

National Old-Time Radio Enthusiasts

N.O.T.R.E. News

Volume 18

Autumn '05



Mrs. Jean Rouverol Carpenter

Mr. Cliff Carpenter

The Soap Opera Couple of Dutchess County (Copyright by Howard Blue, 2005)

WMKV Listening Post On The World Wide Web

Bill & Helen from Australia
e-mail WMKV: Hi! Thanks for the great music from down under Sydney; will tell all my friends to listen.

E-mail from Jessica in Los Angeles: Nothing here comes close to WMKV. I have a DSL at home so I can listen to WMKV in the evening. I have a friend who is a huge fan too and listens via the Internet.

Christine e-mails WMKV: I have just discovered your station on the



Internet. There is not a station around in Texas that plays Big Band.

Russ from Rockford, IL says he goes to sleep listening to WMKV and writes,

"thanks for the wonderful programs; don't ever stop playing those songs."

Rev. Kenny e-mails us from Maryland: I found WMKV through the Kay Kyser website. I am impressed! Besides your big band programming, what really attracted me to your station was your commitment to serving senior citizens. Keep up the good work! Til then, I'll be thinking of you. (Kay Kyser)

WMKV LOVED BY ALL AGES

(A recent WMKV Hotline call...)

Hi, my name is Emily. I am 16 years old, and I just wanted to say that I was just programming my radio one day, and I came across this station. I really, really love this station – I feel privileged to listen to it, because it's historical and lets people know about our culture and the music, and I think it's really beautiful because all these people have such great voices, and I know about some of them because of my parents being music teachers. It's just a great thing; it is really peaceful, and I just really appreciate all the work you guys put into this radio station, so thank you so much for sharing it with me. Bye.

Thanks Emily....we so appreciate your kind words!

To get WMKV on the Internet, you need to have the Microsoft Windows Media Player audio plug-in installed on your computer.

To get the Media Player:

1. Go to www.wmkvfm.org and look on the web page for the "Get Windows Media Player FREE" button.

2. Click on the "Media Player" button (This will take you to the microsoft windows media player download site).

3. The media player download page will automatically select the right download for your computer's operating system (WIN 95, 98, ME, XP, Macintosh, etc).

3. Click on the download button and it will automatically download and install the media player on your computer.

4. After downloading and installing, reboot your computer.

5. Go to our web site, www.wmkvfm.org, and click on the flashing "on-air" button on the web page (This will load WMKV's audio player).

6. Once the player loads, you will need to install Chaincast plug-in. A link to a page with more info. on the Chaincast is available on WMKV's home page.

If you have problems getting WMKV 89.3 FM on the Internet, please e-mail help@streamaudio.com

The Soap Opera Couple of Dutchess County

by Howard Blue

(Copyright by Howard Blue, 2005)

It's hard to know where to start talking about actors Cliff Carpenter and Jean Rouverol, the "new couple" in town in Dutchess County, New York. (They're new as a couple - Cliff's lived there for decades.) The fact that they live in Cliff's log house once owned by famed radio and TV journalist, Edward R. Murrow, and that Jean once lived next door to legendary muralist Diego Rivera won't do. Interesting, but that doesn't tell you enough about Carpenter and Rouverol themselves.

Ok - how about the fact that the collective ages of the two, who have been together for a year and a half, add up to 179 years. Yup.

Cliff and Jean first met in 1946, shortly after he returned to the US from serving in the infantry in Europe during THE war. He was married to his late wife Pauline, (better known as "Mack") and Jean was married to her late husband, film writer Hugo Butler. The two couples met through a mutual friend and had dinner.

Subsequently, when Jean's son Mike came east to go to college in New York City, Cliff and Mack befriended him. As a result, the two couples continued to maintain a light correspondence. Flash-forward several decades. Both Cliff and Jean had been widowed by now, Jean in 1968 and Cliff in 1984. After a long career as an actor, writer and college teacher, Jean had become busy doing volunteer work for the Writer's Guild. Cliff who started his career acting on radio is still working nowadays, doing voice-overs and television commercials.

One day a few years ago, Cliff took a book out of the library, Jean's memoir of her and Hugo's career. Cliff wrote to her and told her how much he liked the book. That letter led to another and another and another. The couple finally renewed their acquaintance in person during the winter of 2003-2004 when Cliff stopped in Santa Monica, California where she was living, on his way to a

vacation in Hawaii. They had lunch together - three times.

During his visit, Cliff stayed with long time friend, Dorothy Bridges, widow of actors Lloyd Bridges and mother of Beau and Jeff who are both also actors. Cliff, Lloyd and Dorothy had all gone to UCLA together. "Where are you staying?" Jean asked Cliff when he came the first time to have lunch with her. On hearing the answer, Jean looked at him with a start. She and Dorothy had gone to junior high school together. "Dorothy got all the good parts," in our school play," she said laughingly. Something clicked at those three lunches and on his way back, Carpenter stopped in again for another one.

On Cliff's return to New York, their correspondence warmed up a bit until he finally suggested "Why don't you come east and move into my nice log house." I'll come for a visit," Rouverol replied, and we'll see how things go," to which Carpenter complained, "That's like asking me to audition." Rouverol came, stayed two weeks, and then returned to Santa Monica to pack up her things and ship them to Dutchess County.

So how does a woman fare moving in with a guy who's lived alone for most of the past two decades? Well, for starters, Jean says, "The house needed a bit of attention in the cleaning department," To which Cliff replies, "I had a housecleaner coming in once a week, but she liked talking to me too much and didn't get that much cleaning done." Jean also says, "We had to negotiate a bit about all the books I brought, which was only about a third of my whole collection. But Cliff was generous and gave away some of his to make room. And he even had the kitchen and bedrooms remodeled."

Although Cliff and Jean see eye to eye on a bunch of things, politics particularly, the two are dedicated progressives, their two careers have been quite different. Jean's mother was a playwright and an actor, who wrote a play for Jean which had a short run on Broadway. Jean first acted in a Hollywood film at the age of seventeen as W.C. Fields' daughter in the

comedy *It's a Gift*. She continued to perform in mainly supporting roles in another eleven films until 1940 when she married screenwriter Hugo Butler.

Shortly before Jean and her husband met, she won a supporting role in *One Man's Family*, one of radio's longest lived soap operas, remaining with the show for fourteen years. It was during this time that she met Jeanette Nolan who became one of her best friends. The friendship was cemented even more some years later, when Jean's son, Mike, married Jeannette's daughter. Of Jeanette, Jean said, "She was one of the nicest human beings I ever knew." And laughing at another memory, Jean added, "Jeanette was a dedicated baker and they never had a loaf of store-bought bread enter their house." In subsequent years, Jean expanded into other fields: writing books, television and film scripts, and soap operas (i.e. *As The World Turns* and *Guiding Light*), and teacher.

Cliff got his start in radio in Los Angeles after graduating from UCLA in 1936. It was the height of the Depression and he had applied for and been rejected for several jobs including one as a laborer ("Forget about it," he was told. "You're a college graduate and you'll only stay with us until you get a better job.") Finally, he had a talk with himself while sitting in his Model A Ford on Los Angeles' famous Mulholland Drive, which winds through the Santa Monica Mountains and the Hollywood Hills. "You're an actor, a really good one," he said to himself. And in fact he had done quite a bit of acting and producing while at UCLA. Now, he decided to overcome his insecurity and give it a try. When a friend told him about an audition for *House Undivided*, a radio soap opera, Cliff gave it a try, and the rest is history. Cliff went on to numerous other radio shows and a fair amount of Broadway gigs (among them *Sunrise at Campobello*, with Ralph Bellamy.

