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A JOURNAL OF VINTAGE RADIO

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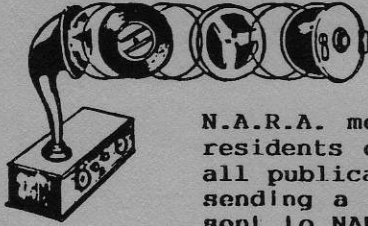
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## NORTH AMERICAN RADIO ARCHIVES

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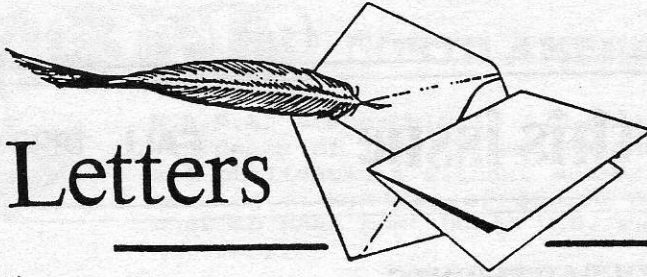
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# Letters



from  
our readers

The blue issue [of *NARA News*] came. Jack Palmer's work continues to inform and entertain, and Jim Cox sheds welcome light on a neglected genre. I'm not much of a country music or soap opera fan, but I like the way those guys dig for facts. I liked your Lux article but for one minor infraction. If you object to Fibber's closet, where do you stand on mom, apple pie and the flag? I'm thinking you may have gulped too many programs at one sitting without coming up for air. Even Benny's respiratory Maxwell and his trips to the vault listened to repeatedly would grow tiresome if you didn't occasionally slip away to spend a half hour with "Candy Matson" or "Gildersleeve." Fibber's closet, like the foghorn "B.O.," was as American as the Three Stooges. A good running gag, as you know, is one that's been inspected and approved by the listening public. It was an important part of radio comedy's dress and charm. I can't imagine Fibber without a closet anymore than I can imagine controlled population growth today. Imagine, e.g., a racehorse with three legs. As well try to imagine Abbott without Castello, or Damon without Runyon, or the Hon. Dr. Mortimer Snerd, ph.d, or Benny's Maxwell with a sunroof, dual carbs and a tank full of gas. I don't think so, at least not here in the New World.

Ken Weigel  
Van Nuys, California

*YOUR EDITOR remains unconvinced.*

\*\*\*\*\*

A follow up: In the last issue, I had a letter extract published in which I stated that those nasty computer viruses cannot be downloaded by simply reading e-mail. This is true. However, novice users of the internet should be aware that viruses can be introduced to your computer through the internet if you download actual programs from an infected website or open infected attachments sent via the e-mail system. (This does not include reading simple e-mail letters. Hence the confusion!) Anyone using the internet at all should be concerned about viruses. And so should anyone swapping disks with any computer other than their own. All computer users should have virus protection software installed. It is easily obtained from your local computer store or software dealer. There are many different ones out there that will do the job. Once installed, you will be able to rest easy knowing you have safeguarded your valuable computer memory from viruses and the potential damage that they can inflict.

Also, regarding the letter asking for scriptwriting advice, I'd suggest a good book on the subject, like Bill Ash's *Writing Drama for Radio* (a United Kingdom book) or the book I grew up on, *Writing Radio and TV Scripts* by Kate Munro. Try the local library for either or both.

John Pellatt  
Willowdale, Ontario

*EDITOR'S NOTE: John is a member of the ACTRA Performers Guild, the Writers Guild of Canada, and the Writers Guild of Great Britain. He has been a writer, producer, and actor for numerous radio and television broadcasts in Canada and Great Britain.*

\*\*\*\*\*

I liked the CBC article by Ray Smith in the summer issue of *NARA News* because I know of the people discussed, what with having access to Canadian radio. The CBC has lots of interesting things.

Chuck Seeley  
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# THE LIBRARIES

Latest Report

by

Don L. Aston

All members should have received 2 temporary lists of the available material in the cassette library. One was 20 pages and the other was 7. I hope to have all the available cassettes included in a complete list by December 31, 1998. This has proved to be one giant task and I want to thank all of you for your continued patience.

I have not heard anything from the Reel to Reel Librarian since March. I hope to also have this situation resolved by the end of the year too.

I want to thank all those who listened to 100's of cassettes and told me what were "keepers" and what were "rejects." At this time I do not think I require any more cassette listeners.

This is what NARA needs now. NARA needs a CASSETTE LIBRARIAN. Before you leap into the volunteer mode, please consider these requirements.

1. You must live in California. Preferable live in Southern California.  
The reason is you should be able to meet face to face with me without too much trouble. This would be necessary on a continuing basis.
2. You should be familiar with cassette duplicating. 2 "duel well" machines are necessary.
3. You should have a computer and knowledge of a database or spread sheet EXCELL if possible.
4. You should have a large area for storage.
5. Convenient access to UPS and or the Post Office is necessary.
6. Should have lots of available time.
7. These are just a few things necessary that I can think of here.

If you wish to be considered for this most important position, do not hesitate to call, E-mail, fax or smoke signal.

Keep NARA running. Volunteer and recruit new members. Lets continue preserving for future generations what we all enjoy... OLD TIME RADIO.



## THE SIXTIES

by  
Frank Bresee

Radio historian Frank Bresee is heard on his "GOLDEN DAYS OF RADIO" broadcast in the United States and Canada over the YESTERDAY USA SATELLITE NETWORK. Frank has a long and distinguished career as a radio performer and producer. He has worked with many greats of fantasy films.

By the beginning of the nineteen sixties, only a few of the original network programs remained. Jack Benny had switched to television, as did Bob Hope, Burns and Allen and so many others. Edgar Bergen with his ever present side kick Charlie McCarthy tried hosting a TV quiz show, and Superman had switched from a five a week afternoon radio serial to a weekly prime time television event.

Ma Perkins, who went on the air in 1933, finally called it quits in November 1960. Virginia Payne had played the title role for 27 years, and with television just around the corner, it seemed like the proper time to retire. On her last program (11/25/60) Ma Perkins, in a touching goodbye to the radio audience, had these words: "Ma Perkins again. This was our broadcast #7065. I first came to you on December fourth, nineteen thirty three. Thank you for being so loyal to us these twenty-seven years. The part of Willy has been played right from the beginning my Murray Forbes, Shuffle was played for 25 years by Charles Egelston and for the past two years by Edwin Wolfe. The Fay you've been hearing these past few years has been Margaret

Draper. The part was played for many years by Rita Ascot. For 15 years our Evey has been Kay Campbell. Helen Lewis plays Gladys and Tom Wells has been played by John Larkin and Casey Allen. Our director is Richard Leonard. Our writer for more than twenty years has been Orin Tovrov. Ma Perkins has always been played by me, Virginia Payne. If you'll write to me, Ma Perkins, at Orleans, Massachusetts, I'll try to answer you. Goodbye, and may God bless you."

"The Romance of Helen Trent," another longtime favorite, gave up on the heroine's long and usually fruitless quest for "romance after 35." And one of the last soaps to leave the air was "Right To Happiness." Finally NBC cancelled it feeling, perhaps, after 21 years that listeners had their right to happiness. No doubt about it, the tastes in Ammerica were changing.

Amos 'n Andy left the air, as did the National Barn Dance, but Arthur Godfrey continued on with no end in sight. In April 1969, Godfrey celebrated his 35th year with CBS. He had been on the air, almost since the birth of the network itself.

In the mid-sixties, some of the old shows began to come back. Stations and listeners were discovering the excitement of radio drama. The Shadow was back, as was the Lone Ranger and the Green Hornet. In January 1967 I began a regular program on the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service, featuring old radio shows plus in person interviews with most of the radio personalities of the forties and fifties. The Golden Days of Radio continued to be broadcast on the AFRTS network until 1995, some 28 years later. It continues on the Yesterday USA Satellite Network to this day. It appeared that radio did not die, it was just recorded for release at a more convenient time.

During the sixties, news, talk, and disc jockeys began to dominate the airwaves. John Gambling began a popular program on New York's WOR, and he was quickly followed by the equally popular Jean Shepherd, who became kind of a counter-culture hero for insomniacs. In Chicago, Wally Phillips began a morning talk show on WGN, and Joe Pyne, in Los Angeles, became the first of the hard-nosed hosts by putting down the people who called in. The listeners loved it, and soon he was heard coast-to-coast. With his suggestive "Feminine Forum," Bill Ballance was also known to millions across the country, and everywhere radio hosts copied his style, but Bill was number one.

The networks continued their service to the affiliated stations, but it had turned into mostly news and sports. Walter Cronkite, Mike Wallace, Harry

Reasoner, and Dan Rather gave regular reports, and old timer Lowell Thomas pressed resolutely into his fourth decade on CBS. In an interview I did with Mr. Thomas he brought up some startling facts. He told me, "I did my first broadcasting 51 years ago. The first one was an ad lib one hour program that I did on KDKA Pittsburgh telling the story of man's first flight around the world. So when I first started broadcasting there were some interesting statistics: Eric Severaid was 13 years old; Howard K. Smith, 11; Daniel Shorr was 9; Walter Cronkite was 9; Mike Wallace was 7 years old; Edwin L. Newman was 6; David Brinkley was 5; Harry Rasoner 2. Bob Pierpoint, John Chancellor, Barbara Walters, Roger Mudd, Marvin Kalb, Dan Rather and nearly all the others, were not even born." Lowell Thomas went on to say that he felt he had been very lucky to be able to continue as a newscaster on CBS for so many years.

Paul Harvey no less bravely persisted with his daily 15-minute newscast on the ABC radio network. But radio's longest-running variety show, "The Breakfast Club," closed its kitchen for good on December 27, 1968. From its beginning as "The Pepper Pot Program," 34 years earlier, Don McNeill had entertained a nation through one big war and a couple of small ones, five U.S. presidents, five Popes, three kings and one queen. When Don McNeill concluded his last show, he took a fond look at his years on the air and then closed with the familiar line, "Be good to yourself." He might have added, "Better than TV has been to us."

# SOUND EFFECTS AND CAPTAIN KANGAROO

by  
Robert L. Mott



*NARA member Bob Mott has had a long and distinguished career in both network radio and TV. He handled sound effects for such shows as Gangbusters, Phillip Morris Playhouse, the Ed Sullivan Show on TV, and the Tonight Show. He also was a writer for Red Skalton, Dick VanDyke, and Andy Williams, among others. He has written two books which you can order directly from the publishers: RADIO SOUND EFFECTS (ISBN #0-89950-747-6) for \$41.95 which includes shipping from McFarland & Company, Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640 (800) 253-2187; and SOUND EFFECTS: RADIO, TV, AND FILM (ISBN #0-240-80029-X) for \$46.95, including shipping, from Focal Press, 225 Wildwood Ave., Woburn, MA 01801.*

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Ten of the most imaginative, challenging, and frustrating years that I ever spent in television were with the "kindly old Captain," a gentleman known to millions of children as "Captain Kangaroo." Before that, he was "Clarabel," the clown on "Howdy Doody." But before any of these colorful sobriquets, he was Robert Keeshan.

The "Captain Kangaroo Show," was a one-hour program shown on the CBS Network six days a week, Monday through Saturday, 52 weeks a year. That's an awful lot to say, let alone do. But by taping two shows a day, five days a week, we not only managed to keep up, we would actually get ahead of ourselves with a surplus of shows.

Although the show was taped, it was "live-on-tape," a technique also used on the "Tonight Show," for which the show was done exactly as if it were live and nothing short of the most horrendous mistake, would cause the cameras to stop recording. Even then, only Keeshan himself had the authority to give that order.

Trying to do two one-hour shows a day was extremely difficult for everyone concerned. and although he had a staff of writers, they functioned more in the capacity of supplying Keeshan with ideas rather than with completed scripts.

One of these "scripts" is shown at the top of the next page. As you can see, they were simply outlines to give Keeshan direction. It was up to the cast and the crew to expand on these ideas. Please note the spelling of FIBBER MAGEE CRASH. Although the writers were all too young to have heard "The Fibber McGee and Molly Show" when it was being broadcast on radio, they all were aware of its famous crash.

Rehearsals for the show consisted of Bob and the cast having coffee around a table with the director, Peter Birch. And unless there was some special production number or a difficult sketch involving costume and makeup changes, the only rehearsals with cameras were reserved for the commercials.

This loose and easy format was fine for the regulars. Trying to do two one hour shows with firm, detailed scripts would have been humanly impossible.



	( continued )
7.	<p>Dancing Bear watches his toy soldier march for the mousehole. As the toy gets close to the mousehole door, the door opens and the toy marches in. The door closes and after a beat it opens. Toy marches out. Again toy turns and marches towards mousehole. Door again opens. After a beat, toy marches out. Toy marches in wide circle and back to the door. But this time the door doesn't open...</p> <p><u>SOUND EFFECTS: FIBBER MAGEE CLOSET</u></p> <p>Dancing Bear gets dustpan and sweeps up the remains of his toy-<u>SE: TIN CANS</u>. Bob holds the toy box open and Dancing Bear dumps the imaginary contents of the imaginary toy soldier into toy box. <u>SE: PIECES GOING INTO BOX</u>. Bob is about to throw away the empty shoe box when the Dancing Bear stops him. DB shakes box-<u>SE:PIECES SHAKING</u>. Finally, opens top and pours the invisible pieces into his paw. Then he winds his " toy " up. <u>SE: WINDING IN SYNC WITH ACTION</u>. He then puts " toy " on floor. <u>SE: TOY WHIRRING SOUND FADING</u>. Dancing Bear " watches " it leave. Mister Greenjeans comes down the stairs and they all decide to go out into the Garden.</p>
8.	COMMERCIAL:

An example of a "Captain Kangaroo" script.  
(Photo by author.)

Even doing two ad lib shows daily depended on the cooperation and anticipation of everyone in the studio. It also meant understanding some of Keeshan's little idiosyncrasies (no one understood all of Keeshan's little idiosyncrasies).

When a show is largely unscripted and unrehearsed and must depend on an ad-lib format for its success, there must be a tremendous amount of mutual respect and trust among everyone connected with the show. Ad libs can't be done for personal gratification or the show would soon become an undisciplined competition of egos. An although ad libs are, by their very nature, unpredictable, it is essential that careful albeit instantaneous thought must be given to their appropriateness for the audience at home and to the other performers.

To illustrate what it was like working a show that was often made up as it went along, here are some of the more memorable moments from the "Captain Kangaroo Show."

When CBS built their Broadcast Center on 57th Street and Tenth Avenue in New York City, they didn't quite build it from scratch. Instead they gutted much of the original building and adapted what remained to the demands of broadcasting. It's important to know that the previous tenant at the site had been a dairy company. In fact, an area that had once contained stalls for milking purposes was now the Broadcast Center's audio-effects room for producing echoes.

In addition to supplying us with milk, cows also attract flies. Although I can't say there was any connection between the former dairy tenant and the present fly problem, I can say that when the milk company left the building in search of greener pastures, a number of flies decided to come into the studio and take a shot at show business. At first they just made the rounds of the different offices. But when word got buzzed around that the Captain Kangaroo was going to be doing his show in the building, the flies all made the equivalent of a bee-line for his studio. Or, to be more specific, for his Hostess Twinkie commercials.

What was incredible was their uncanny timing. It was as if they all had stop watches in their antennas, because at the precise moment that the Captain would begin the Twinkie commercial, in would buzz one of the flies, and the show would have to stop taping. Naturally, CBS was not happy about this time-consuming and costly pest. The studio was ordered to spray, fumigate, and even keep a prop man, out of camera range, riding shotgun with a fly swatter during the commercials. It was all to no avail. The problem only seemed to get worse.

