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# The Illustrated Press

## MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Club Membership: \$20.00 per year from January 1<sup>st</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup>. Members receive a media library listing and a monthly newsletter. Memberships are as follows: If you join January-March, \$20.00; April-June, \$14.00; July-September, \$10.00; October-December, \$7.00. All renewals should be sent in as soon as possible to avoid missing issues of the newsletter. 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 p.m. 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 a Club picnic in August.

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

## CLUB MAILING ADDRESS

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56 Christen Court  
Lancaster, NY 14086



All submissions are subject to approval prior to actual publication.

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*The Illustrated Press*

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## REMINDER

All renewal and new member checks should be made out to D. P. PARISI, not the Old Time Radio Club.

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

Club Web Page: Now you can view and download our various catalogs and club information at ---  
[www.buffalo-otr-club.org](http://www.buffalo-otr-club.org)



**Message From The Editor:**

Our first meeting of spring was not very spring-like. Well, at least it wasn't snowing. It's hard to believe we only have two more meetings till we break for the summer. Our president Jerry Collins was not present for our April meeting. Hopefully when the weather breaks we will see him in May.

It is with great sadness I have to tell you that Tom Monroe passed away on Monday March 31<sup>st</sup>. Tom was a huge presence in the OTR community and, and it is an enormous loss for us. Tom was one of the friendliest and most generous people our club has known. He was a long time supporter of the Cincinnati OTR convention and one of new Nostalgic Expo as well. His absence this year will be keenly felt. A service was held on Wednesday April 9<sup>th</sup> at the Westlawn Cemetery followed by a memorial service at the Mantura Christian Church. Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to Tom's family and to all those who knew and loved him. This is a very sad day for OTR.

Western New York OTR Club.

Bob McDevitt mentioned that we will once again retain a web site on the internet. Bob is in the process of negotiating the needed requirements to get back on the web.

**Bits 'n Bytes**  
**By Bob McDevitt**

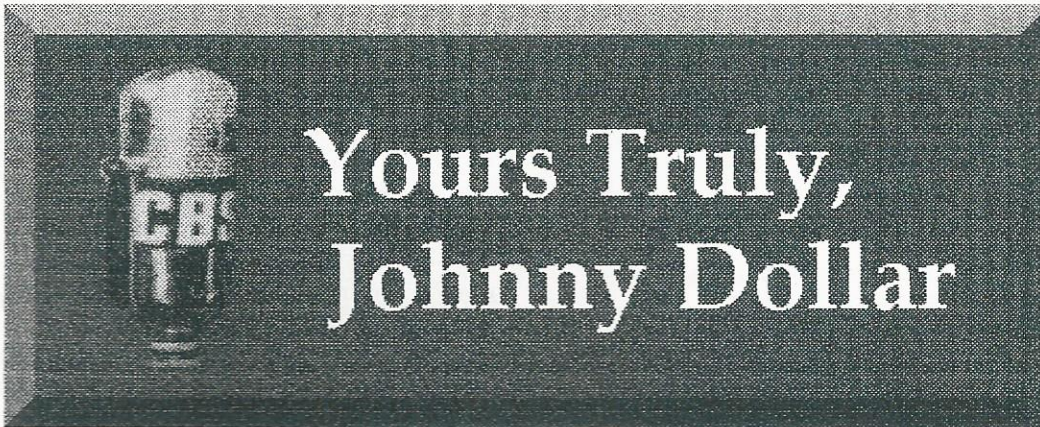
This is an update of the happenings of the club's digital world. It's my chance to bring you up to date. Our website has been down for quite a bit of time so I guess it was time to correct the issue. All of our information about the club is now posted on the web. The web url is [www.buffalo-otr-club.org](http://www.buffalo-otr-club.org) Take a look at it. If there is anything you feel should be there, but isn't, send me an e-mail to [robmed@verizon.net](mailto:robmed@verizon.net) thing new is our current catalogs are posted for download. Now there will be no need to construct a CD to send out each year. I can update the files more often. Another thing is a sample newsletter for potential members to view. Catalog files are pretty much up to date as of this printing. There is, also, talk of e-mailing the newsletter to members. One of the big advantages is the color content would look better this way. What do you think? It's important to let me know what you would like to see. We're here to make our work better. I look for your input.

