



WCGHA Newsletter

MARCH
2023

201 LOCUST ST., MCMINNVILLE, TN 37110



President

Ann Brown



Vice President

Mary Don Bixby



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Past President

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**Come Join Us
March 18,
2-4 p.m.**

**“Moonshine,
Anyone?”
By Kevin Molloy**

We will meet in the Early Voting Room
located at the back of the Warren
County Administration building,
201 Locust Street

No refreshments will be served

Ann Brown, WCGHA President

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Wow! What a great meeting in February—we had one of the largest number of attendees (if not the largest) ever!

We were excited to present Mr. James Fennell his Pioneer Families of Warren County certificate. Mr. Fennell is the oldest recipient of this certificate and it was an honor to have him and his family at our meeting.

If you missed Dr. Norman Rone's stories on early radio in Warren County, it was recorded by Ben Lomand Connect and WCPI. We will publish dates when they become available on our Facebook page. The radio personality posters created by Tom Miller were "frosting on the cake". The posters can be viewed in the Association office.

Thanks to everyone in our team who helped make this month a success!

Ann

Calendar of Upcoming Events

- Mar 18th—Members Meeting, "Moonshine Anyone?", by Kevin Molloy
- Apr 6th—Board of Directors Meeting
- Apr 15th—Members Meeting, B & P Lamp Supply by the Barnes Family
- May 11th—Board of Directors Meeting
- May 20th—Members Meeting, TBD
- Jun 8th—Board of Directors Meeting
- Jun 17th—Members Meeting, Beersheba Springs by Charlotte Boyd
- Jul 6th—Board of Directors Meeting
- Jul 15th—Members Meeting, Show & Tell
- Aug 10th—Board of Directors Meeting
- Aug 19th—Members Meeting, TBD
- Sep 7th—Board of Directors Meeting
- Sep 16th—Members Meeting, "The Barnes Brothers" by Lucas Holt
- Oct 12th—Board of Directors Meeting
- Oct 21st—Members Meeting, TBD
- Nov 9th—Board of Directors Meeting
- Nov 18th—Members Meeting, TBD
- December—Christmas Social

If you have ideas for programs, Mary Don would love to hear from you!



Warren County Radio with Dr. Norman Rone



Front Row (L-R): Bill Zechman, Joe Kuhn, Tom Miller, Dr. Norman Rone, Richard Myers, Chuck Haston, Tom Beckwith
Back Row (L-R): Bryan Kell, Anthony Griffith



WBMC Early Photos



We enjoyed seeing mementos that other guests had saved from their radio days!



Thanks to Dr. Norman Rone and Tom Miller for "Preserving Warren County History"



Tom Miller created these beautiful posters of radio personalities. These posters can be viewed in the Association's Photo Archives. Posters are available for the following: Aaron Durham, Audie Ashworth, Ben Vaughn, Bill Zechman, Bob Reed, Bryan Kell, Bud Dearman, Bud Godwin, Charlie Roney, Charlie Wilson, Chick Brown, Chris Lane Alexander, Chuck Haston, Chuck Mullican, Earl Dugan, Ed Whiteaker, Gerald Phillips, Hal Durham, Harold Roney, Ivey Hillis, Jason Hillis, Jay Walker, Jeff Barnes, Jeff Edwards, Jerald Jones, Jim Eastman, Joe Kuhn, Joyce Knowles, Justin Reed, Kelly Marlowe, Larry O'Kain, Ibbie St. John, Lynn Bouldin, Mark Parkhurst, Monte Hale, Norman Rone, Paul Smith, Plas Taylor, Raymond Adcock, Red Winston, Rena Hayes, Rob Jones, Rocky McKnight, Ron Martin, Roy Crocker, Royce Richards, Sammy Hale, Shane Brock, St. John and Brady, Tollye Wayne, Tom Beckwith, Tom Miller,



I. D. Byars (*In Focus—Southern Standard, May 5, 1989*)

One of the prominent early members of radio in Warren County was I. D. Byars. This article from the Southern Standard provides a fascinating look into this Warren Countian.

