

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

**DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln**

---

Open-Access\* Master's Theses from the University  
of Nebraska-Lincoln

Libraries at University of Nebraska-Lincoln

---

1997

## “Sisters of the Skillet”: Radio Homemakers in Shenandoah, Iowa, 1920-1960

Lori Lynn Rohlk

*University of Nebraska - Lincoln*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/opentheses>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

---

Rohlk, Lori Lynn, "“Sisters of the Skillet”: Radio Homemakers in Shenandoah, Iowa, 1920-1960" (1997). *Open-Access\* Master's Theses from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln*. 63.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/opentheses/63>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Libraries at University of Nebraska-Lincoln at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open-Access\* Master's Theses from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

"SISTERS OF THE SKILLET":  
RADIO HOMEMAKERS IN SHENANDOAH,  
IOWA, 1920-1960

by

Lori Rohlk

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: History

Under the Supervision of Professor Kenneth J. Winkle

Lincoln, Nebraska

December, 1997

# "SISTERS OF THE SKILLET": RADIO HOMEMAKERS IN SHENANDOAH, IOWA, 1920-1960

Lori Lynn Rohlk, M.A.

University of Nebraska, 1997

Adviser: Kenneth J. Winkle

Radio homemaking shows were the mainstay of two radio stations in small-town Shenandoah, Iowa. These stations were founded in the 1920s by competitive seed and nursery moguls Earl May and Henry Field to promote their businesses. Both saw the benefit of programming that catered to female listeners. The format, "radio homemaking," consisted of informal talks by local homemakers - often broadcast out of their own kitchens - on everything from cooking to raising families. The radio homemakers were immensely popular, receiving as many as 700 letters a day. Listeners not only wrote, but visited Shenandoah in droves for formal events or visits to these women's homes. By the 1950s, 14 radio homemakers were broadcasting daily from Shenandoah, several of which were nationally syndicated. Their influence spread beyond the airwaves, as they published a variety of magazines, newsletters and cookbooks. One example is Leanna Driftmier and her *Kitchen-Klatter Magazine* - household names still familiar to many Midwestern families.

What does the popularity of these radio homemakers suggest about the needs of their mostly rural audience? And what ideologies were, in turn, promulgated by their programs and publications? In this thesis, I

explore the the development of radio homemaking within the context of rural radio, and its role in promoting consumption in the rural Midwest. I discuss the lives and work experience of these radio homemakers, and how their attitudes and advice reflected or subverted broader cultural trends regarding domesticity and women's roles. Radio homemakers gave rural Midwestern women a sense of worth in a patriarchal system where their work was often devalued or diminished. They offered a venue for women to learn to augment their homemaking skills, trade recipes, and purchase needed goods without their roles as producers being trivialized. Finally, they served as a form of "fictive kin" for many women whose daily responsibilities or social situation precluded them from sharing their lives with family and neighbors.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of people aided in the research and writing of this thesis. Initial thanks goes to my academic adviser, Professor Kenneth Winkle, whose guidance, cheer and patience was invaluable. In addition, I would like to thank committee members Professor Benjamin Rader, who greatly influenced my approach to the topic, and Professor Lynn White, for her suggestions in the final stages of my writing.

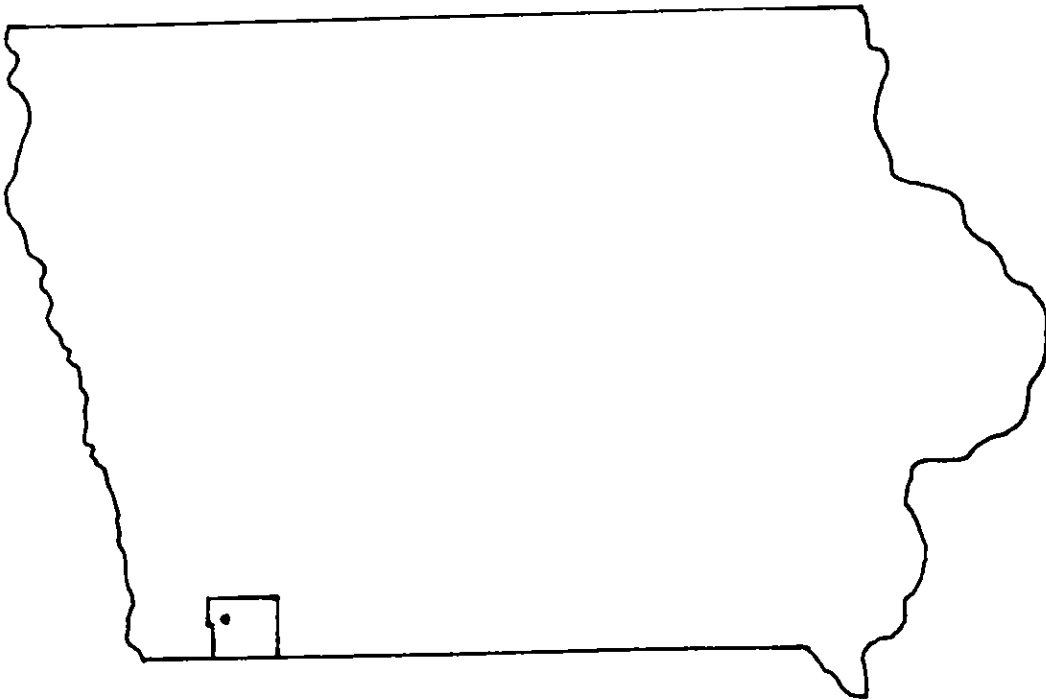
My thanks also goes to Evelyn Birkby, a radio homemaker who initially interested me in the topic and whose wisdom and books I drew upon immensely. I also thank Margery Strom, who opened her home and heart to me regarding her family's radio experience. I also thank the folks at KMA and the Shenandoah Historical Society, who allowed me access to their archives. There are many people, too numerous to mention, who helped me with this work through interviews, providing material and suggestions. Thanks in particular goes to my Aunt Phyllis and Uncle Larry Craig, who were generous and wonderful hosts during the weeks I spent on their idyllic farm doing my research.

This thesis is dedicated to Billie Oakley, a dynamic radio homemaker who passed away while this work was in process; my parents, for their ongoing support; and my dear, sweet Mattie, who helped me finish.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction & Literature Review .....	1
Chapter I. From Service to Sales .....	22
Chapter II. The Growth of Direct-Sales Advertising .....	45
Chapter III. Women on the Air .....	66
Chapter IV. "Sisters of the Skillet" .....	100
Conclusion.....	144
Bibliography.....	154

Fig. 1 Map of Iowa, showing Page County and Shenandoah



## INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The letters are long gone from Billie Oakley's files, but she vividly remembers the desperation of the writer -- an Iowa farm woman who was virtually held prisoner by her husband. In a handful of letters written over several months in the 1940s, the woman wrote that her husband beat her, would not let her go to town, and confiscated her incoming mail. She said that Oakley -- a "radio homemaker" who broadcast a daily show of recipes and conversation -- was her only connection to the outside world. Oakley tried to give the woman as much advice on the air as she could, but it was a time when spouse abuse was not publicly discussed. Oakley also wrote her letters, which the woman apparently never received because she never answered them. Eventually, her correspondence to Oakley ceased. Decades later, Oakley still wondered what happened to her.<sup>1</sup>

While the situation of the letter-writer was extreme, it symbolizes the breadth of the experiences that listeners and the radio homemakers shared. The radio homemaking shows were the mainstay of programming originating from two radio stations, KMA and KFNF, in Shenandoah, Iowa. These two radio stations were founded by rival seed and nursery owners Earl May and Henry Field as a means of promoting



their wares. Both saw the benefit of having women's programs on the air. "Radio homemaking" grew from this idea, which refers to those programs that cater to female listeners by sharing advice on everything from cooking to raising families. This advice was highly relevant, for the radio homemaking shows were always broadcast by local women, often out of their own kitchens. These women were not professionally trained but won their audience's attention and loyalty by sharing their personal lives over the airwaves.

The lives of these radio homemakers shed important insights on the experience of rural women in Iowa and the Midwest. Their story is particularly fertile, combining not only aspects of rural, women's, labor, and communication history, but requiring the application of both social and cultural interpretations. Their story is timely, because the complexities of women's lives in rural areas are just beginning to be fully explored. In the following pages, I will briefly review what other scholars have written about women's history and the rural experience.

The story of rural women in the Midwest was, until recently, often neglected by practitioners of women's history and rural history alike. The former experienced a resurgence with the wave of the feminist movement in the 1970s after decades of dormancy, but the experience of rural women was excluded from such scholarship, dominated as it was by a northeastern, industrialized focus. And rural history neglected serious discussion of women. Perhaps women's lack of ownership of land, to which historian Joan Jensen attributes rural women's corresponding lack of political power, has been responsible for a similar omission of women in rural histories. Even the "new rural history" discusses social history

as it relates to the individual farmer -- a man -- and his family and social institutions.<sup>2</sup>

Despite its neglect, the juncture of women's and rural history is an important crossroads to explore, precisely because up until the early 20th century the majority of American women lived on farms. Even with the rapid urbanization that eclipsed the rural population by the 1920s, the Midwest had a distinctively rural character. Historians helping to illuminate our understanding of rural women, whether in the Midwest or elsewhere, also include Jacqueline Jones, Deborah Fink, and Katherine Jellison. In struggling to present a more realistic configuration of gender and power in the Midwest, rural women's history seems to be paralleling changes within the broader field of women's history.<sup>3</sup>

Doing women's history, observes historian Linda Gordon, requires more than "painting additional figures into the spaces of an already completed canvas."<sup>4</sup> Scholarship regarding women has moved beyond grafting treatises of women's contributions to the already existing narrative of white, male history, or offering biographies of exceptional women. It has also moved beyond viewing women as merely victims of cultural ideology, or as simply reacting to patriarchal forces beyond their control. While women's oppression has not been denied, historians are beginning to offer a more complex interpretation of how even relatively powerless individuals seek ways to shape the larger cultural matrix to serve their own needs. Nancy Cott's book, *The Bonds of Womenhood*, is one example. She examines how the emergence of separate sphere ideology both limited and empowered women, becoming a precursor to the feminist movement. Similarly, Vicki Ruiz, one of the "New

Western" women's historians, explores how Mexican women "have charted their own way." Crucial to her conceptualization is the idea that power is both personal and structural. While women are oppressed by ideological and economic barriers, Ruiz believes that they are also invested with some autonomy and a modicum of power within these structures. In *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*, Ruiz demonstrates that the existence of a tightly knit Mexican women's community made a swift and successful unionization possible. She calls the process "cultural coalescence," whereby individuals from a minority culture adopt elements from the dominant culture that suit their needs. For example, in El Paso Texas in the 1920s, Mexican women used the resources of the health services offered by the Rose Gregory Houchen Settlement House, but rejected missionary efforts to draw them away from their Catholic faith.<sup>5</sup>

Part and parcel of this approach involves a literal reassessment of the historical record. Voices of women and minorities have been expunged from traditional sources, such as newspapers and business records. Historians need to learn to cull different sorts of public records, or to use sources such as oral history and literature, in order to reveal the experiences of women in a meaningful way. For example, *Voices of American Homemakers*, edited by Eleanor Arnold, offers historians much useful information on how women viewed their lives, their work, and their involvement with Extension Homemaker Clubs. The project, funded by the National Extension Homemakers Council, employed volunteers to interview over 200 women.<sup>6</sup>

Including women's voices changes the very face of the narrative. In *A History of Their Own*, European women's historians Bonnie Anderson and Judith Zinsser argue that the periodization of history has traditionally been organized around men's activities and events, such as political and intellectual eras. Measuring women against men's models and scales relegates women's history forever to the periphery. Instead, by examining women's lives in terms of their particular role and place in society, historians are able to construct a picture of the past that is not only more equitable, but more accurate.<sup>7</sup> In American history, women are central to the cultural changes that have taken place in response to social, economic, and political transformations -- particularly those changes caused by industrialization. Constant themes in American women's history include: efforts to ensconce women in a separate, domestic sphere; women's increasing role as purveyors of middle-class consumption; and a deskilling and trivialization of housework that corresponds with prescripts to "modernize" the house.

The idea of a separate sphere for women is pervasive even until the present day, but its roots lie in the industrial revolution at the beginning of the 19th century. Sometimes dubbed the "Cult of True Womanhood" or the "Cult of Domesticity," this ideology's central tenet was that women had a special sphere of work and influence within the home. This was not always true. Between 1790 and 1820, most work was done within the home by both men and women, either on farms or in artisan shops. However, factories began to produce goods more efficiently and cheaply than homes could. As home production subsided, a factory workforce dependent on wages arose. Work in factories was much

more impersonal than production within the home, and the home was increasingly viewed as a haven from the stresses of the competitive workplace. As a "middling class" of white collar workers and managers began to emerge, the daily interaction between different sorts of people once common in colonial America was disappearing. Both the emerging middle class and working class had new loyalties to their peer groups; the working class to their fellow workers in the poor neighborhoods within walking distance of the factories, and the middle class to their peers who visited them in their parlors, located in suburbs as far from the workplace as possible.<sup>8</sup>

This new middle class depended upon domestic ideals to form its distinct Victorian identity. Middle-class women relinquished their previous contributions to labor and accepted a new "vocation" within the home. They were expected to provide a moral haven for the family from the immorality of the competitive workplace. Part of providing a haven for the family, and defining itself as middle class, included becoming conspicuous consumers. They were also raising and socializing children to participate in this workplace, inculcating them with the prudent and sober values deemed necessary to continue their middle class lifestyles in the face of economic security. As children began to become greater economic liabilities than producers within a home economy, native-born Victorian women limited the size of their families to make the most of their limited resources in raising future breadwinners. In short, women became the agents whereby middle-class families moved from producing goods to perpetuating their own class.<sup>9</sup>

The second spate of religious revivals between 1835 and 1875 further heightened the position of the home in American society, making it as much a symbol of religion as the cross. Within this realm, the ingenuity and skills of housewives were promoted in both popular novels and advice books. The deference given to women in the home and the decline of the number of children in middle-class families both suggest that women were gaining more real power within the home, resulting in a kind of "domestic feminism." This happened despite the fact that many women, such as minority and working-class women, were unable -- or unwilling -- to accept ideals promoted by the cult of domesticity. Nevertheless, by 1850 the home had become a powerful center for the nation from which reform movements, such as temperance and abolitionism, would spring. Domestic feminism drew its power from the idea that women were somehow more moral than men, and therefore it was vital to American society that they participate in the public arena. This encroachment on the patriarchal power structure, however, set off a flurry of sexual politics and a backlash of sorts. Domestic feminism had its drawbacks in the long run, because claiming that women's nature essentially differed from men's provided an opening for the trivialization of both women and their domestic realm. Furthermore, undergirding the domestic ideal was the desire that women remain within the domestic sphere so they could devote their time to becoming full-time homemakers and consume manufactured products.<sup>10</sup>

The push toward modernization, which reached full force by the 1920s, provided the key to keeping women in a consumer role. The Victorian family, with its political and moral ideology, was a fading

institution. The new Modernist home was the purveyor of a "culture of consumption" that was deemed necessary for the economy. Emphasis on self-restraint, character, and virtue fell by the wayside, replaced by perceived needs for self-fulfillment and instant gratification. The rhetoric of separate spheres had also become a shadow of its former self. Once a source of empowerment for women and a key element in allowing women to conceptualize themselves as a discrete class with a powerful social and moral agenda, its strength was co-opted by a bureaucratic society concerned with an individualistic ethos. Women's reform activities were absorbed by a new professionalization as college-educated social workers replaced settlement house volunteers. Although women were able to transcend their sphere more than ever, when they did so, it was more often to take jobs and consume, rather than to pursue a moral agenda. However, the idea that women's place was in the home had not been totally eradicated by modernism -- the culture of consumption had only trivialized and reduced women's power within it.

Modernism's tenets of professionalism and consumption were promoted by the emerging fields of home economics and advertising, which both targeted women. Home economists attempted to professionalize housework by encouraging women to become more "scientific" and efficient in their approach. The scientific approach necessitated the purchase of new-fangled gadgets and convenience foods. Advertisers were quick to target women to buy the new durable consumer goods, such as refrigerators and washing machines, because women made 80 to 90 percent of such purchases. Books such as *Advertising to Women* and *Selling Mrs. Consumer* encouraged this behavior. Home economists in turn hoped to make

domesticity as appealing as a career by taking the "mental attention" out of women's daily routines. However, removing the craft tradition from domesticity was akin to putting the artisan on an assembly line -- work became less satisfying and the worker less important. Modernization did not make women's work any less time-consuming, but it did diminish the political and religious functions of the home. As the home and housework became deskilled and trivialized, so did the woman who worked within it.<sup>11</sup>

These effects became heightened during the Cold War. Betty Friedan, writing in *The Feminine Mystique*, notes that cultural expectations were molded because the "media manipulators" wanted women to remain in the home so they could buy more products. Elaine Tyler May, writing in *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War*, also notes the importance of consumerism as a domestic and political ideology. The American family was pressed into service as the first line of defense against the perceived threat of Communism, and a generation who came of age during World War II took the ensuing Cold War's ideology of privatization to heart. But couples in search of the "good life" in the suburbs often found that domesticity did not yield the results they had expected. Women increasingly felt trapped and isolated in suburbia. They responded by seeking doctors and psychologists in droves, displaying evidence of all sorts of psychosomatic symptoms, such as sores on their arms, that did not respond to medical treatment. More married women were seeing psychologists than men or even single women. Their cures were as ineffective as the rest treatments prescribed to Victorian women with



neuresthenia; they were given tranquilizers or told to take a day off occasionally to go to the movies. Other women persisted in their attempt to assuage their unhappiness as the dominant culture told them to -- by becoming the perfect wife and mother. This was the essence of what Betty Frieden called "The Feminine Mystique." When she published her book by the same name in 1963, it not only set off a torrent of debate but essentially reinvigorated the feminist movement.<sup>12</sup>

Like many other women outside the urban, middle-class mainstream, rural women's participation in these broader cultural trends -- domesticity, modernization, consumption, and professionalization -- has been mitigated to some extent. For example, although rural Midwestern women were influenced by the cult of domesticity, anthropologist Deborah Fink demonstrates that these ideals were often unattainable in the isolated and demanding rural environment. Moreover, historian Katherine Jellison shows that rural women from the 1920s to the 1960s have consistently rejected efforts to make them full-time homemakers, preferring instead to retain their productive roles on the farm.<sup>13</sup>

Fink suggests that rural families who sought farms in the Midwest and West during the late 1800s were influenced not only by this cult of domesticity, but by an equally powerful agrarian myth about the democratizing force of rural life. In the United States, this myth traces its origins in part to Thomas Jefferson, who drew on Classical themes to construct a vision of a nation of yeoman farmers that would provide a bulwark for democracy by ensuring a classless, virtuous citizenry. Farm life in general was considered more moral and healthful than urban living. Part of the myth has included the belief that women

gained equality with men as they worked side-by-side on the farm. But women did not necessarily gain power and equality on the farm, as some scholars have suggested. Fink believes that the whole premise of this agrarian ideology actually rested on the exploitation of women and children. She seeks to demonstrate that, although their labor was vital in maintaining the household economy and ensuring the success of the farm, their work was devalued and they gained little financial reward or personal satisfaction in return. Moreover, rural women led a harsher existence than their urban counterparts.<sup>14</sup>

The cult of domesticity and agrarian ideology worked in tandem, ensuring that women would willingly contribute their labor to the system, despite the "nebulous returns realized from their labors." Implicit in both was the notion that women could only participate in farming through their roles as wives and mothers. They could not farm themselves, men made all the major decisions, and when the rare divorce did occur, women left the county. Motherhood -- glorified within the cult of domesticity -- was particularly difficult on the farm. Rural women often did not have an extended family present to help with child care as they went about their household and agricultural chores.<sup>15</sup>

The Country Life Commission of 1909 noted many of the poor conditions that faced rural women and their children, including poorer health than their urban counterparts and lack of education. Isolation on the farm, which radio proponents hoped to eradicate with entertainment programs, was more than a psychological problem. It also posed physical hazards. Besides having poor access to medical care, the isolation also made farm women particularly vulnerable to violence. Such

violence seem to be a fact of life on the Great Plains during its initial settlement period, notes Fink. Old Jules, the father of writer Mari Sandoz, beat his wives, terrorized his children and used more of the household resources than he produced.<sup>16</sup> Violence -- which extended to sexual abuse and predatory behavior -- was predicated on women's second-class status. Women did not "own" their sexuality, were limited in their access to knowledge of birth control, and were ostracized if they enjoyed sex outside the socially prescribed bounds of marriage.

The image of robust farm children, as promulgated by Progressive reformers and others, was likewise a myth. In direct contradiction to the agrarian myth, they also had less access to education than their urban counterparts because they were expected to work on the farm. Reports like the 1909 Country Life Commission noted that rural children lived in unsanitary conditions, and again had less access to medical care. Infant mortality rates were higher for rural areas and unattended children were often involved in farm accidents. Rural women had more children during this period, even as the urban middle class was downsizing the size of its families. Larger families were critical to the survival of farms, and statistics show that women living on farms without hired labor or extended family tended to have more children.<sup>17</sup>

Besides contributing children to the labor force, women's work itself was crucial to the survival of the "family" farm. Women were expected, when necessary, to enter the men's sphere of farm chores and field work. They were responsible for the household economy as well, and could not expect reciprocal help from male household members. To put food on the table, farm women not only had gardens, but maintained

farming operations, such as selling eggs and cream, to buy staples. These jobs were considered "sidelines," and thus unimportant, by men. Women's contribution to the farm was devalued.

The problems women faced in rural areas were exacerbated by class, which according to the agrarian myth, was not even supposed to exist. Even though rural people themselves honored this myth, when pressed, they would admit that some families were significantly better off than others. Poorer women were less able to provide adequate meals for their families, worked under worse conditions, had less capital to invest in enterprises that might sustain the household economy, were more likely to assume more "men's" work, and moved frequently. Tenant farm women also reported being unable to fit in with the neighborhood, and were ostracized more, if indeed they had the time, money, or energy to socialize.

Women fared far worse on the farm than their male counterparts, but, as Fink demonstrates, their problems were barely acknowledged by those federal bureaucrats and the media who proposed solutions to the exodus from rural areas. Even those who acknowledged the particular duresses women had to endure believed that they could be best helped not by giving them more power on the farm, but by helping farms in general. So, while the 1920s and 1930s ushered in many changes for farm women -- the divorce rate accelerated and more women worked outside the farm economy -- the constants in their lives remained the same. Women's production for the household economy pulled farm families through hard times, as subsistence needs intensified.

Women's secondary relationship to men continued to be apparent during the Depression. When men abandoned their families on the farm, the women were discouraged from taking over and were often forced into menial jobs in town. In *Agrarian Women, Agrarian Lives*, Fink demonstrates that government programs reflected such social constraints. Single, childless women were not given enough to live on, to make remaining unmarried an unattractive option. And women with children had to satisfy government agents that they were morally upstanding before they were given aid. Even within intact nuclear family units, government aid could be withheld if it was seen that the wife took on a non-traditional role, or had too much power, within the family. The Farm Security Administration required that women meet three of these four requirements before the farm would be helped: the farm woman must be "satisfied with country life; enjoy working, care for her family, and be subordinate to her husband."<sup>18</sup>

Modern technological advancements during the 1920s and 1930s helped farm women somewhat, but standards for childrearing and housework rose. What time farm women may have gained from durable consumer goods was taken up by running errands for her husband or children. Children were still considered important to the success of farms, as was apparent by men's opposition to the Child Labor Amendment of 1924. However, children became more of an economic liability than an asset, and birth rates dropped somewhat, according to Fink. Multiple heirs of farms decreased and offspring moved to urban areas to seek employment. The birth rate did not drop as much as urban women's did during this time, which Fink believes reflects the perception that rural women had about

childraising: children seemed to be the one resource on the farm they could claim. Rural women were judged, and judged themselves, by the ruler of motherhood. Psychologically, however, the reality of parenting fell far from ideology. Farm women's fondest hope was to see their children, especially daughters, leave the farm.<sup>19</sup>

Even when domesticity was attainable for higher-income farmers with more land, rural women consistently rejected efforts to reduce them to full-time homemaking roles. Instead, historian Katherine Jellison notes, they preferred to maintain productive roles whenever possible. The mission of the Bureau of Economics, which was formed in 1923, was to make farm women more scientific and "better domestic managers." The Extension Service also thought that new technology would decrease the time women spent on housework. Agency bureaucrats believed that women would use the time saved by making the home more amenable, which in turn would help stem the flight to urban areas. This rhetoric seems to reflect the same sorts of forces Glenna Matthews noted at work in deskilling and professionalizing the housework of urban women. Writing in 1927, Madge J. Reese reflected broader trends for professionalization and modernization when she called the farm wife a "manager." She noted that, as such, the woman "must have time and energy to think and plan for real homemaking through cultivation of those qualities of mind and soul which make her an interesting and attractive companion to her whole family. She must have time to associate with her children and teach them the true values of country life."<sup>20</sup>

However, as studies on urban women's work have demonstrated, technology has rarely eased the workload for rural women -- it merely

changed the direction their energies were channeled. In 1930, one study noted that farm women with "labor-saving" technology spent only 3.3 hours less a week on meals, washing, and cleaning, but spent 2.2 hours more on childcare, ironing, sewing, and general housecare. Faced with the reality of the importance of other tasks, rural women adapted the technology being pushed by reformers, but rejected the "prescriptive advice" behind it. Advertisers of modern technology, such as washers, were more savvy than the USDA bureaucrats. While they touched on the same themes of domesticity, advertisers often implied that such technology would give women more free time to engage in their roles as producers on the farm.<sup>21</sup>

The ideology that shaped women's experiences in the rural Midwest also affected radio homemaking shows. On one hand, the radio homemaking shows developed to ease farm women's isolation and sell them products. Yet, the popularity of the radio homemakers must be accounted for, and they were immensely popular. Because early radio did not employ audience measurement tools or ratings services, listener response was gauged through the mail. Some of the radio homemakers received as many as 700 letters a day. Listeners not only wrote but visited Shenandoah in droves for the formal events staged by the stations, or even paid informal visits to the radio homemakers's homes. In one month alone during the 1940s, 1,200 women streamed in from 130 towns in Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, and Kansas for an official KMA tour. The number of radio homemaking programs originating from Shenandoah peaked during the late 1940s and 1950s. The radio homemakers's influence spread beyond the airwaves, as they published cookbooks and a variety of newsletters and

magazines to meet the demands of their listeners, such as Leanna Driftmier's famed *Kitchen-Klatter Magazine*.

What does the popularity of these radio homemakers suggest about the needs of their mostly rural audience? And what ideologies were, in turn, promulgated by their programs and publications? In this project, I will explore the development of radio homemaking within the context of rural radio, and its role in promoting consumption in the rural Midwest. The radio homemakers were so successful at selling products that they were courted by companies who sought their endorsements. I will also discuss the lives and work experience of these radio homemakers, and how their attitudes and advice reflected or subverted broader cultural norms regarding domesticity and women's roles. The radio homemakers may have dispensed domestic advice, but they balanced work and home responsibilities. Many of them supported their families. A few were outright entrepreneurs, taking advantage of the acceptable nature of radio homemaking, which was viewed as a natural extension of women's roles.

In particular, I will examine how the views of the radio homemakers differed from those of home economists. As discussed earlier, home economists did not respect the craft tradition of homemaking, and in their efforts to improve women's access to technology and more efficient methods of homemaking, they often trivialized women's roles. In contrast, until the 1960s few of the radio homemakers had college degrees of any sort, nor did they consider themselves "experts" on domesticity. In fact, the homemaker shows and magazines were highly participatory endeavors for their audiences. Radio homemakers gave



rural Midwestern women a sense of worth in a patriarchal system where their work was often devalued or diminished. They offered a venue for women to learn to augment their homemaking skills, trade recipes, and purchase needed goods, without their roles as producers being trivialized.

Finally, the programs and publications of the radio homemakers seemed to foster a sense of a woman's culture and kinship. The radio homemakers themselves attribute their success to their "neighborliness" -- an informal, folksy style that made their listeners feel as though they were sitting with the radio homemakers at the kitchen table over a cup of coffee. This women's culture often centered around food. Indeed, the sharing of recipes was a mainstay for radio homemaking programs. This exchange seemed to offer a "point of entry" in many of the letters that listeners wrote to radio homemakers. Because food preparation was so central to women's roles, mastering the skill was a way of gaining status and perhaps a means of wielding informal power within the community. Fostering a sense of community did not stop with recipes and cooking -- the radio homemakers, through advice columns and letter writing, ultimately served as a form of "fictive kin" for many women whose isolation, daily responsibilities, or social situation precluded them from sharing their lives with more immediate family and neighbors. Leanna Driftmier was not simply coining a catchy phrase when she called her listeners and readers "sisters of the skillet."

