



The History of Radio Theater

by Clay Roehl © 2002

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Hark back to those days of yesteryear when radio was king, television was still an idea and movies were silent; those days ushered in by the Roaring Twenties. Radio began as engineers experimented with transmitting sound, be it voice or music. But the idea of telling a story on radio using actors and dialogue, music and sound effects, and original scripts written for the medium began shortly after radio itself began in the early 1920s! Radio theater came in many forms; self-contained plays, serials, soap operas, propaganda vehicles and continuing stories of families.

Two of the earliest forms, each quite different from the other, were *The Eveready Hour* and *Amos 'n' Andy*. *The Eveready Hour*, sponsored by Eveready batteries, premiered December 4, 1923, only a couple of years after the first radio station was licensed. Among its features was a one-act play, *The Bungalow*. *Amos 'n' Andy*, in many respects a pioneering work, was listened to by forty million people at its zenith. It debuted January 12, 1926 and was a precursor of radio and then television situation comedies. Other early dramatic programs included

Great Moments in History, *Real Folks*, and *True Story*; the latter sponsored by McFadden Publications and based on the magazine stories.

Radio theater was born early at individual stations but soon became the programming of the networks. The National Broadcasting Company [NBC] and the Columbia Broadcasting Company [CBS] networks were formed early; NBC began November 15, 1926 and CBS September 18, 1927. The two networks would be the major broadcasters of radio theater programs. Production was not

confined to New York but Chicago and also Detroit were major centers with Los Angeles to follow.

Stale formulas from every form of entertainment were being tried; many were succeeding and to an astonishing degree boosting sales. One form, radio theater, incorporated either original stories or adaptations. *Radio Guild* debuted in 1930 and offered adaptations of classic dramas while *First Nighter* used original scripts in their self-contained dramas.

The 1930s and '40s would become known as the Golden Age of Radio. The burst of radio drama was due in a large part to the competition between NBC and CBS. Each network hatched innovative dramatic program formats. At CBS a studio engineer suggested a series with a title

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RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO

PO BOX 1908, Englewood CO 80150 (303) 761-4139 - Dedicated to the preservation of old-time radio programs,
and to making those programs available to our members

Old-Time Radio is Alive and Well in Colorado!

KEZW 1430 AM	"When Radio Was", with Stan Frieberg	Weekdays, 7:00 - 8:00 PM
KFKA 1310 AM	"Radio Memories" (Greeley)	Sunday, 6:00 - 12:00 PM
KRMA TV Channel 6	Secondary Audio Program (SAP), "Tribute to OTR"	Sunday, 2:00 PM
KUVU 89.3 FM	"Destination Freedom"	9:00 PM

RHAC WEB SITE <http://www.rhac.org>

RHAC *OTR* WEB PAGE <http://www.old-time.com/rhac.html>

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	Herb Duniven	4184 S. Syracuse St. Denver, CO 80237		
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LIBRARIES

Reference Material:	Bill McCracken			
Logs & Scripts:	Fred Hinz	c/o RHAC PO Box 1908	Englewood, CO 80150	
Open Reel Tape:	Maletha King	900 W. Quincy Ave.	Englewood, CO 80110	
Ccassette Tape:				
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2002 Conventions

The 26th Friends of Old-Time Radio Convention Oct 24-27, 2002 Holiday Inn-North, Newark NJ
For information: Jay Hickerson, Box 4321, Hamden, CT 06514 (203) 248-2887, or email at jayhick@aol.com

SPERDVAC Convention: Nov 8 - 10 at Hacienda Hotel in El Segundo; details when available

17th Annual OTR and Nostalgia Convention April 11 - 12, 2003; Contact Bob Burchett, 10280 Gunpowder Rd., Florence, KY 41042 (859) 282-0333 haradio@hotmail.com

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like *Columbia Workshop* in which experiments would be tried. Sound effects seemed to be the driving force in expanding writers' imaginations. On one program a faulty air conditioning duct produced the ideal sound for Buck Rogers' spaceship. On another program, calling for a voice at the other end of a telephone resulted in the invention of a filter controlled by an engineer.

