

RETURN WITH US NOW...

The Radio Historical
Association of Colorado, Inc.



Volume 19 Number 4

November, 1993



"The Big Show," a lavish 90-minute weekly variety program, was launched on November 4, 1950. With Tallulah Bankhead as hostess and Meredith Wilson as musical director, it featured the biggest stars in show business. In this picture are left to right, George Sanders, Portland Hoffa, Groucho Marx, Fred Allen, and Tallulah.

CLUB MEETING: There will be an November, 1993, R.H.A.C. meeting.

The November 1993 R.H.A.C. meeting will be Thursday, November 18h at 7:30 PM at The Church of The Master, located at 17th Avenue and Filbert Court (Filbert Court is between Forest and Fairfax Streets).

We hope to have A SPECIAL SURPRISE GUEST at our November meeting. But you must be there in order to appreciate just how special and how much of a surprise it really can be!



BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING: There will be a board meeting on November 4, 1993.

ALL MEMBERS are welcome and invited to attend and participate at the Board of Directors Meeting.

The November 4th meeting will be at the home of Dan Decker at 7:30 PM.



RETURN WITH US NOW... is the official publication of *The Radio Historical Association of Colorado, Inc.*, a non-profit organization. Cost of membership is \$20.00 for the first year with \$15.00 for renewal. Each member has full use of the club resources. For further information contact anyone listed below.



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From the

King's Roost

October was a very busy month for both of us and was climaxed by our trip to Newark, NJ for the Friends of Old Time Radio convention. This time we flew both ways and although the trip there was totally cloudy, the return trip was clear and we could see the Catskill Mountains that certainly look more like moraines from a glacial age than like mountains. Of course, this was the view from 30,000 ft. above them. We are truly blessed in this country to live in a land that is like a giant park. We were not able to discern what crops were in the fields, but they all blended so smoothly, separated only by roadways and waterways. As we neared the Rocky Mountains, the fields became blocks like a patchwork quilt, highlighted by the circles of pivot irrigation. We didn't freeze in Newark this time and arrived in Denver to a beautiful day, with the only regrets that it was too late in the day to saddle our horses and go for a ride.

We discussed the demise of many of the old time radio actors and the effort to have younger people pick up their roles. The Newark-New York area is a cornucopia of new talent, but it just isn't the same as having the old masters performing their arts. Time moves on.

We were pleased to meet with many of our members that went to the convention and were reminded of the widespread area that our club covers (members in

40 states plus 5 Canadian provinces). Newark has a very interesting convention with a wide group of dealers all selling their products related to old time radio, including many forms of old shows that they are able to make available and keep the shows in circulation.

We want to thank Thom Salome for a generous contribution to the tape library. It will be a while before we can work them into the Contributor's Series, but they will be made available to all of our members.

Back home we were greeted by the horses who were happy to find that we had not deserted them and enjoyed riding in the autumn weather in the park.

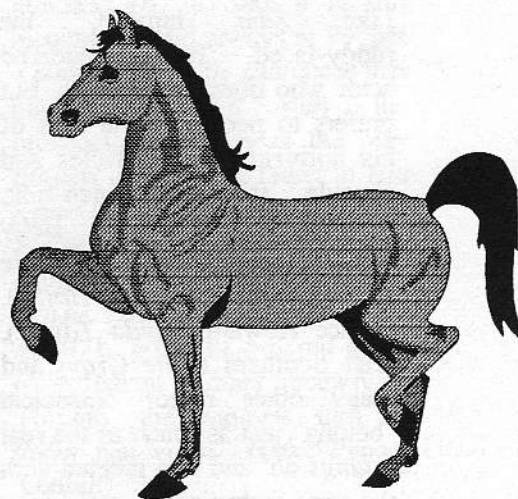
The youngster, the Missouri Foxtrotter has such a good disposition and is trying hard to do his gaiting to my satisfaction. I chose this breed because I felt that it was time to settle for a calmer breed than a Thoroughbred, and the "fox trot" is so easy to ride. I have no regrets about the choice, although I had many reservations about so young an animal, he has not been foolish about anything and will lead seasoned horses through some more difficult areas. We talk to each other.

