

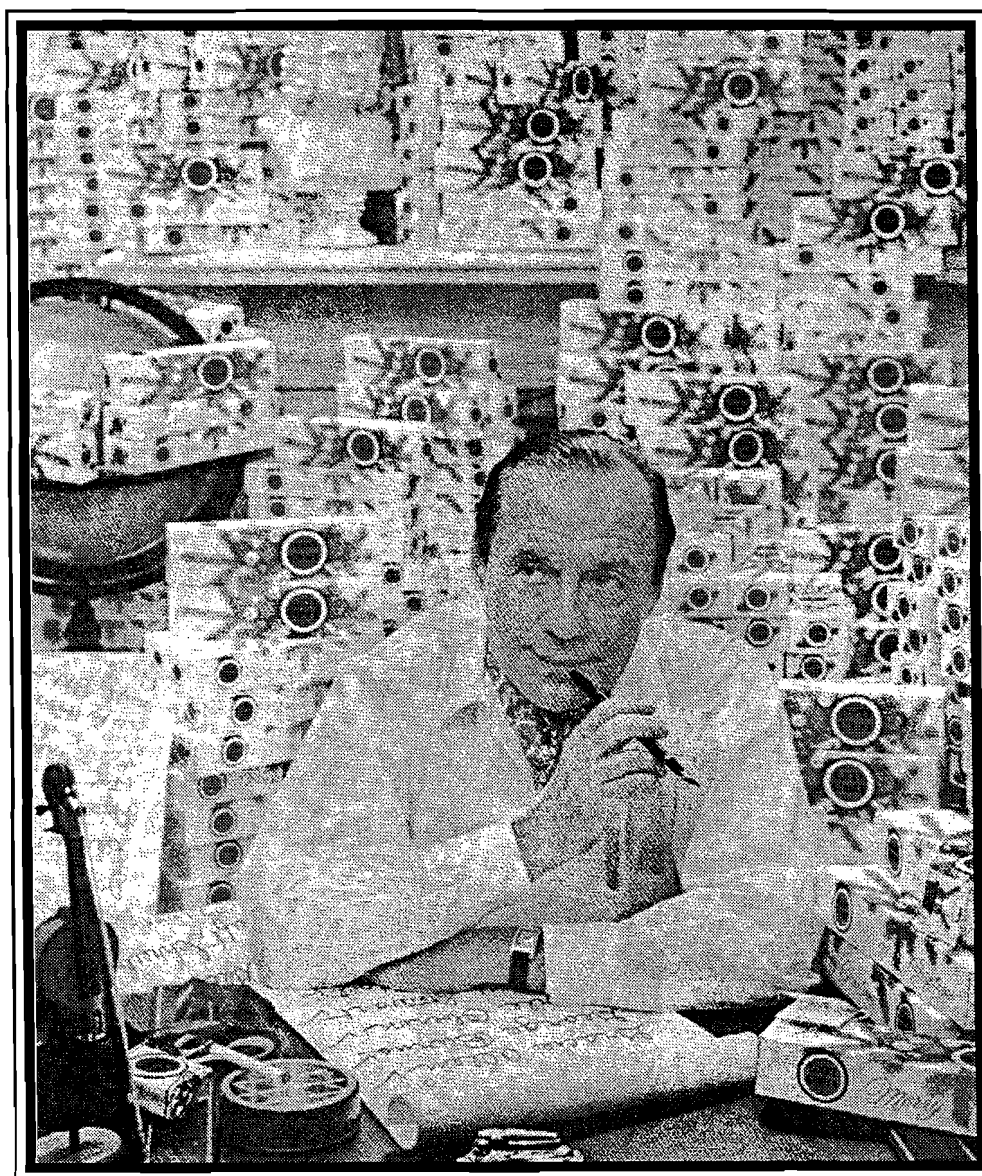
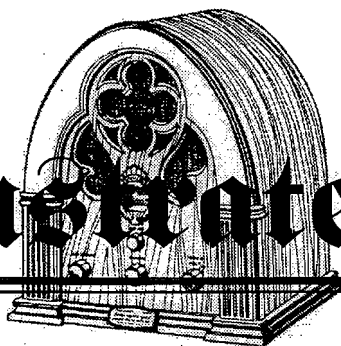
The Old Time Radio Club

