOWN  
 6. THAT'S THE WAY I FEEL 'BOUT-----BOBBY MONACK-----UNITED ARTISTS  
 7. AIN'T UNDERSTANDING MELLOW-----JERRY BUTLER/LEE-----MERCURY  
 8. S&P OF SHAFT-----FAB-KAYS-----VOLT  
 9. FLOY JOY-----SUPREMACIES-----MOTOWN  
 10. AIN'T NOBODY HOME-----H.H. KING-----ABC  
 11. YOU WANT IT, YOU GOT IT-----DETROIT EMERALDS-----CHESS  
 12. FAMILY AFFAIR-----SLY STONE-----EPIC  
 13. ROCK STEADY-----AM'N' A FRANKLIN-----ATLANTIC  
 14. EVERYBODY KNOWS ABOUT ME-----LITTLE JOHNNY TAYLOR-----RCA  
 15. YOU ARE EVERYTHING-----STYLISTICS-----AVCO  
 16. DO THE FUNKY PENGUIN-----ERBUS THOMAS-----STAX  
 17. FIRE & WATER-----WILSON PICKETT-----ATLANTIC  
 18. LOVE GONNA PACK UP-----PERSUADERS-----ATCO  
 19. GAE MENKEY DON'T STOP NO SHOW-HONEY COME-----HOT WAX  
 20. SHOW ME HOW-----EMOTIONS-----VOLT  
 21. JUST MY SALVATION-----RABON ALLEN-----VOLT  
 22. I'M GETTING LONELY-----MARSHALL-----UNITED ARTISTS  
 23. D. WHAT YOU SET OUT TO DO-----BOBBY BLAND-----DUKE  
 24. LOVE IS FUNNY THAT WAY-----JACKIE WILSON-----BRUNSWICK  
 25. STANDIN' IN FOR JOEY-----JOHNNY TAYLOR-----STAX  
 26. SEE WHAT YOU DONE DONE-----DELIA CARTRELL-----CAPTAIN  
 27. NOW RN TELL THAT-----DENISE LASALLE-----WESTBOUND  
 28. SUPERSTAR-----TEMPTATIONS-----GORDY  
 29. OH ME OH MY-----ARETHA FRANKLIN-----ATLANTIC  
 30. IN AND OUT OF MY LIFE-----MARTHA & THE VANDELLAS-----GORDY

**STAFF:**  
 DON DAVIS Program Director  
 ERVIN MCSWAIN Music Director  
 HERMAN DEARSON Public Ser. Dir.  
 BUDDY KING Production Mgr.  
 ED MIMS Gospel Dir.  
 BEVERLY BLAKLEY Traffic Director

**PICK HIT**  
 GOTCHA/MOTHERS PRAYER-----JOE TEX-----DIAL  
 HAD IT ALL THE TIME-----TYRONE DAVIS-----DAKAR  
 HAX TO HATCH  
 OUR FAVORITE MELODY-----JIMMY RUFFIN-----SOUL  
 I'M SOMEONE WHO LOVES YOU-----ORIGINALS-----SOUL  
 MISSING YOU-----LUTHER INGRAM-----NOKO  
 BLACK MOSES-----PICK ALBUM  
 ISSAC HAYES-----ENTERPRISES

KOWH 1972 music survey with staff pictures.

The petition to deny the renewal applications was filed on May 3, 1971. Stations affected were KFAB AM-FM, KOIL AM-FM, KLNG, KOOO, WOW, KFMX, KGBI, KETV KMTV, KYNE TV, and WOW TV.

The group, when asked, was made up of educators and clergy, the names of whom and numbers in the group they refused to reveal. After months of review, the FCC found that, with few exceptions, allegations concerning programming were deficient and unsupported by factual data. The petitioner

(The Mutual Black Network was founded by the Mutual Broadcasting System in 1972. It was renamed the Sheridan Broadcasting Network in 1981 when purchased by Sheridan Broadcasting, an African American-owned company that had been a minority stockholder in MBN. A decade later, SBN merged with the rival National Black Network forming the present-day American Urban Radio Networks.)

While this was going on, a group of blacks called the Black Identity Education Association was holding up license renewals for eleven of Omaha's radio and television stations. The group categorically criticized nearly every Omaha broadcaster for discrimination. Broad allegations were directed against each of the stations charging employment discrimination and failure to program for the black community.

also failed to provide any extrinsic evidence indicating racial discrimination. The FCC renewed the licenses in question on a 5 to 2 vote on October 3, 1972. (OWH Nov 1, 1972)

Pre-sunrise operation for KOWH 660 was late in coming but finally arrived in January 1975. Daytimers had been authorized to apply for pre-sunrise broadcasting in 1967 with a lower power (usually *much* lower, in the area of 100 watts) as early as 6 a.m. then going to full power at local sunrise.

The KOWH delay was because the station was a clear channel (660 is a clear for New York City). FCC hearings on loosening regulations for clear channel stations had been dragging on for years. After pre-sunrise authority was approved in 1967 it was another eight years before KOWH was finally given the go-ahead to sign on at 6 a.m. with a lower power until local sunrise.

The frustration of having to sign off at sundown may have caught up with 660 management in 1974 as the station was fined 1000 dollars for operating past sign off time, operating with excessive power, and for having no log entries showing it.

A final format adjustment for KOWH 660 came in October 1976, this time completing the move to Religious and Gospel programming. The business of selling air time to religious organizations was competitive but could be lucrative, particularly because 660 had a good signal range. KOWH finally settled into a niche that lasted for decades.

Another ownership change wasn't far off, but the AM would be a small player in the deal. It was KOWH's FM signal that was by now more valuable than that on AM, an ironic turnaround from nearly 30 years earlier when Todd Storz shut down 660's sister FM to concentrate on the money-making AM.

In 1978 Great Empire Broadcasting, in town for just a year with its country format on KYNN 1490, badly wanted an FM. Reconciliation agreed to sell KOWH 660 and KOWH FM 94.1 as a package deal to Great Empire, with the understanding that Great Empire would spin off KOWH AM upon its purchase of the two stations.

After several months of objections and appeals from the black community over the loss of its FM Soul station, the deal closed in early 1979. As Great Empire closed the deal on April 23, KOWH 660 was immediately sold to Radio Omaha Inc. for 435 thousand dollars. Radio Omaha was owned by S&M Broadcasting of Indianapolis, S&M being the initials of the owners, Sam Smulyan and Jack Marsella.





With KYNN 1490 now having a sister FM, the station vacated its studios at 3615 Dodge Street for new quarters at 615 North 90th Street, just a block north of the old KOIL showcase building. Radio Omaha Inc. then took over the old KYNN location moving KOWH 660 from 3910 Harney Street to 3615 Dodge and ordering \$30-thousand worth of new equipment.

The religious and gospel music programming remained unchanged while the ABC-Entertainment network was added. Several months later on August 27, 1979, the KOWH calls finally passed into history as the station became KCRO, for *Christian Radio Omaha*.

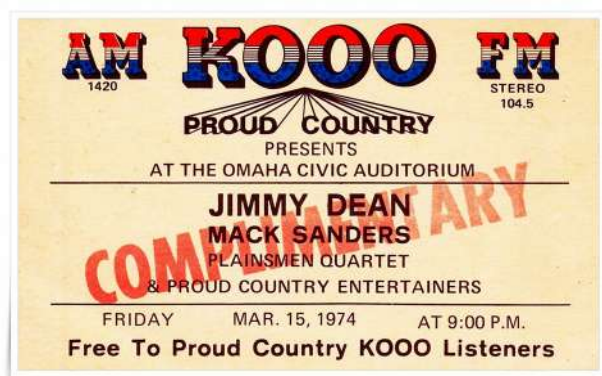
Even gospel stations have to deal with egos. Writer and novelist Jack Moskowitz was at KCRO having worked at 660 for stints through the KMEO and KOWH incarnations. He described KCRO as a religious station where four people worked and nobody got along. (LeoAdamBiga.com).

## 1420 KOOO, KESY- THE DEFINITION OF A NOSEDIVE

Successful during its early years as a country music station, daytimer KOOO 1420 with 1000 watts beat back the competition at the close of the 1960s. That was when KOZN 660 took a run at them starting in 1968, a battle that lasted only a few years.

*K-Triple-O* went unchallenged into the new decade, and by 1972 gained a sister station, KOOO FM 104.5 that would air Country stereo around the clock. The AM applied to increase power in 1977 from 1000 watts to 2500 watts, but without success.

Well-known personality Joe Light landed at KOOO 1420 in 1974, a year after being fired from KOIL. He had spent the interim at KRCB 1560. During this period he credits KOOO management for standing by him during treatment for alcohol. Light was invited back to KOIL in late 1976 when it returned to the air following its FCC-mandated blackout.



Toward the end of the 1970s, the balance of power in the country music arena was shifting. In 1977 Great Empire Broadcasting, a chain of strong country stations with headquarters in Wichita, began shopping the Omaha market for outlets.

*K-Triple-O* owners Webb Pierce and Mack Sanders were doing fine with their Proud Country format but were all too familiar with Great Empire's success. The duo had earlier operated a daytime country station in Wichita quite successfully until Great Empire entered that market. They knew Great Empire would be formidable competition in Omaha.

Great Empire wanted an AM and FM combo, and likely looked at KOOO AM and FM, but the AM was only a daytimer. What resulted was that Great Empire settled on an Omaha AM station licensed for full time while continuing its quest for an FM. The AM station they were looking at was KLNG 1490.

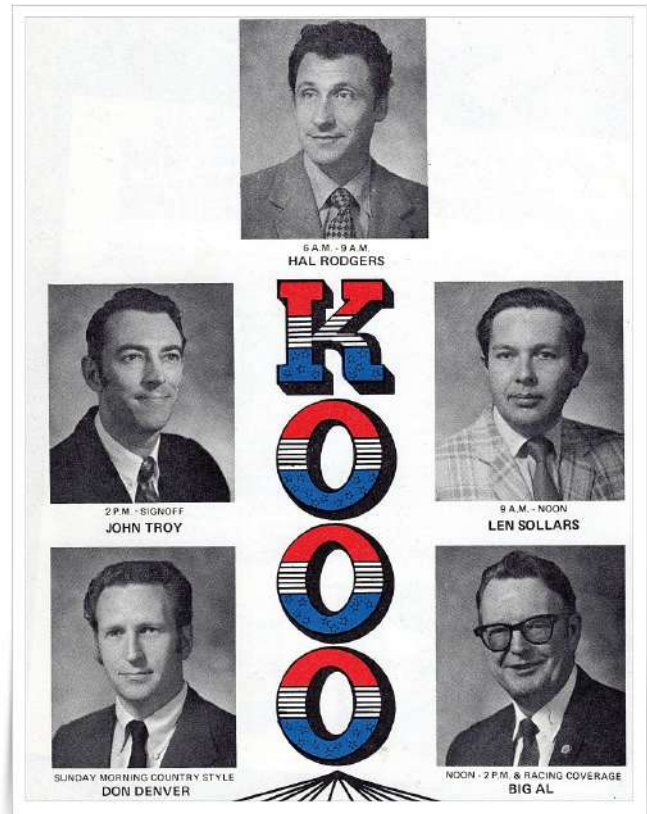
Pier-San Broadcasting only knew country and could see the writing on the wall. Mack Sanders decided to get out by seeking other buyers.

He found one in Colorado: Centennial Communications. Centennial was made up of Broadcast Marketing and Management Consultant Bruce Mayer and accountant Marshall Hambric.

Centennial bought the Pierce and Sanders AM and FM stations for 1.285 million, a tidy price for the pair of signals. Centennial took over in January 1978. The deal closed at about the same time Great Empire Broadcasting closed its deal for KLNG 1490 and flipped that station to KYNN *Country Kin*.

KYNN's country format was very traditional with all the twang and folksy announcers. Centennial met the new country competition by broadening its country music mix to include more crossover adult contemporary artists while eliminating the hard-line down-home country. It added more news and sports and even picked up the CBS radio network which had just been dropped from 1490. Ratings immediately declined.

Centennial separated AM and FM programming in September 1978 choosing to move toward a News and Information format on the AM side, a format similar to that dropped earlier by KLNG 1490



*KOOO personalities, 1972. Hal Rodgers spent nearly a decade as part of KFAB's morning show in the 1960s. Big Al is Frank Allen of WOW, KOWH, and KOIL fame, also a horse racing enthusiast. Besides DJ work, he was responsible for airing Aksarben race predictions and results.*

but without a staff of local reporters. It added United Press International's audio service, Mutual network news and features, and the Nebraska News Network to supplement its CBS affiliation. Morning drive was hosted by Dick Solowicz. By Fall 1978, the AM didn't even register in the ratings.

The stations were losing money, forcing the cancellation of plans that were being made to move downtown. Marshall's brother Ray Hambric moved in from Denver to take over operations as president and general manager in October 1978.

Hambric's first move was to take over the Beautiful Music format just dropped by KEFM and KEZO. Those two stations had decent ratings but had just bailed from the Beautiful Music format saying it was dying and hard to sell.

Nonetheless, it was a niche that a desperate Centennial Communications was eager to fill. Using the same Schulke music service previously airing on KEZO, Beautiful Music returned to Omaha in October, just weeks after its disappearance from the market, now on KOOO FM 104.5,

The FM calls were changed to KESY for "Easy." KOOO 1420 AM remained on the news and information course but only for a matter of weeks. A simulcast of the FM's Easy Listening took over on KOOO 1420 the following month though still retaining the CBS affiliation. KOOO 1420 AM's calls were changed several months later in February 1979 to KESY 1420 AM to match those of its sister FM.

The switch to Beautiful Music succeeded, garnering nearly a nine share for the FM during the Spring 1979 ratings. But it was no help for the AM.

Management began beefing up the air staff with local personalities on both the AM and FM as the year progressed. Jim Morgan took over mornings on KESY 1420 AM in August following an abrupt departure from KOIL. He had been fired mid-show at KOIL when management learned of his negotiations with another station.

Morgan had a country music background and was in place for more changes soon to come at KESY 1420. With the FM's success, Centennial felt confident enough to once again try a separate format on the AM side as the new decade commenced. It would be a return to *K-Triple-O Country*.

## **1490 KBON, KLNG, KYNN- NEWSTALK SELLS OUT TO COUNTRY**

The 1970s were a pivotal year for Omaha's station on 1490. Entering the new 1970s decade with music, the format was changed to a news-talk offering, most daring in the face of KFAB's entrenched news image. The only truly different element was the "talk" segments, scheduled sparingly at first.

Morning personality Don Perazzo was general manager by 1970. Having started at KBON in 1942, Perazzo was an air personality for 15 years on KBON before moving into sales.



KLNG, 1970.

The opening weeks of the new decade heard KBON 1490 playing what its management called “standards in a swinging vein and some recognizable jazz.” But an ownership change in the first quarter of 1970 set the course for waters that had been plied elsewhere.

