

Towers On The Prairie - The Music and News Era Carl Mann



The History of Omaha Radio--
An Inside Look at the Evolution of Broadcasting

Volume TWO 1945 - 1979

**TOWERS ON THE PRAIRIE -
The Music and News Era**

*The History of Omaha Radio--An Inside Look at the
Evolution of Broadcasting*

Volume TWO – 1945-1979

Carl Mann

© 2022 Carl Mann

All Rights Reserved.

No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the publisher or author, except as permitted by U.S. copyright law.

This work is for educational, informational, and research purposes. It contains illustrations and information from copyrighted sources. Fair use of the material is permitted by section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 for purposes such as comment, reporting, teaching, and research, providing that it is limited and does not harm the value of the original content. All rights go directly to the rightful owners.

Cover photo, Paul Oscar Anderson at KOIL in 1962, courtesy of Deane Johnson.

Author's back cover photo at KOIL in 1972 courtesy Larry R. Jansky.

ISBN No. 979-8-9881383-2-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023907711

Published in the U. S. A.

TOWERS ON THE PRAIRIE -
The Music and News Era

**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.**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE – THE POST WAR YEARS

FEDERAL REGULATIONS TIGHTEN FURTHER	1
THE BOOM YEARS BEGIN	2
WOW 590 Omaha	2
KOWH 660 Omaha	7
KFAB 780 Lincoln	12
KOIL 1290 Omaha	20
KBON 1490 Omaha	24
KSWI 1560 Council Bluffs	28
FM- A NEW BROADCASTING BAND	31
KOAD 92.5, moved to 92.9, Omaha	32
KSWI FM 107.9, 96.1, KFMX, Council Bluffs	35
KFAB 97.9 Lincoln	36
KBON FM 98.7 Omaha	37
THE FM EXODUS	38
THE ENTRY OF TELEVISION	39
RADIO PERSONALITIES ARE THRUST INTO TELEVISION	42
SIDEBARS AND FOOTNOTES--	45
THE STANDINGS, 1949	45
KOIL's 50-THOUSAND WATT PLAN	45
JOHNNY CARSON AND MERRILL WORKHOVEN	46
FM PIONEERING IN OMAHA	46
THE FREMONT STATIONS	46
KORN 1370 (later KLIN 1400 Lincoln) KORN, KHUB 1340	46

CHAPTER TWO - NETWORKS OUT, DJ's IN

THE GOLDEN AGE FADES	49
THE TELEVISION BOOM	50
RADIO NETWORKS FADE TO LOCAL PROGRAMMING	52
THE DAWNING OF DJ'S	53
OMAHA'S RADIO DIAL-- 1950s	54
590 WOW OMAHA	54
660 KOWH OMAHA	59
1110 KFAB OMAHA	75
1290 KOIL OMAHA	80
1420 KOOO OMAHA	90
1490 KBON OMAHA	93
1560 KSWI COUNCIL BLUFFS	98

SIDEBARS and FOOTNOTES--

THE TODD STORZ “WAITRESS AND JUKEBOX” MYTH	100
HOW THE LABEL “TOP 40” WAS BORN	100
THE STORZ STATIONS EMPIRE	101
THE OTHER PIONEER- GORDON MCLENDON	102
FROM TUBES TO TRANSISTORS	103
TRANSMITTER OPERATIONS GO REMOTE CONTROL	104
THE OVERNIGHT SHIFT	105
EDUCATIONAL STATIONS RETURN	106
ROCK AND ROLL ROOTS IN OMAHA	108
MUSIC PLAYLISTS 1952	109

CHAPTER THREE - MUSIC AND NEWS

THE NETWORKS TURN TO NEWS AND FEATURES	111
590 WOW Omaha- STAYS OLD-SCHOOL	113
660 KMEQ, KOWH, KOZN- AFTER THE HEADY TOP 40 YEARS	116
1110 KFAB- ESTABLISHES A FIRM FOOTING	120
1290 KOIL- THE GLORY YEARS	123
1420 KOOO- MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE RANCH	139
1490 KBON- TALK RADIO COMES TO OMAHA	141
1560 KSWI, KRCB- STRUGGLES ON	146
FM RETURNS— AND SOON GOES STEREO	149
94.3, later 94.1 KQAL, KOWH FM Omaha	151
96.1 KCOM, KOIL FM, KICN, return to KOIL FM Omaha	155
99.9 KFAB FM Omaha	157
92.3 WOW FM Omaha	159
98.7 KSWI FM Council Bluffs- Construction Permit Only	159
98.5 KRCB FM Council Bluffs	159
101.7 KGBI Omaha- Grace Bible Institute	160

SIDEBARS and FOOTNOTES--

THE PAYOLA SCANDAL	161
KOIL’S LEGENDARY PLAYERS OF THE 1960s	162
PERSONALITY SHOW PREP	163
THE STEVE BROWN LEGACY	164
THE TRANSMITTER OPERATOR	165
SWANCO BROADCASTING AND THE SWANSON FAMILY	168
THE CROWN POINT TOWER FARM	169

CHAPTER FOUR - FM CLAWS ITS WAY UP

THE 1970S— A FAST-MOVING DECADE	171
1290 KOIL- GOES DARK	173
590 WOW- OVERTAKES AN EMBATTLED KOIL	188
1110 KFAB- BECOMES THE HERITAGE LEADER	194
THE SMALLER STATIONS STRUGGLE	198
660 KOZN, KOWH, KCRO- FROM COUNTRY TO CHRISTIAN	198
1420 KOOO, KESY- ANATOMY OF A NOSEDIVE	201
1490 KBON, KLNG, KYNN- NEWSTALK SELLS OUT TO COUNTRY	204
1560 KRCB, KQXV, KLNG- FLAILING AROUND FOR A NICHE	209
TOP 40 FRAGMENTS AS FM STRUGGLES UPWARD	214
91.5 KIOS- OMAHA'S FIRST NON-COMM EDUCATIONAL FM	215
92.3 WOW FM, KFMX, KEZO- A FAILED FM RUN AT TOP 40	217
94.1 KOWH FM, KYNN FM- FROM BLACK TO REDNECK	220
96.1 KOIL FM, KEFM- BEAUTIFUL MUSIC FADES OUT	224
98.5 KRCB FM, KQKQ- PROGRESSIVE ROCK FINDS A NICHE	227
99.9 KFAB FM, KGOR- AUTOMATED TOP 40 MAKES INROADS	229
100.7 KGBI- STRONG SUPPORT FOR CHRISTIAN RADIO	230
NEW FMs FILL THE DIAL	231
90.7 KVNO- University of Nebraska Omaha- FINE ARTS	231
91.9 KDCV- Blair- Dana College- A LOW POWER CLASS D STATION	233
104.5 KOOO FM, KESY- FROM TWANG TO STRINGS	233
SIDEBARS and FOOTNOTES--	
WHO TURNED BURDEN IN TO THE FCC?	236
THE 1970s LEGENDS OF KOIL-	238
PAYOLA- DID IT EVER GO AWAY?	240
1975-- OMAHA RADIO BLIZZARD AND TORNADO COVERAGE	241
FOUR CHANNELS FM—QUADROPHONIC STEREO	244
1000 KOTD- THE PLATTSMOUTH STATION	245
1340 KHUB- THE FREMONT STATION- PART TWO	246
105.5 KHUB FM- FREMONT'S NEW FM STATION	248
THE LUSTER FADES	248
ABBREVIATIONS GUIDE AND GLOSSARY	250
INDEX	251

PREFACE

This work is a love letter to radio. Not the radio of today necessarily, but radio of a bygone era—the Music and News Era. It was a time of wisecracking DJs back-announcing a song, running a contest, promoting a local event, updating the weather, pitching a commercial, then hitting a station jingle into the next record. The newscasts were colorfully presented with sounders, teletype background sound effects, and in some cases with jingle opens and a dramatic presentation. It's how radio sounded when stations were still locally-owned, before today's cookie-cutter programming of corporate radio.

I was enthralled with radio even before the Music and News Era. The Golden Age offered network drama, comedy, and variety. It was appointment listening. But then during adolescence, I witnessed radio changing from being a national entertainment source to a local companion. Even more fortunate is that I would witness this changeover in the very city where it was pioneered on a little 500-watt station that showed the way. What followed were cautious competitors slowly copying the ideas while a few others stubbornly clung to old-school radio. It soon evolved into Top 40 radio vying for the teens while other stations fortified a news and information image. Along the way it became personal, for the listener and for competitive programmers sniping at each other over the air.

It wasn't long before I earned an operators license and entered this competitive arena, taking the Top 40 rock and roll DJ route. My exposure to the behind the scenes of radio made it all very real. I could at last see it as a business, albeit a rather unusual one, filled with risks, egos, hard work, average-at-best pay, and paranoia from rating period to rating period. But few in the business called it drudgery. Radio still held its romance, and the Music and News years were what most of today's retired broadcasters call the FUN years of radio.

I found that by recounting how each Omaha station fully evolved, a comprehensive picture of American radio during this period emerged. It comes through tracking each each station's growth in its quest for improving the signal, keeping up with new rules and regulations, the ever-changing technology, and designing a station that clients could count on to deliver their messages efficiently.

Reaching back and filling out this story required trips through newspaper archives, the Internet, and interviews with the people involved, both the main players and the peripheral. The challenge was reassembling the thoughts and memories of those who had left us, a chore accomplished through interviews with descendants and locating old interviews on tape and in print.

From Omaha, this programming shift was being similarly repeated in a hundred different cities across the country. But the Heartland's setting is where the medium's advances best resemble those on a national scale.

The listener can now understand what made their favorite station tick, old-time broadcasters can relive and perhaps get the big picture that was missed while being focused on their livelihoods, and students of the media can learn about the ancestors of today's electronic entertainment.

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 WorldRadioHistory.com, especially *Broadcasting Magazine* and Yearbooks, and *Billboard Magazine*,

Other publications and organizations include:

Creighton Magazine, spring 1996, *Radio World* magazine, Fremont Valley Museum in Norfolk, NE, Georgia Radio Hall of Fame, *Lincoln Journal Star*, Nebraska Broadcasters Assoc., Omaha Central High School Archives, Pottawattamie County Historical Society, *The South Omaha Sun*, Purdue University for the 2002 thesis by Steven Robert Scherer, *Sponsor Magazine*, *Television Magazine* 1957, *Time Magazine* of June 4, 1956, *WOW Tower* monthly publication 1940s, *Jet* magazine 1970, *VoicesOfOklahoma.com*, *Omaha Magazine*, *The Hamilton Tip Sheet* and *Hitmakers* 1984 trade publications, and *The Brampton (Ontario) Guardian*.

In the bibliography are:

Burnishing the Brand by Tom McCourt and Eric Rothenbuhler, 2004
Radio & Records, Greatest Radio Promotions of All Time, 1981
The Birth of Top 40 Radio, by Richard W. Fatherly and David T. McFarland
The Hits Just Keep on Coming by Ben Fong-Torres 1998
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
Rock Mr. Blues: The Life and Music of Wynonie Harris by Tony Collins, 1995
Clark Weber's Rock and Roll Radio, The Fun Years 1955-1975 by Clark Weber (WLS)

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: David Gleason, webmaster of World Radio History dot com, Michelle Gullett of the *Omaha World-Herald*, Jim Timm and Marty Riemenschneider both of the Nebraska Broadcasters Association, and Dick Warner of the Pottawattamie County Historical Society. Also providing valuable information and/or memories: Cletus Baker, Tom Barsanti, Bob Benson, Clark Besch, Leo Adam Biga, Steve Brown, Alan Cain aka Erik Foxx, Lyell Davis, Roger Davis, Walter Dean, Mark Durenberger, Gary Emenitove, John Erling, Mike Gleason aka Sherm Meyer, Chuck Hoffman, Larry R Jansky, Jerry Jeroska, Deane Johnson, John King, Jim Leadham, Peter McLane, John Menzies, Frank Merrill, Barry Mishkind, Janet Conry Mohring, Roger W Morgan, Chuck Ramold, Phil Robbins, Mike Shane, Kris Erik Stevens, Steve Taylor, Ron Ugly Thompson, Ernest J Wesolowski, Hal Widsten, and Wendy Wiseman.

INTRODUCTION

This volume takes radio from being purveyors of network entertainment into the music and news years. It's accomplished by detailing the growth of each station in this Midwest market. Though this story played out similarly in other markets around the country, Omaha's story contains two major events in this timeline. First, it's where the Music & News format was born, developed by Todd Storz and his 500-watt daytime-only station KOWH in the 1950s. Second, it details the demise of Don Burden's lucrative stations including Top 40 KOIL, his licenses deleted for alleged improprieties. It was the most severe punishment ever dealt to a single broadcaster by the FCC.

However, the big picture in this work is how radio transformed itself from a medium losing audience to television into being an intimate and local constant companion. After network drama, comedy, and variety vanished, local music and news reinvented the medium. Listeners quickly bonded with their favorite stations. They spent longer times listening, enjoying its companionship in the kitchen, on the road, at the beach, or late night alongside the pillow.

It was accomplished through locally produced formatting, where a station structured round-the-clock programming with its own music playlist and using its own air personalities to create an overall persona that can best be called "stationality." It was brought home by personal appearances and community involvement. This personalized approach is recalled as the FUN years of radio. How it came to be and what was done to achieve it is viewed here from the ground level.

Plus, there's FM, a new radio band with superior fidelity and stereo, but still facing a decades-long uphill struggle. In its quest for viability, experiments with "subscription radio," automation, and various new formats were tried, all leading to more variety and audience fragmentation.

Radio for many was a calling, not a job. Alongside facilities and programming developments are the people who made it happen. You will meet various players whose unfamiliar names may make little impression but for their accomplishments, whose backgrounds and futures are noted to show you their sweat equity in fostering radio into this new age.

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, Lyell Bremser, and perhaps most importantly, Todd Storz.

Besides these groundbreakers, 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 springboard to the majors. This includes the author, mentioned in the third person during several events while at KOIL in the 1970s.

This work is structured by decade. The 50s is when the evolution from networks to local music and news took place. The 60s were the lucrative years of this developing era, and the 70s saw the growth of stations, particularly on FM, splinter the formats into more finely-tuned niches for varying audiences.

Though the narrative is delivered as comprehensive storytelling, the subject is broad and may be better absorbed by jumping to the areas of one's interest. Use the table of contents to locate stations and eras of interest, and the index to find major individuals and events. It is hoped that this work will serve to preserve, enlighten, and satisfy.

CHAPTER ONE – THE POST-WAR YEARS

Within weeks after 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.

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

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 available, though it will go to neither.

Through it all, Todd Storz and his 500-watt Omaha station would take root. This little daytime-only station will become the prototype that saves the radio industry on a national scale.

FEDERAL REGULATIONS TIGHTEN FURTHER

On the heels of the 1941 regulation limiting ownership to one station per market in each service (AM, FM, TV) with seven markets the maximum, 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 setting their blocks of time as 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.

Schedules of typical network affiliates began with a sign-on, a farm show, music, and news, all with a personable announcer, then taking some mid-morning network shows, like Don McNeill's *Breakfast Club* on ABC and *Arthur Godfrey* on CBS.

After a local noon newscast, afternoon net offerings would be soap operas. In the dinner time segment of net offerings, featured crooners like Kate Smith and Frank Sinatra would appear perhaps with a mix of news and commentary features. Then stations would take over locally until the network's prime time lineup of drama, variety shows, and sitcoms. National radio personalities at the time included the likes of 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 for 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 in 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 (formerly NBC Blue).
- KBON 1490 the newcomer with only 250 watts airing block programming and MBS.

WOW 590 Omaha

The NBC affiliate WOW 590 in the remainder of the 1940s developed strong local personalities and programming. It ranged from informational Home and Agriculture programming to personalities, notably 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 DeMoss, Tom Chase who joined WOW in 1931, promotion manager Bill Wiseman and President/General Manager John Gillin.



1949 - WOW promoting NBC programs, though by this time it was developing strong in-house air talent as well.

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 and promote audience measurement techniques in a period when little was known about radio audiences. Wiseman would stay with Meredith Broadcasting for another 20 years. He helped usher in WOW-TV in the late 1940s and was the assistant manager of WOW's AM FM and TV before retiring in 1966.

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 still in its original headquarters at the top of the Woodmen of the World Building. His engineering career went on into WOW FM and Television.

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



Merrill Workhoven, WOW.
(WOW Archives)

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



Tip Saggau, WOW,
1949 photo
(WOW "Tower"
publication)

Bill McBride came to WOW in 1947 and with Ray Clark the two pioneered television news on WOW TV. McBride became the WOW TV 6 program director in 1953 and stayed with the station for 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. His sports background included being a premiere sprinter at Thomas Jefferson High School in Council Bluffs and a halfback for Creighton University. As live vocalists faded from radio, Saggau switched to sportscasting. He called Husker football play-by-play on WOW in 1949 and 1950 with Merrill Workhoven providing the color.

Tip Saggau was a charter member of the Omaha Sportscasters Association formed in December 1947. Other charter members included KFAB's Lyell Bremser, Bob Steelman from KOIL,

KBON's Ed Morgan, Jack Sandler from KOWH-KOAD, and Hugh Carlisle of KSWI-KFMX. (*OWH* Dec 24, 1947).

WOW aired a studio orchestra into the 1950s. It was led by Mort Wells, an Omahan who played dance halls in the 1930s. Wells was in the Meredith Wilson Armed Forces Radio Orchestra during the war. Upon returning to Omaha as music director at WOW, he met and described Johnny Carson as "A goose-necked announcer."

Wells in later years organized his own six-piece band. Showing a love for Dixieland music he toured the region appearing at dance halls, Peony Park, and later at supper clubs, notably at Mr. Kelly's in the early 1970s. But before then, the Wells Orchestra was heard many late nights on WOW from the 1940s until 1953.

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

For 15 years Bohlsen 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 Bohlsen's Cupboard*, late mornings, for a while airing adjacent to CBS' Arthur Godfrey Show. Bohlsen's kitchen show even went to television during WOW TV's first month of broadcasting in 1949.

Bohlsen's show continued into the 1950s on both AM stations. Her shows were paid for by the power company before she finally went out on her own. Her show was later syndicated by Tidy House Company of Shenandoah, eventually running on 90 stations.

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" which 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 often used as fill, sometimes airing in the early morning and sometimes late nights during the 1940s. Dee retired from WOW in 1951 but continued to unite homeless pets with owners for many more years.

With Omaha being central in beef and wheat country, WOW's big signal with its rural coverage assisted farmers and ranchers dependent on knowing market prices. In turn, it brought in a lucrative business for the station in selling agriculture-related products.



IT'S A FACT - - -

WOW is easily heard anywhere within a 100-mile radius of its transmitter—because WOW puts 5000 watts power on a 590-Kc frequency.

WOW is known in because of its 11-year record of providing the best in radio, including such NBC programs since 1951.

There are two special reasons why WOW can do your radio advertising job within a hundred miles PLUS of Omaha . . . ALJUNE!

*Plus on the approximate frequency of other full-time stations in this area.



WOW trade publication ad comparing the efficiency of its signal at its low frequency with those of competitors KFAB 1110, KOIL 1290, and KBON 1490. Also note co-ownership of KODY North Platte, purchased in 1943 and sold off in 1950.

Omaha's importance in farming is epitomized by the Omaha Stockyards. They

overtook 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. Mal 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 began his announcer/personality career on WOW. He was hired on August first, 1949, 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.

WOW Promotion Director William O. Wiseman is said to have been an impetus for Carson's move to Omaha. His granddaughter Wendy Wiseman recalls, "My dad and Johnny Carson were fraternity brothers together in Lincoln and they performed in plays, etc. That's how Johnny got connected to my grandpa."

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*, debuted in October 1949 airing from 8:15 to 9 a.m. It ran for just over two years. He also did numerous magic show appearances for extra money which in turn also 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 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 he helped produce the station's drama series *Krime Klan*. He also had worked at KFAB with Lyell Bremser for some time.

Ziegler ran the sound effects for Carson's radio show. One ongoing bit was running thunder and rain over weatherman Ed Stapowich while he was predicting fair skies and warmer temps.

In another on-air bit in 1949, Carson and engineer Percy Ziegler were commenting on a closed-door upper management meeting going on, wondering what secrets were under discussion. They decided to turn on their "hidden microphone" under the conference room table and listen in. What followed were the sounds of shuffling cards, tinkling ice cubes in drink glasses, and laughter. The subdued voices soon were raised in anger with threats, challenges, fights, and crashing furniture, concluding with the approaching sound of police sirens (*OWH* Oct 2, 1976, Robert McMorris column).



John Carson is the new star and emcee of his own show on WOW, Monday through Friday, 8:15 a.m. John is a man of many voices—ventriloquist as well as a magician.

WOW promo clipping showing Johnny Carson at work as a ventriloquist. (WOW Tower publication)



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

Ziegler says management let them get away with just about anything, but "I'm sure we were considered sort of a problem." 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* hosted by Joe Martin. In the next 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 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 the 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 as management's attention was diverted to television, the FM plans went no further. It's no secret that NBC's David Sarnoff disregarded FM radio, instead urging his radio affiliates including WOW to seek television licenses.

WOW TV was awarded Channel 6 in January 1948 and signed on 18 months later. Though television would eventually become radio's competition, it's notable that most TV outlets were born out of an established AM radio operation like that at WOW. The stable of talent on AM would prove very useful, though were somewhat wary and reluctant, in parenting this new medium during its awkward infancy.

KOWH 660 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*.

<h3>Saturday Features</h3>	
Sunrise News and Music Hour	6 to 7 A. M.
Jean Sullivan's Newscast for Women	11:30 A. M.
Douglas County Victory Garden Program	11:45 A. M.
University of Nebraska Program	1 P. M.
"A Look At Australia"	3:30 P. M.
BBC News from London	3:45 P. M.
A Foll Hour of Light Concert Music	4 P. M.
Official Omaha Temperature Broadcast Every Half-Hour All Day — Every Day	KOWH
A variety of block programming was the norm in the mid-1940s as shown here on KOWH's program schedule for a Saturday.	

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 McNeill's Breakfast Club*.

NBC had divested the Blue Network before the war's end but the network retained its name for two years while negotiating rights to be called the American Broadcasting Company.

KOWH's major drawback was that the station had to sign off at sunset each night. Omaha listeners were forced to tune in to KMA 960 in Shenandoah for the NBC Blue prime-time network offerings. 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 that June and full-timer KOIL 1290 wrested it away from KOWH in November.

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



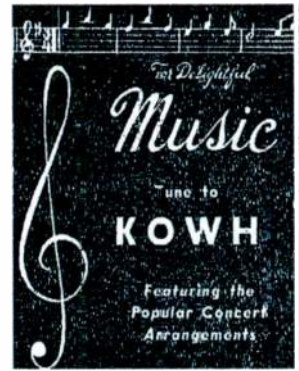
JEAN SULLIVAN

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 (Omaha World-Herald).

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.



1947 - KOWH's music-intensive programming began after losing NBC Blue to KOIL © OWH

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 Mondays through Saturdays.

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

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

Jean Sullivan's *Women In The News* enjoyed a long run well before women's lib.

KOWH NOTES

Jack Sandler now conducts a daily "Man-on-the Street" program . . . over KOWH . . . 12 o'clock noon on Saturday and 1 p. m. Monday through Friday. Jack's "Down the Ice" program will also be heard Sunday at 1:30 p. m.



JACK SANDLER

1946 KOWH ad promoting Jack Sandler's "Man On The Street" program. © OWH

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

Now On KOWH



Lee Barron

Hear this prominent mid-western radio personality, presenting "The Lee Barron Show" Monday through Friday. 55 minutes of entertainment for every member of the family!

4 P.M.

1948- Local bandleader Lee Barron, after getting his radio start on KOIL in 1946, moved to KOWH to host a record show.

Joining the KOWH women's shows lineup in 1948

was *Leanna's Kitchen*, also billed as *Kitchen Klatter*, weekdays from the Shenandoah home of Leanna Driftmeier. Her family by this time had syndicated the pioneer broadcaster's show that had been running on KFNF Shenandoah since the 1920s.

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

It was a significant programming move, 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 that were assigned to record shows.

Barron was a man with many hats. Besides his newly-found radio career, he continued as a big band leader making numerous 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 only ran for six months when he returned full-time to big band management. But he wouldn't be gone from radio for long. Barron showed up on KBON 1490 in 1950 and later on various other stations in the region in a local radio career that lasted well into the 1980s.

Almost as an eerie omen to the coming music radio revolution of the 1950s 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 show was a *local* Hit Parade program rating popular records.

However, the tabulation likely was not done by KOWH but by the show's sponsor, Schmoller & Mueller, a music instruments store that also sold records.

TEN TOP TUNES

1. Nature Boy	6. Just Because
2. You're Gonna Be A Star	7. Haunted Heart
3. Little White Lies	8. Hi Lonesome March
4. You Can't Be True Over	9. Now Is the Hour
5. Manana	10. Laram, Laram, Lili Bidero

Come and listen to these fine
selections

TIME IN
SATURDAY MORNING
1948
KOWH
for "Ten Top Tunes" Program

Schmoller & Mueller Piano Co.
1816 Dodge Street AT. 1888

A KOWH Top Ten listing in an ad placed by the program's sponsor in the May 21, 1948 Benson High School News.

Record shows identifying with the DJ's personality were cautiously continuing to emerge. Like Lee Barron after his brief run in 1948, Bud Armstrong was credited as the host afternoons on *Club 660* although not yet named within the title. 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.

Still, the all-important morning show remained the *Kolache Klub* airing polkas, waltzes, and mazurkas, all presented by the announcer du jour.

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 programming separate 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.)

The upgrade was preceded by unsuccessful fights for full-time high-power operation. In September 1941 KOWH had applied for 10 thousand watts full time using a directional antenna system to be located on a "crook of the Missouri River" six miles south of Omaha. It was denied the following year. Later, in 1945, KOWH was among 40 applicants seeking to break down the clear channels. Their request for 10-thousand watts full-time directional was again denied. Remaining at 500 watts and restricted to daytime-only operation, management settled on moving to a new tower site with a new RCA transmitter.



3:15 to 5 P. M.
Monday through Friday
Bud Armstrong at the Mike
KOWH

1949 - Bud Armstrong replaces Lee Barron afternoons. (©OWH)

KOWH obtained FCC permission in early 1947 to move its transmitter site from 60th and Girard to 60th and Hartman Streets where a 500-foot tower would go up. The 40-acre site was about a mile and a half north of Benson and six miles northwest of downtown Omaha. The tall tower height would be suitable for KOWH's low frequency and would also be a major benefit for sister FM station KOAD.

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 and FM bays were secured to the top, the tower itself being the radiator for the AM signal. Station manager and technical supervisor Frank Shopen announced the new tower site would increase the range of both stations. The new transmitter and tower went into operation in August 1947.

The KOWH 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 induced by WOW's nearby signal.

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

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. His son Todd Storz was a salesman at KFAB 1110 following a stint spinning records on KBON 1490. Todd was a long-time radio enthusiast and was the catalyst in buying the station.

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. That approval came in July.

Robert stepped back and let Todd run the entire operation. Studios remained on the eighth floor of the Kilpatrick Building (formerly the *Omaha World-Herald* Building) at the



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

Well-known KFAB announcer Gaylord Avery joins KOWH, Fall 1949. © OWH

northwest 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; 660 was still the protected nighttime clear channel for New York.

In September Todd hired longtime KFAB newscaster Gaylord Avery to become his program director. Avery had been at KFAB since 1946 and was its 10 p.m. newscaster when Todd hired him away.

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

KFAB in Lincoln was Nebraska's most powerful with 10 thousand watts on 780 kHz, still synchronizing its nighttime 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 Omaha. This was the result of 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.



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



Hugh Feltis, who took over Central States Broadcasting in 1943, became KFAB's general manager in 1945.

Manager Don Searle headed up the Central States Broadcasting group 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.

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. Leaving the Lincoln Hotel studios at 9th & P Streets to KFOR, KFAB's new quarters were set up on the fourth floor of the downtown Sharp Building at 206 South 13th Street (constructed 1927, sixteen floors).

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's sixth floor to KOIL.



KFAB displaying its presence in the Sharp Building, downtown Lincoln.

KFAB Broadcasting Company was now the sole operation headed by 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 the higher power had come just a few months earlier.

Radio networks were so flush with cash that they could spend it on affiliates to upgrade and improve their coverage. KFAB's network, CBS, had been on board in assisting KFAB's upgrade plans

since the 1930s, much of it having been on hold during the war. Upon resumption, the CBS-backed plan for the higher power 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 nighttime 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 during nighttime hours.

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 had been put on hold and 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.



1949 KFAB Image logo after frequency change and power increase.

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 at most to 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 and Omaha coverage 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's sunrise, more than an hour before Omaha's sunrise.

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 length—1,000 watts on 780 kilocycles is equivalent to 8,000 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."

WJAG announcing its dial position move, Dec. 1944. © OWH

While still in Lincoln with 10 thousand watts (the three-tower directional array was not yet constructed), KFAB moved to 1110 kHz on October 7, 1944, 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. Famed newsman Foster May, by this time a free-lance correspondent following an unsuccessful run for the Senate, conducted a series of interviews.

GOOD NEWS FOR OWNERS OF OLDER SETS

WBT, a radio station in Charlotte, North Carolina, also broadcasts on the 1110 kc, KFAB frequency, and occasionally at NIGHT may cause interference for some radio sets. This annoyance will soon be removed, since "directional" towers are now being erected at Charlotte. When the "directionalizing" is completed, even the older, much used radio sets will get night time CBS programs absolutely clear of interference. So . . . move now with the CBS stars to KFAB . . . 1110 "on your dial."

(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.)



1945 KFAB ad mentioning its WBT issue (Oct 31). © OWH

At 10 thousand watts from Lincoln, KFAB now had its semi-clear channel and full-time

operation, no longer synchronizing with the 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 where a new transmitting plant would be built. The KFAB petition to move its community of license to Omaha along with the higher power and directional antenna system was authorized the following year, in October 1945.

**KFAB OMAHA
INSTALLS THREE POSTWAR
TRUSCON RADIO TOWERS!**

• First in the long list of Truscon installations to follow the war is the new directional system consisting of three 435 foot towers for the 50 Kilowatt KFAB station, which blankets Omaha and surrounding territory.

*Truscon Tower
Company showcased its
accomplishment in
Broadcasting Magazine,
1945.*

TRUSCON STEEL COMPANY
YOUNGSTOWN 1, OHIO • Subsidiary of Republic Steel Corporation

After KFAB's move to 1110 in October 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 experiencing 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, WJAG moving to the clear channel as a daytime-only station eliminated any chance of an upgrade to full-time.

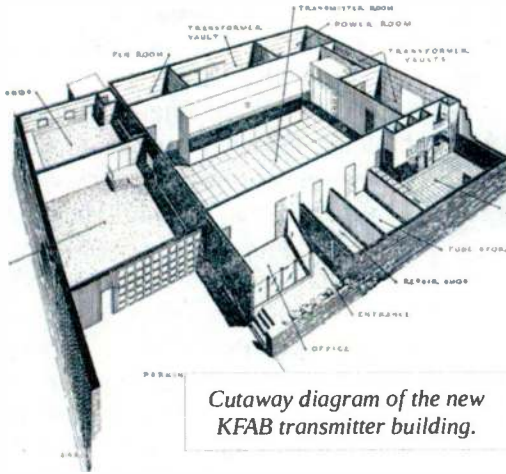
CBS sold WBT in August 1945 for \$1.5 million to Southeast Broadcasting, a subsidiary of Jefferson Pilot. By that time WBT had already been downgraded to Class I-B with its KFAB signal protection plan intact.

The sale was the result of an FCC regulation that disallowed network ownership in localities where stations are so few that competition would be restrained. The May 1943 regulation had been under appeal for two years so the decision came as no major surprise for CBS or the new owners.

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 Lyell 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 formally renamed on June 5, 1945.)



Cutaway diagram of the new KFAB transmitter building.

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 an 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 the government and sent elsewhere.-- *Broadcasting Jan 13, 1947*).



1947: KFAB's three-tower transmitter site on the south edge of Omaha in Sarpy County.

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

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, a tube storage room, a fan room, and two repair shops.

KFAB was guided by three managers in its move to maximum 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. 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. When Feltis left, Harry Burke took over in April 1945, coming over from a WOW sales position. He was KFAB's general manager when the 50-thousand-watt transmitter finally went into service.

KFAB was the first new 50-thousand-watt installation in the country to reach the air after the war. The high-power signal debuted on Christmas Day, 1946. The directional array was not yet intact, so the non-directional signal was powered down to 10 thousand watts at night.

For directional operation, the three towers all needed to receive the transmitter's signals in phases and power levels that were specific and precise to achieve the desired pattern. Adjustments at the phaser unit and the field measurements to check them were tedious and took weeks. Authorization to use the new Sarpy County transmitter site full power full-time came on March 31, 1947.

50,000 WATTS
KFAB
Your Columbia Station

KFAB's new logo, 1947

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 equipment from Westinghouse for a total bill of 111-thousand dollars. (*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 August 1947 with 3-thousand watts at 192 feet, 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.

A synchronous booster was used in Shelby 50 miles west of the city but was shut down in 1953 when the FCC's "7-7-7" rule prohibited any station group from owning more than seven AM, FM, or TV stations in the country. The commission was counting booster transmitters as one of the seven stations. The problem lasted until 1995 when WBT bought an FM station to fill in.



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

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.

Upon becoming 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. His roster soon included former NBC stars 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.

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 whenever the schedule needed a fill-in before she was moved to mornings for two daily shows in 1950.



Texas Mary, a KFAB talent who performed in various time slots from the 1930s into the 1950s.

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.

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 the war's end, the 1944 Duopoly ruling that limited 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 of that year, Central States sold KFOR 1240 Lincoln for \$100 thousand and Omaha's KOIL 1290 for \$250 thousand to Lincoln investors Charles and James Stuart. The stations were now under the Stuart Investment Company umbrella calling itself The Stuart Stations. 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 Sharp 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 of 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.



1945- KOIL Live Drama Production.

Krime Klan was locally produced, some scripts were purchased, others written by KOIL staff announcers such as Harvey Twyman and Twyman's wife, Arlone, herself an experienced actor. Other announcers performing in the series were Virgil Sharpe, Henry Kelpé, 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 AM and TV in his home town of Lincoln where he played "Cactus Pete" on a kids show, 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 that had been block-programmed with generic names that were related to the content. KOIL cultivated its share of these announcers and personalities in the 1940s and 50s, though their names weren't yet part of the show's title.



Henry Kelpé, KOIL 1944

Byron Head came to KOIL from KOWH in the mid-1940s and scored high ratings with his morning show. *KOIL Coffee Club* at 7:15 to 8 a.m. six days a week. It reached a whopping 48.1 in the May-June 1948 Hooper rating which turned out to be the highest morning audience share for any station in the country (*Broadcasting* Aug 16 1948).



Byron Head, KOIL 1944

In 1949 Head also 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 collection of food product and distribution companies and featured a daily call-out grocery certificate giveaway.

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



Band leader Lee Barron began a long Omaha radio career at KOIL in 1946.

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 community 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 lineup 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 at 20th 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 push for delayed programming was so serious that he invested in the development of magnetic tape recording. He and ABC

then became pioneers in the field of tape recording, a technology that would move into homes in the coming decade.

On the technical side, Central States Broadcasting and licensee KOIL 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.

The FM application came in January 1945, with Central States Broadcasting seeking 47.7 MHz in the old FM band. After a new band of frequencies for FM was federally designated, a second application for KOIL FM in 1947 received authorization for 104.1.

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

The plans for KOIL-TV began in 1948. The first Omaha television channel sought by the Stuarts that year was for Channel 3, but it went to May Broadcasting headquartered in Shenandoah.



The Stuart Stations became a three-station group in 1945 with the purchase of WDGY in Minneapolis.

CHARLES T. STUART PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
EXECUTIVE OFFICES, STUART BUILDING, LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

LINCOLN NEBRASKA	KFOR	250 WATTS 1240 KC BASIC ABC
OMAHA CO. BLUFFS	KOIL	5000 WATTS 1290 KC BASIC ABC
MINNEAPOLIS ST. PAUL	WDGY	5000 WATTS 1130 KC

Harry Peck—Station Manager
W. J. Newent—Station Manager
Malvin Drake—Vice Pres. & Station Mgr.

With Channel 6 already won by WOW 590, Central States turned to a third channel that was still available. It filed for the remaining allotted channel for Omaha, Channel 5. When the FCC changed the channel availability table shifting 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 most open channel in the region except at night when it was a clear channel for WABC (the forerunner to WCBS) in New York City.

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 advised to be built in Iowa near Pacific Junction, 30 miles away. The plan went no further. The FCC was dragging its feet on loosening rules for clear channels, a decision, it turns out, still years away.

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

Investment Company had purchased WDGY 1130 Minneapolis in October 1945 for \$300 thousand, and a year later sought to upgrade it from 5-thousand watts and 500 watts at night to 50-thousand watts and 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, requiring a total of nine towers to accomplish. At about this time Charles Stuart had enough and sold his shares of Central States to his co-owner brother James, the pair by now having spent a fortune.

After 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 wartime 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.



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

KBON began its broadcast day at 6:30 a.m., late by modern standards. 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 his 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 his singing for a career in sports broadcasting, joining WOW as sports director 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

An advertisement for the Tip Saggau show on KBON 1490 Omaha. The text reads: "Hear Omaha's Own TIP SAGGAU Sing the Songs You Love to Hear on the TIP SAGGAU SHOW 4:00 - 4:30 P. M. Monday Through Friday". Below the text is the KBON 1490 Omaha logo. At the bottom, it says "© OWH".

1945- Starting as a local singing talent, one of the last on station rosters, Tip Saggau later transitioned to sportscasting.
© OWH

in the evening came the likes of *Charlie Chan*, *The Falcon*, and singer Kate Smith, and after 10 p.m., the dance orchestras.

Mutual 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 Disc Jockey. 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, Jackson’s show gained listeners by his paying attention to audience requests. With listener’s input, the show increased in popularity and spawned Jackson’s afternoon *Rhythm Inn* later in the year running from 3:30 to 4:00 p.m. Both shows by 1949 grew longer with earlier start times--1490 *Swing Club* opening at 11 p.m. and *Rhythm Inn* at 2:30 p.m.



Sandy Jackson tabulating requests at KBON.
(Screen shot from television documentary).

Jackson met a young Todd Storz while at KBON when 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 introduced 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 listeners’ tastes in mind was the right combination to be recognized as Omaha’s first 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 program director rules. Jackson, instead, paid attention to what the audience wanted.

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 titles 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 now 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 that the tower would be much higher than the 227-foot tower at the Northwestern Bell Telephone building. (*OWH* March 15, 1946).

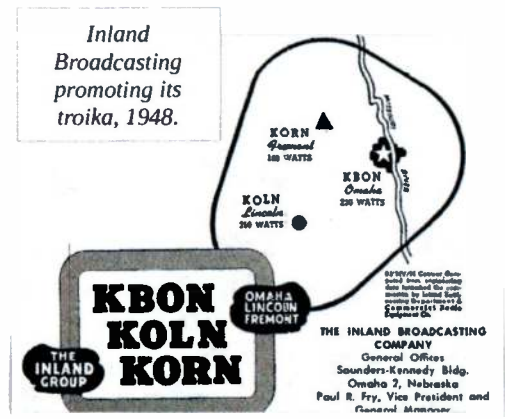
The tall tower was likely planned with an FM station in mind. KBON along with all other Omaha and Lincoln stations had applications in for an FM frequency by the following year.

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

Other ambitious plans were also underway. KBON owners Inland Broadcasting were seeking ways to expand market coverage. KBON's lowly 250 watts could cover Omaha and surrounding counties during the day and was limited just the city at night. Work began on setting up a trio of stations that would serve Lincoln and Fremont as well as Omaha. To accomplish this, Inland planned 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, but making the move to Lincoln required some finesse with the FCC plus 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 the morning of August 11, 1947. Studios were on the second floor of the Federal Securities Building at 13th and N Streets. When the new Fremont frequency was granted some weeks later, the KORN calls returned, this time on 1340 with 100 watts.

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 at 18th and Douglas Streets in downtown Omaha (304 South 18th, seven stories, constructed 1914). Fry was a graduate of the Creighton School of Journalism who began in radio at WAAW in 1938. He was the driving force behind the Omaha, Lincoln, and Fremont stations and also efforts towards Inland's FM and television ambitions.



Inland Broadcasting VP/GM Paul Fry. (1949 photo)

The trio of stations was short-lived. Finding operation "economically impractical for absentee ownership" according to the filing, KORN 1340 in Fremont was sold in 1948 and changed calls to KFGT the following year.

Inland in 1952 sold KOLN 1400 Lincoln to Cornhusker Radio and TV (James Stuart Investments) for \$43-thousand. At that time Inland was an applicant for Lincoln's television channel 12, that app also going to Cornhusker while Inland turned its attention to Omaha's Channel 7 availability.

KBON 1490 promoting its upgrade, August 1948 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

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

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

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 moved at the same time, joining the KBON offices on the 6th floor of the Saunders-Kennedy Building also known as the World Insurance Building, 18th and Douglas. 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.

The other happened in October as KBON personalities Sandy Jackson and Don Perazzo promoted the new RCA 45 rpm record by giving out free 45s at Hospe Piano Company, 1512 Douglas Street. The 45 rpm record was developed by RCA and released in March 1949. Hospe's was also hawking the new RCA 45 rpm record player/changer that holds up to 10 records.

(Columbia Records had just introduced the micro-groove long play 33 1/3 rpm albums in 1948. RCA countered with the 45 rpm single in 1949. Some stations resisted the new 45 rpm record because it involved purchasing new turntables. The record industry workhorse for years had been 78 rpm platters making up music libraries for years. Large, heavy, and breakable, one can imagine how much time and space was required to maintain station libraries until the lighter long-play albums and smaller 45-rpm singles arrived.)


Though with comparatively minuscule power, KBON's ongoing and spirited competition continued to greatly assist the growth of Omaha's radio programming in the coming decades.

KSWI 1560 Council Bluffs


Council Bluffs was left without a station of its own when KOIL moved its community of license to Omaha in 1936. That changed in the post-war years with the arrival of a new AM station, KSWI. With it came one of Iowa's first commercial FM stations 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 forth 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*.



1st Time in Omaha!
ALL NIGHT PROGRAM
"All Through the Night"



Hear Virtually Every Radio Personality in Omaha
from **KFAB - KOIL - KOWH - WOW - KBON**

Eric Allen (KFAB) Phil Allen (KOIL) Announcers' Quartet (WOW) Bud Armstrong (KOWH) Gaylord Avery (KFAB) Russ Baker (WOW) Lambert Bartak (WOW) Ruth Bradley (WOW) Lynell Brynner (KFAB) Lou Berg (KBON) Betty Cox (WOW) Lee Finney (WOW)	Byron Hood (KOIL) Sandy Jackson (KBON) Henry Kalpa (KOIL) Richard Krebs (KOWH) Stasits Mahoney (WOW) Bill McBride (WOW) Dick McCane (KBON) Jack Meyers (KOWH) Ed Morgan (KBON) Ray Olson (WOW) Joe O'Neill (KOWH) Don Perazzo (KBON) Palla Playboys (KFAB)	Adrian Reinmann (KOWH) Joak Sandler (KOWH) Walter Scott (KOWH) Bob Strabman (KOIL) Joan Sullivan (KOWH) Bill Takort (KOIL) Bud Visono (KOIL) Joak Walls (KFAB) Mert Walls (WOW)
--	--	---

All musicians by courtesy of Musicians' Union Local Number 70

Starting at Midnight Tonight

HAVE A PARTY—STAY UP AND LISTEN

Telephone Requests Will Be Played
Brought to You for the Benefit of the American Cancer Society

KBON

1490 on your dial

Through Co-operation of All Omaha Radio Stations

October 1949- KBON Radiothon for the American Cancer Society with a "who's who" of Omaha radio personalities.