Many people ask about our weather in the Denver area. We do have a few weeks in January or February that we have snow on the ground, but for the most part, we get a snow about once a week and all but the snow on the North side of the house is gone before we get more. We ride all winter on the trails, although we have an indoor ring available. In shady spots we are careful about ice that forms from the melting

snow, but it is safer to ride cross-country than on the trails.

At one time we rode following the hounds on coyote scent, so we learned to ride cross-country at all paces. We seldom wear heavy coats, just a lined sweat shirt, and we ride in the middle of the day when temperatures are in the fifties and sixties. It is a very rare day that we do not have sunshine. Years ago, a restaurateur offered free dinners on any day that the sun did not shine. He was NOT a gambling man.

We are looking forward to the SPERDVAC convention, November 12, 13, & 14th, in Los Angeles, CA. We found it interesting that the people in Newark referred to California as "the coast." We always specified East or West coast. The convention in California will, for the most part, will have an entirely different group of radio personalities, just as they did in the days of broadcasting OTR shows. Many of the people and names in Newark were not familiar to us. We are both from



Pepper Young's Family

TUNE IN Mon. Thru Fri. 3:30 P.M. E.W.T. (NBC)

Followers of "*Pepper Young's Family*" are probably entirely unaware that when they tune in each day they hear, not just one family, but two. For actors in this veteran serial have worked together so long that they're practically a family themselves. During almost nine years on the air, each member of the cast has shouldered and worried about the real-life problems of the others, just as the characters do in Elaine Carrington's script.

Nowadays rehearsals are very informal indeed, as talkative and motherly Marion Barney (who plays *Mrs. Young*) steps out of her part for a moment to make sure that "her boys," Lawson Zerbe (*Pepper Young*) and Stacy Harris (*Carter Trent*) have had a proper lunch. All the youngsters do call her "Mom," just for fun — they say "Marion" when they're in real earnest — and the plump, silver-haired actress says she sometimes almost forgets they're not her own children. "Father" of this adopted family is, of course, Tom Chalmers (*Sam Young*). Like *Sam* himself, the ruddy-faced, broad-shouldered actor who doesn't say much, but prefers to peer over the tops of his horn-rimmed spectacles and chuckle at his women-folk, Marion and blue-eyed Betty Wragge (*Peggy Young*). Gentle Greta Kvalden (the maid, *Hattie*), Eunice Howard (*Linda Taylor*), Jean Southern (*Edie Gray*) and many other minor characters "belong" just as much as the real *Youngs* do, and are greeted with the same enthusiasm.

Conversation doesn't follow the same lines as at *Mary Young's* breakfast table, of course. It's

mostly actors' shop talk. Tom Chalmers is likely to lead off with a tale of his student days in Italy, where he made his operatic debut, or tell of the time when he was the first American baritone to sing roles in French and Italian at the Metropolitan. There might be a story connected with the versatile artist's legitimate stage successes in "*Mourning Becomes Electra*" or "*Outward Bound*."

Likely enough this will lead Marion Barney to reminisce about her own legitimate stage days. And there's plenty of material there, for the yellowed clippings of the veteran actress's triumphs would fill several scrapbooks. Old-timers will remember Marion in "*Ben-Hur*" and "*Camille*" way back in 1913 and 1914, and her work in silent pictures. Since 1928, however, this chic and well-groomed lady of the stage has been fully occupied in radio and has become famous for creating mother roles, not only sweet and sympathetic ones such as *Mary Young*, but also hardboiled and bitter characters like *Ma Barker*. Aside from her stage career, Marion's favorite topic is businessman-husband Roy Richardson, to whom she has been married for 35 years.

Hair-raising thrillers can be contributed by Lawson Zerbe, who "specializes" in character parts from 12 to 80. Once, on a bet, this versatile young dynamo managed to enact seven different roles in one broadcast. Usually he's more conservative, and considers his life quite uneventful. There was the time, of course, while playing "*Dracula*" in stock, that a practical joker nailed him firmly in his coffin instead of pretending to do so — and firemen had to chop him out before he smothered. On another occasion,

while the lad was starring in "*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*" with the help of a frightening set of false teeth, one of the molars lodged in his throat and had to be extracted in a hospital. Oh, the stage is a safe and sane life, to be sure.

