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Article Summary: During the 1920s, Norfolk station WJAG developed from a bulletin service of the *Norfolk Daily News* to a broadcast station that dispensed a variety of information and entertainment, and from hobby status to a business dependent on advertising. Future Congressman Karl Stefan became the area's first widely-known on-air personality. Of three Nebraska newspaper publishers who established radio stations in the early 1920s, only WJAG continued to broadcast beyond the 1920s, celebrating its 75th anniversary in 1997.

Cataloging Information:

Names: William Huse Sr, Eugene F (Gene) Huse, W N Huse, August Raasch, Norris Huse, Karl Stefan, Edwin Gould, Walter Cahill, H George DeKay, William Saunders, Agnes Graham, Roland Anderson, Art W Breyer, Sam Kent, George B Salter, Bill Graham, Don Bridge, J B Hassman, L B Musselman, John McAllister, Alice Van Alistin, Robert Allen, Jack Dempsey, Tommy Gibbons, Grace Peterson, John Nelson, Herman Bierman, Marie Bentz, W L Johnson, Sadie Mahin, E B Young, Andy Peterson, Fred Patzel, Mrs E C Warner, Frank Wiedenbach, E C (Eugene) Eppley, Harry Burke, Ted Bandelin, Robert B Howell, Edgar Howard; George Sellner; Ida Rosenbaum

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Photographs / Images: William Huse Sr; Eugene Huse; Roland Anderson of Wahoo; *Norfolk Daily News*, advertisement for Free Radio Sets, May 10, 1922; Karl Stefan, "The Printer's Devil;" John W and W L McAllister with the WJAG dinner bell; WJAG radio "soap opera;" the Hotel Norfolk, home of the WJAG studio; Official WJAG Radio Log, about 1929

THE EARLY YEARS OF BROADCASTING

IN NORFOLK, NEBRASKA, 1922-1928

By Mark Smith

Norfolk's first postmaster, August Raasch, a wounded Civil War veteran and pioneer, died in 1922—the year his community secured its first broadcast station. Raasch left Wisconsin in a covered wagon and set foot in the Nebraska Territory, in the vicinity of modern-day Norfolk, with a colony of German settlers in 1866. For nearly six decades, the eighty-year-old Raasch watched the northeast Nebraska community mature into “a city of nine thousand souls,” the *Norfolk Daily News* reported, “with paved streets, electric lights, telephones, automobiles, airplanes, and wireless apparatus.”¹

Much like a runaway prairie fire, a new mass communications medium, broadcast radio, swept across the U.S. in the early 1920s. In 1922 three Nebraska newspaper publishers established radio stations in their home communities: the Star Publishing Company of Lincoln (WKAC), the *Hastings Daily Tribune* (WKAM), and a daily newspaper in the rural trade center community of Norfolk. The Commerce Department, the regulator of early radio, canceled the Hastings and Lincoln broadcast licenses fewer than two years after their issuance, but the *Norfolk Daily News* pursued continuous broadcasting beyond the 1920s. In 1997 station WJAG, owned and operated by the *News*, celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary. Government documents confirm the northeast

Nebraska mainstay is the state's oldest radio station operated with the same call letters.²



William Huse Sr., founded the *Northern Nebraska Journal* in Ponca, and purchased the *Norfolk Daily News* in 1888.
NSHS-RG 2411-2597

In 1871 William Huse Sr. settled his family in Ponca, Nebraska, and founded the *Northern Nebraska Journal*. Nearly seventy miles southwest of Ponca, the railroad boosted Norfolk's economic growth in the late nineteenth century. The first of three lines laid tracks to Norfolk in 1879, and the community

emerged as a dominant rail hub in northeast Nebraska. Eugene F. (Gene) Huse was three years old when his father, W. N., and grandfather, William Sr., purchased the *Norfolk Daily News* in 1888.³

William Sr. edited the *Journal* in Ponca and W. N. managed the Norfolk acquisition. When W. N. arrived in Norfolk, the *News* was a four-page publication with a circulation of 400. The father-son partnership ended in 1892 and W. N. assumed proprietorship of the *News*. The next year W. N. constructed a new publishing facility at 120 North Fourth Street in downtown Norfolk.⁴

At an early age Gene Huse and his brother, Norris, delivered newspapers and performed tasks at the *News*. Gene graduated from Norfolk High School in 1904 and attended the University of Nebraska, but business opportunities in Norfolk ended his higher education. In 1906 the *News* acquired a new corporate identity: Gene and Norris received identical shares in the Huse Publishing Company. In 1907 Gene administered the *News*'s mechanical department and Norris had charge of editorial operations. “The World's Greatest Country Daily” was distributed to distant points in western Nebraska and South Dakota in the “pre-radio days.” Upon W. N.'s death in 1913, the two sons managed the newspaper. In 1917 Norris moved to New York City, where he eventually worked for the Associated Press. After Norris's departure, Gene purchased his brother's stake in the *News*.⁵

Gene felt he was “just a mechanic at heart.” His employees claimed that Huse could operate, dismantle, and repair the newspaper's press equipment. The me-

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Broadcasting in Norfolk, Nebraska

chanical "tinkerer" discovered a new hobby in 1912: wireless communications. Homemade crystal sets detected government time signals and radio telegraphy messages from sea vessels. A WJAG thirtieth anniversary salute described Huse "twisting and winding wires, adjusting crystals, puttering and fussing around with gadgets to the consternation of his entire family" in a basement workshop. Before the U.S. entered World War I, Huse viewed wireless as a future supplemental service of the *News*.⁶

In 1917 wartime restrictions temporarily ended the private use of American airwaves for two years. After World War I amateur activity resurfaced, which shifted Huse's wireless hobby to a new level. In 1921 the Norfolk publisher formed a partnership with a Sioux City, Iowa, man to construct radio receivers. Huse ended the short-lived venture to focus his attention on extending the *News's* reach through instantaneous radio broadcasts.⁷

The Radio Act of 1912 regulated the licensing of transmission apparatus and wireless operators. To perform transmitter functions, Huse had to secure a ship operator's license, which meant learning Morse and Continental telegraphy codes. Karl Stefan, who joined the *News* as wire telegrapher, spent long hours coaching his employer in the language of dots and dashes. Huse traveled to Chicago in the early 1920s, passed the ship operator's examination, and began to experiment with homemade transmitters.⁸

While Huse focused on radio as a broadcast medium in 1921–22, a small number of local hobbyists acquired federal licenses for amateur transmission. In June 1922 the government listed 124 amateur stations in Nebraska. Five persons secured station transmission licenses in northeast Nebraska: Edwin Gould, Norfolk; Walter Cahill, Plainview; H. George DeKay, Wausa; William Sanders, Hooper; and Agnes Graham of Wisner. If the local hobbyists had also rigged transmission equipment for voice broadcasting, their experiments ended in January 1922. A federal decree not



Eugene Huse. Courtesy of WJAG, Norfolk, Nebraska

only limited amateur transmissions to point-to-point communications, but also required potential broadcasters to apply for special licenses. From 1913 through June 1922 Department of Commerce radio directories do not list Huse or his newspaper as recipients of licenses to operate amateur or Special Land Station transmitters. The government generally issued licenses in the latter category to institutions that experimented with radio to enhance its development.⁹

By April 1921 wireless apparatus at Norfolk High School, under the guidance of radio instructor Edwin Gould, received music broadcasts from KDKA,

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and messages from government stations. The Norfolk Radio Club, a local amateur group, also sent point-to-point transmissions on 9LJ, licensed to Gould, to local high school receivers. By late 1921 Gould's radio club regularly monitored broadcasts from KDKA and a station in Wayne, Nebraska, thirty miles northeast of Norfolk. Preparations were underway, Gould stated, to receive a music program from Roland Anderson's amateur station in Wahoo, Nebraska. A high school student, who lived forty miles southeast of Norfolk, operated a one-tube receiver. "The first wireless receiving station installed in West Point," the *News* reported, snared "distant points" and radio telephony broadcasts from Wahoo.¹⁰

The first signs of the radio boom emerged in northeast Nebraska. In December 1921 the *News* touted the convenience of timely broadcast information:

Snow bound roads need no longer mean isolation and loneliness for the farmer and his family — that is if he is fortunate or enterprising enough to have acquired a radio outfit of reasonable size. He can now sit in his parlor and listen at least three nights a week to entertainment that heretofore has been available to only a limited number of city dwellers. . . . He can get the gist of the livestock and grain market, the weather predictions, and bulletins of the world's news, and on Sunday night can listen to a sermon, all without leaving the comforts of his fireside.¹¹

Huse applied the *News's* resources to introduce broadcasting, which an editorial described as a "new and unfinished art," to the newspaper's readership in 1922. A daily column, "Fifteen Minutes of Radio Each Day," promised to "reveal the secrets of WIRELESS, in an entertaining, understandable way." The series explained radio terminology and exhibited schematics for constructing simple receiving sets. In April a promotional ad stated, "interest in Radio is growing day by day. . . . It is only a matter of time when you will have one in your own home." To "learn how to make your own receiving outfit," the *News* offered low-priced instructional manuals. One month later Huse unveiled a unique

campaign to stimulate local interest in radio. A full-page display ad promoted "FREE RADIO SETS" for area public service organizations. "LISTEN IN," the ad declared, "with your radio receiving set — get the news, weather reports, concerts, market reports, baseball scores, speeches, etc." By mid-June a *News* serial column, "On the Wings of Wireless," engaged its readers with a "mystery story . . . as enthralling, as entrancing as the mystery of radio itself."¹²

