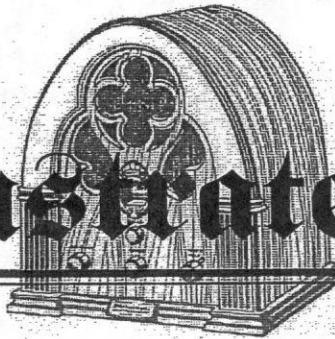


The Old Time Radio Club

Established 1975

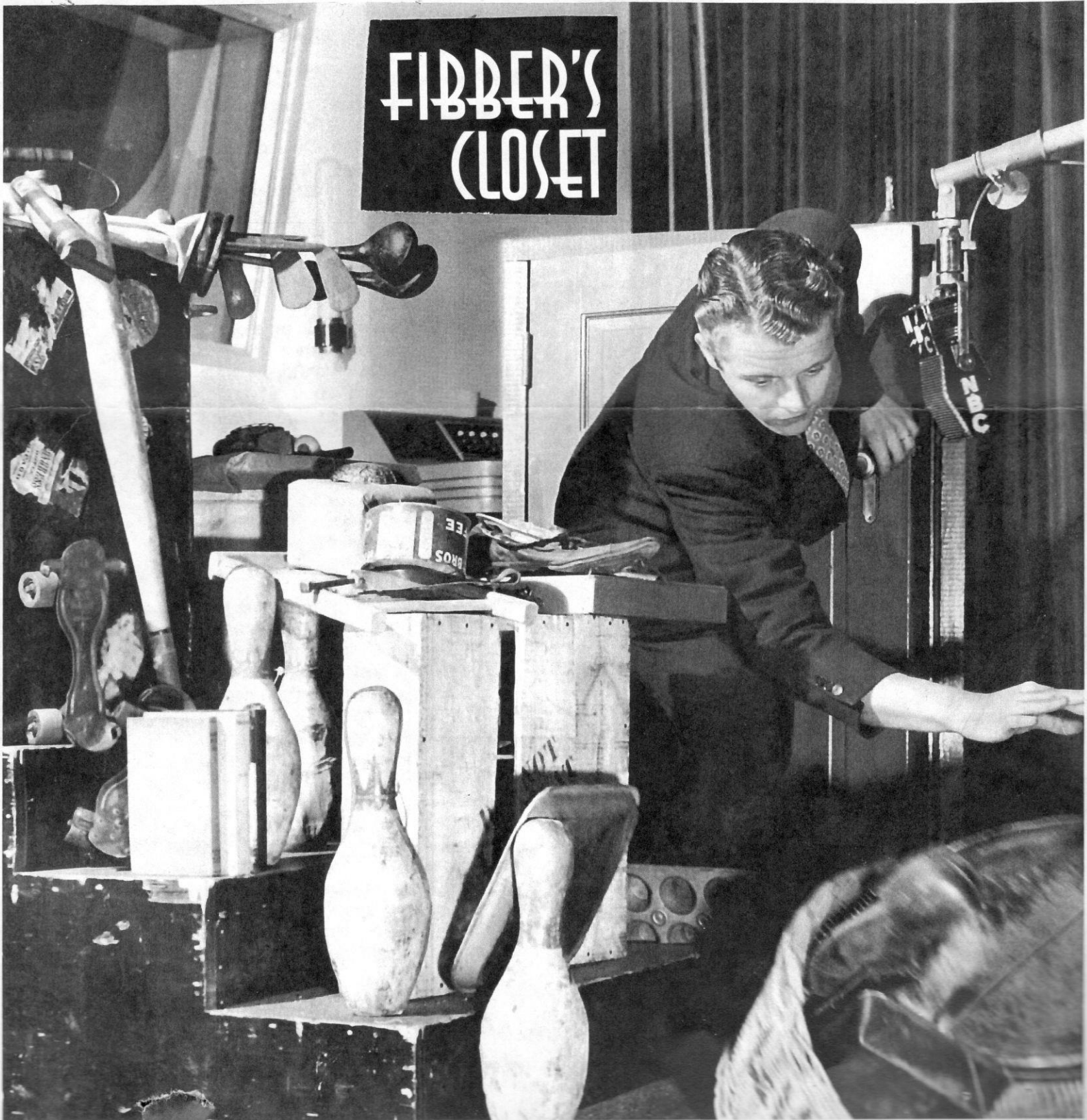
The Illustrated Press



Number 409

April 2013

FIBBER'S CLOSET



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.

