

Vaughn de Leath and the Expansion of Radio Broadcasting in the United States, 1894-1943

Historic Context

Prepared for:
Historic Preservation Division of the Illinois
Department of Natural Resources

February 5, 2025

Prepared by:
Stantec Consulting Services Inc. as
commissioned by Top Hat Wind Energy LLC

Project/File:
193709731



Document Information

Project Name	Vaughn de Leath and the Expansion of Radio Broadcasting in the United States, 1894-1943
SHPO Log #	004050123
Project Number	193709731
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Date	February 2025
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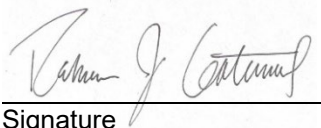


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1 Statement of Context

The historic context developed in this document focuses on Vaughn de Leath and the theme of the Expansion of Radio Broadcasting in the United States during her lifetime, 1894-1943. The historic context focuses on Vaughn de Leath's direct association with some of the most significant events in the expansion of radio broadcasting. These included: her singing on one of the earliest experimental live radio broadcasts in the United States and at some of the earliest experimental radio stations; her popularization of the crooning style of singing to avoid shattering expensive early radio vacuum tubes; and her contributions as a woman songwriter, as a woman composer, and as one of the first women to manage a radio station. The number of songs published by women steadily increased from 1890 until a decline in the 1920s.¹ There was a general decline in women's songwriting starting in the 1920s, possibly due to the replacement of the piano with the phonograph and, later, the radio and the advent of sound in motion pictures. For Vaughn de Leath, her success in early radio broadcasting in the United States allowed her to continue composing and recording her own music.² Vaughn de Leath was born Leonore Elizabeth Vonderlieth in Mount Pulaski, Illinois, but later used the stage name Vaughn de Leath. Additional details of her life are provided in the next section. Before 1920, this historic context will refer to her as Leonore Vonderlieth. After 1920, the context will follow established patterns in referring to her as Vaughn de Leath.

2 Background History

Katherine "Katie" Miller Vonderlieth and George W. Vonderlieth, the parents of Leonore E. Vonderlieth, were first generation American citizens born in the state of Illinois to German-born parents. A brochure within an exhibit at the Mount Pulaski Historical Society Museum in Mount Pulaski, Illinois, gave Leonore's middle name as "Elizabeth," and indicated that she was born to Katie at home by "Mrs. Arning, a local midwife." Per the 1880 census, Katie Miller, age 19, lived with her parents Christian and Karoline Miller at 50 Wines Street in Mount Pulaski. Christian and Karoline were listed as having been born in "Grefenthal [s.i.c.]," which is located in Germany, while Katie was listed as having been born in the United States, in Illinois. Katie Miller was working as a music teacher at in the 1880 Census.³ Based on the 1890 United States Census, 62,000 women were employed as music teachers and, by 1910, that number increased to

¹ Christopher Reynolds, "Documenting the Zenith of Women Song Composers: A Database of Songs Published in the United States and British Commonwealth, Ca. 1890-1930," *Notes*, June 2013, Vol. 69, No. 4, June 2013, p. 673-674.

² Ibid.

³ United States Census Bureau, 1880 United States Federal Census. Accessed online October 2024 at Ancestry.com.



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140,000, indicating an expansion in women's opportunities, such as those afforded to Katie.⁴ In 1910, Katie Vonderlieth, age 49, lived with her daughter Leonore/Vaughn de Leath, age 15, at her mortgaged house at 1128 W. 7th Street in Riverside, California. The census noted Katie's occupation as a "macacion" (suspected misspelling of "musician") in "interstate commerce," and it indicated that Katie had had three children, two of whom were living.⁵

In the 1860 census, George W. Vonderlieth was listed as the son of Henry and Catherina "Kate" Vonderlieth with sisters Elizabeth, Annie R., and Kate, and with brothers John M. and Adolph.⁶ His father, Henry Vonderlieth, came to Mount Pulaski in 1838, two years after its founding, and was a brickyard operator who laid the brick for the courthouse in 1847-1848, built the first brick house in Mount Pulaski, and later owned a small farm adjoining the Village of Mount Pulaski.⁷ After the relocation of the county seat from Mount Pulaski to Lincoln in 1855, the courthouse was deeded to Henry Vonderlieth, Jabez Capps, and George W. Turley, founders and trustees of Mount Pulaski. They in turn gave the building to the Board of Education for use as a school.⁸ By 1870, George Vonderlieth was eleven years old, and Elizabeth and Annie had moved out of the household in Mount Pulaski. Parents Henry and Catherina "Kate" were listed as being "of foreign birth."⁹ By 1900, the census indicated that George W. Vonderlieth had married Katie W. in 1881, that George was a manufacturer of windmills, and that his parents had been born in Germany.¹⁰ In addition to manufacturing windmills, George was also a partner in the C.F. Schafer Hardware Company (Figure 1) for several years while he and C.F. Schafer were also operating the Mount Pulaski Wind Mill Company.¹¹

⁴ Reynolds, "Documenting the Zenith of Women Song Composers: A Database of Songs Published in the United States and British Commonwealth."

⁵ United States Census Bureau, 1910 United States Federal Census. Accessed online October 2024 at Ancestry.com.

⁶ United States Census Bureau, 1860 United States Federal Census. Accessed online October 2024 at Ancestry.com.

⁷ "Adolph Vonderlieth-86," Vonderlieth obituary card file, Mt. Pulaski Township Historical Society, 1999; "Early Pioneers of This Community," in Sil-Tennial Edition, *Times-News* (Mt. Pulaski, Illinois), Thursday, July 15, 1961.

⁸ Paul J. Beaver and Paul E. Gleason, "Mount Pulaski," in *Logan County, Illinois: A Pictorial History*, G. Bradley Publishing, Inc., 2000, p. 140.

⁹ 1870 United States Federal Census. Accessed online October 2024 at Ancestry.com.

¹⁰ 1900 United States Federal Census. Accessed online October 2024 at Ancestry.com.

¹¹ "Charles F. Schafer Business Leader Over Half Century," in Mt. Pulaski Township Historical Society newsletter, Summer 2004, Volume 10, Issue 1, p.2.



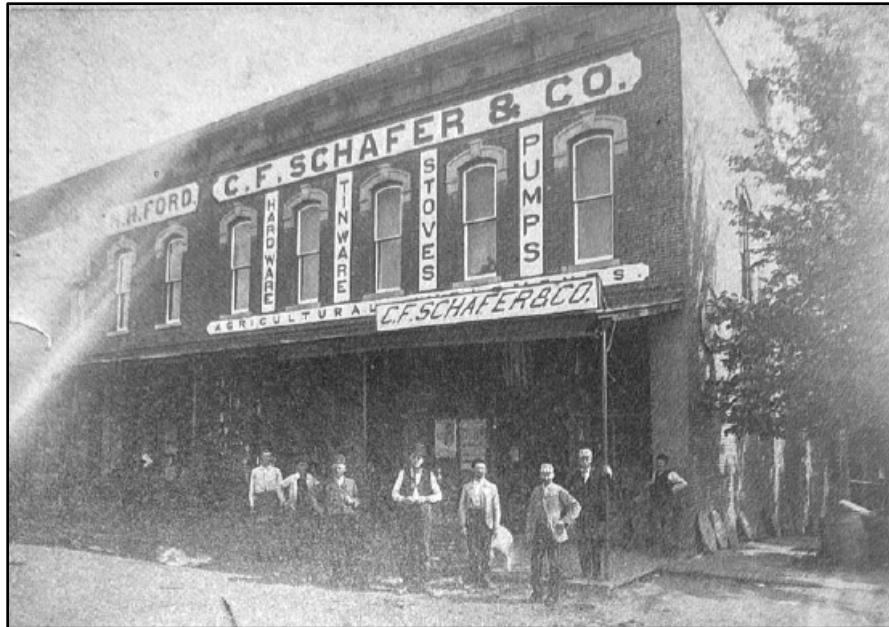


Figure 1. C.F. Schafer & Co. Hardware Store (C.F. Schafer, third from left, and George W. Vonderlieth, fourth from left), circa 1900, undated¹²

A 1901 article referred to George W. Vonderlieth's successful former Yankee windmill factory, indicating that his factory ". . . did a large and extensive business throughout this and adjoining states." George W. Vonderlieth was a Democrat, a Lutheran, and had served for years as Mount Pulaski city treasurer. After he died, Mount Pulaski businesses closed so that residents could attend his funeral.¹³ According to a 1954 article (republished 1961) with a brief history of the Yankee Windmill Company, John M. Whitney, brother of Eli Whitney, arrived in Mount Pulaski, and invented the Yankee Windmill. John Whitney later sold his interest to the Mount Pulaski Windmill Company, which incorporated in 1902.¹⁴

The early owners of the Mount Pulaski Windmill Company were George W. and his brother Adolph O. Vonderlieth, among others. Company advertisements promoted the concept that "wind power is absolutely free, the only cost being the upkeep of the wind mill used to convert the wind pressure into mechanical power."¹⁵ They explained that that Yankee windmill was wooden and used direct motion rather than gears to keep it simple, strong, durable, and "the

¹² Beaver and Gleason, "Mount Pulaski," in Logan County, Illinois: A Pictorial History.

¹³ "Mt. Pulaski, Ills., October 9 – Correspondence of The Review)," *The Daily Review* (Decatur, Illinois), Wednesday, October 9, 1901, p. 3, Accessed online October 2024 via Newspapers.com at: <https://www.newspapers.com/image/7396431/>.

¹⁴ Charles W. Fricke, ed., *Mount Pulaski, Illinois: 1836-1986, 150 Years of Memories*, Community Pride, 1986, p. 22.

¹⁵ "'It Will Pump Your Water for Nothing,' Claim of Builders," July 1, 1954, republished in Mt. Pulaski Township Historical Society newsletter, Winter 2002, Vol. 7, Issue 3, Logan County Genealogical and Historical Society archives.



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most practical for the user” based on 30 years of experience.¹⁶ The company initially manufactured “several thousand” windmills but it eventually transitioned to a plumbing business after rural electrification reduced the need for windmills.¹⁷ In 1958, the former windmill manufacturing building was demolished to build a bowling alley.¹⁸

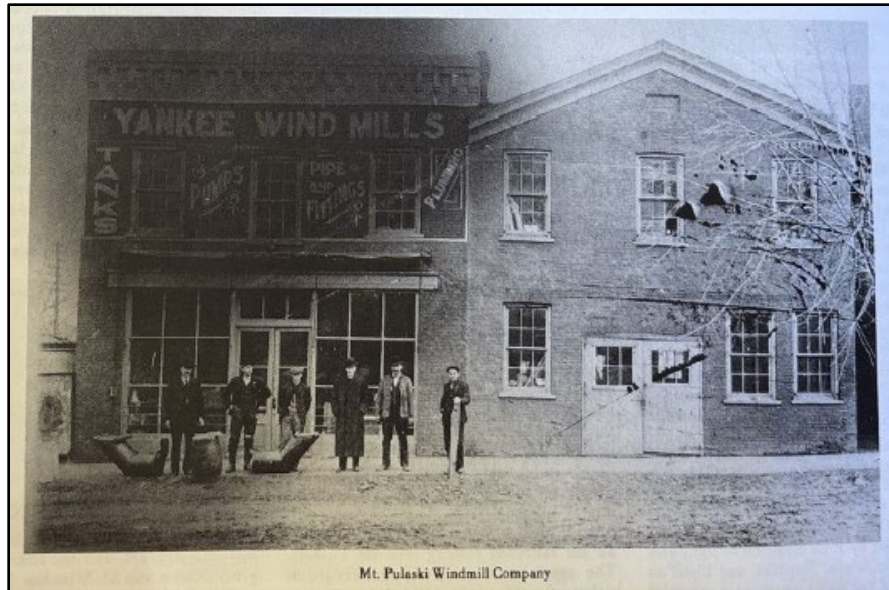


Figure 2. Former Mount Pulaski Windmill Company Building, Undated¹⁹

¹⁶ “Yankee Simplicity and Durability,” July 1, 1954, republished in Mt. Pulaski Township Historical Society newsletter, Winter 2002, Vol. 7, Issue 3, Logan County Genealogical and Historical Society archives.

¹⁷ “Yankee Windmill Was Farmers’ Best Friend Back in Early 1890’s: Was Invented by Yankee, Hence It Was So Named,” July 1, 1954, republished in Sil-Tennial Edition, *Times-News* (Mt. Pulaski, Illinois), Thursday, July 13, 1961.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Fricke, ed., *Mount Pulaski, Illinois: 1836-1986*, original photo is damaged.