Columbia Workshop stands as one of the best of radio dramas. Poet Archibald MacLeish's *Fall of the City* is another. As the 'thirties continued writers became the foremost contributors. *Norman Corwin* heads the list of those writing scripts of depth and imagination which addressed the approaching world turmoil. He was given his own series (*Twenty-six by Corwin*) of half-hour dramas for which he wrote and directed a program every week for twenty-six weeks. As the United States entered World War II he was called on by the government to produce special programs to assist the war effort. When asked to write and produce a program for broadcast just eight days after Pearl Harbor, Corwin wrote *We Hold These Truths*.

There was a program produced by the "*Mercury Theatre of the Air*" and broadcast October 30, 1938, which demonstrated the power of radio drama. It was a one-hour adaptation of H.G.Wells' *War of the Worlds*."

It caused a panic on the east coast as it reported an invasion from Mars landing at Grovers Mill, New Jersey. Chaos reigned. CBS' telephone switchboard was overwhelmed as were the switchboards of police, sheriff, national guard units up and down the coast. Radio's boy genius, Orson Welles, produced and narrated a script by Howard Koch. In newspaper interviews afterward Welles claimed he didn't intend or expect the audience's hysterical reaction.

Arch Oboler was a prodigious and swift writer turning out many scripts. His best known work was scripting the *Lights Out* series where his imagination and proclivity for the weird and unusual came to the forefront. Sound effects would sometimes inspire an entire program. His forte was melodrama. His direction of his plays was precise and he was a virtuoso radio technician. He moved on to writing stand-alone scripts such as *Ivory Tower*, a 1940 overtly anti-Nazi play.

Another radio writer of note was Lucille Fletcher whose *Sorry, Wrong Number* is a thriller classic. Hundreds of writers were employed during the 1930s filling the broadcast hours. Disc jockeys had

yet to be a part of the broadcast schedule. Soap operas alone filled the daytime hours; 38 were sponsored in 1938 and the number was growing. Other serials filled the late afternoon and early evening hours with such popular shows as *Lone Ranger*, *Green Hornet*, *Boston Blackie*, *Henry Aldrich*, and many more.

But the true radio theater genre was the dramatic half-hour and hour self-contained play. Many plays and series of plays were *sustaining* at the beginning but gained sponsors later. The *Mercury Theater* began as a sustaining program but after its production of *The War of the Worlds* Campbell Soups became its sponsor and the series title was changed to *Campbell Playhouse*.

Radio's Golden Age lasted from the early 1930s through the end of the 1940s. During that time creativity flourished under the efforts of writers, directors, producers, sound effects personnel, musicians and engineers. As radio theater dwindled many of these artists moved on to television and the movies.

Today through the efforts of Old Time Radio Clubs throughout the country recordings of old radio shows are broadcast. Some radio theater is produced at local stations, e.g., the KCME Radio Theatre in Colorado Springs at 88.7 FM. National Public Broadcast Radio [NPR] produces a contemporary play weekly.

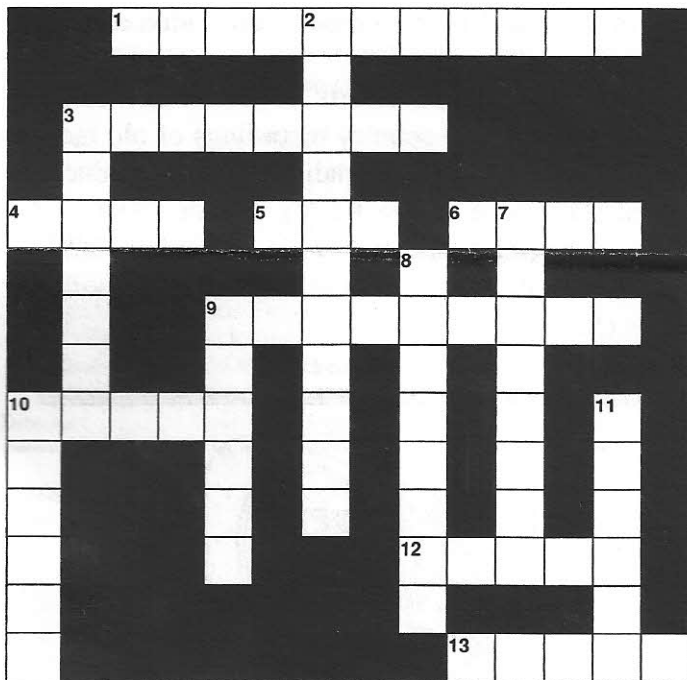
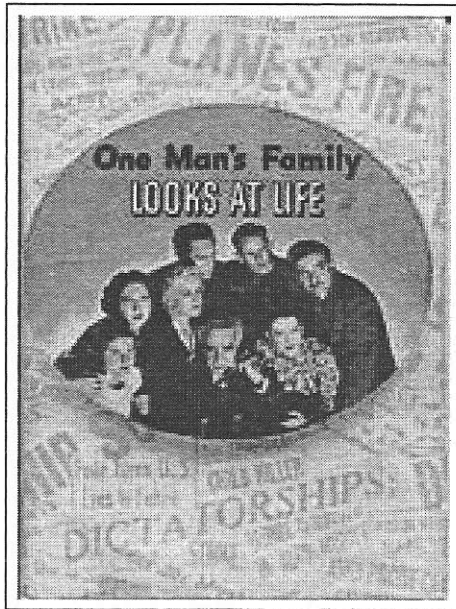