Established 1975

The Illustrated Press

Number 305

December 2002



Season's Greetings

The Illustrated Press

Membership information

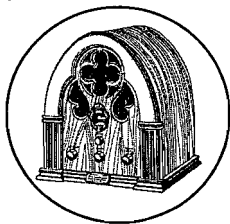
New member processing, \$5 plus club membership of \$17.50 per year from January 1 to December 31. Members receive a tape library listing, reference library listing and a monthly newsletter. Memberships are as follows: If you join January-March, \$17.50; April-June, \$14; July-September, \$10; October-December, \$7. All renewals should be sent in as soon as possible to avoid missing issues. Please be sure to notify us if you have a change of address. The **Old Time Radio Club** meets the first Monday of every month at 7:39 PM during the months of September to June at 393 George Urban Blvd., Cheektowaga, NY 14225. The club meets informally during the months of July and August at the same address. 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 Ct.
Lancaster, NY 14086

E-Mail Address:

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Cheektowaga, NY 14225

Tape Library Rates: All reels and video cassettes are \$1.85 per month; audio cassettes and records are \$.85 per month. Rates include postage and handling and are payable in U.S. funds.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK



JERRY COLLINS

The Old Time Radio Club is in the process of updating and improving its tape lending Libraries. As part of this process we are putting our listings on computer discs. Please let us know if you would like a disc when they are completed. We are about two months away from completing the project. Our eventual goal is to also put our listings on our web site. Please read the Illustrated Press for updates on this latter project.

We could never have done this without the assistance of four Old Time Radio dealers who have helped, through their generous donations, to improve the quality as well as expand our collections. Although donations have been primarily made at the Cincinatti Convention and once again at the recent Newark Convention, They come in throughout the year.

Our four major donors are:

Radio Memories
Ted Davenport,
Tom Monroe
1600 Wewoka St.
North Little Rock, AR 72116

Vintage Broadcasts
Andy Blatt
42 Bowling Green
Staten Island, NY 10314

Great American Radio
Gary and LaDonna Kramer
P.O. Box 504
Genesee, MI 48437

Leo Gawroniak
P.O. Box 248
Glen Gardner, NJ 08826

Please patronize our donors.

The State of the Cassette Library

When I was charged with the maintenance of the cassette library a couple of years ago, the first things I did were to take a count of all the tapes to determine just how many were actually missing, and a listening check to get an idea of the sound quality. I admit, it takes more than listening to a few to draw a conclusion but it gives one an idea of what to expect.

Needless to say, a lot of tapes were missing, quite a few were in less than playable condition and a lot were

inaudible. These I made over from a good copy. I could now safely say the library needed help, lots of it. And so with the help of the members, we began the journey to fix-it land where the computer wizard lives.

Currently, the libraries, all of them are being redone. These include the reel to reel, records, books, informative material, CDs and of course the cassettes. In time, hopefully within a year, all will be up and running. The libraries are constantly expanding and we'll be able to keep up with them much easier with our new computer format.

This is not an easy task we undertake. A lot of hard work and personal time is going into this project. All of the people involved deserve a hearty Thank You for volunteering to do this. They didn't have to but they did.

We are about to enter the digital world where the cassettes will be cataloged on a floppy disc as well as on paper in the Illustrated Press. Times change and so must we, hopefully for the better.

See you in the next issue with further updates.

