



RETURN WITH US NOW...

RADIO HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION OF
COLORADO


Volume 25, Number 2

September, 1999

770 presents **PEMCO**
KNWX
The Business Station
Imagination Theater

A live radio production of two original mysteries written & produced by Jim French

Monday, June 28, 1999 at 7:30pm Museum of History & Industry Theater/2700 24th East



ADMIT ONE

You're Invited To . . .

This is the first of a continuing series of articles on live presentations and oral history relating Old-Time and New-Time Radio drama and comedy. ANYONE can write one of these articles. Some of our members belong to other OTR clubs and attend their meetings and/or conventions where such activities occur. The ground rules are simple: the article must be about some sort of live presentation or live oral history relating to Old-Time or New-Time Radio history, drama, or comedy. Some examples are Old-Time Radio Conventions, radio show re-creations, discussion panels, and interviews.

The PEMCO Imagination Theater Warm-Up by Jim French

Edited by Stewart Wright

Jim French is no stranger to many RHAC members. Articles about Jim and his radio drama programs have appeared in previous issues of *Return With Us Now*. . . Many of us regularly listen to Jim's syndicated *Imagination Theater* over their local radio station or on the Internet. Do you know that Jim records some of his radio dramas IN FRONT OF A LIVE AUDIENCE? These

sessions, under the name of *The PEMCO Imagination Theater*, take place on the last Monday of the month at the auditorium of the Museum of History and Industry in Seattle, WA starting at 7:30 PM. The shows are well-attended; especially by children and teenagers.

I attended the June 28th 1999 recording session. There were about 325 to 350 people in attendance, about one-third were children and teenagers. The actors and Foley artists (sound-effect people) are on stage, and the engineer is in the booth. The audience is primed for a unique experience. What you are about to read is the warm-up Jim gave prior to the recording session.

Jim French:

What this is all about is for the ear and not for the eye. I wanted to explain to you that we're asking you watch us do the work you will be hearing when we put the shows on the air.

It isn't just to entertain you here tonight in this auditorium. But rather, you're watching us work in such a way we hope will entertain you when you hear it on the air. Having mentioned that, I know that you would like to know when these shows are going to air locally. First of all, we are recording a new *Adventures of Harry Nile*, "Who Killed Harry Nile," tonight. This show will be aired

Continued on Page 4

RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO

Dedicated to the preservation of old time radio programs and to making those programs available to our members.

RHAC Board Meeting Thursday, October 7, 1999 - 7:30 PM

At

Larry Weide's 5270 E. Nassau Cir. Englewood, CO 80110 303-758-8382

Old time radio is alive and well in Denver!

KRMA Channel 6 Secondary Audio Program, RHAC's show *Tribute to OTR* Sunday 2:00 PM

KEZW 1430 AM *When Radio Was* weekdays from 7:00 - 8:00 PM *Radio Movie Classics* Sundays 5:00 - 6:00 PM

KFKA 1310 AM *Radio Memories* Sundays 6:00 to 12:00 PM

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RHAC WEB SITE The RHAC web page and catalog is on the World Wide Web:
<http://www.old-time.com/rhac.html>

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OTR FOR THE DIGITAL AGE: Recovery of Old Program Material Part 3

By Jim Hougen

Now, it's time to get really serious. Before I deal with the issues of disk and tape noise, let's get the program material arranged the way you want it. Because you are using a high speed computer, you have the luxury of not placing the program material on your hard drive in the same sequence as you want in the final CD. Don't be sloppy because the computer should not have to a lot of 'searching' during the record process. Re-arranging large blocks of time is not a problem. If you are copying old 78s, you could re-arrange the songs after you have put them on your hard drive. In the case of OTR programs this will not be of concern except for those who will copy a group of 15 minute, or less, programs to a single CD.

Your CD-R drive will usually come with a CD recording software suite of programs. Most of these are entry level programs. A professional version will usually be offered for additional cost. You will need to carefully consider the capabilities of the software before you make a purchase. This is a real case of 'all apples are not alike'.

CD-R drives are not alike either. For this purpose, you need to be absolutely certain that the drive will support the 'Disk-At-Once' recording method, index points, and all of the 'Red Book' recording standards. The Red Book is a publication of the standards for recording audio CDs.

