Waves From The Past

Radio has been a major part of everyone's life. It has brought us weather, news, music, advertisements, public addresses, and emergency reports. It is a major tool of communication.

If asked, "What was the first radio station in Kirksville?" one would probably say KIRX. That would be incorrect because the first radio station started in early November of 1926 when the State Teachers College purchased a radio transmitter from the Kirksville Chamber of Commerce. On December 7, 1926, KFKZ was licensed for operation at 1330 kilohertz, with 15 watts of power, for an unlimited amount of time. The station followed a schedule of broadcasting two hours per week, usually in the early evening of the weekends. The programs consisted of conservative music and addresses by members of the college faculty to the student body and the student body to the community.

One problem the station had with 15 watts of power was that it could only cover a listening area of 50 miles. The college felt this was inadequate. They felt 100 watts of power would better serve the area, so they applied for more power. The application was rejected for reasons unknown. When the station's license expired on July 31, 1929, no renewal application was made. On May 12, 1930, the station no longer existed. Kirksville was without a radio station for 18 years.

Sam Wat Arnold, of Arnold Lumber Company, wanted Kirksville to have another radio station. He discussed it with Sam Burk and together they made it a reality. Opening day ceremonies for KIRX were held at noon on October 17, 1947. The program began with band music and messages from national, state, and local dignitaries. The station went on the air that day and later that evening aired a college football game; an event they still broadcast today.

The station has undergone changes in both format and in the physical structure. In 1947, when the station began, it was originally built as a small house. Mrs. Vera Burk, wife of Sam Burk, said, "The station was built as a house in case it failed. Sam Arnold felt that if KIRX went under, we could still rent the house." In 1967 the FM station, KRXL, was introduced and an addition built which included an air raid shelter. The shelter became the FM control room which is located today in the front of the station. With the addition of this shelter, KIRX/KRXL also increased their wattage power.

The format of KIRX has remained the same. Although names of the programs have changed, the station is still geared toward the general community giving news, information, sports, and country and western music. KIRX has many programs for listeners to participate in as well. A popular program in the beginning, as well as now, is Party Line, a program for buying and selling items. This is probably what the program is thought of as, but Mrs. Burk said, "Party Line is also for discussing issues and topics on the radio. Many people still call in and voice their opinions."

Another program KIRX airs is Area Scene. Area Scene, hosted today by Al Holzemier, grew out of a program that began with KIRX Listen Ladies. Listen Ladies was directed toward women, and gave daily recipes, household hints, news highlights, and interviews. This was Mrs. Burk's first and only program that she hosted. As times changed, Listen

Charlie Porter hosting "Party Line" on KIRX in 1962

The KIRX building is shown in 1963 before the addition of KRXL.
Ladies gradually lost the "ladies only" format and became Area Scene: a show geared toward the general public with interviews of community people about area events.

KIRX/KRXL has always been an asset to the community, it has accomplished this with many fund-raising activities. One of these was the radio auction held June 22-24, 1955, to raise money for the Kirksville Municipal Swimming Pool election. After three days of auctioning, KIRX raised approximately $10,000, clearing $7,500, which they donated toward putting the bill up for election and buying the land for the site.

In 1948 and 1949 the station also held Barn Dances at the Kirksville Armory every Saturday night. These dances featured country and western bands and a weekly talent show. Tickets sold for 50 cents and attendance was as high as 1,800 people. The dances were a very popular form of recreation to the citizens of Kirksville.

KIRX/KRXL has always been a station of innovation. One such example is Sam Burk being the first radio personality to editorialize over the air. This was very unusual at the time, but now is a regular part of the radio’s format.

More recently, KIRX/KRXL has had success with fund-raising for the Red Cross Disaster Drive. In April, 1985, Burk Forsythe organized their fund-raiser called the Battle of the Bands. This featured bands from all over Missouri who played in competition for cash prizes. Tickets were $5 per person; over $2,000 was raised. The largest percentage of the money for the Red Cross was raised in Kirksville. Burk Forsythe received national recognition for organizing this event.

In October of 1985, Marvin McClanahan received the Country Music Disc Jockey of Small Markets award. He appeared on national television to accept this award.

On October 1, 1985, KIRX/KRXL changed management Mrs. Burk sold the station to KIRX, Inc., a corporation owned by Alvina Britz and David Nelson. The station has no immediate plans for the future. Miss Britz said, "It will take at least six months to find out what works and what we need to change."

Though the management has changed, the station itself will most likely remain the same. Its intentions always have been and still will be to serve the people of the northeast Missouri area.

Opening day ceremonies for KIRX were held on October 17, 1947. Dick Cannaday (with microphone) is interviewing first-hour visitors.

KIRX held barn dances every Saturday night in 1948-49 at the Reigor Armory.

All Photos Courtesy of KIRX.