

# NOSTALGIA DIGEST <sup>AND</sup> RADIO GUIDE



HENRY MORGAN

# OLD-TIME RADIO ENCYCLOPEDIA

Here it is at last! John Dunning's long-awaited and much-anticipated definitive encyclopedia of American radio from its beginning in the 1920s until the early 1960s.

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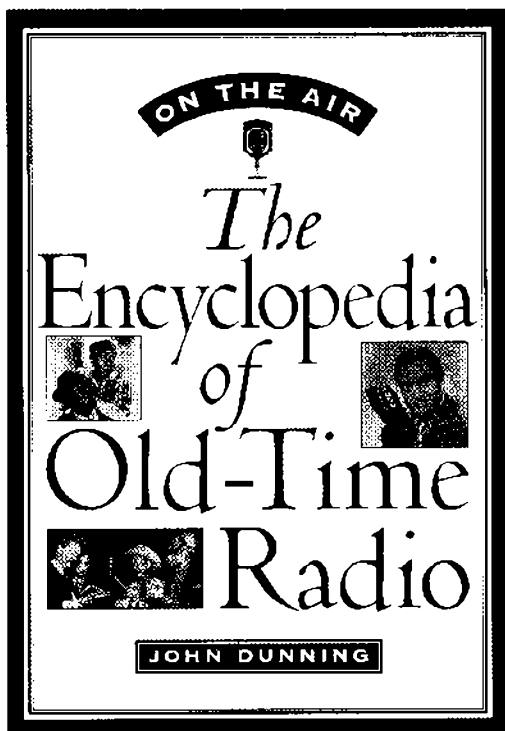
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# CHUCK SCHADEN'S NOSTALGIA DIGEST AND RADIO GUIDE

BOOK TWENTY-FOUR

CHAPTER FIVE

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 1998

## *Hello, Out There in Radioland!*

Frank Sinatra, the "man who provided the soundtrack for our generation" died last May 14 at the age of 82.

John Dunning, in "On The Air --- Encyclopedia of Old Time Radio," says "The career of Frank Sinatra was radio-made. He was still in his teens when he got his first break on a national network. In 1935 Sinatra and three pals won a Major Bowes



amateur show on NBC. By 1939, it was estimated, he was appearing on 18 regular radio shows for stations in the greater New York-New Jersey area."

The tremendous media coverage of Sinatra's death included his Major Bowes stint but virtually eliminated any mention of his large volume of work on radio.

Frank Sinatra's radio work was actually the foundation on which he built his career.

He appeared on nationally broadcast band remotes with Harry James and Tommy Dorsey from 1939 to 1942, starring on his own programs from 1942 until 1955, and as the top singer of top tunes on *Your Hit Parade* in 1943-45 and 1947-49.

He even tried his hand at radio drama, appearing occasionally on the *Lux Radio Theatre*, as guest star on *Suspense* and *Reader's Digest, Radio Edition*. He starred in an adventure series, *Rocky Fortune*, in 1953-54. And he was able to develop his comedic timing well enough to hold his own when he made frequent guest stints on programs hosted by Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Jack Benny and Fred Allen. He made many appearances for military audiences on Armed Forces Radio Service programs during World War II.

While all this radio was going on, Sinatra was making records and movies. When his radio days were over, he turned to television and concerts.

Frank Sinatra became the biggest superstar of them all and it began with his 1935 song with the Hoboken Four on the Major Bowes radio show.

So while all the extensive coverage of Sinatra's life and career failed to spotlight his radio days, we will not make such an oversight.

Tune in to our *Those Were The Days* program on two consecutive Saturdays in August -- August 1 and 8 -- and we'll treat you to a special look at "Frank Sinatra's Radio Days." You'll find all the details in our *TWTD* listings on page 20.

Thanks for listening.

—Chuck Schaden

## HERE'S MORGAN

After Shick bailed out late in 1947, Rayve Cream Shampoo became Henry's next victim. Not content to poke fun on his own turn, he visited the *Fred Allen Show* in May of 1948 to "Rayve" about the product with the man he admired more than anybody else in show business. Morgan told Fred that, according to the small print in his contract, he not only had to make the shampoo and hawk it but he also must throw dirt in men's hair to increase sales and assured Allen that if he didn't like his first shampoo "we give you twenty-four tubes of the same stuff to teach you a lesson."

Another link connecting the two men is that they each made a motion picture which somehow missed the mark and left both comedians and their ardent fans feeling that more should have been made of the material and the talent on both sides of the camera. Although Allen never regarded *It's in the Bag* the same way old foe Jack Benny jested about his fabled turkey, *The Horn Blows at Midnight*, he thought the penny-pinching methods of the producer hampered the hide-and-seek plot and left some of the best work of radio veterans like Benny, Rudy Vallee, William Bendix, and Victor Moore on the cutting-room floor.

Morgan's opus, *So This is New York*, could have been the sleeper of 1948. Carl Foreman adapted the screenplay from a Ring Lardner novel, Richard Fleischer directed, Stanley Kramer produced, and the cast consisted of experienced mirth-makers such as Vallee, Stang, Hugh Herbert, and Leo Gorcey. Unfortunately, this curiosity, set in the 1920s about country folk going to the big city in search of a husband for an unmarried sister, aimed for too many targets during its 78 minutes and the shortcuts taken to save money were glaringly obvious. Henry never had much to say about *So This is New York*, but if he

had been asked about this rarely-seen movie he might have commented sardonically, "It isn't a lost film. It's just hiding."

Morgan liked to close his shows with the promise that he would "be on this same corner in front of the cigar store next week." In the spring of 1948 he stepped in front of the cameras of WPHI in Philadelphia for a program called *On the Corner* which is believed to be the first televised network series for the American Broadcasting Company. As the man on the street Henry would flip through the pages of *Variety*, come across the name of a puppeteer, dancer, singer, or impressionist who would then perform, and toss in an array of gibes between acts. As usual, he saved some mordant remarks for the commercials of Admiral Corporation, who tolerated his scoffing attitude toward their appliances for just five weeks before pulling the plug.

In 1949 Morgan appeared on the final episode of the *Fred Allen Show* and the following year he followed Allen off what Fred called the treadmill to oblivion. But producers didn't forget the efforts of radio cast members Stang, Pert Kelton, and Art Carney who soon found work in television. And other influential figures remembered the curmudgeon with the caustic wit and an affinity for baiting sponsors and presumed that he must be a jolly bad fellow with a radical tinge.

After Henry's name appeared in *Red Channels*, a book citing entertainers supposedly sympathetic to communism, he found himself blacklisted. This came as quite a surprise to Morgan who, as an equal-opportunity basher, had taken frequent pot shots at Russia and had openly confessed that, as a free-spirited iconoclast who called no man master, he could not have endured communism's restrictions for even one minute.

Despite his protests of innocence he found himself out in the Cold War looking



for work. Finally WMGM let him broadcast from Hutton's, a Manhattan restaurant, from midnight to three a.m. The temptation to pull pranks in the middle of the night just to see if anybody was listening, like he did in 1933 at WCAU in Philadelphia when he inserted names of studio executives into missing persons reports, may have been hard for Henry to resist, but with personalities such as Jackie Gleason and James Stewart regularly stopping by, Morgan had no shortage of lively subjects to interview and little dead air to fill.

Producer Mark Goodson, a regular diner at Hutton's who had been hatching an idea for a game show, decided that Morgan might be the right person to function as resident wit on the new program just as Fred Allen had been doing on *What's My Line?* For the next fifteen years on *I've Got a Secret*, Henry sat between the likes of Jayne Meadows, Faye Emerson, Bess Myerson, and Betsy Palmer and asked questions with a sly smile that seemed to say, "I've got a secret of my own. For the first time in my life I've got a steady job!"

After *Secret* ended its season each spring,

Henry either satisfied his wanderlust in Asia or Europe or played in summer stock. It may seem hard to picture the natural improvisator in roles requiring him to stick to the scripts, but he acquitted himself well as pompous Sheridan Whiteside in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, clever Sakini in *Teahouse of the August Moon*, and fussy Felix Unger in *The Odd Couple*.

Even less likely is the prospect of the man who derided the products of countless advertisers doing voice-overs for TV commercials, but that is what happened after *I've Got a Secret* left the air. Morgan continued working with ad agencies taping thirty-second spots until just a few months before his death on May 19, 1994.

But at heart he remained a nonconformist who fought convention all along the line. His wife Karen, whom he had married in 1978 at Sealand with only dolphins and a magistrate in attendance, carried out his deathbed request that, instead of a funeral, his friends should remember him at a memorial party at Sardi's, his favorite restaurant.

Even his own obituary, written in early 1994 as a preface to his autobiography, steered away from the usual path and, instead of describing his accomplishments, listed all of his liabilities from childhood illnesses to adult maladies like gout, lumbago, and heart ailments. Also contributing to his demise were "500 pastrami sandwiches, 3,000 quarts of beer, 7,000 quarts of liquor, 17,250 bacon and egg breakfasts, 21,000 steaks and hamburgers, and 1,296,000 cigarettes." Ever the comedian, he saves the zinger for last: "2 wives."

There is no evidence that Henry Morgan wrote his own epitaph, but if he had very likely the wording on his headstone would have been "Here's Morgan-- This Space for Rent." ■

(NOTE— Tune in to TWTD August 22 for a four-hour salute to Henry Morgan.)

## WOMEN IN OLD-TIME RADIO

# THE DISTAFF SIDE

BY RICHARD R. KUNZ

*Cherchez la femme:* Find the woman. Despite the sexism of the era (women's lib was not yet even a fashionable phrase, let alone a strong social movement), the fairer sex was indeed represented on radio, as well as the motion-picture screen.

While it was still pretty much a man's world, there were some meaty parts available in both mediums for an accomplished parade of actresses. Though the great majority of movies were carried by a male star, a few were structured with a woman in the principal role (*Mrs. Miniver* comes to mind, as well as a half-dozen or so similar examples).

In the golden age of radio, the major series were centered around men, with women as "accessories" of a sort. Even the major "teams"—Jack Benny and Mary Livingstone, George Burns and Gracie Allen, and *Fibber McGee and Molly*, to name a few, generally cast the distaff member in a secondary role. On the dramatic side, the *Shadow* had Margo, *Sam Spade* Effie, *Superman* Lois, and so on. Just the same, most of the supporting roles were characters extremely essential to the program—who could imagine *Dr. Christian* without his faithful nurse Judy, or even Matt Dillon without Miss Kitty?

But, as in real life, the ladies did hold supreme in a few situations, and their ranks continued to grow stronger—as they do now in the "enlightened" '90s. Consider

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*Richard Kunz is editor of The New Electric Railway Journal and a free-lance writer with a special interest in old time radio.*

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the large number of women in commanding positions in broadcasting today—from *Murphy Brown* and Barbara Walters on down to respected local anchors, talk show hosts and deejays. Radio—and later television—always made room for a number of talented women who lit up the airwaves with their performances.

The emphasis in this brief and unscientific survey of the role of women in old-time radio will be on individual performances, either in a non-recurring principal role (in drama or comedy) or as the star of a continuing series. Important though they were in gaining a foothold for women in radio, the "better halves" of famous teams we'll save for another time. And so, in no particular order, we give tribute to the distaff side—a near dozen singularly talented women who brightened up the dial in radio's golden age...

**Mercedes McCambridge** First, a personal favorite—even her stage name was impressive. Mercedes McCambridge arguably had one of the best voices ever to grace a microphone. Her timbre, inflection and delivery were unlike any other, so much so that in later years she was the first and only choice to voice the foul words of the Demon during the highly charged emotional scenes in the movie *The Exorcist*. Many a radio drama was brightened by her particular vocal talents and exquisite articulation.

Born Carlotta Mercedes Agnes McCambridge in Joliet in 1918, she began performing on radio while still in college and soon became one of the most sought-



MERCEDES MC CAMBRIDGE



JOAN DAVIS



ANN SOTHERN

after actresses in the medium. Orson Welles, a giant in his own right, called her the "world's greatest living radio actress." While pursuing a busy schedule before the mike in such programs as the wartime *Everything for the Boys*, Carlton E. Morse's *Family Skeleton* and *I Love a Mystery*, *Murder at Midnight*, and even the sitcom *This is Judy Jones*, she worked in films as well, earning an Oscar as Best Supporting Actress for her first role in *All the King's Men* opposite Broderick Crawford in 1949.

She moved to television in its infancy, starting in two series (the video version of *One Man's Family* in 1949-50, and *Wire Service* a few years later), but the quantity of her work diminished in the 1960s as she suffered a lengthy bout with alcoholism—one personal demon she ultimately conquered. Her later work has been sparse, and primarily in films.

One of the joys of the golden age of radio was listening to that magnificent voice resonating through the night in a chilling mystery or adventure tale. Mercedes McCambridge personified radio drama at its best.

**Joan Davis** Like Mercedes Mc Cambridge, Joan Davis had a distinctive voice. But, while Ms. McCambridge was a consummate dramatic actress, Miss Davis was a gifted comedienne. For many years (she

began in show business as a child), the rubber-faced woman with the raspy, nasal voice amused and entertained millions in movies, on the radio and later as a television star.

Many a musical motion picture of the 30s and 40s was enlivened by her antics, often as the wise-cracking friend of the heroine who often didn't get the guy. Her radio work began in earnest in 1941 with an appearance on NBC's *Rudy Vallee Show*. She opened to rave reviews and soon became a regular on the program, playing a scatterbrained, man-crazy girl who had the hots for Vallee.

In mid-1943, the "Connecticut Yankee" left the program, and it was renamed the *Sealtest Village Store*, with Joan Davis as star. However, the show's producers believed a mere woman could not carry the top-rated show, and quickly signed Jack Haley (the fabled Tin Woodman) as her co-host. The pair continued the program for two years, until Joan jumped to CBS.