All playback equipment for audio CDs is capable of properly playing a CD recorded to these standards. While you are at it, check for other drive capabilities that you may wish to employ for your other computer needs. The ability to record Photo CDs, play and record 'Mixed Mode' CDs should be considered. The record speed should also be considered. At 2x record speed, it will require about 40 minutes to record a 74 minute CD, after all the advance preparations are complete. At 4x speed, about 16 minutes is required. There are 8x record drives available, but not all the blank media will support this higher record speed.

Before you do anything serious, be prepared to waste a disk or two. Connect your disk, tape player or mixer output to the computer sound card input. Carefully check the manufacturer's specifications for input level capability. If you over drive the sound card input, your digitized audio will be distorted. You may have to construct a resistive pad circuit for use between your external equipment and the sound card. Next, record a single program from your source to the computer hard drive. This should result in an standardized '.wav' wave form file, which is the digital representation of the program material you fed to the computer and nothing else.

Now 'the cheese gets binding'. Software from this point on is the absolute key to success. The Red Book standard says that 2 seconds time is to be allocated between each audio track. Most entry level software will only allow this method. That means that any break in your material will have a two second pause. This may not be what you want. Index point capability often is not included. Most professional level software will allow such things as a continuous 60 minute program with index points and no breaks. I prefer the 'Red Roaster

24' package offered by SEK'D, a German company. Their US branch is SEK'D America in Santa Rosa, California. They can be accessed at www.sekd.com. You will find complete pricing and a rather neat demo package that you can download. Be prepared to pay in the range of \$400 to \$500 for a good, professional, software package. Special editing & production features will often cost more.

Now that you have the wave file on your hard drive, you can edit any breaks, add index points & play the whole thing on your computer before 'burning' the disk. Alas, your program material has clicks & pops from your disk playing. You may even have a groove skip or two. Repair all this in the digital mode using various software. The Red Roaster package allows you to do what they call 'virtual editing'. This means you are not editing the actual wave file, but providing instructions in a separate file for the computer. The advantage is that if you want to change something, you don't have to re-record the source material, you just change the special instruction file.

Most professional recording software allows editing of the wave file in the graphics mode. If you are careful, you can remove some very large noise spikes then piece together the remainder such that only an audio expert can tell that an edit had been performed. This can be a time-consuming labor of love. The end result is well worth the effort to preserve some priceless recording.

Various software packages exist to automatically remove disk clicks and pops. By digitally removing these artifacts, the process will often introduce some new artifacts. These will be tiny 'holes' in the audio that were digitally filled in by the computer. You will have to experiment with how much noise to reduce before the new sounds become anno-

ying. You may decide to just leave them alone. That's the nice thing about the computer, you can play around until you get the result which is satisfactory to you, before committing it to disk. Once it is recorded on the CD-R media, it cannot be erased or changed in any way. That is why I suggested that you be prepared to waste a disk or two until you get familiar with the process.

What about that old tape noise? What about some background hum in the original recording. Both of these can be removed using digital filtering software. In nearly every case, you will have to 'teach' the computer what to remove. That's where the noise sample comes in that I mentioned earlier. You select this sample, and get your noise reduction software to analyze the noise. Then start the removal process. If you have a combination of noises, you may have to do several passes through the program. First, concentrate your efforts on steady-state noise such as background hum. Wide band noise, such as tape hiss, is most difficult to filter because the filtering process may also remove desired sounds such as the brush sound of drum, hisses in speech and such like.

One technique is to create a special 'pink noise' sample. To do this, use your graphic equalizer to select only the noise portion of the audio spectrum. This may be between 7000 and 20000 Hz. Give this sample to the computer for noise reduction. When you record the original audio material, cut off everything above 7000 Hz. If the program material was not really high fidelity to begin with, this may be an acceptable compromise. No two situations will be identical. You will have to experiment in each and every case.

Lastly, most professional software includes digital equalization, as well as audio compression & expansion.

Nearly all off the air recordings are already compressed. Leave these alone. A few studio produced transcriptions were not compressed. Most recordings are compressed because of disk recording limitations. Generally speaking, your best efforts are spent in trying to get the best quality that you can, considering all the flaws of the original. Don't over-compensate if the desired sound just isn't there in your original.

