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of

Don
Brea



Don McNeill

and the Breakfast Club

celebrate

20 (y)ears of corn





Mr. Breakfast Club

... DON McNEILL

The Family Man



Diaper Don . . .
1908



Dapper Don . . .
1953

First Public Appearance Master McNeill is seated on his mother's lap next to an aunt, while Grandfather McNeill holds a cousin in a 1910 Sheboygan parade.

Breakfast Club listeners for 20 years have accepted Don McNeill as one of the family, because he is a family man.

His devotion to his wife Kay, their three boys, and his parents and sister Agnes is well-known.

When Don was born in Galena, Ill., December 23, 1907, his father, Harry McNeill, was a mining engineer. Two years later the family moved to Sheboygan, Wis., where Don's father joined his father—Thomas McNeill—in the furniture manufacturing business.

Don grew through grade school and high school in Sheboygan, winning the nickname, "Daddy Long Legs." He learned to hunt and fish with his father and grandfather; acquired the knack for writing, cartooning and story-telling.

A childhood illness, the result of growing too fast, taught him the value of patience, understanding and moderation. These lessons, together with his naturalness, friendliness and shyness, have raised him above the category of a paid entertainer. He actually is the family man next door who comes to breakfast.



Mr. and Mrs. Harry McNeill and Agnes now live in Evanston, Ill.



Ready for School . . . Husky Donald McNeill at the age of five.



A Sheboygan Sheik . . . Sideburns, bell-bottom trousers and Stanley Steamers were the rage when Don graduated from Central High in 1925.



A Family Outing . . . Flag, the springer spaniel, and the McNeills head for the lake. Left to right: Kay, Don, Don Jr., 17; Bob, 12; Tom, 18.



APPLICATION PHOTO . . . Don McNeill was 25 when he auditioned for The Breakfast Club. He had been in radio for five years — the only career he has ever followed.



SID STROTZ was alone in recommending McNeill for the job, but his hunch made Breakfast Club a valuable network property.



COLLEGE GRADUATE . . . While attending Marquette's College of Journalism (he hoped to be an editorial cartoonist), Don was editor of the 1928 Junior yearbook. The same year he went to work for a Milwaukee radio station at \$15 a week. He was valedictorian of the class of 1929.

★ ★
"Please submit photograph
AND RADIO EXPERIENCE . . ."



1928-1933



Don McNeill sent a photograph and the following letter to NBC in June, 1933.

"My start in radio came in 1928 — one year before I was graduated from Marquette University in Milwaukee. I was engaged at WISN as an announcer and radio editor. After a year I joined WTMJ, the Milwaukee Journal station, in the same capacity. In 1930 I transferred to WHAS, the Courier-Journal station in Louisville. Here I teamed with Van Fleming in a comedy act.

"For two years we wrote and presented a daily west coast network program, 'The Two Professors', from San Francisco. Earlier this year we split up the team and I returned to Milwaukee and WTMJ. Sample scripts of 'The Journal Jamboree', which played to capacity theater audiences, 'The Rise Of A Rookie' and other features are enclosed."

As a result of this letter, Don was asked to audition with two others for the m.c. role on an early morning show called "The Pepper Pot." Sid Strutz, then program director of the central division, told Don later that everyone on the program board, except him, thought McNeill was the worst of the three. Since Sid was the boss, Don got the job.



MILWAUKEE, 1933 . . .
Don portrayed the character of Homer Benchbottom in the daily pre-baseball game feature he wrote for WTMJ. Left to right, Coach Christensen of the Milwaukee Brewers, Bob De Haven and Don McNeill.



LOUISVILLE, 1930 Between announcing, writing and illustrating a radio column, Don found time to develop a comedy act with Van Fleming. He also became engaged to Katherine Mary Bennett, his college sweetheart from Milwaukee.



SAN FRANCISCO, 1931-32 Don and Van with Joe E. Brown, a guest of "The Two Professors." Don and Kay were married in San Francisco, Sept. 12, 1931.

Breakfast Club Menu

Helpings of Corn, Music, Sentiment . . . Seasoned with Family Fun and Prayer

"The general idea behind Breakfast Club when I took over on June 23, 1933," recalls Don, "was to try to do something to change the old American custom of not smiling before breakfast.

"This was a real challenge for me . . . a breakfast grouch. Those first few mornings on Breakfast Club were a nightmare. Several times I was ready to give up the job. Then things began to happen.

"I must have sounded cheerful, even though I felt miserable, because letters began to come in from people saying they enjoyed smiling with me at breakfast. The letters made me feel better. I began to enjoy myself and, in doing so, I encouraged more people to join me around the breakfast table."

Breakfast Club continues to follow the policy of being cheerfully corny and helpful with complete disregard for routine broadcasting practices. The result has been a completely informal, relaxed program sprinkled with McNeill's personality.

The breakfast menu has changed little in 20 years. To the four musical calls, songs, chatter, March Time and Memory Time which McNeill introduced on the first show, he has added comedy and singing acts, studio interviews, his famous Prayer Time and the Sunshine Shower. Now it takes 47 persons to get the show on the air, compared to 17 in 1933. But it still is, as Don originally announced . . .

"The Breakfast Club of the Air — a get together time for all of us who smile before breakfast and then can't break the habit all day long — the place to come when a feller needs a friend."

Don McNeill and Dick Teala, the first Breakfast Club singer, as a candid cameraman caught them during an actual broadcast in 1933. The only other persons in the studio during these early broadcasts were Walter Blaufuss and his 12-piece orchestra, an announcer and an engineer.



BREAKFAST CLUB MAESTROS

Good music is a Breakfast Club tradition. The musical foundation built by Walter Blaufuss and his orchestra from 1933 to 1942 has been maintained and expanded by four other maestros. Eddie Ballantine, the present conductor, was a trumpet player in the original Breakfast Club group 20 years ago.

Blaufuss' contributions to the breakfast menu ranged from original hit tunes, like "Your Eyes Have Told Me So" and "My Isle of Golden Dreams", to hymns and classical arrangements.

When Blaufuss took ill in 1942, Harry Kogen, Joe Gallicchio and Rex Maupin shared the baton. Walter died in 1945. Since then Ballantine has directed the orchestra. The only other 20 year veteran is big Bill Krenz, rag-time pianist extraordinary.

One week's musical book for Breakfast Club involves 50 or 60 orchestrations and more than 80 musical gimmicks — much of it written by versatile members of the orchestra.



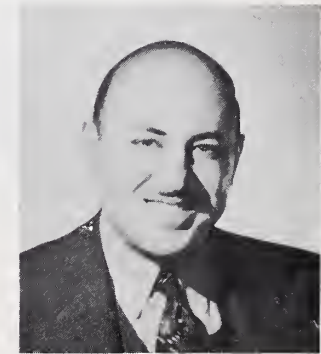
Eddie Ballantine, Since 1945



Rex Maupin, 1942-1945



Harry Kogen, 1942-1945



Joe Gallicchio, 1942-1945



Walter Blaufuss, 1933-1942

Singing STARS



For 20 years Breakfast Club has been blessed with vocalists who carry smiles in their hearts as well as in their voices. Dick Teela, a native tenor of Wausau, Wis., was the first to sing for his breakfast. He left for New York in 1934.

Jack Owens was heard regularly for the next two years. The Tulsa, Okla. baritone left the show in 1936 for Hollywood and a song-writing career. He returned again in 1944 to rule as Breakfast Club's "cruising crooner" until 1949. Since then Owens has lived in California where he has his own radio and television shows.