This project will be able to draw on and contribute to the growing literature on rural women, domesticity and women's work within the home, as well as the role of women in advertising and consumption in American

society. The primary sources for research on radio homemakers have been virtually untapped. These sources include: the few surviving recordings of the radio homemaking shows; private collections of letters, family memoirs, and other documents; the magazines and newsletters published by the radio homemakers; and KMA and KFNP station records. Many of these documents are held in the private collections of the radio homemakers and their families, such as a cache of letters written in support of Leanna Driftmier's nomination as "Iowa Mother of the Year" in 1954. Another outstanding primary source is *Kitchen-Klatter Magazine*, published from the late 1920s until the mid-1980s, whose popularity rivaled slick national magazines. In addition, I conducted oral histories to gain an understanding of the experiences of the radio homemakers and the women who listened to them.

## Introduction -- Notes

1. Billie Oakley, radio homemaker, interview by author, 16 March 1994, Lincoln, Nebraska.

2. Linda Gordon, "U.S. Women's History," in *The New American History*, ed. Eric Foner (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press), 186-187; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love: Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 6; Joan Jensen, ed., *With These Hands: Women Working on the Land* (Old Westbury, New York: Feminist Press, 1981), 1-4; Robert Swierenga, "Agriculture and Rural Life: The New Rural History," in *Ordinary People and Everyday Life: Perspectives on the New Social History*, ed. James B. Gardner and George Rollie Adams (Nashville, Tennessee: The American Association for State and Local History, 1983), 96. The specific role radio homemakers played in either promoting or tempering prescriptions for domesticity will be explored later. Scholars of rural, women's, or even radio history do not explore radio homemaking programs in depth, although some do address the importance of radio to rural life in general. One example of the omission of radio homemaking programming is found in Fred McDonald's *Don't Touch That Dial! Radio Programming in American Life, 1920-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), which focuses on radio's entertainment aspects (such as musicians, comedians and soap operas) or on the development of newscasts. Similarly, although *A Thirty-Year History of Programs Carried on National Radio Networks in the United States 1926-1956*, edited by Harrison B. Summers, (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1971) lists several programs on the air that seemed to be aimed at homemakers, little or no space is devoted to detailing their content, purpose and audience. The exception to this rule is Susan Smulyan, who wrote about women's programming at length in *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920-1934* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994).

3. See also Deborah Fink, *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), and *Open Country, Iowa: Rural Women, Tradition and Change* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986); and Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

4. Gordon, 185.

5. See Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Vicki Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), and "Dead Ends or Gold Mines? Using Missionary Records in Mexican American Women's History." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, 12, (1991).

6. Eleanor Arnold, ed., *Voices of American Homemakers* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1985), 9.

7. Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present, Volume 1* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), xviii.

8. Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 84-85, 239.

9. Blumin, 187, Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 155-165.

10. Glenna Matthews, *'Just a Housewife': The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 19, 22, 28, 89-91.

11. Ibid, 178, 185-188.

12. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (United States: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988), 174; See also Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1963).

13. See Jellison.

14. See Fink, *Agrarian Women*.

15. Ibid, 10.

16. Ibid, 78.

17. Ibid, 145, 149, 153.

18. Ibid, 112.

19. Ibid, 186, 174, 160.

20. Jellison, 32, 62-63.

21. Jellison, xxi. See also Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983).

### *Chapter One*

## FROM SERVICE TO SALES:

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF HOMEMAKING SHOWS IN RURAL RADIO

When a whole boxcar of prunes was mistakenly delivered to the Earl May Seed and Nursery warehouse in Shenandoah (Fig. 1), it might have posed a problem. It was 1927, and Earl May's store was successful in selling farm items, clothing, food, and a host of other items, in addition to its already thriving mail-order catalog business. However, as May's biographers observed, "A carload is a lot of prunes!" The crisis was averted by the radio homemakers and Gertrude May, Earl May's wife, who went on the air to "sell prunes." They introduced every prune recipe they could concoct, including "prune pie, prune salad, prune pudding, and prune rolls." Recalled radio homemaker Bernice Currier: "We talked about prunes, we gave special prune recipes, we even ran a contest for the best prune recipes sent in by listeners." Within a few weeks, the prunes were gone -- only to be replaced by a carload of oysters.<sup>1</sup>

The prune story has become part of the lore of the two radio stations, KMA and KFNF, in Shenandoah, Iowa. Beyond being a source of amusement, these anecdotes and others like them reveal the sales ability of Shenandoah's radio homemakers. The radio homemakers were a

"trademark" for the radio stations.<sup>2</sup> They epitomized the stations' self-avowed mission of providing service to the community, and did so through the help they offered their listeners over the air, and numerous community events they organized. As the decades progressed, and the financial realities of running a radio station became more apparent and more clearly articulated, the radio homemakers successfully wed service with sales. Obviously, the success of the radio homemakers rested on something else besides their ability to sell. Before we can explore other aspects, however, we must understand their role in promoting the agenda of the radio station owners. And that agenda must be framed within the context of the development of the radio industry.

Both KMA and KFNF began as ventures by radio enthusiasts with enough time and capital to invest in the new medium. Their purpose was two-fold: to provide necessary services to area listeners, particularly to the farm family, and to promote their seed and nursery businesses. By the 1930s, advertising began to play an increasingly more important role for these radio stations. Like the advertising industry as a whole, radio targeted women as the most crucial consumer group. As KMA and KFNF became self-supporting entities, largely independent of the seed and nursery companies that launched them, and the emerging industry of television increased competition for advertising revenue, courtship of the female consumer became more intense. As this chapter will show, radio homemaking shows supplied a loyal listenership and a steady source of advertising.

When Henry Field and Earl May began their radio stations, rural America seemed to be in a crisis. In the 1920s, urban dwellers

outnumbered those in rural areas in the United States for the first time ever. In 1875, half of all Americans who worked did so on farms. By 1920, only 30 percent of the population lived on farms. The farm economy had peaked from 1910 to 1914, but the boom was followed by a period of depression for farmers. There seemed to be overwhelming dissatisfaction on the part of farmers who were not experiencing economic and material improvement to the extent their urban counterparts were, and rural people migrated to urban areas in search of employment.<sup>3</sup>

The poverty and poor health that plagued rural Americans prompted progressive President Theodore Roosevelt to form a commission to investigate. Discrepancies between agrarian myth and rural reality were unearthed by the Country Life Commission of 1909, which noted -- among other problems -- the abysmal conditions that faced farm women and their children. Agrarian reformers wanted to stem the rural to urban migration and many blamed women's unhappiness for causing this migration.<sup>4</sup>

The earliest proponents of radio believed that it would be a panacea to cure all ills on the farm, including the isolation of farm women. These proponents included independent hobbyists and enthusiasts, who started amateur stations in their homes to play music and read news to a growing number of radio owners, and Progressives reformers, who saw radio as a means of culturally uplifting the masses. Radio, which could bring the world into the parlor, could be especially effective to rural listeners remote from cultural centers that provided entertainment and education. In the *Symposium of Radio and Rural Life*, published in 1935, respondents to the editor's queries labeled radio as the modern

invention most effective in "breaking down rural isolation." Ray Murray, Secretary of Agriculture in Iowa, observed: "The telephone, automobile and rural free delivery have done much to widen the horizon of Iowa farm families, but the radio has perhaps done more than these three together."<sup>5</sup>

Without the radio, farmers had neither "the time nor the funds" to benefit from the entertainment and educational opportunities available in the city. Heads of radio companies boasted that radio brought families together during the evening to listen to culturally uplifting programs. The taste for jazz that many found so base in the early 1920s had been replaced at the end of the decade by an enthusiasm for classical music among radio listeners. The supposedly elevating force of radio was further supported in advertisements for radio receivers in magazines, notes Roland Marchand in *Advertising the American Dream*. These ads featured elegant homes with "mansion-like proportions;" their formally-attired, upper-class occupants listening with an attitude suitable to the "solemnity of the occasion." This culture would not only make the farm family's lot more bearable in the hinterlands, but would supposedly eliminate their provincial attitudes. In 1935, supporters noted with enthusiasm that the radio had made farmers' interests and tastes almost the same as that of their urban counterparts' -- if not more advanced because of the former's tendency to "plan their listening more seriously." One study found that farmers, who were assumed to have premodern attitudes toward time, became more conscious of the clock because of the need to listen to their radio programs. The study's



author thought that farmers might be changing their habit of retiring early in the evening.<sup>6</sup>

Some radio pioneers were not as concerned with uplifting their rural audience as they were with giving them useful farming information, like weather and market reports, in a timely fashion. Without access to market information, farmers believed they were being cheated by railroads, banks, and speculators. By 1921, the United States Department of Agriculture broadcast market reports instead of telegraphing them around the country on 4,500 miles of line. Four years later, 81 stations carried market information from the federal government. Weather reports were also crucial to farm businesses. Henry Wallace, editor of the pre-eminent farm magazine, *Wallace's Farmer*, said that Weather Bureau reports had saved \$4 million worth of livestock from floods in Arkansas. A move toward modernizing the farm was further carried out as land-grant universities broadcast farm-related programs. The earliest of these was Kansas State Agriculture University, which began broadcasting extension courses in 1924. Two years after this program was introduced, 24 universities were offering similar programs.<sup>7</sup>

Radio was thought to be particularly beneficial to women. The "Radio and the Farmer" symposium on the relation of radio to rural life in 1935 said that the radio was important to the "contentment" of farm women, whose "solitude" was relieved by programs that they could listen to while doing their housework. Similarly, an article by F. Howard Forsyth, "The Radio and Rural Research," published in the 1934, notes, among other benefits of radio, that it "broadened the horizon and cheered the life of farm women."<sup>8</sup>

Katherine Jellison notes that rural women were influential in making the decision to purchase radios. Women were more interested in easing their isolation than they were in investing in the technology that would enable them to become better homemakers. In the 1920s, rural women were more likely to use what political power they had in the family to ensure the purchase of communication and transportation than they were to modernize their kitchen and appliances. The purchase of a radio, a telephone and a car were top priorities for them. The fact that 74% of rural households reported having "access to an automobile," and 85% had a telephone, whereas only 24% percent had indoor plumbing and only 22% had power machinery is not surprising, considering the average distance to a store, doctor, or high school was around five miles.<sup>9</sup>

The purchase of a radio was also affordable for farm families. The average cost spent on a radio, as indicated by a 1923 survey of 2,500 farm families, was \$175 -- far below the \$300 it cost to install indoor plumbing. Farm families were also more likely to invest in expensive radios because their reception was better over long distances. Even in the 1930s, when farm families often had to give up their telephone service because they could not afford it, radios continued to be popular. Many farm families considered buying a radio a necessity, not a luxury. For example, in 1930, more Iowa farm families than urban families owned radios. Farm families often made sacrifices to get a radio. One couple in 1930 did all their chores of husking corn and milking cows by themselves and used the money they saved by not hiring help to buy a radio.<sup>10</sup>

Radio's importance for rural women was illustrated by the introduction of a special column about radio in 1929, aimed specifically at them, in *Wallace's Farmer*. The column was written by Elizabeth Wherry, whose family ran a dairy operation in Iowa. Wherry noted that letters from her readers indicated that they liked entertainment programs more than the "Farm and Home Hour," although they listened to the latter regularly. Women liked to listen to music while they did their housework. One of Wherry's readers wrote:

I am the mother of four children, the oldest a boy of seven and a baby a girl of two months old. We are living on a 240-acre farm, and that means that I must spend most of my time in the kitchen, cooking, baking, washing, ironing, mending, scrubbing, canning, and caring for the babies. The first thing that I do in the morning, even before I go to the kitchen, is to go into the front room and tune in the radio.<sup>11</sup>

#### **"A Necessity in Their Everyday Life"**

Given the interest of both the Progressive reformers and the USDA in reaching rural audiences, it is not surprising that radio grew so quickly. In fact, the enterprises of Henry Field and Earl May in Shenandoah joined 20 other radio stations in Iowa alone, a state that one media consultant calls "a hotbed of radio from the beginning."<sup>12</sup> Yet, while the idea of service radio was a consideration, it is doubtful that easing women's isolation on the farm was the primary motivation for the two men. Both saw the new medium as an informal means to promote their community and their seed and nursery businesses. Henry Field had a long-established nursery business for over thirty years, and Earl May had taken over from his father-in-law in 1919.

The nursery business was one of Page County's most lucrative enterprises, and the first nursery in Shenandoah was launched in 1870, even before town lots were sold. David S. Lake, originally of New Hampshire, brought some fruit trees with him from a nursery in Illinois and sold grafts to settlers wishing to start orchards. Not only was he a leading producer of apples in the Midwest, but he supplied between 200,000 and 300,000 Osage trees every year to farmers who used them in lieu of fences. The Shenandoah Nurseries eventually covered 600 acres, had an annual payroll between \$75,000 and \$100,000, and opened a branch office as far away as France. Other nurseries followed Lake's lead, as "Page County's fertile soil and southern Iowa climate proved especially suitable for the nursery industry."<sup>13</sup>

Lake's venture inspired others to enter the business. Henry Field's first foray into the seed business, at age eight, proved to be a "total loss." Born in 1872 to two of Shenandoah's first white settlers, Field took an early interest in vegetables and flowers, and at age five, was enthralled by the first seed catalog he saw. He saved three years for his capital investment of \$4.65, with which he purchased a supply of pansy seed. Even as a youngster he proved to be ahead of his time, because the "settlers were not yet willing to spend money on such luxuries as garden flowers." (It is instructive to note that his first customer was a woman -- his aunt.) Unperturbed, Field continued his venture when he was 21, raising and selling his own vegetables, fruit and seeds. His business grew, and he was able to finance a building by 1902.<sup>14</sup>

Earl May paid for his college education at the universities of Michigan and Nebraska by selling seeds on horseback throughout the Midwest and the South, for the D.M. Ferry Company of Michigan. In 1915, he went to work for E.S. Welch, owner and president of Mount Arbor Nurseries in Shenandoah. A year later, he married the boss's daughter, Gertrude. A hard worker -- he not only sold seeds but he trapped animals and salvaged hides from dead cattle for \$1.50 apiece -- May admired the success of Henry Field and convinced his father-in-law that Shenandoah could support another seed and nursery business. Welch agreed to back the venture, and in 1924 May rented a "ramshackle building," hired two employees and invested sweat equity wooing customers during the day and preparing orders at night.<sup>15</sup>

Both entrepreneurs were captivated by the possibilities of radio. In 1922, there were 500 radio stations in the nation, 22 in Iowa alone. One of them was WGAJ in Shenandoah, operated by Harlan Gass whose 100-watt station broadcast from his parents' home. For his radio debut, young Gass put a radio antenna and a receiver with loudspeakers in the Empress Theater in downtown Shenandoah and read a poem to residents who had "jammed" the theater for the event. The event lasted "less than five minutes," but the audience members were "thrilled." Henry Field was the next to launch a radio station, and he was soon followed by Earl May. Field disliked the jazz he heard on his own receiving set, and thought that there were enough potential listeners who would also prefer "good old-fashioned heart and home pieces." In 1923, Field received his first taste of radio when he traveled 66 miles by dirt roads to WOAW in Omaha with a number of other Shenandoans. The two-hour program consisted of

the old-fashioned music Field so dearly loved, and he gave a talk on "the advantages of his hometown."<sup>16</sup>

Gertrude May debuted on radio a few weeks after Field did, also on WOAW in Omaha. The Shenandoah Congregational Church sponsored a program that featured not only Gertrude May's singing, but that of Jessie Young, who would later gain fame as a radio homemaker. Several other groups in the area were making the long trek to Omaha to go on the air, and their programs were enthusiastically received.<sup>17</sup>

Earl May made his radio entrance on January 17, 1923, when he represented his fraternal order, Woodmen of the World, as "Consul Commander" of its first "radio camp." His audience included 100 people at the May seedhouse who "sat on folding chairs and ate Jonathan and Delicious apples while they waited for the program to begin." Elsewhere in Shenandoah, 200 listeners crowded the Benedict Piano Studio, 75 listened at the Woodmen of the World Hall, 50 listened at the Delmonica Hotel, 86 crowded two homes in Shenandoah and even the Henry Field headquarters held 20 people. Shenandoah residents were not the only ones glued to their sets that night. Although federal law prohibited from direct advertising, he offered to send a free iris bulb to the first 10,000 listeners who replied with a card, and a fifteen-dollar prize from the Shenandoah National Bank for the telegram from the farthest away. The program received 17,840 messages, more than any other program on WOAW except the 1923 World Series. (The winner of the cash prize was a former Shenandoan who had heard the broadcast from California.)<sup>18</sup>

Both Field and May were hooked. KFNF, "the friendly farmer station," was launched on February 22, 1924, from the third floor of the

Field seed house. May continued broadcasting once a month from WOAW, but the difficulty of driving in Iowa weather convinced him to build his own studio that was connected to the WOAW transmitter by telephone line. On September 4, 1924, KMA ("keep millions advised") broadcast its first programs from the studio in the May Seed and Nursery Company.<sup>19</sup>

Yet another seed business in the area started a radio station, but that venture failed. The Berry Seed Company in Clarinda, which specialized in farm seeds, followed its competitors' lead by launching KSO on November 2, 1925. Its slogan, "We're the Berries," caused one long-time Shenandoah resident to remark: "This was a nice opening but it took more than a slick phrase to operate a radio station. It took personality and none of their announcers had the charisma of Mr. Field or Mr. May." The station was sold to the Iowa Broadcasting Company in 1931 and moved to Des Moines.<sup>20</sup>

It was not unusual for businesses to own radio stations. Direct advertising was initially forbidden on the radio by the federal government, but by the late 1920s, both direct and indirect (sponsorship) advertisement was acceptable. For example, Sears and Roebuck owned a Chicago station's whose call letters "WLS" stood for "World's Largest Store." Direct advertising was initially forbidden because radio developed at a time when the country seemed to be undergoing a new social order. A new emphasis on consumption and instant gratification was eroding Victorian values of thrift and tempering one's impulses. Many proponents of radio did not want the medium to fall full sway to the crass consumerism of the new Modernist outlook. Because radio was deemed so influential and to have such

potential for moral uplift, and because access to the airwaves was seen as limited, the federal government stepped in to regulate it. In 1922, Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover voiced his opposition at the First National Radio Conference to the idea of allowing radio, which had "so great a possibility for service, for news, for entertainment, for education, and for vital commercial purposes, to be drowned in advertising chatter . . . ." <sup>21</sup>

Both Field and May claimed to be responding to the service needs of their community. Early programming on these stations ran the gamut from weather reports to choir and organ music. KMA claimed to be one of the first to regularly broadcast USDA bulletins, stating that "public service programs have ranked high on KMA's priority list since the station's inception." When Field was promoting his new 500-watt station, he promised KFNF's programs would be "devoted mostly to entertainment and educational features, and will specialize in old-fashioned music." <sup>22</sup>

In 1929, KFNF broadcast 355 hours per month. Of that, 17 percent of its time was devoted to commercial programming, 40 percent to entertainment, 13 percent to religious programming, 17 percent to education and 13 percent to agricultural programming. Field reported that KFNF sold time, but "in a limited way." The station was supported "by benefit of good will, and advertising for our own firm." The station had only a half hour per week of sponsored programs, and its direct advertising programs amounted to 13.5 hours per week. At that time KFNF had eight employees in addition to two licensed operators in charge of the station and spent \$225 per week on its payroll in addition



to \$1,000 per week spent on "talent." KFNF's monthly net income in 1927 was \$1,200.<sup>23</sup>

In 1930, Henry Field answered the prerequisite question posed by the Federal Radio Commission, how KFNF would serve "in the public convenience, interest or necessity":

The station is a great help to the people of the Middle West with its farm and garden talks, poultry talks, household helps, mother's hour, boys and girls club work, Sunday School Lesson study, and similar activities. We specialize in weather reports, markets crop conditions, community activities, aid to Farm bureau work and such services. We have also tried to give to the people a clean, wholesome, "homey" type of entertainment which is much appreciated and enjoyed, as evidenced by the hundreds and thousands of letters we have received. The people in a considerable territory, of the Midwest feel us a necessity in their everyday life, and through our over five years of continuous and consistent service have come to depend on us for the type of entertainment they enjoy most, and the information and helps needed in their daily lives.<sup>24</sup>

Even though direct advertising was initially forbidden and the benefits of indirect advertising were dubious, KFNF and KMA yielded highly tangible results for their owners. The two radio stations helped make Shenandoah the hub of a four-state area, bringing both recognition and visitors to the community. In addition, because radio stations had very little competition and clear transmissions in the early days, KMA and KFNF programs were heard around the world. In 1925, Henry Field won second place in the first national contest held by *Radio Digest* to determine the "The World's Most Popular Radio Announcer." He lost to Graham McNamee, a popular radio announcer on WEAJ in New York City. In 1926, Field withdrew from the competition for the sake of his rival, Earl May. May won the contest with 452,901 votes, while Field finished

at sixth place with 153,783. *Radio Digest* was surprised at the strong showing from the "little loyal community" that had beaten competitors in larger markets, noting that: "The world has beaten a path to Shenandoah."<sup>25</sup>

Most important to Field and May, the radio stations increased both mail order and on-site business for their seed and nursery companies. Total sales for the Henry Field Company increased from \$912,211 in 1925 to \$2,571,526 in 1927. In 1927, Field sold 490,000 pounds of coffee, 20 carloads of dried fruit, 204,000 yards of dress goods and 44 carloads of field seeds over the radio. Similarly, the Earl May Seed and Nursery Company reported a 425% increase in business by 1927.<sup>26</sup> Notes KMA historian Robert Birkby:

Sales receipts of the garden seed department were fourteen times greater than those twelve months earlier; those of the nursery department had been multiplied by seven, and the number of employees had tripled. The meteoric rise of the firm was due almost solely to the influence of KMA. In the first year the station was on the air, Earl May estimated that the company's mailing list had grown by a million names.<sup>27</sup>

Obviously, providing community service was good for business. Both radio stations staged formal events to attract people to town. The second anniversary celebration of KFNF drew over 10,000 people from the area. In 1926, over 25,000 people from across the Midwest attended the first KMA Jubilee, spending an estimated \$2 per person in Shenandoah. So many people flocked to Shenandoah that both radio stations built auditoriums to hold audiences eager to both hear and see a radio broadcast, and the performances held there rivaled (and eventually

outdid) the Chautauqua circuit. The KMA station auditorium, called Mayfair Auditorium, was designed to resemble an "outdoor Moorish garden," and was touted as being "the largest radio hall between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains." The auditorium, which cost \$10,000, seated 1,000, and its stage could be soundproofed for broadcasting by lowering a three-ton piece of glass between the stage and the audience.<sup>28</sup>

It was a dynamic time for radio broadcasting, and the ranks of KMA and KFNF entertainers and broadcasters were swelled not only by entertainers being displaced from the Chautauqua and Vaudeville circuits, but by a series of home-grown talents. Many of those who went on the air during the earliest years did so as volunteers or received payment in "scrip" that could be exchanged for goods at the stores of Henry Field and Earl May. The need for performers was dictated by the government, which stipulated that a full program of scheduling be maintained in order to discourage hobbyists from jamming the airwaves with competing signals. Often, employees of the seed companies were pressed into service as announcers or singers. The relatives of Henry Field and Earl May were also encouraged to present their own programs. These non-professionals were tolerated as long as they were sincere.<sup>29</sup>

The content and tone of Shenandoah's radio homemaking shows were established during this creative and innovative period. Women went on the radio to generate programming that would interest female listeners, with the pressure to raise advertising revenue being minimal or absent altogether. Rather than using a direct form of advertising, which listeners resented in the early 1920s, these programs used an indirect

form of advertising, also known as "sponsor participation programs." When direct advertising was introduced, the move was couched as service oriented and justified either as a democratic means of paying for programs, or as providing necessary information to listeners. In fact, at least one advertising promoter dubbed these types of programs "Women's Service Programs." Writing in 1949, Robert Garver, an account executive with Lynn Baker, Incorporated, described women's service programs as the "ideal advertising medium," noting that such shows were "devoted to home economics, shopping, child care, general commentary, fashions, beauty care, nutrition, and similar informative topics in which women are particularly interested."<sup>30</sup>

Both KMA and KFNF had radio homemakers on staff from the very beginning, with KMA's being considered full-time employees. KFNF's women's service programs featured Henry Field's sisters, although eventually only one, Leanna Driftmier, emerged as the regular radio homemaker. In 1926, Helen Field Fischer had a program called "The Mother's Hour," and she occasionally invited Driftmier on the show with her. Henry Field thought that Driftmier should have her own show, and told her that "anyone with seven children ought to have plenty to talk about." Fischer started her own horticulture shows, and "The Mother's Hour" became Driftmier's. Renamed "Kitchen-Klatter" sometime in the 1930s, the show and magazine of the same name became a Midwest institution, covering "a variety of subjects of interest to housewives; cooking, canning, child rearing, menu making, sewing, and housework. Mrs. Driftmier's weekday talks were a development closely akin to the service features provided in the women's page of a newspaper." "Kitchen-

Klatter" was perhaps the first sponsor participation program of its kind. In 1949, Garver -- a staunch proponent of sponsor participation programs -- marveled that Driftmier was still giving her own broadcasts and noted that "the program's longevity is in itself a convincing testimonial to its advertising effectiveness."<sup>31</sup>

KMA's radio homemaking shows were offered sporadically throughout the late 1920s and 1930s, as many of the station's female musicians took turns as radio homemakers. In 1926, classical violinist Bernice Currier took to the airwaves on KMA with "talks on furniture, home furnishings, cooking hints and women's fashions." A friend of the Mays, she had introduced Earl May to his spouse, Gertrude, while both were students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Currier, who was a music major, was invited to join the KMA Orchestra in 1927. Her versatility in music -- although trained in classical music she quickly learned to fiddle -- was eclipsed by her ability to sell. She made her entrance in sales during the middle of a music broadcast, when May asked her what she thought of some boys shirts that were for sale in the store. She answered: "Personally, I like them fine. My two boys Red and Ed wear them, and the shirts are very easy to launder. They wear well and, what is important to a mother, they make the boys look neat and clean." Before long she had her own program, "Home Hour," in which she offered household hints and recipes.<sup>32</sup>

Jessie Young, another long-time radio homemaker, was a member of the Mays' church choir, and made the trip to WOAW in Omaha in 1923 for some of the first broadcasts orchestrated by the Mays. In 1926, when the bank she and her husband worked at closed, Earl May asked her to go to

work for him full time. She tried her hand at advertising and was immediately successful. Her radio show had a variety of names over the years, but it was usually characterized by talks about her everyday life, including "what she planned to fix for supper and what her family was doing." Young conducted a sewing circle daily at 3 p.m. over the KMA airwaves 1928, in which she helped "the housewife and mother solve some of their sewing problems." Her half-hour show was entitled "KMA Sewing Circle" in September 1928, but was changed to "Stitch and Chatter" by Christmas. Later incarnations her show assumed were "Home Visit with Jessie Young," "Home Hints with Jessie Young," and "Homemaker's Chat." By November 1939, Young was airing a 45-minute "Homemaker's Visit" program daily, Monday through Saturday.<sup>33</sup>

Radio homemaking shows exuded an informal, folksy style that appealed to rural listeners. The shows consisted of advice on homemaking, which the radio homemakers augmented with stories about their familird, life, and daily activities. Talks on flowers and gardening were also popular, and both KMA and KFNF employed a "flower lady" to sell their garden and nursery supplies. Programming on KMA and KFNF directly catered to the small-town or rural woman. For example, Mrs. L. L. Vanatta was promoted as an "Iowa Farm woman," who gave "regular weekly talks on the problems of the farmer's wife, and how radio helps to solve many of them." KMA also acknowledged the importance of poultry raising to farm women, traditional a woman's job on farms, by employing two people to give poultry talks. One of them was Mrs. A.R. Perkins, who "actively engaged in the raising and care of poultry, and

her talks always deal with the problems she and all poultry raisers have to meet."<sup>34</sup>

The sharing of recipes was a mainstay of radio homemaking from the outset. Henry Field realized the appeal of recipes before he even began his radio station, including his wife's recipes in his almanac and seed catalog, *Seed Sense*, which he published from 1912 to 1952. A promotional brochure published by KMA in 1928 lauded its earliest radio homemaker, Mamie Miller, who "just makes your mouth water for all the good things she tells you how to make during the domestic science hour every morning from 9:00 until 10:00 p.m." In 1928, KMA also had its own radio recipe department, which was busy enough to require the assistance of flower lady Le Ona Teget as well as "quite a force of assistants to keep these departments running smoothly and take care of the many demands upon their time." Teget gave her own Domestic Science talk in 1928. Listeners requested copies of recipes given over the air, and the radio stations started publishing their own cookbooks to meet this need. After the success of a "pickle book" sometime in the late 1920s, Leanna Field compiled recipes contributed by listeners into "Your KFNF Radio Cook Book." Most radio homemakers published their own cookbooks.<sup>35</sup>

Responding to the personal tone of the radio homemaking shows, listeners not only to ask for recipes but to ask about their lives. The radio homemakers tried to personally answer the letters they received, but it was a formidable task because their shows drew the most mail of any type of programming on the stations. In response, most of the radio homemakers published a small newsletter or a magazine, but Leanna

Driftmier's magazine, named after her "Kitchen-Klatter" radio show, became the most prominent.

