

Conference preserves rich history of radio

By Ron Wilson

Director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University
Radio broadcasts have been a staple of the home and farm through the years.

Whether carrying recipes, farm markets, breaking news, Top 40 music or sportscasts, radio has been a key medium for decades.

Now a special symposium is helping to capture and preserve this broadcast history. It's the subject of this week's Kansas Profile.

The Great Plains Radio History Symposium will be Friday, Oct. 22, in Manhattan. It is conducted by Kansas State University's A.Q. Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications and the

Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media at K-State.

"The conference was started by Dave MacFarland, professor emeritus in the journalism school here, Richard Ward Fatherley of Storz Broadcasting in Kansas City, and me," said Steve Smethers, associate director of the A.Q. Miller School. "We were attending a dinner in Kansas City to celebrate the anniversary of the Top 40 format in radio. We got to talking about how we need to preserve this radio history."

So, they went to work. In 2005, the first Great Plains Radio History Symposium was held at K-State. It went so well that it has become an annual event.

"There seems to be a perception that radio was a creation of the east and west coasts, and that's not the case," Steve Smethers said. "There

is rich history of radio in the central plains. Lots of programming was directed to the farm and home."

The 2010 symposium will include a focus on women, specifically the radio homemaker programs which were a staple of rural Midwestern radio programming from the 1920s through the 1980s. One of those pioneers will speak at the symposium. She is Evelyn Birkby, who still hosts a recipe program on a station in Iowa at the ripe young age of 90.

She will be joined by two women from rural Kansas: Vernadell Yarow, a former radio homemaker on KCLY in Clay Center; and Deanne Wright, former Family Living director for K-State Extension Radio. Deanne now lives near the rural community of Council Grove, population 2,328 people. Now, that's rural.

In addition to the panel, nine media scholars will present topics relating to radio homemaking and other topics about radio in the rural Midwest. There will also be a tribute to Richard Ward Fatherley, who helped found this symposium. He passed away in spring 2010.

Fatherley worked for Storz Broadcasting, first in St. Louis and then as program director for the legendary WHB radio in Kansas City. This company developed the Top 40 music format, a programming innovation that historians have credited with reinventing radio. It gave the medium new popularity in the 1950s and '60s, aided by rising superstars such as Elvis and a new-found innovation called the 45 rpm record. Talk about history...

The memory of Richard Ward Fatherley will be honored at a special

luncheon during the symposium. Other topics to be addressed during the day include women in radio in Wichita, farm radio at WHO in Iowa, a statewide collegiate sports radio network in Oklahoma, and KSAC's connection with the creation of National Public Radio.

KSAC was the name of the K-State Extension radio station which began in 1924 and broadcast on a shared frequency with WIBW in Topeka for 78 years.

Why does this history matter? "I try to tell our students about the pioneering journalists and broadcasters of Kansas," Steve Smethers said. "These are people who built the rural cultural legacy of our state, and our students should know about that. We need to appreciate these journalists and broadcasters who played such an important role

in shaping the rural culture of our state."

For more information, go to www.jmc.ksu.edu and click on the link for the symposium, or call the journalism school at (785) 532-6890.

Radio broadcasts have been a staple of the home and farm through the years. Now the fifth annual Great Plains Radio History Symposium is preserving this key history. We commend Steve Smethers and Dave MacFarland of K-State's A.Q. Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications for making a difference by initiating this program. Even in a high-tech era of podcasts, it's important to remember the broadcasts.

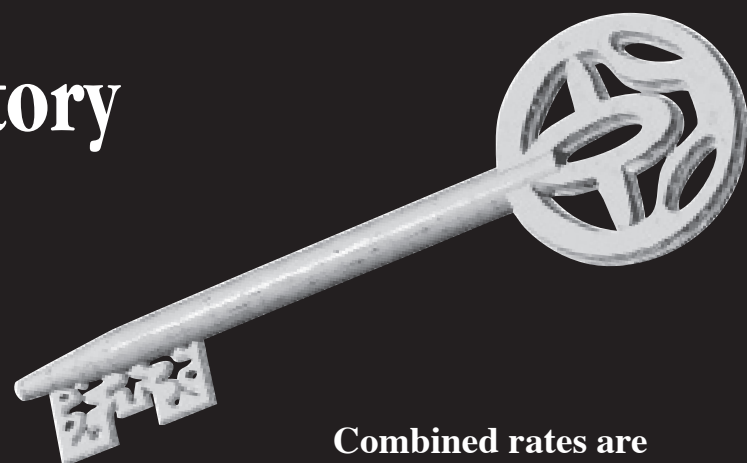
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