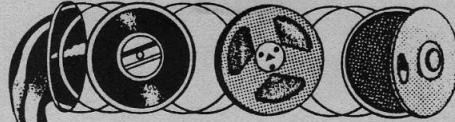
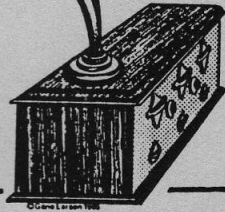


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"FOR THE BEST OF RADIO'S HISTORY"



A JOURNAL OF VINTAGE RADIO

# NARA NEWS<sup>®</sup>

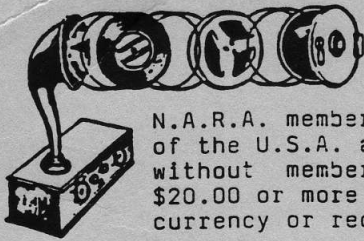
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## NORTH AMERICAN RADIO ARCHIVES

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# NORTH AMERICAN RADIO ARCHIVES

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# Letters



# from our readers

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NOTE: The following letter was sent to John Pellatt, NARA's Contributing Editor.

Dear John,

Just a quick note to thank you for the plug in the Spring 1995 issue of NARA NEWS. A couple of people have written me concerning The Shadow.

One item I did catch in your article. The company that currently copyrights to sell the radio programs of The Shadow is Great American Audio located in New Rochelle, New York. This is not the company (Sandy Hook Records/Radiola, etc. of Connecticut) nor the individual(s) who sued the OTR dealers back in the late 1980's. Perhaps you might make mention of this in your next article just to "clear the air."

A final item. You mentioned David Alan Herzog's book, "Collecting Today for Tomorrow" in your article. Would you please send me a copy of the page(s) that mentions/illustrates that Shadow stud pin by Street & Smith.

Karl H. Schadow  
Richmond, Virginia

JOHN'S REPLY: Thank you Karl for your letter and the correction on the Shadow tapes which I'm pleased to note. My apologies to Great American Audio. The relevant page is on its way and again thank you for taking the time to write. It's letters like yours that really make it all much more worthwhile and fun.

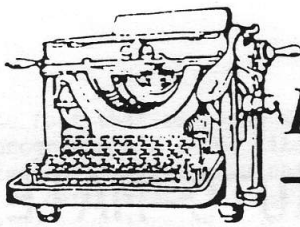
EDITOR'S NOTE: John Pellatt now has an E-Mail address. If you wish to contact him by this route, his address is: [jrp@sources.com](mailto:jrp@sources.com)

Dear Mr. Snyder,

I'm another new member with an opinion I can't keep to myself! I know you're having some problems generating enough catalogs to keep up with all of us newcomers. Well, as Marc Flanagan pointed out in the last issue, many of us have computers. How about supplying catalogs on disk, with printed versions an extra cost option? Just a thought - thanks for considering it.

Lee Levan  
Wyomissing, Pennsylvania

EDITOR'S REPLY: One of our members, Terry Salomonson of AVPRO, is putting our entire cassette catalog into the computer. This is aimed at several things. It will remove some of the duplication, let you order a listing of the shows that are of particular interest to you instead of the entire catalog, increase the amount that can be put on a page so that the number of pages in the catalog can be reduced, and as a result of that reduce the price of the catalog, and then finally, as you suggest, make the catalog available to you computer users on disk. Stand by for further information.



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## From The Editor's Desk....

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YOU ARE RECEIVING THIS ISSUE VERY LATE, and I want to give you an explanation for that, especially in light of my promise to you in my very first issue (Fall 1994) promising you that you would get your copies of the NARA NEWS four times a year, and on time.

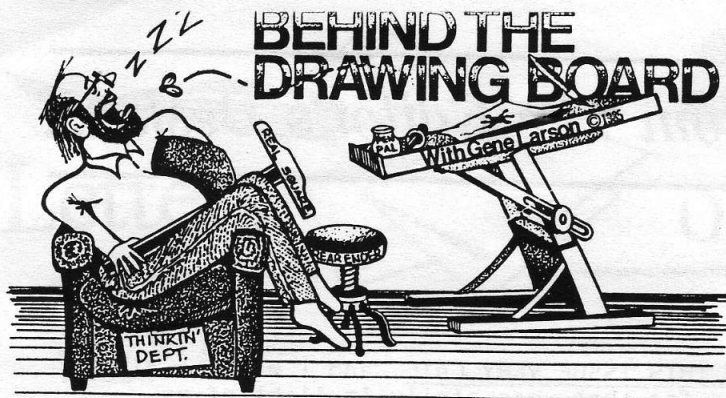
I sent this issue off to Janis DeMoss on September 15 for the regular November first mailing. Because each issue is so expensive to have printed, Janis located an "out of town" printer who agreed to print this one for half our usual cost. She sent it off to him along with a deposit. He kept giving her promises and no delivery. On December first, one month after this issue was to have gone in the mail to you, Janis gave up and called me to see if I could send her a new copy, since I do keep the "masters." What you are now holding in your hands is that same exact issue that I sent to her back on September 15th, except for this page. In sending her the new copy I felt that I should scrap my original editorial and give you this explanation instead. Janis has said that she will have this one done at our regular, expensive printer, and will get this in the mail as quickly as possible.

We wish that it weren't so, but some times these things happen and we certainly apologize for this issue being so late. We do hope that we will be back "on schedule" with the winter one.

Thank you for your understanding.



JIM SNYDER



## AUTO-MATED

My introduction to radio broadcasting as an actual operator began with a mixed feeling of awe and mortification. I was brought into this suburban Seattle station and following a brief introduction to a monstrous-looking machine, found myself suddenly alone with it; those first eight hours are indescribable but I'll do my best to relate to you, in essence, the happenings of that first initial night's trepidation.

My friend Jack was the chief engineer at this particular station and it was he who got this job for me. Previously, I'd hung around many different stations with him over the years and became accustomed to the mediocre chores connected with broadcasting that are seldom referred to the general public. Things such as clearing "overnights" from the old news teletype machines (hundreds of feet of paper containing mostly-unusable information that had to be edited into a brief news and weathercast.) And the making of coffee strong enough to jolt a morning announcer awake enough to actually read sentences, etc. Firing up the transmitter, getting records ready to play, collecting commercials and transcriptions, signing in on all the logs. And those pervious years of "inside" experience proved invaluable to me in the years ahead.

Jack had taught me all he could learn himself about the automation machine in the short period of time since its arrival and installation. The poor fellow was dead on his feet and I could tell that he wanted to stay and help me through the first puzzling night, but his duties that day were overwhelming with all the preparation necessary to make ready this prototypical night. Jack was very apologetic for having to leave me with "The Monster" and told me that he had all the confidence in the world for my ability to survive my indoctrination to it. And he told me to be sure to call him "as problems arose"....(he knew they would)....as he left.

Breaking in new equipment is haphazard at the least and no one knows better than an engineer....or a poor shakey brand-new-on-the-air who'd never had a program of his own. Especially with a monster machine lurking out in the lobby, awaiting its numerous assaults to be triggered upon the "assaultee" who is the only human being in the building

There it went! The station identification!! I was ON, my God help me, I was ON!!! My heart nearly jumped out of my chest, shirt fabric actually heaving and straining to keep the thunderous beating inside. BANG! The starting relay activated the solenoid, in response to someone in the control room pushing a button, setting a recorded cartridge in motion and playing the introduction to a new program on the automation unit, and beginning my new career in radio.

The first of three large ten-inch reels snapped into motion as the debut selection played on the air. The remaining soul who had activated the system became a blur as he shot out of the station as though he had activated a short-fused bomb. LITTLE DID HE KNOW! My new responsibility had just begun, for better or for worse.

The fact that everyone who worked for the station was "tuned in" to see what the new program would sound like did not serve to ease my nerves, either. There before me stood this giant gray oblong-shaped bank of tape reels, control panels, and various sets of cartridge machines. The control panel contained a long line of numbered switches, a strange looking "clock", banks of relays, colored lights, and an actual button that had "PANIC" etched into it! Below all of those things was a line of transformers. Somewhere in that same general area was a meter whose needle was fluctuating.

The first two panels held the large tape reels, next panel was the "brain" of the unit, and the third panel consisted of the cartridge players. The cartridge unit consisted of two doors, one above the other, which housed a "carousel" each. That's what they actually were, 24 openings arranged in a circle on each unit that would play a cart and then rotate to the next slot with a cart to be played. Below the two carousel units was one slot for single-cart play. So I had forty-nine ways plus three more with the reels to go wrong! And that relay-driven maniacal machine had my number!

This "new wave" automation marvel was ready to put me through paces I would never have thought existed. As with nearly anything new, it came complete with its own "bugs"...a term used to describe the many "unexplained" things that can and usually do happen with brand-new untested gear. The only thing going in my favor that fateful night was the fact that only three or four cartridge tapes were being used between the two carousel units and the single-play unit. That single unit was being used to play the introductions and sign-offs for the three programs scheduled for the night.

It all began with "Dinnertime In Stereo" to progress on to "Star Stereo" and "Stereo Stage." So far things were off to a good start...at least until everyone was out of sight and the station was locked up tight with me and the electro-mechanical marvel facing each other. It wouldn't be long before I was to dub that hungry-for-power machine "OTTO" because it had me OTTOMATICALLY on the run at its every whim.

As OTTO was churning out the first tune of my shift, I was prematurely agonizing over the first-ever newscast I would be airing in less than an hour. My legs were turning more rubbery as that anxious time approached ever-nearer. So I went into the newsroom to clear a newscast from the Associated Press Teletype, something I had done for years previously but always for someone else. I kept the monitors (on-air speakers) turned up at various points around the station so I could keep track of what was being broadcast as I worked at the other chores to be done. There seemed to be at least 500 miles of newsprint compressed into a wavering stack behind the teletype machine that I was attempting to haul out and examine.

A strange sound emitted from the newsroom speaker, something in the music that didn't sound quite right. I couldn't figure out what was taking place at first, then it dawned on me that TWO MUSIC TAPES WERE PLAYING AT THE SAME TIME. Papers edited from the nearly-endless teletype babble flew in all directions as I nearly encased part of my shoulder in the newsroom door jamb and skidded partway down the hall, just traversing the corner into the lobby, and stopping short of going headlong into the secretary's front desk. I gained composure enough to point myself into the direction of the machine where I subconsciously punched that mysterious "PANIC" button. (Evidently the wizard who had designed the system figured on someone like me who would need this electronic pacifier and take it at its meaning.) And it worked as I took the term literally and stood dumb-founded in front of OTTO as silence filled the whole station around me. I now knew its function....it simply shut down all on-air programming of the machine. Nothing was

happening. It was as though the "PANIC" button were also attached to my brain because I stood there in a daze and forgot what I was supposed to do! My first reaction as life began seeping back to consciousness was to unlock the station's door and take off running. Then as real-time approached, my thinking processes returned and I pressed the sequence button to advance the computer brain (and mine) to the next mode of operation. The third tape jumped to life when I pressed the "ON" button and one single selection of music was on the air. WHEW! Whatever I did was right for the moment.

That first scarey newscast was drawing closer so I headed back to the newsroom to play "pickup" there. I proceeded at a faster pace to find some local as well as national headlines in order to make some sense for the first newscast. Just as I felt things were back in control again ANOTHER strange sound came from the speaker: BOYANG!! YOIYOIUMMDEE-DOODLE-EE-DOO...(I'd forgotten to advance the two tapes that played together on the air.) The first tape was called upon to play and was mid-note of a tune where it had stopped when I hit the "PANIC" button. At slightly less than warp speed this time, I proceeded to the lobby and advanced the second tape to the beginning of the next song for a better transition. I scurried back to the newsroom and continued getting material to read at news time.

At last things began to go a bit more smoothly and I was able to get that stack of newsprint down to a few strips of usable reading material. Then on to the other duties that were necessary in the operation of a radio station. Since there was such a frenzy of activity in that first hour, it went by surprisingly fast.

TIME TO GO ON THE AIR...LIVE! Was I REALLY ready for that? My memory flashed back to the many times I sat in my room at home and pretended to be on the radio, now I was there for REAL. Although there weren't three-quarters of a million potential listeners out there such as were for Seattle stations at that time, one person or more was too much for me to comprehend at that moment. The music stopped, station identification came on and....I WAS ON! I have no idea what I said at that moment but it sounded as though somebody else's voice came out. The Grand Old Opry would've been receptive to it since I sounded as though I was an understudy for Pat Butram....I YODELED the news from start to finish.

The pressure was overwhelming and, after hitting the button that put OTTO back into service, I headed for the bathroom. As the perspiration poured from my brow I settled shakily onto my perch just as I heard OTTO's speaker playing melodic strings and a voice pronouncing:"Good Evening, and welcome to 'Dinnertime In Stereo!!'" OH, NO!! I FORGOT TO CHANGE TO THE INTRODUCTION TO THE NEXT PROGRAM! I ejected from my perch and scrambled for the lobby, my pants at half-mast and a chip of paint on my nose from cutting another corner too close.

Good ol' "PANIC" button! Silence. Tapes flying. Wrong tape out, right tape in, ON button pushed, and correct program underway. For a fleeting moment I just stood there basking in the relief of knowing that I corrected a bad situation....until I realized that my pants were around my feet, I was standing in front of a picture window with the drapes wide open in the middle of a shopping square, dark outside, amidst a brightly lit lobby! I streaked back into the bathroom under more pressure than could be described, repeating: "I gotta shut those drapes....I gotta shut those drapes..." And this was just the second hour.....

Stay tuned





## TRANSCRIBED FROM TORONTO

by JOHN PELLATT

Gale Gordon died in early July. In the fall 1990 issue of THROUGH THE HORN, John Pellatt had a transcript of an interview that he had with Gordon. John has asked that we reprint it here as a remembrance of Gordon.

In March of 1987 the Editor interviewed radio and television comedy veteran Gale Gordon while he was in Toronto performing in dinner theatre. Mr. Gordon was extremely gracious and cordial and gave freely of his time. Readers are urged to check back issues of the NARA NEWS for previous articles your editor has written to read more about Mr. Gordon's background in radio. Following are extracts selected from a wide-ranging interview of particular interest to vintage radio fans.

**YOU ARE OFTEN REMEMBERED IN THE ROLE OF PRINCIPAL CONKLIN IN "OUR MISS BROOKS". HOW DID THAT SHOW BEGIN?**

"Our Miss Brooks" started as a 13 week summer replacement for the Jack Benny Show. All the big shows ran 39 weeks and then there were 13 weeks off in the summer when people tended to be away on vacation. The bigwigs decided people weren't using their radios and TVs as much when they were away on vacation.

**"OUR MISS BROOKS" IS DESCRIBED BY SOME AS THE LAST SUCCESSFUL BIG TIME RADIO COMEDY SERIES AND ONE OF THE FEW TO BE SUCCESSFULLY TRANSPLANTED TO TELEVISION. TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE THE SHOW'S SUCCESS?**

Of course it was the writing. It's important in any show. The fact that we'd been on radio for four years before going over to television was a big help. Jeff Chandler didn't come over to the television series because by then he'd become a film star and Universal wouldn't let him do TV. That was the only change from the radio series. It was one of the few radio casts that was able to go directly over to television without any major

changes. Everyone knew what we looked like, they'd seen pictures. I wasn't well known, at least not facially at that point, but people accepted our physical appearances and we went on to five more years on television. We had a very far sighted producer Larry Burns who, when casting the radio show, was aware that there might be such a thing as a television series. It was in its experimental stage at that point.

**WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN A SHOW THAT MAKES OR BREAKS ITS SUCCESS?**

The all important thing is the writing. I don't care who you have in it, if it isn't in the writing, it isn't going to be worth anything. You have to have the material to work with no matter who you are. Nowadays, the simplicity is gone. The honest, simple approach is gone. The big lack in TV today is the lack of good writing. They take second rate writing and try to force it, that's why they try so hard to be funny. Writing is a Niagara Falls of words in American TV. There's a tremendous drain. But the medium is so demanding they will accept second best rather than have nothing. There aren't enough geniuses to churn it out. It's impossible.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK OF TODAY'S GROUP OF YOUNG COMEDIANS?**

When a contemporary performer comes up to the camera and says "This is going to be very funny folks," that kills it right there. I want to hit them right in the nose. It's not the way to do it. You cannot assume you are funny. If you do, the audience will assume you are not. It's a normal reaction.

**COULD YOU CONTRAST THAT WITH YOUR OWN APPROACH TO COMEDY?**

We played everything as if it was the most serious thing in the world. Very straight. We believed what we were doing was possible. That has to be there in comedy otherwise it becomes just plain slapstick. That will make people laugh but it is not based on anything real. Anyone can do slapstick and get a laugh. No matter who does it. It doesn't take any talent to hit someone in the face with a pie. It takes some talent to receive a pie, but that is broad comedy. Subtle humour is something different entirely.

**RADIO PIONEERED THE SITCOM FORMAT. WERE THE SHOWS ON RADIO BETTER SHOWS, IN GENERAL TERMS, THAN THE ONES ON TV TODAY?**

There were many bad shows, poorly constructed shows. But it all had the saving grace of newness. Everything hadn't been done 40,000 times. I see sitcoms today doing things Lucy did thirty years ago. In those days, the public hadn't been flooded with imitations so it all seemed newer. On top of that people are much more critical today. They've seen so much more.

**DO YOU THINK TODAY'S WRITERS HAVE JUST RUN OUT OF NEW IDEAS?**

I've seen great teams of writers who lost their ability. Is it fair to say they've run out of ideas? I don't know. There comes a time you do run out of ideas, I don't care how much of a genius you are. There's got to be letdowns. The mind can't function that brilliantly beyond the normal span of years. It's the natural process of slowing down. The newer writers like Neil Simon isn't going to take on a weekly show because it's too much of a strain and he's too much of a perfectionist.

## CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SOME OF THE RADIO "GREATS"? JACK BENNY?

Jack Benny. You never got tired of him. He wasn't on all the time. He let other people say funny things and he reacted to them. Reacting is terribly important. Not too many people do it. If I've had any success in theatre it's because I react. I rarely act. I gave that up years ago. I react. As soon as someone steps on stage with you, you react to each other. I find that pays off. Anyone in a group who reacts and doesn't act, is going to stand out in the show. People will watch that person to see what they will do. You know what the others are doing. But it's human nature to watch the person doing nothing because you don't know what they're going to do. It's a valuable lesson I learned early in my life. If five people are acting and I'm watching them, the audience will watch me.

## DID YOU EVER WORK WITH FRED ALLEN?

No, I never worked with him. A wonderful, bright, brilliant comedic mind. Most of his stuff he wrote himself. He was one of the masters of the quick answer, the smart or keen observation. A brilliant, brilliant man. When we lost him we lost one of the greats. His rivalry with Benny was one of the brilliant comedic treatments on radio. People loved it. Benny was a very attractive, wonderful man. Very few people realized he was the greatest straightman in the world. He never said the funny lines. He reacted to them. All of his cast said the funny things. He didn't. As opposed to Milton Berle who never let anyone say anything. If you had a funny line on the Berle show in rehearsal, he'd say it on air before you opened your mouth. I've worked with him many times. He's personally a very nice man but he cannot resist mugging in front of a camera, even if it's a funeral. He sincerely wants to be loved by everyone. He cannot stay away from doing [schtick] no matter where it is. It is unfortunate because he's a very good dramatic actor. But he didn't last as long as Benny because people got tired of him. You never got tired of Benny—he was never on long enough. You were listening to his music teacher, Mel Blanc, who was so great, or the Mexican part he did, a wonderful part. Benny played straight to him and so you never got tired of Benny. And of course, there was the great writing.

## EDGAR BERGEN?

A charming man. Charming. I remember when I did the McGee picture Edgar was in it with Charlie. The script called for Charlie to walk around and so forth. And so they hired a midget named Billy Curtis to do Charlie's part. They made him up to look like Charlie. It was a wonderful animation. Bergen did the voice when necessary but Billy did Charlie when he had to walk around. Aside from from being a good actor and a handsome man, Billy was also a great horse gambler. He always had a racing form in his hand when he was waiting around to do a shot. One day Bergen's mother came to visit us on the set, a dear Swedish lady, very nice. Charlie (Billy) was sitting on one of the canvas chairs reading his racing form. Bergen came in with his mother in between shots while everyone was sitting around relaxing. Bergen, being a perfect gentlemen, introduced his mother to everyone on the set. Suddenly he realized Billy was sitting there dressed up as Charlie, reading his form, and that he hadn't introduced him to his mother. So his said "Mother, this is Billy Curtis." At that point, Mrs Bergen saw Charlie McCarthy get up out of his chair and stand up. She fainted. Passed out cold. Here was this dummy she'd seen all of her life suddenly walking around and coming to life. I saw that. I was there. It actually happened.

## HOW COULD A VENTRILOQUIST POSSIBLY SUCCEED ON RADIO?

A question everybody was asking. I saw Bergen perform at the Lambs Club when I was living in New York before I went back to California. I saw him do his act on the night Rudy Vallee saw him and said "You must come on my show." That was the show that started his career on radio. It was a very funny act. Nobody had heard of him at that time. Vents were a dime a dozen in those days. But he was very funny and he had distinctive voices for his characters: Charlie, Mortimer Snerd and so on. But it was Vallee who gave him his first chance on radio. His material was so good, so funny. Then he did pictures and TV but that's how it started, his career. A guest appearance at the Lambs Club in NY.

## AMOS & ANDY?

They were such wonderful characters. Larger than life. They said so many things no

one else could say. They made remarks from those two characters so you could accept anything they said about politics, etc. It was beautifully written, beautifully performed. You believed them. You knew they existed. Even if they were creations. The dialogue was witty, the new characters were funny in themselves. It was great writing and great performing.

## DID YOU KNOW THAT RADIO WOULD SOMEDAY MAKE YOU A STAR?

No. When I started in radio it was more or less a joke. It wasn't established as an important entity. I did a show that was cast over the phone. KFWB Hollywood cast me from the sound of my voice and told me to show up the next day at the broadcasting studio. I sat around for hours in a room and there was this woman sitting there doing lots of things, answering phones, writing, and finally she said what do you want? I told her I was there for the show. I was 27 or 28 at the time. She looked at me and said "Over the phone I thought you were a middle aged Englishman and I cast you as a middle aged Englishman in a show I'm writing". That was fine. I did the show. Then she wrote several things that included me. "English Coronets" featured the lives of various English monarchs. I starred in all of those although we didn't get any credits on air in those days. Actors weren't important enough to mention! During that series by the third season I played the lead in Charles II and for the show I received \$7.50. It made me the highest paid radio actor in Hollywood at the time.

## WAS RADIO A LIVING IN THE EARLY DAYS?

No. You had to do 4-5 shows a day. The going rate was \$2.50 for a commercial half hour show. Whatever radio station hired you, they took 10% out of your fee for hiring you. They acted as their own agencies you see. So you'd get \$2.25 net for a half hour show and the rehearsals could go as long as they wanted. This was before AFTRA. It didn't promise to be a luxurious living or even an endurable living. When I started, it was just a route between engagements. I'd been doing theatre in San Francisco and came back and someone said "Why don't you try this radio thing? It's not much but at least it'll pay something." That's how I happened to call KFWB.

**DID YOU ALWAYS PLAY COMEDIC ROLES IN RADIO?**

I did everything. I didn't specialize in comedy. You did whatever you could do. One of the necessary abilities in those days was the ability to do dialect. They expected every actor to do two or three parts on a show. If you couldn't do that you wouldn't get hired. In those days if you played a policeman you did it with an Irish accent so that everyone listening would know that the fellow with an Irish accent was a policeman. A villain had to have a deep voice. There were all kinds of strange casting requirements.

**WE READ ALL KINDS OF STORIES OF THINGS GOING WRONG ON LIVE RADIOSHOWS AND ACTORS HAVING TO COVER FOR OTHER ACTORS. THAT SORT OF THING. CAN YOU RECOUNT ANY SUCH PERSONAL EXPERIENCES?**

I remember a cops and robbers show. I was the heavy. At one point while on the air one of the actors had gone out of the studio to take a quick smoke and I was about to be arrested by him playing an Irish cop. The sound man noticed the actor was gone and he knew his cue was coming up. So the sound man went out to find the actor outside the studio, and the cue came up for the police car. I saw the sound effects man was gone so I imitated the siren. I faded in as if it was coming in from a distance and then I kicked something to make it sound like the door opened and then I played the Irish cop arresting myself. By that time the soundman and the actor came back and he resumed the role. The change in voice quality must've confused the audience a bit but I don't think they really noticed the difference. So on that show I arrested myself and took myself off to jail!

**WAS ACTING EASIER ON RADIO THAN ON STAGE OR LATER ON TV? WAS IT NECESSARY TO REALLY UNDERSTAND THE ROLES YOU WERE PLAYING?**

Very few of us in those days would analyze the play. We'd just play it to the best of our ability. I follow the director. I don't go into any psychological approach. I find that a waste of time. I get annoyed with young actors who try to figure out the psychological

meanings of a part. I'm sure nobody mentioned psychoanalyzing a script to Shaw. If they had, I'm sure he'd've said "Stick to the words." That's what they're there for. I don't think much of these psychological approaches. Radio writers were always there in the studio but they never mentioned any psychological approaches. They were too concerned about getting a script in on the right number of minutes. That was there big concern. If you tried to analyze a script you'd go crazy, doing 4-5 shows a day.

**COULD YOU DESCRIBE A TYPICAL DAY PERFORMING IN THE EARLY DAYS OF RADIO?**

If you were lucky you had an appointment to go to a studio to go to work. Everybody auditioned for every part that was ever done. You auditioned for every part, everything. It was the one thing I loathed about radio above all else—the auditioning. You were competing with your friends and fellow workers. If you got the job, which you needed desperately, we all did in those days, you felt guilty because your friends didn't get it. So there was no winning on that side. To compete with dear, dear friends is awfully embarrassing, and it was degrading. But that happened all the time. I lived for the day in radio that my voice was well known enough that someone would just call and tell me I didn't have to audition for a part. That was my ambition. When that day finally came round I was so grateful. It was such a relief not to compete with people I'd worked with for years, some of them intimate friends. Some of them still are.

**SO THE WORST PART OF THE DAY WAS...?**

Auditioning. The competition between friends to get any part, even little bit parts, was fierce. You would dash from one studio to another. You'd get a friend on the show to read an opening line for you because you couldn't get to the studio in time to start the rehearsal. You'd be coming from another studio and you'd be five minutes late. Everybody knew everybody because we'd all fought to get the parts! Somebody would read your lines until you could get there for the rehearsal. That way you saved the job to get your \$2.50! You had to be there for the broadcast but if you were late for a rehearsal you knew somebody would cover for you.

**DID YOU EVER MISS ANY REHEARSALS? DID YOU EVER HAVE TO GO ON AIR LIVE WITHOUT KNOWING WHAT YOU WERE PERFORMING?**

Kay Van Riper [Gale's first radio employer-director] on KFWB used to write Sunday night shows on Sunday nights. We often went on air without ever having read the last pages of the script, in Charles II or Henry VIII, because she was writing them and turning them out on a hand cranked mimeo machine while we were on the air. Pages would come in we'd never seen, while on air, and we'd do them cold. That happened many times.

**GETTING BACK TO SOME OF YOUR BETTER KNOWN LATER ROLES ON RADIO. HOW DID YOU GET THE PART OF MAYOR LATRIVIA ON FIBBER MCGEE & MOLLY?**

That was an accident. I played a one-shot part. Molly had a boyfriend in her early youth who had gone away and become wealthy. He was visiting Wistful Vista and so Molly and Fibber decided that they had to really try to impress him because he was so rich. They got Gildersleeve to act as a butler. That was the situation. I came on, did the part of the boyfriend. Jim Jordan was bit concerned because at that time I had a reputation as a dramatic actor. I hadn't done too many radio comedies. The director was a friend of mine and said "Don't worry, Gale will wait for the laughs." Well I did the part and they liked it so much that Jim went to Don Quinn and said "This fellow is pretty good. Perhaps you could write something for him?" And so Don Quinn came up and said "Wistful Vista has never had a mayor." He thought my voice sounded mayoral enough. He wrote the part of Mayor LaTrivia for me. That was the only part ever written for me. I played it for twelve or thirteen years and then went into the Service. Came out and my job was still there with Fibber McGee & Molly.

**WHY WERE FIBBER MCGEE & MOLLY SUCH POPULAR RADIO PERFORMERS?**

Jim & Marian were very down to earth people. The average audience could relate to them very easily. They were very well liked. There was never anything suggestive. It was good basic humour. Don Quinn was one of

the greatest comedy writers who ever lived. He had a fantastic sense of what would play. It was all very simple. But the things that happened to them happened to real people in everyday life. I think its honesty and simplicity made everyone love it. Everyone could relate to them in some way or another. That is missing from today's shows on TV. There were many funny lines, funny situations, and people would wait for the running gags. McGee's closet was known world wide. People roared at it. Everyone had a different mental picture of what was actually happening. They did know at the end of every closet scene there'd be that little tinkle of a bell. They waited for it. Everybody has a closet with too much damn stuff in it and they always say "I'm gonna fix that one day", which Jim always used to say. It's something everybody has had or has.

#### THE SHOW HAD SOME WONDERFUL SUPPORTING PLAYERS TOO.

The characters on the show were all looked forward to such as Bill Thompson who played the Oldtimer. Every one of those characters had their own following. Everybody was waiting for them. Before LaTrivia I did the weatherman called Foggy Williams for a brief time. Mrs Uppington was always popular. They knew she'd be very superior. The characters were well drawn. They all had their own followers who loved them. Put it all together, the show couldn't miss. Everything stopped when that show was on. People waited for it. It was like Amos & Andy. In San Francisco people would have speakers outside their stores so you wouldn't miss Amos & Andy. When the show came on traffic would stop. People would really listen to those shows.

#### WHAT WAS THE PROCESS OF PUTTING TOGETHER A BIG NETWORK SHOW SUCH AS FIBBER MCGEE & MOLLY OR JACK BENNY LIKE FOR A RADIO PERFORMER?

For a big show like Fibber McGee & Molly or Jack Benny there would be two or three days at 10am of read throughs for timing. The cast of the shows were already set. We read the scripts Friday to get a rough timing. Cuts were made if it was too long or too short. This was for a Sunday night show. Saturday we'd come in at 10am, read and rehearse for two or three hours. Again

on Sunday we'd do a final read through and sit around and then finally do the show. We'd do two shows in those days. One for the west coast and one for the east coast. Until they developed tape we had to do it all live for the time difference. For the late show, three hours later for the east coast, the actors always would dress up in tuxedos. There was always an audience.

#### HAD THERE ALWAYS BEEN AUDIENCES FOR RADIO COMEDY SHOWS? WERE THEY DISAPPOINTED TO SEE ACTORS ON STAGE, READING SCRIPTS, STANDING AT MICROPHONES?

No. They knew how radio shows were done. Audiences started with comedy shows because the sponsors had no sense of humour. This is literally true. They couldn't tell reading the script whether a line was funny or if it would play. So when a show was done on stage with an audience the sponsor would sit up in a glass booth and listen to the audience response. Then they could go, "Oh that was funny". That's the only way they could tell! But they wouldn't laugh themselves. They'd hear the audience laugh and then decide it was a funny show. So that's why audiences started. Naturally, I prefer working in front of an audience for comedy for the timing. The audiences were great. There was never any trouble getting an audience for the big shows.

#### FANS OF VINTAGE RADIO ALWAYS TALK ABOUT THE MAGIC OF RADIO. COULD YOU DESCRIBE WHAT MADE THE MEDIUM OF RADIO SO SPECIAL FOR COMEDY AND DRAMA?

Imagination was the big thing about radio. We lost all imagination when we lost radio. I think it's the young who suffer the most. In radio days when they put on a mystery show, and you were listening, when the door creaked open, you saw what terrified YOU the most. Therefore you were frightened. People used to really shudder with fear when these wonderful mystery shows came on, like The Whistler, because they could "see" these things going on. You put the same thing on TV, you don't get the same impact. Imagination is missing in TV. You have to see someone else's idea of what is scary and it isn't everybody's. But when you only hear the sound made by some unknown creature, the unknown creature you see is what you imagine as horrible.

#### THE TECHNOLOGY IN EARLY RADIO MUST HAVE BEEN PRETTY PRIMITIVE BY TODAY'S RECORDING STANDARDS.

We used to record at night because it was when most of us radio actors were free. We would do syndicated series on ET's. They were wax, they weighed sixteen pounds and were 78 rpm and were several inches thick. When you made a mistake you had to start all over again because they was no way you could rectify any mistakes on these wax discs. These were very crude recordings in those days. So we would go to work maybe at 11pm after the day's work was done and they could get enough actors together for a syndicated series. There was one show called "Don Hitchcock" (the name of a gasoline in California), and the story was about this young man who wore a cape and rode a horse. There was one episode I was playing the heavy and at the last minute Don turns up on horseback to save everybody. There'd been this big fight scene leading up to this wonderful final climax and the final line was "It's Don Hitchcock"! It was about four in the morning; we were all tired and we'd made three or four episodes of the series already that night. This was the final one of the night. I had a couple of scenes I wasn't in so I slept under this grand piano in the studio. A friend was to wake me before my cue. The cue came and I came up to the microphone and my line was: "Its Don Hitchcock". Music up and out, the end. I walked up to the microphone and said "It's Dan Hoecake". Well, I was almost killed by the cast. We had to do the whole thing over again from word one. We got out at about 6am instead of 4 am. I was not a popular man that morning. They wanted to murder me!

#### IN ALL YOUR YEARS PERFORMING YOU MUST HAVE WORKED WITH SOME PRETTY STIFF COMPETITION. HOW WOULD YOU DEAL WITH THEM IN PERFORMANCE?

I have had actors try to upstage me. I just stand perfectly still and watch them. They think the audience is watching them do their bits of business that aren't in the script but they don't realize they're watching me to see what I'll do when they stop. I've had it happen to me many times. It's a wonderful "out". When they catch on they never try to upstage me again. I do it out of self-defence but it works. There is only one star in a

production and that is the play itself. If the play is good that's what sells it. If the play is good the only way an audience can enjoy it is if the actors are playing the play and not trying to be stars.

**YOU FIRST WORKED WITH LUCILLE BALL IN RADIO ON "MY FAVORITE HUSBAND". HOW DID THAT HAPPEN? WHY DID YOU NOT GO ON TO "I LOVE LUCY" ON TV?**

I was called to an audition for a part with a young woman from the pictures named Lucy Ball. Bea Benaderet was my wife, I was the banker. We would have played the Bill Frawley-Vivian Vance parts on TV but we were otherwise signed up. Lucy had asked us both but I was signed to do "Our Miss Brooks". Bea was signed to do Burns & Allen.