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All Submissions are subject to approval prior to actual publication.

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Editor's Two Cents

Well, its finally spring. I'm looking forward to the nice warm weather which we are sure to get. I have some new and exciting news to share with you. One of my fellow classmates from high school got a break and is a Hollywood writer. He mostly does scripts for cable. If he's lucky he might sell two or three a year. Anyway, at our last reunion, I asked him if he ever thought national radio programs would ever be revived. He knew I was into Old Time Radio, by the way. He told me last year don't get your hopes up. I was in touch with him via E-mail and he told me one of the networks was strongly considering bringing to the air-waves a revitalized form of Fibber McGee and Molly (21st Century style) A few kinks have to be ironed out, within the next year or two radio fans may hear the closet routine. Radio budgets, he said are a triflé of what TV is. The best part of this is he may have a small part for me, either acting or on the technical staff. All this sounds too good to be true, because as you may have surmised, I'm fooling you. And a Happy April Fool's to you. Did I really trick anyone? I hope you enjoy Peter and Martin's articles. Since Ross Martin was in High Adventure he deserves attention—over>

Ross Martin By Tom Cherre

Until reading Martin Grams piece on High Adventure, I never realized Martin did any radio. My most vivid memories of him are from Andamo, from Mr. Lucky and of course Artemus Gordon in The Wild, Wild West, both TV shows. I also recall him in a couple of Twilight Zones too. I was able to download an episode of High Adventure starring Martin. He was good even way back then. Martin was born March 22 1920.



Martin as Artemus Gordon

He was born in Poland as Martin Rosenblatt. When he came to the US as a young child he could speak fluent Yiddish, Polish, and Russian. After learning English he also learned Spanish and Italian. He graduated from George Washington University with a law degree, but chose acting as a profession. After "Adventure" he starred on Broadway in *Hazel Flagg* in 1953. This led to TV roles also including *Peter Gunn*, and *Alcoa Presents*. He appeared as Baron Rolfe Von Stuppe in *The Great Race*. Not only was Martin a great actor, he was an extremely intelligent human being. He suffered a fatal heart attack while playing tennis. He was only 61. Listen to him in *High Adventure*.

High Adventure Series Three

By Martin Grams Jr.



Bob Monroe

High Adventure was a dramatic series based on the ever-familiar mystery and detective theme, with an occasional supernatural angle. The dramas presented a different one each broadcast concerning the weird experiences of people who were propelled from more or less routine lives into unusual circumstances that led to "high adventure." While there is mere speculation, it's more than likely NBC's attempt to cash in on CBS' *Escape* series. The program was announced as the offering of "The High Adventure," with the announcer as the presiding officer, your host, welcoming you to the weekly meeting of the High Adventure Society.... The yarns broadcasted were supposedly based on experience of the members of the fictitious society. Different radio actors and actresses were

featured in the broadcasts and some faithful radio listeners might have recognized a few of the voices, realizing that the Society ploy was just that. Occasionally, a name guest star was added to the presentation. The stories were still written and directed by Bob Monroe. Musical bridges and background were performed by Arlo (Arlo Hulst organist). Because the series was no longer sponsored, the cost of having an orchestra was too much for the network, hence one organist. Effective with the broadcast of September 17, 1950, John Winters, organist, replaced Arlo. Ron Rawson was no longer the announcer. Instead, Ray Barrett was the new man who referred to him to himself as the "host". Later, Barrett was replaced by Mel Brandt and others. Sadly, I have not yet found out who the others were or what episodes they did. After the first four episodes Robert Monroe was no longer contracted by NBC to do the series (his initial contract was for 26 episodes, even if the sponsor backed out). Elliot Drake took over as the author and director beginning with episode #5, but on a rotating basis as Monroe continued to contribute both writing and directing (Beginning with episode #5, those I was able to identify who directed and wrote are credited accordingly.

Episode #1 Return Ticket:

Broadcast Date: July 2nd 1950

Cast: Mary Asworth, Don Douglas, Ross Martin, and Jack Orrison.