In the meantime, the Captain joined forces with CBS and attacked the fly problem by offering a bounty of 25 cents per fly, dead or alive. This generous reward however, had to be withdrawn, when one of the more enterprising stagehands was suspected of submitting for payment a jar of outsiders he had gunned down at the diner down the street.

The solution to this sticky (and hairy) problem came about quite by accident in the form of an ad lib. One of the musical numbers that day required the sound of a bumblebee buzzing. The effect I used was not Barney Beck's [another of NARA's celebrity sound effects members] razzberry but a small and more reliable door buzzer. By manipulating the tiny spark on the buzzer, I could create a very convincing bee sound.

When the musical number was over, I began putting the buzzer away while Keeshan began the Twinkie commercial. Over my head set, I heard one of the camera operators warning the director that a fly had been spotted getting ready to make his appearance on camera and pig out on one of the Twinkies. Knowing how bugged the Captain got over these insect intrusions, I picked up my bee-buzz effect, and decided to try a desperation ad lib. I realized the chance of it working was practically zero, but I had to try it.

I should point out that any ad lib is a brief interlude of madness that is compulsory in nature and must be done with great speed before the moment is gone. An ad lib also must be free-spirited. Put too much pressure or restriction on it and it becomes self-conscious and contrived. Put too little thought into our actions and it can become embarrassing or in poor taste.

Keeshan was halfway through the commercial when the fly made a low-flying pass at the Twinkie. In equal parts disgust and sarcasm, and more for the benefit of the crew than the home audience, Bob announced, "Well, well, here he comes...our old friend the fly."

At that point we would normally have stopped the tape, gotten rid of the fly, and reshot the commercial. This time, however, I decided to give my idea a try. Opening my microphone, I gave a few short bursts of buzzes. Without a moment's hesitation, Keeshan reacted to my sounds by responding "Good morning Raymond. How are you this morning?" I did a few more conversational buzzes and then Bob ended the fly's intrusion into the commercial by saying, "You go outside, Raymond. A house is no place for a fly." With that he walked over and opened the door of his Treasure House set and I buzzed Raymond out.

This story is perhaps the best example I can give of the merits of an ad lib. Without that little exchange between Bob and the fly sounds, those tape stoppages would have continued indefinitely.

The cast of the "Captain Kangaroo Show" consisted of Keeshan, Lumpy Brannum, and Gus Allegrhetti. Lumpy was a fine musician who, prior to becoming "Mister Greenjeans," had played with Fred Waring and his Pennsylvanians. Gus Allegrhetti, who did all the art work as well as the animation and voices of Grandfather Clock, the Dancing Bear, Mister Moose, and Bunny Rabbit, had been a serious art student. Although each had a talent that would have allowed him to be successful individually, it was their work as a team that made the Kangaroo show the dominant children's show for such a long period of time.

When a show had no script, it was essential that each cast member stay in a constant state of alertness in order to make contributions. This included sound effects. As an example, one of the running routines on the show was the Bunny Rabbit's ability to trick the Captain out of his carrots. Although the ruses were many, the ending was always the same: As the Captain leaned on the Treasure House desk bemoaning his losses, the juicy sound of carrots being crunched would waft up from the Bunny Rabbit's hutch. We must have done a thousand variations on this carrot-eating ploy, but it's dangerous to take anything for granted.

On one show, the Bunny Rabbit had once again duped the Captain out of his precious carrots. As the clever Bunny Rabbit quickly scooped up the carrots (*wind whistle*) and ducked down behind the desk (*slide whistle*), the familiar sound of carrots being chomped filled the Treasure House (*a bunch of ice cream-bar sticks being rapidly squeezed in chewing fashion*).

Preoccupied with producing these crunching sounds, I glanced up at my monitor and was startled to see the Captain, Mister Moose, Mister Greenjeans, and most importantly, Bunny Rabbit all staring down behind the desk in a very perplexed manner, wondering what was making that strange crunching sound. Even though my sound-effects area was located behind one of the Treasure House walls, they had somehow known that I wasn't paying attention and they had decided to teach me a lesson. And so the game was on. While I tried to think my way out of this, I of course had to keep crunching--and suffer their little digging remarks.

The Captain wanted to know if the Bunny Rabbit had invited another Bunny over to share his carrots. In response, the Bunny gave the Captain a long, withering, incredulous stare, as if to say, "Are you crazy!" More crunching sounds. Mister Greenjeans volunteered that they had a mystery on their hands. The crunching continued.

Mister Moose, in Allegrhetti's falsetto voice, suggested that maybe it wasn't a carrot being eaten. "Sounds more to me, Bunny, like a bunch of ice cream sticks being rubbed together."

They all had a good laugh at that little inside joke. In the meantime, I kept on making carrots-being-consumed noises with my handful of ice cream sticks. And the more I crunched, the more desperate I became for a way out of my embarrassing dilemma. And then suddenly it came to me. As the three continued their jokes, I added a new sound to the carrot crunches--the familiar buzzes of Raymond the Fly.

The reaction of Bunny Rabbit to the sound of this interloper in his carrot horde was immediate and decisive. As Bunny Rabbit stiffened his body in shocked surprise, the Captain brought the segment to an end by announcing that perhaps Raymond had gotten over his "sweet tooth" (a reference to Twinkies) and become a vegetarian.

When the show returned after the commercial break, the crunching and buzzing had stopped and the Captain and Mister Greenjeans had left the desk area. On the desk, however, and marching in determined military fashion was Bunny Rabbit holding his beloved carrots in one paw, while, on his shoulder, his other paw held a very ominous looking fly swatter.

The trick to doing sound effects on Captain Kangaroo was very simple. The first rule was to have the following effects available at all times: bulb horn (Beepo the clown's nose), Deacon chimes (the Treasure House doorbell), police whistle, postman's whistle, fire gong, train whistle (hat tree game), small buzzer (Raymond the Fly), ice cream sticks (Bunny Rabbit's carrots), and a special recording of crazy clock ticks (Captain Kangaroo watch). In addition, a special library of 100 often-asked for sounds (birds, dogs, cows, horses, sheep, rain, thunder, etc.) and dozens of often-used manual effects. All of these effects had to be within easy reach because you never knew when the kindly old Captain was going to turn on you.

As I've said, Bob never rehearsed. Therefore, when he had time to fill you never knew what to expect. He might read a story, do a playtime, or if you were really unlucky, he'd go out into the Treasure House Garden. This meant you had to be prepared to come up with any record or manual effect the Captain called for. To give you an idea of how nerve racking this could be for sound effects, I've scripted one of these little pastoral strolls.

Please note that all the lines italicized are directed to SFX (sound effects)...me. (Everything after SFX in parentheses describes my thoughts and actions.)

CAPTAIN: Ummm, smell that good fresh air. *Usually you can hear Mister Harkins's dog barkin'...*

SFX: (PUT DOG RECORD ON TURNTABLE. BUT JUST BEFORE YOU OPEN THE POT, YOU HEAR HIM CONTINUE ON TO SAY)



*The author trying to outguess the Captain. (Photo by author.)*

CAPTAIN: ...but I understand he's not feeling well and is at the veterinarian. Mister Harkin's dog...not Mister Harkin.  
SFX: (TAKE DOG RECORD OFF TURNTABLE)  
CAPTAIN: ...what a beautiful day...I wonder where the birds are?  
SFX: (DIG THROUGH THE PILE OF RECORDS AND GET BIRD SOUNDS)  
CAPTAIN: With each passing year they seem to get later and later. Oh look, there's a horse over there....  
SFX: (AFTER A QUICK SEARCH, I FIND HORSE RECORD, NEXT TO IT IS A COW RECORD, I TAKE IT JUST IN CASE. CUE UP HORSE WHINNY AND PLAY IT)  
CAPTAIN: ...and a COW...  
SFX: (I WAS RIGHT. PLAY COW MOOING. EVEN THE CAPTAIN IS SURPRISED HOW FAST THE COW SOUND COMES. BUT THIS IS HIS ONLY RESPONSE)  
CAPTAIN: I hope there's nothing seriously wrong with poor Mrs. Clearie's cow...its moo sure sounds scratchy!  
SFX: (AN OBVIOUS REFERENCE TO SOME SURFACE NOISE ON THE RECORD)

And so it went. With this little insight of what it was like to be on the receiving end of the Captain's playfulness, you will perhaps appreciate better the time I had my revenge.

One summer, Keeshan decided to give the show a different look, and instead of the action taking place in the Treasure House, he had a set built that resembled an old-fashioned river boat.

On the very first show, the script called for the Captain to discuss the most improbable subject that I could imagine: He was to give a demonstration of RADIO sound effects. What was unusual was that the feature writer who had come up with this idea didn't discuss it with me. Instead, she had gone directly to the CBS sound-effects department and borrowed a number of manual effects for Bob to use in the demonstration. There were even coconut shells, for doing horses hooves. It seemed to me that this whole thing was getting curiouser and curiouser.

CAPTAIN: Boys and girls, now I'd like to do a demonstration on sound effects. In the old days of radio, they used to put on little dramatic shows. And to help the people understand the stories better, they used sound effects like these. (indicates props) If they wanted to indicate that someone was at the door, they rang a doorbell. (rings bell) Or to ring a telephone they just pushed a button. (rings phone) And that's what sound effects were.

Already I could tell by his sarcasm that Bob was looking for trouble.

CAPTAIN: But that was in the old days. The old, old, old days, that maybe your grandparents remember.

For a man who had impeccable taste and timing, the kindly old Captain was digging himself a deep hole with a few too many sarcastic "olds."

CAPTAIN: But here on our boat, we only use things that are real. Everything here makes its own noises. Sound effects, boys and girls, went out with radio.

I had no idea what Bob was going for but I did know it was unusual for him to deceive the children into thinking this was a real boat. Something warned me I was in for some trouble. One of the first things I learned when I started doing sound effects was to try to anticipate problems. For this reason, I had inspected the set for possible trouble spots when the show decided to use a boat setting for the summer. And the major problem I found involved the boat's steam whistle.

Keeshan loved to play with sound effects. He'd squeeze Beepo's nose (Beepo was a clown face that was part of the set) and I'd beep a bulb horn. He'd go to the hat tree and ask the children to identify various occupations according to the hats he'd put on, and what sound effects went with each hat: a policeman's hat-whistle, a train engineer's hat-train whistle, and so on. The trouble was, you never had any warning. On one occasion, as we were coming out of a commercial, I looked at my studio monitor and saw Keeshan's hand on Beepo's nose. Lunging for the horn, and nearly chipping two front teeth, I blew a horn sound. But this wasn't good enough for the Captain. He kept his hand on Beepo's nose until I nearly had a hernia trying to sustain the horn sounds for as long as Keeshan held Beepo's nose. So when I found that a steam whistle was going to be part of the set, I rigged a hose from the large, wooden, manual boat whistle to a large tank of pressurized air.

With this arrangement I could control the flow of air with the regulator at the end of the hose, once the air-tank valve was open. Now I was prepared to give Keeshan anything from a short toot to a full-blown boat whistle that lasted for 15 minutes. And the best part of it all was, he thought I still had to blow the boat whistle with my mouth.

CAPTAIN: ...and so, boys and girls, when I want to signal to another boat or it's very foggy out and I want to warn another boat that we're in the area, all I do is pull this lanyard...which is a rope connected to a whistle that operates on steam from the engine room.

In all my many years in show business, never was I presented with more of a setup. In fact, it was too good to be true. I was totally confused about what was expected of me. I could understand the sarcastic little digs about the "old, old, old days of sound effects," but it was completely out of the Captain's character to purposely mislead his audience about the legitimacy of the "real" boat whistle. As the Captain moved toward the lanyard, my mind began to race. Had they indeed rigged a real boat whistle for the Captain to play with? Why else would he be treating sound effects in such a cavalier manner?

As the Captain took hold of the lanyard, even the staff in the control room fell silent, and in the studio, all eyes (and most assuredly mine) were on the rope, in the Captain's hands. Finally, he gave the rope a mighty yank, and the studio was filled with sweet and glorious silence. Not complete silence, however, for from the far end of the studio came the unmistakable sound of a suppressed snicker.

Suddenly, the control room exploded into a frenzy of conflicting instructions directed at me. Half the voices believed the Captain was going for an undisclosed comedy routine, while the other half of the brain trust was screaming for me to blow the "damned boat whistle!"

Again he pulled the lanyard. And again he was greeted with silence. Suddenly I realized that this wasn't a trick at all. He really needed me to blow the whistle! Sound effects unimportant, huh! You want the old, old, old days of radio, do you! I'll give you a taste of old days, me bucko!

The Captain began stomping his foot on the "deck" of the boat and calling out in a loud voice, "Mister Greenjeans, Mister Greenjeans, can you hear me in the engine room?"

Lumpy Brannum, who had gone behind the set to have a quick cigarette, blew out a lungful of smoke and answered, "Yes Captain?"

"I need more steam for the boat whistle."

Lumpy could be heard deliberately bumping into things as he made his way behind the narrow space that separated the studio wall and the set. He did this so that his voice would indeed sound like it was coming from the engine room instead of somewhere off in the middle of the river. "I'll tend to that right away, Captain..."

The control room, on safe ground now that they realized that Keeshan really did need the sound effect of the whistle, all began yelling at once. "Blow the whistle, blow the whistle!" With everyone screaming in my ears, we mercifully went to a commercial.

During this two-minute break, I was certain that Keeshan would come over and demand that I give him the sound of the boat whistle. But that wouldn't be part of the game. That would be admitting defeat. As I peered around the corner of the set, I could see the kindly old Captain deep in thought. Which didn't bother me in the least, because I had control of the all-important boat whistle. When we came back from commercial, Keeshan addressed the camera. "Well, boys and girls, Mister Greenjeans found the small problem and fixed it. Now, when I pull the rope, I guarantee you will hear the sound of a boat whistle."

As Keeshan walked slowly towards the rope, the whole situation took on the drama of a western shootout: Captain Kangaroo versus the soundman at high noon. Even though I had put on my head phones again, there wasn't a sound to be heard other than some nervous coughs.

As the Captain slowly raised his hand towards the lanyard, even the coughing in the control room stopped. And as he gripped the rope and gave a mighty pull, the studio was filled with the sound of the familiar steam-boat whistle. He continued to hold the rope down, and a crooked smile of revenge creased his mouth under his mustache.

After 10 seconds of holding the rope down, it was evident why he had been so deep in thought during the commercial. After 20 seconds, his smile was replaced by a flickering look of puzzlement. After 25 seconds, he began frowning perceptively. At 30 seconds, he realized that there was more to the show than just trying to get even with the sound-effects man, so he reluctantly gave up his little game and released the rope. But now it was my turn. Instead of the steam whistle stopping, it continued to blow. The Captain, unprepared for this turn of events, began jerking at the rope and stomping his feet and shouting to Mister Greenjeans, all at the same time. "Lessen the steam, Mister Greenjeans. Lessen the steam!" And suddenly, as quickly as the boat whistle had started, it stopped. He walked slowly and with an air of some bewilderment away from the lanyard. Little did he suspect I was saving my best until last!

He then told the children how good it was to be floating down the river with a good, "seaworthy ship under you." And for emphasis, he stamped his foot-- perhaps a trifle too hard, giving me the excuse I was looking for to start blowing the whistle again. As the closing theme began, Keeshan started moving around the set hitting various items in hopes of striking something that would shut off the capricious whistle. Shouting to be heard over the din, he apologized to the children for the behavior of the boat whistle but

promised to have it "fixed by tomorrow," and looking in my direction, added, "or we'll get a new one."

