

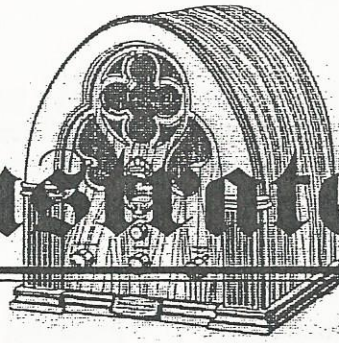
The Old Time Radio Club

Established 1975

The Illustrated Press

Number 397

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Membership Information

Club Membership: \$18.00 per year from January 1 to December 31. Members receive a tape library listing, reference library listing and the monthly newsletter. Memberships are as follows: If you join January-March, \$18.00; April-June, \$14; July-September, \$10; October-December, \$7. All renewals should be sent in as soon as possible to avoid missing newsletter issues. Please be sure to notify us if you have a change of address. The **Old Time Radio Club** meets on the first Monday of the month at 7:30 PM during the months of September through June at St. Aloysius School Hall, Cleveland Drive and Century Road, Cheektowaga, NY. There is no meeting during the month of July, and an informal meeting is held in the month of August.

Anyone interested in the Golden Age of Radio is welcome. The **Old Time Radio Club** is affiliated with the Old Time Radio Network.

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All Submissions are subject to approval prior to actual publication.

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Send all articles, letters, exchange newsletters, etc. to: **The Illustrated Press**

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Library Rates:

Audio cassettes and CDs are \$1.95 each and are recorded on a **club supplied cassette or CD** which is **retained** by the member. Rates include postage and handling and are payable in U.S. funds.



Editor's Two Cents:

Well, our first meeting of the New Year went off well. The weather so far, has been nothing short of spectacular. If you're a snow hater like me you have to be happy. Jerry passed out a slinger dealing in the directions our club is going. To make our club successful and ongoing, there are premises that we must follow. We have been doing some, and may have to make a few changes down the line. Peter Bellanca said "We're not going to live forever, except for Frank, and we may have to think about "Pop Culture"." Diversifying our club to meet the needs and wants of others, like Old Time TV or maybe comics. These were a few suggestions. In the meantime we will continue to follow the latest venues and update as we have been doing. In other words we must change with the times. Those who have not paid their annual dues will get a note in this newsletter advising them that they must pay to keep active and continue with the newsletter. On Wednesday January 11th Frank and I ventured out to see the latest Guy Ritchie Sherlock Holmes flick. I am at a loss for words. While this may not be a bad movie I was not totally happy walking out. I will say the costumes and scenery were great. Ritchie made me

feel like I was back in Victorian Times. The story line was rather week. Being a Sherlock Holmes purist I was a little turned off by his razzle dazzle hand to hand combat. I know this is 2012 and not 1939. Maybe it's me, but I was not enveloped with the film. Irene Adler had about 5 minutes of screen appearance and she was gone. I'm going to be kind and say it was a bit entertaining and give it two and a half stars. Others may like it more than me and that's fine. Just give me the old Sherlock. I can just hear Frank saying "What would Arthur Conan Doyle do if he could see what they are doing to his Sherlock?" I'm sure Frank will have something to say, himself, next month. All elementary!



I like to remind all members that our Knights of Columbus Council is holding its annual Spaghetti Dinner later this month. We use the room free of charge provided by our council. We would appreciate your support for our dinner. Pre-sale tix are \$6.50 and \$7.00 at the door. Hope to see you there . This is by far the best spaghetti dinner in town.....

