



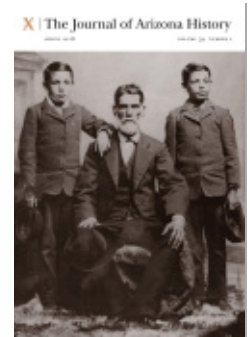
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"Owned and Operated By a Woman": Mary Costigan and
Flagstaff's First Radio Station

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“Owned and Operated By a Woman”: Mary Costigan and Flagstaff’s First Radio Station

By Janolyn G. Lo Vecchio

On December 10, 1925, Flagstaff’s first radio station, KFXY, began broadcasting with a capacity of fifty watts. Downtown merchants installed rooftop loudspeakers so people huddled together on sidewalks below could listen to the broadcast, which opened with the tagline: “This is Station KFXY, Orpheum theatre, Flagstaff, Arizona on the side of the San Francisco Peaks, where the pine forests scent the summer breezes and the winter weather gives you a zest for endeavor.”¹ It was the beginning of a new era in Flagstaff entertainment and the fulfillment of Mary Costigan’s dream of owning a radio station. She was one of the few women to own or manage a radio station in the 1920s, and according to Mary, “In October 1925 the newspaper notices read ‘The only radio station known to be owned and operated by a woman was among the five new class “A” applicants to receive licenses this week.’”²

Born in Detroit, Michigan, on April 13, 1879, Mary Costigan was the daughter of James and Catherine Costigan, Canadian-Irish

¹ *Cocconino Sun* (Flagstaff, Ariz.), December 18, 1925.

² Mary Costigan, unpublished manuscript about KFXY, Mary Costigan Collection, in the possession of Costigan Family (hereinafter Costigan, KFXY manuscript).

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immigrants from Maidstone, Ontario. Her father owned a dry-goods store in Detroit. When Mary was nine years old, her father died at age thirty-six in 1888.³ After his death, Catherine continued operating the dry-goods store with the help of her two small children. During her childhood, Mary and her brother John worked in the family store after school and on weekends. Her first career goal was to become a lawyer, but her mother would not permit her to study law. After graduating from college, Mary worked in an office where she earned four dollars per week.⁴

Her brother John was a talented musician and composer. In 1898, at age seventeen, he became the manager of a touring musical comedy show company. After contracting tuberculosis, he returned home to Detroit to recuperate. In 1908, Mary and John moved to the warmer climate of San Antonio, Texas, to improve his health. While living in San Antonio, Mary worked in a bank's real estate and insurance department as an accountant and also as a cashier and accountant at a realty company. During the summers she returned to Detroit, where she worked as an assistant to the county tax collector.⁵

When she moved back to Detroit full-time from San Antonio, Mary worked as an accountant and cashier at a real estate company and was quickly promoted to secretary-treasurer. Unfortunately, the additional stress of her work responsibilities adversely affected her health, and Mary temporarily moved to California's warmer climate to recuperate. When she returned to Detroit, she opened her own real estate office, which leased apartment houses and formed stock companies for buying and selling apartment houses.⁶

Meanwhile John, who was still battling tuberculosis, had married and moved to Flagstaff, Arizona, where he initially worked as a timekeeper for Arizona Lumber and Timber Company.⁷ He later managed the Majestic Theater until the building caved in during a heavy snowstorm in 1915. While a new theater—the Orpheum—was constructed on the site of the former Majestic Theater, he managed the Empress Theater.⁸ In 1917 John bought the furnishings

³ *Coconino Sun*, January 11, 1924.

⁴ "This is Station KFXV: Miss Mary M. Costigan of Flagstaff, Arizona," *Independent Woman* (New York), October 1927, p. 36.

⁵ *Coconino Sun*, July 8, 1921; "This is Station KFXV," 36.

⁶ "This Is Station KFXV," 36.

⁷ *Coconino Sun*, July 8, 1921.

⁸ Platt Cline, *Mountain Town: Flagstaff's First Century* (Flagstaff, Ariz., 1994), 152–53.