Of course he did neither. The boat whistle became a part of the fun, along with the Treasure House doorbell, Beepo's nose, the Hat Tree sounds, Raymond the Fly, Mister Bainter's backfiring truck, and all the other wonderful sounds that helped make a show that was so short on scripted material but so long on imagination, such a joy and challenge to do.



## NEW BOOK

# RADIO'S GOLDEN YEARS

by  
Frank Bresee and Bobb Lynes

*Radio's Golden Years*, a 1998 publication, was created by NARA "celebrity member" Frank Bresee and SPERDVAC president Bobb Lynes. The forward to the book was written by another NARA "celebrity member," Norman Corwin. This book uses a completely different method of telling us about radio's vintage years. Each page deals with a separate radio program, program series, or performer (there are 254 of them). This time, instead of simply giving us pages of factual information and then perhaps also having a section of pictures, each page in this book combines the art work of Bobb Lynes with the text material provided by Frank Bresee. This is a beautiful combination, but a little difficult to visualize without actually seeing it. So, we have provided, here, a sample of the page about Franks's own program, the "Golden Days of Radio." This is greatly reduced as each page is a full 8½ by 11 inches in size. This book is a lot of fun. Give it a try, you'll like it.

You can order the book directly from Frank Bresee, P.O. Box 1222, Hollywood, CA 90027. Cost is \$21.95, which includes the shipping.

**RADIO'S GOLDEN YEARS.**  
by FRANK BRESEE & BOBB LYNES

THE GOLDEN DAYS OF RADIO WENT ON THE AIR IN AUGUST 1949, AND HAS CONTINUED FOR THE BETTER PART OF HALF A CENTURY... OVER THE YEARS IT HAS BEEN HEARD ON THE LIBERTY BROADCASTING SYSTEM, NATIONAL AND FOR 23 YEARS ON THE ARMED FORCES RADIO SERVICE. IT WAS ALSO HEARD IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ON KFI, KNPC, KRLB & KPCC.

**GOLDEN DAYS OF RADIO**

GOLDEN DAYS FEATURES EXCERPTS FROM FRANK BRESEE'S MOST COLLECTION OF GREAT RADIO PROGRAMS OF THE PAST: THE SHADOW, THE LONG RANGER, JACK ARMSTRONG, SAM SPADE, AND WANDY LIGHTS OUT, HENRY ALLCOCK & MORE.

HOST IS RADIO HISTORIAN FRANK BRESEE

THESE RADIO STARS HAVE APPEARED IN PERCY BOB HOPE, BING CROSBY, JACK BENNY, GEORGE BURKS, BERT & MARY, FIBBER MCGEE AND BILL GALLWIN, ART GILMIRE & MANY MORE!





## TRANSCRIBED FROM TORONTO

by John Pellatt

When I was a kid, one of my favourite authors was the French author Georges Simenon and his detective novels featuring Maigret, the Detective. Maigret was as much philosopher and social observer as he was Chief Inspector of the Paris, France police. CBC Radio here in Canada did a brilliant series of adaptations in the 1970s featuring the late great Canadian radio actor Budd Knapp as the laconic Maigret. Knapp was a superb vocal artist and his interpretation of the role defined Maigret's voice for me. Although no attempt was ever made to affect a French accent, he brought Maigret to life by means of his unique sound, interior monologues, pauses, intonations and brilliant timing. Scripts by Frederick Spoerly condensed and captured the flavour of the original novels incredibly well. Production was minimal but effective; it never overshadowed the story or Maigret himself.

It's been over twenty years since I first heard those plays on CBC Radio and I must admit I have been actively searching for any of them for many years. It was therefore a surprise to discover that Durkin Hayes Audio has commercially released two double cassette packs of the original CBC productions starring Budd Knapp. "Maigret and the Killer" (also featuring "Maigret Sets a Trap" and "Maigret's Christmas") and "Maigret and the Reluctant Witness" (also featuring "Maigret Hesitates" and "Maigret in Society") are nicely packaged compilations from the mid 1970s. Each episode runs about an hour, for a total of six hours of outstanding radio drama. Could they possibly live up to my memories and expectations?

I am pleased to report that they do. Although I detected a few obvious edits (possibly for time?) the episodes seem as fresh and alive as they did the day that they were first broadcast. Without a doubt, it is Knapp's outstanding performance that makes the series memorable. But it doesn't hurt to have those fine scripts based on the urbane Simenon novels too! For this fan it was money definitely well spent.

A little background: Budd Knapp was a star on CBC Radio back in the 1940s and 1950s, working under the legendary CBC Radio drama director Andrew Allan on the famous "Stage" series. His rich, world-weary voice was one of the most distinctive on Canadian radio in the post-war years. He co-starred in the much beloved CBC Radio serial "John and Judy". Throughout his long career he maintained his home in Canada but also worked for several years in London for the BBC and in Los Angeles in film and early TV with such stars as Jack Benny, Frank Sinatra and Charles Bronson. In addition to later live stage, film and TV credits, he continued to be a familiar voice on CBC Radio dramas, most notably for his popular recurring critically-acclaimed role as Maigret, right up to his death in 1982. He was 69.

I can think of no more fitting a tribute to his memory than to have any portion of his body of excellent work made available again to the public.

MAIGRET AND THE KILLER. ISBN 0-88646-452-8. US Suggested list price \$16.99. MAIGRET AND THE RELUCTANT WITNESS. ISBN 0-88646-458-7. \$16.99. Publisher: Durkin-Hayes Audio. Available through local bookstores and talking book outlets.

# DAYTIME DIARY



## Radio Days

As an only child raised in the deep South in the 1940s and 1950s, removed from legions of cousins who resided in rural Georgia -- I grew up almost alone. Thus, I missed the connectional relationship enjoyed by most extended families. Once a year, perhaps, I saw some of my kinfolk. The only family I ever really recall, however, included just three people -- my mother, my father and me.

What did a pre-teen do in a city like Charlotte to pass the time -- and, particularly, in those lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer when school was in recess? For one thing, I loved swimming, and took every opportunity I was given to jump into a community pool.

During academic terms, in junior high and high school I joined newspaper staffs and drama clubs and found plenty to fascinate me in both fields. As a teenager, I was active in youth activities, including choir, drama and newsletter production at a local church. It was this developing interest in reaching an "audience," I think -- including those who read, saw and heard what others created -- that led me to take a shine to a spawning proliferation of local productions offered by a hometown radio station.

Admitting Charlotte wasn't like New York or Hollywood in that pre- and early TV era, I'm impressed from the vantage point of time that our metropolis, then of fewer than 200,000 souls (today, about a million), gave us as many audience participation opportunities as it did. Surely few cities of its size had a station with as much spectator entertainment as Charlotte's WBT. And because it was so easy to join in, I became practiced at it early in life.

On infrequent occasions my family went to the Armory Auditorium on weekends. This municipal facility, situated directly behind my future high school, was the venue for a weekly broadcast of a country music hoedown called *Carolina Hayride*. Arthur Smith and the Crackerjacks, Claude Casey, the strummin'-and-pickin' comedy duo of Whitey and Hogan, Fred Kirby and the Johnson Family Singers -- most of them plucked from the rural farms which surrounded Charlotte -- came to town on Saturday nights for one of the biggest barn dances in Dixie. So impressed with it was CBS, of whom WBT was an affiliate, that it carried a portion of this live amusement to the nation in the mid 1940s.

I learned later that places like Chicago, Richmond, Shreveport and Nashville had hillbilly shindigs of their own. As in those places, even for the portions not carried by a network, ours was beamed over a powerful 50,000-watt superstation that allowed its signal to travel at night to much of the country's heartland, and even to Canada. And as a result, WBT reached well beyond the typical confines of most of its competitor stations.

Casey, Kirby, et al, also performed live five afternoons a week at 3:30 on a 30-minute WBT hillbilly matinee known as *The Briarhoppers*. When CBS picked up the show in the early 1950s and fed it to the rest of America, it was labeled *Carolina Calling*. Arthur ("Guitar Boogie") Smith's *Corner Store*, a subsequent half-hour daily country music romp heard locally, featured one of Charlotte's most gifted musicians and his brothers. All three Smiths lived side-by-side a couple of blocks down the street from my house, and I waved frantically each time one of them passed by our place.

Meanwhile, the Johnson Family Singers, a gospel harmony group, offered listeners a 10-minute stint in the late afternoons, and a longer program at midday on Sunday. After awhile, daughter Betty Johnson made it to the big time as a winner on Arthur Godfrey's *Talent Scouts* on CBS. As a result, she became a popular vocalist for awhile on Don McNeill's *Breakfast Club* at ABC. Betty enjoyed a recording career of some merit, too, her biggest hit on the charts being "I Dreamed."

Meanwhile, in the late 1940s WBT launched an hour-long morning bonanza called *What's Cookin'?* Staged before a live audience Monday-through-Friday at 9 o'clock, it consisted of games, contests, singing, banter and gimmicks. In theory, it was a warm-up for local listeners to *Arthur Godfrey Time*, the 90-minute network audience participation marathon that immediately followed it. But in practice, the local show stole listeners from Don McNeill's broadcast at that hour on local ABC affiliate WAYS.

For several years this riotously invigorating potpourri emanated from a studio in Charlotte's downtown Wilder Building on South Tryon Street. (WBT's other studios were upstairs in the same facility.) When the program outgrew that expanse, it moved up North Tryon to space provided by a piano and organ retailer. There it continued to air live without missing a beat for a few more years.

The show's audience often included many of the same faces daily, frequently swelling past a hundred fans. Some of them gained fleeting celebrity status as they were selected for on-air interviews, or chosen to participate in some of its contests. Daily the program arrived on the air as WBT's early morning disc jockey, Grady Cole, for decades an "institution" in local radio, signed off his four-hour stint with the catchphrase "The time... (snapping his fingers) ...is nine!" A familiar instrumental arrangement of *Heartaches* played by the Ted Weems Orchestra ushered in *What's Cookin'?*

In the early mornings during summer breaks from school I often rode with my dad to town on his way to work. He would deposit me outside the Wilder Building in time for the studio audience's daily warm-up. Announcer Fletcher Austin instructed us in what -- and what not -- to do once the show was on the air.

I was absorbed by the behind-the-scenes properties of a broadcast studio. The director's cues in the form of hand signals fascinated me. Those signals were thrown through the control room window to master of ceremonies Kurt Webster and other "regulars" on stage.

Webster, incidentally, was credited by Godfrey on his morning show for nationally popularizing the re-release of Weems' rendition of *Heartaches*. Webster had been a late-night WBT disc jockey in the 1940s. The song,

originally released in the early 1930s -- nearly two decades before -- made a successful comeback, according to Godfrey, because Webster played it so often. And remember, WBT's 50,000 watts carried its signal to much of the nation at night.

At *What's Cookin's?* point of origin everything appeared to those in the studio audience as totally unrehearsed. But to the radio listener at home or on the road, it invariably exhibited a smooth, highly professional package. *What's Cookin'?* lasted more than a decade, and I'm glad I was among the faithful multiple times during the several summers of its existence.

Promptly at 10 o'clock, when the show left the air, I'd walk three blocks up Tryon Street to the Square -- the "Crossroads of the Carolinas," as it was known then and now, the intersection of Trade and Tryon streets. Wandering into the friendly confines of Kresses variety store on the Square's southeast corner, I'd be drawn by the pungent aromas emanating from a long row of glass counters. They began with piping hot cashews and continued with all sorts of other treats housed in glass cases -- licorice sticks, suckers, gum drops and bubble gum, among them. I didn't often buy, but it never hurt to look.

After perusing the narrow aisles of Kresses, I'd cross Trade to Leggett's Rexall drug store, on the northeast corner of the Square. Plopping myself onto a stool at the soda fountain along a side wall at the back of the store, I'd order a tangy grape-lime rickey. The icy combination fruit punch was a thirst-quencher for warm days and cost only 15 cents, although still a big sum then. Sometimes before leaving the drug store, if I could spare a dime from my grass-mowing earnings, I'd buy a *Little Lulu* or *Red Ryder* comic book. And if I could find a quarter, I'd purchase the current issue of *Radio-TV Mirror* and devour its contents.

Then I'd kill some time playing the newest 45 RPM recordings at yet another piano dealer's emporium a half-block further down Trade Street. This firm doubled as a sheet music and record shop, and encouraged prospective buyers to listen to the music at the turntables.

Finally, I'd amble back to the Square, take a right turn and walk a half-block down Tryon to the Imperial Theater. By 11:30 WBT had set up its remote facilities under the theater's marquis for a quarter-hour question-and-answer bash called the *Strietmann Streetman*. This live show was named for the cracker company that sponsored it. Kurt Webster, Fletcher Austin and others returned to the microphones to poll passersby for a solution to a given question or topic of the day. In reality, they were doing talk radio decades before it came into vogue. Only, nobody called in; people gave their opinions on the spot.

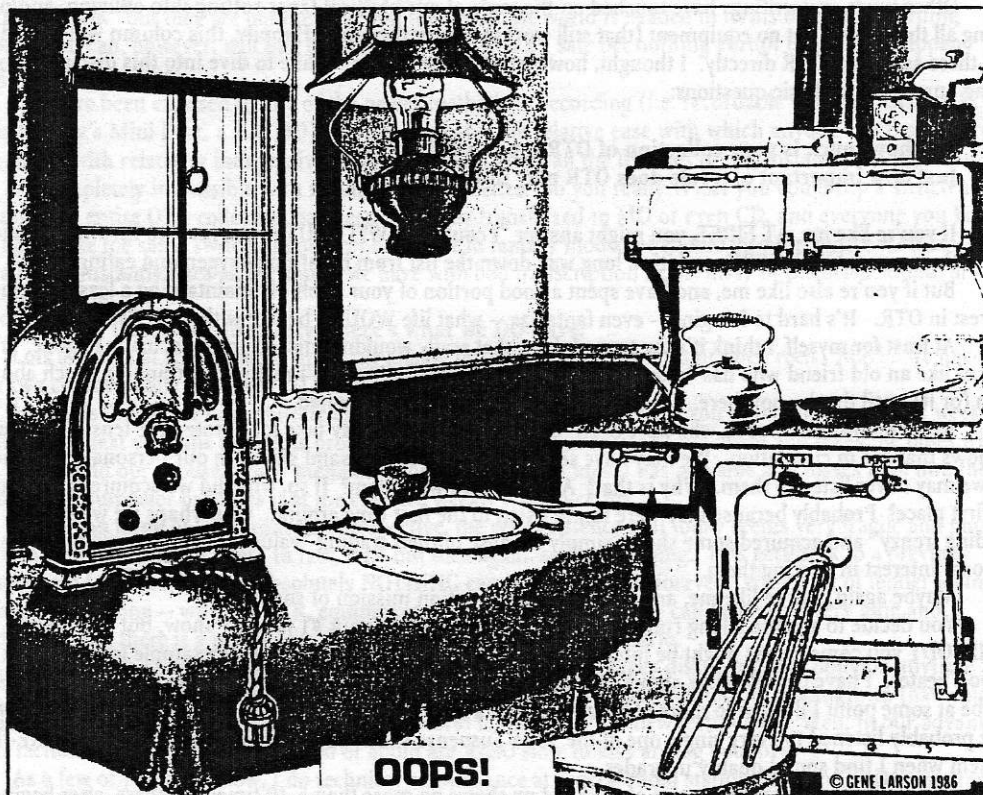
After that show I'd board the city transit at the Square and head for home, my appetite satiated for audience participation shows for another day.

There were many other local radio productions in Charlotte in those days featuring live audiences. Major sports events offered plenty of on-air coverage. Virtually every station in town broadcast one or more religious services on Sunday mornings. I don't remember a lot of the

sermons I heard, but I was fascinated by the man who twisted the funny dials that regulated the voice and tone levels at the remote radio box on the Sabbath day.