The beauty of all this work is that you now have the best copy you can make of your original material. You can share this with your friends by making digital copies with no loss in quality. You can now locate, in an instant, your favorite parts of any program. You can easily make a separate CD of just the music you want from a program to play in the car. As long as you do all your subsequent copying and manipulating in the digital domain, nothing is lost.

Imagination Theater Warm-Up

Continued from Page 1

on August 8th. The second show we will be doing tonight is called "The Weatherman" which is a mystery of sorts and will run on September 12th. (*Editor's Note: these air dates are for the locally-broadcast PEMCO Imagination Theater and not the internationally-syndicated Imagination Theater.*)

I thought that I would mention to you now that you won't see a full-fledged production because we are actors standing in front of microphones & sound effects people making the sounds. There are some sounds that can't be produced manually and they are done from recordings that are played from the booth.

Do you have any questions about the show or about the series before we begin and I introduce the cast?

(At this time Jim answers questions from the audience.)

Does Murphy (Harry Nile's assistant) have a first name? And where did she grow up?

Her first name is Mary. She, for some reason, doesn't want to go with the name of Mary. She's got quite a story about it if you gave her half a chance. She grew up in Southern California.

How long have you been doing local radio drama?

The first local radio dramas I did were on KIRO (a Seattle radio station) in 1965. I did two original shows hoping they would stir up some interest. I had to talk the station management into doing them. So I wrote, directed, recorded, and broadcast two half-hour radio plays. Nothing happened; there was no great stampede or clamoring for "More, More" as I had thought there would be. It was wasn't long before that the CBS radio network canceled the last of the soap operas and great night-time radio mysteries & dramas.

In 1973, at KVI in Seattle, they started broadcasting Old-Time Radio shows and called it *Theater of the Mind*. I was so bold as to say, "I used to write radio plays. I could write one for you." The station staff, "Go ahead." They were very free and easy. It was a wonderful operation. That's how it started.

They got a little reaction and they said, "Could you do another?" I said, "Yes." Pretty soon we started doing them every week, then two a week. We did *Dameron* (an international trouble-shooter) starring Bob Hardwyck & *The Tower Playhouse* which was a random collection of programs. *Editor's Note: Jim's Crisis series and the first episodes of The Adventures of Harry Nile were also broadcast on KVI.*

Are your shows broadcast outside of Washington State?

Yes. We are in about 150 mar-

kets nationally.

Is a station listing available?

There is station listing available in the lobby or from Transmedia in San Francisco (1-800-BAY-RADIO), who is the syndicator.

You are unique in this business because you write, direct & produce the shows. Is there anybody teaching what you are doing?

You must understand that radio writing is a distinct process. It's different from screen writing and stage writing. You really need to learn what all of the requirements are. I have two or three people who seem to be promising as radio drama writers. Even though these people might become able to turn out a script every now and then, I haven't found anyone who can write four scripts a month, which is what I have to do.

I don't want radio drama to die when I do. I would like to see it go on because of the youngsters who get a kick out of it. They realize that there is something about the "Theater of the Imagination" that is way better than a television show or a video game. You can see pictures in your own mind; Radio does that! Why was the program's name changed from the *KIRO Mystery Playhouse* to *Imagination Theater*?

The main reason is for the name change is we are no longer on KIRO, we are on KNWX. The reason why we chose *Imagination Theater* is because that is the name that our syndicator uses for these shows all over the country. So since we had to change it, I thought it would be a good idea to make it standard all over the country.

Are there any books available on writing radio scripts and adapting stories for radio?

If there are books, they're out of print. There used to be some books written by people who wrote radio scripts, but they are 40 to 50 years

old. I have developed a few techniques for writing. As far as adapting an existing story, I don't do that; they are all original stories. It's a perfectly possible thing to take an a play, not a long play, a one-act play and turn that into a radio play.

There's nothing stopping you from doing a play on the air that takes you to the farthest distant galaxy or into the past or into the future, because it's all done with sound. The limits are only your imagination. But, as far as a text book that tells you how to adapt a work for radio, I know of none.

You see, there's no money in writing radio dramas. (Audience laughter.) That's a simple fact. Maybe, someday this will be a money-making proposition. I am the only producer of a commercial radio drama show on a weekly basis in America. (Audience applauds.) I do consider it a real privilege to do radio drama. Even though we have good ratings in many of the markets where *Imagination Theater* is aired and has been for three years, it's still not recognized as a vital, valuable radio program format.

