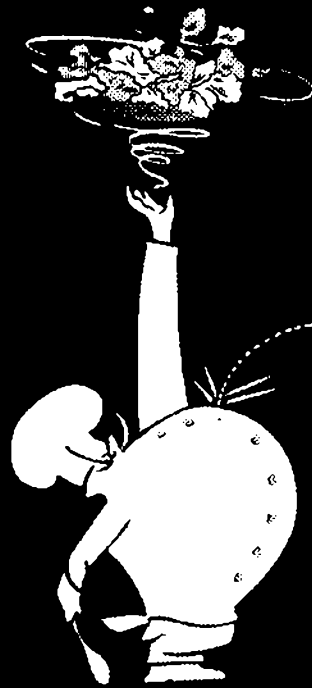


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BOOK 29 CHAPTER 5

AUTUMN 2003

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER/DECEMBER

The Elmwood Park Tower - Part II

BY BILL LEWIN

I was a student at DeVry Tech in 1954 and 1955. I took the FCC exam for the first class radio broadcast license in the fall of 1954.

In late 1954 a fellow DeVry student (Bob Cronkite) asked me if I wanted a job at radio station WLEY in Elmwood Park, where he worked. I said "Yes!" He said, "Bring your license tomorrow and I'll introduce you to the station owner, Zeb Zarnecki." When I met Zeb, he asked if I could work evenings and weekends till 11p.m. When I said I could, he said, "Good. Work with Bob from 3:00 to 11:00 tomorrow and the next day and, if you can run the station by yourself, I will put you on the payroll." I don't remember how much he paid me; I think he paid us console jockeys a decent hourly rate. Zeb was a well-meaning, no-nonsense kind of guy, a stickler for following FCC regulations -- such as logging power output every 60 minutes as required. He didn't want any problems from the FCC. He also wanted us to keep the station clean. I remember him saying, "You are one of us now; this is what you have to do."

After Zeb and I talked for a while at our first meeting, he told me about the live broadcasts they had in 1953 and 1954 (described by Chuck Schaden in the Summer issue of *Nostalgia Digest*). After that, the station went to all-music with the exception of Zeb's Sunday Polish program and a live news program. I think I met Joe

EDITOR'S NOTE - It's amazing how many people are interested in the old WLEY broadcast tower on Harlem Avenue in Elmwood Park, Illinois.

The tower was first mentioned, casually, during a *Those Were The Days* program late last year. There were a number of calls and a few letters, one of which was printed in the February-March issue of the *Nostalgia Digest*. In the Summer issue, prompted by quite a few more inquiries, we offered a nostalgia recollection about radio station WLEY.

This prompted many more comments from readers and listeners. Among them was a call from Walter Zarnecki, grandson of Zeb Zarnecki who co-owned and operated WLEY, telling how pleased he and his sister were with the recollections about their grandfather's radio station. It was a delight to hear from him.

And Bill Lewin of Saddlebrook, Arizona submitted this follow-up to the WLEY story.

Abbruscato, who left shortly after I started. I don't think the DeVry console jockeys stayed at WLEY longer than one-and-a-half or two years.

In early 1955 changes were made at WLEY. We went into the subscription music business to sell subscription music broadcast (without commercials) to restaurants and whoever might be interested. Standard broadcasting would continue, but a switch on the console would send a signal to the subscribers' special receivers to turn them off at commercial time. This venture would be under the direction of a man (I don't remember his name) who was the Program Director (Zeb Zarnecki still owned the station). The new Program Director said, "The effective radiated power

[ERP] should be increased to 40,000 watts." (I think the GE transmitter had ERP of 5,000 watts.) "A rebuilt Collins transmitter, that Zeb is buying, will be located in the vacant extension at the rear end of the small building," he said, "and we will be off the air for about one week while a DeVry instructor will install the 'new' transmitter."

He had already done the necessary FCC applications and clearing. The ERP was increased to 20,000 watts, and the new frequency would be 105.9 MHz instead of 107.1 MHz. It had bothered me to be so close to the high end of the dial at a space reserved for second-rate stations. The old GE transmitter remained as a standby. The control room and the two small studios stayed pretty much unchanged, with the exception of adding two 33 1/3 turntables. The console was modi-

ZARNECKI FAMILY COLLECTION

fied to include a toggle switch to superimpose a control signal on the FM carrier to disable commercials for the music subscribers. Zeb lectured us very clearly that we must never forget to operate the switch at commercial time.

When we returned to the air, with new equipment, the FCC required one or two weeks of test programming, which meant an agency monitored our transmission for FCC compliance. All went well and standard broadcasting with subscription music was started.

I remember that taking power readings every 60 minutes on the Collins took a little longer than before, and running back to the console and the turntables and cueing the tape for commercials and announcing station breaks got a little hectic (particularly if one had to go to the bathroom). It was almost a comedy, but still fun.

My most exciting experience was during a thunder/lightning storm. The turntable was spinning and music was on the air. Suddenly there was a *BANG!* in the transmitter room and the speaker went dead. I ran into the transmitter room. The hum of the fans was silent and all the transmitter tube filaments, seen through the

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front panel windows, were out, but the building power remained on. In a short time Zeb Zarnecki called and asked what happened and if I was OK. He said, "If there is a fire, run out and call from a drugstore. I told him, "I'm OK, there is no fire. I'll

try to find out why we went off the air."

I removed all the rear panels from the transmitter and proceeded to look inside. I spotted a burn mark on a side rail and broken insulation on a wire. Jumping with joy, I thought I had found the problem. I taped the open insulation with electrical tape and replaced blown fuses. Hoping there were no blown tubes to look for, I decided to leave the panels off and set the panel interlock override switches so that I might spot other problems as transmitter power came up. One of the override switches didn't work. This could be resolved by the screwdriver trick – stick a screwdriver in the interlock to make it appear closed. A **SERIOUS BREACH OF RULES!** The transmitter came up just fine. Seeing the tube filaments light and plates glow without problems was a big relief. I checked power and frequency and all was well. I went to the control room and made the customary announcement: "Technical difficulties have been overcome and WLEY returns to the air to resume regular programming."

But I was running with panels off and a screwdriver in one of the interlocks. I was either too excited or too dumb to turn the power off and restore panels before signing on to go back on the air. Now it was too late. In a short time one of Zeb's daugh-

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Fun time

ters called to tell me how relieved they were to hear me come back on the air. Later, Zeb called to tell me I had done a good job. Luckily, he did not come to the station. I could not let him see the screwdriver in the interlock and the panels off. When I signed off, I restored the panels. The failure and the broken override switch were recorded in the log, but the screwdriver trick was a secret.

The subscription music venture did not work out. Zeb kept the station going without it. We had some commercial business, probably enough to keep us going for a while. I think one of Zeb's beautiful daughters wrote some of the commercials. I was always glad to see her at the station. We had to read some of the commercials while others were taped by someone with a better voice than mine.

I remember reading a commercial for a funeral home. I tried my best to come across serious and sincere. That was difficult for someone without training. I had to laugh at myself, sometimes, and I had to turn the mike off briefly to compose myself before reading "Friends, in time of bereavement —"

That summarizes my enjoyable WLEY days. After I left I did not stay in touch. I think Zeb sold the station about a year later. ■

THE QUINTESSENTIAL SUBSTITUTE HOST

ROBERT Q. LEWIS

BY JIM COX

Radio historiographer John Dunning's succinct appraisal of the career of entertainer Robert Q. Lewis is that "Lewis was primed for bigger things that never quite happened." As is the case in similar assessments, Dunning may well have hit the nail on the head.

The bespectacled Lewis—a physical feature that, incidentally, gave him a recognized trademark—was a man who appeared to hold promise that was never fulfilled. Although he would regularly substitute for some of the foremost performers on the air—Arthur Godfrey, Bing Crosby, Ed Sullivan and Jackie Gleason among them—Lewis never achieved their levels of notoriety and success.

Some of the handicaps that held him back were of his own personal limitations. But even more blame can probably be affixed to the environment in which he emerged. He clearly confirmed his potential for spellbinding audiences and habitually had them eating from his hand. His strong suit was a gift of patter that was well received by adoring fans. "As a disc jockey, he was a natural," said *TV Radio Mirror*. The quipster's snappy comebacks left listeners rollicking on the floor, turning what

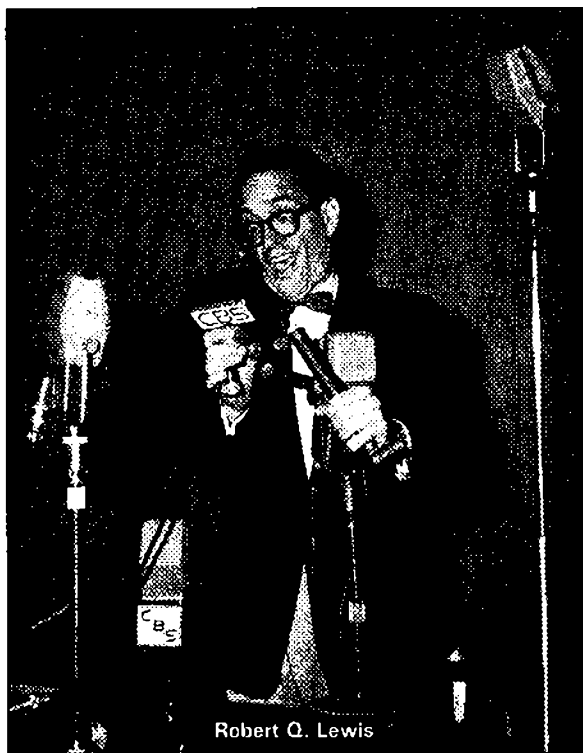
otherwise might be serious matters into trivialized fluff. (*Variety* lauded his "high IQ humor.") That ability was coupled with an engaging, effervescent personality that permitted Lewis to develop a loyal corps of followers that travelled with him from venue to venue.

Yet after a few years of trying to establish himself as an up-and-coming performer in dual mediums, fate intervened on two accounts. His growing popularity in radio never accomplished its ultimate potential, for he arrived on that scene just as the aural medium's wealth was starting to slide. While he persevered nearly to the end of the golden age, he never really connected with numbers that could significantly boost his stock and make his name a household word as it might have only a few years earlier.

When CBS attempted, in several tries, to shift his talent to television, he found himself competing against multiple performers with far greater recognition for the same audiences. Arthur Godfrey, Garry Moore, Art Linkletter and a few others of their ilk were already firmly entrenched with daytime viewers as favored series hosts.

Lewis who, by his own admission, was an average vocalist (he once labeled himself "the worst singer on radio" although he was equal to or better than many), and an even worse dancer and actor, had to rely almost entirely on his ability to deliver humor. "For all his love of show business, he couldn't really sing, couldn't really

Jim Cox is the author of "Frank and Anne Hummert's Radio Factory: The Programs and Personalities of Broadcasting's Most Prolific Producers." McFarland & Company, softcover with photos, \$32.50. To order, call 800/253-2187.



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dance – and enthusiasm was no substitute for talent,” argued one pundit. “As for acting, audiences weren’t yet ready for leading men who wore glasses – or for comics who didn’t look funny.” Besides the jesting, he later pushed forward the talented members of a closely-knit troupe that he assembled around him.

It wasn’t enough to sustain prominence, however. After several attempts he left television altogether to concentrate on his “first love,” radio, where audiences were bailing out as if it were the Titanic during the mid-1950s. For Lewis, it was a case of too little, too late. The potential he offered was never completely realized. Yet despite all the obstacles and misfortunes, in his halcyon days he still evidenced a noteworthy showmanship that landed him some golden opportunities that few other wannabes ever enjoyed.

Born in Manhattan on April 25, 1921,

Lewis – whose real surname was Goldberg – was the son of a successful attorney whose own theatrical ambitions had terminated with college dramatics. Continuing to harbor a deep love for the stage, however, the senior Lewis imbued his son with a similar awe and respect for things theatrical. As the lad grew toward adolescence, his father would take him to Saturday matinee performances at New York theaters. Young Bob viewed the experience as “an escape from life,” alleged a magazine reviewer. There he entered “a story-book world where heroines were like princesses, villains were evil and wore black moustaches, heroes were pure in heart and wore square jaws.”

The boy’s fascination with those trappings led to a conviction that he somehow would personally become a part of it. He began by singing in children’s radio shows. He devoted childhood summers to organizing and operating a kids’ theater in the garage behind the Lewis dwelling at Rockville Center, Long Island. On graduating from De Witt Clinton High School the youth specialized in dramatics courses at the University of Michigan. He added the initial “Q” to his name – signifying nothing – so he could stand out in people’s minds.

During that time he was able to gain a berth as a disc jockey at a Detroit radio station where he perfected the gift of gab and ad-lib. His first real job following graduation took him in 1941 to Troy, New York, where he was employed by station WTRY. They “let him be as versatile as all get-out,” according to a pulp reviewer. He announced, wrote and read fairy tales to

kiddies and was addressed as "Uncle Bob" in the latter capacity. Within a few months, however, Uncle Sam came calling and "Uncle Bob" joined his great uncle's Army.

Lewis, an asthma sufferer since childhood, was sick throughout what became a prolonged ordeal. While extensive patient treatment with the best physicians available to him had virtually cured his chronic childhood illness, he contracted double pneumonia soon after entering the service. It triggered an asthmatic relapse. By the end of 1942 the Army's high command was weary of shipping him from one clinic to another and promptly discharged him from active duty.

Perhaps as a result of his debilitating experience there, a decade later Lewis became a highly visible crusader against painful breathing, becoming particularly focused on helping youngsters in that fight. By the mid-1950s he was named an honorary chairman of the Denver-based non-sectarian Jewish National Home for Asthmatic Children. Coincidentally, he also served as Greater New York chairman of the National Foundation for Muscular Dystrophy. Throughout his professional career, in fact, Lewis accepted opportunities that funneled some of his energies toward charitable causes while seeking to gain mass support for them.

Following his release from the service, Lewis returned to New York City, where he was hired by a small, obscure radio station. Within a couple of years he came to the attention of NBC executives, who signed him to a contract. The chain put him on the air on Saturday evenings at 7:30 (all times Eastern) in a three-month trial run that began April 7, 1945. By August 6 he was linked with Jack Arthur in an 8 a.m. weekday comedy feature. But Lewis didn't last. By December 29 he was gone.

One version of his abrupt departure suggested he was fired for ripostes that poked

fun at NBC vice presidents, an aberration that frequently got Fred Allen called on the carpet for similar transgressions. But Lewis attributed his brief hiatus at NBC to performing too many duties simultaneously: He was writing, producing and acting at the same time.

Nonetheless, the following year he acquired another network stint. On May 18, 1946 he started hosting a musical variety series, *The Saturday Night Revue*, at 8:30 over MBS. It featured Bill Harrington, Vera Holly, Elsa Mirande, Art Tatum and Henny Youngman. John Gart's Orchestra accompanied and Ted Brown announced. (The latter would become an important presence on NBC's *Monitor* down the road.) But the show left the ether just four weeks into it, on June 8.

Retreating to local radio, Lewis was picked up by a major New York independent outlet, WHN, which soon had him spinning platters and chatting humorously between turns. It seemed like a classic fit. In those months he reportedly played Ted Weems' remake recording of "Heartaches," the popular hit from the early 1930s, so frequently that he contributed substantially toward reprising the tune nationally.

During his brief sojourn at WHN yet a third network came calling, one that in time was to offer him the sustained national exposure for which he so desperately hungered. In 1948 *Radio Album* acknowledged that he was discovered "running wild" on a local New York station "theoretically handling a disc jockey's chores."

A journalist suggested that it was CBS owner-chairman William S. Paley himself who must be credited with "discovering" Lewis. Paley "happened to tune in to a free-wheeling disc jockey on a local New York station." *TV-Radio Annual* recalled in 1958: "Once he [Lewis] was persuaded it was really the head of the network calling him, he quickly signed on the dotted line



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and has worked for CBS, in TV and radio, ever since.” To CBS, which was sorely lacking comics at the time, “Lewis looked like the answer to a prayer,” a critic confirmed.

CBS Radio gave Lewis national exposure at 7:30 on Saturday evenings starting May 3, 1947 on a program titled *The Little Show*. Lewis and a silent backstage partner, Doctor of Satire radio writer Goodman Ace of *Easy Aces* fame, “proved that you don’t need a studio audience for comedy.” Ace quickly became disenchanted with their effort, however, when – only a month into it – CBS took a “tight little 15-minute job” according to Ace and turned it into “just another splashy half-hour, with orchestra and trimmings.” Backed by Milton Kaye’s band, the revamped series included performers Jackson Beck, William Keene and Florence Robinson. At that point it shifted to Fridays at 8:30 p.m.

Lewis began a long ride of transferring from multiple slots in the CBS schedule, wherever an opening occurred. His comedy-variety programs, under varied monikers – most prominently including his own name plus *The Show Goes On* and *Waxworks* (the latter series a record-spinning

vehicle with guest interviews) – were slotted into late afternoon, early evening, late night, Friday night, Saturday morning and Sunday afternoon time periods. He was the embodiment of and a prime reason for the adage “Check your local newspaper for time and station.”

Before long Lewis was delivering puns to CBS listeners five afternoons weekly. Then a watershed occurred in his career – absolutely marking his single most important “big break.” Surprisingly, he was tapped to substitute for CBS’s prime moneymaker, Arthur Godfrey, as host of his morning show, *Arthur Godfrey Time*. It occurred during the Old Redhead’s month-long vacation between April 23 and May 23, 1947. People who had never heard of Lewis were suddenly smitten by the charming wisecracking Jewish bachelor who regaled listeners with one-liners evoking riotous laughter. He “registered well with Godfrey’s corn-fed audience,” assessed a pundit. “After that, he was a made man,” another reporter conjectured.

While his revelation on the Godfrey show translated into subsequent broadcasting venues, the acclaim he acquired there resulting from his exposure to vast national audiences is worth deliberation. By 1953 *TV Radio Annual* reported that Lewis had already substituted for Godfrey no fewer than 17 times. Annually he would fill in for CBS’s most high profile personality every time the Great One took an extended vacation, usually for six consecutive weeks or more every year and also during random absences.

Lewis’s sharp wit shone brilliantly every time out. On those occasions he would engage Godfrey’s bass-voiced announcer, the erudite Tony Marvin, in witty repartee. In between numbers he would joust with singers Jan Davis, The Mariners, The Chordettes, bandleader Archie Bleyer and other members of the morning show com-

pany. Though his wisecracks were unpredictable, they ran a practiced gamut from joke to joke.

He once posted this personal classified ad on the air: *Wanted . . . Wife. By radio humorist just over draft age. Girl must be breathing, anywhere between ages of 20 and 21. Should have poise, charm, ability, personality and oil well. If possible send picture of oil well. Box Q.* When he got a reply he informed Marvin that the photo was “messy” – it was “oily all over.”

Recalling the incident for a fan magazine, Lewis admitted: “I haven’t gotten many responses from the ad. . . . Ten percent of the replies I did get were from girls who were underage. But the other 90 percent came from girls who were under observation.”

Lewis, who was engaged at least twice, suggested that “a wife might know a better way to clean out the refrigerator – what I do is to take everything out and eat it, which doesn’t seem right.” (In 1954 *TV Radio Mirror* announced that he was “one of the most sought-after bachelors of all time, averaging some 150 proposals a week.” It further noted that during the wedding month of June “the figure jumps to 400 a week. And not all the proposals come by mail!”)

Substituting for Godfrey, Lewis interspersed his banter and the vocals by the Little Godfreys (cast regulars) with an occasional ditty of his own, typically one per day. Bleyer’s orchestra and The Mariners male quartet normally accompanied him. Some of his numbers were old standards like “Getting to Know You,” “Hard-Hearted Hannah,” “Once in Love with Amy” and “I’m in Love with You, Honey.” But he often turned to lighthearted fare like “I’m in Love with the Mother of the Girl I Love” about a daddy devoted to his three-year-old daughter as well as his wife, “If I Give Up the Saxophone Will You Come Back to

Me?” and “Ain’t You Coming Out, Melinda?” He informed a reporter that he sang on his shows by request. “By request of a charming little old lady,” he said. “My mother.”

By 1950, having genuinely pleased the CBS brass and possibly Godfrey, too – although there is no hint that the two men developed much personal rapport – Lewis was secure enough to occasionally refer to the 90-minute weekday Godfrey bash as “my show.” He undoubtedly did so tongue-in-cheek but the audience loved it just the same.

On July 31 that year he recalled to millions tuning in, “I was on a boat for a couple of days. I just wanted to get some sunshine and rest before I came back to my morning show.” The hundred or more guests in the house giggled hysterically. A few days later, on August 10, he told this story on his secretary, Gloria Dolshin, while shifting back-and-forth addressing audience, Gloria and the show’s gagwriters, all of whom were present:

“When I come back to my show every summer [*audience laughter*] the mail starts coming in again. And we love to hear from you, we really do. But it’s gonna take a while – a long while – for us to get the letters answered. You see, it takes Gloria a long, long while to . . . get down the answers in shorthand and then answer ‘em. So please bear with us. We *do* love to hear from you. [*Addresses Gloria:*] Gloria, remember what I told you about that thing, will you? [*To audience:*] This girl is impossible. Whenever she puts a piece of stationery in the typewriter, you know she types one line and at the end of the line the bell rings – she goes out to lunch! [*Audience laughter; To Gloria:*] That’s not the luncheon bell, Gloria. Gracious me! [*To audience:*] We once had a fire drill and she ordered a sandwich! [*Audience and Lewis burst into uproarious guffaws*] I just



made that one up. [To gagwriters:] Writers, go home!”

As television became a part of the Godfrey programming scheme, Lewis's introduction to visual audiences seemed assured. It became an integral part of his substituting chores, in fact. By the 1950s some or all of CBS Radio's *Arthur Godfrey Time* was also televised live by that chain four mornings a week. (Godfrey took Fridays off from TV to visit his Virginia farm, airing only the radio show from there. Garry Moore televised an extended show in that time period on Fridays.) Godfrey's was one of the early simulcasts of a live broadcast series.

Lewis also regularly substituted for Godfrey at various program rehearsals. In recalling the events surrounding Godfrey's infamous firing of popular vocalist Julius LaRosa while on the air on October 19, 1953 – the start of a long series of artist sackings that quickly eroded Godfrey's favorable image – *Radio Life's* Jack Holland recalled a stressful rehearsal earlier that week. Godfrey was absent while Lewis filled in for him. The McGuire Sisters repetitively practiced a number. Hol-

land noted that LaRosa observed the proceedings while appearing quite morose. “You could feel his impatience, his trigger-like tension,” he wrote.