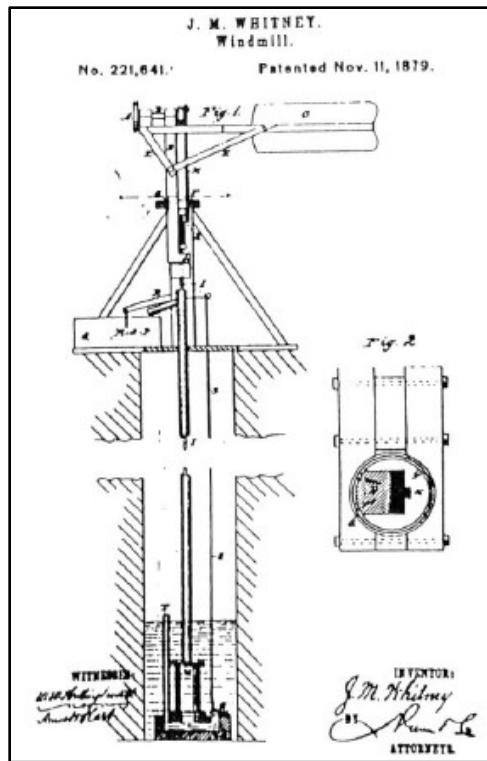


Figure 3. 1879 John M. Whitney Windmill Patent Drawing²⁰



Plate 1. Original Yankee Windmill Rudder²¹

²⁰ T. Lindsay Baker, *Windmill Patent Models*, Yankee Windmill, Logan County Historical and Genealogical Society archive.

²¹ Mt. Pulaski Windmill Company Exhibit, accessed October 2024 at Mt. Pulaski Township Historical Society Museum.

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When George W. and Katie Vonderlieth's daughter Leonore was only three years old, circa 1897, her mother brought her to perform at a gala night in Mount Pulaski as part of a minstrel show at "the old Scroggin opera house" (Figure 5). Moments after the curtain rose, Leonore fled the stage in tears, her mother eventually realizing her daughter had broken out in measles. The foiled early performance was notable enough to have been satirized in cartoons and written about in various articles.²²

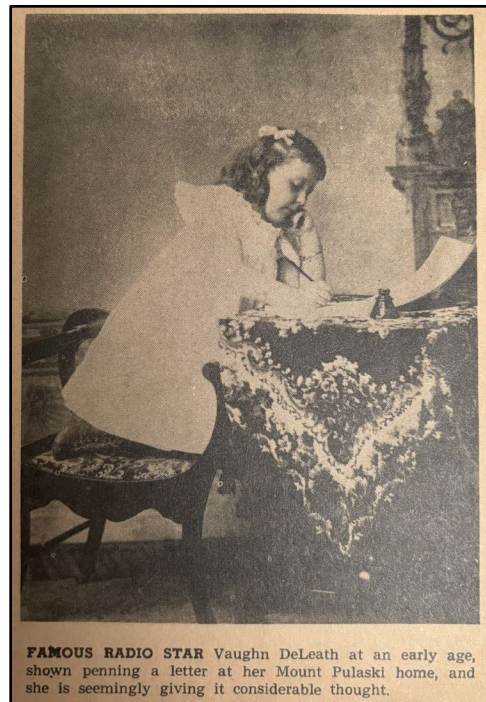


Figure 4. Photo of Leonore Vonderlieth as a child²³

²² "Famous Star Made Debut in Mount Pulaski: Appeared in Minstrel Show When 3 Years Old," November 4, 1947, republished in Sil-Tennial Edition, Times-News (Mt. Pulaski, Illinois), Thursday, July 13, 1961.

²³ Original newspaper clipping, Mt. Pulaski Township Historical Society, Vonderlieth family file, accessed October 2024 at Mt. Pulaski Township Historical Society Museum.





Figure 5. 1912 Photo of Mount Pulaski, Scroggin Building at far left, west side of square²⁴

The 1900 census listed Leonore E. Vonderlieth, age five, and identified her birth date as September 1894 with her birthplace as Illinois. The census indicated that her 40-year-old father George W. and her 39-year-old mother Katie W., were both born in Illinois. The census also listed her sister Alma C. Vonderlieth, age 16. Their address in 1900 was listed as 341 Jefferson Street in Mount Pulaski. Two 22-year-old boarders, Emma Weckel and Albert F. Lipp, were listed in George and Katie's household.²⁵

In 1901, George W. Vonderlieth died at age 42 from heart and kidney issues. A newspaper article referenced his popularity and referred to him as "one of the prominent and wealthy business men of Mount Pulaski."²⁶ Shortly after the death of her father and the sale of their house on Jefferson Street in 1904, twelve-year-old Leonore and her mother Katie relocated from Mount Pulaski to Los Angeles, California, to join Leonore's sister, Alma. Although the age at which Leonore actually moved away from her hometown varies in archival sources between age six and twelve, it is most consistently reported as age twelve. In California, still age twelve, Leonore was director of an orchestra and sold her first song.²⁷ She composed "many songs" as

²⁴ Mount Pulaski Historical Society website, accessed November 2024 at:

<https://mountpulaskitownshiphistoricalsociety.com/>.

²⁵ 1900 United States Federal Census. Accessed online October 2024 at Ancestry.com.

²⁶ "Death of a Mt Pulaski Citizen," in *Herald and Review* (Decatur, Illinois), Tuesday, October 8, 1902, p.2, accessed online October 2024 via Newspapers.com at: <https://www.newspapers.com/image/90936609/>.

²⁷ Logan County Genealogical and Historical Society, "Music has played a large role in Mt. Pulaski," Logan County Genealogical and Historical Society website, accessed November 2024 at: <https://www.logancoil-genhist.org/LogCoSpots/MtPulaski/Music/MP-music.htm#:~:text=Music%20has%20played%20a%20large%20role%20i&text=from%20the%20mid%2D1800's%20onward,their%20voices%2C%20their%20music%20appreciation>



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a child.²⁸ Leonore finished high school at Pomona High School in Pomona, California, and went on to study music for two years at Mills College in San Francisco.²⁹ Leonore later dropped out of college to pursue her musical career.³⁰ As mentioned previously, 1910 census records indicated that Leonore Vonderlieth, age 15, lived with her mother on West 7th Street, Riverside Ward 2, Riverside, California. The 1910 census provided further information that Leonore had attended school and was able to read and write.³¹

At age 17, Leonore had her first major public stage performance as an adult in Los Angeles.³² In 1912, around age 18, she sold her first two compositions “Glenwood Waltzes” and “In the Twilight.”³³ At age 21, she was featured at a 1915 recital at the Ebell Club House, a women’s club in Los Angeles. Importantly, on the recital invitation, she was billed as “Leonore von der Lieth,” a slight variation on her given name, and was still singing as a “soprano.”³⁴ The Ebell Club House, which still exists in a different building in Los Angeles, was founded in 1894 with a mission of promoting women in literature, art, and science.³⁵

²⁸ “Famous Star Made Debut in Mount Pulaski: Appeared in Minstrel Show When 3 Years Old,” November 4, 1947, republished in Sil-Tennial Edition, *Times-News* (Mt. Pulaski, Illinois), Thursday, July 13, 1961.

²⁹ “Vaughn de Leath Listed in ASCAP Biographical,” republished in Sil-Tennial Edition, *Times-News* (Mt. Pulaski, Illinois), Thursday, July 13, 1961.

³⁰ Logan County Genealogical and Historical Society, “Music has played a large role in Mt. Pulaski.”

³¹ 1910 United States Federal Census. Accessed online October 2024 at Ancestry.com.

³² Mt. Pulaski Township Historical Society, “Vaughn DeLeath – “First Lady of Radio,” Mt. Pulaski Township Historical Society website, accessed November 2024 at: https://www.mountpulaskitownshiphistoricalsociety.com/mtpulaskiilWEBSITE/MP_Music/Vaugh%20De%20Leath/Vaughn.htm.

³³ “Vaughn de Leath Listed in ASCAP Biographical,” republished in Sil-Tennial Edition, *Times-News* (Mt. Pulaski, Illinois), Thursday, July 13, 1961.

³⁴ Original Song Recital invitation, Ebell Club House, Monday, November 15, 1915, archive of the Logan County Genealogical and Historical Society.

³⁵ The Ebell of Los Angeles, “About Us,” “History,” and “Mission,” The Ebell of Los Angeles website, accessed online December 2024 at: <https://www.ebellofla.org/about-us#our-mission>.





Figure 6. Left to right: Alma Vonderlieth Cunningham, Katie Vonderlieth (foreground, sitting), and Leonore Vonderlieth at Long Beach, California, Undated³⁶

³⁶ Original postcard, Mt. Pulaski Township Historical Society, Vonderlieth family file, accessed October 2024 at Mt. Pulaski Township Historical Society Museum.



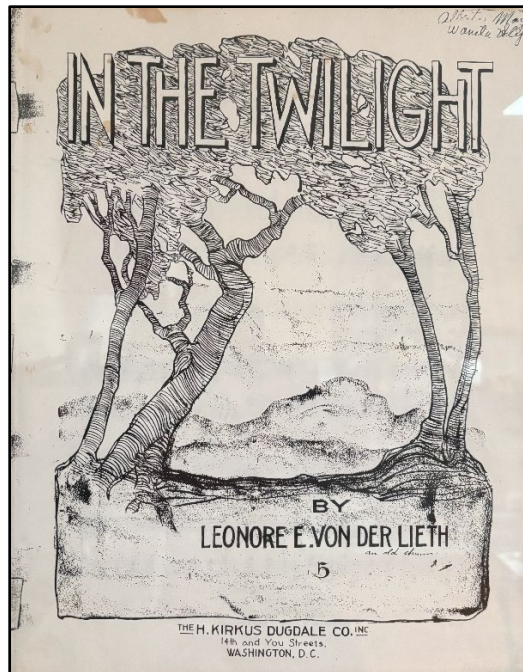


Figure 7. “In The Twilight” Sheet Music by Leonore E. Von Der Lieth³⁷

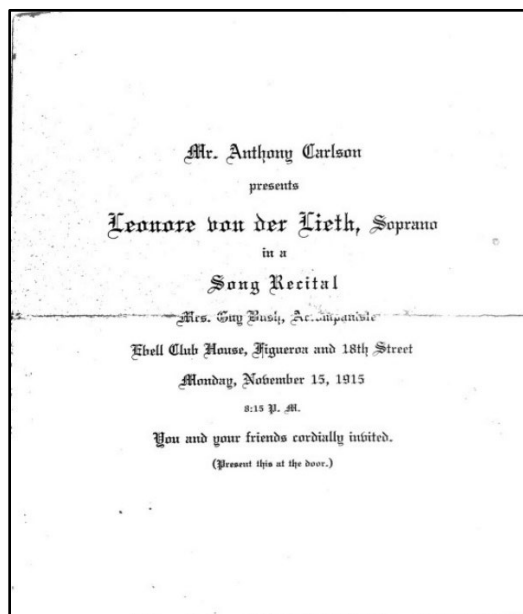


Figure 8. Invitation to Leonore von der Lieth Song Recital at Ebell Club House³⁸

³⁷ Vaughn de Leath Exhibit, accessed October 2024 at Mt. Pulaski Township Historical Society Museum.

³⁸ Original Song Recital invitation, Monday, November 15, 1915, archive of the Logan County Genealogical and Historical Society.

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In early 1920, at age 25, Vaughn de Leath traveled to New York and sang in one of the first live radio broadcasts using her modified contralto voice. The broadcast occurred at radio pioneer Lee De Forest's small experimental "Highbridge Station" 2XG (originally located in the Highbridge section of the Bronx). The station had recently moved into the World's Tower Building in Manhattan (110 W. 40th Street & Broadway in New York City).³⁹ According to Vaughn de Leath, the 2XG studio was "hardly any bigger than a fair-sized closet."⁴⁰ Apparently, De Forest did not receive permission to move his station into the World's Tower Building, and it was temporarily shut down by the local radio inspector. De Forest briefly moved his station and radio transmitter to San Francisco but later returned the station to New York. Upon the return of the station to New York, De Forest again featured Vaughn de Leath, this time singing over the new De Forest Radiophone, in December 1920.⁴¹

According to the *Times-News*, Vaughn de Leath first performed in 1920 using the Audion, an invention Lee De Forest had recently developed, described as ". . . a radio tube which makes modern reception possible without the use of earphones."⁴² Vaughn de Leath later reminisced on her 1920 performance for Lee De Forest, saying she sang into ". . . an old horn that originally had seen service on a 1904 model phonograph," to an audience of "a few amateur experimenters in radio and wireless operators on ships."⁴³ In a 1927 article, Vaughn de Leath described De Forest's device, the Audion, as ". . . an instrument which greatly resembled an old fashioned phonograph horn."⁴⁴ At the time, people would have listened to De Forest's broadcast of Vaughn de Leath's live singing through earphones at their "crude crystal [radio] sets."⁴⁵ As early as October 1920, Vaughn de Leath was recording music under her stage name. One of the first recordings was an Edison recording titled Blue Amberol 4091 which was dubbed from Diamond Disc to the cylinder. Another early recording was Columbia 1203D. On both recordings, Vaughn de Leath sang soprano rather than using her contralto range.⁴⁶

³⁹ Thomas H. White, "Broadcasting After World War One (1918-1921)," United States Early Radio History website, accessed online December 2024 at: <https://earlyradiohistory.us/sec016.htm>.

