



BANNER

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A Fresh Look at Our History

MARCH 2021



The week of St. Patrick's Day, Mataya Schwarz, owner of Madeline's Café & Bakery, told me one of her grandfather's stories. He always added that there was an article in the Lexington newspaper about it, and she wondered if we had ever come across it. I hadn't, but now I was curious, so I asked what year it took place. She didn't know. I asked her how old he had been at the time. She didn't know that either. But I've worked with less information, so I promised I would check the newspapers and let her know if I came across anything.

It must have been a St. Patrick's Day blessing because sure 'n begorra one of our volunteers found the very article . . . and on St. Patrick's Day no less! When I saw this photo, I had to have more details. So, I went back to Madeline's and asked Mataya & Vonda, her mother, more questions. They promised to go home and visit with the man himself and bring me back the info.

The next day when I walked into the coffee shop Vonda had a huge grin on her face. At first, I thought uh-oh something's wrong (not sure why I thought that when she looked so happy, but that's the way my life is). I asked what was up, and she said her father-in-law, a.k.a. the man in the photo, was sitting right behind me.

It's one thing to read about the past, but it's a whole other thing to talk to someone about their past. So, I took my coffee to Mike Schwarz's table and barraged him with questions. Yes, in 1967 he was that young man riding a green horse (yes, I said green), carrying a guitar, and grinning from ear to ear. He still smiles from ear to ear, but no longer rides green horses or carries a guitar (he says he'd rather be dancing). He laughed when asked about the photo. He said he worked for Audrey Crawford who dyed the white horse green in honor of St. Patrick's Day. The caption says he was selling tickets for a Legion & Midget Baseball Benefit, but Mike couldn't remember exactly what his purpose was (He laughs again). One thing he does remember was riding the horse straight into a local bar. When I asked why, his response was because everyone was "encouraging" him to. I think there's a possibility he had already been to the bar that day...

Over that cup of coffee, I learned a lot about Mike. He came from a very musical family. His dad and brothers all played guitar & fiddle and a couple played keyboard. They had a band called the Country Lads and his wife, Sandra, sang with them. You can tell by the photo and when you talk to him that Mike enjoys life to the fullest. I look forward to our next conversation and more crazy stories.

I thoroughly enjoyed listening to Mike Schwarz reminisce about a moment of time in his life. No matter how much he could remember (or couldn't 😊) I was privileged to hear his story. I love learning about the past. I love listening to people talk about their pasts! I've been a history nerd all my life. It's experiences like this that especially remind me that I'm doing what I love most.



SURE 'N BEGORRA the horse was green, too, for St. Patrick's Day. Never was life like this for Old Dobbin, brought in from pasture, changed from white to green and outfitted with a rakish hat. To haw him off, an Irish minstrel (with the unlikely Irish name of Mike Schwarz) took Dobbin on a stroll through the Lexington business district, Friday. Irishmen for the day canvassed the business houses to sell tickets for junior Legion and Midget baseball benefit. Rumor has it some of the bearded ones liked Dobbin's green coloring so well they got carried away and tried it on their beards.

----- KRVN SNIPPETS FROM 70 YEARS -----

The Nebraska Rural Radio Association was officially formed in 1948 and tasked with creating a service-type radio station supplying current relevant information to the farm & ranch population throughout the state of Nebraska. After a thorough study of individuals in cooperation with various ag organizations, the NRRA developed a list of objectives for the programming of this new radio station. It should broadcast:

1. Technical information that would help the farmer and rancher in his business.
2. Complete and timely market reports.
3. The best possible weather information.
4. Airtime for the College of Agriculture.
5. Unbiased news coverage.
6. Legislative news from the State Capitol.
7. Fair and full discussion of urgent problems that affect agriculture, such as roads, taxes, and schools.
8. Free broadcast time for farm organizations.
9. The kind of programs the entire family likes to hear without objectionable advertising.
10. An opportunity to tell people agriculture's story.

KRVN went on the air February 1, 1951, broadcasting at AM1010 with 25,000 watts. They hadn't yet met all of their goals – it was just daytime, and it didn't reach all corners of Nebraska. It went to full time in March 1972 when KRVN AM switched to 880 with 50,000 watts. KRVN now has one of the largest coverage areas in the Western United States. With the addition of an FM station, several sister stations, translator stations, and now a website with streaming capabilities, KRVN is truly available 24/7 worldwide.

