

# NOSTALGIA DIGEST

25 YEARS

1974 - 1999



BOB HOPE & JERRY COLONNA

# And Here's the Cinnamon Bear!

## Searching for the Silver Star since 1937!

The exciting adventures of Judy and Jimmy Barton as they search for the silver star for the top of their Christmas tree.

They meet Paddy O'Cinnamon, the Cinnamon Bear, who tells them that the star has been stolen by the Crazy Quilt Dragon, and has escaped with it to Maybe Land. If the kids are ever to see the silver star again, they must go after the dragon.

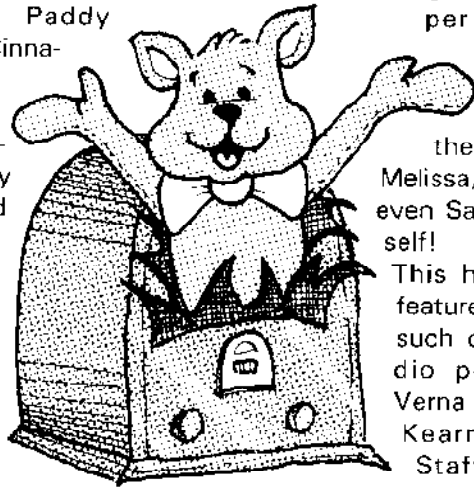
The Cinnamon Bear teaches them to "de-grow" and they shrink so they can go through a crack in the wall to the world of make-believe. The quest takes them through the land

of ink-blotter soldiers, across the Root Beer Ocean, and into confrontations with such characters as the Wintergreen Witch, Snap

per Snick the Crocodile, Captain Tin Top, Fe Fo the Giant, Queen Melissa, Jack Frost and even Santa Claus himself!

This holiday classic features the talents of such outstanding radio performers as Verna Felton, Joseph Kearns, Hanley Stafford, Howard McNear, Elvia

Allman, Elliott Lewis, Lou Merrill, Frank Nelson, Cy Kendall, Gale Gordon, Martha Wentworth, Bud Heistand, and Lindsay McCarrie.



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# NOSTALGIA DIGEST

25 YEARS

1974 - 1999

BOOK TWENTY-SIX

CHAPTER ONE

DECEMBER 1999/JANUARY 2000

## Hello, Out There in Radioland!

Twenty-five years ago, in December 1974, we started a publication that has become the *Nostalgia Digest and Radio Guide*.

Our first issue was called the *Nostalgia Newsletter* and was a six-page gatefold sheet. It came as a result of listener interest in our *Those Were The Days* broadcasts on WLTD in Evanston.

Ten months later, in October, 1975, we changed our format to its present size and published 16 pages. We continued to offer our *Newsletter* in that shape, sometimes with as many as 32 pages until October, 1983 when we became the *Nostalgia Digest and Radio Guide*, calling the first issue of the *Digest* "the new and improved *Nostalgia Newsletter*."

By this time, color had been added to our cover, we had added more pages, photos, and articles, and we were distributing by mail six times a year, publishing an issue every other month. We certainly were more than a newsletter. We were, in fact, a little magazine.

Now we have reached a milestone we never dreamed we'd reach.

To celebrate the occasion, we have e-x-p-a-n-d-e-d this special issue to 64 pages and have filled them with our usual unique assortment of articles. But we've also chosen several stories from past issues which we think you'll enjoy once again if you're a long-time subscriber, or for the first time if you've joined us along the way.

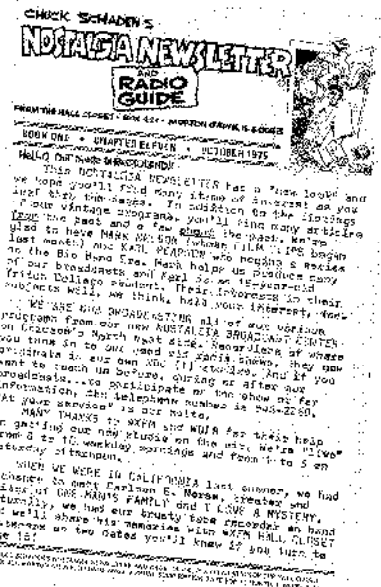
A lot of good material has been written by our contributors since 1974 and it is not possible for us to have each writer represented, but certainly we express our thanks to all who contributed over the past twenty-five years.

It is our hope that you will enjoy browsing through our past with these reprint articles from earlier issues of our little magazine, and the current offerings, too. We've also added a few *Nostalgia Digest Flashbacks* to give us the opportunity to reflect on the past quarter-century. It's been a fast, and wonderful, twenty-five years.

Every single issue has been fun for us and, we hope for you, too.

Thanks for your support and encouragement. It means a lot to us.

-Chuck Schaden



# NITWITS of the NETWORKS

*Or, The People Who Live In The Burns House*

BY ELIZABETH MC LEOD

1923.

Newark, New Jersey.

A restless audience shuffles its feet and clears its throats as the next act takes the stage at the Hill Street Theatre, one of the many fly-blown, sticky-floored smalltime vaudeville houses offering three shows daily for the family trade. Hill Street patrons aren't a particularly discerning lot — their usual fare consists of acts on the way down, or acts on the way up.

The three-piece orchestra strikes up a tinny fanfare as a craggy-faced gentleman in a loud jazzbo suit prances onto the stage — accompanied by a demure, dark-haired young woman. The comedian — for that's what his outfit proclaims him to be — begins braying out jokes between puffs on an outsized cigar. The young woman acts as his foil — prodding him along with questions and bemused glances.

And the audience roars.

But not at him.

At her.

And the same thing happened during the next show. And the next.

Nobody knew why. Not even the gentleman in the jazzbo suit. But he did know

*Elizabeth McLeod is a radio journalist and broadcast historian who lives in Rockland, Maine. She has specialized in the documentation of early 1930s radio for more than 20 years, and is currently co-writer of the CBS Radio Network program Sound-Bytes.*

audiences — he'd been performing for nearly twenty years, and knew enough to give an audience what it wants. If they thought the young lady was funny — then funny she would be.

And that's how it all started.

George Burns and Gracie Allen did variations on a single theme for more than thirty years: the contrast between a laconic straight man and his dizzy female companion. They weren't the least bit unique when they adopted this pattern for their act — "Dumb Dora" acts were already an old vaudeville tradition — but Burns and Allen stood out from the competition by the sheer loopiness of their material.

GEORGE: Do you like to love?

GRACIE: No.

GEORGE: Do you like to kiss?

GRACIE: No.

GEORGE: Well, what do you like??

GRACIE: Lamb chops.

Silly and a bit surreal, "Lamb Chops" was the routine which pushed Burns and Allen out of the pack and onto the marquee as headliners by the end of the twenties. Along the way, on January 7, 1926, the couple had gotten married, and the future looked bright — at least for them. For vaudeville, however, there wasn't much future left at all. George Burns, who had seen many ups and downs — mostly downs — over the course of his career, knew that competition from radio and the new talking pictures meant the two-and-three-a-days were nearing their end — and Burns and Allen would have to adapt to the new cra.



George Burns and Gracie Allen

In 1929, George and Gracie made their first talking film short — a one-reeler for Paramount, shot at the Astoria Studio on Long Island. It was successful enough that the pair signed a contract with the studio for an entire series of shorts, which ran for two years and kept them very much in the public eye.

More important, though, was their trip to Europe during the summer of 1929 — for it was during this tour that they made their first radio broadcast, before the London microphone of the BBC. It was a successful appearance — but not an especially pleasant one for Gracie, who was intimidated by the formidable metal box standing before her in the claustrophobic little studio. But mike fright or no, the response to this broadcast made it clear to George that radio would be their future.

When the couple returned to America in 1930, they resumed making film shorts for Paramount, and took what vaudeville engagements they could get, even as George worked on getting them a regular radio slot.

An audition for General Foods failed to work out — the agency executives didn't think Gracie's voice especially well-suited for broadcasting — but George kept looking. Finally, in the fall of 1931, comedian Eddie Cantor called with a proposition. Cantor had just taken over the Sunday-night Chase and Sanborn Hour for Standard Brands on NBC, and was looking for a guest act — and he asked if Gracie would be willing to appear.

Not George and Gracie. Not Burns and Allen.

Just Gracie.

George Burns loved to perform. He knew the appeal of the act depended on the byplay between Gracie and himself, not just on her gag lines. But he also knew the importance of Cantor's program — already one

of the most popular in the nation — and the boost an appearance by Gracie on that show could offer their careers. And so it was that on November 15, 1931, Burns and Allen made their American radio debut — without Burns. Eddie Cantor essentially played George's role in a five minute sketch revolving around the running gag of Cantor's candidacy for President.

GRACIE: You can't be President. My father told me this morning that he's going to be President of the United States!

EDDIE: Your father?

GRACIE: Yes — my father said, "Gracie, if you can get on the Chase and Sanborn Hour, then I'll be President of the United States!"

Or,

EDDIE: Do you remember the Gettysburg Address?

GRACIE: I think they live in Buffalo now.

Eddie Cantor wasn't George Burns, but Gracie's appeal carried the act, and a few weeks later, George and Gracie — together

## GEORGE BURNS & GRACIE ALLEN

were booked on another Standard Brands show, Rudy Vallee's *Fleischmann's Yeast Hour*. This appearance, in turn, captured the attention of the makers of Robert Burns Cigars — and a cigar-smoking Burns was too good a tie-in for the company to pass up. After a series of guest shots, Burns and Allen joined the *Robert Burns Panatela Program* on a full-time basis in February 1932, co-starring with Guy Lombardo and his orchestra.

GEORGE: How do you like the Lombardo brothers?

GRACIE: How many are there?

GEORGE: There are four of them.

GRACIE: Four of them? They're just like the Three Marx Brothers!

GEORGE: Three Marx Brothers? But there are Four Marx Brothers!

GRACIE: Well, I thought with the Depression and everything...you know!

1932 was an important year for Burns and Allen — not only did they have their first starring radio series, but they made the jump from short subjects into feature pictures, with supporting roles in Paramount's *The Big Broadcast*, co-starring with an array of other CBS personalities.

George and Gracie remained one of the most popular radio comedy acts thru the 1930s — aided by shrewd use of running gags, like the famous "Search For Gracie's Brother" bit during January and February of 1933. Gracie began popping up on programs other than her own, in unannounced cameo appearances, asking after her "missing brother." Variety shows, musical features, other comedy programs — even the occasional drama. No one knew where she'd appear next, and by the time the gag had run its course, "Gracie Allen's Brother" jokes had become a national craze — hounding Gracie's real-life brother into hiding until the whole thing finally blew

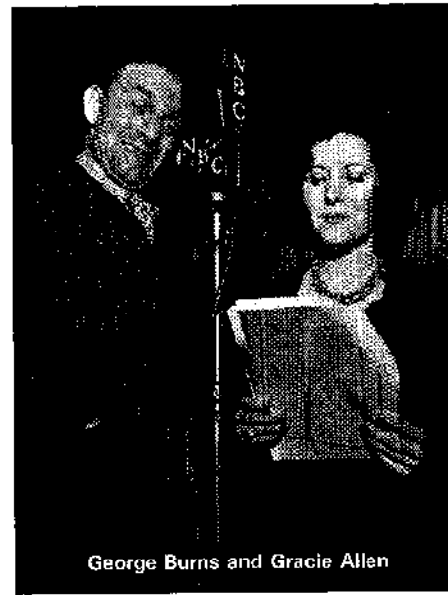
over.

The program format varied little during the thirties: George and Gracie did endless variations on their young-couple-in-the-park patter routines, broken up by musical interludes. The programs had no plot, no continuity — and no mention was ever made of the fact that the two were married: George was often portrayed as a rather moldy ladies man, and Gracie flirted endlessly with announcers and male vocalists.

But by the end of the decade, this formula had worn thin, and nobody could quite put their finger on why. Every effort was made to recapture the old spark — even to the extent of another running gag: the elaborate "Gracie For President" campaign of 1940, which replicated the breaking-in-on-other-shows formula of the "Brother" bit without really capturing the absurdity of the original.

Finally, in 1942, Burns and his staff realized what was wrong. George and Gracie had been married for more than fifteen years — and they had been doing the same act for nearly twenty. They were middle-aged performers trying to pass themselves off as twenty-year-olds — and it just didn't work anymore. They had finally outgrown their material. And, for that matter, so had the audience. With the coming of the war years, the "dizzy dame" stereotype had faded from favor — the new female comedy stars were hard-boiled, aggressive, and brassy: everything Gracie wasn't.

Clearly a new formula was needed. And Burns and Allen found it right in their own living room. In the fall of 1942, the *Burns and Allen* program abandoned its park-bench vaudeville format and became a domestic situation comedy. George and Gracie appeared as themselves — a real life married couple who happened to be radio stars. Borrowing a page from Jack Benny's format, they'd interact with their announcer and their orchestra leader in



George Burns and Gracie Allen

backstage settings, as well as scenes outside the studio. There'd even be a series of hardboiled sidekicks for Gracie, with actresses like Elvia Allman, Sara Berner, and Bea Beneret added to the cast in roles more in keeping with the forties image of women.

But thru all these changes, one thing remained the same: Gracie herself. Although she had been domesticized in the new format, she was still Gracie, still the epitome of "logical illogic," and this may be why her characterization survived when the Irene Noblettes and Eve Sullys and most of the other "dizzy dames" of the thirties fell by the wayside. Gracie seemed to really believe the goofy things she said. She didn't seem to be reading from a script. Audiences picked up on the sincerity of her performance and truly took her to heart. She wasn't a stereotype — she was Gracie.

George and Gracie made a seamless transition to television in 1950, offering yet another variation on their familiar format. The sitcom setting of the radio show continued, but with a twist: George knew it

was all a show, and frequently stepped out of the set to directly address the audience. It was hailed as groundbreaking, this shattering of the fourth wall — but it was actually a throwback to the first Burns and Allen film short of two decades before. George Burns was never a man to forget good material.

Gracie finally retired in 1958. She was suffering from heart trouble, and had in fact grown tired of performing, especially with all the stresses connected with a weekly television show. George tried to repackage himself as a solo act, but audiences just couldn't accept him without Gracie. When she died in 1964, he was shattered by the loss, and retreated even further from the public view. He focused on behind-the-scenes production, and made occasional talk-show appearances. Once in a while he'd try to work up a stage act, solo or with a new partner like Carol Channing — but without Gracie, he just couldn't find his niche.

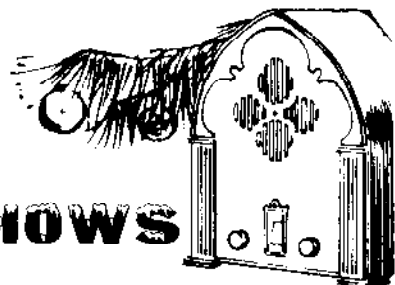
Until 1974, and his dramatic comeback in the film version of *The Sunshine Boys*. George Burns' late-in-life rebirth is one of show business' most heartwarming stories, as he created an entirely new persona for himself: that of the official spokesman for Living To A Ripe Old Age. And when he capped his movie comeback with the role of a lifetime — that of God, portrayed as a gravel-voiced wisecracker in a baggy windbreaker and golf cap — critics joked that it was only appropriate: after all, George was old enough to have been there from the beginning.

From a shrill and unfunny song-and-dance comic to the Almighty Himself. For George Burns, it was quite a career.

But he never forgot — none of it would have happened without that wide-eyed girl who liked lamb chops. ■

NOTE-- Tune in to TWT'D Dec. 4 and Jan. 15 for Burns and Allen broadcasts.

# RADIO'S FAVORITE CHRISTMAS SHOWS



BY RICHARD W. O'DONNELL

Old time radio had many memorable Christmas shows. Some of them were repeated during the Christmas season for several years.



Do you remember Lionel Barrymore's Scrooge, John Nesbitt's "The Juggler of Our Lady," and those remarkable Christmas shows that were given many encore performances on *The First Nighter* and *Grand Central Station* programs. Once you heard them, you never forgot them.

Television, despite its technical advances, has never come close to matching vintage radio at Christmas. Truc, Rudolph, Frosty, The Grinch and other cartoon features come back year after year and will probably be around for decades to come. But these bits of fluff, for the most part, are aimed at juvenile audiences. They lack the depth of the radio shows, and really do not reflect the true spirit of Christmas.

Take the holiday musical shows on TV. True, there are many fine ones, and some feature the greatest of musical talents, especially on PBS. They are marvelous. No doubt about that.

But they lack an essential ingredient. They do not inspire your imagination to soar. Radio, it must be remembered, was,

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

and would still be, if given the chance, the theatre of your imagination.

Take a lovely tune. Take "Sleigh Ride," for example. That certainly is a jolly holiday song. On PBS, there will be a full symphony orchestra, and Placido or Jose may be belting it out with all their hearts. But all you see is a concert hall, the audience, orchestra and singers. Something is missing!

When you listened to the *Railroad Hour*, or the *Voice of Firestone*, or the *Bell Telephone Hour*, during their radio days, all you had to do was let your imagination take charge. If you did, you went along on that musical "Sleigh Ride" and glided through a snowy winter scene. Your imagination made the joyous journey possible.

In fact, it is possible you might enjoy those splendid musical shows on TV at Christmas more, if you ignored the picture, closed your eyes, and let your imagination do the rest.

Television has an array of situation comedy, and almost all of them try to come up with a classic every December. But even if a good one shows up, it is quickly deprived of its opportunity to become an annual event. The show goes into reruns, and you end up watching that great Christmas show during an August heat wave. Christmas just doesn't seem like Christmas in August.

The closest TV ever came to a classic was that old *Dragnet* show, with Jack Webb, where Joe Friday had to investigate



Lionel Barrymore

the theft of the statue of Christ from a church. It was a memorable experience, but has been lost in the shuffle over the years.

Radio had an abundance of great shows during the holiday season. The most famous was probably Lionel Barrymore's annual "A Christmas Carol," which ran from 1934 until his death in 1954. There can be little doubt Barrymore was the greatest Scrooge of them all. Others have played the Charles Dickens skinflint, including several fine British actors, but Barrymore owns the role, at least, as far as American audiences are concerned.

"A Christmas Carol" has been performed on television, on recordings, in theatres, and in four or five movie versions, but it is Barrymore who is the most beloved Scrooge of all. His never-to-be-forgotten performances are a bright star in the history of radio.

The *First Nighter* program, as it was called, had a new half-hour playlet every week. It ran from 1930 until it went off the air in 1952. From 1936, until it was

cancelled, the radio anthology featured a drama called "Little Town of Bethlehem" every Christmas. Basically, this was the story of The Nativity, and it was done in a simple and tasteful style. The show attracted the series' largest audience every year.

Another favorite was featured annually on *Grand Central Station*, a half-hour weekly show. The program ran from 1937 until 1952, and for years featured an awesome Christmas drama called "Miracle For Christmas." The story was about a cynical ambulance driver and a mysterious doctor who make their rounds of mercy on Christmas Eve.

Lum and Abner did the same Christmas show from 1932 until they left the air in 1953. In the drama, they help a couple who had a baby in a barn. It may have been strictly cornball, but you were left with a warm feeling.

For the children, there was a twenty-six chapter serial called *The Cinnamon Bear*. Transcribed in 1937, it remained in syndication for several years, usually starting around Thanksgiving and concluding around Christmas. It was about two chil-



## RADIO'S CHRISTMAS SHOWS

dren and a toy bear called Paddy O'Cinnamon who go searching for a lost Christmas star.

An impressive thing about *The Cinnamon Bear* was the number of famous radio stars who appeared in the series. They included Ted Osborne, Gale Gordon, Cy Kendall, Frank Nelson, Lou Merrill, Elliott Lewis, Elvia Allman, Howard McNear, Slim Pickens, Hanley Stafford, Joseph Kearns, and Verna Felton.

Let's not forget the *Lux Radio Theatre*. During the late forties and early fifties, they repeated "Miracle on 34th Street" a number of times. Edmund Gwenn was always featured as the department store Santa Claus. Originally, *Lux* aired the show in the spring. Then it dawned on the deep thinkers the show might have wider appeal at Christmas.

Not all great radio shows were repeated at Christmas. Some celebrated ones lasted for only a single performance. They used to grind out a new show every week back then, and it was rare that they went back and repeated a particular program.

The *Lone Ranger's* best holiday show was "The Real Spirit of Christmas," about a doctor who, though wanted for a crime, performed a miracle operation on Christmas eve. Needless to say, the Masked Man and his faithful Indian companion helped.

The *Hallmark Playhouse's* "Story of Silent Night" aired in the late forties was a true Christmas classic, but never had an encore.

On one *Amos 'n' Andy* show, Andy told Amos' daughter Arbadella the meaning of The Lord's Prayer on Christmas Eve. This show was a heart-tugger.

James Stewart, for a while, had a Saturday night show called *Six Shooter*. In 1953 he did a western version of the Scrooge story that is still a delight to hear.

Dick Powell's *Richard Diamond* did a modern dress version of the Dickens story and it was a great one. On both shows, the stars were the narrators and lent a special touch to the story.

In 1945, Ralph Edwards and *Truth or Consequences* brought Christmas home to a serviceman confined to a veteran's hospital. They originated part of the show from home town. It was one of radio's greatest moments.

*Gunsnake* had a poignant radio show called "Twelfth Night" in the early fifties. It was a Christmas gem.

John Nesbitt's "The Juggler of Our Lady" started out on a weekly show he had in 1938 called *The Passing Parade*. Nesbitt was a great storyteller, but he did not attract a large audience. He was on and off, but his narrative of "The Juggler of Our Lady" always managed to hit the airwaves at Christmas on some show. It made for great listening.

Comedy shows, for the most part, did not have repeats. Jack Benny did go shopping every Christmas, and used to drive Mel Blanc, who played a store clerk, off his rocker.

*Fibber McGee and Molly* featured a different comedy sketch every Christmas, but the conclusion of the show was always the same. Molly, as little Teeney, and the King's Men did a musical version of "The Night Before Christmas."

Bing Crosby started out on radio and, every year until 1954, he did a musical Christmas show on the airwaves. After that, he did Christmas shows on television.

As far as old time radio is concerned, there will always be a Christmas... and a good Christmas show to hear. ■

*NOTE—A fine assortment of Christmas broadcasts from the golden age of radio may be heard during December on Those Were The Days and When Radio Was. See pages 32-34,37.*

# A Father's Gift

BY KARL PEARSON

This year Father's Day falls on June 18, and for me it will be a time for reflection. My father, George Ivar Pearson, passed away late last year after a long illness. Dad's birthday June 17 makes this year's Father's Day even more significant.