⁴⁰ "First Woman at the Mike Still on Job," *Zanesville Times-Signal* (Ohio), October 16, 1927, Section 2, p. 14, United States Early Radio History website, Thomas H. White, accessed online December 2024 at: <https://earlyradiohistory.us/1927orig.htm>.

⁴¹ Thomas H. White, "Broadcasting After World War One (1918-1921)."

⁴² "Special Interview with Noted Singer on Last Visit Here: First Woman's Voice to be Heard Over Trans-Atlantic Radio," Sil-Tennial Edition, original interview September 3, 1941, republished in Sil-Tennial Edition, *Times-News* (Mt. Pulaski, Illinois), Thursday, July 13, 1961.

⁴³ "Famous Star Made Debut in Mount Pulaski: Appeared in Minstrel Show When 3 Years Old," November 4, 1947, republished in Sil-Tennial Edition, *Times-News* (Mt. Pulaski, Illinois), Thursday, July 13, 1961.

⁴⁴ "First Woman at the Mike Still on Job," *Zanesville Times-Signal* (Ohio), October 16, 1927.

⁴⁵ Ashes of Famous Singing Star Buried in Local Cemetery," Sil-Tennial Edition, *Times-News* (Mt. Pulaski, Illinois), Thursday, July 15, 1961.

⁴⁶ Jim Walsh, "The Original Radio Girl, Vaughn de Leath," in *Hobbies: The Magazine for Collectors*, April 1958, p. 31.





Figure 9. 1971 Cartoon, Lee De Forest (with Audion) and Vaughn de Leath in 1920⁴⁷

As a result of these 1920 performances Vaughn de Leath is generally credited with popularizing the crooning style of singing. In a 1999 article in the journal *American Music* focusing on crooning, Allison McCracken noted that Vaughn de Leath was the first singer to be known as a crooner. McCracken continues to explain that Vaughn de Leath had an intimate singing style and a “desexualized ‘friend’ persona” projecting the idea that she was “giving comfort.”⁴⁸ Although Vaughn de Leath is sometimes credited with the first live broadcast of singing, another contralto, Swedish-born Eugenia Farrar (Ada Eugenia Hildegard von Boos Farrar) apparently sang two songs for De Forest over an experimental New York City station in 1907. Farrar’s performance received little attention despite its significance, yet De Forest described Vaughn de Leath as “an instant success.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Lloyd Ostendorf, 1971 Cartoon, accessed October 2024 at Mt. Pulaski Township Historical Society Museum, Vaughn de Leath Exhibit.

⁴⁸ Allison McCracken, “‘God’s Gift to Us Girls’: Crooning, Gender, and the Re-Creation of American Popular Song, 1928-1933: Crooning in the Jazz Age, 1920-1929,” *American Music*, Winter 1999, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Winter 1999), University of Illinois Press, p. 368.

⁴⁹ The History Researcher (Brentwood, Essex, United Kingdom), “Vaughn De Leath: The 1st Lady of 1920’s Radio,” Hidden Her Stories Blog, accessed online October 2024 at: <https://chrissyhamlin.blogspot.com/2018/01/vaughn-de-leath-the1st-lady-of-1920s.html>.



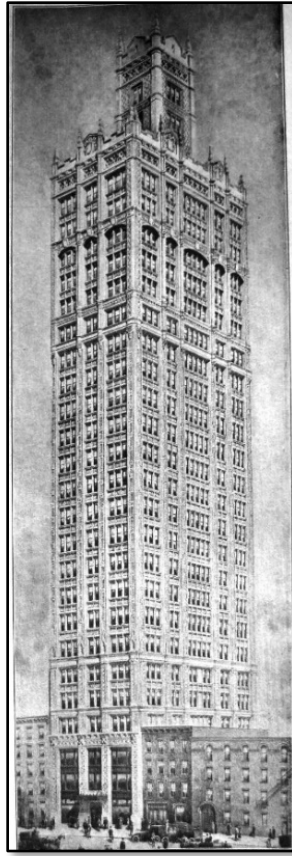


Figure 10. Undated Historic Photo of 1913 World's Tower Building in Manhattan⁵⁰

At age twenty-six, Vaughn de Leath began singing for WJZ-AM Radio in Newark, New Jersey, in 1921.⁵¹ According to an article in the Sil-Tennial Edition of the *Times-News*, Vaughn de Leath was selected by Okeh Records for an important radio experiment. She was specifically chosen due to her “safer” voice for radio transmission, which would not shatter the approximately 110-dollar radio tubes of that time. As a result of her selection for this early radio experiment on WJZ, she again made history with this New Jersey broadcast as her voice was “the first woman’s voice transmitted across the Atlantic Ocean by radio . . .” The broadcast on December 9, 1922, from New York to London was successfully received by seven of the largest European cities.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Joe Knapp, “New Oldies – Are You Lonesome To-Night by Vaughn de Leath (The Radio Girl),” Music Master Oldies Blog, March 28, 2014, accessed online October 2024 at: <https://musicmasteroldies.com/2014/03/28/new-oldies-are-you-lonesome-to-night-by-vaughn-de-leath-the-radio-girl/>.

⁵² “Special Interview with Noted Singer on Last Visit Here: First Woman’s Voice to be Heard Over Trans-Atlantic Radio,” Thursday, July 13, 1961; The History Researcher, “Vaughn De Leath: The 1st Lady of 1920’s Radio.”



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In addition to her work with WJZ, Vaughn de Leath later performed on and encouraged the development of early New Jersey radio stations WDJ, WHN, and WEAJ.⁵³ Also in 1921, Vaughn de Leath collaborated with Irving Berlin on the song “Drowsy Head,” as well as wrote the hit “Now They Call It Swing,” sung by Billy Holiday and Louis Prima.⁵⁴ Vaughn de Leath subsequently recorded for many different record labels under different names, accompanying herself on ukelele, guitar, banjo, and piano. She sang ballads, blues, novelties, and comedic music.⁵⁵ She also wrote the music and lyrics for the hit silent movie version of Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*, a 1922 First National Attraction starring Jackie Coogan.⁵⁶

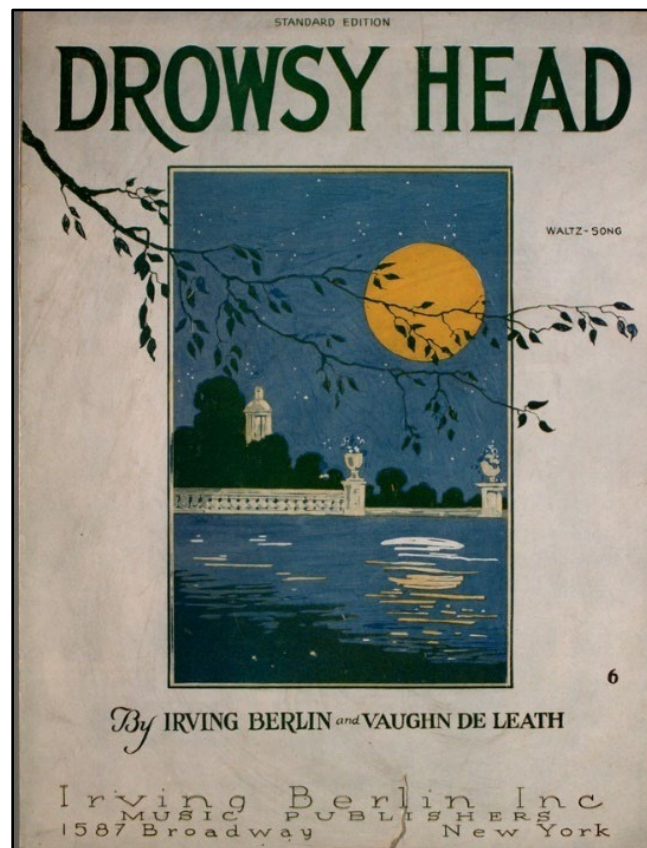


Figure 11. 1921 Sheet Music Cover, “Drowsy Head,” Irving Berlin and Vaughn de Leath⁵⁷

⁵³ Walsh, “The Original Radio Girl, Vaughn de Leath,” April 1958, p. 33.

⁵⁴ Historical Society of Easton and Bruce Nelson, “Easton’s Original Radio Girl,” Historical Society of Easton’s Year of the Women Series, Easton Courier, November 28, 2020, accessed online October 2024 at: <https://eastoncourier.news/2020/11/28/eastons-original-radio-girl/>.

⁵⁵ Andy Senior, “Vaughn De Leath: Jazz Birthday of the Month,” in *The Syncopated Times*, August 28, 2020, accessed online December 2024 at: <https://syncopatedtimes.com/vaughn-de-leath/>.

⁵⁶ Gerald D. McDonald, “A Bibliography of Song Sheets Sports and Recreations in American Popular Songs: Part IV Songs of Silent Film,” *Notes*, Volume 14, No. 3, June 1957, p. 335.

⁵⁷ The Lester S. Levy Sheet Music Collection, Johns Hopkins Sheridan Libraries & University Museums, *Drowsy Head*, Standard Edition. Irving Berlin, Inc. 1587 Broadway, Irving Berlin and Vaughn de Leath,



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In 1923, WDT Radio, known as the “old Shipowners station,” in New York City at Premier Grand Piano Corporation (510-532 W. 23rd Street in New York) opened for broadcasting with its “up-to-date equipment and facilities.” At age twenty-nine, Vaughn de Leath became its composer and broadcasting director while also performing there and leading a sixty-piece orchestra. In her role at WDT, Vaughn de Leath became one of the first women to manage a radio station. A 1923 newspaper article indicated that it was estimated that hundreds of thousands of people heard the opening broadcast on WDT and that many supportive letters and telephone messages followed.⁵⁸

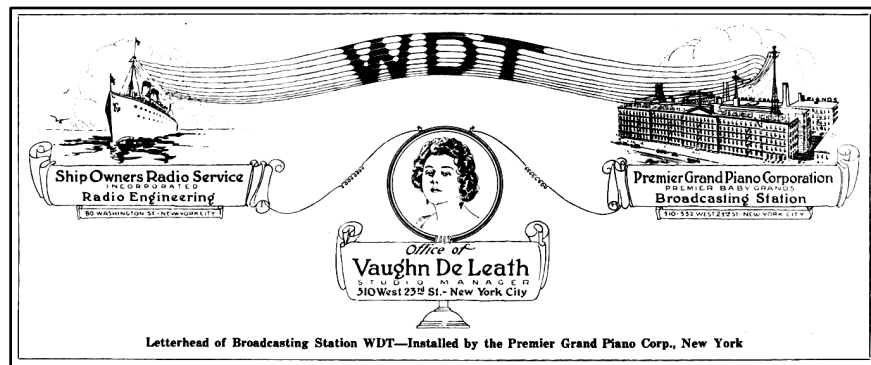


Figure 12. WDT Radio Letterhead from the Office of Vaughn de Leath, Station Manager⁵⁹

A different 1923 article in the *Boston Herald* noted that Vaughn de Leath’s “. . . phonographic records have an enormous circulation . . .”⁶⁰ This article also credited her as “. . . the first woman in the United States, hence in the world, to broadcast vocal music for the benefit of the general public . . . and the woman chosen for the first successful attempt to bridge the Atlantic by a woman’s voice.”⁶¹ According to archival evidence in the form of her 1923 American Society of Composers Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) certificate at the Mount Pulaski Township Historical Society Museum, Vaughn de Leath was also inducted into ASCAP in September 1923 (Figure 13). In 1927, Vaughn de Leath was quoted in an interview as saying that she still felt “a shiver of joy” upon entering a broadcasting room, and that it continued to feel new to her each

1921, Box 078, Item 029, accessed online November 2024 at:

<https://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/collection/078/029>.

⁵⁸ “Opening of Station WDT Proved a Big Event,” *Presto*, June 16, 1923, p. 6, United States Early Radio History website, Thomas H. White, accessed December 2024 at:

<https://www.earlyradiohistory.us/1923WDT.htm>.

