

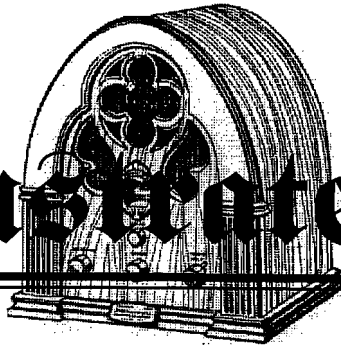
The Old Time Radio Club

Established 1975

The Illustrated Press

Number 327

February 2005



JOAN DAVIS

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 the 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 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 August at the same address.

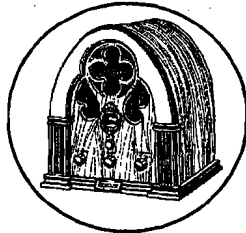
Anyone interested in the Golden Age of Radio is welcome. The **Old Time Radio Club** is affiliated with the Old Time Radio Network.

Club Mailing Address

Old Time Radio Club
56 Christen Ct.
Lancaster, NY 14086

E-Mail Address:

otrclub@localnet.com



Back issues of *The Illustrated Press*
are \$1.50 postpaid

**Deadline for *The Illustrated Press* is the
1st of each month prior to publication.**

The Illustrated Press is the newsletter of the **Old Time Radio Club**, headquartered in Western New York State. It is published monthly except for the months of July and August. Contents except where noted are copyright © 2004 by the OTRC.

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

c/o Ken Krug, Editor (716) 684-5290
49 Regal Street
Depew, New York 14043

E-Mail address: AnteakEar@aol.com

Web Page Address:

members.localnet.com/~robmcd

Club Officers and Librarians

President

Jerry Collins (716) 683-6199
56 Christen Ct.
Lancaster, NY 14086
collinsjf@yahoo.com

Vice President & Canadian Branch

Richard Simpson (905) 892-4688
960 16 Road R.R. 3
Fenwick, Ontario
Canada, L0S 1C0

Treasurer, Videos & Records

Dominic Parisi (716) 884-2004
58 Ardmore Pl.
Buffalo, NY 14213

Membership Renewals, Change of Address

Peter Bellanca (716) 773-2485
1620 Ferry Road
Grand Island, NY 14072
pmb1620@worldnet.att.net

Membership Inquires and OTR Network Related Items

Richard Olday (716) 684-1604
171 Parwood Trail
Depew, NY 14043-1071
raolday@yahoo.com

Libraries

Cassettes and Reference Libraries

Frank Bork (716) 835-8362
209 Cleveland Drive
Cheektowaga, NY 14215
febork@localnet.com

Video and Record Libraries

Dominic Parisi (716) 884-2004
38 Ardmore Pl.
Buffalo, NY 14213

Library Rates: Audio cassettes are \$1.95 each and are recorded on a **club supplied cassette** which is **retained** by the member; video cassettes are \$1.85 per month; records are \$.85 per month. Rates include postage and handling and are payable in U.S. funds.



The Five Radio Networks of NBC

by JIM SNYDER

In its early years NBC (the National Broadcasting Company) operated five different broadcast networks all labeled by color (Red, Blue, Orange, Gold and White). OTR hobbyists are probably aware of the Red and Blue Networks but may not be familiar with the other colors.

On January 4, 1923 the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) started "chain" (or network) broadcasting which was then defined as "simultaneous broadcasting of an identical program by two or more connected stations." A rival network owned by the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) broadcast its first network program in December of that same year. In 1926 AT&T abruptly withdrew from the broadcasting field and after a series of complicated maneuvers RCA purchased the entire operation of their rival for one million dollars. They now owned both networks and decided to keep both running as separate entities. On September 9, 1926 RCA formed the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) which had its premier broadcast on the 15th of November. This broadcast joined 22 stations in the East and Midwest which had basically made up the old AT&T network. This was the foundation of the Red Network. The Blue Network, coming mostly from the former RCA stations, was started up two months later.

There is some discrepancy on the number of stations in each of these two networks at the beginning. Some sources state that twenty-five stations constituted the Red Network and six others the Blue. What appears to be more likely was that there were eighteen in the Red, five in the Blue, and eight that were available to supplement the "basic stations" of either network.

