

Ed Craney: The Voice of Montana



E.B. Craney in 1940's or 1950's
(Montana Historical Society Research Center
Photograph Archives, Helena, MT)

By: Scott Parini

KGIR—The Voice of Montana. The station moniker says it all.

Shag Miller, a former Butte businessman and former owner of KBOW-AM and KOPR-FM radio stations, recently said in an interview that the reason I was sitting with him talking about Ed Craney was because of “what he did and what his money still continues to do for the broadcast industry and should be congratulated.”¹

Craney left his mark on Montana broadcasting by building the fifth radio station in the state and the first in the city of Butte, KGIR. In addition Craney established the state’s first radio network of stations and built relationships with clients that led to the success and popularity of the station. Craney joined a flourishing national interest in radio broadcasting. Radio in the “Treasure State” was new and radio broadcasting itself was still in its infant stages.



KGIR's Ed B. Craney in the 1930's when condenser microphones first came into vogue. (Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives, Helena, MT)

Today there are over 13,000 radio station stations located across the United States and they reach approximately 99 percent of American households. A Radio’s All-Dimensional Audience Research (RADAR) survey from 2002 found that all people over the age of 12 listened to a radio. In 2004, a study found that eight out of ten adults are reached by radio in their cars each week.² Let me turn back the hands of time to the early days of radio when families found entertainment by tuning a wooden box to a station’s frequency in order to enjoy such renowned programs as *The Guiding Light*, *Fibber McGee and Molly*, and *Amos ‘n Andy*.

1 Shag Miller, interview by author, Butte, MT, October 15, 2009.

2 Michael C. Keith, *The Radio Station*, (Massachusetts: Focal Press, 2004), 1.

Radio's Beginnings

On July 2, 1897, Guglielmo Marconi secured an American patent for wireless equipment that improved radiotelegraphy—the broadcast of Morse Code. However, a voice and music broadcast transmission on Christmas Eve in 1906 was the first real radio broadcast.³ During this “first” radio broadcast (as opposed to radiotelegraphy), listeners heard the voice of Reginald Fessenden, a former employee of Thomas Edison, playing a violin solo of Gounod’s “O Holy Night” and reading verses from The Book of Luke. After wishing the audience a Merry Christmas, Fessenden announced that a New Years program would follow and invited those listening to write to him.⁴ Following these first big events in early radio broadcasting, a Council Bluffs, Iowa, native by the name of Leo De Forest, the self-proclaimed “Father of Radio,” developed an amplification tube he called the Audion. After inventing the Audion tube, De Forest needed money and sold for \$50,000 his invention to the American Telephone & Telegraph Company (AT&T). DeForest chose AT&T because of its commitment to make telephony (later called radio) attainable from coast-to-coast.⁵

Although the Audion tube advanced early radio, it also brought on years of litigation. When AT&T purchased the tube from De Forest, the company was overcome with lawsuits, including an infringement suit from the Marconi Company. DeForest himself filed a suit, claiming that Edwin Armstrong’s discovery of the regenerative circuit—a technology of signal amplification—was actually his idea. Litigation was not resolved until 1934 when the Supreme Court ruled in favor of De Forest.⁶

According to Susan Douglas, what we know as radio did not even have a name; yet this unnamed pastime was gaining popularity with amateurs. As a feedback process, more people bought or built radios as more broadcasters went on the air. With the dawning of the early broadcast facilities, the government issued licenses to early stations beginning with the first

3 George H. Douglas, *The Early Days of Radio Broadcasting* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 1987), 6-7.

4 Erik Barnouw, *A History of Broadcasting in the United States to 1933: A Tower in Babel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966) 20.

5 Douglas, *The Early Days of Radio Broadcasting*, 10-12.

6 Ibid.

facility in East Pittsburgh—8ZZ.⁷ This facility would become station KDKA, which was owned by Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company. It officially went on-air on November 2, 1920, broadcasting election results of the Warren G. Harding-James M. Cox ticket.⁸

Early Montana Radio

With the radio boom, clandestine operations in Montana broadcast for fun while “DXers”⁹ listened to the distant stations from across the state’s vast 147,138 square miles. Most of Montana’s early broadcasters hailed from the Billings and Havre areas circa 1922. On May 19, 1922, KDYS-Great Falls was granted a license and began broadcasting making the station Montana’s first licensed station.¹⁰ However, Montana’s first radio station lasted only 18 months.¹¹ By October 1922, Frank A. Buttery obtained a license and began broadcasting under the call letters KFBB from his department store in Havre. KFBB was Montana’s first successful broadcast station.¹²

As the 1920s progressed, stations began broadcasting from across Montana. In the small town of Vida, station KGCX hit the airwaves in 1926.¹³ Stations appeared in more urban areas of the state, including Kalispell, Billings,¹⁴ and a city dubbed “The Richest Hill Earth.” Butte, Montana’s hometown station, KGIR, grew to become a part of the state’s first radio network, the Z-Net (pronounced Z-Bar, like a brand), all because of one man—Ed Craney.

7 Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination from Amos ‘n’ and Edward R. Murrow to Wolfman Jack and Howard Stern* (New York: Random House, 1999) 34, 44 .

8 Douglas, *The Early Days of Radio Broadcasting*, 1, 61.

9 The term DXer is taken from the “D” in distance and the “X” for transmitter

10 C. Howard McDonald, *Voices in the Big Sky!: A Concise History of Radio and Television in Montana from the 1920’s to the Present* (Montana: Big M Broadcast Services, 1992), 2.

11 Ronald P. Richards, “Montana’s Pioneer Radio Stations,” from *A Century of Montana Journalism* (Montana: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 1971, 80.

12 Ibid, 80.

13 The station operated from the rear of the First Bank of Vida by E.E. Krebsbach. William Clare Hess, *Pioneer Radio on the Prairies* (California: The Ayres Press, 1980).

14 C. Howard McDonald, 120.

The Genius of Craney

“I’ve never worked. Always played. Broadcasting was always interesting. Every day different. It was an intriguing business, particularly the early years, finding out how to do things,” said Craney in a 1979 newspaper interview.¹⁵ With a career in radio and later television broadcasting that lasted 40 years, Craney not only established himself as a pioneer in Montana broadcasting, but also was held up as a professional with his contributions to family and friends.