Dan Marafino

WANTS:

I am looking for the following series:
Hallmark Playhouse
Lux Radio Theatre (from 1948 & up)
Cavalcade of America
also trading buddies (I must have something you want).
Dan Marafino

SEALTEST VILLAGE STORE

*Joan Davis, Prop., and Jack Haley, Mgr.
deal in Laughs and Chuckles
(JULY 1944)*

When Joan Davis trips out on the stage—whether at the Thursday night broadcast of her *Sealtest Village* show or Tuesday night preview in which the program is audience tested before actual airing—the first, quite audible reaction is: “Why, she’s *good-looking!*”

Why this should be such a thunderbolt to beholders is still a puzzle to Joan’s friends, who have long known the current clown princess as an attractive, quiet-voiced young lady. It even astonishes those very gag-writers (of whom Joan’s husband, Si Wills, is one) who have been wringing their hands over a hot typewriter all week, searching for more lurid insults with which to picture

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Business is so good at the Davis-Haley 'store' that seasoned troupers Joan and Jack must keep their fingers crossed.

wacky Joan Davis as a homely, loud-mouthed wench who couldn't even be pin-up girl in a lonely Eskimo's igloo.

But there she is, in the slender, appropriately curved flesh, clad in well-tailored suit, with a flower on her ever-hatless head. The hair is wavy and burnished-bronze, the eyes are gray-blue and appealing—but it must be admitted that the famous nose can really look remarkably like a sugar-scoop in the wrong light. And it's Joan's business as a comedienne to see that she gets in the wrong light, that her generous mouth contorts itself into the wryest of grimaces, and that her trim, graceful legs tangle themselves up into pretzel-knots at the most crucial moments for the sake of comedy.

Glamour is anything but the strong point of the one-time Madonna Josephine Davis of St. Paul, Minnesota. When she trips out on a stage, she *trips*. She's the rubber-legged female counterpart of Leon Errol, and she takes her low comedy falls with a certain air—but hard. Television will hold new terrors when it captures the shenanigans of Joan Davis and her long-suffering sidekick, Jack Haley. Right now, the Davis-Haley broadcast is a 3-ring circus, complete with acrobats. The two comics chase each other around the mike, do stumble-bum minuets during musical interludes, pound performers on the back until they almost lose their lines from laughing.

The Script takes quite a beating, both literally and figuratively. Joan and Jack use it to swat each other over the head. They kiss ecstatically when a joke brings hearty laughter, tear pages out of it and throw them away when a gag fails to deliver. Favorite stunt for both guest stars and regulars, when they have a particularly harrowing insult to pay Joan, is to hold

up their copy where the audience can see it and shake their heads to prove it was the writer's idea, not theirs. They can't you see, quite get over this business of giving slugs instead of plugs to a good gal like Joan.

The one person who doesn't mind is the victim of all these left-handed compliments. Joan read the handwriting on the wall when she was only 6, and saw that it spelled out G-A-G-S, not G-L-A-M-O-U-R. Having successfully inflicted sad songs and serious sayings on church festivals for three years, she tried a dramatic recitation on an amateur-night theater audience in St. Paul—only to be hooted off the stage by the paying customers. Undaunted, the train-dispatcher's daughter bounced back next week with a comic routine and beat the balconies into howling mirth. Result: A contract to tour the Pantages circuit, billed as "The Toy Comedienne." She eventually came home to finish her schooling, but the floodlights still gleamed as something mighty enticing to fall into for a good laugh from the gallery. More vaudeville "single acts" followed until, one fine St. Patrick's Day, Madonna's manager teamed this daughter of the Irish and Welsh with Si Wills. That's when she changed her first name to Joan. Just five months later, she also annexed "Wills" as her own legal last name—by marriage.

August has been a sizzling month in the life of the sultry singer of cracked-voice songs. It was in August, 1931, that Si and Joan were married . . . August, 1933, that their daughter, Beverly, was born . . . August, 1941, that Joan made her radio debut on the *Rudy Vallee Program* as a guest . . . and it was also in August, some decades earlier, that her present partner, Jack Haley, was born.

The long trouping experience of both Davis and Haley (for Jack too, has years of vaudeville headlining) has had a lot to do with their show's consistent rating among the five top-ranking programs of its type. But another never-to-be-forgotten success factor has been Rudy Vallee himself, their predecessor and champ booster.

