



# The Old Radio Times

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## Old-time Radio is New Again by Christopher W. Reid



I first discovered old-time radio, or OTR, during a trip with my parents up to Canada when I was in college. Although my father was not normally interested in listening to the car radio, he would frequently switch it on around Oswego, NY. That was where you got the strongest signal for WRVO, a little station that broadcast old radio shows. Then, suddenly, breaking the silence of the car's interior, and over the hum of the traffic outside, I detected a mixture of voices from a long-departed, now seemingly mythical era.

I think it probably struck me at first as somewhat odd that entertainment was being offered here that you couldn't see – a charming artifact of my father's childhood. But, I also noticed something else while I was staring out the car window at the incessant stream of traffic headed north. A mental nerve had been tickled. Where there had been disconnected thoughts of sundry things – school or perhaps some disagreement – my

imagination was now dutifully sewing together the audible threads of a live Abbott and Costello routine and the hokey high adventure of the Lone Ranger.

Sixty years earlier there had been a sound-stage and cast of now-forgotten actors who had thrown together their best performances for my father, a boy bending his ear to the radio in Brookline, Massachusetts. Now, in the family caravan, which had been transformed into a kind of time capsule, I was discovering a world of humor and drama to which I would subsequently return again and again.

But, why would anyone in the 21st century be interested in listening to old-time radio? What pleasures could it possibly have in store for us if we're used to more sophisticated visual programming? I'm proof at least that it is not just Internet-surfing octogenarians who are downloading OTR. With such easy access to

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old-time radio on the Web, I also have a suspicion that people from younger age groups (including the 30-somethings in my own) are enjoying old-time radio as much as I am. And, if they're not, they should be.

I'd like to be able to convince even the most jaded, modern, high-def, 3D consumer of entertainment that old-time radio can be as enjoyable as any other kind of diversion. Old-time radio, in other words, is worth a second look, if not a first listen. While OTR's appeal is little different than other forms of entertainment, it nevertheless does not conform to what people in Generation X (Y or Z) generally think of with regard to any shows before, say, the 1990s *NYPD Blue*: that it's somehow corny, naïve, and probably overly conscious of the moral standards of its time. In short, that it's unrealistic. Of course, if you add to this cultural dimension the technological one – namely that entertainment you can only hear is by definition less real – the argument about an old-time radio show being unrealistic seems even more convincing.

But, do the arguments of culture and technology hold up? Or better: Do they need to? A famous media theorist once said that “the medium is the message.” I would change this to: “the listener is the message,” and if she's not a good listener, the message, and hence the appeal of old-time radio, is lost.

Truly listening to an old-time radio show means being able to imagine how the elements of a narrative fit together in order to give it body and soul. Old-time radio fans do not want for realism, even though their ears are central to their experience. Radio can be as realistic as any medium, as long as your ears and your mind do the work – as long as you're disposed to play along.

A realistic show – whatever the medium or format – needs to mirror a person's sense of



what people are actually like and how they might respond in given situations. Old-time radio is capable of doing this, and there is probably no better show for illustrating that it can be as realistic as any contemporary TV program or movie than the series *Gunsmoke* (1952-1961). Each episode famously begins with the sound of a galloping horse and a single ricocheting bullet. Then there's a bursting cacophony of menacing music, as an ensemble of string instruments seems to slice downward in Hitchcockian fashion until coming to a halt, the reverberating tones opening a space for the weekly announcer to introduce the show with its momentous lines:

*"Around Dodge City and in the territory on west, there's just one way to handle the killers and the spoilers and that's with a U.S. Marshal and the smell of gun smoke."*

The string music picks up again, lushly and reflectively, like a loping horse through the prairie, and builds to a crescendo of plaintive



horns that give way to the introduction's second part:

*"Gunsmoke!... the transcribed story of the violence that moved west with young America. And the story of a man who moved with it, Matt Dillon, United States Marshal."*

A sudden rousing fanfare ensues, and then the story begins...

The radio series' central figure is Marshal Matt Dillon, played by William Conrad. Ultimately the most human of heroes, his principles make him someone we would like to be, his obvious faults cause him to resemble more closely who we actually are. Despite his grounded nature, the listener soon recognizes that Dillon is a hero with significant flaws: He often fails to save the day (whether this means not killing the bad guy or not preventing someone from dying); he has a sharp temper (even with his closest friends); he can be brutally violent (i.e. he doesn't always "wing" his targets); he makes unforgiveable mistakes (such as when he accidentally kills an old

friend in the streets of Dodge City); and finally, and less problematically, he can be awkward around women (particularly the Long Branch saloon's hostess, Kitty).

It's not Dillon's traditional heroic qualities that keep us listening, but rather the way he copes in each episode with the hand he's been dealt. We are also intrigued by his philosophical take on life, especially when it comes to the tenuous presence of the law in Kansas. "The law's new out here," Dillon remarks in one episode, "...and sometimes I think the only time people want it is when it seems to act the way they would act themselves if there weren't any law." Even the Marshal's misanthropy draws the listener in, with his repeated lament about "people". Starting in later episodes, Dillon intones part of the introductory dialogue, saying about being a Marshal: "It's a chancy job...and it makes a man watchful...and a little lonely". This expression of moral solitude remains relevant to anyone who knows what it's like to take a stand, or has always wanted to.

The folksy and faithful Chester Proudfoot, played by Parley Baer, is Dillon's assistant (not his deputy). Today's listener may not completely relate to his somewhat obsequious behavior around Dillon or care for his antiquated notions about women (Chester tells Dillon in one episode that overly talkative women should be slapped around) or, finally, like that he can be rough with children (he asks Dillon in another episode whether he can throw a kid in jail who simply "looks guilty"). We're won over nonetheless by his good intentions, his cracker-barrel charm and his devotion to his friend, Marshall Dillon.

Chester is the listener's proxy: We, too, are uncertain in the show about what has just happened or what will come next. His lack of perception constitutes the dark shadow that surrounds Matt Dillon's bright flashes of insight and re-



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sourcefulness. A bit of Chester's family history may explain his rather unsophisticated view of the world: When he tells Dillon that he had a cousin back in Waco who was hung for stealing cattle, he notes that the cousin didn't realize he had committed a crime: "I guess [the cattle] seemed like a natural part of the landscape to him." Chester, too, takes the landscape for granted, but, unlike his kin, he's on the right side of the law.

About the hostess of the Long Branch Saloon, Kitty, played by Georgia Ellis, Gunsmoke producer Norman MacDonnell revealed the following: "We never say it, but Kitty is a prostitute, plain and simple" [Time, March 23, 1953]. The Marshal visits the Long Branch more than most lawmen probably would, although their particular connection seems to be limited to the fact that he and the hostess both operate in a nether-

world just beyond the borders of decent society. In the episode called "Kitty," the hostess demurs when Dillon invites her to go to the city's annual dance. First, she says that she has nothing to wear. Then she offers that a lot of folks in town simply wouldn't approve of her attending. When Dillon arrives at the dance with Kitty, the line at the punch bowl turns out to be a Greek chorus of hecklers and upturned noses. If Kitty is a whore – and the show is silent about her precise vocation – she's also a whore who, next to Chester, turns out to be Dillon's greatest confidante.

Doc, played by Howard McNear, is the show's last principal figure. As with the other characters, his exact origins are unclear. Nevertheless, in the episode called "Cavalcade" we learn that he is wanted for having killed a man in West Virginia. Doc claims that he acted in self-



defense, but his earlier pattern of wandering from the East Coast to towns out West only to then wind up in that no-place in the middle of the frontier, Dodge City, makes the possibility that he murdered someone at least plausible.

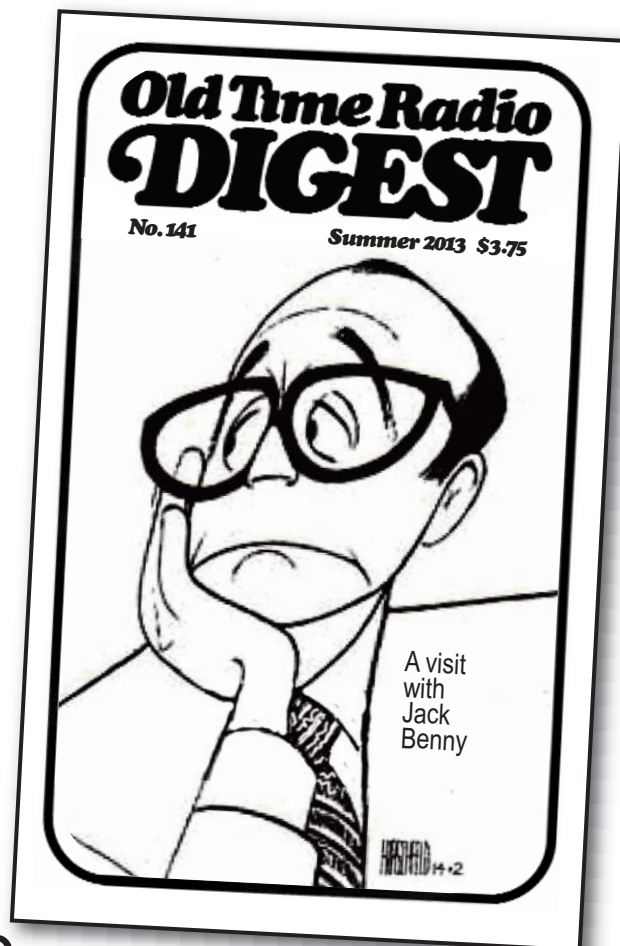
The fog covering Doc's timeline doesn't lift much by the end of the episode. Still, whatever he may have done, he finds that he has a chance for redemption. After Doc tends to a dying man and then leaves the scene to deliver a baby, the deputy sheriff looking for him out of Richmond decides that he cannot be the cold-blooded murderer he was sent to catch – the one who “ambushed and shot” the Virginia patrician, Roger Beauregard. Doc Adams may have blood on his hands from twenty years earlier, but the unholy stains have been cleansed by the exigencies of a place that has no other doctor. Doc – no longer the transient practitioner wanted for murder of Calvin Moore– lives on to deliver more babies and remove more bullets from riddled bodies, while the lawman from Virginia leaves empty handed for Richmond, some 1,400 miles away.