**RHAC will be holding it's holiday dinner on
Saturday, December 15th**

Watch this space for further details!

One Man's Family Crossword

By Jim Johnston - © 2002



ACROSS

- From its debut on April 29, 1932, until its 3,256th and final episode, the show had many different sponsors - Kentucky Winner cigarettes, Tenderleaf Tea, Fleischmann's Yeast, and Royal Pudding. Its last broadcast was sponsored by Miles Laboratories, makers of Bactine, Tabcin, and _____.
- By the 1940s, the show had 17 continuing characters, but the Barbours originally hit the airwaves with five children. Two were boy and girl twins. The boy, _____, was one of the most complex and tragic characters ever put on radio. He fell in and out of affairs and marriages [any woman who interested him was sure to die in some horrible manner], worked at no job for very long to the criticism of his father, was maimed in a car crash on the Bay Bridge, and often gloomily withdrew from life for months at a

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time. Eventually, he found a happy and productive life in Scotland, married permanently [at last!] to a woman named Mary McLeod.

- The Barbours youngest son, _____, served in the Navy in World War 2, became a lawyer, and lived next door to his parents with his wife Betty and their six children, all girls, that included triplets.
- The Laceys acquired the 400-acre _____ Ranch where they raised thoroughbred horses [the stable had 75 stalls] and allowed the entire Barbour family the use of it for summer vacations because it had a swimming pool and woods for hiking.
- Eldest son _____ was a writer and philosopher whose service in World War 1 made him a pacifist, his newly married wife dying in the influenza epidemic and he being maimed in the fighting. Throughout the show's run, it was he, not Father Barbour, who was the family confidant, a man of action and wisdom, but never remarrying.
- Besides his work and his family, Henry Barbour's greatest enjoyment was _____. Teddy, his eldest son's adopted daughter, would swing on the gate and talk to Father Barbour as he worked.
- The Barbour's oldest daughter, _____, married Bill Herbert and bore twin sons, Martin and William. After Herbert's mental problems and death in a car crash, she remarried to Dan Murray, a hard worker and good provider who she met when he applied for the job of manager of her dairy farm. Sound of judgement, her life was troubled only by her son William, nicknamed Pinky, who was a wastrel. Her other son, nicknamed Hank, was, by contrast, a success.
- Henry and _____ Barbour were married in 1896. Her aggravation with Henry's stubborn imperviousness was tempered by their devotion to each other, and she acted as the family peacemaker. As played by Minetta Ellen, she could say volumes with just one carefully timed sigh.
- One Man's Family, a program abstaining weirdness and bloody action, was the creation of Carlton E. _____, who also created "I Love a Mystery", a program epically violent and filled with superstition and horrible annihilations. He once said that simultaneously writing both shows fed his imagination rather than draining it. There was other cross over, too. Michael Raffetto played the Barbour's eldest son as well as the steady hero Jack Packard in "ILAM." Barton Yarborough played the Barbour's middle son and the red-haired soldier of fortune Doc Long on "ILAM".