It was Vallee who first brought them to the airwaves—in individual guest spots, on different programs—and proved to them and the critics that they definitely had something to offer radio. It was Vallee who kept Joan on the present show as a regular, chose her as his successor, and introduced Jack as her assistant, before resigning to go into the service. It was Vallee (now a Lieutenant in the Coast Guard) who was least surprised of all when the re-cast show retained its previous popularity—then kept on climb-

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Man-chasing Joan is quite a problem to Jack—particularly if there is someone around like Frank Sinatra himself.

ing. And it was Vallee who sent Joan two handsome onyx table lighters in the shape of crowns, when she was voted the year's Queen of Comedy.

Nevertheless, radio success came as something of a surprise to both Joan and Jack, who are what is known in the trade as "physical" comedians—Joan with her arm-flinging antics and jaw-dropping grimaces, Jack with his wide-eyed mugging and general air of being a well-meaning, eager little guy who is always being shoved around by the other fellow. Both are used to getting most of their laughs visually. As a consequence, it's doubtful whether Joan—who at just past 30, has become a \$60,000-a-picture and \$100,000-a-year radio star through just such clowning—could really give her best performance without playing to a live audience. At broadcast time, she still seems a bit keyed-up about having to face a mike and hold a script. Added to this, of course, is the knowledge that she is now considered a "prestige" comedienne and that a lot of salaries and reputations depend upon her radio show's retaining its present popularity.

No such terrors dismay the veteran Haley, who has learned to take things as they come, bright lights or comparative obscurity, applause or indifferent silence. Cheerfully admitting that he's "past 40"—though his

boyish features, fresh skin and trim 5-foot-10-1/2 figure will probably still make him look like an Irish juvenile, at 90—he's been through too many opening nights, learned too thoroughly that relaxation is the key to long life in show business, to worry unduly about what other performers are getting in cash, credit or handicaps.

As a matter of fact, although Jack isn't co-starred with Joan in the present set-up, his weekly salary runs comfortably close to hers and he has about an equal number of profitable film assignments. Despite the fact that Joan has never had Jack's long musical-comedy experience on Broadway, while Jack didn't start his theatrical career as early in life as Joan (he ran away from his home town of Boston to go on the stage, at 18), there are some intriguing parallels in the Davis-Haley careers.

Both spent years in vaudeville—and found their life-mates there. For Jack, it was Florence McFadden, one of the "Soda Fountain Girls" in his first big act, which forecast the ice-cream counter setting in his present radio show. They have been married for 21 years now, and the quiet comic is still utterly devoted to his Flo.

Both Jack and Joan became established in movies before trying broadcasting. Now both are under contract to RKO, where Joan has just finished "*Show Business*," and each has several commitments with other studios. But neither has ever let Hollywood go to their heads.

Generous to others but wary of the future, they have few extravagances, Joan invests some of her savings in good jewelry, including a set of buckle-design rubies and diamonds which would flutter any feminine heart. For years, she had a fine, large home which was her pride and joy until she sold it to get a less pretentious one—simply because servicemen guests said they would enjoy a swimming-pool and the smaller house had one.

Jack invests in California real estate, with special emphasis on his 250-acre ranch (127-1/2 miles from Hollywood), where he spends the major portion of his week. A navigator's son with no love for the sea, he has turned to his grandfather's profession, farming, and talks eagerly of "free gravity water," "perennial crops" and his "foundation herd" of white-faced Hereford cattle.

Above all, both have children who are chips off the old block—or, as Beverly once said, "hams off the old block." Haley's 18-year old daughter married young, but Jack, Jr. shows considerable promise at 10, and has even been screen tested. Beverly Wills, almost 11, has definitely inherited some of her mother's comic gifts and has appeared on the show as Joan's kid sister.