Her new series was called *Joanie's Tea Room*, but it more or less picked up where the *Village Store* had left off. This time Harry Von Zell was her announcer and comic foil. The show lasted through several sponsors, time and cast changes, and finished as *Leave It to Joan*. During the *Tea Room* series, her daughter Beverly

## THE DISTAFF SIDE

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played the occasional part of Joan's sister.

Moving to television in 1952, Joan Davis starred in *I Married Joan*, opposite Jim Backus. The show ran for three years; Joan died in 1961.

**Ann Sothern** Yet another female star with the power to carry her own program (several of them, as it turned out in the transition to television) was Ann Sothern, born Harriette Lake in 1909 in Valley City, North Dakota. Beginning as a singer in early sound films in 1929, she eventually migrated to Broadway to learn her craft, quickly becoming a star on the Great White Way.

That success brought her to Hollywood again, where she eventually essayed a ten-picture comedy role as *Maisie*, a popular series in the years before and after World War II. She repeated the part in several years' worth of *Maisie* programs for CBS; a later syndicated version followed. *Maisie Revere* was a Brooklyn beauty who managed to ensnare herself and her friends in situations that were fortunately resolved by the final curtain.

Along with a substantial number of movie roles, Ann Sothern found time to star in two highly regarded television series—*Private Secretary*, and the later *Ann Sothern Show*—again, as always, the “top banana”.

**Gertrude Berg** “Yoo-Hoo, Mrs. Bloom” —a call familiar in the early days of television came down from early radio. Gertrude Berg was identified with only one venture (on radio and television, as well as the Broadway stage), but the track record of *The Goldbergs* ran from 1929 to 1955 (a successor show in a similar vein had a one-year run in the early 1960s).

Gertrude Edelstein was born in Harlem in 1899. An aspiring writer, she eventually created *The Rise of the Goldbergs* for NBC

in 1929. The chronicle of a Jewish family from the Bronx, the long-running series told the story of Molly Goldberg, her husband Jake, their children Sammy and Rosalie, and her Uncle David.

The radio chronicle finally closed down in 1945. After a play based on the series did well on Broadway in 1948, *The Goldbergs* moved to CBS television in 1949 for a long run, for the first year a radio version was offered as well. The Goldberg saga came to an end in 1955; Gertrude Berg died in 1966.

**Kate Smith** The “Songbird of the South” was born in Greenville, Virginia in 1907. Well remembered as hefty of figure with a voice to match, she broke into show business in her teens, starred on Broadway in 1926 and by 1929 had her first radio show on NBC, albeit short-lived. Her size made her the target of many jokes (notably from comic Bert Lahr), and after the initial radio gig led nowhere Kate Smith was ready to quit the business.

Enter Ted Collins. A recording manager at the then-Columbia Phonograph Company, Collins caught one of Kate's Broadway performances and was impressed with the contralto. An agreement was quickly forged between them wherein Kate would do the singing, Ted the managing (and fending off the critics). They would share equally in the profits from that day forward. Collins got Kate a CBS radio show in 1931, and “When the Moon Came Over the Mountain” (her theme song) soon became a standard. Until well after the war, she was the most popular female singer on the airwaves; in the years after the conflict she and Arthur Godfrey were the biggest money-makers for the Paley-led network.

Perhaps her best known song was “God Bless America,” a tune from Irving Berlin's bottomless trunk that was once seriously considered for the U.S. national anthem. Her delivery of the stirring song brought





GERTRUDE BERG



KATE SMITH



MARIE WILSON

tears to audiences after she was granted the privilege of introducing it in 1938. Those heartfelt renditions were in keeping with her great personal patriotism during the war years. Kate Smith was one of the top benefit performers, raising millions of dollars for war bonds and civilian charities.

Kate Smith moved to television in 1950; a year later she signed off on radio for the last time. Her last regular TV series ran until 1960. Four years later Ted Collins died; Kate Smith followed him in death in 1986.

**Marie Wilson** Katherine Elizabeth Wilson entered life in Anaheim, California, on December 30, 1916. She was the quintessential "dumb blonde" of the golden age of radio and early television, playing variations of the same role throughout her professional career.

Marie had a largely unspectacular movie career that did, however, manage to include an appearance in 1936's *Satan Met A Lady*; the odd precursor of *The Maltese Falcon* wherein the Sam Spade character was played by a woman (Bette Davis). She also had a small role in Laurel & Hardy's *Babes in Toyland* in 1934, but did not hit her stride until 1947, when radio producer Cy Howard paired her with Cathy Lewis in *My Friend Irma*.

Arguably an industrial-strength scatter-

brain, Irma Peterson was a legal stenographer who worked for crochety lawyer Mr. Clyde (Alan Reed). Jane Stacy (Cathy Lewis), her roommate, narrated the tales of Irma's bumbling life, and was always trying to discourage the romance between Irma and street hustler Al (John Brown). Other characters of note in the series included Hans Conried as Professor Kropotkin, who lived in the building, and Gloria Gordon as Mrs. O'Reilly, their landlord.

The series was a smash success, and came to the silver screen in 1949, primarily as the launching pad for the cinema career of the team of Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. The movie spawned a sequel a few years later. In 1952, the television saga began; both radio and TV versions expired in 1954. The small-screen series had the distinction of being the first such set of programs telecast from the then-brand new Television City in Hollywood.

With the end of *My Friend Irma* came some undistinguishable movies and a cartoon series. With the possible exception of a cameo in the James Stewart-Maureen O'Hara movie *Mr. Hobbs Takes A Vacation*, Marie Wilson never topped the work she had done on her trademark programs. She succumbed to cancer in 1972, never having been able to shuck the typecasting

she had disdained in her later years.

**Judy Canova** Country comedy has always been popular in the American culture, and Judy Canova rose to become one of the most popular "hillbilly" performers on radio and in the movies. Juliet Canova was a native (1916) of Jacksonville, Florida. The pigtailed comedienne, trained as an opera singer, rose quickly in vaudeville to become a *Ziegfeld Follies* headliner.

After a stint in a New York "rustic" club, the die was cast, and Judy Canova became a cornpone comic for good. Some movies followed (she made her debut in a Busby Berkeley-directed comedy), followed by a 1943 gig on CBS radio in *The Judy Canova Show*. The "queen of the hillbillies" moved to NBC in 1944 and remained there as a Saturday night feature (preceding *Grand Ole Opry*) until 1953.

A mixed, loose bag of comedy sketches and songs, her radio show employed top talent in supporting roles. Hans Conried was the grouchy Mr. Hemingway, Judy's house guest. Verna Felton (in one of her many character parts) was her friend Miz Pierce. Ruby Dandridge essayed her maid, Geranium, while Sheldon Leonard portrayed boy friend Joe Crunchmiller. Mel Blanc, master of many voices, was Pedro, the crazy Mexican handyman, whose tag line "Pardon me for talking een your face, seniorita" was eagerly awaited each week.

A few movies and a dramatic appearance on *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* followed the conclusion of the radio series in 1953; then a lengthy lapse until an appearance in the 1976 movie *Cannonball*. In 1953 Judy Canova gave birth to her daughter Diana, an actress best known for her varied sitcom work (including *Soap*). Judy Canova died in 1983.

**Lucille Ball** The prime comedienne of

the early days of television—and well into its formative years—had deep roots in radio and on the screen. From Jamestown, New York (c. 1911), one of a few artists instantly identifiable by a single name, Lucy embarked on a show business career at 15, traveling to New York City to study drama. Rejected numerous times in her attempts to join the chorus of a Broadway musical, she eventually made her way to Hollywood, landing a job as a Goldwyn Girl in the Eddie Cantor movie *Roman Scandals*.

Literally dozens of movies followed (11 in 1934 alone) in bit and later featured parts, mostly in comic roles. Gradually Lucy established herself as the screen's consummate female clown, in the same league with (and working alongside) Bob Hope and Red Skelton. Despite that long apprenticeship polishing her considerable talents, the movies never took full advantage of her skills.

She met Cuban bandleader Desi Arnaz on the set of RKO's *Too Many Girls* in 1940, and married him the following year. (Less than two decades later they would own the studios at which they made most of their films.) Radio beckoned in 1948, when Lucy paired with Lee Bowman (and later Richard Denning) as Liz and George Cooper in the highly rated sitcom, *My Favorite Husband*. Supported by Gale Gordon and Bea Benaderet, the show ran until 1951 on radio.

The series was to be an excellent training ground for the future Lucy. When television was making great inroads on radio in the early 1950s, the producers of *My Favorite Husband* wanted to make the move to the small screen. Lucy wanted Desi to co-star in the new series, but the powers-that-be would have none of it, reasoning that a thick-accented Cuban could not make it as a domestic situation comedy star.

A television version was ultimately un-



JUDY CANOVA



LUCILLE BALL



EVE ARDEN

dertaken with Joan Caulfield and Barry Nelson, and enjoyed a mild success. Across town, Lucy and Desi were making arrangements to begin their own series, which became the perennial "I Love Lucy." The hugely successful program defined the fifties, and spawned several other sitcoms starring Lucille Ball, sans Desi (whom she divorced in 1960). For a brief period in 1952, the TV series had a radio version, with identical cast and similar plot lines, also on CBS.

Perhaps the most successful woman in broadcasting in the 60s and 70s, Lucille Ball confounded the conventional wisdom that the distaff side was merely decoration in a male dominated medium. Hers was a real-life "rags-to-riches" story set against the backdrop of Hollywood. Considered "just another pretty face" by many Hollywood producers, she ultimately bought the studio itself. Thought to be just this side of crazy by attempting a situation comedy with a Cuban bandleader, she proved the critics wrong. Until her death in 1989, she WAS the first lady of television.

**Eve Arden** That a high-school English teacher—and a woman at that—could prove an inspiration to many seemed rather remote in those lib-less days after the war. It was a man's world, and apart from a few show biz superstars, few women could be

trusted to carry their own series, even if it was done for laughs. Eve Arden proved the naysayers wrong, and went on to a successful and prolific career that lasted for half a century.

Born Eunice Quedens in Mill Valley, California, in 1912, she made her stage debut in stock in 1928, stepping up to the *Ziegfeld Follies* in 1934. A busy screen career took off in 1937, and in 1945 she added radio to her repertoire in support of Danny Kaye on his *Pabst Blue Ribbon Show*. Famous for her caustic wit, she moved to the *Sealtest Village Store* after Joan Davis left, remaining there until that program closed down in 1948.

The best was yet to come. On July 19, 1948 an unassuming, warm little comedy show about an English teacher at a small high school somewhere in the midwest made its debut. Eve Arden starred as Constance (Connie) Brooks, whose tart tongue concealed a compassionate soul, laboring for an abysmally small salary to teach the refinements of the English language to a sometimes-unwilling student body.

Largely refraining from slapstick, and emphasizing wit, this very popular show (not surprisingly especially among real-life teachers) ran for nine years, moving over to CBS television for two more. Eve Arden

## THE DISTAFF SIDE

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went on to star in several other TV shows and yet more movies (including one based on the radio and TV series), as well as *Grease* in 1978 and its sequel *Grease II* in 1982. She died in 1990.

**Fanny Brice** Frances Borach, one of the greatest comedienne in vaudeville and on Broadway, hailed from New York (1891). Several movies reprised her life (*Funny Girl* and *Funny Lady*, starring Barbra Streisand—whom many say is her spiritual successor—as well as *Rose of Washington Square*, with Alice Faye).

Fanny Brice's life was not without its ups and downs—particularly during her relationships with gambler Nicky Arnstein and showman Billy Rose. Her talent was great, however, and resulted in much success on Broadway (in the *Ziegfeld Follies* and several shows tailored especially for her). She made a few movies in the post-silent era, and gravitated to radio in 1932 as a participant on the *Ziegfeld Follies of the Air*, a revue featuring past and present *Follies* stars.

That program lasted but a few months, until the master showman himself, Florenz Ziegfeld, died. The concept was revived four years later, and Fannie Brice was back as an occasional headliner. On one edition, she sang her trademark song, "My Man," on another she introduced the character of *Baby Snooks*, for which she would be forever remembered. Jack Arthur was the first "Daddy," in a series of *Snooks* skits which played out over the run of the show.

Fannie Brice then moved to the *Good News of 1938* program, which nominally starred Frank Morgan, and which was sponsored by Maxwell House Coffee. "Baby Snooks" went along and, in 1940, the program, by now a half-hour in length, became simply *Maxwell House Coffee Time*. The show was divided into equal

halves; Frank Morgan would tell tall tales about his younger days, followed by a *Baby Snooks* skit to fill out the program.

Hanley Stafford, one of the great "stack-blowers" in radio, was added as "Daddy" (Lancelot Higgins). "Mummy" was Arlene Harris, of *Al Pearce Show* fame. *Snooks'* parents were always arguing about one thing or another, and Baby Snooks, the quintessential "brat," was superb at playing off one side against the other. Critics have judged *Snooks* as one of the three "mean kids" of radio; Charlie McCarthy and Red Skelton's Junior round out the trio.

In 1944, the program expanded to a stand-alone series in a half-hour format on CBS. *Baby Snooks* moved to NBC in 1949. The show was still going strong two years later, when Fanny suffered a cerebral hemorrhage on May 24, 1951. She died five days later, and the character of Baby Snooks was put to rest with her. Fanny Brice was a true comic genius.

**Agnes Moorehead** The last of our wireless queens was perhaps the best in imparting sheer terror to the radio audience. Her credits included many radio dramas (and not a few comedies), a substantial number of movies (among them *Citizen Kane*), and much television, including a long run as Endora in *Bewitched*.

Her "civilian" background was no less distinguished. Born in Clinton, Massachusetts, in 1906, she got her M.A. at the University of Wisconsin, and earned a Ph.D. in literature at Bradley University. She studied acting at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. The daughter of a Presbyterian minister, Agnes Moorehead made her stage debut at the age of three; eight years later she "turned pro" in the chorus and ballet of the St. Louis Opera.

