

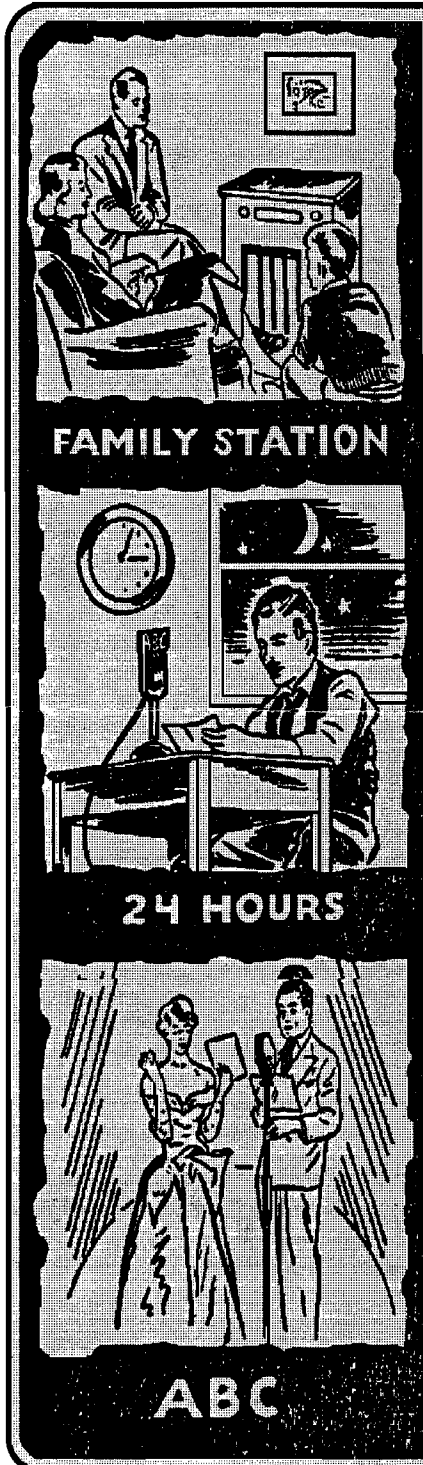
The Old Time Radio Club

Established 1975

THE ILLUSTRATED PRESS

Number 236

May 1996



RADIO'S MOST DRAMATIC

MGM SHOWS

Monday - MAIZIE

Tuesday - MR. PRESIDENT

Wednesday - ANDY HARDY

Thursday - CRIME DOES NOT PAY

Friday - DOCTOR KILDARE

NEW TIME - 6:45 - 7:15

**For the best in
entertainment
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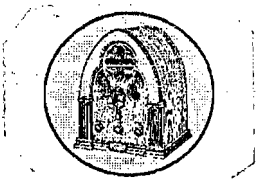
[1949]

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Club Mailing Address

Old Time Radio Club
P.O. Box 426
Lancaster, NY 14086



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**Send all articles, letters, exchange newsletters, etc. to: *The Illustrated Press*
c/o Ken Krug, Editor (716) 684-5290
49 Regal Street
Depew, New York 14043**

Club Officers and Librarians

President

Jerry Collins (716) 683-6199
56 Christen Ct.
Lancaster, NY 14086

Vice President & Canadian Branch

Richard Simpson
960 16 Road R.R. 3
Fenwick, Ontario
Canada, L0S 1C0

Treasurer, Back Issues, Video & Records

Dominic Parisi (716) 884-2004
38 Ardmore Pl.
Buffalo, NY 14213

Membership Renewals, Change of Address

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The JACKIE SHOWS

by Dom Parisi

While reading through some of my old time radio related literature the other day I noticed the number of shows with the name of Jack in the title; Jack Benny, Jack Carson, Jack Paar and so on down the line. This time around I want to write about some of these shows and about the joy, the drama and the entertainment they gave their radio fans.

Whenever we talk about a Jack program the one that comes to mind immediately (at least to my mind) has got to be the master of hesitation, the one-and-only-stingy-thirty-nine-year-old Jack Benny.

