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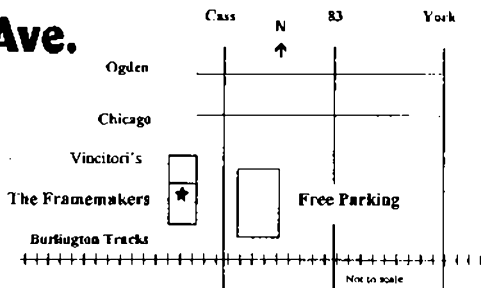
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Navy Pier, Navy Pier, Rah-Rah-Rah!

BY WAYNE KLATT

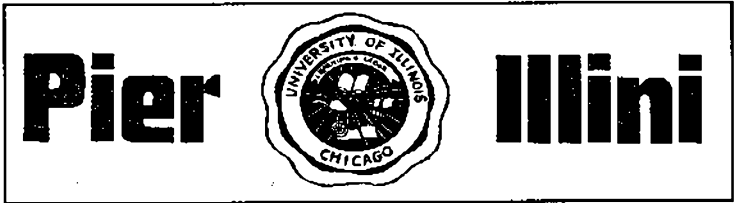
When I mention to younger people that I spent my first two years of college at Navy Pier, they stare

at me as if I majored in Ferris wheel. But for 19 years, what is now the city's Number One tourist attraction was a drab, cramped substitute for a Chicago campus of the University of Illinois.

The \$4 million Municipal Pier was built as a freight terminal and exhibit hall in the administration of Mayor Big Bill "the Builder" Thompson, who had no clear idea what purpose the boondoggle might have. It opened on June 25, 1916, and from then on was empty most of the year. Although the lake end served excursion boats, that trade was dwindling because of the growing popularity of the automobile. The pier was renamed Navy Pier to match the newly built Soldier Field, but by 1921 the Chicago Tribune was calling it a "white elephant."

When World War II ended, thousands of young men and women were trying to get into universities across the country. The Illinois legislature, alarmed by severe overcrowding at the downstate campus, sud-

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



denly remembered that some people lived in Chicago, too. In those times of lopsided perspectives, Mayor Ed Kelly had to mollify nervous businessmen relying on trade shows by assuring them that only the surplus part of the Pier would be used for education.

Only basic courses would be taught, and after a two-year weeding-out period anyone wanting to get a degree would have to enroll elsewhere. The system seemed designed to make us feel guilty for using up tax money just because we wanted a career.

The General Assembly voted the minimum amount of funds to gut one of the two half-mile pier "sheds" and build classrooms on land leased from the city. The pier was transferred, in the words of the Alumni News, "from idea to fact in less than 90 days." Actually, all the workers did was section off the northern tube into 52 classrooms and 22 laboratories separated by Beaverboard (a variation of plywood) uniformly painted battleship gray.

And so the *Pierniversity* opened on Oct. 21, 1946, the only college in America that could be sunk by a torpedo. If you were

curious about the class next to yours, you could watch it from where the Beaverboard almost met the front wall. If everyone kept still, you could even listen in.

When I started classes in 1958, the St. Lawrence Seaway was about to open and the reinforced shore just east of Navy Pier was being prepared as the Port of Chicago, justifying the college nickname of "Harvard on the Rocks." Walking from the Grand Avenue bus stop to the modest twin towers of the Head House (the entrance to the Pier), I soon could see ship after ship from all over the world. But there was no campus, no park, nothing but the economic reality that we were going to school in a long, narrow, one-and-a-half-story human warehouse.

The first thing I learned was that in winter we should take our coats with us to class. The gymnasium was in a large Quonset hut a short walk outside. Whoever designed such things must have been thinking of half a toilet paper roll, only it was made of metal and could house a blimp. The ROTC "parade ground" was outside the rotunda in the easternmost portion of

the pier. We had 10 minutes to hurry from the showers in the metal hut to the end of the tube, a total distance of more than three-quarters of a mile through two solid lanes of students. It could be done, but not by me.

In the early days of *Pi*erniversity a number of students – most of them young men studying under the GI Bill – whizzed along the corridor on roller skates. But in the overcrowded years of the late 1950s, there was no room to do anything except keep up with the crowd as students moved past the iron pillars like a slow-moving stampede that was set off every hour.

There were no adornments, no hallway windows, nothing to provide a distraction from the gray rooms and the bland single corridor except a biology exhibit consisting of a glass-enclosed large snake that was fed a mouse once a week. You could tell when the snake had eaten last by the location of the bulge in that coiled, scaly body. If the bulge was near the mouth, it was Monday; if at midpoint, Wednesday; if smaller and nearer the tail, Friday. Maybe that kept us in a morose mood. It was considered lucky if you glimpsed a body floating by in the lake lapping at our pilings. The wildlife we could see were insects and sometimes rats and, I'm told, an occasional bat.

The school had a large, sparsely furnished "lounge," where students could study in their time between classes, anywhere from 45 minutes to six hours. Of course we studied. After all, there were no Big Games, no homecoming parades, no fraternities and sororities, and few parties to provide a diversion.

In winter, the only heat came from a furnace that blasted hot air in a small part of the tube by the interior stairs near the east end. Even the bitter cold of our classrooms was better than braving that hellish wind, which was like walking behind a jet engine on take-off. In the summer, the only



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air conditioning was a door opened onto the truck delivery area. Long-haired young women who seemed so pretty in winter looked bedraggled from the unrelieved heat and humidity of summer in that above-ground subway of a college.

If you wanted to join a club, the best thing to do was post a bulletin board notice that you were starting one. There was virtually no interaction between students and teachers, unlike the mother campus at Champaign-Urbana, where you could go to a teacher's home to discuss a problem.

Teachers at Navy Pier tended toward the eccentric. My instructor in English 102 was a Civil War fanatic, and all our English papers had to pertain to the period of Lincoln. The rumor was that he was using our research for a doctorate in history. (While I was in his class he sold a movie script, *Rebel Territory*, to Sammy Davis Jr., but the film was never made.) My zoology teacher taught only flowers, and then committed suicide at home two months into the semester. To make up for all the time lost, we were given the toughest biology teacher in the school – and, my God, did we learn!

The "peninsular campus" was cobbled out of only the northern wing of the twin tubes at the Pier. The south wing was still

used for small-scale trade shows, and trucks rumbled by our ersatz classrooms every day. The Washington Post called our school the noisiest campus in the world. We had the feeling – whether true or not – that since there was no admission requirement beyond the ability to breathe, law-makers were hoping we would give up in

despair because it cost the state too much to educate us in those sensible days of low tuition.

Yet we had some very good teachers, and, in the end, that is all that mattered. What did not kill our spirit made us stronger, and we who stuck it out for two years and went on to Champaign-Urbana or another university were prepared for anything. We could laugh at classmates who found it difficult to get from one lecture hall to another in the quadrangle in 15 minutes.

In all, more than 100,000 men and women received part of their education in the now-gone tube. The alumni included former governor James R. Thompson, former top Chicago policeman Joseph DiLeonardi, mystery writer Stuart Kaminsky, jazz pianist Ramsey Lewis, Circuit Court Judge Warren Wolfson, radio host Chuck Schaden, and television newsmen John Chancellor.

When the Chicago Circle campus opened on February 22, 1965, *Pierville* became only a memory and an eyesore. But now, thanks to a \$75 million revamping completed in 1995, it's the Cinderella of tourist attractions, with a Ferris wheel and summertime fireworks. Go figure. ■

YOU AIN'T HEARD NOTHIN' YET!

BY WALTER SCANNELL



Al Jolson

Al Jolson loved to stand on the balcony of a New York skyscraper and look down on the bright lights of Broadway and think of it as “his” street. But in this bootleg-mad year of 1927 he was no longer effervescent with confidence. He was about to take a career risk and betray a friend at the same time by appearing in a movie version of *The Jazz Singer*, a role George Jessel was still making famous on the stage.

Jessel would claim he refused to do the film version when he read the script and saw that instead of giving up Broadway, Jackie Rabinowitz does a big show number at the end. In reality, the script he saw had the same ending as the play. Jessel said he went down to a theater where Jolson was playing and told him about his decision, and Al assured him that he was right in turning the movie down. “The next morning I read in the paper that Al was going to do this,” Jessel said. His only consolation was that everyone was telling him talkies would be just a fad.

Warner Bros. had caused no great stir when it began adding music to its films with *Don Juan*, and *The Jazz Singer* would essentially be just another silent film but with musical moments and a few passages of largely unscripted dialogue. The play-

wright, Samson Raphaelson from central Illinois, admitted the story was “corny” but he knew it was a crowd-pleaser.

Jolson didn’t want to rehearse because he had a practice of never doing the same performance twice, one reason his audiences would come early and stay for a second show. Since he always performed impromptu, he had a one-on-one rapport with his fans that no other American singer ever had.

Unlike the well-bred Jessel, Jolson was born in the Russia ghetto of parents who had to scrimp for passage money to the United States. Al – his real name was Asa Yoelson – wasn’t even sure of the day or year he was born, later choosing May 26, 1886, because it sounded about right. His father, as a cantor, was sternly Orthodox but Al was American all the way and never thought himself particularly Jewish. But, as in his future movie role, he sang as a boy in his father’s synagogue in Washington, D.C.

Al and his mildly delinquent brother Harry took a train to New York to stay with an uncle. Al fell in love with the Broadway theater district just from marveling at the marquees and posters. He and Harry then took a train to Baltimore, where Harry got into a little trouble. The police mistakenly took Al to St. Mary’s Industrial Home for Boys, a reform school that helped turn out Babe Ruth and dancer Bill “Bojangles”

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

Robinson. But as soon as Al could, he ran away – and joined a circus!

The boy returned home when the circus folded, but he knew that performing was in his blood. He took a small role in the play *Children of the Ghetto* and supplemented his income by occasional petty stealing. Now an eager but undisciplined teenager, he decided

to turn his modest voice into a career and tried vaudeville, in which he joked with the audience between songs. His act was as if he were performing in front of his family for attention.

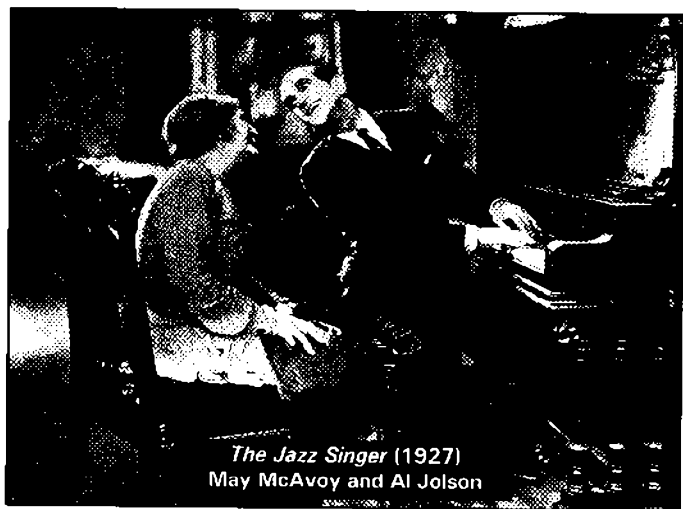
Jolson would later say that a Negro performer suggested he would be funnier in blackface, a fading tradition from minstrel days. The absurdity of his appearance in burnt cork and white gloves made audiences pay more attention to him, and the makeup let him hide his initial insecurity – perhaps too well.

He added whistling and unchorco-

graphed dancing to his act, and one night got down on one knee to sing because he had a toc infection and it eased the pain. Whatever his fans loved, he kept performing forever. In the early 1920s, he introduced “April Showers” and “California, Here I Come,” helping composers Buddy DeSylva and Lou Silvers write songs to his untrained style. Gus Kahn gave Jolson “Toot Toot Tootsie, Good-bye.” Reviewers noted that Jolson gripped an audience as soon as he walked on the stage and never let go. He became addicted to applause, and never denied it.

Brimming with confidence, he once ad-libbed to his audience, “You ain’t heard nothin’ yet!” The audience screamed and demanded more, and the line would be his signature for 44 years. Jolson the World’s Greatest Entertainer was born, but in some ways Jolson the man – the *mensch* – had died. He was a great





The Jazz Singer (1927)
May McAvoy and Al Jolson

April 30, 1927, for a flood relief program. The national exposure made him more popular than Jessel, and Warner Bros. decided to hire him instead of his friend for the world's first (partly) talkie. Jessel had been asking for more money because the film would be in sound, killing his Broadway run of *The Jazz Singer*, and Jol-

son was eager to add movies to his career. For Warner's, it was a no-brainer. (Jessel spent the rest of his long life feeling double-crossed.)

guy to know casually, but no one could ever become emotionally close to him, not even his four wives.

The camera operated in a booth that looked like a refrigerator crate with windows, and the door was sealed to keep the sounds from being recorded. Jack Warner Jr. said that when a scene was finished, the cameraman "staggered out of the nearly airless box." Since the usual lights emitted a low buzz, the silent scenes were shot first and the songs and brief dialogue passages were filmed with incandescent lights, which meant using a relatively new type of film.

Okay, let's list them here because they had no effect on his life: small-town girl Henrietta Keller; dancer Ethel Delmar; actress-dancer Ruby Keeler, and, late in life, Earle Galbraith, who went from autograph-seeker to bride.

Jolson sang on radio for the first time on



The studio decided to keep in Jolson's gabby interruptions to the "Blue Skies" number because he was likable and funny, and to women he, in the words of film historian Scott Eyman, "was blatantly sexual." The producers even decided to give the movie a "sock" ending, Jolson singing "Mammy."

The scene negated the drama, but the studio thought this was a film for movie fans, not theatre devotees. After all, the three Warner brothers were putting their careers on the line with this expensive film, but Sam died the day after it premiered in New



Go Into Your Dance (1935)
Ruby Keeler and Al Jolson

York. Harry and Jack were both grieving and exalting in the success of their experiment at the same time.

The entire entertainment industry changed so swiftly after *The Jazz Singer*

that Jolson helped make himself passé. His career did not bottom out, but he was in that mellow area of pleasant nostalgia. No longer satisfied with musicals that were just reviews, he chose to star in a straight dramatic play, *The Wonder Bar*, a sort of *Grand Hotel* about seedy events happening in a nightclub. Jolson was good in the movie version, but the public didn't want him serious and modern.

So it was back to the old songs on radio's *Kraft Music Hall* and being the third richest man in Hollywood, after Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd. Al and Ruby Keeler adopted a boy from a Chicago agency in 1935 and life seemed good, but Ruby could not stand his ego, with her husband at times referring to himself as "the king."

Jolson settled for supporting roles in a few films, such as *Rose of Washington Square* (1939), the plot stolen from the life of Fanny Brice.

Later that year, Ruby interrupted one of his card games by calling to say she was



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walking out on him. He loved her, but not as much as he loved gambling and applause.

Jolson might have become a has-been, but then World War II erupted. He sang for the troops, and when he returned to the U.S. he personally telephoned families and told them that their boy or husband was all right. Unexpectedly popular again, Jolson decided when the war ended that he deserved a memorial – not a statue, but a movie. He envisioned something like *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942) and even wanted James Cagney to play him. Of course, Jolson said, he would do the songs himself, which would have made Jimmy look even more ludicrous.

Columbia Pictures writer Sidney Buchman (*Holiday*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*) was working for a “poverty row” studio and could not hope to plan an expensive production like *Yankee Doodle Dandy*. He came across a fresh notion –

basing the film on Al’s real life. What a concept! To do this, Buchman combined his first three wives into one, “Julie Benson,” who was mostly Ruby Keeler.

Many performers would be insulted at the suggestion that they were the villains in their own lives, but Al embraced the idea. He not only painstakingly coached unknown actor Larry Parks on his mannerisms, he performed “Swanee” himself in a long shot (a fact not realized until a print of *The Jolson Story* was greatly enlarged in 1969). But someone abruptly thought the film needed a song other than Jolson standbys.

Film composer Saul Chaplin was in a panic with only six hours’ notice. To help him out, Al hummed a lovely old Viennese melody. Saul quickly wrote some lyrics and added a lilting second part to the waltz, and the result, “The Anniversary Song,” became one of the post-war year chart-

busters.

The movie went on to become one of the hits of 1946, and Jessel, who had been left behind in Jolson’s dust, snidely said no truer movie biography was ever made.

Jolson thrived on the success of the film, appearing on dozens of radio shows as featured guest. Eventually, he became the star of his own show, the *Kraft Music Hall*, for two seasons in the 1940s.

Al even insisted on a sequel to *The Jolson Story*, even though all the material was used up, so Buchman cranked out the thin



Larry Parks

Jolson Sings Again, based on Al’s love affair with his fourth wife.

The 1949 movie was successful only because it rode on the coattails of Columbia’s biggest hit. Some said that at 64, Jolson had never sung better than on that soundtrack. By then the young actor portraying him was so well known that Jolson said, “When I die they’re going to bury Larry Parks.”

With two films as his legacy, Al was ready to pass on. But in the autumn of 1950 he made a tour of American troops in Korea. I was in the fifth grade in a Chicago parochial school on October 24, 1950, when a nun entered the classroom in tears to say the radio had just announced that Al Jolson had died the day before of a heart attack shortly after returning to America. She wanted to say more but couldn’t.

Unique as Al Jolson was, an era had died with him. ■

Jolson on Radio

SOURCE: *On The Air, the Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio* by John Dunning. Oxford University Press, 1998.



Shell Chateau (1935)

Back row, from left, maestro Victor Young, actor Lionel Barrymore, singer Carmel Myers and Al Jolson. In the front row are the Watson Sisters comedy team and comedian Vince Barnett

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“The World’s Greatest Entertainer” had a decent career on radio, entertaining millions who were not able to see him on the stage or screen.

In addition to scores of guest appearances on a variety of programs, Jolic was the star of a number of popular radio series between 1932 and 1949:

Presenting Al Jolson with Ted Fio Rito and the orchestra. Chevrolet, NBC. November 18, 1932 - February 24, 1933.

Kraft Music Hall with Paul Whiteman and the orchestra. Kraft Foods, NBC. August 3, 1933 - August 16, 1934.

Shell Chateau with Victor Young and the orchestra. Shell Oil Company, NBC. April 6, 1935 - March 6, 1936.

Lifebuoy Program with Harry “Parkayakarkus” Einstein, Martha Raye and Lud Gluskin and the orchestra. Lever Bros., CBS. December 22, 1936 - March 14, 1939.

Colgate Program with Monty Woolley and Gordon Jenkins and the orchestra. Colgate-Palmolive, CBS. October 6, 1942 - June 29, 1943.

Kraft Music Hall with Oscar Levant and Lou Bring and the orchestra. Kraft Foods, NBC.

October 2, 1947 - May 26, 1949.

TUNE IN TWTD in August to hear an abundance of Al Jolson’s radio appearances... on his own program and as a special guest on many other shows.



Kraft Music Hall (1948)
Al Jolson and Oscar Levant

PHOTOFEST

Bergen Evans and *Down You Go*

BY MICHEL SANTAQUILANI

September 19, 2004, marks the centenary of the birth of Bergen Evans, late Professor of English at Northwestern University, author and co-author, respectively, of *The Natural History of Nonsense* and *A Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage*, as well as author of a half-dozen other books and also scores of articles, and host - sometimes "expert" or "authority" - of numerous game, quiz, and "public affairs" programs in the pioneering days of television.

This last of Evans' careers was rich enough that we should use this occasion, in particular, to remember it. For not counting a large number of guest appearances, Bergen Evans participated, in various capacities, in eleven television shows broadcast between 1949 and 1967. They were *Majority Rules*, *It's About Time*, *Down You Go*, *Of Many Things*, *Super Ghost*, *The \$64,000 Question*, *The \$64,000 Challenge*, *Top Dollar*, *The Last Word*, *English For Americans*, and *Quote-Unquote*.

It was as host of the game show *Down You Go*, however, that Evans gained the better part of his television celebrity. For this reason, *Down You Go* merits special scrutiny, and we will look back on Evans through its prism. It was, we'll find, a show that was popular for a number of reasons, but mainly so because it offered something different: As the *Chicago Tribune* once bitingly put it, unlike other game shows, *Down You Go* treated its viewers as "alert, intelligent, and interested."

As Harry Castleman and Walter Podrazik

Michel Santaquilani is a part-time college instructor and a free-lance writer living in Chicago.



PHOTO: FOST

point out in *Watching TV: Four Decades of Television*, of the game and quiz shows broadcast between 1950 and 1951, the bulk were "practically interchangeable" but three were "distinctive," *Strike It Rich*, *You Bet Your Life*, and *Down You Go*. In fact, these three became some of the genre's most successful examples, *Strike It Rich* and *You Bet Your Life* enduring over a decade, and *Down You Go*, over five years (May 1951 to September 1956).