Perhaps because Lewis wasn't a part of the official Godfrey entourage (the Little Godfreys) – you recall that he had been brought in by the CBS hierarchy, not Godfrey himself – the press never speculated whether Lewis was “about to go” as it did with most of the rest of the cast. If Lewis and Godfrey ever exchanged cross words such incidents were kept hidden from view. As an insatiable media uncovered more and more behind-the-scenes friction in the Godfrey camp, it soon revealed those details to a public that regularly fed from sensationalized headlines. Had Lewis ever been in serious trouble it almost surely would have been widely covered. But no such stories ever surfaced.

The fact is that Lewis's stock appeared to climb, instead of diminish, both with Godfrey and with the public. Godfrey took an extended hiatus in the spring and summer of 1953 to undergo a hip arthroplasty, stemming from pain he experienced following an automobile accident two decades earlier. Lewis quite naturally assumed the reins of the morning show over that lengthy period during Godfrey's surgery and recovery. In addition, he was one of several tapped as visiting hosts of the hour-long live *Arthur Godfrey and His Friends* show over CBS-TV on Wednesday night.

Later, when cancer surgery removed Godfrey from the airwaves between the spring and autumn seasons of 1959, there was Lewis on the docket again for the morning radio show. (Humorist Sam Levenson handled the TV portion on that occasion.) After a dozen years the effervescent, ever-dependable Lewis was still comfortable as Godfrey's second banana, the consummate right hand, a role he obviously relished and continued to excel at.

Lewis occupied several diverse bachelor pads at varying times that were scattered around Manhattan. One was a two-room penthouse; another, a spacious duplex apartment offering a “breathtaking view” of the East River; still another sported a huge terrace that he claimed could double as “an outdoor living room in good weather.” His varied residences were profiled through numerous image-building articles appearing in popular fanzines during the late 1940s and the 1950s. Lewis obviously enjoyed entertaining and was comfortable hosting groups of friends on a regular basis. One writer stated that he had guests over for supper “almost every night.”

A focal point of his domicile was a large tropical fish tank. He routinely haunted art exhibitions, adding to a collection of French impressionist paintings that he adored and displayed proudly. He bought lots of books and found them absorbing. He was an eccentric collector of diverse objects including baby elephants, shaving mugs, cuff links, turn-of-the-century postcards, rare recordings which he played for guests, totem poles and feathered head-dresses – virtually anything with a pronounced Indian accent, in fact – plus cameras, old theatrical and circus posters, clown paintings and figurines, playbills and lots of other showbiz memorabilia. Until the late 1950s he harbored a consuming passion for acquiring things, loved to travel and frequently combined the two.

Only when he moved to a more contemporary cooperative apartment did he begin to divest himself of many of those articles and refocus some of his interests. But he remained a fanatical adherent of the Brooklyn (later, L. A.) Dodgers baseball club. A reporter also wrote that Lewis, himself, was “the pet of more fan clubs than he can count.”

Cope Robinson, now retired in North

Carolina, worked for Newell-Emmett in those days, the sole advertising agency for the Liggett & Myers Tobacco Company. L&M was one of Godfrey’s leading sponsors. In his official capacity Robinson was required to attend all of the Chesterfield programs that L&M underwrote, which included multiple Godfrey venues. That brought him into contact with Lewis on a fairly regular basis and the two men got to know one another socially as well as professionally. “It was very much the whim of Liggett & Myers to intermix our stable of ‘stars’ on their various radio programs,” Robinson recalls. “Chesterfield spent an inordinate amount of advertising money in New York, the number one market in that brand’s sales.”

Robinson remembers that the sponsor once required Lewis, while subbing for Godfrey, to put in an appearance at a Columbia University-Amherst College football game broadcast that it underwrote emanating from Baker Field on a Saturday afternoon. He went by Lewis’s hotel apartment to accompany him. They had a drink and a quick lunch and lots of cigarettes before taking a taxi to the stadium. There Lewis bantered back-and-forth on the air with announcer Marty Glickman, a former University of Syracuse athlete and Olympian track star, who was currently calling the Columbia plays.

Robinson described Lewis as “about as glib as they come and very much at home without a script.” He also remembers that Amherst had a player named Snodgrass whose name or actions on the field caused Lewis and Robinson to chuckle. “I don’t believe that Lewis made anything of the name on the air, for that was not his style – not a mean bone in his body,” said Robinson. “Years later the name was still a buzz word between us.”

Lewis would have many other experiences on the air. While he may not have



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been "the savior of CBS comedy," a sobriquet coined by John Dunning, it certainly wasn't for lack of effort, either on his part or the network's.

For more than four months in 1950 (May 31-October 4) he was CBS Radio's replacement for vacationing crooner Bing Crosby, another Liggett & Myers personality. That summer's show was titled *The ABCs of Music*.

Lewis had already been Godfrey's summertime replacement on *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts* on both CBS Radio and Television. He prided himself, in fact, on giving a break to young talent. "Half the fun of my own career has come from discovering new personalities with a flair for comedy, or fresh new voices, or new acts," he told an interviewer.

Soon he landed his own CBS-TV series with a similar theme, *The Show Goes On*, an outgrowth of the radio feature by the same title. Debuting on January 19, 1950, the format presented young hopefuls performing for a cadre of scouts (agents, producers and stars) who appraised their acts and signed their picks for theater and nightclub bookings. Talent included acrobats, vocalists, ventriloquists and comics. The

series continued mostly on Thursday nights in various 30- and 60-minute time slots through February 16, 1952.

For his televised appearances Lewis, wearing thick-rimmed spectacles, his characteristic trademark, was normally attired in business suit, white shirt and bow tie. He chain-smoked, a habit that undoubtedly pleased Liggett & Myers, whose name was frequently linked with his.

Overlapping this same epoch, Lewis surfaced as the host of another televised outing over CBS, *The Robert Q. Lewis Show*. This Sunday night quarter-hour, essentially a humorous chat with guest stars and individuals who had unusual occupations, premiered on July 16, 1950. Six months later, on January 7, 1951, it was history.

Meanwhile, between October 16, 1950 and January 19, 1951 he presided over yet another series, *Robert Q's Matinee*, a 60-minute weekday variety series that was reduced to 45 minutes within a few weeks, visibly irritating Lewis. Appearing with him there were Tony Craig, Rosemary Clooney, the Daydreamers, Joan Fields, Hal Lohman and the Bernie Leighton Orchestra.

A short time later Lewis expanded his television horizons to the ABC-TV network, his fourth national chain employer. Beginning December 5, 1951 and continuing into early 1954 he hosted the live Goodson-Todman game show *The Name's the Same*. On it a celebrity panel sought to pinpoint a contestant's moniker, which frequently corresponded with a well-known event or famous personality.

Yet his most prestigious and successful experience on the tube in his own right was in a second run under the appellation *The Robert Q. Lewis Show*. Launched over CBS-TV on January 11, 1954, it was another weekday variety series, yet with a "family feeling" that included an ongoing cast of regulars. For the first time he, too,

interacted with a group of continuing performers similar to the format of the Godfrey show in its heyday.

The talented contingent, although not all present at the same time, included The Ames Brothers, Jan Arden, Eugenie Baird, Jackson Beck, The Chordettes, Betty Clooney, Toby David, Merv Griffin, Richard Hayes, Lois Hunt, Judy Johnson, William Keenc, Phil Kramer, Don Liberto, The Mixed Choir, Jaye P. Morgan, Kathy Norman, Florence Robinson, Herb Sheldon, Billy Williams, Jane Wilson, Julann Wright, Earl Wrightson and Bill Wyatt. Several were on their way up. Few had had much exposure before that opportunity.

Lewis touted his announcer, Lee Vines, as comparable to the well-recognized Tony Marvin, Godfrey's man. When Vines wasn't there, Kenneth Banghart or Warren Sweeney pinch-hit. For most of the run Ray Bloch directed the orchestra. Supplanting him were Dave Grupp, Lee Irwin, Milton Kaye, Howard Smith and George Wright.

The show maintained a sense of camaraderie among the troupe and achieved an informality that was engaging. It capitalized on its mistakes during the age of live video, "sharing the fun with the televiewers," wrote a critic.

When that TV series was canceled more than two years later, on May 25, 1956, Lewis consoled himself by picking up where he had left off in radio. *The Robert Q. Lewis Show* continued from 1956-58 weeknights at 8 p.m. over CBS with some carryovers from the daytime TV series. Vocalists Richard Hayes (who persevered as the last of the Little Godfreys, appearing on the Old Redhead's final broadcast in 1972) and Judy Johnson along with Ray Bloch's Orchestra turned up. Lewis also corralled Ralph Bell, Kenny Delmar, Parker Fennelly, Johnny Gibson, Pert Kelton, Ann

Thomas and other entertainers during this period for the evening series and a 55-minute Saturday comedy-variety show at 11:05 a.m. over CBS Radio.

"On TV, there is such a thing as being too long in one spot," he told a *TV Radio Mirror* interviewer in 1958. "The best thing that happened to me was to be off TV for two seasons and give people a chance to rediscover me on radio. I must say I enjoyed rediscovering radio myself, after being away about six years. The tremendous resurgence of interest in it is very exciting."

Lewis said radio appealed to him because "I can do anything I want to on the show without worrying about production costs, time, schedules, and anything like that. There are no sets, no costuming. Listeners 'dress us up' as they feel we should be costumed when we play certain parts. They set the stage with their imaginations. I can do sketches about anything, set in any locale, and people will believe in them."

He also was enamored with the freedom and flexibility of radio, including its shorter hours. "What a luxury to sit up late, finishing a book I can't bear to put down, knowing I can sleep a little late in the morning," he averred. "I used to get to rehearsals practically at the crack of dawn." Lewis had earlier told another scribe he liked to stay up until midnight and sleep until 8:30 a.m. Television, of course, changed all that.

He earned numerous awards for his contributions to the mediums in which he performed. In May 1955 the readers of *TV Radio Mirror* magazine voted the shows he hosted as both their "Favorite TV Daytime Comedy" and "Favorite Radio Daytime Comedy." Three years hence the same periodical's subscribers elected him their "Favorite Radio Comedian" and host of their "Favorite Radio Evening Variety Program." The same issue asserted that he had acquired eight such honors by then deter-



Robert O. Lewis and handleader Ray Bloch

mined by the fanzine's readers.

Lewis would continue making occasional appearances as a surrogate master of ceremonies on several televised game shows. Most notably he subbed for Bud Collyer on Goodson-Todman's *To Tell the Truth* from 1963-65. But after the late 1960s his days as a frequent television entertainer were over. "My relaxed, easygoing format just went out of vogue," he told *TV Guide*.

Lewis prided himself, as has been noted, on his ability to help protégés and aspiring artists. At 33 he announced that he expected to retire at 45. "I've seen too many performers keep going too long, outliving their legends - destroying them," he commented. But what he really was communicating then was his intention to shift into another aspect of show business at that time (in 1966).

"I plan to become an agent or manager," he allowed. "There's so much talent around - so many fine performers - and they don't know what to do with themselves. I hope to catch them before they

arrive, then work with them. And when they finally do arrive, that's when they really need help. They don't know what to do with their money. They don't know how to live.

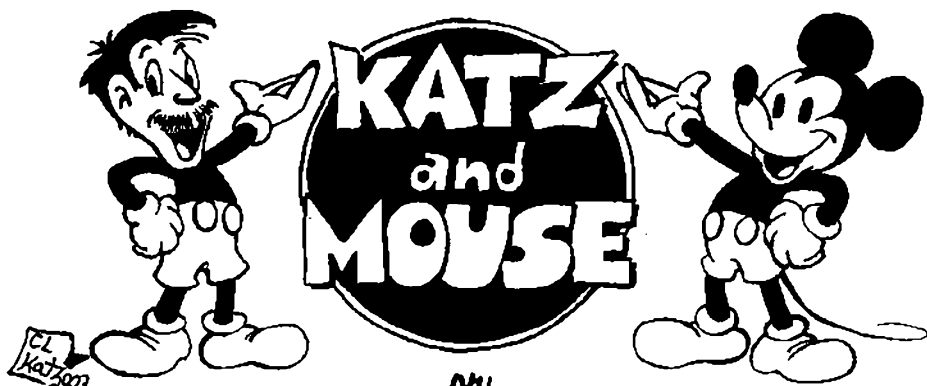
"I'd handle only one or two personalities a year," he declared. "That way, I could really concentrate on them. And then I'd like to start producing stage shows. They'd be musical reviews, using only fresh new talent - giving young performers a chance to show what they can do."

Eventually, he mused, he would like to open his own theater in New York, where he could stage his own shows, and feature talent he had discovered and molded. It seemed like a dream a little boy might have, one perhaps who sat beside his father at a Saturday matinee, discovering a magic world that was bigger than life.

While he may have been instrumental in guiding some neophytes, there is no record that Lewis's ambition to own his own theater - or to manage young talent - ever occurred. Eventually the humorist, like so many of his compatriots in entertainment, left the confines of the Big Apple, seeking new fortunes on the West Coast. By then network radio, for most intents and purposes, had ended. There Lewis found yet another disk jockey slot and returned to spinning records, taking him back to his broadcast origins.

The funny man with the droll wit and the impish gleam died on December 11, 1991 at age 70. He had brought a charismatic charm to millions of listeners and viewers in the fading stage of one medium and the embryonic stage of another. While his brand of humor may "never really [have] caught on" (one pundit's opinion) with the majority of American amusement-seekers, as a second banana Lewis seemed to possess few rivals. In every way he was the quintessential substitute host.

And in that regard, he possibly had no equals. ■



I Remember Mickey

BY CURTIS L. KATZ

It is a happy thought to realize that I have been acquainted with Mickey Mouse for about two-thirds of his 75 years in show biz. If you bring my dad into the picture, then Walt Disney's famous mouse has been like one of the Katz family for his full three-quarters of a century.

My dad was born less than two years before Mickey Mouse started his rise to cinema stardom in *Steamboat Willie*, which premiered at New York's Colony Theatre on November 18, 1928, so Dad grew up watching Mickey Mouse in neighborhood movie houses. By contrast, I was born at the end of Mickey's movie career in 1953, the year Mickey Mouse took his final bow in *The Simple Things*. Thus I first became acquainted with Mickey as "the leader of the club that's made for you and me"; I was of the *Mickey Mouse Club* generation.

The Mickey Mouse Club was one of the first TV shows I regularly watched. It debuted on the ABC network in 1955, and soon after that my little hands were nimble enough to turn the small black knobs that conjured Mickey and his Mousketeer friends onto the small flickering screen of

our family's hefty mahogany tabletop General Electric television.

At that gentle age I was not especially impressed by the singing and dancing talents of the Mousketeers, nor was I yet susceptible to the budding allure of Annette Funicello. I watched *The Mickey Mouse Club* mainly for that moment at the midpoint of the hour-long show, when the Mousketeers twisted the "Mousekederal to the right and the left with a great big smile," and chanted "Meeska-mooska-Mousketeer; Mouse cartoon time now is here," to introduce a Mickey Mouse cartoon. Unlike such animation producers as Warner Brothers, Paramount, and Terrytoons, whose cartoons were widely shown on TV, Walt Disney did not offer his cartoons for television syndication, so as cartoon short subjects began to vanish from movie theaters, it became a rare treat indeed to see an actual Mickey Mouse cartoon. In fact the only other occasional venue for these animated gems, in that era before home video and cable TV, was the weekly *Disneyland* show on ABC, which in 1961 moved to NBC and became *The Wonderful World of Color*.

Our whole family devotedly watched this Sunday evening hour of Disney magic,

Curtis L. Katz is an animation historian and writer from Chicago, Illinois.

though if a particular show didn't feature cartoons, at the mid-point we generally turned to CBS and watched *The Ed Sullivan Show*, which started a half-hour after the Disney program came on. I especially recall *The Wonderful World of Color* program that concluded with Walt Disney giving credit where credit was due. Referring to Disneyland and all his other remarkable accomplishments in the world of entertainment, Walt humbly reminded us, "I hope we never lose sight of one fact... that this was all started by a mouse."

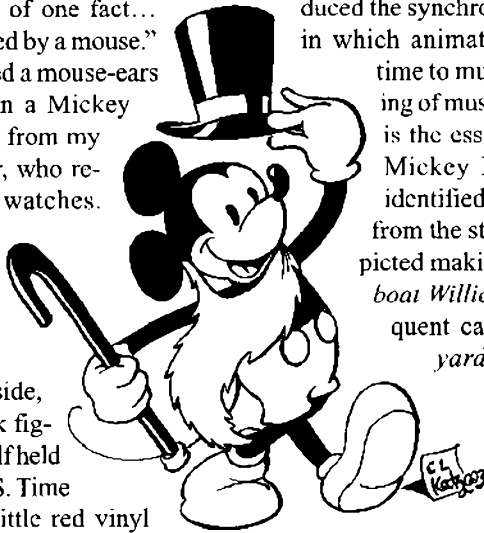
I never, alas, owned a mouse-ears cap. But I did own a Mickey Mouse watch, a gift from my paternal grandfather, who repaired clocks and watches. The gift came in a cubical red box featuring the circular *Mickey Mouse Club* emblem in black and white. Inside, a stand-up cardstock figure of Mickey himself held the timepiece – a U.S. Time wristwatch with a little red vinyl strap. I wish I still had the distinctive packaging, but I'm glad I still have the watch. The red vinyl strap broke years ago and has been replaced with a black leather strap that fits a somewhat thicker wrist.

I owned other Mickey Mouse paraphernalia, of course. I had a well-worn Little Golden Record of Jimmy Dodd and the Mouseketeers singing "The Mickey Mouse Club March" on one side, and "We Are The Merry Mouseketeers" on the other. And there was my *Mickey Mouse Club* guitar, a plastic ukulele-sized guitar with the *Mickey Mouse Club* emblem, elastic band strings, and a red crank which, when turned, made a music box inside the instrument strum... what? I can't recall. Was it "Stick-to-it-ivity"? Or, "I'm No Fool"? Or maybe

"Beauty Is As Beauty Does"? It was one of those dozens of songs that Jimmy Dodd wrote and performed on his *real* guitar on *The Mickey Mouse Club*. It is no wonder, then, that I first associated the world of Mickey Mouse and Walt Disney as much with infectious music-making as with animated cartoons. And this association is entirely appropriate.

With his debut in *Steamboat Willie*, Mickey Mouse (and Walt Disney) introduced the synchronous-sound cartoon, in which animated action moved in time to music – a perfect blending of music and movement that is the essence of ballet. Thus Mickey Mouse was closely identified with music-making from the start and was often depicted making music – in *Steamboat Willie*, and in such subsequent cartoons as *The Barnyard Broadcast* (1931), *The Band Concert* (1935), and *The Symphony Hour* (1942). Mickey's famous handshake with Leopold Stokowski in the 1940 feature film, *Fantasia*, powerfully symbolized the union of music and animation that Mickey Mouse inaugurated a dozen years earlier.

Mickey Mouse had in fact been the inspiration for *Fantasia*; Walt Disney wanted to produce an animated interpretation of Paul Dukas's symphonic scherzo, "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," with Our Hero as the title character, and conductor Leopold Stokowski encouraged Disney to expand on the idea of interpreting classical music through the cartoon medium. The Sorcerer's Apprentice proved to be Mickey's signature role, and the image of Mickey clad in his oversized sorcerer's robe and cap has come to represent the magic



associated with Disney entertainment. *Fantasia* was my dad's favorite Disney movie, and he introduced me to it during the film's 1963 re-release. It quickly became my all-time favorite motion picture, and I have seen it more times than any other movie.

Though I had grown up with Mickey Mouse, I did not actually get to meet him until I was in college during the 1970s. That was the era that coined the pejorative adjective "mickey-mouse," referring to anything that was cartoonishly hokey, flimsy, simplistic, apt to break down. At college, students described classes that were insubstantial and easy to pass as "mickey-mouse courses," or simply as "micks." I bristled at this usage, as did a few social critics. One newspaper columnist wondered why the name Mickey Mouse was being used to signify mediocrity, when Mickey's realm of Disneyland was one of the few corners of the world where things were consistently perfect. It was in that realm that I first met Mickey.

During the summer of 1974 I worked as a porter aboard Amtrak trains and amassed my first fortune in wages and tips... most of which I spent at the end of the season on an extravagant trip to California with college friends Rick, Mark, and Bryan. Disneyland was of course on the itinerary, and since I was the only one of the four-some who had never been to the Magic Kingdom, my travelling companions made sure I sat in the front of every ride, and carefully noted my reactions to every experience. I'm sure I did not disappoint them. Happily, my experience of meeting Mickey Mouse was captured on film. We encountered him ambling down Main Street. I must confess I was at first rather shy in the presence of such a famous celebrity, but Mickey's affable personality quickly put me at ease. He is, in person, exactly as you have seen him on the screen:

cheerful, easy-going, modest, a bit mischievous, but gracious; as fine a representative of *mus musculus* as you could hope to meet. Rick, Mark, Bryan and I took turns passing my camera around so we could each be photographed shaking hands with Mickey; this would be the first of my several encounters with this most famous of all mice.

I next saw Mickey in my realm – Chicagoland. The occasion was the Mickey Mouse 50th Anniversary in November 1978. To celebrate the event, Mickey travelled from California across the country aboard the "Mickey Mouse Transcontinental Whistle-Stop Special" – actually a private observation car carried on the rear of various Amtrak trains. The "Whistle-Stop Special" was a whimsical and theatrical idea calculated to recall Walt Disney's fondness for trains, as well as Mickey's association with railroading.

According to legend, Mickey was born on a train, the progeny of a young Walt Disney who at the time was riding back to Hollywood from New York, where an unscrupulous producer had just usurped the rights to his popular silent cartoon character, Oswald The Lucky Rabbit. Mickey's film career included several railroad adventures, including *Mr. Mouse Takes A Trip* (1940), and *Mickey's Choo-Choo* (1929). The latter cartoon concludes with Mickey and his girlfriend Minnie pumping a handcar, an image that no doubt inspired the motorized Mickey Mouse handcar toy that helped rescue the Lionel Corporation from receivership in 1934 during the heart of the Depression.

The first stop for the "Transcontinental Whistle-Stop Special" was Chicago, Walt Disney's birthplace, where Mickey and his travelling companion, Disney animator and rail fan Ward Kimball, would be presenting a Mickey Mouse film retrospective at the Biograph and Varsity theaters for the



(Curtis) Katz meets (Mickey) Mouse, 1974

CURTIS KATZ COLLECTION

Chicago International Film Festival. I came down to Chicago Union Station to see what an old-fashioned red carpet train station welcome for a movie star was really like. The Hersey High School Band from suburban Arlington Heights, Chicago city officials, TV camera crews, and a horde of fans (mostly adults who kept asking each other, "Aren't you a bit old to be waiting here for Mickey Mouse?") were on hand, as Amtrak's *Southwest Limited* from Los Angeles kept getting later and later.

