

The Old Time Radio Club

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Happy Holidays to all fans of Old Time Radio



from the
Old Time Radio Club

of Western New York State

Membership Information

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Club Mailing Address

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The Mounties in OTR History

by Jack French

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[In the first part of this series, which appeared in our last issue, the history of the RCMP was discussed in detail, as well as the "Mountie Myth" that various elements of our popular culture have created. Five OTR shows which had RCMP heroes in the lead were described in terms of cast, network, duration, plots, and number of programs in circulation.]

Challenge of the Yukon

In February 1938, WXYZ in Detroit, the studio that already had on going successes in "The Lone Ranger" and "Green Hornet," launched another show designed for greatness. It would run until June 1955 and thus become not only the longest running RCMP oriented series, but also one of the most durable juvenile adventure programs in OTR history. For most of that time, it was called by the original title, "Challenge of the Yukon," for not until 1951 did WXYZ re-name it "Sgt. Preston of the Yukon." And, as Jim Harmon has wisely observed, that's what all the kiddie listeners had been calling it from the start.

Since it was a WXYZ production, there was a great deal of crossovers in cast, crew and scripts with this Mountie show and that of the Masked Rider of the Plains. There was a spurious rumor circulating that you could change any "Lone Ranger" script to a "Sgt. Preston" one by merely adding snow. Approximately 1260 episodes were broadcast and approximately 150 are in OTR trading currency now. I won't go into any more detail on this show in this article. It has been discussed in exhaustive terms by others. The experts on this series is Terry Salomonson, P.O. Box 347, Howell, Michigan

48844-0347. In addition to a complete log on the series, Terry has virtually all of the episodes that have survived.

Zane Grey's King of the Royal Mounted



There are two radio shows with this identical name, although one may not have made it to network airing. It is certain, however, that Zane Grey had nothing to do with either series; in fact he had very little connection with this fictional character he's credited with inventing. This mythical Mountie came about in the following manner: Stephen Slesinger, a U.S. promoter of newspaper strips (he's the one who talked Fred Harman into creating "Red Ryder") had noticed that the Toronto Telegram was dropping its "Men of the Mounted" newspaper strip. It had appeared in Canadian newspapers from February 13, 1933 to February 16, 1935 and had several red-coated heroes, one of whom was Corporal King. Slesinger obtained the rights to it, promoted King to Sgt., hired Allen Dean to draw the strip, and paid Zane Grey for the rights to put his name on the top of the title. To encourage Grey to do this, Slesinger hired Grey's son, Romer, to script the story.

This strip was very successful in the U.S. and it ran daily and/or Sundays for the next twenty years, until 1955. In the process, it spawned a comic book series by Dell, a hard-cover novel by Whitman Publishing, some Big-Little Books, and a pair of radio shows. Since the two shows had exactly the same name, we'll distinguish them in this article by calling them: the Dix show and the other show.

The Dix show was a 30 minute program with movie star Richard Dix in the lead, backed up by a West Coast cast. Four complete programs have survived from this series. Jay Hickerson's log must be incorrect for dating this show in the 1930's for the announcer occasionally refers to World War II notices so it must fall in the 1942-45 period. Dix, who was born Ernest Carlton Brimmer in 1894 in Minnesota and died in 1949, played Sgt. King as a smiling, robust Red coat, cheerfully emoting such lines as: "Just a few winks and I'll be back in the pink!" If the Dix show sounded a little bit like "Rose-Marie", it may have been intentional. The program had a live orchestra headed by Al Sack, and to open each show, a men's chorus burst forth with "Stouthearted Men." (That song is from Romberg's "New Moon", not "Rose-Marie", but you get the idea.) Incidentally, this Mountie program was not Dix's only OTR connection; he had also appeared in seven motion pictures which were based on radio's "The Whistler series."

The "other show", unlike the Dix one, was clearly designed as a juvenile adventure show. Two episodes have survived from this series and both are fifteen minutes long. Each is the first proposed story: "Village of the Dead" and "Woman With No Face." These are clearly audition shows and I can't establish whether or not they were ever aired. And that's a shame, for the series is excellent: crisp writing, fast moving plot, and great characterizations from a fine group of actors (identified only as a "West Coast" cast.) I cannot recognize any of the voices in either episode, although Barbara Watkins of SPERDAC believes that Parley Baer is one of them. The log of Jay Hickerson dates this series in 1943 and that seems about right.