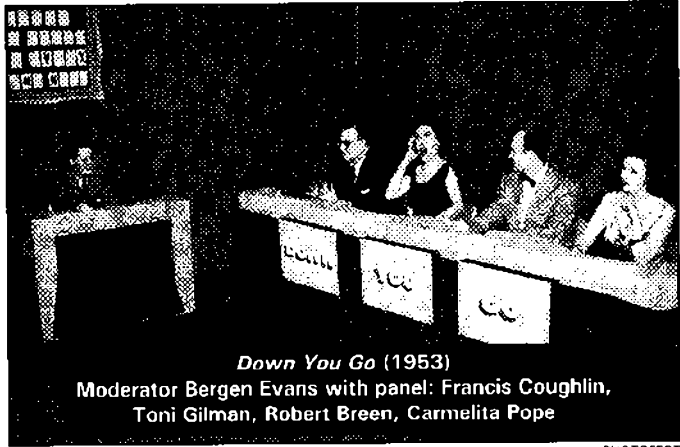
That *Strike It Rich* and *Down You Go* achieved the success they did isn't any wonder that given they were creations of Louis G. Cowan, who "packaged" many a hit in television's first decade, most notably *The \$64,000 Question*. But this is said with the benefit of hindsight. At the time, the success of *Down You Go*, for instance, was a significant source of wonder to some of the nation's top television critics who felt that the show had overcome serious obstacles.

It was "despite" that the show "assumed

a certain amount of literacy and intelligence among its viewers" that *Down You Go* had "done quite well," wrote *Newsweek*, for example. Recall - those who can recall - that *Down You Go* might have been a very simple game in design - a version of "hangman," really - but that the phrases the panel had to guess were often literary or historical references, among other possibilities; and then the clues, which Evans himself devised, were, as Evans described them, "teasing and distorted hints."

For *Time*, on the other hand, it was the show's place of origin, namely Chicago, which had been the stumbling block. A "New York adman," *Time* reported, had warned Louis Cowan that obtaining sponsorship for the show hinged entirely on his moving it to New York and replacing its panel, at least, with the glitterati of that city. Cowan, however, disregarded the warning, and to his credit: for *Down You Go* grew in popularity and by September of 1951 had attracted the sponsorship of Old Gold cigarettes.

This "adman," according to *Time*, also warned Cowan against Evans himself, whom he called "adenoidal." Various descriptions, years after *Down You Go* ceased its run, as "a buzz saw hitting a pine knot" (*Chicago Tribune*) and "a bad pitch - high and inside" (*LA Times*), Evans' voice was unsuited to broadcasting and probably many other fields. But Cowan retained him nonetheless, and without ill effect. Apparently what Evans brought to television in the way of his wit and learning people deemed well worth the price of their aural



Down You Go (1953)
Moderator Bergen Evans with panel: Francis Coughlin,
Toni Gilman, Robert Breen, Carmelita Pope

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discomfort.

But what was *Down You Go*, precisely, and what made it such appealing fare that millions tuned in to watch it once a week - indeed, *sixteen million*, *Time* reported in 1952? Again, *Down You Go* was a very simple game in which the object - for four panelists - was to guess phrases based on clues, most or even all of them puns, wholly devised by Evans, although the panelists were aided by a game board on which they could see how many words made up each phrase, and how many letters, each word.

Once his turn came, a panelist could do one of two things: He could suggest a letter or guess the phrase. Suggesting a letter not part of the phrase resulted in his going "down," or in other words, his being disqualified from the round. Incorrectly guessing the phrase disqualified him too, although each panelist was permitted to make one free guess to start with. A round ended when either all the panelists were "down" or one of them guessed the phrase correctly.

The viewers could participate too, namely by supplying the phrases. It's a measure of the show's popularity that by mid-July of 1953, viewers had mailed in nearly five and a quarter million phrases, according to *Newsweek*. At any rate, viewers whose phrases *Down You Go* used were rewarded in several ways. Apart from win-

ning money or merchandise, or both, because their entries were chosen, viewers were paid additional money if a panelist was disqualified, and yet more, plus a complete set of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, if all of them were.

The phrases were shown to viewers in advance, and that was just what they wanted, evidently. Interviewed in 1972 by the *Chicago Tribune*, Evans recalled that, although the producers of *Down You Go* received many requests to the effect, their attempts to withhold phrases from viewers always caused the show's ratings to drop. Evans attributed the viewers' behavior to "vanity," but whatever the case, it's plain that viewers weren't looking to compete with the panel when they tuned in to *Down You Go*.

But if not, what explained their preference for the show? As more than one reviewer noted, it wasn't the game itself of *Down You Go* – the game "device" or "gadget," in *Variety's* odd lingo – that attracted viewers. This was run-of-the-mill, and nothing, in its essentials, that the public couldn't have found elsewhere on television many times over. Rather, it was the host and panel – how they played the game and what they brought to the show in the way of their personalities – that accounted for its large following.

Of the two, however, Evans was the star, although not merely because of the centrality of his role. After all, the history of television is replete with examples of panel show hosts eclipsed by their panels. More people remember Arlene Francis of *What's My Line?* for instance, than John Daly, the host of that show. In any case, what made Evans very popular was, in short, his "wit" and "erudition" – two words used in connection with Evans which no treatment of *Down You Go* seems to be without.

Though he was "witty" and "erudite" in several ways, Evans was chiefly so in the

clues he devised for the panel. While the show's prompt cards do contain mediocre specimens – for instance, "One who has given the best jeers of his life to literature" (i.e. book reviewer); or "This could be Dagmar and Jane Russell" (i.e. bosom buddies) – more often than not they contain superior, and sometimes far superior, examples – for instance, "Favored by editors, opposed by dry cleaners" (i.e. free press); or "Hypochondriac's conversation" (i.e. organ recital).

While their appreciation of the clues stopped just short of their wanting to decipher them, viewers nonetheless admired their intelligence and, over time, Evans' ability to craft good ones consistently and for years. Evans' own description of what it took to devise them more than justifies the viewers' admiration. He wrote that "a clue...must be factually true, immediately obvious to an immense audience of all ages and occupations, funny if possible, or, perhaps, unexpectedly profound or moving, and utterly bewildering to the panel. Such clues are not easily formulated..."

It wasn't just that Evans had mastered the art of punning after having both studied and taught English for three decades. The clues were more than just puns. It was also that he could raise almost literally any topic in them after having spent years doing research of a very broad nature; the kind of research required to write his most famous book, *The Natural History of Nonsense*, the content of which is so varied that George S. Kaufman described it as "Crowded to the covers with things I never knew before." "You can dine out on it for weeks," he added.

What's more, when Evans and the panel would converse between rounds, his clues were rich enough to generate discussion of an even broader range of topics than they themselves contained. In one show, for instance, a clue relating to the giant in *Jack*



Down You Go (1955)

Panel: Arthur Treacher, Hildy Parks, Jimmy Nelson, Jayne Mansfield

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and the *Beanstalk* led to a discussion of the Cyclops in Homer's *Odyssey*, and then to a critique of the movie *Ulysses* starring Kirk Douglas. And a clue having to do with penitentiaries inspired talk of famous escapes from German POW camps and the merits of a novel on the subject titled *Trojan Horse*.

Thus far Evans and his clues. But what of the panelists whose job it was to decipher them? If Evans was the star of *Down You Go*, what drew the audience to *them*? Apart from a few minor criticisms leveled in the beginning – the women of the group, for instance, were advised not to “mug and play up to the camera” (*Variety*) – you find in reviews of *Down You Go* almost nothing but compliments for Francis Coughlin, Toni Gilman, Robert Breen, and Carmelita Pope.

Although they were said in *Variety* to have “poise” and “charm,” and to be “smooth of tongue,” they were mostly lauded, as Evans was, for their intelligence. As the same publication wrote, they had “brain sparkle,” and were “mental sharpies” and “smart without being smart-alecky.” Of course, the breadth and depth of their knowledge varied a great deal – Robert Breen and Francis Coughlin enjoy-

ing the advantage – but this was only because their backgrounds and occupations varied too.

Breen was a colleague of Evans's at Northwestern University, and Coughlin was a radio and newspaper writer, and “a scholar himself,” according to the *New York Times*.

Carmelita Pope and Toni Gilman, on the other hand, had both been stage actresses, Pope having played in *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1949 in New York alongside Karl Malden, Uta Hagen, and Ralph Meeker; and Gilman having played alongside Jackie Gleason in *Follow the Girls*, a musical comedy which ran for two years on Broadway.

But it's Evans and not the reviewers of the day who can explain best what drew the audience of *Down You Go* to the panel. This is because at the start of every show – at least during the local (Chicago) revival of *Down You Go* in the early Sixties – when the time came for Evans to introduce the panelists, his practice was to capture the essence of each of them using a few carefully chosen adjectives which normally rhymed and were alliterative.

A random selection of them turned up the following: Describing, in order, Pope, Breen, Gilman, and Coughlin, Evans would say, “The pulchritudinous and pensive...the brash and broadminded...the giddy and gorgeous...and the corpulent and cogitative...”; “The budding loveliness of...that gay sprout...the full flower of beauty...and the bloomin'...”; “The ingratiating...the cerebrating...the

irradiating...and the cogitating..."; "The rare...the resourceful...the roistering...and the round..."; and most concisely, "The sweet...the suave...the swell...and the swollen..."

From the date of its premiere to early December of 1954, *Down You Go* originated from Chicago and, specifically, WGN-TV (during which time, and for about six months afterward, it was carried nationally by the DuMont network). For reasons that aren't clear, however, it was broadcast thereafter from New York, although as far as personnel were concerned, it wasn't at all the same show: Evans and Coughlin remained, but not Breen, Gilman, and Pope — whether of their own volition or that of the producers.

In their places were cast not three permanent panelists, but rather, quite a few temporaries, the idea having been to pair Evans with a largely rotating panel of New York notables. Some of the more regular participants were, for instance, Phyllis Cerf, Phil Rizzuto, Boris Karloff, actress Patricia Cutts, novelist Jean Kerr, John Kieran, Jr., and Arthur Treacher. Some merely occasional panelists or guests, on the other hand, were Laraine Day, Rocky Graziano, Elizabeth Montgomery, writer Jerome Weidman, and cartoonist Walt Kelly (creator of *Pogo*).

The reviews of *Down You Go* in this post-Chicago period were nearly all laudatory, even the one published just prior to Evans's departure in late June of 1956 according to which, *Variety* wrote, the show "remains a bright and likable 30-minute affair..." Why the show was discontinued, then, is a bit of a mystery (it ended on September 8 with Bill Cullen its host). Although the information is scant, and no definite conclusion can be reached, one explanation is based on *New York Times* television critic Jack Gould's view of the show's move to New York: that the change of city and panel was "a grievous mistake."

That is, while the quality of *Down You Go* in New York remained high, its popularity nonetheless declined, because there it lacked a key advantage it had in Chicago (the very one *Time's* "New York adman" thought, rather, a *disadvantage*), namely a panel composed of fresh faces, not, as *Variety* put it, "the 'professional sophisticates' who roller-skate from one Gotham-originated panel show to another..." As Gould wrote in January of 1955, "the New York version [of *Down You Go*] has the fatal Broadway touch."

Down You Go, the *Chicago Tribune* wrote in 1952, "operates on the heretofore preposterous principle that a quiz show does not need to cater to the lowest common denominator of public intelligence, but the highest." The same sort of principle, however, underlay *all* of Evans' shows, and this was because Evans purposely chose to participate exclusively in shows that were edifying, or at least as edifying as television and its advertisers allowed.

That Evans chose to do so is a reflection of his having been first and foremost a teacher, and especially one who didn't believe that teaching was a duty to be performed only within academe and the four walls of a classroom. Evans wasn't a television host who just happened to have been a teacher; he was a teacher who saw that by hosting television shows he could reach far more pupils than he could have in a million years at Northwestern.

It is hoped that the centenary of Evans' birth will be the occasion not just for a few historians of popular culture, but for Americans in general, to devote some portion of their time to discovering, or as the case may be, rediscovering this true contribution of Bergen Evans to television broadcasting; especially as, after the passage of decades, and because of the scarcity of tapes and kinescopes, it is in real danger of being forgotten altogether. ■

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A Veteran Broadcaster Looks Back

My Golden Age of Radio

BY JACK D. COOMBE

To those of us who were around in the 1930s and 1940s, the term "Golden Age of Radio" will strike a nostalgic tone, especially to one who had the privilege of having lived and worked as a writer in the medium during that epoch.

It was a colorful and raucous epoch of history with its platoon of such luminaries as Bob Hope, Fred Allen, George Burns and Jack Benny. These were people of incredible talent during the most incredible period in show business.

As a young lad, back in 1935, I had the privilege of being a part of that star-studded period; and later on having worked with some of the famous stars of the medium: Danny Kaye, for whom I wrote for a time; Laurence Olivier; Basil Rathbone... just to mention a few. Of course, none of us realized at the time that we were a part of a golden epoch of any stripe. We performed our duties as well as we were able, and shared the triumphs of good shows, the heartbreaks of poor ones, and let the devil take the hindmost.

Jack D. Coombe, of Northbrook, Illinois, is a veteran broadcaster who began his career in 1935. A published author, he is currently working on a book about his illustrious career.



Jack Coombe in 1947 at WNOG, Norwich, Connecticut

COOMBE COLLECTION

Doing a network radio show was a fascinating endeavor, because it was the stepchild of the music halls of England and the vaudeville and burlesque houses of America. It was a colorful and raucous mixture of music, comedy and drama with the diverse elements of vaudeville and burlesque tossed in and all rolled into one enormous jelly roll of unsurpassed family entertainment.

The comedy shows, in particular, were presented in front of an audience, with an array of microphones standing guard around the perimeter and an orchestra in the pit. We performers did nothing but read lines into the microphones, yet we transported audiences in front of us, plus countless people from all walks of life at home with their radios, into lights of fancy.

Sometimes the shows gave the impression of a devil-may-care attitude with a sense of abandonment. But they were far from that; they were created in smoke-filled rooms with empty coffee pots, soiled cups and soiled plates all over the rooms, dur-

ing the broadcast periods. Each comedy script was carefully scrutinized to determine if every gag was just right for the concept of the program. It was hard, grueling work, its happy-go-lucky aura notwithstanding. But we felt that everything worth doing well must be done well.

To keep the writing staff finely honed, we sometimes played word games (we labeled them "concept games" to keep our wits alert and sharp). We would write as many punch lines to a selected gag as we could invent. For example, we'd take a gag lead-in like: "How skinny is she?" and attach punch lines to it. My favorites to that one were, "She's so skinny, every time she drinks tomato juice she looks like a thermometer" and "She's so skinny her dog keeps burying her in the backyard."

Corny gags? Well, maybe, but take it from me, audiences loved them, looked for more, and we were always ready to oblige with fresh, new material. And the most remarkable fact about it is that it was great fun creating laughter.

A strange ritual with unexpected results always followed, after the production and



...in 1950 at WPTL, Providence

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presentation of a show. It seemed that as many times as we went over the material in the script, it would inevitably happen that we laughed heartily at our own gags when the show was broadcast. But that didn't stop us from learning our mistakes by the process of elimination and, of course, through audience response.

The one aspect of creating radio shows, of which we were most proud, was the lack of blue material. We were under rigid rules...the "no-no list, as we called it...that radio networks laid down. Certain swear words, for example, were forbidden and the irony is that today these words, many being vivid, are tossed about freely and with abandon.



...in 1942 during *Hello from Hawaii* on KGMB/CBS:
Cpl. Dominick Peters, USO Camp Shows director Don George,
Seaman 1st Class Jack Coombe, orchestra leader Johnny Noble

SIGNAL CORPS PHOTO: COOMBE COLLECTION



...in 1949 at WRIB, Providence
with band leader Benny Goodman

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But we had to dance around the subject of skin color, for example, even though many of our most famous radio personalities were depicted as black: Jack Benny's Rochester was an example as were the very popular duo of NBC's *Amos 'n' Andy*.

Ethnic origin was another subject around which we tiptoed, although characters such as Fred Allen's Mrs. Nussbaum and Ajax Cassidy were the principal elements of his show in the segment *Allen's Alley*. The audiences accepted them with a great deal of pleasure, judging by the phenomenal Hooper ratings the show received over and over. The dialects were nothing new to radio audiences steeped in the tradition of vaudeville in which dialects were a source of so much humor. Danny Kaye, the master of dialects, is a good example of this phenomenon; consider his famous "Russian Composer" skit in which he names 60 Russian composers in 32 seconds.

In today's TV parlance, "situation comedy" is centered in a character or group of characters in a situation one would expect them to be in once the format, or 'way of going,' has been established. In the sitcom *Friends*, for example, the group of principal characters find themselves in one fa-

miliar situation after another, and the thrust of the show centers around their reactions to that particular situation. This, of course, is the same technique used by fiction writers and playwrights; the same applies to comedy writing. The characters react to the particular situation they encounter, and their reactions must be true to their characters.

Consider the classic show in which Jack Benny encounters a hold-up man who asks him for his wallet. How can we forget his reaction to the demand "Your money or your life." After a long pause, he responds with, "I'm thinking it over." The answer is true to Benny's character. So we can sum it up: comedy, like drama, consists of a familiar character in an unfamiliar situation. The theory is the same, but with comedy the approach, or attack, is different.

My experiences during the Golden Age immeasurably influenced my later career, especially in the important realm of spontaneity. There were times when that training saved my career. For example, one day, while at WNOX in Norwich, Connecticut, in 1947, I had signed to do a show from a large cleaning establishment over a regional network. The location site had been turned into a large set complete with an orchestra and local celebrities as guests.

As we drew close to air time, the orchestra had failed to show up and, as the minutes ticked away on the clock, we realized that the entire project was in jeopardy. Optimistically, I felt that the band and guests would appear at the last minute and save the day. But they failed to show up and it was panic time. We were going on the air right on the hour, because it was a live show and at that time we didn't have tape recording equipment to record and play it later.

I was given the signal from the show's director and we were on the air, come what may. I could do nothing else but jump in and do what I could to save the day. Then I

called upon my long stage and radio experience, rolled up my sleeves and launched into a one-man show. I told jokes, did impressions of famous celebrities and, using a falsetto voice, ended up interviewing a match stick in the bottom of a waste basket. That showed how desperate I had become. A lot of money and time had been invested in the project. When I had almost reached the ultimate limit, the band and guest artists showed up and saved the day.

Fortunately, the show proved to be a good one and the sponsor, who had a background in show business, understood the situation and was willing to overlook the unfortunate beginning. Instead of finding myself in deep trouble, I was lauded and promoted for my resourcefulness and talent, and earned an unexpected promotion

to my career.

All these happenings point to the fact that experience in the Golden Age of Radio molded my career in show business. Even to this day, I have called upon my knowledge and ability to produce shows on cable TV comparable to ones from that time.

After the Golden Age of Radio was over, I remained in radio as an announcer, producer and writer. From the '40s to this day, I worked for five radio stations and the CBS network, as well as doing stage and film work.

But I never lost my love of radio, greatly missing the challenges and excitement of doing live shows, especially with the spontaneity now gone from the medium. Tapes and CDs will never completely replace them. ■

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STARRING RALPH BYRD

CALLING DICK TRACY!

BY MATTHEW C. HOFFMAN

In the summer of 1990, just prior to the release of the Warren Beatty *Dick Tracy* film, local Chicago television began showing the feature-length versions of the old *Dick Tracy* serials. When the Beatty film had come and gone, I was still thinking of those cliffhangers, so impressed was I with the actor who originally played the title role, Ralph Byrd. In the years to come, I would see the serials again and again in their entirety – all 60 chapters – and appreciate them as exciting action films.

The four Tracy serials, especially the middle two – *Dick Tracy Returns* (1938) and *Dick Tracy's G-Men* (1939) – are the finest chapterplays Republic Pictures ever put out. But what helped make them so memorable was the casting of Byrd in the role. He was the screen's one and only Dick Tracy, bringing enthusiasm to the part and becoming a symbol of decency and author-

ity in the eyes of Saturday matinee audiences of the 1930s.

Ralph Byrd, related to the famous Byrds of Virginia and a relative of polar explorer Admiral Richard E. Byrd, was born in Dayton, Ohio, on April 22, 1909. It should come as no surprise that he was a Boy Scout (with 37 merit badges to his credit) who became Eagle Scout and then scout master. (By age 21 he would become District Commissioner.) He attended Steele High School in Dayton and was a four-letter athlete. Ralph acted in school drama productions and was a soloist in the church choir. This led to some local radio work. He then performed with a Midwest stock company called the Albright Players, but it was his singing that brought him to Hollywood in 1934 and to more radio work.

