

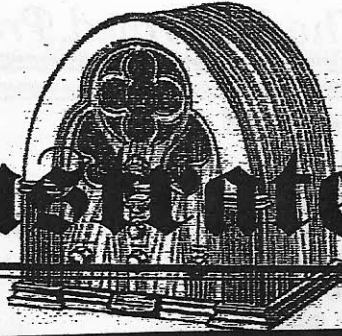
The Old Time Radio Club

Established 1975

The Illustrated Press

NO 390

May 2011



The Illustrated Press

Membership Information

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

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

Club Mailing Address

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

E-Mail Address

otrclub@localnet.com



All Submissions are subject to approval prior to actual publication.

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 © 2009 by the OTRC.

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

c/o Tom Cherre, Editor (716) 833-9713

144 Fontaine Drive

Cheektowaga, NY 14215

E-Mail address: skylark68_1999@yahoo.com

Web Page Address:

members.localnet.com/~robmcd

Club Officers

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

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

Membership Renewals, Change of Address

Peter Bellanca (716) 773-2485
1620 Ferry Road
Grand Island, NY 14072
pmb1620@gmail.com

Membership Inquires and OTR Network Related Items

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

Technical Manager / CD and MP3 Librarian

Bob McDivitt (716) 681-8073
109 Poinciana Pkwy.
Cheektowaga, NY 14225
robmcd@verizon.net

Cassette and Reference Librarian

Frank Bork (716) 601-7234
10 Dover Ct.
Lancaster, NY 14086
frankbork209@yahoo.com

Library Rates:

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

Bet'sha Didn't Know:

In Memoriam:

I am sad to report that Dominic Parisi's wife Louise passed away on Friday April 22nd. I along with the rest of the radio club extend our deepest sympathies to Dominic and his family.
Tom Cherre.....editor.

Well folks, if it ever stops snowing around here we may have a spring. Just a short mention that our "El Presidente" Jerry Collins will be going in for some surgery shortly after the May meeting. We all wish him the best and hopefully he'll come out batting .300 again. Ted Davenport has been kind enough to make another donation to the club. Rich Olday has this message.....Thanks to very generous donations from Ted Davenport and a few from my collection, our CD library is growing in leaps and bounds. Ted is a lifetime member of our club and has donated many items over the years. These are not just copies of what we have in our cassette library, but include many new shows not in general circulation, such as The Green Hornet, and these are not the ones released by Radio Spirits. The new listings will appear in our next CD catalogue that will be out later this year. Our club is very grateful to Ted and we all wish him the very best in his upcoming wedding this May. Also, a very big thank you to my wife Arlene, for entering the new CDs into our library..... Please join us at our June meeting as we make plans for our August meeting/picnic. Until next time.



Just recently we lost Radio & TV star David Nelson, last of the Nelson clan. David died of complications of colon cancer at the age of 74. During the early years of Ozzie and Harriet David and Ricky were played by Tommy Bernard and Henry Blair respectively. As the boys got a little older they had a desire to get on the show and play themselves. Eventually when Bing Crosby guested along with son Lindsay, Ozzie had no choice. Ricky was 8 and David was 11. Harriet Hilliard was only 16 when she started out singing with Ken Murray in Chicago. A little later Harriet became a Mistress of Ceremonies at New York City's Hollywood Restaurant. It was here she met hubby to be Ozzie Nelson. He had a fairly popular band at that time. He asked her to be a female vocalist. This was the very first time a girl sang for a popular band. They eventually got married and both appeared on the Red Skelton Show. Ozzie did the music and Harriet played Mean Little Kid's mother. After Skelton, Don Quinn suggested they do their own show, and as they say the rest is history. Now you know.