Men In Scarlet

During World War II, the CBC began airing an RCMP-oriented series and this Canadian program would encompass over five years, making it the second-longest "Mountie" radio series of all time. A total of 434 episodes were broadcast from March 29, 1943 to May 6, 1948; the shows were all fifteen minutes in length and CBC aired them every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday during that era. I can find no existing recordings of this series (not even O.R.C.A., the Canadian OTR club, has any in their library) but I have located a complete log of the show. The average story runs 2-6 episodes but a few require as many as ten or eleven episodes to finish a case. "Men in Scar-

let" was produced in Toronto with a Canadian cast; John Drainie had the lead role of Sgt. North. This series received the prestigious "Beaver Award" in 1945 from the Canadian Broadcasters magazine.

The Queen's Men

Chronically, the next CBC show to highlight the Mounties would be "The Queen's Men," although it turns out not to be a truly Canadian production. Harry Alan Towers was the producer of this series (calling his production company "Towers of London") and he had several more to his credit, including "Captain Horatio Hornblower." Towers had a stable of British and Canadian actors who worked for him and his custom was to produce 52 total programs in a series and then sell the entire package to the BBC or the CBC. I've not seen any valid documentation regarding the airing of this show, but it should fall in the early or mid 1950's.

Of the 52 programs in this series, almost half that number have survived; a few narrated by Lorne Greene, though most were not. An OTR collector and friend of mine, Mike O'Donnell of Virginia, has termed this series as "a Canadian turkey" and, for the most part, it is. The acting is mediocre, the writing uneven, and the choice of plots regrettable. Many of the episodes deal with minor infractions: petty larceny, hit and run accident, and even a kleptomaniac are investigated by the Mounties. There is no central hero or even a dominant theme to give some much needed unity to this series.

The Silver Eagle

In the summer of 1951, with only one "Mountie" radio show on U.S. networks, Jim Jewell decided to create another. Jewell, a writer/director, was part of that talent pool at WXYZ that launched "The Lone Ranger," "The Green Hornet" and "Challenge of the Yukon." For some reason, he loved colorful nicknames for OTR heroes, even if they made no sense. In "Silver Eagle," our Mountie hero supplements his standard weaponry with eagle feather arrows. ABC broadcast this show on Tuesday and Thursday at 7:30 P.M. from July 5, 1951 to March 10, 1955. This probably means that about 150 episodes were aired; of that number only the audition show and two other programs have been located thus far.

Jim Ameche, star of so many other shows including "Jack Armstrong," had the lead in this show, a Moun-

tie named Jim West. (Robert Conrad later took that identical name on his CBS TV show "The Wild, Wild West.") The Silver Eagle's constant companion was a huge French Canadian, Joe Bideaux, played by Jack Lester, although the announcer, Ed Prentiss, was directed to identify him in the closing credits as "Jacques Lestair." Prentiss, of course, was "Captain Midnight" a few years earlier. This series was produced in Chicago and other frequent cast members included Leo Curley, Jim Bannon, and Laurette Fillbrandt. General Mills sponsored most of the run and frequently used identical commercials that they ran on the "Lone Ranger" series.

The Quiet Force

Meanwhile, up north, the CBC had begun another series in praise of the Mounties; this one was aimed at the junior high school listeners and was broadcast Thursday afternoons for 26 episodes, from October 7, 1954 to March 24, 1955. All of the shows were 30 minutes in length. I can find no transcriptions of this series, although I have located a partial log. All of the episodes dealt with RCMP history or current jurisdiction. J. Frank Willis was the producer and Alan King (no, not that Alan King) was the writer and narrator. I'm still hoping a Canadian collector will come up with at least one episode of this series.

Other RCMP Appearances

There are a few more Mounties who made it into OTR history, but probably none of them had what we would term a series. One of these, dating from the late 1950's was the product of an Ontario disk jockey who called himself "Johnny Size." He portrayed all (or at least most) of the voices in a recording satire he entitled "Mulligan of the Mounties." This RCMP parody ran off and on for about five years on a local station in North Bay, Ontario.

"The Royal Canadian Air Farce," which began on CBC in the early 1970's (and celebrated its 20th anniversary in 1993) has an occasional segment in their political satire show which deals with Renfrew of the Mounted. He is described as having his office in a lonely log cabin on the 14th floor of the RCMP Headquarters. In these parody-sketches, Renfrew is assisted by his dog, Cuddles, who would run into a burning building and quickly emerge with the fire insurance policy, safely wrapped in a wet towel.

The RCMP was also the focal point of a brief dra-

matic series on CBC in the mid 1970's. This radio program, "The Meadowlark Caper," by Ken Mitchell was later adapted into a book with the revised title of the "Meadowlark Connection." I've been unable to come up with any additional data on this show.