While studying at the Hollywood Little Theatre, he was spotted by a talent scout and this led to a small role in *Hell-Ship Morgan* (1936). This George Bancroft vehicle is often listed as one of Ralph's first movies, but a year earlier he had appeared



Dick Tracy Returns (1938)
Ralph Byrd

HOFFMAN COLLECTION

Matthew C. Hoffman of Niles, Illinois is a film historian and free-lance writer.

in Universal's *Chinatown Squad*. After stops at Poverty Row's Puritan Pictures and RKO, Byrd turned up at Republic Pictures shortly before the casting call for the first *Dick Tracy* serial.

By 1937 the cartoon strip had taken off in popularity and Republic had high hopes of cashing in on its success. "Plainclothes Tracy" was about to become America's equivalent of Britain's Sherlock Holmes. According to Virginia McLean, Ralph Byrd's widow, cartoon strip creator Chester Gould saw Ralph in the studio commissary and told Republic head Herbert Yates, "There is Dick Tracy!"

At the age of 27, Byrd was cast and had his big break. He would be paid \$150 a week. But like Arthur Lake in the Columbia *Blondie* series, Byrd would be typecast as this comic strip character. Byrd had Clark Gable-like ears, high cheekbones and a cleft chin, but since he was square-shouldered and square-jawed, he resembled the character enough. According to ace serial director William Witney, Gould would later alter the appearance of Dick Tracy to more closely resemble Byrd. Liberties were taken with the strip, but fans who flocked to the theaters each week did not complain if the screen Tracy failed to have Tess Truchart on his arm. The serials, to their credit, evolved into more realistic crime

films with Tracy becoming a no-nonsense G-man with no time for girls.

In the first of the quartet, Tracy takes on "The Spider." Also known as "The Lame One," this clubfooted archfiend unleashes a reign of terror with the help of his futur-

istic "Flying Wing" aircraft. But you can count on Dick to pole-vault right into the crooks' hideout and battle them head-on. Directed by Ray Taylor and Alan James, *Dick Tracy* was a little unpolished in spots and had a little too much comedy relief, namely, too much Smiley Burnette as Dick's bumbling sidekick, Mike McGurk.

Chester Gould's successor, Max Allan Collins, has provided a recent DVD audio



commentary for a portion of this serial, and he gave a lot of credit to Ralph Byrd, especially in the interior, dialogue scenes where the filmmaking becomes a little dull. Of Byrd, he says, "he has such presence and he radiates such a good-natured yet wholesomely tough persona that he carries it."

After dispatching the colorful Spider in this first serial, Tracy confronted Pa Stark in perhaps the best of the series in *Dick Tracy Returns* (1938), directed now by William Witney and John English. Charles Middleton, *Flash Gordon*'s "Ming," made an excellent villain, unplugging a G-Man from life support in the first chapter. With his five sons, he would mercilessly terror-

ize the country with one scheme after another.

The following year, Tracy was called upon to combat master spy Zarnoff (Irring Pichel) in *Dick Tracy's G-Men* (1939). With his tweed suit and light brown fedora, vest and tie, Byrd cut a fine figure as an FBI agent – friendly and outgoing toward

the good guys, sufficiently tough with the bad guys: "All criminals are rats and should be treated as such." Seen today, the movies invoke a nostalgia with their outdoor serial romanticism. Heroes did battle along waterfronts and California roads, in and around canneries, power plants, factories, and freight yards. These movies were fun to watch, heightened by their location filming, the rousing music,

superb special effects by Howard and Theodore Lydecker, and the great stunt work.

In 2001, I screened a 16mm print of *G-Men* when I operated a Chicago revival house. The audience reaction was highly favorable, proving the serials have held up well over the years and can still entertain in a pop culture society trained by television.

In 1941 Byrd would return yet again in *Dick Tracy Vs. Crime, Inc.*, also directed by Witney and English, the duo responsible for *Drums of Fu Manchu* (1940) and *The Adventures of Captain Marvel* (1941).

Once again the serials delved into the realm of science fiction with Tracy this time matching wits with "The Ghost," a criminal capable of making himself invisible. William Witney, whom I was fortunate to have corresponded with before his death two years ago, was a close friend of Ralph Byrd, and his experiences making these se-

rials for Republic are detailed in his fine memoir *In a Door, Into a Fight. Out a Door. Into a Chase* (1996). Motion picture serials were made quickly and efficiently and took anywhere from three to seven weeks to shoot (with up to 50 to 80 set-ups a day)! Everyone worked at a furious pace, and the end result was a total team effort.

By the early '40s, Byrd already had a contract with 20th Century Fox. He did quite well



PHOTOFEST

as a character actor, turning up in films such as *A Yank in the R.A.F.* (1941), *Moontide* (1942), and *Guadalcanal Diary* (1943). He also had an important role as "Durga" in Alexander Korda's *Jungle Book* (1942). When the Second World War had broken out, Byrd, despite being too old, joined the armed forces and for two years served in the U.S. Army Signal Corps. He gained the rating of Technical Sergeant, but according to Virginia, he was disappointed he did not get overseas. After his discharge in 1946, he and his wife opened a private nursery school to augment his limited income. Byrd never became a major star and

had to take what roles he could get. With his wife and daughter, Carroll, they lived on a ranch in the San Fernando Valley, not far from William Witney and his wife, actress Maxine Doyle. The two couples were

so close that Virginia would become the godmother of Bill's son. Ralph's hobbies ranged from painting and cooking to carpentry and gin rummy. He also had inter-

ests in poetry and classical music. And it's been said he had a collection of 350 smoking pipes.

In the mid-1940s, RKO studio would re-

vive the Dick Tracy character in four low-budget programmers. More faithful to the comic strip, the first two starred the rather impersonal Morgan Conway. Fans wrote in saying there was only one actor who should play the part,

and in 1947 Ralph Byrd donned the trench coat for *Dick Tracy's Dilemma* and *Dick Tracy Meets Gruesome*; the latter co-starred Boris Karloff. There was little work for Byrd by the late 1940s. A severe automobile crash in early 1949 set him back. He did make a full recovery and by the next decade he was signed to play Dick Tracy

for what would prove to be his final appearances in the role. His last chapter began in late 1950 when he appeared in the syndicated *Dick Tracy* teleseries which was made by Snader TV Productions. Twenty-

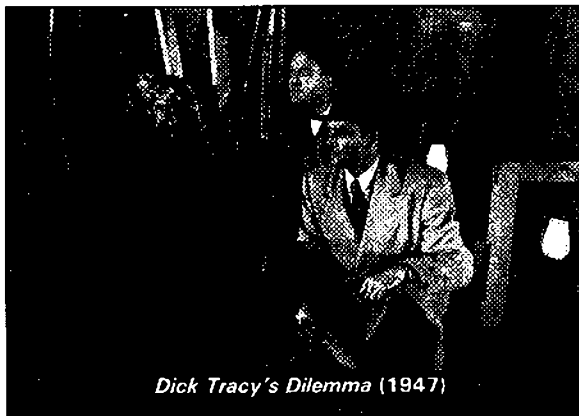
six episodes were made – some of which have re-surfaced on video.

On August 18, 1952, Ralph Byrd died in Tarzana, California. He was only 43 years old. One con-

temporary article said he died of a heart attack while waiting for his wife outside a grocery store, and all other current references do indicate the cause of death was a heart attack. However, in September 2000,

I corresponded with Virginia McLean. She had married Ralph in 1936, and prior to that had been an actress under the name Virginia Carroll. She would re-marry in 1957. When

she contacted me, regarding a screenplay I had written honoring her late husband's legacy, she was 86 years old and living in a retirement home. Despite having arthritis, she managed to write a three-page letter and admitted that it had been such a long time ago. She told me he "died of cancer in the Veterans Hospital after a six-week



Dick Tracy's Dilemma (1947)

HOFFMAN COLLECTION



Dick Tracy vs Crime, Inc. (1941)

PHOTOFEST

stay." Regardless of *how* exactly he died, he passed away at too young an age. Ralph was buried at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, California. His gravestone is inscribed, "Ralph M. Byrd 1909-1952, To Him Belongs Eternal Life."

Ralph Byrd starred in many B movies and turned up in some prestigious ones, but he will always be remembered for his heroics in the serials of yesteryear. Besides *Dick*

Tracy, he also starred in *Blake of Scotland Yard* (1937), *S.O.S. Coast Guard* (1937), and *The Vigilante* (1947), in which he did

sing! He can also be spotted in the 1935 chapterplay *The Adventures of Rex and Rinty*, where he played a park ranger. Serial fans will appreciate the scene in which he assists the star, Kane Richmond, since

the two of them – along with Buster Crabbe – would become the great heroic triumvirate in the serial genre. Off-screen, Byrd was just as genuine as the characters he played. Serial enthusiast (and keeper of the flame) William C. Cline once said of Byrd, "He was one of the friendliest, most open, out-going people who ever came along...

it was disarming to find him such an... anxious-to-please movie personality."

Today, it seems as though any star can get cast as a hero. It doesn't really matter who that person is, it's just another role-



PHOTOFEST

We could use a hero like him in our increasingly threatening world. Bursting forth from the comic pages and embodying the best in this country, Ralph's Tracy



Dick Tracy Meet Gruesome (1947)
Boris Karloff, Ralph Byrd, Anne Gwynne

PHOTOFEST

a suit that is filled until the next actor comes along. Look at the recent *Batman* movies and who stands out in our memory? But for a generation, Ralph Byrd was *Dick Tracy*.

was a reminder of better times when black and white seemed more clear-cut. His screen exploits have been documented in such wonderfully nostalgic books as *Cliffhanger*

(1977) by Alan G. Barbour.

Recently, the first of the serials has been released on DVD for a whole new generation to appreciate should they discover these treasures on their own. We can hope that for all time, Byrd's name will be mentioned first when we hear the call for *Dick Tracy*. ■

The Tom Mix Ralston Straight Shooters

BY TOM FETTERS

The Tom Mix Ralston Straight shooters are On The Air! And here comes Tom Mix, America's favorite cowboy! "Up, Tony, Up Boy!"

Those were the words which brought thousands of youngsters to their radio at 5:45 every weekday evening to share the thrills of this cowboy hero. (Never mind that few of the kids of the 1940s really knew of the real Tom Mix, who had died in 1940 after selling the rights to his name to Ralston Purina in St. Louis for their radio show.)

As far as is known, there are only 27 of these shows in current circulation, but they encompass a time frame from 1939, before World War II, to two weeks before 1950. The show took some interesting turns during that time, as we shall see.

It actually began in 1933, and later became a series of daily shows on the Blue Network from 1937 to March 27, 1942 when Ralston, a major cereal company out of St. Louis, dropped the sponsorship, partly in response to the pressures of World War II.

The show was produced in Chicago. Jack Holden and Russell Thorson played Tom; Percy Hemus was "The Wrangler"; Curley Bradley was Pecos Williams, and Winifred Toomey was Jane, one of Tom's wards. George Gobel of Lombard, Illinois, played Jimmy, the other ward. There were

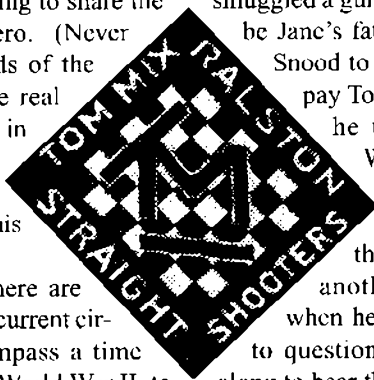
Tom Feters of Lombard, Illinois is a life-long fan of Tom Mix and Shredded Ralston.

several regular characters with brief appearances as needed: Doc Green and lawyer Amos Snood.

The oldest remaining show is from 1939 and involves Tom's ward, Jane. A local cowpoke, Jack Sargeant, who may have smuggled a gun into the Dobie jail, could be Jane's father and has sent Lawyer Snood to see Tom. Snood offers to pay Tom for caring for Jane, and he throws the lawyer out. Wrangler wires Tom that he has found the engineer of the train that hit the car that Jane and her dad and another man were riding in when he was killed. Tom decides to question the engineer with Jane along to hear the story first hand.

The next available show, **Mystery of the Hidden Mesa**, is from April 18, 1941. The show is concerned with Whisper Johnson's plan to bomb the Verde River Power Plant. Tom and the Wrangler have failed to stop Johnson from taking off in a fast plane. Johnson spots the plant lights as he flies over and he turns to bomb it. But Tom pulls the power lines down and the plant is lost in the darkness. Johnson then sees that his gas has drained out! Meanwhile Tom and Wrangler rush to the Dobie Airport and take a newly delivered fast Army pursuit plane to go "sky chasing."

Only a week before Pearl Harbor, Tom is working on the **Mystery of the Black Cat** on December 1, 1941. Over a million dollars' worth of radium has been stolen from several hospitals in a large eastern city. As Tom and Inspector Jamison search



for a missing professor, Jamison's car roars toward them with a huge black cat driving. Wrangler shouts out "A cat, a big black cat!" Tom and the Wrangler trace the cat to the Tower Building in the city and go to the 21st floor to see the cat jump from a window into space. They go to the ground and find only footprints in the ground, walking away.

Two weeks later, on December 15, 1941, Tom is working on the **Mystery of the Border Smugglers**. Tom is helping the Texas Rangers and the Mask has taken the Wrangler captive. Tom and Pecos search for the Wrangler. (Pecos is played by Curley Bradley, who later took the Tom Mix role, so this show is difficult to follow by voice since Bradley's is the more familiar Mix voice.) The two spot a light at an old ranch house and head for it, but Tony senses trouble. Tom asks the horse what's wrong. (This actually works in the show, but sounds dumb today.) Tony swerves away as gunfire erupts. Tom and Pecos chase the Mask and the gang as they ride away and Tom lassos the last man. The Mask returns with a gun held to the Wrangler's head and tells Tom and Pecos to surrender.

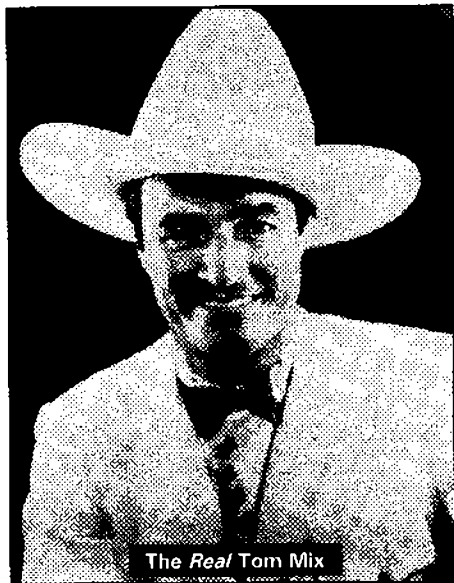
Tuning in the next day, December 16, 1941, we hear Tom drop his gun and get off his horse as he tells Tony to "git going!" The Mask then takes Tom, Pecos and Wrangler along with his gang back to the ranch house. Calamity talks to Captain Hemingway of the Texas Rangers, who learns that Tom and Pecos never got to the hotel. The two search for Tom. Meanwhile, the Mask prepares to move to the old mine hideout and as they leave, Tom smells smoke. The Mask has set fire to the house and they are trapped. Tom has a secret message for those with decoders: "Great guns, but Tony is a swell horse."

On New Years Day, 1942, Tom is finishing up the **Mystery of the Master Mind**.

Wrangler has been taken prisoner (again?) and will be killed at midnight unless Tom sends a flower with a secret formula to the Master Mind. Trouble is that Pecos Williams had the flower in his pocket when he was kidnapped, but escaped by jumping off a bridge into a raging river and losing both his coat and the flower. Tom runs a check on the paper used for the note and they find that only 343 people have bought this particular Hickman & Company paper and by 11p.m., they have eliminated 129. They decide to send another flower. The Master Mind sees through the trick and we learn that the original is withered, since it was given to the girl by her father on the day he died and she gave it to Tom on the plane. The Master Mind has his stooge call Mix to get the flower to them by one o'clock and Tom agrees to get it to them by the next afternoon. "Ahhrgr. You do not understand me. I said one o'clock this morning" and he hangs up in disgust.

February 10, 1942 has Tom solving the **Mystery of the Bay of Whales**. Hundreds of whales have disappeared and Tom, Wrangler, Pecos and Jane have found that a number of dead whales in the bay have vanished. Suddenly they see the *Flying Dutchman* headed right for their small boat, but Tom has them stand fast, as the ship passes flying a pirate flag. The next morning Jane talks to Captain Johnson about his factory ship and tells Tom they both had Ralston for breakfast. That evening, Tom decides to stay with some killed whales to see that they do not disappear.

The series was canceled on March 27 as the War in the Pacific and in Europe seemed to overpower any interest in keeping it on the air. However, the show was far more popular than Ralston had suspected and it was revived on Mutual Broadcasting from WGN on June 5, 1944 with Tom played by Curley Bradley, Sheriff Mike Shaw by Leo Curley and Forrest Lewis as Wash, the



man of all work at the ranch. The Wrangler was gone. The first show apparently was the **Mystery of the Vanishing Herd**.

Now it is June 21, 1944. Tom is resolving the **Mystery of the Vanishing Herd**. Thousands of cattle have been killed by the Iron Mask, who plans to kill another 10,000 cattle at 9 p.m. and bomb the hangar at the airbase where a new secret fighter is stored. Jane and Phineas X. Tweedles are prisoners of the Iron Mask atop Devils Mesa. They have missed a few meals and Jane mentions Shredded Ralston. Jane then sees the gang removing tarps to show medium light bombers and fighters and tells Tweedles to do something. He reveals that he is actually Joe Begley of the FBI, who asks her to cry out as if sick. When a guard runs in, Begley hits him with a pitcher. As they run out, Begley is hit by a bullet and tells Jane to get help. Jane reaches the airfield later and warns Tom of the bombing at 9 p.m. Tom knew that Tweedles was actually Begley, and he heads out to the field to take a plane to stop the Iron Mask's plan.

Two days later, June 23, 1944, we learn

that Tom was successful in saving the fighter, and has gone to capture the Iron Mask in a P-47. Tom destroys the escape plane as Begley grabs the mask from the leader. Sheriff Mike recalls that Tom had returned from England to find that the cattle were dying from a gas sprayed by planes. Windy Wilson rides up to tell them that he lives by a jumbo cactus called the Green Man. He locked his house and went to Silver City and returned to find his house was gone, vanished.

Six days later, June 30, in the **Mystery of the Green Man**, we learn that Windy's house had re-appeared, but the Green Man had disappeared. As Windy falls asleep later at the TM Bar, the Green Man appears in the room and Windy calls for help. Tom and Windy rush downstairs to find Wash, who shows them a green handprint. The Green Man told Windy to stay away from his house or be killed. Just then a car pulls up with a Swami Pataharawha, who wants to buy Windy's house so he can study the Green Man. He offers \$1,000, then \$2,000 as Windy jumps for joy, but Tom won't let him sell. He tells the Swami he can use the house free. As the man drives away, Tom points out that the car only has an "A" sticker restricting use to a few miles. He is suspicious.

Nearly a year later, on V-E Day, May 8, 1945, Tom is about to undertake a **"Secret Mission."** He and Sheriff Mike are in St. Louis with "Mr. Moonlight" and a beautiful girl, Drusilla Drake, who had hit their car with her own on Olive St. at 16th. They learn that Moonlight and Lucy are partners, and Tom tells Mike they are headed for Europe. K12 has directed the operation and monitors the activity from an office high above the street. Tom and the others turn off Skinker Road onto Clayton to head for Drake's house. At the party, Moonlight and Lucy disappear and then Mike finds that Tom is gone. He heads out to the yard

where a plane is ready to go. As they take off, we notice that the pilot has a "hard viscious smile playing about his lips."

With the war in Europe over, on August 10, 1945, Tom is working on the **Mystery of the Vanishing Village**. An entire village of 600 people has vanished and two men connected to the village have been murdered. Sgt. Hank has come home to marry Mary Slade, who has disappeared along with the village. Tom and Mike with Sgt. Hank look at the body of Harry Phillips, the Moose Creek Junction agent. Tom reminds them that Celina Albine was also killed by a long-range rifle with a silencer. Harlequin Dane, a movie producer, is staying at Tom's house and that night Sgt. Hank tells Tom he wishes Tom hadn't left his hospital bed in Antwerp to come back to Dobic. Tom suspects that Dane and Hardy Post, a publicity agent, are involved with the village vanishing. Hank spots a girl who falls near a fence. They rush out to find it is Mary. "And she's hurt. Tom. She's hurt badly!" This show offers a Whistling Sheriff's Badge for ten cents in coin and a red circle from the Shredded Ralston box.

On Monday, August 13, we bend over the motionless form of Mary Slade. Doc Greene is called and rushes her to the hospital along with Hank. Tom and Sheriff Mike ride into town to find that Mary will be taken up to the operating room. Doc says he has to work fast. As the doors close and the elevator starts up, the lights and power go out. The elevator is stuck between the floors.

