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NOSTALGIA DIGEST AND RADIO GUIDE

BOOK TWENTY-THREE

CHAPTER SIX

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1997

Hello, Out There in Radioland!

From the *Chicago Tribune* July 18, 1987:

Woolworth Corp. announced it is closing the last of its American icons. The closing of the 400 F. W. Woolworth stores ends a 117-year-old business that has struggled for more than three decades to compete against big discounters.

It's hard to imagine a world without Woolworth's.

I have known Woolworth's all my life. And although I must admit that in recent years I had not patronized the famous dime store chain, I always took some sort of comfort in thinking that it would always be there.

Actually, just a few days before the "demise" announcement, my wife and I took our granddaughter Katie to the Golf Mill shopping mall and spent a few minutes browsing around the Woolworth's store. While we were there a young employee was cleaning the bird cages and feeding the parakeets, there was a sale on greeting cards, and I spotted a display of comic books.

Comic books.

That was one of the great things about Woolworth's. The *greatest* thing about Woolworth's, as far as I was concerned as a kid, was that I had an aunt who *worked* there!

My Aunt Frieda started working at Woolworth's when she was sixteen years old. In fact she and my mother both worked at the Woolworth's at Lincoln, Belmont and Ashland for a time in the early 1930s. My mother quit when she got married, but my aunt, who never married, made somewhat of a career of working at Woolworth's. She spent a lot of time in their store on Lake Street near Central Avenue and, later, worked at the Woolworth's "flagship" downtown store on State Street.

Aunt Frieda, knowing my love for comic books, would bring me dozens of "old" comics every month. These were actually just one month old, but since the new comics had arrived at Woolworth's, all of last month's issues had to be taken off the comic book shelves and returned to the distributor for credit. But the distributor didn't want the whole comic book. All he wanted was proof that it had not been sold. That "proof" was the upper third of the cover of each unsold comic from the previous month. After the various upper-thirds were carefully removed and returned, the remainder was considered useless and disposable.

My aunt disposed of the comics in my direction, bringing them to me whenever she came to visit. This was a colossal bonanza of comic reading for an eight-year-old kid! And while the "trading value" of these partially mutilated magazines was somewhat less in our kids' marketplace (I could only get one "uncut" comic for two or three of

my "cut covers," I was provided with a youthful "currency" that otherwise would have been out of my reach.

So my Aunt Frieda was one of my earliest connections to Woolworth's.

When I started to have a little spending money, Woolworth's was the place where I could go to buy Christmas and birthday presents for my mother or dad or brother. The things for sale at Woolworth's were *always* in my price range.

There was a huge Woolworth's at Six Corners: Milwaukee, Irving Park and Cicero. It was a big store, with entrances on both Milwaukee *and* Cicero.

We did lots of our shopping at Woolworth's. I would go there with my boy friends and we could always find lead soldiers or Lone Ranger guns or kites or wax lips. Our friends who were girls (notice I didn't say *girl friends*) also shopped at Woolworth's for ten-cent "diamond" rings, paper doll cutout books, hair ribbons and, as they approached the teen years, lipstick and fingernail polish.

You could always get something to eat at the lunch counter at the Six Corners Woolworth's. A hot turkey sandwich, with mashed potatoes and gravy comes to mind. Someone once told me that Woolworth's was the largest purveyor of turkey in the world, and I believe it.

My Aunt Frieda also worked at the downtown Woolworth's on South State Street, a very exciting place. It was probably the busiest Woolworth's in the city. And there was a clerk behind every counter.

If I was in the Loop to see a movie I always made a point of stopping in at Woolworth's to say hello to my aunt. It was fun to spot her at whatever counter she was working and then quietly walk up to it and stand there. My aunt, who had probably waited on a couple of

hundred people before I got there, would come up to me and say, "May I help y—!! Chuck! What are you doing here?" And we would both laugh.

I always tried to buy something from her, but she was switched around a lot and was rarely at the same counter when I visited. And sometimes—most of the time—I didn't need what she was selling. In fact, sometimes I was embarrassed even to walk up to her counter!

Almost all the Woolworth's had cash registers *at every counter*. There were no checkout lanes as there are everywhere today. But these cash registers did not carry a lot of cash. There were trusted Woolworth's employees who walked from counter to counter taking out the larger bills and leaving only change and singles. Then, if a customer made a purchase using a ten dollar bill, and if the clerk at that counter didn't have enough change in the register, she would shout, "Counter Nine, change for Ten!" The "trustee" would magically appear and the clerk would "buy" the ten dollars in singles with the customer's bill, put the sale amount in the register, and give the change to the customer. I seem to remember some kind of a "bong" or a chime that the clerk would ring before shouting, "Counter Nine, change for Ten."

There was a Woolworth's store on Grand Avenue just east of Harlem, a block or so from my first real job as a teenager. I worked part time at Montgomery Ward and Company as a clerk in the mail order department.

My mother usually made me a sandwich to take for lunch, but on the nights I worked until 9:30 I ate "dinner" at the small lunch counter at the Grand and Harlem Woolworth's. They served absolutely the best Sloppy Joe sandwiches I ever tasted. And I washed them down with a frosty mug of Fires Root



SCHADEN'S CONNECTION TO WOOLWORTH'S is shown in this 1930 Christmastime photo. You may need a magnifying glass to see Chuck's mother in the back row, fourth from left, and his aunt, also in the back row, sixth from right. Looks like a happy bunch, right?

Beer. I can still taste it.

What happened next was the next best thing to comic books and my Aunt Frieda working at Woolworth's.

I met a girl who worked at the *bulk candy* counter at Woolworth's.

She also went to Steinmetz High School and worked part time at the Grand and Harlem store.

It was chocolate covered peanuts at first sight!

We shared the same hours, but, of course, she was at Woolworth's and I was at Wards.

Now I started going to Woolworth's even on my breaks.

My mother wondered if I wasn't putting on a little weight.

Well, I couldn't spend a lot of time at that candy counter without buying something.

We dated a bit, but found she did not have a sweet tooth for me. Soon she left

the dime store and got a job somewhere else.

It was the end of *l'affair chocolate*.

Woolworth's was never the same for me after that.

And now the remaining Woolworth's stores are closing. News reports of the end of this legendary company did not specify precisely *when* the stores would be closed, but it probably won't take too long. We'd better hurry to a Woolworth's lunch counter and order a hot turkey sandwich before it's too late.

And maybe, just for old times sakes, they'll have a "Pumpkin Pie Special" with balloons floating over the lunch counter. Order a piece of pumpkin pie, break a balloon, and see how much off the regular price you can get! Remember?

Ahhh, Woolworth's.

Those were the days.

— Chuck Schaden

The Great 'Kemo Sabay' Debate

BY RICHARD W. O'DONNELL

Everybody knows The Lone Ranger — the greatest western hero of them all — used to shout "Hi Yo Silver" as he galloped by on his mighty stallion, in hot pursuit of outlaws.

And everybody knows Tonto, the Masked man's faithful companion, used to refer to him as "Kemo Sabay." Of late, there has been a bit of a dispute over what Tonto really meant when he called the Ranger "Kemo Sabay."

For years, most Americans thought the term meant "Worthy Scout" or "Loyal Friend." Perhaps it still does. The verdict is not in yet.

Actor Clayton Moore, who played the Masked Rider on television for years, always insisted "Kemo Sabay" was an Iroquois term for "faithful friend." However, there are six different Iroquois nations, each with a language of its own, and researchers have been unable to track down "Kemo Sabay" in any of them. They are still searching.

It has also been claimed "Kemo Sabay" is a variation of "quien no sabe," which, in Spanish, roughly translated, means "he who doesn't understand." Tonto reportedly is Spanish for "fool." The theory is those who originally wrote and produced the show used the "Kemo Sabay" and "Tonto" names as a couple of inside jokes.

If so, nobody is about to admit it now. Another theory is that "Kemo Sabay" and "Tonto" were a couple of names that just popped into the writers' heads when they were scripting the early radio shows,

Richard W. O'Donnell of Port Richey, Florida is a free-lance writer and long-time radio buff.

and the names just stuck. In all probability, this is true, as far as "Tonto" is concerned.

As for "Kemo Sabay" — that's a different story, so stay tuned.

The Ranger and Tonto, it should be noted, first galloped out of the west on January 30, 1933. The original shows were aired on WXYZ, a Detroit radio station.

All you had to do was close your eyes, use your imagination, and you were as far west as any cowboy has ever been able to make it. At that, the poor cowboy probably ended up with saddle sores. You were cozy and comfortable in a living room chair close to the radio.

In no time at all, the Lone Ranger became America's favorite western hero. Three times a week, he chased the bad guys and proved that right was right, and it was wrong to be the wrong type of cowboy.

Next came *The Lone Ranger* serials. Every Saturday for fifteen chapters, the youngsters followed his adventures. There were two of them. Then there were three movies: *The Lone Ranger* (1956); *The Lone Ranger and the Lost City of Gold* (1958); and *Legend of the Lone Ranger* (1981).

The Lone Ranger's comic strip was also a big success. And, of course, there was television.

For more than six decades, *The Lone Ranger* has been a stalwart defender of all that is good against all that is evil. He is the straightest shooter of all times.

He does not swear, smoke or drink. He is polite to women, and always tips his hat. He respects everybody — even the villains — regardless of race, creed or color. He is a solid gold hero, pure of heart, and noble in purpose.



BRACE BEEMER as THE LONE RANGER

He is what Don Quixote hoped to be!

* * *

"The Lone Ranger was really the Green Hornet's great-uncle, you know," said Fred Foy, who served as narrator of the famous radio show for several years. "Dan Reid, as everybody knows, was the Lone Ranger's nephew, but few people realize that Dan was also Britt Reid's father. And Britt Reid was the Green Hornet. That makes the Lone Ranger the Green Hornet's great-uncle.

"Both the Lone Ranger and the Green Hornet were created by George W. Trendle and Fran Striker, and were broadcast from WXYZ in Detroit, where there was a stock company of actors who appeared on both

programs. *The Lone Ranger* was on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and *The Green Hornet* was on Tuesday and Thursday nights. The Detroit stock company was busy five nights a week for years."

Foy, who lived in New England after he retired, was not the original narrator of the shows.

"There were three or four of them before I came along," said the long time announcer. "One was Brace Beemer, who became radio's most famous Lone Ranger. He took over after an actor named Earl Graser, who had played the part for seven years, was killed in a 1941 car crash. Brace, who played the part the rest of the way on radio, died in 1965. He was 62 at the time.

"Some of the regulars on the show were Paul Hughes — he played Thunder Martin, the ranger's old friend Harry Golder and Ernie Winstanley.

Golder played a variety of parts, and Winstanley was Dan Reid. Two other performers on the show became Hollywood stars. One was the late John Hodiak. The other was comedian Danny Thomas. In his Detroit days, Thomas was known as Amos Jacobs."

George Trendle, owner of station WXYZ, wanted to have a radio show "dedicated to youth," and decided on a series set in the pioneer days in the west. He hired Fran Striker, a Buffalo, N. Y., writer, to create the hero. Thus was *The Lone Ranger* born.

The first *Ranger* program went on the air as part of a three-station network joined with WOR in New York and WGN in Chicago. In short order, the show was heard

GREAT 'KEMO SABAY' DEBATE

on hundreds of stations nationally.

The triumphant theme from the "William Tell Overture" filled the air as the hoofbeats of the great horse Silver could be heard. Then the orchestra faded, and the Ranger's shout of "Hi-Yo Silver!" came over the airwaves — followed by gunshots and more hoofbeats.

It was at this point that narrator Foy proclaimed: "A fiery horse with the speed of light, a cloud of dust, and a hearty Hi-Yo Silver! The Lone Ranger!"

A bit more music and then Foy would be heard again: "With his faithful Indian companion, Tonto, the daring and resourceful masked rider of the plains let the fight for law and order in the early western United States. Nowhere in the pages of history can one find a greater champion of justice. Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear. From out of the past come the thundering hoofbeats of the great horse Silver. The Lone Ranger rides again!"

And the masked rider would shout: "Come on, Silver! Let's go, big fellow! Hi-Yo Silver! Away!"

The Lone Ranger and his loyal sidekick Tonto remained on radio until September 3, 1954. During that time, there were 3,234 broadcasts. One actor, John Todd, played Tonto in all of them. He might have known what the name really meant.

The definitive *Lone Ranger* episode is called "Bryant's Gap." On this program, the Ranger explains to young Dan Reid why he became a masked rider. The same episode also features the bitter end of Butch Cavendish, the villain who killed Daniel Reid, Sr., Dan's father and the Ranger's brother. In this particular show, the story of the great horse Silver is told, as well as the Ranger's meeting with Tonto.

The history of *The Lone Ranger* is fascinating. He was one of six Texas Rangers

dispatched to round up the notorious Hole-in-the Wall Gang headed by Cavendish. At Bryant's Gap, the Rangers were ambushed, and presumably all of them were killed. The elder Dan Reid was one of them.