A few months after she began her program, Driftmier was deluged with so much mail that she decided to publish a small newsletter to answer her correspondence. "The Mother's Hour Letter" could be had for a dime and a stamped, self-addressed envelope. The first issue, published in July 1926, ran four pages and contained articles on child raising, inspirational verse, and news and photos of Driftmier's family. It also contained an article promoting the sale of a dishwasher that her husband Martin had invented, which operated by turning two handles instead of running on electricity.<sup>36</sup> In this first newsletter, Driftmier established the intimate, service-oriented tone of the publication that was to continue through the next sixty years, even after her death.

My time on the air at K.F.N.F. is so short, that I cannot tell you all of the things that I would like to. I wish I could drop in and visit with each one of my radio friends for I feel that I have a personal acquaintance with so many of you.

I have received a great many good letters and I would like to answer each one personally, but as I have very little time to write letters after I do my house work and care for my children, I decided to send you this MOTHER'S HOUR LETTER. Altho this is a printed letter I want you to feel that it is meant as much for you as if I had written with a pencil or pen.

I am going to try to send you one of these MOTHER'S HOUR LETTERS every month if possible, and in this way give you some of the many helpful ideas that come to me from my friends all over the country. I hope you will like it, and if you do, I wish you would write and tell me. You can also help by writing me, and sending suggestions and ideas which might be of benefit to other mothers.<sup>37</sup>



## Chapter One -- Notes

1. Robert Birkby, *KMA Radio: The First Sixty Years* (Shenandoah, Iowa: May Broadcasting Company, 1985), 132; Ninette Beaver and Bill Tombrink, *Behind the Mike with Earl May: The Story of a Broadcasting Pioneer* (Shenandoah, Iowa: May Seed and Nursery Company, 1979), 28-29.
2. Evelyn Birkby, *Cooking With KMA: Featuring 60 Years of Radio Homemakers* (Shenandoah, Iowa: May Broadcasting Company, 1985), 2.
3. Max Lerner, "The Way of the Farmer," in *Rural America*, ed. Suzanne Fremon and Morrow Wilson (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1976), 109; Rachel Ann Rosenfeld, *Farm Women: Work, Farm, and Family in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 3; Fink, 46.
4. Fink, 24-27.
5. Edmund DeS. Brunner, *Radio and the Farmer: A Symposium on the Relation of Radio to Rural Life* (New York: The Radio Institute of the Audible Arts, 1935), 11 & 13.
6. DeS. Brunner, 11-12; Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley, California: The University of California Press, 1985), 90-91; Howard Forsyth, "The Radio and Rural Research," *Iowa Journal of History and Practice* 42 (1949): 74-75.
7. Reynold M. Wik, "Radio in Rural America," *Agricultural History* 62 (1988): 178-183; Jellison, 56.
8. deS. Brunner, 23; Forsyth, 75.
9. Jellison, 34-35, 64.
10. Ibid, 35, 60.
11. Ibid, 58.
12. Donna L. Halper, *Full-Service Radio: Programming for the Community* (Boston: Focal Press, 1991), 10.
13. *Page County History* (Iowa Writers Program of the Work Projects Administration, 1942), 56-57.
14. *Page County History*, 56; Marjorie Ross Heise, "Two Friendly Farmer Stations," *Iowa Journal of History and Practice* 42 (1949): 405.
15. *Page County History*, 57; Beaver and Tombrink, 5-6.
16. Birkby, *KMA Radio*, 6-8; Christian Warren, "Shenandoah -- 'The Radio City,'" *The Page*, 1971; *Page County History*, 56-57.
17. Birkby, *KMA Radio*, 8-9.

18. Ibid, 11-13.
19. Ibid, 16-17.
20. Christian; *Page County History*, 57.
21. Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920-1934* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 70.
22. "Earl May: KMA Founder," *Shenandoah Evening Sentinel*, 8 Aug. 8, 1985, Section A, 3; Henry Field, *Field's Seed Sense*, August 1929, 3.
23. Application for Renewal of Broadcasting Station License for KFNF, United States of America, Federal Radio Commission, 27 September 1929, 6. Special Collections, Shenandoah Historical Museum, Shenandoah, Iowa.
24. Application for Renewal of Broadcasting Station License for KFNF, United States of America, Federal Radio Commission, 12 December 1930, 7. Special Collections, Shenandoah Historical Museum, Shenandoah, Iowa
25. Birkby, *KMA Radio*, 32-33.
26. Janice N. Friedel, "Manuscript Collections: The Henry Field Collection at the State Historical Society of Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 5-6 (1986): 309; Heise, 408.
27. Birkby, *KMA Radio*, 42.
28. Ibid, 36, 41-42, 45.
29. Ibid, *KMA Radio*, 53; Christian, 1.
30. Robert I. Garver, *Successful Radio Advertising With Sponsor Participation Programs* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1949), 35, 77.
31. "KMA: 60 Years of Broadcasting," *Shenandoah Evening Sentinel*, Section A (8 August 1985):8; Evelyn Birkby, *Neighboring on the Air: Cooking with the KMA Radio Homemakers* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991), 87; Garver, 77, 40.
32. *Behind the 'Mike' with KMA* (Shenandoah, Iowa: World Publishing Company, probably 1926), 11); Birkby, *KMA Radio*, 57.
33. Birkby, *KMA Radio*, 51, 57; *Behind the 'Mike' with KMA*, (Shenandoah, Iowa: World Publishing Company, Sixth Edition, 1928), 23; *KMA Program Notes*, KMA files, Shenandoah, Iowa.
34. *Behind the 'Mike,'* 1928, 9, 31.
35. *Behind the 'Mike,'* 1928, 19; *KMA Program Notes; Your KFNF Radio Cook Book* (Shenandoah, Iowa, Henry Field Seed & Nursery Co., probably late 1927 or 1928), 2.

36. Birkby, *Neighboring*, 97; Leanna Driftmier, *The Mother's Hour Letter*, July 1926, 4.

*Chapter Two*

## THE GROWTH OF DIRECT-SALES ADVERTISING

The idea of Shenandoah's radio stations as a service to the community never disappeared altogether. In 1949, KMA was praised for serving the public in addition to "developing their own commercial interest." KMA had a separate welfare program director and maintained a "Send Out Sunshine" Club that provided programs for "shut-ins and underprivileged listeners." Under the auspices of the SOS Club, KMA distributed many needed goods for its listeners. In 1940, for example, KMA gave away "10 wheel chairs, 200 radio sets, 15 radio batteries, 20 pairs of spectacles, 8 typewriters, 3 hospital beds, 6 pairs of blankets, and 500 baby chicks." Organized and headed by Edythe Stirlen, known as "the Little Minister," the club had amassed 2,500 members/listeners throughout the Midwest. In addition to the SOS Club, KMA and KFNF also prided themselves on the number of service reports they carried -- including the home economics programs -- and their devotion to "humanitarian campaigns, such as the Red Cross, 4-H Clubs, Boy Scouts, and public school affairs."<sup>1</sup>

Although the idea of service radio did not disappear, as the 1930s progressed, the commercial aspects of radio grew. Advertising revenue from businesses besides the seed and nursery companies became crucial to the survival of the stations. What had been an informal venture to promote the seed and nursery business by providing services to listeners turned into a formal push for advertising revenue and product recognition. Before 1935, KMA had served primarily to advertise the May Seed and Nursery Company. Until roads were improved in the 1930s, 90 percent of the nursery's business was mail-order. When the station carried outside advertisers, the clients were expected to pay a flat rate per month based on "how much good the management thought the station could do for the client at hand." In 1935, the station established a rate card and accepted more outside advertising. The move toward more commercialism reflected a national trend. As Garver observed: "The very first broadcasts served up entertainment and public service without the benefit of sponsorship. Early listeners became accustomed to hearing programs that were designed without a suspicion of a commercial, but eventually the economic facts of life had to be faced."<sup>2</sup>

KFNF and KMA became companies in their own right, incorporating separately from their parent companies. KFNF incorporated as a separate entity in 1932, a year before the Henry Field Company was sold in foreclosure to bondholders. Field continued to own and operate KFNF, as well as the Henry Field Stores, Inc., which were also held as a separate corporation. In 1938, KMA affiliated with a national network but still maintained many of the programs that gave it local appeal and

personality. A year later, KMA separated from the May Seed Company, becoming an independent corporation.<sup>3</sup>

Company records for KFNF reveal the considerable cost of operating a station and how much was recovered in advertising. In December 1935, the year it incorporated, was worth \$17,000. Its studio and office equipment was worth \$1,766. Its transmitter, plant and equipment was valued at \$21,234. As of November 1935, it generated advertising revenue of \$6,646.90, which gave the company a net profit of \$326.37. KFNF's largest single expense was payroll, which, at \$4,719, was the only item listed in the thousands. KFNF had only 11 advertising accounts. While most of its advertising in 1935 came from the Henry Field Co., at \$1,794.83, its other large accounts included advertising agencies and a women's magazine. By 1939, KFNF was foundering and Henry Field was forced to sell the station to bondholders.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the trend toward more commercialism, advertisers in the 1930s were nevertheless still hesitant to use radio to sell their products. Radio was considered to be an especially intrusive medium. In *Selling Radio*, Susan Smulyan notes that some advertisers continued to regard the home as the separate sphere -- a "women's workplace and as a space set apart from the harsh economic realities of marketplace." Advertisers also considered radio programs less flexible in terms of the audience schedule than the print media, which could be read at one's leisure. Because of these attitudes, daytime advertising on national networks did not increase until the mid-1930s. Between 1935 and the decade's close, money spent on such advertising more than doubled.<sup>5</sup>

Radio stations pandered to advertisers, trying to convince them that targeting women paid. In turn, advertisers well knew the consumption power women wielded. One writer promoting radio advertising lamented the loss of a "great show" with "a good cast, an enthusiastic following and a fair rating" but poor sales. He noted: "Ninety-five percent of the buyers and users of the product advertised were women, yet twice when the author sat among the studio audience over 65 per cent of those attending were men and boys, and these in a lower income bracket than that of the families who bought the product."<sup>6</sup>

Even after advertisers were convinced that it was both proper and profitable to advertise on daytime radio, radio stations still had to compete for revenue. By the mid-1940s, television and FM radio were challenging AM radio. Television programs were believed to be less amenable to daytime listening than radio programs. "Women do a lot of radio listening, most of it while attending to household chores. These duties might make it impossible for housewives to keep their eyes focused for an appreciable time on the television screen, even though they might prefer to watch television for as long periods as they currently listen to radio." If the competition from television might not prove, initially, to be too serious, competition from other AM stations was. During the postwar years, the number of radio stations increased and "fractioned" the radio audience, diminishing each station's share of listeners. A 1945 study by the FCC found that half of the stations launched between October 1945 and April 1947 were losing money.<sup>7</sup>

Despite this competition, the number of radio homemaking shows airing from Shenandoah increased dramatically in the late 1940s. These

women not only broadcast locally, but were courted by companies that wanted them to promote their products in syndication. Broadcasts retained their emphasis on offering a needed service to their listeners, but they also contained a more aggressive and blatant sales element. The listeners and the radio homemakers themselves might not have always agreed with the aggressive sales pitch, but the radio homemaking shows were consistent in their ability to generate both listener mail and sales.

During this period, many new radio homemakers were introduced to listeners while long-standing ones often jumped between the two stations. KMA management thought it beneficial to have two homemakers broadcast daily. Leanna Driftmier and her Kitchen-Klatter program moved from KFNF to KMA in 1939 when her brother lost control of the station. KMA had more power and gave Driftmier more air time. Jessie Young, who had been with KMA from the beginning, continued broadcasting on KMA until she moved to Colorado in 1942. Young's program was replaced by "Kitchen Club" with Edith Hansen. Hansen was raised on a farm in Nebraska, and had radio experience at WJAG in Norfolk, Nebraska. Adella Shoemaker, one of Leanna Driftmier's neighbors, filled the void left by Kitchen-Klatter at KFNF in 1939 with a show called "Kitchen Klinik." In 1948, when Kitchen-Klatter left KMA for syndication, Shoemaker left KFNF for KMA, and Bernice Currier was called back into service.<sup>8</sup>

In 1950, Evelyn Birkby introduced her program on KMA, "Down A Country Lane." In 1952, Shoemaker began her own syndicated program, and farm wife Florence Falk was introduced to listeners. During this period, "the KMA schedule was loaded with radio homemakers." In 1963, when



Billie Oakley, who had previously worked on KFNF, approached the new manager about doing a radio homemaking show, he resisted, believing that with KMA's offerings, listeners were being "homemastered" to death. Oakley offered to do the program for free two weeks and convinced KFNF to carry her program, "It's a Woman's World."<sup>9</sup>

The radio homemaking shows carried more advertising than other shows. The majority of ads were targeted at women -- such as cleaning and kitchen products. Radio homemakers sold products that were used by the entire family but purchased by women, such as coffee, food, vitamins, and shampoo. Often, the radio homemakers sold various products for their sponsors directly from the station, called "premiums." For example, in 1943, Edith Hansen's morning "Homemaker's Visit" included advertisements for the Gooch Mill Company, the Dwarfies Corporation, La Dana Shampoo, the Perfex Company, Simpson Paint, Vitamin Stores, and a tablecloth spot. In the afternoon, "Kitchen-Klatter" was sponsored by The Crete Mills, Dwarfies Vitamins, the Perfex Company, Simpson Paint, and Paxton & Gallagher. It also carried ads for its own magazine, food savers (plastic baggies), a quilt block, and a ray lamp.<sup>10</sup>

On a typical Saturday, October 7, 1944, the afternoon "Kitchen-Klatter" show carried advertisements for Crete Mills, Dwarfies Vitamins, Dr. Daniel Brooks, and Uncle Sam's Breakfast Food, as well as offers for a quilt block and Western stationery. Sponsors for the morning "Homemaker's Visit," this time with Sue Conrad, another Field sister, included the Gooch Mill Co., the Perfex Company, White Rouge, Vita Trio, the KMA Guide, Gamble Stores, and the Gooch Mill Company's Pancake Flour.<sup>48</sup> In 1948, Bernice Currier's "Homemaker's Visit" included spots

for the vitamins, paint, carpet, and cosmetics. Adella Shoemaker's "Kitchen Klinik" advertised vitamins, paint, shampoo, and kitchen products.<sup>11</sup>

The money these shows earned was substantial. Although rate cards are not available for either station from these years, in 1948 "Kitchen-Klatter" charged \$75 a week for advertising. With nine paying accounts for one show, "Kitchen-Klatter" probably brought in over \$600 a week for KMA. A business manager for KMA called the radio homemaking revenue for those years "substantial."<sup>12</sup>

KMA promoted its radio homemakers to potential advertisers. In 1955, KMA management sent a press release to advertising trade magazines *Broadcasting Sponsor*, *Radio Daily*, and *Advertising Age*, stating that its success in selling Tidy House Products was "graphic evidence of radio's constant, continuing selling abilities." In a ten-week premium offer made by Tidy House on over 74 radio stations and six television stations, KMA had the lowest cost at .0395 cents per order. The offer, for "eight large-size food saver plastic bags for 25 cents and a box top from Perfex Super Cleaner," was promoted by Edith Hansen and Martha Bohlsen, Tidy House homemakers. In 1957, KMA praised Florence Falk, "The Farmer's Wife," for selling \$15,060 worth of Gooch Company merchandise, such as flour, spaghetti, and macaroni, in one day. After a single broadcast by Falk on Saturday, March 30, 1957, the station was "swamped" with 3,012 orders for a rose bush, which Gooch Company customers could order for 40 proofs of purchase.<sup>13</sup>

Items advertised over the air in Shenandoah mirrored national trends in advertising aimed at women. By 1932, the food industry

represented the largest amount of money being spent on advertising, while money spent advertising drug and toilet products rose from the fifth largest amount in 1927 to the second largest in 1932. A survey of over 200 sponsored programs in 1939 showed that "foods, drugs and toilet goods and soaps accounted for the largest number of programs." Over 66 percent of these sponsored programs were "spoken," which probably included the women's service programs, while only 18 percent were musical and 16 percent were variety shows. The next largest advertiser on these sponsored programs were the cigarette and tobacco companies.<sup>14</sup>

One indication of radio homemakers success in selling is the fact that they were approached by outside companies to sponsor products. Many successfully syndicated their programs on other stations throughout the Midwest. Instead of paying to advertise on a radio homemaking show along with other sponsors, these companies hired radio homemakers to produce shows solely dedicated their product and paid stations to carry the show. In 1965, Billie Oakley became Gooch Foods' consumer director. She commanded over \$30,000 a year and broadcast her syndicated program on 41 stations. She became one of the few homemakers to make the transition from radio to television. Oakley also published a newsletter, a book of wit and wisdom, and several cookbooks.<sup>15</sup>

Tidy House, a manufacturer of household products, syndicated Edith Hansen's program on several Midwestern radio stations in 1948. The company eventually contracted radio homemaker Martha Bohlson to split a half-hour program with Hansen. Tidy House was founded in the 1930s by two KMA employees, Cyril (Cy) Rapp and Al Ramsey, who were familiar with the radio homemakers' sales abilities. The Tidy House programs

eventually aired on over 90 stations east of the Rocky Mountains. By 1954, Tidy House, with over 200 employees, was one of the largest employers in Shenandoah. In 1950, Tidy House merged with Pillsbury.<sup>16</sup>

In 1957, Tidy House published a magazine featuring Hansen and Bohlsen. *Kitchen Club: The Magazine for Modern Homemakers* carried the ever-popular recipe column, a "Good Neighbor" feature, poems, household hints, and articles on household linens, decorating, holiday plants, and raising children. It advertised the Tidy House products, which included Perfex, an all-purpose household cleaner; Dexol Laundry Bleach; Shina Dish, a dishwashing soap; and Gloss Tex starch. The magazine contained premium offers for a salad cutter, a garment bag, and a cake plate that rotated and played "happy birthday." For two dollars and a proof of purchase from Shina Dish, readers could purchase the *Kitchen Club Recipes* cookbook compiled by Hansen and Bohlsen.<sup>17</sup>

Only one issue of *Kitchen Club* was published, because apparently it could not match the success of its rivals, *Jessie's Homemaker*, and *Kitchen-Klatter*. *Kitchen Club* might have been too expensive to produce, because it was a large, slick magazine on glossy paper with many professional photographs. It also might not have been as appealing to readers as the more down-to-earth fare produced by Jessie Young and Leanna Driftmier. While Young carried ads from a variety of sponsors over the years, we assume her magazine was largely an independent venture. Driftmier was a free agent -- rather than sell her personality and labor to a company, she started her own.

Driftmier did not promote herself as the model of an entrepreneur, but she controlled her labor to a larger extent than did other radio

homemakers. Early on, her radio show and magazine were so successful that her husband left his position at the Henry Field Seed company to manage the business. After moving to KMA, she was making \$780 a year by 1940 and \$1,144 a year by 1946. In 1948, she began syndicating her programs throughout the Midwest and launched a line of food flavorings with her picture on the label. The same year, Kitchen-Klatter operations moved from the remodeled garage adjoining her home to offices on Sycamore Avenue. In 1959, she and her husband sold the firm to their daughter and son-in-law, and in 1961 the firm moved to even larger quarters. Besides Driftmier's daughters, Margery Strom, Lucile Verness, and Dorothy Johnson, several other women hosted "Kitchen-Klatter" through the years, including Hallie Kite, Verlene Looker, and Eveyln Birkby. In 1971, the show was carried on 14 stations in Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota, Kansas, and Missouri. The Kitchen-Klatter magazine was mailed to 81,000 subscribers in "every state in the Union and 27 foreign countries as well."<sup>18</sup>

One of the reasons the radio homemakers sold so well was their high credibility with listeners. The homemakers generally believed in the products they sold over the air, and several of the radio homemakers refused to sell products they did not trust or test themselves. The commercialism on their programs was supposed to be invisible to the listener and a good radio homemaker could make her advertisements an integral part of the program. Just as often, the commercialism could be blatant. For example, one of Edith Hansen's programs consisted entirely of letters from listeners testifying how much they liked using the Tidy House product, Perfex. Similarly, Jessie Young openly warned

listeners and readers that if they did not support her sponsors, she would go off the air.<sup>19</sup> Since very few transcripts survive, it is hard to quantify the amount or qualify the subtlety of the advertising, but most radio homemakings probably resembled this excerpt from a program by Adella Shoemaker:

I've had so many interesting letters from our listeners -- favorite recipes for pickling and preserving. And we're going to have so many good recipes through the summer. One friend wrote in and she said that she was making apple jelly. They had the early apples and she was preparing some, and she said that one help she enjoyed was shaving paraffin right into the glass. And then she poured her hot jelly in and as the jelly hit the paraffin it melted and it came to the top and formed the film over it. And I thought that was a good idea to try. I always do put a thin film of paraffin immediately over my jelly, just as soon as I have poured it into the glass. And then after the jelly has cooled, and this film has hardened, then I add a little bit more. We don't want to put on too much paraffin, because you know a too heavy a coat might cause the jelly to weep, that is one cause of weepy jelly. Of course, there are other causes too.

So if you have a good recipe for making jelly and if you've used United Pectin in it, you're sure of a good product. Be very careful of your recipes. That's why I think these that come in the folder that comes with every container of United Pectin you buy, are especially good to follow because they are so accurate and dependable. Follow them exactly and you will turn out perfect quivery clear jelly that is a such a delight to make and to serve. It's easy to use, this United Pectin, too. The directions are on each package, it's very simple to use.<sup>20</sup>

Not all the radio homemakers or their listeners were happy with the amount of advertising on the homemaking shows. The problem was compounded because, as direct advertising became more important, the radio homemaking shows were often cut from an hour or a half hour show to fifteen minutes. Some of the radio homemakers complained on the air about heavy commercialism. In 1957, KMA station manager Tony Koelker sent a memo to Bernice Currier and Florence Falk, chiding them for

talking on the air "about how many commercials you have to get on during 30 minutes time." Koelker said that commercials were "the life blood of the stations," and that listeners either resented or didn't understand the reference to commercialism. He noted that these matters did not even concern the listener, and reiterated the time-worn public service stance:

Commercials, as such, should be sugar-coated. An advertising sales message in many ways constitutes news and is really a public service in many instances. When you can, treat your advertising message as such. . . . Your listeners really don't care if you have none or one or a dozen commercials. They want to know reasons why a given product or service will benefit them."<sup>21</sup>

Most of the time, listeners agreed, taking the program and its advertising for granted. A typical letter addressed to Leanna Driftmier in 1946 said: "I rec'd the stationery and like it fine. We use the Dwarfies Ten Vitamens (sic) too. We have had the quilt pieces and hose etc. that you advertise too. We enjoy hearing all about your children, the girls especially."<sup>22</sup>

Other listeners were opposed to both the number and nature of advertisements. One listener took Driftmier to task for "belittling and cheapening love and marriage" in order to sell "a wedding gift and a pair of nylon stockings," and for pairing sacred songs with advertisements for flour and medicine and so forth. She was particularly concerned with the commercialization of Christmas. She wrote: "Let's we older people keep our standard of sacred things and not sell out for commercial gain -- for our selves (sic) or any one else, the next generation won't know what is sacred."<sup>23</sup>

### **National Scope**

While KMA and KFNF were among the first to air radio homemakers, similar programs developed independently across the nation. The USDA, university home economics departments, and some food companies produced programming aimed at women. In 1924, one year before KMA and KFNF were founded, Kansas State Agriculture University began broadcasting an extension course that not only disseminated advice on taking care of livestock and fields, but covered topics like cooking and home decorating. In 1926 -- the same year Leanna Driftmier began broadcasting -- 24 universities were offering similar programs.<sup>24</sup>

The USDA Bureau of Home Economics and the Radio Service invented a fictional character named Aunt Sammy to broadcast scripts written by its home economists, and 50 women took to the airwaves as her persona on October 4, 1926. The premier program, which lasted 15 minutes, included nutritional advice, household hints, jokes and poetry, and a menu of the day. The program was named "The Housekeeper's Chat." Several cookbooks were also published in Aunt Sammy's name. The Aunt Sammy shows were carried on 194 stations in 1932 and were discontinued in 1946.<sup>25</sup> In the 1920s, companies quickly perceived the usefulness of women's service programs. The People's Gas Light and Coke Company sponsored Anna J. Peterson's program from KYW, Chicago, in 1925. Buttericks presented a program on sewing in 1926 from WJZ in New York. One of the most renowned of these types of programs was General Mills' Betty Crocker.