The next day, August 14, the commercial is interrupted to report that the President will have a press meeting at 7 p.m. The storyline has Tom ask where the main switch is located and a man offers to show him. As they grope their way down stairs, the man asks about the bandages covering Tom's head with only holes for his eyes and mouth. He then slugs Tom, but the

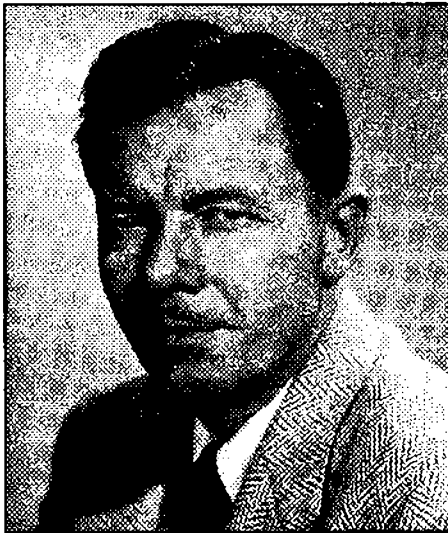
bandages protect him. He finds a janitor and then finds the switch and throws it to restore power. Tom goes to the hotel to meet Hardy Post and offers to ride with him back to the ranch. As they come up a draw, Post sees a town in the valley. Mike says "and now, by thunder, it's come back!"

A re-creation of the August 15, 1945 show exists with an older Curly Bradley playing Tom, Les Tremayne playing Doc Green and this show explains away the mystery. When Tom and Mike ride down to the village, there is no one there, but there is a smell of fresh sawdust. Pecos is sent to the hospital to protect Mary and has to draw his gun and cock it to hold off Dane. Tom ties up the hombre behind the mystery and explains the way Sam Smith, Harlequin Dane and Hardy Post worked together.

Two and a half months later, October 30, 1945, we have Episode 1 of **The Story Book Mystery**. Mike Shaw is pointed out to 300-pound Prunella Crabtree as her blind date. Mike points out that the photo she has is not of him, but offers to go to the ranch to let Tom sort things out. That evening, a shipwrecked sailor with a parrot on his shoulder asks if they have seen his "Friday." "I am Robinson Crusoe."

*Start the morning with hot Ralston
And you surely will agree
That this warm-up, build up breakfast
Gives you cowboy energy.
It's delicious and nutritious,
Made of golden breakfast wheat.
Take a tip from Tom,
Go and tell your Mom
Hot Ralston can't be beat."*

Nearly a year later, the show is sustaining and the jingle has changed.
*When it's roundup time in Texas
And the bloom is on the sage,
Then I long to be in Texas
Back a-riding on the range.
How it beckons and I reckon
I would work for any wage,*



Russell Thorson, radio's *Tom Mix*, early '40s

*To be free again, just to be again
When the bloom is on the sage.*

It is the **Mystery of the Flying City** on August 14, 1946. Tom has bought up every one of the ranches that Morgan Garrity has tried to buy, promising to pay for them in sixty days. Meanwhile, Tom has guaranteed to find homes for each of hundreds of aircraft workers at the new Flying City aircraft plant. Tom is housing the folks in tents on his farm. Doc Green calls to tell Tom that Ed Frisbe, who was beaten on the head, will need a specialist. Tom offers to pay for the help. He then leaves for the Twin Rivers Army Base as Mr. Sims, Garrity's henchman, waits near Snake Bridge over Wolf Creek with a rifle with a telescopic sight. "I can't miss," he mutters as Tom rides onto the bridge.

April 22, 1947 brings the **Mystery of the Woman in Gray**. Tom is worried about the folks in Dobie. He has learned that Cesar Chiano did not die in the forest fire and is still alive. We then learn as Chiano talks to Cupico that he wants to turn Dobie into a hideout for anyone who needs one. The Woman-in-Gray enters the drugstore and tells Charlie Frisbe that he need not

worry about Chiano's threats. She offers to demonstrate her power.

A year later, on April 7, 1948, it is the **Mystery of the Hurricane Horse**. The Hurricane Horse shows up at the ranch and attacks Tony. Tom and Mike rush out, but the horse breaks away and Tom follows on Tony. Tom lassos the horse and it seems calm when Mike talks to it. Meanwhile in town, Buck Anderson, a senior at Big Indian High, owes Mr. Jones \$400 for pin-ball losses. Buck thought the bets were for pennies, but Jones says they bet dollars. Joker calls "Whimper" Jones to tell about the Hurricane Horse and Jones tells Joker to get the horse away from Mix. He does not want his plan to get revenge from Sheriff Anderson to fail.

The next day, April 8, 1948, we learn that the Hurricane Horse has been attacking the Pawnee Village of Chief Crazy Fox. And that Sheriff Mike was injured when he walked up to the horse. Doc Green is bandaging his head. Mike wants to replace Redskin with the Hurricane Horse, but Tom says the horse is a killer. They agree to talk to one of the Straightshooters by phone. Back at the penny arcade, Buck Anderson agrees to play one more game to even the bet for \$400. Tom makes a telephone call to Jantha Pomeroy of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, who is seven years old. She agrees with Mike that he should have the horse. Suddenly Vinegar bursts in to tell them that the horse has vanished. Ralston is back with sponsorship and a new jingle.

*Shredded Ralston for your breakfast
Starts the day out shining bright.
Gives you lots of cowboy energy
With a flavor that's just right.
It's delicious and nutritious,
Bite size and ready to eat.
Take a tip from Tom
Go and tell your Mom,
Shredded Ralston can't be beat."*

April 24 is a special day in Dobie as the train stops to let Babe Ruth talk to Tom. Babe is on his way to Hollywood to help with the *Babe Ruth Story* by Allied Artists. Later, Tom and Mike are still trying to keep the Hurricane Horse in a stall, but he keeps escaping. Buck Anderson tells his dad he wants to skip college and go to work. He gives Whimpering Jones \$800 in \$100 bills as his dad learns when he visits Jones later that morning. Harvey Seagram comes in to report the loss of \$1,200 in payroll money from his safe. It was all in \$100 bills. Whimpering Jones' plan for revenge seems to be working.

In the **Mystery of the Scarlet Scarecrow** on June 4, 1948, Tom is amazed to see Mike hit Peter Ford when Mike sees the man turn into the Scarlet Scarecrow. But Tom saw no change. Tom reviews some of the clues for Mike. Then later, he and Mike come across a runaway, Jeff Mullin, who Tom hires for the TM Bar. Vinegar calls from Capital City to report trouble, and Tom leaves at once.

A week later, June 11, 1948, with the case solved, Tom is working on the **Mystery of the Santa Fe Trail**. Old Scratch was hired at the TM Bar and Jeff knows he is up to something. But he wants to solve the case himself. Dishwater can't get out of bed that morning and Vinegar tosses a bucket of water on him. But he is pinned by a Bowie knife through his shirt, and he quits on the spot. Later, Wash is going to paint the roof of the ranchhouse and has tied a rope to the chimney to keep him from falling. Suddenly a Bowie knife cuts the rope and Wash falls on Schultz, a hardware man from Dobie. Ralston is offering four iced tea spoons for 75 cents and a Shredded Ralston boxtop.

Apparently, the show transitions in 1949 with the last 15-minute show on June 24, and resuming with half-hour, complete stories on September 26. The program is now

called **Tom Mix, United States Marshal** and Tom, still played by Curly Bradley, is now a marshal and Sheriff Mike Shaw is now his deputy. Portions of some of the shows remain, but only one complete show survives.

In the **Mystery of the Dotted Diamond** (first half), Ace Diamond of the Diamond A Ranch arrives at the TM Bar to string up Jack Laramie, who they think killed their foreman with a .44, and since Jack owns the only .44 in the area, he must be guilty. Tom, Mike and Jack go out to where the body was found in the snow and find very little blood. But using the new Bullet-Telescope, they see Ace Diamond on the hill watching them with binoculars.

In a related show (first half), Powder and Blackjack Diamond own the Dotted Diamond Ranch and have had trouble with cut wire fences. Using the Bullet-Telescope, Tom examines the wire ends and clips off the wire with Powder's pliers. Later, at the TM Bar, a masked man takes the pliers from Tom and Mike and locks the door to escape. Wash, who has been "Fetlock Holmes," now decides to be a magician. The Bullet-Telescope is yours for 15 cents and a Hot Ralston boxtop or Instant Ralston boxtop.

In a complete show, **The Mystery of the Magic Mesa**, on December 16, 1949, Tom is still at it. Tom and Mike are in town when Hardweather Hannibal rushes up to tell them he just saw Wild Bill Crocket on top of the mesa. They point out that Crocket is dead, but then they see red and green lights on the mesa. They spring to their horses. On the mesa, Crocket's brother, Jack, and Swayback are starving. Ringo rides up to tell them that Marshal Mix is on his way. As Tom, Mike and Wash climb the mesa, they hear two owls, but Tom knows there are none on the mountain. Tom and Mike capture the three men, but the next morning Jack pulls the door off the cell and they break out. Jack wants



Curley Bradley, radio's *Tom Mix*, 1944-51

steak. Tom tries to stop Jack, who throws him through a window. Tom then slugs him and he falls against an iron stove. Tom goes to get a steak for his black eye. (Half-hour show on Wednesdays and Fridays)

The last show, with only the last half surviving, has Tom trying to capture Jack Brand in the rocky hills. Brand offers to drop his guns and fight hand to hand. Tom drops his guns and Brand jumps down with a knife. Tom exclaims "A knife! You didn't say you had a knife!" and Brand says "Too bad for you!" Winning the fight, Tom greets Mike, who corralled a bunch of the men and got their cattle back too. "From the looks of you, Brand, you've learned your lesson." Tom says "If he hasn't, he'll have plenty of time to learn this in prison. Let's get started." Tom sings "The Old Rugged Cross" and says, "Our program has come to an end. Take good care of yourself now, you hear me? Be with us next week. When you hear this theme, then you'll know it's us."

*When it's roundup time in Texas
And the bloom is on the sage.....*

This was indeed the last of Tom Mix on the air, but Curley Bradley returned on WGN the next week in the *Curly Bradley Show*

three days a week. Same format, same voices, but new roles and without a sponsor.

So we can see the formula emerge from these stories. Vanishing village, vanishing people, vanishing cactus. Secret mission, secret planes, secret partners. Walking *scarlet* scarecrows, big *black* cats, and a walking *green* cactus. This is what pulled in the interest of kids and grownups too.

The characters were well developed and distinctly different. Tom was good to a fault. He took in runaways and he helped folks at peril to his own well being. Mike Shaw was prone to use expletives like Thunderation, Sassafras & Sourdough. He exemplified the loyal assistant who never was quite sure what was going on. Pecos Williams was trustworthy and often was asked to carry out assignments and could be depended on to carry them out. Wash, as comic relief, was goofy, but respected for believing in himself. While Mike would get thoroughly exasperated with some of Wash's stunts, Tom would put up with them just to keep peace in the house. Doc Green was the parental surrogate who would come in to bandage Mike, or operate on Mary to make her well again.

While most of the stories centered around Dobic, in Dobic County in the western plains, the story often carried Tom to more exotic areas such as Antwerp, or Hollywood, or St. Louis. One has to chuckle at the scrambling it took to rewrite one story so they could use a tape from the great Babe Ruth, himself. Babe sounds ill and has a gravelly voice, but Tom and Babe trade compliments before getting back to the main story.

So, that's it. A great kids' program that is tangible only in the tapes of 27 shows. Yet, what shows they are: full of action and mystery, and mile-a-minute thrills. ■

TUNE IN TWTD September 18 to hear The Tom Mix Ralston Straight Shooters.



Chuck Schaden's

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WDCB • 90.9 FM • SATURDAY 1 - 5 PM

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

JULY 2004

SATURDAY, JULY 3 PATRIOTISM ON THE AIR

MR. PRESIDENT (7-3-49) starring Edward Arnold who, in place of the regular format, presents a special dramatization of a great American classic: Edward Everett Hale's immortal story of the value of patriotism, "The Man Without a Country." Listeners are asked to identify the person who might have been President of the United States at the time of this fictional story. Sustaining, ABC. (30 min)

VICTOR BORGE SHOW (7-3-45) The humorist-pianist stars in this summer replacement show for *Fibber McGee and Molly*. Observing the Fourth of July, Victor tells his favorite American story about "Pocahontas" and asks singer Pat Friday for suggestions on how to spend Independence Day in the U.S.A. Billy Mills and the orchestra offer a medley of tunes by George M. Cohan. Harlow Wilcox announces. Johnson's Wax, NBC. (30 min)

CAVALCADE OF AMERICA (9-1-41) "Leif Ericson" starring Karl Swenson in the story of the first great explorer who came to the new land beyond the western ocean... the first to colonize the shores of America. Cast includes John McIntyre, Frank Readick, Everett Sloane, Jeanette Nolan. Clayton Collyer announces. Donald Voorhees and the orchestra. DuPont, NBC. (30 min)

FATHER KNOWS BEST (7-5-51) Robert Young stars in the last show of the series' second season on radio. On the day after the Fourth of July, the children have complaints about the so-called day of celebration. To prove that Father knows best, Jim Anderson tells his family the meaning of Independence Day. June Whitley appears as Margaret, with Rhoda Williams as Betty, Ted Donaldson as Bud and Norma Jean Nilsson as Kathy. Bill Foreman announces. Roy Bargy and the orchestra. Maxwell House Coffee, NBC. (29 min)

YOU ARE THERE (7-4-48) "Philadelphia, July 4, 1776." Newsmen John Daly, Ken Rob-

erts, Maj. John Fielding Elliott, Ned Calmer and Bud Collyer offer coverage of the final debate on the Declaration of Independence and the vote of the American colonies. Sustaining, CBS. (27 min)

SATURDAY, JULY 10

BOSTON BLACKIE (10-10-46) "The Backstage Murder" starring Richard Kollmar as Blackie. While rehearsing for a role in a local benefit production of "The Mikado," Blackie discovers a dead body. Jan Miner as Mary, Maurice Tarplin as Inspector Faraday. Sustaining, NBC. (28 min)

PAUL WHITEMAN SHOW (10-4-39) Remote broadcast from Chicago. "Pops" and the orchestra offer "Washington and Lee Swing," "Dance of the Hours," "I've Got You Under My Skin." Joan Edwards sings "Moonlight Serenade" and "Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries." The Modernaires present "An Apple for the Teacher." Plus a salute to the music from the film, "The Wizard of Oz." Announcer is Tommy Bartlett. Chesterfield Cigarettes, CBS. (23 min)

★ **ONE MAN'S FAMILY (12-28-41)** *Isolated episode.* Chapter 13, Book 40 in the popular series written and created by Carlton E. Morse. On New Year's Eve, at the close of the year which saw the start of World War II for the United States, the family reflects on its fears and concerns for the future. Cast includes J. Anthony Smythe as Henry Barbour, Minetta Ellen as Fanny Barbour, Michael Raffetto as Paul, Barton Yarborough as Clifford, Bernice Berwin as Hazel. Ken Carpenter announces. Tenderleaf Tea, NBC. (30 min)

LUM AND ABNER (4-13-44) *Isolated episode.* Chester Lauck and Norris Goff star as Lum Edwards and Abner Peabody as the boys continue their pursuit of wealth by digging for buried treasure. Alka-Seltzer, 1-A-Day Vitamins, NBC. (12 min)

GREAT GILDERSLEEVE (12-10-52) Willard

Waterman stars as Throckmorton P. Gilder-sleeve with Walter Tetley as Leroy, who learns the value of the dollar – the hard way – when he takes a part-time job working at Mr. Peavey's drug store. Cast includes Lillian Randolph as Birdie, Richard LeGrand as Peavey. Kraft Foods, NBC. (30 min)

NOTE: Each of the shows on today's program has been restored by the First Generation Radio Archives, and our special guests will be Archives' members HARLAN ZINCK and KARL PEARSON, who will talk about what it takes to preserve the vintage radio broadcasts. Read the article on page 58.

SATURDAY, JULY 17 SCIENCE FICTION ON THE AIR

TWO THOUSAND PLUS (11-22-50) *Adventures in the World of Tomorrow.* "Worlds Apart." The spaceship Phoenix, on its first trip to the planet Neptune, is disabled by a comet, and so it receives instructions for a landing at an unknown base called Green Valley. Sustaining, MBS. (29 min)

BUCK ROGERS IN THE 25th CENTURY (4-4-39) *Isolated episode.* The series' origin story tells how Buck, from the 20th Century, came to be an adventurer in the 25th Century. Matt Crowley stars as Buck Rogers, Adele Ronson as Wilma Deering, Edgar Stehli as Dr. Huer. Popsicle Products, MBS. (15 min)

DIMENSION X (5-20-50) *Adventures in time and space... told in future tense.* "The Lost Race." While exploring a planet seeking signs of a lost race, a spaceship has an accident in orbit and is forced to land. Cast includes Matt Crowley, Roger DeKoven, Joseph Julian. Announcer is Norman Rose. Sustaining, NBC. (29 min)

TOM CORBETT, SPACE CADET (5-20-52) *We take you to the age of the conquest of space.* "Greatest Show in the Universe." Part 1 of a 2-part adventure. The space cadets are assigned to transport a circus through space to the planet Venus on a cultural mission. It will be the first interplanetary circus. The cargo includes all personnel and equipment as well as many ferocious lions and tigers. Frankie Thomas stars as cadet Tom Corbett with Jan Merlin as cadet Roger Manning. Cast includes John Griggs, Leon Janney, Connie Lemke. Jackson Beck announces. Kellogg's Pep, ABC. (25 min)

TOM CORBETT, SPACE CADET (5-22-52) Conclusion of "Greatest Show in the Universe." The cadets and their circus passen-

gers and cargo prepare for a landing on the planet Venus. Kellogg's Pep, ABC. (24 min)
X MINUS ONE (9-8-55) *New dimensions in time and space.* "The Martian Death March." Humankind has conquered Mars and placed all of the Martians on a reservation. Cast includes Matt Crowley, David Pfeffer, Ed Jerome, Lawrence Kerr, John Thomas, Stan Farley, Ralph Comargo. Norman Rose narrates. Sustaining, NBC. (25 min)

OUR SPECIAL GUEST is popular culture historian CURTIS KATZ. Read his article on page 44.

SATURDAY, JULY 24

N-K MUSICAL SHOWROOM (11-28-45) The Andrews Sisters – Patti, Maxene and LaVerne – star with guests Bud Abbott and Lou Costello, who perform their classic "Who's On First" baseball routine. Also featured are Curt Massey and the Ambassadors plus Vic Schoen and the orchestra. The Sisters present "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy" and "Put That Ring On My Finger" while Curt sings "I'll Buy That Dream." All join in on "Along the Navajo Trail." Harlow Wilcox announces. Nash-Kelvinator, CBS. (29 min)

BOB HOPE SHOW (1-21-53) Ski-nose Hope stars with Bill Goodwin, Veola Vonn, singer Don Cherry and guest actress Zsa Zsa Gabor. Hope's monolog reflects the inauguration of President Eisenhower. Bob and Zsa Zsa find that the newspapers have called them a romantic item. Sketch: scenes from Gabor's new film, "Moulin Rouge." Jell-O, NBC. (30 min)

INNER SANCTUM (12-18-45) "The Undead" featuring Anne Seymour as the wife on an actor who discovers that her husband is a vampire. Lipton Tea and Soup, CBS. (30 min)

ORRIN TUCKER AND HIS ORCHESTRA (1951) Remote broadcast from the Boulevard Room of the Stevens Hotel in Chicago. Vocals by Scotty Marshall and Orrin Tucker. Selections include "Side By Side," "Too Young," "Hot Canary," "I Double-Dare You," and "Little Girl." Sustaining, ABC.