The Orpheum Theater in Flagstaff, ca. 1916. AHS.0367.00001, Arizona Historical Society (Flagstaff) Collections, housed at Northern Arizona University Special Collections and Archives.

and lease of the Orpheum Theater from John Bancord.⁹ He composed and arranged music for the theater's orchestra in addition to writing and producing plays. Due to the progression of his disease, John asked Mary to help him operate the Orpheum Theater. In October 1917, Mary and her mother Catherine moved from Detroit to Flagstaff.¹⁰ In addition to helping John manage the Orpheum Theater and becoming a licensed motion-picture-machine operator, Mary financed and opened Flagstaff's first beauty parlor and a florist shop, which she later sold for a profit.¹¹ In June 1918, federal officials appointed Mary acting postmistress for the city of Flagstaff. Although it was only a temporary position, the local newspaper praised the appointment: "Miss Costigan is thoroughly competent and will undoubtedly make a splendid official."¹²

In January 1920, John again became seriously ill after traveling to Los Angeles at the advice of his doctor. He returned to Flagstaff

⁹ *Coconino Sun*, August 10, 1917.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, October 12, 1917.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, October 28, 1917.

¹² *Ibid.*, June 21, 1918.

by train, accompanied by a Catholic priest, and was unable to work for two months.¹³ At age thirty-nine, John Costigan died on July 8, 1921, from tuberculosis. Because John's wife had died during the flu pandemic of 1918, his sister Mary became the legal guardian of her two small nephews, one of whom died a short time later. Mary supported her nephews and mother by becoming manager of the Orpheum Theater at age forty-two.¹⁴ In addition to booking vaudeville acts, silent movies, and scheduling appearances by movie stars traveling through Flagstaff, Mary continued providing the Orpheum Theater facilities as a site for fundraising events, free Christmas shows for children, political rallies, and other community events. She also financed a Flagstaff theater group that performed plays at the Orpheum Theater.¹⁵ Occasionally the theater hosted some major events. On March 4, 1924, Zane Grey's movie, *Call of the Canyon*—which had been filmed in Sedona—debuted at the Orpheum Theater to much fanfare.¹⁶ Two years later, she held a week-long celebration of the Orpheum's ninth anniversary with daily premier movies in 1926. During the anniversary celebration, her nine-year-old nephew Bill conducted the orchestra's performance of his father's compositions each night.¹⁷

In addition to operating the Orpheum Theater and Station KFXV, Mary also owned two apartments. In 1922, she expanded her theater business by briefly operating a second theater, the Ramona Theater, which was located on San Francisco Street in the south side of Flagstaff.¹⁸ Her accomplishments are remarkable because they occurred during seven years of family tragedies. From 1917 to 1924, Mary's niece, two nephews, sister-in-law, brother, and mother died in Flagstaff.

At a time when most businesses were owned by men, Mary had become a shrewd businesswoman. She ran a thriving operation at the Orpheum. Prominent Los Angeles businessman Charles B. Hamilton, for example, described her as a "square-shooter in every respect and a woman possessed of considerable gray matter

¹³ *Ibid.*, January 2, 1920.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, July 8, 1921. On the death of John's wife, see *ibid.*, October 18, 1918.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, May 22, 1925.

¹⁶ Joe McNeill and Steven Korn, "Sedona Gone Hollywood: The Call of the Canyon," *Sedona Monthly*, March 2005, pp. 25–35.

¹⁷ *Coconino Sun*, July 30, 1926.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, May 26, 1922.

Mary Costigan and Flagstaff's First Radio Station



Mary with the stars of Call of the Canyon (1923), based on Zane Grey's novel. Pictured (L to R) are: Richard Dix, Mary Costigan, Lois Wilson, and Ricardo Cortez. Courtesy of Ann Costigan.

and executive ability.”¹⁹ By the early 1920s, the Orpheum Theater’s payroll had grown to \$500 monthly with an average operating cost of \$55 daily for expenses such as payroll, movie purchases, advertising, and utilities.²⁰ By 1927, the Orpheum Theater had a \$1,000 monthly payroll, and it was considered a “leading business of the city,” according to the local paper.²¹

Mary had a good reputation among the business community in Flagstaff. She was a member of the Flagstaff Chamber of Commerce, Flagstaff Country Club, and the National Theater Owner’s Association. In December 1922, the local Rotary Club invited her to speak about the motion picture industry.²² Perhaps

¹⁹ Charles Hamilton to Mary Costigan, September 15, 1931, Mary Costigan Collection, in the possession of Costigan Family (hereinafter Costigan Collection).