Bob McDevitt

We would like to welcome new member John Ortiz of Chesterfield to our club.

Welcome John !!!!!

Enjoy the warmer weather and all the good old time radio shows. Happy listening to all.....editor



**Yours truly, Johnny Dollar  
An Introduction**

**By Jim Widmer**

The opening is familiar among fans of Old Time Radio: “the man with the action-packed expense account...America’s fabulous freelance insurance investigator.” And if we still weren’t sure, he always told us himself: “yours Truly Johnny Dollar.”

Opening on a Friday night, February 18, 1949 (The Paricoff Policy Matter), right at the start of television’s golden age, this radio show brought us a high-powered insurance investigator who worked chiefly for the Universal Adjustment Bureau, a clearinghouse for the many insurance companies. The series starred Charles Russell as Johnny Dollar, the smart and tough detective, whose trademark it was to toss silver dollars as tips to busboys and bellhops.

Appearing on CBS Radio, Johnny Dollar was heard each week flying off to a different town filled with danger and possibly murder as he tried to get to the bottom of insurance fraud. There were rarely any recurring characters except

Dollar; despite sometimes romance and friends, the character was generally a loner. These early episodes, however, tended to be flat and the character of Dollar too dry. So at the start of the 1950 season, Charles Russell was out and veteran film actor Edmund O’Brien stepped in as the second Johnny Dollar. The series during the O’Brien years improved with scripts by expert crime writer such as E. Jack Neumann, John Michael Hayes, Sidney Marshall, and Blake Edwards. The character took on the stereotype of the American detective developed by Dasiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. Dollar was more hardboiled; his softer side rarely appeared. O’Brien left in 1952 and John Lund became Dollar number three. With Lund in the role, the character as developed by O’Brien remained.

In 1955, radio actor Bob Bailey, fresh from his long run as George Valentine in *Let George Do It*, stepped into the role as the fourth Johnny Dollar (there was an audition show with Dick Powell in 1948 that is not counted). It was with Bailey that the series really blossomed. Changing to a 15-minute format five times a week, and under the sharp eye of the new producer/director Jack Johnstone, the scripts got much deeper

into the characterization and plot. And Bailey's depiction of Dollar had shades of a gritty street fighter, yet bright and sensitive. With a strong cast (many of the same veteran radio actors appearing in different roles) and excellent directing, the portrayals were much more



real. And exciting; listen to such serials as "The Open Town Matter" or "The MacCormack Matter." Even while radio drama was already declining, this was radio acting at its best. The sound effects, some of which were canned, fit into the scripts so well as to produce some very exciting adventure/mystery. But doing a daily show live was taxing, so by the end of 1956, the series reverted to thirty minute, once a week episodes. But the power of the show continued, due a lot to the continued presence of both Bailey and Johnstone. Gradually, however, toward the end of the 1950's the show began to sound tired- some of the scripts were weak and even Bailey did not always seem excited.

Bailey left the show when it moved to New York production studios and initially Bob Readick filled Johnny Dollar's shows. However, that was only a transition that lasted six months. In June, 1961, Mandel Kramer came to the role. He was perhaps the second best of the Dollar portrayals. Kramer's Dollar displayed more cynical humor than

Bailey's. Johnny Dollar remained sensitive yet tough enough and with Jack Johnstone continuing as producer, the series remained poignant right up to its demise.



Yors Truly Johnny Dollar has the distinction of being the last dramatic radio series from the golden age of radio. As with the close of *Suspense*, radio drama sounded its death throes. Among many old time radio fans, Johnny Dollar is usually viewed as the division between original radio drama and the resurgence of nostalgia which began in the seventies.