Edmund Blodgett “E.B.” or “Ed” Craney was born on February 19, 1905, in Spokane, Washington.¹⁶ His parents were Lucy Blodgett Craney, a schoolteacher from Maine, and James Edmund Craney, a pioneer in the logging industry.¹⁷ James and Lucy traveled from Maine to Washington before ending up in Montana where James worked for the Somers Lumber Company, holding the position of the Great Northern Railroads Superintendent at Swan Lake, Montana. Along with his parents, Craney was raised with his sisters Emily, Martha, and Cora and brother Oliver at the Swan Lake camp.¹⁸ The Craney family lived in a house located on an island in Swan Lake, which was accessible only by steamboat.¹⁹

After the Craney family relocated back to Spokane in 1921, a young Edmund discovered the world of radio broadcasting while involved with the radio club at North Central High School.²⁰ His continued involvement in the club nurtured an interest in building and operating radios.²¹ This interest in radio broadcasting eventually led Craney to build a radio transmitter for KFDC-Spokane, which went on-air on October 18, 1922²² as the first station in Spokane and the 18th in the United States.²³ KFDC was supported by Tom Symons who propositioned Craney to build the station, Once asked, Craney then took classes at the local YMCA to earn his first-class

15 Andrea McCormick, “Wheelings and Dealings Dot Road Trod by Radio,” *The Montana Standard*, March 11, 1979.

16 “Guide to the Edmund B. Craney papers, Montana Historical Society, accessed February 22, 2009.

17 Obituary of Edmund B. Craney, Montpelier, Idaho, April 10, 1991, Idaho State Journal.

18 Martha Craney Wiberg and Edmund B. Craney, *Swan Lake: 1914-1919*, (Montana: The Authors, 1978).

19 Andrea McCormick, “Two Babes Grow Up,” *The Montana Standard*, March 11, 1979.

20 Ed Craney, “There was a fellow by the name of Craney,” C. Howard McDonald, *Voices in the Big Sky: The History of Montana Broadcasting*, Big M Broadcast Services, Volume 5A [audiocassette], 1996.

21 Ian Marquand, “The 100 Most Influential Montanans of the Century,” *The Missoulian*, 1999.

22 Ed Craney, “There was a fellow by the name of Craney,” C. Howard McDonald, *Voices in the Big Sky: The History of Montana Broadcasting*, Big M Broadcast Services, Volume 5A [audiocassette], 1996.

23 Andrea McCormick, “Two Babes Grow Up,” *The Montana Standard*, March 11, 1979.

broadcast license.²⁴

Craney worked in Symons' radio parts store, and was promoted from clerk and janitor to salesperson.²⁵ This sales work brought Craney to the small city of Butte, Montana, in 1927.²⁶ Craney joined a flourishing national interest in radio broadcasting and became a leading early Montana broadcaster. Although radio in the "Treasure State" was new at this time, radio broadcasting itself was still in its infant stages.

From the Ground Up, KGIR—Butte

Craney returned to Butte in 1928 with financial backing from Symons. The Federal Radio Commission (FRC) issued a license and Craney successfully built Butte's first radio station, KGIR. Located on the fourth floor of the Shiner's Furniture building on East Park Street, radio station KGIR officially went on the air at 6 p.m. on January 31, 1929.²⁷ KGIR was located at 1370 kilocycles on the dial, broadcast with a power of 250 watts,²⁸ and shared time with F.A. Buttery's KFBB, in Havre, also a 250 watt station.²⁹ KGIR and KFBB, both 250-watt stations, were required by the government to share time because they shared the same frequency.³⁰ Although reception was noisy, the signal reached approximately 60 miles the small community of Dillon, Montana, on the first broadcast day.³¹

Following the first broadcast, *The Butte Daily Post* announced the official broadcast schedule for KGIR. The station broadcast on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 8 to 12 a.m.; 5 to 6 p.m.; and 7 to 8 p.m. On Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, the station operated from 8 to 12 a.m.; 5 to 6 p.m.; and 7 p.m. to midnight. The Sunday broadcast schedule was 10 p.m. to 12 p.m.; however, on alternate Sundays, the station broadcasted from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

24 Ibid.

25 Ed Craney, "There was a fellow by the name of Craney", C. Howard McDonald, *Voices in the Big Sky: The History of Montana Broadcasting*, Big M Broadcast Services, Volume 5A [audiocassette], 1996.

26 C. Howard McDonald, 12.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 89.

29 Ed Craney, interview by Steve Sevens, February 1977, property of Ron Davis and KBOW/KOPR radio

30 Ronald P. Richards, *The History of Broadcasting in Montana*, 90.

31 "Dillon Radio Fans Enjoy Butte Program," *The Butte Daily Post*, February 1, 1929.

and 7 p.m. to midnight. Those times were “official until further notice.”³² Listeners from all over the Pacific coast, intermountain areas, and mid-west states sent telegrams and messages of thanks to Craney and station KGIR.³³

Messages of congratulations came to KGIR from as far away as San Francisco, California, where Cyrus Kramer wrote, “Your announcements were very clear and distinct, and I want to take this opportunity of congratulation KGIR, and wish you lots of success.”³⁴ Another satisfied listener, Joe J. Nemetz of Ashland, Wisconsin, wrote to the station, “Enjoyed your program in the wee hours of morn[ing].”³⁵ In addition to sending messages of thanks, the listeners wrote to the station for a free copper souvenir that KGIR sent out to the listeners that contacted them.

During this time, the Butte Radio Club petitioned the city council to change the lighting in the uptown Butte area to incandescent lights that would not interfere with the new KGIR signal. In addition, the club helped promote the station’s broadcast of the inauguration of President Herbert Hoover with open houses. The station promoted the broadcast by placing a radio receiver at the Ramsay school.³⁶ The broadcast was successful. Craney’s cost of \$1,045 to air the inauguration was paid by local merchants.³⁷

Even before the station began broadcasting, it overcame a major hurdle—relocation. The Finlen Hotel was to be the original site of the KGIR studio; however, shortly after the license was issued, manager Maurice Weis told Craney that that the station could not be located within the motel.³⁸ The station remained at the Shiner’s Furniture location for approximately 18 months before moving to its larger Broadway Street location.