Tonsils provide escape

by Greg Rains, Standard Staff

Retired McMinnville radio and television engineer I. D. Byars escaped death in pre-World War II hostilities because of his tonsils.

He had passed all of his preliminary entrance exams for the Navy and was ready to start basic training with other new recruits in July of 1940.

However, his swollen, infected tonsils threw a monkey wrench in his plans. He failed the Navy physical and was sent home to have his tonsils removed.

By the time he returned, the recruits he started out with were so far ahead that he was reassigned. Meanwhile, they graduated and went on to their first assignment—Pearl Harbor.

History records that on Dec. 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor without warning or provocation.

Approximately 2500 American soldiers, sailors, and Marines were killed in the raid including Byars' good friend, Warren Crim.

Crim became Warren County's first casualty of the second world war.

"I would have been with them," Byars said shaking his head. "But those old, mean tonsils saved my life."

Some 48 years after the fact, he still can't believe how blind-fate stepped in and saved his life.

"We would have trained together and would have been stationed together at Pearl Harbor had the Navy not sent me back to have my tonsils out", he observed as he sat in front of an elaborate audio/video console at this home in the Smyrna community of eastern Warren County.

Byars escaped death at Pearl Harbor, but having his tonsils removed did not mean a fancy hospital room and plenty of ice cream.



I. D. Byars, who recently retired from Channel 8 as a television engineer, displays some of the medals he earned during his Navy days. Byars joined the Navy a few days before the outbreak of World War II. In the lower photo, he scans the dials and digital displays of an elaborate audio/video communications console. Byars built a career in radio and television engineering operations. (Greg Rains photo)



He came back to McMinnville to visit Dr. C. M. Clark.

"I told Dr. Clark I needed my tonsils out," said Byars, raising his chin. Dr. Clark looked at them and said, "Yea, we'll get rid of those things."

"He sat me down on what looked like a milking stool, threw my head back against

the wall, whacked those two tonsils out, and said, "That'll be \$25, please."

"After they quit bleeding he sent me home," added Byars.

In today's terms that might sound like harsh treatment, admits Byars, but losing his tonsils was a small price to pay for the radio/electronics training he planned to get while he was in the Navy. This was his dream.

Later in life, Byars earned a GED, a two-year bookkeeping/accounting and a four-year degree in evangelism from David Lipscomb. But as a lad he never had the opportunity to finish his schooling.

He saw the Navy radio school as his ticket to learning a profession he had always admired.

As a boy of fifteen he had become interested in radio after visiting Roy Pearsall's radio shop around 1938. Byars said he would drop in just to hear Pearsall Roy talk to other ham operators across the country.

Pearsall was the first person in Warren County to get a ham operator's license. Later on, Byars became the second Warren Countian to get a ham radio operator's license.

"That's when the communications bug first bit," Byars related.

After finishing basic training, Byars was assigned to the U.S.S. Wyoming for duty in the Caribbean.

While there, he received word that radio operators were needed for aircraft patrols and put in an application. Along with his keen interest in radio communications, he had an interest in aviation.

When Byars received his transfer orders to a post in Iceland, he felt his hopes of being accepted for duty as an aviation radio operator had been dashed. He was wrong.

He crossed the Atlantic on the U.S.S. Howard, "a four-stacker" World War I destroyer. He again escaped death when the Howard's sister ship, the U.S.S. Reuben James, was sunk by a German U-boat.

When an oil tanker, the U.S.S. Celena, was damaged by enemy fire, Byars' ship was assigned was to escort the ship to the Brooklyn Ship Yard for repairs.

Little did Byars know that fate had once again stepped in—this time guiding him back to the

states where he picked up his mail and discovered his orders to begin training at Norfolk, Va., for aviation duty.

He recalls the war was tough for all soldiers, and radio operators assigned to aviation duty were no exception. They worked 12-to-15 hour shifts and their greatest concern was giving away an aircraft's position to the enemy.

He made chief radioman in 1944 and soon thereafter married his childhood sweetheart, the former Evelyn Boyd. He was 22. She was 20. They will celebrate 46 years of marriage July 23 of this year.