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OTRR Home Page Articles Jim Widner Articles

## THE MISER OF MOTOWN: GEORGE W. TRENDL

by Jack French ©1998

Complete article with pg 1 repeated from last month:



There were many tight-fisted broadcasting officials in the Golden Age of Radio, but probably none more pernicious than George W. Trendl, the owner of WXYZ in Detroit. Possessed of a penny-pinching persona and an unfailing quest to snatch credit for the accomplishments of his subordinates, Trendl rode roughshod over his minions at WXYZ. Most of his avarice and glory-stealing was well documented by one of his long-term employees, Dick Osgood, in his book "WYXIE Wonderland."

Radio station WXYZ would eventually, through the strength and popularity of its "The Lone Ranger", "Challenge of the Yukon", and "The Green Hornet" become a gold mine for Trendl and his banker cronies. But the talented cast, crew, and production staff of these shows always got short-changed. Many of the high-handed practices Trendl perfected would not have been successful in an era other than the Great Depression, where any job was eagerly sought by desperate Americans.

Trendl, and his hatchet-man, H. Allen Campbell, would offer prospective employees a job.....at no pay! Promising a salary "when things got better", Trendl and Campbell got free labor from many hungry workers. One of them, Ted Robertson, was hired at no pay as a WXYZ soundman and quickly exhausted his savings. When he didn't have the busfare to get to the station from the home of his aunt, where he stayed, the station manager telephoned him, but got the aunt. "He has no money and I can't lend him any more" said the aunt. "Very well", replied the manager, "just loan him busfare for today and

I'll put him on salary tomorrow." Next day Robertson was making \$ 6.25 a week.

While there are many variations on the actual origin of the Lone Ranger, the facts confirm that it was primarily the creation of Fran Striker, writer, and James Jewell, program manager. However in 1935 Trendle, with his banker buddies, incorporated the Lone Ranger so neither Striker nor Jewell ever made a nickel (other than their salaries) from the fortunes in Lone Ranger royalties, movies, merchandise, etc.



For the music played on WXYZ dramatic shows, Trendle and Campbell always specified classical (read "not under copyright" so the music was free. This was not an uncommon practice among the radio stations in those days. But Trendle had more cruel economy measures as documented when he fired 26 station employees on Christmas Day 1936.

Despite the immediate and enormous popularity of the Lone Ranger, Trendle made sure that none of his cast and crew were ever fairly compensated. He actually fired the talented Fran Striker when the script writer asked for a \$ 3 raise per episode. After several months with substitute writers, Trendle allowed the humbled Striker to return to his old job.

Campbell's responsibilities included keeping a duplicate set of accounting books on each radio series so he could show "red ink" to any employee brash enough to ask for a raise. If this failed, Campbell would stoop even lower.

Once Earl Graser, the voice of the Lone Ranger, knowing of the financial bonanza his series had become, tried to get a raise. Campbell told him: "You're no radio actor; all you can do is play the Ranger. You know, I think we ought to make some changes with the Ranger. It might add interest if he was shot and then he could be in the hospital for weeks. Yeah, we might even have him die! Sure, that's it, then his nephew could take his place, the kid, Dan Reid. Hell, that's what we're after anyway...the kid audience!" The color drained from Graser's face and his hopes for a raise evaporated. He retreated from Campbell's office, hoping he still had a job.

## *The Illustrated Press*

Striker, of course, was a prodigious writer and was scripting daily the adventures of both the Lone Ranger and the Green Hornet. But his modest salary crept up in baby-step increments even after both shows skyrocketed in income. And Trendle was such a skin-flint, he refused to lease a pay phone needed by the sound effects staff for the Green Hornet. They had to build one: a steel tray into which they placed a metal washer which dropped into a iron box. They then added the sound of a dial from another telephone they had.

The contract of Al Hodge, the voice of the Green Hornet, required a substantial raise as soon as WXYZ found a sponsor for the program. None appeared so Hodge was pleasantly surprised when he traveled to Canada briefly and heard Green Hornet transcriptions on the air with Canadian sponsors.

Hodge immediately returned to Detroit and confronted Campbell. "Nothing in your contract about Canadian sponsors" Campbell retorted and dismissed him. Hodge officially took the matter to the newly formed radio union, AFRA, and eventually was able to get the raise he deserved.