Friends of Old Time Radio Convention—2002

By Jerry Collins

I recently attended a Theodore Roosevelt Symposium in Buffalo. I noted a definite similarity between the Symposium and the Friends of Old Time Radio Convention. There were many more books on Theodore Roosevelt than surviving members of the Roosevelt family. The same thing is happening in Newark. There were also more books on Old Time Radio than actual true participants from the "Golden Age of Radio." No matter how hard Jay Hickerson works, the gap will continue to grow.

The list of former radio performers included; Arthur Anderson, George Ansbrosio, Frank Bresee, Cliff Carpenter, Tommy Cook, Bill Farrell, Susan Seaforth Hayes, Pat Hosley, Ruth Last, Bill Owens, Rosemary Rice and Hal Stone. The following TV performers were in attendance; Robert Clary, Beverly Garland, Kathy Garver, Will Hutchins, Soupy Sales, Terri Keane and Cynthia Pepper. The following singers and musical performers participated in a number of panels; Bea Wain, Bill Farrell, Gogi Grant and Bill Hayes. The surprise hits of the convention were Johnny Blowers and Jack Lawrence. Blowers was a drummer with the Bunny Berigan and Ben Bernie Orchestras and also played on the *Jack Benny*, *Jackie Gleason*, *Dinah Shore Shows* and also with Frank Sinatra on *Your Hit Parade*. Jack Lawrence wrote songs for Arthur Tracy, Dinah Shore, Frank Sinatra and many others. His most famous hits were *Somewhere Beyond the Sea*, *Linda*, *Sleepy Lagoon* and *If I Only Cared*. Both Blowers and Lawrence have been in show business for seventy years.

My wife and I arrived in Newark at about 2:30 on Thursday. Unfortunately I missed Howard Blue's discussion of his book *Words at War* (radio during World War II and the Cold War). I did spend quite a bit of time that day as well as the next two days in the dealer's room. Although there were less dealers, there was still a good variety of tapes and other radio related products. After dinner on Thursday we were treated to a pair of recreations. Arthur Anderson directed Becky Beach and John Bell's satirical version of *The War of The Worlds*. Dave Zwengler directed the Days Radio Players from Chicago in an episode from *Hall of Fantasy*.

Friday was the day for some excellent panel discussions. I missed Gary Yoggy's panel on the Armed Forces Radio Service. With Gary in charge, I am certain that it was

well done. This was followed by an in depth discussion of *Have Gun, Will Travel* along with comparisons with *Frontier Gentleman* and *Gunsmoke*. Martin Grams, Gary Yoggy and Anthony Tollen handled the discussion. Anthony Tollin, Laura Leff, Johnny Blowers and Frank Bresee picked right up with a panel discussion on Jack Benny. Emphasis was placed on some of the funnier moments in the *Jack Benny Show*. As might be expected, many good things were said about Benny. The final panel discussion was both very enlightening but at times controversial. Terri Keane, Hal Stone, Tommy Cook, Arthur Anderson, Cynthia Pepper and Kathy Garver discussed their careers as child performers. Terri Keane opposed the use of child actors, while Tommy Cook supported the concept. The rest of the performers were somewhat in between.

There were three recreations on Friday. Late in the afternoon the Gotham Radio Players presented *Light Out's* episode of "Chicken Heart." After dinner, Jack French directed an excellent episode from the *Scarlet Queen* show. Bill Owens did a superb job as Phil Carney. Tommy Cook then discussed the wonderful experiences he had working with Arch Oboler during World War II. The evening ended on a pleasant note, Cliff Carpenter did a masterful job as Lawyer Tucker in *Lawyer Tucker*. Will Hutchins, Pat Hosely, Terri Keane and Tommy Cook played good supporting parts.

Saturday began with a panel discussion on blindness and radio with Derek Tague, Lora Palmer, Mike Mandel, Ed Clute and Kathy Garver. Kathy is not blind, but reads for the blind. Hal Stone spent close to an hour discussing his career on radio as well as the book that he recently completed.