Phil Harris
By Tom Cherre

Phil Harris



You know I've always enjoyed listening to the Jack Benny show. It was a great show mainly because of three ingredients. Those three were, first of all, Jack Benny, who was a great comic. They say he had one of the greatest deliveries of a comic line. The second was the superior writers he had doing the show giving us some great laughs. Thirdly, he had a great cast supporting him. One of those was also his bandleader, of course it was Phil Harris. Harris was a jive talking guy who's opening line was usually "Hiya Jackson", and affectionately called Mary Livingstone "Livvy". Many of the gags usually bouncing off Harris were the booze jokes. They made it seem like there wasn't a bottle that Harris didn't like. The other one was of his womanizing, with Harris always giving himself good look compliments. Harris became so popular that he eventually got to star with wife Alice Faye on their very own show. Despite the caricature of Faye on the other side of the page, she was quite good looking. She was a good

actress, and also knew how to carry a tune. Getting back to Phil Harris, he was born with the name Wonga Philip Harris June 24th 1904 in Linton Indiana. He actually grew up in Kentucky and always considered himself a Southerner. His trademark song was "That's What I Like About the South". He also had a bit of a Southern accent, which at times was sometimes noted on the Benny show. Harris was the son of two circus star performers. His father led the circus band and had Phil playing the drums at an early age. He began his own career as a drummer when he formed his own band with Carol Loftner in San Francisco in the late 1920s where they had a long engagement at the famed St. Francis Hotel. Phil Harris married his first wife, Marcia Ralston in 1927. The wedding ended in divorce in 1940. Harris married his second wife Alice Faye in 1941. That marriage would last 54 years until Harris passed away. Faye was previously married to singer Tony Martin. In 1941 their marriage led to a complete episode on the Jack Benny show. In 1946 the couple was invited to co-host "The Fitch Bandwagon", a musical variety and comedy show. The growing popularity of Harris and Faye led to their own radio show "The Phil



Harris and Alice Faye Show” sponsored by Rexall Drugs. The couple played themselves as radio and music star parents of two precocious young daughters, played by Jeanine Roos and Ann Whitfield. Harris didn't play the booze and broads character like he did on Benny, but a slightly less vain and carefree husband and father. Nevertheless he still had references to his wavy hair and vanity. This show proved to be quite popular. Legendary character actor Gale Gordon made frequent appearances on the show as the slightly pompous Mr. Scott, who was a fictitious representative of Rexall. Child impersonator Walter Tetley, of Gildersleeve fame played obnoxious wisenheimer delivery boy Julius, who always had sarcastic one-liners for Harris. He also had a bit of a crush on Alice Faye in the show. Winding out the cast was Robert North who played Alice's deadbeat, humorless, but somewhat down to earth brother. Every episode had two music interludes, usually an upbeat or novelty song by Phil Harris. His big hit song “The Thing” got a lot of play on his show. Alice would come off with a soft ballad or a soft swinging song, which was always a good part of the show. Harris would often refer to his trouble making buddy Remley in the show. On the Benny show Harris usually portrayed Remley as a down and out drunkard. On his show Remley was more of a cheerful, amoral incredibly dumb woman chaser, but with the heart of a child. Harris and Faye remained with NBC rather than succumb to the CBS talent raids of the late 1940s. In that raid Benny jumped ship along with Burns and Allen. NBC made a generous offer to Faye and Harris along with Fred

Allen, but they chose to stay on board, and that they did until the show ended in 1954. Despite Benny's show switching to CBS, Harris still continued to work both shows on different networks until 1952. Harris and Faye did an episode of Suspense entitled “Death on my Hands”. I had the pleasure of listening to that one and it was one of the best. Harris plays a touring bandleader playing a high school dance. An accidental shooting takes place, which lands Harris into trouble. Harris and Faye are both good in dramatic roles. When Harris and his band were invited to play at Truman's Inaugural Ball a playful script was written for the show. Faye sang a Truman-friendly “I'm Just Wild About Harry” song which infuriates Harris a bit. At the end of the show Harris sheds his radio character to speak soberly promoting worthy causes such as Big Brothers of America. He spoke of how humbled he was to receive an invitation to perform at the ball. The Phil Harris and Alice Faye Show was well written and cleverly delivered. It was probably generations ahead of its time. After a long career in radio Harris did several voice over animations for Walt Disney. Phil Harris passed away at the age of 91 on August 11th 1995.