Over the past few months I have found myself frequently reminiscing about my father's life. Dad gave much to his friends and family, always offering a helping hand, encouragement, or support. In the process I feel that he touched many lives, although he may have never realized this fact.

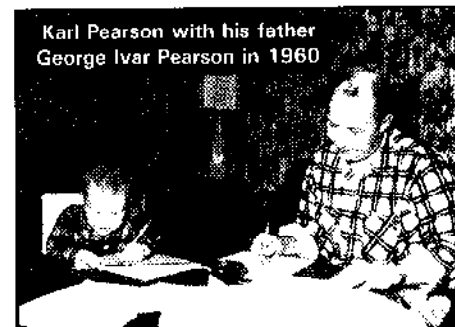
There are three people who are primarily responsible for encouraging my interest in the music of the Big Band Era: my mother, my father, and Chuck Schaden. Over the years these three individuals have encouraged me in both the collecting and broadcasting end of the hobby, and of the three I can proudly say that my father was the one most responsible for developing and nurturing my interests.

George Ivar Pearson, born in 1926, was a true product of the big band era. His parents, who had emigrated to America from their native Sweden before Dad was born, maintained an affection for the music of their homeland. As my father grew up he developed a love for American popular music, particularly for the big bands. Like many youngsters of the 1930s and 1940s, he later recalled staying up way past his bedtime (unbeknownst to his parents), listening to the late-night band remotes that

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*Karl Pearson of Park Ridge, Illinois is a big band historian. This column originally appeared in our June-July, 1995 issue.*

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Karl Pearson with his father George Ivar Pearson in 1960

emanated from such magical places as the Cafe Rouge in New York City, the Trianon in Chicago, and the Palladium in Hollywood.

By the time Dad graduated from Lane Tech in 1944, his musical tastes included a number of nationally-known bands such as those led by Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey and Glenn Miller, as well as Midwestern favorites such as Dick Jurgens, Orrin Tucker and Tiny Hill. After graduation he enlisted in the United States Navy, spending most of his two-year stint on a ship in the Pacific. During his Navy service my father discovered that dancing to the music was just as much fun as listening to it. When Dad was able he would often head for a local dance hall or ballroom, where he would often try to get up the nerve to ask one of the dance hostesses to teach him the latest various steps. By the end of his naval stint he became a fairly good dancer.

After discharge Dad went to college on the G.I. Bill, as did many veterans. His interest in music and dancing continued, and often he would go dancing at various Chicago area ballrooms. After a trip to Sweden with his father in 1947 Dad be-

## A FATHER'S GIFT

came interested in his Swedish heritage. He joined a Chicago Swedish folk dance group, where he met Barbro Olson, a young woman whose parents had also emigrated from Sweden during the 1920s. Barbro and George were married in 1953, and as Dad's life now included a new wife, a career, family responsibilities, and (in a few years) a family of his own, the musical interests as well as the records were put away on the shelf.

As life became increasingly busy, my father had little time to enjoy the music he grew up with. I do recall one Saturday evening when my parents went out with a group of their friends to a dance held at the Chevy Chase Country Club in Wheeling where Frankie Masters and his Orchestra were playing. At the end of the evening Dad came home with a real prize: a brand new Frankie Masters LP (in Stereo), which Frankie had autographed for him!

My first encounter with big band music occurred around 1966, and my father was responsible for it. I had received a portable Westinghouse phonograph as a Christmas gift and, like all portable phonographs of the period, it had four playing speeds: 16, 33 1/3, 45 and 78 RPM. The tonearm also had a switch that flipped the needle over to accommodate 78 RPM records.

At that point in time my record collection was a modest one at best which consisted of no more than ten 45 RPM records (my wife Glenna may find this fact hard to believe) by groups like Paul Revere and the Raiders, the Beach Boys and the Beatles. After searching the house for other records I found several old albums of 78 RPM discs which belonged to my parents. After getting their permission to play them I began to listen to Glenn Miller's "Pennsylvania Six-Five Thousand" and several

others. Although I found the records both different and interesting, I was not yet hooked on the big band sound.

My father introduced me to something both new and old in early 1970. He had recently discovered *Radio Yesteryear*, a program of old-time radio rebroadcasts hosted by Buddy Black over radio station WNMP-AM in Evanston. (It wasn't until later that I found out Buddy Black was merely hosting the program on a temporary basis until Chuck Schaden, the actual program host and originator, obtained sponsor approval.) On that cold March afternoon we listened to a *Fibber McGee and Molly* broadcast and a *Milton Berle Program* that featured Al Jolson as guest. From the vantage point of a thirteen-year-old who had never experienced radio as a major form of entertainment, the programs were fascinating.

Almost immediately I became a big fan of old time radio. I began asking my parents endless questions about specific programs as well as recording shows off the air. I also recall that my father and I were both listening on May 2, 1970, when Chuck Schaden broadcast his first *Those Were The Days* program. About a year later my father gave me a real surprise, when we visited Chuck one Saturday afternoon at the WNMP studios, which was a real treat.

For quite some time I still had only a passing interest in big band music, but that began to change. My father was very proud of his children and equally proud of their interests and accomplishments. Dad often told many of his friends about my unusual interest and several of them loaned me various LP and 78 RPM records. One of his acquaintances loaned me two Glenn Miller 5-volume LP sets which contained a generous selection of material culled from various Glenn Miller radio broadcasts. These two sets marked a turning point in my in-

terests, and I began to try to listen to as much big band music as I possibly could.

Once again dad encouraged me. The support from my mother and sister was equally great, although I suppose the family became a little weary of "Moonlight Serenade" or "In the Mood" after their 500th playing. I often blasted my stereo, as many teenagers are prone to do, although I strongly suspect that I was the only kid my age for miles around who was blasting songs like Benny Goodman's "Roll 'Em"! Even with such minor occurrences the family was very supportive of my big band and old time radio interests, although my sister still claims an aversion to the "William Tell Overture" after one particular week when I copied 40 *Lone Ranger* broadcasts to tape!

Over the next two decades my father and I would often sit and discuss different big band records. As my collection grew I began to return the favor by playing various recordings for him, and it was gratifying to find an item that he had never heard before and watch his reaction. In the early days of collecting my listening preferences were towards the more hard-driving uptempo numbers played by Glenn Miller, Artie Shaw and others. (Being somewhat shy and naive in the romance department I had not yet discovered ballads and other slow-tempo numbers.)

My father's musical tastes differed greatly from mine, and they often reflected his Midwestern upbringing. Dad enjoyed a number of "sweet" dance bands that played in a style he often referred to as "ricky-tick." He also enjoyed the swinging sounds, but usually preferred a lighter style that was easily danceable. Within a few years it became obvious to me that there was more to the big bands than just the "fast stuff."

The search for big band records and trivia continued, and I began to share what

I could with Chuck Schaden and other members of the WLTD staff (the station had undergone a name change). In August of 1973 Chuck invited me to co-host a Glenn Miller program one evening, and my father told many of his friends and co-workers about his son's radio debut. Just a few short months later I was offered a program of my own on Saturday afternoons (I guess the idea of a 16-year-old high school student playing the big band music was rather novel), and as a show of support my father helped me with the script for the first program and offered words of encouragement. He also bought me several big band LPs to help fill out my still modest collection.

Over the years I always felt that my father and I had a special link through the music of the big bands, and as the years passed my love for big band music grew, as did the love for my father. In the last few years of his life Dad's health began to deteriorate, and he began experiencing various health problems. Just last summer, as I began to assemble a special November *Those Were The Days* tribute to Glenn Miller, Dad's health began to worsen. My father was unable to tune in to that particular broadcast, as he had undergone emergency surgery the previous day. Ten days later, on November 22, 1994 he passed away.

In the days since Dad's passing I have found there are times when a certain song will bring a flood of memories. Whenever I think of Tommy Dorsey's "On the Sunny Side of the Street," I often think of my father during his Navy days, looking for a place to learn to do the Lindy. Other songs bring back memories of a specific time, place or incident. Over the past few months I have come to realize what a truly wonderful gift my father had shared with me: his love of music.

Thanks, Dad. ■

# Bogie and Bacall: A Love Story

BY BOB KOLOSOSKI

Lauren Bacall is one of the few movie stars of the 1940s who is still working today.

She has a show on the American Movie Classics cable channel which focuses on fashion and glamour, and she recently starred in a made-for-television movie.

Her career has had fabulous highs and murderous lows, but she has weathered every storm and survived. She has had to deal with the toughest men in Hollywood: the studio bosses. Her ability to cope with these ruthless businessmen is directly related to the fact that she had an excellent mentor: Humphrey Bogart, her first



*To Have and Have Not (1944)*  
Lauren Bacall and Humphrey Bogart

PHOTOFEEST

husband. Their love affair and marriage was a romantic story the best screenwriter couldn't have dreamed up.

In January, 1938 the cover of Harper's Bazaar featured the picture of a new model, 18-year-old Lauren Bacall. The February issue followed up with several more photos which helped make the slender teenager from New York City a sought-after personality by several motion picture pro-

*Bob Kolososki, of Palatine, Illinois, is an architect, movie historian, and fan of the stuff that dreams are made of.*

ducers. By March, Howard Hughes, David Selznick and Harry Cohn had all sent letters to the overwhelmed model.

She asked her uncle Jack for advice and he suggested that she wait until someone made a firm offer and then decide what to do with it. It was excellent advice, because

the next producer to contact Miss Bacall was Howard Hawks. Hawks' wife had seen the Harper's photos and urged her husband to contact the young model whom everyone said had "the look." Hawks wanted to start his own stock company and he was looking for fresh young talent. He thought Bacall could be his first "find."

His offer to her was simple and direct to the point. He would pay her way to California and pay for her hotel and meals while she was there. He would arrange for a screen test and if he felt she had any potential he would sign her to an exclusive contract at \$150 per week. If the test didn't go well, she would be free to pursue other offers. Lauren's uncle liked the terms so she accepted and left for Los Angeles on April 3, 1943.

Once in Hollywood, things happened quickly and Bacall was signed to a contract with Hawks and Jack Warner. She

was put through a series of screen tests at Warner Bros. studios. They were casting a new film based on the Ernest Hemingway story, *To Have and Have Not*. Hawks was set to direct the film and he wanted his new protégée in the movie.

The male lead was to be Humphrey Bogart and one day Hawks took Bacall to a Warners' sound stage where Bogart was working on the film

*Passage to Marseille*. The two were introduced and, after some small talk, Bacall was taken to another building for some wardrobe fittings. About a month later Bacall ran into Bogart at Hawks' office and he commented about how good her screen tests were and left saying, "we'll have some fun together." He had no idea how true that statement was to be.

Shooting on *To Have and Have Not* began a few days later and, right from the first day, Bogart gave the new kid on the lot plenty of attention and volumes of tips on acting before the camera. About three weeks into the movie, Bogart gave Bacall a tender little kiss at the end of the day. The next day he invited her to lunch at the Lakeside Country Club, across from the Warners Bros. studio. The lunch blossomed into a daily routine and caught the attention of several gossip columnists who put little squibs in their columns.

The items caught the attention of Bogart's wife Mayo Methot. Mayo had been a good actress, but was a big drinker and a royal battler. She and Bogie were known around town as the Battling Bogarts; she once stabbed Bogart in the



*To Have and Have Not (1944)*  
Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall

PHOTOFEEST

back while in a drunken rage. Mayo began to hang around the studio to keep an eye on Bogie.

Howard Hawks also took note of the gossip about his now 19-year-old discovery and the 45-year-old Bogart. Bacall was stunned at the attention a few lunches had caused. She liked Bogie; he was a gentle man who was totally professional on the set, but her attraction to him was more of a student smitten by her teacher. The lunches stopped and the business of shooting a motion picture continued.

Then one evening Bogie called Bacall to discuss the next day's scene and while talking to him on the phone she realized she had a strong desire to be with him. The next day she asked him for a private chat and they walked over to his car where, suddenly, they embraced. The attraction they had for each other was too strong to ignore and from that moment on their lives would be intertwined.

They began to meet after work at a rendezvous and sit in Bogie's car holding hands, telling each other how much they were in love. It was an exciting time for Bacall, but she became the center of a fu-



## BOGIE AND BACALL

rious storm. One day Hawks called her into his office and began to strongly criticize her infatuation with Bogie. Their secret meetings, he said, had become public knowledge at the studio and he pressured Bacall to break off the relationship.

One evening, at her apartment, Bacall received a call from Bogart. While talking on the phone, his wife picked up the other line and began to verbally abuse Bacall. Bogie forced Mayo off the phone and quickly told Bacall he would see her at the studio the next day. On the following day, during a break in the shooting, they agreed they had to be more careful, and they stayed away from each other during the final weeks of the shooting.

On the final day of the picture, they had time only for a brief farewell. A week went by before Bacall heard from him. He sent her a letter and in it the screen's tough guy poured out his heart to her. "Baby," he wrote, "I never believed that I could love anyone again, for so many things have happened in my life to me that I was afraid to love. I didn't want to love because it hurts so when you do." He followed with more



*To Have and Have Not (1944)*  
Lauren Bacall, Humphrey Bogart and Walter Brennan  
with Hoagy Carmichael

PHOTOFFS1

letters professing his love for his "baby."

Bogart was a WW II Coast Guard volunteer and one night a week he was on duty patrolling the California coast. He had a one-hour break and Bacall would drive to Balboa to be with him for that hour. Bogart was trying to have his wife agree to a divorce, but she vowed to give up drinking if he would stay with her. Bogart told Bacall that he had to give Mayo the chance to "dry out," then he would seek a divorce. Bacall was heartbroken that she might lose the love of her life.

"You know how to whistle Steve? You just put your lips together and blow" was the phrase that made Bacall a star and the film *To Have and Have Not* a box office champ. While Bogart was away on an extended vacation, Bacall was swept along with the publicity and fame she had so easily inherited from her very first film. She was adored by the critics and public alike, and her bosses saw a great future for her in the movies.

Her triumph, however, was not complete because she didn't have Bogie. She went from coast to coast on a publicity tour that almost helped her forget that he was not with her. Then, one day, Howard Hawks let her in on some good news. Warners was going to cast her and Bogart together in the film version of the Raymond Chandler story *The Big Sleep*. She was thrilled and a few weeks later she and Bogie were reunited at the studio for pre-production conferences.

Bogart asked Bacall if he could see her in private and she agreed. He wanted her to know



*The Big Sleep (1946)*  
Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall

PHOTOFFS1

that Mayo had finally consented to a divorce. He had to give up most of his assets, but he was willing to do that if Bacall would take him back. Her answer was an excited yes and they began to plan their future.

As they worked on *The Big Sleep* they finalized the wedding date and place. The date was to be May 21, 1945 and the place was to be the Ohio farmhouse of Bogart's old friend, author Louis Bromfield. The day of the wedding the beautiful farm was inhabited with wedding guests and dozens of reporters. The local judge had the honor of marrying Lauren Bacall and Humphrey Bogart on that lovely spring day. Bogie cried as he said "I do," and

Bacall was shaking so much that petals were dropping off her wedding bouquet. The two Hollywood stars were nervous wrecks.

Their marriage was strong and produced two children. Bacall placed her career second to being Mrs. Bogart and the mother of their children.

She went to Africa with him when he was filming *The African Queen*, and lived under the harshest conditions.

They were still very much in love when Humphrey Bogart was stricken with cancer in 1956. She stayed by his side during a nightmarish year of false hopes and devastating setbacks. She watched her husband slowly deteriorate, and

was at his bedside when he died. She knew the happiest part of her life had ended.

Bogie was gone, but Lauren Bacall's love for him would never fade, for their life together was the stuff that sweet dreams are made of. ■

*NOTE-- Tune in to TWTD on January 8 to hear some radio appearances by Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall.*



*The Big Sleep (1946)*  
Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall

PHOTOFFS1

# Chicago Radio and the 'Millennium' of 1940

BY BILL KIDDLE

International political unrest and national and global economic uncertainties have long plagued our nation.

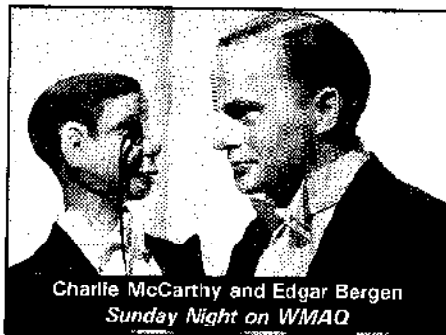
Today, as the world moves toward the millennium midst the fears of a Y2K fallout (and the real violence present in central Europe and the Middle East), some Americans are reminded of another time, sixty years ago when our nation's people awaited the dawn of a new year, 1940, a new decade that would produce the end of the Great Depression but bring the fearful onslaught of a second World War.

Then, as now, the American people turned to the media. On one hand they looked for up-to-date information about global, national, and local conditions, and on the other they sought a source of entertainment -- a relief from the cares of the world.

The most important media available to the vast majority of Americans in 1940 was radio.

Radio broadcasting of 60 years ago was a far cry from what it is today. Yet, "radio was a common experience that unified millions of otherwise diverse Americans and helped them cope with the upheaval of the 1930s." On a more personal level, radio provided Americans with the cheapest, most varied entertainment available. With the turning of a dial, people could

*Bill Kiddle is a retired high school teacher whose interest in radio dates to his undergraduate days at Lake Forest College.*



enjoy dramas and musical programs, comedy and adventure series, as well as being informed of fast-breaking national and international news -- all in the comfort of their own homes.

In January, 1940 over one million people living in the Chicago metropolitan area tuned to the "Today's Radio Broadcasts" section, a daily feature in their morning *Chicago Tribune*. As they scanned the day's listings, they found a wide variety of programs to meet their individual interests.

Comedy was king, and America needed something to laugh at to relieve its troubles. Radio provided the perfect solution. An interesting array of radio comics entered the homes and hearts of millions of people with a form of comedy that relied on mental pictures instead of visual ones. They developed lasting styles and unforgettable characters.

On Sundays, listeners in Chicago kept their radio dials tuned to WMAQ (NBC) during the early evening hours between 6 and 7:30 to enjoy *Jack Benny* followed by *Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy*.

Monday night WBBM (CBS) aired *Blondie* starring Penny Singleton and Arthur Lake, at 9:30.

On Tuesday evening, WMAQ's lineup included *Fibber McGee and Molly* at 8:30 and *Bob Hope* at 9.

Wednesday night was time for *Red Skelton* at 7:30 and *Fred Allen* at 8:30, both on WMAQ.

Two one-time great comedy stars of radio closed out the week. *Joe Penner's Tip Top Show* was in the 7:30 time slot on WLS (NBC-BLUE) on Thursdays, and *George Jessel* had the only major comedy offering on Friday nights at 8:30 on WMAQ.

Freeman Godsen and Charles Correll created *Amos 'n' Andy*, a wildly popular program, radio's first situation comedy. It was heard at weekdays at 7 on WMAQ in a 15-minute continuation format for Campbell Soups.

In 1940 weekly dramatic anthologies, radio adaptations of the popular classics from the stage, novels, and the silver screen, were given first-rate showcases and became prime time features.

Sunday was a good day to hear different types of radio drama. On January 7, 1940, listeners who tuned to WMAQ were in for an afternoon of great entertainment. First, *Grand Hotel*, a popular lightweight anthology returned to the air in a 25-minute format starring Betty Lou Gerson and Henry Hunter. *Silver Theatre* with Cary Grant was aired at 5 and "Becky Sharp" starring Orson Welles and Helen Hayes was the play on the Campbell Playhouse at 9. Also on Sunday, at 1 on WENR (NBC-BLUE) was *Great Plays*. This week's drama was "The Rivals."

On Monday at 8, WBBM carried *Lux Radio Theater*, an hour-long drama hosted by Cecil B. DeMille. On New Year's Day Herbert Marshall starred in "Sorrell and Son."

Tuesday's most significant offering was *Cavalcade of America*, an interesting series of original dramas, sponsored by DuPont. It was heard at 8 on WENR.



The *Tribune* radio column for Wednesday, January 3, 1940 listed two interesting programs: *Hollywood Playhouse* with "When Tomorrow Comes" starring Charles Boyer was on WMAQ at 7 and, an hour later, on WBBM, Louise Rainer and Walter Able starred in "Romance" on *Star Theater*.

On Friday evening, WBBM offered three fine theatre productions. At 7 the *Kate Smith Hour*, sponsored by Grapenuts, presented "One Sunday Afternoon." At 8 *Johnny Presents* a spellbinding mystery, "The Perfect Crime." Then, at 8:30, Barbara Luddy and Les Tremayne appeared on *First Nighter* in "Girls Will Be Brides."

Adventure-detective dramas were on the rise in popularity. By 1940 several trend-setters were very well received. From crime to punishment, radio covered stories taken from the pages of world literature or from the files of the police and other law enforcement agencies.

Sunday night provided two excellent crime-detective dramas. *Mr. District Attorney*, with Jay Jostyn, was heard over WENR at 6:30 for Pepsodent, and *Adventures of Ellery Queen*, with Hugh Marlowe as the

deductive genius, was broadcast on WBBM at 7.

*The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, regarded by many to be radio's greatest detective drama, was on Monday night at 7 over WLS. On January 1, 1940 Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce solved the "Case of the Blue Carbuncle." *Ned Jordan, Secret Agent*, an adventure melodrama originating out of WXYZ, Detroit, made its way to Chicago and was aired over WGN at 7, in the time slot opposite *Sherlock Holmes*.

*Big Town*, with Edward G. Robinson, was an established favorite with listeners on Tuesday night at 7 over WBBM. *Court of Missing Heirs* was a true human interest drama with a subtle air of mystery. More than 150 probate cases were solved in a ten year period as a result of the program. Three times each week (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday) at 6:15 *Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons*, a highly-rated quarter-hour melodrama sponsored by Bisodol, was broadcast over WENR.

Saturday night produced a bonanza of interesting adventure-crime dramas. WBBM aired two Phillips H. Lord productions during the evening. *Sky Blazers*, hosted by Captain Roscoe Turner at 6:30, was the story of early aviation pioneers. It was followed by *Gang Busters* at 7. Also at 7, over at WCFL (ABC) was *The Green Hornet*, with Al Hodge in the title role.

Escapism in the form of mystery and horror drama was well-established on radio. Every Sunday afternoon at 4:30, during the coal-burning season (September to March), *The Shadow* was broadcast over WGN (MBS). On January 7, 1940 Bill Johnstone and Marjorie Anderson, as Lamont Cranston and Margo Lane, appeared in an episode entitled "The Leopard Strikes."