Later that afternoon Martin Grams and Francis Nevins gave us an in depth look at their books on Ellery Queen. The final panel was the annual discussion on music from the Golden Age of Radio. Bea Wain, Robert Clary, Gogi Grant, Johnny Blowers, Bill Hayes, Susan Seaforth Hayes, Jack Lawrence, Soupy Sales and Bill Farrell discussed their musical careers. Farrell was discovered by Bob Hope at the Chez-Ami in Buffalo.

Saturday afternoon came to a conclusion with Ruth Last doing an excellent job in *Suspense's* "Sorry Wrong Number." Saturday evening featured recreations of episodes from *Nero Wolfe* and *Have Gun, Will Travel*. In between these shows we were treated to Jack Lawrence's renditions of some of his top hits. In the *Nero Wolfe* show Tommy Cook played Nero, while Archie was played by Bill Hayes. Hal Stone was the cab driver, while Rosemary Rice played the female role. The evening concluded with Arthur Anderson playing Paladin in *Have Gun, Will Travel*. Hal Stone gave an

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excellent interpretation of a crow, while Will Hutchins and Ruth Last played excellent supporting roles.

The convention ended on Sunday morning with a lively panel discussion that included Robert Clary, Hal Stone, Bill Hayes, Susan Seaforth Hayes, Cliff Carpenter and Bill Farrell. Congratulations to Jay Hickerson and his associates for another excellent convention.

This Is Johnny

REPRINT From TUNE IN Magazine, July, 1943

Johnny Roventini, America's best known living trade mark, is 31 years old, 43 inches tall and answers to the monicker of Johnny the Call Boy.



His is one of the most unusual radio success stories ever told. Eight years ago, Milton Biow, head of a New York advertising agency, sat in a New York hotel lobby waiting for a friend. Eventually, he heard a high, child-like voice shouting, "Call for Mr. Milton Biow. Call for Mr. Milton Biow."

Then an idea came to him. If people answered pages in hotel lobbies, why wouldn't they react the same way on the air? Thus Philip Morris's *Johnny the Call Boy* was born.

Johnny Roventini is a native of Brooklyn, N.Y., and receives \$20,000 a year from Philip Morris for the exclusive use of his voice, his size and his picture. He is the youngest of four children born to the wife of an Italian day laborer. All of the other Roventini offspring were normally tall, but Johnny stopped growing when he was ten.

Johnny gladly gave up his hotel job, which brought him \$15 a week in salary and a similar amount in tips, to go to work for Milton Biow and Philip Morris for \$100 each seven days.

In the beginning, Papa Roventini soundly berated his youngest son for giving up a steady \$30 each week for a temporary \$100, but after a few months, as Johnny regularly received this sum for "doing nothing," as Papa said, he thought better of it. He celebrated by retiring completely from all work. That retirement has lasted to this day. Johnny's earnings grew larger in subsequent years and he was insured for \$200,000. This Milton

Biow says, is only a fraction of his worth to Philip Morris.

Today, Johnny enjoys the status of radio star and this distinction rests becomingly on his pint-size shoulders. His \$20,000 a year made many things possible. He bought the two family house in Brooklyn where his family had formerly struggled to pay the rent. His sister and two brothers emulating the example of their father, decided to retire.

One of the brothers, formerly a cab driver, functions as Johnny's chauffeur and bodyguard. To him is entrusted the sacred duty of protecting Johnny's person and voice. He is constantly beseeching and admonishing Johnny not to yell. He will not permit him to enter an air-conditioned movie theatre for fear of drafts and colds.

Johnny's principal love is baseball. Last year, his friend George Raft arranged a season pass that would enable him to sit on the bench with the Brooklyn Dodgers. This was found to be impractical after he had virtually yelled himself hoarse during a game. Today he sits in the stands with his brother at his side. One yell, and Johnny is literally pulled out of the game by his brother.

He plays baseball too. In order to be able to do so, he completely equipped a sand-lot baseball team in the vicinity of his home. His team is a perpetual advertisement for his sponsor. They are known as the Philip Morris Flashes and that name is emblazoned on their uniforms. Johnny plays the "hot corner"—third base. He comes to bat using a kid-size club. He invariably gets a hit. Opposing pitchers always permit him to do so. Johnny knows that all hits are gifts, but he enjoys them anyway. His car chauffeured by his brother, is a community bus. All the youngsters in the neighborhood are welcome to ride and as many as fourteen have been crammed in at one time.