⁵⁹ Wikimedia Commons, May 26, 1923 from “The Music Trades” magazine, public domain, accessed online December 2024 at:

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vaughn_De_Leath,_WDT_radio_studio_manager,_letterhead_\(1923\).gif](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vaughn_De_Leath,_WDT_radio_studio_manager,_letterhead_(1923).gif).

⁶⁰ “Famous ‘Radio Girl’ Now Own Director: Miss De Leath Extends Versatility as Manager of WDT,” *Boston Herald*, July 29, 1923, Section D, p.5, United States Early Radio History website, Thomas H. White, accessed online December 2024 at: <https://www.earlyradiohistory.us/1923WDT.htm>.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*



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time.⁶² That shiver of joy she felt may have also nudged her in the unhealthy direction of overwork and burnout, possibly contributing to her later illness and death. In 2003, Doug Pokorski noted that *Variety* magazine had described how Vaughn de Leath was capable of entertaining for hours, which was required then due to the need to fill time until another performer could arrive to go live on the air. The article indicated that Vaughn de Leath, “. . . could entertain for hours without tiring.”⁶³

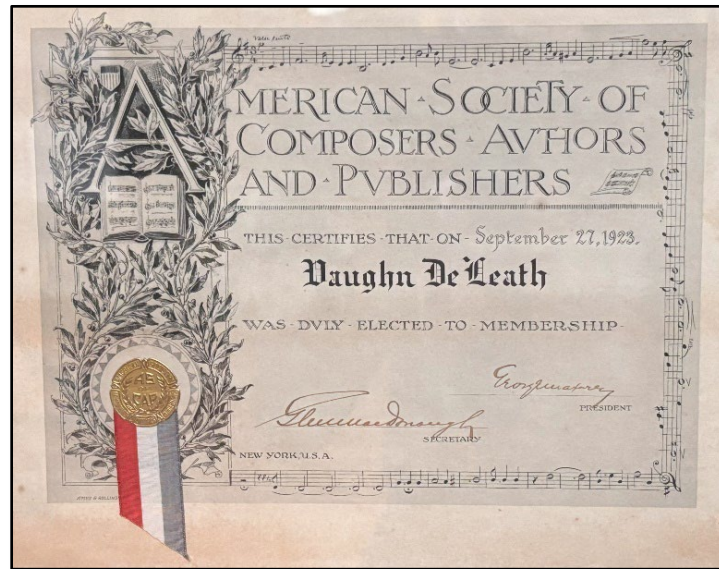


Figure 13. 1923 Vaughn de Leath ASCAP Membership Certificate⁶⁴

In 1924, Vaughn de Leath married successful artist and illustrator Livingston Geer. Around 1926, they purchased the property at 910 Sport Hill Road in the town of Easton, Connecticut, that is further described in Section 5 of this context. The house on its seven acres, nicknamed “The Hitching Post,” became the couple’s summer residence while she was employed with NBC; they lived in an apartment when she was working in New York. They apparently loved the more rural setting of the Connecticut property.⁶⁵ In the late 1920s, Vaughn de Leath recorded multiple songs that became later hits for Marilyn Monroe (“I Wanna Be Loved by You”) and Elvis Presley (“Are You Lonesome Tonight”).⁶⁶ Around this time, Vaughn de Leath had a fan club whose President was Illinois-based Charles “Chaw” Mank, Jr (Figure 14).

⁶² “First Woman at the Mike Still on Job,” *Zanesville Times-Signal* (Ohio), October 16, 1927, Section 2, p. 14, United States Early Radio History website, Thomas H. White, accessed online December 2024 at: <https://earlyradiohistory.us/1927orig.htm>.

⁶³ Doug Pokorski, “First Lady of Radio: Mount Pulaski Native De Leath Crooned Her Way to Fame,” in *Heartland Magazine: Springfield Stories*, February 21, 2003, p. 10A.

⁶⁴ Vaughn de Leath Exhibit, accessed October 2024 at Mt. Pulaski Township Historical Society Museum.

⁶⁵ Historical Society of Easton and Bruce Nelson, “Easton’s Original Radio Girl.”

⁶⁶ Knapp, “New Oldies – Are You Lonesome To-Night by Vaughn de Leath (The Radio Girl).”



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The Official
THE VAUGHN De LEATH HAPPINESS CLUB
Date _____ Am't. Enclosed _____
Name _____ City _____
Street or Box No. _____ State _____
My Birthday _____ Recommended by _____ Pen pals? yes - No _____
Dues are 15c a year — Foreign 20c. Members receive Club Publication, "The Vaughn DeLeath News" Personally autographed Photo Writing exchanging ideas Friendships everywhere.
In Cash . . . Mail Your dues to President: CHAW MANK Staunton, Illinois.
Our Motto: "Spread" Happiness" Every Where in every way.
Hear Vaughn DeLeath Every Monday thru Friday 12 A.M. NBC.
New York time—Sat on WJZ New York, entire blue Network 11:30 at 11 am.
Vaughn DeLeath is a member of American Society of Authors, Composers and Publishers . . . Latest Song Hit—"Hi Ho Silver"
Boost _____ Every where _____ Boost _____ "OUR STAR"

Figure 14. Vaughn de Leath Fan Club Application⁶⁷

In the mid-1920s, Vaughn de Leath recorded for Victor, Columbia, Brunswick, and Edison, among other labels. For Columbia, she recorded via the acoustic "horn" method as well as the electric method. When the Edison company first reached out to record Vaughn de Leath, they were reluctant to pay the "high fee" her agent demanded.⁶⁸ Since the record business continued to decline while Vaughn de Leath became increasingly popular on the radio and with other recording companies, the Edison company was finally persuaded that "she was worth" the high fee. Edison recordings were arguably the best of that era, and had a longer play time, giving the artists more freedom with their recordings. During the 1920s peak of her recording career, Vaughn de Leath had talented accompanists including but not limited to Muriel Pollock, Stuart Ross, and Bill Regis.

By 1925, Vaughn de Leath was doing more freelance work for smaller record labels and was briefly using the alternate stage name of "Gloria Geer."⁶⁹ She occasionally used other stage names including Mamie Lee, Sadie Green, Betty Brown, Nancy Foster, Marion Ross, Glory Clark, Angelina Marco, and Gertrude Dwyer.⁷⁰ On June 13, 1927, the day of a historic ticker tape parade celebrating the first successful solo nonstop trans-Atlantic flight by Charles Lindbergh on May 21, 1927, Vaughn de Leath recorded "It's a Million to One You're in Love," for the Edison company.⁷¹ According to the Alliance for Downtown New York, approximately four million spectators watched as ". . . ten thousand soldiers and sailors led Lindbergh's parade up Fifth Avenue." The parade was referred to as the "greatest demonstration in New York history" and Lindbergh could apparently barely be seen for the massive amount of ticker tape.⁷² On the day of the parade, another radio milestone occurred as NBC linked 50 radio stations in 24

⁶⁷ Logan County Historical and Genealogical Society, archival binder.

⁶⁸ Walsh, "The Original Radio Girl, Vaughn de Leath," April 1958, p. 31.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ The History Researcher, "Vaughn De Leath: The 1st Lady of 1920's Radio."

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Alliance for Downtown New York, "History of New York City's Ticker Tape Parades," 2019, accessed online December 2024 at: https://downtownny.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Downtown_Alliance-Ticker-Tape_Parade-History-2019.pdf.



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states for the largest network radio broadcast ever.⁷³ At the beginning of the 1927 recording, Vaughn de Leath is still so excited about having seen the parade that she starts the recording with, “. . . we’ve been up on the roof [of the Edison building at 79 Fifth Avenue] watching the big Lindy parade . . .” remarking, “And WAS it marvelous! Oh boy!” and delighted in “everybody cheering.”⁷⁴ Her fans loved these personal touches on her recordings.

Although she was born in Midwestern Illinois, Vaughn de Leath used a slight southern drawl in her singing, and many of the songs she wrote were based on the culture and geography of the southern United States. Vaughn de Leath sometimes performed theme songs which included stories and comedy.⁷⁵ In 1928, Vaughn de Leath was introduced on the NBC radio presentation “The Voice of Firestone.” An article about her introduction indicates she had “been before microphones almost from the time when radio was born,” noting that Vaughn de Leath was “at the top of radio’s ladder of fame” and “the first woman ever to sing in a broadcast program.” Although this is the case, Vaughn de Leath is quoted as having done “her share of starving in those early days of her musical career.”⁷⁶

⁷³ Tom Lewis, “A Godlike Presence: The Impact of Radio on the 1920 and 1930s,” *OAH Magazine of History*, Spring 1992, Vol. 6, No. 4, Communication in History: The Key to Understanding (Spring 1992), pp. 26-33.

⁷⁴ Vaughn de Leath and Bill Regis, Edison matrix 11733. It’s a million to one you’re in love, Discography of American Historical Recordings, accessed online December 2024 at: https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/2000158567/11733-Its_a_million_to_one_youre_in_love.

⁷⁵ The History Researcher, “Vaughn De Leath: The 1st Lady of 1920’s Radio.”

⁷⁶ “The Voice of Firestone: Introducing Vaughn de Leath and Franklyn Baur, Two Well-Known Radio Personalities,” 12-13, reprint from *Radio News*, February 1930, in *Nostalgia Digest and Radio Guide*, Book Ten, Chapter Six, October-November, 1984.



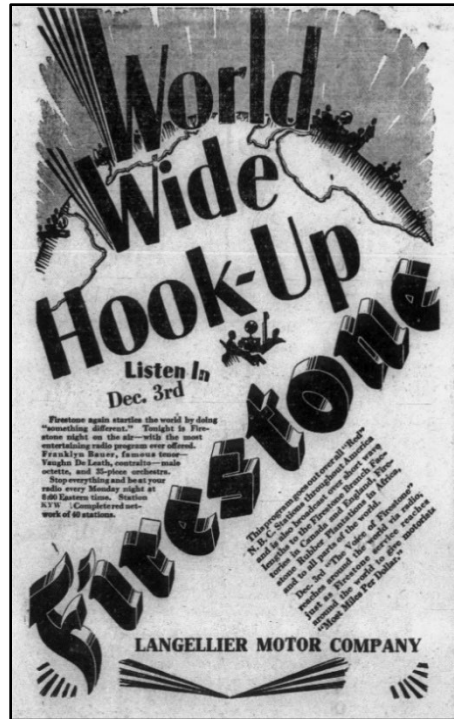


Figure 15. 1928 Advertisement for “Voice of Firestone” Program with Vaughn de Leath⁷⁷

A 1929 article in the *Decatur Evening Herald* indicated that Katie Miller Vonderlieth Phippen, sixty-eight-year-old mother of Vaughn de Leath, had died on Monday, June 24. The article also indicated that, the following Wednesday, Vaughn de Leath and her sister Alma accompanied their mother's body from New York city back to their hometown of Mount Pulaski, Illinois, where funeral services were held at St. John's Lutheran church. The article confirmed that Katie's first husband was George Vonderlieth, who died in 1901, and that she and George had three children, two surviving to adulthood, including Alma Vonderlieth Cunningham and Leonore Vonderlieth Geer (Vaughn de Leath), both of whom then lived in New York City. The article also identified Katie's two sisters, Augusta Miller Rupp in Mount Pulaski and Mary Miller Christison in St. Louis. The article mentioned that Katie, Alma, and Leonore moved to California after George died, where Katie had married her second husband who died two years prior to her own death. The article noted that Katie had been “a talented musician and vocalist,” whose daughters were also musically talented. The article noted that her daughter, then Leonore Geer, was “nationally known as ‘Vaughn de Leath,’ the original radio girl.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Advertisement for World Wide Hook-Up “Voice of Firestone” Program, *Clinton Daily Journal and Public* (Clinton, Illinois), Saturday, December 1, 1928, accessed via Newspapers.com online October 2024 at: <https://www.newspapers.com/image/643648014/>.

⁷⁸ “Phippen Rites Held Wednesday: ‘Vaughn de Leath,’ Radio Singer, Accompanies Mother’s Body Home,” in *Decatur Evening Herald* (Decatur, Illinois), Friday evening, June 28, 1929, accessed online October 2024 via Ancestry.com, Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2006.