However, one of the Rangers, who also happened to be Reid's brother, survived. His name was John Reid.

"Over the years, there has been a bit of confusion about The Lone Ranger's real name," declared Karl Rommel of Lansing, Michigan, a long time collector of Ranger memorabilia. "I don't know why that has happened. From time to time, I will hear the Ranger identified by some other name. It happens every once in a while. For that reason, I want to make it crystal clear, The Lone Ranger's real name was John Reid. There isn't any doubt about that."

After the ambush at Bryant's Gap, John Reid was nursed back to health by an Indian known as Tonto.

"Me, Tonto," said the Indian as the wounded man revived.

"What of the other Rangers?" asked his patient. "They were all my friends. One was my brother."

"Other Texas Rangers all dead," said Tonto. "You only Ranger left. You LONE RANGER now."

That was how it all began. Tonto buried five men at Bryant's Gap. But there were six graves. The surviving brother knew he was marked for death by the Cavendish gang, if they discovered he was alive.

That is also why he donned his famous mask. He did not want the outlaws to know he was alive. His mask was made from the cloth of a black vest belonging to his brother. The Reid brothers owned a silver mine. That is why the Lone Ranger used only silver bullets. He was easily the best shot in the west, but he never aimed to kill. He shot the gun out of his opponent's hand.



THE LONE RANGER and TONTO
Clayton Moore and Jay Silverheels

In the 1938 movie serial, *The Lone Ranger*, the history of the great hero was changed a bit. In the serial, there were five Texas Rangers, and the idea was to figure out which one of them was also The Lone Ranger. One by one, these Rangers were killed off during the fifteen chapters. At the end, only the Lone Ranger was left. He was played by Lee Powell, a western star who was killed during the second world war. In a sequel, *The Lone Ranger Rides Again*, made a couple of years later, the leading role was played by western star Bob Livingston.

Silver was a stallion the Ranger captured in Wild Horse Canyon. He was the fastest and most intelligent horse in the west.

Scout, it should be noted, was Tonto's third horse, and the Indian's favorite. Tonto's earlier horses were White Feller and Paint.

For the record, it should also be noted that one of WXYZ's earliest Lone Rangers, before Graser and Beamer took over, was a chap named George Seaton who later

became a successful Hollywood producer.

Tonto and the Lone Ranger met before Bryant's Gap. They had played together as children. Tonto spoke broken English, but was a master of several Indian dialects, and was fluent in Spanish.

If this is true, it knocks out that story "Tonto" was Spanish for "fool." Tonto was too smart an Indian to adopt such a name. Then again, you never really know. Maybe he wasn't that fluent in Spanish, after all.

During the fifties, *The Lone Ranger* became a television fixture, with Clayton Moore as the Masked Man. John Hart played the role for 26 of the 221 half-hour episodes. The late Jay Silverheels was Tonto. The show went on TV on September 15, 1949.

The first two *Ranger* films starred Moore and Silverheels. The third film starred Klinton Spilsbury in the title role with Michael Horse as Tonto. It did poorly at the box office.

Video tapes of the *Lone Ranger* TV shows are around, as is an abundance of audio tapes of the radio series. And there's talk of still another wide screen *Ranger* flick due in 1998 or 1999.

All of which brings us back to "Kemo Sabay." What does it really mean?

According to western film historian Boyd Magers, nobody really knows for certain what the expression means.

"The late Jimmy Jewell, the first director of the old radio show," revealed Magers, "said he was the one who named Tonto. As for 'Kemo Sabay,' Jewell said that was a summer camp near Detroit. Actually, the sign at the camp's entrance read 'Kee Mo Sah Bee'."

That Michigan summer camp, by the way, is long gone now. So we'll never really know the truth. ■

(NOTE-- Tune in to *The Lone Ranger* on "When Radio Was" October 15 and November 25.)

THE PHANTOM (YIKES!) AGAIN

BY CLAIR SCHULZ

It may come as a surprise to modern moviegoers accustomed to following the gory trail of slashers that the most horrifying moments ever filmed occurred over seventy years ago without a sound made or a drop of blood shed. In *The Phantom of the Opera* when imperiled heroine Christine pulled the mask off the Phantom to reveal a hideous, skull-like head, time and hearts stood still. Beneath that loathsome disguise was the man of a thousand faces, Lon Chaney.

Chaney may not have been as popular as Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Mary Pickford, and Tom Mix, but unlike many of his colleagues his star was still ascending when the silent era ended. He had an advantage over others in his field in that he did not have to learn on the set how to express himself with his face and body; he had been doing it virtually all his life.

It was his luck and not his curse to be born to deaf-mute parents in Colorado Springs, Colorado on April 1, 1883. Almost from the cradle Alonzo communicated with gestures and before his fourth birthday he had already appeared in a pantomime play.

Shortly after the turn of the century his brother talked Lon into performing in comic operettas for a local stock company. Chaney had natural clowning ability and a

Clair Schulz is a free-lance writer from Stevens Point, Wisconsin, and a regular contributor to our magazine. This is the sixth in a series of articles on horror stars that Mr. Schulz has contributed to our October-November issues.

flair for the broad comedy with exaggerated reactions that was expected at that time. It had to be a love of the greasepaint that kept him going during those early days for he was making less than fifty dollars a month.

Vaudeville was very much alive in 1912, but Chaney could see the handwriting on the wall that would be replaced by the moving figures on the screen. He started at \$5 a day as an extra whose body was needed to fill saddles and trains. Gradually his roles in two-reel westerns and slapstick comedies increased so that by 1916 he had become a regular in Universal feature films.

Universal had a reputation for pinching pennies so when Chaney's request for a raise from \$75 to \$125 a week and a contract was rejected he began to freelance with Paramount, Goldwyn, and other studios that were willing to give him bigger parts and more money.

It was with the release of *The Miracle Man* and *The Penalty* that Chaney finally became a leading player. His characters often had aptly descriptive names like Frog, Jake Cripple, and Blizzard. The legless Blizzard in *The Penalty* was the first of any number of roles that would cause Chaney considerable discomfort as he had his calves and feet folded up and bound behind him so that when he appeared to be bouncing around on stumps he was actually painfully abusing his knees.

In the climax of *Outside the Law* he pulled the neatest trick of the year 1920 when gangster Black Mike (Lon) was murdered by Ah Wing (Chaney).

Although Chaney was usually cast as a villain in melodramas, three of his early films were adventures from literature: he played a blackguard in an adaptation of Joseph Conrad's *Victory*, a pair of pirates in *Treasure Island*, and the crafty Fagin in *Oliver Twist*.

Chaney's appearance as a mad scientist in *A Blind Bargain* (1922) was the first of his archetypal roles that would reappear again and again in horror films of the next three decades. He not only played the madman possessed by the idea of implanting monkey glands into humans to prove his demented theories but he also shuffled about

as an ape-man. Three years later in *The Monster* his Dr. Ziska tried to bring the dead back to life in a sanitarium that abounded in creatures who looked like rejects from failed experiments. In between these turns as deranged men in white he starred in *While Paris Sleeps*, the first of numerous movies to use a waxworks as a setting for nefarious doings. It doesn't take much imagination while watching him prowl in the laboratory or among the wax figures to picture Lionel Atwill, Vincent Price, Boris Karloff, and Bela Lugosi in his shoes for they became famous playing

parts he pioneered.

In 1923 Chaney returned to Universal to give one of his most poignant performances of his career as Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. He was touching as the deformed bell-ringer trying valiantly to save the beautiful Esmeralda, who

had brought a little kindness into his life of scorn and shame. Perhaps Chaney projected the hunchback's passion so eloquently because he himself was suffering the self-inflicted burden of a heavy hump strapped to his body which made it impossible for him to stand up straight. He reached deep into his make-



LON CHANEY as THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

up kit to alter his features with a hideous eye, growths on his cheeks like huge sebaceous cysts, and a mop of hair more frightful than a fright wig. *Hunchback* took four months to complete and Lon needed almost three more to recover from the ordeal he put himself through.

His next picture after *The Monster*, *The Unholy Three*, marked the first time Chaney worked at MGM with Tod Browning, the man who would later direct Lugosi in *Dracula* and *Mark of the Vampire*. Browning and the macabre went hand-in-hand so it was quite natural that he and the

THE PHANTOM (YIKES!) AGAIN

actor best-known for playing sinister characters would team up seven more times in the next few years.

The unholy three were a midget, a strongman, and Lon, who doubled as a ventriloquist and a woman. After the thieves fell out and the two others were killed, Chaney threw his voice around a courtroom to exonerate a man on trial for murder. Edgar Bergen was considered foolhardy for bringing Charlie McCarthy to radio; imagine what acting ability was needed to play a ventriloquist in a silent film!

Chaney came back to Universal again in 1925 to become a phantom more ghastly than anything dreamt in a nightmare on Elm Street. All of the great moments are his: Erik with the skull mask and skull-headed cane on the stairs in the Red Death scene; Erik at the organ; Erik forcing Chris-

tine to show her courage; Erik unmasked. Always Erik, always Chaney with those painfully distended nostrils, always the master in control of the art of pantomime. Even in those final scenes after the frantic chase through the streets of Paris when he appeared to be cornered, Erik/Chaney had one more trick up his sleeve: the threat to throw the bomb that wasn't there. That was the way for a villain to bow out, showing the mob their fear in a handful of dust.

Having played lame or legless characters several times it was only a matter of time before Lon would take on the part of an armless man in another Chaney-Browning collaboration. In *The Unknown* Chaney, as a circus charlatan who had his arms bound to his sides to fool the public, committed a murder to protect his secret and then had his arms amputated to win the love of a woman who eventually married some-

one else. Acting without arms was a real challenge in a medium where everything had to be conveyed through facial expression and gestures. Chaney did more than reveal his soul on film; he seemed willing to sacrifice part of his body every time the cameras rolled.

One Chaney-Browning film, *London After Midnight* might be considered their best— if someone can find a copy of it. Although it is considered a lost film, the story survived and there are enough stills around to attest to its existence. The photographs show Chaney in two roles: sporting a fedora as Inspector Burke of Scotland Yard who was investigating a murder and also in costume as a piranha-toothed, long-haired vampire wearing a Mr. Hyde outfit under a top hat. Near the

end of the picture it was revealed that Burke had disguised himself as the vampire to help solve the case which must have bewildered audiences because the square-jawed Burke did not look anything like the unearthly creature of the night.

By 1930 people wanted to hear their favorite stars as well as see them. For his first speaking film Chaney decided to remake *The Unholy Three*. He demonstrated clearly that he could do some magic with his vocal chords just as he had done previously with his face by using a falsetto for the woman and lowering it for his principal role which, as a ventriloquist, allowed him to employ several more voices, including that of a parrot. There was no doubt that Chaney had made a successful transition to talkies as *The Unholy Three* earned almost a million dollars for MGM.

Unfortunately, Chaney's first talking picture was also his last. He died of throat cancer on August 26, 1930, shortly after the movie was released.

MGM mastermind Irving Thalberg himself delivered a eulogy which praised Chaney for being able to lift the burdens off people's shoulders as he took them to a world of make-believe. It was a world of his own creation.

Douglas Fairbanks, Rudolph Valentino, and even the Keystone Cops could thrill audiences, but only Lon Chaney could chill them as well. He was the trailblazer of terror, the actor who starred in the first American vampire film, who put the mad in mad



"ALL THE BROTHERS WERE VALIANT (1923)
Lon Chaney (left) and Malcolm McGregor

scientist, who made Universal the home of the monsters before the world had heard of Karloff and Lugosi. In fact, Bela might never have earned his wings and Boris might have been denied those boots made for stomping because Chaney, a proven performer at dispensing shocks, quite likely would have been Universal's first choice for Dracula and the Frankenstein monster.

But Lon Chaney was more than a horror star. He was a master artificer who assumed a multitude of identities through skillful use of his own make-up and a dedication to his craft that placed performance ahead of pain. Cowboys, crooks, clowns, creeps, conjurers, orientals, soldiers of fortune and misfortune, buccancers, freaks of nature, biddies—they all were putty in his hands with putty on his cheeks. The best of the nostalgic lines about the days of silent films is "They had faces then." True, and Lon Chaney had most of them. ■

(NOTE-- On September 30 the United States Postal Service is scheduled to issue a sheet of commemorative stamps honoring Lon Chaney, Lon Chaney Jr., Boris Karloff, and Bela Lugosi.)



LON CHANEY

SCREWAVES

ONE LISTENER HOWLS IN
WITH HIS FAVORITE
HALLOWEEN BROADCASTS

BY ERIK J. MARTIN

If you're a fan of old time radio mystery programs like I am, this has to be your favorite time of scare—er, year.