Clark Dennis, the Flint, Mich. tenor, replaced Jack in 1936. He, too, was attracted to Hollywood after a year. Now he is in New York. Johnny Johnston and Jack Baker shared the vocal honors in 1937. Johnny departed for New York, leaving Baker to carry on until Jack Owens returned in 1944. Johnny Thompson took over while Owens was ill in 1945. Johnny Desmond of Detroit and GI fame became the seventh and current male vocalist on July 25, 1949. He has added new laurels during the last four years in radio, television, theater appearances and across music counters.



Johnny Desmond, since 1949



Dick Teela, 1933-1934



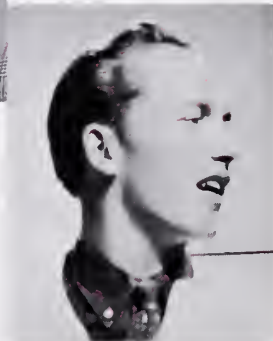
Clark Dennis, 1936-1937



Jack Owens, 1934-1936



Johnny Thompson, 1945



Johnny Johnston, 1937



Jack Owens, 1944-1949

Singing SWEETHEARTS



Peggy Taylor, since 1952

Don McNeill could be accused of running a matrimonial bureau for his Breakfast Club girl vocalists. However, they all came to the show unmarried . . . and just naturally became homemakers. Edna O'Dell of Marion, Ind., was the first regular songstress, appearing in 1935. Today, Edna and her husband operate a summer resort.

Helen Jane Behlke shared the feminine vocal honors with Annette King in 1936 and 1937. A native of Bemidji, Minn., Helen now lives in California. Annette never left Aurora, Ill., to sing on the show, commuting 80 miles daily, from 1936 through 1939. She and her husband still live in Aurora with their four children.

Evelyn Lynne of Dallas and Nancy Martin of Wheeling, W. Va. became regulars in 1939. When Evelyn left in 1941 Nancy alternated with Marion Mann of Columbus until 1946. Both Evelyn and Nancy live in California, while Marion is still in Columbus. After frequent guest appearances in 1946, 18-year old Patsy Lee took her place around the breakfast table. She returned to Oakland, Calif., with a Navy husband in 1952. The newest singing sweetheart is another Californian, Peggy Taylor of Alhambra. She joined the show on July 28, 1952, and already has won the hearts of Breakfast Clubbers.



Edna O'Dell, 1935



Helen Jane Behlke, 1936-37



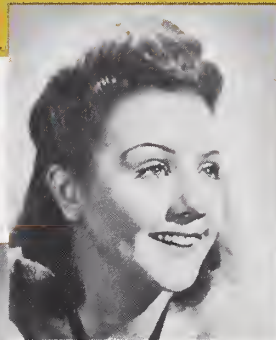
Annette King, 1936-1939



Evelyn Lynne, 1939-1941



Nancy Martin, 1939-1946



Marion Mann, 1941-1946



Patsy Lee, 1946-1952



Fibber McGee and Molly, or Marian and Jim Jordan as they were "knewed as in them days", were 1934 Breakfast Club favorites.



Bill Thompson as he appeared in 1934, getting his start in Chicago and the Breakfast Club.



"Doctor" Russell Pratt, 1935

Comedy ACTS ...



The first year on Breakfast Club Don McNeill combined his own wit with that of the orchestra for comedy touches. Thus, he often referred to the show as "a program of half music and half wit."

Then the network discovered that Breakfast Club was the perfect place to "show-case" its talent. In 1934 Marian and Jim Jordan tried out a "Chickie and Toots" routine. You know them now as Fibber McGee and Molly. Bill Thompson (Mr. Wimple) and Fields and Hall were introduced to network audiences the same year. Russell Pratt, one of the Three Doctors, appeared in 1935.

Aunt Fanny (Fran Allison) and Sam Cowling of The Three Romeos, made their debut in 1937. They still entertain Breakfast Clubbers.

Sam Cowling and Aunt Fanny (Fran Allison) in an early duet. Since 1937



Bill (Elmer) Short, 1933-



The Merry Macs, 1934 — left to right, The McMichael brothers, Joe, Judd and Ted, and Mary Lou Cook (center).



The Escorts and Betty, 1939-1944 — left to right, Floyd Holm, Cliff Petersen, Ted Claire, Betty Olson (seated).



Homer and Jethro, since 1952



The Three Romeos, 1937-1944 — l. to r. Lou Perkins, Sam Cowling, Gil Jones.



The Vagabonds, 1939-1944 — l. to r. Robert O'Neal, Norval Taborn, Ray (Pappy) Grant, John Jordan.

Singing ACTS ...

Through the years most of radio's famous singing groups appeared on the Breakfast Club. Starting in 1934, The Merry Macs, Morin Sisters and The Ranch Boys were regular visitors. The Three Romeos, featuring Sam Cowling, held the spotlight from 1937 through 1944. Three other groups beloved by Breakfast Clubbers were: The Four Vagabonds, led by the late Ray "Pappy" Grant; The Cadets; and The Escorts and Betty, with Cliff Petersen. In recent years group songs have been presented by regular cast members. The one exception is Homer and Jethro, long time favorites of the WLS Barn Dance, who have been making weekly appearances since 1952.



The Cadets, 1939-1944 — left to right, Sam Thompson, Cal Scheibe, Arnold Isolany, Al Stracke, Reo Fletcher (seated).



The Morin Sisters and The Ranch Boys, 1934-1936 — l. to r. Marge, Jack Ross, Shorty Carson, Curly Bradley, Pauline and Evelyn Morin.

Announcers... SPONSORS...

Nearly 6,000 broadcasts ago, announcing the Breakfast Club was a one-man job, held down by Bill Kephart. Today, there is an announcer for each of Breakfast Club's four sponsors. Don Dowd is heard for Swift & Co., (sponsors since 1941), Bob Murphy for The Philco Corporation, (since 1945), Jay Arlan for the O-Cedar Corporation and Jack Callaghan for Bobbi-White Rain, (both of whom joined the sponsor family in 1952).

Other commercial announcers have been Bob Brown and Bob McKee for Swift; Louis Roen for Acme Paint Co. (1941); Durward Kirby for Cream of Wheat (1941-1943); Charles Irving for The Kellogg Co. (1943-1944); Fred Kasper for Lustre Creme (1946-1947); Ken Nordine for Toni (1947-1948); Franklyn Ferguson for General Mills (1948-1951) and Jack Callaghan for Jell-O (1951-1952).



Bob Brown, 1936-1941



Bill Kephart, 1933-1936



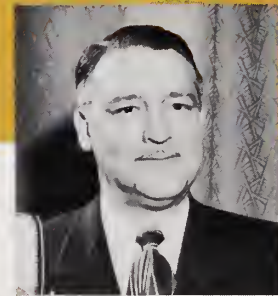
Louis Roen, 1941



Durward Kirby, 1941-42



Bob Murphy, since 1946



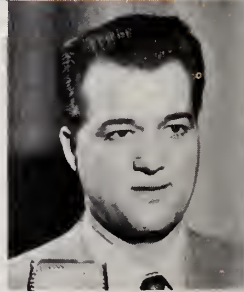
Don Dowd, since 1944



Charles Irving, 1943-1944



Ken Nordine, 1947-1948



Jay Arlan, since 1952



Fred Kasper, 1946-1947



Franklyn Ferguson, 1948-1951



Jack Callaghan, since 1951

. Production . . . ENGINEERS

The "forgotten men" of radio are the engineers and producers — the men responsible for getting the show on and off the air. Confined to a sound-proof control room, even the studio audience is unaware of their activities.

Cliff Petersen, producer of the Breakfast Club since 1945, is one exception. He works on stage with the cast and contributes his rich tenor voice and Swedish accent to the goings-on. From 1936 to 1944 Cliff was the tenor lead of The Escorts and Betty.