LONG RUNNING COMIC STRIPS SHORT RUNNING RADIO PROGRAMS

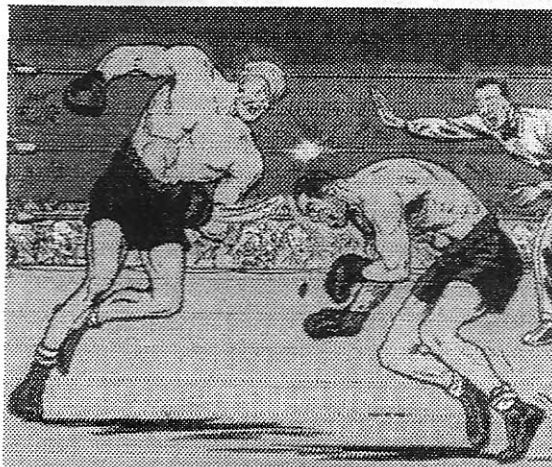
Peter Bellanca

In this installment of *Long Running Comic Strips-Short Running Radio Programs* we are going to look at *Joe Palooka* by Hammond Edward Fisher, commonly known as Ham Fisher. The strip ran from April 19, 1930 to November 24, 1984.

Ham Fisher was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, on September 24, 1900. He dropped out of school at age sixteen to become a salesman and part time truck driver. According to Fisher, he got the idea for a comic strip in 1920 after he met a boxer outside a poolroom in Wilkes-Barre. He called the strip, about a good-hearted, but not too bright boxer, *Joe the Dumbbell*. In 1927, after years of unsuccessfully trying to sell the strip he was hired as a traveling salesman for the McNaught Comic Syndicate. His job was to persuade newspaper editors to purchase the new *Dixie Dugan* comic strip and see if there was any interest in his unpublished strip, now called *Joe Palooka*. By 1929 he had assurances from over twenty newspapers that they would print his strip. One year later the McNaught group decided to put the strip into syndication, it was an instant success.

Boxing was a big time sport in the 1930's and the strip was just what America was looking for. Palooka was honest, clean living, highly moral and epitomized the public perception, although fabricated, of that decade's athlete. Early in the strip he became heavyweight champ by knocking out Jack McSwatt. He held the title, on and off, for the duration of the strip. His boxing matches lasted over many days

with a lot of action. You had the feeling that you were there cheering him to victory due to the way Fisher described the fight. The print read, "second round, Palooka lands a hard right, McSwatt down, referee sends Palooka to neutral



corner" so you had the feeling that you were hearing the boxing match broadcast and watching it at the same time.

Palooka's appearance changed, ever so slightly, to fit each reigning real-life heavyweight champion until Joe Louis, an African-American, won the title in 1937. From then on his appearance remained unchanged.

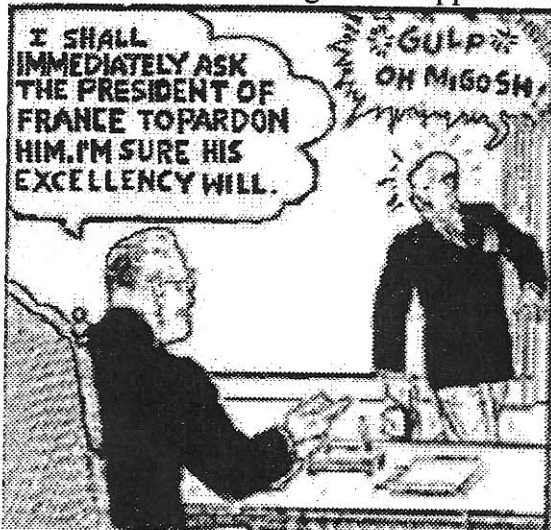
He was backed up by a curious cast of supporting characters. Knobby Walsh was his best friend and manager. His valet was Smokey, an African-American who was drawn in typical 1930 caricature. Over time he underwent a makeover and lost most of his stereotypical characteristics and became Palooka's sparring partner and friend. He disappeared from the strip in the early

1940's. Ann Howe, the beautiful daughter of a cheese magnate was his ever chaste girl friend. Humphrey Pennyworth, a huge blacksmith and Little Max, a young mute orphan, rounded out the main characters in the strip.