Stacy Harris could tell many a hair-raising tale, too, if he wished. But the thin, sensitive-looking young man prefers to talk of pleasant incidents in his brief career as a radio actor and will say nothing whatsoever of the heroism under fire which won him a citation. Harris volunteered with the First American Field Service right after Pearl Harbor, landing in Africa as General Montgomery was about to start his drive up the African coast. Assigned to a Fighting French unit as messenger, ambulance driver, and stretcher carrier, this gallant soldier was twice nicked by bullets, and finally given a medical discharge after three serious attacks of jaundice. Strangely enough, Stacy's part in the serial parallels his own life, as *Carter Trent*, too, has returned from service abroad.

Betty Wragge's another member of the cast who actually lives her role, for the brown-haired lass has grown up with *Peggy* during the last eight years. As a child, Betty appeared on the stage with such famous stars as Richard Barthelmess and Richard Dix, and is now prepared to swap yarns with the best of 'em.

All in all, the members of this actor clan are as varied and colorful as any characters portrayed in a play, and their lives rival the dramatic events of the serial. On the air, nevertheless, they remain "*Pepper Young's Family*," typical Americans.

RADIO LIFE, June, 1944

Pepper Young's Family

"Pepper Young's Family" began on the National Broadcasting Company on October 2, 1932, but at that time it was called "Red Adams." The title character was played by Burgess Meredith, who was just beginning to make a name for himself. He shortly left the cast to do a Broadway play, which led to his Hollywood career. The program was soon sponsored by Beech-Nut Gum. But they insisted that since Adams was the name of a competitive chewing gum, it would have to be changed. It was — to "Red Davis." That didn't last long either, and the third title was "Forever Young." That seemed to conflict with Gloria Swanson's line of dresses designed for women middle-aged and beyond. Finally, they agreed on the title that lasted until the final broadcast on January 7, 1959.

The late Elaine Carrington, who became known in her profession as the "Queen of the Soap Operas," was the creator of the durable series, which was one of the best written and most believable of all the daytime serials of radio's Golden Age.

The main character of Larry "Pepper" Young was taken over by the late Curtis Arnall when Meredith left. Lawson Zerbe (living in Manhattan and still active in radio & TV) was Pepper Young No. 3, leaving in 1945 to go into the service. Mason Adams, who had just been discharged from the Army, auditioned for the role. But by the time that Adams learned that he had the part, he had already signed with the Chicago company to do the play *Dear Ruth*. He

got his release from *Ruth* only after he had found another actor to play the role. Adams took on Pepper admittedly for the money. He felt contempt for radio acting. It still embarrasses him. But he played the part to the end of the show's radio run.

Pepper on the air aged about one year in every four; he was the editor of the local newspaper in the small town of Elmwood; the state or region was never defined but the show's customs, accents, and personalities were definitely Middle American. The Youngs were typified as registered Republicans who voted for FDR at least for the first and second terms. They were more threatened than hurt by the Depression and they managed throughout to keep a live-in maid, named Hattie Williams, who was played by Greta Kvalden (now Mrs. Gilmore and retired from acting and living in Manhattan). "Money," says Mason today, "was something we never talked about."

So popular was the soap that for a while it was heard not only twice a day (once in the morning and, the same script again, in the afternoon) but on both the NBC and CBS networks -- simultaneously. Each episode began with the announcer, either Martin Block or Alan Kent, saying: "Now it's time again for a visit with your friends, the Youngs." The theme music at the beginning and end was "Au Matin." But the sponsor most closely identified with the program was Camay, at the time called "the soap of beautiful women."

For most of its years on the air, Sam Young, Pepper's father, was played by Thomas Chalmers,

who has since died, as has Marion Barney, who played his wife. Pepper married his childhood sweetheart, Linda Benton, who was acted by Eunice Howard (now residing in Roxbury, Connecticut). Adams still sees Chick Vincent, who was his director for so many years. Occasionally he sees Betty Wragge, who played sister Peggy from the very first show. Miss Wragge lives in Manhattan and was Ruby Keeler's understudy in the Broadway musical, *No, No, Nanette*.