In 1922 local news and advertising reflected an expanded interest in broadcasting. Edwin Gould told a spring gathering of the Norfolk Lions Club that radio "is no longer a matter of experiment." The local radio instructor and amateur predicted, "The time is coming when the little radio receiving set will be a fixed equipment in the office, in the home and on the farm." Local retailers advertised radio apparatus and supplies in the *News*. Clark Electric Company encouraged northeast Nebraskans to visit its new store for "radio equipment," and the Norfolk Radio Company plugged its "complete, guaranteed [receiver] sets, supplies, and materials."¹³

Before Huse received a government broadcast license in 1922, he experimented with homemade transmission systems. A five-watt device, constructed in Huse's basement workshop, was fashioned with components garnered from the local electric power company. Karl Stefan remembered assisting his boss "throughout many nights winding coils, and making handmade instruments." Huse situated his equipment at the *News* building in downtown Norfolk; in March 1921 the Norfolk publisher conducted his first experimental transmissions. With the addition of low-wattage tubes in 1922, his tests spanned coast-to-coast, but barely twenty miles distant in the daylight hours.¹⁴

Huse constructed another device, but set aside his homemade transmitter by early April, applied for a federal broadcast license, and purchased a manufactured broadcast unit with a 400-mile radius. A transmission antenna was



One of the earliest Nebraska radio experimenters was Roland Anderson of Wahoo, here with his broadcasting apparatus. NSHS-RG1121-13:47

installed on the roof of the Hotel Norfolk, then under construction across the alley from the *News* building. Huse's daily newspaper reminded local amateurs, northeast Nebraska's primary broadcast audience in early 1922, to "keep themselves posted on the sending program" through published schedules in the *News*.¹⁵

Huse's fascination with radio, his hobby since the early teens, had blossomed into regularly scheduled broadcasting ten years later. On July 27, 1922, the Commerce Department granted a Limited Commercial, Land Radio Station broadcast license and randomly assigned call letters, WJAG, to the Huse Publishing Company (*Norfolk Daily News*). In the weeks that followed, the station tested its transmission apparatus, which had been installed by the Norfolk Radio Company. In September Huse was ready to begin regular broadcasting, but WJAG needed an announcer. For that task, he tapped the talents of the *News*'s city editor, Karl Stefan.¹⁶

In 1922 Karl Stefan had two jobs at

the *News*: city editor and pioneer radio announcer. In a 1938 broadcast tribute to Stefan, WJAG stated that "Karl was interested in radio and it was natural for him to be selected to prepare and broadcast the noon news period."¹⁷

Stefan was born in Bohemia, a part of today's Czech Republic, on March 1, 1884, the seventeenth anniversary of Nebraska's statehood. A year later, the Stefan family moved to the U.S. and settled in Omaha's Riverview Park neighborhood. Faced with hard times, Stefan quit school at age thirteen and labored at a local packinghouse. In 1898 he worked in the Trans-Mississippi Exposition publicity department in Omaha and furthered his education at a YMCA night school. As a messenger boy for Western Union in Omaha, he developed an interest in telegraphy and learned Morse code. Stefan, one of the youngest commercial telegraphers nationwide, traveled to numerous U.S. cities before 1904. He transcribed copy from the Associated Press (AP) and United Press (UP) wire services, and worked as a telegrapher



FREE RADIO SETS

FOR AMERICAN LEGIONS, COMMERCIAL CLUBS,
SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS,
COMMUNITIES, ETC.

"LISTEN IN"

with your radio receiving set—get the news, weather reports, concerts, market reports, base ball scores, speeches, etc.

Let the people of your city, your club, or organization enjoy the latest developments of science.

STOP WISHING

LET'S GET TOGETHER NOW. You can get one ABSOLUTELY FREE

What's the use of wishing you could listen in on a radio phone when your club, organization or community can get one very easily and without cost. We will have different types with receiving distances ranging from 500 to 2,000 miles.

These sets will be installed free of charge by an expert and are complete in every way, including, batteries, wires, etc. Also a loud speaker so that every one in the room can enjoy it. These receiving sets are high-class in every respect and absolutely guaranteed and backed up by The Norfolk Daily News.

LISTEN! Let's get busy and have a good radio receiving set in your club, organization or community right now. We will gladly send a representative, free of charge, to help you in every way.

FOR FURTHER DETAILS AND COMPLETE PLANS, WRITE OR CALL AT ONCE CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT.

THE NORFOLK DAILY NEWS

NORFOLK

PHONE 20

NEBRASKA

Norfolk Daily News, May 10, 1922

for Western Union, a railroad, and grain and livestock exchanges.¹⁸

Stefan traveled to the Philippine Islands, embroiled in civil unrest, in 1904. He joined the telegraphy division of the American-backed, Philippine constabulary and worked as a journalist for the *Manila Times*, owned by former Nebraskan George Sellner. During his Southeast Asian travels, the future broadcaster observed radio communications through frequent visits to a naval wireless outpost in Cavite, P.I.¹⁹

After touring portions of Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, the Nebraska

globetrotter returned to the states, and in January 1907 Stefan married Ida Rosenbaum of Omaha, his childhood sweetheart. The couple moved to Seattle, Washington, where the new groom worked as a commercial wire operator and longshoreman, but family obligations forced the couple back to Nebraska. Stefan worked briefly for the *Omaha Bee*, and left the newspaper in 1909 to join the *Norfolk Daily News* as a wire telegrapher. He transcribed and re-wrote AP copy, and eventually occupied the city editor's desk. During World War I the seasoned telegrapher taught

code classes to Signal Corps members at the Norfolk Federal Building.²⁰

By the 1920s the medium of broadcasting led him to a new challenge. On Wednesday afternoon, September 13, 1922, Stefan broadcast the "first official sending program" on WJAG's 100-watt transmitter. The station's first announcer delivered grain markets and "news flashes." The *News* listed three daily reports, Monday through Saturday at 12:15 P.M., 3:30 P.M., and 5:30 P.M. on 360 meters (833 kilocycles), as a "temporary schedule until enough cards come in indicating what changes should be made." The era of instant communication for "radio fans" had arrived in Norfolk at the "World's Greatest Country Daily Broadcasting Station."²¹

WJAG offered its listeners a varied program in 1922: a routine agenda of news and information at noon and an irregular schedule of local entertainment. Two days after Stefan's initial newscasts, the *News* invited its readers to "listen in" to WJAG. Reception reports suggested the new station exhibited favorable modulation with a signal radius of more than 100 miles. In its first week, "The *News* broadcasting station" presented reports from northeast Nebraska county fairs. WJAG's firm connection to its creator was noted in a September listener solicitation: "The *News* wants to hear from all wireless fans who are picking up 'WJAG' in order to work out a schedule which will be of service to all radio fans in north Nebraska and southern South Dakota, that territory which is covered by the circulation of the *News*."²²

A WJAG historical pamphlet states that its first broadcast facilities consisted of "a cramped, black-draped studio, with part-time talent and personnel." A news desk, piano, control panel, and microphone occupied the small second floor studio in the *News* building, which Stefan dubbed a "cubby hole." Stefan's daughter, Ida Mae Askren, who watched her father advance from city editor to broadcaster, described the studio as a "makeshift arrangement of loose boards, unfinished like the unused part of an old

attic [with] snake-like snarls of wires.”²³

Stefan opened his daily broadcast with a trademark greeting: “Hello friends. Hello everybody! You are listening to WJAG, the *Norfolk Daily News* station, and we’re located at Norfolk, IN Nebraska. On the air with the regular noon-day program — the lunch-hour session of WJAG’s radio family.” One of WJAG’s first announcers, Art Breyer, who worked sans pay at the Norfolk station “for the fun of it,” labeled Stefan the “backbone” of WJAG. Breyer said Stefan’s “personality enabled him to become intimately acquainted with the listeners.” In typical charismatic fashion, the local newscaster personalized a livestock quote on one of his noon reports. “Sam Kent,” Stefan declared, “I’ve got good news for you today. Understand the price of hogs is 6 1/2 cents today, and that’s going to make everything all right.” Stefan’s radio persona, says Breyer, “endeared himself to the public.”²⁴

But Stefan had more than an appealing personality to draw listeners. He dispensed information. WJAG’s first announcer not only peppered his noon broadcasts with local affairs, but also read information from the *Norfolk Daily News*’s AP newspaper wire, the first Nebraska station to broadcast material from the national news service.²⁵

Stefan was also the creator and producer of station programming. In 1922 he originated the “radio family,” whose members gathered around a mythical dinner table each noon hour. Its aim, Stefan said, was “an unwritten understanding . . . that the station was to [be] run by its listeners — the radio family.” Mr. and Mrs. George Salter of Norfolk served as the first “father” and “mother.” In fewer than two years WJAG dispensed hundreds of “official” titles to its listeners: mail carrier, banker, chicken-eater, crippled girl, sweetheart, corn-king (Art Breyer), hog-man, shoe-man, Scotchman (Bill Graham, and later, Don Bridge of Norfolk), goat trainer, goat milker, wolfhound-man, and mayor (J. B. Hassman of Coleridge). In 1924 a dozen bachelors seated at the noon