Because of his extra activities, Cliff has an associate producer in the control room. Maury Murray is the present associate. Louie Perkins, formerly with The Three Romeos, held the post from 1948 to 1951. Charley Butler was the first Breakfast Club engineer. There are two on duty today — Jimmy Daugherty and Harry Schumacher. Others have been Bill Cummings, Kermit Slobb, Jimmy Lato, George Smith and Harry Eckland.



Cliff Petersen, since 1936



Jimmy Daugherty, Harry Schumacher, since 1951



Maury Murray, since 1951



Charley Butler, 1933-1936



Jimmy Lato, 1949



George Smith, Lou Perkins, Harry Eckland, 1949-1950

AUDIENCE... Network

Breakfast Club is now heard on 352 stations in the U.S., Canada, Alaska and Hawaii, compared to 56 stations in 1933. A recent survey of Breakfast Club listeners shows 65% are women, 20% are children and 15% are men. Twenty-seven per cent live in rural areas.

The daily listening audience is estimated at two million families. More than 150,000 persons attend broadcasts each year in Chicago and on tour. Since 1950 Breakfast Club has been traveling four weeks out of the year, making it possible to originate broadcasts in the east, the south, California, Texas and the Pacific Northwest.

Don McNeill has worked for three different networks in his Breakfast Club career. He was hired by NBC in 1933. He and the show became the property of the Blue Network in 1942; made the change to ABC in 1944. His present bosses are pictured below.



