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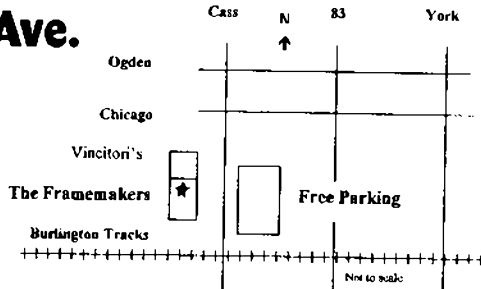
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CHUCK SCHADEN'S NOSTALGIA DIGEST **AND RADIO GUIDE**

BOOK TWENTY-NINE

CHAPTER TWO

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2003

NECROLOGY OF 2002

We Remember Them Well

Last year was not a very good year for show business. We lost many of our favorite entertainers and personalities during 2002.

They're gone, but not forgotten.

JOHN AGAR, 81, member of the Chicago meat-packing family who married Shirley Temple and went on to a movie career in such films as *Fort Apache*, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, *Revenge of the Creature*, *Chism*. April 7.

PARLEY BAER, 88, character actor who appeared in hundreds of radio shows including *Suspense*, *Lux Radio Theatre* and *Gunsmoke*, in which he co-starred as Marshall Dillon's deputy Chester Proudfoot. On TV as Ozzie Nelson's neighbor Darby, and on the *Andy Griffith Show* as Mayor Stoner. He was also the voice of the Keebler cookie elf in TV commercials. November 22.

MILTON BERLE, 93, TV's beloved "Uncle Miltie" who, after a so-so career in radio, captured the nation's audience on Tuesday nights in the early days of the Golden Age of Television. March 27.

BERNICE BERWIN, 100, radio actress who played the role of Hazel Barbour for 23 years on the long-running *One Man's Family* series. May 27.

EDDIE BRACKEN, 87, stage and screen actor who had his own comedy radio show in 1945-47 on NBC and CBS following the success of his two 1944 screen hits, *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* and *Hail the Conquering Hero*. November 14.



Milton Berle



Parley Baer

FOSTER BROOKS, 89, comedian who created a comic drunk act, performed on various *Dean Martin Celebrity Roasts* and other TV variety shows and in personal appearances. Dec 12, 01.

GEORGE CATES, 90, composer, arranger, conductor and musical director of the Lawrence Welk TV show for thirty years. May 10.

KAM FONG CHUN, 84, actor who portrayed detective Chin Ilo Kelly in the TV crime series *Hawaii Five-O*. October 30.

ROSEMARY CLOONEY, 74, popular singer for more than 50 years with such hits as "Come On-a My House," "Hey There," "Tenderly" and countless standards. Also appeared in films *White Christmas* and *Red Garters*. June 29.

JOE COBB, 85, the "fat kid" in the movies' *Our Gang* comedies during the late silent and early talkie era. May 21.

JAMES COBURN, 74, movie "tough guy" who appeared in over 100 films including *Our Man Flint*, *Magnificent Seven*, and *The Great Escape*. November 18.

RAY CONIFF, 85, Grammy-award-winning



Eddie Bracken



Rosemary Clooney



Lionel Hampton



Jackie Kelk

composer, bandleader and arranger whose albums with the Ray Coniff Singers included "S'wonderful" and "Somewhere My Love." October 12.

JEFF COREY, 88, character actor in such films as *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *In Cold Blood*, and on many TV shows such as *One Day at a Time* and *Night Court*. August 16.

KEENE CURTIS, 79, veteran stage, television and film actor who played Daddy Warbucks in *Annie* on Broadway and had a recurring role on TV's *Cheers* as the upstairs restaurant owner, John Allen Hill. October 13.

ALAN DALE, 73, singer, popular in the late 1940s and 1950s whose hits included "Heart of My Heart," "Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White" and "Sweet and Gentle." April 20.

MATT DENNIS, 89, singer, pianist and composer who wrote "Angel Eyes" and who had his own band for a while and was arranger for Martha Tilton, Margaret Whiting, Tommy Dorsey. June 21.

LARRY DOBKIN, 83, dependable, hard-working radio actor on such Golden Age programs as *Ellery Queen*, *Nero Wolfe*, *Phillip Marlowe*, *Escape*, *Gunsmoke*, *Nightbeat*, *Yours Truly*, *Johnny Dollar*. Also in scores of TV shows, on stage and in films. October 28.

JERRY DUNPHY, 80, long-time Southern California TV news anchorman reporting in Los Angeles for 42 years. May 20.

EILEEN FARRELL, 82, Metropolitan opera soprano who also sang popular music and appeared as guest on many radio and television shows. March 23.

JOHN FRANKENHEIMER, 72, leading motion picture director of *Manchurian Candidate*, *Seven Days in May*, *Birdman of Alcatraz*, *The Train*, and other films from the 1960s and '70s. July 6.

KENNY GARDNER, 89, crooner with Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians for 30 years, singing such hits as "Enjoy Yourself" and "Frankie and Johnnie." July 26.

DOLORES GRAY, 78, stage, screen and nightclub singer considered to have one of the great musical-theatre voices of the 20th Century. June 26.

ADOLPH GREEN, 86, prolific song writer who wrote, along with his wife Betty Comden, for stage and screen. Hits include *On The Town*, *Singin' in the Rain*, *The Bandwagon*, *Wonderful Town*, *Good News*, *Bells Are Ringing*, *Will Rogers Follies*. October 23.

JAMES GREGORY, 90, TV, movie and stage actor best known for his role as Inspector Luger for eight seasons on *Barney Miller*. September 16.

JOHN GUEDEL, 88, radio-TV producer who created Art Linkletter's long-running *People Are Funny* and *House Party* programs, and the Groucho Marx series *You Bet Your Life*. December 15, 2001.

CARRIE HAMILTON, 38, actress, writer, musician daughter of Carol Burnett who appeared in the TV series *Fame*, *Murder She Wrote* and *Beverly Hills 90210*. January 20.

LIONEL HAMPTON, 94, vibraphone virtuoso whose musical career spanned more than half a century including a four-year stint with Benny Goodman as part of the Goodman Quartet, which also included Teddy Wilson and Gene Krupa. August 31.

JONATHAN HARRIS, 87, actor who portrayed the evil, cowardly Dr. Zachary Smith on the 1960s TV series *Lost in Space*. November 3.

RICHARD HARRIS, 72, Irish actor who starred in such films as *This Sporting Life*, *A Man Called Horse*, *Guns of Navarone*, *Camelot*, *Gladiator* and two *Harry Potter* films. October 25.

SIGNE HASSO, 91, Swedish-born movie actress of the 1940s and '50s who appeared in such films as *Journey for Margaret*, *Heaven Can Wait*, *House on 92nd Street*, *A Double Life* and *Story of Dr. Wassell*. June 7.

CHICK HEARN, 85, play-by-play announcer for the Los Angeles Lakers for 42 years during which he called a record of 3,338 consecutive games. August 5.

EILEEN HECKART, 82, Oscar-Tony-Emmy-award-winning actress known to TV fans as Mary Richard's Aunt Flo on the *Mary Tyler Moore* series. December 31, 2001.

KIM HUNTER, 79, Academy Award-winning actress for her role as Stella in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and who also appeared in the *Planet of the Apes* films. September 11.

WAYLON JENNINGS, 64, popular country singer who recorded 60 albums and had 16 Number One singles including "Good-Hearted Woman," which he recorded with Willie Nelson. February 13.

ADELE JERGENS, 84, World War II pinup girl who generally played good-hearted bad girls in mostly B-movies during the 1940s and '50s. November 22.

CHUCK JONES, 89, Oscar-winning film animator who created such beloved cartoon characters as Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig, Elmer Fudd and Daffy Duck. February 22.

KATY JURADO, 78, Mexican actress who appeared in many U.S. films including *High Noon*, *Broken Lance* and *Under the Volcano*. July 5.

JACKIE KELK, 81, radio actor best known for his role as Homer Brown on *The Aldrich Family*. He also played Jimmy Olson on *Superman* and Terry Lee on *Terry and the Pirates*. September 5.



Jack Kruschen



Peggy Lee

WARD KIMBALL, 88, one of Walt Disney's trusted animators who helped develop Mickey Mouse, Jiminy Cricket and worked on such film classics as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Fantasia*, *Dumbo*, *Cinderella*. In his free time he formed the Dixieland jazz band known as Firehouse Five Plus Two. July 8.

ROY KRAL, 80, jazz pianist who, with his wife Jackie Cain, created the famous Jackie & Roy duo, recording nearly 40 albums in a 56-year career. August 2.

JACK KRUSCHEN, 80, character actor on radio in hundreds of programs including *Suspense*; *Escape*; *Gunsmoke*; *Nightbeat*; *Yours Truly*, *Johnny Dollar*; *Columbia Workshop*. On TV in *Dragnet* and in dozens of movies. April 2.

PEGGY LEE, 81, sultry-voiced popular singer and song writer whose 700 recordings and 59 albums produced such hits as "Is That All There Is?," "Manana," "Fever," "Love," and "Golden Earrings." January 21.

ROSETTA LE NOIRE, 90, actress whose 60-year career began in Orson Welles' production of an all-black *Macbeth* and continued into the 1990s on TV as Grandma Winslow in the sitcom *Family Matters*. March 17.

BUDDY LESTER, 86, comedian who worked in films with Jerry Lewis and in Frank Sinatra's "Rat Pack" movies, and on TV. He was the brother of comic Jerry Lester. October 4.

FRANK LESLIE, 70, veteran Chicago radio broadcaster who provided traffic reports for WBBM-AM for 11 years and who did voice-over work for commercials and training films. He was a member of the AFTRA/



Danny O'Neil



Del Sharbutt



Howard K. Smith



Paul Tripp

SAG Radio Players, performing re-enactments of radio dramas in the Museum of Broadcast Communications and other venues. October 3.

ARTHUR LYMAN, 70, Hawaiian-born vibraphonist who played "Yellow Bird" and other Polynesian mood music in the 1950s and '60s. February 24.

TONY MARTINEZ, 82, bandleader-turned-actor who played the farm hand Pepino on TV's *The Real McCoys* and *Sancho Panza* in 2,245 stage performances of *Man of LaMancha*. September 16.

IRISH MC CALLA, 73, actress best known for her title role in the 1950s TV series *Sheena, Queen of the Jungle*. February 1.

SPIKE MILLIGAN, 83, legendary British comedian who created and starred on *The Goon Show* on radio and television. February 27.

DUDLEY MOORE, 66, English-born movie actor who starred in *Arthur*, *10* and other films in the 1970s and '80s. He was also an accomplished pianist. March 27.

GEORGE NADER, 80, movie leading man in 50 films including *Six Bridges to Cross*, *Sins of Jezebel* and the cult classic *Robot Monsters*. February 4.

DANNY O'NEIL, 81, popular Chicago-based singing star in the 1940s and '50s who appeared on his own radio and television programs. May 20.

BIBI OSTERWALD, 83, stage, screen and television actress who was in the original Broadway production of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. January 2.

LEWANDA PAGE, 81, actress who appeared as bible-toting Aunt Esther on the

Sanford and Son television series. September 14.

REMO PALMIER, 78, jazz guitarist who performed with Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday and Dizzy Gillespie, but was best known as the man who taught the ukulele to Arthur Godfrey, with whom he worked on radio and TV for many years. February 2.

BYRNE PIVEN, 72, Chicago-based actor, director and teacher for decades on stage, film and at his Piven Theatre Workshop in Evanston. February 18.

ART ROBERTS, 70, longtime Chicago radio disc jockey at WLS-AM in the '60s and '70s, known as the city's "hip uncle" telling weird bedtime stories along with the music he played. March 6.

HAROLD RUSSELL, 88, disabled WW II veteran who won two Academy Awards for his portrayal of a returning soldier in the 1946 film *The Best Years of Our Lives*. January 29.

AVERY SCHREIBER, 66, comedian who, with partner Jack Burns, appeared in many TV variety shows in the 1960s and '70s. He was also known for his chip-crunching TV commercials for Doritos. January 7.

DEL SHARBUTT, 90, network announcer who had one of the most recognized voices on radio during a career that began in 1933 and spanned the Golden Age. April 26.

HOWARD K. SMITH, 87, broadcasting pioneer, one of Edward R. Murrow's "boys" who covered WW II for CBS radio. He later became an ABC-TV news correspondent and commentator. February 15.

ROD STEIGER, 77, Academy Award-winning actor for 50 years in such films as *On*



Gene Autry

★

America's Number 1 Singing Cowboy

BY WAYNE W. DANIEL

One hundred years ago this year a watershed event occurred in the realm of American movie making. It was in 1903 that Edwin S. Porter filmed *The Great Train Robbery*, a cinematic production featuring bandits, cowboys, the commission of a crime, a fight between good guys and bad guys, escape, pursuit, and a concluding gun battle in which the good guys prevailed. From the mold of this hugely popular dramatic film poured forth, during the better part of the ensuing century, an avalanche of Western films seen on movie and television screens by millions of people around the world.