If you have a collection of old time radio tapes or records, the Halloween season is always a great time to pull out the witch's brew of mystery and horror shows. You can spook yourself silly listening to great series such as *Suspense*, *Inner Sanctum*, *The Mysterious Traveler*, and, of course, *Lights Out*. Speaking of *Lights Out*, be sure to follow Arch Oboler's advice and do just that while enjoying a good transcribed ghost story from radio's golden age. The pictures you'll conjure up in your mind will outdo any netherworldy or grisly special effects even the biggest budget horror film could muster, and, if the room is dark enough and your attention unwavering, the hair on the back of your neck will jump up and grow legs.



Erik J. Martin is a
free-lance
frighter er,
writer, from Oak
Lawn, Illinois.

I was first turned on to the magic of radio mysteries, quite accidentally, by tuning in and listening to —coincidentally enough—a *Those Were the Days* Halloween program from the early 80s. I remember hearing two shows that stuck with me like peanut butter on the roof of your mouth: "Three Skeleton Key," starring Vincent Price in a classic *Suspense* broadcast, and "Murder Castle," a great *Lights Out* offering.

I soon became a fan of old time radio programs of all genres — comedies, dramas, quiz programs, science fiction, you name it. But, like a carnival-goer who opts for the tallest roller coaster over the Ferris Wheel, it was always the thrillers that provided me the best entertainment. In the spirit of a zealous *Tales From the Crypt* comic book fan, I grew obsessed with recording and collecting creepwave radio shows. Today, I've amassed a tape collection of radio mysteries that numbers in the high hundreds.

By far, *Suspense* shows outnumber any other in my cassette compilation, and for good reason: not only was it the most prolific of the radio thriller programs, running for 20 years; it was also the best, showcasing the biggest screen and stage stars of the time in bravura performances of only the choicest nailbiting stories. With their memorable twist endings, episodes of *The Whistler* are also easily found in my OTR anthology. Along with *The Shadow*, *Escape*, and the aforementioned *Inner Sanc-*



tum, *Lights Out*, and *The Mysterious Traveler*, these represent the "A" list of radio thriller regulars.

The second tier of radio murder and mystery shows includes *Murder at Midnight*, *Mystery in the Air*, *The Strange Dr. Weird*, and *The Molle Mystery Theater*, and lesser series that are truer to the genre in gore and supernatural situations: *The Witch's Tale*, *Mystery House*, *The Sealed Book*, *The Hall of Fantasy*, *Beyond Midnight*, *Masters of Mystery*, *The Hermit's Cave*, *Quiet Please*, *The House of Mystery*, *The Unexpected*, and *The Haunting Hour*. I particularly enjoy finding rare horror series and random episodes, or "one-horror wonders," as I call them: *Once Upon a Midnight* (hosted by Alfred Hitchcock), *The Black Chapel*, *The Key*, and one of my favorites, *Theater 10:30* and (I believe) its only known episode, "The Wendigo."

There have even been a few "new time" radio thriller series in the 1970s and 80s, among them: *The CBS Radio Mystery Theater*, *The Cape Cod Radio Mystery Theater*, *Midnight, Nightfall*, and *Bradbury 13*.

Just in case you're skeptical of the power of old time radio mysteries, try these boogymen to set the proper mood and alarming ambience before you play your favorite scary shows. First and foremost, always play a mystery or horror show LATE AT NIGHT. Listening during the daylight defeats the purpose.

Secondly, be sure your listening area is semi-soundproof: the atmosphere should be as quiet as possible, although unnerving external stimuli such as an open window revealing wind rustling through the trees can enhance the milieu. Next, sit in a room that is completely dark (the universal first rule of fright). Turn up the volume a little louder than you normally would so as not to miss any sound effects or important aural details. Finally, keep your listening climate a little cooler than normal by

either opening up windows or turning up the air conditioning—all the easier for goose bumps to materialize.

Though Halloween is the ideal time to listen, radio thrillers and mysteries can actually satisfy at any time of year, in any setting. However, they are particularly savory around a campfire in the woods on a



dark fall night, and as a Halloween party nightcapper. Because they aren't quite as violent as slasher movies or other Halloween film fare, children can enjoy them as well as adults (though parental discretion may be advised for some shows—interesting thought: imagine an "R" chip on super heterodynes back in radio's heyday).

I've even played a radio horror show (Arch Oboler's "The Chicken Heart," to be exact) in a dark classroom as part of a school project experiment. The experience garnered a great reaction from my classmates, and even helped earned me an A in the course.

If I were programming the perfect old time radio Halloween show, I would definitely consider these classic boogeyman broadcasts. Being the pumpkin head purist I am, note that only horrific and/or Halloween-related programs to, as Chuck Schaden likes to say, "scare the yell out of you," got my nod (sorry, no comedy or variety shows, though there are many good examples of such). And all share one com-

SCAREWAVES

mon thread: each are outstanding stories with fantastic dramatic narratives, characters, and endings.

1. *The Mercury Theater on the Air:* "The War of the Worlds" (10-30-38). Not only the best Halloween show ever, but the most famous radio broadcast of all time. Orson Welles' Mercury tour-de-force, based on H.G. Wells' science fiction masterpiece about a hostile invasion of extra-terrestrials, quite simply shook up the entire country. Welles and the Mercury crew pulled the ultimate Halloween prank: a mock news broadcast of Martians conquering the world that sounded so authentic that many Americans actually fled to the hills and some even attempted suicide.

2. *Suspense:* "The Dunwich Horror" (11-1-45). Part dramatic account, part faux live eyewitness broadcast, and all classic story, this radio adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft's spine-chilling tale about an evil, ethereal force trying to burst through into our worldly dimension on Halloween night never loses its thriller impact. An excellent performance by Ronald Colman, plus stellar sound effects—you may not want to hear this one alone.

3. *Escape:* "The Fall of the House of Usher" (10-22-47). This is by far the finest radio rendition of Edgar Allen Poe's masterwork I've yet heard. Paul Frees' magnetic voice and knack for dramatic pauses, in tandem with the brooding score, make for a haunting good time. And unlike other radio versions of this story, this broadcast remains faithful to Poe's text. Be absolutely sure to listen to the last 10 minutes in complete darkness, and hold on tight.

4. *Inner Sanctum:* "A Corpse For Halloween" (10-31-49). What Halloween list would be complete without a visit behind the creaking door with Raymond? Starring

veteran radio actors Larry Haines and Mercedes McCambridge, this episode details a deadly manhunt on the Eve of all Hallows. Another great mystery by radio's master of the medium, Himan Brown.

5. *Lights Out:* "The Dark" (1940s) and "Murder Castle" (4-3-43). Two haunted house stories that will leave you screaming for more. A textbook example of how grisly sound effects can stir the imagination into a frenzy, "The Dark" depicts a doctor and an ambulance driver's hellish encounter in a strange house where bodies are turned inside out. In "Murder Castle" longtime radio stock player Joseph Kearns pulls off a great performance as a serial killer who invents new, diabolical ways to slay his hired housekeepers, only to have the tables turned on him at the conclusion.

6. *Suspense:* "Three Skeleton Key" (11-11-56) Starring Vincent Price in the best version of that story about the rats.

7. *Escape:* "Ancient Sorceries" (2-15-48) Also starring the underrated Paul Frees as a wayward traveler who makes the mistake of staying overnight in a demonic village.

8. *Inner Sanctum:* "Song of the Slasher" (4-24-45). To sum it up, the scariest episode of the series: the slasher's eerie whistle will haunt you long afterward.

9. *The Hall of Fantasy:* "The Hangman's Rope" (1953). The ghost of England's famous hangman, Jack Ketch, haunts three innocent people.

10. *Tales of the Frightened:* A series of five-minute ghost stories and terror tales by that godfather of ghastriness, Boris Karloff.



(NOTE-- Several of Erik Martin's choices for the "perfect old time radio Halloween show" will be presented on the annual *Those Were The Days Halloween* broadcast, October 25.)

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Al Capone idolized George Washington and will always be remembered for the St. Valentine's Day Massacre.



Al Capone, sensitive about the 2 deep knife-slash scars on his left cheek, wanted all photographs taken from the right.

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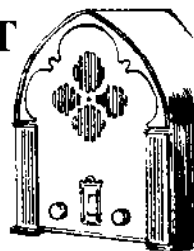


CONFESSIONS OF A RADIO ADDICT

or

How I Came to Write A Book About Old Time Radio

BY LEONARD MALTIN



How exactly does one set out to write a book about radio?

Well, if you're naive enough, you simply do it, because you've fallen in love with the people, and the programs, and you can't help yourself. That's my story. It was only after I got started that I realized how foolish it was to attempt to write a book about "radio." That's tantamount to saying you're writing a book about "the movies." The subject is simply too big.

I was not to be deterred, however. Not after attending my first meeting of SPERDVAC (The Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Radio Drama Variety and Comedy) in Los Angeles. My wife and I were recent transplants from New York, and we discovered SPERDVAC after hearing about it on Bobb Lynes' old-time radio show on a local public radio station.

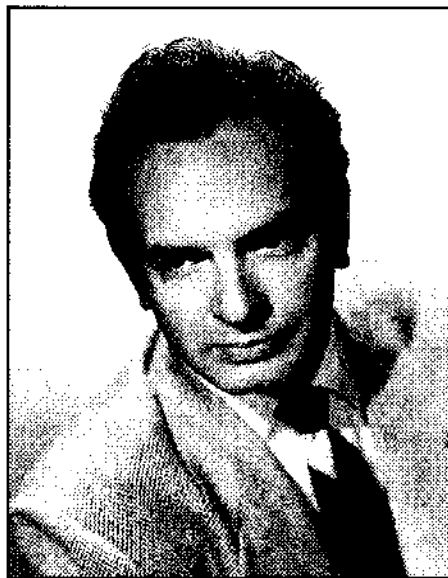
Watching a radio recreation, and hearing these marvelous actors talk about their experiences, was the spur. I knew I had to write about all of this — because it would give me an excuse to meet even more of those radio veterans.

That was eleven years ago. It's taken all

Leonard Maltin's regular appearances on Entertainment Tonight have made him a household name and media personality. He is a leading film authority whose books include Leonard Maltin's Movie & Video Guide and Leonard Maltin's Movie Encyclopedia. He is a fan of old time radio and has written a new book about those days.

this time for me to finish the book — *The Great American Broadcast: A Celebration of Radio's Golden Age*, to be published in October by E. P. Dutton — because other projects interfered. On the other hand, if I hadn't started when I did, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to talk with many giants of the medium who've since passed away.

For instance, quite early on, I mentioned my budding radio project to a friend who was then working as a staff writer on the TV series *Remington Steele*. He said I simply must talk to his colleague Elliott Lewis, who was an endless source of stories about that period. To show you how ignorant I was at that time, I really didn't know the extent of Lewis' work, or his contributions



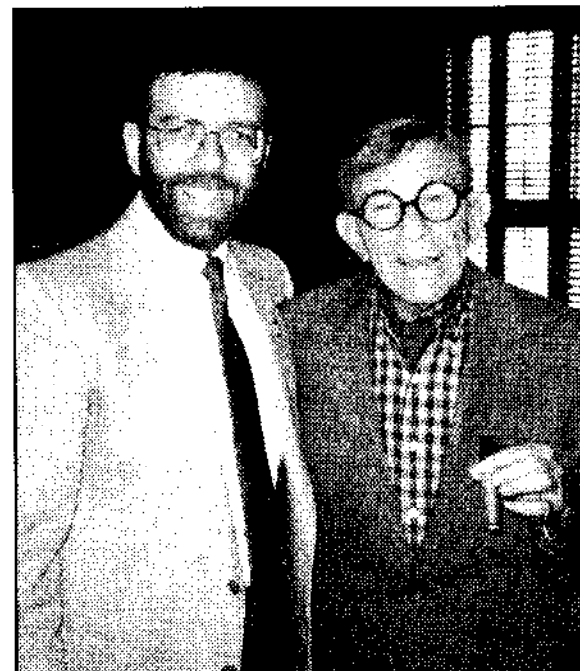
ELLIOTT LEWIS

to the history of radio... that he went from being one of the busiest actors in Los Angeles, and star of such shows as *The Voyage of the Scarlet Queen*, to become a writer, director, and producer of such shows as *Suspense*, *Crime Classics*, and *On Stage*.

We all went to lunch together, at the Warner Bros. commissary, and then repaired to Elliott's office, where he proceeded to give me what may be the best interview I've ever had. Because he was a writer — as well as an actor, director, and producer — his thoughts were cogent, his wording precise. When I asked him to give me an idea of a typical day in the life of a radio director, he broke it down for me, hour by hour, from the first table reading to the actual broadcast, in vivid detail. Wow!

(Oddly enough, he made light of his work as an actor, but almost every other Hollywood-based performer I interviewed — when asked the best radio actor they ever worked with — named Elliott Lewis. His range was extraordinary; after all, this is the man who did a modern-day "Othello" on *Suspense* and made Shakespeare's words sound absolutely contemporary... then the same week, turned up as the genial pain-in-the-neck Frankie Remley on *The Phil Harris-Alice Faye Show*.)

