



The Old Radio Times

The Official Publication of the Old-Time Radio Researchers

Mar/Apr 2011 www.otrr.org 2200 Subscribers

Number 54

Gleason & Armstrong: Knights of the Road By Doug Hopkinson



Robert
Armstrong

James
Gleason

James Gleason and Robert Armstrong were both first and foremost stage and film performers. They both began on stage and they both went into motion pictures. Their first success together was in the 1925 Broadway play (written by James Gleason and Richard Taber) *Is Zat So?* (An interesting side-note is that Fannie Brice



Fannie Brice

was a major financial backer of this play.) This marked the beginning of both Robert Armstrong's and James Gleason's meteoric rise in the entertainment industry. It was the play that launched their careers and set them on the road to fame and

fortune. It was so popular they eventually took it overseas to England and then on to Hollywood. In truth, it was Gleason and his wife Lucile Webster that were the driving and creative force which powered their initial journey. That is not to say that Robert was not a talent in his own right. Time has proven beyond any doubt that he had plenty of talent, but in 1925, Armstrong just happened to be in the right place at the right time to catch a ride. A ride that enabled him to begin and sustain a long and successful career of his own apart from the Gleasons who were accelerating on a track which would take them to achievements they never dreamed possible..

With the immense success of *Is Zat So?* Hollywood scouts were watching Robert Armstrong and he soon had a studio contract. He appeared



in his first film in 1927 and quickly did ten more films in 1928. James Gleason had already done his first film in 1922 but turned most of his efforts towards writing after that. He did one movie in 1928 and six more in 1929. Of those six, one co-starred Robert Armstrong and the other five co-starred his wife Lucile. Gleason and Armstrong each appeared in well over 100 other movies. They appeared together in a total seven different movies between 1929 and 1936. Twenty years later in 1956, they both appeared together on an episode of the television show *Cheyenne*. Armstrong's career was solidly set as an actor in the film industry but Gleason's was much more diverse. James Gleason's career included acting, writing, directing, producing and even a bit of politics. While all this is very interesting it has nothing to do with radio which is meant to be the main thrust of this article.

Previous researchers and authors have provided much of the information that follows about the radio shows in which our two subjects appeared during their careers. There may well be some appearances by either one that are missing.

In searching through many tomes on the subject of radio, this author found only one reference to Robert Armstrong ever appearing on a

radio show. That show was a 1936 *Lux Radio Theater* production of *Is Zat So?* in which Armstrong portrayed his same character from the 1925 stage production. Interestingly, Gleason did not appear on that particular show although he did make six different appearances on *Lux Radio Theater* between 1936 and 1944. Gleason was a regular member of the cast on the *Bob Burns Show* from 1943 to 1946. He also had his own short-lived 30 minute show which lasted only 1 month on the ABC network from January 21, 1945 to February 25, 1946 titled *Jimmy Gleason's Diner*. His longtime wife Lucile was his co-star and they portrayed themselves in the show. The basic premise of the show was conversations with his customers at the diner. Jimmy was the cook and Lucile was the waitress. One could speculate as to whether or not the tragic death of their son (less than 4 weeks prior to the premier) led to the early demise of this radio show. To date, no episodes of *Jimmy Gleason's Diner* are known to exist in general circulation. James Gleason is also credited with 4 appearances in the various incarnations of *The Screen Guild Theater* between 1941 and 1946 and at least one appearance each on *Cavalcade of America* (1/10/1944) and *Old Gold Comedy Theater* (2/18/1945). There is one radio show which both Jimmy Gleason and Robert Armstrong appeared in together that seems to have escaped the notice of radio historians. This show was *The Gleason and Armstrong Show* and it is the main subject of this article.

The Gleason and Armstrong Show (aka *Knights of the Road*) is until now, a relatively unknown, short-lived, 15 minute syndicated radio program from 1931. It starred James Gleason and Robert Armstrong who were two very popular character actors at that time. Although they worked very well together they were not a

team per se like Laurel and Hardy or Moran and Mack. One could liken them to Hope and Crosby. When they performed together they charmed the audiences yet they were both very successful on their own.

The show is about two characters named, appropriately enough, Jimmy Gleason and Robert Armstrong (referred to as Robbie), who want to buy a property from the father of Elizabeth Frost (Robbie's girlfriend) so they can build and operate a gasoline service station of their own. They plan to tour the United States for one year, observing other service stations in order to educate themselves as how to make their future service station the best. Mr. Frost draws up a contract for the sale of his lot with all sorts of clauses which include having them sell his patented "Frost tire puller" as they travel and a morality clause (that Jimmy is indignant over). The contract calls for the duo to earn \$2,000.00 in an honest way during their trip. The clause that most concerns Robbie is the one that promises Elizabeth's hand in marriage should he and Jimmy fulfill the obligations set forth in the contract. They sign the contract and begin their trip from Elizabeth, NJ in a \$35.00 Model T that Robbie had purchased. The ensuing episodes



Robert Armstrong

are all situational comedy with occasional drama and action thrown in. All the episodes are sequential following the basic storyline as the partners travel through various towns and cities across the United States. The boys head west and never seem to make much money but al



Jimmy Gleason

ways manage to make enough to push on to the next town. Robbie tries his luck as a pugilist in one episode trying for a \$100 prize but ends up losing because he led with his jaw instead of his left. Another episode finds them in "Pittsboig" accepting a reward of \$1,000 for capturing a

bank robber. After this windfall they meet up with a teenage boy named Oswald whom they take with them as their chauffeur. Oswald is not a very good driver but he is good at eating (especially beef stew) and sleeping. The trio wend their way to St. Louis, MO and take jobs at the zoo there. Robbie becomes a hero for saving a little girl from an escaped lion (for which he was responsible) and gets a \$500 reward from her father. In Oklahoma City, Oswald parts ways with Jimmy and Robbie who are heading to Texas. In El Paso they gain a canine friend that they name Scram. In Santa Fe, New Mexico they meet up by chance, with Oswald and catch the mumps from him. Oswald's parents agree to let him travel as far as Hollywood with Jimmy and Robbie and so the trio is reunited. The last episode this author was able to find and listen to (episode 103) finds the trio in Los Angeles and being apprehended by the police for the purpose of giving them reward money for some smugglers they had previously helped capture while they were in Mexico.

The earliest broadcast this author has identified appeared in an L.A. Times daily radio listing on May 4th, 1931.

The following day there was a large advertisement in the newspaper featuring pictures of



JAMES GLEASON

...of "Is Zat So" and "The Shannons of Broadway" fame — popular comedy writer and star in many stage and screen hits. Now with RKO-Pathé. You will remember him in "Beyond Victory," "A Wise Child," "Big Money," "A Free Soul," "Pittie on the Kite," "Her Man," "Oh Yeah," and other late pictures.

TONIGHT AND EVERY NIGHT
except Saturday and Sunday

Jimmy Gleason
and
Bob Armstrong

8:00 over KFWB
"KNIGHTS OF THE ROAD"

acclaimed by those who have heard it as one of 1931's greatest radio features

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

that lovable star of the stage, screen and radio — now under contract with RKO-Pathé. Some of his late pictures are "Paid," "Tom Man," "Big Money," "The Racketeer," "Big News," and "Oh Yeah."

James Gleason and Robert Armstrong and proclaiming their show "Knights of the Road" as being "... one of 1931's greatest radio features" and that it was sponsored by Union Oil. It is interesting to note that the daily radio listing of May 4th cited the show as "Knights of the Road", as did the large ad on May 5th; yet the radio highlights on both dates read "Gleason and Armstrong". The daily listing of May 5th fails to indicate the show at all. All of the following

daily listings that this author was able to peruse, referred to the show as either "Gleason and Armstrong" or "Knights of the Road". There was no discernable pattern or logic as to which title the paper decided to print on any given day. It should also be noted that the labels on 94 transcription discs of this show (currently held in a private collection) all bear a Hollywood Broadcast Features label and only make reference to a show title as Gleason-Armstrong. In fact, the



title "Knights of the Road" in reference to Gleason and Armstrong, did not appear in print anywhere again (to this author's knowledge) until October 4th, 1937 when the Ogden Standard Examiner of Ogden, Utah announced that beginning that night station KLO would begin airing Gleason and Armstrong appearing as "The Knights of the Road". It is unclear, yet doubtful, that these KLO broadcasts were live appearances or new episodes. It is more likely that KLO acquired the then 6 year old electrical transcriptions and began broadcasting them. The last L.A. Times listing found for Gleason and Armstrong is for September 22, 1931. Initially, the show began as a 15 minute daily Monday through Friday broadcast. A detailed research of all the daily listings in the L.A. Times shows that on many occasions it was not listed as airing on Mondays but it was scheduled for 30 minutes the following day. As all good researchers know, depending solely upon newspaper broadcast listings is not the most reliable way to document a series log. The listings also indicate intermittently, non-broadcast days as well as other days that cite a 30 minute time slot. What is interest-

TODAY'S RADIO HIGH LIGHTS

GENERAL

- 7:30 a.m. President Hoover, opening convention of International Chamber of Commerce. KECA.
- 7:45 a.m. President Hoover, opening convention. KHJ.
- 8:15 a.m. Reception to King of Siam in New York City. KHJ.

