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WINTER 2004



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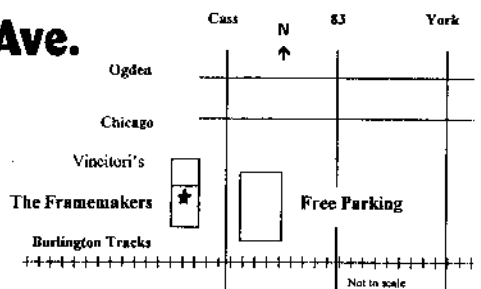
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# CHUCK SCHADEN'S NOSTALGIA DIGEST AND RADIO GUIDE

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BOOK 30 CHAPTER 1

WINTER 2004

JANUARY/FEBRUARY/MARCH

## Confessions of an Alley-Junker

BY JIM DOHREN

Something you seldom find in neighborhoods of new homes is an alley.

For those younger readers who don't know, an alley is a service road which runs behind the homes on a residential block. That's where people's garages were if they had one and where they put out their junk for collection and hauling to the dump – not a “landfill,” mind you, just the dump. Today, of course, most of us properly separate our junk from the recyclables and put them both on the curb or in the alley for pickup. But in the olden days *everything* you didn't really want to keep went out to the alley.

Many readers will remember alleys as I do. When I was a boy growing up on the East Side of Aurora, Illinois, alleys were always a better way home from C. M. Bardwell grade school than the sidewalk, even if it was only a couple of blocks. The alleys slowed our pace and set our imaginations racing. What red-blooded American boy couldn't find a new use for what someone else considered worthy only of being thrown away, even knowing we bore the risk of being hollered at by an adult who told us to “Stop fooling around and get on home!”? The possibilities were endless.

The ex-coal bin space ship my buddy

*Jim Dohren is a subscriber who teaches school in Downers Grove, Illinois.*

Tom Tosaw and I built, inspired by the early television shows *Captain Video* and *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet*, was furnished largely by dials and gauges (most just painted tin can lids), levers, chairs, wheels and other props from the alleys. All of it free.

The inspiration for our exclusive neighborhood BOYS ONLY clubhouse came from a refrigerator crate we found and hauled to my back yard. Along with furring strips cajoled from the workmen at the nearby Mann Sash and Door Co., scraps of old linoleum, some nails and hours of “skilled labor” we had the best clubhouse in the city. It was small enough to climb inside, and we felt like lords of our domain until the first heavy rain flowed through our “waterproof” roof and dissolved the walls of our castle.

Speaking of castles, in the early Fifties when there was a series of films about the Middle Ages, we all became knights. Our shields were cardboard, our helmets empty potato chip tins, our swords and lances wood from Mann Sash and Door's scrap heap – everything from the alleys.

Sometimes we'd just collect some of all the fluids we could find in our wanderings and combine them into a powerful elixir. We gave them terrific names. One, I remember in particular, after 50 years, is Gary Gooky's Ganger Grease!

Each generation, I think, believes it has

created its own discoveries, had its own experiences only to find they're not unique. So it was with our alley adventures. My Dad put a name to them. One day when he saw what we'd collected he didn't have to ask where we found our loot. I remember him saying, "Well, I see you've been out 'alley-junking.'" I suppose I might have felt our accomplishments diminished by the reference to junk. But then Dad explained it was what he and his buddies did when they were kids in Chicago. I felt as if what we were doing had the recognition of *work*, something I knew to be good. I was pleased that it had a name and that

Dad understood. I was carrying on the family tradition.

During much of my life I have had a fascination with changing something someone else considers of little or no value into an object of new use and beauty, whether it be a piece of furniture or an old car. As a teacher at O'Neill Middle School in Downers Grove, I began a recycling club enlisting students to help reduce waste in our building. I'm certain my inclinations are founded at least partially on those alley-junking days when my imagination was fired by what could be done with what others threw away. ■

## NOSTALGIA DIGEST UPDATE

### NEWS YOU CAN USE Chuck Schaden Reporting

**MUSEUM OF BROADCAST COMMUNICATIONS** is planning a move to a new location. Its new home will be a renovated 50,000-square-foot site on State Street at Kinzie in the River North neighborhood, near Marina Towers, the House of Blues and Harry Caray's Restaurant. There will be an extended period of renovation and fund-raising while the MBC prepares for this exciting next step. During this period, offices will be maintained in the Chicago Cultural Center, but all other MBC facilities will be closed to the public, effective December 31, 2003. The MBC plans to present regularly scheduled events at various venues throughout the Chicago area and members will be notified. The new MBC hopes to open sometime in 2005. For additional information or to make a contribution, visit [www.museum.tv](http://www.museum.tv) or write MBC, 78 E. Washington St., Chicago, IL 60602-9837. Phone (312) 629-6008.

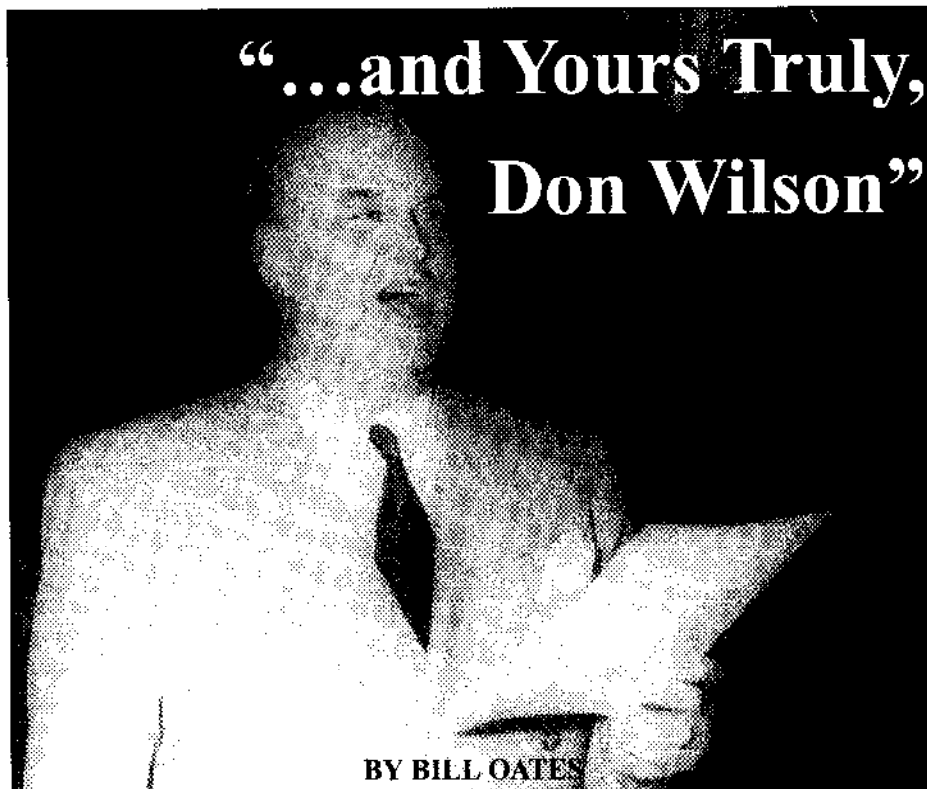
**THOSE WERE THE DAYS RADIO PLAYERS**, who have performed regularly at the MBC during past years, will move with the Museum to the new location. In the meantime, the TWTD Radio Players will continue to present old-time-radio re-enactments throughout the metropolitan Chicago area at schools, libraries, for senior citizens and other organizations. For more information, call (847) 965-7763.

**AFTRA/SAG PLAYERS**, a group of broadcast professionals, will continue to perform old-time-radio re-enactments periodically at the Chicago Cultural Center. For information, call (312) 573-8081.

**METRO GOLDEN MEMORIES** has closed. New ownership took over the store in 1997 and they had every expectation of continuing with the business. However, the economic climate, especially since 9/11, has been difficult and after a long struggle the store closed at the end of July 2003. We join the staff in expressing regret and extend thanks for your patronage over the past 27 years.

**NOSTALGIA DIGEST WEBSITE** may now be found on the Internet. Be sure to check it regularly for information about this magazine and to purchase selected books, tapes, compact discs and other nostalgia-related items. Visit [www.nostalgia Digest.com](http://www.nostalgia Digest.com) See the notice on page 25 of this issue.

**NECROLOGY OF 2003**, the annual listing of entertainers and personalities who died during the preceding year, will be published in the Spring issue of *Nostalgia Digest*. This change is due to the *Digest's* new quarterly schedule. The Necrology of 2003 will appear on our website shortly after January 1, 2004.



# "...and Yours Truly, Don Wilson"

BY BILL OATES

*The Jack Benny Show* made its mark in broadcasting by employing a group of actors who augmented the program's star to create one of radio's best ensembles. From Jack to his sound effects men, everyone contributed to make this comedy show eternally popular and forever endearing. Even though Mary Livingstone became the first "permanent" cast member, announcer Don Wilson remained with the program the longest. He often received awards for his speaking abilities, but his path to radio came because of his singing voice.

Born in Lincoln, Nebraska, on September 1, 1900, Don moved with his family to Denver two years later. Little has been recorded of Donald Harlow Wilson's early

years, but after high school, he entered the University of Colorado in 1919. He excelled on the undefeated freshman football team that scored 68 points against its opponents' 0 in 1920. He graduated in 1923, the same year that he first appeared on Denver's KFEL.

Don started working as a salesman, but the more promising career move came when he joined a singing trio. Their fame made promoters from the Western states' Piggly Wiggly supermarket chain dub him and his cronies "The Piggly Wiggly Trio." Jack Benny must not have known this tidbit of Wilson trivia, for as much as he joked about Don's girth, this knowledge probably would have been referred to on the show more than once. Bing Crosby and Rudy Vallee needed not to be threatened by Don's crooning abilities, but, at the time, the supermarket chain did allow the three

*Bill Oates, of Kouts, Indiana, is a high school English teacher and author.*

to advance their careers and travel to California as its representatives.

Don did not hold much hope in achieving fame from singing, but while in San Francisco in May of 1927, the group made its debut on radio station KFRC. Of course, The Bay Area, as the hub of West Coast broadcasting, was the equivalent of New



Don Wilson (in circle) on University of Colorado Freshman Football Team, 1919

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York and Chicago in these early days of radio, and dozens of famous voices got their start in radio there.

Don Lee owned KFRC at the time, and three years later the trio transferred to his KHJ station in Los Angeles. When Piggly Wiggly no longer needed the group, one of the members returned to Denver, and a duet continued. At this point Don began doing announcing jobs, and when his remaining partner left, introducing programs and commentating became Wilson's occupation for life. His timing could not have been better, because new staff announcers were needed in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and many network shows would soon be coming his way.

Several car dealerships owned many early radio stations, and Don Lee's Cadillacs were part of the automobile-radio connection. The good news was that, with his newfound fortune, Wilson wanted this particular luxury car. The bad news is that, when he could not get a good deal on one, he bought a new Packard instead. Infuriated, Lee fired his announcer. Fortunately for Wilson, Earl C. Anthony owned the Packard outlet and KFI, two of Lee's main competitors. And, as a result, the young man from Denver moved to what would become a very important network affiliate in 1929.

Don soon became the station's chief an-

nouncer, and, shortly thereafter, another great radio voice entered the field. Ken Carpenter moved his family (a wife and baby) from Peoria, Illinois, to California during the early years of the Depression. His father, a pastor, had migrated to a church in Pasadena, and, like John Steinbeck's Joads, the young couple came west to try their luck at finding a job. Ken auditioned at KHJ, but did not fare well with the script. This station's chief announcer, Bob Swan, suggested that he try KFI. After the young man arrived, Wilson let Carpenter do occasional station breaks, until he became a full-time voice. From this chance connection, the two became lifelong friends and were often substituted for each other. The prime example came when Don moved east for NBC network chores, and Ken became KFI's chief announcer.

Whether or not Don appreciated moving from southern California to New York, he certainly found new career advancements. The first started when he began broadcasting, appropriately enough, college football games in 1933. Although he had achieved success on the West Coast, when paired with the legendary sportscaster Graham MacNamee, the rookie approached the assignment with trepidation. Don had heard that his new partner was tough to work with, but he soon found out

that McNamee was not only friendly to the younger announcer, but he also taught Wilson a few things about calling a game. Eventually, McNamee, Wilson, and Ted Husing became known as the top national sports broadcasters of the early 1930s. Of course, because of his move to New York, Don Wilson eventually landed his biggest role when he became Jack Benny's announcer.

Jack Benny moved around in his early days on radio. From 1932 to 1934, the show had numerous time slots, networks, sponsors, orchestra leaders, and announcers. In the spring of 1934, Benny began working for General Tire. Because of contractual obligations, the current announcer, Alois Havrilla, was unable to make the shift. General Motors had dropped its sponsorship of Benny because it felt that comedic advertising demeaned the product and concert music made a better fit for the company. Chevrolet changed from sponsoring Benny on, somewhat appropriately, April 1, 1934, to "serious" music with Victor Young the following week. Havrilla had been established as an integral part of many of the Benny skits, and the next announcer would have to follow suit.

Jack liked Don, who was still announcing football at \$250 per game, in Wilson's estimation, "because I laughed in all of the right places. Jack hired me as the straight commercial man, but after the fourth week, the guys started working me into the script." Radio shows received a thirteen-week trial, and Don was likewise initially signed for this time period. He continued laughing "in the right places" for Jack on radio and television for 31 years.

To appreciate Don Wilson's radio career, one needs to look first at all that he did on programs other than the Jack Benny show. Before he signed with General Tire, Don announced *Music by Gershwin* in 1934. He spent time on *The Kraft Music Hall* prior



Don Wilson

to Roger Krupp and then old friend Ken Carpenter. Also in the 1930s, he announced on the *Tim and Irene* show, the *Joe E. Brown Show*, *The Aldrich Family*, and *The Packard Hour*, to name a few. Perhaps one of the more obscure Wilson appearances came in 1934, when he voiced Lal Taask in the second episode of *Tarzan and the Diamond of Asher*. Coincidentally, among other famous names in the cast of this popular series are longtime Benny nemesis Frank Nelson, Gale Gordon, and Hanley Stafford.

In the 1940s Don continued to perform on radio shows different from his usual role as Jack Benny's verbal sparring partner. Perhaps one of his most important and selfless stints came when the Armed Forces Radio Service tapped him to be the first regular announcer on its famed *Command Performance* program. Of course, when he moved on to another AFRS show, *Mail Call*, Ken Carpenter took his place. Both of these men, like so many in the entertainment industry, freely gave of their time to the war effort in addition to their regu-



lar jobs. Wilson returned to AFRS to add new material when the network edited out the "soap" from *Lux Radio Theatre* and renamed it *Hollywood Radio Theatre*. He also visited the segregated Armed Forces program *Jubilee*. In addition to the aforementioned parts, Don also did the announcing chores on *The Baby Snooks Show* (during the late 1940s), *The Ginny Simms Show* (ca. 1945), *Glamour Manor* (June 1946), *Tommy Riggs and Betty Lou* (1946), and *The Alan Young Show* (1949).

Don Wilson also figured in a number of motion pictures. The Vitaphone division of Warner Brothers signed Milton Cross, Jimmy Wallington, Gabriel Heatter, II, V. Kaltenborn, Paul Douglas, Don Wilson, and a few others to narrate a series of shorts entitled *Our Own United States* (1936). More often than not, he played the part of some sort of announcer in films like *Million Dollar Legs* (1932), *Broadway Melody of 1936*, *Meet the Missus* (1937), *Radio City Revels* (1937), *Two Girls on Broadway* (1940), *Footlight Serenade* (1942), *DuBarry Was a Lady* (1943), *Dick Tracy* (1945) and *The Kid from Brooklyn* (1946).

In addition to the aforementioned cinema parts, Don Wilson played in several other films. Twice he appeared in WLS *National Barn Dance*-inspired movies: *Village Barn Dance* (1940) and *The Roundup* (1941) with Lulu Belle Wiseman. In the latter he played a character named "Slim." He also appeared as Houston in *Dangerous Blondes* (1941), uncredited in *Cinderella Jones* (1946), Fats in *The Chase* (1946), Mr. Chubby in *Sailor Beware* (1951), and Mr. Kettering in *Niagara* (1953). When Disney pro-



*The Mouse That Jack Built* (1959)  
Don Wilson provided the voice of the rodent announcer

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ductions created the Academy Award-winning animation short "Ferdinand the Bull" in 1938, Don narrated this endearing tale.

One of the most unusual appearances for Don Wilson, as well as Jack, Mary and Rochester, came when Robert McKimson developed a cartoon parody of Jack's television show. Warner Brothers' animation division frequently burlesqued famous movie and television stars, as well as specific films and television shows. Jack had been lampooned as early as 1939, when he became a caveman in *Daffy and the Dinosaur*. In 1956, McKimson made "The Honey Mousers" as a tribute to Jackie Gleason and his *Honeymooners* company. However, when the animator returned to use rodents in "The Mouse That Jack Built" in 1959, the real cast of the Jack Benny show agreed to voice themselves.

In addition, and already on Warner Brothers' payroll, Mel Blanc provided the sound of the Maxwell automobile. Even though they were at the pinnacle of stardom, Jack and Mary agreed to the novel idea and demanded only a print of the cartoon as payment. Typically, Don appeared as the announcer who attempted to interrupt the story with a commercial announce-



*The Jack Benny Program* (1938)  
Phil Harris; writers Bill Morrow and Ed Beloin; Don Wilson; Jack Benny; Mary Livingstone; unidentified producer; Artie Auerbach; Dennis Day

ment. Another unusual moment in the cartoon occurs at the end, when live-action Jack faces the camera and utters "Gosh, what a crazy dream."

With many of Don Wilson's moments not on the Jack Benny show out of the way, one can now concentrate on the part that put him on top of the media world. As has already been stated, Wilson entered the early days of network radio as a rising staff announcer. Because most programs emanated from New York or Chicago, he would eventually have to move away from his western roots if he wished to ascend the announcing ladder. When the General Tire job with Benny came on April 6, 1934, the opportunity, at first, seemed to be but another network assignment, but over the next several years his professional life changed dramatically.

During the first season with General, Jack Benny's show continued to evolve into what would become the best in ensemble

comedy. After the initial show focused on "Frank Parker's Music Store," Don was more formally introduced the following week. For the joke writer's sake, Wilson claimed to be from Springfield, Minnesota. This introduced a running gag on towns named Springfield. After the first number by new bandleader Don Bestor, the plot moved to the maestro's house for a game of bridge. Throughout these shows, even though Jack had warned against it, the announcer continued to interrupt the script to herald General's "blowout tires."

One noteworthy program in the series came on August 3, 1934, when Jack and company were supposedly returning from California, where Jack had just finished appearing in *Transatlantic Merry-Go-Round*. Bestor took the announcer's job, because he really stayed in New York. Benny and Wilson acted as if they were running late on the eastbound train. The program is important, because cast members play differ-

ent roles and pretend to be part of the show's production, both of which emerge as Benny show trademarks. Another import Benny character appears for the first time in the guise of fellow train traveler, Irving C. Schlepferman (Sam Hearn). Although a classic radio show was evolving, the sponsorship would end eight weeks later.

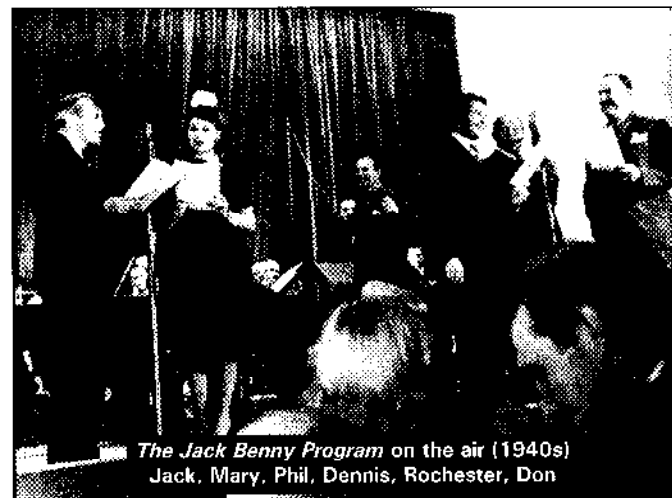
After General Tire's 26 weeks, General Foods' Jell-O took over the Jack Benny show on October 14, 1934. Jack even shared a positive note from president William O'Neill on the last General Tire show, when he offered best wishes for Jack and his new sponsor. The change was relatively seamless, except that Jack would now move from NBC Red to NBC Blue, in Jack's words, to "the earliest I've ever been on." Although his show was three hours earlier than he had been on for General, he would own Sunday nights at 7:00 for the remainder of his tenure on radio.