Among old time radio fans, Cliff his often best known for playing the lead role in *Terry and the Pirates*, a juvenile show. But says Cliff, "Although it paid the rent, and I loved working with Art Carney and some of radio's other greats on it, I'm much prouder of my work on other shows that I did, such as the radio plays of the great Norman

Corwin.

In addition to Cliff's continued work on commercials, the two enjoy their annual appearances at old time radio conventions in Newark, New Jersey and Seattle, Washington. The Newark one is scheduled for October 20 - 23, 2005, at the Holiday Inn North.

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Available for the first time... NBC Monitor episodes of Ethel & Albert starring Peg Lynch and Alan Bunce!

Peg Lynch Personally Signs Each Special Limited CD Edition!

These sparkling 3 to 4 minutes vignettes are complete mini-episodes created especially for NBC Radio's Monitor programming and broadcast 1963 to 1965. These unique programs are being made available for the first time... exclusively by Peg Lynch Recordings.

Peg Lynch is a radio pioneer - some call her the Lady Who Invented Sitcom. Her warm, fast and funny creation, Ethel & Albert -- the everyday life of an average middle-class couple living in small-town America -- became one of the country's most popular husband-and-wife comedies from the day it was first heard in 1938. Starting as a three-minute filler between the Women's Hour and the weather, it zoomed from a small radio station in Minnesota Minnesota (KATE in Peg's hometown of Albert Lea) to ABC in New York, where it was expanded to 15 minutes and later to a half hour. It's popularity increased even more when it moved to live television in 1950 -- first on the Kate Smith Show and then to its own half-hour weekly slot in 1953. The series returned to radio on CBS in 1957 as The Couple Next Door. From 1963 to 1965, it reprised its original three-minute format on NBC Radio Monitor. It was revived as a syndicated radio feature in the mid-70s as The Little Things in Life.

Peg Lynch's comedy is timeless and ever believable. She writes about the little things in life--losing the car keys, the jar that won't open, looking for that other shoe, the guests who leave things and then need them mailed, the driver's license that expires--the things that strike a responsive chord in us all. Devoted fans of the show included hundreds of well-known names of the day, such as James Thurber, George S. Kaufman, Jack Benny, Phil Silvers, Eleanor Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Charles Laughton, Trevor Howard, Basil Rathbone, and novelist John Cheever, who expressed an interest in writing for the show (Ms. Lynch politely declined).

During her six-decade career, Peg Lynch has written more than 10,000 scripts for radio and television, alone and unaided, and she still performs her comedy material across the country.

This CD, Volume 1, starring Peg Lynch and Alan Bunce is from the NBC Radio Monitor series 1963-65 (approx. 3 to 4 min. per episode).

Twelve Hilarious Episodes (approx. 45 total minutes):

01. Driver's License
02. The Painter
03. To Open, Turn Left
04. Neighborhood Bully
05. Just Call and Say Hello
06. Southern Hospitality
07. Giving Directions
08. Their First Kiss
09. Complaint Department
10. Recipe Arithmetic
11. I Can't Remember Names
12. The Birthday Surprise



Jensen Beach, FL - On July 11, 2005 Frances Langford died at home at the age of 91. In honor of her wide body of work and her service to our country, we take a look back at her extraordinary life.



Frances Langford was born in Lake Worth, Florida, on April 4, 1914, and discovered by Rudy Vallee while she was singing on a local radio station.

In addition to her subsequent guest appearances on radio programs such as *Songs by Sinatra, The Burns and Allen Show, and Lux Radio Theatre*, she hosted her own program, *Maxwell House Coffee Time*. She was also half of the dysfunctional duo *The Bickersons*, along with Don Ameche. This powerful comedic team performed as the hypercritical husband and wife on *The Chase and Sanborn Show, The Drene Show* and *Old Gold Time*, and later appeared together on television.

Langford could also truly be said to have been a star of both stage and screen. She performed in two Broadway musicals, including *Here Goes the Bride in 1931*. She appeared in many more films, including the 1947 Western *Deputy Marshal* starring Jon Hall (her first husband) and the blockbuster film *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, in which she joined James Cagney in a rousing rendition of "Over There." However, she may perhaps be best remembered for the 1935 film *Every Night at Eight*, in which she introduced the song that would become her signature - the sultry "I'm in the Mood For Love." Indeed, American's heard many of their favorite songs for the first time in Frances Langford's voice, including "Broadway Rhythm" and "You are My Lucky Star."

"Entertaining the troops was the greatest thing in my life."

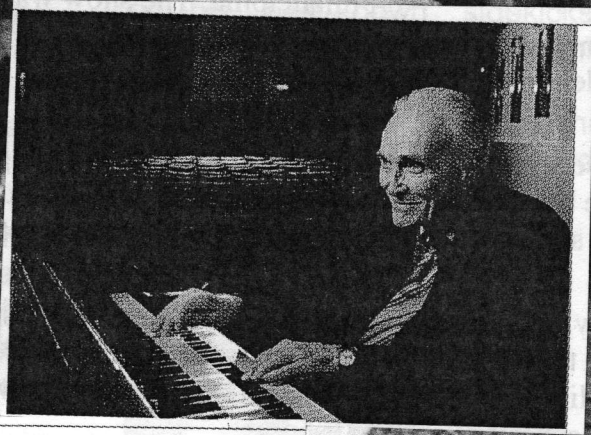
A regular on Bob Hope's *Pepsodent Show*, she joined Hope on his famous USO tours to entertain troops during World War II. Known as the "Sweetheart of the Fighting Fronts", she not only performed in Europe, North Africa and the South Pacific, but also appeared on radio programs such as *Command Performance* and *Mail Call*, and published a daily journal of her experiences during wartime, *Purple Heart Diary*. In later years, she also joined Hope on his trips to Korea and Vietnam. Frances Langford once said, "Entertaining the troops was the greatest thing in my life. We were there just to do our job, to help make them laugh and be happy if they could."

In her final years, Frances Langford enjoyed sailing aboard her 110 ft. yacht and sport fishing with her third husband, Harold Stuart, with whom she would have celebrated a 10th wedding anniversary in November.

Fans may visit her collection at the Florida Oceanographic Society's visitor center, or visit her star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame (at 1500 Vine Street). Of course, fans may also hear her legendary voice by listening to recordings of her radio performances. **Radio Spirits** proudly offers a number



Bob Mitchell - Musical Treasure



Silent Treatment

He's got the soundtrack of an era at his fingertips

Who says Hollywood is obsessed with youth? A who's who of movie hot-

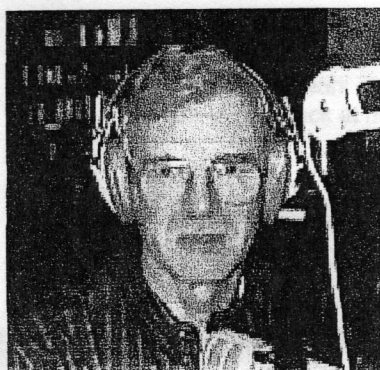
shots—including Leonardo DiCaprio—streams into a restored Hollywood silent-movie theater twice a week to cheer on the 92-year-old house organist.

"I love the silent movies," says Bob Mitchell. He became a professional musician at age 12, then spent the mid-1920s in the dark, providing live accompaniment for movie audiences. "When Warner Bros. announced in 1928 that they wouldn't make any more silent movies, I knew I had to find a new line of work."