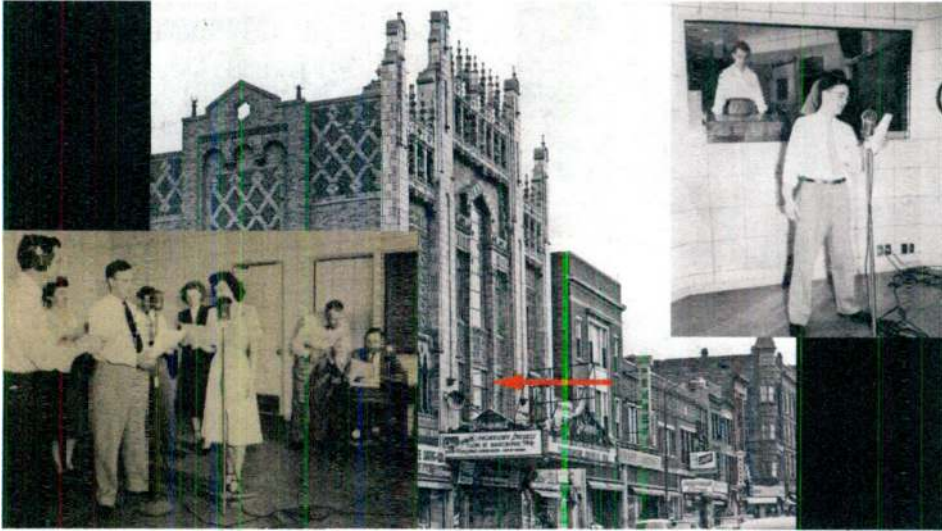


WILLIAM E. HARRIS
General Manager

DAVID R. MOORE, CHAIRMAN
NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE

The transmitter site selected was near the Missouri River bridge on the South Omaha Bridge Road where a tower rose next to a Quonset hut that housed the transmitter. 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 the air 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. Manager William Ware presided over both operations.



KSWI 1947, located in the mezzanine (arrow) of the Strand Theater, 554 West Broadway. Interior photos from the KSWI first anniversary booklet. (Courtesy: Richard Warner)

(KSWI FM 107.9 shared the Quonset hut and tower, the FM antenna topping the AM-radiating tower. KSWI FM signed 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 1560 studios were on the mezzanine of the Strand Theater, 544 West Broadway, downtown Council Bluffs. The station remained there for a couple of years before moving to the Council Bluffs Savings Bank Building at 120 South Main Street.

Council Bluffs historian Richard Warner notes, "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." The station remained there until sold to new owners 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.



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

1947 - Union Stockyards promoting the busy schedule of market reports on no fewer than five local stations. © OWH


Radio Stations Broadcasting Omaha Livestock Market Reports

Station	Freq.	Time
KFAB	1110	6:25-6:30 AM, Estimated Receipts 12:45-1:00 PM, Summary
KOAD (FM)	92.5 Meg.	5:00-5:15 PM, Summary
KOWH	660	6:00-6:30 AM, News, Estimated Receipts 12:00-12:15 PM, News, Mkt. Summaries 5:25-5:30 PM, Complete Mkt. Summary
WOW	590	6:30-6:45 AM, Market Forecasts 7:30-7:45 AM, Estimated Receipts 12:15-12:30 PM, News, Mkt. Summaries 5:30-6:00 PM, News, Complete Summary

COUNCIL BLUFFS, IOWA

KSWI 1560 Latest reports for five minutes beginning: 6:25 AM, 9:55 AM, 11:20 AM, 2:00 PM.

THE PLACE TO SELL!



**UNION STOCK YARDS
COMPANY OF OMAHA**

OMAHA
WORLD'S SECOND LARGEST
LIVESTOCK
MARKET
AND MEAT PACKING CENTER

LET'S MAKE IT FIRST!

Harold Hughes joined the station as program director in 1949. Hughes was a broadcast veteran, the first announcer on KOIL when it signed on in 1925 and KOIL's program director until 1945. He stayed at KSWI until retiring in 1952.



KSWI's Ralph Carey, 1948

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 still-growing stockyards being the second largest in the country at the time. Market reports are an invaluable tool for farmers and ranchers in making profitable decisions without fearing manipulation by middlemen such as grain elevators, stockyards, and railroads.

One notable show in 1948 was *Jazz from 1560* hosted by Ralph Carey at 5 p.m. His banter and knowledge of music even made 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 then moved into television in 1951 working at both KMTV 3 and WOW TV 6 until the mid-1950s. Carey hosted a Teen Dance show Saturdays on WOW TV in 1955.

KSWI program listings were found only in the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*. The *Omaha World-Herald* refused to include KSWI in its daily listings for another ten years.



FM-- A NEW BROADCASTING BAND

A new broadcasting technology was being developed, radically different from the traditional AM method being used. AM aired the audio on the radio signal by varying the amplitude of the signal in accordance with the sound. FM audio was created by shifting the frequency in accordance with the sound. A band higher in the radio spectrum was required for this new set of stations. FM would be glacially slow to catch on despite its promise of better fidelity and the elimination of electrical interference.

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.

The first to apply for an Omaha FM was World Publishing, owners of the *Omaha World-Herald* and station KOWH 660 in June 1940. WOW 590's owners in June 1941 announced plans for an FM station that would offer what management called, "static-less" reception, but didn't file in time before the war.

Meanwhile, the *Omaha World-Herald* heavily promoted FM with stories and even ads offering FM receivers for tuning in these yet-unavailable stations. A 1941 ad 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 plug-in for FM and TV adapters (*OWH* Oct 30, 1941).

Commercial FM broadcasting began in 1941. 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 were soon dismissed including that of KOWH.

As the war wound down, plans were underway for the resumption of FM and TV 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 Combelt Broadcasting- Construction Permit Only

KOAD 92.5, to 92.9, Omaha

Omaha's first FM station to reach the air was brought about by 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 meant the permit could be withdrawn based on findings or rulings that were yet to be determined.

**Tomorrow...
July 1st**

... an entirely new kind of radio broadcasting is coming to you... frequency modulation... the improved radio that reduces static practically to the vanishing point... that imparts to programs a brilliance and clarity of tone you've never thought possible!

On the Air

July 1—7:45 P. M.

Daily Thereafter...
7 A. M. to 11 P. M.

KOAD

Nebraska's Pioneer FM
Station
92.5 on Your FM Dial
FM Channel 223

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

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 60th and Girard Streets. It would be used as a test unit during the conditional phase of the station license.

Almost simultaneously a GE 59-thousand-watt FM transmitter was ordered with a target date set for about 12 months later. The wait was 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 homemade by Shopen and his staff due to the scarcity of manufactured items.

KOAD 92.5 signed on at 7:45 on the evening of July 1, 1946. Governor Dwight Griswold spoke on the inaugural broadcast with

music provided by the Paul Moorehead Orchestra 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-hour daily schedule until 7 p.m. was begun with original programming except for a few afternoon hours filled with a simulcast from the AM side.

Original programs would include *Amateur Playhouse* beginning a six-week run on Sundays that August 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 last worked at KOIL where he was an 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.

fm is
STATIC-FREE


MONDAY EVENING PROGRAMS

★ **NEWS**
6:30 Home Edition-
9:30 Final Edition
5:30, 7:30, 8:30 and 10:30
Front Page News

★ **SPORTS**
6:00 Floyd Olds Sports Club

★ **MUSIC**

6:45 Serenade
7:35 Golden
Melodies
8:35 Opera
Favorites



June 1947 program notes.
© OWH



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

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 commercial 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 Department 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 at 500 feet from atop the new KOWH 660 AM tower 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.

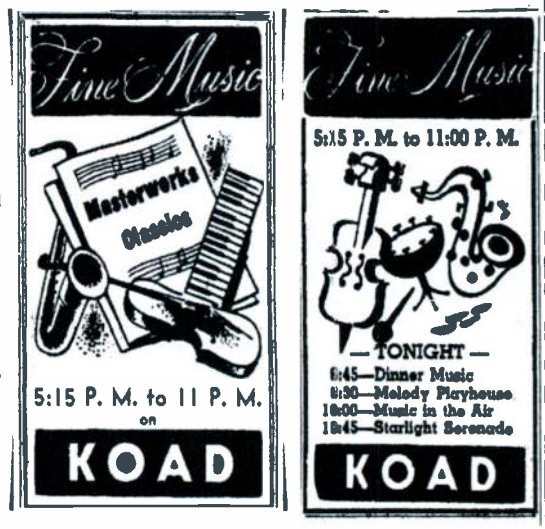
Construction of the 500-foot tower and new transmitter building for KOAD and sister station KOWH began immediately at 60th and Hartman Streets. KOWH 660 on AM will use the tower itself as the antenna radiator. \$80 thousand of the \$400 thousand upgrade would be spent on the new building to house the 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 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 focused on the virtues of FM with little mention of the 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 departed 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.



January and February 1949. Two of the last KOAD ads before being sold. © OWH.

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. Todd silenced KOAD 92.9 in February 1950. After three years and seven months of giving its best, Omaha's first FM was gone.

KSWI FM 107.9, 96.1, KFMX, Council Bluffs



1947 ad announcing KSWI's FM, omitting the dial position (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald)

The market's second FM sign-on was from Council Bluffs. Owned by the local newspaper the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, the KSWI FM license was sought in April right after the sister AM KSWI 1560 construction permit was granted.

KSWI FM first applied for 102.1 but that was changed to 107.9 a month later. The station then debuted on that frequency with 17 thousand watts ERP just weeks later at 6 a.m. on July 26, 1947. Engineers from General Electric and the firm that constructed the cloverleaf bays atop the AM tower were on hand for the opening. The programming was a simulcast of the KSWI AM 1560 programming until sunset, then continuing on its own to 10 p.m. nightly.

Newspaper accounts credited KSWI FM as being Iowa's first FM

station, however, KBUR FM Burlington, Iowa signed on just days earlier on July 21 when it



1948 KSWI-KFMX General Manager William E Ware

jumped the gun on its scheduled July 27 opening and dedication ceremony.

KSWI FM's operation on 107.9 was described as "interim," the frequency subject to change. The dial position was omitted in the initial promotions.



Engineers at the KFMX transmitter, co-located with KSWI 1560 transmitter on the South Omaha Bridge Road, 1948.

In September the frequency was changed to 96.1. A few weeks after that, the owners changed the call letters to KFMX. 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 KFMX calls were switched back to KSWI FM in late 1951 and the license went through renewal the following spring. KSWI FM 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 adjacent four-channel same-city separation.

KFAB FM signed on the afternoon of August 27, 1947 with a Westinghouse 3000-watt transmitter located in the KFAB studios on the fourth floor of the Sharp Building, 206 South 13th Street. The antenna was temporary, a folded quadrupole antenna mounted only 20 feet above the top of the Sharp building. The computed service area extended only 36 miles, but plans were in place for a 100 foot tower to replace the folded quad.

.KFAB FM became Lincoln's first FM station, licensed to the city even though KFAB 1110 AM had already received approval to move to Omaha two years earlier. The daily schedule was 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. There were no notable promotions or events for KFAB FM that followed in subsequent months.

KFAB FM 97.9. left the air in May 1949 relinquishing its license for economic reasons as attention turned to television. According to station manager Harry Burke, "I feel that from an economic standpoint, all efforts of KFAB should be devoted to the new science." (*OWH* May 13, 1949). KFAB had filed for Omaha's available television Channel 7 in April of the previous year.

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 plan involving a group of stations at the time.

Two years went by before KBON FM reached the air. The newly-erected 212-foot KBON 1490 AM tower at 38th and Wright Streets was used, the FM antenna placed on top.

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 simply 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. Following a test on 25 buses for two weeks in December 1949 where riders voted 15 to 1 in favor of the idea, Manager Paul Fry moved ahead on outfitting Omaha's 235 buses with FM receivers at a cost of \$60 thousand.

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.

About 100 buses were equipped by the March first launch day. Along with the launch came new "all-music" programming from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m., "...interspersed with short news and service announcements."

Some appreciated transit-radio service, but there was pushback 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.

KBON-FM launch of bus radio with a new music-intensive format, March 1, 1949. © OWH



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

An advertisement for KBON-FM featuring musical notation. The top part has "AT HOME AWAY" written across a staff with notes. Below that, "BRIGHTENS YOUR DAY" is written in bold. The text continues: "Today KBON-FM begins its new all music programming from 6 a.m. until 9 p.m." and "This is the only full time music schedule available from an Omaha station. It is interspersed with short news and service announcements." Another paragraph says: "For pleasant, restful music . . . that goes nicely with housework, conversation, reading, cards or 'just relaxing' . . . we invite you to keep your FM dial tuned to 98.7 megacycles." The bottom part of the ad shows "KBON-FM" written across another musical staff with notes, and "98.7 megacycles" below it.

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 making the buying of FM receivers unnecessary. There were deeper issues as well. The music on scratchy 78s sounded no better, there were no FM car radios, and early receivers had a drifting problem that required constant re-tuning.

Moreover, the audience was excitedly turning its attention to “radio with pictures,” television. Advertisers stayed away from FM in droves, soon splitting their radio budgets toward television. It was too soon for hi-fi, stereo, and the long-playing album to be the turnaround for FM, and even then it will still be a 20-year struggle to match AM.

The FM slowdown was clearly underway. The first eleven months of 1948 saw no new stations in the Omaha and Lincoln markets--only KBON FM 98.7 arrived with a last-minute sign-on in December. It joined the four FM stations broadcasting in the region: KOAD 92.9 Omaha, KFAX 96.1 Council Bluffs, and from Lincoln though not reaching the Omaha market, 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 for television without ever being constructed. 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 thanks to WOW's attention turning to the licensing and construction of a television station, KWOW was another FM no-show.

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

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

KFOR FM 102.9 in Lincoln also went the television route, leaving the air in 1951 when the owners of Cornbelt Broadcasting turned their 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 arrived in Omaha. KOAD was silenced by new owners Robert and Todd Storz in February. Todd Storz was focused on his KOWH 660 making it into the nation's pioneer Top 40 station.

KBON FM tried a new idea of 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 KFMY) 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 the AM station owners who forged the way. WOW was the first, filing for a license to establish a TV station in 1944 (May *WOW 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 were aggressively behind the push to develop television, even at the expense of FM radio development and with it, Sarnoff's friendship with FM inventor Edwin Armstrong.

However, it would be another five years before television signals would emanate from Omaha's yet-to-be-built towers.

In 1946, \$40 thousand 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.

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.



WOW's Ray Clark took part in WOW TV's first official on-air test in 1949. After regular operation began, Clark became the station's first TV news anchor for the 10 p.m. newscast. (WOW Archives)

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 just blocks away 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 WOW 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 officially signed on to regular schedules within days of each other in 1949. WOW TV was first, with Station Manager John Gillin again pushing 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.



First regular-schedule sign on of WOW TV channel 6 in 1949 with GM John Gillin, Jr. pushing the button.

Just three days later on August 31, May Broadcasting, owners of KMA Shenandoah, signed on KMTV 3. Ed May and his mother pushed the button energizing KMTV's

signal to the air. (The calls had originally been filed and set as KMA-TV but were denied by the FCC at the last minute. Omaha was outside the Shenandoah market and the TV was disallowed sharing the AM station's calls. May changed it to KMTV just before sign-on in 1949.)



Official sign on of KMTV channel 3 in 1949 with the Earl May family pushing the button.

CBS TV and NBC TV were immediately locked into 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, as were some shows from the DuMont TV Network.

(DuMont Television, regarded today as the "Forgotten Network," operated from 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 more than three years in April 1952, but the battle for Omaha's third channel went on for another five years.

The channel assignment table had been 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 Broadcasting's KBON in July 1952 followed by 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 the recommendation from the FCC on April 7, 1955. KFAB protested but to no avail. Noted among its reasoning was 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* finally won the channel in 1957 and a third 500-foot tower joined the midtown skyline from new KETV studios built 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 Dick Clark's *American Bandstand* at 3 p.m. followed by the *Mickey Mouse Club*.

RADIO PERSONALITIES ARE THRUST INTO TELEVISION

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

On the national level, many entertainers who reached fame and fortune via radio 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 on-air host's presentation.

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."

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.

1949

SPECIAL TONIGHT!

7 p. m.—One Man's Family.
7:30—Toner Christopher Lynch and Firestone concert.
8:00—Jacobs Mellets, Telephone Hour Guest Star.

MONDAY thru FRIDAY
PREMIERE
8:18 a.m. to 9:00—
The "Johnny Carson Show."

WOW
590 ON YOUR DIAL

1950

SPECIALS on WOW-TV

5:00—It's Johnny Carson with "Family Matinee."
7:00—Laughs galore as Ed Ryan stars in "Four Star Revue."
8:00—"Kraft Television Theatre" presents "Old Lady Robbins."
11:00—Music and comedy on Broadway Open House.

CHANNEL SIX

Johnny Carson's ascension to television is noted in WOW's advertising, promoting his morning show premiering in 1949, soon hosting one of WOW's television programs in 1950.

A famous example: when pigeons were to be eradicated from their roosts at the Douglas County courthouse, Carson sat atop the courthouse interviewing a pigeon, ad-libbing a translation for the pigeon's responses for its side of the story.



Carson and his studio props (WOW Archives)

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 Bohlsen'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 hosted *Coffee Counter*, 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.



WOW's Don Keough, 1949. (WOW "Tower" publication)

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 atop 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)



Martha Bohlsen whipping up a cake at her WOW TV studio kitchen, 1949. (WOW "Tower" publication)

The days were long for the WOW TV 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 later pioneered the local nightly newscast on WOW TV well into the 1950s, preparing the 10:00 newscast at the radio studios downtown and 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 Channel 6 in 1953 and had his own Saturday afternoon *Teen Dance Show* in 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.

Martha Bohlsen whose cooking and homemaker shows aired over KOIL, KOWH, and WOW for over ten years became a television fixture almost immediately after Channel 6 signed on. Her kitchen set was adjacent to that used by Johnny Carson.

KMTV Channel 3 recruited radio people as well. KOIL's Henry Kelpie and Bill Talbot became familiar faces doing commercials, newscasts, and covering events. More ubiquitous was Jean Sullivan of KOWH and KOIL who became well known for doing television commercials for clients of her ad agency. KOIL's Steve Shepard also made appearances on screen.

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

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



MEREDITH WOW, INC. • INSURANCE BUILDING, OMAHA, NEBRASKA
WEBSTER 2400 • RADIO WOW 590 KC • CBS AFF. • WOW-TV CHANNEL 6 • CBS-TV AFF.

1956 WOW radio and television letterhead

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 focusing on grilled foods. It began almost as a lark in 1960, but *Lyle's Patio* on WOW TV 6 ran until 1965. DeMoss published several cookbooks well into the 1970s.

SIDEBARS AND FOOTNOTES

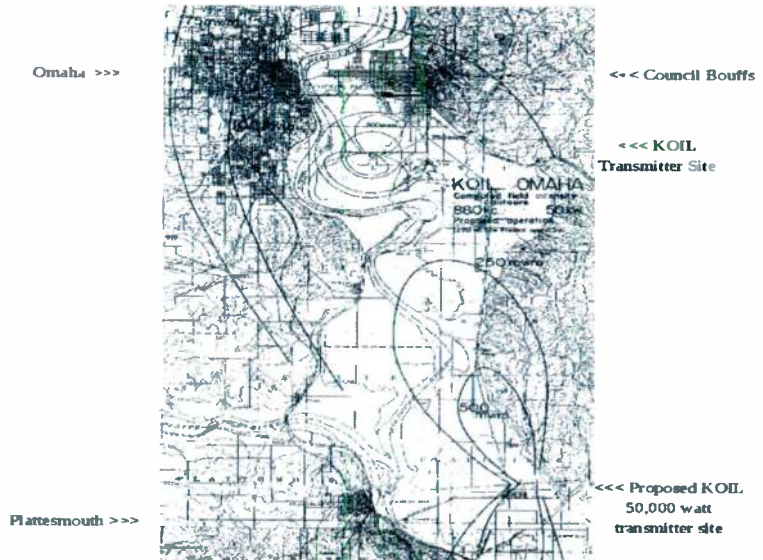
THE STANDINGS, 1949

Besides ratings, a station's standings in a market can be 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 at \$6.50 per 60-second spot while noting that airing on KBON FM was a free bonus; the FM duplicated the AM programming 100 percent. KOAD FM charged just \$2. (*Broadcasting* Aug 5, 1949)

KOIL's 50-THOUSAND WATT PLAN

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 its major lobe toward Omaha. The null on the right side of the pattern would protect the clear channel outlet for 880, WABC (the precursor to WCBS), New York City.



It was too soon and the plan went no further. Ongoing FCC clear

Engineering study showing KOIL's proposed 50-thousand watt pattern.

channel hearings dragged on for years. It wasn't until the 1960s that the FCC finally loosened rules on clear channel operation allowing secondary full-time stations to move onto those frequencies, though with necessary restrictions.

In 1972 KRVN Lexington in Central Nebraska claimed the channel, moving from 1010 kHz to 880 with 50-thousand watts. Its nighttime pattern is beamed westward covering much of the western U.S. at night.

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 just four years later. They remained friends after Carson's move to California.

It was in 1970s California when Johnny Carson had lunch with his former WOW Radio co-worker 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 soon surprised by a gift from Carson, a new Buick Skylark for the return trip. (*OWH* story Jan 24, 2005). Workhoven recounted he was puzzled when Carson put a set of car keys in his hand. Then Carson pointed and said, "There's the car that goes with it."

Workhoven retired from WOW in 1975. He kept the car for many years afterward.

FM PIONEERING IN OMAHA

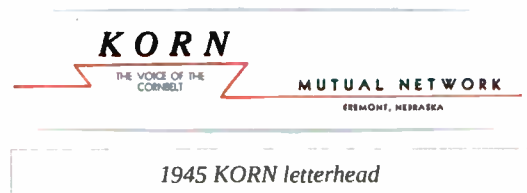
Interestingly, Edwin Armstrong's new technology did indeed arrive in Omaha during FM's earliest formative years, though not in the broadcast service. FM was selected in 1940 for the Douglas County Sheriff's radio communication system. The agency constructed a new 150-foot tower at Clearview home on West Maple Road housing the first FM law enforcement system in the country using a 25-watt GE transmitter. The calls were W9XAD. Five cars were FM equipped and coverage during the tests was reported as good, even including much of Council Bluffs. (*OWH* Aug 27, 1940). (Clearview, a 1931 home for the aged about ten miles west of Benson, was selected as one of the highest points in Douglas County.)

THE FREMONT STATIONS

KORN 1370 (later KLIN 1400 Lincoln) KORN, KHUB 1340

In a rather unusual move, the earliest Fremont station was moved to Lincoln and immediately replaced by another station by the same owners. Fremont, a town of about 12 thousand on the north bank of the Platte River 30 miles northwest of downtown Omaha was well within the near-local range of the Omaha stations. In 1939 it got a station of its own.

Clark Standiford, a former co-owner of KGFW Kearney along with several other businessmen formed the Nebraska Broadcasting Company and built KORN in



Fremont. The station signed on to 1370 with 250 watts, 100 watts at night, on December 22. Standiford was the general manager.

The studios and offices were in the Pathfinder Hotel. The signal emanated from the residence of two station managers east of town who also worked as engineers. The equipment was a Gates 250-A transmitter feeding a 179-foot tower.

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

Standiford was also a shareholder in a group 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 call letters KONB. That station signed on with the call letters changed to 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. With that plan accepted by the FCC, Nebraska Broadcasting sold the station for twenty-thousand dollars to Inland Broadcasting, owners of KBON 1490 in Omaha. Inland had already been in on the plan and had an approved construction permit for a new station in Fremont to replace KORN, an FCC requirement that permitted the station move. It would be a 100-watt station on 1340 upon the move's completion.

The plan came to fruition in August 1947 when Lincoln got the station just in time to replace KFAB 1110 which was moving its community of license to Omaha. KFAB's move was likely a major factor in the FCC decision as none of the markets involved would lose a station from the moves, a condition the FCC takes seriously.

The calls were changed from KORN to KOLN when it lit up on its new frequency of 1400 kHz in Lincoln on August 11. Some weeks later Inland Broadcasting put Fremont's replacement station on the air, on 1340 kHz with 100 watts, resuming service with the old call letters, KORN.



1948 KOLN Logo

The new station took over the old studios at 115 East 5th Street in Fremont. The general manager was Paul Fry who headed up the Inland stations from offices in Omaha, and the chief engineer was Percy Ziegler who later moved to WOW 590 to find himself working with a young Johnny Carson.

Air time on the troika of KORN, KOLN, and KBON was sold as a package described as a "hometown" buy. But not for long. Inland Broadcasting found the Fremont station to be more of a burden than it was an asset, stating that operation was "economically impractical for absentee ownership." Inland sold KORN 1340 to Walker Newspapers for \$22 thousand in 1948, the approval granted in February 1948.



1948 station promotional piece, a bit corroded by this time, given to clients--a paperweight with the top illustrating Inland Broadcasting's station group.

Walker jettisoned the KORN calls in favor of KFGT in March 1949. The new calls stood for Walker's local publications, the *Fremont Guide and Tribune*.

The new owners at KFGT 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 starting with the World Series in 1949.

General Manager Bill Baldwin, except for his years in the service, had been the 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 its radio 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. It gained 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 on Sundays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.



1949 KFGT Logo

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 again began seeking upgrades. The calls were changed to KHUB on the first day of 1959, signifying Fremont as a "hub" market for the region.

KHUB had access to a good air talent pool. 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. Also favorable was that KHUB 1340 would soon get its signal upgrade helping it gain an Omaha audience with its polka shows.



1962 KHUB letterhead

CHAPTER TWO - NETWORKS OUT, DJ's IN

Our philosophy is that audience comes first. Audiences and sales are not always truly compatible. Sometimes it is necessary to sacrifice sales, at least for the moment, in order to take the long-term approach to programming, product, and audience. -Independent broadcaster Todd Storz, Broadcasting magazine, Sept 19, 1955.

THE GOLDEN AGE FADES

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

As the decade began, Omaha's network affiliations remained 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. Local programming was overtaking the network offerings. Records were overtaking live music programming. With the radio network's grip on radio entertainment loosening, once-popular radio programs were ending their long runs.

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

More local newsreaders and DJs gained recognition as personalities. They included Henry Kelpel, 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 Lyell Bremser and Gaylord Avery at KFAB.

Other shifts in Omaha radio during the 1950s included station getting new owners, studios and offices being moved, and the addition of a new AM station taking to the air.

Also, overnight programming took root. KOIL and WOW began running 24-hour schedules in the mid-1950s joining KFAB which had begun doing so a few 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 found that basic local music and news programming was the answer. It's relatively cheap to produce. No big productions or scripts are needed, just announcers and records. The audiences tuned in and the sponsors followed.

The program director's duties changed 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 broadcast medium and advised his affiliates to apply for television licenses. Network radio at the time was holding steady in revenues with much of that network cash being poured into developing television. The newer medium was finally taking off after years of legal wrangling and a world war.

The development of television had been underway well before the war. In the 1920s, two Omaha engineers at WOW, Joe Herold and William Kotera, had been experimenting and playing with primitive television as a hobby. WOW Promotion Director William O. Wiseman recalls seeing their television set, a mechanical type with a spinning wheel. Wiseman wrote in a 1948 speech, "I remember it well. It stood in the corner of the old studios on the top floor of the Woodmen Bldg. On it they were able to get W9XAO, the experimental station in Chicago, plus another in Kansas City, and once in a while a New York station. They received animated cartoons, and Bill (Kotera) remembers a time signal with definition clear enough so the hands on the watch could be seen."

Just before the war, David Sarnoff gave television its first public demonstration at the 1939 World's Fair. In 1944 WOW was the first in Omaha to apply for a television license after the war. It was a false start, the app was withdrawn in 1946 "pending further study" of various phases of television. WOW's experiments with closed-circuit television continued in the meantime at Creighton University. Experimental pickups included Creighton-Wichita basketball in January 1947 and a surgical operation from St. Joseph Hospital in May.

The commercial TV construction permit was refiled in December 1947 and was granted the following January. In preparation, WOW bought a lot at 35th and Farnam streets for possible TV studios and began construction in early 1949. Its license application called for a 500-ft tower on the site, erected in the parking lot in the back. At the same time, May Broadcasting's KMA-TV (call letters before switching to KMTV just before signing

on) was also building studios and a 500-foot tower just blocks away at 2615 Farnam Street.

Television set manufacturers were already taking orders from bars and clubs. One manufacturer planned a sales and service office in Omaha by July, another made plans to send service techs east for training.

WOW TV Channel 6 and KMTV Channel 3 signed on within days of each other in July 1949. Each station at the beginning broadcast about 20 hours per week relying on network kinescope programs and local shows hosted by radio personalities. A kinescope was a rather clunky movie film of a TV screen, the only way at the time to record a live show.

It would be another eight years before Channel 7, the third channel allocated to Omaha, would reach the air. Multiple applicants tied it up in hearings until the *Omaha World-Herald* won the battle in 1957.

The national cable carrying the two networks, NBC and CBS, arrived in 1950, just in time for the World Series that year. For a while, the two stations had to share the single network line, taking turns on alternate nights to air network programming. The off-night station filled the schedule with kinescope delays. Starting in 1950, kinescopes from the DuMont Network were also sandwiched in on Channel 6 until that network's demise five years later.

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.

The audience shift to television was swift. By 1953, 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 nighttime hours.



Floyd Kalber on the news set adjacent to the weather map at KMTV channel 3.

Radio still had an immediacy in news coverage. Video news coverage was slow, limited by the immobility of television equipment and the slow process of film developing and delivery.

In 1950 KMTV 3 hired 26-year-old Floyd Kalber as its first newsperson to join the newsroom staff of one.

Kalber's resourcefulness resulted in the only video of the 1951 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 from Offutt Air Base, 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*.

Kalber remained at KMTV for over a decade. He became a mentor for 21-year-old Tom Brokaw who joined KMTV from KTIV Sioux City in 1960. Meanwhile, Kalber was being watched by NBC after his coverage of the 1958 Starkweather murder spree. He was hired away to NBC-TV's Chicago station in 1962 to replace long-time newsman Alex Drier.

Color television was quick to follow though it would be about ten more years before the first network (NBC) would go all-color. WOW TV 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, made an expensive commitment to become the market's color television leader the following year, a move that cemented its affiliation with NBC after WOW TV took CBS away.



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

Some network personality shows hung on for a while. One 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 astonishing 35 years, concluding its run in 1968. Another was Arthur Godfrey whose daytime CBS radio show lasted until 1972. At the peak of his success in the early to mid-1950s, Godfrey was heard on radio and seen on television up to six days a week.

The only real radio 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 easily scheduled wherever needed.

Local sponsors gravitated toward the record shows, but the content was still old-school. Stations continued to use the network model, airing record shows 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 could include various 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 programmers to even envision.

THE DAWNING OF DJs

The 1950s saw the rise of the DJs, though the seeds had been planted years before. DJs began multiplying 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.

A music program spawning Omaha's first listener-supported DJ emerged on lowly 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 night called *The 1490 Swing Club*.

This listener-oriented approach was outside the programmer's mindset at a time when most record presenters picked their own favorites or played what was directed by the PD. Jackson was given free rein, recalling, "This was so new yet, doing local programming and music, it was very new. I don't recall any restrictions at all." (Clark Besch 1990 Jackson interview).

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, Jackson's 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 radio personality, Johnny Carson. From 1949 into 1950, it was Carson in the mornings on WOW 590 and Sandy Jackson afternoons on KBON 1490.

Then came KOWH 660 showing the way. Station owner Todd Storz by 1952 would show the radio industry that pop music and localization was radio's salvation in the face of the television onslaught. At KOWH, the last of the popular national syndicated shows *Make*

Believe Ballroom and *Your Hit Parade* were dropped in favor of the local DJs 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.

1490 KBON 1000 watts day, 250 watts nights.

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.

Other FM stations in the region:

97.9 KFAB Lincoln, aired 1947-1949.

101.5 KJSK Columbus, Construction Permit only, 1950

102.9 KFOR Lincoln, silenced 1951.

The Omaha 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. It coincided with 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. Frank Fogarty remained at WOW's helm while rising to VP of Meredith Broadcasting in the coming years.

What changed next for WOW early in the new decade was its ownership. Woodmen of the World sold its broadcasting assets in September 1951 after nearly 30 years of operation that began when the station first signed on. The station, along with sister WOW TV Channel 6, was sold for \$2.52 million to Meredith Engineering. Seven years later, in what was basically a transfer of assets while the station remained under the Meredith umbrella, WOW 590 in



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

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*. WOW's Radio staff received free subscriptions to the magazine for years afterward.)

More changes arrived on the technical front. The aging 1935 RCA transmitter was replaced in 1952. The 475-foot tower was replaced in 1956 after being felled by a May 12 storm of "mini-tornados" that struck northern Omaha.

What didn't change was the programming. The 1950s was a decade of metamorphosis for radio programming, and WOW was well behind the curve although still with decent ratings.



Jolly Joe Martin
Pitches It Your Way!
Monday thru Friday
590 Hour — 8:15 A.M.
With time, temperature, and pop tunes of the day. Also features WOW's own Al Lamm at the piano, organ and celeste.
Club "100" — 9:30 P.M.
Music of yesterday and today, plus recorded interviews. Omaha happenings of yesterday.

Radio WOW — 590 on Your Dial

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

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

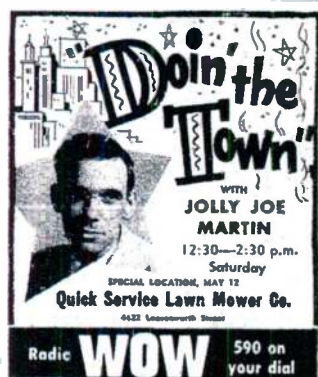
Jolly Joe Martin was passed the baton when Johnny Carson left WOW in 1951. Martin had been with the station since 1948 and took over Carson's morning show, renamed *The 590 Hour*. Martin became the

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.

Martin would spend hours going through newspapers seeking show content. His *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).

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

In the early 1950s Everhart was hosting and singing on various shows of his own. He headlined the *WOW Jamboree* Saturday nights in 1953 and 1954 along with pianist Al Lamm. He performed the songs on the Saturday afternoon *Western Hit Parade* and was among the singing lineup for the 12:30 p.m. *WOW Calling* show in 1955 and 1956. He was even the wake-up talent following Arch Andrews's overnight show at 5:30 a.m. in 1957. Everhart wound down his career as a DJ on Country-formatted KOOO 1420 in the early 1960s.



Doin' The Town
WITH
JOLLY JOE MARTIN
12:30—2:30 p.m.
Saturday
SPECIAL LOCATION, MAY 12
Quik Service Lawn Mower Co.
6432 Lakeside North Street

Radio **WOW** 590 on your dial

(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald)

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

WOW's Ray Clark was an Omaha pioneer in transitioning news from radio to television. Until the TV station got its own 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. news from the new WOW TV studios at 35th and Farnam Streets. WOW radio didn't move into the new quarters joining its sister television operation until 1960.



Ray Clark, WOW, 1946 photo.

The news director was Jim McGaffin, returning from the service in 1950. Before the war, he was alone in the same newsroom watching the Pearl Harbor bulletin come across in 1941. McGaffin would remain news director for both WOW 590 and WOW TV Channel 6 until 1968.

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

"WOW
JAMBOREE"

8:00 P.M.
Saturday Nights



SLIM EYEBHART... popular Western star will be the MC for "WOW Jamboree" moving to a new time Saturday...

with AL LAMM—Well-known piano stylist and recording star playing your favorites...

DON LARSON—Versatile organist whose performances always rate as top entertainment...

THE HAYBENS—Outstanding vocal group well-known for their harmony on romantic ballads, folk songs and novelty tunes.

DIAL 590 TONIGHT WHEN BRISTOL-MYERS, MAKERS OF SAL HEPATICA, BRINGS YOU THE NEW "WOW JAMBOREE!"

WOW Saturday
night
production
1953. © OWH

Radio WOW



WOW's Jack Payne with Creighton Prep Coach Don Leahy, 1966. (WOW Archives)

Saturdays for WOW all through the 50s and 60s. Payne later joined KFAB's Husker broadcasting team in 1970.

Farm news was a mainstay on WOW. 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 market information along with various sponsors and their agriculture-related products translated into big dollars for WOW, and for KFAB as well. WOW's rural audience was well-served by its far-flung and unwavering signal.



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

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 was the associate farm director, both starting their days well before the 6 a.m. reports.

Mal had been with the stations since 1945. Peterson joined the stations in 1952 and specialized in farming and gardening. For a while in 1953 he was teamed with Martha Bohlsen for *Martha's Garden*, airing middays. Peterson went on to host international Farm Study tours and produced two regular features: *Arnold's Garden*, and *Farm Family of the Week*.

With Bohlsen 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 on WOW TV.

The audience shift to television was incessant, but radio possessively clung to some shows. WOW and WOW TV found themselves airing a few 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 simulcast on radio and TV starting in 1952.



1954 Frank Allen began his DJ career at WOW. . He will go on to popular stations KOWH then KOIL. (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

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* with 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).

Locally, WOW 590 began to acknowledge the DJ in the mid-1950s. Stubbornly clinging to block programming with generic show titles and establishment recording artists, WOW was beginning

to credit the personality involved in the shows. In 1954 Frank Allen was advertised as the host on *Morning Mixer* from 9 to 9:45, *All Set For Music* afternoons from 4:30 to 5:30, and on *Cloud Club* at 9:15 p.m.

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 element of the program.

A network switch to CBS came in June 1955 and WOW's *Breakfast Bandstand* became a two-hour lead-in for Arthur Godfrey. 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 NBC 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.



Arch Andrews, WOW Overnight Show 1954. Andrews, WOW's first overnight personality, will later go into Top 40 as a DJ at KOWH. (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

WOW's slow acceptance of recorded music becoming the star was also increasing. The station in 1954 began promoting the "High Fidelity quality" of its signal, citing its audio range of 30 to 15 thousand cycles.



NOW HI - FI!
Regional Radio WOW is now the only Midwest station broadcasting true High Fidelity quality. (30 cycles up to 15,000 cycles!) This is another great FIRST for WOW!

1954: WOW newscasts promoted as the "Four Bell News Roundup," where a bell would introduce each segment. Note too the "Hi Fi" mention at the bottom. (Omaha World-Herald)

The WOW music library was filled with show tunes, light classics, plus many artists appealing to grown-ups, but little rock and roll. Any music with younger appeal was grudgingly vented in short, 30-minute blocks on Saturdays with *Teen Tunes* at 11, and by 1957, *Top Tune Tally* at 4.

Arch Andrews along with Frank Allen would leave to become well-known DJs at Top 40 KOWH 660 before the end of the decade, a strengthening sign that personality name recognition was indeed an important programming element.

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

But the changeover to music and news, the format brought on by Todd Storz's KOWH as early as 1952, will continue to be slow and challenging for WOW 590 in the coming decade.

660 KOWH Omaha

After years of being a station of also-ran status since the 1920s, this little 500-watt daytime-only station turned into a national game-changer in the 1950s. It would establish Omaha as the birthplace of locally formatted all-day music and news radio.

It wasn't that DJs and top tunes shows were especially new to radio by this decade. But making those shows into a continuous all-day format rather than appointment listening was new, and quite unthinkable to programmers of the day.

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.

With programmers firmly entrenched in the old and only known model of programming, fooling with the formula seemed risky. Even though rather obvious in retrospect, the move from block programming to continuous music and news required genius and courage. Thus begins the story of an Omahan who loved radio, dared to make changes, and knew how to monetize his results. It was KOWH owner Todd Storz and his determination to find a way to survive in the new age of television.

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. He and his father bought KOWH in 1949.

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

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 while attending Central High School. At the University of Nebraska, he toyed with the student radio station, boosting the signal enough so that an

New 6 Star
Programs for your afternoon
listening each week day

- mysteries
- drama
- Gaylord Avery
and the News
- comedy
- big prizes
Listen for complete details.
- Jack Sandler
with Sports News

Listen Today
12:15 - Out Of The Night
12:30 - Drama Of Courts
1:00 - News
1:15 - Teles Of The
Supernatural

Easy listening
660 on your dial

KOWH
Omaha

*October 1949 - KOWH
program line-up in the first
months of Todd Storz
ownership.*

*Block programming remains,
though local names of
Gaylord Avery and Jack
Sandler are forefront. ©
OWH*

interference 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 was promoted to afternoons with *Rhythm Inn*. He 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 in 1947 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, the two 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 then formed Mid-Continent Broadcasting. Upon FCC approval of the sale, Todd took control of the station operations while his father, though retaining a 60 percent majority interest in the stations, stepped back and returned to looking after the brewery operations.

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

Only weeks into the new decade, Todd silenced KOAD 92.9 FM 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. Kept were engineer Dale Moudy and announcers Jim O’Neill, Jack Sandler, and George “Bud” Armstrong. All were strong professionals, and Armstrong 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 and 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 not yet formed. All he knew for sure was that he had to find out exactly what listeners want to hear.



1940 photo of a teenage Todd Storz at his ham station W9DYG in Omaha.

Storz 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.

Program Director Gaylord Avery's first task was to go to New York and monitor WNEW, a station that had engineered a format featuring recorded music with news, airing it since 1934.

As an independent with no network, WNEW was forced 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 quite unheard of in the 1930s.

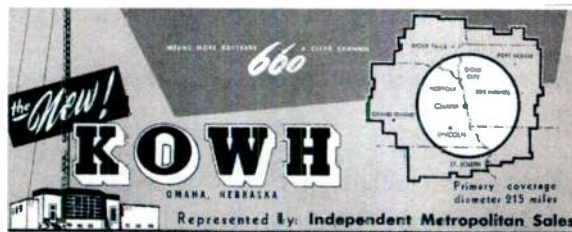
The idea came as WNEW's Martin Block was playing records while waiting for updates on the 1935 Lindbergh kidnapping trial. This appeal of these interludes led to his successful *Make Believe Ballroom* program, copied from a show of the same name developed on the West Coast by Al Jarvis at KFNB.

(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 titles and artists that was commonplace in 1920s and 1930s radio. His last air position was at KFNB continuing to play records even as late as 1958 during that station's Top 40 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 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. Fotherly, 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 listener tune-in.



1950 KOWH ad showing coverage map.
(Broadcasting magazine)

This, along with Avery's positive report from New York and the C. E. Hooper ratings of KOWH's individual programs showing a spike of interest for the record shows, convinced Todd to drop transcribed and block programming in favor of recorded music. He started by expanding the popular music shows that were showing the best ratings.

But “music” was too broad a term to fully understand its appeal. 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 song with the artist. The recording was becoming the star.

With records emerging as the listener’s standard of song appreciation, hit records had taken over song performances on radio by 1959, the final year for *Your Hit Parade*.



Todd Storz, KOWH 1952



In the latter half of 1950, Storz hired Sandy Jackson away from KBON.

Jackson was recalled by many co-workers over the years as always friendly; a man who spoke smoothly and dressed nicely.