Few programs from the first Jell-O season exist; however, the premiere, "The Jack Benny Grocery Store," is among them. Listening to these early shows can be quite a challenge, for, as daughter Joan Benny noted, the transcription disks were often played at home as one might play any other recording. Consequently, many are fragmented and badly scratched. Nonetheless, this particular program opens as it had during the previous season, with an orchestra number by Bestor (these shows contained far more music than did their successors). After Jack proudly greets the audience for the first time with his trademark "Jell-O again," and he talks a few moments with Wilson, Don is warned again about not interrupting the story with commercials. Mary then enters with a joke that Jack attempts to recycle on cast members but fails because they do not co-operate on the road to the punch line. Frank Parker and Don Bestor enter formally. At the first oppor-

tunity, on the cue "jealous," Don Wilson is reminded of Jell-O's six delicious flavors. Don had to be quick with his commercials, because they appear out of nowhere in the script. Jack's response to Don's insertion is "Same old trouble, thank heaven." After another band number, The Three Chicken sisters from New Orleans (a joke on The Three Boswells) "sing" a hillbilly number. A Parker solo precedes the skit of the evening. Another Bestor song, and then back to the skit. The bandleader assumes a part when he enters the "store," and then the announcer does the same as the Swedish-accented Olsen. Perhaps one noteworthy fluff of this initial offering of the Jell-O series comes at the very beginning, when the chorus heralds the now famous letters of the product. Unfortunately, one male in the group failed to pause on the hyphen and his "O" comes out ahead of the rest.

The following week continues with part two of the grocery store skit. Don chimes in on an Italian customer who identifies himself as "Angelo" and inserts the commercial, "And Jell-O..." At the end of the show *Radio Star* magazine editor Curtis Mitchell recognizes the cast (Jack, Mary, Don, Frank, and Don Bestor) and writer Harry Conn, while noting Jack's courage for persevering to keep his quality comedy on the air and gives the comedian the Radio Stars Award for Distinguished Service (first time for a comedy.) After all, comedy had not yet become a staple on network radio.

Orchestra leader Johnny Green and singer Kenny Baker joined the cast of the Jack Benny program during the second season for Jell-O. More importantly for all of the crew, the show began originating from California. Jack's move came about because he was being offered more and more motion picture roles. Transcontinental broadcasting had become a reality, and



The Jack Benny Program on the air (1940s)  
Jack, Mary, Phil, Dennis, Rochester, Don

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Jack essentially set the pace for many more shows to move west. Again, copies of the program during this season come few and far between, but one show that exists in its entirety exemplifies the tenor of the day. The April 5, 1936 "Clown Hall Tonight" episode starts with a Green number and Don's reading of a letter from a satisfied Jell-O customer. Jack and Don swap thoughts about spring, before Mary comes in with one of her poems. Two songs precede the sketch that has Jack playing Fred Allen, Mary mimicking Portland Hoffa, and Don doing the announcing with a Jell-O slant. The earmarks of classic Jack Benny shows were starting to appear.

During the third year for Jell-O, another remarkable cast member joined the Benny show. Phil Harris was introduced on the first program of the 1936-37 season. Don opens by introducing an orchestra number, which he interrupts by asking the listeners to give "six delicious cheers" for the show that has returned for another season. Jack and Don continue with their usual opening talk, this time about summer. Jack then asks the audience to give Don a big hand, just before the announcer is referred to as "Fit as a bass fiddle." Don had been on Jack's summer replacement, *Tim and Irene*.

Phil is introduced, but his wild character would not yet emerge for a few weeks. Later, when Jack, Don, Phil, and Rochester traveled, they are often pictured together, whether coming off a train or attending a social event.

As the Benny Show gained momentum to become the number one program on the

radio dial, so did Don Wilson's fortunes. The *New York Telegram* monitored the best of the best in his class, and after running near the top of the list several times, the editors' poll picked Don as the number one announcer (along with Bill Stern in sports and Lowell Thomas in news) in 1939. The same year he was picked for that spot by *Radio Guide*. In 1940, 1941, and 1942, *Radio Guide* and *Motion Picture Daily* continued Don's string of achievements. And for years thereafter, Donald Harlow Wilson received numerous recognitions for his achievements in radio, and later television. Conversely, fluffs made by the celebrated announcer were played to the hilt by the star of the show. Two classic mistakes stand out as the epitome of a wonderful but tongue-tied announcer. Of course, Jack's quick wit made the most of them. The first that comes to mind is when Don attempted to adjust to the latest Lucky Strike catch phrase: "Be Happy - Go Lucky." Don uttered, "Be Lucky - Go Happy." Off script, Jack asked if that was what Don said, to which the announcer responded, "Yes, Jack, I said, 'Be Lucky - Go Happy.'" After the two realized what had happened, they enjoyed the moment by laughing at the juxtaposed words. As a result, the next

week heard Don away from opening the show, while he practiced the correct lines over and over.

On January 8, 1950, perhaps one of the most famous Benny moments and longest laughs happened as an even greater fluff stopped the show. What happened frequently in later Jack Benny programs was that Jack would make some inane comment, and Don, the show's character of at least token intellectualism, would correct his boss. On this particular show, Don validated his knowledge by saying, "I heard it on Dreer Pooson." (This reference was to the famed investigative reporter Drew Pearson.) The initial response by the audience and Jack was as expected: laughter at Don's expense, but the payoff came later in the show. Jack's constant nemesis, Frank Nelson, was about to enter as a doorman at a hotel. Jack asked, "Are you the doorman?" The script had been hastily revised by Jack's writers, and Nelson wheeled around as he usually did and delivered the line, "Who do you think I am, Dreer Pooson?" To which Jack completely lost it, slid down the microphone stand in uncontrollable laughter and crawled to one side of the stage and then back to the microphone be-

fore he returned to finish the show.

As for Don's character beating Jack in arguments, sometimes getting The Boss to admit that he was wrong had little to do with making the facts right. Two such examples emerge as classic Bennyisms, when Jack proclaimed to a navy audience that Stephen Decatur shouted, "Full speed ahead and damn (of course, Jack didn't say "damn" on the air) the torpedoes!" instead of Admiral David Farragut. Don had to prove Benny wrong, but not before the entire cast was queried as to the quote's origin. To settle the dispute, Mary eventually explained that Jack must be right, because he was the one who was there when it was said.

On another occasion, Don had to convince Jack on a Thanksgiving show that the pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock, not Cape Cod. A lengthy debate ensued until the next week, when Jack admitted his mistake. Don accepted the apology, and Jack responded that his announcer had, in the words of Rudyard Kipling, "suffered the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." Of course, Wilson countered that these were Shakespeare's words. Another feud ensued until Jack admitted that he was

wrong again. To make amends, he simply announced that there was only one thing left to do: call Don up and fire him.

Jack's affection for his cast members is evident in the way he showcased their talents. Don Wilson received many mentions about his speaking abilities, but several other



Don, Mary, Jack, Dennis



The Jack Benny TV Program (1960s)  
Don, Jack, Rochester

moments, too numerous to detail here, exemplify Jack's use of his announcer's on-air character as the focal point of the show. Special dates in Don's broadcasting career came when he celebrated his 16th and 17th anniversaries on radio in 1939 and 1940, as well as his numerous anniversary celebrations on the Benny show. Wilson's 25th became the subject of the story line on October 30, 1949. On January 10, 1954, Jack honored Don by presenting "The Don Wilson Story" to herald the announcer's 30th year in radio and 20th with Benny. In true Jack Benny fashion, the tribute was lovingly fraught with weight jokes, food jokes, and problems with getting sponsors' messages across. Bob Crosby (and Dennis Day in an old man's voice) and Bea Benadaret played Don's dotting parents, but before all of the regulars could take parts in Don's life, the show ended with Jack objecting to Don's taking credit for bringing the show up after it had been down.

Two particular sets of shows underline

the cheap character of boss Benny, when Don becomes the target of Jack's thrifty ways. The first came as a series in early 1949, when Jack was negotiating Don's contract. Locked up and without food, Don suffers for three weeks, as other cast members plead with Jack to relent and free Wilson. Of even longer lasting impact on plotlines were the annual Christmas shopping trips. The intention was to get Don just the right present but at a deflated price. Poor Mel Blanc suffered over the years as the sales clerk who had to endure Jack's stinginess, as the miserly customer had to choose between shoelaces, wallets, cufflinks, a gopher trap, and paints for Don. Although many listeners believed Jack Benny to be a cheapskate because of his radio and television

character, years after Don left the Benny show, he could not dispel Jack's on-air frugality enough. The announcer was quick to mention how generous Jack was to all of his employees. He added that, when the boss changed networks in 1949, he made sure that all of the cast members could make the move.

As for commercial hallmarks, certainly Don and the Sportsmen quartet ranks with the best of the ongoing gags on the Benny show. A real quartet before their network radio fame, the four came on board to revolutionize the singing commercial. Usually, singers praised the product and the star of the show praised them. When Don introduced the Sportsmen, they often exasperated the boss, while delighting the audience with their novel lyrics. As part of the plot line, Jack encouraged them at first, eventually fired them, and then rehired the group.

They were so successful at selling Lucky Strikes that they moved over to television

and delighted the studio and home audiences with singing and dancing in commercials, like the "Digga, Digga Do" number in a 1953 cannibal skit.

When television arrived, *The Jack Benny Program* moved lock, stock and barrel to the new medium in 1950. The early TV shows emulated the radio program very closely, especially because they ran concurrently until 1955.

On TV, Don stood by Jack's side in front of the curtain as he had done since 1934. Additionally, this is also where Don's acting abilities became more evident. The announcer's character became a close confidant of Jack's in many stories, probably because Mary appeared less and less. He frequently came by the fictional Benny home to help move the plot along. When Humphrey Bogart guest starred in 1953, Don and Bob Crosby played policemen under "Detective" Benny.

Eventually, the show became more like the filmed situation comedies of the later 1950s. Don even obtained a rotund television son, appropriately named Harlow. (In reality, Don was married four times. He married his last wife, radio actress Lois Corbett, in 1950. Numerous times, she played his spouse on both the radio and television shows.) Whether the announcer was in front of the act curtain or on the set, he and Jack appeared much like the rotund Oliver Hardy and smaller Stan Laurel. And, as Don graced the set with his infectious laugh and good-natured personality, he set the pattern for announcer-sidekicks to come, the most popular of whom was Ed McMahon to Johnny Carson.

With Jack Benny's help, Don Wilson broke the mold of the very proper network staff announcer and perfected the integrated commercial. Others tried to emulate the Benny show, but few even came close. Over the years Don would sing (for example, "When It Comes To Love, You

Catch Me Quick" with Jack, Mary, and Phil on January 3, 1940), become the focus of the show (the aforementioned series and programs like "Don's Commercial" and "Don's Play" in April 1942), offer the voice of reason and intellectualism when nuttiness and illogic usually ruled, and blend into the nonsense of the day while expertly increasing the sales of a gelatin dessert, a breakfast cereal (Grape Nuts and Grape Nut Flakes from 1942-1944), and cigarettes.

Don Wilson kept busy after the Benny years, even hosting his own show on television and radio from his home in Palm Springs, California. One of his pet projects came when he, Dennis Day, Gordon MacRae, Harry James, and others toured in "The Big Broadcast of 1944" revue in the 1970s. After his death as a result of a stroke at age 81, his ashes were spread over the desert near his beloved Palm Springs.

When old time radio listeners recall popular shows, the Jack Benny program ranks high on the list of favorites. Because Don was the announcer for the longest time, it is hard to imagine this great comedy without the immortal opening proclamation: "The Jello-O (or Lucky Strike) program starring Jack Benny, with Mary Livingstone, Dennis Day, Phil Harris, Rochester, and yours truly, Don Wilson." Once these words begin, the listener can sit back and relax with the knowledge that he or she will be entertained at the highest level from this opening phrase until the final notes.

And, in addition to great comedy, the commercials as delivered by Don Wilson entertain as much as the rest of the show. ■

*NOTE-- Don Wilson may be heard on almost every Jack Benny broadcast scheduled for Those Were The Days during February 2004, the 25th anniversary of Jack Benny Month. See pages 34-35 for details.*

## CELEBbio

## Betty Grable

Betty Grable is a Hollywood success because she planned it that way. She began planning almost as soon as she could toddle and she hasn't stopped for a moment since.

A look at the record shows how well and wisely she planned and to what excellent effect. It proves that beauty and brains are not mutually exclusive, as some would have you believe.

She was born on December 18 at St. Louis, Missouri, the daughter of Conn and Lillian Grable. Mr. Grable was a wealthy stockbroker and the future film star, if she didn't come into the world with the proverbial golden spoon in her mouth, at least had something pretty well approximating it.

At the age of four Betty already was hoofing it with the best of them in dancing school and manhandling a saxophone when she wasn't busy plucking discords on the ukulele. In short, she was an infant prodigy and already was prattling of things theatrical and entertaining.

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*This official biography of Betty Grable was issued by Harry Brand, Director of Publicity for 20th Century-Fox on November 11, 1947. Betty Grable died July 3, 1971 at age 56.*

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Talent such as Betty showed in those tender years doesn't go unrecognized for long. At the age of seven, Betty made her professional debut by public demand, in spite of the objections of her parents, who felt that she was much too young. She went on the air and she appeared with such notables in the entertainment world as Frank Fay, Ed Lowry, Jack Haley and several others on their visits to St. Louis.

In between times, she was attending the Mary Institute, an exclusive school for girls at St. Louis, where she absorbed education in liberal doses.

It had been the habit of the Grable family to take an extended vacation every summer far from home. They had been in Maine and in Florida, in Minnesota and in Canada. In 1929, they decided that Southern California might

be well worth visiting. Out they came that summer and the die, as far as Betty was concerned, was cast.

Betty, it seemed, had a good deal to do with their decision to come to Los Angeles and Hollywood. As usual, she was planning.

Once here, Betty prevailed on her mother to remain. Her father, with his business in St. Louis, naturally had to go home. She enrolled in the Hollywood Professional



School to continue her education and in the Albertina Rasch and later the Ernest Belcher dancing schools to continue her footwork. She not only was drilled in ballet, tap and eccentric dances but almost all other terpsichorean manifestations known at the time.

By 1930, she had progressed so far that the old Fox company decided she should be in the movies. Betty cheated a little, she confesses, to qualify for a contract. She told studio officials that she was two years older than she really was in order to avoid becoming entangled in child labor law regulations.

Her first film stint was a specialty number in *Let's Go Places*, made in 1930. Then she became a member of the old Fox chorus and danced and danced for a solid year. At the end of that time, her contract with the studio was permitted to lapse by mutual consent. Betty felt she was getting nowhere as a film chorine and the studio seemed to be of the opinion it could do without her services. The studio, of course, lived to regret it.

But Betty wasn't particularly downcast. "That year wasn't altogether wasted,"



*DuBarry Was a Lady* (1940)  
Betty Grable, Bert Lahr, Ethel Merman

PHOTOFEST

she pointed out. "I had learned a lot about the movies and what made them move. I knew that experience would be mighty helpful. I made up my mind to see to that. The immediate problem, naturally, was how."

The result of Betty's communing was that she marched over to the Samuel Goldwyn studios, with 1500 other beauties, to try out for a dancing part in Eddie Cantor's picture, *Whoopee*. She was the first of the 1500 to be chosen and her work in that picture got her a little flattering attention from the movie makers but not quite enough.

Betty thereupon decided to try the oblique approach on the time-tested theory that a prophet is never recognized in his own land. So she obtained a part in the Barbara Stanwyck-Frank Fay stage production, *Tattle Tales*. She was in that show for several months but there was nary a nibble from the film producers.

But Ted Fio Rito, at that time at the height of his fame as a bandmaster, happened to catch the show and decided that the colorful Miss Grable was just what the doctor ordered for his orchestra. He made her a tempting offer and she accepted. She

joined his band in San Francisco and discovered, under his tutelage, that she had another asset that she had permitted to lie dormant. She had a voice ideally suited for the rendition of torch songs. It was low, smoky and mellow. She remained with the Fio Rito organization for eight months.

At the end of that time, Betty had a vogue and a following. The movies beckoned to Betty once again and she responded. She was cast as the feminine lead with Wheeler and Woolsey in *Hold 'Em Jail* and then she made a number of shorts.

"But the pictures and the parts," Betty confesses, "were growing steadily less important. I decided to give Hollywood an-



*Coney Island* (1943)  
Robert Montgomery, Betty Grable

PHOTOFEST

other touch of the absent treatment. So I joined Jay Whidden and his orchestra and sang and danced with them in San Francisco at the Mark Hopkins and in Santa Monica at the Miramar."

Once more Betty's planning bore fruit. The absent treatment worked. She was a personality now, and RKO grabbed her and gave her a substantial contract. Her first picture there was the *Gay Divorcee* in which she did that "K-nock K-nees" number with Edward Everett Horton.

For two years Miss Grable labored in the RKO studios, growing steadily in importance and popularity. At the end of that time, she was offered even a better contract by Paramount and naturally accepted. Paramount also had her under contract for two years. All was going well, until that studio began casting her as a college girl in one picture after another. Betty simply didn't care to be the perennial sophomore forever. At the end of another two years she decided she'd had enough.

She went back to her favor-



*Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe* (1945)  
Betty Grable with Showgirls

PHOTOFEST



*Hold 'em Jail* (1932)  
Bert Wheeler, Robert Woolsey, Betty Grable

PHOTOFEST

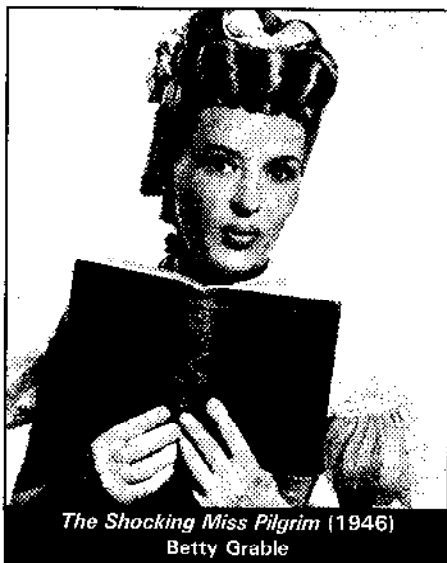


ite stratagem – this time a personal appearance tour which began in July 1939. She was a veritable riot on the road, playing to overflow houses at every appearance. Reports of her sensational personal success naturally trickled back to Hollywood, as Betty had planned. Once more the movies realized that popularity such as Betty was enjoying must be deserved.

Contract offers began to shower about Betty's shapely cars once more. Twentieth Century-Fox made the best offer and Betty accepted. But before she signed, she got the studio to agree to permit her to do the Buddy DeSylva show, *DuBarry Was a Lady*, in New York. She had agreed to appear in that musical some time before and the studio, perforce, had to accede to her wishes.

The rest, more or less, is current theatrical history. Betty, supposedly, was a supporting player in *DuBarry Was a Lady* but she managed to steal the thing just the same. She became the toast of Broadway. Critics lauded her and the paying guests came in endless streams.

She would have continued playing in that



*The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* (1946)  
Betty Grable

PHOTOPOST

show but for the fact that Alice Faye, back in Hollywood, was suddenly taken ill and compelled to undergo a major operation. Alice had been preparing to go into the top spot of *Down Argentine Way* at the time, one of the costliest musicals undertaken by 20th Century-Fox in some time.

Darryl F. Zanuck, production head at the studio, sent a hurry call for Betty. Could



*Mother Wore Tights* (1947)  
Betty Grable, Dan Dailey

PHOTOPOST

she come immediately to fill the gap left by Miss Faye? Betty responded promptly. She arrived in Hollywood one Monday morning at 8:30 and at 10 o'clock that same morning she was facing the test cameras to qualify for the most important movie role that had ever come to her.

Betty is a blue-eyed, golden-haired blonde of the peaches and cream variety. She weighs 112 pounds when she isn't working and between 112 and 117 when she is. The harder she works the more weight she gains. At one time, while rehearsing day and night for *DuBarry Was a Lady*, her weight jumped to 122.

She never diets and prefers steaks on her menu, although she'll eat anything and everything. Ice Cream and rich desserts are favorites with her. She's unquestionably one of the most adept dancers in Hollywood and one of its best horsewomen. She also bowls very well and plays a good game of tennis. At one time she took up ice skating in a serious way and kept at it for a year. She may not have been in a class with the peerless Sonja Henie, but Paramount once thought seriously of producing a picture with Betty of the type that Miss Henie does do well.

Betty has been married twice. Her first marriage to Jackie Coogan, the "Kid" of silent film days, failed. On July 5, 1943, she married the popular band leader, Harry James, at Las Vegas, Nevada. On March 3, 1944, a daughter, Victoria Elizabeth, was born to this happy couple. Another daughter, Jessica, arrived in 1947.

Betty has one sister, Marjorie Arnold, who is happily married and lives in Kansas City.