Mr. Benny was born Benjamin Kubelsky on February 14, 1894 in Chicago, Illinois. His father entered America as an immigrant from Poland. Jack's father opened a haberdashery store in Waukegan. Jack spent a lot of his early childhood days in the store. When Benny was still a young kid his dad gave him a violin. At around eight years of age he played at Waukegan's Barrison Theatre. Pretty darn good for a youngster of his age. Years later the Barrison hired him as an usher where he also doubled as a violinist. It's a good thing vaudeville was popular in those early days; If not, Benny could have ended up as a violinist in an orchestra. Nothing wrong with that of course; but we lucked out — he became a comedian and stilled played the violin — or tried to. All kidding aside, he was a pretty good violin player.

For some six years while appearing in vaudeville Benny fiddled around but hardly joked around. With World War I on the horizon Jack signed-up in the Navy. He played at a benefit for Navy Relief at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station. His violin solo turned out to be a "bummer". He casually tucked the fiddle under an arm and started talking; just joking around and saying whatever came into his mind. After a few jokes and some encouraging laughter from the audience the violin ended up as a prop for many of his routines.

When the war ended Benny returned to the only thing he knew — vaudeville. He changed his name to Ben K. Benny. He changed it again in 1921 so as to avoid confusion with Ben Bernie, the maestro. Jack played the Palace in New York and toured out west in California. It was while playing a west coast booking that Benny met and married Sadie Marks, later to become Mary Livingstone.

Columnist Ed Sullivan asked Jack to appear on a CBS interview show. This is where Benny spoke his famous: "Ladies and Gentlemen, this is Jack Benny talking, there will be a slight pause while you say — who Cares?" Radio, the new format of entertainment, was starting to grab hold in those early days. His appearance on Ed's show gave Jack a new high and led to an offer from Canada Dry for an NBC series.

Jack Benny's show on radio started on May 2, 1932 over the NBC Blue Network. He was 38 years old, one year away from 39! Chevrolet picked him up in 1933 and he was on at 10 PM on Sunday nights, still over NBC. Jell-O became the sponsor in 1934 with Jack appearing again on Sunday nite at 7 PM. This is where the show ran for the rest of its run - Sunday nite at 7 PM.

After going through a bunch of different orchestras, Jack finally ended up with Phil Harris in 1936. Harris became part of the cast. His "Hi-Ya, Jackson," was one of the shows trademarks. Phil lasted until the early 1950s when he was replaced by Bob Crosby. Of course Phil's own show with his wife Alice Faye was popular at this time.

Mary Livingstone was created in the first two years. Giving his wife the part was one of the best decisions that Jack made. Mary's reading of the letters from her mother in Plainfield, NJ developed into a regular routine on the program.

Eddie Anderson (Rochester) was originally hired to appear in only a one-shot deal as a Pullman porter in 1937. Rochester turned out to be so popular that he returned to the show as Jack's valet and chauffeur. He stayed with the show even when it went into TV.

Don Wilson became the announcer in 1934. He began fitting the commercials into the story lines. Jack's program was one of the first shows to use this technique. (*Fibber McGee and Molly* is another). Singer Frank Parker was one of many to perform on the show. Others included Larry Stevens, Kenny Baker, and Dennis Day, the most popular who ended up with his own show. Dennis was discovered by Mary Livingstone and started with Jack in September 1939, Day stayed with Benny to the end. He was absent only in 1944-45 while away in the service.

The program incorporated some pretty good situation plots that stuck with the show. Andy Devine appeared with his "Hi-Ya Buck!" greeting; Mel Blanc was professor LeBlanc the violin teacher as well as the voice of Jack's Maxwell car and Charmichael the Bear. Sheldon Leonard and his "Psst! hey Bud, C'mere!" Frank Nelson

and "Yeeeeesssss?!" "Mr. Kitzel," played by Artie Averbach with his "pickle in-the-middle-with-the-mustard-on-top!" routine. It went on and on week after week until May 22, 1955, the last live broadcast on radio. Jack Benny the legend, died of cancer on December 26, 1974. (600) note: if a number is shown after each "Jack" program section it will mean the number of shows that are available at this time as reported in the Handbook of Old Time Radio by Jon Swartz and Robert Reinehr.

The Jack Carson Show first appeared on CBS radio for Campbell Soups, on June 2, 1943. The show ran for about four years until 1947 when Carson became the M.C. on *The Sealtest Village Store*.

Arthur Treacher and Eddie Marr became regulars on the show. Band leader Freddy Martin provided the music.

Even with a bunch of well known performers, "Carson's" show never really became popular. Jack Carson gained wider exposure a few years later as the proprietor of *The Village Store*, and let's not forget his movie career.