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In 1930, Vaughn de Leath performed on an “experimental television broadcast,” and soon, was appearing twice a week on an experimental television program on the CBS network (Figure 16).⁷⁹ Circa 1932, an interview of Vaughn de Leath for the magazine *Radio Stars* provides some personal insights including the fact that Vaughn de Leath grew up singing to the sound of the windmills her father, George Vonderlieth, built. She called her voice “a trick voice,” capable of both deep tones and “coloratura trills.”⁸⁰ Although she preferred to use her “other voice” on certain songs, she used her “crooning voice” to please her fans. Allison McCracken explained how the term “crooner” was historically applied. In the 1920s, when the term “crooner” was applied to women and male minstrel singers, it was non-controversial, but when band singers in the mid-to-late 1920s were referred to as crooners, it was meant to indicate their “emasculatation and artlessness.”⁸¹



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personality for her fans. In a 2003 article, Doug Pokorski theorized that in the mid-1930s, Vaughn de Leath, “. . . continued to work — so hard in fact, that it damaged her health.”⁸⁵

In 1934, Vaughn de Leath divorced Livingston Geer but retained ownership of their property in the town of Easton, Connecticut. Due to her divorce, Vaughn de Leath was excommunicated from the Catholic church. As evidence of her determination, Vaughn de Leath had a “small chapel, complete with a stained-glass window” built in the basement to allow her to continue practicing her Catholic faith in private; most of her basement chapel was later removed.⁸⁶

By the mid-1930s, Vaughn de Leath no longer had a national presence although she continued to work in the radio industry at the local level.⁸⁷ Crooning was falling out of fashion, and she began to describe herself as a “qualtoniste” instead.⁸⁸ Despite her musical career declining, she received a pin from the ASCAP in September 1937 along with a letter from Chairman E.C. Mills of the ASCAP indicating that she had made worthwhile contributions to American musical literature and that her pin was “. . . the first of the ASCAP membership pins issued to a woman member . . .”⁸⁹ In 1937, Vaughn de Leath married her second husband, musician Irwin Rosenbloom, whom she divorced four years later. Vaughn de Leath also sued another performer, Kate Smith, who was using the title “First Lady in Radio,” and won the suit in 1937.⁹⁰

Circa 1940, Vaughn de Leath responded in a letter to Jim Walsh, grudgingly coming to terms with “playing small time” doing commercials and “my tri-weekly programs.”⁹¹ She indicated she had not made a record in over two years. She vented about being “buffeted about by this network,” and expressed frustration at hearing false rumors about herself. She argued that she still had “something to give the larger networks,” while expressing uncertainty about the future of her musical career.⁹²

In 1941, approximately two years before her death, Vaughn de Leath returned to Mount Pulaski to present a post office box used by Abraham Lincoln to the Abraham Lincoln Memorial Shrine which was then in the Mount Pulaski courthouse. The post office box had been used by Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois; when the Springfield post office later replaced its boxes, the Lincoln box was sent to Mount Pulaski. Her father, George W. Vonderlieth, had used the box for his windmill business and later gave it to A.O. Vonderlieth, whose sons inherited it. When the Vonderlieth family decided to return the box to Mount Pulaski, Vaughn de Leath came to make the presentation.⁹³ In an interview conducted during her 1941 trip, Vaughn de Leath expressed her love for her hometown of Mount Pulaski, noting that she had traveled hundreds of miles out of

⁸⁵ Pokorski, “First Lady of Radio: Mount Pulaski Native De Leath Crooned Her Way to Fame.”

⁸⁶ Historical Society of Easton and Bruce Nelson, “Easton’s Original Radio Girl.”

⁸⁷ Senior, “Vaughn De Leath: Jazz Birthday of the Month.”

⁸⁸ Walsh, “The Original Radio Girl, Vaughn de Leath,” April 1958, p. 33.

⁸⁹ “Vaughn de Leath First Lady to Get ASCAP Emblem,” September 1937, republished in Sil-Tennial Edition, *Times-News* (Mt. Pulaski, Illinois, Thursday, July 13, 1961.

⁹⁰ Historical Society of Easton and Bruce Nelson, “Easton’s Original Radio Girl.”

⁹¹ Walsh, “The Original Radio Girl, Vaughn de Leath,” April 1958, p. 33.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Nancy Rollings Saul, “Collectors covet crooner’s tunes,” *The Courier*, Wednesday, January 29, 1997, p. 13.



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her way to visit. The article indicated that “most of her years” had been spent with NBC network radio shows. Vaughn de Leath was quoted as saying that radio was “the largest contribution to American culture since the invention of motion pictures.” Vaughn de Leath reminisced about performing from most of Europe’s largest cities, including singing from “atop the Eiffel Tower.”⁹⁴ On April 24, 1943, only about a month before her death, she performed for the last time on WBEN in Buffalo, New York.⁹⁵



Figure 17. Photo from Vaughn de Leath to “dear Aunt Augusta” Rupp signed “Leonore”⁹⁶

In addition to her chronic pain, discussed earlier, Vaughn de Leath apparently also struggled with depression and alcoholism.⁹⁷ These conditions and accompanying financial difficulties contributed to her death at age 48 on May 28, 1943, in Buffalo, New York.⁹⁸ Vaughn de Leath died in the Hotel Statler, and was with her sister Alma who was visiting at the time of her

⁹⁴ “Special Interview with Noted Singer on Last Visit Here: First Woman’s Voice to be Heard Over Trans-Atlantic Radio,” Thursday, July 13, 1961.

⁹⁵ Pokorski, “First Lady of Radio: Mount Pulaski Native De Leath Crooned Her Way to Fame.”

⁹⁶ Accessed October 2024 at Vonderlieth Living Center archives.

⁹⁷ Historical Society of Easton and Bruce Nelson, “Easton’s Original Radio Girl.”

⁹⁸ Knapp, “New Oldies – Are You Lonesome To-Night by Vaughn de Leath (The Radio Girl).”



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death.⁹⁹ A 1943 article “First Woman Radio Songstress Dead,” in the *Belvidere Daily Republican* provided details about Vaughn de Leath’s funeral services, indicating that services would include organ music played by “her accompanist” Carl Coleman. The article also corroborated important biographical information about Vaughn de Leath. The article indicated that Vaughn de Leath was “Credited with originating the ‘crooning’ type of song delivery when her soprano high notes threatened to shatter radio transmitter tubes . . .” The article also noted that her first radio broadcast was in “a tiny wireless room atop a New York skyscraper” and that Vaughn de Leath “earned the title ‘first woman in radio.’”¹⁰⁰ An October 14, 1943, article republished in 1961, described that Vaughn de Leath’s ashes had been taken to “her old home city” by her sister Alma. About a week prior to her funeral, the ashes of Vaughn de Leath were placed in the foundation of her monument erected there, “in the Vonderlieth family lot.”¹⁰¹

In June 1943, *The Decatur Daily Review* issued a report from the town of Easton, Connecticut, regarding the will of Vaughn de Leath. The report noted that “The small brick house [S. Marion Street] where the parents of the radio singer, Vaughn De Leath, lived in Mount Pulaski, Ill., is to be brought back and maintained as a radio museum” which would showcase her “considerable memorabilia relating to the early days of radio.”¹⁰² Vaughn de Leath had stipulated that her sister, Alma, should purchase the house. The museum was supposed to have been given to the State of Illinois after the death of Vaughn de Leath’s secretary Bertha Donnelly. Vaughn de Leath’s future ASCAP proceeds were directed to be placed in a fund for needy song writers and her estate of \$10,000 was left to Alma. Sadly, the museum never materialized, and the house was later demolished (Figure 18).

A 1958 article with several factual errors nevertheless provided useful information on the accomplishments of Vaughn de Leath. The article noted that, in 1935, “. . . it was announced that she [Vaughn de Leath] had sung more than 15,000 songs in 2,000 broadcasts.”¹⁰³ The 1958 article was the only one to mention that Vaughn de Leath was, “. . . an aviation enthusiast, an ‘inventor’ (along rather frivolous lines) [s.i.c.] and reputed one of the best trap shooters in the East.” She also apparently had a large collection of earrings. The article also noted that ASCAP described Vaughn de Leath as a “. . . composer, author, pianist, singer, actress, radio, and recording artist.”¹⁰⁴ In a ceremony held on February 8, 1960, Vaughn de Leath was posthumously awarded a star she earned on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in the Radio category. Her star is located at 6634 Hollywood Boulevard. The Hollywood Walk of Fame indicates that Vaughn de Leath used the titles “The Original Radio Girl” and “First Lady of Radio.” The Hollywood Walk of Fame lists her contributions to the expansion of radio

⁹⁹ “Ashes of Famous Singing Star Buried in Local Cemetery,” July 15, 1961.

¹⁰⁰ “First Woman Radio Songstress Dead,” in *Belvidere Daily Republican* (Belvidere, Illinois), Saturday, May 29, 1943, accessed online October 2024 via Newspapers.com at: <https://www.newspapers.com/image/70099051/>.

¹⁰¹ “Memorial Service for Radio Star,” October 14, 1943, republished in Sil-Tennial Edition, *Times-News* (Mt. Pulaski, Illinois), Thursday, July 13, 1961.

¹⁰² “Mt. Pulaski to Get Museum,” in *The Decatur Daily Review* (Decatur, Illinois), Tuesday, June 15, 1943, p. 8, accessed via Newspapers.com December 2024 at: <https://www.newspapers.com/image/88379188/>.

¹⁰³ Walsh, “The Original Radio Girl, Vaughn de Leath,” April 1958, p. 30.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.



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broadcasting including being an “early exponent” and possible inventor of the crooning style of singing and one of the first people to sing on a live radio broadcast.¹⁰⁵ Eventually, Vaughn de Leath faded into obscurity to some degree although her 1925 Columbia recording of “Ukelele Lady,” on which she accompanies herself on the ukelele, was featured in the 1999 movie “The Cider House Rules.”¹⁰⁶

In 1973, the Vonderlieth Living Center was built in Mount Pulaski. The skilled nursing facility was funded through the will of Vaughn de Leath’s first cousin Henry Louis Vonderlieth and his wife Jane Lyster Splint Vonderlieth and maintains a small archive of Vonderlieth family history.¹⁰⁷ In 1976, a 30-bedroom addition was built. Two buildings with three retirement apartments each were completed in 1980, and five more units were available by 1983.¹⁰⁸ Henry Vonderlieth had once taught school when it was held in the courthouse but become wealthy as the circulation manager of several magazines including “Financial World.”¹⁰⁹ Henry Vonderlieth had previously provided funding to enlarge a grade school in Mount Pulaski in 1959. He established the Henry and Jane Vonderlieth Foundation to build the nursing home which would be endowed in perpetuity. Henry died in 1968, and the foundation became active upon the death of his wife Jane in 1969.¹¹⁰ As a result of their contributions, the Vonderlieth family continues to serve the residents of Vaughn de Leath’s hometown of Mount Pulaski.

¹⁰⁵ Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, “Vaughn de Leath” on Hollywood Walk of Fame website, Accessed December 2024 at: <https://walkoffame.com/vaughn-de-leath/>.

¹⁰⁶ Senior, “Vaughn De Leath: Jazz Birthday of the Month.”

¹⁰⁷ Mt. Pulaski Township Historical Society, “Vaughn DeLeath – “First Lady of Radio.”

¹⁰⁸ Fricke, ed., *Mount Pulaski, Illinois: 1836-1986, 150 Years of Memories*.

¹⁰⁹ “Adolph Vonderlieth-86,” Mt Pulaski Township Historical Society, Vonderlieth obituary card file, 1999.

¹¹⁰ “Jane Vonderlieth,” Mt. Pulaski Township Historical Society, Vonderlieth obituary card file, 1969.



3 Definition of the Context

The context focuses on Vaughn de Leath and the Expansion of Radio Broadcasting in the United States in the area of significance Entertainment. Vaughn de Leath is nationally significant as one of the first women to sing live over the radio during its pioneer era. Notably, Vaughn de Leath is also credited with popularizing what was later known as the “crooning” style of singing after she was encouraged to use the lower part of her broad vocal range to avoid damaging the fragile vacuum tubes of early radios. Vaughn de Leath is also nationally significant as one of the first woman to manage a radio station and the first woman to earn an ASCAP pin for her contributions to American musical literature. Vaughn de Leath achieved success in her musical career as the radio developed from experimental broadcasts heard by only a few into network radio broadcasts heard in most homes. Her ability to sing in a new style and over new and experimental methods gave her unique opportunities in the period of early radio broadcasting after World War I. As Vaughn de Leath was a groundbreaking and nationally known singer, composer, and radio station manager, the geographic parameters of the context are, ultimately, at the national level also, focusing on other places she lived and worked, including Illinois, California, New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. The temporal limits of this historic context encompass the lifetime of Vaughn de Leath, from her birth in 1894 through her death in 1943.