Plot: The story of Jack Regan (Ross Martin) who went to work at a lumber and logging camp and found that he had a double look-alike named Benny Even. Benny's girl, Sal, a dance hall girl, refused to believe that Regan was not her man. Ultimately, Benny gets a

crooked idea that involved the attempted murder of Jack.

Trivia: The premiere episode was delayed due to a short news bulletin regarding the recent Korean situation. Same happened for the broadcast of July 9th.

Episode #2 Lock Step

Broadcast Date: July 9th 1950

Cast: Mort Lawrence, Jeff Morrow, Jack Orrison, and Allan Stevenson.

Plot: This is the story of Tim Roark (Allan Stevenson), a young boy who is sent to prison. Without his knowledge, his own father is his cellmate and shows the boy what true friendship can mean. The old man loses his own life saving the boy from making a jail break that would have ruined his chances of an early parole.

Episode #3 The Black Cord

Broadcast Date: July 16th 1950

Cast: Connie Lembcke and Ross Martin

Plot: A young attractive woman masquerades as a widow about to inherit a large sum of money. Posing as the wife of a murdered man, she is befriended by the husband's best friend, Fred Stevens (Ross Martin), who suspects her of being an imposter but whose love for her is so great that he offers to protect her from the police. Connie Lembcke plays the role of the imposter, Ree, who finally turns out to be a policewoman who had been assigned to the role of the "widow".

Episode #4 His Brother's Keeper

Broadcast Date: July 23rd 1950

Cast: Maurice Dorflin, Beryl Firestone, Joyce Gordon, Jack Orrison, and Phil Sterling.

Plot: A suspense story about two brothers, Ward Collins and his big brother Red. The two brothers have only one thing in common: they both fall for the same girl. Red is a braggart who

Ross Martin



takes, what he wants; Ward is unselfish, but he can't get over the complex of being overshadowed by his brother. Then comes the test, Red is caught in a burning tempering room and Ward is the only one who can save him. Ward saves his brother and also turns in the alarm that saves the lives of other workers at the plant. Joyce Gordon is cast as Alice, the girl who makes her choice between the two brothers and chooses Ward.

Episode #5 The Hill

Broadcast Date: July 30th 1950

Cast: Jim Boles, Jack Orrison, Al Patterson and Jim Stevens.

Plot: Dave Wilson, army staff sergeant, found that an old savage man who wanted to rebuild the city of his ancestors was a "pretty right guy" for Dave and his lieutenant owed their life to such a man.

Trivia, etc. Elliot Drake is the author for this broadcast.



George Sanders, host of *High Adventure*

Episode #6 The Greenfield Boy
Broadcast Date: August 6th 1950
Cast: Joyce Gordon and Ross Martin
Plot: Probably the best script of the series, written by Bob Monroe. The story of a baseball player named Joey, but better known simply as "the Greenfield Boy" because Greenfield is his home town. Joey had a terrific batting average and this leads to feud between him and a left-handed pitcher named "Lefty," who decides to court the same girl Joey loves. The Greenfield Boy faces death when Lefty deliberately tries to hit him in the head with a pitched ball, but Joey refuses to register a complaint that would ban Lefty from the Leagues. Joyce Gordon plays the girl, Evie.

Episode #7 Coincidence
Broadcast Date: August 13th 1950
Cast: Joyce Gordon and Ross Martin

Plot: Written and directed by Elliot Drake. A young man named Sammy Bowen (Ross Martin) from the wrong side of the tracks is found guilty of a murder he did not commit. The youth is convicted on circumstantial evidence plus the bias of the Court caused by the boy's juvenile delinquency record. A detective finds a small piece of evidence and saves the boy from electrocution. The boy's girlfriend, Donny, daughter of the slain man (Joyce Gordon) remains loyal to her sweetheart.

Episode # 8 The Fifth Door
Broadcast Date August 13th 1950
Cast John Larkin

Plot: A sea story about three men who were trapped in a locked cabin aboard a sunken ship at the bottom of the sea. The three men know that one of them is a killer, but only the guilty man knows who the murderer is. John Larkin plays the role of Kip Allen, the man who tells the story as he lived it. Kip and one of the other men, Bill, escape from the Petie, the third man does not get out.

