These are the papers of Robert F. Neathery, a developer and operator of radio stations and cable television systems at West Plains in Howell County, Missouri. They consist of personal, family, and business papers, drafts and other papers concerning Neathery’s memoir, *West Plains As I Knew It*, and miscellaneous topical files.

Robert F. Neathery was born in St. Louis in 1908, the son of R. Ferdinand Neathery and Nell Brennan. Ferd Neathery died in 1909 in St. Louis when Robert was barely a year old. In 1913, his mother married Jerome W. Boyer, the owner of the West Plains Telephone Company. With his mother and stepfather, Neathery moved to West Plains where he grew up and has spent most of his adult life.

Neathery attended the University of Missouri after graduating from West Plains High School in 1926. He was a work-study employee of Stromberg-Carlson, a telecommunications equipment manufacturing company, affording him an opportunity that corresponded with his early interest in radio. He returned to West Plains after graduation, opening Neathery Radio and Electric, a business soon expanded to include appliances and, later, televisions. In 1934, he married Louise Gambill of Mountain Grove, Missouri.

With war gathering in 1940, Neathery went to work in the turret division of Emerson Electric Company, designing turrets for B-24 bombers. Once war began, he became a commercial representative traveling to factories and airfields at Pueblo, Colorado, Pensacola, Florida, Patuxent River, Maryland, Willow Run, Michigan, and St. Paul, Minnesota to establish schools for the construction, installation, and maintenance of aircraft turrets. Following the war he took a position with Durakool, Inc., a manufacturer of electrical components at Elkhart, Indiana, but returned to West Plains in July 1947 to establish the town’s first radio station.

Neathery’s KWPM Radio began broadcasting in 1947. Later he opened radio stations at Thayer, Branson, Fredericktown, and Jackson, Missouri, and Mountain View, Arkansas. He pioneered the time-brokering of smaller radio stations to increase coverage areas, and described the practice in the *New York Times*, 30 June 1991. About 1956, he established the West Plains cable television company and went on to build cable television systems for Alton, Branson, and Hollister. Eventually he sold his cable holdings to Charter Communications and the Falcon Cable System. Neathery had sold much of his holdings by the 1970s, but maintained stations at West Plains, Willow Springs, and Thayer. With his friend and colleague, Paul Thompson, he was a partner in a horse-breeding venture known as Neathery & Thompson Stables. Neathery was one of the most prominent citizens of West Plains by the time KWPM celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1997.

Neathery’s only son, Robert, Jr., died in 1988. His wife, Louise, died in 1992. The grandchildren have assumed operation of the family business since Neathery’s retirement. His most
important project in retirement was publication of his memoir. Working with Marideth Sisco of West Plains, Neathery published his recollections in *West Plains As I Knew It* (Willow Springs, Mo.: Yarnspinner Press, 1994). He revised and reissued the memoir in 2001 (West Plains, Mo.: Elder Mountain Press).

The Neathery collection has been arranged in three sections: personal and family papers; drafts and other materials associated with *West Plains As I Knew It*; and miscellaneous topical files containing items of personal and business interest. Folders 1-16 include personal and family papers, correspondence, papers concerning Neathery’s son and grandchildren, showbills for Neathery & Thompson stables, and several folders of miscellaneous historical notes and talking points evidently compiled for broadcast purposes. There are also three folders of photographs. The views are mostly undated and unidentified, although a few were published in *West Plains As I Knew It*. Some of the papers and photographs pertain to Neathery’s stepfather, Jerome W. Boyer, and to his wife, Louise (Gambill) Neathery, and her hometown of Mountain Grove, Missouri.

Folders 17-33 contain undated drafts, research questions, and other material concerning Neathery’s memoir, *West Plains As I Knew It*.

Folders 34-65 contain miscellaneous topical files. They include items reflecting Neathery’s early pursuits and activities such as *Radio Home-Makers* magazine, a Stromberg-Carlson employee magazine, and printed material from Emerson Electric’s turret division during World War Two. Files on KWPM Radio, cable television, and the West Plains Chamber of Commerce represent Neathery’s business interests, and his personal activities are evident in the folders on the Howell County Fair, the Optimist and Rotary clubs, and the Car Club of West Plains. This section of the collection also includes many ephemeral items such as a Stromberg-Carlson employee magazine (1930), a postcard commemorating the last surviving Civil War veterans in Mountain Grove, Missouri (1940), and a program for the Cole Brothers Air Show (1960).

**Shelf List**

These are the papers of Robert F. Neathery, a developer and operator of radio stations and cable television systems at West Plains, Howell County, Missouri. They consist of personal, family, and business papers, drafts and other papers concerning Neathery’s memoir, *West Plains As I Knew It*, and miscellaneous topical files.

**Folders 1-16: Family and personal papers, 1913-2001**

- F. 01: Boyer, J. W. and Nellie (Neathery), papers, 1913-1960
- F. 02: Gambill, Thomas Sylvester, papers, 1926-1973
- F. 03: Neathery, Louise, papers, 1934-1992
- F. 04: Neathery, Robert F., correspondence, 1930-1988
- F. 05: Neathery, Robert F., miscellaneous material, 1911-2001
- F. 06: Neathery, Robert F., Southwest Missouri State University, papers, 1986-2000
- F. 07: Neathery, Robert F., Jr., papers and photographs, 1955-1960
- F. 08: Neathery, Robert F., Jr., flight log, 1964-1981
F. 10: Neathery & Thompson Stables, papers and photographs, ca. 1960s
F. 11: Miscellaneous notes, n.d.
F. 12: Miscellaneous notes, n.d.
F. 13: Miscellaneous notes, n.d.
F. 14: Photographs (mostly earlier views)
F. 15: Photographs
F. 16: Photographs (mostly later views)

Folders 17-33: *West Plains As I Knew It*, drafts and papers, n.d.

F. 17: Introduction, drafts by Marideth Sisco
F. 18: Part 1
F. 19: Part 2
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F. 21: Part 4
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F. 31: Research questions
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Folders 34-65: Topical files, 1903-2001

F. 34: All Saints’ Church (West Plains, Mo.), papers, 1950-1987
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F. 38: Drury College, papers, 1957-1982
F. 39: Emerson Electric (St. Louis, Mo.). Turret Division, papers, 1943-1945
F. 40: Fulton County Fair and Livestock Show (Salem, Ark.), program, 21-23 September 1961
F. 41: Howell County Fair and Stock Show (West Plains, Mo.), premium catalogs and programs, 1958-1998
F. 43: Lake Norfolk (Ark.), advertisements, ca. 1960s
F. 44: Missouri Broadcasters Association, miscellaneous papers, 1966-1995
F. 45: Missouri Fox Trotting Horse Breed Association. Second Annual Celebration, Show, and First Sale, (West Plains, Mo.), 16-17 September [n.y.]
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F. 57: Southwest Missouri State University-West Plains, miscellaneous papers, 1987-2000
F. 58: *Stromberg-Carlson Exchange* [employee magazine], November 1930
F. 59: War Ration stamps, 1942
F. 60: West Plains (Mo.), miscellaneous papers, 1905-2001
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