

Keillor Moves On

By Judith Green

KNIGHT-RIDDER NEWSPAPERS

"Hello, this is Garrison Keillor," says the voice, familiar all the way from its slow vowels to its buzzy edges. The next words should be "... and this is 'A Prairie Home Companion.'"

The chronicler of Lake Wobegon himself. This is unexpected. We thought Keillor's manager was going to link up a conference call; we didn't know he'd be right there. But there he is, as soft-spoken and unassuming as he is on the radio.

So how did you decide to start "American Radio Company," after 13 years of "A Prairie Home Companion"?

"The old show originated from Minnesota, and it really was about Minnesota in many ways. At some point, I started to travel around a lot, and then when I married my wife, who's from Denmark, I lost my ear for Minnesota ...

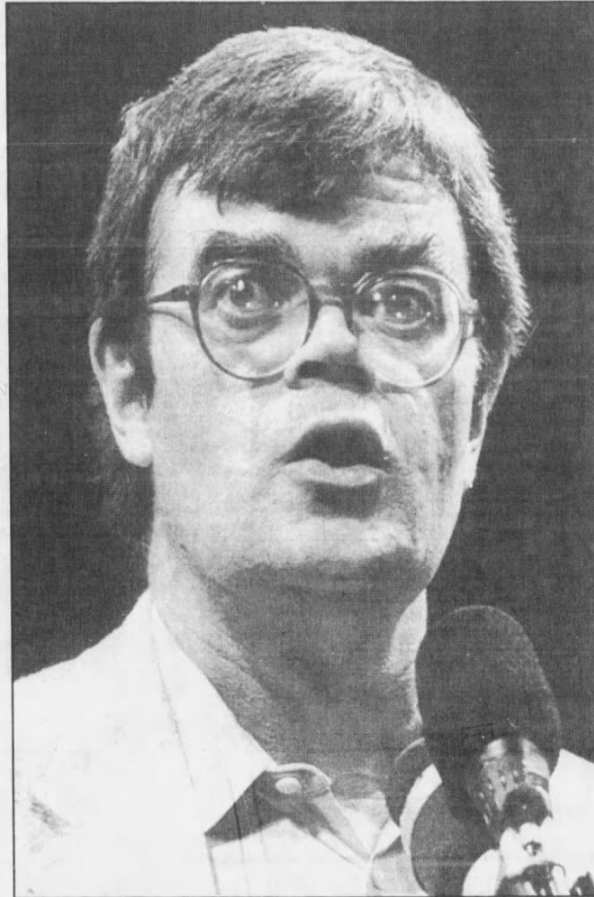
"It was about the Midwest and the prairie as the home of the good, the true and the beautiful. And then when I didn't believe that anymore, I had to move on."

The remark carries a tinge of anger and more than a tinge of regret for the end of "A Prairie Home Companion." He dropped it because the format was becoming well-worn, and because fame and the ill will that accompanies it, he said, had caught up to him in St. Paul, Minn.

The last years of "Prairie" had been difficult, as well, when he ended his relationship with the show's producer, Margaret Moos, to marry Ulla Skaerved, a Danish exchange student at his high school whom he met at a 25th-year class reunion.

How do the shows differ?

"'American Radio Company' is



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Garrison Keillor now doing "American Radio Company."

still trying to find itself, like so many of us these days. It certainly does not have as clear an identity as 'A Prairie Home Companion' ... (which) pretty much leaped out as what it was for 13 years. But people change, and I changed."

(In a renewal letter to those radio stations that had carried "American Radio Company" in its first, somewhat unsettled season, Keillor wrote of the show's difficulties in establishing its attitude.

"My view of the first season is: we

made plenty of mistakes and survived them and finished strong ... but the show didn't hit its stride until late in the year. ... We also conclude that the audience is not there yet but is still arriving.")

How do you feel about what "American Radio Company" is becoming?

"It's the best show on radio. I wouldn't have said that in the Midwest, where we're brought up to be modest. Now that I live in New York, I'm free to boast."