But plots populated only with villains, violence, and victorious sheriffs did not reveal the full range of the Western

experience. Missing were the images invoked by the songs recorded by the likes of Carl T. Sprague and Vernon Dalhart and published in books by such scholars as N. Howard Thorpe and John A. Lomax; songs that extol the virtues of a home on the range or tell of cowboys singing to quiet a restless herd of cattle. As a part of the Western tradition, music had a rightful place in the transmission of the legacy, and recent technological advances in film making enabled the studios to make sound a part of the finished product. It was only logical, then, to complement the rough-and-tumble action of the B western with calming interludes of song. In 1930, western star Ken Maynard became filindom's first singing cowboy when he warbled a couple of Western ditties in *Sons of the Saddle*. Three years later John Wayne was given a singing role in *Riders of Destiny*. Maynard's renditions have been characterized as amateurish, while legend has it that Wayne's total lack of musical talent required that he lip-sync to the voice of another. It was not until 1934

Wayne W. Daniel of Chamblee, Georgia, is a retired college professor and a country music historian. He is the author of Pickin' on Peachtree, A History of Country Music in Atlanta, Georgia, published by the University of Illinois Press.

that the potential of the singing cowboy movie star became evident. The man who was in the right place at the right time with the right credentials to set the phenomenon on an upward spiral was Texas-born, Oklahoma-nurtured Orvon Gene Autry.

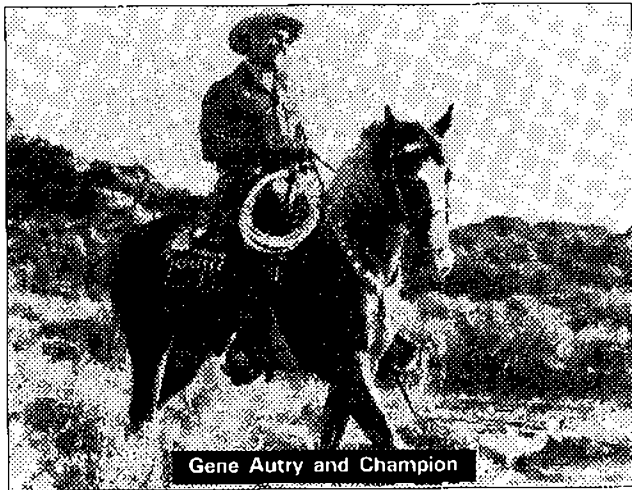
Born September 29, 1907, near Tioga, Texas, Autry was destined to meld his musical talents and business acumen into a formidable force that would write the script for the development of a sizeable segment of popular culture and make him a multimillionaire in the process. With a population of less than 800, Tioga, located some 40 miles from the Oklahoma border, was known for the medicinal qualities of its local water supply. It was not a place likely to be picked as the training ground of a future music industry giant.

Autry's early experiences were relatively inauspicious, giving little hint that they constituted the foundation upon which a multi-media entertainment career would be erected. Describing his early life and that of his contemporaries, he once wrote, "the pace was serene, the life pastoral. We were the sons of ranch hands and farmers and drifters. I knew how to ride a horse and milk a cow and drive a buckboard." One aspect of Autry's life set

him apart from his peers: his interest in music, which stood out as an important part of his early life. "My grandfather was a Baptist preacher ... who taught me to sing when I was five in order to use me in his church choir," Autry recalled in his autobiography, "Back in the Saddle Again." "Mother encouraged my interest in music," he added. "At night she sang to us, hymns and folk ballads mostly, and read Psalms. She played the piano, and a guitar in the Latin style, and on Sunday she was the church organist." Autry wrote that when he was twelve years old he paid eight dollars for a guitar he ordered from a Sears Roebuck catalog. He had earned the money by baling and stacking hay on his uncle's farm. The \$7.95 guitar that appeared in the Sears Roebuck catalogs the year Autry was twelve was called the Pearletta. The catalog picture shows a flattop instrument which, according to the description, had a body made of imitation rosewood, a spruce top, and poplar neck with mahogany finish. The ebony-finished fingerboard was bound with white celluloid and inlaid with four pearletta (imitation pearl) position ornaments. The guitar, which weighed twelve pounds, came with steel strings, adjustable

bridge, instruction book, and fingerboard chart.

By the time he was fifteen, Autry was earning fifty cents a night performing in a Tioga cafe. When the head of the Fields Brothers Marvelous Medicine Show offered him a fifteen-dollar-a-week job, he jumped at the opportunity. "I traveled with them for three months," he wrote in his autobiography. "softening up audiences with



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mournful ballads" before the pitchman began hawking the liniment, pills, and pain remedies that paid the salaries and kept the show on the road.

In those early years of entertaining, Autry did not depend on music for a steady income. While he was still a kid, he and his family moved across the Red River to the small town of Achille, Oklahoma. There he worked as a projectionist at the local movie theater, where he first became acquainted with Western films and the escapades of such silver-screen cowboys as Harry Carey, Hoot Gibson, and Buck Jones.

Common sights where Autry lived during his youth were railroads and stock cars pulled by steam locomotives that came into town empty and left out loaded with cattle from surrounding ranches. "I used to hang around the railroad station in those days," he once told a Los Angeles disc jockey. "I began to listen to those dots and dashes on the telegraph key, so I decided that I wanted to be a telegraph operator. I think I worked in practically every station between Springfield, Missouri, and Sherman, Texas." It was in one such station that Autry had an encounter that forever changed his life. In a 1974 radio interview, he retold the story that has become well-known to Autry fans. "I was working in a little town called Chelsea, Oklahoma. About eleven o'clock at night this fellow came in to send a telegram, and he saw a guitar laying over there on the desk. I always kept a guitar and used to practice on the thing and sing to myself for amusement. He said, 'Say, do you play that guitar?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'I'd like to hear you sing a couple of songs.' So I did a couple of songs for him, and he said, 'Son, you ought to get yourself a job on the radio.' I didn't pay too much attention to him at that time and just thought he was trying to make me feel good. So I read the

telegram, and it was going to King Features in New York, and [it was] signed, 'Will Rogers.' I just realized then who I was talking to."

Later, when the railroads began laying off their employees and it looked as if Autry might lose his job, he remembered the words of Will Rogers. "So, I said to myself," he recalled, "'Will Rogers thought that I was good enough to be on the radio, so I think I'll take a whack at it.'" Autry thought his best bet for getting into show business would be through the recording industry. Consequently, he went east to Chicago and New York in search of a record contract. After listening to Autry's singing, record company officials told him that he had a good voice, but advised him that it would be in his best interest to go back to Oklahoma and get a job in radio in order to gain experience performing in front of a microphone. Autry, following this advice, took his guitar to Tulsa, Oklahoma, where he obtained a job performing on a sustaining basis over radio station KVOO. According to Autry, the experience brought him "no money, but a lot of fun." During this radio stint, he was known as "The Oklahoma Yodeling Cowboy."

After about six months at KVOO, Autry decided that he was ready to make another try for the coveted recording contract. This time he headed back to New York, where he met with success. October 9, 1929, found him in the Victor studios making his first record, "My Dreaming of You," backed by "My Alabama Home." Two years and some 35 records later, on October 29, 1931, Autry recorded his first major hit, "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine," sung as a duet with Jimmy Long, his one-time boss on the railroad and Mrs. Gene Autry's uncle. Autry and Long also wrote the song, which reputedly sold 30,000 copies within the first month of its



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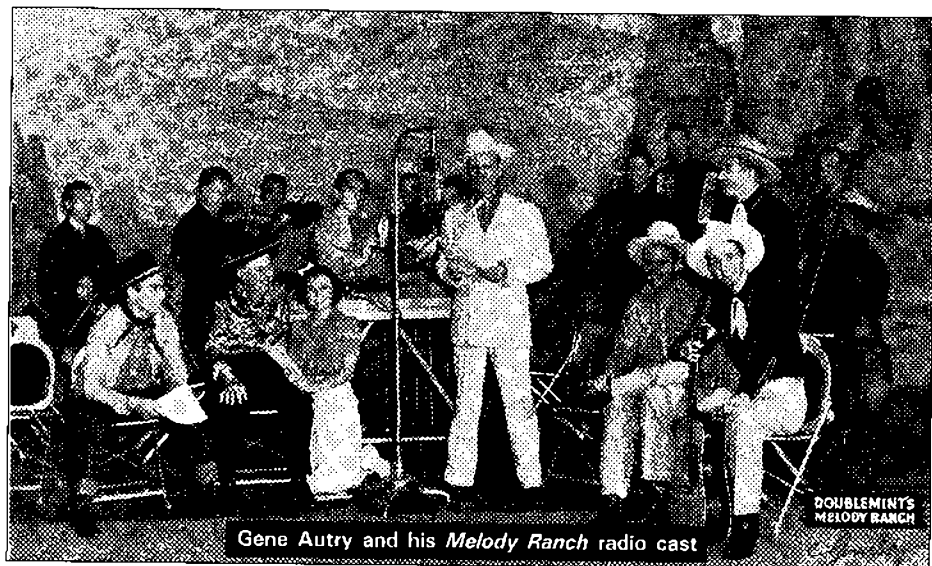
release on record.

As was typical in the early history of country/western music, Autry's hit record was followed by a job on a major radio station. In December 1931, he began appearing on Chicago's WLS, home station of the famous *National Barn Dance*. WLS had gone on the air in 1924 as a marketing and public relations tool of Sears, Roebuck and Company, but in 1928 was bought by Chicago-based "Prairie Farmer," an influential Midwestern farm newspaper. Autry, billed by the station as the Oklahoma Yodeling Cowboy, had his own daytime program, appeared on the Saturday night *Barn Dance*, and toured with other WLS artists. Although Sears, Roebuck no longer owned the station, the WLS-Autry-Sears tie-in was remarkable. Autry's daytime program was sponsored by the mail-order emporium.

The company he was recording for at the time, American Record Corporation, was issuing his records on the Sears-owned Conqueror label, and these had been available at 19 cents each from the Sears

catalog since the Spring/Summer 1931 edition. The Fall/Winter 1931/32 Sears catalog offered its customers additional Gene Autry merchandise: a 39-cent song folio titled "Gene Autry's Cowboy Songs and Mountain Ballads," and an item that would kindle the fires of ambition in the hearts of countless aspiring pickers and singers around the country, the Gene Autry Roundup guitar, to be had for \$9.75.

In 1934 Autry, an established star of radio, records, and stage, had but one media challenge left to pursue -- motion pictures. His record label, American Recording Corporation, was owned by one Herbert J. Yates, who also owned Consolidated Film Industries, a movie film processing company. A man named Nat Levine owned a motion picture production company called Mascot Pictures. According to Autry, when Levine approached Yates in search of financial backing for a Ken Maynard western, Yates agreed to put up the money on condition that Levine give Autry a role in the movie. Thus it was that in the summer of 1934 Gene Autry, along with his fellow WLS performer and future movie sidekick, Lester (Smiley) Burnette, packed up his guitar and cowboy boots, and left Chicago for what appeared to be greener pastures in Hollywood. By the end of the year he had strummed his guitar and sung his songs in two Mascot films, *In Old Santa Fe* and *Mystery Mountain*. He would appear in one more Mascot production, *The Phantom Empire*, a thirteen-chapter serial. Autry's next 58 movies would bear the logo of Republic Pictures, the name Herbert Yates gave the new company he formed when he bought Mascot Pictures and merged it with his other holdings. The last 32 of Autry's 93 films would be released by Columbia Pictures, the studio he signed with in 1947



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following a disagreement with Republic.

With the singing cowboy's movie debut, those with a stake in his future stepped up their efforts to ensure that Gene Autry would become a household name. Unlike most screen stars who portrayed persons other than themselves and assumed the names of these characters, Gene Autry, with one exception, always played Gene Autry in his films. No chance for identity problems or casting errors there. Opportunities were never overlooked for Autry to sing on film the songs that he had also recorded for home purchase and jukebox play. In fact, nineteen of his movie titles were the same as a previously recorded song. They included such favorites as *Tumbling Tumbleweeds* (1935), *Mexicali Rose* (1939), and *Sioux City Sue* (1946).

If making movies and records wasn't enough to keep a man busy, there was all that merchandise to be endorsed and licensed. Kids who spent their Saturday afternoons at the local movie house getting their weekly horse-opera fix also had to have a Gene Autry guitar and a Gene Autry cowboy outfit complete with boots,

spurs, holsters, and cap pistols all bearing their hero's name. They wanted to take their sandwiches to school in a Gene Autry lunch box, sneak a peck at the latest Gene Autry comic book when the teacher wasn't looking, and mark the tortuously slow passage of class time on their Gene Autry wristwatches. Those parents able to afford a higher-priced toy could look forward to requests at Christmas time for a Gene Autry bicycle. One can well believe the August 1939 *New York Times* article reporting that Hollywood's top western star "owns a home in North Hollywood, a 25-acre ranch near Burbank, six horses and a couple of dozen cowboy outfits. How much money he makes is his business, but you may be sure it isn't cabbage."