You know what is on the radio. It's a talk show, music, news or sports. Where does radio drama fit in the format of a commercial radio station? The answer, it doesn't. So how are we on 150 radio stations? I suppose it's because those radio stations have found a little niche, on the weekends generally, that they would like to fill where it won't do them any harm if *Imagination Theater* fails. That's frequently the philosophy of radio programming. They're not going to build a big frame around *Imagination Theater* and feature this show. They have done it in Seattle, but that's because we have had a twenty-some year head start. This idea has been on the air for all these years, but it's brand-new in other areas.

Tonight, I would like to have you meet the people who are going to be doing the show for you. Let me turn the tables and do it backwards.

First, the people that you never get to see or hear, but people that we could not possibly do the show without. The engineer, who stationed up in the booth in the back of the auditorium. She's the person who maintains the proper volume level on all the microphones. I sit next to her & regulate the music & recorded sound effects which go into the show. The engineer is the person with her hands on the master controls. I would like you to give a nice hand to Peggy Stokes.

Doing live sound effect is an art. We have two practitioners that we are very proud of. I'd like you to meet them - Scott Anderson and (unfortunately my tape recorder did not up the name of the second person - a young lady.) By the way, they are going to involve you in at the end of these two shows; they will give you a cue for applause. (The sound effects people raise APPLAUSE signs.)

Tonight's *Adventures of Harry Nile* episode is essentially a story written by Larry Albert. Larry is an actor who has worked on dozens and dozens of shows for me. In fact, he works everyday for me as Operations Manager for my company. He has a remarkable gift, not only as a dramatist, but he also is learning what is necessary to write a radio drama. He is doing a great job. This a script that I thought needed to be broadcast, "Who Killed Harry Nile?" No, Harry doesn't get killed, but for a minute or two it looks like he is dead. This whole story, especially a wonderful series of scenes with Harry's cousin, is all the work of Larry Albert.

Here is the person who is Murphy. She is also the director of all of the shows I do. And for 49 years she has been my favorite, long-

suffering wife, Pat French.

An actor appearing tonight in both of the shows we will be doing is a veteran star. He has appeared in such movies as "Wild One" with Marlon Brando and "Stalag 17" as an actor and the Narrator. He has also done so many radio acting parts that it would be impossible name them. He was the voice of the Los Angeles Rams for many years. Ladies and gentlemen, Gill Stratton.

Working with us tonight for the very first time is a man who is the morning Jazz host on KPLU. He has much more going for him than being good Jazz host. We have discovered that he is also a fine actor. He doesn't have too much to do on these two shows because it is his first time on *Imagination Theater*. I am writing a piece for him in which he will have a major role in the next *Harry Nile*. Will you welcome please Nick Morrison.

That covers everybody but the old grouch himself, the old private eye. The very first word I ever wrote in a *Harry Nile* script, I thought about you. This guy never knew he was an actor. To this day, he's really convinced that he is not an actor. That's funny because all over the country, in Australia, on cassettes and CDs' he is gaining a real reputation as *Harry Nile*. Would you welcome, Phil Harper.

Now one last technical word and we'll get underway with the recording session. The loudspeakers that you are hearing my voice through are going to be turned down a little bit for the actual recording because they cause a bit of a hollow sound. You can imagine that would not work if we were doing a scene that was supposed to take place out-of-doors. You will have to listen a little more carefully. I hope you will be able to catch it all. If we need to stop for any reason, it's no big deal these days. What

we do is just stop everything, pick the spot in the script where the mistake occurred & start from there on a new track. We are recording digitally, we don't use tape anymore. Are there anymore questions before we start? Why do you record it now and play it a couple of months later?

There are post-production activities, additional work that must be done. Also, I like to have plenty of shows lined up ahead of time. Was radio drama ever done as a live broadcast?

In the old days of network radio program were done live because there was no really good way to record them. There were transcription disks that most networks would not allow to be played on the air. They were made as reference recordings of live shows; they were not meant to go on the air.