Karl Stefan, “The Printer’s Devil.” Courtesy of WJAG, Norfolk, Nebraska

“table” requested that WJAG introduce them to local “lady friends.” The station declined. In 1930 WJAG selected a new radio “father.” L. B. Musselman, a Civil War veteran and Nebraska pioneer, succeeded the late G. B. Salter as head of the family table.²⁶

Radio family membership requirements were informal, but targeted at

drawing and maintaining Stefan’s audience. “To be a member of the family,” the *News* advised, “one need only to be a constant listener.” By early 1924 nearly 1,000 listeners requested seats at Stefan’s dinner table. Recipients of radio family membership cards, who also received a sample copy of the *News*, certified their positions in the “The Family of WJAG

Broadcasting in Norfolk, Nebraska

Radio Listeners." To bolster *News* readership, WJAG reminded its listeners that a newspaper subscription transformed them into "100 per cent" members.²⁷

Stefan's radio family was composed of several northeast Nebraska immigrant groups. Germans inhabited Norfolk, the Irish settled in O'Neill and Dixon, and Swedish immigrants populated Wausa. A large Catholic citizenry, whose heritage was rooted in Germany, Austria, Holland, Switzerland, Poland, and Ireland, called Humphrey their home. Czech settlements proliferated in Colfax, Butler, and Knox counties. At times Stefan briefly conversed with WJAG's German and Czech listeners in their native tongues. A typical greeting translated to: "May you live as many years as a fox has hair on its tail."²⁸

In the 1920s Stefan incorporated a noon report sound effect. He clanged a dinner bell, a temporary gift from John McAllister of nearby Neligh, which not only summoned the radio family to dinner, but also greeted new members. In fewer than four years, the radio family dinner table expanded to 20,000 members. In 1928 50,000 participants from five states had seats for WJAG's noon-time serving of news and information. By early 1930 McAllister reclaimed the bell, which originally beckoned farm hands for mealtime on his parents' homestead in southeast Nebraska, and donated it to the Nebraska State Historical Society.²⁹

Much like its sparse program schedule, a small staff produced and engineered WJAG's infant broadcasts. "In those early days," a WJAG broadcast tribute recalled, "Gene Huse put on his old clothes and operated the transmitter himself." Stefan performed the noon news, sports broadcasts, and miscellaneous announcing duties. By 1926 Stefan was WJAG's "chief announcer." But the pioneer duo had a daily newspaper to publish and were not alone in their inaugural broadcast efforts.³⁰

Art Breyer had operated the A. W. Breyer and Company garage, a Buick dealership and repair service, since



John W. and W. L. McAllister with the WJAG dinner bell, which they donated to the Nebraska State Historical Society in 1930. NSHS-RG3837-357

1915. He purchased the Norfolk Radio Company in June 1922, which sold WJAG its first transmitting apparatus, and moved the business to his garage across the street from the *News*. Breyer, with the radio family nickname, "Old Corn King," was an assistant announcer in the 1920s and 1930s. On at least one occasion in 1925 a local woman, Alice Van Alstin, handled announcing chores in Stefan's absence. Robert Allen, a licensed technician recruited as an engineer from October 1922 to May 1923, assisted Huse with operating the transmission apparatus.³¹

Stefan confronted a pioneer announcing chore in October 1922: the first in a string of 1920s World Series studio re-creations. "There was a particularly keen interest in the series that year," *Radio Digest* observed, "and Announcer Stefan moved the microphone from the 'Printer's Devil's Den' (as the

studio is called) to the telegraph desk where the clicks of the telegraph instrument were instantly translated by Mr. Stefan into word pictures of the game." Stefan spiced his re-creations with statistics and sound effects.³²

Three months after WJAG's initial broadcast, northeast Nebraska residents joined the local radio boom in greater numbers. The broadcast "bug," the *News* stated, had "bitten" local radio enthusiasts:

Radio apparatus is appearing in many [Norfolk] homes. Houses are being decorated with masts and strings of wires. . . . Some of the most unusual crystal sets have appeared in Norfolk since The *News* started broadcasting. While many are those sold in the electrical supply houses at very low cost, others are home-made affairs, made of oat meal boxes, empty "stogie" boxes or ice cream boxes requiring a bit of coil, a tack or two, a little copper wire and a bit of crystal or lead ore, and a phone receiver.³³

In 1923 WJAG expanded its entertainment roster with specialty broadcasts of local and regional artists. "We used to search around the country for talent in our early days," Stefan recalled. At two New Year's Day parties in Norfolk, WJAG listeners danced to a radio performance of the Ragadores, a Lincoln combo, whose members consisted of University of Nebraska students. Weekend concerts attracted throngs of northeast Nebraskans, who gathered en masse in their local communities to hear WJAG broadcasts on radios equipped with loudspeakers. Nearly 200 persons, assembled near a receiver in Humphrey, listened to their community band perform a Sunday afternoon concert in the WJAG studio. Listeners filled the home of Pierce mayor Charles Chilvers for a local quartet's broadcast performance. Hundreds of area residents congregated near radios at the Neligh Auditorium and a farm near Clearwater, Nebraska, in late April to hear a musical presentation from the Neligh band on WJAG.³⁴

In May 1923 Art Breyer's car dealership served as a remote broadcast site for a religious recital. The *News* radio studio, too small for staging a sixty-seven-member choir concert, received a wired audio feed from the Buick showroom across the street. Four microphones carried the "successful" cantata, but the *News* admitted its broadcast was a learning experience for local radio pioneers: "It was the first experiment made by The *News* radio department in broadcasting a large number of voices . . . there were some misgivings as to the result."³⁵

For Memorial Day 1923 Stefan wrote and produced a Civil War program — an annual broadcast event through 1930. The drama, "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp," set to music and words, was dedicated to local veterans. Surviving soldiers attended a live presentation of "Tramp" at the WJAG studio in 1927. "So impressive was WJAG's tribute," the *News* wrote, "that tears filled the eyes of those men who gallantly fought lest this nation be torn asunder." By late spring



A WJAG radio "soap opera." On the right is Chief Announcer Karl Stefan. NSHS-RG 5040:1-7

1923 area farmers spent long hours away from radios working their fields. In June WJAG trimmed its mid-afternoon news report, but kept its 12:15 and 5:30 regularly scheduled information broadcasts Monday through Saturday.³⁶

In one instance WJAG's ability to convey instant information altered a *News* publishing tradition. The Norfolk newspaper abandoned an "extra" edition for a Jack Dempsey-Tommy Gibbons prize fight in July 1923 "due to the wide-spread use of the radio receiving apparatus and the success of The *News* sending station in reaching such a large section of the country." Although WJAG stimulated local radio interest through mid-1923, radio receivers had not entered every Norfolk residence. A local motion picture house and the Norfolk fire station installed apparatus for public reception of WJAG's secondhand description of the Dempsey-Gibbons bout. The Auditorium Theater positioned a receiver outside its front door "for the free service of those who do not have radio sets at home."³⁷

By early summer 1923 a heat wave scorched northeast Nebraska. A local dairy factory surpassed its June sales to Norfolk ice cream parlors in early July. Enough lemons were sold in a single week to supply area residents with 50,000 glasses of lemonade. On a hot Fourth of July, wet towels and electric fans pro-

tected WJAG's tubes and motor-generator from searing heat as Stefan dispatched local studio reports of Dempsey's victory he received from a special ringside telegraph wire in Shelby, Montana. Within days of WJAG's coverage, the station received nearly 500 letters and postcards from satisfied boxing fans, who felt "the returns from Norfolk were far ahead of those from other points."³⁸

By the mid-1920s Karl Stefan's announcing style attracted considerable attention from WJAG listeners. In the midst of a previous World Series broadcast, WJAG introduced a new radio "character," the "Printer's Devil," a radio family designation originally assigned to Gene Huse. Stefan transformed the nickname into an unheard, but frequently mentioned personality who received enough compliments and verbal jabs from the Norfolk announcer to arouse listener curiosity.³⁹

Stefan departed the city editor's desk at the *News* in September 1924 to purchase a Norfolk cigar store and magazine distributorship, but kept his announcing chores at WJAG. The Karl Stefan Cigar Store, destroyed in a 1929 fire and rebuilt, featured not only "Printer's Devil" cigars, but also a local telephone information service ("Who's the best dentist in town?") and news items attached to a storefront bulletin board.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, the public wanted to know more about Stefan's sidekick. By December 1924 the Printer's Devil received candy and inquiries for his physical description from female listeners, requests for photographs, and an invitation to date Plainview, Nebraska, women seeking companionship. The radio family cake baker, Grace Peterson of Neligh, presented WJAG with a devil's food cake especially prepared for the Printer's Devil. At the 1925 Boone County Fair in Albion nearly 10,000 persons applauded Stefan, introduced as "Karl Stefan," with shouts of, "Where's the printer's devil?" The local hoopla soared to musical heights with the Printer's Devil Orchestra, which appeared on WJAG in 1925 and 1928.⁴¹ WJAG listeners not only responded to an imaginary radio character but also to Stefan's broadcast performances. A poem dedicated to Stefan, composed by a WJAG listener and printed in a 1925 issue of *Radio Digest*, read in part:

We have listened to announcers
From the East and from the West,
But Stefan, who lives in Norfolk,
Is just about the best.⁴²

