

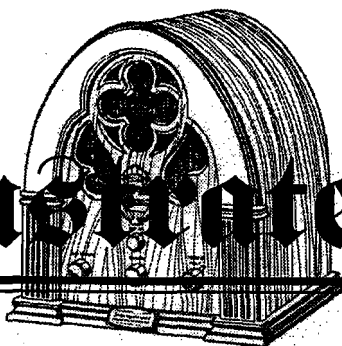
The Old Time Radio Club

Established 1975

The Illustrated Press

Number 313

October 2003



**First in the hearts of
radio fans—Fibber McGee
and his wife Molly**

The Illustrated Press

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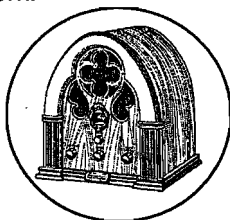
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BOOK Reviews

Walter B. Gibson and The Shadow

by Thomas J. Shimeld

A Book Review by Dan Marafino

Born Sept. 12, 1897 at 2:00 P.M., a new shadow is about to cast itself across the land. In the years to come, the Shadow will become the most popular character to grace the pages of books, all due to the mind of Walter B. Gibson. I will not dwell on all of Mr. Gibson's accomplishments in this book, after all something must be left for the reader to enjoy. Therefore I will give a brief rendering of what Mr. Gibson has given us.

Walter Gibson loved to write, it was his passion. It was not uncommon for him to sit down at his typewriter in the morning, his 10 or so packs of cigarettes alongside of him, and type until his fingertips were numb and bleeding. After a short rest, he would continue on into the night.

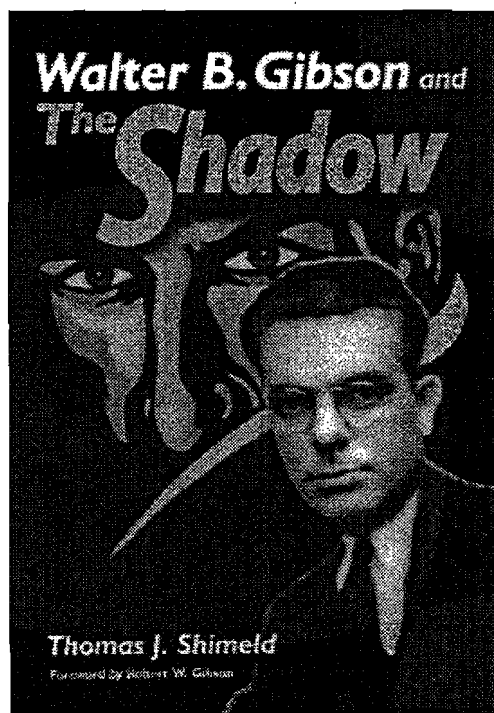
Mr. Gibson's first love, and which would later play a hand in the creation of the Shadow, was the study of magic. He was fascinated with it and through the years made many magician friends; Harry Houdini, Howard Thurston, the Blackstones (father and son) and many more. Gibson thought Houdini was more of an escape artist than a magician but held him in high regard nonetheless.

The firm of Street & Smith employed Mr. Gibson for quite some time writing their magazines. During this period Gibson found the time to create characters of his own, among them *Nick Carter*. Unfortunately Walter was not a business person and for all the millions of words he typed out, he did not get what he was due. He practically did it for nothing, but dismissed this because he loved what he did.

To review this book without telling you more would take a magician, there is so much more inside the covers. How Mr. Gibson came to create the Shadow is a chapter in itself.

Interestingly Mr. Gibson never wrote a script for *The Shadow* radio program. Oh he thought they were well done but he didn't have the time for it. As far as the recent *Shadow* movie is concerned, Walter passed on before it was released.

I have read this book from cover to cover and as far as I'm concerned, it is the best and most comprehensive piece of literature I have read on the subject. *The Shadow* was truly America's first superhero, and although his ways were at times suspect, the end result won out and justified the means. I rate this book very highly and suggest it should go on your must read list.



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The Encyclopedia of Women in Radio, 1920-1960

by Leora M. Sies and Luther F. Sies

Reviewed by Jerome Collins

Let me begin with a number of general statements. There has been a definite need for a research book on the role of women in radio. There is probably a need for a similar book on the role of men in radio. This is definitely a research book. It is definitely not a book that you would read only for pleasure. As a research book, the index and the system of retrieval are vital to the book's success. Luther Sies and his wife Leora have devoted a portion of their life writing The Encyclopedia of Women in Radio. A great deal of professional research went into the writing of the book. Have the Sies' achieved complete success with this book? I will let you decide.

