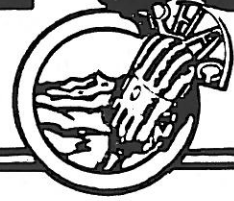


# RETURN WITH US

The Radio Historical  
Association of Colorado, Inc.

# NOW...



Volume 18 Number 9

April 1993



Fred Allen and his wife, Portland Hoffa, in 1932

**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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**BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING:** There will be a board meeting April 1, 1993.  
**ALL MEMBERS** are welcome and invited to attend and participate at the Board of Directors Meeting.  
The April 1st meeting is at the home of Dick King at 7:30 PM..

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**CLUB MEETING:**  
The April 1993 R.H.A.C. meeting will be April 15th, 7:30 PM, at The Church of The Master, located at 17th Avenue and Filbert Court (Filbert Ct is between Fairfax and Forest Sts).

**Our GUEST SPEAKER** will be **HERMAN URSCHHEL**  
Mr Urschel was Chief Recording Engineer for The Rocky Mountain Radio Council, circa 1937-1947. The council was a coordinating facility which permitted regional radio stations to have access to recorded programs of a regional nature. More practically, the council operated the only significant recording studio in this area during that time frame.  
Mr. Urschel went to Barbre Productions doing film sound work 1950-1952.  
In 1952 he and a friend, John Newell, started Western Cine Service. During the period from 1952 to 1979 he held many positions in the company, and at one time did all of the sound recording for Western Cine Service. Ultimately Herman Urschel became president of Western Cine Service.  
He started his own company, Cinema Sales, in 1977. In 1979 Mr. Urschel retired.  
We heartily look forward to hearing from Herman Urschel about his experiences during the growing years of sound recording!

*From the*

## *King's Roost*

We have been checking and generally reviewing the condition of the various cassette libraries. Our findings: Our members need to be reminded of a few necessary steps which need to be taken before returning rented tapes to the libraries.

If you find a problem with a cassette, please, put a note on top of the 7-inch box describing the problem. The librarian does not always check inside each box and may have been waiting for that box to fill another member's order. We would appreciate a note about any problems you may have found (or even caused).

Our concern is to be able to present a complete box of cassettes in good condition to the next member who orders it.

We expect each member to return their tapes within the allowed month rental time and be sure they are rewound so that the next person can start with side one as you did.

On the whole, we have found that the great majority of members have been very careful about returning tapes in good condition!

Here's another problem that keeps popping up: tabs. (It may be a pun...but it's not quite funny.) It goes like this: Each shipping carton is sealed in such a way as to leave one or two tabs which, when pulled, permit one to open the carton without using a knife. **NOT** using a knife is **VERY IMPORTANT**. We need to protect our boxes, folks, in order to extend their working lives and hold down expenses. It also reduces the time consuming labor of our tape librarians who are overworked and underpaid. They are volunteers who get NO pay and not enough thanks.

Spring has finally arrived in the Denver area and it is harder to find time to stay indoors and get the RHAC work done. However, today is a rainy day and it will help to get more work caught up.

This being written while listening to Sherlock Holmes...while Dick is making cassette which in future will go into the Contributor's Library. There are many great shows being placed in the libraries and we are certain our members will enjoy many hours of good listening.

Herman Urschel had been scheduled for speaker at the March meeting. Ward Crowley was schedule to speak in April. However, Ward had to be out of town in April. So, Herman graciously allowed Ward to speak

in March and agreed to postpone his own appearance until April. We are most grateful to Herman Urschel for his going along with this change in events.

We have noticed that our guest speakers have certain traits in common. The most noticeable have been that they all had an intense desire to work in radio and that they all started at very nominal pay. However, they have indeed achieved successful lives following their chosen careers... even when it was not always the most rewarding in monetary terms.

As already mentioned, Herman Urschel will be our speaker at the April meeting.

In May our guest speaker will be Bob Hastings, most frequently known as the former Archie Andrews back in the late 40s. Bob Hastings, of course, had many other roles. And he'll explain most of them when he appears on a special date, May 15. More details next month in the May newsletter. Please, keep this changed date in mind for the May meeting of RHAC. There will also be a May 14, Friday night reception and pot luck dinner at our usual clubhouse location. Bob is a most likeable individual and we're sure to enjoy his visit.