LES TREMAYNE MEMORIAL SERVICE (1-7-04) A celebration of the life of the popular actor who died December 19, 2003 at the age of 90. Participants include Mr. Tremayne's godson, Doug Dudley from the Chicago area; Martin Halperin of the Pacific Pioneer Broadcasters, and actor Marvin Kaplan. Recorded at the Westwood Village Chapel, Los Angeles, California. (Approx 45 min)



Chuck Schaden's

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WDCB • 90.9 FM • SATURDAY 1 - 5 PM
WORLD-WIDE ON THE INTERNET: www.wdcb.org

JULY 2004

★ INDICATES A WORLD WAR II BROADCAST OF SPECIAL INTEREST

SATURDAY, JULY 31

RADIO AND WW II IN THE SUMMER OF 1944

★ **COMMAND PERFORMANCE #123** (7-6-44)

An "all-female" show for military audiences doesn't live up to its billing when Bob Hope, Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra drop in. The ladies are mistress of ceremonies Connie Haines, Lena Horne, Shirley Ross, Lotte Lehmann, Frances Langford. Maj. Meredith Willson and the orchestra. Ken Carpenter announces. AFRS. (30 min)

★ **YOUR ARMY SERVICE FORCES** (7-14-44)

PFC Carl Rukoff hosts a program showing the home audience what USO and camp shows

are doing for GI audiences. Telling about their experiences entertaining servicemen are Edith Brown, back from a camp tour, and Cliff Edwards, known as "Ukelele Ike." Harry Salter and the orchestra. Sustaining, MBS. (29 min)

★ **KOLLEGE OF MUSICAL KNOWLEDGE** (8-16-44)

Phil Harris subs for the old professor, Kay Kyser, in this remote broadcast for servicemen at Camp San Luis Obispo in California. Guests are the King Sisters. Ish Kabibble and Kyser's band provide the music. Bill Foreman announces. AFRS rebroadcast. (29 min)

★ **WORLD NEWS TODAY** (8-20-44)

"Allied headquarters announced today that elements of 14 German divisions and parts of four others have been caught in the Normandy pockets and are being blasted to pieces by artillery fire. The Germans say American forces have crossed the Seine, northwest of Paris." Douglas Edwards and CBS correspondents provide reports. Two pilots from Chicago are interviewed. Admiral Radios, CBS. (25 min)

★ **LIBERATION OF PARIS** (8-23-44)

A special broadcast observing the liberation of Paris, "the first capital city among our allies to free herself from German domination." "...After four years of Nazi slavery, Paris has torn herself free from her oppressors and the beloved capital of France is once again the City of Light." A musical tribute with Lily Pons, Martial Singher, Dr. Frank Black and the NBC orchestra. Guest is Richard deRoachmont, national president of France Forever. Special event, NBC. (30 min)

★ **WORDS AT WAR** (9-5-44)

"A Veteran Comes Back," a dramatization of Willard Waller's book anticipating the end of the war and the return of G.I. Joe. Clifton Fadiman hosts. Johnson's Wax, NBC. (28 min)

AUGUST 2004

Jolson Sings Again

SATURDAY, AUGUST 7

KRAFT MUSIC HALL (10-2-47) **Al Jolson** stars in his own show following the great success of the 1946 film "The Jolson Story." This is the first show in the series. Guests are Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy who join Al, pianist Oscar Levant, singer Milena Miller, Lou Bring and the orchestra, and announcer Ken Carpenter. Jolie and Charlie don't get along too well! Kraft Foods, (NBC. (30 min)

TIME TO SMILE (6-4-41)

Eddie Cantor stars with guest **Al Jolson** as they present "The Eddie Cantor Story." Regulars include Dinah Shore, Bert Gordon (the Mad Russian), Bobby Sherwood and the orchestra and announcer Harry Von Zell. Ipana, Sal Hepatica, NBC. (30 min)

LUX RADIO THEATRE (4-2-45)

"Swanee River" starring Dennis Morgan, **Al Jolson** and Frances Gifford in the radio version of the 1939 film, based

on the life story of Stephen Foster, whose music is heard throughout the play. Morgan appears as the songwriter and Jolson repeats his original screen role as E. P. Christie. Walter Huston is guest host. Cast includes Charles Seel, Norman Field, Eddie Marr, Howard McNear. *This program marks the beginning of Jolson's mid-1940s comeback.* Lux Soap, CBS. (22 min & 19 min & 18 min)

PHILCO RADIO TIME (1-15-47) Bing Crosby with John Scott Trotter and the orchestra and chorus, pianist Skitch Henderson, the Chariteers and guest **Al Jolson**, making his first appearance on Bing's Philco program. Lots of Crosby/Jolson banter and songs. Ken Carpenter announces. Philco, ABC. (30 min)

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (5-18-47) Jack and the gang broadcast from New York, where he is scheduled to open at the Roxy Theatre this week. Special guest **Al Jolson** joins regulars Mary Livingstone, Phil Harris, Dennis Day, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Artie Auerbach, and

the Sportsmen. Subbing for Don Wilson is Kenny Delmar. Benny and Jolson decide their career paths are very similar in their rise to success. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (27 min)

SATURDAY, AUGUST 14

BURNS AND ALLEN SHOW (2-20-47)

Guest **Al Jolson** joins George and Gracie on their 15th anniversary in radio. Mr. and Mrs. Burns recall how they got their start on the air, obtain-

ing a loan from Jack Benny and getting their first job on the stage from Al Jolson. George wonders whatever became of Jolson. Cast includes Mel Blanc, Bill Goodwin. Maxwell House Coffee, NBC. (30 min)

PHILCO RADIO TIME (5-7-47)

Bing Crosby welcomes songwriter Irving Berlin and singer **Al Jolson** for a Berlin songfest. John Scott Trotter and the orchestra, announcer Ken Carpenter. Philco, ABC. (30 min)



Al Jolson and Bing Crosby

PHOTOFEST

KRAFT MUSIC HALL (2-12-48) **Al Jolson** stars with Oscar Levant and guest Charles Laughton. Jolie and Laughton compare styles in a scene from "Romeo and Juliet." Oscar plays "Sabre Dance." Lou Bring and the orchestra. Ken Carpenter announces. Kraft Foods, NBC. (30 min)

LUX RADIO THEATRE (2-16-48) "The Jolson Story" stars **Al Jolson**, Evelyn Keyes, William Demarest, and Ludwig Donath, all from the 1946 film hit. The son of a Washington, D.C. cantor finds success in show business, but his success has its price. Cast includes Herbert Butterfield, Edith Angold, Howard McNear. William Keighley is host. Lux Soap, CBS. (19 min & 16 min & 24 min)

EDDIE CANTOR SHOW (3-6-47) Banjo Eyes Eddie welcomes guest **Al Jolson** as they team up for a cavalcade of songs they made popular. Harry Von Zell announces. Edgar "Cookie" Fairchild and the orchestra. Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer, NBC. (30 min)

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AUGUST 2004

Jolson Sings Again... and Again!

SATURDAY, AUGUST 21

SATURDAY, AUGUST 28

PHILCO RADIO TIME (3-5-47) Bing Crosby stars with the Charioteers, John Scott Trotter and the orchestra, announcer Ken Carpenter and guest **Al Jolson**. Bing and Jolie sing a medley of tunes made famous by Al. Philco, ABC. (30 min)

JIMMY DURANTE SHOW (1-21-48) While the Schnozzola recovers from surgery, guest host

Al Jolson greets regulars Peggy Lee, Candy Candido, Roy Bargy and the orchestra and guest Victor Moore. Al and Victor star in "Captain Jolie's Showboat." Rexall, NBC. (30 min)

STEVE ALLEN SHOW (10-26-49) Steve broadcasts his radio show from Studio B, Columbia Square, Hollywood, before a large studio audience that has jammed the place to see Allen's special guest, **Al Jolson**. Jolie joins Steve to promote his latest picture, "Jolson Sings Again," and talks about his career, singing many of the songs that he made famous. KNX, Los Angeles. (50 min)

EDDIE CANTOR SHOW (1-8-48) Eddie and guest **Al Jolson** plus regulars Harry Von Zell, Bert Gordon (the Mad Russian). The question is, Who is going to play Cantor in his life story? Eddie and Al try to find the answer. Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer, NBC. (30 min)

KRAFT MUSIC HALL (4-1-48) Host **Al Jolson** welcomes guest Jimmy Durante, who wants Al to buy a nightclub with him. Oscar Levant, Ken Carpenter, Lou Bring and the orchestra. Kraft Foods, NBC. (30 min)

KRAFT MUSIC HALL (11-6-47) Guest Humphrey Bogart joins **Al Jolson** and Oscar Levant. Bogie wants to play Al in the next Jolson screen biography. Kraft Foods, NBC. (30 min)

EDDIE CANTOR SHOW (1-7-49) Guest **Al Jolson** shows up for another outing on the Cantor show. Harry Von Zell and Eddie visit Jolie at his home in Palm Springs. An abundance of comedy and song by the great old pros. Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer, NBC. (29 min)

BOB HOPE SHOW (4-8-47) Broadcasting from the El Capitan Theatre in Hollywood, Bob welcomes guest **Al Jolson**, who recalls Hope's days as a bellhop trying to break into show business. Cast includes Vera Vague, Jerry Colonna, announcer Wendell Niles. Pepsodent, NBC. (28 min)

LIFEBUOY SHOW (10-18-38) **Al Jolson** stars with Parkyakarkus, Martha Raye and guests Marie Wilson and Charlie Butterworth. Al and the show are going to New York and Parky is bringing the train tickets. Jolie joins Charlie, Marie and Parky in a sketch, "Nightmare on the Yukon." Lud Gluskin and the orchestra. Lifebuoy Soap, CBS. (29 min)

LUX RADIO THEATRE (5-22-50) "Jolson Sings Again" starring **Al Jolson**, Barbara Hale, William Demarest, Ludwig Donath, all from the 1949 film sequel to *The Jolson Story*. It's the rest of Jolson's story, picking up where the first film ended. William Keighley, host. Lux Soap, CBS. (15 min & 26 min & 19 min)



Eddie Cantor and Al Jolson

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 4 V-DISCS AND WORLD WAR II A 61st Anniversary Salute

The War Department's V-Disc program of providing specially recorded musical entertainment to our troops around the world began in the summer of 1943. To observe the occasion, big-band historian **KARL PEARSON** will join us for a program of musical history and memories.

We'll hear seldom-heard V-Disc selections featuring the music of Spike Jones and the City Slickers, Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians, the combined orchestras of Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Captain Glenn Miller and the Band of the Army Air Forces Technical Training Command, Harry James and his orchestra, Bing Crosby, Louis Armstrong and Jack Teagarden, the combined orchestras of Duke Ellington and Woody Herman, Jo Stafford, Sam Donohue and the Navy Dance Band, and many others.

In addition we'll tune in to a rehearsal and two network radio broadcasts of V-Disc recording sessions:

★ FOR THE RECORD (7-31-44) REHEARSAL.

A portion of the *dress rehearsal* for the evening's broadcast, featuring Benny Goodman and his orchestra, vocalist Mildred Bailey, host Deems Taylor and announcer Arthur Gary. Perry Como missed the rehearsal and Goodman fills in for him in a half-kidding manner. (17 min)

★ FOR THE RECORD (7-31-44) BROADCAST.

An on-the-air recording session for V-Disc, the official phonograph record of the Armed Forces, produced by the Special Services Division, hosted by Deems Taylor. Recording for V-Disc on this premiere broadcast are Benny Goodman and his orchestra, Mildred Bailey, Perry Como and Carmen Miranda. Selections include "After You've Gone," "Goodbye Sue," "Tico Tico" and "These Foolish Things." Sustaining, NBC. (30 min)

★ FOR THE RECORD (9-18-44) Another on-the-air recording session for V-Discs, featuring host John Conte, with Cab Calloway and his orchestra, The Three Suns, and Marilyn Maxwell. Selections include "Cruisin' with Cab," "Twilight Time," "There'll be a Hot Time in the Town of Berlin," and "Rainy Sunday." Sustaining, NBC. (30 min)

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

ADVENTURES OF THE FALCON (11-5-50)

"Case of the Rich Racketeer" starring Les Damon as Mike Waring, the Falcon. A racketeer who double-crosses his lawyer and has many enemies, tries to hire Waring. Ed Herlihy announces. Kraft Foods, NBC. (29 min)

ALAN YOUNG SHOW (11-8-46) Alan Young, "that man who is Young today and Young forever" is joined by Jim Backus (as Hubert Updike III), Herb Vigran, Charlie Cantor, Ken Christie, Ruth Parrott. When Alan watches Mrs. Johnson's baby, everyone thinks he has become a father. George Wylie and the orchestra. Jimmy Wallington announces. Ipana, Vitalis, NBC. (29 min)

HAVE GUN, WILL TRAVEL (9-18-60) John Dehner stars as Paladin with Ben Wright as Hey Boy and Virginia Gregg as Miss Wong. The son of an old friend tells Paladin his stepfather is mistreating him. Paladin decides to see for himself. Cast includes Sam Edwards and Ken Lynch. Hugh Douglas announces. Multiple sponsors, CBS. (24 min)

LIGHTS OUT (7-27-46) "The Battle of Magicians," a tale of zombies, creatures of the dead. Cast includes Everett Clarke, Tony Parrish, Meg Hahn, Duke Watson, Boris Aplon, Nathan Davis. Broadcast from Chicago, this is one in a revival of the best shows from the series, newly produced. George Stone announces. Sustaining, NBC. (30 min)

BURNS AND ALLEN SHOW (1-6-49) George and Gracie with special guest Gregory Peck. After seeing a Gregory Peck movie, Gracie wishes George would be more like the handsome, romantic movie idol. George goes to Peck to get some advice. Cast includes Bill Goodwin, Bea Benaderet, Paula Winslowe, Doris Singleton. Tobe Reed announces. Harry Lubin and the orchestra. Maxwell House Coffee, NBC. (30 min)

DRAGNET (6-10-49) "Homicide" is the second show in the series. Jack Webb stars as Sgt. Joe Friday with Barton Yarborough as Sgt. Ben Romero. A nickel-plated .44 calibre Smith & Wesson revolver was used to shoot two Los Angeles police officers. Police make extensive use of IBM machines and a tape recorder to solve the case. *The familiar Dragnet theme is not used in this program.* Sustaining, NBC. (29 min)

SEPTEMBER 2004

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 18 THE TOM MIX RALSTON STRAIGHT-SHOOTERS ARE ON THE AIR!

Isolated episodes:

TOM MIX (1939) Russell Thorson stars as Tom. Lynn Brandt announces. Premium offer for Tom Mix three-color pocket flashlight. *This is the earliest available Tom Mix program.* Ralston, NBC. (14 min)

TOM MIX (2-1-41) "The Mystery of the Black Cat" starring Russell Thorson as Tom, Curley Bradley as Pecos Williams. Don Gordon announces. Ralston, NBC. (14 min)

TOM MIX (12-15-41) "The Mystery of the Border Smugglers." *One of two consecutive, isolated episodes.* Ralston, NBC. (14 min)

TOM MIX (12-16-41) "The Mystery of the Border Smugglers." *Second of two consecutive, isolated episodes.* Ralston, NBC. (14 min)

TOM MIX (6-21-44) "The Mystery of the Vanishing Herd" starring Curley Bradley as Tom Mix with Leo Curley as Sheriff Mike Shaw and Forrest Lewis as Wash. Don Gordon announces. Ralston, MBS. (14 min)

SPEAKING OF RADIO (5-13-72) Don Gordon, longtime announcer for the *Tom Mix* program, talks about his career in a conversation with Chuck Schaden. (21 min & 8 min)

★ **TOM MIX** (5-8-45) "Secret Mission." On V-E Day of WW II, Tom (Curley Bradley) talks to his Straight-Shooter listeners about the end of the war in Europe-- "but the war isn't over yet." Ralston, MBS. (14 min)

TOM MIX (8-10-45) "The Mystery of the Vanishing Village." *First of three consecutive, isolated episodes.* Premium offer for Whistling Sheriff's Badge. Ralston, MBS. (15 min)

TOM MIX (8-13-45) "The Mystery of the Vanishing Village." *Second of three consecutive, isolated episodes.* Ralston, MBS. (13 min)

TOM MIX (8-14-45) "The Mystery of the Vanishing Village." *Third of three consecutive, isolated episodes.* Ralston, MBS. (15 min)

TOM MIX (1983) A 50th Anniversary *homage* to the long-running radio series. Radio historian/author Jim Harmon wrote an original script attempting to provide a solution to "The Mystery of the Vanishing Village," as further episodes have not been found. Curley Bradley returns to the microphone to star as Tom

Mix, with Jack Lester as Mike Shaw, Les Tremayne as Doctor Green (and announcer), Jim Harmon as Pecos Williams, with Art Hern and Richard Gulla. Produced and directed by Jim Harmon for Ralston Purina Company. (14 min)
For more details on the episodes being presented today, read Tom Fetters article on page 25.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 25 TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALL GAME

DAMON RUNYON THEATRE (6-26-49) "Baseball Hattie" is the Damon Runyon story told by "Broadway," portrayed by John Brown. A baseball fan follows the New York Giants and when she chews out a pitcher, he responds by proposing marriage. Syndicated. (27 min)

SHOWDOWN AT LEAGUE PARK (2001) A radio re-creation of the first and fourth innings of the historic fifth game of the 1920 world series between Cleveland and Brooklyn. There was no radio coverage on October 10, 1920 when this game was originally played, but this thoroughly researched radio re-creation, using actual pitch-by-pitch accounts, brings the listener radioside at the dawn of an era. Play-by-play announcer is Mike Snyder and commentator is Bob Becker. (Approx 30 min)

OUR SPECIAL GUEST is MORRIS ECKHOUSE of October Productions, producer of "Showdown at League Park," who will talk about this recreation and how it was produced.

HALLMARK PLAYHOUSE (5-12-49) "You Could Look It Up" starring William Frawley in the James Thurber comedy about a midget who helps cure a baseball team of overconfidence. Hallmark Cards, CBS. (29 min)

BIOGRAPHY IN SOUND (8-16-55) "Legend of the Babe." Mel Allen narrates the story of famous baseball player Babe Ruth. Participants in the program include James Farley, Waite Hoyt, James T. Farrell, Branch Rickey, Hubert Pruet, Senator Ford, Frank Stevens, John Kieran Jr., Tom Meany, Ben Grauer, Ed Byron, Paul Carey. Sustaining, NBC. (28 min & 26 min)

HOLLYWOOD STAR TIME (1-24-48) "Elmer the Great" starring Harold Peary in Ring Lardner's baseball comedy about a home run hitter with the Chicago Cubs. Herbert Marshall hosts. Frigidare, General Motors, CBS. (28 min)

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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



These radio stars reminisce
with broadcaster/historian
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Those Wonderful Radio Premiums

BY GARDNER KISSACK

Say, Kids! Are you ready for adventure, amazement, and delight? Of course you are – but first, here's an important message from Kix, or Cheerios, or Wheaties, or Kellogg's, or Ralston-Purina, or Quaker Oats!

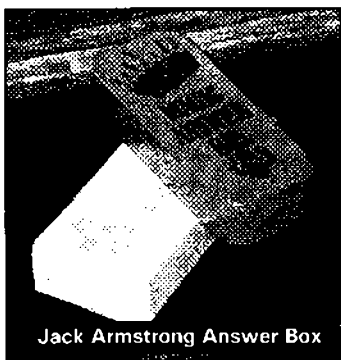


Orphan Annie Ovaltine Shake-Up Mugs

G. KISSACK COLLECTION

How much cereal did you have to eat before you were allowed to tear off the box top and send it with a dime to Battle Creek, Michigan, or Minneapolis, Minnesota, or Checkerboard Square in St. Louis?

Even though there were some radio show giveaways (most often associated with breakfast foods) in the 1920s and '60s, the bulk of, and the best of the premiums were offered during what is called the Golden Age of Radio. This era spanned the early 1930s to the early '50s. It was certainly over by the day after Thanksgiving in 1960, when Ma Perkins closed the Rushville Center Lumber Yard for the last time and ended her career.



Jack Armstrong Answer Box

G. KISSACK COLLECTION

Dozens of programs offered hundreds of

Gardner Kissack of Chicago Heights, Illinois is a retired school teacher and a member of the Those Were The Days support staff.

mostly desirable premiums over the radio to millions of kids and grown-ups. The price was usually a label or a box top and perhaps a dime or two. If you could stand the wait while the order was processed, and the further wait while your package

wended its way to your home – never by first-class mail; it might take two weeks or more – you would be rewarded. Your prize? There were badges and rings and scarves and belt buckles with secret compartments. There were maps, maps of Simmons Corners from *Little Orphan Annie*; of

Webber City Inc. from *Amos 'n' Andy*, and of South America from *Black Flame of the Amazon*). There were decoders and glow-in-the-dark arrowheads and compasses, and more.

Who can read Jean Shepherd's glowingly fond memories of growing up in the Midwest a couple of generations ago, or who can see the hilarious, painfully true-to-life film from 1983, *A Christmas*

Story (from Shepherd's book, "In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash") without being entertained and reminded of what kids did when they wanted a radio show breakfast food premium?

One: Used or Consumed the Product – sometimes more than desired/wanted/needed – just to empty the box or jar for the label or box top.

Two: Saved Some Money – perhaps volunteering to take out the garbage or go to the store for a loaf of bread and a quart of milk, "and can I keep the change?" (Allowances were still in the future.)

Three: Mailed the Box Top and Coin. And waited, patiently, or not so patiently.

And then it arrived! If it was a decoder badge (for example), the owner would wear it with pride. He or she would also listen to *Little Orphan Annie* or *Captain Midnight* or another popular after-school serial. With pen or pencil in hand to jot down the secret code numbers, each representing a letter of the alphabet which, with the aid of the decoder, would spell out a secret message. This secret message was known to only the few hundred thousand other listeners across the country.