It was a reunion of sorts, Jackson remembering their first meeting, "Todd came to work at KBON when I was there, and I broke him in to take over my night time show" when Jackson was promoted to afternoons (Clark Besch 1990 interview).

At KOWH Jackson took afternoons at 2:00 with *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.

As contracts expired, block programming over the next three years was slowly dropped from the KOWH schedule. Music was fit in around those program blocks that remained. By 1953, *Back To The Bible* and *Kitchen Klatter* were the last to go. (*Burnishing the Brand* by Tom McCourt and Eric Rothenbuhler, 2004).

1950, Sandy Jackson, “Omaha’s first disc jockey,” moves from KBON to KOWH. (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald)

When Todd Storz tabulated his weekly Top 20, he avoided the national charts using them simply as

reference material. Local record sales were the primary source of gauging popularity. Record stores cooperated, noting that sales increased. Jukebox plays were factored in after Storz finally convinced the rack jobbers of the same synergy as seen by the record

stores. Record requests also became a factor after Sandy Jackson brought his request show over from KBON. It was all current popular songs on the playlist with just three new songs at the most added each week.

The Top 20 gained dominance on the station as the ratings rose. The occasional pop standards (perhaps best described as the "Oldies" of the day) 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).

A NEW RECORD!



Gaylord Avery



Sandy Jackson



Jim O'Neill



Johnny Pearson



Jack Sandler



"Dream-Train" Marion



Walt Kavanaugh



Don Laughman

These 8 KOWH Personalities
Have Made Your Station

NO. 1!

HOOPER SURVEY OMAHA - COUNCIL BLUFFS
December, 1951

MORNING
8 A. M. - 12 Noon
Monday - Friday **33.5**

AFTERNOON
12 Noon - 6 P. M.
Monday - Friday **47.8**

SATURDAY
8 A. M. - 6 P. M. **41.9**

TOTAL
8 A. M. - 6 P. M.
Monday - Saturday **42.1**

TWICE CLOSEST COMPETITOR!

- Largest total audience of any Omaha station in every time period — week-end morning — weekday afternoon — all of 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"

KOWH takes the lead, February 17, 1952.

Pictured are PD Gaylord Avery, Sandy Jackson, Jim O'Neill, morning's Johnny Pearson, Jack Sandler, future KFAB legend Walt Kavanaugh, and newsman Don Laughman. Dream-Train Marion hosted "Dream Train," a daily 5:30-6pm show following "Platter Poll."
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

The Oct-Nov 1951 ratings had Sandy pulling a whopping 60.9 share in his first hour (2-3 p.m.) and 54.5 in the second (3-4 p.m.). The syndicated *Make Believe Ballroom* pulled a 34.6.

KOWH promoted itself on-air as "America's Most Listened To Independent Station" and retained the 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 performed readership studies for magazines.)

The on-air product was in place, but it's nothing until listeners learn 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 arrested. Seemingly spontaneous (events like this rarely are), the promotion was planned to the

last detail beforehand and was shared in a memo to all staff. The KOWH "Money DOES

Grow On Trees” memo outlined it from the start: DJs were to mention 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 that created a frenzy by setting a time limit for a 105-thousand-dollar prize. Sums of money were planted in Playland Park in Council Bluffs on the roller coaster beams, in a tree at Omaha’s Riverview Park, and beneath some sod at the KOWH transmitter at 60th and Hartman Streets. 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 ongoing 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 and 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—starting with Johnny Pearson, and later Jim O’Neil.

The *Johnny Pearson Show* (pronounced PEER’-sun) replaced *Kolache Klub* in 1952 following an hour of news at sign-on. Pearson’s personable patter included voicing his co-host Amanda, a character with whom he would converse.

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

The morning show’s 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 Klub* show were still in the mix, the up-tempo tunes being a perfect fit for mornings and South Omaha’s large Eastern European audience. Popular morning shows on WOW 590 (Jolly Joe Martin) and on KOIL (Byron Head) were facing a storm.

Hooper ratings for KOWH by 1952 exceeded 36 percent of the audience toppling the market leader KOIL 1290. KOIL had been the top dog in the market with a 37.4 Hooper as late as 1949 when KOWH was last with a 4.2. Todd’s station had gone from 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 78s until 1954 or 55 because Todd believed they sounded better. As more and more record companies switched to 45s, record companies had to make special ET recordings just for the Storz Stations. The practice eventually ended. (Phil Robbins' observation via close friend 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 "News, Live at 55," this made KOWH "first with the news," but also had the benefit of returning to music just when competitors were stopping down for their top-of-the-hour newscasts. With that, KOWH would grab the non-news, music-loving listener for the next 55 minutes.

The KOWH news department 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 rebroadcast.

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. During the flood's approach, the station recruited trucks and drivers to help evacuate families from the potential flood area. KOWH was given special FCC permission to continue broadcasting during the nighttime hours until the flood crest reached the Omaha-Council Bluffs area and the clean-up began. (*Broadcasting* Apr 21 and 28, 1952)

As KOWH management described it in a letter to a listener, "During the week of April 13th through the 19th we broadcast numerous long-distance telephone calls with authorities in communities as far north as Sioux City, Iowa, and as far south as St. Joseph, Missouri. A total of fifty-six remote broadcasts originated directly from our mobile unit for a total air time of six hours and forty-six minutes. These were supplemented by broadcasts of appeals and information of various types required by agencies participating in aid to the area."

(A year later, 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.")

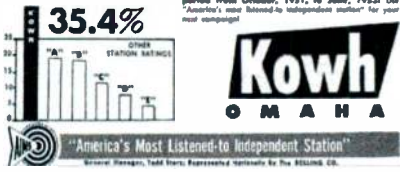
The KOWH news department raised its profile further with investigative reporting. In 1953 illegal gambling operations in the city were revealed when newsman Don Laughnane recorded voices and events from after-hours drinking spots and illegal gambling joints using another high-tech device for the time, 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.



A "Don Laughane" wire recorder, concealed in a shoulder holster and connected to a tiny "wireless" microphone, is being exposed. KOWH reveals Don Laughane's results in a special program of gambling and "after hours" dancing to KOWH to beat their own radio ratings, and saving illegal liquor!

As a result to the rest of the Omaha, Council Bluffs area, the station's weekly KOWH program and holds the largest total audience of any Omaha station, 8 A.M. to 2 P.M., Monday thru Saturday! Its weekly KOWH has a longer run than any other station in the 28-month period from October, 1951, to June, 1952! The "America's most listened-to independent station" for your next campaign!



Don Laughane and his hidden microphone as KOWH claims 35 percent of the radio audience.

These innovative devices--mobile units, small tape recorders, and handy-talkies--were made workable by Storz's engineer Dale Moudy. Todd was a technophile and was fortunate to have inherited Moudy, a highly-qualified engineer, in his purchase of KOWH

Both men were gadget-friendly. Todd, an active ham radio operator, had his ham radio gear set up at the KOWH tower site with remote control operation from his desk.

Moudy had 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.

In 1954 Todd Storz cut back on the news staff in order to buy remote equipment and three wire services plus start the weekly news tip contest

awarding 25 dollars to the winning tipster. By this time 40 percent of his personnel made over 20 thousand dollars per year, a substantial salary for the 1950s. (*Broadcasting* Feb 1, 1954).

Bill Stewart was made KOWH PD in 1954. His job was to mix the music with personality, overseeing 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 DJs. No "blue" material was permitted, which could get the offender fired and off the air 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."

Air talent by the mid-1950s was now 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 Laughane did noon to 2, followed by Sandy Jackson's regular two hours.

Midday personality Sandy Jackson with his adult appeal hosted *The 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 announced 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 midday. Price replaced Johnny Pearson on the morning show in 1955. Pearson was sent to WHB, Storz's station in Kansas City, a common practice in the Storz chain of moving proven talent to larger markets.



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

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). His radio career will extend into the 1970s as the founder of the Omaha Public Schools non-commercial station KIOS FM.

As Todd's empire expanded, KOWH continued as his flagship station. Viewed as the Storz "home office", the station was often used as a training or prep center for newly hired talent. Some would be brought in to work only briefly on KOWH before being sent to another station in the Storz chain of stations. The other Storz stations at the time were WTIK New Orleans, WHB Kansas City, WDGY Minneapolis, and WQAM Miami.

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.

In 1956 KOWH had 39 percent of Omaha's listeners just as the Rock Revolution was igniting. 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 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 Twenty music list each week was the programming basis for the Storz stations. It would expand to the Top 40 list thanks to Bud Armstrong and a programming decision he made at Todd's new station in New Orleans, WTIK, in 1954.

WTIX 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 WTIX that began an hour earlier and ended an hour later than the countdown on WDSU.

The Top 40 playlist distributed to record stores became iconic from that point on as stations began publishing their weekly music survey of hits for the public. Stations already had been reporting their top tunes lists to record companies and trade publications to maintain record service. Publishing their Top 40 surveys for placement on record store counters each week became another 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 a Top 100. However, the format label "Top 40" encompassed all stations playing the hits of the day regardless of playlist size.

The Top 40 formatics were soon used in the Country music format. Later, as Top 40 splintered, the top tunes list continued to be used in other music genre formats such as Adult Contemporary, Soul, and Albums and exists to this day.

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 the sign-off. 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*, 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.



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

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, a 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.

Some on-air stunts bordered on silly. In 1956 when the planet Mars was to make its closest approach to Earth since the 1920s, KOWH promoted plans to make contact with life on the planet. When the closest approach hour arrived, the programming was stopped for "calling Mars" dialogue lasting a few minutes.

(A more serious attempt occurred in Omaha much earlier. In 1920 Omaha radio experimenter Dr. Frederick Millener set up a communications station south of the city for the purpose of making radio contact with Mars. See Volume One.)

On the technical side, the relatively new transmitter with its 500-foot tower and far-reaching signal was in place when the station was purchased. This allowed Todd to turn his attention to upgrading the studio with top-quality gear to be 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. The upgraded equipment and newly-increased production skills resulted in many 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. Jingles were inserted everywhere in the hour, including DJ show opens, introducing the weather, and even the hourly newscasts. (Because of McLendon, jingle companies sprouted in Dallas and remained in operation there for years afterward.)



According to Peter McLane, jingle historian and a Midwest programmer who got his start at Omaha's KOOO, Todd had a standing order to keep buying the popular Pam Jingle packages as they became available for all his stations. This kept competitors from using them.

Most of Storz's competitors used Tom Merriman Commercial Recording Corporation jingles also cut in Dallas. Other later jingle packages were produced by the Johnny Mann Singers and the Anita Kerr Singers.

Sandy Jackson had his own jingle made while at KOWH. "Somebody from one of those (jingle) companies came and suggested, would I like my theme song tailor-made?" Owners would pay only for station jingles, so Sandy says he bought two of his own for 60 maybe 75 dollars, "But they were MINE, and when I left the station I could take them with me...still have it." (Clark Besch 1990 interview). Indeed the Sandy Jackson "He's here!" jingle was used extensively on KOWH, then went with him after moving to KOIL.

Peter McLane notes that Jackson's jingle was produced by Warren Durette, a big band leader in Kansas City who marketed jingles on the side in the 1950s. Durette also did a jingle for well-known New York and later San Francisco DJ, Peter Trip.

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.

Todd Storz openly shared his philosophy in 1954, "The audience is your product; develop it." (*Broadcasting* Feb 1, 1954). Storz emphasized this a year later, saying, "Our philosophy is that audience comes first. Audiences and sales are not always truly compatible. Sometimes it is necessary to sacrifice sales, at least for the moment, in order to take the long-term approach to programming, product, and audience." (*Broadcasting* Sept 19, 1955).

Storz described his programming at KOWH, saying that popular music is featured "without race or hillbilly numbers. Pitched to the housewife, the station will repeat hit tunes many times a day if requests justify. Personality shows have been developed, augmented by contests and gimmicks" (*Broadcasting* Feb 1, 1954).

Dayparting of music was tailored for the different audience mix in different parts of the day. Tunes were usually limited to the absolute top hit songs for morning drive. Middays, 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 OFFICIAL KOWH GUIDE
To the Top Tunes in the
OMAHA-COUNCIL BLUFFS Area

Week Of June 29, 1957	Last Week
1--I LIKE YOUR KIND OF LOVE ANDY WILLIAMS	Cadence 2
2--GOING STEADY TOMMY SANDS	Capitol 4
3--I JUST DON'T KNOW FOUR LADS	Columbia 1
4--A TEENAGER'S ROMANCE RICKY NELSON	Vocalion 10
5--YOUNG BLOOD THE COASTERS	Atco 20
6--BYE BYE LOVE EVERLY BROTHERS	Cadence 11
7--FOUR WALLS JIM REEVES	RCA 5
8--LOVE LETTERS IN THE SAND PAT BOONE	Dot 3
9--ROCK YOUR LITTLE BABY TO SLEEP BUDDY ENOKI	Roulette 23
10--GIRL WITH THE GOLDEN BRAIDS PERRY COMO	RCA 6

KOWH - Omaha - 660 on Any Radio Dial

WARNING: This "Top 40" list has been copyrighted by KOWH. All rights herein are reserved and further use may not be made for radio broadcast or publication purposes without the written consent of KOWH.

1957 KOWH Top Ten hit list distributed to the public via record stores. Typical of the days before music genres fragmented, establishment artists such as Andy Williams and Perry Como were ranked side by side with teen favorites Tommy Sands and Ricky Nelson. Also note Shenandoah's Everly Brothers at #6 with their first national hit.

Rock returned at 3 and later ruled during the teen-owned evening hours. Adult-Contemporary returned for the overnights.

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.

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

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.

The KOWH studio was friendly to visitors, even teens who often ventured downtown before malls became a favored destination. One visitor comments, “As a young boy in the mid 50’s when my buddy and I would take the bus downtown we would head for the old Kilpatrick Bldg. at 15th and Douglas. I think it was on the 8th floor where the studios of KOWH were located. You could sit in the lobby and watch the jock on the air, grab a Channel 66 Color Radio Top 40 chart, and hope Don MacKinnon, Arch Andrews, or Don Hinson would come through the doors.”

Nationally, the music format was hungrily copied by numerous desperate station owners and programmers. The 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 principles. Gerald Bartell headquartered in Milwaukee switched several his of 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.

THE OFFICIAL KOWH GUIDE
To the Top Tunes in the
OMAHA-COUNCIL BLUFFS Area

The KOWH FABULOUS FIVE


Week of May 8-9, 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 6
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 Metal) BUSSE— 4 to 7:30

1958 KOWH music survey showing the DJ line-up. While many Top 40 DJs were quite itinerant, Sandy Jackson and Frank Allen had local careers.

All 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 as a station had an Achilles heel: it 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 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 nighttime 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.)

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

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 still good.

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



KOWH Don MacKinnon, 1959

KOWH went to *National Weekly* owned by William Buckley. He paid \$822,500, the highest price ever for a daytime-only 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.

The new KOWH owners were not radio-savvy and naively believed the battle with KOIL could be won. Keeping the format intact, the station continued with the Todd Storz formula

After seeing KOIL slowly overtaking their lead in 1958, Buckley doubled down in 1959 launching into a furious fight with KOIL, one of the first Top 40 battles in radio.

The new owners brought in a new program director by hiring Don MacKinnon, an experienced personality from KIOA Des Moines who would eventually go on to great Top 40 success in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

MacKinnon hosted his own show and ran small newspaper ads saying, "Did you hear what Don MacKinnon said today?" as he worked to reinvigorate Top 40 KOWH.

Next came new jingles. They introduced the “Color Radio” image for KOWH, a tie-in to the newly developed color television technology that despite its slow growth was garnering consumer interest.

It was a pricey package. Jingle historian Peter McLane explains, “The KOWH ‘Color Radio’ jingles of 1959 were spin-offs of the Chuck Blore-programmed KFVB KEWB KDWB packages. They were done custom by Bob Sande and Larry Green who had an ad agency that did advertising jingles in LA, called Song Ads. Chuck Blore hired them for the Color Radio concept. Because of LA production, they were mucho expensive. Most jingles were produced in Dallas.”

Then a programming stunt took place one day as KOWH played a minor Top 40 song at the time called “The Revolution/Teenage Bill of Rights,” repeatedly, all day long. The lyrics began, “Should we start a revolution, or should we leave things like they are.” The DJs announced regular record titles acting like nothing unusual was happening. It created some short-term buzz, especially among teens who commonly switched 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 Top 40 KISN that year, but it’s not certain which of the two stations did it first.)

On the heels of the stunt 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 larger jackpot.

Each contest was designed to require ongoing listening to win. Contestants had to accumulate clues randomly given out making sure the dial is never changed. KBON 1490 jumped into the middle of the fray to grab KOIL and KOWH listeners who then could play both station’s contests simultaneously. KBON hired interns to monitor both stations and would broadcast each station’s clues immediately as they were aired, even interrupting commercials to do so.

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 run down 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...”

KOWH 6
COLOR RADIO
AS IT SHOULD BE... IN OMAHA

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

the FABULOUS 40
PAC HIT OF THE WEEK
YOUNG IN YEARS
THE DIAMONDS

1. MACK THE KNIFE	BOBBY DARIN
2. I Told You So	Sonny Heaton
3. Sleepwalk	Santa & Johnny
4. Grand Old Married	Larry Price
5. The Three Bells	The Browns
6. My Little Girl	Doc Clark
7. Something Else	Eddy Cochran
8. You're A Big Girl Now	The Bob Hofers
9. Please Say	The Coasters
10. You Better Know It	Jackie Wilson
11. I'll Be Home Again	The Everly Brothers
12. Princess Lane	Jerry Williams
13. Sing The Angels Untuned In	The Crickets
14. Red River Rock	Johnny And The Hurricanes
15. Decadence	Phyllis Green
16. Say Man	Bo Diddley
17. Hissin' Time	Bobby Byrd
18. Love Police No. 3	The Clovers
19. Morgan	Iva Robb
20. Shout-Part 1	The Isley Brothers
21. The Mummy	Bob McPadden & Dor
22. Drivin' Practice	Johnny October
23. Roly	Nina Simone
24. You Were Mine	The Flippers
25. Put Your Head on My Shoulder	Paul Anka
26. Lonely Street	Andy Williams
27. Faded Bill of Fame	Pat Boone
28. Just Ask Your Heart	Frankie Avalon
29. I Really Want You to Know	The Impress
30. In the Mood	Ernie Fields
31. Like I Love You	Ed Berna
32. Linda Lee	Ray Charles
33. Come On and Get Me	Fabian
34. Broken Hearted Melody	Sarah Vaughan
35. Don't Be Care	Wink Martindale
36. Mr. Blue	The Platters
37. Battle Hymn	Marion Child
38. Peace Love	Gene & Susan
39. Some Kind of Earthquake	Diana Saly
40. It Was I	Blak & Fly

The entire Fabulous 40 Survey given away every hour
 *Get More beginning at 10 am. When you hear the number at the top of this Survey call us at 41436 and skillfully answer a question and we give you the entire Record Survey.
 WEEK OF SEPT 1959 - SURVEY REPORT

1959 KOWH music survey, one of the last.

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.”

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 on the dawn of a new decade, January first, 1960, shocked to hear soft pop orchestral music on 660 in place 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.

EPILOGUE: When paying an astounding \$822,500 for KOWH with its healthy profit and loss sheet, *The National Enquirer's* William Buckley apparently was 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 what he recorded:

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?'"

Despite his overpaying for the station, William Buckley held on to his Omaha radio station for 13 years. Buckley hired Peter Starr as station manager and was so impressed with Starr's business acumen he made him a one-third partner in 1966. Buckley's stations KOWH 660 (the calls having returned after KMEO) and KOWH FM 94.1 (acquired in 1962) were the first in what then became the Starr Broadcasting Group.

A buying spree led by Peter Starr and his brother Michael followed and a chain of stations made Buckley quite wealthy. However, a series of bad investments by a company owned by Buckley in the early 1970s led to the group's downfall. Rather than have a bankruptcy

stain on his record, Buckley ordered Starr Broadcasting to absorb the investment group's debts. The radio group soon floundered into questionable practices attracting the attention of the SEC. The Starrs were forced out; the stations were sold off. Details on this story follow in the KMEQ/KOWH 1960s segment.

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.



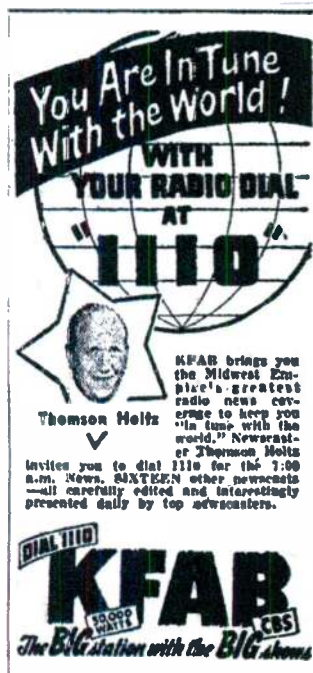
1950 - KFAB's Texas Mary and the Radio Rangers worked a wake-up block in the mornings until 1952.

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 its primary functions increasingly were coming from the Omaha studios and offices downtown in the Farnam Building at 1613 Farnam, plus a small streetside studio at 17th and Howard Streets.

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 plus TV two nights a week.

Also strong on CBS were legendary newsmen Lowell Thomas and Edward R. Murrow. Then there was the star-studded CBS 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 starting at KFNF Shenandoah then joining KFAB in 1942. In 1950 MacDonald's programs *Down To Earth* and *The Farming Biz* ran daily. MacDonald was also 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.



1951 - KFAB's morning newsman Thomson Holtz kept listeners "in tune with the world."

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 June 1951 KFAB became Omaha's first station to broadcast all night long. Manager Harry Burke announced that "KFAB will start 24-hour operations becoming the only station in the entire area broadcasting around the clock." (OWH June 4, 1951)

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.

Lyell 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 while continuing to be part of the news image for the station which by 1951 was boasting 17 newscasts daily and a new image 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 while being 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)

1954 – Lyell Bremser, authoritative sports voice that included calling Huskers football games since 1939.

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 most with CBS radio shows owning all but one of the top ten programs for the 1952-53 season.

As ABC and NBC were decreasing evening programming that year, only CBS was providing a full three hours of sponsored prime-time programming on KFAB and other 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.

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 Lyell 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.



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

In the summer of 1956, Program Director Lyell 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).



KFAB news image 1955

The network swap with WOW took place June 19, 1955, though the accompanying television networks

1956 when major vocalists Gogi Grant, Don Cherry, Cathy Carr, and Rusty Draper made appearances in support of the station's "Big Change" promotion.

The "Big Change" campaign began in August. It was in recognition of the changing face of radio brought on during recent years by Todd Storz's 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*. Live music was provided by 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. The rest of the day mixed features into the personality air shifts. Their patter included lots of time and temperature and frequent weather forecasts. Weather was treated as especially important due to the region's agricultural economy being dependent upon weather and its occasional challenges

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 each 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 from 4 to 6 p.m. Bob Jones followed with *Jones' Junction*, evenings.

KFAB 1110 completed a move from its two Omaha studios to its Dundee offices and studios at 5010 Underwood in early 1957 where it would remain for decades. The Lincoln studios in use since 1947 were closed in 1955, its nine employees relocated to Omaha.

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 Lyell Bremser.



KFAB, 1958 ad showing its relationship with KMTV.

May Broadcasting made the purchase as a show of commitment to the Omaha market. After WOW TV Channel 6 grabbed the CBS affiliation away from Earl May's KMTV 3 the previous year, NBC was wavering on its deal to go with Channel 3. KETV Channel 7 was

just preparing to sign on and had an 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 its heavy investment in color television gear for KMTV was enough to win NBC over. KETV was left with the fledgling 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.)



Bill Talbot, KFAB 1958. A long-time KOIL news personality, Talbot joined KMTV and KFAB in 1953.

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."



1956 KFAB letterhead style

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 Lyell Bremser and Ken Headrick were key factors.

1290 KOIL Omaha

KOIL1290 entered the 1950s owned by Lincoln investor James Stuart. It was running five-thousand watts full-time with a directional signal at night.

The directional signal pattern that was required for allowing full power at night went into service several years after the KOIL transmitter site near Lake Manawa was built. This resulted in an unforeseeable null in the direction of mid-town Omaha. Though not necessarily detrimental to the station's immediate urban coverage, it was a thorn that remained until the transmitter was relocated 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 17th 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.)



B KOIL's 17th Street entrance to its Aquila Court studios.

KOIL began operations from its new studios at 511 South 17th in January 1951, the on-air staff enjoying a ground-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. Byron 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.

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 13th 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.



KOIL's Bob Steelman, 1944

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 the same as the milkman deliveries.)

Sports was handled by Bob Steelman, a KOIL regular since 1944. He was scheduled adjacent to newscasts and for sporting events, plus he had a regular sports 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 Kelpé 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.



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

KOIL experimented with 24-hour broadcasting in November 1951 with overnight programming on Sunday nights into Monday morning. Virgil Sharp hosted until 2 a.m. followed by three hours of nearly uninterrupted music until the Monday morning lineup with Bill Talbot at 5 a.m.

Why Sunday nights was selected for an all-night show can be explained by the fact that Omaha is a busy marketplace starting very early on 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 30th Street westward past 72nd 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 tentative response. 24 hours even once a week didn't last out the year on KOIL. It wasn't until 1955 that KOIL, by then under new ownership, adopted a regular 24-hour schedule.

In 1952 a local emergency brought KOIL back into a temporary 24-hour schedule. It was the 1952 Omaha flood, making national news as Omaha was a choke point for the Missouri River's high waters. KOIL, along with all the other stations in the market including those licensed for daytime only, stayed on the air around the clock providing news and information.



Jerry Weist prepares the KOIL Mobile Unit.

KOIL Engineer Jerry Weist worked the technical details of flood coverage. He maintained three mobile units in the flooded areas, one of them driven down from sister station WDGY Minneapolis. (OWH Apr 20, 1952).



Popular platter-spinner and native Omahan Ralph Carey joined KOIL in 1950 coming from KSWI Council Bluffs.

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*).

1940s-oriented KOIL was beginning to feel the pinch from music-oriented KOWH 660 by 1952. Byron Head'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 two changes in station ownership.

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 lineup 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.

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.



Don Burden, 1954 photo.

Calling itself the *Rural Voice of Nebraska*, KRVN had a wide-ranging signal and keyed on weather and market reports upon 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 the 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. Once at KOIL, 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 over the years, holding executive positions from general manager to VP



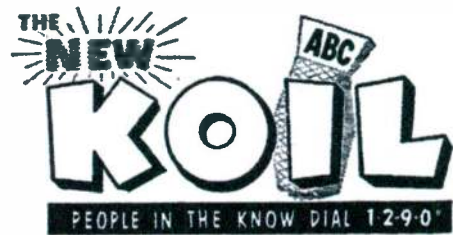
1959- Steve Shepard and Chic Crabtree. Don Burden's right-hand men brought with him from KEIO Idaho.

of the Star Stations well into the 1970s. His was the last voice heard 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 the owners of WLS in Chicago.

Burden went to James Stuart, KOIL's mortgage holder in Lincoln, and announced he wanted to buy KOIL himself. Stuart said if Burden could put a group together that had 50-thousand dollars in 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 once 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.



KOIL's new logo, 1954.

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.

Burden's program changes were immediate. The station was re-christened *The New KOIL* in early 1954.

The Grocery Boy Show went to KOWH although 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. *The Grocery Boy Show* would return to KOIL after four years and remain until 1976.

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



KOIL studio 1955 with Chuck Woodard.

The major change under Burden's and Crabtree's tutelage was the addition of recorded music, the record shows being

generically-named program blocks that was common practice at the time. It started with *Tune Time* in mid-mornings, then the syndicated *Martin Block* (the former *Make Believe Ballroom*) 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.

WHAT'S COOKIN' AT KOIL

KOIL'S By Head



This handsome man you see with the personality smile helps thousands of KOIL listeners get up in the morning and, of course, he joins them at their breakfast table. By's an early bird — he has to be at the

station before six A.M. He's also a veteran radioman—he says while still in knee britches he started his radio career in 1929 singing and acting—that's 21 years! By really isn't old as you can see by his picture—he attributes his youthful appearance to the fact that he is young. His duties in addition to his early morning shows consist of being funny on the *Umbrella Man*, *Grocery Boy* and *Stepping Stones to Stardom*.

1950 - Byron Head's morning show was top-rated in the 1940s, but was facing strong competition from WOW's Johnny Carson. He also handled the *Man on the Street* noon show "The Umbrella Man" and the daily *Grocery Boy* segment. © OWH

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 that without a nighttime signal, he could be beaten. Todd disputed this saying the nighttime audience was owned by television. Indeed television was the new rage in the early 1950s. The argument would soon be put to the test. (Burden interview, *Hitmakers* 1984).

Burden couldn't yet afford the Hooper rating 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 that 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, though was still locked into Omaha Cardinals baseball. Additionally, KOIL's broadcast schedule went to 24 hours a day.

Filling the network-vacated hours were disc jockeys playing music. Personalities were emerging as the stars, their names beginning to appear in the program block names. 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* and *Jack's 1290 Club*. In the evenings it was 30 minutes of *Top Tunes* followed by 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.

Among the personalities passing through KOIL's Aquila Court studios at this time was Gary Owens who enjoyed later fame on NBC's *Laugh-In*. Owens joined KOIL starting as a newsreader on the 8 to 10 a.m. shift. He was pressed by PD George Dunleavy into taking over the morning show one day 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 TVs *Laugh-In* in the late 1960s.



Gary Owens, 1959 photo.

Bob Cain joined KOIL at the beginning of 1956. Cain came from a newsman background at the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* and at that newspaper's station, KSWI. Being a DJ was very temporary, his time at KOIL lasting only until July. Cain returned to 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-70s, then joined CNN in its dawning years, retiring from there as an accomplished anchor in 2002.

Also in 1956 George Wilson had an air shift and became KOIL's program director for the next three years before going on to legendary status as a Top 40 programmer well into the 1980s. Wilson said in his book *This Business of Radio Programming*, "Whatever I know about radio I learned from a man named Don Burden. He's just the greatest."

Wilson became a prominent figure in the 1990's Payola investigations, testifying he accepted about \$100 thousand a year while programming KIQQ in Los Angeles. He later said in his autobiography, "After tax problems were taken care of, so were any charges."

Another staff addition in 1956 was Jim Price who hosted *JP's Matinee*. Price had a classical music background and would go on to found Omaha's public radio station KIOS in the 1970s. Other music blocks at the time featured PD George Dunleavy with *Let George Do It*, leading into afternoon drive's *Rhythm of the Road*.

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 Bob 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 Chic Crabtree, who added the “Dr.” as it was his initials. Rose lasted only four weeks at KOIL and kicked around in 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 ongoing “Lucky House Number” promotion. The numbers and streets were picked randomly using mechanical methods on the air. The resident of that address 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 get those results from time to time but were hardly intentional.) Burden countered with “Lucky Telephone Number.” The listener had 60 seconds to call in and claim 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.

KOIL’s effort at toppling KOWH solidified in 1957. The station hired a new program director, Bob Wilson, who took the 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 one week on the cover of *Sponsor* magazine to reprint a letter Manager Virgil Sharpe had written to KOIL Co-Manager Chic Crabtree. In it he called out a KOIL claim 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).

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

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 made claims 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.

Todd Storz also made big money in 1957, but he did it by selling off KOWH while it was still hot. Seeing that he was losing the battle with KOIL, Storz quickly found a buyer. William Buckley and his *National Review* magazine paid \$822-thousand for the 500-watt station. 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 and the ferocious battle with KOIL continued with the new owners. 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 continuous listening to collect timely clues to winning 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 that had begun two years earlier.

The first overnight personalities at KOIL were live. Among them was Jim Dandy (Jim Dahlmeier) coming from KMNS Sioux City in 1958. Jim Dandy was a popular air name at the time thanks to the term being revived with the 1956 LaVerne Baker hit of the same name.

But overnight operation at KOIL required a licensed transmitter operator on duty at the tower site all night long to oversee the directional antenna operation. After Dahlmeier left for KBUZ in Phoenix, KOIL moved its overnight programming to the transmitter site and basically automated using a simple Seeberg 100 record changer referred to on-air as "Silent Sam."

The Seeberg unit, designed for retailers to provide background music in their stores, just segued records. It could hold a hundred 45 rpm singles and would play them in sequence one by one. Scratchy fadeouts dissolved into dead air between songs until the needle could be heard plopping down on the next 45. The overnight licensed transmitter "babysitter" with no on-air experience would simply oversee the record player, stopping hourly to play back newscasts that were tape-recorded from the evening show.

The all-night shift was a good training ground for DJs, especially for combo jocks who held a First Phone license. KOIL's Lake Manawa transmitter site was soon equipped with a small mixer board, mic, and turntables. "Silent Sam" was retired in 1960 when a combo jock arrived taking the overnight shift live once again, this time from the lonely transmitter site. That was Joe Light who soon 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 the famous Crowell-Collier chain of Top 40 stations in St. Paul, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

Jim Hummel was at KOIL in 1959. His claim to KOIL fame was a promotion stunt in August of 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 42nd 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).



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

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.

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 was a key player on the KOIL management team into the 1970s.

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

KISN's success equaled that of KOIL. Its 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 from KIMN and KTLN. Turning out to be Burden's only swing and a miss, it was quickly sold off.



Charlie Goodrich at KOIL transmitter site, 1960.

Burden's empire further expanded in 1964 with the purchase of WISH 1310 and WISH FM 107.9 Indianapolis for \$1.25 million then changing the calls to WIFE.

Besides air personalities, KOIL was a nurturing ground for other talents and skills such as sales and engineering. Burden himself was a harsh mentor but his hard-driven station was a good platform that provided a valuable training ground and jumping-off point.

Omaha native Ralph Beudin worked sales for Burden in 1954 before moving over to KOWH a year later. Beudin 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.

Gerry Weist (pronounced "West") had been with KOIL since the early 1950s. Coming into Don Burden's fold, Weist continued to oversee all of KOIL's engineering and soon became a Burden confidante and VP. He soon was awarded partial interest in Burden's stations.

A notable KOIL engineer 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 a summer relief engineer watching over the Gates BC-5P transmitter at night when licensed personnel were required on-site for monitoring directional antenna arrays. While continuing studies in college, Goodrich remained with KOIL under 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 (605 North 13th Street) as an electronics design engineer. McMartin grew to produce a line of broadcast products that included transmitters, audio consoles, and modulation monitors.

KOIL's victorious on-air battle under Don Burden's leadership claimed its spoils on January 1, 1960. That morning KOWH 660 gave up the fight and flipped its format to Beautiful Music. An extremely lucrative decade lay ahead for KOIL 1290.



KOIL claims the lead, 1959.

1420 KOOO Omaha

Even though television was a major challenge to American radio, new stations were still filling the broadcast band. Two key factors allowed more stations to be authorized: the FCC had relaxed distance requirements between stations, and directional antennas could be designed to create signal patterns that can be wedged into tight coverage areas.



The 1420 kHz slot left vacant in 1933 by the short-lived KICK in Carter Lake, Iowa was again on the air in the Omaha market in 1957.

It was KOOO, *K-Triple-O*, the O, of course, for its community of license, Omaha. A proposed directional signal pattern allowed the new station to be squeezed in on 1420, but limited to only daytime operation. The pattern was aimed to the northwest in order to protect co-channel stations in Mankato, Minnesota, Davenport, Iowa, and Junction City, Kansas.

KOOO was built by Harold Soderlund, general sales manager at KFAB. Soderlund was also an early mentor to Todd Storz while both were at KFAB in the late 1940s. Soderlund formed Central Plains Broadcasting keeping a 65 percent majority interest. Approval for his station came in October 1956.



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

KOOO lit up on March 20, 1957. Its transmitter site in Iowa was about a mile east of the Missouri River and a half mile south of US-275, also known as the South Omaha Bridge Road, not far from the KSWI 1560 tower. Its twin-tower array surrounded by corn fields beamed 500 watts northwest toward the city, making it particularly strong in South Omaha. Studios were at 2321 M Street, just off the busy South 24th Street corridor of the South Omaha business district.

Initially, KOOO scheduled blocks of record shows that included DJ Bob Warnes on mornings from 6 to 9 and Jim Price in his dawning years as an Omaha radio pro from 9 to noon and again from 3 to 4:30 p.m. Jean Sullivan, well-known since 1941 on KOWH and KOIL and who by this time had moved to television with *Women's View* on Channel 3, had a 30-minute show at 11:30 a.m. Overall, KOOO aired a mix of music programming that even included some current pop tunes along with afternoon Polkas. News was at five minutes before each hour.

With a staff of over a dozen people, costs were high for a daytime-only station. One major expense was hiring a licensed tech to babysit the directional transmitter site all day. The first year was difficult, Soderlund even seeking FCC permission to sign off early during the summer months of 1958 due to "economic and manpower problems" (*Broadcasting*, May 12, 1958).



*Deane Johnson, KOOO
program director and air
personality..*

Deane Johnson, who later was PD for KOOO, 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.

RADIO

MARCH 30 - APRIL 4



KOOO'S SWING WESTERN 40

- WHITE LIGHTNING
- LUTHER PLAYED THE BOOGIE
- POOR OLE HEARTSICK ME
- FRANKIE'S MAN JOHNNY
- HOME
- A THOUSAND MILES AGO
- GUITAR BOOGIE SHUFFLE
- I TRADED HER LOVE
- ONE MORE TIME
- 0 THANKS A LOT
- 1 IT'S LATE
- 2 MISS MEMORY
- 3 SWEET SWEET GIRL
- 4 WROSO
- 5 SPRINGTIME IN ALASKA
- 6 HIGH WATER WEEHAW

- THE KOOO CORPORATION
- GEORGE JONES
 - JOHNNY CASH
 - OMAHA
 - JOHNNY SEA
 - JIM REEVES
 - WEDD PIERCE
 - THE VIRTUES
 - ROLAND JOHNSON
 - LEE SAND
 - JOHNNY CASH
 - RIKDY NELSON
 - BOBBY HELMS
 - WARREN SMITH
 - JAOK OLEMET
 - JOHNNY HORTON

- CAPITOL
- SUN
- HICKORY
- N R C
- VICTOR
- DECCA
- HUNT
- BRUSHWICK
- TODD
- SUN
- IMPERIAL
- CEGA
- SUN
- SUN
- COLUMBIA

KOOO "Swing Western 40" playlist, March, 1958. Note how Top 40 tunes by The Virtues and Rick Nelson are fitted in to "modernize" the Country list.

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 a modified Country format, calling it "Town and Country" music. Johnson recalls, "I hired a couple of kids from UNL (University of Nebraska Lincoln) that were broadcasting addicts. It was their first

jobs. One was Steve Brown of later KOIL fame and the other was Peter McLane who became a big name in Des Moines radio.

"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 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. Studios were moved in November from its M Street location to the Livestock Exchange Building, in the center of South Omaha's busy stockyards.

The Livestock Exchange Building (4920 South 30th Street, built in 1926) was the centerpiece of the Union Stockyards. The large ten-story building at the time housed a bank, bakery, cafeteria, soda fountain, cigar stand, clothing store, telephone and telegraph office, apartments, and sleeping rooms. It boasts two elegant ballrooms on the top floor with 22-foot ceilings. (Since the stockyards closed in 1999, the structure remains a mixed-use building with apartments. The ballrooms are available for special occasions.)

COUNCIL BLUFFS
OUTDOOR THEATRE

**RADIO
KOOO
NIGHT
FREE
ADMISSION**

• ON STAGE •
**JOHNNY SWOBODA
SILVER STREAK
ACCORDIAN BAND**

From 7:00 to 8:00 P. M.
• ON SCREEN •
Bert Lancaster
"The Kentuckian"

—CO-HIT—
Clark Gable in
"Soldier of Fortune"

**COME EARLY AND MEET
THE DISC JOCKEYS.
MISS KOOO AND ALL
PERSONNEL from Radio KOOO**

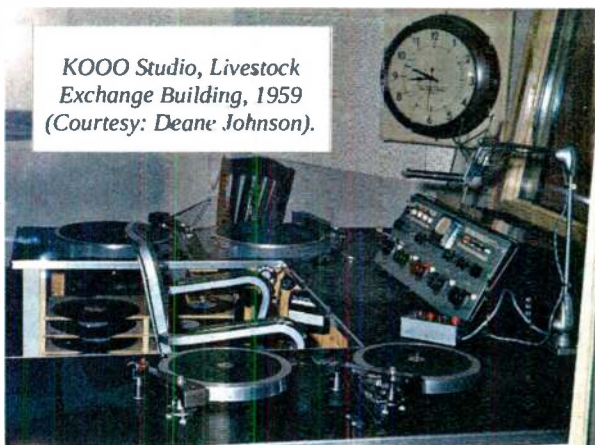
KOOO 1958 personal appearances promotion.

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. KOOO, though only a daytime station, remained Omaha's first and only Country station for over five years.

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 who he first brought into radio in 1958.

Fenlon's group kept the station for exactly two years. KOOO changed hands in July 1960 when 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 built KSIR 900, that market's first full country music station, it too, just a daytimer.

The two were entering the 1960s with the intention of expanding their empire into Omaha. KOOO will be another success for the duo.

1490 KBON Omaha

With a mere 250 watts, KBON 1490 worked hard at staying competitive. The programming was stuck in the 1940s with a variety of entertainment and news blocks, the music mix sticking with the establishment artists and standards. Still, unknowingly, the station made some significant contributions to radio's evolution in Omaha.

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 jettisoned its FM on 98.7, making a last-ditch effort to save it by inaugurating "bus radio" in March 1950. The station outfitted Omaha's buses with FM receivers that piped in an FM simulcast of KBON 1490 programming. FM revenue remained thin, particularly from national sponsors. 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 were 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. Scheduling was still “appointment listening.” KBON’s various 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, which soon moved to afternoons and expanded to two hours.

Unsurprisingly, Jackson was pirated away in early 1950 by 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. But 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.

Other than Barron, 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 time 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 McCann 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.

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 6. Mayme’s past included managing the Happy Hollow Country Club. During the war she was manager of the Service Men’s Club at Union Station.



Omaha band leader Lee Barron, who started at KOIL in 1946, was one of Omaha’s first early DJ’s with his own record show on KOWH and KBON.

When
Lee Barron says . . .

**HELLO,
BEAUTIFUL!**

He means
YOU . . . the homemaker.

He’s inviting you to hear two
hours of top tunes on

HELLO BEAUTIFUL

starting today
2 to 4 P. M.
Monday thru Friday

KBON 1490
on your dial

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 to KOIL in 1953, returning to KBON in 1958.)

SPEND the DAY ... WITH OLD FRIENDS

Mayme Allison Shows "ROUND THE TOWN"
 ... For Mrs. Omaha every week day at 11:30 a.m. Mayme's decorator, cooking and home-making hints have helped thousands of women in the past four years. She is a delightful combination of busy housewife, professional club manager, club leader and wise woman with an accent on special events.

Meet "MR. MUSIC"—7:30 to 10:15 P.M. MONDAY THRU SATURDAY
EDDY brings you the brightest star on the musical horizon. Jim Harker: From Sinatra to Dixie Dean, from Louis Armstrong to Duke Ellington and from Handel to Tchaikovsky. Don Porozze joins with 25 hours of music every week for your listening pleasure. **PLAYING ALL RECORDS...** **DICK McComb** will make — that's Mr. McComb's record. From the 1920s up to five as a saxophoneist, Mr. McComb has participated in ... recorded ... or been accompanied with music in all his phases.