Edward G. Robinson  
*Big Town* - Tuesday Night on WBBM

Each weekday evening at the early hour of 6:15, Carlton E. Morse's serialized classic *I Love A Mystery* was aired over WMAQ in a quarter-hour format. On January 1, 1940 Jack, Doc and Reggie were plunged into a new mystery, "The San Diego Murders" (better known to *ILAM* fans as "The Richard's Curse.")

In early 1940 Arch Oboler, who had entertained millions with his *Lights Out* program, presented to radio audiences a new anthology series, *Arch Oboler's Plays*. On Saturday, January 6, 1940 at 7 on WMAQ, listeners heard a new dramatization of one of his old *Lights Out* thrillers, "Money, Money, Money."

Western adventure came to Chicago listeners on WGN (by way of WXYZ) in the person of the *Lone Ranger*. The thrilling adventures of the masked man and his Indian companion were heard Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 6:30, sponsored by Silvercup Bread. *Death Valley Days*, an anthology of western tales told by the Old Ranger and sponsored by Twenty Mule Team Borax, was heard over WMAQ at 8:30 on Saturday evenings. Also on Saturday, at 5:30 on WENR, was *Renfrew of*

*the Mounted*, with House Jamison in the title role.

Every day millions of American women tuned in for the latest episode of their favorite soap opera as tragedies, triumphs, and life's scandals unfolded. By 1940 there were over three dozen of these daytime serials on the air in Chicago over an eight hour span between 9 am and 5 pm, five days a week.

Before noon, WMAQ offered *The Man I Married* at 9; *John's Other Wife* at 9:15; *Just Plain Bill* at 9:30; *Woman in White* at 9:45; *David Harum* at 10; *Road of Life* at 10:15; *Against the Storm* at 10:30; *Guiding Light* at 10:45; *The Carters of Elm Street* at 11; and *The O'Neills* at 11:15.

WBBM broadcast *Pretty Kitty Kelly* at 9; *Hilltop House* at 9:30; *Stepmother* at 9:45; *Brenda Curtis* at 10:15; *Big Sister* at 10:30; *Aunt Jenny* at 10:45; *When A Girl Marries* at 11:15; *Helen Trent* at 11:30; and *Our Gal Sunday* at 11:45.

Other morning favorites on other stations included *Young Dr. Malone* at 10:15 on WLS; *Bachelor's Children* at 10:15 on WGN; and *Mary Sothern* at 11:15 on WGN. Two WLS favorites, *The Story of Mary Marlin* at 9:30 and *Pepper Young's Family* at 10 were so popular that they were rebroadcast in the late afternoon on other networks.

In the afternoon hours, programming became more diverse, but fans could still find these interesting tales told on WBBM: *This Day is Ours* at 12:30; *My Son and I* at 1:45; *Society Girl* at 2:15; and *Linda's Love* at 3:15. *Beautiful Life* at 12:15 and *Road of Life* at 12:45 were WBBM rebroadcasts from other networks.

Listeners to WMAQ would hear *Valiant Lady* at 1:30; *Ma Perkins* at 2:15; *Backstage Wife* at 3; *Stella Dallas* at 3:15; *Lorenzo Jones* at 3:30; *Young Widder Brown* at 3:45; *Girl Alone* at 4; and *Kitty Keane* at 4:30.



Edith Spencer as Aunt Jenny  
Weekday Mornings on WBBM

Most school children were in the last week of their winter break when the New Year dawned, and many of them gathered around their radios at 5:30, tuned to WMAQ, to listen to *Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy* and his adventures against bad guys in Northern Mexico. Many of the girls wanted the radio dial tuned to WGN at 5:45 to hear *Little Orphan Annie*.

Boys in the family might be more interested in keeping the radio tuned to WMAQ at 5:45 to hear the lighthearted adventures of *Lil Abner*, a radio recreation of Al Capp's famous comic strip, with John Hodiak in the title role.

Others might want to listen to the western action of the *Tom Mix Ralston Straight-Shooters* on WENR. At 6, *Captain Midnight* and his Secret Squadron come to life in the imagination of the kids listening to WGN.

Thanks to remote broadcasting technology, radio provided a live "you are there" atmosphere for millions of Americans interested in a vast array of sporting events. New Year's Day provided college football fans with the top bowl games. A play-by-

play report of the Rose Bowl game between Southern California and Tennessee was aired at 3:45 on WGN with West Coast sportscaster Mike Frankovich at the Mutual microphone. The Orange Bowl game between Georgia Tech and Missouri was on WBBM at 1, and the Sugar Bowl game between Texas A&M and Tulane was on both WLS and WENR, also at 1. The College All-Star East-West game was broadcast over WIND at 3:45.

During the winter of 1940, Chicago hockey fans could listen to WGN at 10 to hear Bob Elson and his reports on the Blackhawks in action on the ice from the Chicago Stadium. (During the week, WGN carried Bob Elson's *Sports Review* every evening at 6:15.

College basketball was at its mid-season best as WIND carried all the action of selected Loyola, DePaul, and Northwestern games throughout the week.

WENR had its own version of the *Friday Night Fights*. On January 5, 1940 boxing fans had a "ring-side seat" for the Apistoli v Betina bout broadcast at 9.

From the very beginning of radio, music programs were very popular. It was an inexpensive new way to bring all of the top musical performers into every home.

A turn of the dial could give you music for every taste. Lovers of great classical music enjoyed the Sunday afternoon performances of the *New York Philharmonic Symphony* under the direction of Igor Stravinsky at 2 on WBBM.

Those interested in popular music might listen to WBBM at 9 on a Tuesday evening to hear *Glenn Miller and his Orchestra* with the Andrews Sisters, or to the Aragon-Trianon dancing parties on Sunday evening at 6. WGN closed its broadcast day every night with a performance by a leading orchestra. The list for early January, 1940

included Orrin Tucker, Lew Diamond, Tommy Dorsey, Joe Sanders, and Boyd Raeburn.

Radio emerged as an important source of news and information. The first week in 1940 was a grim time for sober-minded Americans. War had been declared in Europe. Tiny Finland battled for its life against the Soviet Union. Germany was at war with both Britain and France, and only the constraint of winter kept Hitler's fearsome "Blitzkrieg" in check until spring.

Many people in the Chicago metropolitan area started their day by listening to *Europe Today* on WBBM at 7 and then returned home to listen at 5:45 for an updated version of the same news program. *Foreign News* was a regular feature on WGN at 9:15.

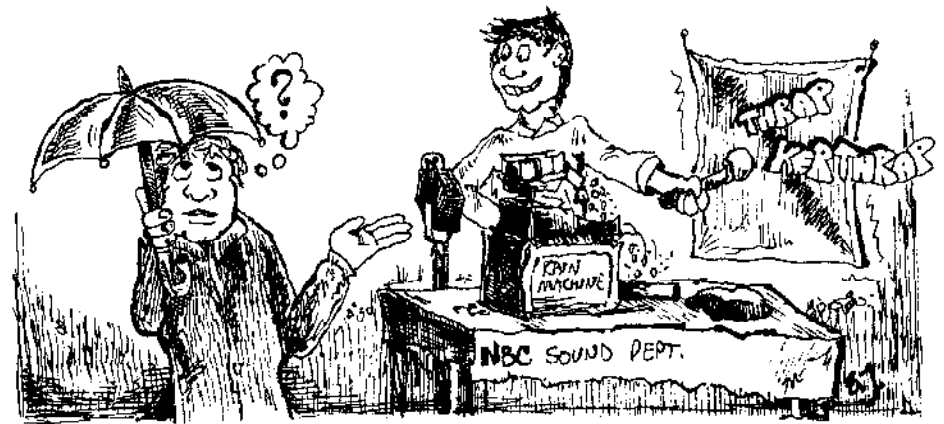
H. V. Kaltenborn, Fulton Lewis Jr., Raymond Graham Swing, and Clifton Utley were a few of the many newscasters whose commentary and analysis were important in informing and influencing public opinion on global and domestic matters.

As we enter a new millennium with our many forms of audio and visual communication, we may view the content and style of radio in 1940 to be quaint or even primitive.

But 60 years ago, as electricity finally reached every American home, it was radio that helped capture the nation's hearts and minds, and prepared its people for the realities of global conflict.

A newspaper columnist in 1940 said, "People cannot know now in what circumstances they will undertake to make their decisions. Other events of this new year may greatly influence them. They may remain at peace during this year, but that is not, as they might wish it were, an absolute certainty."

A gem of wisdom for the year 2000, as well. ■



## Radio Rain and Other Sound Makers

BY KATHY WARNES

Thunder booms and torrents of rain pour from the sky. The man riding horseback through the dense forest bends low over his horse's head, murmuring encouragement. Radio listeners can hear the sound of the horse's hooves squishing in and out of the mud above the noise of the storm.

How did radio soundmen produce these realistic storm effects? What kind of equipment did they use to simulate such catastrophic events as earthquakes and car crashes?

The radio rainmaker had his choice of at least half a dozen props to make it rain. Each studio had its favorite precipitation procedure. One way was to run a machine that dropped sand on a sheet of metal. Another was pouring fine shot onto a piece of cellophane. Still another was splattering birdseed on parchment. Over the air-

*Kathy Warnes is a radio fan from West Allis, Wisconsin. Illustrations are by Brian Johnson, a free-lance cartoonist from Evanston, Illinois. This article originally appeared in our April-May, 1984 issue.*

waves, these all made rain.

If the radio rainmaker was an NBC man, he used a rainmaking machine invented by sound expert and engineer Ray Kelly of the National Broadcasting Company. Legend has it that Kelly got the inspiration for his machine one day when he sprinkled salt on his luncheon lettuce. He studied the wavy surface of the lettuce and how the salt grains traveled varying distances on it before they stopped. Why not amplify this noise with a microphone, he thought, and it would probably sound more like rain than any of the methods currently being used.

Kelly devised a machine with a five operation cycle that produced five tones. First, an electric motor distributed grape seeds on a revolving disc. Second, a windshield wiper scraped them off, one at a time. Third, each seed hit a marble which rested on a felt-covered arm about a foot below the disc. Fourth, half the seeds bounced off the marble, hit a suspended ping-pong ball, and then tumbled down a slide of cellophane to bombard an inflated peanut bag. Fifth, the other seeds bounced from the marble directly to a stretched sheet of onionskin paper, then to the peanut bag. The resulting sound was a heavy rainstorm

## RADIO RAIN

for radio listeners.

Radio soundmen used other machines just as complicated as Kelly's rainmaker.

One was a wind machine that produced the sigh of a spring breeze, the howling of a hurricane, and the variations in between. Another machine was a honeycomb arrangement of wooden blocks or clothes pins which, when scraped on either a sandpaper or plywood base, sounded like thousands of men on the march.

Then there was the ordinary phonograph. Sound engineers simply turned to the station's record library for many sound effects. If the station had a good library, the sound engineer could find recordings of crowds at a world series, the subway, or the circus. He could unearth the sounds of trains in transit, animals roaring, and other standard noises.

Each radio broadcast required a certain number of standard sounds. One children's hour program scheduled a fairy tale where, in the course of the story, a horse climbed a glass mountain. How did the studio sound expert solve this? He poured a thin layer of sand in a cigar box, and then pressed a drinking glass into the sand and twisted a little. The children heard the glassy clatter of hooves on the slippery glass mountain.

The soundman resembled a magician

pulling endless audio tricks out of his hat. Making thunder posed no problem at all for him. He just beat upon a tightly-stretched drum or a sheet of plywood and boom! Hoofbeats in the mud were



achieved with the aid of a rub of real mud and a paddle or pair of plungers. In fact, almost every soundman had a plunger in his kit, along with a tom-tom, a piece of canvas, a rubber balloon, a basketball bladder, a banjo, a pillow, a piece of silk cloth, some fine shot, a handful of cellophane, an ordinary strawberry basket, and a hot water bottle.

With this odd assortment of props, the soundman could make listeners hear bacon sizzle, a locomotive puff, a flock of birds whirr by, airplanes flying in formation, and a waterfall roar. By manipulating the piece of silk, the soundman produced the put-put of an outboard motor, the hot water bottle became a person swimming, and the canvas created the effect of a football being kicked down the field.

Besides these basic sounds, the equipment in the soundman's kit spawned several others. The drum made thunder, but also became waves pounding on a reef. With half of an English walnut revolving on a suspended drum head, the soundman created airplane engines. By putting a few buckshot into an inflated basketball bladder



der and shaking them violently, the soundman had the roar of cannon or rifle fire. When this was amplified, the resulting noise was enough to frighten Attila the Hun!

What about more complicated sounds like the noise of a bridge collapsing or a house falling? What about the crunch of a freighter crashing into a Coast Guard cutter in foggy seas? For these effects, the soundman tore an ordinary strawberry basket in pieces in front of the micro-



phone. For the crackling flames and crash of trees falling in a forest fire, he crumpled cellophane in front of the microphone. To create the illusion of a man walking on packed snow, the sound man kneaded cornstarch between his hands and for the rustle

of dry grass, he manipulated a stalk of wheat in front of the microphone.

Some of the sounds in the soundman's repertory were the real thing. A telegraph key and an automobile door were played by a telegraph key and an automobile door.

The telegraph message was clicked off with a genuine telegraph key and the sound of the car door originated from a real car door, detached from the car it once belonged to. The sound of wagon wheels was genuine, complete with earthen floor to heighten the effect. Telephones, cash registers, horns and whistles played themselves and were kept in the studio stock rooms.

But the most original of the sound makers was the radio soundman himself! ■

## NOSTALGIA DIGEST FLASHBACK

### COVER STORY

Jack Benny has been on the cover of our *Nostalgia Digest* eleven times during the last twenty-five years, more than any other personality.

His first appearance on our cover was in February, 1976. Because of our annual February broadcast celebration of "Jack Benny Month," Jack has been on the cover of this magazine's February issues of 1981, 1982, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1995, and 1997. He'll probably show up again in 2000.

Charlie McCarthy is our Number 2 cover star, appearing eight times between November, 1975 and October/November, 1995. Charlie, along with Edgar Bergen and, occasionally, Mortimer Snerd, was a November cover regular from 1975 thru 1979.

The Number 3 cover star position, appearing seven times, is a three-way tie between George Burns and Gracie Allen, who first appeared on our cover in September, 1976; Bing Crosby, who made his cover debut in March, 1977; and Fibber McGee and Molly who first turned up on a *Nostalgia Digest* cover in April, 1977.

Rounding out our list of frequent cover stars, are Bob Hope and Fred Allen, each with six covers; Amos 'n' Andy and Eddie Cantor, each with five covers; and Abbott and Costello, Red Skelton, Al Jolson and Orson Welles, each with four cover appearances.



# SUSPENSE SHOWSTOPPERS

Choosing the Best Episodes

From Radio's Outstanding Theater of Thrills

BY ERIK J. MARTIN

During its unprecedented 20 year reign as the best and longest lived mystery series on radio, *Suspense* drew both high ratings and critical raves. It also drew famous stars to its microphone, and amassed the best collection of veteran stock radio players and creative collaborators to make for a winning blend of talents.

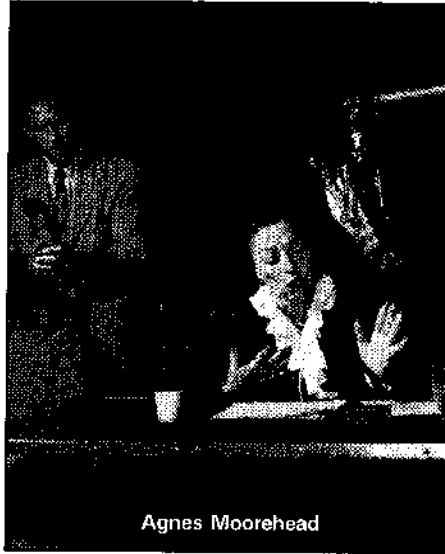


It's no wonder that *Suspense* ranked as the second favorite radio program of all time behind only the *Jack Benny Program*—according to a 1999 poll taken by listeners of the *Those Were The Days* radio program to determine the 20 best old-time-radio shows of the 20th Century.

Deciding which episodes of *Suspense* fall into the "best of" category is kind of like picking your favorite Alfred Hitchcock films: they're all good, and all worthy of consideration on their own goosebump merits. Yet certain stories and unforgettable performances, like cream, rise to the top. Over its two decades, here, in my humble opinion, are the *Suspense* shows that have stood out as a cut above the rest.

**1. Sorry, Wrong Number (5/25/43)** Louise Fletcher's riveting spine-tingler about an invalid woman who accidentally intercepts a telephone conversation between two men plotting to murder her, one

*Erik Martin is a free-lance writer from Oak Lawn, Illinois.*



Agnes Moorehead

of whom she begins to suspect is her husband. The magnificent stage, screen and radio actress Agnes Moorehead played the frightened Mrs. Elbert Stevenson with such raw emotion and conviction that, upon the program's conclusion, Moorehead purportedly collapsed from sheer exhaustion. Also deserving accolades was the top-notch work of soundman Bernie Surrey, who shared a unique chemistry and sense of timing with Moorehead. Her performance led to many return engagements on *Suspense*, including seven repeats of "Sorry, Wrong Number," and helped earn Moorehead the well-deserved moniker of "the first lady of *Suspense*." The episode was such a hit that Fletcher's story was made into a 1948 Hollywood film starring Barbara Stanwyck, and Moorehead came back to the *Suspense*

microphone for more plays than any other performer.

**2. Donovan's Brain (5/18/44 and 5/25/44)** Orson Welles stars as a scientist whose experiment in keeping alive the brain tissue of an evil business executive goes horribly awry. This landmark program, based on a popular science fiction novel, was the series' first attempt at a two-parter. It featured original music scored exclusively for the episode, and pioneered a number of innovative sound effects. In the unforgettable words of Welles, whose portrayal stands as one of his finest on radio (and certainly his best effort on *Suspense*), "sure, sure, sure!"

**3. August Heat (5/31/45)** Perhaps the greatest of all the first person narratives attempted on the series, "August Heat" is a mesmerizing masterpiece of brooding suspense, written by W.F. Harvey. The incomparable Ronald Colman stars as James Clarence Withencraft, a struggling artist who is inexplicably inspired to sketch the portrait of a stranger on trial for murder. In a strange, happen-chance twist of fate, later that day he meets the very man in his



Ronald Colman



Orson Welles

sketch, a stonecutter who happens to be engraving Withencraft's name on a tombstone! The episode, graced by a haunting original score, became an audience favorite that was repeated over the years. It is also recalled as a standout during the series' cream years of 1944-47, when *Suspense* ran on Thursday nights under the sponsorship of Roma Wines and benefited from the collaborative talents of director William Spier, composer Bernard Herrmann, soundman Bernie Surrey, and narrator Joseph Kearns ("the man in black").

**4. Three Skeleton Key (11/11/56)** The best radio version of "that story about the rats" in the twilight of the grand radio days. Vincent Price reprises his role as a lonely watchman in an isolated lighthouse that is attacked by millions of enormous rats. Barricaded inside the lighthouse, Price must also protect himself from his two co-workers a coward, and a lunatic. Though the story had been a big hit on *Suspense* and *Escape* in years past, and despite its somewhat shortened length (20 minutes: the average program duration for *Suspense* by the late 1950s), this dramatization ex-

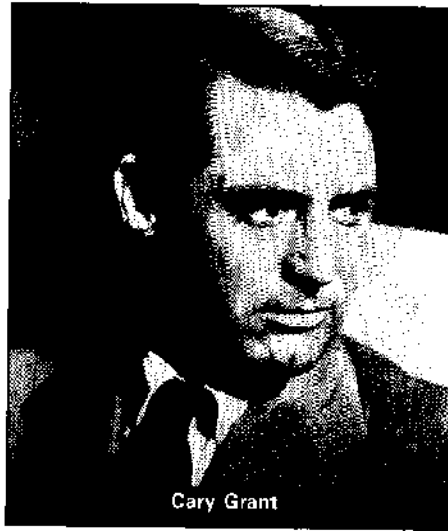
## SUSPENSE SHOWSTOPPERS

ceeds all predecessors thanks to Price's *tour de force* effort in a role he was born to play.

**5. On a Country Road** (11/16/50) A fine little slice of horror, this show depicts the terror of a distraught couple, enacted by Cary Grant and Cathy Lewis, who run out of gas on a rainy, dark country road where an escaped insane woman, armed with a meat cleaver, is being sought by police. The program is unique in that it uses music sparingly, allowing the realistic sound effects and tense pauses between dialogue to pace the action. Grant is especially convincing as the protective husband whose voice pitch and inflections grow increasingly panicky while trying to calm both his nervous wife and a strange woman who takes shelter in their car. "On a Country Road" became a classic that was also repeated over the years.

**6. The Hitchhiker** (9/2/42) Another example of the tremendous talents of actor Orson Welles and writer Louise Fletcher, "The Hitchhiker" captivated audiences from the first toll of the *Suspense* churchbell until the last exhale of Welles' dying breath. The tale is simple: a young man driving his way across the country is tormented by the roadside specter of an inescapable, shadowy hitchhiker who continues to appear in every town he passes through. An excellent example of the power of radio drama, this ghost story with an unforgettable twist left a lasting impression, as evidenced by perennial audience requests to repeat the episode.

**7. The House in Cypress Canyon** (12/5/46) One of the all-out scariest stories in the *Suspense* repertoire featuring Robert Taylor, Howard Duff, Hans Conreid and Cathy Lewis the latter three a fine trio of veteran radio performers who regularly appeared on the series. A young married couple purchase a new house in a nice,



Cary Grant

quiet California suburb, only to discover that the house is haunted by an evil, malignant presence. As befitting the fine collaborative efforts of Spier and the series' usual suspects in this, another episode in *Suspense's* "cream" years, the rising dramatic tension is conjured impeccably. Interesting trivia: The famous fictional gumshoe Sam Spade also played by Duff on his own CBS series makes a cameo in this story.

**8. The Yellow Wallpaper** (7/29/48) A frightening study in psychological horror, this program once again spotlighted the dramatic range of Agnes Moorehead. The plot: A woman slowly going insane is taken away by her doctor-husband to their summer home for a long respite. But as the days pass, the woman's deranged mind makes her believe the room she is convalescing in is haunted. Moorehead tops herself again with this emotionally volatile role; like fingernails on a chalkboard, her shrieking, grief-ridden voice resonates in the listener's mind long after the powerful conclusion. One of the best of the Autolite-era *Suspense* broadcasts.