**The grand romance of  
FRED ALLEN and  
PORTLAND HOFFA**

The day of which I write was approximately five years ago. It was behind the scenes of "The Passing Show," a fleshy, flashy piece of rhinestone entertainment on pre-depression Broadway. It was one of those days on which stars have headaches, hoofers get runs in their stockings, and comedians look as full of *joie de vivre* as Egyptian mummies.

It was a day on which a tall young man called Fred Allen, despondantly leaning against a backdrop, considered that life was pretty dull. Life. . . what was it but a bunch of old gags to make over, let down the hems, and pin onto new political problems. And the dear public? What was the dear public but a bunch of people who sometimes laughed at gags but usually didn't. In short Fred was feeling what is colloquially known as "lousy." Very.

Now, in case you haven't recognized the principle of this merry piece, the Fred Allen already mentioned is the self same zany who cavorts Sunday-nightly in your loudspeakers for Linit and Bath Club. And the hooper who—in my story—is about to enter Monsieur Allen's life is none other than the dumb-cluckish young thing named Portland on the same program who claims residence in Schenectady and asks first primer questions with the guilelessness of Lorelie Lee.

This hooper in "The Passing Show" had a run in her stocking, probably, but it didn't get her down. She had the sort of face,

Fred noticed covertly, that never quite lost hope. Turned up nose, you know; amused blue eyes that held a quiet merriment. Though dressed like innumerable other hoofers, she shone as distinctively as the night's first star, as far as Fred was concerned.

Some newspaperman who knew her had written this line: "Portland Hoffa was a hooper, and she held herself aloofer." That is to say, she didn't chew gum like cud-punishing bossy, say "gawd," or wear orchids every pay day. To Fred, she was a miracle, for she yanked him straight out of his private chasm of despair and changed his opinion of the Younger Generation.

Twirling his false mustache, our boy friend decided to find out more about her. "Such a cute girl ought to get out before it gets her."

So what did Fred do about it? He married her and made her a stooge. His stooge. He made a hooper into a stooge—and what happened? But wait. Maybe you don't know what a hooper is. Well, suh, the sons and daughters of vaudeville call all dancers "hoofers." And a stooge? That's the guy planted in the audience to heckle the comedian on stage. Sometimes he has a seat in the first row downstairs. Usually, he is in a box. Or he may be on the stage. No matter where he makes his headquarters, he "feeds" the dumb, oaf-like queries that give the comedian his chance to spring his laugh line. That's your stooge. Understand?

Portland Hoffa became a stooge, but before she surrend-

ered, believe you me, it took a deal of crafty Allen strategy.

That first day approximately five years ago when an uninvited impulse prodded Fred Allen to learn more about the girl, he employed the method of his grease-painted profession. He wise-cracked, he did. And lo! the first faint fires of romance were lighted.

"I'm a doctor's daughter," Portland advised him. "My father named me after the city where I was born. Out in Oregon, you know."

"I know," said Fred. "You ought to be glad you weren't born in Terre Haute or Gila Bend or Hastings-on-the-Hudson."

"One of my sisters was called Lebanon and another Last One," said Portland.

"Good gracious."

"Dad thought she'd be the last one," Miss Hoffa continued serenely, "but she wasn't. So he changed her name to Next-to-Last."

So they fell to talking. He told her he'd like to be a novelist, but he kept catching himself laughing up his sleeve and that didn't incubate the heart throbs demanded in literature. Said he wrote and sold vaudeville skits because it was more profitable to sell them than to have them stolen. Said that he'd been born in Cambridge, Mass., and started through life as a children's librarian. With that background, he had dared hit the trail in vaudeville, first as a bum juggler, then cashing in on his dry humor in mill towns through New England. He told her he hated dryads, farthingales, wimples, wiffletrees,

TAPE 5241 FAMOUS JURY TRIALS

1200'

- 1L 9-18-48 The People vs. Wally Dent *EV's*  
 9-25-48 The People vs. Irene Miller *EV's*
- 2L           The People vs. Paul Masters  
 Synd. The State vs. James Russell
- 1R    Synd. The Crown vs. John Peter Zenger  
 Synd. The State vs. Vincent Carter *2872*
- 2R    Synd. The State vs. Thomas Crosby  
 Synd. The State vs. Vernon Craig