One of his most popular adventures was in 1938 when he lost his title and joined the French Foreign Legion for a five year enlistment. While he was stationed in North Africa he was falsely accused of desertion and sentenced to be shot.

Prior to publishing this scenario Fisher had contacted the White House to see if President Franklin Delano Roosevelt would appear in the strip to help Palooka clear his name. FDR agreed to appear. On



June 13th and 14th Knobby Walsh meets with FDR, who with the approval of the President of France honorably releases

Palooka from his five year enlistment and grants him a full pardon from the desertion charges. FDR states that he is doing this because of Palooka's, "fine qualities and affection held for him by our people."

FDR wasn't the only person of note to make an appearance in the comic strip, Al Jolson, Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Jack Dempsey, Joe Louis, and President Harry S. Truman all appeared at one time or another.

Palooka joined the Army in 1940 as a private. When the U.S. entered WWII he was sent to Europe to fight the Nazis. Because of his battle heroics he was offered an opportunity to attend Officer Candidate School, but he turned it down. He wanted to keep that common man image even though his picture was used for recruitment posters, manuals and hygiene instructions. After the war his adventures included, among others, finding lost cities and missing atomic bomb plans.

On June 24, 1949 he married Ann Howe. Engraved invitations for the event were sent to a select list of people. They read: "Mr. Ham Fisher requests the honor of your presence at the marriage of Ann Howe to Mr. Joe Palooka on the afternoon of June twenty-fourth in your favorite newspaper." Formal acceptances were received from Supreme Court Chief Justice Fred M. Vinson, General Omar Bradley and Attorney General Tom C. Clark. After marriage, Palooka continued his many adventures and also found time to raise a family. In 1984 he retired from the comics and moved to Wilkes-Barre Pennsylvania.

The strip generated many types of media and merchandise, board games, lunch

boxes, wristwatches, comic books, bubblegum wrappers and a cut-out on a Wheaties box were just some of items. He appeared in eight two-reelers in the 1930's and twelve full length films from 1946-1951. In 1954 he had a short lived TV program that starred Joe Kirkwood, Jr., Cathy Downs, Max 'Slapsie Maxie' Rosenbloom and Luis Van Rooten.

Fisher, although very creative was not an accomplished comic artist. He generally relied on his assistants to do most of the

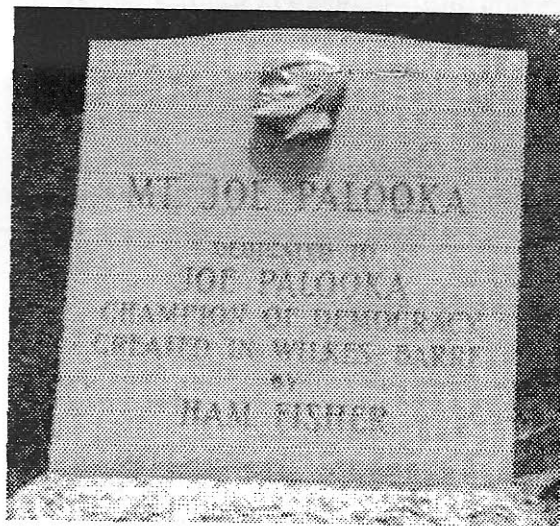


work. One assistant hired in 1933 was Alfred Caplin, who later changed his name to Al Capp. Capp left the strip a year later when refused a raise to his