Paxton Radio, a subsidiary of Welcome Radio based in Ohio, acquired control of KBON just weeks into the first quarter of 1970 paying 400-thousand dollars to owner Blaustein Industries for the outlet. The new owners soon changed the call letters to reflect a new direction for their Omaha outlet. It would have a telephone base with callers making their voices heard. First, they sought KAUL for “Call,” then settled in July for KLNG for *Calling Radio* to reflect a new *Newstalk* format.

Manager Frank Scott dropped ABC and picked up CBS which had just become available when WOW dropped the net after 15 years . KLNG 1490 then adopted a mix of news and music that featured a 3 ½ hour block of network and local news each afternoon at 4 p.m.

Some music remained with KLNG, playing “good” (mostly instrumental) music at night, because according to manager Frank Scott, “night call-in shows too often turn into gripe sessions.” Besides evenings and overnights, the non-descript music took over the weekend schedule as well, starting from 1 p.m. on Saturdays.

In February 1972 as tensions were rising in the Mideast that led to the Yom Kippur war, Frank Scott delivered reports directly from Israel for three days. The on-air lineup by this time was made up of experienced local broadcasters. Mike Metz, who came from a news position at KIMN Denver handled mornings, Lyle DeMoss was on mid-mornings, and Mike Harris took afternoons. KLNG promoted itself as “The Un-Music Station. (It’s Not For Everyone.)”

**Tomorrow 2:05 p.m.**

**FRANK SCOTT**  **Reports**

**LIVE from ISRAEL**  
on  
**KLNG**  
Newsradio  
**1490**  
Call him on 344-4494

**3 Days from Israel: Feb. 22, 24 and 28**  
Experienced newsmen Frank Scott reports live and direct from Tel Aviv. Call him for on-the-spot reactions from prominent, informed guests.

**TOMORROW, THURS. and NEXT MONDAY**  
Cosponsored by  
AAA Cornhusker Motor Club    Coca Cola  
I-Go Van & Storage                Roberts Dairy

KLNG 1972 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald)

**NOBODY  
OUT TALKS  
KLNG**

**LYLE DEMOSS:**  
8:30 Noon, Mon-Fri.  
Nobody outtalks KLNG. And we hope you'll put your money where our mouth is. We'll be on KLNG around the clock till we drop.

**MIKE HARRIS:**  
12:30-1:00, Mon-Fri.  
starting October 7 to benefit Pratt School of Individual Instruction. Tune KLNG . . . 1490 on your radio dial.

**MICHAEL METZ:**  
6:30 p.m.-11:00 p.m., Mon-Fri.  
The talkmasters will be talking it up for Pratt School and you can help. You can put your money where our mouth is.

**PETER CITRON:**  
World-Herald columnist, Sundays, 3-5 p.m.  
Help Pratt School by taking your donation to the talking trailer. Tune 1490 now and hear all the details. Nobody outtalks KLNG!

Phone  
344-4494

**TUNE  
KLNG  
1490**  
FOR DETAILS  
**NOBODY . . . OUT TALKS  
KLNG**  
NEWSRADIO . . . 1490

KLNG Lineup 1973  
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald)

In April 1973 Joe Finan, VP of Programming for parent Welcome Broadcasting, arrived in town to bolster the sagging format. Finan was familiar with high-profile personality radio having been a Top 40 DJ at KTLN in the 1950s and staying with the Denver station when it later switched to talk as KTLK.

Finan moved the station to all-talk, dropping any remaining music and canceling non-productive features such as *Trading Post*. He then directed the on-air hosts to be more aggressive and opinionated.

The new schedule had Lyle DeMoss doing 8:30 a.m. to Noon, then a half-hour feature of news with former KMEQ/KOWH newsman Mike Bradley and Dana Whelan, followed by Mike Harris to 4 p.m. After a CBS feature, Michael Metz ran the talk show to 12:30 a.m. *Omaha World-Herald* columnist Peter Citron was given an afternoon three-hour block on Sundays.

The Mike Harris afternoon talk show was repeated on the overnights. At 4 a.m. another two-hour news block with Roger Green commenced, taken over by Rad Whelan at 6 a.m. until Lyle DeMoss opened the phone lines at 8:30 a.m.

Old-time radio shows at the time were making a nostalgic comeback and were scheduled for two hours early Sunday evenings. Frank Scott by this time was made Vice President of Welcome Radio, the subsidiary of Paxton Inc.

Some legendary broadcasters worked in the studios of KLNG in the 1970s. Carol Schrader honed her news career at KLNG before moving to KETV 7 as a reporter, and later as a longtime anchor at KMTV 3. Mike Harris returned and stayed five years after a brief stint at KOIL in 1974. Former WOW personality Joe Martin joined KLNG in 1976.

Omaha actor John Beasley also worked at KLNG radio following a stint at KOWH. His colleagues Lyle DeMoss and Carol Schrader encouraged him to develop his fine speaking voice. In

2002 he founded the John Beasley Theater to promote live theater, especially works written by or featuring African-Americans.

Lyle DeMoss may have been the best-known of the KBON crew. A well-known personality and programmer at WOW in his earlier years, DeMoss had been the assistant general manager of WOW-TV in the 1950s. He participated in local theater, winning the Fonda/McGuire Award at the Omaha Playhouse in 1960.

DeMoss often did broadcasts centering around food and cooking, and even published his own cookbook in the 1970s with recipes from the 40 years he spent as a cooking show host.

A holdover from the KBON days since 1969 was Chuck Hagel, DJ, newscaster, and talk show host until 1971. Hagel left radio for public service and in later years became a U.S. Senator from Nebraska and was Secretary of Defense during the Obama administration.

News-gathering is labor-intensive and expensive, but KLNG with its signal limited to surrounding counties during the day and the city limits at night plugged on.

Network assistance came in 1975. KLNG was one of 33 stations in the country to sign with NBC's News and Information Service (NIS). Called by one NBC source as a "10 million dollar gamble," the network start-up made its debut on June 18.

NIS fell substantially short of its goal of signing 75 out of the top 100 markets. Also cropping up were complaints from some existing NBC stations of having to compete with its own network. It's not known that KFAB 1110 was one of them, but the Omaha powerhouse likely didn't feel then need to do so as it was already well established and had fifty times the power.

NIS provided up to 55 minutes of news and features each hour. Affiliates were allowed to select and use whatever they wished to supplement local coverage and events.

KLNG went all out to be Omaha's news station, expanding the newsroom to include reporters in its second-floor studios at 3615 Dodge Street. The newsroom added cubicles for reporters from where they could call out, record phone interviews, and edit their stories with actualities brought back from the field on cassette tape. Talk show hosts remaining were Mike Metz, Lyle DeMoss, and Mike Harris.

KLNG was regarded as a credible news station and often swapped stories and sound bites with KLIN in Lincoln. But, the Fall 1975 ratings were unkind, as the station lost 40 percent of its audience following the switch to all news. KFAB still dominated with a 27 share.

After about a year, NBC realized its secondary network effort was not going to become profitable and gave a six-month notice to its stations. KLNG stayed with the network to the final day, May 29, 1977.

It was final in more ways than one. Welcome Radio sold KBON to Great Empire Broadcasting, a country chain based in Wichita that was seeking a foothold in the Omaha market. Mike Oatman of Great Empire said his stations are country with strong news departments and announced he was undecided about changing the KLNG format. But, there was little doubt in the local industry.

Great Empire paid 700-thousand dollars for the 1490 facilities, the first of three stations it would purchase in Omaha. The sale was finalized on that last day of NIS operations.

1490 flipped to country music just days later changing calls to *Country Kin* KYNN 1490. Studios remained at 3615 Dodge Street. Among the first personalities hired was Hal Rodgers of 1960s KFAB fame to handle morning duties. KYNN automated the 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. hours until February 1980 when it went live around the clock.

Competitors KOOO 1420 AM and KOOO 104.5 FM went to airing a country/adult contemporary hybrid format. KOOO FM stumbled around with less than a two share, its best rating reaching only a three. KYNN 1490 debuted with a five share and nearly reached a six in the following rating period.

Great Empire's country format leaned toward the old school traditional side of the fragmenting country formats, even though the playlist included all the current artists as well.

The program director was Chris Taylor and the news director was Walt Gibbs of KRCB fame.



*KYNN 1490 contest November 1978.*

Johnny Carson's old WOW sidekick from the early 1950s, Percy Ziegler, was the chief engineer.

Sales Manager was Ken Fearnow brought in from KTFX Tulsa who would later become general manager leading Great Empire's Omaha stations to a lucrative high in the coming decade.

A personable DJ of note at KYNN was Terry Benton, an African-American in his late twenties, finding it a “kick” that his family can't believe "he's still doing that redneck music." Benton was folksy and chatty. He did magic tricks saying, "watch the radio carefully," and put callers on the air. Benton said he liked how at appearances he surprises people that he's African American saying he's "the perfect you can't judge a book by the cover story." (OWH Aug 19 1979)

KYNN's country format was as traditional as could be. The station called itself, *The Radio Ranch* and the personalities were called “Ranch Hands.” The logo was an assembly of wood planks nailed together to form the call letters. Each hour concluded before news time with a hymn “Song of Inspiration.”

With the new owners, KLNG Manager Frank Scott was out, moving on to a colorful career. He went to Washington DC in 1976 where he was Radio Division Vice President of NBC and general manager of WRC-AM and WKYS FM in that news-making market. In 1982, he was named director of programs for the *Voice of America* and in 1984 was the director of VOA Europe headquarters in Munich, Germany. Scott returned to Omaha in the mid-1990s as president of the Omaha Press Club and Special Projects Administrator for Mitchell Broadcasting until retiring in 2004.

FM country competition emerged in September 1978 when KEFM dropped Beautiful Music in favor of an automated Modern Country format. But KYNN's personality country was unphased and the AM station beat the FM contender by a ratio of two-to-one in the following year's ratings

KYNN 1490 finally got its sister FM in April 1979. KYNN FM 94.1, the former KOWH FM, immediately set out to hire additional staff, keeping its programming separate from the AM with a more modern brand of country.

A new venue for KYNN AM and FM was sought, and the stations landed in a former mortuary near 90th and Dodge Streets, just a block north of the KOIL Building.

KOWH 660, spun off in the deal with Great Empire's purchase of its sister FM, then moved into KYNN's old studios at 3615 Dodge Street.

Great Empire finally got its FM in Omaha. But, the owners weren't content with its 1000 watt AM station KYNN on 1490. The outfit was still shopping, seeking a better AM signal. That meant more changes were in store for the 1490 spot on the dial.



## 1560 KRCB, KQXV, KLNG- FLAILING AROUND FOR A NICHE

The 1970s began a decade of restless searching for KRCB 1560, going through formats and call changes. It also became a notable stopover station for ex-KOIL jocks.

Daytime-only KRCB 1560 was running a kilowatt from a single tower on the South Omaha Bridge Road just a mile into Iowa. Studios were in a converted frame house at 546 Mynster just off Kanesville Boulevard on the west side of Council Bluffs.



*1560's transmitter site, 1970.*



*KRCB Mynster Street office and studio, 1970.  
(Photos courtesy Ernest J. Wesolowski).*

*KRCB Golden Radio* had been an adult standards station for years, a mix of 1920s to 1960s music. Then came the changes.

It started just before the 1970s. As described by Council Bluffs historian Dick Warner, the station signed off at sunset on March 2, 1969, with its standard sign off theme, "Twilight Time" by the Platters. On Monday, March 3, KRCB signed on early in the morning with "Hot Smoke and Sassafras" by Bubble Puppy.

The garage-band rock tune marked the beginning of *The Big 15-6*, a contemporary oldies and rock mix of music with "Boss Jocks." The music focused on a Top 20 mixed with oldies from the past 5 to 10 years. News was provided by long-time station personality and newsman Walt Gibb along with the newly-added ABC Contemporary Network.

Gibb was an expert at back timing a record into the network newscast. ABC Contemporary news came over the line at precisely :54:30 on the clock. Warner describes Gibb's skill: "If we were there watching he'd choose to hit the network with a cold end song... Hawaii Five-O would have been big at that time. There would be a warning tone over the network line ten seconds before the news; he'd have that pot in cue and as soon as he heard the tone in cue turned up the pot and scooted his wheeled chair to the back of the room and crossed his arms on his chest to build the drama... the board was out of reach, he couldn't pot down the music if he wanted to from that position. As we watched in awe the cold end would come and right on the money there was the Contemporary news opening logo... I never saw him miss."



1970 KRCB AM / FM weekly music guide with psychedelic artwork.

The program director was Buddy Scott. Don Burden in a rare recognition of new competition hired Scott away shortly afterward, making him KOIL's PD.

When new sister FM KRCB 98.5 signed on in May 1969, programming was simulcast on both stations.

New owners took over in 1972. J.J. Conroy and R E Russell sold the AM and FM in September for 414 thousand dollars to KRCB Michigan, Inc. headed by its president, Dick Freeman. Freeman formerly managed a television station in Southfield, Michigan. The final FCC approval came September 29.

The new owners split the AM and FM programming, allowing FM to take over the main studio and moving AM to the old news area at the end of a hallway.

The studio for AM was then upgraded with the hallway closed off and a new mono five-channel McMartin board installed along with a couple of turntables. A new ITC triple stack cartridge machine was also added, its output running into a single channel making for a problem whenever carts ran past their cue tone. Meanwhile, the FM and production room mono McCarta cart machines were replaced with ITC stereo units. With that, the simulcasting ended and 1560 AM was again on its own.

In October 1973 KRCB 1560 adjusted the format to *Good Time Rock and Roll*, a Middle of the Road format that was 95 percent oldies with songs from 1954 to 1965, some tunes going back as far as 1952. The FM flipped to Progressive Rock.

The KRCB 1560 personality line up was Tommy Lee Anthony mornings, ex-KOIL personality Joe Light 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Dick Warner until sign off. Terry Mason did weekend shifts. Tommy Lee was PD but the position soon shifted to the more experienced Joe Light.

In 1973, PD Joe Light banished the polka show to FM, deeming the AM with its new format more important. Dick Warner says, "I think Joe Light felt keeping the rock music going on AM Sunday mornings gave us an edge as KOIL was running something else (religious or public service, I don't remember). Hopefully, some dial spinners would discover us and stay"

Polka Joe wasn't pleased but kept a positive attitude. He ran a newspaper ad promoting his show on the four stations on which it was airing and carefully inserted in the KRCB FM 98.5 line "This is FM Radio. Check your dial.

However, the banishment and the MOR format was short-lived. Tommy Lee and Joe Light were blown out, although, in a rare move of civility in the radio biz, both were given two weeks notice.