**WHEN TV CAME ALONG RADIO SEEMED TO QUICKLY WHITHER AND DIE. WHY DID RADIO GIVE UP SO EASILY?**

TV brought movies into the house and people were delighted to be able to sit in their own livingroom without having to go out and watch movies in their own stocking feet for

nothing. They wanted to see the stars in their own room. It was irresistible. When you could see Jack Benny it was exciting. You were dying to see what he looked like, what you'd imagined he'd look like. Whether he did or not didn't matter, you were seeing him in your room. It was amazing. When someone recognizes me on the street I know they wonder why I don't recognize them. They've seen me in their house. They can't understand why I don't know them. It's true of any TV performer. They feel that you should recognize them as well as they recognize you.

**FINALLY, MR. GORDON, YOU'VE BEEN IN RADIO, TV, FILM AND THE LIVE STAGE FOR QUITE A NUMBER OF YEARS NOW. TO WHAT DO YOU ATTRIBUTE YOUR SUCCESS AND LONGEVITY?**

It's strictly good luck. Being at the right place at the right time. I've worked for 74 years. I am grateful. It is a privilege to work at the profession I love. I know actors who've been in the business longer but they haven't always been working. I have. I've never had to have a job ever outside of radio, TV or film. I've always had a job in acting. It keeps me young. It's a lot of luck. I love

what I do and it keeps me alive. I'm 81 and I expect to be in the business another ten years and then they'll have to throw me out. I am grateful to do what I love to do.

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GALE GORDON  
1906-1995

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## STAFF CHANGES

The winter 1985 issue of the NARA NEWS announced that Tom Monroe had agreed to become our cassette librarian. Tom built what was then a small and disorganized library into one that now contains over 20,000 old time radio shows. This he coupled with many rental "specials" and notably rapid service. After ten years at the helm Tom has decided to step down. We greatly appreciate the many thousands of hours that Tom has put into this program.

Taking over as cassette librarian is Barry Hill. Barry can be contacted at Route #1, Box 197, Belpre, Ohio 45714. We appreciate Barry's willingness to take on this gigantic task and we look forward to working with him.

# BOOK SHELF

by Hal Stephenson

## *Screenwriter -- Words Become Pictures*

This book features interviews with eleven men and one woman who wrote movie scripts. Many programs on *Screen Director's Playhouse* and *Lux Radio Theater* are adaptations for radio broadcast of their work. An example of the motion pictures that each author wrote is listed below.

Person Interviewed: A movie script this writer wrote, its year of release, and the nature of his or her contribution:

Charles Bennett *The Man Who Knew Too Much* 1956, co-story writer of remake  
A. I. Bezzerides *Beneath the Twelve Mile Reef* 1953, screenplay  
Irving Brecher *Bye Bye Birdie* 1963, screenplay  
*The Life of Riley* 1949, story, screenplay, producer, director

John Bright *She Done Him Wrong* 1933, co-screenplay  
Philip Dunne *How Green Was My Valley* 1941, screenplay  
William Ludwig *Love Laughs at Andy Hardy* 1946, co-screenplay

Nat Perrin *The Gracie Allen Murder Case* 1939, screenplay  
Allen Rivkin *Till the End of Time* 1946, screenplay  
Wells Root *Magnificent Obsession* 1954, co-screenplay

Allan Scott *Remember the Day* 1941, co-screenplay  
Curt Siodmak *Moonraker* 1978, in part from his novel *Skyport*  
Catherine Turney *My Reputation* 1946, screenplay

*Screenwriter -- Words Become Pictures* by Lee Server (1987) has 256 pages including many black and white pictures, writer's filmographies, a bibliography, and an index. U.S. hard bound price is \$22.50 for ISBN 1-55562-018-3. Paperback has ISBN 1-55562-017-5. The U.S. publisher is The Main Street Press, Inc., William Case House, Pittstown, NJ 08867. The Canadian publisher is Methuen Publications, 2330 Midland Ave., Agincourt Ontario M1S 1P7. This book summary is reproduced with the permission of the publishers.

Another book by Lee Server, *Danger is My Business*, was summarized with emphasis on the origin of *The Shadow*. It appeared in the Spring 1995 issue of *NARA NEWS* on pp. 19-20 of Vol. XXIII, No. 1.

The author of *The Life of Riley*, Irving Brecher, may interest vintage radio fans. An edited version of his interview is on the next page.

Irving Brecher produced radio's *The Life of Riley* and wrote it without credit. As one of Metro's movie writers, he was not supposed to be writing (outside the studio) for radio. However, Irving produced, wrote, and directed the film of *Riley* in 1949.

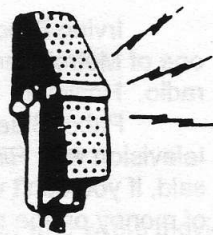
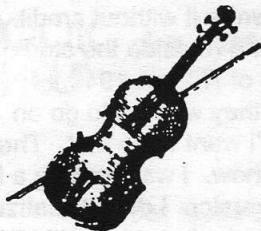
Pabst Blue Ribbon sponsored *Riley* on radio. In 1949 they wanted to go on television with *Riley*. Live, from New York. Irving said "I didn't want to do that. They said, if you don't want to do it, we'll have to cancel the radio show. I was making a lot of money on the radio show, so I agreed to do the television version. **I didn't realize at the time that Pabst Blue Ribbon was just filling the television time slot with *Riley* so they would have it for Madison Square Garden boxing the next fall.** We made a ridiculous deal for me to do the radio show from Los Angeles and the television show from New York. I realized I couldn't live this way--shuttling back and forth on airplanes all week. I went to NBC and told them I wanted to put the show on film. They said it was against their policy. If we put it on film, we didn't need *them*. They said, you could put it on film but *you* have to pay the difference. Pabst was paying me \$8,200 for each production. To put *Riley* on film cost me \$2,000 more a show."

William Bendix, who had played *Riley*, wasn't available for television. Pabst said they didn't care--get anybody. Irving went to New York and found a guy named Jackie Gleason. Irving's agent said "Don't touch this guy, he's unreliable." But in desperation the role was given to Jackie Gleason. The show was licensed later to NBC and they produced the long series with William Bendix.

"I made 26 shows with Jackie Gleason in a little store on Melrose Avenue. It won an Emmy. The day it won an Emmy, it was canceled."



Chester A. Riley (portrayed by William Bendix) and family are in this 1949 picture.



FROM  
**JACK PALMER**

**THE FIRST COUNTRY MUSIC SHOWS ON NETWORK RADIO**

Last time I promised a discussion of some of the earliest country music on network radio. Local country music shows were common on nearly all radio stations from the day the station went on the air. There was always plenty of local talent, it was cheap (Free!) and it did draw an audience. And the musicians soon discovered that they could use their radio broadcasts to build up an audience for their personal appearances. Apparently the system worked because it continued until World War II.

But regarding network shows, the first one I have been able to find was THE PICKARD FAMILY. They first appeared on the Blue network of NBC in the fall of 1928. The 30 minute program on Friday evenings was sponsored by Interwoven Socks, and was billed as light music. On later programs they were billed as novelty songs and orchestra. But they were actually a country family group similar to The Carter Family or The Stoneman's, In fact they actually appeared on the Grand Ole Opry in 1926. Their country heritage can be readily ascertained by listening to any of their old 78 RPM records. Like many country musicians, they eventually ended up on border radio in the mid 1930s.

Listed below in the order they first appeared are the other country shows which followed THE PICKARD FAMILY onto network radio. I selected 1936 as an arbitrary cutoff date, both to keep my list to a reasonable length and to ensure I discussed only the early shows. There is no doubt that many other shows that were broadcast in those early days featured songs and corny jokes that would be straight off of "Hee Haw" today. But they weren't actually country (Or hillbilly.) in the truest sense of the word. Perhaps several of the shows I have listed do not really qualify as country.

**NATIONAL FARM AND HOME HOUR.** This long running show went on the air in 1929 on NBC Blue. The show was broadcast at noon in the Central Time Zone. I discussed this show briefly in an earlier article. On the networks for almost 30 years, it has been almost completely overlooked by old time radio collectors and historians. Although mostly a farming news and discussion show, it also featured a musical segment for most of its run. There was a show called FARM AND HOME sponsored by Montgomery Ward which appeared in 1928. This may have been a precursor to the NATIONAL FARM AND HOME HOUR, but outside of the name I can find nothing to tie them together. Jay Hickerson's Ultimate History avers that copies of 12 of these shows are currently available. If anyone does have a copy I would love to hear it. Most of my knowledge of this show is from my own memories of listening to it as a child.



**SUNDAY AT SETH PARKER'S.** As the title implies this was first broadcast on Sunday evenings on NBC in the year 1929. Perhaps many will disagree that this was a country show. I agree that it was not strictly a country show, but it certainly played up the rural aspects. It was supposedly broadcast from a small town in New England and was written and MC'd by Phillips H. Lord (He played Seth Parker.) who later became famous for Gangbusters. The program was a rather slow paced drama with some singing (Mostly hymns.). It remained on the air for many years under several different titles. According to Jay's Ultimate History a copy of one show is available.

**HOMER RODEHEAVER HYMN SING.** This famous hymn singer of the 20s and 30s first appeared on CBS in 1930. He did two short evening shows a week. This is another not strictly country show, and probably should not be included here. As the title states, it featured the hymn singing of Rodeheaver. He was probably the most popular hymn singer of the 1920's and 30', based on the amount of his 78 RPM recordings I still run across when looking through old records.

**MOUNTAINEERS MUSIC.** In 1931 this program began to appear five evenings a week on NBC. It was sponsored by Pinex and billed as light music. I have been unable to find any information about this program, but based on the title, it has to be country.

**1932. CARSON ROBISON'S BUCKAROOS.** This was a short Friday evening program that began on NBC Blue 1932. Carson Robison had been involved in country music since he had teamed up with Vernon Dalhart in 1924 to do the first million selling country music record, THE PRISONER'S SONG. From that time on he wrote and performed country music almost exclusively. He had started out in vaudeville years before and later worked for Victor Records as a whistler and musical accompanist. He played the guitar, banjo and was such an outstanding whistler that he made several solo whistling records. He continued on network radio for many years under several series titles.. He specialized in sad ballads and western type songs. Jay's book indicates copies of 21 shows are currently available.

**CLAUDE W. MOYE.** In 1932 this program went on NBC three mornings a week. Since the program was billed as hillbilly songs, there can be no difficulty in identifying it. Besides the singer had appeared for several years on THE NATIONAL BARN DANCE as Pie Plant Pete where he accompanied his own singing with his guitar and harmonica..

**COLORADO COWBOYS.** Also in 1932 this group appeared every Friday afternoon on NBC BLUE. The program was billed as Western songs. Other than that I can find nothing about this group.

**WENDELL HALL.** In 1933 this popular singer first appeared on NBC. He had a 15 minute program on Sunday evenings. Hall was classified as a hillbilly by many, but he was actually more of a pop or novelty singer. His most famous song was It Ain't Gonna Rain No Mo, which he recorded with Carson Robison in the early 20's, while both were appearing in vaudeville.

(To be continued)

# The art of collecting classic radio in the 1990's vs. 1970's

## *A reflection on the past, present & future of OTR*

by Bob Burnham

The Hobby of old time radio collecting and the various functions within our special interest group has had more than its share of ups and downs. Many clubs and organizations have recently been celebrating 20 year anniversaries. The Hobby as we know it has been around for more than 20 years when you consider the earliest old time radio collectors began saving shows in the 1950's when a few popular shows were still being produced by the major networks.

The "golden age" of old time radio collecting in my mind was actually the 1970's. Sure, the equipment we had to work with was much poorer, and we had our own set of problems resulting from that, but many of the difficulties that cropped up in old time radio in the 1980's and continued at an even more accelerated pace in the '90's did not even exist in the 1970's.

The act of "selling" tapes of old time radio has long been a source of controversy among certain circles. For the most part, however, those collectors who **do** choose to sell to support their interest in collecting shows and the concept of "**Hobbyist-Dealer**" have become widely accepted by most within the inner circle of the Hobby. One of the major sources of support and growth of the **Friends of Old time Radio** convention is **directly** through the dollars from Hobbyist-Dealers. Widely accepted as the largest old time radio event anywhere in the country, this convention is the only one that actually honors and puts a special emphasis on accomplishments of **COLLECTORS** in addition to the professionals who created the shows.

The subject of copyright of old time radio is one I'm very weary of, but needs a few brief comments. There are some who believe that every show ever produced is copyrighted or is definitely someone's "property." Others feel that copyright or some form of "rights" exist on a relatively small number of shows (such as those produced in more recent decades). Research done at Library of Congress can verify whether a copyright was ever done on a show or script and if it was renewed — but that sometimes doesn't tell the complete story. A third line of thinking is "Until proven otherwise, a show is Public Domain." Unfortunately, that "proof" is often not revealed — if it exists — unless the issue is made into a legal action and brought before a court. These concerns were not on the minds of collectors and dealers of old time radio in the 1970's, but in this decade, are very major concerns.

I began actively collecting and trading old time radio with a relatively small circle of friends in the early 1970's. No thought was given to the physical act of copying shows. Yet one of my earliest sources of programs (a major dealer) started a lawsuit against myself and **seven** other Hobbyist-Dealers a couple decades later over a series we had traded and sold for better than 20 years. **That dealer opened up a "can of worms" by throwing a large sum of money at a corporation for an exclusive deal, then throwing another chunk of money at an attorney to start the action against us.** Frivolous? Yes. Greedy? Of course. Harmful to the Hobby? Certainly. Expensive? Most definitely. Thanks to the support of certain Hobby activists and organizations, that action was finally concluded. Many people got involved by raising funds, writing articles and making important phone calls. After about 5 years, that action concluded, more or less in favor of the Hobby, but the end result is that particular series is **no longer in circulation** — at least among most Hobbyist-Dealer catalogs.

What has become of the fun of trading? What about the personal contacts and friendships cultivated? The publications? There are some great ones going today, but I still miss National Radio Trader and Collector's Corner. **Sadly, old time radio dealing has become a game of money and power. If you have one, you can get the other.** If you have either, every move you make will be watched under a microscope by those with either, and you had better not step on anyone's toes, or you'll be the next legal victim. At least one person quit the Hobby as a result of the legal action described above. Another paid a huge settlement before the case was anywhere near concluding. There are fewer dealers now than ever before, limiting the choices of newcomers to the Hobby. People like Gary Dudash of AM Treasures, Joe Webb of Nostalgia Warehouse, Bob Joseph of Sound Tapes of the Past and Jerry Chapman of Airwaves have long since left the Hobby. All of these dealers were extremely active and dominant in the 1970's. They left for various reasons, but more often than not, the fact that they were no longer able to devote time to the hobby, for the minimal return, other than the

mere joy of collecting and listening. **\$6.00 for 6 hours of old time radio is a thing of the forgotten past.** Today, you may get a frequent attractive glossy catalog in your mailbox offering shows (or a more conservative mailing from a Hobbyist-Dealer), but **look at those prices!** Of course, this is not **entirely** the fault of anyone or thing in particular — the cost of **everything** has skyrocketed from postage to blank tape. But at the same time, those who **HAVE** survived need a little more incentive to "keep on keepin' on."

One thing **positive** that survived from that era is the concept of old time radio buying groups, where a group of several collectors pool their funds, and purchase programs from a few selected high quality sources. This concept was introduced to me by Hobbyist-Dealer Ron Barnett in the 1970's. (Ron is still very much open for business, last I heard). In 1983, I formed a buying group of my own and over the next few years, we proceeded to for example, purchase Don Aston's complete catalog at that time! That buying group, by the way, is still alive and well, and Don is still as active as ever.

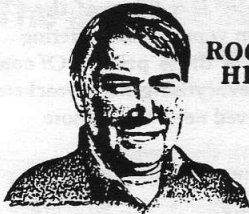
Maybe I'm a little wacky, but from a self-preservation standpoint, doesn't it make a lot more sense to **purchase** tapes from your fellow hobbyists rather than **SUE** them? Another major dealer today began in business around the same time I started the buying group — and started by buying tapes from people like us.

There **ARE** some positive things that have happened. There was a controversy that began in the 1970's and continued into the 1980's between Hobbyist-Dealers and one of the major clubs in the Hobby. They were concerned about certain shows getting into the mainstream of circulation due to agreements they had with those who contributed to the club's library. Club officers at that time chose to write formal cease and desist letters to Hobbyist-Dealers, rather than a friendlier approach. Since then, a kinder and gentler approach has won this groups' acceptance and endorsement (and dollars!) from those they used to antagonize.

The more obvious positive developments within old time radio were eluded to earlier: **Technology.** A lot of the equipment collectors used in the 1970's was of poor quality. To make matters worse, poor recording techniques were used and made still worse with poor tape. Unfortunately, some of those problems caused by early techniques such as double-tracking (recording separate programs on left and right channels of reel tapes) have spilled into this decade. If you obtain a show that has another show playing faintly in the background, it was probably caused somewhere along the line by this technique. There are still people who trade, sell and purchase in this format, but the majority are using cassettes. Modern cassette equipment is superior in every way to the consumer recording equipment available in the 1970's.

Where are we going from here? Despite the few positive notes pointed out, I see a dreary picture being painted for the future of old time radio as we know it. **The litigious nature of today's society and the tendency to monopolize by certain dealers means there's no end in sight to the shows that will be swallowed up by the legal system.** Everything that anyone **thinks** has any value will be either rented or paid for to a handful of individuals or corporations that you can count on one hand. Maybe the current crop of high-visibility **NON-Hobbyist-Dealers** say they will not bother the old time radio Hobby and the mom and pop dealers that got them started. But the next decade of power-hungry Corporate bulldogs **will** have a different attitude. Sadly, I see the day when today's clubs will have to pull every non-licensed copy of every show from their libraries or face court action. **How long do you think a video rental store would stay in business if all they offered were bootleg copies of movies? The same will apply to old time radio clubs... not tomorrow, not next year, but SOME day.** If every recording in their rental libraries does not bear someone's © or ® they will be in trouble. Period. I hope I don't live to see that day! Unfortunately, it has already started happening! A certain individual has asked a club to remove certain shows from their library. Furthermore, if any of today's Hobbyist-Dealers are still dominant in the 2,000's, they will have to either go "legit" or quit (whatever that means). For now, let's enjoy the ride, and collect as many shows as we can possibly put our hands on that we'll have even the remotest interest in, in the years ahead.

