



# RETURN WITH US NOW...

RADIO HISTORICAL  
ASSOCIATION OF  
COLORADO

Volume 24, Number 11

June, 1999



*Radio News - February, 1925 cover*

## The Mystique of EKKO Stamps

By Wayne Gilbert

In the early 1920s radio broadcasting was in its infancy, and the family radio were still very primitive. Most families still used the battery from their car to power their radio (being careful not to spill the battery acid on the kitchen linoleum), and as the battery's power dropped so did the radio's performance. To make matters worse, most radio stations broadcast on the same frequencies, 833.3 for music and entertainment and 618.6 for news and weather reports. It took a lot of patience and a good deal of skill to separate one station's

programs from another's, and broadcast stations were never even sure if they were being heard by anyone.

Radio stations broadcast their station call letters frequently, hoping to identify themselves at that moment when their signal was being received by some straining listener, and asked all listeners to write to the station. Listeners, flushed with the excitement of actually receiving a recognizable transmission, often responded to the station's request & later shared their triumph with friends when the station often identified its listeners by name.

As a further inducement for listeners to write, broadcast stations soon began sending letters of verification to listeners who acknowledged hearing their broadcasts. These letters ranged from a simple form letter thanking the listener for responding, to very elaborate letters describing the station and its equipment in detail.

As the number of listeners' responses increased, radio stations in an attempt to reduce expenses began sending Broadcast Listener (BCL) cards as acknowledgments. These cards, like the earlier verification letters, also varied in style and elaborateness. Both the verification letters and BCL cards generally included the times that the broadcast station was scheduled to be on the air, since most stations only broadcast for a few hours each night and few broadcast throughout the day. This "silent" period, created when the radio station wasn't broadcasting, allowed the station's equipment to be serviced, and listeners to hear more distant or weaker stations.

Soon it became a national pastime for listeners to try to receive (or DX, as it was called then) as many stations as possible, and listeners began to insist that local broadcasters extend these silent periods into specific "silent nights." It was common for a whole family to

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# RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO

Dedicated to the preservation of old time radio programs and to making those programs available to our members.

## RHAC Board Meeting Thursday, June 3, 1999 - 7:30 PM

At

**Guy Albright's, 786 South Quitman St., Denver, CO 303-934-0184**

Old time radio is alive and well in Denver!

KRMA Channel 6 Secondary Audio Program, RHAC's show *Tribute to OTR* Sunday 2:00 PM

KEZW 1430 AM *When Radio Was* weekdays from 7:00 till 8:00 PM

KEZW 1430 AM *Radio Movie Classics* Sundays 5:00 till 6:00 PM

KFKA 1310 AM *Radio Memories* Sundays 6:00 to 12:00 PM

KUVO 89.3 FM *Destination Freedom* 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the month 7:30 PM - **BROADCAST LIVE!!!!**

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**RHAC WEB SITE** The RHAC web page and catalog is on the World Wide Web:  
<http://www.old-time.com/rhac.html>

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**RETURN WITH US NOW...** is the official publication of the *Radio Historical Association of Colorado, Inc.*, a nonprofit organization. Cost of membership is \$25.00 for the 1st year with \$15.00 for renewal. Each member in good standing has full use of the club resources. For further information contact anyone listed below.

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### LIBRARIES

<b>Reference Material:</b>	Bill McCracken, address above	303-986-9863
<b>Logs &amp; Scripts:</b>	Fred Hinz, c/o RHAC, P O Box 1908, Englewood, CO 80150	
<b>Open Reel Tape Librarian:</b>	Maletha King, 900 W. Quincy Ave., Englewood, CO 80110	
<b>Cassette Tape Librarians:</b>		
#1 (1-499)	Marilyn J. Turner 2299 S. Sable Blvd., Aurora, CO 80014	303-751-4325
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**Editor's Note:** Due to the length of this month's featured articles in *Return With Us Now...*, there will be no Tape Library Order Form. The Form will resume next month.