He became an organist for radio stations and also founded the Mitchell Boys Choir, which performed music for and appeared in dozens of "talkies," including Bing Crosby's *Going My Way*. When the Silent Movie Theatre reopened in the early 1990s, he got his old job back.

For films ranging from *The Little Rascal* to Cecil B. De Mille's *Carmen*, Mitchell pulls from classical and popular music—as long as the piece wasn't written after the movie was made. "For instance," he explains, "for a scene where immigrants land at Ellis Island, I'll play 'Sidewalks of New York,' which was composed in the 1890s, but never 'New York, New York.'" —Elissa Royal

How It All Started by Bill Eberle



Bill Eberle in the studio
(Click picture to make larger.)

I first started listening to "Old Time Radio" in 1986. I remember I was driving to Maryland to visit my daughter during the Christmas season when I accidentally ran across a radio station that was broadcasting an episode of *The Lone Ranger*. In keeping with the holiday season, the story dealt with Christmas. Of course I had grown up listening to the radio shows and as TV became more popular, and the radio shows disappeared, I had all but forgotten about them. It was great to hear *The Lone Ranger* again after so many years. It was my favorite radio show.

Then I searched the radio dial and found several stations that rebroadcast the old radio shows. One station was WCAU in Philadelphia. The show was hosted by Jim McCormick and

later Gary Hodson. Unfortunately, the show was often pre-empted by regularly scheduled sports, such as the Philadelphia Phillies.

As it turned out, several of my friends at work also enjoyed the old radio shows. One of them mentioned that he buys radio shows on tape. At the time I thought to myself, "Why would anyone buy radio shows when you can hear them rebroadcast on radio stations?"

Well, I started buying a few. Mostly *The Lone Ranger* shows, including the Christmas story I had heard driving to Maryland. One purchase lead to another. At first, I would concentrate on the shows I was familiar with. Then I branched out to other shows that seemed interesting. Today, my collection consists of over 3,700 shows.

How did I get started on radio? Well, another friend and co-worker, a volunteer DJ at the Vassar College station (WVCR in Poughkeepsie) told the station manager that I had a collection of radio shows. He wondered if I would be interested in broadcasting the radio shows at WVCR, but I told him that I had no experience and was concerned about making a weekly commitment. He was persistent, though, and I finally accepted the offer. The station manager wanted me to come up with a name for the show and a short description. When my DJ friend asked me what music I was going to select for the theme to my show, I didn't have to think twice about using *The Lone Ranger's* theme music, *The William Tell Overture*. My wife came up with the name of the show, *Radio Showtime*, and when I went to the studio for my first show four days later, a listing and description of my show were already in the new station program guide.

My first show was broadcast November 5, 1989.

What was the first show I broadcast? You guessed it! *The Lone Ranger*.

I was pleasantly surprised when I went to the studio the next week and found a post card from a listener, telling me how much he liked the old radio shows. He named a few shows that he especially enjoyed, including one starring Peter Lorre. He couldn't remember the name of the show, but I recognized it as *Mystery In The Air* and played it for him the following week.

Initially, *Radio Showtime* was only one hour long, but it soon expanded to two hours, and then finally to three. At first, I didn't know if I had enough shows so as not to repeat any. But it's been nine years, and I've only repeated shows for holidays and special requests.

Paul Winchell, Ventriloquist - 82

Mr. Winchell attended the SPERDVAC conventions [when they were still having them] even after he suffered a stroke. In '96 when Steve Allen was the master of ceremonies he was looking around the room for friends to comment on and when his gaze met Paul Winchell's, he stepped down and grabbed his hands in tribute. There wasn't a dry eye in the room. He was a very good showman for so many years on early TV from '47. He was sad that his best work was done live and didn't have anything for future children and parents to enjoy. He did a show for Metromedia from '64 to '68 that was taped and then erased in a dispute over syndication rights.

The voice of the legendary ventriloquist is preserved as Walt Disney's Tigger in Winnie the Pooh. Winchell earned a Grammy in '68 for "The Most Wonderful Things About Tiggers".

During a career spanning six decades computers can make everything talk, so there's no need for the art of ventriloquism anymore" he told The LA he saw television evolve from the best asset to something of a nemesis for ventriloquists. "Television and its use of Winchell's co-star Jerry Mahoney was introduced to the nation in '36 on Major Bowes Original Hour, earning first prize. Jerry, the smart mouthed puppet Paul had invented in his teen years joined him in '47 on NBC TV for "The Paul Winchell - Jerry Mahoney Show". His string of children's shows through the 60s welcomed top named including Carol Burnett, Lucille Ball and Angela Lansbury. Named television's most versatile performer in '52 and '52 by Look magazine was also in demand as a panelist on "What's My Line?" and for guest roles on The Beverly Hillbillies,

Perry Mason, and Love American Style.

Winchell was also an inventor, holding 30 patents including one for an artificial heart from '63 that he donated to the University of Utah for research. Times in 1988. Among Winchell's other inventions were an early disposable razor, a flameless cigarette lighter, an invisible garter belt, and an indicator to show when frozen food had gone bad after a power outage.

Winchell donated the original versions of his best-known sidekicks, Jerry Mahoney and Knucklehead Smiff to the Smithsonian Institution.

Computers have replaced the art of ventriloquism, "I don't think kids today would even understand it."



Goodbye sweet prince . . . and thanks for all the entertainment!

Myrna Oliver, LA Times Staff Writer

John Fiedler, 80; Actor -

A veteran character actor known for playing Mr Peterson, the henpecked therapy patient on "The Bob Newhart Show" has passed away at the Booth Actor's Fund Home in Englewood, NJ.

John joined us for the FOTR convention a few years ago to star as Homer on Henry Aldrich and had a fine time among his many fans of his 50-year-plus career on stage, screen and live television as well as the taped variety. He worked with Frank Thomas and Jan Merlin on Tom Corbett, Space Cadet in a recurring part.

Fiedler knew early on that he would be a character actor. "People would come up and say, 'Gosh, I thought it was you, then I heard your voice and I knew.'" Nine times out of ten, they didn't know the name.

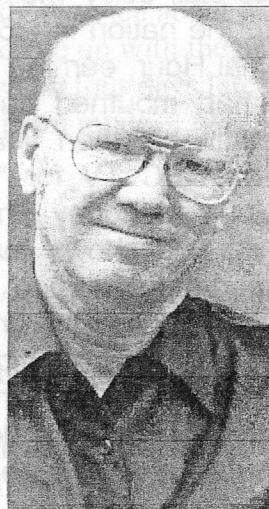
He played Juror No. 2, in the '57 courtroom drama "12 Angry Men" and Vinnie in the original Broadway production of "The Odd Couple" as well as the only non-white character in the '59 drama "A Raisin in the Sun" on Broadway.

The son of an Irish-German beer salesman, Fiedler was born in Plattsville, Wis. His family moved to Shorewood, a suburb of Milwaukee, when he was 5, and he nurtured his dream of becoming an actor by staging

productions in the family garage with other children in the neighborhood.

After graduating from high school in 1943, he enlisted in the Navy, serving stateside during WWII, then moving on to New York City, where he studied at the Neighborhood Playhouse. In the early 1950^s Fiedler had a stint playing Homer on NBC Radio's "The Aldrich Family".

"He was a very sweet man, and when you're that nice of a guy it's easy to play Piglet for Walt Disney in the Winnie the Pooh series since the 1960^s. Fiedler's kindness extended to his vocal delivery for the character. It was like the wind blowing through tall grass. It sounded homey, and it sounded comforting."



