

# RETURN WITH US

The Radio Historical  
Association of Colorado, Inc.

# NOW...



Volume 20, Number 8

March, 1995



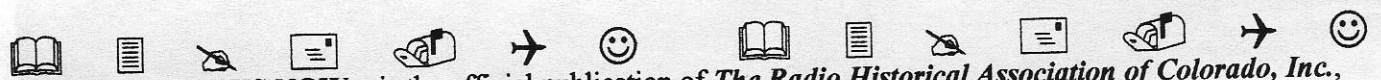
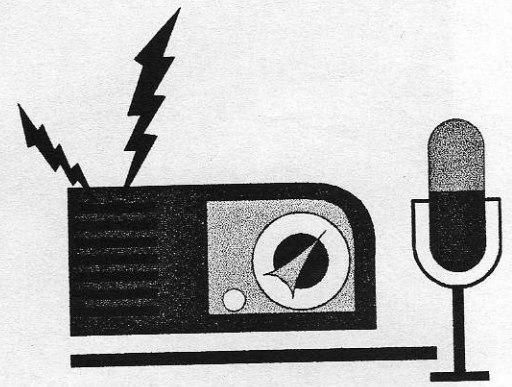
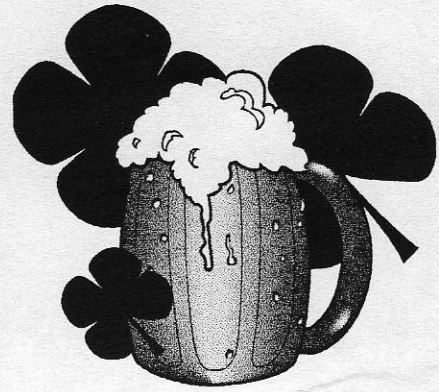
**Dick Powell** (1904-1963). Powell's many radio programs included *Hollywood Hotel* (CBS, 1934-1938), *Your Hollywood Parade* (NBC, 1937-1938), *Campana Serenade* (NBC, CBS, 1943), *The Fitch Bandwagon* (NBC, 1944), *Rogue's Gallery* (Mutual, 1945), and *Richard Diamond, Private Detective* (NBC, ABC, 1949-1952)..



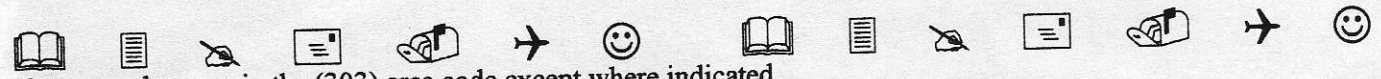
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING:** There will NOT be a board meeting March, 1995.



There will NOT be a regular monthly meeting in March, 1995



**RETURN WITH US NOW...** is the official publication of *The Radio Historical Association of Colorado, Inc.*, a non-profit organization. Cost of membership is \$25.00 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*

Before we get into other matters, we want to remind all users of our libraries to make their checks payable to RHAC or Radio Historical Association of Colorado. Do **NOT** make them payable to the librarian: it causes delays if we fail to catch the name and try to deposit them at the bank without proper endorsement.

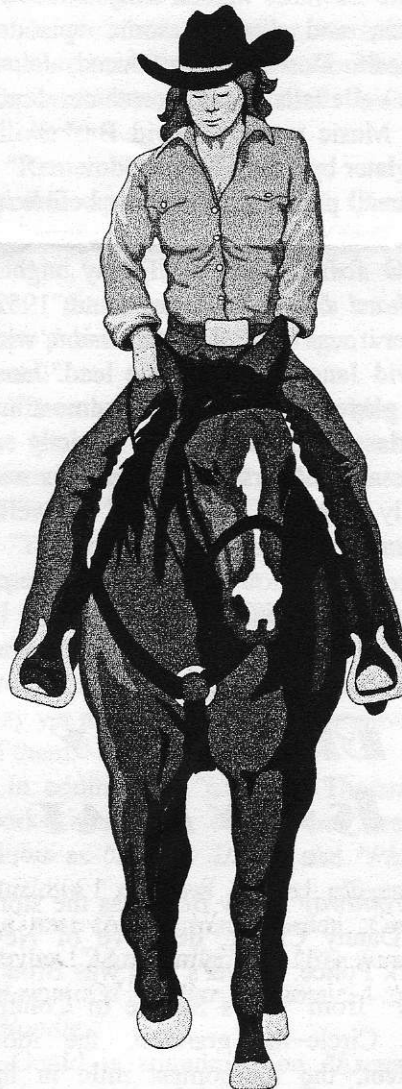
One new member had difficulty placing an order for logs and scripts because his order was addressed to the librarian but RHAC was not part of the address. The postal clerk didn't know and rejected it. The solution to the problem is simply to be certain to have "RHAC" as part of the address.