When a writer produces an encyclopedia such as this one there is always the risk that certain people, shows and events will be left out of the book. Unfortunately, the more important the item left out, the greater the flaw in the book. I have selected some of my favorite actresses and shows and checked to see how they were cited in The Encyclopedia of Women in Radio, 1920-1960.

Lee Allman was one of the top actresses at Station WXYZ in Detroit. Lee played Miss Case on the *Green Hornet* as well as occasional roles on the *Lone Ranger* and *Sgt. Preston*. She is not mentioned in the book.

The Great Gildersleeve probably had more women in key parts than any show in radio. Counting his niece, secretary, housekeeper and numerous girl friends, there were 13 woman in key roles. Still it is not one of the 10,500 items in the book.

Lucille Ball played the lead role on *My Favorite Husband*. This show would eventually lead to the creation of the *I Love Lucy Show* on television. Once again neither Miss Ball nor her show is listed. After much searching I did find the show in the comedy section.

The Encyclopedia of Radio includes a very complete listing for *The Shadow*. Both Agnes Moorehead and Gertrude Warner played the part of Margot Lane.

These two along with Lesley Woods, Grace Mathews and Marjorie Anderson were included in *The Shadow* listing. When you go to the individual listings for these five actresses only Grace Mathews' listing includes any reference to *The Shadow*.

Vicki Vola was one of radio's top actresses. She is listed under the heading for *Mary Noble Backstage Wife*, *The Road of Life*, *Our Gal Sunday*, *The Man I Married* and *Brenda Curtis*. Her most famous role was that of Miss Miller on *Mr. District Attorney*. The listing for that show does not include the names of any actors or actresses.

Rosa Rio was one of radio's top organists. She was featured on many of radio's top shows including *Cavalcade of America*, *Ethel and Albert*, *Front Page Farrell*, *Hannibal Cobb*, *Lorenzo Jones*, *The Shadow*, *When a Girl Marries* and *Myrt and Marge*. Yet only one radio show is mentioned in her listing.

Anne Hummert, Elaine Carrington and Irna Phillips were three of the biggest names in radio soap operas. Hummert might not have been the best, but she was the most productive, the most controversial and probably produced the most famous soap operas. She is the only one of the three not listed in the index.

On the positive side, The Encyclopedia of Women in Radio is very thorough when it comes to *The Adventures of Sam Spade*, *Nick Carter Master Detective*, *Ellery Queen* and *The Thin Man*.

Mr. and Mrs. Seis also did a very thorough and complete job with female singers like the Andrews Sisters, the Boswell Sisters, Kate Smith, Ethel Waters, Jessica Dragonette, Ruth Etting and others.

An equally good job is done with female comedians such as Gracie Allen, Judy Cannova, Mary Livingston, Fanny Brice, Marian Jordan, Jane Ace, Joan Davis and others. Unfortunately neither their names nor the names of their shows are listed in the index. The section on comedians is thirteen pages in length. Thus it was somewhat difficult to find some of the comedians. It might have been better to use page numbers rather than listing numbers in the index. I am also somewhat biased. One of my favorites, Alice Faye and *The Phil Harris and Alice Faye Show* are not mentioned in the book. At least I could not find any mention of the show. Maybe this touches on the book's biggest problem.

I am certain that the book will serve a purpose as a research tool. I did not find any inaccurate material. Still some material is missing. In other cases it is difficult to find certain material. Based on the last two

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commentns the use of these books for continuous research is possible, but at times very difficult.

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by Elba Lohman

Looking for a word to describe Spike Jones is about as hopeless a proposition as searching for the philosopher's stone. The English language just isn't strong enough. Ever since 1942, when "Der Fuehrer's Face" first planted Spike's homely pan firmly on the pop music map, frenzied pen-pushers have been seeking the *mot juste*—but to no avail. They've finally compromised by calling him a "primitive."

Actually, the ebullient terror of band-land is anything but pre-historic. He's more like a musical coming attraction of the atomic age. No caveman in his wildest nightmares could possibly have conjured up the powerful din of metal and motor raised by the "City Slickers" at their best. And it's doubtful if even the most talented aborigine could equal the lip and larynx effects of Spike's unique crew.