PHIL HARRIS-ALICE FAYE COLLECTION

by

Candy Taylor

Phil Harris-Alice Faye Collection

The Phil Harris-Alice Faye Collection, or "the library" as Harris referred to it, is a collection of memorabilia, which the Harrises donated to Linton in 1979 in connection with the original Phil Harris weekend. This is one of the most important legacies Harris left to his hometown of Linton. Originally the collection was located upstairs in the Margaret Cooper Public Library on 110 East Vincennes Street. In the spring of 1998 the collection was relocated to the basement of Ambank on 89 West Vincennes Street. Three rooms now house the collection in a temperature-controlled environment.

Phil Harris was born in Linton on June 24, 1904, the only child of Harry and Dollie Wright Harris. He moved from Linton and became a famous movie actor and musician. He married Alice Faye, who was a popular movie actress in the 1930s and 1940s.

The memorabilia is a virtual history of show business and represents much of the lives and careers of both Harris and his wife. The collection has provided hours of pleasure for visitors. It is an important source of information about the Harrises. The collection includes photos, scrapbooks, clippings, awards, and magazines.

As a tribute to his hometown that gave him so many childhood memories, Phil Harris started a scholarship program from the proceeds of the Phil Harris Weekend. In addition, he and his wife donated personal mementoes, which were housed in the Phil Harris-Alice Faye Collection.

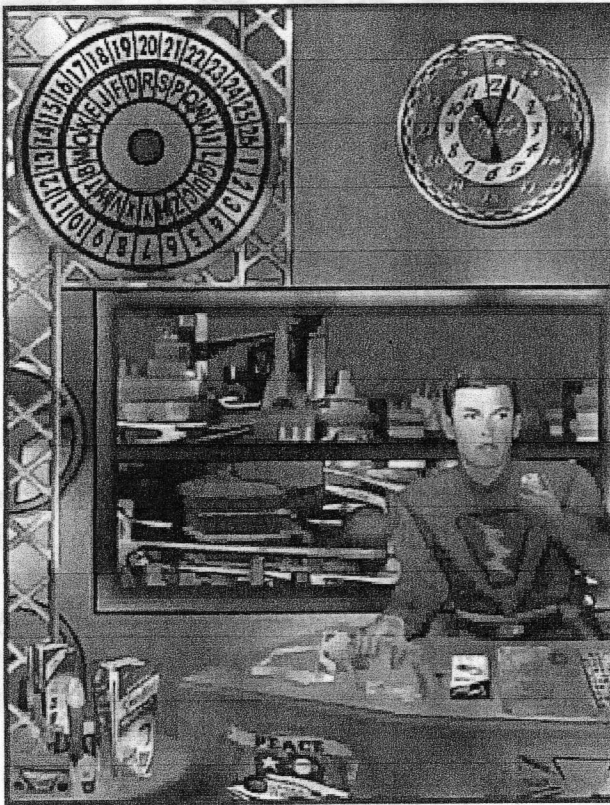
Sadly, the collection now includes memorabilia relating to Phil Harris' death on August 11, 1995, at age 91, just a few weeks after he returned to his beloved Linton for his last Phil Harris Scholarship Festival. Harris' remains now rest in California, but a large part of him and his life continues to live on in the Harris-Faye Collection in his hometown of Linton, Indiana.

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It's Hard to Lose a Hero By Dr. Warren Chaney



Heroes are in short supply these days. The world lost one on November 9, 2004.

Edward Kemmer, known to millions of his fans as Commander Buzz Corry, passed away in New York City. Ed starred in that role during the 50's run of the top rated television series, Space Patrol. Most of time, heroes of the screen are celluloid only. I've been a film and television director for 30 years and during that time I've seldom seen any similarity between an actor's screen image and the actor. This was not true with Ed Kemmer. Ed Kemmer and Commander Corry were so similar that it often appeared that only the name changed.

In real life, Ed was a hero. He was a fighter pilot during World War II and crash landed behind enemy lines on his 48th combat mission. He escaped and was recaptured and remained a POW until freed by General Patton's army at the end of the war.

I got to know Ed some 25 years ago when directing a television network Saturday morning sci-fi movie. During the filming, the special effects team failed to deliver several crucial rocket cockpit scenes.

The studio panicked when it learned the "cockpit" special effects were unable to be filmed. Hearing of it, I improvised. I had the "blue screen" cut from the cockpit and mounted a camera on the outside looking in. Actors were put in place and the scenes filmed. As the space craft veered this way and that, the camera mount tilted and turned, matching the movement of the actors who were directed to do the same.

The results looked impressive.

"Brilliant," cried the studio executives. "Impressive," said another, "And, all without the costs of special effects."

Fortunately, the studio had never seen or didn't remember, Space Patrol. I was merely duplicating the shots I remembered as a child. As I drove home, I mused on the "effect" the series had upon my childhood and adult life. My education, career, and avocations all owe their genesis to the space opera of my childhood. You can imagine my delight when one of my cast members informed me that she had worked with Ed Kemmer for several years in the soap opera, The Guiding Light. She had Ed's address and phone number and soon arranged for me to meet him.

Having the opportunity to know Ed Kemmer over the past years has been one of the real delights of my life. Ed was Commander Corry. He was very much the same person off the screen that he was on. Just as he'd been a "leader" in the military, he fit the role of a leader of the Space Patrol. When you work in a world of actors as I do, it's so refreshing to find a non-actor, actor. If he had any pretense, I never picked up on it. If there was an out of control ego, I never saw it.

Ed worked his entire professional life which is no small feat in this business. After Space Patrol he starred in a number of features and appeared in countless television productions. He spent the later years of his career as a highly successful lead in the soaps. Ed was successful because he was a very talented actor. His talent and military leadership skills were obvious in the Space Patrol series. He easily moved from television to radio and back to television again. Each media required different acting skills and Kemmer mastered them all.

Generations later, young people continue to watch and enjoy Space Patrol. Fifty years later, it can still grip the imaginations of young people. Yes, the sets and production values are crude by modern standards but so are most things. Yet, the characterization of Kemmer's Commander Corry still commands the attention and respect of young people, new to the show.

My 12 years old son Grayson, grew up on Space Patrol as have many children of the series early fans. When he learned of Ed's death, he cried. As I write, he sits on the stairs leading down to my office and is sobbing quietly. He sits directly below a framed poster from the show.

When Space Patrol suddenly went off the air, I was stunned. It came as a shock to the millions of children and adults who tuned in every Saturday. The show's ratings had been quite high for both the television and radio productions. As other sci-fi programs had shrinking sets and diminished budgets, Space Patrol was just the opposite. Unfortunately, irreconcilable conflict between ABC and Helen Mosher led to it's premature demise.

Children saw Space Patrol as an integral part of their life. Commander Corry was a family member. When the series ended, kids lost their first important fraternity membership and a loved one. I once remarked to Ed that when the series went off the air, I didn't think I would ever get over the loss. As I sit here writing, I realize that I never have.

Ed Kemmer was always kind, considerate, and generous to his legions of fans. He signed autographs endlessly, answered the same questions over and over with remarkable enthusiasm, and always posed for pictures whenever asked. His passing will forever leave an empty space in the lives of the fans who knew him or just viewed him. Other's will step in and fill his space...but, they will never fill his place.

My son just got up from the stairs and headed toward the kitchen.