*Gunsmoke* is populated with true-to-life figures who act heroically when they have to, and in a world where the law isn't always welcome. The show's characters are authentic because, rather than being completely transparent, they are at once known and unknown – to each other, as well as to the listener. The individual episodes bring to the surface the familiar and unfamiliar in compelling fashion, not just about the characters, but about the world they inhabit.

“Billy the Kid”, *Gunsmoke*'s very first episode went on the air April 26, 1952. Its opening scene puts the listener in the middle of what was probably one of the US Marshal's more mundane tasks, the writing up of a wanted poster.

The scene is significant because it already

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gives us our first taste of Dillon's hard-bitten weltanschauung. Hightower, the printer, takes down some of the wanted man's personal details and then interrupts the procedure to gleefully tell Dillon about the wonderful new wood cut out he created of the killer from a tin type of a wedding photo that he stole from the mantel of the fugitive's wife.

Here are the opening lines from very first scene from Gunsmoke, a show that aired nearly 500 episodes over nine years:

**Marshal:** [speaking slowly, matter-of-factly]...wanted for murder...

**Printer:** ...wanted for murder...

Marshal:...Clay Richards...

**Printer:**...Clay Richards...

**Marshal:** ...age 31...height 6 ft...eyes brown...hair red.

**Printer:** ...eyes brown...hair red.... [almost giddy, suddenly:] Hey, how'd you like me to print his picture on these notices. I got a wood cut...we'll, let me show ya...Ernie [in the distance: "yeah"]...fetch the Marshall a copy of that front page...Interviewing Clay's wife yesterday, I noticed a tin type on the mantel...their weddin' photograph...so, first thing you know, I snitched it...

**Marshal:** [doleful] that's very thoughtful...

**Printer:** [excitedly; Ernie comes over] Yeah, eh, oh, I'll take that, Ernie... And, then I propped it up in front up me and carved me this wood cut...ain't she prime...ain't she just elegant...

**Marshal:**[sarcastic]...real elegant...

**Printer:** good likeness, don't cha think?

'Course, he was seven or eight years younger when the tin type...[fades out]

**Marshal:** [interior monolog; reflective] Sure, it's a good likeness....It doesn't show what makes a law abiding man like him want to try to rob a bank...it doesn't look like a man who murdered an old cashier and a Chinese cook who just

happened to be there...but it's a good likeness.  
[fades in]

**Printer:** [cheerful]...a picture like this just dresses up the front page, don't it?

**Marshal:** [sarcastic] yeah, it's a little masterpiece, Mr. Hightower, a notable contribution to the culture of Dodge City.

The printer's opportunism hits a nerve with Dillon, so much so that he suddenly lashes out at Chester who interrupts the scene. Directly afterwards, he apologizes to his assistant:

**Marshal:** ...I, eh, I'm sorry I turned on ya like that Chester.

**Chester:** Why, that's ok Mr. Dillon, out all night with a posse, no sleep, a man's bound to get touchy...

**Marshal:** ....no, it's not that, it's the way people use a thing like this...the men on posse last night...they enjoyed it as though they were huntin' fox or possum...Hightower back there, he acts like it was a birthday treat specially gotten up for him...everybody finds a way to use



Parley Baer, Georgia Ellis, & Howard McNear



it...

Matt Dillon may be a United States Marshall, but he's also troubled by the affect the law can have on people. The press views the crime as a chance to sell papers, while the newly deputized citizens delight in the witch hunt. Just as the law is supposed to preserve what is right, it also brings out the worst in people. Dillon sees how the law, not the murder itself, is in fact responsible for creating a circus-like atmosphere in Dodge. In fact, the Marshal appears at times like a ring master, trying to get unruly animals back into their cages. Dillon's particular humanity comes from the fact that he's in this middle position, forced to mediate between people who do wrong, sometimes despite themselves, and the blunt instruments of a law that doesn't recognize any nuance.

The man in the wanted poster was a law abiding citizen, but neither the law nor the printer's woodcut can say anything about why he became a killer. Neither is able to offer especially good "likenesses" of the people it scrutinizes – whether it's by applying the cold letter of the law or producing tin types – yet they're the best means available to any society that wants order. Dillon doesn't simply dislike "people," or his job for that matter. His basic frustration stems from the fact that he is entrusted with keeping the peace, realizing all the while that people are vulnerable, that the law is often inadequate, and that he is charged with having to make critical judgments about both.

The second, and final, episode I want to look at is entitled "Meshougah" (air date February 21, 1953), and it's a good example of why *Gunsmoke* was referred to as an "adult western". If you have a vivid imagination, the broadcast even exceeds the level of horror and surprise found in many of today's TV shows or movies.

In the episode, Matt Dillon and Chester are on their way from Dodge to nearby Pierceville to deliver some government documents. When they arrive, they notice that the town is unusually quiet, save for a few neighing horses, a barking dog, and a crowing rooster in the distance. In fact, it's completely empty. After Dillon and Chester discover that the bank has been robbed, they head over to the saloon where three of the outlaws that had "crawled into Pierceville" suddenly get the drop on them. They're then taken to a warehouse, where they find the missing townspeople and learn what transpired.

When the outlaw gang robbed the town's bank, one of its members was killed in the shoot out. The man who was shot happened to be the younger brother of the gang's leader,



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Brill, who then went “crazy”. First, he had all the women taken hostage and threatened to burn the town down. He then ordered everyone to be locked up in the warehouse until he could establish who killed his sibling.

In the warehouse, a baby is crying and the townspeople talk among themselves. Brill yells for everyone to shut up and demands to know who killed his brother: “Who did it?! You think I’m bluffin’? I tell you, I ain’t bluffin’! If I have to wipe out this whole stinkin’ town I’m gonna do it!” No one responds. A merciless truth-seeking mission is then set into motion: “Start with two of em’, Brill tells some members of his gang. Two men are to be taken outside and shot point blank at regular intervals until someone admits his guilt.

The scene then escalates. When a man named Dave Mechsan is picked to be shot, his wife screams: “No, oh no, not Dave! No, you can’t! No, not Dave, no! No!” Dave is then killed right before her eyes, at which point she emits a terror-filled scream that pierces the listener’s marrow like an ice pick – the pure response to the claustrophobic feeling of death closing in on



William Conrad and Georgia Ellis

all sides.

The episode’s darkness only intensifies after a total of three men are killed at the warehouse (Dave’s murder we learn “didn’t count”). After a couple of gang members return to the warehouse and discuss interrogating the “pretty girl” (their lascivious banter suggests they have more in mind than a simple Q & A session), Dillon and the remaining men manage to overpower them. No phony TV half-punches here, they use a board or some other implement to hit the gang members’ into submission, beating their flesh to a noticeably meaty pulp.

Bold action is required next, for when Dillon, Chester, and the banker Bill Hoden head to the saloon where the gang is assembled, they’re seriously outnumbered. Bill, who claims he is good enough with an axe to “split” “one of them boys” is tapped to do just that. When a flash of light suddenly catching the axe head is cast upon the face of the human target, Bill lets his weapon fly, hitting his man “square in the ...” (the sound of metal hitting stiff tissue makes it plain enough where the axe landed). With the guard out of the way, the three men then storm the saloon and shots are fired with the purpose of mowing down everything that moves. The outlaws fall to the floor with a dull thud, one body at a time.

The episode ends on a typically dour and reflective note. In reference to the gang leader, Brill, who in fact survived the final shoot out, Dillon tells us: “He was alive when he went to Hayes City with the rest of the boys...I was there when they tried him...And I was there when they hanged him.”

The music builds to a crescendo that is more sober than triumphant: it does not tell us that justice has been served, but simply that the misfortune is over. With at least three towns-



people having been brutally murdered, a number of outlaws killed, and a whole town terrorized because someone's kid brother was taken out in a botched robbery, the listener is left to wonder how the ledger might have been balanced over the 25 minute episode.

As he frequently does, Dillon reestablishes order by bringing one brand of ruthless violence to another. It's a moment in which the law, whose ambiguity is the underlying theme of many of *Gunsmoke's* narratives, finally becomes transparent. In a word, when the law can't tame the frontier, the smell of gun smoke fills the air.

Although the pleasures of old-time radio are multiple, including its potential for gritty realism or, in other cases not described here, laugh-out-loud humor, the most convincing reason to listen to it today is perhaps the old-fashioned form of relaxation it affords. Often I'll turn off the lights and place my digital music player in close proximity to my ears. I'll then hit the play button and close my eyes. As the voices from that long-departed era emerge once again, the worries of the day are gradually siphoned off into the undercurrent of my unconscious. What remains is the sparkling gold of old-time radio. And, like any prospector, I'm always hungry for more.

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## Eye on ebay: Pinbacks, What's the Point? by Doug Hopkinson

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This time I thought it would be interesting to look at some of the vintage pinbacks one can obtain within the endless seller's bazaar that is eBay. A pinback is a badge or button with a pin attached to the back of it so you can attach it to a lapel, vest, hat or what have you for the purpose of advertising to all that you are a fan or proponent of an individual, a team, a product or an ideal. Commonly called a pin or a button, it appears the proper terminology is pinback. No one seems to know why but there you have it. Pinbacks were a quite popular premium sent out by radio stations and sponsors of radio programs. It should go without saying that pinbacks were and still are used by many companies and organizations and not solely for radio programs but the main focus of Eye on eBay is always on products related to old time radio. EBay has many thousands of such for sale listed daily. Let's get started as I have quite a few for you to look at.

First up is one of my favorites and also a very prevalent pinback on eBay, Pretty Kitty Kelly. I am fairly certain Ms. Kelly has been in a couple past editions of Eye on eBay. Here she is again. Pretty Kitty Kelly was a 15 minute serial drama



that debuted in 1937 and lasted about three and a half years on the air. The title role was played by Arline Blackburn and her supporting cast included Clayton "Bud" Collyer (soon to be the voice of radio's Superman). Our example below is moderately priced at \$7.49 and a \$2.07 shipping charge. It is reasonable but shop around. You will find this pinback to be priced anywhere from \$25 to \$3.

Next up we have a nice Buck Rogers Spaceship Commander of the Solar Scouts pinback. You don't see this one every day. It is one of the rarer Buck Rogers items. Priced at \$425.00, you would need to be a serious Buck Rogers fan or seriously wealthy to bite on this; perhaps both. It's a lot of money for something not much bigger than a quarter. The seller does have a best offer option. Test it out. This author has had good success on many items using this option.