By the late 1920s Stefan assumed the identity of the radio sidekick, whom he shaped into a local broadcast icon. The *Omaha Bee-News* identified Stefan in 1928 as the "Printer's Devil." By 1932 the WJAG 12:15 P.M. news was conducted by "Karl Stefan, the Printer's Devil."⁴³

In 1924 WJAG listeners discovered innovative reception apparatus. John Nelson of Ericson, Nebraska, captured WJAG broadcasts with a tube and radio dials mounted on a man's derby hat. A Norfolk hospital patient listened to WJAG on a crystal receiver through the aid of a bed-spring aerial, and a Winside, Nebraska, man found that a pair of damp socks dangling from a clothesline antenna fetched an improved WJAG signal on his three-tube radio.⁴⁴

Apart from the novelty of local broadcasting, farm segments of WJAG's audience believed that radio eased rural isolation and kept them informed with timely information. Farm families,

isolated for days by winter's fury, used WJAG as a link to the outside world. In January 1924 Herman Bierman, a snow-bound Battle Creek, Nebraska, farmer, who hadn't seen mail delivery for several days, depended on WJAG news bulletins. That same year, the Norfolk station served as a radio companion for a rural resident facing the effects of heavy snow in western Iowa, and a farmer southwest of Columbus regularly monitored WJAG weather reports to alert his neighbors of pending winter storms. A South Dakota farmer, who consistently monitored WJAG's noontime market broadcasts, concluded that "with radio, gravel roads and automobiles, the

Bentz and several other Norfolk residents confined to their homes with physical disabilities. By late November a shut-in fund accumulated \$1,300, the equivalent of thirty-four receivers for homebound listeners in the WJAG territory.⁴⁶

Bentz described her free receiver as a "2 tube set with one set of ear phones. I used to listen to Norfolk during the day and Omaha and Lincoln during the evening." The drive for shut-in apparatus netted \$370 during the 1926 World Series. Nearly twenty businesses in northeast Nebraska and South Dakota, and three public institutions, Lutheran Hospital in Norfolk, Norfolk State Hospital, and the Cedar County Courthouse in

"We have listened to announcers From the East and from the West, But Stefan, who lives in Norfolk, Is just about the best."

farmer at last, is getting the greatest enjoyment out of life." WJAG's service to the rural community, *Radio Digest* observed in 1926, "eliminated distance and brought scattered house-holders into a neighborly community."⁴⁵

WJAG not only eased the isolation of farmers but also that of shut-ins. The recreation of World Series games on WJAG in 1922 and 1923 produced a shower of gifts at the Norfolk studio. Listeners sent Stefan, who produced the yearly reenactments, candy and cigars. Rather than surround him with future gifts from appreciative listeners, the station steered the generosity of its listeners toward charity. During the 1924 broadcast Stefan announced that the radio family "crippled girl," a baseball fan, was too poor to buy a radio. To provide local shut-in Marie Bentz with a home receiver, he suggested listeners send pennies to WJAG. The appeal produced sufficient funds in one day to buy radios for

Hartington, collected donations from listeners who congregated near radios for Stefan's reenactments. By November 1928 more than 150 radios had been distributed to area shut-ins.⁴⁷

For the first four months of 1924 WJAG continued its routine schedule of two newscasts, Monday through Saturday at 12:15 and 5:30, but abandoned the latter report in May. For the next four years the noon news, expanded to nearly an hour, acted as the station's sole, continuously scheduled daytime broadcast. To inform listeners of important announcements outside its daily broadcast hour, the station activated its transmission apparatus, as needed, for brief weather and news bulletins. The "emergency hour," inaugurated in November 1924, was broadcast at 9:00 A.M., 3:00 P.M., and 5:30 P.M.⁴⁸

In 1924 WJAG experimented with programs from a remote studio at the Norfolk American Legion building. The

News stated that “it is the intention of WJAG to broadcast concerts by talent from area towns in the Norfolk district.” Among the first remote broadcasts was an Easter concert, which featured the Grace Lutheran Church choir. The remote facility, operated primarily on Sunday afternoons and Wednesday evenings, accommodated large performances and live audiences. In May 1924 nearly 100 persons attended a performance of the Bloomfield, Nebraska, band and choral society, and Harry King’s Orchestra entertained listeners with a remote program of dinner music.⁴⁹

Aside from the promotional value of opening a remote facility, the first hint of accepting outside funds to cover broadcast expenses appeared in an April 1924 edition of the *News*: “Several Norfolk business houses are now planning to sponsor special radio concerts from this station.” A year later WJAG continued its broadcast advertising experiments. One of its most popular programs, barn-dance music, was sponsored by two Norfolk businesses: the Meridian Oil Company and Moxley Battery.⁵⁰

The Norfolk station produced a variety of new programs in 1925. A daily hospital report of patient conditions — broadcast on Stefan’s noonday program — premiered in March. Nearly forty-four years later, the dissemination of patient information, limited to arrivals and dismissals in 1968, ended at Norfolk hospitals. Youngsters from Elgin, Nebraska, performed a 1925 Mother’s Day concert in the WJAG studio, which attracted 250 persons huddled near radios at the Elgin community building. A new service, for out-of-town travelers camped at a Norfolk park, was added to the WJAG program roster: radio messages of their safe arrival sent to long-distance friends and relatives. Art Breyer announced WJAG’s first studio wedding in 1925. W. L. Johnson and Sadie Mahin of Meadow Grove, Nebraska, exchanged broadcast marital vows in August.⁵¹

Announcements of area newborns premiered on WJAG in 1926. Mrs. E. B. Young, who conducted a weekly reli-

gious program on WJAG, began transmitting weekly greetings to parents and infants in January. A few weeks later the “Cradle Roll,” a daily feature, premiered on WJAG’s noon show. While Stefan used the radio family bell to call listeners to the mythical dinner table, another bell was introduced to greet local infants. The parents of Andy Peterson, Finnish immigrants who trekked to Wisconsin in the 1860s, brought the latter bell to Nebraska in 1872. Peterson loaned the “old Viking cow bell” to Stefan. The Wisner, Nebraska, resident and businessman quipped that grasshoppers chewed their way through a missing section of the bell in 1874. After a hearty ringing of the Viking cow bell, new babies received official “Cradle Roll” membership cards signed by Stefan with the Printer’s Devil mark, a fingerprint. By 1952 the station mailed nearly 2,500 cards a year to infants in Nebraska, South Dakota, Iowa, and Kansas. Upon their eighteenth birthday, each cradle roll member received an invitation to join the WJAG radio family.⁵²

In August 1926 radio listeners voted Fred Patzel of Madison, Nebraska, the WJAG champion hog caller. His loud “whoowie, whoowie, whoowie” calls, summoning pigs to the trough, defeated two men and a woman, Mrs. E. C. Warner of Warnerville, Nebraska. A month later Patzel won the world’s hog calling title in Omaha. In February 1933 Stefan invited Patzel to re-create his prize-winning cry on a Saturday noon market broadcast. Before engineer Frank Wiedenbach could adjust the audio feed to WJAG’s transmitter, the champion hog caller’s yell overpowered and destroyed \$200 worth of transmission tubes, knocking WJAG off the air for nearly five minutes.⁵³

Three watershed events, financial, promotional, and managerial, left their imprints on WJAG in 1926–27. For the first three-and-a-half years of its existence, WJAG operated largely without advertising revenue, but the expense of maintaining WJAG as a *News* supplementary service since 1922 totaled thousands of dollars. Karl Stefan told Norfolk

Rotarians in 1925 the cost of building and operating WJAG hovered near \$11,000. By 1926 Gene Huse calculated the price of goodwill derived from the radio operation approached \$30,000. Although WJAG experimented with program sponsorships in 1924 and 1925, it did not accept advertising on a consistent basis until February 1926. The station’s first account was the Carberry Seed Company. Through 1927 the radio family heard advertising pitches from the McFayden Motor Company, Norfolk Nursery, Norfolk Grocery, Fleming’s Pharmacy, Norfolk Cereal and Flour Mills, Star Clothing, and the Norfolk Livestock Sales Company.⁵⁴

By the end of World War I, North American Hotels concluded the first stage of construction, digging a foundation for a new hostelry in downtown Norfolk. At that point the company folded, leaving a large pit at Fourth Street and Norfolk Avenue next to the *News* building. By 1920 Gene Huse and a group of Norfolk business leaders conducted a community fund-raising campaign to finish the five-story facility, but a slow economy halted work on the nearly complete building. E. C. (Eugene) Eppley of Omaha, the nation’s largest independent hotel operator in the mid-1920s, purchased the property five years later to attract not only travelers, but also conventions and banquets. In December 1925 Eppley announced the addition of studio space for WJAG in the Hotel Norfolk, whose roof already supported the station’s transmission towers and aerials. The new studio was situated on the mezzanine behind large plate glass windows.⁵⁵

Eppley’s hotel, opened to the public in July 1926, greeted its guests with 122 rooms, three dining areas, a coffee shop, a barber shop, and second floor ballroom and banquet facilities constructed near the WJAG studio. The small original studio paled in comparison to the hotel’s classy broadcast accommodations. A *News* report described the modern radio surroundings:

