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Radio's Straight Shooter **TOM MIX** by Jack French © 2015

One of the longest running dramatic shows in the Golden Age of Radio portrayed the adventures of a cowboy-detective. The program was Tom Mix, sponsored by Ralston Purina of St. Louis, Missouri.

The cereal that Tom Mix sold by the carload to his radio audience of yesteryear has virtually disappeared from grocery stores. But to many *Tom Mix* is still as firmly associated with Ralston as their famous red and white checkerboard trademark. And it all came about because of the tremendous popularity of this western radio show, night after night, week after week, over a span of seventeen years.

The success of the radio program was no surprise to its creator, Charles E. Claggett, Sr., of St. Louis, Missouri. Claggett, then a spry 68 year old investment counselor when I interviewed him in 1976, told me "I'd done my homework and I knew Tom Mix would be as great a hit on radio as he was in movies."

In 1932 Claggett, a copywriter for Gardner Advertising Company, was determined to recover the Ralston Purina account his agency had recently lost to a New York firm. He conducted a survey of school age youngsters and confirmed that Tom Mix was the hero they most admired.

The president of Gardner, Elmer G. Marshutz, persuaded Mix to sign an agreement, which he had hastily scribbled on the back of an old envelope, giving the agency the right to use his name



in advertising and to impersonate him on radio. The Ralston Purina people were unconvinced of Mix's popularity, so Claggett created a full page advertisement which ran in a Sunday newspaper. The advertisement contained a Tom Mix comic strip which concluded by inviting youngsters to join the Tom Mix Straight Shooters Club for merely one Ralston cereal Box top. In those Depression days a premium response of 25,000 returns was considered good. "We drew half a million returns on that first ad," Claggett chuck-

led. "It literally buried William H. Danforth, Ralston's president, in box tops.. In fact, we took a photograph of him in the middle of his office with mail up to his neck."

The resulting *Tom Mix* radio program, first broadcast from NBC studios in New York City on September 25, 1933, was an immediate hit and Claggett had the Ralston account again. Tom Mix never actually appeared on the

radio show. His part was first played by Artells "Art" Dickson. The Old Wrangler was portrayed by Percy Hemus, a veteran character actor and native of New Zealand. When the show moved to Chicago in mid-1937, Hemus was the only cast member who was brought to the Midwest.

Russell Thorson, who a decade later would star as Jack in *I Love a Mystery*, became the new Tom Mix in Chicago. The third Tom Mix was Jack Holden. In the late thirties Holden's voice became too familiar on the WLS Barn Dance, so Claggett replaced him with Joe "Curley" Bradley, who filled the role until the series finally ended in 1950.

Bradley had originally joined the program before World War II as Pecos, one of the Ranch Boys Trio. The other two in this singing group were Jack Ross and Shorty Carson. In addition to vocalizing the commercials, they all filled in at various bit parts on the show.

"With the death of Percy Hemus in 1943, the Old Wrangler role evolved into Sheriff Mike Shaw, who was played by Leo Curley for over twelve years. Other long-term cast members were Jane Webb as a little girl, Forrest Lewis as



"Wash", the African-American cook and handy man, Sid Elstrom as Amos Q. Snood, and Templeton Fox who did many of the women's roles. All of the cast are now deceased. The last cast member to die was Jane Webb, who passed away on March 20, 2010 at age of 84."

Unquestionably Harold "Hal" Peary was the most versatile actor in the Tom Mix radio cast "He could do at least ten completely different characterizations," Claggett remembered. "Sometimes he'd be four separate people on the same show including two persons talking to each other." Most of the cast had parts in other radio shows and Peary was very much in demand. He was so popular as the neighbor on *Fibber McGee and Molly* that when that show moved from Chicago to California, its producers convinced Peary to go with them. Eventually Perry starred in his own radio program, *The Great Gildersleeve*.

Early in the radio series *Tom Mix* had two young wards, Jane and Jimmy. Jane Webb played her namesake for many years, but at least six different young boys played Jimmy; each losing his role as his voice changed. One of them grew up to be a top television per-

sonality in the mid-1950's, comedian George Gobel. Jane Webb also played several other roles, including Belinda on the show *Those Websters*.

A lone organist supplied the musical accompaniment for the singers, provided scene bridges, and punctuated the announcer's remarks. In the early days the man at the keyboard was Glenn Welty; after World War II Harold Turner was the organist. Several capable technicians, including Bob Cline and George Kuentz, handled the great sound effects the program prided itself on. The show had numerous producers over the years, Sid Menser, Bob Womboldt, and Al Chance to name a few. The last, and longest producer was a woman, Mary Afflick. She and Curley Bradley pursued an off-mike romance and eventually married.

In the early programs *Tom Mix* went through several writers but finally an eccentric fellow named Charles Tazewell nailed down the job and held it through the insistence on wearing a heavy overcoat every day, including the hottest days in summer.

"Our program had a high moral tone," Claggett recalled. "Both *Tom Mix*, whose name we were using, and William Danforth, our sponsor, insisted on that." Therefore the program was long on mystery, adventure, and humor but short on violence, cruelty, or revenge. Mix, a lawman and rancher in Dobie, Texas, seldom injured or killed treacherous villains. Tom would merely shoot the gun out of the offender's hand, or in emergency situations, he would render the villain unconscious by "creasing his skull" with a well-placed pistol shot.

Most of the programs began with the singing of the Ralston commercial. There were different versions over the years; the mid-1940's jingle, sung to the tune of "When It's Round-up Time in

Texas," went as follows:

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



Top: Compass Magnifier
Left: Sheriff Badge with Siren. Above: Siren Ring

The seventeen year duration of the *Tom Mix* radio program was interrupted for only one year. When the United States switched to daylight savings time in World War II, Ralston canceled the program because they were convinced that most youngsters would not give up their additional hour of daylight to come into the house and listen to *Tom Mix*. "They were wrong, of course," Claggett said, "but by the time they realized their mistake, we'd lost our time slot, and it took nearly a year to get another."

When they finally obtained the only available slot, it was on the Mutual Network opposite one of the most popular radio shows, *Dick Tracy*. To recapture the radio audience, Claggett took the direct approach: he successfully convinced the writer on the *Dick Tracy show*, George Lowther, to leave that program and write for *Tom Mix* instead. Within a few months *Tom Mix* was leading the ratings again.

From the very beginning radio premiums were a major source of interest to all young listeners, and *Tom Mix* offered enough different premiums over the years-to fill a stagecoach. Many were free ("for only a Ralston box top"), and the rest were available for a box top plus a small amount of money. The premiums included rings, badges, guns, bandanas, spurs, telegraph sets, bracelets, code books, stationery, vests, hats, lariats, and even a toy branding iron. Today these items are eagerly sought by collectors, and a Tom Mix ring or badge frequently sell for well over \$100.

The radio program stories were supposedly based upon the real exploits of Tom Mix, but even that premise permitted a wide latitude since the "real" Tom Mix was a curious mixture of fact and fiction, of legend and lore. He was born on January 6, 1880 in Cameron County, a rural area of western Pennsylvania. Later he would name Oklahoma or Texas as his birthplace and brag that he was "one-quarter Cherokee," but all of his ancestors were Irish-English.

He enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1898, served one enlistment but saw no action, and deserted after signing a second enlistment. He wandered through the Southwest in a variety of jobs: bartender, deputy sheriff, wrangler, and rodeo performer. Eventually his riding skills and marksmanship led to roles in the silent movies of Hollywood in 1913. In less than ten years Mix rose to



Curley Badley radio's Tom Mix

become one of the top stars and highest-paid actors in the country.

During the course of his ascent to fame, Tom and his press agents re-wrote his life story to eliminate his desertion and add military wounds, foreign service, and employment as a U.S. marshal and a Texas Ranger. It was pure fiction but an adoring public believed every word.

The real irony of the Tom Mix legend is that nearly every exaggeration could have been true. Tom was a genuine marksman, a superior athlete and a man of great courage and resourcefulness. Perhaps the publicity writers were only giving Tom's public the fanciful tales they demanded.

In the 1920's Mix was with Fox Studios, and he was making nearly \$20,000 a week (before the era of high taxes), had a mansion with a

seven-car garage and a plush ranch in Arizona. Thousands flocked to his movies to see a hero in a white hat who never smoked, drank liquor, or treated a woman with disrespect.

Fox dropped Tom's contract in 1928, about the time talkies were coming in, but it was probably his age more than his voice that was responsible. Mix at 48 years of age would have been hard pressed to complete the studio demands of a movie a month, especially the vigorous action films he was famous for. The stock market crash of 1929 wiped out Tom financially, and he began a new career as a wild west performer in the circus world.