**9. Ghost Hunt** (6/23/49) A unique casting experiment in the series that worked beau-

tifully. "Ghost Hunt" spotlighted *Truth or Consequences* host Ralph Edwards as a lively radio DJ who agrees to broadcast his show overnight in a haunted house as part of a promotional stunt. In the "spirit" of the occasion, Edwards encounters many blood-curdling supernatural phenomenon. This is one of the great examples of the success *Suspense* creators had in casting popular comedy and variety show stars in roles either faithful to their characters or else against type. Other hallmark examples: Jack Benny as a clever embezzler in "A Good and Faithful Servant;" Ozzie and Harriet as a poor, young couple plotting a murder in "Too Little to Live On;" and Milton Berle as an actor who isn't taken seriously in "Rave Notice."

**10. The Thing in the Window** (12/19/46) If Moorehead was "the first lady of *Suspense*," Joseph Cotton was certainly the show's "first man," appearing at least ten times on *Suspense*, more than any other male actor. Cotton shines as a neurotic man who continually calls the old woman in the apartment building across from his, insisting that he sees a dead man's ghost sitting in her window-side chair. A bravura performance by Cotton in a masterfully written tale with what else—a brilliant twist ending.

### Some runners up:

**The Dunwich Horror** (11/1/45) with Ronald Coleman as a professor trying to prevent an evil life force from invading the Earth, written by H.P. Lovecraft.

**To Find Help** (1/18/45) starring Frank Sinatra as a deranged handyman who makes Agnes Moorehead a prisoner in her own home (repeated in 1949 with Gene Kelly and Ethel Barrymore).

**Backseat Driver** (2/3/49) featuring Jim and Marian Jordan as a couple who are carjacked by a dangerous criminal (an episode repeated at least twice in the 1950s).

**The Name of the Beast** (4/11/46) star-



Joseph Cotton

ring Vincent Price as painter obsessed with rendering the portrait of an escaped murderer, played supremely by Elliot Lewis.

**Mission Completed** (12/1/49) starring James Stewart as a paralyzed WWII vet seeking revenge for his past.

**The Man in the Room** (5/11/50) with John Lund as a freelance writer who invents a murder plot that comes true.

**The Face is Familiar** (1/18/54) starring Jack Benny as an unwitting accomplice in a bank holdup, with the great Sheldon Leonard (the racetrack tout on Benny's show) as his instigator.

**The Black Curtain** (1/3/48), the premiere broadcast in *Suspense's* hour-long weekly format, featuring Robert Montgomery as an amnesia victim trying to retrace the last three years of his life.

**Cellar Door** (1/24/56) with Parley Baer and Paula Winslowe as the parents of a toddler who has accidentally locked them in the cellar.

**Zero Hour** (1/3/60), a story by Ray Bradbury, with Evelyn Rudi as a young girl whose parents dismiss her talk of an "invasion" as imaginary nonsense.

*Suspense* has always provided us with first-class radio entertainment. ■

# Searching for a Silver Star or The Cinnamon Bear, Christmas and Me!

BY CHUCK SCHADEN

*Judy and Jimmy Barton can't find the silver star for their Christmas tree. While searching for it in their attic, they find an old friend, the Cinnamon Bear, who comes to life and suggests that the twins accompany him to Maybe Land to look for the lost star. The twins "de-grow" and travel to Maybe Land in a glass airplane which runs on soda pop. But the thirsty trio drink up the fuel and become stranded in Looking Glass Valley.*

In the late 1930s and early '40s, the Christmas season officially began at our house with the radio adventures of *The Cinnamon Bear*:

*The Cinnamon Bear* was a 26-chapter radio serial that was broadcast every year between Thanksgiving and Christmas. It was sponsored on WGN by Wieboldt's Department store. Every day after school I would rush home to follow the adventures of Paddy O'Cinnamon, the Crazy Quilt Dragon, the Wintergreen Witch and all of the other inhabitants of Maybe Land.

The final chapter of the story was broadcast on Christmas Eve and I had to wait until that very last episode to find out if Judy and Jimmy recovered the silver star in time to place it at the very top of their Christmas tree.

When I was a kid, the days between Thanksgiving and Christmas were filled with excitement of the season and, year

*This article previously appeared in our December, 1975 and October/November, 1985 issues.*

after year, as Judy and Jimmy went through their adventure, I had an adventure of my own.

It was the adventure of eager anticipation. I loved Christmas—still do—and the best part of all was the season itself. The buildup... the preparation... and then, finally, the Big Day.

At our house the Holiday Season began on the night before Thanksgiving. I would find myself in the kitchen helping my mother prepare the turkey. I vividly remember using a tweezer to pluck the remnants of the feathers from what was always the largest bird she could find. Then she would lift that hefty fowl over the front burner of the kitchen stove and burn off most of the remaining fuzz. Next, the stuffing (or do you say dressing?). Filling the inside of that bird was a pleasant task as I thought about the giant helping of turkey 'n' trimmings that would be my treat tomorrow. Next, the sewing up of ol' Tom, placing him in the roasting pan, and then to the back porch, naturally cooled by the month of November. Besides, Tom and his blue enameled resting place were much too big for our ice box (oh, yes, we had an electric refrigerator, but in those days it was called an ice box).

In the morning, Mom was up early to get that bird in the oven... and she spent the first part of the day working on sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, acorn squash, pumpkin pie, and all the trimmings that make up a Thanksgiving feast.

Sometime around four o'clock that afternoon, as the aroma of the roasting turkey and all the other goodies was becoming more than we could stand, the doorbell rang and relatives started pouring in. A bit later we sat down at the table and were thankful for our family and the bounty that we shared that and every Thanksgiving Day.

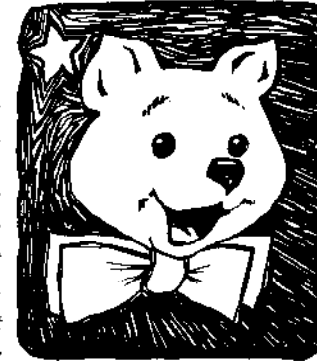
*Judy and Jimmy are thankful that Willie the Stork takes them to the Root Beer Ocean where they surprise the Crazy Quilt dragon who had taken the silver star from the twins' attic, and who has lost it. Paddy O'Cinnamon and his friends are captured by the Inkaboos and are sentenced to be thrown into the Immense Inkwell. Crazy Quilt comes to the rescue and, while swimming away in the Root Beer Ocean, they spy the silver star being swallowed by Wesley, the Wailing Whale! They meet Samuel the Seal who gets Wesley to sneeze up the silver star, only to lose it again to Penelope the Pelican who flies away. Presto, the Magician arrives to produce Penelope in his Magic Hat but, alas, the Pelican has dropped the star on the Island of Obie in Maybe Land.*

Chicago was a magic land at Christmas time. In those days, the stores and streets weren't decorated with the trimmings of the season until the season began... on Thanksgiving. Then, as if by magic, my world was transformed into a winter wonderland of color, excitement and sounds.

Christmas shopping began in earnest. In

school, the teacher started showing us how to make paper ornaments for the school tree (there was one in every room) and we drew names for the school grab bag. I hated it if I drew the name of a girl!

At home, we didn't wait for Christmas Eve to hang up our stockings. My brother Ken and I hung them up on December 6th, St. Nicholas Day. Since Santa himself always paid us a personal visit on the 24th, we hung our stockings on the sixth. (It



was my folks' theory that an early December visit from St. Nick might serve to "hold us over" and calm us down for a bit. The Christmas excitement WAS great at our house!) Ken and I hung our stockings before we went to bed and when we awoke the next morning, they were filled to the top with goodies. Actually, we

always hung Dad's socks; they were bigger and could hold more. We found candy canes, oranges, an apple, a Tango candy bar, a couple of Mary Janes, a few cookies, and a stick. The stick was a warning from old St. Nick: we had better be good for the next couple of weeks or Christmas might not be all we hoped it would be. Boy, were we good!

It occurs to me that we never asked why Santa came on the 6th and again on the 24th. It didn't matter. We believed in him. We really believed.

(The Santa hoax was uncovered by me one Christmas Eve when I discovered that Mr. Claus and my Uncle Ray wore the same wrist watch. It was not absolute proof, you understand, but I was very suspicious. My suspicions were confirmed, however, the next summer when I discovered Santa's red suit packed in a carton in the attic... along with his rubber face! I never told anyone about my discovery. After all, who was I



## SEARCHING FOR A SILVER STAR

to ruin Uncle Ray's fun?)

Meanwhile, back on the radio...

*Judy and Jimmy are captured by Pirates and taken to Captain Tuffy who takes the twins and the Cinnamon Bear to the Island of Obie where they see a Roty-Poly Policeman wearing the silver star. Crazy Quilt and the twins rush to grab the star. Crazy gets it first and runs to the home of the Wintergreen Witch. He is chased through a Magic Picture in the house and they all find themselves confronted by a giant. Crazy Quilt dashes away, but Judy and Jimmy find the giant, Fee Foo, is friendly. He gives them a magic signal ring and they follow their noses and find the Dragon with the star. He claims that he was enchanted into stealing it by the Wintergreen Witch, who immediately arrives on the scene and captures them all.*

It's fun to capture some memories of Christmas shopping in Chicagoland. We lived on the Northwest Side and though we did pay an annual visit to the Loop and to Wieboldt's downtown ToyTeria to pick up our free Cinnamon Bear Coloring Book and simulated Silver Star, mostly we stayed near home, visiting every store with a toy department and a Santa Claus.

I spent a lot of time at Scars on Irving Park and Cicero. What a great toy department they had. Santa was there, of course, and they had a model railroad section with the best train outfit outside of the Museum of Science and Industry. I spent so much time there with my boyhood chums Dan and Wayne that once the manager of the toy department treated us to hot dogs downstairs at Hillman's. I think he wanted us out of the way for a while!

When Mom wasn't busy baking Christmas cookies, she did some holiday shopping at Montgomery Ward's or Sabbath's at Grand and Harlem and my Dad watched

eagerly for the Annual Christmas Tree Truckload Sale at Goldblatts. Every year, about the second week in December, Goldblatt's ran a full page ad in the newspapers announcing their big \$1 Christmas tree sale. Fresh trees, of course — in those days no one ever considered an artificial tree — and you had to get there early to get a good one. Dad watched for that newspaper ad with as much anticipation as I waited for Christmas. When it appeared, we jumped into the car and raced for Goldblatt's.

We drove around to the big outdoor lot behind the store to choose from thousands and thousands of Christmas trees... all priced at \$1 each. Some were still on the trucks. Others were stacked in giant piles or were leaning against the building or the fence. This great display — probably half a city block wide — was fully illuminated by a single 40 watt light bulb, dangling out of a window at the rear of Goldblatt's. But no matter. We fought our way through the crowd and into the evergreens. After a while we emerged with THE perfect tree. We could hardly wait to get it home to show Mom. And, year after year, for the entire span of Goldblatt's Annual Christmas Tree Truckload Sale, it never failed. When we brought that tree home, Mom would say, "Is that the best you could do? There aren't any branches on one side of it."

Well, it WAS only a dollar!

*Judy, Jimmy, Crazy Quilt and the Cinnamon Bear escape from the Wintergreen Witch with the silver star safely tucked away in the Dragon's pocket. But it has been broken and they make their way to see Melissa, Queen of Maybe Land, who will repair their precious ornament. She gives them special instructions to repair the star, but they must go to the Darkest Dark in the Wishing Woods to read them. Snacker Smick, the Crocodile, swallows Melissa's magic instructions, but not before he reads*

*that Judy and Jimmy should find the Wishing Well and, with a single wish, wish the star repaired. They race to the Wishing Well and the Cinnamon Bear promptly falls into it so Judy and Jimmy must use their only wish to save him. As they are about to leave the Wishing Woods, they are surrounded by the terrifying Muddlers.*

*Cowboys from the Lollipop Hills arrive just in time to save them. Then the Wintergreen Witch turns up again and tries to turn our heroes into bullfrogs. It doesn't happen as she discovers that her magic powers are gone. Angrily, she takes the silver star and throws it into the Bottomless Abyss. Paddy and the twins go after the star and find it and a Silk Hat that flies. They take the broken star to the Land of Ice and Snow.*

As the first flurries of snow fell on our neighborhood, the first of the decorated Christmas trees started appearing in the windows of homes around us. At our house, the whole family participated in the tree trimming. Dad set it up in the living room and rearranged the furniture. Mom put the lights on the tree, and Ken and I helped with the ornaments.

How well I remember those ornaments. There were very thin, delicate Santas, silver pine cones, little glass snowmen, tiny gold bells that really tinkled, miniature musical instruments. And tinsel. Maybe you called it icicles. They were made of tin foil and they were precious. During the war they stopped making tinsel and you had to save it from year to year. And save it we did. We put it on the tree one strand

at a time, and took it off one strand at a time. But it really made the tree. It really did. And no matter how scrawny or lopsided that tree may have been back in Goldblatt's One Dollar Lot, it was the most beautiful tree we ever decorated.

Under the tree we had a tiny Christmas village enclosed by a green and red picket fence. There were little houses with lights inside, churches, carolers, a one-horse open sleigh, and the Nativity Scene. In the Manger were the Infant Jesus, Joseph, Mary, the Wise Men, and the Shepherds; the true meaning of Christmas.

What a scene. Our living room was filled with the shimmering lights of the Christmas tree and, as I sat on the floor between the tree and our radio, my

imagination was filled with the sights and sounds of a childhood Christmas.

*Santa Claus takes Judy and Jimmy, the Cinnamon Bear, and the Crazy Quilt Dragon to see Jack Frost who fixes the broken silver star and places it on a window sill to mend. It is stolen by the Bad Dolls and then recovered by Captain Tin Top and the Tin Soldiers. Crazy Quilt takes the star and runs with it to the North Pole. But he's captured and at last the silver star is returned to Judy and Jimmy who take it home to place it at the very top of their Christmas tree.*

Judy and Jimmy and the Cinnamon Bear searched for that silver star every Christmas... and every Christmas they found it.

My silver star is the fond memory of their adventures... and my adventures, too. ■



# Old Time Radio at the Turn of the Century!



Chuck Schaden's

## THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 PM

DECEMBER 1999 -- JANUARY 2000

### SATURDAY, DECEMBER 4, 1999 RADIO TO PLAN YOUR CHRISTMAS LIST BY

**CINNAMON BEAR** (1937) Chapter 15 in the continuing adventures of Judy and Jimmy Barton and Paddy O'Cinnamon in search of the silver star for the top of the Christmas tree. Snapper Snick the Crocodile. (12 min) *Those Were The Days* listeners have voted **THE CINNAMON BEAR** one of the **20 Best Old Time Radio Shows of the 20th Century**.

**BURNS AND ALLEN SHOW** (12-23-36) An early show in the series starring George and Gracie, featuring singer Tony Martin, Henry King and the orchestra, announcer Ken Niles. Gracie and the cast present a play she wrote based on Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol." Campbell's Soup, CBS. (28 min) *Read the article about Burns and Allen on page 2.*

**CINNAMON BEAR** (1937) Chapter 16. Oliver the Ostrich. (12 min)

**SCREEN DIRECTORS' PLAYHOUSE** (12-23-49) Edmund Gwenn stars in a radio version of the film "Miracle on 34th Street" narrated by Willard Waterman. Macy's Department Store

Santa is on trial to prove he's the real Santa Claus. Sustaining, NBC. (30 min)

**CHARLIE MC CARTHY SHOW** (12-19-48) A holiday program for Edgar Bergen, Charlie, Mortimer Snerd, Pat Patrick (as Ersil Twing), Don Ameche and Marsha Hunt (as the Bickersons), and guest Mario Lanza. Bergen tells Charlie about Santa's reindeer on strike; the Bickersons in a Christmas sketch; Lanza sings "The Lord's Prayer." Chase and Sanborn, NBC. (28 min) *Those Were The Days* listeners have voted **THE CHARLIE MC CARTHY SHOW** one of the **20 Best Old Time Radio Shows of the 20th Century**.

**CINNAMON BEAR** (1937) Chapter 17. The mud-slinging Muddlers. (12 min)

**SUSPENSE** (12-13-55) "A Present for Benny" starring Jack Kruschen in a story about Christmas shopping and a present that went astray. Cast includes Stacy Harris, Eve McVey, Benny Rubin, Junius Matthews, Joe Kearns. Sustaining, CBS. (28 min) *Those Were The Days* listeners have voted **SUSPENSE** one of the **20 Best Old Time Radio Shows of the 20th Century**.

**CINNAMON BEAR** (1937) Chapter 18. The Cacklebur Cowboys. (12 min)

### SATURDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1999 RADIO TO ADDRESS CHRISTMAS CARDS BY

**CINNAMON BEAR** (1937) Chapter 19. To the Golden Grove. (12 min)

**ESCAPE** (12-29-50) "The Cave" starring John Dehner. A Christmastime story of two ten-year-old boys who go exploring, find a cave and discover pirates! It's the spirit of the holiday that saves them from disaster. Sustaining, CBS. (29 min) *Those Were The Days* listeners have voted **ESCAPE** one of the **20 best**

*Old Time Radio Shows of the 20th Century.*

**CINNAMON BEAR** (1937) Chapter 20. The Grand Wunky takes the Wintergreen Witch to exile in Looking Glass Valley. (12 min)

**LIFE OF RILEY** (12-24-44) William Bendix stars as Chester A. Riley who invites his boss' son to spend Christmas with the Riley family. The boy's mother is going to the hospital and he doesn't have any interest in the holiday. American Meat Institute, NBC. (31 min)

**FIRST NIGHTER** (12-22-45) "Little Town of Bethlehem" starring Barbara Luddy and Olan Soule with Sidney Ellstrom, Hugh Studebaker, Herbert Butterfield, Willard Waterman, Philip Lord in their 9th annual presentation of the Christmas Story. Campana Products, CBS.

**CINNAMON BEAR** (1937) Chapter 21. The Land of Ice and Snow. (12 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (12-14-52) Christmas shopping with Jack and the gang. Jack decides to get a gopher trap for announcer Don Wilson. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, CBS. (29 min) *Those Were The Days* listeners have voted **THE JACK BENNY PROGRAM** one of the **20 Best Old Time Radio Shows of the 20th Century**.

**CINNAMON BEAR** (1937) Chapter 22. Meeting Jack Frost. (12 min)

### SATURDAY, DECEMBER 18, 1999 RADIO TO WRAP, BAKE AND DECORATE BY

**CINNAMON BEAR** (1937) Chapter 23. Paddy O'Cinnamon gets stuck in a pile of Christmas stickers. (12 MIN)

**LIFE WITH LUIGI** (12-20-48) J. Carroll Naish stars as Luigi Basco with Alan Reed as Pasquale, who discovers Luigi's Christmas list, but doesn't find his name on it. AFRS rebroadcast. (25 min)

**CINNAMON BEAR** (1937) Chapter 24. Judy, Jimmy and Paddy O'Cinnamon attend the Christmas Tree Parade. (12 min)

**THE SHADOW** (12-22-40) "Joey's Christmas Story" stars Bill Johnstone as Lamont Cranston and Marjorie Anderson as the lovely Margo Lane. The Shadow has a chat with "Santa Claus" to help a down and out family at Christmastime. Blue Coal, MBS. (28 min) *Those Were The Days* listeners have voted **THE SHADOW** one of the **20 Best Old Time Radio Shows of the 20th Century**.

**GREAT GILDERSLEEVE** (12-20-50) Willard Waterman stars as Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve with Walter Tetley as Leroy. Later, he

brings presents to children in a hospital and reads the Christmas story, "Why The Chimes Rang." Kraft Choral Club sings "Around the Community Christmas Tree." Kraft Foods, NBC. *Those Were The Days* listeners have voted **THE GREAT GILDERSLEEVE** one of the **20 Best Old Time Radio Shows of the 20th Century**.

**CINNAMON BEAR** (1937) Chapter 25. Captain Tin Top returns the star, but the Crazy Quilt Dragon steals it! (12 min)

**A CHRISTMAS CAROL** (12-24-31) This is the earliest known radio version of the classic Charles Dickens story. Ebenezer Scrooge learns the true meaning of Christmas. Sustaining, NBC. (41 min)

**CINNAMON BEAR** (1937) Chapter 26. The final episode in the adventure. Do our heroes finally find the star for their Christmas tree? (12 min)

### SATURDAY, DECEMBER 25, 1999



### CHRISTMAS DAYS OF THE 20th CENTURY



*On our last Those Were The Days program of the 1900s, we tune in to a variety of seasonal broadcasts from a variety of Christmas Days during the 20th Century.*

**PHILCO RADIO TIME** (December 25, 1946) Bing Crosby presents his annual Christmas program with Skitch Henderson, the Charioteers, John Scott Trotter and the orchestra, announcer Ken Carpenter. Selections include "Adestes Fideles," "The Christmas Song," "Jingle Bells," "White Christmas," "Silent Night." Bing narrates Charles Tazewell's classic story, "The Small One." Philco, ABC. (30 min)

**LUX RADIO THEATRE** (December 25, 1939) Producer Cecil B. DeMille presents a pre-release presentation of Walt Disney's "Pinocchio" featuring members of the cast who provided voices for the 1940 motion picture. A puppet comes to life in this classic fantasy. Cliff Edwards is Jiminy Cricket; Dickie Jones is Pinocchio; Walter Catlett is Honest John; Christian Rub is Gepetto; Evelyn Veneble is the Blue Fairy; Frankie Darrow is Lampwick. This is the first time the public was introduced to the now-famous Disney characters. Lux Soap, CBS. (60 min in 3 segments) *Those Were The Days* listeners have voted **LUX RADIO THEATRE** one of the **20 Best Old Time**

# Old Time Radio at the Turn of the Century!



Chuck Schaden's

## THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 PM

DECEMBER 1999 — JANUARY 2000

### Radio Shows of the 20th Century.

**PHIL HARRIS—ALICE FAYE SHOW** (December 25, 1949) Phil and Alice hope to get Don Wilson to play Santa for their daughters, but guest Jack Benny shows up in Don's place. Cast includes Elliott Lewis as Frankie Remley; Walter Tetley as Julius; Jeanine Roos and Ann Whitfield as daughters Phyllis and Alice. Phil sings "Jingle Bells" and Alice sings "Santa Claus is Comin' to Town." Rexall, NBC. (29 min)

**TERRY AND THE PIRATES** (December 25, 1946) An unusual isolated episode of the long-running kids' adventure show, presented entirely in rhyme. A nervous Terry Lee prepares for a "Radio Message" to his "Uncle Sam." He introduces all the characters on the show who extend their Christmas greetings to listeners. Quaker Puffed Wheat Sparkies, ABC. (15 min)

**CAVALCADE OF AMERICA** (December 25, 1944) "America For Christmas" starring Walter Huston with special songs by Woody Guthrie, arranged by Earl Robinson and sung by the Sportsman Quartet. A group of U.S. servicemen celebrate Christmas on a small island in the Pacific during World War II. A USO troupe gives them a Christmas show about America. DuPont, NBC. (29 min)

**FIBBER MC GEE AND MOLLY** (December 25, 1945) Jim and Marian Jordan star as the McGees of Wistful Vista. Fibber gets a Christmas gift from Doc Gamble, but no one can figure out what it is! Cast includes Arthur Q. Brian as Doc Gamble; Gale Gordon as Mayor LaTrivia; Bea Benadaret as Mrs. Carstairs; Harlow Wilcox; King's Men; Billy Mills and the orchestra. Johnson's Wax, NBC. (30 min)

*Those Were The Days* listeners have voted **FIBBER MC GEE AND MOLLY** one of the 20 Best Old Time Radio Shows of the 20th Century.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 1, 2000



### NEW YEAR'S DAYS OF THE 20th CENTURY

On our first *Those Were The Days* program of the 2000s, we tune in to a variety of seasonal broadcasts from a variety of New Year's Days during the 20th Century.