Everyone should start their **own** buying group and buy out **other** people's catalogs, and rent all the tapes in the rental libraries while they still have most of the good shows in them (Besides I could use the orders... and the clubs can use your support <wry grin> )!!



ROGER  
HILL

## THE OLD CURMUDGEON

Well, here it is nearly September and I've been promising Jim Snyder for over a month that I would get a column to him for this next NARA NEWS. My Summer, 1995 issue just came last week and what a beautiful production. Janis DeMoss has sure done a great job of getting it together and sent out. And the logo looks all cleaned up and spiffy thanks to Gene Larson. Don't recall the journal looking so good before. Maybe it's that eye-catching pink cover! Wow! Of course, nothing would be any good if it weren't for Jim Snyder and his handling of the editorship as well as he does. He's really gotten the recent issues looking so professional. Thanks to you Jim and to you Janis and to you Gene and all the contributors to this last issue.

For the first time in over 20 years, I'll be attending the convention in Newark this October and looking forward to meeting many of the friends I've only known by letter and phone over these many years. No better time to go to the East Coast Convention than for their 20th. I'm still amazed by all that the Gassman's did for the 20th SPERDVAC convention last November (in 1994). What a treat that was!

Haven't heard much from Gene Larson these days. He recently moved into a nicer place and warned me that Miles City was about to be inundated with their annual cattle drive, or rodeo, or wild west days, or some such event. He implied he'd be much too busy to do any writing for awhile and that I should be glad not to be in the midst of such an onslaught of outsiders. If you ever have any chance to visit Miles City, Montana (except during cattle drive days in August), it is an interesting place. They've got a museum there of western history that makes the trip worthwhile just to see that. Of course, Gene would probably enjoy meeting any NARA members too.

Anyway, back to the subject of vintage radio. In preparation for this column, I had written to nearly two

dozen people whose names and addresses were in *Reminisc* magazine. If you've never seen this publication, it's a delight worth subscribing to. Each issue is just chock-full of great photos and articles from times past. And there's nearly always at least one article on vintage radio (as well as movies). At any rate, in each issue there's a page with names/addresses of people who are seeking something--such as words to a song about grandma's lye soap, or where to find directions to make paper hats like pressmen wore. So I sent off to each person listed a copy of NARA's table of contents and a copy of a short article. This was supposed to let them see that I was on the up-and-up for what I was going to ask and also maybe to clue them in on a darned good old radio organization (i.e., NARA). I also asked each person to reflect on some of the memories they might have of old radio listening and to share them with us. Well, I received back a grand total of 2 replies and they were not very extensive in their comments on early radio. Both writers were in their 70's or older. And after all that, I now can't locate the letters to use for this column! But let me share with you some other bits and pieces.

I've no idea if Jim Snyder will mention his summer trip to Norway but I thought it fascinating that one week he was enjoying (?) 23° temperatures in Geiranger, Norway as it was snowing and seven days later he's back in Mesa, Arizona sunning himself in 122° climate! What a change.

Jumping to another topic...I've spent some time (and quite a bit of money) trying to locate the right blank audio cassette labels for use with a sheet-feed inkjet printer and my software on the Macintosh computer. I tried Papers Direct which has nice looking (and very pricey) labels in pretty colors but some of them won't hold inkjet ink very well and others don't look so crisp and clean. Then I had some Avery ones which are okay but also more expensive than I wanted

to pay. The software company that handles what I use to print the labels had their own brand of blank label too but it took forever to get them. Then there was Wholesale Tape Supply (WTS) which has absolutely beautiful pastel labels but were not laid out in standard two column, six row format and I just couldn't get my printer to adjust for clean printing on the label. There was too much overlap and run-off onto other areas. The representative for WTS says they'll provide the other format soon. But I did find a relatively inexpensive source of decent white blank audio cassette labels and they were perfect. The paper stock was thick enough to feel strong and to work well in maneuvering the labels onto cassette shells. The inkjet printed very nicely on these labels, although one must be careful not to touch them right away as they are completed since the ink will smear. It takes a few seconds for the ink to get dry enough. Also, these labels peeled off well and adhered beautifully to the plastic cassette. The name of the company? Professional Labels. What a perfect name. If anyone is interested in further information on this company or the others I've tried, just drop me a note. Maybe one day my address will be back in the journal. (hint! hint!)

Now that we are in the store (#23 Bayhill Shopping Center; San Bruno, CA 94066), you could reach me by fax (415- 871-6062) or by phone (same area code: 871-6063). I didn't get to try the Burlington labels or some other sources I was told of but for white blank audio cassette labels, I'm convinced that Profession Label has the right kind for me. Of course, if you use pin-feed or laser printer, your needs and abilities may be different concerning these other labels.

David Siegel and his wife Susan visited a couple of months ago as they were traveling the West Coast and putting together material for their latest guide to used book stores. Some of you may know David as a collector of radio shows who has just

about anything and everything under the sun. What a huge catalog he puts together too. Since he has most all that anyone has, he says he'll trade his radio shows (on open reel only) for movies he wants on video tape (VHS). Another friend, Jim Stringham in Lansing, Michigan...has been trading on this basis with David and has been very happy with much of what he's received.

In addition to joining the W.C. Fields fan club, I've also received literature from the Al Jolson fan club and Popeye fan club. The Popeye one has some very well done publications and offer such items to members as popeye cookie jar and sets of cards with popeye characters on them. One advantage of being in business with something like this vintage media store is that memberships in various groups can be deducted as business expenses. Makes it more possible to join all the worthwhile organizations and not feel guilty as spending so much money.

Another part of starting this business has involved finding reproductions of old radios. Sometimes they're just a nicely carved wooden knick-knack in shape of a cathedral radio. Other times they are a fully operational unit such as the ones Thomas company makes. We have several from them, including a 1902 gramophone which looks like it's ready to play the cylinder record on it's display. All of these models have AM/FM radio and a cassette opening into which you can place a favorite Fibber McGee and Molly show or one of those superlative Quiet Please productions. If you don't know about them, I can send you information and even get one for you at less than retail. (Doesn't that sound like a plot line from a FM & M show? "Lissen Doc, I can get that for you at half-price!")

Another friend I've made recently through correspondence turns out to share many of my values concerning science teaching and wildlife. This is Chuck Juzek of New Port Richey in Florida. Chuck sent me a copy of a nicely done 8-page article on "Yesteryear's Heroes". Now Chuck's main love is the pulps but he knows about and overlaps into vintage radio as well. Through him, I've come to know a little more about pulp magazines than I did before. Sure does seem like there's plenty of hobby subjects out there for everyone. So why do juveniles have to focus on violence and crime so much? What a shame!

Another friend from the past who has re-established contact is Dave Amaral. Dave now lives in Southern California but once worked at KCBS in San Francisco as an engineer. Dave has some wonderful sounding radio shows and has always taken care to record and dub with the very best techniques and equipment. Speaking of dubbing, I've just acquired a used Sony dubber which can make 3 copies at once from one master cassette. It automatically rewinds all tapes before starting the dubbing and with a VU meter for both sides, the volume levels can be properly set before starting. The copying is done almost faster than Marshall Dillon draws his revolver and then all the tapes are automatically rewound again and a little beeper goes off when it's done. Now I wonder why in the world I never had something like this before...and then I remember as I see the price tag of a new one! But if anyone has cassettes they want dubbed for some reason, I can probably offer you a very reasonable arrangement to do this.

If you're into used books, especially on radio or other entertainment media, you might drop a

line to The Book Nook and see if they have what you might be seeking. Write them at 366 Route 9W; Upper Nyack, NY 10960. Very nice people!

Another group you might like to know about, even if you aren't anywhere near the S.F. Bay Area to participate in their luncheons, is the Broadcast Legends group. These are people who've been in radio business as performers, writers, engineers, producers, and you-name-it for at least 20 years. They meet once every 2-3 months for lunch and a presentation of interest. The newsletter itself is such a glamorous production that it's almost worth the price to join. But if you would like to join and meet the qualifications, send \$25 to Broadcast Legends membership; 75 Almenar Dr.; Greenbrae, CA 94904.

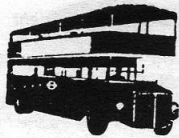
And if you're getting more interested in vintage movies as I did, you might like to contact Peter Kavel for some of the films he offers which are not run-of-the-mill types. For example, I purchased "Remember Pearl Harbor" and "Ferry to Hong Kong" (with Orson Welles) from him to mention just two. Ask him for his catalog at: 1123 Ohio Ave.; Alamogordo, NM 88310. And if you want older TV shows on video tape, contact Tom Kleinschmidt at 529 Cleardale Avenue; Ewing, NJ 08618. He has a wonderful catalog and has things as early as 1948 and 1949.

Well, I know Jim S. is gonna have to edit some of this column out to make it fit into his available space so by the next issue, we should have this business venture running a bit more smoothly and maybe by then the piles of paper will be better organized. (and maybe pigs will learn to fly and sing!) But until then, I just wish you all happy listenin'!

## Frank and Ernest



# FROM ACROSS THE POND



by Ray Smith



For many people in Britain, the VE-Day celebrations in May of 1995 were even more moving than the street parties held back in 1945 to recognize the end of war in Europe. For some it was a case of *deja vue*. On the balcony of Buckingham Palace, flanked by her daughters, Queen Elizabeth and The Princess Margaret, stood the most beloved member of Britain's Royal Family, a tiny, fragile and gracious old lady, affectionately known as The Queen Mum. 50 years earlier, as Britain's reigning Queen and wife of King George the Sixth, she had stood on the same balcony with her daughters, acknowledging the love and affection of the cheering masses. On the original VE Day, it was the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) wireless which brought London's carnival atmosphere into homes throughout the old British Empire. The "telly" carried the 1995 celebrations but wireless stars were front and centre. From a large stage below the Palace balcony, three of the UK's best loved entertainers, thrilled the Royal Family as well as the huge crowd. The ever-young rock and roll king Cliff Richard, sometimes referred to as the UK's "Elvis" sang a special song to the Queen Mum, one of his big songs, *Congrat...U...lations*. Then came the portly Welsh comic, Sir Harry Secombe, both a war and a wireless veteran, proudly wearing his military medals, while his powerful tenor voice belted out *We'll Keep A Welcome In The Hillside*s. Sir Harry was even introduced as "Neddy Seagoon from radio's famous *Goon Show*." And of course no wartime nostalgia concert in Britain would be complete without the most celebrated wartime singer of all-time, Dame Vera Lynn who led a huge crowd singing along the original hits from her wartime BBC radio series, *Sincerely Yours*. The tears were never far away as we hummed the familiar melodies of *Berkeley Square...Room Five Hundred and Four...When the Lights Come on Again...We'll Meet Again...Yours in the Grey of December...Comin' In On A Wing And a Prayer* and of course, *There'll Be Bluebirds Over The White Cliffs of Dover*. Now in her mid 70's Dame Vera sings better than ever and must be one of the few senior citizens in the world of entertainment who can still pack concert halls from Sydney, Australia to Toronto, Canada. When I went to one of her stage shows three years ago, I was even more impressed. This grandmotherly lady not only captivated her



Vera Lynn sings "for the boys" (1945)

audience, but she entertained them for a solid one hundred and five minutes without a break. Maybe I shouldn't have been surprised. After all, Dame Vera Lynn was already a wireless legend back in the golden age of radio.

But while Vera's wartime BBC show *Sincerely Yours* was a real morale-booster for the Allied Forces, a show with the unlikely title of *Workers Playtime* was doing the same for the weary war workers in Britain's factories. *Workers Playtime* was a half hour variety (vaudeville) show transmitted three times weekly and later in its life, twice weekly, from factory canteens (cafeterias) throughout the British Isles. It was even discussed at the War Cabinet table. However, I doubt if Sir Winston Churchill's famous "We Shall Fight Them From The Rooftops" speech would have had quite the same historical impact, had he suggested that "We shall even fight them from *Workers Playtime*, coming today from a factory canteen in Clacton-on-Sea, Essex." That isn't as unlikely as it sounds. Although the cigar-totin' "Winnie" didn't appear on *Workers Playtime*, one of his Cabinet colleagues did. The Minister of Labour, Ernest Bevin was so keen on the idea, he broadcast on the first program in October of 1941. And he even took the unusual step of summoning Bill Gates, whom the BBC had chosen as the shows resident emcee to Whitehall, in advance of the program, presumably to give him the governments seal of approval. Originally the Ministry of Labour provided the BBC with a list of factories it wanted the program to visit. Production and O.B. (Outside Broadcast) staff visited the factory in advance to determine if its canteen had a suitable stage from which the entertainers could broadcast, to ensure that the worker's normal lunch break coincided with the program's 12:30 - 1:00 p.m. "live" transmission slot and most important of all, whether the land lines and related technical facilities could be "managed," to make the chosen factory a suitable and reliable outside broadcast point. Just in case the "live" transmission broke down, the BBC had two pre-recorded editions of *Workers Playtime* in reserve.



*Vic Oliver, the Austrian-American comedian who starred in Hi Gang and periodically on Workers Playtime.*



*Bill Gates who emceed Workers Playtime from 1941 until 1964.*

During the war *Workers Playtime* took on a cloak and dagger aura, since for reasons of security, the government wouldn't allow the factory location to be mentioned on the wireless. Bill Gates overcame this restriction by announcing that the broadcast was coming from a factory canteen, "somewhere in Britain." For the professional vaudeville entertainers booked on the show, *Workers Playtime* was a far cry from the gracious and elegant variety theatres, the Empires, Palaces and Hippodromes of provincial Britain, in which they usually performed. Some of the more bizarre "factory sites" included a slate quarry fifty feet below ground, the rain-drenched quaysides of Clydebank, Scotland when the show came from the famous John Brown Shipyards and a converted poultry shed which had

its own unique "fragrance." But in 1943 at a factory in Bristol, Workers Playtime was given the ultimate honour, being chosen for a Royal Command Performance before Queen Mary, the Queen Mother. After the war Workers Playtime settled down to a comfy format that usually consisted of 3 or 4 "turns" including pop singers, instrumentalists, specialty acts suited to radio, (like Leslie Welch, the Memory Man) and comedians. When the show came from the Bondor LTD factory in Baldock, Hertfordshire on April 28th 1950, the shows pianist/accompanist, James Moodie got things off to a rousing start with the community sing song, "We ain't got a barrell of money..." Then Margaret Eaves enchanted the crowd as she performed This World of Ours, This Happy Heart and I'll Follow My Secret Heart. Next, in contrast, was the gap-toothed English comic, Terry Thomas, who later became a world famous movie actor. He got exactly eight minutes for his "patter" and a generous 60 seconds for the long forgotten comedy song, Fiddly Dee. Closing the show, was that edition's top of the bill (headliner) the black singer/pianist Leslie Hutchinson better known as Hutch. Hearts must have been popular back then. Margaret Eaves sang two songs about them earlier in the show and Hutch took up the cause of St Valentine, opening his act on My Foolish Heart, continuing with Your Heart and My Heart and ending on the powerful finale, My Heart and I. With a performer like Hutch, who more than earned his 40 guinea fee for that broadcast, (roughly US \$85 in the 50's) the BBC was onto a real winner and it was no surprise that he made many more equally succesful broadcasts on Workers Playtime during its 23 years on the airwaves.

It was fitting that the man who had introduced the very first Workers Playtime from Wales, back in 1941, played the same role at the end of the show's lengthy regular run in October 1964, with a broadcast from Hatfield Heath. It was an emotional moment for the "gentle shepherd" of Workers Playtime, Bill Gates, as it must have been for two of the program's most frequent guest entertainers who joined him for the very last show. One was the former wartime singer, the late Anne Shelton who was still broadcasting in the 60's and 70's. The other was veteran comic Cyril Fletcher with his "odd odes" (funny verses) a comedy star who enjoyed a long radio career on Does The Team Think and Fletchers Friends while appearing every Sunday night on tv's What's My Line. Workers Playtime had been the "variety theatre of the airwaves," providing work for a huge number of star and supporting performers, who spent most of their time touring the British music halls. Perhaps it was fitting that the series came to an end at the same time as Britain's vaudeville theatres were shutting down in record numbers... victims of television.



*Cyril Fletcher, the king of "Odd Odes," heard on the final Workers Playtime.*

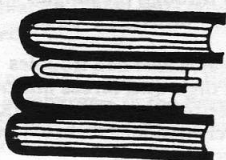
In the mid 90's the British vaudeville that had been written off thirty years earlier, has re-emerged as "the new variety" to find enthusiastic audiences in small civic theatres throughout Britain. Interest in "Olde Tyme Musichall" is kept alive and indeed flourishing,



by The British Musichall Society with members around the world. The BBC has been replaying favourite variety shows from the golden days of radio which have been very popular. And Dame Vera Lynn, who was broadcasting "for the boys" in 1945, is still singing about those White Cliffs of Dover, 50 years later.

One Londoner, when asked on tv why he felt it was so important to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of VE-Day and to remember the wireless stars and shows of 1945, seemed to have the best answer. "Well," he said, "few of us are likely to be around for the 100th anniversary, are we....?" Now there's some food for thought!

Cheerio for now.



## PRINTED MATERIALS LIBRARY

**Bob Sabon** Librarian



Bob Sabon reports that three of the four sections of the printed materials library are up and running and ready for you to use. Three of the four catalogs for the library are now ready for you in "nice, new, crisp" format:

The book catalog lists 407 books.