In July 1942, just seven months after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Gene Autry was inducted into military service during a broadcast of his *Melody Ranch* radio program. His initial assignment was with Special Services, entertaining personnel at military bases throughout the country. Autry, who considered this "soft duty," wanted to do more. He aspired to be

a pilot in the Army Air Corps, but there were problems with that, one of which was a lack of experience. "I had flown only small craft," he wrote in his autobiography, so "I found a private field in Phoenix and, on my own time, at my own expense, I started checking out bigger aircraft ... I flew two or three times a week for six months and, finally, I was accepted for flight school." He was subsequently promoted to flight officer and transferred to the Air Transport Command, where he spent the remainder of his time as a military man. "It was tough and important work," Autry recalled, "high risk and low profit, and it suited me fine."

By July 4, 1945, Autry had been discharged from military service. He returned to civilian life in the middle of a squabble with Republic Pictures over the contract he had signed with the firm in 1938. On June 27, 1944, he had filed suit against Republic seeking to void the contract. His position was that because of his enlistment in the military he could not fulfill its requirements. Republic did not see things that way, contending that Autry owed the studio 21 more pictures. In 1947, after three years of court battles, Autry and Republic were finally divorced. A decision rendered by the California Supreme Court freed the Western star of all contractual obligations to the studio. In the meantime, Autry had made five movies for Republic since his discharge from the military, but henceforth, through a deal with Columbia Pictures, his films would be produced by his own independent firm, Gene Autry Productions, and released through Columbia.

Autry did not let his legal entanglement with Republic Pictures stand in the way of other lucrative entertainment ventures and financial undertakings which brought him financial success. A government document filed by Autry in December of 1948



U.S. Army Air Corps Officer Gene Autry

WAYNE DANIEL COLLECTION

revealed that his net worth exceeded \$800,000, that he had financial holdings in 17 enterprises, and that his gross income for the first ten months of the year was \$548,913. His sources of income included royalties (\$197,996), radio and personal appearances (\$101,167), motion picture performances (\$62,240), and radio broadcasts (\$67,500). In addition to Gene Autry Productions, his financial investments included interests in radio stations, music publishing companies, a cattle company, an aviation company, movie theaters, a rodeo, newspapers, a distributing company, and a manufacturing company. There were more acquisitions to come: oil wells, television stations, motels and hotels and the California Angels baseball team. It has been reported that by 1970 his financial worth was in excess of \$100 million.

Autry's last film, *Last of the Pony Riders*, was released in November 1953. His network radio program, *Melody Ranch*, which had been on the air since 1940, was broadcast for the last time in 1956. In 1962 he recorded a long-play album, "Gene Autry's Golden Hits." This

event marked his last appearance in a recording studio. With his days as a full-time entertainer behind him, Autry had 36 years left in which to count his money and reminisce over his accomplishments, the honors bestowed upon him, and his impact on American popular culture. There was much food for thought.

Take, for example, Autry's song-writing. Of 460 songs he recorded, he is credited as composer or co-composer of 188, or 41 percent. His song-writing efforts earned him induction into the Nashville Songwriters' Hall of Fame and a lifetime achievement award from the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP). In addition to "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine," the songs that Autry had a hand in writing include such hits as "Be Honest with Me," "You're the Only Star in My Blue Heaven," "At Mail Call Today," "Here Comes Santa Claus," and his long-time theme song, "Back in the Saddle Again." Like most good songwriters, Autry had a knack for spotting catch phrases and ideas that could be turned into hit songs. He once recalled how he came to write his 1947 hit, "Here Comes Santa Claus." "I was riding down Hollywood Boulevard at the Hollywood Christmas Parade, and I was grand marshal that year, and the kids kept saying, 'Here comes Santa Claus. Here comes Santa Claus.' So I made a mental note of that, and I wrote that song, and we sold over a million records of it the first year that it was out." Autry was in the Air Force, stationed at Love Field near Dallas, Texas, when he and Fred Rose wrote "At Mail Call Today." As Autry recalled, "They had a magazine called *Yank* that was

put out for all the service men, and they had a column [called] "Mail Call," and everybody would pour their heart out to it. So there was one letter I saw, and it said, 'At mail call today my heart was broken. My girl had jilted me for someone else.' So I called Fred in Los Angeles. I said, 'Fred, I've got an idea for a song.'" Rose flew to Dallas, the two wrote the song, and Autry recorded it on December 6, 1944. Letters from adoring fans provided inspiration for "Be Honest with Me" and "You're the Only Star in My Blue Heaven." To meet the demands for new songs to record and sing in his movies, Autry had always to be on the alert for fresh material.

There were also the repertoire demands of his CBS radio network show, *Melody Ranch*, which featured Autry singing from three to five songs on each weekly broadcast. *Melody Ranch* debuted on Sunday evening, January 7, 1940. Sponsored by the makers of Wrigley's chewing gum, each show featured, in addition to songs by Autry and others, a comedy routine featuring Pat Buttram, Johnny Bond, and other comics, and the highly popular western drama that consumed some fifty percent of the show's air time.



WAYNE DANILL COLLECTION



PHOTOFEST

A staple of the post World War II *Melody Ranch* shows was a western trio dubbed the Cass County Boys, so named for the Texas county that one of the members called home. The trio, consisting of Bert Dodson (bass fiddle), Fred Martin (accordion), and Jerry Scroggins (guitar), also appeared in eleven Gene Autry movies. One of the longest-running shows on radio, *Melody Ranch* served as a convenient means for publicizing Autry's current and forthcoming movies and records.

Melody Ranch stalwarts Pat Buttram and Johnny Bond were among several of Autry's sidekicks, men who put in long years of service as supporting artists to the western star. In addition to his stint on *Melody Ranch*, Buttram appeared in seventeen Autry movies between 1948 and 1952. Bond first appeared on the *Melody Ranch* radio program in 1940 as a member of a vocal and instrumental trio that also included Jimmy Wakely and Dick Reinhart. He was still with the show when it went off the air. The most famous of the Autry sidekicks was Smiley Burnette, who went to work with the

Oklahoma Yodeling Cowboy at WLS in 1933. Known to western movie aficionados as Frog Millhouse, Burnette appeared in Autry's first movie, *In Old Santa Fe*, in 1934, as well as his last, *Last of the Pony Riders*, in 1953. In between, he appeared with Autry in 53 pre-World War II motion pictures and in six after the war. Autry had a reputation for sticking by those he chose to be on his team, which in turn inspired devout loyalty from those who came to be known as his sidekicks. As one writer put it, "'Out where a friend is a friend' isn't just part of a song to Gene, it's a way of life."

Autry's choice of sidekicks was not limited to the two-legged kind. As well-known as the humans who were associated with America's favorite singing cowboy, was Champion, his equine companion of silver screen and rodeo arena. In time, the horse became a star in its own right. Actually, there were numerous Champions: the original steed; Champion, Jr.; the Champion of television fame; and a slew of Champion doubles. The original Champion died in 1947 at the age of 17. He had been retired in 1942 after having appeared in Autry movies for eight years. All these Champions contributed greatly to the success of the rodeo phase of Autry's career. The original Champion made headline news in 1940 when TWA renovated a 14-passenger airplane so he could be flown from Autry's western movie set to New York in time to make a rodeo opening at Madison Square Garden. Champion, Jr., appeared in most of Autry's post-World War II movies. The third of the film Champions was his master's faithful mount during the final phase of Autry's career as an entertainer.

With characteristic enthusiasm and business finesse, Autry, when he realized that television was the wave of the future in entertainment, set about to take

advantage of the trend. He created his own company, Flying A Productions, and on Sunday evening, July 23, 1950, *The Gene Autry Show* made its debut on the CBS television network. Autry was the first of the cowboy heroes to be seen on the small screen. The ninety-first, and final, episode of *The Gene Autry Show* was filmed in 1955. Flying A Productions also produced four other television series, *Annie Oakley*, *The Range Rider*, *Buffalo Bill, Jr.*, and *Champion the Wonder Horse*.

Gene Autry died on October 2, 1998, at his home in the Studio City neighborhood of Los Angeles. He was 91. Autry was preceded in death by his first wife, the former Ina Mac Spivey, to whom he was married for 48 years. He was survived by his second wife, Jacqueline Ellam Autry, whom he married in 1981.

Though Gene Autry is no longer among the living, his legacy lives on. His recordings, reissued on several compact disc compilations, keep on selling. His movies and television shows are available in video and DVD format for home enjoyment and are frequently seen on television. Visitors to Nashville's Country Music Hall of Fame can see, among those of more than 80 similarly honored country/western stars, a likeness of Autry, who was admitted to that august circle in 1969.

In Autry's hometown, the recently incorporated Tioga Museum and Heritage Association, located at 107 Gene Autry Drive, has as one of its goals the collection and preservation of archival materials pertaining to the town's most widely known former resident. The museum's annual Gene Autry Festival commemorates one whom its officials call "a man of high standards and integrity."

In 1941 the town of Berwyn, Oklahoma, officially changed its name to Gene Autry, Oklahoma. Local officials were inspired by the fact that in 1938 Autry had

purchased 1200 acres of nearby land on which to keep his rodeo livestock. Today, the Gene Autry Oklahoma Museum of Local History houses an outstanding collection of memorabilia pertaining to Autry and other singing cowboys. The annual Gene Autry Oklahoma Film and Music Festival draws visitors from far and near to this tiny hamlet located some 25 miles north of the Texas state line near Ardmore, Oklahoma.

A must-see attraction for Autry fans who visit the Los Angeles area is the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. Founded by Autry himself, the museum is devoted to preserving and interpreting the history and traditions of the American West. Also in Los Angeles is the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Autry is the only entertainer to be represented on this world's most famous sidewalk with five stars, one each for radio, records, film, television, and live theatrical performance, which includes rodeo.

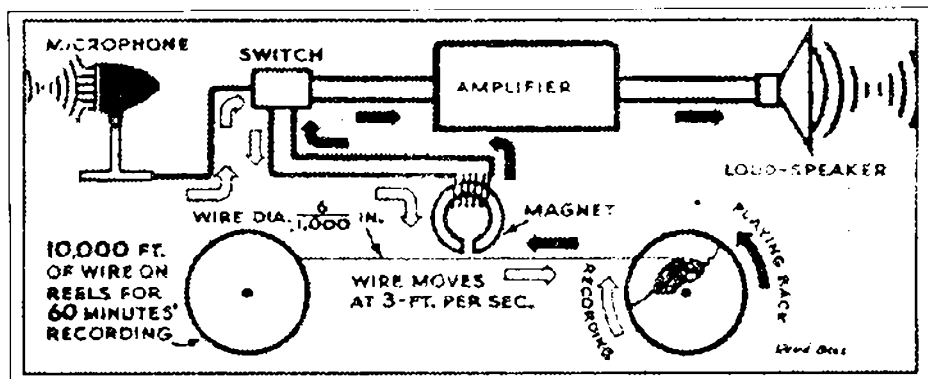
Gene Autry, who entertained millions during his lifetime and helped shape the character of twentieth-century American popular culture, is an entertainment draw and cultural icon of the twenty-first. While today's generation of singing-cowboy fans cannot experience the thrill of watching Gene Autry take a stand for law and order in a 1930's neighborhood theater, they can learn the lessons of the Code of the West from videos and DVDs in the familiar milieu of their home entertainment centers.

Though the joy of spending a Sunday half-hour listening to *Melody Ranch* on AM radio is not an easy possibility, one can learn to love the songs of the wide open spaces through the technology of the modern CD player. The medium has changed; the message remains the same. ■

Tune in TWTD March 15 to hear a Gene Autry Melody Ranch program.

A Failed Promise

The Magic of Wire Recording



WIRE RECORDING AND PLAYBACK DIAGRAM FROM JANUARY 1946 POPULAR SCIENCE MAGAZINE.

BY BILL RYAN

Long before audio tape recording was available to Americans, voices, music and actualities from World War II were being stored on wire hardly thicker than a hair.

Wire recording, once considered a technological breakthrough with wide use foreseen in industry and education in the post-war world, failed to materialize fully.

In May of 1943, *Time* magazine noted that Army and Navy technicians had given the nod to a highly portable little gadget called the Magnetic Wire Sound Recorder, an instrument about the size of a portable typewriter. It could record the human voice and other sounds within earshot.

The supply spool held 10,000 feet of

Bill Ryan, now retired, worked as a broadcast editor for United Press International and as an assistant professor of journalism at Idaho State University. This article first appeared in Radio World, a product of IMAS Publishing (USA) Inc., of Falls Church, Va.

carbon steel wire for 60 minutes of recording. On its way to the take-up spool, the wire received and stored the signal as it passed through a magnetic zone. The wire could be erased and used hundreds of times. If it broke, it was fixed by simply tying a knot in the wire.