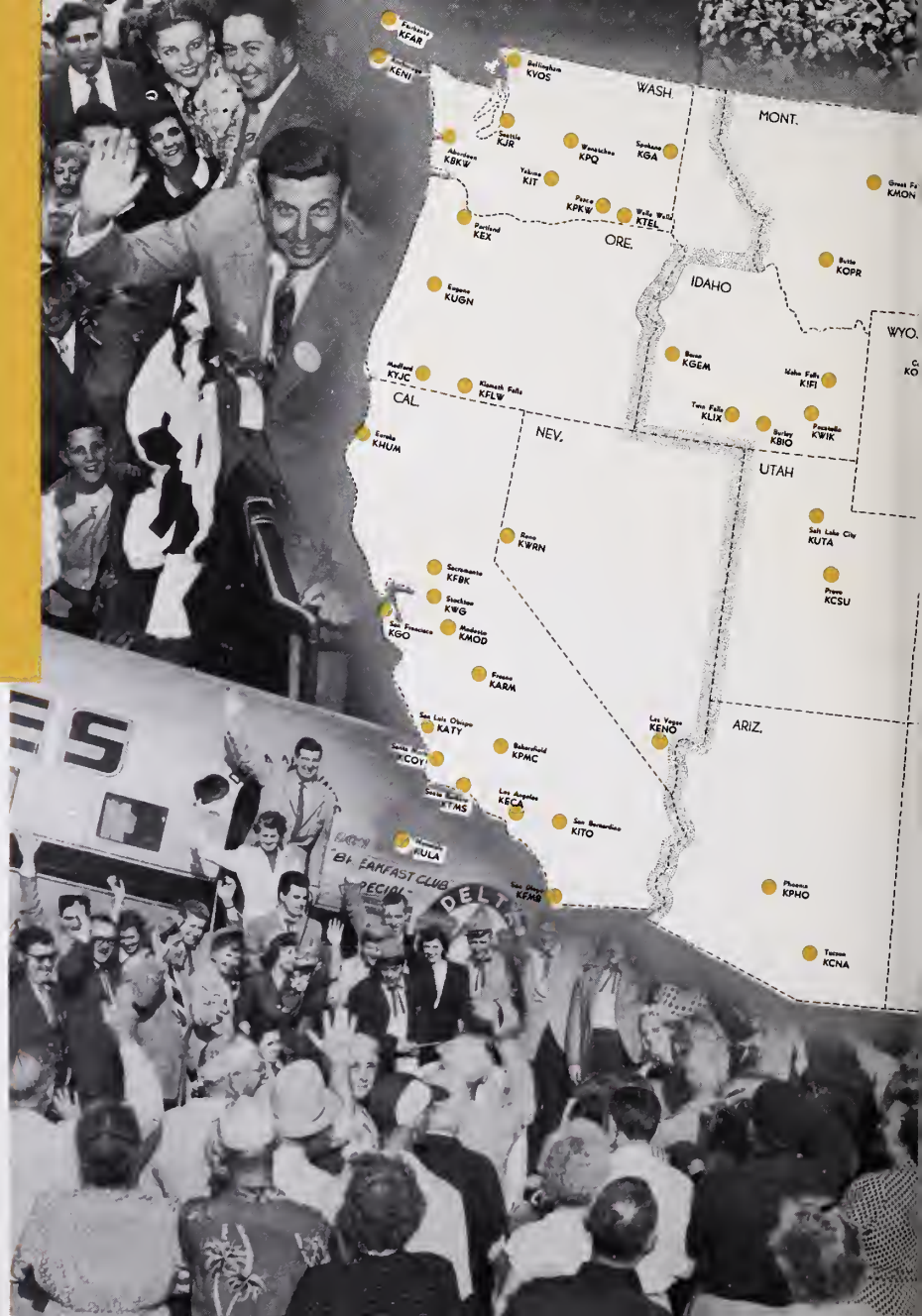
Edward J. Noble,
Chairman of the Board

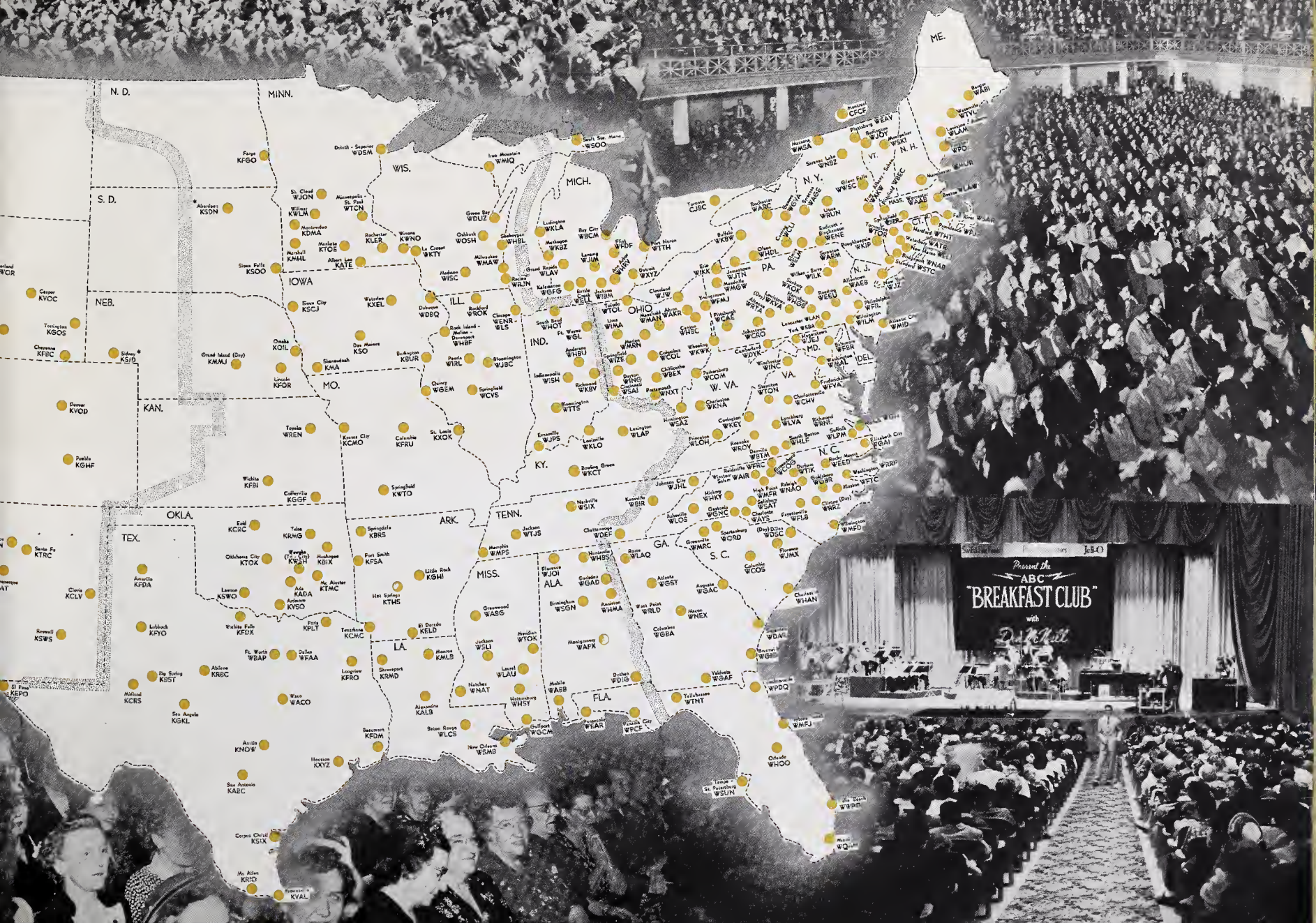


Robert E. Kintner,
President



John H. Norton, Jr.,
Vice President, Central Division





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Breakfast Club

IMPACT

In its 20 year history Don McNeill's Breakfast Club has piled up one record after another. More than 750,000 fans have purchased eight different editions of Memory Time poem books and Breakfast Club yearbooks. For many years Breakfast Club has been voted radio's "favorite audience participation show."

Two events in 1952 illustrate Breakfast Club's greatest asset — its ability to sell. Fifteen hundred communities staged "Don McNeill Week" events for Swift & Co., and in four weeks last year, more than 30,000 fans voted for Salesman Don or Sam by buying Philco products.

Other highlights of Breakfast Club's impact are pictured on these pages.

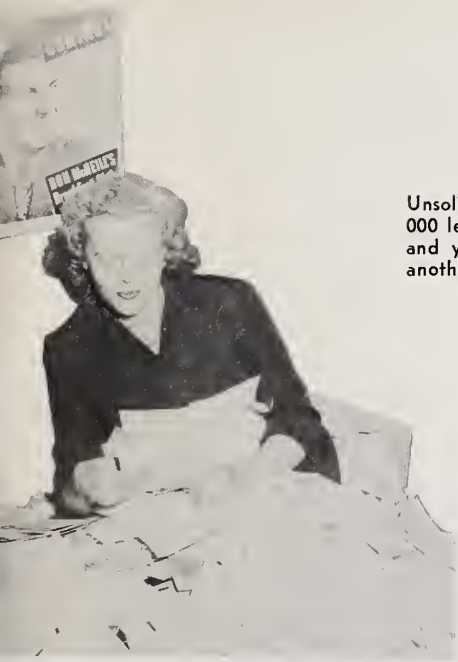


Breakfast Club Bond breakfasts and tours during World War II sold more than \$35 million in treasury bonds.

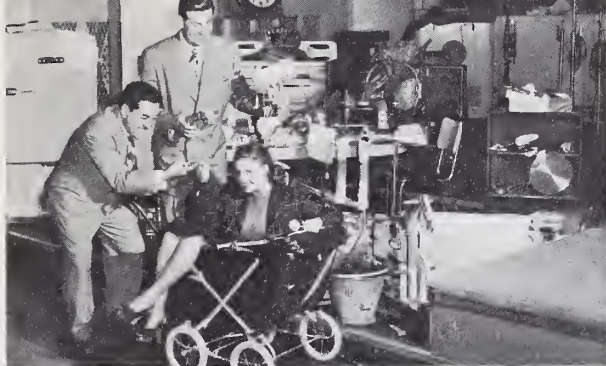


Over a million listeners applied for charter membership cards in a two-week period of 1944.





Unsolicited fan mail totals 100,000 letters a year. Ticket requests and yearbook orders account for another 250,000 letters.



\$15,000 in gifts were brought to Don for distribution to the needy at two studio "Giveaway-in-reverse" shows in 1947 and 1949.



Don's plea for Breakfast Clubbers to share a meal with less fortunate neighbors overseas in 1946 produced 40 tons of food.



17,000 fans jammed Madison Square Garden at 8 a.m. in 1946 for a Breakfast Club-Circus broadcast.



2½ million "Sunshine Shower" cards or letters have been sent to hospital patients since 1946.



Don McNeill as he appeared before the microphone in 1933.



First Year

1933

Chicago's Century of Progress was news when Don McNeill took over an ugly-duckling early morning radio show on June 23. He introduced a new format, four calls to breakfast, March Time and Memory Time, sprinkled it with corn and his personality, and called it Breakfast Club.

Starting with a few pages of notes which he laughingly called a script, Don handled the show "purely catch as catch can with 16 messers of ceremonies." These included: singer Dick Teela, Walter Blaufuss, 12 musicians and announcer Bill Kephart.

In the absence of an audience, Don invented characters like "Homer", the hero of his one-man, one-act plays, and "Juliet", the dumb dame. Listeners were also introduced to Bill Krenz, the tallest piano player in captivity, and "Elmer" (Bill Short), the man of many romances.



Big Bill Krenz still captivates audiences with his original piano compositions. Eddie Ballantine, present conductor, is the only other 20 year veteran of Breakfast Club music.

Dick Teela and The Originalities, a group of B.C. musicians, presented this picture in 1933. Left to right, Jean Cafarelli, Bill Giese, Dick Teela, Bill Short and Jack Rose.



Walter Blaufuss, composer of popular songs and a boy prodigy of Milwaukee, conducted the orchestra until 1942.



OF CORN

The Breakfast Club family really started to grow in 1934. Comedy and singing acts were added and, within the same week in October, both Don McNeill and Jack Owens became the proud fathers of Tommy McNeill and Mary Anne Owens.

1934

Jack had replaced Dick Teela as vocalist in April. The Merry Macs, Songfellows, Three C's, Morin Sisters and Ranch Boys were the featured singing acts. Breakfast Clubbers will also recall the fine appearances of Marian and Jim Jordan (now Fibber McGee and Molly), Bill (Mr. Wimple) Thompson, and Fields and Hall.

The audience was growing, too. Fan mail produced enough material this year so that Don could dispense with a script. The saga of Jimmy Darou, a Canadian jockey hurt in a three-horse spill, and the fables and foibles of other listeners have been the standard Breakfast Club diet ever since.



Marian and Jim Jordan before they won fame as "Fibber McGee and Molly."

Jack Owens listens attentively as Don and Walter discuss a program in 1934.



Jimmy Darou, one of Breakfast Club's earliest fans, sent Don this photograph. "I've never missed a program since 1933, when I was hurt. I really don't know how I would have had the courage to get along without you and Memory Time."



While America was asking "what is swing music?", the Breakfast Club and Don McNeill were featuring world cruises in fantasy. The "rug dance" (when Don asked housewives to pick up a throw rug and dance to Walter Blaufuss' music) reached new heights of popularity.

