

God's Ad Man

You see them everywhere along the highways and back roads of the Bible Belt—crosses and signs proclaiming JESUS SAVES or GET RIGHT WITH GOD. Thousands of these exhortations are the work of one man, retired coal miner H. Harrison Mayes, 76, who has been making them for more than 50 years. Last week, NEWSWEEK's Jon Lowell traveled up the Cumberland Gap to visit Mayes at his home in the mountain town of Middlesboro, Ky. Lowell's report:

"You're not from the highway department, are you?" With this suspicious greeting, H. Harrison Mayes, short and gnarled as a leprechaun, welcomes the visitor to his cross-shaped home, symbolic of his faith. The twelve windows across the front room represent the Twelve Apostles; the ten across the back the Ten Commandments. Out in the yard stands a long row of 200 concrete crosses, weighing 1,400 pounds each, urging the passerby to GET RIGHT WITH GOD. Soon they will be hauled away by truck and one by one will appear mysteriously overnight on selected highways. Mayes is a humble man who never went beyond the fifth grade in school. But he believes that the Almighty seldom relies on geniuses. "God had to pick a fool like me," he says, "to advertise him."

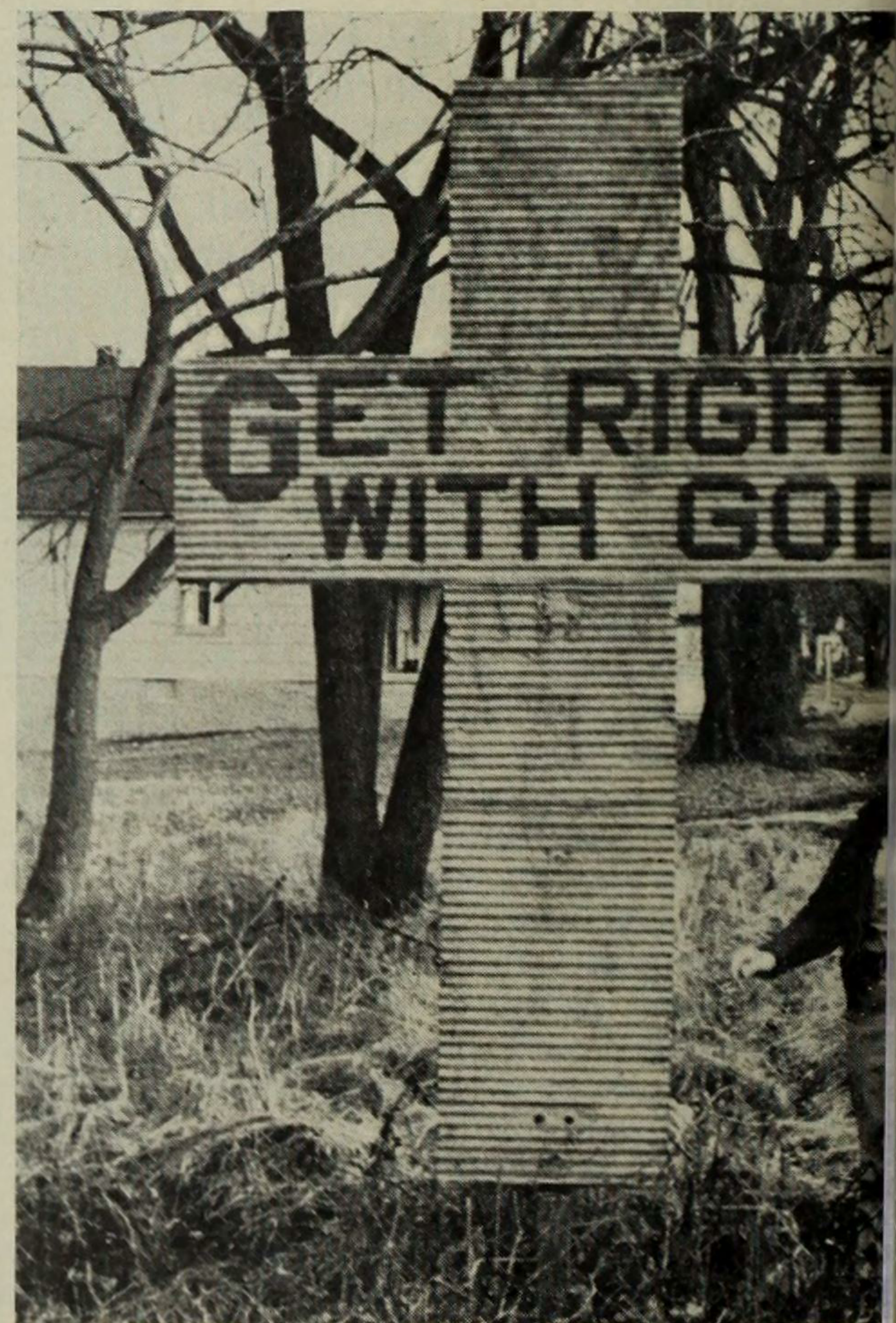
Mayes began his unconventional career in 1917 by painting JESUS SAVES on rocks near his home "up here in the holler, where I've lived all my life." As a young man working for the Fork Ridge Coal Co., he says, "I was saved from an accident by the Lord and I figured I would devote the rest of my life to warning others to follow His word." Since then, Mayes has erected signs in all 50 states and in 82 foreign nations or provinces. Some of the crosses are made of concrete poured into homemade wooden molds that Mayes builds himself; others are fashioned from corrugated aluminum. And for foreign missionaries, Mayes cuts out crosses of oilcloth that he mails overseas.