In practice, NBC was "national" only in its name since its programs only reached as far west as Denver. In December of 1926 the network's board of directors voted to establish a third NBC network on the West Coast. This was the Orange Network which was headquartered in San Francisco. The Orange Network had its inaugural program on April 5, 1927 and began regular broadcasting six days later. Basically, this network "recreated" the same programs as were heard in the east over the Red Network. In 1936 the Orange Network dissolved into the "Pacific Coast Red Network."

The Gold Network started in 1931. This included five stations in the West and gave an outlet for recreations of the NBC Blue programming. NBC Gold was discontinued in March of 1933 with some of the programs switching over to NBC Orange.

I've been unable to find much information on the NBC White Network. We do know that it was religious in its content and operated in the late 1920s and continued into the 30s. This was also referred to as the Watchtower Network.

Where did the networks get their color coded names? One of the common stories was that they were named after the colored phone jacks used by the telephone company for switching. The real reason is just as bizarre. NBC documents tell us that the use of colored pencils to draw network lines on a map gave them their names.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) felt that NBC should not be allowed to operate two "national networks" and demanded that one of them (Red or Blue) be sold. The Supreme Court upheld the FCC position and so the Blue Network was put up for sale. Edward Noble, the maker of Lifesavers, purchased it for eight million dollars. Everything that had belonged to the two networks now had to be divided up: stations, microphones, even wastebaskets. On October 12, 1943 the sale was approved and Noble named his new network the American Broadcasting System Inc. (ABS). A year later this was changed to American Broadcasting Company (ABC).

Farmington Hills to Consider Marker

By Shawn D. Lewis



Farmington Hills, Michigan—The Lone Ranger will be on the City Council agenda today. Council members will consider approving an agreement to allow for the placement and maintenance of a historical marker for the original Lone Ranger's house, built in 1860. The marker would be near the intersection of Locust and Shiawassee. The council meets at 7:30 p.m. today at City Hall, 31555 W. 11 Mile.

The marker will differ from most historical markers in Farmington Hills in two major areas. First, the sign will be black and silver instead of the traditional green. "We wanted to keep it more in the feel of the Lone Ranger," said Charmaine Kettler, staff planner for the City of Farmington Hills.

The Illustrated Press

Secondly, the marker is nationally designated. "Most markers in the city are local or state, with the majority being local," explained David Fromme, who has lived in the house for the past 11 years. Fromme is paying \$500, and the city is paying the remaining \$1,000 for the marker.

The Lone Ranger who lived in the house was not the masked Clayton Moore, who popularized the character on television during the 1950s. It was Earl Graser, the radio Lone Ranger, who lived in the house in the 1930s. The program originated from station WXYZ in Detroit, and was broadcast to more than 400 radio stations across the United States. It ran until 1955. Graser was the voice of the Lone Ranger from 1933-41, when he was killed, in an automobile accident. Brace Beemer replaced him on the radio.

The house was built by Orville Botsford, a member of the family who founded Farmington Hills. Kettler said there currently is no marker on or near the property. She said the marker will be in Farmington, although the house is in Farmington Hills. Farmington already has signed off on the placement of the marker, Kettler said, and the next step is for Farmington Hills to agree. She said, depending on when the marker arrives, it could go up this winter or in the spring.

Homeowner Fromme said, "During the Depression, radio was the main form of entertainment. Earl Graser died young and didn't have a chance to make his place in history." —Nov. 15, 2004

The Golden Age of Radio Lives On

By A.S. Berman

Holed up in a lonely lighthouse, you lie in darkness, waiting for death. Outside you hear them clawing, crawling, thousands of them. Rats. And all that stands between you and them is a wall of glass that, even now, is slowly beginning to crack.

This scene from "Three Skeleton Key", one of the most famous audio productions in radio history, kept audiences shivering in their living rooms throughout the '40s and '50s. And Glenn Carlson sees no reason why it can't do so again—online.

Carlson, 39, is executive director of The One Act Players, a troupe of professional voice actors in San Francisco that re-enacts radio mysteries and dramas of yesteryear for an Internet audience.

The One Act Players' site features links to the group's audio productions, which visitors can listen to free via streaming audio from Live365.com, an Internet radio station. Current offerings include an episode of *Flash Gordon*. Next up: a re-creation of "Three Skeleton Key," as well as an *Inner Sanctum Mysteries* program based on Guy de Maupassant's horror classic "The Horla."