His marksmanship and trick riding gained him a new generation of adoring fans in both the United States and Europe. But the bad weather, tight money, and high financial overhead of the late 1930's spelled doom for most circuses, including Tom's. He was still struggling financially when he was killed in an automobile crash near Florence, Arizona on October 12, 1940. Dead at 60 years of age, his body was brought back to Forest Lawn Cemetery, where it lies near Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., Jean Harlow, and other silver screen stars.

Few of his fans ever knew he had two daughters, Ruth and Thomasina, and still fewer knew he had been married five times.

"Tom's death never really affected the radio program," Claggett said. "We mentioned it briefly on the next program in a dignified announcement, but the listening youngsters quickly forgot." "The radio program actually stretched Tom's career an additional ten years after his death.

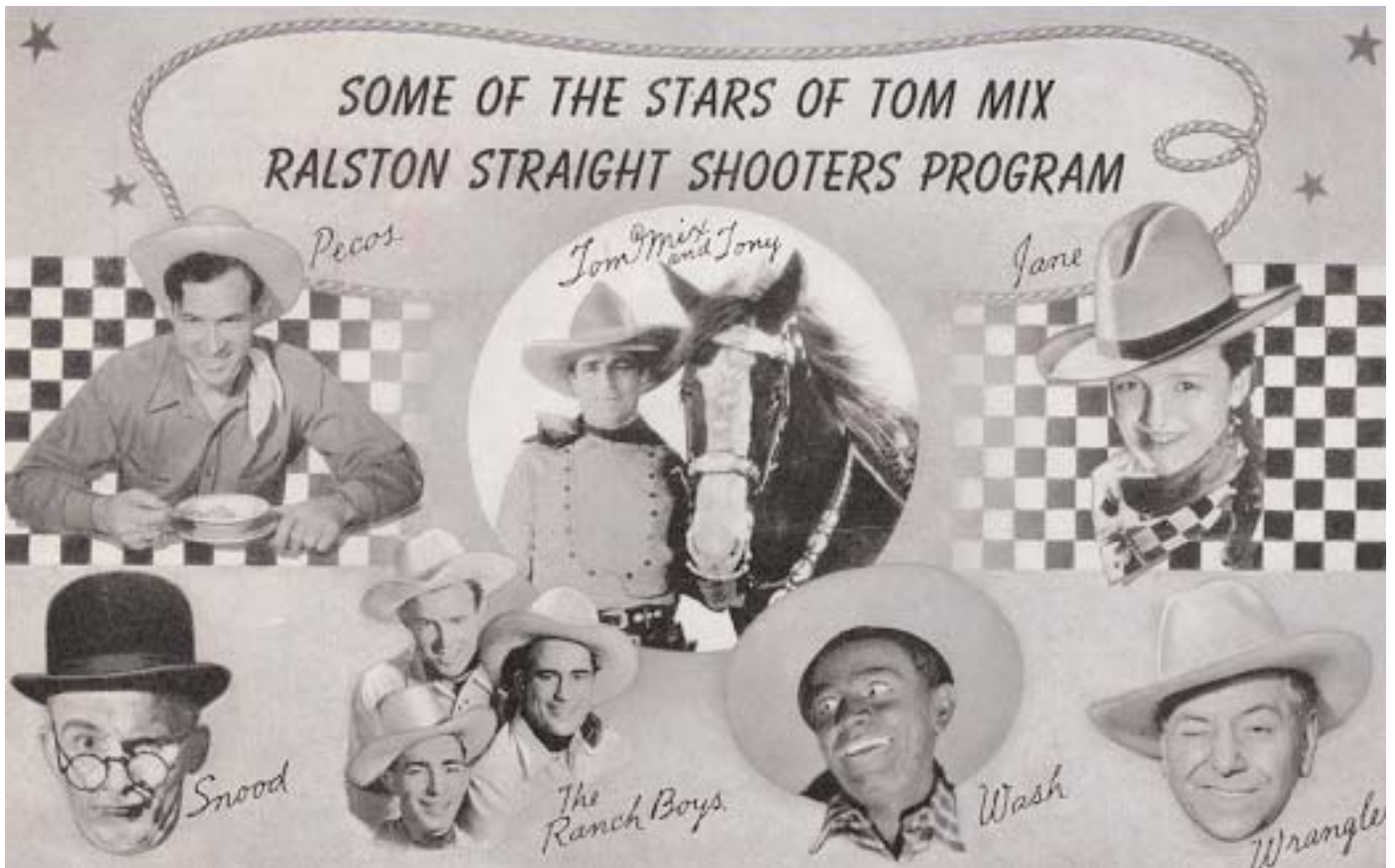
The radio program beamed its last broadcast on June 23, 1950. By that time few dramatic radio shows remained since advertising dollars and network interest had switched to the emerging television industry.

"When Ralston Purina ended its sponsorship of the *Tom Mix* program, Mutual wanted to run it as a sustainer. Ralston refused to give up its radio rights so Mutual reformatted the program under a new title of *The Singing Marshall*. It aired from July 1950 to December 1951.

Bradley, using his own name, played the marshal, while Leo Curley portrayed his side-kick and ranch foreman, "Red Rivers." Forrest Lewis was back as the African-American cook, this time named "Prosperity." After a few months, his character was phased out in favor a female ranch cook, voiced by Viola Burwick. Other regulars from the *Tom Mix* show were Don Gordon, announcer, and Mary Afflick, producer/director filled those same roles on *The Singing Marshall*."

But today Tom Mix is well remembered not only in the world of movies, radio, and circus but also in the ideals he portrayed. Each year thousands of visitors pass through the Tom Mix Museum in Dewey, Oklahoma, paying homage to both the man and the legend. For, as announcer Don Gordon concluded on the final Tom Mix radio broadcast, "In the heart and imagination of the world, Tom Mix rides on, and lives on, forever."





This postcard was mailed to all youngsters who wrote a fan letter to the *Tom Mix* radio program in the mid-1930's. Pictured are the real Tom Mix and Tony (who were not on the program) and Percy Hemus, Jane Webb, and The Ranch Boys trio (who were). "Pecos" is Joe "Curley" Bradley and the remaining two are Jack Ross and "Shorty" Carson.



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Written by Jay Hickerson January, 2015
Editor of Hello Again

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Truth or Consequences — A Christmas to Remember, 1947

by Martin Grams, Jr

It was the evening of December 20, 1947. Radio's popular quiz program, Truth or Consequences, recently concluded another Miss Hush Contest, Edwards tricked contestants into taking two live seals home for the night (for a \$500 prize of Easter Seals) and following a steady stream of DUZ commercials, Ralph Edwards delivered a holiday message that set the stage for the remaining 23 minutes of the program, with no commercial interruption. "Yes, it's here again. For the past week you've been going over that gift list and maybe most of your purchases, but now on the threshold in the big week of the year, with wreaths in the window, holly on the door, with a jolly old man with the long white whiskers fattening up his reindeer for the big trip down... There's no denying it, Christmas is here!" Edwards proclaimed. "And come Thursday morning, the bells will be ringing in all the churches, the kids will be laughing in all the houses and most everyone in their own way will be celebrating the reason for Christmas, the doctrine of peace on Earth, goodwill toward men. And... we got to thinking what an ironic thing it is that many of those who helped give peace the real meaning of the word, will be doing their celebrating from a bed or a wheelchair in a veteran's hospital. And I wonder if each one of them can know and feel in their hearts just how grateful we are. So fellas in hospitals all over the country, this next consequence is for you."

For the holiday season, Ralph Edwards and Ed Bailey, the producer of the program, established a special three-way set-up from the Long Beach Naval Hospital, in Long Beach, California, with a pick-up from several locations in



Greeneville, Tennessee. Through this three-way set-up, a wounded veteran in the hospital, Hubert Clark Smith, known to his friends as H.C., found himself a contestant on the radio quiz program.

Born in 1927, Hubert was a native of Greeneville, Tennessee. When he was old enough to enter service during the War, he asked his parents for permission. They hesitated at first but later figured it would be better to volunteer than wait to be drafted. He joined the Navy where he spent three years working on a mine-sweeper and on the USS Monongahela, an auxiliary oiler. His service in the war ended pre-maturely when Hubert and a friend hitched a ride back to the

Naval Base and the driver of the vehicle hit a utility truck that was working on the road. The force of the crash caused Hubert to hit his head on the roof of the automobile, breaking his neck. Before the automobile came to a standstill, Hubert's body had been



Hubert Clark Smith

thrown from the car and found on the pavement. He was promptly discharged from service and returned to the United States as a patient of the Long Beach Naval Hospital. He was paralyzed from the neck down and doctors gave him one chance in a million that he would ever get better. While most of America was sitting by the fire with their family and enjoying good health, Hubert, at the age of 19, was among the many war casualties who were lying in a hospital bed. And he was a long way from home, family and friends from Greeneville.