It was Spike Jones who first took the tin in Tin Pan Alley seriously. Foremost among his musical instruments are such melodic devices as washboards, cowbells, auto horns, police sirens, thimbles and motorcycles. To this gay and effervescent zombie, music is sound—and anything that can make a noise belongs in a jazz band. His favorite boast is that the 10-man "City Slicker" aggregation can play louder than any 100-piece symphony orchestra in the land, is willing to prove it at the drop of a Flit gun. Competition merely inspires him to new and greater acts of mayhem against traditional schmaltz.

Take his performance in the movie, "Thank Your Lucky Stars," for example. Scheduled to follow Dinah Shore and an 80-piece symphony orchestra on the screen, he was told that his own miniature gang of rioters would suffer by comparison. Spike stuck out that James Cagney-ish jaw, gave the problem a second's thought, and snapped right back with a solution. He'd show 'em. Answer was to hire Phoebe, a gifted goat who could "Naa-a-ah" in the key of C when required. Cue-ing Phoebe was a comparatively easy matter, by the way. She knew she was to give out with the bleat whenever one of the boys twisted her tail.

That was the beginning of a trend for Spike. Fans have noticed that he never lets go of a good idea once he's spotted it, just keeps adding on new moans and groans from time to time. Phoebe's debut was such a breathtaking success, that Spike innovated a chimp in the band for "Meet the People," a camel for "Bring on the Girls," and finally a Berkshire pig for "Breakfast in Hollywood." Now he's beginning to worry if the zoo will have enough animals to supply him for the rest of his picture engagements.

Spike wasn't always as much of a screwball as he is today. Nor was he always so famous. Melodic manslaughter and money seem to go hand in hand for him. Born thirty-five years ago as Lindley Armstrong Jones, he first became interested in rhythm listening to clicking rails and express train whistles as he followed his station-agent father from town to town. Drums became his first love when a Negro cook in Calpatria, California, took pity on the yearning lad and whittled him out a pair of drumsticks from chair rungs. Then eleven, Spike pilfered the cook's breadboard, started his precedent-shattering career innocently enough by strumming out "Carolina in the Morning."

The following Christmas, the senior Jones' (mother was a schoolteacher) promised their delighted youngster that he could have a set of drums—provided that he stick to the straight and narrow musically speaking. Jazz was definitely taboo. But in spite of these well-meant plans, Jones was soon thumping out heat-beats as part of a dance quartet called the Calipat Melody Four. He continued right in the groove when the family returned to his home town of Long Beach, organizing a dance orchestra called "Spike Jones and His Five Tacks." For local radio shows, the "Tacks" metamorphosed into "The Patent Leather Kids," a name more pleasing to their shoe-store sponsor.

Polytechnic High School was followed by Chaffee Junior College in Ontario, California—and then years that seemed years of standard drumming. Ray West, Everett Hoagland, Earl Burnett were some of the lad's maestros,

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and by the standards of the depression-ridden thirties, Spike was doing all right. Sometimes he made his \$90 a week, sometimes half that. Anyway, by the time he met Patricia Ann Middleton (singer with Al Lyon's orchestra) in 1935, he thought he was pulling a steady enough income to get married on. (The way Patricia Ann tells it, their meeting was symbolic. The first night she saw him, Spike had forgotten his tie, was trying to conceal the deficiency from the public by knotting a shoe-string around his manly throat. That shoestring didn't bother the songstress, apparently, and neither did the next few years when she became even better acquainted with shoestrings—and ways and means of living on them.)

Breaking into radio was a step up for Spike, and for a while in the late thirties he thought he was sitting pretty and life was treating him just fine. Stints with such big names as Rubinoff, Burns and Allen, Eddie Cantor and John Scott Trotter raised the ante to about \$150 on Saturday nights, and besides there was baby Linda Lee at home to keep him amused. But placidity and contentment were never Jones' strong points, and in due time he got so bored with the straight playing of popular tunes that he decided to lambast them privately just for the heck of it.

Looney weekly jam sessions in a building adjoining the Hollywood cemetery resulted—and it was here that the irreverent burlesquing technique the public loves was born. The musicians, fed up to the ears with the saccharine hit tunes they played for a living, came prepared to "louse them up" in no uncertain fashion. Pistols, saws, firebells, auto pumps, tuned cowbells all made their appearance—and their contribution. Nobody took it at all seriously until Harry Myerson, West Coast recording manager for Victor, heard one of their records and spotted it for a winner.

