

## Lamm, Carl: Glory Days of Country Music Radio <sup>[1]</sup>

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## Carl Lamm: Glory Days of Country Music Radio

by David Cecelski. "[Listening to History](#) <sup>[2]</sup>," *News & Observer*. Published 11/10/2002. Copyrighted.  
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I interviewed Carl Lamm in his broadcast studio at WMPM-AM in Smithfield. Legendary as "the voice of Johnston County," Lamm has been a part of country music radio since 1946. He has been a disc jockey and co-owner at WMPM since 1958, and the station still plays a vibrant mix of old-time country, bluegrass and Southern gospel. Surrounded by photographs signed by friends at the Grand Ol' Opry like Little Jimmy Dickens and Kitty Wells, Lamm recalled the years when some of the finest country music bands came out of North Carolina and radio, not television, was king in America.



Carl Lamm. Photo by Chris Seward, 2002. To request permission for further use or to purchase a print, please contact the *News & Observer*.

When I was a child, radio was exploding and growing day by day and week by week. It was almost a new thing then. The first broadcast station in the United States, KDKA, Pittsburgh, came on the air in '20, '21, and around 1924 WPTF went to Raleigh. WPTF in Raleigh used to be really a dominant, influential station in the early days. Farm programming was very popular, and WPTF had a farm director called Connie B. Gaye from Lizard Lick up here in Wake County. Connie B. Gaye is the grandfather of the country music shows they had up there. Early in the mornings at WPTF, maybe 5 o'clock to 6:30, they'd have country bands come right in the studio. They had Roly-Poly Reid and Looney Luke, the Tobacco Tags, Bill M. Starting in Rocky Mount after World War II, just about every town started getting a radio station, and everybody listened to the radio. WCEC in Rocky Mount is where I had my first job. I would average about 200 letters a day from people that A lot of the people that requested songs would be high school boys and girls. The typical request would be: This song goes out for Billy and Theresa, Mary and Tom, George and Anna Mae, and they want to hear "I Love You Most of All." I did big band stuff, too -- Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, Kay Kyser. Kay Kyser lived there in Rocky Mount, and he would come over to the radio station from time to time. Now, Kay for about five years had the No. 1-rated radio show in America. We originated all the programming at WCEC. During the tobacco market, we'd go to the Masonic Temple and do a country music show down there. We'd have sponsors like Golden Bell Fertilizer and Smith-Douglass. I remember we had How Any idea we could dream up, we did it. Every afternoon, Ray Wilkinson did a broadcast called "The Old Oak Tree." He'd have rabbits and squirrels, and he'd give voices to them. He had a voice like Grandpappy, Clem Kadiddlehopper, different. Another thing I did there, around 10 o'clock I would go out under the marquee of the Center Theater and tape a broadcast. I would intercept passers-by on the sidewalk, and I'd have a different question every day. And at the end of talking to them To tell you how much fun we had and how much showmanship was in radio in that day and time, there was one broadcast I remember it was raining so hard that nobody was coming up and down the street. And so Ray came out there, and I remember another thing Talmadge Pollard did there at Rocky Mount was read the funny paper on the air. He would talk about Popeye and Maggie and Jiggs and Dick Tracy and Li'l Abner, Little Henry, all the characters in the funny paper. He would make Paul Byrd from here in Smithfield was one of the country music pioneers. Paul and Talmadge called themselves the Johnston County Ramblers and they had a 30-minute program every day at noontime there in Rocky Mount. Then they'd go I remember one time there was a boy named Junior that sang for one of the bands. I told the listening audience that if they'd send us a hundred letters the next week we'd buy Junior all the hot dogs he could eat. Of course, the next week we You can't imagine how big radio was prior to TV. Seems like once TV became a competitor, radio put on a business suit and it changed in a lot of ways. But it was incredibly exciting just after World War II. And you really established a good re

"Johnston County's Lamm is a radio staple," WRAL.com. February 25, 2015:<http://www.wral.com/johnston-county-s-lamm-is-a-radio-staple/14472687/> <sup>[3]</sup>

Lamm, Carl E. *Sixty-three years on the air: my life and times* Edwards Brothers, 2010.

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### Origin - location:

[Johnston County](#) <sup>[8]</sup>

[Smithfield](#) <sup>[9]</sup>

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