Before *The Jack Carson Show*, Carson was featured as himself in *The Signal Carnival*, the show ran on NBC in 1941 featuring Barbara Jo Allen as Vera Vague, and Hal Perry as Mr. Smugooznok. Gordon Jenkins provided the music (18 shows available).

The Jack Haley Show began on NBC October 8, 1937 for Log Cabin Syrup, then over CBS in 1938-39 for Wonder Bread. A comedy and musical variety show, it starred Virginia Verrill, Warren Hull the emcee, and Ted Fiorito and his Orchestra. Before getting his own show, Haley was a comic on the *Maxwell House Showboat Program*. I have not heard *The Jack Haley Show* even though (40) are available.

The Jack Kirkwood Show started on NBC as a six-a-week morning show called *Mirth And Madness* in 1943. It moved to CBS in 1944 renamed *The Jack Kirkwood Show*, and ran nightly until 1946. Kirkwood wrote his own stuff and was backed by Irving Miller's Orchestra.

The show revolved around vaudeville type of humor and satire. It usually began with small talk between Kirkwood, his wife Lillian Leigh and announcer Jimmy Wallington. Then it continued on with a couple of musical numbers, and ended with a skit by the little mad-house theatre.

Included in the cast was vocalist Don Reid, Gene Lavalle handled the comedy end. Around 1948 Kirkwood tried a

series called *At Home With The Kirkland's*, spoofing husband and wife shows. The Kirkwood show was also heard on Mutual from 1950-1953 featuring Wally Brown and Steve "Sam Spade" Dunne, this is another in a long list of shows that I haven't heard. (15 available)

Jack Oakie's College, a musical variety show with Oakie as the president of a university bearing his name, was heard on December 29, 1936 over CBS. It was a 60-minute Tuesday night show for Camel Cigarettes and ran until March 22, 1938. Guests on the show included Joe Penner, ("Wanna buy a duck?") Stu Erwin, and a 13-year old singing sensation by the name of Judy Garland. The great Benny Goodman provided the tunes during 1937. Even with all this talent, nothing could help the show. It faded away. Anyone ever hear a Jack Oakie Show? (3 available.)

The Jack Paar Show opened as a summer replacement for Jack Benny on June 1, 1947 over NBC. He was supported by Larry Marks, Artie Stander, Larry Gelbart and Sid Dorfman. Hy Averback was the first announcer. Jane Morgan, better known as the landlady on the *Our Miss Brooks Show*, played Jack's landlady, Mrs. Morgan. Hans Conried played Oliver T. Hampton, an aging actor, and Frank Nelson was another of the announcers. Carol Richards and Jud Conlon's Rhythmairs handled the musical section.

Although this show seemed to have things going for it, it didn't take off, it just went off the air! Who out there has heard a Jack Parr show? (3 available)

The Jack Pearl Show (this one I've heard and can say that I really enjoy it, especially, "Vas you dere, Sharlie?") In 1933 Pearl had a 30 minute Wednesday show for Royal Gelatin on NBC. In 1936 he moved to the Blue Network section of NBC for Raleigh with a Monday night spot.

Pearl blossomed from New York's lower east side right along with Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor. He worked his way up through vaudeville and burlesque finally landing on the 1932 *Ziegfeld Follies of the Air*.

Cliff Hall was a Jack Pearl straight man who became known as "Sharlie." Hall fed "the Baron" (Pearl) the lines; Pearl would respond in character, "Vas YOU dere Sharlie?"

At one time Pearl's show was one of the top ten on radio. But it lost ground quickly. In 1935 he gave up the Baron Munchausen character and concentrated on a situation comedy with a German tavern keeper called Peter Pfeiffer. Cliff Hall stayed with Jack through the

years. Pearl tried several comebacks, in 1942 and 1948. Then it was over. (29 available)

Jack and Cliff Show was a summer comedy and variety program that aired in 1948 only. Jack Pearl and Cliff Hall hosted the show which centered around comedy skits with Pearl's rendition of his famous Baron Munchausen. (0 available)

Jack and Loretta Clemens appeared on just about all the networks — NBC, CBS and the Blue Network in 1933 through 1939. Yet none are known to exist. It was a 15 minute musical show with guitarist Jack and his sister Loretta playing the piano. (0 available)