KGIR was also the first the station in Montana to join the National Broadcasting

32 KGIR Makes Aerial Bow, Receives Much Applause, *The Butte Daily Post*, February 1, 1929.

33 Ibid.

34 Cyrus H. Kramer to KGIR, February 1, 1929, Edmund Craney Papers 1916-1979, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT.

35 Joe J. Nemetz to KGIR, February 1, 1929, Edmund Craney Paper 1916-1979, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT.

36 Mary Murphy, *Mining Cultures: Men, Women, and Leisure in Butte, 1914-41*, (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 171.

37 Ronald P. Richards, *The History of Broadcasting in Montana*, 94-95

38 Andrea McCormick, “KGIR: Blast of Sound Heard ‘Round the Town,” *The Montana Standard*, March 11, 1979.

Company (NBC),³⁹ gaining affiliation with NBC on November 28, 1931.⁴⁰ Initially, it broadcast only a few network programs.⁴¹ NBC granted network affiliation to KGIR because of Montana Senator Burton K. Wheeler's influence.⁴² However, Craney had as much influence on getting KGIR affiliated with the network as Wheeler did. Craney remembered in an interview that it was because of a poker game with Scoop Russell, an employee of the Record Corporation of America (RCA) that brought on the thought of the NBC affiliation. Russell had asked Craney how well he knew his senators—Burton K. Wheeler and Tom Walsh. Eventually Craney asked for wires from the Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Club among others if they wanted NBC in Montana. At this time Craney had just joined the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) and was the only station in the state of Montana to be a member. Tom Walsh eventually took the responses to NBC, but NBC did not want anything to do with Walsh. NBC wanted Wheeler to be obliged to them. Craney ended up meeting Wheeler in his office to personally ask for him to go to NBC, in New York, to ask for their affiliation with KGIR. Wheeler never had to ask for the affiliation as it was granted and eventually “everything worked out okay,” according to Craney. Both Craney and Wheeler began a friendship that lasted many years⁴³ According to Miller, “[Craney] had a great friendship for Senator Burton K. Wheeler,” who would give Craney anything he wanted.⁴⁴

KGIR gained a vast audience, much of it driven by the popularity of Franklin D. Roosevelt's “Fireside Chats.” The “Fireside Chats” aired in 1933 on March 12, May 7, July 24, and October 22.⁴⁵ Craney believed that radio advertising became popular with the chats, which helped make the station profitable.⁴⁶

39 Ibid.

40 Andrea McCormick, “Wheelings and Dealings Dot Road Trod by Radio,” *The Montana Standard*, March 11, 1979.

41 Mary Murphy, “Messenger of the New Age: Station KGIR in Butte,” In *Retracing the Past: Readings in the History of the American People, Volume II Since 1865* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2006), 158.

42 Burton K. Wheeler served as a Montana Senator from 1923 to 1947.

43 C. Howard McDonald, *Voices in the Big Sky!: A Concise History of Radio and Television in Montana from the 1920's to the Present* (Montana: Big M Broadcast Services, 1992), 104-105.

44 Shag Miller, interview by author, Butte, MT, October 15, 2009.

45 Erik Barnouw, *The Golden Web: A History of Broadcasting in the United States 1933-1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 7.

46 Richards, *The History of Broadcasting in Montana*, 94-95.

KGIR Programming

“Radio, when it started out, is what television is today—programming. *Amos ‘n Andy*, *Myrt and Marge*, *Fibber McGee and Molly*,” said Miller when asked about what he thought made KGIR successful. Miller continued to say that Craney did not believe in leaving the studio to do remote broadcasts because such an activity was “just asking for trouble.”⁴⁷ In addition to NBC network programs, KGIR featured local news, recorded music, and sports. The listeners of the station talked about what they heard. Despite Craney’s reticence, they especially appreciated local remote broadcasts where an announcer was on-site broadcasting live, such as the time KGIR aired a live cattle auction that took place 30 miles from Butte near the small town of Wisdom. The cattle auction took place on the Hazelbaker Ranch and was broadcast over the telephone—a partyline. Before the auction began, area residents were contacted by the KGIR staff and advised to avoid using the phone while the 15-minute broadcast took place. This broadcast was a first from a cattle ranch. In addition to KGIR, it was fed to NBC and aired nationally.⁴⁸

KGIR gained a vast audience during its initial years of broadcasting. When the station celebrated its fourth anniversary, KGIR gave listeners an opportunity to express what made the station and programming successful in addition to asking them to express how they would make a successful program. Letters sent to the station conveyed thanks and expressed gratitude. During the fourth anniversary celebration KGIR, one of the most popular programs for listeners was *The Early Gazooks*, a program sponsored by the Crystal Creamery Company of Butte.

Eight-year-old Mary Dorhafer wrote, “with light heart and sunny smile,” a letter to the station expressing how she enjoyed how the Early Gazooks announced the time, which kept her from being late for school as the program aired between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m.⁴⁹ Another listener, Mrs. J.R. Sundquist, sent a letter praising KGIR for *The Early Gazooks* because they “helped to start the day right with their witty jokes and clever songs.” Mrs. Sundquist also expressed

47 Shag Miller, interview by author, Butte, MT, October 15, 2009.

48 Greg McDonald, “Butte Revisited: To Nissler, Z-Bar, and XL,” (n.d.) 4-5.

49 Mary Dorhafer to KGIR, February 1933, Edmund Craney Papers 1916-1979, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT.

how “like Crystal Creamery milk, [The Early Gazooks] keeps us all in good health and good humor.”⁵⁰

Of the letters of thanks sent to KGIR, one of the most heartfelt came from Butte’s James H. Eyan dated February 1, 1933:

Dear Sirs:

I have been a staunch fan of K-G-I-R programs and wish you my sincerest congratulations on your fourth anniversary program and wish you have forty and four more. You are by far, a great asset to the city and Butte can boast of the most aggressive station in Montana.

The program I like best of your many and varied programs is “The Early Morning Gazooks”, [sic] which is the most original program I have had the pleasure of listening to from any radio station. Their wit, their humor, and their musical selections chosen for this program are the eye opener of Butte citizens.