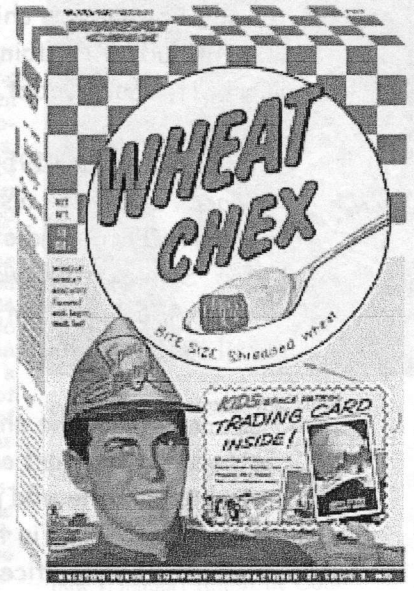
"How are you, Grayson?" I asked.

"I'm okay Dad," he replied. "It's just hard."

"Getting something to drink?" I questioned.

"No, Dad," he replied. "I'm gonna eat a bowl of Wheat Chex."

I joined him and we ate in silence, staring at a "collector's" box of Chex. For you see, it's hard to lose a hero.



| ... Return to Memorial Page ... |

LOS ANGELES TIMES -
November 13, 2004

Ed Kemmer, 84:
Played Lead on '50s Sci-Fi TV Show
'Space Patrol'

By Dennis McLellan, Times Staff Writer

Ed Kemmer, who played the heroic, steel-jawed Cmdr. Buzz Corry on the popular 1950s children's science-fiction television program "Space Patrol" and later was a regular on numerous TV soap operas, has died. He was 84.

Kemmer, who suffered a stroke Nov. 5, died Tuesday at St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center in New York City, said family friend Jean-Noel Bassior, author of an upcoming book about "Space Patrol."

Television was still a novelty when "Space Patrol" debuted on March 9, 1950, as a 15-minute show that aired live five days a week on Channel 7 in Los Angeles. It was one of a trio of pre-Sputnik-era children's "space operas" that included "Captain Video" and "Tom Corbett, Space Cadet."

By the summer of 1950, a radio version of "Space Patrol" was also airing on the ABC radio network. By the end of the year, a weekly half-hour "Space Patrol" was being broadcast live on the ABC television network, where it ran until 1955.

"Space Patrol!" the announcer dramatically intoned at the start of each episode. "High adventure in the wild reaches of space ... missions of daring in the name of interplanetary justice. Travel into the future with Buzz Corry ... commander in chief of ... the Space Patrol."

Tall and handsome with wavy-brown hair, Kemmer was ideal for the heroic lead role of

Corry, who policed the solar system as commander of the 30th century battle cruiser Terra V. A real-life hero, Kemmer had been a World War II fighter pilot who spent 11 months in a German prisoner of war camp. After the war, he studied acting at the Pasadena Playhouse on the GI Bill.

"I didn't know what the devil TV was all about, but I thought it looked fascinating," Kemmer told Gary H. Grossman, author of the 1981 book "Saturday Morning TV."

When Kemmer started on "Space Patrol," he was paid \$8 per 15-minute show. "We did the program on a shoestring, thinking, hoping, praying it would go network," he said.

Although the budget - and his pay - increased substantially after "Space Patrol" hit the network, cast members still had to deal with acting on live TV.

One time, Kemmer told the Asbury Park Press in 2002, "we were shooting a scene in the cockpit of the spaceship. Everything outside of the cockpit was dark, of course, because it was supposed to be outer space. So we were doing our dialogue, and all of a sudden a stagehand walks by outside the cockpit carrying a 2-by-4!"

Kemmer ignored it, but co-star Lyn Osborn, who played his comic sidekick, Cadet Happy, was "a real jokester and did the biggest double take you ever saw."

Osborn loved playing jokes, Kemmer said in another interview. "Sometimes, when he would forget a line, he would look at me and say, 'Well, what do you say, Commander?' and I would have to fill in until he could pick up his lines."

Bassior, whose "Space Patrol: Missions of Daring in the Name of Early Television," will be published by McFarland in December, told The Times this week that the series "gave the country a positive vision of a space-age future."

Date: Wed, 15 Jun 2005 08:41:11 -0400

DerekTague

It's very difficult for me to write this, but I considered Nana Clute to be an integral part of the Old-Time Radio scene. For the record and for the benefits of those who never saw Ed and Nana Clute in action as they provided music for many an OTR convention, Nana pronounced her name "NAY-nuh" (rhymes w/ "Dana") rather than the traditional way based on the way it looks, i.e. "NAH-nuh."

Nana was Ed's eyes and was the one who prompted Ed as she looked out for music cues during OTR re-creations. As testament to her importance, one year at the FOTR planning meeting, Arthur Anderson posited a gentle reminder that re-creation directors prepare their scripts so that the credit would read "Music by Ed and Nana Clute," and pointed out that the music not be solely attributed to Ed, because as Arthur mentioned "Ed can't do it alone." At this juncture at the meeting, "that Godfrey Guy" Lee Munsick (Lee was still living in NJ at the time) nominated Nana on-the-spot for the FOTR "Alan Rockford Award," which Ed had previously won [The Rockford award is presented to OTR hobbyists, particularly those involved with the FOTR convention, who help further the hobby]. Ed was happy to present this award to his beloved wife that autumn.

It always amazed me what a dynamo Nana was. She was a short-stature woman who dedicated herself to her husband, whom she usually referred to as "Edward," and his art. She tirelessly drove the mini-van and unloaded Ed's keyboards, speakers, & other musical accoutrements.

It was an after-hours tradition at FOTR conventions for several of us to hang out in the bar at the Holiday Inn's bar/lounge. I often found myself in with the crowd that included Ed & Nana Clute, Will & Babs Hutchins, Maggie & Valerie Thompson, Gary Yoggy & his contingent of central New York state OTR fans including the Boogie-Woogie Girls, Anthony Tollin, and several others. It was at these ad hoc gatherings where Ed and I would trade awful puns (the less said about them, the better). One time, Nana got a good one in:

Q: Did ya hear about the guy who went to sleep and dreamed he was the tail-pipe of a 1952 Studebaker?

A: He woke up exhausted.

I'm sure I'm not alone in applauding the love and warmth that emanated from Nana Clute not only for the furtherance of this hobby, but also for her incomparably talented husband Edward Clute. We'll all miss you Nana.

Derek Tague

CLUTE, Nana Elliott

Age 68, died Monday, June 13, 2005, at Arnot-Ogden Hospital, following a prolonged struggle with diabetes. Nana was the daughter of Catherine and Arthur Elliott of Dundee. She graduated from Dundee Central School in 1954 and earned a degree in speech pathology from Syracuse University. She spent several years devoted to teaching horseback riding in Greenwich, CT. Nana was a member and past President of The Women's Study Club of The Dundee Library; she served on the board of the Southern Tier Library System, and worked with the Watkins Glen 4-H dog obedience program. Nana was also involved in the family business, Elliott Insurance Agency, for many years. For the past thirty-three years, Nana was a devoted wife and constant companion to her husband, Edward S. Clute and



enjoyed accompanying him to all his piano performances and Old Radio Show Conventions. Nana was loved and survived by her brother, Warren (Joyce) Elliott of North Carolina; niece, Nana Elliott of Las Vegas; nephew, Arthur (Dianna) Elliott of Connecticut; several cousins and many worldwide friends. A memorial service will be conducted at a later date to be announced at the Dundee Methodist Church. Contributions in her memory may be made to the Dundee Library 32 Water St., Dundee, NY 14837; or Arnot-Ogden Memorial Hospital Foundation, 600 Roe Ave., Elmira, NY 14905. Arrangements by Royce-Chedzoy Funeral Home, 212 E. 4th St., Watkins Glen.