"There are very few broadcast outlets left that are open to audio theater drama," Carlson says. "But (there's) a huge presence of fans on the Internet."

Ironically, the core audience for old-time radio is found not among those who remember the original broadcasts but those "who didn't know it existed," says Don Corey, who hosts *Radio Revisited*, an anthology of classic shows airing on radio stations in Chicago, Denver and Saginaw, Mich. "Anything that brings (old-time radio) to the attention of that group—and the Internet does that—helps it along."

For Carlson and his players, old-time radio injected much-needed variety into classes at the Voice Factory, a voiceover training school in San Francisco. Faced with reading an endless series of uninspiring radio commercials in the classroom, Carlson and One Act cofounder Scot Crisp turned instead to the Web, where they managed to locate several old radio scripts.

Since founding The One Act Players in 1998, the group has taken its performances from the classroom to a professional sound studio, where each program is recorded. Though technology gives the players greater control over their performances than yesterday's radio stars enjoyed, it does little to speed the creative process. Their debut production, *Flash Gordon*, took six weeks of rehearsal and 2-1/2 hours to record the single 15-minute segment.

One of the group's greatest challenges in adapting old shows, Carlson says, is deciding how close they should stick to the original scripts. "With *Flash Gordon*, you take this big radio sci-fi show from the 1930s," he says. "To our modern ear, it sounds really funny." Rather than trying to rework aspects of the show that might sound contrived or just plain corny to modern audiences, the players usually stick to the script and let listeners "connect to the pieces on whatever level they do."

Though seemingly an anachronism, old-time radio on the Web may be bringing the art form back from the brink of extinction. Before the World Wide Web, Jack French didn't give the genre much chance of surviving. "I remember going to a (radio) convention 10 or 15 years ago, and they were all white males over 60," recalls French, 65, editor of the Metropolitan Washington Old

The Illustrated Press

Time Radio Club's bi-monthly journal. "I remember thinking, 'in 10 years, there's not going to be any hobby left.'"

Yet now, about 40% of those who have joined old-time radio fan clubs in the past three years have been recruited online, many of whom are younger and women, French says. "It's saving the hobby—literally"



The Many Characters (of Fibber McGee and Molly)

by TOM CHERRE

Most of us were all fans of *Fibber McGee & Molly*. My dear mother, bless her soul, must have been a big fan. She constantly kept reminding me, as a kid, how my bedroom closet resembled that of Fibber McGee's. You see, I had to close it super fast when I threw something in there otherwise everything would come tumbling out. Of course that was quite a few years ago.

Fibber McGee and Molly was a good show, but it didn't start out that way. The first year in 1935 left a lot to be desired. The show was what you might call a bit rough. And that's putting it nicely. I had an opportunity to listen to the first couple of shows, and they were anything but funny. The shows were all very poor quality. A year or so later they improved and were significantly better. By 1941 *Fibber McGee & Molly* were the #1 show on the air. The scripts were written better. Fibber and Molly were funnier, but it was the many different characters that added so much to its success. I felt the show was like a bus driver picking up a different person at each stop. Each person would have something completely different to say to the driver as he got on the bus. The show ran from April 1935 as a half hour to June 1953. Due to Marian Jordan's health problems the show went to 15 minutes and in 1956 it dwindled down to a paltry 5 minutes on NBC's *Monitor*.

As I said before, the characters were fabulous. Starting with Bill Thompson, he was absolutely perfect as the voice of the lovable, humble, and battered Wallace Wimple. That same voice later filled the canine body of "Droopy Dog." In addition to Wimple he also did Nick Depopolus, Horatio K. Boomer, and the Old Timer, with his ever popular catch phrase, "That ain't the way I

heard it Johnny." Thompson put the show in a minor crisis when he was called to active duty in the Navy in 1943. Until his discharge in 1946 his four characters only appeared once in three years. He later made it real big playing the voices for hundreds of cartoon characters.

Hal Peary, famous for the Great Gildersleeve, got his start in that character role as McGee's dueling neighbor from 83 Wistful Vista. Each week they came to verbal blows, with Gildy usually asking for his lawn mower back one more time. He became the great one in 1942 and moved to the friendly confines of Summerfield in the *Great Gildersleeve*. (Note. It was noted that Gildy was married in Wistful Vista but suddenly became a bachelor on his own show. It was never ever clarified on either show.)