Episode #9 Special Delivery
Broadcast Date: August 27th 1950
Cast: Inge Adams and Ross Martin
Plot: Written and directed by Robert Monroe. The story of John Rhodes (Ross Martin) diplomatic courier, who fulfills his mission in getting a pouch to the correct destination by the required date. During his mission, Rhodes meets Laurine, the beautiful girl, to whom he falls in love.

Next month in the May issue of The Illustrated Press we will feature the conclusion and part Two of High Adventure by Martin Grams Jr.

LONG RUNNING COMIC STRIPS SHORT RUNNING RADIO PROGRAMS

Peter Bellanca

In my past articles I've written about major comic strips such as *Blondie*, *Joe Palooka*, *Popeye*, *Bringing Up Father*, *Mandrake and Red Ryder*. This article is about one of the second tier strips, *The Nebbs*. Although the strip ran for twenty-four years it never reached the popularity of the above mentioned strips.

The creator of the strip was Sol Hess. Hess was born on a farm in Illinois and then while he was in his teens his family moved to Chicago. When he was in his twenties he took a job as a traveling salesman for Rettif, Hess & Madsen, a wholesale jewelry company. He became very successful and was promoted to the company's main office that was located close to the *Chicago Tribune* newspaper. A writer at heart he became friendly with some of the cartoonists at the paper and unofficially began supplying them with jokes and ideas. In 1919 one of the cartoonists, Sidney Smith, the creator of the popular *The Gumps* comic strip began to use Hess' gags and dialogs on a regular bases.

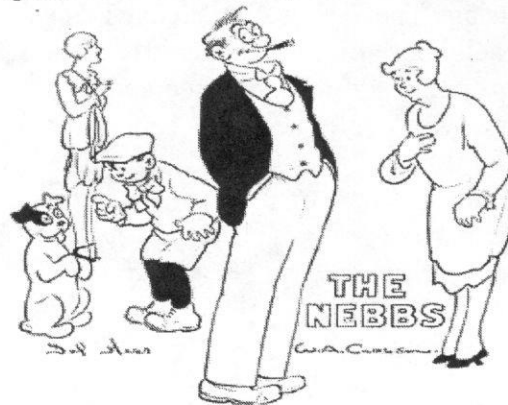
In 1920-1921 Wallace A. Carlson together with Smith accompanied by Hess writing the dialog adapted *The Gumps* into an animated film series for Paramount Studios. During production, Carlson and Hess formed a partnership to create a comic strip. In 1922 Smith and the *Chicago Tribune Syndicate* signed a ten-year contract for one hundred thousand dollars per year for ten years to syndicate *The Gumps* and Hess wanted a share as a contributor to the strip. Smith offered him one hundred dollars a week. Hess considered that an insult and persuaded the *Bell Syndicate* to publish a strip he had created called *The Nebbs*. With

Hess doing the writing and Carlton doing the artwork the strip was published on May 21, 1923. By 1925 Hess was earning eight hundred dollars a week and left the jewelry business to concentrate on *The Nebbs*.



Although the strip closely emulated *The Gumps*, it surprisingly caught on. The title comes from the Yiddish, *nebbish*, which translates to someone who is insignificant or unimpressive. Hess stated in a 1939 interview that it referred to a "poor sap." This was true of *The Nebbs*, they were second bananas for their entire run.

The Nebbs family consisted of Rudolph (Rudy), the balding, mustached father, Fanny, a typical domestic looking mother popular at the time, Junior, standard



1920's kid with knickers and cap, daughter Betsy, a typical young woman of the flapper era and of course Spot, the mandatory dog in family strips.

Catastrophe was the key ingredient in the strip. Whenever they attempted any

undertaking something would always go wrong, from dropping the holiday dinner on the floor to various projects ending in a disaster. Apparently the readers identified with the down to earth characters and the many problems they got into and had to solve in the strip. Even though not in the top level of strip comics it did appear in over five hundred newspapers. During this period comic strips pertaining to family life were becoming popular. Strips like *Blondie*, *Gasoline Alley*, *Bringing Up Father*, and *The Gumps* had huge following and many strips tried to imitate them.