The ceiling has been decorated by the hand of a master. . . . Velvet used as

Broadcasting in Norfolk, Nebraska



The Hotel Norfolk, home of the WJAG studio beginning in 1926. NSHS-M182-0264

[wall] draperies are about one-half inch in thickness. . . . Large bands and orchestra[s] will present concerts in the [adjacent] ball room, the music being broadcast from station WJAG. . . . Accommodations of the new studio are such that small orchestras and entertaining groups can present their programs from the hotel home of WJAG. . . . The room has been built and equipped so that no wall echoes will be transmitted from the microphone to the aerials and then to receiving sets tuned in on WJAG. . . . Studio visitors always will be welcome and will be permitted to watch the broadcasting through the glass windows.⁵⁶

The new hotel and radio studio reaped the mutual benefits of enhanced public visibility. The former served as a major community hub, annually drawing thousands of patrons through its doors for lodging, social events, and a view of

the mezzanine studio. In like manner broadcast programs attracted radio fans to the hotel. In 1927 dozens of listeners gathered at the studio windows to view a performance of the Ray-O-Vac (battery) Twins. The ballroom, a magnet for large performances on WJAG, was the site of a broadcast choir concert in 1932. An overflow audience of 200 persons, in the ballroom and adjacent mezzanine, listened to a 500-member Madison County children's chorus.⁵⁷

Initially, the hotel studio piped remote entertainment to the *News* building next door, the main control point and site of Stefan's noon reports. With the installation of a new transmitter in the Hotel Norfolk, WJAG moved its main studio and daily broadcast operations to the mezzanine in 1927. The sale

of radio airtime and a major studio relocation pushed the day-to-day operational burden of WJAG past the pioneer stage. In April 1927 Gene Huse hired Harry Burke as the station's first full-time manager. In 1930 Ted Bandelin replaced Burke, who left Norfolk for employment with WOW radio, Omaha.⁵⁸

A 1927 *Omaha World-Herald* poll of radio listeners confirmed the popularity of broadcasting in Norfolk. Of thirty stations receiving votes in the mass popularity contest, WJAG ranked eighth as the top choice of radio fans. KMA and KFNF of Shenandoah, Iowa, finished first and second respectively. Later that month, WJAG conducted two, fifteen-hour marathon broadcasts to celebrate the sixth anniversary of Gene Huse's radio experiments and the installation of

new transmission equipment. Performers representing nearly forty Nebraska communities and eight announcers from stations in Omaha, Lincoln, York, Wayne, Council Bluffs, Iowa, Yankton, South Dakota, plus WJAG's Art Breyer (assistant announcer) and Karl Stefan (chief announcer), entered "the home of Printer's Devil" for appearances in late March.⁵⁹

As a prelude to expanded broadcasting on WJAG in 1927–28, the station polled its listeners during the broadcast celebration on the most popular forms of entertainment. Ten *News* employees sorted 30,000 to 40,000 listener responses — 500 pounds of mail. A Norfolk High School piano and violin recital claimed the fifty-dollar first prize. The D & H orchestra of Schuyler, Nebraska, finished second, and three Lincoln musicians from KFAB (later relocated in Omaha), Gloomy Gus, Eddie, and The Cornhusker Girl, were voted the third most popular entertainers.⁶⁰

Three years after its first broadcast in September 1922, Stefan told local Kiwanians that "WJAG has been heard from coast to coast and on both the north and southern boundaries of the United States." By 1926 WJAG and a dozen other broadcasters nationwide, including Ames, Iowa (WOI), and Laramie, Wyoming (KFBU), occupied 1110 kilocycles, which diminished the distant reach of WJAG's signal. Stefan observed that with "so many radiocasting units being on the air, WJAG's range has been curtailed to practically the territory served by the *Norfolk Daily News*."⁶¹

To curb airwave interference, the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) assigned new frequencies to WJAG and dozens of radio stations regularly heard in Nebraska in May 1927. The government, the Associated Press reported, "created a radio grave yard" for hundreds of stations nationwide. Of 693 licensed broadcasters, 527 outlets were assigned wavelengths between 199.9 and 300 meters. WJAG's frequency, 1110 kilocycles (270.1 meters), and transmit-

ter power, shifted to 500 watts by May 1927, was adjusted to 1350 kilocycles (222.1 meters) with 250 watts of power.⁶²

In a public statement WJAG attacked the proposed frequency adjustment: "We will do all we can to have the wave length changed," the announcement read, "but if we cannot induce the radio commission to give us a better one, we will go off the air." The new frequency and power assignment, the station estimated, would devastate its radio service; a majority of area radio sets were unable to receive 1350 kilocycles. The Norfolk Chamber of Commerce informed U.S. Senator Robert B. Howell of Nebraska that "allocation of the wave length given WJAG, the *Norfolk Daily News* station, will work a hardship upon the farming and grain interests of northeast Nebraska and South Dakota. . . . The average farm receiving set will not tune down to 222 meters."⁶³

In a move that surprised station officials, the FRC quickly granted WJAG a lower frequency in early June: 1050 kilocycles (285.5 meters) with a daytime power of 500 watts and nighttime output of 250 watts. The station credited the intervention of Senator Howell and U.S. Representative Edgar Howard, whose arguments of an adequate farm broadcast service in northeast Nebraska convinced the FRC to issue the altered dial position. By mid-June WJAG shifted to its new frequency.⁶⁴

A gradual expansion of airtime began in 1927. In February a regular studio vocalist was added to the WJAG program roster. Marjorie Beeler, the Norco Feeds Girl, serenaded radio listeners on Thursday afternoons. By March experimental broadcasts of "dinner hour" orchestras filtered through the airwaves. A variety of local bands and the WJAG house orchestra, the Norfolk Serenaders, which performed in the March marathon, appeared on Saturday broadcasts. The opening of a plush motion picture house, Norfolk's \$300,000 Granada, was broadcast when it premiered its first film in April 1927. Three weeks later the Serenaders entertained theater patrons

in a special Red Cross benefit. After a summer hiatus, the "dinner hour" programs returned to WJAG on a regular schedule each Wednesday and Saturday in September. In the last two weeks of November, the evening programs briefly expanded to six days a week.⁶⁵

A major government hurdle prevented WJAG from pursuing an extended broadcast schedule in late 1927. By November the FRC assigned an additional Nebraska station, KMMJ, Clay Center (licensed to Grand Island in 1939), to 1050 kilocycles, which the government allotted to WJAG months earlier. The geographic proximity of the two stations on an identical frequency, causing the signals to interfere with each other, meant both stations had to share 1050 kilocycles: only one station could activate its transmitter at any given time. WJAG and KMMJ had to split transmission hours.⁶⁶

The gradual extension of longer broadcast hours on WJAG continued in 1928. The first program heard Monday through Saturday, Stefan's 12:15 P.M. news show, was the cornerstone of the broadcast schedule. In January 1928 an irregular schedule of brief entertainment followed the noon broadcast. But most months of that year, WJAG turned off its transmitter for a few hours before returning to the airwaves at 4:00 P.M. for late afternoon entertainment and news summaries. About an hour later, it would sign off for another ninety minutes until its evening broadcast at 6:30.

For the first time WJAG no longer relied solely on regularly scheduled live performances as it had since 1922. In 1927 a \$500 license was purchased from the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), which permitted WJAG to transmit recorded music. The first scheduled phonograph show appeared in November. By January 1928 regularly sponsored phonograph broadcasts and live entertainment from the Auditorium Theater appeared together on the program roster. In May the Columbia record hour and live organ music from the Granada theater competed for the at-



WJAG program log, about 1929. Courtesy L. Robert Puschendorf

tention of WJAG listeners.⁶⁷

A regular but still limited schedule of daily programs signaled the need for additional staff and revenue to cover the costs of broadcasting. In May 1928 the *News* justified its stance to sell radio time

on WJAG: "A radio station of this size cannot be maintained without considerable expense. At the present time it requires the part or full time of 5 persons. To reduce this expense a small amount of advertising has been accepted."⁶⁸

By 1928 the popularity of World Series network feeds linked to radio stations nationwide, including WOW, Omaha, prompted WJAG to end Stefan's yearly reenactments. But several petitions from loyal fans of Stefan's wire play-by-play sent him back to the telegraph unit and microphone for a final round of Series broadcasts in October. "Fans who checked announcements of station WJAG," a *News* account stated in 1928, "with those of chain stations, whose announcers watch the actual play, report there is practically no difference in time."⁶⁹

A year later the enormous popularity of network Series broadcasts was evident in WJAG's program schedule: during at least three of the five ball games, the station went off the air daily for two hours. Although WJAG abandoned local broadcast coverage, the *News* installed a large mock-up of a baseball field in front of its building in 1929. Bleachers, installed inside Breyer's automobile showroom across the street, permitted baseball fans to view a mechanical reenactment of distant plays. Behind the apparatus, Stefan read the plays while another WJAG employee moved a metal ball from pitcher to batter and the players around the bases. In 1930 a petition with 100 signatures supported WJAG's Series re-creations, but it failed to rekindle the local effort. "It is virtually impossible to compete with the country's two great radio chains . . . which have announcers seated in the press boxes of the ball park where the game is being played," the *News* announced. Use of the mechanical scoreboard also was discontinued for "lack of interest."⁷⁰

In October 1928 the FRC announced new frequency and time-share arrangements for a number of Midwest broadcasters. It moved WJAG exclusively to 1060 kilocycles with a radiated power of 500 watts. The commission also ended broadcast operations in Wayne and Columbus. The frequency shift was a mixed blessing for Huse's station. Although WJAG had shed the time-share arrangement with KMMJ in Clay Center,

the FRC classified the Norfolk station as a "limited time" broadcast facility, which restricted WJAG's regular program schedule to daylight hours. In December the FRC doubled WJAG's transmitter power to 1,000 watts, which the station implemented in 1929. For the next dozen years, WJAG kept its dial position and power intact.⁷¹

After the FRC granted WJAG the unlimited daytime use of 1060 kilocycles in 1928, the station turned its transmitter on and off for three broadcasts of morning, noon, and late afternoon programming. In 1926 WJAG experimented with a morning broadcast to ascertain the popularity of A.M. listening. The station activated its transmission apparatus and appealed for reception reports; in fewer than five minutes, seventeen listeners telephoned WJAG.