Although a Danish physicist in the early 1900s had suggested that magnetized wire could carry sound, the device was perfected by Marvin Camras, a young scientist at the Armour Research Foundation in Chicago. General Electric was contracted to produce the machines.

As GE entered production, wire recorders were distributed to key military personnel for pilots in combat or on reconnaissance flights as well as other strategic uses. The pilot of the *Enola Gay*, the plane that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945, said some of his crew members were given wire recorders before the flight to describe what they witnessed for scientists to study.

Some newsmen also used the recorders. One of the great battle actualities of the D-Day invasion of 1944 was a shipboard wire

report given by George Hicks of the Blue Network.

Early field units used two 6-volt wet cell car batteries. Later models operated on two flashlight batteries and had playback facility.

The future looked bright for wire recorders.

Fifteen makers of electronic equipment met in early 1945 to discuss standardization for civilian use in the postwar world.

The recorders were expected to compete with office dictating machines and home phonographs.

Sears was the first manufacturer to offer a living room console radio-phonograph combined with a wire recorder.

Selling at \$169.50, the Silvertone unit came with one 3-1/2-inch spool of stainless steel wire, good for one hour of recording. Additional spools cost about \$3.98.

Veteran ABC-TV audio man Gene Larson said he remembers seeing one of these Silvertone units. According to Larson, the take-up reel was attached to the same shaft as the phonograph turntable, running at 78 rpm.

Other manufacturers who planned to include wire recorders in their larger units were Stromberg-Carlson and Scott Radio.

Business Week magazine of March 15,

1947, said. "Wire recorder owners will be able to borrow expensive record albums and re-record them at low cost. This prospect has been giving disc makers the chills for months."

But Larson said the wire recorders could not compete with commercial records or with the soon-to-appear tape recorders due to a lack of fidelity, and stereo would be out of the question.

Incidentally, the first mention of tape recorders appeared four months after the war. A brief note in Science News Letter for Dec. 22, 1945, states:

"A new German magnetic tape recording machine, to make records of code or voice messages, obtained by the Army in Germany, has been on public display recently in the Department of Commerce, (in Washington's) Office of the Publication Board. The signal from the receiver passes through an amplifier to (a) recording head, which magnetizes the coating on the tape. The exact composition of the tape is not known, but it appears to be a plastic composition coated with material having high magnetic qualities."

This and similar tape machines brought back from Europe revolutionized the broadcast and recording industries. Other than home use, wire recording never had a chance. ■

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"OH, DENNIS...."

BY WAYNE KLATT

It all came about because Kenny Baker got too big for his britches.

The Irish tenor had been on Jack Benny's Sunday night radio program since 1934.

The former nightclub singer wasn't bad looking, had some acting ability, and could deliver comic lines. His success on the program led to roles in several films, but the only one remembered today is the Marx Brothers' *A Day at the Circus*. By 1938 Baker was considered more popular than either Mary Livingstone or Phil Harris, and he thought he was being paid too little.

So when his contract was about to expire the next year, Baker secretly signed up with Fred Allen by letting Allen, a friend of Jack's, think his boss had already approved the move.

Jack was usually even-tempered, but this was betrayal. He was determined to get someone soon who would be just as good as Baker or even better.

One day as Jack and Mary were listening to audition records that had come, "suddenly Mary perked up and asked to hear

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

one particular voice again," Benny's long-time manager Irving Fein recalled in his book about the show. The singer was Eugene Patrick McNulty, who was receiving

\$12.50 a week to sing on a local New York radio station. McNulty was better looking than Baker and had a good voice, but could he do comedy? Jack invited the young man to try out at a mass audition.

Remember that Jack and Mary were used to Baker's brashness. The 21-year-old hopeful must have seemed like a wallflower



Dennis Day

standing with all the other singers in the audition room, some probably with band experience. He may have had a golden voice, but at first glance he didn't seem to project the distinctive personality that radio needed.

When it came McNulty's turn, Jack called out, "Oh, Eugene!"

"Yes, please," McNulty replied with a child's innocence.

Jack cracked up. Although not a gag writer, he saw that building a role around the newcomer would be a wonderful way to accentuate his own selfish, stingy character. But that McNulty name had to go. Program officials came up with one that

was easy to remember, less ethnic, and sounded, well, nice, Dennis Day.

Unlike Mary Livingstone and Phil Harris, there was nothing in Dennis's background to build upon. He was born in May 1917 to Irish parents in New York City, and after enrolling in

Manhattan College he sang to raise money so he could enter law school at Fordham University. The still adolescent-looking kid was bright, yet his voice was so high and clear he sounded like an innocent. And so the intelligent singer pretended to be dumb for the rest of his career, just as generous Jack Benny posed as a penny-pincher.

Dennis at first was too shy to say more than a few words on the show—he absolutely refused to believe he had any talent—and so the writers extended his role by a few lines each week until he became integral to the ensemble. As it turned out, Dennis's voice was more distinctive than Baker's, he had a wider delivery, and he had much better comic timing. He was like a missing piece of a jigsaw puzzle, the character who offset tightwad Benny, flippant Mary, bragging and boozy Phil, and politely sarcastic Rochester. Women had liked Kenny Baker, but everybody loved Dennis. He was so natural for the show that his contributions were easy to take for granted.

With Dennis Day, the man was hardly distinguishable from the role. He really



was modest, polite, loyal, and well intentioned. Much of the humor on the program came from situations in which he was unaware Jack was being mean to him. This fit in perfectly with Jack's concept of essentially playing the straight man to his side characters. "Listen," he once said, "when Phil Harris, Dennis Day, Rochester, and Mary stop getting the big laughs on my show, then I'm in trouble."

Like many timid comics in show business, Dennis apparently enjoyed trying out accents and speaking like a 90-year-old man. But he came most alive in his singing, whether the song was the latest top-selling ballad or his own hit, "Clancy Lowered the Boom." He didn't have a particular style, but he could sing with touching or comic inflection.

Dennis's contributions to the program became most evident in 1943, after he went into the service and was replaced by singer Larry Stevens. When Dennis returned, there was no attempt to make him sound more sophisticated. He still said "Gee, Mr. Benny" with a sense of wonder and looked at washing-machine windows thinking it was television. Some listeners believed

what they had heard about Dennis Day having to mow Jack's lawn as part of his contract, so Jack explained that Dennis had two gardeners to mow his own lawn.

Since the former Eugene McNulty did not socialize with show business big names and was never involved in scandal, the public was unaware of his private life. His sister-in-law was beautiful singer-actress Ann Blyth, and he and his wife, Peggy, had 10 children. Wellll!

Dennis was so popular on the Benny program that he was given his own radio program, *A Day in the Life of Dennis Day*. The show stayed funny, but there were no memorable characters to play off from, so his daffy dumbness wore thin.

When Jack's cast went on TV weekly in 1952, some of the humor of the radio program was lost since you could see a character about to make a remark before he or she said it. That spoiled the fun of hearing a funny line popping out of nowhere. The scripts were also simplified, so the Benny home was no longer filled with his players.

Television producers were eager to sign up any successful radio performer, and Dennis had been in two popular programs. In 1952 he was given his own starring vehicle, *The Dennis Day Show*, but his niceness was funny only when he worked for a supposedly mean boss. His TV show lasted only until 1954, and during that time he appeared on Jack's show only now and then.

Until 1955, Benny was on both radio and television regularly, but on TV the "Jack-and-the-gang" format was dropped in favor of a cheaper-to-produce star vehicle, so Dennis was largely out of sight while still in his mid-30s.

Perhaps if he had concentrated only on singing or on comedy his popularity would have continued, but there were no more places for him to go except rare spots such

as an adaptation of Victor Herbert's operetta "Babes in Toyland" in 1955.

By all accounts Dennis was happy in his early retirement, kept busy enough by occasional personal appearances and the comings and goings of his children and thirteen grandchildren.

Then in 1987, when he was living in Bel-Air, California, he was diagnosed as having Lou Gehrig's disease, a progressive nerve disorder that causes a loss of muscle control. A few months later, he fell in his house and underwent two operations to relieve pressure on the brain. When he died in his home on June 22, 1988, he was surrounded by his many descendants. He was 71.

I'm not so sure he really has left us. Not long ago I thought up what I considered a perfect joke for Dennis, then I realized it wouldn't be funny if anyone else told it. Dennis may have had limited talent, but it was unique. I suppose many of us are carrying a little of him around with us without realizing it, because for many years he had been a friend of ours. ■



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FEBRUARY 2003

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 1

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (5-5-46) Jack and the gang prepare for a trip to Chicago and New York. Mary Livingstone, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Phil Harris, Dennis Day, Verna Felton, Mel Blanc, Frank Nelson. *This is the first of five related Jack Benny and Fred Allen programs to be presented this month.* Lucky Strike, NBC. (23 min)

RALEIGH-KOOL CIGARETTE PROGRAM (7-20-38) Tommy Dorsey and his orchestra with vocals by Edythe Wright and Jack Leonard. Tommy presents an Amateur Swing Contest featuring Dick Powell on cornet; Ken Murray on clarinet; Shirley Ross on piano; Jack Benny on violin, and Bing Crosby on drums. Raleigh-Kool Cigarettes, NBC. (27 min)

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (10-8-39) On this first show of the 1939-40 season, Jack hires a new singer to replace Kenny Baker. It's Dennis Day, making his first appearance on the Benny program. Verna Felton is Dennis'

mother. *First of three consecutive and related programs to be presented this month.* Jell-O, NBC. (29 min) *Read the article about Dennis Day on page 17.*

LUX RADIO THEATRE RE-CREATION (2-10-02) Our *Those Were The Days Radio Players* present a re-enactment of the February 15, 1937 *Lux Radio Theatre* which starred Jack Benny and Mary Livingstone in "Brewster's Millions." It's a comedy about a man who must spend a small fortune to inherit a larger one. *Recorded before a studio audience at the Museum of Broadcast Communications in Chicago.* (Approximately 60 min)

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-20-44) Jack entertains guest Groucho Marx in his home and later presents, with his usual cast, "The Gilroy Murder Case." Grape Nuts, NBC. (29 min) *Read the article about Groucho Marx on page 25.*

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8

JACK BENNY SHOW (5-12-46) Broadcasting from the Civic Opera House in Chicago on Mother's Day, Jack welcomes radio's Quiz Kids who challenge Jack and the gang to a quiz session: The Quiz Kids vs. the Lucky Strike Kids. *Second of five related broadcasts.* Lucky Strike, NBC. (27 min)

QUIZ KIDS (9-26-43) Chief Quizzer Joe Kelly in a typical broadcast from Chicago. Featured panelists are Joel Kupperman, 12; Patrick Owen Conlon, 11; Melvin Miles, 5; Lonny Lunde, 12. Announcer is Bob Murphy. Alka Seltzer, NBC. (30 min)

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (10-15-39) Second show of the season, *second appearance of Dennis Day on the Benny program.* Cast includes Mary Livingstone, Phil Harris, Don Wilson, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson. Andy Devine pays a visit. Dennis and his mother show up late again. Jell-O, NBC. (30 min)

PHIL HARRIS-ALICE FAYE SHOW (5-8-49) It's Mother's Day and Phil doesn't have a gift for Alice, who hints that she would like a fur coat.