Byars was stationed in Bermuda when he received word of the birth of his first daughter, Gloria Jean on April 21, 1945. Two years later, his second daughter, Carolyn Jane was born Aug. 20, 1947.

Although it seemed like an eternity, Byars said the war in Europe ended fairly quickly and then all the resources of the Allies were focused on Japan.

He received orders to transfer to the Philippines and while at sea the ship received word of the Japanese surrender.

For the most part Byars' time in the Philippines was uneventful, except for the fact that he met and made friends with another fellow from McMinnville who would play a key role in one of his future endeavors. More on this later.

In August of 1946, his six-year enlistment with the Navy ended and he retired from active duty and joined the reserves.

He returned home and started Byars Radio and Appliance. During this time he learned to fly cloth-covered airplanes on the GI bill.

When he received his first-class engineer's license from the Federal Communication Commission, he sold his business and went to work at WHAL in Shelbyville around 1950.

From there he went to WDBL in Springfield and then to WSIX in Nashville.

While at WSIX the Navy called him back into service for duty in French Morocco, North Africa, in the Korean War.

When he returned in 1951, he went to work at WMMT, now WAKI. He worked for the WMMT owners through the early '50s, and even installed a station for them in Sparta around 1953.

“After working at and installing several radio stations throughout the country, I thought it was about time for me to start making some money and own a station,” said Byars. “So I got the idea of putting another station in McMinnville.”

He did a frequency check and came up with 960 on the AM dial. He then obtained the proper license for an AM station which would have twice the power of WMMT.

For the necessary financial support he teamed up with several prominent citizens including well-known local radio announcer, Joe Mathis and that old Navy buddy he had been stationed with in the Philippines in 1945, Franklin H. “Chick” Brown.

Brown was the editor of the SOUTHERN STANDARD at the time. When Brown left for the radio venture, Rayford Davis became editor of the newspaper.

WBMC-AM went on the air May 1, 1955. The “BMC” stood for Byars, Mathis Corporation—they being the only two with professional radio experience. Local talent heard over the airwaves included Jim Eastman, Sammy Hale, Willard Orrick, Gerald Phillips, Roy Crocker, Bill Round, Hal Durham, Dr. Norman Rone, and Joe Kuhn.

“When I think of I. D. Byars, I always think of a highly qualified engineer,” recalled Rone in a recent conversation.

“He was very serious-minded, I would even say a perfectionist,” added Rone.

Byars built young Rone his first crystal set, related the optometrist. Rone and his friends would use the set to broadcast news and music to the neighborhood.

Rone had no idea a few years later he would again be broadcasting on equipment engineered by I. D. Byars, but this time it was not pretend. It was a real radio station.

Byars also taught Kuhn, now a public relations officer for a local bank, how to use the control board and other equipment at the station. Kuhn had his own country music program on WBMC.

“When I think of I. D. Byars, I think of the good ole days of radio,” said Kuhn. “We didn’t have all these carts and pre-recorded stuff they have now. It was live.”

Kuhn said in the electronics and engineering field, the former Navy radioman was one of the best he had ever encountered.

Byars liked installing radio stations, but he didn’t like the day-to-day maintenance. He sold his share of WBMC to Cowan Oldham and moved on.

“I ended it with WBMC and eventually got into television,” he said with a smile which seemed to indicate that he had no regrets.

According to Byars, there is not much difference between radio and television electronically, so it was quite natural that his next venture would be in television.

He started installing television equipment and soon thereafter received an offer from WDCN-TV in October 1970 to work in Nashville.

WDCN is owned by Metro Board of Education so Myers had his work cut out for him when he started out there because most of the equipment was donated.

“Being part of the school system, we had to take what was left,” he recalled. “Lots of times, our equipment was given to us by WSM, WSIX, or WLAC. For tax purposes it was best for them to donate their old equipment to us.”

When WDCN-TV started out it was channel 2, and WSIX, now WKRN, was channel 8.

“About 1973 or ‘74 we really got a break,” began Byars. “General Electric bought WSIX AM, FM and TV. They were channel 8. We were channel 2.

“For some reason, they could not get as much per minute for their commercials being on a lower band,” he said.