Talking to Lewis only whet my appetite for more. But I blew my biggest opportunity. *Entertainment Tonight* had scheduled an interview with Orson Welles, to promote a syndicated TV program he was hosting, and assigned one of my fellow reporters to the task. I could have tagged along, but I felt silly doing so, and asked my colleague instead if he would ask Mr. Welles some



LEONARD MALTIN and GEORGE BURNS

radio questions as my proxy. He kindly did, and I got some terrific responses, which I've used in my book. But I should have gone myself, and felt that pang of regret even more strongly when *The Great Man* died just a short time later.

Still, I was awfully lucky. Lucky to talk to George Burns, for instance, who at age 90 was still sharp as a tack. He remembered that when he and Gracie were booked on *The Guy Lombardo Show*, and had to go to Hollywood to make a movie, it was their responsibility to pay for the phone lines to continue to appear "live" on the weekly broadcast... and the phone bills came to more than their salary! He would wander off the subject of radio from time to time, but it wasn't hard to steer him back.

He in turn urged me to talk to his old friend Harry Ackerman. I knew Ackerman as the executive producer of such hit TV series as *Bewitched*, *I Dream of Jeannie*, and *Gidget*, but Ackerman started out with

CONFESSIONS OF RADIO ADDICT

Young and Rubicam in New York, and worked his way up to directing *The Aldrich Family*, before moving to Hollywood. Eventually he was promoted to an executive position and ran the West Coast branch of CBS Radio during its twilight years, supervising everything from *The Jack Benny Show* to *Gunsmoke*. As the director of *Screen Guild Playhouse*, he also had a lot of great stories about working with various stars... and had the distinction of hiring Norman Corwin for one of his few "commercial" assignments, an adaptation of "The Shop Around the Corner" for James Stewart and Margaret Sullivan.

After all his years in television, Ackerman still looked back on radio with special fondness. Why? "It was just a time of great freedom, I think. Freedom to operate within your own particular talent limits, to operate and explore without fear of being second guessed too much, and certainly without fear of being supervised to death. It was a medium for the writer and the director more than any other has been."

With each interview, I kept learning, and developed more pointed questions for my next conversation. I wanted to talk to a range of radio people—actors, directors, writers, producers, musicians, sound effects artists—and was lucky enough to do so. A trip to Santa Barbara afforded me a chance to have lunch with Howard Duff. A drive south led me to the oceanfront home of veteran organist Gaylord Carter. Dur-



WILLIAM CONRAD, right, with *Gunsmoke* director Norman Macdonnell

ing trips to New York I had lengthy conversations with people like Jackson Beck and Kenneth Roberts; other times, I used the telephone. On assignment for *Entertainment Tonight*, I'd occasionally find myself sitting with someone who had at least a tangential connection with radio, and I never missed an opportunity to ask about it. That's how I got interesting stories from Lauren Bacall, Jack Lemmon, Gregory Peck, and other stars you might not immediately associate with radio. *ET* also opened the door for me to chat with Bob Hope.

One holdout, not only for me but for everyone involved with the hobby, was William Conrad. He'd turned down SPERDVAC on many occasions, and seemed to have no interest in participating in anything "nostalgic." I mentioned this one day to my actor friend James Karen, who'd befriended Conrad while working on the TV series *Jake and the Fat Man*. Jimmy said he'd see what he could do. A short time later he phoned me to say that Conrad had agreed to an interview, if I could find him a tape of *Of Mice and Men* with Burgess Meredith and Lon Chaney Jr.



ARCH OBOLER

I pulled some strings—hard—and had it within a day. The following week I was sitting in Conrad's comfortable study with a Maltese Falcon on the bookshelf behind him, a souvenir from his producing days as Warner Bros. and we were talking animatedly about radio, which he loved.

"I never took a drama lesson in my life," he told me, "I never even thought about what it was to be an actor. All I thought about was the money that it was possible to make, maybe. And it turned out to be possible. I have very little ego—I'm an egomaniac about some things, but about my talent, I was just lucky to have a voice that fascinated people."

I spent an extraordinary afternoon with Arch Oboler, had lengthy conversations with Himan Brown, Larry Gelbart (who started writing for *Duffy's Tavern* when he was still in his teens), Ray Erlenborn, Ray Bradbury, Fletcher Markle, Rosemary

DeCamp, F. Jack Neuman, Robert F. Lee and Jerome Lawrence (who tipped me to the fact that Arthur Miller, among other august playwrights, started out on radio), Carlton E. Morse, Mercedes McCambridge, Parley Baer, Peg Lynch, and so many more, including my hero, Norman Corwin.

But one of the most poignant experiences I had came about because Jeanette Nolan wanted her husband, John McIntire, to talk to me. Jeanette had already provided me with wonderful material, including notes and essays she had written over the years. But she had a hard time convincing John to talk. It seems that since he'd given up drinking, he was loth to talk about the old days—because he associated drinking with reminiscing! But one day she and John were in my part of Los

Angeles, filming a television episode, and she persuaded him to sit down with me. I went to their motel, and spent several captivating hours listening to John and Jeanette, she gently prodding him to open up about his radio career—which began in 1926!

Writing this book has been a rich and rewarding experience for me, and I hope at least some of that is conveyed in the finished product. But the completion of this project hasn't dampened my curiosity one bit; I want to meet more radio veterans, conduct more interviews, and hear more shows.

I guess you could say I'm hooked. ■

(NOTE Autographed copies of Leonard Maltin's book *The Great American Broadcast: A Celebration of Radio's Golden Age* will be available at *Metro Golden Memories in Chicago*. Call 1-800-538-6675 to reserve your copy.)

Chuck Schaden's
THOSE WERE THE DAYS
 WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 P.M.
OCTOBER 1997

PLEASE NOTE: The numerals following each program listing for *Those Were The Days* represents the length of time for each particular show: (28:50) means the program will run 28 minutes and 50 seconds. This may be of help to those who tape the programs for their own collection.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4th
REMEMBERING JIMMY STEWART

SCREEN DIRECTORS PLAYHOUSE (1-6-50)

"Magic Town" starring **James Stewart** in a radio version of his 1947 film about a pollster who finds the perfect average American town, which ruins itself when people are told of his discovery. Cast includes Virginia Gregg, Hans Conried, Eddie Marr. RCA Victor, NBC. (30:26)

BING CROSBY SHOW (11-14-51) Excerpt as Bing welcomes guest **James Stewart** who talks about becoming the father of twins. Bing and Jimmy go shopping for an intimate gift for Jimmy's wife Gloria. Chesterfield Cigarettes, CBS. (12:00)



JAMES STEWART

SCREEN GUILD THEATRE (9-29-40) "Shop Around the Corner" starring **James Stewart**, Margaret Sullavan and Frank Morgan in a radio version of their 1940 film comedy about two shop clerks who don't realize that they are lonely hearts pals. Gulf Oil Co., CBS. (28:04)

QUIZ KIDS (10-12-47) Excerpt with **James Stewart** taking over for Quizmaster Joe Kelly in a round of questions for Quiz Kids Patrick Conlon, Lonny Lunde, Joel Kupperman, Rinny Templeton, Naomi Cooks. Alka Seltzer, NBC. (15:25)

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (1-9-49) Jack and Mary Livingstone meet guest **James Stewart** at the Brown Derby, where Jack tries to convince Jimmy to let him produce his next film. Cast includes Dennis Day, Phil Harris, Eddie

"Rochester" Anderson, Don Wilson, the Sportsmen, Mel Blanc, Herb Vigran, Hal March. This is Benny's second show on his new network. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, CBS. (28:15)

SCREEN DIRECTORS PLAYHOUSE (12-9-49) "Call Northside 777" starring **James Stewart** in his original 1948 screen role as a reporter who tries to prove a convicted killer innocent of murdering a police officer. Cast includes William Conrad, Stacy Harris, Peggy Weber, Ken Christy, Paul Frees, Tyler McVey. Jimmy Wallington announces. Sustaining, NBC. (30:12)

OUR SPECIAL GUEST will be *Nostalgia Digest* columnist and film historian **BOB KOLOSOSKI** who will talk about the career of **James Stewart** who died on July 2, 1997 at the age of 89.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11th

SIX SHOOTER (9-20-53) "Jenny Carter" starring **James Stewart** as Britt Ponsett in the first program of the series. Heading towards the town of Land Creek, Britt finds a wounded man and brings him to a cabin where a single woman lives by herself. Colman Home Heaters, NBC. (29:00)

KOLLEGE OF MUSICAL KNOWLEDGE (1-19-44) Kay Kyser, the "old professor himself" emcees a musical quiz program featuring Ish Kabibble, Georgia Carroll, Sully Mason, Harry Babbitt. Remote broadcast before an audience of Navy fliers at Los Alamedas, California. Bill Fohrman announces. AFRS rebroadcast. (30:28)

IMAGINATION THEATRE (10-31-96) A trio of "Twisted Tales" is this series' 1996 Halloween offering. 1. "Scared to Death" (26:22) 2. "Gaitor Girls" (10:14) 3. "Revenge of the Pumpkin" (15:31) Syndicated.

BURNS AND ALLEN SHOW (10-21-41) George is upset after being rejected by two insurance doctors. Gracie and friends interrupt his peace

and quiet. Cast features Bill Goodwin, Elliott Lewis, singer Jimmy Cash, Paul Whiteman and the orchestra. Swan Soap, NBC. (28:25)

SUSPENSE (3-6-47) "Elwood" starring comedian Eddie Bracken in a straight dramatic role as a teen just out of high school who wants to do something big with his life. Cast includes Cathy Lewis, Joe Kearns. Roma Wines, CBS. (28:52)

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18th

On the eve of the 1997 Radio Hall of Fame induction ceremonies, we salute this year's "Network Pioneer" inductee William Conrad as well as the other 1997 nominees, Bing Crosby, Eddie Cantor and Kate Smith.

EDDIE CANTOR SHOW 1-10-45) The Andrews Sisters join **Eddie Cantor** and regulars Bert Gordon (the Mad Russian), Nora Martin, Leonard Seuss, Billy Gray, Harry Von Zell. Eddie's Lower East Side, New York, childhood is the subject of a sketch. Ipana, Sal Hepatica, NBC. (28:41)

KATE SMITH SHOW (1943) **Kate Smith** and her producer Ted Collins welcome guests Veronica Lake and Abbott and Costello. Miss Lake appears in scenes from her new picture, "The Hour Before the Dawn" and Bud and Lou offer their famous "Who's On First" routine. AFRS rebroadcast. (29:40)

GUNSMOKE (8-9-52) "The Kentucky Tolmans" starring **William Conrad** as Marshall Matt Dillon, with Parley Baer as Chester Proudfoot, and Joe Kearns, Virginia Gregg, Harry Bartell, Lou Krugman. A mountain girl asks Dillon to protect her father. Sustaining, CBS. (28:20)

PHILCO RADIO TIME (10-16-46) **Bing Crosby** stars with guest Bob Hope in the first show of the series, with Lina Romay, Skitch Henderson, the Charioteers, John Scott Trotter and the orchestra, Ken Carpenter. Bing and Bob trade insults, sing "Put It There, Pal." This is Crosby's first transcribed network program and the technique changed the face of radio. Philco, ABC. (30:00)

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25th
ANNUAL HALLOWEEN SHOW

INNER SANCTUM (10-31-49) "Corpse for Halloween" starring Larry Haines, Barry Kroger and Mercedes McCambridge. A man responsible for the death of his buddies on an expedition is haunted by their ghosts on Hallow-

een. AFRS rebroadcast. (25:03)

HALL OF FANTASY (1953) "The Hangman's Rope." The story of Jack Catch who held the job of executioner for the Crown for 23 years. And now he comes back to finish his job. Produced and narrated by Richard Thorn. Sustaining, WGN-MBS. (24:12)

LIGHTS OUT (1940s) "The Dark" is Arch Oboler's "Exercise in Horror" about bodies being turned inside out. (8:35)

GREAT GILDERSLEEVE (4-20-49) Harold Peary stars as Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve, with Walter Tetley as Leroy, Mary Lee Robb as Marjorie, Lillian Randolph as Birdie. Gildy has taken up crime detection as a hobby as he and nephew Leroy investigate a ghostly sound coming from a haunted house. Kraft Foods, NBC. (30:00)

SUSPENSE (11-1-45) "The Dunwich Horror" starring Ronald Colman in H. P. Lovecraft's classic tale of horror and the unknown. On Halloween night, Colman narrates the story and portrays the librarian — keeper of "The Necronomicon." AFRS rebroadcast. (25:33)

ESCAPE (2-15-48) "Ancient Sorceries" starring Paul Frees in a chilling tale of the supernatural. "You are alone in a remote village on the Welsh border, surrounded by silent towns people who are watching and waiting for you to decide how to lose your soul." Sustaining, CBS. (30:00)

Today's program will be presented on a special ghost-to-ghost network. And because this Halloween broadcast is too scary to do alone, Chuck will be joined by Ken Alexander — who is scary enough all by himself! Don't miss it if you can.