Next is another Buck Rogers pinback, this one is much more colorful and not quite as rare. Priced at \$39.99 which sounds a lot cheaper than 40 bucks (no pun intended)(ok it



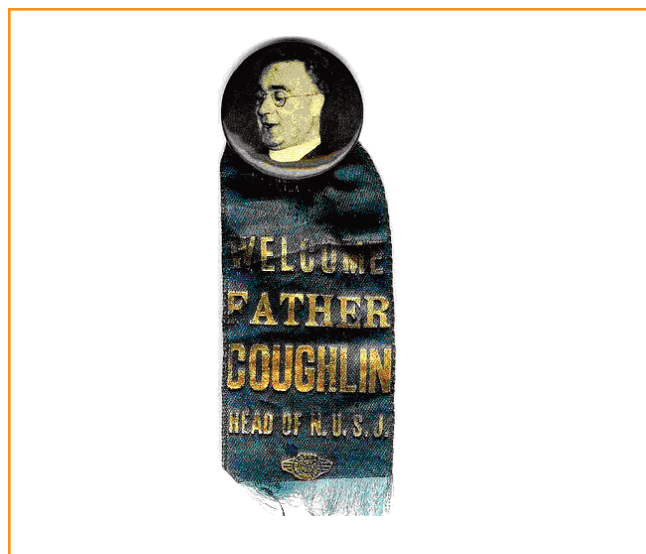
was intended) this appears to be the average going price. One word of warning though, know your pinback before you buy it. This particular pinback has been reproduced and many have been sold at a vintage price by unscrupulous sellers. There is a website that has many examples of some of these classic forgeries. When you see the real and the fake side by side the difference is usually quite evident. Just do a little homework before plunking big money down on tiny objects.



Next up we have two crime fighting caballeros that we all love, The Cisco Kid and Pancho. These tin pins were sent out by Butternut Bread. They are flimsy and easily bent. Pancho looks to be stoned and Cisco looks like he is a little nauseous. The price of \$35.00 for the pair may be on the high side. I have seen some sellers giving these away with the purchase of other items. At least this seller has class and is offering free shipping. Would he be more likely to sell them at \$34.99?



Next we have a very interesting pinback with a ribbon. The subject of this one is a very controversial Catholic priest known to radio listeners as Father Coughlin. He is credited as being one of the first political figures to use the airwaves to reach a mass (no pun intended, really) audience. This pinback more than likely dates to 1934 when Coughlin began his political party National Union for Social Justice (NUSJ). His is an interesting bit of history in the United States. His party had more than one million members before the Roosevelt administration (the same administration Coughlin had earlier supported, ironically) was able to shut down his organization and remove him from radio. I urge readers to look him up. Do the research and draw your own conclusions. There is at least one internet share club today that will not allow any Father Coughlin radio shows on their site; this almost 80 years after the uproar. It is amazing that his radio program can still light fires after all this time. \$14.99 (not \$15.00) is a small price to pay for a piece of history but shop around, I found one for 10 bucks delivered.

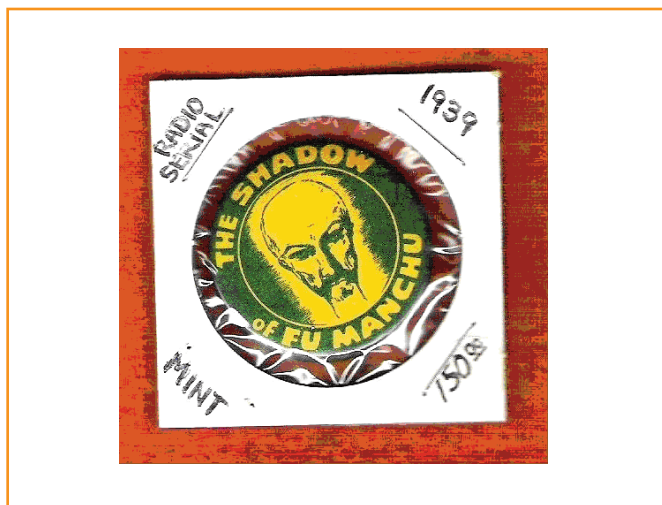


This next pinback is an awesome Flash Gordon Club pin sponsored by the Chicago Herald and Examiner. I've never seen its like before. I'm not sure why he has bunny ears but they are probably some kind of high tech listening device.

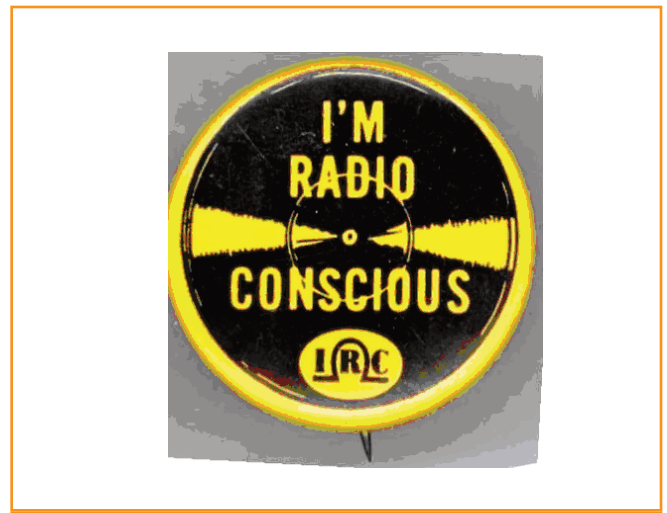
(\$127.46 ) Despite the 15% discount, this is an expensive item. Still, it would be a very cool item to own. Classy free shipping is a slam dunk deal closer.



Next up is an alien looking Shadow of Fu Manchu pinback. Notice it is in a coin holder with a hand-written price of \$150.00 on it. Yet the seller started the auction at \$29.95 and with 1 day and hours left, there have been no bids. I have serious doubts that this is a vintage 1939 model. Its color is a bit more intense than others I compared it to. Perhaps other people got the same feeling of fraud here. Cool looking button but pass it up for an authentic one. On the other hand, I could be totally wrong and this is a well preserved item you could get at a steal of a price. I'm no expert by any means.



At first glance the next pinback looks like a radiation warning sign. Upon further examination it is a record with the words I'm Radio Conscious on it. This has nothing to do with any old radio program but how cool is this??! I'd have snapped this up in a heartbeat if not for the \$59.95 (not \$60.00) price tag. Yikes! No idea what makes this so valuable. IRC stands for International Resistive Company. They make electronic parts that are used in radios among other things. Resist buying this..



Ever heard the saying *Nothing good ever comes from Nebraska* ? No? I may have made that up... This next item is something kinda neat from Nebraska. It's a pinback that declares the wearer a guest of radio station KMMJ in Clay Center, Nebraska. It has a nice picture of a small building nestled between two radio towers. KMMJ began broadcasting in November 1925 and was owned by the M.M. Johnson company known for their Old Trusty brand of incubators. Programming on this station was aimed at the agricultural families residing in Clay Center. Of the entertainers that performed out of the KMMJ studios there are three of note; Jimmy Atkins, Robert Taylor and Lawrence Welk. The date of this button is not stated but it is definitely from before 1939 when the KMMJ studios

moved to Grand Island, Nebraska. For just \$5.00 plus \$2.00 shipping you could have a pretty neat little pinback that you can tell the kids about.



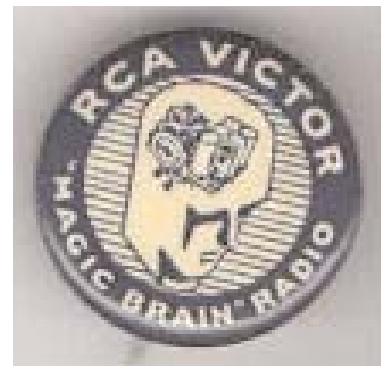
Next is a nice Speed Gibson Secret Police pinback. The I.S.P. does not stand for internet service provider. It means International Secret Police, the organization that inducted Speed Gibson into its ranks. This program ran from January 1937 until May of 1940. Voices heard on this program included Elliot Lewis, Howard McNear and Hanley Stafford. Of note is the fact that all 178 episodes can be found in circulation rather easily. This pinback however, is not so easily found and commands the price, in this instance, of \$74.99 (not \$75.00) plus a shipping fee of \$3.00. It is very tacky to add shipping to a high price item.



Up next is a rather odd looking item. It is a 1945 Land of the Lost pinback featuring the fatherly fish known as the Red Lantern. This radio program lasted 5 years between 1943 and 1948. Among the actors that gave voice to Red Lantern was Art Carney. This is the only example I have seen on eBay but it appears to be soiled or stained. At \$29.00 it may or may not be a good value. Free shipping is class. The picture of the fish is pretty cool.



An unusual pinback and probably this writer's favorite is this next offering. It is an advertising button for RCA Victor's magic brain radio. The magic brain was marketed between 1935 and 1938. It really referred to a shielded sub-chassis that plugged into the main chassis with a cable. RCA likened it to a brain although from what this





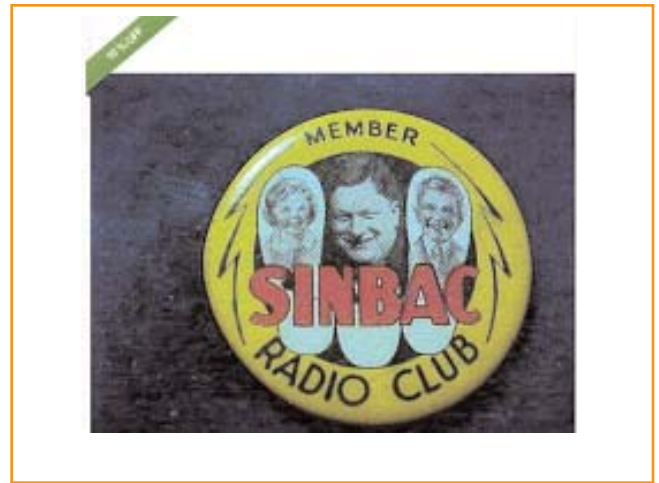
writer read, it really wasn't anything revolutionizing and was kind of a flop. The picture sure is neat though. There are not any programs associated specifically with this product although many programs were heard through it. This appears to be a rare pinback. \$45.00 might be a fair price. Free shipping is extra classy.