But the morning audience had to wait another two years for a regularly scheduled A.M. show on WJAG. In 1928 the Norfolk station added a sunrise program: a Monday through Friday 7:00 show, with AP news, weather and road reports, farm information, and music, premiered in mid-November. The "noonday program," Stefan's regular broadcast of news, weather, farm markets and stock exchange quotes, kept its traditional airtime of 12:15. A few hours later, WJAG's transmission apparatus was reactivated at 4:00 for sixty minutes of phonograph music. Continuous afternoon programming premiered in December 1928, which signaled a shift to longer schedules in the next year.⁷²

The first six years of local broadcasting transformed WJAG from Gene Huse's vision of a bulletin service to a broadcast station that dispensed a variety of information and entertainment. Of greatest significance in the first half-dozen years was WJAG's gradual shift from "hobby" status, supported by Huse's financial contributions, to a business that began to depend on advertising. With the construction of a modern studio in the Hotel Norfolk and a gradual expansion of regularly broadcast programming, which required addi-

tional radio staff, WJAG's pioneer status had begun to fade. The station's localism, guided by Karl Stefan, attracted listeners and a full-time daylight frequency from the federal government. The years ahead, marked by Stefan's election to Congress in 1934, along with the Great Depression and World War II, would test the mettle of the WJAG staff and its radio family.

Notes

¹ "Funeral Tuesday for Aug. Raasch, Norfolk Pioneer," *Norfolk Daily News*, Dec. 9, 1922 (hereafter abbreviated as *NDN*).

² Quentin S. Proctor, Federal Communications Commission (hereafter cited as FCC), Washington D.C., to L. G. DeLay, Nebraska State Historical Society (hereafter cited as NSHS), Mar. 22, 1973, Nebraska Radio Collection (hereafter cited as NRC), NSHS, Lincoln; Robb Thomas, WJAG, Norfolk, Nebraska, to author, Oct. 15, 1997.

³ Gene Huse was born on Aug. 15, 1885, in Ponca, Nebraska, *Nebraska Newspaper* (December 1982): 2; Jane Graff, project coordinator, *Nebraska, Our Towns, North-Northeast* (Seward, Nebraska: Second Century Publications, 1990), 179; Ted Landale, "Gene Huse, Doer of Other Things," *Sunday World-Herald Magazine*, Jan. 7, 1951; Fred Stafford, "Century Develops Sturdy Daily News," *NDN*, May 1, 1987.

⁴ Stafford, "Century Develops Sturdy Daily News;" Mary Ellen Pangle, "A History of Norfolk," *NDN*, July 5, 1929.

⁵ Landale, "Gene Huse;" Stafford, "Century Develops Sturdy Daily News;" Stafford, "Publishers of News Had Varied Interests, Including Auditorium," *NDN*, May 1, 1987.

⁶ To extend the national reach of telegraphed time signals, the Navy constructed a wireless station in Arlington, Virginia. "Many of the large jewelry stores," the *New York Times* reported in August 1912, "are preparing to install their own wireless [receiving] stations . . . so that they may correct their clocks and timepieces by wireless." *New York Times*, Aug. 8, 1912; Landale, "Gene Huse;" Stafford, "Publishers of News Had Varied Interests;" Bob Thomas, "Tribute Time—30th Anniversary," July 27, 1952, WJAG historical files (hereafter cited as WJAG papers).

⁷ Landale, "Gene Huse;" "Early History," *WJAG News*, April 1947.

⁸ Section one of the 1912 Radio Act states, "a person, company, or corporation . . . shall not use or operate any apparatus for radio communication . . . except under and in accordance with a license." In section three, the act requires transmitter operation "under the supervision of a person or persons licensed for that purpose by Secretary of

Commerce and Labor." Radio Act of 1912, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 37, pt. 1 (March 1911–March 1913): 302–3; Karl Stefan's Speech, WJAG anniversary broadcast, July 25, 1937, WJAG papers; Landale, "Gene Huse."

⁹ Department of Commerce, Bureau of Navigation, *Amateur Radio Stations of the United States* (Washington: GPO, 1922), 236–72; Clinton B. DeSoto, *Two Hundred Meters and Down* (West Hartford, Connecticut: American Radio Relay League, 1964, rpt. of 1936 ed.), 75.

Commerce Department publications, issued through the department's Bureau of Navigation, list individuals and organizations who received amateur and Special Land licenses in the 1910s and early 1920s. See *Radio Stations of the United States* (Washington: GPO, 1913–1916, 1919); *Commercial and Government Radio Stations of the United States* (Washington: GPO, 1920–1922); and *Amateur Radio Stations of the United States* (Washington, GPO, 1920–1922). From 1913 to 1916, the Commerce Department classified amateur and Land Stations together in a single publication, *Radio Stations of the United States* (Washington: GPO, 1915), 8.

¹⁰ From June 1921 to June 1922 Edwin Gould operated Norfolk's only licensed amateur station. The *News* account of Gould's receptions from Wayne, Nebraska, does not mention the transmission source. No amateur stations were licensed in Wayne from June 1921 to June 1922. Government documents and newspaper descriptions strongly suggest the broadcasts originated from the local college. In 1915 U. S. Conn, president of the State Normal School at Wayne, received a Special Land Station license for 9YT. In June 1922 the government continued to list the Wayne station on its roster of Land Stations. Gould's Norfolk Radio Club was affiliated with the Northeast Nebraska Radio Club, whose director in late 1921 was I. H. Britell of the State Normal School in Wayne. "Music is Heard Over Wireless at High School," *NDN*, Apr. 23, 1921; "Radio Telephony is Explained to Lions," *ibid.*, May 2, 1922; "Wireless Music to be Received Here," *ibid.*, Dec. 7, 1921; *Amateur Radio Stations of the United States* (1922), 236–72; *Radio Service Bulletin* 12 (December 1915): 2; *Commercial and Government Radio Stations of the United States* (1922), 107; "Radio Concerts at West Point," *NDN*, Dec. 30, 1921.

¹¹ Editorial, *NDN*, Dec. 3, 1921.

¹² A May 10, 1922, *News* editorial reminded readers that "broadcasting is a difficult business." The first installment of "Fifteen Minutes" premiered on Mar. 27, 1922. See radio columns and promotional ads in *NDN*, Mar. 22 and 27; Apr. 25 and 26; May 3, 10, and 17; June 15, 1922.

¹³ "Radio Telephony is Explained to Lions;" Clark Electric Company ad, *NDN*, May 6, 1922; Norfolk Radio Company ad, *ibid.*, Sept. 8, 1922.

¹⁴ Landale, "Gene Huse;" Karl Stefan's Speech. In 1987 the *News* stated that Gene Huse "went on the

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air experimentally in 1921." WJAG celebrated "the sixth anniversary of its birth" in March 1927. See *NDN*, Mar. 23, 1927. See also Stafford, "Publishers of *News* Had Varied Interests."

¹⁵ Landale, "Gene Huse;" "Norfolk *News* to Put in Broadcasting Set," *NDN*, Apr. 5, 1922; "Hotel Norfolk to Be Finished Ahead of Time," *ibid.*, Apr. 1, 1926.

¹⁶ T. J. Slowie, FCC, Washington, D.C., to Bob Thomas, WJAG, Norfolk, May 3, 1953, WJAG papers; "WJAG Significance," *WJAG News*, July 1947; "Norfolk *News* Station is in Action," *NDN*, Sept. 14, 1922; Landale, "Gene Huse."

¹⁷ WJAG manager Arthur C. (Art) Thomas composed Stefan's broadcast tribute, which was read by several WJAG announcers during Karl Stefan Day on Dec. 19, 1938. U.S. Representative Carl Mapes of Michigan introduced WJAG's biographical compilation of Stefan into the *Congressional Record*, on Jan. 9, 1939. See 76th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 84, pt. 2: 51.

¹⁸ *Congressional Record* 84, pt. 2: 50; J. R. Johnson, *Representative Nebraskans* (Lincoln: Johnsen Publishing Co., 1954), 173; "High Lights in Life of Karl Stefan," *NDN*, Nov. 1, 1934; *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-1989* (Washington: GPO, 1989), 1867.

¹⁹ *Congressional Record* 84, pt. 2: 50; *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-1989*, 1867; "High Lights in Life of Karl Stefan."