The script catalog has 228 scripts listed.

The catalog for logs has 29 of them currently.

The magazine section, which also includes booklets and other assorted materials, still has quite a bit of work necessary before that portion of the library is ready. Bob hopes to have this operating by the end of the year. He also says that he might, at some future date, be able to provide a catalog on cassette tapes for the blind, should there be requests for this format.

If you would like to receive the three catalogs that are ready, as listed above, please send Bob ten 32 cent stamps to cover the cost of the mailing. He will send them to you in an unfolded large brown envelope. Send requests to:

Robert Sabon  
308 West Oraibi Drive  
Phoenix, AZ 85027

# History finally honoring WWII Navajo code talkers

By Nancy Lofholm  
Tribune/Cox News Service

**F**ORT DEFIANCE, Ariz. — Carl Gorman was out counting livestock near Navajo Mountain in the spring of 1942 when a buddy came with the news.

"The Marines are looking for guys for special duty. Let's join. Maybe we'll get big-shot jobs in Washington."

Lured by the promise of adventure and a chance to see the world beyond the stark and remote Navajo Nation, Gorman didn't hesitate to make the trip to Fort Defiance to sign up.

Many others who heard the call for recruits go out over shortwave radio across the reservation showed up, too. Samuel Billison was drawn by the heroics he had seen in John Wayne war movies. Wilson Keedah Sr. went because there were no jobs on the reservation. Dennie Housteen signed on when he was told he would get a blue dress uniform. William Dean Wilson, then 15, lied about his age and went on the advice of a high school teacher.

Even though there is no word in the Navajo language for patriotism, they all went because they believed it was their duty. They were willing to fight for mother earth, their tribe, their families and for a country that less than 80 years before had been making war on their grandparents. They went to fight for a country that had not yet given them the right to vote.

There were 30 of them who initially signed up and were accepted for special duty. One dropped out because of illness, and the 29 boarded a bus for boot camp carrying their pouches of sacred corn pollen for protection. They had no idea what their top-secret special assignment would be.

They didn't know their weapon would be their language or that they would be honored later in life for playing a pivotal role in winning World War II as Navajo code talkers.

In the early 1940s, only about two dozen people outside the Navajo Nation could speak Navajo. The language was virtually unknown off the reservation because it is very complicated and it is rarely written.

Philip Johnston, a civil engineer for the city of Los Angeles, was one of the few non-Navajos who could speak the language in the 1940s. He had grown up on the Navajo reservation with his missionary parents. And he had served in World War I in France so he knew of the need for secret military communications.

Johnston proposed to the Pentagon that a code be devised from the Navajo language. His idea was initially met with skepticism. Other Indian languages had already been tried for wartime communications, but they were translated by Germans who had studied in the United States between wars.

Johnston knew Navajo could be different, and he was tenacious about selling the idea. He set up some demonstrations for the top brass. He split Navajos into two rooms and had them relay messages. Then he did the same thing with Navajos in air-to-ground communications. The speed and accuracy of the transmissions was impressive enough that a pilot program was approved.

The first Navajo recruits had to make up a code for 211 military terms. Their code passed muster with Navy intelligence officers, who for three weeks tried and failed to decipher any messages from the code.

From the first days in boot camp when their braids and ponytails were shaved off, quite a few of the Navajo code talkers wondered what they had gotten themselves into.

Their fellow soldiers called them "chief" or "Geronimo." They were often teased about why they didn't bring their bows and arrows to war with them.

"They treated us really rough, but we were kind of used to that rough stuff," Gorman recalls.

But nothing in their lives prepared them for what they would experience in war.

In 1942, Japan ruled most of the hundreds of islands strung out over thousands of miles in the Pacific. The United States was concentrating troops there to try to break that hold, and that's where the code talkers were sent.

The fighting was dirty and dangerous, and the troops had to live under some wretched conditions. In some ways, the Navajos adapted well. They occasionally hunted animals and found plants to supplement their C-rations. They were good at creeping noiselessly through the jungles and at keeping their bearings even in darkness.

The Navajos also had troubles because of their own forces mistook them for Japanese with their dark skin, high cheekbones and sometimes Oriental-looking eyes.

In one incident of mistaken identity, a Navajo was desperately trying to send a message to another unit on the front lines but was getting no answer. The Navajo who should have been receiving the message had been captured and was being held prisoner by his own troops.

Because of these befuddling experiences, some officers, including Gorman's, at first refused to use the code talkers.

Those who did try them had a striking early example of their effectiveness when U.S. forces were able to overtake a small island near New Guinea where the Japanese had set up an air base and supply depot.

Previous sneak attack attempts had failed because the Japanese were easily breaking the U.S. code and had plenty of advance warning of attacks.

When 11 Navajo code talkers were sent in to take charge of communications, the U.S. forces were able to surprise the Japanese with a series of pounding attacks.

In 1943, the Japanese were on the defensive and the United States began hopscotching troops through the Pacific Islands.

From the Solomon Islands to Okinawa the code talkers were there — in the battles of Tarawa, Saipan, Tinian, Guam and Iwo Jima.

In every one of these crucial battles, the words "New Mexico" or "Arizona" crackling over the radios indicated a message in Navajo would follow. The gibberish of the Navajo confounded the Japanese in every case.

The Navajo's code talking usually put them on the front lines of the battles. Seven died. Others still don't know today how they survived. William Dean Wilson fell into a foxhole with several Japanese but was able to scramble out. Bill Henry Toledo ran through a volley of sniper shots after his radio was knocked out. With mortars and artillery landing all around him, Thomas Begay was sent in to replace a fellow code talker who was killed.

.....

In the middle of a crowd jostling trays of hamburgers in the Burger King at Kayenta sits a large glass case filled with war memorabilia.

Inside is a Japanese land mine, trinkets from Okinawa, medals for bravery and a scarred and dented field radio. There are old black-and-white pictures of helmeted Marine code talkers. There is a framed certificate of appreciation to the code talkers signed by former President Ronald Reagan.

For the code talkers, this recognition was belated.

The existence of the code talkers was kept secret until 1969. When they were honored at a reunion of the Fourth Marine Division that year, it was the first time they were officially and publicly recognized for the crucial part they played in the war.

In the homecoming hoopla of World War II, the Navajo code talkers had filtered unnoticed back to the reservation where they tried to shake the horrors of war in traditional cleansing ceremonies. Some faded into the skid rows of cities where they treated their war scars with alcohol.

They all returned to find their service to their country hadn't changed things at home. Their right to vote was still restricted. Teachers in reservation schools were

forbidding Navajo children to speak their native language. A third of their sheep herds had been killed in a government attempt to curb overgrazing.

A few of the returning code talkers, like Gorman, used their G.I. benefits to go to college. Others, who had jacked up their age to enlist, finished high school.

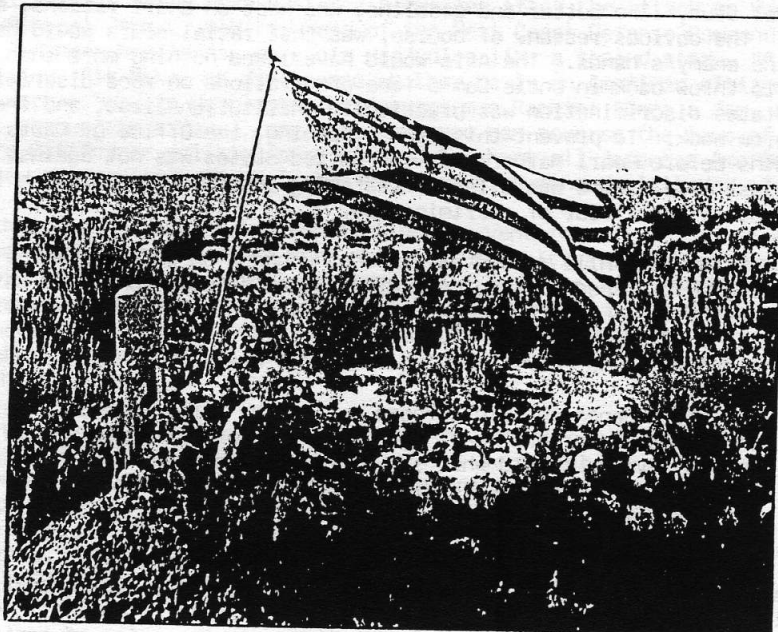
They all kept quiet. They had been sent home with instructions to keep their code talking secret, and it remained that way for nearly a quarter of a century.

But the code talkers are now getting their due. Everyone from Hollywood producers to college historians are wanting to know more about the code talkers.

The Senate has declared Aug. 14 National Code Talkers Day. The code talkers are in demand at parades and ceremonies around the country.

Wearing their medals along with their traditional turquoise jewelry, the code talkers have appeared at the last three presidential inaugurations.

They have formed a group — The Navajo Code Talkers Association — and through that organization they have helped build a bridge between two cultures.



NANCY LOFHOLM/Daily Sentinel/Cox Newspapers

Navajo code talker Johnny Tabaha Sr., a Marine in World War II, is buried among other Navajo military veterans at Fort Defiance.

# Fighting Words: Name-Calling on Radio in WWII - Part I

By Ken Weigel

"Why does Hitler make all his speeches from a beer garden? Why, that's so when he starts foaming at the mouth, nobody will notice."  
(Fibber McGee & Molly broadcast, December 16, 1941)

\* \* \* \*

Earlier this year the Los Angeles *Times* carried an article about a Japanese-American league that forced a video distributor to recall a WWII Bugs Bunny cartoon containing racial slurs of Japanese soldiers. The cartoon depicted the soldiers with buck teeth and other exaggerated features. That brought to mind a wartime serial I had seen of television--*Smilin' Jack*--where it was painfully obvious that certain references to the enemy had been muted.

More recently, Roger Hill alluded to WWII racial slurs on radio in the winter 1995 issue of the *NARA News*. Hill said he could not recall hearing American radio programs "verbally degrade" or "speak badly" of the enemy during the war. He further compared radio's "more controlled" regard for the enemy after Pearl Harbor to the hardy bias of the print media, which depicted the invaders as being "squinty-eyed, glasses-wearing, and buck-toothed."

Actually, the war of words on radio included a good amount of disparagement. But the racial slur, like butter and gasoline, was kept on short rations, and for good reason. The obvious reason, of course, was that racial slurs would have played right into the enemy's hands. The Axis would have liked nothing more than an opportunity to throw back in Uncle Sam's face observations on race discrimination. In the United States discrimination was practically institutionalized, and there was plenty to throw back. To prevent this from happening, the Office of Facts & Figures declared months before Pearl Harbor that the United States was not against any single race but against evil. Here was a less threatening doctrine around which the flag could be wrapped without fear of recrimination.

One admonition that Hill recounted was one he heard on a *Fibber McGee & Molly* program. In the skit, broadcast two days after Japan's "unprovoked and dastardly attack" on Pearl Harbor, Fibber, the salesman, boasts that he can get Mayor LaTrivia a world globe at a 40% discount. Molly tells the Mayor that if he wants one with Japan on it he'd "better hurry!"--implying that time was running out for Japan.

Only a week after Japanese pilots "came out of the dirty dawn on a quiet Sunday morning," as one writer described Pearl Harbor, a popular Summerfield maid, Birdy, shocked the Gildersleeve household when she offered to join the Japanese Army. When Gildy asked what in heaven's name for, Birdy said she wanted to help out: "I'd like to cook for dem people for just one day, dat's all!" (*The Great Gildersleeve*, December 14, 1941)

Molly's quip and Birdy's offer to "help out," though more breast-beating than slur, signaled that radio had heard the blowing of the bugle. The public clamor for revenge was intense, and vague threats like these in the guise of comic banter fluttered like Old Glory on the airwaves.

The first official transmission of a blast against the enemy came just hours after Pearl Harbor, when New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia told a WNYC audience that "Nazi thugs and gangsters" were responsible for it. Goaded Hitler was one of LaGuardia's favorite pastimes. He had gone after him as early as March 1938, when Hitler annexed Austria. At that time he hinted that the German Fuhrer was one pea shy of a full pod and belonged in restraints. A year later at the New York World's Fair, after Hitler had grabbed what was left of Czechoslovakia, the Gotham vicar suggested dedicating a Chamber of Horrors in his honor. Dr. Josef Goebbels retaliated by calling LaGuardia a beetle-browed *schweinhund*, or words to that effect. These were the preliminaries.

"Warlord," in reference to the Japanese, took its place in the radio lexicon on December 9, 1941, the same night Molly made her threat. Discussing readiness in his fireside chat that evening, President Roosevelt called on the nation to step up production and to help reinforce the other powers who were fighting the "warlords of Japan." Referring to their "treachery" and "gangsterism," he called the invaders "crafty and powerful bandits," and warned that no nation was secure against aggressors who "sneak up in the dark and strike without warning." Three weeks later he repeated the "warlord" epithet in a special broadcast to the people of the Philippines, as that archipelago came under enemy bombardment. Like LaGuardia, Roosevelt had also publicly excoriated the "gangster" Fuhrer and his "political clique" with their "gargantuan aspirations" of world domination. Hitler, who thought FDR "insane," had scoffed at the association. He pointed out that the term "gangster" originated in America, where such lice nested. That didn't stop German propagandists from comparing Churchill, in propaganda broadcasts to the United States, to such "desperadoes" as Dillinger and Jesse James. Winston Churchill, no slouch in a slur derby himself, called Hitler a "wicked man, the repository and embodiment of soul-destroying hatred" (BBC, November 9, 1940).

In California, where near-hysteria prevailed after the attack on Hawaii, Brigadier General John L. DeWitt, head of the West Coast Defense Command in charge of interning Japanese-Americans, wore his prejudice like a second star. "A Jap's a Jap," he said. "It makes no difference whether he is an American citizen or not." His views were echoed in Washington by Congressman Rankin: "Once a Jap, always a Jap... You cannot regenerate a Jap...any more than you can reverse the laws of nature." One gung ho California politico even offered to shoot all Japanese-Americans on sight. In any case, name-calling began in the high and high-minded altitudes of command.

Together the comics, movies and fictional adventures all helped to establish the attitude government agencies were reluctant to cultivate, but welcomed just the same. Comic strips and political cartoons could draw the Japanese soldier as all teeth and specs, and Hollywood could ridicule the Germans' blind obedience, and there was no one to protest. The pulps had reduced the *Hun* to savagery long before Germany and the United States were at war. Here, for example, is how one Nazi officer "interrogates" a French prisoner:

*"...Bernheim grabbed Laval by the neck, swung him around, and with a vicious backhand slap ripped his knuckles across the Frenchman's already torn and swollen lips. Laval groaned and fell to his knees. 'It is amusing to relax like this after a hard day of fighting in the air,' Bernheim said. 'I enjoy these pleasant meetings...'" ["Last Patrol of the Brave," David Goodis, *Fighting Aces*, May 1940].*

Radio, on the other hand, had to be more circumspect, primarily because of its immediacy, but also because it enjoyed an integrity which today seems astonishing. Racial slurs and blunt descriptions were not often heard on radio, although if you paid close attention you could hear:

Sound: Rifle shot; sniper falling from tree lands with thud  
GI: Scratch one squint-eyed Jap.  
("Guadalcanal Diary," Lux Radio Theater, February 28, 1944)

In the network comedy skit, after Pearl writers walked a fine line when discussing the enemy because of new government restrictions. Unsure of what they could and could not say, and loath to give out information that the enemy might use, any mention of war was couched in abstraction or circumlocution. In Jack Benny's case, a sketch ushering out the old year with allegory, a Benny tradition anyway, gave the comedian's writers an opportunity to indulge in abstruse innuendo just three weeks after Pearl. In the sketch, "The New Tenant," Benny manages to taunt all three Axis partners and also champion the Soviet Union, America's newest ally. Benny, as "The Old Year 1941," lives in a boarding house called the "United States" run by "Uncle Sam" (Phil Harris) and his wife "Columbia" (Mary Livingston). Jack explains to Dennis Day how the sketch works:

Benny: Dennis, these little sketches we do at the close of each year are not so much plays as they are allegorical fantasies...Listen to the thought behind it. Remember, it's nothing but abstract symbolism. Have your got it, Dennis?

Dennis: Yessir!

Benny: Mary, you're gonna be "Columbia," and you have 48 children, one for each State in the Union. And you have some adopted kids, too, like Puerto Rico, Hawaii, the Philippines, and so on. And now for our play. As the curtain rises, it is almost midnight of December 31st, and Old Man 1941 is up in his room, packing his bags and ready to make his exit. Curtain. Music.

Music: Auld Lang Syne

1941 [Benny in character, old and tired]: Here comes one of your boys now.

Columbia: Yeah, that's my fattest one.

1941: Hello, Texas.

Texas [Don Wilson]: Hello, Old Timer! Hi ya, Ma!

1941: My, my, look at the size of that boy.

Columbia: Yeah, he's gettin' a little plump around El Paso!

Texas: Say, Ma, have you seen Pa around? I got some new air fields I want to show him.

Columbia: Oh, he's out in the yard somewhere, and he's madder than a hornet

Texas: I'll go look for him. See you later, Ma.

1941: You know, Columbia, I don't blame Sam for being so riled up.

Columbia: You mean about our little adopted daughter, Lulu?

1941: Yup, Lulu, Burns me up just thinking of it. There she was on a Sunday morning out in the yard picking pineapples, minding her own business, when a swarm of them dern Yellowjackets flew in and stung her right in the back.

Columbia: That was a lowdown trick if I ever heard of one...Hey, Old Timer, come over here by the window. Look!