Our next pinback looks to be a novelty item. It's a Let's 'Lect Lum for President button. The seller says it is from the 1930's. This author is not well versed in the Lum and Abner program. Perhaps one of you readers out there knows if there was a storyline during their program run where Lum was running for President, similar to when Gracie was running for President on the Burns and Allen program. At \$22.99 (not \$23.00) plus a tacky 2 bucks shipping (really?) this could be a good item for a Lum and Abner fan.



This pinback is a 1930's radio premium pinback for the Sinbac radio club. Broadcasting out of Chicago on radio station KYW (yes there was a K station in Chicago), Uncle Bob Wilson did a children's program sponsored by Sinbac Shoes, a Chicago company. It's a good thing this pin is small because Uncle Bob is just a bit little creepy looking flanked by two young children. That is just this writer's opinion. Nothing was ever proved against good old Uncle Bob. (I'm

kidding!) This is also a widely available button so shop around before purchasing one. \$4.49 Shipping \$1.99



Another advertising pinback is this Philco button. It is unclear what year it is from but Philco did sponsor a couple radio programs at least; Philco Radio Hall of Fame and Philco Radio Time. Besides being a sponsor they also delivered many programs to people through the radios they built. You have to love the Philco logo with the lightning bolt through it. At just \$9.99 it is priced right. The \$3.85 shipping charge is not only plain tacky, it is also pretty high. I doubt it costs much to mail out something as small as your fingernail and as light as a feather. It's still pretty cool though.

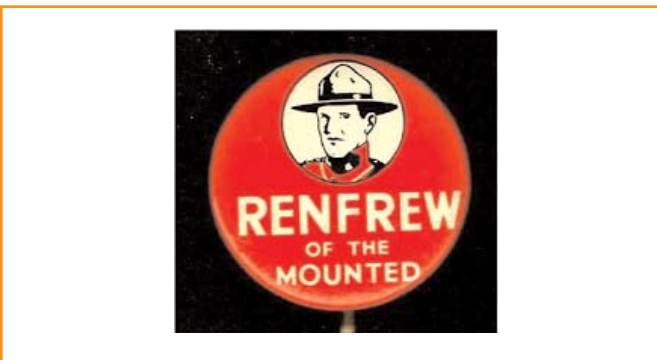


The next pinback is an exquisite example of a 1934 Mandrake the Magician premium put out by Taystee Bread. Mandrake made his debut in the comics in 1934. Our crime fighting magician did not make radio waves until 1940. Mandrake

was portrayed by Raymond Edward Johnson who was better known later as Raymond, your host on Inner Sanctum. This author is unaware of what sponsors the radio program may have had. Conclusion: inconclusive as to whether this is a radio premium. If this is an original vintage pinback it is probably museum quality. At \$129.00 this is a tricky decision to make and one better left to serious collectors.



Here is a nice red pinback of Renfrew of the Mounted. The radio program was based on a series of books for adventuresome boys titled Renfrew of the Royal Mounted. It spread to radio in 1936 lasting 4 years. House Jameson portrayed our hero Sergeant Douglis Renfrew. Wonder Bread sponsored the program and was probably behind this premium. This particular pinback seems to be widely available on eBay so shop around before bidding or buying. Prices range widely.



The last pinback for this issue is another RCA advertising button. This one is a bright yellow with a great Nipper picture on it. It says, I'm voting for bi-acoustic radio with RCA Victor at

the bottom. The Bi-Acoustic hit the market around 1932. The advertisements for it claimed it was a fine musical instrument and gave you both music from radio and music from the built-in record player. Is this what the Bi is? Radio and phonograph? The ad also says it is capable of two extra octaves. Is that what the Bi meant? Who knows. What is known is that this is a really neat looking pinback and the price is an even C note. That's at least an octave higher than I want to pay.



That's it for this edition of Eye on eBay. Hope you enjoyed it. ■

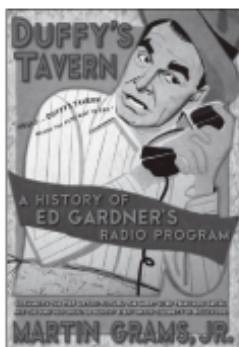






**“Hello, Duffy’s Tavern, where the elite meet to eat. Archie the manager speakin’... Duffy ain’t here”**

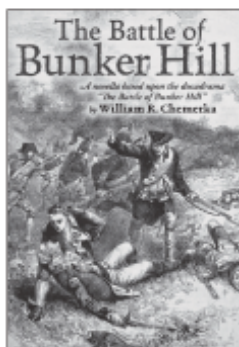
*BearManor Media*



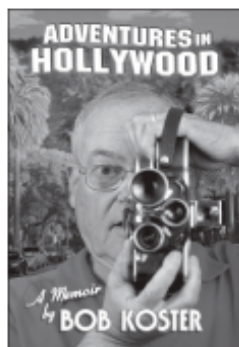
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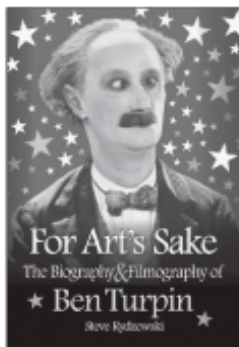
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\$24.95



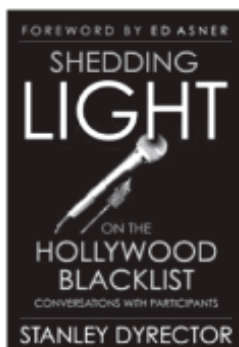
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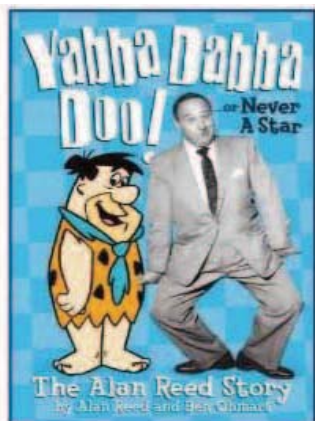


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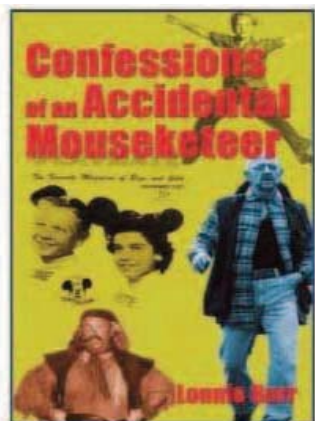


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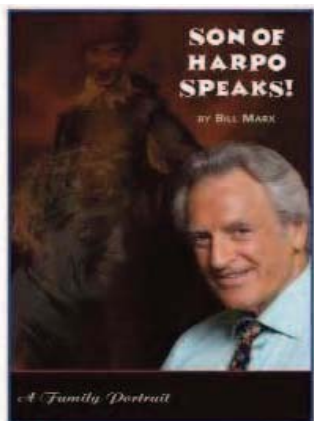
*Ships in September*



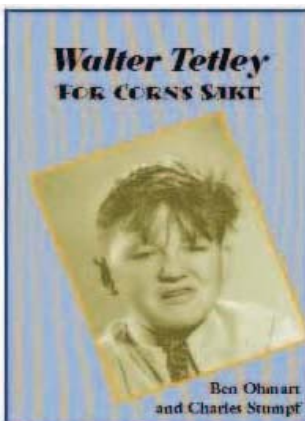
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## Confessions of a Maine Radio Announcer

By Walter J. Beaupre (Article originally published in *Radiogram*, July 1991)

It was 1944 and near the end of my freshman year in college. Professor Brooks Quimby had asked to see me after his "Introduction to Public Speaking" class. I hung back, waiting for the professor to answer student questions about the assignment. Finally he turned to me: Walt, do you drink?" I was startled. "You mean beer, wine, whisky? No, it's against my religious beliefs." "Then would you be interested in a night announcer's job at WCOU?" By way of explanation, the local Yankee/Mutual affiliate in Lewiston, Maine had until recently employed an announcer during the 6-12 midnight shift who had two significant flaws:

1. he became bored easily, and
2. he drank alcoholic beverages on the job to wile away the lonely hours.

Matters came to a head when the announcer -- loaded with cheer one night -- decided to put on the air a specially made transcription announcing the end of World War II. The transcription featured the voices of President Roosevelt and other dignitaries, thanking God for the sudden, unheralded Allied victory.

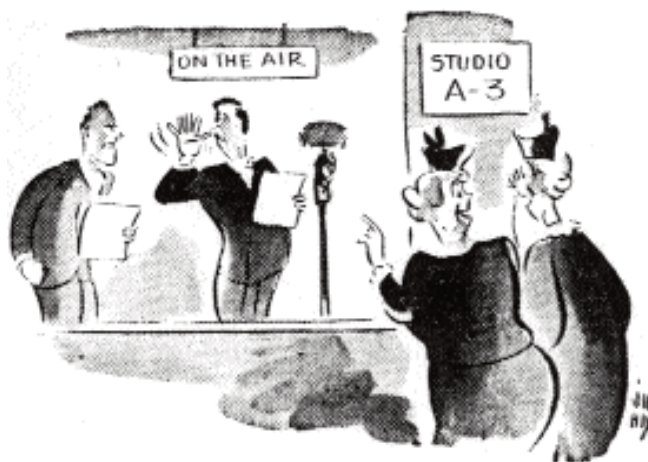
The good people of the listening area -- lead by a local daily newspaper which competed with WCOU for advertising dollars -- were properly outraged by this "cruel hoax during the darkest hours of the War!"

WCOU apologized; the announcer was fired; and the business manager of the station held down the night shift until a sober replacement could be found. Most of the key personnel at the station were away fighting for Uncle Sam; the owner, Faust Couture (from whose last name

the call letters were taken), station manager and ace sports-caster John Libby, chief announcer Bob Payne, and announcer/musician Laverne "Miff" Coulton.

So it was business manager Oscar Normand who -- all in one fateful evening -- interviewed me for the job, showed me how to run the RCA console and turntables, pointed out the pile of commercial copy, watched me as I stumbled through the routine for a while, and left me to my own devices.

WCOU, the only radio station since 1938 in the Lewiston/Auburn area, was part of the Couture family dynasty. The family had pioneered French language newspapers in the U.S. The first floor of the building housed the paper *Le Messenger*; business offices for the radio station took up most of the second floor; the third floor was reserved for the studios and control room which were (as of 1938) state of the art. The UPI teletype machine was on the second floor where it would be "handy" to both the newspaper and the radio staff. When I was the "radio news staff" and had to dash down to the teletype machine for news while a record was playing, I didn't find it wonderfully convenient --



"They communicate by signals, Agatha, but I don't know what that one means!"  
*Radio Guide Monday, November 11, 1940*

especially when the newspaper guys had gotten there first!