Just as the train and its celebrity passenger finally arrived two hours off the advertised time, I crossed paths with a college classmate who had worked with me at Amtrak during the summer of '74, and was still with the Company. When I mentioned

that I was unemployed, he told me who to talk to at the Amtrak personnel office. I did so, and also wrote an article about Mickey Mouse's arrival in Chicago. The article ("Rail Rodent") became one of my first published pieces. And shortly after it appeared in print, I was hired by Amtrak. Thus did the magic of Mickey Mouse grace my life and help start my dual career in writing and railroading. Like Walt Disney I can, in my own modest way, claim, "...this was all started by a mouse."

Since then, I have occasionally visited Mickey Mouse at his place of employment, and he has occasionally visited me at mine. I have seen him again at Disneyland, and he has at times been my passenger when travelling to visit children's hospitals or to promote tourism. Even while on a leisurely train trip, Mickey graciously takes the time to pose for photos, to meet

admirers on board, and to greet crowds at station platforms.

Mickey Mouse and I have covered a lot of miles together, and now we both have a lot of years between the ears. This November, Mickey Mouse will turn 75, and many editorials will speculate on the reason for his longevity. Some will hail him as a symbol of American virtues, while others will vilify him as an icon of corporate greed. But if the fable of the Golden Goose is any indication, it is counterproductive to be so analytical about such a magical whimsy. Whether 75 or 175, Mickey Mouse remains a timeless friend to those with child-hearts and imagination. And as I can attest from personal experience, Mickey Mouse is definitely a sorcerer, not merely an apprentice. ■

The Day I Met the Mouseketeers

BY GEORGE LITTLEFIELD

Nearly everyone in my division in Austin High School seemed to be watching *The Mickey Mouse Club* in 1957 – but no one was talking about it. Since the ABC-TV hit kids' program was perceived by most people as a show designed with little children in mind, the last thing you wanted to admit to in high school was that you watched the program. It was something you told only your best friends: then you found out that they were watching, too.

I had started watching *The Mickey Mouse Club* with its first broadcast in the fall of 1955. I instantly bonded with the Mouseketeers, the multi-talented kids who were featured in every episode. After all, most of them were about the same age as I was, and the girls – especially Doreen Tracey and Annette Funicello – were absolutely breathtaking.

I didn't say anything to anyone at school about how great I thought *The Mickey Mouse Club* was; you never knew for sure who would agree with you, and who might laugh you to scorn.

But one day in 1956, during the morning meeting of Division 263, my best high school buddy, Marshall Ellenstein, caught a glimpse of my open wallet. Inside was a picture of Annette Funicello that I had drawn while looking at her photo.

"That's Annette Funicello!"

"Not so loud – somebody'll hear you!"

"Have you got any others?"

"Here's Doreen Tracey – it didn't turn out as well as Annette, 'cause Doreen is

George Littlefield is a retired editor and free-lance writer who has loved all things Disney since the age of two.

harder to capture."

"Cool! Did you watch the show yesterday?"

"Yeah! *Spin and Marty* was great..."

And so on. From then on, every afternoon, Marshall and I called each other up and talked about girls, school, movies, records and the Mouseketeers.

Then, during the summer of 1956, I took a memorable and wonderful vacation to the southwestern USA. I had two main goals before the trip: to see Disneyland, then less than a year old, and to meet at least one Mouseketeer in person.

I succeeded in the former goal, and failed miserably at the latter. But I didn't fail for lack of trying; while in the Los Angeles area, I was constantly on the alert for the real, flesh-and-blood versions of the Mouseketeer faces that I had come to know so well. I looked behind every palm tree and in every store and restaurant we visited, but it was all to no avail.

I returned home happy to have seen Disneyland and Knott's Berry Farm and Tijuana, but frustrated at still never having shaken a Mouseketeer's hand.

Marshall and I and a number of our friends continued to enjoy *The Mickey Mouse Club* as the show closed out the 1956 season and moved on into 1957. As school ended in June and vacations began, I started to put aside my thoughts of the Mouseketeers and began planning some good times for the summer, including bus trips down to the Loop for Marshall and me. Life was good!

Then, on Friday, June 28, 1957 it happened: I was leisurely examining the pages of that day's Chicago *Sun-Times*, when I



Mouseketeers Annette Funicello, Lonnie Burr, Cheryl Holdridge, Cubby O'Brien, Doreen Tracey, Bobby Burgess and Karen Pendleton assemble for a group photo. Dearborn Station, Chicago, 1957.

MARSHALL LLLLNSTEIN PHOTO

suddenly stopped and stared at a page in the entertainment section. What to my wondering eyes should appear, but a photo of Mouseketeers Bobby Burgess, Cheryl Holdridge, Sharon Baird, Annette Funicello and Lonnie Burr. Dressed in civilian clothes rather than their Mouseketeer uniforms, they were artfully posed around a poster that proclaimed, "Celebrate July 4th, Dyche Stadium, 3 PM."

I read the photo caption in sheer amazement: "Five of Walt Disney's celebrated Mouseketeers point out that they'll all be in Evanston July 4th, to participate in a big Independence Day Celebration at Dyche Stadium. Actor Fess Parker will also be there."

I shook my head in disbelief, and then gave way to total joy – the Mouseketeers were coming in person to my city! I'd missed them in California, but I wasn't about to miss them in Chicago – or Evanston either, for that matter!

As I finished my *Sun-Times*, one of the

last things I looked at was Kup's Column, buried far back in the paper, as usual. There, Kup did me a real favor by announcing that the Mouseketeers would be arriving in Chicago via the Santa Fe Super Chief on July 2, 1957 at Dearborn Station, not too far from the Loop.

The very next thing I did was to call "Information," get Dearborn Station's number, contact them, and ask what time the Super Chief was due in on July 2. The answer was 1:30 p.m.

I now had enough hard info to form a plan. I immediately called Marshall and told him of my idea – when the Super Chief pulled into town on the second of July, Marshall and I were going to be there, too, complete with pen and paper for autographs, and my trusty Brownie Hawkeye for photos!

Marshall flipped when I told him my plan! Like most Chicago people, he still had no idea that the Mouseketeers were coming to town, let alone that he and I ac-

tually stood a very good chance of meeting them in person.

For us, time passed very slowly between June 28th and July 2nd, but at last that significant day arrived.

Marshall took two busses to get from his home on W. Chicago Avenue to mine on N. Kilbourn. His mom had explained to him what busses we would need to take in order to get to Dearborn Station, a place where we'd never been before.

Marshall arrived with a small pad of paper and a pen, and I was carrying my camera, flash gun, and four or five flash bulbs, as we stepped onto our first bus and began our trip to meet the Mouseketeers.

About a half-hour and two busses later, we saw the proud tower of Dearborn Station looming up in front of us. As soon as we were in the waiting room, I found out the track number for the arrival of the Super Chief.

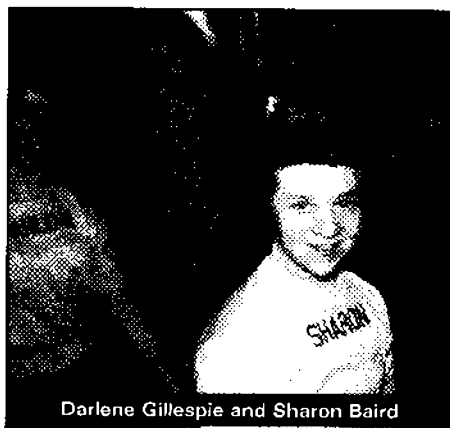
Marshall and I weren't the only fans there, either. There were about 25 other kids waiting for the Mouseketeers; several held up placards that stated: "Evanston welcomes Walt Disney's Mouseketeers," and other similar sentiments.

When the big clock on the station wall moved to 1:25, we were all allowed to go out to the waiting areas adjacent to Track Nine, and meet the train there.

At precisely 1:30 p.m., with several blasts of its diesel horn, the red-orange and gold Super Chief pulled slowly into Dearborn Station and stopped with one of the passenger cars directly opposite Marshall and me.

Just a few moments later, my world came to a screeching halt as, one by one, the real, live Mouseketeers stepped down out of the passenger cars and walked right by us.

There were Karen and Cubby – why, they hardly came up to my belt buckle. And there was Bobby – he was taller than I. And Lonnie – he looked like a real nice



Darlene Gillespie and Sharon Baird

MARSHALL ELLENSTEIN PHOTO

kid. And all the rest.

"Welcome to Chicago!" is what I wanted to yell, but for some reason, I couldn't manage even a hoarse croak. My extremities seemed to turn to Jell-O, and my camera felt as if it were made of lead. Everything was happening in slow motion.

"Come on!" cried Marshall. "Take some pictures! They're not gonna stay here forever!"

Dutifully, I raised my camera, and focused on – Annette Funicello, not 10 feet away from me! She stopped in her tracks and stared right at me, a small smile on her face. I realized that she was posing especially for me! You'd have thought we'd been hit by a sudden earthquake, the way my camera shook.

I made a Jackie Gleason noise, like "Ha-ma-ha-ma-ha-ma," and handed my Brownie Hawkeye to Marshall. "Here – you take the pictures – I just can't seem to do it!"

Marshall left to shoot some photos, while I just stood there and gawked at Mouseketeers walking by me in full uniform. They were all there, from the affable Jimmie Dodd, the adult leader of the group, to the loveable Roy Williams, an animator who was known as the "Big Mooseketeer." If that wasn't enough, Fess "Davy Crockett" Parker was also on hand, dressed in buckskin from head to foot.

Only Walt Disney himself was absent. I found out later that he had flown in to Chicago for the big day.

I followed the last of the Mouseketeers out to the waiting room, where they were all assembling for a group photo by newspaper photographers. Marshall got a good shot of them there. I was still tongue-tied and numb-footed as I stared at the Mouseketeers, live and in color, just an arm's distance away!

Marshall also managed to collect autographs from Cheryl, Darlene Gillespie, Sharon Baird (who signed her name "Mouse-Sharon"), Annette, and (sigh) Doreen.

Before I knew it, the Mouseketeers were herded outside Dearborn Station and up into a bus that would take them to their Chicago headquarters, the Palmer House Hotel, in the Loop.

Marshall and I stood there and watched the chartered CTA bus pull away. It had been a wonderful, dreamlike experience to see the Mouseketeers up close.

And I wasn't finished, not by a long shot. On July 3rd, I saw the Mouseketeers again, this time at the Roosevelt Theatre. I sat through two showings of *Johnny Tremayne* so I could see all the Mouseketeers appear twice on the stage.

Then on July 4th, 1957 Walt Disney, Fess Parker, Jimmie Dodd, Roy Williams and all the other Mouseketeers put on a spectacular show at a sold-out Dyche Stadium in Evanston. It was an unforgettable night for anyone who loved *The Mickey Mouse Club* and the Mouseketeers as I did.

There were thousands of fans there that night, but I could still remember Dearborn Station and Doreen Tracey and Annette Funicello staring right at me.

To this day, I still get a dreamy look in my eye when I remember that wonderful day in Dearborn Station when I finally met the Mouseketeers. ■

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WHO DONE IT?

BY MATTHEW C. HOFFMAN

Throughout their careers, Bud Abbott and Lou Costello were brilliant at what they did, whether it was those methodical word games or the timing of their lines. They were experts in their chosen field. The proof is in the routines, in the delivery. Set aside the physical stuff and concentrate on those bits like "Who's On First?" or "Mustard." There was no greater straight man than Bud Abbott; he could set up a gag, hold composure, and bring Lou back on track if a cue was missed or a word miscalculated. All smooth as silk. They may have been rough-edged burlesque performers, but they were absolute disciplinarians in their craft. And they were just plain funny. You can listen to all the same routines over and over again and still laugh. In film, they were the most popular comedy team until post-war America sought the uninventive, free-for-all frivolity of Martin & Lewis.

Who Done It? (1942) was already their ninth film together, and it's one of the best of their early vehicles that Universal cranked out. One of its distinctions is its wonderful supporting cast, which includes such names as Patric Knowles and Louise Allbritton (who provide the expected ro-

matic element), William Gargan, William Bendix, Mary Wickes, and Don Porter. Jerome Cowan, another great character actor who usually played crafty execs and unctuous cads in so many '40s films, also turns up in the proceedings.

This comedy whodunit is set almost exclusively at a radio station. Chick Larkin (Bud Abbott) and Mervyn Milgrim (Lou Costello) work as soda jerks downstairs in the Radio Center drugstore. When they're not serving up Limburger cheese sandwiches, they're aspiring to be radio mystery writers. "Muck and Mirc" they call themselves as they give an impromptu performance at the counter for the new staff writer, Jimmy Turner (played by British import Patric Knowles, who had made his Hollywood debut in 1936).

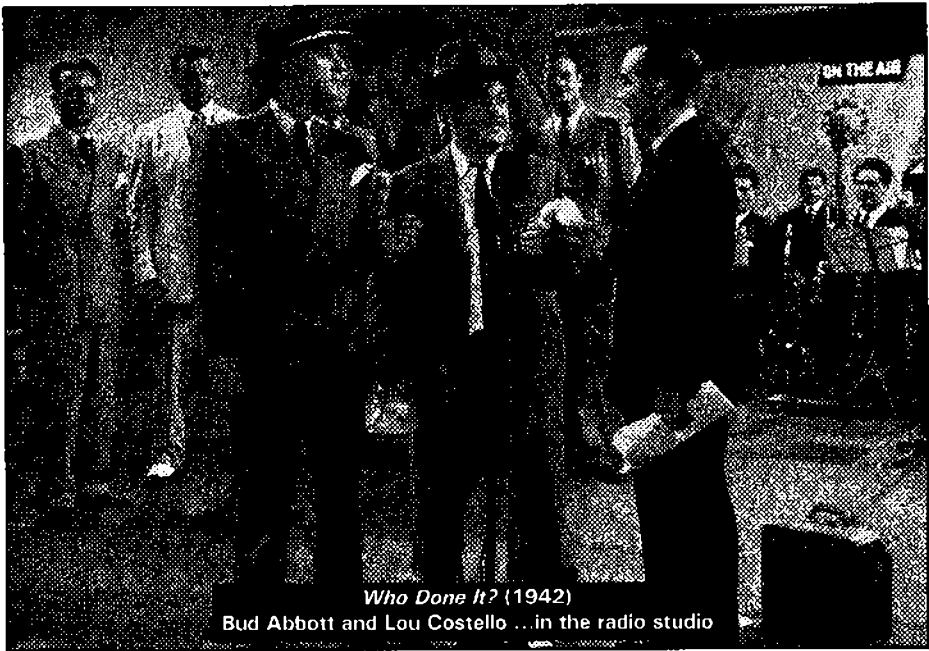


PHOTOFEST

Turner, either out of generosity or sympathy, invites them to see a recording of "Murder At Midnight" at the GBS studio. With radio producer Jane Little (Louise Allbritton) also in attendance, they witness a real-life murder of the executive director, Col. J.R. Andrews (Thomas Gomez). He is electrocuted in his chair after clutching his microphone. One of the suspects is writer Marco Heller (Jerome Cowan), who wrote that death in his "Steel Chair Murder Case."

Dapper Bud and dimwit Lou determine to solve the case themselves, thinking the public will be begging for Muck and Mirc

Matthew C. Hoffman is a film historian, curator and manager of LaSalle Bank's Classic Film Series.



Who Done It? (1942)
Bud Abbott and Lou Costello ...in the radio studio

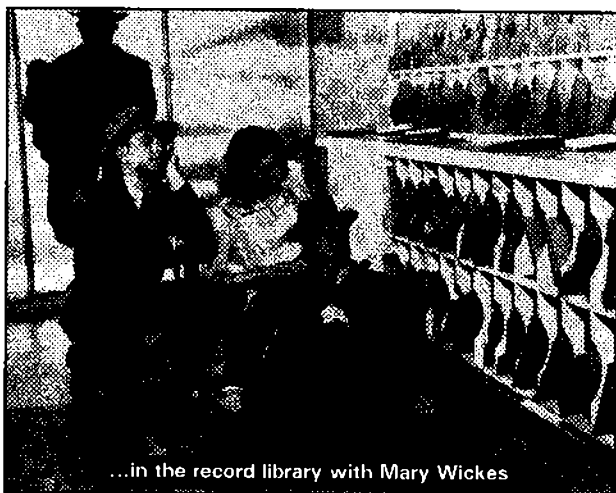
PHOTOFEST

as a result. During the inept interrogation, it's discovered Andrews died from ten thousand volts. Lou, mistaking the word for "votes," gets further confused by Bud with a verbal exchange reminiscent of "Who's On First?" "What's volts?" Lou asks. "That's right," Bud tells him. "Watts are volts!" Afterwards, during their investigation, they keep a close eye on harmless Juliet, secretary to the late colonel. This role is played by wisecracking Mary Wickes, a rather gawky comedienne cut from the same cloth as Joan Davis, their co-star in the recent *Hold That Ghost*. Mary Wickes would star in their last film, *Dance With Me Henry* (1956), before making a comeback in the 1990s, playing such roles as Aunt March in *Little Women* (1994).

While impersonating detectives they have to elude two real ones – Lieutenant Moran (William Gargan) and Brannigan (William Bendix). However, not only are the cops after our boys but also the murderer who wants to reclaim the incriminat-

ing rubber glove Lou kept as evidence. *Who Done It?* is more of a prop-driven comedy, and during the course of the night Lou's child-like Mervyn is frustrated by a temperamental drinking fountain, frightened to death by ominous "voices" in a dark, sound-recordings library (which are radio transcription records he unknowingly turns on), and is shaken up by an elevator that shoots up and down like a wooden block on a carnival high-striker. One of the funniest gags, though, comes later. After a chase from Moran and Brannigan in which Chick and Mervyn disguise themselves as part of the "Flying Bordellos" (!) acrobatic troupe, they briefly escape from the building in a truck. Over the radio they hear that Mervyn has won a \$10,000 prize on "Wheel of Fortune." He has five minutes to claim the money and attempts to contact the studio from a drugstore telephone. "Alexander 2222" is one of the more protracted bits of hilarity in the film, done entirely solo by Lou.

While all these shenanigans are going



...in the record library with Mary Wickes

PHOTOFEST

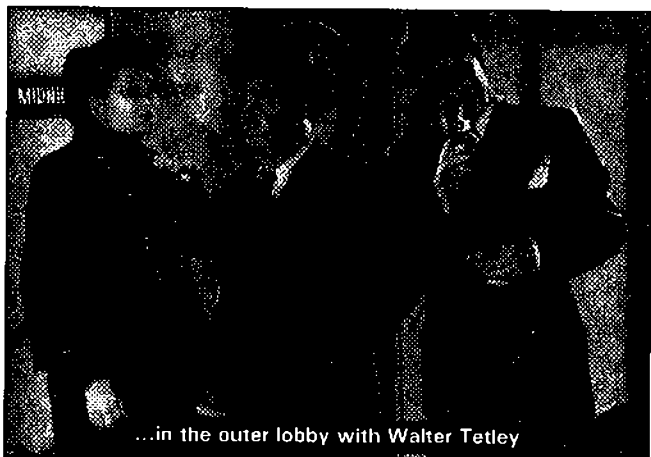
on, Jimmy and Jane try to find out who would want to kill Colonel Andrews, and what's the meaning behind those cryptic facts being sent out on "America On the Air." Andrews, who just happened to be an expert at codes, had discovered a threat to national security which had cost him his life. Jimmy intends to reenact the crime with all the red herrings present so that the true murderer will show his hand. This eventually leads to a hectic rooftop chase where Lou performs more acrobatics on a high wire before finally subduing the killer.

There are parallels between this story and *The Nitwits* (1935), starring the overlooked vaudevillian team of Bert Wheeler and Robert Woolsey. In the RKO film, which was also set primarily in an office building, W&W played cigar stand workers trying to sell a murder song – "The Black Widow's Gonna Getcha If You Don't Watch Out" – to a music publisher who subsequently gets killed in a unique manner by "The Black Widow." As

in *Who Done It?* the duo attempts to solve the case independent of the police. *The Nitwits* was one of W&W's better films, featuring direction by the legendary George Stevens and offering a nice supporting cast, including Betty Grable as Bert's girlfriend accused of the crime. There's a funny routine where that cigar-smoking master of the bon mots, Woolsey, tricks a buffoonish cop into handcuffing himself – Lou

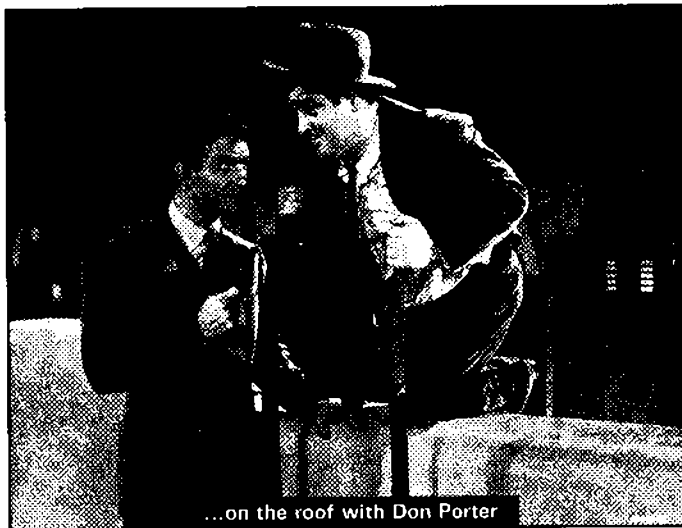
would do the same to William Bendix – and there is also a climactic, madcap chase in a building at night. Both films created a very atmospheric backdrop against which the comedy played out. (The earlier film did manage to work in a musical number between Wheeler and Grable, who sang "Music in My Heart" as the camera followed them up several flights of stairs. Abbott & Costello films, likewise, almost always had musical numbers, but this was wisely avoided in the *Who Done It?* scenario.)

The initial broadcast of "Murder At Midnight" reveals the atmospheric setting with



...in the outer lobby with Walter Tetley

PHOTOFEST



...on the roof with Don Porter

PHOTOQUEST

its studio shadows and unusual camera angles. The scene is visually striking. As characters play to the on-air audience in attendance, director Erle C. Kenton and cinematographer Charles Van Enger bring to life, for the movie audiences, a medium that relies on the listener's imagination to fill in the details. The filmmakers show us, with dramatic exaggeration, what "Murder At Midnight" might look like if we were trying to picture the set over the radio. Characters do not just stand in front of microphones in a brightly lit studio. The performance itself takes on the visual qualities of what is being spoken from the radio script; the end result being a hybrid between film and theatre. *Who Done It?* is, quite simply, a wonderful film about old-time radio, evoking the spirit of the medium.