KRVN REPORTING FROM THE OMAHA GRAIN EXCHANGE in 1951



Despite opposition KRVN was granted permission to broadcast directly from the floor of the Omaha Grain Exchange. The station had to hire its own reporter – someone who was a trained grain salesman and who had floor experience. He would broadcast at the Opening, Midpoint and the Close of each market day.

In the foreground, you can see the reporter holding the KRVN microphone, watching the markets' progress as it was written on the back wall. Today, farm announcer, Clay Patton, gives a noonday market report from his KRVN booth live on NTV, a local ABC Television station.

KRVN FAMILY SHOWS

Uncle Mike (Mike Meyer) hosted a Saturday morning children's show from 1952-57. Children came into the studio and participated live on the show. This *Punch & Judy* show became so popular it had to be moved to the Veterans Memorial Building. Over the years there have been other children's shows and shows for teens. In 1956 Dave Gauger, a high school senior, hosted *Tops in Pops* asking all "Hep-Cats" to phone in their requests.



KRVN WEATHER IN YOUR AREA

The need for accurate local weather information was intensely apparent to rural Nebraskans after the 1948-49 Blizzards. In 1951 the main weather offices were in Omaha, Lincoln and Scottsbluff, and no one made a statewide forecast. KRVN went to extreme measures to obtain better forecasts and condition reports for their patrons. For a while KRVN paid for telegrams so different offices could communicate and put together a broader look at the entire state. Today frequent weather updates, road condition reports and weather cancellations are routine but vital.



FINDING A BIG RED SPONSOR

In order for KRVN to carry Nebraska football, they had to find \$2500 advertising for it. Al Beisner, the local Dodge dealer, drove around to the Kearney, Grand Island, North Platte and Ogallala Dodge dealers getting a \$500 commitment from each. That was the funding they needed to start. Today KRVN is the longest running Husker football affiliate!



KRVN ON-AIR LIVE ENTERTAINMENT

Early on music filled a significant part of the broadcast day. Dick Klasi and Doc & Esther Embree worked for KRVN, doing live music.

Other groups toured the country and appeared on local stations. This is one such group: Walt Shrum and the Westernaires. (Bob Hoag, Rusty & Vera Cline, Walt on the bass, and Dwight Priddy in front) Walt, Bob and Rusty toured as a WWII USO show for 3 years in the European theater. Before and after the war they had a movie career in 25 B Westerns, appearing with Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Charles Starrett and Smiley Burnette.

Walt Shrum later settled in Lexington and married Ellen Selah, who worked at the station. He worked as a KRVN salesman from 1958 until his death in 1971.

Call letters for the station had to start with **K** – the FCC requirement for stations west of the Mississippi. The other three letters stand for **R**ural **V**oice of **N**ebraska – and serve as a reminder of the station's objective.



By Steve Wolff

Lexington has had a long-term love affair with aviation dating back to 1914 with Emmett McCabe's flight of his unique biplane. McCabe conducted many of his flight tests at the Hans Juhl farm north of Lexington, an area that likely offered level terrain free of obstructions. Suitable landing fields are an aspect of aviation that is often overlooked and given little thought by the general population.

With the establishment of the transcontinental air mail route, the federal government built a series of light beacons and intermediate airfields for emergency use. Lexington's first airport was one of these emergency fields located on the Hans Juhl farm. This federal field moved to what is now Plum Creek Park in 1924. Unfortunately, for the city of Lexington, commercial operations from a federal facility were prohibited. In 1928, Lexington leased 80 acres southwest of the city for a municipal airport on the Guy Temple property near Plum Creek Parkway & Cattlemen Drive. A year later through some arrangement with the federal government and the City of Lexington, they shared the municipal airport; and the Plum Creek Park site closed. That July, the Lexington Motor Company sponsored rides in a Ford Tri-motor, a large aircraft for its time. Three hundred people took the opportunity to fly at this airport event—so many that some even flew after dark.