By JoAnn Bantin

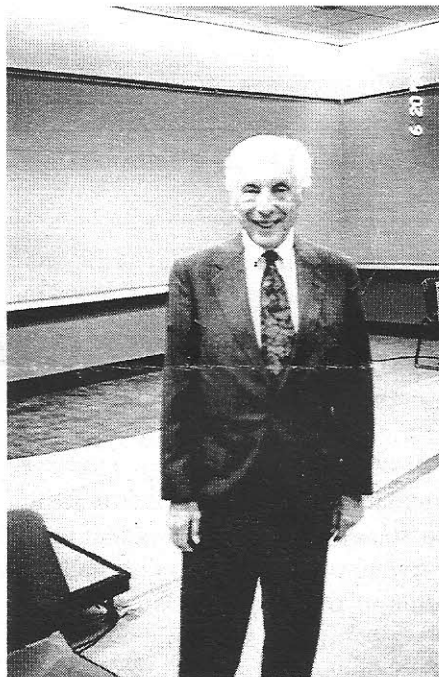
Some of the *RHAC Players* along with The Sherlock Holmes Club, Dr. Watson's Neglected Patients, paid tribute to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's birthday on May 22, 1999, with the production of "The Final Problem." We had a great audience, birthday cake, and a wonderful production. All the revenue went to The Rocky Mountain Respiriters, which is a really wonderful health care need volunteer organization. We want to let everyone know that Olinger Mortuary at East Colfax and Magnolia was most helpful in letting us use their facilities for this event. This mortuary is not just for "that thing" any more, it is now reaching out to the community and offering wonderful services.

Next on our list, just to remind you, various people are still in the process of transcribing the *Sherlock Holmes* play, "The Iron Box", "The Christmas Carol" and the first *Shadow* script, "The Death House Rescue." Hopefully, readings for "The Iron Box" will begin sometime in August. Other readings for parts will begin in early fall. Actually, as soon as scripts are ready. Soon we will be announcing dates and times and hope to be seeing a lot of you then.

Other exciting news, a *RHAC Players* board meeting will be scheduled for early June, more workshop sessions in the form of

class projects are being prepared for summertime fun, and we have received an acknowledgment from a California writer who is interested in *The Players* and airing some of his work. Fall will bring some exciting productions and we also hope to begin airing a wonderful play written by Larry Weide. This one is really scary and you will love it.

From all *The Players*, have a good summer and we will see you soon.



## An Interview With Harry Bartell

The following interview was recorded in Seattle on June 19, 1998 prior to Radio Enthusiasts of Puget Sound Showcase VI Convention. Harry's radio acting credits include *The Adventures of Nero Wolfe*, *Escape*, *Let George Do It*, *Broadway Is My Beat*, *Defense Attorney*, *Dragnet*, *The Saint*, *Suspense*, *Crime Classics*, *Charlotte Greenwood Show*, *California Caravan*, *Fort Laramie*, *Frontier Gentleman*, *Gunsmoke*, *Hollywood Playhouse*, *On Stage*, *KIRO Mystery Playhouse*,

*Rogers of the Gazette*, *Romance*, *Six Shooter*, *Have Gun Will Travel* and *Yours Truly*, *Johnny Dollar*.

Have you an idea of how many radio shows on which you performed?

Pretty close to 10,000. I did over 3,000 broadcasts with *Dear Abby*.

In addition to acting, you did quite a bit of announcing.

I announced *Silver Theatre*, *Sherlock Holmes*, and *The Casebook of Gregory Hood*. I never considered myself an announcer. I sort of played an announcer as an actor.

On many of the *Sherlock Holmes* shows you would talk to Nigel Bruce.