4 Development of the Theme or Area of Significance

Around the time Vaughn de Leath was born in 1894, radio as we know it, using electromagnetic radiation to transmit sound did not yet exist. Only wired communication had been established, but there were early experiments in the late 1800s at transmitting music via telephony over wired telegraph and, later, at transmitting music over telephone lines. Although there were advances in wired telephony, and there were some pre-1915 telephone-based news and entertainment services, this technology was never commercially successful in the United States.¹¹¹

Much like the experiments with wired voice transmission in the late 1800s, *wireless* telegraphy and telephony were also in their infancy at this time. An early effort toward wireless telegraphy between William Crookes and David Hughes may have been successful as early as 1879; however, this cannot be confirmed since these experiments were never fully investigated or understood. In the 1880s, there were short-lived experiments with wireless telephony focused on transmitting sound through induction.¹¹² Circa 1896, Guglielmo Marconi developed a

¹¹¹ “News and Entertainment by Telephone (1876-1930),” Electric Telephone, U.S. Developments, Early Radio History website, Thomas H. White.

¹¹² “Personal Communication by Wireless (1879-1922),” William Crookes and David Hughes, Pre-Radio Development, Early Radio History website, Thomas H. White, accessed online December 2024 at: <https://earlyradiohistory.us/sec004.htm>.



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successful early wireless telegraphy system using longwave signals; for navigation and emergencies, ships began to carry this radio equipment along with their own radio operators who communicated using Morse code.¹¹³

By 1906, Lee De Forest had developed a wireless telegraphy system utilizing devices referred to as “Audions” or “DeForest equipment.” Audions were “radio signal detectors that were enclosed in partially excavated glass tubes” in various configurations. Its early reviews as an experimental technology were mixed, citing the potential of the Audion but also its deficiencies. After its initial development, engineers studied the Audion and developed a clearer understanding that it worked as an “electron device.” By 1915, the De Forest Radio Telephone & Telegraph Company was selling Audion vacuum-tube receivers designed to receive transmissions of time signals from the Navy, although the Audion was still in its early development and had quality control issues. Also in 1915, the American Telephone & Telegraph Company bought the patent rights to the Audion although De Forest retained the right to continue to make non-commercial sales.¹¹⁴

In 1919, experimentation with radio broadcasting began in earnest after the wartime ban on the civilian use of radio receivers was removed on April 15, 1919, and government stations began to broadcast. By 1920, De Forest had developed the OT-10 vacuum-tube transmitter which made radio telephones practical for use on yachts and other motorized boats. Experimentation with early radio broadcasting began with using vacuum-tube transmitters. By 1921, the William B. Duck Company offered the De Forest Radio Telephone and Telegraph Company Type RS-100 Jewelers Time Receiver, so that, paired with a loudspeaker, the time (broadcast by the Navy) could be heard throughout jewelry stores to assist jewelers and to attract new customers.¹¹⁵ Harold Arnold at AT&T and Irving Langmuir at General Electric in the early 1920s and Howard Edgar Rhodes of Westinghouse circa 1930 researched vacuum tube technology and developed further advancements.¹¹⁶

On February 26, 1919, the United States Bureau of Standards began experimenting with broadcasting on its station WWV and developed the “Portaphone,” a portable radio receiver designed to allow people to receive radio broadcasts of music or news.¹¹⁷ Other early United States wireless radio broadcast locations included but were not limited to: Glenn L. Martin aviation plant in Cleveland, Ohio (overseen by F.S. McCullough); the U.S.S. George

¹¹³ “Radio at Sea (1891-1922),” Early Radio Development, Commercial Service, United States Early Radio History website, Thomas H. White, accessed online December 2024 at: <https://earlyradiohistory.us/sec005.htm>.

¹¹⁴ “Audion and Vacuum-tube Receiver Development (1907-1916),” Lee DeForest and the Early Audions, Practical Refinement, Early Radio History website, Thomas H. White, accessed online December 2024 at: <https://earlyradiohistory.us/sec010.htm>.

¹¹⁵ “Broadcasting After World War One (1918-1921),” Post-World War Experimentation and Development, Pioneering News and Entertainment Broadcasts, Early Radio History website, Thomas H. White, accessed online December 2024 at: <https://earlyradiohistory.us/sec016.htm>.

¹¹⁶ “Expanded Audion and Vacuum-tube Development (1917-1930),” Early Radio History website, Thomas H. White, accessed online December 2024 at: <https://earlyradiohistory.us/sec014.htm>.

¹¹⁷ “Broadcasting After World War One (1918-1921),” Post-World War Experimentation and Development, Pioneering News and Entertainment Broadcasts, Early Radio History website, Thomas H. White.



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Washington, which had a vacuum-tube transmitter to test long range radiotelegraphy and broadcast “nightly talking machine concerts” to nearby vessels; a demonstration station set up by the Army Signal Corps, which broadcast phonograph selections from the Transportation Building in Chicago, Illinois, to a local electrical show but which was heard in Michigan and Wisconsin; and Frank Conrad’s development of radiotelephone for use in the military and, later, in his experimental radio station 8XK at his home in Pennsylvania.¹¹⁸

In early 1920, as described earlier in the context, Vaughn de Leath sang over Lee De Forest’s experimental “Highbridge station” 2XG from the World’s Tower Building in New York City. Other types of early 1920 radio broadcasts included boxing matches from Mather Field, free radio phone concerts from experimental radio station 8XB operated by Precision Equipment Company in Cincinnati, Ohio; and Lee De Forest’s other brief experimental station 6XC (using station 2XG transmitter) in San Francisco, California. In May 1920, Dorothy Lutton sang over a Canadian Marconi station, and on June 15, 1920, Nellie Melba transmitted a concert via wireless telephone from a Marconi station at Chelmsford, England. In the early 1920s, Dr. William D. Reynolds, an amateur radio operator who expanded to broadcasting nightly radio concerts and formed the Reynolds Radio Specialty Company to broadcast music for dancing. Also worth of a mention during the 1920s and into the 1930s was the work of state land-grant university radio stations which began with assisting the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in broadcasting the weather through their extension programs prior to World War I and continued with a commitment to non-commercial public service broadcasting. These early efforts led to the later development of National Public Radio (NPR) in the mid-1960s.¹¹⁹

In September 1920, Westinghouse executive H.P. Davis decided to investigate radio broadcasting service financed by the sale of radio receivers and added this to the design of its Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, radio station KDKA. KDKA is credited with the commercial expansion of radio broadcasting in the United States.¹²⁰ The first broadcast of KDKA was on election night, November 2, 1920, broadcasting Warren G. Harding’s presidential win in a “small makeshift shack on the top of the Westinghouse manufacturing building in East Pittsburgh.”¹²¹ A year later, Westinghouse established three additional broadcasting stations, one of which was WJZ in Newark, New Jersey. Along with Westinghouse, other large broadcasting stations developing in the early 1920s included Radio Corporation of America (RCA) and American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T).¹²²

On October 1, 1921, the first experimental radio station in Newark, New Jersey, WJZ, began broadcasting. The station was operated by Westinghouse Electric Company and its tiny studio

¹¹⁸ “Broadcasting After World War One (1918-1921),” Post-World War Experimentation and Development, Pioneering News and Entertainment Broadcasts, Early Radio History website, Thomas H. White.

¹¹⁹ Hugh R. Sloten, “Radio’s Hidden Voice; Noncommercial Broadcasting, Extension Education, and State Universities during the 1920s,” *Technology and Culture*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (January 2008), pp. 19-20.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Miller, “The 1913 World’s Tower Building – No. 110 W. 40th Street,” accessed November 2024 at: <https://daytoninmanhattan.blogspot.com/2012/09/the-1913-worlds-tower-building-no-110-w.html>.

¹²² “Big Business and Radio (1915-1922,” Westinghouse, Early Radio History website, Thomas H. White, accessed online December 2024 at: <https://earlyradiohistory.us/sec017.htm>.



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and transmitter were at the Westinghouse meter plant at Plane and Orange Streets. The studio was only 15 feet by 30 feet, half of an upstairs ladies' restroom in the building, and included microphones, a control panel, and "... a few pieces of furniture ... including a piano rented from the Griffith Piano Company." WJZ first made history with its broadcast of a World Series game.¹²³ WJZ advertised its "radiophone" technology and, in 1922, again made history with Vaughn de Leath singing on the first transcontinental radio broadcast.¹²⁴

By 1922, a "broadcasting boom" was happening in the United States. Supporting this fact, in March 1922, there were 500 radio broadcasting stations listed that included at least one in every state.¹²⁵ By December 1922, 230 of the 570 radio stations in the United States were "licensed by radio and electrical manufacturers and by dealers primarily interested in selling receivers and related electrical components to the public."¹²⁶ Besides these, 70 were operated by newspapers, 65 by educational institutions, 30 by department stores, and 10 by churches and YMCAs.¹²⁷ By 1926, among other consolidations into radio networks such as the AT&T and Columbia Broadcast System (CBS), the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) was formed from RCA, General Electric, and Westinghouse. Its first President was Merlin H. Aylesworth formerly of the National Electric Light Association.¹²⁸ NBC was developed by Owen D. Young (GE and RCA board chairman) with its 40 stations using leased AT&T lines to cover major markets across the United States. The network's programs began to attract commercial sponsors as early as 1926 when a Dodge advertisement ran during an NBC variety show.¹²⁹

The Federal Radio Commission (FRC) was established in 1927 and regulated the commercial development of the radio industry. From 1927-1928, 39 companies already sponsored programs on NBC and four sponsored programs on CBS. In 1928, the FRC closed stations and put others on probation for including too much advertising. Regardless, in 1928, NBC sold 10 million dollars of advertising and CBS sold 4.1 million dollars of advertising.¹³⁰ The election of 1928 was the first to be used for campaign broadcasting and, during the Great Depression, radio broadcasts provided a welcome distraction and helped hold the nation together.¹³¹ Starting in March 1933, Franklin Delano Roosevelt hosted his radio "Fireside Chats" to talk directly to the country about his policies.¹³² By 1934, newspaper advertisements decreased while advertisers

¹²³ Nat Bodian, "Recalling the Early Days of Broadcast Radio in Newark," Newark Memories on Old Newark website, accessed online November 2024 at <https://newarkmemories.com/memories/503.php>.

¹²⁴ "Big Business and Radio (1915-1922)," Westinghouse, Early Radio History website, Thomas H. White.

¹²⁵ "Broadcasting Becomes Widespread (1922-1923)," Broadcasting Boom of 1922, Early Radio History website, Thomas H. White, accessed online December 2024 at: <https://earlyradiohistory.us/sec018.htm>.

¹²⁶ Slotten, "Radio's Hidden Voice: Noncommercial Broadcasting, Extension Education, and State Universities during the 1920s," p.2.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ "Broadcasting Becomes Widespread (1922-1923)," Broadcasting Boom of 1922, Early Radio History website, Thomas H. White, accessed online December 2024 at: <https://earlyradiohistory.us/sec018.htm>.

¹²⁹ Alice Goldfarb Marquis, "Written on the Wind: The Impact of Radio during the 1930s," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (July 1984), p. 386.

¹³⁰ Marquis, "Written on the Wind," p. 387.

¹³¹ Lewis, "A Godlike Presence," pp. 28-29.

¹³² Lewis, "A Godlike Presence," pp. 30-31.



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spent \$42.6 million on the radio — approximately 15 percent of total advertising budgets.¹³³ In response to newspapers shutting off radio access to wire news in response to the threat of lost revenue, the Press-Radio Bureau was established in January 1934. The Bureau sold networks five-minute news summaries and bulletins for important news. This effort failed, and only encouraged the radio networks to form their own news organizations.

Roughly between 1930 and 1938, popular music songs were written in a less artistic fashion, hawked by “pluggers.” “Pluggers” would convince band leaders and singers to perform their song on the radio and, if the song was successful in sheet music and record sales, the song would get two to five weeks of follow-up plugging on the radio. If not, the song was abandoned as a “dog.” By 1934, the radio reached 60 percent of American homes, and 18 million radio sets had been purchased. Also in 1934, the FRC was replaced with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).¹³⁴ In 1937, inventor Major Edwin H. Armstrong began the first regular FM radio broadcasts from experimental station W2XMN, “. . . a 40 kW station transmitting from his iconic tower on the Palisades above the Hudson River in Alpine, New Jersey.”¹³⁵

By 1937, radio broadcasting had advanced to the point that CBS sent 29-year-old Edward R. Murrow to cover the coronation of George VI of the United Kingdom and provide a live radio broadcast; this event was also the first outside live radio broadcast for the British Broadcasting Company (BBC).¹³⁶ Soon, radio broadcasts of overseas events by news commentators were occurring more regularly as stations perfected the ability to splice in reports on a schedule. The demand for live overseas radio broadcasts increased as events in Europe unfolded and, in March 1938, Edward R. Murrow broadcast reports of Hitler’s invasion of Austria for CBS.¹³⁷ Drama programs including soap operas also became more popular on the radio during this time. By 1939, Americans had purchased 44 million radios and 86 percent of households were covered, listening 4.5 hours per day.¹³⁸ In her 1984 journal article, Alice Goldfarb Marquis observed that, especially at this time, “. . . radio unified the country in speech, tastes, customs, and moral standards as no medium ever had or — until television — ever would.”¹³⁹

In April 1939, RCA introduced television at its pavilion at the New York World’s Fair, using cameras at the “Avenue of Patriots” to broadcast to a few hundred watching sets about the city. Due to World War II, television was not introduced until after that time but, by 1953, there were more than 17 million television sets in the United States. Despite the introduction of the television, the radio industry continued in a modified fashion into the 1940s and remains an important method of entertainment in the United States.¹⁴⁰

¹³³ Marquis, “Written on the Wind,” p. 392.