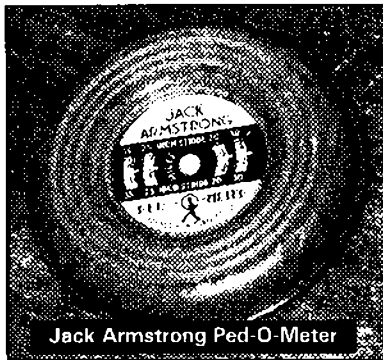
If the badge or ring or bullet or belt buckle contained a secret compartment or

compass or whistle, or glowed in the dark, well, so much the better.

One of the most popular premiums ever was the Lone Ranger atomic bomb ring offered by Kix in January 1947. Just imagine, a kid who knew about World War II and its dramatic conclusion could now have and wear a shiny silver (polished brass, actually) miniature atomic bomb which would, when the red plastic tail fin was removed, reveal (in a darkened room, preferably a closet with door closed) "Atoms Split to Smithereens" (to quote a 1947 newspaper ad) – although few mushroom clouds were ever actually sighted. General Mills estimated that at least three and a half million rings were distributed. That's a lot of Kix.

In October of '47 the Lone Ranger/Kix offered the six-shooter ring, a nicely-detailed, realistic looking, if tiny, revolver with a spark-producing flint. Only about one million of these were sent for, possibly because it was a little awkward to wear your gun on you ring finger. Pretty nifty, but not as keen at the A-bomb ring, apparently.

And while the *Lone Ranger*, as one example among many, was aimed at and geared for kids, with subtle lessons of tolerance, fairness, proper grammar/language,



Jack Armstrong Ped-O-Meter

G. KISSACK COLLECTION



Orphan Annie Secret Decoders

G. KISSACK COLLECTION

and moral guidance woven into the plot and dialogue, premiums were offered on other programs as well: Jack Benny and Mary (Livingstone) had a Jell-O recipe booklet as far back as 1937; Lum and Abner had a weather prophet badge in 1936, and the Amos 'n' Andy map from Pepsodent was available in 1935. *Helen Trent* listeners could receive two gifts (badge and medalion) in the late 1940s.

Many shows offered cast photos from time to time: Father Barbour's brooding brood on *One Man's Family*; Ma and Fay and Shuffle on *Ma Perkins*; *Sky King* with Penny and Clipper (niece and nephew); *Captain Midnight* with Patsy and Chuck; *Fibber and Molly* and friends, and of course, Jack Armstrong, Betty Fairfield, and Uncle Jim. And Don McNeill's *Breakfast Club* regularly offered plastic-spiral bound yearbooks filled with pictures, poems, homey homilies, and some fiction and fact from Sam's Almanac.

However, boys and girls were the targets and recipients of most premium offers. As far back as 1934 *Jimmy Allen* fans had a chance to get a five-part aviation instruction manual, each several pages long. Imagine: flying lessons for grade and high schoolers in the mid-1930s! And as popular as Jimmy Allen was, *Captain Midnight* became the biggest in-the-air hero on the air (when Allen's writers joined the Captain's squadron) -- and he just happened to have some of the most sought-after decoders, club manuals, and Ovaltine shake-up mugs.

The 1940s offerings ranged from the

1941 Mystery Dial Code-o-graph to the '49 Key-o-matic Code-o-graph. Two of the best: the 1942 decoder with the Captain's photo (!) and the '45 decoder with its red plastic dial among the most desirable collectibles today. There would be other *Captain Midnight* offers into the mid-1950s, but with the competition from *Captain Video and His Video Rangers* (and others) beginning in 1949, radio audiences and memorable premiums began their twilight journey to the Isle of Happy Landings and Sweet Memories.

One of the first really big and popular programs with an accurate sense of its audience was *Orphan Annie*, whose premiums were some of the most sought-after and treasured of all by those who listened regularly to the show. Annie's Secret Society annual booklets, with stunning graphics and bright colors, contained not only decoder directions and the latest secret password (Safe to tell now, right? In 1938 it was "War-Tassel" -- combining Annie Warbucks and Joe Cornassel. In 1940: "Seven Stars" which you were to say only to another member or the society!) and the secret high-sign and wig-wag signs, but also the Society's seven gold rules:

1. Study hard.
2. Get lots of sleep.
3. Get plenty of exercise.
4. Do the things your parents say.
5. Eat things your mother wants you to.
6. Be a loyal member of the Radio Orphan Annie Secret Society (ROASS).
7. Drink Ovaltine every day.



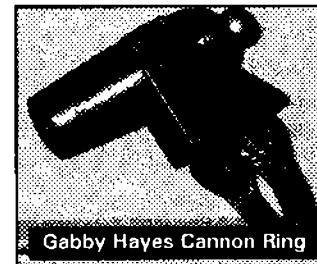
Capt. Midnight Secret Decoder

G. KISSACK COLLECTION



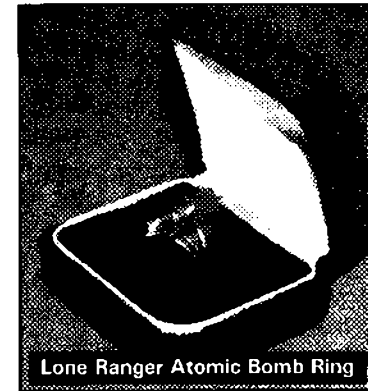
Don Winslow Secret Code Book

G. KISSACK COLLECTION



Gabby Hayes Cannon Ring

NATALIE LAGONI PHOTO



Lone Ranger Atomic Bomb Ring

G. KISSACK COLLECTION

Multiply hundreds of thousands of members per year for a decade and we're talking about millions of members of ROASS. In 1941 Ovaltine switched its sponsorship to *Captain Midnight* and by 1942 the Society was fading into the dusty shadows of radio history.

Consider the All-American Boy, Jack Armstrong. What a name. Arm. Strong. And decades later, the name of the first American, indeed the first human, to take that one small step for a man, and one giant leap for mankind -- on the Moon!

The radio Armstrong offered many, many premiums: pedometers, telescopes, a dragon eye ring, maps, Betty's glow-in-the-dark gardenia bracelet, model airplanes, among others during its 18 years on the air (1933-1951), but none more controversial than the 1942 Secret Bombsight (with little wooden bombs and paper enemy ships as targets) that was a simple design patterned after a secret bombsight the Allies were developing -- and the Jack Armstrong version was in the hands of kids before the real one was ready for our warplanes!

Amazing and troubling, so the government, understandably, investigated how such a thing could happen.

Some premium offers were regional, not national, and didn't involve the mail. You could, for example, get a silver star (for the tree-top) from a Wieboldt's department store in the Chicago area, especially desirable if you listened to the adventures of the *Cinnamon Bear*, first aired in 1937, and repeated annually since.

Tom Mix was quite possibly the champion of premiums -- offering more over the most years (1933-1950, and briefly again in the early 1980s to mark the 50th anniversary of the first show) than any other program or star or sponsor, Ralston-Purina. (Tom Mix's 1940 death in an auto accident didn't diminish the program's popularity.)

Even Gabby Hayes had a Quaker Oats premium in 1950-51: a miniature cannon ring that had a spring mechanism strong enough to propel a pea or stone -- a little too forcefully for many parents.

A miscellaneous roundup of other offerings might include the Lone Ranger's 1942 Blackout Kit (part of the Home Front effort), Don Winslow's Secret Code Book/magic slate (1953), Red Ryder medals, and Melvin Purvis Junior G-Man pins.

Such an informal survey is necessarily incomplete because there were so many programs that the mere mention of them is enough to evoke fond recollections: *Bobby Benson*; Capt. Tim's Ivory stamp club; *Tennessee Jed*; *Dick Tracy*; *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon* and his wonder-dog King; the *Cisco Kid*; *Buck Jones*; *Buck Rogers*; *Flash Gordon*; *Renfrew of the Mounted*; *Pretty Kitty Kelly*; *Straight Arrow* ("Secrets of Indian Lore and Know-how: 72 Injun-uties"); *Lone Wolf*; *Superman*; *The Green Hornet*; *David Harding*, *Counterspy*, and of course, Hoppy, Gene, and Roy.

Heroes and heroines all, from the Golden Age of Radio when radio premiums ruled, wonderfully and unforgettably. ■

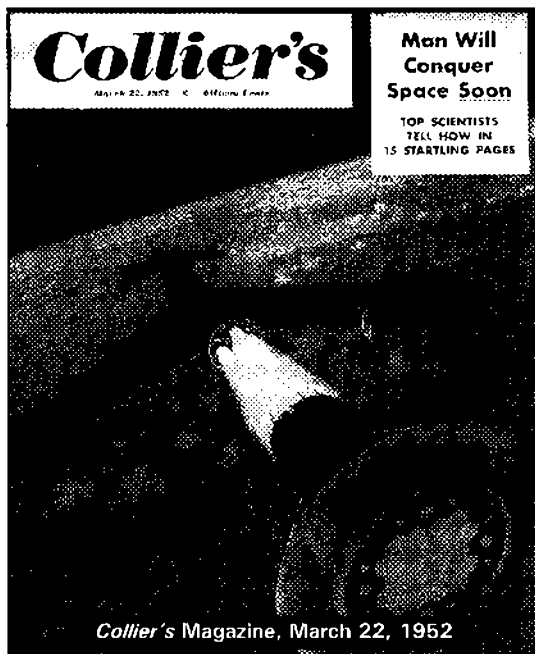
MAN WILL CONQUER SPACE SOON

BY CURTIS L. KATZ

"That's one small step for a man; one giant leap for mankind."

Thirty-five years ago Neil Armstrong spoke those carefully chosen words as he became the first earthling to set foot on the moon. That "small step" was the culmination of the greatest decade of achievement in human history. But paving the way to that achievement was a far more formidable space program than NASA's: one proposed in the early 1950s that would have orbited a large space station in the 1960s, and would have landed an entire *expedition* of 50 men on the moon in the 1970s. This ambitious, methodical, and thoroughly feasible space program was conceived not by the United States, nor by the Soviet Union, but by a popular weekly magazine found in homes, dentist offices, and barber shops across America.

Curtis L. Katz is a popular cultural writer from Chicago, Illinois.



C. KATZ COLLECTOR

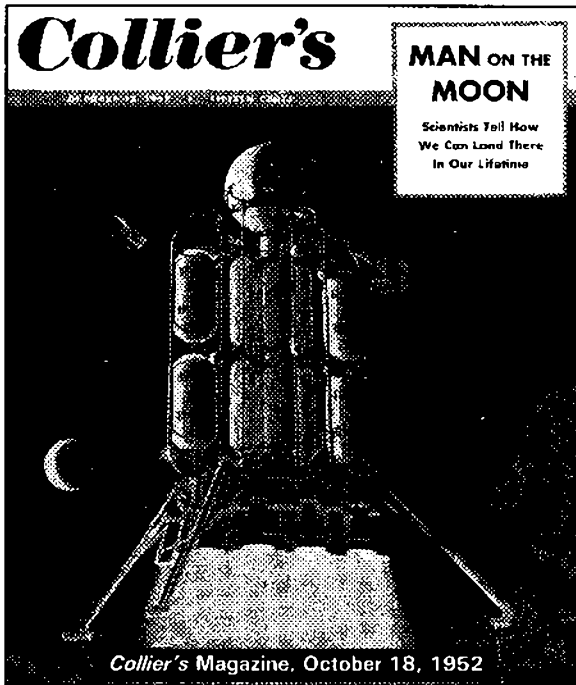
Collier's magazine was one of the many general interest periodicals such as *Liberty* and *The Saturday Evening Post* that flourished in the first half of the 20th century. It was founded back in 1888 by Peter Fenelon Collier, a successful bookseller.

In 1948, Gordon Manning joined the staff of *Collier's* and quickly rose to the post of managing editor. Manning would later enjoy a long distinguished career in television news production, but at the moment he was searching for sensational ideas that would boost *Collier's* sagging circulation in the wake of rising production costs.

In the postwar 1940s, the prospect of space travel was gaining attention. The capture of Germany's rocket scientists in 1945 and the continued testing of their V-2 rockets at White Sands, New Mexico, from 1946 to 1952 primed the public's imagination. A best-selling book in 1949 was *The Conquest of Space*. With Professor Willy Ley's authoritative text on planetary and illustrator Chesley Bonestell's

arresting paintings of planetary landscapes and space ships, *The Conquest of Space* was a landmark volume that introduced the general public to the imminent possibility of the exploration of other worlds. That possibility was brought to life the following year by George Pal's feature film, *Destination: Moon*. Pal, of "Puppetoons" fame, blended melodrama and documentary style to create a realistic vision of the first manned flight to the moon. Despite the doubts of Hollywood "experts," *Destination: Moon* was literally an astronomical success, grossing five and a half million dollars and inaugurating the science fiction movie craze of the 1950s and early '60's.

In 1951, Gordon Manning asked Chesley Bonestell, who had just served as technical advisor on *Destination: Moon*, if he would like to collaborate on a magazine feature about outer space. But Bonestell was hard-pressed to find an author from the academic community in his native California willing to be associated with the



C. KATZ COLLECTION

decidedly speculative notion of space flight. However, in October of that year, New York's Hayden Planetarium attracted 300 scientists and experts in many fields to its First Annual Symposium on Space Travel. These proceedings were dominated by Dr. Wernher von Braun and several of his German colleagues. Covering this event for *Collier's*, at Manning's behest,

was Cornelius Ryan, an Irish-born Reuters war correspondent. Ryan, who had just joined *Collier's* as one of the magazine's many "associate editors," would later become famous for his monumental World War II books, *A Bridge Too Far* and *The Longest Day*. Ryan was impressed by what he heard at



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the Hayden, and in November he followed the symposiasts to San Antonio for a symposium on "Physics and Medicine of The Upper Atmosphere," which he urged Chesley Bonestell to attend. After hearing von Braun speak, Bonestell prophetically told Ryan, "There is the man to send our rocket to the moon." The two lunched with von Braun, who had long desired to bring his spacefaring vision directly to the general public, and who jumped at the offer to write articles for *Collier's*. The following week, several of the participants from the Hayden Planetarium event joined Cornelius Ryan at the *Collier's* offices in New York for the magazine's

own week-long space symposium, and began planning the *Collier's* space program.

The March 22, 1952 issue of *Collier's* Magazine looked much like any other. But between the ads for Chesterfield cigarettes and Nash automobiles was "one of the most important scientific symposiums ever published by a national magazine;" over 20 "startling pages" under the banner, "Man Will Conquer Space Soon." The pre-eminent lights in a stellar cast of experts contributing to those "startling pages" were Willy Ley, Dr. Wernher von Braun, and Chesley Bonestell.

Though schooled as a paleontologist, Willy Ley was a founding member of the German Society For Space Travel in 1927, and was the first tutor in rocket science to the teenaged Wernher von Braun. Ley fled Nazi Germany in 1935, settled in the United States, and through extensive writing and lecturing became the herald of the coming Space Age.



C. KATZ COLLECTION

Wernher von Braun remained in Germany, and became the technical genius behind the German V-2 rocket weapon. Considered the world's foremost rocket engineer, von Braun was brought to America after World War II, headed the Army's guided missile program, and would ultimately spearhead the Apollo moon-landing project.

Chesley Bonestell was trained in architectural rendering; thus he was experienced in using technical data to realistically paint subjects that no eye had yet seen. He was associated with such prestigious projects as the Chrysler Building and the Golden Gate Bridge. Subsequently he became a motion picture matte artist whose credits ranged from *Citizen Kane* to *The Horn Blows At Midnight*. An avid amateur astronomer, Bonestell took up illustrating astronomical subjects in 1943. His paintings for *The Conquest of Space* and the *Collier's* articles established him as the dean of astronomical artists.

Two other illustrators also worked on the symposium. Fred Freeman, a magazine illustrator, had served as a naval officer during World War II, and thereafter devoted his talents to illustrating publications on naval history and technology. The lean rugged men who peopled his nautical illustrations served well crewing *Collier's* spacecraft. Rolf Klep, another Navy veteran, had, before the war, written and illustrated several distinguished children's books on classical subjects. The striking paintings and detailed cutaway views rendered by Bonestell, Freeman, and Klep added to the excitement of the articles they accompanied and made their concepts vividly real.

The symposium examined a wide spectrum of space-related topics. The basic principles of the three-stage rocket and orbital space station were introduced. Human survival amidst such hazards of the void as weightlessness, meteoroids, and cosmic rays was analyzed. The promise of astronomy beyond the veil of earth's atmosphere was discussed. Such exotic possibilities as atomic propulsion and life on other worlds were evaluated. The unsettling prospect of space-based atomic weapons was repeatedly suggested; an obvious rhetorical appeal to the national angst over the Cold War arms race. Even legal questions over ownership of outer space and its resources were raised.

The *Collier's* space articles created the sensation the editors had hoped for. Reader comment was effusive, ranging from, "I wish to congratulate you on your magnificent amount of forethought on the reality of interplanetary flight..." to, "...never have I read anything in [*Collier's*] as purely silly... For plain waste of paper and ink



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this takes first prize."

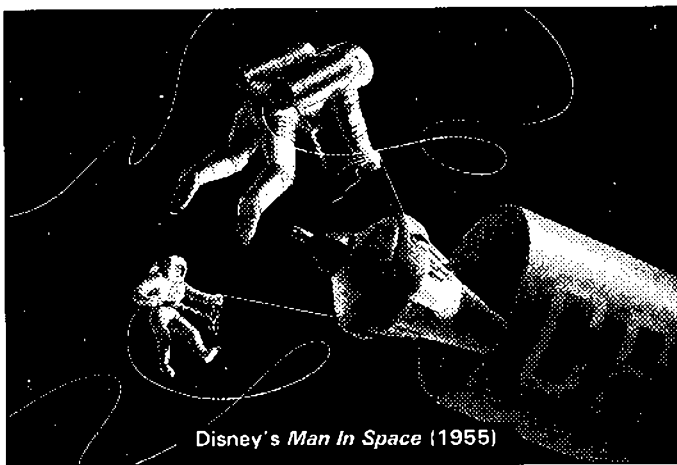
Buoyed by such rousing response to "Man Will Conquer Space Soon," *Collier's* produced sequels. The next logical subject, the exploration of the moon, was featured in the October 18 and 25, 1952 issues. Meanwhile, Cornelius Ryan organized a new symposium, whose members included some from the first symposium, but mostly experts from the medical sciences. Their findings were serialized in three parts beginning with the February 28, 1953 issue under the title, "Man's Survival In Space." This article examined space exploration's "most indispensable of all instruments - man himself," covering the qualifications, training, and safety of "spacemen." (The term "astronaut" had yet to be coined.) There followed two more *Collier's* articles on space, both by Wernher von Braun. In the June 27, 1953 issue, he described a simple starter for a space program: a satellite, or "baby space station," which would put three monkeys into orbit.

And in the issue of April 30, 1954, von Braun offered a grand vision of an eventual mission to Mars.

The *Collier's* space program was bold in concept, incremental in approach. Basic to the program was the development of a huge three-stage rocket, whose third stage would be a reusable space plane. A

fleet of these rockets would be used to ferry men and parts to construct an earth-orbiting wheel-shaped space station, whose axial rotation would produce artificial gravity for its occupants. This space station would serve military and scientific purposes, and as a way station for the construction of expeditionary spacecraft to the moon and Mars. Since vehicles built in space would not travel through any atmosphere, they needn't be aerodynamically designed, and thus would economically consist of open framework carrying propellant tanks, engines, and a crew module. Initially such a manned spacecraft would circle the moon on reconnaissance, then a manned expedition would land on the moon to establish the first of several permanent moon bases. A future Mars mission would consist of a veritable armada of space vessels, mostly support and supply ships that would orbit the Red Planet, plus an aerodynamic winged ship that could fly through the Martian atmosphere on landing and take-off. A Mars base would be established and manned for 15 months.

Throughout these articles it was emphasized that while new materials and technologies might be developed in the course of space research, the space program de-



Disney's *Man In Space* (1955)

PHOTOFEST

scribed in *Collier's* was not a vision of the distant future, but a program that could be carried out *immediately* with existing materials, technology, and knowledge. Cornelius Ryan editorialized, "What are we waiting for?... We have the scientists and the engineers. We enjoy industrial superiority. We have the inventive genius... Our engineers can spell out right now... the technical specifications for the rocket ship and space station..."