In the years since I have realized that we were living in a veritable mecca of audio entertainment -- a wealth to appreciate, and much of it taken for granted. I wonder if other towns that were near ours in size could have boasted of similar live broadcast opportunities to the extent we enjoyed in that era. Somehow, it seems rather dubious to me now.

At the end of the 1950s the golden age of radio passed. But the radio days remain among my life's most cherished memories. An environment that posed those occasions turned out to be my good fortune. While they weren't network productions with Bing and Benny and McGee and Molly, they were just as thrilling to a youth who was being raised by himself in the postwar South. And now I can genuinely appreciate their immeasurable contributions to my lifelong love affair with old time radio. They were, after all, the foundation of an avocation that, for me, finally reached the length and breadth of the globe.



Staff artist Gene Larson calls this his "TRICKTURE." (The lamp suggests that no electricity is available for this new radio.)

# THE FUTURE OF OLD TIME RADIO

by Bob Burnham

This is one of those topics that does seem to haunt some of us from time to time. With this column, I wanted to assemble a few thoughts that go a step beyond merely speculative meanderings and whinings, or "we must do this now or we are doomed" drivel. At various times, my commentaries suggested that maybe the OTR copyright fiends are one day going to REALLY emerge from some strange place in the sky. I wondered if these Mean Vultures of OTR Copyright Hell would one day snatch all of our OTR tapes away from us, after having high-priced Wall Street legal firms do a bulk mailing to every OTR club, every private collector and every hobbyist dealer demanding they immediately pay up or face a lifetime of solitary confinement after being questioned for hours by someone who suspiciously has copied the mannerisms of Jack Webb. Hey, don't worry, I'm just being overly dramatic here. Traditionally, there'd be a friendly advisory, before anything ugly would develop.

Other times, my writings have touched on the topic of our physical tapes rotting into oblivion, and/or having all these tapes but no equipment (that still works) to play them on. Happily, this column will NOT deal with these aspects of OTR directly. I thought, however, it might be worthwhile to dive into this discussion by asking ourselves two basic questions:

**Just how much is your collection of OTR tapes worth to you?  
Just how important of a role does OTR play in your life?**

If you're like me, AT FIRST, you might answer "I could live WITHOUT it just fine" to the first question and to the second, "NOT VERY, and it's a long way down the list from breathing oxygen and eating food."

But if you're also like me, and have spent a good portion of your adult life maintaining a least a surface interest in OTR. It's hard to imagine -- even fantasize -- what life WOULD be like without OTR at our disposal.

At least for myself, I think it's the type of thing that really wouldn't be missed until it actually IS gone. It's kind of like an old friend who has "assumed room temperature." You don't really start thinking much about them (or it) until they're not there. Then you remember what you once had.

As OTR fans, many of us who have been "around" for a while may take for granted the tens of thousands of shows that are in circulation. We may have several hundred or thousand shows in our personal possession, but we may never listen to them. Why is that? Are we bored with them? If so, why did we acquire those shows in the first place? Probably because they were fun to listen to the first time around. Or perhaps we went on a "trading frenzy" and acquired some shows simply because of their trading "value" with no regard paid to our personal interest in hearing them.

Maybe again, you're like me, and went on a preservation mission of some sort.

You decide to acquire a long running series that may NOT be your #1 favorite show, but you figure SOMEBODY you come across might be interested in obtaining copies from you. One example for me is Lux Radio Theater. I have over 400 Lux shows, but probably have actually listened to no more than 100 episodes. Maybe at some point I'll listen to more of them -- maybe a LOT more -- but maybe not. At one time or another, I have probably listened to every single one of the 900+ Suspense shows that exist, and periodically will RE-listen to them when I find sound quality upgrades.

I probably have provided copies of A FEW Lux shows no more than 5-10 times to others, after having them for probably better than 15 years. Obviously, I didn't land any great trades and certainly if I sold any copies, didn't even cover my blank tape costs for all those shows, so I'm still wondering why I collected that series to begin with! Perhaps part of it was I thought I MIGHT develop a later interest in the series and decide to listen to

those I hadn't heard. Fat chance that'll happen anytime soon though, with my lifestyle and limited free time.

One piece of advice that makes sense is always given by syndicated radio talk show host and author, Dr. Tony Hyman. With regard to reasons people should collect stuff, he suggests that they should collect the items whether they be radio shows or rubber bands, because they ENJOY collecting them (and enjoy them NOW). Period. Forget about investment purposes or anything related to money. Although a business or two has managed to make a small fortune by its efforts to monopolize and corner the OTR selling market, you and I know that the radio shows themselves have no more significant monetary value, any more than a popular favorite music recording purchased at a record store. Like it or not, OTR still represents sort of a niche interest. Some of those attempting to syndicate OTR to today's radio stations have met with great difficulties breaking into the top 5 markets, then if and when they do, in many cases, it's on a low-power station airing their programming a 2:00 in the morning! Of course, there are additional reasons for this which I'll refrain from commenting on at this time which perhaps are equally important or perhaps more significant factors. From the title, obviously, you can figure out this article is headed toward trying to figure out what we have to look forward to as far as the future of OTR. The answer to the question first generates a new question. How far into the future do you want to look? A few days, a few months, a few years, a decade or more?

It's easy to figure out in general terms where we're going if we look at where OTR has been. In terms of the physical media on which we store shows, the answer is not real clear cut, but there are some clues.

Historically, the OTR hobby has been VERY SLOW to adopt new techniques, equipment and formats. That means that regular audio cassettes are going to be around as the preferred media for some time to come. Cassettes are "OK" but they are not the direction the rest of the world is headed in terms of home recording methods. You can, however, still buy them everywhere, so it's a safe bet nothing abrupt is going to happen during the next few years.

If you've been exposed to any of the newer methods of recording (i.e. recordable Compact Disk...CD, and especially Sony's Mini Disk, a.k.a. MD) you already know the relative ease with which anyone can make mirror-image copies with relatively inexpensive equipment. You know all the features of, for instance, the MD format which are completely impossible with regular audio cassettes. So you really WISH you could flip a switch and suddenly your entire OTR collection has been magically transferred to MD or even CD, and everyone you know could also make the same switch. I guess while we are in fantasy mode, we should also flip switch #2 that magically and instantly fixes all the shows we have with bad transcription skips, hissy or distorted sound, or speed fluctuation.

**Now let's flash back to reality. Here's what we DO have:**

Lots and lots of shows stored in mostly analog format -- either cassettes or open reels. Maybe we have the one or two commercially produced OTR titles on CD.

Is all this "stuff" we have collected going to be around in the future? If you're talking about next week or next month or next year, the answer is probably yes unless A.) Your house burns down and takes the tapes with it or B.) We die and our spouse/family member/significant other decides it has no value and tosses it all into the neighborhood dumpster or leaves it at the curb for weekly trash pick up.

When you think of OTR from this perspective, the very existence of it today seems very fragile and poised on certain demise sooner or later. In fact, it IS, but then again, so is everything! This gets back to a previous column where I pointed out that absolutely NOTHING can be made to last forever. With a bit of tender loving care though, anything -- whether OTR, equipment or even organic matter -- can be given a very long and extended life, but there is a practicality factor that figures into every scenario.

I don't think we need to fly into panic worry about our analog tapes dissolving into oblivion anytime soon. Yes, some of those tapes may become unplayable, but there are easy methods of dealing with that which I have described in the past. I mentioned the OTR world is slow to adopt new technology. Well, to our advantage, certain factions of the professional world of audio are ALSO slow to kiss analog goodbye.

As a few of you may know, I do technical maintenance at several radio stations here in the Detroit area. It seems the larger the station, the slower they are to upgrade their facilities. It is simply harder and more expensive for them to make such a change (OTR collectors, obviously, are in the same situation). Several major stations in this area are still using analog reel to reel tapes and analog broadcast cartridges for commercials. Three, off the

top of my head, are owned by CBS (two AM's and an FM), yet another powerful station owned by ABC-Disney is the same. Management executives have told me "Well, we're THINKING of converting to all digital in a couple years," or "Upper management doesn't simply doesn't want to make the investment yet, period."

Yet one smaller station put together several thousand dollars (and I do mean several like thirty!) to buy a bunch of Sony's professional grade MD machines, which for them partially though not fully replaced reel to reel and cartridge. A lot of smaller market stations have made conversions to all computer-based audio equipment, perhaps controlled by a central satellite feed, which allows their stations in many cases, to operate with a staff of less than five people total. In some cases, these changes were needed in order for the station to continue to exist in these this curious economic times. In other cases, it was done simply because the owner of the station just wanted to see greater profit.

A comparison of these scenarios to OTR can be seen. The situations, however, are uniquely different in the sense that the pro facilities have already made the investment in pro equipment, since for them, it's their business. With OTR, since for many, it's still just a hobby, they have not or cannot or are not willing to make the investment in, for example, a professional grade reel to reel machine. At least two companies are still making reel decks for this use (though one has been hinting strongly that open reel equipment is going to be shortly dropped from their product line-up). But how many collectors are going to be willing to spend \$4,000 for a reel deck? Why in the world would they do this when they can call up a mail order place like Crutchfield, or go to a retail outlet like Best Buy and for a mere \$249, can buy Sony's basic Mini-Disk recorder. For another \$20, they could buy a 5-pack of blank disks, which will hold well over 10 hours of audio in monaural.

Of course, this doesn't answer the problem of how to play the existing tapes.

If it's cassettes we're talking about, there is still plenty of good equipment that is readily available, but with reels, you'll need to spend some money for the equipment. Unless you know what to look for and what to stay away from, you can get in trouble buying used reel machines -- even professional decks.

So where ARE we going as far as OTR's future? I think the transition from cassette to whatever will more or less force itself on OTR collectors over a long period of time, the same way cassettes affected reel to reel, and perhaps the transition will never be fully complete in our lifetimes! Someone, somewhere is still going to be able to play quarter-tracked reel tapes in the year 2030, the same way that if you looked hard enough, you can find someone today can play 78 rpm records and looked even harder still and you'd find someone, somewhere can even play Edison cylinder recordings!

I said practicality is a factor, and it is in this sense: Someone, somewhere, probably or at least hopefully, will have converted enough shows to a newer form which will mean that YOUR copies MIGHT not have much value or use. A more important question, perhaps is: Will OTR still retain its interest at a COLLECTOR level as we move into and beyond the digital age, or will many of our larger collections end up in the dumpster, when no one is around who cares about audio-only performances? Of course, I know there are a lot of younger collectors around who are very active today, but my guess if a survey were taken among all OTR fans who are involved at a serious level, the majority would be over 40 years of age, and the numbers of people below age 30 would be a VERY small percentage.

If you're among that younger group, consider yourself to one of the keys to OTR's existence into the future. In the year Two Thousand SOMETHING it'll be you that will be making the transfers from CD, Digital Audio Tape or whatever to digital SOMETHING. If you're like me, and just happen to fall into the "majority" age range, just make absolutely certain that you have a son/daughter/niece/nephew/grandchildren/significant somebody who will do something constructive with your tapes if you plan to hang onto them your entire life. YOUR collection COULD be the one that has that one rare show that all the other veteran collectors' heirs have trashed! "Constructive," of course, doesn't mean erasing them and recording music in the place of the shows!

Seeya next time!

Bob Burnham, BRC Productions, P.O. Box 510264, Livonia, MI 48151-6264 ~ FAX (313) 277-3095 ~  
Past columns can be found at: WWW.BRCRADIO.COM....just click on "Bob's Articles" for a list by topic.

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## REVIEW by Al Inkster

Avi. *Who Was That Masked Man, Anyway?* NY: Orchard Books, 1992. 170 pp.

Avi. *Who Was That Masked Man, Anyway?* Narrated by Jeff Woodman and John Randolph Jones. Recorded Books, Inc., 1993. 3 audiocassettes (3.75 hrs.)

Classified as a young adult book, Avi's *Who Was That Masked Man, Anyway?* offers a character that will be dear to the hearts of OTR fans of all ages. Living in Brooklyn in the spring of 1945, Franklin Wattleston, obsessed with radio adventure and detective programs, continually applies the information and attitudes he learns from those shows to everyday problems, emulates the code of radio heroes, writes his own script to be performed with his long-suffering friend (casting himself as hero Chet Barker and Mario as sidekick Skipper O'Malley), annoys adults with his references to characters and events in the radio shows, and agonizes when his parents forbid him the use of the radio.

A bright boy, he confounds his teacher Miss Gomez because he does so poorly in school that he may be "left back." No matter what she asks him in class he answers by relating some informative gem about a radio show. Asked to choose a country for a geography report, he selects Transylvania. Informed that it is not a country but a region of Roumania, he responds, "But that's where Dracula comes from . . . and its principal product is blood," earning himself yet another after-school session with Miss Gomez. He explains to her that thinking about the Green Hornet's activities is much more interesting to him than concentrating on what she says about the principal products of Australia.

What he says and how he says it, influenced by his beloved radio melodramas, feature both verbal and plot cliches of the genre. If his teacher reports him to his parents, his mother will stretch him on the rack and his father will feed him to the boa constrictor in the basement. His soldier brother is on a secret mission, "one man against the forces of evil." The medical student who rents his brother's room is an evil scientist who heads the mob. The uncle that his parents will not talk about is an eccentric scientist. The purpose of a supposed school meeting for parents is to discuss the government's plans to take kids into the navy to serve as crews on midget submarines.

Frankie's big problem is that his brother Tom has come home from the war, and their parents have decided that, since Tom's room has been rented to the medical resident Mr. Sperdlow, he will take the room of Frankie, who will have to move to the basement. Worse, the radio will stay with Tom so that he will have a source of entertainment to take his mind off the horrors of war. Frankie needs the room back so that he can listen to the radio of his friend, who lives next door in the room directly across from Frankie's. He plots in typical melodramatic radio methods to make Mr. Sperdlow move. He uses a two-way radio to wire a skull that the medical student has, hoping to frighten the "superstitious criminal" with ghostly voices. He tries to make his mother believe that Mr. Sperdlow is a gangster so that she will evict him. As he concocts his schemes, he comments to Mario, ". . . our ultimate purpose is the extermination of the most rascally and dangerous criminal in the world! A traitor to the United States! A fiend who has cost the lives of thousands of our countrymen!"

Frankie also has a wild plan to start a romance between his brother and Miss Gomez: quite a task since his brother hardly leaves his room since coming home from the war and Miss Gomez is still grieving over the death of her fiancé in battle. His bringing them together leads to the book's climax, a hilarious scene worthy of classical farce. The ridiculousness of the situation causes Tom to laugh for the first time since his return and starts him on the path to recovery.

Both the printed and the audio versions of the book are enjoyable. The audio employs two readers: Jeff Woodson to narrate the story and John Randolph Jones to serve as the radio (including lengthy passages from both imaginary and actual programs such as *Captain Midnight*, *The Shadow*, *The Lone Ranger*, *Sky King*, *The Green Hornet*, and *Buck Rogers*). Both do a creditable job, but it would have been more effective to use excerpts from the radio shows.

# Nothing's New — and that's the idea

Friday, July 17, 1998 ★  
SAN FRANCISCO  
EXAMINER

By Michelle Nolan  
SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

**N**OTHING'S NEW is the perfect name for an intriguing shop tucked into a corner of the Bayhill Shopping Center in San Bruno.

"Vintage" is the equally apropos sign above the entry-

way into what amounts to the closest thing to a time machine you're ever likely to see on the Peninsula.

If you're seeking new joys in old entertainment, Nothing's New will leave you captivated.