Don Porozze's "SUNRISE SERENADE" "DAVE RADON"
 Wake up and get rolling every morning with Porozze's **MUSIC** **MEMORABLE** items. Wagner, Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Liszt, Chopin, Debussy, Strauss, and many others. **DAVE RADON** has the news and **DAVE RADON** every morning at 11:30. Really good stories, not-bull ... and lots of news for and about Omaha.

Dick McComb "SOUTH OMAHA SALUTE" "DICK McComb SHOW"
 Ten years of **SOUTH OMAHA SALUTE** every Monday through Friday from 9-10 a.m. and **Saturday** morning at 10-11 a.m. Dick McComb: **Mr. Public**. His completely different week day morning hour. **THE NEWS** **MEMORABLE** items at 9:30 a.m. and various good popular music and **DAVE RADON**, long of interesting, special programs by Omaha school boys, the Public Library center, club news, a "happy hour" program and all-time-out entertainment by Dick.

1490 ON YOUR DIAL **Mutual**
KBON

KBON personality line-up. © OWH

Other local programs included Art Stanley with two hours of afternoon requests, the first hour for pop music, and 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 KFNE.

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 requests or research. The show played

As the 1950s progressed and KOWH was making inroads 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.

THE New Listen IN OMAHA RADIO

SUNDAY MUSIC
 SUNDAY MORNING 10:00-11:00
 STEPHENS HALL, 7:30-10:00 p.m.
 This cast a full hour of classical and light music
 Always Starts at the 10:00 to 11:00 p.m.

SUNDAY MYSTERY BLOCK
 "The Shadow" "The Whodunit" "The Case"

EVERY WEEKDAY MONDAY THRU FRIDAY

10:10 to 4 P. M. The Johnny Carver Show and MR. 10000	5:00 - 5:30 P.M. MUSIC with Jimmy Johnson and MR. 10000	5:30 - 6:30 P.M. AUTO RADIO NEWS A complete news-cast requested to talk with you're driving home.	7:30 to 10:00 P.M. THE NEW SHOWS Cowboy Excitement!
---	---	---	---

10:30 - 11:30 P.M.
THEATRE
 Shows every week
 Always starts at 10:30

Every Night 7 Days a Week—NEWS SUMMARY 10:00 P. M.
 Fulton Leach, 6:00 P. M., Monday thru Friday

Saturday Afternoon Football
Notre Dame
 Follow the Fighting Irish and every Saturday during the season.
FOOTBALL SCOREBOARDS
 5:30 and 6:30 P. M.

"PIKE DIX SATURDAY NIGHT"
 8:45 - 11:30 P.M.
 270 minutes of music for your Home Parties.

Your Mutual Affiliate **KBON** **1490 on Your Radio Dial**

1954 launch of the "New Listen" campaign. (Courtesy Omaha World-Herald)

everything from "Handel to Hillbilly, Beethoven to Boogie." Variety and no repetition was the rule.

Harker also was 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, 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 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 in favor of news and "good music" in October 1957, just two years after picking it up. Mutual remained with the station.

YOU'LL WELCOME
the
BIG CHANGE
in
OMAHA RADIO
Starting tomorrow on KBON

★ More listenable music, day and night
plus
★ A new concept in radio news reporting

*It's all Refreshingly New—
Delightfully Different*

—Radio Omaha— **KBON**
1490

1957 Launch of "The Big Change" format in October, described in detail in November. © OWH

LISTEN

... to a NEW radio concept designed to be a welcome companion wherever you are, and dedicated to provide a service to everyone in the growing Omaha metropolitan area.

LISTEN

... to good music — a variety of listenable music (no rock 'n' roll), plus the noticeable absence of disc-jockey chatter, gimmicks and raucous programming. KBON plays 260 tunes a day — 35% more music per hour than any other Omaha radio station.

LISTEN

... to radio's newest, freshest style of news reporting. KBON features three short, two-minute News Digests per hour. KBON brings you three concise weather summaries each hour — time and temperature reports after each tune, and KBON presents bulletins, when justified, on severe weather conditions affecting roads, traffic and schools. You can be sure you are always up-to-the-minute when you listen to KBON — 1490 on your dial.

KBON
DIAL 1490

HEAR
 Omaha's Newest
 Radio Show
**"MARKEL'S
 CAR-TUNES"**
featuring
Dick McCann
MUSIC — PRIZES
4:30-5:00 p.m.
Monday through Friday
12:00-1:00 p.m.
Saturday
Presented by ...
broadcast direct
from ...
JOHN MARKEL FORD
Host

KBON DIAL 1490

TUESDAY ON KBON
 * * * * *
**A SALUTE TO
 STAN FREBERG**
Author of
**"OMAHA WITH THE
 ORIGINAL CAST"**
Hear
 • Freberg's zaniest
 recordings
 • His tough-provoking
 commercials
 • Interviews with
 Stan Freberg
 • "OMAHA WITH THE
 ORIGINAL CAST"

It's
"STAN FREBERG DAY"
All Day Tuesday
 on

KBON DIAL 1490

1958 KBON client-named afternoon music show and Stan Freberg day promotions.
 © OWH

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 using the theater of the mind. Freberg had great success with commercials. One in particular was for an Omaha client that led to his release of a six-minute musical called "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 rewritten without the sponsor's 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 some of his successful commercials and tracks from his comedy albums. His albums included parody and satire plus segments of his *The Stan Freberg Show* that ran on CBS in 1957 as a replacement for Jack Benny. His radio show failed to get a sponsor and left the air, regarded 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 TV and newspapers by demonstrating radio's theater of the mind advantage. In one, he drained Lake Michigan replacing it with hot chocolate and whipped cream with the Royal Air Force towing a ten-ton cherry placing it on top. 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 40s 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 announced 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 for airing 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 apologized in an ad in the *Omaha World-Herald* 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 attempt to spike the station's value upward. Just weeks later in September, KBON was sold by Paul Fry of Inland Broadcasting to Goldenrod Broadcasting for \$170-thousand. An entirely new chapter for KBON lay ahead in the 1960s.

... Concerning Radio Listening

"BY THE NUMBERS"

As you may have heard, we did, for a while, play a bit more of that "rock" music lately . . . the kind that has been taking the honors on the various Top 20, 30, 40 and 50 Lists. Thought we were hanging our listeners what they wanted.

But now we know our listeners really don't care about those numbers after all . . . the overwhelming consensus of opinion is in favor of better popular music, less repetition, less shouting, and less noise, and that's just what we'll be bringing you from now on.

Our sincere thanks to the hundreds of folks who have taken the trouble to let us know what they want to hear. Keep the comments coming. Your interest will always be appreciated by the Station "WITH YOU IN MIND."

RADIO KBON
1490 on Your Dial

September 1959 KBON apologizes for dipping into the "Top 40 pool" of songs during the summer. © OWH

1560 KSWI Council Bluffs

By 1951 daytime-only KSWI 1560 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." Indeed, few name announcers appeared, although the ubiquitous Omaha band leader Lee Barron briefly held a shift in 1950. He had already done brief stints at KOWH and KBON by that time.

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 1951 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald)

In its effort to increase power to 1000 watts, the *Nonpareil* in 1951 sought a move to 880 kHz for KSWI, a clear channel that belonged to WCBS New York City. Hearings in Washington had been underway since the 1940s to break up the clears and allow more stations to move onto those frequencies as secondaries. But it

wouldn't be until the 1960s that rules would be loosened on clear channel operation to do so. KSWI's request was dismissed in 1955.

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 nighttime 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. KSWI 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 floodplain was being threatened by rising waters. Sandbags were piled around the transmitter building to keep waters at bay.



1952 KSWI transmitter and tower site sandbagged in preparation for Missouri River flooding. Note rowboat at the ready as well.

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.)

Also in 1952, Robert O'Brien was named general manager, remaining in that position until the *Nonpareil* was sold to new owners in 1964.

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."

Information servicing was beefed up in 1957 with the addition of News Director Walt Gibbs, the beginning of his 20-year association with the station. Gibbs wore other hats as well during his 20-year tenure with the station, including that of sports director and program director. Networks were also added in 1957: ABC, MBS, and Keystone Broadcasting, Keystone being a transcription service begun in 1942.



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 was played. A ping pong ball going back and forth then 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 it 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 originated earlier and elsewhere. (1957 *Television Magazine*, "The Storz Bombshell")

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 WTIK 1450, 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

Oklahoma City
KOMA

Kansas City
WHB

St. Louis
KXOK

Minneapolis
WDGY

New Orleans
WTIX

Miami
WQAM

The Storz Stations

STORZ BROADCASTING CO. HEADQUARTERS: KIEWIT PLAZA,
OMAHA, NEBRASKA © ROBERT H. STORZ, PRESIDENT

From his 500-watt daytimer, the Todd Storz empire quickly grew. Storz bought WTIX 1450kHz 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. In 1958 Storz vastly improved his New Orleans coverage by purchasing 5000-watt WWEZ on 690 for \$490-thousand, transferring the WTIX call letters and programming to 690, and donating the old 250-watt 1450 frequency to the Orleans Parish School Board for a nice write-off.



Todd Storz, about 1960.

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 money-maker 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 with him.

In 1958 KOMA Oklahoma City was purchased with its nighttime signal covering nearly the entire US west of the Mississippi. It was here Todd experimented with automation, but technology in the pre-computer era proved clunky and impersonal, too soon to replace the live personality. George "Bud" Armstrong also became executive VP of all Storz stations that same year.

It wasn't until Omaha's Deane Johnson became Program Director at KOMA that the automation was shut down. Armstrong learned of this at a dinner with Johnson during a market visit. Johnson recalls Armstrong asking him about the automation and having to nervously confess he pulled the plug on it. Armstrong replied, "Good, it's about time."

Hurdles for Storz were reaching a zenith at about this time. Huge money-makers don't come without problems. Todd was losing key personnel to other stations, pirated away and taking format secrets with them. Critics, while admitting Top 40 saved radio in the dawn of the TV era, pummeled 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 perceptions.

Growth in the Storz era ended in 1960 with the purchase of KXOK St. Louis. Todd Storz died of a stroke in 1964 at the age of 39.

It was a painful period for Todd's father who was left to take control of the Storz Stations. 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.

Todd Storz is buried in Forest Lawn Cemetery in Omaha. In his memory his father raised funds to build the Storz Pavilion at Clarkson Hospital, now the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

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. It was the same year that the family sold the brewery. 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, coincidentally next door to the WOW AM/FM/TV studios. Operations for the chain of the six Storz AM stations, all outside of Omaha, were centralized in Kiewit Plaza. This included central accounting. Paychecks for DJs and management in the far-flung chain were all issued from the building's eighth floor at 35th and Farnam Streets.

Robert Storz and George Armstrong 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 one going in 1988.

THE OTHER TOP 40 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 by receiving his play-by-



Gordon McLendon at his flagship station in Dallas.

play information from a news ticker, the only way live game coverage could reach the Southwest in the early 1950s.

While Todd Storz developed the pop music rotation format, McLendon's showmanship style crossed into creative station promotion that 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.

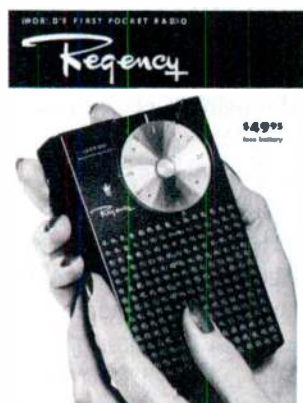
McLendon's most significant contribution was the development of radio jingles. Because of McLendon in Dallas, a number of the most successful jingle companies were built there and remained headquartered in the Big D for decades.

FROM TUBES TO TRANSISTORS

For years the vacuum tube was the workhorse of radio. Without its ability to generate signals and to amplify, wireless technology would not have developed as it did over the course of fifty years. The downside of tubes was that they could be unreliable, bulky, and somewhat delicate. In operation, they used too much power and created too much heat.

Along came the transistor, a solid-state component made of semi-conductor materials designed and layered together to do everything a tube could do. Being solid-state they were small, durable, and required much less power. Old timers soon missed the warm, reassuring orange glow of glass tubes that were on their way out.

Developed in 1947, it wasn't long before these miniature, low-power amplifiers were put to use in hearing aids and in computers during their infancy. And into radios. The first handheld radio on the consumer market came in 1954, the Regency TR-1 for 49 dollars. For comparison, a new television at the time could be purchased for 300 dollars. By the end of the decade pocket radios were within financial reach of teens.



1955 ad for the Regency TR-1

The transistor radio came just in time to save radio which had been seeing its audience eroding to television. The small, battery-powered handheld units moved radios from kitchens and living rooms into one's pocket. Private listening soon made radio stations personal companions, no longer purveyors of appointment listening. It's no coincidence that rock and roll's rise parallels that of the transistor radio.

By 1967 the last of the remaining radio manufacturers in the U.S. would end the production of tube sets. Transistors were soon embedded in integrated circuits. Printed circuit boards using engraved wiring to connect multiple transistors and components soon replaced the hard-wired chassis. Zenith (Chicago) was the last American manufacturer to hang on to point-to-point wiring. Zenith was also the last radio

manufacturer to hang on to the "made in the USA" tag. Production overseas was taking over.

By the 1970s tubes were all but gone, remaining only in transmitters and aging pre-transistor products. One exception was a smattering of audiophiles who believed tube amplifiers provided a better and warmer reproduction of their music.

It wasn't until the mid-1970s that solid-state circuitry permitted broadcast transmitters to operate without tubes. KRCB 1560 was the first in Omaha to purchase a Harris 1000-watt solid-state unit in 1976, the first year available. The Harris had been in development and performing on-air tests since 1974 when Nautel introduced the industry's first solid-state transmitter.

Higher-power AM units followed throughout the 1980s with the industry's first ten-thousand-watt solid-state FM transmitter arriving in 1993. Since then 50 kilowatt solid-state units have become the norm, with KFAB getting theirs sometime after 2010. Less than a quarter the size of KFAB's 1960s Westinghouse transmitter, it's relatively quiet, humming away with a lighted screen for metering readouts and control.

TRANSMITTER OPERATIONS GO REMOTE CONTROL

In the earliest days of broadcasting, stations were constructed with the studios, offices, and transmitters all in the same place. It soon became more efficient to place the transmitter at a different location owing to space needs for towers and to avoid blanketing populated areas. Programming was fed by phone lines.

KFAB was the first in the region to do so, building a new site and towers near the Lincoln fairgrounds in 1926. WAAW followed the example moving its transmitter out of the Grain Exchange home studio in 1931, WOW from its downtown building to a site in northwest Omaha in 1935, and KOIL from the Council Bluffs Hills studios to Lake Manawa in 1937. Transmitter operators were tethered to these lonely sites requiring living quarters to be included in the transmitter building's design.

Wherever the site, FCC regulations of the day called for an engineer with a First Class Radiotelephone license to be on duty overseeing the transmitter at all times during hours of operation. It was for more than being on hand to make timely repairs. When things were running smoothly their duties were keep the transmitter operating in line with FCC rules and regulations.

A transmitter's constants would drift and adjustments had to be made. Meter readings to track transmitter power, modulation levels, and frequency parameters were logged every 30 minutes. The log also called for a visual check of the tower lights at dusk. In the 1940s when directional antenna arrays were introduced, the phasing equipment that creates the signal pattern required even more meter readings to track. Logs had to be officially saved for two years.

As transmitters became more reliable and stable, engineers had less to do except bench repair work and emptying the trash. The FCC began looking into authorizing remote control of these transmitter sites. It cautiously made the move in 1950, adopting rules for

remote control of Class D non-commercial stations of 10 watts or less. The foundation of the rules was that control circuit faults could not activate the transmitter, and any faults causing loss of on/off control would shut down the transmitter.

In 1953 remote control was authorized for non-directional AM stations and FM stations both with powers of 10 thousand watts or less. By 1957 the commission authorized remote control of high-power and directional radio stations. Television had to wait longer. UHF stations were authorized in 1963, VHF in 1971

.Controlling a radio transmitter from a remote site borrowed on telephone technology. Besides dedicated phone lines between the studio and transmitter, stepping relays like those used by Ma Bell were found to be the way to perform various functions by remote control

A stepping relay is a pulse-driven, multiple-pole relay. One at the studio would be synchronized with an identical stepping relay at the transmitter. The operator could dial through the positions for metering and control functions. Two phone lines with DC continuity were required. The only major issue was that rapidly turning the selector switch could cause the two steppers to get out of sync resulting in false readings, but a reset button would get things back on track.



The Gates RDC-10AC like this one was used for years at KOIL and KOIL FM. It's typical of first-generation remote controls, with 10 metering/control channels using stepping relays in the studio and transmitter site.

Such remote control units were racked in many studios well into the 1970s despite other advances. Gates produced the innovative RCM-20 which worked with audio tones rather than DC voltages in 1955. Rust Industrial Co. of Manchester, N.H. introduced a strip chart recorder for transmitter logging in 1958 and its advanced "Autolog" product line in 1964. Digital arrived in 1975 when Moseley Associates embraced the technique to eliminate stepping relays with its TRC-15. It had the added advantage of needing only one phone line.

In the coming years, computers with automatic hourly readings and printouts would take over until the day when multiple transmitters around the country could be watched by computers from a single city.

THE OVERNIGHT SHIFT

Until the early 1950s, radio stations would leave the air at around midnight. Overnight broadcasting occurred only during special events such as Radiothons for a charitable cause or emergencies leading to extended news coverage 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 in Omaha began with KFAB 1110 in 1951. WOW 590 followed in 1954, KOIL 1290 in 1955, and KBON in 1959.

Stations still needed to sign off 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 instead, as Monday's pre-dawn hours were busy with livestock deliveries at the South Omaha stockyards.

Eventually, as aging transmitters were being replaced by newer units, the older units would become auxiliary transmitters allowing stations to stay on 24/7. KFAB was the first to boast “No silent period.” For most stations overnight downtime is now limited to rare air personnel shortages or even more rare tower maintenance.

EDUCATIONAL STATIONS RETURN

Learning institutions were early to use radio for educational purposes, but most stations slowly vanished after the Feds declared that free enterprise was the best way to develop the new medium. School budgets and tuitions couldn't cover expensive attorney fees to defend their assignments from being challenged and taken over by commercial broadcasters. While a few educational stations survived, smaller schools found carrier-current to be an affordable alternative.

At Creighton University, the Rev. R. C. Williams, S.J., faculty advisor, started carrier-current station KOCU in 1948 to prepare students for broadcasting careers. Williams had earlier 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 WOW engineers in the new medium of television in the 1940s.

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 or building. The KOCU transmitter emanated signals via the campus steam system.

KOCU's carrier-current transmitter reached the final stages of adjustment in February 1948 and soon signed on to 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 emerged, teaming 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.

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 60th and Dodge Streets. The school later to become UNO, the University of Nebraska at Omaha. It was KWOU operating carrier current on 550 kHz, running 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 a year's absence on October 14, 1955.

For two years, from 1959 to 1961, KWOU was transmitting illegally over the air, running 10 watts on 880 kHz. The frequency was the clearest daytime option 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. KWOU discontinued operation 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).

Two high school carrier current stations signed on in 1977. In January, KTEC at Tech High School began operation 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. KTEC was shut down along with Technical High in 1984 when the building was converted to Omaha

This Week	Last Week	Week on Chart	
1	ONE YOU - Gary Puckett & the Union Gap/Columbia	2	7
2	THOSE WERE THE DAYS - Mary Hopkins/Apple	3	7
3	MIDNIGHT CONFESIONS - The Grassroots/Dunhill	4	8
4	TELEVISION - The Hollies/Atlantic	7	7
5	I'VE GOTTA GET A MESSAGE TO YOU - Soul 2 Soul/Atco	1	9
6	FIRE OF MY HEART - Big Brother & the Holding Co./Columbia	6	7
7	MUSIC GABBY SING - Steppenwolf/Dunhill	11	7
8	WHITE ROOM - Cream/Atco	15	6
9	FIRE - Arthur Brown/Atlantic	3	8
10	LOVE CHILD - Diana Ross & the Supremes/Motown	23	4
11	GREENBUSH, GLUCKSTEIN ... & JONES - Crym's Shmoos/Columbia	21	7
12	POOR BABY - The Cowells/WGN	16	7
13	DO THE DOO DOO - Aretha Bell & the Drolls/Atlantic	14	7
14	SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME - Max Frost & the Troopers/Tower	12	7
15	SMILEY BLEDHRE - Fifth Dimension/Soul City	22	5
16	KITCHEN SINKING/FLIP - Jose Feliciano/ABC	24	5
17	HEY JUDE/REVOLUTION - The Beatles/Apple	10	8
18	FEELS 3 - Chromosome Clankstar/Berlin/Fantasy	13	8
19	DA-DADD-DA-VIDA - Iron Butterfly/Atco	9	7
20	KEEP ON LOVIN' ME - Marvin & Tama/Motown	26	4
21	TIME HAS COME TODAY - Chambers Brothers/Columbia	18	6
22	CHEWY, CHEWY - Ohio Express/Buddah	27	5
23	HOLD ME TIGHT - Johnny Nash/Dad	36	3
24	ROCK TO ME - The Motians/Independence	33	3
25	GIRL WATCHER - The O'Jays/ABC	8	7
26	HEY, WESTER UNION MAN - Jerry Butler/Motown	25	4
27	MY SPECIAL ANGEL - The Vogues/Aspic	35	7
28	JALABA - Donnas/Aspic	31	5
29	FIRE - Five by Five/Savla	39	3
30	ABRAHAM, MARVIN AND JOHN - Dion/Lorico	38	4
31	ALL ALONG THE WATCHTOWER - Jimi Hendrix Experience/Reprise	37	6
32	SHINE, SHINE - Royal Lancers/Atlantic	40	3
33	STAY MY SEE-SAW - The Moody Blues/Berlin	45	3
34	STONEY - Classics IV/Imperial	44	2
35	CINDYMAN - Doves/Aspic	41	4
36	CINDERELLA SHERBINE - Paul Revere & the Raiders/Columbia	32	3
37	FOOL FOR YOU - The Impressions/Curtom	42	3
38	I'M IN A DIFFERENT WORLD - Four Tops/Motown	38	2
39	DO SOMETHING TO ME - Tommy James & the Shondells/Ronnetto	-	1
40	TAKE ME FOR A LITTLE WALK - Vanilla Fudge/Atco	38	2
41	POLPOISE SMOG/FLIP - The Monkees/Columbia	41	5
42	KENTUCKY WOMAN - Deep Purple/Peterson/Arcton	38	2
43	PROMISES, PROMISES - Dionne Warwick/Scepter	38	1
44	KEEP THE FAITH - American Breed/Atco	38	2
45	THE BUNG - The Goodkings/Aspic	38	2
46	THE PAID UP ON POWER - Richard Harris/Dunhill	-	1
47	COURT OF LOVE - Uni-Flex/Aspic	-	1
48	COOKY COOKY GOODNESS - 1910 Fruitgum Company/Buddah	-	1
49	WHO'S MAKING LOVE - Johnnie Taylor/Aspic	-	1
50	BRING IT ON HOME TO ME - Eddie Floyd/Aspic	-	1

50 DON'T GO BY HANGING.
 51 THESE WERE THE HONEYMOON NEW YORK CITY: "These Were the Days" (WGN-FM). **KOCURADIO 55**

KOCU music playlist 1968, showing an eclectic mix of psychedelic rock, pop, soul, soft adult contemporary, and even bubblegum music.

Public Schools headquarters. KIOS 91.5 soon moved studios into the building from its original location at Central High School.

The other station was KDCO at Central High School. KDCO began as an extension of Central's media courses. Utilizing carrier current on 540 kHz, KDCO broadcast before and after school and during lunch hour, soon going 8:30 to 3:30 on school days. It was run by students under instructor Tom Marsicek using discarded gear from the speech department (Oct 12 1977 CHS).

KDCO upgraded the following year getting two professional turntables and a tape cartridge machine in September. It also signed with a music service permitting 120 new albums a year plus some 45s rather than having to use records that students brought in. Fundraising and selling commercial air time paid for the service.

KDCO was gone by 1980 due to a lack of teachers and personnel. Marsicek left for a position at Tech High and many of the station's student staff members had graduated (Sep 19 1980 CHS).

ROCK AND ROLL ROOTS IN OMAHA

It's well documented that Top 40 radio was developed in Omaha. The city also contributed to the beginnings of rock music. The roots for rock and roll music are more cloudy, however. Several artists lay claim to the title of making the first such record. An Omahan is in on this claim.

In 1947 Omaha native 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. The only 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.

Wynonie Harris was a graduate of Omaha Central High School. His picture is displayed at Central High's Hall of Fame. Born in 1913, Wynonie was always an extrovert performer, working in Omaha clubs as a dancer and MC since his late teens. By the early 1940s, he was working in Harlem where he began blues singing. He had fifteen Top Ten hits on the King label between 1946 and 1952, though all but two were on the "R&B/Race" charts.



Wynonie Harris, a graduate of Omaha Central High School.

His rock style was described as “hot and raunchy,” too risqué for radio, but his records were hot jukebox favorites in North Omaha clubs at the time. It’s possible, however, that he received airplay of the more tame recordings in the South on the few Black stations that existed during the 1940s.

Harris at the very least is acknowledged as helping lay the groundwork for rock and roll. Elvis cited him as an influence after seeing Harris perform in Memphis in the early 1950s. According to Henry Glover, Harris’s record producer, Elvis “copied many of the vocal gymnastics of Wynonie as well as the physical gyrations. When you saw Elvis, you were seeing a mild version of Wynonie” (*Rock Mr. Blues: The Life and Music of Wynonie Harris* by Tony Collins, 1995)

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 the music.



**JOHNNY
DICKSON**



**DON
FERAZZO**



(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, W/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. I 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 Callan 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 falsetto “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 on there on



**SANDY
JACKSON**
KOWH

1. Wheel of Fortune, K. Starr, Capitol
 2. Anytime, E. Fisher, Victor
 3. Blue Tango, Leroy Anderson, Decca
 4. Broken Love, E. Howard, Merc.
 5. Winowah, 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
- Producers
1. Hambone, Phil Harris
2. Pittsburgh, Penn., Guy Mitchell
3. Tulpe and Heather, Fred Waring



**BOB
STELMAN**



**BY
HEAD**



**HENRY
KELPKE**

KOHL

1. Cry, Johnny Ray, Okeh
2. Blue Tango, Les Baxter, Capitol
3. Wheel of Fortune, K. Starr, Capitol
4. Anytime, E. Fisher, Victor
5. Broken Love, E. Howard, Merc.
6. Bermuda, Bill Sisters, Victor
7. I Wanna Love You, Ames Bros., Coral
8. Winowah, Weavers, Decca
9. Please Mr. Sun, T. Edwards, MGM
10. The Noddin' Rag, P. Como, Victor



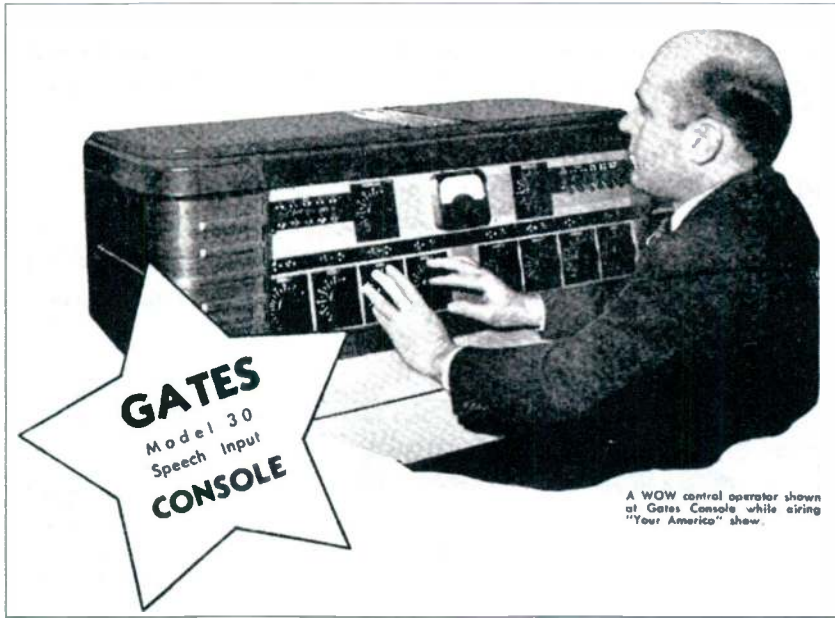
**KEN
CASE** **WOW** **CAROLYN
COVERT**

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, C.P.
 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
- Producers
1. Blacksmith Blues, E. Morse
2. Play Me a Hurlin' Tune, P. Como
3. Noddin' Rag, G. Lombardo
4. Tulpe and Heather, P. Waring
5. Hell's Bells, Clyde McCoy

1952 Playlists from Showtime magazine, Omaha edition, March 10, 1952 (Courtesy: Frank Merrill collection).

WOW 590 had the most conservative playlist, omitting the heartthrob artists of the day, most notably Eddie Fisher and Johnnie Ray. Also missing is popular innovator Les Paul who, with wife Mary Ford, was experimenting with electric guitars and overdubbing.

Oddly, KOWH is playing the Arthur Prysock version of “Wheel of Fortune,” the hit version showing up elsewhere by Kay Starr.



1944 WOW operator at the remote Gates console running the "Your America Show" live presentation from downtown Omaha airing on NBC, later on Mutual.

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 programs on the station to the station itself.

Personal involvement with stations was assisted by the transistor that made radios smaller for individual listeners, quickly discovered by trend-setting teens with their increased spending power. Young people could now easily access “their music” without suffering their parents disapproval, being able to listen to the radio in their bedrooms, cars and anywhere they went.

THE NETWORKS TURN TO NEWS AND FEATURES

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 schedules.

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)

Among the networks, 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 until 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.

First, our programming is designed to fit your station's audience. It's not business 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 Bouda, Keith Jackson and Jack Dray.

Even so--our commercial inventory is only half as much as the old-fashioned networks.

And we give you twice as many news activities as other networks. And the 24-hour Newsweek, plus 8 news casts a day and two weekend sports casts. All of which is why such stations as WCBM, Baltimore... WEZE, Boston... WJBT, Milwaukee... WKRC, Cincinnati and KPCW, Denver have joined the ABC Demographic Radio Networks in the past 6 months.

Also why KFRE, Fresno... WQOW, Omaha... WENL, Richmond... WDCX, 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.



Ralph Beaudin



The Four ABC Demographic Radio Networks.

Any resemblance to traditional radio networks is purely coincidental.

The show's signature logo, the "Monitor Beacon" sounder, became familiar to KFAB's weekend listeners as well as to those across 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.

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 American 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 started out with five years 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. He likely put some of the Storz teachings to work after leaving Omaha. Beaudin started with KQV Pittsburgh in 1958 flipping the station to Top 40, the first such format 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. Morning DJ Clark Weber at WLS recalled that Ralph Beaudin had been a sergeant in the USMC, noting his military-style carried over into his management style, though nobody accused him of being unfair.

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

NEWS

10
MINUTES
ON THE
HOUR

ONLY Radio WOW
gives you **COMPLETE**
NEWS
EVERY HOUR!

reported by:
Roy Clark
Merrill Worthoven
Gene Platt
Bill Oormley
Gene Berry

aided by CBS
Newscasters:
Blair Clark
Charles Collingwood
Douglas Edwards
Nancy Henshman
Alan Jackson
Larry LeVasseur
Blaine Littel
Paul Niven
Stuart Novins

sports by:
Jack Payne
Joe McCartney
Phil Rizzuto
Jerry Coleman
Pat Sommerall

farza news by:
Arnold Peterson
Frank Arney

For complete news coverage every hour — on the hour — keep tuned to:

Radio WOW
59 on your dial

1961 - WOW counters
KFAB's push to be
Omaha's news leader. ©
OWH

In 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 Channel 6. Its first day at the new location was October 17.

A new FM station was added the following year. WOW FM 92.3 signed on the air with 21 thousand watts from atop the TV tower in the back parking lot on May 15, 1961.

William O. Wiseman was appointed assistant general manager in 1960. Wiseman's long career spanned the industry from its beginning through the development of television. In the 1920s Wiseman was 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. He retired in 1966. Unique all these years was that his initials matched his station's call letters.

Wiseman's replacement was Howard Stalnaker who joined Meredith Broadcasting in 1946. He rose to manager at the company's KPHO-TV in Phoenix then moved to Omaha when appointed general manager of WOW's radio and TV operations. He was later named VP of Meredith and on the board of directors staying until the company left broadcasting in 1975.

Local programming carried over from the 1950s included *Breakfast Bandstand* with Joe Martin, Martha Bohlsen's homemaker show mid-mornings, Gene Piatt afternoons, *Cloud Club* evenings, *All Night Starland* at midnight, and Husker football in the fall.

As the DJ formats were becoming more attractive to local sponsors, networks were under pressure from affiliates to give them more airtime for local programs. According to the *New York Times*, Aug. 11, 1960, "It is understood the proposed changes were initiated by stations affiliated with the CBS

network. Many affiliates believe airtime they now allot to certain network programs can be utilized more profitably through local programming.”

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 last of the drama shows, *Yours Truly Johnny Dollar* and *Suspense*, remained on the air until Sept. 30, 1962.

Both ABC Radio and Mutual almost went out of business during this difficult time of transition. NBC was also struggling when the Westinghouse Broadcasting Co. stations dropped the network to go independent. In the end, radio networks reshaped themselves to provide national news and features to the increasingly local-oriented radio station base.

WOW's “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 Bohlsen and her local show for homemakers

As a CBS affiliate, WOW 590 loyally aired the network's hourly newscasts. Through the 1960s this also 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.

Hourly ten-minute newscasts consisted of CBS news followed by local news from WOW's 20-man news staff, AP, and UPI. Some of that news staff included announcers Merrill Workhoven and morning show host Gene Piatt.

responsible news.

**ON-THE-SCENE COVERAGE
FROM EVERYWHERE**



Anchorman
Gene Piatt



Farm Director
Arvid Petersen



Sports Director
Jack Payne



Police Reporter
Tom Murray



Features
Marilon Tribault



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).



WOW Gene Piatt (WOW Archives)

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 in 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 saying that he couldn't find a suitable home for his family, but it may have been big-market culture shock as well.

Sports editor Jack Payne continued to call Husker football games all through the 1960s as he had since 1950. Also in the booth was Merrill Workhoven providing game 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 he left WOW (Payne called the games over KBON that year), Russ Baldwin and Dennis Claridge took over until Joe Patrick grabbed the reins.

Joe Patrick, born Joseph Phillipson, was the 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 the five-state weather forecasts.

WOW's new FM station on 92.3 was briefly promoted with a music preview in May 1961. Upon its 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

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 Life Insurance 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	

1963 WOW promoting its Husker football coverage with Jack Payne and legendary Husker coach Bob Devaney.

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.



Joe Patrick, 1958 photo while still at KFAB.

The music playlist had been acquiescing to the more contemporary artists by 1967 with adult-contemporary mainstream releases by the likes of Glen Campbell, Brenda Lee, The Vogues, The Classics IV, and Dionne Warwick.



WOW Logo 1956

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 Year's morning 1960 when 660 was re-launched with new calls and a lush orchestral format as *Cameo KMEO*.

Calling it "Cameo Music" and using an ivory cameo jewelry piece as a logo, KMEO did its best to appeal to adults by using mood-enhanced daypart titles. They were *Morning Overture*, *Mid-Morning Moods*, *Noon Intermezzo*, *Afternoon Tea and Crumpets*, and *Early Evening Candles and Wine*. There was nothing past early evening as KMEO was a daytimer that signed off at sundown.

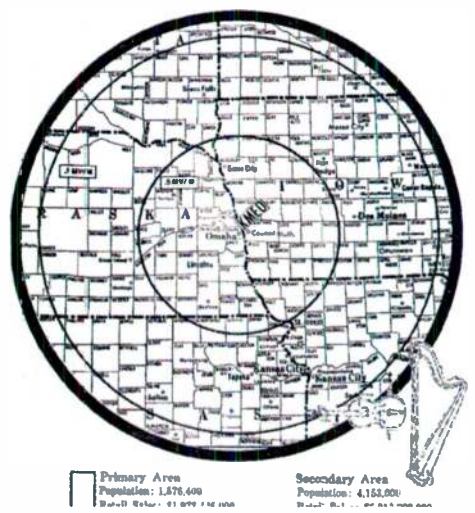
This was the newly-named Beautiful Music format in its early years, believed

1960 - Cameo Radio, KMEO 660



to have been started in Dallas at KIXL 1040 as early as 1947 and further developed by Gordon McLendon in San Francisco on his KABL 960 in the late 1950s.

KMEO Market Facts & Coverage Area
 660 Kilocycles
 Eighth Floor Kilpatrick Building Omaha, Nebraska 341-2228



KMEO 660 coverage in 1960 before the power increase, its 500 watts still impressive by virtue of its lower frequency.

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. No surprise, as owner William Buckley was a conservative writer and political commentator who owned *The National Review*.

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, the general manager was Jay Spurgeon.

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 KRCB 1560 Council Bluffs in 1964. He and his wife later co-hosted AkSarBen Coronation Ball coverage in 1967 for KETV Channel 7.

KMEO's budget allowed for some well-known names. Joe Martin, a longtime WOW radio / TV personality, joined in 1961. He 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 five 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, becoming a fixture for the rest of the 1960s even during the station's four years in a Country format. Bradley stayed in news for the remainder of his radio career, going to KBON 1490 and then to WOW 590 until retirement.

Bradley had replaced KMEO 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 / TV where he was the weatherman on the Channel 6 news. After that, Bramhall found a home on fine arts non-comm KVNO 97.7.

KMEO feature programming included *Travel Tips* three times a day with Mal Hansen and Belle West. Martha Bohlsen's daily homemaker's show was added in 1962, temporarily leaving its long-time home at WOW 590 while remaining on KOIL.

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 radio 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* for 68 thousand dollars. Katz moved on into real estate and later was PD at KMA 960 Shenandoah. KQAL kept its calls until 1965 finally changing them to KOWH FM.

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.

This was followed in 1965 when daytimers on clear channels were at last allowed to increase power. The FCC gave daytime AMs operating on class I-A channels ninety days to file amendments updating requests for a higher power. Some requests had originally been filed as far back as 1947. KOWH was one of seven daytimers on clear channels, its 660 kHz assignment belonging to New York's WNBC. In bringing its application up to date, KOWH 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).

(Proceedings for loosening rules on the clear channels had been dragging on since 1945. Notable is that earlier, the clear channel policy of permitting one other full-time station to operate at night on each of the twenty-five clear channels had been the subject of proceedings concluding in 1961 with the breakup of 13 of the 25 clears. The new stations permitted on those 13 channels were reclassified to class II-A. 660 kHz was not one of the 13, but for a while, the Feds briefly toyed with the idea of allowing 750 thousand watts maximum power for clear channel stations on the twelve remaining class I-A's. That would have included New York's WNBC on 660.)

More changes were on the way. *National Review* owner William Buckley hired Peter H. Starr as a KMEO salesman in 1964. After noticing Starr's sharp and driven business acumen, Buckley promoted him to general manager the following year.

In July 1966, Starr and Buckley's *National Review* threw in together and formed Starr Broadcasting Group with Peter Starr as president. Technically it was a partial sale of the AM and FM with Buckley selling one-third to Starr Broadcasting for 475 thousand

dollars. In the completed deal on July 22, Buckley retained two-thirds of Starr Broadcasting, Peter Starr the remaining third.

(Sidebar: Thus began the Starr Broadcasting Group. Though only one-third owners, the Starr brothers, Peter and Michael, went on an acquisition spree that 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. That includes its Omaha station, KOWH, which was sold off in 1970 before things went sour.

Starr Broadcasting after reaching a peak in the early 1970s was eventually brought down by a co-owned investment company that William Buckley, the Starrs, and others formed in 1971. The new firm was eight million dollars in debt by 1974. Not wanting to have bankruptcy on his record, William Buckley had Starr Broadcasting absorb the assets and liabilities of the failing company. What followed was questionable activity in trying to stay afloat until charges were filed by the Security and Exchanges Commission in 1979. The Starr brothers were forced out and the company was sold to Disney's Shamrock Broadcasting in the early 1980s. Michael Starr bitterly recounts the story in his book, *What a "Friend" We Had In Bill.*)

KOWH and its sister FM finally moved studios out of the transmitter building into new digs in June 1967. The stations were 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 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.)

After the move, a new 510-foot tower for the AM and FM was erected at the 60th and Hartman site "just down the hill a bit" from the old in 1968.

The FM adjusted to a Fine Arts format ending the simulcast 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. The format took aim at KOOO 1420, also a daytimer, that had owned the Country audience since before the decade began.

A "What's Buzzin' Cousin" promo campaign began, designed around new calls for *Country Cousin*, KOZN. It was soon discovered that the



KOZN 660 music surveys, 1968.

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 more genuine country presentation and a loyal audience which proved too much for a takeover. KOZN gave it up in early 1971 and in March brought back 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 format, but the older audience was owned by the market's other major success story, KFAB 1110.

An NBC affiliate since the mid-1950s, KFAB carried the network's hourly newscasts along with commentary features by Morgan Beatty, Chet Huntley, Joe Garagiola, and David Brinkley. On weekends KFAB carried NBC's *Monitor*.

Entering the 1960s, KFAB continued to seek its market dominance through local news and information, interspersed with non-offensive pop music that was a secondary element. The announcers paid less attention to the artists/music and more to the hourly temperatures in Omaha and Lincoln.

Music briefly took center stage for evenings in 1960 when Program Director Ken Headrick developed the first regular stereophonic program in the Midwest. Audiophiles had stereo in homes, available through tapes and records, but stereo broadcasts for the masses were yet a novelty.

KFAB used 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. KFAB 1110 carried one channel, KFAB FM 99.9, the other.

KFAB participated earlier in NBC TV's two-receiver stereo stunt in 1959. With a radio tuned to KFAB eight feet to the right of the television, the Perry Como Show on KMTV Channel 3 could be heard in stereo, on February 28.

COMO
IN
STEREO
SATURDAY NIGHT

Enjoy the special Perry Como show in true-to-life Stereo sound! Just place your radio at least 8 feet to the right of your TV set. Tune the radio to your local NBC station. Tune your TV set to your local NBC channel. Adjust radio and TV to the same volume—then sit back and enjoy the Perry Como show in the thrilling Stereo sound. It's almost like hearing Perry in person!
CHECK SATURDAY EVENING FOR CORRECT TV CHANNEL AND RADIO STATION.

TUNE YOUR TV SET TO NBC-TV

TUNE YOUR RADIO TO NBC STEREO

Saturday, February 28, at 7:30 P.M.
Remember the name is TV Station Channel 3

RCA VICTOR

KFAB participated in NBC TV's two-receiver stereo stunt in 1959. © OWH

Enlisting KFAB FM 99.9, the two stations began a regular stereo broadcast of adult-appeal music from 6 to Midnight on 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).

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 industry... a 50,000 watt transmitter, and you, the listener, will reap the dividend in the very near future.

KFAB Radio has always been a quality leader in broadcasting. For nearly 20 years... it is certainly better than other radio stations in the area. It is the result of the research and development. Therefore, the transmission of rich, informative, variety, and entertainment should be the product of our program in the future.

The reason that the 1110 signal you have so habitually received for so many years will be greatly improved. The music, news, and information you are used to will be made even more enjoyable through KFAB's new wide sound AMPLIPHASE 50,000 watt transmitter. From the finest talent in the region, you'll experience a richer, fuller, more 3D-like sound... the ultimate in pleasurable radio listening. This, you'll soon agree, has been a quality personal difference in KFAB's programming. QUALITY... Continues in the schedule.