Subsequently, she sang regularly on local radio. After college, Agnes Moorehead taught speech and drama in high school,



FANNY BRICE



AGNES MOOREHEAD

sourpuss Maggie to fun-loving Jiggs on *Bringing Up Father* on NBC in 1941.

Orson Welles had spotted Miss Moorehead's considerable thespic talents beginning in 1937, when he was tapped to play the lead in a restructured version of *The Shadow*. The 22-year-old "child prodigy" chose his protegee-to-be, nine years his senior, for the role of Margo Lane, confidant of the man

spending her summers in stock. She began appearing on Broadway in 1928, then switched to radio with appearances on *The March of Time* and *Cavalcade of America*. Active in stage and radio work in the years to follow, her career got a further boost in 1940, when she joined Orson Welles' Mercury Theatre Company. Her first work for that legendary association of some of the theater's then-and-future talents was in a small role as Charles Foster Kane's mother in *Citizen Kane* for RKO in 1941.

Despite studio interference, Welles' second RKO film *The Magnificent Ambersons* was of award-winning caliber and Agnes Moorehead's part as a spinster was duly noted by the receipt of an Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actress. It was the first of five such designations for this gifted actress.

She had become one of the busiest performers in Hollywood and on Broadway, as well as radio, often essaying portrayals of possessive, neurotic and puritanical women. Nevertheless, this versatile actress was equally adept at comedy, a skill she later brought to television's *Bewitched*. Cast opposite Lionel Barrymore on *Mayor of the Town* as the whining housekeeper Marilly, she provided a tone of counterpoint to the warmer members of the all-star cast. In a similar vein, she played

who could cloud men's minds.

Out of the half-century of outstanding stage, screen, radio and television performances, one is often singled out as the crowning achievement of the career of Agnes Moorehead. It was actually a series of eight virtually identical renderings of the classic drama, "Sorry, Wrong Number" on *Suspense*. First heard May 25, 1943, the story was repeated live seven times on the same series.

The story of a bed-ridden woman who accidentally hears of a murder plot on a crossed telephone line ranks among the dramatic classics. Her efforts to get help on the phone are frustrated at every turn by an array of people on the other end of the line. Her hysteria mounts, and she realizes too late that she is the one marked for death. The intensity of her acting in this largely one-person play generally resulted in her near-collapse on the mike table at the close of the drama.

Agnes Moorehead died of lung cancer in 1974. Her performances will rank as some of the finest in radio history.

To her and all the women of old-time radio this essay is respectfully (and lovingly) dedicated. ■

(NOTE—Tune in TWTD September 12 to hear some of these women on the air.)

# REMEMBERING RIVERVIEW

BY C. MACKEY

Much has been written about Chicago's Riverview Amusement Park—all of it in passionate terms describing cherished memories. I, too, won't forget the world-famous park; but, to tell the truth, my recollections aren't all favorable. Until now I never admitted my true feelings, and no one ever suspected my lukewarm attitude; for I learned to act at Riverview; and I must say, I did it well. Let me explain.

I was approaching my twelfth birthday when my big brother, my all-time hero, invited me to go to Riverview with him and his two best friends. Now, you have to understand this was a really big deal. I was being invited to go to their favorite place, with them, and without parental coaxing. I was being invited just like I was a real person, not someone's young charge.

Up to that time I had spent hours hidden under our front porch eavesdropping as the three of them reminisced about their latest trip to the amusement park, hours of listening to descriptions of all they saw and did there, hours of wishing that some day I would be allowed to go too.

My brother and his friends, for example, loved to gossip about the bizarre characters in the Freak Show. There was a man made out of rubber who could bend himself in half; another who gobbled sharp, metal swords like they were French fries; a woman whose entire body was covered

with tattoos of birds, animals, flowers, and snakes. I recall them talking about someone whose eyes popped right out of their sockets and still another who didn't have any legs. I especially remember them laughing about a woman who was so huge she couldn't support her own weight and had to spend all of her days sitting on a stool with her rolls of fat spilling over its sides.

I enjoyed hearing the three of them speak about the rides too; they sounded thrilling.

The Bobs was their favorite. They loved recounting how the speed of the trains, and the sharp turns and dips of the tracks would cause them to be slammed from one side to the other. They argued endlessly about who was braver and had ridden the longest without holding on to the grip bars or about who would be the first to go the entire ride without holding on at all. It seemed to be a true test of manhood to tolerate the Bobs with dignity. I carefully had filed this away in my mind.

The big day came at last and to say I was excited is a gross understatement. The four of us boarded the bus and made the one hour trip to the park in what seemed like an eternity. As we approached, I was awed by a giant picture of a man with a jeweled head-dress and a long black beard. This was Aladdin, I was told; and his likeness rose above his castle, a marvelous fun house and our first stop.

We paid our nickel admission to the park, passed through a gate and turnstile;

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*C. Mackey, a graphics designer from Flossmoor, Illinois is a veteran of the Bobs.*

---

and I finally found myself within Riverview's boundaries. I paused to savor the moment and look around.

People of all ages were everywhere—their excitement obvious and contagious. They laughed, talked, and joked with one another as they hurried from one attraction to another. In the distance, the tower of the

Pair-O-Chutes stretched toward the sky, the squeals of its riders barely discernible over the tops of the trees. Delicious smells of popcorn and cotton candy drifted through the air. I remember thinking

the Park looked old and rather dingy. Well, perhaps it did. I didn't care. I had arrived; and I was with my big brother and his friends.

We hurried to Aladdin's Castle and were immediately immersed in a labyrinth of screen doors. All of them looked the same, and one of us always pushed the wrong door and led the others to a dead end. Finally, we found our way out of the maze and into a room of mirrors, but not ordinary mirrors. We moved from one to another inspecting our reflections and giggling hysterically as the pounds rolled on and off and as our stature grew and shrunk.



Countless dark, scary passageways swarmed with flashing lights and frightening masks while other corridors were alive with shrieks and moans. We tested our balance and stamina by crossing a floor covered with twirling disks and crawling through a rolling barrel. The Castle was both challenging and fun; and

at that moment I loved it, Riverview, my brother, his friends, and even the classroom bully Jonny Davis.

The rides were great, too. We whirled ourselves dizzy on the Tilt-A-Whirl, crashed recklessly into one another on The

Dodgem, toured the Park in the flashy Riverview Chief, spun madly riveted against the sides of the Rotor, and soared through the air on the planes of the Stratostat. Shoot-the-Shoots was an immediate favorite, and my friends rewarded me by agreeing to a second ride. This time we sat in the front of the boat, and our loyalty was repaid with a thorough drenching as we hit the water.

At the Penny Arcade, we attempted to snare a watch from the sand with a steam shovel's claw and, with pennies, bought movie star cards from a post card machine. The fishing pond, Basketball Toss, rabbit

## REMEMBERING RIVERVIEW

and horse races, and the Coke bottle games captured our attention for a while too. We were having a wonderful time, and I thoroughly understood why my new friends



loved Riverview so much. It was fun, daring, and truly unique; and now I was a part of it too.

Suddenly, we stood before the Bobs; it was to be our last ride. It was huge and, I thought, a bit rickety. My ears were bombarded by the clanking of chains as the roller coaster crept up the tracks and with the screams of riders as its cars plunged down steep hills. I saw weak-kneed, white-faced adults and teens stumble their way off the ride and felt their relief as they scurried away.

Unexpectedly, a story I'd overheard in my hiding place came to mind. Two classmates of my companions had disgraced themselves by becoming sick and vomiting as they exited the revered Bobs. They were never allowed to show their faces without being reminded of this embarrassment. "Oh please," I prayed, "don't let that happen to me!"

My friends advised me that the ride was best in the last seat of the last car. My brother and I took this seat of honor, and the two young men sat in front of us. The Bobs slowly made its way up the first hill, and I relaxed a little. "Perhaps it would be all right after all," I thought.

My three partners let go of the grip bars, raised their arms in the air to illustrate their fearlessness, and looked expectantly at me. I reluctantly followed suit. They smiled proudly.

We reached the top, and the entire weight of the train quickly whipped us down the steep slope. I was so stunned that I froze and couldn't lower my arms. My unsuspecting friends were very, very impressed with my daring. I nodded with the most confident smile I could muster, causally took hold of the bars, and didn't admit the truth.

I'm afraid the rest of the ride was a blur. I remember very little except being thrown wildly from side to side, releasing my fingers from the grip bars when I least desired, and wishing with all my heart that the ride would end. Throughout it all, however, I remained true to my role and kept a look of ecstasy glued to my face.

As we stepped out of the roller coaster's car to the platform, I sighed longingly, faced my companions, and exclaimed to them and everyone within an earshot that I'd just had the experience of a lifetime—looking back, I believe I actually had.

"You're all right, Kid," my hero exclaimed and slapped me on the back. "You can come back with us any time."

I was thrilled, but I also knew that next time I would be in bed with double pneumonia. ■



# Jerome Kern: Perfect in Form

BY BILL SHELDON

Who was the greatest figure in American popular music?

Irving Berlin? Richard Rodgers? the Gershwins? Cole Porter? Harold Arlen?

In my opinion, it is Jerome Kern.

As it happened, Kern came before most of the rest.

When George Gershwin, at age 17, was astounded by hearing "The Didn't Believe Me," a classic to this day, Jerome Kern, at age 29, was already an established composer.

The young Gershwin realized that here was a different talent, a distinctive voice that stood out from most of the popular product of those days.

Jerome Kern, with his classical training, had struck out in a different direction than those turn-of-the-century pale imitations of European operetta or overly sentimental ballads that were then coming out of Tin Pan Alley. He began to forge a new direction that helped inspire American writers to create a wholly different kind of song, sophisticated and musical, but one which was immediately and immensely popular.

Kern continued writing that way to the end of his life.

One of his later songs, "All the Things You Are" was almost dropped from the show for which it was written. "Too complicated," the producers said, "Why it changes key four times! The public will never understand it!" He fought for its inclusion in the show and won, though he "knew" it would never become a hit. As a matter of record, the Broadway show for

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*Bill Sheldon is a music historian, cabaret performer, and owner of a financial publishing firm.*

---

which it was written, *Very Warm For May*, was a complete flop and has never been heard of since. The song quickly became a hit and, all the key changes notwithstanding, remains one of the enduring classics of American popular music.

Jerome Kern was born on January 27, 1885. He was one of those precocious youngsters who showed musical talent at an early age. His father, however, decreed that he was to go into the family furniture business and when a piano manufacturer opened a local showroom, Jerry was sent to look over the stock. The manufacturer insisted that the young Mr. Kern, the astute buyer, must have some wine. When Jerry, aglow a few glasses later, was shown a glossy new piano, he said, "OK. I'll take two." But somehow he signed an order for *two hundred* pianos. The elder Kern then figured it was about time for his son to get out of the furniture business and sent him to music school.

Jerome Kern, working with a variety of lyricists, wrote many successful musical shows during the 1920s and became known as one of the country's foremost theater composers.

Always keeping up with the latest cultural trends, he had read Edna Ferber's best selling novel "Show Boat" and made the move, rare in those days, of buying the theatrical rights. He had immediately seen the possibilities of a musical show and the premiere of *Show Boat* on December 27, 1927 with Oscar Hammerstein's immortal lyrics, was indeed a sensation.

The critics hailed a new era in the musical show world. For once, here was a play with music, not some perfunctory story strung together to showcase some singer

## JEROME KERN

---

or dancer performing a catchy melody. Here was a real plot, dramatic and historically significant, with songs — wonderful songs — arising out of the dramatic action. *Show Boat* remains a classic to this day. Rarely does a year go by that it is not playing on some stage, in some language, somewhere in the world. Songs such as “Old Man River,” “Why Do I Love You” and “Make Believe” will live forever.

And there have been movie versions, too. The musical was filmed twice by Metro Goldwyn Mayer: in 1936 starring Irene Dunne, Allan Jones, Helen Morgan and Paul Robeson; and in 1951 starring Kathryn Grayson, Howard Keel, Ava Gardner, and William Warfield.

Hollywood did not lack for original Kern musicals. He composed a wide variety of movie scores, ranging from films for Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, Gene Kelly and Rita Hayworth, and Deanna Durbin, to opera luminaries like Lily Pons and Grace Moore.

MGM gave him the unique tribute of a film biography, *Till the Clouds Roll By* (in 1946) with Robert Walker playing a very fictionalized Jerome Kern and loads of musical sequences with stars such as Judy Garland, Frank Sinatra, June Allyson, Lena Horne, and Angela Lansbury.

One of the things that producers of a Kern show quickly found about him was his attention to detail.

On one occasion, when the orchestra was not playing to his satisfaction in a rehearsal, and the musicians were ignoring his comments, he simply gathered the music off the stands, climbed into a taxi, and took it home.

During another show a director went up to Kern, saying, “Our star is having a problem with this note. Could I suggest we change it?” The reply, “Might I suggest

we change the star!” didn’t surprise anyone who knew Jerome Kern.

He could, however, be charming with his co-workers. When working on a score with lyricist Johnny Mercer, whom he greatly admired, someone referred to Mercer as “Your lyricist.” Kern snapped back, “He’s not my lyricist, he’s my collaborator!”

In 1945, Kern was in New York for a revival of *Show Boat* and he was delighted when Richard Rodgers asked him to compose the music for a new show starring Ethel Merman, to be called *Annie Get Your Gun*, the story of Wild West sharpshooter Annie Oakley.

He never got to write that score.

While walking down a busy New York sidewalk, Kern collapsed. He had been ignoring conditions of high blood pressure for some time.

Police, finding no identification on him, took him to the charity ward at the nearest public hospital. When someone finally figured out his identity, he was unconscious and too ill to be moved. The usually disorderly and noisy ward became quiet and its inhabitants were told of the famous patient. The nurse in charge stayed on a 24-hour vigil until family members could be located. It was the same hospital in which the penniless Stephen Foster had died a century earlier.

