

ISSN 0730-014X



A JOURNAL OF VINTAGE RADIO

# NARA NEWS<sup>®</sup>

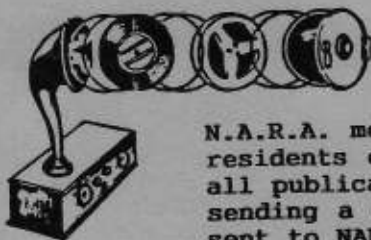
Official Publication of the

**NORTH AMERICAN  
RADIO ARCHIVES**

VOL. XXVII

SUMMER 1999

NO. 3



## NORTH AMERICAN RADIO ARCHIVES

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NARA NEWS, a journal of the North American Radio Archives, is published quarterly for distribution to members. Sample copies may be purchased from the membership director for \$4.00 each. All correspondence and manuscripts should be sent to the editor. NARA NEWS is listed with the Library of Congress under #ISSN 0730-014X. Opinions expressed in the journal are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion or recommendation of the organization or staff. Permission to reproduce contents of this publication may be given upon request.

## DEPARTMENTS

Staff.....	1
Letters.....	3
Cassette Library Notice.....	4
Cassette Librarian Needed.....	22
Library Catalogs.....	24
NARA NEWS for the Visually Impaired.....	29
Financial Contributions.....	36
Membership Expirations.....	38
Change of Address.....	45
Conventions.....	46
Tip of the Atwater Dial.....	50
Deadlines.....	50

## ARTICLES

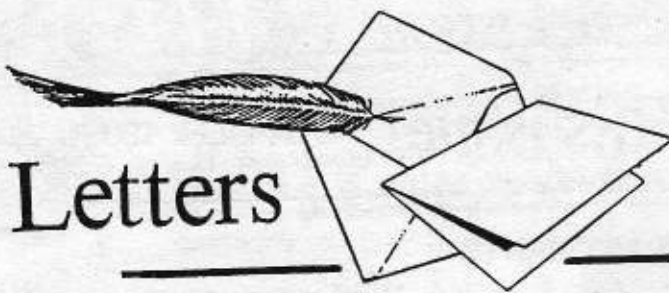
Cassette Library and other subjects (Don Aston).....	5
Gene Autry (Frank Bresee).....	6
Home Front Preparedness (Ken Weigel).....	7
Art Linkletter Book (Hal Stephenson).....	12
The Shadow (Chuck Seeley).....	13
Battle Lines in Daytime - Conclusion (Jim Cox).....	17
Vintage Radio Trains (Gene Larson).....	23
Carlton E. Morse (Hal Skinner).....	27
Transcribed From Toronto (John Pellatt).....	30
Roy Rogers (Jack Palmer).....	31
The OTR Digest (Hank Hinkel).....	33
Radio's First Music Broadcast (Clarence Runden).....	34
Cassettes for \$105 each (Jack French).....	35
Orson Welles (Sam Levene).....	37
Father Coughlin (Jim Snyder).....	41
United Kingdom Cowboys (Ray Smith).....	43
Radio Collector's Cards (B.J. George).....	47

## FEATURES

Tom Mix Ad.....	25
New Book.....	36
Honors for a NARA Member.....	39

## ADVERTISING

Classified Ads.....	49
Paid Advertising Rates.....	49



# Letters

# from our readers

About the [last] issue: The Don Aston piece was very interesting and it would be great to see similar pieces on the, uh, old timers of the hobby. Seems to be a large percentage of teachers involved; I know five or six myself from the old days.

Usually I pass on the articles about soap operas, but Jim Cox's piece was cool. That the soaps had story lines concerning the war never occurred to me. I look forward to part 2. And I continue to enjoy and learn from Ken Weigel's history.

Chuck Seeley  
Kenmore, New York

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The second and final part of Jim Cox's piece and the third of four parts of the one from Ken Weigle are in this issue.*

\*\*\*\*\*

Thanks for the article about Don Aston. There is no doubt in my mind that our hobby has flourished over the years because of people like Don and Jay Hickerson, along with the other vintage radio pioneers. While I have known for years how much Don has contributed to the OTR hobby, I was not aware of all he has done for NARA until I read your article. We all owe him a great debt of gratitude.

Richard Richter  
Pierre, South Dakota

\*\*\*\*\*

Another great issue! I enjoyed the articles on Don Aston, Bob Hope, Gene Autry, "Y2K," Jack Benny, Lum & Abner, etc. I always look forward to NARA News. There is always the unique, such as "Dry Nursing the Home Front on the Road to Victory." Keep up the fine work!

Chuck Huck  
Warrenville, Illinois

*EDITOR'S REPLY: Thank you for your very kind words. Whatever success we have is due entirely to the fine writers who share their knowledge and observations with the rest of us. That includes both our "regulars" who appear in each issue, and the others who send something in from time to time, or perhaps only one time. Without them you would have nothing to read, and we are most grateful to them all.*

\*\*\*\*\*



Just a word to compliment you on the article on Don Aston. I have met Don several times, but really knew very little about him and what his duties were with our organization. I have been a member of NARA for quite a few years now, and I really know very little about any of the people serving as our officers. I think it would be a good idea if you, or someone, wrote a short article about each of our officers, telling a little about them and explaining their duties. Since our organization is the only OTR group actually attempting to be a nationwide organization, we are unable to hold local meetings where a member gets a chance to meet the officers of the organization.

In fact, I would like to see a short history of our organization presented either in the *NARA News* or as a separate pamphlet. I have seen bits and pieces of how the organization started, but nothing that could be considered an actual history. All in all I don't think most members really know much about their organization even though it has been around a long time for an OTR group.

Keep up the good work on the *NARA News*. Although I'm obviously a little prejudiced, I still think our publication has the most varied and interesting articles of any of the OTR clubs.

Jack Palmer  
Battle Creek, Michigan

*EDITOR'S RESPONSE: Jack is, of course, one of those "regular" writers for the NARA News that we mentioned up above. His column is this issue is his 25th consecutive one without his ever having missed a deadline. Jack mentioned that NARA has been around a long time. Actually, NARA is the oldest existing OTR club, just completing its 27th year serving the hobby. A beginning history of the club can be found on page 9 of the winter 1997 issue.*



## CASSETTE LIBRARY NOTICE!!!

NARA's cassette library is now fully open for business and our new catalog is available to members who would like to have one. To get your copy, please send \$2.00 (to cover shipping costs) to:

Don Aston  
P.O. Box 1392  
Lake Elsinore, CA 92531

## THE CASSETTE LIBRARY

and Others

BY

Don L. Aston



The Cassette Library is open. Members are getting a catalog of what is available. I am working to get the catalog out and then ... then my program on my computer crashes. Not all my work was lost, just a portion, but this has delayed sending out more copies of the catalog. Some are asking if I had a paper copy of the catalog. At the time I did not and had not taken it to the printers. After all of this time, this had to happen. I should be all back in catalog production by the time you are reading this NARA NEWS.

I still need help from a Southern Californian. It would speed up the turn around on library orders and other related items. I need someone to fill, package, ship, and restock orders. If I could have someone help just a few days per month, It would really help. I know members would appreciate the quicker service this help would provide.

On a related subject, I have been asked why NARA has eliminated commercials from the old time radio that circulates from the library. The real quick answer is NARA does not edit any show. The member may be assured that what is on the cassette is what was available when NARA obtained the program. With the thousands of programs in the library, it is very possible that some programs were edited by those that proved the material to NARA. NARA provides the most complete program that is available.

Many Old time radio programs, such as Jack Benny and Fibber McGee and Molly, included the plug for their sponsor right in the program. Jack Benny, however, did not record the songs in his early programs and those songs are lost. If a program was syndicated, many times the commercials were done live and not recorded. That is why some programs have long periods of music that could be faded in and out allowing for live commercials. Many programs such as NIGHTBEAT and GUNSMOKE were sustained. They were aired without sponsors during much of the time. I am just touching lightly on this commercial subject, but be assured, if the commercial was part of the program and it was recorded, it should be on the NARA cassettes. NARA preserves Old Time Radio, it does not edit it.

Now that the Cassette Library Project has been completed, NARA is seeking material to add to the Archive. NARA is constantly seeking source material such as discs, tapes, and wire recordings. If source material is not available, NARA will accept low generation material. All donations are tax deductible as NARA is a registered non-profit corporation. Support your Archive with your DONATIONS. Contact me for further information about donating to the NORTH AMERICAN RADIO ARCHIVES, Ltd.



# GENE AUTRY

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.*

-----

Gene Autry was one of America's favorite motion picture stars, recording personalities and radio heroes. Over the years, Mr. Autry made 89 feature films, 91 half hour television shows, and was responsible for appearing on an amazing 635 phonograph records. In addition, he appeared on his weekly CBS radio show every week for sixteen years, from January 1940 to May 1956. For many years he toured the country, putting on two or three shows a day with his horse Champion.

During the radio days his program originated at the CBS Columbia Square studios on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood. He broadcast for the same sponsor over the years...Wrigley gum. His show changed very slightly over the years---a couple of songs and a Western yarn, projecting a campfire atmosphere. As a matter of fact, most listeners thought the program was coming from his home, the "Melody Ranch" in the San Fernando Valley.

Mr. Autry was on my "Golden Days of Radio" show on several occasions, and I would like to relate two of his stories. One concerns a recording session in the mid-forties. He was in a studio to make some records. During the session he had recorded six songs and was about finished. There were ten minutes left of studio time, and it was decided to make a sample recording of one more song, just to see how it sounded.

The recording was made, in one take, and it turned out so well that his recording company decided to distribute it the way it was. It was released for Christmas that year....and that is how "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" became one of the biggest selling Christmas songs of all time.

On another program he related the following: "Frank, I want to tell you about something that happened to me when I was a telegraph operator down in Oklahoma. One night a stranger got off the train, in the cow-crossing where I worked, and came in to send a telegram. He saw my guitar lying there and asked me to play it for him. Well, I sang a couple of songs, and he joined in for a couple---and altogether I guess it took him a half hour to write out that telegram. Finally the man finished it and said, 'See you again son' and went out and got on the train. There wasn't much in the telegram---just a couple of jokes addressed to a newspaper in New York. But that night I could tell everyone I knew, that I had met Will Rogers. He had written his newspaper column between songs. I met him a few years later in Hollywood. He looked at me and said, 'Well son, I see that you and your guitar made it.'"

Gene Autry's passing brings to a close a golden era of Western stars. He was quite a fella, and quite a performer. A great deal of the history of the west died when he passed away.



Radio in WWII—

## Home Front Preparedness: Victory Gardens, Gags & Gimmicks

by  
ken weigel<sup>o</sup>



The "victory garden," the first of the stateside Victory crusades, was familiar to most Americans well before Uncle Sam took up the sword. It was first heard of in news coming out of Great Britain, where German U-boats and airplanes were working night and day to cut the British commercial lifeline. There, nearly floored by food shortages, Britishers "planted for victory" on private and vacant lots, in parks and on land adjoining railway lines, wherever a patch of arable soil could be found. Once Uncle Sam was in the fight, i.e., once Whiskers declared that "Food Will Win the War," it became America's turn to "Dig for Victory" and "Plant for Peace."

In a *Fibber McGee and Molly* show (NBC), broadcast around Easter 1942, series creator Don Quinn's overwritten attempt to involve listeners was typical of the dowdy treatment given the first government memos that came fluttering down to the networks. At the time *Fibber* was the second-highest rated program in the land. In this sketch Teeny, the shaveling from next door, suspects Fibber is duffing it, and tries to sell him vegetable seeds so he'll plant a victory garden. Count the laughs:

*Fibber: I been thinking of starting one but somehow I—*

*Teeny: Look, mister. How can we win this war if everybody says, "Well, I been thinking of doing something but I never did it"?*

*Fibber: Sis, you really got a point there.*

*Teeny: My teacher says that every single vegetable we grow means so much more food for our soldiers and sailors. She says we gotta have a green land here for those boys in Iceland.*

*Fibber: That's a very good idea, and I—*

*Teeny: She says we have an ocean between us and Australia, and an ocean between us and Europe, and if we have an ocean that we can just sit on and do nothin', we better get smart.*

*Fibber: Your teacher is very intelligent.*

*Teeny: She says that an army travels on its stomach. And if we don't keep 'em full of fuel we just don't know our groceries.*

*Fibber: You're absolutely right, sis. Gimme two bucks worth of seeds. And I'll get to work tomorrow—*

*Teeny: My teacher says it's much better to get blisters on our hands than calluses on our hearts. And whether we're buying bonds or planting vegetables, there's only one thing we gotta do. And that's dig, dig, dig!*

In that whole exchange there's but one snicker, one sniggle, and something falling between the two for which there is no name. In place of laughter, however, there *was* untamed applause. How wildly audiences responded to these appeals, incidentally, also provides a clue to the modern collector who has set himself the task of dating wartime programs. The more fervent the applause was, the closer in time it was to Pearl Harbor, or to some other critical Allied campaign. As the war boomed on and an Allied victory hove into view, patriotic appeals to plant, to economize, nay, to collect burlap bags became routine, and the applause that once rang in studio rafters diminished accordingly.

To listeners' ears today, these early promptings to "buy a share in America" smell strongly of Old Glory, as indeed they were meant to. After the Axis were turned back there



was a considerable loosening up in the selling of home front vigilance, especially on network comedy programs. But the straight-laced, studied appeal turned out by the federal labs continued throughout the war, because the war still had to be financed. So long as the dogs of war barked, they had to be fed.

Victory gardening thus became official when Uncle Sam equated food with "ammunition," like "bullets, planes and tanks." So labeled, the country's food processors and distributors were deemed to be "putting weapons in the hands of our fighting men as surely as the men and women producing guns." The Victory garden green thumb resulted in six million new gardens in the four months following Pearl Harbor. By the end of the first year more than eight million tons of produce were under cultivation in the United States. This amazed even the British, who began regarding America the Beautiful as that welcome two-headed arsenal/breadbasket of democracy.

\* \* \*

How wartime preparedness played out on radio in the year following Pearl Harbor will make an interesting yarn for the historian who has the time to put it under the glass. I, frankly, don't, but I will attempt here to set down a rough-and-tumble outline. It was a period of mixed signals in broadcasting. In the early months, radio was reluctant to discuss war topics because broadcasts that might aid the enemy were taboo. All that did was leave broadcasters unwilling to risk an opinion or to program with any exuberance. Audience participation shows were immediately shelved to keep unscripted, potentially dangerous comments from going out over the air. Aural depictions of combat were also banned to keep living rooms innocent of the actual horrors of war. Both of these bans were later lifted, but when broadcasters did verge upon war business they invested it with a fireproofed allegiance falling just short of religion; only the hosannas were missing. Most unrelieved serious discussion was reserved for the round tables, where a patriotic, pro-war toeing of the line was the order of the day.

Local stations took the easy path by imitating the format, content and approach of network programs. Their obliging efforts produced martial music, military interviews, recordings of canned government talks and other patriotic clanging as it poured straight from the federal spigot.

Indeed, most early home front preparedness messages, regardless of the kinds of program they were heard on, echoed the sober drift usually reserved for radio forums. It typified radio's post-Pearl Harbor walk on eggshells. The *Jack Benny Program* of May 3, 1942, for example, opened without its standard introductory fanfare until after the star himself made a rectilinear pitch for war bonds—material supplied compliments the Office of Facts & Figures. His was among the first of countless weekly whiskered "war messages" and schedules that began turning up on the desks of war program managers.