Betty Crocker was a fictional character who gave her first recipe program in 1926 over WCCO, a radio station founded by General Mills in



Minneapolis. Styled as a cooking expert, she was invented to promote the Washburn Company food programs and later General Mills. Garver noted that early Betty Crocker programs were in keeping with the philosophy of indirect advertising for sponsorship. A typical program broadcast from WEAJ, in New York, on Oct. 15, 1926 simply announced the Washburn Company sponsorship of the "home service talks" three times a week, the subject of that morning's lesson (Gold Medal's Orange Pie), and that Betty Crocker would be happy to answer listener questions.<sup>26</sup> In comparison, General Mill's treatment of Betty Crocker -- which the company "inherited" in 1928 -- was highly orchestrated:

Betty gets the most painstaking attention from the General Mills advertising department, and the company lawyers are equally devoted to her. To strengthen her position as a trade-mark, they suggested that the company's dehydrated soup be named Betty Crocker soup. And it is now the opinion of counsel that Betty's position is so secure that no other Betty Crocker can muscle in on her audience, not even a live person born and baptized Betty Crocker. A "Betty Crocker policy," drawn up by the advertising and legal departments, is a constant guide for the copywriters who compose what Betty says. Betty must be dignified; though her style may be altered according to the audience, it must always be that of a gentlewoman. Betty should be friendly but not intimate. She must stick to home economics and never discuss her private life, which would be rather dull anyway. Whenever possible Betty should say "we," not "I," for it would be unsound and perhaps illegal to represent Betty as a superwoman who thinks up all her own recipes and answers all her own mail. For some esoteric legal reason, "anything said by Betty or credited to Betty must be literary true with respect to some current member of the company's home economics staff."<sup>27</sup>

In contrast to Betty Crocker, Garver noted that Shenandoah's Leanna Driftmier was "a very real person." Another real person who gained national prominence was Ida Bailey Allen. Unlike Leanna Driftmier, Allen was a cookbook author and cooking school instructor

before she even began broadcasting, and had formal training as a dietician. Allen's program, "The National Homemaker's Club," was eventually syndicated over CBS. Her show divvied up its segments to various sponsors, because larger blocks of radio advertising time were becoming expensive.<sup>28</sup>

By 1946, a national survey of AM broadcasting stations revealed that home economics programs were the third most popular type of program in the nation. The most popular program was the disk jockey program, which was "virtually a national craze." The second most popular program was the musical clock, or wake-up program. Interestingly, the number one and number two programs appealed to a broad audience, while home economics programs represented a more specialized audience.<sup>29</sup>

While this specialized audience undoubtedly consisted of women, it is difficult to determine whether or not the radio homemaking shows appealed only to a rural audience. Certainly, the intimate and informal nature of the radio homemaking shows reflected the personal relationships that many people believed existed in rural and small-town America. Many radio analysts believed that listening habits did differ between those in urban areas and those in rural areas, typifying urban listeners as having more sophisticated tastes in programs. Others believed that urban and rural listeners differed in their tastes in music, but had "only minor and irregular disagreements on non-musical programs. Dramas, mystery programs, and sports programs are somewhat less popular in rural areas; religious programs are somewhat better liked on farms."<sup>30</sup> By the late 1940s, radio homemaking shows were certainly not a Midwestern rural phenomenon. A 1949 nationwide survey

of sponsor participation programs revealed some regional differences in the number of "home economic" and other women's service programs, but the East Coast, West, and Pacific regions were as well represented as the Midwest. The South had few radio homemaking shows but had fewer sponsor participation programs altogether.<sup>31</sup>

Audience ratings for women's service shows were lower than other sponsor participation programs but were offset by extreme listener loyalty and attentiveness. The women who listened to such programs did so "with the knowledge that they must listen attentively to understand the program. They are really interested in the subject matter, they want to hear what the personality has to say, and they listen in as regularly as possible." These programs also attracted the most listener mail per show.<sup>32</sup>

The emphasis on a personal delivery was especially evident in the women's service programs. Of 260 stations that replied to a national survey in 1948, only 39 percent of women's shows allowed transcribed commercials, the rest carried only ad-libbed commercials. Garver thought transcribed commercials would interfere with the "spontaneity and mood continuity" of such programs, as opposed to the music shows whose formats availed themselves to such commercial breaks. More importantly, the women who ran the programs had more influence over their shows, including the commercials. "Because the character of the shows is based on and distinguished by their personal commentaries and handling of interviews, they generally feel that the audience prefers to have the product recommendations also delivered by them rather than by an unfamiliar, recorded voice."<sup>33</sup>

It cost more to advertise on women's service programs than it did to buy regular advertising. In 1948, 57 percent of the women's service shows surveyed charged more money for advertisements than did "straight announcements." The difference in rates may have been partly caused because these shows cost more to produce.<sup>34</sup> However, Garver thought that the women's service shows were a particularly good buy for advertisers, because they offered:

(1) the strongest type of product endorsement, (2) high listener loyalty, (3) effective aid in opening up new distribution, (4) a wide variety of merchandising co-operation on the part of the program conductor as well as the station staff, and (5) a high yield of voluntary mail that is valuable for its reference to the sponsor's product.<sup>35</sup>

For advertisers and radio station owners, the move from a service to a sales-oriented genre did not necessarily mean service was omitted altogether. In fact, promoters believed that radio advertising combined the best of both worlds -- service could be given through sales and that women's programming epitomized this synthesis:

There is a happy conjunction here of two of radio's most potent forces: public service and advertising. For if the advertising were deleted -- if brand names, for example, were taboo; if specific household aids were not recommended; if definite manufacturers, stores, or other outlets were not mentioned over the air -- the listeners would find little substantial fare in the anonymity of the recommendations.<sup>36</sup>

Garver was undoubtedly naive and wishful in stating that carrying advertising was tantamount to performing a public service, but he was probably accurate in his judgment that listeners were not interested in programming that was removed from any specific reality. True, Garver

limited his specificity to the naming of particular products and real life retailers, and the anonymity that women listeners sought to dispel was much more complex than simply needing a reliable source of information on what to buy and where to buy it. Americans, lost in what they perceived as an impersonal mass communication society, reacted favorably to advertising from an individual who seemed to address them personally. Roland Marchand, in *Advertising the American Dream*, observes that:

Of all the media . . . it was the radio that impressed advertisers most forcefully with the public craving for personal relationships through the media. Advertisers learned early that listeners formed personal attachments to radio personalities who were "guests" in their homes. Those who offered information and personal advice were bombarded with intimate letters.<sup>37</sup>

Marchand gives as his example Betty Crocker, who became personified by various regional women on the radio through "chatty" visits on the "Betty Crocker School of the Air." Her program evoked a response of 4,000 letters a day. Letter-writers, surprisingly, would willingly reveal personal "intimacies" of their lives. Because of the strong response, other advertisers followed suit with similar fictitious radio personalities.<sup>38</sup> Needless to say, if women were insistent on writing to people that did not really exist, the radio homemakers -- who were average, everyday women like themselves -- must have seemed especially sympathetic.

Despite being labeled "mass communication," radio and other media do not necessarily impose a monolithic message on a passive audience. While owners of radio stations wanted to present potential advertisers with the image of a listener ready to imbibe any sales message, in

reality both the radio homemakers and their listeners had their own agendas. To fully understand the phenomenon of radio homemaking shows, it is important to understand the character and shared experiences of these women.

## Chapter Two -- Notes

1. Driftmier, "Greetings," *Mother's Hour Letter*, (July 1926): 1.
2. Heise, 418.
3. Ibid, 415; "KMA Always had Purpose," supplement to the *Shenandoah Evening Sentinel*, 7 August 1975, 3; Garver, 77.
4. Friedel, 309; "KMA Always had a Purpose"
5. Affidavit, Page County, December 1935.
6. Smulyan, 86, 91-92.
7. Warren Benson Dygert, *Radio As an Advertising Medium* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc, 1939), 2.
8. Garver, 142-143.
9. Birkby, *KMA Radio*, 137, 139, 141.
10. Ibid, 141, 148-149.
11. KMA Program Log, KMA Records, Shenandoah, Iowa. Tuesday, 27 April 1943, 3, 6.
12. KMA Program Log, Saturday, 7 October 1944.
13. KMA Program Log, Saturday, 25 September 1948, 3, 5.
14. Garver, 296; Earle Crowley, KMA business manager, interview by the author, 8 August 1994, Shenandoah, Iowa.
15. KMA press release, KMA Records, Shenandoah, Iowa. 7 September 1955; KMA Press Release, April 1957.
16. Herman Hettinger, *A Decade of Radio Advertising* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1933), 129; Dygert, 79.
17. Promotional material, Personal Collection of Billie Oakley, Lincoln, Nebraska; Billie Oakley, radio homemaker, interview by author, 16 March 1994, Lincoln, Nebraska; Birkby, *KMA Radio*, 149.
18. Birkby, *KMA Radio*, 138; "Birth of Shenandoah," unpublished manuscript, Shenandoah Historical Museum, Shenandoah, Iowa.
19. *Kitchen Club*, (January 1957): 26-27.
20. KMA payroll records; "Driftmier Company" advertisement, 1971.
21. Oakley interview; Evelyn Birkby, radio homemaker and author, interview by author, 23 March 1994, Sidney, Iowa; Margery Strom, radio

homemaker and daughter of Leanna Driftmier, interview by author, 21 March 1994, Shenandoah, Iowa; KMA transcript, date unknown; Jessie Young, *Jessie's Homemaker Radio Visit*, (July 1947): 8.

22. KMA transcripts, Adella Shoemaker, probably late 1940s. KMA Records, Shenandoah, Iowa.

23. KMA Memo, from Tony Koelker to Florence Falk and Bernice Currier, 23 April 1957. KMA Records, Shenandoah, Iowa.

24. Letter to Leanna Driftmier from Mrs. Harry Dippert and Mother, Shannon City, Iowa, Jan. 2, 1946, KMA Records, Shenandoah, Iowa.

25. Letter to Leanna Driftmier from Mrs. Edith A. Miller, 833 W. 2nd, Waterloo, Iowa, 8 January 1946. KMA Records, Shenandoah, Iowa.

26. Jellison, 56.

27. Smulyan, 89; Birkby, *Cooking with KMA*, 7.

28. Hettinger, 261-262; Garver, 78.

29. Garver, 78-79.

30. Ibid, 79; Smulyan, 90.

31. Garver, 168-169.

32. Lerner, "The Decline of the Small Town," in *Rural America*, 124; Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Patricia L. Kendall, *Radio Listening in America: The People Look at Radio -- Again*, (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1948), 28.

33. Garver, 253-321.

34. Garver, 36.

35. Ibid

36. Ibid, 37

37. Ibid, 58.

74. Ibid, 39.



### Chapter Three

## WOMEN ON THE AIR: THE WORK EXPERIENCE OF THE RADIO HOMEMAKERS

I'm sitting on the davenport in the dining room which is my office and broadcasting room. My big old desk is covered with recipe files, letters, a glass of water for taking my Guardian 12 Plus vitamin every morning. The Microphone glares at me daring me to think of a wonderful recipe to give tomorrow morning and then find the time to give it and also have time to check it. Sometimes the microphone smiles and everything goes so smoothly that I know I must have skipped some important item and I check hurriedly in my mind only to find Ovenglayze lurking back there waiting for it's [sic] moment of triumph. So it goes -- this enthralling business which is called "Radio."<sup>1</sup>

In a 1958 column for *The KMA Guide*, Bernice Currier described the blessings and tribulations of being a radio homemaker. She enjoyed reading her listener letters and learning about the "very real and genuine interest" her listeners took in homemaking, as well as their dedication to "civic and national charities." She found their efforts "heart warming." In this same column, Currier also described the necessity of trying to be creative under deadlines and facing the microphone. She wrote about the constant search for new recipes that were the mainstay of radio homemaking shows, and trying to push her products, which paid for her shows. In addition, Currier noted that she had to balance her radio work with her family and her volunteer and domestic obligations -- such as cleaning her house from the woodwork to the cupboards in preparation for a Business and Professional Women's Board meeting. "But that is one of the trials and vicissitudes of being

a house-keeper, homemaker, mother, grandmother and broadcaster and isn't it fun?" 2

Radio homemaking was challenging but rewarding work, in many ways, for the women who worked for KMA and KFNF from the 1920s through the late 1960s. Working on the radio allowed these women the opportunity to earn fairly decent wages at a time when often they were precluded from doing so. Radio homemakers used their wages to support their immediate and even extended families, especially during the Great Depression. Radio work allowed women a public voice, travel, and a role participation in public life. The job was also one of the few with some status available to women, and radio homemakers were accorded celebrity status in their small communities. Radio homemaking also allowed women to express their creativity and use their talents in a realm that was located somewhat outside the domestic sphere.

Radio work had its limitations. Radio homemaking was a stereotypical broadcasting job for women, and women were relegated to doing that type of broadcasting almost exclusively. Radio homemaking was an acceptable occupation for women because, like nursing and teaching, it was seen as a natural extension of women's domestic roles. Radio homemakers were also expected to do gender-specific tasks within the radio station that their male broadcasting peers would not be expected to do, such as baking cookies for visitors. Radio homemakers were categorized first as women before they were viewed as professionals. Their primary role in life was supposed to be wife and mother, and their main fulfillment was expected to be through these primary relationships, and not through their radio work. These attitudes were typical in rural

culture, even though in reality rural women needed, sought, and enjoyed wage work.

#### **Women's Work in Shenandoah, Iowa**

Compared to their urban counterparts, rural women had limited opportunity for wage work in the first half of the 20th Century. City women were free to take jobs in factories, offices, hotels, or restaurants. In rural areas, however, the economy was based on agriculture, and wage work for both genders was often unavailable. Wage work for women in rural areas consisted of teaching, working in agriculturally related industries, or working on farms as domestic help. Moreover, there was a stigma attached to wage work in rural areas that city women often escaped. A woman's economic status in rural areas was predicated on her status as a wife and mother. Rural areas were slow to provide wage work for women, unless it was under extreme circumstances. Deborah Fink has demonstrated that farm policy in rural areas in fact enforced this idea.<sup>3</sup>

Resistance to the idea of women working for wages outside the home were compounded during the economic crisis of the 1930s. As employment decreased, men feared that women would replace them in jobs because women could be paid less. Many blamed women entering the workforce for the lack of jobs in the country, and a 1936 Gallup poll revealed that 89 percent of the population thought employers should "discriminate against married women."<sup>4</sup> Ironically, rigid sex roles prevented women from losing such jobs as clerical work, which not only had lower unemployment rates but were ones that men were unwilling to take.

These attitudes seemed to be mitigated somewhat in rural areas. If a woman was not supported by a husband, father, or some other family member, doing wage work was considered more respectable than engaging in illegal activities, such as prostitution, as an article from the 1928 *Shenandoah Evening Sentinel* outlining the arrest of two "girls" for public intoxication indicates. In a column with the headline "A Social Problem," the editor argued that the two young women could become "law abiding citizens" if people would only give them work and chided Shenandoans for not doing so based on the fact that they did not have respectable jobs or references. "What is there for these young women to do? How are they going to pay the fines the good judge said they might pay by the end of the month? How are they going to get the money? What is there for them but to go back to their old lives and make their living in an illegal way?"<sup>5</sup>

In the 1920s, there were apparently many more opportunities for wage work in and around Shenandoah compared with other rural communities. The town's 7,000 were supported by several nurseries, chicken hatcheries, and more than 50 manufacturing industries, according to the 1930 Page County Directory. In 1928, over 8 million pounds of a wide variety of locally produced goods were shipped from Shenandoah, including:

Stock powders, dips and remedies; tools, glare shields for automobiles, flags, advertising specialties, portable tourist cabins, harness and leather goods, ice cream, flour and feed, butter, gloves and mittens, automatic stereoptican machines and projection screens, bottles soft drinks, furniture, husking pegs, belts, etc., potato chips, doors and windows, electricity, ice and gas, remedies, cosmetics, magazines, stationery, catalogues and other printed matter, and bakery products.<sup>6</sup>

In 1930, many Page County women worked for the Henry Field or Earl May nurseries as clerks or unspecified "helpers." A number of women held secretarial-type jobs -- such as clerks or stenographers -- at companies such as the Iowa-Nebraska Power and Light Company. Local women were also employed as nurses, teachers, telephone operators, waitresses, cooks, housekeepers, laundry workers, and maids. The majority of the women employed were single, either living by themselves or with relatives. Fewer married women worked, and when they did it was likely that their spouse worked at the same place they did, or had a job with sporadic income, such as sales or carpentry. A few women in non-skilled, low-paying jobs had spouses whose employment was not listed. There were a handful of women employed in non-traditional or managerial jobs, or even those who ran their own business. One woman was listed as a linotype operator, one was a printer, one was a minister, one a pressfeeder at the World Publishing Company, and two were listed as school principals (one was married, one was single). A few families apparently had joint businesses. For example, Mrs. Fern Drury was listed as proprietor of the Drury Hotel while her husband, Roy, was in charge of a restaurant, which was presumably on the premises of the hotel. One woman had apparently taken over as grocer in the family business after her husband died, although very few widows listed wage-work and most owned their own homes. A few widows obviously rented rooms to relatives, or still had children living with them.<sup>7</sup>

It is apparent that both Earl May and Henry Field supported the idea of women working outside the home, since both not only relied on

female employees but actively recruited them. There were many opportunities for women to find work in their seed and nursery enterprises, and positions were flexible enough to accommodate the needs and interests of the workers. After working for a law office for three months using a dictaphone -- a job she said she hated -- Barbara Broff was glad to go to work for Henry Field. On Sunday afternoons, she and her sister stood at the door of the auditorium and pinned buttons on visitors. Broff also worked at the nursery but moved to other parts of the business because she "could not understand all the nursery terms." "They were terrible so I spent most of my time with the catalogue."<sup>8</sup> Broff also worked doing "piece work" and served as a secretary for one of the buyers. The piece work involved answering letters from customers inquiring about items from the nursery or the hatchery. The pay depended on the length and type of the form letter. She received more money if the letters included leaflets on products, samples, or catalogues. Recalled Broff: "The woman that was measuring it was an orderly lady and her happy word was "Damn it to hell." And she said, 'This girl earned every bit she got.' And I would take my maybe 32 dollars, and most of the time people were getting 13, and go down and buy a whole new outfit."<sup>9</sup>

Another Field employee, Stella Lewis, landed a job as secretary for one of the radio announcers at Bertha Field's recommendation. The radio announcer's gimmick was interpreting people's dreams and helping them find lost objects. He worked in front of a live studio audience and also answered listener mail. Lewis made \$35 a week during the 1930s, which she said was "just unheard of that time . . . we just really

thought we were in the big money."<sup>10</sup> Lewis also worked for the hatchery department, and took over broadcasting Ross Selman's poultry show when he went on vacation. Many of the people who worked at the seed houses did stints on the air as entertainers or broadcasters. Stella Lewis recalled that her mother, who was a receptionist for Field, was one of the amateur musicians who "filled in on the air when they (the radio station) didn't have anything else on the air." Often, groups of seedhouse employees "decided they would have a little program and they'd all get together and sing a song."<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the large number of women employed at KMA and KPNT stemmed from the tradition of female employees already in place at the seed houses. At the inception of such a new industry, radio may have been free from the historically ingrained prejudices that Ruth Milkman found prohibited or limited women's employment in other industries.<sup>12</sup> Certainly, the generous attitudes that May and Field expressed toward women's wage work was a crucial component. Field grew up in a family whose views on women's roles were quite liberal. In addition, the family was not wealthy, so it was expected that the children -- male or female -- earn their way. His sisters were all entrepreneurs in their own fashion; one virtually founded the children's agricultural organization, 4-H, and was the county's first female superintendent of schools.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, May's belief in women's need to earn income is evident in his treatment of radio homemaker Jessie Young. He hired her during the Depression when the First National Bank -- which employed her and her husband -- closed. Young recalled her chance meeting with May after she learned she would be jobless:

And when I came out of the bank after it closed I was walking down the street thinking, "Well now where am I going to get a job?" And I met Mr. May. And he wanted to know how I felt about it, and I said: "Well, it's closed and my job's over." And he said: "Where are you going to work?" And I said: "I don't know." And he said, "Come on down to the studio."<sup>14</sup>

May was married to a woman who not only supplied the family money to finance the May seed house and the radio station but was quite involved in business. In fact, after May died in the 1940s, Gertrude May took over the business operations. As KMA engineer Norm Kling noted: "Gertrude was the May family then, you might say."<sup>15</sup>

Even though May obviously supported working women, the personality that built KMA into a highly successful radio station could be difficult to work with. On occasion, it was Gertrude May who smoothed ruffled feathers, as is indicated by her relationship with Mabel Nelson Sullivan, Earl May's personal secretary for 20 years. Sullivan thought that working for KMA would be glamorous. She was hired as May's "private" secretary in 1927, after graduating from secretarial school.

That she would be secretary to the area's best known resident added to her enthusiasm. Mabel was small and petite, her boss a portly man with a kind face and a reputation for being fair but demanding. She knew her job would include long hours and a variety of duties, but she didn't dream it would be as exciting and challenging as it turned out. From the first day, she began to recognize and cope with the idiosyncrasies of her dynamic employer.<sup>16</sup>

One of May's "idiosyncrasies" was his "vocal explosions."<sup>17</sup> Sullivan found herself making decisions that risked his ire, such as interrupting his nap to invite in a man whom she thought might be Senator George Norris of Nebraska. Fortunately for her, it was. In



another incident, when May had been particularly hard to deal with and Sullivan was "furious" with him, she "lost her temper and threw her notebook at Earl May. When she saw the stunned look on his face and realized what she had done, she ran, crying, from the office." Gertrude May, arriving at the office as she ran out, intercepted Mabel, listened to her story, and invited her to supper that evening at the May home. Evidently, Earl May had forgotten about the incident by that time and never mentioned it. Mabel returned to work the next day. "There was not time to hold a grudge." And, undoubtedly, no time to lose a job.<sup>18</sup>

Sullivan quit once to get married, but May was reluctant to lose her. He refused to hire a replacement for her to train before she left and demanded her help after she officially terminated her position. "During the year and a half she was gone, Mabel received numerous telephone calls and telegrams from a frustrated Earl May. How did she handle this? Where did she keep that? It was a relief to both of them when she came back and worked until the end of the war."<sup>19</sup>

Sullivan's duties included organizing the first KMA Jubilee in 1928, which attracted 100,000 people to Shenandoah and involved arranging a street dance with several orchestras, a pancake breakfast, and an assortment of contests, such as sack races and milking contests. The secretary was not exempt from doing radio announcing, and she was assigned the task -- note Earl May's biographers, in astonishment -- of broadcasting the sports news. "She was given the assignment when Earl May realized she knew more about sports than anyone else on the staff." She also cared for the May children, taking them, for example, shoe

shopping or out to eat. She also watched the children while their parents vacationed.<sup>20</sup>

Sullivan was only one woman in a string of others who were indispensable to KMA operations. By the 1940s, women's work on KMA was so integral to the station -- as typists, secretaries, clerks, and continuity writers -- that the KMA Guide honored female employees with a cover story. A few held supervisory positions, such as head of the continuity department, musical director, supervisor of the mail department, and promotion manager. Station management knew that their work was vital to day-to-day operation.

Behind the 18 1/2 hours of continuous radio service we give you daily there is a tremendous amount of work. There is continuity to write, programs to be accurately scheduled, musical numbers to be selected and cleared, orders to handle, correspondence to be written, records to be filed, and so on, all of which must be done daily by a competent office force. Though they're not announcers, control operators, engineers, or musicians, they are just as vital to the efficient operations of KMA as many of the folks you hear regularly.<sup>21</sup>

Women continued to hold a variety of jobs at KMA throughout the 1950s. In 1954, Martha Yates was responsible for typing and printing the daily log at KMA, which included program times and announcements.<sup>22</sup> Laline Mahn oversaw the music library, and her duties included counting and distributing the fan mail, filing sheet music, keeping track of the daily record shows, and filing the records received from different companies. The music library included 3,500 popular records, over 2,000 western and "hillbilly records," and numerous religious and polka records.<sup>23</sup> A woman also managed the circulation department from 1945 through at least 1950.<sup>24</sup> Mrs. Jesse Orr was described as "boss" of the

order department in the February 1950 *KMA Guide*, and acknowledged as the person who "keeps things humming and well organized."<sup>25</sup>

### **The Radio Homemaking Experience**

Radio homemaking was perhaps the most difficult and demanding of women's jobs at the radio stations. To be successful in this genre, these women had to develop skills in disparate areas and devote a considerable amount of time and energy preparing their shows. Radio homemakers also had formal and informal responsibilities at the stations besides their individual shows. They organized or appeared at community events to promote the radio stations and their advertisers, hosted visitors, handled correspondence for their shows, worked with salespeople, and were in charge of offers and giveaways. Most of them published a newsletter or magazine on the side that complemented their shows. They also promoted their programs by corresponding with listeners, printing a variety of newsletters, magazines, and cookbooks, and organizing a number of special events to draw advertisers and listeners together.

Radio homemakers were often the creative force behind successful advertising schemes. They were phenomenal salespeople. Part of their success undoubtedly stemmed from their direct connection with their audience and the fact that they knew what their listeners wanted. But while "hominess" appealed to listeners, the effortless blend of sales and service achieved was not simply intuition. The radio homemakers selected the right product and pitched it in a precise way to their

listeners. They claimed to sell only products they believed in. They kept track of special advertising offers and listenership areas, which involved tedious paperwork.

Radio homemakers frequently chose products to promote. Billy Oakley initiated many new advertising schemes for products she believed in, such as selling udder balm for hand cream. They also met with advertising salespeople and clients to help cement the relationship between advertisers and the station. In 1949, Adella Shoemaker, who did the Kitchen Klinik show six days a week, drove to Omaha to visit the manufactures of Butter-Nut Coffee, Paxton & Gallagher. She interviewed a coffee buyer and the general manager of the Butternut Coffee Branch.<sup>26</sup> Their involvement in learning more about the products was also a way of promoting the shows. In the July 1956 issue of the *KMA Guide*, Florence Falk was pictured interviewing Mrs. Frank Kessler of Amred Products Company of Omaha, discussing new premium offers on its flavorings. Bernice Currier was featured doing an interview with the owner of Vitamin Industries, Inc., whose vitamins she promoted.<sup>27</sup>

The attention given to sponsors accounted for only a small part of the preparation that went into each show. The most time-consuming work consisted of gathering material and devising or gathering new recipes for each show. Most recipes given on the air were sent in by listeners, but they were always tested by the radio homemakers in their own kitchens on their own families. The number of recipes tested was staggering, considering the large number a radio show could generate each week. Byron Falk recalled that his wife Florence and fellow radio homemaker Adella Shoemaker often stayed up until three or four in the

morning testing recipes or answering listener letters, another time-consuming task. In March 1954 alone, Florence Falk responded to listener mail with 600 letters of her own, 20 letters a day. Moreover, she kept track of where these listeners lived.<sup>28</sup>

Visits from these loyal listeners were part of the daily lives of the radio homemakers. Fans wanted to see not only the radio stations, but the homes of the radio homemakers. In 1954, visitors were scheduled regularly by the KMA station, with home visits to radio station personalities on Tuesdays and Thursdays. That year, Bernice Currier listed visits from County Extension clubs, sewing clubs, the Happy Hour Club, the Floral Culture and Study club, the Women's Club, the Homemaker's Club, and others. She prepared cookies for each of these tours. She must have spent the greater part of her time preparing for these visitors, and recorded that one group of "radio visitors" had to extend its visit because it rained "as tho (sic) it never intended to quit" and they could not make it to their cars.<sup>29</sup> Clubs visited from as far away as Verdon and Waverly, Nebraska and Atchison, Kansas.<sup>30</sup> KMA Women's Director Doris Murphy observed that more than 1,200 women visited from 130 towns in Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri and Kansas during one month alone in 1955:

Huge busloads of women unloading at KMA early in the morning these beautiful spring days, has not been an uncommon sight. Clubs, organizations and groups have come by the hundreds to spend the day with us, and we have enjoyed giving them the tour of the radio station, May Seed Company, Mount Arbor nursery, the nursery fields, Shenandoah flower gardens and a visit from the homemaker's homes.<sup>31</sup>

Howard Driftmier recalled the shock of his new wife when a group of visitors trooped uninvited through Leanna Driftmier's home, even though the rest of the family took it as a matter of course. Margery Driftmier Strom recalled that growing up in a radio family was a very public existence.<sup>32</sup> The Falks had radio visitors as early as 6 in the morning and as late as 10:30 at night.<sup>33</sup> They were good-natured about the visits -- the KMA Guide noted that Florence Falk and her husband raised 275 baby chickens, 75 pigs and eight calves, but were "never too busy, to stop and chat with friends who drop by." Such frequent visits could not only interrupt a busy schedule but could cause mayhem. One visit to the Falk home was cut short when the visitor's car rolled down the hill and crashed through the fence around their cow pasture.<sup>34</sup>

Radio homemakers were not only expected to open their homes to visitors, but to provide food and drinks as well. This was undoubtedly an informal arrangement in the early years, but by the 1940s and 1950s it had become an explicit responsibility. In 1954, a KMA meeting devoted to discussing visitor protocol it was decided that the homemakers would alternate serving cookies and soft drinks on these visits, which would begin and end at the Earl May seedhouse. The minutes of the meeting noted that there "was some disagreement regarding this question but the majority favored the homemakers serving cookies etc." The exact nature of the disagreement at this meeting was not mentioned, but perhaps the radio homemakers resisted the idea of serving food and drinks to visitors.<sup>35</sup>

It is difficult to determine how much of this work was reimbursed by the station. Sometimes the cost was tangible, as when Bernice

Currier's living room carpet was worn so thin from this traffic that May felt obligated to replace it. Other tasks were more difficult to quantify. Making cookies for visitors, for example, dovetailed with the radio homemaker's home responsibilities, as illustrated by this memo from Currier to KMA station manager Tony Koelker in 1954: "Enclosed is the amount I spent on cookies as near as I could figure. If you would rather have it itemized, let me know. It is hard to figure such things when I have some ingredients on hand etc."<sup>36</sup>

Florence Falk was more specific in figuring her costs. She estimated that in 1954 she spent \$6.37 giving a busload of visitors the "'red carpet' treatment" on her farm, including hiring someone for \$1.50 to come in and help her. In May 1955, she drove 192 miles on radio business, and spent eight hours and 15 minutes baking 26 batches of cookies. That summer, she made 14 trips "to greet visitors." She billed KMA \$20.67 for the ingredients for her May and June baking, which came to a total of 1,530 cookies that she conscientiously figured cost .014 cents per person. She donated the milk for baking from the family farm. In addition, it took Falk 16 hours and 40 minutes to assemble "Gooch Units" for her visitors during that month. The units she passed out included 3,340 recipes, 2001 macaroni leaflets, 980 pancake leaflets, and 1,640 cookie deals.<sup>37</sup>

Another time-consuming responsibility for the radio homemakers was the annual Homemaker Days. Following the tradition of the Jubilees organized in the 1920s and 1930s by Henry Field and Earl May, the radio homemakers organized programs with domestic themes throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s. The Jubilees, which began in 1926, were

discontinued during World War II but were resumed after the war. More than 35,000 people attended the KMA Jubilee in 1941. The KMA Homemaker Days, often held monthly, each drew more than 1,000 people. These shows were theme oriented. In 1948, the September Homemakers Day theme was wallpaper and paint and the November theme was home freezers. In April 1948, KMA's first postwar Homemaker Day drew more than 1,000 women to listen to guest speaker Anne Mason, "famous New York interior decorator and author of *What Goes with What?*" A freezer worth \$279 was given away at the November 1951 Homemaker's Day. More than 1,300 women from 104 towns in Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri and Kansas attended this event, which was noted as the "biggest KMA Homemakers' Day on record." The program was hosted by Miller Tractor Co. of Shenandoah. The afternoon's events included a demonstration on "cooking a complete meal from the home freezer," given by Katheryn Miller, the International Harvester home economist; live music; a "Penny Auction," and short talks by Edward May, KMA president, and four radio homemakers.<sup>38</sup>

By 1953, the Homemakers Day program had become an annual, instead of a monthly event, and was subsumed under the Livestock Feeders Institute. Women from 126 different towns packed the KMA Auditorium for the three-and-a-half hour program, which featured a demonstration by Martha Logan, who was with the Home Economics Department of Swift & Company and was a regular on the national network show, "Breakfast Club." Logan spoke on "how to prepare and serve meats," followed by a demonstration by a professor from Iowa State College on how to cut meats. Martha Bohlsen, Director of Women's Activities of the Tidy House Products Company, Shenandoah, gave household hints under the title



"Household Magic," and distributed Tidy House products as door prizes.<sup>39</sup>

The big event in 1953 was the spring Homemaker Show, which was a evening style show co-sponsored with Schoenberg's Style Shop in the nearby towns of Clarinda and Red Oak. The show attracted more than 1,400 women from 55 towns in the four-state listening area to preview the "latest" in spring fashions. The fashions were described over the air by the KMA Homemakers. The Annual KMA Cookie Tea, in which women came with plates of cookies to share with the other visitors, outgrew its quarters every year in the late 1950s. In December 1957, more than 1,600 women crowded into the brand-new Iowa National Guard building on the north side of Shenandoah, with standing room only.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to hosting their own events, radio homemakers participated in a number of public affairs, often doing remote broadcasts. In 1960, Florence Falk was one of five KMA announcers who were flown to the State Fair in Des Moines. Falk broadcast a show from 10 to 11:30 a.m. from the May Seed Company booth on KMA Day. While she was in Des Moines, Falk attended the Governor's 12th Annual Workshop in Des Moines, a Business & Professional Women's Board Meeting, and the State Farm Bureau Women's Meeting. Falk also attended the Federated Club meeting in Greenfield and the National Lutheran Church Women's Convention in Kansas City.<sup>41</sup>

Remote broadcasting was prone to unexpected emergencies. Equipment was apt to fail, and it was not unusual for broadcasters to return to the station to discover that their recorder had not taped their interviews. At such times, ad-libbing from notes was necessary.