RHAC member David Bakish advises that his years of research on Jimmy Durante has culminated with the publication of "Jimmy Durante" from McFarland and Co., Box 611, Jefferson NC 28640. We do not acknowledge each new book about which we get a notice. However, we do recognize the effort and work of research put forth by each author. The work of these authors help us understand and better appreciate the lives of entertainment personalities whom we met in radio.

**We need your help!** Preston Chambers, 1543 Highway 138 #S-321, Conyers GA 30208: Preston was a member who failed to renew his membership and failed to return five sets of cas-

settes which he had rented from the club. Preston has not returned our calls to him at (404) 929-8525. If anyone in that area can contact him and get him to return the tapes (which are RHAC property), you can be assured we would appreciate your help.

We now have tenants at the house near the barn. This is a big relief to us. It saves us from the daily responsibility of being sure to get the horses fed on schedule. We will now be allowed to have a leisurely breakfast once in a



while; and visit the horses when we want to rather than when we have to. We also installed an electric toilet in the arena. It just burns the waste and thus avoids the need for a water hook-up which could freeze in winter . . . and another septic system. It really works very well.

Our spring weather has green beginning to show in most pastures. Dick had planted one field in oats just a week before it snowed and this was also greening. We are certainly hoping for more moisture to keep things growing. We will be planting some seedling trees and some larger ones also, just as soon as the calendar indicates that winter is past. We are not kidding ourselves that we will live long enough to sit in the shade of these trees, but they will add a lot of nice landscaping to the property.

One last thing to mention. RHAC buys cassettes and 7-inch reels in bulk for use in the libraries. RHAC members may buy these supplies in any quantity **BUT** you **MUST** pay the postage for shipping:

Cassettes: C-62 @ .50/ea w/o box; C-92 @ .75/ea w/o box;  
Boxes, soft plastic @ .10/ea;  
Reel: 1200ft in new white box @\$2.35; 1800ft same price;  
Empty new white box .25/ea.  
These supplies can be ordered from:

RHAC Open Reel Library  
900 W. Quincy Ave.  
Englewood CO 80110

**Postage is extra and YOU MUST compute.** (estimate & send extra money).

## Richard Diamond, Private Detective

*Richard Diamond, Private Detective* came to NBC April 24, 1949, representing the new Dick Powell image. Powell had gone almost full-circle, starting as a glamor-boy singer in the 1930's, graduating only through sheer stubbornness to the super hard-boiled Philip Marlowe in the film *Murder, My Sweet*, and finally arriving at *Diamond*—a charming mix of slick sophistication and two-fisted action. As Diamond, Powell even managed to sing once in a while.

Movie producers had given Powell a hard time when he tried to break away from his baby-faced crooner image, and in *Murder, My Sweet* he had earned his stripes. So he relaxed with *Richard Diamond* and truly seemed to enjoy the part. Diamond was a happy go lucky dick, rather a lightweight who still managed to hold his own with Sam Spade, Johnny Dollar, and others of that ilk. He enjoyed the free life, enjoyed his girl friend Helen Asher, and—most of all—enjoyed ribbing the cops. Diamond tried to cooperate with frustrated Lieutenant Walt Levinson, but his special delight was badgering the incredibly dumb desk sergeant, Otis. Levinson was given a good ride by Ed Begley, who must have turned up on just about every radio series ever done. Otis was played by Wilms Herbert, who also doubled as Miss Asher's sheepish butler, Francis. Francis usually showed up at the end of the show, when Diamond would drop by Helen's Park Avenue home for a bit of song and fluff. It was a nice contrast to the rough-and-tumble body of the story, a time for Diamond and his girl to plunk out a song or two from one of Powell's early movies, share a piano stool, and maybe smooch a bit on the side. That was when Francis entered, fuming "You never warn me!" and rushing out of the room.