²⁰ "High Lights in Life of Karl Stefan;" Art Thomas, WJAG, to Stefan, Jan. 30, 1946, MS2624, Karl Stefan Papers, NSHS; Ida Mae Stefan-Askren, Park Ridge, Illinois, to author, Feb. 26, 1996.

²¹ "Norfolk *News* Station is in Action;" Landale, "Gene Huse;" *Commercial and Government Radio Stations of the United States* (1923), 77; *Radio Service Bulletin* 64 (August 1922): 3.

²² "Radio Fans, Listen! WJAG is Sending," *NDN*, Sept. 15, 1922.

²³ WJAG, *A Dream of 33 Years Come True* (Norfolk, Nebraska: privately printed, 1955); Bob Thomas, Norfolk, Nebraska, to author, Jan. 15, 1997; Fritz Asmus, *Reminiscences of 1922*, WJAG anniversary broadcast, July 25, 1937, WJAG papers; Karl Stefan's Speech; Ida Mae Askren letter.

²⁴ "Hello Friends. Hello Everybody!"—Karl Stefan's Noonday Greeting on WJAG," *NDN*, July 25, 1952; "Station Second to Get Permit in Nebraska," *ibid.*

²⁵ E. E. Makiesky, Associated Press, Omaha, to Bob Thomas, WJAG, Apr. 27, 1959, WJAG papers.

²⁶ *Congressional Record* 84, pt. 2: 51; Bob Thomas, radio family, May 13, 1980, WJAG papers; Karl Stefan's Speech; "G. B. Salter Honored by Station WJAG," *NDN*, Apr. 24, 1926; "Radio Flashes," *ibid.*, June 26, 1924; July 22, Oct. 26, 1925; Jan. 7, 1926; "Musselman is New Official Radio Father," *ibid.*, Jan. 9, 1930.

²⁷ "Radio Flashes," *NDN*, Jan. 29, Aug. 16, July 10 and 12, 1924.

²⁸ Norfolk Centennial Committee, 6; A. T. Andreas, comp., *History of the State of Nebraska*, pt. 2 (Chicago: Western Historical Co., 1882), 984; Graff, *Nebraska: Our Towns, North-Northeast*, 106, 162; Graff, *Nebraska: Our Towns, Central-Northeast* (Seward, Nebraska: Second Century Publications, 1990), 26, 127; Paul Olson, ed., *Broken Hoops and Plains People* (Lincoln: Curriculum Development Center, 1978), 153, 164. Mae Lee Moldenhauer, WJAG officer manager, to Ross L. Rice, Fremont, Nebraska, Aug. 26, 1960, WJAG papers; Karl Stefan's Speech.

²⁹ In 1998 McAllister's bell is stored at the Nebraska State Historical Society's Museum of Nebraska History in Lincoln. A collection description of the bell mentions no tie to WJAG in the 1920s. "Former Bell of WJAG Now Rests Among Antiques," *NDN*, Jan. 13, 1930; "Let's Go! WJAG Throws a Party!," *Radio Digest*, Feb. 20, 1926; "Radio Fans to Name Bills of Station WJAG," *Omaha Bee-News*, Nov. 5, 1928; Robert Pettit, NSHS museum collections, Lincoln, telephone interview by author, Oct. 15, 1997.

³⁰ Bob Thomas, "Tribute Time—30th Anniversary;" Landale, "Gene Huse;" biographical description of Karl Stefan, WJAG papers; "Let's Go! WJAG Throws a Party!"

³¹ The *News* cited several instances of Breyer's announcing duties in the 1920s and 1930s and at least one reference to Ms. Alstin in 1925. For example, see "One-Stop Service Breyer's Feature," *NDN*, Feb. 7, 1933, "Breyer Becomes Head of Norfolk Radio Company," *ibid.*, June 3, 1922, "Norfolk News Station is in Action;" "Station Second to Get Permit in Nebraska," and many others. WJAG technicians, WJAG anniversary broadcast, July 25, 1937, WJAG papers.

³² *Congressional Record* 84, pt. 2: 51; "Let's Go! WJAG Throws a Party!" "Fans Praise WJAG on Series Service," *NDN*, Oct. 8, 1927; James Denney, "He Rode Radio to Congress," *Sunday World-Herald Magazine of the Midlands*, Oct. 10, 1972.

³³ "Norfolk is Bit by Radio Bug; Fans Roll Own," *NDN*, Nov. 17, 1922.

³⁴ Karl Stefan's Speech; "Ragadores are Popular among Radio Lovers," *NDN*, Jan. 2, 1923; "Humphrey Band Concert Sunday Heard by Many," *ibid.*, Feb. 5, 1923; "Sunday Program on Radio Heard by Many," *ibid.*, Feb. 19, 1923; "Radio Concerts on Sunday are Heard by Many," *ibid.*, Apr. 30, 1923.

³⁵ "Cantata Sung by Two Choirs for Radio Fans," *NDN*, May 22, 1923.

³⁶ The last presentation of Stefan's play was on May 30, 1930. The program did not reappear on "Radio Flashes" program schedules after that year. "Tribute Paid to Civil War Vets by WJAG," *NDN*, May 31, 1927; "Background of Music Features Radio Skit," *ibid.*, May 29, 1930; "Farmer Puts Radio

in Cold Storage," *ibid.*, June 20, 1923; "Radio Concert from WJAG on Friday Afternoon," *ibid.*, May 31, 1923.

³⁷ "Radio Flashes of Prize Fight from Norfolk," *NDN*, July 3, 1923.

³⁸ "Cool Drinks Vie with Ice Cream for Popularity," *NDN*, July 12, 1923; "Thousands Hear Fight Returns Sent by Radio," *ibid.*, July 5, 1923; "Appreciation for Radio Fight News," *ibid.*, July 9, 1923.

³⁹ "Let's Go! WJAG Throws a Party!" "Many Persons Comprised Official WJAG Radio Family," *NDN*, July 25, 1952. For three examples of references to Stefan's radio character see "Radio Flashes," *ibid.*, Jan. 8 and 23, Mar. 13, 1924.

⁴⁰ "Karl Stefan Leaves News for Business," *NDN*, Sept. 2, 1924; "Cigar Store, Gift Shop are Destroyed by Fire," *ibid.*, Mar. 8, 1929; Cigar store newspaper ad, *ibid.*, May 4, 1929; "Stefan's Store Asset to Public," *ibid.*, Feb. 27, 1933.

⁴¹ "Radio Flashes," *NDN*, Mar. 25, Sept. 29, July 30, Dec. 8, 1924; Feb. 20, 1925, Sept. 2, Nov. 1, 1928; "WJAG Given Ovation by 10,000 Persons," *ibid.*, Sept. 25, 1925; "Feature Night Goes Over Big from WJAG," *ibid.*, Feb. 17, 1925.

⁴² Geo. E. Downs, "To Karl Stefan, Announcer, WJAG," *Radio Digest* 9 (May 1925): 2.

⁴³ "Radio Fans to Name Bills of Station WJAG," *NDN*; "Radio Flashes," *ibid.*, Apr. 2, 1932.

⁴⁴ "Uses Derby Hat for Radio Set," *NDN*, Dec. 18, 1924; "Radio Flashes," *ibid.*, Jan. 28, Apr. 1, 1924.

⁴⁵ "Radio Flashes," *ibid.*, Jan. 5, 17, and 19; Mar. 22, 1924; "Let's Go! WJAG Throws a Party!"

⁴⁶ "Radio Flashes," *NDN*, Nov. 25, 1924; Fritz Asmus, *Reminiscences of 1922*; Karl Stefan's Speech; "Radio Fans to Name Bills of Station WJAG;" Art Thomas, First Public Meeting of the Radio Family, WJAG anniversary broadcast, July 25, 1937, WJAG papers.

⁴⁷ Marie Bentz, interview by Art Thomas, First Public Meeting of the Radio Family; "Shut-In Fund is Growing as Fans Send Donations," *NDN*, Oct. 15, 1926; "WJAG Fans Give \$370 Toward Shut-In Fund," *ibid.*, Oct. 19, 1926; "Radio Fans to Name Bills of Station WJAG."

⁴⁸ A review of "Radio Flashes" program schedules found the noon newscast to be the only regular daytime feature until late 1927. See "Radio Flashes," *NDN*, Jan. 3, May 1, Nov. 16, 1924.

⁴⁹ "Radio Flashes," *ibid.*, Apr. 17 and 18, 1924; "Easter Concert via Radio was Heard by Many," *ibid.*, Apr. 21, 1924; "Bloomfield had Best Program on Radio Friday," *ibid.*, May 7, 1924; "King's Orchestra in Radio Program," *ibid.*, May 5, 1924.

⁵⁰ "Radio Flashes," *ibid.*, Apr. 22, 1924; "Radio Program is on Tonight," *ibid.*, Mar. 25, 1925.

⁵¹ "WJAG Gives Reports on Hospital Patients," *ibid.*, Mar. 25, 1925; "Radio Flashes," *ibid.*, May 14, 1925, Jan. 10, 1928; "Hospitals Discontinue *News*,

Radio Reports," *ibid.*, Apr. 30, 1968; "New Feature to be Used by WJAG," *ibid.*, July 23, 1925; "Youthful Pair is Married as Fans Listen in," *ibid.*, Aug. 26, 1925.