The immediate effect of this call to action was a broadening of public discourse on the subject of space travel. Certainly not all response was favorable. The Pentagon and even some scientists and engineers dismissed space flight as mere "Buck Rogers stuff." A persistent hard point was the fact that the top space advocates had recently been the enemy whose rockets had rained death upon London. When even some of Dr. von Braun's colleagues objected to his grandiose plans, he offered the article about the modest monkey-carrying satellite, only to draw fire from humane societies. But for the most part, the *Collier's* articles increased public enthusiasm for space, and their content spread to other media. Three popular books were spun from the *Collier's* features: *Across The Space Frontier* (1952), *Conquest of*

The Moon (1953), and *The Exploration of Mars* (1956). In 1955, George Pal borrowed the title of the book, *The Conquest of Space*, for a movie that featured the *Collier's* space vehicles designed by von Braun and Bonestell in a dramatization of the first manned journey to Mars.

The concepts in the *Collier's* space program reached a wider audience when Walt Disney, seeking a way to represent "Tomorrowland" on his new ABC-TV *Disneyland* program, was introduced to the *Collier's* articles by animator Ward Kimball. The result was "Man In Space," an hour-long program that first aired March 9, 1955. Directed by Kimball, the show brought Willy Ley, Wernher von Braun, and their colleague Dr. Heinz Haber into living rooms across America, and climaxed with a thrilling animated depiction of the first manned orbital flight of von Braun's three-stage rocket and space plane. The show was an instant hit, and was aired twice more in 1955 by popular demand. "Man In Space" begot two sequels ("Man And The Moon," December 1955; "Mars And Beyond," December 1957), made Wernher von Braun a media celebrity, and persuaded President Eisenhower to make an earth-orbiting satellite one of America's contri-

butions to the forthcoming International Geophysical Year.

It is worth noting that the two most popular programs of that first *Disneyland* season were "Man In Space" and "Davy Crockett," each in its own way expressing the American tradition of pioneering adventurous frontiers. It was upon those readers who would actually pioneer the space frontier that the *Collier's* articles had their most important influence. Numerous space scientists, engineers, and technicians have credited *The Conquest of Space*, the *Collier's* space articles, or the books derived from them as having introduced them to and inspired them to pursue the intriguing possibility of space travel. In this respect, the *Collier's* space program was a true milestone on our path to the cosmos.

Alas, the prophet did not live to enter its Promised Land. Though *Collier's* circulation increased, advertising revenue declined as production costs continued to escalate. With its issue of January 4, 1957, *Collier's Magazine* folded, just nine months before Sputnik I launched the Space Age, and propelled mankind toward Neil Armstrong's "giant leap." ■

Tune in TWTD July 17 to hear Curtis L. Katz plus some science fiction radio shows.

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Looking Back at the Future

BY RICHARD W. O'DONNELL

Sci-fi tales are fabulous. Make no mistake about that.

In truth, they are a relatively new art form. True, there was Jules Verne way back in the 19th century. And H. G. Wells. Let's not forget Buck Rogers or that other comic book hero Flash Gordon. Science fiction stories have been around for quite a while.

Sci-fi's Golden Age probably dawned in the late Forties and during the Fifties, when scientists began bouncing sound waves off the moon and the Russians started shooting rockets into the heavens.

All of a sudden futuristic dramas were the rage. Gallant space explorers were zipping off to other worlds in a hurry. Friendly aliens were dropping by to warn us to be careful with that nuclear stuff. And Martians were en route to our humble planet all the time.

Our films, books and TV shows were loaded with fingernail-nibbling adventures. America had entered the space age.

Ironically, two old time radio shows captured the attention of space buffs as much as any out-of-this-world adventures to come along. Of course, from 1951 to 1957, when two NBC series were on the air, they were spanking brand new. Listeners had never heard anything like them before.

The shows were *Dimension X* and *X Minus One*. It was almost as if they were being broadcast from another world.

Television was looming large on the scene. But deep thinkers - aren't all science fiction fans intellectuals? - turned their TV sets off when these shows were on. No image on a tiny screen could match

the pictures radio listeners could conjure up when these half-hour shows took to the air.

In retrospect, some of these fictional glimpses of life in "maybe worlds" did have a few minor goofs - "bad" predictions - along the way. For example, it can be reported, Grant's Tomb was not stolen during the 1960s by a mad professor. That just didn't happen, despite what those "X" writers may have claimed.

And in the 1970s, no Happy Life Homes were built, as predicted in an episode called "The Veldt." These dwellings were homes where you didn't have to lift a finger. Machines took care of everything. Pure comfort.

Perhaps the reason we have no Happy Lifers these days was the price. It was too good to be true. All they wanted was \$30,000 for them, plus a few thousand more to install those gadgets that made life so wonderful. Even in the '70s people weren't going to fall for that deal. It had to be a con.

Another thing. In a 1955 show called "Roads Must Roll" it was predicted that traffic jams would bring an end to automobiles. Huge conveyor belts would be used to carry people from here to there and home again.

What inspired that particular story? Real life. For a while, back in the Fifties, they did consider building those moving highways to replace autos. But nothing ever came of the idea.

"Marionettes, Inc.," a comedy thriller about wayward husbands who have matching puppets made of themselves to sit in at home with their wives while they were out on the town, allowed little, if any, room for the high cost of living. Set in the Nineties, they were selling drinks for only sixty

Richard W. O'Donnell is a free-lance writer from Port Richey, Florida.

cents. One does wonder if that particular drinking spot is still around.

In the 1956 show "Appointment in Tomorrow," set in 1999, the world is ruled by "The Thinkers." You're supposed to jump when they snap their fingers. This particular show may have been a few years ahead of its time.

And there was no "Martian Death March" in 1997, as predicted back in 1951. Earthlings did not take over Mars and thousands of Martian Highlanders did not die while marching back to their homes in the hills to get away from the invaders.

In 1965, an astronaut had only ten minutes of fuel left in an "X" adventure. He somehow managed to stretch that fuel out to ten hours. If anybody knows how he did it, our chronic energy headache would fade away in a hurry. The episode was called "The Outer Limit."

Keep your fingers crossed. During the

early part of the 21st Century, it was forecast "Martian Sam" would soon be pitching for the L.A. Dodgers. This talented robot, imported from you-know-where, can best be described as a mechanical Roger Clemens.

Also, with great joy, it must be reported the plague did not wipe out one of our expeditions to a planet where everybody was doomed by the bug. This is supposed to have happened on June 3, 1997.

Be that as it may, here's to those "X" radio shows. They may have made a few mistakes with their predictions of future times, but they were one of radio's all-time high points.

We must remember that Ben Franklin, speaking about the future, said, "It is easy to see, hard to foresee." ■

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COMPILED BY RON SAYLES

JULY

- 4 George W. Trendle, 1884 (d. 5-22-72) *The Lone Ranger*
- 5 Tommy Cook, 1930 *Blondie, Red Ryder*
- 8 Melville Ruick, 1898 (d. 1972) *Announcer, Lux Radio Theatre*
Bill Thompson, 1913 (d.7-15-71) *Fibber McGee & Molly*
- 9 H. V. Kaltenborn, 1878 (d. 6-14-65) *Commentator*
- 10 Graham McNamee, 1889 (d. 5-9-42) *Announcer, Sportscenter*
- 11 Harry Von Zell, 1906 (d. 11-21-81) *Burns & Allen, Fred Allen*
Tommy Bartlett, 1914 (d. 9-6-98) *Welcome Travelers*
- 12 Jean Hersholt, 1886 (d. 6-2-56) *Dr. Christian*
Milton Berle, 1908 (d. 3-27-02) *Milton Berle Show*
- 14 Douglas Edwards, 1917 (d. 10-13-90) *Newscaster*
- 16 Charles Egelston, 1882 (d. 10-31-58) *Ma Perkins*
Frank Singiser, 1908 (d. 5-28-82) *Newscaster*
- 17 Art Linkletter, 1912 *People Are Funny, House Party*
- 18 Harriet Nelson, 1909 (d. 10-2-94) *Ozzie & Harriet*
Marvin Miller, 1913 (d. 2-8-85) *Railroad Hour*
Red Skelton, 1913 (d. 9-17-97) *Red Skelton Show*
Charlie McCarthy, 1920 *Charlie McCarthy Show*
- 20 Verna Felton, 1890 (d. 12-14-66) *Red Skelton, Jack Benny*
Bill Goodwin, 1910 (d. 5-9-58) *Bob Hope, Burns & Allen*
- 21 Hünan Brown, 1910 *Inner Sanctum, CBS Mystery Theatre*
- 23 Karl Swenson, 1908 (d. 10-8-78) *Lorenzo Jones, Our Gal Sunday*
Jackson Beck, 1912 *Superman, Philo Vance*
Sandra Gould, 1916 (d. 7-20-99) *Duffy's Tavern*
- 24 Basil Ruysdael, 1890 (d. 10-20-60) *Your Hit Parade*
Raymond Edward Johnson, 1911 (d. 8-15-01) *Inner Sanctum*
- 25 Al Pearce, 1900 (d. 6-2-61) *Al Pearce Show*
Harold Peary, 1905 (d. 3-30-85) *Great Gildersleeve, Fibber McGee & Molly*
- 26 Gracie Allen, 1902 (d. 8-27-64) *Burns & Allen*
Buddy Clark, 1911 (d. 10-1-49) *Contented Hour*
Stacy Harris, 1918 (d. 3-13-73) *This is Your FBI*
- 27 Viola Vonn, 1918 (d. 10-28-95) *Chandu the Magician, Blondie*
- 28 Rudy Vallee, 1901 (d. 7-3-86) *Fleischmann Hour*
- 29 Joseph Curtin, 1910 (d. 4-5-79) *Mr. & Mrs. North*

TOMMY
COOK



BILL
THOMPSON



TOMMY
BARTLETT



HARRIET
NELSON



MARVIN
MILLER



JOHNNY
COONS



JACKIE
KELK



AUGUST

- 1 Alice Frost, 1910 (d. 1-6-98) *Mr. & Mrs. North*
Walter Scharf, 1910 (d. 2-24-03) *Phil Harris-Alice Faye*
- 2 Johnny Coons, 1916 (d. 7-6-75) *Sky King, Vic and Sade*
- 3 Wendell Hall, 1896 (d. 4-4-69) *Red-Headed Music Maker*
- 4 William Keighley, 1889 (d. 6-24-84) *Lux Radio Theatre*
- 5 Al Goodman, 1890 (d. 1-10-72) *Fred Allen Show*
Parley Baer, 1914 (d. 11-22-02) *Gunslinger*
- 6 Louella Parsons, 1881 (d. 12-9-72) *Hollywood Hotel*
Jim Ameche, 1915 (d. 2-4-83) *Jack Armstrong, Silver Eagle*
Jackie Kelk, 1922 (d. 9-5-02) *Aldrich Family, Superman*
- 7 Ernestine Wade, 1906 (d. 4-14-83) *Amos 'n' Andy*

- 10 Jack Haley, 1899 (d. 6-6-79) *Village Store*
- 13 Skinnay Ennis, 1910 (d. 6-3-63) *Bob Hope Show*
- 15 Johnny Roventini, 1910 (d. 11-30-98) *Phillip Morris' Johnny Baby Rose Marie, 1923 child star*
- 16 Eddie Green, 1896 (d. 9-19-50) *Duffy's Tavern*
- 19 Marie Wilson, 1916 (d. 11-23-72) *My Friend Irma*
- 20 Andre Baruch, 1906 (d. 9-15-91) *Announcer, Your Hit Parade*
- Alan Reed, 1907 (d. 6-14-77) *Fred Allen, Life with Luigi*
- 21 Ken Carpenter, 1900 (d. 10-16-84) *Bing Crosby, Charlie McCarthy*
- Billy Idleson, 1920 *Vic and Sade, One Man's Family*
- 22 Lesley Woods, 1910 (d. 8-2-03) *The Shadow, Boston Blackie*
- 23 Art Van Harvey, 1883 (d. 7-7-57) *Vic and Sade*
- Bob Crosby, 1913 (d. 3-9-93) *Jack Benny*
- 24 Phil Baker, 1896 (d. 12-1-63) *Take It or Leave It*
- Jimmy Fidler, 1900 (d. 8-9-88) *Hollywood commentator*
- Durward Kirby, 1912 (d. 3-15-2000) *Announcer, Club Marinee*
- Howard Duff, 1913 (d. 7-8-90) *Sam Spade*
- 27 Roger Pryor, 1901 (d. 1-31-74) *Screen Guild Theatre*
- Larry Thor, 1916 (d. 3-15-76) *Broadway is My Beat*
- Vicki Vola, 1916 (d. 7-21-85) *Mr. District Attorney*
- 29 Richard LeGrand, 1882 (d. 6-29-63) *Great Gildersleeve, Fibber McGee*
- Lurene Tuttle, 1907 (d. 5-28-86) *Sam Spade, Red Skelton*
- Willard Waterman, 1914 (d. 2-2-95) *Great Gildersleeve*
- Arthur Anderson, 1922 *Let's Pretend*
- 31 Arthur Godfrey, 1903 (d. 3-16-83) *Arthur Godfrey Time, Talent Scouts*

MARIE
WILSON



ARTHUR
GODFREY



BILLY
MILLS



SEPTEMBER

- 1 Don Wilson, 1900 (d. 4-25-82) *Jack Benny Program*
- John J. Anthony, 1902 (d. 7-16-70) *Good Will Hour*
- 2 Amanda Randolph, 1896 (d. 8-24-67) *Amos 'n' Andy, Beulah Vera Vague (Barbara Jo Allen), 1904 (d. 9-14-74) Bob Hope Show*
- 3 Alan Ladd, 1913 (d. 1-29-64) *Box Thirteen*
- 4 Charlie Cantor, 1898 (d. 9-11-66) *Duffy's Tavern*
- 5 Jimmy Wallington, 1907 (d. 12-22-72) *Announcer*
- Kenny Delmar, 1910 (d. 7-14-84) *Fred Allen, The Shadow*
- 6 Billy Mills, 1894 (d. 10-20-71) *Fibber McGee & Molly*
- 9 Ed Prentiss, 1908 (d. 3-19-92) *Captain Midnight, Guiding Light*
- 10 Edmund O'Brien, 1915 (d. 5-9-85) *Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar*
- 11 Anne Seymour, 1909 (d. 12-11-88) *Story of Mary Martin*
- 15 Roy Acuff, 1903 (d. 11-23-92) *Grand Ole Opry*
- Jack Bailey, 1907 (d. 2-1-80) *Queen for a Day*
- Penny Singleton, 1908 (d. 11-13-03) *Blondie*
- 17 Gabriel Heatter, 1890 (d. 3-30-72) *News commentator*
- 18 Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, 1905 (d. 2-28-77) *Jack Benny*
- Joe "Curley" Bradley, 1910 (d. 6-3-85) *Tom Mix*
- 19 Elvia Allman, 1904 (d. 3-6-92) *Burns & Allen, Blondie*
- 22 Hanley Stafford, 1900 (d. 9-9-68) *Baby Snooks, Blondie*
- Sybil Trent, 1926 (d. 6-5-2000) *Let's Pretend*
- 27 William Conrad, 1920 (d. 2-11-94) *Gunsmoke, Escape*
- 29 Gene Autry, 1907 (d. 10-2-98) *Melody Ranch, National Barn Dance*
- 30 Kenny Baker, 1912 (d. 8-10-85) *Jack Benny, Glamour Manor*

ANNE
SEYMOUR



ELVIA
ALLMAN



KENNY
BAKER



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>

Astaire and Rogers

A Dazzling Dancing Duo

BY RANDALL G. MIELKE

The most famous dancing duo in cinematic history started performing together simply by chance.

Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers did not dance their way into the hearts of moviegoers in the 1930s as a team. They were put together when they worked on an RKO studio film in 1933 called *Flying Down to Rio*.

Although Astaire had been a successful dancer on Broadway, he had made only one movie, *Dancing Lady* (1933) with Joan Crawford, before he was teamed with Rogers. Rogers, on the other hand, was doing well as a serious actress. She had done 19 films, some of which were musicals, before teaming with the agile Astaire.

The somewhat mindless plot of *Flying Down to Rio* revolves around an attempt to keep a Rio hotel afloat. Gene Raymond and Delores Del Rio are the stars of the film, and Astaire and Rogers played two members of Gene Raymond's band. The two dancers had secondary roles in the film and provided comic relief. But their one dance together, a full-scale production number called "The Carioca," stole the movie.

After *Flying Down to Rio*, Rogers went

Randall G. Mielke of Warrenville, Illinois is an author and free-lance writer.



Flying Down to Rio (1933)

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to other projects and made seven films in 1934 while RKO tried to find a film to capitalize on the Astaire-Rogers success. The result was *The Gay Divorcee*, based on a play that Astaire had appeared in on Broadway.

The Gay Divorcee (1934) is a musical farce about a woman who hires a gigolo so she can get a divorce. Supporting actors in the film include the rattled Edward Everett Horton, the always-flustered Eric Blore, and the outrageous "Italian" Erik Rhodes. The three would appear again in other As-

taire-Rogers films. The outstanding score includes "Night and Day" and "The Continental."

The Gay Divorcee proved to RKO that Astaire and Rogers were big box office. As elegant dancing partners, the duo offered a new kind of romance, supremely sophisticated, yet accessible to everyone.

Their next film together, *Roberta* (1935), is a light-hearted story of a group of entertainers who find themselves operating a dress shop in Paris. The film, like so many other films in which they appear, belongs to Astaire and Rogers.

Roberta starred Irene Dunne, with Randolph Scott as her romantic leading man, but it is Astaire and Rogers' scenes that are the most vivid. Without having to carry the plot of the film, their roles were easily built up to showcase their talents. Jerome Kern songs in the movie included: "I Won't Dance," "Lovely to Look At," and "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes."

Probably the most delightful and enduring of the Astaire-Rogers musicals of the 1930s is *Top Hat* (1935). For this film, all of the ingredients seemed to fall into place. Snappy dialogue, a suave Astaire pursuing an indifferent Rogers (who thinks he's someone else), the marvelous supporting cast of Horton, Blore, and Rhodes, and the words and music by Irving Berlin, make this film shine. Although somewhat similar to the plot of *The Gay Divorcee*, the delightful Berlin songs, which include "Top Hat, White Tie and Tails," "Isn't This a Lovely Day (To Be Caught in the Rain)?"



The Gay Divorcee (1934)

PHOTOFEST

"No Strings (I'm Fancy Free)," and "Cheek to Cheek," made *Top Hat* one of the team's biggest hits.

In their next film for RKO, *Follow the Fleet* (1936), Astaire and Rogers play former vaudeville partners who are reunited when the fleet winds up at the dance hall where Rogers works. Randolph Scott and Harriet Hilliard (the popular singer and wife of the bandleader Ozzie Nelson) provide the secondary romantic plot in the film, and Irving Berlin provided another of his hit-filled scores, including "Let Yourself Go," "I'm Putting All My Eggs in One Basket" and the beautiful "Let's Face the Music and Dance." For the first time Astaire and Rogers were not placed in an atmosphere of ultra-sophistication, yet they



Roberta (1935)

PHOTOFEST



Top Hat (1935)

PHOTOFEST

still delivered delightful dance numbers.

Swing Time (1936) was their sixth film for RKO and although audiences liked the film about a gambler trying to save enough money to marry the girl he left behind, many critics hinted that after six films, the cycle was showing signs of fatigue. While the opening weeks at the box office were excellent for *Swing Time*, business fell off

sooner than it had with the previous Astaire-Rogers musicals.

Still, the Jerome Kern songs made the film worthwhile with such classics as Astaire pretending he can't dance in "Pick Yourself Up," Astaire's romantic singing of "Just the Way You Look Tonight" while Rogers' head is full of shampoo, and the climactic

duet of "Never Gonna Dance." Also, "A Fine Romance" provided the perfect vehicle for the Astaire-Rogers romantic by-play.

The duo followed *Swing Time* with *Shall We Dance* in 1937. The best things about *Shall We Dance* are the Ira and George Gershwin songs, which include "They All Laughed," "Shall We Dance," and "They Can't Take That Away from Me." It was the first Gershwin score for the duo, and it featured Astaire as a ballet dancer who would rather tap dance with musical-comedy star Rogers than continue his ballet career.

Astaire was always looking for new ideas for duets with Rogers, and for this film he suggested a dance routine on roller skates. The result was "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off," one of their most memorable numbers.

Their next film, *Carefree* (1938), has Rogers playing a crazy, mixed-up girl-child who goes to psychiatrist Astaire for counsel. His treatment results in her falling in love with him. While trying to stop this, he



Swing Time (1936)

PHOTOFEST



The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle (1939)

PHOTOFEST

falls in love with her. Despite the Irving Berlin score, the film did not fare too well at the box office and it was the first Astaire-Rogers musical that failed to earn a profit. *Carefree* features only four numbers for the duo, one of which was "Change Partners." The film is more screwball comedy than musical, but it's still fun.