THERE'S ALWAYS MORE TO LISTEN FOR ON
RADIO KFAB 1110



The two-station stereo effort was short-lived. FM stereo dplexed onto one signal became a reality just weeks 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 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 local features and newscasts. The "safe" music selections were used like interludes between the frequent weather updates and the solid newscasts delivered live that made listeners want to keep KFAB close.

KFAB underwent a technical upgrade, March 1962
(Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald)

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 announcer, only 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 newsmen Walt Kavanaugh plus NBC News. Cole remained with KFAB through most of the decade except for a brief stint in Denver in 1967.



KFAB's Don Cole.

Hal Rodgers joined KFAB in 1961 and did late mornings up to the noontime farm features and livestock markets report. Rodgers 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 Rodgers and Walt Kavanaugh who returned for late afternoon music and news.

Kavanaugh awoke at 3:30 a.m. every day for four decades to inform people of the latest news. 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.



1961 - KFAB was not yet exclusively carrying Husker football but was often the most listened-to. © OWH

LISTEN TO THE BROADCAST "PROS"

The Big RED Triple Threat Team

OF

Lyell Bremser
Dave Blackwell
with Taylor

KFAB

Saturday, September 16

GAME TIME 3:45 pm*

ENJOY ALL THE ACTION, COLOR AND EXCITEMENT

WHEN **NEBRASKA** MEETS

THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON "HUSKIES"

KFAB

*Tune in at 3:30 for the Pre-Game Bob Devaney SHOW

FOR NEBRASKA FOOTBALL AT ITS BEST

KFAB Husker Football coverage, 1967, September © OWH

Nebraska

Cornhusker football further reinforced KFAB's solid image. General Manager Lyell Bremser called the Husker Football games play-by-play on KFAB for 45 years, having started at the station when it was still licensed to 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 Husker schedule. KFAB ran with the Huskers that day while KOOO 1420 was given the World Series game.

Indeed, the Huskers football program during the 1960s was building nicely under coach Bob Devaney who was also contracted for KFAB's pre-game shows. Nebraska was on the way to a national championship by 1970. KFAB enjoyed the halo effect of Husker football year-round. KFAB would continue to grow into the 1970s reaching stratospheric rating numbers that would gain national attention.

1290 KOIL- THE GLORY YEARS

By the 1960s Don Burden had 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 Top 40 KOWH changed calls and flipped to a format of strings and sonatas. KOIL then turned into a money machine using the Top 40 KOWH Storz formula.



Front cover of a 1961 KOIL music survey. Don Steele on afternoon drive called himself "The Car Tune Kid."

KOIL had won by 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 former personalities showed up on KOIL: Frank Allen and Omaha's first DJ, Sandy Jackson. Allen joined late, having bailed on KOWH in 1959 just four months before its format switch. He worked 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, the 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.

KOIL 1290 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.

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, later changing the calls to KICN in 1961. He simulcast KOIL AM programming on the FM without ceremony or promotion. The goal 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 working morning drive had the duty of powering the FM transmitter 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.

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.



Paul Oscar Anderson in KOIL Aquila Court studio 1962. (Courtesy: Deane Johnson).

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 see in the mind's eye 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 recording of the poolside sounds rolling in the studio whenever the mic was on. It was true “theater of the mind.”

Sandy Jackson opened a teen club on New Year's 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, this time at WOW 590.

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 followed by KWMT Fort 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.”

Joe Light with his sometimes overly-wild sense of humor was the most polarizing of KOIL's personalities. Coming from Denver where Steve Brown had hired him for Burden's KICN, Light started on KOIL's overnights from the Manawa transmitter site in 1960.



The Real Don Steele and Joe Light setting up an appearance at a movie theater.

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.

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."

Widsten lists the lineup at the time starting with morning drive 6 to 9 Bob Wilson, 9 to Noon Frank "Coffee Head" Allen, and Noon to 3 Johnny Mitchell (Kris Erik Stevens). Afternoons 3 to 7 was Gary Mack (Gary Gears), from 7 to Midnight Todd Chase, and from Midnight to 6 in the morning was Frank Hall (Bramhall). Widsten in the early 1970s went to KGW Portland, Oregon where he programmed Top 40 directly against Burden's KISN.



Joe Light KOIL. 1970s and 1960s photos.

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.



Todd Chase, KOIL 1964..

Gary Gears was drafted into the Army and replaced by Gene Okerlund, who would later become announcer Mean Gene for the World Wrestling Federation. Gears went to WLS Chicago after returning from the service.

Frank Hall (Bramhall) went into TV weather on Channel 6 and later became a fixture on non-commercial stations KIOS and KVNO.

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.

PD Mike McCormick went on to program KQV Pittsburgh then to WLS Chicago as PD of that Top 40 powerhouse. Among his WLS hires was John Records Landecker. In the typical short-sighted cruelty of large markets, he was let go in 1973 after losing just one rating period to competitor WCFL.

Using different air names for one's 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 being listened to but remembered the program or DJ's name, that station would receive proper credit.



Johnny Mitchell (Kris Erik Stevens) and the new board at the KOIL Aquila Court studio 1965 (Courtesy: Kris Erik Stevens).

An additional reason was the practice of using "house names" for DJs, mainly because a jingle was already produced with that name. DJ Hal Widsten says upon his arrival at KOIL, PD McCormick told him to go to the jingles closet and pick one out that he likes. He chose Jim Hunter. Kris Erik Stevens recalls being given the name Johnny Mitchell because there was already a KOIL jingle from an earlier jock with that name.

When Bob Wilson was moved from mornings to middays, a KISN Jim Hunter was brought in from Portland 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 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.

House names for air personalities at KOIL continued into the early 1970s. Alan Cain arrived in 1971 and was given the air name Jimmy Fox because a jingle for that name was on hand. He kept the name after moving on to WGRQ in Buffalo. When Fox returned to Omaha at WOW in the mid 1970s, he couldn't use his Jimmy Fox name because there was already a Jimmy at the station, the morning talent: Jimmy O'Neill. He then changed his name to Erik Foxx, using the double X.

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 recalls his arrival at KOIL. "My first introduction to KOIL (aside from having heard about it when I was with KISN in Portland) was the day I walked into the studios at Aquila Court to follow Frank Coffeehead Allen on a weekend shift. There was Frank with his 'cub reporter' hat, packing up his things and preparing to leave the studio at about 10 minutes before the hour. I introduced myself as Frank put out his cigar on a paper plate that also contained about 4 pieces of very stale-looking cheddar cheese. I said, 'I'm the new guy, Roger W. Morgan.' Frank replied, 'I'm Coffeehead...here, ---saved some cheese for ya.'"

Roger W. Morgan soon began doing what he calls "the Morganizing stuff that Burden and Steve Brown were stealing from Drake," making it into a high-profile 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.

"Every morning I would call a business and do a put-on phone call," Morgan said. "We would call and do ridiculous things like trying to rent one of those big concrete mixers to mix martinis in for a big cocktail party. At the end of the conversation, I would tell them that they had just been Morganized."

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!



Roger W. Morgan and Don W. Burden, 1968 (Courtesy: Roger W. Morgan).

"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 in this fashion was later deemed a nuisance and outlawed by the FCC. Today, disclosure that the call is being recorded plus permission to air the conversation is required upfront. But Morgan's "Morganizing" lived on a while longer in previously recorded reruns.

KOIL took on the "Good Guys" imaging in 1963, an idea perfected by Todd Storz protégé Ruth Meyer at WMCA 570 in New York. With the teamwork and shenanigans of the KOIL personalities, National PD Steve Brown admitted: "Our stealing 'The GOOD GUYS' from PD Ruth Meyers' 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.



Johnny Mitchell (Kris Erik Stevens), emcees a KOIL concert. (Courtesy: Kris Erik Stevens collection).

The Good Guys made numerous personal appearances. There were record hops for client events, schools, and station promotional 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, all on the station trade-outs of course.

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.

(These 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 record that was slightly warped. From that came the 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 Lyell Dean, later of WLS Chicago and ABC News fame, Bob Benson who later headed ABC News, and Fred Winston who later became a zany WLS Chicago morning personality.

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 been a "rip and read" wire copy news operation.



1967 - KOIL newsroom at Aquila Court studios with Chuck Hoffmann.
(Courtesy: Gary Emenitove, Chuck Hoffmann).

(The incessant clack-clack-clack, the ink on fingers, even the smell—the infamous rip-and-read! Most stations subscribed to a wire service such as AP or UPI that would set up a noisy teletype machine in a newsroom or even in a closet. For news, jocks would rip off the latest output from the long roll of yellow paper and assemble a newscast to read. Responsibilities included replacing the paper roll or changing the ink ribbon on the machine and winding up with purple fingers.)

Making the job somewhat easier for Benson was the fact that Burden and another radio pioneer, Gordon McLendon, were good friends. One of the things that Don Burden wanted for his stations was the kind of news image that McLendon had created at his Dallas and Houston stations KLIF 1190 and KILT 610.

Burden was a big fan of the McLendon 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 for acquiring the equipment needed to do the same in Omaha. 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 set for every public safety frequency in the area. Burden loved to hear both units reporting on the air back-to-back.

A less successful mobile unit was the KOIL Visual News Cruiser which scrolled news headlines from a board on top. Deane Johnson describes how it came to be: "Burden had been visiting Gordon McLendon at his Texas Ranch, and McLendon showed him this new idea he was using in Dallas. It was a van with a lighted billboard mounted on top...programmed by typing a paper tape on a machine in the van. A loop was made, and the tape fed through a device that sent the information to the lighted display that scrolled it. It was powered by a generator in the van.

"Burden had to have one, so we got it, and L.J. Lancer (Irving Nathan) drove it all over Omaha scrolling the news as he went. The whole system was constantly breaking down and one day it was gone."

KOIL was doing local newscasts live 18 hours a day. 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."



KOIL News Director Bob Benson returning from assignment, January 1966 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald)

Benson went on to WLS Chicago, 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 from 1978 until 1993.



The KOIL personalities 1964

The Don Burden-

Gordon 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, not a programmer. He had pros to handle the music and news but he 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).

Successful KOIL promotions bringing visibility to the station included:

- The KOIL Fumble-Foot Five basketball team, made up of KOIL's personalities (and occasional ringers), would play high school faculties, scoring and clowning around on the court for charity.

- 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 damage claims.

- 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

- 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



1973 KOIL Fumble-Foot Five promo pic with Scott Carpenter (Steve Taylor), newsman Sherm Meyer, and Carl Mann.

to take home and hand out. The added benefit to Burden was impressing the client who would witness KOIL's reach with all the inquiries.

- The KOIL Easter Egg Hunts replaced the long-outlawed treasure hunts.
- The Mystery Santa Claus was a top businessman in town, a client of course, 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.

One of the most unique KOIL traditions was at Christmas with the KOIL Carol Tree debuting in 1961. A large evergreen tree would be 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 alongside and watch while listening to the car radio. The tree would be located at a high-traffic site, usually 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 along 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 engineers designed and built its own system to continue the tradition, that is, when the lights worked. 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.



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. On top of that, they had to re-bulb the 450 globes with red, green, and blue lights every year.

After several more 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 had to deal 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. At that time it was licensed to reduce power to 1000 watts at night. A required signal pattern that might allow a higher power was unforeseen.

As luck would have it, one of the two suppressed signal nulls in what became the necessary night pattern went right through Omaha. In reality, this was likely little noticed

by most city listeners. But listeners in not-too-distant Fremont would hear KOIL's signal drop out at each sunset forcing them to tune in KOMA 1520 Oklahoma City or WLS 890 Chicago for nighttime Top 40.

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 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 arguably the city's number one teen hangout with traffic that surpassed the scenes in "American Graffiti." (One other teen hot spot was Todd's Drive-In further west on Dodge near 78th Street.) It's not clear that reception was ever really a problem at Tiner's, but it was at least the principle that rankled Burden.

To remedy this problem Burden had the transmitter site moved westward from Iowa into Nebraska onto 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 on the Douglas-Sarpy County line.

The new transmitter plant 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 small cinder-block building for the transmitter. There was just enough space inside to install a small mixer board, tape decks, and turntables for the night DJs.

KOIL temporarily used its old 1000-watt RCA transmitter while moving the Gates transmitter to Omaha. The RCA afterward was kept for standby use well into the 1980s. When it was moved to the new studios at 8901 Indian Hills Drive in 1968, its antenna was a long wire strung along the rooftop. Seldom used, its coverage was inferior to the main signal 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. Also, its proximity to the control room made the audio annoyingly distorted for the on-air DJ monitoring through headphones.

The new transmitter site received FCC permission to light up in January 1966. The Lake Manawa towers were dismantled and the transmitter building was sold and turned into a tavern, then ironically, a church.

As transmitters and directional arrays became more stable, the FCC began approving remote control operation for directional systems. KOIL received permission in September 1970 to operate remotely while directional at night. A First Phone license holder/combo DJ was no longer needed to be marooned at the transmitter site itself but could instead work from the main studios.

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 showcase 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.

The 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 operations. The second floor was corporate offices for the Star Stations group. The basement level held a computer room, Bridal Fair offices (another Burden enterprise, contracted to over a hundred stations), storage space, and on the east end, a spacious indoor vehicle parking garage.

A terrace along the building's front led from the west parking lot to the building's entrance toward the center. The terrace route would pass the floor-to-ceiling studio windows that faced north where air talent viewed past the terrace to the busy 90th and Dodge Streets intersection. Listeners could come up and wave to the on-air personality, many holding up signs for requests.

The 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).



The October 16 grand opening for the new KOIL/Star Stations Building was in typical Burden festive style. It began with a dinner celebration for 700 guests at the Happy Hollow Country Club. For entertainment, comic impersonator David Fry opened for Harry Belafonte.

Roger W. Morgan returned from a honeymoon in Puerto Rico to emcee the grand opening party. He recalls, "The American flight I boarded in San Juan made a stop in Miami and a most impressive passenger boarded with the other Miami passengers. I was seated in first class, so there was no mistaking that the impressive passenger who boarded in Miami was, indeed, Harry Belafonte.

"Knowing that the flight from Miami terminated in Omaha, I couldn't resist leaning across the aisle and asking Mr. Belafonte why he was going to Omaha. 'It's some kind of client party and I'm the surprise guest entertainer...a radio station, I think.' I introduced myself and said, 'I think I'm introducing you.'"

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 Pittman, 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.” (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 selling an African-American format on his station.)

Roger W. Morgan recalls, “Sure enough, that night, as more than 100 guests made their way from the cocktail party into the theater at the Country Club, it was my assignment to step on stage and announce, ‘Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Harry Belafonte.’ As a hush fell over the room and jaws dropped, from the back of the room came that booming voice, ‘Day Oh...Day Oh...tally Mr. Tallyman, tally me banana!’ Pretty heady stuff for this skinny kid from Oregon.”



KOIL Building, viewed from its northeast corner, 1968.

Steve Brown 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!)”

That afternoon, the new offices and studios for the Star Stations were opened for a tour of invited guests. The “door man” was another superstar of the time--Captain Kirk from *Star Trek*, William Shatner.

As visitors entered, they were greeted in the lobby with large backlit pictures of the station's personalities just past the receptionists desk 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.

Inside, the carpeted hallway led to offices and conference rooms to the left, and AM and FM operations to the right.

One office was exclusively for public affairs. It had a plush couch and chairs for guests and a small recording booth with a microphone hanging down for the guests to 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 closely 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, and genuine 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 and a view northward to Dodge Street.

One DJ remarked about the large circular halo-like overhead light during one of Burden's intense management meetings in his office. Burden was temporarily called out leaving the sweaty group behind to sit in silence. Looking up at the circular light, PD Bill Stevens broke the silence with, "I thought that thing followed him when he left the room."

The computer at 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 difficult to program and far from trouble-free.

Deane Johnson says, "Burden wanted to computerize. Nothing was yet available for broadcast application, 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. All the walls separating the studios had large soundproof windows with a view to the next studio all the way down to the last studio. From the lobby there was a door to the first studio, the FM room. The receptionist was responsible for changing tapes and loading spots on the automation system. A soft alarm bell would signal when a tape was nearing its end.

The KOIL control room was next. The personality was seated inside a wrap-around island in the middle of the room facing the control board and the floor-to-ceiling window to the outside terrace. Three cart machine slots were at tabletop level just below the board, two more cart machines were above a turntable on the right. Two more turntables and the record bins were to the left of the operator.



Don Burden in the new KOIL control room with DJ Bobby Noonan at the mic, 1968.

The next adjacent room 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 was later converted to an FM studio for live operation in the 1970s. There was yet another production room across the hall from the last room.

Going back up the hall on the other side came the music library that was equipped with phones for music research and a request line extension used by the request girls for tabulating incoming calls. The break room was next, directly across from the control room. It became a popular place for coffee and gossip.



1968 KOIL Studio with counter-level tape cartridge decks. Note too, the coffee and cigarettes, careless DJs accouterments of the day, outlawed from control rooms n later years.

On the other end of the building was the hard-working KOIL sales staff. They had a popular product to sell and their commissions were lucrative. They were driven, attending sales meetings twice daily, at the start and end of each day. Many evenings were spent entertaining clients on the station trade-outs. Burden gave a gold watch to salespeople 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, the newsman, and a request line operator.

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, signifying the targeted housewife listener.

But, expansion soon stalled out. Burden sought to buy WIST Charlotte, North Carolina 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*)

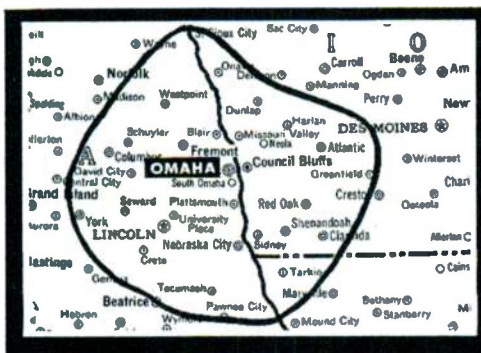


5000 Watts

0.5 Milliwatt Area

KOIL's coverage map showing its non-directional daytime pattern, 1969.

24 Hour Coverage in the Heart of America



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 (licensed to Vancouver, Washington, across the state line) was levied for improper station identification. The hourly legal ID, the requirement being call letters followed immediately by the city of

license, was rushed and obscured, buried 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 1970s events resulting in KOIL’s stunning fall from the top.

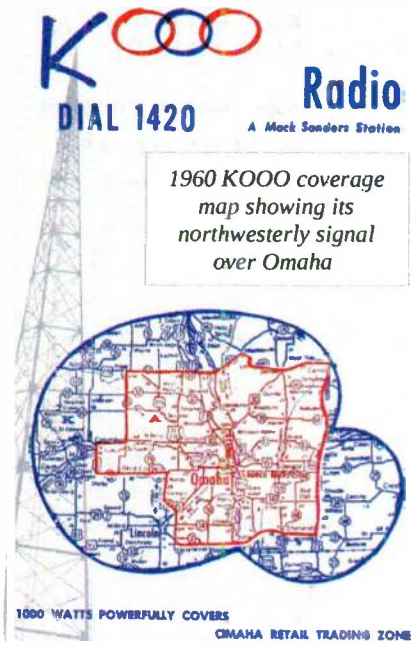
1420 KOOO- MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE RANCH

Country-formatted KOOO 1420 entered the 1960s being sold to 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.

Pier-San was country music entertainers Webb Pierce and Mack Sanders, the duo having found earlier success with their 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 numerous number-one country hits during the 1960s. Pierce kept busy as a 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 would eventually create a radio empire with stations in nine markets, including Lincoln and Nashville.

Sanders' first move was to adjust the country image “by moving it uptown out of the stockyards” (the Livestock Exchange Building) to new quarters at 1910 California Street, formerly the home of a recording company.

Mack Sanders brought in air talent that knew and understood country music, starting with well-known Country DJ and former bandleader Lee Nichols as general manager and DJ. 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.

Coca Cola PRESENTS

KOOO Top Tunes

March 19, 1962
"IN ORBIT"

1. You Are My Life - All My Love	W. Pierce
2. Whilingly	S. Coley - W. Nelson
3. Little Bit of You	V. Johnson
4. Unleash, Unleashed	K. Valle
5. She Got You	P. Cline
6. Heavy Load Company	P. Yagnum
7. 50 Miles From Home	H. Hawkins
8. Aching, Breaking Heart	G. Jones
9. That's My Pa	S. Vasey
10. Loading Your Love	J. Reeves
11. I Let It Slip Away	F. Young
12. Charlie's Blues	D. Walker
13. Sweetie on 's Trapped	M. Robbins

KOOO 1962 top songs playlist picturing its well-known air talent. Co-owner Webb Pierce's recording unsurprisingly is at number one.

Other air personalities included Buddy McCall, Ezra Hawkins, and Slim Everhart "The Singing Cowboy" from Texas.

Everhart's radio experience went back to 1936 on KFAB. He moved to WOW in 1947 with various shows of his own. He and Mack Sanders had worked together on KMA in 1950, part of that station's live music lineup that included Mack and Jeannie Sanders and the Everly Brothers' family.

Engineer Don Denver joined the station in Pierce-San's first year, becoming a popular personality on KOOO for the next 18 years.

In the early years, Denver worked his show from KOOO's remote cinder block transmitter building in an Iowa cornfield, about a half-mile south of the South Omaha Bridge Road. Combo jocks babysitting directional broadcast equipment are often isolated at the tower site. Listeners rarely know how frequently their cheerful-sounding DJs work in such solitary, lonely environments.

A lasting element at KOOO was its polka show on weekdays at 4. The station's signal was particularly strong in South Omaha, the center of the city's Eastern European population.

Studios and offices moved once again in 1963 from its home at 19th and California Street to 102 South 48th just off busy Dodge Street.

KOOO Shower of Stars

Greatest All-Star Country Music Show Ever Seen Here



FEATURING — IN PERSON

- BUCK OWENS
- THE BUCKAROOS
- MERLE HAGGARD
- THE STRANGERS
- BONNIE OWENS
- CHARLIE PRIDE
- FREDDIE HART
- GOSDIN BROTHERS
- BOB MORRIS
- FAYE HARDIN

OMAHA CIVIC AUDITORIUM
FRIDAY, SEPT. 13 — 8 PM

Tickets at Auditorium, Bronfen, Wolf Bros. Western Wear, Downtown; Phillips Dept. Store, South Omaha; Wolf's Fashion Bonnet, 72nd and Dodge; Bronson's Western Wear, Council Bluffs

Admission —
Adv. \$3.50, at the Door \$4

1968 Shower of Stars ad. Mack Sanders' country music contacts helped solidify KOOO and its country music popularity with star-studded concerts at the downtown Civic Auditorium.

© OWH

Throughout, 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 calling his Ranch Boys band the KOOO Band.

Sanders and his country music contacts in 1965 further reinforced KOOO's image as Omaha's Country & Western station with live concerts featuring well-known acts, Sanders often including himself on the playbill.

He brought his friend Jimmy Dean to the Civic Auditorium in May 1965 for a show that sold out despite inclement weather. In a September 1968 show, the headliners were Buck Owens and Merle Haggard.

Country competition arrived in 1968 when KOWH 660 changed calls to KOZN 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 the new format. For the rest of the decade, KOOO ran the MBS newscasts on the half-hour to supplement the local top-of-the-hour newscasts.

KOZN's "Modern Country" proved no match for KOOO's Traditional Country. KOOO was well-established among country fans. 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 was positioned as the station 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.

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 brought aboard 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 a 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.

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



Fritz' home atop a pole in downtown Omaha 1959.

house. A mini-scandal erupted when it was reported that Fritz's bartender friends were sending up cocktails via rope and basket.

Lyell Davis, just out of the Army and seeking a radio career, was hired to assist Fritz during the stunt. "They needed someone to spin records while Fritz slept on the flagpole.

That was me and my introduction to radio."



Fritz "Johnson" Bader at KETV. Photo from the early 1960s.

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."

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.

Lyell Davis continued on KBON's *Milkman's Matinee* airing from midnight to 6 a.m., then presented 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 launched in the face of established news competition from KFAB and WOW.



1965 – KBON focuses on news. © OWH

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's KOWH and Don Burden's KOIL. Price held a Master's degree in music and did side work with the Omaha Symphony for years.

Meanwhile, 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 later installed in April 1962.



KBON's Frank Scott

The station rejoined the ABC network in June 1962 when the net was dropped by KSWI. With it came Paul Harvey, Alex Drier (having just joined ABC after 21 years at NBC), and Don McNeill's *Breakfast Club*.

Goldenrod tried to sell the station in 1963. Information Radio of Nebraska offered \$325 thousand which included a no-compete clause for Goldenrod. 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 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 was freelancing, voicing various commercials and handling 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 rest 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 that were made available at participating sponsors.

DeMoss also ratcheted up the culinary phase of his career with *What's Cookin'*, a new twice-daily recipe

Hi Mom!
WHAT'S COOKING?
LYLE De MOSS IS!
And he answers the question with a new recipe twice daily Monday thru Friday on KBON!
sponsored by CRYSTAL PACESCO CO. "Only the Best is Dressed for It"
11:40 A.M.
3:40 P.M. sponsored by METROPOLITAN WYLVES REST. "Live Modere for Linn with Gus"
KBON-RADIO 1490
"Where the Best Begins"

Lyle DeMoss KBON 1964 re-invented himself as a culinary host. (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

Where? ...on KBON'S
OPEN LINE
Three times daily at 8:30 A.M., 12:30 & 6:30 P.M.
KBON Radio 1490

KBON November 1965 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald)

feature. The following year as a contest prize he hosted a BBQ for the winner and 49 friends.



To become teen question-askers on new KBON program "Ask the Teenager." Program is aired 4:30-4:55 weekdays. No previous experience necessary, just the desire to exchange info with your fellow addicts. Future? You might become a know-it-all!

KBON PEOPLE KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON!
ASK THE TEENAGER
4:30 - 4:55

KBON
RADIO
1490

1966 - Bridging the generation gap with "Ask the Teenager" weekdays after school. © OWH

1964 is also when Goldenrod finally sold KBON. It went for \$325 thousand that June to 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. He started out at age 18 with his father Louis selling kerosene in Baltimore from a horse-drawn tank wagon. Their business grew into the huge Amoco Company 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 the public good (*Broadcasting* July 6, 1964). But, as KBON reporter Walter Dean recalls, "The word was that we were a tax write-off and the owners didn't care what we did so long as it didn't embarrass anyone."

Walter Dean joined KBON working weekend nights phoning in reports on high school football games for KBON, "... eventually working for them full time over the summers and during the summer of my freshman year at the University of Nebraska Lincoln.

"We were affiliated with ABC Radio and the studios were in a downtown office building above a restaurant. I remember having to climb a fire escape to get to a back door and into the newsroom on weekends."

KBON doubled down on its news image in 1965, going up against market leader KFAB with two solid hours of morning news. Reporter Walter Dean recalls how serious the biz became. "Frank Scott was the GM and with great fanfare--he'd been an actor and seemed to know a lot of people from New York--programmed the station as one of the first News/Talk operations in the country. Bryce Brasel was the news director, Chuck Hooker his deputy and there were two or three young guys in the newsroom.

"At a time when radio news consisted of a lot of 'rip and read' of the wire services (AP and UPI), KBON worked hard to cover local issues. We had a couple of mobile units and I remember being sent all over town to cover or follow up on things.

"Audio tape, what came to be called 'actualities,' was a big deal at KBON and I believe we were far ahead of everybody else in capturing and using in our stories 'sound bites' of newsmakers and witnesses and concerned citizens. We used large but carry-with-a-shoulder-strap portable reel-to-reel battery-powered Telefunken recorders that were likely

an expensive investment for the upstart newsroom. I hauled one all over the city to conduct interviews with politicians, business people, concerned citizens, and sometimes even entertainers who were performing in town.”

The *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.”

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 war between KOWH and KOIL 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 to increase KBON’s TSL (time spent listening.)

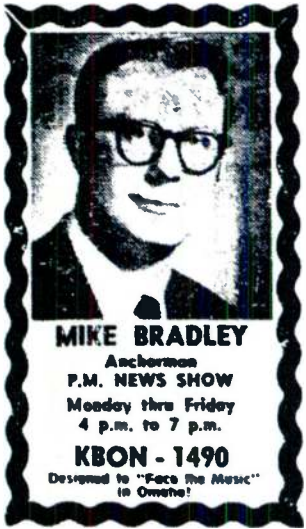
*instant
radio prize
information*

As part of KBON's complete information programming, the "secret word," the "magic money word," the "cashline jackpot" and many other words, numbers or info you need to know now come to you instantly on KBON. No need to dial around; you'll get them all on KBON the moment they're broadcast on any station.

KBON People Know what's going on...
even on the Other Radio Stations!

KBON
RADIO
1490

1966 – KBON extends its information offerings to “instant” announcements of contest elements from cash contest games on other stations in the market. © OWH



Mike Bradley, afternoon anchor KBON 1969 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

Walter Dean recalls his covering the Near North Omaha riots of 1967: “Bryce (KBON news director) and I were in his personal car because we didn’t want to attract attention driving a flashy red and white mobile unit into an area where bands of rioters were smashing store windows, looting the businesses and then setting them afire.

“At one point we stopped at a stop light and suddenly heard glass breaking, people yelling and a burglar alarm started shrieking. I looked over to my right and saw what remained of the window of a convenience store collapse and people begin to climb in. One of them looked around, noticed us, and yelled. Bryce hit the gas.”

Walter Dean stayed in the news business moving on to WOW radio and television, then leaving Omaha for CBS in Washington in 1985.

Studios were upgraded in 1968 when the station left its longtime quarters in the Saunders-Kennedy Building at 18th and Douglas Streets to take up residence in KOIL's old studios in the 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.

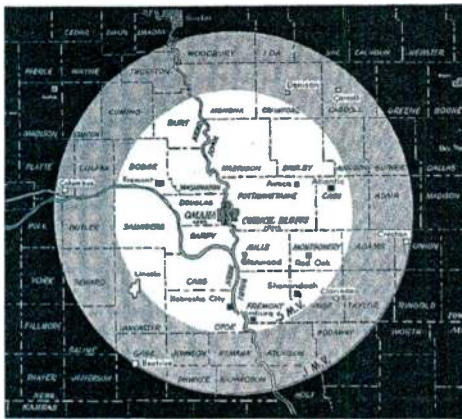
Talk programming on KBON was positioned against the music stations with the slogan "Designed to Face The Music." The format would be further refined with major changes that lay ahead for 1490 in the coming decade.



1968 KBON 1490 Logo

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 moved 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.



KRCB coverage map 1963.

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 later worked his way up to Omaha's heritage station KFAB 1110 staying until his retirement.

A signal upgrade from 500 to 1000 watts came in August 1962 about a year after its initial application. Though now with 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 in an equal partnership. Gross was a TV sales consultant and VP at Bozell and Jacobs Advertising. Slusky was in real estate

and the operator of Council Bluffs 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 though the ABC and MBS networks were dropped.

Immediately after the sale, KRCB's studios were moved from the small building at 120 South Main Street adjacent to the *Nonpareil* 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 for 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 the 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 live 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 radio hosts in the region but was a polka historian with reputedly one of the largest collections of polka music in the country.

POLKA MUSIC
CZECH and POLISH
Every Sunday
11:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M.
On Radio Station KRCB, 1560 on your dial
BIG JOE
Polka Show

1967 KRCB's Sunday
money-maker that began a
year earlier. © OWH

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 newly-begun tape network. His KRCB Sunday show aired from 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, Joe Siedlik's *Big Joe's Polka Show* ran eight hours, 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 than it did much of the rest of the week. No wonder they were willing to break format!"

After just four years Slusky 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. James Lowenberg replaced Jay Spurgeon as general manager.

Conroy immediately set out to further improve the station facilities. 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.

Conroy also applied for an FM for KRCB, receiving the grant in November 1967 followed by the KRCB FM call letters in December. However, construction would take another 18 months.

On the programming side, 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 Hoffmann recalls during his first job at the station as a news reporter, "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).

Hoffmann was given a new air name, J. Charles Hoffman. It was changed again to Jay Charles when he took over the morning show.

The program director was Buddy Scott, who would later be pirated away by Don Burden to be KOIL's PD. Scott's temporary replacement was News Director Walt Gibbs.

By January 1969 KRCB 1560 had adjusted to a self-labeled "Maximum Music" format of hit music described as contemporary/progressive. ABC News ran at :55 with local news at :15 and :25.

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 5TH 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
BARABAJAGAL Donovan
TRACY Cuff Links
HAYRIDE
Gary Lewis & Playboys
HUMMIN' Magic 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

Meanwhile, the FM construction was delayed by a fire that also temporarily took the AM station off the air. The blaze on January 26, 1969, created \$60 thousand in damage in the transmitter building. The yet-uncrated FM transmitter was a total loss. A five-year-old record library also was destroyed as were another 700 irreplaceable 78 rpm records.

A pair of new transmitters arrived for the AM and FM. The AM signal was restored. KRCCB FM soon signed on in May from 175 feet atop the AM tower on the South Omaha Bridge Road. The FM simply simulcast the AM until sunset, then continued the same programming until midnight.

KRCCB's Cletus Baker recalls the damaged AM transmitter was kept as a standby. "The story I heard was that as the insurance inspector was leaving the building remains, (station engineer) Jim Droege ran after him and offered him a hundred bucks for the salvage rights, to which he said, 'Sure!' Droege repaired the unit and it was authorized for standby use in October.

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 for FM stations, 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 could now go further, upgrading to a stereo amp and a pair of matching speakers. When FM stereo was finally approved on June 1, 1961, those serious listeners needed only to add a stereo FM tuner.

Before 1961, stereo broadcasting was a novelty, requiring two radio stations and two receivers, one each for the left and right channels. 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 were fed stereo recordings with each station airing a separate channel. Listeners were treated to the sounds of a ping pong ball going back and forth and race cars and trains speeding by followed by stereo 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 from 6 p.m. to midnight on 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 its first year. FM stereo had been approved in June, and KQAL 94.1 launched stereo broadcasting several months later on November 23, 1961, to become Omaha's first FM stereo station.

FM programmers found that many hours could be filled inexpensively with record albums and a minimum of announcers. Album buyers were primarily adults so the programming was very adult-oriented, ranging from pop orchestras and show tunes 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 its AM sister KOIL 1290's Top 40 programming until 1967. When switching calls later to KOIL FM, 96.1 became the first automated Beautiful Music formatted station in Omaha.

KRCB FM 98.5 signed on in 1969 simulcasting KRCB 1560 during the day and 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 different 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 popular Country, Rhythm and Blues, and Progressive Rock formats emerged.

By 1970 FM was still working to gain respect. FM in cars became standard in 1971, but FM painfully was still almost ten years away from becoming equal with the AM giants.

Even with Omaha's FM receiver penetration at 61 percent that year, FM radio showed creativity but limited revenue, and the going was rough.

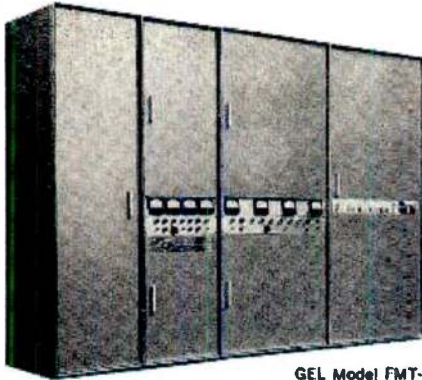
94.3, later 94.1, KQAL, KOWH FM Omaha

KQAL 94.3 (moved to 94.1 just four months later) 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 19, 1959, from downtown, the tower 230 feet above the street atop the City National Bank Building at 405 South 16th Street. (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 in 1912.)



KQAL announcement as FM returns to Omaha. M.C. was the abbreviation for megacycles. © OWH

"Our GEL Model FMT-10A has been operating as though it were the 100th produced rather than the first!"



GEL Model FMT-10A Transmitter



Mr. W. L. Dunbar
Radio KQAL-FM,
Omaha, Neb.

1960 GEL trade ad with testimonial from KQAL engineer Dunbar.

The transmitter was a new GEL (General Electronic Laboratories) 15-thousand-watt unit, serial no. 1. The director of engineering was William L. Dunbar.

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 1959 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.

That fall, on November 23, 1961, KQAL 94.1 became Omaha's first FM station to go stereo. 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 AM transmitter site at 60th and Hartman Streets. Despite KMEO's high tower, the FM transmitter and small tower 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 first. 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, and an hour of jazz at night, with the remainder of the schedule serving up light pop music in the Percy Faith and Andre Kostelanetz styles. 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.



1961 - No longer simply in "Hi-Fi," KQAL introduces stereo FM to Omaha on November 23.
© OWH

The new sound would be simulcast on KOWH 660 AM. 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 that limited 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*. A year later ownership was divided and renamed 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.

(Side note: Starr Broadcasting thus began in Omaha and went on to become a successful group buying up stations around the country. Michael joined brother Peter Starr in the expansion soon worth millions but both were forced out in the early 1970s by Buckley after a series of unrelated investments brought the empire down. The story is bitterly told in Michael's book, *What a "Friend" We Had In Bill.*)

Around this time KOWH FM was granted a permit for 100 thousand watts at 600 feet, the increase granted in May 1966. The permit included the move for the FM transmitter from its long-time downtown site atop the Orpheum building to the AM site at 60th and Hartman. Programming continued with a classical/jazz "Fine Music" format.

A lightning strike in June 1967 caused enough damage that the station limped along until leaving the air for a few weeks in August for repairs. The elongated silence was due to a last-minute decision to install all new equipment rather than simply repair the old.

The outage went into September delaying the start of a new format of classical music, jazz, and fine arts features that had been promised earlier. The outage also interrupted the station's announced plan to raise \$12-thousand in subscriptions that began several weeks earlier. Manager Richard Yancey said the checks had to be returned.

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 shows in earlier years.

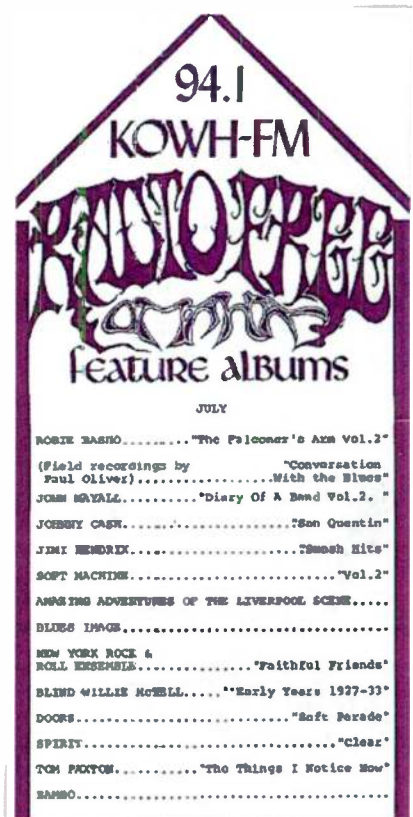
KOWH FM again began seeking listener-funded support. Selling "subscriptions," the public fund drive sought \$12,000. It raised just \$900. After an extension, the drive still fell short.

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 changed. Drastically. The light jazz and orchestral music were out. 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 former KOWH FM audience was further shocked by an experimental format of progressive rock and jazz. They heard a mix of rhythm and blues, traditional blues, folk music, international music, hardcore rock, and jazz running until 1 a.m. It was free-form rock, a format developing on the



1969 KOWH FM "Radio Free Omaha" album music playlist. A deep mix, from John Mayall to Johnny Cash.

West Coast. Here, it became known as *Radio Free Omaha*. It was yet another first for Omaha radio.

Former KOIL DJ Rick Stewart was made program director for *Radio Free Omaha*. Stewart was already with Starr Stations coming from the afternoon shift 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. In its stead, 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.

Just months later, *Radio Free Omaha* sponsored a Grateful Dead appearance at the Music Box in February 1969. (The Music Box was a popular live music venue with a dance floor and a bowling alley at 118 North 19th Street. It closed in 1980, and the building was 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 the AM side when 660 made its format flip and call letters change from KOZN back to KOWH.

Radio Free Omaha was the market's first taste of free-form rock radio. It made some inroads and was 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.



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 following the simulcasting of its daytime-only sister

station KRCB AM 1560. KRCB FM was still quite new and finding its way, having just signed on in 1969.

KOWH FM 94.1 had gone through a decade of meeting challenges, trying 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 as a winner.

96.1 KCOM, KOIL FM, KICN, return to KOIL FM Omaha

KCOM was Omaha's second FM to sign on during the FM Renaissance years. The 96.1 dial position had been vacant since KSWI FM left the air in 1953 just six years earlier. Begun with an application in February 1959, 96.1 MHz lit up as KCOM the following September, licensed to Delta Broadcasting System.

The station was set up in the Rorick Apartments, a moderate high-rise on the south edge of downtown at 604 South 22nd Street at Saint Marys Avenue. The schedule was just six hours a day, from 5 to 11 p.m.



Delta Broadcasting System, Inc. • Rorick Building • 504 S 22nd Street • Omaha, Nebraska

KCOM letterhead, 1959.

Delta's owners, Edward Pontes and Dale Applegate, were more hobbyists than businessmen. They played classical music, show tunes, and light classics from 8 a.m. into the evenings from a thrown-together studio in a street-level room in the 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 sold KCOM just months after first signing on. Don W. Burden from KOIL 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 in later years well after Todd's death.

Burden offered \$25 thousand for KCOM in January 1960 with approval coming the following month. Once becoming part of Burden's Central States Broadcasting (the subsidiary of the Star Stations), the calls were switched to KOIL FM in February.

KOIL FM kept the 8 a.m. sign on schedule and proceeded with new day-long light music segments starting with *Morning Bouquet*, then *Afternoon Musicale*, *Sterling and Strings* for the dinner hour, and the evening's *Gas Light* until midnight.

Seeing little reason to continue with the expense of separate programming, Burden closed the Rorick studio by late June and simply switched to a simulcast of its sister station on AM, Top 40 KOIL. The simulcast was Omaha's first full-time Top 40 on FM, but the improved fidelity was not enough to draw interest to the new band. KOIL FM's programming remained in mono even after FM stereo technology had arrived in 1961. The KOIL 1290 studios made no plans to upgrade to stereo for a simulcast. Burden just wanted to operate enough hours to keep things legal until FM could become viable.

Burden changed the calls to KICN in July 1961 upon throwing in the towel and selling his Denver station KICN. Burden loved the "Kissin'" identity and parked the call letters in Omaha, harboring hopes of using them again someday. But he never used the Kissin' image in Omaha. The KOIL simulcast simply continued and KOIL's engineers would insert the hourly KICN legal ID with a live cut-in.

KICN at just 3.5 thousand watts was upgraded to the full power authorization of 100 thousand watts in 1966, but the transmitter site remained atop the Rorick Apartments, the tower height increased to 132 feet. The tower teetered in a slant after a December 1967 storm but was righted until toppled by another storm in the 1980s.

Burden finally made moves to work his FM into a separate identity when FCC rules in 1966 outlawed full duplication of AM and FM programming. Apparently giving up on finding a station to purchase to take over the KICN call letters, the calls were relinquished in March 1967. With that, Burden brought back the call letters KOIL FM, separated the FM programming from that on KOIL, re-launched the FM in stereo, and began a 24-hour schedule.

The new programming was an automated soft music format with no live announcers. KOIL FM became Omaha's first Beautiful Music FM, in "Living Stereo." The lush orchestral format was a natural for FM, a band already known for soft 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. A similar format had been tried in 1960 in Omaha on KMEQ 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," established an early version of 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.)