That was the beginning of the home stretch for Spike. Here at last was a field his wacky, mocking spirit could let go of its inhibitions on—and even make money doing it. One after another he began to turn out the musical libels that have made him famous. Typical of the Jones repertoire is that tongue-in-the-cheek version of "Chloe" which sends the "City Slickers" adorers into shuddering ecstasy. As Spike explains, for years he was driven crazy by radio baritones shouting for "Chloe," and in his recording he's out to find her once and for all. The search is a ribald parody starting out with all the traditional heavy jungle background of the smooth jazz orchestras, but suddenly bursting loose with "Chloe—where are you, you old bat you?" Then there's "Little Bo Peep Has Lost Her Jeep," with the devil-may-care lads tearing apart the bowels of an old jalopy for realistic effects. Automobiles, by the way, have almost unlimited possibilities as musical instruments



Cass Daley peeks at Spike's future in "Ladies' Man."

when the "Slickers" get hold of them. There are so many parts to a car, and each part can be encouraged to emit so many different kinds of squeaks, honks, rattles and coughs. Last year, Spike released a jubilant and important communique to the press on the subject: "Now that the government has issued an ultimatum removing all dangerous and dilapidated automobiles from the highways, I have been able to obtain plenty of instruments from local junkyards. Have compiled super auto-radiator-section to feature in my new band, to be used for the first time in our impression of the Ink Spots imitating us, imitating the Ink Spots imitating us, in "You Always Hurt the One You Love." He also mentioned that since his Beverly Hills neighbors complained about the noise of his rehearsals, he had made arrangements for the use of a convenient garage. "The tenants next door to it don't seem to mind," he states. "Apparently they can't tell the difference between the mechanics' hammering and ours."

Another popular insult to standard music is "Behind Those Swinging Doors." For once, Spike had to hire an extra player to get just the effect he wanted. The new-

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comer was a trombone player who received the Musicians' Union recording scale of \$30, not to play the instrument, but just to burp on cue—"which he did," says Jones, "with unusual finesse." Only slightly less spectacular is the "Slickers" idea of using a complete set of tuned doorbells (presented by a fan who felt Spike had missed something) to record "I Started to Sneeze at Lake Louise When It Got Damp at Banff." Other incredible hair-raisers (which no self-respecting Jones fan would miss) are "Drip, Drip, Drip" or "Sloppy Lagoon" (in which canteloupes slosh about in H₂O); "Blue Danube" (tenderly enlivened with burps where they will do the most good); "The Glow Worm" (played with Flit guns); and "Leave the Dishes in the Sink, Ma" (Spike's first attempt at tunewriting, abetted by Milton Berle and Gene Doyle).

Of course, it wouldn't do to forget "Der Fuehrer's Face," said to be the biggest comedy hit in the history of the record business. Until that momentous July day in 1942, Spike had been just coasting pleasantly along, producing a musical razzberry for the Victor Company every two months. Then the "Slickers" 12th offering was turned down—just at the time that Petrillo set a deadline for recordings. The maestro had to think of something else in a hurry, settled on the Disney tune, "Der Fuehrer's Face." After a struggle to get permission, Spike finally waxed the disc on the very last day allowed. He tried two versions—one with the trombone doing its best to imitate a Bronx cheer, and another with the genuine home-grown article. Needless to say, the real "bird" was fruitier, seemed to Jones the making of the song. Only catch in the situation was that the sound had never been used before in a recording, was likely to be firmly turned down by the company's representatives in New York. Spike thought the situation over, decided there was only one answer, and did a mad Paul Revere to New York in the hopes of keeping his pet squawk in the record. After his wild cross-country dash, the impulsive melody-maniac was surprised—and a little disappointed—to find out no arguments were needed. The "bird" stayed in as everyone now knows—and sold 1,500,000 copies of that resounding insult to the moustached would-be superman. It was after that that Spike Jones and his "City Slickers" became a firmly-entrenched American jazz institution.