**RED SKELTON SHOW** (January 1, 1946) New Year resolutions are featured in the "Skelton Scrapbook of Satire" as Red appears as Dead-eye and, later, as Junior the Mean Little Kid. Cast includes singer Anita Ellis, Verna Felton, Pat McGeehan, Wonderful Smith, announcer Rod O'Connor, David Forester and the orchestra. Raleigh Cigarettes, NBC. (29 min)

**RAILROAD HOUR** (January 1, 1951) Gordon MacRae presents a review of highlights from *Railroad Hour* programs of 1950. Guest is Lucille Norman who joins Gordon, the Norman Luboff Choir and Carmen Dragon and the orchestra to present selections from "Red Mill," "Snow White," "Pirates of Penzance," "Bittersweet," "Sally," and "Allegro." Marvin Miller announces. Association of American Railroads, NBC. (30 min)

**THE WHISTLER** (January 1, 1950) "Evening Stroll." On New Year's Eve a college professor considers his future at the university. Bill Foreman stars as *The Whistler*, with Donald Woods, Barbara Eiler, Mary Lansing, Gil Stratton Jr. Announcer is Marvin Miller. Signal Oil Co., CBS West Coast. (28 min)

**GREAT GILDERSLEEVE** (January 1, 1947) Harold Peary stars as Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve who forgets to ask Eve Goodwin to the New Year's Costume Ball. Kraft Foods, NBC. (31 min)

**KRAFT MUSIC HALL** (January 1, 1948) Al

Jolson stars with guest actress Madeline Carroll and regulars Oscar Levant, Ken Carpenter, and Lou Bring and the orchestra. Al talks about his New Year's Eve party, then he and Madeline do a British sketch. Jolie sings "Avalon," "My Blue Heaven," "Anniversary Song." Kraft Foods, NBC. (30 min)

**GUNSMOKE** (January 1, 1956) "Puckett's New Year" starring William Conrad as Matt Dillon, U.S. Marshall; Parley Baer as Chester Proudfoot; Georgia Ellis as Kitty Russell; Howard McNear as Doc Adams; with Ralph Moody as Puckett. At the end of the year, a prospector seeks to kill the man who left him to die in a snowstorm. Chesterfield Cigarettes, CBS. (22 min) *Those Were The Days* listeners have voted **GUNSMOKE** one of the 20 Best Old Time Radio Shows of the 20th Century.

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (January 1, 1950) Jack stars with Mary Livingstone, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Dennis Day, Phil Harris, Mel Blanc, Artie Auerback, Sportsmen, Don Wilson. In a flashback to New Year's Eve, Jack's not going to Mary's party because he has a date, but at Jack's house before Mary's party, he proposes a New Year's toast to everyone in his cast. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, CBS. (27 min)

### SATURDAY, JANUARY 8, 2000 BOGART AND BACALL ON THE AIR

**BOLD VENTURE** (1951) "Death By Fighting Bird" starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall as Slate Shannon and Sailor Duval in a tale of "adventure, intrigue, mystery and romance." In Havana, Slate and Sailor bump into a cock fight. Syndicated. (26 min)

**COMMAND PERFORMANCE #945** (3-15-45) Host Herbert Marshall welcomes guests Janet Blair, Jimmy Durante, Edward Arnold, Sons of the Pioneers, Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. "He-man" Durante tries to win Bacall's love. Bogie steps in! The cast joins in to present their version of a "down-home" radio station. AFRS. (30 min)

**LUX RADIO THEATRE** (10-14-46) "To Have and Have Not" starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall recreating their original screen roles in this radio version of the 1944 film. Bogie is an American fishing boat captain who becomes involved with the Resistance movement in Nazi-occupied Martinique. Bacall, as "Slim" teaches him how to whistle. William Keighley hosts the program's 12th anniversary broadcast. Cast includes Tim Graham, George Sorel, Jack Kruschen, Betty Alexander,

Charles Seal. John M. Kennedy announces. *This is a rehearsal recording.* Lux Soap, CBS. (54 min in 3 segments)

**BING CROSBY SHOW** (2-13-52) Bing welcomes guests Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall who sing Bogie's song "The Bold Fisherman" from his new film, "African Queen." Jud Conlon Rhythmaires, Ken Carpenter, John Scott Trotter and the orchestra. Chesterfield Cigarettes, CBS. (28 min)

**BOLD VENTURE** (1951) "Twelve Year Pact" starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. An old pal offers Slate Shannon half of his oil strike. Syndicated. (25 min)

*Read the article about Bogart and Bacall on page 12.*

### SATURDAY, JANUARY 15, 2000

**THEATRE FIVE** (1960s) "Tomorrow 6-1212" featuring Rosemary Rice, Donald Buca, Marie Masters, George Petrie, Arlene Wacker. A woman calls to get the weather in New York, but instead she gets a strange forecast. Fred Foy announces. Syndicated, ABC. (21 min)

**YOURS TRULY, JOHNNY DOLLAR** (3-5-66 thru 3-9-56) "The Plantation Matter" starring Bob Bailey as "the man with the action-packed expense account, America's fabulous free-lance insurance investigator." When a mysterious woman dies, Johnny is questioned. A complete adventure in five parts. Sustaining, CBS. (75 min in five, 15-min segments) *Those Were The Days* listeners have voted **YOURS TRULY, JOHNNY DOLLAR** one of the 20 Best Old Time Radio Shows of the 20th Century.

**BURNS AND ALLEN SHOW** (9-14-43) George and Gracie with Bill Goodwin, Hans Conried, singer Jimmy Cash, Felix Mills and the orchestra. Gracie tries to get guest Brian Donlevy to join the "Upstairs Greek Art Theatre." Swan Soap, CBS. (29 min)

**SPACE PATROL** (1950s) "Voyage to the Future" offers "high adventure in the wild, vast reaches of space" with Ed Kemmer as Commander Buzz Corey and Lyn Osborn as Cadet Happy. In this episode, Corey and Happy travel through time and space with their prisoner, Dr. Scarno. AFRS. (22 min)

**RECOLLECTIONS** (3-6-57) Program 29 in our series of 33 broadcasts. Ed Herlihy hosts a look back at NBC programming: Dinah Shore; Charles Laughton; Wynn Murray and Ray Heatherton; Babe Diedrickson Zaharis; John Boles. Sir Harry Lauder. Sustaining, NBC. (24 min)

# Old Time Radio at the Turn of the Century!



Chuck Schaden's

## THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 PM

DECEMBER 1999 -- JANUARY 2000

SATURDAY, JANUARY 22, 2000

REMEMBERING

### TALLULAH BANKHEAD

**MAIL CALL #115** (10-25-44) Mistress of Ceremonies is Tallulah Bankhead who presents comedian Danny Kaye, singer Georgia Gibbs, Pied Pipers vocal group, organist Ethel Smith, Major Meredith Willson and the AFRS orchestra. AFRS. (30 min)

**SCREEN DIRECTORS' PLAYHOUSE** (11-16-50) "Lifeboat" starring Tallulah Bankhead recreating her screen role in this radio version of Alfred Hitchcock's 1944 film. Compelling drama of shipwreck survivors adrift in a lonely lifeboat during World War II. Anacin, RCA Victor, NBC. (58 min in three segments)

**ELEANOR ROOSEVELT SHOW** (1950) *Excerpt*. The former First Lady and her son Elliott Roosevelt interview actress Tallulah Bankhead about her career and other interests. NBC. (20 min)

**THE BIG SHOW** (2-4-51) Tallulah Bankhead is hostess for radio's last big-time variety series. Guests include Fred Allen, Portland Hoffa, Robert Cummings, Leo Durocher, Laraine Day, Jimmy Durante, Judy Holliday, Frankie Laine, Jane Pickens. Meredith Willson and the orchestra. Ed Herlihy announces. Judy Holliday appears in a scene from "Born Yesterday." Tallulah and Robert Cummings offer a scene from the Noel Coward play "Private Lives." Sustaining, NBC. (87 min in three segments) *Read the article about Tallulah Bankhead beginning on page 49.*

SATURDAY, JANUARY 29, 2000

**SUSPENSE** (10-11-45) "Beyond Good and Evil" starring Joseph Cotten. An escaped fugitive takes on the guise of a minister to steal a large sum of money from the church. Roma Wine, CBS. (30 min) *Read the article about Suspense beginning on page 24.*

**JIMMY DURANTE SHOW** (2-4-48) The Schnozzola with regulars Peggy Lee, Candy Candido, Roy Bargy and the orchestra, and guest Victor Moore. Jimmy and Victor go back to the good old days "Courtin' Corabelle." Rexall, NBC. (29 min)

**STORY OF DR. KILDARE** (2-8-50) "Amputation." Lionel Barrymore and Lew Ayers star as Dr. Leonard Gillespie and Dr. James Kildare in this series based on the popular MGM films. An auto victim retreats into a self-protective shell after losing her leg. Syndicated. (28 min)

**BOB HOPE SHOW** (1950s) Guest Zsa Zsa Gabor joins Bob and the regulars. Bill Goodwin falls for the glamorous Zsa Zsa. AFRS rebroadcast. (25 min)

**INNER SANCTUM** (4-17-50) "Beneficiary: Death" featuring Everett Sloane and Barbara Weeks. A hitch-hiker is killed in an auto accident and his body is mistaken for that of the driver of the car who decides to remain "dead" so his wife can collect the insurance. Bromo Seltzer, CBS. (30 min)

**RECOLLECTIONS** (3-13-57) Ed Herlihy presents program 30 in the series. Mary Martin; Milton Berle; Eleanor Powell; John Barrymore; Fats Waller. Sustaining, NBC. (25 min)

Coming in February 2000

## Speaking of Radio: The Jack Benny Program

# "When Radio Was" -- WMAQ-AM 670

Monday thru Friday Midnight to 2 a.m. Host Stan Freberg

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<i>December, 1999 Schedule</i>				
<b>NOTICE!</b> WMAQ, Chicago now carries TWO <i>When Radio Was</i> programs each night between Midnight and 2 a.m.		<b>1</b> Suspense Baby Snooks FBI in Peace & War Life of Riley Pt 1	<b>2</b> Life of Riley Pt 2 Sam Spade The Shadow Fibber McGee Pt 1	<b>3</b> Fibber McGee Pt 2 Green Hornet Life With Luigi Bob and Ray
<b>6</b> The Saint Great Gildersleeve Pat Novak	<b>7</b> Rocky Fortune Milton Berle Broadway's My Beat	<b>8</b> Lone Ranger Bickersons Superman Burns & Allen Pt 1	<b>9</b> Burns & Allen Pt 2 Mercury Theatre Nero Wolfe Abbott & Costello Pt 1	<b>10</b> Abbott & Costello Pt 2 Mystery in the Air Suspense Lum and Abner
<b>13</b> Richard Diamond Harris-Faye Show CBS Workshop	<b>14</b> Boston Blackie Abbott & Costello Suspense	<b>15</b> Grand Central Station Baby Snooks Abbott & Costello Charlie McCarthy Pt 1	<b>16</b> Charlie McCarthy Pt 2 Texas Rangers Lone Ranger Jack Benny Pt 1	<b>17</b> Jack Benny Pt 2 Nick Carter Escape Bill Stern
<b>20</b> Dragnet Fibber McGee Crime Photographer	<b>21</b> Directors' Playhouse Red Skelton Jack Benny	<b>22</b> Greatest Story Freberg's Christmas Box Thirteen Great Gildersleeve Pt 1	<b>23</b> Great Gildersleeve Pt 2 Six Shooter Sergeant Preston Life of Riley Pt 1	<b>24</b> Life of Riley Pt 2 Gangbusters Frontier Gentleman Police Headquarters
<b>27</b> Suspense Mel Blanc Show The Whistler	<b>28</b> Great Gildersleeve Burns & Allen Father Knows Best	<b>29</b> Milton Berle Bill Stern Suspense Ozzie & Harriet Pt 1	<b>30</b> Ozzie & Harriet Pt 2 Gunsmoke The Whistler Blondie Pt 1	<b>31</b> Blondie Pt 2 Boston Blackie The Shadow Lum and Abner
<i>January, 2000 Schedule</i>				
<b>3</b> Dragnet Abbott & Costello Gangbusters	<b>4</b> Green Hornet Life With Luigi Philip Marlowe	<b>5</b> Suspense Bill Stern and more	<b>6</b> Schedule Not Available	<b>7</b> Schedule Not Available
<b>10</b> The Whistler Harris-Faye Show Texas Rangers	<b>11</b> Lone Ranger Jack Benny This is Your FBI	<b>12</b> The Shadow Sergeant Preston and more	<b>13</b> Schedule Not Available	<b>14</b> Schedule Not Available
<b>17</b> Gunsmoke Burns & Allen Escape	<b>18</b> Have Gun, Will Travel Fred Allen Boston Blackie	<b>19</b> Suspense Vic and Sade and more	<b>20</b> Schedule Not Available	<b>21</b> Schedule Not Available
<b>24</b> Sherlock Holmes Fibber McGee Crime Photographer	<b>25</b> Third Man Life of Riley Richard Diamond	<b>26</b> The Shadow Bill Stern and more	<b>27</b> Schedule Not Available	<b>28</b> Schedule Not Available
<b>31</b> X Minus One Great Gildersleeve and more	<b>OUT OF AREA LISTENERS PLEASE NOTE</b> If WMAQ Chicago is out of your reception area, "When Radio Was" is heard on a great many other stations throughout the country. For a complete station listing, plus more detailed program information, and a steady audio stream on the Internet, visit <a href="http://www.radiospirits.com">www.radiospirits.com</a>			

Ken Alexander  
Remembers . . .

*The Rag Man, the Peddler,  
the Good Humor Man*



It's probably been a while since you saw a horse in the street in front of your home, or in the alley behind your home. In the 1930s and '40s, on Chicago's West Side, we would see horses, and we would hear the clip-clop of their iron shoes on pavement, every day.

Vendors and others plied their trade in the streets and alleys of the neighborhood, and many of them made their rounds in horse-drawn wagons.

The milkman came around early in the morning to make his deliveries — so early that most people were still sleeping. We seldom saw him, except when he came to collect once a week, later in the day.

Some dairies were using trucks in those days; others still had wagons.

Many milk trucks were designed so that the driver could drive standing. He was continually getting in and out of his truck to make deliveries, and this arrangement obviated his having to settle into a seat each time he drove to the next house on his route. I believe that these trucks ran on batteries.

Some of the horses that pulled milk wagons were so smart that they memorized all the houses on the route. Thus, while the milkman was making a delivery at one

house, the horse would pull the wagon to the next house, usually just a few doors away. In this way, the driver didn't have to climb into the driver's seat after each delivery.

Some houses and apartments were equipped with electric refrigerators; others had iceboxes, which needed to have the ice replenished every few days. That was the job of the iceman.

The iceman drove his truck through the alley, scanning the rear windows of each customer's residence for the square, cardboard sign which indicated that ice would be needed that day, and how much — 25, 50, 75 or 100 pounds. When he spotted one of his company's signs, he would stop his truck, get out, and go to the back of the truck, where, with his ice pick, he would chisel a cake of ice of the required size. This he would grasp with a pair of tongs and hoist onto his back for the climb upstairs. (His right shoulder was covered with a thick pad to keep it from freezing.)

When the iceman cut a cake of ice from a larger block, some shards of ice would usually chip off. If my friends and I happened to be playing in the alley, and if it was a hot day, the boldest boy among us might approach the iceman: "Could we have a piece o' ice?"

"Help yourself," the iceman would say,

and we would clamber onto the tailgate and each take a large sliver of ice. What a delight! It didn't have the flavor of a popsicle — it had no flavor at all — but it was every bit as cold. And you couldn't beat the price.

In spring, summer, and fall, peddlers of produce would come to the neighborhood. Each had a wooden wagon drawn by a horse, and as the wagon creaked along the alley, the peddler would hawk his wares: sweet corn, tomatoes, apples, potatoes, plums. I still remember one peddler's cry of "Freestone yellow peaches, four pounds for a quarter!"

Sometimes, the peddler's cries could be a bit creative. For example, one day we heard a peddler hawking new potatoes for "Twenty-nine cents a large peck!" That caused my parents some amusement, for, as they explained to me, there is no such thing as a *large* peck; a peck is a peck — eight quarts. Period.

Then there was the man who bought, rather than sold. We referred to him as the rag man. He bought rags, old newspapers, and scrap metal. As his wagon approached, we would hear him call "Rakes a lion!" which we construed to mean "Rags and old iron."

Rumors circulated among us boys in the neighborhood about the tremendous wealth to be had by selling scrap to the rag man. A hundred pounds of newspapers would bring ten cents. For ten pounds of aluminum, four cents could be realized. I never had any material to sell to the rag man, but I enjoyed fantasizing about what I might do with the money if I'd had anything to sell.

Before Chicago began using trucks to collect the city's garbage and rubbish, it employed wagons for the job. These were large wagons, whose bodies, I believe, were made of iron. They had sloping sides; their shape was somewhat like that of the plastic trays in which meat is sold at the super-

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**"He was a skinny, old man,  
and he had a large, two-  
wheeled cart."**

---

market. The garbage wagons were pulled by a team of two horses.

With all the horses around, you may be wondering where they were shod. They were shod in blacksmith shops, and there was one in our neighborhood, at about 3700 west on Chicago Avenue. Unlike the village smithy in Longfellow's poem, it did not stand under a spreading chestnut tree; however, it was a real blacksmith shop.

I once was in the shop — a large, dark, high-ceilinged room with bare brick walls and a doorway tall and wide enough for a horse to pass through.

Off to one side there was a forge. There was an anvil, and on racks along the wall hung horseshoes, which would be heated in the forge and hammered into the right shape for the hooves of the horses that would wear them.

Speaking of horses reminds me of the pony man. During the warm seasons he would appear in the street leading a pony. For a small fee he would allow a small child to ride the pony. The ride was only a short one — to the end of the block and back — with the pony walking slowly and the pony man walking alongside, but the tots enjoyed it.

One man, who owned neither truck nor horse, used to scavenge the alleys for corrugated cardboard cartons. He was a skinny, old man, and he had a large, two-wheeled cart, which he pulled like a draft animal, leaning forward as he plodded along.

Then there was the man who sharpened knives and scissors and blades of any kind. He had his gear in a hand cart, and as he trundled the cart, the turning wheels would sound a chime to make his presence known:

DING, DONG, DING.....DING, DONG, DING.

There was a popcorn man who came around on warm evenings. He drove a small truck in which he had a machine for popping corn, to which he would add butter and salt. There was always a bevy of kids around the popcorn man's truck.

Another vendor who attracted the kids was the waffle man. He came on Saturday afternoons, and to let us know that he had arrived, he would blow a few notes on a bugle. Right there in his truck he made waffles — sweet, hot, golden waffles which he would spread with butter and sprinkle with powdered sugar.

How could I forget the Good Humor man? He drove a small, white truck with a large picture of a Good Humor bar painted on the side. (Most people called Good Humor bars ice cream bars, but my mother maintained they were ice *milk* bars. To us kids, the point was of only academic interest.)

On the outside of the truck, above the windshield, was a row of small bells, which the Good Humor man would jingle as he cruised the neighborhood.

The Good Humor man wore a crisp white uniform, a white cap with a black visor, and a black Sam Brown belt. No matter how sultry the weather, the Good Humor man always looked cool. Even when we had no money to spend, we were always happy to see the Good Humor man.

He, and the other men who made their living traversing the streets and alleys with their horses and wagons, their trucks, and their carts, did more than provide a service to the people of the community: Each one added a bit of color to the neighborhood, making it a more interesting place to live.

And that may explain why, after the passage of sixty years, when I think of the old neighborhood, some of the memories which most readily come to mind are my recollections of the rag man, the peddler, and the Good Humor man. ■

# PEARL HARBOR WEEK ON THE RADIO

BY TODD NEBEL

On December 7, 1941 the American public realized with cold shock the choice of war over peace. This shock was followed



by a roaring anger, then a deeper determination. For a whole generation of Americans, that moment in time would remain indelibly imprinted in their memories for a lifetime. It came like a bolt out of the blue on a peaceful Sunday afternoon. "The Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor!"

If you are over sixty years of age you might have heard it over loudspeakers while watching a football game, while listening to the radio, while walking home from church, or in a breathless call over the telephone. General reaction was one of disbelief, shock, anger, and finally humiliation as the American public quickly dashed to their radios to find out more information.

Radio in those days devoted Sunday afternoons largely to public affairs and classical music programs. Such programming was thought probably to please the FCC, so audiences were not large, but they were loyal. At 1:30 p.m., Central Standard Time, NBC-Red was about to broadcast a University of Chicago Roundtable program while NBC-Blue was just beginning a Chicago Bears - Chicago Cardinals football game. A labor talk sponsored by the CIO

*Todd Nebel of Cary, Illinois originally wrote this article for our December 1991/January 1992 issue.*

*Let's remember Pearl Harbor  
As we go to meet the foe.  
Let's remember Pearl Harbor  
As we did the Alamo.  
We will always remember  
How they died for liberty.  
Let's remember Pearl Harbor  
And go on to victory!*

had just ended on CBS when an interim program with newsman John Daly cut in at 1:31 p.m. with, "The Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor by air, President Roosevelt has just announced. The attack was also made on naval and military activities on the principal island of Oahu." In his haste, Daly stumbled on the pronunciation of *Oahu* before repeating the incredible announcement.

The other networks delivered similar bulletins, while here in Chicago WGN (the Mutual affiliate), which happened to be on the air with a regular newscast when the first flash came, was the first station in Chicago to air the news. The time was 1:26:30 p.m. Soon all Americans had heard the news and had realized what had happened as bulletins adding new details broke into regular programming for the remainder of that afternoon.