Betty Grable actually likes work and thrives on it. Says it's when she doesn't have it that she gets the mopes. ■

*NOTE—Tune in TWTD March 20 to hear Betty Grable on radio.*

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# THE TOM MIX RALSTON STRAIGHT-SHOOTERS

BY JOHN DINAN

*Shredded Ralston for your breakfast  
Starts the day off shining bright;  
Gives you lots of cowboy energy  
And a flavor that's just right!  
It's delicious and nutritious,  
Bite-size and ready to eat.  
Take a tip from Tom,  
Go and tell your Mom,  
Shredded Ralston can't be beat!*

In the 1970s Clifford Irving wrote of Tom Mix's life between the years 1911 and 1913 when Mix supposedly accepted an offer from then Mexican president Madero to track down "certain enemies" (e.g. Pancho Villa) of the president. In addition to this escapade, Mix reportedly saw action in the Spanish-American War, the Philippine Insurrection, the Boxer Rebellion and the Boer War.

Mix was a bona fide movie star, lawman and skilled rodeo performer. He learned bulldogging from Bill Pickett, the man who invented it.

What we learned later was that just about everything about Mix's fabulous he-man career had been either faked or seriously embellished. In a discussion I had with Western pulp writer Harry Sinclair Drago, Mr. Drago spoke of a Tom Mix pulp that was being discussed with Mix but never came to fruition. His opinion of Mix was that "there was no truth in any of the Mix stories"; that, indeed, Mix was a fraud and a fake.

But it was the fictionalized Tom Mix that became an active partner in the fantasy life

*John Dinan is a free-lance writer from  
Topsfield, Massachusetts.*

of kids of the Great Depression era and beyond. There were Tom Mix comic books, Big Little Books, hardcover novels, and Tom's adventures that ran in the Sunday funnies along with those glorious premium offers.

Mix's radio career was tied directly to the Sunday funnies premium offers. While he had been on the radio since 1933, it was the contract he signed in 1938 with Ralston Purina Co. that would result in the creation of *The Tom Mix Ralston Straight-Shooters*, a daily 15-minute serial that captured the ears and hearts of young America.

The stories, as were all Mix stories, were a blend of dramatized fact and fancy with Tom always on the side of justice and fair play. The magic of the radio dramas was enhanced by the premium offers in the Sunday funnies. For "ten cents in coin and a Ralston box top" mailed to Tom at Checkerboard Square, St. Louis, Missouri, a kid could get a Tom Mix pocketknife, a siren ring with which you could signal fellow Straight-Shooters, a compass to help you find your way to Tom's TM Bar X Ranch, or one of about a hundred premiums which were offered over the life of the radio program from 1938 to 1950.

Mix himself didn't play the radio character. Various actors who played the Mix character were Artelle Dickson, Russell Thorson, Jack Holden and the best radio Tom Mix, Joe "Curley" Bradley. Bradley, who did the Mix part from 1944-1950 was a bona fide cowboy and had known and worked with Mix in real life.

It didn't matter to us that Mix had been dead since 1940. The Tom Mix radio show



Curley Bradley

and his image in the Sunday funnies premium offers lived on. When I was told by my father that Tom Mix had died in a car accident, I couldn't completely accept this. I know the Grim Reaper couldn't lay a glove on Tom and sure enough, even though he was indeed killed on October 12, 1940 in Arizona, he lived on in the Sunday funnies and radio broadcasts. (Ironically, another western hero, the Lone Ranger, died less than a year later when actor Earle Graser, who portrayed the Masked Man on the air, fell asleep at the wheel of his car and was killed in the crash on April 8, 1941.)

The Sunday funnies premium offer presented, typically, a 12-panel drama integrating the premium offer into the story. Perhaps the most dear of the Mix premiums, the Straight-Shooter badge, was offered at the completion of Mix's corralling some city gangsters and their boss: "Big Shot." Mix, with the help of kids Jimmy and Jane, corrals the crooks and: "Tom, as governor of the state, I award these special medals to you, Jimmy, Jane and Tony (Mix's horse) for your heroic capture."

At the bottom of the ad there's a picture

of Tom with his voice balloon informing us kids: "Boys, Girls... I'll send you a beautiful simulated gold badge just like mine, FREE for one Ralston Box Top! Use coupon. HURRY!" The ad copy goes on: "This badge is a knockout! Simulated gold with TM Bar X brand Straight-Shooter design in full color. You'll be proud to wear it 'cause it shows you're a special pal of Tom's. Hurry! Send it in right away."

The Tom Mix that now and then rides across my mind is the Tom Mix of the Ralston Straight-Shooters. The Straight-Shooters and Tom came to the end of the trail in 1950 when the Ralston people replaced Tom with *Space Patrol*.

I believe, along with nostalgia buff Jim Harmon, that "if his country needs him badly enough, Tom Mix, or his spirit, will come out of our hearts and heads sending a signal on his Siren Ring to ride out against lawbreakers and make a world where we are all Straight-Shooters." ■

*TUNE INTWTD January 3 to hear a Tom Mix radio show and some Tom Mix memories from Mel Tormé.*



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# Memories of Madison and Kedzie

BY PETER BLYTH CROMBIE

Madison Street and Kedzie Avenue are located in the very center of the West Side of Chicago. In fact, if a map of Chicago were a target on an archery range, the "bull's-eye" would be at the crossroads of Madison and Kedzie, so close are the four corners to the center of the city.

I grew up only a half-mile from "Madison and Kedzie," as the local folk referred to it. My parents had a home on Whipple Street between Jackson Boulevard and Van Buren Street. Born in 1923, I was eleven years old when the accompanying photo of Madison and Kedzie was taken back in 1934. To all who lived within walking distance of that famous corner, and that could be a mile to several miles away, it was "Broadway and 42nd Street" and the "Great White Way."

The corner glittered with the lights of three theaters which helped to transport everyone, albeit temporarily, from the dull and drab tenements, the row houses and the bungalows of Chicago's teeming West Side during the days of the Great Depression. During the day, huge, red, iron street cars, affectionately called "red rockets," rumbled and rattled almost continuously on Madison Street, carrying people east to State and Madison streets in downtown Chicago, a world-famous corner in those bygone days. And, riding west on Madison Street, the line ended at Austin Avenue and the eastern edge of the genteel suburb

*Peter B. Crombie of Oak Lawn, Illinois is a retired commercial artist and art education teacher.*

of Oak Park. The Kedzie cars made their way to the North Side or the far reaches of the South Side.

At night, the streets and sidewalks were so brightly lit that it seemed like daylight. There were several restaurants, and hamburger and hot dog diners were everywhere, many of them featuring the famous "Chicago" hot dog (with chopped onion, chopped tomato and celery salt; no mustard or catsup). One or two diners still referred to hot dogs as "red hots." Just west of Kedzie, on the south side of Madison Street, there was a snack shop called Sip & Bite. We, as high school teenagers, dubbed the diner the "Sip and Gag." A hamburger or hot dog at any of the small diners was ten cents; soda pop was five cents; a jelly-filled bismarck and a cup of coffee was ten cents – for both!

Thompson's Restaurant was on the northwest corner and, on the floor above, there was a Chinese restaurant. There were clothing stores and many kinds of shops offering just about any kind of service and repair, all within a quarter-mile of the popular corner. A block west on Madison Street at Spaulding, there was a Woolworth's "5 and 10 cent" store and, next door, there was a Neisner's "five cents to a dollar" store. Ice cream parlors, often referred to as "soda fountains," were common in the area. On the northeast corner stood the Madison-Kedzie State bank.

The next building east of the bank was the Senate Theatre. By the mid-1930s the Senate Theatre facade was remodeled and a more up-to-date, brightly painted mar-



Looking east on Madison Street at Kedzie Avenue, 1934

PETER CROMBIE COLLECTION

quee was installed, festooned with hundreds of flickering light bulbs. The marquee hung over the sidewalk in the same manner as the great movie theatres in downtown Chicago. The vertical sign spelling SENATE was also replaced with a larger sign with more lights, making it much easier to see at a distance.

Across the street from the Senate, on the southeast corner, there was a Walgreen Drugs with the old, original marquee sign and, in the same building, was Little Jack's Restaurant, famous for gourmet dining with Mrs. Little Jack's cream cheesecake. People came from great distances to dine at Little Jack's, especially to top off their dinner with cheesecake and coffee. Little Jack's was a very popular restaurant that survived World War II and on into the late 1950s. Between Walgreen's and Jack's was a liquor store, Choice Wines and Liquors.

On the southwest corner of Madison and Kedzie there was a "speakeasy" until 1933 when the Volstead Act was repealed. Then

the PRIMA sign appeared. Prima was the brand name of a popular Chicago beer in those days. When I was a boy of 11, I can recall walking past that corner on a balmy spring day (circa 1934), clutching my nickel, the price of admission to the Kedzie Theatre Annex. As I strolled past the open doors of the now legal saloon, I could hear the lusty singing of "Happy Days Are Here Again," a popular song of the newly elected Roosevelt administration.

The Kedzie Annex was located next door to the Kedzie Theatre, also known as the Kedzie Vaudeville Theatre. Both theaters were located on the north side of Madison Street, next to and just west of Thompson's Restaurant. Since it was a Saturday afternoon, there always was a double feature playing at the Annex and both usually were westerns. This was back in the days when the good guys wore white hats and the bad guys wore black hats. In many of the westerns there was a very tall, slim fellow who always wore a white hat and I looked for

him in those old cowboy movies. His name was John Wayne.

In later years, I can remember that speak-easy corner more affectionately as Ucitel's Drug Store, especially because it had a very large and complete ice cream parlor. It became a pleasant hangout, a place for high school students to gather and refresh themselves and talk about homework and tomorrow's various assignments. Oh yes, students cared about their high school studies in those days. It was especially important because the chances of attending an institution of higher learning in the pre-World War II days were, to say the least, very slim.

The high school students at Ucitel's were entirely from John Marshall High School. The huge, square-block campus was located one block south of Madison Street on Kedzie Avenue at Monroe Street. The building ran south to Adams Street and west to Spaulding Avenue. There was no school yard or playground. The students gathered on the very wide sidewalks on either Adams or Monroe when arriving to begin the school day. It was here that I had spent the happiest four years of my life — though I didn't realize it until some years had passed.

I graduated from Marshall High on the 29th of January, 1941. My years of servitude had ended; my years of freedom had begun, albeit short-lived. On a sunny afternoon in December 1941, I was seated at a booth in the ice cream parlor at Ucitel's Drug Store along with several friends, both male and female. We were enjoying great chocolate malteds and giggling in a festive mood while discussing our boring, post-high school jobs and how we all looked forward (with some good luck) to a more hopeful future. The store radio, softly playing the latest popular tunes (Glenn Miller's version of "Juke Box Saturday Night," at the moment), was inter-

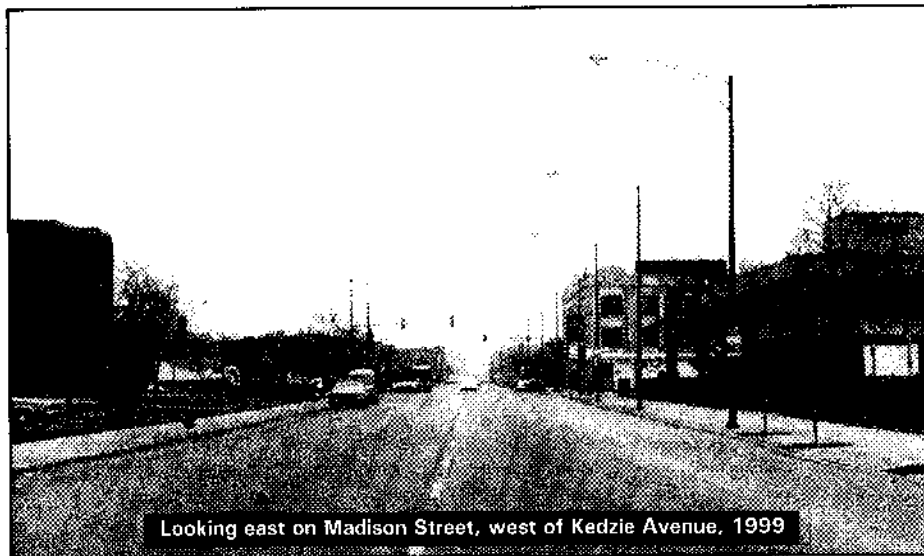
rupted by a stern voice announcing a "sneak" attack by many Japanese aircraft on a U.S. Naval Base at a distant and unknown place called Pearl Harbor. But somehow we felt safe at that devastating moment because we were at "Madison and Kedzie." But I knew that my freedom of less than one year would soon end.

We enjoyed ourselves a few more times at Ucitel's though war clouds gathered, dark and lower, over Madison and Kedzie. All too soon our lives would change forever and our beloved corner would eventually become a dimly lit and unfamiliar place. The festive giggling ended and was replaced by grim thoughts of no future and spending our lives battling strange-looking little men from the other side of the world.

In November 1942, at the age of 19, I enlisted in the Army Air Corps. In early December all enlistments were "frozen" whatever that meant — and all enlistee records were turned over to the various local Selective Service offices, mine included. I received an induction notice in mid-December to report for a physical exam and possible swearing-in, etc. on 13 January 1943. By enlisting, all I succeeded in doing was advancing by three months my departure into the war.

Several snowstorms produced much snow over the Chicago area in the early days of 1943. I was ordered to appear at the Induction Center, located in the Insurance Exchange, an ornately decorated white marble building that ran along Wells Street from Jackson Boulevard to Van Buren Street in downtown Chicago. In a gymnasium-sized room on the second floor, at least 200 draftees appeared in the drafty (no pun intended), empty hall with many uncovered, drafty windows that faced Wells Street. An Army officer appeared and ordered us to strip!

After the physical exams and the quiet,



Looking east on Madison Street, west of Kedzie Avenue, 1999

PETER CROMBIE PHOTO

somewhat pious swearing-in ceremony took place, we were taken to another large room filled with picnic benches all in rows, and were served a lunch of hot dogs and sauerkraut, bread and coffee. One fellow looked at the plate and exclaimed, "Dogs and grass?" I decided that we were being introduced to "army chow" in an Army mess hall.

After chow was over, the Army officer stood on a platform, loudly called for attention, and announced that we had seven days to "settle our affairs" and *you will* report to your respective local draft boards at 6 a.m. (the officer shouted, "O-600 hours, 20th January 1943"). By 2 p.m. we were dismissed and a few minutes later I was on a Van Buren streetcar heading back to the West Side.

The Van Buren streetcar line ended at Kedzie because of the big car barns on the west side of Kedzie. I transferred to a northbound Kedzie car and got off at Madison. After my morning experience, I needed a chocolate malted and a few friendly faces. I went straight to Ucitel's.

There were no familiar faces there. Everyone who came in and out was bundled

up against the cold. They seemed to look down and wore grim expressions on their tired faces. A year of total war had begun to take its toll on the once cheerful atmosphere of Madison and Kedzie. I sipped my malted silently hoping a familiar face would come in. I waited. No luck. So I went home to tell my parents of my experiences of this day and that I would be gone in a week.

The Selective Service office for my neighborhood was located in the same building housing Little Jack's Restaurant and the Walgreen Drug Store, at the southeast corner of Madison and Kedzie. The office was on the third floor, room 320. In the darkness of an early winter morning, January 20, 1943 (my father's 63rd birthday), I said good-bye to my parents whom I would not see again for three long years. My father was leaving for work at an iron foundry on the Chicago River at North Avenue. As he was about to leave from the back door, he looked at me and said in his Scottish accent, "Ye'll take keer of ye self, Petey." He turned away and walked out the back door to the alley. He never looked back. He turned left in the alley

and made his way to Van Buren and Kedzie where he caught a Kedzie car to North Avenue.

After saying good-bye to my mother, I also left by the back door toward the alley. But I turned right to Jackson Boulevard. The temperature was 17 degrees. As I walked along Jackson toward Kedzie, I noticed that great piles of snow were everywhere, covered with little dots of soot. Autos, parked in the streets, unable to move because of the severe cold (or gasoline rationing), looked like great mounds of snow – also speckled with soot. Snow was never white in Chicago in the days when coal was used to heat homes and buildings.

Since I was “fleet of foot,” I arrived at my beloved corner in a matter of minutes. I entered the building on the Kedzie Avenue side, dashed up the steps to room 320, checked in and was told to join the gathering of young men on the corner in front of Walgreen Drugs. I was back at my favorite corner for one grateful, last look. As the gathering of men grew in size, I stood on the corner, but I was alone in the crowd. I glanced across the street to the darkened Ucitel’s Drug Store. I felt more alone than ever as I vowed, half-aloud, that I would survive this conflict, somehow. I would keep my head down. I would take no unnecessary chances, because I must come back to that soda fountain of youth some fine day. The war can’t last forever, I thought. I had spent many happy hours there in more carefree times. I must relive those carefree times, I promised myself.

My reverie ended as I looked away from my favorite haunt. I began to hear the buzzing hum of two “green hornet” streetcars that had just left the car barns at Van Buren Street. The two cars rounded the corner, turned east on Madison and stopped. All the draftees, now numbering about 75 or 80, were ordered to get aboard as quickly as possible (the cars were blocking traffic

on Kedzie. The second car was only half-way around the corner). In a matter of minutes, the cars started heading east on Madison to Clark, where they turned south to Roosevelt Road. The cars turned east on Roosevelt Road to the Illinois Central Railway Station on some old tracks left over from the days of the Century of Progress World’s Fair of 1933-34.

The two green hornets stopped under the roof of the Illinois Central station at a rather rickety platform with an equally rickety stairway that descended to the station platform. Again, in a matter of minutes, the 80 excited draftees dashed down the rambling staircase and clambered aboard the waiting train. The hissing, steaming, smoky and smelly locomotive seemed overly anxious to pull away into the dull gray, hazy, wintry dawn of another smoky, industrious, wartime Chicago day. The train headed south, then east through the snow-covered fields and forests of northern Indiana and southern Michigan, to the Army Reception Center at Fort Custer, Michigan, located a few miles east of Battle Creek.

After 29 months in the Southwest Pacific with the Army Engineers (not the Air Corps) the war ended and I found myself, three years later (and many years older), standing on the legendary corner, just as I had done three years earlier, when I was waiting for the green hornet streetcar to take me away.

It was now January 1946, but this time I was not waiting for a streetcar. Wearing the Class-A uniform with wool overcoat and garrison cap that I had been issued when I was discharged from the U.S. Army at Camp Grant, Illinois a day earlier, I had walked from my parents’ home following the same route that I had taken to the Selective Service office three years earlier, back to the corner of Madison and Kedzie.

Heavy snow had fallen in late Decem-

ber and, as in 1943, the same great piles of soot-covered snow were still there as well as the old snow-covered autos parked in the same places they were stuck in three years earlier – also covered with dots of soot. Nothing had changed, I thought. The fates had saved it all for me.

It was Friday, January 4, 1946 and it was a busy morning. People were rushing about. No one took notice of me. I was invisible, so it seemed. I glanced about. The theaters were still there. And there was the bank and Walgreen’s, Little Jack’s, Thompson’s restaurant and Ucitel’s Drug Store and Soda Fountain. But they did not look the same. They had been dulled and darkened by three years of wartime industrial smoke and neglect, and three Chicago winters and summers had taken their toll.

Somehow, it seemed that I was somewhere else because everything seemed hostile. Something had caused a great change. Could it have been the war? Perhaps I am in some kind of time warp and I am standing on a Madison and Kedzie on a planet on another universe, I thought.

Madison Street and Kedzie Avenue are still there today. But “Madison and Kedzie” no longer exists. The theaters are gone; the restaurants are gone and so is the bank. I made a recent visit to the area. The only building remaining is the structure that once housed Little Jack’s, Walgreen’s and the WW II Draft Board office. Most of the old buildings have been replaced by CHA housing.

“Madison and Kedzie” has become a memory, a part of my past. ■

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# So You Were Expecting a Mrs. Goldberg?

BY WALTER SCANNELL

Do you remember when comedies were about real people? Do you remember *The Goldbergs*?

One of the longest-running comedy-drama series of all time came about simply because Gertrude "Tillie" Edelstein thought her family was funny.

"In America," her grandfather said, "if you want a bed you buy a bed. In Lublin, if you want a bed you made it or waited for someone to die." Grandpa also said he didn't need to see the Statue of Liberty when he emigrated from Russia. "I didn't live in a ghetto – that was my Statue of Liberty." He landed in New York knowing a single English word, "pickles."

Funniest of all was Tillie's father, Jake, a born boss who only wanted to be a simple tailor. He bought a hotel in the Catskills, the summer vacation home for thousands of Jewish families and the source of American humor for decades.

At age 12 Tillie, even then no beauty, stuffed towels down her dress on rainy days and hobbled around like an old gypsy to read palms. Did the guests know she was only a schoolgirl in a costume? On rainy days in the Catskills, did it matter?