Conclusion

The RCMP was well represented in the OTR history of North America. From 1930 to 1980 over a dozen radio series featured Mounties as heroes, although recent programs did so in a humorous manner. Despite the claims of many of these shows in their signature openings and closings, not one of them had any official sanction or assistance from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

In aiming at audiences on both sides of our border, the producers of these shows did an excellent job. In fact, in the program "Blair of the Mounties," we haven't yet determined whether the show was produced in the U.S. or Canada. And while these radio programs kept their Mounties in scarlet tunics, on horseback, and navigating birchbark canoes long after the real Mounties had abandoned these practices, the radio shows did accurately portray the integrity, dedication and courage of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

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Numerous OTR transcriptions from personal collection and other furnished by Frank Parrick of O.R.C.A. tape library, Robert Schultz of Illinois, Dick Judge of New York, Jim Snyder of Arizona Eugene Ewan of New Jersey and Robert Brenet of New York.

They Rode the Airwaves: Cowboys on Radio

by Dom Parisi

The Cisco Kid, Gene Autry, Dr. Sixgun, The Lone Ranger, Matt Dillon of *Gunsmoke*, Luke Slaughter, Hopalong Cassidy, Roy Rogers, Red Ryder, Hawk Larabee, (Hawk Larabee?) yes, Hawk Larabee and all the other cowboys, famous or not, that once rode the radio dials on the good old rough and tough westerns are still alive today on tape.

Programs dealing with cowboys was an exciting part of growing up during the Golden Age of radio. Good guys, bad guys, and the in between guys, and the gals also, were an important part of every kids life, and sometimes the adults too! The westerns had as many bigger than life adventure plots as there were the many choices of shows to tune in to. Oh sure, there were some "mushy" romantic themes in the shows. But at times the romance bit wasn't as great as the cowboys real devotion to duty and to his horse. With time permitting, however, romance did enter the scene. One western hero, the Cisco Kid, loved the lovely señoritas more than he loved his horse Diablo.

This article will deal with the westerns on radio. I can still remember sitting in front of our old floor model radio and letting my mind take me down that old, hot, dusty trail. My favorites were then, as they are today, *The Lone Ranger*, *Gunsmoke*, and *The Cisco Kid*. Let's climb up on the well worn saddle and "mosey" down yonder where the buffalo roam and the coyote yelp.

The Cisco Kid was first heard on station WOR and the Mutual network on October 2, 1942. In the beginning Cisco was played by Jackson Beck. His sidekick Pancho was played by Louis Sorin, and later by Harry Lang and Mel Blanc. The series was billed as a story of "O'Henry's beloved badman who rides the romantic trail that leads sometimes to adventure, often to danger, but always to beautiful señoritas."

Remember what I said about Cisco and his romances? Cisco always triumphed over evil, his reward was always a kiss from a lovely señorita who gasped "Ohhh, Cisco." Cisco's reply, "Ohhh, señorita."

Cisco, a Mexican, was promoted as an outlaw who victimized the wealthy and the greedy. Jack MacGregor directed the early shows. The series

LISTEN
TONIGHT FOLKS!
The All-Star Show of the Air!
YOU SAID IT! [1938]
Featuring
TED HUSING Outstanding sport Commentator!
LOU HOLTZ Uproarious Comedian!
KAY THOMPSON and Her Trio!
RICHARD HIMBER and His Orchestra!
with internationally famous stage and radio GUEST STARS
550 KCY. WGR
every Monday, 8:00 P.M.
 Sponsored by
PHOENIX BEER
MOFFATS ALE

lasted just over one season. Around 1946 Mutual-Don Lee revived the program with Jack Mather as Cisco and Harry Lang as Pancho. All references to Cisco's outlaw image were gone. He became the good guy, and after he got his man, off he would ride with his sidekick Pancho:

"UP, Diablo!"

"Up, Loco!"

They galloped into the sunset, and beyond, with their laughter echoing off the valley walls.

Death Valley Days presented true dramas of the Old West. First heard on the NBC Blue Network on September 30, 1930, it became one of the longest running shows on radio. In 1944 it switched to CBS.

The writer of *Death Valley Days* was a lady named Ruth Cornwall Woodman, a Vassar graduate, living in New York.

She had only a passing interest in the desert. The program is what its name implies, a rugged land in the remote Death Valley region of California. Mrs. Woodman was an advertising person in 1930 when she got the idea for the series. Within a few months she was writing one of the most respected dramas of early radio. She spent months on location in ghost towns, talking to old timers, visiting museums, and reading old newspapers. She was often accompanied by W. Wash Cahill, an expert on the desert. After talking with small town newspaper editors, old men hanging around the local stores and bartenders in old saloons, she returned to New York to write the stories she had researched. She created the Old Ranger who introduced each story.

