

Humorist let go over 'inappropriate behavior'

Keillor denies any wrongdoing after Minn. radio's ouster

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Garrison Keillor, one of the nation's most lauded humorists, was fired Wednesday by Minnesota Public Radio over allegations of "inappropriate behavior" that occurred while he was in charge of "A Prairie Home Companion," his long-running variety show heard nationwide by millions every week.

Keillor, 75, who retired from the show last year and did not respond to a request for comment, denied any wrongdoing but described what he believed to be the allegation against him in an email to the Minneapolis Star-Tribune.

"I put my hand on a woman's bare back," he wrote. "I meant to pat her back after she told me about her unhappiness and her shirt was open and my hand went up it about six inches. She recoiled. I apologized. I sent her an email of apology later and she replied that she had forgiven me and not

to think about it. We were friends. We continued to be friendly right up until her lawyer called."

Minnesota Public Radio did not confirm whether the allegation was why he was fired and declined to give additional details on the accusation in question, including whether it was sexual in nature. The news broke hours after another enduring broadcaster, "Today" show host Matt Lauer, was fired by NBC for "inappropriate sexual behavior."

"Minnesota Public Radio is terminating its contracts with Garrison Keillor and his private media companies after recently learning of allegations of his inappropriate behavior with an individual who worked with him," said Angie Andersen, communications director for the station.

Keillor spent his career creating and tending a fictional place called Lake Wobegon, "the little town that time forgot and the decades cannot improve." His radio show, "A Prairie Home Companion," launched in 1974, stitched together old-timey jingles for fictional brands of biscuits and acoustic performances by guest musicians. But the heart of the show

was Keillor's storytelling — a slow, artfully rambling monologue about a stoic heartland community.

By the 1980s, Keillor had won a Peabody, and the show was one of public radio's biggest cash cows — as popular as public-radio juggernauts "Car Talk" and "Marketplace".

Keillor was shy, wry and unreadable in many ways, but his grave persona created an American enterprise as familiar and cozy as a hearth.

His program, despite its sense of place, was a road show, with a tractor-trailer full of sets and props and a traveling crew of stagehands, producers and performers who spent long hours together in college auditoriums, civic centers and hotel rooms.

Keillor has been married five times, twice to people who had worked with him on the show. But three longtime members of the show's staff, who asked not to be named, said that Keillor's shrinking demeanor and social awkwardness were a far more powerful part of his personality than any forwardness around women.

"The guy screams 'fatherly,'" one female staffer



JEFF BAEMEN/AP

Minnesota Public Radio did not give additional details Wednesday about the firing of humorist Garrison Keillor, who retired last year from "A Prairie Home Companion."

said, "He was awkward and fascinating and lovely."

On the road, Keillor kept mainly to himself, holed up in his hotel room to write his weekly monologue.

Writers would join him to work over material, but those encounters were often stilled and quiet, the co-workers said.

In 1994, Keillor addressed the National Press Club and defended Bill Clinton against a battery of accusations, calling him a "soulful man" who "got himself elected without scaring people." Keillor warned that society should try "not to make the world

so fine and good that you and I can't enjoy living in it."

He added in his hangdog baritone: "A world in which there is no sexual harassment at all is a world in which there will not be any flirtation. A world without thieves at all will not have entrepreneurs." Twenty-three years later — amid a reckoning of workplace behavior that has felled politicians, TV anchors and Hollywood heavies — a viewer is left to wonder: Was Keillor being straight, or satirical?

In 1998 Keillor wrote "Wobegon Boy," a novel about a radio host who is

wrongly accused of sexual harassment and fired by his station.

In his email to the Star-Tribune, Keillor shared other thoughts. "If I had a dollar for every woman who asked to take a selfie with me and who slipped an arm around me and let it drift down below the beltline, I'd have at least a hundred dollars," he wrote. "So this is poetic irony of a high order. But I'm just fine."

Keillor said he doesn't "have any interest in arguing about this."

Associated Press contributed.