Other than being a terrible announcer (and I have off-the-air recordings to prove it) the first few weeks were marred by one minor tragedy. To understand my plight the reader needs to understand the setting. From 6 PM to 8 PM, programs alternated between network and local shows. For example, the Yankee Network News was on at 6:00, followed by state/local news at 6:10; Fulton Lewis Jr. was on at 7:00 with local commercial tie-ins. Strictly local programming included live music shows from Studio 1 and sports shows etc. from Studio 2. The control room where I worked exclusively when I was alone contained the master console and turntables, two metal cabinets filled with Standard Transcriptions, no more than a dozen 78 rpm records, and a rack of special transcribed 15-



May 5, 1923

minute shows scheduled for specific dates and times.

Paulette, the receptionist for the station, was responsible for putting the transcribed shows for each day in the rack. On this particular occasion she had forgotten 'Leave It To The Girls', which was scheduled for 10 PM. I went to cue up the 16-inch disk a few minutes before ten. No transcription. I was horrified. The show must go on! At 9:59:30 I cut away from the network broadcast, switched on my mike, read a commercial, and then said to radio-land, "I can't find 'Leave It To The Girls' scheduled for broadcast at this time; so there will be a period of silence while I hunt for it!" I turned off the mike and dashed for the mail room on the second floor. Five minutes later the show went on the air.

Oscar, my mentor and wartime boss, patiently explained that the show was sustaining [a public service show for the WAVES], no harm done; and I should have simply put on some records to fill the fifteen minute spot.

Local newscasts from a station with NO news gathering staff were always a problem, and on weekends and holidays a veritable nightmare. We relied on the publicity handouts of state agencies, colleges, and the like. Sometimes in desperation we generated news. For example, if we knew that 6 deaths were predicted for the Maine highways over the Labor Day weekend we'd call the Mayor and ask for his comments. Being both inarticulate and trusting he would say, "You boys make a quote for me!" The quotes we dreamed up were often so outrageous that we should have been sued for defamation of character.

On one occasion two part-time staff announcers were convinced that they knew how a local crime had been committed. Hungry for news at any cost, they took an old shirt, shot a hole in it,

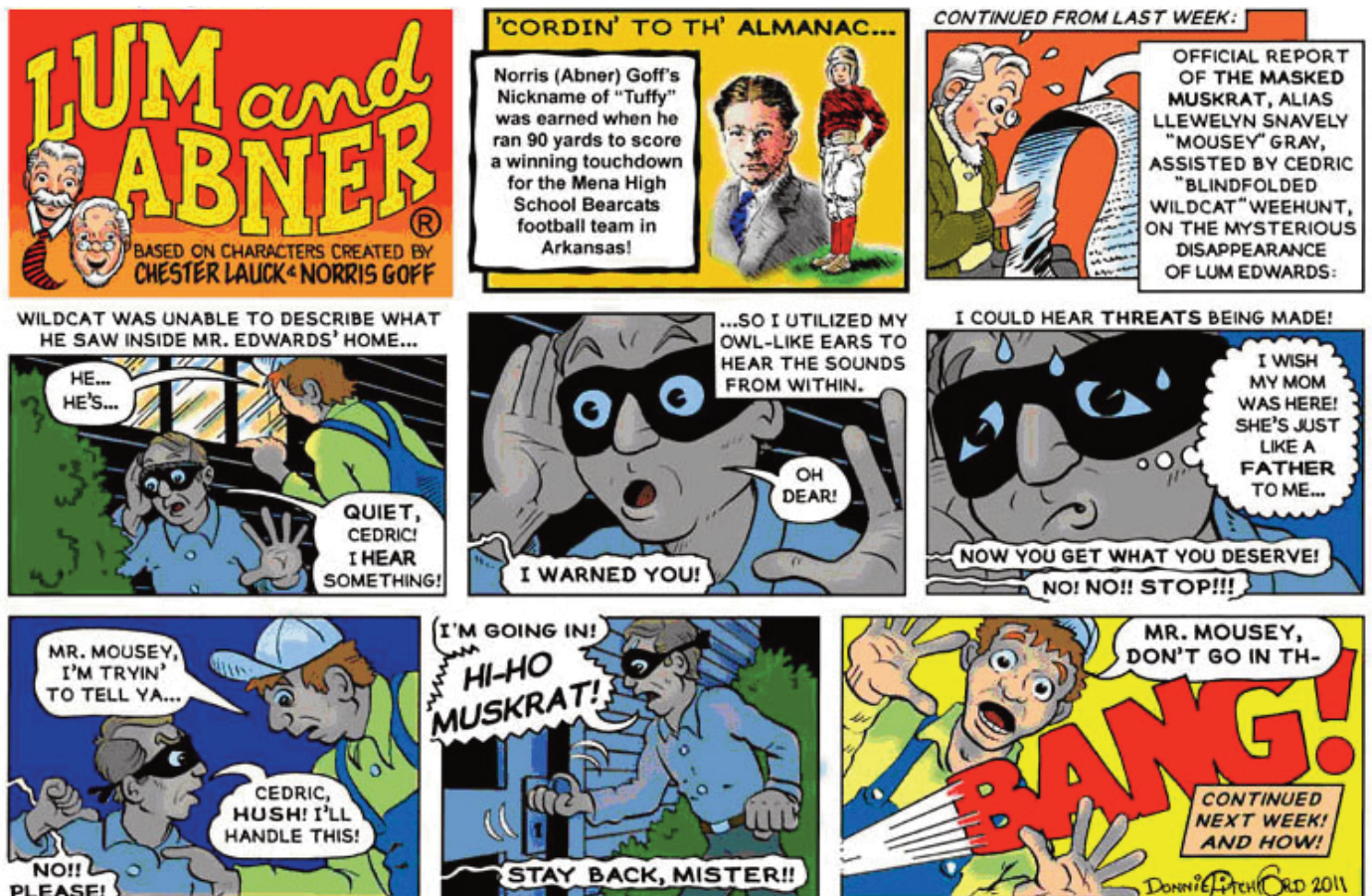


and planted it near the scene of the crime. They they proceeded to "discover" it and scoop the media. The scoop backfired, because when the police arrived on the scene to inspect the shirt -- it had mysteriously disappeared. The crime was eventually solved; the shirt incident was not!

For me the most dramatic news story occurred in February, 1952. I left my apartment for work before 4 PM. One of my regular duties was to do the 'Six O'Clock News' (sponsored locally by this time). I edited the world and regional stories, but two local items were handed to me just as I went on the air. One of the local items concerned a fire in progress at 13 Lowell Street -- the address I had left two hours before! Somehow I got through the rest of the newscast, but fifteen minutes later I viewed in person the smoking remains of all my worldly possessions.

The station had many live local shows, especially during the early evening hours. Many of them were built around two personalities: Roselle Coury and Marion Payne Louisfell.

Roselle was a raven-haired song stylist from Berlin, New Hampshire, who broke into radio by buying her own air time, selling spot announcements within her shows, and arranging for the additional musical talent. She drove the six hours from and to Berlin, New Hampshire, every day -- summer and winter -- that the show was aired. By the time I knew her she had been so successful in selling her talents that the station hired her full-time rather than compete with her! Not all of her daily shows featured her singing voice. Roselle did a women's show in the morning with recipes, birthday greetings, and the like. She also did



"Lum and Abner" is a registered trademark, used by permission of Chester Lauck, Jr. Copyright 2011 FirstArkansasNews.net and Donnie Pitchford. All rights reserved.



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an early evening show called the Lucky Dollar Program.

Roselle was multi-talented. She also had a temper as volatile as it was violent. One evening on the Lucky Dollar Program she perceived that one of her telephone contestants was trying to con her into awarding him "Lucky Dollars." Before she had exhausted her vocabulary of four-letter words I cut her off the air and played an interlude of organ music. She then proceeded to roast me. I tried to calm her ruffled feathers by pointing out that I didn't want her fired and the station sued. She went on with her show, and we were good friends after that. I wrote comedy sketches and continuity for many of her variety programs. Roselle Coury was a first class talent in every respect: a terrific speaking voice and a fine pop singer. There were few women, local or network, on the airwaves in the '40's and '50's any better than Roselle Coury.

Of course, Roselle was blessed with a superb studio organist, Marion Payne Louisfell. Marion began her career in silent movie house orchestras as a pianist and later as a Mighty Wurlitzer organist. On the Hammond organ, Novachord, and Steinway grand in Studio 1 Mrs. Louisfell was incredible. Every pop tune that came into the studio she would write down quickly in her own notational system. Then she could play it in any key for any vocalist. Marion, the sister of Maine's Senator Fred Payne, was the kindest, most patient, most humble, most charitable person I have ever met. Her charming 'Gaslight Serenade' had a loyal following at 12 noon. Marion could have been "big time" except that she was too busy making other lesser talents sound good -- including this writer.

Early in 1947, when WCOU pioneered FM broadcasting in Central Maine, I had an idea for a stereo music show, Conversations In Music.

The show was to help promote sales of FM sets. Studio 1 was now wired so that two microphones could broadcast over FM and two microphones could broadcast separately over AM simultaneously. Marion's voice and her Hammond were emphasized over FM while my voice and the studio Steinway were emphasized via the AM signal.

The result (wherever there was an AM and FM radio in the same room tuned to our stations] was perhaps the first commercially sponsored 13-week series in stereo. Marion cheerfully put up with the countless hours of rehearsals I needed because I was a rank amateur on the piano. Her musical arrangements made me sound good -- even when I was lousy. Unfortunately, neither of us ever heard the show in stereo. There was no equipment invented in 1947 to let us hear a playback stereo-phonically.

This was the Golden Era of live talent in local radio. In addition to Roselle Coury and Marion

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## THE SHADOW...

Sponsored every week over the entire Mutual Broadcasting System by Wildroot Company, Inc., makers of Wildroot Cream-Oil. America's most popular hair tonic and Wildroot Liquid Cream Shampoo.