VARIETY

- 5 p.m. The Three Bakers (CBS) Reisman's Orchestra. Brandford Browne. KHJ.
- 7 p.m. Frank Watanabe. KNX.
- 7:15 p.m. Arthur Pryor's Band (CBS.) KHJ.
- 8 p.m. Blue Monday Jamboree (surprise program.) KHJ.
- 8 p.m. Arizona Wranglers. KNX.
- 8 p.m. Adventures of Sherlock Holmes (NBC.) KFI.
- 8 p.m. Gleason and Armstrong (screen comedians.) KFVB.
- 9 p.m. Hamlet in Hollywood. KTM.
- 9:30 p.m. Ranch Boys. KTM.

ing is that there are 103 episodes known to exist and if one were to count the number of days from May 4, 1931 (first listing) through September 22, 1931 (last listing) excluding weekends, one arrives at the number 103. This is not an attempt on the author's part to create a Stonehenge or Great Pyramid type of mathematical mysticism. It is merely being pointed out because the source of the transcription discs (used for this article) had stated that 103 episodes comprised the entire run of the show. While it is purported that episode 103 is the last episode made, there is no direct evidence (to date).

James Austin Gleason was born on May 23, 1882 in New York City, NY. His parents, William J. Gleason (a well known comedian-actor-producer-director) and Mina Crolius Gleason (long time actress with the Boston Museum Stock Company) were both theater performers, so acting came rather honestly and naturally to him. Gleason was a veteran of the military and served in the Spanish-American War and World War I. Just prior to WWI he had rejoined the army and headed to Texas when Pancho Villa had started some trouble on the border. In 1906 he married Lucile Webster, a young actress who worked in and around his hometown of Oakland, CA. He remained married to Lucile until her death in 1947. Together they had one son, Russell, who became an actor in his own right. Tragically, Russell died at the age of 36 on Christmas day in 1945. His death was the result of a fall from a fourth story hotel window. Of all the write-ups this author has read on Russell's death, none mention the word "suicide" although it is heavily implied. One newspaper did run the storyline as "Son of Actor Jimmy Gleason Ends Own Life". James Gleason passed away on April 12, 1959. No cause of death was listed in the many published obituaries other than "after a long illness" although at least one article mentioned that he had gone in for prostate surgery in December of 1958 and another mentions that he had been in the hospital almost a year due to chronic asthma. This mini-biography of James Gleason hardly does justice to him and all his accomplishments. To do proper credit to his life story would require an entirely separate article to support this as fact.

Robert Armstrong was born Donald Robert Smith or Robert William Armstrong (depending upon which source you prefer) on November 20, 1890 in Saginaw, MI.

His father ran a profitable business providing

We are offering a **FREE** issue in hopes you like what you see, and will want to subscribe. Use the handy coupon below.



- Yes, send me a free issue of the Digest.
- Enter my ___ year(s) subscription at _____
One year \$15 for 4 issues.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

10280 Gunpowder Road Florence, KY 41042
888.477.9112 bob_burchett@msn.com

Editorial Policy of the Old Radio Times

It is the policy of The Old Radio Times not to accept paid advertising in any form. We feel that it would be detrimental to the goal of the Old Time Radio Researchers organization to distribute its products freely to all wishing them. Accepting paid advertising would compromise that goal, as dealers whose ideals are not in line with ours could buy ad space.

That being said, The Old Radio Times will run free ads from individuals, groups and dealers whose ideals are in line with the group's goals and who support the hobby.

Publishing houses who wish to advertise in this magazine will be considered if they supply the publisher and editor with a review copy of their new publication. Anyone is free to submit a review or a new publication about old time radio or nostalgia though.

Dealers whose ads we carry or may carry have agreed to give those placing orders with them a discount if they mention that they saw their ad in 'The Old Radio Times'. This is in line with the groups goal of making otr available to the collecting community.

We will gladly carry free ads for any other old time radio group or any group devoted to nostalgia. Submit your ads to: bob_burchett@msn.com

Edited by Bob Burchett
bob_burchett@msn.com
Distributed by Jim Beshires
beshiresjim@yahoo.com

the use of his small fleet of boats on Lake Michigan. Despite his success in Michigan, his father was lured to the Pacific Northwest by the news of gold being discovered in Alaska. He moved the family to Seattle, WA when Robert was very young.

Robert attended school in Seattle and went on to law school at the University of Washington. He chose to drop out during his senior year to join a touring vaudeville company. In New York, he went to work with his uncle Paul Armstrong who was a writer and producer.

Paul Armstrong's claim to fame was playwrighting *Alias Jimmy Valentine* which was originally a short story titled "A Retrieved Reformation" written by O. Henry. *Alias Jimmy Valentine* the play, opened in January of 1910. It was made into a movie no less than three times. It should also be mentioned that Paul Armstrong's son, Paul Armstrong Jr., continued the Jimmy Valentine legacy by penning two additional stories that were turned into movies. Robert toured the country doing small performances and while out west joined up with a stock company that was owned by Mr. and Mrs. William Gleason. He went back east to New York with them and began to learn acting in earnest. His first major Broadway role was in 1925 when he was given one of the lead roles in *Is Zat So?* Robert joined the Army during WWI and served as a private in the infantry.

He was married four times during his life with the last one taking place on January 1, 1940 to Claire Louise Frisbie Armstrong. This marriage lasted until his death in 1973. An interesting note is that both Robert and Claire divorced their respective spouses the day before their wedding. Also of note is that Claire's married name had been Armstrong. She had divorced Rolfe Armstrong to marry Robert Armstrong. A

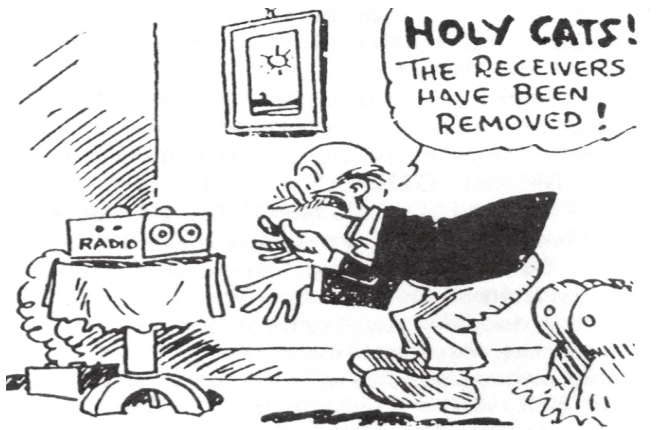
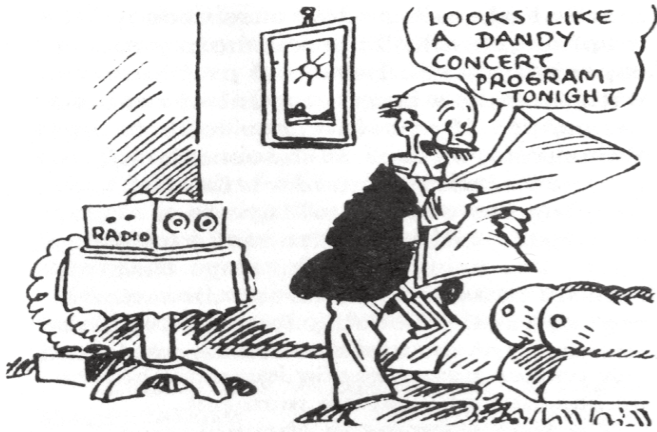
strange coincidence and for the record, Rolfe was not related to Robert. Sadly, this author was unable to discover any additional information regarding Mr. Armstrong's personal life.

He was, and still is, best known for and associated with, the character Carl Denham, the fast talking movie producer that brought a giant ape to New York city in the original 1933 film King Kong; this despite the fact that he appeared and starred in well over 100 movies and almost 50 different television shows. He passed away on April 20, 1973 in Santa Monica, CA after what was termed "a short illness". Even in death his obituaries focused primarily on his King Kong role, especially because he died within hours of Merian C. Cooper who was the producer and co-director of the classic film.

The Gleason and Armstrong Show is quite entertaining if you enjoy the nostalgic aspects of the early 1930s. Their eastern dialect and period slang offer insight to the common man of that time. To hear Gleason say to Armstrong "Boy am I crisp!" when he gets mad about something or the way they both say "Why soitenly" and refer to other men as "mugs" and using terms such as dame, swell, elegant, hunky-dory, dome (for head) and beak (for nose) and of course the ever popular "how do you like dem apples", somehow takes one back to the depression era even if one was never there before. The running joke throughout all the episodes is Robbie slamming the door shut every time he enters or exits the car despite Jimmy imploring him not to. In several episodes the two briefly showcase a talent for singing, when they harmonize a cappella. (This author particularly enjoyed their rendition of Ragtime Cowboy Joe.) It's amazing to hear that a five course meal costs 50 cents or that they filled the gas tank and topped off the oil for 90 cents or that they had the engine overhauled for 12 dollars. As one might expect, a common subject throughout the series is money; mostly



the lack thereof but also staggering amounts (for that time) in the form of rewards and prizes. In several episodes they allude (in words or by actions) to their distrust in banks, a common sentiment of the times after the collapse in 1929. The show was definitely aimed at a general audience of all ages. It wasn't too simple nor was it complex by any means. It was imbued with all the classic American values; honesty, integrity, family, baseball and apple pie. The show itself served as another vehicle to further promote the duo's talent and names. From the standpoint of an OTR researcher and enthusiast, it was not a show that set the radio world on its ear (so to speak) and it certainly appears it was quickly forgotten once it left the airwaves, yet it is a perfect testimony of how these two performers worked so well together and why they became so popular. From the standpoint of today's world, it is just another ancient radio show unburied from the sands of time and held aloft in briefest triumph until the next one is found and our attention is once again drawn away. ■



Hallmark PLAYHOUSE

by Dee Neyhart The Digital Deli 2011©

Background

Founded by Joyce C. Hall in 1910, the Hall Family's internationally famous greeting card company adopted the name, Hallmark, in 1928 and its now ubiquitous slogan, "When you care enough to send the very best," in 1944. The 1940s were Hallmark's most ambitious period of expansion, finding Hallmark advertising internationally over print media and Radio, primarily. During the 1940s and early 1950s, Hallmark sponsored the following Radio productions:



NORMAN ROCKWELL IS ONE OF MANY FAMOUS ARTISTS WHO HAVE PAINTED HALLMARK CHRISTMAS CARDS FOR YOU - SOLD ONLY IN QUALITY RETAIL STORES

HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR CHRISTMAS CARDS

"When you care enough to send the very best" *



* THE BEST IN CARDS FOR YOUR PERSONAL SIGNATURE. That's how so many people of good taste add extra warmth to their Christmas greetings. There is something very personal about a card bearing your



* THE BEST IN "INDIVIDUALIZED" CARDS. Special greetings to send to mother, father, brother, or

- 1940 *Tony Won's Scrapbook*
- 1942 *Meet The Navy [Meet Your Navy/This is Our Navy]*
- 1944 *The Hallmark Charlotte Greenwood Show*
- 1946 *Radio Reader's Digest*
- 1948 *Hallmark Playhouse*
- 1953 *Hallmark Hall of Fame*
- *Playhouse 25 [AFRS]*

Note that the *Playhouse 25* canon, denatured by the Armed Forces Radio Service, comprised selections from both *Hallmark Playhouse* and the *Screen Guild Theatre*, among others.