Burke and McPherson, the Gazook announcers, are the smile givers of your station. They start the Butte citizens off in the morning with a smile that seems to predominate all during the day, and it surely a gloomy day that doesn’t begin with a smile.

Mr. Craney, the K-G-I-R staff and [,] advertisers sponsoring this program are to be complimented on such a superb program.

Wishing you the best of luck and continued success.

I remain, sincerely,

James H. Eyan⁵¹

In addition to the Gazooks program, KGIR’s request hour was a listener favorite. According to the listeners, the evening request hour—sponsored by Stratford’s Men Shop—was a favorite because it had “variety, taste, and color” and did not contain a “great deal of salestalk.”⁵²

50 Mrs. J.R. Sundquist to KGIR, February 1, 1933, Edmund Craney Papers 1916-1979, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT.

51 James H. Eyan to KGIR, February 1, 1933, Edmund Craney Papers 1916-1979, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT.

52 Mary Kippner to KGIR, February 3, 1933, Edmund Craney Papers 1916-1979, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT.

Another success story for Craney and KGIR was a venture where the station distributed radio programming to other Montana stations. During the 1930s, programming was difficult to bring into Montana, transcriptions, which are 16-inch disc recordings, made it possible for programs such as *Amos 'n Andy* and *Cecil and Sally* to air in Montana.⁵³ The programs aired on stations through sponsorships, which were a big part of advertising sales. Brand consciousness was built through sponsorships and repetitive radio advertisements for brand name mass-marketed products.⁵⁴ For example, electric Jolly Time Popcorn Poppers, which were not available in stores, were shipped from the Jolly Time Company to listeners who sent \$1 to KGIR.⁵⁵

With programs on the air aimed at both women and men—primarily women during the daytime hours—KGIR gained an audience that enjoyed the advertising as much as the sponsored radio programs. Whether it was through correspondence regarding a contest or simply fan mail, Butte women outnumbered men in responses sent to KGIR by two to one. Montana women paralleled national trends in which more women, primarily from working-class households, composed letters to radio stations.⁵⁶

Craney not only acquired the rights to distribute programs in Montana, but also distributed acetate discs of political speeches created in the KGIR studio to other Montana stations that often contained political speeches.⁵⁷ In fact, in 1947, Craney was awarded a Peabody Award⁵⁸ for his coverage of the state legislature.⁵⁹

Jazz music helped popularize radio because advertisers often preferred it to other genres of music at the time; also, the popularity of jazz music melded together the many different races and nationalities of the listening audience. During the early years of the radio boom, there was a great interest in jazz music. Often times the music was played from phonograph

53 Greg McDonald, 110.

54 Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting 1920-1934* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994) 80.

55 Commercial copy from the Edmund Craney Papers 1916-1979, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT

56 Murphy, "Messenger of a New Age," 159

57 Greg McDonald, 110.

58 A Peabody Award is given to recognize distinguished achievement and meritorious public service by TV and radio stations, networks, producing organizations, and individuals (from <http://www.peabody.uga.edu/>)

59 Obituary of Edmund B. Craney, Montpelier, Idaho, April 10, 1991, Idaho State Journal.

recordings, or singers were brought in to the studio to perform it live. The music was performed in radio studios where long, draping velvet curtains helped to temper the acoustics.⁶⁰ Although jazz music broadcast on KGIR was equally popular, some listeners wanted it gone from the airwaves.⁶¹

Although the programming and content of KGIR pleased most listeners, some were unhappy with the content and did not mind sharing what they felt. For instance, the text of an undated letter from the Ed Craney Papers follows:

Dear KGIR,

Seeing as how Butte is the only station we can get in this locality and the only form of entertainment we have at present is the radio and your programs are very poor[,] please do something about that woman broadcaster who is annoying us immediately. If she can't speak English or learn to talk English, please take her off the air.

Sincerely,

A disgruntled listener⁶²

KGIR and Advertising

The Great Depression helped to make radio popular because in those years it brought families together as they had to watch how the money was spent, which meant that often times they stayed home listening to radio.⁶³ Advertising by local merchants in Butte during the Great Depression years kept KGIR on the air.⁶⁴ In fact, one of the earliest KGIR promotions to involve listener participation involved the giveaway of a new automobile—a “Baby Austin.” This promotion worked through a process in which the money spent at KGIR advertisers was matched with coupons “good for one chauffeur-driven ride” in the aforementioned Austin. These coupons were then put into a raffle and the automobile awarded to a winner at a giveaway held at Butte’s

60 Susan Douglas, *Listening In*, 95

61 Murphy, “Messenger of a New Age,” 160

62 An anonymous letter from the Edmund Craney Papers 1916-1979, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT.

63 George Douglas, *The Early Days of Radio Broadcasting*, 206

64 C. Howard McDonald,

ballroom, the Winter Garden, in 1930.⁶⁵ The concept of the radio promotion was to lure listeners to listen and attract new listeners while still keeping the advertiser satisfied. ⁶⁶

Miller recounted that Craney was a good friend but also a dedicated businessman, an “enigma in the fact that he would do anything for you, but also cut your heart out.” As a hands-on operator, Craney had a special technique for selling. He would call on a potential client to for a meeting that would be held in his office or at his house complete with a buffet of caviar, danish ham, cheeses, and imported beers. When asked how he would describe Craney as a businessman, Miller answered, “superb.”⁶⁷

The superb businessman succeeded with both local and national advertisers. Craney stated that it was hard to interest national advertisers especially in the city of Butte—but also Great Falls, Billings, and Missoula—because of Montana’s radio market.⁶⁸ During the early years of KGIR, the savvy Craney sent Montana-raised turkeys and Flathead cherries to advertising representatives at national firms.⁶⁹

Craney sent Montana-related gifts, such as copper jewelry, to the Chicago and New York offices of The Walker Company who was the Z Network’s national sales representative. Now, those gifts that made their way from Montana to the Chicago and New York offices, but were not meant for the ad reps, but for the advertisers with whom Craney was promoting on the Z Network. In fact, Craney bluntly told the ad reps, “get off your ass and get out there and deliver them to those clients you’re working with.”⁷⁰

Craney knew he had to go to extraordinary lengths to secure national advertising. He stated in a 1977 interview, “Montana has more stations per population...and yet Montana is not a market...it is a high cost market and one that is difficult to get national advertisers to come into...because there just aren’t the people in Montana to make it a market.” He also reflected on

65 “KGIR-Baby Austin Giveaway” caption from photograph, Edmund Craney Photograph Collection (PA80-88, folder 8), Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT.