Remember the opening? (sound: a bugle call) "As the early morning bugle call of covered wagon trains fades away among the echoes, another true *Death Valley Days* story is presented for your entertainment by the Pacific Coast Borax Company, producers of that famous family of products - 20 Mule Team Borax, 20 Mule Team Borax Soap Chips, and Boraxo. Well, Old Ranger, what's your story about tonight?"

The show was dropped in 1945, when the sponsor switched to a new show called, *The Sheriff*. Why is it

that with a series that lasted so long, there are only two episodes that I know of in circulation? I'm speaking of "Sam Bass," and a "Burro with no Name." Are there anymore out there? I sure hope so!

The Sheriff started in 1945 over ABC. The sponsor of *Death Valley Days* wanted a more modern view of the west, and he got it with *The Sheriff*. Originally called *Death Valley Sheriff*, it was sponsored by Pacific Borax, and introduced to the airwaves Sheriff Mark Chase. He had all the tools of modern criminology at his call, and he patrolled his territory in a new car. Chase was a former U.S. Marine who went to Canyon County in California and became the sheriff. Robert Hagg played the part and latter Don Briggs took over. The series was heard on Friday nights for Borax and last six years. In its entire run it continued the "morning bugle call" of the *Death Valley Days* series.

----to be continued next month----

From the Editor's Chair

Wasn't that a great, well researched, two part article by Jack French on "The Mounties in OTR History." Jack is editor of RADIO RECALL, the newsletter of the **Metro Washington Old Time Radio Club** and graciously let us run the article due to our proximity to the Canadian border and our Canadian membership. We are beginning a series by Dom Parisi about cowboys on the radio that will quite informative and run for about six issues. Dom is one of the founders of our organization and has served as our treasurer and pillar of stability since day one. Since his retirement he has been our most prolific researcher and writer for the IP.



Member Peter Wall sent the club a very extensive log of *Richard Diamond, Private Detective*, which is now in our Reference Library.

January inaugurates the twentieth anniversary year of the **Old Time Radio Club**. We began officially in May 1975, although a few of us had meet informally prior to that date. During the coming year will have some "flashbacks" into our history and reminisces by members who have been with us for a while as well as our usual array of articles, ads and information. All articles, ads OTR memorabilia that's fit or unfit to print is welcome. If unfit, we'll computer enhance it to make it suitable. Just send it in.

◆ ◆ ◆ Tuning In ◆ ◆ ◆

by Tom Heathwood

How many of us can recall the warm and "personal" season's greetings we got from all our old radio friends? Live from New York or Los Angeles, or maybe just a few miles away at the local stations, all our favorites were wishing us well at Christmas time! These were not taped or "pre-recorded" salutations of the holiday, but very sincere and personal words said in such a way as to make every single listener think our radio friends were talking directly to us. No Christmas show ever went off the air before the stars had thanked the cast, the sponsor and, of course, the listeners for joining in the festivities.

Outstanding among my memories of the great old Christmas programs would have to be a few shows that offered holiday fare, year after year, often becoming a "tradition" in the homes of millions of listeners across the country.

The *Campbell Playhouse* which offered, yearly, "A Christmas Carol" with motion picture and radio star, Lionel Barrymore was the most traditional of all! Over the 1930's and 1940's when it was broadcast, it varied somewhat in format and length, but best remembered would be, perhaps, the hour long version as directed by Orson Welles for CBS, in which he would narrate and play a small part (such as Bob Cratchitt).

Barrymore was superb in his voicing of Ebenezer Scrooge, Dickens' most miserly, and miserable character, who was transformed by three Spirits of Christmas into a kind and gentle soul who found the true meaning of Christmas. Barrymore's voice was ideally suited for the role, and was eagerly looked forward to, as the family gathered around the old Philco in the light of the Christmas tree in the "front room." The story had an almost mystical effect on the listeners, many of whom were children, who memorized, word-for-word, the dialogue of the radio play and could anticipate the lines with increasing clarity as the years went by.

Lum and Abner did a fifteen minute sketch for many, many years that told of a young couple and the birth of their child in a distant farming area near "Pine Ridge." The analogy was obvious, and the tenderness and love of the two "old fellers" was a moving event for listeners every Christmas. The sponsors made

sure the audience was aware that this dramatic gem was a "gift" of the season.

Amos 'n' Andy had a moving Christmas story of Andy working as a department store "Santa" to earn enough to buy a very special doll for Amos' little girl, Arbadella. The program always ended with Amos and Arbadella listening to the "very best Christmas music," The Lord's Prayer, with Amos explaining to the youngster what the words mean. This program was presented, with minor variations, over most of the Golden Days of Radio.