Recording the radio homemakers from their homes could also be problematic. Florence Falk awoke more than one morning to find that she could not broadcast because the power lines were down. During one power failure, Bernice Currier happened to be listening when the announcer said that recordings would be carried instead of Florence Falk's regular show. As Murphy reported in *The KMA Guide*: "Bernice knew something was wrong, so she quickly called the control booth . . . told the engineer her amplifier was still on, and to patch in her line and she would take the program. Within five minutes Bernice was on the air, filling in the full 25 minutes with interesting homemaking news, recipes, and helps."<sup>42</sup> Of course, as soon as the program finished, the power was restored to the Falk household.

#### **Status at Radio Stations**

Despite their dedication, hard work, and value as a reliable revenue source, the radio homemakers' status at the radio stations was somewhat nebulous. "Course, the women have always had to battle, it's always been a men's field," said radio homemaker Evelyn Birkby. "And even at their height -- at one time there were 14 radio homemakers in Shenandoah between KFNF, KMA, and the syndicated programs -- even then the men took the attitude that it . . . was the bottom rung of the ladder in radio."<sup>43</sup>

Women who worked at the radio stations, whether they were radio homemakers or secretaries, were unable to escape the notion that their most important role in life was that of wife and mother. The publicity for radio homemakers and other female employees at KMA reflected this

idea. *The KMA Guide*, which began publication in 1938, projected a family-oriented image of the station by running short articles, photos, and amusing anecdotes of its employees. But while male employees were depicted as having a family life in addition to their professional life, radio homemakers were depicted as having a family life that was more fulfilling than their professional life. They were accepted only when staying in their domestic role, even on the air. Plus, their family lives were their program's. It was emphasized that their professional life in no way interfered with their family obligations. In fact, sometimes their domestic feats seemed superhuman.

For example, Adella Shoemaker was praised not only for testing her recipes, but for canning 500 jars of fruit, meat, and vegetables. Similarly, Edith Hansen was portrayed as a woman whose chief concern pleasing her family with pies and cookies, which they preferred to pies. In another example, lest anyone in the listening audience think that Bernice Currier was the "gutsy woman . . . born before her time" as a fellow radio homemaker remembered her, the *KMA Guide* highlighted Currier's domesticity: "Bernice has had other experiences even more important to homemaking. She has had the full responsibility of rearing two boys and two girls. Her accomplishments as a mother equal her success as a radio homemaker." This, despite the fact that Currier had logged 20 years of experience on the radio as an announcer, a continuity writer, and a program director.<sup>44</sup> Doris Murphy's many accomplishments, including her election as Iowa Chairman of the National Association for Women Broadcasters, was tempered with the statement: "Doris is a Midwest woman who runs and manages her own home. If you listen to Doris you'll

realize that you've spent 15 min. of your time meeting one of the outstanding experts on home decorating."<sup>45</sup>

Even though these women often had extraordinary personal lives -- such as Doris Murphy balancing her work load with responsibilities as a single mother -- their domestic roles were glorified and their professional careers were trivialized simply to uphold and reflect traditional gender roles. A more realistic and fuller account of their accomplishments was not forthcoming. As with other rural women, radio homemakers were expected to count their accomplishments vicariously through the lives of their husband and children.

Working as a radio homemaker was undoubtedly socially acceptable because its subject -- homemaking -- was seen as a natural extension of the women's sphere. Going on the air to talk about domestic issues, such as cooking and raising children, mitigated the threat that these women were wage earners. In this respect, radio homemaking was a profession similar to nursing or teaching, which were also seen as suitable extensions of women's interest. As Ed May, son of KMA's founder and manager of the radio station from 1942 to 1975, observed: "I think of the various people throughout the years that have been on KMA, the homemakers have been perhaps the most successful -- and perhaps that was one way in which women were able to break into radio."<sup>46</sup>

Women who tried to conduct some form of straight news announcing or other reporting were bucking traditional gender roles. In 1926, 5,000 listeners surveyed said they preferred male announcers over female announcers 100 to 1. The professor who conducted this survey said that radio announcing was "no woman's job" because of the call for late-night

emergency coverage of everything "from a riot to a shipwreck." He added:

From the advertiser's standpoint the woman announcer is favored for only one type of program, and that is for products on which she is acknowledged an authority. Cooking schools of the air, beauty programs such as those sponsored by Elizabeth Arden or Lady Esther, Ltd., may have their possibilities, although in 1936 when a woman was announcing for Lady Esther, Ltd., as already noted, a *Sales Management* survey showed the announcing to be the "most obnoxious" on the air."<sup>47</sup>

Even when women did not use the homemaking shows to break into radio, the pressure to do a domestically oriented show was great. Doris Murphy joined KMA in 1931, and spent 18 years "doing the behind-the-scene work so necessary in keeping our station on the air." She was women's director at KMA, trained new people, and edited the *KMA Guide*. Yet, when she was finally offered her own program in 1949, the fifteen-minute broadcast included not only news but "hints on home beautification."<sup>48</sup> Murphy often shared the microphone with the radio homemakers or took over their programs in an emergency. She also participated in the many activities the radio homemakers organized over the years, such as Homemaker Days or the KMA Cookie Days.

The work schedule of radio homemaking was flexible enough to allow women to maintain their domestic responsibilities. The job was time-consuming, but radio homemakers did not have to be at an office during a certain period of time. Many of these women were able to broadcast their shows from their homes. Some female announcers took their children to the studios with them. Leanna Driftmier regularly took her children along to broadcasts during the early years, admonishing them to

be still while she was on the air. Rosalie Hillman, whose mother was Edyth Stirlen, KFNF's popular "Little Minister," remembers playing among the musty velvet curtains in the FNF studio during her mother's broadcast. Affordable childcare was not readily available in Shenandoah, said Hillman. "I suppose some of the people who could afford it maybe had someone come and live with them and take care of their children, but people like mother took their kids with them when they went to work."<sup>49</sup>

At work, radio homemakers were hard pressed to drop the domestic role. It is evident that much of the radio homemakers' formal obligations to the radio stations centered around the domestic sphere -- by preparing refreshments for countless visitors and serving as hostess at public events with home and domestic themes. Informally, they also willingly took on traditional gender roles and contributed to the sense of community and camaraderie at the radio stations. They baked cakes and other sweets for members of the staffs on celebrations, such as birthdays. They also hosted parties. The night that Florence Falk held a Swedish Smorgasbord at her home for 30 members of the KMA staff in February 1954, everyone ate so much food that there was a roar of laughter when the button on the skirt of the music librarian hit the floor with a "ping" during a lull in conversation.<sup>50</sup>

Even though their work encompassed what was traditionally a domestic sphere, the radio homemakers considered themselves working professionals. They certainly were not leading a traditional lifestyle. They projected a public image and voice in a culture in which women's opinions were not always accepted by the larger culture. Radio homemakers had the opportunity to travel in circles that were

inaccessible to the ordinary rural or small-town homemaker. As Florence Falk noted: "Radio work sometimes entitles a homemaker to some rare privileges."<sup>51</sup> One such rare privilege came in 1956, when Florence Falk was the subject of an Edward R. Murrow show, where she made an appeal for women to consume more pork. The Falk segment was not aired, but she received local recognition for "doing a great deal to combat pork surplus, by her constant advise and recipes which encourage consumption of the product."<sup>52</sup>

The radio homemakers did not view their jobs as simply an extension of their prescribed domestic roles. A major motivation for these women to seek jobs as radio homemakers was certainly the money. Many radio homemakers also agreed that they did their jobs because they were challenging and personally satisfying. Radio broadcasting offered them a certain amount of prestige and served as a creative outlet. Certainly the allure of going on radio in the early years was that it provided people a brush with stardom; many early entertainers and broadcasters simply did the work to feed their egos. However, feeding a family was a more overriding concern for many radio homemakers.

One KMA station manager speculated that none of the women who worked for him as radio homemakers really "needed" their incomes, and many people probably shared his opinion. In reality, many of them either contributed substantially to their family income or were the sole bread winners in their families. Doris Murphy, KMA Women's Director, not only raised her young son by herself after her husband died of cancer, but supported her parents and siblings during the Depression when other household members could not find jobs. Billie Oakley enjoyed

her debut as 14-year-old "cowboy musician" by winning a KFNF talent contest staged by Henry Field, but was most impressed that it transpired into a job as a station musician for \$12.50 a week. A move to radio homemaking netted her a two-dollar-a-week raise. The income Evelyn Birkby earned as a freelance columnist and a radio homemaker during the 1950s was crucial as she and her husband waged a losing battle to make a living on rented farmland.<sup>53</sup>

Their female listening audience seemed as enthusiastic about the radio homemakers' professional accomplishments as their domestic ones. For example, Florence Falk's show was dubbed "The Farmer's Wife," a moniker that made it clear that her claim to relevance as a broadcaster was through her marriage to a farmer. However, when she was named "Page County Homemaker for 1956" it was for more than her homemaking skills. Falk was a "unanimous choice" for the Farm Bureau Women's Association because she was the only woman broadcasting from a farm home and because of her leadership activities in local community service and women's club work. At the time, she taught Sunday School, led the Essex Senior Girl Scouts, was a Cub Scout Den Mother, and was writing a history of her hometown, Essex. In 1958 Falk and Currier were awarded the annual "Miss BPW" award by the Business and Professional Women of Shenandoah for their "outstanding assistance in public relations." In 1960, Falk served as Seventh District Publicity Chairman of the BPW.<sup>54</sup>

While economists are fond of promoting the idea that the wages one receives are determined by neutral and impersonal market forces, the reality is that wages reflect social attitudes toward the worker's worth. This "worth" includes not only what the worker produces and the



cost of replacing her or him, but it also reflects how the worker's life ought to be structured. Wages were, and are, a way of bolstering social order, as Alice Kessler-Harris's demonstrates in *A Woman's Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences*. Thus, women's earnings reflected widespread attitudes that women should be at home, and that their wages should, at most, supplement men's wages. The ideas of a "family wage" and a "living wage" that emerged with industrialization explicitly denied women the right to support a family. Indeed, if women did not live within the prescribed social order as a wife or daughter, she should not expect to lead a happy life. As John Ryan, a Catholic priest who was one of the chief proponents of wage reform noted: "The living wage for a woman is lower than the living wage for a man because it is possible for her as a result of her traditional drudgery and forced tolerance of pain and suffering to keep alive on less."<sup>55</sup>

It is doubtful that radio homemakers were paid what they were worth to the stations, because women's wages have historically lagged behind those of men. Nevertheless, radio homemakers made more money than other female employees. Joan Davis remembers that her sister received decent pay at the radio stations working as a manager, but that the radio homemakers received much more. However, radio homemakers were often paid on a piecemeal basis and often had to absorb many of the expenses of being on the radio themselves, such as buying food to test the recipes. Bernice Currier was paid \$50 a week, probably in the 1940s, out of which she paid for the food that she "was expected" to feed radio fans who stopped unexpectedly at her home.<sup>56</sup>

In examining the payroll records of KMA, taking 1942 as a sample year, Earl May, the station owner, made at least three times as much as Kitchen-Klatte's Leanna Driftmier. May took home \$3,597.10 for the year while Driftmier received \$1,002.21. A male announcer, Ralph Childs, netted \$1,957.10 in 1942. That year, Doris Murphy, continuity writer and head of KMA's Women's Department, made only \$719, though by 1943 her salary had increased to \$1,801.85. In 1942, Jessie Young's salary was \$1,416.63, though the year before it had almost matched Earl May's salary, with a yearly salary of \$3,669.63. In comparison, Helen Stiles received \$206.89 a year as a stenographer in 1942; Edythe Stirlen, the "Little Minister" received \$490 for her programs; Frank Field, Henry Field's son, received \$278.25 for the year for his seed program; Andrew Bates, a writer and production person, made \$845.96 and Albert Anders, a salesperson, made \$2,351.64.<sup>57</sup>

Radio homemakers knew what they were worth. They fought personal battles to improve their pay, and worked on professionalizing the field for women. Many of them recognized that they received lower pay than other broadcasters because of their gender. Bernice Currier "resented being paid less than men."<sup>58</sup> Billie Oakley said that one woman who managed a station in Kentucky advised her not to take less pay than she was worth, even if the job was prestigious:

It's (radio) sort of an interesting job because there's sort of glamour about broadcasting. And that glamour tides you over sometimes and you'll work many times for less because of that. And that's what she said. 'You know what you have to have to live. Don't work for any less than that.' And so there were many times when I didn't take a job with a station that I'd like to work for because of the glamour part of it, but they were not paying well enough.<sup>59</sup>

This same station manager, who worked with Oakley when she was "quite young and needed the guidance" was adamant that Oakley not let herself be pushed around. "And she said, 'We have every right to be managers of these stations, and owners, and sales managers and everything else. We simply have to prove it to them.'"<sup>60</sup> Despite this, Oakley did not believe that women would ever be paid equal to men in radio.

The recognition that gender was a factor in their pay did not mean that women automatically helped each other. Oakley related how she was fired by a female manager one time when Oakley refused to dust the office. Fellow workers overheard the woman threaten to fire her if she did not comply with the request, and Oakley was subsequently able to file for unemployment benefits.<sup>61</sup>

Certainly, many of these women did work on behalf of their fellow employees -- both in terms of wages and professionalizing the field. Doris Murphy, woman's director at KMA, was asked by her East Coast broadcasting peers to help organize American Women in Radio and Television (AWRT). Murphy was elected the first national membership chair and she returned home to start the "Heart of America" chapter and become its first president. Falk claimed that AWRT in fact began at a meeting in Doris Murphy's home. By 1957, the organization had 1,600 members.<sup>62</sup> In 1950, Murphy was selected Chairman of District 10 of the Association of Women Broadcasters, which encompassed Iowa, Nebraska, and Missouri. Her role was to plan meetings and direct "action toward improving the standards of women's programs." The award was "one of the

highest honors a woman can receive in the broadcasting industry."<sup>63</sup> She was recognized for her work by Raymond Sayer, secretary-treasurer of the Broadcasting Company, with a bouquet of roses.

In 1948, Edith Hansen was appointed Iowa state "chairman" of the Association of Women Broadcasters, an organization with fifty members in Iowa that served as an auxiliary of the National Association of Broadcasters, "a group of outstanding radio men." In 1954, Currier, Falk, Shoemaker, and Murphy attended the Third Annual Convention of American Women in Radio Television, held in Kansas City. The prestige of this event can be judged by the speakers, who included Harold Fellows, president of the National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters; Frieda Hennock, a commissioner with the Federal Communications Commission; and Alice K. Leopold, director of the Women's Bureau of the USDA.<sup>64</sup>

The AWRT group was so successful in organizing that they drew the interest of men working in radio, particularly when it organized its first national convention in London. Recalled Billie Oakley: "The president of CBS went over there with us. A lot of big shots got into the act when they found out the women were getting that far. But it was a perfectly glorious experience. But there we were, suddenly, in the limelight with a few guys -- but not very many -- but the women were running our own show. We loved it. That was the one touch of glamour that we had."<sup>65</sup> While the radio homemakers competed with each other for listeners, advertisers, and program ideas, they more often mentored and supported each other. Women who served as program directors often were responsible for bringing other women on the air. Ormah Carmean, who was

hired as program director at KMA in the 1920s, was responsible for hiring Lina Teget, known as the "Flower Lady;" Eva Hopkins, a local woman who gave beauty advice and sold her own line of cosmetics; and Frena Ambler, the "Story Lady for the Little Folks." Doris Murphy had a reputation for hiring and encouraging a number of women to go on the air. Evelyn Birkby recalled that Murphy actively recruited her to try broadcasting after reading her column in the local paper.<sup>66</sup>

The experience of being on the radio encouraged these women to become entrepreneurs for themselves, although some in a more limited fashion than others. Perhaps the best-known entrepreneur was Leanna Driftmier, who started a female-headed business with the *Kitchen-Klatter* magazine and line of products that she eventually passed on to her daughter and granddaughter. Radio homemakers most often became entrepreneurs by compiling and selling their own cookbooks or newsletters. They also branched out into other occupations. Doris Murphy, women's director at KMA, was a successful real estate agent who bought old houses and remodeled them to resell. Adella Shoemaker opened a Tearoom in her home at 310 West Summitt Avenue in 1955, and served luncheons and dinner by reservations. Her venture was apparently supported by her fellow radio homemakers; 30 visitors were steered her way at the KMA "Flower Arrangement Day," reportedly gaining an "added thrill" with the experience of eating at her new establishment. Doris Murphy noted that Adella was "happy to see all her old radio listeners and with Adella's wonderful cooking ability, I am sure you will always get a delicious meal at Adella's Tea Room."<sup>67</sup>

The shared experiences that caused radio homemakers to seek their own road and support each other in professionalizing their careers also shaped their dispensations of domestic advice. The radio homemakers undoubtedly viewed themselves to a certain extent as a distinct gendered group. The next chapter will explore how this world view tempered the messages that advertisers wanted them to push, and their participation in promoting a woman-positive culture in the rural Midwest.

## Chapter Three -- Notes

1. Bernice Currier, "A Letter from Bernice Currier, *The KMA Guide*, (1958): 5.
2. Ibid.
3. See Deborah Fink, *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).
4. Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex During World War II* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 28-29.
5. "A Social Problem," *The Shenandoah Evening Sentinel*, November 11, 1928, 2.
6. *1930 Shenandoah and Clarinda City Directory* (Missouri: R.L., Polk, & Co., 1930), 14.
7. See Ibid.
8. Barbara Broff, interview with Paul Bowers, 1991, Greater Shenandoah Historical Society KMA-KFNF Video Project, 1991, tape #I-10.
9. Ibid.
10. Stella Lewis, interview with Paul Bowers, Greater Shenandoah Historical Society KMA-KFNF Video Project, tape #I-10.
11. Ibid.
12. See Milkman.
13. Margery Strom, interview with author, 21 March 1994, Shenandoah, Iowa; Billie Oakley, interview with author, 16 March 1994, Lincoln, Nebraska.
14. Jessie Young, KMA radio homemaker, date and interview unknown, but probably from the 1970s anniversary broadcast. KMA Archives, Shenandoah, Iowa.
15. Norm Kling, interview with Paul Bowers, Greater Shenandoah Historical Society KMA-KFNF Video Project, 6 April 1991, tape #I-4.
16. Ninette Beaver and Bill Tombrink, *Behind the "Mike" with Earl May: The Story of a Broadcasting Pioneer* (Shenandoah, Iowa: May Seed and Nursery Company, 1979), 21.
17. Ibid, 32-33.
18. Ibid, 32-33.
19. Ibid, 54.

20. Ibid, 20-21, 33.
21. "Office Girls," *The KMA Guide*, Shenandoah, Iowa, (October 1944): 6.
22. *KMA Guide*, (February 1954): 4.
23. "Silent Talent," *KMA Guide*, (January 1954): 4.
24. "Meet the Gal Behind the Guy Who Brings your Guide, *KMA Guide*, (December 1950): 13.
25. "A Chat with Edward May," *KMA Guide*, 3.
26. "Adella Learns the Cofee Trade," *KMA Guide*, (June 1949): 11.
27. "KMA Homemakers Visit Omaha Sponsors," *KMA Guide*, (July 1956): 3.
28. Bryon Falk, Florence Falk's spouse, interview with the author, August 1994, Essex, Iowa; KMA Memo, from Tony Koelker to Doris Murphy, 24 March 1954, KMA archives, Shenandoah, Iowa.
29. "A Letter from Bernice Currier," *KMA Guide*, (July 1954): 5.
30. "It's Tour Time at KMA," *KMA Guide*, (June 1954): 5.
31. Doris Murphy, "On the Party Line," *KMA Guide*, (July 1955): 9.
32. Margery Strom, interview with the author.
33. Murphy, Ibid.
34. Doris Murphy, "On the KMA Party Line," *KMA Guide*, (May 1954): 14.
35. KMA Memo, from R.H. Sawyer to Edward May, et. al., "Summary of discussion at meeting regarding tours for visitors," KMA archives 14 May 1954, 3.
36. KMA Memo, from Bernice Currier to Tony Koelker, KMA archives, 15 June 1954.
37. KMA Memo, from Florence Falk to Tony Koelker, "Expenses Incurred by FLorence Falk -- Radio Visitors," KMA archives, probaby June 1955.
38. "Harvest Jubilee Celebration Big Success!" *KMA Guide*, (October 1951): 15; Evelyn Birkby, *Cooking with KMA: Featuring 60 Years of Radio Homemakers* (Shenandoah, Iowa: May Broadcasting Company, 1985), 145; *KMA Guide*, May 1948, 12; Murphy, "On the KMA Party Line," *KMA Guide*, December 1951, 7; *KMA Guide*, Ibid, 4.
39. "A Report on Homemaker Day," *KMA Guide*, (September 1953): 5; "KMA Homemaker Days, August 10th to Feature Meat and Cooking, Authorities, Fun and Prizes," Ibid, (August 1953): 4.



40. "Huge Crowd Attends KMA's First Homemaker's Night," Ibid, (April 1953): 5; "A Letter from the Farmer's Wife," Ibid, (January 1957): 10.

41. Murphy, "On the KMA Party Line," Ibid, (October 1960): 8.

42. Ibid, (October 1955): 8.

43. Evelyn Birkby, interview with Paul Bowers, 1991, Greater Shenandoah Historical Society KMA-KFNF Video Project, tape #I-15.

44. *KMA Guide*, (August 1984): 4; (September 1948): 5; (July 1947): 5.

45. "Doris Murphy is on the Air," Ibid, (October 1949): 5.

46. Ed May, interview with the author, August 1994, Shenandoah, Iowa.

47. Warren Benson Dygert, *Radio as an Advertising Medium* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1939), 58.

48. "Doris Murphy is on the Air," *KMA Guide*, Ibid.

49. Rosalie Hillman, interview with Paul Bowers, Greater Shenandoah Historical Society KMA-KFNF Video Project, 6 April 1991, tape #I-16.

50. Murphy, "On the KMA Party Line," *KMA Guide*, (February 1954): 14.

51. Florence Falk, "A Letter from the Farmer's Wife," *KMA Guide*, (February 1956): 10.

52. "Hungry New York 'See It Now' Crew Invades Iowa Farm Home," *KMA Guide*, (February 1956): 2 & 13.

53. Andy Anderson, interview with author, August 1994, Shenandoah, Iowa; Tom Murphy, interview with author, August 1994, by telephone in Lincoln, Nebraska, from California; Billie Oakley, interview with author; Evelyn Birkby, interview with author.

54. Murphy, "Party Line," *KMA Guide*, (February 1956): 8; Ibid, (October 1960): 8; "Cover Story," in Ibid, (November 1958): 2.

55. Kessler-Harris, 11.

56. Birkby, *Cooking*, 33.

57. KMA payroll records.

58. Birkby, 66.

59. Billie Oakley, interview with the author.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid
62. Birkby, *Cooking*, 79; Falk, "A Letter from the Farmer's Wife," *KMA Guide*, (November 1957): 10.
63. "Congratulations Doris," in Ibid, (July 1950): 17.
64. *KMA Guide*, (May 1948):4; Murphy, "Party Line," in Ibid, (May 1954): 4.
65. Oakley, interview with author.
66. Beaver and Tombrink, 12; Birkby, interview with author.
67. Murphy, "Party Line," *KMA Guide*, (October 1955): 8.
68. Kessler-Harris, 62-63, 65, & 80.
69. "Cover Lady -- Edith Hansen: From Farm Girl to Famous Homemaker," *KMA Guide*, (April 1951): 2.

## Chapter Four

# "SISTERS OF THE SKILLET": PROMOTING AND SUSTAINING RURAL WOMEN'S CULTURE

I am very glad to hear that Leanna has been nominated as the Mother [of the Year] for '54. I know of no one who is more deserving. I have never met her but consider her one of my very best friends. Our home has been made happier through the years by our visits by radio and letter. She taught me patience, consideration of others, to enjoy homemaking (I used to hate it.) And more than these things the love of God and people. Even now if something comes up that I'm worried or stumped about I think to myself "Now what would Leanna do". By looking at my problems calmly and trying to see things as she would things usually turn out very well.<sup>1</sup>

Leanna Driftmier, the woman who created the Kitchen-Klatter radio show and magazine, was already a household name in the Midwest when Mrs. Harry Christensen of Cumberland, Iowa, wrote the preceding letter in support of her successful nomination for Iowa Mother of the Year in 1954. Driftmier maintained a personalized relationship with her fans. She called them "Sisters of the Skillet," and they responded by writing her with their intimate problems and, in some cases, naming their daughters after her. In 1945 alone, she received more than 100,000 letters from fans.<sup>2</sup>

This letter and the thousands of others sent to the radio homemakers illustrate the personal connection that listeners believed

they shared with Leanna Driftmier and the other radio homemakers. This personal connection and the way in which listeners interacted with the radio homemakers is significant. It shows that radio was not inherently an impersonal, one-way means of communicating with audiences. A more complex interpretation of mass communication is in order, one in which the listener's agenda is as important as that of the traditional gatekeepers -- the radio station owners, managers, and advertisers. The women who listened to the radio homemaker programs were not simply passive participants but used the radio homemaking shows to foster their own sense of community and to promote and sustain a unique rural women's culture. Leanna Driftmier's "Sisters of the Skillet" created a viable sense of themselves within the constraints of the larger, patriarchal, and capitalist rural society.

Mass media has commonly been regarded as a homogenizing force that inflicts the messages of a cultural and economic elite on a passive, mass audience thereby influencing people to buy certain products and behave and think in a certain way. Although the pervasive effects of mass media and advertising are well-documented by various fields of research, it is also true that the interaction between the audience and the media is much more interactive and malleable than generally perceived. In reevaluating the relationship between the purveyors of mass media and its recipients, we can gain a more accurate perspective on how and to what extent people manage to govern and conceptualize their own lives.