Fibber McGee & Molly by Tom Cherre

Being this is the month of February it's only fitting that we feature a sweetheart of a couple, Jim and Marion Jordan – Fibber McGee and Molly. Imagine being married to a guy like Fibber. Molly was truly a saint, to put up with all of McGee's shenanigans. In real life they we're also sweethearts. They were both natives of Peoria Illinois. Jim the son of a farmer met Marion, the daughter of a miner while singing at the same Catholic Church. Marion Driscoll's parents did not approve of the relationship at first. Jim had aspirations of being a professional singer bouncing around from one town to the next. Within a year he gave up singing and began work at the local post office. Her parents approved and they were married on August 31, 1918. Five days later Jim received his draft notice for World War I. When Jim came home from France he



Jim and Marian Jordan as Fibber McGee and Molly in 1937

and Marion tried their luck in a vaudeville act. Things just didn't work out. They came back home. They had two small children, and this was no way to make a living. Marion stayed home

for awhile watching the kids and Jim took to the road as a solo act. Marion then joined him on the road with their two children. Eventually they both returned home again after another disappointing run and Jim began working at a local department store. The entertainment bug was still there and one more time they ventured to the vaudeville circuit hoping they would get that one big break. While staying at his brother's home in Chicago in 1924 the family was listening to the radio. Listening to a music act, Jim said that he and Marian could do better than what was on. Jim's brother bet him \$10 that he couldn't. Jim and Marian went to station WIBO where they were immediately put on the air. At the end of the program they were offered a contract and a weekly salary of ten dollars a week. Not much, even in 1924, but it was a start and the break they were looking for finally came. The sponsor was *The Oh Henry* candy bar. The show was successful and led to other radio shows including *Luke and Miranda*, *The Smith Family* and *Smackout*. *Smackout* was a 15 minute show which centered on a general store and its proprietor Luke Grey (Jim Jordan), a storekeeper with a penchant for tall tales (sound familiar) and a perpetual lack of whatever his customers wanted. He always seemed to be "smack out of it." Marian Jordan played both a lady named Marian and a little girl named Teeney, (later to be on F&M), as well as playing musical accompaniment on piano. During the show Marian would voice a total of 69 different characters. Mrs. S.C. Johnson of Johnson's Wax recommended to her husband John, to give the show a chance as a new show to be called Fibber McGee & Molly.



Don Quinn, who was a cartoonist met Jim and Marian back in 1931, when he was hired to do their earlier shows. They formed a partnership and Quinn was the principal writer and creator of the loveable and laughable "*Fibber McGee and Molly*." The show premiered on NBC April 16th 1935. It took about three years for it to become a household term. It became the country's top-rated show in 1938. Fibber was like an Ozzie Nelson, never had a job, or a want for money. The McGee's won their house in a raffle from Mr. Hagglemeyer's Wistful Vista Development Company, with lottery ticket #131313. Fibber was a blowhard, always telling tales, with hare-brained schemes, antagonizing as many people as he could. He was a loafer, a conniver, and a penny-pinching know-it-all. He was really a person who could get under your skin. Under all his faults and blunders he was a somewhat likeable person. In case you didn't know, the premise of the show revolved around people, characters of every sort knocking on his door. My favorite had to be Wallace Wimple. He was a sorrowful hen-pecked husband verbally and physically abused by "Sweetieface" his "big old wife." His voice was

unmistakably done by Bill Thompson. He was later to do the same voice for Droopy the cartoon dog, years later. My other favorite character was "The Old-Timer," also done by Thompson. He would always make an appearance distorting a story saying "That ain't the way I heard it." He always called Fibber, Johnny and Molly, daughter. There were also many other characters to fill the bill including the little girl played by Marian Jordan, who was either called "Little Girl" or just "Sis." I like the others too, but those three are my personal favorites. Of course they had the usual running gags, such as the closet routine. Making a phone call also included Myrt, the telephone operator. Fibber also had his multiple tongue twisters with sentences starting with the same letters going on and on. Announcer Harlow Wilcox delivered his Johnson's Wax bit as part of the storyline. Billy Mills provided the music along with the Kingsmen doing the vocals. It was a good show. *Fibber McGee and Molly* was a show that I remember from the old days, and I'm still enjoying it to today. "Night T'all."