That was the reason I got that job, a fluke. They had a huge audition and every name announcer in town was over at CBS. I walked into the foyer and I couldn't understand what was going on. I asked the secretary. She said, "Edna Best was conducting an audition for the announcer for *Sherlock Holmes*." I said, "May I go in and say hello?" I had worked with her as an actor. I said, "Hi, Edna." I started to leave. She said, "Aren't you going to read? As long as you're here, pick up the script and read." That's how I got the job.

They were very successful in integrating my work with Nigel Bruce.

*Fort Laramie* was one of my favorite shows. I have read a lot of private soldiers' diaries of the period and the show had the flavor of that period.

I don't know how authentic the radio shows were as far as the scripts were concerned, but was certainly a feel of great legitimacy about them.

I think that diaries were used in researching the show. There was another element in that particular show that was very rewarding as far as an actor was concerned. The three of us that played the major roles (Raymond Burr, Vic Perrin and myself) seemed to fit together very

well. I attribute this to Norman McDonald's great casting. Your performance as Lt. Sieberts came across very well.

I had great doubts about that when we first started to do the show, because I was about 43 at the time. Getting down into that age range and staying there was a problem. I have heard one or two of the shows since then and think I was successful.

*Fort Laramie* was head and shoulders above the other radio shows in how it portrayed the Army in the Old West - it was believable.

Some of the scripts were written by Kathleen Hite. She was an interesting person, she also wrote a number of *Gunsmoke* scripts as well. She was able to capture and put on paper the ambiance and the feel of people at that time. I thought that it was rather remarkable that a woman writer would go in that direction.

You did quite a few *Johnny Dollar* shows.

I worked a lot of shows with Jack Johnstone not only *Johnny Dollars*. I did a lot of *The Man Called X* and *Hollywood Star Playhouse*, which went through four or five different creations. It was the same show, but they changed the title when it went from one network to another.

Johnstone's directing style was to be right down with the actors rather than being in a booth.

That became a problem sometimes. Jack got very much involved in everything. He started acting and making noises when he was directing, particularly in a scene that had a lot of action. Jack had a lot of fun, but he was very good as far as I was concerned.

Bob Bailey conveyed a certain image as *Johnny Dollar* and when they decided to do a TV show they gave him an audition and decided that he didn't look the part.

That's the *Gunsmoke* thing all

over again. I thought Eddie O'Brien probably looked more like the *Johnny Dollar* character than any of the others. Actually that was one of the great things about radio. Everyone had a picture of a character and it was absolutely correct.

Do you have favorite series that you enjoyed working on and why?

Probably *Escape*. The scripts were wonderful, many of them were based on Classics that stood the test of time. They offered me as an actor parts that I never would have gotten on any other program. They were exciting and fun to do and very rewarding from a performance standpoint. I loved *Gunsmoke*. This was a different experience entirely. I did many *Dragnets* also. *Escape* opened up all kinds of business for me.

You starred in one of the "Shipment of Mute Fate" episodes on *Escape*?

Yes, Jack Webb had done it first. It was a great show. There's a good example of what I've talking about. The lead character in that show carried it. It was not too often that a free-lance actor got an opportunity to do something like that, except on a show like *Escape*. I was starred on some of the *Suspense* shows, but it wasn't quite the same thing.

Somebody asked me about *Suspense* once. I said "I don't recall having done very many of them. When my daughter starting logging what I had done, I found out that I had worked on *Suspense* over a longer period of years than any other show. I have no knowledge of actually what went on, but I can tell you about *Escape*."

You worked with some really great directors - Norman McDonald, Jack Webb, Jack Johnstone, and William N. Robson.

Robson created *Escape* before Norman McDonald did it. I had a fascinating experience at the first Friends' of Old-Time Radio

Convention I went to. One of my favorite shows and again pointing out *Escape*, was "Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." I was getting out of the elevator on the ground floor the first day we were there and a couple was approaching us and the man said, "Harry Bartell, 'Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge!'" I thought this is remarkable, that any identity from a single episode could be that strong. It was just top-quality, it was done by Bill Robson.