Jerome Kern died on November 11, 1945 with his wife, his daughter and Oscar Hammerstein at his side. He had never regained consciousness. (Berlin eventually wrote the score for *Annie Get Your Gun*.)

A song by Kern has been likened to a classic black and white drawing, “needing no color or ornament to make up for bad drawing or poor craftsmanship. The architecture... is always in balance, (and) perfect in form.” ■

(NOTE -- Tune in to TWTD August 15 for a Portrait of Jerome Kern with special guest Bill Sheldon.)

# A Land-Slide for Sgt. Preston Fans!

One of radio's most exciting premiums was offered by the *Challenge of the Yukon* in the mid-1950s when a listener could actually get some land in the Yukon Territory! This is what that deed looked like:

## DEED OF LAND

*This indenture* made this 4th day of January, in the year of Our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Fifty-five.

BETWEEN: **KLONDIKE BIG INCH LAND CO., INC.**,  
a body corporate duly registered for the purposes of carrying on business in the Yukon Territory, having its head office for the said Territory, in the City of Whitehorse, hereinafter called the "Grantor,"  
**OF THE FIRST PART**

AND: \_\_\_\_\_ hereinafter called the "Grantee,"  
(fill in your name)  
**OF THE SECOND PART.**

WITNESSETH THAT the Grantor for good and valuable consideration now paid by the Grantee to the Grantor (the receipt whereof is hereby by it acknowledged) doth grant, bargain, sell, alien, release, remise, convey and confirm unto the Grantee, his heirs and assigns forever an estate in fee simple: **WITNESSES:**

ALL AND SINGULAR that certain parcel or tract of land and premises situate, lying and being in the Yukon Territory more particularly known and described as follows: **TRACT NUMBERED** **S 86086**

comprising by metes and bounds one square each more or less as more particularly described in that certain subdivision plan, prepared and acknowledged by the Grantor under date the 13th day of December, A.D. 1954 and deposited at the registered office of the Grantor in the Yukon Territory, of the whole of Lot Two hundred forty-three (243) in Group Two (2) in Yukon Territory, as said lot being shown on a plan of survey of record in the Land Survey and Aeronautical Charts Division of the Department of Mines and Technical Surveys of Ottawa under number 6718, containing by metes and bounds nineteen and eleven hundredths (19 11/100) acres more or less, together with all and singular the covenants, benefitted and appurtenances to the same belonging or in any way appertaining with reversion and reversions, remainder and remainders, rents, issues and profits thereof and all the profits, rights, title, interest, claims, property and demand both at law and in equity of the said Grantor of, as, to or out of the same or any part thereof;

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the said lands and premises with the appurtenances and every part thereof unto the said Grantee, his heirs and assigns to his and their sole use, benefit and behoof forever, subject nevertheless to the reservations, limitations, provisions and conditions expressed in the original grant thereof from the Crown; **SEE OTHER SIDE**

## DEED OF LAND


**CONTINUED**

AND the Grantor for itself, its successors and assigns doth lawfully covenant, warrant and agree to and with the Grantee, his heirs and assigns in manner following that is to say that it shall be lawful for the Grantee, his heirs and assigns from time to time and at all times hereafter peacefully and quietly to enter into the said lands and premises and to have, hold, occupy, possess and enjoy the same without the lawful quit hindrance, eviction, denial or disturbance of, from or by the Grantor, and also that the Grantor has a good, true and perfect estate in fee simple in the said land and premises and good right, full power and lawful authority in full and complete to make and do all that as they are hereby said and conveyed and intended or intended to be and the words are free from encumbrances, subject however to the provisions herein contained;

AND this conveyance and everything herein contained shall be wholly subject to a perpetual easement for ingress and egress, to, from, over and upon the tract herein conveyed for the use of the owner or owners of all other tracts of the land and premises herein described and further described and set forth in said subdivision plan hereinabove mentioned and without restricting the generality of the foregoing clause the same shall not in anywise be construed as a derogation from the grant hereby effected to the Grantee herein, and the Grantor hereby grants unto the Grantee a perpetual easement for ingress and egress, to, from, over and upon any or all of the tracts of land as described in the subdivision plan aforesaid as may from time to time remain vested in the Grantor;

AND the Grantor covenants with the Grantee that it has done no act to encumber the said lands;

AND the Grantor releases to the Grantee all its claims upon the said lands;




The provisions of the Land Titles Act being Ch. 162 of the Revised Statutes of Canada, 1952 and amendments thereto shall not apply to this Deed of Conveyance and in addition that not so as to limit the generality of the foregoing the Grantor shall not be obliged to do any acts or execute any documents as may be necessary to better secure the title of the Grantee or to provide a transfer to the within described lands and premises registrable under the aforesaid Act or to deliver or have registered a subdivision plan of the aforesaid Lot 243 or any part thereof;

Whether the singular or plurals are used throughout this Indenture, the same shall be construed as including the plural or the feminine or body corporate or jolly where the context or the parties hereto so require;

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the corporate seal of the Grantor has been hereto affixed in the presence of its proper officers duly authorized in that behalf;

The Corporate seal of **KLONDIKE BIG INCH LAND CO., INC.** was hereto affixed in the presence of:



*John E. Brannan Jr.*  
PRESIDENT

*Joseph J. Peterson*  
SECRETARY

Deed courtesy Richard J. Havemann, Winfield, IL. Tune in *TWTD* August 29 for a Sgt. Preston program and more on the Deed!

Chuck Schaden's  
**THOSE WERE THE DAYS**  
WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 P.M.

**AUGUST 1998**

**FRANK SINATRA'S RADIO DAYS**

SATURDAY, AUGUST 1st

SATURDAY, AUGUST 8th

**SONGS BY SINATRA (12-12-45)** Frank cel-

ebrates his 30th birthday on this program from New York after a lengthy nine-week personal appearance stay at the Paramount Theatre. Featured are June Hutton, Pied Pipers, Axel Stordahl and the orchestra. "The Voice" sings "It Might as Well be Spring," "Button Up Your Overcoat," and "Old Man River." Old Gold Cigarettes, CBS. (26:27)

**ROCKY FORTUNE (1953)**

Frank Sinatra stars as Rocky, a "footloose and fancy-free young man" who gets a job as a companion to a monkey! Cast includes Herb Vigran, Barney Phillips. Sustaining, NBC/AFRTS. (24:25)

**SONGS BY SINATRA (10-24-45)** Frank's "old boss" Tommy Dorsey is guest for some memories and music, including a medley of Sinatra/Dorsey hits. Frank sings "I'll Buy That Dream," "Without a Song" and "I'll Never Smile Again." Pied Pipers, Axel Stordahl and the orchestra. Old Gold Cigarettes, CBS. (28:50)

**READER'S DIGEST RADIO EDITION (12-19-46)** "Room For a Stranger" starring Frank Sinatra as a Navy flyer back from overseas whose leave is cancelled on Christmas Eve. This warm-hearted drama is set in Northern Illinois. Hallmark Cards, CBS. (29:25)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (10-8-44)** Jack needs a new singer after Dennis Day joined the Navy, so he tries to hire Frank Sinatra, star of "Your Hit Parade." Frank appears from New York. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (26:00)

**OUR SPECIAL GUEST** is big band historian and *Nostalgia Digest* contributor **KARL PEARSON** who will talk about Frank Sinatra's musical career on radio.



**FRANK SINATRA PROGRAM (2-9-44)** Guest

W. C. Fields joins Frank, comedian Bert Wheeler, announcer Truman Bradley, and Axel Stordahl and the orchestra. Fields thinks he discovered Frank and promotes his invention, a "Sinatramizer" which makes anyone sing like Frankie. Frank sings "Falling in Love with Love," "No Love, No Nothin'," and "Long Ago and Far Away." Vimms Vitamins, CBS. (30:25)

**LUX RADIO THEATRE (5-31-48)** "Miracle of the Bells" starring Fred MacMurray, Valli, and Frank Sinatra, recreating their original screen roles in

this radio version of the 1948 film. A Hollywood press agent faithfully attempts to carry out the dying wishes of the actress he loved. A "miracle" occurs when the movie star is laid to rest in her home town. William Keighley is host. Lux Soap, CBS. (21:53; 19:32; 15:16)

**COMMAND PERFORMANCE #165 (4-26-45)** Emcee Frank Sinatra welcomes singer Frances Langford and a gaggle of Hollywood kid stars: Elizabeth Taylor, Margaret O'Brien, Roddy McDowell, Peggy Ann Garner, and Bing Crosby's four sons, Gary, Philip, Dennis, Lindsay. Frankie takes a beating at the hands of these kids! AFRTS. (29:00)

**SUSPENSE (1-18-45)** "To Find Help" starring Frank Sinatra "in his first dramatic appearance" and Agnes Moorehead. An old woman is terrorized in her own home by a handyman who turns out to be psychotic. AFRTS (24:42)

**YOUR HIT PARADE (7-10-48)** Frank Sinatra, Beryl Davis, Ken Lane and the Hit Paraders, Axel Stordahl and the orchestra present the top seven songs of the week. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (25:20)

## SATURDAY, AUGUST 15th PORTRAIT OF JEROME KERN

**RAILROAD HOUR** (10-9-50) "Roberta" starring Gordon MacRae, Ginny Simms and Edna Best in Jerome Kern's 1933 musical about a Parisian fashion designer. Carmen Dragon and the orchestra, Norman Luboff Choir. Marvin Miller announces. Association of American Railroads, NBC. (29:15)

**SONGMAKERS** (6-10-46) "Jerome Kern" is the subject as Everette Clarke tells the story of the song writer in words and music. This is an audition recording for a series "dedicated to the proposition that everybody loves music..." (13:23)

**LUX RADIO THEATRE** (5-28-51) "Show Boat" starring Kathryn Grayson, Ava Gardner, Howard Keel, Marge and Gower Champion and William Warfield in their screen roles from the 1951 film. Based on Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II's musical about life on a Mississippi show boat. William Keighley is producer-host. AFRS rebroadcast. (18:50; 17:05; 17:30)

**PAUSE THAT REFRESHES ON THE AIR** (8-16-42) Andre Kostelanetz and the orchestra presents a "Portrait of Mark Twain" by Jerome Kern, introduced for this first broadcast performance by the composer himself. Coca Cola, CBS. (30:07)

**SONGS BY SINATRA** (1-15-47) Frank Sinatra, guest Jane Powell and the Pied Pipers offer a "Tribute to Jerome Kern" with Axel Stordahl and the orchestra. Old Gold Cigarettes, CBS. (26:55)

**OUR SPECIAL GUEST** is music historian **Bill Sheldon** who will talk about Jerome Kern and his contribution to American popular music. *See the article about Jerome Kern on page 17.*

## SATURDAY, AUGUST 22nd REMEMBERING HENRY MORGAN

**HENRY MORGAN SHOW** (9-3-46) First program in his half-hour series. Henry Morgan tells how his new ABC show came about. He's joined by regulars Arnold Stang, Art Carney, Bernie Green and the orchestra, and announcer Charles Irving for satire and sketches. Features include "Great Sayings of Unfamiliar Men;" "The Man on the Flying Trapeze" played on a bagpipe; a commercial for "Morgan Cigarettes;" a baseball broadcast, BBC-style; and a trip to New York in the year 3000. Sustaining, ABC. (28:08)

**FRED ALLEN SHOW** (6-26-49) This is the final program in Fred's regular weekly series. Guests are Henry Morgan and Jack Benny. Cast includes Portland Hoffa, Kenny Delmar, Parker Fennelly, Minerva Pious, and Peter Donald, and the DeMarco Sisters. Fred runs into Morgan who owes \$300 to the Mohawk Loan Company. Ford Motors, NBC. (29:36)

**HENRY MORGAN SHOW** (12-16-49) It's Morgan with Arnold Stang (as Gerard), Pert Kelton, announcer Ben Grauer, singer Fran Warren, and Milton Kadem and the orchestra. Some seasonal material about Macy's Santa Claus and an unusual musical arrangement of "Skater's Waltz." Also: a lady cab driver; a PTA meeting; and a spoof of the Quiz Kids, "The Quest Pests." Sustaining, NBC. (28:23)

**KRAFT MUSIC HALL** (5-20-48) Al Jolson welcomes guest Henry Morgan who appears as a famous Russian musical commentator and also as a famous German musical commentator. Kraft Foods, NBC. (27:15)

**HENRY MORGAN SHOW** (6-18-47) *Excerpt* featuring Morgan up late listening to an all night disc jockey. Arnold Stang, Bernie Green and the orchestra. (6:42)

**SUSPENSE** (11-6-47) "Dream Song" starring Henry Morgan as a writer who hears some very irritating music from his next door neighbor's apartment. Cast includes Joseph Kerns, Wally Maher. Roma Wines, CBS. (29:34)

**HENRY MORGAN SHOW** (4-11-50) More Morgan satire, with Art Carney, Arnold Stang, Pert Kelton, Lenore Lonigan, Billy Williams Quartet, Milt Kadem and the orchestra, announcer Ed Herlihy. Sketches about a hockey player for the Detroit Mohawks; a Radio France husband-wife team at breakfast; famous historical events: "We Was There." Sustaining, NBC/CBC (Trans Canada Network). (28:37) *See our cover story about Henry Morgan on page 2.*

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WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 P.M.

**AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1998**

**PLEASE NOTE:** The numerals following each program listing for *Those Were The Days* represents the length of time for each particular show: (28:50) means the program will run 28 minutes and 50 seconds. This may be of help to those who tape the programs for their own collection.