Over the years, the WXYZ programs continued to make untold fortunes for Trendle and his backroom cronies, while the creators toiled in relative obscurity at modest wages. There were enormous royalties earned from the movies, television, books, and countless items of merchandise, from costumes to lunch boxes. And virtually all of the profits went into the personal piggy-bank of George W. Trendle.

The final, bitter irony of this story occurred in July 1954, when at the age of 70, Trendle sold his entire rights to the Lone Ranger to the Wrather Corporation for \$ 3 million. Tossing his proverbial dog a bone, Trendle gave Fran Striker a \$ 4000 bonus out of the proceeds.

This article is printed by express permission of the author. Jack is the author of 'Private Eyelashes: Radios Lady Detectives', published in April 2004, by Bear Manor Media. You may order it at: <http://bearmanormedia.com>

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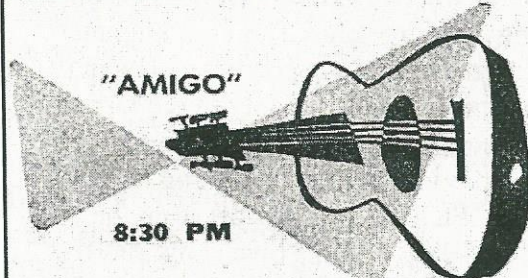
**Eva Gabor on "Amos 'n' Andy" ..9:30**

**Mario Lanza Sings Your Favorite Christmas Songs on Recorded Holiday Series .....10:15**

\*\*\*\*\*  
**Eavesdrop on Party Line at 6:10 A. M.**  
With Buehly, Jack Ogilvie and Al Fox



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WITH TODAY'S GUEST  
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*(appearing at the Town Casino)*  
**1:30 PM**



**"AMIGO"**  
**8:30 PM**  
**9:30 PM—HOCKEY—BUFFALO vs. PROVIDENCE**  
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**webr** The Good Neighbor Station  
**970**  
ON YOUR DIAL



**Quick Watson!**

check your dial for  
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THE NEW ADVENTURES OF  
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MORE thrills MORE mystery

8:30 P. M. -- WKBW  
American Broadcasting Company

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*"In Person!"*  
**Dinah Shore**  
Radio's Singing Sensation!

TONIGHT 8:15 P. M.

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**TONIGHT - The "Norths"**  
combine fun and mystery.



Join them at  
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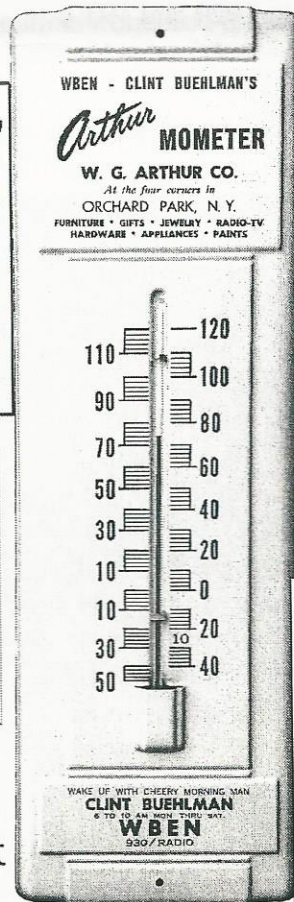
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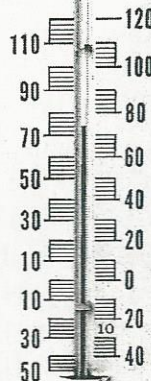


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**WGR**

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CBS NETWORK

**The Lone Ranger**  
He Rides Tonight  
to Avenge  
a Wrong



**WKBW - 7:30 P. M.**  
1520 on your radio dial

## Part Three of Radio's Forgotten Years: Tuning Thru The Depression Years

By Elizabeth McLeod

Other dramas of the depression tended to stick to an anthology format—the True Story Hour, The Colliers Hour, Soconyland Sketches, The First Nighter Program. Continuing characters began to make inroads most notably in the form of crime shows: Sherlock Holmes had its first radio incarnation beginning in 1930 and Dr. Fu Manchu spun off from the Colliers Hour into his own show shortly after.