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Naturally, Frankie (Elliott Lewis) knows of a wholesale dealer. Rexall, NBC. (29 min)

SUSPENSE (4-5-51) "Murder in G-Flat" starring Jack Benny as a man who accidentally finds a considerable amount of money on the subway. AutoLite, CBS. (29 min)

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (1-14-45) Broadcasting from the Hotel Astor in New York City, Fred Allen drops in because Jack's sponsor wants the commercial read by Allen. Cast includes Phil Harris, Don Wilson, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, singer Larry Stevens, Minerva Pious (as Mrs. Nussbaum). Lucky Strike, NBC. (29 min)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (5-19-46) Still in New York City, Jack is staying at the Acme Plaza, where Rochester is preparing Mr. Benny's bath. Fred Allen shows up to invite Jack to be a guest on his program next week since Phil Harris is to be on Fred's show tonight. *Third of five related broadcasts.* Lucky Strike, NBC. (28 min)

FRED ALLEN SHOW (5-19-46) Guest Phil Harris joins Fred and the regulars. The Allen's Alley question deals with "safe driving." Phil does his version of Allen's Alley called "Tobacco Road." *Fourth of five related broadcasts.* AFRS rebroadcast. (30 min)

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (10-22-39) Third show of the season, *third appearance of Dennis Day on the Benny program* and Dennis is late again. Guest Kay Kyser shows up looking for his missing cigarette case. Cast does their version of the film, "Stanley and Livingstone." Jell-O, NBC. (30 min)

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF DENNIS DAY (10-22-47) Dennis takes a second job as an insurance salesman in this episode of his own radio show. Cast includes Barbara Eiler, Bea Benaderet, Dink Trout, John Brown, announcer Vern Smith, Charles Dant and the orchestra. Colgate, Lustre Creme, NBC. (29 min)

SEALTEST VARIETY THEATRE (12-9-48) Dorothy Lamour stars with guests George Murphy and Jack Benny, with Henry Russell and the orchestra, the Crew Chiefs, announcer Carlton Kaddell. Sketches: Lamour and Murphy as a couple in a department store at Christmas shopping time; Jack, the producer of Lamour's new movie, talks with her about the sneak preview of his new film. Sealtest Products, NBC. (28 min)

★ **JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (12-10-44) Broadcasting from the Air Technical Service Com-

mand in San Bernardino, California, Jack introduces guest Dorothy Lamour to an appreciative military audience on her birthday. Cast: Mary Livingstone, Phil Harris, Larry Stevens, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Don Wilson, Mel Blanc. AFRS rebroadcast. (30 min)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 22

FRED ALLEN SHOW (5-26-46) Guest Jack Benny joins Fred for the last show of his 1945-46 season. A classic broadcast as Jack sneaks into an NBC studio tour and learns about Allen's new giveaway program, "King for a Day." The Allen's Alley question is "Do you have trouble sleeping?" Answers are provided by Kenny Delmar (Senator Claghorn); Alan Reed (Falstaff Openshaw); Minerva Pious (Mrs. Nussbaum); Parker Fennelly (Titus Moody). Also: DeMarco Sisters, Al Goodman and the orchestra. *Last of five related broadcasts.* Tenderleaf Tea, Blue Bonnett Margarine, NBC. (30 min)

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (3-17-40) Upset that he didn't win the Academy Award, Jack asks Orson Welles to come over and help him become a dramatic actor. Welles and his staff show up and Jack is directed by Welles in a "Hunchback of Notre Dame" sketch. Orson invites Jack to appear on the Campbell Playhouse next week to star in the comedy, "June Moon." Jell-O, NBC. (30 min)

CAMPBELL PLAYHOUSE (3-24-40) "June Moon" starring Jack Benny in a radio version of the Ring Lardner-George S. Kaufman Broadway comedy. Jack is a song writer from Schenectady who goes to the big city of New York to write a romantic hit. Orson Welles is host and producer. Cast includes Benny Rubin, Bea Benaderet, Lee Patrick, Virginia Gordon Ernest Chappell announces. Campbell Soup, CBS. (28 min & 31 min)

BING CROSBY SHOW (2-12-53) From Palm Springs, California, Bing welcomes guest Jack Benny, who is worried about his surprise birthday party (on the 14th). Bing wants to know Jack's exact age before giving him a birthday present. Bing sings "Glow Worm" and "Heart and Soul." General Electric, CBS. (29 min)

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (5-5-40) On the occasion of Benny's 9th anniversary on the air, this broadcast is from the stage of the Ritz Theatre in New York City. Jack recalls his early days in radio and then he and the gang do their version of Fred Allen's program with Jack as Fred; Don as Harry Von Zell; Mary as Portland Hoffa. Jell-O, NBC. (30 min)

**OLD TIME
RADIO****CENTURY****Chuck Schaden's****THOSE WERE THE DAYS****WDCB • 90.9 FM • SATURDAY 1 - 5 PM****WORLD-WIDE ON THE INTERNET: www.wdcb.org****MARCH 2003****★INDICATES A WORLD WAR II BROADCAST OF SPECIAL INTEREST****SATURDAY, MARCH 1**

SUSPENSE (12-5-46) "House in Cypress Canyon" starring Robert Taylor, Howard Duff, Hans Conried, Cathy Lewis, Jim Backus. "Unearthly cries" and blood "oozing from under a locked door" horrify the young couple who recently purchased their new home. Roma Wines, CBS. (30 min)

JIMMY DURANTE SHOW (3-24-48) The Schnozzola stars with guest Victor Moore, plus regulars Peggy Lee, Candy Candido, Dave Barry, Alan Reed, Crew Chiefs, Roy Bargy and the orchestra, announcer Howard Petri. Jimmy outlines his presidential campaign strategy. Rexall, NBC. (30 min)

ROYAL GELATIN HOUR (1-14-37) Rudy Vallee hosts this popular variety program. Guests are Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy (in their sixth consecutive appearance on the Vallee show), Pat O'Brien, Sheila Barnett, Baron Giorgio Susiani and Walter O'Keefe. O'Brien appears in a drama, "Escape," written by Arch Oboler; Barnett in a comedy sketch "Temperamental Lady"; McCarthy has a toothache and Bergen is a dentist; O'Keefe has a comedy monologue; Rudy sings "Little Old Lady," "Dear Diary," and "Boardwalk Blues." Graham MacNamee announces. Royal Gelatin, NBC. (28 min & 26 min) *Read the biography of Rudy Vallee on page 32.*

BABY SNOOKS (1-16-51) Fanny Brice stars as Baby Snooks with Hanley Stafford as Daddy and Arlene Harris as Mommy. Daddy plays the violin. Tums, NBC. (15 min)

MR. DISTRICT ATTORNEY (10-4-54) "Set Up for Re-entry" stars Jay Jostyn as Mr. D.A. with Len Doyle as Harrington and Vicki Vola as Miss Miller. A deported gangster disguises himself so that he can return to the United States. Sustaining, MBS. (31 min)

MY FRIEND IRMA (11-29-48) Marie Wilson stars as Irma Peterson with Joan Banks as

Jane Stacy. It's Irma's birthday and Jane is planning a big costume party in her honor. Cast features Hans Conried as Professor Kropotkin, Gloria Gordon as Mrs. O'Reilly, John Brown as Al, Donald Woods as Richard Rhineland III. Pepsodent, NBC. (28 min)

SATURDAY, MARCH 8

★ **BURNS AND ALLEN SHOW** (2-10-41) George and Gracie star in a broadcast from Chicago, where the comedy team is to entertain troops at Ft. Sheridan. Lots of Chicago references and mentions of the city's various locations during this program, which features an appearance by Chicago Mayor Edward J. Kelly. Cast features announcer Jimmy Wallington, Senor Lee, The Smoothies, Artie Shaw and the orchestra. Hormel (Spam), NBC. (31 min)

FRONTIER TOWN (1953) Reed Hadley stars as Chad Remington, a lawyer in a ruthless frontier town in the early West, trying to find some stolen money. Wade Crosby as Cherokee O'Bannon. Music by Ivan Ditmar. Syndicated. (28 min)

★ **YOUR HIT PARADE** (1-2-43) Presenting the top ten tunes of the week as performed by Joan Edwards, Barry Wood, organist Ethel Smith, the Hit Paraders, Mark Warnow and the Lucky Strike Orchestra. Martin Block is host; Basil Ruysdale announces. At the conclusion of this wartime broadcast, the program presents "one of the greatest songs of all time." Lucky Strike, CBS. (21 min & 17 min)

★ **STATE OF THE UNION** (1-7-43) *Excerpt.* President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivers his State of the Union address to the 78th Congress and the American people. FDR pays tribute to our Allies, their fighting men and their leaders. He paints an optimistic picture of the might of the United Nations over the

Nazis and the Fascists. He talks about U.S. war production... "the arsenal of Democracy." Comments by Eric Sevareid follow FDR's speech. CBS and all Networks. (23 min)

ADVENTURES OF OZZIE AND HARRIET (11-14-48) The Nelsons look forward to a quiet evening at home after neighbor Thorny (John Brown) invites David (Tommy Bernard) and Ricky (Henry Blair) to spend the night in a log cabin. Vern Smith announces. International Silver Company, NBC. (29 min)

THE SHADOW (3-20-38) "The Silent Avenger" stars Orson Welles as Lamont Cranston with Agnes Moorehead as the lovely Margo Lane. A criminal, condemned to death, vows revenge on all who put him on Death Row. Ken Roberts announces. Blue Coal, MBS. (29 min)

SATURDAY, MARCH 15

★ **GREAT GILDERSLEEVE** (3-29-42) Harold Peary stars as Gildy with Lurene Tuttle as Marjorie, Walter Tetley as Leroy, Lillian Randolph as Birdie, Earle Ross as Judge Hooker. Marjorie is doing her part in the war effort by writing letters to servicemen. Gildy and Leroy offer to help her out. Kraft Foods, NBC. (30 min)

ARTHUR GODFREY TIME (10-8-48) It's Arthur and all the little Godfreys: announcer Tony Marvin, Jeanette Davis, Bill Lawrence, the Mariners, Archie Blyer and the orchestra. Surprise guest Gene Autry drops in with "Little Champion." Gene sings "Cool Water" and Arthur sings "Too Fat Polka. Glass Wax, Nabisco, Chesterfield Cigarettes, CBS. (15 min & 15 min & 30 min)

MELODY RANCH (1940s) Gene Autry stars with Pat Buttram, Cass County Boys, Alvino Rey and the orchestra. Music and a western drama. Gene is a Texas Ranger who helps Sheriff Dobbs hold off a lynch mob. CBS. (30 min) *Read the article about Gene Autry on page 6.*

★ **FIBBER MC GEE AND MOLLY** (4-21-42) Jim and Marian Jordan star with Isabel Randolph (Mrs. Uppington), Bill Thompson (Old Timer, Mr. Wimple), Gale Gordon (Mayor La-Trivia), Harlow Wilcox. Molly challenges Fibber to get in to see a ball game, even though all the tickets are sold out for the season

opener. Johnson's Wax, NBC. (29 min)
ESCAPE (11-15-49) "Three Skeleton Key." "Escape to a lonely lighthouse off the steaming jungle coast of French Guiana and a nightmare world of terror and violence." This is that chilling story about the rats! Cast includes William Conrad, Elliott Reid, Harry Bartell. Sustaining, CBS. (29 min)

SATURDAY, MARCH 22

INNER SANCTUM (6-12-45) "Portrait of Death." A man buys an expensive sinister-looking portrait and finds that there is a curse on it. The model and the artist each committed suicide the day the portrait was finished. Lipton Tea and Soup, CBS. (29 min)

YOU BET YOUR LIFE (1947) Groucho Marx stars in the audition show for his long-running quiz program. Announcer is Jack Slattery and the secret word is "air." CBS Audition. (30 min) *Read the article about Groucho Marx on page 25.*

BOX THIRTEEN (5-10-48) "A Book of Poems" starring Alan Ladd as Dan Holiday, a writer who advertises for adventure. Dan receives a book of poetry from an invalid who provides a clue to help solve a murder. Sylvia Picker is Dan's secretary, Suzy. Syndicated, MBS. (26 min)

OUR MISS BROOKS (9-11-49) Eve Arden stars as Connie Brooks, English teacher at Madison High School. Miss Brooks' plans for a picnic before school starts in the fall are disrupted when Mr. Conklin (Gale Gordon) asks all teachers to report early because of the visit of the State School Superintendent (Frank Nelson). Colgate-Palmolive, CBS. (28 min)

MURDER AT MIDNIGHT (12-2-46) "The Man Who Died Yesterday." A man who was born on a ship while it passed the International Date Line gained one day to his life and can see 24 hours into the future. Cast includes Stewart Grady and Mandel Kramer. Music by Charles Paul. Sustaining, MBS. (26 min)

PHILCO RADIO TIME (10-16-46) Bing Crosby stars in the premier show of the series, with guest Bob Hope and regulars Lena Romay, Charioteers, pianist Skitch Henderson, John Scott Trotter and the orchestra. This is a *milestone broadcast* for radio as it's the first *transcribed* (pre-recorded) entertainment program heard on a network. Philco, ABC. (29 min)

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MARCH 2003

SATURDAY, MARCH 29
RADIO STILL LOVES LUCY

Repeating selected broadcasts from May 2002

SCREEN DIRECTORS' PLAYHOUSE (5-19-50) "Miss Grant Takes Richmond" starring **Lucille Ball** as a secretary innocently involved with crooks. Cast includes Steven Dunn, Frank Nelson, Arthur Q. Brian, Herb Vigran, Jeanne Bates. RCA Victor, NBC. (31 min)

TWENTY QUESTIONS (6-1-46) Moderator Bill Slater presides over this panel show with regulars Fred Van Deventer, Florence Rinard, Bobby McGuire, Herb Polesie and guest **Lucille Ball**. The panelists try to guess the subject "animal, vegetable or mineral" – in twenty questions or less. Subjects include Leo, the MGM lion, Desi Arnaz, and the Statue of Liberty. AFRS rebroadcast. (30 min)

MY FAVORITE HUSBAND (6-24-49) **Lucille Ball** stars with Richard Denning, Gale Gordon and Bea Benaderet. Liz is constantly changing

her mind and the problem is never more evident than when she and George go out to dinner with the Atterburys. Frank Nelson is the waiter in a classic radio scene. AFRS rebroadcast. (24 min)

SUSPENSE (11-17-49) "The Red-Headed Woman" starring **Lucille Ball** and Desi Arnaz. After being jilted by her fiance, a woman steals her company's payroll and runs away to Texas. AutoLite, CBS. (29 min)

LUX RADIO THEATRE (9-10-51) "Fancy Pants" starring Bob Hope and **Lucille Ball** in a radio version of their 1950 film about an American actor who takes a job as a British valet who works for a family of unrefined Westerners from the United States. Cast includes Verna Felton, Tom Tully, Herb Butterfield, Gerald Mohr, Arthur Q. Brian, Ed Max. William Keighley is host. Announcer is John M. Kennedy. Lux Soap, CBS. (17 min & 20 min & 22 min)

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MIDWEST BALLROOM-- John Russell hosts a big band program featuring Chicago area orchestras and dance bands. *WDCB, 90.9 FM, Saturday, 5-6 pm.*

"When Radio Was" -- WBBM-AM 780
Monday thru Friday Midnight to 1 a.m. Host Stan Freberg

WHEN RADIO WAS-- Stan Freberg hosts an hour of vintage radio programs from the golden age. *In Chicago, tune to WBBM-AM, 780 AM, Monday thru Friday, Midnight-1 a.m.* The series

is also heard on a great many other stations throughout the United States.