The Origin Of Have Gun Will Travel by Martin Grams

With the advent of television, many advertising agencies representing high-profile sponsors attempted to convince their clients to branch away from radio. Television was the popular "rave" and they were convinced the boob tube would become profitable only if they jumped in with both feet during the earliest stages of experimental broadcasting. Numerous successful television programs made the crossover into radio, the exact opposite of what would be expected, in an effort to commercially promote products through both markets. Space Patrol, Tom Corbett and Howdy Doody began on television first, then, attempted to branch out into radio. On the Western frontier, Have Gun-Will Travel became another



"There was a story to Have Gun- Will Travel," John Dehner recalled months before his death in 1992. "Dick Boone was doing it on television and while he was doing it, we also were doing the radio version. They thought it would be a good idea---whoever the "they" are---but they thought it would be a good idea to take the scripts that were being used on television, convert them to radio and

"whola," you have a radio show, not having to pay any money for a new script." It isn't known exactly who came up with the idea of doing HGWT on radio, but theories have been tossed around. Some believe that CBS wanted to bring another western to radio simply to sell commercial time and make a profit. Larry Dobkin, a supporting actor on both the radio and television version, commented "Well, there was little stirring interest in radio westerns, because Gunsmoke held its audience in radio.....It could be that somebody said, "That's a good idea. Why don't we add another Western? But I don't know that as a fact." Another and more logical theory ((supported by paperwork that suggest these are the true facts) is that Norm MacDonnell was the man responsible. "There were define ill feelings between Norm and the television crew responsible for Gunsmoke" actor Ben Wright explained. "They took that (radio) show away from him. He had no say in who or what went on the (television) air. He later became a producer for the (television) program and that settled a little. I think Norm came up with the idea for doing the radio version of Have Gun, possibly to show them that "Hey, look what I can do with your program and I did it even better. But don't take my word for it. I wouldn't be surprised if Norm originated the idea of doing the radio version." On November 8th 1958, Norman MacDonnell conducted three voice tests, hoping to choose the right actor for the role. Harry Bartell, Vic Perrin, and John Dehner delivered the lines from the opening scenes of "Strange Vendetta." We three were called in for those tests." Harry Bartell recalled, "I don't know if it was Norm MacDonnell who suggested us or not. I know we were the only three

to do those voice tests." What should be noted is that none of the four primary actors on radio's *Gunsmoke* were tested for the role, suggesting MacDonnell's involvement. John Dehner ultimately won the role, ironic when you consider that Dehner was among the men offered the role of Matt Dillon in early 1952, but turned it down because he didn't want to be typecast in a Western. Dehner chose the role to play Paladin his own way, without attempting to reproduce the television counterpart. "I didn't pay any attention to him (Boone) at all. It was whatever came out of me. I knew it would be deadly if I were to imitate him or to do anything that was even vaguely similar to him. His Paladin was strictly Dick Boone. And I am not about to imitate. So I just did it the way I felt it." "John Dehner was a very sweet guy. I was fond of him." Lillian Buyeff recalled. He was a very serious person, but he did have a sense of humor. One of my favorite people. I remember Norm MacDonnell—both of them were treasures. Words cannot express the company I kept."



Ray Kemper, Tom Hanley and Norman Macdonnell.



Three days after the voice tests, an audition was cut, acted out by a staff of talented radio actors, to the script of "Strange Vendetta." The board at CBS approved and four days later, "Ella West" became the first fully-recorded episode of radio's *Have Gun Will Travel*. "Ella West" would, however, become the third broadcast in the series. In the beginning for the first couple of months, there was a mad dash to record the episodes for scheduled broadcast. "Strange Vendetta" was recorded a second time, one that would pass for network airing, as opposed to the audition. It was recorded two days before the series premiere. "Road to Wickenburg" the second episode of the series, was performed and recorded only hours before network airing. (Had the recording session been late "Ella West" would instead have probably aired in that time slot.) The first 30 plus radio scripts were adaptations of television dramas, all from the first or second season of the television program. The script writers who wrote the teleplays were never paid any residuals for the reuse of their scripts or plots, which at times were dramatized on radio word-for-word. "We were given a huge stack of television scripts and asked by Norm to try and make radio scripts from them," John Dawson recalled. "We had