When the rubber shortage became acute, the call came down to turn in all unused rubber items. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, Rudy Vallee asked his *Sealtest Program* listeners to *search your garage, attic, cellar, closets and turn in your scrap at the nearest garage or filling station. Old tires, tubes, bathing caps, rubber gloves, and tennis shoes are urgently needed.*

The Office of Price Administration (OPA) used rhyme and verse to sell rubber rationing: *Announcer: Get in the scrap, neighbor. Little drops of water/little grains of sand/make the mighty ocean/and the pleasant land. Little scraps of rubber/little rubber scraps/and for Hirohito, 'Dolph and Duce/they'll be playin' taps. Teething rings, rubber bells, toy balloons, sink stoppers, ice caps, boots, rubbers, football bladders, garters, corsets, tires, inner tubes, welcome mats, baby carriage tires, crepe-soled shoes, kneeling pads—if it's rubber, or you think it's rubber, get in the scrap!*

Children were asked to turn in their bicycle balloon tires to "victory collection depots" or "dumps," and afterwards rode away on "victory bikes." Early in the war a *Hop Harrigan* salvage campaign, following guidelines set down by the Office of War Information (OWI), the official voice of Uncle Sam, used the rubber shortage to propagandize the juvenile Harrigan legions:

*Announcer: We all know the extent of the suffering to which the Chinese have been subjected by the Japanese. I have a little Chinese boy here, 12-year-old Edmund Jung. Edmund is a third-generation American, but he realizes that this is his war just as much as yours and mine. Edmund, what are you going to give in this salvage campaign?*

*Edmund: A rubber ball.*

*Announcer: What do you want me to do with it?*

*Edmund: Bounce it on Tojo's head.*

*Announcer: I'll certainly try to do that son, and I know that a lot of people share your sentiments. C'mon, let's go all out in the scrap rubber campaign! Hirohito means business. Let's show him so do we!*

Shortages of sugar, gasoline and morale led to a further proliferation of wartime messages on radio. Listeners began hearing about "victory cakes," "victory speed," and even *Victory*—programs. A wool shortage produced the "victory suit," the rubber shortage the victory collection dumps, and gasoline rationing a "victory speed." The men's "victory suit" came about in March 1942, brought on by high priority army demands for worsteds and woolens. Vest, patch pockets, cuffs and the traditional extra pair of trousers were replaced by short jacket, narrow lapels and an adjustable waistband in place of belt or suspenders. To everyone's surprise, victory suits tripled in price, and the new fashion statement gave impetus to the two-pants joke from coast to coast. Comedian Bob Burns claimed his victory suit pants had so much cotton in them they stood at attention when the band played "Dixie." Fred Allen's tailor asserted "A suit like this you couldn't buy on a pushcart for half the money."

Vallee also talked about the country's need for "the full help of a great civilian army at home to back up our boys at the front." In a comedy sketch, as he passed a home displaying a V sticker in the window, his was the voice of Uncle reminding listeners that "that V certificate is a service stripe of our civilian army. It means that the family living there is doing all in its power for victory." If your family saved paper, squelched rumors, spotted planes, and engaged in other rabid patriotic activities, it too could obtain a V sticker. The V-Home kits, supplied by the War Writers Board (WWB), were the source of pertinent war information which daytime scribes like Elaine Carrington, Irna Phillips and the captives at the Hummert factory worked into their soap operas. In time they became the source of much pertinent radio humor.

The business of victory gardening brought with it advertisements for victory cook books, victory meat recipes and victory waxed paper for preserving food. Not far behind came a trail of garden jokes, spoofs and skits. McGee, e.g., shook off garden fatigue by thumbing through the pages of his favorite magazine, *Weeder's Digest*. Jack Benny's beautician saved his mudpacks for weekend puttering. When the call for more poultry came down from Washington, hen houses rose like weeds next to garden lots. This prompted a rash of complaints from urban gardeners whose chickens ate the seeds as fast as they planted them. When Fred Allen asked one Alley gardener if he was doing his bit by raising chickens, the henpecked husband said, frankly, no: "One old cluck around the house is enough." One night Harry von Zell asked Eddie Cantor about his victory garden:

*Cantor: It's wonderful. Last month I got 500 radishes, 400 head of lettuce, 200 tomatoes—  
von Zell: What theater were you playing at?*

Whether mordant or botanic, gags about gardens, vegetables and "belly ammo" were batted from one comedy show to the other in those robust radio days. Listeners could be forgiven for thinking that radio's comedy merchants were only returning the vegetables vaudeville audiences had tossed at them not too many years before. The one wartime shortage the American home front never had to suffer through was the radio shortage gag. They circulated with abandon even while the tide of war favored the Axis. Gag writers declared open season on rubber early because Japan had an early monopoly on rubber. Herewith a few early specimens of the rubber gag:

A few weeks before Pearl Harbor, Gildersleeve warned his nephew Leroy to stop blowing his bubblegum. "Young man," he said, "if you keep playing with your gum that way, some day you're going to have a blowout. And remember, you haven't got a spare face."

Shortly after Pearl Harbor, John Barrymore, Rudy Vallee's co-star, complained of a chronic personal shortage—money. Vallee comforted him with the reminder that the government would gladly take his checks because it was "calling in all rubber." A short while later Bob Hope complained about the desperado who broke into his room and stole his hot water bottle. *Sealtest* comedienne Joan Davis confessed to being ill-informed about the rubber situation:

*Davis: I don't understand this drive to salvage rubber. You're supposed to get a cent a pound for it. But I got \$20 for my overshoes.*

*Vallee: You see, Joan, a cent a pound is for scrap rubber. For invasion barges the government pays more.*

In a Christmas 1942 sketch, Bob Hope called an expressman (Jerry Colonna) to take his luggage to the train station:

*Hope: So you're an expressman now, Colonna? How's business?*

*Colonna: Fine. I work all day. I've got the only truck in the city with four rubber tires.*

*Hope: Where'd you get the tires?*

*Colonna: I work all night too.*

Hope also told that night's "victory audience" that ever since his aunt gave her girdle to the scrap drive she's been dreaming of a "wide Christmas."

The "V" also came in for some radio ribbing. Just before the Allies invaded North Africa, in November 1942, Fibber's Don Quinn turned his attention to the morse V—three dots and a dash—in the form of a greeting card verse. Wallace Wimple, the McGees' neighbor, recited it:

*I know three Dorothys here in town:  
Dorothy Smith and Jones and Brown,  
Who chanced in a USO to meet  
A handsome sailor from the fleet,  
Who won their hearts and won their hands,  
Then sailed away to foreign lands.  
And when he comes back I'll bet we'll see—  
Three Dots in a dash for victory!*

\* \* \*

As noted in an earlier consideration, "Victory" as a war emblem, from which the V derived, was borrowed from the British, though Germany had first claim to it and failed to exploit it. German radio made it a practice, early in the fighting, to mark military victories with transmissions of Special Announcements. The first use of it came during the Norwegian campaign in April 1940, and they quickly became synonymous with victory. With each victory regular programming was interrupted by trumpet blasts, followed by a reading of the Special Announcement and the playing of a signature military march tune. German naval and air victories against England, e.g., were commemorated by musical recordings of "We Sail Against England" and "Bombs Over England." Battlefield victories in France were hailed by a



playing of "Die Wacht am Rhein." Singular victories were given more solemn treatment. The routing of British forces at Dunkirk, e.g., earned a playing of the national anthem with the sacred Horst Wessel song attached, followed by a hard dose of dead air, presumably to accommodate listeners who wished to contemplate the glory of Hitler's might. As Hitler drove through the Low Countries and France, the dosage of "victory fanfares" increased. In time they grew tedious. When Germany went on the defensive they were reduced to marking not victories but the repulsing of Allied offensives.

To return to the Victory emblem, out of the V for Victory mishmash on this side of the Atlantic came Victory postcards, Victory potholders, Victory hair pin kits, V-Homes, V matchbooks and V-shaped flower vases, pins and brooches. Though later repealed, a "victory tax" of 5% was levied on consumer purchases. Victory Rallies were held across the country, and "victory booths" vended war bonds and stamps. A Victory Book Campaign distributed literature to servicemen, and a Victory Task Force V-patch, with the morse V imprint below, identified members of the Army War Show that toured the country to raise war funds. A Civilian Voluntary Services beat the bushes for volunteers to grow victory gardens, and also lined up "victory speakers" to deliver canned talks on government policies.

When the Hollywood radio colony got into the act, publicists had a field day promoting their client lists. Singers, actors, comedians and band leaders needed little coaxing to make public appearances. They turned up at department store "victory windows" and "victory houses" to sell war bonds. Talent was also available for troop broadcasts at military bases, and oddball publicity gimmicks. Shirley Temple was photographed knitting a V sweater for her brother George, a sailor sweating out the war aboard a navy battle station in the Pacific.

In California, the directors of the Hollywood Victory Committee, the coordinating agency that arranged celebrity guest appearances, sent a trainload of talent on a Victory Caravan tour to raise money for Army and Navy relief. Gathering radio talent for these cross-country tours was easy work; the Victory Committee found that waving a microphone before a ham actor had the same effect as waving cheese before a mouse. Civilians who failed to succumb to patriotic fervor, a force infinitely more potent than reason, felt a gnawing at their liver and conscience. It was a time of great patriotism.

The V and Victory extravagance was seemingly endless. To reduce shipping space there was V-mail—microfilms of regular-sized letters that were remagnified at destination. There were hoped for V-days—V E and V J—which anticipated victories in Europe and Japan. And there were the V, or Victory, Girls, patriotic-minded youngsters barely out of their teens, who entertained soldiers and sailors on leave in the name of God, country, and a more aggressive domestic policy. Though the legions of American boys and girls named Victor and Victoria is not recorded, at least one boy, born in Detroit, was dubbed "V-J," and one girl, origin unknown, was given the felonious appellation "V-Etta."

The number of these "victory" stunts was astronomical. One of the cheapest, and most rewarding, was the "musical victory" secured by Ginny Simms on a *Command Performance* program in August 1944. Simms declared the German song, "Lili Marleen" to be too lovely a tune to belong to any one group of barbarians. So saying, she promptly filched it for stateside radio audiences as plunder of war. It was a hit here already. The musical burglary, from the German point of view, added insult to injury, for the Allies were just then kicking the Hun out of Paris. But if the Germans bellyached, no one paid much attention. In lifting "Lili Marleen" from "the Fritzes and Vons for all the Joes and Johns," Simms was only doing what the British had done before her: the Eighth Army in North Africa pinched "Lili Marleen" from the Germans first.

\* \* \*

Next: Victory programs, gas rationing, and BBC tributes.



## BOOK by Hal Stephenson SHELF

*I Didn't Do It Alone* by Art Linkletter  
Art's autobiography as told to George Bishop  
1980; 208 pages, some BW photos, Caroline House



He was born Arthur Gordon Kelly in 1912 in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, of an unwed mother and father. About age 8, he discovered that he had been adopted by the Reverend and Mrs. Reuban John Linkletter. His faith in God began with them.

While Bob Hope was entertaining troops, Art Linkletter entertained their wives and children. It grew from a household cleaner promotion like a House Party show to television specials about the tours. It included the Military Wife of the Year for 9 years. The prize was a stateside family trip and tea with the First Lady in the White House.

Art considers the best stunt on *People Are Funny* to be the five programs involving stealing someone's house. The elaborate scheme started by buying a home that had to be moved anyway, selling it to an unsuspecting couple, sending them on a trip, moving it into a carnival tent next to the studio, and letting the couple search for it. They never found it but were at last shown the house and received lavish prizes.

The autobiography describes the development of Art's skills at extemporaneous announcing, interviewing, and relating to individual people and audiences. His and his team's spirit of adventure kept *People Are Funny* going for 19 years. Art's pioneering business in Australia is described as an example of his adventurous spirit. He stresses the need for *persistence* in developing a talent.

Art speaks of his lifelong participation and support of the YMCA. He suggests for the care of young people "that we look for signs in the very young and do everything to help them along a path that they approach only by instinct through some God-given basic talent."

A chapter is spent on his daughter Diane's death caused by a lingering recurrence from LSD.

Art quotes the diary of his wife Lois written very early in their marriage. "We both want children but ... he is really going ... somewhere... so when the time comes, I will stay with him as much as possible." Later, Lois writes "I love the children and would never leave them with someone I could not trust completely. But I love my husband and might not have kept him had I not been willing to be with him."



# THE SHADOW

## RADIO vs PULP vs MOVIES vs COMICS

by  
**Charles Seeley**



It is possible that The Shadow has four different sets of fans, who may or may not know much about each other. For example, devotees of The Shadow on radio may not be aware of the Shadow comic. Similarly, followers of the Shadow comic may not know the movie Shadow, and so on. This article will attempt to "round up" the four areas of Shadow fandom.

The origins of The Shadow on radio and in the pulp magazines are closely interrelated, and have been extensively explored in various publications such as *Mediascene* and Jim Harmon's *The Great Radio Heroes*. Therefore, the subject will be given only a short recap here. In the late twenties, Street and Smith Publications, Inc. sponsored a radio show which adapted mystery stories from its pulp *Detective Story Weekly*. Predictably, the show was entitled "Street and Smith's *Detective Story Magazine Hour*." At first, the announcer was a mysterious voice known only as The Shadow. Soon, The Shadow was narrating the entire story. In order to keep clear copyright to the name "The Shadow" Street and Smith decided to publish a one-shot magazine with the lead story featuring The Shadow. *The Shadow, A Detective Magazine* hit the newsstands in April, 1931, and the character most responsible for the pop culture revival of the sixties was born. The magazine was an instant success and would run 325 issues until its demise in 1949.

By 1936, The Shadow had become the principle character of the radio show, which was re-titled in his honor. It is interesting that, although interrelated in their beginnings, the radio show and the pulp each had a different version of The Shadow. On radio, Lamont Cranston was real; The Shadow was his alter-ego. Cranston really was a wealthy, young man about town. His ability to cloud men's minds was a result of a trip to the Orient.

Margo Lane is Cranston's "companion" and is the only person privy to his secret identity. (Jim Harmon makes a good point in his book when he suggests that Margo Lane and Lois Lane are sisters who share an extraordinary penchant for getting into tight spots.) Margo was first seen (heard?) on the radio show. She didn't appear in the pulp until June of 1941. There exists a controversy between radio and pulp fans about Margo. Pulp devotees argue that she was only introduced into the magazine because of pressure from the radio audience. The radio fans insist that Margo was always a part of The Shadow's life. When she first appeared in the pulp, she wasn't even one of The Shadow's agents, and usually managed only to make The Shadow work harder. She eventually straightened up when she became an active agent.

Harry E. Charlott was the original scripter of the radio show and, after his death, the scripts were mostly the work of free-lancers, including Alfred Bester, who has



since put in a pretty valid claim as the author of the best science fiction novel ever with *The Stars My Destination*. Oddly, Walter Gibson contributed few, if any, radio scripts. Of course, he was busy churning out ten to fifteen thousand words per day, on three typewriters, for the pulp which, at one point, was issued bi-weekly.