Jack Armstrong was on the air from 1933 through 1950 on all the major networks at one time or another. This show, as we know, was a juvenile adventure series featuring Jack Armstrong, "the All-American Boy." although Jack Armstrong was not the name of a "real" Jack person, I've included it here because this is a "Jackie" column. Others have done heavy research on this show so I won't go any further except to say that a while ago I asked (through the L.P.) if anyone had a copy of the last episode of "*The Search for Prof. Loring.*" So far I have not received a reply. Has anyone a copy of the lost chapter? (100 episodes available)

Jack Berch and His Boys was heard in 1935-1952 on most of the networks. It was a 15 minute musical program that featured a singer by the name of Jack Berch. Even though around 70 episodes are available, where are they?

Jack Bundy's Carnival MBS in the 1944-1945 season. This was another musical program featuring Jack Bundy and Monica Lewis, with Bob Shepherd and the Bob Stanley Orchestra. I'd be very surprised if anyone out there has ever heard this show. Only 2 episodes are known to be available.

The Jack Coffey Show was heard on the Blue Network in 1941. This was also another musical variety show. It was a 30 minute show hosted by Jack Coffey and featured his Orchestra along with Dick Kapi and Beverly Blayne. You know, I'm no "spring chicken," I've been around the town for a while, but believe me, I never heard of Coffey, Bundy, Berch or Kapi. Who the heck were they? Where are these shows? I have not seen them advertised anywhere! The OTR Handbook says 0 are available — I believe it!

Hang in there! Were not done yet! here's another . . .
Jack Pepper CBS 1944. Yes you guessed it! Another 30 minute musical variety program hosted by a Jack Pep-

per. But, but! This show featured Art Carney, Jackson Beck (these guys we all know), the Murphy sisters, and the Mitchell Ayres Orchestra. Too bad, no shows are in circulation. I hope I'm wrong.

To continue on with another show I haven't heard . . .
The Jack Smith Show over CBS in 1943. The show centered around a program of light music

Singing Jack Smith formed a musical trio while attending Hollywood High School in 1931. They auditioned for a job at the Coconut Grove, Bing Crosby, Al Rinker, and Harry Barris had left the Grove to seek their future in show business. Jack Smith and the boys got the job and lasted almost a year. In the daytime they attended school.

After Smith graduated from school, he sang on *The Kate Smith Show*, *The Prudential Family Hour* and ended up a regular on *Kenny Baker's Glamor Manor*.

Jack Smith's nightly show for Procter and Gamble ran until 1951 on CBS. It played popular tunes of that period and hits of Broadway. Toward the end Margaret Whiting and Dinah Shore joined the show. (19 available)

I couldn't find anything on *Jackie Gleason* although I've heard a show of his that I think is off the radio. Anyone have more information on this?

The Handbook of Old Time Radio lists the following Jack shows but does not list any known information on them except the network they aired over and the years they were on the air. All of the shows listed except *The Jack Webb Show*, where 2 are available, have 0 shows available.

The following are variety programs: *Jack Baker Show*, NBC, 1950-1951 - *Jack Gregson Program*, ABC, 1954-1955 - *Jack's Place*, CBS, 1953 - *Jack Owens Show*, ABC, 1952-1954.

The following are comedy programs: *Jack Webb Show*, ABC, 1946 - *Jack Higgins Show*, Blue Network, 1940-1941.

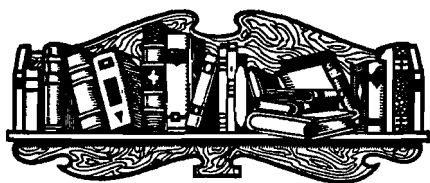
News Show: *Jack Costello*?

Sports Show: *Jack Miley*, NBC, 1939-1940.

The following are music shows: *Jack Miller Show*, CBS, 1931-1932 - *Jack Heller Show*, Blue Network, 1933-1935 - *Jack Fulton Show*, Blue, NBC, CBS, 1932-1938 - *Jack Hunt Show*, CBS, 1952-1953 - *Jack Hylton's Orchestra*, CBS, 1935-1936 - *Jack Frost Melody Moments*,

NBC Blue 1929-1934 - Jack Brook, The Fitch Professor, CBS, 1931-1932.