The mid-1960s saw the Beautiful Music format being refined to orchestral music produced exclusively for Beautiful Music stations. Syndicators were springing up producing 14-inch reels of tape filled with orchestra-produced covers of familiar songs from standards to pop, designed to be run on their own automation systems that would be provided as part of the contract to stations. The early syndication format suppliers included Bonneville, Schulke, IGM, and Drake-Chenault.

another charter advertiser ...

koil FM
96.1

◀ LIVING STEREO ▶



Mr. John Marhal, president of John Marhal 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).

Automation, like the one already in use for years by KFAB for overnights and elsewhere running "jukebox" style formats, was too clunky, slow, 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 in such a relaxed format, and in many cases were desired elements. (Drake-Chenault later developed automation that would handle tighter, faster-paced Pop, Rock, and Country formats in the 1970s. Personality was still missing or bland at best, 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 14-inch open 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 its system.

The FM automation equipment was set up in Star Station's new quarters at 8901 Indian Hills Drive in time for the October 1968 official opening of the new building. The automation equipment was located adjacent to the lobby, separated by a door to the receptionist desk. The tapes were all handled by the staff of receptionists and request line girls, rotating their positions as needed. KOIL DJs handled the tape-loading responsibilities during late nights and overnights.



Toned-down newscasts for KOIL FM were provided by the KOIL news department. Burden's Beautiful Music format serving the older audience complemented the younger Top 40 listeners on his AM station. Direct competition wouldn't arrive for another five years when WOW FM 92.3 would 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 its new AM site in Sarpy County on the south edge of Omaha. 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 installed in 1962, but remains labeled for FM.

KFAB FM first signed on in 1947 but as a Lincoln station on 97.9 from the Sharp Building, 106 South 13th Street in Lincoln. FM broadcasting failed to gain traction and KFAB FM in Lincoln was gone by May 1949.

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 Broadcasting (Journal Star Printing and May Broadcasting own 49 percent each) brought the reincarnated KFAB FM to the air on December 30, 1959, this time from Omaha on 99.9 MHz. KFAB's was the most ambitious return to the FM band, with 58

thousand watts on a newly-erected 440-foot tower at the AM transmitter site south of the city. A power increase to 115 thousand watts would be authorized in July 1960.

The FCC has since limited the maximum power for FMs to 100 thousand watts. KFAB FM was “grandfathered in” to keep its higher power and remains Omaha’s most powerful FM station.

The KFAB FM 99.9 transmitter was required to be housed in a separate structure at the base of the fourth tower that was erected in line with the AM’s three towers at the site. This was necessary to avoid an overlong transmission line from the main building.

The FM studio was added to the AM studio/offices at 5010 Underwood Street. Much of the FM 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.

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 on FM using a sub-carrier for the second channel was approved 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 in 1961 on November 23. The single-signal stereo was to be FM’s catalyst to success. Surprisingly, KFAB FM didn’t adopt stereo until 1969, promoting it as *Cloud Nine Stereo* with light classical and pop music and a simulcast of the overnight automated *Serenade in the Night*. (AM stereo wouldn’t happen until 1979.)



1969 KFAB FM adopts stereo.

QSL
OMAHA, NEBRASKA
K F A B

50,000 WATTS
115,000 WATTS ERP

AM 1170 KCS.
FM 99.9 MCS.

*KFAB FM and AM Listener
Verification Card*

92.3 WOW FM Omaha

Meredith Broadcasting applied for an FM in 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.

**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 Popular In The Country"	"The Star"
Joe Williams, Trumpet and Gene Baker	Lee Brown Band
"The Love Walk"	"Sincerely, Intentional"
Little Richard	Worms, Gladys Knight
"The Rain Is Spittin'"	"Flower Drum Song"
Little Richard	Various Cast
"The Last Time I Saw Paris"	Selections from "Aida"
Helmut Ziegler and orchestra	Lucien Varon
"When You Wish Upon A Star"	"Mind My Business"
Paul Henning orchestra	J. S. Johnson Band
"You Took Advantage of Me"	"Big House from Winnetka"
Paul Henning orchestra	Paul Henning

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 promoting its new FM
on 92.3, May 1961 (Courtesy:
Omaha World-Herald)

Using the WOW TV tower behind the studios at 3501 Farnam Street, WOW FM aired with 40 thousand watts at 481 feet. The operation was run by WOW 590 General Manager Frank Fogarty and Station Manager William O. Wiseman.

Programming was described as "Good Music." 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 WIAC in South Omaha. 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.

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 listed as the community 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, the 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 community of license.

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, by this time on the air as KOIL FM.

The 1560 AM station had been sold twice since its beginnings and was now KRCB. Owned by KRCB Inc. and headed by retired attorney James Conroy, the 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 an antenna at 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 simulcast concluded at its sunset sign-off time. A year later the FM expanded to a 24-hour schedule offering Progressive Rock overnights as well as evenings. 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 in 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



KRCB

OMAHA - COUNCIL BLUFFS
15-6 AM - FM 98

*KRCB AM and FM music
playlist front page with
psychedelic artwork., 1970.*

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. Programming was quickly expanded to a 17-hour day from the original 3 to 10 p.m. schedule.



KGBI letterhead, late 1960s.

Programs 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 conveniently leading to the Christian Contemporary music explosion of the 1980s.

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.

Air personalities and program directors worked long hours and the pay was not so great, but the perks came in the form of free concert tickets, first-release records, meeting with record promoters and music artists, and rubbing elbows with local media, government, and business leaders. As record promoters sought all-important exposure for their clients, radio people receiving cash or favors for airplay was tempting to some or simply another perk to others. 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.

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.

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 was misleading, as Omaha record sales are carefully tracked for inclusion in national reports that in turn influence major market airplay. That makes Omaha a favorite among record promoters.

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 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, 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.

Often a new talent would have to change to different air names upon arrival 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 frequently 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 name in unison, began appearing around 1970. Shouts were easy to incorporate into an existing musical jingle package without sounding off-key.

Numerous high-profile personalities worked at KOIL. Their career paths were often seen going to WLS Chicago or major markets on 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. After KOIL, Stevens worked in numerous major markets like Detroit and Atlanta before arriving at what many consider a pinnacle of success, WLS, where he finally could be Kris Erik Stevens. Afterward, Stevens opened his voice talent business in Los Angeles.
- Newscaster Lyell Dean (Lyell Dean Lebsack), was earlier at 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 before getting his air name at KOIL in 1961. He went through a series of famous stations, most notably in Los Angeles where he was one of the original “Boss Jocks” 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) went to Chicago as Mike McCormick to successfully program WLS. He’s the one credited with hiring the popular John Records Landecker.
- 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. (As a side note, 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.)

PERSONALITY SHOW PREP

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 such "spontaneity" requires lots of show preparation and hard work between the daily air shifts. Some jocks scour the newspapers and trade magazines for information that can be developed into informational or funny bits. Others hit the concerts and night spots getting 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 daylights 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 segues and intros 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 segues 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 was recued 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 radio businessman 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 successful and happy. Former KOIL PD Deane Johnson noted that Brown would achieve the nearly impossible whenever handed a task by Burden.



*Steve Brown, 1959 photo.
(Courtesy: Deane Johnson collection).*

Steve Brown recalled years later in a 2004 web posting how it was during those heady years at KOIL (Emphasis is Steve's own), "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.

"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!!"

Brown in running the Star Stations came up with air names for some memorable personalities. He was the originator of legendary names like The Real Don Steele (Don Revert), Joe Light (Charles Springer), and Roger W. Morgan (Jim Hunter).

Brown got to know a lot of rock stars, including the Beach Boys, as the Star Stations promoted many of their appearances. One of Brown's favorite stories is how he 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.

KISN Portland (part of the KOIL chain) was sponsoring a Beatles appearance 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.

In a November 16, 1995, OWH interview Brown recalls, "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."

Brown's story is confirmed in the *Ultimate Beatles Encyclopedia* on page 65: "The Beatles and the Beach Boys 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 precarious business, Brown returned to Omaha resuming his role as Burden's national program director in 1974. But he couldn't reclaim the lofty level of success he once enjoyed, thanks 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 FCC-mandated 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.

THE TRANSMITTER OPERATOR

Running such new technology as a broadcast transmitter required more than just understanding electronics. The operator had to know federal rules and regulations in keeping the signal compliant with its authorization. Even after commercial transmitters began replacing the homemade units in 1921, their signals would drift and outages would still come at inopportune times. A federally-licensed transmitter operator had to be at its side at all times during the broadcast schedule.



1934 FCC seal, in use until 2020.

The licensing tests were administered by the Federal Radio Commission. When the Federal Communications Commission was created and took over in 1934 it issued two classes of "Radiotelephone" Operator Licenses. The Second Class allowed the repair and operation of maritime, aviation, and other communication equipment. Once obtained, the license holder could test for the First Class license (commonly called a "First Phone" in the business) that additionally

permitted operation and maintenance of broadcast transmitters. The licensed operator is more of a technician but is commonly called the “engineer” though no engineering degree was required.

All stations had to be overseen by at least one full-time First Phone chief engineer, responsible for the construction and maintenance of a station. Other First Phones with lesser responsibilities and abilities would be on staff assisting in running and monitoring the transmitter during its operation. The main job was to log the transmitter’s meter readings every 30 minutes and keeping them within parameters. The logs were official documents that had to be safely stored and available for inspection for at least two years.

A transmitter’s power output was to be within a window of 5 percent over or 10 percent under. The carrier frequency could deviate only 20 cycles either way. Modulation peaks had to be kept between 85 and 100 percent. The current reading at the base of the tower and a nightly visual check of the tower lights was to be noted on the log daily. In the 1940s when directional stations began taking to the air, the phaser unit feeding the multiple towers had critical tolerances to maintain so that the signal pattern would stay in place. These were additional readings that had to be watched, maintained, and logged by the operator.

Stations began upgrading transmitters and towers at remote sites in the 1930s, many well outside of town. Living quarters for the operators were incorporated into the transmitter building designs. WOW’s brick building next to its new tower at 57th and Kansas Streets in 1937 included full-time living quarters for the engineer. At about the same time, KOIL’s two-story art-deco transmitter building constructed near Lake Manawa in Iowa included basic comforts for an engineer. KFAB’s new three-tower site in 1947 at 60th and Cape Hart Road also included comfortable quarters for an engineer.

After the war, the First Phone became a meal ticket not just for electronic enthusiasts but as an inroad for announcers and disc jockeys who could cheaply double as transmitter operators. Broadcast schools sprang up providing training in basic electronics plus the federal rules and regulations necessary to pass the licensing tests. Often these so-called “schools” merely provided memorization of the test answers since the Commission used a standard set of randomly administered tests. This resulted in many operators having limited expertise in electronics, but it was enough to get a job in radio.

FCC rules stated that transmitter operators could perform non-technician duties as long as it doesn’t interfere with proper operation. After going to a 24-hour schedule in 1951, KFAB realized its automation equipment airing *Serenade In The Night* could be moved to the transmitter site allowing the operator to perform double duty.

More common was building a small studio at the transmitter site for a DJ holding a valid First Phone to run his show. Small rudimentary studios were squeezed in at lonely transmitter sites, the cramped quarters in some cases mere feet away from the transmitter and its noisy air-cooling blowers, the monitoring meters carefully kept within sight of the DJ at the mic and turntables. For wanna-be DJs, getting a license to become what was called a “combo jock” became a fast track for getting into radio.

Daytime-only KOOO on 1420 when first signing on in 1958 required an operator on site all day to oversee its two-tower directional array. A studio board, mic, and turntables were added for some shifts to be handled by DJs with a First Phone license. The lonely tower site was a mile or so off the South Omaha Bridge highway reachable only by a dirt road in the middle of cornfields and groves of trees. Listeners would never realize the solitary environment that many of their fun-sounding air personalities endured. Even after full remote control of 1420's transmitter was permitted, engineer Jim Leadham recalls how the Collins transmitter and phaser unit would sometimes drift during inclement weather, or "walk" as he put it, requiring multiple trips to the site to bring readings back within tolerance.

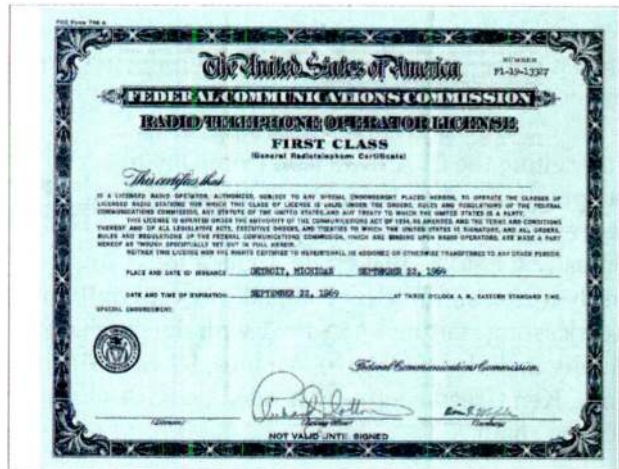
Licenses had to be prominently displayed at the station. The "License Wall" was a special place, often a bulletin board festooned with the soft blue certificates. Sometimes a dozen licenses were on display as all air personalities whose duties included transmitter control joined those of the station's technical staff.

As equipment design improved stability, the rules loosened. In 1953 a basic test for a Third Class permit was added. This allowed holders to record meter readings and perform limited operations of lower-power broadcast stations. From 1963 to 1978 an additional simple technical written test added a "Broadcast Endorsement" to the "Third Phone." This allowed FM and AM remote control operation of a transmitter from the studio although AM was limited to non-directional single-tower stations of ten thousand watts or less. Later, remote operation of directional arrays was permitted after the station's equipment demonstrated reasonable reliability.

In 1973, all classes of broadcast stations were allowed to be operated by an "Endorsed Third." This was eliminated just six years later when holders of Restricted Radiotelephone Permits (just fill out a form and mail it in) were allowed to operate broadcast transmitters of nearly all classes and powers.

In 1981, all numbered classes of radiotelephone licenses were eliminated. In 1983, all renewing First and Second Class licenses were issued as General Radiotelephone Operator Licenses. The following year certificates began to be granted or renewed as lifetime documents rather than for the usual five-year renewal period.

Equipment became so stable that automation took over. Unattended operation was permitted in 1995 and control points were allowed to be at any location outside the studio. Today no operating license at all is needed for local or remote-controlled stations. Responsibility for proper operation falls completely to the station owner.



A First-Phone license certificate.

SWANCO BROADCASTING AND THE SWANSON FAMILY

Swanco Broadcasting operated a group of stations from its home office in Omaha, a little-known fact as it never owned a flagship station in the city. While the Storz Stations and Don Burden's Star Stations were headquartered in Omaha well into the 1970s, the prominent Swanson family, best known for inventing the frozen TV Dinner in its downtown plant, headquartered its broadcast operations in a building at 84th and Dodge Streets also until the 1970s.

Gilbert and W. Clark Swanson were the sons of C. A. Swanson who came to Omaha in 1896 and built a food processing empire. His sons also became successful and were a catalyst in the frozen food industry, introducing the chicken pot pie in 1951 and the TV Dinner in 1953.

After selling the C. A. Swanson Company to Campbell's Soup in 1955, the family business was renamed Swanson Enterprises, a holding company for stock, real estate, foundations,



family trusts, and smaller companies worth millions. One of the companies was Swanco Broadcasting starting up in 1961 with the purchase of stations in nearby states. The chain initially included KIOA Des Moines, KLEO Wichita, KQEO Albuquerque, and KRMG Tulsa. Ken Greenwood who headed up KRMG soon came to Omaha and helped run the Swanco chain.

Swanco was headquartered in the family-built Swanson Building at 8401 West Dodge Road. Don Burden's Star Stations also had an office in the building early on. Gilbert and Clarke, while launching their broadcast empire, considered going into business with Burden but became uncomfortable with him and stayed away. Indeed, Burden encountered troubles with the FCC in the coming years. (Ken Greenwood interview with John Erling for *Voices of Oklahoma*).

After the two brothers died in the 1960s, Swanco Broadcasting continued to acquire viable radio stations into the early 1970s despite the inept handling of the Swanson family fortune by Gilbert's offspring, Jay Fulbright and Gilbert Jr., the latter being the primary player.

Among Junior's and Jay's fiascoes was the "Here's Johnny's" restaurant franchise. NBC TV star Johnny Carson having worked at WOW in Omaha early in his career agreed to sign on as chairman of the board and use his star power for what was described as a "gourmet hamburger sit-down restaurant." For \$37.5 thousand a year plus 15 percent stock ownership, all Carson had to do is appear at five of his restaurants per year.

The brothers spent one million dollars of the Swanson family fortune to start the franchise in 1968. Thirteen opened around the country. The Omaha eatery was built at 1818 South 72nd Street near Mercy Road in March 1969.

The brothers (and franchisees) soon found that the third Swanson generation had no experience in food or franchising. At the same time, diners showed no interest in gourmet burgers in a sit-down restaurant. Carson bailed by 1970 but the Swansons stayed, pouring

another two million dollars into the Here's Johnny venture. By 1975 bankruptcy was declared. The Omaha restaurant closed in September 1976.

After Jay died in 1975, Gilbert continued to lose the family fortune on his own. Gilbert relinquished control of Swanco Broadcasting in 1977 which by this time had moved its offices to Tulsa and changed its name to Swanson Broadcasting, Inc. The company lasted another ten years, bought out by NewCity Communications in late 1987.

The Swanson name, once prominent and prestigious in Omaha and known for its success and philanthropy, remains on some civic landmarks clustered near the old Swanson Building site. The Swanson branch of the Omaha public library is at 90th and West Dodge Road, Swanson elementary school is at 410 South 86th Street, and Swanson Towers rose at 86th and Indian Hills Drive. Outside of that cluster, a Creighton University dormitory carries the Swanson name, the last legacy of what was once Omaha's First Family.

THE CROWN POINT TOWER FARM

Since 1949 (1957 for channel 7) Omaha's television stations were broadcasting from midtown Omaha just west of downtown on individual towers about 500 feet high. A Federal directive in 1964 encouraged stations to group towers together in approved areas to protect aircraft, thus permitting much taller towers.

The three television 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 was discussed, it was decided things would be simpler, and some say cheaper, if each station had its own tall tower.

After going through the usual FAA, City, and Federal approval processes, 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, though 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.

Between the three stations, a million dollars worth of equipment was purchased from RCA, including a new transmitter for WOW TV.

The 55-acre TV antenna tower farm fired up in November 1966 as the three TV stations moved transmissions from their midtown towers to the antenna farm. The three in-line towers become a landmark visible for miles around.

The Tower Farm, or Antenna Farm as it's sometimes called, was a major boost for Omaha's FM stations, as nearly all would eventually rent space on them. (A new KETV 1324-foot tower following the original tower collapse in 2003 during an HDTV antenna install is now offset to avoid guy lines of neighboring towers.)

Radio Broadcasting Companies & Stations	
RY	LEY D E CO 1903 Jones --- 34 6-6373
556-2910	K B O N RADIO STATION 676 World Ins Bldg --- 34 2-8282
	K F A B BROADCASTING CO 5010 Undrwd --- 55 6-8000
-341-1826	KFAB Transmitter Ft Crk --- 33 9-8746
341-3253	K M E O RADIO STATION 8 Fir Kilpatk Bldg --- 34 1-2228
393-2192	K O I L RADIO STATION 511 S17 --- 34 2-7626
342-1108	K O O Radio Station 1910 Calif -- 344-4191
42-1108	K Q A L-F M Radio Station 1630 Cty Natl Bk Bldg --- 34 1-0176
ation)	K S W I-ABC Dial 1560 120 S Main Council Bluffs Ia --- 341-6750
	Meredith Broadcasting Co 3501 Farnm --- 346-3400
E	MEREDITH W O W INC 3501 Farnm --- 346-3400
	Star Stations The 8401 W Dodge Rd --- 39 1-7800
	Storz Broadcasting Co 320 W O W Bldg --- 346-4700
-6400	Swanco Broadcasting Inc 8401 Dodge --- 393-2800
3-9747	W O W-FM RADIO STATION 3501 Farnm --- 346-3400
	W O W REGIONAL RADIO STATION 3501 Farnm --- 346-3400

1962 phone book listing of Omaha radio stations and addresses.

Swanco Broadcasting headquartered in Omaha never owned an Omaha station. Don Burden's Star Stations offices are also in the Swanco Building while his KOIL is downtown at 17th and Howard.

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— 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 stations. Some music stations treated their news commitment as a major part of their image but it was beginning to get in the way of the "More Music" trend. With News/Talk formats emerging, news on music stations turned into a headline service with the longer newscasts buried in the overnights.

AM radio remained strong but as the 60s concluded the music itself became more serious and less fun and joyful, being replaced with social commentary. (an apt description from WLS DJ *Clark Weber's Rock and Roll Radio*). Also, as more DJs were needed to fill the talent pool, standards were lowered, in turn lowering the percentage of those with "star quality." This led to more and more air personalities being told to shut up and just read the cue cards, 5 by 7 index cards with liners and brief promo scripts.

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 more secondary, with 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 rock and pop, also with a strong news staff that included Mike Aulabaugh, Sherm “Man On The Move” Meyer, and Brian Jordan. KOIL put mobile units on the streets primarily for traffic reports and 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 operator 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 lost its grip 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 failed to become a contender in the race.

FM still had the image of classical and soft pop instrumental music, perceived as a romantic or background product. This format evolved in the direction of the Beautiful Music format using soft-voiced announcers. It spawned syndicators such as Schulke and Bonneville that provided lush music delivered 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’s FM, KEZO.

There was one brave exception to this FM direction: live personality Top 40 on FM. It was tried by KFMX 92.1 (formerly WOW FM) for about six months in 1972 but 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 along with a legal battle to save its license over alleged improprieties by owner Don Burden. Stodgy WOW 590 went to 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 sister KRCB FM gained footing starting with Progressive Rock to eventually become Omaha’s contemporary music leader in the following 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 and repositioning for an audience and the advertising dollar. Stations were headed by businessmen who knew, understood, and even loved radio. Many of them even began at entry-level radio positions. This would be their last decade as ownership would begin shifting to bankers, investors, and corporations.

1290 KOIL- GOES DARK

KOIL was owner Don Burden's money machine, entering the 1970s as a ratings leader owning the younger demographics.



Ron Ugly Thompson, KOIL 1970. Thompson added "Ugly" 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), whose 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."

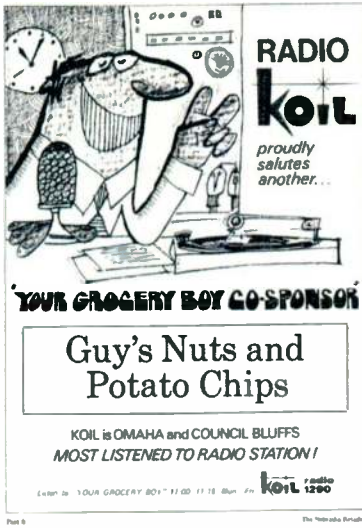
It should be noted that Buddy Scott (Mike Bothell) was an accomplished broadcaster. Thompson's recollection exemplifies the often contentious relationship DJs had with management, even with one of their own in a mid-level management position. Scott went on to success as general manager at a couple of California stations, then joined Drake-Chenault Programming Services before becoming VP at TM Productions in Dallas.



1971, Buddy Scott, KOIL, holding a station award.

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, plus the caller's advance permission to be put on the

air or to record it for later broadcast. This effectively put an end to the "Morganizing" types of surprise calls.



KOIL 1972 ad for the Grocery Boy, a 15-minute daily show begun on KOIL in 1940, running until 1976.

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 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 were 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."

Stone proved to be a competent PD, plus he took over the morning show with his strong, deep voice and good old boy charm upon Roger W. Morgan's departure. 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 and 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 (John 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 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.



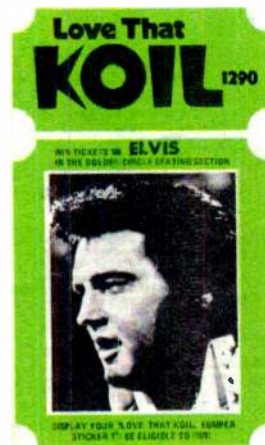
Charlie Stone, KOIL 1972.

One of Burden's Star Station subsidiaries was a talent booking agency in Los Angeles, Good Guys Inc. National PD Steve Brown left his Star Stations position for Southern California in 1972 to pursue concert bookings there. He loved interacting with music artists during station promotions. Brown's spot as national program director was filled in April 1973 by J. J. Jordan. 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, J.J. Jordan left for a job in record promotion and was replaced by Gary Allyn whose credits included KONO San Antonio and other markets including Denver, Miami, and San Diego. Allyn immediately cut the Star Stations' playlists to a thin 25 with heavy rotation on the top 10. He also eliminated hit bounds and extras. It was a tight playlist more suited for large, competitive markets, but it created some immediate positive feedback though perhaps at the expense of long-term listening.

When Allyn left, the playlist was returned to 50 records. Gary Martin of WRKO was the next national PD but his tenure was short as Steve Brown returned to his national PD spot at KOIL 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 following 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.



KOIL Elvis tickets giveaway 1974.

The quickly sold-out show led to a second show, also selling out. The on-air giveaway of tickets was somewhat diminished by Brown's decision to award them individually to make the giveaway last longer rather than in pairs.

(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.)

(Elvis played at the Pershing in Lincoln the night following the 1977 concert. 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 creating the Citizens Band (CB) craze of the 1970s. It was 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 looking on with a smile. The song went on to sell two-million records.

New challenges were plaguing KOIL 1290 at this time. Its format was facing increasing competition from both AM and the growing FM stations. But that was the least of Don Burden's worries. Ongoing legal problems were snowballing.

KOIL TOP 30 FOR THE METROPLEX KOIL NEW MUSIC SURVEY WEEK OF JANUARY 20-26, 1976			
Last Week	This Week	Title	Artist
1	1	CONVOY	- C W McCall
2	2	I WRITE THE SONGS	- Barry Manilow
6	3	EVIL WOMAN	- Electric Light Orch
7	4	FOX ON THE RUN	- Sweet
17	5	LOVE ROLLERCOASTER	- Ohio Players
3	6	THEME FROM MAHOGANY	- Diana Ross
	7	LOVE TO LOVE YOU	
		BABY	- Donna Summers
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

FEATURE ALBUM
MUSIC MAESTRO PLEASE Love Unlimited Orch

"Convoy" hits number 1 in the city where it all began for C. W. McCall.

The 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 programmer 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 delivery 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, drawing some criticism from those who felt manipulated.

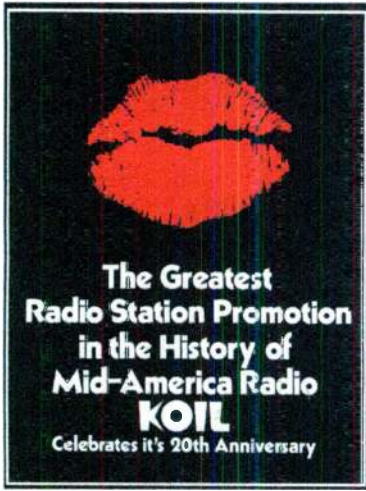
Bigger promotions would be on the way as the Top 40 competition ratcheted up. KRCB 1560 had been making noise with Top 40 but with its daytime-only signal failing to sufficiently cover the western reaches of the market, it had little effect. It was Meredith Broadcasting and its stations WOW 590 and WOW FM 92.1 that grew into major competition 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 as a direct competitor. 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 enjoyed taking on-air jabs at KOIL. Off air, the station would send a bouquet of black funeral carnations to new KOIL personalities as they were hired. 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 an LP disc, "Bootleg Top 40," recently sent to stations by a record promotion company. The collection of tracks was 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 was on 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 promoted 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 answer their phones, "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 Marti 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 tape at home rather than at the station because “there is a certain Gestapo element there.”



Jerry Weist, KOIL chief engineer since the early 1950s.

Burden's "Gestapo" was primarily upper management, and chief engineer Jerry Weist was seen by the staff as “the lookout.” Weist was inherited with KOIL when Burden took over but was fully on board with partial ownership by 1975 with nearly four percent of the Star Stations. Though well-liked, he was often seen as KOIL's "hall monitor," keeping watch on the behavior of what was viewed as the adolescent air staff.

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 Star 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.”



1972 KOIL evening personality Jimmy Fox

It's not that Burden was a tyrant. 1972 evening jock Jimmy Fox recalls keeping his car safe during work, "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 up on the second floor.

KOIL still filed suit to keep Aulabaugh from employment at WOW and sought 35 thousand dollars in damages from the offending station (Aug 18, 1973).



Mike Aulabaugh, at work in the KOIL newsroom, 1972

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, going to Associated Press.

Popular and sometimes outrageous personality Joe Light (Charles Springer) abruptly left KOIL in June 1973, fired for an early morning prank. After a late night out, an inebriated Light came into the station at around 2 a.m. interrupting the overnight show being run by part-timer Scott Carpenter (Steve Taylor).



1973 KOIL Scott Carpenter (Steve Taylor). (Courtesy of Michael Gleason.)

Telling him 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 a show of his own.

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." Light, a popular though sometimes polarizing personality at KOIL off and on since 1960, was out the next day.

The rift between KOIL staff and management reached a peak when surveillance equipment was discovered in the station DJ 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 quiet holiday morning PD Tom Page, in the lounge having coffee and casually looking up at the ceiling, noticed a shadowy object in a ceiling vent. When he stood on a chair to inspect, he found it to be a microphone.

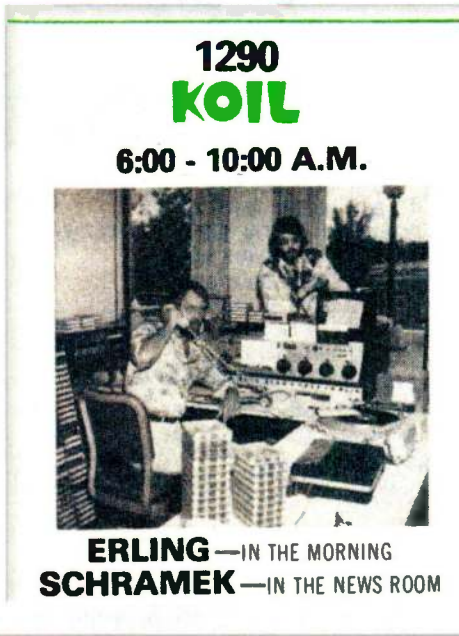
Pulling the mic's cable, something fell with a clunk in another nearby ceiling vent. The on-air DJ Carl Mann went up to the second vent standing on a chair and to the gasps of the small group of staff that by this time had assembled from home, pulled out a small TV camera.



Tom Page (John Koepplin),
KOIL 1973

The next business day management was confronted. They admitted that it was 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. Management went on to explain 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 Meyer (Mike Gleason) immediately resigned and complained to the ACLU.



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 placeholder for Erling until the launch of live programming on automated KEFM 96.1 where he would do mornings.

*KOIL morning show, October 1975.
Note tape cartridges stacked in foreground and in rack on left.*

Not long after taking the FM morning show, Erling proved himself 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'Neill, WOW's morning personality, gained fame as the host of TV's *Shindig* in the 1960s and had been a popular 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 in earlier years, DJing at his Indianapolis and Portland stations.



Sam Holman, KOIL 1974

Holman had highly impressive credentials. He worked Top 40 in the late 1950s at KQV Pittsburgh under former Omahan Ralph Beaudin. He assisted in flipping WLS Chicago from *The Barn Dance Station* to Top 40 in 1960. He then did the same for WABC New York, both stations soon owning their massive markets.

Sam was outgoing, often smiling, and 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 involved with appealing his legal problems plus there was now 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 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 likely a better-paying offer.

But Jimmay'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.

By the newspaper account, 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. WOW Program Director Tom Barsanti remembers it differently. He says it was a call from Jimmy's wife Eve, telling him that Jimmy was not feeling well and that he would not be in for his morning show.

Barsanti recalls those calls were a problem that had been going on too long following Jimmy's late nights out. O'Neill was fired the next day. Barsanti says, "We did argue in the non-compete hearing that because he was derelict by not coming to work, the non-compete should be enforced, but we lost."



Jimmy O'Neill on air at KOIL 1975. The studio microphone is the RCA BK-5A. (Courtesy Larry R. Jansky).

KOIL won the judge's ruling and O'Neill started afternoons on 1290. But Holman's problems continued. The staff was set to unionize with AFTRA.

When AFTRA had secretly obtained enough interested personnel, it sprung the surprise on the station management, which by this time included O'Neill in a management position as program director.

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 was unanimous to join.



KOIL Top 50 logo mid-1970s.

Four air people were fired after the vote. 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 reinstated. 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 was taking root. KGOR 99.9 passed up KOIL to become third in the market, following KFAB 1110 and WOW 590. 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 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 immediate relatives working for the Internal Revenue Service, Carl Mann and Bob Dean, were questioned when FBI agents suddenly arrived at the station, presumably investigating whether there was some sort of collusion going on. That investigation went no further.

In the days leading up to the shutdown, competing applicants were already showing up and filing for the facilities. License denial meant Burden couldn't sell his stations after they were silenced with the licenses deleted. But the frequencies were still up for grabs for new stations.

An angered 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).

Some FCC Commissioners referred to the decision 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 Arthur's, 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 AM and FM transmitters, eyes glued on the clock, his hands on the remote-control switches for each transmitter, the AM and FM.



Gene Shaw on air in foreground with engineer Don Eliason at the transmitter remote control switches, eye on the clock, leading to KOIL and KEFM's midnight silencing (Courtesy: Larry R. Jansky).

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 Evening News*, 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 Vanderbilt News Archive which archived this report credits Morton Dean for the news package on KOIL's blackout, however, local WOWT reporter Walter Dean claims it was he who covered the event from the KOIL terrace and it was his packaged report the network ran. Dean was a reporter at Channel 6 who rose to associate news director before joining CBS News in Washington in 1985.)

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, and Blue Gene Shaw to KKXL Grand Forks, North Dakota. Only Jimmy O'Neill remained in the market, going to KRCB Council Bluffs and later trying his hand at his own business, opening an ad agency in Omaha.

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.

More tellingly, the entire investigation is spelled out in a Federal Communication Commission Report from February 1975, Dockets 19122 to 19125, that found virtually

nothing. Numerous investigations into Burden's Star Stations were all spelled out in the report covering corporate contributions, political ads, insurance fraud, monitoring of government witness phone calls, rigged contests, distortion of newscasts, and gifts to the C.E. Hooper rating service, all concluding with little or no substantiation. As detailed at the conclusion of this chapter, the report ended with "no firm foundation for any decisionally significant finding of fact."

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 seeking to lease 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 pre-1974 Beautiful Music format.

In typical KOIL fashion big-name personalities were brought back for the return. 1960s favorite Roger W. Morgan was hired for mornings, and Joe Light who was at Country KOOO at the time 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 Fries 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.

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.



KOIL and KEFM return to the air, December 17 ad (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

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. Bruce Vidal then took over mornings. Joe Light finally left the market moving to California, where he would do two stints at KIQQ in Los Angeles 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)

Former KOIL jock Jim Morgan, who by this time owned Digisound, a studio from where he ran his own lucrative voicework business, was hired for afternoons in 1978. The following year Morgan 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.

Roger W. Morgan, on KOIL in the Morgan, 6 to 10 AM, is back in town for good to Morganize 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 AM
The New 1290 on your AM dial
The natural place to be

KEFM 96 FM
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).

at



KOIL air staff with studio guest Wolfman Jack 1978.

Two notables to join KOIL in 1979 were Steve Lundy and Terry Mason, both from WOW 590.

Even though WOW had taken over the Top 40 crown and KOIL was in turmoil trending downward, Lundy admired Jimmy O'Neill and was still in awe of those historic KOIL call letters. So when O'Neill called offering an opportunity, Lundy went to the interview.

Lundy described KOIL's PD as Showbiz Jimmy, "the nicest, genuine guy." Jimmy told him, "Radio's not rocket science. We like to have fun. If we have fun, our listeners have fun."

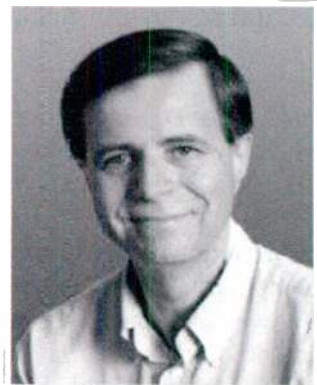
O'Neill then took Steve to meet Steve Brown, who greeted him with a California cool that nearly equaled Jimmy's, feet up on the desk, saying, "What's up, man?" Lundy accepted the job before leaving that day.

Lundy would go 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, the park's open-air venue that boasted a white orchestra shell. KOIL had once hosted a concert there in 1973 with Clint Holmes and headliner Rick Nelson. The weekly dances grew and had to be moved to the park's Royal Terrace Ballroom.

(Peony Park began as a restaurant and gas station in 1919 and over the years became a popular 35-acre park at 78th and Cass Streets. It included amusement rides, a 4.5-acre swimming pool with a 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 spot.)

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, KOIL PD 1978.

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 took turns hosting the event until 1981, even after KOIL softened its music mix. Later in the 1980s KQKQ 98.5 will take over Sprite Night after firmly winning teens in the ratings.

Meanwhile, the competition for ownership of 1290 and 96.1 dragged on. In November 1978 applicants for KOIL and KEFM were asked to be considered separately. KRCC 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 AM radio personality music and news while at the same time spawning the corporate-centric radio takeover of the 90s.

590 WOW- OVERTAKES AN EMBATTLED KOIL

WOW 590 decided early in the 1970s to go for a younger audience. It started 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.

It was a cautious move toward seeking a more contemporary audience. DJ Steve Lundy who joined WOW well after the move to Top 40 recalls, "WOW had a corporate feel. It was owned by Des Moines company Meredith Publishing (everyone got a free copy of Better Homes and Gardens each month), and was a union shop, creating an us-versus-them corporate culture feel."



dipping into contemporary music with a "safe" softer songs list. Billy Moore is the former KOIL DJ Bobby Noonan who will later head up KFMX in 1972.



"Omaha's First DJ" Sandy Jackson joins WOW for mornings 1970. (WOW Archives)

WOW ratcheted things up a couple of years later following a six-month attempt at stereo Top 40 on its sister FM, KFMX 92.1. It proved too soon for the FM takeover.

When KFMX failed, it was up to the AM side. 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 his success dwindled 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 into 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.



WOW's Eddie Hudson. (WOW Archives)

O'Neill's Omaha arrival was planned 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 Hudson (real name Edmund Berven) 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 their 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.

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 was 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.

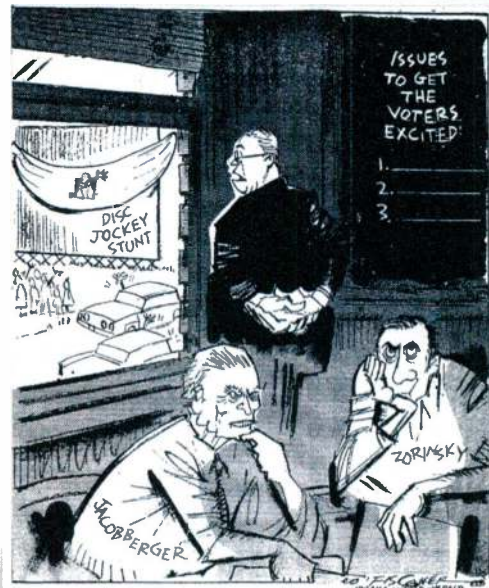
Barsanti recalls his favorite promotion:

"We hired the Righteous Brothers, at the peak of their popularity, to do a concert at Peony Park. Admission was only to people wearing a WOW shirt. We sold the shirts at (I think) 7-11 stores all over...we gave the proceeds to a charity...and we had a few thousand people at the concert all wearing identical WOW t-shirts. We even got some of the guys in the band to wear the t-shirts."

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



'Maybe If You Both Spent a Few Days in a Banana ...'

Political cartoon by World-Herald cartoonist Ed Fischer, April 22, 1973 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

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 onto tape cartridges as a matter of convenience and preservation. 45 rpm records would wear out or get scratched. In radio, the 45s 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 releasing it on its felt pad after the turntable starts its spin underneath. Called a “slip cue,” the record is manually spun to the song’s beginning while listening on a cue monitor, then backed up to the start of the first note. The needle will sometimes create damage on each backup leaving a permanent hiss sound, the cue burn, 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.” Capitol Records was also well-known for cheap vinyl, often being the first to warp.

Barsanti would slightly speed up the records when recording the song to the tape cartridge so that it would sound brighter against KOIL’s airplay. Slower, original recordings in comparison would

sound like they were dragging. Some vocalists were sped up nearly to the point of sounding like the chipmunks, but for most songs, it was a subconscious but positive difference to the listener. This practice also slightly shortened the songs, technically 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 “Life In The Fast Lane” when it arrived. Erik Foxx also guiltily remembers being ordered to edit Led Zeppelin’s classic “Stairway to Heaven” to three and a half minutes.

Erik Foxx (Alan Cain) was doing evenings at KOIL as Jimmy Fox until 1972 and had just returned in 1974 from gigs in Buffalo and Pittsburgh. He had kept his Jimmy Fox air name since leaving KOIL but found there already was a Jimmy at WOW, Jimmy O’Neill. He was given the choice of Marshall or Erik.



1970 - WOW AM/FM/TV studios, 35th and Farnam Streets, and AM 590 studio, inset. Built originally for television, the AM moved in from downtown studios in 1960, the FM started up a year later. The tower was the original for TV (1949-1966) and for WOW’s FM (1961-1973) until both main transmitters were moved to the Crown Point TV Antenna Farm. (1960’s WOW AM Studio photo courtesy WOW Archives.)

Erik Foxx (now spelled with two X's) was the replacement for 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 after GM Steve Shannon moved to KCMO Kansas City soon taking Barsanti with him. Foxx's new boss replacing Shannon was Jim Eddens.

John Erling's comment that got him fired was at the expense of Blue Cross insurance company. Erling joked that Blue Cross once failed to raise premiums because the execs were out of town golfing 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 was out but soon snatched up by KOIL.

Inroads against KOIL were being made. Consultants George Wilson of the Bartell Group and Jack McCoy were retained by WOW to help keep the momentum going. Wilson had been PD at KOIL in 1956.

WOW's ratings were eating away at KOIL in late 1975 when KOIL's National PD, Sam Holman, hired morning man Jimmy O'Neill away for afternoons on 1290. WOW fought the move, delaying O'Neill's debut on KOIL with a court 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. Newspaper accounts indicated WOW claimed KOIL induced Jimmy to break contractual terms by his calling Tom Barsanti late one night in an effort to be fired. WOW Program Director Tom Barsanti recalls it differently. "There was a late-night call but not from Jimmy. I got a wee hours of the morning call from Jimmy's wife Eve telling me that Jimmy was not feeling well and would not be in for his morning show.

"I took her 'not feeling well' to mean Jimmy had fallen off the wagon again (this was not the first time I received such a call) and I told her to tell Jimmy to be in my office later that day.

"When he finally showed, I told him I was not going to keep him. So, in effect, he was let go. We did argue in the non-compete hearing that because he was derelict by not coming to work, the non-compete should be enforced, but we lost." KOIL 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 become a long-time Omaha radio personality. Wingert's theater background was a natural for his on-air work.

Wingert was recommended to Barsanti by a colleague at WOW's sister station in Kansas City. Barsanti remembers, "Dave and I met a few days later and discussed the situation. I told Dave to think of it as an acting role. I would lay out the character and he would fill the role and bring he own talents to it." It was the start of a long relationship with Omaha radio for the East Coast thespian.