As the youngest member of an extended family, Tillie would ask the Passover questions each September. But one year she couldn't attend the holiday meal because of diphtheria, so she listened to "How is this night different from all other nights?" coming through the wall, and for the first

*Walter Scannell is a history buff and nostalgia fan from Chicago.*



Gertrude Berg as Molly Goldberg

time she felt grateful to be living with such a loving family.

She would watch the antics of her relatives with delight and virtually memorized their strings of illogic as they mingled and mangled English and Yiddish. Somewhere in all this, Molly Goldberg was born.

Tillie's mother, Dinah, was a small woman who kept busy but did not play a major role in the family, so the adolescent girl learned to imitate Jewish mothers she saw around her. She put these tidbits together in skits she performed for guests at her father's hotel. From this you might think Tillie was as down-to-earth as her future radio and television characters. In reality she was bright and, although largely self-educated, eager to learn.

That was one of the reasons she immediately fell in love – at 13 – with a young man whose first name was Lewis. In giving away his last name, Berg, she said in her autobiography, "so the plot is no longer thick." Yes, in time she married this London-born civil engineer who had a passion for education and literature, and they read loftier books together.

When Tillie was 20, her father opened the successful Samovar Russian restaurant in New York City's Spencer Arms Hotel. Even his waiters were counts in exile, but Jake was still unhappy because he was not a starving tailor.

A few years later Gertrude Berg was happy as a wife and mother of two but thought she could be something else as well, and decided to try radio sketches. The continuing story would concern immigrants with Americanized children and neighbors. The plot of one sketch was just that Sammy comes home and smells soup. That's it. Whoever heard of a network buying a script from a nobody about nobodies doing nothing? That was exactly what happened.

A program director named Schwartz thought *The Rise of the Goldbergs* had potential for drawing the interest of women who bought Proctor and Gamble products. The problem was that Gertrude, then 29, wanted to play the middle-aged Mrs. Goldberg, herself, but whoever heard of a writer acting?

Besides, Tillie – let's call her Molly from now on – in real life was less ethnic and more cosmopolitan than her character, so she had to audition by reading – in Yiddish – a recipe for Christmas cookies. (Her husband wrote the words out phonetically for her.) She was nervous, but Schwartz said, "I like it."

Her skits became a 15-minute series on Wednesday evenings in 1929, then for the next two years it aired on Saturday nights.



As soon as she came home from one show in 1931, the sponsor called telling her (not asking her) to come to work with six scripts instead of one next time because he was putting *The Goldbergs* on Mondays through Saturdays! Molly thought she could never write a daily program, but her characters didn't mind it.

The show was built around everyday events, like an out-of-work uncle refusing to let people help him. One of the early actors on the program was little Garson Kanin, who grew up to write Tracy-Hepburn movies and win a Pulitzer Prize for the play *Born Yesterday*. Other later-famous cast members were Everett Sloane, Joseph Cotten, George Tobias, Van Heflin, Arnold Stang and Marjorie Main! Among the announcers was Bud Collyer before he went on to TV quiz shows.

Writing and acting five or six days a week was grueling, but fan mail from all over the country made Molly feel part of a huge, loving family. The amazing thing was that most of the letters came from Christians. *The Goldbergs* were so ethnic they were universal. Besides, the Depression helped the show's popularity because

people were now paying more attention to others, and many were moving back to their families.

In 1934, producers at CBS who had rejected Molly's show before she tried NBC made up for their lack of foresight and paid her well to jump to their network, which carried the show Mondays through Fridays. This was followed by years of alternating between the two networks, with the show airing at various times Mondays through Fridays, originally in the evenings and later around lunchtime.

To keep away from family distractions, Molly wrote her early scripts in the 42nd Street public library. Others she wrote on taxi rides to the studio. After she did a live performance, she would relax by walking to Schafft's and having a soda.

Molly and her made-up family were such a popular stage show attraction at an Atlantic City theater that the management stopped showing a feature film and had just a newsreel in between their skits. To keep the radio show fresh, the fictional Gold-

bergs moved from New York to Connecticut (as Molly had) so that everything changed but the theme music, Toselli's "Serenade."

In 1945, Molly's father, Jake, passed on but not without a last joke. Bored with waiting for death, he climbed out of his hospital bed, then put on a nurse's cap and cape and sat on a chair just before his daughter came in to see him.

Between that year and 1949, Molly was off the air, as radio programming was changing to accommodate different tastes and the networks began developing television programming. Ever a fighter, she refused to listen to producers who told her that her show would never appeal to TV audiences. She and her cast auditioned in front of CBS producers and sponsors.

No one laughed. But General Foods immediately drew up a contract, and her weekly show enlivened Monday nights. To help draw listeners to the television show, the Goldbergs returned to CBS radio for Friday evenings in 1949-1950.

Audiences got to see the Goldbergs back at 1030 East Tremont Avenue in the Bronx when her show premiered on television in January 1949. If you turned on your set, you saw Molly leaning out her third floor window and saying "Yoo-hoo, Mrs. Kramer!" But since Molly didn't look Jewish enough to match her character's voice, she learned to put putty around her features and aged herself with a few eye-pencil lines.

Out of necessity, the show became less a daily account of a family than it was a situation comedy. The show was also losing more than just its homey flavor. Philip Loeb as husband Jake was removed during the period of the Communist blacklisting, no matter how much Molly fought to keep him, and he was replaced in 1954 by the



*The Goldbergs on Radio*  
James Waters, Roslyn Silber, Gertrude Berg, Al Ryder

duller, less ethnic Harold J. Stone and later by Robert H. Harris. (Four years after being hounded out of the business, Loeb died from an overdose of sleeping pills.)

*The Goldbergs* TV show ran on CBS and then NBC to February 1953, then it was picked up for six months in mid-1954 by the Dumont network before running in syndication in 1955 and 1956. Imagine being able to tune in to the same family from 1929 to 1956.

Television took away some of the universality of the humor, and audiences were now largely second- and third-generation Americans with no ties to the Old World. Besides, many Jewish families were moving to the suburbs in the mid-1950s, and the problems of the Goldbergs were seeming less relevant. So Molly decided to diversify, and wrote a Broadway play for herself, *Molly and Me*.

She later starred in the first vehicle she did not write, the smash play *A Majority of One*, co-starring Cedric Hardwicke. But when a studio made a movie from the story, it replaced Molly with a bigger star, Rosalind Russell. Miss Russell, a practic-

ing Catholic, took lessons in Jewishness but lacked Molly's cozy chutzpa, and the film was quickly forgotten.

Molly decided to recycle her Mrs. Goldberg character as Sarah Green for the TV sit com *Mrs. G. Goes to College* (later named *The Gertrude Berg Show*) about a matronly widow who enrolls in college. CBS aired it in 1961-62, but Molly without a likable family was just another overweight, plain-looking woman.

She died in 1966, at 67. But since the typical Jewish mothers she played sometimes yearned for the last word, here is what she says about her life. "Someone from a long time ago knocks on the dressing room door, as so often happens. Then, in the mirror, I see Tillie, the daughter of Jake and Dinah. A dressing room is like that. The past keeps walking in. I'm happy to see it, happy to know it's still there, and happy that memory can still be a reality. Time hasn't moved and yesterday was just a few minutes ago." ■

*TUNE IN TWTD March 20 to hear a radio episode of The Goldbergs.*



*The Goldbergs on TV*  
Gertrude Berg, Philip Loeb

# RADIO STAR BIRTH DATES

COMPILED BY RON SAYLES

## JANUARY

- 1 Janet Waldo, 1918 *Meet Corliss Archer*
- 2 Bernardine Flynn, 1904 (d. 3-10-77) *Vic and Sade*  
Julius LaRosa, 1930 *Arthur Godfrey Time*
- 3 Zasu Pitts, 1898 (d. 6-7-63) *Lum and Abner*  
Victor Borge, 1909 (d. 12-23-2000) *Victor Borge Show, Kraft Music Hall*
- 6 Danny Thomas, 1912 (d. 2-6-91) *The Bickersons, Fanny Brice Show*
- 8 Butterfly McQueen, 1911 (d. 12-22-95) *Beulah, Jack Benny Program*
- 10 Gisele MacKenzie, 1927 (d. 9-5-03) *Mario Lanza Show*
- 12 Ed McConnell, 1892 (d. 7-24-54) *Buster Brown Gang*  
Lon Clark, 1911 (d. 10-4-98) *Nick Carter: Master Detective*
- 14 William Bendix, 1906 (d. 12-14-64) *Life of Riley*
- 15 Goodman Ace, 1899 (d. 3-25-82) *Easy Aces*
- 17 Minerva Ellen, 1875 (d. 7-2-65) *One Man's Family*
- 18 Lucille Wall, 1899 (d. 7-11-86) *Portia Faces Life, Lorenzo Jones*  
Danny Kaye, 1913 (d. 3-3-87) *Danny Kaye Show*
- 19 Larry Ross, 1906 (d. 4-25-88) *Maxwell House Show Boat*  
Ish Kabibble (Merwyn Bogue), 1908 (d. 6-4-94) *Kay Kyser's Kollege*
- 20 George Burns, 1896 (d. 3-9-96) *Burns and Allen Show*
- 21 J. Carrol Naish, 1900 (d. 1-24-73) *Life with Luigi*
- 22 Ann Sothern, 1909 (d. 3-15-01) *Adventures of Maisie*
- 23 Florence Halop, 1923 (d. 7-15-86) *Duffy's Tavern, Jimmy Durante Show*
- 25 Portland Hoffa, 1910 (d. 12-25-90) *Fred Allen Show*
- 27 Howard McNear, 1905 (d. 1969) *Gunsmoke*
- 31 Eddie Cantor, 1892 (d. 10-10-64) *Eddie Cantor Show*  
Tallulah Bankhead, 1902 (d. 12-12-68) *The Big Show*  
Garry Moore, 1915 (d. 11-28-93) *Club Matinee, Durante-Moore Show*  
Mario Lanza, 1921 (d. 10-7-59) *Mario Lanza Show*

## FEBRUARY

- 2 Len Doyle, 1893 (d. 12-6-59) *Mr. District Attorney*
- Benny Rubin, 1899 (d. 7-15-86) *Jack Benny Program*
- 3 Charles Correll, 1890 (d. 9-26-72) *Amos 'n' Andy*
- 4 Nigel Bruce, 1895 (d. 10-8-53) *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*
- 6 Bennet Kilpack, 1888 (d. 8-17-62) *Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons*
- 7 Bill Johnstone, 1908 (d. 1997) *The Shadow*  
Eddie Bracken, 1920 (d. 11-14-02) *Eddie Bracken Story*
- 8 Truman Bradley, 1905 (d. 7-28-74) *Announcer*
- 9 Ronald Colman, 1891 (d. 5-19-58) *Halls of Ivy, Jack Benny Program*  
Chester Lauck, 1902 (d. 2-22-80) *Lum and Abner*
- 10 Jimmy Durante, 1893 (d. 1-29-80) *Jimmy Durante Show*
- 12 Joseph Kearns, 1904 (d. 2-17-62) *Suspense, Jack Benny Program*  
Ken Roberts, 1910, *The Shadow, Quick as a Flash*
- 13 Joan Edwards, 1920 (d. 8-27-81) *Your Hit Parade*
- 14 Jack Benny, 1894 (d. 12-26-74) *Jack Benny Program*  
Tyler McVey, 1912 (d. 7-5-03) *One Man's Family, Glamour Manor*
- 15 John Barrymore, 1882 (d. 5-29-42) *Rudy Vallee Show*



JANET  
WALDO



JULIUS  
LA ROSA



DANNY  
KAYE



MARIO  
LANZA



JIMMY  
DURANTE



MARY LEE  
ROBB



EDDIE  
PEABODY

- Mary Lee Robb, 1930 *Great Gildersleeve*
- 16 Edgar Bergen, 1903 (d. 9-30-78) *Charlie McCarthy Show*  
Del Sharbutt, 1910 (d. 4-26-02) *Announcer*
- 17 Statts Cotsworth, 1908 (d. 4-9-79) *Crime Photographer*  
Red Barber, 1908 (d. 10-22-92) *Sportscaster*
- 18 Edward Arnold, 1890 (d. 4-26-56) *Mr. President*  
Wayne King, 1901 (d. 7-16-85) *Lady Esther Serenade*
- 19 Eddie Peabody, 1902 (d. 11-7-70) *National Barn Dance*
- 20 Gale Gordon, 1906 (d. 6-30-95) *Fibber McGee, Our Miss Brooks*
- 21 Shirley Bell, 1921 *Little Orphan Annie*
- 22 Sheldon Leonard, 1907 (d. 1-10-97) *Jack Benny Program, Maisie*  
Dan Seymour, 1915 (d. 7-27-82) *Aunt Jenny's Real Life Stories*
- 24 Victor Moore, 1876 (d. 7-23-62) *Jimmy Durante Show*
- 25 Marion Claire, 1904 (d. 2-24-88) *Chicago Theatre of the Air*  
Jim Backus, 1913 (d. 7-3-89) *Alun Young Show, Sad Sack*
- 26 Mason Adams, 1919 *Pepper Young's Family*
- 28 Jim Boles, 1914 (d. 5-26-77) *I Love A Mystery*  
Louise Erickson, 1928 *Great Gildersleeve, A Date with July*

## MARCH

- 1 Dinah Shore, 1916 (d. 2-24-94) *Eddie Cantor, Dinah Shore Show*
- 3 Ruby Dandridge, 1902 (d. 10-17-87) *Judy Canova Show*  
Donald Novis, 1906 (d. 7-23-66) *Fibber McGee and Molly*
- 5 Minerva Pious, 1903 (d. 3-16-79) *Fred Allen Show*
- 6 Lou Costello, 1906 (d. 3-3-59) *Abbott and Costello Show*  
Virginia Gregg, 1916 (d. 9-15-86) *Dragnet, Richard Diamond*
- 8 Louise Beavers, 1902 (d. 10-26-62) *Beulah*  
Franklyn MacCormack, 1908 (d. 6-12-71) *Jack Armstrong*
- 12 Harlow Wilcox, 1900 (d. 9-24-60) *Fibber McGee and Molly, Suspense*  
Mandel Kramer, 1916 (d. 1-29-89) *Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar*  
Gordon MacRae, 1921 (d. 1-24-86) *Railroad Hour*
- 14 Les Brown, 1912 (d. 1-4-01) *Bob Hope Show*
- 15 Ernie Hare, 1883 (d. 3-9-39) *Happiness Boys*  
Billy Jones, 1887 (d. 11-23-40) *Happiness Boys*
- 16 Jerry Lewis, 1926 *Martin and Lewis Show*  
Dick Beals, 1927 *Lone Ranger*
- 17 Mercedes McCambridge, 1918 *I Love A Mystery, Inner Sanctum*
- 20 Ozzie Nelson, 1906 (d. 6-3-75) *Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*  
Jack Kruschen, 1922 (d. 4-2-02) *Broadway is My Beat*  
Ray Goulding, 1922 (d. 3-24-90) *Bob and Ray Show*
- 22 Chico Marx, 1891 (d. 10-11-61) *Flywheel, Shyster and Flywheel*
- 24 Vanessa Brown, 1928 (d. 5-21-99) *Quiz Kids*
- 25 Arturo Toscanini, 1867 (d. 1-16-57) *NBC Symphony Orchestra*  
Andy Clyde, 1892 (d. 5-18-67) *Hopalong Cassidy*  
Ed Begley, 1901 (d. 4-28-70) *Richard Diamond, Charlie Chan*
- 26 Bob Elliott, 1923 *Bob and Ray Show*
- 28 Paul Whiteman, 1890 (d. 12-29-67) *Kraft Music Hall, Burns and Allen*  
Frank Lovejoy, 1912 (d. 10-2-62) *Nightbeat*
- 29 Earle Ross, 1888 (d. 5-21-61) *Great Gildersleeve*
- 31 Les Damon, 1908 (d. 7-20-62) *Thin Man, The Falcon*  
Henry Morgan, 1915 (d. 5-19-94) *Henry Morgan Show*



SHIRLEY  
BELL



DINAH  
SHORE



LOU  
COSTELLO



FRANKLYN  
MAC CORMACK



BILLY JONES  
ERNIE HARE



RAY GOULDING  
BOB ELLIOTT

A much more complete listing of birth dates (and death dates) of show business personalities may be found on Ron Sayles' web page:

<http://mywebpage.netscape.com/bogusotr/instant/taz.html>





Chuck Schaden's

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## JANUARY 2004

### SATURDAY, JANUARY 3

**INNER SANCTUM** (6-23-47) "Over My Dead Body" featuring Larry Haines and Vera Allen. A man plans to feign death to determine which of his heirs deserves his money. AFRS rebroadcast. (24 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO: The Jack Benny Program** (2-5-94) First program in the 12-part series features recollections by Jack Benny and Sheldon Leonard. *Excerpts:* Jack's first program for Canada Dry (5-2-32); Jell-O Program (1-31-37); Grape Nuts Program (10-11-42); Lucky Strike Program (9-26-46); Jack introduces Sheldon Leonard (5-29-49); Tout at race track (1-23-54); Tout at fruit stand (4-3-49); Tout in department store (12-13-53). *This series begins today and will continue through March in celebration of the 25th Anniversary of Jack Benny Month on TWTD.* (29 min)

**THE BIG STORY** (5-26-47) Bob Sloan narrates the details of a crackdown on a lottery racket and how Keeler McCartney broke the story for his newspaper, the Atlanta Constitution. Pall Mall Cigarettes, NBC. (24 min) *Read the article on page 46.*

**MEL TORMÉ REMEMBERS** (1971) In a special recording for employees of the Ralston Purina Company in St. Louis, the singer and former child radio actor recalls the company's sponsorship of the *Tom Mix* program and remembers his days in Chicago in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Tormé was a faithful listener to the *Tom Mix Ralston Straight-Shooters*. (11 min)

**TOM MIX RALSTON STRAIGHT-SHOOTERS** (4-28-48) *Isolated episode* from the "Mystery of the Hurricane Horse" starring Curly Bradley as Tom. *Read the article on page 18.*

**HALLMARK PLAYHOUSE** (9-23-48) "Captain January" starring Lionel Barrymore and Luana Patten in the story of a salty sea captain and a young orphan. Hallmark Cards, CBS. (29 min)

★ **FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY** (12-7-43) Jim and Marian Jordan star as the McGees of Wist-

ful Vista. Two years after Pearl Harbor, Fibber is reminded that the war is *not* almost over! Johnson's Wax, NBC. (30 min)

### SATURDAY, JANUARY 10

**ESCAPE** (1-31-50) "Present Tense" starring Vincent Price, Charles McGraw, Joan Banks, Harry Bartell, Ben Wright. A convicted ax-murderer dreams that he has escaped from the train taking him to prison and execution. Sustaining, CBS. (29 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO: The Jack Benny Program** (2-12-94) Second program in the series with recollections by writers George Balzer and Milt Josefsberg. *Excerpts:* Jack introduces his writers (5-29-49); Cast at rehearsal (3-24-46); Your Money or Your Life (3-28-48); Dorothy Kirsten and Mary's biggest laugh (4-25-48); Gertrude and Mable (11-14-48); Jack introduces his switchboard operators (5-29-49). (26 min)

**THE WHISTLER** (9-15-48) "Uncle Ben's Widow" featuring Jeff Chandler and Betty Lou Gerson. An eyewitness claims an "accidental" death was really murder. Signal Oil Co., CBS. (28 min)

**FRONTIER GENTLEMAN** (6-1-58) "School Days" starring John Dehner as J. B. Kendall, reporter for the London Times. Two towns vie for the only school teacher available. Sustaining, CBS. (24 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO: The Jack Benny Program** (2-19-94) Third program in the series, featuring recollections by Don Wilson and Dennis Day. *Excerpts:* George Jessel narrates Jack Benny's life story (11-4-51); Don Wilson's 16th anniversary in radio (3-12-39); Don's contract (1-23-49); Benny on sightseeing bus (9-11-49); Jack introduces Dennis Day (5-29-49); Dennis brings his mother (10-6-46); Dennis as Titus Moody (3-17-46); as Ronald Colman (11-9-47); as Hitler and Tojo (1-2-44); sound effects man (2-1-42). (39 min)

**THE SHADOW** (3-14-48) "Stake Out" star-

ring Bret Morrison as Lamont Cranston with Grace Matthews as the lovely Margo Lane. Syndicated, MBS. (26 min)

### SATURDAY, JANUARY 17 REMEMBERING ROSALIND RUSSELL

*Re-scheduled from August 2, 2003, preempted for a tribute to Bob Hope.*

**ACADEMY AWARD** (5-18-46) "My Sister Eileen" starring **Rosalind Russell** and Janet Blair in their original screen roles as two sisters from Ohio who try to survive in their nutty Greenwich Village apartment. House of Squibb, CBS. (28 min)

**HALLMARK PLAYHOUSE** (10-21-48) "Mrs. Parkington" starring **Rosalind Russell** in the story of a rich man and the poor girl he marries. Hallmark Cards, CBS. (29 min)

**SUSPENSE** (12-9-48) "The Sisters" starring **Rosalind Russell** with Lurene Tuttle, Joseph Kearns and Jeff Chandler. A woman buys a coffin at a funeral home and asks the mortician to hold it for three weeks until she needs it. AutoLite, CBS. (29 min)

**SCREEN DIRECTORS PLAYHOUSE** (2-1-51) "Take a Letter, Darling" starring **Rosalind Russell** and Fred MacMurray in a comedy about a female advertising executive who hires a male secretary. Great supporting cast: Arthur Q. Bryan, Jim Backus, Peter Leeds, Mary Jane Croft, Isabel Randolph, June Foray, Fritz Feld, RCA Victor, Anacin, NBC. (28 min & 29 min) **OUR SPECIAL GUEST** is film historian **BOB KOLOSOSKI**, who will talk about the film career of **Rosalind Russell**.