Historian Lawrence Levine explores this idea in his essay, "The Folklore of Industrial Society." He observes that popular culture (or

mass culture) has typically been viewed, at worst, as "the attempt of the ruling classes to exert hegemony over the masses"<sup>3</sup> and, at best, as something that catered to the lowest possible taste and therefore too trivial to study seriously. Levine contends, however, that popular culture is akin to folk culture "for people living in urban industrial societies, and can thus be used to reconstruct people's attitudes, values, and reactions."<sup>4</sup> Ironically, in the study of popular and folk culture, notes Levine, consideration of the audience is generally neglected. "Indeed, the audience remains the missing link, the forgotten element, in cultural history. The creation, the creator, and the context are often accounted for; the constituency remains shadowy and neglected."<sup>5</sup>

The two-way interaction between regional audiences and what played on the radio is evident in changes in music styles. Levine notes that folklorists were concerned that phonographs of regional blues recordings played over the radio would corrupt regional tastes and styles. On the contrary, the interaction was more complex, as regional musicians exerted their influence on whatever songs were being disseminated by the radio and through record sales. For example, sometimes the lyrics to songs were changed to reflect regional mores and traditions. Another example of the flexibility of folk music can be found in the music of Dr. Huphrey Bate, whose radio program on the Grand Ole Opry made him one of the nation's most popular musicians. Most of his music could be directly traced back to traditional tunes, be they fiddle pieces, vaudeville, or popular songs from the late 19th century.<sup>6</sup> Historian Lizabeth Cohen's study of the ethnic working class in Chicago also

demonstrates that mass culture does not necessarily produce homogeneous values across communities and, in fact, often strengthens subcultures. Noted Cohen: "Early radio in Chicago promoted ethnic, religious, and working-class affiliations rather than undermining them, as many advocates of mass culture had predicted."<sup>7</sup> Families and neighbors who comprised Chicago's working class often gathered together to listen to the radio and this act became another aspect of community life. Until radio stations became heavily commercialized and joined national chains in the 1930s, early radio stations were owned or sponsored by organizations with ethnic or religious loyalties.<sup>8</sup> Chicago stations often broadcast news from Europe and native music.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the Chicago Federation of Labor used radio to reach its constituents by founding station WCFL. The Federation also had to abandon its plan of strictly proselytizing to the masses about the labor party's agenda, instead finding it necessary to reach their public with programming that appealed to various ethnic constituencies, such as offering a Polish and an Irish hour.<sup>10</sup>

A similar dynamic was at play with the radio homemaking shows and their listeners. Women were not loyal fans of these radio homemaking shows simply because they blindly went along with prescriptive advice that they buy certain products or behave in a certain way. They too had an agenda and had needs that could not be fulfilled simply by purchasing a brand-name product. In the rapidly changing 20th century, the women who listened to the radio shows did so to bolster their sense of self-worth and their position within the home. The radio shows and their accompanying publications all addressed rural women as important

"experts" within the home, who were only naturally seeking the best information they could to run their homes in the best possible way and make healthy fulfilling lives not only for their families, but for themselves. Listeners were interested in having their pride in their work reinforced and their responsibilities legitimized. Listeners also used the radio homemaking shows and their publications as a creative outlet, a way of expressing their talents and abilities. The publications published by the radio homemakers provide as useful a record of rural women's community as the shows themselves. In fact, women subscribed to the publications when they found they could not receive the programs on their radios.<sup>11</sup>

In seeking this kind of support for their lives, the women who followed and interacted with the radio homemaker shows formed a sort of community of the airwaves, one that promoted women's associations within the community and transcended the spatial and often emotional isolation of the rural Midwest. Leanna Driftmier's term, "Sisters of the Skillet," summarized the essence of a demographic group that supported a unique and thriving women's culture.

Interdependence and kinship was an important facet of life in rural communities. The patterns of farming and the inevitability of emergencies made it crucial that neighbors pitch in to help each other. The importance of "neighborliness" has been emphasized in rural areas, and has often been romanticized in nostalgic accounts. Despite this romanticism, even in the latter half of the 20th Century the unpredictability of nature, the markets, and people's health made farm families reliant on neighborly goodwill. In her autobiography of life

as a newlywed on a rented farm, radio homemaker Evelyn Birkby described this interdependence. She talked about the men borrowing farm tools from each other, or -- in the event of a death or illness -- descending en masse to do the harvesting. For women, this interdependence might have meant helping watch each other's children during times of illness, fixing food for the larger number of workers during harvest, or helping each other during peak periods when food needed to be preserved.<sup>12</sup>

Even though radio stations did not begin collecting audience reports until 1945<sup>13</sup>, it is safe to say that the majority of the radio homemaking show's listeners lived on farms or small towns. Most daytime listeners of KMA and KFNF lived in the immediate listening areas of Page and Fremont Counties. In 1943, KMA's listening area included 1,546 towns with a population of 10,000 or less, in which lived 34.7% of the total population and in which 45.3% of the total population shopped. KMA managers calculated that 80% of its listeners lived in small towns. They counted 3 million people in 151 "primary" counties around Shenandoah as its listenership, noting that they spent \$820 million a year shopping.<sup>14</sup>

In 1949, 93 percent of the total radio families in Page County listened every week to KMA, while 89 percent listened in Fremont County. Page County had 7,630 families with radios, of which 2,600 lived within Shenandoah alone. Of that, 7,140 families (93%) listened to daytime KMA broadcasts weekly in Page County, with 2,300 (89%) in Shenandoah listening to daytime radio on KMA. Fewer listened to evening radio programs, at 6,760 (88%) in the county and 2,140 (83%) in Shenandoah. The majority of these listeners listened almost every day of the week,



or 76.3 %, while only 11.9 percent reported listening three to five days a week, and 5.2 percent reported listening only one or two days a week to daytime broadcasts.<sup>15</sup> Fremont County had 3,770 families with radios in 1949, of which 3,370 listened to daytime broadcast from KMA (89%), again with a smaller number -- 3,130 (83%) -- tuned into night time programs. The number listening six or seven days was 73.9 % (2,780), while only 3.9% tuned in three to five days a week and 11.6% listened one or two days.<sup>16</sup>

Most of the KMA listeners lived in towns less than 2,500 or in rural areas. In 1946, the number of rural listeners from Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, Kansas, Minnesota, and South Dakota numbered more than 2 million, or 68.4 percent, while the number living in towns of 2,500 or larger was just over 1 million, or 31.6 percent. Of this total number, 320,616 lived on farms. The highest percentage of rural listeners were in South Dakota, which had a rural listening audience of 28,227, or 91.4 percent, and Minnesota, whose rural audience was 27,632, or 81.5 percent. The state with the lowest percentage of rural listeners was Nebraska, with only 51.7 percent of its KMA listeners living in rural areas.<sup>17</sup>

Women constituted the majority of those who wrote to the station, whether in response to an offer by an advertiser or to send a fan letter. In 1946, 24% of the KMA advertisers used mail solicitations, which garnered 415,796 pieces of mail. In addition to responses to advertisements, the station received 29,949 pieces of fan mail. Of those letters, the vast majority -- 91.8 % -- of the writers were women. Men seemed most inclined to respond during the the months of January,

February, and March, possibly because the cold weather during these months gave them more time to listen. Women, on the other hand, wrote more frequently from July to September. Of the letter writers, 81.5% lived on a farm or in a small town, 7.7% lived in a town with a population between 4,000 and 10,000, while 10.8% lived in a city. Data acquired in 1944 and 1945 yields roughly similar numbers.<sup>18</sup>

In spite of the physical barriers to rural women associating with each other -- such as distance, inclement weather, and work load -- farm women have actively sought each other's company and, indeed, "got together over their work."<sup>19</sup> John Mack Faragher wrote about the vitality of women's kinship on the 19th century farm.<sup>20</sup> Dorothy Schweider asserted that women who settled the Midwest maintained strong social contacts with each other during this period.<sup>21</sup> In the 20th century, Deborah Fink's study of women in "Open County, Iowa" demonstrates that women developed intimate networks with their neighbors by working with them for long periods of time after making their way to the neighbors, because "dropping in for a visit" was too inconvenient.<sup>22</sup> Fink believes this association among women was important in the rural social framework. "In a social system based on family organization, a woman's interaction with other women, both inside and outside her family could consolidate her base of social power. In fact, women seem to have put significant time and energy into cultivating this interaction."<sup>23</sup>

This emphasis on neighborliness continued even as farming communities became more modernized and less isolated. The *Kitchen-Klatter* column "Over the Fence," which ran in the 1940s, was always accompanied by a cartoon showing two neighbors talking over their

adjoining fence. It typically discussed community concerns or the mundane day-to-day aspects of being a neighbor. One "Over the Fence" column chided women for neglecting new people in their neighborhoods. "Remember that they need friends, and call on them. Put yourself in their place and be willing to go more than half way in making these people less lonely."<sup>24</sup>

Even as more and more rural people moved to cities, it is apparent that they did not wish to lose the face-to-face contact and sense of community that had typified their lives in small towns and rural areas. In 1940, Leanna Driftmier noted that many of her city listeners reported experiencing loneliness, even after living in an area from six months to a year. She added: "Small towns are getting almost as bad, if I am not mistaken. I wish you could read some of my letters that say 'I don't know what I'd do without the radio and the chance to hear you, Leanna, for you're the only friend I have now that we've moved. It seems hard to get acquainted here.'"<sup>25</sup> Driftmier said that often people who had lived in the same community all their lives did not realize how lonely newcomers felt. She urged her readers, whether they lived in the city or a small town, to make an extra effort to interact with their neighbors by gestures such as sharing covered dishes.<sup>26</sup>

The radio homemakers tapped into this cultural value and attributed their success to their neighborliness. Drawing on the informal, folksy style that Henry Field had mastered in the sales talks he gave on his radio program, the radio homemakers consciously visited with their listeners as though they were sitting over a cup of coffee at the kitchen table. Leanna Driftmier viewed herself as a "radio guest" in

the home of her listeners during her show, and said that her visit felt so real that she even used her hands during her show to explain cooking procedures.<sup>27</sup> She wrote in *Kitchen-Klatter*: "To be invited into your home each day is a mark of real friendship which I appreciate. I want to be a real neighbor to you, sharing with you the happy incidents in my day and bringing to you what help and encouragement I can."<sup>28</sup>

Americans, lost in what they perceived as an impersonal mass communication society, responded favorably to radio programs featuring a realistic character who seemed to personally address them. Roland Marchand, in *Advertising the American Dream* observes that:

Of all the media . . . it was the radio that impressed advertisers most forcefully with the public craving for personal relationships through the media. Advertisers learned early that listeners formed personal attachments to radio personalities who were "guests" in their homes. Those who offered information and personal advice were bombarded with intimate letters.<sup>29</sup>

Marchand cites Betty Crocker as an example. She was a media creation personified by women in various regions through radio visits on the "Betty Crocker School of the Air." Her program evoked a response of 4,000 letters a day. These letter-writers would willingly reveal the most personal aspects of their lives and problems. Because of the strong response, other advertisers followed suit with similar fictitious radio personalities.<sup>30</sup> Needless to say, if so many women felt compelled to write to fictional characters, the radio homemakers -- who were flesh-and-blood, average farm or small-town women -- must have seemed especially sympathetic.

The style and content of radio homemaking reflected this interdependence and kinship. As noted earlier, Driftmier referred to her listeners as "Sisters of the Skillet" and children who wrote to the magazine addressed her as "Aunt Leanna." More than one listener referred to Driftmier or other radio homemakers as being like a sister or another female relative. Driftmier's picture made it into the family album of one of her loyal listeners, with the caption "Leanna Driftmier, my radio sister for more than 25 years."<sup>31</sup> Similarly, a radio homemaker originating out of Oklahoma was known as "Aunt Susan," although her real name was Edna Vance Adams Mueller. In fact, the compiler of her biography/recipe collection had assumed for years as a child that the "Aunt Susan" whose recipes were in the family recipe collection had been "one of the shadowy women who were part of the food brigade at our family reunions."<sup>32</sup>

Calling non-relatives by family titles, such as "Aunt" is akin to the "fictive kin" structure found in black families as an adaptation to slavery.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps using these familial titles was important to those rural women who were be isolated from their blood relatives. Certainly, it is generally true that women were more isolated than men on the farm. Men had more opportunities to associate with others and often had control over the car. Moreover, the constancy of the household duties made it difficult for women to associate with each other. Women responsible for small children and a variety of labor-intensive chores during the day found it difficult slip away to visit neighbors or go to town. The weather also played its part. A sudden rainstorm or a

blizzard could make a country road impassable, even in the 1940s and 1950s.

Even though a woman was secluded on the farm, the very act of listening to the radio show linked her to a broader community. Sometimes, the shows provided a way of linking distant friends and relatives together. Radio homemaker Evelyn Birkby fondly told how three generations of women -- a grandmother, mother and daughter -- had established a shared routine in their day by listening to the same radio homemaking show from their different homes. The women often talked about "their" show when they did have the opportunity to meet in person.<sup>34</sup>

The format of the radio programs suggests a way of maintaining this network and interdependence. Women communicate in a purposeful way to build and maintain connections and community with other women, notes psychologist Deborah Tannen.<sup>35</sup> One way that women establish connections with each other is by responding to other women's problems through sharing their own experiences. This type of conversation resembles the family stories that radio homemakers shared with their listeners. "We would get letters from people like 'Uncle John died last week,' and we'd go to the radio and say, 'I know what you mean, Uncle Johns are hard to come by,' " said Evelyn Birkby.<sup>36</sup> Radio homemakers shared family illnesses, deaths and even divorces over the radio.

Listeners seemed to get a vicarious thrill out of being privy to the daily activities of the radio homemakers via their radio visits. Even the radio homemakers were sometimes startled by this need. For example, Florence Falk received 25 letters from listeners referring to a

particularly "homey" gesture she made on one radio show. Noted the *KMA*

Guide:

Little did Florence Falk, the "Farmer's Wife" realize what an impact it would make when she went on the air one day and said that in ten minutes she was going to the kitchen and take out the two angel food cakes she had baking in the oven. She found out her listeners liked her friendly way of doing things. It was just like a person would do, if a neighbor had dropped in for a visit. And they liked knowing what was going on in the Falk farm home that morning!<sup>37</sup>

Listeners and readers so much wanted to know what was going on in the radio homemakers's lives that sharing personal family stories became standard. In 1940, Leanna Driftmier began writing "The Story of My Life," which was serialized in the pages of *Kitchen-Klatter*. In 1950, her daughter, Lucile Driftmier Verness, published "The Story of An American Family," an account of the family history that began with Driftmier's father moving to Page County, Iowa, from South Deerfield, Massachusetts, in 1868. The book proved to be immensely popular. Additions to the story were added in 1976, as a loyal audience was brought up to date on the activities of the Driftmier clan in the 25 years since the original had been published. Similarly, "Personal Peeks into Jessie's Past" appeared in *Jessie's Homemaker Radio Visit* in 1949, as told to Susan Kay. This serial also addressed Young's family history -- albeit in a more melodramatic fashion -- beginning with her parents's disastrous attempts to move from Bohemia to a farm in Nebraska, during which her mother died. These stories appeared to be as popular as the radio soap operas. Many listeners, in fact, compared the Kitchen-

Klatter broadcasts with the long-running radio soap opera, "One Man's Family,"<sup>38</sup> which was the most popular dramatic program in 1935.<sup>39</sup>

Many radio homemakers interacted personally with their readers and maintained friendships with women who lived a distance away. It is likely that this happened, in part, because the radio homemakers relied so heavily on other women to send in ideas and recipes for their shows. Having opportunities to make friends outside the community was also one of the benefits of being a radio homemaker. In the 1950s, radio homemaker Adella Shoemaker struck up a friendship with Mrs. Harry Ziegler of Blue Earth, Minnesota, which was featured in the *KMA Guide*. Their friendship consisted mostly of letters -- in 14 years of correspondence they had visited only four times. Ziegler contributed recipes and other items to be presented on Shoemaker's show. During one of their infrequent visits they did a radio show together during which they baked Norwegian Fattigmands or "Poor Man's Cake." Though they did not have very many opportunities to associate, Ziegler named the youngest of her five children, Donnie, after Shoemaker's son. Like the radio homemakers, Ziegler was active in community leadership, being a 4-H leader in her township and County Home Chairman [sic] of the Farm Bureau.<sup>40</sup>

Women living in the Shenandoah area often listened to a particular radio homemaker because they knew them. They were influenced either by a personal friendship or by loyalty to a club, church, or neighborhood. One woman said she listened to Florence Falk regularly because both belonged to the same Toastmaster's Club. She seemed pleased to know personal details about Falk's life, such as the fact that Falk was prone



to writing her speeches for the club while driving.<sup>41</sup> Women living within the community of Shenandoah were less likely to be impressed by the celebrity status of the radio homemakers, but regarded them as ordinary women in the community who were trying to earn money or put their talents to good use. Women living within Shenandoah reported that they were also less likely to depend on one of the radio homemakers radio shows as a source of intimate friendship -- or perhaps were less willing to express it than some of the women who wrote to the radio homemakers from a distance away. One reason for this might be that women around Shenandoah did not feel as isolated as women living in other parts of the Midwest, such as the less populated areas of Kansas and Missouri. Shenandoah had a strong tradition of women's associations. Lina Ferguson, KMA's "Flower Lady," believed that Shenandoah always seemed to be a "club town," perhaps more so than other communities.<sup>42</sup> The active women's community that existed in Shenandoah probably had a symbiotic relationship with the radio homemaking shows.

### A Recipe for Friendship

Cooking -- the topic most often addressed by radio homemakers -- reflected rural women's concern with relationships. Beyond their practical nature, the preparation of food and the exchange of recipes are imbued with cultural meaning, and shaped rural women's connections with each other. A recipe for Indian Bread that Billie Oakley often shared over the air or published in cookbooks was passed along to her, along with a sample, by a girl to whom she had given a home permanent. As Birkby noted in one of her cookbooks: "This became the cake Billie

made through the years to take as a gift to welcome a new baby, say her own thank-you to a friend, to comfort a family that has had sorrow, or to take to a covered-dish dinner."<sup>43</sup>

Mastering the skill of food preparation was a way of gaining status and perhaps a means of wielding informal power within the community. Nadine Elwers, who grew up on a farm near Shenandoah, said that men who helped with baling hay or harvesting passed along information about particularly good meals they had at certain farm houses, and were more inclined to return to those farms to work. She also recalled that one of her grandfathers had chosen his bride because during a courtship visit to her home he learned she could bake like his mother.<sup>44</sup> Having people request recipes for something you baked was flattering and reassuring to women. Women did not always cook to please men, but often to impress or please other women. In one of her columns, Bernice Currier was proud to note that everyone asked for the recipe for the German Sweet Chocolate Cake she served to the Board of the Business and Professional Women's Club.<sup>45</sup> Many women also seemed to genuinely enjoy cooking as a hobby or as an excuse for socializing with one another. Florence Falk used one of her recipe columns to encourage women to invite friends over to try some new recipes and to "have a good time along with everyone."<sup>46</sup> Sharing recipes seemed to offer a socially acceptable way for women to communicate with each other. Asking for or submitting a recipe seemed to offer women a valid reason to write to the radio homemakers, though they would stray into other topics. Having one's recipe printed in a radio homemaker publication or read over the air was a status symbol, as was being published in the local church

cookbook. One woman, whose reputation for making excellent banana cake was well-known in the Shenandoah area, refused for years to share the recipe with Evelyn Birkby. "It was so delicate and tasty that every time I ate a piece, I would ask Myrtle to give me the recipe," noted Birkby in her book. " 'No!' she would say emphatically. 'It's special. If I give you the recipe, you'll make it and get compliments, and it won't be mine any more!'"<sup>47</sup> After two years, Myrtle finally relented. Her status is maintained in the custom of rural and small communities -- she is now dead but the recipe, published in Birkby's most recent book, bears her name.

The material importance of recipes is apparent in the call for help that went out for "one of our Kitchen-Klatter Circle," whose house burned to the ground in May 1941. The woman in question had to carry her bedridden 84-year-old father to safety and she lost all that she owned. But the loss of her cookbooks and recipes proved a particular hardship. Readers were asked to send her any recipes or cookbooks "they could spare, and know she would be very grateful for them."<sup>48</sup>

Recipes were valuable not just for their practical considerations, but because they represented relationships with other people, traditions passed along in their families, or even rites of passage. Women who entered their favorite recipe in a KMA contest in May 1949 had to explain in 50 words or less why this recipe was special. "Maybe it's the one your grandmother gave you, the first one which you prepared for your husband, one that you use for unexpected company or -- there's thousands of reasons . . ." <sup>49</sup> The contest received hundreds of entries for the \$600 worth of prizes that were to be awarded, and judges noted:

" . . . some of the reasons you gave brought tears to our eyes."<sup>50</sup>

Because recipes and cookbooks represented family traditions, it was expected that they be passed along for generations. For example, Mary Hamilton, who did the typing for the first KFNF Cook Book that Leanna Driftmier compiled, observed: "I've still got a very much weather beaten copy of that but I expect a lot of people throughout, farmer's wives throughout the country had passed (it) down to their children and grandchildren. I expect that old KFNF Cook Book is probably in a lot of farm homes today, yet."<sup>51</sup>

The idea that recipes and cooking secrets were a source of women's power is even implied in the pages of *Kitchen-Klatter*, such as this poem printed in 1940: "I believe there's something witchin'/Tantalizing in a kitchen;/Something just beyond the fingers/Strange and mystical that lingers;/Treasure hoarded down the ages,/Secrets from old housewife's pages."<sup>52</sup>

The folkways of family traditions and customs brought from Europe were lovingly preserved in recipes and probably contributed a great deal to KFNF being cited by a scholar as "an excellent and interesting example of a station appealing to various foreign groups within the community."<sup>53</sup> Jessie Young paid homage to her hard-working mother, an immigrant from Bohemia, by including traditional recipes in her magazine, *Jessie's Homemaker Radio Visit*. Radio homemaker Florence Falk, "The Farmer's Wife," also shared her Swedish heritage with her listeners. She gave Swedish recipes on her radio show and compiled a cookbook on the art of the Swedish Smorgasbord. She peppered her columns with references to Swedish traditions and adopted the Swedish

custom of hanging a special flag outside her home whenever she was able to accept visitors. She said that her interest in her ethnic heritage began in 1918, when, as an adoptee, she finally learned her nationality. In 1958, she was able to fulfill her dream of traveling to the Europe and shared her adventures with her radio listeners.<sup>54</sup>

Bits of folk wisdom were also dispensed in the radio homemaking cookbooks and publications in recipe format, such as "Recipe for a Happy Marriage" or "How to Make a Family." One *KMA Guide* write-up featured radio homemaker Adella Shoemaker gathered for a small reunion with her family. It was dubbed "Adella's Recipe For Happiness":

As you can see, the table was adorned with Adella's favorite recipes, but the most successful one she tried that afternoon was: Take two sons (one you haven't seen in some time), mix in 3 cuddly grandchildren, and two very attractive daughters-in-law, and talk long after coffee, allowing all your maternal feelings to exhibit themselves freely.<sup>55</sup>

"Are you tired of cooking?"

Beyond the cultural importance of food and cooking, meal preparation was the main focus of the radio homemaking shows simply because women spent so much time doing it. Leanna Driftmier probably struck a nerve when she wrote in September 1947:

Are you tired of cooking? I can answer that question, for who isn't after trying to tempt the family appetites during these hot, hot months just past. One is even bored with the thoughts of spoons, flour and bowls. If this is true of you, you need to try new foods. There is romance in cooking, if one has time to think of it in that light. When you prepare Chop Suey, think of distant China. As the family eats it, discuss the customs and ancient history of this interesting country.<sup>56</sup>

Women valued the recipes given by the radio homemakers because the new ideas allowed them creativity and variety in the meals they constantly had to prepare.<sup>57</sup> In 1957, Edward May, owner of KMA, attributed a "tremendous surge" in subscriptions directly to the KMA Guide during the month of July because the magazine had added "two full pages of the most choice, and timely, cookie recipes that you can obtain anywhere." Reader requests for the more than 3,000 recipes compiled by Falk and Currier for KMA's Third Annual Cookie Tea were tremendous.<sup>58</sup>

Driftmier and other radio homemakers acknowledged that rural women often did not always have time for new recipes. In one column, Driftmier noted: "It is pretty hard for a country woman to spend time trying out new recipes when there is the care of the chickens and the garden, the cream cans to wash and the washing, ironing and mending to do." Farm husbands often resisted trying "fancy dishes," preferring a "good substantial meal."<sup>59</sup>

Radio homemakers served as sources of information when rural people did not have the technology that their urban counterparts had, such as electric or gas ranges or indoor running water. In her book on the radio homemakers, Evelyn Birkby noted that Jessie Young received requests on how to keep food without refrigeration as late as 1940. Promotional literature reiterated this:

Problems in refrigeration which have almost disappeared in the city are very real to farm women who have no electricity, and to the many others who have electricity but cannot afford electric refrigerators. Jessie Young helps her listeners solve such problems by giving frequent recipes for canning and smoking meats.<sup>60</sup>

Despite these difficulties, many rural and small-town women rejected the pre-packaged food designed to make their lives easier. Rural women took pride in their cooking and considered it something of an art form. Many of their recipes could be mastered by the beginner, yet the radio homemakers frequently printed recipes that were difficult, time-consuming, and required a high degree of skill. Bernice Currier criticized an article that claimed making things from scratch was "extravagant, time-wasting, energy-wasting and usually produced inferior products."<sup>61</sup>

How many of you agree with that? It seems to me in this day of speed and worry it is a wonderful thing to be interested in painting, re-decorating, cooking, sewing, writing, music and all of the things that are not our regular work. Even our regular work can become play if we add some creativeness to what we are doing. The other day someone was bragging about a cake she had made. It was a beauty. The cake itself was fine textured, moist, level across the top; so she made a pale pink icing fluffed up in peaks all over the sides and top and it looked like a dream cloud. Some one (sic) else in the crowd said "Well, don't you think you would have saved a lot of time if you had used a package cake and package icing?" This friend said that yes, she would have saved a lot of time that she could have spent rushing here and there and getting her nerves all tense, coming home late, nothing planned for supper and the family wondering where she had been all afternoon.<sup>62</sup>

Even though frozen bread dough was commercially available in the 1940s and 1950s, Bernice Currier still gave recipes for baking seven fancy types of rolls from scratch, to be prepared for "a summer buffet or coffee,"<sup>63</sup> including De Luxe Rolls, Butterhorns and Cruller Rolls. Currier's recipe for "Blue Lakes and Potato Salad" was designed to impress guests. It was prepared on a large flat lettuce leaf and

garnished with a bundle of cooked green beans and a strip of pimiento "to look like a fagot of sticks." Currier advised women to add plenty of color to the potato salad, such as sliced, unpeeled red radishes and green peppers for an artistic effect. She noted: "This salad makes a very striking bit of color for the tables too."<sup>64</sup>

It is probable that women wished to perceive their work as creative and valuable because cooking was very much a gender-specific area. Men could and did cook in rural areas, as is evident in the radio shows and cooking columns issued by KMA that featured men. But a man in the kitchen was a rare creature and was viewed as an exception rather than the norm. In these cases, men showed mastery in what was typically considered a woman's realm. KMA's Larry Parker presented recipes that appealed to the "man of the house" on his "Man in the Kitchen" radio show that aired daily Monday through Friday. Women were advised to tune into Parker's show to gain "an insight on what hubby might want for dinner in the evening." Noted the *KMA Guide*: "KMA is the only radio station in the midwest to feature a male-homemaker (often referred to as a "home-breaker") and the show is winning new friends daily."<sup>65</sup>

When men cooked they did so because it was an enjoyable hobby they did infrequently, such as barbecuing. Men who did their share of house work were portrayed positively by the *KMA Guide*, such as in the case of Jonny Dickson, KMA's evening announcer, who gave their three-room apartment its weekly cleaning, made beds, prepared meals, and washed dishes while his wife Mary worked a day shift. "You can be sure all the women think Jonny is an 'ideal husband,'" noted the *KMA Guide*, although the fact that his example was unusual was noted. Similarly, Marth



Yates, KMA's program logger received the Guide editor's sympathy when she noted that her "present problem" was trying to get her husband "interested in some household chores." The Guide commented: "You're not alone, Martha." Men who shirked their household duties were viewed with some amusement and a little bit of superiority. The KMA Guide poked fun of disc jockey Dick Mills, who resorted to "eating cold corn and beans" right out of the can when his wife Millie was gone for a month. "Batching is no fun as far as Dick is concerned . . ."66

Men's efforts in the kitchen were sometimes ridiculed, as in this poem written by one woman who did not like her husband's cooking:

Should husbands do the cooking?  
O.K. but certainly not mine  
He's clumsy, awkward and sloppy too  
He's so messy, it's a crime.

Other women's husbands may be neat  
And have the knack it takes  
To put a meal together right  
From soups on through to cakes.

But mine has arms like an octopus  
With ten thumbs on each hand  
If you can imagine him as a cook  
Your imagination is working grand.