twenty-two dollar a week salary. Capp had demanded the raise as Fisher was about to leave on his vacation. The vacation was cancelled and Capp was fired. The hard feeling caused by this turned into a full blown feud. To make matters worse, Capp had introduced a big, dim-witted, muscle bound hillbilly named Big Leviticus, his combative Mammy and small Pappy into the *Palooka* strip. When he left he used those characters as models for his *Li'l Abner* comic strip. Fisher claimed that Capp stole his idea and in retaliation hired Capp's top assistant, Mo Leff plus two of his other assistants. Their feud spread to magazine articles, personal friends and spilled over into their respective strips. As *Li'l Abner* became more popular than *Joe Palooka*, Fisher accused Capp of sneaking obscene images into the background of the *Li'l Abner* strip. In 1954 he sent examples of these strips to Capp's syndicate and brought formal charges against him. In court Capp produced the original strips and proved

that the strips in evidence were altered. Fisher had redrawn the backgrounds to make them appear indecent. The National Cartoonists Society expelled him on ethics charges and to this day, Ham Fisher is the only person ever expelled for "conduct unbecoming a cartoonist."

On December 27, 1955 Fisher, despondent over his failing health committed suicide by over dosing on prescription drugs. He left an estate of over two million dollars to his wife and daughter. According to his obituary in the *New York Times* his body was cremated, and it is not known where his ashes are located. Mo Leff continued the strip for four years and then Tony DiPreta took over until it was cancelled in 1984. In 1947, at the height of its popularity, more than 900 daily newspapers published the strip.



There are two monuments to Joe Palooka, a carved stone slab outside of Wilkes-Barre on route 309 and a statue of Palooka dressed in boxer trunks, sneakers and cape on the main street of Oolitic, Indiana.

In 2008, Berkley Prime Crime published Max Allan Collins' mystery novel, *Strip for Murder*. It's the story of the feud

between Fisher and Capp plus Fisher's suicide, with all names changed. In the novel Al Capp is Hal Rapp and Ham Fisher is Sam Fizer.

The Radio Program

Joe Palooka was broadcast on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from April 12 to August 16, 1932 over the CBS Network. Edward "Teddy" Bergman, Norman Gottschalk and Karl Swenson all played Palooka at some point in the program. Elmira Roessler, Elsie Hitz and Mary Jane Higby played Ann Howe. Knobby Walsh was played by Frank Readick



and Hal Lansing. The announcer was Harry von Zell, who will always be remembered as referring to President Herbert Hoover as "Hoobert Heever" during a live broadcast. The program was sponsored by Heinz Rice Flakes.

It was impossible for the radio program to compete with the visual action of the comic strip, plus the constant turnover of actors in such a short period of time also helped to doom the series.

Some Radio Highlights of the Stars of the Show:

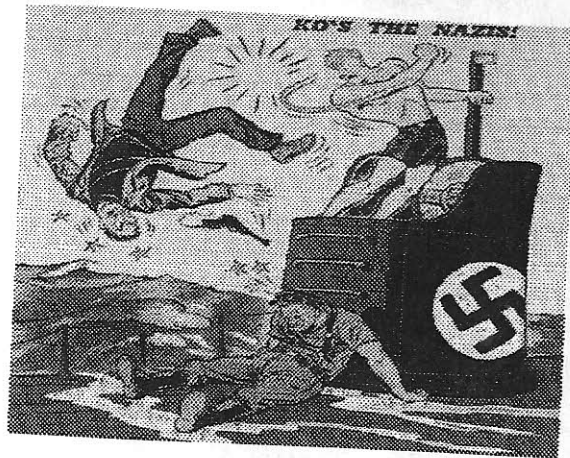
Edward "Teddy" Bergman who changed his name to the more familiar Alan Reed was a talented dialectician who was one of the busiest actors in radio. He appeared on *Duffy's Tavern*, (Clancy the Cop), *Fred Allen* (Flagstaff Openshaw), *Life with Luigi* (Pasquale), *My Friend Irma*, (Mr. Clyde), *Maxwell House Coffee Time*

(Daddy & Mr. Weemish), *Abie's Irish Rose* (Papa Levy) and many more.