You know, I couldn't write any of my articles without all the published reference books and material that's available on the market. I enjoyed researching these Jack shows. I hope they include some of your favorites. Please feel free to write with your comments and additional information you can supply regarding this article. We look forward to hearing from our members



Book Review

by DOM PARISI

The Handbook of Old Time Radio, by Jon D. Swartz, Ph.D., has 806 pages and sells for \$100. Cheap it's not — but oh what a source of information.

I purchased my copy from Radio Spirits, Inc., P.O. Box 2141, Schiller Park, IL 60176.

This book is going to be a big help in researching material for future articles. Tune In Yesterday (now out of print) is very helpful when one is writing about OTR; but this new book picks up where Tune In left off. Within its 806 pages is listed over 2,000 radio shows from 1926 through 1962 with brief descriptions of each broadcast. Tune In Yesterday gives longer descriptions on some of the shows; Handbook of OTR doesn't, but its still a valuable source of information on OTR should be a part of every serious collector's library. A lot of shows that are not listed in Tune In are in the Handbook.

You could pick up a copy from your local book store (special order) like "Borders" or "Barnes and Noble" at a cost of around \$92.50. My order through "Radio Spirits" also included 7 Free OTR cassettes. Either way, you can't go wrong.

The book is published by The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Metuchen, NJ and London, 1993. There aren't any photos in this book, but it has a great bibliography section and a listing of dealers with a section on collecting OTR programs. The book is well worth the price.

Oh yes, one more note. Our club is listed in this book!

We Were Years Ahead of Cronkite

by Frank O. McIntyre

World War I was over. The doughboys had returned, to a tumultuous welcome — wearing puteses and hats resembling the planet Saturn. The world was safe for democracy. This nation was in a condition of mass euphoria. And among the marvels of the early 1920s was the wireless telegraph.

We had been reading wartime suspense stories about the mysterious "da-dit-da-da" sounds which rode the night air to troops huddled in the trenches in No Man's Land. This challenged belief. We were still awed by the marvel of transmitting a human voice many miles by wire. For sound to jump across space without any conduit was incredible.

By the middle 1920s, radios were in most American homes. Farmers around my home town of Fullerton, Nebraska (population, about 1,500), strung aerials between windmill towers erected on their houses and barns. The new miracle of radio enabled people living in isolated communities to achieve instant cosmopolitanism. Perhaps our reaction could be summed up best in the call letters of radio station: "WOW"!

People were proud of the capacity of their radios to "pull in" distant stations. There were no networks. Local broadcasters announced call letters at the end of each number, or program segment, thus facilitating distance-seeking, called "DXing."

For a few years, stations in the United States signed off for one hour a week, late in the evening, to permit DX buffs to try for foreign stations. If you heard such a broadcast, you sent data to the Omaha World-Herald, for confirmation and recognition in print.

Ed Agnew, operator of the Fullerton grain elevator and flour mill, impressed his guests at Saturday evening radio-listening sessions. I was in charge of the dials, and I knew the secret. I tuned into WHAS in Louisville, Kentucky, for its nine-o'clock playing of "My Old Kentucky Home," with which it signed off for the evening. Then I simply increased the volume. PWX, in Havana, Cuba, had the same wavelength as WHAS. When they heard the Cuban announcer, Ed's guests were overwhelmed.

The Agnew radio was a *Fada Neutrodyne*, controlled by five big dials. This was the first popular set which was

not "regenerative." Earlier radios (being regenerative) were tuned by bringing a growling, whistling signal to a high pitch, then lowering the volume. These groans and screeches rode the air-waves to other radios in the neighborhood. Some anonymous so-and-sos disrupted popular programs regularly with regenerated cacophony. The Fada "neutralized" the squealing — but its five dials constituted a tuning challenge.

Early radio advertising elevated a product called "Crazy Crystals" to a national health fad. This crystallized mineral water was for people who couldn't afford trips to the spas in Excelsior Springs, Missouri, or Hot Springs, Arkansas.

Until the middle 1920s, we were on the receiving end of radio broadcasting. But a few creative souls aspired to get into the sending business. In Fullerton, Ulysses Arwine was one of them. Ulysses (corrupted to "Useless," then abbreviated to "Use") was Fullerton's resident mechanical genius. He was our counterpart to the "Wizard of Menlo Park." self educated, he almost literally talked to machines.