Following the radio broadcast, Hubert Smith partially recouped from his injuries. Both surgery and physical therapy helped improve Hubert's condition. He remained a quadriplegic for the remainder of his life and required assistance in daily activities. He needed a walker to get around until the day he died. Hubert did in fact marry Lyla Morrell, who remained his lifelong partner in marriage until her death from cancer in 1973. After he returned home in the late forties, Hubert attended Tusculum College and majored in mathematics and accounting, with

hopes to become a CPA. His dream was never realized and he settled with managing a large farm in the Milburton community. Hubert overcame his handicap by using a special ball point pen to write, able to drive for a certain vehicle around the farm and ran his own business on the farm. "Despite his injuries, he was a great example of determination and positive attitude," his sister-in-law, Mary Hartman, told the local newspaper, upon his death in 2006. Hubert C. Smith donated the majority of his money to the College for an endowed scholarship fund under his name. The scholarship continues – every year Mary Hartman receives numerous cards and notes from students.

"I knew I was to be on the program, but of course I didn't realize to the extent I would be involved," Hubert recalled in an interview with Chuck Schaden in 1988. "I had a previous call from one of Mr. Edwards' associates that they would like for me to be a contestant on the program."

His appearance on the radio program was the result of weeks of scheming and planning.

Ralph Edwards, contestant
and Jack Benny

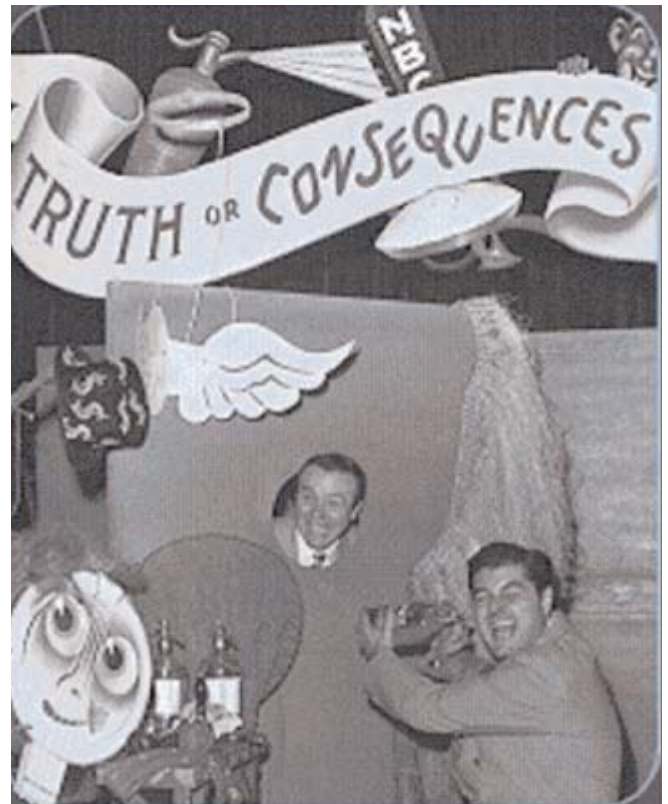


The question he was supposed to answer correctly was "Why is a lazy husband like a Model T Ford?" Hubert was unable to answer correctly. The answer Edwards was looking for was "Because both are shiftless." As a consequence, Hubert had to go along with the joke of pretending that he was wandering the streets of Greeneville on Christmas Eve. A number of engineers were stationed in Greeneville to broadcast live from the old George R. Lane Store, traffic sounds from Main Street, cut-ins from the high school Christmas party, and the ringing of the bells of Asbury Church. Hubert was able to exchange brief conversation with friends providing warm wishes.

Among his high school friends was Robert Parks, who reminded Hubert about the explosion they made in Mrs. Rhymer's chemistry class. Hal Neas mentioned the big football games they used to play. Bill Gammon told how he and Hubert used to shoot firecrackers in the study hall. Mr. Gilland, the principal at Chuckey-Doak High School, told Hubert that, "We're thinking of you all the time. The gang's all here with a happy tear in their eyes for you. Hurry and get well and Merry Christmas."

In Asbury Church, Ida Ripley was playing the organ and Rev. M. Guy Fleenor, spoke: "I have always thought about and preached about the joy of giving and how much more blessed it is to give than to receive. But tonight, I find genuine reason for joy in receiving... in receiving back into our midst one of our dearest friends, H.C. Smith. And whether by radio's miracle or in our dreams, H.C. has never left our hearts... and prayers that went with you into war will bring you back to us again to share the peace you have helped make possible."

By this time, Hubert Smith was trying to hold back the tears. With friends in Tennessee to



back him, Hubert led them in singing a rendition of "Silent Night." But the best was yet to come. He heard from his grandparents but he had yet to hear from his mother and father. As it turned out, they were in the Long Beach Naval Hospital, surprising the unsuspecting lad. Hubert was crying in a manner that he was almost speechless. This followed with a reunion with his girl, Lyla Morrell, two years his senior, who he would later marry. During the program she told Edwards and the radio listeners that she was an operator for the Inter-Mountain Telephone Company, "but the number that I want best is H.C." In arranging for Hubert's reunion, Edwards was able to talk to Hubert's mother into flying to California. She had never flown before and she was scared to death the entire time. She and her husband operated the Greeneville Bus Station for 50 years and on the program, Edwards explained how he arranged to have their employer hire substitute workers in order for

Hubert's parents to come to California. Near the end of the program, Edwards addressed all the servicemen in all the military hospitals. "This is your moment, too, fellows," he said, "because your parents and wives and children and sweethearts, in their minds and hearts, are thinking that they, too, are there with you. And that's what your hometown is thinking right now, too, boys. Small towns. Big cities. That's what they're thinking, and don't think it is just at Christmas-time, either. It's every day. It's just that with all this talk about peace on Earth at Christmas time, we wanted you to know in this special way that the peace you fought to give us... we are going to fight to keep."

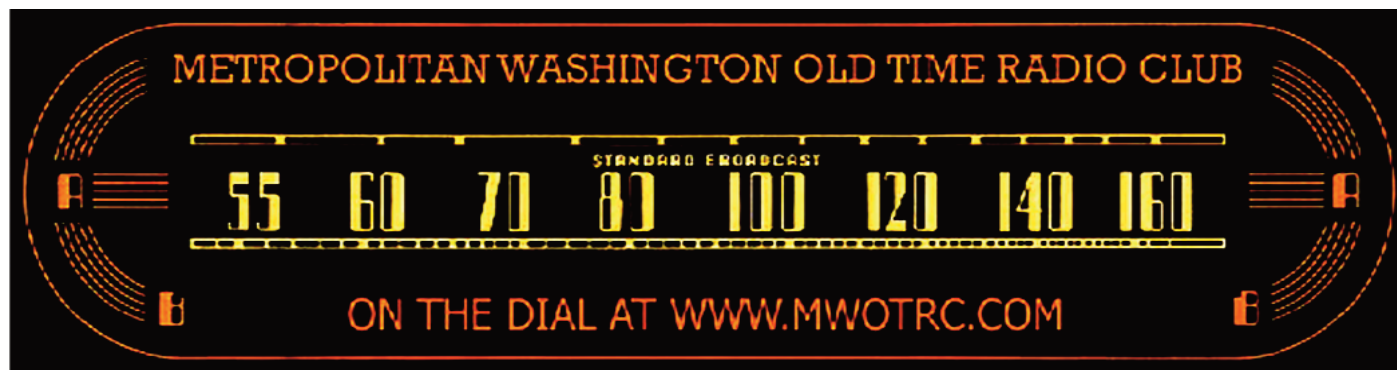
The holiday offering prompted a number of letters from radio listeners – supposedly hundreds, if not thousands. One letter was addressed simply to "H.C." – no state, no city, no hospital name, no nothing, just H.C. –sent from the post office in Greeneville and it went directly to Hubert's hospital bed in Long Beach, California. No delay. No dead letter office. No "Return to Sender" stamped on it.