Lexington first seriously considered having an exclusive municipal airport in 1933; but plans languished until November '44 when the Chamber of Commerce approved the need for Lexington to have its own dedicated airport closer to the city. In October of 1944, Frank Beran one of Lexington's early aviators opened a flying school on Karl Rendecker property located at the southwest corner of Road 761 & Highway 21. Beran had 50 students, one was Evelyn Fagot-Williams. Milo German, Karl Rendecker and Otto Meyer kept their personal aircraft at that site.

In January '45 the city passed a \$20,000 bond issue for purchasing land and improvements. That summer the city bought 146 acres which became the permanent location of Lexington's municipal airport (the Anthony Farm, one mile west of town). Improvements to the new airport property—seeding with grass and alfalfa—began immediately. On May 9, 1946 the official opening of the new airport was attended by Nebraska's Governor Dwight Griswold. Earlier that year Charles Peterman, a former flight instructor for Frank Beran, had opened his own flying field and school near Highway 21 & 20th Street. Both Peterman and Beran relocated to the new municipal airport and offered GI flight instruction, charters, agricultural crop care and aircraft sales.

By the end of 1946, the Lexington Airport Board realized the airport was the key to Lexington's growth and began planning for additional lands comprising 108 acres costing \$171,727 with improvements. At the time it was a Class I—an airport of 80-150 acres with runways less than 2700 ft. The desire was to have a Class III airport with a concrete runway 3500 ft long and 50 ft wide which could accommodate anticipated local service airlines.

During 1946 Otto Meyer had built a large 110' x 200' hangar for \$50,000. This large hangar changed hands several times (at one point being used to store grain) before it was purchased by the city twenty years later. Meyer purchased a twin-engine Cessna and hired a young ex-Army Air Corps pilot named Jim Kelly to fly it. The city collected revenue from fuel sales, aircraft parking and hangar rental. Airport revenue received a major boost in 1948 when buildings and personnel from the U.S. government's Intrastate Airways and Communications Station at Overton were moved to Lexington. That facility would be closed in 1955 and the buildings given to the Civil Air Patrol.

The 1960s saw a period of major expansion and improvements to the airport. In 1961 Jim Kelly was named Airport Authority Board Chairman. The following year the Lexington Airport Authority received an \$80,000 grant from the federal government for runway extension and airport improvements. In matching funds, the State of Nebraska and the City of Lexington each contributed \$40,000. In 1963 Paulsen's low bid was \$113,146 for paving and \$367 for seeding. Holdrege Electric installed the lighting system. Work started in July with J.J. Bode as subcontractor for Paulsen, extending and widening the NW-SE runway. When finished it was concrete 3500 ft long and 50 ft wide with a depth of 7 inches. Other improvements included paved taxiways, parking, aircraft tie downs and seeding of vacant areas. The airport, now approved for day/night operations, was dedicated in June 1964 with Gov. Morrison, Lt. Gov. Burney and James Sandstedt from Nebraska's State Aeronautics' Department in attendance.

The 70s was a decade of progress and loss. The airport's master plan called for a 700 ft extension of the NW-SE runway. Funding (an estimated \$104,000) was approved in July '73. In 1974 Rain Chief Engineering was awarded a contract for a new six place T-hangar which was built to the west of the large hangar. Then in November '75 disaster struck when the large hangar caught fire. Damage was estimated at \$200,000.



AIRPORT PROGRESS has continued throughout the decade. Some of the more recent developments include 1. a paved car parking lot, 2. the administration building, 3. a plane parking ramp, 4. the shop hangar, 5. the main hangar, rebuilt after being severely damaged by fire in 1975, 6. a six-place T-hangar built in 1973. Only the old weather station buildings (No. 7) are not of the past decade.

There was concern the remains could not be rebuilt; but it was within six months, by New World Construction, at a cost of \$74,385. In 1976 a new administration building, shop/hangar and access road were approved by the city council. Total projected cost was \$236,000 to be shared by city, state and federal governments.

Aerial view of the airport taken December 1979. Reach Electronics is in the top left-hand corner. The large unnumbered building in the background is an enclosure for the Crossroads swimming pool.