¹³⁴ Marquis, “Written on the Wind,” pp. 393-394.

¹³⁵ “Armstrong Dedication, Commemorative Broadcast Planned,” ARRL: The National Association for Amateur Radio website, June 11, 2013, accessed online December 2024 at: <https://www.arrrl.org/news/armstrong-dedication-commemorative-broadcast-planned>.

¹³⁶ Marquis, “Written on the Wind,” pp. 400-401.

¹³⁷ Lewis, “A Godlike Presence,” p. 31.

¹³⁸ Marquis, “Written on the Wind,” pp. 404-405.

¹³⁹ Marquis, “Written on the Wind,” p. 411.

¹⁴⁰ Lewis, “A Godlike Presence,” p. 32.



5 Associated Property Types

Several property types have been identified in association with the life of Vaughn de Leath including houses in which she and her family lived, a commercial building retaining vestiges of the opera house in which she performed as a child, and a cemetery in which she and most of her family members are buried. An additional former house on S. Marion Street at the corner of Cooke and S. Marion Streets in Mount Pulaski, referred to as the “George Vonderlieth home” appeared to be an early brick house with end chimneys (Figure 18). As discussed earlier, Vaughn de Leath intended for this Vonderlieth family house to become a museum, but this never materialized. The house was identified as the “homestead” of Vaughn de Leath in a Mount Pulaski newspaper and as the “birthplace” of Vaughn de Leath in another source, but this house has since been demolished.¹⁴¹



Figure 18. Demolished S. Marion Street birthplace of Vaughn de Leath¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Sil-Tennial Edition, *Times-News* (Mt. Pulaski, Illinois), Thursday, July 13, 1961.

¹⁴² Fricke, ed., *Mount Pulaski, Illinois: 1836-1986, 150 Years of Memories*.



5.1 Residential Property Type

503 E. Jefferson Street Mount Pulaski, Illinois

The house at 503 E. Jefferson Street in Mount Pulaski, Illinois (parcel 06-414-003-00), was owned by Katherine “Katie” Miller Vonderlieth and she and her daughter Leonore (Vaughn de Leath) lived here circa 1900. Katie Vonderlieth presumably inherited the property after the death of her husband George W. Vonderlieth. The house at 503 E. Jefferson Street had not yet been built based on the 1893 Plat Book of Logan County, and it was still outside the village limits on the 1900 Sanborn Map.¹⁴³ On the 1922 Sanborn map, the house is finally included since it is within the village limits although it was certainly built before this time (Figure 19).

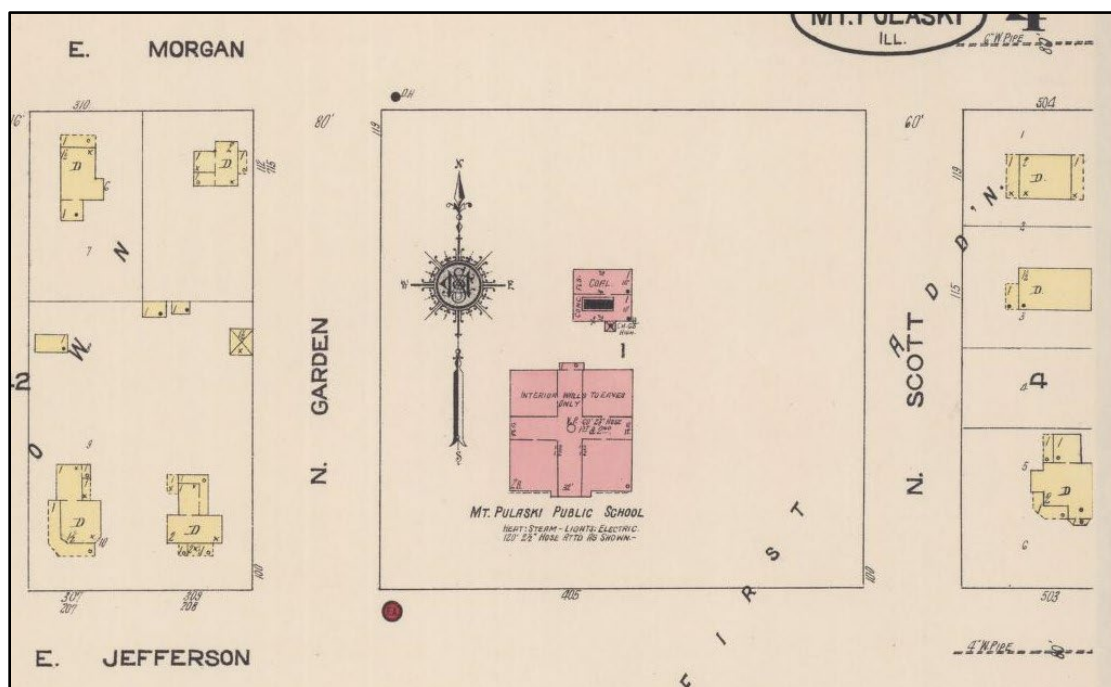


Figure 19. 1922 Sanborn, Mount Pulaski, 503 E. Jefferson Street (lower right corner)¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ George A. Ogle & Co., Mt. Pulaski Township, *Plat Book of Logan County, Illinois*, Chicago, 1893.

¹⁴⁴ Sanborn Map Company, Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Mount Pulaski, Logan County, Illinois, April 1922, Library of Congress website, accessed December 2024 at:

https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn02032_005.



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A 1904 Logan County deed book entry confirms that Katie W. Vonderlieth owned and later sold this property to George Stoll on November 15, 1904 (filed November 28, 1904), described as Lots 1-6, Block 4 of the R.E. Turley First Addition to Mount Pulaski which included blocks 4, 5, and 6.¹⁴⁵ An article in *The Daily Review* from Friday, November 18, 1904, provides further confirmation of Katie Vonderlieth's ownership of the house:

Mrs. Katie Vonderlieth has sold her handsome home on the corner of Jefferson and Scott streets to George Stole [s.i.c.], a retired farmer, for \$6,000, and left Wednesday with her daughter Leanore [s.i.c.], for Riverside, Cal., to spend the winter with her daughter Alma, who has a good position there in a music store.¹⁴⁶

The circa 1895 house at 503 E. Jefferson Street is a 2.5 story, truncated hipped roof Victorian house with original perpendicular wings giving the house a generally L-shaped appearance. The house is oriented to the southwestern corner of the parcel, and it rests on a continuous brick foundation. The wraparound front porch at the southwestern corner is shown on the Sanborn map and appears to have been original since its brick foundation is continuous with the brick foundation of the main portion of the house. The wraparound front porch has been enclosed later; the porch appears to have a synthetic stucco finish and fixed aluminum windows. The house primarily has 1/1 wooden sash windows with simple wooden surrounds although there appear to be fixed aluminum windows in the enclosed front porch. The house preserves its interior brick chimney, wooden box gutters, weatherboard siding, and pair of engaged square-sided supports framing decorative scrollwork brackets meeting at the front corner of the second story. In the gables of both wings are original wooden fish scale shingles and wooden ventilators with simple wooden surrounds. At the eastern elevation/right side of the house is a small, set back, single story gable roof addition. At the northern elevation/rear of the house is a single story, historic frame gable roof ell addition on a continuous concrete block foundation which is shown on the 1922 Sanborn map. Based on Google Streetview images from 2007, the house previously had a metal awning above the enclosed porch. This awning was removed in 2013 exposing wooden brackets beneath. It is unclear whether the wooden brackets remain preserved under the current metal fascia.

¹⁴⁵ Logan County Deed Book 80, p. 175, 54074, Katie W. Vonderlieth to George Stoll, November 15, 1904-November 29, 1904.

¹⁴⁶ "Mt. Pulaski." in *The Daily Review* (Decatur, Illinois), Friday, November 18, 1904, p. 4, accessed online via Newspapers.com at: <https://www.newspapers.com/image/7005728/>.





Plate 2. 503 E. Jefferson Street, western elevation and façade, looking northeast



Plate 3. 503 E. Jefferson Street, northern and western elevations, looking southeast



Plate 4. 503 E. Jefferson Street, detail of shingles and scrollwork, looking northeast

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910 Sport Hill Road Easton, Connecticut

A house associated with the later life of Vaughn de Leath was identified in the town of Easton, Connecticut, where she was a longtime resident. Although it was beyond the scope of this mitigation to survey a property at 910 Sport Hill Road in Connecticut (Figure 20) it has been included here and described based on Google Streetview images. According to its listing by New York real estate brokerage Houlihan Lawrence, the house at 910 Sport Hill Road, listed for sale at \$425,000 in 2020, was built circa 1832 and is “. . . believed to have had only four owners over time.”¹⁴⁷ The listing describes its “rambling grounds” with “mature trees, stone walls, curved drive, 3-bay barn and detached 2-car garage.” The house also apparently retains its wood-burning fireplaces, 12/12 windows, brass knobs and hardware, and handblown glass around the front door. The listing notes that the house was the “. . . previous summer residence of the Original Radio Girl Vaughn de Leath,” and that it had served as a parsonage for approximately 90 years prior.¹⁴⁸ As of 2020, stacks of mortared stones serving as structural supports remained in the basement. These stones are suspected to have been rejected by a former resident of the house, a Baptist minister and tombstone carver for the adjacent Union Cemetery.¹⁴⁹

The house at 910 Sport Hill Road appears to be a two story, side passage, Federal style house with an off-center front door with original wooden transom and sidelights and a central, interior brick chimney. The house has a side gable roof and retains historic 12/12 wooden sash windows; the northwestern wing has 6/6 double hung replacement windows. The house has historic single story, gable roof wings at its original northwestern and southeastern gable ends. The northwestern gable end wing has a wooden shake roof; the southeastern gable end wing has an interior chimney and an asphalt shingle roof.

¹⁴⁷ Reliance Network and Houlihan Lawrence, listing for 910 Sport Hill Road, Easton, CT, accessed online November 2024 at: <https://www.houlihanlawrence.com/realestate/details/3918670/910-sport-hill-road-easton-ct-06612>.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Historical Society of Easton and Bruce Nelson, “Easton’s Original Radio Girl.”





Figure 20. 910 Sport Hill Road (2023 Google Streetview image)

5.2 Commercial Property Type

Scroggin Building 130 S. Washington Street Mount Pulaski, Illinois

The Scroggin Building at 130 S. Washington Street is a commercial building with a strong association with the early success of Vaughn de Leath as a child in her hometown of Mount Pulaski. The building at this address now operates as the Longview Community Bank but was originally the Scroggin Hotel and Opera House, identified on a 1900 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map and referenced in numerous historic archival sources (Figure 21).