²⁰ *Cocconino Sun*, December 22, 1922.

²¹ *Ibid.*, October 19, 1927.

²² *Cocconino Sun*, June 3, 1927; *ibid.*, December 22, 1922.

the best illustration of the high regard in which Mary was held by Flagstaff businessmen occurred in 1926 when a community executive committee was organized to oversee the financing and construction of Flagstaff's first modern hotel, the Hotel Monte Vista. The executive committee entered into agreements with Hockenbury Hotel Systems, Inc., to conduct a fundraising campaign, H. L. Stevens and Company of San Francisco to build the hotel, and Hamilton Hotels Company of Los Angeles to operate the hotel. The executive committee worked closely with Hockenbury representatives and successfully raised \$200,000 in one week to build the Hotel Monte Vista. Mary was one of only three women on the twenty-six-member executive committee. The other two members were equally prominent Flagstaff women: Elizabeth Babbitt and Ana Frohmiller, Coconino County treasurer.²³

In 1925, she joined the Flagstaff Business and Professional Women's Club (Flagstaff BPW), which was organized on April 10 in the Coconino County Courthouse office of Ana Frohmiller. Founded in 1919, the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs was the first national organization for professional women, and its goals were to achieve equity and economic self-sufficiency for women, address legislative issues affecting women, increase opportunities for women in the workplace, and provide scholarships for women. Flagstaff BPW was founded by Ana Frohmiller, the Coconino County treasurer who later served as state auditor and, in 1950, became the first woman to run for Arizona governor. Mary served as second vice president of Flagstaff BPW in 1929.²⁴

During the 1920s, the development of radio for communication and entertainment began to transform America. News, sports, and music was available to anyone who could afford to purchase a radio. The development of national hit songs and programs created a new national culture. Broadcasts of national news, disasters, political conventions, and presidential inaugurations provided rapid transmission of national events and issues throughout the United States.²⁵

²³ Ibid., April 23, 1926; *ibid.*, May 17, 1926; *ibid.*, May 21, 1926.

²⁴ *Arizona Federation of Business and Professional Women: Women Who Made a Difference, 1921–2003* (Phoenix, 2003), 118–19, 126–27.

²⁵ On the rise of radio, see Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination from Amos 'n' Andy and Edward Murrow to Wolfman Jack and Howard Stern* (New York, 1999).

Mary Costigan and Flagstaff's First Radio Station

BOOKING THE BEST IN FEATURE PICTURES



ROAD SHOWS AND VAUDEVILLE

The Orpheum Theatre

BROADCASTING STATION KFKY
M. M. COSTIGAN, LESSEE AND MANAGER
FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA

Orpheum Theater letterhead with Mary Costigan's name. Courtesy of the author.

Although women gained national suffrage in 1920 and were increasingly entering professional careers in the decade that followed, few women owned or operated a radio station. In 1921, Marie Zimmerman became the first woman in the United States to receive a license to operate a radio station. Her husband built the radio station's equipment, and she managed Station WIAE from their home studio for one year in Vinton, Iowa.²⁶ The following year in Medford, Oregon, Bill Virgin received a radio license and started Station KMED with his wife Blanche. Following her husband's death in 1928, Blanche licensed the radio station in her name and continued operating it until she sold the business twenty-two years later.²⁷ In 1926, Dana McNeil was issued a radio license in Pierre, South Dakota. Station KGFX was co-owned by Dana and his wife Ida until his death in 1936. Ida McNeil then licensed the radio station in her name and continued operating it by herself until 1962 when she sold the station.²⁸

Mary was captivated by the new technology, which first came to Flagstaff when six young men succeeded in receiving radio transmissions on May 23, 1922, on a homemade receiver.²⁹ The radio had arrived in Flagstaff and it was there to stay. By January 1923, the *Coconino Sun* reported, "Radio Bugs Swarm Around These Parts," describing the activities of local "radio bugs" Arthur Riordan and Oliver Raudebaugh installing radios, Harold Sykes building a radio, and others regularly listening to radios.³⁰ During the following year, Frank A. Miller, a "radio expert," opened a radio business

²⁶ Donna L. Halper, *Invisible Star: A Social History of Women in American Broadcasting* (North Castle, N.Y., 2001), 18–19.