TAPE 5242 STRANGE WILLS / BOARD OF MISSING HEIRS / CONFESSION

1800'

- 1L    Synd. STRANGE WILLS: They Met in Monte Carlo *1257 V6 1257*  
 Synd. SW: Black Interlude *V4*  
 Synd. SW: The Lady and the Pirate *V6-*
- 2L    Synd. SW: The Prince of Broadway *V4-*  
 Synd. SW: East of Hudson's Bay *V6*  
 Synd. SW: Autograph Girl *V4*
- 1R    Synd. SW: Penthouse Orphan *V4*  
 Synd. SW: Emeralds Come High *DH*  
 Synd. SW: Emily *DH*
- 2R    3-31-46 BOARD OF MISSING HEIRS: First, John B. Fontaine Jr.  
 8-23-53 CONFESSION: James V. Madsen *DH*  
 8-30-53 C: Leo J. Fowler *DH*

TAPE 5243 CONFESSION / THE LOSER

1800'

- 1L    9-6-53 CONFESSION: George S. Andress *DH+*  
 9-13-53 C: Roger S. Chapman *DH+*  
 5-5-55 THE LOSER: From Corona Women's Prison. Forgery, Robbery,  
 Drug Addiction
- 2L    5-12-55 TL: From Folsom Prison. Kidnaping, Forgery  
 5-19-55 TL: From San Quentin Prison. Safecracking  
 5-26-55 TL: From Folsom Prison. Robbery, Burglary, Assault *DH+*
- 1R    6-9-55 TL: From San Quentin Prison. Drug Addiction, Robbery  
 6-16-55 TL: From San Quentin Prison. Robbery, Kidnaping, Murder  
 6-23-55 TL: From San Quentin Prison. Attempted Escape from Folsom, part 1
- 2R    6-30-55 TL: From San Quentin Prison. Attempted Escape from Folsom, part 2  
 7-7-55 TL: From San Quentin Prison. Murder, Assault, Robbery  
 8-4-55 TL: From San Quentin Prison. Robbery, Murder

VARIOUS BBC DETECTIVE AND MYSTERY PROGRAMS Tapes 5244 through 5257

This section includes several famous detective shows broadcast in the 1970's and 1980's. Inspector Maigret (Tapes 5244-5246) by George Simenon stars Maurice Denham and Michael Gough. Sherlock Holmes (5246-5247) by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle stars John Moffett and Timothy West on 5246 and Roger Reese and Crawford Logan on 5247. Albert Campion (5248) by Margery Allingham stars Basil Moss. Philip Marlowe (5251-5252) by Raymond Chandler stars Ed Bishop.

Second Holmes (5252) by Grant Eustis features Peter Egan as grandson Stanford Holmes, with Jeremy Nicholas. A Case for Dr. Morelle (5252-5253) by Ernest Dudley stars Cecil Parker and Sheila Sim. Inspector West (5254) by John Creasey stars Patrick Allan and Sarah Lawson.

Several serials are included: Pay Any Price (5249-5250), Death May Surprise Us (5255), Shadows of Doubt (5256) and So Much Blood (5256). Murder After Midnight (5257) was part of the Clive Bull Show, with Dr. Martin Fydow reading about famous murder cases.

Donations for this section are from RHAC members Mike O'Donnell (5244, 5245, 5247, 5248, 5251 and 5257), Tom Monroe (5246, 5249 and 5250) and Larry Valley (5254, 5255 and 5256), with the remainder anonymous donations.

Other BBC programs may be found in the Regular Library on Tapes 005 013 078 087 414 427 512 513 656 657 821 822 823 887 900 901 902 and 1036 (through Tape 1081), and in the Contributor's Library on Tapes 5076 5077 5078 5079 and 5080.

Timings to the nearest minute are on the index sent with each tape.

