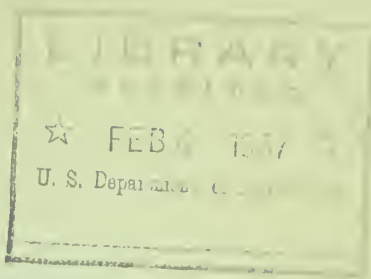


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U. S. D. A. State Ext. Service College Station

The Hook Up

Home Agent County Agent Extension Editor

A ROUND-ROBIN CIRCUIT LINKING FARM & HOME BROADCASTERS

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No. 1

AS OTHERS HEAR US

The Hook-Up is glad to offer its broadcaster-readers an opportunity this month to do some wholesome listening. Our contributor is Mrs. Elizabeth C. Wherry of Wyoming, Iowa, who writes as a rural consumer of radio programs.

Mrs. Wherry is a farm woman, and a veteran radio listener and critic. She writes the column "Country Air" for Wallace's Farmer. The following letter, written to Morse Salisbury, was read before the rural life section of the First National Conference on Educational Broadcasting, held in Washington December 10 to 12. Mrs. Wherry:

"My observations will be made from remarks I chance to hear and from that general impression one gets from people when living and working among them.

"First of all music. No matter what we do about it people like hill billy stuff and what they call old time music, and to the other extreme we find them listening to the jazziest of modern tunes. That to me is a stage of development..... As long as the stuff is on the radio people will listen to it and pass up many of the better and more developing programs.



AS OTHERS HEAR US
(Continued)

"Bohemian music, accordion music, and band music all get over well. I think they'll all listen to good band music if they can get it. That is one extreme of the picture.

"Then there is the music of the Farm and Home Hour. Walter Blaufuss has with his arrangements and orchestrations and his choice of numbers managed a period of 'bright, peppy music' that strikes response in the hearts of many, many people who do not give much ear to other good music or to the talks that make up the balance of the hour. Walter Blaufuss has something! Other musicians out to bid for farm listeners might well study him. It's cheerful music, I heard one woman say. I think he could get by with Ase's Tod with his orchestration and not send any worn out housewife to suicidal thoughts. I can't think it is entirely his selections. I, who know nothing about orchestrations am inclined to think he has a balance of instruments and arrangements that are at one and the same time capable of holding both cultured and more primitive listeners.

"Then to go on to still others, I think among better class of listeners Andy's music shop (WOI) is still perhaps the best thing we get to start our days off. Many people wish he'd have more music and less talk. These listeners are devotees of Firestone, etc.....

"The fifteen minute strips seem to hold a great deal of interest. David Harum, Vic and Sade, the O'Neal's, and what have you.

"One thing I have never heard discussed is housekeeping hours or cooking schools. Somebody must listen to them, but I never hear anyone mention a recipe they got over the air. They're more a joke than to be taken seriously, it seems.

"News and news comments hold people with an almost inexplicable grip. I am constantly marvelling over how much more affairs-conscious the farm woman is -- all farm people in fact. And I wonder if the radio with its news flashes, its dramatizations of events, its commentators, isn't responsible for a lot of all this. What this may mean to newspapers, I cannot even suggest. But if income is at all compatible with such a course, I believe people will take them with more interest than before, simply because hunger is aroused. The same is true, I believe, of books. A world is opened to the book hungry, and others find an appetite they did not know they had.

"The news, however, interests all classes. I think that even the people whose taste we might not classify as the best resent yellow news. It is perhaps the best opportunity the press has ever had to develop good news tastes and standards. There is something distasteful about sordid spoken news that one can read without batting an eye.

"It may be that city people find these news periods just as colorful as rural people. I do know that horizons are extended, casual conversation has taken on a tinge of broadness, even a bit of worldliness as the result of the many topics that are actually discussed in one's own living room. Even though the discussor (is there such a word? - should be) is an unknown announcer, commentator or radio dramatist - here these words and subjects are familiarly pouring into our very lives. We talk and think in those broadened terms because of them.

"I'm not at all sure people always want farm - I mean special farm things. I still think they get a lot of their

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farm practices from reading. But how they love to feel a kinship with the faster moving sections of the world. They simply are no longer isolated -- only in miles.

"There is so much,' often is the comment. 'One can't find all the things.' There still seem to be rather inadequate guides to locating the sort of thing one wants to listen to. But books have been in existence for longer years than radio and one experiences the same difficulty there. Fifteen-minute periods seem too short to many. Less jumpiness makes for better listening. It's a nuisance to constantly switch the dial. 'You can't depend on any one station any more.' Which probably isn't a fair comment.