"I received a number of cards and letters and some of the people, local groups in California, visited me and gave me gifts," Hubert later recalled. "Of course, a few months later, more or less as people went on with their daily activities, I didn't hear anything more until a number of years later when a record was released to individual stations for reruns and again I started receiving a number of phone calls." The reruns Hubert Smith recalled were probably as a result of a follow-up on The Ralph Edwards Show in the early fifties.

Fred Carney, the sound engineer who arranged for the connection at the Military Hospital that evening, later recalled that in all the years he worked on Truth or Consequences,

"The one which touched me most deeply was that in which a paraplegic boy in Long Beach was reunited by a three-way remote with his hometown friends and in his hospital room with his mother, father and girlfriend. The boy even heard carols sung in the church where he had attended. There were tears in my eyes, in the engineers and in the eyes of the other patients." Hubert Smith led a long and fruitful life following the radio broadcast. Hubert was not permanently paralyzed from the neck down, courtesy of both surgery and physical therapy. He remained a quadriplegic for the remainder of his life and required assistance in daily activities. He needed a walker to get around until the day he died. He did in fact marry Lyla Morrell, who remained his lifelong partner in marriage until her death in 1973. After he returned home, he graduated from Tusculum College and owned and managed a large farm in the Milburton community. "Despite his injuries, he was a great example of determination and positive attitude," his sister-in-law, Mary Hartman, told the local newspaper. ■





Going strong for 30 years, the **Metropolitan Washington Old Time Radio Club** brings people together who have an interest in Old Time Radio (OTR). This is done through monthly meetings consisting of presentations about OTR stars and programs, and recreations of classic OTR shows, plus occasional performances of member-penned scripts produced in the OTR style.

Radio Recall is our illustrated twelve page journal published every other month, edited by Jack French, OTR historian and author. Articles by Jim Cox,



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Gather 'Round the Radio (GRTR) has been a monthly e-Newsletter feature of the Club since 2005, containing book and

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Peg Lynch, Writer and Star of Early Situation Comedy, Dies at 98

by Bruce Weber July 27, 2015

Peg Lynch, who wrote and starred in “Ethel and Albert,” one of television’s earliest situation comedies, died on Friday at her home in Becket, Mass. She was 98.

Her daughter, Astrid King, confirmed the death.

Ms. Lynch, who wrote nearly 11,000 scripts for radio and television without the benefit of a writer’s room committee (or even a co-writer), was a pioneering woman in broadcast entertainment. As a creator of original characters and a performer of her own written work — every bit of it live! — she might be said to have created the mold that decades later produced the likes of Tina Fey and Amy Schumer.

And long before Jerry Seinfeld made a famous show ostensibly about nothing, mining the mundane details of the lives of single New Yorkers, Ms. Lynch did much the same thing, mining the mundane details of the lives of Ethel and Albert Arbuckle, a representative young married couple living in a representative American town called Sandy Harbor.

“I base my show on the little things in life,” Ms. Lynch said in an interview in *The New York Times* in 1950, when the show, then on radio, was known as “The Private Lives of Ethel and Albert.” “I believe that people like to find out that other people have some of the same problems they do.”

The show had its first national exposure as a 15-minute, five-day-a-week radio program on the Blue Network (the progenitor of ABC) in 1944, with the actor Richard Widmark playing Albert. Three of the radio scripts were staged for television in Schenectady, N.Y., in 1946 — by then her co-star, who remained with the show



Peg and her daughter Astrid King

for its remaining years, was Alan Bunce — and in 1950 *Ethel and Albert* appeared in sketches on *The Kate Smith Hour*, an afternoon variety show. It became its own weekly series, broadcast on Saturday nights on NBC, in 1953, later moving to CBS and then ABC before going off the air in 1956.

An affectionate portrayal of a loving couple and their ordinary befuddlements in ordinary pursuits — balancing the family budget, planning a trip, giving a party — *Ethel and Albert* was distinguished by its verisimilitude.

It was shrewd and observant in its writing; Jack Gould, *The Times*’s television critic, praised Ms. Lynch’s “uncanny knack for catching the small situation in married life and turning it into a gem of quiet humor.” And the understated comic acting of Ms. Lynch and Mr. Bunce (Margaret Hamilton, best known as the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz*, made guest appearances as Albert’s aunt), made it persuasively realistic, a mirror for its middle-American, Eisenhower-era viewers.

“The charm of *Ethel and Albert*,” Mr. Gould wrote, “is that they could be man and wife off screen.”



Alan Bunce & Peg

Margaret Frances Lynch was born on Nov. 25, 1916, in Lincoln, Neb. Her father, Hugh, who worked for the Moline Plow Company, died in the flu pandemic of 1918, and she and her mother, the former Clara Frances Renning, moved to Minnesota. She grew up in Kasson, Minn., near Rochester, and later Rochester itself, where her mother was a nurse at the Mayo Clinic.

As an enterprising teenager she worked at a radio station owned by a classmate's father, among other things lining up sponsors and, according to her website, interviewing celebrities like William Powell, Lou Gehrig, Jeanette MacDonald, Ernest Hemingway and Knute Rockne who were in town for medical reasons. An avid reader and writer from childhood, she graduated from the University of Minnesota.

In 1938, Ms. Lynch was writing copy for a variety of programming for KATE, a small radio station in Albert Lea, Minn., when, 10 years before she was married herself, she invented *Ethel and Albert*, who first appeared in three-minute

sketches within other programs.

"*Ethel and Albert*' was initially a sort of commercial," Ms. Lynch's daughter wrote on her mother's website, "Peg having discovered that a husband-wife format could be adapted to sell a variety of products. Try writing 15 minutes of snappy dialogue every week for 12 weeks in which a wife tries to persuade her husband to buy an Allis Chalmers Tractor and you'll get the picture."

She brought the characters with her when she moved to other stations, first in Charlottesville, Va., and later in Cumberland, Md., where *Ethel and Albert* were given their own 15-minute evening segment. From there it was on to New York in 1944.

Her pleasant, undemonstrative affect, no doubt a product of her Midwestern upbringing, and somewhat nasal voice, became signatures of the character of Ethel.

"When we first brought the show to New York, I didn't want to play Ethel," she said in an interview in *The Times* in 1946. "I was scared, you know, the big city and all that. But when we started auditioning other people I became frantic. They all had such beautiful lush voices, and I knew I simply couldn't write for somebody like that."

Before agreeing to appear on the Blue Network, she turned down an offer from NBC, which wanted to co-own the show, "possibly the only smart business move my mother has ever made," her daughter wrote. Ms. Lynch retained ownership of *Ethel and Albert* throughout her life. Ms. Lynch's marriage, to Odd Knut Ronning (her Norwegian third cousin), ended with his death in 2014. In addition to her daughter, she is survived by a grandson.

Ms. Lynch and Mr. Bunce returned *Ethel and Albert* to radio for three years in a show called

The Couple Next Door, and they performed the roles in numerous advertisements.

"I've heard from various people over the years that the conversational style in *'Ethel and Albert'* is similar to a show I've never seen," Ms. Lynch said in an interview published last year in the book "Poking a Dead Frog: Conversations with Top Comedy Writers" by Mike Sacks. " 'Siegfried'? 'Zigfeld'? 'Feigold'? Something like that?" She added: "I'd like to write an *'Ethel and Albert'* now, and what their problems would be like and how they would get through them. It would be interesting. Life becomes different when you're in your 90s. People treat you differently. People are always asking 'Are you warm enough?' or 'Are you hungry?' 'What can I do for you?' No, I'm fine thanks. I'll do it myself." ■



Peg and Parley Baer at one of the Cincinnati OTR Radio conventions. Parley said working with Peg was the high light of his career. That's saying a lot because Parley had great career. He wanted to it take the act on the road. The fact that we were able to make it possible for them and other radio actors to work together at our Cincinnati conventions was one of the reasons we were a successful event over the years.

Editorial Policy of the Old Radio Times

It is the policy of The Old Radio Times not to accept paid advertising in any form. We feel that it would be detrimental to the goal of the Old Time Radio Researchers organization to distribute its products freely to all wishing them. Accepting paid advertising would compromise that goal, as dealers whose ideals are not in line with ours could buy ad space.