Both radio and pulp Shadows were designed to make the listener/reader believe that the character was real. The radio version succeeded the best. During World War Two, listeners wrote to the networks demanding to know why The Shadow wasn't out fighting the Nazis and Japanese.

The early radio Shadow exhibited some powers the later Shadow didn't use. At times, the former would use ventriloquism or telepathy or even "will" people to do his bidding. These qualities disappear by the forties, and The Shadow becomes just another detective with a gimmick. Even so, the audience was still there, and the show lasted longer than the pulp, ending its original run in 1954. However, the show was revived in the sixties, achieving some success on radio stations across the country. Probably, more than anything else, the re-emergence of The Shadow on radio sparked the nostalgia interest still raging in America.

The Shadow character of the pulps is completely different from the radio incarnation. The pulp Shadow is the real person, while Lamont Cranston is another person, the identity of whom The Shadow sometimes assumes. The Shadow is, at first, a complete man of mystery, of whom we know little except for his hatred of evil. He is a master of disguise, he melts unseen through the shadows of night, appearing and disappearing unexplainedly. His weapons against evil are twin .45 automatics, with which he never misses, and a network of fiercely loyal agents. Seen infrequently, he is tall, lean, dressed in black with jet slouch hat and cape, a scarlet muffler masking his face, save for prominent nose and glaring eyes. He wears a glowing Girasol ring as an aid in hypnotizing people. He appears from nowhere, just when the situation is most hopeless. Criminals cringe at the sound of his name or his chilling laugh. Obviously, this is not the radio Shadow.

Besides Margo Lane, both radio and pulp versions share supporting characters. There is Moe Shrevnitz (Shrevvy) who, in the pulp, is a tough and cool agent of the The Shadow, using his cab to further his master's plans. Shrevvy on radio is merely comic relief, a dummy. Police Commissioner Ralph Weston is the most faithfully transcribed from one medium to the other. In both, he is hard-headed and demanding, the archetypal thirties cop. He wants to catch The Shadow, but grudgingly accepts his aid.

In the sixties, Belmont Books issued a series of new Shadow novels in paperback, supposedly written by Walter Gibson. In 1975, Pyramid Books began re-issuing the original Shadow pulps. So far, The Shadow in recent printed form has not taken off, as did "Doc Savage" and "The Avenger" re-issues, but it still might. The reader is urged to pick up one or two Shadow paperbacks, if you've never read one, just to see what it's like.



The Shadow was also the subject of one movie serial and five feature films. Rod LaRocque was The Shadow in "The Shadow Strikes" released in 1937. Kane Richmond starred in three Shadow pictures for Monogram entitled "Behind the Mask," "The Shadow Returns," and "The Missing Lady." The serial was simply called "The Shadow" and was released by Columbia in 1940. In it, Victor Jory is Lamont Cranston/The Shadow. He looks and fits the part well, but in action, well, there is room for improvement. First of all, this Shadow seems to be a cross between the radio and pulp versions. Somehow, he is patterned after both. In the film, Cranston is real and The Shadow is a mask, as in the radio show. However, he cannot "cloud men's minds." Jory's Shadow is an attempt at a pulp Shadow, at least, he dresses like the pulp Shadow. He uses .38 revolvers instead of .45 automatics and misses everytime he uses them. His Shadow is a washout at fisticuffs. If you remember, serials are long on action, and there is a fair amount in "The Shadow" but Cranston seems to fight better as Cranston than as the Shadow! As the Shadow, Jory is always being knocked out by the bad guys and left to have buildings explode around him. This inept Shadow doesn't even fairly defeat his adversary, the Black Tiger. In the final chapter, the Black Tiger proves himself as inagile as our hero when he stumbles into an electronic device and electrocutes himself. The only memorable scene in the serial is in one of the early chapters, when we see The Shadow peering through a skylight, laughing eerily. A few characters also appear in the serial that are present in the radio and pulp versions, but not as we know them. Harry Vincent is The Shadow's most trusted agent in the pulp, but in the film he is little more than a chauffeur. At one point, he impersonates The Shadow, an action



impossible on radio or in the pulp. Margo is present in the film merely to be put into danger. Of course, many of you have seen the more recent 1994 film, "The Shadow," with Alec Baldwin.

Everyone, at one time or another, has read a comic book, of one type or another. It was inevitable that The Shadow would appear in panelogical form. Street and Smith put out the first Shadow comic book in March, 1940. It ran 122 issues reprinting, at first, the newspaper strip by Vern Greene, then going to original stories by Bob Powell. It ended with the November, 1950, issue and in 1964, Archie/Radio Comics brought The Shadow back, hoping to ride on the wave of nostalgia then gathering force. It was a pitiful attempt. The Shadow was portrayed as another "super Hero," an unintelligent move since The Shadow already possessed a firmly established character. The book folded a year later after only eight issues. The latest attempt to



# THE SHADOW



present a comic book Shadow began in 1973, produced by National Periodicals Publications, better known as DC, publishers of "Superman." The comic was cancelled after twelve issues, about two years. DC has done the best with the character by choosing to adapt the pulp stories. After all, an invisible hero may be easy to draw but it won't hold a reader's interest. Comics are an essentially visual medium and the pulp stories lend themselves excellently to it. DC's Shadow is the pulp Shadow, complete with slouch hat, cape, and girasol ring. The stories are set in the thirties, and well capture the mood of the character.

Most interesting was an issue of "Batman," himself an avenger of the night, wherein The Shadow appeared and was revealed to have been Batman's inspiration to become a crime-fighter. In fact, recent issues of "Batman" have shown a trend back to the original mysterious Batman, replacing the "Holy ski shoes" variety of a few years ago. DC also published "The Avenger" comic, derived from the pulp of the same name. In one issue, The Shadow and his band

mistakenly battle the Avenger and his band, and the point is made that the Avenger cooperates with and observes the law while The Shadow, a vigilante, operates outside of it.

The Shadow is an important figure in popular culture, equally as important as Tarzan or Superman. Perhaps he is as popular as he is because he is the archetypal vigilante, and the vigilante has been a popular character through the ages (witness Robin Hood and Zorro). Why? Maybe everyone, somewhere inside, has a secret desire to cut through red tape and get things done now, or mete out justice instead of law. The vigilante is just as popular now as ever in films and literature. Paperback series dealing with vigilante characters such as the Executioner and the Destroyer are similar in spirit to The Shadow, if nothing else.

And finally, there is The Shadow's deathless contribution to American humor. You've all heard it. Frank Sinatra was fond of quoting it.

"Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?"

"The Shadow do!"

---

NARA member Barney Beck handled the sound effects for the Superman radio series featuring Bud Collyer in the title role. Barney tells us that after one show where he crumpled a wad of cellophane in his hand to give the sound of fire, Collyer came over and inquired what he used to make the sound of cellophane being crumpled.

# DAYTIME DIARY



## Battle Lines in the Daytime, Part II

Having examined more than a dozen soap operas whose very existences relied upon World War II, our attention now turns to the serials that had been airing for some years prior to the war's inception and their treatment of the subject. They are categorized into three sub-groupings: (1) those dramas in which one or more characters were sent to the battle lines, with some subsequent reflections on the ravages of the hostilities; (2) those wherein a character volunteered for a homefront assignment; and (3) the patriotic appeals that were often effectively employed throughout the genre.

The soap operas' preoccupation with the war can be witnessed by the fact that, in the autumn of 1943, for instance, 15 of NBC's 20 daytime serials maintaining contemporary settings made frequent reference to the war. Many of those adopted story lines that were actively intertwined with the conflict. We will explore those in which at least one character participated in combat.

Early in the conflict several programs dwelled upon homefront complexities by having younger males enroll or be drafted into the armed services. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, characters on *David Harum* and *Amanda of Honeymoon Hill* were rejected for service due to health-related deficiencies.

The bane of many a soap opera plot, that of turning a leading character into a victim of amnesia, received a tremendous boost on *Rosemary* when shell-shocked lieutenant Bill Roberts -- Rosemary's cross to bear for essentially the 11-year run of that series -- returned from battle as an amnesiac. His protracted dysfunction allowed him to forget about his devoted second wife, Rosemary, a nurse who waited on him hand-and-foot during his four years of memory lapse. Bill, on the other hand, couldn't remember beyond his first wife Audrey and their little daughter Jessica, both of whom had disappeared. At one point, he even dispatched Rosemary to find them, and dutifully she went a-fetching. It was a miserable lot for Rosemary and should have been a harbinger of a lifetime of trouble with this man, but alas, she was blinded by love. Until the series departed the airwaves in 1955, Bill continued to display some type of mental imbalance that may have been directly attributed to his war experiences, or maybe was only the result of his own selfish personality. Either way, it was a story of a woman supremely loyal to a man who never deserved it.

The same thing happened on *Big Sister* as Ruth Evans Wayne devoted her life to Dr. John Wayne, a selfish physician with more than one loose screw, who -- as Bill Roberts often did to Rosemary -- abandoned his wife, preferring to live alone in a distant city for lengthy periods. Was it a result of the horrors of war? Wayne suffered a prolonged separation from

his young bride not long after their marriage in October 1939, being held captive in a Japanese prison camp after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. It was, incidentally, one of the few references in soap opera, comparatively speaking, to Japan's involvement as America's enemy -- most of the enemies named in soap opera were Germans. And the Italians were almost never cited. Wayne's long absences from home in the years that followed were sometimes linked to his earlier disappearance at the hands of the Japanese in an effort to explain his preference as a loner.

At least a third husband in soap opera displayed traits of similar imbalance, and he, too, roamed frequently far from home and a devoted wife. He was Walter Manning, husband of Portia, heroine of *Portia Faces Life*. Walter experienced many tough months in Germany before returning to the embrace of his fiancée. Working for U. S. Army Intelligence, he was falsely accused of spying for the Germans. Resigning his commission and becoming a foreign correspondent, he was captured and tortured by the Nazis, who sought to obtain his military secrets. Eventually, he was rescued and flown home. But his troubles weren't over. At home he faced accusations of being a Nazi sympathizer and of having shared proprietary data with the German high command. When he landed in court, it took Portia, a brilliant attorney, to successfully defend him against the charges. His future remained uncertain, however, for he required intense psychiatric rehabilitation provided by one of Portia's many admirers. There was always the threat in this serial -- when Walter was out of his right mind, which occurred frequently -- that a suitor would advance on his turf and win Portia's heart. She never let it go that far, but neither did she rush to put out the amorous fires that seemed to rage within her for other companionship.

Meanwhile, in addition to her interest in other men, Portia also became involved in more espionage cases, seemingly becoming a magnet for them during the war period. When her drama shifted from NBC to CBS in 1944 she continued to pursue enemy agents with a vengeance, despite an ultimatum from CBS that banned network broadcast of spy stories. This violation may have contributed to the serial's brief tenure at CBS. Within six months it returned to NBC where it stayed for the remainder of its 11-year run.

Jerry Malone may have been the antithesis of the selfish husbands in some soap operas. The namesake of *Young Doctor Malone* showed strength of character in dealing with his wife Ann Richards Malone, even though he, too, enjoyed at least one period of living away from home. Early in the war the physician was shot down over Germany and presumed dead, allowing his young wife license to pursue a fling with another man. Eventually, Jerry returned home and found himself involved in a murder trial. Thus, the ravages of war didn't seem to have a lasting effect -- and even a crippling affliction he suffered sometime after the trial couldn't be tied directly to his battle scars.

Young David Farrell, meanwhile, a journalist commonly known as *Front Page Farrell* -- perhaps to prove something to himself, or to prove his masculinity to his young wife -- decided to enlist in the Army. His contributions to the service turned out to be less than startling and he was fortunate not to encounter serious combat.

Nicky and Claudia Lacey never intended to volunteer for military maneuvers, however; they simply were detained by being in the wrong place



at the wrong time. Claudia, the somewhat belligerent twin of the Barbour's of the San Francisco, the focal group of *One Man's Family*, had met and married British Army Captain Nicholas Lacey while living in England in 1935. Three years later they had a daughter, Penny. During World War II Nicky and Claudia were rescued from a ship that was torpedoed. For a couple of years, until the war ended, they were sequestered in a German concentration camp. Such influences, incidentally, as well as Nicky's persistence, helped tame the rebel-rousing Claudia to the extent that her frequent and sudden outbursts were reduced to mere occasional storms.

During the war professional thespian Larry Noble, husband of Mary, more familiarly known as *Backstage Wife*, honored the nation by serving as a lieutenant in the Coast Guard. For awhile during the time he was away announcer Ford Bond introduced the series as *Mary Noble, War Wife* each day. This highlighted the masculine lead's extended absence while giving the show a temporarily altered focus.

While nearly 300,000 Americans died from the brutalities suffered in the war, there was but one major soap opera personality who suffered fatal consequences. He was the only son of *Ma Perkins*, John, who was killed in Europe, buried "somewhere in Germany in an unmarked grave." It was a very dark moment in the drama and the audience reacted in shock, disbelief and outrage. While the network was deluged with sympathy notes addressed simply to "Ma," an avalanche of complaints could hardly have been predicted. Callers and letter writers were rabid in their consternation. Many protested that mothers and wives of service personnel did not need such a vivid reminder of the dangers of battle.

It became Dancer-Fitzgerald-Sample advertising executive Roy Winsor's lot to respond to the detractors. He supervised *Ma Perkins* for the agency. If radio was to be realistic, he answered, it could not ignore such a possibility. *Ma Perkins*, he said, confronted the same difficulty that thousands of American mothers, wives and girlfriends had to come to terms with. Winsor cited Ma's inner strength and suggested that she could be a comfort and encouragement to listeners facing this experience in real life. (Winsor, incidentally, was to go on to blaze trails in televised serials following radio. He either singly created or collaborated in developing *Search for Tomorrow*, *Love of Life*, *The Secret Storm*, *Another Life*, *Ben Jerrod* and *Hawkins Falls*. He also was head writer on *Somerset*.)

One of the things Winsor stated unequivocally was that "we do not intend to bring him (John) back" in subsequent episodes. And while John never reappeared, he was not soon forgotten. Perhaps to nullify the critics, although it was never admitted, a young man named Joseph was introduced into the plot to fill the void. The similarities between John and Joseph seemed too many to be coincidental. In the first place, they could have been identical twins. Ma's family was so smitten with the young Joseph, in fact, that she invited him to move into the Perkins home, taking John's old room, and assume his old duty as a milk truck driver. Maybe Roy Winsor's assertion that John would never return was upheld, but a lot of listeners seemed pacified by this turn of events, too.

While John Perkins was soap opera's only major figure to suffer as a fatality in the war, in autumn 1942 CBS investigated its serials for incidents concerning death in military action. The web found that, in a



two-month period that year, such incidents were recorded in *Pepper Young's Family*, *Big Sister*, *Young Doctor Malone*, *David Harum* and *Aunt Jenny's True Life Stories*. Only in *We Love and Learn* was a nonservice death included during the period studied.

There were other daytime dramas, of course, in which characters went off to the war. Sammy Goldberg, one of *The Goldbergs*, was sent away in uniform not coincidentally when the actor playing him, Alfred Ryder, received his own summons from Uncle Sam. The same thing happened to actor Billy Idelson, who played Rush Gook, son of *Vic and Sade*.