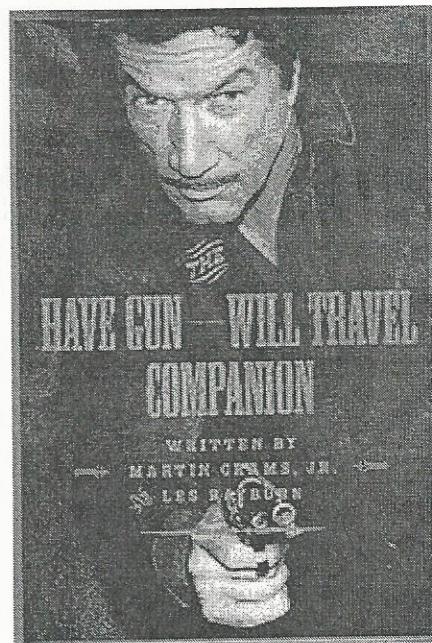
to shorten the 26 to 30-page scripts into short 22-page radio dramas. We kind of divided the scripts, Frank Michael and Ann Doud and I, by the authors. I was in admiration of Gene Roddenberry's work, so I grabbed all of his scripts. We were allowed to use any dialogue from the scripts, but I found I had to re-word some of it so descriptive actions could be portrayed. Norman MacDonnell directed the episodes himself, using most of the same crew from his *Gunsmoke* radio program. "We were all of a group that stayed pretty much together," Dehner recalled. "There was Bill Conrad, Tony Ellis, myself, Norm MacDonnell, John Meston, Parley Baer, Harry Bartell, Virginia Gregg, Larry Dobkin...we saw each other every week. We all got along and we were all very talented, friendly people group of people. It was fun, too. You'd arrive on the first sound of *Gunsmoke*, or *Have Gun-Will Travel* or *Frontier Gentleman*, we'd arrive in the morning and open up the Danish pastries and pour the coffee and sit for a solid hour shooting the breeze. Then we'd get down and read the script and work out the sound patterns and then we'd take—very often—we'd take the dress and that would be it. But it was clean and fun. Boy that was great."



Ray Kemper, sound technician, had also turned writer by the time *Have Gun* premiered in 1958. "I do recall an incident on the very first show," Kemper recalled. "John was really trying hard to do the Paladin character just right. At one point I stopped the rehearsal and asked Norm in a loud voice if he wanted 'Big Dome?' (referring to Paladin) to wear spurs. Dehner looked stricken and asked, (Big Dome)? In the booth Norm was laughing like crazy—he hit the talk back and said, "John, you just shrank about a foot. Of course, Dehner laughed too. After more than 20 episodes, MacDonnell realized that the show was not as successful for radio as it was for television. Perhaps it was because the television audience had a strong impression of what the Paladin character should look—and act --like, courtesy of Richard Boone's treatment for the small screen. More importantly, adapting television scripts into an audio medium was egregious at best. "Well, it turned out they were totally inappropriate for radio, and they were forced to write new and original radio shows which is really what happened," Dehner recalled. "But they were simultaneously on the air, one on television and one on radio. In "The Hanging Cross," Paladin attempts to thwart a lynching on Christmas Eve, and make peace between the Sioux Indians and the white men on Nathaniel Beecher's ranch. The television version concludes with Paladin taking down some of the boards from the homemade gallows, and rides off observing the shadow on the ground, from the gallows, depicting a cross. This kind of imagery could not be captured in an audio medium. Comparing both the radio and television version was fairly easy when you consider the fact that a few of the episodes aired back-to-back on both

CBS radio and CBS – TV. “Death of a Young Gunfighter” aired on CBS Radio on March 15th 1959. The television version aired the night before, March 14th. “Maggie O’Bannion” aired on CBS Radio on April 5, 1959. The television version also aired the night before, April 4. The first person to submit an original script, not adapted from a television episode was Ray Kemper, one of the six men responsible for the sound effects on the radio version (and radio’s Gunsmoke). Episode twenty-three, “The Gunsmith” provided an intriguing story of anguish and retribution. In the town of Woodland, nestled in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada range, Paladin meets Hans Reicher, a German store keep and former gunsmith who suffers from the abuse of Link Dobey, the town bully. An old friend of Hans died by the hand of his faulty craftsmanship, and swore off making handguns ever since. The sheriff lost respect from the town citizens when he was unable to maintain peace and order with Dolbey around. Paladin, after discovering the bully beat Hans in order to acquire the last (and most beautiful) of the gunsmith’s talent, faces off against Link Dolbey. Good prevailed, but only because the gun exploded in Dolbey’s face. Hans confesses to the man in black that due to recent events, he felt wise to create a flaw in the gun, just in case Dolbey got his way. “I wrote a few scripts for “Have Gun-Will Travel,” Gunsmoke, Voyage of the Scarlet Queen and other programs, recalled Kemper. Writers were paid pretty good money and anyone who wrote a good script could be guaranteed a good sale. Norm was always open for suggestions and ideas, no matter how fantastic they would be. Years before, I wrote scripts for a series called The