**PLEASE
NOTE**

MONTHLY LISTINGS FOR "When Radio Was" ARE NO LONGER READILY AVAILABLE to us and we are unable to include the program's calendar in the Nostalgia Digest. HOWEVER, the complete program schedule and list of stations carrying the series, as well as streaming audio for "When Radio

Was" may be found on the Internet at www.RadioSpirits.com Click on "On the Radio" for the daily and monthly broadcast schedules and archived programs.

THE ONE, THE ONLY... GROUCHO!

BY CLAIR SCHULZ

Groucho Marx will always be remembered as the chief wisenheimer from the Marx Brothers movies, the gag-a-minute rascal who was always in there swinging even as the quality of the films diminished. When he got his turn at bat on the air, he hit a few foul balls before finding a pitch that allowed him to touch all the bases.

Groucho and Chico Marx spent the 1932-33 season bandying words in *Flywheel*, *Shyster* and *Flywheel* over the Blue Network. Few episodes from that program have survived, but extant scripts reveal that the series tried to capture the action and lunacy of the Marx Brothers films instead of trying to develop character and witty situations through the skillful use of dialogue and sound effects.

From late March 1943 to mid-June 1944 Groucho appeared on *Blue Ribbon Town* as host, a role that fit him like a straitjacket. Hosts of variety shows need to be hail-fellow-well-met types and Groucho was, well, Groucho. He was called upon to stop his persiflage with a guest in mid-rib to introduce songs (e.g. "Let's stop this wedding day palaver and listen to Bill Days sing a real song of romance") or deliver dreadful lines that might have been rejected from an Abbott and Costello script such as "What eyes, what lips, what teeth. She's got the teeth and she's giving me the brush."

Everywhere he turned in *Blue Ribbon Town* he seemed to be playing out of posi-

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



tion. When acting as straight man to Leo Gorcey (who called him "Marxie"), when placed in domestic skits unsuited to his demeanor, or when spouting baby talk to guests (like cooing "Genie, my queenie" to Gene Tierney), Marx was handcuffed to situations better tailored to the temperaments of an Eddie Cantor or a Jimmy Durante. Worse yet, he had to sublimate his dominant personality in favor of the guests. When man-hungry Vera Vague approached one evening, the audience heard Groucho Marx, the man with the roving eye who had pursued women for lust or money on stage and screen, becoming a panic-

stricken craven who shouted, "Lock all the windows! Shut the doors! Bar the entrances! I've got to keep that she-wolf from the door!"

Amid all this twaddle Groucho occasionally departed from the printed page to put his distinctive twist on a joke. When singer Faye McKenzie asserted that "I always approved of a man getting married. That's something I endorse," Marx replied, "You do? Well, just sign on the back of my neck." After the laugh, he added, "Or neck on the back of my sign."

Ad-libs, however, could not boost the ratings of *Blue Ribbon Town* or save Groucho's job, and he was replaced by Kenny Baker and later, in a different version of the program, by Danny Kaye. In 1959 Marx wrote that "I still think the show. . . was a pretty good one," which brings to mind James Thurber's response to the question "How's your wife?" The humorist shot back with "Compared to what?"

"A pretty good one" did come along for Marx and it was his talent for improvisation that opened the door for him. During a 1946 show with Bob Hope the two comedians threw down their scripts and a gauntlet of spontaneous jests. John Guedel, producer of *People Are Funny* and *House Party*, observed the battle of wits and approached Marx with a proposal for a different kind of audience participation show, one that would marry the quiz program with Groucho's keen sense of humor.

Although Marx was initially unreceptive to the idea, stating, "There are a hundred on the air," he agreed to participate in *You Bet Your Life* because he realized that his movie career was virtually over and because of Guedel's assurance that Groucho would not be forced into the mold of other quizmasters, whose primary function was to ask questions. The game would be sec-



Groucho Marx

ondary. The show's spotlight would be focused on the fun generated from the interviews between real people being themselves and Groucho being, well, Groucho.

It couldn't have worked out better for Guedel or Marx when the program found a sponsor in Elgin American, who took the package to ABC, the same network that had allowed Bing Crosby to tape his shows. Freed from the strictures of an inflexible script or a fixed amount of time, Marx could allow his freewheeling imagination to meander, knowing that the director would delete longuours, jokes that misfired, bloopers, risque lines, etc. (Although some television reruns bore the title *The Best of Groucho*, every show lived up to that billing because they all were a condensed version of an hour's worth of taping.)

During the early years of *You Bet Your Life*, the premise of the game was firmly related to the title. Contestants started with a sum of money and wagered any or all of their funds on each question. If they answered all questions correctly, their earnings could reach \$160. Winners advanced

to the jackpot round near the end of the show which might earn them \$1,000 to \$3,000. Usually participants wagered even sums such as \$10, but some bettors chose odd figures that kept George Fenneman, the show's announcer and scorekeeper, scrambling to keep the fractions proper. One man, at Groucho's playful urging, upped his bet to \$39.08½. Fenneman, always a good sport and a genial straight man for Marx's japes, kept a precise record of the man's earnings, even down to announcing his winnings in mills, which allowed Groucho to toss in some quips about the mills of the gods and the Mills Brothers.

One problem with the wagering format is what keeps cities like Las Vegas and Atlantic City solvent: Betting involves chance and chances are that, on a given night, everyone could lose. A primary purpose of quiz programs is to award prizes or cash and nothing, short of the answering scandal in the 1950s, is more harmful to a giveaway show than to give nothing away. When the worst happened on a show in 1953, no amount of editing could alter the fact that all players had struck out, so Guedel changed the formula to one that would allow contestants to select from questions weighted in difficulty from 1-10 and in value from \$10-\$100. To make certain there would be no losers, contestants started with \$100 and could lose only half of their stake at any time.

Gradually the betting aspect became less important and was replaced by a format that Marx or Fenneman repeated succinctly every

week: answer four questions in a row correctly to win \$1,000; miss two consecutive questions and the game is over. Winners could return at the end of the program for a chance to win either \$2,000 or \$10,000, depending on whether a spinning carnival wheel landed on their selected number. Even if a pair of contestants missed the jackpot question, they still left the studio with \$500.

Actually, no one went away empty-handed because Marx would ask a "gimme" question which allowed losing couples to split \$25. This consolation prize took the form of the queries Tom Howard presented to his panel of dunces on *It Pays to be Ignorant* in which the answer was apparent in questions such as "In what state did the California Gold Rush occur?" and "What color is the little brown jug?" It hardly mattered if the contestants even responded, for Marx was eager to give them the money and also ready with a send-off line like his "We take that for granite" after asking "Who is buried in Grant's Tomb?"

Another method of earning money on the program was to say the secret word, which would trigger the orchestra to play "Hoo-



George Fenneman and Groucho Marx

ray for Captain Spaulding," a song associated with Groucho since his appearance in *Animal Crackers*. Shortly after *You Bet Your Life* appeared on television in 1950 a bespectacled, mustachioed duck that vaguely resembled Marx descended on piano wire carrying \$100 to reward those who had uttered the magic term. Marx usually reminded couples of the rules when he greeted them by offering clues such as "It's something you always have with you." By presenting a hint and by selecting common terms like *face, chair, paper, shoe, and hand*, the show's staff gave contestants more than a fair chance of winning the extra cash.

On some episodes the production team increased those favorable odds to a virtual certainty by lobbing a word right into a particular contestant's home court. Thus an author said *book*, the owner of a Mexican restaurant mentioned *food*, and the maitre d' of the Brown Derby uttered *table* in the natural course of the conversations. And it could not have just been coincidence that C.S. Forester appeared on a program when *name* was the secret word and Groucho led off with the loaded question, "What does the C.S. stand for?"

The only player who turned the lame duck into a golden goose by bending the rules was Ernie Kovacs one evening in 1958 when he pinch-hit for bridge guru Charles Goren, who withdrew from the game portion after being interviewed and saying *name* on another show when that was the winning word. After Ernie and his partner won \$1,000, Kovacs began yelling, "Name, name" and beckoning the duck to come down and pay off again. It was all in fun and, because Kovacs had announced that any money he won would be given to charity, the bird returned with more loot. Groucho played along, saying that it didn't make any difference "since it's counterfeit money," which was true as any close-up

photograph of the duck reveals that it carried bogus bills.

Marx frequently gave money away during the quiz with the same offhand "We don't care" attitude and accepted questionable answers with a "That's close enough" because the game portion of *You Bet Your Life* interested him considerably less than the probing and diverting interviews. In the early days of *You Bet Your Life* members of the studio audience became the contestants, but gradually a winnowing process developed in which people who had written letters or who had done something newsworthy or who knew someone who worked on the program were selected for interviews from which scripts were written so that, although Marx usually had not met any of the non-celebrities before the show, he knew enough about them so that he could guide the direction of the dialogue. But, being Groucho, he took his customary detours down Ad-Lib Lane so frequently that almost as many improvised jests made the final cut as did scripted yuks.

Attentive listeners to episodes of *You Bet Your Life* can separate the planned drolleries from the impromptu wisecracks. Jokes like "If it weren't for stealing hubcaps, kids today could barely make a living" and "All my life women have been throwing themselves at my feet. And after they tackle me, they usually haul me to the police" could be dropped in whenever there was an opening. Other witticisms were specially prepared for a particular guest. He told a woman who worked for Lloyds of London that "I have a policy with them now. If I'm torpedoed at Hollywood and Vine, I get \$8 a week for the rest of my life." Often the exchanges with guests have a custom-tailored feel to them, e.g. Groucho: What does your father do for a living? Model: He delivers mail in Chicago. Groucho: Well, he delivered a pretty good female, too.



The One, The Only... Groucho!

Even the tunes in a category such as "Songs of the 1930s" were chosen to stack the deck in Marx's favor so that when the comely contestants gave the answers "You're Driving Me Crazy," "Everything I Have is Yours," and "You Do Something to Me," they served as straight lines so Groucho could respond with leering responses such as "Wouldn't it be great if that were true?"

Despite having the safety nets of a filmed rather than a live show and an arsenal of written one-liners that would rarely leave him speechless, Marx fought the jitters before every broadcast. To Groucho's credit, his nervousness is well-hidden on *You Bet Your Life*, the program a writer for *TV Guide* aptly described as producing "the finest manufactured spontaneity television has yet known."

Some famous personalities such as Liberace, Joe Louis, and Ray Bradbury appeared as guests, but for the most part the contestants were ordinary folks who perhaps engaged in an offbeat occupation

or came from a quirky family. Although the pairing did not occur on every program, teaming a male with a beautiful woman made for built-in humor so Groucho could dismiss the man with a cursory remark and then state one of his Marxian questions that sounded more like a demand such as "Enough about you. Who's this gorgeous creature and why have you been hiding her from me?" Innocuous answers from newlyweds of all ages provided Marx with wide gaps through which he could drive home zingers like "I'll never forget my last wedding. They threw vitamin pills instead of rice."

Mildly eccentric people were welcome on *You Bet Your Life*. It didn't matter if the guest was a hobo,

elevator operator who sang in Sanskrit, circus strongman, or the president of the Society for the Domination of Women who wanted to rescind suffrage for women. At one point during the exchanges each person would cause Marx to raise a quizzical eyebrow or stare blankly at the audience before launching some of his characteristic barbs.