Given a "Use" Arwine, all that remained for a broadcasting venture of dubious legality in Fullerton was a risk-taking promoter. Gilbert ("Gib") Griffin, owner of the town's nicest restaurant, was such an entrepreneur. "Gib" was the first person in Fullerton to raise silver foxes, ostensibly for profit.

Anyone might have predicted that "Use" Arwine would build a do-it-yourself radio broadcast station to be located in "Gib" Griffin's Cafe, before radio buffs in most towns had progressed beyond mastery of catwhiskers on crystal sets . . . that's what happened.

The call letters of Fullerton's first (and only) radio broadcast station were WBVD. It pirated a wavelength just above that of WOW in Omaha. It operated intermittently during the winter of 1925-26.

It utilized a used World War I Westinghouse transmitter tube. Modern power sources, such as electricity from the city lines, were unavailable — so heavy storage and dry-cell B batteries were used. The microphone was a mouthpiece from an old-style wall telephone. WBVD generated about five watts of power. The farthest confirmed distance of reception was Polk, 35 miles away.

Each evening's broadcasting began with a reading of headlines from the Grand Island Daily Independent. The highlights of the brief broadcasting existence of WBVD was a live full-evening concert by Glenn Miller's Fullerton-based dance band which was moderately

popular in ballrooms in Nebraska and nearby states (not to be confused with the Glenn Miller band of "In the Mood" fame.)

Years after the demise of WBVD, I asked "Use" Arwine if the whole operation hadn't been illegal. He guessed that it was — but he explained that there were no teeth in federal regulations in the 1920s. According to him, the worst that could have happened would have been confiscation of his equipment — which, if it hadn't been a radio transmitter, would have been junk.

After a few weeks Arwine and Griffin abandoned the project, and "Runt" Agnew and I entered the scene. By the way, that nickname was standard in Fullerton not for a person of slight stature, but for one whose name was Ronald.

"Runt" was a high school sophomore. I was a junior. Somehow he gained possession of the Arwine-Griffin apparatus. After being dismantled, it was a jumble of wires, batteries and other gadgets — plus one old telephone mouthpiece. We rebuilt it and added extra battery power in the process, we blew a couple of tubes.

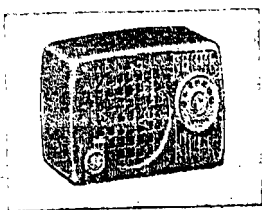
Our studio was Agnew's unfinished basement — dark and dingy, but quiet. Our call letters were WORM.

As was the custom with some early stations, we had a slogan. It was "the latest sound from underground." I take credit for the gem. I was the poet laureate of the Wolf Patrol of the Boy Scouts.

I was the announcer. It was that bad. We talked a lot, and we played 78 rpm records on a crank-wound "talking machine." It never occurred to us that there might be laws regulating such practices.

Occasionally we conned a prominent citizen into making a guest appearance. We presented a program of solos by Mrs. J. Dudley Barnes, the town soprano. It was said that she could hit notes so high that even the dogs couldn't hear them, and that she shattered glass within a 10 mile radius, without benefit of an amplifier.

After less than a week, some Fullerton townspeople warned us that the federal monitor station in Grand Island was aware of our existence, and was displeased. We scoffed at the idea. We didn't believe that our tiny Rube Goldbergian station could reach 40 miles to Grand Island. But better judgment prevailed — not ours, but that of our parents. Thus, a brief interlude of leadership in electronic communication in Fullerton, Nebraska, ended . . . almost nobody knew it.



SAME TIME, SAME STATION

by Jim Cox

PERRY MASON

One of radio's most chilling melodramas was played out, quite surprisingly, every weekday afternoon for a dozen years. Few people under the half-century mark will recall that television's most famous attorney, *Perry Mason* — who solved scores of murder cases in closing witness stand sequences that kept audiences guessing for almost an hour — was catapulted into that series from radio. And the radio version was drawn from some highly successful pulp fiction loosely based on the alter-ego of southern California lawyer-turned-author Erle Stanley Gardner.

By the time Mason reached CBS' 15 minute soap opera lineup on October 18, 1943, the character was familiar to millions of mystery novel fans. In his daily prologue, narrator Richard Stark exclaimed: "*Perry Mason*, the famous character created by Erle Stanley Gardner, dramatized by Irving Vendig. *Perry Mason*, defender of human rights, champion of all those who seek justice."