Joe Light made no secret of his departure during those two weeks. Warner says, "Joe had great fun with this on the air... his show was laden with subtle digs. I remember him coming out of a song... 'Harold Melvin and the Bluenotes with the Job I Lost...oops, I mean The Love I Lost,' and 'Coming up... news on ABC's American Temporary Radio.'"

Warner continues, "Joe had his problems, and I'm certainly glad he wasn't an employee of mine, but he was funny! On the last day, neither Tommy or Joe showed up... I had the longest shift of my career, sign on until sign off."

Terry Mason landed at WOW 590 part-time and Joe Light moved to KOOO 1420. KRCB 1560 returned to simulcasting its sister FM, airing its progressive rock format in AM mono.

In spring 1974 Omaha attorney John Mitchell, who had an interest though not yet full ownership in the operation, brought in John Howard from KGFW, a Kearney station Mitchell owned, to manage KRCB. Staffer Dick Warner says Howard brought some key personnel with him including PD Paxton West and newsman Chuck Wolfe.

<b>ATTENTION POLKA LOVERS</b>	
<b>POLKA MUSIC EVERY SUNDAY</b>	
<b>For Omaha and 70 mile radius</b> 8 AM til noon. Big Joe Polka Show KRCB 98.5 FM This is FM Radio Check your dial	<b>All Nebraska and Midwest</b> 3:05 PM til 5 PM Polka Music Sunday 880 on AM dial from 50,000 Watt Lexington KRUN
<b>Columbus Area-</b> Sunday 9 AM til 2 PM 1510 on AM Dial K-TTT	<b>Ord Area Sunday 10</b> AM til 1:30 PM 1060 on AM Dial KNLV

*Polka Joe on FM and around the state. The Lexington station typo was intended to be KRVN. August 1973 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).*

Warner recalls, “KGFW apparently was quite a money maker and I believe the intent in bringing them to Council Bluffs was to have them do here what you have been doing in Kearney. Those of us already there referred to them as The Kearney Boys, but that certainly wasn’t derogatory.... they were all friendly, polite, very professional and easy to work with.” (Kearney, pronounced CAR-nee.)

John Howard upon his arrival announced plans that focused on giving Council Bluffs its own identity with its own AM station.

In preparation, a revamping of the studios was launched. The front room was subdivided into three rooms with the AM studio in the front window. The other two were for the newsroom and news studio. New equipment was installed.

The FM and its progressive rock was left untouched. Albums were tracked, announcers spoke in soft tones, the music reverently played and carefully introduced with no talk over. Dick Warner notes, “John Howard in particular seemed to distance himself from the FM staff, which tended to keep to themselves. The Kearney Boys dressed well (remember that was common in business 40 years ago!) while the FM staff with their tattered jeans, beards, and darkened control room probably appeared a bit weird. Building monitors were all on the AM.”

Paxton West made the announcement. KRCB would again split the AM and FM programming with KRCB 1560 returning to Middle of the Road music along with low key announcers, this time placing a focus on Council Bluffs (*Billboard* May 18, 1974).

Localizing the programming was thorough. As described by Warner, “They swarmed all over Council Bluffs, covering every meeting and event, producing well-done local public affairs programs, interviewing city leaders and businessmen. They printed a *KRCB Gram* on a blue sheet of paper every weekday that was distributed around town with the big local headlines... tune in for all the details. There were ‘We Take Pride in Council Bluffs’ bumper stickers that went with the new jingles of the same theme. Actually, it was all quite first-class, and KRCB was truly once again Radio Council Bluffs.”

A timely Statler Brothers song “The Strand” released in 1973 was often played commemorating the station’s roots in Council Bluffs’ Strand Theater. The Strand was the site of the station’s first studio in 1947. (The building was gutted by a fire in 1974 and demolished.)

While the Kearney Boys were easy to deal with, Station Manager John Howard at times could be difficult. Warner remembers, “In a fit over disc jockeys chatting with groupies on the phone he came in one time with a pair of wire cutters and severed the phone line.”

In other incidents, Howard “fired a part-timer one time in an argument over Nebraska football (though the fellow should have known better than to make anti-cornhusker remarks in front of Nebraskans)! He fired Terry Mason, though I don't recall why, and ‘Dirty Dave’ Riley when the latter demanded a raise pointing out that FM was far superior to the AM in relevance.” John Howard remained in the general manager chair for several more years and became executive VP by the end of the decade.

During this time co-owner John Mitchell who had 40 percent of KRCB 1560 and sister FM KQKQ 98.5 bought the remaining interest in the stations from Dick Freeman’s KRCB Michigan, Inc. for \$379 thousand.

The failure of the format localizing Council Bluffs is best described by Dick Warner who witnessed it. Though it worked in Kearney for KGFW, Council Bluffs denizens don't perceive themselves as small-town but instead as part of the greater Omaha-Council Bluffs metroplex. Notes Warner, “Thus, a station that gives great detail as to every nuance of CB government and affairs is missing a good part of what CB locals are interested in. Most CB people work in Omaha, shop in Omaha, patronize Omaha entertainment... we think the whole Metroplex is ours!”

KRCB 1560 continued to languish. Towards the silencing of KOIL in 1976, the station launched a Top 40 format in anticipation of KOIL’s audience seeking a new home. Former KOIL DJ Kevin Kassera programmed the station as, *The Winner*.

DJs and contests were designed to attract the abandoned KOIL audience but were toned down in the direction of automated Top 40 KGOR’s low key approach. There were no jingles, fewer commercials, (both likely due to lack of capital and ratings) and news was scheduled only in morning drive before 8 a.m.

*The Winner* music playlist was a Top 16 making up 20 percent of the music mix, the other 80 percent being oldies dating back to 1964. Besides Kevin Kassera, ex-KOIL personalities Shotgun Tom Page and Jimmy O Neill came aboard after KOIL’s tumultuous blackout. Page had joined earlier after being fired following KOIL's union being voted in. Additionally, former KOIL newsman Chuck Shramek was with KRCB since refusing to run Burden's "carpetbaggers" editorial at the start of each newscast before the blackout.

But, with a poor audio chain, no night time operation, competition from Top 40 WOW 590, and a signal that sounded distant to West Omaha listeners, *The Winner* was soon openly ridiculed as, *The Weiner*.

A new identity was briefly tried starting October 23, 1978, when the calls were switched to KQXV for, KQ-15, the XV being 15 in Roman Numerals. After adjusting to a Top 40/AOR format, ratings dropped from a 2.2 to a dot-nine.

KQ-15 lasted just six months. On April 11, 1979, the calls were changed again, this time picking up the old KLNG call letters that had been discarded from 1490 when that station changed to KYNN in 1977. KLNG 1560 would be going to an all News-Talk format.

GM Joe Reynolds announced the plans for KLNG are to become "Total Information Radio." He sought to lock in ABC Information and hoped for CBS, though the latter was on KESY and would stay there.

It would be the third attempt at news radio in Omaha, following its failure on 1490 and more recently on news-and-feature oriented daytimer KOOO 1420.

The initial program schedule had solid news from 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. For middays, it was former KBON hosts Mike Harris and Joe Martin. Harris hosted phone talk 9 to noon, and Martin, who joined the station in June, was the afternoon talker.

Torri Pantaleon was hired as a sports announcer/sports talk host/play-by-play announcer. Pantaleon hosted a call-in sports talk show, working part-time while still on active duty with the U.S. Navy as the Public Affairs Officer for the Navy Recruiting District in Omaha.

KLNG Traffic Reports came from the top of the Woodmen Tower, an imaging move as a police scanner provided the vast majority of information, not a viewpoint. Later, the station relied on Yellow Cab Drivers who radioed reports to "Andy the Dispatcher" (*OWH* July 9, 1979).

The News-Talk format couldn't gain any traction for 1560. Ratings remained just a fraction of a one share. Barry Taft became the new AM/FM PD in September 1979 while Paxton West became operations manager.

In December, afternoon jazz music was suddenly added to the schedule and five employees were let go, four of them on-air personalities. Ops Manager Paxton West said the weekday format would remain News-Talk from the sign on to 1:30 p.m., then jazz to sign off at sundown. (*OWH* Dec 20, 1979)

The next format change will come soon, in April 1980, as 1560 continues its quest for a viable format.

## TOP 40 FRAGMENTS WHILE FM STRUGGLES UPWARD

With the increasing number of stations, music formats begin to fragment in search of a distinctive though smaller niche of listeners. The "top songs" concept remained intact, but the song selection became more focused on different demographics and tastes. Even more confusing with the emergence of popular album cuts, spurred by the Beatles moving from hit songs to hit albums.

AM radio was slow to decline in Omaha, more so than in other markets where FM was taking over. It's likely the strong presence of AM'ers KFAB and KOIL for two decades was so entrenched that Omaha FM listenership was kept behind the national level. In 1979 Omaha's AM listenership was a 62 percent share while FM's share was at about 36 percent (Duncan American Radio- Spring 1979 Metro). But, even with the KOIL vs. WOW Top 40 battle, AM's dominance could still be seen eroding.

Where Top 40 once reflected audience taste, it later was viewed as trying to dictate taste. In its early years Patti Page and Frank Sinatra were acceptably listed alongside Elvis and Doo Wop tunes. By 1967 when a Frank Sinatra song could share a playlist with Jefferson Airplane, the chasm created by the increase in competing stations was beginning to make the difference appear like "somebody else's music" infiltrating personal tastes. The differences deepened with the inclusion of Bubblegum music for the youngest of the teens.

In retrospect, Top 40 was a female-oriented format. Many songs were picked to appeal to the 18-34 year-old women who were viewed by advertisers and ad agencies as the administrator of the family purse strings. When KOIL announced the #1 song on its year-end countdown of 1975 as Terry Jack's "Seasons In The Sun," males were in horrified disbelief. Young men were growing restless, breaking away toward rock through album purchases and Progressive Rock stations where available.

Other listeners who were becoming disenfranchised by pop and rock or were outgrowing Top 40 were drifting towards country music, especially women, helping KOOO 1420 and later keeping KYNN 1490 viable.

Additionally, popular music became a form of self-expression, and soon there was a format on the air for nearly everyone. A mass appeal music playlist was no longer possible with so many genres of music appealing to so many different audiences. A major catalyst for this was FM, seeking ways to entertain with untried formats in various niches.

The FM band began to fill up in the 1970s. The FM audience grew, and formats became more mainstream towards the end of the decade when FM was reaching parity with AM. The most notable new formats were Soul Music and Progressive Rock, both appearing on KOWH FM as the 1970s commenced.. Adult Contemporary was also growing, though more slowly. Songs from *Billboard's*

newly installed AC chart in the early 1970s started out basically as its Top 40 list but with rock and teeny-bop weeded out.

In Omaha, FM penetration was behind the curve. Five FM's were already on the air with three more to arrive in the 1970s.

### **91.5 KIOS- OMAHA'S FIRST NON-COMM EDUCATIONAL FM**

Though KGBI 100.7 was Omaha's first non-commercial station, it was by choice since it operated on the commercial part of the FM band. Omaha's first non-comm on the non-commercial portion of FM's band, 88 to 92 MHz, was KIOS 91.5.

The Omaha School District was initially a contender for the 104.5 availability rather than in the non-comm portion of the FM band. It was feared the WOW TV channel 6 audio on 87.7 MHz was so close to the 88 MHz low end of the FM band that it would create interference to each other.

(WOW TV's audio at 87.7 could be tuned on most car receivers. The audio portion of TV was found by numerous commuters to be interesting listening, particularly during newscasts while on the road.)

The school board was eventually persuaded by the FCC to seek their channel on the non-commercial portion of the FM band. It re-applied for 91.5 in 1968 and sought the calls KIOS for *Instruction Omaha Schools*. (104.5 soon went to KOOO FM.)

Former announcer/DJ Jim Price was the founder and later the manager of KIOS. His varied background included being a DJ at KOWH during the Todd Storz years and later at Don Burden's KOIL, then as music director for KBON. Most interestingly, Price held a Master's degree in music from the University of Nebraska, and for decades was a member of the Omaha Symphony (Omaha Central High School Archives, May 2, 1973).

KIOS 91.5 was launched on September 16, 1969 airing 26 thousand watts from a short 200-foot tower at Central High School in downtown Omaha. The format was described as cultural, running from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Right away KIOS battled a complaint by WOW TV 6 that the FM's signal was interfering with TV reception in the downtown area. Channel 6 wanted KIOS to reduce power or move the transmitter site. The complaint was dismissed in October, though a transmitter move was still a few years off.



KIOS added National Public Radio (NPR) to its broadcast schedule in 1971, becoming a charter member in that network's first year.

Radio Talking Book Service (RTBS) under the guidance and support of KIOS began airing the on the station's sub-carrier audio channel (SCA) in September 1974. Blind listeners were provided special receivers to pick up the subcarrier channel.

RTBS in Omaha was the sixth such service in the country to go on the air. It was located across the hall from KIOS, staffed by volunteers who read newspapers and magazines, though no books. The service depended on donations for the subscriptions. RTBS has since relocated to the campus of Immanuel Hospital.

The KIOS transmitter was moved beginning on November 21, 1975, from Central High School to North High School at 52nd and Maple. The new site was the highest elevation on OPS property. The base elevation of the new 490-foot tower was higher than the tip of the old Central High School tower.

The transmitter and antenna move was filled with mishaps. After over three weeks of silence, KIOS finally returned to the air in December. It's new site greatly improved the signal's range with nearly the same power, now at 24.5 thousand watts.

The studios also left Central High, relocating to Technical High School at 32nd and Cuming Streets. It remains there long after the high school closed down in 1984. The five-story complex with its beautiful auditorium was kept by OPS, the building becoming headquarters for Omaha Public Schools.

Frank Bramhall came to KIOS as the studio manager in 1975. He had worked at KMEO 660 in the early 1960s, then went to WOW 590 and TV 6 as the weatherman on the Channel 6 newscasts.

Besides teaching radio at Tech High School through the magnet programs, Bramhall hosted a morning show on KIOS, *Breakfast with Bramhall, Beethoven, and Bach*. His was the first voice heard when KIOS returned to the air after its 25 days of silence during the antenna move from Central High School to Benson.

Jazz fan Bill Watts joined KIOS around 1975 doing his first radio show, *Music Room*. It was the start of a second career for Watts after 22 years as a merchant seaman. Watts says, "It just happened that the guy who was doing a jazz show went on vacation and did not come back. So I got the job." Watts focused on the early and traditional with a favored emphasis on Kansas City jazz. Watts left KIOS in 1977 for KVNO where he continued to play traditional jazz for another twenty years.

Germany native Charlotte Fritzer Skow began her radio career on KIOS in 1976. Skow lived through Hitler's regime listening to the *Voice of America* with a hidden radio. She came to America in 1948. Her program, *Musical Bouquet of Germany*, became popular in Omaha, home to many German-Americans. Skow stayed at KIOS for ten years, then moved to KIWR 89.7 where she aired her program for another eight years.