With Hess' death in 1941, *The Nebbs* were taken over by his daughter Betsy, (same name as the Nebb daughter) and her husband, Stanley Baer. Betsy and her husband were also doing a strip called *The Toodle Family* for the *Chicago Sun/Times Syndicate* while the *Bell Syndicate* was still syndicating *The Nebbs*. The *Chicago Sun/Times Syndicate* did not consider this an idea situation, their contracted cartoonists were also working for their competitors. So after a few years it was revealed that the Nebbs and the Toodles were related and they began to visit each others strips. The Nebbs then moved and became neighbors of the Toodles. By 1947 *The Nebbs* comic strip disappeared and their characters were only seen in supporting roles in *The Toodle Family*. A strange end to a comic strip that still had many loyal readers.

Wallace A. Carlson retired shortly before *The Nebbs* ended and died in 1967.

The Toodle Family strip ended in 1961.

As far as merchandising went *The Nebbs* did not generate much in the way of spin off

material. There were a few *Big Little Books*, comic books, a *Milton Bradley* board game, and some minor items like a score pad for Bridge.



On September 9, 1945 *The Nebbs* made their radio debut on the Mutual Broadcasting System. The program was sponsored by Cystex and aired on Sundays at 4:30 p.m. It starred Gene and Kathleen Lockhart as Rudy and Fanny Nebbs with Conrad Binyon as Junior. Others in the cast included Francis "Dink" Trout, Dick Ryan, Billy Roy and Ruth Perrott. The announcer was Tommy Dixon. The sponsor claimed that Cystex would cure any rheumatic pain, nervousness or being rundown by ridding the body of excess acids and body poisons. There is a product sold today with the same name that states it helps with bladder and kidney problems.

The radio program followed the comic strip and centered on the Nebbs family at home. Transferring from the visual comic to the audio radio is difficult and in the Nebbs case it was impossible. The family situations were undeveloped and unexciting, due in my opinion, to poor writing. The program was cancelled five months later on January 13, 1946.

THE RADIO PERFORMERS

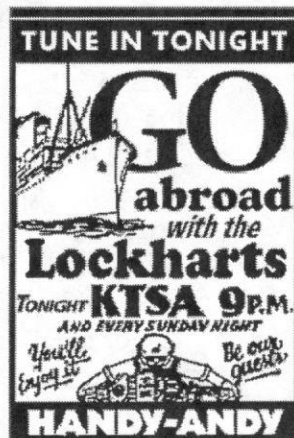
Gene Lockhart had a broad and distinguished career as a film and stage actor appearing in over three hundred

motion pictures and numerous Broadway plays. He was truly a man for all seasons, as a song writer, teacher at the Juilliard School of Music, composer of books and lyrics for numerous plays, magazine writer and he played professional football for the Toronto Argonauts of the Canadian Football League.

Probably his most remembered song was, *The World is Waiting For the Sunrise* to which he wrote the lyrics and concert pianist Ernest Seitz, under the pseudonym of Raymond Roberts, the music. His movie career began in the silent movie era and ended with *Jeanne Eagles* in 1957. He was nominated for an Oscar as Best Supporting Actor for his role as Regis in the 1938 movie *Algiers*. As a film actor he was kept busy appearing in such major films as, *The Story of Alexander Graham Bell*, *His Gal Friday*, *Meet John Doe*, *Sweethearts*, *Going My Way*, *Miracle on 34th Street*, *Carousel* and *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. On television, among others, he appeared in *The Ford Theater*, *Family Theater*, *Lux Video Theater* and *The Gulf Playhouse*.

Other than *The Nebbs*, Lockhart's radio roles were limited to a three month run of *Go Abroad with the Lockharts* on NBC's Blue Network from October 13, 1930 to January 26, 1931, the syndicated comedy, *His Honor, Homer Bell* and guest appearances on Lux Radio Theater and other radio dramas. The *Go Aboard* program was based on Gene and his wife Kathleen planning trips overseas and was sponsored by the Handy Andy Grocery Stores.