You'd hardly confuse Erle C. Kenton with Orson Welles, but he did well enough by the material. Would critics of Abbott & Costello feel better about the level of creativity or be more accepting of A&C if Billy Wilder had directed a few of their efforts? Of course not. The main appeal of Bud and Lou is watching them do an old-fashioned stage routine where it didn't matter who the director was... just so

someone bothered to turn on the camera and mike. Though *Who Done It?* does not have as many of those classic routines as other films, the filmmakers went all out to make it as polished a vehicle as they could for their box office champs. Kenton and crew did far more than just turn on the camera and mike here. Besides being an enter-

taining jaunt into the theatre of the imagination, *Who Done It?* is a pretty good example of one of Hollywood's best and most loved comedy teams. ■

You can see *Who Done It?* at 8 p.m. on Saturday, November 1 in an exclusive big screen showing at the LaSalle (Bank) Theatre, 4901 W. Irving Park Road, Chicago. For more information, call (312) 904-9442.



WHEN DOES YOUR SUBSCRIPTION EXPIRE?

Check the line above your name in the mailing panel on the back cover. The month and year of the last issue of your subscription appears in parentheses.

Example: (DEC-03)

CHANGING YOUR ADDRESS?

So you don't miss an issue, be sure to notify us as early as possible. Changes should be sent to Nostalgia Digest, Box 421, Morton Grove, IL 60053. The Post Office **DOES NOT** automatically forward the Digest which is sent by pre-sorted standard mail.

RADIO STAR BIRTH DATES

COMPILED BY RON SAYLES

OCTOBER

- 1 Everett Sloane, 1909 (d. 8-6-65) *Mercury Theatre*
- 2 Groucho Marx, 1890 (d. 8-19-77) *You Bet Your Life*
Bob Burns, 1896 (d. 2-2-56) *Kraft Music Hall, Bob Burns Show*
Barton Yarborough, 1900 (d. 12-19-51) *Dragnet, I Love a Mystery*
Bud Abbott, 1900 (d. 4-24-74) *Abbott and Costello Show*
- 3 Gertrude Berg, 1899 (d. 9-14-66) *The Goldbergs*
- 7 Andy Devine, 1905 (d. 2-20-77) *Jack Benny Program*
- 12 Ted Collins, 1900 (d. 5-27-64) *Kate Smith Show*
Jane Ace, 1905 (d. 11-11-74) *Easy Aces*
- 13 Harry Herschfield, 1885 (d. 12-15-74) *Can You Top This?*
- 14 Joseph M. White, 1891 (d. 2-28-59) *Silver-Masked Tenor*
- 15 Ransom Sherman, 1898 (d. 11-26-85) *Fibber McGee and Molly*
Robert Trout, 1908 (d. 11-14-00) *CBS News*
- 17 Jerry Colonna, 1904 (d. 11-21-86) *Bob Hope Show*
- 21 Tommy Riggs, 1908 (d. 5-21-67) *Tommy Riggs and Betty Lou*
Hy Averback, 1920 (d. 10-14-97) *Bob Hope Show, Village Store*
- 22 Parker Fennelly, 1891 (d. 1-22-88) *Fred Allen Show*
- 23 Ford Bond, 1904 (d. 8-15-62) *Manhattan Merry-Go-Round*
- 24 David Nelson, 1936 *Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*
- 25 Minnie Pearl, 1912 (d. 3-4-96) *Grand Ole Opry*
John Reed King, 1914 (d. 7-8-79) *Chance of a Lifetime, Sky King*
- 27 Jack Carson, 1910 (d. 1-2-63) *Jack Carson Show, Village Store*
- 29 Fanny Brice, 1891 (d. 5-29-51) *Baby Snooks*
Jack Pearl, 1894 (d. 12-25-82) *Baron Munchausen*
- 31 Dale Evans, 1912 (d. 2-7-01) *Roy Rogers Show*



GROUCHO
MARX



BOB
BURNS



GERTRUDE
BERG



JANE
ACE



FANNY
BRICE



WILL
ROGERS

NOVEMBER

- 3 Harry Babbitt, 1913 *Kollege of Musical Knowledge*
- 4 Will Rogers, 1879 (d. 8-15-35) *Gulf Headliners*
Shirley Mitchell, 1919 *Great Gildersleeve, Fibber McGee & Molly*
- 5 Joel McCrea, 1906 (d. 10-19-90) *Tales of the Texas Rangers*
Roy Rogers, 1912 (d. 7-6-98) *Roy Rogers Show*
- 7 Phil Spitalny, 1890 (d. 10-11-70) *Hour of Charm*
- 8 Scotty Wiseman, 1909 (d. 1-31-81) *National Barn Dance*
- 9 Ed Wynn, 1886 (d. 6-19-66) *Texaco Fire Chief*
- 11 Joe Penner, 1904 (d. 1-10-41) *Joe Penner Show*
- 12 Claudia Morgan, 1911 (d. 9-17-74) *Adventures of the Thin Man*
- 14 Morton Downey, 1901 (d. 10-25-85) *Songs by Morton Downey*
Dick Powell, 1904 (d. 1-2-63) *Richard Diamond, Rogue's Gallery*
Rosemary De Camp, 1910 (d. 2-20-01) *Dr. Christian*
- 16 Jim Jordan, 1896 (d. 4-1-88) *Fibber McGee and Molly*
- 17 Ted Husing, 1901 (d. 8-10-62) *Sportscaster*
- 18 Don Quinn, 1900 (d. 12-30-67) *Fibber McGee and Molly*
- 19 Alan Young, 1919 *Alan Young Show, Tony Martin Show*

- 20 George Fenneman, 1919 (d. 5-29-97) *You Bet Your Life, Dragnet*
 Fran Allison, 1907 (d. 6-13-89) *Breakfast Club*
 Judy Canova, 1916 (d. 8-5-83) *Judy Canova Show*
 22 Howard Petric, 1907 (d. 3-24-68) *Jimmy Durante Show, Judy Canova Show*
 23 John Dehner, 1915 (d. 5-4-92) *Have Gun, Will Travel, Frontier Gentleman*
 24 Irene Wicker, 1900 (d. 11-17-87) *The Singing Lady*
 Don McLaughlin, 1906 (d. 5-28-86) *David Harding, Counterspy*
 25 Peg Lynch, 1916 *Ethel and Albert, Couple Next Door*
 27 J. Scott Smart, 1902 (d. 1-15-60) *The Fat Man*
 Mary Livingstone, 1908 (d. 6-30-83) *Jack Benny Program*
 28 Elliott Lewis, 1917 (d. 5-20-90) *Phil Harris-Alice Faye Show, Suspense*
 29 Harry Bartell, 1913 *Nero Wolfe, Sherlock Holmes, Gunsmoke*
 30 Richard Crenna, 1926 (d. 1-18-03) *Our Miss Brooks, A Date with Judy*

ED
WYNN



JUDY
CANOVA



DECEMBER

- 2 Ezra Stone, 1918 (d. 3-3-94) *Aldrich Family*
 4 Isabel Randolph, 1889 (d. 1-11-73) *Fibber McGee and Molly*
 Deanna Durbin, 1921 *singer, Eddie Cantor Show*
 5 William Spier, 1906 (d. 5-30-73) *Suspense, Sam Spade*
 6 Agnes Moorehead, 1906 (d. 4-30-74) *Suspense, The Shadow*
 7 Bob Brown, 1904 (d. 1980) *Vic and Sade*
 9 Ken Niles, 1906 (d. 10-31-88) *Hollywood Hotel, Abbott & Costello Show*
 10 Ray Collins, 1889 (d. 7-11-65) *Mercury Theatre*
 Una Merkel, 1903 (d. 1-2-86) *Great Gildersleeve*
 Dorothy Lamour, 1914 (d. 9-22-96) *Chase & Sanborn Hour, Sealtest Show*
 12 Edward G. Robinson, 1893 (d. 1-26-73) *Big Town*
 Frank Sinatra, 1915 (d. 5-14-98) *Your Hit Parade, Rocky Fortune*
 13 Jay Jostyn, 1905 (d. 7-24-77) *Mr. District Attorney*
 14 Lillian Randolph, 1898 (d. 12-12-80) *Great Gildersleeve*
 Spike Jones, 1911 (d. 5-1-65) *Spotlight Revue*
 15 Bob Hawk, 1907 (d. 7-4-89) *Take It or Leave It, Thanks to the Yanks*
 Jeff Chandler, 1918 (d. 6-17-61) *Our Miss Brooks*
 17 House Jameson, 1902 (d. 4-23-71) *Aldrich Family*
 18 J. Anthony Smythe, 1885 (d. 3-20-66) *One Man's Family*
 19 Ray Noble, 1907 (d. 4-3-78) *Charlie McCarthy Show*
 23 Don McNeill, 1907 (d. 5-7-96) *Breakfast Club*
 Anton M. Leader, 1913 (d. 7-1-88) *Suspense, Murder at Midnight*
 25 Tony Wons, 1891 (d. 7-1-65) *Tony Wons Scrapbook*
 Candy Candido, 1913 (d. 5-24-99) *Jimmy Durante Show*
 27 Oscar Levant, 1906 (d. 8-14-72) *Kraft Music Hall, Information Please*
 Cathy Lewis, 1916 (d. 11-20-68) *My Friend Irma, Great Gildersleeve*
 28 Olan Soule, 1909 (d. 2-1-94) *First Nighter*
 Dick Joy, 1915 (d. 10-31-91) *The Saint, Danny Kaye Show*
 29 Wendell Lopez, 1904 (d. 3-28-94) *Bob Hope Show, Man Called X*
 30 Vincent Lopez, 1894 (d. 9-20-75) *Luncheon with Lopez*
 Michael Raffeito, 1899 (d. 5-31-90) *One Man's Family, I Love a Mystery*
 Jeanette Nolan, 1911 (d. 6-5-98) *The Whistler, One Man's Family*
 Bert Parks, 1914 (d. 2-2-92) *Break the Bank, Stop the Music*
 Marie Wilson, 1917 (d. 11-23-72) *My Friend Irma*
 31 Richard Kollmar, 1910 (d. 1-11-71) *Boston Blackie*

MARY
LIVINGSTONE



SPIKE
JONES



MARIE
WILSON



*A much more complete listing of birth dates (and death dates) of show business personalities may be found on Ron Sayles' web page:
<http://mywebpage.netscape.com/bogusotr/instant/taz.html>*

CALL FOR

J O H N N Y M O R R I S

BY WALTER SCANNELL

It was the advertising idea of the century – having a walking, talking product symbol who never changed over 30 years of fame.

Here is how the story goes. Philip Morris had been a minor brand of cigarettes that featured a generic hotel bellboy on its packages. Company vice president Alfred Lyon, who believed in personal selling rather than gimmicks, happened to be in Manhattan's Hotel New York on an April evening in 1933 with advertising agency president Milton Biow when they heard a clear but high-pitched "call" for a Mr. "So and So."

In those days before pocket phones, bellboys were given tips for informing guests when they had a call on the lobby phone or for announcing a name to make the person appear important.

Lyon and Biow looked for the sound and saw Johnny Roventini wearing a red and black uniform that had to be made especially, because he was only 48 inches tall, and his black pillbox hat with a chin strap didn't make him seem much bigger. What was remarkable was that he was so perfectly proportioned he did not look like a dwarf. At 22, he resembled and sounded like a schoolboy.

About that call, a Philip Morris historian said, "He had a way of making you feel like the most important person in the world." He perfected his choir-like deliv-



PHOTOFEET

ery because he wasn't tall enough to be seen over an upright traveling trunk.

Johnny already was a minor celebrity. He was billed as the world's smallest bellboy and was pictured on souvenir hotel postcards, but Lyon and Biow supposedly did not know about him. On a hunch, the two men gave Johnny a tip and asked him to call for Mr. Philip Morris.

The young man went back and forth across the lobby calling out the name, not realizing it belonged to a cigarette and that he was performing at an audition. When he came back to say he couldn't find the gentleman, Lyon and Biow offered him a job. Maybe you and I would jump at the offer, but Johnny was hesitant. This was during the Depression, and he was making about \$15 a week at the hotel plus about \$10 in tips. He decided to talk it over with his Italian immigrant mother.

He reported back to Lyon and Biow that he would take the radio job provided he

Walter Scannell is a history buff and nostalgia fan from Chicago.

could keep working at the hotel. That was just like Johnny, a little crafty but always a "good boy."

Renamed "Johnny Philip Morris" for the ads, he was working at the New York hotel as usual on April 17, 1933, when someone from NBC drove him to the studio for his call. Audiences first heard him on the short-lived *Ferde Grofe* show. Grofe was a composer of semi-classical music, and his "Grand Canyon Suite" continues to be played by major orchestras around the country. The best known section is the clippity-clop, clippity-clop "On the Trail," inviting listeners to imagine mules going down a narrow path.

When Johnny said "Call for Philip Mor-riis!" against the trail music, it seemed so natural that it must have been hard to imagine someone had to think it up. The company said one reason was that his natural B-flat call blended nicely with the dominant E-flat of the music. Unaware of what a hit he had become with just four words, Johnny was driven back to the hotel so he wouldn't miss too many tips.

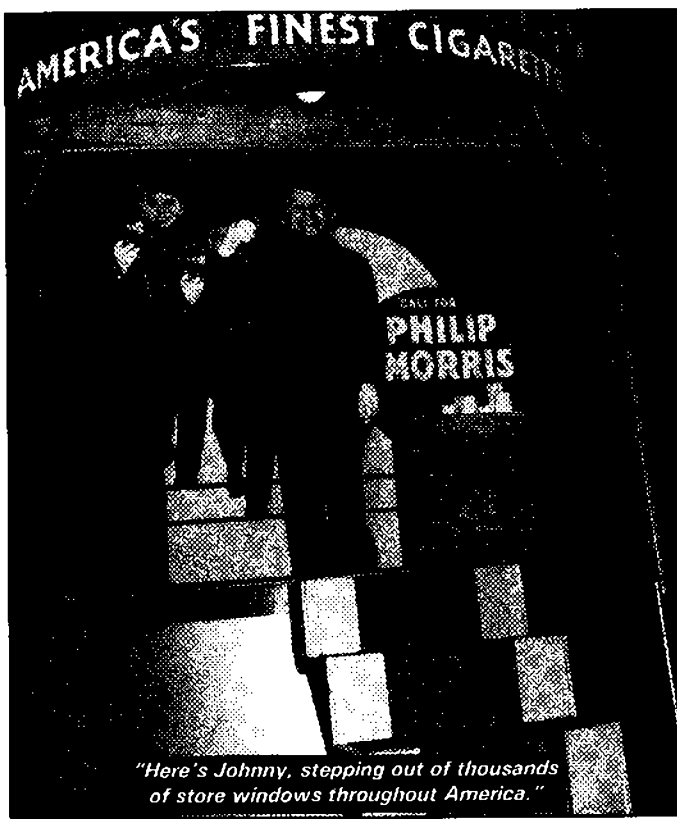
But there was no way the sponsor was going to let the little man go. Philip Morris quickly went from a little-known brand to the fourth best-selling cigarette in the country, and as sales doubled and then quadrupled Johnny kept being driven to the studio and back to the hotel. Realizing

he had found a career, Johnny resigned from his hotel job on December 16, 1933.

Roventini was given his own radio variety show, *Johnny Presents*, on NBC Tuesday nights from 1933 to 1940, with "On the Trail" as its theme music, and did the call on the *Philip Morris Playhouse*, which ran on CBS from 1939 to 1953. Johnny got to meet many male celebrities but was fonder of his moments with Barbara Stanwyck, Deborah Kerr, Dorothy Lamour, Paulette Goddard, Madeleine Carroll and Marlene Deitrich.

In time he signed an exclusive lifetime contract giving him a fabulous salary of up to \$50,000 a year.

Each show ended with "This is Johnny returning to the thousands of store windows and counters all over America. Look for me. I'll be waiting for you. Come in



PHOTOFEST

and...call for Phi-lip Mor-riis!" One night as Groucho Marx was performing at the Coconut Grove nightclub a waiter dropped a tray. "That was Johnny stepping out of thousands of windows all over the country," Groucho ad-libbed.

With increasing sales, Philip Morris sponsored more shows, eventually includ-

ing the Milton Berle radio program. Then transcriptions were introduced so Bing Crosby could record his show between golf games. Johnny was offered a sizable sum to record his call, but he was too canny for that.

Each time Philip Morris wanted his voice, it would have to pay him for performing in person (not that he had any trouble remembering his lines). Johnny knew he had the sponsor over a barrel and must have laughed all the way to momma.

Johnny missed only one broadcast, and that was because a snowstorm kept him from reaching the studio. In his absence, the announcer asked the audience to stand up and deliver the opening call for the show to go on. "They were beautiful," Johnny said afterward, "and right on key!"

After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Johnny offered to enlist in the Coast Guard auxiliary, but because of his size he was issued a one-of-a-kind "1/2-A" draft card. Too bad he didn't get to fight for his country because he seemed everywhere at once. Philip Morris had hired four "Johnny juniors" to appear in bellboy costumes when several business functions were being held in different parts of the country at once, and all five little men remained friends.

Without knowing any other languages, Johnny learned how to give his call in French, German, Spanish, Swedish and his parents' native Italian. Johnny was photographed for a variety of ads. The best-remembered may be a lifesized (which isn't saying much) cardboard likeness of him holding a cigarette pack in one hand and a



Johnny Presents (NBC, 1933-40)
Johnny Roventini with announcer Nelson Case

PHOTOFEST



PHOTOFEST

“Call for Philip Morris” sign in the other. His proudest moments came when he shared a dinner table with Dwight D. and Mamie Eisenhower and sat beside with Jack Dempsey.

In 1951 he made a tour of gas stations across the country, driving around in a spotless English-made MG. When asked to sign an autograph, he would write: “May all your troubles be as small as I am. Sincerely, Johnny Morris of Philip Morris.”

This was around the time Johnny introduced his first television show, *My Little Margie*, with Gale Storm. But on TV he was seen more often than he was heard. A “Johnny Morris” ad was usually over

someone’s shoulder when a scene in *I Love Lucy* took place in a shop (notice how often Lucy and Ricky smoke in the early episodes), and Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz shared space with him on cigarette cartons.

At a special tribute for Johnny in 1959, Eddie Cantor, one of the finest people in show business, praised him for his goodness, warmth and gentleness. After that, the cigarette makers phased Johnny out, but he was brought back to television in 1965 for the sponsor’s heaviest advertising blitz in its history: *The Red Skelton Show*, *Jackie Gleason*, *Hazel*, *Thursday Night at the Movies*, *Slattery’s People*, *Candid Camera*, *The Loner*, and *CBS News* with Walter Cronkite.

After his commercials went off the air, Johnny made personal appearances until retiring in 1974. He never married and had lived with his mother until her death in the 1960s, but he enjoyed being with his nieces and nephews. One nephew, Philip Roventini, recalled that when Johnny was walking outside people would say, “Johnny, give us the call.”

“Everybody loved him,” Roventini said. After all, Johnny had estimated that he made the call a million times, and shook as many hands.

He died at a hospital in Suffern, New York, at the age of 88 on November 30, 1998, his life a reminder of the gentler times. ■

RE-ENACTMENTS OF OLD TIME RADIO BROADCASTS



presented by the *Those Were The Days Radio Players*
at the Museum of Broadcast Communications



Radio Hall of Fame Studio, Chicago Cultural Center
Michigan Avenue between Randolph and Washington

2 pm Sunday, Oct. 12

2 pm Sunday, Nov. 9

2 pm Sunday Dec. 14

No Charge -- Limited Seating

Museum opens at 12 Noon

Radio Studio opens at 1:30 pm

OLD TIME
RADIO



CENTURY

Chuck Schaden's

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WDCB • 90.9 FM • SATURDAY 1 - 5 PM

WORLD-WIDE ON THE INTERNET: www.wdcb.org

OCTOBER 2003

★ INDICATES A WORLD WAR II BROADCAST OF SPECIAL INTEREST

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4

PHIL HARRIS-ALICE FAYE SHOW (6-26-49)

In this last show of the season, Phil signs on for another year with his sponsor. Elliott Lewis is Frankie Remley, Walter Tetley is Julius Abbruzzo, Gale Gordon is Mr. Scott, the sponsor. Cast includes Frank Nelson as an airline ticket agent. Phil and Alice sing "Baby, It's Cold Outside." Rexall, NBC. (29 min)

MR. DISTRICT ATTORNEY (1940s) "Case of One Slip Meant Death" starring Jay Jostyn as the D.A. with Vicki Vola as Miss Miller, Len Doyle as Harrington. It appears to be no accident when a tiger causes a death at the circus. Bristol Myers, NBC. (28 min)

YOUR HIT PARADE (7-10-48) The top tunes of the week are sung by Frank Sinatra, Beryl Davis, Ken Lane and the Hit Paraders. Axel Stordahl and the orchestra. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (25 min)

★ **LUX RADIO THEATRE (10-4-43)** "Pride of the Yankees" starring Gary Cooper in the biography of New York Yankees baseball star Lou Gehrig. Cast includes Virginia Bruce and Edgar Buchanan with Griff Barnett, Ken Christy, Elsa Janssen. Cecil B. DeMille hosts. Lux Soap, CBS. (19 min & 18 min & 23 min)

HELP!

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT.
JOIN WDCB's
FALL MEMBERSHIP CAMPAIGN
CALL 630/942-4200
TO MAKE YOUR PLEDGE

Listen to
Those Were The Days
for details.