Eight years ago, his suits, shoes and hats were purchased in boys' shops. Today, everything is made to his measure. His wardrobe is much more expensive and extensive than the average man's.

Johnny's most important radio program, as far as the neighborhood is concerned, is the Friday night CBS *Philip Morris Playhouse*, on which movie stars appear in radio adaptations of motion pictures. Before and after each program, he is asked by the neighbors to describe in detail what Marlene Dietrich said, what Dorothy Lamour wore, what kind of a guy George Raft is—and did he get any autographs? Johnny gets as many autographs as possible from the stars for the neighborhood youngsters. Dorothy Lamour gave him fifteen on as many slips of paper.

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Miss Lamour idly asked, "What are you going to do with all my autographs—trade them in for one of Betty Grable's?"

"No," replied Johnny, "I give them out to my relatives." "With the number of autographs you requested," she replied "you must be related to the Dionnes."

Johnny attended a Brooklyn Dodgers game with George Raft. Raft later reported that just as many people asked Johnny for his autograph as requested his signature.

Johnny likes to feel he is an adult when dining out so he orders a regulation size dinner. After a few bites he gives up. His hunger is completely sated. He is an exceedingly generous tipper, a throw-back to the days when he was a hotel page boy. He still remembers the disappointments over no tip and the joys of a larger pourboire.

Besides the Friday CBS *Playhouse*, he is heard on the Sunday CBS *Crime Doctor* series and the Tuesday *Johnny Presents* programs over NBC. All three are coast-to-coast airings and Johnny is the first and last person heard on all of them. As the Ray Block orchestra plays Ferde Grofe's "On the Trail," Johnny's "Call for Philip MMMMMooooorrrrr-rrrrraaaaiiiiiisssss!!!!!" rings out clearly.

IS THERE A SANTA CLAUS?

*I'm sure we've all heard
this story before,
but it probably has been a while.
So here it is once again.*



One hundred and five years ago Virginia O'Hanlon asked the question, "Is there a Santa Claus?" in a letter to the Editor of the New York Sun. She wrote: "Dear Editor: I am eight years old. Some of my friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, 'If you see it in The Sun, it's so.' Please tell me the truth, is there a Santa Claus?" signed Virginia O'Hanlon, 115 West Ninety-fifth Street, New York City.

The answer to her letter, written by Francis P. Church in 1897, has been printed every year by *The Sun* until 1949 when the paper went out of business. Here it is:

"Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's

are little. In this great universe of ours, man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge. Yes Virginia there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exists, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy.

Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world. You tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank God! he lives and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay 10 times 10,000 years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

Vivacious Veteran

*Billie Burke has Found the Fountain
of Youth — and Memory (April, 1945)*

Though she's been one of the best-loved actresses in three fields of entertainment for more than four decades, openly boasts of her grandchildren at every opportunity, and cheerfully admits to being in the neighborhood of 60, Billie Burke's in no danger of being called the Grand

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Old Lady of show business. "Grand" and "Lady" are indeed the good words from everyone who knows her, but "old" is an adjective no one could ever apply to the chic, vivacious portrayer of featherbrain roles on stage, screen and radio.

Men of all ages fall in love with her because of her eternal femininity, can't find enough glowing phrases to describe her reddish-blond curls, blue-grey eyes and gracious manner. Women are devoted to her, tell of her long trips through pouring rain to visit a sickbed, of gifts and help she has given them. Their only fear is that the public will mistake the nit-witty characters she portrays for her real-life personality.