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NOVEMBER 1997

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1st

DOUBLE FEATURE: Organist Rosa Rio plus Second Tier Radio Comedians

ROSA RIO:

WHEN A GIRL MARRIES (7-16-48) An isolated episode in the long-running daytime series (1939-1958) "dedicated to everyone who has ever been in love." Mary Jane Higby and John Raby star as Joan and Harry Davis. *Rosa Rio* apparently provides the organ theme music. Sure-Jell, NBC. (14:55)

BILL STERN SPORTS NEWSREEL (8-2-46) The fabled sportscaster and storyteller has boxing stories about John L. Sullivan and Jack Dempsey. Guest is singer Joan Edwards. *Rosa Rio* apparently provides organ accompaniment. Colgate, NBC. (14:44)

FRONT PAGE FARRELL (7-2-48) Isolated episode in the long-running (1941-1954) daytime drama about a "crack newspaperman and his wife." Apparently *Rosa Rio* at the organ. Black Flag Insect Spray, NBC. (14:36)

SPEAKING OF RADIO (4-12-97) In a telephone conversation recorded earlier this year, Chuck Schaden talks with organist *Rosa Rio* in her home in Sun City, Florida, as she talks about her career during the golden days of radio. (27:19)

ROSA RIO TIME (7-1-47) In this daily program *Rosa Rio* plays the organ and piano at the same time, offering such selections as "Humoresque" and "Stormy Weather." Stan Short announces. Sustaining, ABC. (9:08)

LORENZO JONES (4-30-45) Karl Swenson and Lucille Wall star as Lorenzo Jones and his wife Belle. The mayor pays a visit to the Jones' residence in this isolated episode of the long-running daytime series (1937-1955). Apparently *Rosa Rio* provides the organ theme. Bayer Aspirin, NBC. (14:55)

—PLUS—

SECOND TIER RADIO COMEDIANS:

STARTIME (2-27-51) Jack Pearl stars as "Baron Munchausen" with Cliff Hall as "Sharlie" in a "potpourri of melody and comedy a la carte" featuring singer Ray Middleton and Mimi Benzelle. The Baron has written an opera and wants Ray and Mimi to star in it. Audition program for a possible series. ABC. (29:50)

JOE PENNER SHOW (1938) Joe Penner, a student at Huskies College, has been signed up by his roommate to join the college Glee Club. Music by 11-year old "Little Tommy Lane" (who grew up to become Tommy Leonetti) and Ben Pollack and the orchestra. Huskies Flakes, CBS. (29:34)

EDDIE CANTOR SHOW (1-24-45) Cantor stars with Bert Gordon as the "Mad Russian," Nora Martin, Leonard Seuss, Harry Von Zell. Eddie's wife Ida wants a divorce and Cantor asks the Russian to help clear things. Bristol Myers, NBC. (28:50)

See the article by Bill Oates on page 26.



ROSA RIO

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8th
REMEMBERING ROBERT MITCHUM

SUSPENSE (4-10-48) "Crossfire" starring Robert Young, Robert Mitchum, Robert Ryan and Sam Levine in an unusual hour-long Suspense broadcast. This is a radio version of the RKO Radio Pictures 1947 film with the original screen stars in their original roles. An intolerant ex-soldier becomes a killer and leads police in a murderous chase. *It is rare for*



ROBERT MITCHUM

Suspense to do a radio version of a movie. Sustaining, CBS. (31:20; 28:35)

READER'S DIGEST RADIO EDITION (2-27-47) "We Expected You at Dakar" starring Robert Mitchum in "a story of intrigue and danger ... the true story of a young American agent at Casablanca" during World War II. Host is Richard Kollmar. Hallmark Cards, CBS. (29:46)

SUSPENSE (5-15-47) "Death at Live Oak" starring Robert Mitchum as a man accused of a crime he did not commit. Roma Wines CBS. (29:59)

OUR SPECIAL GUEST will be *Nostalgia Digest* columnist and film historian Bob Kulososki who will talk about the career of Robert Mitchum who died July 1, 1997 at the age of 79.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15th
A RADIO NOSE JOB

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (10-23-49) with Mary Livingstone, Phil Harris, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Dennis Day, Don Wilson, Artie Auerbach, Sportsmen, Mel Blanc, Frank Nelson. Jack recuperates at home after being in the hospital to have an obstruction removed from his nose. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, CBS. (27:40)

FAVORITE STORY (1940s) "Cyrano de Bergerac." Host Ronald Colman stars as Cyrano, renown for his nose, but longing for the love of a beautiful lady. Janet Waldo appears as Roxanne. Syndicated. (26:58)

JIMMY DURANTE SHOW (12-3-47) Guest Charles Boyer joins regulars Candy Candido, Peggy Lee, Arthur Treacher, Alan Reed,

Howard Petrie, Roy Bargy and the orchestra. Schnozzola Durante auditions at Boyer's repertory theatre and is persuaded to play the lead in a production of "Cyrano de Bergerac." Veola Vonn is Roxanne. Rexall, NBC. (28:45)

FATHER KNOWS BEST (1950s) Robert Young stars as Jim Anderson with Dorothy Lovett as Margaret, Rhoda Williams as Betty, Ted Donaldson as Bud, Helen Strong as Kathy. The Anderson household has a typical day until Jim's client with a large nose arrives for dinner. Sustaining, NBC. (26:14)

DR. CHRISTIAN (1940s) "The Norton Nose" is a comedy about a young woman whose nose was injured in an accident when she was hit by a truck. Jean Herholdt stars as Dr. Christian with Rosemary DeCamp as nurse Judy Price. Vaseline Products, CBS. (24:49)

THE ANGEL WITH THE COLD NOSE (1940s) Margaret O'Brien stars in a Christmas story as a young girl who befriends a "tramp" and his dog. Syndicated. (26:29)

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 22nd
ANNUAL THANKSGIVING SHOW

MEL BLANC SHOW (11-26-46) There's a Thanksgiving party at Mel's Fix-It Shop, but things aren't going well for Mel. Cast includes Joe Kearns, Hans Conried. Halo Shampoo, Colgate Tooth Powder, CBS. (23:55)

CASEY, CRIME PHOTOGRAPHER (11-25-48) "Thanksgiving Holiday" stars Statz Cotsworth as Casey, with Jan Miner as Annie Williams and John Gibson as Ethelbert. Casey plans a Thanksgiving outing, but decides to help a friend first. Toni Home Permanent, CBS. (29:35)

MAXWELL HOUSE COFFEE TIME (11-21-40) Dick Powell is emcee for this Thanksgiving Day broadcast featuring Fanny Brice and Hanley Stafford as Baby Snooks and Daddy, Mary Martin, Meredith Willson and the orchestra, announcer Don Wilson, and guest Jack Benny. Jack wants to hold the premiere of his new movie, "Love Thy Neighbor" in Waukegan, Illinois. Daddy tells Snooks the story of the first Thanksgiving. Maxwell House Coffee, NBC. (30:15)

PHILCO RADIO TIME (11-26-47) Bing Crosby stars with guest Frankie Laine. In a dramatic segment for Thanksgiving, Bing narrates the story of Lt. Philip Nolan, "the man without a country." Philco Radios, ABC. (29:50)

LIFE OF RILEY (11-29-48) William Bendix stars as Chester A. Riley with Paula Winslowe as Peg, John Brown as Digger O'Dell, the friendly

Chuck Schaden's
THOSE WERE THE DAYS
 WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 P.M.

NOVEMBER 1997

undertaker. Riley invites neighbor Gillis and his family - and their turkey - to Thanksgiving dinner. AFRS rebroadcast. (24:28)

MR. PRESIDENT (1949) Edward Arnold stars as the nation's chief executive who is asked to declare a National Day of Thanksgiving. Sustaining, ABC. (29:39)

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 29th
RADIO TO GET INTO
THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT BY

COUPLE NEXT DOOR (12-9-58) Peg Lynch and Alan Bunce star in this later version of the popular "Ethel and Albert" series. She asks him to go to the post office to mail a Christmas gift to a relative in Alaska. Sustaining, CBS. (15:15)

SUSPENSE (12-17-61) "Yuletide Miracle" starring Larry Haines and Santos Ortega. A man on parole is moved by the spirit of Christmas to fulfill a dying boy's wish. Sustaining, CBS. (24:21)

COUPLE NEXT DOOR (12-12-58) Peg Lynch and Alan Bunce star. A "practical" Christmas gift sparks rumors of poverty. Jell-O, U. S. Steel, Kelvinator, CBS. (15:20)

CHARLIE MC CARTHY SHOW (12-14-47) Edgar Bergen welcomes guest Gary Cooper with regulars Pat Patrick, singer Anita Ellis, and Mortimer Snerd. Charlie asks Cooper to play Santa Claus. Chase and Sanborn Coffee, Royal Pudding, NBC. (30:00)

SPEAKING OF RADIO (4-19-97) Peg Lynch, writer and star of "Ethel and Albert" and "The Couple Next Door" recalls her career and tells how she gets ideas and develops scripts for



ALAN BUNCE and PEG LYNCH
 "The Couple Next Door"

her programs. This conversation with Chuck Schaden was recorded at the Cincinnati Old Time Radio Convention. (31:20)

COUPLE NEXT DOOR (12-23-58) Peg Lynch and Alan Bunce star, with Francie Myers as Betsy and Margaret Hamilton as Aunt Effie. Selecting a Christmas tree and decorating it. Sustaining, CBS. (15:12)

THE WHISTLER (12-24-50) "Three Wise Guys" featuring John Brown in a Damon Runyon story about the recovery of loot from a factory payroll job hidden in the town of Bethlehem. Signal Oil Co., CBS (27:25)

...and for more good listening...

ART HELLYER SHOW-- Music of the big bands and the big singers with lots of knowledgeable commentary and fun from one of radio's legendary personalities, now in his 51th year on the air! *WJOL, 1340 AM, Saturday, 9 am-1 pm; Sunday, 2-6 pm.*

DICK LAWRENCE REVUE-- A treasure trove of rare and vintage recordings with spoken memories from the never to be forgotten past. *WNIB, 97.1 FM, Saturday, 8-9 pm.*

REMEMBER WHEN-- Host Don Corey's "nostalgia fest" with the emphasis on old time radio musical and variety shows, plus show tunes and interviews. *WAIT, 850 AM, Sunday, 1-4 pm.*

"When Radio Was" -- WMAQ-AM 670
Monday thru Friday Midnight to 1 a.m. Host Stan Freberg

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday

October, 1997 Schedule

NOTE: Carl Amari hosts a weekend edition of "When Radio Was" featuring old time radio shows and interviews on <i>WMAQ, Saturday and Sunday, 10pm-midnight.</i>				
	1 The Shadow Burns & Allen Pt 1	2 Burns & Allen Pt 2 Green Hornet	3 Dragnet Baby Snooks	
6 Box Thirteen Fibber McGee Pt 1	7 Fibber McGee Pt 2 Six Shooter	8 Gangbusters Abbott & Costello Pt 1	9 Abbott & Costello Pt 2 Sam Spade	10 Have Gun, Will Travel Police Headquarters
13 Texas Rangers Jack Benny Pt 1	14 Jack Benny Pt 2 Boston Blackie	15 Lone Ranger Charlie McCarthy Pt 1	16 Charlie McCarthy Pt 2 Broadway is My Beat	17 The Saint Lum and Abner
20 Suspense Fred Allen Pt 1	21 Fred Allen Pt 2 Dark Venture	22 Crime Classics Favorite Husband Pt 1	23 Favorite Husband Pt 2 Escape	24 Murder By Experts Unsolved Mysteries
27 Molle Mystery Theatre Grand Marquee Pt 1	28 Grand Marquee Pt 2 Lights Out	29 Mysterious Traveler Ozzie & Harriet Pt 1	30 Ozzie & Harriet Pt 2 The Whistler	31 Suspense Lights Out

November, 1997 Schedule

3 The Shadow Burns & Allen Pt 1	4 Burns & Allen Pt 2 Green Hornet	5 Dragnet Aldrich Family Pt 1	6 Aldrich Family Pt 2 Box Thirteen	7 Six Shooter Superman
10 Gangbusters Fibber McGee Pt 1	11 Fibber McGee Pt 2 Gunsmoke	12 Suspense Jack Benny Pt 1	13 Jack Benny Pt 2 Escape	14 Have Gun, Will Travel Superman
17 Texas Rangers Charlie McCarthy Pt 1	18 Charlie McCarthy Pt 2 Tarzan, Lord of Jungle	19 Boston Blackie Lum and Abner Pt 1	20 Lum and Abner Pt 2 Crime Classics	21 The Shadow Superman
24 The Whistler Favorite Husband Pt 1	25 Favorite Husband Pt 2 Lone Ranger	26 Suspense Great Gildersleeve Pt 1	27 Great Gildersleeve Pt 2 Broadway is My Beat	28 Columbia Workshop Superman

OUT OF TOWN LISTENERS PLEASE NOTE:

"When Radio Was" is a syndicated series heard throughout the country. If you're unable to tune in WMAQ, call (847) 524-0200, Ext. 223 and ask which station in or near your town carries the program.