Sound: Mad dog barking

1941: *I'll be derved, there's that mad dog, Adolf. [Audience laughs]  
Look at that bear chasing him.*

*Sound: Dog runs off yelping [Audience applauds]*

*Columbia: Is that a Russian bear?*

1941: *It ain't Carmichael. Look at 'em go!*

*Sound: Small dog yapping*

1941: *Oh, shut up, Benito! Who cares about you?  
(Jack Benny Program, December 28, 1941)*

Six months later, though Americans had won decisive victories at Midway and the Coral Sea, some writers were still referring to the enemy analogically. In this *Lum and Abner* episode, Lum (Chester Lauck) compares the fighting in the Pacific to a football game:

*Lum: When this game started, the Jap team sorter had th' ball....Course, they started playin' 'fore th' rest of us wuz ready, too! But now, we're puttin' in our best players, an' we've took the ball away from 'em! Aye grannies, we're gonna make a heap o' touchdowns now!...[Those Marines] are about the best ball carriers we go!  
(June 18, 1942)*

In the weeks and months after Pearl Harbor, the ominous shadow of the Oriental schemer, "devious and slant-eyed," fell across the Japanese warrior as reports of his cruelty reached home. In the public mind he took on the characteristics of a wicked little man with buck teeth, slant eyes and horn-rimmed glasses who bowed too low, read and wrote backward, spoke pidgin, ate on the floor, and laughed at the wrong time.

Writers knew instinctively that the monosyllabic enemy was easier to flog than others. "Gook," a name applied to any native of the Pacific Islands but made objectionable by the Japanese invasion, had two hard consonants to commend it, and so it saw fatigue duty in the war of words early on. Other labels accruing to the Japanese invader were "jackal," "monkey-man," "riceball" and "subhuman," the latter borrowed from the German *untermenschen* in describing the Slav. One Pacific commander suggested "yellow hun of the east," another "bestial apes," which sounded redundant, but like "Japes" (Japs + apes), a name suggested by the Marines, neither sobriquet caught on, and the Japanese remained "Japs," "gooks" or "nips" until V-J Day.

The brisk "Jap," like the "Hun" of WWI, was handy for slogans like "Rap the Jap," or "Let's Blast the Jap Clean off the Map," used in posters advertising war bond and salvage drives. Out West, numerous racist petitions to "Slap the Jap Rat" were circulated. Some of these slogans found their way into radio--viz:

*Marjorie: Uncle, why don't you sit down and eat the nice egg Birdie fried for you.*

*Gildersleeve: That's what I'm trying to do. [He gags, drops his fork] Birdie! What is this, a fried egg or the stopper out of the kitchen sink?*

*Birdie: It's a egg, Mr. Gildersleeve, and it was cooked--*

*Gildy: It wasn't cooked Birdie, it was vulcanized. I give up! Just wrap it up, and on my way downtown I'll drop it on a scrap rubber pile. By George, I'd like to slap a Jap in the map with this scrap!  
(The Great Gildersleeve, June 28, 1942)*

"Kraut" and "boche" became popular with the allies in the North African theater of operations to describe the German soldier. Because it was cold and offered less dignity, the Army preferred "kraut," another double consonant, over "jerry" and

"heinie," a tempting homonymic. After the Italian campaign it received the official endorsement of *The Stars & Stripes*. Neither term, however, was so prevalent as "Nazi," although all five were heard on radio. Italians remained "wops," "guineas" and "dagos" for the duration.

Uncomplimentary references to ethnicity joined flag-waving appeals to patriotism on the government-sponsored radio shows that mushroomed immediately after America began mobilizing. *You Can't Do Business With Hitler*, *This is War!*, and *This is Our Enemy* were among the first programs to acquaint Americans with enemy virtue. In these shows, save for the qualities that made him dangerous, enemy foibles were examined for the kinks that made him loathsome. Debuting a month after Pearl, *You Can't Do Business With Hitler* was a transcribed quarter-hour show that rated Hitler's Germany as a public service. Here we learned that the Nazi conqueror was a cruel and impudent bully, with the scruples of a pawnbroker. The titles of some episodes of this government-run-series--i.e., "The Living Dead," "The 1000-Year Reich," "The Anti-Christ"-- left little doubt about their intent.

*This is War!* came to radio in February 1942 as the first series to really get tough with the enemy. It also used straight talk to rally the home front: "The fight is on and you are in it, whether you handle a bayonet or a monkeywrench" (February 14, 1942). In May, Mutual's *This is Our Enemy* began cataloging the perverse policies of Hitler's National Socialism. The announcer warned of a "cold, hard truth" to follow that was "not for the squeamish nor for the timid." This series stayed away from enticing hate, but its stark descriptions of the Nazi way of life gave listeners much to think about.

With each new series the enemy came into sharper focus. In June 1942, CBS began airing a weekly expose of the cruelties of successive Axis tyrants on *The Nature of the Enemy*. Commercial radio found itself in agreement with government-backed shows, albeit in somewhat milder terms: none of the Axis leaders had any redeeming values to speak of other than a cold, methodical proficiency at making war. On one *Nature of the Enemy* broadcast, General Yamamoto, who planned the attack on Pearl Harbor, was described as "a slippery beast" with "wrinkled and beady eyes....This man's stench is not a pretty one." Hate on radio was becoming palatable.

For every blunt racial or cultural chastening, a thousand other verbal gibes in diluted form poured into living rooms across the country. Most of it was of the standard sticks-and-stones stuff drawn from an ancient stock of home-grown pirate hymns. In "The Awakening of Johnny Castle," for example a play in the transcribed *Treasury Star Parade* series, a conscientious objector who undergoes a transformation after dreaming his wife is killed in an air raid refers to the Japanese as "black-hearted cutthroats." Some of it came from unexpected quarters, like the comment *Uncle Don* made late in the war. Hearing that American soldiers would soon be returning from overseas, he told his young audience that maybe the Japanese had brains after all (WOR, August 10, 1945). Sometimes the slights were oblique, as when enemy shortwave propaganda was described as spewing out over the "germ-ridden airwaves." Or they were playful, as when this American bomber pilot meets enemy ack-ack fire:

*Pilot: Those cruiser boys can really shoot. Something tells me that son of a [explosion] doesn't like us.*  
("Your Air Force," Randall MacDougall, April 4, 1942)

Sometimes writers evoked contempt by portraying the enemy as glorifying barbarism:



Jap: *Your imperial ancestors were Samurai! Great warriors who followed the code of Bushido! Bushido means you may slice off the head of a captured enemy as a mark of chivalry!*

("Japanese-Americans," *They Call Me Joe*, Harry Kleiner, NBC, summer 1944)

Or as just plain scum:

Narrator: *[The Wehrmacht] threw a continent against Stalingrad, they threw the disease of the world, the dregs of Europe, the darkness of time; the thieves of treachery, the dung: all the corruption of history gathered and flung at this city on the plain.*

("Concerning the Red Army," Norman Rosten, CBS, February 22, 1944)

Axis-jeering could also be comical:

Bob Hope: *The last time I celebrated Christmas with the men we had turkey for dinner. I don't know exactly what part of the turkey I got, but if you put a mustache on it you could call it Adolf.*

(Undated *Command Performance* Christmas show)

Or it could be comically inventive, like the time Norman Corwin recruited his sound engineer to show the amusing side of Axis jamming, on *An American in England*. In "The Yanks are Here," the fifth program in this 1942 London-produced series for CBS, Corwin explains that the reason the British didn't jam Lord Haw Haw's broadcasts is because "smudging out the bray of the fascist ass" would be a waste of time. Corwin implies that enemy jammers would be far more effective if they brought their equipment in line with the speech characteristics of the speakers being jammed. Then he asked the sound man to give a demonstration using a little imagination. Listeners heard a speech by Mussolini being obscured by a heavy piston-like thumping that called up an image of a huge bull moose pounding his rump into the ground. Next, a Hitler speech was obliterated by the sound of an oboe rising up and down the scale before lyrically disappearing into a bass flatulence. And so on, with aural patterns right out of a Tex Avery cartoon.

The manner of the verbal assault naturally depended on the proclivities of the radio writer. *Fibber's* versatile creator, Don Quinn, had a weakness for rhyme that lifted the potshot to poesy. On one broadcast Wallace Wimple, *Wistful Vista's* living memorial to henpeckery, ditched his customary attack on "sweetie face, my big ol' wife," and instead poked fun at the enemy with this ode:

*The Japanese are very nasty fighters,  
But good at arranging flowers, the sillies.  
So let's give them a lot of practice, the blighters--  
With lillies.*

(*Fibber McGee and Molly*, February 2, 1943)

Quinn softened many a sinister message with wordplay:

Molly [addressing the audience]: *Don't forget, it's your sons of toil that'll help put those Nazis under tons of soil.*

(*Fibber McGee and Molly*, February 16, 1943)

Any laugh that came at the enemy's expense was fair:

Gracie: *This must be a very confusing war for the Japanese.*

George: *A confusing war? Why?*

Gracie: *They call themselves the sons of heaven, and the Marines are sending so many of them to the wrong address.*

(From an undated *Burns & Allen* episode)

Cheapening the enemy was a sure belly:

Mary Martin: I think they should give every man in the Army a commission.

Ronald Reagan: Oh, they couldn't do that.

Martin: Maybe 30 cents a Jap.

Reagan: There's too many fellas willing to do that for free.  
(Kraft Music Hall, February 16, 1942)

As the war unwound so did radio, and harsh invective became commonplace on new government-funded programs. Ire spilled over on radio forums too, and preachments of hate came under fire. In the next installment we'll take a closer look at hate on radio and the whitewashing of new allies. We'll also sample the fine art of radio needling overseas.

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## NARA'S LIBRARY CATALOGS

To obtain catalogs of what is available to members from the various club libraries, please write to the librarians listed below and enclose the price of the catalog

### CASSETTE CATALOG

The listing of the 20,000 shows in the cassette library is \$13.00 (checks payable to NARA). For a copy please contact Barry Hill, Route 1, Box 197, Belpre, OH 45714.

### REEL-TO-REEL CATALOG

The catalog of the 15,000 shows available in our reel-to-reel library costs \$18.00 (make checks out to NARA). They can be obtained from Scott Jones, 4741 E. Grant Ave., Fresno, CA 93702.

### SCANFAX CATALOG

Lists of program series in our new SCANFAX cassette library are \$1 each, but you can request more than one series list for a maximum total of \$2. Include a self addressed stamped envelope and send your requests to Don Aston, P.O. Box 1392, Lake Elsinore, CA 92531. Series currently available:

The Six Shooter (the entire series)	The Marriage (24 shows)
X-Minus One (the entire series)	Tales of the Valiant (10 shows)
Dimension X (the entire series)	Christopher London (2 shows)
Magnificent Montague (44 shows)	The forty Million (4 shows)
Halls of Ivy (28 shows)	Radio City Music Hall
Private Files of Rex Saunders (14 shows)	Big Town
White Hall One Two One Two (21 shows)	It's Higgins Sir (13 shows)

### PRINTED MATERIALS CATALOG

The printed materials library currently has three catalogs ready, the book catalog (407 books), the script catalog (228 scripts), and the catalog of logs (29 logs). To receive all of these please send ten 32 cent stamps to Bob Sabon, 308 W. Oraibi Dr., Phoenix, AZ 85027

# JUST THE FACTS MA'AM

by  
FRANK C. BONCORE



WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR RADIO SHOWS, ONCE YOU LISTEN TO THEM? OTHER THAN PLAYING THEM ONCE OR TWICE OR PERHAPS TRADING THEM, THEY ARE USUALLY PLACED IN STORAGE SOMEWHERE. DICK OLDAY AND MYSELF HAVE FOUND A WAY TO PUT THEM TO GOOD USE.

FOR THE PAST 5 YEARS DICK OLDAY AND MYSELF HAVE BEEN DOING AN OLD TIME RADIO SHOW ON THE NIAGARA FRONTIER RADIO READING SERVICE. THE NIAGARA FRONTIER RADIO READING SERVICE (NFRS) IS A VOLUNTEER LION'S CLUB AGENCY THAT READS NEWSPAPERS, BOOKS, MAGAZINES AND OTHER MATERIAL TO THE BLIND AND VISUAL HANDICAPPED ON A SUBCARRIER FREQUENCY. WE ARE SUB CARRIERS OF TWO TELEVISION STATIONS AND ONE RADIO STATION. MOST OF OUR AUDIENCE HAS SPECIAL RECEIVERS WHICH THEY RENT FOR \$35.00 A YEAR. IF THEY CAN'T AFFORD THE \$35.00, THE LIONS CLUB WILL TAKE CARE OF THE FEE JUST SO THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED CAN HAVE A RECEIVER. THE NFRS IS ALSO PICKED UP BY ALL THE LOCAL HOSPITALS (INCLUDING VETERANS HOSPITAL) AND NURSING HOMES.

WHEN WE FIRST STARTED, WE WERE ON ONCE A MONTH FOR TWO HOURS. WHEN THE AUDIENCE COMPLAINED THAT THEY WOULD FORGET WHAT DAY WE WERE ON WE THEN WENT TO A ONCE A WEEK ONE HOUR SCHEDULE. THE NFRS HAD A PROBLEM GETTING VOLUNTEERS TO WORK ON HOLIDAYS, SINCE OUR SHOW WAS "LIVE ON TAPE" WE WERE ASKED TO DO THREE HOUR HOLIDAY SPECIALS TO FILL IN THE GAP WHICH WE GREATFULLY ACCEPTED THE OFFER TO DO. OUR HALLOWEEN SPECIAL HAS ALSO BECOME A REGULAR PART OF THE PROGRAMMING. THIS SUMMER WE WILL BE ON MONDAY TO THURSDAY EVENINGS FOR AN HOUR IN ADDITION TO OUR REGULAR SUNDAY TIME SLOT AND OUR HOLIDAY SHOWS. WE ALSO HAVE CUT WHAT WE CALL "GENERIC SHOWS" WHICH THE NFRS USES JUST IN CASE ONE OF THE TAPES GETS LOST OR DEVELOPES A PROBLEM OR IF THE STATION NEEDS A FILL IN. IT MAY SOUND LIKE A LOT OF WORK BUT WHEN TWO OR THREE PEOPLE DO IT IT BECOMES A LOT OF FUN.

ALSO BEING ON A SUB CARRIER, WE CAN PLAY ALL THE ORIGINAL COMMERCIALS WHICH MAKES IT EVEN MORE FUN. OVER THE YEARS I HAVE DEVELOPED A FORMAT FOR MY HALF (THE BETTER HAVE OF THE SHOW) IN DOING COMEDY ONE WEEK, FOLLOWED BY A WESTERN, A THRILLER, AND A SCIENCE FICTION SHOW IN SUCCEEDING WEEKS OF THE MONTH. DICK PLAYS REQUESTS AND OTHER DIFFERENT SHOWS ON HIS HALF. ON HOLIDAYS, WE USUALLY SET DIFFERENT THEMES SUCH AS A CERTAIN ACTOR, OR A DETECTIVE NIGHT, OR PERHAPS SHOWS THAT WE NORMALLY DON'T HAVE TIME TO PLAY, ONE OF OUR MORE POPULAR THEMES HAVE BEEN SATURDAY MORNING ON A SUNDAY NIGHT OR WHATEVER NIGHT OUR SPECIAL IS. WE TAKE THE OLD KIDDIE SHOWS THAT WERE ON SATURDAY MORNING AND PLAY THEM. OUR AUDIENCE REALLY SEEMS TO GO FOR THAT.

NOW IF YOUR LOOKING FOR ANY GLORY, OR REWARD THIS IS NOT THE THING TO DO. THERE IS NO MONEY AND MOST OF THE AUDIENCE IS RECLUSIVE AND DOES NOT RESPOND TO ANYTHING WE DO. HOWEVER, WE WILL SAY SOMETHING OFF BEAT OR THREATEN TO REPLACE A POPULAR PROGRAM JUST TO GET A RESPONSE AND THAT'S HOW WE TELL THEY'RE LISTENING. WE FOUND THAT WE ARE THE SECOND MOST POPULAR SHOW ON THE SERVICE THE MOST POPULAR SHOW BEING WHEN THE OBITUARIES ARE READ.

THE VISUALLY HANICAPPED CANNOT ENJOY TELEVISION BUT CAN ENJOY OLD TIME RADIO. SO, INSTEAD OF LETTING YOUR COLLECTION SIT ON THE SHELF, CONTACT A LIONS CLUB MEMBER IN YOUR AREA, FIND OUT IF THERE IS A RADIO READING SERVICE IN YOUR AREA AND GET A GREAT DEAL OF SATISFACTION BY SHARING YOUR SHOWS WITH THOSE WHO ARE LESS FORTUNATE.

*Frank Boncore is a regular columnist for the ILLUSTRATED PRESS, the monthly publication of the "Old Time Radio Club" located in Buffalo, New York.*



After several years of planning and preparation, my wife and I have opened a vintage media store in a local shopping center. It's a bit unusual because we don't just rent and sell "classic" movies on videotape but we also have:

- old radio shows and old television shows from 1950's and earlier
- old and new books by and about vintage entertainment (for browsing in the store, for rent, and for sale)
- stamps and FDCs with a theme pertaining to vintage media
- old movie/radio/tv magazines (including Radio Guide)
- old comic books with subjects based on characters in movies/radio/TV
- vintage advertising reproductions on metal (tin/steel & enamel)
- posters and lobby cards as well as arcade cards and other paper items
- jewelry and other media-theme knick-knacks as well as clothing items
- reproductions of old radios (by Thomas) and some originals too
- LP records and CDs with old radio shows and related material
- a small but growing organization: *Bayhill Vintage Media Study Group*
- rentals of TV/VCR combinations and compact stereos with record players
- conversion service of videos from PAL/SECAM to NTSC and vice versa
- custom dubbing and label making for video/audio collections
- graphics service with flatbed scanner and color inkjet printer (using Mac)

The movies on videotape we provide for rental include a variety of foreign films, usual studio releases, unusual films not commonly seen (and never found in chain video giants like Blockbuster), and many silents. Send \$1 for sample list.