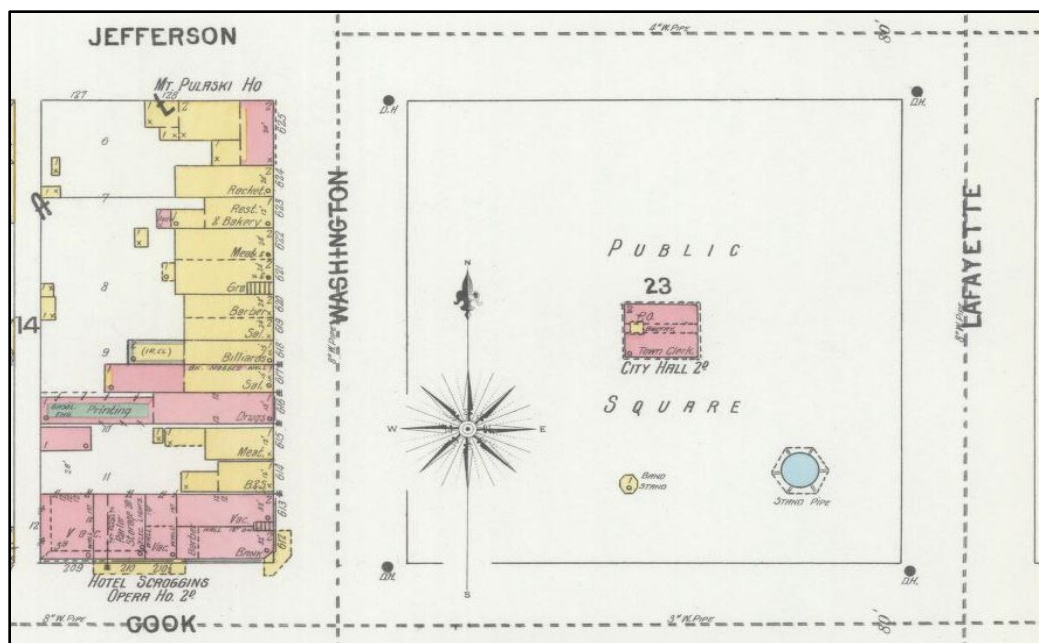


Figure 21. 1900 Sanborn, Mount Pulaski, Scroggin Building (lower left corner)¹⁵⁰

Leonard K. Scroggin and Walter P. Sawyer founded their bank in 1872 and built the Scroggin building on the corner of Washington and Cooke Streets between 1876 and 1878. The Scroggin and Sawyer bank was in the front with two office rooms and the opera house on the second floor. At the west end of the building was a hotel with the kitchen in the basement, office on the first floor, and sleeping rooms upstairs. The hotel apparently had approximately twenty rooms and included a restaurant and a dining room.¹⁵¹ In 1881, L.B. Scroggin joined his father, and the

¹⁵⁰ Sanborn Map Company, Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Mount Pulaski, Logan County, Illinois, March 1900, Library of Congress website, accessed October 2024 at:

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g4104mm.g020321900>.

¹⁵¹ Charles W. Fricke, ed., "The Farmer's Bank" in *Mount Pulaski, Illinois: 1836-1986, 150 Years of Memories*, Community Pride, 1986, p. 554.



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business was renamed Scroggin and Son. In 1892, Thomas A. Scroggin took ownership of the bank, and it was renamed the Farmers Bank.¹⁵² In 1914, the bank was incorporated as a state bank under the name The Farmers Bank of Mount Pulaski, Illinois, and 1,000 shares of stock were sold at 100 dollars per share to 109 citizens of the Mount Pulaski area.¹⁵³



Figure 22. Undated Early Historic Photo of Scroggin Building (far left), Mount Pulaski¹⁵⁴



Plate 5. The Farmers Bank, Original Sign Mounted Inside Longview Community Bank

The Scroggin Opera House is especially significant as it relates to Vaughn de Leath since she was on stage here perhaps for the first time in her life. Her brief but, apparently, memorable childhood performance is documented in numerous newspaper articles and cartoons. Although the building has been heavily modified, sections of the original Opera House have been preserved and help tell its story. Additionally, portions of the facades of the adjacent, connected

¹⁵² Emagene Veech Green, *And She Held Forth Her Hand: History and Genealogy of Mt. Pulaski, Illinois, and Surrounding Vicinity*, Section 1, p. 86.

¹⁵³ Fricke, ed., "The Farmer's Bank" in *Mt. Pulaski, Illinois: 1836-1986, 150 Years of Memories*.

¹⁵⁴ Longview Community Bank archive.



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commercial buildings have also been preserved and incorporated into the current building. The rear, former hotel portion of the Scroggin Building, was demolished.

The running bond brick commercial building at 130 S. Washington Street preserves its historic orientation to the corner of S. Washington and W. Cooke Streets. It preserves the canted corner which once held its corner entrance. Access to the main level of the eastern façade is provided by a poured concrete set of corner stairs and a poured concrete access ramp from street level to a raised sidewalk with metal railings. At the southern elevation, a cast iron railing protects the basement level recessed below the raised sidewalk. Steps up from the street provide access to the raised sidewalk and another small set of steps above the basement level provide access to a side entrance. Sections of its cast iron façade have been preserved near the southern façade entrance/former entrance and some of the brick corbelling remains exposed at the cornice lines of the connected, adjacent former storefronts along S. Washington Street.

Inside, the Farmers Bank (previous owner), converted the former Opera House space into apartments in the 1960s; however, a small section of the Opera House seating was salvaged. Despite the apartment conversion, the Art Deco entrance stairs to the former Opera House have been preserved inside the building. The adjacent storefronts fronting on S. Washington Street were internally combined by the Farmers Bank in the 1970s. In 1983, a large gambrel type roof was built “over the bank building” and over the adjacent connected storefronts to its north then occupied by Suzanne’s Casual Shoppe, Downing and Clements Insurance, and Gasaway Shoe Repair. The Gasaway Shoe Repair building, the northernmost property at that time, was speculated to have been one of the oldest in Mount Pulaski, built by Jabez Capps circa 1836 as a two-story log cabin.¹⁵⁵

An original large opening in the southern façade has been infilled with glass block and the façade has been partially covered and stuccoed. Along with the later asphalt shingle mansard roof wrapping around the building, its appearance has been dramatically modified with an aluminum awning over the first story façades, a gambrel roof addition that projects above the original roofline, and replacement windows. There is also a narrow, two-story rear exterior entrance addition, a larger two-story rear ell addition, a small rear metal car port addition, and a larger open-sided metal lean-to addition along the northern elevation of one of the connected former storefronts. The immediately adjacent, connected storefront has also been heavily altered with brick veneer and infill of its historic openings. Beyond being added and modified above, the ground floor of the other two historic recessed storefronts have been better preserved.

¹⁵⁵ Fricke, ed., “The Farmer’s Bank” in *Mount Pulaski, Illinois: 1836-1986, 150 Years of Memories*.



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Plate 6. 130 S. Washington Street, southern and eastern façades, looking northwest



Plate 7. 130 S. Washington Street, southern façade, looking north



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Plate 8. 130 S. Washington Street, northern and western elevations, looking southwest



Plate 9. 130 S. Washington Street, detail of former eastern façade storefront, looking west





Plate 10. 130 S. Washington Street, detail of cast iron, southern façade, looking north



Plate 11. 130 S. Washington Street, detail of structural brick wall, looking east



Plate 12. Original stair to Opera House space and detail photo of Art Deco railing



Plate 13. Detail of surviving Art Deco Opera House railing and wooden paneling



Plate 14. Apartments in former Opera House space



Plate 15. Left to right: Attic space and surviving original Opera House seating

5.3 Cemetery Property Type

Mount Pulaski Cemetery
Corner of W. Elkhart Road and N. Washington Street
Mount Pulaski, Illinois

Stantec previously surveyed the Mount Pulaski Cemetery at the southwestern corner of the intersection of W. Elkhart Road and N. Washington Street in Mount Pulaski, Illinois (MP 1, 40.017919, -89.28647), and it was determined eligible for listing in the NRHP by the SHPO on February 11, 2024.¹⁵⁶ During the survey of the Mount Pulaski Cemetery, Stantec had previously recorded the burial of Leonore Vonderlieth/Vaughn de Leath (1894-1943). Due the strong association of Mount Pulaski Cemetery with Vaughn de Leath, Stantec returned to record the following burials of Vaughn de Leath's immediate family members, all of whom are also buried in the Mount Pulaski Cemetery:

- George W. Vonderlieth (father, 1859-1901)
- Katherine "Katie" Miller Vonderlieth (mother, 1861-1929)
- Alma Vonderlieth Cunningham (sister, 1883-1963)
- Lila Koneta Vonderlieth (sister, 1891-1892)
- Karoline Wittig Miller (maternal grandmother, 1821-1903)
- Christian Miller (maternal grandfather, 1830-1912)
- Catherina Weckel Vonderlieth (paternal grandmother, 1816-1878)
- Henry Vonderlieth (paternal grandfather, 1817-1886)

¹⁵⁶ Holly Higgins, Heather Doerge, Sarah Garrett, Sandra DeChard, Christopher Harris, Jason Flatt, and Jennifer N. Ryall (Rachel M. Kennedy and Jennifer N. Ryall, Pls), *Historic Architectural Resources Survey for the Top Hat Wind Energy Project, Logan County, Illinois*, November 2023, Stantec PN 193709731; Carey L. Mayer to William Pridden, IEPA, Stantec-193708974, SHPO Log #004050123, February 11, 2024.



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In addition to Vaughn de Leath's immediate family members, Stantec recorded the burials of the following Vonderlieth and Miller extended family members who are also buried in the Mount Pulaski Cemetery:

- Augusta Miller Rupp (sister of Katie/second wife of Christian Rupp/"beloved" aunt of Vaughn de Leath, 1857-1940), Christian Rupp (1841-1925), and first wife Ida K. Schweigkart Rupp (1849-1885)
- Elizabeth Vonderlieth Schafer (sister of George/aunt of Vaughn de Leath, 1848-1926) and G.L. Schafer (1845-1905)
- Anna Rebecca Vonderlieth Schafer (sister of George/aunt of Vaughn de Leath, 1850-1924) and Charles Frederick "C.F." Schafer (1847-1918)¹⁵⁷
- John M. Vonderlieth (brother of George/uncle of Vaughn de Leath, 1852-1885) and Agnes E. Vonderlieth (1854-1929)
- Adolph O. Vonderlieth (brother of George/uncle of Vaughn de Leath, 1856-1934) and Anna Lipp Vonderlieth (1868-1932)
- Henry Louis Vonderlieth (grandson of John Vonderlieth/cousin of Vaughn de Leath, 1881-1968) and Jane Lyster Splint Vonderlieth (1888-1969)

¹⁵⁷ Their headstone was not located in the field and a photo is provided here via Findagrave.com. "Anna R. Vonderlieth Schafer," Findagrave.com Memorial ID number 86658488, accessed December 2024 via Findagrave.com at: https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/86658488/anna_r_schafer.





Plate 16. Left to right: Headstones of George W. Vonderlieth, Katherine “Katie” Miller Vonderlieth, Vaughn de Leath/Leonore Vonderlieth, Alma Vonderlieth Cunningham, and Lila Koneta Vonderlieth; Vonderlieth marker - foreground



Plate 17. Left to Right: Headstones of George W. Vonderlieth and Katie Miller Vonderlieth

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Plate 18. Metal marker and headstone of Vaughn de Leath, First Lady of Radio



Plate 19. Headstone of Alma Vonderlieth Cunningham





Plate 20. Headstone of Lila Koneta Vonderlieth



Plate 21. Fallen headstone of Christian Miller and Karoline Wittig Miller



Plate 22. Headstone of Catherina Weckel Vonderlieth and Henry Vonderlieth



Plate 23. Headstone of Augusta Miller Rupp



Plate 24. Headstone of Ida K. Schweigckart Rupp and Christian Rupp



Plate 25. Headstone of G.L. Schafer and Elizabeth Vonderlieth Schafer



Figure 23. Headstone of Anna R. Vonderlieth Schafer and C.F. Schafer via Findagrave.com



Plate 26. Headstone of John M. Vonderlieth and Agnes E. Vonderlieth



Plate 27. Headstone of Adolph O. Vonderlieth



Plate 28. Headstone of Anna Lipp Vonderlieth



Plate 29. Headstone of Henry Louis Vonderlieth



Plate 30. Headstone of Jane Lyster Splint Vonderlieth

6 Physical Characteristics and Integrity

The house at 910 Sport Hill Road in the town of Easton, Connecticut, and the Mount Pulaski Cemetery in Mount Pulaski, Illinois, both retain high levels of historic integrity, preserving their integrity of location, setting, feeling, association, design, workmanship, and materials. The house at 503 E. Jefferson Street in Mount Pulaski, Illinois, retains a moderate level of historic integrity, preserving its location, feeling, and materials while its integrity of association, setting, design, and workmanship have been somewhat compromised by the construction of a non-historic school building on the parcel directly to the west and by unsympathetic alterations to the house itself. The Scroggin Building at 130 S. Washington Street in Mount Pulaski, Illinois, has been heavily modified. Despite being in its original location in downtown Mount Pulaski and having a generally similar setting and association with its surrounding buildings, it no longer appears to retain sufficient historic integrity of feeling, design, workmanship, or materials to convey its significance.

7 Relationship to the National Register Criteria

Except for the Scroggin Building at 130 S. Washington Street which no longer appears to retain sufficient historic integrity to convey its significance and the Mount Pulaski Cemetery which has already been determined eligible for listing in the NRHP, the property types identified in the historic context are likely eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion A and/or B for their association with Vaughn de Leath and the Expansion of the Radio Industry in the United States, 1894-1943, in the area of significance Entertainment. There are likely to be additional unidentified historic resources that could be eligible for listing in the NRHP under this historic context, however a complete survey of these properties at a national level was beyond the scope of the mitigation. Future survey and evaluation of these properties is recommended to expand the list of associated property types at the national level.



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