And if that sounds like an advertisement, so be it. This crowded little emporium of many thousands of items of film, television and radio nostalgia is in itself an advertisement for much of the best of 20th century American pop culture.

Since the husband-and-wife team of Roger and Lourdes Hill opened Nothing's New three years ago, hundreds of customers have made weekly or monthly pilgrimages for their fix of the past.

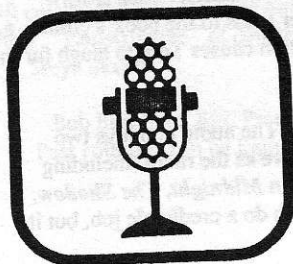
This is one mom and pop video store that offers more in the way of both mainstream and obscure vintage entertainment — along with personalized service — than any of the large corporate stores can provide.

"That's the most satisfying thing," Lourdes Hill says. "Finding a film for someone and having them get real emotional and say, 'I've been looking for this for years!'"

"Most people have an idea of what they want," Roger Hill says. "So we try to expose them to something they might enjoy that they might not know about. Sometimes we'll offer a free rental and they'll come back and ask, 'Got any more of those?' That's a great feeling."

The Hills have stocked their video lending library with

nearly 7,000 films at least 30 years old. Likewise, they have approximately 2,000 classic television shows ("Highway Patrol," starring Broderick Crawford, and "Dragnet," starring Jack Webb, are customer favorites) and between 13,000 and 14,000 radio broad-



ROGER HILL

Whatever your favorite memory might be of the period of the 1930s through the 1960s, you'll probably find at least one example of it here.

What's your favorite classic fright flick? Everything from "Astounding She Monster" to "Zontar, the Thing from Venus" is represented in the "so bad, it's good" genre.

Do you long once more to hear the evocative radio theme from "Sergeant Preston of the Yukon"? You can soon hear Yukon King barking, and feel those sleds schussing across the snow.

Or do any of you middle-aged guys still salivate at your adolescent memory of the 6-foot Amazon Irish McCalla playing "Sheena, Queen of the Jungle" on television in the mid-1950s? You'll find your hormones remember the Golden Age of Television, too.

But what's really interesting about a journey to "Nothing's New" is that everything old is also new again to someone.

Corporate video stores tend to stock primarily the classic examples but common of a genre, whether it's "High Noon" representing the Western, "This Gun for Hire," the detective drama, or "Flash Gordon," the movie serial.

But at Nothing's New, you can find enchanting stuff such as obscure Monogram westerns starring Lash LaRue (master of the bull-whip), early Warner Bros. potboilers like "Marked Woman" (with a young Humphrey Bogart and an even younger Bette Davis), or seldom-seen Republic serials such as "The Masked Marvel."

The Hills got into the video business in a roundabout way. Roger Hill, who is originally from Columbus, Ohio, went to Ohio State University before moving to

San Francisco and earning his bachelor's degree in biology from San Francisco State. After taking a course in TV studio operations, he "got hooked" on broadcasting and went on to earn a master's degree in radio/TV/film broadcasting. He later earned a master's degree in molecular biology.

Lourdes Hill worked as a seamstress and flower arranger in the Philippines before moving to San Francisco about nine years ago. She met Roger through a mutual friend, and the two have been married seven years. Both have grown children from previous marriages.

Before coming to the United States, Lourdes Hill had seen few movies, but has since made up for lost time. She found that she loved them, and has seen literally thousands since opening the store. "We have to watch each movie for quality, but if I like it, I watch the whole thing," she explained.

The Hills got the idea for Nothing's New several years ago after they became frustrated trying to find a video of their favorite old film, "Khartoum," the 1966 classic starring Charlton Heston and Sir Laurence Olivier.

He was advised against the idea, knowing how hard it is to make a small business succeed. "But we kept meeting people who couldn't find the movies they wanted. There was nothing meeting the needs of people along these lines," Roger Hill said. Despite discouraging words, the couple decided to go ahead. "People told Orville and Wilbur Wright that they could never get off the ground, and they did anyway," he said.

Though the Hills work long hours, and Roger Hill continues to teach part time at City College, they believe the effort is worth it. Many of their customers have

come to be "like family," Roger Hill said. "One lady keeps bringing in food. The baker next door brings in pie. At this rate, I'll never lose weight!" he laughed.

The Hills don't have a personal "Top Ten" or anything like that. When asked what their favorite films or actors are, they just respond, "Oh, hundreds and hundreds."

That's not surprising, considering their knowledge of vintage video and audio of all types.

"Sometimes someone will come in and they won't know the name of a film, but they'll remember the story or the actor," Lourdes says. "We can usually figure it out for them."

The Hills also have a rental library of several hundred publications of all sorts, ranging from coffee table books to periodicals such as Big Reel to generally unavailable and expensive scholarly tomes.

The bulk of the business at Nothing's New consists of rentals, but the store has hundreds of tapes for sale as well. They publish a movie directory and a quarterly newsletter.

The Hills feel so strongly about the preservation of classic film that \$3 of every store membership (the onetime fee is \$10) goes to the UCLA Film Archives' effort to restore and preserve American films. (Thousands of films made on nitrate already are lost forever.)

The radio section of the store, a favorite of Roger's, is especially extensive. The Hills rent or sell numerous audio tapes to harried commuters, for whom the likes of Fibber McGee and Molly or Jack Benny can provide a welcome dose of humorous relief on the road.

Roger Hill is knowledgeable in video and audio technology, so he can offer services such as transferring from one medium to another.

The store sells a variety of vintage paraphernalia such as movie posters, stills, sheet music, magazines, coffee mugs and just about anything collectible. Numerous reproductions also are available for those with a yen to decorate their walls or their dens inexpensively.

The Hills hope to get a study group going one day, with speakers knowledgeable on aspects of radio, TV or film. Speakers are plentiful, Roger Hill said, but a suitable location is needed. One informative talk was held soon after Nothing's New opened, but the jam-packed store proved too small, and distracting, for comfort.

Though there are challenges to the business, the Hills clearly are proud of what they are doing. "It's a clean place where people can reach out and pick up any movie off the shelf and not be embarrassed," Roger Hill said.

He and his wife sum up their philosophy of vintage entertainment with the following line: "With vintage radio, television and movies there are eternal themes of good versus evil, punishment for wrongdoing, and a search for truth, justice and love, which never goes out of style."

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*Roger Hill founded NARA back in 1972 and is now our President Emeritus. To get information on ordering movies, radio and TV shows write to Nothing's New, #23 Bayhill Shopping Center, San Bruno, CA 94066.*

## Victory and the "V" Campaign

by  
ken weigel

### I

On January 14, 1941, eight months after Germany invaded the Low Countries, Victor de Laveleye, a Belgian refugee reporting news on the BBC's Radio Belgique, broadcast the following message to his countrymen:

*I am proposing to you as a rallying emblem the letter V, because V is the first letter of the words "victoire" in French, and "vryheid" in Flemish—two things which go together, as Walloons and Flemings are at the moment marching hand in hand; two things which are the consequence one of the other, the victory which will give us back our freedom, the victory of our good friends the English. Their word for victory also begins with V. As you see, things fit all round....*

Two strokes slanted downward culminating in a point—simplicity itself. It was a brilliant idea, for soon a spirit of resistance showed itself in the form of chalked V's on walls and sidewalks throughout Belgium, Holland and northern France where listeners, at great personal risk, secretly tuned in Radio Belgique.

Long months before de Laveleye set his radio V in motion the native-born in the occupied countries had gone shopping for emblems and symbols with which to agitate the enemy. The Dutch, for example, expressed defiance by wearing paperclips in their button-holes, and the French and Belgians by scrawling "RAF" and "Vive de Gaulle" on telegraph poles, railway cars and kiosks. But the Nazis had been the target of agitators for two decades, so there was little in the way of contumely that hadn't already blistered their eyes or scorched their ears. That is, until de Laveleye's nagging V hoisted its muscle onto the airwaves. Directly it went where no emblem had gone before: deep beneath the Hun skin. And there it stayed for the duration.

Radio Belgique, along with Radio Oranje, was part of the BBC's nascent Dutch Service begun after the German invasion in the spring of 1940. It began in September transmitting ten minutes of news daily in French and Flemish. Radio Oranje, older by two months, broadcast a political diary, Dutch songs and patriotic speeches in addition to news. The purpose of these two programs was to project Europe's solidarity against the invader.

The Dutch Service itself was only one part of a vast BBC expansion that saw extra transmitters, news readers and translators rushed into service to challenge the Germans. In the expansion, additional BBC air time was also given to Denmark, Spain, Norway, Poland and Rumania, all of which were important to the war effort.

### II

In that first broadcast, de Laveleye told listeners that the V symbol, "infinitely repeated," would make the enemy feel "encircled by an immense crowd of citizens eagerly awaiting his first moment of weakness, watching for his first failure." He showed them ways to acquaint the German with the V:

*Drawn with a finger in the dust on the back of an army lorry. Chalked on the door of a billet or company office. Daubed in tar on a tree or wall by the roadside. Cut with a knife on a Wehrmacht poster.... The letter V. Symbol of defiance. Symbol of hate. Above all, symbol of final victory.*

Beyond a general defacement of flat surfaces, de Laveleye urged listeners to leave their tables whenever German soldiers came into a cafe, and to hide nickel coins, copper, leather and rubber goods, all items in short supply inside the Reich. When copper and nickel coins began dropping out of circulation, he encouraged workers who'd been thrown into forced labor to misplace their tools, wreck their machinery, and bungle the jobs assigned to them. Office workers were advised to post German mailings to phantom addresses and to tie up phone lines with unnecessary calls. Before long protestors were boycotting shops, theaters, hotels and other establishments frequented by the enemy. There were student protests and mass strikes in Holland, and a military movement was stewing in Norway.

Hardly two months had passed when de Laveleye's V campaign was headlined on *Les Francais parlent aux Francais*, a popular BBC program beamed to French audiences. Overnight walls, posts and pavements sprouted V's and other anti-German inscriptions in towns and villages throughout France. Radio Paris, in Nazi hands since June 1940, warned citizens that anyone caught scribbling "idiot calligraphy" would find himself in the dock. Other BBC broadcasters followed de Laveleye's lead, and a period of creative mischief ensued. Aware of gasoline and food shortages inside the Reich, they goaded listeners to travel more, eat like horses, and harry the organizers of the rationing system.

Not satisfied with the purely visual display of defiance, de Laveleye decided to stick the V in the German ear. He told listeners how everyday sounds could be converted into a hectoring V rhythm. School teachers, e.g., could call their pupils to order by clapping their hands in the rhythm of the morse V—" . . . \_". Blacksmiths could tap V's on their anvils, and railway engineers could toot the V at street crossings.

For all these public activities, audible and ocular, de Laveleye's radio sodality showed a ready acceptance and a fertile imagination. Cafe patrons tapped the morse V on glasses to summon waiters, and set their forks and knives in a V-shape when they left. Grocers laid out their vegetables in the shape of V's, shipboard signalmen on Norwegian ocean tubs flashed the morse V, and in the springtime Europe's flowerbeds came in in colorful V arrangements.

### III

The popular reception the V encountered drove BBC planners to dream up new ways to pester Fritz, so they formed a "V Committee" for the purpose. The committee's bold plan—to "cause riots and destruction in every city in [occupied] Europe"—was outlined in a pamphlet titled "Broadcasting As a New Weapon of War." As weapon, radio would require a qualified, licensed operator skilled in the use of firearms. That meant de Laveleye would have to step down.

The operator appointed to replace him was Douglas Ritchie, a comparative sharpshooter currently serving his country as an assistant BBC news editor. Ritchie had many talents; he chaired the V Committee, was the author of its war pamphlet, spoke seven languages fluently, and had connections in places that enabled him to do more than just find good rum on Sundays. He took the alias "Colonel Britton," saddled his microphone and, as authorized wholesaler for the radio V, rode off into the ether, six-shooters blazing. De Laveleye, meanwhile, took a seat on the V Committee and returned to the Belgian Service, which he later supervised.

Speaking on Friday nights on the English Service, Colonel Britton introduced himself and got right to business, telling listeners "The night is your friend, the V is your sign." He broadcast in English, and left it for a mixed corps of foreign speakers, each one claiming to

be Colonel Britton, to repeat his instructions in the tongues of the countries receiving their broadcasts. The BBC intentionally clamped a guard on his identity, and soon all of Europe was abuzz over this "Scarlet Pimpernel of Radio," as the British press described him.

Shortly after Ritchie went to work, early in June 1941, the V Committee joined the opening of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony to the morse V. It was a marriage as providential as that of Bebe Daniels and Ben Lyon, nay, almost of tea and crumpets. From that day on the conjoined Fifth and V were heard on sundry foreign language broadcasts and in programs shortwaved to North America, where it was embraced by the major USA networks. Shortly afterward the V drum-tap interval signal was adopted on the European Service, which carried the load of de Laveleye's early campaign.

One of the Colonel's first inspirations was the mobilization of a "V radio club." This group was comprised of wireless devotees whom he taught how to improve reception and to minimize the effects of enemy jamming. Another gimmick was his radio "V army." Its first assignment, aimed at Parisian listeners, was to stage a quiet "knocking" demonstration. Through personal contacts Ritchie had wheedled a note out of Winston Churchill, which Ritchie obligingly read over the air before the knocking began. In it the Prime Minister declared that the V represented "the unconquerable will of the people of the occupied territories" that would serve as "a portent of the fate awaiting the Nazi tyranny." The demonstration was a triumph for the BBC. The simple radio coup stoked the V fires to 3500° F., as Churchill's words lingered on to remind the radio army of its unshakable resolve. It also brought a neighborly cheer from the Soviet Union, Britain's newest ally. Radio Moscow reported how the people of Europe "not only see the V sign but hear it on the knock on the door, in the whistles of railway engines and the pealing of church bells."

#### IV

As all of occupied Europe now looked to the BBC for leadership the Germans stepped up their propaganda attacks against the British. In July Josef Goebbels, Hitler's Propaganda Minister, paid the BBC the supreme compliment by annexing the morse V to the German radio. Annexing was something the Germans were good at, having already annexed half a dozen countries to the Third Reich before fixing on the V.

Not content to stop there, Goebbels next adopted the V as the *Rundfunk's* official interval signal. Alongside the hypersophic gurgle of National Socialist ideology cluttering Nazi newspapers appeared articles crediting the Germans with inventing the V. Sweeping aside "British lies," they showed that the V stood not for the French *victoire* or the Flemish *vryheid* but for the German *viktoria*. Radio Paris informed listeners that the V campaign was hatched in the mind of a German tank driver. This clever *panzermeister*, the fable went, had decorated his vehicle with the V, surrounded it with laurels, and crowned the works with a swastika. If Parisians still harbored doubts about its origins they had only to look to their own Eiffel Tower, from which hung a huge V banner, put there by the German High Command.

Rewriting history, like annexing countries, was a typical Nazi expedient. However, through the first two years of war even the British would agree that the Germans owned the word "victory." Dr. Goebbels' bloated hot air artists used it so often in their radio "victory fanfares" that even the German homefront tired of it. But the derivative V *symbol*, Victory in the diminutive, was the brainchild of a Belgian refugee, carried to fruition by Colonel Britton. Unfortunately, in the Colonel's hands it turned into a political hot potato.