66 Smulyan, 87-86.

67 Shag Miller, interview by author, Butte, MT, October 15, 2009.

68 Ed Craney, “There was a fellow by the name of Craney”, C. Howard McDonald, *Voices in the Big Sky: The History of Montana Broadcasting*, Big M Broadcast Services, Volume 6B [audiocassette], 1996.

69 Greg McDonald, “Butte Revisited: To Nissler, Z-Bar, and XL,” (n.d.) 10-11.

70 Ibid.

how national advertisers must use stations in small markets in order to reach the listener and how stations cannot depend on local advertising and need the national advertiser.⁷¹

Craney believed that Montana was unlike other states when it came to radio. Factors such as population and area play a role in getting national advertisers, giving states with large cities an advantage. Despite those hurdles, he and his advertising representatives succeeded. Craney recalled, “Frank Reardon had the Pay-N-Save Supermarket and we at KXLF (nee KGIR) and our



KGIR Dr. I.Q. for Mars display at the Pay'n'Save Super Market (Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives, Helena, MT)

other XL stations had worked with wholesalers, brokers, and retailers. Reardon had helped out materially in getting national advertisers to come in and bring their advertising into this market.”⁷²

In 1941, the candy manufacturer Mars had a display in the Pay-N-Save with a sign that boasted of the KGIR broadcasts of *Dr. IQ* that ran on Mondays at 7 p.m.⁷³

In C. Howard McDonald's *Voices in the Big Sky: The History of Montana Broadcasting*,

Craney maintained that a Sego Milk sales

manager from Salt Lake City, Utah, was “after” him so that the company could get more floor space for their products at local supermarkets. Craney gave in and granted the company time for a “Sego Week,” which was his own idea. Through the extra publicity, Sego Milk was granted floor space in the supermarkets around Butte. After the “Sego Week,” other national accounts were secured through the same “Parade of Products” process—that is, if so much advertising was purchased, then a week would be granted for that particular advertiser.⁷⁴ Other national accounts featured in the “Parade of Products” included Coca-Cola with the “Coca-Cola Hospitality Fair”

71 Ed Craney, interview by Steve Sevens, February 1977, property of Ron Davis and KBOW/KOPR radio.

72 Ibid.

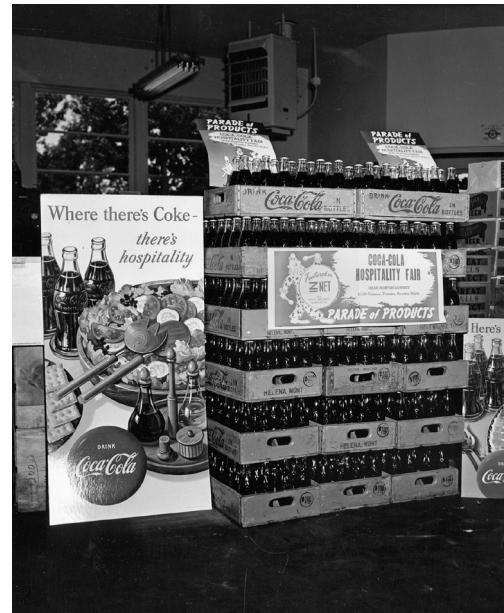
73 “Pay-N Save-Supermarket, Walter P. Burn & Assoc,” Photograph, Edmund Craney Photograph Collection (PA80-88, folder 6), Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT.

74 Ed Craney, There was a fellow by the name of Craney, C. Howard McDonald, *Voices in the Big Sky: The History of Montana Broadcasting*, Big M Broadcast Services, Volume 6B [audiocassette], 1996.

sponsored by the broadcasts of Morton Downey⁷⁵ and Johnson's Car-Plate supplies sponsored by the broadcasts of *Fibber McGee and Molly*.⁷⁶

The station also worked with wholesalers and brokers who helped not only with advertising but also in network programming. In Butte, the Louis S. Kohn Tobacco Company helped Craney to get the American Tobacco account in addition to the Copenhagen "snuff account." During this same interview, Craney also stated, "the station has to make money to be of service to the public. If it isn't making money, it can't serve the public interest convenience and necessity."⁷⁷

Included in the Ed Craney Papers, a public collection of Craney's files that range from 1916-1979, held at the Montana Historical Society in Helena, are advertisements for KGIR. "The Z Net serves Montana's richest markets" says one of these advertisements that depicts a bull wearing a cow bell with the "Z" logo who is saying "Anyway you figure it's three stations for the price of one." Another of these advertisements shows two bulls, one with a Z brand, looking at the Northern Lights with the KRBM, KGIR, and KPFA call letters. The caption reads, "Northern Lights nothing!..That's smart advertising!"⁷⁸ Advertising was one way that Craney brought local and national advertisers to his station, but it was after KPFA and KRBM were added to his Z Network that they would be able to run advertisements on all three of the stations.



Coca Cola Hospitality Fair - Parade of Products (Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives, Helena, MT)

75 "Coca-Cola Hospitality Fair" Photograph, Edmund Craney Photograph Collection (PA80-88, folder 6), Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT.