Convinced, in the war years, that housewives would welcome an interruption in their daily dosage of small town trivia, ad agency Pedlar and Ryan packaged the series for Proctor and Gamble. P & G carried *Mason* until it left the air in 1955, first for Camay, then for a new laundry detergent . . . "Proctor and Gamble's new washday miracle — nothing else will wash as clean as Tide, yet is so mild."

At the start of the radio series, Gardner wrote the scripts himself. At that time the format may have paralleled more closely the TV version than it would later. (The first radio sequence was "The Case of The Unwanted Wife.") Gardner, however, grew weary of churning out five-a-week scripts and relinquished that task to others, notably Ruth Borden and Irving Vendig.

Under Vendig, *Mason* flourished, reaching its stride by the turn of the decade. He developed the character into one whose prolonged, yet absorbing, action-packed dilemmas caught the fancy of millions. As America's housewives attended to their ironing boards, dishpans and diapers, murder and mayhem in the early afternoon (2:45 ET the first season, 2:30 the second and a decade at 2:15) must have been a welcome diversion. By 1950,

Mason was achieving some of the highest audience ratings of all soap opera.

Vendig was masterful in employing the organ sting to keep his listeners at rapt attention and near their radios for the next bit of Stark's monologue. Fans who followed one of TV's earliest and most enduring serials, *Search for Tomorrow*, a little later, had to see similarities in the two programs: In its early years, *Search* was heavily flavored with intrigue and generous organ strings, too. Little wonder — Vendig wrote both P & G-sponsored series.

Following the opening Tide commercial of a typical *Mason* sequence broadcast May 2, 1950, announcer Stark poignantly asks: "How does tragedy strike? Of what is mystery made? Why the commonplace of seemingly unrelated everyday events? . . . At the moment, in *Perry Mason's* own hotel, a tragedy is being played out. And what do we know? We know this: on a bed in an apartment next to *Perry Mason's*, a young woman sobs her heart out . . . And then, driven by her overwhelming despair and unreasoning emotions, she rises from that bed, walks to her dresser, opens the drawer . . ."

Stark's voice is interrupted by a phone ringing again and again without being answered. He continues: "The telephone in her room blares an urgent summons, but Kay Clement, if she hears it, pays no attention . . . Her mind is too full of her own bitter thoughts, with the seeming collapse of her own personal world" . . . A clock ticks loudly into the microphone. Stark adds: "Minutes pass. Kay's bitter sobbing grows less. And then — ." (Glass shatters as shots are fired; sharp organ stings underscore the action.)

Meanwhile, listeners learn that *Mason* and his secretary, Della Street, are finishing an early dinner in the hotel dining room downstairs. Taking the elevator up to continue working, they see the door open to the Clement apartment. Calling out and receiving no answer, they step inside and find four smashed clocks on the floor, and — at the end of the hall — Kay Clement, lying under a window, barely breathing, wearing a watch with its face smashed, also. "What do you make of it, chief?" Street asks. "I'm not gonna try," *Mason* answers.

As the pair move the young girl to *Mason's* apartment, a blue envelope drops from Kay's hand. "What do we do now? Call a doctor?" Street asks, as the organ stingingly rises and fades to the final commercial.

After the commercial, Stark's parting words for the day — as always — are designed to hold the audience for more: "As *Perry Mason* stands looking at the small,

pathetic figure of Kay Clement unconscious on his couch . . . wonders what caused these strange events . . . he has no idea the key lies in the blue envelope Della saw drop from Kay's hand, the blue envelope which is to lead to so much intrigue, excitement and heartbreak. (sting) Won't you join us tomorrow?

Six weeks later, in the episode of June 13, 1950, *Mason* and Street are still involved in the Clement sequence. By now, a man named Gonzalez, identified as a drug pusher and "probably a killer," has avowed his mission is to silence Clement. Meanwhile, Clement has eluded protective custody provided by homicide lieutenant Tragg, and is now hiding out. Who will find her first — *Mason* or Gonzalez? And who could possibly turn it off and never return to the mystery now?

The traditional pace had been slow in radio soaps, with the argument advanced that a listener should be able to miss two or three consecutive programs and not lose the story line. But compelled by TV in the late 40s to become more exciting and attractive, many serials stressed action. In 1951, *Perry Mason* solved three murders and sought many other deviates for lesser crimes.