Mary Jane Higby was one of radio's most successful actresses during its Golden Age. She was the leading lady or a regular in *Parties at Pickfair* (Mary Pickford), *When a Girl Marries* (Joan Davis) from 1938 to 1956, *This Is Nora Drake* (Nora) from 1958-1959, *John's Other Wife*, *Joyce Jordan*, *Girl Intern*, *Romance of Helen Trent* plus many other soap operas. Her prime time appearances were on *Inner Sanctum*, *Nick Carter*, *Master Detective* and *Mysterious Traveler* among others. With the decline of the radio she did commercials and voiceovers. She returned to radio in 1974 on Himan Brown's *CBS Mystery Theater* and was heard on over thirty-five of its broadcasts.

Karl Swenson was Lorenzo on *Lorenzo Jones* from 1937 to 1955. He also was Mr. Chameleon on *Mr. Chameleon* from 1948 to 1951 and was heard on many other programs.

Elsie Hitz radio credits include, *The Everyready Hour*, *The Magic Voice*, plus many, many soap operas. With the demise of radio in the 1950's she left the entertainment business and returned to private life.

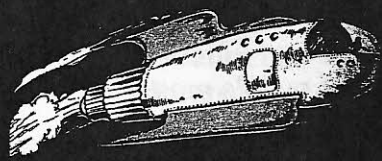


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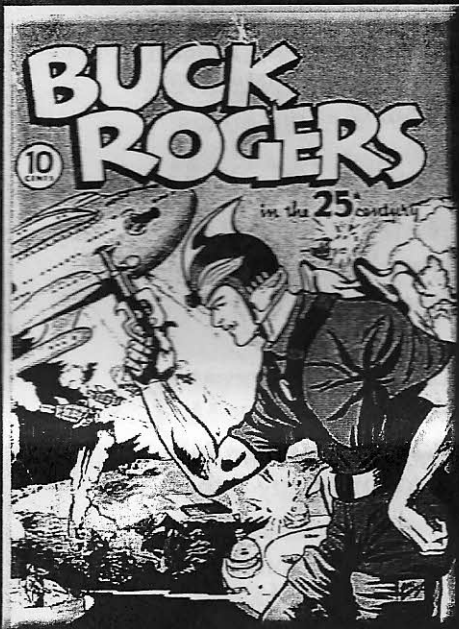
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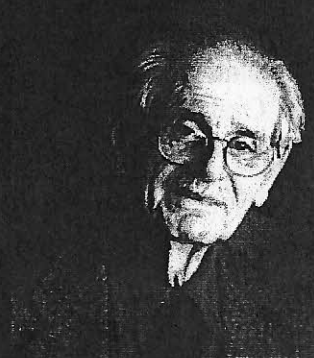
LAUREN CHAPIN
Kathy on Father Knows Best



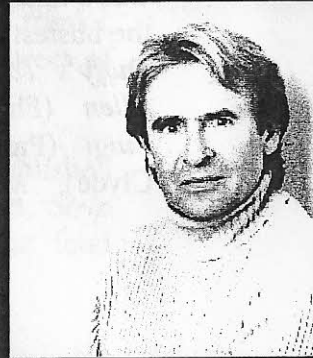
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DIRECTIONS

Driving directions: Take exit I-83 to Exit 20A (Shawan Road). Hotel is on the right. You can't miss it!

For GPS: 245 Shawan Road, Hunt Valley, MD 21031

Hotel Phone: 410-785-7000 • MarriottHuntValley.com

Nearest Airport is BWI (Baltimore-Washington International). There is an MTA light rail that will go direct from the airport to Hunt Valley located across the street from the hotel. Call to inquire for details.

ADMISSION

Every person who pre-pays their admission in advance before August 1 will receive free goodies (books, DVDs, tee shirts, etc.) with a retail value more than the cost of admission! You can pay at the door, but if you pre-pay in advance, you get a discount and free goodies! Cost is \$15 per day in advance. Three Day Weekend is \$45.