Second Tier Radio Comedians

JOE PENNER

JACK PEARL

BERT GORDON

BY BILL OATES

In the early days of network radio, numerous comedians were borrowed from the New York vaudeville and burlesque stages to ply their wares over the airwaves. Some rose to the ranks of broadcasting immortality: Jack Benny, Eddie Cantor, Fred Allen, Bob Hope to name a few. Also from those early radio entertainers came many whose careers, for the most part, are forgotten. Among those whose voices and especially catch phrases were commonplace during their shooting star careers were Joe Penner, Jack Pearl, and Bert Gordon.

Many comedy performers in early radio of the 1930's shared a common series of events that brought them to the microphone. First, their existence in America began as children or grandchildren of immigrants. Next, the struggle to grow up in large cities often meant hardships and prejudices. Finally, a path to the vaudeville stage was blazed, often when they utilized accents heard in and around the neighborhood.

Though the youngest of the three, **Joe Penner** was the first of the three to ascend to the higher echelon of radio fame, and, sadly, the first to experience a failed career. Of those who listened to and used accents as a part of their acts, Penner instead worked hard to shed his native lan-

guage identity, so that he might be accepted by mainstream America.

Born Josef Pinter not far from Budapest, Hungary in 1904, as a three year old he was left to the care of grandparents, when his mother and father sought a home in America. At age eight, the boy accompanied his grandfather to a new home in Detroit, after the two took the Carpathian (a player in the Titanic disaster the same year) to America where the early production of Ford motorcars provided Joe's dad with employment.

For the next five years, the boy learned English, while coping with the cruelties thrown his way by the local toughs. His embarrassing debut in school came when he was placed as an eight year old in kindergarten so that he could learn English. He later said he would prefer to forget those dark years, when he would run home to cry in his mother's lap after his classmates' tauntings. As a result, the boy became shy and nervous (traits he said he never lost), and he turned to violin lessons, crafts, and play writing to occupy his childhood. At first, it was not his comedy that brought him theatrical recognition, rather his fine soprano voice gave audiences notice. However, he clicked even more when his foray into comedy began as a Chaplin imitator for local groups.

Penner's successes as a performer were not long lived, and he had to assume numerous jobs before he made a hit on stage. Living in Detroit provided him with a va-



JOE PENNER: "Wanna buy a duck?"

riety of occupations, and the most promising was at Ford, where he rose to a \$200 a week clerical job. He continued in a variety of employments, and when he was selling pianos in 1923, he accepted the role of assistant to Rex the Mind Reader and Magician. This chance also was short lived, for during one performance, Joe let the curtain drop that hid the wires for the "floating" lady. Despite the fact that the act was booed off the stage and the young assistant lost his job, another chance came when a featured comic failed to appear; Joe Penner took his place and officially became a comedian.

The struggle to become a top banana inched along the first two years, but during the 1925-26 season, he joined the road company of the Greenwich Follies at \$375 per week. As he honed his comedy skills

in productions such as *East Wind* and *Follow Thru*, his career followed a path of ups and downs. Reflecting on those roller coaster years, Joe wrote a 1934 Saturday Evening Post article and said that his natural shyness worked against him offstage, but he savored great joy when an audience laughed.

In 1930 he had his first chance to appear on radio, as a result of his success in the *Vanderbilt Revue*. He was petrified at the thought, but the management of the Pittsburgh theater where he was appearing insisted. He recalled that he was placed inside a glass booth and felt like a goldfish. He also decided why the fish have a sad look: he too was captured and received no positive response from the outside. "Radio isn't for me," he insisted and returned to the stage.

Touring in 1931, Joe Penner accidentally hit upon four words that would fire his act to the top. At a very quiet vaudeville performance in the very hot Publix Theater in Birmingham, Alabama, the comedian sought to resuscitate the audience's enthusiasm. While the master of ceremonies was doing his job on stage, the comedian stuck his head out and said, "Wanna buy a duck?" He might have said, "Wanna lease a buffalo?" or "Wanna climb a rainspout?" Nonetheless, the random choice was made and the audience (for reasons that escape psychology and logic) woke up and went wild. Fortunately, the m.c. played the straight man and told the comic to "Go away."

A little later Penner chirped, "Does your brother wanna buy a duck?" More exasperated came the response for Penner to go away and that the interlocutor did not have a brother. "Well, if you did have a brother ... ?" and so the ad lib stroke of genius continued, while the audience's

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howls of laughter increased.

As Joe Penner's fame grew, so did his list of catch phrases. Some of those which clicked were "You na-a-asty man!" and "Don't ever do-o-o that!" Of course, he tried others that were not accepted, and he even tried to substitute for the duck with "ash can" or "rhinosommonous" (his word). However, "Wanna buy a duck?" did not fade in popularity as he feared; rather, when the entertainer became nationally famous, it was estimated that the duck question was worth about \$250,000 per word.

As a result of Penner's new found popularity, greater offers poured in. Warner Brothers gave him a chance to join their armada of stars when he made fifteen short subjects for the Vitaphone division. However, a chance appearance on Rudy Vallee's *The Fleischmann Hour* set the wheels in motion for the comedian's own program.

Things were going well for Joe Penner, and he was reluctant to appear before a microphone as a result of his scary Pittsburgh debut. His agent said that radio had come a long way and that another try would not hurt. Joe argued that his stage act involved a lot of visuals, and that they would be lost to the listening audience. When the agent told Penner, "I'd just love to hear how your voice sounds over the radio," and wife Eleanor Penner added, "So would I," Joe capitulated.

Little did Joe Penner know that what he believed to be a mere analysis of his voice over a microphone was in reality an audition for the very popular Rudy Vallee show. Soon after the comedian wowed the audience, and after a second appearance a week later, Joe Penner had his own show, *The Baker's Broadcast* for Vallee's sponsor Fleischmann's. His salary rose from \$500 per week as a stage star to \$7500 when he

started in radio. Later, radio brought him up to the phenomenal \$13,250 per week salary and enough exposure to land him a billing on stage at the coveted New York Palace Theater.

Two Joe Penner shows played the airwaves in the 1930s. The first began in 1933 and included Mel Blanc as the voice of Goo-Goo the duck and young orchestra leader Ozzie Nelson with his new found singer Harriet Hilliard. (During the run of the Penner show the two future Nelsons of radio fame became engaged.) Even though he was voted radio's most popular comedian in 1934 and against popular wisdom, Joe left this first program which he felt had become a platform for mass produced and uninspired scripts. When the agency for the sponsor refused to change the format (Why fight it when it was in the top ten?). Joe sat out radio for a year and Ozzie and Harriet continued in the slot with Robert Ripley of "Believe It or Not?" fame.

As was often the case, a new radio star was often given a chance to perform in motion pictures, and Joe Penner was no exception. His first film *College Rhythm* (Paramount 1934) was reviewed in Time magazine as "typical" of the popular college pictures of the day with Penner garnishing more praise than the film. His other film for Paramount was *Collegiate* (1937), before he landed an impressive contract at RKO.

Watching Penner films today is disappointing with the exception of *Go Chase Yourself* (1938) where he plays an inept bank clerk married to a young Lucille Ball (who years later would buy the studio and renamed it Desilu), *The Day the Bookies Wept* (1939), and *Millionaire Playboy* (1940). After RKO, Joe Penner appeared in the abysmal filmed version of *The Boys from Syracuse* (Universal 1940).

When an opportunity for another radio show presented itself as a situation com-



JACK PEARL, right, and CLIFF HALL: "Baron Munchausen & Sharlie"

edy, Joe Penner agreed to return. The second program about the wealthy Park Avenue Penners and their black sheep Joe premiered in the fall of 1936 for Cocomalt and Huskies cereal on CBS. It often contained a simple story line loaded with puns and silly humor, an additional time for silly questions and answers, and ended with a usually non-serious song from Penner. At first the show, targeting children with Joe Penner cereal premiums like game rings, had a decent following. However, the program faded and finished on the NBC Blue network in 1940.

Joe returned to the stage, set his sights on play writing, and joined the cast of *Yokel Boy* in December of 1940. One month later, after feeling fine physically and experiencing a creative shot in the arm, he died of a heart attack at age 36. He realized neither a comeback as an entertainer, nor did he achieve his desire to write. He might have found another niche on the stage or in radio, and television certainly seemed a place for his physical comedy, but he never had the chance. Those who recognize his catch phrases years later usually do so from viewing animated cartoons made in the 1930's.

Just as Joe Penner tried to shed his Hungarian dialect to be accepted as a child, **Jack Pearl** of Baron Munchausen fame knew that some accents could be profitable to performers. Like so many early radio stars, Jack Pearl was born on New York's Lower East Side in 1894, where numerous accents and entire foreign languages were shouted out the windows and down the

streets.

Young Pearl preferred show business to schooling, and at age twelve he traded a formal education for a job as an errand boy for a music publisher. Eventually, he landed a spot in the famed Gus Edwards's "School Days" vaudeville act. Edwards, who wrote numerous popular songs like "School Days," had himself been a child actor. In the original American vaudeville house, Tony Pastor's at 14th street, because of his age the boy was barred from singing from the stage, so instead he sang from the balcony. With a knack for placing similar kids on stage to offer gags from school desks, he helped numerous future stars, like Eddie Cantor, Walter Winchell, Mae Murray, Hildegard, Ray Bolger, Bert Wheeler, Arthur Freed, Groucho Marx, Mervyn LeRoy, Johnny Hines, Eleanor Powell, Lou Silvers, and George Jessel (who eulogized his mentor: "I sat on his knee and he taught me to sing.") Bing Crosby played Edwards in the 1939 Paramount biography *The Star Maker*.

Once the child Jack Pearl was no longer in knee pants, he struck out in vaudeville teamed with Ben Bard, finding work with the Shubert brothers shows in 1919. In

PENNER, PEARL and GORDON

1922 the team made an experimental sound motion picture short for Lee DeForest. When a substitute was needed for German accented comedian Danny Murphy, Pearl adapted to the part, not realizing that his fortunes lay in that sound. Among the shows which included Pearl were *The Dancing Girl* (1923 with partner Bard and Marie Dressler), *Pleasure Bound* (1929), *International Revue* (1930), and George Gershwin's *Pardon My English* (1933).

By the early 1930's, Jack Pearl's fame skyrocketed to radio through two major career opportunities. Although it ended up a failure, the chance to work in Florenz Ziegfeld's 1931 version of his famed *Follies* allowed Jack Pearl to perform at a prestigious level where he had never previously worked. The format of the show was by 1931 old fashioned and the deepening Great Depression did not help audiences either; however, as an adjunct to the show, CBS debuted *The Ziegfeld Follies of the Air* on April 3, 1932 with old *Follies* stars Fanny Brice, Will Rogers, Billie Burke, and newcomer Pearl. Like its stage counterpart, this *Follies* closed early after being on the air only a few months. Jack Pearl's second radio break came when he, like Jack Benny, made a visit to star finder Ed Sullivan's program in 1932. Soon after Pearl was paired with Walter O'Keefe on a show for *Lucky Strike*, and by the start of the 1933-34 season, Pearl had his own thirty minute slot on NBC for *Royal Gelatin*. His salary advanced from \$3,500 to \$8,500 in five months.

Jack Pearl's German dialect, the first success of its type on radio, evolved into a character named Baron Munchausen. There actually was a real Baron von Munchausen, who distinguished himself as an accomplished cavalryman in the second half of the eighteenth century. Although

he did tell some adventuresome tales, an acquaintance of his borrowed the name and wrote the fantastic adventures that sold as quickly as the books could be printed. The boasts that were attributed to the Baron soon became Pearl's act, but one more element needed to be added: the straight man. Most of the Baron's exaggerations were played off his friend and confidant "Sharlie," Cliff Hall.

The stories were presented as follows: the Baron began telling Sharlie some incredible tale with the language being mangled by malaprops and mispronunciations all the way, Cliff Hall questioned the Baron for clarification and doubted the entire hyperbole, whereas the Baron answered "Vas you dere, Sharlie?" So successful was the act that when Pearl tired of the Baron and restructured his radio program as a situation comedy revolving around a German barkeeper, the audience did not respond positively.