As God's ad man, Mayes figures he has spent more than \$50,000 on his campaign—all of it raised by free-lance sign painting in Middlesboro. Except for postage for his mail-order ministry, Mayes says he doesn't solicit any help. He does receive assistance, however, from friends who help him move the concrete crosses and from contacts in seaboard towns who

assist him with a second line of advertising for his client. In his dusty, crowded shop, which he calls "Hub's Nub Theological Seminary," Mayes cleans out whisky bottles and fills them with messages like PREPARE TO MEET GOD, printed in sixteen languages, including Chinese. Then he mails them to friends who drop them into the ocean. Sometimes he hears from people who find the bottles, including one correspondent in the Philippines who recently found a bottle that had been dropped into the ocean off the west coast of Nicaragua 23 years before.

Despite his rural, fundamentalist background, Mayes belongs to no church. "I'm a Protestant-Catholic-Jew," he grins. "I follow the best parts of each." This eclectic theology has led him to the conviction that "the world needs one religion, one language, one nation, one kind of politics and one race." To that end, Harrison says he wants to marry a black woman and raise an interracial family if his wife, Lillie, should pass away before him. "It's the only way to end racial prejudice," he declares.

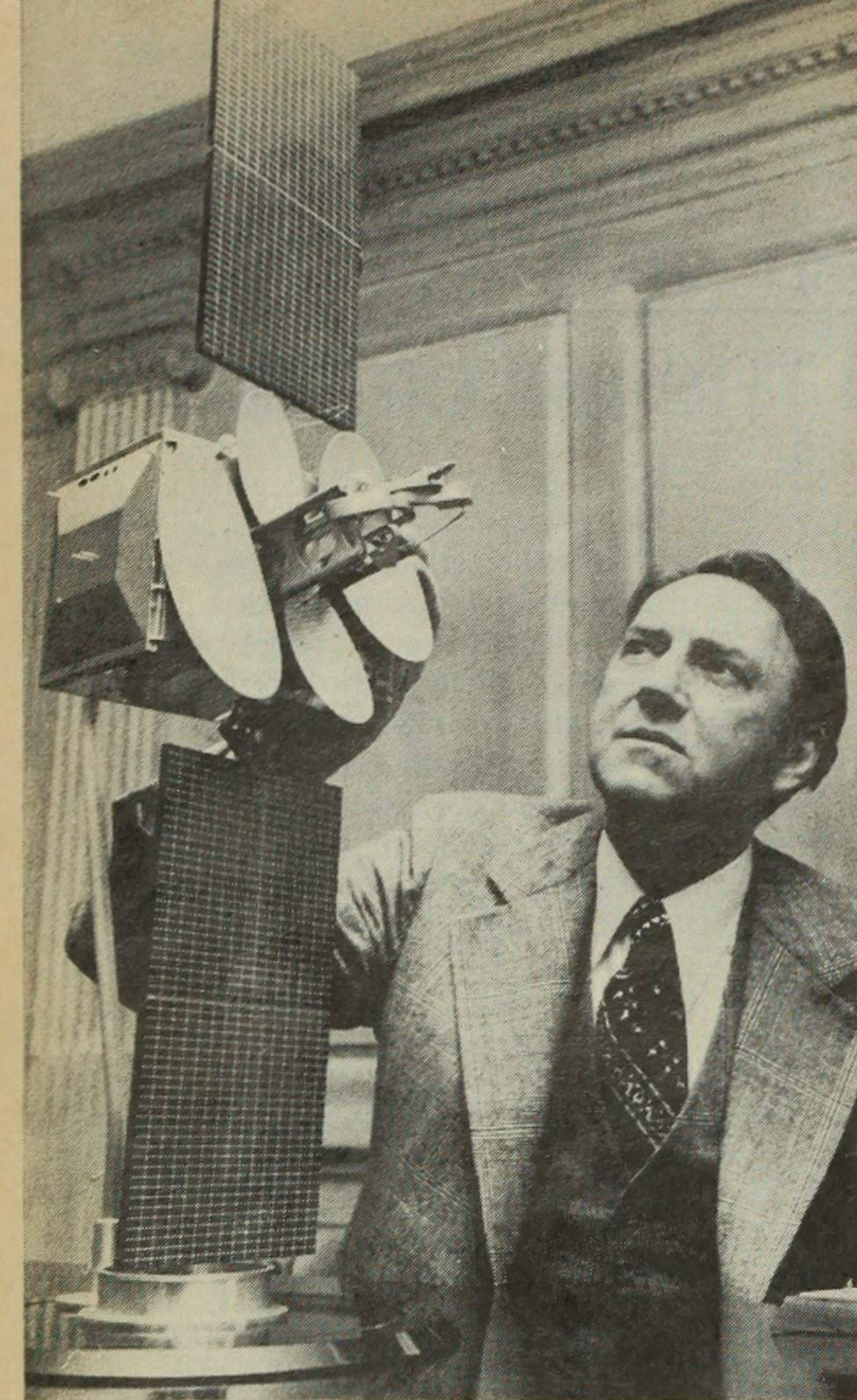
Lillie Mayes, meanwhile, quietly reads her Bible in the front room of her cross-shaped home and smiles at her husband's patriarchal dreams. "He sure likes to carry on," she says. "My kids say, 'he stops, he'll die.'" And in his weaker moments, God's self-appointed huckster is inclined to agree. "I'm just 126 pounds of mud," he sighs, "waiting to join God in heaven."