Count of Monte Cristo and I was using a pen name of N. Clint Reynolds on the (script) covers when I submitted them. When I submitted this script----and I think I did the same for a couple others—Norm said “Oh Ray, we know who you are, so you’re going to get credit for this. That’s why the cover of some of the radio scripts I wrote have N. Clint Reynolds on them, instead of my name. But that’s me. Of the first radio episodes, 35 were adaptations of television scripts. Beginning with episode 40, the series consisted completely of original radio plots. Ray Kemper would ultimately script a total of nine episodes, and the majority of his submissions are now considered some of the best episodes of the radio series. Reference guides continue inaccurately Gene Roddenberry was a script writer for five Have Gun-Will Travel radio broadcasts. The correction should be noted. John Davidson adapted all five of those episodes from Roddenberry’s television scripts and Roddenberry himself had no personal involvement with the radio program.



MYTHS DEBUNKED

There's an old saying, don't believe everything you read. A number of web-sites are inaccurately facts with nothing to found the basis of their claims. The following corrections should be noted: One, John Dehner was not hired to play the role of Paladin because of his role as J.B. Kendall on the Frontier Gentleman series, nor is his portrayal as Paladin an extention of his former characterization. (We can look back at both series and compare the two radio productions and romantically "assume" this is so, but it's not a fact.) The radio version of Paladin was an adaptation of the television series—plain and simple. Second, the cost factor to adapt a television script into a radio script was the same as purchasing an original radio script from the open market. MacDonnell's insistence to dominate the series, in the eyes of CBS, with his radio version was the purpose behind the adaptations in the first place. There was no cost factor under consideration. Third, it's been reported that half of the television scripts were adapted for the radio program. THIS WAS NOT SO. There were 225 television productions and only 35 of them were adapted into radio scripts. Fourth, the audition recordings are dated November 8, not November 11. I tracked down the person who retains the original CBS masters and the date November 8 was handwritten 8 on the boxes with the tapes. Fifth, Elliott Lewis and Lew Ayers was not among the actors in the audition recordings.

THE EARLY EPISODES

Episode #1 "Strange Vendetta"
Broadcast November 23 1958

Recording date: November 21, 1958,
12:00am to 12:24am Cast Harry Bartell
(Don Miguel Rojas); Lillian Buyeff
(Maria Rojas); Howard Culver
(Wilkins); Joseph Kearns (Doctor
Mayhew); Ralph Moody (Farley, the
border guard); and Victor Perrin
(Timmons).
Producer/Director: Norman MacDonnell
Story origin: Based on the teleplay of the
same name by Ken Kolb, originally
telecast October 26, 1957.
Script writer : John Dawson
Commercials: Kent's Filtered Cigarettes
and Pine-Scented Lysol
Opening narration: Sit down gentlemen
and sit still. I've come to order a coffin
for the first one of you who makes a
move.

Episode #2 "Road To Wickenburg"
Broadcast November 30, 1958
Recording Date: November 30, 1958,
2:30 to 3:00pm Cast: Lynn Allen
(Susan); Harry Bartell (Sol Goodfellow);
Eve McVeigh (the lasy); aand Victor
Perrin (Sheriff Jack Goodfellow).
Producer/Director: John Dawson
Story origin: Based on the teleplay of the
same name by Gene Roddenberry,
originally telecast October 25 1958.
Script writer John Dawson
Commercials: Kent's Filtered Cigarettes
and Pine-Scented Lysol.
Opening narration: There are four of you
gentlemen and I've only one bullet left
in my derringer. So my choice is very
simple. I'll kill the first man who speaks.

