

## SMILIN' ED MCCONNELL

The son of a minister, McConnell began to sing at the age of three and soon learned how to play both drums and piano. He was athletic as a teenager, and after attending [William Jewell College](#), he went into prize fighting. During [World War I](#), he was briefly thought to be dead, as noted in an [NBC](#) press release: "A troop train on which he was traveling was wrecked in Arkansas by a German sympathizer and Ed wound up in a river. When he was pulled out, an Army surgeon pronounced him dead, but a buddy finally revived Ed with artificial respiration."

After his Army service, McConnell was a gospel vocalist with various evangelists. He entered radio in Atlanta in 1922 as a hasty substitute when a scheduled performer failed to arrive. Married in 1928, McConnell joined the [CBS](#) network in 1932, and five years later, he went to NBC as their "Sunshine Melody Man," offering hymns and uplifting messages. McDonnell's blend of "songs, humor and philosophy" was aired over network affiliates at 5:30pm. Guests included the Doring Trio, The Four Grenadiers, The Campus Choir and the Rhythmaires.

He became known in [New York City](#) when he was heard over [WJZ](#), even though the show was from [Chicago](#) and he was living in [Elk Rapids, Michigan](#). McConnell's timeslots and sponsors also changed. At one point, he was heard at 10:30am doing a 15-minute program sponsored by the Air Conditioning Training Corporation of [Youngstown, Ohio](#). *Variety* noted that aside from such hymns as "God Understands," he "unloads a hokey hodge-podge of songs and you-know-me-I wouldn't-steer-you-wrong-blather."

McConnell grabbed the attention of youngsters when he created the character [Froggy the Gremlin](#), along with Irma Allen on the organ or Del Owen on the piano. But even when McConnell had become famous to kids as "Smilin' Ed," he continued to host programs for religious adults. For instance, while the [Buster Brown](#) show was running, Ed presided over a five-minute show sponsored by the American Poultry Journal It reached over 50 stations. *Variety* reviewed:

Anyone who's been laboring under the impression that a dash of American folk music and a hymn or two is strictly for farm listeners is apparently off the beam, because here's a series of 48 shorties that two metropolitan stations - Chicago's [NBC](#) flagship, [WMAQ](#) and [Minneapolis' WCCO-CBS](#) have latched on to for a 16 week ride... Packaged by E. H. Brown Agency for American Poultry Journal, (transcription) disks which feature two songs apiece by Smilin' Ed McConnell, with Irma Glen accompanying on the Hammond, are blanketing the east and midwest now. McConnell plugs the mag ("If you've got a poultry problem, write to APJ's Problem Corner and get a personal reply from the editor...send in a subscription too, only 50 cents for two years!") and sings... Cornfed delivery of a song like "Come Along My Mandy" and hymn "When Cares of Life Distress You" on one platter, cues the general format, but the star of NBC's live "Buster Brown" airtimer knows how to put over the old "neighborly feeling." And he's no slough at plugging the Journal it might be added.

Another Smilin' Ed show that turned up for a while was a 15-minute program sponsored by the Purity Baking Company. Once again, *Variety* reviewed:

One of the veterans of radio, Ed McConnell mines the rich veins of American sentiment among those who are white-haired, churchy, rural and simple. He has a disarming style that has been analyzed in these columns on previous occasions and for other sponsors. This show differs only that he sticks to hymns and is necessarily serious in comment, with none of the semi-light homefolksy gab he could more appropriately introduce in a framework not devoted to ecclesiastical music alone. Aiming at a selective audience, the program will no doubt do well.

McConnell puts it on a personal basis. Even while telling his listeners this is one program that will not "be cluttered up with long-winded advertising" he is sledge-hammering the important thought - no chee no hymnee. "My friends who love me will support me by buying Tasty Bread" he announces..." "McConnell has a good [Epworth League](#) baritone and a down home rhetorical sloppiness. It's "you-all" or "ya" and no fuss. In fact, this is about the most calculatedly unpretentious program of the season. McConnell is probably the most humble man in America, making \$100,000 or better, a year.

Material for this audio synopsis came from wikipedia, the on-line encyclopedia.

For the Old Time Radio Researchers, I'm Colin Campbell. Now on with the show!