Each director is different in the way he approaches directing. These were all great men, I assume that there were some similarities too.

Directing in radio from the actor's standpoint was not subject to too much variation. The director's primary aim was fitting this material properly into a time slot. Secondly, getting as much color out of that material as he possibly could. Most of the time there was very little direction as far as the actor was concerned. He might say, "We need more pace or in this scene we have to slow it down for impact either or there. But, for the most part, there's very little director to actor conversation. Most of it was in the physical production, that's all they had time for. You get into a show like *Lux Radio Theatre* where the stars were sometimes lost, that's different. Then direction became one-on-one.

A lot of the better directors were really good at casting.

A number of them used restricted casts, restricted as far as number of actors were concerned. One of the reasons for that was the matter of reliability and ensemble-type of performance which you didn't get otherwise.

Jack Webb had a definite of how he wanted a show done. You did a lot of work with him.

He had a VERY definite picture of how he wanted it done. You did it or

you didn't work for him again. There was no question about that. I did a lot of *Dragnet* including 26 episodes of the television series.

Jack's main point was that he didn't want projection, he didn't want people playing to an audience. You cut down on the projection that you use, particularly if you are coming off the Theater stage. If you work at the pace that he did, the *Dragnet* scripts were one and a half to two times as long as most. He used that much material in the same time frame. In order to do that, you couldn't sit around and take long pauses. The pace was pushed. When you cut out projection, the two things put together made the Jack Webb style.

Jack was a nut about authenticity. The things that he said on the radio or showed on the TV screen were right. On one television show, the Technical advisor was a sergeant on the police force in L.A. He came on the set and his desk had been moved into the set, while he was on vacation and Jack knew where all the papers on that desk were. Jack was that careful.

Did you work with Tony Ellis on *Frontier Gentleman*?

I worked with Tony as an actor. I later worked with him as a director. I worked with *Suspense* with him. Like *Fort Laramie*, *Frontier Gentleman* came too late. I worked quite a bit with John Dehner. John was a personal friend of mine.

Having a regular ensemble of actors on shows like *Gunsmoke* and *Frontier Gentlemen* added a lot to those show credibility.

I believe so. One of the major benefits was that you had great trust in the other actor. You knew if for some reason if you got off-track or you made a mistake, that they were going to cover for you. And you would cover for them. As a result, there was an ensemble feeling that was very different than if you had a

different cast on the show everyday.

Did you have the opportunity work with Elliot Lewis as an actor or director?

I certainly did. Elliot was a very laid-back director, but very much in control of what he did.

On some of the episodes of the *Voyage of the Scarlet Queen* his character got very frenzied.

When I played his role in a re-creation of the *Voyage of the Scarlet Queen* at a SPERDVAC Convention, I couldn't attempt to play the way he did.

Many of our member do not know that you did many Spanish dialect roles on radio.

There was a local show (*Romance of the Rancho*) on KNX, the CBS outlet in Los Angeles. I was called to the audition for a story about Early California. I played a juvenile in the show and I was the only non-Mexican. The next week I cast as a Mexican-American. I had never done a Mexican dialect in my life and I didn't know what to do. I listened very carefully to the other actors and started working from there. The next week I was called back again as a Mexican. That's the way my Spanish dialects started.

It seemed like every time *Johnny Dollar* went to Latin America

I was there. Dialect work was bread-and-butter to an actor. Except for an actor like Elliot Lewis. I don't think Elliot did a dialect in his life. Elliot was a leading man, a magnificent leading man - a great actor!

I enjoy his *Crime Classics*.

It was a joy to work by the way. I'll tell you a story about Jeanette Nolan on *Crime Classics* that endeared me to Jeanette. There was an ad-lib scene where a crowd had approached a court and we were screaming to free the prisoner. Hans Conreid was on my left and Jeanette

was on my right, right behind my right ear. Everyone else was yelling "Free him! Let him go!" Jeanette, in her wonderful old lady voice was yelling, "Kill the son-of-a-bitch!" I was through for the rest of the day.