DOWN

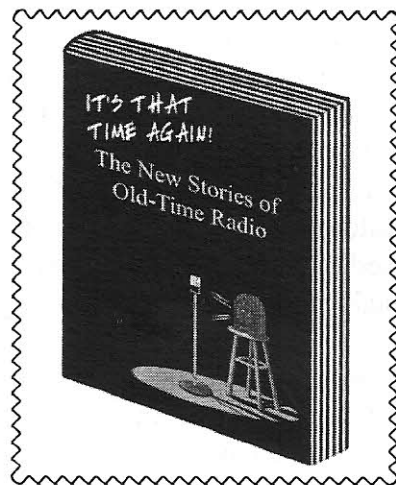
- Henry Barbour owned his own firm as a _____. Establishing it on Montgomery Street in 1912, he sold it three decades later for a \$450,000 retirement nest egg when even he saw that his middle son would never accede to his wishes and follow him into the business.
- The female twin, _____, led a life that was like "the ocean because it was changeable, restless". Her first husband, John Roberts, died in the Spanish Civil War and left her a \$350,000 estate. On her way to join second husband Nicholas Lacey in Europe in 1943, she and her children were presumed lost at sea when a U-boat torpedoed their liner. In the end, the Barbour's eldest son traced them to a concentration camp and a reunion.

7. The Barbour's eldest son was not only a writer. He had a career in _____ even though he still suffered from war injuries.
8. Upon their marriage, Henry and his wife bought a residence in the _____ area of San Francisco, near the later site of the Golden Gate Bridge. The entire family lived on this peninsula, the youngest son living right next door and the older daughter and husband Dan Murray living "three blocks down and two blocks over". Thus the family kept together even with the children grown and married.
9. Playing the Barbour's youngest son was not only a role, it was a career. He was played by actor Page _____ for the entire 27-year run.
10. Judge Glenn _____ and Doctor Fred Thompson were Henry Barbour's boyhood friends who competed along with him for the hand in marriage of a young lady named Martin, who would become Mrs. Barbour. She often told Henry she had chosen him over Fred because he smelled like antiseptic, and over Glenn because he was too much of a ladies' man.
11. J. Anthony Smythe, playing Henry Barbour for the 27 year run, created the utterance "_____, _____" which often was Henry's way of agreeing to disagree, being irritating, or apologizing. It became the show's tag line.

have Thanksgiving dinners and Christmas celebrations from most of the series in our collections and we heighten our enjoyment of the season as we listen to these shows.

On a personal note, I want to wish all of our members a happy Thanksgiving. I hope you and yours enjoy a wonderful and peaceful holiday together.

On the OTR Bookshelf . . .



Coming early this winter is a unique new anthology edited by Ben Ohmart of BearManor Media. This book, called "IT'S THAT TIME AGAIN! *The New Stories of Old Time Radio*", is a collection of new short stories by today's authors based upon familiar characters from favorite OTR shows. In this book, readers can relive the mystery, adventure, and comedy of such OTR shows as:

Lum & Abner
Captain Midnight
Candy Matson
Tom Mix
Pat Novak, for Hire
Dimension X
Rogue's Gallery
The Black Museum
 and more!

Ma Perkins
Honest Harold
Our Miss Brooks
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The Green Lama
Quiet Please
The Inner Sanctum
Frontier Gentleman

Price - \$15.00 (wholesale rate \$9 per book if ordering 10 or more) ISBN 0-9714570-2-6

Copies can be preordered from the publisher,

**BearManor Media - Ben Ohmart
 P.O. Box 750, Boalsburg, PA. 16827**

Or on the web at; www.bearmanormedia.com

From the Desk of the Editor by Carol Tiffany



Well, here we are again, frantically getting ready for the Holiday season. As you are making out your Christmas lists, trying to think of just the right gifts for those near and dear to you, we'd like to ask a favor of you; a few minutes of your time.