Several of the funniest interviews occurred when Groucho turned molehills of language barriers into mountains of hilarity. After a woman asked her sister her age in Italian and told Groucho, "47," Marx came back with a scripted but still witty reply: "How much did she lose in the translation?" He later joined the pair in a strident version of "O Sole Mio" that could have forced a banshee to take a vow of silence. Only slightly more unconventional were the pair of Portuguese gentlemen, one of whom did not speak English but who could, by manipulating his checks and lips, replicate the sound of a variety of instruments. Marx's request of this musical

marvel's companion lacked originality but could not be bettered for its wry delivery: "Ask him if he can imitate a drum and beat it."

Groucho's modus operandi on *You Bet Your Life* was not one of an actor but rather of a reactor. "I focus on the guests," he told an interviewer. "I let them talk until they get confused. Then, I move in. . . . When some contestant puts his foot in his mouth, I just push it in a little further."

It was during Dr. Hackenbush's special treatment for this hoof-in-mouth malady that the natural ad-libs emerged. After a man admitted, "Yes, I'm married. I have a wife," Groucho gently told the tittering audience, "You may laugh, but it's a very handy arrangement." The lass who said that her ideal man would be a combination of Swiss and American was asked, "Do you want that on rye bread or pumpernickel?" To the woman who boasted, "I've been married 31 years to the same man" Groucho said, "If he's been married 31 years, he's not the same man."

Among Groucho's favorite guests were Anna Badovinac from Badovinac, Yugoslavia, where everyone is named Badovinac and who was looking for another Badovinac after the death of her second husband named Badovinac; Zetta Wells, owner of a myna that refused to sing until the middle of the quiz portion when its version of "Stars and Stripes Forever" brought the audience to its feet; Mr. and Mrs. Story, parents of 23 children, and Pedro Gonzalez Gonzalez, who told the comedian that if they did a vaudeville act the team would be called Gonzalez Gonzalez and Marx, prompting Groucho to grumble, "That's good. Two people in the act and I get third billing."

Most episodes of *You Bet Your Life* contained a name that allowed Marx or writer Bernie Smith a chance to build a complete routine. Each time Groucho addressed a

Fuller Brush salesman named Raoul he sounded like a baying coyote. He would deliberately mispronounce or corrupt names such as Anna May Devereux into Anna May Wong, wait to be corrected, then come back with his kicker of "Well, in that case, I'm wong." Groucho couldn't be topped at this name game for, even if he didn't have a pun on hand, he could always squeeze a small laugh out of the mild accusation, "Well, if you're going to be shifty and change your name, it's all right with me."

Towns and cities gave Smith and Marx directions for other places to go. The Swiss miss who announced that her hometown was Gallen was asked, "Is that near Four Quarts?" and of the British gent from Highgate he inquired if that was anywhere near Low Bridge. He had some fun with a woman from Louisiana, Missouri and a gag man's holiday with an employee of the Owens Illinois Glass Company, which was located not in Owens, Illinois but in Vernon, California. People answering his question of "Where are you from?" with "Hawaii" should have expected the "I'm fine. How are you?" response they received.

Vocations also furnished Marx with plenty of material so he could go out on a limb by trying to open a branch office with a tree surgeon, present a sly invitation to be kept after school by a pretty teacher, and assault a jockey with an endless supply of nag gags. It was intimated by some people who worked on the show that the job-related lines preceded the selection of the contestant, meaning that researchers sought intriguing people who worked in professions that would mesh with Groucho's material, which might have caused the wit to look from the guest to a bad joke and ask, "Which came first, the pickin' or the egg?"

It didn't matter which came first because



George Fenneman and Groucho Marx

throughout his career Groucho tossed his darts indiscriminately at people, places, and things with little regard to people, places, or things. Just as Marx could have delighted audiences watching *A Night at the Opera* if he played opposite a mannequin instead of Margaret Dumont, he could have provoked laughs on *You Bet Your Life* if his guests had been a lamppost and a sofa with sallies like "I've come home lit myself sometimes" and "So fa, so good."

So far, so good might have described the course of the program, which enjoyed a long run over ABC, CBS, or NBC from 1947 to 1960 on radio and from 1950 to 1961 on NBC television. Although the same contestants appeared on both ver-

sions, the programs were not identical because they were edited differently and the radio broadcast aired on different nights of the week while the television show remained on Thursday evenings throughout its run. Along the way Marx received a Peabody Award for his radio work in 1949 and an Emmy in 1950 as television's "Most Outstanding Personality."

It was that outstanding personality, inhibited by his role on earlier radio productions by format or choice of material, which was unleashed on *You Bet Your Life*. No matter how hoary some of the jokes might be, Marx's lively exchanges with Fenneman and the guests distinguish it from all other audience participation/quiz shows, whose emphasis centered on the contestants. From the moment Fenneman said, "Here he is. . . the one, the only. . ." and the audience finished the introduction with a resounding "Groucho!," the cynosure of *You Bet Your Life* had been established.

Marx, who freely admitted during interviews and in print that he thoroughly enjoyed appearing on *You Bet Your Life*, thought he was paid the ultimate compliment when a woman he met on State Street in Chicago stopped him and pleaded, "Please don't die. Just keep on living."

Groucho Marx, who passed away August 19, 1977, couldn't comply with the first request, but ask anyone who listens to recordings of his radio show or watches reruns of his television program, "Is Groucho Marx still with is?" and the answer is obvious: You bet your life! ■

Tune in TWTD February 1 to hear Groucho Marx with Jack Benny in 1944 and March 22 to hear the audition show for You Bet Your Life from 1947.

Rudy Vallee is a phenomenon in the entertainment world.

He has maintained a tremendous popularity with the public for more than 25 years, and has scored during this period in three separate careers: as the leader of one of America's outstanding orchestras; as a radio personality—both crooner and comedian; and as a movie actor.

This amazing personality was born in Island Pond, Vermont, on July 28, 1901. His father was the town druggist. At the age of six the Vallee family moved to Westbrook, Maine, which town and stage now claim Rudy Vallee as their own.

At the age of seven Hubert Prior Vallee began studying drums and piano under his older sister, Kathleen, who was a musician. He left those instruments three years later, and began studying the clarinet. His famous saxophone came later. Meanwhile, he worked as soda jerk in his father's drug store.

In 1917 Vallee enlisted in the Navy. He served for three months before his true age of 15 was discovered, whereupon he was returned, posthaste, to high school. It was shortly after his experience in the Navy that Vallee definitely decided upon a career as a musician, joined a small local band as a drummer, and adopted the first name of his idol at the time, Rudy Weidoeft, who was then chief proponent of the saxophone.

Vallee started acting in 1921, the year he was graduated from Westbrook high school, winning the leading role in the class

This is the official 20th Century-Fox studio biography for Rudy Vallee written by Harry Brand, Director of Publicity and issued in 1949. Rudy Vallee died July 3, 1986 at age 84.

play. Next year he attended the University of Maine, paying part of his expenses by playing his saxophone in small college bands. Next year, determined to pay his own way through college, he went to Yale, in the hope that the larger university would offer more opportunities for income from his sax.

The young student-musician had made a wise choice, for he made \$1,500 the first year and hit high on his studies. His reputation as a musician, however, brought an offer from London to play with an orchestra in the Savoy Hotel and he dropped out of college in 1924 to accept.

Rudy was an overnight sensation in England and he made his radio debut on 2LO, London's big broadcasting station. The Prince of Wales even asked Rudy to teach him the saxophone, but Rudy had decided to go back to Yale, where he was graduated in 1927.

In the fall of 1927, Rudy went to New York but found an indifferent reception.

After appearing in a few one-night engagements with Vincent Lopez and Ben Bernie, he organized his own orchestra and secured a job with the smart Heigh-Ho Club. He was an immediate success and in February 1928, made his American radio debut in New York. His familiar greeting, "Heigh-Ho, everybody!" became famous. At the same time he started singing through a megaphone.

Vallee soon became the top "crooner" of his day. The Wall Street debacle of 1929 wiped out his life's savings, but undismayed he spent five weeks in Hollywood making *The Vagabond Lover*. On the last day of that fateful year he separated from his wife, the late Fay Webb. They were subsequently divorced. Vallee later mar-

riced actress Bettejane Greer (now Jane Greer), but that romance, toto, went on the rocks.

In 1929, Rudy began one of the most enduring and successful programs on radio, usually called *The Vallee Show*. Ten years later he made his 518th broadcast for the same sponsor, Standard Brands, from Hollywood. His tremendously popular radio program served as a springboard to radio fame for Edgar Bergen, Bob Burns, Alice Faye, Frances Langford, Larry Adler and many others.

During the next ten years, until 1939, Rudy made movies, played many important dates with his band, made personal appearance tours, many recordings and wrote songs. Two of the latter, "Vagabond Lover" and "Deep Night," were outstanding hits.

When Rudy came back on the air, it was in a show co-starring Joan Davis and the late John Barrymore. Vallee also proved, for the first time, his real ability as a film actor, making a hit with critics and public in *The Palm Beach Story* in 1942.

Rudy joined the Coast Guard as a chief petty officer shortly after Pearl Harbor, and

he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant during the course of the war, conducting a Coast Guard band.

Following the war Rudy scored hits in the RKO pictures *The Bachelor and the Bobby Soxer* and *I Remember Mama*. In



these two films he portrayed semi-comedy roles, but his one big ambition now is to play "heavies" on the screen. He would consider a role as a private detective ideal.

Shortly after his discharge from the Coast Guard, Rudy built a home in Palm Springs, where he now spends much of his time, but he still owns an eagle's nest of a home atop a high hill overlooking Hollywood. He is a lavish entertainer, but keeps constantly fit by daily workouts.

Rudy is now making *Father Was a Fullback* at

20th Century-Fox. He also appeared for this studio in *Unfaithfully Yours* and *Mother is a Freshman* and in the recently completed Betty Grable picture, *The Beautiful Blonde from Bashful Bend*. One of his earliest pictures was also for that studio, being Irving Berlin's *Second Fiddle* in 1939. ■ Tune in TWTD March 1 to hear the Royal Gelatin Hour from 1937 starring Rudy Vallee with many guest stars.



Gene Kelly

Debbie Reynolds

Donald O'Connor

Singin' In The Rain

BY RANDALL G. MIELKE

If any movie can be considered a classic representation of an era as well as a genre, *Singin' in the Rain* is that movie. Not only was the film extremely precise in recreating a period of transition in Hollywood from silent films to talkies, but it also displayed all the elements that are necessary for an enduring movie musical. Last year (2002) marked the 50th anniversary of this classic film.

Made at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios in 1952, the idea for the film originated with producer Arthur Freed. Freed, a former lyricist who had written many songs with Nacio Herb Brown, asked screenwriters Betty Comden and Adolph Green to write a script using the songs that he and Brown had written. Realizing that most of

the songs had been composed during the early sound phase of films, 1927-1931, Comden and Green set their story during that period. In the end, with the exception of two numbers — "Fit as a Fiddle" (by Freed, Al Hoffman and Al Goodhart) and "Moses Supposes" (by Roger Edens, Comden and Green) — all the Freed/Brown numbers featured in *Singin' in the Rain* were from earlier MGM movies.

Early on in the script-writing, Howard Keel was being considered for the male lead, which prompted the writers to work up a story about a minor Western actor who becomes a star in the talkies. That didn't really work out, so Comden and Green began altering the character to that of a song-and-dance man who becomes a silent film star, and then becomes an even bigger star in early sound musicals.

Singin' in the Rain is the story of Don

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

Lockwood (Gene Kelly), a dashing, smug but romantic-silent film star and swashbuckling matinee idol, and his romance with chorus girl Kathy Selden (Debbie Reynolds, in her first major film role). But it is the backdrop for this romance, how a whole industry adapts to the introduction of sound films, that makes *Singin' in the Rain* so charming and appealing.

From the first scene it is apparent that the film will offer a satirical and light-hearted look at the early days of talking pictures. While Lockwood boasts of his early training at a musical conservatory, the film shows the reality of his beginnings as he and his friend Cosmo Brown (Donald O'Connor) are seen performing in a burlesque house.

The film continues with the story of Lockwood and his relationship with a temperamental silent-screen star, Lina Lamont (Jean Hagen), and his romance with



Moses Supposes
Donald O'Connor and Gene Kelly

PHOTOFFEST

Selden, a talented but unheralded actress. Lockwood and Lamont are pressured by studio head R.F. Simpson (Millard Mitchell) to change their silent romantic drama ("The Dueling Cavalier") and make it into a sound picture.



Fit As Fiddle
Donald O'Connor and Gene Kelly

PHOTOFFEST

Lockwood and Lamont are pressured by studio head R.F. Simpson (Millard Mitchell) to change their silent romantic drama ("The Dueling Cavalier") and make it into a sound picture. The main problem is that Lina Lamont has a shrill, screechy New York accent. Cosmo Brown suggests that the studio turn the doomed film into a musical ("The Dancing Cavalier"), and also suggests that Lockwood's girlfriend, Kathy Selden, dub in her singing voice behind the scenes for lip-synching Lina. (Though this spoofed the kind of behind-the-scenes deception of the early sound period, *Singin' in the Rain* actually continued the deception. When Reynolds sings "Would You?" in the film her voice is dubbed by Betty Noyes.) The



Debbie Reynolds and Gene Kelly

PHOTOFEST

results of their scheming to expose Lina and put Kathy in the limelight provide the film's delightful and expected resolution.