Episode #3 "Ella West" Broadcast
December 7, 1958
RECORDING Date November 15 1958
8:00 to 8:25pm Cast Lynn Allen
(Clarisse) Harry Bartell (the barkeep
and Tomahawk Carter); Lawrence
Dobkin (Mr. Breed); Sam Edwards

(Tracy Calvert) Virginia Gregg (Ella West) Barney Phillips (the stage driver) and Ben Wright (the manager).
Producer/Director: Norman MacDonnell
Story origin: Based on the teleplay of the same name by George Roddenberry, originally telecast January 4, 1958
Script writer: John Dawson
Commercials: Kent Filtered Cigarettes
Opening narration: I promised I'd avoid a gunfight if possible. But it looks as though it isn't possible. I have one bullet left. You may draw when you're ready.

Episode #4 "The Outlaw" Broadcast December 14th 1958 Recording Date: December 6th 1958 7:00 to 7:30pm.
Cast: Jeanne Bates (the woman and Sarah Holt); Frank Cady (the hotel clerk); Lawrence Dobkin (Manfred Holt); Sam Edwards (Abe Talltree); Joseph Kearns (Ned Alcorn); and Ralph Moody (Sheriff Jake Ludlow).
Producer/Director: Norman MacDonnell
Story Origin: Based on the teleplay of the same name by Sam Rolfe, originally telecast September 21st 1957. Script Writer: Frank Michael. Commercials: Kent's Filtered Cigarettes and Look Magazine. Opening narration: "Mister, you killed nine men. I never heard anyone say you made allowances for your opponent's ability with a gun.

Episode #5 "The Hanging Cross" Broadcast December 21st 1958.
Recording date: December 13th 1958 6:30 to 7:00pm. Cast: Dick Beals (Chiwah, a.k.a. Robbie); Virginia Christine (the lady); John James (various ad libs), Jess Kirkpatrick (Tater); Ann Morrison (Maudie) Victor Perrin (Nathaniel Beecher); Roy Woods (Chal-la-te); and Ben Wright (Pete).
Producer/Director: Norman MacDonnell. Story origin: Based on the

teleplay of the same name by Gene Roddenberry, originally telecast December 21st 1957. Script writer: John Dawson. Commercials: Kent Filtered Cigarettes. Opening narration "In all my life, I've only seen a dozen real killers. But I've seen ten thousand people who will sit back and let murder happen. Which is the greater evil?" Trivia, etc Ralph Moody was originally scheduled to play the role of Cah-la-te, but for reasons unknown, Roy Woods took the role. Woods would later replace Moody again in another HGWT radio episode, "A Matter of Ethics."

Episode #6 "No Visitors" Broadcast December 28th 1958. Recording date December 20th 1958, 6:30 to 7:00pm
Cast: Jeanne Bates (Clara Benson); Virginia Gregg (Dr. Phyllis Thackeray); John James (the man); Lou Kurgman (Davis, the townsman); and Victor Perrin (Jeremiah Mulrooney).
Producer/Director Norman MacDonnell.
Story origin: Based on the teleplay of the same name by Don Brinkley, originally telecast November 30th 1957. Script writer: John Dunkel Commercials: Kent Filtered Cigarettes: Opening narration "You came to me with a torch and a gun. You call it righteousness. Call it by its real name. Murder>"

In a future blog post, I will discuss the calendar year of 1959. (to be continued....)

Martin Grams Jr. is the co-author of The Have Gun Will Travel Companion (2000) now out of print. Copies can still be purchased on a number of web-sites including



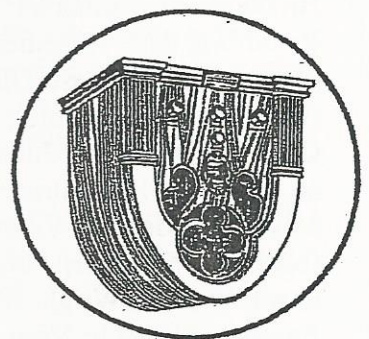


Happy Valentine's Day!

Me Too!

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