In Washington, President Roosevelt met with his advisors as well as congressional leadership, then retired to work on his address to tomorrow's special session of Congress. In a reassuring message to the women of the nation, Eleanor Roosevelt stood in for her husband and spoke over radios in millions of American homes. ➔

## WRITERS' BLOCK

## NOSTALGIA DIGEST FLASHBACK

Since our magazine made its debut twenty-five years ago, we've published 183 issues. **Mark Nelson** was our first regular contributor, beginning a "Film Clips" column in September, 1975. For the next three years, Mark contributed 27 columns to the *Digest*.

**Karl Pearson** came aboard in October, 1975 beginning a long-running "Notes from the Bandstand" column. Karl has contributed 92 columns and articles to this magazine, more than any other writer.

**Bob Kolososki**, who began writing the "Film Clips" column in June, 1980, has written 90 columns and articles.

**Dan McGuire** was the first to contribute a "personal memories" column of his recollections. Beginning in 1976, Dan wrote 54 nostalgic articles before running out of memories.

**Ken Alexander** agreed to recall his days-gone-by starting in 1991 and, over the years, has contributed 39 columns reflecting his (and all of our) past.

Among the many who chimed in with other reflections on the "good old days" were **G. P. Lucchetti**, with 13 articles and **Russ Rennaker**, with 10 columns.

We've been blessed with many contributors over the years. Among those who have appeared on these pages many times are **Todd Nebel** (38 articles, most dealing with World War II); **Clair Schulz** (23 articles, mostly personality profiles); **Terry Baker** (17 articles); **Bill Dates** (16); **Fr. Kevin Shanley** (15); **Richard W. O'Donnell** (15); **Bill Elwell** (12); **Ed Knapp** (11) **Curtis L. Katz** (9); **Steve Darnall** (8); **Elizabeth McLeod**, (6) and **Erik J. Martin**, **Michael Haggerty**, **Bill Kiddle**, **Jim Warras**, **Richard Kunz**, **Wayne W. Daniel**, and dozens of others who shared their nostalgic interests with our readers.

## PEARL HARBOR WEEK ON RADIO

But as afternoon wore on to evening, military censorship clamped down, leaving radio with limited information to supply an unlimited demand for the news. The radio section of the War Department wisely issued its first command to all radio stations across the nation to omit all casualty lists from being aired. "The broadcast of casualty lists would in effect set up obituary columns of the air, when such times can be used to elevate morale rather than depress." The War Department also informed all broadcasters that "information regarding strength, location, designation, and movement of United States troops is a secret."

While Americans sat in a state of limbo not knowing when a declaration of war would most assuredly come, the outcome became more clear as evening progressed and America's vital interests fell one by one. More and more analysis and commentary, some of it badly informed, filled the network programming.

Program schedules were tossed aside, cancelling some shows and delaying others to make room for more news bulletins. Even commercials gave way to news. With the largest audience in history at its disposal, radio fortunately was able to relieve the tension somewhat as some of radio's old favorites and entertainment programs were allowed to air.

For instance, Orson Welles, whose "War of the Worlds" broadcast only three years earlier frightened many listeners, was ironically broadcasting a reassuring drama of patriotism about the time of the news flash. An ironic incident also occurred on the Dinah Shore song program that evening. She had announced plans for dedicating her December 7th show to American boys at Wake Island. The tribute took place as scheduled even though the Japanese were

attacking Wake Island that same evening.

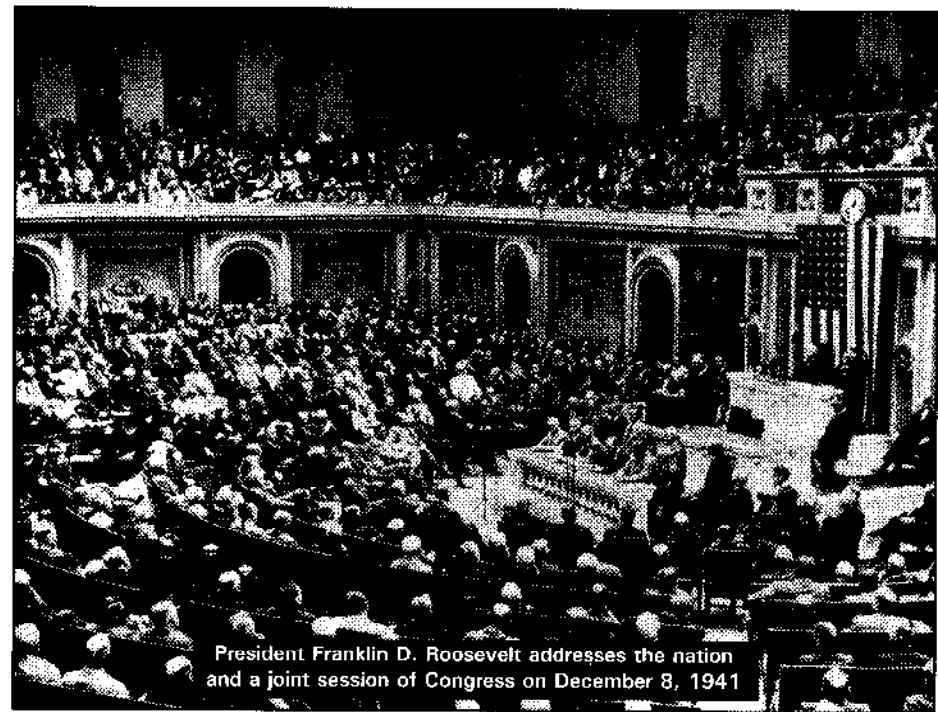
And finally, the Charlie McCarthy program was, by a stroke of luck, staged at an army camp that evening. Regulars on the program Bud Abbott and Lou Costello were quoted as saying they were disturbed about the soldiers' grave faces and wondered whether the men would be too serious to laugh. Fortunately, they were not.

But Abbott and Costello were not alone when they feared that the soldiers, as well as Americans in general, were in no mood to laugh. In fact, many listeners, when polled during those first few days following Pearl Harbor, and later following Germany's Declaration of War on the United States on December 11, 1941, felt that radio programs were "impertinent."

The general feeling was that such entertainment programs were unimportant in such momentous times. However, this reaction was already tapering off after the first fell week of excitement over the war had ended and as the radio industry quickly began restoring all of its entertainment programs by week's end. With foresight into the future of war, Bob Hope made the comment on his December 16th program that his troupe "would continue to try to help Americans keep on laughing in the face of war. One of the things that make us an unbeatable nation," he said, "is our ability to laugh. We may black out our lights but never our sense of humor."

The blackened lights that Bob Hope was referring to also had its effect on radio during that first week of war. Blackouts on the West Coast followed air raid warnings and the possibility of bombardment to major cities in southern California. Because enemy planes could make use of radio broadcasts to "home-in" on targets and because spies might use amateur radio, the FCC ordered all amateurs to get off the air.

Many local radio stations were shut down in California, Oregon, Washington



President Franklin D. Roosevelt addresses the nation and a joint session of Congress on December 8, 1941

PHOTOFEST

and Hawaii for several days to a week until initial fears of an attack had died down.

Pearl Harbor week also saw many West Coast radio producers discontinue nighttime rehearsals, with the most prominent being Cecil B. DeMille's *Lux Radio Theatre*. DeMille's reasoning for the cancellation was that the *Lux* performers were mainly movie stars who would be unable to reach the theatre because of the blackouts, thus causing them to become stranded or unable to get back home.

But home was the place to be for radio's Bing Crosby during the blackouts. When the war broke out and the command was issued for lights out, Bing already had equipped one room in his home with opaque windows from which light could not leak out. When the first blackout came, he turned out all the lights except in the blackout room!

As America eagerly awaited President Roosevelt's speech to the joint session of

Congress December 8th, the radio networks were gearing up for this greatest news event of all time. In fact, the networks were already rearranging for additional war news on a regular basis.

The Mutual Broadcasting System decided to set aside one minute every hour on the hour to broadcast the latest war news. Regular programs were subsequently shortened to provide for the added time for news. NBC decided to set aside the first two minutes of a half hour program as well as the first two minutes of a full hour program. And CBS followed the practice with important news as it was breaking.

In this historic week in American history, the entire country pulled together as one, following its leader Franklin D. Roosevelt into war with full confidence in him and our own convictions. Few people in American public life provoked stronger emotions than FDR. → →

## PEARL HARBOR WEEK ON RADIO

This American president had just helped us weather one of the worst crises that our country had faced since the Civil War and again he was there as a father figure as well as Commander in Chief.

Arthur Krock of the *New York Times* wrote: "The circumstances of the attack against Pearl Harbor were such that national unity was an instant consequence. You could almost hear it click into place in Washington today. Congress, as interpreted by readers and individual members, made a national front that grew in length and depth as fast as its members heard of the President's announcement."

"Yesterday, December 7, 1941, a date which will live in infamy, the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan..."

He concluded, "I ask that Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December 7, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire."

It took less than ten minutes for the President to deliver his historic speech. As he ended and looked up, his hands gripping

the edge of the lectern, the solemn air in the great chamber was shattered by thunderous applause and shouts.

This president, the first president to use radio to speak simply and directly to its people, had just spoken to 62 million Americans, the largest radio audience up to that time.

Never, at any other time in our history, was our country more together as one and radio played a major part in installing those feelings of national unity.

Following a broadcast of *Fibber McGee and Molly* and a heartwarming rendition of "Our Country 'Tis of Thee," President Roosevelt spoke to the nation in a Fireside Chat on December 9th, saying, "We are now in this war. We are all in it, all the way. Every single man, woman and child is a partner in the most tremendous undertaking of our American history. We must share together the bad news and the good news, the defeats and the victories, the changing fortunes of war."

And FDR triumphantly concluded with, "So, we are going to win the war, and we are going to win the peace that follows."

Following those reassuring words by President Roosevelt, every American felt as confident as he did in the final outcome of the war. ■



## A Christmas Farewell To Cousin Joe Off to War



BY FR. KEVIN SHANLEY

Farewells were never easy in our family. Mom often recounted her tearful farewell to her mother in Ireland back in 1927 when Mom set sail for America to join my Dad and to begin her new married life. Mother and daughter never met again in this world.

Dad, too, was reluctant to return in later years to his native Ireland. "It was too difficult to say good-bye once," he explained, "and I don't want to do that again."

But when World War II came to America, especially after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, farewells became more than

routine among families and friends. Too often people felt that they would not see these men, and later women, for years to come until it was "all over, over there." Even more poignant was the knowledge that some of them would return badly wounded from battle, and that some might never return at all.

Almost every family in our neighborhood proudly displayed the blue star service flag as a proud reminder that someone in the family was away fighting for freedom. And sadly there began to appear gold stars announcing that some family member had made the supreme sacrifice in the cause of liberty.

Our older cousin, Joe, was one of the  
*The Rev. Kevin Shanley is staff member of the Carmelite Spiritual Center in Darien, Illinois and a member of the Those Were The Days Radio Players.*



early volunteers in World War II. Although born in Ireland, he was determined to fight for his adopted country in the cause of peace. He soon completed his basic training at nearby Fort Dix and was ready for war, probably in the European Theatre of Operations.

But before being shipped overseas, Joe was given a brief leave to say farewell to his family and friends.

As youngsters, we had gotten to know Joe well because he was the mechanic for the local Sunoco gas station in our neighborhood.

On the way to and from our classes at nearby St. Aloysius School, he would often admonish us: "Study hard now and you'll be a great success in life. There's nothing like a good education." And this from a man who had spent as little time as possible in school himself!

My brothers and I accepted his admonitions without fully understanding what it all meant.

He also told us to send his best regards to my Mom. She was not only his favorite aunt, but also his godmother who was his baptism sponsor years ago at Fairview Church in Dublin before his coming to America as a small boy. They were especially close because Joe's mother, my Mom's favorite sister, had died when he was just a small boy.

As Joe grew to manhood, my Mom always seemed to be there with an encouraging word or small gift to make Joe feel

## NOSTALGIA DIGEST FLASHBACK

### THE WRITE STUFF

In 1970, several years before publishing our first issue in December, 1974, we offered a Program Guide to listeners of our *Those Were The Days* broadcasts. It wasn't long before we built up quite a mailing list. We were grateful that our first sponsor, North West Federal Savings agreed to pay for the printing and mailing of this free guide.

Soon, this complimentary mailing (sent out every six to eight weeks) had grown to such proportions that the savings and loan sponsor suggested the *TWTD* listings be incorporated into their regular monthly bulletin.

By the fall of 1974 we felt it was time to start our own publication, asking listeners if they would be willing to pay \$5 per year for the *Nostalgia Newsletter and Radio Guide*. In a few weeks we had more than 1100 paid subscribers. Over the years, we've had to increase our subscription rates from time to time, always trying to give our subscribers good value for their investment.

We're proud of our little magazine and very pleased that you have allowed us to keep it going for so many years.



special, and to help him understand that he was also very loved by his aunt and god-mother. In later years, Joe would try to reciprocate by helping Mom in any way that he could. Having one of the few cars in the family, he was always willing to drive Mom, and all of us, on vacations to the seashore, or any other place.

It was just before Christmas of 1942 when Joe arrived at our flat to say farewell to Mom and all of us. America had been at war about a year, and the tide of victory had not yet begun to turn in favor of the Allies. We knew that there were still grim years of fighting ahead for the Armed Forces.

As youngsters we were so proud of our cousin Joe in his neatly pressed khaki uniform, all spit and polish, especially his combat boots which he tapped nervously on the kitchen linoleum as he sat in a big wooden chair.

"I've been assigned as a rifleman in the Dixie Division," he explained to Mom and all of us. He really didn't know his overseas destination, or just couldn't tell us.

But we were happy to know that he would be joining a famous infantry division that had fought with distinction in World War I, and probably a lot of other conflicts through the years.

Strangely enough, the Dixie Division was composed mainly of Southern Baptists and Northern Catholics from the New York-New Jersey area. Their first battles in basic training involved just trying to understand the unusual speech accents of each other, and to learn to accept the differences in their religious faiths.

Cousin Joe would later win the respect of his men when, as a staff sergeant at the Battle of the Bulge and other conflicts in Europe, he risked his life a number of times for his men. They learned to respect both

his courage and his faith. Both were more than important to Joe.

As youngsters enamored with the glory of war, we excitedly asked him about tanks and guns and the great adventure of battle. He only smiled quietly and promised to tell us all about his experiences when, please God, he returned safe and sound at the end of the war.

But mostly Mom and Joe spoke softly to each other about adult things such as praying, keeping faithful to his religion, and to be assured that he would be remembered in her prayers each day. She also gave him a religious medal to wear with his Army dog-tags.

We had so many other questions to ask Joe but there just wasn't time for all that. Our questions would have to wait for years to come, and were sometimes answered when I began writing him with Victory Mail (V-Mail) letters through the encouragement of Sister Francis Baptista, our seventh grade teacher at St. Aloysius.

"I'd better be going now," said Joe as he rose from the chair. Trying to be brave, we smiled as we shook hands manly with Joe. We thought he was off to a great adventure that would be filled with excitement.

But we noticed tears in Mom's eyes as she kissed her favorite nephew good-bye. "God keep you safe and sound, and come back safely as soon as you can," she said softly.

Then, almost as suddenly as he had arrived, Joe was out the door and off to war. It wouldn't be until Christmas of 1946, after World War II had ended, that Joe returned to the Family with wartime memories that often seemed to haunt him for the rest of his days.

But we remembered Joe from that Christmas of long ago when love and prayer were much more important than war or words. ■

## The Name's Tallulah, Dahling

BY BILL OATES

Tallulah. The mere mention of that unique first name evokes one of the great twentieth century entertainment characters whose on and off stage antics enthralled audiences for nearly five decades. She did have a famous last name, one established as a prominent Alabama political force after the Civil War. However, this Bankhead, while Confederate-loyal all of her life, expanded the family's fame through the English speaking theatre to a greater extent than her prestigious father or grandfather ever did.

Born into relative affluence in Jasper, Alabama in 1903, the future shooting starlet debuted under tragic circumstances. Her mother and father married in 1901, and a first child, Adelaide Eugenia, came into the world a year later. Three weeks after Tallulah's birth, the girls' mother died of blood poisoning as a result of complications in childbirth. Young Tallulah was christened next to her mother's casket, and soon after began a somewhat nomadic existence when she left for her first home at her Aunt Marie's in Montgomery. When Congress recessed, the girls moved back to Jasper to live with the Bankhead grandparents.

*Bill Oates of Kouts, Indiana is a high school English teacher and author with a love of old time radio.*



Tallulah Bankhead

PHOTOFEET

John Hollis Bankhead, the last Confederate veteran in the United States Senate, not only helped raise his granddaughters but he also made an important impact on American politics. First elected to the House in 1887, by 1916 Senator Bankhead created enthusiasm to erect a bust of Robert E. Lee in the Capitol rotunda. By donning his Confederate uniform in silent protest, he waited until the tribute was commissioned. Also during that year, he cast the deciding vote for Woodrow Wilson at the Democratic Convention. Another accomplishment included getting the Federal Highway System started in 1917, before the senator's twenty-year tenure in the upper house ended with his death in 1920. (Of the two early coast-to-coast US Highways, US 30 in the north was named for Abraham Lincoln, and the road that ran from Washington, D.C. to San Francisco was named for John Bankhead. A bust to both men was erected at their origins in the nation's capital.) Another proud mo-

## THE NAME'S TALLULAH, DAHLING

ment in his storied career came in 1916, when his son, John, was elected to the House of Representatives.

Although her family had a comfortable lifestyle, Tallulah Bankhead's financial nest egg did not come from father John. He lost a big chance to become wealthy when he invested in a new Atlanta drink company, Coca-Cola, but sold off early and moved his money to the long forgotten Cherry Cola Company. Tallulah did inherit one item of value from the Bankhead side of the family, her first name. To trace the unusual moniker, one need only move east one state to scenic Tallulah Falls, Georgia. Grandmother Bankhead's family was en route to Alabama from South Carolina, when the future actress's namesake came into the world near the falls. Unfortunately, Granddaughter Tallulah never knew the meaning of the word given by the Native Americans. Nonetheless, throughout her career, the second Tallulah Bankhead was so proud of her unique first name that she refused to lend it to product endorsements.

Father John Hollis nearly became the first actor in the Bankhead family. After attending the University of Alabama, he went to New York City to engage in political work. While there he faked a stage record and auditioned for a play. Before he could accept a part, Grandmother Bankhead intervened and returned the boy to the safety of Jasper. Both he and daughter Tallulah always wondered what might have happened if John had been offered a role in a New York play. Apparently, Tallulah's mother also fancied acting, and so it is debatable from which side the eventual actress received her inspiration.

John Bankhead's impressive career in the House resulted after he successfully departed his long period of mourning for his young wife. His deep depression caused

long drinking bouts and even thoughts of suicide. Fortunately, his precocious younger daughter sensed his sadness and often helped free him from the doldrums. Much to the chagrin of her grandparents but to the delight of her father, Tallulah entertained visitors with recitations and bawdy songs. Another positive force came into his life when he remarried in 1915. So self-confident was Daddy that he was elected as Alabama's Tenth District U.S. Representative.

On considering her unique vocal quality, Tallulah Bankhead believed that a number of childhood maladies in her throat and chest were in part responsible for her trademark deep voice. Coupled with a botched surgery that sent the doctor's knife beyond her tonsils and into her uvula, the young girl faced an embarrassing vocal situation until it paid off when she decided to be an actress.

While receiving a strict Catholic girls' school upbringing, Tallulah became enamored of pre-World War I motion pictures. So smitten with actress Mary Pickford that the young Alabamian had her hair trimmed like that of America's Sweetheart. In 1917, Tallulah entered a *Picture Play* magazine beauty contest but forgot to send her name and address with the entry photo. Later she sent the important information, but, after months of waiting, gave up any hope of winning. Ultimately, her image did appear in the magazine with the caption "Who is she?" Dozens claimed to be Tallulah, until Daddy sent a letter and a copy of the photo. Although Grandma Bankhead objected to her granddaughter claiming the prize, Daddy let the girl have the chance to act that he missed years before. (Grandma felt that it was not proper for a Southern lady to work unless she had to.) Regardless of Grandmother Bankhead's feelings, it was easy for Tallulah to give up performing in New York a try, because the



Tallulah Bankhead  
Paramount Pictures (1930s)

WILL OATES COLLECTION

girl could stay with her widowed Aunt Louise, who had an apartment on 45th Street.

Tallulah's first brush with appearing in front of an important audience came early in her life. While in Montgomery, young Tallulah performed at one of Aunt Louise's parties. The governor of Alabama, as well as Orville and Wilbur Wright, the famed aviation pioneers, were among the guests. However, the girl's first trip to New York provided the teenager with a more formal chance to make good on stage. After Tallulah's arrival, the same aunt decided to move to the Algonquin Hotel, the very spot where so many actors and literary giants swapped stories. What Louise's motives were are unclear, because when famed Broadway producer David Belasco expressed an interest in Tallulah, the aunt told him that the two women would soon return to Alabama and that the girl had no talent. However, Louise returned alone, and then Daddy came north to support his daughter's theatrical ambition. He talked to Frank Case, the Algonquin's famed owner, and the hotel proprietor assured the

Congressman that he would keep an eye on the girl.

While in New York, Tallulah's connections to the theatre community soon expanded. Actress Estelle Winwood became an early friend and introduced Tallulah to Broadway luminaries like the Barrymores. At the same time, Grandpa Bankhead staked his granddaughter's chances at \$50 per week. In 1918, Tallulah Bankhead finally landed her first Broadway role as a walk-on in *The Squab Farm*. The \$25 per week job barely lasted a month. In the reviews even the walk-ons were panned: "might be better back in the care of their mothers." One Algonquin resident, Ivan Abramson, more correctly identified Tallulah's poise and beauty and offered her a job in his film, *When Men Betray*.

Tallulah Bankhead's first acting jobs seemed directed more toward film than the stage. At the time, there were numerous motion picture companies active in New York. She soon landed a second film part in the Samuel Goldfish (later Goldwyn) production, *Thirty-A-Week*. Tallulah received pretty good reviews when it was released in the spring of 1919.