After admitting defeat, Jack Pearl and Cliff Hall returned as the Baron and Sharlie in the fall of 1936 for Raleigh and Kool cigarettes, quickly vaulting to the top ten. One valuable standard in the show was "the man with his trombone" Tommy Dorsey and his orchestra, which was usually given two complete numbers. Tenor Morton Bowe and for awhile Mae Questel (voice of Olive Oyl and Betty Boop) added to the nonsense. Although the music still holds up, the jokes, which sometimes received the loudest laughs from the people before the microphones, do not because they often relied on weak puns.

Perhaps Jack Pearl's creativity was not fully showcased on radio, and as he became more deeply entrenched as the Baron, it became less likely that his other talents would be utilized. In two late 1937 programs during the final tall tale skits, the Baron plays the roles of a Scotsman and Uncle Tom. It took a great deal of linguis-

tic gymnastics to assume a German accent, then have this voice also adopt a new dialect. Nonetheless, the ratings began to plummet and Jack Pearl was off the air.

Like Joe Penner, when Jack Pearl's career began its meteoric rise, motion picture scripts were hastily written to capitalize on the Baron's popularity. His first chance came in 1933, when MGM teamed the Baron with Jimmy Durante in *Meet the Baron*. Although a kind of Marx Brothers craziness is attempted, the laughs come more from the supporting players, like Ted Healy and his Three Stooges. Of the film, producer David O. Selznick said, "a horror that I made ... I have never been a devotee of radio comics and I only made the picture as a personal favor." It was unfortunate, for if the talent, including writers Herman Mankiewicz and Norman Krasna and actors like Zasu Pitts and Edna Mae Oliver, had been handled better, Jack Pearl's debut in film might have been better.

Jack Pearl's second picture, *Hollywood Party* (MGM 1934), starred Jimmy Durante and was designed to have the Baron more in support. The movie is best remembered for the Laurel and Hardy egg smashing scene with Lupe Velez (even videotape packaging has *The Boys on the cover*, as opposed to the "bigger stars" in the film.) The plot involves Jimmy Durante, a.k.a. Schnarzan, in search of full toothed lions to wrestle, and the boasting Baron has the very things brought back from his adventures in Africa. Jack Pearl's character was not fully developed, and the high points of the film include the aforementioned egg scene, a great musical title number, and a Technicolor Disney cartoon *Chocolate Soldier*.

During the 1940's, Jack Pearl gave radio a couple more tries and visited military bases. He did not attempt television, but did score great applause from the au-



BERT GORDON: "How do you do?"

dience when he and Cliff Hall appeared on the special vaudeville edition of radio's *The Big Show* in 1951. He had returned to live in Manhattan, where he died in 1982.

Finally, another master of the dialect deserves to be added to the list of important but forgotten second bananas. Like Jack Pearl, **Bert Gordon** assumed an accent that made his career, and likewise, he got his start on New York's Lower East Side. Born Barney Gorodetsky in 1900, he was the son of Russian immigrants, and though he was good at imitating his parents' accents, he decided that the sound as a permanent attribute was not to his liking. The public decided otherwise.

Also like Pearl, Bert Gordon became enamored with the stage and at age twelve joined "Stage Struck Kids." In two years he rose to Gus Edwards' "Newsboy

PENNER, PEARL and GORDON

Sextette," and after that act broke up he joined a young Bert Lahr in "Nine Crazy Kids." A team was formed when brother Harry joined Barney to play the vaudeville houses. When the comedian changed his name to Bert Gordon, he often played to his homeliness (big ears) with an attractive girl partner (like Gene Ford) who played the "Dumb Dora" type. At one time he even played "Desperate Sam" in a Western act.

Parallel to the careers of Penner and Pearl, Bert Gordon continued climbing up the entertainment ladder until he found a chance to appear on radio in the early 1930's. On his trek across the Broadway stages during the 1920's, he caught the eye of George White, who added Gordon to his *Scandals* and brought the comedian along when the troupe toured Europe for two years. His first exposure to the microphone came on the Jack Benny program, but in 1935 *The Mad Russian*, as he would be known to radio listeners, was given his longest running position in the medium as a stooge on the Eddie Cantor program.

Eddie Cantor's show was in the cornerstone of early radio comedy. Cantor first bowed in 1931 and his show ran to 1950, with a few breaks in between. Once *The Mad Russian* joined the cast, he proffered his trademark "How do you do?" with an accent as thick as borscht prior to a verbal sparring with Cantor for the remainder of the program's run. And like Penner and Pearl, Bert Gordon was invited into motion pictures.

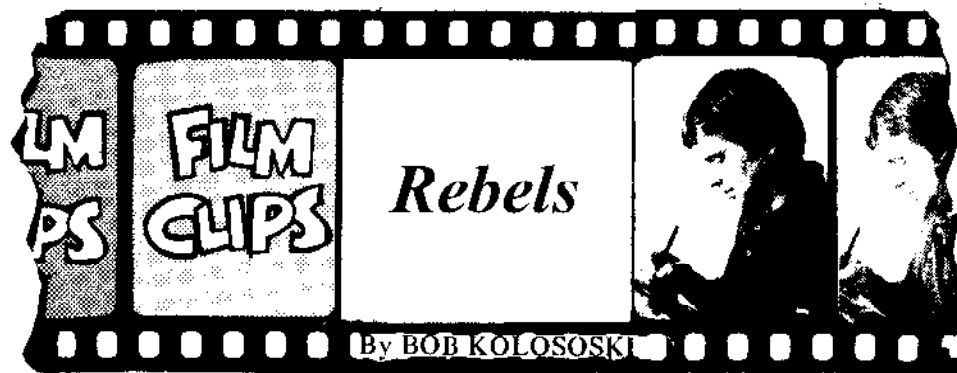
Bert Gordon worked for several studios, and his debut was along side of Joe Penner in *New Faces of 1937* (RKO). Among his other films were *Sing For Your Supper* (Columbia 1941), *Let's Have Fun* (Columbia 1943), and *She Get's Her Man* (Universal 1945). The last vehicle was perhaps one

of his most rewarding ventures, because his support of Joan Davis and William Gargan in this comedy whodunit showed how Gordon was able to function well in an admirable production.

Although Bert Gordon was reluctant to play *The Mad Russian*, he knew where his source of funds lay. At least twice during his career he sent the character to other radio programs: *The Milton Berle Show* and *Duffy's Tavern*. Sometimes, when politics did not favor the Russian reference, he was merely referred to as Boris. Nonetheless, when Eddie Cantor left radio in 1950, Bert Gordon found a place at *Duffy's*, and for the final year of that show on radio he frequented the place where "the elite meet to eat." He was a guest on the show a few years earlier, and Ed Gardiner remembered his contributions and that a *Mad Russian* probably would fit in with the rest of the zany characters that Archie served. Unfortunately, this was Bert Gordon's last important foray in radio, and television offered little else. He died in California in 1974.

Radio required a variety of personalities. Old vaudevillians often sentimentally recalled those whose names did not shine in the marque lights as long or as brightly as others, and they added that their career investments were of no less substance. When the lesser comedians, the second bananas, quickly rose and nearly as quickly descended the ranks, their contributions were all but forgotten. For Joe Penner, Jack Pearl, and Bert Gordon, they, like many others, had their day in the sun, provided audiences with laughs and catchy phrases, and then faded into the ether. ■

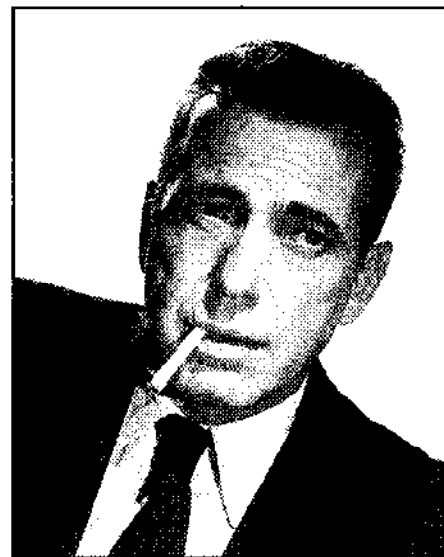
(NOTE-- Tune in to Joe Penner, Jack Pearl --as Baron Munchausen,-- and Bert Gordon-- as the *Mad Russian*-- in three vintage broadcasts on *Those Were The Days November 1.*)



A rebel is, simply, a person who defies authority or control. The founders of our country were rebels with a cause.

There have been many movie stars who were rebels, on and off screen, but very few were rebelling for a cause other than themselves.

In the 1930s Bette Davis, James Cagney and Olivia deHavilland defied the authority of Jack Warner and openly rebelled against the studio contract system. They managed to win victories for themselves, but the studio contract system wasn't broken until television cut into movie profits.



HUMPHREY BOGART

Then the studios wanted to rid themselves of expensive stars on studio payrolls.

On the screen Cagney played tough guys and gangsters and in each case his character openly defied authority. They were rebels, but weren't considered as such by the audiences of the '30s; they were hoodlums, thieves and killers.

The first true screen rebel was Rick Blaine in *Casablanca* (1942). At first he refused to aid the Allied cause while he treated the evil Nazis with contempt. He was a man without a family, with allegiance to no one except himself and Sam, his only friend. The choice of a black man as Rick's one loyal friend reinforced his indictment against society and the prejudices of the time. He gave up the girl at the end, but not so much for noble causes as his deep desire to remain a loner. Humphrey Bogart as Rick defined the movie rebel and those who followed did so in his shadow.

In the late forties a sleepy-eyed Robert Mitchum emerged as a full-fledged rebel off the screen. He was arrested in 1947 for possession of marijuana and spent six months in the Los Angeles County Jail. He thought the bad press would end his career, but instead was often cast as a character on the fringe of society who just didn't give a damn. When he played Philip Marlowe in *Farewell My Lovely* (1975) he understated Marlowe's nonconformity

REBELS

sending out a signal that Mitchum was no longer the young rebel.

By 1950 Mitchum's casual style of acting was overtaken by an actor who mumbled his way to Broadway fame as Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Marlon Brando was the ultimate rebel in the rebellious fifties. He had trained at the Actor's Studio in New York and was a disciple of "the method" style of acting. To the older audiences of the 1950s Brando was an unrestrained, anti-social punk. He fortified that image with his portrayal of a motorcycle gang member in *The Wild One* (1953). When his character is asked what he is rebelling against, he answers, "What do ya got?" His screen work has always been interesting and often brilliant because he has never shown anyone the real Brando. No one knows what makes him tick, therefore we never know what to expect from him on the screen. He has always managed to defy definition.

Brando was the dark rebel of the 1950s and James Dean was the decade's martyred rebel. Brando brooded with intensity while Dean whimpered on Natalie Wood's shoulder. Dean was a pale clone of Brando and two steps behind him, but he became immortal when he smashed his sports car into the side of a California mountain. Speed was Dean's way of spitting into the eye of authority. He drove fast, lived fast, and died young. He wasn't much of a rebel off screen, but in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) he identified with every teenager who lamented that "my parents just don't understand me." His early death left the door open for other rebels to take his place.

Paul Newman made his screen debut about the same time James Dean died. It was in one of the worst films of all times: *The Silver Chalice* (1954). Nevertheless,



MARLON BRANDO

over the next decade Newman turned in impressive performances in a string of quality films. He was the cold-blooded killer Billy the Kid in *The Left-Handed Gun* (1958) and a self-centered rat in *The Hustler* (1961). In several films his character broke the rules and used a wide-grinned smile to charm his way out of trouble. His best rebel was the title character in *Cool Hand Luke* (1967). Luke was a misfit who defied authority as a force of habit. The most quoted movie phrase of the '60s pertained to Luke's disrespect of the law. "What we have here is failure to communicate" was the battle cry for the hippie generation and their opposition to the war in Viet Nam.

Paul Newman was a good rebel, but he had a rival who redefined the movie star rebel.

Steve McQueen was lean, hungry and a rebel from the day he was born. His father left when Steve was a baby and McQueen never had the chance to see his father again. His mother moved in with an uncle who worked long days, drank all night and



JAMES DEAN

taught Steve that independence was every man's right.

McQueen grew up working on his uncle's farm and dreamed of a good life. He joined the Marines at 17 and spent time in the brig for going AWOL. After the Marines he drifted from job to job until he joined New York's Neighborhood Playhouse to study acting. He worked hard and landed the lead in the Broadway play *Hatful of Rain*. He had a bit part in the Paul Newman movie *Somebody Up There Likes Me* (1956) and was the star of the low budget film *The Blob* (1958). The same year he landed the starring role in the TV series

Wanted: Dead or Alive. He became the first TV star to become a super movie star.

His roles in *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), *Hell is For Heroes* (1962) and *The Great Escape* (1963) made him a megastar "overnight." He made big money but gained a reputation as a difficult star with a chip on his shoulder. He loved motorcycles and often did his own stunts involving fast cycles or cars. He had several off screen affairs with his leading ladies and divorced his first wife to marry Ali MacGraw, his co-star in *The Getaway* (1972). He was a heavy smoker all his life and died in 1980 of lung cancer. He was the last great movie rebel.

Others have followed McQueen, but none have duplicated his mesmerizing screen image or his wild life off screen.