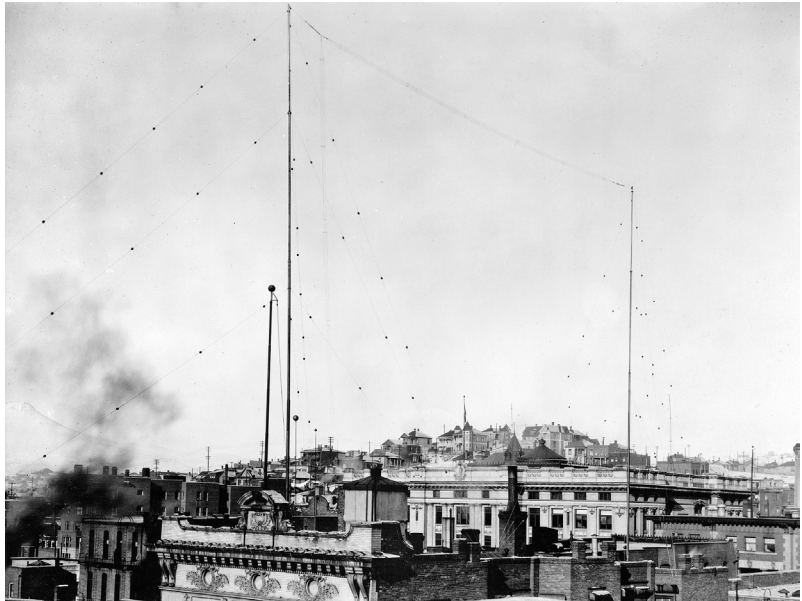
76 "Jonson's Car-Plate" Photograph, Edmund Craney Photograph Collection (PA80-88, folder 6), Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT.

77 Ibid.

78 Z Net advertisement sketches from the Edmund Craney Papers 1916-1979, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT

Ascent of the Z Network

At the Broadway Street location, KGIR was located on the fifth floor of U.S. Senator William A. Clark's former office and remained at the location until the station was moved. Craney wanted to expand the station and gain more reach—for listeners and advertisers. With the idea of expanding KGIR, Craney was faced with choosing between moving and expanding the station or to remain at the current location. Although he had a vast knowledge of radio engineering,



Antennas atop the Broadway Street building where KGIR was located. (Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives, Helena, MT)

Craney consulted an outside engineer, Robert Martin of Paw Paw, Michigan, who discovered the “marshy area that would be a perfect antenna site” and “provide good ground conductivity needed for AM radio.”⁷⁹

According to Greg McDonald, Symons, Craney's business partner, visited the Nissler Junction site and believed that “Craney had taken a leave of his senses” because of the remoteness of the site. Following on the advice of Martin, Craney purchased the land at Nissler Junction—located approximately eight miles from Butte and 18 miles from Anaconda—and moved KGIR to the site. At the new location, KGIR was operating with more power than before because of the new 5,000-watt transmitter that was located at the site—dubbed “Shady Acres.”⁸⁰ As Craney purchased other radio stations around Montana, he sought to form a regional network

Supported by a large audience from Butte and surrounding areas, KGIR was received well—in both popularity and a clear signal. In 1947, Craney connected a series of stations

⁷⁹ Greg McDonald, “Butte Revisited: To Nissler, Z-Bar, and XL,” (n.d.) 1.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 2-16

across Montana with KGIR, creating a network dubbed the “XL” network⁸¹. Preceding the “XL” assigned call letters, the Z Network began with three of Craney’s holdings, KGIR in Butte, KPFA in Helena, KRBM in Bozeman. Later he added KXLK in Great Falls and KXLL in Helena.⁸²

With Craney’s intelligence of radio sales and his unrivaled approach to selling, he could see that his stations could be sold nationally. Craney wanted a unique identifier and after searching through broadcast journals, he came up with a combination of call letters that were

not in use. Those call letters were all “XL” signs. The sign that Craney devised was unique because he started at the end of the alphabet instead of at the beginning, which was not a new tactic. Craney knew that the letter “Z” was distinctive when forming his Z Network because of its deviance. Craney stated that the reason he chose the Z was because he wanted to identify Montana, but



KGIR Studio Exterior at Nissler Junction (Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives, Helena, MT)

to also differentiate his holdings from others in hopes to bring in national advertising revenues.⁸³ For his radio operations, Craney petitioned the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to change the call letters of three of his stations, KGIR, KPFA, and KRBM, so that he could get the “XL” call sign for all of his holdings. Craney’s string of “XL” stations, all NBC affiliates, were known as the Z Network.⁸⁴

All stations in the Z Network began their broadcast day with the following poem entitled “Today” by Ella Wheeler Wilcox:

81 Michael Malone and Richard B. Roeder, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1976), 278.

82 C. Howard McDonald, 120-121

83 Greg McDonald, “Butte Revisited: To Nissler, Z-Bar, and XL,” (n.d.) 7.

84 R. Ehresman, *Going Forward with Radio in the State of Montana Presented by Z Network: The Montana Network*, (Illinois: National Radio Personalities, 1948)

“With every rising of the sun,
Think of your life as just begun.

The past has cancelled and buried deep
All yesterdays. There let them sleep.

Concern yourself with but today
Grasp it, and teach it to obey

Your will and plan. Since time began
Today has been the friend of man.

You and today, A soul sublime
And the great heritage of time.

With God himself to bind the Twain,
Go forth, brave heart, attain, attain.”⁸⁵

National Advertising and the Z Net

Pacific Northwest Broadcasters, also Craney’s brainchild, was a sales network located in Butte. Not only did the network help with the Montana Z Network holdings, but also with Craney’s out-of-state holdings. Craney owned KXL in Portland, Oregon; KXLY in Spokane, Washington; KING in Seattle, Washington; and KXLE in Ellensburg, Washington. The sales network helped advertisers to get their name and their products on the Montana, Washington, and Oregon markets by buying time on all the stations.⁸⁶

Although Craney established the Pacific Northwest Broadcasters in order to bring national advertisers to his local markets, the success also came from the stringent management techniques that all stations of the Z Network followed. In the Craney Papers is plastic-comb booklet, *A Discussion of Radio Techniques*, defining the principles of copywriting and musical programming. All of the information was “compiled from Professor Eldon C. Barr’s XL Station discussions” and was “intended to serve as a guide for all XL Station Personnel.” The booklet

85 “Today,” sign-on poem each morning for stations of the Z Net, Edmund Craney Papers 1916-1979, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT.

86 Richards, *The History of Broadcasting in Montana*, 102.

was so revered that plainly stated on the cover is a note that reads “property of the XL stations and not to be removed from the station premises without express permission.”⁸⁷

To be successful and serve the client, advertising copy must be believed and remembered. The booklet gave the copywriter a system for composing successful commercials. With successful commercials, each should do the following: (1) attract attention, (2) create interest, (3) sell appreciation of value, (4) create desire, and (5) appeal for action.⁸⁸ The five steps for successful commercials are a classic example of Alan H. Monroe’s Motivated Sequence where people are inspired to take action.