The multi-talented Gale Gordon, who would reach even greater heights later on in radio and then in TV played Mayor LaTrivia. He later played Foggy, the Weatherman. Each week the Mayor (or Foggy) and Fibber would usually battle wits with each other. McGee often ending up with the upper hand.

Arthur Q. Bryan was the friendly Dr. Gamble. Like most of the characters on the show Doc Gamble had his many differences with Fibber. Bryan also gained immortal fame when he later played the voice of Bugs Bunny's nemesis "Elmer Fudd." That's the guy who said "You wascal wabbit." We later heard Bryan as Floyd the Barber on *Gildersleeve*. Bryan took his character of friendly enemy to McGee shortly after Mayor LaTrivia left the show.

Isabel Randolph found her stock trade portraying high society matrons like Abigail Uppington. McGee always called her Uppy. It seemed like her main purpose for being on the show was to have her thin skin poked into by the likes of lowbrow McGee. A bit of trivia, Randolph later played the mother of Dick VanDyke on the same TV series.

Ransom Sherman had two strikingly different character roles on the show. He played Molly's Uncle Dennis, the stereotypical Irish drunk. He also played the more subdued Mr. Wellington, manager of the Wistful Vista moviehouse. He was an individual with intelligence and pompousity.

Richard LeGrande reached his popularity later on as Peavey the druggist on *Gildersleeve*. On McGee he played the part of Ole the Elk's Club janitor. There was also Marlin Hurt who played Beulah the McGee's maid. We can't forget the little girl Teeney who was perfectly played by Marian Jordan. She'd get McGee all upset by twisting and changing all the words she had to say.

The Illustrated Press

I'd also like to mention the writing team of Don Quinn and Phil Leslie who repeatedly had to come up with gags and funny story lines for many years. They applied their fine talents for making every character funny and believable. The show also boasted the musical talents of Billy Mills and his orchestra. They usually entertained us with a couple of instrumentals. The Kingsmen quartet was on hand to lend their fine vocal support. And last, but my no means least, who could forget the announcer pitchman, Harlow Wilcox? He had one of the most recognizable voices in the business. He was a master of integrating the commercial into the story. This technique was perfected by Jack Benny and Ed Wynn, but would be copied later on by many others. Wilcox was also the announcer of *Amos 'n' Andy* and *Suspense*.

With all these people on the same show, how could it miss? I still get a big kick every time I hear McGee opening up that closet and listen to that last bit of clatter. It's just a sweet memory.

Capsulated Personal History of The Old Time Radio Club (of Buffalo)



by Peter Bellanca

With the Old Time Radio club approaching its thirtieth birthday in May of this year I thought this might be the appropriate time to do a little historical reminiscing and hopefully answer some of the questions that have arisen at our meetings pertaining to the founding and early days of our organization. The following is a factual account with my personal reflections.

In the late 1960s Chuck Seeley gave me a number of comic books that he was no longer interested in. I traded those comics for eleven reel to reel tapes of Old Time Radio programs. I informed Chuck that he was now half owner of these tapes and we formed a business partnership for the purpose of collecting and selling Old Time Radio programs and related nostalgia items. That started us on the road of Old Time Radio.

In November of 1974, there was a general public meeting at the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society for anyone interested in the nostalgia of their youth and Chuck and I attended that meeting. From that meeting emerged the Western New York Popular Culture Society. At the February, 1975, meeting of the WNYPCS, Dan Marafino persuaded a group of members

whose primary interest was Old Time Radio to meet on their own and form an organization. Both Chuck and I thought this was a great way to acquire more tapes. In March eleven people (Pete Bellanca, Dan Marafino and Dom Parisi are the only original members still active in the club) met at Frank Matesic's home and decided that some type of old time radio organization should be established. The next month we met at the Crane Library in Buffalo and in May, St. Matthew's Episcopal Church allowed us to use their meeting hall on a permanent basis.