From the night of her stage debut in London (1903), right up to her present radio series, this ageless Peter Pan has immersed herself completely in every role she has played—whether as musical comedy queen, silent-screen star, wife or mother. The theatre has been her private as well as professional life. Her father was the famous circus clown, William E. Burke ("Billie" was his nickname—she was originally christened Ethelbert when she was born in Washington, D.C.). Her husband was the great "Follies" impresario, Florenz Ziegfeld. She retired from public life for almost 15 years, after the birth of their child, returning to build a new career only after Mr. Ziegfeld's death.

It was then that she created the lovable but slightly lunatic matron she has since made famous on both celluloid and ether. Today, she has got so completely inside the role it's hard to tell the imitation from the genuine. One side of the character is quite competent at balancing checkbooks and paying bills. The other is equally capable of sending deposits to a faraway friend and mailing chatty, intimate letters to the bank—to the amazement of both.

One side flutters, prattles with an apparently artless wit, stages as good a performance for two people as for hundreds. (There's a strong suspicion that the Billie Burke impersonation of Billie Burke serves a dual purpose, to cover up a natural shyness and reserve, and to turn the laugh on herself rather than see others embarrassed.) The other concentrates on her work, worries about every nuance and inflection, takes a businesslike interest in broadcasting. Miss Burke likes to get her scripts well in advance, marks every word for the proper expression, even draws little faces in the margin to indicate each mood. Sometimes these cartoons—showing smiles, frowns "thought-waves"—are so astonishing that she herself has to pause and wonder.

A thoroughgoing trouper, she habitually arrives at the studio laden with bags, parcels and—in cold weather—two fur coats (one for the street, the other for the studio). There's a bulging handbag (usually a draw-string pouch of infinite capacity), a case of vacuum bottles with tea and water, a large fitted bag containing make-up, odd bits of apparel, fresh vegetables, a pat of butter and two slices of special bread (she's very careful of her diet). There are also two pairs of gloves, three different kinds of pencils, plenty of fresh handkerchiefs, and two pairs of glasses. The glasses are unforgettable to everyone except Miss Burke, who invariably leaves one pair behind for someone else to find after she's gone. Yet despite all this (or maybe because of the many "spares"), the effervescent comedienne is always beautifully dressed, immaculately groomed. She loves clothes—particularly hats. Most revealing tip-off, perhaps, is her unpretentious little house in the Westwood section of Los Angeles. From the street it doesn't look much like a star's home. Inside, it is just as feminine and fluffy as any fan could imagine. But behind it is the real center of Billie Burke's existence these days. The backyard adjoins that of her daughter's home, forming a garden-patio



She's not as giddy as she sounds.

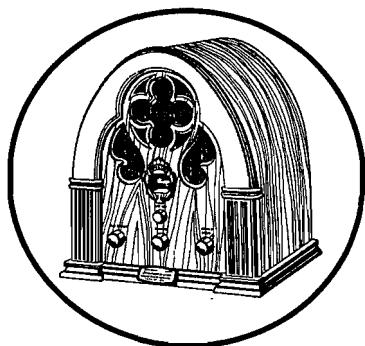
where the actress can be with her adored family—daughter Pat, son-in-law Bill, and the youngsters, Cecillia and Florenz (who inherited both her grandfather's name and her grandmother's strawberry-blond coloring).

Miss Burke broadcasts from both Hollywood and New York, depending on film commitments, using different casts but carrying on in the same light-comedy vein which makes the noonday *Billie Burke Show* comparable to evening programs. She undoubtedly misses her family while in the East, but there's a spot in Manhattan which tugs at her heart-strings too—the Ziegfeld Theatre, built by her late husband. It's reopening by Billy Rose last December (and Billy's decision to keep the original name and decor) was undoubtedly one of the most momentous events in her life since Ziegfeld's death. It's doubtful if she saw much of the show at that gala premiere, studying instead the restored interior of a once-familiar scene she hadn't revisited in more than a decade of widowhood. Friends know that she was never able to pass the site without tears in her eyes, that she has never forgotten the man she has always idolized.

But that's another side of Billie Burke, which doesn't belong to the public. It may be the most important side of a skillful actress who specializes in portraying giddy women "who can't keep their minds on anything for a moment."

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