Helen was played by Virginia Gregg. Between this role, Brooksie on *Let George Do It*, and Betty Lewis on *Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar*, Miss Gregg spent a good part of her professional career trying to lead stubborn gumshoes to the altar. She never made it, but her failure was entertaining and believable.

That was all fringe action, back-and-forth sallies between the regulars to open and close each case. The middle 20 minutes was where the going got rough, with muggings, shootings, knifings, threats, and bombs that might not go off. These situations required all of Diamond's OSS training and most of his natural cunning. William P. Rousseau directed when the show opened as a Sunday-night sustainer. Blake Edwards was an early Diamond writer, and directed some episodes himself. Don Sharp produced, Jaime Del Valle later became producer director. Music was by David Baskerville and later by Frank Worth.

Rexall picked up the show before its first year was up. In 1950 it moved to ABC for Camels on Friday nights. *Richard Diamond* lasted until 1952. Later it was revived on television, with David Janssen playing the lead. Janssen played it straight, as an almost humorless Diamond with strictly a cops-and-robbers theme. But this was really Powell's show and Powell's character.

*Tune In Yesterday* by John Dunning,  
©1976, Prentice-Hall, Inc.

## BROADWAY IS MY BEAT

*Broadway Is My Beat* was the story of Danny Clover, detective of New York Police. Clover's beat was Broadway—"from Times Square to Columbus Circle—the grandest, the most violent, the loneliest mile in the world." A better-than-average police show, *Broadway Is My Beat* came to

CBS in 1949 and ran for more than four seasons. Larry Thor played Danny Clover as a tough cop of the Jack Webb school. Charles Calvert was the semi-humorous Detective Tartaglia. Produced and directed by Elliott Lewis, and written by Morton Fine and David Friedkin, with a downbeat theme of "I'll take Manhattan," this show rated as good entertainment in the old radio Hall of Fame.

*Tune In Yesterday* by John Dunning,  
© 1976, Prentice-Hall, Inc.

## Rats!

*Was the Effect Called for in  
One Memorable  
"Escape" Episode. This and  
Other Realistic Noises  
Created by "Escape's"  
Soundmen Rated  
Radio-TV Life Award  
and This Backstage Story*  
By Lynn Roberts

When the script for CBS's "Escape" called for the sound of a horde of rats attacking a lighthouse, squealing, clawing at the windows, gnawing through a trap door and boarding a ship, it would seem almost enough to stump even a veteran radio soundman. "Escape's" two veteran soundmen, Bill Gould and Cliff Thorsness, admit that creating this effect was certainly about their toughest challenge. Radio-TV Life considered their work on it deserving of a Distinguished Achievement Award.

"It was a tough show to work out the sound on," the technicians acknowledged when we cornered them for a behind-scenes discussion, "because none of the effects called for were straight, legitimate ones. They couldn't be found in any sound library—and CBS has the finest. We had sound recordings of individual rats, but none of them in quantity nor doing the things

this script called for them to be doing. So we had to start strictly from scratch."

Working under the supervision of Al Span, head of CBS's Sound Department, Thorsness and Gould set about manufacturing the realistic noises of a rat attack.

Three full days of preparation were required, including one day of special recording. To create the noise of rats in great quantity, the soundmen combined recordings of mice, birds, pigs and monkeys, playing them back at diverse r.p.m. speeds. They recorded for four solid hours, employing ten turntables.

To create the sound of rats clawing at the windows, a big round stiff brush (off the janitor's giant sweeping broom) was hit upon as the most effective prop. The noise of the brush being swept across actual glass, amplified through a contact mike (the "throat mike" such as was used by Army pilots during the war), produced the desired effect.

For the sound of the rats gnawing through a wooden trap door, berry boxes were crunched, not as customarily in the hand, but in the soundmen's mouths, because the actual noise made by the contact of wood against teeth made the difference between an unconvincing sound and a startlingly real one.

For the sound of the rats' teeth working on the metal parts of the trap door, tin cans were used and again a contact mike was employed.

The soundmen reported that one of the most difficult effects to create for the show was the noise of the rats as they clung to the revolving beacon atop the lighthouse. For this, the volume of the rats' squealing was increased, then faded out, to produce the realism of their closeness as they were swung toward the hearer.

Another of the more difficult effects, according to the two technicians, came about when the script had one of the rats breaking away from the pack, calling for the noise of a single rat to be

heard effectively against the combined squealings and clawings of the horde.