1935

These were the musicians of 1935: George Kayser, Carl Fasshauer, Al Spiegel and Bill Short, strings; Bill Krenz, piano; Harold Kooden, Bob Strong and Ted Wheeler, reeds; Eddie Ballantine, Ernesto Arrigoini and Carol Martin, brass; Jack Rose, guitar and Sam Baum, drums.

Other familiar names were Gale Page, "Doctor" Pratt, The King's Jesters, Hollywood Hi-Hatters, Rangers, Mary Steele, Three Flats, Sylvia Clark and the Doring Sisters. Edna O'Dell became the first regular girl vocalist.

In December, Tommy McNeill made his radio debut at the age of 14 months.



Gale Page and "Doctor" Russell Pratt were frequent Breakfast Club visitors in 1935. Here, they and Don McNeill are about to enjoy some pink cotton candy.



"Take a 2-minute stretch" is Walter Blaufuss' order to the 1935 Breakfast Club orchestra.



Edna O'Dell, green-eyed beauty from Marion, Ind., was the first regular Breakfast Club songstress.



The McNeill family in 1936. Don holds Tommy, 2, as Kay exhibits Don Jr., born April 14.



Practicing what they preach, this 1936 group of breakfasters "start the day with a smile, music and an extra cup of coffee." Left to right, Carl Fasshauer, Bill Short, Earl Roberts, Walter Blaufuss, Helen Jane Belke, Don, Frank Papile, Clark Dennis, Bill Krenz and Eddie Ballantine.

1936



"A believe-it-or-not organization, composed of miracle men and miracle women," read the inscription on a radio medal of merit. It was Breakfast Club's first national recognition, but

believe-it-or-not, it didn't produce a sponsor.

Don McNeill celebrated his 1000th Breakfast Club broadcast in September with two new singers. Clark Dennis of Flint, Mich. and Helen Jane Behlke of Bemidji, Minn. had replaced Jack Owens and Edna O'Dell.

Walter Blaufuss and Don composed the hymn "My Cathedral" and it was performed for the first time the morning King George of England was buried. This was also the year Don brought Minnie, the singing mouse of Woodstock, Ill., to the microphone.



Annette King joined the show in November.



When a fan sent them gift pajamas, Bill Krenz, Don McNeill, Walter Blaufuss and Johnny Johnston promptly dressed for this picture.

Samuel Taggart Cowling II comes naturally by his curly toes as this 1915 picture shows.



"Hold your noses for the Romeos" was this trio's own introduction. Left to right, Gil Jones, Louie Perkins and Sam Cowling, Jeffersonville, Ind. classmates.



Aunt Fanny (Fran Allison) left a teaching career in Iowa to join Don McNeill's Breakfast Club.

1937 The year "The Big Apple" took the younger generation by storm, Breakfast Club listeners met Fran Allison and Sam Cowling for the first time.

Both started as singers. Fran gave up vocalizing to become Aunt Fanny, the lovable chatterbox, while Sam developed into McNeill's heckler.

In August, a hopelessly ill Marine wrote Don that seeing a Breakfast Club broadcast was "the thing he wanted to do before dying." He became the first invited studio visitor.

Clark Dennis left to join Fibber McGee's show and Helen Jane Behlke also departed. Jack Baker, Johnny Johnston and Annette King carried on. Don introduced Inspiration Time, and Breakfast Club was ranked sixth in the musical division of network shows by a national radio poll.

1938

"Corn and country ham continues to draw more people than caviar," reported a radio writer. "That's why Breakfast Club, a show by ordinary people like us, is so successful."

Reading remarks like this, fans couldn't understand why the show wasn't sponsored. One Breakfast Clubber from Wyoming went so far as to apply for the job. He wrote Don, "I have never done any sponsoring, but let me know about the duties and the pay!"

Don fulfilled a five-year-old dream when he conducted the show, pajama-clad from his own bed at home. The cast and the orchestra carried on from the studio.

The Ranch Boys left to travel 4,000 miles across country on horseback and Annette King became Mrs. Frank Reid, Jr. Breakfast Club's first publication, a book of poems called *Memory Time* made its appearance.



Highlight of 1938 was the "Breakfast In Bed" broadcast. Two year old Donnie participated with Don and Kay, but brother Tom was ill.

Ranch Boys head for the wide open spaces. Left to right, Jack Ross, Hubert (Shorty) Carson and Joe (Curley) Bradley.

The Vagabonds appeared on the Breakfast Club when Annette King, Walter Blaufuss and Don posed for this picture.



Ralph Smith and "Mokey" pose with Don McNeill during "Be Kind To Animals Week" in 1939.



1939

Don started the year by dedicating a broadcast to a seaman on duty in mid-Atlantic. "I have heard you from almost every port in the world," the seaman wrote McNeill. "I will be listening again in January when my ship is at sea."

A host of other fans voted Breakfast Club and Don McNeill their "favorite program and favorite master of ceremonies." Annette King left the show to await the arrival of her first-born, a baby girl, in May. Evelyn Lynne of Dallas, who was to make her "Dear Diary" entries famous, and Nancy Martin of Wheeling, W. Va., became regular girl vocalists.

The Dinning Sisters, Vass Family, Vagabonds, Cadets, Romeos and The Escorts and Betty were featured singing acts of the year. In November, Breakfast Club celebrated its 2,000th broadcast.



Evelyn Lynne joined the show in time for Breakfast Club's 2000th broadcast.



Nancy Martin began a seven-year reign as "Queen of the breakfast table" in 1939.



Pappy's crazy recipes and the Vagabond's instrumental imitations, spirituals and jive were Breakfast Club favorites. Left to right, Robert O'Neal, Norval Taborn, Ray (Pappy) Grant and John Jordan.



Professionally a legitimate quartet, The Cadets couldn't resist heckling McNeill & Co. at breakfast. Left to right, Homer Snodgrass, Ken Morrow, Cal Schiebe, Al Stracke, and Reo Fletcher (seated).

1940

Local sponsorship of the Breakfast Club on individual stations finally broke the long sponsorship drought. Don and the gang were successful in selling dozens of products, ranging from laundry service to headache remedies.

These success stories attracted 120 radio station representatives and advertising agency men to a gala Breakfast Club broadcast as the network prepared to sell the show nationally.

Don built his first house, a log cabin, on a lake near Chicago. Fans contributed many knick-knacks for the house and again picked Breakfast Club as their favorite program and Don as favorite m.c. The singers also rated tops.



Don adds a trophy to the mantel of his new home. He called it "Lumbago Manor" because it had "a creek in the back."



Dress parade after a 1941 broadcast shows The Escorts and Betty, Joe Gallicchio and the orchestra with Don and Nancy.

1941

"Praise the sponsors and pass the products!"

Swift & Co. became Breakfast Club's first network sponsor on February 8, buying fifteen minutes three times a week on 75 stations. This was the largest daytime commercial hook-up at the time.

Nine days later Acme Paint Co. bought a segment of the show and on November 14, Cream of Wheat joined the sponsor family. Breakfast Club had finally arrived commercially.

Visitors from 25 states and Canada were counted in the studio audience one June morning. Capacity crowds were attending each broadcast.

Evelyn Lynne left to marry Eddie Coontz of Tulsa and Marion Mann was brought in from Columbus to share vocal honors with Nancy.



The Swedehearts of St. Paul were born in the voices of these Escorts: Floyd Holm, Ted Clare and Cliff Petersen.



Son Number Three . . . Robert Patrick made his appearance in the McNeill household on St. Patrick's day, 1941.



"Star of Stars" and "Best Variety Show and Girl Singer" awards are admired by Don, Nancy and representatives of Swift & Co.