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 29th**  
**MORE RADIO THEME SONGS**

*Once again we tune in to the signature music of radio: the theme songs that introduced so many of our favorite programs during the Golden Age.*

*Co-host for this second tiptoe through the tunes is our own KEN ALEXANDER who helped us with a similar program last year.*

*On today's broadcast we'll hear a great many familiar theme songs — from such programs as *When A Girl Marries*, *Quiet Please*, *Charlie McCarthy Show*, *Telephone Hour*, *Voice of Firestone*, and others — and we'll listen to the original music from whence they came.*

*In addition to many sound clips and excerpts from vintage shows, we'll hear complete broadcasts of:*

**SCREEN GUILD PLAYERS** (9-20-43) "The Maltese Falcon" starring Humphrey Bogart, Mary Astor, Sidney Greenstreet and Peter Lorre in their original screen roles from the 1941 film. Dashiell Hammett's character Sam Spade joins the search for the elusive Black Bird. *The Screen Guild Players theme is from Symphonie Moderne composed by Max Steiner for the film Four Wives.* Lady Esther Products, CBS. (29:35)

**CURTAIN TIME** (5-3-47) "Birds of a Feather" starring Harry Elders and Nanette Sergeant in "a gay, romantic comedy" about a slightly shady nephew who inherits a pet shop from his aunt. Cast features Myron Wallace, Sidney Ellstrom, George Cisar, Mary McKinley. Host is Patrick Allen. Bert Farber and the orchestra. *The Curtain Time theme is Waltz from Suite Number One for Two Pianos by Anton Arensky.* Mars Candy, NBC. (28:55)

**SGT. PRESTON OF THE YUKON** (5-10-55) Brace Beemer stars as Sgt. Preston with a cast that features Paul Hughes and the "WXYZ stock company." Preston and his Wonder Dog, Yukon King are asked to capture some bad

guys who have robbed a trading post. Fred Foy announces, with news of a special offer to Klondike Land Owners (those who already have the deed to that one square inch of land). *The Sgt. Preston theme is the Overture to Donna Diana by Emil Von Reznicek.* Quaker Cereals, MBS. (28:24) *Note — A copy of that famous Klondike Deed appears on page 19.*

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5th**

**JIMMY DURANTE SHOW** (11-12-47) The Schnozzola with guest Dorothy Lamour and regulars Arthur Treacher, Candy Candido, Roy Bargy and the orchestra. Jimmy's packing for a trip to Hollywood; later he meets Lamour on the train. Rexall, NBC. (28:41)

**ADVENTURES OF ELLERY QUEEN** (3-27-43) "Adventure of the Circus Train" stars Hugh Marlowe as Ellery with Marion Shockley as Nikki. A circus fortune teller attempts to identify a murderer on a moving train. Bromo Seltzer, NBC. (28:05)

**IT PAYS TO BE IGNORANT** (10-5-45) Tom Howard moderates this zany quiz show with panelists Harry McNaughton, Lulu McConnell and George Shelton. Among the tough questions: "What is a window?" and "What railroad is mentioned in the song, 'Atcheson, Topeka and Santa Fe'?" AFRS rebroadcast. (29:40)

**HALLMARK PLAYHOUSE** (9-19-48) "Drums Along the Mohawk" starring Jeff Chandler with Lurene Tuttle in a radio dramatization of Walter D. Edmund's novel. A newly married couple set out to make their life in the Mohawk Territory. James Hilton hosts. Hallmark Cards, CBS. (29:29)

**ADVENTURES OF OZZIE AND HARRIET** (11-7-48) Ozzie is convinced that his set pattern of living should be broken. Cast features John Brown, Jack Kirkwood, Janet Waldo, Tommy Bernard and Henry Blair. Verne Smith an-

nounces. International Silver Co., NBC. (28:43)  
**SUSPENSE** (5-8-47) "Dead Earnest" stars Wally Maher with Elliott Lewis, Cathy Lewis. A man involved in an accident, apparently dead, is in reality in a cataleptic coma. His ID gone, he winds up on the embalmer's table. Roma Wines, CBS. (29:51)

## SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12th THE DISTAFF SIDE Women in Old Time Radio

**OUR MISS BROOKS** (3-11-50) **Eve Arden** stars as school teacher Connie Brooks who is awakened by a burglar in her house! Gale Gordon as Mr. Conklin; Richard Crenna as Walter Denton; Jeff Chandler as Mr. Boynton; Jane Morgan as Mrs Davis. Bob Sweeney as the burglar. Colgate, Palmolive, CBS. (28:50)

**SUSPENSE** (7-29-48) "The Yellow Wallpaper" starring **Agnes Moorehead** in the famous story about a doctor's wife who keeps a journal about the summer home she believes to be haunted. AutoLite, CBS. (28:02)

**BABY SNOOKS** (1-2-51) **Fanny Brice** stars as the youngest, accused of cheating on a school test. Hanley Stafford is Daddy, Arlene Harris as Mommy, Frank Nelson as neighbor Kunkle. Tums, NBC. (15:11)

**THE GOLDBERGS** (12-11-40) *Isolated episode* of the long-running (1929-1950) series created by and starring **Gertrude Berg** as Molly Goldberg, with Roslyn Silber as Rosalie, James R. Waters as Jake, and Alfred Ryder as Sammy. Oxydol, CBS. (14:20)

**MY FAVORITE HUSBAND** (1950) **Lucille Ball** and **Richard Denning** star as Liz and George Cooper, "two people who live together and like it!" It's Liz' birthday and she doesn't want anyone to remind her of it. Cast includes Gale Gordon and Bea Benaderet as Rudolph and Iris Atterbury, and Ruth Perrott as Katie, the maid. AFRS rebroadcast. (24:32)

**INNER SANCTUM** (1946) "Murder Comes at Midnight" starring **Mercedes McCambridge**. A couple rent a house in the country for the summer. She is held prisoner by an escaped convict who needs a doctor. AFRS rebroadcast. (24:26)

**JUDY CANOVA SHOW** (11-9-43) **Judy Canova** stars in her own series with Mel Blanc, Ruby Dandridge, singer Eddie Dean, Charles Dant and the orchestra. Judy goes duck hunting! Colgate-Palmolive, CBS. (24:15)

*See the article about Women in Old Time Radio on page 6.*

## SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19TH FLIGHT TO ENGLAND — Part 1

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (6-1-52) On this last show of the 1951-52 season, Jack prepares for a trip to London and an appearance at the famous Palladium. Cast includes Mary Livingstone, Don Wilson, Phil Harris, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Artie Auerbach, Bea Benaderet, Sara Berner, Mel Blanc, Benny Rubin, Frank Fontaine. Dennis sings "Love In Bloom." AFRS rebroadcast. (23:30)

**LUX RADIO THEATRE** (2-12-40) "Sidewalks of London" starring Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester with Alan Marshall in the radio version of the 1940 Paramount film. Laughton repeats his screen role as a London sidewalk performer (a "busker") who takes a stage-struck street waif under his wing and helps her realize her ambition. Cecil B. DeMille is host. Lux Soap, CBS. (21:41; 18:25; 18:55)

**MY FRIEND IRMA** (1950s) Marie Wilson is Irma Peterson and Cathy Lewis is Jane Stacy. Irma wins a trip to England and makes all the arrangements herself. Cast includes Alan Reed, Hy Averback, Elvia Allman, Gloria Gordon. AFRS rebroadcast. (23:50)

**SHERLOCK HOLMES** (10-5-47) "Case of the Missing Heiress" starring John Stanley and Alfred Shirley as Holmes and Watson who visit the British Museum to investigate a kidnapping. Clipper Craft Clothes, MBS. (29:55)

**BOB HOPE SHOW** (1940s) Bob broadcasts from England where he appeared at the Palladium. Along with singer Margaret Whiting and Les Brown and his band of Renown, Bob welcomes British star Jack Buchanan, and Douglas Fairbanks Jr. Sketch about Bob's ancestor Robert the Conqueror who invaded England in medieval times. AFRS rebroadcast. (23:05)

**NOTE** — **Ken Alexander** is guest host for this program while Chuck Schaden and a group of *TWTD* listeners are on vacation in England.

## SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26th FLIGHT TO ENGLAND — Part 2

**MYSTERY IN THE AIR** (8-14-47) "The Lodger" starring Peter Lorre and Agnes Moorehead in the story of Jack the Ripper. Lorre is the mysterious Mr. Sleuth at a London boarding house at which Moorehead is the proprietess. Camel Cigarettes, NBC. (28:00)

**FLYWHEEL, SHYSTER AND FLYWHEEL** (1991) First program in the British Broadcasting Corporation series based on scripts used by

**Chuck Schaden's**  
**THOSE WERE THE DAYS**  
**WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 P.M.**

**SEPTEMBER 1998**

Groucho and Chico Marx on the Five Star Theatre in 1932. Michael Roberts is Groucho Marx as Waldorf T. Flywheel and Frank Lazarus is Chico Marx as Emmanuel Ravelli, with Lorelei King as Miss Dimple. Music by the David Firman orchestra. BBC. (27:03)

**LIGHTS OUT** (9-7-43) "Lord Marley's Guest" is Arch Oboler's story about an American movie starlet staying at an English Lord's summer home. On a boat ride, they encounter a "devil fish," an octopus larger than their boat. Ironized Yeast, CBS. (29:06)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (9-10-50) On this first show of the 1950-51 season, Jack has returned from a London trip where he appeared at the Palladium. While he was gone, he finds that television has taken over at CBS! Mary Livingstone, Phil Harris, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Dennis Day, Don Wilson, Sportsmen, Joe Kearns, Mel Blanc, Frank Nelson. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, CBS. (26:33)

**ESCAPE** (7-10-54) "The Birds" with Ben

Wright, Virginia Gregg, John Dehner. "You are in a farmhouse on the southern coast of England. The autumn countryside around you is desolate and bleak, and you know that in the dusk outside — waiting patiently for you, silently watching for you — is an enemy from whom there may be no escape!" This is the story on which Alfred Hitchcock later based his famous film by the same name. Sustaining, CBS. (28:11)

**YOURS TRULY, JOHNNY DOLLAR** (6-22-50) "The London Matter" stars Edmund O'Brien as the man with the action-packed expense account. He's on his way to England at the request of the U.S. Treasury Department, Narcotics Division. Cast includes Herb Butterfield, Wally Maher, Virginia Gregg, Ben Wright, Wrigley's Gum, CBS. (28:34)

**NOTE**— Ken Alexander is again guest host for this program while Chuck Schaden and some *TWTD* listeners continue vacationing in England.

*...and for more good listening...*

**ART HELLYER SHOW**-- Music of the big bands and the big singers with lots of knowledgeable commentary and fun from one of radio's legendary personalities, **now in his 51st year on the air!** *WJOL, 1340 AM, Saturday, 9 am-12 noon.*

**DICK LAWRENCE REVUE**-- A treasure trove of rare and vintage recordings with spoken memories from the never to be forgotten past. *WNIB, 97.1 FM, Saturday, 8-9 pm.*

**JAZZ FORUM**-- Chicago's foremost jazz authority, Dick Buckley, presents an entertaining and enlightening program of great music by noted jazz musicians. *WBEZ, 91.5 FM, Monday thru Thursday, 8:30-9:30 pm; Sunday 1-4 pm.*

**REMEMBER WHEN**-- Host Don Corey's "nostalgia fest" with the emphasis on old time radio variety shows, plus show tunes and interviews. *WAIT, 850 AM, Saturday, 9 am-12 noon.*

**WHEN RADIO WAS**-- Carl Amari hosts a weekend edition of the popular series featuring old time radio broadcasts and interviews. *WMAQ, 670 AM, Saturday and Sunday, 10pm-midnight.*

**(CBS RADIO) MYSTERY THEATRE**-- Producer Himan Brown hosts reruns of his 1974-1982 mystery series. *WMAQ, 670 AM, Saturday night at Midnight until 5 am Sunday.*

**IMAGINATION THEATRE**-- This series is heard occasionally on *Those Were The Days* in Chicago, but is broadcast weekly in many other cities across the country. For the station in your area, call Tim McDonald at TransMedia Productions at 1-800-229-7234. For a list of stations carrying the program and an **episode guide**, the Internet address is: [tmedia@aimnet.com](mailto:tmedia@aimnet.com)

**THE SATURDAY SWING SHIFT**-- Bruce Oscar is the host for this two-hour program featuring swing music on record as performed by the big bands, popular singers and small groups. *WDCB, 90.9 FM, Saturday, 10 am-Noon.*



# "When Radio Was" -- WMAQ-AM 670

Monday thru Friday Midnight to 1 a.m. Host Stan Freberg

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
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## August, 1998 Schedule

<b>3</b> Escape Burns & Allen Pt 1	<b>4</b> Burns & Allen Pt 2 Sam Spade	<b>5</b> Green Hornet Fibber McGee Pt 1	<b>6</b> Fibber McGee Pt 2 Dimension X	<b>7</b> Suspense Superman
<b>10</b> Dragnet Jack Benny Pt 1	<b>11</b> Jack Benny Pt 2 Have Gun, Will Travel	<b>12</b> Philip Marlowe Charlie McCarthy Pt 1	<b>13</b> Charlie McCarthy Pt 2 Black Museum	<b>14</b> Shadow Superman
<b>17</b> Gunsmoke Great Gildersleeve Pt 1	<b>18</b> Great Gildersleeve Pt 2 Mercury Theatre	<b>19</b> Gangbusters Life of Riley Pt 1	<b>20</b> Life of Riley Pt 2 Tales of Texas Rangers	<b>21</b> Suspense Superman
<b>24</b> Hermit's Cave Favorite Husband Pt 1	<b>25</b> Favorite Husband Pt 2 Lone Ranger	<b>26</b> Third Man Abbott & Costello Pt 1	<b>27</b> Abbott & Costello Pt 2 Boston Blackie	<b>28</b> Shadow Superman
<b>31</b> Frontier Gentleman Aldrich Family Pt 1	<b>OUT OF TOWN LISTENERS PLEASE NOTE:</b> <i>"When Radio Was" is a syndicated series heard throughout the country. If you're unable to tune in WMAQ, call (847) 524-0200, Ext. 234 and ask which station in or near your town carries the program.</i>			

## September, 1998 Schedule

	<b>1</b> Aldrich Family Pt 2 Lights Out	<b>2</b> Sgt. Preston Fibber McGee Pt 1	<b>3</b> Fibber McGee Pt 1 This Is Your FBI	<b>4</b> Suspense Superman
<b>7</b> Dragnet Jack Benny Pt 1	<b>8</b> Jack Benny Pt 2 Escape	<b>9</b> Mercury Theatre Burns & Allen Pt 1	<b>10</b> Burns & Allen Pt 2 Black Museum	<b>11</b> Shadow Superman
<b>14</b> Gunsmoke Great Gildersleeve Pt 1	<b>15</b> Great Gildersleeve Pt 2 This Is My Best	<b>16</b> Gangbusters Life of Riley Pt 1	<b>17</b> Life of Riley Pt 2 Tales of Texas Rangers	<b>18</b> Suspense Superman
<b>21</b> Richard Diamond Favorite Husband Pt 1	<b>22</b> Favorite Husband Pt 2 Lone Ranger	<b>23</b> Third Man Our Miss Brooks Pt 1	<b>24</b> Our Miss Brooks Pt 2 Boston Blackie	<b>25</b> Shadow Superman
<b>28</b> Frontier Gentleman Father Knows Best Pt 1	<b>29</b> Father Knows Best Pt 2 Rocky Fortune	<b>30</b> The Whistler Duffy's Tavern		

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# RADIO'S FORGOTTEN YEARS

## Tuning Thru the Great Depression

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BY T. ELIZABETH MC LEOD

Mention Old Time Radio, and the sounds that leap to most memories are those of the 1940s and early 1950s — the “Golden Age.” The OTR interest in recent years has focused almost exclusively on that era — to the point where many seem hardly aware of what happened before this “Golden Age.” Some may have heard the more popular programs of the late 1930s, but for many the years before 1935 are a blur.