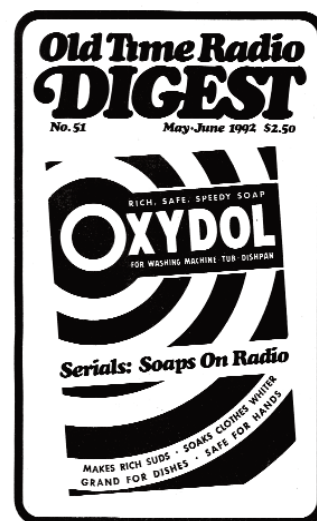
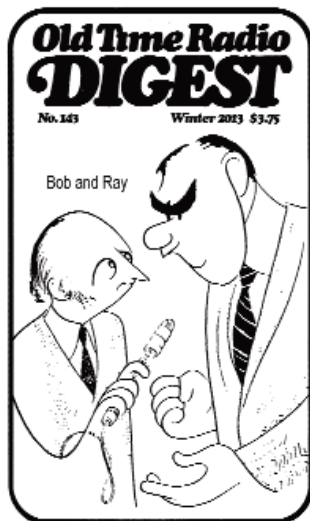
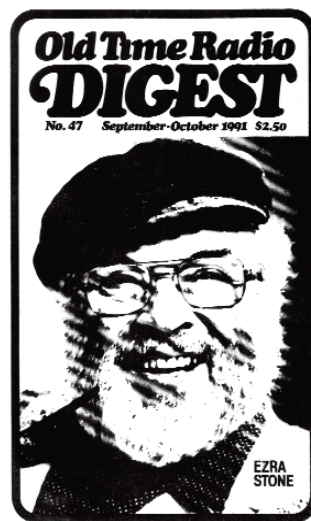
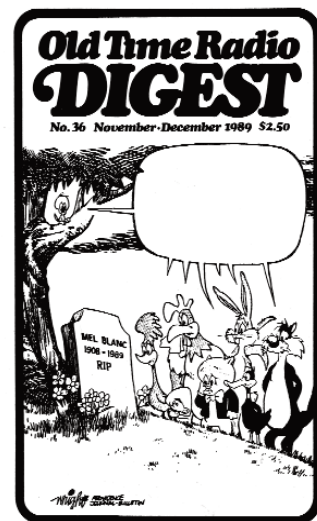
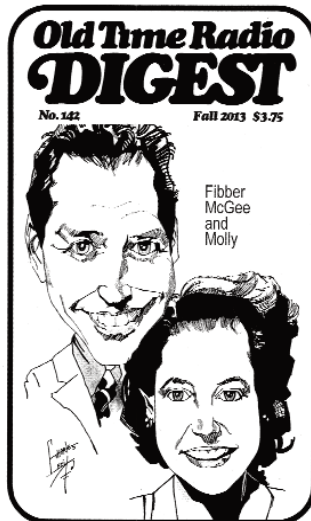
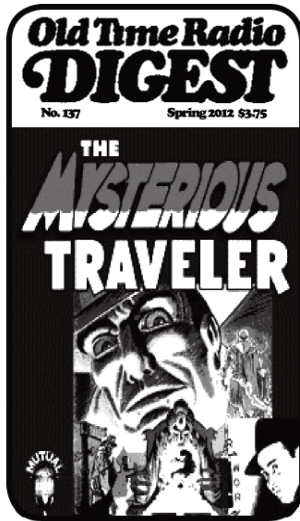
That being said, The Old Radio Times will run free ads from individuals, groups, and dealers whose ideals are in line with the group's goals and who support the hobby.

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We will gladly carry free ads for any other old time radio group or any group devoted to nostalgia. Submit your ads to: bob_burchett@msn.com

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We are offering a **FREE** issue in hopes you will like what you see and want to subscribe. The Digest is the longest running OTR publication without a club connection. (30 years 149 issues.)

Editor's note: I ran this article in last year's Nov/Dec issue. It brought back many memories of my growing up listening to Christmas shows. I thought it might be a good idea to repeat it. Many of the Christmas shows were repeats, and no one seemed to mind.

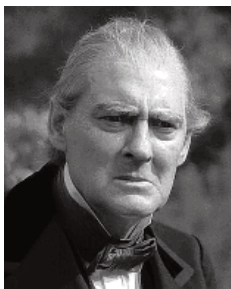
Unexpected Christmas Classics

by Elizabeth McLeod

One of radio's most endearing qualities was its consistency during the holiday season. Every year, December after December, you knew that Bing would sing "Adeste Fideles," that Amos would explain the Lord's Prayer to Arbadella, that Lum and Abner would follow a bright star through a snowy winter night, that Jack Benny would go shopping and trim his tree, and that



Lionel Barrymore would once again "Bah Humbug" his way through "A Christmas Carol." It was that familiarity, that sense of favorite things annually repeated, that gave the holiday season so much of its family flavor during the 1940's and early 1950's ... right up through those last years before television came along with a new set of seasonal traditions.



But, not all of radio's Christmas classics were the old familiar favorites. Every year, lis-



teners could expect to come across something unusual or unaccustomed, a chance to hear a fresh and different angle on the holiday season. Consider Sherlock Holmes, for example -- ever the coldblooded intellectual criminologist in his longrunning radio series, he is hardly a figure one normally associates with Yuletide. But, there he was on Christmas Eve of 1945, as portrayed by Basil Rathbone, bringing all the powers of his analytical brain to bear in an effort to recover a sack of Christmas gifts stolen by one of Professor Moriarty's innumerable henchmen. An Elementary Christmas to all, and to all a good night.

Likewise, one doesn't normally think of Milton Berle when Christmas cheer comes to mind. Unlike many of his comedy colleagues, Berle was never associated with a particular festive holiday tradition. He had no Christmas theme song to call his own; he never gathered his cast around the fireside for a warm family evening of carols and egg nog; and, if Santa walked onto his show, Berle would have been likely to hit him flat in the face with a Christmas



creme pie. And yet, there he was in 1947 (just before he moved on to bigger things in television), getting all the legitimate laughs he could out of the holiday season in a well-written, highly entertaining "Salute To Christmas." And, contrary to his gaghogging, Berle was generous with the laughs in this broadcast -- with one of the funniest bits allocated to his double-talking stooge Al Kelly, who brings down the house with a virtuoso reading of "The Night Before Christmas."

Even less likely to be associated with Christmas festivities than Berle, was the venerable Nick Carter, Master Detective -- who normally devoted himself to the eradication of ruthless Nazi spies and saboteurs, and the occasional mad scientist (who might easily have wandered in



from a nearby Shadow script). But, on Christmas night 1943, there was Nick himself -- in his straight-arrow Street-and-Smith sort of way -- setting out to cure a modern-day Scrooge of his dislike for the holiday season. As adaptable as ever, and accompanied as always by Patsy and Scubby, Nick fit right into this scenario ... as though he were related in some way to that other well-known Nick...the one in the furtrimmed red suit.

And, then there's Rocky Fortune! He was one of the many hard-boiled freelance adventurers who popped up in legions over the postwar era, as unavoidable to listeners at the time as ribbon candy on Grandma's Christmas table. Since Rocky and his fellow tough guys of the late forties were never particularly known for their sentimentality, you might expect him to spend the holiday in a lonely office with the

lights off.. .forlornly polishing his roscoe with a half-empty quart of rye sitting on the desk next to him. But, given the appropriate crime, a man such as Rocky Fortune was fully capable of giving his adventures a Christmas



twist. Sure enough, there he was in 1953 solving "The Plot To Murder Santa Claus." Rocky was the sort of character who'd do anything for a buck, as tough and cynical as they came, but nobody messed with the fat man when he was on the case! Frank Sinatra may have made more memorable contributions to the nation's holiday lore over the course of his long career, but his work as the enterprising Mr. Fortune is an oft-forgotten Christmas treat.

Had enough of the city streets? How about some sagebrush? When the Christmas season arrives, it arrives everywhere ... even the ever wild West. In 1950, the timeless heroes of Tales From The Texas Rangers offered a tale from their 1930's files dealing



with the desperate acts of a Depression-ravaged bandit at Christmastime. That adventure demonstrated that, while crime never pays, holiday kindness always does. Film star Joel McCrea is suitably earnest in his Ranger role, giving radio one of its better attempts at a modern-day Western anthology program.

Will Rogers wasn't a particularly Christmas-oriented performer in his lifetime, although one could certainly imagine him suiting up as Santa for his small-town neighbors in some for-

gotten 1930's film role. Although his son, Will Rogers Jr, never quite matched his dad's charisma, he put forth an entirely credible latter-day twist on his father's established persona in the early 1950's comedy-drama *Rogers of the Gazette*. He was just the sort of folksy down-home editor you might



actually expect to hear stating that all he knows is what he reads in the papers. In this role, the junior Rogers offers up a perfectly agreeable holiday outing with "A White Christmas in Ilyria," a warm 1953 tale of smalltown folk banding together to help those in need of help.