PHIL HARRIS-ALICE FAYE SHOW (9-25-49)

In this first show of the new season, the sponsor gives Phil an office in the Rexall building so he can keep an eye on him. Cast: Elliott Lewis, Walter Tetley, Robert North, Gale Gordon. Rexall, NBC. (29 min)

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11

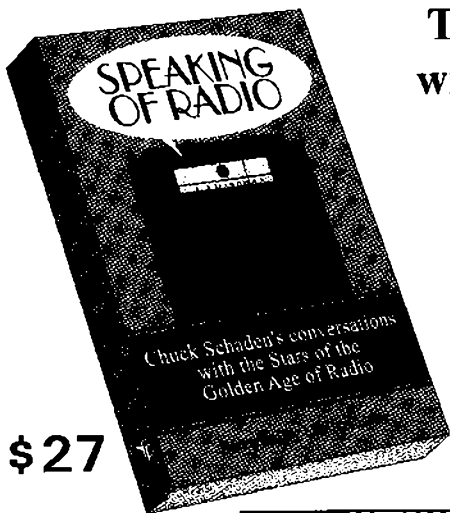
JACK BENNY PROGRAM (1-28-51) Jack and the gang are in New York City for Jack's second TV show. At a nice French restaurant, Jack and Mary Livingstone meet guest Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. Cast: Phil Harris, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Dennis Day, Sportsmen, Bea Benaderet, Mel Blanc, Joe Kearns. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, CBS. (27 min)

★ **CAVALCADE OF AMERICA (11-13-44)** "The Laziest Man in the World" starring Charles Lughton as Benjamin Franklin, who, in his later years, recalls his many inventions. Walter Huston is host-narrator. DuPont Company, NBC. (29 min) *Read the article on page 58.*

ALDRICH FAMILY (12-16-48) Ezra Stone stars as Henry with Jackie Kelk as Homer and House Jameson and Katharine Raht as Mr. and Mrs. Aldrich. Sam's peaceful evening is shattered by Henry's last-minute preparations for a party he is to attend. Henry and Homer sing the Jell-O jingle at the opening and close of the program while Meredith Willson's Talking People provide the middle commercial for the product. Jell-O, NBC. (29 min)

FRED ALLEN SHOW (10-4-39) Deadpan actor Ned Sparks is Fred's guest on this first show of the 1939-40 season. The sponsor has sent a "Radio Program Creator" to get the new series under way with a modern show. Fred conducts a quiz segment with selected members of the studio audience. The Mighty Allen Art Players offer a spoof of the film "Stanley and Livingstone" called "Stanley and What's His Name?" Cast features Portland Hoffa, Min-

THIS IS THE BOOK FOR YOU!



\$27

The radio stars reminisce
with broadcaster/historian
Chuck Schaden.

Don Ameche	Bret Morrison
Eve Arden	Carlton E. Morse
Bill Baldwin	David Nelson
Jack Benny	Frank Nelson
Edgar Bergen	Harriet Nelson
Jim Boles	Arch Oboler
Ken Carpenter	Harold Peary
Norman Corwin	Ed Prentiss
Dennis Day	Tony Randall
Howard Duff	Lillian Randolph
Ralph Edwards	Alan Reed
Alice Faye	Mary Lee Robb
Virginia Gregg	Ken Roberts
Phil Harris	Kate Smith
Jim Jordan	Olan Soule
Jay Jostyn	Ezra Stone
Howard Koch	Russell Thorson
Elliott Lewis	Les Tremayne
Phil Leslie	Lurene Tuttle
Art Linkletter	Rudy Vallee
Barbara Luddy	Harry Von Zell
Mercedes McCambridge	Willard Waterman
Agnes Moorehead	Don Wilson

"The Mac West episode? —I almost got thrown off the air for life because of that skit."

—DON AMECHE



Sorry Wrong Number "...was written for me by Lucille Fletcher. It was so nerve-racking that I thought, 'No one will listen to this.' The first time we went on the air, they got so excited at the very end that they didn't do the right ending. So in about five weeks I repeated it. I did it 18 times on the air."

—AGNES MOOREHEAD



I did not only great things for the program, but also I think I probably saved radio itself from going downhill almost into oblivion. The president of NBC said to me, 'Mr. Vallee, you have demonstrated how powerful radio can be. We are deeply indebted to you. We feel that, in a way, you have saved the National Broadcasting Company.'

—RUDY VALLEE



HERE'S THE BOOK OLD-TIME-RADIO FANS HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR!

**SPEAKING
OF RADIO**

**Chuck Schaden's conversations
with the Stars of the
Golden Age of Radio**

Over
400 pages
Photo of
each star
Includes Index
Soft Cover 6 x 9

\$27



"I was called down to audition for something. They said, 'Just read this.' I read it and forgot about it. About a week or so later, I got a call that said, 'Oh, you're it.' And so I did it from then until it went off the air. I did *The Shadow*, I guess, longer than anyone."

—BRET MORRISON (*Lamont Cranston*)

**Recollections of the great radio days
by the stars who made them great.**

**In their own words, 46 radio personalities
take you back to the good old days for a
behind-the-scenes look at the way it was
during the golden era of broadcasting.**

"In those days, you didn't speak of it as a radio *job*, because radio didn't pay anybody any money. All you did was go in and perform. You could walk in off the street, into any radio station, and they were glad to have you. If you had a ukulele under your arm, you could go to work. For nothing."

—JIM JORDAN (*Fibber McGee*)



"The last year that I was with General Foods... I had a few shows that weren't as hot, but I still had a lot of great shows. So they practically said to me, 'Watch it a little bit...' as though every show had to be perfect, you know. See, I spoiled them. And then they went back to New York. But the way they said to me, 'Just watch it a little bit,' I got mad."

—JACK BENNY

"I loved radio best and I'll tell you why. You could have a life of your own in radio. It was big time. You did it live. You didn't dare make a mistake... It only happened once a week, so you could live like a human being the rest of the week. I had more personal time when we were in radio. I still get such a kick out of those radio shows."

—HARRIET NELSON



MEMORIES OF THE RADIO DAYS



"We used to take what we called a 12-hour vacation. You'd pick an evening when you were through fairly early and didn't have a show until perhaps noon the next day, and you'd imbibe a little heavily and the next morning you were usually a little hung over but, boy, were you relaxed!"

—WILLARD WATERMAN

"In one week I did 20 shows. I was doing the *Harris* show as an actor, I was producing and directing *Suspense*, I was producing, directing, editing, writing openings and closings, and co-starring in *On Stage*. I was producing and directing *Broadway's My Beat* and I was producing, directing and writing the openings and closings and editing *Crime Classics*." —ELLIOTT LEWIS



"I remember the introduction for Eddy Duchin, 'the inimitable piano fingers of Eddy Duchin.' Now, you wanted to say that one real fast, and as the announcer, I did it for some time. You would just stand there and blood would pour down your face. In an up-voice, too! That was a brute."

—KEN CARPENTER

"Man, you got a book there, I tell you!" —PHIL HARRIS



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erva Pious, Charlie Cantor, John Brown, Harry Von Zell, Merry Macs, Wynn Murray, Peter Van Steeden and the orchestra. Ipana, Sal Hepatica, NBC. (14 min & 17 min & 28 min)
THE SHADOW (2-22-48) "Nursery Rhyme Murders" starring Bret Morrison as Lamont Cranston aka "The Shadow" with Grace Matthews as the lovely Margo Lane. A deranged patient escapes from the Brookside Sanitarium and a series of murders begins, each with a nursery rhyme theme. Blue Coal, MBS. (23 min)

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18

FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY (6-5-45) Jim and Marian Jordan star as the McGees of Wistful Vista. Mrs. Carstairs (Bea Benaderet) is coming for tea and Molly wants the hall closet cleaned out, just in case she starts to snoop. Arthur Q. Bryan is Doc Gamble, Shirley Mitchell is Alice Darling, Marlin Hurt is Beulah, with announcer Harlow Wilcox, King's Men, Billy Mills and the orchestra. Script by Don Quinn and Phil Leslie. Johnson's Wax, NBC. (30 min)

MAN CALLED X (9-18-47) "The Throne of Tayneen" stars Herbert Marshall as Ken Thurston, the international troubleshooter. Leon Belasco as Pegon Zeldschmidt, Thurston's sidekick. A plane carrying scientists from Singapore to Manila is lost over the Pacific. AFRS rebroadcast. (26 min)

FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY (1945) Episode #1 in the *Australian version* of the popular U.S. program. Using the same 6-5-45 script by Quinn and Leslie, with some minor changes in language. Fibber cleans out the hall *cupboard* in anticipation of the arrival of Mrs. Carstairs. No cast credits are given for the Australian actors, and the announcer - who is not Harlow - is billed as "Reg" Wilcox. Sponsored by Johnson's Wax. (30 min)

LUX RADIO THEATRE (11-10-52) "Grounds for Marriage" starring Van Johnson and Kathryn Grayson in their original screen roles from the 1950 film. Comedy, music and romance with Kathryn as an opera star and Van as her ex-husband-physician. Cast includes Stephen Dunne, Herb Butterfield, Lillian Randolph, Eddie Marr. Irving Cummings, host. AFRS rebroadcast. (20 min & 13 min & 16 min)

OUR MISS BROOKS (10-1-50) Eve Arden stars as the Madison High School teacher with Dick Crenna as Walter Denton, Gale Gordon as Mr. Conklin and Jeff Chandler as Mr. Boynton. Miss Brooks and Walter, arriving late for

classes, try to sneak past the principal's office without being seen. Colgate, Lustre Creme, CBS. (30 min)

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25 ANNUAL HALLOWE'EN SHOW

MURDER AT MIDNIGHT (1946) "The Dead Come Back" with Joseph Julian. The police allow a murderer to escape and return to the scene of his crime to prove that he is not really insane. Directed by Anton M. Leader. Syndicated. (26 min)

CRIME CLASSICS (6-30-54) "Good Evening, My Name is Jack the Ripper." Lou Merrill, as narrator Thomas Hyland, tells another "true story of crime." This time it's the tale of the infamous London strangler. Cast includes Betty Harford, B. S. Thompson, Irene Tedrow, Paula Winslowe, Ben Wright. Produced and directed by Elliott Lewis. Sustaining, CBS. (29 min)

SUSPENSE (11-1-45) "The Dunwich Horror" starring Ronald Colman in H. P. Lovecraft's classic story of horror and the unknown. On Hallowe'en night, Colman narrates the story and portrays the Librarian - keeper of the "Necronomicon." AFRS rebroadcast. (26 min)

GREAT GILDERSLEEVE (10-31-51) Willard Waterman stars as Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve. It's Hallowe'en and Gildy suggests the Jolly Boys give a party for the kids in the neighborhood. Cast: Lillian Randolph as Birdie, Mary Lee Robb as Marjorie, Dick LeGrand as Peavey, Earle Ross as Judge Hooker, Arthur Q. Bryan as Floyd, and Tommy Rettig as the little boy. Kraft Foods, NBC. (30 min) *A Thanksgiving show (11-21-51) is related to this program and will be presented on TWTW November 22.*

PHILO VANCE (1-17-50) "Talking Corpse Murder Case" stars Jackson Beck as the detective created by S. S. Van Dine. A woman whose husband died and was buried swears she has seen him alive. Vance investigates. Cast includes Joan Alexander and George Petrie. Syndicated. (27 min)

INNER SANCTUM (6-19-45) "Dead Man's Holiday" starring Myron McCormick. After a train accident, a man is unable to locate his wife, who was sitting next to him. Continuing his search, he discovers a strange couple living in his home. Then, he's told that he has been dead for six years. Lipton Tea, CBS. (29 min) *Today's program will be presented on our special Ghost-to-Ghost network. Don't miss it if you can!*

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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1 REMEMBERING GREGORY PECK

ACADEMY AWARD (8-21-46) "Keys of the Kingdom" starring **Gregory Peck**, repeating his original screen role in this radio version of the 1944 film. It's the story of the life of a missionary. House of Squibb, CBS. (29 min)

SCREEN GUILD THEATRE (9-7-50) "Twelve O'Clock High" starring **Gregory Peck** with Ward Bond, Hugh Marlowe, Millard Mitchell and Reed Hadley in the radio version of the 1949 film. Peck stars as a hard-boiled WW II commander who takes over a flying squadron that has had bad luck on bombing missions. Sustaining, ABC. (27 min & 31 min)

SUSPENSE (3-17-49) "Murder Through the Looking Glass" stars **Gregory Peck** as a schizophrenic with amnesia who tries to recall events of the recent past. He knows that there has been a murder and he might be responsible. Cast includes Ed Begley, William Johnstone, Sidney Miller. AutoLite, CBS. (29 min)

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SCREEN DIRECTORS' PLAYHOUSE (7-15-49) "Yellow Sky" starring **Gregory Peck** in a radio version of his 1948 film. Peck heads a gang of thieves who come to a western ghost town where they confront a mysterious woman and her grandfather. Cast: Gloria Blondell, Sam Edwards, Paul Frees, Wally Maher. Jimmy Wallington announces. William Wellman, director of the film, introduces the story. Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer, NBC. (30 min)

OUR SPECIAL GUEST is movie historian **Bob Koloski** who will talk about the amazing film career of Gregory Peck.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8

CHARLIE MCCARTHY SHOW (9-21-41) Edgar Bergen with Charlie, Bud Abbott and Lou Costello, Ray Noble and the orchestra and guest W. C. Fields. The insults fly during a classic McCarthy-Fields confrontation. Bud and Lou do a wild-animal routine. Chase and Sanborn, NBC. (29 min)

GUNSMOKE (9-26-53) "Fawn" starring William Conrad as Marshall Matt Dillon in a story of prejudice in Dodge City. Cast includes Parley Baer as Chester, Howard McNear as Doc, Georgia Ellis as Kitty, with John Dehner, Lawrence Dobkin, Edgar Barrier, Leo Curley. Sustaining, CBS. (30 min)

LUX RADIO THEATRE (3-7-38) "Poppy" starring W. C. Fields in his only appearance on Lux. He re-creates his stage and screen role as Professor Eustace P. McGargle, a conniving side show performer who tries to pass off his daughter as a long-lost member of a prominent family. Cast features Anne Shirley (as Poppy) with John Payne, Skeets Gallagher, Lou Merrill, Frank Nelson, Helen Grant. Cecil B. DeMille hosts. Lux Soap, CBS. (38 min & 16 min) *Read the article on page 40.*

RICHARD DIAMOND, PRIVATE DETECTIVE (3-5-50) Dick Powell stars. Diamond is called to investigate when an actress receives a snake as a present and is shot at. Cast includes Ed

Begley, Joan Banks, Jack Kruschen, Charles Seel. Sustaining, NBC. (29 min)

FIRST NIGHTER (3-11-48) "There's Something in the Air" starring Olan Soulé and Barbara Luddy. Romantic farce about some very special talents. Cast: Parley Baer, Verna Felton, Luis Van Rooten. Announcer is Larry Keating. Campana Products, CBS. (30 min)

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15

LIFE WITH LUIGI (9-21-48) J. Carrol Naish stars as Luigi Basco in the first show of the series, set in Chicago's "Little Italy" neighborhood. Luigi is behind in his rent. Cast features Alan Reed as Pasquale, Bea Benaderet as a club-woman, and Gale Gordon as announcer and a banker. Sustaining, CBS. (31 min)

★ **LIGHTS OUT** (12-1-42) Arch Oboler presents "Mr. Maggs," who purchases a mysterious locked chest at an auction. Ironized Yeast, CBS. (27 min)

RUDY VALLEE SHOW (3-14-30) The "Vagabond Lover" stars in a situation comedy-type show with Una Merkel, Arthur Q. Bryan, Walter Tetley, and prize fighter Slapsy Maxie Rosenbloom. Rudy and Slapsy visit the library, where Rudy wants to get a book about Julius Caesar, leading into a sketch about the days of the Roman Empire. Sealtest Dairy Products, NBC. (28 min)

★ **LUX RADIO THEATRE** (12-6-43) "Mrs. Miniver" starring Greer Garson and Walter Pidgeon in the radio version of the stirring 1942 film. A moving story of the suffering and courage of a British family during World War II. Cecil B. DeMille hosts. Lux Soap, CBS. (24 min & 11 min & 22 min)

BURNS AND ALLEN SHOW (9-27-45) George wants to surprise Gracie with a housewarming party. When she overhears some of the plans, she decides George has a girlfriend! Mel Blanc appears as the Happy Postman and the cast includes Frank Nelson, Bea Benaderet, Bill Goodwin, Les Paul Trio. Maxwell House Coffee, NBC. (28 min)

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 22 ANNUAL THANKSGIVING SHOW

EDDIE CANTOR SHOW (11-21-45) Eddie wins a live turkey but has trouble when he thinks of preparing the bird for Thanksgiving dinner. Guest prize fighter Billy Conn joins Bert Gordon (the Russian), Leonard Sues. Thelma Carpenter, Jim Backus and Les Tremayne, who



HAROLD PEARY stars as Honest Harold, the Homemaker on *The Harold Peary Show* on TWTD Nov. 22, Dec. 20 and Dec. 27

subs this week for Harry Von Zell. Ipana, Sal Hepatica, NBC. (28 min)

HALLMARK PLAYHOUSE (11-24-49) "The Courtship of Miles Standish" starring David Niven. James Hilton is host for this drama about early days in the Plymouth Colony. Hallmark Cards, CBS. (29 min)

HAROLD PEARY SHOW (11-22-50) Directing and starring in the Thanksgiving play "The Courtship of Miles Standish" is Honest Harold, the "Orson Welles of Melrose Springs." Cast includes Gloria Holliday, Joe Kearns, Jane Morgan, Olan Soulé, Parley Baer, Eddie Firestone. Sustaining, CBS. (30 min)

PASSING PARADE (11-25-48) John Nesbitt, the well-known story-teller, offers some reflections on Thanksgiving: home, family, sentiment. He reads "Vagabond House" by Don Blanding. Syndicated. (11 min)

LET GEORGE DO IT (11-20-50) "Cause for Thanksgiving" stars Bob Bailey as private detective George Valentine. On Thanksgiving Day a 10-year-old boy is so scared that he can't - or won't - talk. Standard Oil of California, MBS. (30 min)

GREAT GILDERSLEEVE (11-21-51) Willard Waterman stars as Gildy with Lillian Randolph, Mary Lee Robb, Walter Tetley, Earle Ross, Dick LeGrand. Gale Gordon and Tommy Rettig. Birdie is cooking a big turkey for Thanksgiving while Gildersleeve tries to round up some guests to share the holiday feast. Kraft Foods, NBC. (30 min) *This show is related to the Gildersleeve broadcast of 10-31-51 played on TWTD October 25.*

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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 29 RADIO TO GET INTO THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT BY

BLONDIE (12-15-48) Penny Singleton and Arthur Lake star as Blondie and Dagwood Bumstead with Hanley Stafford as Mr. Dithers and Frank Nelson as Herb Woodley. Dagwood tries to find out what his children want for Christmas. Colgate, Super Suds, NBC. (25 min)

CASEY, CRIME PHOTOGRAPHER (12-25-47) "Santa Claus of Bum Boulevard" stars Staats Cotsworth as Casey. A stranger has made an annual event of handing out money on Hackett Street ("Bum Boulevard"). Casey plans to cover the story but discovers the stranger was robbed before his charitable act this year. Robert Dryden is featured with Jan Miner as

reporter Ann Williams and John Gibson as Ethelbert, the bartender at the Blue Note Cafe. Tony Marvin announces. Anchor Hocking Glass, CBS. (29 min)

SCREEN DIRECTORS' PLAYHOUSE (12-21-50) "Miracle on 34th Street" starring Edmund Gwenn in a radio version of the 1947 film classic. He's Kris Kringle, Macy's Department Store Santa, on trial to prove he's the real Santa Claus. Cast includes Lurene Tuttle (as Doris), David Ellis (as Fred), Frank Nelson (as Shelhammer) and William Conrad (as the Judge). Film director George Seaton appears at the close of the story. *The writer of this radio adaptation has taken many liberties with the screenplay for the broadcast.* Multiple sponsors, NBC. (23 min & 9 min & 24 min)

★ **KRAFT MUSIC HALL (12-16-43)** Bing Crosby stars with guests Joan Davis and Phil Silvers. Comedy and music with a light touch of Christmas flavor. "Time Marches Back" to 1920. Regulars include announcer Ken Carpenter, Ukie Sherin, Trudy Erwin, Music Maids and Lee, Charioteers, John Scott Trotter and the orchestra. Bing sings "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning" and Trudy sings "White Christmas." Kraft Foods, NBC. (29 min)

DAMON RUNYON THEATRE (1948) "Dancing Dan's Christmas" stars John Brown as story-teller Broadway. Dancing Dan confesses to a jewelry robbery and tries to avoid being rubbed out by Shotgun, who has vowed to kill him because Dan has been going out with a girl who is also being pursued by one of Shotgun's associates. Syndicated. (25 min)



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SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6 RADIO TO PLAN YOUR CHRISTMAS LIST BY

FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY (12-6-49) Jim and Marian Jordan star. To save money, Fibber decides to make his own Christmas cards this year. Gale Gordon, Dick LeGrand, Arthur Q. Bryan, Bill Thompson, Harlow Wilcox,

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13
RADIO TO ADDRESS
CHRISTMAS CARDS BY**



NIGEL BRUCE and **BASIL RATHBONE** star in *Sherlock Holmes* on *TWTD* Dec. 6

King's Men, Billy Mills and the orchestra. Teeny sings "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer." Johnson's Wax, NBC. (29 min)

FRED WARING SHOW (12-22-48) Fred and the Pennsylvanians present traditional Christmas carols, an exciting and classic version of "Jingle Bells" and Uncle Lumpy with a holiday story about Little Orly. Announcers are Bill Bivens and Durward Kirby. Johnson's Wax, NBC. (30 min)

CALIFORNIA CARAVAN (12-21-47) "How Santa Claus Came to Simpson's Bar" is based upon a true incident that took place on Christmas Eve, 1882, in a small prospecting town in the West. California Physicians Service Insurance, ABC. (27 min)

PHIL HARRIS-ALICE FAYE SHOW (12-11-49) Phil and Frankie are shopping for a Christmas present for Alice. Phil decides on a mink coat, but Remley is leaning towards a dishwasher and garbage disposal. Elliott Lewis, Walter Tetley, Jeanine Roose, Anne Whitfield, Joe Kearns. Rexall, NBC. (30 min)

SHERLOCK HOLMES (12-24-45) "The Night Before Christmas" starring Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce. In a story set on Christmas Eve, 1886 (and suggested by an incident in "The Blue Carbuncle" by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle), Holmes takes a case requiring him to keep an eye on gifts brought to a seasonal party. Petri Wines, MBS. (30 min)

NIGHTBEAT (12-20-50) Frank Lovejoy stars as Randy Stone, reporter working the night shift at the Chicago Star. Stone recalls a Christmas that was unusual for him – instead of making him work on the holiday, his editor gave him a five-day vacation... during which he learned something about the real meaning of Christmas. Cast: Kate McKenna, Sammy Ogg, Ralph Moody, Bill Conrad, Gale Bonney. Sustaining, NBC. (29 min)

PAUL WHITEMAN'S ABC CHRISTMAS PARTY (12-24-46) An all-star Christmas extravaganza starring the "King of Jazz" himself Paul Whiteman and his orchestra and a host of the network's radio stars including Walter Winchell, J. Scott Smart ("The Fat Man"), Bing Crosby, Henry Morgan, Basil Rathbone, Geraldine Fitzgerald, Kenny Baker, Don McNeill, Tom Breneman, Don Wilson, Lum and Abner, Patrice Munsel, Arnold Stang. A big, beautiful 90-minute holiday gift from the American Broadcasting Company. Smart tells the story of "Bug Eye and the Christmas Cap-er"; Morgan and Stang audition a new show; Rathbone and Fitzgerald in a scene from "A Child is Born"; Breneman in Encino, California, and McNeill in Winnetka, Illinois, →