### SATURDAY, JANUARY 24

**MURDER AT MIDNIGHT** (1946) "The Secret of XR3" featuring Karl Swenson as Gorgo, a three-foot-tall midget who has an opportunity to take hormone capsules to help grow to a normal size. Syndicated. (27 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO: The Jack Benny Program** (2-26-94) Program four features recollections by Frank Nelson, Veola Vonn, Don Wilson, George Balzer and Mel Blanc. *Excerpts:* Jack introduces Frank Nelson (5-29-49); Floorwalker (12-14-41); Dr. Nelson, Dentist (1-23-49); Shooting of Dan McGrew (3-27-55); "Dreer Poosen" flub (1-8-50); Jack introduces Mel Blanc (5-29-49); the Maxwell; Carmichael the Bear (3-12-39); shopping for a Christmas gift for Don (12-21-47). (36 min)

**HOLLYWOOD STAR PLAYHOUSE** (9-27-51) "The Professor Stays at Home" starring Edmund Gwenn. A professor devises a perfect plan to murder his nagging wife. Sustaining, ABC. (29 min)

**THIRD MAN** (1952) "See Naples and Live" starring Orson Welles as Harry Lime. In Italy, Lime is after a valuable emerald locket worn by a rich American traveler. Syndicated. (26 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO: The Jack Benny Program** (5-7-94) Program five features recollections by writers George Balzer and Milt Josefsberg. *Excerpts:* Jack introduces Artie Auerbach (5-29-49); Mr. Kitzel, Movie Extra (10-26-47); Jack's echo, Part 1 (10-3-48); Jack's echo, Part 2 (10-10-48); Jack's echo, Part 3 (10-24-48); King Solomon's Mines (1-7-51). (33 min)

**TWENTY-FIRST PRECINCT** (1950s) A probationary officer's first job at the precinct is to guard a hospitalized prisoner who was wounded by a policeman during a robbery. Everett Sloane as Captain Frank Kennelly. AFRS rebroadcast. (28 min)

### SATURDAY, JANUARY 31 FREDRIC MARCH ON RADIO

**THEATRE GUILD ON THE AIR** (11-19-50) "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" starring **Fredric March** re-creating his 1932 screen success in Robert Louis Stevenson's story of a tormented doctor. United States Steel. (24 min & 18 min & 10 min)

**SUSPENSE** (8-24-44) "Actor's Blood" starring **Fredric March** in a unique presentation for *Suspense* which features a story written and "told to us" by Ben Hecht, who narrates. A writer is invited to a friend's house to reveal a murderer - and a story - he can use. Roma Wines, CBS. (30 min)

**ACADEMY AWARD** (6-29-46) "A Star is Born" starring **Fredric March** in a radio version of his 1937 motion picture. Esther Blodgett becomes a star while husband Norman Maine's career slides. House of Squibb, CBS. (29 min)

**READER'S DIGEST, RADIO EDITION** (1-20-46) "We Took to the Woods" starring **Fredric March** and Florence Eldridge in a story of a dutiful wife who takes care of her blind husband. Hallmark Cards, CBS. (30 min)

**SUSPENSE** (5-26-49) "The Night Reveals" starring **Fredric March** as a fire inspector who suspects that his wife is a pyromaniac and may be responsible for a number of fires in town. AutoLite, CBS. (29 min)

*Read the article on page 48.*





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**FEBRUARY 2004**

*Celebrating the 25th Anniversary of Jack Benny Month  
on Those Were The Days with  
A Month of February Shows... and Nothing But Benny!*

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7**

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-14-37)** Today is Jack's birthday and he says he is "around 35"(!) Jack is trying to find his stolen violin so he can play "The Bee." Guest Ben Bernie drops by to lend his violin to Jack. Mary Livingstone, Kenny Baker, Phil Harris, Andy Devine. Jell-O, NBC. (30 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO: The Jack Benny Program (7-30-94)** Program six in the 12-part series features recollections by Jack Benny. *Excerpts:* Jack's life story in music (5-11-41); Fred Allen's tribute to Benny (5-11-41); Benny-Allen feud (6-27-48); Allen and Benny in vaudeville (4-26-53). (31 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-19-39)** Someone sent Jack a polar bear for his birthday last week. *This is the first reference to the bear as Carmichael.* Mary, Phil, Kenny, Don, Andy, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson. Jell-O, NBC. (29 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-26-39)** The Benny Bargain Basement Players present their version of the film "Jesse James" with Jack as Jesse; Mary as Zorelda, his sweetheart; Phil as Barshee, the villain; Kenny as a railroad executive; Verna Felton as Jesse's mother; Don as the crowd that Jesse holds up; Andy as one of the James brothers. Jell-O, NBC. (29 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-1-42)** Guest Humphrey Bogart shows up to join the gang in the play "The Fright Wig Murder Case." Veola Vonn appears as a French maid in the sketch and there's a salute to sound effects man Virgil Rhymer (played by Frank Nelson). Jell-O, NBC. (30 min)

★ **JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-6-44)** Jack and the gang broadcast from Roosevelt Naval Base on Terminal Island, San Pedro, California. Jack

and Mary are an hour late for the show. Jack recalls when he enlisted in the Navy in 1917. Grape Nuts, NBC. (29 min)

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14**

★ **JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-13-44)** Jack celebrates his birthday during this remote broadcast for a military audience at March Field, California. Guest is harmonica virtuoso Larry Adler, who reminisces with Jack about their overseas trip to Egypt, where Jack bought a camel. Mary, Phil, Dennis Day, Rochester, Don, Butterfly McQueen. Grape Nuts, NBC. (29 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-3-46)** Jack takes Mary to a concert starring guest Issac Stern, one of the world's great violinists. They meet Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Colman at the Philharmonic Auditorium. Colman reads the first prize-winning letter in the "I Can't Stand Jack Benny" contest. Phil, Don, Rochester, Larry Stevens, Frank Nelson. Lucky Strike, NBC. (29 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO: The Jack Benny Program (9-24-94)** Program seven with recollections by writers George Balzer and Milt Josefsberg, Jack Benny and Joan Benny. *Excerpts:* Mary reads a letter from Momma; Jack and Mary recall the early days of his show (5-9-41); Mary's letter from Momma (3-12-39); Jack takes inventory (10-2-49); Jack's memory loss (10-9-49). (33 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-2-47)** Jack and Mary go to the movies to see "It's a Wonderful Life" and they run into director Frank Capra. Later, Jack meets his Guardian Angel (Victor Moore), who wants to show Jack what life would be if Jack Benny had never been born. Don, Phil, Rochester, Dennis, Sportsmen, Frank Nelson, Peter Lind Hayes. Lucky Strike, NBC. (26 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-9-47)** What Jack does after he finishes one of his radio programs: He stops in at the drug store for a soda. Jack, who says he is age 38, tunes in the radio to hear "H. V. Kaltenborn" broadcast a special birthday tribute to him. Mary, Phil, Dennis, Rochester, Don, Mel Blanc, Artie "Kitzel" Auerbach, Frank Nelson, Elliott Lewis. Lucky Strike, NBC. (27 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-16-47)** A flashback takes listeners to Jack's house for his birthday party. Among the guests are Ronald and Benita Colman and violinist Issac Stern. Lucky Strike, NBC. (26 min)

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21**

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-15-48)** Jack's going to be 39 and the Beverly Hills Beavers decide to hold a surprise birthday party for him, and so, it seems, does everyone else. Jack's sister Florence sends him an elaborate singing telegram. Don, Phil, Dennis, Rochester, Mel Blanc, Verna Felton. Lucky Strike, NBC. (27 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-29-48)** Jack invites his girlfriend, Gladys Zabisco, to rehearsal and a bite to eat. At rehearsal, Jack makes Phil analyze the lyrics to "That's What I Like About the South." Sportsmen sing "Sonny Boy." Don, Mary, Rochester, Dennis, Mel Blanc, Sara Berner. Lucky Strike, NBC. (27 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-6-49)** Mary opens the show because Don still hasn't signed his contract and is locked in the den. Later, she tells Phil and Dennis how Jack tried to appear on the *Ford Theatre* with Claudette Colbert by replacing Vincent Price and how Jack "auditioned" for the part. Claudette, Vincent and director Fletcher Markel all appear on this show. Lucky Strike, CBS. (27 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO: The Jack Benny Program (10-1-94)** Program eight offers recollections by writer George Balzer. *Excerpts:* How Jack met Rochester (5-31-42); Rochester at sea (2-17-46); Railroad station for Colorado trip (1-11-48); Railroad station in Pasadena (1-29-50). (28 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-13-49)** Jack's birthday is tomorrow and he's going to be 40, but nobody believes it. Jack's sister sends him a telegram saying that he isn't going to be 40, but 39! Jack calls Rochester to have him look at his birth certificate. Lucky Strike, CBS. (29 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-12-50)** It's Jack's second week in New York. He's at the Acme Plaza Hotel, planning his next program. In the

absence of the Sportsmen, Rochester suggests the Ink Spots, who sing "If I Didn't Care." Jack decides to do his version of "Allen's Alley" with Jack himself as Fred and Mary as Portland. Guests are Kenny Delmar as Senator Claghorn, Parker Fennelly as Titus Moody and Peter Donald as Ajax Cassidy. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28**

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-19-50)** Jack and the gang are on the Super Chief on their way back to Los Angeles after a two-week trip in New York. Phil, Dennis, Rochester, Don, Mel Blanc, Roy Glenn, Sportsmen. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO: The Jack Benny Program (10-15-94)** Program nine features recollections by Jack's manager Irving Fein, Jack Benny and writer George Balzer. *Excerpts:* Drug Store lunch (4-9-50); Professor LeBlanc (5-19-49); George Burns sings Jack's song (1-20-52); CBS closed circuit broadcast (12-23-48); CBS Benny promotional announcements (1948-49); First Benny show on CBS (1-2-49). (37 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-24-52)** Jack and the gang present "The Fiddler," their version of the popular radio show *The Whistler*. Mary, Dennis, Phil, Don, Mel Blanc. AFRS rebroadcast. (27 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-1-53)** Stanley Kramer, producer of the film *High Noon*, is on hand for Jack's version of the story, repeated from a broadcast eight weeks earlier, by popular request. Mary, Don, Dennis, Bob Crosby, Mel Blanc. Lucky Strike, CBS. (27 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO: The Jack Benny Program (11-19-94)** Program 10 features recollections by Don Wilson and writer George Balzer. *Excerpts:* The Don Wilson Story (1-10-54); Don introduces the Sportsmen to Jack (10-6-46); Don's 30th anniversary in radio (1-10-54); Jack's vault and secrecy pledge (12-30-54); Jack introduces Joe Kearns (5-29-49); Jack's vault and "Virus X" (1-11-48). (33 min) *Programs 11 and 12 of this series will be broadcast in March 2004.*

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-13-55)** In a flashback to last year, everyone is planning surprise birthday parties for Jack. But he's upset and thinks everyone has forgotten his big day. *This is an almost identical script as the one used on February 15, 1948 (see last week's TWTD schedule).* Mary, Don, Rochester, Dennis, Bob Crosby. Lucky Strike, CBS. (26 min)



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**MARCH 2004**

**SATURDAY, MARCH 6**  
**GLENN MILLER CENTENNIAL**

*Glenn Miller was born 100 years ago on March 1, 1904 and today we salute the man and his music.*

**GLENN MILLER AND HIS ORCHESTRA** (4-4-39) Remote broadcast from Frank Dailey's Meadowbrook, located on Route 23, the Newark-Pompton Turnpike, between Montclair and Cedar Grove, New Jersey. Selections include "Blue Skies," "Don't Worry 'Bout Me," and "Our Love." Vocals by Marion Hutton and Ray Eberle. Charlie Nobles announces. Sustaining, NBC-BLUE. (30 min)

**THE YESTERDAY SHOP** (6-19-74) *Excerpt.* Host Mike Schwimmer welcomes guests Karl Pearson and George T. Simon, author of the new book "Glenn Miller and his Orchestra." Simon was the former editor of Metronome magazine and took part in Miller's first band and his Army Air Force Band and was a close

friend of Miller. Conversation centers around the Miller band and music clips are featured. WLTD, Evanston, Illinois. (18 min)

**GLENN MILLER AND HIS ORCHESTRA** (11-23-40) Remote broadcast from the Cafe Rouge of Hotel Pennsylvania in New York City. Selections include "Little Brown Jug," "A Million Dreams Ago," "Limehouse Blues," "I Dreamt I Dwelt in Harlem." Vocals by Ray Eberle and Marion Hutton. Sustaining, NBC-BLUE. (25 min)

**CHESTERFIELD MOONLIGHT SERENADE** (1-28-41) From New York: tunes include "Georgia On My Mind," "Cheer Up," "Measure for Measure." Vocals by Dorothy Clair and the Modernaires, Ray Eberle. Paul Douglas announces. Chesterfield, CBS. (13 min)

**THE YESTERDAY SHOP** (6-19-74) *Excerpt.* More conversation about the Glenn Miller band with host Mike Schwimmer and guests Karl Pearson and George Simon. Includes a clip of a 1944 BBC interview with Major Glenn Miller. WLTD, Evanston, Illinois. (21 min)

**CHESTERFIELD MOONLIGHT SERENADE** (9-24-42) *Excerpt* from the East Coast version of Glenn Miller's final program before entering the Army. Guest is Harry James, who will take over the program next week. Tex Beneke and the Modernaires present "Juke Box Saturday Night." Chesterfield, CBS. (6 min)

**CHESTERFIELD MOONLIGHT SERENADE** (9-24-42) The West Coast version of Glenn Miller's final program before entering the Army. From the stage of the Central Theatre in Passaic, New Jersey. (Harry James is not on this repeat show.) Selections include "It's Great to Be an American," "In the Mood," and "Juke Box Saturday Night." Chesterfield, CBS. (13 min)

★ **AMERICAN BAND OF THE A.E.F.** (8-3-44) Captain Glenn Miller and the band broadcasting from Bedford, England, with guest artists Sam Browne and Dinah Shore. Music includes "Sun Valley Jump," "Time on My Hands," "Long Ago and Far Away," "I'll Be Seeing You," and "With My Head in the Clouds." Also

features Sgt. Johnny Desmond, the Crew Chiefs and the Glee Club. BBC, short wave to the USA. (30 min)

★ **GRAND ROUND-UP** (12-25-44) *Excerpt.* Christmas Day broadcast from "an Allied Troop Theatre in Paris" before an audience of members of the Allied Expeditionary Forces. The American band of the AEF is conducted by Sgt. Jerry Gray, "substituting for Major Glenn Miller." AAFP, BBC and MUTUAL. *Mutual announcer mentions that Glenn Miller was listed as missing in the last 24 hours.* (8 min)  
**OUR SPECIAL GUEST HOST** for this program is big band historian **Karl Pearson.**  
*Read the article on page 40.*

**SATURDAY, MARCH 13**  
**RADIO'S DRUG SCENE**

**GANGBUSTERS** (1950s) "Case of the New York Narcotic King...who ran a \$2 million dope racket until he was tripped up by a federal agent's broken leg." Hon. John C. Hille, Assistant U.S. Attorney, New York, tells the story to Don Gardner. Cast features Mandel Kramer and Raymond Edward Johnson. Syndicated. (23 min)

**DRAGNET** (6-8-54) Jack Webb stars as Sgt. Joe Friday with Ben Alexander as Officer Frank Smith. Working the Narcotics Detail, Friday and Smith investigate a teen-age heroin user. AFRS broadcast. (24 min)

**PHIL HARRIS - ALICE FAYE SHOW** (10-3-48) It's the first show for their new sponsor, the Rexall Drug Company, and it's discovered that

Frankie Remley has signed with the sponsor instead of Phil. Cast includes Elliott Lewis and Walter Tetley. Bill Forman announces. Rexall, NBC. (29 min)

**ROCKY FORTUNE** (3-2-54) Frank Sinatra stars as Rocky, that "footloose and fancy free young gentleman." Fortune is sent to a Park Avenue doctor's office, where the doctor asks for help because his son has been stealing drugs from his medical supplies. Cast includes Maurice Hart, Raymond Burr, Georgia Ellis, Barney Phillips. AFRS rebroadcast. (24 min)

**IN THE NAME OF THE LAW** (1930s) "Narcotics in the Trunk." In a story "taken from actual police case files," customs inspectors find heroin in a trunk belonging to a woman arriving in the U.S. from China. Syndicated. (25 min)

**GREAT GILDERSLEEVE** (2-22-42) On Washington's birthday, Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve says it always pays to tell the truth... but when it comes to some matters, like the drug store owned by the estate he manages for Marjorie and Leroy, it's another thing. *From the series' first season; there's no mention of Mr. Peavey and his drug store yet.* Harold Peary stars as Gildy with Walter Tetley as Leroy, Lurene Tuttle as Marjorie and Lillian Randolph as Birdie. Kraft Foods, NBC. (30 min)

**BIG TOWN** (1940s) "Teen-age Terror" starring Edward Pawley as Steve Wilson, managing editor of the Illustrated Press, with Fran Carlon as Lorelei Kilbourne and Mason Adams as Harry the Hack. A 17-year-old boy helps Wilson and the police crack a ring of dope pushers selling to school children. AFRS rebroadcast. (23 min)

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**MARCH 2004**

**SATURDAY, MARCH 20**

**DIARY OF FATE** (4-6-48) "Tyler White Entry." "Fate" tells the story of a con man who is to be executed for a murder he did not commit. Syndicated. (28 min)

**AIR ADVENTURES OF JIMMIE ALLEN** (1930s) *Isolated episode* of the series starring John Frank as Jimmie Allen, 16-year-old boy pilot. Skelly Oil, syndicated. (14 min)

**LUX RADIO THEATRE** (9-30-46) "Coney Island" starring Betty Grable, Victor Mature and Barry Sullivan in a turn-of-the-century musical comedy about a saloon entertainer who becomes a musical comedy star through the efforts of a show business hustler. William Keighley hosts. Grable sings "When Irish Eyes are Smiling," "Cuddle Up a Little Closer," and "Put Your Arms Around Me, Honey." AFRS rebroadcast. (17 min & 18 min & 14 min) *Read the Betty Grable biography on page 13.*

**SPEAKING OF RADIO: The Jack Benny Program** (11-26-94) Program 11 in the 12-part series includes recollections by Phil Harris, Dennis Day and Elliott Lewis. *Excerpts:* Phil's first appearance with Jack (10-4-36); Benny show rehearsal (11-7-48); Too many mistakes (11-13-49); "How Are Things in Giocca Morra?" (5-4-47); Phil and Frankie Remley (6-6-48); "That's What I Like About the South" (11-30-47). (38 min)

**THE GOLDBERGS** (9-21-39) *Isolated episode from the long-running series.* Gertrude Berg stars as Molly Goldberg. Oxydol, CBS. (15 min) *Read the article on page 26.*

**ADVENTURES OF OZZIE AND HARRIET** (1-9-49) The Nelsons are becoming concerned about David and Ricky's obsession with sports heroes. Harriet wants Ozzie to show the boys

that he, too, is a hero. International Silver Company, NBC. (29 min)

**SATURDAY, MARCH 27**

**SCREEN DIRECTORS' PLAYHOUSE** (3-8-51) "Bachelor Mother" starring Lucille Ball and Robert Cummings. A department store clerk unwittingly becomes guardian for an abandoned baby. Anacin, RCA Victor, Chesterfield, NBC. (29 min & 27 min)

**STORY OF DR. KILDARE** (2-9-51) Lew Ayers and Lionel Barrymore star as Dr. Kildare and Dr. Gillespie at Blair General Hospital. Kildare suspects that a patient has Anthrax and that could result in an epidemic. Syndicated. (25 min)

**JIMMY DURANTE SHOW** (10-29-47) The Schnozzola welcomes guest Lucille Ball with hopes of co-starring as leading man in her next picture. They discuss the plans at dinner. Rexall, NBC. (29 min)