The final difficult effect called for was the sound of the rodents vacating the lighthouse to scamper aboard a boat.

Another reason the show was particularly challenging, the two sound effects men declared, was the fact that "Escape's" producer, William N. Robson, is a strong perfectionist. "An effect might sound very satisfactory," they clarified, "but with Robson, it had to sound *really real*."

"We were pleased," they admitted "when Harry Bartell, one of the actors, told us we'd made the rats real enough to smell them."

Billy Gould laughed. "They became real enough to me—I actually found myself not able to eat."

"Escape's" rats, however, weren't the first eerie effect which Gould and Thorsness have been called upon to produce.

"Remember," smiled Billy, ready to spoil his appetite again, "Arch Oboler's man-eating spider on 'Lights Out?'"

"And," supplied Cliff, with a weak grin, "the attack of the ants on 'Escape's' broadcast of 'Leiningen vs the Ants!'"

Thorsness also recalled working on the Norman Corwin production which starred sound, entitled "The Anatomy of Sound."

"That one wasn't easy," he remembered. "It was a narration built around all the ordinary sounds one hears throughout a day. It was a problem of producing simple sounds in a natural way yet making the listener very aware of them."

In addition to "Escape," Thorsness works sound on such other drama shows as "Family Hour" and "Philip Marlowe," and has created effects in the past for Norman Corwin, Orson Welles, "Man Called X," "Big Town," "Hollywood Star Time," and "Blondie."

Gould is soundman on "Escape," "Johnny Dollar," the Joan Davis show and "Our Miss Brooks," and previously worked "Suspense," "The

Whistler," Fletcher Markel's "Ford Theater," the Jack Kirkwood series, and the Jimmy Durante and Jack Kirkwood programs.

Both Gould and Thorsness have been with the CBS sound department for more than 10 years.

Prior to this, Thorsness was manager of L.A.'s downtown Orpheum Theater, and Gould was a show-business veteran, having worked in vaudeville and tent shows since the age of seven.

Gould's goal is to produce and direct variety shows for television. Thorsness aspires to the production end of radio dramatic productions.

As a perfect "tag" for this story dealing with their creation of realistic radio "rats," Cliff then made a grinning confession.

"I can't stand mice—when it comes to taking a mouse out of a trap, I make my wife do it."

RADIO-TELEVISION LIFE, March 24, 1950

## The Life and Love of BURNS and ALLEN

George Burns and Gracie Allen were married in Cleveland, Ohio, by a Justice of the Peace who was irritable throughout the entire ceremony because they had interrupted his departure on a fishing trip. The event took place seven—or maybe eight years ago. They are a little vague as to the actual date. It was either June or July, the sixteenth or seventeenth. Gracie isn't quite sure—neither is George.

However, they *do* remember the Justice and the witnesses. The justice was grouchy and mumbled the marriage service under his breath as though he desired to keep it a secret just to spite them. The witnesses were two strangers . . . recruited for the occasion. This didn't prevent the witnesses from "hooking on" to Gracie and George immediately after the ceremony. In the thrill of the happy event, the bride and groom even invited the "stand-ups" to dine with them. They accepted—and

stayed with the newly-weds until four o'clock the next morning. "I thought maybe they were planning to live with us!" says George.

The following day they departed for Detroit where they played their honeymoon week. Incidentally, it was the final week of their Orpheum tour.

"Well," said George to Gracie, "It's the Big Town again. Are you game for whatever happens . . . good or bad?"

"Sure," said Gracie . . . the famous way that Gracie always says "Sure!"

All the way back to New York they bolstered each others failing courage. They kept assuring each other that " . .

Rome wasn't built in a day." What if something *didn't* turn up right away? After all, they were young. They had saved some of their money. They were going to be courageous and strong and lean on one another for moral support!

The moment they stepped from the train, George's agent met them with a six-year contract in his hand! It called for their appearance in vaudeville on the RKO circuit starting at a salary of \$450.00 per week. \$50.00 more than their top so far . . . and the contract called for more money at the end of each year.

So, to this day, George and Gracie have never had the opportunity to indulge "moral support" they promised each other. "RKO, the Palace, Radio and Robert Burns cigars plus the movies have supplied most of the *support*," grins George. At the end of their fourth year, Burns and Allen were drawing down \$4,500.00 in the way of "support." But that just a bit ahead of our story.