²⁷ Art Chipman, *KMED: The First Half Century* (Medford, Ore., 1972), 3.

²⁸ Halper, *Invisible Star*, 68–69.

²⁹ Cline, *Mountain Town*, 246–47.

³⁰ *Coconino Sun*, January 12, 1923.

in Flagstaff.³¹ Mary closely followed the development of the fledgling radio industry in Flagstaff and decided to open a radio station.

In August 1925, Mary purchased two business lots on Aspen Avenue across the street from the Orpheum Theater for \$4,500.³² A front-page Flagstaff newspaper article one month later announced Mary's plans to build an ice-skating rink, dance pavilion, café, and radio broadcasting station on her undeveloped lots. Mary's new venture received strong support from the *Coconino Sun*:

Miss Costigan has the utmost faith in Flagstaff and belief that it will continue to grow even more rapidly than in the past. She intends to keep her amusement features even with this growth. . . . While many details are still to be worked out in connection with these enterprises, this progressive young woman, of whom Flagstaff has many reasons to be proud, says that she believes there's nothing too good for Flagstaff [and] earnestly hopes it will be a drawing card here, making Flagstaff a more desirable place for winter visitors by affording them additional winter recreation.³³

Another newspaper article providing more details about the plans for the new recreational building and ice rink commended Mary for "her vision in providing us a recreational center against the time when winter storms will drive us under cover."³⁴

However, the planned project failed to materialize, and instead the business lots were used for Orpheum Theater parking. In spite of this setback, Mary continued to pursue her dream of owning a radio station and ordered radio equipment from the store of "local radio experts" Arthur Riordan and Ray Prochnow. The McArthur Brothers automobile company in Phoenix shipped the radio equipment to Flagstaff, and Arthur Riordan installed it in the Orpheum Theater.³⁵ When Mary received a Class A radio broadcasting license in October 1925, it garnered publicity throughout the United States, and she received requests from movie and radio publications for her picture.³⁶

Station KFXV began broadcasting on December 10, 1925, at the Orpheum Theater. Cecil Waters, who was described as an

³¹ Ibid., November 28, 1924.

³² Ibid., August 17, 1925.

³³ Ibid., September 11, 1925.

³⁴ Ibid., October 23, 1925.

³⁵ Ibid., November 27, 1925; *ibid.*, October 13, 1925.

³⁶ Ibid., December 28, 1925.

“announcer, janitor, operator, and violinist,” transmitted KFXV’s first program. A Fort Valley, Arizona, resident called in and reported: “Program coming in fine, thank your artists and come again.” The owners of Wilson and Coffin plumbing and heating store installed a loudspeaker on the roof of their building and launched a floating aerial antenna between balloon bouquets so Flagstaff residents standing below on downtown streets could easily hear the radio station’s first broadcast. KFXV’s programs could be received up to fifteen miles during the day and farther at night.³⁷

A *Coconino Sun* article described the radio station’s first program as “casual” selections by the Orpheum orchestra. Other December programs included a broadcast of midnight mass from the Catholic church on Christmas Eve, music from other Flagstaff churches on Christmas Day, and Christmas carolers at the Orpheum Theater. The newspaper article ended with the optimistic prediction: “When Miss Costigan, the first woman in the world licensed to operate a radio station—and one of the last to receive a permit as the airlines are now closed to additional stations, gets her schedule arranged we can sit at home and know whether the geraniums will freeze before morning and get the latest quotations on the price of pinons.”³⁸

Mary was fascinated by the new technology and wanted to be a part of the burgeoning radio industry from the start:

The thought that you could talk into a small instrument and your voice could be heard miles away thrilled me and still does thrill me. That was why in 1923 while vacationing in San Antonio, Texas, I visited the broadcasting station there and learned from a very gracious operator what I must do to secure a Station. Returning home to a small town in northern Arizona where I owned and managed a Motion Picture Theatre, I immediately had a transmitter built by the owner of the only station in Arizona. My station being the second station. I was operating before the Radio Commission [forerunner of the Federal Communications Commission] existed.³⁹

Mary oversaw the growth of the station at a time when radio itself was in its infancy. As she noted years later:

³⁷ *Ibid.*, December 28, 1925.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, December 18, 1925.