The April through November meetings were very difficult. Members could not agree on what direction the club should take. Some wanted a local informal coffee klatch group, while others wanted a formal national organization, and we appeared to be on the verge of extinction. Many prospective members attended our meeting during this period, viewed the disorganization and bickering and never returned. The one bright spot during this period was the establishment of a club magazine called *Memories* with Dan Marafino as editor. One week after the November meeting ended in total chaos, three members (Pete Bellanca, Ray Olivieri, and Dom Parisi) met with Chuck Seeley at his home to reorganize the club. I assumed the duties of president, Ray Olivieri became vice-president, Dom Parisi became the treasurer (and still is) and Chuck Seeley became the secretary. It was decided that the club would become a national organization, dues were established, a bimonthly newsletter would be established and our club magazine *Memories* would be continued as a quarterly magazine. Both a reference library and a tape library were to be established and Chuck volunteered to be editor of the planned club newsletter. The first newsletter was dated February, 1976 and was a one page, four paragraph document which Chuck renamed *The Illustrated Press* beginning with issue number eight. Chuck and I took over the editorship of *Memories* which continued to be published under various editors until 1993. In December of 1975 the remaining members agreed unanimously to the reorganization. We set about to enroll new members and had a great deal of success.

In June of 1978 we had our first international meeting at the Queen Mary School in St. Catherines, Ontario, Canada and in August of 1980 held a picnic at Balls Falls, Ontario, Canada. These were arranged by Richard Simpson of Fenwick, Ontario, Canada. Richard is still active in the club and holds the office of Vice president of our Canadian Branch. Beginning in January of 1979 two significant changes took place, the name of the club was changed from The Old Time Radio Club of Buffalo to The Old Time Radio Club and we began meeting at Ed Wanat's home. We met there for twenty-five years

The Illustrated Press

It was Chuck's flare for writing (he has a degree in English from Canisius College) that started the club on its successful journey thirty years ago. Chuck wrote articles for Memories and the IP using names such as Brad Runyon, (if you knew Chuck you know why he chose this name) Ted Bronson, Kimball Kinnison, Woody Smith, Ethan Edwards and many others. He was a one man writing machine, trying to keep our publications from going under. As far as I know, no one in the club ever knew he was writing under so many names. Chuck left the club in the early 1980s and is currently owner of a book store in his native Kenmore, NY.

Starting in the late 1970s up to the present has been a period of stabilization and growth for our organization. After a number of years in financial difficulty the club, with Dom balancing the books, has become quite prosperous. For over twenty years Jerry Collins keeps getting re-elected as president (he heads a powerful political organization). He has done a superb job of keeping everything running like a well oiled machine.

The club has also been fortunate in that we have had some excellent editors of the IP for the last thirty years. After Chuck left the editorship Kean Crowe became editor in June of 1979 and continued until November of 1980 when Dick Olday took over. Dick Olday, a national recognized OTR expert, became editor and is our current Membership Chairman and continues to be a pillar of the club. Dick, Jerry and Frank Boncore are the three individuals who constantly plug our club at various OTR conventions and receive contributions for our tape libraries. Dick was editor of the IP from December 1980 until December of 1987. Linda DeCecco took over starting with the January 1988 issue and I became editor for the August and September 1992 issues. Linda came back to finish the year and I began as full time editor in January of 1993. In February of 1996 Ken Krug became editor. Ken has had the longest run as editor and has done an outstanding job. The IP has never looked better.

We have moved into the digital age under the direction of Bob McDivitt. Bob is the driving force behind our using Excel for the cataloging of our libraries and digitizing much of our audio libraries. Bob has set up our web page (members.localnet.com/~robmcd) and is constantly striving to improve both the sound quality and ease of access to our libraries. Bob is also the go to guy for all of our computer problems.

Looking back it has been an amazing thirty year run. I have seen many changes take place in our hobby from reel to reel to cassette to CDs to MP3s and computer mastering. It never ceases to amaze me that we have over five-thousand cassettes in our library and thou-

sands upon thousands of programs in our reel to reel library. Our MP3 and digital audio libraries are growing at a very rapid rate.