And, don't forget Radio's Outstanding Theatre of Thrills when you make up your holiday listening plans. Over its twenty-year run, *Suspense* took on just about every topic you could dramatize on the radio, and Christmas is no exception. One of the series most unusual holiday episodes was one of its most timely. In late 1957, the Cold War was at its frigid worst, with Americans whipped into yet another anxious frenzy by the launching of the Soviet satellite Sputnik. Producer-director William N. Robeson and writer Michael Frost offer an allegory called "Dog Star," the tale of an innocent young girl who wants a puppy for Christmas ... and gets her wish granted ... from a most unexpected, sky-spanning source. Suspenseful yet poignant, the episode demonstrates the creativity and thoughtfulness that year after year characterized this long-running program. Familiar performers might also show up in unfamiliar guises over the holiday season. Consider Harold Peary, for example -- the actor best known for his portrayal of pompous-yet-endearing Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve.



Christmas was always a big deal around the Gildersleeve household, with niece Marjorie's yearnings and nephew Leroy conniving as always for one spectacular gift. Peary's naturally-jovial personality made him an ideal hero during these episodes, always out to do right by his family and friends. But, when Peary left *The Great Gildersleeve* in 1950, one might have expected his holiday-season presence to disappear as well. And yet, there he was, jolly and well-meaning as ever as the star of his new series *Honest Harold*. While not an identical to Gildersleeve, the new-show had enough in common with the old to easily carryover the mood of the original series. So, when "Honest Harold" hosts a Christmas party for the neighborhood kids, there's no disguising his trademark good-natured Gildyness. Whether it was old stars in new roles, unaccustomed settings for familiar themes, or just the comforting presence of a glowing dial on a cold, snowy night at home, radio was an integral part of the holiday season for a generation of Americans. However you observe the season, whatever listening you enjoy with your own family and friends this December, may your own holidays be happy and healthy -- and memorable too. ■

(Reprinted from Radio Collectors of America newsletter December issue)

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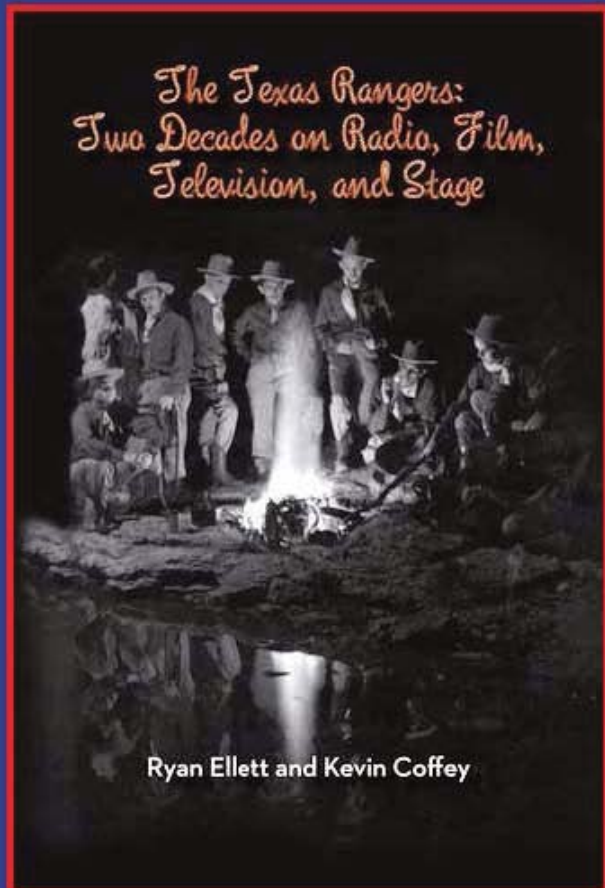
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The Texas Rangers. Millions of people heard them on radio and saw them in movies featuring Gene Autry, Johnny Mack Brown, and others.

Kansas City's KMBC was home to many Country and Western artists during radio's Golden Age, but few could match the popularity and longevity of The Texas Rangers. Debuting in 1932, The Texas Rangers entertained America by radio, records, tours, motion pictures, and television before finally disbanding in the 1950s.

*The Texas Rangers:
Two Decades on Radio, Film,
Television, and Stage*



Ryan Ellett and Kevin Coffey

With few commercially released singles, The Texas Rangers were soon forgotten after their heyday except by the most devoted fans of the genre. Now, nearly six decades after the end of their performing years, *The Texas Rangers: Two Decades on Radio, Film, Television, and Stage* offers an in-depth history of the Texas Rangers. This book provides a rare look into the personalities and business dealings that kept the group performing before the public for more than twenty years.

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Billboard vs Jimbo: Amos 'n' Andy

by James Mason

Amos 'n' Andy

Reviewed Friday, 10 -10:30 p.m. Style—Comedy.
Sponsor—Lever Bros. (Rinso & Vimms Hitch Hike.)
Agency—Ruthauff & Ryan. Station—WEAF
(New York) and NBC.

Radio's first and greatest blackface act came home Friday a better act than when it went away. The new show-frame, a half hour of the old characters (Amos and Andy, Fingfisher, Lightnin' and Henry Van Porter) plus a guest star, in a complete script each week instead of the quarter-hour script, was a solid click.

The duo faded from CBS rather than do a once-a-week half-hour session. The current sponsor apparently had a better talent contract than did the previous bank-roller.

Script was loaded with gags and garnered lusty laughs from the studio audience: first time since their Sam and Henry days that this duo worked before filled pews. It was situation comedy all the way, and even tho it was trite in spots, the timing and delivery of the Messers Gosden and Correll gave the show whip and wham. Their writing was also punchy. Each scene closed with a smapper.

Script, an oldie, had Andy trying to con a rich uncle into believing he was successful husband so's to get a mention in the will.

It was an obvious plot, and just so obvious that the playing made it sparkle.

Charles Coburn, the guester, was in his glory as a reprobate of a veterinarian who permits himself to be bribed, without too much persuasion to prescribe a pronto return home for the wealthy relative. He was shaky at the start but got into the groove when the studio audience



started to laugh. Nor did Amos "n" Andy stint the laughs they wrote for Coburn. He had the biggest belly of the show.

Old-timers who dialed Amos 'n' Andy by listening for their theme tune will have to remember the Bob White musical signature that identifies Rinso programs. This won't be tough, as the show is in the must class. Opposition is Bob Hawk's Thanks for the Yanks quiz on CBS.

Lou Frankel

The 30 minute version of Amos and Andy is a fine show, despite what you might read or might have heard - or as in the case of XM Radio, not have heard.

XM refuses to play Amos and Andy, obviously afraid of the backlash they would receive.

Here's the thing: Amos and Andy is part of history. It's no different than people still eat at restaurants despite the fact that prior to the 60's most of those places were racially divided. It's

also no different than Dave Chappelle's show a few years back; he made fun of all races, including his own. Controversial? Yes, but the man sold more TV show DVD's than anyone else.

And besides, the show, "Amos and Andy" isn't making fun of anyone. They are simply doing a schtick - unlike Chappelle, who even made fun of his own race!

Now, on with the review:

The show really has a bad title as Amos has virtually nothing to do with the show. As a matter of fact, Amos is such a good guy, if he were a central part of the show, I'm afraid the show would be no fun at all. He does show up now and then but only to provide some sort of morality to the plot.

The show really centers around The Kingfish, a conniving, scheming out-for-a-buck fellow who

usually takes easy pickings from Amos, who is a tiny bit slower than most folk. If the show should come with a warning, it shouldn't be about race but about the fast-buck morals of said Kingfish.

Other than the fact they are "black" there is no difference in their act than say, a cross between various John Brown radio characters, Lou Costello, Ralph Kramden and Fred Flintstone.

You can follow Jim at his blog - <http://otrbuffer.blogspot.com/>



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Joan Davis from Wikipedia

Joan Davis (June 29, 1907– May 22, 1961) was an American comedic actress whose career spanned vaudeville, film, radio and television. Remembered best for the 1950s television comedy *I Married Joan*, Davis had a successful earlier career as a B-movie actress and a leading star of 1940s radio comedy.