Hallmark's second sponsored outing eventually drew controversy--and threats from the American Federation of Radio Artists (AFRA)--with Hallmark's sponsorship of *Meet The Navy [Meet Your Navy/This is Our Navy]* in 1943. The issue revolved around the principle of uniformed servicemen competing with civilian performers, a practice specifically proscribed in a 1916 Army regulation. While not affecting the first two seasons of *This is Our Navy*, by the Fall of 1943 the issue came to a head with Hallmark's sponsorship of "*The Bluejacket Choir*," a CBS [WBBM, Chicago] production featuring the sailors' choir from Great Lakes Training Station.

Hallmark's generous interim solution was to employ eleven civilian 'stand-by' singers, compensated by Hallmark as card-carrying union performers, though not actually performing in lieu of *The Bluejacket Choir*. The compromise measure, though simply an expedient, met with the approval of both The Navy Department and AFRA. When it came time for Hallmark to renew with CBS [WBBM] for its *Meet Your Navy* and *The Bluejacket Choir* [Blue Network] productions, The Blue Network got the nod, agreeing to make *Meet Your Navy* an all-serviceman production directed by newly commissioned Navy Lieutenant, *George Zachery*, of *Columbia Workshop* and *Ellery Queen* fame. That hurdle

having been surmounted, the series ran under the new arrangement for at least 26 more weeks. Lessons learned all around, Hallmark resolved to limit its future sponsorship to commercial dramatic productions only. AFRA was happy, The Navy was happy, and the Networks were happy. Indeed everyone came out smelling like roses, except for Hallmark, whose sterling reputation had been mildly challenged due to the broadcasting industry notoriety.

Reminded of the axiom, "*no good deed goes unpunished*," Hallmark moved forward from that point into exclusively commercial dramatic productions--the only exception being its *The Hallmark Charlotte Greenwood Show*, a situation comedy already under negotiations, airing as an extension of *Charlotte Greenwood's* 1944 summer replacement program for *The Bob Hope Program*. Hallmark picked up the tab for the Fall 1944 production of *The Hallmark Charlotte*

Uncover 1916 Army Code as "In Case" Ace

NEW YORK, May 15.—In withholding a waiver for commercial sponsorship by Chesterfield cigs of *This Is the Army*, American Federation of Radio Artists this week made it clear that the decision was given only after the union was approached by Army Emergency Relief. The Hallmark Greeting Card program, *Meet the Navy*, uses servicemen for commercial air purposes, but AFRA has done nothing about it because it had not been asked for clearance.

Hallmark briefly drew the ire of AFRA with its Meet the Navy productions of 1942 and 1943.



GRANDMA MOSES IS ONE OF THE MANY FAMOUS ARTISTS WHO HAVE PAINTED HALLMARK CHRISTMAS CARDS FOR YOU—SOLD ONLY IN QUALITY RETAIL STORES

HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR CHRISTMAS CARDS

"When you care enough to send the very best" ❄️



❄️ **THE BEST IN CARDS FOR YOUR PERSONAL SIGNATURE.** There's how so many people of good taste add extra warmth to their Christmas greetings. There is something very personal about a card bearing your personal signature... and neatly selected for each one on your list. Among hundreds of individual Hallmark designs to choose from in this distinguished HALLMARK GALLERY ARTISTS COLLECTION. Subjects have been painted especially—and exclusively—by Norman Rockwell, Grandma Moses and scores of other foremost artists. Look for this display in the friendly store where you buy Hallmark Cards. Ask for Hallmark Gallery Artists Christmas Cards.

❄️ **THE BEST FOR NAME IMPRINTING.** If you prefer cards with your name imprinted—ask to see the Hallmark Albums at fine stores that feature Hallmark Cards. You will save shipping time because Hallmark albums offer a complete range in subject and price. The Hallmark on the back assures you of perfect taste.

Greenwood Show, which ran over ABC from October 1944 through January 1946.

On the primary business side, it was also the mid-1940s that found Hallmark teaming with some of America's finest artists and illustrators to grace the covers of their greeting cards. The two most famous of the era were *Grandma Moses* and *Norman Rockwell*, whose illustrations and paintings graced Hallmark's "*Gallery Artists*" series of seasonal greeting cards of the mid-1940s. The reception of the *Gallery Artists* series of cards was so great that magazines of the era, most notably, *Life Magazine*, featured both Hallmark and its artists in at least three feature articles of the era in addition to Hallmark's seasonal advertising.

Hallmark's evolution as a sponsor and producer of award-winning dramatic productions began with their 1946 sponsorship of *Radio Reader's Digest* until June 1948, at which time

Hallmark began producing its own seventy-year, signature series of dramatic programming over Radio, then Television, and ultimately Cable and Satellite Television. *The Hallmark Playhouse* led to its *Hallmark Hall of Fame* productions, produced simultaneously over Radio (CBS) and Television (NBC) from 1951, forward. Hallmark's prestigious *Hallmark Hall of Fame* franchise has garnered on the order of eighty prime-time *Emmys* over the years.

Hallmark and CBS bring Hallmark Playhouse to the air

Having sponsored *Radio Reader's Digest* for its three final seasons, Hallmark determined that its promotional aims could best be served by producing its own signature drama anthology, *Hallmark Playhouse*, which began airing on June 10, 1948, the week following its last sponsorship of *Radio Reader's Digest*. *Hallmark Playhouse* immediately set out to raise the bar in quality, production values, and talent, once its own name was attached to the production. Those earliest *Hallmark Playhouse* productions eventually evolved into one of Radio and Television's longest running, most prestigious, star-studded, and critically acclaimed dramatic series in broadcasting history.

Hallmark's sponsorship of *Radio Reader's Digest*, while a moderately successful promotional vehicle in its own right, found Hallmark airing predominantly adventure, crime, and mystery dramas, characteristic of the type of short stories found in the print version of *Reader's Digest* of the era. These were mostly compelling, suspenseful, or occasionally salacious short stories one might have found in any popular pulp digests and journals of the era.

It would appear that Hallmark's principal intent in mounting its own signature series of dramatic productions over Radio was to associate its name and sponsorship with a more presti-

gious and wholesome brand of well-produced and engineered dramas. Indeed, the stark contrast between Hallmark's own signature productions of 1948 and beyond, and those of *Radio Reader's Digest*, tend to support this hypothesis. And as the quality and critical acclaim of the *Hallmark Playhouse* dramas increased over its five-year run, Hallmark's reputation for sponsoring a far higher calibre of drama inevitably led to its long-running *Hallmark Hall of Fame* franchise. In this respect, in particular, it's entirely appropriate to consider *Hallmark Playhouse* as the initial 'template' that ultimately resulted in Hallmark's remarkable series of award-winning *Hallmark Hall of Fame* productions of 1951 and beyond.

The *Hallmark Playhouse* ushered in a higher quality of production almost from its inception. Perhaps as much as to differentiate itself from its previous three-year sponsorship of *Radio Reader's Digest*, Hallmark mounted its *Hallmark Playhouse* with the best soundbooth, soundstage, and music direction it could obtain, world-class dramatic vehicles, the finest scripters and adapters of the era, and some of the era's finest acting talent. The Summer 'replacement' of *Radio Reader's Digest* was a shoe-in to be picked up in the Fall of 1948--and so it was.

A Hollywood production, world-acclaimed American novelist *James Hilton* hosted *Hallmark Playhouse*, lending his fame, demonstrated appreciation for classic fiction, and renowned critic's weight to the production. And indeed, that first season of *Hallmark Playhouse* was marked by predominantly fiction dramas. The season opener dramatized *Stephen Vincent Benét's* fiction classic, *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, with *Alan Reed* and *John McIntyre* in the leading roles. Adapted by *Jean Holloway* and directed by *Bill Gay*, the premiere production was well mounted and entertaining. *Lyn Murray's* music direction of *Hallmark Playhouse* would continue

HALLMARK

When Hallmark Playhouse first aired in 1948 it had somewhat modernized its logo as above.



1949 marked the year that Hallmark redesigned their logo to the more commonly recognized logo above, including Hallmark's 'hallmark'--its now-ubiquitous, five-pointed crown.

for another four seasons, in yet another 'hallmark' of the overall quality of *Hallmark Playhouse*.

Hallmark's messaging itself was skillfully crafted into most presentations. Subtle, yet effective, the intertwined commercial messages represented one of the more novel and tasteful commercial gambits of the era and continued on through Hallmark's sponsorship of all of its productions going forward. Hallmark's clear intent--to introduce class into both its messaging and its dramatic productions--paved the way for all of the Hallmark productions that followed--well into the beginning of the 21st century.