Too bad, because the Depression era provides a fascinating period for OTR research — and some fine listening besides — if you're willing to do some digging.

What was radio really like at the dawn of the 1930s?

As the new decade began, the medium was moving into its adolescence. The experimental years were over, the networks were off and rolling, and the movement toward making radio a form of Wholesale Entertainment For The Masses was well underway.

The most popular program format of the late twenties was the sponsored musical feature. It could be a large symphonic group, a dance orchestra, or a song-and-patter team — and it would usually carry the sponsor's name. The *A&P Gypsies*, for

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example — a large, genre-crossing orchestra conducted by Harry Horlick. The *Ipana Troubadours* — a hot dance band directed by Sam Lanin. The *Goodrich Zippers* — a banjo-driven orchestra conducted by Harry Reser, when he wasn't leading the same group under the name of *The Cliquot Club Eskimos*. Everyone remembers the *Happiness Boys*, Billy Jones and Ernie Hare — but what about Scrappy Lambert and Billy Hillpot, who performed exactly the same sort of material as Trade and Mark, the Smith Brothers. The list is endless: the *Silvertown Cord Orchestra*, featuring the Silver Masked Tenor. The *Sylvania Foresters*. The *Flit Soldiers* — yet another Harry Reser group. The *Champion Sparkers*. The *Fox Fur Trappers*. The *Ingram Shavers*, who were the *Ipana Troubadours* on alternate Wednesdays. The *Yeast Foamers*. The *Planters Pickers*. And, the magnificently named *Freed-Eisemann Orchestradians*. All playing pretty much the same sorts of music, all announced by Phillips Carlin or John S. Young or Alwyn Bach or Milton Cross in pretty much the same sort of stiffly formal style.

And then came the Vagabond Lover.

Maine-bred saxophonist Rudy Vallee organized his eight Connecticut Yankees in 1927, and the intimate quality of this group made it a radio natural. In a series of remote broadcasts over WABC from New York's Heigh Ho Club, Vallee pioneered an informal style of broadcasting which would help to break the medium out of its white-tie straightjacket. His band got its



RUDY VALLEE

first network shot on NBC Blue in 1928, under the sponsorship of Clopin Cod Liver Oil Capsules — but the series faded from view as quickly as the stomach-turning product it advertised. Late in 1929, the people at Standard Brands decided to take a chance on a hour's worth of the Yankees every Thursday night — and this time the Vallee style grabbed the national imagination.

Rudy wasn't a great singer, by any stretch of the imagination. Nor were the Yankees, musically speaking, anything but a very ordinary twenties dance band. But Rudy was also a master showman. None of his musicians were any threat to the reputation of Biederbecke, but they knew how to put fun into their playing. Rudy may have sung thru his adenoids, but he was a master of routining songs, of putting together a program that worked as a cohesive whole and not just one-number-after-another. And he knew, instinctively, what songs were right for his style.

For its first two and a half seasons, the

series remained close to the traditional sponsored-dance-orchestra format, pausing only to introduce occasional guest stars. But late in 1932, with the show's popularity beginning to sag, Rudy's showmanship came to the forefront. A new policy was adopted, stressing guest stars. The Standard Brands checkbook opened wide, and the best that vaudeville and Broadway had to offer were enticed to the microphone. The *Fleischmann's Yeast Hour* became radio's first really Big Time variety program, and set the pattern for every one that would follow.

The success of the Vallee approach to the variety format caused the Standard Brands people to think that lightning might well strike twice, and in 1931, they added a second hour to their radio schedule for Chase and Sanborn Coffee on Sunday nights. Tapped to star was the hyperkinetic Eddie Cantor, who had convulsed the nation with several guest appearances on the Vallee program earlier that year.

Latter day listeners often think of Cantor as a rather old-fashioned performer who tended not to spare the corn. But the Cantor of 1931 wasn't the passé Cantor of 1948. Cantor at the turn of the thirties was coming off more than a decade's worth of Broadway hits and was beginning a series of ever-more-opulent musical comedy films for Samuel Goldwyn. His phonograph records were top sellers — he was a true multimedia superstar long before the term was invented. And he was radio's first great solo comedian.

Cantor's jumping-jack personality was part of his success. He projected an infectious sense of fun right thru the loud-speaker, and it was impossible not to be caught up in the zany spirit of his broadcasts. Several additional factors contributed to the success of his show.

The first was his early insistence on a live studio audience. Cantor knew he

## RADIO'S FORGOTTEN YEARS

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worked best before a crowd, and was a master of milking laughs. And, he knew that the sound of that laughter couldn't help but be contagious over the air.

His second important contribution was his mastery of the "stooge" technique of comedy. Cantor wasn't the first radio comedian to press his announcer into service as a straight man — Joe Cook had done so with John S. Young in 1929 — but he was the first to thoroughly integrate that announcer-stooge into the fabric of the program. His interplay with Jimmy Wallington was fast, snappy, and sharp — and Wallington could dish it right back as well as he could take it.

And, Cantor's third important contribution was his emphasis on running gags. From his baiting of violinist/orchestra leader David Rubinoff to his constant references to his five daughters to his 1932 "Presidential Campaign," Cantor thoroughly understood the principle of bringing the audience back for more — a principle which would be adopted by just about every major comic who would follow.

Among the comics who adopted these principles was a man who had been an even bigger star for a longer time than Cantor: *The Perfect Fool*, Ed Wynn.

Wynn had headlined on Broadway before the first World War, and remained a top stage attraction thru the twenties, dithering and honking his way thru a series of girl-and-gag revues. He had tried radio as far back of 1922, but mike fright prevented any extended efforts on the air until 1932 — when officials of the Texas Company offset his terror of broadcasting with a very hefty check. In April of that year, Wynn first donned his tiny felt fireman's helmet and whizzed onto the stage of the New Amsterdam Theatre on a pedal-powered fire engine as Texaco's *Fire Chief*.



EDDIE CANTOR

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The *Fire Chief* programs combined the lessons learned from Cantor's broadcasts with Wynn's own unique style, and even today, they're fun to hear. Wynn clearly loved to perform, and even though some of his jokes might have made Joe Miller cringe, they're delivered with such panache that you can't help but laugh.

Invaluable too is the contribution of Graham McNamee. Probably the most important announcer of the 20s, McNamee displays a wonderful gift for stooing in this series — he knew exactly how to draw Wynn out and to work with the comic in the timing of the gags. And, the sincere friendship and respect shared by the two men helped Wynn to control his ever-present mike fright to the point where they became an inseparable team.

Another stage veteran was Jack Pearl, a rather ordinary dialect comic who rode a brief wave of success in 1933-34 as Baron Munchausen. Getting his first radio exposure on a 1932 broadcast of the *Ziegfeld Follies of the Air*, Pearl and his stooge Cliff Hall quickly found a niche on the *Lucky*



ED WYNN

*Strike Hour*, where for a brief time they were one of the most popular attractions on the air. Although Pearl tended to depend too heavily on catch-phrases in his act, his routines are not without a certain appeal. Pearl was a facile punster, and Hall an especially able straight man.

But the ultimate Depression-era zany was Joe Penner.

A forgotten performer today to most, and little more than a footnote to the average OTR fan, Penner was a national craze in 1933-34. There is no deep social meaning in his comedy, no shades of subtlety — just utter slapstick foolishness, delivered in an endearingly simpering style that's the closest thing the 30s had to Pee Wee Herman. An added attraction was Penner's in-character singing each week of a whimsical novelty song, especially written to suit his style. Like Pearl, however, Penner was doomed to early decline by the sheer repetitiveness of his format, even though he remained very popular with children right up to the end of his radio career.

Another approach to the variety format was taken by the *Maxwell House Show Boat*. Premiering in 1931, this Thursday

night favorite drew from two major inspirations: the Ferber/Kern/Hammerstein stage production and the *Showboat* program heard in the late 20s over WLS, Chicago. For several seasons, it was the most popular program on the networks, and inspired an almost fanatical loyalty among its predominantly female fans.

The *Maxwell House Show Boat* rode a river of sentimentality — the Depression-era version of “nostalgia” for the “simpler times” of the Old South. Even though no attempt was made to reflect a period setting for the show, the entire tone of the program was redolent of cotton blossoms and magnolia, having little to do with the grit and grime of Depression America. It also broke ground in the way in which it combined fictional characters like “Captain Henry” and blackface deckhands “Molasses and January” with real-life cast members like Lanny Ross and Annette Hanshaw. It was an unusual combination of corn and class, and it inspired occasional imitations. None remained afloat as long as the original, and certainly none inspired the loyalty that filled the pages of



JACK PEARL

## RADIO'S FORGOTTEN YEARS

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many a fan magazine.

Dramatic radio was of secondary importance during the depression years. While there were many serial programs of which more later — the really memorable dramas were still in the future. But the seeds had been planted — in Chicago.

Perhaps the first important full-scale drama to come out of Chicago was a weekly series for the Great Northern Railroad called *Empire Builders*. Beginning in January of 1929, and running thru the spring of 1931, this series offered half-hour tales set on the "Empire Builder," Great Northern's crack train on the Chicago-Seattle run. The series was one of the earliest successful anthologies, tied together by a host figure referred to only as "The Old Timer," and listening to surviving episodes reveals a show which offered remarkably high production values. The acting — featuring such stalwarts as Don Ameche and Bernadine Flynn — was capable, and the sound effects work was extraordinary considering that no recordings of any kind were used. The programs also provide something of a surprise for modern-day nostalgics convinced that radio always kept a puritanical moral tone: "Hells" and "Damns" are heard — and, distastefully, there are occasional ugly racial epithets, reflective of the casual bigotry of the time.

Other dramas of the depression tended to stick to an anthology format — the *True Story Hour*, the *Colliers Hour*, *Soconyland Sketches*, the *First Nighter* program. Continuing characters began to make inroads most notably in the form of crime shows: *Sherlock Holmes* had its first radio incarnation beginning in 1930, and *Dr. Fu Manchu* spun off from the *Colliers Hour* into his own show shortly after.

Almost always overlooked in the discussion of early radio are the many syndicated

transcription shows which began to flood the air in 1929 and 1930, and which continued to proliferate thruout the decade. The most interesting of these shows was also the most widely circulated.

The *Chevrolet Chronicles* was produced by the World Broadcasting System for distribution on disc to more than a hundred and thirty stations in the fall of 1930. The centerpiece of each program was an interview with a World War Medal of Honor winner, conducted by flying ace Eddie Rickenbacker. The show was an unqualified success, and spurred a lot of interest in the syndication field. Unfortunately, many of the shows which followed failed to keep up that high standard — endless parades of second-rate serials and cornball comedy skits were more typical of the material available on the transcription market.

But the *Chronicles* wasn't the most important of the syndicated shows. That honor belongs to a program which achieved its greatest success on a network after initial success on the disc market — a program which was by far the dominant radio show of the Depression, and perhaps the single most influential program in the history of broadcasting.

*Amos 'n' Andy* wasn't just a radio program during the Depression — especially during 1930-31, it was an obsession. This simple little fifteen minute serial gripped the attention of as many as forty million listeners six nights a week. Why?

Today, nearly seven decades later, it's difficult for the average OTR fan to fully understand the *Amos 'n' Andy* craze of the early 30s. Most fans have heard the half-hour *Amos 'n' Andy* shows of the forties and perhaps some of the fifties TV episodes, and while they're certainly funny in a broad, sitcom sort of way, there's nothing in them that would seem to justify the fanatical enthusiasm that surrounded this



FREEMAN GOSDEN and CHARLES CORRELL

program in its earliest years.

The later shows, however, do not in any way represent what *Amos 'n' Andy* originally was. As first conceived, the program was far from the exaggerated gagfest that it became in its later years. Instead, it was a masterfully written serial drama with humorous overtones — a series that depended as much on suspense for its appeal as it did comedy.