³⁹ Costigan, KFXV manuscript.

Imagine if you can my first Station was only 10 watts. A dressing room over the stage [of] my first studio. The motor that furnished the electricity made so much noise it was placed in the basement. So when anything went wrong it was a run from the studio to the basement but I loved it all.⁴⁰

In the early days of radio, owners and operators often had to make it up as they went along. Mary demonstrated a diverse skill set that was suited to running Flagstaff's first radio station. As she recalled years later:

We never paid our talent—people offered and were so glad when you allowed them to go on. The local talent was excellent. A teacher's college in the town furnished a glee club, many good musicians, and singers. The dramatic club from the college gave plays. Regular records were used until electric transcriptions were available. We gave the news, [and] taught bridge. Also used the vaudeville acts that were booked at the theatre. Many visitors came to our town because of the beautiful scenery and climate. Writers, artists, lecturers, they were all very gracious and willing to talk on my radio, Zane Gray [*sic*], Harold Bell Wright, and others.⁴¹

Mary tried to operate her radio station on a commercial basis by charging for advertising and later described her advertising methods:

With the low power that even the larger stations had then, it was almost impossible to get Los Angeles or Phoenix on our radios. Denver came in better. For that reason, advertisers certainly got their money's worth. A salesman covered our town and surrounding towns. The merchants all advertised. I think I charged only \$1.00 for a short announcement between numbers. A reporter was on our staff as far back as 1926. . . . I never broadcasted an "Ad" on Sunday. I know it is not possible to do that now. Cost of operation is so high that every minute must pay.⁴²

Three years after its first broadcast in 1925, Station KFXV had become well established in Flagstaff with "many of the local radio dealers tuning in each day at the noon show for the benefit of those uptown."⁴³ In March 1928, Frank Wilburn, a former station owner in Prescott, installed new radio equipment for the station, and KFXV was broadcasting four times daily. Some

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ *Cocconino Sun*, June 8, 1928.

California residents wrote letters to the radio station exclaiming they were “enthusiastic about the clearness and excellence of musical programs.”⁴⁴ By June 1928, KFX Y’s wattage was 100, 1420 kilocycles (kilohertz), with a wave length of 205.4 meters, and KFX Y’s equipment included Kellogg microphones. In addition to daily hour-long programs at noon and 11:30 p.m., KFX Y began broadcasting special programs featuring musical performances by the Orpheum Theater orchestra, vocal and theatrical performances by “local talent” at 5:00 p.m.⁴⁵

After outgrowing the radio station’s backstage studio space with its limited hours for broadcasting due to stage performances, KFX Y moved to larger and better quarters at the Monte Vista Hotel in 1929. At this location Station KFX Y expanded its broadcasting hours. KFX Y’s studio was located in the Chamber of Commerce Room at the hotel, and the studio equipment included microphones, two large Victrolas, a piano, a thousand-pound transmitter, and the newest crystal equipment described by Mary as “the only device of its kind in this state.”⁴⁶ The tube lineup in the crystal oscillator included one 210 tube, a buffer amplifier of one 865 tube, an intermediate amplifier of one 852 tube, a power amplifier of two 211 tubes in parallel modulated by two 212 DEES speech amplifiers, and one 211 tube. All the tubes were made by RCA except the modulators, which were Western Electric.⁴⁷ The station’s other equipment was stored in the tower on the hotel’s roof.

On opening day at the new location, over four hundred Flagstaff residents came to the KFX Y studio to greet their friends over the radio. The opening program included performances of two solos, a duet, three vocal solos, a male quintette, plus banjo and orchestra music by the Sefton and Orpheum Theater orchestras. By 1929, KFX Y’s broadcasts had increased from three times weekly to three hours daily.⁴⁸

As KFX Y continued to expand its broadcasting schedule, Mary decided to move the radio station and Orpheum Theater into a larger building. In January 1929, Mary formed a corporation with Philomena Babbitt as president, Dr. E. S. Miller as vice president,

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, March 30, 1928.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, June 8, 1928.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, January 25, 1929.

⁴⁷ Telegram to Mary Costigan, May 15, 1931, Costigan Collection.

⁴⁸ *Cocconino Sun*, February 1, 1929.