Les Paul and His Machines, 1950

By **DAVID HINCKLEY**

Somewhere there's music

How faint the tune

Somewhere there's heaven

How high the moon

"How High the Moon" started life as one of hundreds of songs composed by the prolific team of composer Morgan Lewis and lyricist Nancy Hamilton.

It quickly rose above the pack, however, becoming the breakout hit from its 1940 Broadway vehicle, "Two for the Road," as well as a favorite in the jazz world. Within the next decade, hundreds of jazz musicians had played and recorded it, up to the level of Charlie Parker.

So it's not surprising that it also fell into the repertoire of Lester Polfus, a genial Wisconsin fellow who started his career singing country tunes as Rhubarb Red and by the late 1930s had heard Eddie Lang and been converted to jazz, for which he adopted the name Les Paul.

By the late 1940s, he was a well-known touring and recording artist. He was also, in a paradox not uncommon in the music business, almost flat broke.

Personally, he was thrifty — to put it mildly — except he had this thing for electronics. He would buy sound equipment and recording devices obsessively, then try to wire them up to do things they hadn't done before, like multitracking.

By 1950 he was also convinced that this newfangled thing called television was the future for live musicians. Having just signed a deal with Capitol Records, he packed up all his gadgetry along with his wife — Mary Ford, who was also the vocalist in his live and recording act — and moved everything to the place where this television thing was

happening, which, of course, was New York.

Specifically, he headed for Jackson Heights, which he knew because he had briefly lived there years earlier. Since then, it turned out, prices had gone up. So he took a small apartment on Northern Blvd. over the Two Pigs Meat Market. It cost \$40 a month, but he figured it worked out okay because he didn't have to have a phone. Anyone who needed him could call the butcher, who would then holler upstairs to Les that he had a call.

Mary wasn't altogether happy with this, but Les was convinced they were on the brink of stardom. Combine his guitar and Mary's voice with the right multitracking, he told her, and they would be unstoppable.

At the very least it would catapult them past their friend Patti Page, who had a voice similar to Mary's and whose records already featured primitive double-voice multitracking.

In late 1950, both Les/Mary and Page put out versions of "The Tennessee Waltz." But Page's got to the market a little earlier and was the bigger hit, which made Paul even more determined to pull ahead.

He set up recording equipment in their tiny apartment and soon was recording almost around the clock. When neighbors got tired of too many vocals at 3 a.m., he would prop a blanket over Mary to muffle the noise.

Meanwhile, like all those other jazz players, Paul had added "How High the Moon" to his live show, and he told Jim Conkling, his boss at Capitol, he'd like to record it.

Conkling told him to forget it. Musicians love it, he said, but the public couldn't care less. Capitol had, by his count, 23 recorded versions, none of which it intended to release because none sounded like a hit. Record store owners wouldn't even stock any more versions.

One night soon thereafter Paul went out to grab a couple of White Castle burgers. On the way home he stopped at a tavern where he ran into a friend who expressed interest in the multitracking experiments. During their conversation, there was sketched out yet another new arrangement for "How High the Moon," this one using many, many tracks. And when Paul got home, he called another musician named Zeke Manners, who lived on Riverside Drive, and asked him to come over to Jackson Heights to start recording.

As the hours went by, Paul played his tracks while Manners chimed in on accordion. Mary added the lead vocal, harmonies and some acoustic guitar.

By daybreak, "How High the Moon" sounded like it had never sounded before.

Like nothing else had sounded before. It had 12 tracks.

Les Paul loved it and rushed over to play it for Jim Conkling, who once again told him to forget it.

"It's the most ridiculous lyrics I've ever heard," said Conkling. "It's not going to go."

In early 1951, however, Conkling took a job at Columbia and in what he later called a moment of sentimentality, he agreed that one of the last releases he'd schedule for Capitol would be "How High the Moon."

He still didn't think it would be a hit, which was the same thing he said about another record he released only with great reluctance, Nat King Cole's "Mona Lisa."

"How High the Moon" was released in late March. By late April it was the No. 1 record in the country, topping Patti Page's version.

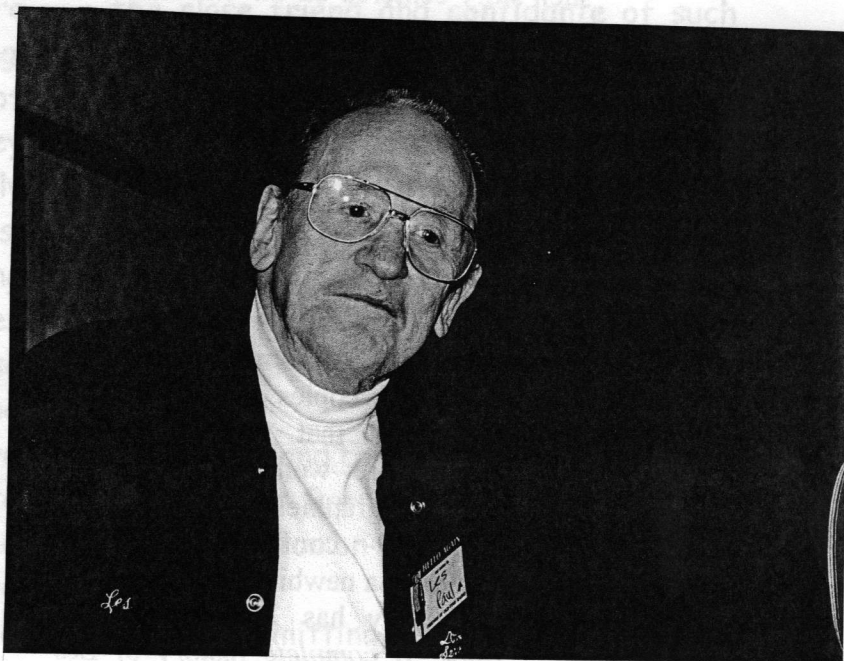
Some jazz critics decried the multitracking as a gimmick that diminished the music, but

Paul would live to see multitracking redefine the way popular music is made.

"'How High the Moon' had terrific verve," wrote Rolling Stone Bill Wyman years later. "It was proof at last that pop music had something more than love songs; that it could provide stylish instrumental inventiveness."

"How High the Moon" also propelled Les Paul and Mary Ford to a decade of hits and a large home in Mahwah, N.J. They were divorced in 1964, and she died in 1977, but Paul lives there to this day, surrounded by a personal museum of every electronic device with which he has ever experimented.

Originally published on September 27, 2005



Being Introduced to Les Paul Or: What's all the (Pol)fuss about?

By Melanie Aultman

Les Paul? I'd heard of him. Although my mother sang solos in church and at weddings and funerals, I have no formal music education beyond public school, church choir and a college course in Latin American music. Music listened to at home was, I often joke, Swan Lake and Patsy Cline. Not much of a collector, music purchases for me were almost always the greatest hits albums of favorite artists.

Fast forward to a recent exposure to and ever increasing appreciation for old-time radio. Other OTR enthusiasts would reminisce about guests that had attended the various conventions. One such story centered on the attendance of Mr. Paul at a Friends of Old-Time Radio (FOTR) meeting in Newark. Asked if I was familiar with his work, I had to confess that no, I wasn't. This was apparently a SACRILEGE of the highest order!

But rather than rebuke or criticize, the loyal fan encouraged me into the fold by directing me to some biographical information and copies of Paul's music. Since it seems that readers of this publication are well versed in the subject and biographies sometimes vary in facts, I'll confine myself to observations of a newbie to the scene.