Marion Mann and Nancy Martin became favorite pin-up girls of the boys in service.



Harry Kogen, Durward Kirby and Marion Mann join Sam Cowling and Don around the breakfast table.



1942 At the beginning of the war, Don restated Breakfast Club's original objective. "As an American Institution," he said, "it is our function to keep 'em smiling, to work and to sacrifice."

In cooperation with the U. S. Treasury, Breakfast Club appeared at bond rallies, service camps and institutions. More than \$25 million in bonds were sold at one Chicago bond breakfast.

When Walter Blaufuss retired because of ill health, Harry Kogen, Joe Gallicchio and Rex Maupin shared the baton. Don was awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters degree at St. Bonaventure College and radio listeners named him "Star of Stars." Breakfast Club and Nancy Martin also won awards.

Fan mail was getting bigger all the time. An Ohio listener topped the contributions this year with a letter measuring 7 by 5 feet.



When Nancy Martin became Mrs. Sam McEldowney, the wedding party included Lt. and Mrs. Archie Levington (Fran Allison).

1943

With 15 orchestra and staff members in the armed forces, Breakfast Club's 3000th broadcast found family cast members working overtime.

The National Paper Salvage drive for children was inaugurated on one broadcast. Special appearances were also made at Great Lakes Naval Training Station, Fort Benjamin Harrison, and the President's Birthday Ball.

Don aired a plea for women to sign up for emergency nursing service while he was hospitalized with a "strep" throat. The late sister Kenny and a polio patient she helped were honored guests on another broadcast. In a lighter vein, Breakfast Club staged a one-man band contest. With Paul Whiteman supplying the program notes, studio janitor Archie Sweet wrested the "world's worst" title from Panhandle Pete of Grand Island, Neb. The Kellogg Company joined the sponsor family and Breakfast Club was voted "favorite morning program" for second consecutive year.



The three McNeill boys appeared together for the first time on a Christmas week broadcast. Left to right: Don Jr., Don, Tom, Nancy Martin, Kay and Bobbie.

"Fiction and Fact from Sam's Almanac" is born in the agile mind of Sam Cowling, who emerged as McNeill's heckler.



The first full scale promotion to enroll new listeners resulted in over one million Breakfast Clubbers applying for charter membership cards. The offer had to be withdrawn after the first week. With the world still engulfed in war, Don introduced Prayer Time as a "silent prayer for a world united in peace." Kay McNeill's first book, "Don's Other Life", and Don's "No Cigarettes" were best sellers.

1944

Two old friends — Aunt Fanny (Fran Allison) and Jack Owens — returned to the breakfast table. The "cruising crooner" was born when Jack Owens sang a love song to his wife, Helen, as she sat in the audience one morning.

By broadcasting direct from his home in Winnetka, surrounded by the cast and their children, Don succeeded in spending his first Christmas morning in 12 years with Kay and the boys.



Listeners accepted Don's Moment of Silent Prayer as reverently as did his studio audience.



"Yes, we have 'No Cigarettes'", was McNeill's solution for the cigarette shortage.



A song was in order when Fran Allison and Jack Owens rejoined the cast in 1944.

The war bonds Breakfast Club sold (\$7 million), the crowds it drew (65,000 with 200,000 turned away), and the stunts pulled on a two-week Eastern tour made radio history. In Radio City the audiences were five times greater than any other daytime broadcast. In Richmond a woman offered \$50 for a Breakfast Club ticket, but there were no takers.

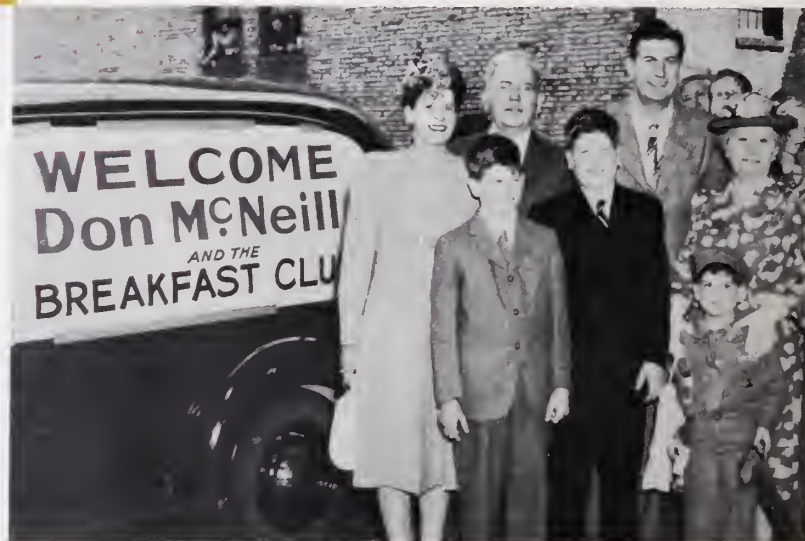
The 12th anniversary show from Sheboygan sold \$621,250 more in 7th War Loan Bonds. Earlier, Don signed a new five-year contract. In September, Philco Corporation became sponsors of the fourth quarter hour. Oct. 27 marked the last Saturday broadcast as the show went on a five-day-a-week schedule. Following Walter

Blaufuss' death, Eddie Ballantine became maestro and Cliff Petersen, producer.

1945



"July Jingle Bells" ring out as Breakfast Club stages its famous "Christmas In July" broadcast for 25 servicemen separated from their families in 1944.



The McNeill family in the old home town of Sheboygan. Left to right: Kay, Don Jr., Harry T., Tom, Don, Mrs. Harry T. McNeill, and Bob.

Hildegarde helps Don launch the 7th War Loan Drive in Washington, D. C.

Aunt Fanny helps Don celebrate his 4000th broadcast.



1946

Broadway opened its sleepy eyes early one April morning to watch 17,000 jam their way into Madison Square Garden for a Breakfast Club broadcast and a circus rehearsal. The first fan arrived at 1:30 a.m. and the Garden was filled to capacity one hour before broadcast time. The leading emcees of radio's top daytime programs met for the first time when Tom Breneman visited Don McNeill's Breakfast Club in February.

Lustre Creme bought the first quarter hour, marking the first time the full hour was sponsored. A policy of having a guest songstress each week was started when Nancy Martin and Marion Mann left to become full-time homemakers. Don's plea to share a meal with less fortunate neighbors overseas produced 40 tons of food for the Salvation Army to distribute.



New York's Finest were needed to keep order when Breakfast Clubbers stormed Madison Square Garden.



Ole Olson suggested the "Sunshine Shower" when he guest-emceed for Don in February.



Aunt Fanny and Don examine the "loot" Breakfast Clubbers brought to the "giveaway-in-reverse" show.

1947

When a studio visitor asked why Breakfast Club didn't give things away, Don McNeill took a listener's poll. When 99 per cent replied, "don't spoil the show with material giveaways," Don designated the show of November 7 for the audience to do the giving. Gifts valued at \$10,000 were given by 600 persons from 24 states. Included were food, clothing, coal, vacuum cleaners, a refrigerator and an electric range. All the gifts were distributed to the needy of Chicagoland.

19-year old Patsy Lee, one of the many guest songstresses who appeared on the show after Marion Mann and Nancy Martin left, became a regular in October. She had been singing professionally in the San Francisco area since she was 16.



More than 100 needy families received baskets of gifts similar to the one Don carries up to a third floor flat.



Patsy Lee, the Oakland, Calif. thrush.