General Electric struck a deal with WDCN to change frequencies. GE gave WDCN three-quarters of a million dollars and agreed to maintain the public television station’s transmitting equipment for 99 years at a dollar per year.

“We saw—not stars in our crown—but color. So we petitioned the FCC for this swap,” said Byars.

WDCN added color cameras and ultra modern equipment, and during a construction slump, built a two million dollar television complex.

Before the swap Byars recalled how he played a key role in the station’s May 1971 Action Auction. The studios would not hold all the

merchandise, he noted.

“We went over to the state fairgrounds and rented the women’s building over there,” he recounted. “This was to be one of my greatest challenges in television.”

There was very little time to prepare the building for the broadcast—less than 24 hours.

“We had to revamp the entire building. We had to install a light grid and had to string cables all over the place. You had to have a lot of light in those days.”

“It was more or less just strung together. I don’t know how we ever got it on the air.”

Amazingly, the program did go on the air without incident, he summarized.

Byars retired from WDCN two years ago at the age 65 and now occupies himself with a ham radio operation. He is a member of the Warren County Ham Radio Operators Club. He tries to keep his hand in the communications business as much as possible these days. After all, he had to give up his tonsils to get the training.



Special Event For Warren County Pioneer Family by Marie Blair

At the WCGHA meeting on February 18, James Fennell was awarded a Pioneer Family certificate as a descendant of Elisha Pepper II. Elisha Pepper II is the 2 great grandfather of James , who was also recognized as being the oldest applicant we have approved as a descendant of a Warren County Pioneer Ancestor. At 98 years old, he currently resides in Coffee County Tennessee, where he still drives, and enjoys reading current magazines more than watching tv.

James is the ninth member of his family to receive a Pioneer Family Certificate. He is the son of Harmon (1884-1945) and Myrtle Belle Roach Fennell (1891-1991). Other certificate recipients in the family have been James's nieces and nephews. Wendell Tally was the first one to receive a certificate (Wendell's mother, Era Belle, was a sister to James). Wendell's wife, Sue, did the research for the certificate, and they wanted to share the family history with cousins. Other members of James's family who have received certificates are: Sharen Townsend McNalt, Timothy Dale Hughes, Germaine Charles Bush II, William Wayne Crawley, Cindy Lou Crawley Pearson, Donna Jean Crawley Mills Locke and Ronald Rigsby. Applications have recently been received from additional family members and are in process with the Pioneer Family Committee.

James is the middle child of Harmon and Myrtle Belle Roach Fennell. He has one younger sister, Joyce, who is still living in Texas. According to James, he and his siblings were born in the Centertown community of Warren County, in a large white house owned by his parents. The house is still standing, and is located across from the old Centertown Bank. In addition to James, Joyce and Era Belle, other siblings were Mamie, Dawson, Ralph, Addie, Melba and Lois. During that time, Mr. Fennell's father ran a store in Centertown.

The Fennells closed the store in the 1930's, and the 1940 census shows the Fennell family living on the Centertown to Jacksboro Road. James said his family rented the farm; his father farmed and his mother took care of the family. At some time, James's mother worked as a telephone operator. James was not sure where the telephone office was operated, but says it was when there were crank telephones that were battery operated. There was no electricity in the area at that time and the family used oil lamps. James related a story about his mother driving a 1925 Model T car when they went into McMinnville. James said he was a young boy, there was a large hill on the drive and he was always afraid because the car would barely make it up the hill. He thought they might not make it home.

James began his first year of school attending Crossroads School (no longer standing). According to James, the school was located on the road between Centertown and Jacksboro. It was a one room school, with one teacher, and he walked from home to school with other children living in the area. James's first teacher was Mamie Davenport (married Herschel Hale) and the next teachers he remembers were Ms. Carrick and Ms. Irene Grandstaff. Later James attended Centertown school. Memories from the Centertown School were Mr. Arledge as principal and Ms. Jettie Vinson as a teacher. James actually graduated from high school in Coffee County when the family moved there around 1942.