The '*Playhouse*' format of Radio drama first entered popularity in the late 1920s, experiencing recurring popularity over the following thirty years. *Hallmark Playhouse* appears to have ushered in a resurgence of 'Playhouse' format dramatic programming, given the number of

“Playhouse” Seg Renewed for Fall

HOLLYWOOD, Aug. 14.—*Hallmark Playhouse*, summer dramatic ailer starring James Hilton, has been renewed for the fall and will originate in Hollywood. The bankroller will drop the *Radio Reader's Digest* tag, retaining the present format which features famous plays, with Hilton as narrator. Bill Gay will produce, with Al Capstaff supervising. Show will remain in the Thursday night National Broadcasting Company slot.

Reason for the shift in format was the sponsor's dissatisfaction with the split in product identification, whereby the magazine shared plugs with Hallmark cards. Agency is Foote, Cone & Belding.

Billboard announcement of the renewal of *Hallmark Playhouse* for the Fall of 1948

'Playhouse' productions that began airing shortly after the premiere of *Hallmark Playhouse* on June 10, 1948. This, by way of explaining both the aggressive competition in Radio between 1947 and 1953, and the competing networks' desires to capitalize on the success of an emerging, competing, high-quality program.

A byproduct of the number of 'Playhouse' productions of the era was that as newspaper listings began the inevitable trend toward emphasizing Television programming over Radio programming, the Radio listings of the era could often contain three to five productions every week listed simply as 'Playhouse.' Indeed the productions most often mistaken for or conflated with *Hallmark Playhouse* were the various *Philip Morris Playhouse* programs of the era. Compounding the problem, *Hollywood Star Playhouse*

aired over CBS a half-hour earlier than *Hallmark Playhouse* in most major markets. Confusing enough in its day, Radio historians of today find the situation even more exasperating as they attempt to research the *Hallmark Playhouse* canon seventy years later.

As the series' seasons rolled on, so did the quality of its productions. In the Fall of 1952, *Hallmark Playhouse* began airing on Sunday evenings until February of 1953, at which point it transitioned to the *Hallmark Hall of Fame* canon, again hosted by *Lionel Barrymore*. Hallmark's television productions of *The Hallmark Hall of Fame* had begun airing over NBC Television in October 1951. Debuting to almost instant critical and popular acclaim, Hallmark's television production of *The Hallmark Hall of Fame* begged the obvious argument to capitalize on that acceptance by rebranding *Hallmark Playhouse* as *The Hallmark Hall of Fame* over Radio. And so it was that while NBC Television was airing *The Hallmark Hall of Fame* over the 'orthicon tube' across America, stalwart fans of *The Hallmark Hall of Fame* over Radio could continue to listen to it for another season over CBS Radio.

But as we've often noted in other articles, the appearance of a Television production of an airing Radio program generally marked the beginning of the end for the Radio production. Rare exceptions of the era were *Dragnet*, *Have Gun Will Travel*, *Our Miss Brooks*, and *The Life of Riley*, among a handful of others. Even the more ardently and loyally supported Radio productions with Television counterparts eventually gave way to their Television productions. Such was the novelty, popularity, and growing influence of Television during the 1950s. A 'vast wasteland' to some, the proverbial 'candy store to a kid' for others, Television inexorably wrested audience attention from Radio to Television and so, for all intents and purposes, ended The Golden Age of Radio. ■

CINCINNATI'S
25th ANNUAL

**SPECIAL
GUESTS**

**Bob
Hastings**
Archie Andrews,
McHale's Navy
**Rosemary
Rice**

Archie Andrews,
I Remember Mama
**Esther
Geddes**
Magic Garden,
Talk of The Town

OLD TIME RADIO & NOSTALGIA CONVENTION

MAY 13-14, 2011

DEALERS ROOM WILL OPEN
SOMETIME ON **THURSDAY** AFTER 2:00
HOURS: **FRIDAY** 9AM-9PM
SATURDAY 9AM-4PM
EVENING RE-CREATIONS 7PM

CROWNE PLAZA

5901 PFEIFFER ROAD EXIT 15 OFF I-71
CINCINNATI, OH 45242 513.793.4500
ADMISSION \$10 PER DAY
ROOMS \$89 SINGLE or DOUBLE

For more information call Bob Burchett
Toll Free 888.477.9112 bob_burchett@msn.com

www.cincyotr.info
RED ROOF INN 513.793.8811



Danny Kaye (1913-87)

By Billy Jack Long

David Daniel Kamin-ski was born January 18, 1913, in Brooklyn, New York. He was the son of Jacob Kaminsky (yes, the spelling was different) and his wife, the former Clara Nemerov. With their sons, Mack and Larry, they emigrated from the Ukraine to the United



States in 1910. For school, he attended P.S. 149 in Brooklyn before going on to Thomas Jefferson High School also in Brooklyn, but he never even finished the first year, leaving at the age of 13.

At that time, Danny became a tummler, which is Yiddish for master of ceremonies at Jewish resorts in the Catskill Mountains of Pennsylvania. Danny would do many other things and, as it can be seen from the program on the right, he experimented with different names. He did many other jobs that had nothing to do with entertainment.

In 1935 he acted in some shorts for Educational Films, usually as a Russian musician acting with future stars June Allyson and Imogene Coca (his contract actually began in 1936). Sadly that division of 20th Century-Fox shut down in 1938 which meant the end of Danny's film career, at least for six years.

Danny premiered on Broadway in 1941 in a show called, *Lady in the Dark*. He stopped the show with a tongue twisting song called "Tchaikovsky". It was written by Kurt Weill and Ira Gershwin.

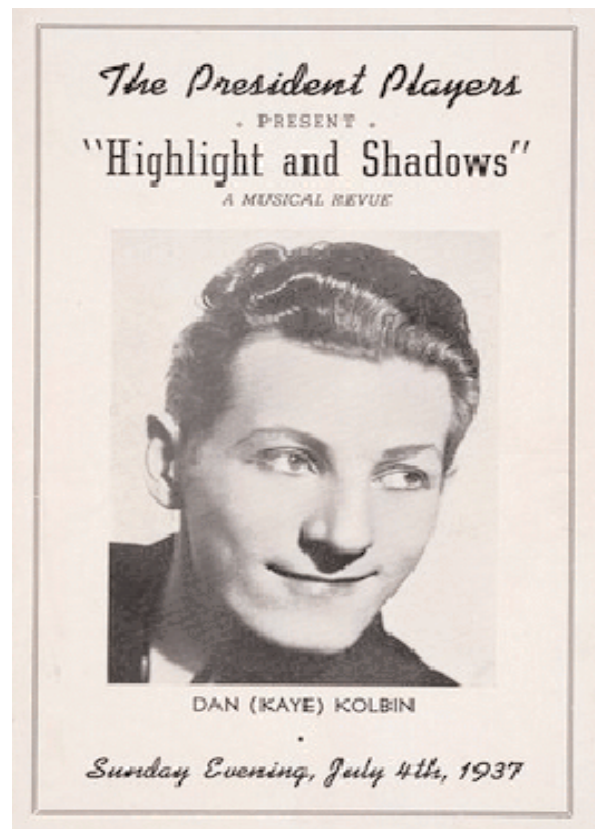
He began doing some experimental radio programs in 1940. He starred in his own program beginning in 1945, about a year after his "big break" in motion pictures. Also in 1940, he married a young pianist by the name of Sylvia Fine (1913-91). They remained married until his death in 1987. They had a daughter, named Dena who was born in 1946.

Danny is best known for his movie career which included such films as *The Court Jester*, *The Inspector General*, and started out with *Up in Arms*.

In the 1950s, he wrote for *Mad Magazine*. In the 1960s he had his own variety show. Toward the end of his life, he appeared in a number of comedy shows and was lauded for a dramatic film called *Skokie*.

He was a life long Democrat and active with UNICEF and also owned a baseball team in Seattle.

Danny Kaye died March 3, 1987, at the age of 74 in Los Angeles of hepatitis. ■



The 4th Revised Ultimate History of Network Radio Programming & Guide to All Circulating Shows

Written by Jay Hickerson October, 2010
Editor of Hello Again

565-page reference book listing over 6000 network, regional, local and syndicated radio programs. (Soft cover and spiral bound). This information was first presented in this combined format in 1992 with separate publications issued in 1986.

Traces each program by giving broadcast dates, sponsors, network and air time. Often a brief description with one or two cast members is given. The main purpose, however, is to trace each program by showing when it was on the air.

Lists ALL shows available to collectors. Exact dates and sources are mentioned in most cases.

Includes theme music titles if known. Most complete source available.

Includes All Information
AS OF OCTOBER 1, 2010

\$52.00

plus \$5 postage and handling

**Subscribers to the
Old Radio Times get a
\$10 discount. Your cost
is \$42 plus \$5 P&H
for a total of \$47.**

Jay Hickerson, 27436 Desert Rose Ct.
Leesburg, FL 34748 352.728.6731
Fax 352.728.2405 Jayhick@aol.com

Meet the Members: Colin Campbell

Please tell us a little something about you and your history of old-time radio. How did it all begin for you?

Ever since I was five years old I listened to radio. While I was born too late for what we call "Old Time Radio" I loved the medium from an early age. Being legally blind, I've always enjoyed anything to do with sound. I made radio my life long career and still work in the medium today producing and voicing commercials.

How many hours a day and week do you listen to OTR? Do you have a listening schedule or is it just random?

I listen to OTR every night.

By what primary means do you listen to your OTR?

These days I primarily listen through SHOUT cast on an Internet enabled media device called "Roku."