More than 50,000 persons sought Breakfast Club tickets when the show originated in the New York area for two weeks. An overflow crowd of 4,500 turned out to see their favorites in Brooklyn. The Toni Company took over sponsorship of the first quarter hour in September. For Don's 40th birthday on December 23, the cast dressed as four-year olds. Don was outfitted in a Lord Fauntleroy suit; Sam modeled a baby's outfit; Jack was the barefoot boy and Patsy wore a pinafore.

A few days earlier the McNeill family broadcast was unusually gay because it marked 13-year old Tommy's first public appearance since his recovery from polio. When Don told about the crisis, listeners showered Tommy with 15,000 cards and letters.



This is how Jack Owens earned "the cruising crooner" title.



The two biggest kids at Don's 40th birthday broadcast.



Sam and Bobby were "feuding" when this McNeill family picture was taken in December.





Don and Kay in front of the church in San Francisco where they were married in 1931.

1948 This was "party year" on the Breakfast Club. Don McNeill was drafted as the laugh candidate of "The Fourth Party" and carried on a mock presidential campaign from May to August. An audience of 3,200 and thousands of televiewers in the East saw him "nominated" in Philadelphia. Atlanta turned out 8,000 supporters for a personal appearance show in June. Another 8,000 fans attended the "withdrawal" broadcast from New Philadelphia, Ohio.

Breakfast Club celebrated its 15th anniversary with a Garden Party broadcast from the McNeill home. Annette King, Evelyn Lynne and Nancy Martin appeared in January while Patsy Lee was ill.

Allen Prescott and Jack Paar emceed the show in February while the McNeills "second-honeymooned" in California. General Mills became the first quarter hour sponsor in August. Two months later Breakfast Club moved to the new ABC Civic Studio after 4500 broadcasts from the Merchandise Mart.



Just two months before Breneman's sudden death, Don made a surprise call on Tom at "Breakfast In Hollywood."



Aunt Fanny and Sam wore their Sunday best to all parties.



Jack Owens serenades two of Bob Murphy's daughters at the McNeill Garden Party, while a bunch of the boys critically watch Tom McNeill at the keyboard.



Atlanta hails McNeill as "The South's Favorite Yankee."



Patsy and Don aboard "the presidential special" in Chicago's Northwestern station.



Johnny Desmond brought two fine young ladies — Diane and Patricia — to the Breakfast Club family.

Don, Frank Buck and Sam at the climax of the Great Mouse Hunt.

1949

On its first visit to the state, 30,000 Texans gave Breakfast Club a riotous welcome in Dallas, Fort Worth, San Antonio and Houston. Bernie Christianson, the 11-year old Chicago vocalist, made the trip after Don discovered him in the audience one morning. In September, the late Frank Buck helped "bring back alive" a mouse which had been running wild in the studio. The STPOFFTGBPTCWB held a meeting on Breakfast Club's 16th anniversary. It was formed by Don, a Christmas week baby, as a "Society To Prevent One From Forgetting To Give Birthday Presents To Christmas Week Babies." More than 900 persons sent or brought \$5000 worth of gifts to the studio. All were turned over to the Salvation Army. Johnny Desmond succeeded Jack Owens on July 25.





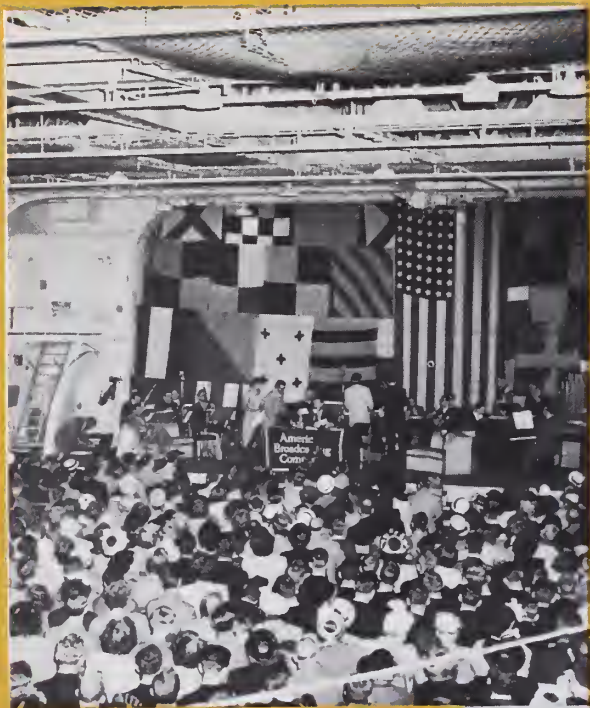
Amon Carter (Mr. Fort Worth) presented Don with a ten gallon hat.



Col. Robert Hoggard of the Salvation Army accepted the birthday gifts Don McNeill received from Breakfast Clubbers.



When Bernie Christianson celebrated his 12th birthday, he was singing three times a week on Breakfast Club.



Battle flags provide background for Brooklyn broadcast from the hanger deck of USS Enterprise.



His severest critics were on hand to celebrate Don's 5000th broadcast.



Kay nursed Don back to health when a slipped disc put the toastmaster in traction.



One of the 73 Korean war wounded veterans who was united with his family for Christmas. A Breakfast Club fund paid all travel expenses.

1950

Don McNeill's services for Breakfast Club were assured until 1970 when he signed a 20-year contract with ABC. Four other events made 1950 a year long to be remembered. Don celebrated his 5000th broadcast in April; the McNeill family spent six weeks in Europe; Philco launched the Don McNeill TV Club in September; and Breakfast Club made it a Merry Christmas for 73 Korean veterans.

Soon after the gang celebrated the start of Swift & Co.'s 10th year as a sponsor, Don was sidelined for ten days with a slipped disc. Bob (Ace) Murphy carried on the duties of toastmaster in the best Breakfast Club style. Don Ameche took over while McNeill was in Europe. The year was climaxed with Don making a \$10,000 Breakfast Club fund available for families of Korean war wounded veterans in 17 military hospitals to spend Christmas together.



Gloria Swanson helped Don initiate his TV Club for Philco in September.



Eddie Ballantine's two daughters, Cliff Petersen's son and daughter and three Murphys join the two Cowling boys in smothering Sam with gifts on a Christmas TV Club show.

Jerry Lewis broke up a Breakfast Club broadcast when he visited with the gang in April.



Twenty years later, Don and Joe E. Brown point to a picture taken in 1931. (See page 5).



A fight manager's dream! Don McNeill put Jack Dempsey and Joe Louis in the same ring for a TV Club show.

1951

Breaking an 18-year tradition, breakfast was served for the first time on Breakfast Club in April. It was a spur-of-the-moment decision prompted by a studio visitor's insistence that she be served breakfast. Don invited her to return the next day when everyone in the audience was offered a breakfast of KIX and Swift's bacon and eggs, prepared on a Philco Electric Range. Another studio guest sparked a hitch-hiking stunt. Mrs. Elmer Feagins of Texarkana told Don that her husband would walk to Chicago if McNeill interviewed her. Don did and Mr. Feagins did! As a surprise the family — five children, Mrs. Feagins and a daughter-in-law — was brought to Chicago to greet Elmer when he completed his trek. While Don was on vacation, Joe E. Brown and Peter Donald sat in for the toastmaster. Jell-O took over the first quarter hour in May, and Philco renewed both the TV Club and Breakfast Club contracts.



Six days and 820 miles later, Elmer arrived to pay off a bet he lost to his wife.

"Meet the new TV Club mascot," says Don and his heckler, Sam Cowling, strikes the dog-gonedest pose.

California in 1951

Hollywood found out "radio was still alive" when Breakfast Club arrived in February to originate ten broadcasts. The demand for tickets ran as high as 10,000 a day, but only 17,000 could be accommodated. It was the show's first California visit.

