



Buffalo Tales



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THE BESHORE FAMILY

Electronics Pioneers

by Margaret Stines Nielsen

In the early part of the century Andrew Beshore, of Pennsylvania, went south to attend Washington and Lee University, and on to a Divinity School in Dayton, Virginia. There he met Nannie Burrus, of an early day North Carolina family, who was studying music at Shenandoah Collegiate Institute. The couple were married and set out for Aurora, Nebraska where Andrew began his ministry in the Methodist Church. Their sons Paul and Charles were born there. Later Andrew was transferred to Pleasanton, where Woodrow Wilson and David Lloyd George were born. The couple also lived in Gibbon for a time.

During World War I Andrew, a powerful speaker, traveled to Liberty Bond rallies around the state. In Scribner he met William Jennings Bryan. Through that connection he was asked to be a summer replacement in a Chautauqua circuit.

In 1921 the family moved to Kearney¹ where Andrew, Jr. and Robert E. Lee were

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The Beshores in 1937; front row: Andrew, Andy, Bob, Nannie;
back row: Paul, Chas., Woody, Dave.

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CHRISTMAS TREE WALK

Trails & Rails Museum will be open December 1 through 9 for the special Christmas Tree Walk. Hours are from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. each day. Baked goods will be for sale, and the Museum Gift Shop has many items for Christmas giving.

Books

NEW!! *Tales of Buffalo County*, Volume IV, just published. Reprints of stories originally published in *Buffalo Tales*, 1987-1989.

161 pages, 100 illustrations, 30 stories, indexed.

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Available at Trails & Rails Museum, 710 West 11th Street, Kearney, or order from Buffalo County Historical Society, Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848.

born. Andrew had joined the Redpath-Homer Chautauqua Circuit, traveling from early summer to November, which meant he was gone for most of the year. In 1931, with the depression and changing times striking his two main sources of income, he gave up and moved to Pennsylvania, where he took a job with the State Rehabilitation Department. Although he returned for an occasional visit, Nannie was left with a baby and five other boys to support, a devastating blow to the family.

Nannie had supplemented their meager income by giving piano and voice lessons and her sons worked at any jobs available. The family had a large garden; Nannie canned quantities of fruit and vegetables, made sauerkraut, and dried corn. The neighbors helped as they could. In spite of this it came to the point that the stores wouldn't allow Nannie credit. "Chas" dropped out of high school for a year to work at the Kearney Tea and Coffee House.

All the boys had natural mechanical aptitudes. As a child Paul began experimenting with light bulbs run on dry cells and storage batteries. Although the house had no electricity he soon had lights in every room. He built his first radio at the age of ten; "in 1926 (he) completed his first loud-speaker radio, a single tube re-generative type circuit which would receive signals from KDKA, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and other distant places."²

Paul and his brothers had tinkered with a number of vehicles and gadgets. He took drafting in high school and began making blueprints of some of his inventions. They



were finished by holding them up to the sun and developing them in the bath tub. The next step was to advertise these blueprints and plans for sale to other amateur mechanics. In time this developed into a catalog advertising a whole array of radios, vehicles, and other electronic products, under the name of Motor Industries Co.³

In 1933 Paul "developed and patented a miniature radio about the size of a small matchbox. It was the first radio utilizing a crystal . . . and a tuner which enabled the user to select more than one station. This radio consisted of a block of wood, with the crystal embedded in the block and sealed with pitch, and magnet wire wound around the block, a tuner dial and an earphone. Originally it was packaged in a cardboard pillbox obtained from the local drug store."⁴ In the early days the Beshores mined their own crystals in the Colorado mountains.

Named the TinyTone, the radio was advertised in *Popular Mechanics* and *Mechanics Illustrated* for \$2.99. With borrowed money, and what Paul made writing articles for *Popular Mechanics*, the TinyTone Radio Corporation was established in the Beshore home at 1404 5th Avenue. The four oldest boys worked together on the project, assisted by neighborhood boys. Lester Billings stayed with the company for the fifty-plus years it was in operation. When a lot of orders piled up they might work the night through, arousing the suspicions of some of the neighbors.