I don't wish to end this on a note of doom and gloom, but I feel this must be said. The dilemma with OTR collecting is that the pool of individuals who remember OTR gets smaller every year. It may continue as a niche hobby but I really don't hold much hope that it will survive as we know it in the long term. During the 1960s and 70s when the nostalgia craze was in full swing there were numerous OTR organizations, publications and individuals who remembered OTR. Check around today. You can count the number of active organizations on one hand. MP3s are killing the dealers. There are fewer and fewer dealers at the conventions. There are a few bright spots, notably the researching and writings of Jim Cox and Martin Grams, Jr. Regardless of what the "experts" say, young people are not interested in OTR. Having been in the education biz for over forty years and having taught middle and high school students and currently teaching at the collegiate level I can say without reservation there is no interest among the masses of young people in OTR. Yes, there will always be a few cases that will be cited as "proof" that the youth of America are getting turned on to OTR. Don't believe it. My generation knows that *Inner Sanctum* and Jack Benny are superior to a Playstation2 video game, but young people do not. The art of just listening for a thirty minute time period is sadly a lost art. To quote Westbrook Van Voorhis, who said quite profoundly on *The March of Time* program, "Time marches on!" and "As it must to all men, death came this week to . . ." You can fill in OTR. Maybe I'm wrong, but don't bet on it.

The Great Carson Wove a Magic Spell but never let up as Student of Comedy

by Larry Wilde

FROM A JOHNNY CARSON MONOLOGUE:
(After introduction by Ed McMahon.) I would have let the applause run longer but what profit a man if he gain the whole audience and lose a commercial. You people who wrote for tickets six months ago, was the thrill you just had worth the wait? I'd come out now and shake your hands personally but I don't do custom work. I'm Johnny Carson . . . known to the Indian braves in Nebraska—to whom I used to loan money as a youngster—as great straight arrow. Ah, that's really a translation. What they called me was: Big Shaft. This is the "Tonight" show. Listed as event number one twenty-seven on the eight-dollar guided tour of New York.

The Illustrated Press

ANOTHER, GOOD audience. We've had great audiences recently. Ever since we put that line at the bottom of the tickets: Bring Your Own Bottle. But seriously, folks, we have a real holiday show for you tonight. And tonight's holiday is the massacre at Bull Run.



Johnny Carson was born in Corning, Ia., on Oct. 23, 1925. At fourteen, he began entertaining for the Elks and Rotarians in his hometown of Norfolk, Neb., performing card tricks and magic as "The Great Carsoni." After two years in the Navy and four years at the University of Nebraska, Johnny moved to Hollywood and hosted a television show called "Carson's Cellar."

In 1951, while writing jokes for Red Skelton, he took over the show one evening when, Skelton was injured and as a result of his performance won the *Johnny Carson Show* on CBS. Later, he became host of the daytime quiz show *Who Do You Trust?* and made personal appearances on the Dinah Shore, Perry Como, and Ed Sullivan shows. He also became a regular guest panelist on *What's My Line?* and *To Tell the Truth*, as well as doing feature acting roles on *Playhouse 90*, and the *U. S. Steel Hour*.

Johnny became a national institution when he succeeded Jack Paar as host of NBC's *Tonight* show. You can forget that "Carson is cocky, complacent and cantankerous" myth the magazines and newspapers insist on feeding the public.

Johnny sat on his NBC office sofa sipping coffee, and conversing with all the warmth and geniality that can be expected from a man who for years has been the late-night darling of television. He spoke quickly, emphatically, rarely hesitating to answer a question.

WILDE: You started doing it as a magician. I believe there are three types of magic acts. First, straight serious magic. Second, straight magic but with jokes and funny comments interspersed. And third, the out-and-out burlesquing of magic, ala Ballantine.

CARSON: Right.

WILDE: Which type did you start doing?

CARSON: I started out doing straight tricks, to fool

people, and then very quickly it came into comedy magic—magic to entertain rather than to fool Somebody.

WILDE: You started doing it at about 14, for money?

CARSON: Yeah, in school—three dollars a show—the Rotary Clubs, Ladies' Aid, church groups . . .

WILDE: Great experience.

CARSON: Greatest in the world. Little by little it became centered around the audience participation type of magic . . . jokes . . . tricks would occasionally go wrong. So it was essentially comedy-magic.

WILDE: At what point did you eliminate the magic and concentrate completely on comedy?