What shows keep you going today?

After exhausting all known episodes of *Dragnet* and *Gunsmoke* (listening to many episodes a few times) I am on to *Johnny Dollar*, *The Whistler* and *Suspense*. I also very much enjoy *The Lux Radio Theatre*.

What are your favorite OTR Comedies and why?

Jack Benny simply because he was a comedic genius and *Fibber McGee and Molly* for its home spun appeal.

Do you have any least favorite Comedies?

I don't like *Abbott and Costello* or *Fred Allen*.

What are your favorite OTR Mysteries and why?

Suspense, well for the suspense.

What are your favorite OTR Westerns ?

Gunsmoke and *The Lone Ranger*. The first for its great drama and awesome production and the second for its innocence.

What are your favorite OTR Science Fiction shows and why?

Dimension X and *X Minus One*. I feel they really exemplify the pre-space age wonder of the 50's well.

What show do you wish you had more of to listen to?

The Six Shooter. You just can't beat Jimmy Stewart on radio and he is one of my most favorite movie actors. I realize that we have all produced shows but it only ran for one season. Please tell me who the best actor and actress in OTR is and why? Memories of him and her? Orson Wells is by far the most prolific male radio actor and orator in my opinion. For a female I like a little known actress named Joyce McCluskey who was on many of the *Dragnet* episodes. I simply like her voice. Soft, soothing and sympathetic.

Is there a series that existed once but now there are no known copies, that you would like to hear?

I'd like to hear more routine stuff like news casts and presentations such as WJSV's Complete Broadcast day. Being in radio my whole life I am interested in some of the mechanics of the medium back then. I'd also like someone to try and recreate an evening's broadcast with shows in the order they were presented on a network for a specific date. When I hear "coming up on CBS or NBC" I'd like to have it actually follow.

Is there anything else you'd like to say?

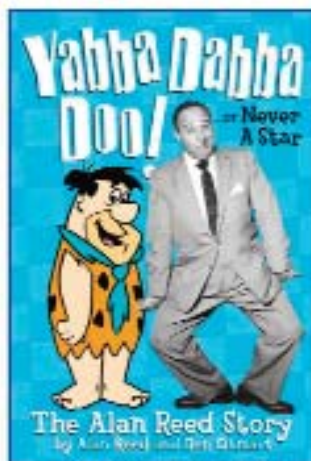
Being legally blind, it's difficult for me to follow the action in movies and TV shows. OTR gives me the ability to just close my eyes and enjoy a story. I like to say "the pictures are better..." a quote I heard during "Empire of The Air," Ken Burns documentary on the medium.

Thank you for taking part in this 'Meet The Members'.

Bear Manor Media



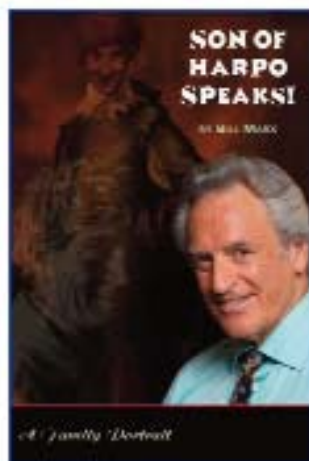
Can you resist looking at these great titles from Bear Manor Media?



\$19.95



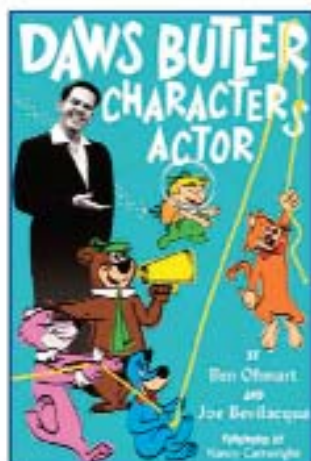
\$26.95



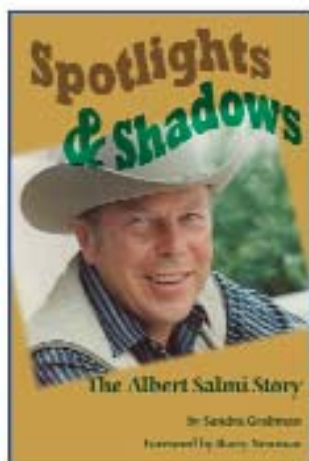
\$24.95



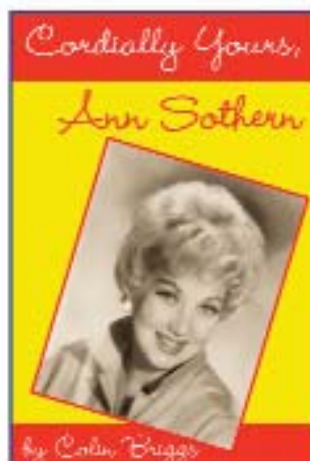
\$24.95



\$24.95



\$19.95



\$24.95

Check out our latest titles!

BearManor Media P O Box 1129 • Duncan, OK 73534-1129

580-252-3547 (Sandy Grabman)

www.bearmanormedia.com

Add \$5.00 shipping for the first book, \$1.00 for each additional

Please join our online mailing list for news and coupons!

<http://groups.google.com/group/bearmanor>

Contact us at books@benohmart.com

Pairing of Peary and Tetley was a magical match

by James Mason

Bud Abbott and Lou Costello. Lum and Abner. Fibber McGee and Molly. Burns and Allen. Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy. Martin and Lewis.

Those are probably some of the names you think of when you reflect on great comedy teams. There's no doubt why you do; for each one of the above teams were not only funny, they had incredible sustainability and lasted many years. Not only that, each of the above has a consecrated place in the National Radio Hall of Fame.

There's another pair however, that's not considered a "team" by classic definition. Harold Peary and Walter Tetley were together 9 years on the comedy show, *The Great Gildersleeve*.

Peary's background was that of a singer of Spanish melodies - not as an actor. However, he was armed with a trademark bellowing voice and made his way up from early radio baritone to a 1937 fill-in on the big NBC hit show *Fibber McGee and Molly*, to having his own sitcom (the first sitcom spin off in history.)



Here's what happened: Gildersleeve played many parts but finally went to writer Don Quinn and asked to settle in on just one weekly role. Quinn wrote in the character Throckmorten P. Gildersleeve who would be McGee's next door neighbor. Everything about the character would be big: his belly, his name, his voice and Quinn gave him a girdle factory to run -- a pun about rotund people, itself.

Only after about a year on *Fibber McGee and Molly*, Peary was actually getting applause when he entered on the show- - something no other character was getting. He and Fibber would play off each other and accuse each other of stealing and other terrible things, almost coming to blows before Gildy would say, "You're a harrrrrrd man, McGee" - and that is he became known for when he worked on that show. His rascally laugh too, a trademark that has endured generationally.

In the NBC spin off, *The Great Gildersleeve*, Peary played the part of a bachelor father figure to a family that was not his own. This is a contradiction in itself because Gildersleeve was actually a child-like character, more content at having fun (singing, dating, kissing!) than working his tedious job as Summerville's Water Commissioner. He never took his job seriously as he

was always late for work (always!), often played hooky and was "stuck behind the eight ball." Though I don't think he ever said this, I think Gildy actually hated his job.

The non-nuclear family aspect was a very unique concept in entertainment when the show arrived in 1942. Gildy's new family consisted of his teenaged niece Marjorie (played by another veteran actress Lurene Tuttle) and a very bright, early teen in the hyper-dimensional Leroy (Tetley.)

Girded with a part-Scottish, part Brooklyn accent and with the ability to use words to cut as sharp as a razor, Tetley contrasted well against his oafish, probably-Midwestern uncle. Gildersleeve was not the father - just a figurehead and Leroy was not the son, just a facsimile - a nephew (the son of Gildersleeve's sister.) Despite the fact they barely knew each other, Gildy and Leroy had a special relationship from day one in every sense of the word.

At the age of 7, Tetley was a star, bringing in a bundle of money. By age 16, Tetley was a minor superstar radio veteran having already amassed some 2,800 broadcasts. When Tetley got the job as Leroy he was like the cleanup hitter for the New York Yankees as far as ability



Mr. Peabody and his pet boy (Tetley)



goes. He had been lauded nationwide as a notorious scene-stealer. Whenever he guest starred on a show the cast and audience loved him and the biggest actors and shows began asking specifically for him to appear and Tetley made the rounds at both NBC and CBS on a regular basis. And while Tetley played a smart-alecky brat on all the dozens of shows in which he appeared, he did it with perfect comedic timing.

Tetley and Gildersleeve both had impeccable timing. This is especially true of Tetley, who was actually quite older than he appeared to be (there's a story out there that says his mother actually had him castrated so that he could play child parts forever and keep bringing in the money.)

Leroy loved to catch his uncle doing anything that wasn't quite appropriate for an elected official to do and would almost always call him out on it, publicly or privately. Leroy's enjoyment of doing this flustered Gildy so badly he would often clamor, "Hmfph oh! Lee-eee-eee-roy...." -- much to the delight of the studio and listening audience.

One time, Leroy and Gildy had planned a trip -- but right before time to go, Gildersleeve's fleeting flame Lila would coerce "Throcky" into taking



her shopping because her car was not running.

"I'll give you anything you want, Leroy", Gildy would beg, "If I can just break our date!"

"Anything, Unc?" This would allow Leroy to victimize the gigantic pants off of Gildersleeve, something he did with regularity.