Tallulah took a break from filmmaking and visited her sister in Washington, D.C., where the two cavorted as belles in the Capital social circles. Unfortunately, upon Tallulah's return to New York, her acting opportunities dried up for the next six months. Grandmother came to the rescue when she used her influence to get Tallulah into a second company of Rachel Crothers' *39 East*. Tallulah was not confident after her audition, but the author did chose the young actress after hearing a dozen lines. Eventually, the playwright, who told Tallulah to take up diction, ballet, and French, personally guided Tallulah in the production. When the first company stars Henry Hull and Constance Binney took weekends off, understudies

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Tallulah and Sidney Blackmer assumed the lead roles. Extremely nervous, Tallulah felt safe by merely mimicking the regular star. On opening night her jitters worsened when she discovered that several family members came up from Washington to see the young actress. Nonetheless, her acting career seemed well under way until the Actors' Equity Strike of 1919 closed the play.

Tallulah Bankhead's fortunes seemed doomed for awhile, yet she found that support of the actors' union was paramount. She wanted to show her cronies that the cause was just, and to put money where her feelings were, she pledged \$100 to the cause. Although she was broke from lack of work, a plea to Granddaddy to not let the Confederate flag represent reneging on a promise created the needed funds. In the first of several health problems that took her off the stage, just as the strike broke, so did her appendix. Instead of travelling with the *39 East* company, she remained in the East to recuperate.

The next acting opportunity came when Tallulah was cast opposite famed comedian Willie Collier in *The Hottentot*. A \$200 per week salary raised her spirits until renowned producer Sam Harris pulled her for, of all things, not having a strong enough voice for the part. She had already bragged to her father about getting the role, and enraged, she stormed into Harris' office, demanding that the producer write a letter to her father explaining that she was just not right for the part. Surprised at her audacity but not impressed enough to reinstate her, the great producer did write the missive; moreover, he remembered the young actress when he cast her alongside a young Katherine Cornell in Rachel Crothers' *Nice People* in 1921.

As her fame grew in the New York act-

ing circles, so did her friendships with famous stars. She established a relationship with Ethel and John Barrymore that lasted the next three decades. John's trips to the Algonquin grew more frequent, not to visit his sister, but rather to see Tallulah. Eventually, he invited her to the Plymouth Theatre where he was starring with brother Lionel in *The Jest*. Inside the dressing room she received two offers from John: the first to star with him in his upcoming motion picture, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and the second to practice some romantic scenes on the couch. She declined both.

For the next couple of years, Tallulah Bankhead's fortunes gained momentum. Her first real role materialized when she was cast in Zoe Akin's *Footloose*. Although the show was a four-week flop, it added to her acting experiences. As eleven workless months passed and her pawnables dwindled to nothing, another Rachel Crothers' vehicle, *Nice People* (1921), presented itself, allowing the actress a chance to work with Katherine Cornell. The next year Tallulah starred in another Crothers' play *Everyday*. Written with Tallulah in mind, this next vehicle allowed the actress to work with Henry Hull, who became a very important co-star years later. She replaced Kathlene MacDonald in *Danger*, but remained idle until the fall of 1922, when she starred in *The Exciters*.

During her first stay in New York, Tallulah Bankhead began exercising her philosophy: "foe of moderation, the champion of excess." At parties like those thrown by Dorothy Parker, the rising actress exhibited a serious drinking problem. Her devil-may-care demeanor created a reputation that followed the rest of her life. Acts such as turning cartwheels down the sidewalks of London with the Prince of Rumania became typical. She even created a throw-away line at parties when she had had enough alcohol: "No thank you, I don't



Tallulah Bankhead with Cast  
On Stage in *The Little Foxes* (1939)

PHOTOFFST

drink. Got any cocaine?" At one party the host did have the powder, and to save face, Tallulah took it and continued to take it until someone passed off heroin as cocaine. She became violently ill, and from that time on, she swore off all illicit drugs, refusing all but except doctor prescribed medicine. However, Tallulah continued to drink until the theater or an important cause loomed ahead. She stated in her autobiography, *Tallulah* that she never went on stage inebriated. She stuck to this promise, except when her doctor prescribed medicinal alcohol for the pneumonia she contracted as a result of filming *Lifeboat* in 1943. She had a reason to have a whiskey when her beloved Daddy died in the fall 1940, but did not.

When Tallulah told her own story in her 1952 autobiography, she exercised a very candid explanation of her life. After joking about excessive drinking and drug use early in her life, she later admitted that such triflings were just foolish episodes in her younger less stable years. Although she redeemed herself of these vices and gambling, her intemperate reputation remained.

The second act in Tallulah Bankhead's storied theatrical career materialized when she received a telegram inviting her to work in Sir Gerald DuMaurier's English plays.

Even though she had to travel to London, where she would receive half the salary she was making in the United States, she leapt at the chance. No specific play was offered; however, she was desired as an actress to play an American woman in overseas productions. Flat broke, she borrowed \$1,000 from a wealthy old friend of Granddaddy's; and with little guaranteed, she boarded a ship bound for England.

The situation of not having a specific role seemed to be a somewhat precarious status. Nonetheless, she literally danced the Charleston across the Atlantic to her new acting venue. Little did she know that an even greater problem loomed ahead. On arrival in England, Sir Gerald announced that Tallulah must not have gotten the second telegram telling her not to come. Actually, the actress ignored the second communiqué, knowing that she could charm her way into a part once she arrived. After flirting with DuMaurier and not receiving the positive response she anticipated, Tallulah then convinced his soon-to-be famous daughter, novelist Daphne, to intervene, and a second chance to act materialized.

Tallulah Bankhead began a love affair with the English theater, which lasted eight years. One half of her New York pay would have looked good compared to the thirty pounds a week she received in her first overseas role in *The Dancers*. When one actress left the play to have a baby, Tallulah then moved into what would become her longest theatrical engagement until *The Little Foxes*. Eventually, a Tallulah following emerged in London, as she progressed from bombs to admirable productions, until her salary grew to 500 pounds per week.

Tallulah Bankhead referred to her Lon-

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don stage years as "the happiest and most exciting" in her life. It was there that she met her first love, blue-blooded Stuart Napier, Lord Abington. While in England she achieved critical and box office acclaim in Sydney Howard's *They Knew What They Wanted*. She even starred in a silent British film, *His House in Order*. During her last English appearance, ironically in Rachel Crothers' play *Let Us Be Gay*, Paramount Pictures offered her a five-year contract to make films in the United States. True to Tallulah fashion, she left many new friends and admirers, as well as unpaid bills and taxes. The problem was that more quickly than the money flowed into her bank account, Tallulah spent it.

Tallulah did make one quick trip back to the United States during her London performing career. Somerset Maugham was casting his hit *Rain* (the Sadie Thompson saga), and when American actress Jeanne Eagles decided not to take her lead part overseas, Tallulah jumped at the chance to offer her services. She studied Eagles' portrayal, but instead of impressing the author with her personal rendition, she alienated him. He disliked both her aggressive behavior and the near carbon copy of the original stage Sadie. She was so distraught by his rejection that she attempted suicide. During her next London role in Noel Coward's *Fallen Angels*, she delighted the audiences when she modified the playwright's words, "Oh dear, rain" to "My Gawd, rain." Only she could pull off such an acidic delivery that would both insult Maugham and delight her legions of followers.

Her first concentrated effort on film stands as a forgotten era in Tallulah's acting career. As soon as she arrived back in New York, she began *Tarnished Lady* at Paramount's Long Island Astoria Studio.



At \$50,000, the salary was adequate for ten weeks work. Co-star Donald Ogden Stewart and director George Cukor held great potential. However, the trio's first talking picture was, in her words, "a mess." Paramount treated her as another Marlene Dietrich, but the poorly directed movie did not deliver. The next two films, *My Sin* and *The Cheat*, likewise lacked the kinds of scripts that best utilized Tallulah's talent. By 1932, she was working at Paramount's Hollywood lot for \$6,000 per week in *Thunder Below* and *The Devil and the Deep*, before being loaned to MGM for *Faithless*. She was often type cast as the wicked woman who was saved from her sinful ways in the final reel. Although this series of films did little to bolster her acting prestige, Tallulah Bankhead did feed a quarter of a million dollars into her bank account.

In December 1932, Tallulah returned to the New York stage. With Paramount dangling a new contract and Warner Brothers and MGM courting her, Hollywood wanted to keep Tallulah Bankhead. She even turned down a personal offer from Louis B. Mayer, and as a result of her imperti-

nence toward the MGM head, she assured no film contract from any studio for the next twelve years. At the time she could not be happier, for filmmaking bored her and insulted her acting talents. Unfortunately, Tallulah's timing was poor, for her stubbornness came just as the Great Depression was reaching its climax, with entertainment being one of the industries most devastated.

After rejecting many bad scripts, Tallulah Bankhead agreed to appear in *Forsaking All Others*. Because of the weakened economy, no backers for the play were found, and she produced the show herself. The play opened on March 1, 1933, the day President Franklin Roosevelt ordered all banks shuttered, and it closed fourteen weeks later. Critics claimed that she was much better than the show, and these accolades somewhat softened her \$40,000 personal loss. However, some of the money was recouped when the vehicle was purchased as a Joan Crawford screenplay. Not only was the opening of this play ill-timed during the depths of The Great Depression, but also no other parts were forthcoming for the next fifteen months. Once a part did come Tallulah's way, illness again caused her to forfeit a lead, this time to Miriam Hopkins as the title character in *Jezebel*.

Sensing a triumphal return to stardom in London, Tallulah sailed for England in March 1934. Before she could revive her dual careers as toast of the West End theatres, as well as eccentric socialite, she needed a role. After hearing that an old friend was producing *Dark Victory* in New York, she booked passage and returned to the United States. Her tenure in the lead was cut short by another malady. Ironically, both *Dark Victory* and *Jezebel* became successful film vehicles for her constant rival Bette Davis.

Anticipating a chance to improve her

strained financial status and to gain an opportunity to prove to Somerset Maugham that she could play Sadie Thompson in a 1935 revival of *Rain*, Tallulah plunged headlong into the production, with critics and audiences touting her portrayal. In typical Tallulah fashion, she had her secretary clip all of the complimentary reviews and paste them into an album for Maugham, who had snubbed her a dozen years earlier. However, the greatest acting trophy for her presented itself the following year.

The most popular historical novel in twentieth century American literature, *Gone With the Wind*, fell into the hands of David O. Selznick in 1936 for the then unprecedented sum of \$50,000. So popular was the novel that, in the proper hands, the motion picture held the potential to become a blockbuster hit. Sister Eugenia wrote Tallulah that the feisty Alabama born actress was fated for the part. Aunt Marie began a letter writing campaign to potential lead Ronald Colman and Selznick himself to encourage their support for her famed niece. Eventually, Tallulah was one of the final twenty women screen tested for the part. Both producer Selznick and director George Cukor enthusiastically courted her for the part. Rudy Vallee prematurely predicted on his June 17, 1937 radio show that, "if Hollywood exercised good sense, they'd make her [Tallulah] Scarlett O'Hara." Columnist Louella Parsons even said that the part was available for Tallulah's taking, primarily because Cukor and backer Jock Whitner were the actress's friends. Parsons added that when the seemingly inevitable announcement came, the columnist would "go home and weep." To the writer who loathed the idea of having Tallulah cast as Scarlett, the actress called her "a witch." (Unprejudiced by the moniker, Parsons later loved Tallulah in the movie *Lifeboat*.) Tallulah Bank-

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head felt that her third screen test, the last in Technicolor, doomed her to not get the coveted part.

Distraught at the rejection and once again tired of Hollywood, she returned to Broadway for her first major triumph and her only marriage. Jasper, Alabama experienced its greatest brush with fame when U.S. Representative William Bankhead gave his daughter away on August 31, 1937, to John Emery. Three months later the two starred in Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*: his Caesar received critical praise but Cleopatra was panned. The two later toured in *I Am Different*, but as their drinking and fighting intensified the rocky union dissolved in 1941.

When Lillian Hellman wrote *The Little Foxes*, Tallulah read along as the play developed. By the time the show was finished, the actress knew that her second most desired role would soon manifest itself. By January 1939, the drama began its out-of-town rehearsals in Baltimore. With fine-tuning, the tale of a Southern family hell-bent on self-destruction opened on February 15, 1939. As Regina Giddens, Tallulah received her best reviews in New York theatre. Essentially, she immersed herself in Hellman's prose and the character. For Tallulah, it was "the best role I ever had in theatre." Her reward was the success of a one-year run in New York and another year on tour. For the time being, her debts disappeared as she collected ten percent of the very healthy box office. Unfortunately, Warner Brothers gave the screen role to frequent rival Bette Davis.

Just as Tallulah was enjoying her tour with *The Little Foxes*, alarming news came regarding her beloved Daddy. The 1940 Democratic convention reflected the party's latest, and somewhat substantial, threat from the Republicans. So powerful

was House Speaker Bankhead that his fellow Southerners began a campaign to nominate him for the presidency. However, Will was among those who helped his old ally Roosevelt receive a commanding first ballot victory. During the maneuvering for a ticket, Bankhead was even considered as a Vice Presidential running mate. Although such promises were broken, Tallulah's Daddy loyally supported the party's choice, Henry Wallace.

Waiting to hear her father's address at the convention (she always tried to hear his speeches on the radio), Tallulah was informed that the Speaker of the House was too ill to make his appearance. Will Bankhead suffered heart attack scares during the 1930's, but he avoided doctors' restrictions and continually plunged headlong into rigorous campaigning. Instead of visiting her father in a possible executive office position in the Roosevelt administration, Tallulah and Eugenia accompanied their father's body back to Alabama for burial. The only man to stand by her through all of her triumphs, disappointments, and extravagances now left a void in her life.

After the state funeral, Tallulah returned to the *Little Foxes* touring company as the shadow of World War II began engulfing once peaceful nations. She became an ardent supporter of Finland, when Russia invaded the smaller country. When her beloved Britain lost so many, including many close friends, to German air raids, she lent her support to assistance agencies. After the battle of Dunkirk, she made the ultimate sacrifice and swore off liquor until Hitler was defeated.

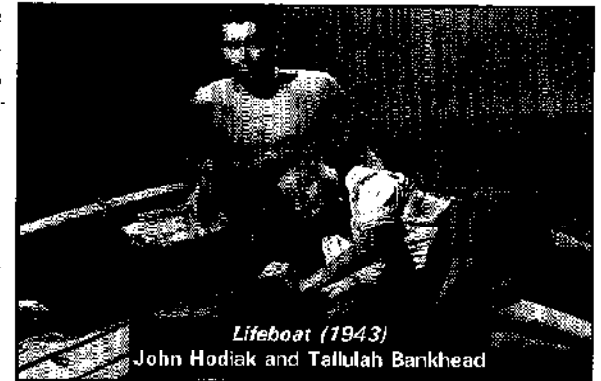
Tallulah Bankhead's next theatrical venture was a critical if not a mild box office success. Thornton Wilder concocted a "tribute to mankind" as a scrambled comedy which placed cave people in the modern twentieth century. Baffled audiences did not fully understand the anachronistic

*The Skin of Our Teeth*, but the Pulitzer Prize nomination committee was impressed enough to award the play as the best of 1943.

Tallulah played Sabina, a general utility maid, in the Antrobus house, where Mr. Antrobus (Frederic March) just invented the wheel. Directed by young genius Elia Kazan, *The Skin of Our Teeth* opened in New York on November 18,

1942, despite Tallulah's mercurial emotional outbursts at rehearsals. In her autobiography, she related such arguments with company members in her blasé, matter of fact routine. Those who worked with her usually recalled them less fondly. Nonetheless, the show opened to confused viewers, and by the time it reached Boston, the theater manager was giving tickets away.

When Tallulah was not helping the war effort (she helped Mrs. Roosevelt establish the first USO canteen in Washington, D.C.), she was again making movies. Closely related to her charitable work was her first film effort in many years, *Stage Door Canteen*, a movie that included a conglomeration of many performers who entertained the troops. In 1943, Tallulah assumed perhaps her greatest film role as Connie Porter in *Lifeboat*. This experimental one set Alfred Hitchcock movie placed a variety of characters adrift in a lifeboat, after a German submarine torpedoed their ship. One late comer to the craft is a wily Nazi (Walter Slezak), who seemingly only communicates with Porter. Tallulah's convincing portrayal of the glamorous journalist earned her the New York Screen Critic's Award as the year's best actress, but she was completely snubbed by the directors of the Academy Awards. For her \$75,000 salary, Tallulah endured repeated soakings in the studio tank, caught a cold as a re-



*Lifeboat (1943)*  
John Hodiak and Tallulah Bankhead

PHOTOQUEST

sult, and took lessons so that she could speak German convincingly. Although the characters were supposed to be cold from bobbing in the North Atlantic, she actually sweltered while wearing a fur coat under intense studio lights. After warding off two bouts of pneumonia, she moved on to play Catherine the Great in Ernst Lubitsch's film *A Royal Scandal*.

Returning to the stage, Tallulah's next opportunities took her to a variety of venues, including the summer stock "citronella circuit" (as she called it.) In 1948, she landed a plum role in a revival of Noel Coward's *Private Lives*. She played Amanda earlier but garnished little acclaim until Donald Cook joined the cast to play Eliot opposite her. The chemistry of the two helped pack summer stock houses and propelled it into a fall run. After an enthusiastically raucous opening in Chicago's Harris Theater, the show remained in the Windy City for months until the playwright allowed the show to begin a new Broadway return on October 4, 1948.

During the run of *Private Lives*, Tallulah Bankhead made the most important radio address of her career. Her immense popularity on stage and her devotion to the Democratic Party made her a prime spokesperson to introduce Harry S. Truman as a presidential candidate. Sponsored by the International Ladies Garment Workers

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Union, she made a special between acts live broadcast that denounced Thomas Dewey and his party's congressional members, while exalting Truman and the party connected to three generations of Bankhead loyalty. How influential she was over the airwaves can only be estimated; however, she was given prime seats in the inaugural reviewing stands.

Before completing *Private Lives*, Tallulah Bankhead appeared in screen tests for a film version of Tennessee Williams' *A Glass Menagerie*. The part of the Amanda Wingfield, the former southern belle, seemed destined to come her way, but excessive drinking before the final screen test excluded her. She returned to the play in which she appeared the longest, but she often gave uneven performances, relying more on her outlandish behavior both on and off stage. However, an unfamiliar medium came to stabilize Tallulah Bankhead and offered her one last glorious fling before audiences.

Network radio as the primary provider of electronic entertainment faced oblivion as the 1950's began. The Post War boom in television sets forced many radio stars to rethink the future for their talent. The National Broadcasting Company, which encouraged the growth of television, sought to create one last variety radio program to keep at home those who chose not to watch or who were unable to receive early television signals. Entitled *The Big Show*, the ninety-minute extravaganza was to have a monstrous budget, an overwhelming presence, and a formidable leader to guide the entourage each week. The lot of master of ceremonies fell to Tallulah Bankhead.

Even though she was tapped to host the biggest gamble on NBC radio in 1950, Tallulah Bankhead's exposure to the me-

dium was minimal. Her first appearance before a microphone occurred when she was in the London cast of *The Gold Diggers* (1926) and made a plea for listeners to support a local hospital. She claimed that she experienced greater nervousness for her five-minute spiel than she ever did on stage. She appeared on an early *Lux Radio Theater* production of *Let Us Be Gay* on December 2, 1934, when the radio show emanated from New York and did primarily plays. (Her *Forsaking All Others* was adapted on the same show in 1938 but with the film cast, with Bette Davis in Tallulah's stage part.) Tallulah's general fear of the medium and activities on Broadway kept her fairly far from microphones until a 1937 visit to the immensely popular Rudy Vallee show. Curiously, she was less nervous about that outing because she knew that an audience would be present. Even though Vallee often predicted that his visitors were often destined for success, he made an on air blunder in assuming that Tallulah would play the much-coveted Scarlet O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*. The following year she starred in the Lux production of *Dark Victory* (4-4-38), a version of her stage triumph (two years later Bette Davis starred in the same story, but this radio show was based on the film version.)

When her financial woes increased, often as a result of unsuccessful visits to Nevada's casinos, she frequently took guest parts on radio, but she refused to compromise her artistic integrity. One case in point occurred when Tallulah visited Eddie Cantor's program. She did not consider delivering poorly written lines in a lousy sketch until the writers rewrote it. Among other appearance, Tallulah played on an Orson Welles' program, *Duffy's Tavern*; and in shortened versions of *The Green Hat* and *Camille*. Her most rewarding appearances probably came on the *Fred Allen Show*, where she and the star twice (April



Tallulah Bankhead on *The Big Show* (1950) with Meredith Willson, Portland Hoffa, and Fred Allen

PHOTOFEST

27 and May 5, 1946) lampooned the then popular husband and wife morning radio couples. So successful were these parodies that they were reprised on *The Big Show* several years later.

When NBC decided to create *The Big Show* for its fall 1950 premiere, the network knew full well that it was up against stiff competition, from both its counterpart television network and CBS radio. The fall video line-up (only its third year of regular programming) included strong programs during the prime time hours from 7 to 11 pm (Eastern time), so the radio powers scheduled *The Big Show* to begin at 6 pm. Its early start hopefully gave it a jump-start during dinnertime and placed it against the first half-hour of network television. The early starting time also kept it free from radio's finest still on the air, when *The Jack Benny Program* played on CBS at seven. Ironically, Benny made the move from NBC only a year and a half earlier during the famous network radio raids perpetrated by CBS. Despite the careful planning, NBC was unable to garnish an audience worthy of its new and very expensive (from

\$50,000 to \$100,00 per show) program.

In order to give the competition a serious run, the network employed Dee Englebach to produce and direct, Meredith Willson to organize the one hundred plus orchestra and chorus, and an impressive group of writers (Goodman Ace, Selma Diamond, George Foster, Mort Green, and Frank Wilson) to prepare the script. Even though an admirable team was organized to create the extravaganza, Tallulah Bankhead accepted the opportunity to host the show under her terms. If being a radio star on a regular basis did not suit her, she could leave after four weeks and presumably return to the stage. Eventually won over by the show, she stayed for the duration of the program's two-year life.

*The Big Show* debuted on November 5, 1950 when Tallulah Bankhead introduced her first guests (Fred Allen, Jimmy Durante, Jose Ferrer, Ethel Merman, Paul Lukas, Danny Thomas, Russell Nype, and Frankie Laine.) "The glamorous and unpredictable Tallulah Bankhead" set the pace for this ninety-minute extravaganza, which ran the gamut from broad farce to Shakespearean tragedy. The initial success came at the hands of Englebach, who made her more than a traditional emcee. The consummate seasoned actress, who was initially nervous about performing in uncharted waters, showed that not only could she host such a show, but also that her presence was able to establish a certain tone for the program. (Entertainment luminaries like Groucho Marx and Fred Allen affectionately referred to the program as "the Tallulah show.") During its run, *The Big Show* had as its guests Robert Merrill, Ethel Barrymore, Judy Holliday, Margaret Truman, Bob Hope, Smith and Dale, Rex Harrison, Gypsy Rose Lee, Milton Berle, and Van Johnson.