IT'S MUTUAL FOR MYSTERY

Payne Louisfell, WCOU employed singers Paul Daigneau (a Ray Eberle type), Gideon Saucier who did the Crosby tunes, Dolena McIntire who had a glorious operetta voice, and Georgette Giboin who could do the classics and grand opera. For a season we featured a young war veteran Bill Hall during an afternoon show. This was at the insistence of the station owner who believed that the horribly wounded Marine deserved a chance to find himself again. I was paid extra for serving as his accompanist/coach. Bill had blackouts and blinding migraine headaches during some rehearsals, but he never let us down at showtime. Bill's voice had the same sort of appeal that later made super-stars of Buddy Clarke and Perry Como. He could break your heart with a ballad.

Bonnie Laird was another talented songstress who filled in during times when Roselle Coury was on maternity leave. Bonnie's husband, Johnny Marsh, had a magnificent baritone voice with which he sang "Ol' Man River" when he wasn't reading commercials.

A superb jazz pianist Gratien Ouellette took over Mrs. Louisfell's duties during times when she was seriously ill. After being told by the sta-

tion management that there was no "future" for him in radio, Gratien went to New York City and had a brilliant career, the favorite accompanist of many top recording stars.

There were moments of hilarity on and off the air. On one occasion the morning announcer Hal was expecting Johnny, the "Call for Phillip Morris" diminutive ambassador, to show up for an interview at 8:45. Hal put his records away in anticipation -- Johnny didn't show. Hal talked and stalled, and stalled and talked. It was almost 9:00 and Hal was apologizing for the 10th time and getting more and more disgusted. Suddenly the door to the studios burst open and in waltzed Johnny with his entourage. Just as suddenly Hal blurted into the open mike: "Jesus Christ! The little son-of-a-bitch finally made it!"

On another occasion a hillbilly band was rehearsing in Studio 1 while the Boston Red Sox were on the air from Fenway Park. In our local station control room two staff announcers noticed that the band members were having a heated discussion. Why not listen in?

But instead of routing the Studio 1 mike into the control room, it was accidentally routed out

## HANDY MAN AROUND THE HOUSE



over the airwaves, and with it a stream of cuss words and vulgarities. Horrified by what had happened but ever resourceful, one of the announcers cut off the Red Sox game momentarily, apologized for the "foul language in the radio booth at Fenway Park," and assured listeners it wouldn't happen again.

The station carried the nightly commentary of Fulton Lewis Jr., a great favorite of conservative listeners, but a colossal blow-hard in the opinion of two announcers -- one of them yours truly. One night my like-minded crony and I hit upon a plan to cut fulminating Fulton down to size. While Mr. Lewis Jr. was ranting and raving we silently opened the microphone in our control room. During his dramatic pauses we made throat-clearing noises, coughed, blew our noses, and perpetrated other antisocial sounds. In the middle of this merriment the telephone lights blazed insistently. It was the boss telling us to "cut the crap...instantly!" It had never occurred to us that anyone we knew actually listened to the creep!

Like all other "hip" radio announcers we tried soaking commercial copy in lighter fluid and igniting it while a colleague was earnestly selling.

That wasn't as effective as walking naked into the line of sight of a buddy who was trying to wax enthusiastic about swim suits. When tape recorders first came into use after the war, a Brush Sound Mirror was wired into our console. If one were wearing earphones while reading the news, some clown would turn on the tape recorder which played your own voice back to you a split-second later. The results were pretty funny -- unless you happened to be the newscaster. We soon learned to tolerate delayed feed-back at high sound levels.

Perhaps the most monumental breakup for this announcer came during a broadcast for which some federal agency had provided a script to be read locally. Rudy Hamel (who later in life had a brilliant career in the legal department of Bristol-Meyers) and I started reading the script "cold" without ever checking the contents. We soon discovered that we were supposed to be farm experts talking about the virtues of "sticking pigs" and "slaughtering hogs." We both knew what the other person was thinking and we began to break up. Finally it got so bad that we had to cut ourselves off the air and play the standby organ transcription.

### THE WIRELESS AGE December, 1922





This time we were convinced that we were in deep, deep trouble with the Front Office. Actually the outcome was very touching. A woman wrote to the station thanking "those two fools" for saving her life. She had just received word that her soldier husband had been killed in Germany, and in her grief planned to end her own life. Her radio was turned on, and when she heard us trying desperately not to break up she became hysterical along with us.

Mostly, radio was serious business in war time. We were forbidden to broadcast weather reports or play song requests at specific times. These could be signals or the enemy who lurked off the Maine coast in Nazi submarines. Much of the military news was strictly managed by the Office of War Information. As an example, lists of military casualties and the names of local people killed in battle or lost at sea were marked "Hold for your next local bond drive."

My other job to help pay my way through school was as pastor of a country Methodist Church. Often I would open the station Sunday mornings at 7:00; write my sermon during the network religious shows, and leave at about 10:00 when Conrad Giguere came in to do the French language program *Le Messager En Parade*. On one particular August Sunday morning in 1945 I checked the UPI teletype to discover that the U.S. had dropped an "atom bomb" on Hiroshima. I incorporated this news into my sermon and probably preached the first -- if not the best -- of the warnings about a possible nuclear demise for this old planet earth.

I did Big Band remote broadcasts on my Saturday nights off. I did them because I thought it was fun. Only the engineer got paid. My reward was to stand beside the likes of Duke Ellington, Jimmy Dorsey, Johnny Bothwell, Gene Krupa, and others. As pop records became a studio sta-

ple after the war there were many interviews with the Stan Kentons and the Arthur Fiedlers.

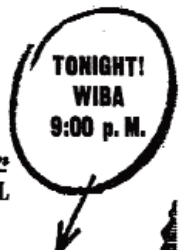
Hollywood stars playing summer stock came in to plug their current productions. I happen to have a recording of an interview I did with Moe Jaffe went over to the piano in Studio 1 and played his latest song, "If I Had My Life To Live Over." I secretly thought it was a "bow-wow," but Buddy Clarke and countless other crooners proved me wrong.

Although most of the locally produced efforts were music and variety shows, we did not avoid drama at WCOU. The Bates Manufacturing Company sponsored a dramatic series written by one of my college classmates, Florence Furfy, called *Do You Know Maine?* It was excellent. I coped periodically with local groups such as Hadassah who used me as narrator but supplied volunteers for less demanding parts. The cause was noble even if the productions were sometimes less than professional.

Norman Gallant and his wife Catherine Rice did some very fine dramatic shows over WFAU, our sister station in Augusta, Maine. In addition, Cay did some brilliant dramatizations for children along the lines of Irene Wicker, "The Singing Lady." One summer I wrote an adaptation of Shakespeare's 'Othello' which we aired



Camel Cigarettes  
PROUDLY PRESENT  
*The Screen Guild Players in*  
**REDBOOK'S 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL  
MOVIE AWARD WINNER:**



**"COMMAND DECISION"**

The Redbook award will be presented to this MGM masterpiece on the Screen Guild Players tonight.

Clark Gable  
Walter Pidgeon  
Van Johnson  
Brian Donley  
John Hodiak  
Edward Arnold



Sponsored by  
**Camel  
Cigarettes**



over WFAU. Fortunately, I walked off with the rehearsal tape of the show which I saved. In my opinion it holds up reasonably well against some of the things NBC, CBS, and Mutual did during the same period. Local radio did a lot of drama - - some of it well worth repeating today!

Although I left radio broadcasting in 1948 to begin a college teaching career, I "moonlighted" while teaching until 1957. Many years later my son worked his way through college doing radio work in the same market area but not the same stations. I was able to observe the change in technology and the dynamics of local radio in the 1980's. I think my era was more fun, more creative.

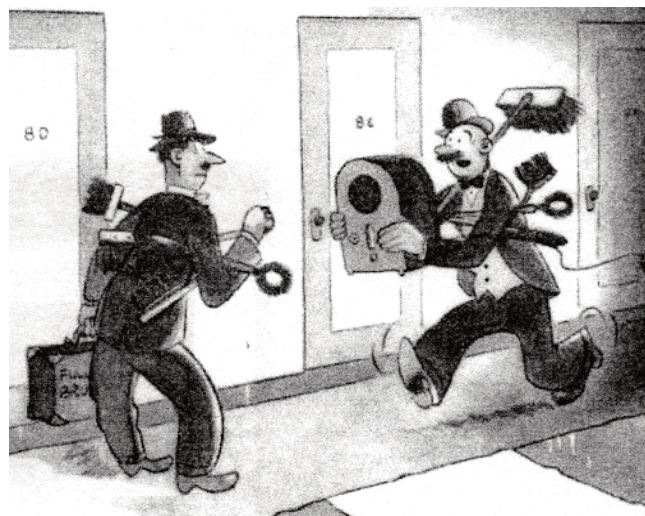
True, working conditions in radio today are better than in the 1940's. For a starting salary of 60 cents an hour I operated the master console, read spot announcements, wrote commercial copy for certain accounts, directed radio plays, wrote and acted in comedy skits, sang in a jazz trio, played piano solos, accompanied singers, hunted for records in the right key for singers to do voice-overs, cataloged records, performed newscasts, read poetry, wrote and produced commercial jingles, and did background color for sporting events. There was never any paid holiday nor time-and-a-half for overtime. But it was exciting. It was fun. I was very young.

While I was in college I heard most of the Mutual Network shows out of one ear with a textbook in my lap. Certain shows could always pull me away from the books. I liked The Falcon, The Shadow, Orson Welles' The Black Museum, and my favorite was Wyllis Cooper's 'Quiet', Please! What a kick it is to listen to these same shows today and give them my undivided attention -- thanks to SPERDVAC.

( **NOTE:** Thanks to a WCOU engineer of the era, the late Colby Cooke, many variety and musical

shows mentioned in this article were preserved as air-checks recorded on glass-based 16-inch transcriptions and stored in Mr. Cooke's Wilton, Maine, barn. Before his death he gave the transcriptions to the author who transferred the programs to cassette tapes at the University of Rhode Island Media Center and donated copies to the Maine Broadcasting Museum. Some of them have been rebroadcast for Old Time Radio Fans in Central Maine.) ■

( Thanks to Jerry Haendiges for permission to use this article. You can visit Jerry at [www.otrsite.com](http://www.otrsite.com) )



"I must be slippin'! That last guy sold me a radio!"  
RADIOLAND Vol IV March, 1939



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## Casey, Crime Photographer Live From The Blue Note

by Elizabeth MacLeod

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*The following article is presented in celebration of the 69th anniversary of the radio premiere the Casey series on July 7th.*

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If the second half of the 1940's was the Golden Age of radio detective drama, it was also the Golden Age of the radio detective gimmick. It wasn't enough for a radio crime-solver to own a snub-nosed .38 and a wide-brimmed fedora, he needed something else, something entirely his own to distinguish him from the army of shamuses roaming the rainswept streets of the broadcast band in the years after the Second World War. If you weren't a Fat Man, you had to be a Thin Man, or a Singing Man or a Self-Referential Man. You had to be, above all else, Distinctive.