PAUL WHITEMAN hosts *Paul Whiteman's ABC Christmas Party* on *TWTD* Dec. 13



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exchange greetings; Baker is at Glamour Manor; Lum and Abner read "The Night Before Christmas"; Crosby reads the story of the Nativity. Sustaining, ABC. (29 min & 27 min & 31 min)

★ **UNCLE SAM PRESENTS** (12-11-43) An American Christmas featuring the Band of the Training Command of the Army Air Forces under the direction of Capt. Glenn Miller. Selections include "Don't Be That Way," "Vict'ry Polka," "White Christmas." Vocals by Pfc Johnny Desmond and the Crew Chiefs. OWI (Office of War Information) broadcast. (15 min)

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (12-21-47) Jack and Rochester (Eddie Anderson) go downtown to do some Christmas shopping. Jack and Mary meet at the store and run into other members of the cast. While attempting to purchase a gift for Don Wilson. Jack is recognized by sales clerk Mel Blanc. Joe Kearns, Benny Rubin, Elliott Lewis, Veola Vonn. Dennis Day sings a medley of Christmas favorites. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (27 min)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20 RADIO TO WRAP, BAKE AND DECORATE BY

DUFFY'S TAVERN (12-24-48) "A Christmas Visitor" stars Ed Gardner as Archie, manager of Duffy's Tavern, "where the elite meet to eat." In a warmhearted departure from the usual comedy setting, Archie is unhappy that he's not getting a Christmas bonus. A stranger, played by Jeff Chandler, takes him for a walk and shows Archie the real meaning of Christmas. Bristol Myers, NBC. (30 min)

HAROLD PEARY SHOW (12-20-50) Christmas is just around the corner and Honest Harold's Reindeer Club is planning a party for the children of Melrose Springs. Naturally, Harold expects to be the club's Santa Claus. But there's a rival for the job: Stanley Peabody (Olan Soulé). Harold sings "O Come, All Ye Faithful." Bob Lamon announces. Sustaining, CBS. (30 min)



BING CROSBY stars in *A Christmas Sing with Bing* on TWTD Dec. 20

READER'S DIGEST RADIO EDITION (12-19-46) "Room For a Stranger" starring Frank Sinatra as a Navy flyer back from overseas whose leave is cancelled on Christmas Eve. This warmhearted drama is set in Northern Illinois. Richard Kollmar hosts. Announcer is Tom Shirley. Hallmark Cards, CBS. (29 min)

MEL BLANC SHOW (12-24-46) Mel can't decide what to buy his girlfriend Betty for Christmas. Cast includes Hans Conried, Joe Kearns, Mary Jane Croft. Colgate Tooth Powder, CBS. (23 min)

A CHRISTMAS SING WITH BING (12-24-57) Bing Crosby stars with the Norman Luboff Choir and Paul Weston and the orchestra in the third annual "Sing with Bing" as he takes listeners around the world for a Christmas Eve celebration. Performances by singers in Australia; Minnesota; Canada; Salt Lake City, Utah; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Jerusalem; the USS Pocono in the Mediterranean; Rome, Italy; Netherlands; Austria. Bing sings "Joy to the World," "The First Noel," "White Christ-

mas," "Away in a Manger," "Adeste Fidelis," "Jingle Bells," "Silent Night." Insurance Company of North America, CBS, AFRS, CBC, VOA. (32 min & 28 min)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27 SEASON'S GREETINGS

FRED ALLEN SHOW (12-28-47) For Fred's last show of 1947, guest Monty Woolley tries to help Fred exchange a defective cuckoo clock at a department store. The Allen's Alley question: "What is the outstanding event of 1947?" Cast includes Portland Hoffa, Kenny Delmar (Senator Claghorn), Parker Fennelly (Titus Moody), Minerva Pious (Mrs. Nussbaum), Peter Donald (Ajax Cassidy), DeMarco Sisters, Al Goodman and the orchestra. Blue Bonnet Margarine, Tender Leaf Tea, NBC. (29 min)

PHIL HARRIS-ALICE FAYE SHOW (1-1-50) At the dawn of the New Year, Phil is suffering the after-effects of the musicians' union New Year's Eve party. Later, he thinks his public wants him to be a concert singer. Elliott Lewis, Robert North, Walter Tetley, Gil Stratton, Jr. Phil sings "The Old Master Painter." Rexall, NBC. (30 min)

LUX RADIO THEATRE (12-10-51) "The Lemon Drop Kid" starring Bob Hope and Marilyn Maxwell in their original screen roles from the 1951 film based on the Damon Runyon story. Bob is a small-time racetrack tout in debt to the mob for \$10,000. Bob and Marilyn sing "Silver Bells." Cast includes Verna Felton, Jack Kruschen, William Conrad, Leif Ericson, Ted DeCorsia, Ed Max. William Keighley is host. Lux Soap, CBS. (18 min & 21 min & 19 min)

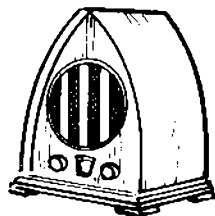
HAROLD PEARY SHOW (12-27-50) Honest Harold is looking forward to spending New Year's Eve with his girlfriend, Theodora. He's going to surprise her by taking her to the town's New Year's Barn Dance. Hal Peary stars with Gloria Holliday, Olan Soulé, Jane Morgan, Joe Kearns, Parley Baer, Mary Jane Croft. Roy Roen announces. Sustaining, CBS. (30 min)

COUNT BASIE AND HIS ORCHESTRA (12-31-65/1-1-66) Celebrating the arrival of the New Year in a remote broadcast from the Pick-Congress Hotel in Chicago, Count Basie and the orchestra present "Auld Lang Syne," "All of Me," "Sometimes I'm Happy," "Sweet Georgia Brown," "Jumpin' at the Woodside," "One O'Clock Jump." Sustaining, NBC. (34 min)

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WHEN RADIO WAS-- Stan Freberg hosts an hour of vintage radio programs from the golden age. *In Chicago, tune to WBBM-AM, 780 AM, Monday thru Friday, Midnight-1 a.m.* The series is also heard on a great many other stations throughout the United States.

Monthly listings for "When Radio Was" ARE NO LONGER READILY AVAILABLE to us and we are unable to include the program's calendar in the Nostalgia Digest. HOWEVER, the complete program schedule and list of stations carrying the series, as well as streaming audio for "When Radio Was" may be found on the Internet at www.RadioSpirits.com Click on "On the Radio" for the daily and monthly broadcast schedules and archived programs.

THE RADIO CAREER OF W. C. FIELDS

BY BILL OATES

He claimed that he hated dogs and children, disguised rude comments with his own coded profanity, and drank to excess. Yet he endeared himself to millions and joined a small group of comedians who remained popular long after their deaths. W. C. Fields' film career exhibited many of his classic memorable moments, but the medium that brought him back to his followers, and eventually ushered his return to movies after a long, serious illness, was radio.

William Claude Dukinfield first appeared on January 29, 1880, to a very poor household in the Germantown district of Philadelphia. Although his childhood held few reasons to be optimistic, he remembered many occurrences and people and incorporated them later into his stage routines. One important Fieldsian adaptation was the frequent muttering of asides, a trait reminiscent of his mother, who made snide comments to her family about neighbors passing by.

The boy was known as Claude, a name he detested. He preferred his nickname, Whitey, a reference to his light colored hair. When he used his parents' preferred moniker in his acts, it often denoted a villain-

Bill Oates, of Kouts, Indiana, is a high school English teacher and author.



W. C. Fields

BILL OATES COLLECTION

ous character. However, suffering with a despised name ranked low in his childhood challenges, because avoiding his abusive father occupied more of his time.

After being inspired by a juggler at a visit to a vaudeville house at age nine, Fields ran home to practice the art with several oranges and lemons lifted from his father's produce cart. He spent a great deal of time exercising in the family stable but damaged a great deal of fruit in the process. Generally, the payment for those items dropped literally came out of Fields' hide. By age 11 the boy had had enough. According to Fields, his father stepped on a misplaced shovel in the yard and hit an area of the old man's shin that had been bruised earlier that day on the produce wagon. The penalty resulted in the shovel coming down on the boy's head, and the young man felt that he had had enough. Later, when the elder Dukinfield entered the stable, Claude crowned him with a large wooden spoon. The boy ran away from home and never returned.

Between moving from hole to hole or floor to floor and stealing food to fend off

starvation, the next period of W. C. Fields' life was abominable. After one winter of eking out an existence, he condescended and took up residence with his grandmother. His parents did not want him back, and worse, he was forced to accept a job in a local department store. Not one to be saddled with such a job, when spring arrived, he took off again. His next episode as an independent traveller eventually led him to the stage and film.

In 1891, W. C. Fields began his entertainment career. He had added to his juggling repertoire valuable pool table tricks, which not only impressed audiences, but also netted him money when he hustled other players. He quickly moved from church socials to amusement parks to big-time vaudeville. In the early years of the twentieth century, he circled the globe, playing engagements as far away as South Africa and Australia. In a short period of time, and not without bumps and detours, he became attached to the then-famous black-faced team of McIntyre and Heath, who were starring in *The Ham Tree*. By 1915, W. C. Fields joined the famed *Ziegfeld Follies*, the absolute pinnacle of vaudeville, and trod the boards with Eddie Cantor, Will Rogers, Bert Williams, Fanny Brice and Ed Wynn.

Fields lasted seven seasons with Ziegfeld. Two years after his departure, a part in a "legitimate" play afforded him the opportunity to star in a vehicle that both accelerated his acting career and initiated the role of one of Fields' most memorable characters, Eustace McGargle. *Poppy* became first a stage success, and later became both an important silent and sound motion picture. It also became one of W. C. Fields' first important radio appearances.

In a nutshell, for W. C. Fields' film career is a major subject in itself, the actor hitched his star to Paramount films in the silent days of the 1920s. Except for an

early one-reel comedy, a series of shorts for Mack Sennett in the early days of talkies and a relatively serious role in MGM's *David Copperfield*, the comedian spent most of his celluloid years at the mountain top studio until his debilitating illness in the mid 1930s. However, it was not motion pictures but radio that restored him to audiences.

While working on the second film version of *Poppy* at Paramount in 1935, the great comedian suffered from two maladies that limited his appearance in the film: 1) he injured his sacroiliac while playing tennis, and 2) his enormous ingestion of alcohol began to take its toll. He was so sick that many thought that he would not leave the sanitarium in which he was recuperating. On his sick bed, W. C. Fields was approached to appear on radio, a medium he had previously avoided. However, when asked to honor Paramount Pictures on its 25th anniversary, he relented. As a result, because of Fields' spirited tribute to Adolph Zukor and his film company, the Chase and Sanborn coffee company sought him out to become a well-known entity on its new *Charlie McCarthy* radio show. →



Charlie McCarthy and W. C. Fields

Edgar Bergen and his wooden sidekick Charlie had skyrocketed to their own program after a brief stint on the Rudy Vallee program. Vallee's *The Fleischmann Yeast Hour* and *The Royal Gelatin Hour* were two popular variety shows that also had the distinction of frequently debuting new talent. After hearing of the new ventriloquist act in a New York hotel, Vallee invited Bergen to appear on December 17, 1936. Vallee told the audience when he was asked, "Why put a ventriloquist on the air?" He simply answered, "Why not?" So popular was the act that it became a regular on the show, until Bergen was given his own chance for another Standard Brands product, Chase and Sanborn.

Edgar Bergen not only established his own program on May 9, 1937, but he also moved away from Vallee's New York base to join the stream of radio personalities who would broadcast from the West Coast. Beginning with Bergen's first show, Fields would be a fixture for many weeks. Likewise, young Twentieth Century Fox screen

star Don Ameche came on board as the m.c. and the primary foil for Fields' stories.

Introduced as back from health problems, W. C. explained his "serious illness" to Ameche. The poor straight man attempted to act sympathetic to Fields' explanation, while he carefully directed the comedian from straying too far from the script and keeping away from forbidden topics. During the first routine, Fields mistakes the names of Bergen, orchestra leaders Werner Janssen, and guest Ann Harding, and then begins his insults with Charlie. Listening to the show, it is difficult to determine which barbs are written and which are ad-libs. Ameche keeps bringing Fields back to the health issue, as the comedian continues his references back to Charlie's early comment about Fields' "redwood nose." Ameche does his best to keep up, as Fields drones on about illnesses invented by Fields' creative mind and real ones such as the recent sacroiliac ailment. Ameche often breaks up as Fields drones on and on with his familiar voice and

unique pronunciation of "sacroiliac."

Edgar Bergen later recalled that he and W. C. would meet at the ventriloquist's house and go over the script. Listening to Fields-originated lines from his Paramount films, one can easily find many of them repeated in the revised radio scripts. Lines like "the nurse caught me blowing the foam off my medicine" jump out as those written and often reused by the comedian. Although Fields



The Charlie McCarthy Show
W. C. Fields, Dorothy Lamour, Charlie, Edgar Bergen

PHOTOEST

altered the script drastically, Bergen noted that their relationship was completely amicable.

Succeeding shows included a variety of Fields-Ameche and Fields-McCarthy banterings. On the second Chase and Sanborn show, after Ameche introduced Fields as "a permanent member of the cast" the conversation hinged on what brand names could be discussed on the air, especially Paramount and Chase and Sanborn. When the conversation begins to run wildly away from the topic, Ameche has to reel Fields back into the script. Later in the season, The Great Man tackled topics like movie extras getting scurvy, "Bolivia," returning to pictures to do *The Big Broadcast of 1938*, killing a moose with face powder, and responding to Charlie's defamation of character suit.

Only one other radio feud garnered more audience attention than the Fields-McCarthy fights: the arguments fabricated between Fred Allen and Jack Benny.

Soon after Fields left the Chase and Sanborn show as a regular, he found a variety of opportunities that capitalized on his regained health and popularity. The first big chance in a starring role came on March 7, 1938, with a guest appearance on the *Lux Radio Theatre* program. Ironically, this big chance came as a result of an adaptation of the movie *Poppy*.

Reprising his role as carnival con man "Professor" Eustace McGargle, Fields headed the romantic comedy with Anne Shirley and John Payne in support. The overall show was fairly unexciting, until Fields made his entrance as the disreputable medicine salesman. Even though many of his lines were in and of themselves lackluster, when presented in his distinctive nasal tone and wonderfully timed delivery, the audience responded with glee.



You Can't Cheat an Honest Man (1939)

Sadly, this was his only appearance on *Lux*.

W. C. made several guest appearance returns on the Bergen-McCarthy show. On the September 21, 1941 program he accused the wooden child of setting a skunk trap across his garden path. During the February 20, 1944 visit the two began their segment by feuding, but they became allies against a sadistic barber played by Verna Felton. Whether he was swapping tall tales with Don Ameche or insults with Charlie, W. C. Fields took command of the microphone, bare-knuckle boxing for laughs. So popular were these visits during the 1937 season and the subsequent returns that Columbia records released an LP of the best of these moments in the late 1960s.

Soon after W. C. Fields re-emerged from his life-threatening illness and became a radio star, he returned to making movies. His first venture, and last for Paramount, was the very strange *The Big Broadcast of 1938*. With its star-studded cast, the film did great

box office, but anyone attempting to understand its plot will probably suffer a stress migraine. Critics, who recognized that Fields could add a stellar performance to a dull picture, dubbed his bits as funny. Although it was Fields' swan song at the studio, it launched the career of another successful comedian, Bob Hope. From Paramount Fields moved on to Universal.

In 1938, W. C. Fields had his last relatively regular foray on radio, when he added the comic relief to the *Lucky Strike Show*. Using tried and true Fields-originated skits like "The Temperance Lecture" and "The Pharmacist," he played to delighted audiences with the assistance of Hanley Stafford, Walter Tetley, and Verna Felton. However, he soon moved on to his now classic Universal films: *You Can't Cheat an Honest Man* (with Bergen and McCarthy), *My Little Chickadee* (with Mae West), *The Bank Dick*, and *Never Give a Sucker an Even Break*.

As for W. C. Fields' last visits to radio, other than those returns to the Bergen-McCarthy program, they occurred infrequently throughout the 1940s. One particularly special moment came when he appeared on the post-war version of *Armed Forces' Command Performance*, Campbell

Soups' Request Performance in 1945. In the premiere show, Reginald Gardner and Ida Lupino urged Fields to honor a listener's request and drink a glass of water on the air, a seemingly impossible task for one who tasted water only if it was mixed with whiskey. After prolonged evading of the issue and registering disgust at the idea, he finally relented to the delight of the audience.

By the mid-1940s, Fields' appearances in films were mere cameos until his health prohibited them altogether. Age and bodily abuse took their toll on *The Great One*, and on December 25, 1946, he departed the earthly stage. Fortunately, most of his films (all of his talking pictures) exist, as do many of his appearances on radio. What might have been a clever epitaph on his tombstone, now an urban legend, never existed: "On the whole, I'd rather be in Philadelphia." What is true is that, like so many of the great comedians, W. C. Fields continues in popularity, whether through his original creations or by more recent incarnations such as cartoon characters who use his distinctive voice. ■

Tune in TWID November 11 to hear W. C. Fields on radio.

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MAGIC MOMENTS

BY CLAIR SCHULZ

Nearly everyone can recall some events of growing up when the sense of excitement and expectation was at its zenith. It may have been those frosty Christmas Eves when the hands of clocks also appeared to be frozen or perhaps an automobile trip to a fair or carnival that never seemed to end. For me the highest point of juvenile anticipation occurred while rushing home from the post office with a package of items I had ordered from

Johnson Smith and Company

Just receiving the catalog alone was enough to advance my pulse rate, for if there ever was a way to interest a boy it was to promise a printed parade of "6,000 novelties" that would "amaze and amuse." Any company that had adopted as its mottoes "There are tricks in all trades, but our trade is all tricks" and "We are in business for fun" had a live one on the hook the moment it added the address of Master Clair Schulz to its mailing list.

What boy wouldn't have fun with a cornucopia of items at dime store prices that included shipping? And JS accepted just about any kind of payment: money orders, checks, postage stamps, currency, coins, even refund checks from Sears, Wards and other companies. Once, when my allowance had not stretched as far as my thirst for gadgets and gewgaws, I briefly considered sending with my payment two unused tickets redeemable at the Clinton Theatre, then realized that it might be a slight imposition to ask Johnson and Smith (I pic-

tured the owners as two jokesters in the mold of Olsen and Johnson who filled orders between pie-throwing contests) to travel from Michigan to Wisconsin just to watch Gabby Hayes chew tobacco or Francis the talking mule chew hay.

Even though my orders were always under \$5, they were returned with unvarying promptness. I would mail a postal money order after school on Monday and the following Saturday without fail when I would peer with breathless anticipation into Box 368 there would be the little card requesting me to pick up my package of novelties at the counter.

Novelties are "articles of trade whose value is chiefly decorative, comic, or the like and whose appeal is often transitory." Boys want merchandise for the ages...the ages 8 to 12, so Johnson Smith scratched their itch by appealing to their sense of curiosity and adventure with an array of mechanical and mystical items at bargain rates.

Besides quick service and low prices another reason I kept sending my money to Detroit was that I considered the folks at JS my friends who tried to be straight-

Clair Schulz is a free-lance writer, movie historian and collector from Muskego, Wisconsin.

forward in their descriptions. When they trumpeted the value of the lucky dime ring ("wear one and you'll never go broke"), they made it clear that the coin was not included. The JS copywriters must have been boys at heart, for they knew how to tantalize with phrases like "worn by West Indian natives to whom it has a peculiar significance," "appears to be a mystic ring of some sort," and "we do not make any claims for it but merely offer it as an interesting novelty," disclaimers and teasers which would avoid claims of false advertising yet contain enough mystery to tempt those youngsters experiencing the wonder years.

The dime ring performed like the spare tire we forgot to keep inflated: no problems until we needed it. After I removed Old Mercury the first time for some emergency (probably to satisfy a craving for a handful of nonpareils), the prongs would not hold its successors in place even when I rubbed my rabbit foot charm and Egyptian lucky pocket coin. After losing two dimes, I realized that my mother had a better plan for never going broke: tie the dime in the corner of a handkerchief, stick it in my pocket, and don't ever spend it.

I did not lose the penny-in-a-bottle marvel, although none of my friends seemed as intrigued as I was with the mystery of a coin in a tiny glass container barely big enough to hold it with a hole on top the size of a toothpick. They seemed more intent on teasing me by saying that I gave 39 of my pennies to purchase one of Johnson Smith's. To this day I am not certain how the penny got in the jug and I don't want to know, for there are some enigmas like "Who Stole the Kishka?" that are better left unexplained.

Some items, like watches, in the JS catalog had me betwixt and between. I knew I certainly could not afford the seven-jewel Swiss watches priced at \$25. The only

timepiece I could purchase with my meager allowance was the sun dial attached to a leatherette strap, priced at 25 cents, which I am certain lived up to its billing of being waterproof and never needing winding but might have proved difficult to read inside, on cloudy days, or at night.

The bottle of invisible ink I did order presented another problem of practicality. In order to read the written message, the paper needed to be held close to a source of light like a lamp or a candle, and some of the letters never seemed to show through no matter how hard I pressed or how bright the illumination. Complicating matters was the fact that my handwriting has always been excrable. One summer day I hid the secret message "Meet me behind our garage at 3:30" for friend Billy who lived next door to read. At the appointed time he was cooling his heels because he thought he was supposed to go down in his basement and cough.

The lures of "Be a Movie King," "Oh Boy! Some Sport!", and "Have a Barrel of Fun!" caught my mind's eye as I pictured myself loading one Castle film after another onto my own 16mm movie projector, but I couldn't even buy the cartoons themselves, so I settled for a book of hand shadows and ended up wiggling my fingers and saying, "What's up, Doc?", "Sufferin' succotash", and other animated expressions to the north wall from the stage of my bed.

The JS catalog offered merchandise for the artistic such as books on drawing and a pantograph, and for the mechanically-inclined such as microscopes, motors, airplanes, radios, and chemistry sets, but I avoided those diversions because those items sounded like school or work. I wanted novelties I could have fun with as soon as I opened the box. And what delights were enclosed...

The See-o-Scope, a cardboard periscope,

VENTRILO or The Wonder Voice Throwing



DIRECTIONS: Dip the Ventrilo in water. Then place between lips and blow through either opening till sound is clear, then place on tongue and press it against the roof of mouth and hiss strongly through it till sound comes through. Then practice talking and other imitations.