Jon Lowell—Newsweek

Mayes: 'I'm just 126 pounds of mud'

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UPI

RCA's Hawkins: Voices from space

ing station then sends the signals out over local lines. There is no need to interconnect the receiving points with land cables, and that makes for big savings in construction costs.

Alaskans will receive the greatest benefits from the new domsat system. Thanks to the RCA satellite, they already can receive live television programs, such as football games, rather than seeing them on a delayed basis. Telephone service will also improve because RCA can provide more circuits at lower costs. And the satellite can stimulate the economic growth of Alaska by binding the state more closely to the rest of the U.S. "We have put Alaska into the twentieth century," says Alaska Sen. Mike Gravel. "This means we will be able to bring modern methods of communication to Alaska's rural areas . . . and make Alaska contiguous with the southern 48."

Still, there are some problems. Even though domsat has a potential market of \$500 million a year by 1980, there may not be enough business for every company entering the field. To be profitable, a large system must sign up a couple of big users, such as TV networks. Even Hughes Aircraft, which has contracts to build \$150 million worth of satellites, doesn't believe all the domsat ventures will survive. Companies that have put their money on the line are already scrambling for customers, and some may decide to buy space on other satellites rather than launch their own. As one official gloomily puts it: "If more than three companies survive during the first few years, it will be remarkable."