My library has *The Gibson Les Paul Book: a complete history of Les Paul Guitars* by Tony Bacon and Paul Day. [GPI Books, San Francisco 1993] Text alternates with color pictures of the changing models throughout production history. One without a musical

background might approach the material as though learning a foreign language. Humbucking pickup? No matter. It only serves to add to the mystique surrounding musicians and their world. I called a local musical instrument store and asked if they sell Les Paul guitars. I was told that, in general, they don't because they thought the Gibson people are hard to deal with. They do have a used LP Epiphone, so I plan to go and see it.

I suspected perhaps a gypsy or flamenco influence in some recordings. Mary Alice Shaughnessy's *Les Paul an American Original* mentions the influence of the work of a gypsy guitarist from Belgium, Django Reinhardt. When listening to Paul's music, I think the same thing as when I was once lucky enough to hear flamenco guitarist Carlos Montoya in person. How does he get those sounds out of that instrument? One can "hear" the diligence and dedication of Mr. Paul in the effortlessness in which he plays.

Whether one chooses to believe one particular story over another of how certain things came to pass in Les' career, I can't help thinking that his "story" would be a good one for a junior biography. What a positive message of perseverance! One senses that he is a "good guy" who continues to give back to the profession again and again.

So was the fan who introduced me to Les Paul successful? No use reinventing the wheel—believe the Monkees said it best — "I'm a Believer!"

RON LACKMANN, Author

From *Archie Andrews* to *Tom Mix*, all radio characters and programs that ever stemmed from a comic book or Comic Strips on radio's golden age are collected here for the first time, in an easy-to-read, A through Z book!

From Ron's introduction:

"The wonderful thing about Radio as it used to be in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s is that whoever or whatever you were hearing over the airwaves was your very own visual creation. It was your imagination that supplied the images of what the people, places, and situations you heard looked like. The "pretty" girl was your version of what "pretty" was . . . and the "handsome" hero was your visualization of what constituted "handsome." During the memorable years when Radio was America's favorite home entertainment medium, the airwaves were permeated with all sorts of programming. There were the daytime dramas of domestic stress, or soap operas as they were called because they were usually sponsored by soap detergent companies, that at-home moms and night-working dads could tune in to hear and sometimes their sick-at-home with a cold kids also listened to "the soaps." There were the five-day-a-week children's adventure serials that were heard in the late afternoon when youngsters came home from school. There were prime time mystery programs, and comedy and variety shows, game and panel, and even adaptations of great works of the theater and literature, as well as radio versions of well known films, for the minds eye to envision. www.BearManorMedia.bizland.com/id60.html \$19.95 ISBN 1-593-021-6

RON LACKMANN, Author

Mercedes McCambridge, A Biography and Career Record

Mercedes McCambridge made her professional acting debut in Chicago on NBC radio in 1956. By 1946, no less an authority than Orson Welles called her "the world's greatest radio actress." McCambridge later became an Academy Award winning film star (*All the King's Men, Giant, and Johnny Guitar*) and Tony Award nominee who starred on Broadway in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolfe* and Neil Simon's *Lost in Yonkers*. The actress's private life included two marriages, divorces and suicide attempts, the murder of her two granddaughters and daughter-in-law by her only child, John Patrick, and his subsequent suicide, and her long-time battle with alcoholism. Mercedes was the close friend and confidante of such well known celebrities as producer Billy Rose, legendary film stars James Dean, Rita Hayworth, Montgomery Clift, and Mrlene Dietrich, novelist Edna Ferber, and two-time presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson.

Publisher - McFarland Company, Inc. Box 611, Jefferson, North Carolina 28640. \$45

www.mcfarland.com

Available at Barnes & Noble Bookstores and at Amazon on-line.

Health permitting, Mr. Lackmann will be autographing these and other books he has published at the Friends Of Old-Time Radio Convention in Newark, October '05.



The Phil Harris-Alice Faye Collection, or "the library" as Harris referred to it, is a collection of memorabilia, which the Harris' donated to Linton in 1979 in connection with the original Phil Harris weekend. This is one of the most important legacies Harris left to his hometown of Linton. Originally the collection was located upstairs in the Margaret Cooper Public Library on 110 East Vincennes Street. In the spring of 1998 the collection was relocated to the basement of Ambank on 89 West Vincennes Street. Three rooms now house the collection in a temperature-controlled environment.

Phil Harris was born in Linton on June 24, 1904, the only child of Harry and Dollie Wright Harris. He moved from Linton and became a famous movie actor and musician. He married Alice Faye, who was a popular movie actress in the 1930s and 1940s.

The memorabilia is a virtual history of show business and represents much of the lives and careers of both Harris and his wife. The collection has provided hours of pleasure for visitors. It is an important source of information about the Harris'. The collection includes photos, scrapbooks, clippings, awards, and magazines.

As a tribute to his hometown that gave him so many childhood memories, Phil Harris started a

scholarship program from the proceeds of the Phil Harris Weekend. In addition, he and his wife donated personal mementos, which were housed in the Phil Harris-Alice Faye Collection.

Sadly, the collection now includes memorabilia relating to Phil Harris' death on August 11, 1995, at age 91, just a few weeks after he returned to his beloved Linton for his last Phil Harris Scholarship Festival. Harris' remains now rest in California, but a large part of him and his life continues to live on in the Harris-Faye Collection in his hometown of Linton, Indiana.

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the PHIL HARRIS / ALICE FAYE COLLECTION



PHIL HARRIS
1904 - 1995

ALICE FAYE
1915 - 1999

Phil Harris

Phil Harris (June 24, 1904 – August 11, 1995) was a United States singer, songwriter, jazz musician and actor.

Harris was born **Wonga Phillip Harris** in Linton, Indiana, on June 24, 1904. He began his career in show business as a band drummer in San Francisco. In the late 1920s, he formed an orchestra with Carol Lofner, and began a long run at the St. Francis Hotel. By 1932, the partnership had broken up, and Phil Harris was leading and singing with his own band based in Los Angeles.

Harris married an Australian, Marcia Ralston, in 1928. The couple divorced in 1939. Their adopted son, Phil Harris, Jr., was born in 1935.

In 1936, Harris became the musical director of the Jack Benny show. In addition to singing and leading the band, Harris was an important member of Jack's gang on this ensemble show, playing himself as a hard-drinking, brash, egotistical, illiterate Southerner. His obnoxious but good-natured character was a popular addition to the cast, known for his musicians' hipster slang, and his casual use of nicknames for the rest of the cast. His usual entry line was to greet Benny with a cheery, "Hiya, Jackson!" His signature song from the program was "That's What I Like About the South."

In 1941, Harris married actress Alice Faye, and in 1946-48, the two hosted radio's *The Fitch Bandwagon*. Originally a showcase for big bands, *The Fitch Bandwagon* evolved into a situation

comedy with Harris and Faye. The couple continued in their own radio program, *The Phil Harris-Alice Faye Show*, from 1948 to 1954. In this domestic situation comedy, Harris and Faye played themselves, while actresses played their daughters Alice, born in 1942, and Phyllis, born in 1944.

Harris made many guest appearances on popular television programs during the 1960s and into the 1970s, with many appearances on the *Kraft Music Hall*, *The Dean Martin Show*, *Hollywood Palace* and other musical variety programs.

Harris also worked as a singer and voice actor for animated films, with performances in the Disney animated features *The Aristocats*, playing Thomas O'Malley, and *The Jungle Book* where he voiced the character of "Baloo the Bear" and sang one of the movie's showstoppers, "The Bare Necessities." He was also the voice of Little John in the 1973 animated movie *Robin Hood*.