CLAIR SCHULZ COLLECTION

because of its short length and crude optics, allowed me to see (not too clearly or too far) without being seen (if I hid in a bush, behind a fence, or stayed in my room).

The Ventrilo consisted of two small curved metal pieces surrounded by a piece of gauze. The accompanying instructions told users to dip the Ventrilo in water, "press it against the roof of the mouth and hiss strongly through it until a sound comes through. Then produce talking and other imitations." Even with an illustrated book and practice I became convinced that I was making as much progress as Mortimer Snerd would have made trying to impersonate Edgar Bergen and that if I ever performed before others the strong hissing noise would not be coming from me.

The Panama puzzle padlock was a trick lock that would not budge when I handed it to friends but which would open magically for me when I held it behind my back. I will reveal the secret of this trick to anyone who sends me 25 cents. Money orders, checks, coins, postage stamps, and refund checks accepted.

The spring snake that catapulted out of a metal canister instead of the promised candy was a scream in more ways than one. Note to potential practical jokers: word spreads quickly about this trick, so spring

the trap often while the first victim is still recovering from shock. The same was true for the joy buzzer that passed a tingle from donor to recipient. By lunchtime everyone had been warned, "Don't shake hands with Schulz."

Hot toothpicks did not go over well because very few of my

male classmates used them and the girls would not consider such an unladylike habit, but the pepper candy and gum burned a few tongues.

Sneezing powder left the biter bitten and a little bitter. The directions stated that the user should place the powder on the back of the hand, blow it in the air, and watch other people sneeze, which was fine if I stopped breathing (something I have always been averse to doing) or leave the room immediately (which would have prevented me from seeing the effect of the joke). I learned my lesson from that misfire and therefore avoided ordering the itching powder.

Dirty soap appeared to be white in color but contained a dye that would cause it to lather in black. I tested this one myself and never used it on anyone else because, although it may have been a riot at boarding houses where blame is difficult to place, I knew that I alone would feel the effects of a filthy lavatory in our only bathroom.

The whizzer sparkler provided my own personal fireworks under the covers as the revolving wheel threw off red, white, and blue sparks, although this display of pyrotechnics left my bedclothes and pajamas smelling distinctly flinty.

A box of comic letterheads that touted spots like The Diaper Towers ("Covers the

Water Front”) and the Broken Arms Hotel (“Just Another Joint”) amused me if no one else. A similar item, the sign “Silence – Genius at work,” thumbtacked to the hall side of my bedroom door for years, should have earned me a spot on *You Asked For It*, for nearly every pal who saw it taunted me with “Are you renting your room to someone else now?” or a similar zinger.

The bait for the black eye joke took the form of a promise that a boy would see something dirty if he looked in the kaleidoscope. The dirty part, of course, would be the ring around his eye he would see in a mirror. The trick came with the caveat “it isn’t a bad joke if your friend isn’t hot-tempered,” a wise precaution so the wrong person’s eye didn’t get blackened.

For the dribble glass it was also important to find an amiable sort and to use only water so I could tell the victim, “It will dry up quickly.” At least once I was told to dry up myself.

Books of snappy jokes provided me with patter that I hoped would distract my friends from my fumbling fingers as I clumsily attempted feats of legerdemain. I don’t think an appearance by the ghost of Joe Miller, whose wheezes I was reciting, could have hidden the fact that the rubber pea seemed to have a will of its own when I manipulated the three plastic shells around or that I was reversing the direction of the sliding portion of the coin-in-a-box trick. It was not in the cards for me either, even with a marked deck, because I could not keep my spiel going and concentrate on deciphering the intricate shapes on the backs at the same time.

Although tattoo transfers never transferred very accurately from sheet to skin, it was still a treat to be a cockney, cockamamie sailor for a day. A celluloid monocle, cardboard mask, or seedy wig could be added for effect. JS asked the question, “How would you look with a

mustache?” and even though the answer turned out to be “Pretty silly,” it only cost me 12 cents to find out.

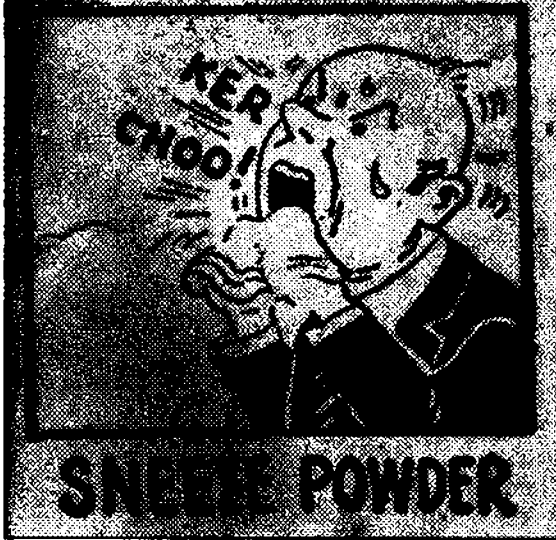
And it only cost me \$1 for a grab bag that promised a dozen novelties which raised my level of expectation on those Saturday mornings even higher. What was that rattle in the box? Could it be a gyroscope that would spin on the point of a pin? Or maybe Hotsy and Totsy, the magnetic Scotty dogs? The 5-in-1 mystery hidden compass? The mechanical lead pencil with the magic multiplier on the barrel? A pocket-size magic wand so I could bedazzle at a moment’s notice? Jumping beans? The glow-in-the-dark badge that I could flash in the face of a nocturnal burglar? A magic pocket mirror that distorted faces like those full-sized beauties in fun houses? A lapel squirting flower? A boomerang that comes with the claim “there is no thrill like throwing a boomerang and watching it come back”? No thrill except, of course, for the arrival of an order to Johnson Smith.

People can still order from the Johnson Smith Company, which has been located in Bradenton, Florida, since 1986. The business was founded in 1914 by Alfred Johnson Smith in Chicago, moved to Racine in 1926 and then to Detroit in 1935, where it remained until the early 1970s when it relocated to nearby Mount Clemens. The JS stock continues to lean toward the playful and unusual like a sneezing tissue holder that talks back and pink flamingoes for porch or yard, but a fair share of the offerings now are franchised items of personalities like Elvis and Lucy or of well-known products which can be found in stores and in other catalogs.

That was not the case in the JS catalogs I remember. Where else could a boy buy 10 pounds of magazines for a mere \$1.50 postpaid, then wonder if he should have ordered the Samson gymnasium or a grip-

HARMLESS FUN!

To make your victim sneeze, simply blow some toward him, on the back of your hand. Or, sprinkle some on a table. When a magazine is tossed down, it will whirl powder into the air.



CLAIR SCHULZ COLLECTION

of-steel developer first so he would have the strength to lug the cumbersome box home? Or have live snakes, mice, alligators, turtles, pigeons, and chameleons delivered to his doorstep (and probably delivered a case of the screaming meemies to his mother at the same time)? He could also order charms, cameras, miniature Bibles, gazing balls for telling fortunes, banks, puzzles, kazoos, pennants, copies of the *Hobo News*, books on how to raise chicks and how to do tricks, Ouija boards, plants both innocuous and carnivorous, bottles of snake oil, puppets and marionettes, bicycle horns, billfolds, an ever-drinking, ever-bobbing penguin who never said "when" until his glass was empty, and an automatic fisherman that "will catch fish while you sleep." And, oh yes, a whoopee cushion. Whoopee, indeed.

envelope of mummified sneezing powder that wouldn't bring a tear to a gnat's eye. A few years ago on a whim I bought a battery-powdered device that could easily be mistaken for a remote control which causes garage doors to open and close. There are buttons marked "laugh," "rim shot," "boing," etc. on the front and pressing each activates the appropriate sound effect from a memory chip. When I take the unit from a desk drawer on certain nights and press the magic buttons, for a few moments I am not the balding, arthritic malcontent sitting in a high-backed chair, but once again the bright-eyed, smiling youth heading home on his bike with legs pumping, lungs congested with an unbearable lust for fun and a heart overflowing with a boundless sense of joy, holding on for dear life with both hands. ■

Readers of this article who open a Clinton High School annual for a certain year may find two points of pertinent interest. Next to my senior photograph is the quotation "Remember: I'm not always right, but I'm never wrong," a one-liner cribbed from a JS book of snappy jokes. Five pages later I appear again in a photo titled "Wittiest" in which I am grinning like the Cheshire Cat as I pretend to be grabbing for the waist of Susan, my female counterpart, who is standing on a chair and styling my crewcut with an oversized comb. (This caption should appear under the photo: "Comb appears through the courtesy of Clair Schulz, who appears through the indulgence of friends and family and the manifold offerings of Johnson Smith and Company.")

Today all that remains from those orders are Ventrilo and an

Gregory Peck: Role of a Lifetime

BY WAYNE KLATT

When Gregory Peck died on June 12, 2003, he was praised as representing good men struggling to do what was right. His entire career would reflect his three main influences: the Zane Gray Westerns he read as a boy; his practical and reliable mother, and his good-hearted, outdoors-loving and sometimes hot-tempered father. How these elements came together is a story of how Peck created his greatest role even before he ever played it.

The pharmacist's son was born on April 5, 1916, in La Jolla, then a sleepy California town of no consequence. Doc Gregory Peck chose the name Eldred for his son from a phone book, because he didn't want him to have a nickname (but in time the actor went by his middle name, Gregory). The boy's parents were separated when he was two, and they were divorced when he was five.

Like many children raised in troubled

Wayne Klatt is an editor at the City News Service of the Chicago Tribune and a free-lance writer.

marriages, Gregory may have blamed himself for their quarrels and became withdrawn. Raised largely by his grandmother, he naturally felt cut off from the world.



Gregory Peck

PHOTOFEEST

Military school only taught him how to be friendly with others while keeping his thoughts private. Uncertain of his future, he took medical studies at the University of California to be like his father, and for amusement he appeared in a few plays. His reviews were awful.

He had all the gifts of an actor –

over six-feet-two, handsome in a way that seemed both intellectual and adventurous, and having one of the great voices of our time. But he could never emotionally release himself. Besides, he was more interested in rowing, which led to a spinal injury that was about to alter his life.

Unable to become an athlete, Peck acted more often and in 1942 took a part in a Broadway play, *The Morning Star*. His diction was so forceful and clear that writer-independent producer Casey Robinson ignored Peck's awkward screen test and hired him for *Days of Glory* (1944), a film about

the Russian resistance to the Nazis. The movie was forgettable, but Peck was signed up by one of the best agents in Tinseltown, Leland Hayward.

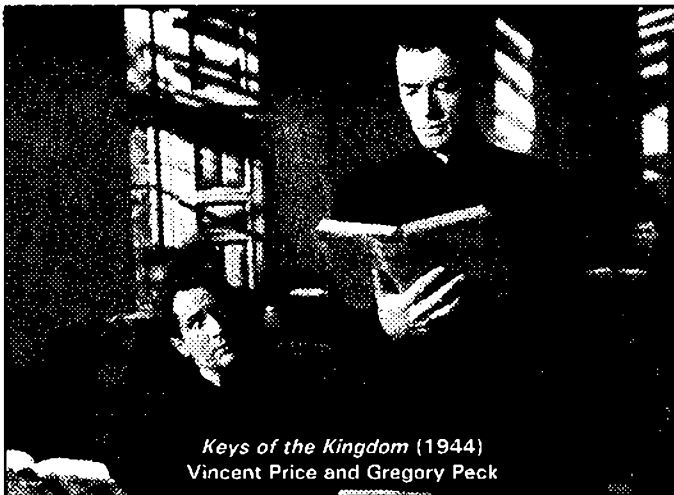
Hayward insisted that his client star in each film, knowing that with Peck's injury he would fill the void caused by leading men in the armed services. So it was

that Peck, from an Irish family, played a missionary priest in *Keys of the Kingdom* (1944), winning him an Oscar nomination he did not yet deserve.

His first love remained the theatre, and he helped found the famous La Jolla Playhouse, where Hollywood actors could recapture the experience of live audiences. Even well into his career, he often returned to his hometown to act in old plays. He also did several condensed film adaptations on the hour-long *Lux Radio Theatre* and the half-hour *Screen Guild Players* program and appeared on *Suspense*.

In films, Peck was drawn to essentially good characters who were flawed or were drawn into violence. In *Spellbound* he was cast as a psychiatrist who may be a killer, in *Duel in the Sun* he played a wayward son who blows up railroad tracks, and *Yellow Sky* finds him as a robber who almost rapes the Anne Baxter character. In one of his best roles, *The Gunfighter*, Peck is a gunslinger who cannot escape his past, and in *Twelve O'Clock High* he is memorable as a hard-driving Air Force officer who becomes temporarily catatonic.

The twist in *The Bravados* – that a vengeful husband discovers he has been



Keys of the Kingdom (1944)
Vincent Price and Gregory Peck

PHOTOFEST

tracking down the wrong men – was Peck's own idea. In the chilling original version of *Cape Fear*, he is driven to hiring thugs to beat a psychopathic Robert Mitchum, and then uses his own wife and daughter as bait to stop him.

But still lacking confidence, he came off bland in movies where he was just a hero or noble professional, as in *Gentleman's Agreement* (writer), *The Paradine Case* (lawyer) *Only the Valiant* (cavalry officer)



Spellbound (1945)
Gregory Peck and Ingrid Bergman

PHOTOFEST

and *Captain Horatio Hornblower* (naval officer). With gaining faith in himself, he developed a measured, reflective style, making him especially successful as men thinking over their lives, as in *The Macomber Affair*, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, and *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956), a role that rescued him from a box office slump.



Roman Holiday (1953)
Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck

PHOTOFEST

Audrey Hepburn. He repeatedly claimed that he was taking a bath when she knocked on his door and asked for an interview, and he invited her in and answered her questions while still in the tub. The reality was just that he had met her professionally a few times before asking her out. She must have loved his bathtub fib, because it was his

modesty that won her over. Perhaps no actor was more respected in Hollywood as a man. John Huston called him "one of the nicest, straightest guys I ever knew, and there was a size (depth) to him." But as with many of Peck's characters, a darker side sometimes emerged. He often quarreled with his first wife, Gretta Konen, and both of them drank too much at parties. Although Peck was usually friendly, he could be cold to certain actors and directors.

Peck had such a dry sense of humor that only friends realized how funny he could be. Audiences first saw this side of him when director William Wyler paired him with Audrey Hepburn in *Roman Holiday* (1953). The scene where Peck pulls his hand out of the "Mouth of Truth" monument and pretends it has been eaten off was Gregory's suggestion. (But it was Wyler's idea not to forewarn Audrey, and her delightful on-screen reaction was real.)

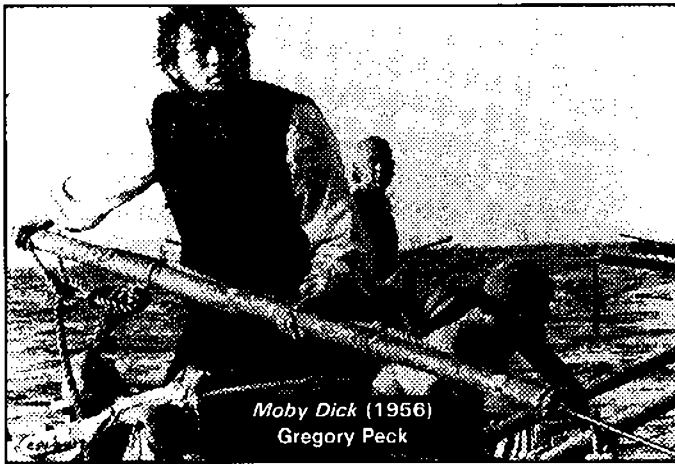
Another joke of Peck's was telling reporters for years how he met his beautiful second wife, the French celebrity-journalist Veronique Passani, who was a bit like

modesty that won her over.

One reason Peck was so convincing in Westerns was that he was something of a rancher, renting grazing land in central California and taking part in roundups. Although not known for subtle or emotive acting, he was always a craftsman who valued rehearsals, even appreciating Wyler's habit of repeated takes for a scene, sometimes 30 or more. In the inspired ending to Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1956), Peck's Ahab is lashed to the whale, which was essentially a giant barrel turning over and over in the water. He was never in more danger during a filming, but he insisted on doing the scene again even after director Huston called out "That's it!" to his crew.

After the film was finished, Peck formed his own company, Melville Productions. But whether producing his own movies or appearing in ones produced by others, he kept playing too safe, appearing in films that any other actor could have done, as in the hit *The Guns of Navarone* (1961). Then a change came.

When the amateur author Harper Lee of Alabama decided to write a story based on her father, a good-hearted country lawyer, she kept Gregory Peck in mind. Lee had no idea *To Kill a Mockingbird* would ever be made into a film, let alone sell 30 million copies, but imagining an actor in the scenes was a way



Moby Dick (1956)
Gregory Peck

PHOTOFEST

for her to keep the episodes consistent (a common author's trick). Since Lee's childhood playmate had been the future writer Truman Capote (*Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *In Cold Blood*), he may have helped her expand her short story into a novel while both were living in New York.

Among the first million who read the story of two children growing up at a time

of racial injustice were producer Alan Pakula and director Robert Mulligan. They knew Peck would be perfect for the middle-aged lawyer, Atticus Finch. They sent him a copy, and he read it in one night. "I never had a part that was as close to the real me," he once said. "God was smiling at me." Peck took a trip to Monroeville before shooting began in 1962 and casually spoke



To Kill a Mockingbird (1962)
Gregory Peck and Brock Peters

1919-102

PHOTOFEST

with Lee's father, "a fine old man," Peck said later, "and truly sophisticated, although he never travelled farther than a few miles from that Southern town."

To perfect his delivery, Peck rehearsed scenes over and over at home. He also telephoned the young actor Brock Peters to welcome him to the cast. Brock was one of the tallest and most muscular African-American actors in movies then, but as Peck questioned him in the courtroom scene, Brock had to fight back tears.

Harper Lee's father died before the picture was released, and in gratitude for portraying him so well Lee gave Peck her father's gold watch and chain. He wore it on Oscar night, when he received the Academy Award for Best Actor. Peck had at last had found himself, after a role found him.

Peck afterward wanted to loosen up. He not only did outright comedy in *Arabesque*, he sang and danced in a 1969 TV special with Jack Benny and George Burns, called *Two Bushels and a Peck*. "I can't tell you how he loved it," Jack Benny said. "He didn't want to stop rehearsing. When I got tired, he said, 'Go home, I'll keep working.'"

But Peck was shattered in June 1975 when his 31-year-old son Jonathan, a local TV journalist, killed himself under job pressures. It may have been no coincidence that from then on, Peck took on darker roles. He played the stepfather of the anti-Christ in *The Omen* and as evil Nazi Josef

Mengele in the tongue-in-cheek thriller *Boys From Brazil*.

Afterward he settled down to doing character roles and a few TV movies. Peck didn't mind showing his age on the big screen when he played the writer Ambrose Bierce, executed by Mexican revolutionaries, in *The Old Gringo* (1989).

That same year he received a lifetime achievement award of the American Film Institute, which he had helped found. In other away-from-the-camera activities over the years he became a member of the National Council on Arts, and was elected chairman of the American Cancer Society and president of the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Sciences. The once shy, uncertain young man had accomplished a complete turnaround.

A memorial given at a Los Angeles cathedral after his death at 87 drew hundreds of people from Harry Belafonte to Harrison Ford. Cardinal Roger Mahoney told them, "Gregory Peck did not have to act at being an extraordinary human being."

But a more lasting honor was given to him just a few days before he passed away. A poll by the American Film Institute of the best and worst of each type of character chose Gregory Peck's realization of Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* as the most admired film hero of all time. You might say it was a lifetime achievement. ■
Tune in TWTD November 1 for a tribute to Gregory Peck.



To Kill a Mockingbird (1962)
Gregory Peck

PHOTOFEST

A Brown Paper Bag Christmas

BY FR. KEVIN SHANLEY, O. Carm.

Mrs. Delaney was one of the kindest persons I'd ever met. Her face lit up in joyful recognition whenever she encountered family, close friends or even casual acquaintances. Her smile bid each person welcome and the deep lines of her weary face seemed to indicate a loving care for those around her. Her prematurely gray hair, pulled back from her forehead and tied in a neat bun just above the collar of her dress, indicated the struggle in which she and so many others were engaged for survival during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Mrs. Delaney and my mom, both immigrants from Ireland, were close friends and shared both memories and news of the "ould country" whenever they met. Their friendship extended to their spiritual life and they often attended Mass, novenas and other devotions at St. Aloysius Church, across West Side Park from where we lived.

We, their children, attended St. Aloysius School together and shared after-school play time in the park and other places in the neighborhood.

Life was difficult for most people during the Depression. Pennies were scrimped, bargains intently sought, purchases made seldom and selectively, and a great deal of sharing kept families and individuals from acute poverty and outright destitution.

There was little of the long bread lines of the hungry or homeless people in our city, and neighbors looked out for each

other and shared what they had.

We, as children, learned a whole new alphabet vocabulary following the election of President Franklin Roosevelt, who assured us that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." We soon learned what the Blue Eagle of the NRA (National Recovery Administration) symbolized with the slogan, which indicated, "We Do Our Part."

But closer to our experience was the WPA (Works Progress Administration), which was often derided to stand for "We Poke Along." The program sought to put millions of unemployed to work on public projects. As part of this experience, our city obtained help in building a new medical center and stadium, repairing and resurfacing streets and expanding the park system.

Our family remained among the more fortunate ones, since my Dad, who had come from Ireland in 1926 and a few days later began working for the Western Electric Company, held his job throughout the Depression.

He was one of a couple of men in his department – out of over 100 – who survived the era. We were more than grateful, and our parents managed not only to keep us fed, housed, clothed and educated, but also sought to help others less fortunate. Dad's \$12-a-week salary was stretched greatly.

The Delaneys, and others, were not quite so fortunate. In addition, Mr. Delaney was, as the Irish called it "addicted to the creature," and part of what little he made was often spent at the local pub. This made life more difficult for his family and added a few more worry lines to Mrs. Delaney's face.

The Rev. Kevin Shanley is staff member of the Carmelite Spiritual Center in Darien, Illinois and a member of the Those Were The Days Radio Players.

But it was the sharing that so many did with what little they had that made it possible for families to survive the Depression. Food, used clothing and household items were readily shared with others in need. We had four boys in our family, and when we had outgrown clothing, it went to help others.

During Advent in our parish church, we were urged to do what we could to aid others who were less fortunate. Since most of us were pretty poor, it was simply regarded as sharing with our fellow needy families and individuals.