I've done my own cooking for 30 years  
I hope I can for 30 more  
It may not be the best in the world  
But it is an enjoyable chore.

This is only one woman's opinion  
Others may not agree with mine  
But I hope and pray that I never see the day  
When on my husbands' cooking I must dine.<sup>67</sup>

It would be difficult to generalize whether or not men's efforts were resented because some women did not want to share this domain or if it reflected underlying tension regarding the allocation of household

duties within each family. Certainly, since cooking and collecting recipes were considered an acceptable pursuit for women, this activity was free from the censure that pursuing a stereotypical male realms -- such as politics or auto repair -- would have garnered. Sometimes gathering recipes and cooking offered a means for women to escape the tensions of rural life. Florence Falk made clear that she enjoyed reading cookbooks because it was an acceptable pursuit. "Cookbooks make for not only interesting reading but are fairly safe from controversy."<sup>68</sup>

The radio homemakers were successful because they promoted the elevation of homemaking as art and skill, and validated women's needs to make it more interesting. Leanna Driftmier and radio homemakers to follow also differed from home economists in that they considered themselves on an equal footing with their listeners. Driftmier upheld intergenerational traditions by attributing gems of wisdom to her mother, who had raised seven children on a farm in Southwestern Iowa. Moreover, radio homemakers relied as much on listeners sharing tips and recipes as they did on advice from professional home economists. As one KMA listener writing in 1969 put it: "These dreamy sing-song readers of Home extension and interviews gag us [and do not] satisfy us at all!"<sup>69</sup>

If experts on domesticity promoted the idea that cooking was easy, imagine how miserable women were who could not master this skill. The radio homemakers were prolific in sharing their cooking misadventures with their listeners and readers. Doris Murphy likened one baking disaster that befell a radio homemaker as akin to the "Perils of Pauline" movies, where "something was always happening to the heroine."

Bernice Currier had this feeling when the rubber spatula she was using to mix cookie dough disintegrated into the batch. In order to prepare for some visitors, Currier had to pick pieces of rubber out of the dough.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps the most well-known disaster occurred during one of Leanna Driftmier's live broadcasts, when the eggs her daughter was using in a recipe they were demonstrating were rotten. Listeners were delighted when this mishap was revealed.

Sometimes the advice of the radio homemakers ran parallel to that being disseminated by the home economists. Like the home economists of the 1920s and 1930s, who were determined to make housework as smoothly managed as any business, Leanna Driftmier gave a spate of advice on efficiency. *Kitchen-Klatter* listeners and readers were told how to do their laundry, can their own food, organize their day, plan weekly menus, pack their child's school lunches, and even how to make coffee. Instructions for these procedures were very specific and had an air of scientific management about them, with their emphasis on exacting time frames, temperatures, and steps. A tip on laundry in the January 1928 issue of *Kitchen-Klatter*, from a woman in Kansas, noted that the "presence of strong alkali in the water" would shrink woolens and destroy their softness. The article also noted that the water temperature should be "between 95 degrees and 105 degrees."<sup>71</sup> An article on making coffee in the 1930s notes that few women made good coffee, but it could easily be attained through: "Accurate measuring, careful timing, correct temperature of the water and freshness of the coffee."<sup>72</sup>

The radio homemakers also participated in Home Extension and Farm Bureau activities and interviewed them on their radio shows. In April 1957, Florence Falk attended the 12th Annual Family Life Conference at Iowa State College in Ames. One of her interviews was with Leslie Smith of the Home Economics Extension Division of the College.<sup>73</sup> In another instance, Florence Falk gave a Salad Demonstration on March 29, 1955, to 35 members and guests of the Fremont Township Farm Bureau. Falk recruited her neighbor, Mrs. Lawrence Patterson, and they made five new salads and served them as refreshments.<sup>74</sup>

Despite the overlap in activities, the prescriptive advice of the radio homemakers differed fundamentally from that of the home economists. While Leanna Driftmier believed that homemaking should be more efficient, she thought that the end result was not to make the home more businesslike but to make women's lives easier. She did not believe that housework would cease to be important if it were less time-consuming. Kitchen-Klatter poems and articles indicated that housework was central to the family and women's lives, and ought to be regarded as an art. For all its importance, Leanna Driftmier did not advocate that women become drudges in their quest to improve the home. In articles and editorials throughout the 1920s and 1930s, she emphasized the importance of time management to allow women a few hours to themselves. While women were to nurture their children, children were to learn responsibility at a young age and appreciate their mother's work.

Mother makes the prettiest clothes, makes the bed and in short makes the home. But if Mother makes too much, even if she makes the home, it can hardly be a happy home; it isn't the tired nervous over-worked Mother who can be happy and

patient with the children. We must learn what to leave undone, if we have too many things to do each day. In so many cases the mother does so many things in the home which the children could be trained to do.<sup>75</sup>

Even vacations were not to be taken at a woman's expense. Leanna Driftmier suggested that women not ruin vacations for themselves by attempting to fix food for the trip, which she had come to regard as "foolish." "For a change," she observed, "it wouldn't hurt anyone to sit down at a counter in a hamburger shop; I don't think it's possible to get more than six blocks from one."<sup>76</sup> In another column, she told of a summer vacation when she packed her husband and children off, and used her own vacation money to redecorate the kitchen and buy a new range. That finished, she had someone come in and clean, then spent two weeks taking meals at local restaurants and catching up on her reading. If women could not afford such long vacations, they were to take mini-vacations by planning at least two hours as time spent on something that they found enjoyable. Of course, she thought that the Kitchen-Klatter broadcasts at 2 p.m. daily might be a nice time for this indulgence.<sup>77</sup>

#### **Maintaining the Household Economy**

KMA promotional literature often made it appear that cooking was perhaps the only arena in which women had interests. In 1955, *The KMA Guide* noted: "You can guess what usually takes place when farm women get together. They talk about cooking. . . ."<sup>78</sup> But cooking by no means defined the parameters of Midwestern women's interests and responsibilities from the 1920s to the 1960s. The pages of *Kitchen-Klatter* and *Jessie's Homemaker*, as well as other publications, show that

women considered raising their children a major responsibility. These women also had an interest in being creative, in supporting their churches and schools, in promoting connections with other women, and in maintaining the household economy and earning enough money to do so.

The importance of farm women's contributions to all aspects of the rural community is stated in one of Florence Falk's column when she interviewed outstanding homemakers selected from 10 different counties in Iowa. Said Falk: "A lot of work stands behind each homemaker not only in her home, but in her church and community, her contributions to the extension work, and with the Farm Bureau. All of these were farm women and we all found much in common -- farm life, families and the love of serving others and helping wherever and whenever possible."<sup>79</sup> This involvement echoed the "Republican Motherhood" rhetoric of earlier generations.

Maintaining the household economy -- feeding and clothing the family -- was central to women's responsibilities on the farm. But running a farm home was grueling and demanding work. While writing and columns by radio homemakers rarely revealed the very dark side of rural living, they did not gloss over all aspects of life on the farm. In January 1956, for example, Florence Falk wrote about the lack of water on farms, with farmers being forced to haul their water from nearby towns -- a situation she called "almost desperate."<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, the twice-daily schedule of chores demanded that farm life continue as usual.

Given these realities, it is no wonder that rural women preferred to listen to another rural woman give advice born of experience than

listen to a home economist whose advice was developed in a scientific laboratory. During the height of what Betty Frieden dubbed "The Feminist Mystique," scholars of women's history noted that the larger culture trivialized cooking and domestic work. Many scholars have argued that advertisers and home economists produced consumption and modernism for women and invariably trivialized women's roles and status within their homes. Yet, rural women tended to resist prescriptive literature that urged them to curtail their activities as producers.<sup>81</sup>

Even though radio homemakers promoted domesticity, with its tenets of homemaking, cooking, motherhood, and being a good wife, they also condoned women's needs to earn income and support the household economy by producing much of the goods necessary to run it. For example, while they urged women to buy Henry Field's pressure cookers, both they and their listeners regarded that gadget as not just a convenience but as a necessity. Farm and town women alike wrote to Leanna Driftmier extolling the virtues of the pressure cooker, which helped them feed their families and save money. In December 1928, one woman wrote:

I bought one of your Pressure Cookers, 12 qt. size, last winter, and must say I made good use of it for canning. I canned beans, corn, tomatoes, peas and carrots mixed, pumpkin, and all my fruit. Also, meat last winter, and not one can spoiled. I am sure strong for the P. Cooker. I believe it more than pays for itself and my only regret is that I did not get one sooner but it seemed like I could never afford to put the money into one. We use it often for every day when we want something well done in a short time." <sup>82</sup>

A long-running personal advertising column reveals Midwestern women engaging in various cottage industries to earn income. Leanna Driftmier encouraged readers to support these advertisers, who did

everything from sewing dresses out of seed sacks to raising Persian kittens to sell for \$5 each. While these ads dwindled somewhat by the 1940s, a column on poultry advice emerged, which explicitly stated the importance of egg and fryer money to women.

Rural women also tried to save money on food preparation. The recipes given by the radio homemakers indicate that even after the second World War, some Midwestern women still made basic food items rather than purchase them at the store. In 1956, Bernice Currier printed a recipe for "Cold Catsup" submitted by Mrs. James Myers of Villisca, Iowa, in her "Homemaker's Visit" column in *The KMA Guide*.<sup>83</sup>

Recipes given by the radio homemakers reflected changes in technology and were adjusted for times of inadequate food supplies. During World War II, Leanna Driftmier noted that women needed their "cream and egg check" to do their shopping, but also commended one woman for not shirking on feeding her family with these same supplies simply to earn this check.<sup>84</sup> During the war, recipes suggested substitutes, such as honey for sugar, which was being rationed. Meatless recipes were also popular during this period, and many were resurrected from the Depression.

Certainly, Fremont and Page Counties were slightly poorer farming areas than others in Iowa. In 1946, there were certainly fewer farms and farm families in the Southwest agricultural district of Iowa, including Page and Fremont Counties, compared with the rest of Iowa. The Southwest district had the smallest number of persons living on farms and the lowest number of farms in Iowa that year. There was a total of 61,715 people living on 17,983 farms in the Southwest District



that year, compared to the 102,108 people living on 27,603 farms in the Central District of Iowa. The average size of of the farms in the Southwest district was higher, with 172 acres in this district compared to the state average of 168 acres per farm. There were 5,895 persons living on 1,611 farms in Fremont County in 1946, while there were 6,891 people living on 2,088 farms in Page County.<sup>85</sup>

The densest population of KMA radio homemaker listeners lived in the poorer areas of Iowa. In the 1940s, more of the land in the Southwest agricultural district was operated by renters than land owners, and their rate of land ownership was slightly lower than the state average. In 1946, for example, 42.5% of the farm land in Fremont County being worked was owned by the operator, and 48% of the total land in Page County was owned by the operator. The state average for land ownership by operator was 48.5%. The rate of land being farmed by the owner was highest in the South Central and Southeast farm districts of Iowa, at 58.4% and 58.5 percent, respectively. The percentage of land being rented by the operator was slightly higher in Fremont and Page Counties, with 57.5% of the total land being rented by the farmer in Fremont County, while 52% of the land being rented by the farmer in Page County, compared to the state average of 51.7% being rented.<sup>86</sup>

This district and these counties were also slightly below the state average in its yields per acre of all crops in 1946. Fremont County had 144,730 acres under production whose total yield was 47.9 bushels per acres. Page County had 114,770 acres under production, with a total yield of 51.9 bushels per acre. The Southwest district had a

total of 53.4 bushels per acre yield, while the state total was 56.7 bushels per acre.<sup>87</sup>

The decline in the popularity of the radio homemakers coincided with an increase in the wealth of farmers in their listening areas. By the mid to late 1950s, the farms in the KMA listenership area were following state trends -- fewer people were living on farms with higher acreages. The number of total people living on farms in the Southwest Agriculture district had dropped by 6,543, from 61,715 in 1946 to 55,172 in 1955. The Southwest District still had the sparsest farm population, with the lowest number of people living on the lowest number of farms in the state. The number of farms in this district decreased by 2,048, from 17,983 in 1946 to 15,935 in 1955. The average size of these farms had increased by 23 acres from 172 acres per farm in 1946 to 195 acres per farm. The number of acres per farm was slightly higher than the state average size of 181 acres per farm. The percentage of land being owned by operators compared to the percentage of total land being farmed by renters had reached half and half by 1955 for the state, but in the Southwest District 51 percent of the land was still being farmed by renters while 49 percent of the land was farmed by the owner. In Page County, more land was being farmed by owners than by renters, as 51.9 percent of the land was farmed by an owner compared to 48.1 percent being farmed by renters. Fremont County lagged further behind, with 43.2 percent of the land being operated by the owner while 56.8 percent of the farm land was being farmed by tenants.<sup>88</sup>

The number of women in the radio homemaking listening areas decreased as well as farms grew larger and the number of families

supported by farming dwindled. Less land was being devoted to farming in 1955 than in 1946 but yields were larger. The Southwest district lost 97,258 acres of farm land from 1946 to 1955, harvesting a total of 1,017, 914 acres in 1946 compared to 974,656. The district yield per acre decreased substantially as well, from 53.4 bushels per acre in 1946 to 36.6 bushels per acre in 1955, at a decrease of 16.8 bushels per acre. The district where the majority of radio homemaker listeners lived had the lowest yield per acre compared to the 48.4 state average. The average per acre was lower that year because it was unusually dry and the soybean crop suffered.<sup>89</sup>

By the 1960s, the fortunes of the area had improved because of modern farming methods. In a 1961 marketing piece, KMA boasted that it had a wealthy listenership. The brochure claimed that there were 82,000 "modern, highly productive farms" in its 56-county listening area, whose average gross income of \$12,386 was \$5,000 above the national average.<sup>90</sup>

### **Bigger Jobs to Tackle Than Fancy Work"**

Rural life may have been isolating, but it was subject to the social and economic forces that changed the rest of the nation during the period from the 1920s to the 1960s. The introduction of radio itself caused transformations in the rural environment, as Victorian ideals slowly eroded from the countryside. Paved roads, technological advances in the home and on the farm, World War II and changing attitudes toward gender roles all effected rural women.

The radio homemakers experienced these changes and shared their stories with their audience -- buying appliances, remodeling their

kitchens and driving new cars. They were among those who made summer vacations an indelible part of the American fabric for today's nostalgic middle class baby boomers. The children of these women grew up, went to college, went to war, traveled abroad and chose to make a living in other parts of the country. Frederick Driftmier's letters to his mother, Leanna Driftmier, reflected the pull of education and wanderlust that many of his rural peers were experiencing. *Kitchen-Klatter* readers learned about his education at Yale, while his sister, Lucille, wrote of her new life in Arizona -- both worlds apart from the rural Midwest. Similar themes were explored by other radio homemakers, such as in Florence Falk's column and show, "The Farmer's Wife," and in Evelyn Birkby's "Up a Country Lane" columns.

Advice given by the radio homemakers also reflected rural values throughout these periods. Motherhood was glorified to a great extent throughout most of this period and trends regarding modern childrearing methods were quick to find favor in rural areas. In the 1920s, the nation's concern with raising healthy children was reflected in the pages of *Kitchen-Klatter Magazine*, as mothers were given advice on nutrition. After World War II, when the mother became responsible for the psychological well-being of her family, the heightened concern with raising happy, well-adjusted children was reflected in a *Kitchen-Klatter* column introduced in 1940 called "Our Children." The column dealt with sensitive issues, such as how difficult it is for a mother to raise a child with a mental or physical handicap. Parents wrote in concerned with children's antisocial behavior, such as biting other children or being too shy to play with others. Leanna Driftmier and other radio

homemakers answered these columns with calm and reassuring advice that made modern childrearing methods seem more common sensical and intuitive.<sup>91</sup>

The hardships borne by rural Midwestern women during World War II also appeared in these shows and publications. *Kitchen-Klatter* was filled with letters, poems and articles on the war -- the fact that women had sons, husbands, brothers and boyfriends fighting in the war was one of the most prevalent themes during these years. Women tried to stave off feelings of helplessness by doing their part for the war effort. Besides promoting the war effort on their shows and in their publications, the radio homemakers did volunteer work themselves. Leanna Driftmier encouraged women to put up stars in their windows if someone in their family was in the service. The radio homemakers also had relatives in the service, and listeners shared Edith Hansen's ordeal when her son, Donald, was hospitalized with a war wound.<sup>92</sup>

The war also blurred the gender lines in the rural Midwest. Much has been written about the lack of men to do harvest work during World War II, and this certainly had an impact on the radio homemakers and their listeners. In her *Kitchen-Klatter* column, "Around the Kitchen Table," written in November 1943, Maxine Sickels said she had to maintain her good humor when taking over men's chores, particularly when she dumped a whole load of hay on her upturned face as it made its way to the haymow. She also lamented that normally in November she would be making quilts and visiting with friends, but because of the war she would "still be picking corn." She said that the war effort had added more work to her schedule, even though she claimed that hers was a more

liberal family than most: "We have never been a family that drew sharp lines between "His" work and "Hers" but the shortage of farm labor has demanded that "Her" help with "His" and do "Hers" on rain days and at nights."<sup>93</sup>

Rural life did not settle back to normal after the war, if the question and answer advice columns that began appearing in *Kitchen-Klatter Magazine* and *Jessie's Homemaker Radio Visit* are any indication. Upheavals in the traditional social fabric of the Midwest occurred both during and after the war. Generations were thrust together due to housing shortages and husbands being drafted, causing conflict between married women and their parents or in-laws. Other tensions were caused by teens dating at a young ages, running around with the "wrong crowd," or ignoring curfews. A woman from York, Nebraska, wrote Jessie Young that her daughter was questioning her values. "My 12 year old [sic] daughter has suddenly decided she is old enough to be running around with boys. To my way of thinking, 13 is much too young for that sort of thing although most of her girl friends the same age do the same."<sup>94</sup>

Parents also had difficulty with the fact that their children were marrying without their consent or approval. Many of the problems seemed to be unique to rural areas. For example, one woman in Fayette, Mo., was worried because her 16-year-old daughter wanted to spend the summer working at a resort in Minnesota and her help was desperately needed on the farm. (Jessie Young thought that if her help were not "very badly" needed on the farm and the daughter was mature enough, she should be allowed to have that experience.)<sup>95</sup> Other problems that cropped up frequently were with noisy or nosey neighbors or with women who let

their children run all over the neighborhood. In most cases, Jessie Young and Leanna Driftmier advised women not to alienate their neighbors.

While Leanna Driftmier's letters were more reserved and were probably edited for public taste, Jessie Young printed very frank letters in her "Question Quests" column. Young received letters from women who were worried that their husbands were having affairs or, on the opposite end of the spectrum, were worried that they had married poorly. One Council Bluffs, Iowa, woman received a letter at the house intended for her husband at the office. "It almost put me in the hospital," she wrote. "Here it is from some girl or woman in Denver who is evidently expecting my husband to get a divorce and marry her and from the remarks in her letter I believe they have even already been living together. Hurry your answer, What Oh shall I do?"<sup>96</sup> Young's advice was to have a "heart-to-heart talk with friend husband," if she wanted to keep him. If she did not want to keep him, she advised her to "show him the letter, tell him to go get his divorce quick, the quicker the better, stick him for all the alimony you can and tell him to scat."<sup>97</sup>

Conservative attitudes toward love and marriage also seemed to be threatened in rural areas, which Young looked upon harshly in her advice columns. She criticized young women who married for money, not love. She told one woman not to marry a man simply for a "meal ticket." "Until you know how to return love, and want a husband because you love him, why don't you stay single and work, providing your own meal ticket. Maybe you aren't ready for marriage."<sup>98</sup>

Even though *Kitchen-Klatter* maintained a conservative tone, topics that ordinarily drew censure were also making their way into its pages and presumably the radio show as well. These topics included divorce, wife desertion, and teenage pregnancy. Driftmier generally took a moderate stance when giving advice, urging women not to interfere with their adult children's lives or to bring up unnecessary grievances with neighbors. Above all, she thought that a woman ought to do whatever was needed to make family life go as smoothly as possible, be that holding her tongue when her son and daughter-in-law frivolously wasted a savings bond she had purchased for them, or allowing young children to eat on expensive China with the rest of the family at Christmas.<sup>99</sup> Both Young and Driftmier were concerned that women continue to be good wives, although they believed that marriage was a partnership. For example, Jessie Young said that a woman "has to ask her husband for every cent she wants to spend because he is the man of the house and is supposed to make the living. That is his duty and privilege." She tempered her stance somewhat by adding that money was an issue to be discussed. "Marriage is a partnership business, neither husband or wife should develop the habit of telling the other what to do."<sup>100</sup>

Changes in women's roles were not always viewed negatively. Leanna Driftmier observed that the home of her childhood -- when women baked all their own bread, canned their own fruits and vegetables and did sewing -- was gone, because so many women had Army, Navy and defense jobs. Driftmier did not romanticize women's roles completely, hoping that "household drudgery" would be "a thing of the past" and the extra time women gained would "belong to our community and to our



children." While she believed that women's greatest happiness was in the home she did not know if women would continue to be fulfilled by domesticity. "Our generation had time for all of these things, and took for granted the fact that we should do them. But this is no longer true. The generation that followed us has bigger jobs to tackle than fancy work. These children of ours are taking their place in the world of industry, and sometimes I wonder if they will ever be content to return to their homes after the war is over."<sup>101</sup>

These were prophetic words. By the 1960s and 1970s, even rural and small-town women were less content to remain in their homes to cook, clean and do "fancy work." Leanna Driftmier's "Sisters of the Skillet" had traded cast iron for teflon coated skillets, slow cookers, fry daddies and microwaves. *Kitchen-Klatter* subscriptions were dwindling and the magazine and program both abruptly ceased in 1986. Loyal fans were shocked by the closing and one woman reportedly took to her bed. Radio station owners, intent on modernizing their formats with rock or country music formats in the 1960s, did not perceive a market for women's programs. Billie Oakley, the last of Shenandoah's old-time radio homemakers to still broadcast a regular program, retired for the third and final time in March 1994. By this time, the golden era of radio homemaking had also long passed.

## Chapter Four -- Notes

1. Letter to the Iowa Mother of the Year Nomination from Mrs. Harry Christensen, 16 February 1954. Personal collection of Margery Strom, Shenandoah Iowa.
2. "20 Years Helping Others," *The KMA Guide*, (March 1946): 11.
3. Lawrence W. Levine, *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 294.
4. Ibid, 295.
5. Ibid, 302
6. Ibid, 299-300.
7. Elizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 133.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid, 135.
10. Ibid, 136-138.
11. Letter to Jessie Young from a woman from Minersville, Utah, "Letter Basket," *Jessie's Homemakers Radio Visit*, (January 1949): 13.
12. Birkby, *Up a Country Lane Cookbook*, 126-128.
13. BMB Station Audience Report, Study No. 2, Spring 1949, 1. KMA Records, Shenandoah, Iowa.
14. "How Many Towns Makes a Market?" *KMA Program News*, (June 1932): 1. KMA Records, Shenandoah, Iowa.
15. "Station Data by Counties and Cities," BMB Station Audience Report, Study No. 2, Spring 1949, 4. KMA Records, Shenandoah, Iowa.
16. Ibid, 3.
17. Table: "Population Analysis of KMA (BMB) Counties," *Coverage, Listenership, Mail, Market*, 1946, 5. KMA Records, Shenandoah, Iowa.
18. "Listener Writing Habits," in Ibid, 10.
19. Fink, *Open Country*, 77.
20. See Faragher, *Sugar Creek*.
21. See Schweider, 1980, 165.

22. Fink, Ibid, 79-80.
23. Fink, Ibid, 77.
24. "Over the Fence," *Kitchen-Klatter*, (April 1940): 10.
25. Leanna Driftmier, "Help Your Neighbor," *Kitchen-Klatter*, (July 1940): 7.
26. Ibid.
27. Lori Rohlk, "Iowa's Radio Homemakers, *Iowa Woman Magazine* (Autumn 1992): 20.
28. Driftmier, "A Radio Guest," *Kitchen-Klatter*, (April 1940): 2.
29. Marchand, 353.
30. Ibid, 352-356.
31. Debra Cumberland, interview with the author, April 1997.
32. Patty Vineyard MacDonald, *Long Lost Recipes of Aunt Susan*. (Memphis: S.C. Toof & Company, 1989), 4.
33. See Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*.
34. Birkby interview.
35. Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. (New York: Ballentine Books, 1990), 100-102, 176-178
36. Rohlk, Ibid.
37. Doris Murphy, "On the KMA Party Line," *KMA Guide*, (May 1956): 8.
38. Strom interview.
39. Sol Taishoff, editor, *The First 50 Years of Broadcasting*. (Washington, D.C., Broadcasting Publications, Inc., 1982) 27.
40. Doris Murphy, "KMA Party Line," *KMA Guide*, (February 1954): 14.
41. Arlene Gibson, listener, interview with author, 17 August 1994. Shenandoah, Iowa; Helen Hopkins, listener, interview with author, 12 August 1994. Shenandoah, Iowa; Marge Perry, listener, interview with author, 13 August 1994. Shenandoah, Iowa; Olive Peterson, listener, interview with author, 17 August 1994. Shenandoah, Iowa; Alma Peterson, listener, interview with author, 15 August 1994. Shenandoah, Iowa; Wilda Rhoades, listener, interview with author, 17 August 1994. Shenandoah, Iowa.

42. Interview with Lina Ferguson, Shenandoah Public Library Archives.

43. Birkby, *Neighboring on the Air*, 229-230.

44. Nadine Elwers, Shenandoah native, interview with the author, 23 March 1994. Shenandoah, Iowa.

45. "A Letter from Bernice Currier, *KMA Guide*, (May 1957): 10.

46. Florence Falk, "The Farmer's Wife," *The KMA Guide*, (May 1954): 11.

47. Evelyn Birkby, *Up A Country Lane*, 149-150.

48. "Over the Fence," *Kitchen-Klatter*, (August 1941): 10.

49. "Fun for All," *The KMA Guide*, (May 1949): 11.

50. "Recipe Contest," *The KMA Guide*, (June 1949): 5.

51. Mary Hamilton, interview with Paul Bowers, Tape #I-12. Personal collection of Paul Bowers, Storm Lake, Iowa.

52. Catherine Cate Coblentz, *Kitchen-Klatter*, (July 1940): 8.

53. Bettinger, *A Decade of Radio Advertising*, 79.

54. "A Letter from The Farmer's Wife," *The KMA Guide*, (March 1958): 10.

55. Adella Shoemaker, "A Letter from Adella Shoemaker," *The KMA Guide*, (March 1954): 10.

56. Driftmeir, "Kitchen Klatter Kinks," *The KMA Guide*, (September 1947): 15.

57. Oakley interview; Margery Strom interview; Evelyn Birkby interview.

58. Edward May, "Two Pages of Best Cookies Recipes in Midwest Every Month in GUIDE," *The KMA Guide*, (July 1957): 2.

59. Driftimer, "Are Farmer's Wives Good Cooks?", *Kitchen-Klatter*, (November 1941): 2.

60. Evelyn Birkby, *Neighboring on the Air*, 229-230.

61. Bernice Currier, "A Letter from Bernice Currier," *KMA Guide*, (March 1958): 10.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid, (June 1957): 10.

64. Ibid.
65. "Aired at New Time," *KMA Guide*, (October 1953): 5.
66. "Jonny Dickson, The Ideal Husband," *KMA Guide*, (August 1949): 12); "Martha Yates," *KMA Guide*, (February 1954): 4; Doris Murphy, "On the KMA Party Line," *KMA Guide*, (February 1955): 9.
67. "Party Line Listener Writes Poetic Verse," *The KMA Guide*, (November 1955): 5.
68. Falk, "A Letter from the Farmer's Wife," *The KMA Guide*, (March 1958): 10.
69. Letter from an unidentified listener from Falls City, Nebraska, to KMA. Received by KMA 17 March 1969. KMA records, Shenandoah, Iowa.
70. Murphy, "On the KMA Party Line," *The KMA Guide*, (June 1955): 9.
71. Mrs. A.L. Foster, "Laundry Helps," *Mother's Hour Letter*, (January 1928): 8. Personal collection of Margery Strom, Shenandoah, Iowa.
72. Leanna Driftmier, "You Can Make Good Coffee," *Kitchen-Klatter*, (October 1937): 2.
73. Falk, "A Letter from the Farmer's Wife," *The KMA Guide*, (April 1957): 10.
74. Murphy, "On the KMA Party Line," *The KMA Guide*, (May 1955): 9.
75. Driftmier, "Kitchen-Klatter News," *Kitchen-Klatter*, (January 1928): 2.
76. Ibid, (May 1936): 2.
77. Ibid, "Rest Time," (June 1928): 2.
78. "KMA Day at Iowa State Fair," *The KMA Guide*, (October 1955): 3.
79. Falk, "A Letter from the Farmer's Wife," *The KMA Guide*, (May 1954): 10.
80. Falk, Ibid, (January 1956): 13.
81. See Jellison.
82. Driftmier, "Some of My Mail," *Kitchen-Klatter*, (December 1928): 9.
83. Bernice Currier, "Homemaker's Visit," *The KMA Guide*, (September 1956): 12.