In the guide, Barr noted that store traffic increased due to exposure on the XL stations. He emphasized that store traffic consisted of the 26-40 age group and the housewives.⁸⁹ The housewife played a major role in radio advertising and programs. Because women played a major role in the house, many advertisers began to target the housewife through formats to draw in female listeners. Through the newly devised formats, women became targets for advertising campaigns that promoted products for the home.⁹⁰ The Z Network focused their advertising copy on reaching their demographic.

For instance, KXLF aired “The Modern Betsy Ross,” which was about the “smart homemaker and inspiration of America’s fighting forces of 1943.” The program mainly focused on questions from around the home and provided the housewife with food preparation shortcuts, homemaking tips to fit the family budget, and beauty tips for extra busy lives.⁹¹

The commercial copy went through a vigorous process from the writing of a commercial for a specific time of the day—i.e. listeners are relaxed in the afternoons and in a sophisticated listening mood during the evening hours—to the weather at that time of the day. Other notable points from the techniques manual include that the client’s name be mentioned two times if not three, the locality of listening audience be taken into account when writing the copy, and that the

87 Eldon C. Barr, *A Discussion of Radio Techniques*, Edmund Craney Papers 1916-1979, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT.

88 Ibid, 4.

89 Ibid, 9-10.

90 Smulyan, 86-88.

91 Program cue sheet from the Edmund Craney Papers 1916-1979, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT

repetition and jingles—or music beds—be up to the commercial quality.⁹²

Essence of National Advertising

“Traffic through the highways of the sky” is just one way to describe radio advertising in its formative years. Radio advertising was relatively new as advertisers had previously used newspapers, billboards, and magazines. There was an ability to build a “name consciousness” where an advertiser’s name could be mentioned as many times during a sponsored broadcast. In addition, the national advertising helped spread the message about the low-cost products being pitched. With national advertising in forefront of radio promotion, the low-cost items promoted during this time had to capture the listeners and persuade each of them to buy the product. In fact, NBC pioneered the sponsored radio program and did their best at convincing the advertisers that such advertising could boost sales and bring in more revenue.⁹³

Because radio played a large part into the daily lives of families, radio advertisements were frequently dubbed “guests of the home.”⁹⁴ These guests of the home that were heard from the radio were those that produced successful programs—that were all sponsored by different companies and their products.⁹⁵ With the advent of the advertising agency, many advertisers were able to thrust their name and products and upon the listening audience. Although the audience may have been limited in radio’s early years, the medium would expand into one of the greatest ways to get a product name out to a vast audience.

Analysis: Craney as The Voice of Montana

How did Craney become the voice of Montana? Craney built his legacy from the ground up and that is just one of the reasons why this man was so successful and has his place in Montana history. Like KGIR’s station moniker, “The Voice of Montana,” Craney also holds that title as a Montana broadcaster. The genius of Craney as a businessman and as a salesman are

⁹² Barr, *A Discussion of Radio Techniques*,

⁹³ Smulyan, 79-81.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 86-87.

⁹⁵ Erik Barnouw, *The Golden Web: A History of Broadcasting in the United States 1933-1953*, 18-19.

explained above; however, because of his willingness to meet to his client's and listeners' needs, the man made a name for himself. With advertising and the agency being two of the greatest factors to boost station revenues across the nation, I must also discuss what made it possible for Craney as Montana broadcaster to be successful—the growth of the radio station.

Craney began KGIR in a small studio located in Shiner's Furniture with only 250 watts of power to emit the signal to Butte and the surrounding areas. With only 250 watts of power, the signal strength of KGIR was not sufficient. Again building upon his ideas, Craney then moved the station to a new location on Broadway Street. While at this location, the KGIR studios were not only larger than before, but also a new 500-watt transmitter beamed the signal farther than before. From 250 watts to 500 watts, station KGIR was on the rise. In the world of broadcasting, I can tell you that the increase of power from 250 to 500 watts is going to get the signal further and bring in a larger listening audience.



KGIR transmitter and control, 121 West Broadway, Butte, Montana, 1930. (Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives, Helena, MT)

Craney's holdings and ideas were only getting bigger and better as time progressed—especially with the formation of the Z Network. The Z Network put Craney at the forefront of Montana broadcasting. Not only was the network unique in the fact that it used the letter “Z” in its name, but also because it sparked curiosity for being such an odd but successful sign.

Eventually KGIR was relocated about seven miles west of Butte at Nissler Junction where a new plant was built on land that Craney purchased after having it surveyed to ensure that the then barren and swampy area would benefit his signal strength. The KGIR studios were moved to the Nissler Junction location where a new 5,000-watt transmitter was also housed. With the increase in power and land, Craney's radio operations were growing to serve the Montana residents. With the new transmitter and the newly constructed plant west of Butte,

Craney's Butte holdings were expanding to better serve the community and the listeners.

Although I have only focused on the three locations for KGIR, I can say that even in the years following KGIR's name change to KXLF that Craney continued to successfully bring in listeners and advertisers. The KXLF (nee KGIR) radio station moved from Nissler Junction back into the city of Butte in 1956 where it remained until the early 1980s. After the move, the station was housed at The Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad depot on South Montana Street. Craney again went from big to bigger when he combined his radio and television holdings under one roof, which is reminiscent of the way he built his business. Craney started out with one radio station in 1929 and eventually ended up with five radio stations in the state Montana—as well as some out-of-state holdings and his later television holdings. What made Craney successful as a broadcaster is the fact that his radio holdings grew in size and gained more power, which led him to form the Pacific Northwest Broadcasters to gain national advertisers to promote products on his stations.