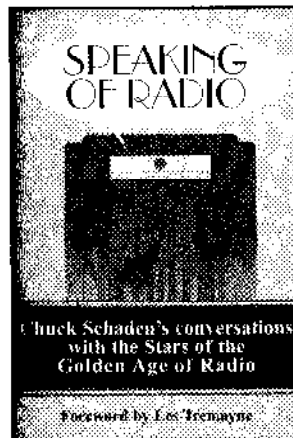
**SPEAKING OF RADIO: The Jack Benny Program** (1-14-95) The conclusion of the 12-part series features recollections by Don Wilson, writer George Balzer, Dennis Day, Jack Benny and Joan Benny. *Excerpts:* Jack introduces the Sportsmen (5-29-49); Sportsmen sing "Old Jack Benny Had a Farm" (3-23-47); Jack plays violin with the Sportsmen (11-23-47); Special Quartet: Bing Crosby, Andy Russell, Dick Haymes, Dennis Day (3-16-47); Si, Sy routines; Cimmaron Rolls sequence (1953) Birthday surprise for Jack (2-15-42); Radio honors (1-31-37). (36 min)

★ **SUSPENSE** (11-23-43) "Strange Death of Charles Umberstein" starring Vincent Price as a spy for the Allies whose mission requires him to assume another identity. Hans Conried co-stars. Sustaining, CBS. (30 min)

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| Edgar Bergen  | Jay Jostyn           | Harriet Nelson   | Russell Thorson  |
| Jim Boles     | Howard Koch          | Arch Oboler      | Les Tremayne     |
| Ken Carpenter | Elliott Lewis        | Harold Peary     | Lurene Tuttle    |
| Norman Corwin | Phil Leslie          | Ed Prentiss      | Rudy Vallee      |
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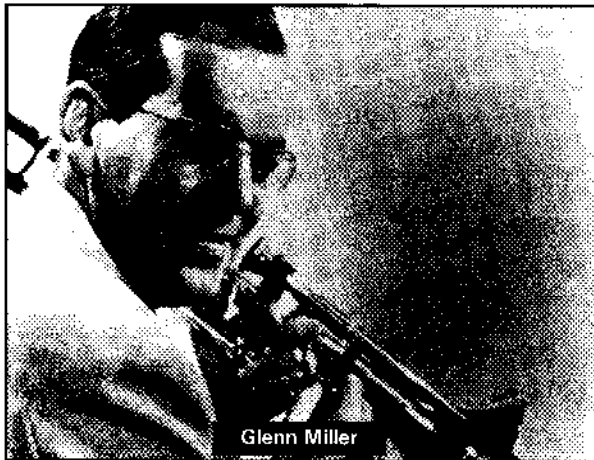
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# AMERICAN PATROL

BY GARDNER KISSACK

By the time the noisy, single-engine C-64 Norseman lifted off the runway that dreary December afternoon in 1944, on what would be its final flight, the drizzle and 34 degrees of the English winter seemed a slight relief from the pelting rain and heavy fog that earlier had postponed for 48 hours the hop across the Channel to Paris. The 5-foot 11-inch, 170-pound man who sat just behind the co-pilot was not an aviator, although



Glenn Miller

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he was a major in the U.S. Army. He had been 38 years old when he joined up in 1942, and he might have been worried about the dangers of flying in such an overcast but he was feeling good that he had arranged for a radio-phonograph console to be delivered as a surprise Christmas gift for his wife Helen back in New Jersey. For her and their family he was exceedingly thankful this dark Friday.

Although he believed absolutely in what he was doing, having long backed the U.S. war effort, he had been hoping and dreaming for some time about building a new home for Helen and their two children – a spacious, hip-roofed ranch on a sloped plot of ground with a courtyard adjoining a flat-

*Gardner Kissack of Chicago Heights, Illinois is a retired school teacher and a member of the Those Were The Days support staff.*

roofed recreation area and indoor pool. He even had a large scale model built of his new “Tuxedo Junction,” as it was to be called.

He had remained stateside for the early years of the war because the military chiefs had kept him home raising millions of dollars at bond drives across the country. He truly was an asset on the Home Front, in one evening raising over two million dollars in New York, and four million in both Chicago and St. Louis. No wonder the brass was reluctant to let him leave the states – in addition to the uncertain perils of war, of course. But he had finally persuaded them to let him take his band overseas to entertain the troops and to give them a taste of home. Now his main ambition was coming true. He and his band were in Europe at last.

It was a long way from Clarinda, Iowa, where Alton Glenn Miller was born on



Glenn Miller at Frank Dailey's Meadowbrook, Cedar Grove, NJ (1939)

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March 1, 1904. His family – mother, father, two brothers and a sister – moved a lot, to Tryon, Nebraska in 1909 and then to North Platte. By 1915 they were living in Missouri. In 1918 the family settled in Fort Morgan, Colorado, where they moved from one rental property to another. During these somewhat difficult years, the teen-aged Glenn worked as a soda jerk and in a sugar factory to help with the family finances. His childhood heroes included Horatio Alger and Teddy Roosevelt.

In high school he was on the football team, played trombone in the school band, and received mainly Cs along with a few As and Bs in math, but less in Latin. He graduated in May 1921, perhaps not the average student but surely not exceptional. There were few hints of greatness. One year later, Mr. A. Glenn Miller enrolled at the University of Colorado at Boulder, which was just a few miles from Fort Morgan. An early academic record shows he earned an 80 in Freshman English, 83 in Trig, 76 in American Gov-

ernment, and 50 in Harmony II!

Today campus visitors will find the Glenn Miller Ballroom – named and dedicated by Colorado students in 1953 – as well as Varsity Bridge, a native Colorado stone bridge – used by Jimmy Stewart and June Allison in the film *The Glenn Miller Story* – which replaced an old steel span frequented by Glenn and his college sweetheart during their college days. The University is also home to the Glenn Miller Archives, the most complete and comprehensive collection of Miller memorabilia and material in the world. According to Miller archivist Allan Cass, Clarinda, Iowa, and Fort Morgan, Colorado, host annual June events honoring and celebrating Glenn Miller's life and achievements.

While in college Miller played in a band led by his friend and fellow student Holly Moyer. Miller was finding direction. Music – and a beautiful co-ed, Helen Burger – soon pushed his studies to a second tier of priorities. Moyer's band toured and Miller's confidence in himself as a

performer grew and then soared. The experience and discipline gave him insights into music that would last his lifetime and influence music for many lifetimes, although he did not then know the former and he would never know the latter.

Playing with a larger band in Chicago a few years later, after leaving the university, Miller roomed with fellow musician Wayne Allen and later with Benny Goodman in the Bryn Mawr apartments at Sheridan Road and Bryn Mawr Avenue. The band performed at the Blackhawk Restaurant nightclub on Wabash Avenue in Chicago's Loop - the club that would feature such bands as Coon-Sanders, Hal Kemp and Bob Crosby, among others. Miller also played at the Southmoor, one of Hyde Park's elegant hotels, in 1925 and '26. After that he went to the Rendezvous Club on the North Side, a club run by the Chicago mob. It was a busy life and



a full schedule.

And there was the long-lasting, long-distance courtship of his college girlfriend who, during his long absences, had some serious suitors which, when he heard about them, sent him into action. He wired her to "Come to New York" to be married. Helen Burger did just that and, on October 6, 1926, she became Helen Burger Miller, Mrs. Glenn Miller. A Denver newspaper announcement of their marriage, headlined "Former Colorado U. Students Married in New York City," noted that she was a graduate of the university and a member of the Pi Beta Phi sorority and he was "also a former university student and now the highest paid trombone player in the United States." Life was good, and getting even better.

In New York City, where Miller labored for three years playing in Broadway theater orchestras, they had an apartment in Astoria, Queens, near the 59th Street bridge and close enough via subway to recording studios and the theater district north of 42nd Street. By 1929 Miller and his friends Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey had made some recordings for Decca and RCA/Bluebird labels, some with newcomer Bing Crosby.

Now at age 26, comfortable with his accomplishments thus far and life in general but not wholly satisfied, Miller anticipated the decade that lay ahead - a decade of economic depression but also of musical opportunities, a decade of refining his musical theories and, while playing many of the major hotels in Manhattan with the Ray Noble band as well as appearing at Rockefeller Center's Rainbow Room, he would combine experience with experimentation into his creative arrangements that would, eventually, make the man into a legend. Before the decade was out, he would have his own band.

Still, recognition, popularity and fame, to say nothing of fortune, were slow to arrive. His band, although working steadily

and traveling extensively, barely broke even initially and actually lost money in 1936 and 1937, finally turning a small profit late in 1938.

In the meantime, Glenn and Helen would not have a family of their own as they had wished, but they did pour a lot of affection and attention on their little dog Boots for 12 years. He was, as often happened, a very real part of the family in many ways, accompanying them almost everywhere. Later, however, in the spring of 1943, the Millers adopted a son, Stevie, from a home in Evanston, Illinois, and later a girl, Jonnie, who because Glenn was overseas, he would never see.

After hundreds of concerts throughout the country during the Depression and with a growing popularity, by 1938 Glenn Miller had made a mark on the world of music. Some of his band's most memorable performances occurred at one of his favorite venues, the Glen Island Casino on Long Island. Although Miller's reputation as an arranger and as a perfectionist had been spreading, it is generally conceded that the Miller band "arrived" in August of 1939 at Glen Island. The ballroom, with its stunning views of Long Island Sound, was airy and spacious enough with ample room for those mostly affluent couples wanting to jitterbug as well as room for those who enjoyed slower, more intimate dancing, and still more space for the enthusiastic throngs who preferred to linger near the bandstand to watch and be near the musicians. It was a heady time.

Miller's reputation as the superb arranger who knew what he wanted and as someone who knew how to find "the men who



Major Glenn Miller and Dinah Shore in London

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could produce the sound he wanted" was the talk of the business, according to John Dunning in his comprehensive history of radio, "On the Air." Miller was such a success by 1939 that he was on the air three times a week: Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings and at various times in the 1940s with quarter-hour, half-hour and hour-long radio shows. The program was *Chesterfield Time*, sometimes called *Moonlight Serenade* (not to be confused with *Sunset Serenade*, a Saturday afternoon Miller program for the troops and the USO.) *Chesterfield Time* often featured the Andrews Sisters along with regular singers Marion Hutton and Ray Eberle.

Within a few years the hits piled up quicker and sooner than anyone in the band would have imagined a few years earlier: "In the Mood," "Moonlight Serenade," "String of Pearls," "Little Brown Jug," "Tuxedo Junction," "American Patrol," "I've Got a Gal in Kalamazoo," and "Pennsylvania 6-5000," to name just a few!

In February of 1942, for the band's RCA record of "Chattanooga Choo-Choo" Glenn Miller received the first Gold Record ever awarded a recording artist for selling one million copies. During those war years, swing music was at its peak and so

was Glenn Miller.

Yet, with all the personal and commercial success, Miller longed to do his part for the war effort, and even though his eyesight disqualified him from battle, he enlisted anyway (after being rejected by the Navy) and within months had formed several bands for the Army, with Sousa marches a brief specialty. By 1944 his Army Air Force Orchestra was performing in Great Britain and making more than a dozen radio broadcasts a week for the Armed Forces Network.

Music historian Karl Pearson, in his superb *Nostalgia Digest* article from October 1944, "Glenn Miller and World War II," notes that Miller's volunteering for the Army was front-page news: "Here was a famous entertainer with a million-dollar business, walking away from it all to serve his country. On September 27, 1942 Glenn Miller and his Orchestra played their farewell performance at the Center Theatre in Passaic, New Jersey. It was an emotional scene for all present." Marion Hutton left the stage in the middle of "Kalamazoo," overcome with emotions she could no longer control. The band was touched, too, "and Miller, famed for his cool, calm exterior, was also affected." The curtain came down in the middle of the closing theme.

When Miller went into the Army, "He passed the mantle of greatness to Harry James by giving him his popular *Chesterfield Time* radio show, assuring his friend of top-dog status in the music world," according to Bruce Oscar, WDCB program host of *All Things Jazz and Swing Shift*. As stern and opinionated as Miller was, he was equally thoughtful and generous. "Harry, I know you're going to do a wonderful job."

Two years later, Pearson points out, General Dwight Eisenhower personally requested the Glenn Miller orchestra for performances overseas and so Miller flew

ahead to smooth out the details of the band's arrival in June of 1944, and then wanted to do the same in December when the band was headed to Paris, although he was certainly not required to do so. "Miller decided that he would leave France a few days early to take care of business, including arrangements for a special Christmas Day broadcast which would be the first direct broadcast from Paris since the fall of France in 1940." No doubt Miller – still buoyed by General Jimmy Doolittle's comments to his band in July: "Next to a letter from home, your music is the greatest morale booster in the ETO (European Theatre of Operations)" – wanted members of his troop to be comfortable and safe once they got to Paris.

The string of hits halted when Major Glenn Miller's plane went down on that dreadful day in December, 1944. The lost plane, with its crew of three, was never found. It probably lies at the bottom of the English Channel, the unintended and unlikely victim, recent reports indicate, of Allied planes flying above the weather in darkness returning from bombing runs over enemy territory, disposing of their lethal cargo of unused bombs over water, a practice that was common to minimize the danger to bomber crews, protecting them from ordnance explosions and helping insure a safe landing in Britain should a landing gear collapse or other mishap occur.

Yet Glenn Miller's music continues its popularity year after year, generation after generation.

Why is his music so highly regarded and so often played 60 years later? How did one man's music come to be so respected, loved and durable? Is it because the music is mellow, nostalgic, sentimental, or romantic? Or a little of each? Does it, perhaps, evoke good feelings for those who have treasured memories from the 1930s and 1940s? What, then, explains his renown



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among those born after mid-century?

Veteran radio announcer Ken Alexander puts it concisely: "Miller's music is smooth, less obtrusive, and at the same time individual and recognizable." He adds, "And the band was featured in two films, *Sun Valley Serenade* and *Orchestra Wives*, so they can be seen as well as heard in their original splendor." Those films from 1941 and 1942, respectively, plus the 1954 *Glenn Miller Story* each served up giant helpings of the great Miller music.

Most people explain the Miller popularity by saying that the band had a special sound, an identifiable something that makes it stand apart from other bands (which may also have their own special sound). Musicologists, big-band experts, and Miller mavens continue to explain as they have explained in years past, what makes Glenn Miller music special and durable, often crediting "the clarinet-led reed sound" and the master's magical arrange-

ments. All that analyzing, so delicious to purists, may be entirely beside the point that it is a sheer joy and pure pleasure to listen to the music of Glenn Miller.

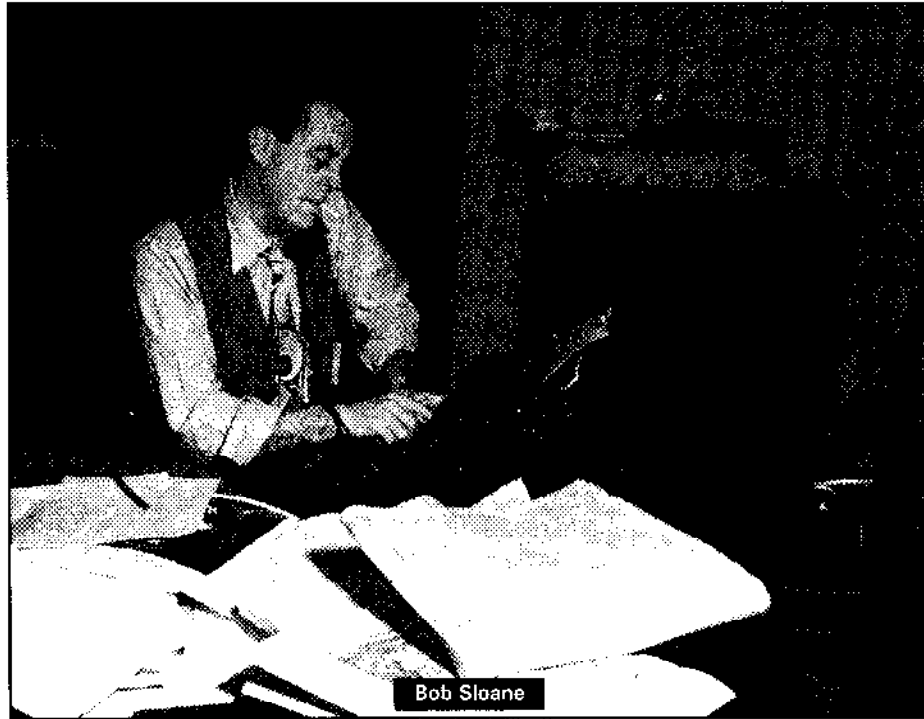
Many people, not just members of the Greatest Generation, are truly touched and a few may even tear up when they hear a Miller recording. And if there are some folks who don't know the difference or can't distinguish between "Moonlight Serenade" and "Sunrise Serenade" or "Tuxedo Junction" and "String of Pearls," but nevertheless can instantly identify a Miller arrangement, a Miller melody, the Miller sound, they may love the music no less than those who know well his entire repertoire.

And that may be the ultimate tribute to the memorable and distinctive sounds of the one and only, great Glenn Miller. ■

*TUNE IN TWTD March 6 for a Centennial Salute to Glenn Miller with special guest host Karl Pearson.*



# THE BIG STORY



BY RICHARD W. O'DONNELL

Radio's *The Big Story* honored newspaper reporters for outstanding work, mostly on breaking crime stories.

It was on NBC from 1947 to 1954, mostly on Wednesday nights. Later, it had a short life on TV before fading away forever.

Well-known radio actors – Ralph Bell, Robert Dryden, Alice Frost and Betty Garde – to name a few, played key roles. There were no set characters. The show was held together by announcer Ernest Chappell, and Bob Sloane, who narrated the various episodes.

Each week, a different reporter would be given a pat on the back, and a check,

*Richard W. O'Donnell is a free-lance writer from Port Richey, Florida.*

for his or her great work on a story.

It was one of those shows where you didn't know the names of the performers. But you sure knew the sponsor. Pall Mall cigarettes paid the bills, and let you know it.

A reporter's "big story" would be dramatized on each half-hour show. A full orchestra added life to the product. Everything was tense. The characters were on edge. Nobody knew how to relax, or so it seemed.

Now, at times, perhaps inspired by jealousy, there were rumors the details of the various episodes were juiced up a bit to pump a little life into the presentations.

That is, the reporters featured were, in real life, a lot duller than the program made them out to be. Each reporter, by the way, came on at the end of the show to pick

up his or her check, and fill the listeners in on any new developments.

"Charlie — is still in the jug," the highlighted journalist would say. "serving life for his rampage. As for his victims, life will never be the same. And thank you for your check."



Ernest Chappell



Alice Frost

After that, there would be a blast of heavy music, and the listeners would be reminded that next week, Pall Mall would bring you another exciting yarn about a heroic reporter, and to a burst of triumphant theme music, the show would fade from the air.

Now, I was always curious about the authenticity of these *Big Story* shows, primarily because I worked in the newspaper business, and never in my life had I known a colleague to stick his or her neck out, when there was danger close by. They all knew how to duck.

Much to my surprise, the late Lennie Lerner, a close friend at the *Boston Globe*, announced to one and all he was going to be on *The Big Story*. A few months earlier, he had persuaded a suspect in a murder case to surrender to police in East Boston.

Well, I tuned in *The Big Story* the week Lennie was on. I must confess I was surprised at my old friend's daring during what might have been an unpleasant experience.

The next day, I saw him at the office. "Geez, Lennie," I said "that show was really something last night."

"Thanks," he responded. That was all he said.

"You were risking your life," I said.

PHOTOFEST

"That guy had a loaded gun. He could have blown you away."

Lennie blushed, and squirmed in his seat. He seemed embarrassed. "I'm no fool," he said, lowering his voice. "I wasn't going after a guy with a gun. His mother took it away before I entered that flat."

I was disappointed. "Well, you still talked him into surrendering."

Lennie was squirming again.

"You mean you didn't talk him into surrendering?"

"No," said Lennie. "His mother hit him on the back of the head, and told him to stop behaving like a fool."

My hero had crumbled in front of me.

"I did find him, though," Lennie reminded me. "I went to the house to talk to his mother, and she told me he was there. She had taken his gun away by then. All I had to do was call the police, and tell them where he was hiding. I did do that."

They gave Lennie a *Big Story* plaque, which he displayed proudly, for years, on the wall of his den at home.

*The Big Story* is gone now. In its day, it was a mixture of fact and a dash of fiction. The show certainly made for great listening. ■

TUNE IN TWTD January 3 to hear an episode of *The Big Story*.



# The Best Years of His Life

## FREDRIC MARCH

BY MATTHEW C. HOFFMAN

There's a scene in *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) where the Al Stephenson character has returned to the banking business he knew before the war. A customer comes to him with the expectation of receiving a G.I. loan. This somewhat naïve soldier wants to buy a farm but has no collateral. Stephenson, himself a veteran, has to explain to the man what collateral is. The younger vet, unfortunately, has very little to put down. The problem weighs on Al's conscience, but he reaches a decision. To his way of thinking, an ex-G.I. is a good risk. The loan will be processed, but Al will receive, in due course, a mild reprimand from his superior over the matter.