#### V

How well the V campaign succeeded can be judged by this one fact alone: at the peak of its popularity, British intelligence was quite as ready to pull the plug on Colonel Britton

as the Germans were. Forging false ID's and trashing the shops of collaborators was in itself not a bad thing to do, but the responsibility for planning radio conspiracies fell to the Special Operations Executive (SOE), which controlled the European resistance. Ritchie would've swallowed his tobacco to learn that the SOE was using a BBC transmitter to secretly pass orders to members of the same V army he was lighting small fires under. The men and women in the SOE army, however, were not just mischievous scamps but commandos whose work involved killing German sentries, blowing up trains and motorized convoys, and rescuing downed allied pilots. In other words, the Colonel's ether antics were threatening to compromise the work of the war planners.

The SOE's messages were sent in the open on evening newscasts on the BBC's European Service. Couched in the commonplace language of the personal message, they were prefaced by the first measure of Beethoven's Fifth and the morse V, and by the statement *Voici quelques messages personnels* ("Here are some personal messages"). Most were legitimate, reporting births, departures, arrivals, and items of local interest. Others, however, were incongruous. These—e.g., "*The elephants are eating the strawberries*" and "*Catherine is waiting by the well*"—were encryptions. They told the maquis to expect a supply drop on a certain night or to destroy telephone lines at a set place, or that a meeting was being arranged.

Thus when the Colonel began veering into SOE territory he rubbed the SOE fur the wrong way. At SOE strategy sessions the residing Charlemagnes and Alexanders accused him of everything from sabotage to the fencing of sacred relics. He was hailed as the patron of all things seditious, including the rationing of soap, eggs and shoe leather. His hand was seen in the Dunkirk disaster, the bombing of Coventry, the torpedoing of the *Athenia*, the conscription of women, the Irish potato famine, the Black Plague, the manufacture and sale of bad whiskey, and Sandy Macpherson's organ interludes. It was even hinted that he was hoarding butter. How many actual radio "crimes" Ritchie and his foreign-language stand-ins set afloat before the SOE turned purple is not documented. Suffice it to say that he got under the SOE bark as deeply as he got under the Hun's.

Ritchie's troubles multiplied when the allied governments-in-exile began demanding a say in the advice he and his Colonel Britton clones were giving their countrymen. Another check to the Colonel's longevity was the small size of his English-speaking audience. A fair estimate was that only about one in ten Dutch and Norwegians actually understood the King's English, or at all events the kind of English Ritchie spoke. In France the grasp was even weaker, and in Poland, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia it was weaker still. Even in Belgium, where the V campaign had taken root, most English-speaking Belgians preferred getting their war news from the BBC Home Service. The reasons for this are plain; the signal was strong, and Home Service transmissions carried less propaganda than the Colonel's English Service, which meant they were less likely to be jammed.

By the time the United States entered the war in late 1941 the Colonel's broadcasts had lost most of their sap. By then several of the more brutish of his radio army had met their deaths before German firing squads, or were serving long stretches in the tombs for acts he'd encouraged them to commit. This brought more dark glances from the Ministry of Information, Ritchie's supervisor.

## VI

Colonel Britton's radio defense of the realm limped along for another five months before pressure from the SOE and His Majesty's Government finally made Ritchie cry uncle. In his last broadcast, in May 1942, the Colonel told listeners he would not speak again "until the moment comes to indicate a particular line of action which is needed. I cannot

tell you what that line will be." The "moment" came two years later when, on the eve of the invasion of Normandy, Ritchie cautioned the resistance, now thirsting for German blood, not to take "premature ill-timed action." The "line of action" he referred to involved an epic radio deception that made his early wet-nursing of the resistance seem vain and trifling by comparison. On this occasion, Ritchie did not speak as Colonel Britton, but as the "Number One Voice of SHAEF." Colonel Britton's muzzling, back in 1942, was permanent.

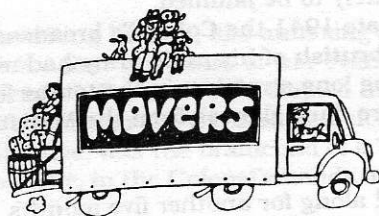
Happily the V lost none of its dynamism after Ritchie dismounted his radio pulpit. Nor could pick axe or shovel remove it from the European consciousness. On the contrary, the Victory cry wrung from the Colonel's labors reached from Bush House north of the Tweed all the way to Iceland, eastward as far as the Soviet Urals, and westward from the Baffin Islands down to the Patagonia outback. The cry leaped the Atlantic via the BBC's North American transmissions, where it was welcomed by ready-made audiences in Canada and the United States. Here at home, where fads and manias are taken in as culture as a matter of course, it fell in lock step with "Remember Pearl Harbor," the first official war cry to strike a Yankee nerve. Network radio followed the American GI to battlefronts overseas, and the cry of Victory and its metamorphic indicative, the V, followed right along.

Next: How the V and Victory were used to cattle-prod the American homefront into supporting the war effort.



## NARA NEWS ON TAPE FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Bill Bright, a retired Canadian broadcaster, records the material from each issue of the NARA News on cassette for our members with vision problems. Don Aston duplicates the cassettes and sends them out to members who might need this service. If you know of members, or prospective members, who would benefit from this, please contact Don Aston at P.O. Box 1392, Lake Elsinore, CA 92531. He can be reached by phone at (909) 244-5242.



## ADDRESS CHANGE?

If you are going to be changing your address please let NARA know! Send **BOTH** your old address **AND** your new address to our membership director:

Janis DeMoss  
134 Vincewood Drive  
Nicholasville, KY 40356



**BOOK  
SHELF**

by **Hal & Carol Stephenson**

Pronounced "Stevenson"



***Encyclopedia of American Silver Manufacturers***

by Dorothy T. Rainwater  
Crown Publishers, Inc., New York, 222 pages,  
1975 edition, hardcover, ISBN 0-517-521-458

Have you wondered why Ozzie, Harriet, David and Ricky Nelson lived at 1847 Rogers Road? Can you remember Harriet Hilliard Nelson saying "the beauty that lives forever is International Silver"?

This book is a history of more than 1,400 manufacturers. It has over 2,200 trade marks illustrated. Many members of the Rogers family were in silverware businesses. This is a simplified version of information in the encyclopedia.

In 1836, William Rogers was one of the first to manufacture tableware of sterling silver. It had been the general practice to use coin silver. The coins used then were 900/1000 silver and 100/1000 copper. Sterling is 925/1000 silver and 75/1000 of metal added for strength--usually copper. This standard became part of the U.S. Stamping Act of 1906.

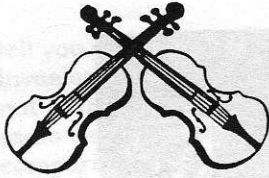
In 1847, Asa, Jr. and his brothers William and Simeon produced silverplated spoons with Rogers Brothers trade marks. In 1862 the Meriden Britannia Co. bought the dies and William directed production of the 1847 Rogers Bros. line. One of many companies that became part of INSILCO upon its formation in 1898 was Meriden Britannia Co. The Rogers Brothers--William; Asa, Jr.; and Simeon--continued making their line with INSILCO until they died. Marks of INSILCO's predecessors were continued in use after 1898. The INSILCO mark was not used until 1928. It is international because of its offices in Canada and Britain.

**1847 ROGERS BROS. STERLING**

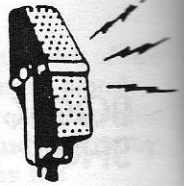


INSILCO sponsored the Nelsons from 1944 to 1949. Our son Charles' favorite adventure of the Nelson's is their haunted house broadcast on Halloween (10-31-48). Endorsing their sponsor, Harriet says "America's finest silverplate is 1847 Rogers Brothers."

(Hollowware.) (Used only 1853-61)



## From JACK PALMER



### MORE TIDBITS FROM OLD TIME RADIO

Now that I am actually working on my biography of Vernon Dalhart, I spend even more time looking through microfilm projectors at early newspapers and entertainment magazines. Since most of these machines project an entire page on the screen at a time, you can't avoid looking at the entire page when checking for one item. Because of this I continue to run across items on early radio which pique my interest. The past few weeks I have been going through VARIETY magazine from the year 1926. Network radio was just beginning; There seemed to be few rules on station wave lengths; And people didn't know if they should pay, or be paid to appear on a radio broadcast. I copied some of the comments from late 1926 about that new thing, radio. All the comments are taken from the news and comment pages of VARIETY. The capital letters repeat the headline which identified each article.

**127 NEW STATIONS.** A December 29, 1926, article announced that from July 1 to December 15, 127 new broadcasting stations took to the air. In addition 20 more stations were presently under construction all across the country. (The rapid growth of radio stations created many problems in the early days. One of the biggest problems is discussed below)

**NEW STATIONS ADD TO 'CHAOS'.** On August 25, 1926, there was a complaint about new stations (and some already operating) switching wave lengths and causing interference with stations already broadcasting. 12 stations were now operating on "freak" bands and creating a 'chaos of the air'. (Many stations seemed to just pick a broadcast band and didn't care if it interfered with other stations)

**RADIO RAMBLINGS.** This regular weekly column contained many interesting comments about the current conditions of broadcasting. Here are a few. The first two are from September 8, 1926.

"WBNY seems to be interfering with WHN, both operating on a 1,500 watt broadcasting power and via the same metres.— Both come through with an unwelcome 'echo' on each other's behalf, necessitating some fine and oftimes impossible tuning out." (Exactly what I was commenting on above.)

"It's to be hoped the fall will see an improvement in program ideas. As it is, it's the same old grind of music and songs, songs and music, with an occasional (sometimes too much so) talking program number. No sequence; no showmanship; no variety. sometimes the ether public gets a lucky break; most often not." (What would he say about radio today?)

Two more comments from August 18, 1926.

"Whatever may be said anent radio for advertising purposes, it certainly can "make" bands. It has done wonders for Lopez, Olsen, Bernie, Leonard, Golden, Rich and a few others." (It continued to "make" bands until World War II. Think of all the "big bands" and where you first heard them.)

"WRNY among the individual stations still comes through like a tin-pan. Carelessness in transmission." (Another common problem then.)

WCWS, BRIDGEPORT, COMPETITOR, BARRED BY 5 LOCAL DAILIES. Radio Station Soliciting Advertising For Air Informed It must Pay For Program Announcements As Advertisements In Newspapers. The headline of September 22 tells it all. The newspapers claim the radio station is a competitor, therefore it must pay for program announcements at regular advertising rates. (As I remember, they tried this with television when it first became popular and it didn't work there either!)

\$20,000 FOR FIGHT BROADCAST; FIRST AGREEMENT OF KIND. Royal Typewriter Buys Privilege-Rickard's Asking Price \$40,000-WMCA Offered \$15,000-Royal' Return, Mention Only. This headline in the September 22, 1926 issue pertained to the first Dempsey-Tunney fight in Philadelphia. Rickard had asked \$40,00 for the rights to broadcast the fight, but only received half. Royal typewriter used it as an advertising gimmick. As the headline said, Royal's return was mention of their name during the broadcast. (Apparently one of the first times this was done.)

RADIO MERGER PUTS ONLY NATIONAL ETHER SYSTEM IN HAND OF R. C. A. Absorption Of WEAf Leaves Concern With Score Of Broadcasting Stations Of 26,000,000 Households In U. S. Only 5,000,000 Have Receiving Apparatus-Sale Possibilities Enormous-Company Denies Monopoly Claim. This long headline appeared on 15 September, 1926. AT & T had just sold their radio station WEAf and its network of 16 stations to RCA and no one was quite sure what would happen now. The new National Broadcasting Company with its 20 stations would be able to reach most of the 26,000,000 households in the U.S. and it was the only network. (Columbia was a year away.) The article is over a page long and discusses many possibilities, such as more pay for radio performers, the opportunity for RCA (the parent corporation) to sell more radios and the charges for advertising on the network. (Pay for network performers did increase dramatically as the competition for stars became greater, RCA and everyone sold many more radios; and the charges for advertising on radio eventually became very expensive)

TWO FLIV PROGRAMS. One last unusual item from December 15, 1926 is quoted in part. "After several hours delay in getting its scheduled entertainment started for broadcasting via Station WRNY Saturday night, the watch was pulled on the Young Man's Philanthropic League dinner arrangers and just one minute given them to do something or have the radio part canceled." The story went on the say that the announcer had been filling in since 9 PM when the program had been originally scheduled to start.

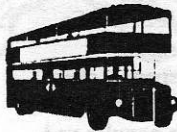
"The announcer placed the blame on the League heads of committee for taking its time in hooking up with the 'air'. It was 10:17 before the broadcasting started. The watch ultimatum turned the trick"

"Station WGBS Sunday night, through failure to get the wires properly connected, did not start broadcasting the Clark and McCullough dinner at the Friar's Club until after 10 o'clock.

"To the radio 'fans' the broadcasting of the two dinners was a *flivver*." (Italics mine. I have to assume a 'flivver' is slang for a poor operation. Perhaps based on the model T)

THE END

# FROM ACROSS THE POND



by Ray Smith



## BBC "TURNS"

It's a joke as antiquated as the origins of British music-hall. A man staggers into a theatrical agents office, flops into a chair and says to the agent, "I've just had a funny turn!" To which the agent replies, "Terrific! Can they do a week at the Palladium starting Monday?" Maybe it was jokes like that which helped to kill vaudeville and music-hall. Even as recently as the 50's and 60's the quickest way to insult a theatrical vaudevillian, at least in the UK, was to describe them as a "turn." "I'm a variety act, old chap!" they responded, throwing you an icy glance that 200 years earlier, would have guaranteed you despatch to the Bloody Tower. The word "turn" was detested by theatrical performers in the twilight years of the great variety theatres. A network of large and small provincial vaudeville theatres had meant full employment, for any half decent "turn." And the wireless "complemented" the variety theatre, providing even more work for these "turns" with a host of light entertainment programs including *Mid Day Music-hall*, *Variety Bandbox*, *Workers Playtime*, *Northern Variety Parade*, *Garrison Town Hall*, *Variety Fanfare*, *Variety Playhouse* and *Blackpool Night*. But the advent of TV, which didn't truly and finally usurp radio in Britain until the mid-60's (much later than in America) also nailed down the coffin lid on an already fading and embattled vaudeville circuit.

Many vaudeville acts turned to a new source of employment, the

working mens social clubs, (miners clubs, rugby clubs, soccer supporters clubs, etc.) which proliferated in the industrial Midlands, the woolen and cotton mill towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire and the coalfields of Scotland and Wales. But whereas audiences went to theatres to be entertained, in the clubs the main objective was "serious drinking." In the theatres the acts were used to comfortable, well-appointed dressing-rooms, 15 piece "pit" orchestras, professional sound and lighting staff and an experienced "stage manager" to ensure the show went smoothly. In the clubs, they had to change and makeup in the public toilet, perform above the din of rowdy "beer-swilling" to the accompaniment of a local "Sunday school" pianist, on a tiny platform with poor sound and no lighting. And the greatest indignity of all was being introduced by the emcee, who was usually one of the coal miners who doubled as "entertainments chairman."

I recall, while sitting in one such club in Leicester, watching a well-known radio comic being introduced by an official, with the words, "Can we 'ave a bit of quiet for the turn?" On another occasion, while a famous BBC radio star was performing a low-key "torch song" the local chairman decided the crowd wasn't paying enough attention. In the midst of her number, he grabbed the mike from her hands and bawled out, "She's not such a bad turn. Give the lassie and chance will ye!" And

she was a recording star of considerable repute. This radio favourite stormed off-stage vowing never to set foot in a club again.

But that was then and this is now. The word "turn" has become fashionable once again, as radio and tv audiences look back in laughter, to the golden days of musichall. It may surprise you to discover that the Royal Family were



**The Royals enjoyed the "turns"**

big fans of musichall turns and regularly attended variety galas filled with turns...Royal Variety Performances they were called! These galas raised thousands of pounds for charity. And a show entitled *Turns* hosted by Jimmy Perry, did much to bring the formerly detested word back into vogue.