Peter Fonda began his career playing nerds, but discovered motorcycles and he became a wild angel in the 1966 movie of the same name. In 1979 he co-scripted, produced and starred in *Easy Rider* and suddenly he was the rebel of the hour. He didn't hold that distinction long because one of the actors to gain fame in *Easy Rider* was Jack Nicholson.

Nicholson starred in some of the best films of the '70s and his ability to portray an outsider bucking the system was his key to success. He wasn't as devilish off screen as Steve McQueen, but his private life would probably be banned in Boston. In 1975 he won the Best Actor Academy Award for his role as a free-spirited individual in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. He has aged into a great character actor able to tackle comedy as well as drama.

Our society has glorified rebels. Maybe we would like to kick sand in the face of authority, but are afraid of the consequences.

That's why movie rebels are appealing. They carry out our secret desires while we munch on a bag of buttered popcorn. ■

Ken Alexander
Remembers . . .

Autumns of Old



Autumn is my favorite season.

Chicago's climate affords us a wide variety of weather in a year's time. Winter slaps us with temperatures down to 25 below zero with biting winds—painful cold and snow and sleet and ice making it difficult to walk and hazardous to drive.

Winter is a study in white and gray, and the season seems to last forever. The best thing about winter is the vernal equinox.

The hues of spring are pale green dotted with the bright colors of the tulip and the iris. But if you blink you'll miss them.

Spring might be my favorite season, except that many years it never comes. Spring should be a three-month-long transition between winter and summer, a time when Nature comes to life. But often the transition lasts only a few days; one week it will be chilly and raw, and the next we're into summer and everyone is griping about the heat and humidity.

Heat and humidity, of course, are what summer is all about. Temperatures can top 100, and on a sultry August day with not a breath of air stirring, those of us who must be outdoors have no choice but to swelter and sweat.

Some folks claim to like summer. They enjoy a day at the beach, lying, nearly naked, on the sand surrounded by hundreds more nearly-naked bodies. They delight

in the cool lake breeze and frolic in the 65-degree water.

These folks don't seem to realize that the reason they go to the beach is to *escape* the summer weather. The fact is, they really don't like summer at all.

Summer is dark green studded with beads of perspiration.

But then we have autumn, lovely autumn. The oppressive heat of summer gives way to agreeable conditions: comfortable temperatures and dry air; a slight nip in the early morning and late evening; golden afternoons.

Fall is my kind of season.

The colors of autumn are brown, tan, garnet, gold, yellow and blue. The poet Helen Hunt Jackson wrote of "October's bright blue weather."

The geese and many of the birds fly south to avoid the cruelty of winter. Even some butterflies—fragile creatures that they are—rather than remain in the Midwest will fly all the way to Mexico. The fireflies douse their lights.

Everything seems to be dying or at least going into hibernation. Flowers fade and wither, done in by the first hard frost. The grass turns brown. Trees, so full and green in summer, become bare.

The fall season is at once bracing and melancholy. There is sadness in autumn's

beauty, but there is beauty in its sadness.

I've always enjoyed walking on a carpet of crinkly autumn leaves. As a child, I would imagine myself tramping through a vast bowl of crisp corn flakes.

As schoolkids on the West Side in the '30s, we would collect fallen leaves of various types, dip them into melted paraffin to preserve them, and mount them on pages of a loose-leaf notebook, as a project for science class.

Fall. In that era before rock-and-roll, the disc jockeys would play such topical tunes as "Autumn Nocturne," "September in the Rain," "Autumn in New York," and "Autumn Serenade." And we'd hear Roger Williams' recording of "Autumn Leaves" and "'Tis Autumn" as sung by Nat Cole.

On the networks, Jack Benny, Fibber McGee and Molly, and all our other radio friends would be back on the air after their summer vacation.

For us kids, too, vacation was over and it was, alas, back-to-school time. But by the end of the first week, we would have adapted to the drill.

Autumn means football—prep, college, and pro football—and all its adjuncts: homecoming dances, tailgate parties, Sunday afternoons watching the game on TV. Or, in the old days, listening on the radio.

Homeowners and apartment building janitors would rake leaves into a pile in the gutter and light them. In the fall in the city, the air would be heavy with the smoke—and the smell—of burning leaves.

Toward the end of October, we set our clocks back an hour, and it's dark by supertime.

And then—Hallowe'en.

In the lower grades of grammar school, we were allowed to wear costumes when we returned to school after lunch, and the teacher would be challenged to identify each of her disguised charges.

The boys I hung around with—not I,

but the boys I hung around with—used to ring doorbells around Hallowe'en. They would enter the lobby of an apartment building, press all the doorbell buttons and run.

"Every fall, my father would look forward to 'Injun Summer' in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune*."

Now, this prank was a throwback to a couple of centuries earlier, when people were less enlightened. Back then, if someone rapped on a neighbor's door and ran away on Hallowe'en, and the neighbor opened the door to find no one there, he might think that the knocking had been done by a ghost.

But this was the 20th century. Our neighbors in their apartments knew better than to suspect that a ghost had rung their doorbells. When they pressed the buzzer and found no one there, they realized that the neighborhood urchins had been at work. They had not been frightened, and they had not been fooled. And the kids who had rung the bell *knew* this. So what, I wondered, was the point?

These same boys would also take a piece of soap and make a squiggling mark on the window of a store or of a basement apartment. You could see these white squiggles all over the neighborhood.

The choicest part of the fall season is a series of warm, hazy days occurring after the first frost—a final reprieve before the onset of winter.

This delicious interlude is known as Indian summer.

Every fall, my father—the whole family, really, but especially my dad—would look forward to finding the cartoon "Injun Summer" in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune*. And we would never be disappointed.

The story has it that one autumn day in

AUTUMNS OF OLD

1907, the legendary cartoonist John T. McCutcheon sat at his drawing board in his studio in the Fine Arts Building with the deadline approaching. He needed to produce a cartoon for the front page of tomorrow's editions, but he lacked an idea.

McCutcheon's thoughts strayed to his boyhood on a farm in the 1870s. He visualized an Indiana cornfield with corn shocks in the distance; a pile of burning leaves, their smoke hazing the atmosphere; a bearded old man sitting on a log, a pipe in his mouth, a rake across his knees. An eight-year-old boy — probably the old man's grandson — stands beside the old man, gazing into the distance.

The old man begins to speak: "Yep, sonny, this is sure enough Injun summer. Don't know what that is, I reckon, do you?..."

And as he goes on to spin a fanciful tale of why we call this season Indian summer, the corn shocks are transformed by the boy's imagination into tepees.

"Sometimes in the fall you'll see a sheaf of Indian corn tacked to the front door of a neighbor's house."

For every creative artist there are days when inspiration will not come, and this was one of those days for John T. McCutcheon. But since he had to meet a deadline and "Injun Summer" was all he had been able to come up with in the allotted time, he turned it in, although he really was not proud of his effort.

Response from the readers was overwhelming. The people took the cartoon to their hearts, and beginning in 1912, the *Tribune* reprinted "Injun Summer" on a Sunday every fall.

When Indian Summer has come and gone, the autumn begins in earnest. The languor of early fall gives way to a feeling of vitality. The air becomes crisp. The pace of life quickens as we look ahead to winter.

Even the produce department at the grocery takes on a festive appearance.

You'll see ornamental Indian corn — the husks peeled back to show an ear of reddish-brown kernels with a few yellow ones mixed in, or a pale yellow ear with a row of black or brown kernels here and there.

Sometimes in the fall you'll see a sheaf of Indian corn tacked to the front door of a neighbor's house.

Then there are the gourds. Some are the size and shape of a Bartlett pear. Others are the size, shape and color of a small orange. Some look for all the world like a tiny pumpkin, three inches across — perhaps they *are* young pumpkins. One gourd is shaped like an elongated punching bag. There's another pear-shaped variety with a top portion that's cream color while the bottom part is deep green — and the dividing line between the two colors is as sharp as if a painter had used masking tape.

There's a gourd called the Ten Commandments. It's the color of ivory and shaped like a tomato but larger. Near the top, spaced around the circumference, are ten — always ten — little nubs.

A collection of gourds in a wooden bowl or a basket makes an attractive autumn centerpiece.

Late in the season comes Thanksgiving, a day when families traditionally gather.

I can recall a few Thanksgiving songs that we learned in school. One was "Prayer of Thanksgiving."

We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing.

Then there was "Grandmother's Thanksgiving."

Over the river and through the wood

To Grandmother's house we go.

And one which told of the gastronomical pleasures of the holiday:

*Carloads of pumpkins as yellow as gold,
Onions in silvery strings.*

Shining red apples and clusters of grapes,

Nuts and a host of good things,

*Chickens and turkeys and fat little pigs—
Oh, this is what Thanksgiving brings.*

Beautiful autumn.

A few aspects of autumn have changed since I was a kid. For one thing, Hallowe'en has evolved into a colossal commercial enterprise. As a child, I never heard of trick-or-treating. We were living through the Great Depression, and many of the families in our neighborhood had a hard enough time putting food on the table without providing treats for all the kids on the block. And the kids knew this.

Nowadays, however, for weeks before the end of October, the papers are full of ads for trick-or-treat candy, costumes, makeup, decorations, even Hallowe'en greeting cards. Americans today spend more money for Hallowe'en than for any special day except Christmas.

There's no more burning of leaves in the fall. The smell of the smoke and the resultant haze in the atmosphere — once a welcome sign of autumn — are now considered air pollution.

Because of readers' complaints that it was offensive to Native Americans, an 80-year-old autumn tradition was stopped when, in 1992, "Injun Summer" appeared in the *Tribune* for the last time.

And so autumn is not in every way exactly as it used to be. And I suppose that, as years go by, the season will undergo even more changes — as will other aspects of our lives.

But there's one thing about autumn that has not changed: It's still the loveliest time of the year. ■



Our Readers Write

WE GET LETTERS

HAMMOND, INDIANA-- I really enjoyed Clair Schulz's story on Al Jolson (Aug-Sept, 1997) and, although I am just a shade too young to remember him at the peak of his career, I know he will always be a legend in the world of music.

I am old enough to remember one thing about Mr. Jolson and I want everyone to know it.

I was assigned to GHQ (General Headquarters) in Tokyo in 1950 when Truman's war started up over in Korea. All of a sudden Special Services (USO) became a pretty hot organization, sending show units throughout the operations area. They were good and they busted their humps to put on great acts for the forward areas and the guys in the hospitals.

Al Jolson would have been just another one of these acts, except for one thing he said and refused to do.

While entertaining at Tokyo General Hospital he was asked to give a show at GHQ Officers Club (tantamount to a command performance) and he refused, saying "I came here to sing for the guys in the hospitals. I don't have time for anything else."

Some of us younger troops may have known very little about the man but every soldier in the Far East Command became a lifelong fan of Al Jolson as of that day.

—DON LOEFFLER

NOSTALGIA DIGEST AND RADIO GUIDE

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Museum of Broadcast Communications

museum pieces

Reported by Margaret Warren

It was a glittering evening back in June when the Museum celebrated its Tenth Anniversary. Six of broadcasting's major pioneers came to town to celebrate: Betty White, Barbara Billingsley, Edie Adams, Steve Allen, Jayne Meadows, and Mike Wallace. Each had been honored before at separate Museum events and here they all were again. Such a group! Stop by the Archives, ask to see the tape of that evening, and enjoy the excitement.

We wondered how often these six appear in the Museum Archives. Using the user-friendly Archives computers, here's what we found:

There are 80 programs with Betty White, everything from her early *Life With Elizabeth* to *Mary Tyler Moore* to *Golden Girls* to the *Barbara Walters Special*.

Type in Barbara Billingsley and up pop

26 programs, mostly *Leave It to Beaver*.

How many for Steve Allen? Try 128. Remember him on *What's My Line?* and *I've Got a Secret?* We have those plus, of course, his own comedy programs and his acclaimed *Meeting of the Minds*.

Jayne Meadows is found 24 times, many with Steve as well as on *St. Elsewhere* and *Hotel*.

Call up Edie Adams and 22 programs appear. Many are with Ernie Kovacs as well as her own *Here's Edie* series.

Check Mike Wallace and there are 58 programs. Select from an early interview with Dagmar, a Vietnam War documentary, several editions of *60 Minutes* along with a *Chicago Tonight* chat with John Calloway.

A remarkable group with great accomplishment and, for us, hours of wonderful viewing. Stop in and enjoy.



Betty White, Barbara Billingsley, Edie Adams, Steve Allen, Jayne Meadows and Mike Wallace at the Museum's 10th Anniversary Party June 13.

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Read Bill Oates article about Jack Pearl, Joe Penner and Bert Gordon. Page 26.

THE GREAT 'KEMO SABE' DEBATE

By Richard O'Donnell
Page 4

THE PHANTOM (YIKES!) AGAIN

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SCAREWAVES

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