84. Evelyn Birkby, *Cooking with the KMA Homemakers*, 50.
85. Assessor's Annual Farm Census, 1946, pp. 12-13.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid, 15.
88. Ibid, 1955, 13.
89. Ibid, 15, 7.
90. KMA Promotional Piece, 1961.
91. See *Kitchen-Klatter* magazine and *Jessie's Homemaker Radio Visit*.
92. Birkby interview; see also *Kitchen-Klatter* during the years of World War II.
93. Maxine Sickels, "Around the Kitchen Table," *Kitchen-Klatter*, (November 1943): 8.
94. Jessie Young, "Question Quests," *Jessie's Homemaker Radio Visit*, (August 1949): 16.
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid, (March 1949): 14.
97. Ibid.
98. Ibid, (April 1949): 14.
99. Driftmier, "From My Letter Basket," *Kitchen-Klatter*, (December 1944): 5.
100. Jessie Young, "Question Quests," *Jessie's Homemaker Radio Visit*, (February 1949): 12.
111. Driftmier, "Glimpses Ahead," *Kitchen-Klatter*, (November 1943): 2.

## CONCLUSION

The territory radio homemakers charted was settled by advice columnists, television talk shows and glossy, full-color cooking and general interest women's magazines. From their introduction in the 1920s throughout the three ensuing decades, the radio homemakers undoubtedly played a significant role in rural culture. They gave rural Midwestern women a sense of worth in a patriarchal system in which their work was often devalued or diminished. They offered a venue for women to learn to augment their homemaking skills and purchase needed goods, without their roles as producers being trivialized. Radio homemakers also served as a form of "fictive kin" for women whose isolation, tasks or social situations prevented them from sharing their lives with more immediate family and neighbors. Ultimately, radio homemakers bolstered a distinct women's culture in the rural and small-town Midwest.

This study of the radio homemakers contributes to the growing body of scholarship in rural women's history by providing an in-depth look at how and to what extent these women shaped their own lives and the environment around them. Women's history is progressing beyond merely portraying women as passive participants in a patriarchal society, instead providing a more complex and realistic interpretation of the interplay of gender and power. I am following the lead of historians

such as Vicki Ruiz, one of the "New Western" women's historians, who has demonstrated how Mexican women have actively empowered themselves when interacting with the dominant Anglo culture.<sup>1</sup>

The radio homemaking shows aired from Shenandoah, Iowa, originally grew out of a necessity for a full day of programming at low cost but soon turned into one of the most successful and reliable source of revenue streams for KMA and KFNF. The radio homemakers were savvy direct marketers on the airwaves, implementing their own ideas and techniques to sell products to their listeners. Part of their success can be attributed to the fact that they reflected or subverted broader cultural norms and expectations regarding women's roles and the domestic sphere. In doing so, they were not acting necessarily at the behest of the station owners or the advertisers, but were relying on their own judgment and awareness of the needs of their listening audience. That they amassed such a loyal audience is a testament to their ability to influence and gain some modicum of control and power in their workplace.

The longevity and staying power of the radio homemaking shows throughout such a rapidly changing period of time also reveals much about their ability to serve the needs of rural women. The prescriptive messages dispensed by the radio homemakers paralleled and reflected changing cultural norms, yet the radio homemakers were merely parroting the current fashions and values. In the 1920s, when Home Economists were intent on making the homemaking more businesslike and advertisers were pushing women to buy durable consumer goods, Leanna Driftmier was printing essays on how fulfilling it was to be a mother and advertising a washing machine for sale that she and her husband had made. In the



1930s, the radio homemakers gave recipes for foods that did not require expensive, hard-to-find items. Those recipes were revived during World War II, when similar shortages occurred. And while the rest of the United States ostensibly had electricity and modern appliances, the radio homemakers were giving recipes and tips for preserving food the old-fashioned way.<sup>2</sup>

The radio homemakers left a strong historical record of their lives and work, including their writings in newsletters and magazines, taped radio shows and letters. The surviving radio homemakers and the women who listened to them also invited me into their homes for extensive interviews, which I rounded out with those conducted by other people who were interested in capturing this history on tape. In addition, the radio stations, the historical society and certain individuals who realized that they were involved with an important period in history all kept a wealth of information regarding the radio homemakers, such as memos, payroll records and program logs. This treasure trove of resources enabled me to approach the radio homemakers' story on their terms. I was able to step away from the typical tendency in historical works to organize my points and periods around men's activities and events, a phenomenon noted by Bonnie Anderson and Judith Zinsser.<sup>3</sup> Instead of comparing the radio homemakers' experience to a male "norm," I was able to construct a more meaningful narrative that revealed the radio homemakers' voices.

As Kessler-Harris notes, historians have tended to view women through a separate sphere framework, interpreting wage work efforts vis-a-vis domesticity. Such domestic ideology tends to make gender

identification more important than class or race identification, which is not always the case. The idea of a separate domestic sphere becomes particularly problematic when considering women who were responsible for both wage earning and taking care of the family and household. Working women themselves often viewed their lives and decisions in more complex terms. Gender, while still important, is part and parcel of a larger worldview that includes race, class, and time in history. This more complex interpretation also challenges the idea that men have certain ideas about work based only on their public perspective, while women ostensibly derive all their notions about work from their home sphere.<sup>4</sup>

It is obvious from my study that the women employed at the radio stations -- be they secretaries or radio homemakers -- lived and worked within a culture in which their gender was the main category by which they were treated. Age and family responsibilities did seem to temper the world view of women working in Shenandoah. Young, single women who worked as helpers in the seed and nursery companies or the radio stations clearly enjoyed earning money and spending it on themselves. Yet, they had little or no interest in comparing what they earned with the earnings of their male counterparts. Unlike the young women who worked as assistants, the radio homemakers clearly saw that they had a skilled job that commanded a large audience and important advertising revenue. They considered themselves professionals and just as deserving of money and status as were male announcers. The radio homemakers did, to a certain extent, compete with each other, but they also worked together on projects to benefit their communities and their job status. They did what they could for other women, including hiring them or

supporting them during crises. Pay equity was a concern for most of the radio homemakers. The radio homemakers organized to professionalize and augment their position within the radio industry.

One of the most influential trends in American women's history has been Modernism's increasing pressure on women to function as consumers and its trivialization of women's skill and role within the home.<sup>5</sup> Industry targeted women to purchase the new durable consumer goods, such as refrigerators and washing machines, because studies showed that women made 80 to 90 percent of such purchases. The promotion of consumption went hand-in-hand with the promotion of modernizing and professionalizing the home. If the home was to be modern it must be run as efficiently as a business, not as an art or avocation.<sup>6</sup>

It is not an anomaly that the popularity of the radio homemakers increased throughout this period and peaked in the 1950s, when the importance of consumerism as a political ideology also peaked.<sup>7</sup> Radio homemakers would not have enjoyed the high degree of success as they did if they did not have such credibility among their listeners and something to offer beyond a simple sales pitch. Their mostly female listeners were already inundated with messages from advertisers and home economists that trivialized women's importance. Women working within the home faced the same deskilling and devaluation of their skills that their counterparts within the workplace faced with mechanization.<sup>8</sup>

My work demonstrates that the radio homemaking shows, while promoting consumption, also offered women a venue to improve their homemaking skills and purchase needed goods without their importance as a skilled worker within the household being diminished. The experience

of radio homemakers, as they balanced their professional life with their familial obligations, influenced the domestic advice they dispensed over the air and in their publications. The radio homemakers told listeners how to run their home more efficiently but they did not patronize or belittle their audience when they did so. Moreover, radio homemakers had very different goals in mind than did the efficiency experts: any resulting leisure time that arose as a result of their efforts was to be enjoyed. In this case, the radio homemakers undoubtedly knew by experience what scholars of labor history would eventually determine -- increasing efficiency and technology in the home does not necessarily correlate with a reduction in women's household labor.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the burden inherited from the Victorian cult of domesticity and Modernism's twin tenets of consumption and efficiency, rural women also lived within the constraints of an agrarian myth. Among other things, this myth included the belief that women on the farm were equal to men. Rural anthropologist Deborah Fink has demonstrated that agrarian ideology rested on the exploitation of women and children whose labor was vital in the survival of the family farm. Historian Katherine Jellison reveals a more complex reality existed for farm women, who resisted prescriptive literature that urged them to curtail their activities as producers.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, in my studies of rural women I found that the radio homemakers understood and supported their listeners' role in maintaining the household economy on the family farm. The "cream and egg" check earned from women's farm endeavors was acknowledged as vital to buying groceries and farm supplies.<sup>11</sup> Correspondence between the radio

homemakers and their audience reveals that rural women appreciated information on processes, products and technology that helped them stretch their household budget even further. The radio homemakers also actively encouraged women's efforts to make money on the side.

Gender was undoubtedly a critical component of the world view of these radio homemakers. This world view was shaped by their experience as women living within a rural culture in which women's roles were trivialized and options were limited for professional and personal fulfillment outside the realm of domesticity. Yet, these were not unusual or exceptionally unhappy women. In fact, they shared similar backgrounds, life experiences and interests with their rural, female audience, as emphasized often in station promotional literature. Most were from the area and many had grown up on farms. Very few had professional degrees, and those who did tended to downplay them. Edith Hansen's background was typical of most radio homemakers. She was born in Iowa, moved to Nebraska with her parents when she was five, and later was one of the first white homesteaders who moved to the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota. The *KMA Guide* promoted Hansen's farm background, glorifying white settlement and its accompanying hardships: "Edith attended country school in a sod school house. Like most farm girls she had to shoulder her share of the hard work and responsibility in the home of her parents when they were enduring the hardships of pioneer life."<sup>12</sup>

While the radio homemakers might not call themselves feminists, it is clear that they in many ways acted outside traditional women's roles. They engaged in wage work, had public personas, and enjoyed a high

status in the community. They actively worked to improve their status at the radio stations and created a supportive network for their peers. Most of all, through their work, they also managed to change the larger cultural order for women, although the majority might not have been aware that they were doing so or admit that this was their intent.

Obviously, supporting radical changes in women's roles was not Driftmier's intent, nor was it why she was popular with rural Midwesterners. She was admired for her "friendly, neighborly, frank personality" and her ability to raise her children and manage her household even after a serious automobile accident left her wheelchair bound.<sup>13</sup> She was seen by many as epitomizing the roles of wife and mother, and certainly herself presented the picture of ideal domesticity. Nevertheless, she managed to stretch those otherwise constraining female roles to allow her entrance into the public sphere. Although women were supposed to be demure and refrain from public speaking, Driftmier was one of the most recognized and popular of the radio personalities broadcasting from Shenandoah. And while the ideal woman would devote all of her time to running her household, Driftmier managed to combine her housework with a decidedly entrepreneurial endeavor. Certainly, Driftmier did not totally transcend the bounds of femininity expected of Midwestern women. She and other radio homemakers chose an occupation that was considered acceptable for women precisely because it concerned itself with the female domain of domesticity. It is doubtful that Driftmier would have been as successful if she had ventured into male territory, such as broadcasting the farm report.

In her life and work, Driftmier might be compared to a previous generation of women, who found that writing about the home was an acceptable and lucrative occupation. Consider, for example, Sarah Hale, who published the influential *Godey's Lady's Book*, or the Beecher sisters, who collectively produced works like *All Around the House*; or *How to Make Homes Happy*.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, Driftmier's sister, Jessie Field Shambaugh, who was one of the founders of 4-H, was also a promoter of the tenets of domesticity and modernization in the Midwest. Comparing the Field sisters with the Beecher sisters has its limitations, because the earlier generation of 19th century women managed to invest the domestic sphere with powerful moral overtones that would eventually spill into the public arena.

The radio homemakers certainly weren't the Progressive Era "social feminists" that the Beecher sisters were. In fact, it is difficult to firmly place the radio homemakers within the spectrum of feminist ideology. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to explore to what extent *Kitchen-Klatter* and similar ventures provided participants and listeners with a sense of themselves as a discrete gendered class, laying the necessary groundwork for a rural feminist movement or ideology in the 1960s and 1970s. If not feminists per se, the radio homemakers certainly had what Temma Kaplan called a "female consciousness" or a socially constructed awareness of being female arising from sharing similar tasks with other women. They also perhaps had "communal consciousness," derived from awareness of themselves as part of a group of rural women.<sup>15</sup>

Whatever our conclusions, there is no doubt that the most important aspect of my findings on rural women was their ability to promote, support and even, to a certain extent, create a vital women's culture in the rural Midwest. They tapped into a network of reciprocity that women needed in rural areas to support their endeavors and to bolster their emotional well-being. A form of fictive kinship arose in response to the intimacy and friendship provided by the radio homemakers, with readers calling the radio homemakers a "sister" or "aunt." This interdependence was apparent in many ways, but the exchange of recipes and tips on cooking was central to women's lives. Indeed, food was a powerful presence in rural women's culture and it is evident that women not only cooked to please men but to please each other. The elevation of housework as a skilled and important avocation in rural areas played a great role in the importance of the radio homemakers. Through their radio shows, publications and personal correspondence, the radio homemakers gave rural women a strong sense of their own worth within the agrarian patriarchal culture. Their efforts preserved pride in craft traditions passed down for generations of women.



Conclusion -- Notes

1. See Vicki Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* and "Dead Ends or Gold Mines? Using Missionary Records in Mexican American Women's History."
2. See *Kitchen-Klatter Magazine* and *Jessie's Radio Homemaker*.
3. See Anderson and Zinsser.
4. Kessler-Harris, 62-64, 65, & 80.
5. Shapiro, 177.
6. Matthews, 178, 186-188.
7. See Betty Frieden and Elaine Tyler May.
8. Matthews, *ibid*.
9. Driftmier, "Kitchen-Klatter News," *Kitchen-Klatter Magazine* (January 1928): 2; Cowan, 100-101.
10. See Jellison.
11. Birkby, *Cooking with the KMA Homemakers*, 50.
12. "Cover Lady -- Edith Hansen: From Farm Girl to Famous Homemaker," *KMA Guide* (April 1951): 2.
13. "20 Years Helping Others," *The KMA Guide* (March 1946): 11.
14. Matthews, 31.
15. Nancy Cott, "What's in a Name? The Limits of 'Social Feminism'; or, Expanding the Vocabulary of Women's History," *The Journal of American History*, (December 1989): 827.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

#### Archives & Records

KMA Records, private and public, KMA offices and storage building, Shenandoah, Iowa.

Nodaway Valley Historical Museum, Clarinda, Iowa.

Page County Extension Office, Clarinda, Iowa.

Shenandoah Public Library, Shenandoah, Iowa.

Shenandoah Historical Society, Shenandoah, Iowa.

#### Interviews

Anderson, Andy, KMA Station Manager. Interview by author, 15 June 1994. Shenandoah, Iowa.

Birkby, Evelyn, radio homemaker. Interview by author, 23 March 1994. Sydney, Iowa.

Birkby, Evelyn. Interview by Paul Bowers, 1991 Greater Shenandoah, Historical Society KMA-IFNF Video Project, 1991, tape #I-15.

Broff, Barbara. Interview by Paul Bowers, 1991 Greater Shenandoah, Historical Society KMA-IFNF Video Project, 1991, tape #I-10.

Crowley, Earle, KMA business manager. Interview by the author, 8 August 1994, Shenandoah, Iowa.

Currier, Bernice, KMA radio homemaker. Interviewer unknown, August 1975. Shenandoah Public Library Archives.

Davis, Joan, sister of KMA employee. Interview by author, March 1994, Shenandoah, Iowa.

Elwers, Nadine, Shenandoah native. Interview by author, 23 March 1994. Sydney, Iowa.

Ferguson, Lina. KMA "Flower Lady." Interview by Julia Falk, 28 February 1976, Shenandoah Public Library Archives.

- Field, Frank. KFNF and KMA announcer. Interviewer unknown, 26 September 1975. Shenandoah Public Library Archives.
- Gibson, Arlene. Kitchen-Klatter listener/reader. Interview by author, 17 August 1994, Shenandoah, Iowa.
- Hamilton, Mary. Interview by Paul Bowers, 1991 Greater Shenandoah, Historical Society KMA-IFNF Video Project, 6 April 1991, tape #I-12.
- Hillman, Rosalie. Interview by Paul Bowers, 1991 Greater Shenandoah, Historical Society KMA-IFNF Video Project, 6 April 1991, tape #I-15.
- Hopkins, Helen. Kitchen-Klatter listener/reader. Interview by author, 12 August 1994. Shenandoah, Iowa.
- Kite, Hallie. Kitchen-Klatter employee. Interview by author 16 August 1994. Shenandoah, Iowa.
- Kling, Norm. Interview by Paul Bowers, 1991 Greater Shenandoah, Historical Society KMA-IFNF Video Project, 6 April 1991, tape #I-4.
- Lewis, Stella. Interview by Paul Bowers, 1991 Greater Shenandoah, Historical Society KMA-IFNF Video Project, 1991, tape #I-10.
- Murphy, Tom, Doris Murphy's son. Interview by author, date unknown. By phone between Lincoln, Nebraska, and California.
- Oakley, Billie, radio homemaker. Interview by author, 16 March 1994. Lincoln, Nebraska.
- Perry, Marge. Kitchen-Klatter listener/reader. Interview by author, 13 August 1994, Shenandoah, Iowa.
- Peterson, Olive, listener. Interview by author, 17 August 1994, Elm Heights nursing home, Shenandoah, Iowa.
- Peterson, Alma, listener. Interview by author, 15 August 1994, Shenandoah, Iowa.
- Rhoades, Wilda. Kitchen-Klatter listener/reader. Interview by author, 15 August 1994, Shenandoah, Iowa.
- Shoemaker, Adella, radio homemaker. Interviewer and date unknown, but probably 1940s. KMA transcripts, KMA Records, Shenandoah, Iowa.
- Strom, Dorothy, radio homemaker. Interview by author, 24 June 1994, Shenandoah, Iowa.
- Strom, Margery, radio homemaker. Interview by author, 21 March 1994. Shenandoah, Iowa.
- Young, Jessie, KMA radio homemaker. Date and interview unknown, but probably from the 1970s anniversary broadcast. KMA Records, Shenandoah, Iowa.

### **Personal Papers**

- Eveyn Birkby. Personal Papers. Sydney, Iowa.
- Byron Falk. Personal Papers. Essex, Iowa.
- Evalyn Saner. Personal Papers. Shenandoah, Iowa.
- Margery Strom. Personal Papers. Shenandoah, Iowa.
- Billie Oakley. Personal Papers. Shenandoah, Iowa.

### **Periodicals & Documents**

- 1930 Shenandoah and Clarinda City Directory. Missouri: R.L., Polk, & Co., 1930.
- Affidavit, Page County, December 1935. Special Collections, Shenandoah Historical Society Museum, Shenandoah, Iowa.
- Application for Renewal of Broadcasting Station License for KFNF, United States of America, 1929-1930. Special Collections, Shenandoah Historical Society Museum, Shenandoah, Iowa.
- Annual Report, Page County Extension Activities, 1922, 1926, 1928, 1939, 1943, 1944. Page County Extension Office, Clarinda, Iowa.
- Assessor's Annual Farm Census, Iowa, 1946-1959.
- Behind the 'Mike' With KMA. Shenandoah, Iowa: World Publishing Company, 1926, 1928.
- "Birth of Shenandoah," unpublished manuscript, Shenandoah Historical Society Museum, Shenandoah, Iowa.
- BMB Station Audience Report, Study No. 2, Spring 1949. KMA Records, Shenandoah, Iowa.
- Coverage, Listenership, Mail, Market, 1946. KMA Records, Shenandoah, Iowa.
- KFNF Programs, June-July 1936, Shenandoah Historical Society Museum archives, Shenandoah, Iowa.
- Home Talk Magazine, Home Talk Publications, Shenandoah, Iowa. Selected issues, 1989-1991.
- Kitchen Club, January 1957.
- Kitchen-Klatter Magazine. The Driftmier Company, Shenandoah, Iowa. Selected issues, 1926-1973.

*KMA Guide.* Tom Thumb Publishing Co., Shenandoah, Iowa. Selected issues, 1944-1977.

KMA records, public files of KMA, Shenandoah, Iowa.

KMA payroll records, 1940-1952. Personal papers of Evalyn Saner, Shenandoah, Iowa.

KMA Program Logs, 1943-1948. Private files of KMA, Shenandoah, Iowa.

*KMA Program News*, June 1932, 1. KMA Records, Shenandoah, Iowa.

*Jessie's Homemaker Radio Visit*, selected issues, 1946-1975.

Leanna Driftmier's Mother of the Year scrapbook and nomination letters. Personal archives of Margery Strom, Shenandoah, Iowa.

*The Memory Book: Tales of Sunnyside farm, by the Field children and friends.* Shenandoah, Iowa: Henry Field Print Shop, Dec. 1918.

*The Mother's Hour Letter.* Newsletter published by Leanna Driftmier as a precursor to *Kitchen-Klatter Magazine*, 1926.

*Page County History.* Iowa Writers Program of the Work Projects Administration, 1942. Shenandoah Historical Society Museum, Shenandoah, Iowa.

*The Page*, Clarinda, Iowa, 1971.

*Shenandoah Evening Sentinel.* Selected issues, 1924-1984.

*Studio and Broadcasting Station K-F-N-F*, promotional brochure, date unknown but probably late 1920s. Shenandoah Historical Society Museum, Shenandoah, Iowa.

*Your KFNF Radio Cook Book.* Shenandoah, Iowa, Henry Field Seed & Nursery Co., probably late 1927 or 1928.

#### **Radio Shows**

Kitchen Klatter show, with Leanna Driftmier and her daughters Lucille Verness and Dorothy Strom, 22 December 1960. Shenandoah Historical Society Museum, Shenandoah, Iowa.

Kitchen Klatter program, with Leanna Driftmier, 23 December 1946. Shenandoah Historical Society Museum, Shenandoah, Iowa.

### **Secondary Sources**

#### **Books**

Anderson, Bonnie S. and Zinsser, Judith P. *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present*, Volume 1. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988.

- Arnold, Eleanor, ed. *Voices of American Homemakers*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1985.
- Atkeson, Mary Meek. *The Woman on the Farm*. New York: The Century Co., 1926.
- Baker, John C. *Farm Broadcasting*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981.
- Barile, Mary. *Cookbooks Worth Collecting*. Radnor, Penn.: Wallace-Homestead Book Company, 1994.
- Beaver, Ninette and Tombrink, Bill. *Behind the Mike with Earl May: The Story of a Broadcasting Pioneer*. Shenandoah, Iowa: May Seed and Nursery Company, 1979.
- Birkby, Robert. *KMA Radio: The First Sixty Years*. Shenandoah, Iowa: May Broadcasting Company, 1985.
- Birkby, Evelyn. *Neighboring on the Air: Cooking with the KMA Radio Homemakers*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991.
- *Up A Country Lane Cookbook* Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 1993.
- *Cooking with KMA: Featuring 60 Years of Radio Homemakers*. Shenandoah, Iowa: World Publishing Company, 1985.
- Blumin, Stuart M. *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Brunner, Edmund deS. *Radio and the Farmer: A Symposium on The Relation of Radio to Rural Life*. New York: The Radio Institute of the Audible Arts, 1935.
- Cohen, Lizabeth. *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Cott, Nancy. *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.
- Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Heart to the Microwave*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983.
- Croy, Homer. "A Visit to a Farmer's Radio Station." In *Corn Country*, edited by Croy. New York: Duell, Sloane and Pearce, 1947.
- Dygert, Warren Benson. *Radio As an Advertising Medium*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1929.
- Fink, Deborah. *Open Country, Iowa: Rural Women, Tradition and Change*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1986.

- 160
- *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880 - 1940*.  
North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992.
- Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1963.
- Hettinger, Herman. *A Decade of Radio Advertising*. Chicago, Illinois, The University of Chicago Press, 1933.
- Jellison, Katherine. *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913 - 1963*. North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993.
- Jensen, Joan M. *With These Hands: Women Working on the Land*. Old Wesbury, N.Y.: Feminist Press, 1981.
- Jones, Jacqueline. *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present*. New York: Vantage Books, 1986.
- Halper, Donna L. *Full-Service Radio: Programming for the Community*. Boston, Focal Press, 1991.
- Garver, Robert I. *Successful Radio Advertising With Sponsor Participation Programs*. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1949.
- Gordon, Linda. "U.S. Women's History." in *The New American History*, edited by Eric Foner. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Lazarsfeld, Paul F., and Kendall, Patricia L. *Radio Listening in America: The People Look at Radio -- Again*. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1948.
- Lerner, Max. "The Way of the Farmer." In *Rural America*, edited by Suzanne Fremon and Morrow Wilson. New York: The E.W. Wilson Company, 1976.
- Levine, Lawrence W. *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- MacDonald, Patty Vineyard. *Long Lost Recipes of Aunt Susan*. Memphis: S.C. Toof & Company, 1989.
- Marchand, Roland. *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*. Berkely, Calif.: The University of California Press, 1985.
- Matthews, Glenna. *"Just a Housewife": The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. United States: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988.
- McDonald, Fred. *Don't Touch That Dial! Radio Programming in American Life, 1920-1960*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

- Osterud, Nancy Gray. *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York*. Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Rosenfeld, Rachel Ann. *Farm Women: Work, Farm, and Family in the United States*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985.
- Ruiz, Vicki. *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987.
- Ryan, Mary P. *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- *The Invisible Farmers: Women in Agricultural Production*. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983.
- Shapiro, Laura. *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986.
- Smulyan, Susan. *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920-1934*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994.
- Summers, Harrison B., ed. *A Thirty-Year History of Programs Carried on National Radio Networks in the United States 1926-1956*. New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1971.
- Swierenga, Robert P. "Agriculture and Rural Life: The New Rural History." In *Ordinary People and Everyday Life: Perspectives on the New Social History*, edited by James B. Gardner and George Rollie Adams, 91-113. Nashville, Tenn.: The American Association for State and Local History, 1983.
- Tannen, Deborah. *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. New York: Ballentine Books, 1990.
- Taishoff, Sol, ed. *The First 50 Years of Broadcasting*. Washington, D.C., Broadcasting Publications, Inc., 1982.
- Verness, Lucile Driftmier. *The Story of An American Family*. Shenandoah, Iowa: Driftmier Publishing Company, 1950.
- Whitmore, Faye and Cheshire, Manila, ed. *The Very Beginnings: (4-B) in Southwest Iowa*. Shenadoah, Iowa; World Publishing, 1963.

#### **Periodical Articles**

- Cott, Nancy F. "What's in a Name? The Limits of "Social Feminism"; or, Expanding the Vocabulary of Women's History." In *The Journal of American History*. 76(1989):809-829.
- Forsyth, Howard F., "The Radio and Rural America," *Rural Sociology* 4(March 1939):67-77.



- Friedel, Janice N. "Manuscript Collections: The Henry Field Collection at the State Historical Society of Iowa." In *Annals of Iowa*. 5-6(1986):304-314.
- Heise, Marjorie Ross. "Two Friendly Farmer Stations," *Iowa Journal of History and Practice* 42(1949):405-419.
- Meyerowitz, Joanne. "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958." In *The Journal of American History*. (1993):1455-1482.
- Rathge, Richard W. "Women's Contribution to the Family Farm." In *Great Plains Quarterly*. 9(1989):36-47.
- Rife, Gladys Talcott. "Personal Perspective on the 1950s; Iowa's Rural Women Newspaper Columnists." In *The Annals of Iowa*. 49(1989):661-691.
- Rohlk, Lori. "Iowa's Radio Homemakers." In *Iowa Women* (Autumn 1992): 18-21.
- Ruiz, Vicki. "Dead Ends or Gold Mines? Using Missionary Records in Mexican American Women's History." In *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, 12(1991):33-56.
- Sachs, Carolyn. "Women's Work in the U.S.: Variations by Regions." In *Agriculture and Human Values* 2(1985):31-39.
- Taylor, Leslie A. "Femininity as Strategy: A Gendered Perspective on the Farmers' Holiday." In *The Annals of Iowa*. 51(1992):252-277.
- Wik, Reynold M. "The USDA and the Development of Radio in Rural America." In *Agricultural History* 62(1988):177-189.