Tallulah Bankhead's outrageous radio character aptly represented her personal

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life. For example, she had a penchant for sneaking uniformed service personnel in ahead of long lines that in and of themselves would have more than filled New York's huge Center Theater. One G.I. bid her "good luck" after she gave him a lift in her car. When he left, she broke into tears saying, "Imagine, he's going off to Korea, and he wishes me good luck."

Soon after the program premiered, Meredith Willson, who composed many songs for the show, proffered his most memorable song to date, "May the Good Lord Bless and Keep You." Intended for use as a one time closing number, Tallulah Bankhead insisted that it become a permanent fixture. Because of its popularity, not the least of which came from the military personnel in the Korean War, the song was repeated at the end of every *Big Show* thereafter. One irony is that when Tallulah learned the song for the program, she had to have Willson sing it for her one note at a time until her unpolished near bass voice captured the tune.

Despite Tallulah Bankhead being a somewhat reluctant visitor to radio, her work on *The Big Show* created several new opportunities to display her talent. *Screen Director's Playhouse* appeared as late-comer to radio, when it debuted January 9, 1949. Intended as the latest film-to-radio offering to compete with *Lux Radio Theater*, the program admirably succeeded with quality productions. Eleven days after *The Big Show* premiered, Tallulah reprised her film role as Connie Porter in *Lifeboat* on the *Screen Director's Playhouse* (11-16-50.) With a formidable supporting cast that included Jeff Chandler and Sheldon Leonard, the program led to two more appearances, *Dark Victory* (2-15-51) and *Humoresque* (4-19-51.) After her third appearance on the series, Tallulah bade the

audience farewell with her *Big Show* trademark: "May the Good Lord Bless and Keep You." Unfortunately, the *Screen Director's* radio show did not last as long as *The Big Show*, and left the air September 28, 1951. When the two radio programs ran on NBC, they were advertised as part of Anacin and RCA Victor's five nights of radio sponsorship. Ironically, the latter sponsor was hawking television sets on the radio, the very medium that was quickly facing major programming changes as a result of the success of the newer product.

As her popularity increased during the early years of *The Big Show*, so did the demand for personal appearances. Nervous about the prospects of entering a new outlet for her talent, she began travelling the lecture circuit. Offered \$1,500 to just be herself on stage at Southern Methodist University, Tallulah accepted the chance and spoke to the Dallas audience on December 5, 1950. She also visited a Chicago synagogue and a Wilmington, Delaware theater before returning to New York for the radio show's rehearsal on Saturday. Late in her life she continued lecturing, when she was not performing club dates or appearing in mostly forgotten stage vehicles. Before civic or university groups she amazed even herself when crowds came to hear her merely tell stories. After *The Big Show*, she reprised her role in a variation of the radio show as a Las Vegas act, using modified Goodman Ace monologues.

During the second season of *The Big Show*, the show's strengths began to wane and for several reasons the program soon expired. The season premiere from London, a joint effort with the British Broadcasting Company to celebrate NBC's silver anniversary, met with mixed responses. When Tallulah delivered Gene Fowler's poem "The Jervis Bay Goes Down" as a tribute to the British steadfastness during



*The Big Show (1950-52)*

Jerry Lewis, Dean Martin, Bob Hope, Meredith Willson, Lewis Armstrong, Frank Laine, Tallulah, Deborah Kerr

PHOTO: JEFF

the Second World War, she received rejection from the critics, who believed the reading to be in bad taste. The American press, which initially praised the variety show's quality, virtually ignored it during the second season. By 1951, television sets were being purchased at record numbers and more stations joined the NBC television network, thus pulling people away from their radios in favor of the novel medium.

During the second season Tallulah also faced a personal problem when she had to confront one of her hired help with the theft of thousands of dollars. The actress only wanted her money returned and to keep the incident out of the newspapers. In a sympathetic column, Walter Winchell praised the non-vindictive actress; however, the announcement caught the eye of New York District Attorney Frank Hogan. Thinking that Tallulah contacted the law, the former employee threatened to tell all she knew about Miss Bankhead's lavish lifestyle that included alcohol and drugs. Even though the episode made Tallulah a nervous wreck, she carried on at rehearsals joking about the very public trial. The end result found the former employee guilty, but for a number of reasons, including Tallulah's plead-

ing, the sentence was suspended.

*The Big Show*, which lost NBC an estimated one million dollars, expired in the spring of 1952, but a futile attempt to resurrect it on television occurred when NBC rotated it in as one of its offerings on the *All Star Comedy Revue* during the 1952-53 season. Despite admirable guests, this season was the final one. The once monthly *Big Show* format was a shadow of the radio program with

a smaller budget and less time. Besides, viewers were more likely to turn to the immensely popular *Jackie Gleason Show* that had just moved to CBS from DuMont during the same time slot.

As for television appearances, Tallulah Bankhead, and more importantly the character she established for the listening audiences on *The Big Show*, returned time and again to parody herself. To help Milton Berle launch a new color program for Kraft Foods during the 1958-59 season, she appeared as his first guest. The two closed the show nostalgically with the song "I Remember It Well." She appeared with Lucille Ball when Lucy and Desi starred in their post *I Love Lucy* show, *Lucy in Connecticut* in 1960. In 1964, she was heralded as the very special guest star on the *Andy Williams Show*. The time allotted for her elaborate and flamboyant number at the end of the program did not, however, match that of "the number one singing group," The Beach Boys. The aging star did land a plum appearance on the highly rated *Smothers Brothers Show* in 1967, and her final stint before her public came on the *Merv Griffin Show* the following year.

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Tallulah Bankhead did find more roles on the stage after her exit from a regular broadcast schedule, although none came close to her earlier triumphs. Among the plays were *Dear Charles*, a revival of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Ziegfeld Follies* (the 1957 edition), the summer stock production of *Welcome, Darlings, Eugenia, Crazy October* with Joan Blondell, *Midgie Purvis*, *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, a summer production of *Glad Tidings*, and *Here Today*. All of these productions kept her name in lights, at least briefly, with the last on the list closing after only five performances.

Motion pictures even offered the aging legend a few more chances to act, but they did nothing to enhance her career. In 1953, she appeared in *Main Street to Broadway* (MGM), a romantic story less important for its plot than for its nostalgic look at stage legends like Ethel and Lionel Barrymore, Helen Hayes, and Mary Martin. Tallulah also had the opportunity to play opposite Bette Davis in *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* but Tallulah declined. Columbia Pictures offered Tallulah a chance to play in *Fanatic* in 1964, when the talents of mature actresses such as Bette Davis in *Baby Jane* proved to be a box office success. Much to Tallulah's shock, the mediocre British production was renamed *Die! Die! My Darling!* to capitalize on the star's oft used moniker of address. She felt that "Darling" was an overused expression from her past. The mildly entertaining romp with Tallulah as a crazy woman holding Stephanie Powers against her will was the last Bankhead starring production. Unfortunately, the film showed that her once-famed beauty had given way to the ravages of age and raucous living. Attributed to her after the production, she said, "They used to shoot Shirley Temple

through gauze. They should shoot me through linoleum."

Appearing with Merv Griffin for the last time in public, Tallulah responded to his question about why she came on the TV show to be his guest: "It's one way of proving to people that I'm not dead." Years of outrageous parties, where she and her friends ingested a variety of wicked poisons, took their toll and helped accelerate her demise later that year on December 12, 1968. In one last chance for the deep-throated actress from Alabama to appear on stage, her character made famous on *The Big Show* was reprised when Helen Gallagher portrayed her in the musical *Tallulah* in 1983. Entitled "Misremembered," the New York Times' criticism of the show claimed that the star was wasting her talent (and the audience's time) with bad music and high school styled choreography. The reviewer went on to say that the story was in poor taste. In an ironic placement, the panning of *Tallulah* appeared just above a positive review of the revival of *The Music Man*, the musical written by Meredith Wilson, the musical director of *The Big Show*. Too bad that this biographical rendition of Tallulah's life, which had television exposure on a David Suskind Show just before the musical's opening, failed as a viable tribute to Tallulah's four decades before the spotlight.

Although Tallulah Bankhead's life contained numerous controversies and tempestuous episodes, her body of work on the stage, screen, and radio stand as a tribute to a unique talent. Despite all of the what-could-have-beens in Tallulah's career, her amazing successes stand as a body of work second to none. She increased theatre ticket sales, impressed audiences in several wonderful films, and almost saved old time radio. For these accomplishments, her stellar career deserves a deep "Thank you, Darling" from her many admirers. ■



## OUR READERS WRITE WE GET LETTERS

**BRIDGEVIEW, IL**— Just wanted you to know how much we enjoy the *Nostalgia Digest* and the *Those Were The Days* radio show every Saturday. It just keeps getting better as the years pass by. The series you did with Jim Jordan [*Fibber McGee and the Good Old Days of Radio*] was great. It must have been a pleasure for you to "work" with Fibber and the gang.

My father drove a taxi in Peoria for almost 50 years. He took many of the old time stars from the train station or airport to their hotels. He told me that he took Marian and Jim Jordan to the south side so Marian could see her old home. The people that lived in the house let them come in and look around. It had to be one of their last visits to Peoria. —DON WHITE

**CICERO, IL**— It is with great pleasure that I renew my subscription. I remember before the *Digest* when you just printed a monthly *Newsletter*. I can hardly wait to hear what you will do for your 30th Anniversary Show in May, 2000! —RICHARD BILEK

**EUSTIS, FLORIDA** — Though I've been in Florida for nine years, I still miss *TWTD*. Your magazine keeps me in touch with your shows and at least I can order them. It's great! —KATHY SMITH

**ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, IL** — Thanks for bringing back the *Cinnamon Bear* this year. We have the tapes, but it's better listening to the story on the radio! —G. WESTWOOD

**ORLAND PARK, IL**— My three young children, ages 10, 8 and 3 months, all are listening to *Suspense*, *The Cinnamon Bear*, and your radio show every Saturday. They love it! Keep up the great work and send our best to Ken Alexander, too. Hope he is on your show for another 40 years. —ERIK R. KUNZ

**WHITEFISH BAY, WISCONSIN** — Since you left WBBM, my only contact with *Those Were The Days* was thru the *Nostalgia Digest*. When coming home from Chicago on a Saturday in July, I decided to tune in

WNIB on my car radio 'til I was out of range. To my delight, I received a strong signal all the way to Whitefish Bay... north of Milwaukee. I now have WNIB/WNIZ programmed on my stereo. Provides great Saturday listening!

—ROBERT T. ADLAM, M.D.

**LOMBARD, IL** — When you speak of Saturday morning radio experiences as a kid, your voice resonated with great enthusiasm and fondness. Being the same age, I, too, found myself going back to those wonderful, innocent days of *Let's Pretend*. I've been a teacher for 30 years.

—JOAN YOUNG

**AKRON, OHIO**— Sign me up for two more years! I must say I really enjoyed the article about "Vintage WLS 75th Anniversary" [Aug/Sept, 1999]. On page 32 was a picture of a fan magazine called "Stand By." About ten years ago I got a "Stand By" at a garage sale. It's in good shape for 62 years old dated 11-27-37.

I'm looking forward to visiting the Museum of Broadcast Communications next summer as there will be some 8,000 to 10,000 letter carriers in Chicago for our National Convention 2000 and I will be one of them. Hope to visit your studio.

—PAUL MERLO

**(ED. NOTE** — Please let us know the exact dates of the convention, so we can get our *Digest* to the post office before the sessions begin!)

**BROOKLYN, OHIO** — Enjoyed the Vintage WLS article. A very unique station. I recall that WLS and WENR shared time. One of my old White Radio Log books of 1953 vintage verifies this. Both on 890 kc, both 50 kw. I'm wondering if WENR was strictly an NBC Blue network outlet and WLS mostly locally produced "down home" type programs? And I still wonder if two separate transmitters were involved.

—W. H. CORRIGAN

**(ED. NOTE**— An occasional NBC Blue network program was carried while WLS had the frequency, but mostly they were





## MORE LETTERS

two separate stations, sharing different times of the day. We believe that each station had its own transmitter.)

**EVANSTON, IL** — Enjoyed your “Listeners Choose 20 Best Old Time Radio Shows of the 20th Century” [Oct/Nov, 1999]. Sat back in my lawn chair with a Honkers Ale and read the selections starting at number 20 and imagining the theme songs of each show and I read the descriptive paragraph. I believe your efforts in the recapture of past radio have made a significant contribution to the development of a collective memory of our time.

In the August/September issue, one of your readers, Tom Jarnowski, asked about a program called “Uncle Dan” that he remembered listening to in school. I believe the show he remembers was, “Uncle Dan of Froggy Hollow Farm.” “Uncle Dan” would sit in a rocking chair on his farmhouse porch and tell stories to children — most of the stories having to do with animals. The program was aired on WBEZ for many years and was, in fact, one of the most popular with school children. This was back in the days when WBEZ was a school-educational station and was run from the Chicago Board of Education offices. —**RICK RONVIK**

**NORTHBROOK, IL** — Although I did not participate in the voting for the 20 best old time radio shows of the century, I will agree with the first three choices [*Jack Benny*, *Suspense*, *Fibber McGee*]. After that — well! I can’t believe *Vic and Sade* would make the top 20, let alone the top 10. To me it was boring. I also think if you removed the “War of the Worlds” episode from the *Mercury Theatre* series, it would not have made it. Was *Great Gildersleeve* funnier than *It Pays to be Ignorant*? Not in my opinion. I can’t believe *Escape* is in and *Grand Central Station* is out. I can’t believe *I Love A Mystery* is in and *Mr. District Attorney* is out. I can’t believe *Cinnamon Bear* is in and *Let’s Pretend* is out. Was *Lights Out* better than *Inner Sanctum*? I can’t believe *One Man’s Family* (an overgrown soap opera), *Our Miss Brooks*

and *X Minus One* are in, and *Fred Allen*, *Bob Hope*, *Red Skelton*, *Eddie Cantor*, *Burns and Allen* and *Moore and Durante* are out (all of whom, in my opinion, are funnier than *Charlie McCarthy*). —**PHILIP SCHWIMMER**

**EASTON, PENNSYLVANIA** — I occasionally see *Nostalgia Digest* when my brother, who lives in the Chicago area, gives me back issues. Hence I was pleased to see your April/May 1999 issue with the article on William Boyd, not because I have nostalgic memories of Hopalong Cassidy so much as the fact that Boyd made a number of visits to my high school fencer, in the Roseland section of Chicago, during the years I attended (1946-50). But Boyd’s visits and talks weren’t just those of a movie star showing up for his fans.

The principal of Fenger during those years was J. Trimble Boyd, William Boyd’s brother. William Boyd’s visits, like those of tenor Phil Regan and other people from show business, clearly indicated J. Trimble Boyd’s connections through his brother. Thought you’d appreciate the local connection. —**PAUL SCHLUETER**

**ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, IL** — I had been out of town for two weeks and was eager to hear your program. I was anxious to hear old-time radio stories. I was greatly disappointed to learn you were airing four hours of big band music [August 28]. I think you should go back to what made your program popular originally — radio stories. A small amount of music mixed with stories is, to me, a good blend. Also, I feel that if you have an interview with an old-time star, that you limit your four-hour offering to only one interview. I enjoy your reminiscences, but I hope you’ll go back to your original “claim to fame” and broadcast old time radio stories. The music is available nearly everywhere, but the vintage stories you’ve offered before are unique. Please go back to being different and play more stories. —**SHIRLEY BARTELT**

**WAUKEGAN, IL** — I’ve listened to *TWTD* for years, including attending some broadcasts and other events you’ve presented. You’re doing a great job and are to be commended for your contributions to the preservation of old-time radio! In the late 1930s or early 1940s, growing up in Iowa, I often listened to a radio program out of Chicago called

*Club Matinee*. It was broadcast weekday afternoons around 3 p.m. Hosted by Ransom Sherman, it was a variety show with music and comedy.

I think it originated in the Merchandise Mart. As I remember, Garry Moore was co-host and the orchestra was led by Jose Betancourt. One hilarious segment that was occasionally included was a performance by the “Stedgie Prep Military Band” — an aggregation (aggravation?) which deliberately played out of tune, with instruments coming in at the wrong time, etc. Their renditions of pieces like “Dance of the Hours” and “Poet and Peasant Overture” were some of the funniest things I have ever heard. Do any recordings of these broadcasts exist? —**ROBERT COATES**  
**(ED. NOTE)** — *Club Matinee* was on the air from 1937 to 1943, but we have not been able to uncover any copies of the program. That doesn’t mean they don’t exist, so we keep looking. If we should find one, we’ll share it with you and all our listeners.)

**MIDLOTHIAN, IL** — I am 83 years old and never miss a program. I remember our first radio which was an RCA Victor. It was a radio-phonograph with a car battery for electric. I was a child of six or seven. An Irish singer named Eddie Loftis had a program and after dinner a man read a story for children out of the newspaper. —**CECELIA BROWN**

**GEPP, ARIZONA** — Hooray! Your mention of possibly going on the Internet has brought tears of joy to my eyes. After ten long years, the thing I miss most (besides family and friends) from Chicagoland is *Those Were The Days*. I’ve found substitutes for hot dogs, the Cubs, and the Lake — even Marshall Fields, but there is nothing like your show. Please, let me encourage you for all us “transplants” — please go on the Internet! I don’t have a computer or the Internet, but I’ll get both... as soon as you’re on!! —**LUANNE SWANSON**

**DE KALB, IL** — Thanks for including Andy Ooms’ article “Radio Youth” [June/July, 1999] about growing up with radio in South Dakota. I was born and raised in Watertown, SD, and shared many of the same radio experiences. Like Andy, I spent a lot of time listening to WNAX in Yankton. I find it incredible when Andy says *Your*

*Neighbor Lady* is still on the air at WNAX after almost 60 years! Our family listened to her every day back in the 1950s. Since I lived further to the east and north than Andy did, I was able to pick up a strong signal from WCCO in Minneapolis, which ran all the CBS shows.

To get baseball scores I always tuned in to WCCO to listen to Halsey Hall, “the Dean of Northwest Sportscasters.” In the late 1950s I also used to listen to a sports show on a St. Paul Station (KSTP) that featured “Da Crusher Wit’ All Da News in Da Woild o’ Sports,” the Crusher being a rival of Gorgeous George. Even back in those days Minnesotans liked their wrestlers! Our local station in Watertown, KWAT, carried Mutual’s *Game of the Day* with Al Hefer. As I grew up and as radio dramas and comedies disappeared, my listening habits changed and by my senior year in high school (1959-60), most of my listening time was spent with Dick Biondi’s rock and roll broadcasts on WLS in Chicago. In 1960 I left to attend college at Northwestern and my South Dakota radio days were at an end. The article brought back some great memories. And congrats on your 1500th *TWTD* show. I’ve enjoyed listening to almost every one of them. —**PHIL VANDREY**

**CHICAGO** — Congratulations on the 1500th broadcast of *Those Were The Days* [August 7, 1999]. I can honestly say that I feel I have listened to every one of those monumental programs. I feel that we are “family” inasmuch as that I go back to the days of WLTD and the rookie broadcaster who had the same love affair with old-time radio as I did.

I was a charter subscriber to that little newsletter called *Nostalgia Digest* and used to comb through it like some of the comics and Big Little Books of childhood. You have been with me (via tapes of your shows) during four stays in the hospital, numerous vacations in the mountains, on the water-walks with the dog through the park, and put me to sleep just about every night.

I have worn out three tape decks through the years, along with two digital timers locked onto 1-5 pm each Saturday afternoon. I truly feel we are family. Thank you for the many hours of entertainment and dedicated service. From a 68-year-old going on 14! —**JIM L. CLARK**



## STILL MORE LETTERS

**LINCOLNWOOD, IL** — Congratulations on 1500 programs.. and more in the future. Saturday would not be the same without you on the air with all the programs. Frankly, I just had to give up recording you each week. There is just no more room for all those tapes! Naturally, you often broadcast items I wish I had, but I have to face the fact that I must stop collecting more stuff! I'm just glad you are there.

— **BARBARA SCHWARTZ**

**CHICAGO** — Now that your Show Number 1500 is history, it's clear that this letter is long overdue. I'm not one of those people who's been with you since Show Number 1, but I can't think of a better time to have come aboard your bandwagon than the day my wife and I did.

One of my wife's co-workers had told her about "some guy who plays old-time radio shows every Saturday," and since we were going to be in the kitchen all day working on Christmas cookies, we decided to try to find this guy.

It was December 7, 1991, and we got in on the ground floor of what I still consider one of the great achievements of broadcasting in the last half of the century — your multi-year reenactment of World War II. We have missed very few shows since that first one, and we aim to miss as few as possible as long as you continue.

I'm a baby boomer, so I wasn't around for the great radio days. That doesn't mean I don't know about them. Such was the power of those old shows (and of my parents' constant recollection and retelling of them), that Fibber and Molly were as real to me as many of the relatives I had heard of and never met.

As the years progressed, I got to meet those relatives in the flesh. I was mostly unimpressed. Then, finally, in the '90s, thanks to you, I got to meet Fibber and Molly and Gildersleeve and Father Barbour and all the rest. You've not only given me part of my heritage, you've actually given me the *better* part.

As we sat or worked in our kitchen on Saturdays after that first day, we listened to

the world war progress to its not-always-certain conclusion. Then we've followed you on all the pathways you've taken us on since. Our tastes haven't always matched yours (I just don't think you will ever interest either of us in Jane Ace), but we're glad we've heard it all. And most of all, we're glad that you're the one who's been playing the shows for us.

You would probably be the first one to admit that you will never win the title of World's Greatest Announcer. But even if we had the power to bring back any of the giants of the Golden Age, still, neither of us can imagine anyone we would rather hear on Saturday, because it's so absolutely obvious that you love the stuff you play and that you love to share it with us. There's a point at which great devotion trumps great diction, and you've reached that point and gone far beyond it.

After playing an interview, you once said how great it was to be able to sit across from one of the radio greats and say "Thank you."

It's unlikely we will ever sit across from you. But we do want to say Thank You. We don't have company over that often, but you're welcome to our kitchen every week for as many years as you want to keep visiting.

— **KAY AND JERRY STEMNOCK**

**(ED. NOTE** — You cannot know how much your kind words mean to us. It's a pleasure to present our programs, do the interviews, and publish the *Digest*. We really appreciate the comments from everyone who takes time to write or call.)

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