Arthur (Sharkey) Andrews with equipment for Radio Station KFXV, winter 1928–1929, Monte Vista Hotel. Image PB 152, F-9, 11, Helen Wilburn Collection, Courtesy of Sharlot Hall Museum Library, Prescott, Arizona.

and Mary as secretary-treasurer to sell \$100,000 stock divided into four thousand shares of twenty-five dollars each. The purpose of the new corporation was to “establish, maintain, operate, manage and control a theater or theaters” with “attractions of various kind and natures including dramatics, operatic and musical performances, vaudeville, moving pictures, intellectual and instructive entertainments” as well as to “establish, maintain, operate, manage, and control for profit and entertainment a radio broadcasting station dealing in all kinds of radios, wireless, electric, and other radio instruments.” A \$100,000 two-story Spanish/Moorish building would house the theater, radio station, five offices, two stores, and an apartment. The *Coconino Sun* reported the new corporation was necessary because “Miss Costigan says the present Orpheum is too small owing to the continued increase in business, the growth of Flagstaff, and the demand of the amusement patrons for the best of everything . . . with seating capacity which will be ample for Flagstaff and the troop of winter visitors.”⁴⁹

Unfortunately, Mary’s ambitious plan failed to materialize due to the onset of the Great Depression and an underhanded business deal. In August 1929, Warner Brothers Vitaphone sound equipment was installed at the Orpheum Theater to project Al Jolson’s *The Singing Fool* movie while Mary was in Los Angeles negotiating to bring more “talkie” movies to the big screen in Flagstaff. During Mary’s absence, John Weatherford, the Orpheum Theater building owner, gave a ten-year, \$36,000 theater lease, beginning November 1, 1929, to Arthur Maxemin, the former Orpheum Theater orchestra leader and current co-owner of the Liberty Theater in Flagstaff. The *Coconino Sun*’s front-page articles about these events ended: “Both of the Flagstaff theatres have had successful summers although neither of them had installed talkies until this week, when Miss Costigan had talkie equipment placed in the Orpheum.”⁵⁰

Interestingly, another Flagstaff businesswoman had a similar experience. In 1925, Lulu Hall, who had managed the Weatherford Hotel since 1919, lost her lease when Margaret Weatherford revoked it after her husband John renewed the lease with Hall. The ensuing legal battle between Hall and the Weatherfords over the renewal of

⁴⁹ Ibid., January 11, 1929.

⁵⁰ Ibid., August 23, 1929.

the lease was ultimately decided in 1927 by the Arizona Supreme Court in Hall's favor.⁵¹

Mary immediately countered with a press statement announcing she owned the corporate rights to the Orpheum Theater name and her plans to move all the Orpheum's seating and equipment, which she also owned, into a new building on her two undeveloped lots on Aspen Avenue as soon as possible after her Orpheum Theater lease ended on November 1.⁵² Until the new theater was completed, she leased the C. A. Clark Building on Leroux Street from the Arizona Central Bank, renovated the building, installed new sound equipment, upgraded lighting and screens, and moved in her projection equipment and seating from the Orpheum Theater.⁵³

Although Mary's plans to build a new building faltered, she re-opened the Orpheum Theater on November 6, 1929, in the renovated Clark Building. A *Coconino Sun* advertisement about the Orpheum's opening featuring a "talkie" film, *The Argyle Case*, at its new location stated, "All the equipment is being moved from the old building to the new building. The name—Orpheum Theater—moves too." The advertisement ended with Mary's guarantee: "The standard of the new house will be the same as I have always tried to give you. Service and courtesy is my motto."⁵⁴ Meanwhile Arthur Maxemin installed sound equipment in the former Orpheum Theater building owned by John Weatherford.⁵⁵

As the Depression deepened with bank failures in 1930, Mary's businesses began to falter in spite of her hard work. By this time, she was also competing with a national movie chain, Fox West Coast Theaters, after Maxemin sold his business to the chain.⁵⁶ She updated the Orpheum Theater movie equipment again by installing a \$10,000 RCA Photophone sound system.⁵⁷ On March 15, 1930, Mary borrowed \$4,000 at 8 percent interest from Dr. Albert E. Schermann in addition to taking a \$9,500 mortgage with 8 percent interest on the Orpheum Theater and borrowing around \$800 on

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, September 23, 1927.