Spike's not one to depend on other men's gadgets and contraptions. He's invented a few exotic clamor-creators of his own, such as the sneezaphone, the collidophone, the crashophone (to break glass) and the poontangophone (a cigar box and a lathe). Most risqué of his instruments is one he designed to amuse the G.I.'s while on a USO tour in France. Named the latrino-*phone*, Spike describes it as a new kind of harp, made by stringing a Chic Sales seat cover with catgut.

Some of these contraptions can be quite hazardous, as the band members know to their sorrow. A first aid kit is always on hand to take care of the odd accidents which may occur when a man starts fooling around with an anvil, a crashophone and a goat at the same time. And if Spike could only find a nurse who would jump right into the thick of things and make noises as well, he'd annex her too.

But in spite of these expected occupational risks, the boys really seem to love their work, feel a genuine professional interest in the amount of sheer bang, bang they can produce. On occasion, they even take time off to dream up some novelties too wacky to hit even a "City Slickers" recording. The world is still waiting breathlessly for that epitome of gooniness in which these serious-minded artists zip mustard plasters from each other's torsos. But so far they've never been able to polish the effect to the high standards required by the public ear.

They join with the boss, though, in rejoicing at the fact that they have now started corrupting the young as well as the bobby-soxers and older folks. New recordings for children, "Old MacDonald Had a Farm" and the "Mother Goose Medley," are merely a first attack. As soon as materials are available, they're all set to drive the neighbors hysterical with some "City Slickers" musical toys—miniature washboards, cowbells, and the like. And the follow-up is an album of fairy tales for grown-ups in their second childhood. After that, Spike expects to have the whole gamut of the generations listening avidly to his renditions of "songs you'd like to forget."

There's only one false note in the whole picture for Spike Jones now. He's got everything—records, radio, movies, composers twirling in their graves, a happy home, a racket-conscious public. But he can't seem to make the uproar that he should in the sheet-music industry. On paper Spike's energy just doesn't register.

(August, 1946)



BING CROSBY

Kraft Music Hall

by Tom Cherre

Bing Crosby was an American Icon in the first half of the twentieth century. He was a number one movie attraction, and the number one recording star. He also happened to have the most popular musical radio show on the air . . . *The Kraft Music Hall*. The Kraft Pheonix Cheese Company had introduced the *Kraft Music Hall Revue* in 1933 for the express purpose of promoting their new concoction, something called "Miracle Whip", Sound Familiar? This product was like mayonnaise which served as a salad dressing and sandwich spread. The *Kraft Music Hall* with Bing as its star personified the radio industry. The show became an instant hit. Not only did 50 million listeners tune in each Thursday to hear Bing sing, they also looked forward to hearing his special guests. His guest list which included top singers, actors, comedians, and occasionally a big sports star, was never equaled. *Kraft Music Hall* was similar to Ed Sullivan's TV Show which would follow a few decades later. The *Kraft Music Hall* format ran with Bing's theme "Where the Blue Of the Night" and host Ken Carpenter introducing Bing and his guests. Bing would sing a few songs then join his guest, chit chat with him or her and maybe even sing a duet. Bing was always congenial, witty and humorous, and always put on the Crosby charm. He made you feel relaxed with his down home approach. You felt comfortable listening to him. The show was also an excellent vehicle for plugging a new record or an upcoming movie. Back in '38 when the country's population was about 120 million Bing had almost 50% of the listening audience. If any club member has attended one of our OTR meetings you'd be blind if you didn't notice the many hundreds of Crosby albums that adorn our club member Emeritus Ed Wanat's walls. I'm sure Ed will clue me in to the exact count next meeting.



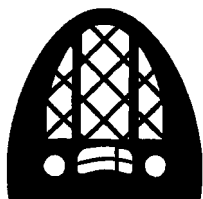
Born of humble means in Spokane Washington, Harry Lillis Crosby toiled through many jobs while growing up. Bing recalls his favorite school boy job was a caddy for the local club. His love of golf remained with him the rest of his life. He started singing in local clubs with his partner Al Rinker. People enjoyed his smooth melodic crooning voice. He formed a strong relationship with jazz. He improvised a format called scat singing where he would mix syllables to a different melody. He also became acquainted with a young black horn player from New Orleans. His name was Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong. This relationship would also last a lifetime. No one, not Sinatra, Elvis, the Beatles, or Streisand would ever have as many hit songs for over three decades. No one probably ever will. His movies, records, and radio show speak for themselves. In this 21st century Bing has all but been forgotten, I'm sure he holds a soft spot in not only Ed's heart, but in all of ours.