At present we rent and sell only locally (\$1.50 for 3 days for most items) but by April, 1996 we intend to offer rental/sales by mail. We also have a combination package which appeals to many customers. This is "5-6-7". Any 5 items (mix & match among what we can rent out) for \$6 for up to 7 days. And, of course, we encourage people to take a look at some of the interesting radio shows, television programs, and movies which they might otherwise skip over.

A person does not have to be a member to browse and buy but any rentals require purchasing a *one-time* membership card for \$5 (\$1 of this goes to the UCLA Film Restoration Archive). The membership card also gives the member access to many discounts, special purchases, and regularly issued catalogs of what we have for rental. The artist for our membership card logo is Gene Larson of NARA fame. A sample photocopy of the card appears below. It's light blue with navy blue logo and the thickness of a regular credit card. You can obtain one by sending us \$5 and you will receive all future mailings we provide. Only if borrowing privileges are abused do you lose your member's privileges. Then a short probationary period occurs before you may apply for another card (but at a higher cost).

We are interested in purchasing/leasing/borrowing any suitable material or items you might have along these lines. We also will accept consignments. Please see our business card reproduction on the right next to the copy of the membership card.

And with that, Lourdes and Roger Hill say "Hearty Congratulations to NARA on their 22 years and a very big "Thank You" to the staff who makes it work. Janis de Moss and Jim Snyder do superhuman work on the journal! If you are in the San Bruno area (just south of San Francisco at I-280 and San Bruno Avenue), come and sit a spell.



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# THROUGH THE ETHER

WITH

**ROBERT J. BROWN**  
RADIO'S TIME MACHINE

By the end of World War II radio had firmly established itself as the most effective medium for putting listeners into immediate and intimate contact with the world around them. Through transatlantic broadcasts and shortwave pick-ups, radio had demonstrated its power to transcend distance by bringing the actual voices and sounds of global conflict directly into the American living room. In the postwar period the same technology that had allowed the medium to exceed the limits of space now enabled it to surpass those imposed by time. As a result, a listener's cultural horizons now came to extend not only outward -to locations as far afield as London, Cairo, and Manila, but also backward -to the great events of the distant past. The instrument through which such time travel was accomplished was CBS's extraordinary documentary series, You Are There.

Listener's began their exciting aural journey into the past on July 7, 1947 when this unique program, originally entitled CBS Is There, first took to the air in a regular offering of thirty-minute broadcasts. Vivid scene painting and expert acting allowed events and personalities which had previously been familiar only in the pages of dreary school texts, to come alive. CBS Is There was radio's most effective effort at popularizing history in a manner that was primarily informational instead of merely entertaining. As such, the program was quite distinguishable from the array of heavily fictionalized pseudo-histories, like Cavalcade of America, which had preceded it. Far from being a mere spectator at some contemporary theatrical re-enactment, CBS Is There allowed the listener to witness the shaping events of western society firsthand as they 'actually' unfolded before his ears. At the turn of the dial he or she was offered an unprecedented opportunity to eavesdrop on crucial decisions in the making, to stand in the crowd at some rousing speech, and to take part in plotting strategy on the eve of battle. Convincing performances and realistic sound effects compelled many to forget that the events depicted had occurred well before the advent of wireless. In spite of this anachronism, and to the weekly delight of thousands, a CBS microphone invariably found its way into the confederate camp at Gettysburg (1863), the Roman Forum and the Alamo (1836).

The ubiquitous microphone underlined the program's central theme: to inspire within the listener a profound feeling of proximity to the events being described. In the beginning of each broadcast, the announcer routinely queried his audience "to imagine that our microphone is present at this unforgettable moment." In 1948, in an effort to increase listener involvement the program's title was changed to You Are There. The producers of You Are There sought to draw listeners in and engage them by commencing the broadcast just prior to some climactic occurrence or significant watershed whose outcome was to alter the course of history in some fashion. In such a manner did typical programs begin in the presidential box of Ford's Theater (1865), on the ramparts of Fort Sumter (1861), or in the hills overlooking Waterloo (1815).

Listeners were privy to such events because of the work of CBS's experienced news team, whose members John Daly, Don

Hollenbeck, Ned Kalmer, Harry Marble and Richard C. Hottel had so recently proved their mettle covering more recent historical crises during the Second World War. The utilization of real-life newscasters, correspondents and announcers to report on the fast-breaking stories of other eras enormously enhanced the program's credibility in a way that would have been lacking had professional actors been substituted in their place. The integration of these individuals into the events they were describing without allowing them the foreknowledge of how the situation would resolve itself, greatly increased the sense of spontaneity. The unrehearsed atmosphere was further augmented by frequent recourse to 'on-the-scene' interviews with numerous participants and men-in-the-street. Historical situations were made real by drawing upon 1940s technology and the whole panoply of broadcast news methods which had been developed during the war. In this way an event could be comprehensively and systematically covered via short wave relays, remotes, wire recordings and "live" transmissions from the scene. Using the wartime "roundup" model, many broadcasters could be heard simultaneously from various points, offering different perspectives of an event. Thus in the program dealing with the Execution of Emperor Maximilian I (1867), the issues in this great nineteenth century diplomatic crisis could be examined from the viewpoint of the three powers involved: Mexico, France, and the United States. Often such wide-ranging coverage could be supplemented by commentary from one of Columbia's team of professional news analysts, one of whom, Major George Fielding Elliot, was uniquely equipped to offer his insight into the strategy, tactics, and logistics of many past battles. Each show had an anchor, usually Don Hollenbeck, who organized the reports sent in from field correspondents and summarized the situation for the listener. To make such voice traffic appear genuine, static was manufactured in the studio at CBS and introduced into the broadcast at frequent intervals.

Both creator Goodman Ace, and producer/director Robert Lewis Shayon, strove relentlessly to maintain the realistic aura of You Are There broadcasts. In the beginning of each program listeners were assured that "all things are as they were then." While the scripts were not penned by professional historians, academics were occasionally consulted on matters of detail. Accuracy was scrupulously upheld through reference to "authentic fact and quotation." But, the avoidance of serious collaboration with historians and the desire to entertain as well as inform, accounts, in large measure, for the unfortunate choice of many fanciful happenings as program subjects. The broadcast on the Fall of Troy, for instance, was based neither on historical research or archaeological evidence, but rather on ancient literary sources which have never been held to be entirely reliable. In another breach of accepted historical method, where several interpretations of an event existed, You Are There writers often chose the most dramatic, but not necessarily the most accurate, viewpoint. That the choice of topics was highly selective in the extreme is evident in the decided preference YAT writers expressed for those with an American or Anglo-European bias. Such cultural ethnocentrism often involved characterizing non-whites in what contemporaries may deem

a prejudicial manner. This can be seen in the way the brutal exploits of Clive's imperialists at the Battle of Plassey (1757) were applauded, while their Indian opponents were portrayed in a much less sympathetic light. Modern listeners must remember that You Are There broadcasts are themselves historical material which reflect attitudes particular to the time in which they were aired and must therefore be treated as such. While subsequent research has since revised our opinion of many of the events portrayed in these broadcasts, several others, it should be noted, contain interpretations which present-day historians still consider fashionable.

One of the most striking features of You Are There is its clever manipulation of time. Centuries had to be spanned in order to retrieve an event for the 1940s listener. So that an historical situation could be fit within the parameters of a thirty-minute broadcast, time had again to be reconstituted; expanding or condensing it in accordance with the actual duration of the original event depicted. Thus, seconds could be made to appear like minutes, and minutes like hours. Interestingly enough, You Are There did not employ the traditional "musical bridge" device to denote either a forward or backward movement in time and space as did many other programs. Even though situations often were compressed or elongated, You Are There 'newscasts' always maintained the illusion of contemporaneity. The skilful manner in which this aural trickery was accomplished, as well as other deceptions that were perpetrated on the program, illustrated the dangerous potential of broadcasting in a way that was reminiscent of Welles's 1938 Martian program. In both cases, a situation was dramatized so realistically that fact and fancy, past and present, became almost indistinguishable. Fortunately, the listener of the late 1940s was considerably less credulous than his Depression-era counterpart had been.

After only a few months as a Monday-night summer replacement, You Are There's popularity earned it a spot as a sustainer in CBS's coveted Sunday evening line-up. There it remained until 1950, when it was adapted for television. Despite the added prestige supplied by Walter Cronkite and others, the television version of You Are There somehow did not measure up to its aural predecessor. It is not difficult to see that much had been lost in the transition; in place of the colorful historical pageantry of the imagination, audiences received black and white, fake beards, and makeshift Hollywood sets. At the very least, television's You Are There did redeem itself in one important way: it continued to carry the message to a new generation of Americans that history was not an academic monopoly but could be enjoyed by all. The program's ability to present a wide range of seemingly dull issues, from Alexander at Issus (333 BC) to the Signing of the Magna Carta (1215), in a lively and intimate way that appealed to a popular audience, constituted a real educational achievement that the whole broadcasting industry could be proud of. As it had done so many times in the previous three decades, radio had once again helped to redefine the role of the media in American society, as a cultural agent which could inform as well as entertain.

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- Script must include all music and sound effects cues, as well as all spoken material.
- It must be arranged in radio script format.
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The prize for the winning script writer will be \$150 cash, and the winning entry would become property of the Radio Enthusiasts of Puget Sound. That show will be performed at the REPS Radio Showcase IV, in 1996.

The scripts should be sent to Joy Jackson, 3663 Car Pl. N., Seattle, WA 98103

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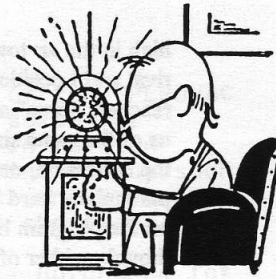
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# REFLECTIONS



by Charles Sexton

## TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES? A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.

I always liked the quiz and game shows of the '40's, even though I don't pay any attention to them on television today. I especially liked People Are Funny with Art Linkletter and Truth or Consequences with Ralph Edwards. And the prizes! - Wow. It seemed to me every contestant on one of those shows walked away with at least a new refrigerator or record player. I was also captivated by the mystery and secrecy of some contestant being led into the "soundproof" room while Art or Ralph let the studio and listening audiences in on whatever devilment was to befall him or her.

Years later I was to experience firsthand these emotions when I was selected to be a contestant on the television version of Truth or Consequences starring Bob Barker. The year was 1963 and my new wife and I were finishing up a trip to California when her brother, who worked at NBC, provided us tickets for a taping of the show. Barker did the warmup himself and selected the contestants. When he asked who would like to be on the show, I waved my hand like some kid in the third grade who finally knew the answer to one of the teacher's questions. He asked me my name and where I was from and a couple of other things and I spoke up clearly and, I suppose, loudly. It was clear to me the contestants being selected were those who didn't mumble!

This particular episode of "T or C" featured Terry Moore and Cesar Ramero as guests, and I was really excited that my "consequence" would involve one of them. And there was no question I would have to take the "consequences", for I would have missed the question deliberately, even if by some stretch of the imagination I knew the answer, in order to get to the fun part of the show.

Another contestant and I were then seated in the front row of the studio and were told we would be involved in the last portion of the show. About half way through the program, we were led out of the studio and, as we left, I heard the audience being told we were going into the "soundproof" room while the details of the next stunt were being prepared. This was great! From my days of listening to the radio version of the show, I knew just what a "soundproof" room must look like. Imagine my disappointment when we were simply led out into the hallway. But things looked up immediately when I was asked if I could take off my glasses when we went back inside. I happily complied. "Oh, boy," I thought, "it's going to be seltzer water in the kisser or maybe a cream pie." I could hardly wait!

When we returned to the studio, we went immediately on stage and were introduced to Bob Barker who proceeded to ask us the question to which we "must tell the truth or face the consequences." Of course, we missed. Bob then showed us a small red rubber ball, about the size of a softball, with a \$50 sign painted on it. He explained he was going to stand in front of the studio audience and, on the count of three, throw the ball

high in the air towards us. Whichever one of us caught the ball would get \$50. As my rival and I positioned ourselves to grab the thrown ball first, Bob began his count. As he reached "three" and tossed the ball in the air, the entire studio audience also threw balls at us of the same size and color, except these were not marked with a \$50 sign! Amidst all the confusion, neither of us caught the ball Bob had thrown. I remember getting pelted particularly hard by one of the balls. I figured it was from one of those who wanted to be on the program but had not been selected! Or maybe my wife threw it! Anyway, even though neither of us caught the ball, we were awarded \$50 each anyway. In addition, we received an electric razor and a Truth or Consequences board game. It wasn't a refrigerator or even a record player, but I wasn't about to complain. The \$50, by the way, went towards a day at Disneyland for my wife and me and her brother and sister-in-law. The razor didn't work and I ended up throwing it away, and the game, with Ceasar Romero's autograph on the top of the lid, simply disappeared after a few years. This was also before home tape recording machines, so I don't even have a video copy of the program.

What I do have, though, are my memories of the show and its radio predecessors, and that more than makes up for the prizes I no longer have.

## Honors

One of our members, Robert Newman, was honored at last April's "Cincinnati Old Time Radio and Nostalgia Convention." He was named as the first recipient of what is to become the annual "Stone/Waterman Award" which is named after Ezra Stone (Henry Aldrich) and Willard Waterman (the Great Gildersleeve), two OTR stars who had been active in the annual convention prior to their deaths.



Newman has served as the coordinator of the Cincinnati convention for a number of years. He was also a founding member of G.R.A.I.C.E., which is a group that performs re-creations of old radio shows. He is the founder and president of the Radio Listener's Lyceum, an old time radio club centered in Cincinnati, and he is the editor of that club's newsletter.

We want to add our congratulations to Robert, in addition to those he received at the convention. He is a most deserving individual.

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## Wireless Wanderings



**JIM SNYDER**

In the December issue of the SPERDVAC RADIOGRAM, Barbara Watkins asked for information on radio drama in foreign countries and for taped copies of any such shows that might exist. The answer to this is rather simple; it's shortwave.

Shortwave radios can be purchased for under fifty dollars with prices ranging right on up to as expensive as you might want to go. But price is not necessary. An expert has told me that "it would take a truly professional communications center to beat a global portable, and the portable is as easy to operate as the clock radio with which you are already familiar." I have three shortwave receivers, and two of them are no bigger than a paperback book. These operate every bit as well as the much larger Sony that I also have, and are really much simpler to use.

With shortwave you can bring in stations from around the world while sitting in your own living room. At any given time you will find a number of stations broadcasting in English, and this includes drama such as Barbara was looking for. I recall a one hour dramatic presentation over Radio Tokyo that told the story of a railroad crossing guard. For a solid hour we heard how he lowered the gates when a train was coming, and how he received abuse from people who were in a hurry and wanted to cross before the train arrived, etc. But our hero had been at that crossing for thirty years and there had never been an accident while he was on duty. Now this was hardly Shakespeare, but it was certainly vintage Japanese literature.

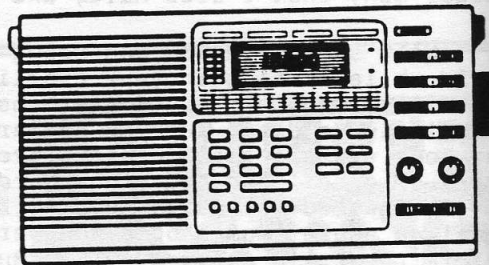
Much of the programming on shortwave is of a propagandistic nature. The stories and newscasts are designed to sell people on a particular point of view. This is particularly true of stations operated by foreign governments. It can also prove to be of great value to world travelers.

In the spring of 1970 I was traveling in northern Cambodia when the government was overthrown and the Kymer Rouge started their takeover of the country. Suddenly all the airports were closed and there was much military activity including shooting in the town in which I was staying. No one would give me any information about what was going on or why the airports were shut down. Finally, after three days, I ran into a Frenchman with a shortwave receiver. He let me listen to a Voice of America newscast and I then learned that if I was going to get out of Cambodia I was going to have to do it on my own. After that I started carrying a shortwave receiver on all my foreign trips. The next time it became essential was in 1981. I was traveling in China when President Reagan fired all the air traffic

controllers. Being overseas we had no idea if that would cause a problem for our return to the States. Each morning I would go up on the roof of the hotel to pick up Voice of America newscasts of the situation. When I would go down to breakfast everyone would crowd around for the latest information. Then they started joining me on the roof each morning so that they could hear first hand. When we reached Hong Kong I noticed that all those other people went right out and bought shortwave radios of their own.

One evening in the airport in Cotonou, Benin, in west Africa, while waiting for a long delayed flight, I pulled out my short-wave and ran through the dial for something in English. Soon I had fifty people crowded around yelling "turn it up louder so we can hear." I now consider this to be an essential part of my travel baggage.

While Barbara is looking for drama, I tend to pass that up and look for newscasts from around the world. This is informative and also often gives a point of view that we never hear from our own news organizations. You recall the massive famine in North Africa a few years ago. I was fully aware of this a full three years before our TV networks picked it up because of listening to shortwave from North Africa. There are many points of view on what has been going on in the Middle East over the last number of years. Our news organizations tend to give us only one point of view. Shortwave gives many. You don't have to agree with them, but it is interesting to hear them, and it certainly makes you better informed.