James shared other memories that gave us a peek back to his younger life and the times. He talked about Arthur Lorange "making the best molasses ever made", blackberries he picked and sold for 10 cents a gallon, eggs his mother sold for 12 cents a dozen, bread, not sliced, selling for 5 cents a loaf. He spoke of the family attending church at Pleasant View and mentioned neighbors such as Amos Lance, George Rigsby and Ora Hillis. He also mentioned the Busey family and their daughters, Sophia and Audrey.

James was inducted into the Army at Camp Forrest near Tullahoma in August 1942. During his World War II service, he and 29 others were taken as POWs in Germany. James said it was a scary time and no way to tell one day from the next. They were able to escape and eventually returned to their regular unit. He was discharged in May 1945 and returned to Coffee County.

After the war, James was married to Christine Watterson. At some time, he and Christine moved to Kalamazoo, Michigan and he worked for the Brundage Company for 36 years. When he retired, they returned to Coffee County. James was married to his wife of 75 years until her death in 2020.

James seemed to enjoy sharing these remembrances and our ride through the Centertown Community.

Congratulations again to James and his family for their efforts in preserving their family heritage.



Donations from Wendell & Sue Talley

The WCGHA presented their "History Preservation" Award to Wendell & Sue Talley for their donations to the Warren County Archives and the Warren County Fair Association. Ann Brown accepted an 1890 store ledger from the store at Daylight where the Post Office was located. Regan Kelsey accepted a scale from the store which was owned by Wendell's Dad, Howard, for many years. The Talley's are to be commended for their efforts to preserve Warren County's history and we appreciate their contributions to these organizations.



(L-R) Ann Brown, Sue Talley, Wendell Talley, Regan Kelsey. (Photo courtesy of Marie Blair)



Office News

Our office volunteers logged 192.25 hours this month—thanks to Evelyn, Bonita and Mary for keeping the office running smoothly. J. B., Allen, and Kathy have been making good progress on scanning High's records. Marie, Carolyn, Bettye, Mary Don, Cheryl, Wanda and Scarlett have also been in to work on various projects.

Research

We have four visitors this month researching yearbooks, Cunningham, Womack, Rock Island, and Locke Bend Road.

Contributions

Tennessee Convicts: Early Records of the State Penitentiary, Vol I and Vol II	Resource Library	Vol I—WCGHA purchase Vol II—Chuck Sherril
Middle TN Journal of Genealogy, Vol XX #2	Resource Library	Mary Oaks
Radio Personality Posters	Photo Archives	Tom Miller
Descendants of Anderson Davis	Family Files	Lynette Moore
James Robert Cook Jr.	Family Files	Tammy Owen
Milstead-Mayes (photos and documents)	To be processed	Kerry Mayes
Postcard—early school photo (unidentified)	To be processed	Gail Woodlee

Welcome to our New Members!

* Dr. Wally and Pat Bigbee, McMinnville * Freda A. Clifton, McMinnville * Bryan Kell, McMinnville * Lynette Moore, Rock Island * Grayling Pruitt, Brentwood * Karen Young, Rock Island *

Thanks to all our faithful members who have renewed for 2023! If you haven't renewed, you can still renew and ensure your 2023 Bulletin deliveries.

If you sent a check but still received a 2nd Paypal invoice, please ignore. Paypal automatically sends a 2nd notice and we didn't get our updates posted in time!



Come Visit Us

**Our hours are
Monday & Friday
9 a.m.-3 p.m.
931-474-4227**

Email:
wcgha.tn@gmail.com

On the Web:
www.tngenweb.org/wcgha

On Facebook:
Warren County Genealogical
& Historical Association
and

**WCGHA's Old Warren County, TN
Family History/Photos**

**Our office is located at
201 Locust Street
McMinnville, Tennessee
in the lower level of the
County Administration Building**

Committees

Membership:

J. B. Brown



Historian:

Chris Keathley



Programs:

Mary Don Bixby



Web page/FB Admin:



Ann Brown

Research:

Bonita Mangrum

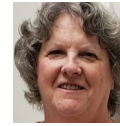


Mary Oaks



Newsletter Editor:

Susan Driver



susandriver801@gmail.com

931-314-6959

Bulletin:

Ann Brown



Publicity:

Gail Woodlee



Office:

Evelyn Wade



Mary Oaks

