

Smithville MO Historical Society

P.O. Box 270, Smithville, MO 64089
Kathleen Bird, Editor

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www.smithvillemohistory.org

Preserving the past for appreciation in the future
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Upcoming Event

Mon Sep. 11, 2023 – History Talk at 7:00 pm

Television Comes To Smithville

Smithville Library Community Room

The first TV broadcast to Smithville occurred 74 years ago. WDAF-TV emcee Randall Jessee led the broadcast. His children Jana and Randy will discuss his life, the early history of this local TV station.



News from The Kansas City Times

Monday, October 17, 1949

Opening Night Programs Range from Sports to Meat Cutting

In the Homes and Stores of outlying communities, television receivers were surrounded by interested groups last night at WDAF-TV, The Star's station, took the air with its first regular programming. This scene, at Smithville, Mo. about twenty miles north of Kansas City was typical. The receiver was in a department store owned by Leon Morton. Watching the broadcast here is the store owner's daughter-in-law, Mrs. Leon Morton Jr., Smithville Robert Young, San Diego, who was visiting in Smithville; Young's children, Bobby Young, 3 and Doreen Young, 4, and at the extreme right, 7-year-old Carl B. Hoff, son of the Rev. and Mrs. Carl Hoff, Smithville. The photograph was taken as Randall Jessee, assistant program director, was giving sports news.

Schoolhouse Renovations Progress

Cleaning and painting of the interior of the South Gale Schoolhouse has been completed, following up on roof replacement last Fall. Visitors at our open house on Founder's Day were thrilled. The painting of the exterior is our next task. Pack's Hardware donated five gallons of paint for the outside of the building. Discussions are underway about adding a second door at the back of the building so it will qualify for fire and liability insurance coverage.



In Memoriam

We sadly share that MollieSue Morton, daughter of Leon and Ruth Morton, and a descendant of a family in the local mercantile business, passed away on May 16, 2023 in Boulder, Colorado. She was born here on September 1, 1952 and had many fond memories of time spent in the Morton family store. Last year she recorded a History Talk of us about the family business. Mollie is survived by her sister Martha Morton Muesel of Breckenridge, Colorado.

Please patronize our Patrons

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The quality of the images and the sound was excellent at Smithville.

Daily television, described as the great adventure of the twentieth century, came to the Kansas City area last night with the first regular 4-hour broadcast by WDAF-TV. Set owners and their friends saw and heard, most of them for the first time, the sort of fare television will bring into their homes in the months ahead. Screens brightened at 5:30 o'clock with the WDAF-TV test pattern, heralding the full-scale debut of video to start thirty minutes later. March music came from the speaker and on the screen appeared the WDAF-TV studios and transmitter tower at Thirty-first and Summit streets.

First to appear on the screen after the national anthem was sung by a chorus was Dean Fitzer, general manager of the radio and TV stations of The Star. He introduced Roy A. Roberts, president of The Star, who outlined briefly the future and program plans for television here... Then scene next shifted to the American Royal, where Randall Jessee, assistant program manager came into view with a Shorthorn steer named Harry Truman, the 4-H reserve champion over all breeds, and its owner, 11-year-old Donald Miller of Arbela, Mo.

Jessee interviewed Max Cullen of the National Livestock and Meat board, who displayed the various wholesale cuts of beef with the aid of the steer. Its flank was marked off into sections corresponding to the cuts. On a meat block Cullen showed housewives how to cut up a beef rib to obtain several savory and economical meals from the cuts.

Before Cullen appeared Harry Darby, president of the Royal, and Jay Dillingham, a Royal vice-president and president of the Kansas City Stock Yards company, were interviewed. There followed a brief scene and interview by Jessee of G. G. Roller and his parade horse, Diamond Jim, with Roller pointing out that the \$7,700 saddle on his mount was fashioned with solid silver engraved mountings.

Next on the screen was a 20-minute national newsreel, a review of events of the week over the world. With the newsreel the viewers saw and heard their first television commercial. They found it much like the short commercials shown in neighborhood motion picture theaters. The newsreel featured views of navy officers, testifying in the B-36 inquiry, Russian moves in Berlin, elections in Austria, a plane crash in Mexico and the purge of Reds in

Czechoslovakia. The viewers also saw Cardinal Spellman visiting Pope Pius XII, an English ballet company rehearsing in New York, and fast football action in the Oklahoma-Texas game. After views of a royal moose hunt in Sween, the newsreel closed with shots of paddle board water polo in Southern California.

Next, those watching the screen were taken in imagination to New York for a National Broadcasting company salute to WDAF-TV, a review of the sort of entertainment provided by the network and the means by which it will be brought to those in the Kansas City area by film. After the salute, the history of The Star, WDAF and WDAF-TV from the founding of the newspaper by William Rockhill Nelson to the final tests for the television broadcasts last night, occupied a 30-minute niche. Jessee was the commentator for views of the modernization program work at The Star, the early stages of radio here and finally the building of the WDAF-TV studio and tower. Detailed shots of the tower project from the driving of pilings seventy feet into the ground to provide firm footings, to the capping of the 724-foot structure, were shown.

Congratulatory telegram from Gen. Omar N. Bradley, Gov. Frank Carlson of Kansas, Gov. Forrest Smith of Missouri and other officials were read by Bill Bates, Program Director.

There followed a 10-minute newscast, with news presented by means of a telegraph tape which moved slowly across the screen to present the late news in brief form. A state-by-state weather forecast for the area followed the newscast. In a 15-minute sports program, Jessee gave a review of the national football situation, highlighting the position of Notre Dame as the top team of the country, and followed his summary with a short interview with C.E. McBride, sports editor of The Star. McBride confessed he was "a little scared" at his first appearance before the TV cameras.