⁵² "Radio Flashes," *ibid.*, Jan. 28, Feb. 8, Sept. 24, 1926; Andy Peterson story — WJAG noon news, Mar. 4, 1940, WJAG papers; WJAG Cradle Roll membership card, no date, WJAG papers; "WJAG Cradle Roll Holds Popularity," *NDN*, July 25, 1952.

⁵³ "Fred Patzel Wins Hog Calling Battle," *ibid.*, Aug. 5, 1926; "Station WJAG to Stage Hog Calling Meet," *ibid.*, July 23, 1926; "Patzel Resting Vocal Cords at Madison Home," *ibid.*, Sept. 13, 1926; "Champion Hog Caller Wrecks WJAG's Tubes," *ibid.*, Feb. 13, 1933.

⁵⁴ "Radio Party Given at Rotary Meeting," *ibid.*, Dec. 9, 1925; Landale, "Gene Huse;" "Early Radio Sponsors Few, Far Between," *Broadcasting*, May 14, 1962, 140; WJAG advertisers by age, no date, WJAG papers; "Varied Program is Heard by WJAG Fans," *NDN*, Apr. 3, 1926; "Radio Flashes," *ibid.*, Apr. 8, 1926; "Two Ether Programs Please Listeners," *ibid.*, Apr. 17, 1926.

⁵⁵ Landale, "Gene Huse;" "E. C. Eppley to Own and Operate Hotel Norfolk," *NDN*, Nov. 27, 1925; "Tells of Hotel and Eppley Organization," *ibid.*, Apr. 15, 1926; "Eppley Pleased After Inspecting Hotel Building," *ibid.*, Dec. 7, 1925; "Hotel Norfolk to be Finished Ahead of Time," *ibid.*, Apr. 1, 1926; "Many Visitors are Here for Hotel Opening," *ibid.*, July 29, 1926.

⁵⁶ "Hotel Norfolk has Home for Station WJAG," *NDN*, July 26, 1926.

⁵⁷ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places: Hotel Norfolk, Norfolk, Nebraska, Dec. 1, 1988, sec. 8: 8; Elkhorn Valley Historical Society, Norfolk, Nebraska; "Hotel Norfolk is Popular Hostelry," *NDN*, Feb. 24, 1930; "WJAG Birthday Program Draws Much Attention," *ibid.*, Mar. 21, 1927; "School Chorus Heard Over WJAG on Sunday," *ibid.*, Oct. 10, 1932.

⁵⁸ "Hotel Norfolk Has Home for Station WJAG;" "History of WJAG," *WJAG News*, June 1938, 2.

⁵⁹ "Shenandoah Stations Win Radio Popularity Contest," *Sunday World-Herald*, Mar. 13, 1927. In February 1927 WJAG announced the installation of a new transmitter, rated at 1,000 watts, with a federally approved power output of 600 watts. See note 62. "WJAG Presents Big Programs on March 23, 24," *NDN*, Mar. 1, 1927; "Towns will have Parts in Radio Program," *ibid.*, Mar. 16, 1927; "8 Announcers will Handle WJAG's Event," *ibid.*, Mar. 18, 1927; "Station WJAG's Birthday Party is Big Success," *ibid.*, Mar. 24, 1927.

⁶⁰ "Station WJAG Being Flooded by Responses," *ibid.*, Mar. 26, 1927; "Prize Winners in Radio Event are Announced," *ibid.*, Apr. 1, 1927; WJAG anni-

versary promotional ad, *ibid.*, Mar. 22, 1927; "Radio Fans are Greeted by New Set at WJAG," *ibid.*, Feb. 4, 1927.

⁶¹ Geographically, the closest station to Norfolk operating on 1110 kilocycles in January 1926 was WOI, Ames, Iowa. "Speaks of Service Station WJAG Gives," *ibid.*, Jan. 27, 1926; *Radio Service Bulletin* 106 (Jan. 30, 1926): 11–20.

⁶² By January 1927 government documents reveal that WJAG's power on 1110 kilocycles had been increased from 200 to 600 watts and lowered to 500 watts by May 1927. "Broadcasters are Assigned Wavelengths," *NDN*, May 24, 1927; *Radio Service Bulletin* 117 (Dec. 31, 1926): 17; *ibid.*, 121 (Apr. 30, 1927): 12.

⁶³ "New Wave Length may put WJAG Out of Service," *NDN*, May 25, 1927. When comparing wavelength (meters) to frequency (kilocycles), a higher frequency translates to a shorter wavelength. A *News* hardware store ad in December 1927 observed that many radio sets would have been unable to receive WJAG on 222 meters. "Over 100 existing stations, with worthwhile programs," the ad declared, "are beyond the reach of the average receiver because it cannot tune below 240 meters." "C. of C. Opposes New Wave Given to Station WJAG," *ibid.*, June 3, 1927; Krutzfeldt Bros. radio ad, *ibid.*, Dec. 21, 1927.

⁶⁴ Although WJAG avoided shifting to an undesirable frequency, the May 31, 1927, *Radio Service Bulletin* listed the proposed move to 1350 kilocycles. The 1050 kilocycle assignment first appeared in the January 1928 edition. "New Wave Given Station WJAG by Commission," *NDN*, June 4, 1927; "WJAG to Change its Wave Length," *ibid.*, June 14, 1927; *Radio Service Bulletin* 130 (Jan. 31, 1928): 24; *ibid.*, 122 (May 31, 1927): 7.

⁶⁵ Norco Girl promotional ad, *NDN*, Feb. 9, May 20, 1927; "Radio Flashes," *ibid.*, Mar. 1, Apr. 28, May 11, Nov. 15 and 21, 1927; "Capacity Crowd Attends Opening of New Theater," *ibid.*, Apr. 18, 1927; Granada benefit ad, *ibid.*, May 6, 1927; "WJAG Resumes its Evening Programs," *ibid.*, Sept. 22, 1927.

⁶⁶ *Radio Service Bulletin* 127 (Oct. 31, 1927): 8; KMMJ file, NRC, NSHS; *Supplement to Annual Report of the Federal Radio Commission, 1928*, in *Federal Radio Commission Annual Reports* (New York: Arno Press and the *New York Times*, rpt., 1971), 181.

⁶⁷ "Radio Flashes," *NDN*, Nov. 15, 1927; Jan. 10, 16 and 23; Apr. 20, May 7, Oct. 18, 1928; "Radio Fans are Greeted by New Set at WJAG."

⁶⁸ Newspaper and radio promotional ad, *ibid.*, May 17, 1928.

⁶⁹ "Two Chains will Broadcast Series," *ibid.*, Oct. 3, 1928; "Series Story being Broadcast by WJAG," *ibid.*, Oct. 6, 1928.

⁷⁰ "Radio Flashes," *ibid.*, Oct. 7, 8, and 10, 1929; "Score Board is Popular with Baseball Fans," *ibid.*, Oct. 12, 1929; "WJAG will Omit Series Program," *ibid.*, Sept. 30, 1930.

⁷¹ "Radio Station WJAG to Share Time with WOW," *ibid.*, Sept. 11, 1928; *Supplement to Annual Report of the Federal Radio Commission, 1928*, in *Federal Radio Commission Annual Reports*, 54, 162–63, 181, 192–95; Proctor to DeLay, NRC, NSHS, George H. Douglas, *The Early Days of Radio Broadcasting* (Jefferson, N. Car.: McFarland & Co., 1987), 96; *Sixth Annual Report of the Federal Radio Commission, 1932*, in *Federal Radio Commission Annual Reports*, 25, 29; *Fifth Annual Report of the Federal Radio Commission, 1931*, *ibid.*, 94; "Station WJAG Planning Many New Features," *NDN*, Nov. 8, 1928, 2; "Fans Like WJAG's Election Coverage," *ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1928; "Station WJAG Given 1,000 Watts Power," *ibid.*, Dec. 17, 1928; *Radio Service Bulletin* 145 (Apr. 30, 1929): 13. In 1998 WJAG transmits on 780 kilohertz.

⁷² A combination of three events may explain the delayed implementation of a morning show on WJAG in 1928, two years after an experimental A.M. broadcast. Additional broadcast hours required more staff. WJAG began selling advertising on a consistent basis in February 1926. The first years of ad sales may not have justified the expense of extra airtime. In 1927–28, WJAG shared broadcast hours with KMMJ, Clay Center, which operated on the same frequency (1050 kilocycles) as WJAG. In late 1927 a *Norfolk Daily News* "Radio Flashes" column listed a 7:30 A.M. farm and poultry show on KMMJ. The *News* reported that the Clay Center station operated at 790 kilocycles in mid-October, two weeks before the government listed KMMJ on 1050 kilocycles in the Oct. 31, 1927, *Radio Service Bulletin*. See note 66. In a time-share arrangement, KMMJ's use of morning hours would have prevented WJAG from implementing an A.M. show. By the late 1920s the Federal Radio Commission began to question stations that did not use their assigned frequencies on a continuous basis.

Additional revenue, an unlimited daytime frequency, and government pressure may have prompted Gene Huse to initiate a sunrise broadcast on WJAG in late 1928. "Station WJAG Planning Many New Features;" "Do Fans Use Radio Sets in Morning?" *NDN*, Jan. 20, 1926; "Radio Flashes," *ibid.*, Oct. 13, 1927; Nov. 12, 15, 1928; Dec. 1 and 4, 1928; Philip T. Rosen, *The Modern Stentors, Radio Broadcasters and the Federal Government* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 133.