"It seems to me that lectures on subjects of current interest, historical importance, economic subjects, travel talks, psychology and philosophy, if couched in popular terms -- good popular terms -- are much listened to. And they stimulate a good deal of thought.

"I do think the educational station has much to learn of the commercial one. That is, the people who do the broadcasting are not onto the psychology of listener interest. The liveliest ornithologist in creation isn't going to get across if he has a raucous voice -- and a poor delivery. Andy is right -- stations such as WOI must realize that their stuff goes out to empty air unless it has a little of the polish and verve of commercial programs. On the other hand the commercial stations should hear the sigh of relief that follows tuning in on educational stations - and no advertising.

"Did I mention that book hours -- when they are read or reviewed at length, that is long enough to give the essence and flavor of the book in case the listener never gets to

read it -- are frequently talked about. And among people where I'd least suspect it. After all a story is the very best way to tell anything.

"To sum up the better choices in rural listening as I hear it commented upon - let's list bright music first, news and comments second, dramatic sketches of the continued type third, comedy next, and heavier educational features next. My private opinion is that when we find continuity writers and radio artists capable of doing in the radio world what Paul de Kruif did in the magazine and book world in an educational way, the laity will lap it up, know more and despite the snorts of scientists over the de Kruif type of presentation they'll find a more sympathetic laity and one that will more readily cooperate with the program of advancement. After all, only people who are in particular need of information read government bulletins. But they'll lap up what bulletins say when it's cooked over with garnish.

"I have a very nice hired girl -- typical of hundreds who could not even go on through high school during depression years. She said when they got the radio she seemed to find it a substitute for High School. Many of the things she would have learned, much of the good times she might have had, many of the topics that she might have learned to speak of with familiarity came to her on the radio. If radio ever for one minute forgets that it must lead thought and tastes rather than always pamper them I dread to think what it might become in our national life.

"We take it all so casually, it seems to me, that more than ever it becomes a part of our background like the things our parents talk about at the table when we are little -- and it is very possible that it exerts as great an influence in our lives."

FROM THE COMMERCIAL STATIONS' STANDPOINT

Represented on the program of the rural life section of the First National Conference on Educational Broadcasting were two commercial stations, both pioneers in developing farm programs. The speakers were G. Emerson Markham, director of agricultural broadcasting for WGY, Schenectady, N. Y.; and John Baker, of WLS, Chicago. (Mr. Baker was formerly, for four years, radio editor for the Massachusetts Extension Service.) We quote from their remarks:

MR. BAKER: "If educational broadcasters had to pay for their radio time, they'd make a lot better use of it..... they'd learn more about things that interest the public -- and use those things as entering wedges for their messages; they'd learn how to be human in front of the microphone; they'd realize that their first obligation to the radio audience is to be pleasant and friendly -- with education becoming secondary to that; they'd realize that some people should not broadcast no matter how much they know.....

"I think more colleges, extension services, and organizations and groups which expect to use radio must come to the idea of having a radio representative just as they now have a press representative."

MR. MARKHAM: "I would point out that the adult farm public will not listen because it should..... We therefore work on the principle that if you would make rabbit pie, the first step is to catch your rabbit -- in other words, catch your audience. We assume that the audience is entirely uninterested in the informa-

tion to be imparted until the speaker makes it so. We are urging upon our cooperators, then, nothing more than the old selling formula -- command attention, arouse interest, create desire, and obtain action. Until listening becomes compulsory, you can't go wrong by making people want to hear what they ought to hear.

"A good axiom to bear in mind is that you must be liked to be listened to. Speakers, therefore, must have a personality. To create a personality, have personal opinions, recount your experiences and appropriate anecdotes, and inject your own particular brand of humor. Season your remarks with human interest appeal. This puts the emphasis on showmanship rather than education, I realize, but there is no profit in preaching to empty pews. Let's have fewer facts, but have those few dramatically presented. They will make more of an impression on those who need the information, and make interesting hearing for those who cannot use them.

"More radio talks have been ruined by including too many facts -- far more than the listener can absorb -- than in any other way. Be satisfied to put across a little information at a time: the audience will remember it longer.

"Anyone less than the best available speaker is unfair to the radio public, the station, and the subject. The audience is too large, the time too valuable, to assign talks to inept individuals. Besides, poor speakers give a bad name to an entire radio service."