CARSON: I did the magic along with the comedy—all throughout the service. I also did straight "stand-up" in the service. I was probably one of the few officers in the Navy that entertained the enlisted men. It's usually reversed. I was an Ensign, and I remember performing on troop ships going over with mainly enlisted men audiences. Any time you did jokes about the officers, as an officer, you had something else going for you. So the magic was really through school—I didn't do it much after I got out of the service. I went into radio then. I keep it as a hobby now. I don't do much with it anymore.

WILDE: Approximately how many years was that, John?

CARSON: I did magic for about 10 years—where I was quite active in it. Like any kid, I was writing the column for the school paper in humor, in junior high school. Magic was actually just an interest that I picked up along the way. But people ask: "Where did you start to become funny?" No one can really pinpoint it, if you ask any comic.

You find out that you can get laughs, when you're a kid . . . either by doing silly sounds or impressions or acting up or whatever it is. The magic actually came after you found out that you could be amusing in other areas. It just became a hobby. But because of the desire, I guess, to get laughs, or finding out that you could get laughs, the magic was a good adjunct thing to have, because you could tie it in very easily.

WILDE: Where did you get the jokes that you used during that period?

CARSON: I think you steal, mainly, when you first start, like everybody does. You listen.

You subscribe—I suppose like everybody did at one time—to Billy Gleason. You read all the gag files. You know you can go to the libraries and find jokes that they are still using today. You watch Rowan and Martin in their "Laugh-In" and they are doing stuff to a new audience that hasn't heard it before. Then you finally reach a point where you find you can construct your own or you can make them up or you can find, topical things and switch them around. It's mainly construction anyway.

The Illustrated Press

WILDE: Later you became a comedy writer. What made you turn from performing to writing?

CARSON: I was doing both at the same time, actually, Larry. Even when I was in radio in Omaha, I wrote most of my stuff as a disk jockey. I did a show for an hour and a half every morning . . . you write your own stuff. You pull it out of the papers. I never actually gave up the performing for writing. It was just something that I was doing, while I was on the West Coast. I wrote for Red Skelton for about 20 weeks.

WILDE: Comedy writers, in discussing their craft, use phrases like "cadence," "rhythm," "formula jokes," "non-sequiturs"—the basic tools of the profession. How did you learn the technique of joke construction?

CARSON: I think, by observing, by listening and watching somebody else's work. I grew up, probably like you did, listening to the comedians on the radio—the late thirties and forties. As a matter of fact, in college I did a thesis on comedy. I taped excerpts from the various radio shows and then tried to break them down and explain what kind of construction they were using. But I think you learn construction by reading . . . watching . . . listening. Pretty soon you find the formula for jokes, you learn the construction of jokes—whether they are two-way jokes, single jokes, topping jokes, running gag jokes, change of pace jokes. That's all formula stuff. Most discussions of comedy are very dull, I find. Because once you try to explain comedy, it loses the magic that it is supposed to have.

WILDE: John, you mentioned the thesis you did on comedy writing, in college. Were you fairly sure then that comedy was going to be your life's work?

CARSON: No, I can't say that. Again, when people ask: "Where did you make the transition?" I don't think you really know. It happens! It's a gradual changeover. As you work, you feel comfortable with certain things, but I don't think you say—maybe some people do—"I'm going to be a comedian." I knew I was going to be an entertainer. I didn't know for sure if it was going to be "stand-up" comedy but I realized that if you have an ability to get laughs, or if you can write funny things, it's gonna take a direction, and whatever happens, usually kicks you off into the next thing.

WILDE: Was it in the service that you first began doing a stand-up act—without the magic?

CARSON: Well, I had done that in college, even in high school. You know you're involved in school plays . . . they called them skits then. I was always involved in that type of thing.

WILDE: Were there any comedians, when you were getting started that you admired?

CARSON: Yeah, practically all of them on the radio. *Fibber McGee and Molly*, Don Quinn, who just died a couple of months ago, I admired tremendously because he could write comedy so well.

The Benny show, the Hope show, Fred Allen—all of the comedy shows that were on the radio at that time—you had to learn from them.