The RKO vaudeville tour was a howling success. So much so, in fact, that after playing the same act for three years in practically every city in the United States, Gracie and George asked for a vacation and got it. They went to London for a rest. They promised one another that they wouldn't *think* of professional engagements. They didn't . . . for twenty-four hours! At the end of that time they were signed for eight weeks of vaudeville . . . and were approached by a concern

that was sponsoring a new fangled idea: *a comedy stunt over the radio!*

Never will they forget that nightmare of fear that went with that first encounter with the microphone. Gracie was so frightened that she nearly fainted! For years they had been used to working to an audience. Here, in this quiet, silent room, there was nothing but that "black thing" to hear them. The nice, polite director of the London studio assured them: "We have cleared the studio of all spectators. We felt you would be nervous if anyone were watching!" Gracie and George were both babbling at once: "For heaven's sake, get them back in here at once . . . everybody!" The next evening there were seventy-five visitors in the studio. The act was a riot. Burns and Allen once more had an audience to play to. They have never played without one since that day. "And I'm *still* scared," smiles Gracie. The London "rest" ended with a frantic cable from their agent in New York to return at once. There was an engagement for them at the Paradise of vaudeville, the Palace, awaiting!

Eddie Cantor was planning a return to the Palace between stage shows. Since he is such a "big shot" to theater managers, he is permitted to exercise an almost unheard-of privilege: select all the acts that are to appear on the same bill with him! He chose his old friend Georgie Jessel first . . . and then asked Jessel for suggestions for the other act that was needed to complete the program. "Burns & Allen," suggested Georgie. "Can they get a new act together?" asked Cantor. "Sure!" replied Jessel.

Then he called Burns & Allen to tell them the news. "All you have to do is get a new act together!" Jessel told Burns. George almost collapsed. It takes time to work up new material. They knew their old stuff was sure fire . . . but how could they be sure of brand-new, untried stuff? "Better tell Cantor we can't make it!" Burns protested.

"Nonsense," said Jessel. "Meet me at Sardi's in half an hour."

And so it was that, on the back of a menu in Sardi's, the two Georges whipped together a new act that played the Palace Theater with Eddie Cantor *for nine consecutive weeks* . . . breaking all records for the house! The act went so sensationally, that Cantor asked George if he might borrow Gracie for a five minute skit on the radio. Gracie held her own with the famous Cantor and after that the town was theirs.

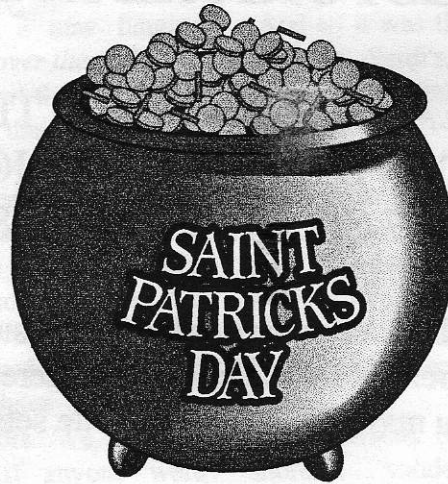
Engagements for Paramount movie "shorts" . . . vaudeville . . . radio, came so fast that they couldn't handle all of them . . . but they did! Their first big break in Radio came when they were placed on the Rudy Valle hour for a famous yeast company. Two weeks after they were signed by the J. Walter Thompson advertising company for appearance over the air on the new "Robert Burns Hour." That was twenty weeks ago! They're still doing it.

In the meantime they went to Hollywood where they were featured in "The Big Broadcast."

"We've played vaudeville houses in Los Angeles," they told me (each contributing a remark here and there). "But that was our first visit to California as native sons . . . the movie stars *are* the 'native sons,' aren't they? Hollywood's a great place. We're so crazy about it that we could live out here for as much as four or five weeks out of the year! For the rest of the time give us that little apartment at the Essex House in New York . . . even if the Big Town is a little short on climate.

"Don't get the idea that we're panning the movies, though. Every time we take a look at our bank balance, we realize just how much *good* the movies are doing in the world! We are particularly fond of *Paramount* movies! The signature on their checks look so pretty.

"The movies aren't really our game, though . . . and besides, we've been in the vaudeville harness too long to ever get used to an audience-less profession."



Happy  
St. Patrick's  
Day!

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