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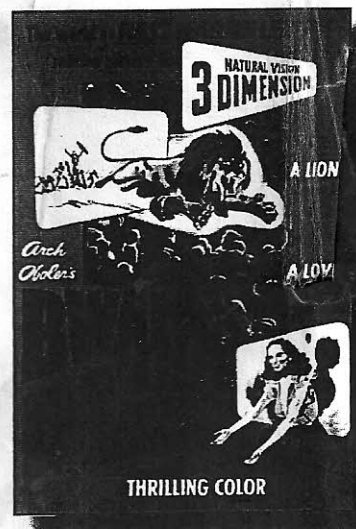
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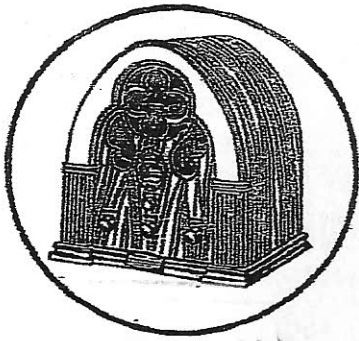
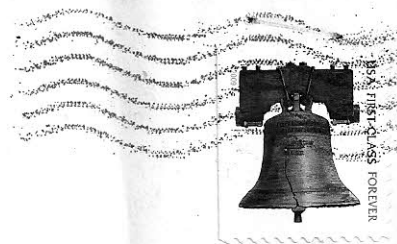
LEGAL DISCLAIMER: All presentations, events and stars subject to change.

The Old Time Radio Club

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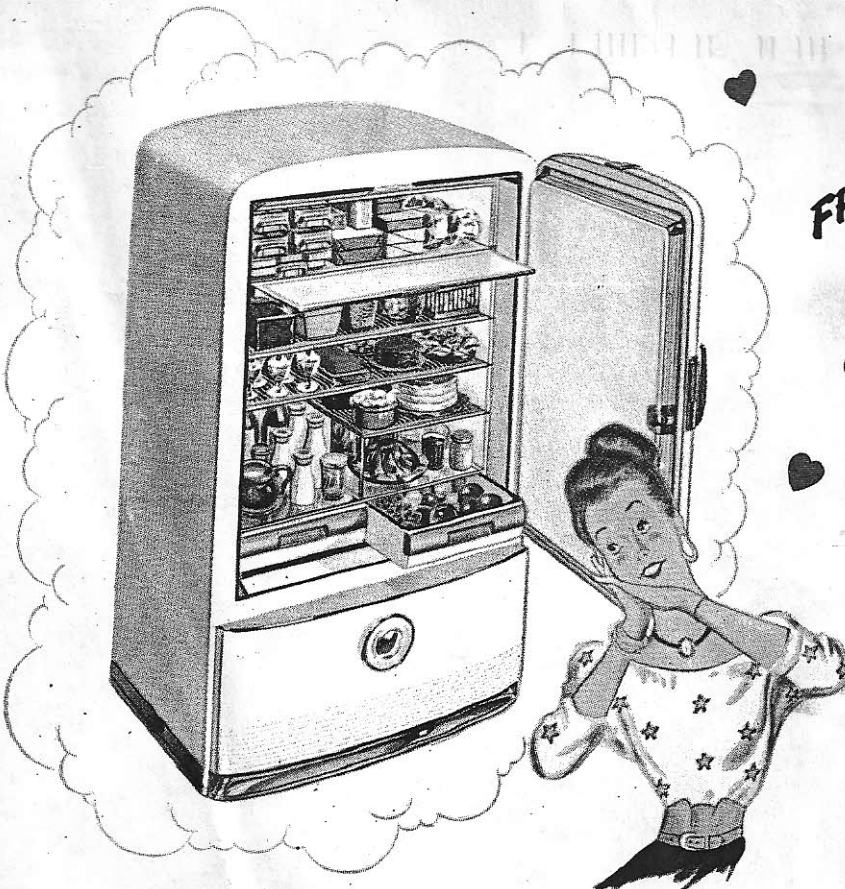
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