Fredric March portrayed Al Stephenson in this, his most famous film, for which he won his second Oscar, and it's a performance that continually amazes. His character in this scene is a regular Joe who, perhaps guilty over his own economic well-being in post-war America, just wanted to give a fellow G.I. a break. One never sensed any movie star egotism on the screen. Here

*Matthew C. Hoffman of Niles, Illinois is a film historian and free-lance writer.*

was a down-to-earth, understanding human being. These qualities of decency and intelligence were exemplified by Fredric March throughout his long and diverse career on stage and on screen.



Fredric March

PHOTOFEST

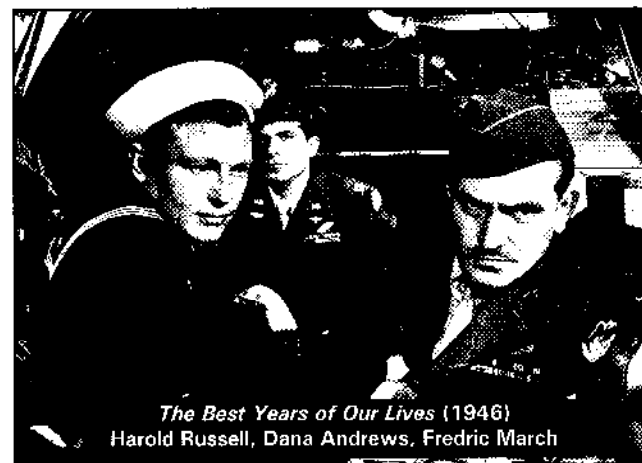
Like Ronald Colman and Ray Milland, Fredric March's name is rarely if at all mentioned these days. His omission from the American Film Institute's "50 Greatest Actors" was particularly egregious since March was once considered the finest actor of his generation. Unlike some of the more

popular (and less talented) actors who were contemporaries of his, March was first and foremost an actor, not a personality. His handsome looks were classical; his voice, distinct and resonating. His acting style often had him underplaying a role, making the performance stand the test of time. With his dramatic roots firmly entrenched in the stage, he could adapt to any film genre, any challenging role.

He appeared in screwball comedies such as *Nothing Sacred* (1937) with Carole Lombard. He turned up in literary classics, playing the convict Jean Valjean who is hounded by policeman Charles Laughton in *Les Misérables* (1935), as well as Count

Vronsky opposite Greta Garbo in *Anna Karenina* (1935). He was adept in contemporary roles as well as historical dramas such as *The Sign of the Cross* (1932) and *The Buccaneer* (1938)—both for Cecil B. DeMille. He worked with some of the greatest directors from Hollywood's Golden Age: Lubitsch, Wyler, Cukor, Leisen, Mamoulian, Wellman, Hawks, and Ford. He played everything from Mark Twain to Christopher Columbus to the President of the United States.

In his later years he portrayed Willy Loman to great effect in *Death of a Salesman* (1951) and was the William Jennings Bryan-inspired character in *Inherit the Wind* (1960). Never an onscreen loner or rebel, March often played conservative, middle-class men, such as the husband whose family is held hostage by criminal Humphrey Bogart in *The Desperate Hours* (1955). Perhaps because he was never associated with being an "anti-hero," modern audiences might prefer to have his per-



*The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946)  
Harold Russell, Dana Andrews, Fredric March

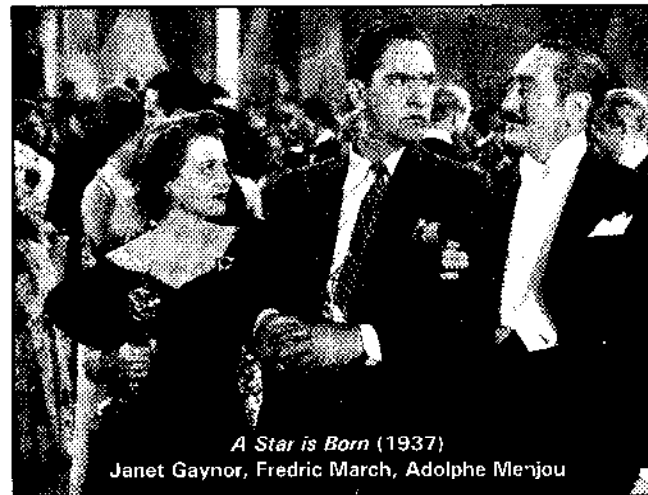
PHOTOFEST

formances—and the ideals the films represented—remain in the film cans of movie vaults. Their loss, for pop culture predictions and tastes can never take away from the artistry March demonstrated in over 70 films and countless plays.

Fredric March made his entrance into the world on August 31st, 1897. Born Frederick McIntyre Bickel, of English and German stock, he grew up in Racine, Wisconsin, in a relatively happy middle-class household. In his childhood he had a knack for dramatic readings and was a good student. In 1915 he attended the University of Wisconsin, where he majored in finance

and economics, but his college years were interrupted by the First World War. Duty called him away. He enlisted and became a lieutenant in the Army.

After the war he returned to school, where he became class president, managed the football team, and even starred on the track team. When he graduated he took a banking job in New York, but the



*A Star is Born* (1937)  
Janet Gaynor, Fredric March, Adolphe Menjou

PHOTOFEST

position didn't have the lure or the promise he wanted out of life. He needed something that would appeal to his artistic sensibilities. It was during this time in his life when he was bitten by the Broadway bug.

After an appendicitis surgery, Bickel gave up banking altogether and began to tread the boards in touring companies and in stock. In 1924, on the advice of friend and future Hollywood director John Cromwell, he changed his name to Fredric March—a shortened version of his mother's maiden name "Marcher." (Evidently, Cromwell thought "Bickel" sounded too much like the inebriant "pickle.")

After a brief and unsuccessful first marriage, March found his perfect leading lady, the woman he would spend the rest of his life with. The year was 1926. Her name, Florence Eldridge. After a season of summer stock together in Colorado, they would be married. Florence, too, was a talented star on the stage, and she would in time appear in many of his movies as well as co-star with him in several radio dramas. Fredric's professional turning point soon followed in 1928 when he played the role of Tony Cavendish in "The Royal Family" — later turned into a film in 1930. This



*Death of a Salesman* (1951)  
Fredric March

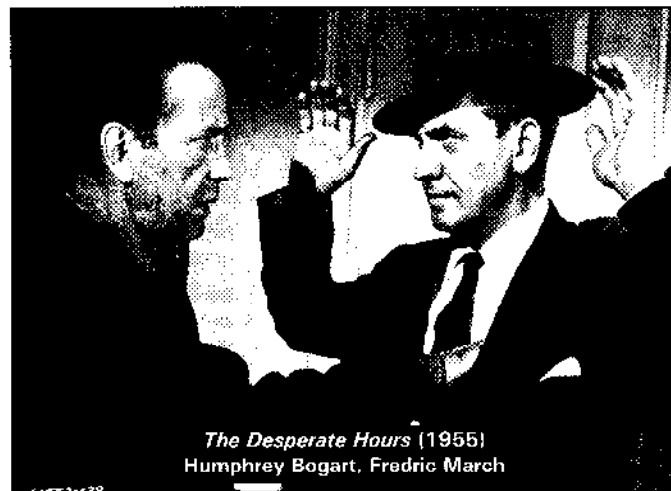
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parody of the famous Barrymore family caught the eye of the motion picture industry, since the play debuted in Los Angeles.

He was soon signed to a five-year contract by Paramount. Many of his early roles in this period were forgettable through no fault of his own. He needed better scripts but did not have long to wait. In 1931 he starred in the definitive version of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, in which he played the tortured doctor torn between the bestial and

the spiritual qualities of man. To classic horror enthusiasts, no Best Actor Oscar shines more brightly than the one he won for this picture.

In the years that followed he appeared in some misses, but most were hits, such as his role of Death in the beautiful and elegant *Death Takes a Holiday* (1934). When his contract expired at Para-



*The Desperate Hours* (1955)  
Humphrey Bogart, Fredric March

PHOTOFEET



*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931)  
Fredric March

PHOTOFEET

mount, March turned to freelance work at other studios such as 20th Century Fox and MGM.

Off the set, March contributed greatly to the community at large. During the war years he traveled with the USO and did a great deal of fundraising for the war effort. After a successful comeback to Broadway with Florence in the play *The American Way*, Fredric did radio work to support Democracy over the airwaves. Until his death in 1975, March remained an unquestionable patriot, representing the best in America. Even into the 1960s his country called on him to perform dramatic readings for patriotic events.

During the decades after the war, March would win two Tony Awards — the second of which came in 1956 for what is considered his greatest success on the stage: Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. This, coupled with the fact that he won a couple of Oscars, makes one wonder how the name Fredric March could be so obscure.

Though his stage performances are lost in eternity, seen only by those who were in attendance, his movies will live on through



*Inherit the Wind* (1960)  
Spencer Tracy, Fredric March

PHOTOFEET

the centuries thanks to film revivals and, to a lesser extent, through the emergence of home entertainment alternatives such as DVD. His film credits read like a registry of great performances. For those unfamiliar with him, one needs only to track down a title such as 1937's *A Star is Born*, where he superbly played the washed-up, alcoholic actor Norman Maine. On the other side of the spectrum there is the role of the Reverend William Spence in the inspirational *One Foot in Heaven* (1941), one of his finest films from the 1940s. (It was fitting that he would one day play a minister because at one time his parents had the expectation that he would become a clergyman.)

When a viewer looks back on his career and discovers these performances, the things that will stand out are his versatility and the earnestness with which he undertook every role. Perhaps one day in the not too distant future he will again be recognized as one of America's most gifted actors. ■

TUNE IN TWTD January 31 to hear Fredric March On the Air.

# The War Years In Chicago's Neighborhoods

BY NEAL SAMORS and MICHAEL WILLIAMS

America entered World War II following the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Empire of Japan on December 7, 1941. For the next four and one-half years residents of Chicago, like the rest of the country, had to deal with many changes in their daily lives. Life on the home front required citizens to adapt to new necessities that included paper and scrap drives, food rationing, Civil Defense preparations and air raid drills. Chicagoans participated in each of these efforts with an unmatched patriotic fervor and learned how to unite to meet the challenges. In addition to new governmental requirements, citizens became involved in the war effort by creating Victory Gardens on empty lots and prairies, purchasing War Bonds to support their country and help finance the war, and hanging flags in their windows to recognize family members serving in the Armed Forces. The Great Depression was over and World War II had begun.

\* \* \*

War in Europe and Asia had already begun by 1939, but most Americans hoped

to avoid becoming an armed participant in the growing war fronts. Then, on Sunday, December 7, 1941, in a surprise attack, the naval and air forces of Japan hit the American military on the island of Oahu in Hawaii and decimated the US fleet in Pearl Harbor. World War II had begun for America.

Former DePaul Blue Demon Coach Ray Meyer remembers vividly the events of that fateful weekend. "I'll always remember when Pearl Harbor was attacked. We were living at 925 S. Austin Boulevard. We were living with my wife's parents because I was out of work. Her sister and brother-in-law lived upstairs in the two-flat. We were eating lunch that Sunday, and, all of a sudden, they came running down to tell us the news—Pearl Harbor was bombed. We were shocked, and we listened to the radio all day, and heard Roosevelt's speech the next day. The war affected all of our lives in so many ways. The military started calling up people to join the war effort. I was about 25 at that time, so I went down with 'Moose' Krause, who was going to join the

*Neal Samors and Michael Williams are the authors of The Old Chicago Neighborhood: Remembering Life in the 1940s, from which this article is adapted. The book is published by Chicago's Neighborhoods, Inc. (208 pages including 100 duotone photographs). In addition to a chapter about the war years, the book also includes sections on daily life, sports and recreation, and entertainment in the neighborhoods. To order, visit their website, [www.chicagosneighborhoods.com](http://www.chicagosneighborhoods.com) or send check or money order to Chicago's Neighborhoods, Inc., 282 Stanton Drive, Buffalo Grove, IL 60089. Soft cover book, \$32, and that includes tax, shipping and handling.*



School Children's Victory Garden, Jackson Park, 1945. Woodlawn

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Marine Corps. I was planning to join the Marines with him. But at the recruiting station they asked me if I had ever had an operation, and I had had one on my knee. They told me 'good-bye.' I got a letter from Dr. Danny Leventhal indicating that I was in perfect shape, but too much cartilage was taken out, so I never served in WW II."

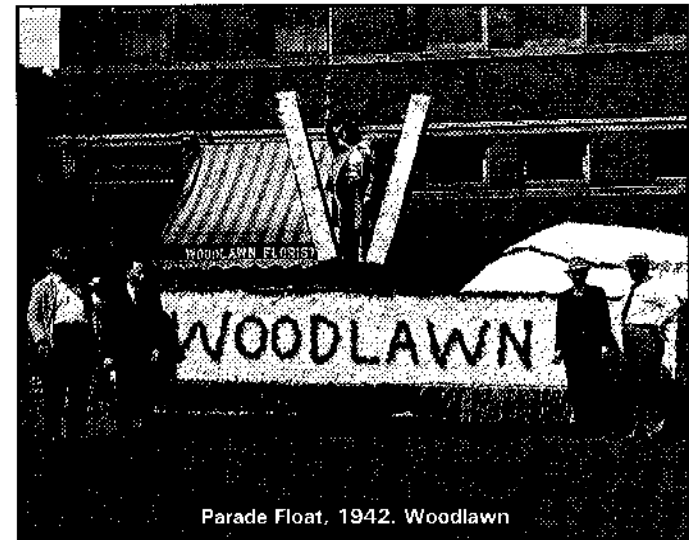
Many Chicagoans learned of the bombing of Pearl Harbor while attending or listening to the Chicago Bears football game. Bob Kennedy, former Cub General Manager, was in attendance that day. "I was sitting in the upper deck right below the announcer's box on December 7, 1941, during the Cardinal-Bear game. Bob Elson saw me sitting there, opened the window and hollered down to me, just before the half, 'Hey, Bob, the Japs just

bombed Pearl Harbor!' I said to my buddy, 'Where the heck is Pearl Harbor?' I had no idea where it was located. So, some of the fans around me said, 'What did they say Bob,?' 'We're going to war,' I said. Then the fans started leaving and it got real quiet in the ballpark. It was amazing because the players stopped

on the field and looked around and didn't know what was going on. People were driving away. No horns were blowing. There was no noise, and we were all aware that we're going to war."

\* \* \*

One of the responses to the war on the home front was an effort to save and conserve materials that were in limited supply, including scrap metals such as aluminum.



Parade Float, 1942. Woodlawn

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Lincoln Park Servicemen's Center, 1942

CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT

num, tin and brass, and raw materials such as silk and rubber. The city's response was huge, and eventually residents recycled materials ranging from newspapers to kitchen grease. As it turned out, the scrap metal that was saved would have a limited impact on the building of armaments. It would, however, be valuable in the making of consumer goods and allowed critical materials such as 'virgin' aluminum to be used for the construction of aircraft.

Although there was some uncertainty by citizens about how newspapers and kitchen grease was actually used for the war effort, the evidence is clear that both materials were used to help the military. In the case of kitchen grease, homemakers would take the waste cooking fats to their butchers and receive a cash payment for the cans of fat. The fat was then turned into glycerin that became dynamite. As for the newspapers, they were used by the military to make waterproof supply cartons. Rationing of meat, sugar, butter, eggs, shoes, nylons, tires, and gasoline was necessary to preserve the supplies and redirect them to the military during the war.

The rationing of daily necessities was difficult for many, and often seemed to be

administered unfairly. West Ridge resident Sandy Zuckerman Pesmen recalls, "There was meat rationing, but rich people somehow had as much meat as they wanted because they had more red ration stamps than we did. I don't know how they got them, but they would go to butchers and get steak. We didn't have a whole lot of steak, but lamb

was available, so we had a lot of lamb chops and fish. We managed okay, and nobody was ever thin or hungry in our house. I do remember the limited availability of silk stockings. My aunts were upset because they didn't have silk stockings and they would paint lines on their legs with make-up that was available."

Children were particularly valuable in the effort to collect scrap metal and paper. From roaming the alleys to going door-to-door, their enthusiasm and competitive nature could yield large amounts of material. U.S. District Court Justice Charles Kocoras recalls, "We were always having paper drives at school. Because my father had a truck, somehow, we had access to more paper than anybody else. We would go around collecting it and bring the paper to school, and I distinctly remember that with my dad's help we always had the most paper. There was always some kind of recognition for that good deed."

\* \* \*

"Son in Service" flags were first hung in windows to commemorate those Americans serving in World War I. The tradition continued during World War II, when each family who had a member in active ser-

vice was entitled to hang a white flag with a blue star in their window. The blue star would be replaced with a gold star if the service member were killed. Often companies or organizations would fly multi-star flags in factories or meeting halls to support large groups of service people.

Author Fr. Andrew Greeley remembers the impact of the flags in his Austin neighborhood. "When the war began, my father was in his middle '40s, so there was no chance of him going into the service. I had cousins on my mother's side who did go into the service. I remember seeing the service stars in people's windows, including the blue stars and the gold stars. There were 22 young people from the parish who were killed during the war, so our parish flag had hundreds of blue stars and 22 gold ones. I remember being an acolyte at the funeral mass for one of the deceased."

The issues on the Southwest Side were the same for Tom Doyle. "My father was about 35, so he missed serving in the military. But a lot of our neighbors served during the war, and some got killed. So, they would put flags in the front windows with gold stars on them. I also remember the memorial signs at the end of every block with the lists of neighborhood people who served in the military. Our neighbors were close, and we knew each other well."

\* \* \*

Most Chicagoans got their news about the war from listening to the radio, watching newsreels at the movie theaters, or reading one of Chicago's several daily newspapers.



Recruiting Center, 1942. South Lawndale

CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY

War-related stories dominated both the airwaves and newsprint, but many residents grew to depend on the comforting voices of their favorite radio newsmen for their information.

Fr. Andrew Greeley recalls hearing famous broadcasters of the day. "I remember Gabriel Heatter saying, 'There's bad news tonight. There's bad news tonight.' And, then occasionally, as time wore on, he would say, 'There's good news tonight.' I remember H. V. Kaltenborn, Edward R. Murrow, Eric Sevareid and Elmer Davis. I also remember John Charles Daly, who went on to be one of the moderators on *What's My Line*. Then, there was Charles Collingwood, reporting from London when Edward Murrow wasn't there. The 5:30 p.m. radio news somehow seemed more vibrant than the television news does today, perhaps because so much was left to your imagination. I remember Ed Murrow saying, 'This is London,' with all the portent of doom. Radio was very powerful because you were envisioning what they were talking about. And my memories about the war years are very powerful. I thought that our world was in a state of collapse and I had no idea what



Flag Dedication Ceremony, 1942. Uptown

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my mom yelling out the window, 'The war is over!' My friend Rick Fizdale and I went to the mailbox at Western and Rosement and we sat on top of the green, metal mailbox waiting for the troops to come home. We waited for hours and hours because we thought that the troops were going to come marching down Western Avenue."

that would mean."

Charles Kocoras' father would listen to the war news on the radio in their Englewood home. "My father would listen religiously to the evening news to learn about the progress of the war. The name Gabriel Heatter sticks in my mind, and my father would always listen to him. My father kept up with the events, and Greece, his home country, was very much a participant and was actually subjugated by the Germans. First, the Italians controlled Greece, and then, because they weren't happy with the Italians, the Germans came in and basically took over. We had family back there during the war. Of course, I do remember an enormous sense of relief when the war was over and that exultation was present in all of Chicago."

\* \* \*

When the war finally came to an end on V-J Day, Chicagoans were overjoyed. Many residents streamed to the Loop, where thousands packed the sidewalks and streets. There were many spontaneous celebrations in the neighborhoods as well, providing memories that have lasted a lifetime.

West Rogers Park resident Steve Zucker was just a child at the time. "I remember

Joesph Lamendella has similar memories of his Lakeview neighborhood. "All the neighbors came out on the street and were hanging pots and pans on V-J Day in 1945. I was eight and my brother was five at the time. We each got a bottle of white wine and a cigar and got drunk and disgustingly sick in the middle of the street. I have not had white wine, with rare exception, to this day, and I don't think that my brother has ever had another cigar."