Whenever Gildersleeve would be caught in a faux pas, Leroy would joyfully say, "What a character!", right to his uncle's face. Somehow, Leroy got away with saying and doing all kinds of little naughty things like this. He was picked up by the police, he got into fights, he harassed the younger neighbor kid. He'd con kids out of their skates and brand-new magic sets. Boil it down and you find Leroy was a Tom Sawyer-type kid but with the wit of no radio character before him (and aside from Arnold Stang and Groucho Marx, none after him.) He was aware of the fun of manipulation and the power of psychology. He was not a bad boy or a delinquent, by any stretch of the imagination. It was just that inside of him was both a conniving con man and a rogue tattletale yet paradoxically, he was also an assailable, breakable,

fatherless child.

If Gildy had a plan, Leroy was there to destroy it. Gildersleeve realized soon after moving in with the two kids that Leroy was going to be someone he would have to keep an eye on. Leroy often ran amok and had the audience enjoying it right along with him. Though it was easy for the audience to like Gildersleeve, Leroy made it even more fun to see Gildersleeve fail. This might be because he was big -- no, make that great. *The Great Gildersleeve*. And there is some sort of Freudian joy in seeing a big man fall. Leroy was the perfect foil (of many) for the pear-shaped Casanova Gildersleeve.

Leroy was not a bad boy. Instead, what we find in Leroy is a very intelligent child who actually is aware of the power of psychology and the fun found in manipulation.

The verbal rapport between the two seemed natural. They were not about taking turns telling jokes or puns, nor was one setting up the other for a big punch line. They would have been one of the greatest - maybe THE greatest comedy teams in history had they actually become one -- the resonance between the two simply seemed real. And when you get two real characters together, you often find magic.

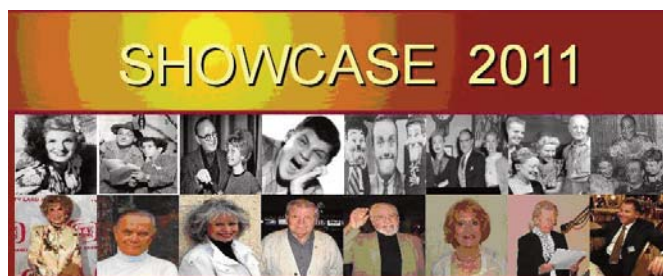
Though the two characters did not have a father and son relationship, it was obvious that the two loved each other. There were no arguments that ended with, "You're not my father!" or "You're not my son!" Leroy actually needed the stern hand of Gildy and oddly, Gildy



needed to be brought down to earth by the constant vigil of Leroy. Both lived up to each other's needs and this is what made *The Great Gildersleeve* seem real and fun.

Of course all of that came to an abrupt end when Peary left NBC for CBS. Everyone else seemed to be jumping the NBC ship and Gildy wanted the big money that CBS was handing out, too. It backfired - maybe one of the biggest backfires in show business history as Peary thought the show would go with him. Kraft, the sponsor, had a long relationship with NBC and declined the move. Peary and Tetley were no longer part of the same family anymore.

Each went their different ways and each was successful, albeit, Tetley more so than Peary. But neither found another like each other again. Magic, after all, doesn't last forever. ■

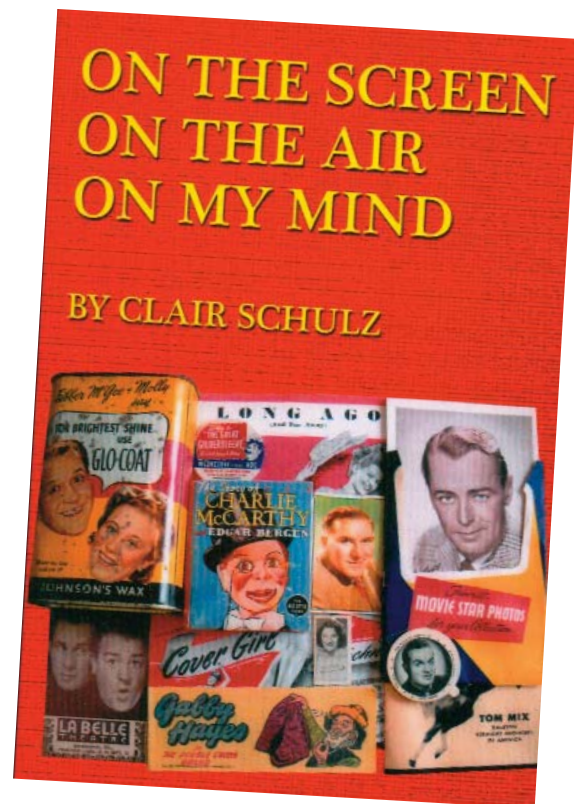


SHOWCASE JUNE 24-26th, 2011

For one fabulous weekend in June, those "Golden Days of Radio" return, when REPS rolls out the red carpet to welcome the stars and fans of classic radio and current audio theater too! Each year offers something new and different and you can be certain a great

time awaits you! It's an opportunity to meet, get the autographs of and befriend the voices of radio's past!

www.repsonline.org



Featuring 35 profiles of Hollywood stars and 18 articles on old-time radio shows and illustrated with over 140 images from the author's personal collection of sheet music, photographs, magazines, premiums, posters, and other show business memorabilia, this nostalgic omnibus belongs on the bookshelves of everyone who fondly remembers the golden age of radio, TV, and motion pictures.

\$34.95 plus \$5.00 shipping.

Copies of the book may be ordered from the publisher at www.bearmanormedia.com.

With each order sent directly to the author he will include a complimentary original arcade card and an original Dixie Cup lid, each featuring a photograph of a screen star and each dating from the 1940-1955 period.

Check or money order payable to Clair Schulz, US orders only. Clair Schulz, S67W13702 Fleetwood Road, Muskego, WI 53150. For more information about the book and this offer contact the author at: wistfulvista79@hotmail.com.



A Foray Into Soap Operas

by Henry L. Morse

Memories

My first adventure with soap operas (soaps) began in 1947 as a boy of 9. Back in my generation, if you were not really that sick, but just sick enough to stay home from school, and if your parents worked, you got to stay home alone the whole day. In those days there were really only four things I could do when faced with being home alone. I could play with the limited number of toys we had. Reading was another option, but we depended on the local library for books, and being sick, going to the library was not an option. Of course, going out to play was not an option either, and with all the other children in school there was no one to play with anyway. Lastly, there was listening to the radio.

Ok, so my parents went to work in the morning and I turned on the radio. There were those morning shows like *Don McNeill's Breakfast Club*. Very interesting to a 9 year old! And depending on what part of the country you lived in, at about 11:00 AM the soaps started that black hole in boyhood broadcasting that lasted until about 4:30 PM. Can you imagine the heart rushing excitement I felt upon hearing words like?

"And now, Our Gal Sunday, the story of an orphan girl named Sunday, from the little mining town of Silver Creek, Colorado, who in young womanhood married England's richest, and most handsome Lord Henry Binthrope – the story that asks the question, can this girl from a mining town in the West find happiness as the wife of a wealthy and titled Englishman"?

I don't know how you felt about these opening lines but I much preferred:

"A fiery horse with the speed of light" A cloud of dust and a hearty "Hi-Yo Silver!" The Lone Ranger"

Wives! Mothers! Don't miss this vital new radio drama—the story of a courageous woman who is wife, doctor, mother—presented by the sponsors of the Lux Radio Theatre.

THE LIFE AND LOVE OF
Dr. SUSAN

EVERY AFTERNOON
MONDAY THROUGH
FRIDAY

2:15 P. M.
E. S. T.

COLUMBIA NETWORK

But alas, that was not to be, at least during those hours devoted to the soaps. All I could do was to wait until about 4:30 PM in my listening area, when the children's programs filled the airwaves. You remember, programs like *Sky King*, *Hop Harrigan*, *Challenge of the Yukon*, *Superman*, and the like. Things got a bit dodgy then, as my parents returned home and the dinner hour began. Listening was a bit hit or miss. Then there was that long wait while dad listened to the news, then finally 7:30 – *The Lone Ranger*, at least Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. However these are but the memories of a man who was 9 years old in 1947. And now on to the soaps!

Life In The 1930s

Without delving into politics, I can safely say that the recession started with the market crash in 1929 turned into a depression in the 1930s, felt not just in the US, but also in many parts of the world. The depression meant different things to different people. On the positive side some of our greatest achievements in movies, music, and Broadway shows happened in the 1930s. For others, the dust bowl, very high unemployment, and other factors led to people living in shantytowns and standing in bread lines. The average family income went from \$2,300 to

\$1,500. The average production worker earned about \$17 a week if lucky enough to find a job. Doctors made about \$65 per week. Volumes have been written about the 1930s so let us begin by exploring the conditions that led up to the creation of the soaps.

Women In The 1930s

There was certainly a step backward from the gains made during the feminist movement of the 1920s. Some women worked outside the home, but mostly in menial jobs. There was little or no support for women in the unions because the attitude was that a woman taking one of the better or union jobs would be depriving a man from a job needed to support his family. At that point women were relegated to household chores and taking care of the children. Some may recall that kitchens were designed to be small in order to save the woman of the house steps during meal preparation. Certainly, they were not at all like today's kitchens designed for having multiple people preparing family meals. In rural areas washboards, heavy irons, clotheslines, and coal stoves in the kitchen were the order of the day. In some cities electric appliances began appearing, such as irons, refrigerators, and stoves. College curricula for women began to emphasize family, homemaking, and teaching. There were increasing feelings of despair. Women felt trapped in the home with nothing to do and limited financial resources.

Enter the Soap Opera

This was like a marriage made in heaven. Women in the home needed some kind of diversion – something to give them hope. Manufacturers of household products needed an advertising platform. The introduction of Bakelite, a plastic, and other manufacturing improvements, made radio more affordable to many more households.

NEW-TODAY!
**"WE,
THE ABBOTTS"**

great new epic of American home life!

