

PANORAMA/ENTERTAINMENT

Asbury Park Press/Friday, June 12, 1987 D3

Keillor will be gone after tomorrow

The Chicago Tribune

ST. PAUL, Minn. — For the very last time, if he is to be truly and forever believed, Garrison Keillor will put on his tuxedo, red suspenders and jogging shoes tomorrow and sing Hank Snow's "Hel-lo Love" in that earnest, laconic baritone far better suited to story telling than music making.

Although taped reruns of "A Prairie Home Companion" will be aired for months to come on the National Public Radio network, the live broadcasts from the World Theater in downtown St. Paul will end tomorrow, only a few weeks short of the show's 13th birthday.

For St. Paul, it means the end of a presence that has given this riverside city of 268,000 its strongest national image since the 1930s, when people such as John Dillinger, Alvin Farkis and Ma Barker holed up here with police-condoned impunity.

"There hasn't been a real strong identity to our city," said Eileen McMahon, associate director of tourism and marketing for the St. Paul Convention Bureau. "'Prairie Home Companion' put us on the map."

St. Paul is one of several twin cities in the nation — such as Fort Worth and Dallas, and San Francisco and Oakland — whose national images are obscured by a bigger, glitzier neighbor.

But St. Paul and Minneapolis do have their separate identities. As Keillor once put it, the difference between St. Paul and Minneapolis "is the difference between pumpernickel and Wonder Bread."

Keillor has long been a resident of St. Paul. It is a city small enough so that for years he felt free to walk the downtown streets, stroll around his neighborhood and ride city buses to

GARRISON KEILLOR'S "Prairie Home Companion" will air live for the last time at 6 p.m. tomorrow on radio stations WNYC-FM, 94.1, and WHYY Public Radio, 90.9. The Disney Channel will present the TV version at 9 p.m. tomorrow and WNYC-AM, 83.1, will air the taped version at noon on Sunday.

work, frequently wearing his Anoka High School letter man's jacket.

In the past several years, as his national fame escalated and the local press discovered they had a palpable celebrity in their midst, Keillor came to feel less and less relaxed in St. Paul.

He complained not of being harassed by autograph hounds, but of townspeople who would turn their heads away when they walked past his house, and look in the opposite direction when they saw him in a store.

"It's like people will look away from a crippled person," Keillor said in a newspaper interview. "That's what it's like to be a celebrity in St. Paul. To see everybody looking in the opposite direction."

He accused the local press of engaging in celebrity journalism when one newspaper published a story about his producer and longtime housemate, Margaret Moos, leaving town. According to the story, Ms. Moos left when Keillor announced he was going to marry his high school sweetheart, a Danish exchange student who showed up for a school reunion.

But the last straw was when the St. Paul Pioneer Press published a front-page photograph of his new house, along with the address, price and property taxes, while he was returning from Denmark with his new wife and children.



Garrison Keillor will be hanging up his red suspenders after tomorrow night's "Prairie Home Companion."

Locally, an angry Keillor put much of the blame for his departure on the shoulders of the newspaper.

"That wasn't the sort of journalism they taught us at Murphy Hall (college) . . . but the paper has chosen to work that avenue, and so I choose to move," he wrote in a letter published in the April 5 edition.

There are some mixed feelings on the other side, too. Some resented his "We're all they've got" remark about how St. Paul had only four celebrities, the governor, the mayor, the local TV weatherman and him. A small band of

protesters marched in front of his house carrying signs that read, "Don't bite the hand" and "There'll be no woe in St. Paul if Keillor Begone."

But none of this matters much beyond St. Paul. Ms. McMahon still keeps copies of Keillor's book, "Lake Wobegone Days," in the office to give to visitors seeking a convention or meeting site. When she goes on the road to promote St. Paul, she takes along PHC videotapes, some Powder Milk Biscuit T-shirts and other Lake Wobegone memorabilia products to curry favor.