The heroines of NBC's *The Guiding Light* and *Young Widder Brown* were proud wives or sweethearts of servicemen. Prouder still were the leading ladies of *The Right to Happiness* and *Helpmate*, for their husbands were wounded.

Shifting gears, let us consider more directly a fact we have hinted at already: that where it was impractical for a soap opera character to get into uniform and be shipped overseas to the battlefield, he (and yes, she) might perform paid or voluntary duty at home, greatly aiding the nation and its allies.

At one point, the hero and banker of Homeville, *David Harum*, who was also into horse trading as a sideline, left his ledger sheets to serve his country as the manager of a plant manufacturing secret government weapons. Never mind that he had no prior experience for his exalted position as taskmaster; his fans could overlook that, seeing that he was doing his part for the nation.

The genteel financier wasn't alone among soap opera figures in his quest. The patriarch of *Pepper Young's Family*, Sam, acquired a similar occupation at about the same time. And the mama of Lolly-Baby, *Stella Dallas*, always of modest means, merely took a job working in a war plant to perform her part. Wartime jobs were held by characters in *Kitty Foyle* and *The O'Neills*, too.

In autumn 1943 *Front Page Farrell* did his bit by covering wartime problems for his newspaper -- dilemmas selected by the show's writers upon consultation with the U. S. Office of War Information.

The breadwinner of *When a Girl Marries* was caught in the general rush toward industrial mobilization, becoming legal counsel for still another fictional wartime factory. In that line, every time he found a suspect band of slackers he delivered a patriotic speech calling for sticking to the job.

Easing into the third sub-grouping of the ongoing daytime dramas, let's examine how patriotic appeals wantonly turned the serials into vehicles for worthy causes.

Irna Phillips, soap opera scriptwriter extraordinaire, reaped adulation from the U. S. surgeon general for information on emergency medical treatment that she worked into episodes of *Pepper Young's Family*. The indomitable Ms. Phillips, in fact, told a college crowd in 1944 that her dramas were penned after consulting with the American Legion, American Medical Association, Association for Family Living, Federal Council of

Churches of Christ in America, National Education Association, Navy Department, Office of War Information, Red Cross, Veterans Administration and the War Department.

Yet another measure of the popularity of these dramas could be illustrated by the motivational messages that became part of a program. When *Ma Perkins* -- whose son John died in battle during the war -- asked American housewives to save used tinfoil or fat, millions could be expected to cooperate. To do less would seem like being a traitor to the nation. And although that didn't tell Procter & Gamble how many were tuning in, such noble gestures helped America while very likely raising the perception of Oxydol and P&G's other goods at the same time.

To add impact, the soaps brought many wartime personalities to their fictional communities. For instance, Lieutenant Thomas M. Reardon, the first marine to land on Guadalcanal, visited *Bright Horizon's* Riverfield on a war-bond tour. Waves commander Mildred H. McAyer was heard one day on *Aunt Jenny's True Life Stories*, as was Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. And Eleanor Roosevelt, the president's wife, chatted with the heroine on *The Story of Bess Johnson*.

Public service announcements were mainstays tacked on to the closing billboards on some serials during the war years. "Don't relax on saving used fat," *Rosemary* announcer Harry Clark often admonished listeners. "It's urgently needed to prevent soap shortages. You help yourself when you save used fats." It may have seemed a contradiction to the commercials for sponsoring Procter & Gamble's dishwashing product Ivory Snow. But industry sentiment was that there were some larger concepts the country must collectively support, even beyond the call to economic duty. Such messages, in existence following the outbreak of World War II, continued even after the war ended.

A more direct appeal, at the start of one *Rosemary* episode during the war, came from actress Betty Winkler herself, who played the heroine for most of the run:

*I am speaking to you ... all of you ... my friends out there, listening to Rosemary. I am speaking to the mothers and wives and sweethearts of our men who are fighting to bring this war to a close -- to make this a free world, the kind of world you want to live in, the kind of world we Dawsons want to live in.... If you will do something for me, I'll do something for you. If you'll buy a war bond -- because I, Rosemary Dawson, ask you to -- and send me the receipt showing me you have purchased it, I shall return that receipt with a personal letter from me. I am doing this because I want so much to make the Seventh War Loan Drive the biggest drive we have ever had. And so will you, my dear friends, who have listened to and enjoyed this program -- who have laughed with us and cried with us -- buy a war bond? Or as many bonds as you can. And send your receipt to Rosemary Dawson, care of Rosemary, to this station. And you will receive a letter from me and my thanks.*

During a week in October 1942, in conjunction with the Office of War Information, the cast of *Our Gal Sunday* highlighted the distress experienced by America's allies in their pursuit of the war.

Other soap operas devoting a week to similar emphases that fall included *Aunt Jenny's True Life Stories*, *Big Sister*, *Life Can Be Beautiful*,

*Ma Perkins, Portia Faces Life, Stella Dallas, We Love and Learn and Young Widder Brown.* Their combined effort was more than communicative and cooperative in nature. It had the added impetus of identifying the serials with reality, keeping them in touch with some larger issues going on in the world at that time. As a result, it made the characters and the stories themselves seem more believable to audiences.

Finally, no matter how dismal things might seem during this period, or any other, on *Life Can Be Beautiful* Papa David Solomon reminded the disconsolate ad nauseum that life could be beautiful again, and he employed the phrase thousands of times. It was an upper that millions of Americans facing the ravages of world war reflected upon again and again.

At the top of one show, broadcast the day after D-Day in August 1945, the narrator allowed nothing more than this brief appellation: "Here is Papa David." The old man invoked these thoughts:

*Yesterday we heard the news for which the entire world has been waiting.... The day has come ... D-Day ... We are invading Europe. In your hearts and in mine, there ain't any doubt but what it's going to be successful. But in your heart I know like in mine is one big prayer that the invasion will be successful quickly and our losses won't be too great. Would ... would I be out of order at a time like this to suggest that ... right now ... we have a few seconds of silence ... so that we can all offer up such a prayer? [A 13-second lapse of silence followed.] Amen. And may it come soon, when life is beautiful again!*

It was a natural expression for this series to directly confront a situation of crisis proportions that was then riveting the world's attention. And Papa David could hardly allow it to pass without his trademark phrase becoming a moving part of it.

The soap operas were, for the most part, seldom part of time as we know it. But when events with major consequences to the world's population developed, and large objectives that could benefit humanity were put before them, the serials rose to the occasion in sterling proportions. Some might even say it was their finest hour.

### **CASSETTE LIBRARIAN NEEDED**

NARA is still looking for a volunteer to take over as the librarian of the cassette library. If you would be willing to consider this very important position in our club please contact Don Aston, P.O. Box 1392, Lake Elsinore, CA 92531, or by phone at (909) 244-5242, or at his e-mail address: [aston@cosmoaccess.net](mailto:aston@cosmoaccess.net)

Please give this some consideration!



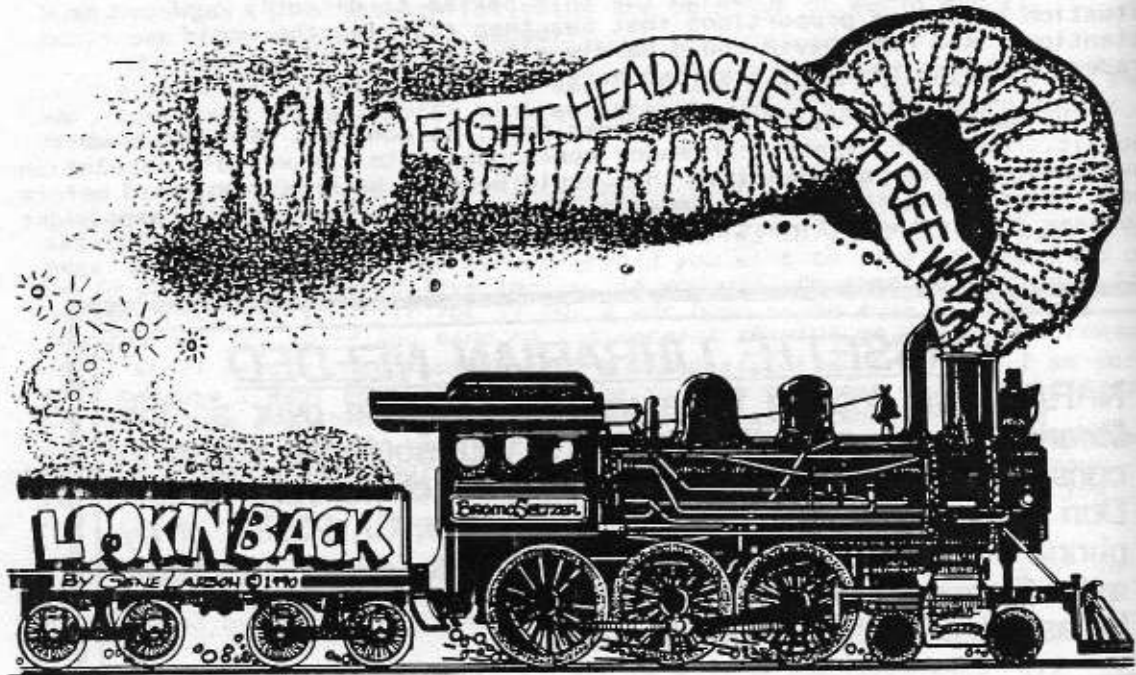


## VINTAGE RADIO TRAINS

by  
Gene Larson

The Bromo-Seltzer train cartoon that you see at the bottom of this page was pulled out of my mind when the "actual" sounds were awakened in the memory playback system of my brain. The familiar sounds of those commercials are just as clear today as they were back then. If you're familiar with the sounds, you might just trigger your own replay at this very moment. Just stop, close your eyes, and concentrate. Did you hear them? Great, huh?

Ironically, the very speaker from which you originally heard the sounds of that famous train could have, in turn, created them inversely. In other words—as I've been told—a speaker coil was used to make the train "talk" by placing it to someone's throat and having them say something like: "Fight headaches, thhhhaaaaarrrrrreeeeeeeee waaaaayeeees... BromoSeltzer BromoSeltzer BromoSeltzer..." as the "train" gained speed. The speaker coil acted as a microphone, picking up the vibrations of the vocal cords as the person "shaped" the words by "mouthing" them...creating that wonderfully-weird effect. The output of the coil was then fed through an amplifier and on to a speaker or control board input. Maybe someone can experiment with this method and let us know how it turns out.



I remember that when I lived in Seattle, KJR radio had a station identification produced by the same method and when I inquired about it I was told about the process. If I didn't have all my stuff packed away, I'd try it myself.

For the life of me, I can't remember the "three ways" that Bromo-Seltzer fought headaches, but then maybe I never did really know. Kids usually don't care about such things, anyhow.

Trains were a big part of vintage radio and figured into many of the programs, either as a main theme or as a part of a story line. The *Mysterious Traveler* immediately comes to mind, since I spent many a night in a darkened room, shivering through each episode. *Grand Central Station* brought up images of trains arriving and departing at a maddening pace. *I Love a Mystery* successfully used the wail of a train to set us up for another mysterious adventure episode with Jack, Doc, and Reggie. And I still remember a story about a "ghost train" mystery that Roger Elliott solved on the *House of Mystery*. In the stories, Elliott was a scientist of the supernatural who set out to disprove ghostly happenings. And he always found that real live human beings were behind some plan or another to scare off somebody. He sure had me worried a whole lot of times!

I'm certain there are many more train related programs that clacked through our ears back then. But that Bromo-Seltzer train is recorded foremost in my memory file. If this column has in any way given you a headache, just reach for a Bromo-Seltzer...even if it IS all in your mind.

Well...back to the drawing board...

## 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.*

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### **CASSETTE LIBRARY CATALOG:**

The cassette library is now fully open for business once again. For a complete catalog of the available shows, please send \$2.00 to Don Aston, P.O. Box 1392, Lake Elsinore, CA 92531.

### **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 of 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 CATALOGS:**

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 33¢ stamps. Send requests to Bob Sabon, 308 West Oraibi Drive, Phoenix, AZ 85027.  
E-MAIL: hornet29@juno.com

# This Tom Mix offer comic pages on

EVERY BOY AND GIRL CAN JOIN MY **STRAIGHT SHOOTERS** AND GET THE WONDERFUL THINGS SHOWN HERE. JUST CHECK THE PRESENTS YOU WANT ON THE **BIG COUPON** AND MAIL IT TO ME TOGETHER WITH ONE (OR TWO) **RALSTON BOX TOPS** JOIN TODAY! **HURRY!**

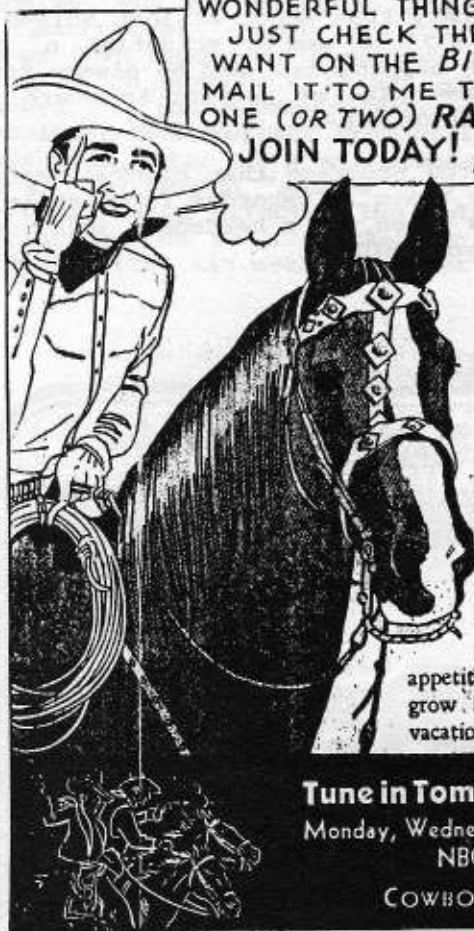
**TOM**  
says,  
"Read every word of this big free offer carefully. Then ask

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Tom calls Ralston the Straight Shooter Cereal, because it keeps you healthy, peppy and full of energy like a Straight Shooter must always be. You see, Ralston is made of whole wheat. That's why it's so good for you and tastes great. And be sure to tell Mother that Ralston is "double-rich" in Vitamin B — then she'll buy Ralston for you in a jiffy. She knows that vitamin B is just like western air for boys and girls. It gives you a real appetite and helps you keep well and grow strong—just like a western vacation.

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A Dandy Picture of Tom Mix and Tony (the wonder horse)—ready for framing.

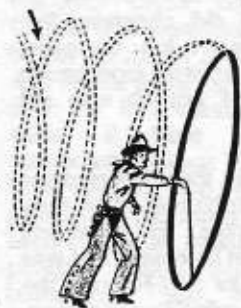
**Straight Shooter Sweater Brand.** Every Straight Shooter can wear this cloth TM Bar brand on his sleeve or sweater like Tom does.

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Good only in U. S. A. Offer expires September 30, 1934.

# CARLTON E. MORSE: THE MAN OF "ONE MAN'S FAMILY"

AN INTERVIEW BY  
Hal Skinner

To millions of Americans for twenty-seven years, Father Barbour (J. Anthony Smythe) was the head of "One Man's Family." But for my money, as Dave McElhatton states in "The One Man's Family Album," the man of "The Family" was Carlton E. Morse.