We did an *Escape* called "Second-class Passenger." Jeanette played an Oriental seductress and she was fabulous. She could play anything and I'd believe her.

Jeanette Nolan was a magnificent actress, one of the finest actresses in this country. She had an amazing versatility not only in radio, but also on television and film. I was very fond of Jeanette and John McIntire.

**Editor's Note:** Many of Harry's performances, including most of those he mentions in the interview, can be found in the RHAC Library.

## The Mystique of EKKO Stamps

Continued from Page 1

gather around their radio on these silent nights to hear broadcasts from stations from across the United States, and even from around the world. Many listeners found that certain atmospheric conditions caused unusual receptions, but claims of these extraordinary receptions were met with skepticism. Quickly broadcast stations became overwhelmed with their listeners' requests for verification cards to confirm these unusual DXs.

In 1924, the EKKO company approached broadcasting stations with a plan to replace both verification letters and BCL cards with a postage-like stamp. These attractive stamps came in a variety of colors and featured an American eagle perched between two radio towers, with a participating station's call letters printed boldly across the bottom of the stamp. (Canadian versions would have a beaver gnawing a tree, instead of the eagle.) The EKKO plan encouraged listeners to record their radio broadcast

receptions on a specially designed card and send the card, with a dime (for postage and handling), directly to the EKKO Company. The EKKO company would check the listener's reception claim, and mail the listener a radio verification stamp upon the claim's confirmation. To listeners these stamps became known as "Echo Stamps" or, as the EKKO company had undoubtedly hoped, "EKKO Stamps."

Soon more than 600 stations across the United States subscribed to this plan and it became a national pastime for radio listeners to log as many stations and acquire as many EKKO stamps as possible. Additional stamps from stations in Canada, Cuba, and Mexico, were issued, and the EKKO company designed a stamp album especially for this new hobby. This album contained a list of all participating stations, with their call letters and broadcast frequency, and was conveniently set up with sections for each state and country. Pages were marked with a silhouette of a stamp for each station currently participating in the EKKO plan in that locality and included a few blank silhouettes for future participants.



**KOA Denver EKKO stamp**

Broadcast stations proliferated, further crowding the airways, and by 1927 the EKKO company was reporting more than 800 stations were on the air, most subscribing to the EKKO plan. As a clever stimulant to collectors, the EKKO company pointed out that the government

would soon have to take action to reduce the congestion of the airways, possibly closing some stations. Collectors were urged to acquire as many stamps, as quickly as possible, before stations were closed. The EKKO company also inferred that stamps from stations no longer licensed would increase in value, thereby tacitly suggesting that it had become acceptable to sell or trade stamps. The EKKO company was partly right, for the government did take action and some stations closed. Unfortunately for the EKKO stamp collectors, however, the government also attempted to solve the overcrowding problem by allotting new frequencies to the radio broadcasters. Stations were soon spread across the radio dial and broadcasters were allowed to abandon their policy of "silent nights." Improvements in the performance of new radio models made it less of a challenge for listeners to receive radio broadcasts from distant stations, and the public became more interested in what was being broadcast than who was broadcasting it.

In an attempt to boost the public's interest in the EKKO collecting hobby and maintain stamp sales, the EKKO company agreed to stop verifying listeners' claims and to simply provide stamps upon request. This turned out to be a major mistake, for although there had always been cheaters and stamp traders, the verification aspect of the hobby had been a major appeal and, when that policy was abandoned, the hobby went into rapid decline. Most stations remained in the EKKO plan until their individual stamp inventory was exhausted, but the hobby had lost its popularity and was soon forgotten. Station WBBR of New York City was the last station known to honor requests for stamps, and it hung on until 1948 when it, too, apparently ran out of stamps.