Just before Christmas of 1937, when I was a first-grader at St. Aloysius School, Mom asked me to deliver a package for her to Mrs. Delaney. For much of that afternoon, I had watched Mom as she selected coats, dresses and other items of clothing from our closets. She inspected each item for wear and tear, and also cleanliness. Items that did not measure up for sharing were set aside for further attention.

Then Mom sorted and folded each item with a care that showed her own great love and concern for people. She wasn't just sharing things, but giving a fine gift that expressed her Christian spirit. All items were then packed neatly into a brown paper bag.

"Kevin, will you take this package to Mrs. Delaney?" she asked. Although it wasn't my favorite thing to do, I agreed and walked the few blocks to the Delaney home.

The doorbell didn't work, so I knocked on the front door. Soon Mrs. Delaney greeted me.

"What do you have there?" she asked.

"My Mom asked me to bring this package to you," I explained.

Without examining the package in any great detail, Mrs. Delaney was effusive in her thanks to my Mom. I agreed that I

would convey her thanks when I returned home.

It was only later, when I had grown up and began to realize how sensitive my Mom was to Mrs. Delaney's feelings, that I understood it was so much easier to receive such help from a little boy carrying a brown paper bag package than from another adult. Mom was so often that way, and Christmas that year was happier for both families.

Many years later, after I had been ordained a priest, I was returning home for the Christmas holidays.

"Did you hear that Jimmy Delaney just died?" said my brother Mike when he picked me up at Newark Airport. I remembered Jimmy from our days at St. Aloysius School and playing in the neighborhood. He had been an ironworker, and seemed much too young to die.

When I arrived home, Mom informed me again of Jimmy's death and suggested, "I really think you should go to the wake." That was about the closest she came to a direct command.

Although I was thinking of other things to do just before Christmas, I attended the wake and met the family. We reminisced about the old days in the parish and how much things had changed. We remembered the "good old days," whether they had been good or not.

I looked for Mrs. Delaney, but she wasn't there.

"Jimmy's death has been very hard on Mom," explained her oldest son, Vinny, "and she's resting at home. We'll be sure to tell her that you were here. She'll be happy to know that."

The following day was Christmas Eve, and when I went over to St. Aloysius Church that morning, Fr. Hourihan, the associate pastor, asked if I could help with several Requiem Masses that were

scheduled for that morning.

"Could you take the Delaney Mass this morning?" he asked. I agreed and mentioned that I had known the family for many years.

St. Aloysius is a large, Gothic church that provides both a brilliant array of stained glass windows and a brilliant white marble altar – plus a warmth that makes people feel welcome at any time.

When I walked down the aisle to greet the Delaney family and the casket, I caught my first glimpse of Mrs. Delaney in many years. She seemed so weary and grief-stricken, being helped on each side by one of her sons.

When the ritual greeting of the liturgy reached her ears, she suddenly recognized who I was, and seemed to know that things would now be all right.

In the homily of the Mass, I remembered the struggles of the past years and the many expressions of goodness and

kindness that were shared by so many in the parish.

I told them that Jimmy's death was difficult to accept and more so to understand. But what was more important was that God was with him and each of us. My sometimes halting words brought both tears and comfort to Mrs. Delaney and her family.

When we gathered in a local restaurant on West Side Avenue after the burial, we had more time for sharing. Mrs. Delaney reminded me of my brown paper bag gift from Mom so many Christmases ago.

"That was a kind gift," she reminded me, "and you were kind to bring it. Today is another gift of kindness, and you brought it. Thank you."

Seldom have gifts spanned so many years in my life, or meant so much to different people. But the true gift is simply that at Christmas – and always – God is with us. ■

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Cavalcade of America and the World War II War Effort

BY HOWARD BLUE

It was the early dark days of World War II. The Allies had suffered a string of defeats. The Thomas family was huddled under the kitchen table in their apartment in Queens, in New York City. They had been living with the war for a year and a half. As it intensified, so too did the air raid drills. They usually took place as soon as it got dark, which meant there could be no lights anywhere. This night, as they often did, the Thomases had gathered around the radio in the kitchen to listen to their favorite program, one of the weekly high-lights of their lives.

Suddenly, an air raid drill began. Mrs. Thomas, her daughter Barbara and her son Mark, of course, had quickly turned out the lights, drawn the curtains and then returned to the radio. A few minutes later, much to everybody's surprise, the warden yelled out "Lights out on the fourth floor apartment." They all realized that it was the radio; it was powered by lighted tubes. They were loath to turn it off but had no

choice. They certainly did not want to see the city go up in flames from the bombers homing in on the radio's light. But Mrs. Thomas suddenly solved the problem by covering the kitchen table with blankets that went to the floor. They all crawled into the makeshift darkroom and finished listening to the program without uttering a sound.

To several generations during its Golden Age, in the 1930s and 1940s, radio often seemed to serve as the focal point of family life. This was especially so during World War II when families relied on it for the latest war news and for instant and regular entertainment. One unique aspect of this phenomenon was the radio play. During the war era, the networks, the USA's government, unions, advertising agencies and a variety of private organizations collaborated to produce a wide variety of morale-boosting radio dramas. In some cases, such as that of *Cavalcade of America*, already existing dramatic programs were frequently utilized to produce these shows.

NBC first began to air *Cavalcade of America* in 1935 after the advertising agency Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborn, (BBD&O) began to produce it for the Du Pont company. Du Pont had taken a public relations beating some years earlier after it was learned that the company's World War I sales of the propellant powders used by the allies had garnered it a \$238 million profit. Now Du Pont hoped to improve its image via a show that dra-

Howard Blue is the author of Words at War (Scarecrow Press, Dec. 2002), from which this article was adapted.



Words at War retails for \$34.95, but Mr. Blue is offering copies at \$29.95. To order, write to Mr. Blue at 1951 Valentines Road, Westbury, N. Y. 11590

or visit www.howardblue.com

matized positive features of American history. Initially the series featured broadcasts such as the two-part "The Spirit of Competition," which presented one segment about the Oklahoma land rush and a second about a Mississippi steamer race. Later came bio-



graphical sketches of people such as Samuel Morse and Daniel Boone. Even the *Cavalcade's* war-related broadcasts stuck to established ways of saying things and avoided focusing on ideas or on clarifying problems and issues.

The series was noted for several prejudices. For years it generally steered clear of historical events beyond the 1890s, avoided black-related themes and refused to employ black actors or handle scripts that criticized the rich.

It also sought to avoid any "heavies." The joke at BBD&O was that the one exception was King George III, who could be bad-mouthed in shows that dealt with the American Revolution. But saying anything negative about Hitler, Franco, or Mussolini was taboo.

To be fair to Du Pont, however, this taboo was widespread in the immediate years preceding the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. For example, in 1935, after radio personality Alexander Woollcott continued to blast away at Nazism and Fascism on his weekly program, *The Town Crier*, Cream of Wheat, his sponsor, fearing that German-

Americans might be offended, threw down the gauntlet: "Either drop all matters of a controversial nature or leave the show." Woollcott quit, walking away from a contract that was paying him \$80,000 a year.

Somewhat similarly in 1939, after broadcaster H. V. Kaltenborn strongly denounced Nazi propaganda, and some listeners complained, General Mills, his sponsor, dropped his program.

By the end of the decade Du Pont's expansion into textiles and plastics, reports of various breakthroughs in its laboratories and the *Cavalcade's* adroit projection of the company's image, resulted in an improved public perception of it. Then, with America's entry into the war in 1941, the producers finally altered their view of history.

Now it came more and more to include what had happened a few months ago on the African front or in Burma. In dealing with major themes such as freedom of religion, for example, instead of the oft-told story of Roger Williams, the *Cavalcade* presented Arthur Miller's "Listen to the Sound of Wings," a show about the

German Protestant pastor, Martin Niemöller. This broadcast described how Niemöller stood firm on his religious beliefs, defied Hitler and then suffered eight years of imprisonment.

By early 1943, *Cavalcade* broadcasts dealt regularly with war-related themes. Still, Du Pont zealously watched for anything in *Cavalcade* scripts that might tarnish the company's image. In two instances, this involved petty censorship. The July 1943 broadcast of Stephen Vincent Benét's "Listen to the People" contains a soliloquy by a "totalitarian voice." "We can give you your own Hess, your own Himmler, your own Goering," he says at one point. The play's original text continues with the words "all home-grown and wrapped in cellophane." But cellophane was a Du Pont product protected by a trademark. Apparently nervous at having listeners envision a Nazi leader wrapped in a Du Pont product, the producers substituted the word "tissue" for "cellophane" when the play was broadcast.

Arthur Miller encountered an even pettier instance of censorship. In 1944 at the request of BBD&O he wrote a script, a humorous one, about the Army's canine corps. Early in his story when Joe, the story's canine protagonist, is still privately owned, his owner refers to times when Joe bit salesmen who dared to ring his doorbell. "We'd like you to delete the reference to his biting," Miller was told. "Why?" he asked incredulously. "Well, you know," he was told, "many Du Pont products are sold door-to-door by salesmen and we don't want them to be disturbed by reference to a dog biting a salesman." Miller offered to change the doorbell ringer's identity and his suggestion was kicked upstairs to the agency honchos. After some discussion, they decided to convert the salesman to a government employee, a postman.

A team of eleven writers, among them some of the best in radio, worked for the *Cavalcade*. Besides Benét and Miller, there was Morton Wishengrad, one of radio's finest writers of drama; Miller's friend, poet Norman Rosten (a protégé of Benét) and broadcast historian and NBC script editor Erik Barnouw. The series also featured a fairly regular acting troupe which included Wally Maher and Will Geer, the latter famous in later years for his role as "Grandpa" on the television show *The Waltons*.

The U. S. armed forces were the subject of a number of shows in the *Cavalcade of America*. Three titles that were typical of *Cavalcade* shows dealing with the military are "Take Her Down," "Sky Nursemaid", a show about the Army Evacuation Service, and "The Sailor Takes a Wife." "Take Her Down" features Clark Gable, who shortly before had served in the Air Force as a gunner and photographer in air raids over Europe. He had attained the rank of major and earned an Air Medal. This, his first radio appearance since his release from active duty, was announced beforehand and there was a scramble for tickets.

But the folks who received them were quite disappointed.

Gable was playing the role of a submarine captain who sacrificed his life to save his crew. The roles that he and eight other actors were playing required the sounds of men in a submarine. To achieve this, they spent most of the performance speaking from offstage in a 10 by 12 isolation booth. An actor who worked on the show remembered the broadcast clearly. For all his fame, Gable was not particularly good at his craft, and on radio he had a special problem: Live radio broadcasts petrified him and he read his lines too slowly. On top of this, one of the actors in the booth passed wind during the performance. But



Cavalcade of America

Burgess Meredith, Agnes Moorehead, Jeanette Nolan, Ed Jerome, John McIntire, Ain MacAllaster and Ted deCorsia

they could not open the door until the end of the broadcast. Somehow the group managed to suppress their laughter and complete the show without cracking up on air.

"The Sailor Takes a Wife," by Allan Sloane, concerns the Merchant Marines, the "stepchild" of the World War II military. As we learn from the broadcast, in the first year of the war, the Merchant Marines, the "civilian navy," experienced a greater percentage of casualties than any other branch of the armed forces. In the story, Barry Arthur (played by Dick Powell) is a 4F newspaperman who tries first to volunteer for the service. He wishes to impress a certain young woman who is accusing him of being a "shirker." After he is rejected, he successfully joins the Merchant Marines. The first time Barry ships out, a Japanese submarine sinks his ship. The portrayal of the sinking, with scarce detail concerning injuries and deaths of the

men on board the ship, is interesting in how it typifies much of radio drama of the war era.

In the scene after the sinking, the young woman whose criticism drove him to join the service, comes to interview him in the hospital – and they declare their love for each other. But Barry is not coming back to the newsroom right away. He is going back to sea, this time for the "right reason." "I am going back . . . this time," he says, "because there's fighting going on and there's all those guys over there who need this stuff . . ."

Cavalcade of America continued its run way beyond the war era, into the middle of June 1957.

Not surprisingly considering the high quality of its writers, radio aficionados continue to hold the show in their highest esteem. ■

Time in TWFD October 11 to hear a Cavalcade of America broadcast.



OUR READERS/LISTENERS WRITE

WE GET MAIL

CICERO, IL— I enjoyed your *TWTD* salute to Art Hellyer (July 12). It was great hearing the clips from his radio shows of the past, but I would have to say the best part of the program was you, Ken Alexander and Art together. —**RICH BILEK**

ELMHURST, IL— I enjoyed the show with Art Hellyer. How old is he anyway? He sure sounded great! Too bad radio can't be like that today. I'd also like to say how much I enjoyed reading about the Elmwood Park tower and your connection to it.

—**KEN DIETZ**

(ED. NOTE— Art mentioned on our show that his birthday is August 7 and he turned 80 this year. "I can't believe it," he said.)

CASTLE ROCK, COLORADO— During my early teen-age years, I used to hang around the old viewing room at WLS-AM. On one occasion, I approached the station receptionist to find out if tours on WLS-FM were available. She shut me and my friend down pretty quickly saying no one is allowed to visit WLS-FM. Being young and unintimidated, we later slipped down the stairs to the FM. The lobby was empty but shortly thereafter, a young woman walked by and asked what we wanted. We asked for a tour. She looked like she'd never been asked this before and disappeared for a few minutes. Upon her return, she gave us a complete tour of WLS-FM.

At the end of the tour, we were escorted into the FM studio, where Art Hellyer was behind the board. He welcomed us with open arms and conversed with us while "Brother John" was broadcasting on the network from ABC in New York. Later, when Art went on the air, he introduced us to his audience and spoke with us for a while.

It's people like Art who helped me become even more enthusiastic about radio. He also demonstrated that anything is possible. One minute we're being shot down by a receptionist and an hour later we're on WLS-FM! Thanks to Art and other generous broadcasters, I spent over 10 years in the industry after earning my degree

in radio and television from SIU, in Carbondale.

Mr. Hellyer is more than a gifted broadcaster; he's a warm and generous human being. —**GUY POSTLEWAIT**

PALOS HILLS, IL— The Spring issue of the *Nostalgia Digest* was a great one to start your new [quarterly] format. It has been read from cover to cover. The article about old-time movie theaters brought back many good memories for me. Then, in the Summer issue, I see that you and some of your buddies were also hooked on the movies. Our days were filled to the brim with radio, movies and sports. Those really were the days, my friend.

"Memories of the Uptown Theatre" got me reminiscing about my younger days spent at the movies in Peoria, Illinois. Downtown there were six great theaters to choose from. On Saturdays we *had* to go find out if the hero would be able to extricate himself or the damsel in distress from another life-or-death situation. For nine cents it was worth the wait each week to find out. —**DON C. WHITE**

PARK RIDGE, IL— My compliments to Gardner Kissack for his well-written article, "Oh How We Loved *The Halls of Ivy*" [Summer, 2003]. His commentary has the same sparkle as the scripts of that delightful program. He has the same fondness for alliteration as did the writers, who were exceptionally gifted wordsmiths. As for the program itself, as a devoted listener I didn't consider myself even "slightly sophisticated." I was going to college at the time and sensed that it's president was not like Dr. William Todhunter Hall. But I suspended disbelief and simply enjoyed the wit and charm of Ronald and Benita Colman. —**BILL DeFOTIS**

PROSPECT HEIGHTS, IL— Bring back contributor Walter Scannell. Give us more of his "Songbirds" [Summer, 2003 issue], riveting reminiscences of big band singers. And please permit me to share a couple of vignettes where my paths crossed with

those Songbirds.

Cutting grammar school for a wicked excursion on the El to the Loop, circa 1941, I was attracted to a crowd in front of Walgreens at State and Randolph and slipped inside. In a scene both improbable and exciting, I was able to see Peggy Lee standing atop a table belting out tunes to celebrate the grand opening of this store.

One block away and 16 years later, I played bridge with Dinah Shore in the windows of Chicago Federal Savings at State and Washington. The intersection was sealed by police barriers for the gallery of crowds gathered outside. She wore one million dollars in jewels on loan from Peacock's in support of a Heart Association benefit. A photograph appeared in the Chicago Tribune and on the cover of our national bridge tournament magazine.

And let's put an asterisk on Mr. Scannell's warm treatment of Helen O'Connell. Wasn't it in 1979 when we sat in the Pavilion at Ravinia observing emcee Chuck Schaden as he introduced Tex Beneke and the Glenn Miller Band along with Bob Eberle and, yes, the fabulous Helen O'Connell? Still another nostalgic panorama etched in our memories.

—HARRY DALEBURN

GLEN ELLYN, IL— I caught part of the [Big Bands] program on July 5. Early in the program you played a cut from the Isham Jones orchestra entitled "Christopher Columbus." It is a lively cut with a catchy tune. I remembered that I have an old vinyl disc with the very same cut, complete with the intro announcement mentioning United Cigar Stores (how politically incorrect!). I have recently been listening to CDs from the Glen Ellyn Library of old jazz stuff. It is amazing how often the primary riff from that song is quoted in later stuff. I also found out, via a CD of early Ink Spots stuff, that the song has words.

I also found out part of the reason many young people referred to Guy Lombardo as Guy Lumbago. The band was technically very good. But on the song "If I Loved You" the singer sang the notes and not the words. His phrasing gutted the meaning of the song. And while I'm being nasty picky, while looking through the [Summer, 2003] *Nostalgia Digest* I stumbled upon Walter Scannell's article on Songbirds (solo women singers). I didn't realize they only came in

white. Where are Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Ethel Waters and quite a few others I can't think of now? There's at least a whole 'nother article there. Jazz and swing grew out of black people's music.

—DAVID CONDON

(ED. NOTE)— We've asked writer Walter Scannell to respond to you: I agree that my article was unbalanced by featuring only white singers. I had considered adding Ethel Waters, Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald, but in the end I decided that this would take the short article too far into other fields. The piece grew out of my wondering what happened to popular World War II-era vocalists once the big band period quickly ended. I wanted to show the effects of an era's passing rather than the entire big band field. Unlike the female white singers, the black "songbirds" remained popular far longer and still have a steady following. Billie Holiday drifted into blues, Ethel Waters became a touching actress, and Ella Fitzgerald let herself become a familiar "personality" late in her career. They did not drop into obscurity and were not forced into performing the same old songs the same old way for audiences aging with them. My decision not to go into their lives was the same as why I had excluded male singers, to maintain a focus in a short article. As I did my research, I thought that other writers had slighted black influences in swing, and yet because of space limitations I found myself doing the same thing. Perhaps someone more familiar with blues, jazz and black swing bands will submit a piece for *Nostalgia Digest*.

—WALTER SCANNELL

LINCOLNWOOD— I have been listening for at least 25 years now and want to thank you for all the good listening you have provided. I did talk to you once when I donated a Johnson's Wax floor polisher for Fibber McGee's closet and I was very glad to see that it has a prominent place in the exhibit at the Museum of Broadcast Communications. My mother hated that old machine and never used it, although she could never bring herself to throw it away. She kept it for decades in her own version of Fibber's closet. —GREG GOTTSTEIN

BROOKFIELD— We went from Brookfield to see a play in Glencoe on the first of July. Since I had looked inside your cover



MORE MAIL

advertising Don Roth's Blackhawk in my *Nostalgia Digest* for a while, I decided the time was right to visit the restaurant for the first time. Well, Chuck, I want to say the food was delicious. My husband said it was the best petite filets he has ever had. The service was above average, to say the least. But what really amazed me was the following incident: I mentioned when we entered that we had heard of the place through you. I figured it was never bad to give my favorite radio personality a plug! When coffee arrived we were presented with two absolutely delicious hot fudge sundaes, compliments of Bob Vorachek, General Manager.

It is a long drive and lots of traffic, but you can bet your boots we will return. In fact, we are trying to decide which friends to take with us on our second visit. Just wanted you to know how pleased we were with your suggestion to eat there. And the history of the restaurant speaks loads for the days of the big bands. Love your show. You bring so much joy to so many people!
-SONNY AND SHARON MANUEL

E-MAIL- Thanks for the great Bob Hope 100th Birthday Special [TWTD, May 24]. Your selection of shows was particularly good. He provided a great service to our country during his career as an entertainer. I'm sure his biggest regret is that Americans still have to go to war and he has to stay home. For me, it just isn't right to have a war and not have Bob Hope able to entertain the troops. It makes war even more sad. -HENRY SCHAPER

WARRENVILLE, IL- Just finished listening to your tribute to Bob Hope [TWTD, August 2]. Great stuff! There is almost nothing funnier than Hope's monologues and his bantering with Bing. And Hope as a dramatic actor on *Suspense* in "Death has a Shadow" ranks as some of his finest work. Too bad he didn't do more *Suspense* shows. Dramatic actors are usually unsuccessful as comedians, but comedians usually are superb dramatic actors to boot. Ken Alexander's tribute at the end of your show was one of the best I

have heard since Bob's passing.
-CHUCK HUCK

GRIFFITH, INDIANA- The president certainly hit the nail on the head when he said we had lost a great American when we lost Bob Hope. It would be hard to think of anyone who has come close to doing as much for the good ole USA as Bob. Whether Bob was entertaining the troops overseas or keeping morale up here on the Home Front, he was always there. Thank you for pre-empting "Remember Rosalind Russell" [scheduled for August 2] to present the Bob Hope tribute. Apart from coverage on the news (and I think a cable station ran a few of his movies), the overall lack of Bob Hope material on radio and TV was rather depressing last week. I guess the networks thought their silly reality shows were more important than a man who kept us laughing through the Second World War, Korea and Vietnam. At least you had enough class to say, "Hey, we just lost a legend here! It's time to take off our hats, bow our heads and pay some respect." Thanks a million, Mr. Schaden.

And you can be sure that there's a heck of a golf game going on up in Heaven! I wouldn't be surprised if Bing met him at the Pearly Gates with a golf bag over his shoulder. I can just picture it now: Bing and Bob dressed in their golf attire, Bob calling Bing "Lard" and Bing calling Bob "Hose Nose..." And a million GIs vying to be Bob's caddy. Thanks for the memories, Bob! -NICK DEFFENBAUGH

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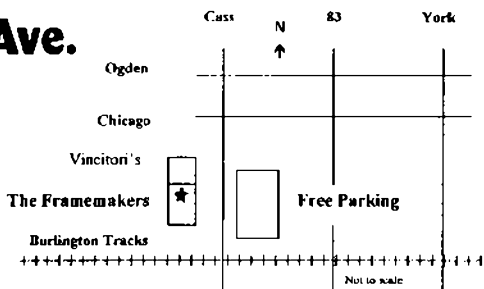
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← **W. C. FIELDS**

had a relatively short, but memorable, career on radio. Read Bill Oates' article which begins on 40.

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