Of course, all the big shows had their own particular way of saying "Merry Christmas" to the listening audience: Jack Benny and the great Christmas shopping shows with Mel Blanc as the harried clerk; Fibber McGee and Molly with their "Night Before Christmas" programs; *Grand Central Station's* tale of a medical intern on ambulance duty on Christmas Eve; *Duffy's Tavern's* "Miracle In Manhattan;" *The Great Gildersleeve's* "Why The Chimes Rang," and so many more!! All our daytime soaps and afternoon kid's shows had special pre-Christmas shows too. Most of the regular shows were pre-empted on Christmas Day, but came back with the prime time hours on Christmas Night for nostalgic moments to end a busy day!

Many of us involved in the replay of old time radio have endeavored to keep the tradition alive. All the hosts on the YESTERDAY-USA SUPERSTATION have Christmas shows planned. Folks doing local radio like the Gassman Brothers in California, do "specials" and sometimes "marathons" every Christmas. I'll have fun joining John and Larry again this year on KPCC (Pasadena) for the fun and I'll have my annual HERITAGE THEATRE show on YESTERDAY-USA all during the Christmas week on the satellite.

But for now, in the spirit of radio yesteryear, may I take this opportunity to thank all the readers of the *Illustrated Press* for their kind words about "Tuning In," and to wish you all A Very Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year!!

TONIGHT 9:00 P.M.
DICK HAYMES sings with
HELEN FORREST
WGR 550 on your dial [1947]
Columbia Broadcasting System

I Goofed Department

In last month's *Illustrated Press* I left off a title of one of the RCMP radio series, it was, **McLean of the Mounties**. The McLean title should have appeared between paragraphs 2 and 3 in the right-hand column on page 4 beginning with "This 15 minute show was...." The omission of this title may have confused readers into thinking that paragraph three is still about **Blair of the Mounties**. My apologies to Jack French on this oversight to his fine article on the RCMP. I guess I'll have to get a smarter computer.

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HAS PROMISED
THE MARCONI COMPANY**
that he will speak on
Christmas Eve by
Wireless Telephone
to every home within
200 miles of Montreal
equipped with a suitable
wireless receiver.
LET THE KIDDIES LISTEN
to his songs, rhymes and
stories. He will com-
mence promptly at 7:30
P.M., and will continue
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A RADIOGRAM from SANTA CLAUS

Dear Daddy,

Do you remember how, when you were a boy, you used to be awake nights just before Christmas and wonder what Santa was going to bring you?

Your boy will be doing the same thing a few weeks from now, and perhaps a little suggestion from me will help a whole lot.

Radio has a great fascination for every red-blooded American boy, and there is nothing you could get that would give him more pleasure than a good Radio Set.

Maybe he is already a radio fan; if he is, then there are dozens of things he needs in order to enlarge and improve his set.

Let him experiment; it will teach him many things that are not taught in schools, patience, accuracy, logical reasoning. And the beneficial result of successful experiments will never be lost on the young mind that you are anxious to develop along right lines.

With a good set in the home, your boy will be able to listen to University Extension courses, opera, beautiful readings from good authors; your whole family will benefit; your home will never be lonely during the long winter evenings, for you have but to tune in, and the whole world will come to you on the wings of the night.

My sleigh will be loaded with sets, loud speakers, tubes, transformers, headphones, batteries, and everything. Find out what your boy wants, and with your help I'll do my best.

Yours very truly,

[1927]

SANTA CLAUS

Join our

(1932)

CHRISTMAS

CLUB

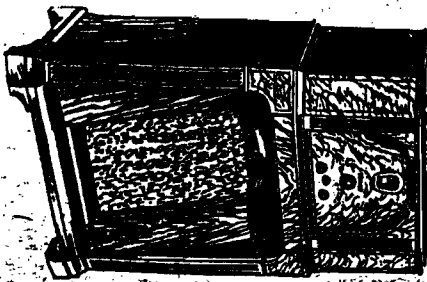
Pay only a small amount each week and we will deliver any model 1933

PHILCO

for Christmas

Yes, you can buy a marvelous, big performing PHILCO simply by paying a very small amount each week from now until Christmas. At that time your new PHILCO will be delivered to you and the balance due will be carried on EASY PAYMENTS.

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Marvelous New 1933 MODEL 91X

Wonderful 9-tube PHILCO with inclined - sounding board, twin speakers, shadow tuning, automatic volume control, tone control and latest type PHILCO high efficiency tubes. Ask for a demonstration!

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