This view was reinforced, several years ago, when I had the good fortune to spend an afternoon with Morse just before his 90th birthday. He obviously enjoyed the time reminiscing as much as I did, observing that visitors weren't too numerous those days because most people didn't realize that he was still around.

Appropriately, the visit took place in the house he built in the early nineteen-thirties on property south of San Francisco that was the setting for Sky Ranch. The ranch, now called Seven Stones, was broken up into estates, but originally consisted of several hundred acres. The rather modest home by today's standards, built of hewn logs with an immense fireplace in the family room, felt and looked like the right place for the Barbour clan to congregate when they wanted to retreat from foggy Sea Cliff. Pictures support the lore that "The Family" met here many times with the man, especially before the show moved to Hollywood. Morse spoke of members of the cast as if they were his real family. No wonder, since several actors were

together so long and reflected the values of Morse and most American families of the time.

Seated in his favorite easy chair with a manual typewriter an arm's length away, a dog in his lap, and a magnificent view of the redwoods through the wall-size picture window, Morse vividly recalled episodes, people, and experiences from radio's longest running serial-drama, and other shows. A pioneer not only in radio, Morse also recalled being the first person to make a commercial round trip trans-Pacific flight on the China Clipper.

It was utterly fascinating to listen to this early innovator of radio drama who, with his cast, pretty much invented radio acting, set the standards, and contributed so significantly to radio broadcasting. Here was the man who not only created "One Man's Family," "I Love a Mystery," and "Adventures by Morse," plus others, but also produced the shows, wrote the scripts, selected the casts and directed most of the broadcasts.

It is estimated that Morse wrote the equivalent of fifty, one hundred thousand word novels. "The Family" alone filled thirteen "books" of 3,256 chapters. His was a giant talent. I had to ask him how he did so much writing for so many years. This was his reply: "You know, this all started because I milked cows on a ranch up in Oregon." (Morse

was born in Louisiana, moved to the ranch when he was five and lived there until he was seventeen.) "We used to get up at four o'clock in the morning and milk cows, then had to take the milk to the station about a mile away to meet the milk train, come back, and have breakfast at home. We did this so much that it [became a habit] to get up at four o'clock in the morning, have a little breakfast, and have two or three hours with no telephone calls while everybody else was still asleep. In two hours I would turn out a fifteen page script. How could I do it? I would sit down at the typewriter, and suddenly, the typewriter wasn't there any more. I would 'wake up' an hour and a half or two hours later and the script would be out. I would then take the script down to NBC. I wouldn't even edit it. They would write it up, making corrections and copies. Then I would take it down to direct it and there would be times when I could swear I had never written it or seen it before."

As for the source of his ideas, he said a friend of his who is a writer down in Hollywood told him, "Don't you know that all knowledge is floating around like a great river? All you have to do is sit down and listen and what you need will come to you." When Morse asked his friend why in the hell didn't they give him Shakespeare, the answer was that it would have been a complete flop on radio because

nobody wanted to listen to Shakespeare. But you did need to know how to interest millions of people and you had to be on a level that everybody would understand.

Morse said, "However, to this day, I can't imagine writing fifteen pages, seven days a week. You see, during its fifteen minute days, I turned out one 'I Love A Mystery' script a day and wrote 'One Man's Family' on the weekends. This was in addition to producing, casting and directing. I only take credit for the eighteen years of half-hour 'Family' shows, though. When I went to New York to put it on television as well as radio, I had to get somebody else to do some of the writing. But for those eighteen years I wrote every single word.

One might wonder what he did with the rest of his time if the scripts were finished so early in the morning. He explained that he would go down to the office about eight o'clock when his secretary would be there, dictate a few letters, cast shows ahead, etc. There would be about two or three hours during the day when Mike (Michael Raffeto), Barton Yarborough and some of the others would go out and play golf. "I also had a swimming pool for recreation out at the club," he added. "Then we would come back in the afternoon in time to rehearse the show. Remember, 'I Love A Mystery' was every night. After the show, I would come back home around 9:30. They would give me a bowl of soup and roll me into bed."

Various stories have circulated about how the actors for the original cast of "The Family"

were found and selected. One version is that the magic mix was the result of Morse's involvement with a drama group while he was attending the University of California at Berkeley. Thus, the story goes, when the show was being cast, Morse merely turned to his list of actors he knew in the group and assigned them their roles. Morse got a big laugh when this was mentioned. "No, no," he said. "Michael Raffeto, Barton Yarborough, Kathleen Wilson, and Bernice Berwin went to Berkeley about the same time I did. But I was just a seventeen year old ranch kid and I didn't know anybody. I was only there two years. I flunked military. The only 'A' I ever got was in a writing class and I had no idea I would ever do any writing. When I started to work for NBC these young people came in from the university looking for jobs. It was right in the middle of the Depression. Otherwise, they would have been going to the theaters. So when they turned to radio, I got that whole collection of people." It was a fortuitous combination of circumstances for both the creator and the cast that allowed Morse to "devise and maintain a complete family universe satisfactory in every way to his pleasures and needs."

J. Anthony Smythe was Father Barbour from the beginning to the end of the show, twenty-seven years later. Except for missing three shows due to pneumonia, Minetta Elen, the mother in the minds of others besides the Barbours, stayed with the show for twenty-two years, retiring in 1955 at the age of eighty. Michael Raffeto, the inimitable Paul until his voice let him down in 1955, also wrote and directed, and of course was Jack on "I

Love a Mystery." His "Mystery" pal, Doc (Barton Yarborough), played Clifford from the beginning until he died of a heart attack in 1951. Bernice Berwin was the one and only Hazel through all the years the family "lived" at Sea Cliff near the present day Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Kathleen Wilson brought to life the role of Claudia until about half way through the run when she left to become Lady Kathleen Pilkington, wife of Lord Alastair Pilkington of London, England. Over ninety others played various offspring and supporting characters through the years as the family grew.

One of Morse's most interesting reactions came when Page Gillman was mentioned. Gillman began the role of Jack when he was twelve years old and stayed until the last episode. When asked if there was any connection between Page and a Don Gillman who was vice-president of NBC when the show began, Morse replied with a perfectly straight face and no hesitation, "Page was Don Gillman's son. That's why the show got on the air." Page retired as a rancher in Oregon.

In a quietly moving way, Morse shared a bit of his collected wisdom from nearly a century of productive living. His library contained more of his thoughts which he felt were too personal to publish. Here is a sample of the "ideas about things" he hadn't put into his unpublished book, but had been thinking about recently. "Everybody wants to know why we are here. What's in everybody's heart? They would like to be better than they are. So, this is a place for learning. This is a place for being a little bit



better than you were last time. Take an acorn. Out of that grows a hundred foot tree. In us we have a spiritual corn, a little thing. Depending on what we put into it now, sometime, in some way, it will be represented in the future. I think we are just part of forever. This is forever right now. And we are going to be here forever in one form or another. We have a spiritual seed that is going to accept everything we put into this life. We are always learning. But we can't have perfection. We couldn't stand it if it were here. But we're all pointing in that direction and that is what forever is. As far as we are concerned, whatever form or shape we take, that little seed we have in us now is going to be here with the world forever." He ended his statement by saying, "Something I got from nowhere belongs only to me. I don't try to sell it to anyone else."

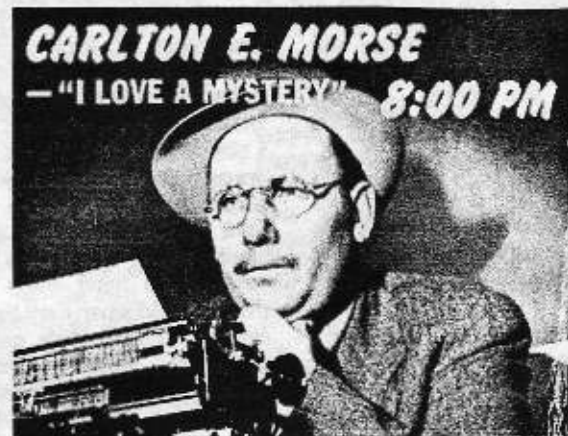
In addition to the above, it was apparent that Morse's creative mind was still quite active and still in the process of learning. He said he had been rereading and "enjoying the hell out of Dickens, even though he overwrites. I could say in one page what he says in three."

After touring the family room where Morse heaved a five-foot log into the fireplace, the patio where the Barbour "family" parties had been held many times, the library full of books and manuscripts, a showcase full of awards, and a doorway where a sign proclaimed, "A-1 Detective Agency, Jack Packard-Doc Long-ReggieYork," it was hard to leave.

This man of "The Family" who, unlike many radio and film writers, was recognized for his talent and contributions to American culture and pleasure,

was a warm and inspiring person. It was a rare privilege to share a few hours with Carlton E. Morse, even though I didn't really listen often to "The Family" during those twenty-seven years. I preferred instead to cower in bed, next to my five tube table model "Arvin" and let that eerie train whistle and the voices of Jack, Doc and Gerry Booker scare the daylight out of me as they bounced around "The Temple of the Jaguar" on "The Island of Skulls."

Indeed, the *MAN* of "One Man's Family" was one of radio's greatest writers.



## 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.



## TRANSCRIBED FROM TORONTO

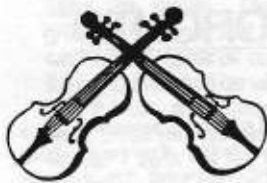
by John Pellatt

Good news regarding that tape levy I mentioned in the winter issue! The outpouring of opposition to such draconian legislation has forced the Government in Canada to rethink the whole thing. They have agreed to table it until the year 2000. Partial victory for now! Gerald Covey from Washington state writes and makes the intriguing assertion that taxing blank tapes for the possible use you might make of it to record copyrighted material is as insane as taxing photographic film (because you might photograph a copyrighted picture); blank sheets of paper (because you might use them to photocopy a copyrighted book or magazine) or pens and pencils (because you might copy by hand some copyrighted material). The last idea sounds like a brilliant idea for a satirical sketch Gerald! Too bad Max Ferguson retired, that would be exactly his cup of tea! Well, taxing tape is a dangerous precedent, I think we can all agree, if it is to punish us for an alleged copyright violation we might make. Gerald has made tongue in cheek parallels that are frighteningly plausible once that first step has been taken. I'll keep you updated on how it goes up here. And thanks to Gerald for the interesting letter. (Welcome to NARA, Gerald! Gerald and his wife Doris are new to NARA and are long time supporters of Bill Bragg's OTR satellite station, as well as REPS in Seattle). I hope membership will increase your enjoyment and appreciation of vintage radio as it has done for me over the last 26 years.

Just got the latest "Hello Again" from Jay Hickerson. Vol 30 Number 1 contains updates on the fall 1999 FOTR Convention, reviews of publications received, lists of books published, conventions to be attended and two further pages of names and addresses of collectors old and new. HA remains the source of up to date information in hard print for the hobby. It's \$15 a year for six issues. Jay Hickerson's address is Box 4321, Hamden, CT 06514.

Scanning through the "pop culture" section of my local used bookstore the other day I came across "The Saint" by Tony Mechele and Dick Fiddy, published in large size paperback in 1989 by Bostree Limited in London, England. This is a book detailing the background and every episode of that action packed dashing hero, Simon Templar, who was portrayed in the 1960's b&w TV series by the man who came to define ST for a generation, Roger Moore. Great fun! Of interest to NARA readers, however, is the four pages (admittedly slim-pickings but still and unexpected find!) detailing "The Saint on Radio". The earliest incarnation was on the Irish (? British?) commercial radio station Radio Eireann in 1939. A year later saw the first BHC Radio version broadcast. In the US, The Saint was first heard in 1945 on NBC (sponsored by Bromo Seltzer) starring film and stage actor Edgar Barrier. Brian Aherne starred in a series on CBS later that same year. But the man most of us recognize as radio's Saint, Vincent Price, didn't begin on CBS until the summer of 1947. He jumped to Mutual in 1949 and to NBC in 1950. The Saint surely had the luck and charm of a cunning rogue to have survived so many incarnations!

Finally, my thanks to fellow vintage radio enthusiast and Toronto resident Sam Levene for providing the review found elsewhere in this issue of the play "It's All True". Some of you may know Sam from his postings to the OTR Digest on the internet. His intelligent and thought provoking review is the first of many appearances I hope this good friend to NARA and the hobby will be making in these pages in the days and years to come.



## From JACK PALMER



### ROY ROGERS

As I mentioned in my last article, we lost our two all-time favorite cowboy movie actors and singers in 1998. I promised when I wrote about Gene Autry that I would also briefly cover Roy Rogers career. Both Autry and Rogers had multi-faceted careers. Both were movie stars, recording artists and radio and stage performers. While Autry had the distinction of being the only artist with five stars on the Hollywood Walkway of Stars, Rogers has the distinction of being the only member of the Country Music Hall Of Fame inducted twice. He is there as a founding member of The Sons Of The Pioneers under the name Leonard Slye and also as Roy Rogers, the singer and actor.

Roy Rogers was born November 5, 1911, in Cincinnati, Ohio as Leonard Franklin Slye. He was raised on a farm near Duck Run, Ohio, where he first learned to ride a horse. In 1930, his family drove to California to visit a newly married sister, and liking both the climate and better job prospects, decided to move out there. Even in California, jobs were not that plentiful during the depression, and Leonard drove a truck and picked fruit among other jobs.

Leonard had learned to play the guitar and call square dances while living in Ohio. At the urging of his sister he appeared on a local radio station, which featured amateur performers. Shortly thereafter, he was asked to join a local country music group called the Rocky Mountaineers. Leonard asked for another vocalist so they could harmonize and Bob Nolan, a transplanted Canadian, was hired. Bob soon left the group and Tim Spencer from Oklahoma replaced him. In the next couple of years, Leonard sang with several groups, none having any success. Finally in 1933, Len decided to form his own group. Along with Tim Spencer and Bob Nolan, they formed the Pioneer Trio.

They soon had their own program on radio station KFWB, featuring their close harmonies and original songs penned by Nolan and Spencer. By 1934, they had added the instrumentalists, Hugh and Karl Farr and, having been told they were too young to be pioneers, changed their name to Sons Of The Pioneers. Today this group of five is considered the "original" Sons Of The Pioneers. The "Original" Sons Of The Pioneers were inducted into the Country Music Hall Of Fame in 1980. The group soon were doing transcriptions for radio and were popular enough to become the third artist, or group, signed by American Decca when the company began in 1934. They also began to appear in western films singing one or two songs. The records, radio transcriptions and movie appearances made them a popular group. However, their only radio appearances were on local stations in the Southern California area. By the time of their first network radio show on Mutual in 1939, Leonard had already left the group. The group itself still continues to perform today.

While Leonard continued singing with the group throughout 1937, he had already embarked on his individual career as a singing movie cowboy. First he took time off to learn to shoot and ride. Finally in October 1937, Rogers signed a contract with Republic Pictures. Using the name Dick Weston, he appeared in small parts in several movies including a couple with Gene Autry. In 1938, Rogers appeared in his last Autry film, THE OLD BARN DANCE, where he played a "bad" guy who fights Autry. Later that year, Autry had a contract dispute with Republic Pictures, and Weston, now called Rogers, was brought in to replace him. The movie, UNDER WESTERN SKIES, made Rogers a cowboy movie star. By 1943, as King Of The Cowboys, he was the top western movie star, and retained



that position until he went into television in the early 1950s. On New Year's Eve, 1947, about a year after the death of his first wife, Rogers married the co-star of his previous twenty films, Dale Evans. Although Hollywood gave the marriage a year, their marriage remained solid until Roy's death, over 50 years later.