⁵² *Ibid.*, September 6, 1929.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, October 18, 1929.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, November 1, 1929.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, October 4, 1929.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, November 1, 1929.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, March 14, 1930.

her life-insurance policies.⁵⁸ She continued operating the Orpheum Theater as well as KFX Y, which was broadcasting eight hours daily.

Overwhelmed by theater and radio station operating expenses, debts, and reduced theater income due to the Depression, Mary made the decision to sell KFX Y. Although she received inquiries from business owners in Nebraska, Idaho, and New Mexico, negotiations to sell the radio station failed. By spring 1931, the Orpheum Theater's debts were \$21,068. Mary sold the Orpheum Theater, Station KFX Y, her two business lots, apartments, house, and all of her household items except the silverware and linens for \$500 to Schermann in 1931.⁵⁹

However, Schermann soon encountered similar difficulties operating a radio station and theater during the Depression. He closed the Orpheum Theater and began to try to sell the radio station. In 1932, the Federal Radio Commission approved Schermann's request to move KFX Y to Yuma and give it a new call number, KUMA.⁶⁰ On December 2, 1939, James Babbitt, an attorney representing Schermann, entered a motion at a Federal Radio Commission hearing in Phoenix to relinquish KUMA's license because the radio station was unprofitable and another Station KYUM had been granted a license to broadcast in Yuma. The Federal Radio Commission approved the motion, and Station KUMA (former KFX Y) went off the air permanently.⁶¹

After selling her Flagstaff businesses at age fifty-two in 1931, Mary and her nephew Bill went to Detroit to visit relatives. As they left Flagstaff Mary exclaimed, "That's it. I'm moving before you die. With as many people as I've buried here, I'm not losing you." At the beginning of the school year in 1931, Mary and Bill moved to Phoenix where he attended Brophy Preparatory School while she worked in the school's office in exchange for Bill's free tuition. While working at Brophy Preparatory School, Mary continued to unsuccessfully seek employment with Warner Brothers Studio, Court Reporters Supply Company, Grenade Corporation, and Pacific Coat Hanger Manufacturing Company in Los Angeles.⁶²

⁵⁸ New York Life Insurance to Mary Costigan, March 27, 1931, Costigan Collection.

⁵⁹ Mary wrote a series of letters to station owners in other states. Copies of these letters and the bill of sale to Schermann are found in the Costigan Collection.

⁶⁰ Shannon Huniwell, "Yuma's Radio Switcheroo," *Popular Communications*, January 2004, pp. 15-18.

⁶¹ *Arizona Republic* (Phoenix), December 2, 1939.

⁶² Ann Costigan, interview by the author, West Hills, California, January 27, 2007; Costigan Collection.



Portrait of Mary Costigan. AHS.0774.00011, Arizona Historical Society (Flagstaff) Collections, housed at Northern Arizona University Special Collections and Archives.

In 1934, they moved to California where Bill finished his senior year in high school and attended Loyola University while Mary worked as an accountant. She retired in 1947 as an accountant at Bullock's Department Store and died in California at age eighty-one on May 12, 1960.⁶³ Although Mary never again owned a business or worked in the entertainment industry, her love for radio endured. In an unpublished document, Mary summed up her radio station career:

Our station of 1925 was very crude in comparison [with today's stations] but in this industry as in all others the Pioneers—the boys who spent their time and energy as well as we who put our money into equipment have helped make the lovely and complete [radio] station of today. . . .

⁶³ Ann Costigan interview, January 27, 2007.

Mary Costigan and Flagstaff's First Radio Station

The Depression struck hard and after owning Station KFXV for seven years I was forced to dispose of it. The combination of theatre and radio was ideal.⁶⁴

During the 1920s when only a few women operated radio stations, Mary Costigan was unique. Unlike Marie Zimmerman, a married woman who briefly operated a radio station for one year, Mary was a single woman who was a theater manager. She received a radio license and operated Station KFXV successfully for seven years without the support of a husband. An innovative businesswoman, Mary Costigan was a pioneer radio-station owner who established commercial radio broadcasting in Flagstaff, Arizona.

⁶⁴ Costigan, KFXV manuscript.