The role that advertising played on Craney's stations also lends itself to the success of Craney as businessman. As mentioned above, Craney did begin the Pacific Northwest Broadcasters to better the relationship between national advertisers in large markets and those of much smaller markets, like Montana. After KGIR's initial broadcast in late January 1929, Craney had already begun to promote his station through asking listeners who received the radio signal to write to the station for a copper souvenir. As mentioned above, letters of congratulations poured in to the station from all over the Pacific Northwest. What was Craney doing with this early promotion? He was marketing his station in a way that people from around the region could listen in and hear programming, but to promote products through advertising so that they could be brought into other regions. With Craney's Z Network Parade of Products, not only did the promotional idea work for the advertising clients, but also displays were set up in stores, which advertised on Craney's stations, with signs displaying the network logo and the Parade of Products moniker. During the Parade of Products, not only were the advertisers having their products pitched on Craney's stations, but also they were receiving a weeks worth of

free airtime. By getting the local and national advertising clients to buy time on his network of stations, Craney was ingenious in getting the advertiser to run a schedule of commercials. If the local advertiser or national advertising representative was thinking of buying time, Craney knew how to persuade them to buy the time—he would bring each of them together and hold special lunches with elegant foods and beer.

When it came to Craney making a name for himself in the broadcast industry, he did so with his network of stations and regional sales office, but it was due to Craney's early advertisements for KGIR in Butte and KPFA in Helena. When the two stations joined in 1937, they formed what Craney called the Z Network. In the Craney Papers are copper advertisements for the stations that depict cattle—mostly bulls—in various states with one reading “In Montana we brand cattle, why not networks?” and another that boasts the network was “still showing results.” With Craney marketed KGIR in Butte, “Montana’s largest city,” while KPFA in Helena was “Montana’s Capital City.” With the display of the two Montana cities and the bull on each of the copper advertisements, Craney was saying that because of the strength and tenacity of the stations that the commercials heard by the listening audience would double advertisers’ results.

Another of the copper advertisements from the Craney papers proudly boasts that because of the two Z Network stations, listeners in the Butte and Helena areas depended on the radio for their means of entertainment and information. By featuring programs sponsored by either local or national advertisers, the listening audience was prompted to purchase those products. With Craney at the helm of his Z Network, by modernizing the radio facilities, acquiring more stations, and increasing the power of those stations, he became the voice of Montana.

The Craney Legacy Lives On

There is another chapter to the Ed Craney story, though there is just room here for just a brief overview. With the rise of KGIR, the Z Network, and the Pacific Northwest Broadcasters, Craney brought radio to the city of Butte. Twenty three years later the genius brought television to “The Mining City.” Butte’s first television station, KXLF-TV 6, officially went on the air on

August 14, 1953, from the upstairs of Frank Reardon's Pay-N-Save Supermarket on Harrison Avenue. The television station remained at the downtown location until 1957 when Craney purchased the former Milwaukee Railroad Depot on South Montana Street, which became the home of both KXLF-AM and the television station. KXLF-TV, dubbed the Continental Divide Station, was also Montana's first television station.

In 1958, Craney founded the Greater Montana Foundation to improve the Montana broadcasting industry and supply awards to Montana broadcasters. The Jim Manning Society was also established by Craney to award the best salespeople of the year.⁹⁶

In his later years, Craney fell victim to macular degeneration that caused him to lose his eyesight. With a yearning to know what was happening in the world, Craney would often pay people to come to his Nissler Junction residence and read him the newspaper.⁹⁷ In her letter of January 21, 1991, to Andrea McCormick, Craney's daughter-in law, Darlene ("Dolly") stated that Ed's condition had worsened and reached a point where he was confined to a nursing home in Montpelier, Idaho. This letter also states that, "The staff loves Ed and treats him royally. Despite his inability to communicate, due in part to his deteriorating health, Craney remained "gracious."⁹⁸

Edmund Blodgett Craney, in his own words, "departed Planet Earth," on March 6, 1991, in Montpelier, Idaho; per his request, no funeral or service was held. He said that when "he kicked the bucket," there was to be no "fuss," and the champagne was to be opened to celebrate his life on "Cloud 89."⁹⁹

From an astute engineer who built a radio empire in Montana to that "little old guy" who fixed Andrea McCormick Eggo Waffles for breakfast,¹⁰⁰ Craney was a man of great genius, both benevolent and shrewd. Craney's contributions to Montana, including KGIR, the Z Bar Network, the "XL" holdings, and his television interests, can be summed up with a statement

96 Edmund B. Craney Montana Broadcasters Hall of Fame Nomination Form, Edmund Craney Papers 1916-1979, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT.

97 Shag Miller, interview by author, Butte, MT, October 15, 2009.

98 Darlene Craney to Andrea McCormick, January 21, 1991, property of Andrea McCormick.

99 Darlene Craney to "Ed's friends," n.d., Ed Craney Papers, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana.

100 Andrea McCormick, interview by author, Butte, MT, April 27, 2009.

that Shag Miller made during our interview. Miller stated that because of the money that Craney's broadcast operations brought to the state of Montana that money still continues to help broadcasting in the state.

Eighty years ago, the first radio station broadcast a signal from Butte, Montana, and left its mark on Butte and Montana broadcasting history. Well before Craney's death, Butte began a long decline as copper production waned. Outside the now-vacant Exerdance Building, the former location of Shiner's Furniture and KGIR's first studio, a plaque adorns the wall commemorating Craney's life. The plaque, which was presented by the Greater Montana Foundation, reads (without punctuation): "Montana broadcasting pioneer E.B. Craney established in this building Shiner's Furniture Company KGIR. Butte's first radio station on the air January 31, 1929 Presented by the Greater Montana Foundation to honor the memory of its founder E.B. Craney (1905-1991).

Craney's legacy survives and is summed up in the Margaret Moore Meuttman poem "Survival,"¹⁰¹ read at the end of each broadcast day on the stations of the Z Network:

A thousand years from this tonight
When Orion climbs the sky,
The same swift snow will still the roofs,
The same mad stars run by.

And who will know of China's War,
Or poison gas in Spain?
The dead—they'll be forgotten, lost,
Whether they lose or gain.

Of all the brilliant strategies
Of war-lords now alive,
Perhaps a Chinese iris vase
Of porcelain may survive—

Perhaps a prayer, perhaps a song,
Fashioned of love and tears,
But only beauty—only truth
Will last a thousand years.¹⁰²

101 "Survival" is from Ted Malone's *American Album of Poetry*:

102 Sign-off poem for the Z Net stations, Edmund Craney Papers 1916-1979, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT.