*The soon-to-be ubiquitous
Dave Wingert*

Listeners were unimpressed by 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 rating period before its blackout.

KFAB and WOW were numbers one and two in the market, together holding almost half the total listenership. KFAB's audience was in the upper demographic, WOW's, on the younger end.

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 DJs would drive 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 and passing out T-shirts, bumper stickers for cash, and concert tickets.

Foxx recalls handling 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 Foxx had designed in the form of the WOW logo. After the Beach Boys finished, it was set off. It fizzled and smoked. Foxx recalls sweating over the failure but found his management wasn't concerned and actually got a laugh from it.

Other big concert 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, the latter two moving 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, and Joni Hoffman. News Directors included Mark O'Brien and Chuck Wolf.

At about the time WOW took KOIL's crown in 1976, it packed up to move to bigger quarters. 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 and WOW FM tower. WOW radio moved out taking the old call letters with it while WOW TV Channel 6 selected WOVW for its new calls.

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 overlooking Interstate I-80.

The new studios were spacious. As Burden's battles at the KOIL Building were continuing, WOW was building a showcase operation. 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. The station's transmitter was fairly new, replacing the 1952 unit in 1975. Adding state-of-the-art stereo would be the next step.

AM stereo hadn't yet been fully approved by the FCC. WOW's stereo was an 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 the right and left channels. It was the only one of the five systems to use this method. 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 test ran from May to July 1979. The audio range was improved and the stereo separation was good. PD Erik Foxx recalls, "I had a unit in my office and my car. I liked it, but it was not as clear as FM."

More AM stereo would soon enter the Omaha market as the 1980s got underway, but it would fail to change AM radio.

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 the spring of 1978. On its heels was the automated rock at KGOR 99.9. Still, WOW 590 was second only to 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 a comfortable companion to its listeners with hourly news from NBC, a local news staff, and regular weather and temperature reports that always included Lincoln. The station was the one bastion of stability in the Omaha market.



KFAB signage above its second floor studios at 5010 Underwood, a longtime landmark in Omaha's Dundee neighborhood, 1970.

KFAB music was non-offensive, described by some as insipid, and could even be perceived as mere 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.

Few listeners were ever aware that they were accompanied overnight by a mere robot. KFAB was early with automation, using it on overnights for over a decade. *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. Even though automated, the all-night show was still part of the strong companionship that KFAB cultivated.

The automation system was SMC's Sono-Mag which 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 was set up 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 spew out of the sequencer creating major problems for the engineer on duty.

On weekends KFAB carried NBC's long-running *Monitor* with its iconic "Monitor Beacon" sounder. *Monitor* was launched in 1955 and remained on the air for twenty years.

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 2nd. 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 two westernmost towers buckled under the force of the winds collapsing to the ground shortly after 10 p.m. taking KFAB off the air.



KFAB transmitter building and one of its three towers in Sarpy County, 1970 (Courtesy: Ernest J. Wesolowski).

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 of three self-supporting structures, but getting KFAB's nighttime pattern back in place.

Lyell Bremser and Ken Headrick professionally steered KFAB into the 1970s. Bremser became program director for KFAB in 1950, KFAB co-owner in 1954, then rose to KFAB general manager in 1956.



KFAB control room studio at 5010 Underwood. (1979 photo courtesy Norm Gruenke)

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." His 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 was KFAB being the voice of the Nebraska Cornhuskers. Lyell 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. As Johnson delivered the scores on the *Scoreboard* show, there was always rousing college fight songs from just about every college campus playing in the background on big 14-inch reels of tape.

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 to 2000 and was the public address system voice for the College World Series.

Dave 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 well-worn exclamation during great plays) as the best football broadcasting "sixsome" of the year. Bremser's enthusiasm also included numerous cries of "Holy Toledo."

Well-known sportscaster Dave Webber joined KFAB as an announcer and also covered Big Red championship games in 1970, 1971, and 1972. Webber settled in Omaha after serving in the military assigned to Offutt Air Force Base in the mid-1960s. He was on KBON 1490 for a year. Following his KFAB stints he went into television sportscasting at KMTV 3 and later WOWT 6.



*Sportscaster Jack Payne
(Courtesy: Nebraska
Broadcasters Assoc).S*

Tom Johnson came from KBON where he had worked his first year in radio. Johnson started as Sports Director. He was KFAB's program director in 1969 during his second year there and stayed with KFAB for a total of 24 years.

On football game days Johnson was responsible for the *Scoreboard* segment that updated the status and scores of other games around the country. He would go down the list 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.

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. Among his more notable films was "Sideways," the film that nearly destroyed sales of Merlot wine,

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 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.

From 1974 to 1983 four stations were originating Husker coverage from Memorial Stadium in Lincoln: KFAB with Lyell 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.

It wasn't just Husker sports and its year-round halo effect helping KFAB dominate the 12+ ratings in Omaha. It begins with the morning show hosted by Don Cole, Walt Kavanaugh on news, and Kent Pavelka on sports.

The trio had great chemistry, regularly interacting, talking about events, or telling corny jokes. KFAB mornings in 1979 garnered 38 percent of the 12+ audience. The next highest was WOW with 16 percent. The only asterisk to these numbers is that much of KFAB's listenership came from the upper, older demographics.

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 five-thousand watts of 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 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 was 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 each ran a kilowatt and only one of them was licensed for full-time. KBON 1490 could operate around the clock, and until 1983 had to drop power from 1000 watts 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 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 including sports figures Bob Boozer of the St. Louis Cardinals and Bob Gibson of the Seattle Sonics, both of whom were hometown Omahans.

After nearly a year and a half of negotiations, Reconciliation closed the deal in 1971 paying \$375 thousand for KOZN 660 AM and a lease option to buy KOWH 94.1 FM. The company assumed ownership in January 1971. The KOZN calls on AM 660 were dropped 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. He ran classified ads in the trades seeking “cooker” talent and “No Rhymin’ Simons.”

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 studios from the Prom Town House to 3910 Harney Street in late 1971. News and Gospel music were added to the AM mix at about the same time. Both stations added the newly-formed Mutual Black Network in November 1972.

(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 the Mutual Black Network. A decade later, Sheridan Broadcasting merged with the rival National Black Network forming the present-day American Urban Radio Networks.)

While this was going on, a group of Black people calling themselves 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. The allegations were broad, charging employment discrimination and failure to program for the Black community.




*Rodney Wead, KOWH
manager and president of
Reconciliation Broadcasting.*

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.


SOUND OF SOUL

KOWH
February 7-10, 1972
HOT SOUL 45's









11 AM-3 PM

SOUL MEN
February 7-10, 1972
HOT SOUL 45's



6 AM-11 AM

<p>8 BOBBY WATKINS Music Director</p>  <p>3 PH-7 PM</p> <p>10 HERMAN BEARDSLEY Public Bar. Dir.</p>  <p>7 PH-NOON</p> <p>10 THE HANDELICHOBY</p>  <p>13 NOON-2-6</p>	<p>1. LET'S STAY TOGETHER.....AL GREEN.....FI</p> <p>2. CLEAN UP WOMAN.....BETTY WRIGHT.....ALEXON</p> <p>3. SUGAR DADDY.....JACKSON 5.....NOTON</p> <p>4. BROWNING IN A SEA OF LOVE.....JOE SIMON.....SPRING</p> <p>5. MAKE THE WOMAN.....CLAYTON KERRY/PIPS.....NOTON</p> <p>6. THERE'S THE WAY I FEEL.....BOBBY BRIDGES.....UNITED ARTISTS</p> <p>7. AIN'T UNDERSTANDING MELLAN.....JERRY BUTLER/LB.....MERCURY</p> <p>8. BUB OF SHUFFT.....BAR-KAYS.....VOLT</p> <p>9. FEEL JOY.....SUNSHINE.....NOTON</p> <p>10. AIN'T NOBODY HOME.....TINY TURNER.....ABC</p> <p>11. YOU WANT IT, YOU GOT IT.....DETROIT ETERNALS.....CBS</p> <p>12. FAMILY AFFAIR.....TINY TURNER.....EPIC</p> <p>13. ROCK STEADY.....JAY & THE FUNKILERS.....ATLANTIC</p> <p>14. YOU ARE EVERYTHING.....LITTLE JOHNNY TAYLOR.....RCA</p> <p>15. DO THE FUNKY PENGUIN.....STILLWELL.....AVCO</p> <p>16. DO THE FUNKY PENGUIN.....STILLWELL.....AVCO</p> <p>17. FINE & WATERS.....LARRY PUCKETT.....ATLANTIC</p> <p>18. O' YE O'BRA PACE UP.....REAGAN.....AVCO</p> <p>19. GIVE MONEY DON'T STOP NO MORE.....BOB BYRD.....VOLT</p> <p>20. BEYON DE HEAVEN.....EMOTIONS.....VOLT</p> <p>21. PUT MY HANDS ON.....RICKI ALLEN.....UNITED ARTISTS</p> <p>22. I'M A LITTLE BIT OF A MAN.....BOBBY BLISS.....RCA</p> <p>23. DO WHAT YOU SET OUT TO DO.....BOBBY BLISS.....RCA</p> <p>24. LOVE IS FUNNY THAT WAY.....JACKIE WILSON.....MERCURY</p> <p>25. REMIND ME FOR JODE.....JOSEPH TAYLOR.....STAX</p> <p>26. SEE WHAT YOU DONE HERE.....DELLA CARTWELL.....CAPTAIN</p> <p>27. MAN SHE TELL THAT.....WILHELM LAMALLE.....MERCURY</p> <p>28. SUPERSTAR.....TEMPATIONS.....CORBY</p> <p>29. OH ME ON MY.....ANITA FRANKLIN.....ATLANTIC</p> <p>30. IN AND OUT OF MY LIFE.....MARTHA & THE VANHELLAS.....CORBY</p>	<p>BUDDY KING Production Mgr.</p>  <p>6 AM-11 AM</p> <p>BO BEARS Gospel Dir.</p>  <p>6 AM-12 NOON</p> <p>BEVERLY BLAKLEY Traffic Director</p>  <p>3 PM-5 PM</p>
---	---	---

OTCHA/NOTERS PRAYER.....JIM TEE.....REAL

HAD IT ALL THE TIME.....TERRY DAVIS.....DEAR

ONE FAVORITE MELODY.....JIMMY HEFFIN.....SOUL

I'M SORRY WHO LOVES YOU.....ORIGINALS.....SOUL

AS BEING YOU.....LUTHER GRAYSON.....BOBO

BLACK MOSES.....PICK ALPH.....ENTERPRISES

BLACK MOSES.....TIMMY HAYES.....ENTERPRISES

KOWH February 1972 music survey with staff pictures.

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 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. Pre-sunrise authorization allowed a daytime-only station to sign on with a lower power as early as 6 a.m. while still dark, then going to full power at local sunrise. Generally, pre-sunrise power authorizations were under 100 watts.

Daytimers had been authorized to apply for pre-sunrise broadcasting in 1967. The KOWH delay was because the station was on a clear channel (660 is a clear channel 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 about 50 watts of 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, using excessive power, and 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 lucrative, particularly because 660 had a good signal range. KOWH finally settled into a niche that will last 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 what was then 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.

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 dollars worth of new equipment.

KCRO

AM-660

*Christian
radio*

3615 Dodge • Omaha, NE 68131
402-422-1600 • FAX 402-422-1602

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. (Leo Adam Biga, *My Inside Stories*).

1420 KOOO, KESY- ANATOMY 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.



KOOO promoted itself with country music concerts, the free tickets distributed as prizes and through clients.

K-Triple-O went unchallenged into the new decade and by 1972 gained a sister FM on 104.5. KOOO FM would air Country stereo around the clock.

KOOO AM applied to increase power in 1977 from 1000 watts to 2500 watts but was denied.

Well-known Omaha personality Joe Light landed at KOOO 1420 in 1974, a year after being fired from KOIL. He had spent the interim at KRCB 1560. Light credits KOOO management for standing by him

during alcohol treatment. 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 Omaha radio's Country music arena was shifting. In 1977 Great Empire Broadcasting, a chain of successful Country stations headquartered in Wichita, began shopping the Omaha market for outlets.



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.

K-Triple-O owners Webb Pierce and Mack Sanders were all too familiar with Great Empire's success stories. Pierce and Sanders had earlier operated a daytime Country station in Wichita quite successfully until Great Empire entered that market. They were aware that Great Empire would be formidable competition in Omaha as well.

KOOO promoted itself by putting on country music concerts, the free tickets distributed as prizes, and through clients.

Perhaps as a prelude in spring 1977 to make their property more attractive to prospective buyers, KOOO's manager announced the separation of the AM programming from that on FM would take place in mid-April. The AM would focus on Country for "purists," meaning playing the more traditional country songs, while the FM would stick with modern country.

Great Empire was seeking an AM and FM combo and likely looked at KOOO AM and FM, but the AM was only a daytimer. Great Empire instead settled on an Omaha AM

station licensed for full-time while continuing its quest for an FM. The AM station they bought was KLNG 1490.

It was a full-time station versus Pier-San Broadcasting's daytime station The writing was 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 sum for the pair of signals.

Centennial took over in January 1978, the deal closing at about the same time Great Empire Broadcasting closed its deal for KLNG 1490 and flipping that station to *KYNN Country Kin*.

KYNN's Country format was very traditional with twangy music and folksy announcers. Centennial met the new Country competition by broadening its country music mix to include more crossover adult contemporary artists and keep the softer country music.

General Manager Bruce Mayer in his announcement said, no more “hard-line down-home country, no stars of the past, no Roy Acuff” (OWH Dec 14, 1977). More news and sports were then added, and in January 1978 when CBS radio was dropped by KLNG, it was immediately picked up by KOOO.

Ratings immediately declined.

Centennial made plans to separate AM and FM programming choosing to move toward a News and Information format on the AM side, a format similar to that dropped earlier by KLNG 1490. It added United Press International’s audio and the fledgling Nebraska News Network to supplement its CBS and MBS affiliations. Also announced an eight-man news staff was to be hired though this went unfulfilled. (OWH Aug 13, 1978)

The split came on September first, 1978. In the 1978 Fall Arbitron ratings, the AM didn’t even register.

The stations were losing money, forcing the cancellation of plans that were being made to move to a downtown location. Marshall Hambric’s brother Ray Hambric moved in from Denver to take over operations as president and general manager in October .

Ray Hambric first focused on the FM that was failing in its format of Pop-Oriented Country. He jumped on an opportunity to take over the Beautiful Music format just dropped by KEFM and KEZO. Those two stations had decent ratings but bailed from the Beautiful Music format within days of each other saying soft music formats were hard to sell and dying.

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 just weeks after its disappearance from the market, now on KOOO FM 104.5. Calling it “Easy Listening,” the calls were later changed to KESY for “Easy.”

KOOO 1420 AM’s News and Information format that had begun just weeks earlier went untouched, but only for a few short months. On November 21, 1978, the AM dropped the All News format and began simulcasting its FM. Only the CBS affiliation was retained for the AM. The KOOO 1420 calls were changed a few months after that in February 1979 to KESY 1420 matching 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 the AM and FM simulcast as the year progressed. Jim Morgan took over mornings on KESY 1420 AM in August following his 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 decade for Omaha's station on 1490. Entering the 1970s with music, the format was changed to News/Talk, a most daring move in the face of powerhouse KFAB's entrenched news image. The only 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 and management.

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 were being cautiously explored elsewhere in the country—News/Talk.



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 station. 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." Call-in shows indeed were still a new, unrefined element in radio formatting. Such shows existed as far back as the early 1960s but often were confined to weekend feature blocks. KBON staffer Walter Dean describes an evening host who at the time "...did a talk show every night in which he put listeners who phoned in on the air. It was pretty tame and as I recall not terribly popular, and dominated, it seemed, by the 'regulars.'" Besides evenings and overnights, the non-descript music took over the weekend schedule 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.

Tomorrow 2:05 p.m.

FRANK SCOTT
Reports



LIVE from ISRAEL

on
KLNG
Newsradio
1490
Call him on 344-4404

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 reports from prominent, informed guests.

TUESDAY, THURSDAY, and NEXT MONDAY

Sponsored by
AAA Carmaker Motor Club Coca Cola
1-800 Van & Storage Roberts Dairy

KLNG 1972 (Courtesy:
Omaha World-Herald)

The on-air lineup by this time was made up of experienced 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 proclaimed itself as “The Un-Music Station. (It’s Not For Everyone.)” It further underscored its format with the liner, “Nobody Out-talks KLNG.”

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 then staying with the Denver station when it later switched to talk radio 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

KMEO/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. 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 Whelan at 6 a.m. until Lyle DeMoss opened the phone lines at 8:30 a.m. *Omaha World-Herald* columnist Peter Citron was given an afternoon three-hour block on Sundays. 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 at WOW-TV in the 1950s. He participated in local theater, winning the Fonda/McGuire Award at the Omaha Playhouse in 1960.

**NOBODY
OUT TALKS
KLNG**



LYLE DEMOS
5:30-6:00 AM, 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 'til we drop.



MIKE HARRIS
11:30-1:00 PM, Mon-Fri

starting October 7 to honor
St. Prax's School of Individual
Institutions. Tune KLNG . . .
1490 on your radio dial.



MICHAEL METZ
6:30-7:00 AM, Mon-Fri

The information will be talk-
ing it up for Prax's School
and you can help. You can
put your money where our
mouth is.



PETER CITRON
World-Herald column-
ist weekdays, 1-3 p.m.

Help Prax's School by tuning
your donations to the talking
trucker. Tune 1490 now and
hear all the details. Nobody
outtalks KLNG!

**TUNE
KLNG
1490**
FOR DETAILS
**NOBODY . . . OUT TALKS
KLNG**
NEWSRADIO . . . 1490

Phone
344-4484

*KLNG Lineup 1973
Included is popular Omaha
World-Herald columnist Peter
Citron. (Courtesy: Omaha World-
Herald)*

DeMoss reinvented himself as a foodie with shows centering around barbeque and cooking. He later published cookbooks with recipes collected from the 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 stayed the course.

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 a "10 million dollar gamble," the network start-up made its debut on June 18.

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.

Operations Manager Frank Scott said that the station will program locally during the day about 30 minutes of each hour. That will drop to 20 minutes at night with 40 minutes of network each hour.

Scott said the news blocks were the station's strongest suit. "That's where our advertisers always wanted to be placed, and while the station has been making money, it's never been a big winner, always a marginal operation."

He noted NBC's new NIS service now makes it possible for the station to go all-news. KLNG also

would continue carrying sports such as Nebraska football and Creighton basketball (OWH June 11, 1975).

KLNG went all-out to be Omaha's news station. Studios and offices were moved from downtown's Aquila Court Building to the second floor at 3615 Dodge Street. The newsroom was expanded to add reporters with individual cubicles that were designed so that they could call out, record phone interviews, and edit their stories using 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. The station lost 40 percent of its audience following the switch to all news. KFAB still dominated with a 27 share.



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 their own network.

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 until the final day, May 29, 1977.

The day 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 about country music coming to 1490.

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 the last day of NIS operations.



KYNN 1490 contest November 1978.

1490 flipped to a Country format 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 remainder of the schedule until February 1980 when it went live around the clock.

Competitors KOOO 1420 AM and KOOO 104.5 FM shifted to airing a Country/Adult Contemporary hybrid format. This resulted in a KOOO FM stumble 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. Johnny Carson's old WOW sidekick from the early 1950s, Percy Ziegler, was the chief engineer, working out his pre-retirement years.

Sales Manager Ken Fearnow was brought in from KTFX Tulsa and 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 couldn'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 surprised 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 presentation was traditional Country to the max. 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 the top-of-hour newscast with a "Song of Inspiration" hymn.

With the new owners, KLNG Manager Frank Scott was out but he continued his colorful career in Washington DC. In 1976 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 in keeping its programming separate from the Traditional Country on the AM with a brand of Modern Country.

A new venue for KYNN AM and FM followed the FM purchase. The stations landed in a former mortuary at 615 North 90th Street near 90th and Dodge Streets, just a block north of the building that housed the showcase studios of KOIL.

KOWH 660 which was spun off in the deal with Great Empire's purchase of its sister FM, was then moved from the Prom Town House into KYNN's old studios at 3615 Dodge Street.

Great Empire finally got its AM and FM in Omaha. But the owners weren't content with the AM signal, a mere 1000 watts on 1490. The owners were shopping for a stronger outlet for KYNN AM. 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 for KRCB 1560 began with a restless searching for a viable format, going through various ideas and call changes. The station also became a stopover for ex-KOIL jocks seeking a refuge for various reasons between jobs.

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 Kanessville Boulevard on the west side of Council Bluffs.

KRCB Golden Radio had been an adult standards station for years, a mix of 1920s to 1960s music. Then came the changes.

They 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 mix of contemporary oldies and rock music with "Boss Jocks." The music focused on a Top 20 mixed with oldies from the past five to ten years. News was provided by long-time station personality and newsman Walt Gibbs along with the newly-added ABC Contemporary Network.

Gibbs 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 Gibbs' skill: "If we were there watching he'd choose to hit the network with a cold-ending song... 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 in his wheeled chair to the back of the room... 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."

KRCB's program director was Buddy Scott. Don Burden in a rare recognition of new competition hired Scott away shortly afterward making him KOIL's PD.



1560's transmitter site, 1970. (Courtesy Ernest J. Wesolowski).



KRCB Mynster Street office and studio, 1970. (Courtesy Ernest J. Wesolowski).

When new sister FM KRCB 98.5 signed on in May 1969, programming was simulcast on both stations.



1970 KRCB AM / FM weekly music guide with psychedelic artwork.

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. Its president, Dick Freeman, formerly managed a television station in Southfield, Michigan. The final FCC approval came on 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 after the hallway was closed off and a new mono five-channel McMartin board was installed along with a couple of turntables. A new ITC triple stack cartridge machine was then 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 of those tunes going back as far as 1952. The FM flipped to Progressive Rock.

The KRCB 1560 personality lineup was Tommy Lee Anthony mornings, former KOIL personality Joe Light from 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."

ATTENTION POLKA LOVERS

POLKA MUSIC EVERY SUNDAY

For Omaha and 70 mile radius
8 AM til noon. Big Joe Polka Show
KRCB 98.5 FM
This is FM Radio
Check your dial

All Nebraska and Midwest
3:05 PM til 5 PM
Polka Music Sunday
880 on AM dial
from 50,000 Watt Lexington KRUN

Columbus Area-
Sunday 9 AM til 2 PM 1510 on AM
Dial K-TTT

Ord Area Sunday 10 AM til 1:30 PM 1060 on AM Dial KNLV

Polka Joe on FM and on AM around the state. The Lexington station typo was intended to be KRVN. August 1973 (Courtesy: Omaha World-Herald).

However, the banishment and the MOR format were 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 nor Joe showed up... I had the longest shift of my career, sign on until sign off."

Upon the end of the MOR format, KRCB 1560 returned to simulcasting progressive rock from its sister FM, the 1560 presentation of course in AM mono. Terry Mason landed at WOW 590 part-time while Joe Light moved to KOOO 1420.

In spring 1974, Omaha attorney John Mitchell, who had an interest though not yet full ownership in the operation, brought in John Howard to manage KRCB from his Kearney (pronounced CAR-nee) station, KGFW. Staffer Dick Warner says Howard brought some key personnel with him including PD Paxton West and newsman Chuck Wolfe.

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 they have been doing in Kearney. Those of us already here 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."

John Howard upon his arrival announced plans that focused on giving Council Bluffs its own identity with its own AM station. In preparation, while the simulcast of the FM prog rock continued, a revamping of the AM 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 were left untouched. Albums were tracked, announcers spoke in soft tones, the music reverently played, carefully introduced with no talk-over.

Richard 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 1973 Statler Brothers song “The Strand,” was often played commemorating the station’s roots in the Council Bluffs Strand Theater, the site of the station’s first studio in 1947. (The Strand was gutted by a fire 1974 and subsequently 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 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 ‘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 the AM and FM 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. Warner observes, that even 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!”



New technology milestone: transmitters become all solid-state. 1976 Harris MW-1 one-thousand-watt transmitter installed by KRCB.

In about 1976 a new Harris MW-1 transmitter, likely the first solid-state transmitter in the Omaha-Council Bluffs market, was installed (per Clete Baker, one of the Kearney Boys). Non-tube transmitters were first introduced to broadcasters by Nautel just two years earlier. This Harris model,

new this year, replaced the RCA AM transmitter that had been in operation since the fire in 1967.

Despite the new equipment, KRCB 1560 continued to languish. Towards the silencing of KOIL in 1976, the station launched a Top 40 format in hopes of grabbing some of that station's abandoned audience. Former KOIL DJ Kevin Kassera programmed the station as *The Winner*.

DJs and contests were designed to attract some of the stranded KOIL audience but were toned down in the direction of automated Top 40 KGOR's low-key approach. There were no jingles and fewer commercials, likely due to lack of capital and ratings as much as intent, 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, several ex-KOIL personalities came aboard due to KOIL's ongoing problems. "Shotgun" Tom Page had joined after being fired following the KOIL union vote. Former KOIL newsman Chuck Shramek went to KRCB after refusing to run Burden's "carpetbaggers" editorial at the start of each newscast just before KOIL's forced blackout. Jimmy O'Neill had stayed with KOIL to its last day before crossing the river to KRCB, soon replacing Kassera as PD.

Despite the new transmitter installed at around this time, the station remained with a poor audio chain, no nighttime operation, competition from full-time Top 40 WOW 590, and a signal that sounded distant to West Omaha listeners. *The Winner* was soon openly ridiculed as *The Weiner*.



1978 KXQV logo for short-lived "KQ-15." (Courtesy Richard Warner)

A new identity was briefly tried starting October 23, 1978, when the calls were switched to KQXV, 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-Fifteen 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 switched to KYNN in 1977. KLNG 1560 would be Omaha's next News/Talk station.

GM Joe Reynolds announced plans for KLNG to become "Total Information Radio." He locked in the ABC

Information network and hoped for CBS, though the latter was on KESY and there to stay, as it turned out.

It would be the second attempt at News/Talk radio in Omaha following the format's failure on 1490. 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 talk show personalities Mike Harris and Joe Martin. Harris hosted phone talk from 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 was 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 the view would be worthless; only a police scanner can provide citywide information. Later, the station relied on Yellow Cab drivers who radioed reports to “Andy the Dispatcher” (*OWH* July 9, 1979).

The News/Talk format gained no traction for 1560. Ratings remained a fraction of a one share. Barry Taft became the new AM/FM PD in September 1979 and Paxton West was moved to operations manager.

In December, afternoon jazz music was suddenly added 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 AS 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 specific demographics and tastes. Making it even more confusing was the emergence of popular album cuts, something that accelerated in the mid-1960s by the Beatles broadening music attention 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 stations KFAB and KOIL for two decades was so entrenched that FM listenership in Omaha was behind the national curve.

In 1979 Omaha's AM listenership was at 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, erosion in AM's dominance could still be seen.

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 accepted alongside Elvis and Doo Wop tunes. By 1967 when a Frank Sinatra song was sharing a playlist with Jefferson Airplane, the difference started to appear like “somebody else's music” was infiltrating personal tastes. The differences deepened with the appearance of Bubblegum music in the late 1960s appealing downward to the pre-teens.

Seen in retrospect, Top 40 was a female-oriented format. Many songs were picked to appeal to the 18 to 34-year-old women who were viewed by advertisers and ad agencies as the administrators 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 from Top 40 and moving toward Rock through album purchases and Progressive Rock stations where available.

Other listeners who were becoming disenfranchised with pop/rock or were simply outgrowing Top 40 drifted towards Country music, especially women, helping KOOO 1420, and later keeping KYNN 1490 viable.

Popular music was becoming a form of self-expression. 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. The 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 niche 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 the rock and teeny-bop tunes weeded out.

In Omaha, FM penetration may have been behind the national curve, but five FMs were already on the air with three more to arrive in the 70s decade.

91.5 KIOS- OMAHA'S FIRST NON-COMM EDUCATIONAL FM

Though religious-formatted KGBI 100.7 was Omaha's first non-commercial station, it operated on the commercial part of the FM band. Omaha's first on the non-commercial portion of the FM band, 88 to 92 MHz, was KIOS 91.5, firing up just weeks before the start of the 1970s.

The Omaha School District was initially a contender for the 104.5 availability in Omaha even though it was a commercial channel. 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 where the non-comms reside that the signals would create interference with each other.

WOW TV's audio at 87.7 could be heard on many car receivers that could tune that low. The audio portion of TV was found by numerous commuters to be interesting listening, particularly for newscasts while on the road. WOW-TV would even validate this in some of its promotions.

After holding up the application for about a year, the school board was finally persuaded by the FCC to seek a 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 a co-founder and later the manager of KIOS. He, along with OPS Assistant Superintendent Craig Fullerton, envisioned a station devoted to educational broadcasting for students and the public welfare of Omaha, "...a mission born out of a shared love for education and the medium of radio itself." The board also made reassurances that the station would be used for educational purposes and not for the promotion of school district policies and issues.

Price's 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 210-foot tower at Central High School in downtown Omaha. A studio was fashioned in the basement. The format was described as cultural, airing 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. weekdays, silent on Saturdays, with a light schedule on Sundays. Educational programming was featured with concert hall music during the evenings.

Almost immediately KIOS battled a complaint by WOW TV 6 that the FM's signal was interfering with TV reception in the downtown area where the towers for both stations were located. Channel 6 wanted KIOS to reduce power or move the transmitter site. The FCC dismissed the complaint in October, though a KIOS 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 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 Benson 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. Its 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 and KIOS studios was kept by Omaha Public Schools, turning the building into headquarters for the OPS.

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. Frank Bramhall left for KVNO in August 1979 and expanded his morning show where it ran for another twelve years.

Jazz fan Bill Watts joined KIOS around 1975 hosting 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* on 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 ran her program for another eight years.

Landlines for network distribution were beginning a fast fade to satellites in the late 1970s. NPR was the first national network to replace phone lines with satellite delivery in 1978. KIOS installed the first satellite earth dish in the state of Nebraska that year.

92.3 WOW FM, KFMX, KEZO- A FAILED FM 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 standing in the back parking lot. Though the tower remained as a backup for Channel 6 after its main antenna moved to the North Omaha Antenna Farm, WOW FM's antenna remained active atop the midtown tower since signing on in 1961, still running at 40 thousand watts.

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 a younger listenership 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.

The new call letters were KFMX, a set of calls dating back to 1947 that was briefly used by the *Nonpareil'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” (*OWH* Dec 1, 1971), the format was clearly a full head-on assault on KOIL 1290 .

KFMX launched on December 13, 1971. The elements were all there- All hit music, cuts from best-selling albums, and oldies from recent years called “Blockbuster Goldens.” Newscasts were abbreviated, the longer ones buried in the overnight hours.



WOW personality and later KFMX PD Billy Moore. (WOW Archives)

PD Billy Moore was former KOIL DJ Bobby Noonan, quite familiar with how to compete against his old station. His assembled air staff each had a minimum of 3.5 years of experience, the oldest age on staff being 27 years. Spots were limited to eight minutes per hour, countering KOIL’s spot load of 18 minutes per hour. The biggest advantage however was that FM had superior fidelity and broadcast the music in stereo.

KFMX promoted itself as *Stereorock 92.1* and issued a weekly Top 40 Hit List that along with the singles 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 prominently displayed.

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 upper management said Gast’s departure was unrelated to the lawsuit

Steve Shannon was brought in as the new GM. (*OWH* April 4, 1972). Rod Odson took 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 liked to take on-air jabs at its AM rival on 1290. Off air, new hires at KOIL were sent a sympathy card and black funeral 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. General Manager Steve Shannon pulled the plug on

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	Tom Rundgren
8)	5)	JUMP INTO THE FIRE	Nitson
7)	6)	BACK OFF BOOGALOO	Ringo Starr
11)	7)	LITTLE BITTY PRETTY ONE	Jackson Five
2)	8)	TUMBLING DICE	The Rolling Stones
5)	9)	I GOTCHA	Joe Tex
10)	10)	A HORSE WITH NO NAME	America
12)	11)	MISTER CAN'T YOU SEE	Buffy St. Marie
13)	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	Nell Diamond
14)	16)	ME & JULIO DOWN BY THE SCHOOLYARD	
20)	17)	I'LL TAKE YOU THERE	Paul Simon
18)	18)	BABY BLUE	Staple Singers
22)	19)	DIARY	Badfinger
13)	20)	SILVACITO	Bread
23)	21)	SOMEDAY NEVER COMES	Melo
16)	22)	GLORY BOUND	Credence Clearwater Revival
19)	23)	LEGEND IN YOUR OWN TIME	Greasroots
27)	24)	IT'S GOING TO TAKE SOME TIME	Carly Simon
28)	25)	HOW DO YOU DO?	Mouth & Mac Neil
34)	26)	PUPPY LOVE	Donny Osmond
31)	27)	POWDER BLUE MERCEDES QUEEN	Carpeniers
25)	28)	DR. MY EYES	Raiders
33)	29)	TAXIE	Jackson Browne
38)	30)	ROCKET MAN	Eton John
32)	31)	I NEED YOU	Harry Chapin
37)	32)	YOU ARE THE ONE	America
36)	33)	WE'LL MAKE IT, I KNOW WE WILL	Sugar Bears
34)	34)	TROGLDYTE	Jimmy Carter Bunch
39)	35)	WALKIN' IN THE RAIN	Love Unlimited
40)	36)	HELP ME MAKE IT THRU THE NIGHT	
*)	37)	HOW CAN I BE SURE	David Cassidy
38)	38)	NICE TO BE WITH YOU	The Gallery
30)	39)	A COWBOY'S WORK IS NEVER DONE	
26)	40)	THE FIRST TIME EVER I SAW YOUR FACE	Bonny & Cher
		PICK OF THE WEEK	Roberta Flack
		ISN'T LIFE STRANGE	The Moody Blues

KFMX 92.3 Stereorock music survey, May 1972.

KFMX when deficits were nearing \$100 thousand. It was too soon for live Top 40 FM in Omaha.

The KFMX DJs bid a bitter farewell on June 25th, 1972. On its last night as KFMX, the jocks played air checks, samples of famous Top 40 stations across the country. The air checks were from a promotional LP that had been distributed to program directors nationally by a record company. Playing the air checks, the jocks made an issue of how they were examples of “the way good Top 40 radio stations should sound.” Carefully omitted was the KOIL air check on the disc.

Monday morning June 26th, after three overnights of installing automation equipment, 92.3 launched Schulke's Beautiful Music format. New call letters were to follow, receiving the FCC OK in October. Thus was born KEZO, the EZ for “Easy” listening and the O for Omaha.

GM 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 an automated 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 move to a full 100 thousand watts would come in 1977. The old transmitter at the 3501 Farnam studios using the midtown tower was kept as an auxiliary.

KEZO’s new Beautiful Music format competed directly with KOIL FM 96.1 which had been airing the format since 1967. Beautiful Music had a loyal core audience that listened for long periods, translating into good TSL (Time Spent Listening) ratings.

In August 1974, KEZO suddenly was the lone Beautiful Music station in Omaha for two years when KOIL FM dropped its automated “Muzak-like” programming going to a more high-profile light adult contemporary format with live announcers, features, and new call letters, KEFM.

The following year 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.

The new home for KEZO 92.3 and WOW 590 were showcase studios in West Omaha, in the Empire Building at 11128 John Galt Boulevard. The AM kept the legendary WOW calls while WOW TV changed calls to WOWT.

Beautiful Music competition returned in late 1976. KEFM 96.1 which had flipped to a live adult-contemporary format in 1974 was forced off the air by the FCC in September. When it returned to the air in December, its original automated Beautiful music was back in place.

By this time the Beautiful Music format was doing a fade. It was a difficult format to sell. 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 found that despite the good ratings, their spots were not getting results.

With little warning to the audiences, both KEZO and KEFM suddenly dropped Beautiful Music in September 1978. It happened within days of each other (*OWH* Oct 23), with KFFM 96.1 going country and KEZO 92.3 going rock.

KEZO had decent ratings as a Beautiful Music station, a ten share, but GM Jim Eddens said they were responding to research indicating FM on both coasts are showing more success with rock.

KEZO 92.3 launched its new Rock format on September 6 keeping the KEZO calls in place, repositioning 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, the format going out with a whimper.

Bob Linden took over as *Z-92's* first PD, 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 out as a strong #4 in the Spring 1979 ratings but then settled in at #8 one year later. Despite this rocky start, the *Z-92* rock format would last, and in the coming decade would even briefly beat out KFAB at the top of Omaha's ratings.

94.1 KOWH FM, KYNN FM- FROM BLACK TO REDNECK

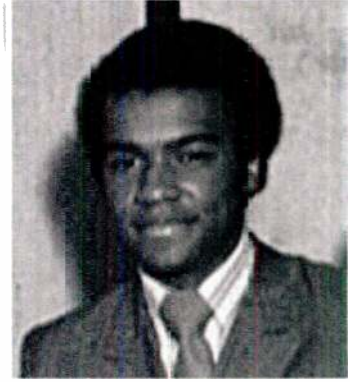
94.1 already held some Omaha FM firsts at the beginning of the decade. It was the first FM to light up the dial during the 1959 FM Renaissance and the first to go stereo in 1961. In the late 1960s, it became the first Omaha FM to air Country, and later, Progressive Rock. The Country was a simulcast of 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, KOWH FM became the first to air a Soul Music format on FM. On January first, 1970, the station dropped its simulcast of the AM's Country format switching 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, from 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 Program Director Buddy King (*OWH* Feb 8, 1970).



*KOWH Program Director
Buddy King*

The format change was likely in anticipation of the FM and AM stations' sale to an African-American group, Reconciliation Broadcasting. Negotiations had been ongoing 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 but 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. Wead was executive director the United Methodist Community Center Wesley House which provided strong support for the purchase.



*Omaha's Cathy Hughes in later years
at WOL, Washington, D.C.*

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 used her position as a launching pad for a very successful career. She invested \$10,000 in the radio station from an inheritance. "I had this money after my

father passed away,” she recalled. “The radio station owners at the time were not looking for investors, but I volunteered the investment and figured having a stake in the company would afford me more opportunities to learn the radio business and have responsibility for its success. Thankfully they were kind enough to pay back my entire investment in full when I left.” (Interview, *Radio World*, March 12, 2019).

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 radio operation targeting African-American and urban listeners, and the largest African-American-owned broadcasting company in the US.

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, owners of station KBYE in Oklahoma City, that they were to buy the stations. The brothers later dismissed the suit and the Reconciliation deal finally closed.

Ownership of KOWH AM 660 and FM 94.1 was assumed in January 1971 from Starr Broadcasting, Owned primarily by William Buckley who bought the stations from Todd Storz in 1957. The price for the two stations was \$375 thousand.

Rodney Wead became GM for KOZN 660 and KOWH FM. Wead announced KOZN AM 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 would 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 FM launched its new format with 24 hours of the Supreme’s “Stoned Love” playing repeatedly.

Program Director Jack Harris wanted a bigger audience than the 100 thousand Black population 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.

KOWH AM and FM moved from the Prom Town House 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 management difficulties unrelated to Reconciliation that would haunt local Black broadcasters into the next decade.

Both KOWH AM and FM joined the newly-formed Mutual Black Network in November 1972. The FM 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 programming to them.

But, the stations struggled. During the 1970s, ratings for KOWH FM fluctuated in the one- share range, occasionally reaching a three. The Ford Foundation underwrote the station for several years, and the ownership team chipped in money to keep the station afloat (North Omaha Radio History.com 2016).

AM 1490		KYN 94		FM 94	
TOP 40 FOR WEEK OF Sept. 14th - Sept. 20th					
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.	Starting 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	Suzie 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 Calo	MCA	
39.	NEW	In Memory Of A Memory	Johnny Paycheck	Epic	

KYNN 94.1 and 1490 music survey, September 1979.

In his 1994 book *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." He further observed, "Almost none of the established businesses would buy from us and they searched hard for reasons not to."

It was suggested by Wesley House economic developer Wilbur Phillips that with some of the music played, "they (whites) think you're selling the revolution." (Omaha Star Jan 13 1972).

Rodney Wead stayed with the stations until 1974, leaving for a community development position in Chicago. Toward the end of the decade, Reconciliation showed signs of wanting to cash out. Board Chairman Bob Gibson said that in its seven years, KOWH lost 265-thousand dollars and was dealing with a three-year-old lawsuit for another 10-thousand dollars. He said the AM became profitable after switching to a religious format, but cash went out as soon as it came in. The frustrated Gibson also noted how much he personally gave the station with no payback. (OWH Oct 27, 1978 interview)

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 to buy the station 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 badly wanted 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 immediately 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.

Bob Gibson of Reconciliation Broadcasting was pleased with the negotiations. He noted that supporters from the startup years will get their investments back about threefold and he won't be stuck with \$100,00 in debts (*OWH* Oct 27 1978).

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, a simulcast of its AM on 1490 until Great Empire could find a better venue.

A medium-size single-story building with basement at 615 North 90th Street that once served as a mortuary was found. The new KYNN AM and FM studios and offices would be complete in new quarters 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 even 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 early lock on Classical and Instrumental Pop music such as Montovani and the Boston Pops. FM was a natural in developing the format which in turn helped FM gain credibility.

KOIL FM 96.1 was already an early believer in the Beautiful Music format. Don Burden was the first in Omaha 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 132-foot tower on top of the 11-story Rorick Apartments on the south edge of downtown. The building was also conveniently 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 on tape plus the automation system on which to play it. Equipment racks were moved in to hold the large open-reel tape machines for the music and the tape cartridge carousels for the spots and liners. Syndicators sent the music to stations on large 14-inch reels of tape. The music was a soft mix of ballads, strings, and show tunes, carefully selected for the 30-plus demographic.

Beautiful Music became a profitable format because of its low cost of operation and high TSL (Time Spent Listening). Automation was designed for walk-away operation, often overseen by a multi-tasking DJ or even someone in the office pool. The format commanded high listener shares from a loyal audience that seldom changed the dial.

Beautiful music was regarded by many as the first format to seriously develop specifically for FM. In doing so, it furthered listener interest in the FM band. More importantly, it became a 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.

Competition 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 split among two stations in Omaha, the Beautiful Music format was showing cracks in its foundation. Background music was a difficult sell after the sponsors learned their messages were lost in the background. Burden wanted to bring the format more into the foreground without losing its adult, easy-going appeal.

An adjustment came in April 1974 with a much-ballyhooed call letters change. In typical Burden fashion, the announcement was made in a festive and pricey style.

Burden tossed a huge \$40,000 client dinner party at the downtown Hilton Hotel Ballroom, 16th and Dodge Streets. It was a who's who of local business owners, managers, and ad agencies that attended. 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.



KEFM 96.1 letterhead 1973.

After dinner 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

perhaps a move toward call letter confusion as it closely resembled the competition, Beautiful Music KEZO 92.3.

But, KEZO wasn't really the target. Just a few months later on August 1st, a live, adult mix of light pop music was launched on KEFM. The new target turned out to be KFAB 1110. The format was designed to lure some of that station's massive audience to FM with a similar music mix along with increased servicing like 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's attributes-to-be and played music samples. The music was a mix of crossovers from Pop and Country charts.

KEFM's new format had live announcers, ABC news, traffic reports, and fewer commercials. Music was along the lines of Percy Faith, Roger Williams, and Frank Sinatra.

The press release confirmed 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 weeks earlier 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 an enjoyable, easy-going, and empathetic personality and a natural for morning drive. He was soon moved to the AM to prop up morning ratings on KOIL 1290.