**Sources:**

- Combs, Charles. Stamp Collector, Photos & Telephone interview. February 1996
- Hotchner, John. "Ekko Labels Acknowledged Radio Reception," Linn's Stamp News, 13 September 1993, p. 6
- Hotchner, John. "Ekko Seals," Linn's Stamp News, 7 December 1992, p. 6
- Johnson, O.K. "Ekko Labels," Linn's Collectors Forum, 12 February 1990
- Kneitel, Tom. "Broadcasting's Greatest Ekko," *Popular Communications*, April 1986, p.20
- Mueller, Barbara. "Philatelic Relics From Radio's Early Days".

A similar copy of this article was printed in the 5/97 issue of the *Horn Speaker* and the 5/98 issue of the *Flash* publications. It is with their knowledge and permission that this article is being printed here.

## **New in The Tape Library**

By Maletha & Dick King

Now that a lot of us have had a chance to enjoy last month's entries of the *Bing Crosby Show*, we are able to offer another run of 38 shows of *Mr. District Attorney* starring David Brian and Paul Garrett. It certainly takes a creative mind to write detective-type shows that have always been so popular with the listening public. They are well-written with enough threads of plausibility to make them shows that can keep your attention for the whole show.

We move on to two reels of *Command Performance USA*. These were great shows featuring many of the popular actors of that day such as Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, Red Skelton, June Haver, Judy Canova, Danny Kaye, Harry James, Betty Grable, Veronica Lake, and a lot more from that era. After enjoying

those reels of great music and entertainment, we offer one reel of *The Man Called X*. Here again, we are entertained by the works of great writers and actors that build stories of intrigue to keep us listening and picturing the scenes in our mind's eyes. Radio was a great tool to keep the mind working, and now as RHAC members we are privileged to be able to hear these shows again.

### Distaff Detectives

*Editor's Note:* Our series women radio detectives by Jack French, the editor of *Radio Recall*, the newsletter of the Metro Washington OTR Club continues with *The Phyl Coe Mysteries*. These articles can also be found on Kevin's Smith's *Thrilling Detective* Web site. Kevin's site is located at:  
<http://www.colba.net/~kvnsmith/thrillingdetective/>

### Phyl Coe

The *Phyl Coe Mysteries* was a syndicated radio series that came out in 1936, with the lead character's name designed to reflect the sponsor, Philco Radio Tubes. **Phyl** (short for Phyllis) Coe is described as the "beautiful girl detective". She was a private investigator who was smart, aggressive, and a "take-charge" lady.

In one episode where a magician is shot on stage, Phyl, who is attending the performance, with her boy friend, leaps to the stage, barks orders to theatre personnel, and solves the crime before the cops even get there. In other mysteries, she identifies the thief of a famous painting, solves the mystery involving a new death-ray gun, and solves a murder aboard an aeroplane.

Cast and crew have not yet been identified. None of the solutions to each episode appear in it, since the original listeners were supposed to send in their answers to Philco and win cash prizes. About 12 episodes are known to be in circulation. At the

height of its popularity about 250 radio stations throughout the U.S. were airing this 15-minute program. The contest was run by Geare-Marston, Inc of Philadelphia. *The Phyl Coe Mysteries* (1936, syndicated) 15-minute episodes

### A Member's Letter

I am writing to ask if there is any chance an RHAC member recorded the last 24 hours that KIMN 950 AM was on the air before it changed to KYGO? I used to listen to KIMN when I grew up in Colorado and it was my very favorite station. Please... Please... if someone has them, I would love to borrow them or purchase a copy of them. If you don't have them, could you refer me to someone who might have them?

Thank you in advance for all of your help.

Loretta Treas  
 2884 Wiese Way  
 Sacramento, CA 95833  
 E-Mail: [lpreas@concentric.net](mailto:lpreas@concentric.net)

### Radio Puzzle

This month we start a new feature - an Old-Time Radio Crossword Puzzle. The puzzles by Jim Johnston will alternate with quizzes by David Michael. As with the quizzes, both the puzzle AND its answers will appear in the same issue. (See Answers on back page.)