Kathleen Arthur Lockhart was born in the United Kingdom, married Gene in 1924 and emigrated to the U.S. She had over



a forty year career on stage and in the movies, appearing in more than thirty films, including *Two Years Before the Mast*, *Mother Wore Tights* and *The Glenn Miller Story*. She played alongside her husband in the 1938 version of *A Christmas Carol*. Gene played Bob Cratchit and she was Bob's wife, Belinda. This film marked the



THE LOCKHARTS AS THE NEBBS

acting debut of their daughter June at the age of thirteen. June Lockhart went on to have a long career in the film and television industry. Both Gene and Kathleen Lockhart have stars on Hollywood's *Walk of Fame*, Gene has two, one for films and one for TV. Kathleen's is for her film career.

Gene Lockhart died of a heart attack on March 30, 1957 at the age of sixty-five. After the death of her husband Kathleen retired from the entertainment business except for a small role in *The Purple Gang* in 1960. She passed away on February 18, 1978 at the age of eighty-four and both are buried in Holy Cross Cemetery at Culver City, California.

Conrad Binyon made his first film appearance when he was six months old in 1931 being wheeled in a baby carriage and appeared in over twenty-five films, many of them non-credited. Some of his movies include the *Our Gang* series, *The Glass Key*, *The Human Comedy*, *My Blue Heaven*,

The Courage of Lassie, *The Boy From Stalingrad* and *Since You Went Away*. On radio he was Hank on *One Man's Family* from 1939 through 1950. He also played Butch Roscoe on *Mayor of the Town*, Junior on the *Life of Riley* and appeared on the *Major Hoople* and *Smilin' Ed's Buster Brown Gang* programs. His one television appearance was on the *Fireside Theatre* on March 27, 1951. He loved flying and received a pilot's license when he was seventeen years old and three years later joined the Air National Guard. His unit was called up for active duty during the Korean Conflict and he served as a combat pilot. He remained in the Air Force for the next twenty years and never returned to his former career in radio and films.

Francis "Dink" Trout had an extensive career in show business. He was Luke Spears on *Lum and Abner*, Mr. Anderson on *A Day in The Life Dennis Day* program, Horace on *The Fitch Bandwagon* and a short run as Junior on the *Life of Riley*, He played Pinky Pickett in both the radio and film versions of the *Scattergood Baines* series plus many non-credited film roles. In 1947 he began working for Disney Studios doing voiceovers. His last film *Alice in Wonderland*, was released shortly after his death at age 51 on March 27, 1950 from cancer.

The following press release is from the September 1, 1945 issue of *Billboard Magazine* announcing the new program.

The Lockharts Play MBS Nebbs Lead

NEW YORK, Aug. 27 --- Film and legit actor Gene Lockhart and his wife have been assigned for the leads in *The Nebbs*, New Mutual commercial bowing in September 9. Show is sponsored by Cystex Company. Program based on the Bell Syndicate comic strip on the same name, is packaged by Raymond R. Morgan Agency, which is handling the account. Format calls for domestic situation comedy.

Closet Gag By Tom Cherre

Pictured on this month's cover is Howard Tollefson. He was the sounds effects man responsible for delivering the onslaught of junk falling out of Fibber's closet. The gag had its premiere on March 5th 1940 in the episode "Cleaning the Closet." Molly opens the closet looking for a dictionary and is promptly buried in a heap of Fibber's stuff. Cleaning out the closet becomes the show's plot. Apparently it would never remain permanently clean. Included in the inventory of Fibber's stuff includes a photo album, a rusty horseshoe, and a ten foot pole. After repacking the closet, Fibber realizes the dictionary has been put away and upon opening it again the downpour happens again. The audience roared and one of radio's greatest running gags was born. From then on, Molly's warning "Don't open that door, McGee!" was the cue for a mass of rubble to come tumbling out. Tollefson included pots and pans, bowling pins, old roller skates, wooden crates, golf clubs, and anything else that would make noise to create laughs. The final sound was usually a final tinkling little bell with a resounding quote from Mr. McGee saying "I gotta straighten out that closet one of these days." Believe it or not the sound effect was done live each week so it was always a little different each time it was performed. On at least one occasion the gag is flipped. Dr. Gamble attempts to leave Fibber's house and inadvertently is about to open the closet door by mistake. Molly warns him too late. He opens the door and all is silent. Fibber chirps in "Oh I forgot to tell you, I cleaned out the closet this morning." Only Jack Benny's basement vault rivals the closet gag.

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