But, it wasn't always the detective himself who was unique. In one of the best crime shows of the postwar era, the protagonist was actually a rather average fellow. It was the setting that was distinctive. The crime-solver, in this case, was a fairly generic take on the scrappy newspaperman, a standard figure in crime fiction since the rise of Walter Winchell in the late twenties. His name was Jack "Flashgun" Casey, but nobody ever used his first name. Even his nickname was rarely heard -- to friend and enemy alike, he was just Casey, Crime Photographer. And the setting, the gimmick that made his program different from any other crime drama on the air, was a bar. A saloon, where drinks were nursed, cigarettes smoldered in dirty ashtrays, and jazz piano tinkled in the background. A shabby neon-lit hole in the wall called The Blue Note Cafe.

There was no other place like it on the air. In an era not all that far removed from Prohibition, the temperance movement still held sway in



Staats Cotsworth

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much of the country, and radio sponsors who were not breweries tended to downplay the consumption and sale of alcoholic beverages on the programs they backed to avoid offending the sons and daughters of Carrie Nation. On soap operas and evening dramas alike, the mark of a loose woman was one who drank cocktails. Even *Duffy's Tavern*, the popular comedy set in a sawdust-floored Third Avenue dive, was stripped of its barroom atmosphere for a time by a nervous advertiser, and billed only as Duffy's.

Casey himself hadn't always been a habitue of The Blue Note. In the original magazine stories and novels by George Harmon Coxe, "Flashgun" Casey was usually on the move. His newspaper duties keeping him hopping from one assignment to the next, and there was little need for a well-developed base of operations. Efforts to develop Casey as a regular patron of a particular drinkery in his literary adventures were abandoned early in the series -- plot and



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action were the thing, not reflection. But, radio was different -- as a more intimate medium than the printed page, it required a certain familiar background to carryover from week to week, to give listeners a comfortable frame of reference for the characters, to provide a status quo which could be disrupted by the crime of the week and then reassuringly restored at its conclusion. Sherlock Holmes had his familiar rooms at Baker Street, Ellery Queen his book-lined apartment, Nick and Nora Charles their penthouse, Sam Spade his sleazy San Francisco office -- and Casey had The Blue Note, a place to cogitate out loud on the problem of the week, a place where he could discuss his latest dilemma with his reporter girlfriend Ann Williams, and perhaps trade repartee with the comic bartender Ethelbert.

And, the listener could picture himself or herself sitting right there at the bar along with them. It was a concept that went all the way back to the very birth of radio drama, to Amos and Andy sitting in the taxicab office and discussing their troubles as the listener sat there too, a first-hand participant in the story. The Blue Note provided an ideal setting for the listener's direct participa-



John Gibson, Alice Reinheart, Staats Cotsworth

tion in Casey's weekly drama, giving the characters and the story a distinct, palpable sense of emotional realism.

Producer/director/scriptwriter Alonzo Deen Cole was a master of this sort of intimacy. His first major accomplishment in radio drama, *The Witch's Tale* in the 1930's, offered an unmistakable sense of place from its very first moments on the air -- a cold howling wind, a screeching cat, and the rusty-screen-door voice of Old Nancy, brought listeners into a dark, forbidding cottage deep in the woods, from which there would be no escape. Nancy's abode framed each week's tale of the supernatural, carrying the listener into the drama and then out of it again, to relative safety, at its close. Cole used this format throughout the run of *The Witch's Tale* to great effect. Cole didn't create The Blue Note -- the bar was part of the very first Casey broadcast, under the "Flashgun Casey" title in 1943, complete with Ethelbert the bartender and the background music. But, it was under Cole's guidance that the bar was fully realized, becoming as much a regular character in the series as Casey and Ann themselves, with jazz great Herman Chittison joining the program as the definitive Blue Note pianist. Chittison, known to friends and colleagues as "Ivory," had never intended to be a musician. He trained in college to be a chemist, but became enamored of the burgeoning African-American jazz scene of the 1920's and developed a light, percussive piano style (in the stride manner popularized by James P. Johnson and Fats Waller). Abandoning his studies in the mid-twenties, he toured Europe with such luminaries as Louis Armstrong and Willie Lewis, before settling in New York in the early forties as the headman of a popular Harlem trio. Early in his career, Chittison moved away from his Walleresque stride piano style to-

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ward something more sophisticated. During the 1930's, he was noted for his flossy technique, somewhat like that of the blind virtuoso Art Tatum. But, by the time he arrived in New York, he'd settled into a suave, more disciplined style at the keyboard. His performance in *The Blue Note* each week was unobtrusive enough not to interfere with the dialogue, but creative enough in its rhythmic flow to give the bar a distinctive musical atmosphere. In this, it was not unlike the music provided by Dooley Wilson at Rick's Cafe Americaine in *Casablanca* -- a film that was in theaters at the time of Flashgun Casey's radio premiere. Young jazz enthusiasts found themselves tuning into to the program each week with no interest in the crime story of the moment -- they wanted to hear what Chittison was doing in the background. Among the eager fans of the program was an earnest young pianist named Thelonious Monk, who had idolized Chittison for years and based much of his early style on that of *The Blue Note's* resident artist.

Chittison spent seven years at *The Blue Note* piano and, along with John Gibson's long-running performance as Ethelbert the bartender, gave the bar a real sense of continuity from episode to episode. Chittison left CBS in the early 1950's, after the original run of Casey came to a close. When the series was revived for a brief run in 1954, an even more prominent jazzman took his place at *The Blue Note* piano. Teddy Wilson spent most of the 1930's working with some of the towering figures in American music, from Benny Goodman to Billie Holiday, and slipped easily into Chittison's old role. His style was similar to that of his predecessor, but still distinctively his own. Once again, the series developed a following among hard-core jazz enthusiasts with no interest in snappy-talking newspapermen. Wilson himself greatly enjoyed



Staats Cotsworth and Jan Miner

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his time on the series, noting that he picked up many new fans and renewed the acquaintance of many older ones due to the exposure he received on the program.

Bartender Ethelbert was the final ingredient in *The Blue Note's* success. On the surface, he was an extension of the earthy, New York-to-the-core barkeep character that had been a steady part of the popular culture scene for decades, perhaps reaching its apotheosis with Ed Gardner's unforgettable portrayal of the malaprop-prone Archie of *Duffy's Tavern*. But as portrayed by Gibson, Ethelbert, whatever his grammatical missteps, was no comical oaf -- he was a keen, alert judge of character and usually had worthwhile observations on the case of the moment. In the program's earliest days, he had even been presented as something of a rough-diamond intellectual, serving up obscure literary allusions along with the drinks. Even after that trait faded away, he remained a likable, intelligent contributor to *The Blue Note's* atmosphere.

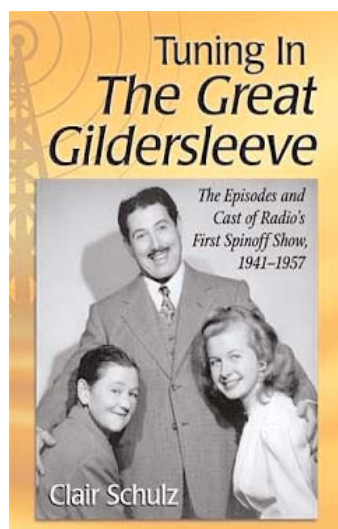
For regular Casey listeners, The Blue Note was a real place, with a continuous existence, that carried on during the intervals between the weekly broadcasts. It's not surprising that many real-life bars during the late 1940's adopted the "Blue Note" name for themselves -- some of which survive to this day. You won't find Casey and Ann there, or Ethelbert, or Herman Chittison, or Teddy Wilson ... but, the original Blue Note still lives on wherever Old Time Radio is heard. ■

Reprinted from the July 1912 issue of the *Radio Collectores of America* newsletter

## Tuning In The Great Gildersleeve

A Review By Doug Hopkinson

Once again, Clair Schulz has turned out another great book that will appeal to fans and researchers of old-time radio. His latest effort is titled *Tuning in The Great Gildersleeve* and is published by McFarland & Company, Inc. This 230 page soft cover tome is chock-full of information about



*The Great Gildersleeve*. Mr. Schulz enlightens us with details about the characters, the actors and actresses that portrayed them, the radio program, the movies and the brief television series.

The majority of the book is dedicated to a chronological episode guide of the radio series. Each entry has the broadcast date, the official title of the episode, the cast for that episode, the writers of that script, a brief summary of the pro-

gram, a comment section which complements the summary with more detailed description and a section Mr. Schulz calls allusions in which he points out any famous or not so famous literary references made during the program. All the information imparted by these episode descriptions is invaluable any audio collector that wants to assign a correct date to a file or to check the accuracy of a date assigned previously to a file within his or her *Great Gildersleeve* collection. Not only are there entries for all 500 plus known circulating episodes, there are also entries for 46 episodes that are as yet unknown to exist.

There are five appendices in this book dedicated to cast members, Gildersleeve in movies and television, an alphabetical listing of the episode titles, notable occurrences and ratings and rankings. Schulz gives a brief rundown on each cast member and their character on the *Gildersleeve* radio program and brief mention of other programs they may be known for. Each alphabetical title listing is followed by the broadcast date which is a very handy feature. The notable occurrences section is a list of firsts. First appearance by a cast member, first appearance of a character, first scripts by writers and first date a particular saying was spoken. The ratings and rankings is just a list of years and numbers and might interest some more than others. This book has a one page bibliography and nice 5 plus page index to close it out. The book is lightly sprinkled with pictures of the cast throughout; just enough to keep a reader happy.