The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle (1939) was a departure for the duo. The Castles popularized ballroom dancing in the years before World War I with their exuberance and innovative style. This was the first time that Astaire and Rogers played real-life characters, and the first time that they appeared as husband and wife. The songs were not fitted to them, and the score comprised old tunes such as "By the Light of the Silvery Moon."

The serious nature of the story and its tragic ending of Vernon being killed in an airplane crash helped contribute to the most disappointing box-office returns of the Astaire-Rogers series. Everyone involved with the films agreed it was time to stop.

It had been announced that *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle* was to be the team's last picture together and it would have been except for Judy Garland. Astaire and Garland had scored a big hit in *Easter*

Parade (1948) and the two were signed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer to make *The Barkleys of Broadway* (1949), a story about a co-starring couple whose marriage hits the rocks when the wife decides to abandon musical comedy for drama. However, due to Garland's failing health and erratic behavior, she was replaced and Rogers was asked to step in.

The film was not as brilliant as the Astaire-Rogers musicals at RKO; however, the musical numbers were clever, and the songs included "You Can't Take That Away From Me," which was revived from *Shall We Dance*. And, aided by the publicity about the Astaire-Rogers reunion, the film was a critical and commercial success.

But despite some lackluster entries, the Astaire-Rogers films endure for many generations to enjoy. Their long-lasting presence is due to the elegance, sophistication, and delightful banter of cinema's most dazzling dancing duo. ■



The Barkleys of Broadway (1949)

PHOTOFEST

Dating DO's and DON'T's

BY HARLAN ZINCK

Part of a radio archivist's job is researching the shows that we preserve and uncovering as much history on the programs as possible. This allows both the series and the individual shows to be accurately cataloged – complete with data on production companies, performers, writers, directors, musicians, and other background data that will be useful for current as well as future researchers.

When dealing with a syndicated series, however, one of the most difficult parts of the job is determining exact broadcast dates for the individual shows. Since syndicated programs were pre-recorded for distribution and broadcast by many different stations over a fairly long period of time, it's always difficult to decide exactly what their "official" broadcast date should be.

A good example of the difficulties we encounter is *The Story of Dr. Kildare*, a syndicated series recorded in Los Angeles by MGM in the summer of 1949 for release the following year. We began our search by trying to determine the recording dates for the shows, since these would indeed be unique dates for the broadcasts. Problem is, we don't have access to MGM's recording logs – and, in fact, it's very likely that those logs were destroyed along with many other MGM production records when the studio was sold back in the early 1970s.

After deliberating a bit and scanning

Harlan Zinck is the Preservation Manager for the First Generation Radio Archives, "Preserving Radio's Past for the Future" at www.radioarchives.org. If you have comments or questions he can be contacted by e-mail at preservation@radioarchives.org.

some old program schedules, we decided that the most accurate broadcast dates to assign were the dates on which the programs first aired over WMGM New York – the "million dollar station" owned by Loews Incorporated – on which MGM's syndicated shows such as *Dr. Kildare*, *The Adventures of Maisie*, and *The Hardy Family* made their initial debuts. This made sense primarily because these were indeed "debut" dates; all subsequent broadcasts could reasonably be considered "repeats." Thus, though all of the shows were recorded in 1949, the broadcast date for the first episode is listed as Wednesday, February 1, 1950.

Setting a single broadcast date for *any* syndicated show is always an exercise in guesswork, as they were played on a variety of stations in a variety of markets on a variety of dates. Thus, depending upon your point of view, it would be equally correct to assign broadcast dates for the *Kildare* series well into 1955 or later, since some station somewhere was indeed broadcasting them even at that late date.

The "pick a date" game has been going on for years in the old time radio field. Sometimes the choice is fairly easy to make as, for example, with the *Guest Star* public service broadcast shown at the top of the next page.

As you may be able to see on the label, the producers insisted that this program not be played before September 26, 1954. Though it is true that local stations will have played this show throughout the week, it's a safe bet that the first possible broadcast date was the 26th – and it's that date we have cataloged as the date of broadcast. (Those with sharp eyes will notice that the station that originally had this disk



And, until the day comes when we gain access to the Morton production logs to determine a recording date, that's pretty much the date we'll stick with. Assuming the logs still exist...which they probably don't.

Over the years, collectors have frequently assigned arbitrary broadcast dates to syndicated shows – often basing their listings solely on a date that someone at a local station somewhere scribbled on the label. Such dating is spurious at best and generally serves only to confuse

played it on September 28th.)

However, with a widely syndicated program that was heard over the course of a few *years* rather than a few *days*, the choices become less obvious. Take a look at the label from the popular *Hometowners* musical series printed below.

Chicago-based Morton Radio Productions sold this series of shows to a large number of small-town stations in the post-war years, “bicycling” the disks from station to station for almost a decade. If you’re wearing your glasses, you’ll see that no fewer than six separate stations aired this very same program between 1948 and 1955.

So, what is the broadcast date we’ve chosen to assign this program?

Unknown.

rather than clarify the issue – but, then, confusion and contradictory program logs are fairly common in old time radio.

So, we have a choice: research and hope to find a recording date, pick the first likely broadcast date, or just forget dating alto-



gether and go with unique program numbers instead. We've found that listing a program number rather than a broadcast date is often the best way to go, since this unique number is usually printed on the label and/or embossed into the run-out portion of the disk itself.

But, wait!

Even with program numbers, there can be problems. Sometimes when one syndicator bought out the holdings of another, it would re-release older shows and assign them *new* program numbers.

Thus, a syndicated series such as *The Smith's of Hollywood* starring Harry Von Zell and Brenda Marshall may have been initially released in 1947 with an established and consistent series of program numbers, but when the distribution rights shifted to another syndicator in the early 1950s, the order of the shows was rearranged and new labels were slapped on the old disks with a new and totally different

numbering sequence. Two legitimate archives with two different sets of disks might well assign them different show numbers – and, to a certain extent, they'd *both* be right!

As you can imagine, this is the sort of thing that tends to keep radio archivists awake nights.

Suffice it to say that, when the First Generation Radio Archives lists a broadcast date for a syndicated show, we have researched and found a legitimate source for that date. Whether the date is 100 per cent correct is open to opinion, discussion, and disagreement – but at least we believe we've made a reasonable choice.

But don't be surprised if we change our minds later on...because we probably will.

Ge...who knew it would be so hard to get a date? ■

Harlan Zinck will be a guest on TWTID July 10.

Nostalgia Digest Book Selection

NOW WHEN I WAS A KID...

Nostalgic Ramblings by Dan McGuire

Foreword by Chuck Schaden



A nostalgia trip back to an era when life was less complex and moved at a slower pace. From a kid's perspective, it recalls the joys of growing up in a small town from the late 1930s through the early 1950s. Danny McGuire and a host of neighborhood kids were free to roam anywhere and play everywhere. With "big city" Chicago just a trolley ride away, they enjoyed the best of two worlds. It was a time when folks knew their neighbors and would stop to "set a spell" on someone's front porch to share neighborhood news. Because folks looked out for each other, kids could wander off for hours without alarming their parents. But they'd best be

home in time for supper if they "knew what was good for them!" A collection of recollections which originally appeared in the Nostalgia Digest. 300 pages, dozens of photos. 6x9, softcover book. **\$22.95 plus tax and S&H Total: \$29.96**

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OUR READERS/LISTENERS WRITE

WE GET MAIL

CHICAGO— Thanks again for the most informative periodical. Nothing beats it. I read it from cover to cover. Always interesting. —**BOB FORD**

NAPERVILLE, IL— I noticed, in the Necrology of 2003, an error in Michael Jeeter's obit. The TV series that he played in with Burt Reynolds was *Evening Shade*, not *Evening Star*. Michael Jeeter was known on *Sesame Street* as *The Other Mr. Noodle*.

—**CARL LANTZ**

(**ED. NOTE**— You're right, of course. Sorry for the slip of the typewriter.)

GRIFFITH, INDIANA— After reading the 2003 Necrology, my dad commented that there are towns whose phone books don't contain as many names. Last year certainly was a tough year for show biz, and my family and I would like to extend our condolences on the loss of your friend (and our friend) Les Tremayne. He was a remarkably talented man and will be missed. Thank you for giving his fans an opportunity to send him [90th] birthday wishes last year. It gives me a warm feeling to think that my letter might have brought a smile to his face. —**NICK DEFFENBAUGH**

(**ED. NOTE**— Indeed it did. All the cards and letters sent to Mr. Tremayne were read and sincerely appreciated by him and his wife Joan. A memorial service for Les Tremayne, held in Los Angeles on January 7, 2004, was recorded and will be broadcast on *TWTD* July 24.)

NORTHBROOK, IL— In the Spring, 2004 *Nostalgia Digest*, Jim Widner's article on Frank Lovejoy states that he was born March 28, 1914, and died in October of 1962. And that he was 50. A little math, and you'll see that if those years were correct, he died at 48.

—**PHILIP SCHWIMMER**

(**ED. NOTE**— You're correct. Mr. Lovejoy was 48 when he died.)

MOLINE, IL— I greatly enjoyed Jim Widner's [Spring, 2004] article on Frank Lovejoy, one of my favorite dramatic radio actors. I first

became aware of Mr. Lovejoy through his involvement with *Night Beat*, which has long been one of my favorite programs, mostly due to the fine writing and characterizations associated with it. However, I have also enjoyed *Night Beat's* ability to take me back to Chicago in the early 1950s, when telephone calls were a nickel, Randy Stone's apartment cost six dollars a week, and the population of Chicago was about three to four million. Stone's exploits for the Chicago Star took him all over the city with visits to, at, or near such locales as Riverview Park, the Merchandise Mart, Oak Street Beach, the Wrigley Building, and Cook County hospital. During Stone's travels, he traversed a plethora of the city's thoroughfares such as Cermak Road, Clark Street, Sheridan Road, State Street, Wentworth Avenue and Western Avenue. On occasion, Stone's adventures even drew him out of the confines of the city to such suburbs as Aurora, Joliet and Lake Forest. *Night Beat's* writers sometimes provided detail to their programs to the extent of including specific addresses and telephone numbers. In my mind, *Night Beat* painted a vivid picture of Chicago during the 1950s; a pretty nice place to visit, if you ask me.

—**HOWARD OLLER**

SAFFORD, ARIZONA— While driving through Iowa's southwestern hinterlands, I encountered strong head winds that were blowing my rear view mirror off its setting, making it difficult to see traffic approaching to pass from behind, or to change lanes. I decided to stop at the next little town and get a replacement for the aging mirror. The town turned out to be Clarinda, Glenn Miller's home town. It was about closing time, but the friendly salesman kept the store open another 20 minutes and helped me install the mirror. Being a fan of 1940s big bands in general and Glenn Miller in particular, I had often wondered if some mystic properties of the air or soil at places like this could explain how such places spawn a musical prodigy. But Clarinda, Iowa, looked like so many other off-the-beaten-path places in rural USA. Nothing about it



MORE MAIL

seemed to give me a hint. Driving out of town with my new and safe mirror, I seemed to hear faint strains of "Moonlight Serenade"! Glenn Miller liked Clarinda. The salesman at the auto parts store liked it. I liked it and I'm sure almost everyone in Clarinda liked it! —FRANK HORN

E-MAIL— During World War II I was a kid growing up on an Iowa farm. I do remember a little about rationing. Your ration stamps were *your* ration stamps, not be shared, traded or sold to anybody. Ration stamps were something that made it important to plan ahead. My parents canned a lot: fruit bought by the bushel in season, garden produce and meat. Canning fruit required sugar, a rationed item, that was bought as they got the stamps for it and saved for canning. Not really legal, but it did save buying fruit in tin cans, also rationed. Farmers needed to have enough stamps for any animal they would butcher for their own needs and also needed permission to butcher their own animals. There was an

exception to this. If an animal had to be killed, as with a vet's order, because it had a broken leg, you could then use the meat instead of calling the rendering truck. During the war, farmers — when they were going to butcher an animal — would say their pig or cow was going to break its leg. Sounds real odd to a kid. Many vets would give approval to butcher an animal if he was reasonably sure of a need. I don't know how often an exception was made, but sometimes I think it would be interesting to know just how many animals broke legs during WW II. I'm sure I ate meat from animals that were butchered under the exception rule, because meat was always a part of our meals. — HENRY SCHAPER

NILES, IL— I began listening to *TWTD* when I moved to Chicago in 1977. Your weekly program has been so much a part of my listening routine, I was lost when I lived in Rome, Italy, for a semester. As a teacher of history, I have incorporated a number of your old-time-radio programs into my classes on the Great Depression and World War II. It amazes students how rich entertainment was in the decades before television and video games. I have learned so much from your programs. Having grown up in the 1950s, I experienced the last decade of the Golden Age of Old Radio. Thanks to your programs, I have come to know and love the full spectrum of Old Time Radio. It has been a very enjoyable "education." Thank you for your dedication to broadcasting. You are a true Chicago treasure!
—FATHER CHRIS KUHN



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Website: www.wdcb.org

SOUTH ELGIN, IL— Problem: No Metro Golden Memories. No Museum of Broadcast Communications. No Spring issue of *Nostalgia Digest*. Well, there's a wanna-be issue that came thru the U.S. Mail like the USS Arizona came thru the Pearl Harbor attack. Affixed to a battered and torn issue with a partial cover, wrinkled pages and torn and dirtied back was a cute little sticker from the Postal Service that said, "We're sorry that your article was damaged during processing." "Damaged?" Yeah, like Troy after the Greeks left. Like Constantinople after the Crusaders visited. Like the Butch Cavendish Gang after the Lone Ranger paid his respects. I've got every issue of *Nostalgia Digest* beginning with August 1988 in neat little binders. Actually, I'm

one of those OTR fans (fiends?) who refer to the old issues regularly. Now to state the problem. Where can I get a single issue to keep my collection intact? Again, no MGM or MBC! Would you be so kind as to point me in the right direction? —**GREG STEVENS**
(ED. NOTE— A *current* single issue may be purchased at The Framemakers, 10 N. Cass Ave., Westmont, IL. Other than that, recent back issues may be obtained for \$4 each by sending directly to Nostalgia Digest, Box 421, Morton Grove, IL 60053.)

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA— I received your book, "Speaking of Radio," which I have read with a great deal of interest. It is really a fascinating book and it is remarkable that you were able to collect all of these memories for future generations. We have lost most of these people now and just recently lost another of the people you interviewed, Mercedes McCambridge. Thanks for so much good reading.
—**JIMMIE HICKS**

MT. PROSPECT, IL— Thank you for your contribution to one of the greatest hobbies, Old Time Radio! I finished your book of your interviews with so many legends of radio history. I remember hearing many on your programs, but it's so nice to read and savor the words from your book. It is amazing how many of the real stars of OTR you managed to meet. I feel blessed to have lived in this area and enjoyed the flavor that Chicago has offered and to have met and talked with you about such an important era in U.S. entertainment. —**BILL RITCHIE**

CHICAGO— I just finished your excellent book. Some observations: 1) Your careful pre-interview preparation was obvious to the point that several interviewees remarked you knew their performance history better than they. 2) It was interesting that you let the performers tell the story in an unfettered way by asking evocative questions that kept the memories flowing. 3) I was surprised that announcers seemed to be the best informed about the dynamics of radio program production and also provided the most articulate responses. 4) Phil Harris came across as the only performer who either never left his character or never had one. 5) Norman Corwin is a remarkable and gifted person. 6) I've always thought *One Man's Family* was more than a cut above

the popular soap opera of its day, and Carlton E. Morse's interview explains my long attraction to that program. I could go on, but let me say that by collecting and publishing the interviews in "Speaking of Radio" you have captured and shared with your public the thoughts and views of those who created the most imaginative epoch in broadcast history. No small task, and a giant step from WLEY. —**WILLIAM O'NEILL**

PORTLAND, INDIANA— I am now reading your book and can't put it down! Thanks for producing a great book that allows one to get to better know the personalities of great old radio times gone by. I wish I had met some of them while they were still around. A great read! —**GREG A. SHREEVE**

BARRINGTON, IL— I was 29 years of age when I searched the AM dial one fateful Saturday in the early 1970s. I remember because I had long hair or, I should say, hair without an empty spot. I have followed you up and down both the AM and FM dials. The sad thing is that most of the stations you have left have either changed call letters, changed formats or, as they say, gone dark. You have a God-given gift of being able to share your old time radio with us out here in Radioland every Saturday.

Your anniversary show this year [April 24] was an audio book to me. I usually read an interview a week from your book "Speaking of Radio." I was sad when WNIB announced its sale [November, 2000] and had fears that *TWTD* would be a piece of radio history. But you made our day when you said WDCB would be your new home [February, 2001]. And then when the WDCB antenna blew down [December, 2001], I was on the road, stopped for gas, and when I started the car WDCB was gone! The next day I learned what happened and the station's website said 'DCB would be up in a few days with lower power. The thought of not having OTR and the other fine programs on WDCB into my home was terrible. I purchased something I haven't used since Uncle Miltie was king of TV: an antenna for my attic. Just like the good old days, I was in the attic turning the antenna and my wife was yelling at me, "A little more to the left" or right, depending on the signal. Finally the station came in loud and clear. The fact that the station is on the Internet is a big plus. I have programmed



STILL MORE MAIL

WDCB as a favorite and when we are on vacation, I can turn on my laptop and there you are.

Ken Alexander is just great. The banter between you brings a new dimension to the program. The reading of the newspaper is a flash of the past for my family. We sing along to the Robert Hall theme song. But I still haven't heard, "We're doing our Christmas shopping at Robert Hall this year..." Not long ago Ken was reading ads and talked about O'Connor and Goldberg shoes. Our daughter worked for them while attending high school. It brought back fond memories. Keep up the great job. In my own little mind, I feel that 34 years from now someone will be playing one of your programs, talking about the good old days of broadcasting with Chuck Schaden as the nostalgia guru at the turn of the century.

-PAUL CARLSON

E-MAIL- I have often wondered as I listened to your program how many young people got their first taste of classical music from the signature music of their favorite radio programs. Then it occurred to me that this would make an interesting theme for a show. Perhaps the most well-known is the use of the "William Tell Overture" for *The Lone Ranger*. There are lots of other examples: "Flight of the Bumblebee" for *Green Hornet*; "March" from "Love for Three Oranges" for *The FBI in Peace and War*; and my personal favorite, *Sgt. Preston*, with the Donna Diana Overture. I'm sure you can come up with many other good examples and might make an interesting theme to build a show on sometime, if you haven't already done so. -R. KENT TeVAULT

(ED. NOTE- Your idea for a program about the origin of radio theme music is a good one. In fact, we've already done a pair of 4-hour *TWTD* programs on the subject. The first was September 13, 1997 and the second was on August 29, 1998. Our pal Ken Alexander, who has an outstanding background in classical music, was most helpful in preparing those two broadcasts. They are available on cassette tape if you're interested. Each 4-hour program is \$25 plus

\$5 S&H. Send to TWTD Transcripts, Box 421, Morton Grove, IL 60053.

GLEN ELLYN, IL- My husband and I faithfully listen to your program on Saturday afternoons. We both were raised during the radio days and remember so many of the programs. What a joy to re-listen and remember those wonderful, seemingly easy days of our youth. Your program is a treasure to us. My husband had a stroke almost five years ago and we are pretty much home bound. So our home is our entertainment center. We plan to be in the kitchen on Saturdays. I usually bake something or fix an early supper. You must believe me when I say your program is like medicine to us. We laugh. We laugh more. We continue to be glued to the radio just as we did when we were kids. The programs bring a sense of joy to our home. My dad used to play in the Orrin Tucker Orchestra years ago, so I was raised with good big-band music. There have been times that you have mentioned his orchestra and this brings such happiness to me. My dad would be thrilled to know his orchestra is still remembered. Thanks for bringing happiness, memories and laughter into our home on Saturday afternoons. You are sooo appreciated. -JUDY GALE
(ED. NOTE- Thanks for your very kind words. Just for you - and everyone else who enjoys good big-band music we'll play a 1951 Orrin Tucker broadcast from Chicago on *TWTD* July 24.)

NOSTALGIA DIGEST AND RADIO GUIDE

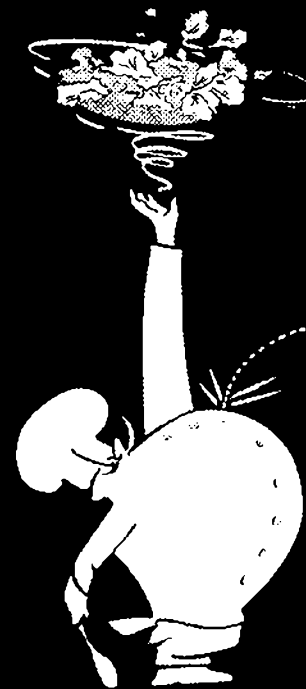
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starred together in a string of popular movie musicals. Read about this dazzling, dancing duo in Randall G. Mielke's article on page 54.

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