Despite the fact that Rogers had become a popular movie star, and often appeared as a guest star on many of the network radio shows broadcasting from the west coast, he did not have a network show of his own until 1944. The reason may have been due to Roy's terrible case of milk fright. From his first earliest broadcasts, he had been ill at ease in front of a microphone. It had taken him years to overcome it. On November 21, 1944, he began his first radio series on Mutual sponsored by Goodyear. Surprisingly, the 30 minute musical variety show featured a vocalist, Pat Friday, as well as The Sons of The Pioneers. There were also short Western skits. The show was broadcast on Tuesdays at 8:30 PM and lasted until the following May. Over a year later, in October 1946, Roy appeared on NBC at 9 PM on Saturday nights. Titled SATURDAY NIGHT ROUNDUP, it was a similar 30 minute series sponsored by Miles Laboratories. In this series, Dale Evans and The Riders Of The Purple Sage appeared with Roy. It lasted until the following March.

After another year hiatus, Roy returned to Mutual in August 1948, with THE ROY ROGERS SHOW, a 30 minute show sponsored by Quaker Oats. This was broadcast Sundays at 6 PM. Still featuring Dale Evans and The Riders Of The Purple Sage, the show had become a dramatic story, with integrated songs. The show had always featured a short skit with Roy and one of his sidekicks, Gabby Hayes first, and later Pat Brady. The skits had been expanded to story length and what music that now remained was made part of the story. The show remained on Mutual until May 1951. That fall, the show went back to NBC, to be sponsored by Post on Friday evenings at 8 PM. The following year, it was shortened to 25 minutes and broadcast on Thursday nights at 8 PM. The last show for Post was December 1953. The following month, Dodge became the sponsor for the last year of the show. When Dodge became sponsor in 1954, they wanted a more adult show, and the writers changed the show into more of a mystery/adventure series than Western. The last show was broadcast on July 21, 1955.

From 1952 until 1954, Roy and Dale also appeared on NBC-TV in THE ROY ROGERS SHOW. One of their best-known songs was used as the theme for both their radio and television shows beginning in 1951. The song, HAPPY TRAILS, was written by Dale, based on a sign off signature used by Roy. In the late 1980s, Roy and Dale hosted the ROY ROGERS AND DALE EVANS THEATER on The Nashville Network, and Roy also appeared for a short time with Gene Autry on the same network, both introducing their old movies. Throughout the years there were many guest appearances on both radio and TV.

There was a sorrowful side to Roy's life. In addition to the death of his first wife, three of his children died tragically. Robin, the only child born to him and Dale, was a Down's syndrome baby and only lived two years. Two of their four adopted children were killed in accidents.

In the late 1960's, Roy opened his Roy Rogers Museum in Victorville, California, which not only featured memorabilia from his long career, but also presented his horse, Trigger, and dog, Bullet, stuffed and mounted. I have visited his museum twice (Once being lucky enough to meet Roy, himself) but since Roy came along a little late for me, I was not that impressed with his museum. However, if you are a real Roy Rogers fan, it would be a joy, as the museum contains almost everything you can think of that affected his life and career.

Rogers was inducted into the Country Music Hall Of Fame himself in 1989. In 1993, he was inducted into the Cowboy Hall Of Fame during a special ceremony at The Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum. Roy had suffered from angina pectoris since 1958, but by a strict health regime was able to continue a limited career for many years. As he said in a 1975 interview, I can "do almost anything except a rough and tumble fight in a film". Rogers passed away in his sleep on July 6, 1998.



## THOUGHTS OF A COLLECTOR

by

Henry R. Hinkel

As I have mentioned in previous articles, I enjoy reading the OTR Digest on the Internet and especially some of the questions asked by the "young ones". A question was asked concerning the time change of the 15 minute Amos and Andy shows to the new half-hour format. The inquiry was upon reading and checking newspapers and other articles of that time, no mention was made as to why the change in format or how come people did not question or complain about the change in a very popular radio show. Times change.... attitudes change.... ideas change.... and in the passing of time a simple explanation is often over looked.... no one really cared.... it was just another radio show.

Today, among collectors and historians, everyone seems to want to be an analyst to dissect history into a pat and logical explanation of things. The simple explanation was.... no one cared.... it was just another radio show. Back in those "good old days" if given a choice of listening to Amos and Andy, or Bob Hope, or going to the movies to see Errol Flynn or Robert Taylor, guess what the choice was.... the movies. Amos and Andy and Bob Hope would be on the radio again next week. The movies usually played for only 2 or 3 days then was gone forever.... never to be seen again except 20 years later on the "Late Show".

Just about everyone listened to the radio, but it was only a small part of a person's life. There seems to be a misconception among young OTR collectors that people used to sit and stare at the radio when they listened. Old printed radio advertisements showed the family gathered around "looking" at the brand new radio floor model console as they listened to their favorite program. Not so.... Mothers would often be in the kitchen preparing things for tomorrow's supper, fathers may be reading the newspaper or magazine, the kids would be doing homework and all of them would have one ear tuned in to the radio. All would pause in what they were doing to catch some rapid-fire series of jokes, to hear what happened when the girl screamed, or whose body fell to the floor. I can remember stopping what I was doing and turning my head to look at the radio when the villain entered the dark house, hearing the stairs slowly creak and waiting to see if the victim heard it too. It seemed like everyone could do more than one thing at a time.... and chew gum too. Did you ever try talking to a die-hard sports fan or walk slowly past the TV when they were "involved" in the sporting event? How about talking to a young child when they are watching cartoons? The concentration seems to be a little different than it was back in the "old days".

Another contributor commented that Lux Radio Theater did not hold up to the original movie and that it did not hold and keep a large audience because of this. This is only partially true. The writers had to tell a story in 45 minutes that the original movie told in 90+ minutes. The listeners did lose in this respect because they never had a chance to get the full impact of some stories because of the condensed versions. Listeners would tune in for two reasons, first they had enjoyed the movie, second to listen to the radio cast do the story compared to the movie cast. The original movie cast did not always appear in the radio cast.

It was a tough job for an actor to try and do the part originally done by Bogart, Robinson or Cagney. I remember listening to a couple of stories when I thought the radio

cast was better than the movie cast. But radio could not compete with the visual effects. You could not get the same feeling listening as the spy in "Saboteur" falls from the torch on the Statute of Liberty as you did when you watched the drama unfold in the movie.

Lux Radio Theater had a good following with rural America. The working farm family could not go to town anytime they wanted to, there was too much work to be done. Lux provided the movie stories that the rural families could not get to see. Remember, movies only played for 2 or 3 days and were gone. We had 3 movie theaters in our city of 40,000 and they all showed different movies. As kids we were lucky.... we could see everything from Charlie Chan and Boston Blackie to the big MGM musicals and everything in between. Rural America had to depend on the Lux Radio Theater and similar shows to bring Hollywood into their homes.

OTR collectors are now the lucky ones.... we have stumbled into a hobby that most people do not know exist. We entertain ourselves by listening to those detectives get hit on the head week after week, chuckle with the antics of Amos and Andy, listen to high drama or old movies, travel to unexplored worlds, or just relax with Sinatra, Crosby, Jolson and Lanza. Let's enjoy what we are actually privileged to have. Let's not try to analyze all the in and outs, what and wherefores, the why and howcomes. As William Shatner said to a die-hard trekkie who peppered him with technical questions -- "For God's sake, it was only a television show". This was radio, performed by professionals for our entertainment and their livelihood. We will never see this era of radio, as we knew it, again. Let's be glad we found this hobby and what's more important, enjoy what most the world knows nothing about.

Just some thoughts of a collector,

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## THE FIRST MUSIC BROADCAST

by  
Clarence Runden

It was Dr. Lee De Forest, who is generally recognized as the "Father of Radio," who broadcast the first musical program in 1907, from his tiny laboratory on the top floor of the Parker Building on 4th Avenue and 19th Street in New York. That evening he had dinner with an old friend, a Swedish concert singer, Madame Eugenia Farrar, and her companion who was a young newspaperwoman.

"If you'll come up to my laboratory," De Forest told them, "I'll show you a wireless set which transmits the human voice over the air. In fact, you can be the first one to sing into it." An hour later, in the lab, she faced an old-fashioned phonograph horn and into it the Swedish artist sang "I Love You Truly." It was the first song ever broadcast. "Encore!" shouted Dr. De Forest, and the Madame sang "Just A-Wearyin' for You."

She had just begun her first number when in the Navy Yard in Brooklyn a young wireless operator sprang from his chair. "I hear a woman singing!" he exclaimed to the lieutenant in the room.

The officer, fearful of the enlisted man's sanity, clamped on the earphones. "I'll be damned!" he said, and then immediately phoned the New York *Herald*. His call was transferred to a rewrite man who, convinced that the newspaper was the target of a practical joker, called back a few minutes later to check on the authenticity of the information.

The lieutenant assured him that both he and the sailor were of sound mind. The rewrite man dashed off a brief story which was buried on page 5 of next morning's paper. One of the most significant developments of modern times was given the treatment usually accorded an item of no more importance than a street-corner brawl. And the newspaperwoman who had actually witnessed the history making broadcast regarded it so lightly that she did not even trouble herself to write a story about it!



# CANADIAN OTR TAPES FOR SALE: SPECIAL RATE: ONLY \$ 105 EACH!

by Jack French



No, that's not a misprint. Your editor just paid \$ 105 each for two 90 minute cassettes of Old Time Radio from the National Archives of Canada through their subcontractor, General Assembly Production Centre in Ontario.

This was certainly not my intent when I started this quest about five years ago. The story of this lengthy process to extract from the Canadian National Archives, a series that has never been in circulation, is an interesting, and painful, tale. Perhaps it will be of value to other fans and collectors interested in Canadian OTR shows.

As many people in this hobby know, I've been researching for many years all U.S. and Canadian radio series with a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) hero in the lead. To that end, I've attempted to locate audio copies of every such series. One that had always eluded me was a 1954-55 series, "The Quiet Force", which was produced and broadcast by CBC from their Toronto studios.

Since 1993 I've been corresponding and telephoning the National Archives in Ottawa, slowly acquiring more data about that series and the methods for obtaining copies of the original discs in their possession. I determined that their holdings included the complete run of this series, 26 half-hour episodes running from October 7, 1954 to March 31, 1955.

Progress moved at a snail's pace. The unit at the National Archives that handles requests from the public (called the Client Services & Communications Branch) has few personnel, due to budget cuts, and responses take a long time. One week to return a telephone call, one month to respond to e-mail, and about three months to answer routine letters.

I eventually determined that I could request audio copies of "The Quiet Force" only after obtaining permission from the CBC headquarters. That took an exchange of several letters, since I had to prove I was a legitimate researcher, not just a curious fan. After providing copies of articles I had written on the subject of RCMP radio heroes, I finally received authorization from CBC to go back to the National Archives and order audio copies.

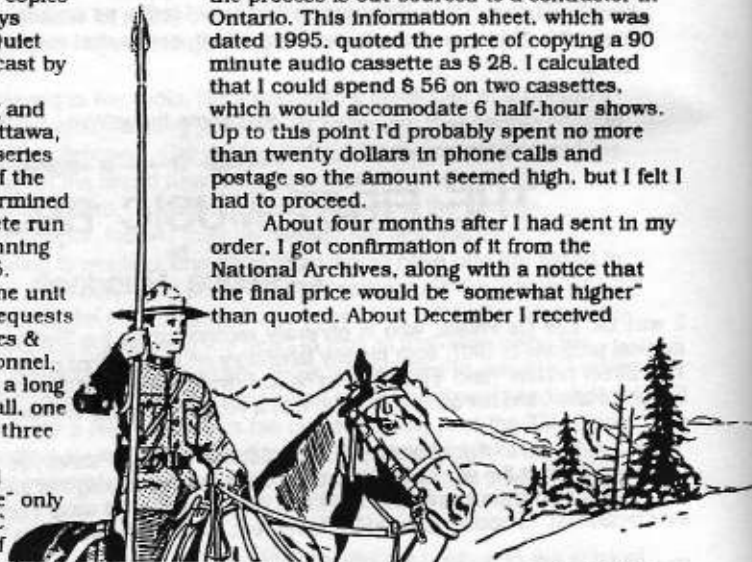
In granting this permission, CBC first got from me a written agreement that I understood that if I did obtain the audio copies, I must use them only for research purposes. Moreover I had to certify that I would never duplicate them or distribute them in any way.

Armed with this authority, I then focused my quest again on the National Archives.

There was some delay because one cannot order any audio recordings by name, date or series. They can be accessed only by the ISN number which the Archives have assigned to each item in their possession. Determining those numbers took another three or four months.

In mid-1998 I finally had all of the materials which the Archives had directed me to assemble. To assist in preparing my formal request, the Archives sent me literature explaining that their bureau does not do any duplication of audio records. That portion of the process is out-sourced to a contractor in Ontario. This information sheet, which was dated 1995, quoted the price of copying a 90 minute audio cassette as \$ 28. I calculated that I could spend \$ 56 on two cassettes, which would accommodate 6 half-hour shows. Up to this point I'd probably spent no more than twenty dollars in phone calls and postage so the amount seemed high, but I felt I had to proceed.

About four months after I had sent in my order, I got confirmation of it from the National Archives, along with a notice that the final price would be "somewhat higher" than quoted. About December I received



another Archives progress report that all of six requested shows had been located and the initial duplication was underway. It took a few more e-mails and phone calls to determine that, by regulation, the Archives cannot send original audio recordings out of their headquarters so they create CDs from their originals. In turn, these CDs are then transported by courier to their subcontractor, who converts them to audio cassettes.

In January 1999 I received a phone call from General Assembly in Ontario; they had completed my order and now needed to charge

it to my credit card before it could be shipped. "Sure" I said. "What's the total?" I felt my knees buckle at the response: "8 210."

"Beg pardon?" I heard myself saying. "Was that \$ 210 for two 90 minute cassettes?"

"That's right" said a cheerful voice on the other end. "We charge \$ 50 an hour so 6 half-hour shows is \$ 150. Then you pay for the courier, to and from the Archives, so that's two trips at \$30 or \$ 60 added to your total. What credit card will you be charging this to?"

The rest is a blur. I was aware I was staring at my VISA card, mumbling numbers into the telephone. Later, I collapsed in a chair in a fit of crazy laughter. "I just paid over two hundred bucks for two OTR cassettes" I shouted to my wife, between peals of mad chortling. "They'll either put me in the Guinness Book of Records.....or the looney bin!"

**NOTE:** This article is reprinted, with permission, from the April 1999 issue of RADIO RECALL, the regular publication of the "Metro Washington Old Time Radio Club," which is headquartered in Washington D.C. Jack French, the author of this article, and the editor of that publication, was the editor of the NARA NEWS from 1980 to 1985. For information on the Washington club and its fine publication, contact their membership director, Mark Paulette, 12707 Parkland Drive, Rockville, MD 20853.