By 1976 Steve Brown was imaging KEFM's format as *CB96*, likely to capitalize on the Citizens Band (CB) craze that he helped launch with the nation's initial airplay of C.W. McCall's hit, "Convoy" on KOIL a few months earlier.

It was a format adjustment away from soft adult background music toward Pop Country songs, focusing on tunes that crossed over on both of those charts. The format was tried earlier in Indianapolis on Star Station's WIFE FM getting an "older, but fairly broad demographic audience." Manager Steve Shepard was reluctant to call it Country, saying it was "difficult to put a label on it....Maybe it should be All-American" (*OWH* May 21, 1976).

The *CB96* music tapes were produced in-house. *CB96* operated out of the old FM room using the same automation system when it was Beautiful Music but with some live-assist equipment moved in--a mixer, a microphone, and a couple of cart machines for spots.

It made running a smooth, live operation quite difficult. One of the operators, Larry Jansky, recalls, "I remember it wasn't easy to segue the music on the automation system and there was always dead air when switching from one reel to another. Stretching and ad-libbing the intros was a constant... In short, the system wasn't the best of setups to do a

show.” Jansky adds, “There was some extra music on carts to use in case the automation machine went south for any unforeseen reason.”

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, KEFM 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 flipped to Country on Sept 1, and KEZO went to 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 took over the Beautiful Music format in less than two weeks followed by a change of calls to KESY, for “Easy.”



1978 KEFM Country logo.

Jim Morgan, who spent most of his Omaha radio career at KOIL, had a country radio 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, its new FM on 94.1, and KEFM 96.1. The Great Empire versions were personality-driven, the AM side sticking with traditional country music. 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 two-to-one margin during the Fall 1979 ratings. In the 12+ overall category, KYNN AM had a 4 share to KEFM's 2.2. Additionally, KYNN's new FM on 94.1 simulcasting the AM added another 1.2 to Great Empire's victory.

KEFM 96.1 will try yet another music format as the 1980s begin.

98.5 KRCB FM, KQKQ- PROGRESSIVE ROCK FINDS A NICHE

The sister FM for KRCB 1560 signed on in May 1969 just before the new decade. KRCB FM 98.5 was a full 100 thousand watts with its antenna on top of the 175-foot AM tower

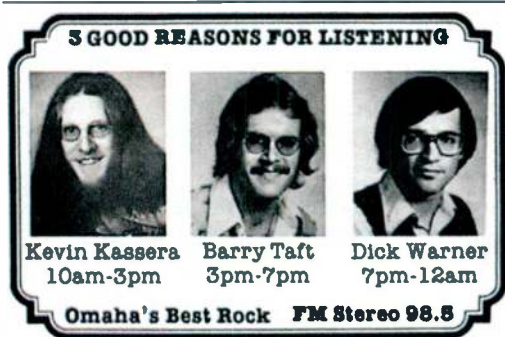
on the South Omaha Bridge Road in Iowa. Oddly, it was in mono; stereo wasn't added until 1973.

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.

Before the year ended, *Radio Free Omaha* KOWH FM dropped its Progressive Rock format and KRCB quickly picked it up, placing it in their evening schedule after its AM simulcast ended at sunset. KRCB FM then went to a 24-hour schedule keeping the rock running all night.

The station changed hands in 1972. Both the AM and FM were sold for \$415 thousand by owners J.J. Conroy and R. E. Russel to new owners in Detroit headed by Dick Freeman who had 32 percent ownership. Freeman became president and general manager upon FCC approval which arrived on 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 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 allowing Progressive Rock full-time.



1978 KQ Lineup

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, another reason for the new calls may have been because quadrasonic stereo was being marketed and the Q was for

Quad. Janet (Conry) Mohring was at the station at the time 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 were my good friend John Korbek'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."

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 KGFV Kearney and KFLI Mountain Home, Idaho.

Mitchell was also co-owner of Young & Mitchell Advertising Agency. He resigned from the agency a few months after taking ownership of the stations to avoid a conflict of interest, selling his stock to John Young.

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 were 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, KFAB FM management by 1974 took note of the youth movement of the 1970s and decided to cautiously dip a toe into the mainstream hits 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 and granted: 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. Management defined the station as Adult Stereo Rock--"No screaming DJs, no juvenile promotions, limited commercial interruptions."

KFAB/KGOR Manager Lyell Bremser explained to the staff that the programming was "aimed at the under-35s, those who grew up on rock but are tired of the way most Top 40s present it." He went on to say the market is out of balance. With well over 50 percent of the market under 35, he noted that out of 15 stations serving Omaha, "only three are attempting to serve listeners under the age of 35 primarily." Bremser said those three are two AMs and one FM. The FM is mainly progressive making for "a complete void in the FM spectrum." (*OWH* Oct 2, 1974).

At about 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 (May also owned 49 percent of KGOR and KFAB). KFAB's Lyell 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 standby for backup operation.

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 attract a young 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 behind 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 still playing Progressive Rock, both FM stations were indeed showing increased 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

Christian-formatted KGBI 100.7 went through a major upgrade in the early 1970s. Though operating as a non-commercial station, it resides in the commercial portion of the FM band. Grace Bible Institute was making plans to increase its value by going 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 tower itself at 831 Pine Street within the campus. The small tower would be repurposed as the microwave STL (studio to transmitter link).

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 southwest of Springfield and northwest of Louisville, the two towns about six miles apart. A 499-foot tower was erected and a new transmitter was installed in a small building near its base.

KGBI lit up from its new site on June 7, 1973. Leftover funds were used on remodeling the studios on the Grace Bible Institute campus.

KGBI 100.7, 1973



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*. A few hours of classical music were also scheduled.

The school continued to grow and expand. In 1976, the name was changed from Grace Bible Institute to Grace College of the Bible to reflect its full status as a four-year institution of higher learning.

KGBI supported itself with an annual on-air fundraiser labeled as a "Share-a-thon." Contributions always surpassed the financial goals 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 Omaha area 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's new FM became the metro's third non-comm in 1972, the other two being KIOS 92.1 and KGBI 100.7, the latter operating on the commercial portion of the band. The university sought the calls KUNO but found they were unavailable, licensed to a Navy ship. Instead, management settled for KVNO in July 1971. An April 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 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).

The tower existing on campus for KYNE TV channel 26 was not used. Instead, the



TOP 30 PLAY LIST

Vivaldi		Four Seasons
Beethoven		Moonlight Sonata
Mussorgsky:	Tomita	Pictures at an Exhibition
Pachelbel		Canon in D for Strings & Continuo
Hendeleoahn		Symphony #5 "Reformation"
Beethoven		Symphony #6
Smetana		The Moldau (The Fatherland)
Carl Orff		Carmina Burana
Smetana		The Bartered Bride
Tchaikovsky		Capriccio Italian
Bach		Tocatta and Fugue in D-Min
Beethoven		Symphony #5
Bernstein		Jeremiah Symphony
Stravinsky		The Rite of Spring
Strahms		Piano Concerto #3 in A fl
		Triple Concerto
Tchaikovsky		1812 Overture
Rachmanioff		Concerto #2
Ives		Celestial Country
Handel		Water Music
Copland		Rodeo (Suite for the Hall)
Grofe		Grand Canyon Suite
Chopin		Sonata # 3
Borodin		Polvietian Dances
Mendelssohn		BigJah
Prokofiev		Et. Kije Suite
Strahms		Violin Concerto in D Major
Debussy		Claire de Lune
Bach		Prelude and Fugue
Cffenback		Le Papillon
Handel		Variations & Fugue

1970s era KVNO Playlist.

transmitter operated from the KETV tower at the Crown Point TV antenna farm, running 2.75-thousand watts at 650 feet.

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.



KVNO music list from the Last Radio Show program, January 1978 (Courtesy: John Menzies).

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."

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." Menzies adds, "When KVNO dropped *The Last Radio Show* for an all-evening jazz format, they gave us *New World Music Magazine* on Sunday nights."

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



Frank Bramhall, KVNO studio. 1980 photo

KMEO 660, an 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, and jazz requests in the evening.

Bramhall brought along his morning show from KIOS, *Breakfast With Bramhall, Beethoven, and Bach*. His show was expanded from 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. KOOO was competently run by country music artist Mack Sanders and was firmly entrenched with the country listenership. The station held off a three-year attack from KOZN 660 *Country Cousin* in 1968. 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 non-commercial 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 music 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 that problem was corrected by station engineers.

KOOO AM 1420 and KOOO FM 104.5 simulcast programming until sundown when the evening announcer would shut down 1420 AM and continue programming on 104.5 FM.

The studios were combined at 102 North 48th Street where they resided since the early 1960s. The stations were run by James Treat, GM and President.

Toward the end of 1972, 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 moved across Dodge Street to 4807 Dodge in March 1973. Proud Country celebrated with two stage shows at the City Auditorium headlined by Roy Clark.

Proud Country KOOO continued to produce live music shows that would include top country entertainers. Exactly a year earlier the station sponsored two free concerts featuring Del Reeves, Jean Shepherd, Warner Mack, and the Plainsmen Quartet.

In November 1974 Proud Country Entertainment was assigned to American Entertainment Corporation, essentially a simple name change for the company.

Jack Reno joined KOOO AM and FM for about five months in November 1974 coming from WUBE Cincinnati. Reno had hits of his own and appeared on the Grand Ole Opry in the 1960s. He had performed with Waylon Jennings and Dolly Parton.

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 with his showmanship and baritone voice. He started at KOIL in 1946, had a show on KOWH 660 in 1948 but also kept busy with other projects. Barron 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 strong run at entering the Omaha market. Based in Wichita, Great Empire owned money-making country music AM and FM stations there, as well as in Springfield (Missouri), and 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.

Pier-San Broadcasting clearly was looking for buyers. It can be assumed that Great Empire looked over the duo's properties, but wasn't interested in the daytime-only AM signal. The newcomers instead went for a full-time AM station, KLNG 1490, while continuing to seek an FM.

Sanders and Pierce found a buyer in Colorado, Centennial Communications. In announcing the sale, Mack Sanders proudly noted he pioneered country on the station since 1960. He added that the station "has always been profitable and never lost money in 16 years." (*OWH* June 22, 1977)

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.

Centennial was made up of accountants Marshall Hambric and Bruce Mayer, both of Denver. Mayer took over management at the Omaha property while Hambric remained in Colorado.

Centennial responded to KYNN's Country competition that December by adding crossover pop artists with Bruce Mayer saying no more "hard-line down-home country, no stars of the past, no Roy Acuff." (*OWH* Dec 14, 1977)

News and information along with sports and daily features were added to the programming mix. The CBS network dropped by KLNG in January 1978 was picked up.

The programming change was disastrous. While 1490 was flat in KYNN's first ratings book that fall, KOOO FM dropped from a 2.4 share to 1.8, and the AM didn't even show up. Revenue soon plunged from 600 thousand a year to 200 thousand (*OWH* July 10, 1982).

Seeking a solution, 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. Bruce Mayer stepped down as general manager and was replaced by Ray Hambric who made the change.

KOOO AM 1420 would go in a separate direction, however. It had been announced earlier that the AM programming would separate from that on FM on September first with a News and Information format (*OWH* Aug 13, 1978).

In less than two weeks KOOO FM 104.5 picked up the same automated Beautiful Music service that had been employed at KEZO and began playing Dionne Warwick, Montovani, and Sinatra. A call letter change to KESY FM, for “Easy” listening FM soon followed.

KOOO AM’s news and information format that had begun just weeks earlier went untouched, but only for a few short months. On November 21, 1978, the AM dropped the All News format and began simulcasting its FM. The KOOO 1420 calls were changed a few months after that in February 1979 to KESY AM 1420 matching those of its sister FM.

KESY FM climbed to #4 by Spring 1979 generating almost a nine share, with some surprising strength among men 18-34 that might be attributed to in-office “captive audience” 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, albeit with a fast-fading format.

SIDEBARS and FOOTNOTES

WHO TURNED BURDEN IN TO THE FCC?

Don Burden caught the attention and subsequent ire of the FCC early on when chiding the government for a station identification violation in 1963 that cost him a two-thousand-dollar fine. The fine was for an insufficient pause between the call letters and the community of license, both required to be announced sequentially and clearly in the hourly legal ID.

KISN was programmed as a Portland, Oregon station, the larger market directly across the river and state line from Vancouver, Washington, its community of license. The identification with Vancouver was somewhat hidden and rushed in KISN’s weather forecast introduction, “KISN Vancouver Radar Weather...” The FCC believed running the calls and city so quickly together, buried in a sentence, and passing that off as a legal ID obscured the station’s true identity as a Vancouver station. Burden followed up his fine with a trade magazine ad calling it “The most expensive pause that refreshes.”

After that, it appears that Don Burden and his stations were a fixture on the Fed’s radar. What followed were numerous accusations of misconduct and questionable business practices, none of which were ever firmly proven.

The smoke ignited into a fire in 1966. A disgruntled Burden employee at his KISN Portland station, Paul Oscar Anderson, had been with Burden for several years, having worked at KOIL in 1962. Anderson, sometimes called POA, wanted to leave KISN and cross the street to KGAR. (The term can be taken literally this time as KGAR was building studios directly across from KISN at NW 10th and Burnside in Portland

preparing to compete head on with KISN.) But, he was being held to a non-compete agreement by KISN stating he couldn't work elsewhere in the Portland market for a year.

POA 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.

This and the following investigation is spelled out in a lengthy Federal Communication Commission Report from February 1975, Dockets 19122 to 19125, summarized here:

Paul Oscar Anderson (real name: Paul E. Brown) in 1966 wrote the FCC about attending a meeting alleging Mark Hatfield's 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 on 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 suggested 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.

Numerous other investigations of the Star Stations are detailed in the FCC report covering the following: corporate contributions, political ads, insurance fraud, monitoring of government witness phone calls, rigged contests, distortion of newscasts, and gifts to the C.E. Hooper rating service. All were concluded with little or no substantiation. The investigation ended with "no firm foundation for any decisionally significant finding of fact."

Following his loss of KOIL/KEFM along with KISN and WIFE AM/FM in 1976, Don Burden moved to California in 1979. In 1980 he sought control of KPEN 97.3 (three 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 briefly worked for Burden at KPEN and says, "When Burden opened 'his' station in Mtn. View (station address was in neighboring Mountain 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 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. 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 all new station owners. His estate continued to collect on it for years after he died in 1985.

THE 1970s LEGENDS OF KOIL

SAM HOLMAN earned his stripes at KQV Pittsburgh in 1958 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, WAIT, 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 Arthur's, the KOIL staff's favorite watering hole, about how nervous the WLS management became. WLS' old listeners quite naturally disappeared and management asked what to do. Sam said, "We wait." What slowly followed was a new, young audience that swelled WLS' numbers into the top tier lasting the next two decades.

Holman soon did the same for WABC in New York, working an air shift there as well. Holman 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 WOW 590 and was later promoted to program director for WOW's FM Top 40 venture on KFMX.

After his departure from KFMX Noonan went on to KKDJ Los Angeles. His voice work career on the West Coast took off. Noonan was production director at KRTH for five years and soon 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 to produce imaging for stations plus 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. He was with the 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 in Omaha on KOIL's overnight show in 1960. His signature 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 on air he said, "I'm sorry. Half the girls at Papillion High are NOT rags."

Light's career took him to Southern California at KCBQ San Diego and later to KIQQ Los Angeles. But radio personality formats were tightening up, limiting jocks to brief breaks and cue cards. Light felt muzzled, taking the fun out of radio for him and concluding his brilliant run as an air personality.

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 along his 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 during the 1970s and 80s.

One KOIL staffer who enjoyed a brush with greatness deserving a mention is DESIREE, a KOIL request line girl and receptionist in the mid 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 credited for her role in the hit song.

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 [Ontario] Guardian*).

PAYOLA- DID IT EVER GO AWAY?

Charges of Payola reared up again in 1973 as they would in future years during mini-investigations.

Record promoters as liaisons between stations and record companies were recognized as an acceptable and necessary part of the radio and records business. The major record labels and several independent promoters all made weekly calls to their list of stations, pushing their product. They often came to town where they were allowed to meet with a station's music director or program director, all with station management's understanding and approval of the relationship.

Most of the promotion people from major record labels along with independent contractors who covered Omaha were headquartered in Minneapolis. Many were regular visitors at KOIL and other Omaha stations, some as frequently as two to three times a month. They used their seemingly unlimited expense accounts in developing relationships with music directors and PDs.

The perks of being the 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.

Over-the-line 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 with concert tickets to "assess" a label's artist playing there, a motor scooter discussion ending in "what color would you like," and 100-dollar bills tucked inside Christmas Cards.

A vacationing music director's stay in pricey New York City found his hotel tab quietly picked up by one label, another label securing tickets to a Broadway play, while yet

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 rarely could sell enough copies to cover the promoter's expense account.

The answer is that records added to playlists in medium markets like Omaha were watched closely in major markets by stations that couldn't afford to take a chance on playing a record unless it was proving to be a hit. 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*.

(The industry term "Tip Sheet" was used for trade publications from the late 1950s until the demise of most of them in the first years of the New Millennium. It referred to a class of publications that let radio stations know who was playing what songs and was a major assist in deciding which of dozens of new songs each week a program director should pick. Such reporting has been superseded today by weekly computerized sales reports.)

These trades gathered information on how current songs and artists were selling. They were a huge influence on all stations, but most importantly in major markets like Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City. Heavy competition in those cities called for extreme caution by the program director when making decisions in selecting records to add to the playlist. A hit in major markets 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," these stations 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 rarely did a week go by without a visit from one or even several deep-pocket promoters.

1975-- OMAHA RADIO BLIZZARD AND TORNADO COVERAGE

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 surprise 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 deepen by noon. By 4 p.m. cars were stuck and being 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 some staff home that late afternoon, but the storm was reaching its peak. Two DJs trying to get home, John Erling and Carl Mann,

along with their driver soon got stuck in the blizzard not far from the studios. It was in the Old Mill area near 108th and Dodge where the jeep had to be abandoned.

The Old Mill Holiday Inn was nearby but up a steep hill calling for a near-exhausting walk in blizzard conditions. The dark landscape in the distant street lights through the blowing snow looked like a deserted disaster scene from a movie. The trek upward in the horizontally-driven snow was numbing.

Erling remembers it well. "I felt the scene was a 'white out'...and we were afraid to walk individually up that hill, so we walked single file while holding hands with our outstretched arms forward ...Any one of us could have veered off in other directions. I have lived through many snow storms, having grown up in North Dakota, this was the first time I was afraid."

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 left marooned in radio and TV stations across the city were stuck doing 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 asleep face down on the set's desks during breaks.

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.

Mother Nature had more in store for Omaha just months later. 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.

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."

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 until 1979.

At KOIL, DJ Tom Page relayed information as he got it from the newsroom where the staff kept busy monitoring the scanners and teletype, relaying ongoing reports such as "tornado touch down sighted and confirmed at..." The twister was tracked from 84th and L Streets in Southwest Omaha past busy 72nd and Dodge Streets and up to Maple Street in Northwest Omaha.

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 a natural in his mobile unit and gave accurate reports. Jordan's immediate after-storm report was from the NW side of town near 72d and Maple Streets observing 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: KOIL's John Erling had as a guest on his show that morning Miss Nude America, Kitten Natividad, 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 rushed out to pick up their favorite clients bringing them in for live introductions to the nude guest.



KOIL May 6, 1975, John Erling interviewing Miss Nude America.

In connection with the tornado, Erling says, "I was blamed for the tornado because of the interview." Indeed there were comments in the *World-Herald* from readers connecting the two events as evil, the tornado being retribution.

A second postscript to the 1975 tornado event: future CNN anchor Chuck Roberts blew into Omaha the same day as

the tornado. Covering the storm was his introduction to his new job as a KMTV reporter/anchor. "We were wall to wall on that story for a couple of weeks working 12 hours a day," he recalls.

KMTV news director Mark Gautier who hired him had a good eye for talent. Roberts later became the first anchor on the country's first 24-hour national news network; his was the first face seen on camera when CNN signed on. The paint was still wet on the CNN set when the cameras were switched on. Roberts adds, "Omaha is so much better than its market size and a great place to start a career. I learned my craft in Omaha." (*Omaha Magazine*, October 2015).

FOUR CHANNEL FM—QUADROPHONIC STEREO

With the popularity of two-channel stereo, how much better could music sound with four channels? Not much, it turns out. Quadrophonic stereo was easily accomplished using magnetic tape, both open reel and tape cartridge formats. The hard parts were putting four channels on vinyl and finding a way to air it on FM. For vinyl records, various quad stereo formats emerged. The three most popular formats were the QS system by Sansui, the SQ system by Columbia, and the discreet CD-4 system from JVC/RCA. Consumers were unimpressed. The extra speakers and hardware necessary for quad stereo confined interest to the hard-core audiophile.

For broadcast, Quadrophonic FM stereo and its four discrete channels for surround sound had become a reality in 1970, but with several competing broadcast systems. In anticipation, Omaha's FM on 98.5 changed calls to KQKQ in 1974 to be ready for embracing the four-channel format should a single format emerge. Meanwhile some stations around the country went ahead with one of the various quad stereo formats available seeking a competitive edge. Some two-station methods were tried, like WLOL FM and KSJN in Minneapolis teaming up to air four channels, one broadcasting the front, the other the rear channels. For content, their programs were limited to specials using records, tape, and live pickups of operas and events.



The three most popular quadraphonic LP formats in the 1970s were SQ (Stereo Quadraphonic), QS (Regular Matrix) and CD-4 (Compatible Discrete 4) / Quadradisc.

But KQKQ during its wait saw that it just wasn't going to happen. After the FCC launched long-term testing of the different formats, it finally selected a national standard in 1983. By then the idea of quad had been abandoned by FM.

Obstacles to Quad FM stereo were that a strong signal with no multi-path problems was required as were tuners with a decoder.

The two major reasons that Quadraphonic sound failed to take off were the lack of content offered by the music industry and the way it was mixed to tape and disc. Record companies re-released only some of their more popular catalog titles in quad stereo. They were simply four-channel mix-downs of the studio's original multi-track recordings. The result was that the listener was placed right in the middle of the band, a confusing place to be for anyone seeking a "natural" perspective. The instruments and voices were coming from all directions. Such a mix changes the original recording into something totally different.

This was improved with the concept of using the 3rd and 4th channels for ambiance pickup from behind the listener. The stereo performance would be in the front with the two "rear" mikes completing the quad effect from the back of the hall. Hardly worth the extra effort and cost associated with the the gear required.

The Quad fad made a few ripples then slowly died off. Consumers decided to leave the novel use of multiple channels to Hollywood action movies. For music, two channels were enough for two ears.

1000 KOTD- THE PLATTSMOUTH STATION

The historic Missouri River community of Plattsmouth some 25 miles south of Omaha, is well within the larger city's area of dominant influence. Plattsmouth (pronounced "PLATT-smith") is a town of five thousand situated on the south side of the Platte River where it meets the Missouri River, hence the city's name, Platte's mouth. In 1970 the town got its own radio station on 1000 kHz, licensed for daytime-only operation.

With the calls KOTD for *Keep One Thousand on the Dial*, 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. At 250 watts, KOTD signed on October 26, 1970,

A two-tower directional antenna was employed to produce a northward null in the signal pattern to protect a co-channel station in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Omaha was in the path of this signal suppression, but the station was still quite audible in the city. KOTD's programming often appeared in the *Omaha World-Herald* radio listings.

KOTD's primary coverage area was the tri-county area of Sarpy and Cass Counties in Nebraska and Mills County in Iowa. Programming was described as popular music and news. Local businesses kept the station afloat as it found an audience in the community and in rural Sarpy County, many listeners pleased to have a station of their own.

KOTD also offered polka shows, popular among Eastern Nebraskans, particularly in the long-time polka stronghold of South Omaha. Deldon Hamann was the first host of KOTD's Saturday and Sunday Polka Shows.

Del Hamann also was KOTD's local news director. Hamann was involved in a bizarre accident after covering a story in 1973. On April 8, Hamann covered a 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's replacement on the polka shows was 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.

During the 1970s, regular programming continued to focus on news and farm news, at times carrying UPI and CNN newscasts. Operating daytime only, the station received a pre-sunrise authority of 60 watts in 1974.

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 the formerly clear channel 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 was KORN in 1939 which was moved to Lincoln in 1947 to become KOLN 1400, later KLIN. It was immediately replaced on 1340 in Fremont with the old call letters KORN. The calls were changed in 1949 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, starting 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 500 watts on 1330 kHz for daytime-only operation. This effort was adjusted 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, the higher power request was granted in March 1962. KHUB 1340 installed a new Sparta 701 AM transmitter running its newly authorized power. 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 become the city's increasingly populated 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 football 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 simply called, *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. He began to do regional tours traveling throughout the Midwest between Sunday broadcasts. Moostash had a loyal following among the many Central and Eastern 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 by 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. This occupied the majority of Joe's time for the next 30 to 40 years. *Moostash Joe's Polka Show* aired on KHUB for nearly 60 years.

KHUB 1340 received permission in August 1974 for a transmitter and tower move to a site on Military Avenue one half-mile east of what were then the city limits. The following year KHUB Inc. was sold by Harry Snyder to George Allen and Richard Shaheen for \$600 thousand.

The Fremont station remained local never pursuing the Omaha market during the expansion and move-in upgrades of the 1980s and 1990s. It remained at 500 watts broadcasting from 115 East 5th Street in Fremont for years to come. The ubiquitous Lee Barron joined KHUB in January 1980 as news director and also did a Sunday evening Big Band show.

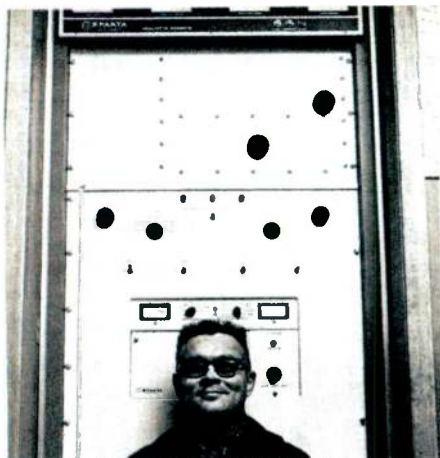
In 1985 KHUB was granted an unusual increase of nighttime power to 1000 watts while remaining at 500 watts during the day. This was eventually returned to 250 for nights.

KHUB went through a series of sales in the 1990s. KHUB Inc. (the AM and FM) was sold to Robert Clauss and Joseph Nugent in 1992 for \$400-thousand. Nugent later sold the AM/FM combo in 1996 for \$582-thousand to K-Heartland Broadcasting owned by Terry E. Simpson.

The seller also sold Simpson the KMRV Blair construction permit for another \$18 thousand. Simpson took a loss the following year selling to Mitchell Broadcasting for \$422 thousand. Mitchell kept the stations until his retirement, selling his group to Waitt Radio Inc. in 2002.

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 was 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.



Quality and Service make Sparta just right

Harry C. Snyder gets up with KHUB 1340 AM, Fremont, Nebraska. He became an C.E. of 16, owner of 20, transmitter equipment with KHUB's Sparta 701 AM transmitter convinced him that a Sparta 602 FM transmitter would be a just right investment and that more than QUALITY made the difference. As Harry about Sparta SERVICE. The sales represent the highest standards, and their personal interest. Sparta always has in the well-being of its friends and their equipment.

SPARTA... small enough to be a
 real radio brand... big enough to offer
 5 YEARS WARRANTY... the best value anywhere.
 Call us... Call us... Call us...
SPARTA ELECTRONIC CORPORATION
 1501 N. 10th St. - Lincoln, NE 68502
 402-466-1515 - 1-800-333-3333
 A DIVISION OF COMM-FM INDUSTRIES CORPORATION

KHUB FM 105.5 signed on in July 1972. Programming was simply a simulcast of its sister AM.

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 KLGW Algona which Allen had purchased earlier from Snyder.

The new KHUB FM owners in November 1979 sought to move the transmitter to a site two miles southwest of town near the south bank of the Platte River. The power would remain three-thousand watts but the antenna height would improve to 450 feet. The tower was approved and went up on Reed Lane overlooking the Platte River.

1973 trade magazine ad by Sparta showing KHUB FM's transmitter and station owner Harry Snyder.

KHUB FM would go on to new call letters, different owners, and various formats as the new millennium approached. But unlike some other peripheral stations trying to grab some of

the Omaha market through upgrades, Fremont's FM would not become an Omaha move-in signal.

THE LUSTER FADES

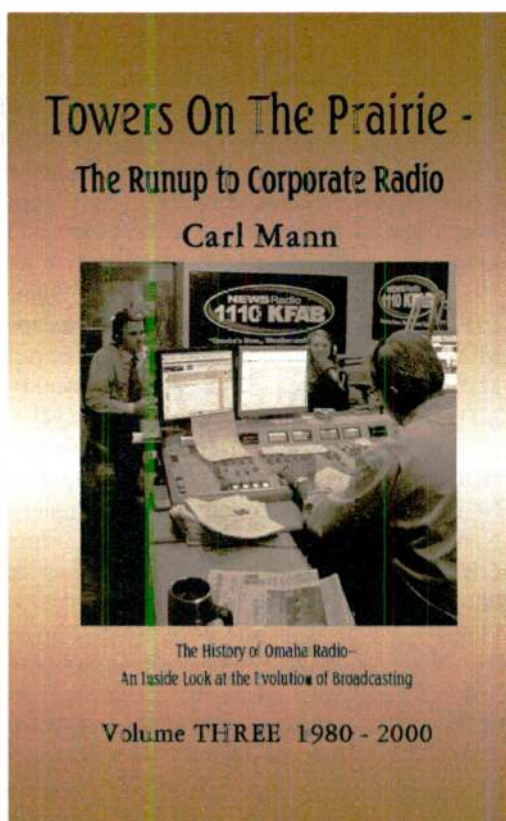
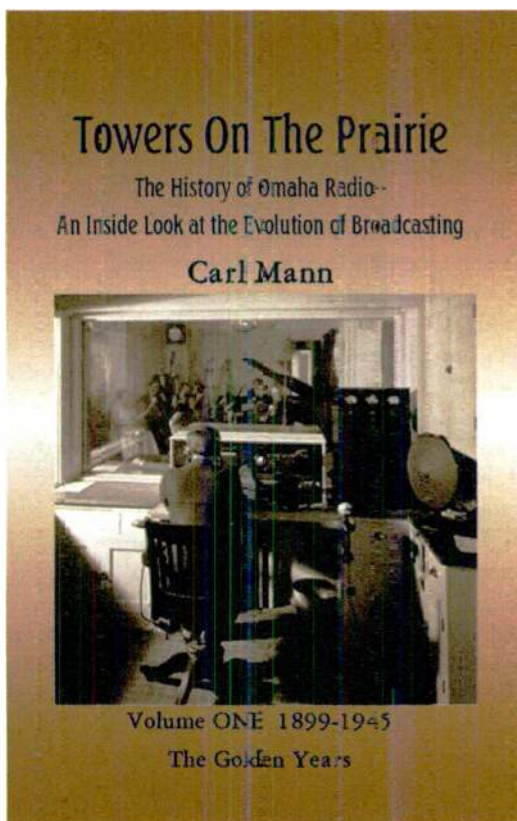
By the end of the 1970s, the push for advertising revenue was facing much heavier competition. The slice of the advertising pie was getting thinner, already being divided up between radio, print and television.

In the decade to come, more stations, particularly on FM, were on the way. Soon cable TV would run local spots. Outlying communities with FM would upgrade their fringe signals to cover Omaha and Council Bluffs becoming de-facto locals. Increasingly, national business was going to the networks, co-op spots were vanishing, and music promotion budgets were going to MTV.

The decline of national spots would be the biggest loss. National accounts found they could cover the markets they once reached with individual station buys much more cheaply with network radio, for pennies on the dollar. Lasting longest among the national

accounts for local spot buys were the likes of Coke, Budweiser, and McDonald's. Soon it would be local bars, restaurants, and car dealerships dominating a station's spot cartridge racks keeping the lights on.

As the 1980s progressed, stations were becoming viewed as commodities. Radio professionals in management gave way to investment bankers. Corporations and banks would take over, accelerated by radio's deregulation in the 1990s. Old schoolers lamented the loss of "fun" as the seriousness of survival became the norm. The shift to corporate radio in Omaha and the nation is covered in volume three, The Run-Up to Corporate Radio.



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 (for the purpose of collecting performance royalties).
<i>Broadcasting</i>	Trade magazine for radio, begun in 1931, later expanded to include television.
BMI	Broadcast Music Incorporated. (Formed to collect performance royalties after station disputes with ASCAP).
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System (network)
Combo Jock	DJ holding a FCC First Phone license allowing double duty at a transmitter site.
CP	Construction Permit, an FCC authorization that is required before a station can begin construction or a modification.
Diplex	System permitting two independent signals simultaneously to air on a single carrier frequency without mutual interference. Used for FM Stereo.
DX	Distance (amateur operator lingo) To DX is to listen for distant stations.
ERP	Effective Radiated Power. An FM term, it is the output power of the transmitter plus the gain of the antenna.
FCC	Federal Communications Commission (Government regulatory agency)
GM	General Manager
<i>Hitmakers</i>	Radio music tip sheet founded by Barry Fiedel around 1979.
kHz	KiloHertz. One thousand cycles. It's the measurement of frequency in kilocycles that is used in denoting AM stations' dial positions.
<i>LJS</i>	Lincoln Journal Star (newspaper daily), Lincoln, Nebraska
MOR	Middle of the Road. Music format using the best of various formats.
MBS	Mutual Broadcasting System (network)
MHz	MegaHertz. One million cycles. it's the measurement of frequency in megacycles that is used in denoting short wave and FM stations' dial positions.
NBC	National Broadcasting Company (network)
NCE	Non-Commercial Educational station
Non-Comm	Non-Commercial station, primarily for educational or religious purposes.
<i>OWH</i>	Omaha World-Herald (newspaper daily)
PD	Program Director
Platter	Casual reference to a 78 rpm record, the disc being large and heavy like a platter.
RF	Radio Frequency wave. A wireless electromagnetic signal is referred to as RF.
SM	Sales Manager.
QSL	Verification card or letter from a station confirming reception. QSL collecting became a hobby for some listeners who liked to seek out distant stations.
SCA	Subsidiary Communications Authorization, allowing a subcarrier on a station's signal that carries separate information or audio. See: Diplex.
TSL	Time Spent Listening, an Arbitron ratings term, the number indicating how many listener quarter-hour segments a particular station accrues at a given time.

INDEX

A

Allen, Frank 57, 58, 71, 123, 125, 127, 202
Anderson, Paul Oscar 124, 236, 237
Andrews, Arch 58, 71, 123
Armstrong, George "Bud" 10, 12, 49, 60, 67, 68, 100–102
Aulabaugh, Mike 172, 179
Avery, Gaylord 11, 12, 19, 49, 59, 60, 63

B

Barron, Lee 9, 10, 22, 25, 94, 98, 154, 234, 236, 247
Barsanti, Tom 182, 189–192, 219
Beaudin, Ralph 90, 112, 113, 181, 238
Benson, Bob 74, 129–131, 162
Bickle, Andy 188, 189
Blackwell, Dave 196, 197
Bohlsen, Martha 4, 9, 43, 44, 55, 57, 113, 114, 118
Bradley, Mike 86, 87, 117, 120, 145, 146, 205
Bramhall, Frank 117, 125, 217, 232, 233
Brasel, Bryce 143, 144
Bremser, Lyell 3, 49, 56; KFAB owner/manager, 77, 79, 80, 121, 158, 196, 229, 230;
Sports/Husker football, 19, 76, 122, 197
Brown, Steve 174, 175, 181, 225, 226; early years, 89, 92; events/legacy, 123, 125, 127, 128, 135,
164, 165
Buckley, William 72, 74, 75, 88, 116–119, 151, 152
Burden, Don 72, 83, 84, 123, 155, 156; programming/promotion, 72, 73, 85–87, 123, 127, 130–
132, 134, 135, 157, 177, 224, 225; KOIL decline/legacy, 136, 138, 139, 176, 178, 181, 183–
185, 236–238
Burke, Harry 16, 17, 19, 36, 76, 77
Burkhart, Kent 67–69

C

Carpenter, Scott 131, 174, 179
Carson, Johnny 4, 18, 46, 53, 85, 168; WOW career, 5, 6, 43, 55; entry into television 40, 42
Carver, Johnny 79, 85, 96
Clark, Ray 3, 40, 44, 56, 154, 168, 171, 234
Crabtree, Chic 83, 84, 87

D

Dee, Sally 4, 5
DeMoss, Lyle 2, 5, 19, 45, 143, 145, 146, 205–207
Devaney, Tom 115, 122, 197, 240

E

Eddens, Jim 192, 194, 220
Erling, John 180–182, 184, 192, 226, 241–243
Everhart, Slim 55, 140
Everly Brothers 70, 140

F

Feltis, Hugh 12, 13, 17
Fogarty, Frank 54, 159
Fox, Jimmy 126, 179, 191; as Erik Foxx, 126, 191–194, 219, 242
Freberg, Stan 52, 97
Freeman, Dick 210, 212, 228
Fries, Bill 175, 185
Fritz Johnson, aka Bader 141, 142

G

Gibson, Bob 135, 199, 221, 223
Gillen, John J, Jr. 2, 39, 40, 54
Goodrich, Charlie 89, 90, 132
Grubb. Galye, aka Gloomy Gus 14

H

Hambric Marshall 202, 203, 235
Hansen, Mal 5, 43, 57, 118
Head, Byron 21, 82, 83, 85
Headrick, Ken 77, 79, 80, 120, 122, 175, 196
Herold, Joe 40, 50, 54
Hoffman, Chuck 129, 148
Holman, Sam 113, 181, 182, 192, 238
Holtz, Thomson 75, 76
Hudson, Eddie 189, 190, 193
Hughes, Cathy 221, 222

J

Jackson, Sandy, KBON and KOWH years, 25, 26, 28, 49, 53, 60, 62–66, 68, 70, 71, 94; KOIL and
WOW years, 116, 123, 124, 188, 189, 219, 220
Johnson, Deane 65, 91–93, 101, 124, 130, 134, 136, 162, 164
Johnson, Tom 196, 197
Jordan. Brian 172, 179, 182, 243

K

Kavanaugh, Walt 56, 63, 76, 79, 80, 121, 122, 198
Kelp, Henry 21, 22, 44, 49, 81, 82
Keough, Donald 43
Kotera, William 3, 50, 159

L

Lamm. Al 44, 55, 114
Laughnane, Don 63, 65, 66
Lundy, Steve 187, 188, 193

M

MacDonald, Bill 18, 75, 77
MacKinnon, Don 71, 72

Mann, Carl 174, 175, 180, 183, 184, 241
Mason, Terry 124, 187, 210, 211
May, Earl 23, 40, 41, 50, 79, 80, 251
May, Foster 14, 20
Mayer, Bruce 202, 203, 235
McBride, Bill 3, 49
McCann, Dick 49, 94
McCormick, Mike 125, 126, 162
McGaffin, Jim 56
Mclendon, Gordon 69, 71, 102, 103, 117, 130, 131, 156
Mitchell, John, Michell Broadcasting 165, 208, 211, 212, 228, 229, 247
Mitchell, Johnny, aka Kris Erik Stevens 125, 126, 128, 162, 247
Moore, Billy 136, 188, 218, 238
Moostash Joe Spellerberg 246, 247
Morgan, Ed 4, 20, 95
Morgan, Jim 203, 227
Morgan, Roger W. 126, 127, 185
Morgan, Roger W. (Morganizing) 127, 128, 163, 173
Morgan, Roger W. (off-air pranks, MC) 134, 135, 137, 138, 186

N

Noonan, Bobby, see: Moore, Billy
Novak, Nathan 138, 185

O

O'Neill, Jim , KOWH, 49, 60, 62–64, 66
O'Neill, Jimmy , WOW and KOIL. 180–187, 189, 191, 192, 219
Owens, Gary 86, 89

P

Palmquist, Richard 44, 45, 117
Patrick, Joe 79, 115, 116, 146, 197
Pavelka, Kent 197, 198, 246
Payne, Jack 56, 57, 115, 196, 197
Pearson, Johnny 63, 64, 67
Perazzo, Don 28, 94, 96, 204
Peterson, Arnold 57, 115, 189
Piatt, Gene 113–115, 236, 242
Pierce, Webb 93, 139, 140, 202, 233, 235
Presley, Elvis 67, 175
Price, Jim 67, 86, 91, 143, 216

R

Rodgers, Hal 122, 202, 207
Rose, Don 86, 87

S

Saggau, Tip 3, 24, 43, 56
Sanders, Mack 93, 139–141, 202, 233–235
Sandler, Jack 4, 8, 34, 59, 60, 63

Sarnoff, David 7, 39, 50
Scott, Buddy 148, 173, 209, 239
Scott, Frank 143, 144, 204–206, 208
Searle, Don 12, 14, 17
Shannon, Steve 189, 192, 218, 219
Sharpe, Virgil 21, 38, 74, 82, 87
Shepard, Steve 44, 81, 83, 129, 138, 184, 226
Siedlik, Big Joe 147, 148
Snyder, Harry 48, 246–248
Soderlund, Harold 60, 77, 91, 100
Stewart, Bill 66–68, 100
Storz, Todd 11, 25, 50, 53, 60; Programming/Promotion, 49, 59, 61–64, 66, 67, 69–71, 100;
 KOWH decline/legacy, 72, 74, 85, 88, 101, 102, 123
Stuart, James 20, 23, 24, 27, 38, 80, 84
Sullivan, Jean 8, 9, 19, 44, 49, 91

T

Talbot, Bill 21, 22, 44, 49, 80–83
Texas Mary Marsich 18, 24, 75
Twelve, Otis 107
Twyman, Harvey 21, 33, 34

W

Warner, Richard 29, 147, 209–212
Wead, Rodney 199, 221, 222
Webber, Dale 197
Wilson, Bob 87, 123–126
Wingert, Dave 174, 192, 193
Wiseman, William O. 2, 3, 5, 50, 113, 159
Workhoven, Merrill 3, 6, 43, 44, 46, 114, 115, 174

Z

Ziegler, Percy 6, 47, 207

These were the FUN years of radio. Omaha is centric as it's the very place where Music and News radio was born. It was a game-changer, turning radio stations from purveyors of network shows into personal companions. This colorfully-told story continues by following competing stations seeking their niches ranging from country and progressive rock to news-talk and soul. Along the way, you'll meet the creative pioneers tackling the challenges of changing technology, television, the new FM band, increasing regulations, shifting economic conditions, and listener tastes. The misfortunes are told as well, such as a stunning fall from a wealthy radio empire in the most severe FCC punishment in radio history. Take this journey and learn in plain language how D.J.s, jingles, and top tunes reinvented radio into what it is today..



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carl Mann's career in broadcasting started in engineering with an FCC First-Class Radiophone License then entering announcing and rock DJ work that included stints at KOMA Oklahoma City and KOIL in his hometown of Omaha. Carl also worked in radio and television news at Omaha's WOW Radio and at KPTM Fox 42 television. His credits include Music Director and Operations Manager at KOIL and Program Director at KCRG and KQCR in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

The research into detail of every aspect is amazing...clearly presenting the facts in a sensitive and professional manner

--Deane Johnson, former PD KOIL and KOMA.

A detailed, interesting accounting of the rich history of Omaha radio and the broadcast personalities who made their mark.--

Marty Reimenschneider,
Nebraska Broadcasters