### Syndication

Almost always overlooked in the discussion of early radio are the many syndicated transcription shows which began to flood the air in 1929 and 1930, and which continued to proliferate throughout the decade. The most interesting of these shows was also the most widely circulated.

“The Chevrolet Chronicles” was produced by the World Broadcasting System for distribution on discs to more than a hundred and thirty stations in the fall of 1930. The centerpiece of each program was an interview with a World War Medal of Honor winner, conducted by flying ace Eddie Rickembacker. The show was an unqualified success, and spurred a lot of interest in the syndicated field. Unfortunately, many of the shows which followed failed to keep up that high standard—endless parades of second-rate serials and cornball comedy skits were more typical of the material available on the transcription market. But the chronicles wasn't the most important of the syndicated shows. That

honor belongs to a program which achieved its greatest success on a network after initial success on the disc market—a program which was by far the dominant radio show of the Depression, and perhaps the single most influential program in the history of broadcasting.

### Check And Double Check

Amos 'n' Andy wasn't just a radio program during the Depression—especially during 1930-31, it was an obsession. This simple little 15 minute serial gripped the attention of as many as forty million listeners six nights a week. Why?

Today nearly seven decades later, it's difficult for the average OTR fan to fully understand the Amos 'n' Andy craze of the early 30s. Most fans have heard the half-hour “Amos 'n' Andy shows of the 40's, and perhaps some of the 50's TV episodes, and while they're certainly funny in a broad, sitcom sort of way, there's nothing in them that would justify the fanatical enthusiasm that surrounded this program in its earliest years.



The later shows, however, do not in any way represent what “Amos 'n' Andy originally was. As first conceived, the program was far from the exaggerated gagfest that it became in its later years. Instead, it was a masterfully written

serial drama with humorous overtones--- a series that depended as much on suspense for its appeal as it did comedy. It couldn't have worked without the men behind the characters. Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll were both unusually shrewd writers. They understood exactly how long a storyline should be strung out to maximize tension, and then snap it to a climax in a single cathartic scene. And then they could start the cycle all over again.

Aside from excellent plotting, the serial episodes of "Amos 'n' Andy" display a remarkable depth of characterization. The characters are not stereotypes, not cardboard cutouts. They react in different ways to changing circumstances, and they grow and change themselves over time.

The performances that brought these characters to life were equally masterful. Gosden in particular was a brilliant radio actor, a master of inflection and vocal shading, and especially gifted in multiple roles. Correll's perfect sense of timing meshed perfectly with his partner's more intense performances, to create a program which, in its prime, had no equal. Not that there weren't imitators.

The comedy serial was perhaps the most imitated format of the Depression, on and off the networks. Network programs like "Lum and Abner" and "Myrt and Marge", local programs like "Bert and Shmerl, the Yiddish Gentleman," on Wmca, New York, and endless syndicated serials like "Si and Elmer" and "Black and Blue" rose up in the wake of "Amos 'n' Andy," without ever matching its appeal. Perhaps "Lum and Abner" came closest to capturing the spirit of its progenitor, but even the

gifted Chet Lauck and Norris Goff couldn't top Gosden and Correll at their prime....And perhaps no one ever will.

There's little left of Depression radio, compared to what remains from the later years. It's not that programs weren't recorded—it's that so few were saved. The uncoated aluminum discs which carried the embossed record of the early-30s radio have for the most part been lost to the years. Those that survive are often incorrectly dubbed to tape yielding noisy, skipping recordings that are difficult to follow. But it's worth it. Once in awhile, a pristine set of discs from Speak-O-Phone Studios or Universal Recording Labs will turn up, and a careful tape transfer will offer a rare glimpse into a vanished era. An age when "Wanna Buy A Duck?" echoed thru every schoolyard, and an entire nation wondered if Andy was going to marry Madame Queen.

An age that's still accessible—if you're willing to tune it in.



**SHERLOCK HOLMES**  
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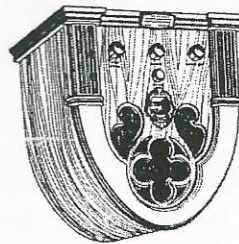
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