TAPE 5244 INSPECTOR MAIGRET (BBC)

1800'

- 1L 5-29-77 Maigret and Monsieur Charles
- 6-5-77 Maigret and the Hundred Gibbets
- 2L 6-12-77 Maigret Goes to School
- 6-19-77 Maigret's Boyhood Friend
- 1R 6-26-77 Maigret at the Crossroads
- 7-3-77 Maigret has Doubts
- 2R 7-10-77 Maigret and the Madman of Bergerac
- 7-17-77 Maigret and the Minister

TAPE 5245 INSPECTOR MAIGRET (BBC) STEREO

1800'

- 1L, 12-26-83 Maigret Goes Home
- 1R 12-27-83 Maigret in Montmartre
- 2L, 12-28-83 Maigret in Society
- 2R 12-29-83 Maigret Sets a Trap

pogo sticks, arch supporters, duennas, and house deteckatifs.

You can see how well they were getting on. Clicked from the beginning. Before Portland could put on the brakes, she got a look behind the comedian's eyes and saw that he was lonely and disillusioned and weary of looking at life through rose-colored footlights. But whether he was trying to be funny with her, or something, she couldn't quite decide. She thought not.

He and Portland got to meeting each other. Apparently just coincidentally. And Portland found out that even funny guys that looked like judges, could be awfully romantic. And Fred found out that little hoofers, even in the midst of a harum-scarum existence, and without benefit of a throne room, could be as queenly as anything. So presently Fred married the girl, and that huge, ingratiating bunch of solemnity and wit became "my husband" to Portland.

Fred hadn't thought of getting himself encumbered. But with the destinies of two to consider, he thought it out pretty deliberately. There was nothing left to do but to break her in as a stooge. He broke her in. That was at Lake Nipnue, Mass. The first time, she was cold and clammy with fright. He had to hold her hand, pat her on the shoulder, and promise to by her a soda afterwards if she was a good girl and went through with it without any more jitters. Just when it was time to go on, the manager came backstage and said that there wasn't enough of an audience to bother.

It was better after that. He had a way of welcoming her on the stage. He said, "Anybody who looks at me now is crazy." She liked that. And the first thing anybody knew, she was the stooge supreme, piping out the right silly questions as if absolutely devoid of any sense..

Three years at that. Stooging up and down the back roads of vaudeville circuits. Working their way to the front. And finally getting a job on Broadway. It was a show called "Polly," and Portland was so weary of acting the goof that she stayed home and read books while Actor Allen went out and sang for his supper. And how Fred missed her. He begged her to come back. So she bravely took up the yoke of her stooge-dom in the memorable "First Little Show" and "Three's a Crowd."

In the "Little Show," Portland wore a pair of shorts and a satin blouse. One night she heard gales of laughter. She got quite cocky over the way she was getting the laughs. In fact, she was planning to call Fred's attention to it later in the dressing room. As she was about to jump into her dance routine, husband Fred placed firm hands about her waist and walked her off. Not until then did she discover that her velvet tights had split, and a white silk inner lining that looked like something else had stimulated all the laughter.

Working night after night on Broadway soon exhausted both of them. They decided to Get Away From It All. They decided to go to Europe, to the gaiety of gay Paree. They went. Somehow, it wasn't what they expected. Within a fortnight, they were

back in the U.S.A., basking on the sun-drenched sands of Atlantic City. Home-folks, those Allens. From that day on, they bought American.

In 1932, Fred brought his dry conclusive voice to radio. Portland, too. And suddenly life became for her a matter of being quiet while her husband worked. The old bugaboo of New Material stared them in the face, and threatened to seperate them. Resignedly, Fred retired to his office and began to dictate to Portland's younger sister. With him, gags are a science, and he revamps such wheezes as used to give Ceasar hysterics, and applies them to modern conditions. While he writes programs and magazine stories, Portland keeps quiet and works jig-saw puzzles. Sunday nights, she speaks her pretty piece, mentions Schenectady again, and heckles ol' Mister Allen. Fred's used to it by this time. No matter how it sounds, it's all put on. It's all just a gag. A gag of five years' standing. Actually, they're closer-than-this, and the love that brought them together and helped to conquer Broadway is still the talk of the Big Town's radio row.

And that is my little tale's happy ending. It's the only kind of ending possible. when the girl is a goil like Portland and the guy is a feller like Fred.