Much has been said about Bing's drinking problem. Sure, he had a problem in his early days, but he licked it. He was able to have a drink or two later on and that was it. The media also dwelled on his being overly strict with his sons. I feel this item was overly exaggerated. My dad was strict, but my brothers and I survived for the better. Despite all this Bing Crosby came off as a nice guy. He was kind and generous to his friends, especially to those down on their luck. He could sing and act. He was fond of golf, and was probably one of the top amateur's in his time, no matter what his buddy Bob Hope might have said. He liked horse racing and was an avid reader. Of course he liked to have a pipe smoke once in awhile. I truly enjoyed his music and movies. I even named my dog "O'Mally" after his fine portrayal of Father Chuck O'Mally from "Going My Way." In one of Bing's interviews he was quoted saying



Bing was 27 and Dixie was 18 when they married on Sept. 29, 1930. She was far more famous than he was.

"I was never much of an actor. I guess I could deliver a line when I had to, and I guess I could carry a tune, but other than that I wasn't anything special." I tend to strongly disagree. His last words walking off the 18th tee were "That was a great game of golf fellas." He took a few steps and he was gone. In my book he may be gone, but anything but forgotten. He was truly one of the best.



RADIOLDIES

by DAN MARAFINO

The Announcers - Part 1

The announcing profession has undergone a genuine metamorphosis since the days of radio's heyday. The announcers of that era were often considered glamorous figures, often ranking on a level with the programs' stars. They were nationally known and were frequently integrated into the program content as characters who made specific contributions to the plot, not just disembodied voices who "announced" the shows. Good voices and stylish delivery were valued assets, especially in the very early days of relatively poor transmission and reception. Diction and pronunciation were also important, and announcers were expected not only to be authorities on the English language but to be able to pronounce correctly the names of obscure foreign composers and conductors. While the announcers of that era were not often required to depart from a prepared script, the ability to ad-lib was an asset too. The goal of every announcer was perfection. A fluff or mispronunciation would strike terror into the heart of the announcer who committed it and would be the subject of discussion by network executives and alert listeners for days.

An announcer had several functions. He usually introduced the program and its star, often read the commercials, and was frequently called upon to act as a straight man for the comedian. In addition, a number of network announcers were used before the actual broadcast to "warm-up" the studio audience. They would walk on stage a few minutes before broadcast time, tell jokes, and give instructions on how and when to applaud. Their routine would usually call for them to introduce the cast. Some programs were constructed so that they began with applause or laughter, and it was the warmup announcer's duty to time such audience reaction so that it would be up full just as the program took to the air. The announcer would go to any lengths to trigger audience laughter—a sure fire way was to drop his trousers unexpectedly.

Some of the standard gags used during warmups included the announcers instructions to the audience, "When we wave at you, it means to applaud. Don't wave back!"; "O.K. folks, we have thirty seconds to go . . . if anybody has to!"; "Now be sure to clap real loud so the folks back home in Des Moines can hear you!"; and, after telling people that they should get acquainted with each other, "Now, just turn around and shake hands with the fellow behind you." When they did turn around, of course, the fellow behind was also turned around. Another favorite gag was to tell everyone to hold hands and then ask a man on the end of the aisle to stick his finger in the electric socket.

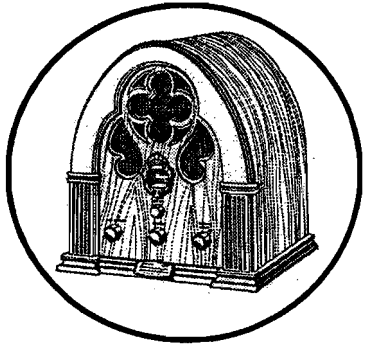
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- 3162 Family Theater "The Littlest Angel" 12/21/49
Family Theater "The Cobbler's Widow" 12/28/49
- 3163 Family Theater "The Adventures of Pinocchio"
1/31/51
Family Theater "The Long Way 'Round" 2/7/51
- 3164 Family Theater "Pardon For Tippy" 3/14/51
Family Theater "Passion And Death of Christ"
3/21/51
- 3165 Family Theater "Tommy Malone Comes Home"
4/25/51
Family Theater "Heaven Is Like That" 5/2/51

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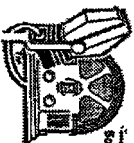
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