In 1977 KIOS installed broadcasting's first satellite earth dish in the state of Nebraska. NPR was the first national network to replace phone lines with satellite delivery in 1978.

Frank Bramhall moved to KVNO in August 1979 and expanded his morning feature into a show that lasted there for another twelve years.

### **92.3 WOW FM, KFMX, KEZO- A FAILED RUN AT TOP 40**

WOW FM's studios were combined with the AM and TV operations in a single-story building at 35th and Farnam Streets with the original WOW TV tower still standing in the back parking lot. The FM was remained at 40-thousand watts from atop the AM tower at 58th and Kansas Streets.

WOW FM 92.3 entered the 1970s playing standards and ballads with some semi-classical selections in the evenings. But management had been searching for a way to reach the younger audience.

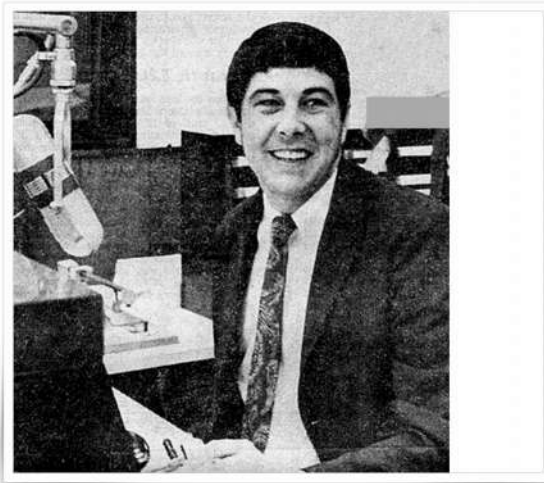
The format adjustment for youth began just months into the new decade on September 15, by subscribing to the automated ABC FM Progressive Rock format. Eight months later in May 1971, the music was replaced by a mix somewhere between easy listening and easy rock. By the end of the year, the station went all-out with a call letters change and a live Top 40 format going head to head with KOIL 1290.

The new call letters were KFMX, a set of calls dating back to 1947 that briefly belonged to the *Non-Pareil's* FM station in Council Bluffs. Despite General Manager Russ Gast saying the new format had "certain goals...not to counteract anybody else's programming," the format was clearly a full head-on assault on KOIL 1290 (*OWH* Dec 1, 1971).



KFMX launched on December 13, 1971. The elements were all there- All hit music, cuts from the best-selling albums, and oldies from recent years called "Blockbuster Goldens." Newscasts were abbreviated, the longer ones buried in the overnight hours. Additionally, KFMX was all stereo and running 24 hours a day.

PD Billy Moore was former KOIL DJ Bobby Noonan, quite familiar with how to compete against his old station. The assembled air staff each had a minimum of 3.5 years experience, the oldest being 27. Spots were limited to eight minutes per hour, countering KOIL's spot load of 18 minutes per hour.



*KFMX PD Billy Moore, in 1968 photo at KOIL while still Bobby Noonan*

KFMX promoted itself as “Stereorock” and issued a weekly Top 40 Hit List that included the Top 10 Albums. The station would “Un-Coil the hits” by promoting 92-minute sweeps of uninterrupted music. “Let’s Boogie” T-Shirts were distributed with the call letters prominent.

Executive General Manager Russell Gast resigned in April following a million-dollar lawsuit filed against the station by PD Billy Moore. Gast had accused Moore of being a marijuana smoker and asked for his resignation. Moore denied the accusation and sued for damages. WOW management said Gast’s departure was unrelated to the lawsuit. Gast was replaced by Steve Shannon (*OWH* April 4, 1972). Rod Odson took over the PD reins in May. Moore went on to a highly

successful DJ and voice work career in Los Angeles at KKDJ and KRTH.

KFMX took on-air jabs at its AM rival on 1290. New hires at KOIL were sent a sympathy card and black flowers from the staff at KFMX.

KOIL never took the bait. There was no on-air feud and no counter-programming on KOIL's part.

KFMX lasted just six months. It was too soon for live Top 40 FM in Omaha. General Manager Steve Shannon pulled the plug on KFMX when deficits were nearing \$100 thousand.

The KFMX DJs bid a bitter farewell on June 25<sup>th</sup>, its last night as KFMX, by playing air checks of famous Top 40 stations across the country. The airchecks were from a promotional LP that had been distributed to program directors nationally.

Playing the air checks, the jocks made issue of how they were examples of “how good Top 40 radio stations should sound.” Carefully omitted was KOIL's aircheck on that disc.

Monday morning June 26<sup>th</sup>, after three overnights of installing automation equipment, 92.3 launched Schulke's Beautiful Music format.

New call letters were to follow, getting the FCC OK in October. Thus was born KEZO, the EZ for "Easy" listening and the O for Omaha.

Shannon switched the Top 40 battle to his AM station, WOW 590. The evolution to Top 40 for WOW got underway in the spring of 1973 with a "WOW has gone bananas" campaign. WOW PD Tom Barsanti was on board and had already hired Jimmy O'Neill of TV's *Shindig* fame to do mornings.

With O'Neill's arrival, Sandy Jackson was moved from WOW 590 mornings and appointed as the KEZO PD. Omaha's pioneer disc jockey would work out his pre-retirement years in a Beautiful Music format. WOW AM PD Erik Foxx recalls Sandy did KEZO news and watched the tapes spin, always with a smile and something good to say.

An upgrade had been in the works during the KFMX months of operation. It was completed in 1973 with a new transmitter and antenna at the Crown Point TV Antenna Farm. KEZO was authorized 92 thousand watts at 1221 feet, the last of the Omaha FMs to go to a higher power. The old transmitter at the 3501 Farnam studios was kept as an auxiliary. The move to a full 100 thousand watts would come in 1977.

KEZO's new Beautiful Music format directly competed with KOIL FM 96.1, which had been Beautiful Music since 1967. The format had a loyal core audience that listened for long periods, translating into good ratings.

KEZO had the format to themselves for a while starting in 1975. KOIL FM dropped Beautiful Music going to a more high-profile light adult contemporary format with live announcers, features, and new call letters, KEFM.

Last Week	This Week	Title	Artist
3)	1)	SYLVIA'S MOTHER	Dr. Hook & The Medicine Show
4)	2)	HOT ROD LINCOLN	Commander Cody & His Lost Planet Airmen
1)	3)	ROCKIN' ROBIN	Michael Jackson
6)	4)	I SAW THE LIGHT	Tod Rundgren
8)	5)	JUMP INTO THE FIRE	Nilsen
7)	6)	BACK OFF BOOGALOO	Ringo Starr
9)	7)	LITTLE BITTY PRETTY ONE	Jackson Five
11)	8)	TUMBLING DICE	The Rolling Stones
2)	9)	I GOTCHA	Joe Tex
5)	10)	A HORSE WITH NO NAME	America
10)	11)	MISTER CAN'T YOU SEE	Buffy St. Marie
12)	12)	FAMILY OF MAN	Three Dog Night
15)	13)	MORNING HAS BROKEN	Cat Stevens
17)	14)	OH, GIRL	Chi-Lites
21)	15)	SONG SUNG BLUE	Neil Diamond
14)	16)	ME & JULIO DOWN BY THE SCHOOLYARD	Paul Simon
20)	17)	I'LL TAKE YOU THERE	Staple Singers
18)	18)	BABY BLUE	Badfinger
22)	19)	DIARY	Bread
13)	20)	SUAVACITO	Malo
23)	21)	SOMEDAY NEVER COMES	Creedence Clearwater Revival
16)	22)	GLORY BOUND	Grassroots
19)	23)	LEGEND IN YOUR OWN TIME	Carly Simon
27)	24)	IT'S GOING TO TAKE SOME TIME	Carpenters
28)	25)	HOW DO YOU DO?	Mouth & Mac Neil
24)	26)	PUPPY LOVE	Donny Osmond
31)	27)	POWDER BLUE MERCEDES	QUEEN
25)	28)	DR. MY EYES	Jackson Browne
33)	29)	TAXIE	Harry Chapin
38)	30)	ROCKET MAN	Elton John
32)	31)	I NEED YOU	America
37)	32)	YOU ARE THE ONE	Sugar Bears
36)	33)	WE'LL MAKE IT, I KNOW WE WILL	Lobo
34)	34)	TROGLODYTE	Jimmy Castor Bunch
39)	35)	WALKIN' IN THE RAIN	Love Unlimited
40)	36)	HELP ME MAKE IT THRU THE NIGHT	Gladys Knight & The Pips
*)	37)	HOW CAN I BE SURE	David Cassidy
*)	38)	NICE TO BE WITH YOU	The Gallery
30)	39)	A COWBOY'S WORK IS NEVER DONE	Sonny & Cher
26)	40)	THE FIRST TIME EVER I SAW YOUR FACE	Roberta Flack

**PICK OF THE WEEK**  
ISN'T LIFE STRANGE ..... The Moody Blues

\* New

KFMX 92.3 Stereorock music survey, May 1972.

During this time KEZO 92.3 and sister AM station WOW 590 moved into new studios in West Omaha, the result of Meredith Broadcasting spinning off the TV station.

WOW TV 6 was sold to Chronicle Broadcasting of San Francisco in 1976. With separate owners, the radio operations were no longer permitted in the same building as the television.

With the move, WOW TV changed calls to WOWT. The AM kept the legendary WOW calls and along with KEZO 92.3 moved out. Both radio stations opened up shop at showcase studios in West Omaha in a building at 11128 John Galt Boulevard.

Beautiful Music competition returned in late 1976. KEFM 96.1 that had flipped to a live adult-contemporary before being forced off the air by the FCC in September returned to the air in December with its original automated Beautiful music.

By this time the Beautiful Music format was doing a quick fade. It was a difficult format to sell, the major drawback being that sponsor's ad dollars were making a poor impact. Background music meant background commercials. The spots had to match the programming mood, meaning no hard sell or attention-getting gimmicks. The dearth of younger listeners also made the client's buy less appealing. The sponsors noted that despite the good ratings, their spots were not getting results.

With little warning in 1978, both KEZO and KEFM dropped Beautiful Music. It happened within days of each other (*OWH* Oct 23). KEZO 92.3 had decent ratings, a ten share, but GM Jim Eddens said they were responding to research indicating FM on both coasts are showing more success with rock.

With that, KEZO 92.3 launched a Rock format on September 6. Keeping the KEZO calls, it repositioned itself as *Z-Rock*. This was just days after KEFM 96.1 went country,

PD Sandy Jackson, "Omaha's First DJ," was let go and left the market for KLIN FM Lincoln, now the only Beautiful Music station left in the region. Abandoned Beautiful Music listeners did their best to bring in the Lincoln signal, enough so that KLIN FM appeared briefly with a small share in Omaha's Fall 1978 ratings.

Bob Linden took over as Z-92's first PD at putting on an eclectic album-oriented-rock format. He was described by friends as an old New York hippy, animal rights enthusiast, and vegetarian who fed his dog carrots.

Z-92 started with at a strong #4 in the Spring 1979 ratings but then settled to #8 one year later. Despite the rocky start, the Z-92 rock format would last, and in the following decade would even briefly beat out KFAB at the top of Omaha's ratings.

## **94.1 KOWH FM, KYNN FM- ABANDONING THE BLACK AUDIENCE**

94.1 already held some Omaha FM firsts at the beginning of the decade. It was Omaha's first FM to light up the dial during the 1959 renaissance and the first to go stereo in 1961. In the late 1960s, it became the first to air Country and Progressive Rock on Omaha's FM dial.

The country was a simulcast of its AM station KOZN 660 until two in the afternoon. After two, it switched to progressive rock, a mix of R&B, Rock, and Jazz as *Radio Free Omaha*.

As the new decade began, it was the first to air a Soul Music format on FM.

On January first, 1970, KOWH FM flipped formats to Soul Music scheduling it for eleven hours, 1 a.m. to 12 noon. The music focused on black artists and found a small but supportive African-American audience in Omaha. *Radio Free Omaha* and its progressive rock filled the rest of the schedule, 12 noon to 1 a.m.

But *RFO's* days were numbered. Two weeks later KOWH FM dropped the Prog Rock going with Soul music full time on January 14.

In February, Starr Broadcasting made the announcement. KOWH adopted "one of the newest trends in radio... Soul Music" (*OWH* Feb 8, 1970). Its announcement went on to say that soul music listeners encompass all ethnic backgrounds.

The morning drive personality was Harold Dennis who talked in rhyme. Following Dennis on the schedule were two well-known African-American personalities, both Omahans, Irwin McSwain and PD Buddy King (*OWH* Feb 8, 1970).

The format change was likely in anticipation of the FM and AM stations' sale to an African-American group, Reconciliation Broadcasting. There had been on-going negotiations since mid-1969. A 1970 *Jet* Magazine story reported that Reconciliation, Inc. had 21 black investors, many with local roots. The group consisted of mostly black businessmen that included sports figures Bob Gibson of the St. Louis Cardinals and Bob Boozer of the Seattle Sonics, both natives of Omaha. Reconciliation was headed by founder and president Rodney Wead.

Observing these talks was a young Cathy Hughes who got her first radio job at KOWH FM in 1969. Hughes grew up in the Logan-Fontenelle Housing Projects and attended the University of Nebraska-Omaha and Creighton University, her father's alma mater, but never completed her degree. She was at KOWH FM as a do-everything volunteer into the early 1970s. Hughes didn't stay with the station but instead used it as a launching pad to a very successful career.

From the knowledge she gained at KOWH FM, Hughes built her empire. Hughes first created the urban radio format called "The Quiet Storm" on Howard University's radio station WHUR. Later, Hughes founded Radio One which eventually became the largest African-American-owned broadcasting company in the US, and the largest radio broadcaster targeting African-American and urban listeners.

Negotiations for KOWH 94.1 FM lasted nearly a year and a half. Among the delays was a lawsuit over an alleged oral agreement brought by Thomas and David Lynch that they were to buy the stations. The Reconciliation deal finally closed and ownership was assumed in January 1971.

Rodney Wead became GM for KOZN 660 and KOWH FM. Wead announced KOZN will revert to its old calls of KOWH on January 1, 1971 when the country format will be dropped and a predominantly soul music format will take over. The FM will retain its current soul music format (*OWH* Dec 21, 1970).

The Soul format was refined on both the FM and AM stations to what Rodney Wead called, "Sock n' Soul" Music. Wead went on to say the FM would later incorporate more jazz.



*KOWH AM and FM 1972*

KOWH FM launched its new format with 24 hours of the Supreme's "Stoned Love" playing repeatedly on both AM and FM. Program Director Jack Harris wanted a bigger audience than the 100 thousand blacks in Omaha, saying, "... we're just as cognizant of the fact that soul music is not all black...we're going to do the same thing the Top 40s are doing—we're going to play pop records." (*Billboard* Jan 16, 1971).