Once again, we are asking for your input for a couple of new articles for our newsletter. For the December issue, we are hoping to put together a Christmas "wish list" for favorite OTR characters. What would *Connie Brooks* like to receive from *Mr. Boynton*? What would be in *Helen Trent's* stocking from *Gil Whitney*? How about *John Bickerson's* gift from wife *Blanche*? If you have any ideas, please send or E-Mail them to me for inclusion in our Christmas issue. These can be serious gifts, or funny ones. Either way, this can be a fun article for our newsletter.

In the same vein, we will be repeating a popular column from last year in our January issue, "*OTR Characters' New Year's Resolutions*". Your ideas for this year's resolutions are needed. Thanks in advance for your participation.

One of the most enjoyable things about our OTR shows is the fact that the characters in most of them acknowledged and celebrated the holidays. Thus, we

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An Echo from the Golden Age of Radio

Contributed by R.H.A.C. Member, Paul Barringer

On the front page of the ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS, dated Sunday, Feb. 20, 1949 was this article titled, FATAL RADIO DISPUTE. "RAVENNA, OHIO, Feb.19. -(UP)- A 75 year-old farmer who killed his hired hand in a dispute over the Jack Benny radio program, today was given a suspended one-to-20 year sentence."

"The farmer, Jacob A. McDonald, pleaded guilty to manslaughter and was ordered by Judge Black C. Cook to sell his farm and leave northeastern Ohio. He also was ordered to pay \$6500 to the widow of Jackson W. Bailey, the hired hand."

"McDonald testified the fatal shotgun shooting last Oct. 19 followed a two-day argument that began when he refused to let Bailey tune in the Jack Benny show. McDonald preferred to listen to a give-away program."

You think people didn't take their radio seriously back in the old days? Man oh man. Also, what kind of a sentence would he have gotten today?



New in the Tape Library

by Dick and Malettha King

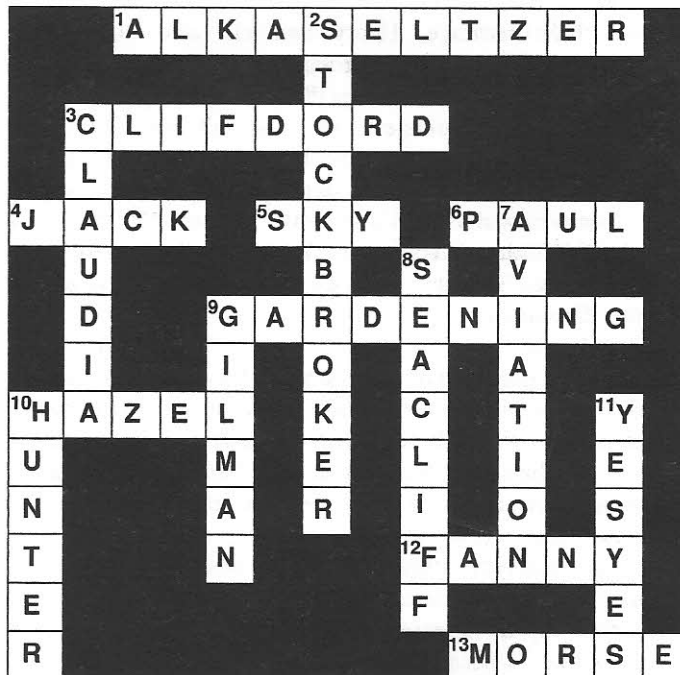
This month we're again adding to our general library with 32 shows of "Wild Bill Hickok". Although they were originally written for a younger group of listeners, they're still interesting stories and well worth the listening enjoyment. Then too, these shows cause us to reflect on and respect the writers; They not only had to come up with plausible plots but they had to also have a working knowledge of the natural hazards and animals involved in the shows.

Next month we'll finish this series and move on to other shows which were directed more toward adult audiences. This change will fit in well with the change of seasons as we can now spend more time indoors listening to OTR shows as we look out at the winter weather.

We're looking forward to the RHAC Christmas party and seeing you there.

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Answers to the "One Man's Family" Crossword Puzzle



The Last Word



Michael Raffetto as Paul Barbour

If you enjoyed the "One Man's Family" crossword in this issue, stay tuned for another great OMF article coming in our February issue of "Return With Us Now". Learn more about the first family of radio and what made them tick as well as more about the creative geniuses behind the scenes who made the characters so unforgettable.