The moving, intimate story of a family, like your own, striving in the changing world of today to preserve the ideals that have built their HOME!

Presented by NUCOA, the wholesome "thrift spread for bread" and flavor shortening.

I'M GOING TO TUNE IN ON THAT!

MON. THRU FRI. 3:15 P. M. **WBBM**

"PORTIA FACES LIFE!"

THE STORY OF A
WOMAN'S FIGHT
IN A WORLD
OF MEN



TUNE IN to this thrilling, new, fast-moving radio drama . . . portraying the life of courageous Portia Blake . . . a beautiful widow . . . the mother of a 9-year-old boy . . . a woman lawyer . . . who fights to gain her place in a man's world!

WBBM • 3:00 P.M.

MON. THRU FRI.

These serialized radio programs that we call soaps had their earliest beginnings in the late 1920s but really took root in the 1930s. Manufacturers of household products sponsored almost all of these programs, so they began to be referred to as soaps and the name just stuck. Even contemporary soaps, are now called daytime dramas, but are sponsored by a much wider variety of products.

Soaps were targeted to women aged 18 to 49 and were basically open ended serials where characters were born and died. Sometimes characters disappeared from the storyline

only to reappear later. Radio censors were very conscientious during the golden age of radio so one could always be sure that these stories contained nothing untoward. Some were stories that people could relate to like *Ma Perkins*. Some of the storylines had sexist and class overtones such as *Our Gal Sunday* and *The Romance of Helen Trent*. By the outbreak of WWII there were approximately 64 soaps being aired.

The Two Powerhouses

Frank and Anne Hummert and Irna Phillips created most of the most popular soaps. While Frank and Anne employed a large staff of writers, Irna wrote and dictated all of her own storylines.

Among some of the soaps created by Frank and Anne were:

- *Just Plain Bill* – 1933 to 1955
- *Ma Perkins* – 1933 to 1960
- *The Romance of Helen Trent* – 1933 to 1960
- *Mary Noble Backstage Wife* – 1933 to 1959
- *Our Gal Sunday* – 1937 to 1955

As television eclipsed radio, Roy Winson, one of their radio directors created some of the most popular television soaps.

- *Search For Tomorrow* – 1951 to 1986
- *Love of Life* – 1951 to 1980
- *Secret Storm* – 1954 to 1974
- *General Hospital* – 1963 to present

When soaps first appeared on television in the 50s and into the 60s the television censors pretty much held to the standards that were present on radio. Of course it is a lot different today.

Among some of the soaps created by Irna Phillips were:

- *Guiding Light*
Radio – 1937 to 1956
Television – 1952 to 2009

- *Right to Happiness* – 1939 to 1960

- *Brighter Day* – 1948 to 1956

And on Television:

- *As The World Turns* – 1952 to 2010

- *Another World* – 1964 to 1999

Irna was indirectly responsible for these daytime drams:

- *All My Children* – 1970 to present

- *The Young And The Restless* – 1973 to present

- *The Bold And the Beautiful* – 1987 to present

Let us take a journey into the world of the soaps by examining a few examples. Soaps were typically 15 minutes in length. The introduction was between 2 and 3 minutes starting with a musical theme, an introduction, and commercial message. The storyline was about 11 minutes following by more commercials, the ending message, and an exhortation to tune in tomorrow.

Ma Perkins

I have chosen *Ma Perkins* as the first example because it was set in a small town called Rushmore Center that boasted a population of about 4000. Plots in this series tended to center around small town life rather than the more cosmopolitan plots in the other examples I will present later. The setting storylines appealed to so many listeners that at one time it was aired on two networks at the same time as well in Hawaii, Canada, and even Europe over Radio Luxemburg. Ma, sometimes called “Mother of the Air”, was an ageless widow of 60, portrayed by Virginia Payne, was only 23 when she became Ma. She played Ma for the entire series. Virginia was quite comely and had to be “Frumped Up” for personal appearances.

Some considered Ma as being a woman’s answer to another popular soap, “*Just Plain Bill*”. Early on Ma’s character was a bit combat-

RETURN WITH US TO...

by Bill Owen
Doc Howard 34

Ma Perkins



VIRGINIA PAYNE



MA PERKINS

WHEN THE PROGRAM DEBUTED IN 1933, FEW LISTENERS WERE AWARE THAT THE ACTRESS WHO PLAYED THE ELDERLY MA PERKINS WAS ACTUALLY A YOUNG WOMAN... VIRGINIA PAYNE.



THROUGH ITS LONG ASSOCIATION WITH ONE BRAND OF SOAP MA PERKINS HAD THE BEST SPONSOR IDENTIFICATION OF ALL OF RADIO'S SOAP OPERAS.

AND NOW... OXYDOL'S OWN MA PERKINS

MA OPERATED A LUMBERYARD IN THE TOWN OF "RUSHVILLE CENTER" THE SERIAL WAS ON THE AIR FOR 27 YEARS... A TOTAL OF 7065 BROADCASTS. NO ONE BUT VIRGINIA PAYNE EVER PLAYED THE TITLE ROLE. CHARLES EGGLESTON PLAYED SHUFFLE SHOBER FOR 25 YEARS... EDWIN WOLFE THE OTHER 2 YEARS.

ive but she softened over the years. She always lived by the golden rule and was always trying to help others. She was always trusting until disappointed by actions of one of the characters on the show. Ma had three grown children, Evey, John, and Fay and plots frequently developed around them. Evey was a shrewish, shallow, social climber whose main goal seemed to be attaining the presidency of the local social organization, The Jolly Seventeen. Evey was married to a character named Willie who was a not very successful and was a flashy dresser and cigar smoker. He was always looking for an angle or a fast buck. Early in the series Ma did not like him and tried unsuccessfully to get Evey to divorce him but later relented. John was killed in WWII. Fay was widowed a

year after she was married and many storylines revolved around her romantic adventures. Fay eventually moved back home with her beau Gary who caused Ma no end of trouble.

Most storylines revolved about the normal human condition in any small town. People lived, died, married, divorced, and sometimes were disgraced. However, here were a few dark melodramatic plots:

- Ma sheltered a political escapee from Russia
- A man's wife was shot by agents through a window in the Perkins home
- Wife dies in husband's arms
- Ma exposed a black market operating in town

Just as an example, following is a brief summary of one episode:

Evey and Willie have gambled their entire life savings with cousin Sylvester (not one of Ma's favorites), in a radium mine. Willie and Evey do not have jobs and only 60 dollars left to their name. Sylvester has sworn them to secrecy but Ma wants the truth. When asked a direct question, Evey lies to Ma, but Ma does not believe her. It is hard to believe that it took 11 minutes of dialog to accomplish this but episodes and plots were often exceedingly slow.

There are a number of episodes of *Ma Perkins* in circulation among collectors and available from resellers of old time radio episodes.

The Guiding Light

This one was created and written by Irna Phillips and ran from 1937 to 1956. It began on TV in 1952 and was simulcast on radio until 1956. The TV version was recently cancelled.

Initially the Reverend John Rutledge, pastor of the Church Of The Good Samaritan, was the main character. The setting was the village of Five Points where the population was a melting pot. The storylines often had a distinctly religious overtone, which was not surprising consid-

ering the times. Occasionally, Pastor Rutledge devoted the entire 15 minutes to a sermon. In general each episode had one scene of action as opposed to the Hummert style. Storylines often took days or even weeks to complete.

Irma wrote or dictated every word. Sometimes she used character voices while dictating. Her writings were up to 2 million words a year. Irna was a pioneer of "cliff hanger" in order to bring listeners back. She used slow character development to keep continuing interest. Music had to be on an organ played in the style of what might have been heard in a medieval cathedral. Irna owned every part of her shows.

Initially the plots were simple:

John's daughter Mary fell in love with Ned and John did not approve. Ned disappeared just before the wedding, came back after some time, and crushed Mary by in-

roducing his new wife, a film star name Torchy Reynolds.

Irna branched out in the forties with *Today's Children and Woman in White*. She began integrating the characters and storylines into all three soaps. Although these were 15 minute shows she tried to convince the network to make them each 20 minutes long giving her, in effect, an hour long soap. Later a new orthodox Jewish family named the Kransky's was introduced. The stories got a bit edgier with plot lines involving daughter Rose's affair with a publishing magnate. Ned was still in the storylines and seems he was cheating on his film star wife. Eventually the Kransky story shifted to a new series in the late forties – "*Right To Happiness*". John Rutledge left to become an Army Chaplain and a new storyline was introduced centered on a Dr. Charles Mathews that ultimately faded into the TV storylines.

There are a limited number of episodes of *Guiding Light* in circulation among collectors and some available through resellers of old time radio shows.

Our Gal Sunday

This series, produced by Frank and Anne Hummert, was really a story of class. The main character, Sunday, married outside her station of life. The storylines revolved around the trials and tribulations of her marriage.

The series had its origins in a Broadway play "*Sunday*" starring Ethel Barrymore. Frank and Anne Hummert acquired the rights to the story thus setting up the serial that was aired from 1937 to 1959. The story begins when a child is left on the doorstep of a miner's cabin in Silver Creek, Colorado. Two grizzled miners Jackie and Lively raise her and give her the name Sunday. She grows into a beautiful woman and is courted by her best friend Bill Jenkins. However, Sunday wanted more out of life than living



in Silver Creek. The Brinthrope family had several holdings in Silver Creek and sent Lord Henry's brother Arthur to inspect the mines. Arthur wanted Sunday to run away with him but Jackie, one of the miners, shot him. It was revealed later that he was not killed.

She eventually married Lord Henry and they go to live on his estate, Black Swan, in Virginia. They had three children and some of the storylines were about their problems. At the end of the series they both return to England where she finally finds true happiness.