Harris adopted a Top 50 playlist plus 15 soul extras. He also programmed two pop records from the Hot 100 into each hour. That included white artists, such as Van Morrison, the Bee Gees, Neil Diamond, and Tony Orlando and Dawn.

After considering moving studios from the Prom Town House and building on to its property at the transmitter site at 6424 Hartman Avenue, KOWH AM and FM instead moved to 3910 Harney Street in late 1971.

At about the same time, on November 2, 1971, the *Omaha World-Herald* published a story saying that Rodney Wead of Reconciliation was “working quietly” to recover a sum of money missing from the station. Wead denied the story at a press conference the following day. Nothing more followed, but the event revealed difficulties unrelated to Reconciliation that would haunt local black broadcasters into the next decade.

Both the AM and FM joined the newly-formed Mutual Black Network in November 1972, and FM 94.1 also joined the ABC-Contemporary network. It was part of a news upgrade for the FM, which also added a local two-man, 20-minute newscast evenings at 6 p.m. anchored by Norman Shipp and Ken Watts. The newscast according to Shipp would include "local investigative reporting concentrating on the black experience." (*OWH* Dec 8, 1973)

Omaha's black population, about seven percent of the market in 1973, now had stations with more relatable programming. Meanwhile, other local broadcasters were being targeted by a group of blacks petitioning to deny license renewal of eleven Omaha radio and television stations.

Renewals were held up for 14 months by the Black Identity Education Association, which criticized the stations for discrimination. The group remained murky, refusing to say how large it was and refusing to identify members. Their broad allegations failed to sway the FCC and were dismissed in October 1972, just over a year after being filed.

During the 1970s, ratings for KOWH FM fluctuated in the range of a one share, occasionally reaching a three. Toward the end of the decade, Reconciliation showed signs of wanting to cash out.

In his 1994 book called *Stranger to the Game*, co-owner Bob Gibson bitterly wrote, “I don’t think I understood the full meaning of the word bigotry until I tried to sell advertising time for KOWH.” His evidence was personal, saying that, “Almost none of the established businesses would buy from us and they searched hard for reasons not to.”

KOWH FM had upgraded to 100 thousand watts in April 1977 with a new transmitter and antenna, still using the 510-foot AM tower on Hartman Street. The upgrade increased the value of the FM. It wasn’t long before Great Empire Broadcasting, a successful country music chain of stations based in Wichita, took interest in the FM signal. Negotiations began in October 1978.



Great Empire at the time owned stations in Wichita, Springfield (Missouri), and Shreveport. It entered the Omaha market just the previous year by purchasing KLNG 1490 and flipping it to country KYNN. What it wanted badly was an FM signal to complement the AM. KOWH 660 was being included in the negotiations as a package deal, but Great Empire owners made it clear they would spin off the unneeded AM daytimer.

The black community was horrified at the thought of their soul station going country. An opposition group was formed and given 90 days to find another buyer or to develop a million dollars in funding to buy the station themselves.

The group had no success. The Great Empire deal closed in early 1979 for 1.375 million dollars. The price for the FM alone was \$1,050,000. Reconciliation sold the AM directly to another buyer without its going through Great Empire, that buyer ready to close the deal at the same time.

TW	LW	SONG	ARTIST	LABEL
1.	2.	Charlotte's Web	Statler Brothers	Mercury
2.	3.	Let's Keep It That Way	Mac Davis	Casablanca
3.	7.	*Put It Off Until Tomorrow	The Kendalls	Ovation
4.	6.	Old Flames	Dolly Parton	RCA
5.	8.	Lovin' Up A Storm	Razzy Bailey	RCA
6.	11.	Do You Want To Go To Heaven	T.G. Shepard	Warner
7.	10.	*Heart Of Mine	Oak Ridge Boys	MCA
8.	13.	*When	Slim Whitman	Epic
9.	12.	He's Out Of My Life	Johnny & Janie	Columbia
10.	14.	Startin' Over	Tammy Wynette	Epic
11.	1.	Looking For Love	Johnny Lee	Asylum
12.	18.	*Faded Love	Ray & Willie	Columbia
13.	17.	Women Get Lonely	Charlie McClain	Epic
14.	16.	Free To Be Lonely Again	Debbie Boone	Warner
15.	15.	The Last Cowboy Song	Ed Bruce	MCA
16.	20.	Bombed, Boozed and Busted	Joe Sun	Ovation
17.	19.	While I Was Making Love	Susie Allanson	U.A.
18.	23.	*Rock And Roll	Bill Anderson	MCA
19.	26.	*Theme From Dukes of Hazard	Waylon	RCA
20.	21.	Yesterday Once More	Moe Bandy	Columbia
21.	22.	If There Were No Memories	John Anderson	Warner
22.	25.	Gone	Ronnie McDowell	Epic
23.	28.	*I Believe In You	Don Williams	MCA
24.	29.	I'm Not Ready Yet	George Jones	Epic
25.	34.	On The Road Again	Willie Nelson	Columbia
26.	32.	Hard Hat Days	Red Steagall	Elektra
27.	30.	Sweet Sexy Eyes	Christy Lane	U.A.
28.	31.	Working My Way To Your Heart	Dickie Lee	Mercury
29.	37.	Over The Rainbow	Jerry Lee Lewis	Elektra
30.	36.	Hard Times	Lacy J. Dalton	Columbia
31.	33.	They Never Lost You	Con Hunley	Warner
32.	35.	Raisin' Cain In Texas	Gene Watson	Capitol
33.	38.	Steppin' Out	Mel Tillis	Elektra
34.	39.	Pecos Promenade	Tanya Tucker	MCA
35.	NEW	Tumbleweed	Sylvia	RCA
36.	NEW	*Pair Of Old Sneakers	George & Tammy	Epic
37.	NEW	Texas Bound	Jerry Reed	RCA
38.	40.	You'd Better Hurry Home	Connie Cato	MCA
39.	NEW	In Memory Of A Memory	Johnny Paycheck	Epic

KYNN 94.1 and 1490 music survey, September 1979.

By April, the KOWH FM 94.1 calls were changed to KYNN FM and operations were moved to the KYNN AM studios at 3615 Dodge Street.

Country music replaced the soul sounds. Programming was simulcast until Great Empire found a better venue. A move to a site near 90th and Dodge Streets for the KYNN AM and FM studios and offices would be complete by the following year.

KYNN FM eventually aired country programming separately from its AM side. The FM format had a more modern music mix while leaving the traditional country music and folksy delivery on the AM side. Great Empire solidified its ownership of the country audience in Omaha but still had bigger plans in the works.

## 96.1 KOIL FM, KEFM- BEAUTIFUL MUSIC FADES OUT

The Beautiful Music format that emerged in the 1970s was an outgrowth of FM's lock on Classical and Instrumental Pop music such as Montavanni and the Boston Pops. The stereo and high fidelity of FM's audio is also credited, proven when the Beautiful Music format failed to gain traction on AM in the early 1960s on KMEO 660.

KOIL FM 96.1 was already an early believer in the Beautiful Music format. Don Burden was the first to put it on the air in 1967 when he switched his FM to automated Beautiful Music leaving behind the KOIL AM simulcast that had been running there in mono for several years.

96.1 had been 100 thousand watts since 1966, still using its original small tower on top of the Rorick Apartments on the south edge of downtown. The building conveniently was also the residence of Gerry Weist, chief engineer for KOIL AM and FM.

For his Beautiful Music format, Burden selected IGM Shaffer, a syndicated service that provided lush music and an automation system on which to play it. Equipment racks holding large tape players for the music and tape cartridge carousels for spots and PSAs were moved in.

Syndicators sent the music to stations on large 10-inch reels of tape. The music was a soft mix of ballads, strings, and show tunes, carefully selected for the 30-plus audience.

Beautiful Music became a profitable format for a while simply because of its low cost of operation. Automation required only a babysitter, often the receptionist or a multi-tasking DJ or production staffer. The format commanded high audience shares from a loyal audience that spent long hours listening.

Beautiful music was regarded by many as the first format to seriously organize specifically for FM. In doing so, it furthered listener interest in the FM band and more importantly became the major catalyst in forcing rating services to include FM.

Other radio format syndicators to emerge were Schulke Radio Productions (SRP, originally Stereo Radio Productions Ltd.), Peters Productions, Bonneville Program Services (BPS), and Century Broadcasting.



*KEFM 96.1 letterhead 1973.*

Competition for KOIL FM arrived in 1973. WOW's FM station switched calls to KEZO and entered the Beautiful Music arena using Schulke Radio Productions. Jim Schulke was behind the "matched flow" element of Beautiful Music. The other services provided a more random mix paying little attention to flow. The downside of Schulke's method was that the music sweeps of matched music would become repetitive groupings of songs.

Even with significant audience shares, the Beautiful Music format, now split among two stations in Omaha, was showing cracks in its foundation. Background music was a difficult sell after the sponsor's learned their messages were lost in the background. Burden needed to bring the format more into the foreground without losing its adult, easy-going appeal.

The adjustment came in April 1974 with a much-ballyhooed call letters change. In typical Burden fashion, the announcement was made in a big way. He threw a huge \$40,000 client dinner party at the downtown Hilton Hotel Ballroom, 16th and Dodge Streets. The KOIL DJs were outfitted in tuxedos to mingle and dine with clients while the KOIL request line girls handed out single stem roses to the ladies. Live entertainment was provided by a Burden friend, Della Reese.

After dinner and just before introducing the entertainment, Steve Brown made the surprise announcement that KOIL FM would become KEFM. The "E" in the call letters was for *Easy*, as in Easy Listening. It was seen as a move to counter the other Beautiful Music station in the market, KEZO 92.3.

But, it also may have been maneuvering for a new live, adult music format with increased servicing that would appear just a few months later. On August 1<sup>st</sup>, KEFM launched a format of light pop music designed to lure some of KFAB's massive audience to FM with a music mix similar to that found on 1110.

The press release for the new KEFM was dispatched announcing the change. A taped sample was sent to station representatives and ad agencies in an envelope marked, "Enclosed is the tape you ordered—in the plain wrapper as requested." The soft female voice on the tape listed the station attributes and played music samples. The music was a mix of crossovers from pop and country charts.

KEFM's new format included live announcers, ABC news, traffic reports, and fewer commercials. Music was the likes of Percy Faith, Roger Williams, and Frank Sinatra. The press release indicated KFAB was the target, now labeled by some as having a Middle of the Road format, though 1110 was just as likely revered as a news and information station to the older demos.

John Erling was tapped for mornings on the new KEFM. Steve Brown had sensed Erling's talent early on, having hired him after he was fired from WOW for upsetting a sponsor. Brown placed Erling in a holding position as a KOIL newsreader. Once on KEFM, Erling proved to be a fun, easy-going and empathetic personality and a natural for the morning drive. He was soon moved to prop up morning ratings on KOIL 1290.

By 1976 Steve Brown was imaging the format as CB 96, possibly to capitalize on the CB (Citizens Band) craze he helped launch with the playing of C.W. McCall's hit, "Convoy" on KOIL a few months earlier.

The format flip didn't work. KEFM Ratings were abysmal, soon dropping below a 2 share in 1975 and staying in the cellar until its 1976 blackout.

KEFM was silenced along with KOIL during the Star Stations' problems with the FCC in September 1976. When it returned to the air three months later under Beneficial Broadcasting along with sister station KOIL, it quietly went back to its automated Beautiful Music format, all the promotional attention going to the AM side. Listenership went back up into the 3's but by then KEZO ruled the Beautiful Music audience with a ten share.

Beautiful Music listeners were aghast in 1978 when both KEZO 92.3 and KEFM 96.1 dropped the format within days of each other. KEFM went country on Sept 1, and KEZO went rock on Sept 6. (*OWH* Oct 23)

KEFM considered a return to Beautiful Music when KEZO flipped to rock but got wind that another station was gearing up to fill the void. The rumor proved true, when a struggling KOOO 104.5 soon changed calls to KESY, for "Easy," and took over the format in less than two weeks.

Jim Morgan, who spent most of his 1970s radio career at KOIL, had a country music background. He was made PD of *New Country 96 KEFM* and did a live morning show while the rest of the day was automated with Drake-Chenault's "Great American Country," a Modern Country format. KEFM shared KOIL's news people, Dave Edwards and Catherine Joyner. Former KOIL salesman Larry Campbell was named general manager of both stations by this time.



Country was now available on KYNN 1490 and KEFM 96.1. The Great Empire version on AM was personality-driven, traditional country music, while KEFM offered its stereo jukebox version of modern country with a live personality only during morning drive.

KEFM ended the 1970s getting beat by a better than two-to-one margin by AM station KYNN 1490 during the Fall 1979 ratings. Adding insult to injury was that KYNN was simply 1000 watts with a night time signal that covered just the metro.

Sealing KEFM's fate was KYNN's new FM on 94.1 just getting started, soon to be a major factor in the country music ratings.

### **98.5 KRCB FM, KQKQ- PROGRESSIVE ROCK FINDS A NICHE**

The sister FM for KRCB 1560 signed on in September 25, 1969 just in time for the 1970s. KRCB FM 98.5 was a full 100 thousand watts with its antenna on top of the 175-foot AM tower on the South Omaha Bridge Road in Iowa.

Programming during the day was a simulcast of its AM station, airing popular rock music and ABC Contemporary news. After the AM signed off at sunset, the FM continued the format until midnight. One breakaway exception to the simulcast was the *Polka Joe Show* on Sundays. Soon in 1970, it went to a 24-hour schedule playing progressive rock on the overnights starting at midnight. This was in response to *Radio Free Omaha* KOWH FM having dropped progressive rock earlier in the year.

The station changed hands again in 1972. Both the AM and FM were sold for 414 thousand dollars by owners J.J. Conroy and R.J. Russel. The new owner was KRCB Michigan Inc. headed by its president, Dick Freeman. FCC approval came September 29.

After a year, Freeman made some upgrades. In September 1973 the station added a separate studio for KRCB FM at the AM studio and offices site at 546 Mynster Street, Council Bluffs. The FM then went stereo, and two weeks later on September 24 under PD Mark Andrews the programming split off from the AM simulcast and flipped to Progressive Rock.

A year later in September 1974, the FM calls were changed to KQKQ. The Q in call letters was part of a growing trend with Top 40 and Rock stations. Stations that were re-branding were drawn to placing the seldom-used Q, X, or Z in their call letters making the calls unique and adding a subtle "newness" to the station.

However, KRCB had a more meaningful reason for the new calls. KQ was selected because of the emergence of quadrasonic stereo in the marketplace, the Q standing for Quad. Janet (Conry) Mohring was there and remembers, “The intention was to eventually go to quad, and the station would be referred to as K-Quad. The call letters and the quad was my good friend John Korbelik's brainstorm (radio name John Frederick). He was a DJ at KQKQ and close friends with the program director Paxton West. Paxton put his stamp of approval on John's idea.”