It couldn't have worked without the men behind the characters. Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll were both unusually shrewd writers. They understood exactly how long a storyline should be strung out to maximize tension, and could then snap it to a climax in a single cathartic scene. And then they could start the cycle all over again.

Aside from excellent plotting, the serial episodes of *Amos 'n' Andy* display a remarkable depth of characterization. The characters are not stereotypes, not cardboard cutouts. They react in different ways to changing circumstances, and they grow and change themselves over time.

The performances which brought these characters to life were equally masterful. Gosden in particular was a brilliant radio actor, a master of inflection and vocal shading, and especially gifted in multiple roles. Correll's perfect sense of timing meshed

perfectly with his partner's more intense performances, to create a program which, in its prime, had no equal.

Not that there weren't imitators.

The comedy serial was perhaps the most imitated format of the Depression, on and off the networks. Network programs like *Lum and Abner* and *Myrt and Marge*, local programs like *Berl and Shmerl*, *the Yiddish Gentle-*

*men*, on WMCA, New York, and endless syndicated serials like *Si and Etmer* and *Black and Blue* rose up in the wake of *Amos 'n' Andy*, without ever matching its appeal. Perhaps *Lum and Abner* came closest to capturing the spirit of its progenitor, but even the gifted Chet Lauck and Norris Goff couldn't top Gosden and Correll at their prime.

And perhaps no one ever will.

There's little left of Depression radio, compared to what remains from the later years. It's not that programs weren't recorded — it's that so few were saved. The uncoated aluminum discs which carried the embossed record of early '30s radio have for the most part been lost to the years. Those that survive are often incorrectly dubbed to tape, yielding noisy, skipping recordings that are difficult to follow.

But it's worth it.

Once in a while, a pristine set of discs from Speak-O-Phone Studios or Universal Recording Labs will turn up, and a careful tape transfer will offer a rare glimpse into a vanished era

An age when "Wanna Buy A Duck?" echoed thru every schoolyard, and an entire nation wondered if Andy was going to have to marry Madame Queen.

An age that's still accessible — if you're willing to tune it in. ■

# The Greatest Railroad Show

BY CURTIS L. KATZ

- ✓The first great exhibition to come to America after the war.
- ✓It will be such a show as Chicago has not seen since the glowing days of the Century of Progress more than a decade ago.
- ✓Biggest national spectacle since the 1939 New York's World's Fair.
- ✓National exposition of pageantry and exhibits depicting 100 years of railroad progress.
- ✓The greatest railroad show!

The object of this public relations hyperbole was the Chicago Railroad Fair, the largest public exhibition ever staged by a single industry, which was held along Chicago's lakefront in the summers of 1948 and 1949.

At that time, war-weary Americans were just returning to the national business of "the pursuit of happiness," and the railroads wanted an opportunity to ensure that "pursuit" included riding their shiny new post-war streamliners.

The occasion for this opportunity was the centennial of the first train in Chicago, the acknowledged Railroad Capital of the World." Back in 1848, an already antiquated second-hand locomotive bravely named the *Pioneer* inaugurated service on the Galena & Chicago Union Railroad, earliest predecessor of the Chicago & North Western (today part of the Union Pacific). The idea for a centennial railroad fair was proposed at a January 1948 meeting of railroad executives and publicists sponsored by the *Chicago Tribune*, and the Fair was officially endorsed on January 30 at a regular meeting of the Western Asso-

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ciation of Railroad Executives in Chicago.

The unanimous choice to head the Chicago Railroad Fair was major Lenox Lohr, president of Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry. Under Lohr's management, the Century of Progress world's fair of 1933-34 had made a profit during the worst years of the Depression. Everyone was confident the Major could be counted on to give Chicago and the railroads a good show, though he had barely six months in which to organize it.

The site selected for the Fair was a 50 acre mile-long lakefront stretch of Burnham Park between 20th and 30th Streets. During A Century of Progress, this had been the site of the popular *International Villages*, whose *Streets of Paris* was made infamous by Sally Rand and her fan. Ground was broken April 13, and the nearby Illinois Central was contracted to build nearly five miles of track on the fairgrounds, including a connecting spur across busy Lake Shore Drive.

Strange sights began to appear on Chicago's lakefront: swaying palm trees, Indian adobes, and a huge concrete stage for the pageant, *Wheels A-Rolling*.

An official Railroad Fair song of the same title was written by Philip and Helen Maxwell (he was the director of the Chicagoland Music Festival) and debuted July 17 over the Mutual Network on



PHOTO COURTESY TRAINS MAGAZINE  
CHICAGO RAILROAD FAIR - MAIN ENTRANCE AT 23rd STREET

WGN's *Chicago Theatre of the Air*.

On July 19, a parade marched down State Street, heralding the on-time arrival of the Railroad Fair. Grand Marshal of the procession was Janie Jones, widow of the legendary "brave engineer," Casey Jones.

The following day at 10 a.m., the 23rd Street entrance was opened, and the first visitors paid their 25 cents to see this world's fair of the world of American railroading.

Though national in scope, the Chicago Railroad Fair had a decidedly western tilt. The *Western Vacationland*, sponsored jointly by the Great Northern, the Northern Pacific, and the Burlington, ran a continuous rodeo. The Rock Island's *Rocket Village* featured country music and square dancing. Union Pacific's *Western States* exhibit, and Santa Fe's *Southwest Indian Village* carried out the western theme as well.

But there was also southern hospitality to be had at the Chicago & Eastern Illinois' *Florida In Chicago* exhibit, as well as at the neighboring *New Orleans French Quarter*, presented by the Illinois Central.

Nine railroads were represented under one roof at the eastern railroads pavilion, whose most popular attraction was "Genial Joe," the robot railroader, a cartoonish 9-foot tall figure in overalls that stood in the entrance and greeted people.

The Chicago & North Western recreated Chicago's first train station. Passenger car builders Pullman and Budd were among the other prominent exhibitors.

Dominating the south end of the fairgrounds were the exhibit tracks, on which were displayed the largest gathering of railroad rolling stock ever assembled for a non-operating purpose. Here, literally side by side, one could see railroad equipment ranging from the iron horses of yesterday



## GREATEST RAILROAD SHOW

to the General Motors *Train of Tomorrow*. One could also *ride* a train — on the Burlington's Deadwood Central narrow gauge line up the mile-long western perimeter of the fairgrounds.

In addition to the exhibits, there were daily special events. Individual railroads, states, and organizations had their own "days," which gave railroads plenty of opportunities to organize excursions. Contests and prizes added to the fun, as did celebrity visits. Eddie Cantor and Red Skelton clowned at the Fair. So did Edgar Bergen who, in a role reversal, was photographed sitting on the knee of the dummy, Genial

Joe ("Charlie McCarthy warned him this would happen some day," quipped the *Tribune*). Al Jolson caused a furor by not appearing at "Al Jolson Day." The World's Greatest Entertainer claimed no knowledge of the engagement, which his agent had widely promoted.

The Railroad Fair's most lasting legacy may have been the impression it made on Walt Disney. Just days after his visit to the Fair, Disney wrote, "The Main Village, which includes the Railroad Station, is built around a village green or informal park..." the initial sentence of his first studio memo

describing ideas for a new kind of amusement park.

The Fair's featured attraction was, of course, the colossal railroad pageant *Wheels A-Rolling*, presented four times daily on a lakefront stage 450 feet long and 100 feet deep before a 5,000 seat grandstand. The stars of the show were 21 actual historic trains, supported

by a cast of 150 actors in multiple roles, animals including 70 horses, numerous vintage automobiles and other conveyances, two narrators, plus a small orchestra and chorus. All this for just 60 cents!

The creator of this extravaganza was Edward Hungerford, "the dean of American railroad authors," who added



PHOTO COURTESY TRAINS MAGAZINE

DEADWOOD CENTRAL NARROW GAUGE TRAIN

pageantry to his credits with celebrated Fair of The Iron Horse for the Baltimore & Ohio centenary in 1927. His subsequent transportation pageants included *Wings of a Century* at A Century of Progress, and *Railroads on Parade* at the 1939-40 New York World's Fair.

In one hour and fifteen minutes, *Wheels A-Rolling* unfolded nearly 300 years of American transportation history.

Highlights included:

The B&O's primitive locomotive *Tom Thumb* in its legendary race with a horse car. (After 120 years, the horse still won.)

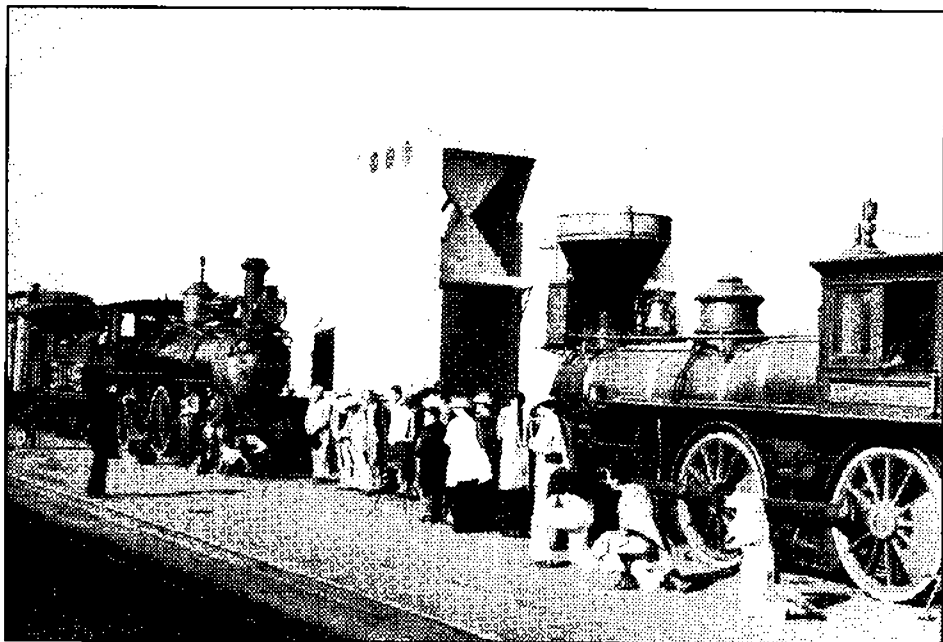


PHOTO COURTESY TRAINS MAGAZINE

### WHEELS A-ROLLING PAGEANT -- "GOLDEN SPIKE" SCENE

— The doughty *Pioneer*, arriving with Chicago's first train. (Earlier in 1948, the C&NW restored this engine to operation for their own centennial, as well as for the Railroad Fair.)

— The Lincoln Funeral train. ("This should be the most effecting scene in the play," wrote Hungerford, and it was, un-faillingly moving audiences to tears, not only from the drama of the moment, but perhaps from the memory of a more recently deceased wartime president.)

Promontory Point, and the driving of the Golden Spike linking East and West.

— New York Central's 100 mph speedster, the 999, racing to the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

— The triumphant arrival of the Burlington's streamlined *Pioneer Zephyr* at A Century of Progress.

Critics effusively praised *Wheels A-Rolling* in their columns, while fairgoers did likewise by frequently filling the grandstand to capacity. In fact the entire Chi-

cago Railroad Fair was a hit with the public and press far beyond all expectation. By popular demand the Labor Day closing date was twice pushed back until the Fair finally closed on October 3. And then, by further demand, a second season was announced for 1949.

Between seasons the railroads made preparations for a fair that would be "not bigger, but better" in 1949. New attractions included a second narrow gauge train, the Cripple Creek & Tin Cup, imported from Colorado by the Denver & Rio Grande Western; Gold Gulch, a "Wild West town," presented by the Burlington; an actual operating San Francisco cable car, brought in by Western Pacific; as well as an ice show and a water thrill show. The North Western upstaged Genial Joe with a 35-foot tall animated figure of Paul Bunyan. A new official song, "Gone To Chicago (On The North Western Line)" was written by Meredith Willson, and debuted on WGN.

## GREATEST RAILROAD SHOW

The 1949 Chicago Railroad Fair opened June 25, a month earlier than in 1948. On September 25, attendance topped that of the first season.

But despite this success, and nationwide cries for another encore, Major Lohr heeded the old theatrical maxim, "Leave 'em wanting more," and on October 2, the Chicago Railroad Fair took its final bow as scheduled.

Not satisfied to let the festivities end, civic boosters took over the Railroad Fair site, and in 1950 presented Chicago Fair, a mini-world's fair in which Railroad Fair buildings were occupied by industrial, commercial, and scientific exhibits. The Deadwood Central was retained, as were the stage and many of the trains from *Wheels A-Rolling*, which were used for a

new pageant, *Frontiers of Freedom*. Alas, Chicago Fair flopped, and was not repeated. Today the Railroad Fair site is dominated by the huge McCormick Place exposition center.

The Chicago Railroad Fair was a thumping success, attracting over 5.5 million visitors. Yet the public soon forgot it, and so did the railroads. Those shiny new post-war streamliners did well for a time, but then fell victim of those 1950s innovations, jet liners and Interstate highways.

This year 1998 will see no major commemoration of the 150th anniversary of Chicago's first railroad. We no longer have railroad fairs, though we now have railroad museums.

So it is good to take a moment to remember when Chicago was Railroad Capital of the World, and when railroads gave Chicago "The Greatest Railroad Show." ■



### THREE OF THE STARS OF WHEELS A-ROLLING FROM 50 YEARS AGO CAN STILL BE VISITED IN CHICAGO!

A veteran of many exhibitions and museums, including the Museum of Science and Industry and even the Field Museum, Chicago's first locomotive, the Pioneer of the Chicago & North Western, has made its home since 1972 in the Museum of the Chicago Historical Society, on Clark Street at North Avenue. Built some time in the late 1830s, the Pioneer operated in New York and/or Michigan before coming to Chicago, and it is the oldest surviving product of the Baldwin Locomotive Works, for a hundred years America's pre-eminent builder of locomotives.

