



Keill Wencil/Winona Daily News

Garrison Keillor (right) signs a promotional sign for one of the many autograph-seekers Monday afternoon after Keillor stopped in Winona as part of his "Barnstorming tour" of communities

around Minnesota. Keillor, the creator of "A Prairie Home Companion," drew a crowd of more than 300, entertaining them with tales of Lake Wobegon and small-town Minnesota.

## Garrison Keillor addresses more than 300 at historical society

By Jonathan Maze  
Winona Daily News

More than 300 people crammed into the main hall of the Winona County Historical Society Monday afternoon.

Each chair had been taken, forcing some guests to stand for 90 minutes, as Garrison Keillor spread his tales of a small town somewhere in Minnesota.

And despite the standing-room-only crowd, each member of the audience was made comfortable by Keillor's tales.

For most of these people, Keillor has been an invited guest in their living rooms at least once a week, as they listened to his tales of Lake Wobegon on the radio.

But Monday, he was much more of a person, answering questions at the end and patiently waiting while most of the audience filed past to shake his hand, make a comment or take a picture.

"We're just trying to get back in touch with small-town Minnesota," Keillor said, in the center of a crowded group of admirers.

"It gives a chance to get in touch with the listeners. It's not work as we've come to know it."

Afterward, while many of these listeners waited to get their chance to talk to Keillor personally, they indeed felt closer. The fame that "A Prairie Home Companion" brought to Keillor did not seem to faze them — or him.

One woman, who did not want to use her name, was a teacher at Anoka High School when Keillor attended as a student. Even then, his ability began to show, and he gained fame among the Anoka faculty.

"He was submitting things to the New Yorker back then," she said. "He was very good, a very good writer."

Keillor's stop in Winona was an attempt, as he said, to acquaint himself and the radio show with the listeners who have related to the tales of Lake Wobegon. Winona was the second stop of this "Barnstorming tour" of 10 different cities in three days.

The first was La Crosse, Wis., in the morning. Rochester was the next stop, followed by St. Peter in the late evening. Six will follow today and Wed-

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I guess I've always been a maverick. I always tried to find Fort Myers Beach in 1901, after his wife died.

## ► Tales

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nesday.

Keillor began his Winona program with a talk about Lake Wobegon and the perils and joys of Minnesota life — and how they reflect upon society.

"I fear the older world is slipping, fading away," Keillor said. "The older world where people love books. The older world in which people are unabashed about their faith in God.

"I worry sometimes that this culture is slipping away to something meaner, crueller, where fame and wealth are more admirable than hard work and ingenuity."

Like his radio program, the audience was able to understand Keillor's words, to relate the things he talked about.

"We have wonderful assets here in Minnesota — and some terrible liabilities," he said. "We all know what the liabilities are. Winters. Winters here are harsh.

Nature makes at least two or three attempts to kill you.

"And March ... March is the month God designed to show people who don't drink what hangovers are like. It's the same climate which grows magnificent amounts of corn and soybeans, but produces magnificent amounts of mosquitoes."

At the end of the program, Keillor took questions from the audience, answering each one with his distinct sense of humor, keeping the audience laughing. The first one asked about the latitude and longitude of Lake Wobegon. It was a question Keillor could not answer.

"Latitude and longitude is recorded on the map — which Lake Wobegon does not appear on," Keillor said.

But it appears on the map now. Maybe not the real map. But all the visitors on Monday know where it is.

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