(Quad FM stereo and its four discrete channels, as opposed to regular stereo's two channels, had indeed become a reality in 1970. From there, the FCC approved long term testing of several competing systems. The FCC finally selected a national standard in 1983, but by then the idea of quad had been abandoned by FM, though a few rare stations continue with the technology. A strong signal with no multipath problems was required as were receivers with decoders plus the addition of two more amplifiers and speakers. Besides the complications and expense of four-channel reception, the bottom line is that the audience just didn't care.)



*Dick Warner in the KQKQ 98.5 studio at 546 Mynster, 1978.  
(Courtesy: Richard Warner).*

KQKQ ownership shifted to Nebraskan John Mitchell in early 1975 on January 24. KRCB Michigan Inc. sold its controlling interest in the pair of stations for 379-thousand dollars to Mitchell, an Omaha attorney who by this time had already bought into the stations owning 40 percent. Mitchell also had interests in KGFW Kearney and KFLI Mountain Home, Idaho.

Mitchell was also co-owner of Young & Mitchell Advertising Agency. He resigned from the agency a few months later selling his stock to John Young to avoid conflict of interest with the stations.

KQKQ's transmitter was moved in 1979 from its sister station's AM tower on the South Omaha Bridge Road to the old KMTV tower near downtown Omaha on March 26. It was an upgrade in height, to 530 feet.

In the late 1970s, FM was on the verge of taking over AM stations in the market. KQKQ's progressive rock along with KGOR's jockless and automated Top 40 was making major inroads against the AM contemporary stations KOIL and WOW.

For KQKQ, the spring 1979 ratings showed a particularly good increase in young women listeners during midday and PM drive. In just ten years, KQKQ found itself poised to become Omaha's new contemporary music and personality leader. Straight-ahead Top 40 was just around the corner.

## **99.9 KFAB FM, KGOR- AUTOMATED TOP 40 MAKES INROADS**

Entering the new decade with its *Cloud Nine Stereo* of light classical and pop music, management by 1974 took note of the youth movement of the 1970s and decided to cautiously dip a toe into the mainstream music pool.

A courageous first move was taken in October 1974, just over two years after the failed live Top 40 effort of KFMX 92.3. New call letters were sought: KGOR. Speculation was that the calls would stand for "Golden Oldies Radio." But when the new format launched on October first, no oldies were heard. The calls were found to stand for *Greater Omaha Radio*, and an adult contemporary hit music format appeared.



KGOR 99.9, 1974.

The station confirmed in December that KGOR 99.9 was airing the automated "Stereo Rock" package from TM Productions in Dallas. At the same time, plans were announced to move the transmitter facilities from the AM site in Sarpy County to the TV Antenna farm in North Omaha.

The new transmitter site was approved in January 1975. The antenna would be at 1230 feet on the KMTV tower, owned by May Broadcasting, which also owned 49 percent of KGOR and KFAB. KFAB's Lyle Bremser said the FM's coverage would increase by 73 percent (*OWH* Oct 30, 1974).

KGOR was allowed to remain at 115-thousand watts, the permission grandfathered in after the FCC set FM limits at 100-thousand watts. The old transmitter and tower at the KFAB AM site in Sarpy County were kept as a standby.

The automated stereo rock, best described as Top 40 Muzak with its soft-sell and short KGOR jingle, was enough of an alternative to KOIL's clutter and patter to increase KGOR's listenership. In just a year, the Fall 1975 ratings showed KGOR briefly passing up KOIL and even KEZO to become number three in the market to KFAB and WOW.

The KFAB management just let it ride. No print advertising, no promotions. By 1978, with KGOR still automated and DJ-free, and with KQKQ now playing Progressive Rock, both FM stations were showing strength with younger listeners.

By 1979 KGOR's automated rock became a major contender in the pop/rock arena. KGOR gave WOW 590's Top 40 a good run, trailing the AM station by only a share point in the Spring 1979 ratings, even eking out a narrow win in the 18 to 34 demo. KGOR's increase coupled with WOW's slight drop each rating period boded ill for the future of AM radio.

## **100.7 KGBI- STRONG SUPPORT FOR CHRISTIAN RADIO**

Non-commercial Christian-formatted KGBI 100.7 went through a major upgrade in the early 1970s. Grace Bible Institute was ready to go to full power with a new tower in the countryside. Studios would remain with the small tower at the Grace Bible Institute at 1515 South 10th Street. The studio, and the tower to be re-purposed as a studio-transmitter link, was within the campus at 831 Pine Street.

After receiving official permission to increase power from 29 thousand to 100 thousand watts, a fund drive was launched to make it happen. \$129 thousand was raised.

Land for the tower site was donated by a Grace graduate residing in Arkansas. It was in western Sarpy County, about equidistant SW of Springfield and NW of Louisville, the two towns about six miles apart. A 499-foot tower was erected and a new transmitter was installed.

KGBI lit up from the new site on June 7, 1973. Leftover funds were used on remodeling the duplex studios on the Grace Bible Institute campus.

KGBI aired inspirational music and programming. In the mid-1970s, typical programs included *Haven Of Rest*, *Back to the Bible*, and *Night Sounds with Bill Pearce*.

Grace Bible Institute itself continued to grow and expand. In 1976, the name was changed to Grace College of the Bible to reflect its full status as a four-year institution of higher learning.



*KGBI 100.7, 1973*

KGBI-FM supported itself with an annual on-air fundraiser labeled as a "share-a-thon". This continued annually, always more than meeting the financial needs of the station at a time when on-air fundraising by public radio stations struggled.

Besides serving Omaha with the generous donations that came in, KGBI was able to expand its reach with a second 100 thousand watt station in Central Nebraska. KROA 95.7 Doniphan-Grand



Island was purchased for 275 thousand dollars and approved in March 1977. It relayed KGBI programming.

## NEW FMs FILL THE DIAL

The FM band blossomed as new stations found their way to the air. New FMs in the 1970s included KOOO 104.5 Omaha and three non-commercial stations: KVNO Omaha, KIOS Omaha, and KDCV Blair.

## 90.7 KVNO- University of Nebraska Omaha- FINE ARTS PROGRAMMING

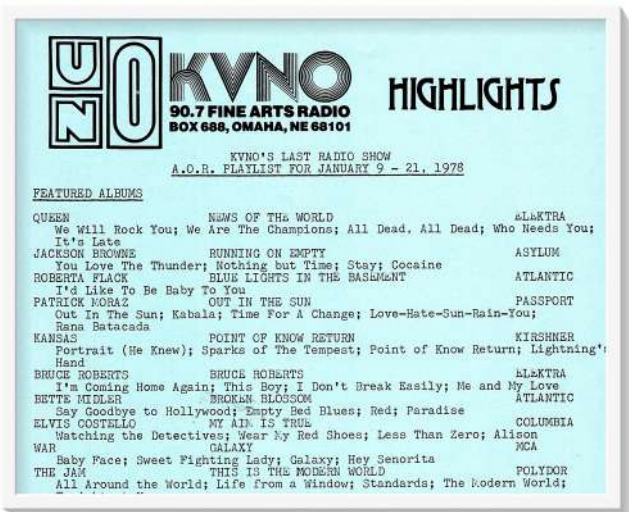
The University of Nebraska became the metro's second non-comm in 1972, not counting KGBI on the commercial portion of the band. It sought the calls KUNO but found they were unavailable, licensed to a Navy ship. Instead, management settled for KVNO in July 1971. A spring 1972 target date was set.

The launch date was delayed until late summer. KVNO 90.7 commenced broadcasting on August 27 from its UNO campus studios in the Adolph Storz Mansion at 6625 Dodge Street. The transmitter ran 2.75-thousand watts from 650 feet on the KETV tower at the Crown Point TV antenna farm.

(The 1910 Storz Mansion had been purchased by UNO in 1970 and also housed KRNO, the campus carrier current station. The building was demolished in 1987).

KVNO's Fine Arts format was described by Program Operations Director Frederick "Fritz" Leigh as a classical music base supplemented by jazz, folk, soundtracks and pop. The initial schedule was 4 p.m. to midnight, silent on Saturdays.

Bill Watts came over from the Omaha Public Schools non-comm KIOS in 1977 renaming his show *Prime Time Jazz*, the show becoming a popular fixture on KVNO for the next 20 years. Watts' theme song for the opening and closing of his show was Count Basie's "Blue's and Hoss's Flat."



KVNO music list from the Last Radio Show program, January 1978 (Courtesy: John Menzies.)

After classical music and jazz, the final hours of the broadcast day were given over to New Rock. 1977 Student/DJ John Menzies recalls that Monday through Saturday, from 10:10 p.m. to 2 a.m., the station relinquished its format to six mass communication majors who were allowed to play free-form, unfettered, album-oriented music.

Called *The Last Radio Show (LRS)*, new music was highlighted each night with a new release album showcased as the evening's Feature Album. Menzies says, "The idea was to play at least one track from the featured album every hour during your four-hour shift." "Typically the program director (an appointment bestowed by the faculty/management upon one of the LRS jocks) would assign an album he thought you might know something about. Sometimes the new release was simply foisted on you – and in 1977's pre-Google world, it made researching unknown bands difficult."



Frank Bramhall, KVNO studio 1980.

Fritz Leigh was later promoted to KVNO general manager. He left for a similar job at Arizona State University in August 1979 where he would be tasked with starting up that school's FM station.

Leigh was replaced by Frank Bramhall from KIOS 91.5. Bramhall had been working and teaching at KIOS for eight years. Before that, Bramhall's diverse background included news director at KMEO 660, overnight Top 40 DJ at KOIL 1290 as Frank Hall, and TV weatherman on WOW TV channel 6.

Bramhall's start coincided with KVNO's seventh anniversary. To celebrate, the station took requests all day, with classical requests in the daytime, jazz requests in the evening. Bramhall brought along his morning feature from KIOS, *Breakfast With Bramhall, Beethoven, and Bach*. His show was expanded 7 to 9 a.m. on KVNO and held that time slot for the next ten years.

### **91.9 KDCV Blair- Dana College- A LOW POWER CLASS D STATION**

Dana College station KDCV in Blair went on the air with just ten watts at 91.9 on December 3, 1972. The range was pretty much limited to Blair itself, though management claimed it could reach 15 miles. The station was operated by students and faculty. The schedule was generally 4 p.m. to midnight and broadcast only during the school year.

The FCC stopped issuing new licenses for class D educational stations in 1978. An attempt to upgrade KDCV to a class A by changing its community of license to Herman, Nebraska and moving to 88.7 was denied. KDCV was silenced in 2010 when the 125-year-old Dana College closed.

The license was later deleted at the licensee's request in March 2013.

### **104.5 KOOO FM, KESY- FROM TWANG TO STRINGS**

Country had been thriving in Omaha on daytimer KOOO 1420 since the late 1950s. The station held off a three-year attack from KOZN 660 *Country Cousin* in 1968. KOOO was competently run by country music artist Mack Sanders and was firmly entrenched. Now, Pier-San Broadcasting sought to air its country format full-time on FM.

Omaha's remaining commercial FM frequency of 104.5 had earlier been sought by the Omaha Public Schools for its station, KIOS. After KIOS was persuaded by the FCC to take a spot on the educational end of the FM dial, 104.5 found new, competing applicants. One was Charles F. Heider of First Mid America Inc., seeking the channel for a "private venture." The other was Pier-San Broadcasting.

Pier-San won 104.5 after an October 1971 hearing. The KOOO FM call letters were granted in December.

Pier-San was owned by two country stars, Webb Pierce and Mack Sanders (*OWH* Jan 17, 1970). This would be the first FM for Pier-San, the company already owning other AM stations including KECK 1530 in Lincoln which it purchased in 1968,

KOOO FM signed on May 6, 1972, running 31,400 watts at an overall height of 285 feet from a short tower atop the DEA Manor Building building at 122 South 39th Street. The building's residents sometimes complained of problems tuning in to other stations due to the strong RF field from 104.5. The country programming would even permeate their phone lines until corrected by station engineers.

The KOOO AM 1420 and KOOO FM 104.5 stations simulcast their programming until sundown when the evening announcer would shut down 1420 AM and continue on 104.5 FM.

The stations were headed by James Treat, GM and President. The studios were combined at 102 North 48th Street, but a few years later were moved across busy Dodge Street to 4807 Dodge Street, into the old Donald Jack Photo Studio. Donald Jack had been the photographer where KOIL DJs were sent for their station portraits.

Toward the end of the year, KOOO AM and FM merged with KTOW in Sand Spring, Oklahoma, near Tulsa. KTOW was owned by country artists Roy Clark and Hank Thompson along with their manager.

The new corporation was called Proud Country Radio Entertainment. With the reassignment of licenses, the deal brought in \$531,650 for Sanders while retaining his interest in his Omaha stations. His other stations in Lincoln, Kansas City, and Wichita were not part of the deal.



The stations celebrated the move to Proud Country in March 1973 with two stage shows at the City Auditorium headlined by Roy Clark. KOOO was already well-known

for sponsoring and promoting live music shows that would include top country entertainers. Exactly a year earlier the station sponsored two free concerts featuring Del Reeves, Jean Shepard, Warner Mack, and the Plainsmen Quartet.

In November 1974 Proud Country Entertainment was assigned to American Entertainment Corporation with the four stockholders, including Sanders and Clark, being the same owners of KOOO AM and FM as before, essentially simply a name change for the company.

Jack Reno joined KOOO AM and FM for about five months in November 1974 coming from WUBE Cincinnati. Reno appeared on the Grand Ole Opry in the 1960s and performed with Waylon Jennings and Dolly Parton. He had hits of his own on the American country music charts.

Big Band leader Lee Barron joined KOOO FM in October 1976 as the night personality and weekend host of his Big Band show, *Big Band Ballroom*.

Barron was a natural for radio, being a former bandleader with a baritone voice. Barron had a show on KOWH 660 as early as 1948 but also kept busy with other projects. He called stock car races at Playland Park off and on for 30 years, worked as the local enrollment supervisor for a broadcasting school in Minneapolis, and for a while ran a music store at 33rd and Ames Streets selling instruments and music instruction. After his tenure at KOOO, briefly interrupted by a move to a news director position at KCJJ Iowa City, Barron went to KHUB in Fremont in 1980.

Country music was a solid format and it wasn't long before competition once again appeared. In 1977 Great Empire Broadcasting began a powerful run at entering the Omaha market. Based in Wichita, Great Empire owned money-making country music AMs and FM's there, in Springfield (Missouri), and in Shreveport.

Sanders and Pierce were familiar with Great Empire's success and deep pockets. Sanders had owned country-formatted daytimer KSIR in Wichita before Great Empire's KFDI with its full-time signal took over that market's country audience. Sanders knew Great Empire would be a formidable competitor. One can guess that KOOO's owners were ready to bail while they could.