Sometimes the news is funny, even when it is not intended to be. I used to listen to the news from Radio Peking (before it became Beijing) on a fairly regular basis. At that time, before we had any diplomatic relations with the country, each newscast ran through the various problems of the world and then always said that they were caused by "the Yankee running dogs and their ilk." That phrase was used numerous times in each broadcast, and was so absurd that it was funny. If you listen to North Korean shortwave, even today, you will hear some of that same kind of rhetoric.

One time, sitting at home, I listened to an entire fifteen minute newscast, from what was obviously a foreign station, only to hear at the end, "From our studios high up in the Andes Mountains of South America, you have just heard the latest Associated Press news." I could have gotten that from any top forty station at home.

One of my favorites was a newscast from an African nation that had just put down an attempted coup d'etat. The newscast told of the capture of the person that they felt was responsible for this attempt to overthrow their government. They then said that "He will be given a prompt, fair, and impartial trial. Then he will be executed." That gave new meaning to the word "impartial."

I enjoy shortwave, and if you choose to get involved with it, you will find that it opens up a whole new world for you.

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Tribune Newspapers, Wednesday, January 11, 1995 \*

## Shortwave covers events as they happen

When I was a kid, shortwave radios looked like horror movie props — complicated machines that should have been hooked up to Frankenstein.

There were great rows of mysteriously labeled dials, meters and switches. And you needed every one of them just to tune in the BBC.

Almost everything has changed since those days. I'm no longer a genius. The radios are tiny and easy to use. But one thing stayed the same. Messing with shortwave is still as close to magic as you can get.

The big deal, to me, is the ability to eavesdrop on the news. Instead of getting 10 seconds of hand-picked video and sound on the network news, you'll listen as the event unfolds.

When the United States began assembling a task force off the shores of Haiti, I was there as shipboard radio operators set up a communications system for the invasion that never came.



**Bill Husted**

Technobuddy

Then, by moving the dial just a bit, I found an amateur radio operator in Haiti who was so angry about the U.S. intervention you could hear him gasping for air between words.

I can't promise owning a shortwave will be a life-changing experience for you. But I'm pretty sure you'll find something fine on your trip around the shortwave bands. You'd get your money's worth if you did nothing more than listen

to the elegant cadences of the news being read on the BBC.

But don't spend any big bucks yet. Here's what I recommend. There's a terrific book called *Passport to World Band Radio*. The book is known for its listings of worldwide radio schedules. But it also contains hard-nosed product reviews of radios — if you get a copy, you'll see it doesn't pull punches. Most bookstores have it for \$19.95.

Because radios come in all sizes and price ranges, you'd be smart to do your own research. But — if you asked my advice as we chatted in the dull-folks corner at some party — I'd recommend the Sony 2010 if you have \$350 to spend. If you have trouble finding it where you live, you can order one by calling Amateur Electronic Supply at (800) 558-0411.



# REPORT

by

JACK PALMER

Yes, this was the ninth year for the Cincinnati convention. Despite occasional financial and personal difficulties and a few hassles with other OTR enthusiasts, Bob Burchett has persevered and this convention seems settled in for the foreseeable future. Which is good for the OTR hobby in general and a real break for the fans in this part of the USA. The other conventions are all far away from the center of our country. This convention contains two elements which makes all OTR conventions so entertaining. Guests from the golden days of radio, some very good re-creations of old time radio shows and a well stocked dealer's room. But it also is different from other conventions I have attended. Because it is smaller and has fewer guests, it makes it easier for everyone to have a chance to visit with the guests as well as each other.

I reached Cincinnati a little late this year due to a late start and a fantastic amount of highway construction zones in Indiana. When I arrived about 4 PM, Friday evening, the dealer's room had already been open for an hour, and most of the regular dealers and attendees had already renewed acquaintances and were settled in for the weekend. I hesitate to name all the people I ran into at this convention since I know I'll overlook many. However, some of the more prominent (or should I say loudest!) were Don Aston, Terry Salmonson, Bob Burnham, Ted Davenport, Tom McConnell, Bob Burchett, Tom Monroe, Robert Newman, Barbara Davies and her husband, and of course the Ramlow's who show up every year to videotape the whole proceedings. I guess I remember these because I spent most of my time arguing with them.

This convention is held at a hotel on the outskirts of Cincinnati and has use of a separate area away from the hotel. Both the dealer's room and the re-creation room are in the area, so a person doesn't have to move from area to area unless they want to eat. This makes it convenient for a lot of visiting in the dealer's room without worrying about missing anything important in other rooms. The first re-creation was at 7:30 Friday evening. Unfortunately, because it was Norman Corwin's "My Client Curley" I skipped it, and spent my time visiting in the dealer's room. Because I'm not a great fan of Corwin's material, I missed a very funny and unusual show. Which is only another instance of when I've been wrong! Saturday morning I was lucky enough (along with others) to have breakfast with Herb Ellis, one of the guests. Then on to the dealer's room to continue looking for great new shows to add to my collection, and more visiting. During the morning, there was an open discussion with Herb Ellis on Jack Webb and Dragnet and a sound effects demonstration by Ray Eherlborn. That afternoon there was a re-creation of a Dragnet story. I can't remember the title but it was well done and featured Herb Ellis as Sgt. Friday. After the raffle and door prize drawing (I won zilch) we all left to get ready for the evening's festivities. These included a cocktail hour, followed by a sit down dinner and another re-creation. After the dinner, Ed Clute played requests for a while, mostly old radio show themes. Then the Phillip Morris Playhouse was presented complete with commercials. The play was "The Apology" and again featured Herb Ellis in the starring role. This was not one of my favorite shows, but it was well presented and helped close out an enjoyable convention. Sunday morning I had a farewell breakfast with several of the group, including Herb Ellis again, and then left for my antiquing in Kentucky before I headed home that evening. Found nothing of value in Kentucky, so left early and reached home before dark.

This year there were a lot of dealers and a lot of material, including taped shows, videos, books and other material. I had a terrific struggle but managed to get away from the convention without making too many purchases!



## CONVENTION

# REPORT

by Charles Sexton

The 11th annual convention of the national Lum and Abner Society took place in Mena, Arkansas, on Saturday, June 24, 1995. Early arrivals Friday night gathered in the lobby of the Lime Tree Inn and carpooled up Rich Mountain to the Queen Wilhemina Lodge, part of the Arkansas State Park system, to partake of the buffet supper which was open to the public. This offered a good way for new members and first time visitors to get to know each other.

The convention itself, although modest in comparison to "big-city" type conventions, offered a variety of events throughout the day. The organizers and "Zekatif Ossifers" of the Society, Donnie Pitchford, Sam Brown and Tim Hollis, presented a very well planned and delightful day's activities. One can only imagine the scrambling they had to endure as two of their three planned guests had to cancel shortly before the start of the convention. However, the third guest, Mr. Parley Baer, was a delight and helped make the convention special, but more on him later.

The first official event took place at 10:00 Saturday morning in the Lime Tree meeting room. Some 70-80 folks were in attendance, including those who were Society members, but also including other motel guests and townspeople who were invited to attend. There was no charge or admission for any part of the convention activities, and it was open to all. The first order of business was the introduction of the above referenced Zekatif Ossifers who outlined the planned day's activities. They also introduced Scott Lauck, Chet's grandson, and then introduced Birmingham, Alabama, television personality, Cousin Cliff Holman, who put on a magic and comedy routine similar to those he has performed for over 45 years on his children's television program. Cousin Cliff obviously enjoys what he does and he entranced us all, especially the young children present at the convention. He also used Parley Baer in some of his routines.

This convention, unlike any other I've been to, did not have a separate dealers' room for the collector of this, that or the other thing. Collectors were limited to the offerings at one small table set in the back of the room which included some authentic Lum and Abner movie stills and products produced by the Society such as reproductions of Lum and Abner radio scripts.

Following Uncle Cliff, we were treated to a series of video treats in what amounted to a Saturday Matinee. First up was a cartoon, titled Tom Turkey and His Harmonica Humdingers (MGM 1940). Although not touted as a cartoon representation of the Lum and Abner show, the characters, in both appearance and action, closely resembled many of the residents we are familiar with. Next was a travelogue on Hot Springs, Arkansas, completed after the Lum and Abner show left the air. It was narrated by Chet Lauck, Lum of Lum and Abner. No matinee is complete without a preview of coming attractions and this one featured Lum and Abner in Partners In Time. The only catch was that this preview was for the next year's convention which will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the release of that film. Talk about an early hype on getting conventioners ready for the next one! Squire Skimp couldn't have ballyhooded it any better! The last film shown was Lum and Abner Abroad. About the best that could be said for this movie was uttered by

Society president Donnie Pitchford when he noted, "the sooner we start this movie, the sooner it will be over." This was really a strange film. In 1955, Chet Lauck and Norris Goff shot three episodes for a planned Lum and Abner television series. Where? Would you believe Yugoslavia? How they ended up in Yugoslavia doing this in those days is apparently still a mystery. The show did not sell, so the three separate episodes were spliced into a feature film. Up until the convention, the popular notion was that this film had never been released. However, we were informed that evidence was found in the Chet Lauck files kept by the University of Arkansas that there was a limited release. In fact, Mr. Lauck's records included some documentation of the profits/losses the movie realized in various cities in the U.S. The movie is most significant in that it represents the last time Chet Lauck and Norris Goff appeared as a team.

Saturday afternoon all conventioners were encouraged to travel 20 miles to the east down Highway 88, the Lum and Abner Highway, to Pine Ridge, the home of Dick Huddleston's store and the Lum and Abner Museum. According to photos from the 1930s, Pine Ridge looks much now as it did then. The road was dirt and gravel until the mid-1950s when it was paved, but it's easy to see how Chet and Norris could have used the setting of this little town for their show. The owners and operators of the store and museum are Lon and Kathryn Stucker. They know their Lum and Abner and the history of the surrounding area as well. Kathryn told me, for instance, that Pine Ridge now only has a population of 18; in fact, only 100 people live within 5 miles of the town and only 7500 live in the whole county. She noted that during the 1930s, when the town of Waters changed its name to Pine Ridge, the town and Dick Huddleston's store was the major source of contact for everyone who lived within a five to ten mile radius and it was rare for the local citizens to go all the way into Mena, 20 miles away. Waters wasn't the only town in the area to change its name, either. A pre-1935 map displayed in the store showing the original name of Waters also reflected the name of Egger where the town of Cherry Hill is now located. Cherry Hill is one of the towns Lum and Abner often referred to in the run of the show. Another nearby town is called Ink. Kathryn told me its name was determined when the person filling out the government application to establish the town came to that part of the form asking for the proposed name and read "write in ink." I sorta think Kathryn was pulling my leg, but who knows?

In the evening we all assembled back at the Lime Tree Inn and were treated to a radio script written by Society Secretary Tim Hollis which related how Lum and Abner met Gunsmoke's Chester, who OTR fans know was played by the featured guest, Parley Baer. Donnie and Tim portrayed Lum, Abner and Cedric Weehunt and the meeting in the west occurred through a dream Lum was having. Although Mr. Baer is known to have appeared on the Lum and Abner radio program, no episodes featuring him have surfaced. However, a number of film clips were shown highlighting his career in television and movies including his work as the voice of Ernie Keebler, the Keebler elf; Mayor Stoner on the Andy Griffith Show; roles on I Love Lucy, The Adams Family and Quantum Leap; and an eight month run on the Young and the Restless. Mr. Baer also was featured in the movie Dave as one of the president's Cabinet members. The Society presented Mr. Baer with its Lum and Abner Memorial Award for his long and distinguished career. The final order of business for the evening was a presentation to the Society member who had come the farthest to attend. That person was Cliff Caplinger who made the trek all the way by Amtrack from Inyokern, California. Cliff's a real fan as this was the second year in a row he was so recognized.

It's probably trite to say a good time was had by all, but from my observations, that's how I'd close my comments.



# CONVENTIONS:



## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

The various conventions around the country are outstanding places to enjoy old time radio. All provide re-creations of old radio shows and workshops with some of the stars of old time radio. We encourage you to take advantage of these opportunities to add a new dimension to your hobby.

We list dates here as soon as we receive them so that you can plan ahead.

- ① PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE HAS BEEN A CHANGE OF DATE FROM WHAT HAS BEEN PREVIOUSLY ANNOUNCED FOR THE 10TH ANNUAL OLD TIME RADIO AND NOSTALGIA CONVENTION in Cincinnati, Ohio. The new convention dates are April 12 and 13, 1996. The convention will be held, as usual, at the Marriott Inn on the north side of Cincinnati, just off I-75. You will find a report on last April's convention on page 44 of this issue. The person to contact for information is Bob Burchette, 10280 Gunpowder Road, Florence, Kentucky 41042. Phone: (606) 282-0333.
- ② THE 12TH ANNUAL NATIONAL LUM AND ABNER SOCIETY CONVENTION will be held on June 22, 1996 in Mena, Arkansas, which is located only about twenty miles from Pine Ridge, where the action in this popular radio series took place. The Best Western Lime Tree Inn is the convention hotel for this event. On page 45 of this issue you will find a report on last June's convention. For information on this event, please contact Tim Hollis, #81 Sharon Blvd., Dora, Alabama 35062.
- ③ THE FRIENDS OF OLD TIME RADIO CONVENTION is an annual affair held at the Holiday Inn North at the Newark, New Jersey airport. The hotel is located just off the interstate and for those flying into Newark, the hotel provides a free shuttle service back and forth to the airport. Contact person is Jay Hickerson, Box 4321, Hamden, Connecticut 06514. Phone: (203) 248-2887.

Future dates:  
21st ANNUAL CONVENTION - October 24 - 26, 1996  
22nd ANNUAL CONVENTION - October 23 - 25, 1997

### AUDIENCE RESPONSE

Some stage actors had a difficult time making the transition to radio drama because they were used to performing in front of people. When producer Bill Spier was casting the series Suspense, he usually asked actors with a long theater resume' if they had had any experience playing without audiences. "Certainly," one of them replied. "I used to play Shakespeare on the road."

# BUY SELL TRADE

NARA CLASSIFIEDS

*Non-commercial ads are free to all members. Your ad will be placed in one issue, but you can resubmit it as often as you like.*

The NARA OTR source list is a three-page compendium of over 80 OTR clubs, publications, archives, libraries, museums, and dealers. It lists the name, address, and if available, the telephone number of each of these sources. It is available from Jack French, 5137 Richardson Dr., Fairfax, VA 22032. Cost is \$2.00 for NARA members and \$3.00 for others. Send cash or stamps; please NO checks. All profits from this go to NARA.

WANTED: Any information about radio programs featuring a singer named Vernon Dalhart. I have information that he appeared on one or more MAJESTIC THEATER OF THE AIR programs in 1929. He also broadcast a continuing program for Barbasol in the late 1920's, probably 1927 and 1928. He appeared on this program as Barbasol Sam (this was prior to Singin' Sam Frankel). For at least one year he had a girl singer with him named Adelyne Hood, who was called Barbara on the show. I would like any information about these shows or any others on which he may have appeared. Please contact Jack Palmer, 145 North 21st Street, Battle Creek, MI 49015.

About 1947, the summer replacement for Jack Armstrong (at least as received in Tennessee) was the Johnny Lujack show. It was based on mythical adventures of the real Notre Dame football All American, of the same name. I am looking for a copy of any of the shows. I contacted Mr. Lujack himself, now retired from the Chicago Bears, and he doesn't have any of the shows himself. John Kepler, 26242 Wolverine Trail, Evergreen, CO 80439.  
TEL: 303-674-7879 - FAX: 303-674-7754.

To NARA Chicagoland members. I would appreciate any info, tapes, or other, regarding Chicago radio personality (1940's) Ernie Simon. Believe deceased 1950's. Bob Sabon, 308 West Oraibi Drive, Phoenix, AZ 85027

Robert Newman, 11509 Islandale Drive, Forest Park, OH 45240, is looking for "Those We Love," a soap opera that ran from 1937 to 1945; "The Story of Mary Marlin," a serial drama from 1937 to 1952; and "When the West Was Young," a thirteen part story of the west broadcast over AFRS.

## PAID ADVERTISING INFORMATION...

### COMMERCIAL ADVERTISING RATES:

#### ONE ISSUE:

Full page	- \$ 50.00
Half page	- 25.00
Quarter page	- 15.00

#### FOUR ISSUES:

25% off the above rates

# A TIP OF THE ATWATER DIAL TO....

Janis DeMoss who paid for the printing of the summer issue of the NARA NEWS out of her own pocket. This is in addition to her usual work of collating and mailing each issue, along with her many other duties as our membership director. We really appreciate all that you do for NARA, Janis, as well as this large financial contribution.

Roger Hill, Gene Larson, and John Pellatt for clippings to be used in the future.

Bob Simpson for a bundle of artwork.

Bob Sabon for the hours spent organizing the materials in the printed materials library, and for making up the library catalogs (see page 23).

Tom Monroe for his many years of service as our cassette librarian, and to Barry Hill for taking on this very important function of our club (see page 11).

Our columnists for this issue: Frank Boncore, Robert Brown, Bob Burnham, Roger Hill, Gene Larson, Jack Palmer (2 articles), John Pellatt, Charles Sexton (2 articles), Ray Smith, Hal Stephenson, and Ken Weigel.

Those who have already sent in articles for the winter issue: Jack French, Jack Palmer, Charles Sexton (2 articles), Hal Stephenson, and Ken Weigel.

Robert Newman, the first recipient of the "Stone/Waterman Award" (see page 40).

Our advertisers in this issue: Cardinal Video (page 38), Nothing's New (page 34), and Stuffed Moose Audio (page 40).

# **Thank You**

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**DEADLINES:** December 15 for the winter issue.  
March 15 for the spring issue.