**ADDITIONAL NOTE:** Since this article first appeared in April, Jack French has learned that the United States Library of Congress has a similar price structure. He tells us that if you want something dubbed from their collection (assuming you get the copyright holder's permission), the Library of Congress has a \$100 an hour minimum fee for the "use of engineering studio."



## NEW BOOK

There's a new book out that deals with an area of radio that has not previously been covered, as far as we know. The title is ON THE SHORT WAVES: 1923-1945, and it was written by Jerome S. Berg. As the title suggests, this is a history of shortwave radio from its beginnings through the end of World War II. As discussed in our fall 1995 issue, shortwave can add a great deal to your overall enjoyment of radio and this book gives you a rare, and often personal, worldwide view of this particular medium. It's 280 pages are profusely illustrated with many items of historical interest. The book is \$46.50 postpaid (\$48.50 for Canadian and international orders) and can be ordered from McFarland & Company, Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640, or by credit card at (800) 253-2187.

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All contributions to NARA are tax deductible. We appreciate your financial support!!!

## "IT'S ALL TRUE"

Reviewed by Sam Levene

In 1937 Orson Welles was involved in the premier of a play that provided one of the most dramatic events in the history of the contemporary theater. In fact, the events surrounding the play's opening may have been more dramatic than the play itself. This was the famous case of "The Cradle Will Rock," with book, music and lyrics by Marc Blitzstein. Welles was the director, and the producer was John Houseman. The play was a project of the depression-era Federal Theater, funded by the WPA. It was an operatic musical about workers trying to organize a union while their bosses tried to block them. Word got back to Washington that the play was a decidedly left wing tract, maybe even Communistic, and certain government officials and agencies objected to federal funds being used for such a "subversive" project. As opening night neared, Welles and Houseman were suddenly ordered to cancel the production scheduled to open on June 15, 1937 at a New York theater. The day before the opening an injunction was obtained preventing the actors from performing. A dozen WPA guards padlocked the theater, ostensibly because Welles and Houseman were defying the orders not to proceed with the show. On opening night Houseman and Welles hired an empty theater several blocks away and marched cast and audience to the new location. The regulations of one unsympathetic union prevented the cast from appearing on stage and the musicians union would also not cooperate, so the actors bought tickets, sat with the audience and performed from their seats, while composer Blitzstein played his score from a piano onstage and read out his stage directions. The result was so successful that the play was repeated in that form for the next two weeks and later opened elsewhere in a regular run, even though "The Cradle Will Rock" has been described as "a hate-warped tract which sadly saw everything in black and white."

These events have now been dramatized by the award-winning young Canadian playwright Jason Sherman, in a new play which ran this winter at Toronto's Tarragon Theater. The play is called "It's All True." The ironic title is that of one of Welles' greatest disasters, an unfinished documentary called "It's All True," shot in 1942 at Carnival time in Rio de Janeiro. Welles told Peter Bogdanovich that the mess of "It's All True" prevented him from getting work for the next four years. Interestingly, in recent years an assembly of footage from that unfinished film was put together and has been screened in a number of cities. I saw it and found it mostly sleep-inducing.

Jason Sherman's play "It's All True," would never put anyone to sleep, though he admits in a program note that it's NOT quite all true. There is a great deal of bickering in the piece, - Welles and Houseman shouting at each other and at the Blitzstein character, the actors having tantrums -- it's all a bit noisy. But it's clever, believable and well worth seeing. The play deals both with the events described above and with the personal lives of the principals -- Blitzstein mourning his dead wife, his struggle with his homosexuality (which would many years later lead to his murder on the island of Matinique),



Welles' deteriorating relationship with his wife at the time -- some of it a bit more than we want to know.

Sherman takes a few liberties with time but it was roughly around this period that Welles was playing the Shadow on radio and there are several references in the play to his Cranstonian alter ego and the money he was making doing the part while all his actors were starving. At one point the Welles character loses his temper with one of his colleagues and yells at him, "What do you want, in the depths of your ignorance?" That's the actual phrase Orson used in the famous voice-over session from later years when he was recording a commercial and lost patience with his British producers - a session that was taped by an engineer and later bootlegged around and of which many radio buffs own a copy. So author Sherman did his research.

The actor playing Welles, Victor Ertmanis, did a remarkable job of re-creating the Welles voice and was generally convincing. But he looked middle-aged and tired. In June 1937 the already renowned Orson Welles was 22! It's hard for us to picture. The young John Houseman character bears little resemblance to the figure we would later come to recognize.

This cause célèbre over "The Cradle Will Rock" took place in the summer of 1937 and certainly merited being dramatized. Welles himself hoped to direct a film about it and was preparing a screenplay on the topic as late as 1984. But, typically, three weeks before shooting was to start the financing fell through. Orson died the following year. Thus the way was left open for Jason Sherman's "It's All True."

A little more than a year after "The Cradle Will Rock," October 30, 1938, to be exact, Welles was involved in a much greater cause célèbre, one that would bring him a kind of immortality. It was, need one say, the broadcast of "The War of the Worlds." How about a play or a movie taking us backstage at the time of "the panic broadcast" with an exploration of what really went on, the motives, the hopes, the naivete if that's what it was. What, in fact, was "all true" about that seminal event?

*EDITOR'S NOTE: "The Night That Panicked America," a 1975 movie by Paramount Pictures, did indeed explore what went on backstage the night of that broadcast.*



### **DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOUR NARA MEMBERSHIP EXPIRES?**

The mailing label on the cover of this publication shows the expiration date of your NARA membership. Please check it, and if you are close to that date why not send your \$20 dues, before you forget, to our membership director: Janis DeMoss, 134 Vincewood Drive, Nicholasville, KY 40356. Make your check out to NARA.

## Honors

Many of you know of NARA's celebrity member Ray Erlenborn through his artistry with sound effects at several of the old time radio conventions around the country, and through his occasional columns here in the NARA News. Back in February the "Groves Theater of Americana" in Yucca Valley, California honored Ray for an entirely different facet of his long career in entertainment, that of a silent screen actor.

The program highlighted Ray in his role as Spike, a member of the Rinkeydink Gang, in a showing of a "Winnie Winkle" comedy. This program was presented to full houses on three consecutive evenings and not only included the musical accompaniment of the silent film era but featured Ray spicing things up by doing live sound effects throughout the "two-reeler" (two ten-minute



Ray, on the far right, at the age of 12 in his role as Spike in "Rinkeydinks," one of the WEISS BROS. "Winnie Winkle" series.

film reels that comprise one movie). This included the sound of hits on the head, kicking in a safe door, and the sound of a whistle and tom-tom when one of the actresses fell off the top of a double decker bus.

Starting at age 12, Ray appeared as the original Spike in about a hundred of the Winnie Winkle comedies before he went on the road in vaudeville, as Spike, with Dodo Reid. Ray's film career ran from 1929 to 1937. In addition to the Winnie Winkle comedies he appeared in such "silents" as "Ben Hur," "Wedding March," "Rivals," "City Lights" (with Charlie Chaplin), and the Buster Brown comedies.

He moved on to "talkies" such as "Wild Boys of the Road," and "Mayor of Hell" with James Cagney.

Later Ray became a producer of industrial films in which he used radio actors such as Richard Crenna and Art Linkletter. For his work in this field he received an award from Goodwill Industries.

He was an early pioneer in radio where, as a kid, he sang and played the ukulele. He also had a magazine type show, the "Penzoil News Review." For five years, starting in 1932, he wrote the "Marco Juvenile Review" which featured young artists such as Judy Garland. In the early days of television he had a show titled "Here Comes Curley."

In 1937 Ray joined the sound effects staff of CBS. In radio he handled this end of the production of such shows as "Columbia Workshop," "Big Town," "Blondie," "Gateway to Hollywood," and the "Al Pearce Show" (he also had an acting role on this show). In television he did the sound effects for Red Skelton, the Smothers Brothers, Sonny and Cher, Danny Kaye, and Jack Benny. He also did albums with Eddie Cantor, Bob Hope, and Stan Freberg.

Ray continues to be very active in his profession. For example, in May he worked on a "Salute to Ginger Rogers" in Palm Springs with Rich Little.

We were delighted to learn of the many facets of Ray's career and of the recognition he received for his work in silent films.



Ray Erlenborn handling sound effects at CBS Hollywood.





JIM SNYDER

# FATHER CHARLES EDWARD COUGHLIN

Charles Edward Coughlin was born in Hamilton, Ontario, in 1891 of a Canadian mother and American father. He was to become a pioneer for some of today's religious broadcasters who view their religion and politics as one.

Coughlin attended Catholic schools throughout his life, and was apparently quite an athlete. After his ordination as a Catholic priest at age 25, his first assignment was to teach at Assumption College in Sandwich, Ontario. When his order changed policy and required their priests to take a vow of poverty, Father Coughlin left the order to become a secular priest in the Detroit diocese. After three years of parish duties in Detroit, he was assigned to go to the Detroit suburb of Royal Oak to start a Catholic church in a community that had only thirty-two Catholic families. Two weeks after the Shrine of the Little Flower Church opened in Royal Oak, the Ku Klux Klan burned a cross on its lawn with a sign saying, "Move from Royal Oak." It is interesting to note that at a later date he actually participated in a Klan funeral procession and helped conduct the service.

He started his broadcasts over WJR in Detroit on October 17, 1926, and they became a regular Sunday feature. After only two years, so much money had come in that he planned a new stone church and still another year saw his broadcasts carried on stations in Cincinnati and Chicago. Three thousand letters a week came in, many with money. Initially his sermons were limited to religious

subjects but on January 12, 1930, shortly after the stock market crash, he moved into the political arena and attacked Communism and socialism. The following week he gave his listeners the "choice" of Christianity or Communism and the week after that he attacked Bertrand Russell and a professor from the University of Wisconsin for their socialism.

Father Coughlin continued discussing Communism and predicted a Communist takeover of the United States by 1933. He blamed Henry Ford for this because of his hiring policies and because he contracted to built truck and tractor factories in Russia.

His broadcasts were picked up by CBS in 1930 to run for twenty-five weeks. On January 4, 1931 he planned a talk denouncing international bankers and repudiating the Treaty of Versailles, which he considered to be the cause of the Depression. When CBS learned of the planned subjects, they asked him to "tone down the broadcast." He said that rather than do that, he would talk about a different subject entirely, which he did. This broadcast now dealt with how CBS was trying to censor him. CBS received thousands of letters denouncing this policy and so the network executives were silent the following week when he went ahead with the original talk. CBS, however, did refuse to renew his contract when his twenty-five week run was over. So, he organized his own "network," with thirty-two stations across the country. He had a loyal following. The St. Paul station that carried

his broadcasts asked their listeners if they should continue to carry Father Coughlin. 400 said no, but 137,482 said yes.

He viewed President Herbert Hoover as the cause of the nation's ills, accusing Hoover of "ardent zeal to protect the banking class, the banker's friend, the Holy Ghost of the rich, the protective angel of Wall Street." Coughlin strongly supported Franklin Roosevelt for the presidency in 1932. A grateful Roosevelt invited Coughlin to the White House and the priest gave him a long list of recommendations for the economic recovery of the nation, some of which Roosevelt followed and some of which he didn't, which angered the Detroit priest. Coughlin told Roosevelt that he should name more Catholic ambassadors so Roosevelt told him that he could name the governor-general of the Phillipines. Coughlin selected Frank Murphy, who later became the governor of Michigan. Although Roosevelt wanted his support, he didn't like Coughlin very much and there came a break in their alliance. Coughlin campaigned actively against Roosevelt in the next election referring to him as "Franklin Double-Crossing Roosevelt."

He tangled with the union movement. Because he disliked the leadership of the CIO he said that Catholics could not be members of that union because "Catholicism was as incompatible with the CIO as Catholicism was incompatible with Muhammadanism." He helped organize a competing union named the Automotive Industrial Workers Association.

He started a new organization called the Christian Front from which Jews were excluded. When the organization was accused of being anti Semitic he rationalized it away by saying that was just a word used by the Communists. In fact, however, in order to be a member a person had to sign a pledge to buy



only from Christians, and to give employment to Christians only. In his writing I find him referring to some of his opponents as "atheist Jews."

In the early stages of World War II he was anti-British and very pro-Nazi. He sometimes repeated speeches by Nazi Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels, virtually unchanged, as his own.

By the end of 1940 so many stations had stopped carrying his broadcasts that he left the air. He did continue with his writing and even after our entry into the war he opposed sending food to England "while some Americans are starving."

The FBI seized his records in 1942. The government apparently had a case for trying him for sedition, but instead went to Archbishop Edward Mooney who told Coughlin to quit writing and publishing or to leave the priesthood. Coughlin submitted. He continued to say mass at the Shrine of the Little Flower to gigantic crowds until his retirement in 1966. He died thirteen years later.

# FROM ACROSS THE POND



by Ray Smith



## UK COWBOYS!

Whaddya mean . . . BBC radio produced its own home-grown wild west adventure programs!? It's enough to make George 'Gabby' Hayes turn in his grave. Brits on Boot Hill are akin to Mel Gibson's Braveheart taking on armor-plated 14th century 'Anglo-Saxon curs' in the woods of Arkansas. Unlikely, to say the least, I hear you remark. And yet . . . when Roy Rogers, Dale Evans and Trigger visited my homeland in the 40's, the 'King of the Cow-ies' as we called him, was besieged by millions of adoring fans. Roy was received with the same adulation which greeted England's Beatles approximately two decades later, when they set foot on American soil for the first time.

American cowboys invaded the British Isles in 3 ways, the illustrated comic book, the blockbuster American cowboy movie matinee and the fledgling British 'commercial' TV network. Wagon Train, Cheyenne Body, Lawman, Wells Fargo and Rawhide, joined Roy, Gene, Hoppy, Cisco and Twerpie (as the Brits called Wyatt Earp) to gallop across our flickering 12 inch b&w 'Pye' television sets. It seems incongruous that this song would be on the lips of everyone in the UK, from window cleaners to bowler-hatted upper crust, city gents.

*Whistle me up a melody,  
Whistle me back where I  
wanna be, Whistle a tune that'll  
carry me, To Tombstone  
Terri-tory! If your path has run  
afoul of the law, It's a handy  
place to be, Where you're  
future's jest as good as your  
draw, In Tombstone Territory.*

I'm not sure where Tombstone Territory ranks in the hierarchy of American cowboy programs. But when Brits can recite its theme perfectly, 35 years after the show ended, you've gotta believe that the Beefeaters of Olde Britannia adored even the most obscure of American media cowboys.

As a wee lad, although I frequently wore a kilt, the game of choice amongst me and my pals was 'cowboys and injuns'. At the top end of the road where I lived, was one of Scotland's numerous hills. With my left hand slapping my 'backside' and my right arm tugging the reigns of an imaginary horse, this two footed 'humanoid' Roy-Trigger combination, 'galloped' the wild west of Caller Fountain Hill, seeking out Jesse James and other baddies. My chums vied for the honor of 'playing' Cochise, Geronimo or Big Chief Sitting Bull. I always wanted to portray the Big Chief myself, simply because my granny had seen him in person, when Buffalo Bill's

Wild West Show visited the UK in her childhood.

You might get the impression that the cowboys whose adventures we 'played out' in the heather-clad Scottish Highlands bore names like Gene Autry, The Masked Man and Paw Cartwright. Wrong! Our heroes came directly from BBC Radio, which refused to indulge a nation of 50 million trigger-happy Lone Stranger wannabe's! They reckoned there were more than enough American cowboys at the movies. If Wild West fans wanted to hear them on the wireless, they'd be cowboys with a distinctly British accent, old boy!