Pier-San Broadcasting looked around for buyers. It can be assumed that Great Empire looked over the duo's properties, but instead went with a full-time AM signal, that being KLNG 1490.

Sanders and Pierce found a buyer in Colorado. KOOO AM 1420 and FM 104.5 were sold for a tidy \$1.285 million just when Great Empire was closing the deal for KLNG 1490. Great Empire's deal was announced in June and approved by December 1977.

KOOO's new owner was Centennial Communications. Centennial was made up of accountant Marshall Hambric and Bruce Mayer, both of Denver. Mayer took over management while Hambric remained in Colorado.

The first thing Centennial did in response to KYNN going country was to broaden its country music mix by adding adult contemporary songs. It also picked up the CBS network recently dropped by KLNG in January 1978. News and information along with sports and daily features became part of the programming mix as the KOOO AM and FM simulcasting continued.

The programming change was disastrous. While 1490 was flat in KYNN's first ratings book that fall, KOOO FM dropped from a 2.4 to 1.8, and the AM didn't even show up. Revenue plunged from 600 thousand a year to 230 thousand.

The following year KOOO FM saw an opening for Beautiful Music when KEZO and KEFM both dropped the format in October 1978, flipping to Rock and Country respectively.

In less than two weeks KOOO FM 104.5 picked up the automated Beautiful Music service once employed at KEZO, separated programming from the AM, and began playing Dionne Warwick, Montavoni, and Sinatra. With that came a call letter change to KESY FM, for "Easy" Listening FM.

KOOO AM's news and information format went untouched for several more weeks. In November 1978 the AM dropped the unsuccessful format and began simulcasting its FM, but kept CBS. The KOOO 1420 calls were changed a few months later in February 1979 to KESY 1420 matching those of its sister FM.

KESY climbed to #4 by Spring 1979 generating almost a nine share, with some surprising strength among men 18-34 attributed to in-office listening. As the year stretched toward the new decade, KESY 104.5 built a lineup of live on-air talent adding Gene Piatt, well-known from his years with WOW and KFAB, and former WOWT Channel 6 Sportscaster Ray Stevens. Lee Barron continued as news director. KESY 104.5 FM finally regained its footing.

## **SIDEBARS and FOOTNOTES**

### **WHO TURNED BURDEN IN TO THE FCC?**

Don Burden already was somewhat known by the FCC as a bit of a troublemaker, but the popular story is that he wasn't singled out by the government as a poster child for misconduct until somebody turned him in for alleged inappropriate behavior. It wasn't a listener, but a disgruntled employee from one of his stations: KISN Portland.

The popular account of who set off Burden's problems comes from a KISN staffer who blames former KISN (and KOIL in 1962) personality Paul Oscar Anderson for running to the FCC. POA abruptly left KISN to cross the street to KGAR, literally as it turns out, as KGAR was building studios directly across from KISN at NW 10th and Burnside in Portland (both stations were licensed to Vancouver, Washington, across the state line).

POA was being held to a non-compete agreement by KISN and found he couldn't work the Portland market for a period of time. He then went to the FCC with an account of a staff meeting he attended between the news department and Don Burden. In the meeting Mr. Burden allegedly declared his radio station would make Mark Hatfield the next US Senator from Oregon.

The investigation is spelled out in a Federal Communication Commission Report from February 1975, Dockets 19122 to 19125.

Paul Oscar Anderson (real name: Paul E. Brown) in 1966 wrote the FCC about attending a meeting alleging Mark Hatfield coverage would surpass that of incumbent Robert Duncan. Coverage was set up dedicating a reporter to each candidate, though Anderson left the meeting before knowing Duncan was also being assigned a reporter. Hatfield did indeed get the majority of coverage as incumbent Duncan spent most of his time in Washington unable to campaign except on weekends.

Anderson's letter was received September 28, 1966. Subsequent investigation however showed it to be at least partly in Anderson's self interest as he was apparently trying to get out of a no-compete contract. The commission noted that Anderson didn't voice his complaint to his superiors and instead met with a competitor seeking employment. On Anderson's morning show two days after the meeting

he refused to run promos for Hatfield news coverage. When queried by the PD he explained why and was told he would probably be fired. Taking this as a dismissal, Anderson left the station and took employment at the competitor.

The FCC viewed Anderson's testimony under these circumstances as "suspect lacking corroboration." No one else recalled Burden saying Hatfield coverage was to be positive and the Duncan coverage negative as outlined in Anderson's letter. Though the days following the meeting did result in more coverage for Hatfield, records showed it was because Duncan spent most of his time in Washington, D.C. rather than campaigning. Field coverage of the candidates was ended by KISN in early October when the story of the investigation became public.

The investigation ended with "no firm foundation for any decisionally significant finding of fact." Numerous other investigations followed covering corporate contributions, political ads, insurance fraud, monitoring of government witness phone calls, rigged contests, distortion of newscasts, gifts to C.E. Hooper ratings service, all with little or no substantiation. At best, it was a lot of smoke but no fire.

Paul Oscar Anderson died in 2009.

## **DON BURDEN AFTER KOIL**

Don Burden was banned from radio but the FCC took very public heat for its heavy-handed shutdown of his stations. Following his loss of KOIL/KEFM, Don Burden returned to radio in Los Altos, California eight years later. Burden remained restricted from total station ownership gaining all but controlling interest of the station on the West Coast.

After his stations were blacked out, Burden moved to California arriving in 1979. In 1980 Burden sought control of KPEN 97.3 (3 thousand watts at 350 feet) in the San Francisco market. He hit a roadblock, thanks to his earlier problems (*Broadcasting*, July 16, 1980). In April 1982 rather than face lengthy FCC hearings, he quietly acquired 49 percent of the station where FCC approval was not required (*Radio & Records*, July 16, 1982). Burden was VP and GM with partner Frank DeSmidt.

Ron Ugly Thompson worked for Burden one last time at KPEN and says, "When Burden opened 'his' station in Mt. View, he tracked me down in Boulder and offered me the morning shift. An old friend, Ron Dennington (Ronnie Knight of WOKY fame) was his PD at that time.

"I never felt comfortable working with Burden always in the same town, and the show was a flop. Successful jocks at any of the Star properties did those wild bits that got the great ratings when Burden

was somewhere else. ...Burden didn't understand the 'sausage' being made step by step; he only understood the numbers. So with him at the other end of the control room phone, it wasn't any fun."

The pair sold KPEN in October 1984 when Burden's health was failing. During this time he lost his 26-year-old daughter Patricia to a car accident in Salt Lake City. The station sale was approved on August 22, 1984, for \$2.5 million.

Burden continued to own the KOIL towers and property at the 60th and Harrison transmitter site earning income from its lease to any and all new station owners. His estate continued to collect on it for years after his death in 1985.

### **THE 1970s LEGENDS OF KOIL-**

*Sam Holman* earned his stripes at KQV Pittsburgh working under GM Ralph Beaudin. It was the first ABC O&O station to go Top 40. With KQV's sudden market dominance, the pair were moved to WLS Chicago in 1960 flipping that station from *The Barn Dance Station* to Top 40. At the time only WIND and WJJD dabbled in airing a Top 40 format. Holman was Beaudin's production manager, assisting in choosing the station's new personalities from 350 audition tapes that came in.

Sam would tell the story over martinis (his favorite after-work drink) at the KOIL staff's favorite watering hole, Arthur's, about how nervous the WLS management became. WLS listeners quite naturally disappeared and management asked what to do. Sam said, "We wait." What followed was a new, young audience that swelled WLS' numbers for the next two decades.

Holman soon did the same for WABC in New York, doing an air shift there as well. Sam would later work for Don Burden, landing at KOIL and KISN between gigs, and was brought in as National PD for Burden in the early 1970s.

*Bobby Noonan* aka Billy Moore left KOIL for cross-town rival KFMX for a brief time as PD. After being fired from KFMX he went on to KKDJ Los Angeles. His voice work career took off as production director at KRTH and for five years was the in-house voice for Drake-Chenault syndication on its AC, Rock, and Oldies formats. He later moved to Indianapolis where he built an in-home studio and continued doing imaging for stations along with commercials and narrations for clients all over the country.

*Buddy Scott* (Mike Bothell) initially was a Burden hire in 1969, pirated away from KRCB when the latter, a daytimer, was making a Top 40 assault against Burden's KOIL 1290. Scott left KOIL in 1971 for California becoming general manager of KXOA Sacramento, followed by KMEN San



Bernardino, and Drake Chenault Programming Services, before becoming VP at TM Productions in Dallas in 1980.

*Don Mac*, an Omaha native who worked at KOIL from 1973 to 1974, left for Southern California where he programmed KDAY Santa Monica and later KGFJ AM and KKTT FM Los Angeles. Mac later was national promotion manager for Capitol Records before becoming a pastor in 1982. After pastorates in Kansas City, DC, Philly, and Brooklyn, Don settled in Los Angeles in 2005.

*Joe Light* got his start at Burden's Star Stations in 1959 at KICN Denver. He debuted at KOIL on the overnight show in 1960. His trademark show opening was, "Lights on, everybody."

At times while the records played most jocks would work the phones or get up for coffee. With Joe, one could see the wheels turning as he sat at the board planning his next break. When not thinking up bits, he would work crossword puzzles while on the air.

Light loved the fun and spontaneity of radio, constantly thinking up gags and outlandish remarks that sometimes would offend and get him into trouble. He once remarked that half the girls at Papillion High School were "rags" prompting an outpouring of complaints. When finally apologizing, he said, "I'm sorry. Half the girls at Papillion High AREN'T rags."

Light's career took him to Southern California at KCBQ San Diego and later to KKIQ Los Angeles. But radio personality formats were tightening up, limiting jocks to scripts and cue cards. Light felt muzzled, taking the fun out of radio for him during his pre-retirement years.

*Ron Ugly Thompson* worked at Burden's KISN Portland as well as making two appearances on KOIL in the 1970s. Thompson enjoyed being spontaneous and outrageous making him a natural close friend of the similarly-talented Joe Light. Thompson's very itinerant resume includes some legendary Top 40 stations including KCBQ San Diego, KLWW Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and WIXY Cleveland.

Corporate and sales saw their share of stars as well. *Pat Shaughnessy* walked in only to pitch city business directories to station manager Don Tawzer but was hired on the spot to sell for KOIL. (*Broadcasting* 10/3/1983). Shaughnessy went on to head Drake-Chenault and later Dallas-based TM Companies, a full-service syndicator of radio products.

*Bill Cunningham* and brother Darby were flashy salespeople for Burden in the early 1970s. Bill moved to Miami and managed WMYQ in 1976, recognized as arguably the first successful FM Top 40 in the country. Bill returned to Omaha in 1980 and led KQKQ 98.1 to the top, staying until 1987.

*Tom Devaney*, an executive for Burden's Star Stations, bought PAMS Productions, a highly successful jingle company in Dallas in the 1970s and 80s.

One KOIL staffer who enjoyed a brush with greatness deserving a mention is *Desi Kershaw*, a KOIL request line girl in the early 1970s. Desi made credible claims of being one of the "four chiquitas in Omaha" mentioned in Grand Funk's 1973 hit song, "American Band." She once expressed a resigned disappointment that she wasn't somehow compensated for her role in making the song a hit.

Years later, Don Brewer of Grand Funk in recalling the four chiquitas said, "I can't remember their names anymore...When we reunited in 1996/97, I think it was, they came to a show and it was a friendly reunion. They were all married with kids, as are we." (Brewer, 2013 interview, Brampton Guardian).

## **PAYOLA- DID IT EVER GO AWAY?**

Charges of Payola reared up again in 1973 as it would in future years during mini-investigations.

Record promoters by this time were an acceptable part of the radio and records business. They were allowed to meet with the station's music director or program director, all with station management's understanding and approval of the necessary relationship.

Promotion people from major record labels along with independent contractors, most of whom were headquartered in Minneapolis, were regular visitors at KOIL and other Omaha stations. They used their seemingly unlimited expense accounts in developing relationships with music directors and PDs.

The perks of being music director and program director at KOIL included being wined and dined at the best Omaha steak houses, occasional gifts which technically were limited to 25 dollars in value, concert tickets, and backstage passes when a label's artist was in the area.

Questionable practices would still pop up. At KOIL some music directors who wish to remain anonymous tell stories about offers of airline tickets to Las Vegas to "assess" a label's artist playing there, a motor scooter in "what color would you like," and 100-dollar bills tucked inside Christmas Cards.

A vacationing Music Director's hotel tab in pricey New York City was quietly picked up by one label, while another label provided him with hard-to-get tickets to NBC television's *David Letterman Show*, all the while being wined and dined at New York's swankiest spots.

KOIL people were treated like royalty by record people well into the 1970s, a practice that ended only with the station's blackout of 1976.

A logical question is why record promoters would spend this kind of money on a medium market station like KOIL? A hit record in Omaha wouldn't sell enough copies to cover the promoter's expense account.

The answer is that records added to playlists in medium markets were watched closely by major market stations that couldn't afford to take the chance on a record unless it showed promise where played. KOIL was a "reporting station," sending its weekly music survey to national trade publications like the *Gavin Report* and in the 1970s to the newly-established *Radio and Records*.

These trades gathered information on how these songs and artists were selling. They were a huge influence on all stations, but most importantly the major markets like Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City. Heavy competition in those cities called for extreme caution when making decisions in selecting records to add to the playlist. A hit in a major market would become a record label's cash cow.

Thus, the smaller market stations would lead the way. With less competition, broader playlists, and an eagerness to be "first with the hits," they were the ones testing and breaking out new songs and artists. Being a small to medium market reporter with a good reputation makes that station very important to record labels and their promoters. KOIL was highly influential, and seldom a week went by without a visit from one or more deep-pocket promoters.

## **1975— OMAHA RADIO COVERS A BLIZZARD AND A TORNADO**

Two major weather events occurred in Omaha in 1975: A surprise blizzard in January and a disastrous tornado in May.

The year had barely begun when a 14-inch blizzard paralyzed Omaha stranding thousands and requiring two days to dig out. The storm began as regular snowfall on the morning of Friday, January 10. Relentless, the snow began to get deep by noon, and by 4 p.m. cars were stuck and abandoned everywhere. High winds and frigid temperatures followed at nightfall. Weather forecasters took lots of heat for missing the call on this one.

KOIL contracted a driver with a jeep to take staff home that evening, but as the storm reached its peak, they soon got stuck in the blizzard not far from the studios. It was in the Old Mill area near 108th and Dodge with John Erling and Carl Mann the passengers.

The Old Mill Holiday Inn was nearby but was a fair walk up a steep hill from the abandoned jeep. The trek was numbing. The street lights showed only horizontally-driven snow and a deserted landscape.

Other workers and stuck drivers in the vicinity were also finding refuge at the hotel. The Holiday Inn was quickly sold out. The hotel bar ran out of beer by 11 p.m.