There were some major differences in the *Mason* of radioland and the one on TV — *Perry*, his secretary Della Street, his unheard / unseen receptionist Gertie, private detective Paul Drake and Lt. Tragg — different people filled the roles in the two mediums. Who could forget the imposing Raymond Burr as TV's *Mason*, or his competent ally Miss Street, played by Barbara Hale?

Did a cigarette ever cross Miss Street's lips? Not on TV, to be sure. But in the radio version, *Mason* and Street were nicotine addicts. In no way did that diminish their ability to pursue dangerous criminals, of course. Nor to follow spellbinding plots which must have allowed more than one housewife to absentmindedly burn an occasional shirt with a hot iron.

On radio, Bartlett Robinson was the original *Mason*, followed by Santos Ortega, Donald Briggs and the man who would be best remembered for the role, ruggedly handsome John Larkin. For half of the series' life, 1949-55, he gave the part a quick-tempered interpretation that breathed life into Vendig's scripts.

Larkin's other radio credits included lead roles in *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*, *Helpmate*, *Mark Trail*, *Radio City Playhouse* and *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*.

As the *Mason* radio run ended, the announcement had already been made that Larkin would star in a half-hour daily soap opera CBS-TV was developing for P&G to

debut in 1956, *The Edge of Night*. *Night* would be a thinly veiled version of *Mason*. Larkin would play detective (and later, attorney) Mike Karr in the serial.

Three of radio's leading ladies — Gertrude Warner (*Joyce Jordan, M.D., Mrs. Miniver, Modern Romances, Whispering Streets*, et al), Jan Miner (*Casey, Crime Photographer, Hilltop House, Lora Lawton* and more) and Joan Alexander — played Della Street, in that order. Alexander had the memorable run, playing opposite Larkin.

Her other radio credits included the part of Lois Lane in *The Adventures of Superman* and supporting roles in *The Man from G-2, Rosemary* and *This is Nora Drake*. In the latter, she was Peg Martinson, the "other woman" who made life hell for Nora in that series' early days.

Others in the *Mason* cast were Matt Crowley and Charles Webster as Paul Drake; Mandel Kramer and Frank Dane as Lieutenant Tragg. Besides Stark, announcers Alan Kent and Bob Dixon were featured. For a while, the program actually had two announcers — one for the commercials (whose name is lost to history), the other (most prominently, Stark) as narrator of the episodes.

While not unique, portions of *Mason's* theme were played simultaneously on the organ and piano by William Meader. Created for the program, the first notes of the radio theme were adapted for the opening of the familiar TV series theme.

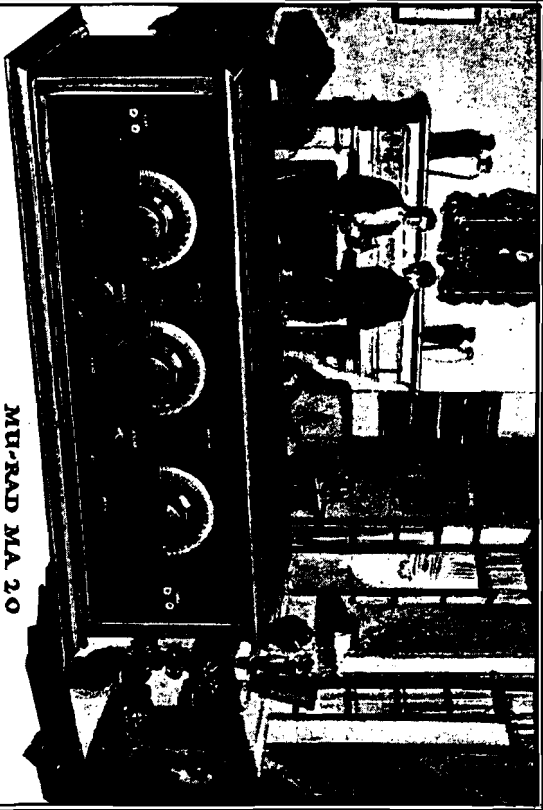
Mason dispelled any lingering thoughts that the only way for radio soap opera to succeed was to feature a female lead — or a philosophizing or senile male or a male in a contrived story who was flanked by at least one ambitious woman. Here was a bright, young male professional whom women admired — whose exploits for righteousness carried them far from the routine and mundane of their often simple existences. It was pure fantasy, and big doses became addictive to a fault.



The Last WORD . . .

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[1924]



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