This reviewer will not put much emphasis on the negatives of this book as the positives far outweigh them but they must be mentioned to maintain objectivity. The first is that it might have been nicer to break out the non extant audio episodes in some way. Schulz does ear-



mark them in the episode guide with (script) following the date of the episode. The same ear-marking is not applied in the alphabetical title listing of appendix C. The second negative is the price. While it is priced the same as other books of its genre, it is still a bit higher than most in the hobby will want to pay. It needs to be pointed out that the author does not set the price. The last negative is a repeat negative from Mr. Schulz's previous book. It is not truly a fault of the author but perhaps the editors at McFarland should have picked up on this. The vocabulary of the author is at a level a couple bars above the average joe. One should not need a reference book in order to read from a reference book and more than one probably will. In this reviewer's opinion a slight dumbing-down would be good. Again, the negatives are only being mentioned and not emphasized. Overall, this book is a great reference guide to The Great Gildersleeve and the hours of research Clair Schulz put in are quite apparent. This reviewer highly recommends the book and gives it a solid "A". ■



## **OTRR ACQUIRES NEW EPISODES AND UPGRADED SOUND ENCODES FOR July/August**

This is a list of newly acquired series/episodes. They may either be new to mp3 or better encodes. These were acquired by the Group during the months of May and June. They were purchased by donations from members and friends of the Old Time Radio Researchers. If you have cassettes that you would like to donate, please e-mail [beshiresjim@yahoo.com](mailto:beshiresjim@yahoo.com) For reel-to-reels, contact [david0@centurytel.net](mailto:david0@centurytel.net) and for transcription disks [tony\\_senior@yahoo.com](mailto:tony_senior@yahoo.com)

### **Fibber McGee And Molly**

55-09-28 McGee Fixes The Bathroom Shade.wav  
55-09-29 McGee Is Charitable To Lester.wav  
55-09-30 McGee Tries To Tell A Joke.wav  
55-10-03 McGee Makes A Suggestion To Molly's Club.wav  
55-10-04 Penetrating The Fortress.wav  
55-10-05 Preparing for Mister Shi.wav  
55-10-06 Doc And McGee Mess Up The Chowder.wav  
55-10-07 Molly Buys A Bookend.wav  
55-10-12 Mr And Mrs Average Citizen.wav  
55-10-13 McGee Tries To Write A Dunning Letter.wav  
55-10-14 McGee Delivers Papers.wav  
55-10-15 The Knocking Door Mystery.wav  
55-10-02 McGee And Wimple Visit A New Barber.wav

### **Great Scenes From Great Plays**

48-10-01 (01) Cyrano de Bergerac.wav  
48-10-08 (02) The Corn Is Green.wav  
48-10-10 (11) The Old Lady Shows Her Medals.wav  
48-10-15 (03) The Barretts Of Wimpole Street.wav

48-10-22 (04) Dark Victory.wav  
48-11-05 (06) Little Women.wav  
48-11-12 (07) A Tale Of Two Cities.wav  
48-11-19 (08) The Enchanted Cottage.wav  
48-11-26 (09) What Every Woman Knows.wav  
48-12-03 (10) The Devil And Daniel  
Webster.wav  
48-12-17 (12) Young Mr. Lincoln.wav  
48-12-31 (14) You And I.wav  
49-01-07 (15) The Citadel.wav  
49-01-21 (17) Icebound.wav  
49-01-28 (18) The Goose Hangs High.wav  
49-02-04 (19) The World We Make.wav  
49-02-11 (20) Dead End.wav  
49-02-18 (21) A Doll's House.wav  
49-02-25 (22) The Lady With A Lamp.wav  
**Green Hornet**  
43-11-21 Fire Blitz.mp3  
43-11-28 Diamond In The Rough.mp3  
43-12-11 The Man Who Came Back.mp3  
43-12-18 Story Of A Parrot.mp3  
44-01-01 Obvious Clue.mp3  
44-01-08 The Way Of A Woman.mp3  
44-01-15 Lowrey's Big Moment.mp3  
44-01-29 Pressure From Without.mp3  
44-02-05 Bent Paper Matches.mp3  
44-02-12 A Light In The Dark.mp3  
44-02-19 Short Circuit.mp3  
44-02-26 Murder Will Out.mp3  
44-03-04 A Case Of Honor.mp3  
44-03-11 Fog In The Night.mp3  
44-03-15 The State Versus Chester Canby.mp3  
44-03-25 The Man Who Fooled The World.mp3  
44-04-08 Intrigue On The Waterfront.mp3  
44-04-11 When Fools Rush In aka Death Wears  
A Mask.mp3  
44-04-18 Lady Of Intrigue.mp3  
44-04-25 The Orphan From St. Amand.mp3  
The 47-10-28 Exposed.wav  
The 47-11-04 Graft Crosses A Bridge.wav

47-11-11 Too Hot To Handle.wav  
52-10-01 Political Crossfire.mp3  
52-10-03 Spy Master.mp3  
52-10-08 The Changing Alibi.mp3  
52-10-10 Keys To A Robbery.mp3  
52-10-15 Election Boomerang.mp3  
52-10-17 Proof Of Treasure.mp3  
52-10-22 Jeff Warren's Safe.mp3  
52-10-24 Unknown Assassin.mp3  
52-10-29 The Microfilm Of Death.mp3  
52-10-31 The Hawkridge Gems.mp3  
52-11-05 A Friday Night In The Mountains.mp3  
52-11-07 The Simple Clue.mp3  
52-11-12 The Triple Cross.mp3  
52-11-14 Ceiling On Crime.mp3  
52-11-19 The Cigarette Filters.mp3  
52-11-21 Shipment For Korea.mp3  
52-11-26 Gas House Ending.mp3  
52-11-28 Murder And Espionage.mp3  
52-12-05 Axford's Romantic Disaster.mp3  
52-12-03 Pretenders To The Throne.mp3  
**MGM Theater Of The Air**  
49-12-09 (8) Anna Karenina.wav  
49-12-16 (10) The Youngest Profession.wav  
50-01-13 (14) Crossroads.wav  
50-01-20 (15) Slightly Dangerous.wav  
50-01-27 (16) Riptide.wav  
50-02-10 (18) Third Finger, Left Hand.wav  
50-02-17 (19) Queen Cristina.wav  
50-02-24 (20) Come Live With Me.wav  
50-07-28 (41) Public Hero Number One.wav  
50-08-04 (42) A Letter To Evie.wav



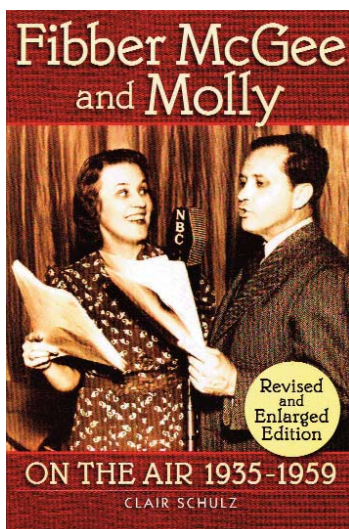
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# Fibber McGee & Molly On the Air 1935-1959

A Review By Doug Hopkinson

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BearManor Media has recently released a revised and enlarged edition of Clair Schulz's work first published in 2008. The book is, without doubt, an essential to any researcher or collector interested in verifying dates and titles of Fibber McGee and Molly audio files. Mr.



Schulz spent a great deal of time listening to each episode and also delving into the archives and compiling information from all the scripts. The book is a chronological guide to every episode of Fibber McGee and Molly. The author's intent was to provide a book that can be used to enhance the experience of listening to the program. One can open the book while listening to an episode and read the corresponding entry for it which will tell you the broadcast date, actual title from the script, the cast by character and actor, a brief summary of the plot, the music played and the performer, if there was a running gag used in the episode and a final comment about the episode. This reviewer particularly enjoyed the comments. They are insightful and on a personal level such as observations one might make to a fellow listener about the episode. The book concludes with 52 pages of appendices A through E. In order they cover: list of episode titles alphabetically, Hooper and Nielsen ratings and rankings by season, list of chronological dates in which the "hall closet" was opened with

a breakdown of usage per season, notable occurrences such as first and last appearances by actors and characters, sponsors by years and Fibber firsts and finally, guest appearances on other radio programs. The last 7 pages are the index which no reference book should be without. There should be no misunderstanding; this is a reference book and not a book about the history of Fibber McGee and Molly or Jim and Marian Jordan. Mr. Schulz relates a few facts in the preface and introduction about the Jordans and mentions other actors on the program as well as the various writers of the scripts over the life of the series but he does not examine each actor or writer in depth or detail their lives and histories. He only wrote a few pages at the beginning of the book to explain who the people and characters were and why the program was unique and successful for such a long time. The book does not boast many pictures but it does have a few. There are a couple of Jim and Marian, one of the full cast in 1945 and several of Fibber McGee related products.

This edition is touted as "revised and enlarged". New photographs were chosen for this edition. The first page also mentions that over 300 episodes were added including information for the programs for which no audio copies currently exist. Mr. Schulz claims that he re-listened to the 913 episodes listed in the previous edition so that errors could be corrected. He updated information and added comments to these. This new edition now has listings for every episode broadcast of Fibber McGee and Molly. On one hand, if you are an owner of the 2008 edition, it seems a shame that a new, improved version has come out and now you have to essentially buy the book twice, but on the other hand, it has been 5 years, no reference book ever published is without errors and new information is constantly being discovered. Mr. Schulz makes it



clear that in this new edition he wanted to address mis-information about the program such as people thinking and believing that the hall closet was opened on every episode. He wanted to put to rest the correct spelling of character names. With comments he wanted to provide a reliable impression of the episode and also a place to praise an actor or a writer for some particular feature in the episode. To all appearances Mr. Schulz has achieved his objectives. His new edition is the new bible for Fibber McGee and Molly facts. There are no shortfalls with this book. In past reviews of books authored by Mr. Schulz this reviewer may have mentioned that there are words used by the author that are a bit above the average vocabulary. This book has less of that although he did get in one good "verisimilitude" on page 14.

As a reviewer this book gets high marks. As a researcher, I like and appreciate this book very much. As a Fibber and Molly fan, I love this book!

*As a way of making this volume a special part of the lives of people who fondly remember Fibber McGee and Molly; I commissioned an artist to draw a caricature of Jim and Marian Jordan, printed the 11x14 work on 80-pound cardstock suitable for framing, and designed a special stamp to be placed next to the image of the Jordans.*

*Any order sent directly to me for \$34.95 (\$29.95 + \$5.00 shipping) will receive an autographed copy of the book plus one of the prints. The back of each drawing will be consecutively numbered in pen by me next to the stamp.*

*Clair Schulz*

For information regarding this offer, contact Clair at: [wistful79vista@hotmail.com](mailto:wistful79vista@hotmail.com).



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The Wireless Age, December, 1922

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