### Phil Harris/Alice Faye

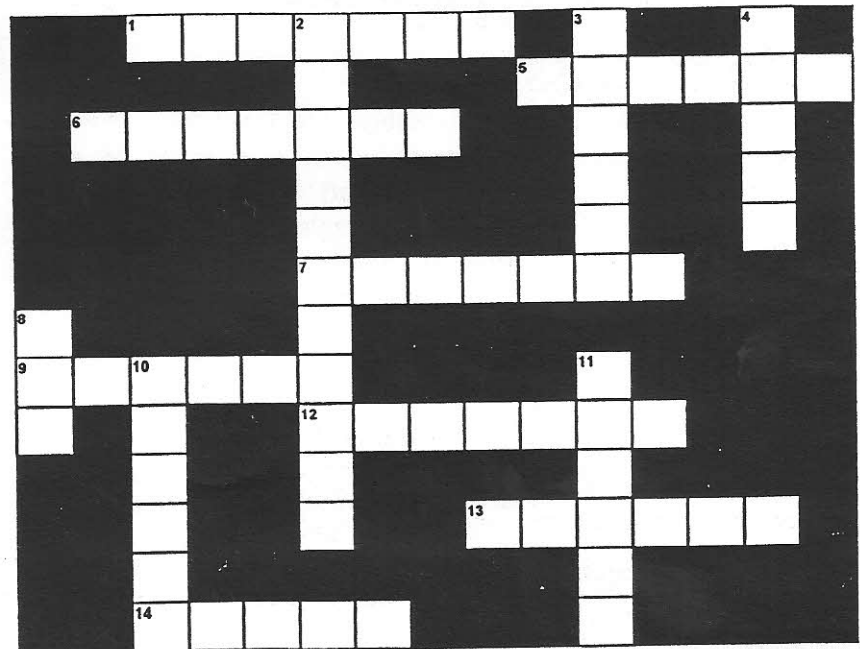
#### Across

- 1 Two script writers (first names)
- 5 Played Scott
- 6 Whitfield's role
- 7 Phil murdered it
- 9 Harris' nickname
- 12 Willie
- 13 Caustic brat
- 14 How Frankie played

#### Down

- 2 Abbruzzio's Job
- 3 Alice's former job
- 4 Played Alice Jr.
- 8 First sponsor
- 10 Second sponsor
- 11 Lewis' masterpiece

### Phil Harris/Alice Faye



## Radio Crossword Puzzle

### Answers:

#### Across

- 1 RayDick
- 5 Gordon
- 6 Phyllis
- 7 English
- 9 Curley
- 12 Brother
- 13 Julius
- 14 Lefty

#### Down

- 2 Deliveryboy
- 3 Movies
- 4 Roose
- 8 RCA
- 10 Rexall

11 Remley

## Radio Memories: Radio and Dinner

By Lon McCartt

When I was a boy, we all sat around a table for meals. It was a general rule that during dinner time, we did not listen to the radio. However, one evening, for some reason my parents made an exception and we listened to *The Aldrich Family*. It came on about meal time and we all enjoyed the adventures of Henry Aldrich and his friend, Homer.

Who can forget the familiar opening as Henry's mother called

him home? "Henry!, Henry Aldrich!!!" And then there was Henry's reply, "Coming Mother."

I think that show because it was Ezra Stone's first appearance on the program since serving time with the Army during World War II. He played the part of Henry. At any rate, something very funny happened on the show. I know it must have been funny, because my father started to laugh and then he began to choke on something he had been eating. It turned out to be a frightening experience for all of us and that was the end of listening to the radio while we were eating dinner.

Radio Historical Association of Colorado  
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FIRST CLASS MAIL



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