I lived through the renaissance from transcription disks to tape recordings. It is my belief that Bing Crosby broke that taboo. ABC wanted him to a show. He said, "I'll do the show, but I'll do it on tape." They said, On tape? No, it has to be live!" Bing said, "I'll only do the show if you let me tape the shows ahead of time." Then they could scissor out anything that was undesirable. They could make it perfect. So finally, ABC put *The Bing Crosby Show* on tape and that broke the taboo. Pretty soon, every show was on tape. Originally, because the techniques of recording had not been perfected, radio shows were done live. In certain places in the world they still do it live.

That's all the time we have, we are going to start our shows. After the *Harry Nile* adventure, we will take a 10 minutes intermission. I hope you will enjoy yourself. *Editor's Note*: At this time, Jim goes up to the booth and the recording of "Who Killed Harry Nile?" begins. After the intermission and a prize drawing, Jim begins the introductions of the cast

and crew for the second show.

Our second show is called "The Weatherman." It's a fantasy & takes place in a little New England town.

The gentleman who will be leading you through this story, plays the part of a weatherman. I would like you to meet the actor playing him - Bill Brooks.

Here is a man you hear frequently on our show, but not as frequently as I would like because he is a busy guy. He has been a television director, comedy writer, and author. Please meet Frank Buxton.

(Continued on the back cover.)

New in The Tape Library

By Maletha & Dick King

We have a lot of great shows to put into the library this month. Starting off with a reel of *The Man Called X*, eight shows from 1952, some of which might be a forecast of things going on today. From there, we move on to a reel of juvenile adventure shows. I wonder how any of us ever survived with such violence in our everyday listening. Maybe we had more sense than the youth of today & realized it was only a story.

The next five reels of *Family Theater* all have great actors & good stories. The entertainment industry felt that it was the time for them to step in present some positive shows to benefit our restless society of 1947. These shows all have a good moral & are still good entertainment. In this series you will enjoy actors such as: Loretta Young, Jim Ameche, Walter Brennan, Beula Bondi, Bing Crosby, Irene Dunne, Van Heflin, Margaret Sullivan, Claude Jarman Jr., J. Carroll Nash, Pat O'Brien, Bill Williams, Ethel Barrymore, The Bob Mitchell Boys Choir, Gregory Peck, Maureen O'Sullivan & on & on. . . .

Our RHAC picnic and garage sale went over well. We moved a lot

of good stuff that we cannot store any longer. Many members and friends took home treasures, so we know that all items went to good homes. The club benefitted by over fifty dollars, just a small fraction of the true worth of the items, but all of these treasures needed new homes.

NEEDED

Member Al Harding is looking for a motor for a Sony reel-to-reel deck. Al can be reached at 314-239-2182.



Review: The Great Radio Soap Operas

By Jim Cox

Reviewer S. Wright

DON'T let the title keep you from seeking out this book. It is much, much more than a book on radio soap operas. Jim has written a GREAT BOOK, comprehensive histories of 31 of network radio's most durable soap operas. They include: *Aunt Jenny's Real Life Stories*, *Backstage Wife*, *Big Sister*, *The Brighter Day*, *David Harum*, *Front Page Farrell*, *The Guiding Light*, *Hilltop House*, *Just Plain Bill*, *Life Can Be Beautiful*, *The Light of the World*, *Lora Lawton*, *Lorenzo Jones*, *Ma Perkins*, *One Man's Family*, *Our Gal Sunday*, *Pepper Young's Family*, *Perry Mason*, *Portia Faces Life*, *The Right to Happiness*, *Road of Life*, *The Romance of Helen Trent*, *Rosemary*, *The Second Mrs. Burton*, *Stella Dallas*, *This Is Nora Drake*, *Today's Children*, *Wendy Warren and the News*, *When a Girl Marries*, *Young Doctor Malone*, & *Young Widder Brown*. Don't be disappointed if one of your favorite "soaps" isn't in the above list. Many others are also discussed in this book.

If you enjoy facts, there are plenty. Each of the series covered in depth includes extensive information on casts, writers, production personnel, sponsors, ratings, dates on the air,

and time slots. There is biographical information on many actors, producers, directors, & writers. Also, the opening lines for many soap operas are included. You'll find appendices on "Soap Opera Firsts, Lasts, and Mosts" & "Adult Weekday Radio Serials By Year of Debut." There is an excellent annotated bibliography.