All the leads in *Singin' in the Rain* turn in performances of a lifetime. Kelly, O'Connor, and Reynolds are vivacious and engaging and all work well together (as evidenced in the "Good Morning" number). As Don Lockwood, Kelly, who also collaborated in the direction and choreography of the film with Stanley Donen, had several opportunities to show off his dancing style at its best — athletic and unassuming. Most notably, of course, is the title number, which has come to stand for irrepressible optimism as Kelly surrenders himself to a rain storm, kicks and stamps in a series of puddles and climbs halfway up a lamppost with rain pouring onto his face. He literally splashes and jumps for joy over his love for Kathy, and in so doing, Kelly creates one of the cinema's most unforgettable moments.

O'Connor (as Cosmo Brown) was the quintessential "buddy" in the film, al-

ways there with a witty line, a clever remark or a solution to a problem. He was the reliable friend to the leading man, always aiding Kelly in his pursuit of Reynolds. As Brown, O'Connor demonstrates his abilities as a comedian and a dancer, especially in the "Make 'em Laugh" number. In this hilarious, highly energized comic dance, O'Connor performs with props and sets on a soundstage. Cosmo Brown was probably O'Connor's best film role.

Another joy in the film is Jean Hagen's memorable comic performance as Lina Lamont. Comden and Green had Judy Holliday in mind when they created the Lamont character, and Hagen was instructed to act similarly to Holliday portraying Billie Dawn in the film *Born Yesterday* (1950). Her characterization, from shrill voice to

simpering mannerisms, is funny and appealing.

And it is her role that launches some of the best comedy segments in the film. When the studio is remaking one of the Lockwood/Lamont films into a musical,



Singin' in the Rain
Gene Kelly

PHOTOFEST



Gene Kelly

PHOTOFEST

the technicians must use cumbersome recording equipment of the period to make a soundtrack. In order to pick up Lina's voice, the bulky microphone is placed first in a bush, and finally in the bosom of her low-cut gown. There, however, it also picks up Lina's heart-beat. Finally, the microphone is hidden in a corsage on her shoulder, but studio head R.F. Simpson, visiting the set, trips over the microphone cord and tips Lina head over heels.

Another humorous segment involving Lina Lamont comes when the studio shows the latest Lockwood/Lamont film, "The Dancing Cavalier," which it has made into a talkie, to a prescreening audience. Lina's hideous voice is extremely irritating on screen, and although the film is supposed to be a romantic period piece, it comes off as a comedy. Volume problems and extraneous recorded noises

(Lina's playing with her pearl necklace in particular) make the sneak-preview audience howl with laughter. When the synchronization of the film and sound record-



Broadway Rhythm Ballet
Gene Kelly and Cyd Charisse

PHOTOFEST

ing gets off track, Lina is saying: "No, no, no" in the villain's voice, and the movie villain is saying: "Yes, yes, yes" in Lina's voice.

The musical highlights of *Singin' in the Rain* are plentiful. Aside from the delightful and expansive "Good Morning" number by the three leads, Kelly's rendition of the title number and O'Connor's "Make 'em Laugh," Kelly and O'Connor turn in an engaging and energetic performance displaying their diction knowledge in "Moses Supposes."

If the film has any flaw at all it is probably the "Broadway Rhythm" ballet viewed via Lockwood's imagination. The number, except for the score, has no real relationship with the rest of the film and even has a different leading lady, Cyd Charisse. Although expertly crafted and performed, the number almost looks like an afterthought. Even Lockwood's boss, R.F. Simpson, after hearing Lockwood's description, says: "I can't quite visualize it. I'll have to see it on film first" as if to say "This has no relation to the plot" and, indeed, it doesn't.

Surprisingly, this great film was basically ignored by film critics when it was released. It received only two Academy Award nominations—Best Supporting Actress (Jean Hagen) and Best Musical Score (Lennie Hayton)—and didn't win any awards. Hagen lost to Gloria Grahame for *The Bad and the Beautiful* and the film's musical score Oscar nomination lost to Alfred Newman's score for *With a Song in My Heart*.

Still, *Singin' in the Rain* remains one of the most durable musicals ever made. If the test of a great musical is that it can be seen over and over again without a longing for the dialogue to end and the musical numbers to begin, then *Singin' in the Rain* passes with honors. And it has been doing so for more than 50 years! ■



Our Readers Write WE GET MAIL

LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY— I enjoyed very much the December 2002-January 2003 issue of *Nostalgia Digest*. I always enjoy reading about Edgar Bergen. I knew that Candice was younger than I am, but I did not think it plus-10 years. So I checked www.imdb.com. She was born in May, 1946 not 1956. I enjoyed Mr. Skillman's article on Christmas. I, too, had Hopalong Cassidy items. Regarding Mr. Klatt's article on Christmas songs, before the Harry Simeone Chorale made it popular, I knew that song as the "Carol of the Drums" as opposed to "The Little Drummer Boy."

—TIMOTHY KURYLA

(ED. NOTE)— Candice Bergen was born May 9, 1946 and is probably not too happy that you caught our typographical error in the article by Gardner Kissack!

CHICAGO— While my article on the origin of Christmas carols, "Do you Hear What I Hear?," was appearing in the December-January issue, I learned of the death of the composer of that song. Frenchman Noel



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Regney — was any composer ever better named? was not someone who sat around in a studio all day. He studied in Europe to become a classical composer but was forced into the German army during the Nazi occupation. He rebelled and became a spy for the French resistance. Afterwards he moved to New York. He was so disturbed by his war memories that with the help of his American wife, a pianist, he wrote "Do You Hear What I Hear?" as a cry for peace. Bing Crosby made the song famous when he recorded it the next year. Regney wrote another 1963 hit, "Dominique," performed by the Singing Nun. When Regney died in Connecticut just before Thanksgiving at the age of 80, I am sure he knew his carol is one that moves us every year.

—WAYNE KLATT

CHICAGO— I enjoyed the article on the 66th Signal Battalion (Oct-Nov 2002). My late husband was in the 65th Signal Battalion for over several years during World War II. The pictures were great.

—MRS. MARIE J. LORENZ

CHICAGO— It is striking how WW II recollections on *TWTD* and in the *Digest* have relevance to the current controversy on U.S. policy toward Iraq. The immediacy of radio and first-person accounts best capture the discussions and popular opinion that swirled about world wide on how to deal with Hitler's invasion of Europe. Although they are a half-century old, news commentators' remarks about Hitler and the impacts of his actions on world affairs could be lifted almost verbatim to describe how current leaders are reacting to Saddam Hussein's despotic behavior. I hope today's leaders are aware a Hitler memoir revealed that if France had confronted his forces in Sudetanland or Poland he would have had to withdraw. —WILLIAM O'NEILL

KANSAS CITY— I have been away from Chicago just about 10 years now. Was delighted to find *TWTD* on the Internet and now can go back to listening to the golden age of radio on Saturdays! Happy to be back! —STUART SLAYMAKER

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA— Thank goodness for the Internet. I get to hear you down here in Tallahassee. I used to live in Addison, Illinois and was upset that I

couldn't hear *TWTD*. Only one station 40 miles away plays OTR on a weak signal. Now on Saturdays I get to listen to you again. Thank you for airing OTR for over 32 years. You are great! —SCOTT COOK

LANSING, IL— I am moving to Florida and am wondering if there is any thought to syndicating your show so it would be carried by other radio stations in other parts of the country. I would think that with all of us pre-boomers headed to Florida, we would be a wonderful market. Any plans along those lines? I've listened to you for more years than I care to say and you and your show have become part of our family and its traditions — especially for Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, Halloween, and Independence Day. Gosh, I'm sure going to miss your show. I know you're on the Internet but that runs up a big phone bill, but I know I'll treat myself for special occasions. —MARILYNN MARTIN
(ED. NOTE)— Thanks for your kind words. We've never wanted to syndicate our program because we have been most comfortable doing our broadcasts locally. This is how we have been able to include references to Chicago-area customs and nostalgia. To syndicate would mean doing a "generic" broadcast, conforming to the needs of a variety of radio stations. We're very happy doing our four-hour broadcast on WDCB and delighted that listeners who used to hear us in the Chicago area are able to "click on" to us on the Internet after they have moved from this area. So we're glad that you, too, will be able to do that, if not on a regular basis, at least from time to time. Thanks for listening.)

EUSTIS, FLORIDA— It's that time of year to renew my subscription. I feel it's more like contacting an old friend and saying thank you for *TWTD* on the Internet. I was without your show for ten years but kept up with the program through the *Nostalgia Digest*. Now I have the total package. Thanks again and thanks to WDCB.
—KATHY SMITH

BARRINGTON, IL— Thanks for many years of nostalgia. You have been a part of our lives since those early days in Evanston. In 1990 we were transferred to Cincinnati. It was a sad period. I thought I had lost *TWTD*. We came "home" in 1995 to be part



MORE MAIL

of the WNIB family. We still miss WNIB [but] with our Bose Wave Radio with roof (attic) antenna, WDCB comes in loud and clear. —**PAUL AND JUDY CARLSON**

CHICAGO— What a pleasure it is to have *TWTD* as part of the holiday season after being deprived of what has become a part of this time of the year for me last December [when the WDCB tower collapsed]. I must admit when I saw that it was a little windy today I had a sense of dread... but there you are, coming through loud and clear. Today [Nov. 30] you mentioned a landmark that is right by my house... the radio tower on Harlem avenue near Grand. I am about four blocks or so east of that tower and can see it from my window. I pass it frequently and it looks like it is being used once again. I know WCKG identifies itself as an Elmwood Park station so perhaps they use the transmitter. In any case it was nice to hear my neighborhood referred to on *TWTD* today. Thanks for making the holidays a bit merrier through these old time radio shows and continued success to you and the program. —**JEFF KWIT**

CHICAGO— I am very happy that the tower is back up and youse gize are easily readable all over the area again. I am on the street a lot on Saturdays and missed many of the shows when not close to Glen Ellyn, which isn't close to anything. I will be sending a tribute to the station shortly to help with the tower expense. I know and everyone else should know that towers don't grow on trees. —**TED BLIEMAN**

QUEMADO, TEXAS— Hi! I listened for the first time yesterday to the Internet broadcast (until I had to free up the phone line) and was just so pleased. I live where it is not easy to receive even AM radio, so I haven't listened to radio in many years. It was such a thrill to know that you were broadcasting LIVE and to listen to the music and programs that you played. —**ELIZABETH MINNEY**

ELLINGTON, FLORIDA— Congratulations to

you and Ken Alexander for your 15-year association. Ken and you work so well together, you're both a pleasure to listen to. I am one of your many Florida listeners who appreciate your show every week. Many former Chicagoans find it a blessing to be able to listen to your show on the Internet. Keep up the good work. —**RON MARUSCAK**

AURORA, IL— Please tell Mr. Alexander that he did a great job on the Halloween program. I especially enjoyed his intro to the show. His ability to describe scenery and keep you interested is outstanding. All the spirit of Halloween must have really spooked him because at one point in the program, Mr. Alexander asked Koni how he was doing on program time. I noticed a bit of uncertainty in his voice when he asked her the question. Now, I know Mr. Alexander was not "really" concerned about the time, but was rather scared to death of all the Halloween decorations that were in his studio. Right Mr. Alexander? —**TOM NAWOSKI**

BARRINGTON, IL— I am very sad to say that I will be moving out of state and I will miss my favorite Saturday pasttime. My boys and I love listening to your program and you and Ken Alexander add so much to the show. Your love for classic radio comes through. You are perfect for your job. I will miss you sorely. —**ROBBI KULIK**

CHICAGO— May Ken Alexander be around always to read his file of newspapers. He is a jewel in the crown. —**EDWARD C. BEYER**

NOSTALGIA DIGEST AND RADIO GUIDE

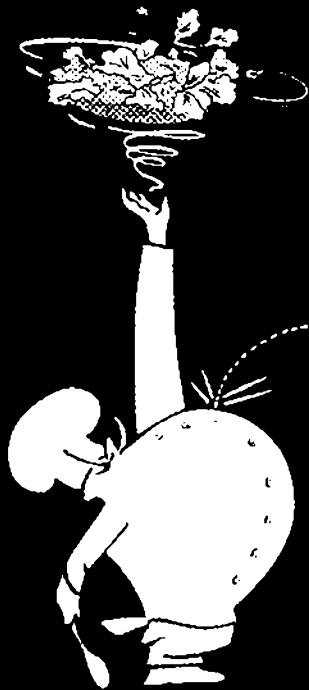
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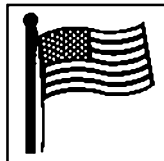
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