Kay McNeill made news, too, by chasing a robbery suspect in Hollywood. While walking with a friend, Kay saw a man dash from a store followed by the proprietor who was yelling he had been robbed. She ran after the two men. A passing taxi driver joined the chase and collared the suspect. Only then did Kay learn the man had threatened the store man with a knife!



Edward Arnold was Don and Kay's host at breakfast in The Brown Derby.

One of the ten capacity audiences which attended broadcasts in Hollywood.



Don and Philco were hosts to these seven Korean veterans from the Naval Hospital at Camp Pendleton, Calif.





Outfitted with rebel caps, 22 Breakfast Clubbers toured the South in a chartered Delta plane.

Naturally, the mayor of Jacksonville was the first to present Patsy Lee—the only Californian aboard — with a sack of Florida oranges.



To accommodate the overflow crowd in St. Petersburg, Breakfast Club played a ball game against the Three-Quarter Century team before 8,000 persons.

Southern trip.. 1952

More than 38,000 saw Breakfast Club in action on a two-week Southern trip which included January broadcasts from St. Louis, Louisville, Nashville, Birmingham, Atlanta, Jacksonville, St. Petersburg and Miami. There were many examples of fans traveling 300 to 500 miles. A party from Memphis registered 1300 miles round-trip. Unable to get tickets in Nashville or Birmingham, they went on to Atlanta before seeing the show.

Biggest turnout was in St. Petersburg. When all 2700 Coliseum tickets were grabbed up in one day, Don and the gang agreed to make an extra appearance with the famous Kids and Kubs softball team. The game drew the largest crowd in the history of Al Lang Field, but the Breakfast Club lost to the 75-year olds.

On its second trip of the year, Baltimore gave Breakfast Club a warm welcome in more ways than one. Six hours before air time, fire destroyed the stage curtain and all of Breakfast Club's broadcast equipment. Between the hours of 3 and 8 a.m., Station WFBR and Breakfast Club did the impossible — rented a new theater and found enough engineering and stage equipment — to put on the show as scheduled. An audience of 2,000 was treated to one of Breakfast Club's best performances. Another 12,000 saw the show in Boston, Hartford, Washington, Philadelphia and New York.

1952

In October, the show moved permanently to the Morrison Hotel. After auditioning more than 200 girl vocalists, Peggy Taylor of Alhambra, Calif., was selected in July to replace Patsy Lee. O-Cedar and Bobbi-White Rain replaced Jell-O as sponsors. Don began enrolling babies born during the Breakfast Club hour in an exclusive Baby Club.



By working all night and using borrowed equipment, the Breakfast Club gang with the help of Station WFBR were able to broadcast from another theater.

Jimmy Darou (see page 19) and his wife were greeted like old friends when they flew in from Montreal to attend a Radio City broadcast in April.



Baltimore firemen, Cliff Petersen, Engineer Jimmy Daugherty and Sam Cowling mournfully examine damage to the theater and broadcast equipment six hours before air time.

Mr. and Mrs. Rick Livvendahl at their wedding reception, May 24, in Berkeley, Calif.



Patsy and Rick admire an auto-graphed sterling silver service platter, the Breakfast Club Gang's wedding gift.



Sam raised a mustache to keep Peter Donald company when the famous story-teller sat in for Don in August.

The boys welcome Peggy Taylor as Breakfast Club's newest singing sweetheart on July 28.

Two groups from the Old Town Boys Club of Chicago set out for a row on the lake under the direction of Leroy Woodfork.



First Aid is administered by Sam Cowling and Don.



Boys Club Camp

Don McNeill shared his 1952 summer vacation with a hundred boys selected by Boys Clubs of the central region. From July 4 through September 8, ten boys spent each week-end at a camp established by the Breakfast Club toastmaster on a private lake northwest of Chicago. The purpose of the camp was to give city boys an all-expense paid vacation in the country.

The boys, 10 to 14 years old, lived in tents and took their meals in a cook house. Each group was accompanied by two adult leaders. Don provided a full program of outdoor activities under the direction of a supervisor. He and his sons spent many hours fishing, swimming, boating and hiking with the boys. All nationalities and religions were represented. The camp will be continued in 1953.



Each group attended Breakfast Club to tell the network audience of their experiences and to collect autographs.

Programs and Plans

There is more to getting Breakfast Club on the air five mornings a week than what meets the eye or ear. Planning and programming conferences, and the handling of mail keep the seven principal cast members and eight other persons busy around the clock. Mary Canny, Don's secretary, and Eddy McKean, special writer, usually meet with the cast Monday afternoons to discuss ideas sent in by listeners. One of these conferences is pictured below (right) at Don's lake lodge. Left to right, Eddy McKean, Cliff Petersen, Don McNeill, Johnny Desmond, Fran Allison (Aunt Fanny), Peggy Taylor, Mary Canny, with Eddie Ballantine and Sam Cowling in the foreground.



Business and promotional affairs connected with Breakfast Club are under the supervision of Ralph Bergsten, business manager and vice president of Don McNeill Enterprises, and Fred Montiegel (right), yearbook editor and promotion manager.

Material discussed at cast meetings is carefully screened by this quartet of secretaries in Don McNeill's office. Left to right, Peggy Comfort, Alice Grabau, Pat Bard and Marge Schlitt.



Convention Sidelights

Looking for Don McNeill in unusual Chicago locations was a television game during the 1952 Republican and Democratic conventions. Don had a mobile unit assigned to his morning convention sidelight show by Philco. It roamed the streets, permitting him to interview city and convention workers, candidates, delegates and visitors. In the montage on this page, starting lower left and continuing clock-wise, McNeill is shown delivering visitors to convention hall by tally-ho; staging a fashion review in front of Buckingham Fountain; visiting Riverview Park; transporting delegates by yacht; interviewing the donkey and elephant with Bob Hope at Brookfield Zoo; chatting with a catleman and his family in the Stock Yards; and demonstrating the position most people took after the final session.

ON STAGE, Breakfast Club presents an imposing family picture of 47 performers, musicians, announcers, technicians and other personnel involved in a broadcast.

Seated, left to right: Mary Canny, Pat Bard, Marge Schlitt and Peggy Comfort of Don McNeill's staff; Johnny Desmond, Peggy Taylor, Don McNeill, Aunt Fanny (Fran Allison) and Sam Cowling, cast members; Maury Murray, Alice Grabau and Cliff Petersen, production staff. Standing, 1st row, left to right: Fred Montiegel, Ralph Bergsten and Eddy McKean of Don McNeill's staff; Hal Hiatt and Henry Coffey of ABC music department; Don Jacoby, Russ Wilt, Oscar Chausow, Jack Cordaro, Eddie Ballantine, Charlie Tamburino, George Oliver, Jack Shirra and Tommy Thomas, ABC musicians; Jay Arlan, Vi Berwick, Bob Murphy and Don Dowd, announcers; Jimmy Daugherty and Harry Schumacher, engineers. Standing, 2nd row, left to right: Bob Eckhardt, Don Rushton and George Thompson, ABC Guest Relations staff; George Jean, Maurice Morovitsky, Shep Lehnhoff, Buddy Shaw, Byron Baxter, Bill Krenz, Lee Knight, Seymour Drugan, Tom Filas and Fritz Wolff, ABC musicians; Charles Wilson and Charles Greenschlag, stage hands.



Breakfast Club's Big Family

Photo Credits: Don McNeill family MCCALL's (page 3), Madison Square Garden PARADE (pages 17 and 31), Korean Veteran and family OFFICIAL U. S. NAVY (page 38), Cast Conference COLLIER's (page 47). Special thanks, too, to NBC and ABC press departments and to all contributing photographers.