Looking back at "all our yesterdays" I'd like to pay tribute to a few of my favourite radio "turns," people who seldom became solo "headline stars" in their own right, but who knew how to entertain us royally on the wireless. All they had to do was stand in front of a BBC microphone, and...give us a turn.

Musical turns were ideal fodder for radio. As his name suggests, Billy 'Uke' Scott played instruments belonging to the ukelele family. But unlike George Formby, who

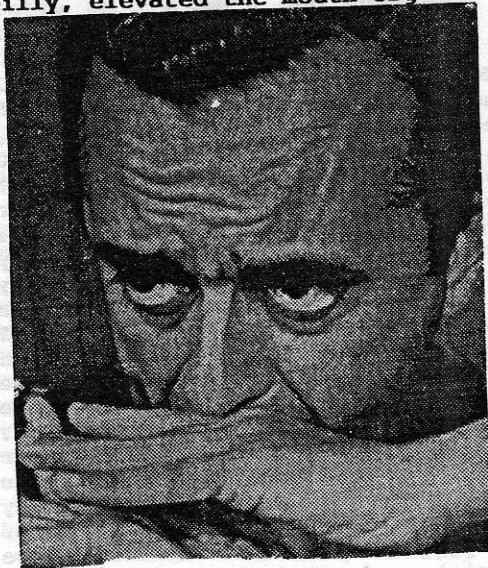


**Billy (Uke) Scott, radio favorite**

admitted he could only play 2 chords, even when performing such mega-hits *A Leaning On a Lampost*, Billy was truly the Arturo Toscanini of the wee instrument which has a 2nd use...its ideal for bopping somebody on the head. Desmond Lane was the UK's penny whistle man, Aussie import Shirley Abicair made delightful moises on the zither and in Scotland, Will Starr was christened "master o' the button-box" in recognition of the speed and dexterity with which he played the button-key accordion. Polish exiles Rawicz and Landaur who made Britain their home, were forever popping up on radio variety shows with their twin pianos, playing duets of the *Exodus Theme* variety, long before Ferrante & Ticher. And Eddie Calvert, billed as "The Man With the Golden Trumpet" was a great favourite on Radio Luxembourg. Mind you, Eddie was more than "just a turn." He enjoyed a few short years of stardom on the strength of his hit version of *O Mein Papa*. But eventually, Eddie reverted to being

"just another turn" ending his career somewhat sadly, in a "pit" orchestra in Durban, South Africa.

In America the Harmonicats were a favourite radio and vaudeville turn. Britain had a couple of groups which played mouth organs of every shape, size and texture. The Three Monarchs comprised two straight-men and Cedric Monarch who spoke with a deliberate "lithp" and did the comedy. After their act folded, Cedric became a comedian. Another favourite radio troupe was the Morton Fraser Harmonica Gang. This 7-piece ensemble, included a former circus dwarf who did triple backward flips while playing a gigantic instrument that seemed twice as long as he was. Pity such acrobatic dexterity was lost on wireless listeners. Two Canadian exiles, Larry Adler and Tommy Reilly, elevated the mouth organ to



Larry Adler,  
Harmonica Turn

-----  
symphony orchestra status. But along with other favourite UK harmonica aces, Max Geldray (The Goon Show), Ronald Chesney (Educating Archie) and pint-sized

Bert Sellars, they appeared regularly as solo turns on our favourite radio vaudeville shows.

Radio thrived on the unusual and exotic. Leslie Welch was known as The Memory Man. He challenged the studio audience to stump him by asking questions about sporting events. "Who scored the deciding goal in the Scotland versus England soccer cup final in 1892?" Not everybody's idea of sparkling radio entertainment, but Leslie knew his sports. My granny used to joke that the Latin American turn known as Dorita Y Pepe were really Doris and Pete who lived above a chip shop, "down the Mile End Road" in London's East End. I think she was having me on.

And impressionists were great radio favourites, particularly when mimicking the radio stars of the day. One of the best was Peter Cavanagh, billed as "The Voice of Them All." His take-offs of Churchill and Montgomery of Alamein, (whom he resembled) were eerily realistic. And a younger chap named Peter Goodright who got his start in the WW2 Stand Easy Shows with Cheerful Charlie Chester, had a weekly impressions show out of BBC Manchester. George Meeton was another superb impressionist. But unlike to two Peters, George did "noises." He was like a one-man BBC sound effects department. In one of his turns, George recreated the famous Dam Busters bombing scene from WW2 including mid air battles between the RAF and the Luftwaffe, the bouncing bombs hitting their targets, water cascading through the broken dykes, and the final "Victory Roll" by Wing Commander Guy Gibson and his boys. You can imagine the emotional impact of George's finale, as the orchestra played the stirring Dam Busters March! It was all done by his vocal chords. Great stuff from a hugely talented but I'm sorry to say, long-forgotten, radio turn.

Another radio standby were those brother acts. Bob and Alf Pearson became household names on Ted Ray's *Rays a Laugh*. Their signature tune, heard every week on that top-rated program, showed a strong commitment to radio, "We bring you melodies...from out of the sky...my brother and I." Country and western music was the last thing you'd hear from the Western Brothers. These were two middleaged cads from the upper classes, who spoke in posh accents, dressed in black tie and tails and sported those infamous English monocles. They "drawled" rather than sang, their own comedy parodies at the piano. Their

humour was of the "taking the Mickey" variety. And a delightfully English double-act known as Flotsam and Jetsom endeared themselves to WW2 audiences (and irritated Adolf Hitler to no end) when they performed their famous song about "The Englander and the Hun!" Needless to say, back in those jingoistic times, it was the humble Englander who despatched the nasty Hun, to the accompaniment of cheers from the BBC audience. Would you believe it, I've barely skimmed the surface. But I'd better close off. You see, I feel a turn coming on.

Cheerio for now.



### NEW BOOK

*THE WITCH'S TALE* was written by Alonzo Deen Cole, the popular program's creator, writer, and star. This 253 page "trade" paperback contains thirteen scripts from the series along with information about the program and star. Also included is a complete log for the series' eight year run, a program index, and cast photographs. The prologue and epilogue were written by Miriam Wolff who played the role of Nancy, the Witch. Cost of the book is \$22.95 including shipping. It can be ordered from Dunwich Press, P.O. Box 193, Yorktown Heights, NY 10598, or by credit card at (914) 245-6608.

## NARA NEWS COMMERCIAL ADVERTISING RATES

### ONE ISSUE:

Full page - \$50.00

Half page - 25.00

Quarter page - 15.00

### FOUR ISSUES:

25% off above rates

# Owning a piece of The Klondike

by  
Roma Freedman

In 1955 Quaker Oats sponsored a television program which was a follow-up to its radio network show whose hero was Sergeant Preston of the Yukon. The story continued on year after year, but the merchandising offers began to grow dull and boring. There had been a compass, a skinning knife, a firelighting prism ring, and other goodies. By this time sixty-seven other ready-to-eat cereals marketed by other companies were offering much the same kind of premiums.

So Quaker asked its advertising agency to think of something different. It must be truly unusual, but also inexpensive. An appealing premium must be found that would draw a huge business without costing more than two to five cents each of their advertising dollar.

Bruce Baker, of the advertising agency, was the one chosen to come up with this clever idea, and it was not until the night before the scheme was to be presented to the company that he, by then quite desperate, remembered something he had heard about years before, wherein tiny bits of land had been given away in Oklahoma. He stopped rolling and tossing in his bed and asked himself, "Why can't we offer a deed to a square inch of land right in Sergeant Preston's own Yukon Territory? The cost should be small, and just as the radio and TV program, surely must give children a mysterious faraway setting for their imaginative

adventures while they are toiling away at chores and homework. Why wouldn't actual ownership of land in the Gold Rush country appeal to millions of children?"

So Baker was able to sell his idea to the agency and to Quaker's merchandising department as well, but the lawyers didn't like it at all. They could see many legal complications ahead. But Baker was sure this was an idea that would have real appeal. Eventually he chartered a plane to fly himself, a Quaker representative, and a lawyer to the Yukon.

They were somewhat like children themselves in their lack of knowledge of what the gold rush country would be like. They wore their Brooks Brothers suits, and bench-made shoes, and carried no overcoats, although winter was near. They had to change planes three times before they reached Dawson. There were only a few old sourdoughs still living in what had become a ghost town, although Dawson at one time was the capital of the territory. These old prospectors, seeing the elegance of the men's clothes, believed someone must have found the mother lode, and a rumor started that kept all the Territory and parts of Alaska busy talking the rest of the winter.

Baker and his two companions had arranged a meeting with the Queen's Counsel, but when he heard that they wanted to buy land in the old





"No! Johnny! There are no 'QUAKER-PUFFED RICE SPARKIES' IN THERE!"

gold fields to give away in one-inch parcels, he wasn't sure he wanted to waste his time on it, or on them. But after much argument, they worked out the details making it legal in the territory, and also safe to give in the United States, where some laws against the promotion of questionable securities existed.

Bending over a map, they finally selected a 19.11 acre spot on the Yukon River twelve miles north of Dawson. They paid \$10,000 for this, passing title on to the Big Inch Land Company, Inc., which would disperse the land by subdivision.

This land was divided into 21 million parcels, each an inch square, and marked by letter and number so that each bit was different from the piece next to it. The deeds were enclosed as free premiums in Quaker Puffed Wheat and Puffed Rice. They were promoted on the Sergeant Preston show in the spring of 1955. Additional deeds could be had by sending in a box top from the cereal package.

After the Klondike Big Inch Land Company had distributed all the property it wished to, it was kept in existence for ten years, and then having no further need for it, the company was dissolved in 1966. This land could never be used for anything useful, since the grantor (the Big Inch Land Company) gave each owner an easement over the other square inches of land to get to his own square inch, so nothing could be built on it. And the Crown reserved all mineral rights.

A later promotion was dirt from the Yukon, which was sledged to Whitehorse, then taken up the Alcan Highway to an orphanage near Anchorage. Here the children earned a little spending money by making tiny sacks, each to be filled with an ounce of this real Yukon dirt. Twenty million of these were offered as premiums, and were soon gone.

Years passed, and occasionally the company got inquiries about the land, and whether the deeds were of any value. One man claimed to have collected 10,800 deeds which he believed would be equal to a piece

of land 75 feet square. The lawyers, a humorless lot, said that the real value of the deeds was the romantic appeal of being a property owner in the Great Yukon Territory. They said they would have to see the serial numbers of each deed, to discover if even two of the one-inch bits were side by side. Since there were twenty million owners, none of whose names or addresses were known to the company, he was not likely to be able to find other owners with which to swap parcels. It was true that these were not just certificates allowing the person to claim title at some later date, but really were deeds. When the person filled in his or her own

name, after taking the deed from the package at home, he had acquired title to that square inch of land.

Some 21,000,000 deeds were handed out during that campaign, but none of the claim holders ever bothered to register their titles with the Yukon Territorial Land Office. The kids apparently didn't read the fine print, or perhaps were too young to read. Eventually the government reclaimed the land for \$37 in back taxes. A spokesman for the Quaker Oats Company claimed that they never received the bill. Ah well, it was nice to dream, wasn't it?

## 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 LIBRARY:**

We are continuing to listen to all the cassettes in the library to insure quality before putting them back into circulation. As the cassettes are checked and catalogued you will continue to get listings in addition to what you have already received. If you have questions, or if there is something that you are looking for, please send your request, along with a stamped-self-addressed envelope to Don Aston, P.O. Box 1392, Lake Elsinore, CA 92531. Orders should be sent to this same address.

### **SCANFAX CASSETTE CATALOG:**

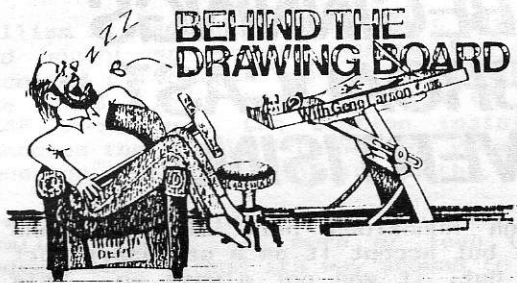
A list of the various program series available in our SCANFAX cassette library is available for \$1.00 and a self-addressed-stamped envelope. You can then ask for program titles for those series that are of interest to you. Send your requests to Don Aston, P.O. Box 1392, Lake Elsinore, CA 92531.

### **PRINTED MATERIALS LIBRARY:**

The printed materials library has four catalogs available: the book catalog (407 books), the script catalog (229 scripts), the catalog of logs (47 logs), and the magazine catalog. All four are available for ten 32¢ stamps. Send requests to Bob Sabon, 308 West Oraibi Drive, Phoenix, AZ 85027.  
E-MAIL: [homet29@juno.com](mailto:homet29@juno.com)

## **NARA NEEDS A CASSETTE LIBRARIAN!**

If you could possibly take on this important assignment, please see Don Aston's explanation on page 4 and then contact him at P.O. Box 1392, Lake Elsinore, CA 92531. He can be reached by phone (909) 244 5242; e mail [aston@cosmoaccess.net](mailto:aston@cosmoaccess.net).



## KIDS RADIO AND THE WAR

by

Gene Larson

The other morning I awoke and realized that I was getting to be just like an old radio....my finish is tarnishing, I'm full of static, and my tubes are dimming. Half the time I couldn't tell you what happened yesterday, but I can still recall what took place decades ago and it makes me wonder if a person remembers old stuff as he gets older. Don't mind me, I just had a birthday recently and these kinds of feelings hang around for a few days until I forget again.

I do remember the contrasts experienced when our family moved back and forth between the west coast and the midwest when I was a kid. Seattle was a particularly scary place back then as search lights swept the skies and giant gas-filled balloons were anchored and swayed high in the air all around the city every night. Every so often air raid sirens would go off to test them and everyone's nerves. I can even remember hearing about a Japanese submarine being caught in Puget Sound, which put folks even more on edge. And those neighborhood Civil Defense volunteers randomly picking a section of the area at night to move up and down the streets yelling: "This is a blackout....all lights out! Get those blackout shades down!" or something to that effect. I was scared, watching those eerie searchlights from my bedroom window.

All was not lost for this little kid back then because ole Tom Mix was out there somewhere on a

secret mission, helping to protect our United States! He and a lot of others of our radio heroes urged us kids to help our Uncle Sam fight the war by saving old shoes, rubber tires, and tinfoil to turn in for the war effort, and we did. They also urged us to buy war stamps and fill our little books. These were the kid's version of war bonds.

Dad was called into the Army, so Mom and an aunt gathered their gas-rationing stamps and packed us into an old Buick in which, mishap after mishap, we moved back to Kansas. We lived with Grandma and Grandpa in a small farming town until the war ended and we got our own house in a nearby city. There were no searchlights in this little community, but not too far away was a military base. Day and night maneuvers took place in the town and tanks, amphibians, and jeeps rolled through. I can remember a couple of soldiers stopping next to me in a jeep one day and using their "walkie-talkies." Then I went home so I could hear "The Air Adventures of Jimmy Allen."

Little Orphan Annie, Tom Mix, Hop Harrigan, Captain Midnight, Jimmy Allen, Bob Hope, Fibber McGee and Molly, and all those other folks helped me get through WWII just fine. Now if they were all still in our society today, we might have been much better off. Hmmm.

Now, where'd I put my last line? Oh! See ya "Behind the Drawing Board."



JIM SNYDER

# THE BEGINNINGS OF BROADCAST ADVERTISING

Advertising is an accepted, though obnoxious part of radio and television broadcasting. We hate it but accept it as a necessary part of the entertainment that we get. But, it was not always so. This time I'd like to discuss advertising's development in radio. There are several different versions of how this all came about, but I think that what I have here is the most generally accepted sequence of events.