Stories about their life together included:

- The family guardian was shot
- Rustlers kidnap Sunday
- Both are blackmailed
- Sunday runs away to the Wild West with Henry spending considerable plot time looking

for her

- They are beset by imposters trying to take their estate away from them
- Henry's snooty relatives shun Sunday
- Lord Henry is constantly preyed upon
- Thelma Mayfield, Henry's childhood friend attempts to woo Henry away from Sunday

A sample episode:

Charlotte Abbott, a friend of Sunday's, has been spreading rumors about Sunday ever since Kevin Brownsfield, an attorney, has come to town on a legal matter. During the visit Kevin has a chance meeting with Marsha Gordon. Because Marsha spent some time with Kevin previously, Marsha has the idea that Kevin is in love with her. This is reinforced by the fact that Kevin says he wants to meet with Marsha and her mother that very day. When Kevin is pressed, he reveals to Marsha that he is not in love with her, and is in love with another woman. That woman can never be his to marry. While Sunday is driving Kevin to the Gordon's for the meeting, Marsha's mother tells her to fight for the love of the man she wants to marry, mentioning the debt Kevin owes Marsha's father for helping him launch his career. As the episode ends a car pulls up and Kevin alights in the company of Sunday.

Of course, this is an unexpected development and sets the stage for the next episode.

As the reader can see, sometimes the storylines can be quite convoluted.

There are only a few episodes of *Our Gal Sunday* in circulation today.

The Romance of Helen Trent – Queen Of the Soaps

The show opens with the plunking of a stringed instrument, banjo or mandolin playing the song "Juanita". A soft male voice intones: "Time now for the romance of Helen Trent – the real life drama of Helen Trent, who, when life

RETURN WITH US TO... by Bill Owen Don Showwood 177

The Romance Of Helen Trent

FOR 27 YEARS, LISTENERS FOLLOWED THE AFFAIRS OF FASHION DESIGNER HELEN TRENT.

THIS SOAP OPERA PROVIDED ONE OF RADIO'S MOST OFT-QUOTED OPENINGS...

THE STORY OF A WOMAN WHO SETS OUT TO PROVE WHAT SO MANY OTHER WOMEN LONG TO PROVE IN THEIR OWN LIVES... THAT ROMANCE CAN LIVE ON AT THIRTY-FIVE... AND EVEN BEYOND.

HELEN'S SUITORS WERE NUMEROUS. SHE REJECTED MANY OF THEM AND SEVERAL MET VIOLENT DEATH.

GIL WHITNEY (PLAYED BY MARVIN MILLER, DAVID GOTHARD, AND WILLIAM GREEN) PURSUED HELEN FOR NINETEEN YEARS BEFORE MARRYING ANOTHER WOMAN.

HELEN WAS PLAYED BY VIRGINIA CLARK AND BETTY RUTH SMITH IN CHICAGO. JULIE STEVENS WAS HELEN WHEN THE PROGRAM MOVED TO NEW YORK.

THE FINAL CURTAIN RANG DOWN ON HELEN TRENT ON JUNE 24, 1960, WITH LEON JANNEY AS POLITICIAN JOHN COLE, HER LATEST PARAMOUR.

© SHERWOOD AND OWEN 1978

mocks her, breaks her hopes, dashes her against the rocks of despair - fights back bravely, and successfully, to prove what so many women long to prove in their own lives – that just because a woman is 35 or more the romance of youth can extend into middle life and even beyond.”

The *Romance of Helen Trent*, created by Frank and Anne Hummert, aired from 1933 to 1960 – a total of 7222 episodes. The show made double digits in the ratings by 1950 and was placed in the *Radio Hall of Fame*. The story was about a 35 year old woman, who never aged during the entire run of the show, and her various romantic trials and tribulations. This was truly the eternal quest for romance. This show boasted as many as 8 million listeners. Virginia Clark through played the role of Helen 1944, and

then by Julie Stevens, until the last episode. American Home Products sponsored the program.

Helen, a fashion designer, never drank, smoked, or uttered the softest curse. Her archrival was Daisy Parker – a gossip columnist who once shocked the listening audience by drinking a martini on the rocks. The storylines were always a struggle between good and evil. During the run of the show Helen was plagued by an unscrupulous hypnotist, a homicidal physician, poisoned, jailed for murder, just to name a few. She had 28 suitors over the years with varying tragic results. She jilted, was jilted, left at the altar, had a fiancée that died, and many others. Her longest lasting suitor was Gill, who she met in 1940. While Gil was on a secret government he was paralyzed in a train wreck. He did not want to tie Helen down to a man in his condition. In an odd twist he married Helen's archrival, Daisy Parker. During the final week of the series in 1960 various characters were killed off by; a plane crash, amnesia seizure, a landslide, a bolt of lightning, and finally Helen.

The final Friday episode had Helen plunging to her death from a collapsing balcony hearing the voice of Gil saying, "Helen, Helen, it is Gil".

Following is an example of the plot of a single episode:

Helen is lured to the apartment of a former suitor by a mysterious phone call. When she arrives she finds him dead. While she is recovering from the shock, she picks up the telephone, which will surely leave incriminating fingerprints, and makes a telephone call. There. Her archrival, Daisy Parker, has been sitting in her car across the street, waits a short time and then follows Helen. She comes to the apartment and all but accuses Helen of murder. We are left anticipating the next episode as her present romantic link, Gil Whitney, calls here there.

There are a limited number of episodes of today.

Epilogue

Just before the end of broadcasting on radio, TV began to take hold. *The Guiding Light*, simulcast on radio, moved over and their were new shows:

- *As The World Turns*
- *Search For Tomorrow*
- *Love of Life*
- *Secret Storm*

These shows had pretty much the same level of censorship as on radio. These programs have become more edgy, contain steamy scenes, and have more intense plots.

For example, *Days of Our Lives*, a TV series being aired today, has stories surrounding the Horton family. Some examples of today's storylines include:

NET WEIGHT ONE POUND EIGHT OUNCES



OXYDOL
SOAKS OUT DIRT...*SAFELY*



OXYDOL'S SPEEDY SUDS SAVE TIME AND DRUDGERY-GET WHITE CLOTHES SHADES WHITER--YET ARE SAFE FOR WASHABLE COLORS, HANDS

TUB WASHING	WASHING MACHINE
<p style="text-align: center;">HOW TO SOAK OUT DIRT IN 10 MINUTES</p> <p>1 Sprinkle Oxydol in tub, and add a little COLD water first, swishing around to start suds. 2 Add HOT water to desired temperature (very hot for white clothes--lukewarm for colors). For best results use enough Oxydol to maintain lasting suds after clothes are added. 3 Soak clothes 10 minutes, dousing up and down several times to dislodge loosened dirt. Overnight soaking is perfectly safe for white clothes, but unnecessary with Oxydol. 4 Sprinkle especially stubborn spots with dry Oxydol and rub clean. Wring out for rinsing. 5 Thorough rinsing is essential to carry away the dirt. Rinse first in hot water, then in cool. Bleaching can be added to final rinse.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">HOW TO GET WHITER, BRIGHTER WASHES</p> <p>1 If you wish, you can soak clothes for a few minutes in a tub of cool water with thick Oxydol suds. White clothes can be soaked overnight. 2 Fill washer with water (hot for white clothes, lukewarm for colored). Start washer, then pour in Oxydol. 3 Run one minute, then add clothes (wringing them into the washer if they have been soaked beforehand). 4 Run the machine from 5 to 10 minutes, depending upon amount of dirt in clothes. 5 Rinse first in hot water, then in cold. Bleach can be added to the final rinse. (Boiling is unnecessary with Oxydol but if you prefer to boil your white cottons and linens you will find that Oxydol will give wonderful results in the boiler.)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">FOR SPEEDIER DISHWASHING</p> <p>Use Oxydol this speedy way: 1 Sprinkle Oxydol in dishpan. 2 Add a little COLD water first and swish to start suds. 3 Add HOT water to desired temperature. You'll swish up mountains of rich suds almost instantly--suds that last, so you don't have to keep adding more soap. Try Oxydol for dishes tonight. You'll be delighted at how quickly it dissolves grease, leaves dishes and silver sparkling clean.</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">A MARVEL FOR GENERAL CLEANING</p> <p>Makes sinks, bathtubs shine like magic--refrigerators, woodwork fairly gleam--without hard scrubbing. Fast-acting Oxydol saves time and work in washing painted walls, plain, waxed and varnished floors. Cleans coats, shelves quickly, easily. Grand for enameled furniture. And with Oxydol's rich suds--no grit to scratch or mar polished surfaces. Use it regularly for safe, speedy, easy cleaning.</p> 

LISTEN IN DAILY TO OXYDOL'S OWN "MA PERKINS"



PROCTER & GAMBLE
MADE IN U. S. A.
GANTON PATENTS 1,862,289 1,862,290 1,862,291

- The rape of Mickey Horton's wife
- The identity of the child fathered by that rape
- Love triangles lasting a decade or more
- The Salem Strangler
- Cruise of deception
- Various characters kidnapped
- Marena becomes possessed

These don't seem suitable for younger viewers. I long for the days when you could leave a child in the room with the radio on without worry about exposure to anything questionable.

There are thousands of radio shows from the

golden age in circulation by collectors, hobbyists, and sellers. Also, some radio stations broadcast old time radio programs. There is also a satellite station devoted to old time radio every day, all day.

I am sorry to see radio lost as a dramatic entertainment medium. However, there are some places in the country where contemporary drama is created and aired. You can find them by checking the Internet.

I, myself, am a radio hobbyist/historian and regularly lecture at libraries, arts centers, senior centers, and retirement associations in New Jersey. ■

TERRIBLE TEMPERED MR. BANGS