And the BBC cowboy show adored by millions was Riders of the Range which ran for 6 series broadcast between 1949 and 1953. The entire program was written and produced by a remarkably talented radio backroom boy, Charles Chilton. He also gave us the brilliant science-fiction drama Journey Into Space, numerous programs saluting Old Tyme Musichall (vaudeville), and even produced some Goon Shows. He's an unlikely cowboy, speaking with a thick 'Cor Blimey Muvvah' London barra-boy (street trader) cockney accent. And yet the program was hailed for its



## RIDERS OF THE RANGE



A Musical Drama of the West  
with Cal McCord  
Paul Carpenter, Charles Irwin  
Carole Carr, Alan Keith  
Macdonald Parke, Bob Mullin  
The Four Ramblers  
The Sons of the Saddle  
Led by Jack Fallon  
Written and produced by  
Charles Chilton  
(BBC recording)

authenticity. Each series saluted a different aspect of the old west, opening up the Chisholm Trail, the Battle of Little Big Horn, construction of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad and the true story of Billy the Kid. Riders of the Range was described as 'a musical drama of the west'. It opened to the sound of a stampeding herd of cattle. The series aimed to show Brits there was more to being a 'cowpuncher' than 'packing a brace of 6-shooters.'

The principal characters who populated the '6T6' Ranch were The Rancher (played by Cal McCord), based on Jesse Chisholm, the first of America's great cattle kings: Texas Ranger hero Jeff Morgan (actor Paul Carpenter) who was a composite of Deadwood Dick, Buffalo Bill and General Lew Wallace: Jeff's bewhiskered sidekick Luke, modelled on 'bewhiskered sidekicks' everywhere: and a character known as 'JC'



*Radio "Luke" alike puppet*

MacDonald played by actor MacDonald Park. Although Riders of the Range was a thrilling drama series, the cowpokes took time out to light a campfire, eat some grits and jewels and sing a few songs. The program broadcast on April 21, 1950 was typical. Singing cowpoke Bob Mallin, Val Doonican & his 4 Ramblers (an Irish 'country and western' group) and The Sons of the Saddle Orchestra conducted by Jack Fallon, led us musically, 'On the trail where the sun hangs low.' Then sidekick Luke (actor Charles Irwin) sang 'Pecos Bill,' The Rancher's daughter Mary (pop vocalist Carole Carr) serenaded 'All the pretty horses,' and later, Scott Joplin's Maple Leaf Rag brought Bob Mallin back to croon, 'I'm a natural born cowboy.' After the closing dialogue, it was sign-off time with the 'Riders of the Range' signature song, followed by an

extra special 'woof . . . woof . . . woof' from Rustler the Dog.



*Charles Chilton and 'Rustler' 1950*

In 1963 I attended a dinner at a clubhouse on Bedford Street in London's west end. At my table was a tall, outgoing and extremely affable gent with one of those 'flattened' Canadian accents, which told me he'd lived in the UK for many years. "Ray" said my buddy, "I'd like you to meet Cal McCord . . . you know, the cowboy turn". I immediately thought of rope spinning, bareback-riding, sharp-shooting and song-singing of the Happy Trails variety. In fact, I thought of everything EXCEPT Riders of the Range. Gadzooks. What a flippin' idiot! There I was sharing a 'pie, pea and chips' dinner with the man who actually STARRED in Riders of the Range! And all I could say in that stiff British accent I had was, "How do you do, Cal. Pass the HP Sauce old chap!" Back in the 60's we had yet to discover how much we missed the golden days of radio. A decade after Riders of the Range, it was almost as if I'd totally forgotten the program existed, or that one of my childhood heros was 'voiced' by Cowboy Cal McCord! When I ran my 'Wee Puppet Folk' show in Canada during the 70's, one of the children's favourite puppets was an ancient cowpoke known



"Jeff" & "Luke"  
Eagle comic  
(1956)

as Old Stager. When I created this character I wonder if I'd been thinking back (subconsciously) to my own childhood and remembering Side-Kick Luke from Riders of the Range?

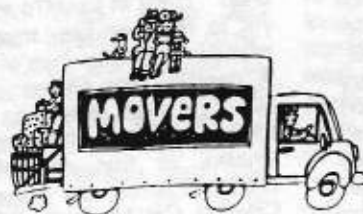
Although Riders of the Range ended in 1953, the program had a lasting impact on British popular culture. It had become an established full-color comic strip page in the UK's leading boys comic paper, The Eagle which has something of a cult following to this very day. Nicholas Hill and co-members of his Eagle Society are as nostalgic about their famed weekly comic paper as Olde Tyme Radio fans are about the golden days of steam

broadcasting. The Riders of the Range adventure cartoon which continued well into the 1960's was fully scripted by Charles Chilton and drawn by one of the Eagle's legendary artists, Frank Humphris. Thankfully many of those comic strips have been preserved for posterity and can still be enjoyed today.

I'm glad Riders of the Range survives in comic strip form. Although one of the most popular radio shows of its day, it has never been heard from again, not even when the BBC celebrated radio broadcasting milestones (50th, 60th, 70th year etc) by bringing back our favourite programming. It's not that they don't want to replay the show . .

they can't. In one of those unfortunate 'accidents of history,' BBC sound archives tell us that not a single episode from all 6 of the 'R of R' series has been retained. Every single program was 'wiped' many years ago. And if writer, producer and creator Charles Chilton still has a few 'personal reels' from Riders of the Range in his private archive, he's definitely not saying. And so, on September 14th, 1953, when Jeff Morgan, side-kick Luke and real-life UK vaudevillian, Cowboy Cal McCord galloped into the sunset of BBC Broadcasting House, they truly became radio's 'ghost riders in the sky.'

Cheerio for now.



## 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

# 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 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 24, 1999. Note that there has been a change in these dates from those announced a year ago. The convention will not open until Thursday afternoon and will end with a Sunday morning breakfast and program. The hotel provides a free shuttle service back and forth to the airport. The contact person is Jay Hickerson, Box 4321, Hamden, CT 06514. Jay can be reached by phone at (203) 248-2887, or e-mail at JayHick@aol.com
- ② **THE ANNUAL SPERDVAC CONVENTION** is held, each year, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel at the Los Angeles International Airport. A free shuttle 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. Future convention dates:  
November 12 thru 14, 1999 for the 17th annual convention  
November 10 thru 12, 2000 for the 18th annual convention
- ③ **THE 16TH ANNUAL LUM & ABNER CONVENTION** is scheduled for June 26 and 27, 2000 in Mena, Arkansas at the Best Western Lime Tree Inn. Be sure to check this for up-to-date information from Tim Hollis, 81 Sharon Blvd., Dora, AL 35062. His phone is (205) 648-6110.
- ④ **THE REFS RADIO SHOWCASE VIII** will be held on June 26 and 27, 2000 at the Seattle Center in Seattle, Washington. You can obtain information on this event from Mike Sprague, P.O. Box 723, Bothell, WA 98041. Phone: (425) 488-9518 or e-mail at hrrmikes@aol.com

**NOTE:** We have received no response for our request for information from the other popular conventions around the country. If and when we are able to get information on them we will list them in future issues of *NARA News*.



**28** Actor-Director-Writer



**Orson Welles**

Born: George Orson Wells

May 6, 1915 Kenosha, Wisconsin

Hollywood's boy wonder began his acting career in Ireland in 1931. He soon switched to writing and directing. Orson produced an all-black version of *Macbeth* in 1936. Along with John Houseman, Welles founded the *Mercury Theatre* in 1937. Orson's greatest film, *Citizen Kane* (1941), was a psychological study of an American newspaper tycoon. Welles spent the next two decades in Europe acting and directing. There he starred in BBC's *The Black Museum*. Welles' other radio appearances include *The Shadow*, *Sherlock Holmes*, *The Third Man* and *Orson Welles Theatre*. Welles died October 10, 1985.

The *Mercury Theatre* group included: Agnes Moorehead, Ray Collins, Joseph Cotton, Karl Swenson, Everett Sloane, Alice Frost, Kenny Delmar and John McIntyre.

**NARA NEWS**

VOL. XXIV NO. 3

OCTOBER 30, 1938

CARD NO. 29

**FAKE RADIO 'WAR' STIRS TERROR THROUGH U.S.**

A wave of mass hysteria seized radio listeners tonight when a broadcast dramatization of H.G. Wells' "The War of the Worlds," led thousands to believe that an interplanetary conflict had started with invading Martians spreading wide death and destruction in New Jersey and New York. The broadcast, which disrupted households, interrupted religious services, created traffic jams and clogged communications systems, was made by Orson Welles, who as "The Shadow," used to give "the creeps" to countless child listeners. This time at least a score of adults required medical treatment for shock and hysteria. The program was produced by Mr. Welles and the Mercury Theatre on the Air over CBS. The play was to simulate a regular radio program with "break-ins." Mr. Welles opened the show with a description of the series. The simulated program began. A weather report was given, prosaically, an announcer remarked that the program would continue from a hotel, with dance music. Then there was a "flash" about a professor at an observatory noting a series of gas explosions on the planet Mars. News bulletins and on scene broadcasts reported the landing of a "meteor" near Princeton, NJ "killing" 1,500 persons. The "meteor" was a "metal cylinder" containing strange creatures from Mars armed with "death rays." (Continued on a tape near you. Tune-In to hear the full story!)

30 Show-Drama

## SUSPENSE

First heard: June 17, 1942

Last heard: September 30, 1962

*Suspense* was auditioned on July 22, 1940 when *The Lodger* was performed on *Forecast*. The host for *Suspense* during its early years was the mysterious *Man in Black*. Other hosts included Joseph Kearns, Ted Osborne and Robert Montgomery. Producer/Directors were William Spier, William N. Robson, Anton M. Leader, Norman Macdonnell, Elliott Lewis, Antony Ellis and Bruno Zirato, Jr. Music was provided by Bernard Herrmann, Lucien Moraweck and Lud Gluskin. Announcers were Truman Bradley, Ken Niles, Frank Martin and Harlow Wilcox. And sound effects were performed by Berne Surrey, David Light and Ray Kemper. The success of *Suspense* could be summed up from an article in the April 1949 issue of *Radio & TV Mirror*, in which Tony Leader "insists that stories must be logical, believable. There must be no false clues to mislead the listeners, no use of the supernatural to gain the effects of terror and... *Suspense*." The stars that appeared on *Suspense* reads like a who's-who of Hollywood legends, including Humphrey Bogart, James Stewart, Lucille Ball, Bette Davis, Jack Benny and Bob Hope.

Besides *Sorry, Wrong Number*, Lucille Fletcher also wrote another of *Suspense*'s most thrilling episodes: *The Hitch-Hiker*.

31 - Script "Sorry, Wrong Number"

SOUND: THE SUSPENSE THEME - TOLLING BELLS AND EERIE MUSIC

NARR: (AGAINST THEME) *Suspense!*

SOUND: MUSIC AND CHIMES CONTINUE

NARR: And the producer of radio's outstanding theatre of thrills...the master of mystery and adventure...William N. Robson.

ROBSON: Tonight, Margot Stevenson comes to our stage to appear in a study in terror by Lucille Fletcher called "Sorry, Wrong Number," the story of a woman who accidentally overheard a conversation with death and strove frantically to prevent the murderer from claiming an innocent victim. Now listen to Margot Stevenson and Terry Ross in "Sorry, Wrong Number," a tale well-calculated to keep you in...*Suspense!*

SOUND: MUSIC OUT. SOUND OF DIALING IN. IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE PHONE DIALING ENDS; THE BUSY SIGNAL

STEVENSON: Oh- dear..!

*Sorry, Wrong Number* was first performed on May 25, 1943 with Agnes Moorehead in the riveting role of Mrs. Elbert Stevenson, who while dialing Murray Hill 7-0093, overheard the plot to kill an innocent woman. This episode was repeated 7 more times.

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# BUY SELL TRADE

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*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 newly revised 1999 edition of the "NARA OTR SOURCE LIST" is now available. This six-page compendium lists the contact information for all of the following: 20 OTR membership clubs, 4 unaffiliated OTR publications, 16 fan clubs, 9 state archives, 45 OTR audio dealers, 8 nostalgia merchants, 11 antique radio clubs, 21 OTR museums and libraries, 3 dealers in blank tape, 6 annual conventions, current list of OTR web sites, 3 contemporary OTR drama groups, and 2 charity organizations that seek OTR tapes. Cost is \$2.00 to NARA members and \$3.00 to others. Send payment in stamps or cash to Jack French, 5137 Richardson Drive., Fairfax, 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 33¢ ones would be about right. All profits go to NARA so be generous. Orders filled the 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 updated copy soon.

\*\*\*\*\*

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 \$2.00 to NARA members and \$3.00 to others. Please send payment in cash or seven 33¢ stamps (**NO** checks please) to B.J. George, 2177 South 62nd Street, West Allis, WI 53219. All profits will be given to NARA.

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I am doing research on radio cigarette advertising and radio military recruiting advertising. Any information on how I might obtain copies of these historical advertising radio spots would be greatly appreciated. Robert F. Sawallesh, 2541 Brimhollow Drive, Valrico, FL 33594 (813) 654-3900.

NARA NEWS	
COMMERCIAL ADVERTISING RATES	
<u>ONE ISSUE:</u>	
Full page	- \$50.00
Half page	- 25.00
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## A TIP OF THE ATWATER DIAL TO....

The following members for financial donations to NARA. Your generosity is appreciated.

Don Aston - Lake Elsinore, California  
Janis DeMoss - Nicholasville, Kentucky  
Bill Dwyer - Brookline, Massachusetts  
Arthur Fischbeck - Mason City, Iowa  
Bryan Grapentine - Phoenix, Arizona  
Al Inkster - Tucson, Arizona  
Rick Rieve - Fairfax, Virginia  
Jim Snyder - Mesa Arizona

All contributions to NARA are tax deductible.

Don Aston for continuing to handle the cassette library on a temporary basis in addition to all his other duties, until a new librarian can be found. We hope that one of you will come forward to take on this important NARA function.

NARA columnist Jim Cox whose new book on the radio "soaps" will be out sometime this summer. McFarland is the publisher and we will give you ordering information as soon as we have it.

Ray Erlenborn for the recognition he recently received for his long tenure in show business (please see page 39).

Gene Larson, NARA's staff artist, for the art work on page 23 that accompanies his article.

Our columnists in this issue: Don Aston, Frank Bresee, Jim Cox, Jack French, B.J. George, Hank Hinkel, Gene Larson, Same Levene, Jack Palmer, John Pellatt, Clarence Runden, Chuck Seeley, Hal Skinner, Ray Smith, Hal Stephenson, and Ken Weigel.

Those who have already sent in articles for future issues: Frank Bresee, Jack French (2 articles), B.J. George, Gene Larson, Bob Mott (2 articles), Chuck Seeley (2 articles), Hal Skinner, Hal Stephenson (6 articles), Ray Smith (2 articles), and Ken Weigel.

### **DEADLINES:**

**September 1 for the fall issue**

**NOTE: This is 2 weeks earlier than  
previously announced.**

**December 15 for the winter issue**



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