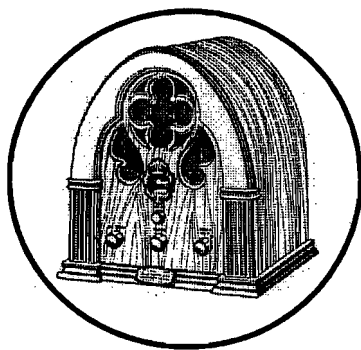
(February 1969)

LATEST ADDITIONS TO THE CASSETTE LIBRARY

- 3461 Phil Harris/Alice Faye "Family Picnic" 5/29/49
Phil Harris/Alice Faye "Phil Has His Tonsils Out" 6/5/49
- 3462 Richard Diamond "Jerome J. Jerome" 9/17/49
Richard Diamond "The \$200,000 Bundle" 9/24/49
- 3463 Romance "The Man From The North" 2/2/49
Romance "Pagosa" 8/6/51
- 3464 Romance "Germelshausen" 7/4/50
Romance "Let There Be Honor" 7/11/50
- 3465 Romance "The Apple Tree" 6/20/50
Romance "Quiet Wedding" 6/27/50
- 3466 Bulldog Drummond "Murder In The Death House" 9/10/45
Bulldog Drummond "Death On The Diamond" 9/17/45
- 3467 Dark Fantasy "The Sea Phantom" 2/6/42
Dark Fantasy "W Is Foe Werewolf" 2/13/42
- 3468 Whispering Streets "The Bijou"
Whispering Streets "The Gossip That Backfired"
- 3469 Dangerously Yours "The Shiek" 9/3/44
Dangerously Yours "The Firebrand" 9/10/44
- 3470 Molle Mystery Theatre "Make No Mistake" 4/30/48
Molle Mystery Theatre "Close Shave" 6/14/48
- 3471 Lux Radio Theatre "The Other Love" 6/16/47
- 3472 Lux Radio Theatre "A Stolen Life" 8/25/47
- 3473 Lux Radio Theatre "Take Care Of My Little Girl" 2/4/52
- 3474 Lux Radio Theatre "The Girl In White" 5/18/53
- 3475 Lux Radio Theatre "The Fall Of Maggie Phillips" 6/22/53
- 3476 Lux Radio Theatre "Physician In Spite Of Himself" 7/13/53
- 3477 Lux Radio Theatre "This Woman Is Dangerous" 3/16/53
- 3478 Lux Radio Theatre "Scudda Hoo, Scudda Hay" 10/24/49
- 3479 Lux Radio Theatre "China" 11/23/43
- 3480 Man Called X "Will You Marry Me?" 8/7/47
Man Called X "The Lost Ones" 8/21/47
- 3481 Man Called X "No One Wind On Zero" 10/2/47
Man Called X "All Glitters" 10/9/47
- 3482 Man Called X "Carbon 4" 1/28/48
Man Called X "One Way To Macassar" 2/1/48
- 3483 Halls Of Ivy "Chamber Music & Knockwurst" 3/31/50
Halls Of Ivy "Professor Hall Plays Sick" 4/7/50
- 3484 Crime Does Not Pay "The Kid With A Gun" 10/10/49
Crime Does Not Pay "All American Fake" 10/17/49
- 3485 Broadway Is My Beat "Shorty Dunne" 11/24/50
Broadway Is My Beat "Kenneth Mitchell" 12/1/50
- 3486 Green Hornet "Graft Crossing A Bridge" 11/4/47
Green Hornet "Too Hot To Handle" 11/11/47

The Old Time Radio Club

49 Regal Street
Depew, NY 14043



FIRST CLASS MAIL

"Tribute"

*Give me again, those Golden Years, of Radio at its best.
Let me hear just one more time, Drama and all the rest.
Escape, The Shadow, and Riley too,
Now they are gone, those shows that we knew.
Remember Mollie, and Fibber McGee?
Henry Aldrich, Let's Pretend, we all laughed with glee.
Dragnet, Gunsmoke, great shows all,
Inner Sanctum, Suspense, we fondly recall.
Where did they go, where did they hide? TV, that Ogre cast them aside.
Listen, what's that, they're back once again, uniting us all, neighbors and kin.
Forget the TV, go back to the dial, for now we remember if just for awhile.
Skelton is there, Cantor, Pearl, Orson too, and War Of the Worlds.
Frankie, Tommy, Glenn and Hal, McIntyre, Dorsey, Miller, Carle.
Duffy, Luigi, keep counting the score, into our lives they've come once more.
Never to leave us, always to reign,
'Cause we knew all along that Radio Was King!*

By Owens L. Pomeroy