At the Museum of Science and Industry, 57th Street at Lake Shore Drive, is the New York Central's fabled locomotive 999. Shortly after it was built in 1893, the 999 became the first manned vehicle to travel over 100 mph, and was proudly exhibited as such at Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition later that year. This engine was acquired by the Museum in 1962. Though the high driving wheels that made possible 999's famous feat were replaced by more practical smaller wheels in 1899, the speedster still cut a "dashing" figure, having been moved indoors and cosmetically restored in 1993.

And of course, there's that Museum of Science and Industry favorite, the Pioneer Zephyr. The world's first diesel streamlined train, it revolutionized travel during the Depression, and electrified the nation with its May 26, 1934 record-breaking non-stop dawn-to-dusk dash between Denver Union Station and A Century of Progress in Chicago. After a quarter century of service on the Chicago Burlington & Quincy, this "Silver Streak" was donated to the Museum in 1960. In 1997 the train received a major restoration, and is now in a new underground display area that will open this summer. The gleaming stainless steel streamliner has been fitted up with interactive exhibits to help relive the Zephyr's glory days at A Century of Progress. —Curtis L. Katz

## Radio: In the Good Old Summertime

BY RICHARD W. O'DONNELL

October was the month when most of the big time stars returned with their shows after summer vacations, back in the thirties and forties, when radio ruled the roost.

Bergen and McCarthy, Fred Allen, Jack Benny, Fibber McGee and Molly, Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, and other big names, all well-rested, were back for thirty-nine more weeks.

During the summer, while they were away, replacement shows took over. Or new shows were tested to learn if they were ready for fame and fortune.

*The Aldrich Family* got its big break in 1939 when the family comedy replaced the *Jack Benny Show* on Sundays for a summer run. Up until then, Henry and his family had been featured in short sketches on the Rudy Vallee and Kate Smith programs. The characters originated in Clifford Goldsmith's Broadway play, *What A Life!* Ezra Stone was Henry, House Jameson was his father, Katherine Raht the mother, and Jackie Kelk was Homer. The half-hour show remained on radio until 1953 when it left the air.

Many summer shows became so successful, listeners lost track of the programs they were replacing in the first place.

*The Quiz Kids*, featuring a lot of youngsters who knew all the answers, was a summer replacement for *The Alec Templeton Show*, which, in turn, one year earlier, had been a warm weather substitute for *Fibber McGee and Molly*, and gained a regular spot on the NBC schedule.

*The Quiz Kids*, ranging in age from about four to twelve, was first heard in June, 1940, and lasted until 1953. Quite a run.

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

Templeton lost his place in the lineup, but the pianist survived for years on NBC and other networks.

Joe Kelly was the long time host of the quiz show, and his unshaven panelists included Mary Ann Anderson, Gerald Darrow, Richard Williams, Harv Fischman, Cynthia Cline and Joel Kupperman, who reportedly had a 200-plus I.Q. He was a whiz at mathematics.

Then there was *Dr. I. Q.*, who handed out silver dollars on Monday nights to movie fans at various film palaces across the land.

Lew Valentine and Jimmy McClain took turns playing the man with the questions on the program, which debuted in June, 1939, as a replacement for some long forgotten show, and lasted a decade, mostly on NBC.

The doctor had assistants in the movie audiences, and they would place a mike under an individual's nose. That meant the lucky person would have a chance to win from five to fifty silver dollars for the right answer to the question asked. The questions were not easy. You had to be sharp to win the silver. Otherwise, you were given a couple of candy bars.

*Information Please*, a snobbish quiz show, also dipped its toes in the summer waters before wading in for a long swim. It was launched by NBC in May, 1938 and lasted until 1948. Clifton Fadiman was the moderator, and the deep thinkers on the panel included sports columnist John Kieran of the *New York Times*, who knew all there was to know about everything; Franklin Adams, a *New York Post* writer, who knew even more; and pianist Oscar Levant, another heavy thinker. A fourth chair was usually occupied by a guest

## **RADIO IN THE SUMMERTIME**

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brain. They included Fred Allen, Deems Taylor, Christopher Morley, Alfred Hitchcock, and Wendell Willkie, to name a few. Milton Cross was the announcer.

Listeners received two dollars for sending in their questions, if they were used, and a hefty five dollars if they baffled the brains. Without a doubt, *Information Please* was loaded with snob appeal, but the peasants must have enjoyed it, or it would not have survived for all those years.

*The Jack Paar Show* was a summer substitute for Jack Benny. It arrived in June, 1947, and lasted until Rochester's boss returned. After that it was gone forever. Later, Paar would hit it big as the TV host on NBC's *Tonight Show*. Radio just wasn't his medium.

*Blondie*, the comic strip that became a successful movie series, also was a summer replacement. Actually, when it was first tested on CBS in July, 1939, it was being groomed for a long run. The movie's Blondie and Dagwood, Penny Singleton and Arthur Lake, were also the stars of the radio series. Over the years, *Blondie* was on other networks, and Penny Singleton was replaced by Ann Rutherford and other actresses in the title role. Be that as it may, *Blondie* lasted on the air until 1950.

*Escape*, probably radio's greatest adventure show, debuted on CBS during the summer of 1947. Unfortunately the series never received credit or the sponsors it deserved. It lasted, a great deal of the time on a sustaining basis, until 1954. Only after it went off the air did critics and listeners really begin to appreciate the program. William Conrad and Paul Frees were the narrators, and countless major radio stars were featured.

Then there was *Gang Busters*, a weekly drama about notorious gangsters, which debuted in July, 1935 on an experimental

basis. NBC was trying to come up with a show with an authoritative touch. Real life law enforcement officials, impersonated by actors, narrated these shows "by proxy." Dillinger, Bonnie and Clyde, the Tri-Cities Gang, and other sinister characters were spotlighted in the weekly half-hour dramas. *Gang Busters* was on the air for twenty-two years.

Orson Welles' *Mercury Theatre* was a substitute in 1938 for the *Lux Radio Theatre*. Did you ever hear of *The Hour of Mystery* as a summer replacement in 1946 for *Theatre Guild On the Air*? This mystery show probably had the greatest list of summer guests ever. They included Laurence Olivier, Frank Sinatra, William Holden, Franchot Tone and David Niven, among others.

Other popular shows that either debuted, or were tested in the summer included *The Adventures of Sam Spade*, *Topper*, *The Thin Man*, *Alan Young Show*, *Counterspy*, *A Date with Judy*, Lucille Ball's *My Favorite Husband*, and Eve Arden's *Our Miss Brooks*.

Also *Suspense*, John Nesbitt's *Passing Parade*, *Ellery Queen*, *Fred Waring Show*, and *Life of Riley* starring William Bendix. This comedy started out on a Sunday afternoon and went on to become a prime time favorite.

Even the great Jack Benny's first radio series, sponsored by Canada Dry, debuted in 1932 during the summer months. Benny wasn't a replacement, it should be noted. He was blazing a trail.

Last but not least, can you name the soap opera that survived a summer test in 1933 and remained a daytime favorite until 1960? It was *The Romance of Helen Trent*. Helen was played by Virginia Clark during the early years. The program came on the air in July, 1933, and was allowed to develop its format and characters before it went on the regular CBS schedule in the fall of that same year. ■



## Our Readers Write WE GET LETTERS

**PEORIA, IL**— Clair Schulz' article (April-May, 1998) was masterful. Without his name on it, the reader would think Bob Hope himself wrote it. —**FR. ROBERT A. L'HOMME**

**CHICAGO RIDGE, IL**— The story about Bob Hope left out the story Hope always told about how he got his start in show business. He was living at what is now the Claridge Hotel at 1244 N. Dearborn in Chicago. He said he was starving. He told a man he met on Randolph street that he needed a job. That man told him to see a man who was looking for an emcee for the vaudeville acts at the Stratford Theatre at 63rd and Halsted. Hope got the job and said he was never out of work again. —**BILL DAUM**

**MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN**— Talk about triggering memories! The article (June-July, 1998) on Kukla, Fran and Ollie did just that. I grew up with television. My first encounter with it involved that wonderful team. A neighborhood furniture store displayed a TV set in the window, with a speaker outside. Not only could we see, but we could actually hear the magic. I recall a bunch of us kids huddled around the store window, competing for the best view. It was very cold out, but that didn't matter. This was a novelty that had to be experienced, no matter what the hardship. They must have sold many TVs from the pressure we put on our parents. Kukla, Fran and Ollie was my favorite show until Uncle Miltie came along. There was, however, room for both. —**RICK HAGERTY**

**NORTHBROOK, IL**— Of course I'll renew my subscription to *Nostalgia Digest*, especially after seeing the cover article in the June-July, 1998 issue. A neighbor gave my mother, many years ago, a beautiful doll when the neighbor's aunt passed away. Mom always said that it is a Deanna Durbin doll, but I didn't find out for sure until I found someone to restring and clean her. The article has given me an idea of how she should look and what kind of clothes she needs. —**MARY WADLEIGH**

**CHICAGO**— Boy, did your article (June-July, 1998) bring back some memories about Giles School. Not too many things changed from the time you graduated in 1948 until I graduated in 1965. I always remember the Halloween parade around the neighborhood. Somewhere in my mother's house is a picture she took of Mr. Leigh with the biggest, ugliest, orange tie that I had ever seen. It was a great school and your article brought back great memories. But I have to disagree with you on one thing. How could you be a member of the "best graduating class Giles School ever had? Mr. Leigh told us WE were the "best graduating class Giles School ever had!" —**JIM LEON**

**HOFFMAN ESTATES, IL**— When I stopped by Metro Golden Memories to pick up my copy of John Dunning's new Encyclopedia of Old Time Radio, I wasn't quite sure what to expect. But whatever I had expected wasn't even close to the reality of this marvelous work. I've been looking through it for a week and it just keeps touching my mind and heart with its' detailed coverage of programs I remember. I read with fond memories about shows I listened to as a youngster over station KIDO in Boise, Idaho. This new book will take its place along side of the copy of his first book that I picked up "way back then" at Metro Golden Memories, and the many others I've collected through the years that provide insights into "those exciting days of yesteryear." Dunning's encyclopedia, however, will be the keystone of that collection because of what it is: the most complete, accurate, and the best. —**EDWARD C. COOK**

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### NOSTALGIA DIGEST AND RADIO GUIDE

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The Nostalgia Digest is published six times a year by THE HALL CLOSET, Box 421, Morton Grove, IL 60053 (847) 965-7763.

Annual subscription rate is \$15 for six issues. A two-year subscription (12 issues) is \$25. Your subscription expires with the issue date noted on the mailing label. A renewal reminder is sent with the last issue of your subscription.

**ADDRESS CHANGES** should be sent to Nostalgia Digest, Box 421, Morton Grove, IL 60053 **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**. The Post Office **DOES NOT** automatically forward the Digest which is sent by bulk mail.

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Museum of Broadcast Communications

# museum pieces

Reported by Margaret Warren

Creatures invaded the Museum of Broadcast Communications last Spring.

They weren't the creepy, crawly kind. They were AM-1000's (WMVP) "Media Creatures," the trio of newsmen

*Tribune's* Rick Kogan, *Sun-Times'* Richard Roeper, and the station's Kathy Voltmer — who hold forth middays to comment on the stories of the day among themselves and with guests.

The invasion was only a slight departure from the program's regular format as they joined in the media frenzy of that particular day: Seinfeld's departure from TV.

A studio audience and celebrity guests joined in to yada, yada about Jerry, Kramer, George, Elaine and all the rest of the crazies on the show.

Later that evening, the Museum threw its own party for the exiting sitcom.

About a hundred fans showed up to devour pizza, watch the last big broadcast and record their own farewell wishes to the cast.

Anybody needing a Seinfeld-fix in the coming months can stop by the Museum Archives. There are four episodes waiting. Jerry also pops up on two Letterman shows and a "Politically Incorrect," also on the Archives shelves.

It'll soon be time for back to school and in broadcast terms, that would be Madison High and "Our Miss Brooks." Stay in the archives and take a look back, probably 45 years, and watch Miss

Brooks in her usual pursuit of Mr. Boynton. This time Mr. LeBlanche, the French teacher, gets caught in the middle.

Connie Brooks or Jerry Seinfeld or any of the thousands of titles, vintage and contemporary, wait to be watched and enjoyed in the Museum Archives. It's all free to members, so stop in soon.

What? You're not a member? You really should support this unique museum and take advantage of all the special programs and events. Sign up the next time you stop in. Or call to arrange your membership.



AM-1000's "MEDIA CREATURES," (from left) Kathy Voltmer, Richard Roeper, and Rick Kogan

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Chicago Cultural Center

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← **CHICAGO'S FIRST LOCOMOTIVE. THE PIONEER.**

as it was toured around the Chicago & North Western Railroad in May and June, 1948 before appearing in "Wheels A-Rolling" at the Chicago Railroad Fair. Read Curtis Katz' article, page 32.

**HERE'S HENRY MORGAN**

By Clair Schulz  
Page 2

**JEROME KERN**

By Bill Sheldon  
Page 17

**SUMMERTIME RADIO**

By Richard W. O'Donnell  
Page 37

**WOMEN IN OLD TIME RADIO**

By Richard R. Kunz  
Page 6

**SGT. PRESTON LAND-SLIDE**

Exciting Radio Premium  
Page 19

**WE GET LETTERS**

Our Readers Write  
Page 39

**REMEMBERING RIVERVIEW**

By C. Mackey  
Page 14

**RADIO'S FORGOTTEN YEARS**

By T. Elizabeth McLeod  
Page 26

**MUSEUM PIECES**

By Margaret Warren  
Page 40

**PLUS** WNIB *THOSE WERE THE DAYS* LISTINGS . . . . . Pages 20-24  
WMAQ *WHEN RADIO WAS* CALENDAR . . . . . Page 25