Few actors from radio soaps have fared better than Mason Adams. His voice is heard on so many commercials that he declines to name some for fear of offending the others. Nevertheless, for many years Mason has been the official spokesman for Smucker's jams and jellies on all their radio and TV advertising.

Adams lives in Westport, Connecticut, with his wife and their son and daughter. Although he was born in New York City, his voice is as Middle West in tone and pattern as Henry Fonda's. To this day it is still recognized, and always as Pepper Young's — even by audiences that have seen him play the prosecuting attorney in the play *Inquest* in 1970, the father in *You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running*, in the London company, in 1968, and the judge in *The Trial of the Catonsville 9* in 1971. When he ordered a cup of coffee at a diner recently in Toronto, the waitress said, "I know that voice. You're Pepper Young!"

Unidentified, Circa 1972

Great New Newsletter !



Thrilling Days of Yesteryear

Presents:

In the first issue of *Thrilling Days of Yesteryear*, we'll tell you some of our plans and philosophies. Our focus will naturally be on the Golden Age of Radio with the primary emphasis on the way it was, and not the way we are now. The introspective view will be to treat those warmly remembered broadcast years with respect and to nurture the fond memories.



Naturally, it will be for the hobbyist collector, but also for all those who like their nostalgia in large doses. The era is equally great for those who remember and the ones who missed out on the memories.



We'll cover such items from the past as the great story about pioneer announcer, Ben Grauer. He once spoonerized, "Thank you. We are deepful gratefully."



There'll be stories on the quiz shows and, of course, the wonderful band "remotes," wild & wooly West and hilarious comedies.

We'll put the stars in the spotlight and interview them for you to give you further insights into what they and this tremendous era were really like.

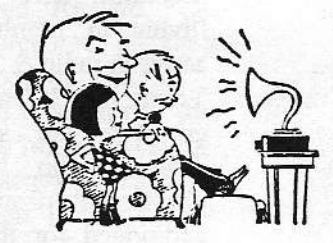
There'll be articles from publications of the past like *Variety*, *Radio Mirror*, *Downbeat*, etc. Of course, the editor will always welcome input from other old time radio buffs . . . stories, ideas, articles, questions, etc.

All of it, now as it was then, designed with the family in mind, taking you back to a time when you didn't have to worry about what programs your children were hearing.



It all starts with *Volume 1, No. 1, January-February, 1994*

DON'T MISS AN ISSUE !!



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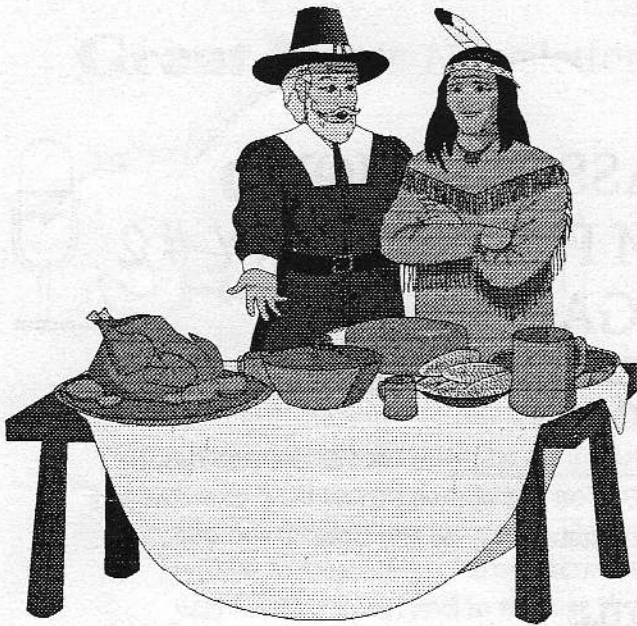
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We hope to have
A SPECIAL SURPRISE GUEST
for our
Regular Monthly Meeting,
November 18, 1993, 7:30 p.m.
at The Church of the Master
17th Avenue nad Filbert Court

Happy Thanksgiving !

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