Radio broadcaster and historian Chuck Schaden lived in Norridge, just over the border on Chicago's Far Northwest Side, during the 1940s. "When the war ended, we were living across the street from the fire chief, Walter Schoenfeld of the Norwood Park Township Volunteer Fire Department. On V-E Day, he came out of his house with a gun and shot into the air a couple of times in celebration. I remember that kids on their bikes were riding up and down the street of our block ringing their bells and blowing their horns. People who had automobiles would drive up and down the streets blowing their horns. It was a totally unorganized expression of joy that was repeated on V-J Day, which was a little better organized and a little more solemn." ■

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Archie Andrews, I remember Mama  
**Hal Stone**  
Jughead in Archie Andrews  
**Will Hutchins**  
Blondie, Sugarfoot  
**John Rayburn**  
Over 50 Years on Radio  
**Boogie Woogie Girls**  
Andrews Sisters' Songs  
**Blue Cole Trio**  
Brings Back Radio Memories



# Back Then, E. T. Meant Electrical Transcription

BY BILL RYAN

An almost forgotten feature of pre-1950 radio is the canned music service, which provided all the melody a station needed or could use.

When jocks began playing recorded music on the radio, the records were the same as collectors could buy in stores. Made of pressed shellac, those 78-r.p.m. disks were seldom of high audio quality, they broke easily, and they wore out fast.

But pressed into those wide grooves were the sounds of the popular singers and bands of the day.

To avoid playing scratchy 78s and to have on hand any type of music needed, most stations subscribed to at

least one transcription service by the middle '30s. The big 16-inch, 33 1/3-r.p.m. disks were made of better material, sometimes vinyl, if treated right did not have scratches and pops or hiss, and brought a higher frequency response. None, to my knowledge, were stereo.

The libraries provided a vast range of music—dance band, marching band, popular and classical singers, choirs, Hawaiian, country & western, religious, and production aids such as fanfares and musical bridges or segues.

*Bill Ryan is a retired college professor and former broadcast news writer-editor for UPI. He can be reached at [wryan1807@aol.com](mailto:wryan1807@aol.com)*

Most services provided scripts to enable the local announcer to put together a 15- or 30-minute program of music in which to insert commercials.

Most also provided voice tracks of the performers leading into their musical program. They went like, "Hello, this is Frank DeVol in Hollywood. I'd like to invite you to stay for a program of my music. Let's begin with 'The Teddy Bear's Picnic.'" And the announcer would segue from Frank's voice track to the music on that Capitol 16-inch disk, which was of very high quality.

Capitol Transcriptions, a subsidiary of Capitol Records,

was a latecomer in the field. But then so was Capitol Records. The transcriptions featured many Capitol artists.

The World Transcription Service was originally a subsidiary of the Decca Record Co. and featured many artists who were also on the Decca label.

The World Library in the '40s and '50s featured hundreds of artists performing every kind of music. World Transcriptions were unique in that the grooves started near the label and ran outward. The grooves were also vertical-cut.

It was explained to me that the needle in a vertical-cut groove bounced vertically to pick up a higher quality musical vibration; in a lateral cut, the needle vibrated against the sides of the groove. So the station

needed special pickup arms and cartridges to play World Transcriptions.

All the services provided comprehensive catalogs of the songs and performers in the library, all cross referenced for the local program producer's convenience.

Besides Capitol and World, another fine service which leased music to stations was RCA Thesaurus. I enjoyed working with the service and its "Music of Manhattan" features. Besides the voice tracks and scripts, Thesaurus had tracks of a harpist playing progressions from one key to another. The Thesaurus book told what key each number began in and ended in. Thus, if you had Norman Cloutier's Orchestra ending a nice piece in A and the next number began in C-sharp you'd play the harp segue from A to C-sharp and start the next number seamlessly. Now that was *class*.

With one exception, all the transcriptions of this type I ever saw were stored in large metal filing cabinets with pull-out drawers for easy access to the envelope-encased disks, which were kept in numerical order.

The Lang-Worth Company had been like the others in using 16-inch disks and large filing cabinets. But they eventually went small, with 33 1/3-r.p.m. records that looked much like today's CDs.

Lang-Worth's Silver Strings was one of my favorites, with arrangements by the great Morton Gould conducted by Jack Shaindlin, who had written the music for the *March of Time* movie features.

The Standard Transcription Service was known for its array of dance bands. Rumors continually floated that the Lewis

Williams on Standard was really Tommy Dorsey under an alias.

In working with transcription services, I was always searching for and finding musical treasures.

Wonderful singers such as Marie Greene on World, Hal Derwin on Capitol, and Kay Armen on Standard made few commercial records but cut dozens of songs on transcriptions.

I loved the John Scott Trotter, Ray Sinatra, and Johnny Green orchestras on World; the Norman Cloutier and Alan Roth

groups on Thesaurus; the Claude Gordon band on Capitol and the Silver Strings on Lang-Worth. Few of these appeared on commercial records, although Trotter accompanied Bing Crosby on hundreds of Decca sides.

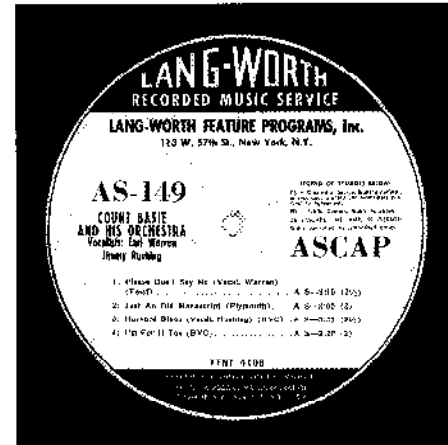
Two factors led to the death of the transcription services.

One was the 1949 advent of the high-quality vinyl LP record.

The other was the change in radio programming and production, which was less formal and had no need to keep on hand every kind of music.

As the contracts ran out, some of the services decreed that the stations could do as they wished with those hundreds of disks rather than ship them back. Some languished for years before becoming targets for shooters or being melted down for further use.

One company owns a large stock of transcriptions and sells them to interested buyers. Otherwise, the services that once provided music libraries to radio stations are only a dim memory. ■



# In Field's Where They Lay

## A Those Were The Days Christmas Fable

BY WAYNE KLATT

So there was Ken Alexander in his Santa costume putting the last child down from his lap at Marshall Field's when the toy department manager approached him. He was looking rather grim.

"We thank you for coming down at the last moment to fill in for a sick Santa," the manager said, "but your services will no longer be needed."

"Was something wrong?" Ken asked in his kindly way.

"With your many voice imitations, I'm afraid you got confused. Have you any idea what Boris Karloff sounds like when he says Ho-Ho-Ho?"

"Oh, that," said Ken. "Only half the children ran screaming out of line. I'll do better tomorrow."

"For you," the manager said, "there will be no tomorrow! You are a disgrace to your fake beard."

Ken's face turned as red as his suit, but what could he say? He once was reading a spooky story on a *Those Were The Days* Halloween program when he accidentally used the voice of Edmund Gwen. Things like that happen.

There was no time to change clothes. Ken had been having so much fun with the children until his Boris Karloff accident that he lost track of time. Still in costume, he glanced at the wall clock and knew he had to hurry so he could buy his Christmas gifts before the store closed.

*Wayne Klatt is a journalist who occasionally writes children's stories.*

*Photo courtesy Robert P. Ledermann from his book Christmas on State Street: 1940s and Beyond, published by Arcadia.*

He dashed from one department to another, then went up to the gift wrapping room. With all the boxes piled in his arms, he couldn't see that the place was empty. As he waited and waited, he wondered why Field's hadn't put up its Christmas tree yet.

He put the packages down and saw that it was past closing time. "Oh well," he thought, "I don't suppose anyone will mind if I help myself."

Ken went behind the counter and reached for ribbons and rolls of holiday paper. He put them in a Field's green bag and went to the sales floor to pay for them. "Anybody here?" he called out, but no one answered. He left a personal check, then headed for the escalator, which had stopped running but could be used as stairs.

He was about to leave the seventh floor when he saw two small figures sleeping under a table in the Walnut Room. One was a chubby woman with glasses, and the other was a little man with a red coat and a tall black hat. Both had fluffy white hair and a small pair of wings.

The woman awoke first. "Mistletoe, get up," she said.

The little old man sat up, rubbed his eyes, and asked, "What time is it?"

"December," she said.

This was something Ken was sure that Chuck Schaden would want to see for himself. Almost hopping with excitement, he ran to the telephone near the elevators. "Chuck," he said into the phone, trying not to be overheard, "I'm at Field's. You've got to come over and see this!"

"I'll be right over," Chuck said. As Ken hung up, he heard small footsteps.

"Hi, Santa!" Uncle Mistletoe said with

a friendly wave.

"Excuse me, but my real name is..."

"Do you know that you and your assistants are the only ones who can watch me work?" Mistletoe asked.

"We are?" Ken asked.

"To just about everyone else, we're invisible," Mistletoe said. He rolled up his sleeves and added, "Now stand back!"

With inexplicable speed, Chuck Schaden opened the skylight and came slithering down a rope attached to one of the ladder hooks at the atrium ceiling.

"Be careful," Ken told his friend, "this could be dangerous."

"What could?" Chuck asked.

"I don't know yet."

Uncle Mistletoe reached in his pocket for some sprinkly dust and threw it into the air. Instead of falling back at him, the little specks started taking on the shape of a jagged triangle that turned all sorts of colors before stopping at green.

Then the little man swirled his hands and instantly garlands and tinsel settled on the branches.

"Here," Aunt Holly said, handing Ken and Chuck some dust out of Mistletoe's pockets. "You do the ornaments."

Not sure how to go about it, they threw out the dust and it became miniature globes and nutcrackers and candy canes, all perfectly in place.

"That was fun," said Chuck. "Have you always done this, Mr. Mistletoe?"

"Goodness me, no," Aunt Holly chuckled as she answered for him. "So many stores were cutting down on their holiday displays in the last few years that we could see the children were being disappointed. 'Mistletoe,' I said, 'I think it is time we

learned a new trick.'"

"Holly," I says," said Mistletoe, "I've got an idea. Why don't we brighten up the stores a little? You can't explain downsizing to little children, all you can do is pump up the enchantment so things will seem like they were back in the old days."

"But where did you get the magic dust?" Chuck asked.

"Oh, that," Mistletoe said. "First you grow sunflowers, then you spread the flowers with a little honey to attract pollination. When the season is over, you shake the flowers into a strainer, and what's left you sprinkle. Aunt Holly read it in a cookbook somewhere in the basement. You should see our basement—"

"You should see Ken's basement," Chuck suggested.

Ignoring Chuck, Aunt Holly said, "There you go again, Mistletoe, gabbing away. Do you know how many stores we have to do tonight?"

"Be seeing you," Uncle Mistletoe said and lifted off with such a flutter of his tiny wings that you couldn't even see them. Then he and Aunt Holly went up through the skylight Chuck had left open.

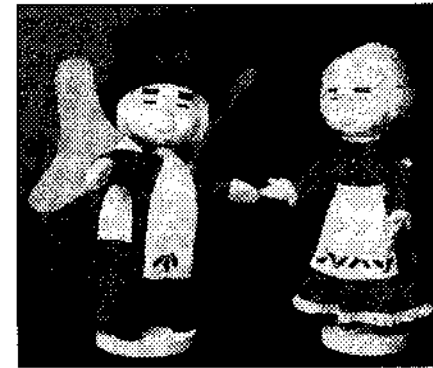
When they were gone, Chuck turned to Ken and scratched his head. "What I don't understand," he said, "is how I could see them when most people can't."

"Maybe you just have to believe," Ken said.

"That's what I mean - I saw them, and I still can't quite believe them."

"Maybe it's because you were standing next to someone who does," Ken said.

▲ By the way, Ken Alexander's sunflowers reached six feet high this summer. ■







## OUR READERS/LISTENERS WRITE

# WE GET MAIL

**BANKS, OREGON**— I'm formerly of Schaumburg, Illinois, and am now retired and living in a rural area west of Portland, Oregon. While in the Chicago area I listened to your broadcasts as far back as 1972 when you were at WLTD in Evanston. We moved to Oregon in 1998 and your programs have been one of the things I've missed since coming here. Now, thanks to the Internet, I'm able to again listen to your Saturday broadcasts and it gives me a little touch of Chicago out here in the boonies. I'm glad to be back as one of your listeners. I've had the opportunity to listen to many others who play Old Time Radio shows, but none has ever shown your interest, enthusiasm and knowledge of the subject. So, "Jell-O again" and best regards.  
—DALE C. HASKIN

**DES PLAINES, IL**— I happened to stumble upon your show today and I can't believe I've missed it all this time. I thought the only place that played the old radio shows was on AM, and when they stopped, I



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630/942-4200

Call for matters pertaining to the station itself, its broadcast signal, or to pledge support.

Website: [www.wdcb.org](http://www.wdcb.org)

thought that was that. I am probably not one of your typical listeners, being only 35, but my mother used to play AM radio when I was a kid and one year at Hallowe'en I heard Wally Phillips play Arch Oboler and it both excited me and scared the heck out of me — and I was hooked. I tried to listen to whatever I could but it always seemed to be on at very odd times when I couldn't stay up to listen. So, I just wanted to say thank you and I will now be a loyal Saturday afternoon listener. —MELISSA CORSON

**CHICAGO**— *TWTD* is still a comfort and joy in my life! I am happy to be renewing my *Nostalgia Digest* subscription because it adds to my enjoyment of listening to you and Ken Alexander as you break the sound barrier between yesterday and today every Saturday. You always manage to re-create a wonderful world that I wish I could live in all week long. At first I was sad I would be receiving fewer copies of the *Digest* each year, but the issues are now so delightfully stuffed with treats and goodies that I don't feel as if I am getting any less than I did before. It was also a clever (and thoughtful!) way for you not to need to increase subscription rates at this economically wobbly time. So thanks, Chuck, and blessings to you and Ken and all involved with *TWTD*. —EVANNE MARIE CHRISTIAN

**CHICAGO**— I've enjoyed your radio shows since I moved to Chicago in 1975. I want to thank you for many hours of enjoyment and hope that there are many more to come. The *Nostalgia Digest* is also great! I enjoyed visiting Metro Golden Memories once a month or so to browse and purchase tapes. I know you wrote recently in the *Digest* that you had sold your share in MGM, but it seemed to be going strong when I visited there in June. I was shocked, then, to arrive there last week and see that it had closed. Do you know what happened?  
—CLEMENT BURGER

**MELROSE PARK, IL**— I was disappointed to discover that Metro Golden Memories has closed. What happened? —TED BLEIMAN

**E-MAIL**— I tried to contact Metro Golden Memories about some old time radio shows to purchase and learned that their phone is disconnected. Have they gone out of business? —JERRY KRETEN  
**(ED. NOTE)**— As we mentioned in the "Update" on page 2 of this issue, Metro Golden Memories closed its doors and went out of business at the end of July 2003, another victim of the economy.)

**CLARENDON HILLS, IL**— Congratulations on your new website. It looks great! Keep adding to it — your many fans will love it. As you know, we met shortly after I heard your first broadcast on WNMP (May 2, 1970). We traded a few tapes. When you built Jack Benny's Vault (in the Museum of Broadcast Communications), I donated an old hair piece and a Lucky Strike green tin for the display. I have all of your *Nostalgia Digests* beginning with the Book One, Chapter One, December 1974 issue of your *Nostalgia Newsletter*. You mailed it to me using a 10-cent, pre-cancelled "Peace on Earth" Christmas stamp. Ah! Those were the days. —JOHN COOPER

**AURORA, IL**— Just heard about the website. It's beautiful! —ROBERT R. TOLLES

**BRADENTON, FLORIDA**— Congratulations on your great new website. Just purchased your book, *Speaking of Radio*, at the website's Nostalgia Shop. Looking forward to reading it. I listen to your show every Saturday on the internet and the signal is coming in loud and clear now that the upgrade is complete. —RON MARUSCAK

**CHICAGO**— My birthday gift just arrived in the mail from my son. I'm talking about *Speaking of Radio*. All I could read right now was the Foreword, Introduction and Acknowledgments and I like it already! I have about 20 of those interviews that I taped when you aired them on *TWTD* and for someone to get all that on paper is really amazing. I can't wait to read it all. To say it was a good job would be an understatement. —JOHN HEGER

**WARRENVILLE, IL**— *Speaking of Radio* is a fantastic read, lots and lots of information on the radio greats. It's a must for every OTR fan. Your new website is also a great one, lots of info. —CHUCK HUCK

**GLEN ELLYN, IL**— I just finished reading *Speaking of Radio* this morning at Caribou Coffee (that's how I read it — one or two profiles at a time with my morning coffee — very enjoyable). I just had to write and tell you how much I appreciate this wonderful volume! I learned so very much from your book. Since timewise it stretches all the way back to the 1920s, I learned a great deal about the beginning of commercial radio that I never knew before. I also gained a new appreciation for the importance of Chicago in the history of radio. I never dreamed that so many radio stars started here or had their greatest years here, or that so many programs originated here! I also appreciate the fact that, in almost every case, you thanked the performers on behalf of your radio listeners for their great radio performances. In this way, I felt that I had a small part in each interview. Of course, I heard many, if not most, of these interviews on your show over the years, but it is one thing to hear them one at a time over a long period of time and quite another to have them all in permanent form, to read and re-read and refer to whenever I need or want to. *Speaking of Radio* now takes its place as my very favorite volume concerning Old Time radio, and one of my very favorites concerning entertainment in general.  
—GEORGE LITTLEFIELD

**CHICAGO**— First, let me say what you have heard a million times: I really enjoy your show. I wish it were longer and more frequent, but I will take what I can get. Now to my question: Was there a band or band leader known as The Big Noise (or Wind) from Winnetka? —MAURICE SHARPE  
**(ED. NOTE)**— I am not aware of a band or bandleader known as The Big Noise. But there was a tune, "Big Noise from Winnetka," written by Ray Bauduc and Bob Haggart of the Bob Crosby orchestra. The song got its name from the roar of approval that students from Winnetka, Illinois, gave to the number which Bauduc and Haggart improvised between shows. In the Crosby band's very popular recording, Haggart whistled and played the string bass while Bauduc played the drums. We'll play the selection for you on *TWTD* during our January 3, 2004 broadcast.)

**LANSING, IL**— I enjoy your broadcasts every Saturday. I prepare meals for the week and



## MORE MAIL

keep the radio tuned to your program. I especially enjoy Ken Alexander's newspaper readings each week. How does Ken preserve these newspapers for so long?  
-BILL DOWNS

**E-MAIL**- I first started listening to you in early 1973 (I lived at 26th and Cicero) and have been a longtime subscriber to *Nostalgia Digest*. Your show is better than ever. Adding Ken Alexander's newspaper segment was a stroke of genius. -AL JACOBSON

**LOMBARD, IL**- I am having trouble believing that Ken Alexander has all those old newspapers sitting around in his basement. While doing research the other day at the Chicago Historical Society, I was wondering if that is where he has been getting his old papers. Am I correct in my assumption? Maybe you shouldn't say since I wouldn't want to spoil the illusion if I am correct.  
-KEN GENTILE  
(ED. NOTE- Ken does not get his old papers from the Chicago Historical Society.)

**ELMHURST, IL**- I was listening, with much pleasure as always, to your show last Saturday [August 9]. I was particularly caught by your conversation with Dan McGuire regarding the knife-and-scissor-sharpening carts. I, too, remember them going through our alleys in the Armitage and Kildare neighborhood, where I grew up. I just wanted to let you know that one, at least, is still alive and in business. A couple of months ago I was startled to hear that familiar sound outside my home here in Elmhurst. I really thought I was fantasizing until I got to the front door and saw him, now about a half-block away. By the time I gathered up my kitchen knives and left the house, I had to run to catch up with him. I was SO excited to see this scene from the past. Tony sharpened four knives to the wonderful, sharp edge I remember for just \$4.50! I asked him where I could find him so I could come to him when I needed his services, but he would not tell me, simply saying that he went from suburb to suburb when the weather permitted, and that he

would be back again next year. I thought you and Dan would enjoy this bit of information.  
-MARY ANN (GROSSKLAS) BOEHM

**WHEATON, IL**- The article on the Mouseketeers in Chicago [Autumn, 2003] sure jiggled more than a few memories of my trip to the Roosevelt Theatre that June day. My friend and I were practically quivering with excitement at the prospect of seeing the Mouseketeers in person! Thinking I had a few autographs collected from that most memorable day, I dragged up my 8th grade autograph book (everyone had one in the '50s) from the basement. After airing it out, I found the autographs of Mouseketeers Doreen, Bobby and Tommy, as well as a Mickey Mouse drawing from Roy Williams, one of the adult leaders on the *Mickey Mouse Club*. It was a great day that only could have been better for us had they brought along Spin and Marty, the young heart-throbs of 1957. -DEE BRYJA

**BOLINGBROOK, IL**- Thanks so much for your consistency and persistence in presenting lively radio entertainment on Saturdays. And thanks for the *Nostalgia Digest*. I enjoy reading others' letters and find myself saying, "I wish I could say it like that." I can only echo ALL the positive and heartfelt comments my fellow Saturday afternoon listeners have advanced over the years. -JOHN RANDALL

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## ← GLENN MILLER

is the subject of a Centennial Salute in this issue. Read Gardner Kissack's article which begins on page 40.

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