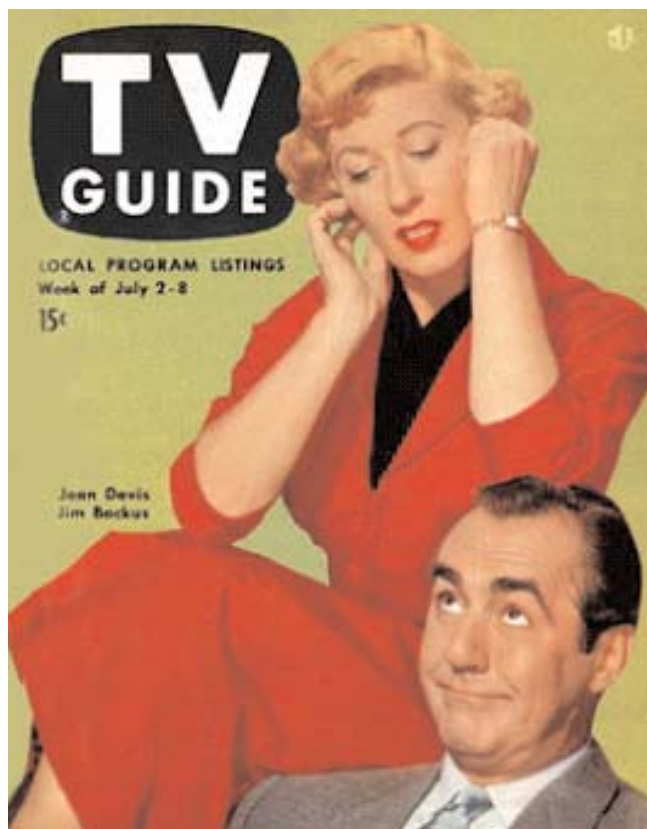
Born Madonna Josephine Davis in Saint Paul, Minnesota, Davis had been a performer since childhood. She appeared with her husband Si Wills in vaudeville.

Radio

Joan Davis entered radio with an August 28, 1941, appearance on *The Rudy Vallee Show* and became a regular on that show four months later.

Swan soap ad featuring Davis' radio show, 1945. Davis then began a series of shows that established her as a top star of radio situation comedy throughout the 1940s. When Vallee left for the Coast Guard in 1943, Davis and Jack Haley became the co-hosts of the show. With a title change to *The Sealtest Village Store*, Davis was the owner-operator of the store from July 8, 1943, to June 28, 1945, when she left to do *Joanie's Tea Room* on CBS from September 3, 1945, to June 23, 194. Sponsored by Lever Brothers on behalf of Swan Soap, the premise had Davis running a tea shop in the little community of Smallville. The supporting cast featured Verna Felton. Harry von Zell was the announcer, and her head writer was Abe Burrows, formerly the head writer (and co-creator) of *Duffy's Tavern* and eventually a legendary Broadway playwright.

The tea shop setting continued in *Joan Davis Time*, a CBS Saturday night series from October 11, 1947, to July 3, 1948. With Lionel Stander as the tea shop manager, the cast also included Hans Conried, Mary Jane Croft, Andy Russell, the Choraliers quintet, and John Rarig and his Orchestra.



Leave It to Joan ran from July 4 to August 22, 1949, as a summer replacement for *Lux Radio Theater* and continued from September 9, 1949, to March 3, 1950. She was also heard on CBS July 3 through August 28, 1950. She was a frequent and popular performer on Tallulah Bankhead's legendary radio variety show, *The Big Show* (1950–52).

Films

Davis' first film was a short subject for Educational Pictures called *Way Up Thar* (1935), featuring a then-unknown Roy Rogers. Educational's distribution company, Twentieth Century-Fox, signed Davis for feature films. *Tall and Lanky*, with a comically flat speaking voice, she became known as one of the few female physical clowns of her time. Perhaps best known for her co-starring turn with Bud Abbott and Lou Costello in *Hold That Ghost* (1941), she had a reputation for flawless physical comedy. Her pantomime sequence in *Beautiful But Broke*

(1944) was a slapstick construction-site episode. Not to forget *TAILSPIN* (1939) as a supporting actor, for the women's Bendix Air Race circuit.

She co-starred with Eddie Cantor in two features, *Show Business* (1944) and *If You Knew Susie* (1948). Cantor and Davis were very close offscreen as well.

Television

When *I Love Lucy* premiered in October 1951 on CBS Television and became a top-rated TV series, sponsors wanted more of the same with another actress who wasn't afraid of strenu-

ous physical comedy. *I Married Joan* premiered in 1952 on NBC, casting Davis as the manic wife of a mild-mannered community judge (Jim Backus) who got her husband into wacky jams with or without the help of a younger sister, played by her real-life daughter, Beverly Willis. *I Married Joan* did not nearly achieve the ratings success enjoyed by *I Love Lucy*, but during its first two years it received moderately successful ratings, even cracking the top 25 for the 1953–1954 season. However, by the start of its third year, not only were the ratings beginning to slip,

You'll love JOAN DAVIS

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MY JOANIE! YOUR CHEEK'S AS SOFT AS A SWAN BABY'S!

THERE'S a new love in the life of Joanie—America's Comedy Queen! And Joanie has put together the grandest, slap-happiest radio show of her life for her brand-new heart-beat—Swan. And for you!

It's mirthful! Musical! Merry! Full of Joanie's come-hither!

Crammed with Joanie's special cart-wheeling kind of gags that make you laugh right up from your toes!

Don't miss the fun when America's No. 1 Chuckle-Queen goes into her rib-tickling radio act.

You'll be crazy about Swan's new Joan Davis Show with Andy Russell!

CONSULT YOUR LOCAL PAPER

NEW TIME!

EVERY MONDAY NIGHT ON CBS

NEW STATION!

SEE JOAN DAVIS
STAR OF "GEORGE WHITE'S SCANDALS"
RKO Radio Picture
Soon at your local theater

but Davis was beginning to experience heart problems. As a result, the series was canceled in the spring of 1955. Ironically, in its original syndicated run, the series was extremely popular and received high ratings. After Davis died in the spring of 1961, most if not all local TV stations at the time removed the show from their line-ups as a matter of taste—laughing at someone who had just died.

In 1956, a year after *I Married Joan* had ended its prime-time run, Davis was approached by ABC to star in another sitcom called *The Joan Davis Show*. The premise of this proposed series had Davis playing a musical comedy entertainer who had raised a daughter on her own. Davis used her real name as the lead character. Veteran character actress Hope Summers was cast as Joan's housekeeper, and Davis' daughter Beverly Wills was signed to play Joan's daughter, also named Beverly. Child actor Ray Ferrell was cast as Joan's grandson Stevie. In

the pilot, Joan was being introduced to her five-year-old grandson for the first time and was trying to convince Beverly that, despite her hectic show-business schedule and her somewhat zany personality, she was a loving and responsible grandmother. The pilot did not sell as a series for ABC. It was virtually forgotten among Davis' television work until many years later when the Museum of Television & Radio in New York discovered the program and added it to its collection.

Death

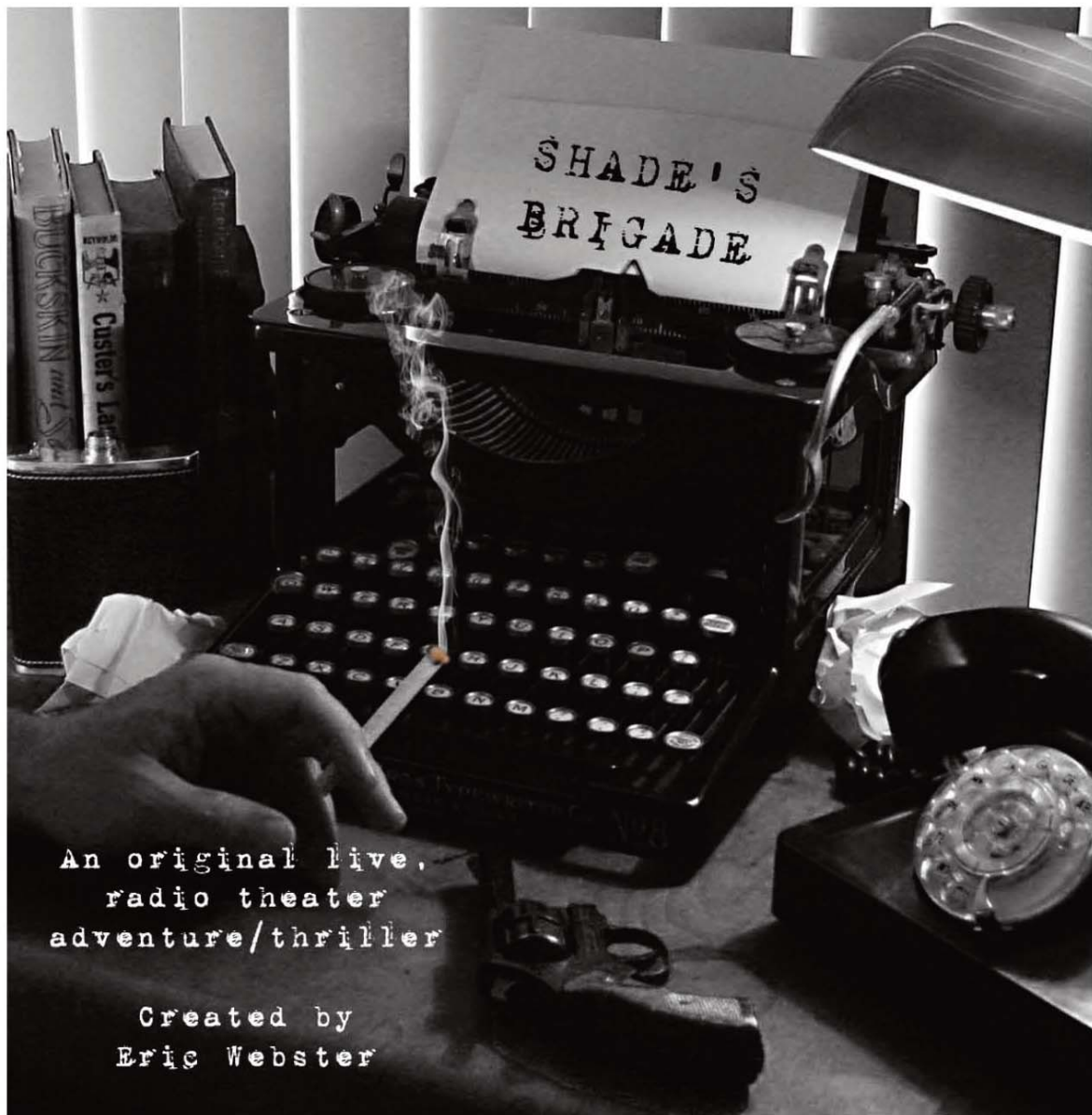
On May 22, 1961, Davis died of a heart attack at the age of 53 at her home in Palm Springs, California.[4][5] She was interred in the Holy Cross Cemetery mausoleum in Culver City, California.