In the mid-80s the city of Lexington was experiencing a crisis with the loss of Sperry-New Holland, a major employer. Unemployment reached 13.5% in 1985. The Airport Authority and the City of Lexington had to make a politically unpopular decision as to the direction of whether to continue the expansion of the airport. The Airport Authority felt that large corporations with corporate jet aircraft, the community's labor base, and a willingness of the City to offer favorable terms to prospective companies, justified recommitment to the master plan developed in the 1960s. This proved a prescient sentiment. After three years of planning, 58 acres owned by Margret Schmidt and 1.26 acres owned by Louis Kash were bought at the north end of the existing concrete runway making it suitable for the corporate jets of Iowa Beef Processors, the new tenants of Sperry-New Holland's former property. Corporate planes from Wal-Mart, Super 8 Motels, Pamida and later Tyson used the new facility.

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Jim Kelly 1925-1992

In 1991 the Airport Authority approved a \$1,500,000 project to extend the NW-SE runway to 5500 ft and widen it to 100 ft with the federal government funding 90%, the State 3% and the City of Lexington 7%. GLC, Inc of Columbus was low bidder for concrete and seeding work, and Kayton Electric of Holdrege was awarded the lighting contract. The next summer the final third of the runway extension was completed making it possible for corporate jets, turboprops and air ambulances to land at the field.

In April 1992 the airport was renamed Jim Kelly Field in honor of the hometown boy who became the visionary behind the continued modernization of the Lexington Airport. Over the years the airport has been the focal point of many community events including dances held in the big hangar, air shows and fly-ins. Presently, the YMCA Transportation Celebration is a popular fall event at the airport. Kelly, aviation enthusiast, local publisher and community booster left a challenging reminder, "Industry does require a good airport."



2021 DCHS ANNUAL MEETING : **CELEBRATING 70 YEARS OF KRVN**

The Dawson County Historical Society held their Annual Meeting the afternoon of Saturday, February 27th. The program: *Celebrating 70 Years of KRVN* was led by Historical Society President, Scott Foster. Several past and current KRVN employees contributed to the discussion—from the launch of KRVN in 1951 to its current operations.

A short meeting was held after the program. Director, Crystal Werger introduced the Dawson County Historical Society Board of Directors, Staff, and Volunteers. Treasurer, Don Batie, reported that even though many events had to be cancelled due to the Corona Virus and attendance was down, 2020 was a good year for the museum financially. We applied for an Economic Injury Disaster Loan and received a \$4300 grant to help us get through the year.

With the worst of the Corona Virus hopefully behind us we are moving forward with our event planning and programming for 2021. On Saturday, May 29, we will host our Annual Car Show at the Dawson County Museum. We are also planning several Front Porch Talks throughout the year and Trivia Night again in November. And last, but certainly not least, we will be bringing back *Coffee with Carol*. We advertise our events on our website, Facebook page, KRVN and the local newspapers so be watching to see what's up next at the Dawson County History Museum.

DCHS Board of Directors & Staff & Volunteers

Crystal Werger, Director
Carol Nelson, Staff Assistant
Cheri Bergman, Display Designer
Mary White, Archives Volunteer

Steve Wolff, Conservation Volunteer
Linda Mins, Genealogy Volunteer
Chris Johnson, *Past Perfect* Volunteer
Janet Quitmeyer, Research Volunteer

Scott Foster, Gothenburg
Darren Hanson, Lexington
Jan Wightman, Lexington
Donn Newquist, Sumner
Jennifer Schubert, Overton
Courtney Litzenberger, Lexington

Nanette Beattie, Sumner
Don Batie, Lexington
Wayne Howard, Cozad
Shail Kumar, Lexington
Pat Gaudreault, Cozad

**IN CELEBRATION OF ITS 70TH YEAR WE HAVE SEVERAL KRVN ITEMS ON DISPLAY THROUGHOUT THE MUSEUM.
WE ARE CURRENTLY IN THE PROCESS OF CONSTRUCTING A PERMANENT KRVN EXHIBIT.
IF YOU HAPPEN TO HAVE ANY KRVN ARTIFACTS THAT HELP TELL ITS STORY, NOW IS THE TIME TO BRING THEM IN !
OR IF YOU KNOW A KRVN STORY THAT MUST BE TOLD, TELL US !**