The home was a gathering place for boys of all ages, with the energetic Beshores in the middle of the action. As one family member said, "There are some skeletons."



But Nannie with her strict Baptist moral code saw that they didn't get too far out of line.

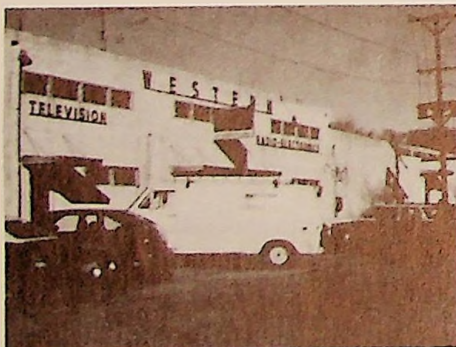
In 1936, as the business grew, the company moved to the third floor of the Fort Kearney (later First National) Bank at 2031 Central Avenue. The sound of the various machines caused some stress to those who had offices on the second floor. The manufacturing end of the business was then moved to 2218 Avenue A (later Fairmont Creamery). Here they made their own plastic molding machine which was used to make cases for the TinyTones. The advertising and business offices were left in the bank building. The company took and developed its own pictures, with Andy as the photographer later on. Lyman Rice⁵ did the art work. The company was the first to have an offset press.

By 1942 the company, now the Western Manufacturing Corporation, had moved to a 2500 square foot building on 22nd Street and 14th Avenue. With the outbreak of World War II the Beshores began bidding on government contracts and they were soon working full time on aircraft parts and components for the Norden Bomb Sight.⁶ 150 people were employed during peak periods.

All the boys worked for the company at various times, each contributing in his own way. The day after graduating from high school Woody had gone to Pennsylvania to work as a machinist with various companies and was well established there. However,



TinyTone company established in Beshore home, 1404 5th Avenue.



Western Manufacturing Corporation, 22nd Street and 14th Avenue.



The TinyTone

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after five years the TinyTone business had grown so rapidly that Paul offered him a share in the business if he would supervise the manufacturing end of the company. Chas., who served in World War II, returned to Kearney for a time to be general manager. Later he went to Chicago and points east where he was an executive in several large companies. His last position before he retired was as general manager for the Otis Elevator Company. He now lives in Pinehurst, North Carolina. Andy has worked as an electronics engineer for the TRW Systems⁷ in California for the past thirty-five years. David and Robert are physicians in Denver. Nannie died at the age of fifty-five.

The three oldest Beshores married girls from the Kearney area: Paul married Betty Knudsen; Charles married Doris Olson, and Woody married Barbara Houtchens.

Paul and Woody continued as partners but eventually the manufacturing came to a halt. Paul spent most of his time taking care of his real estate; Woody still operates the Western TV Sales and Service.

Paul continued to work on various ideas. His last was a TV antenna for ham operators made in the shape of a flag pole and flag which could be used on condominiums. He died on September 28th, 1988 at the age of seventy-one.

Schooled by the depression and World War II, Paul was prepared for any eventuality. Western Manufacturing had become for electronics what Kaufmann-Wernert was for variety stores: "Anything you want—you can find it there." A three day auction of equipment and material brought bidders from all over the country. Woody and his son, Dr. Doug Bashore, bid in much of the equipment. They plan to manufacture dental equipment.

The Beshores were pioneers in the field of electronics—a frontier where the advances have been mind-boggling.

NOTES

1. A distant relative, Dr. Michael Beshoar, (sp.) was surgeon at Ft. Kearny in 1865-66 and mayor of Dobytown in 1866.
2. Family history by Chas. Beshore.
3. Other names included Pakette Radio and Midway Co.
4. Family history by Chas. Beshore.
5. A local artist who painted the murals in First Presbyterian Church.
6. The bomb sights used to drop the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki are on display at the Smithsonian Museum. Parts made by Western Mfg. bear Woody's stamp.
7. The company supplies many parts for NASA.

SOURCES

Interviews with Mrs. Paul Beshore and Woody Beshore, a brief family history supplied by Chas. Beshore, family records, *Hippocrates in a Red Vest* by Barron B. Beshoar.