On October 24, 1963, Davis' mother, daughter Beverly Wills, and two grandchildren were all killed in a house fire in Palm Springs, California.



Lou Costello, Bud Abbott, and Joan Davis in "Hold That Ghost"

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OTRR ACQUIRES NEW EPISODES AND UPGRADED SOUND ENCODES FOR NOV. AND DEC.

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 Sept. and Oct. 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
For reel-to-reels, contact david0@centurytel.net & for transcription disks tony_senior@yahoo.com

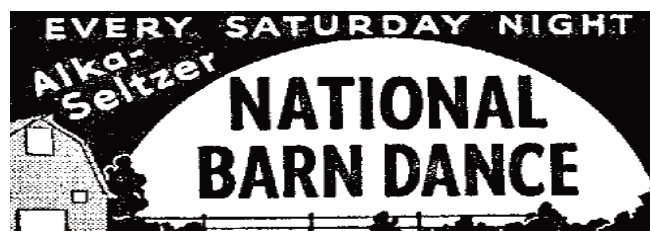
Refreshment Club

01-01-37 1st Song - Labumba.mp3
01-04-37 1st song - Your Tuscany.mp3
01-05-37 1st song - The Continental.mp3
01-06-37 1st song - Billboard March.mp3
01-07-37 1st song - It happened in Chicago.mp3
01-08-37-1st song - Why do I lie to myself about you.mp3
01-11-37 1st song - High_and_low.mp3
01-12-37 1st song - First_call.mp3
01-13-37 1st song - Hail to the spirit of liberty mp3
01-14-37 1st song - We saw the sea.mp3
01-15-37 1st song - Golddiggers Lullaby.mp3
01-18-37 1st song - I love a parade.mp3
01-19-37 1st song - Happy Landing.mp3
01-20-37 1st Song - March Time.mp3
01-21-37 1st Song - Rise and shine.mp3
01-22-37 1st Song - Love is sweeping the country.mp3
01-25-37 1st Song - My Love Parade.mp3
01-26-37 1st Song - I take to you(1).mp3
01-27-37 1st Song - War correspondent march.mp3
01-28-37 1st Song - Gee but your swell.mp3
01-29-37 1st Song - The lady in red.mp3
02-01-37 1st Song - Things look rosy now.mp3

02-02-37 1st Song - Maine Song.mp3
02-03-37 1st Song - March for liberty.mp3
02-04-37 1st Song - Crazy Rythm.mp3
12-01-36 1st Song - Cross Patch.mp3
12-02-36 1st Song - Strilke up the band.mp3
12-03-36 1st Song - Coming at you(1).mp3
12-03-36 1st Song - Coming at you.mp3
12-04-36 1st Song - Goody Goody.mp3
12-07-36 1st Song - Fare thee well Anabelle.mp3
12-08-36 1st Song - Pennies from heaven.mp3
12-09-36 1st Song - March Time.mp3
12-10-36 1st Song - Two buck Tim.mp3
12-11-36 1st Song - Wake up and sing.mp3
12-14-36 1st Song - Let yourself go.mp3
12-15-36 1st Song - You hit the spot.mp3
12-16-36 1st Song - On the square march.mp3
12-17-36 1st Song - I feel a song coming on.mp3
12-18-36 1st Song - Sing its good for you.mp3
12-21-36 1st Song - Roll out of bed with a smile .mp3
12-22-36 1st Song - Tell the truth.mp
31-23-36 1st Song - The diplomat March.mp3
12-24-36 1st Song - Drums in my heart.mp3
12-25-36 1st Song -I Love Louisa (Yuletide Show).mp3
12-28-36 1st Song - Dixie.mp3
12-29-36 1st Song - Frost on the moon.mp3
12-30-36 1st Song - On the ball march.mp3
12-31-36 1st Song - Stand up and cheer.mp3

Silver Eagle

06-29-54 Redmans Vengeance.mp3
07-08-54 Murder onMukluk Creek.mp3
07-22-54 Indian War Clouds.mp3
07-29-54 Blood Brother.mp3
12-02-54 BorderRenegade (cut opening).mp3



The National Lum and Abner Society from Wikipedia

The National Lum and Abner Society, formed in 1984, published a bimonthly newsletter, The Jot 'Em Down Journal, until 2007. Between 1985 and 2005 the organization held 20 annual conventions (skipping 2004) in Pine Ridge and Mena, Arkansas, playing host to numerous veterans of the Lum and Abner radio programs and motion pictures. Since 2007, the NLAS has existed as an organization with free membership with its Jot 'Em Down Journal transferred to the NLAS website. Founding officers Sam Brown, Tim Hollis, and Donnie Pitchford have remained connected to the organization since the beginning.

NLAS Convention guest stars included radio-television-cinema veterans Roswell Rogers, Clarence Hartzell, Jerry Hausner, Elmore Vincent, Wendell Niles, Bobs Watson, Les Tremayne, Louise Currie, Willard Waterman, Parley Baer, Cathy Lee Crosby, Forrest

Owen, Mary Lee Robb, Kay Linaker, Frank Bresee, Fred Foy, Barbara Fuller, Sam Edwards, Dick Beals, Rhoda Williams, Robie Lester, Ginny Tyler, Nancy Wible, and Dallas McKennon. Additionally, various family members and personal friends of Chester Lauck and Norris Goff were present.

The first NLAS "Reunion" took place in June 2011 as part of the annual Lum and Abner Festival in Mena, Arkansas to celebrate the 80th Anniversary of the Lum and Abner show as well as the 75th anniversary of the changing of the name of Waters, Arkansas to Pine Ridge. The NLAS has released the first three CD volumes of Audio Jot 'Em Down Journals for blind members, working through the Helping Hands for the Blind organization in California. These contains readings of the 1984-89 printed issues of The Jot 'Em Down Journal. A fourth volume is on hold at present.

LUM and ABNER

BASED ON CHARACTERS CREATED BY CHESTER LAUCK AND NORRIS GOFF

In a 1933 *Lum and Abner* broadcast, Lum, Abner, and Grandpappy Spears "foller th' East Star" through the snow with supplies for a poor young couple forced to spend a cold night in an abandoned barn.

In a manger, the wife, tended by Doc Miller, gives birth to "a fine baby boy."

This touching story, symbolic of the Biblical account of the birth of Christ, was reenacted annually until *Lum and Abner* left the air.

"Lum and Abner's Traditional Christmas Story" was revived in syndication and can be heard to this very day.

Merry Christmas!

DONNIE PITCHFORD

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For more info: www.lumandabnersociety.org + Facebook: "Lum and Abner Comic Strip Group"