Jim Cox (an RHAC member) manages to blend facts, entertaining anecdotes, scripting and plotting techniques, plot lines, and a generous portion of Radio history into a highly informative, readable, & enjoyable book. No small feat in deed! This book really captures the vitality of radio soap operas in such a way that the reader feels like the shows are still on the air. Even though the last radio "soap" went off the air nearly four decades ago, they live on in Jim's book.

Jim states this book was a labor of love. (See **Comments by Jim COX**, below.) The love of his subject matter clearly shows through. *The Great Radio Soap Operas* is a book well worth adding to your Old-Time Radio library.

Comments by Jim COX

Editor's Notes: I found the following comments by the author on the Web site of amazon.com. I feel that they will give our readers some additional, valuable insight and information into the creation of this excellent book.

"After the Golden Age of radio (about 1930-1960), I began to seriously collect materials from the era. One item I repeatedly sought was a collection of factual information flavored with obscure details about the daytime serials that had been missed by other authors, or hadn't surfaced in one place. I wanted glimpses into the lives of favorite performers beyond a single series. And I wanted perspectives on how those dramas originally made it to the airwaves.

Eventually, it occurred to me

that -- if my ambition was to be realized -- it might be up to me to make such a contribution. This is my attempt to satisfy that quest.

Thirty-one of more than 200 daytime dramas were selected for intense examination and reflection. Others are highlighted in cross-references throughout the text. Favorite performers surface in 158 brief profiles, some with photographs.

The volume explores creators, producers, directors, actors, actresses, announcers, musicians, sound technicians, advertisers, agencies, networks, audiences, ratings and the timeslots for each drama. Heavy use of anecdotal, behind-the-scenes trivia, much of it never published, is included. The influence of individual series on others of the genre is interwoven into the narrative.

The book includes appendices, photos, notes, annotated bibliography and index.

For me, this project was a labor of love. From three decades of collecting memorabilia to years of research and writing, joy was packed into every day. I wanted to make it the most comprehensive, exhaustive volume on the topic ever produced. Indeed, it is the first major treatise to be released in 33 years dealing exclusively with the radio soap opera genre. To my knowledge, it may be only the second volume singularly pertaining to its subject since radio's Golden Age faded.

I attempted to capture the pathos and heartache, hope & contentment experienced by the soap opera heroes and heroines in their ongoing daily struggles. To the reader I leave the judgment of how well I succeeded."

-- Jim Cox

Availability Information:

\$55.00 (\$59.00 postage paid) from:

McFarland & Co. Inc.

Publishers

Box 611

Jefferson, NC 28640

Order Line: 1-800-253-2187

Members' Meeting

There will be a Member's Meeting Thursday, September 16th, 7:30 PM, at the Church of the Master, East 17th Ave. at Filbert Court. Enter through the Filbert Court door.

A special speaker and other activities for the meeting are tentatively being planned.

Election of Officers

Officers will be elected at the September Members' meeting.

Imagination Theater Warm-Up

Continued from Page 5
Next is the gentlemen who comes

up from Southern California to grace our local Old-Time Radio club's (Radio Enthusiasts of Puget Sound) Convention. He has been kind enough to spend another day here to do a radio show for us - Gil Stratton.

We will also bring Larry Albert and Nick Morrison back.

Finally, an actress who has been with us from practically since the beginning, doing some wonderful work. Would you please welcome director, actor, teacher - Lee Paache.

We can't start until the director is on stage. So Pat, where are you? (The director of the show, Pat French comes on stage.)

Now we will do the show.
Editor's Notes:

The recording of both shows went smoothly; there was only a single, minor

fluff of a line in each show and they were immediately corrected.

The recording session is completed by 9:00 PM & the audience goes home. They are looking forward to the broadcasts (local and national) of these shows. They were part of an all too infrequent entertainment phenomenon: the recording of radio drama.

Recording sessions for PEMCO's *Imagination Theater* normally take place on the last Monday of the month. For free tickets to a recording session, send a stamped, addressed envelope to:

KNWX
1820 Eastlake Ave. E.
Seattle, WA 98102

Be sure to tell them how many tickets you need.

RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION of COLO.
P.O. BOX 1008 ENGLEWOOD, CO 80150



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