KDKA went on the air in Pittsburgh in November of 1920 and while the claim is disputed by many, it is generally accepted that this was the first regular broadcasting station. By July 1922 there were four hundred licensed stations and not a single one of them had even considered the idea of selling time for advertising, or selling it for any other purpose for that matter.

A number of reference books will tell you that the first radio advertising was of the indirect type, namely attaching a commercial name to a program (such as the A&P Gypsies), without including direct advertising. While this was a common early format it was preceded by about eight months by a more direct form of selling. On August 16, 1922, station WEAF in New York started up. This station was owned by American Telephone and Telegraph. This was to be the first in a proposed chain of "toll broadcasting" stations. AT&T called its planned stations "radiotelephone" stations which they said would work like phone booths, which you entered, paid a price, and talked to your party. Under their plan, a person would enter a radio station (a "phone booth of the air"), pay a fee, and address the listening public. There was a great deal of public indignation to this proposal and AT&T had to defend its plan in print, in which it said in part "that it is against the public interest to broadcast pure advertising matter. This experiment is to see whether there are people who desire to buy the right to talk to the public and at the same time tell the public something it would like to hear."

Anyway, the station went on the air and less than two weeks later the first sponsor entered its "phone booth on the air." On August 28 the first commercial I can document went out. Late in the afternoon, the Queensboro Corporation bought ten minutes for \$50 to sell apartments in Jackson Heights, Long Island, in the round-a-bout way of talking about the benefits of suburban living. Within three weeks they had sales of \$127,000 that they attributed directly to that ten minute broadcast. The corporation then purchased four more ten-minute afternoon segments and paid an additional \$100 for an evening period.

Even with this success, WEAF was having a tough time selling time. In September only two more companies, Tidewater Oil and the American Express Company, entered their "phone booth." Total revenues for the first two months of operation were \$550, but then the approach of Christmas brought in a number of department stores including Macy's and Gimbel's.

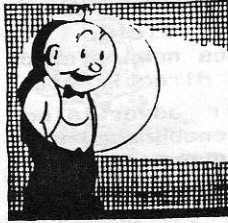
William H. Rankin, of the Rankin Advertising Agency, became interested and bought an evening period for \$100 to discuss his field. He received a flock of letters and calls and so the agencies now entered the field. Even though a number of sponsors contracted directly with WEAF themselves, the station insisted on paying their advertising agencies the standard 15 percent commission, which then encouraged the agencies. At the end of six months, WEAF had sixteen sponsors.

Now this advertising wasn't quite of the type with which we are familiar today. It more or less took the form of an educational lecture that worked its way around to the sponsor in some indirect way. A greeting card company, for example, offered a talk on the history of Christmas cards. My favorite was the presentation by Gillette on the fashions in beards since medieval times. This ended with the dramatic triumph of the safety razor (sort of like the Lone Ranger riding to the rescue). Station executives were very cautious. A toothpaste company wanted to give a talk on teeth and their care, but the debate on whether anything as personal as teeth should even be mentioned on the air, was a long one. The toothpaste company finally won out. There were strict rules, however. No prices could be mentioned, store locations could not be given, and samples could not be offered.

Indirect selling by sponsor identification started on April 25, 1923 with the advent of the Browning King Orchestra, sponsored by the Browning King clothing firm. There was no sales message and it was never even mentioned that Browning King sold clothing. This new format quickly became the policy of WEAF and we then got the Ipana Troubadours, Cliquot Club Eskimos, and the A&P Gypsies, among others.

Other stations wanted to get in on sponsored advertising but AT&T claimed that it had the "exclusive rights" to what it considered to simply be one phase of the telephone business. The government started investigations and in time AT&T removed itself from the broadcasting industry. Government action was still required for advertising to become what we know it to be today. While many reference books tell us that the Radio Act of 1927 was responsible for the commercial broadcasting system, the act itself says nothing at all about the sale of time other than one sentence that stated that a person or company buying time or furnishing a program, had to be identified. The first code of the National Association of Broadcasters, adopted in 1928, said "Commercial announcements should not be broadcast between seven and eleven p.m."

The fledgling CBS network broke the ice towards what we would recognize as commercials in 1929, when it was desperate for sponsors in order to stay in business. This led them to the first mention of price, in ads for Cremo cigars. The public was told that they cost five cents and were not made with spit (this referring to the practice of cigar workers to lick, with their tongue, the last leaf around the cigar to hold it in place). With the Cremo military band playing in the background, the announcer yelled, "There is no spit in Cremo!" Not only was price mentioned, but in the very same ad we dropped to the poor taste shown in commercials today. The floodgates were now opened and NBC issued an announcement, that "After long consideration, the company has decided to alter its policy with reference to the mention of price in commercial announcements." Commercials, as we now know them, were on the air.



## SPOTLIGHTING OTHER CLUBS

*This page gives OTR clubs and organizations, outside of NARA, a chance to tell us about their program. This service is free, and full details can be obtained from the editor.*

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### THE INTERNATIONAL AL JOLSON SOCIETY

The International Al Jolson Society is an organization dedicated to perpetuate the memory of the entertainer, Al Jolson. The Society has over 1000 members in countries such as England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, France, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, Malta, Japan, Israel, South Africa as well as in the USA and Canada. The Society has been around for almost fifty years and will celebrate its fifty year anniversary in the year 2000.

The Society keeps Al Jolson's memory alive by gathering at annual festivals and mini-conventions held at various locations in the USA and overseas. The Society produces a publication called The Jolson Journal which contain articles, news clippings, photographs, stores and artwork about Al Jolson's life and career within their pages. It comes out twice a year. They also publish a newsletter called the Jolson Journalette which comes out four times a year.

There are various individuals or groups within the Society who have kept Jolson's name alive by performing his songs either as singers or musicians to audiences in their cities, states or around the world. This includes over 200 Jolson impersonators in the world who use a Jolson-like voice to entertain.

Jolson fans keep in touch by way of phone calls or letter writing or through the Internet. It has been through the Internet that the Society has gained many new members.

Over the years, the Society has given to charities such as the American Film Inttitute, The American Heart Association, The Holocaust Museum etc. The Society also donated a special bench and brick in the walkway (in honor of Al Jolson) for the beautiful Korean Memorial near Boston Harbor.

It was through the efforts of the Society that he has been honored by the U.S. Postal Service with his own stamp and will also have an (honorary) street named after him in front of the Winter Garden Theater in New York. It will be called AL JOLSON WAY.

If you would like to receive a membership application to join The International Al Jolson Society, please write to:

**THE INTERNATIONAL AL JOLSON SOCIETY c/o Bruce Wexler - president  
16 Silversmith Court \* Howell, New Jersey 07731**

# 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 **THE 16TH ANNUAL SPERDVAC CONVENTION** is scheduled for November 13 thru 15, 1998 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel at the Los Angeles International Airport. A free shuttle service is provided for those flying. The person to contact for information is Larry Gassman, Box 1163, Whittier, CA 90603. He can be reached by phone at (562) 947-9800.
- ② **THE 13TH ANNUAL OLD TIME RADIO AND NOSTALGIA CONVENTION** is scheduled for April 23 and 24, 1999. Note that this is a return to it's April time slot. This convention is held at the Marriott Inn on the north side of Cincinnati, Ohio. The contact person is Bob Burchette, 10280 Gunpowder Road, Florence, KY 41042. The phone is (606) 282-0333.
- ③ **THE 15TH ANNUAL LUM & ABNER SOCIETY CONVENTION** will be held on June 25 and 26, 1999 in Mena, Arkansas at the Best Western Lime Tree Inn. Mena is the closest city to the legendary Pine Ridge. For information please contact Tim Hollis. 81 Sharon Blvd., Dora, AL 35062. Phone is (205) 648-6110.
- ④ **THE REPS RADIO SHOWCASE VII** is scheduled for June 25 and 26, 1999 at the Seattle Center (at the Space Needle) in Seattle, Washington. You can obtain information on this event from Mike Sprague, P.O. Box 723, Bothell, WA 98041. Phone: (425) 488-9518 fax (425) 402-6988 email hrrmikes@aol.com
- ⑤ **THE 24TH ANNUAL FRIENDS OF OLD TIME RADIO CONVENTION** will be held at the Holiday Inn North at the Newark, New Jersey International Airport October 21 thru 23, 1999. The hotel provides free shuttle service back and forth to the airport. Contact person is Jay Hickerson, Box 4321, Hamden, CT 06514. Jay can be reached by phone at (203) 248-2887 or fax at (203) 281-1322. E-mail is JayHick@aol.com

**16** Show-Comedy

**The Jack Benny Program**

Jack began his own radio show for Canada Dry on May 2, 1932. Over the years there have been many additions to the cast, including Jack's wife, Mary Livingstone, who first appeared on August 3, 1932. Eddie Anderson, who played Jack's valet Rochester, was first heard as a Pullman porter on March 28, 1937. A regular guest during the early years (often appearing in one of the many versions of *Buck Benny Rides Again*) Andy Devine first popped in on October 4, 1936. After Canada Dry, Jack's sponsors included Chevrolet, General Tires, Jell-O, Grape Nuts and Lucky Strikes. Directors included Robert Ballin and Hillard Marks, who also produced the show. Other producers were Irving Fein, Tom Harrington.

(At right are Dennis Day, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Phil Harris and Mary Livingstone)



Some of the parts played by Mel Blanc included: Professor LeBlanc, T.Wimley the soundman, Virgil Reimer the soundman, an English horse, Jack's Maxwell automobile...

**18** Actor

**Don Ameche**

born: Dominic Amici

May 31, 1908 Kenosha, Wisconsin



Don began his acting career while attending college. He then ended his law studies and headed to Hollywood. Being rejected by MGM, Ameche signed with 20th Century Fox. One of Don's early movies, *The Story of Alexander Graham Bell* (1939), made the name Ameche a byword for telephone. On radio Don teamed with Frances Langford in the long running series *The Bickersons*, first heard on *The Chase & Sanborn Hour*. Ameche also appeared on *The First Nighter* and *Grand Hotel*. Don moved on to tv with *International Showtime* (1961-65). Ameche continued making movies, earning an Academy Award for his supporting role in *Cocoon* (1985). Mr. Ameche died December 6, 1993.





(At right are Jack Benny, Don Wilson and Mel Blanc)

17

Cast members included Sara Berner, Bea Benaderet, Artie Auerbach, Mel Blanc, Sam Hearn, Sheldon Leonard, Elliott Lewis, Frank Nelson, etc. Music was conducted by Don Bestor, Frank Black, Bob Crosby, Johnny Green, Phil Harris, George Olsen and Ted Weems. Vocalists included Kenny Baker, Michael Bartlett, Dennis Day who first appeared October 8, 1939 along with his mother played by Verna Felton, James Melton, Frank Parker, The Sportsmen Quartet and Larry Stevens. Announcer were Kenny Delmar, Paul Douglas, Alois Havrilla, George Hicks, and the portly Don Wilson who began on April 6, 1934. The show was written by George Balzer, Ed Beloin, Jack Douglas, Milt Josefsberg, Bill Morrow, Sam Perrin and John Tackaberry. Sound effects were performed by Floyd Caton, Monty Fraser, Ed Ludes, James Murphy, Virgil Reimer, Gene Twombly, Cliff Thorsness and Jack Wormser.

*Did you know...* That Lou's Hollywood career began as a stunt man? And that Bud was once a circus lion trainer?

19 Comedians

**Bud Abbott** Born: William Alexander Abbott  
October 2, 1895 Asbury Park, New Jersey

**Lou Costello** Born: Louis Francis Cristillo  
March 6, 1906 Paterson, New Jersey



The comedy duo met on burlesque circuit and became a team in 1936. They hit the big times when they performed their classic *Who's On First* skit on *The Kate Smith Radio Hour*. A record of that skit would later be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. The team made their first movie appearance together in *One Night in the Tropics* (1940) followed with a long string of Abbott & Costello movies beginning with *Buck Privates* in 1941. After several successful years on radio the two made their tv debut on the *Colgate Comedy Hour* in 1951. Then they started their own series the following year; *The Abbott and Costello Show*. Lou died March 3, 1959 and Bud died April 24, 1974.

# 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 1998 edition of the *QTR SOURCE LIST* is now available. This six-page compendium lists every OTR club, dealer, publication, archive, convention, web site and library in the U.S. and Canada, with over 140 separate listings. Each citation contains name, address, telephone and e-mail address, if available. If you have a prior edition, it may be time to update. These lists are color-coded to designate the year. The 1998 version is on yellow paper. Copies printed on white paper are over six years old and the others: gold (1994), purple (1995), green (1996), and orange (1997). Cost is \$2 to NARA members and \$3 to others. Send payment in stamps or cash to Jack French, 5137 Richardson Dr., Fairvax, VA 22032. PLEASE, no checks...our profit margin cannot justify sending Jack to the bank and post office. And send stamps in some usable denomination. Seven 32¢ ones would be about right. All profits go to NARA so be generous. Orders filled same day by return first class mail. (Please do not post this list on the Internet since it is a NARA fund-raiser.) Get your copy soon.

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WANTED: I would like to purchase a Captain Midnight decoder. If you have information on where one can be obtained please contact Jackie Morris, 1245 Singletary Ave., San Jose, CA 95126.

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WANTED: I'm looking for printed articles on "Inner Sanctum," "The Whistler," and "Mysterious Traveler." I would appreciate any information you could provide. Donald Berhent, 807 Glenhurst Road, Willowick, OH 44095.

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We have a listing of 181 books dealing with old time radio that might be useful to you in building your OTR library. Each entry lists the title, author, publisher and date of publication, a brief description of the contents, and the ISBN number if applicable. We know of no other list that is as complete as this one. Cost is \$2 to NARA members and \$3 to others. Please send payment in cash or seven 32¢ stamps (NO checks please) to B.J. George, 2177 South 62nd Street. West Allis, WI 53219. All profits will be given to NARA.



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

Gary Papers for plugging NARA inside volume 4 of his "Night at the Radio" series. These album collections each contain four OTR cassettes. You can get information on these collections by writing to Garry at P.O. Box 458, Ashland, OR 97520.

Hal Stephenson for an OTR related cartoon.

Don McMillen for putting on OTR programs for a retirement home in Sheridan, Wyoming.

Chuck Seeley for providing information on an excellent article that we are trying to get permission to reprint in a future issue.

Roger Hill for assorted materials and information.

B.J. George for the season's greetings ad that he purchased on page 49.

Gene Larson, NARA's staff artist for the drawings on pages 20 and 40.

Don Aston for getting out the supplemental cassette library listing that we all received in September. This is a gigantic job and he is working on it as rapidly as possible. You will be receiving additional lists in the future, just as quickly as they are ready.

Our members for keeping us informed about conventions around the country. We can't list them if we don't know about them. In fact, there is one convention that we haven't listed in the past because we don't find out about it until it's over. Any information you have on conventions is appreciated.

Our columnists in this issue: Don Aston, Frank Bresee, Bob Burnham, Jim Cox, Roma Freedman, B.J. George, Al Inkster, Gene Larson, Bob Mott, Jack Palmer, John Pellatt, Ray Smith, Hal & Carol Stephenson, and Ken Weigel.

Those who have already sent in articles for future issues: Frank Bresee (3 articles), Gene Larson (2 articles), Bob Mott (3 articles), and Hal Stephenson (8 articles).

*We appreciate your help!!!*

## **DEADLINES:**

**November 15 for the winter issue**

*(Please note that this is one month earlier than usual.)*

**March 15 for the spring issue**