Radio Stars, May 1933

### *Was a Joke, Sons*

Offering Fred Allen, Bob Hope, and Red Skelton honorary vice-presidencies, their network tried last mid-week to "fade" the episode Allen. If we'd been in the network's boots, we'd have

wished we'd tendered our offer three days earlier, before making front page headlines and, in our opinion, a ridiculous issue of what normally might have passed as another of Fred Allen's caustic sallies.

Irked at being cut off the previous Sunday, when his program (again) ran overtime, Allen arranged a script in which he was asked why he had been chopped off the air.

He started to explain: "Well, there's a little man....." and suddenly his nasal remarks faded into suspenseful silence. Thirty-five seconds later, Fred's twanging resumed. What he had said only to the studio audience, into a mike made "dead" by a network engineer on orders from "upstairs," was: "Well, there's a little man in the company we work for. He's a vice-president in charge of program ends. When our program runs overtime, he marks down how much time is saved."

Asked "What does he do with this time?" Allen continued, "He adds it all up, ten seconds here, twenty seconds there, and when the vice-president saves up enough seconds, minutes, and hours to make two weeks, he uses the two weeks of our time for his vacation."

Adamant Allen had said it and was glad, but network officials, who had notified him Friday of the unacceptability of his material, must have been mad. Subsequently, Bob Hope was faded (twelve seconds) and Red Skelton (seven seconds) for humorous references to the Allen episode. Everyone along radio row waited like an expectant father to hear

what quip Henry Morgan would unleash on Wednesday night ("over another network"). Henry was admirably restrained, confining his remarks to a weak gag about "Cut-Off, the story of Fred Allen." That same night, officials, apparently having decided to wash up the whole business, allowed Dennis Day the best crack: "I'm listening to the radio."

Mildred: "But I don't hear anything."

Dennis: "I know. Fred Allen's on."

What we wished the network had done, instead of censoring the Allen script, was to have clamped down on the sore spot that provoked Fred to voice defiance. He has shown consistently bad judgement, we hold, in letting the program run over, necessitating its cutting off before completion. Allen loves to ad lib and his studio audience loves to guffaw at his impromptu cracks, thereby persistently eating up time allotted to the regular script and the orderly procedure of the broadcast. The studio audience enjoys a complete show, but dialers are brushed off and made to feel cheated as the broadcast abruptly signs off in the middle of a vowel. We think this perpetual practice is bad manners, bad showmanship, and bad for Allen and his producers who don't get together and arrange for a bigger bumper to allow the program to exit in finished manner.

It's no fault but his own that Fred Allen has been repeatedly chopped off the air when his allotted time was up. It's not too hard to imagine that his habit of sloppy finales may have irritated network officials to the point

where they couldn't see anything funny—either in Allen's facetious material or his uncooperative manner toward censorship, which has been a source of increasing friction all season. What means were taken to arrive at an understanding we do not know. Agency and network should have collaborated. But obviously, if the network couldn't take a joke, the arbitrary fade method wasn't the proper course, for it threw a lush story into the laps of the newspapers, who leaped like crazy kangeroos at the chance to embarrass a rival medium. (We discount the rumor the whole fiasco was a publicity stunt). Regardless, we think Fred should have been allowed his little gag. Radio is heralded as having come of age, but is not supposed to have grown old and stuffy, too.

Fred will probably have a whale of an audience next week. Reportedly he said, "I wouldn't be found dead as a vice-president." As for us, we feel like Bob Hope, who, the morning after he was faded, was credited with the observation: "We all got cauliflower heads today."

Firing the final blast, the network agreed: Gags about NBC and its vice-presidents will not be censored. In fact, by way of public atonement, NBC was urging all comedians to have a field day at its expense. Everybody else was anyway.

RADIO LIFE, May 4, 1947





# RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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Signature

**REMEMBER**  
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# HERMAN URSCHEL

RETIRED CHIEF RECORDING ENGINEER of ROCKY MOUNTAIN RADIO COUNCIL

**WILL BE OUR  
GUEST SPEAKER THURSDAY,  
APRIL 15, 1993, 7:30 PM AT THE  
CHURCH OF THE MASTER  
17TH AVENUE AND FILBERT COURT**

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