Most staff personnel in both radio and TV stations across the city were marooned at their posts and thrust into long hours of handling on-air duties they would catch catnaps when and where they could. Channel 3 KMTV showed movies all night long with some of the stranded hosts seen during breaks sleeping face down on the set's desks. Nothing was moving the next morning except for snowplows. It wasn't until Saturday night the KOIL crew that had been stuck at the station managed to come out in a pickup truck to retrieve the Holiday Inn duo for some on-air relief.

Following one of Omaha's worst blizzards came the Omaha tornado on the afternoon of May 6 carving a five-mile path through the heart of West Omaha and killing three people. It was part of a two-day outbreak that struck the Midwest and Southern U.S. on May 6–7, 1975.

Gene Piatt anchored the coverage on KFAB, going wall to wall with reports and bulletins. Piatt was well-experienced. He spent 13 years at WOW radio starting in 1957, then worked a couple of years at KCMO Kansas City. Piatt joined KFAB in 1972 staying there until 1979.

WOW's Erik Foxx suspended programming to air tornado reports and recalls, "I was doing my show, and was playing 'Sugar Sugar' by the Archies when it hit. Mark O'Brien (news director) came back to help. There was talk of hitting the basement if it hit the TV tower (a 500-foot tower in the parking lot behind the building), but that was quickly forgotten as we had a job to do."

At KOIL, Tom Page relayed information as he got it from the newsroom, the staff kept busy monitoring the scanners and teletype getting on-going reports such as "tornado touch down sighted and confirmed at..." as it was tracked from 84th and L Streets past busy 72<sup>nd</sup> and Dodge Streets up to Maple Street.

KOIL's best reports were from Brian Jordan in the station's mobile news unit. His first report was before the storm, noting the green color of the darkening sky from a vantage point south of town near Papillion. His remarks initially seemed alarmist, but Jordan was always a natural in his mobile unit environment and gave accurate reports. Jordan's immediate after-storm report was from the NW side of town near 72d and Maple Streets, noting that the traffic signals were out, "...completely gone."

News-talk KLNG carried bulletins and went late into the night airing call-ins from the public.

The tornado missed the radio stations, but the Prom Town House at 70th and Dodge, once the studios for KOWH and in earlier years for occasional KOIL evening remotes, was destroyed.

A side note to the day of the tornado is that KOIL's John Erling had as a guest on his morning show that day Miss Nude America, Kitten Nativad, who was in town promoting an appearance at an adult club in Fremont. She did her entire interview in the nude. Curtains had to be drawn over the picture windows that looked into the control room as gawkers began to appear. The KOIL sales staff hurriedly picked up their favorite clients bringing them in for live introductions to the nude guest..



*KOIL May 6, 1975 , John Erling interviewing Kitten, Miss Nude America. Probably the last thing one would notice is the turntable, now primarily used as a resting place for a clipboard or other items, seldom used for records as music was on tape cartridge by this time.*

In connection with the tornado, Erling says, “I was blamed because of the interview.” Indeed there later were comments in the *World-Herald* from readers connecting the two events as evil, the tornado being retribution.

### **1000 KOTD- THE PLATTSMOUTH STATION**

On October 26, 1970, a small 250-watt station signed on from Plattsmouth (pronounced by locals as "PLATT-smith").

The town is a historic Missouri River community of 5 thousand, some 25 miles south of Omaha. The station was founded by Platte Broadcasting Co., headed by J.P. Warga and co-owned by his wife Irene and his sister Josephine Warga.

KOTD, for *Keep One Thousand on the Dial*, was licensed for daytime-only operation on 1000 kHz. The station received a pre-sunrise authority of 60 watts in 1974.

Plattsmouth is situated near the south side of the Platte River where it meets the Missouri River. KOTD's coverage was the tri-county area of Sarpy and Cass Counties in Nebraska and Mills County in Iowa.

A two-tower directional antenna was employed producing a null in the signal pattern to protect a co-channel station in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Omaha was in the path of this northward signal suppression, but the signal was still quite audible in the city, particularly in South Omaha, enough so that KOTD's programming often appeared in the *Omaha World-Herald* radio listings.

Former KFAB announcer Hal Rodgers was named program manager in 1972. Rodgers had PD experience at KRNT Des Moines and also worked Omaha stations KOOO and KETV. Programming was described as popular music and news.

A bizarre and tragic accident in 1973 involved KOTD news reporter Deldon Hamann. On April 8 Hamann covered a fatal train accident in Bellevue just north of Plattsmouth where a woman was struck and killed. After returning to the station and filing the story, Hamann was struck and killed by the same train when leaving for home.

Litigation followed and the judge ruled that Hamann's employer failed to provide safe means to and from work. Station access was via a single road that crossed the railroad tracks. His widow was awarded half of Deldon's weekly salary until remarriage.

Hamann was also the first host on KOTD's Saturday and Sunday Polka Shows. Polka in Eastern Nebraska was popular, particularly in South Omaha, a long-time polka stronghold where Eastern European immigrants settled, working in the meat packinghouses.

Hamann was replaced by Polka musician and bandleader Jim Bochnicek, who earned the title "Mr. Polka Power" until leaving at the end of 1975. Other hosts followed, including bandleader Bob Zagozda.

Regular programming continued to focus on news and farm news, at times carrying UPI and CNN newscasts. Joe Martin of WOW 590 and channel 6 fame was hired as PD in August 1980. Martin instituted a "cross-country" format with a *K-One thousand* station identifier. Programming was labeled as "mellow music," a mix of MOR and country, along with news and farm reports. The music mix was switched to all country in March 1982.

A sister FM on 106.9 was added in 1993, but the AM remained a sleepy, local station until an upgrade in 1994. That's when it switched frequency to 1020 kHz to gain authorization for a higher operating power. The Warga family would retain ownership into the 1990s.

### **1340 KHUB- THE FREMONT STATION- PART TWO**

KHUB 1340 was Fremont's second station, the first having been moved to Lincoln to become KOLN 1400. It was immediately replaced in Fremont with its old call letters KORN on 1340. The calls were changed to KFGT when purchased by Walker Publishing, then changed again to KHUB in 1959 by new owners Snyder Enterprises.

Snyder Enterprises was a father and son duo, Leroy and Harry Snyder. Harry had already worked for the station, having been its chief engineer at age 16.

For economic reasons, the station had been given authorization to operate during shorter, specified hours rather than full time. The power was just 100 watts.

In March 1960 a push for higher power got underway. Snyder sought a move to 1330 kHz daytime only with 500 watts. This effort was reverted the following January to an application for the 1340 facility to return to unlimited hours along with a power increase to 500 watts days and 250 watts at night.

After a two-year battle, that higher power request was granted in March 1962. KHUB 1340 installed a new Sparta 701 AM transmitter running 500 watts daytime (250 at night) and coverage was greatly increased. In December the younger Snyder, Harry became the full owner and formed KHUB Inc.

With KHUB's proximity to Omaha, the station by now delivered a decent signal into much of the market, particularly over what would later become the city's populous area west of 72nd Street.

This made the station a good interim stop for out-of-work Omaha DJs as well as a training ground for newbies. KFAB's Kent Pavelka honed his play by play talent at KHUB airing a schedule of 30 football games every year, plus the same number of basketball games, along with Legion baseball

games in the summer. That experience got Pavelka hired at KFAB and into the Huskers announcing booth in 1974.

KHUB remained a local to Fremont, carrying Husker games even in the strong shadow of KFAB's coverage of the games. It also carried major league baseball, local high school games, and local news. Its news department won an Associated Press award in 1976 for coverage of the Hotel Pathfinder explosion in downtown Fremont in January of that year.

KHUB's best calling card in Omaha and the region was its Sunday afternoon *Moostash Joe Polka Show*. Moostash Joe began polka on KHUB in 1959 using his real name Joe Spellerberg. It began as a two-hour Sunday polka show called simply, *The Polka Show*.

Joe soon adopted the moniker Moostash Joe. He formed numerous bands over the years, one of them the Czechers Band in 1964, and he began to do regional tours traveling throughout the Midwest between Sunday broadcasts. Moostash had a loyal following among the many Central European descendants who settled in Nebraska.

To eliminate the 35-mile commute from his home in Dodge, Nebraska to the studios, Moostash Joe transformed part of his home into a studio and did his record show from there. That ended in the summer of 1988 when AT&T phone line rates took a sharp jump upward forcing Joe to return to commuting. His show by then was stretched to five hours a week.

Polka's popularity was no secret to Joe. He told the *Lincoln Journal Star* in 2005, "It's happy music. The lyrics are all positive. It doesn't pull you down. When people come to a polka dance, a lot of them come in costume. If they don't come in costume, they come in good clothes." (*LJS* July 1, 2005)

In 1975 Moostash Joe diversified, starting up a record label, MJ Records. At the same time, he began working for a travel corporation which led to promotional polka tours. That evolved into a bus touring business under his now-famous name and occupied the majority of Joe's time for the next 30 to 40 years.

KHUB facilities were upgraded with permission granted in August 1974 for a transmitter and tower move to a half-mile east of what were then the city limits on Military Avenue. It wasn't until 1985 that KHUB 1340 was granted an increase of nighttime power to 1000 watts but remaining at 500 watts during the day.

The ubiquitous Lee Barron joined KHUB in January 1980 as news director and also did a Sunday evening Big Band show. *Moostash Joe's Polka Show* aired on KHUB for nearly 60 years.



## **105.5 KHUB FM- FREMONT'S NEW FM STATION**

KHUB 1340 applied for an FM station in 1971 seeking three-thousand watts on 105.5 MHz. The calls were approved in August and a construction permit authorized that December.

Owner Harry Snyder of KHUB Inc. was so satisfied with his Sparta 701 AM transmitter running on KHUB 1340 that he bought a Sparta 602 FM transmitter. The antenna was just 56 feet high.

KHUB FM 105.5 signed on in July 1972. Programming was simply a simulcast of sister AM, KHUB 1340.

Snyder sold his Fremont AM/FM combo in 1975 for \$600 thousand. The buyer was Interim Inc., headed by George Allen of Algona, Iowa, owner of KLGK Algona which Allen had purchased earlier from Snyder.

The new KHUB FM owners later sought to move the transmitter to a site two miles SW of town just on the south side of the Platte River in November 1979. The power would remain three-thousand watts but the antenna would improve to 450 feet.

Little changed in the 1980s except for the call letters. KHUB FM became KFMT in July 1984.

Lots changed in the 1990s with the station going through three different owners.

George Allen and George Sheehy of KHUB Inc. transferred their control of the AM/FM combo to Robert Clauss and Joseph Nugent in September 1992 for \$400 thousand. Nugent the following year was the applicant for 97.3 in Blair in September 1993.

Nugent sold KHUB 1340 and KFMT 105.5 to K-Heartland Broadcasting headed by Terri E. Simpson in 1996 for \$582 thousand. The FM format was flipped from country to oldies.

Simpson at the time was also seeking to buy the 97.3 Blair construction permit from Nugent for \$18 thousand. 97.3 Blair had been issued the calls KMRV at the time, but its construction went no further. The Blair sale was rescinded, the frequency later going back up for competing applications.

Mitchell Broadcasting then bought the Fremont AM and FM in 1997 adding them to his chain of stations which included three Omaha stations, an FM in Lincoln with an Omaha translator, and an AM and FM each in Kearney and North Platte.

KHUB 1340 and KFMT 105.5 continued to be fringe players in the Omaha market while continuing to be a training ground and refuge for Omaha talent.

## **THE LUSTER FADES**

By the end of the 1970s, the push for advertising revenue was facing real competition. More stations, particularly on FM were on the way. Soon cable TV would run local spots. Outlying communities with FM would soon upgrade their fringe signals to cover Omaha and Council Bluffs becoming de-facto locals.

For radio, national time buys were shifting more dollars to television, movie co-op spots were vanishing, music promotion budgets were going to MTV, and only the likes of Coke, Budweiser, and McDonalds would buy local spots. Local clients of any reliability were along the same line—bars and restaurants. With them were car dealerships, these three products soon dominating a station's cartridge racks and program logs, keeping the lights on.

As the 1980s progressed, stations were becoming viewed as commodities. Radio management professionals gave way to investment bankers. Corporations and banks were poised to take over, events greatly accelerated by radio's deregulation in the 1990s. The shift to corporate radio in Omaha and the nation is covered in volume three, *The Corporate Years*.

## ABBREVIATIONS GUIDE and GLOSSARY

ABC	American Broadcasting Company (network)
AFTRA	American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (Union)
Aksarben	An Omaha civic and philanthropic organization. The name is Nebraska spelled backwards.
AP	Associated Press (news service)
ASCAP	American Society of Composers Authors and Publishers (Collects performance royalties)
BMI	Broadcast Music Incorporated. (Formed to collect performance royalties after station disputes with ASCAP.)
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System (network)
CP	Construction Permit, an FCC authorization that is required before a station can begin construction or a modification.
Diplex	Diplexing permits telecommunication of two independent signals simultaneously by a single station or antenna or on a single carrier frequency without mutual interference. It's how two stereo channels can air on an FM station.
DX	Distance (amateur operator lingo) To DX is to listen for distant stations.
FCC	Federal Communications Commission (Government regulatory agency)
GM	General Manager
kHz	KiloHertz (the measurement of frequency in kilocycles, one thousand cycles. Used for denoting AM stations dial positions.)
LJS	Lincoln Journal Star (newspaper daily)
MBS	Mutual Broadcasting System (network)
MHz	MegaHertz (the measurement of frequency in cycles; one million cycles. Used for denoting short wave and FM dial positions.)
NBC	National Broadcasting Company (network)
NCE	Non-Commercial Educational station
Non-Comm	Non-commercial station, primarily for educational or religious purposes.
OWH	Omaha World-Herald (newspaper daily)
PD	Program Director
QSL	Verification card or letter from a station confirming reception. Became a hobby of collectibles for some listeners enjoying distant reception.
SCA	Subsidiary Communications Authorization, allowing a subcarrier on a station's signal that carries separate information or audio which requires conversion on the receiving side before it can be put to use.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carl Mann spent the majority of his working career in radio broadcasting. He began in technical work obtaining his FCC First-Class Radiophone License before entering announcing and Top 40 air personality work. His air work included stints at KATI Casper, KOOK Billings, KOMA Oklahoma City, KOIL Omaha, and KCRG and KQCR FM Cedar Rapids. His credits include Music Director and Operations Manager at KOIL and Program Director at KCRG and KQCR. Carl also worked in radio and television news at WOW Radio and at KPTM Fox 42 television, both in Omaha. Carl now resides in Cedar Rapids, Iowa with his wife Sharie, dog Andy, and three cats. He may be reached at [catmann03@yahoo.com](mailto:catmann03@yahoo.com).



The author in 1975 at KOIL, Omaha (courtesy Larry R. Jansky).