
Twin Time Capsules Demonstrate Early Ties Between Emily Griffith Opportunity School and Rocky Mountain PBS

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September 9, 2016 marked the 100th Anniversary of the Emily Griffith Opportunity School – now called the Emily Griffith Technical College. To celebrate, participants in Denver witnessed the opening of a time capsule that had been bricked off in a new expansion building completed in 1956 and now ready for demolition.

Curiously, there was also a time capsule placed in the same building at the same time by the new KRMA educational television station. This was not a coincidence. KRMA, the foundation for Rocky Mountain PBS, had ties to Emily Griffith Opportunity School that went beyond co-location at Glenarm Place. Both entities were central to Denver Public Schools' adult education efforts at mid-century.

Among the items unveiled in the KRMA time capsule were: articles from The Denver Post about KRMA, a study guide for the “Poco a Poco” Spanish language series, KRMA scripts, and a booklet about the Emily Griffith Opportunity School.

In honor of Rocky Mountain PBS' 60th anniversary, let's take a closer look at the history of KRMA and its connection to Emily Griffith Opportunity School:

On April 29, 1953 the Board of the Denver Public Schools (DPS) agreed to apply to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for a license to establish an educational TV station. The FCC approved the application in July 1953 to form KRMA-TV, whose call letters stood for “Knowledge for the Rocky Mountain Area.”



Dr. Kenneth Oberholtzer, superintendent of DPS, was instrumental in getting KRMA started. Oberholtzer reported to The Denver Post in 1953 that financing for the new station would come from taxes via the Denver Public Schools system, philanthropic contributions, and cost sharing through the Denver Area Council for Educational Television.

The reason that a school department wanted to have an educational TV license was to enhance efforts at educating Denver students, especially adult learners. At the time, classes at Emily Griffith were full, with long waiting lists. Dr. Oberholtzer made a convincing argument to relieve that pressure through on-air instruction, by demonstrating that the cost for adult education delivered by Emily Griffith Opportunity School was 45¢ per hour per student, while using television would cost just 15¢ per hour per student!

Oberholtzer's proposed idea was controversial in the community. Some questioned the advisability of using tax dollars to support a TV station aimed at adults instead of the more typical and "essential" DPS needs, while others wondered whether there was a need for an educational TV (ETV) station in Denver.

Eventually, proponents prevailed, and the station went on the air on January 30, 1956.

KRMA initially offered 10 hours per week of week-night programming. Those programs came from local and national talent who produced their own shows with educational content. Topics for those initial programs included child development, travel, classical music, religion, the arts, and foreign policy, mostly directed at adult audiences. But there were also courses directly related to occupational training.

One hugely popular class was shorthand. Study kits accompanied the class and a certificate was given to those who passed the course. One woman who took the shorthand course received a raise of \$30 a week after completing the course!

Such programs targeted at adults were delivered in collaboration with Emily Griffith Opportunity School. In fact, Russell Casement, who was the principal of Emily Griffith starting in 1960, was appointed to serve simultaneously as executive director of KRMA in 1963.

(Initially, there also were a few evening programs directed at young children. KRMA – Channel Six later offered daytime and summer courses to school children enrolled in the Denver Public Schools, such as foreign language instruction [Spanish and French], Grade 4 Science, Math for Intermediate and Upper Grades, Spelling, Geography, and Sewing. These programs were overseen by a separate DPS entity – the Boettcher School of the Air.)

An article in The Denver Post (Dec. 25, 1960) recognized KRMA leaders Dr. Kenneth Oberholtzer, superintendent of DPS, Howard Johnson, principal of the Emily Griffith Opportunity School during the 1950s, and James Case, program director for KRMA, as significant contributors to the national movement for educational TV.

In 1987, the station's license was converted to a community license and transferred to what had become the Council for Public Television Channel 6, Inc.. Despite this parting of ways, Rocky Mountain PBS continued to have adult education as a central mission. Today, there are no tests or certificates, but how can viewers help but learn about history, science, public affairs, etc. by watching American Experience, Colorado Experience, Arts District, NOVA, Nature, Ken Burns documentaries, Frontline, and the PBS Newshour?

In that vein, Rocky Mountain PBS continues to share a vision articulated by Emily Griffith in 1916 when she dedicated the school she founded to "providing opportunities for all who wish to learn."

Watch these fun and interesting videos!

- [A 3-minute condensed version of the extraction and ceremony](#)
- This is a [full version of the ceremony](#) (which actually includes a fun presentation and comments by **Tina Cartagena** during the ceremony).

NOTE: Pay particular attention to the time period of the video from **28:37—31:30** that includes Tina and several KRMA SAM volunteers seeing the time capsule for the very first time during the ceremony. For more on Emily Griffith, watch this episode of [Colorado Experience](#).