Song hits by Harris included the early 1950s novelty record, "The Thing." The song talks about the hapless finder of a box with a mysterious secret and his efforts to rid himself of it.

A close friend and associate of Bing Crosby, Harris was a longtime resident and benefactor of Palm Springs, California. He died in Palm Springs in 1995. Until shortly before his death, Harris returned annually to his hometown of Linton for a celebrity golf tournament in his honor. He also performed at the local high school and distributed scholarships to promising students. In 1993, Harris was inducted into the Indiana Hall of Fame. He is buried in the Palm Springs Mortuary & Mausoleum. Faye died in 1998





INDUSTRY NEWS

Old Time Radio Meets the Digital Age

Industry News, Scoop, Friday, March 24, 2006

At no time since the heyday of old time radio has there been so much potential for such shows as *Jack Benny*, *The Shadow*, *Burns & Allen*, *Dragnet*, *The Lone Ranger*, or *The Great Gildersleeve*. The Green Hornet is once more ready to fight crime, Abbot and Costello will continue trying to straighten out who's on first, and Fibber McGee and Molly will again keep folks laughing.

Like the market for high-grade and scarce radio premiums and related pop culture collectibles, the demand for old time radio programs themselves is increasing. Much of that call for the hits of yesteryear has been driven by new media, none more so than the advent of subscription-based digital radio.

Sirius Satellite Radio, which along with XM Satellite Radio is one of the two largest suppliers in this rapidly growing and highly competitive field, offer a full channel devoted almost exclusively to old time radio. The only new program on Channel 118, at least at this point, is *The Twilight Zone*, which features star-studded radio interpretations of Rod Serling's TV drama. Jim Caviezel, Jane Seymour, John Ratzenberger, Daniel J. Travanti, and host Stacy Keach have been among the performers following in the footsteps of the stars of the 1930s, '40s and '50s. Other than this one program, though, it's been a pure blast of historic entertainment.

After the widespread introduction of television in the 1950s, original radio drama and comedy gave way to all-music formats over a period of just a few years. Following that, FM radio marginalized AM radio, and old time radio was further relegated to the history books, or so it seemed.

But many beloved programs wouldn't go away. Sound recordings, first on record, then cassette, and then CD, kept memories alive for collectors who heard the shows when they originally aired. Then new audiences, sometimes children and grandchildren of original fans, began hearing the material. In many regions, local radio stations began airing the shows again. The collectibles market, too, contributed to keeping characters and programs alive by compiling and documenting the many promotional items which were created for them. Numerous record prices over the years kept the



1934 Cardboard Promotional Sign For The Shadow Radio Program



1940s George Burns and Gracie Allen Display Sign

mainstream media at least vaguely aware of this loyal following.

Just as the booming ratings of the past decade have shown that there's a lot of life left in AM radio, so too is there imagination and entertainment bottled up in older programs waiting to get out. And just as there's been a sustained upward surge in the awareness of pop culture history, there's been an explosion of avenues through which information and the programs themselves can be disseminated.

With hundreds of websites dedicated to old time radio, the success of radio on the local level, and satellite radio technology becoming so readily available, it was probably only a matter of time until demand met supply. Now the staples of radio's past have become part of the fabric of radio's present, and they may well be securing a part of the medium's future as well.

For the car or portable radios, subscription based radio requires the listener to get a special receiver (ranging from about \$50 to \$280) and pay a monthly fee. The competition between Sirius and XM has been heady to date, with high profile signings such as Howard Stern and Major League Baseball dominating the news.

Once a member, though, listeners can simply tune in through any computer with internet access and speakers.

The ability for listeners around the world turn on old time radio means that the potential audience dwarfs the 130 million original potential listeners from the early 1940s market in the United States.



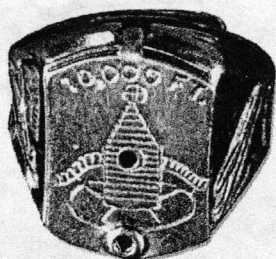
1947 Superman Radio Show Ad Sheet



1938 Green Hornet Radio Fan Club Photo



1945 Lone Ranger Paper Mask



The rare Little Orphan Annie Altascope Premium Ring one of eight known examples



1940s Promotional Blotter with Mailer For The Whistler Radio Show

Ode to 'Amos' doesn't offend

KINGFISH, AMOS 'N' ANDY.

World premiere by Carl Clay. At Black Spectrum Theatre, Roy Wilkins Park, Baisley Boulevard at 177th Street, Jamaica, through March 26. Seen Friday.

BY STEVE PARKS
NEWSDAY STAFF WRITER, 16 Feb '06

Why is it that we can still see D.W. Griffith's 1915 racist epic, "Birth of a Nation," but "Amos 'n' Andy" remains banned after 50 years?

Now a black theater company has mounted an affectionate look back at the first TV series to feature an all-black cast. From its radio comedy days, with white men voicing the leads, to its 1951 television premiere, "Amos 'n' Andy" was the target of an NAACP boycott. Set in Harlem, the sitcom was considered objectionable because of stereotypes depicting blacks as lazy, shiftless and none too bright. But in its two years in prime time, "Amos 'n' Andy" made America laugh; after it was canceled, the show remained in rerun syndication until 1966.

Which brings us to Carl Clay's new play about the show he grew up watching. In commentary that opens and closes its two acts, we learn of "Amos 'n' Andy's" popularity with black Americans who were supposedly offended.

In re-creating the characters on a throwback set by Harlan Penn, complete with the social lodge where slow-moving Lightnin' (Fulton Hodges) pushes a broom, it's apparent that black Americans, at least those attending Friday night, still find "Amos 'n' Andy" funny. Or so it seems, judging from the laughter and interplay with the actors, who work the crowd from the aisles as well as the stage.

Todd Davis brings an indefatigable braggadocio to Kingfish, strutting bombastically like a young James Earl Jones. He's up to no good, swindling his fencepost-dumb pal, Andy (Jamaican-accented

Andrew Cooksey), out of "antique" cigars worth a grand each.

As with the TV version, Kingfish's troubles reside mostly on the home front, where his wife, Sapphire (an imposingly assertive Arlene McGruder), enlists her mother (the feisty Marcha Tracey) in browbeating him into looking for a job. But Kingfish perseveres, getting a shrink to diagnose him with "post-traumatic slavery syndrome."

Leon Rogers as loudmouthed lawyer-evangelist Calhoun, and Michael Leonard James as Amos, the fully employed cabbie and voice of reason, fill out the comic bill under Bette Howard's direction.

At 2 hours and 15 minutes, Clay's fittingly farcical ode would benefit from trimming. And although the show looks like it remains set in the '50s, new-millennium anachronisms pop up. ("It hasn't been the same in Harlem since Bill Clinton moved in.") With enough material for three "Amos 'n' Andy" episodes, "Kingfish" would play crisper at 90 minutes.

Nevertheless, Clay honors an important nugget of black entertainment history, and asks: Why can't we see "Amos 'n' Andy" on, say, TV Land, cable's reservoir of nostalgia? The playwright gives his own perspective in an interview: "As an Italian-American friend of mine says, 'The Sopranos' is an affront to the Italian community, but I don't miss an episode."

Ironically, "Kingfish" plays at Roy Wilkins Park, named for the late NAACP leader who led a boycott of the series.



Dave Zwengler

Harold Zeigle - Video Taping daily in Heaven



Tommy Little, Editor
North Atlantic
River and Lake
Magazine