

KEYT-TV, AN ADVENTURE IN TIME by Walter R. Wolf, Jr.

For the past fifty years the letters KEYT have spelled and meant Santa Barbara's Channel 3 Television Station, but that use of those letters is not exclusive. Those same letters also spell my Uncle's name, Keyt, Tom Keyt.

He lived in Santa Barbara in the early 1920's to the early 1930's, moved to the Los Angeles area, then back to Santa Barbara in 1948. He passed away in 1958.

My maternal grand father was William Baxter Keyt, a dentist and musician in Denver, Colorado. He passed away when my Mother and Uncle were quite young.

FAST FORWARD TO KEYT-TV

Long before KEYT-TV existed, the Federal Communication Commission had assigned Channel 3 to this area. Television had blossomed in Los Angeles with several stations on the air. Channel 2, CBS, and Channel 4, NBC, were among the strongest.

Prior to the invention of Cable-TV, all television signals were transmitted through the air, line-of-sight, from tower-to-tower or mountain peak-to-mountain peak. Locally, there was a major problem. Ventura County's mountains blocked reception in low-lying Santa Barbara. The answer would not be simple. Each home

needed an elaborate antenna array mounted on top of a forty-foot-tall steel pole secured at the highest central point of the house and braced by two sets of four steel guy wires anchored at the four corners of the roof. The larger the array, the better the reception. Each array was rotated about the axis of the pole by an electric-motor-drive-system located at the top of the pole, and controlled from inside the home to fine-tune the TV image. Collectively, an ugly sea of poles, wires and arrays blanketed the city. Pearl Chase, the champion of Santa Barbara's Mediterranean architecture, must have been outraged!

With Television now here, entire families gathered closely together to squint at their small TV sets to watch the Ed Sullivan Show or whatever in black and white.

In the meantime, Channel 3's transmitter was under construction on a mountain-top, west of the city, at a site selected to serve both north and south county areas.

What about call letters? The FCC offered several choices to the owners of Channel 3. They chose KEYT.

At that time, my Uncle, Tom Keyt, was the Regional Sales Manager for the Accounting Machine Division of the National Cash Register Corporation with an office on De La Vina, just above Mission Street. In a re-organization of their West

Coast operations, they offered him a transfer to San Francisco. Rather than accept that offer, he resigned from NCR, leased that office and their accounting machine, and opened a business-payroll-accounting-business of his own, which he named PAY-SOS.

Tom was very active in the local Rotary Club. When Channel 3's owners chose KEYT, Tom was teased by his friends and fined for notoriety by the Rotary Club as part of their charitable fund-raising efforts.

Santa Barbara's thin telephone directory listed KEYT-TV and Keyt, Tom.

There would be much confusion between the two.

The moment that KEYT-TV came on the air, a ghost-like image of their transmission from behind Santa Barbara interfered with reception of signals from both Channels 2 and 4 from Los Angeles. Viewers raced to their phones. They weren't angry. They were mad! Many of them found Keyt, Tom, from his home listing. The fact that Keyt, Tom, wasn't KEYT-TV^J made absolutely no difference to them. The insults poured in, night and day, week after week. Relief for Tom and family came only when the telephone company intercepted and screened all calls to Tom's home.

This wasn't an easy time for KEYT-TV either. It was a business, marketing air-time to various sponsors. Those sponsors soon became the targets of those irate viewers. "How dare you advertise on Channel 3?" Some sponsors retreated in self-defense, totally willing to honor their air-time contracts, but adamant that their names not be mentioned on the air again! What a mess! It lasted for what seemed like an eternity.

Eventually, Cable-TV arrived in Santa Barbara, and what a blessing it was. The ugly sea of poles, wires and arrays that had blanketed the city was discarded, the red tile roofs were uncovered, and Pearl Chase could breathe again!

Bringing television to Santa Barbara had been a long and tedious adventure for the whole area. Congratulations to everyone who was involved.

Long live KEYT-TV and long live the Keyt family name.

Post-script: Tom's daughter, Barbara Keyt Fox, a piano teacher and organist, lives in Lompoc, California. Tom's son, G. M. "Bud" Keyt, a now-retired, life-long employee of National Cash Register, lives in Boise, Idaho. Both Barbara and Bud were born in Saint Francis Hospital in Santa Barbara.