

RETURN WITH US

The Radio Historical
Association of Colorado, Inc.

NOW...

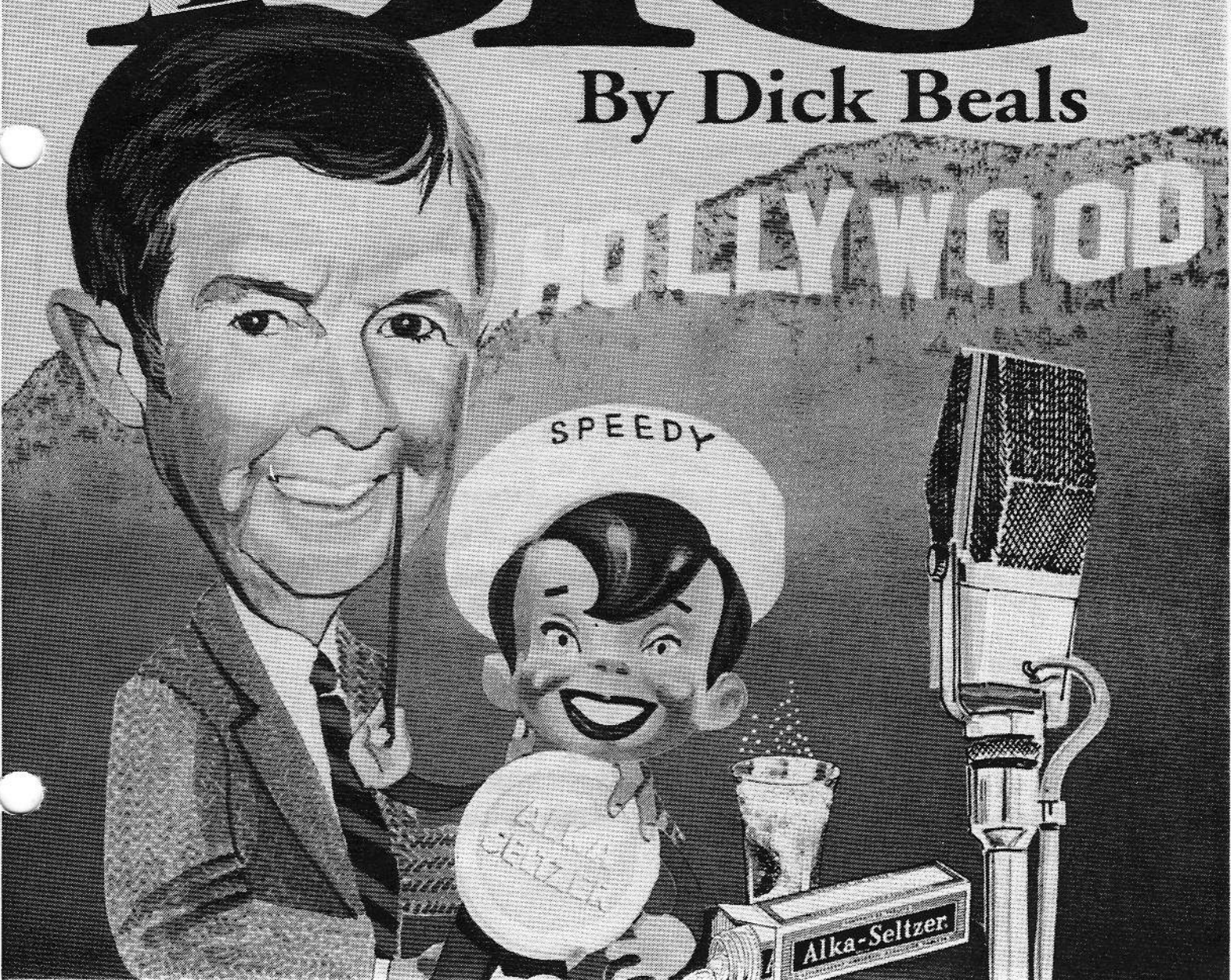


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BIG THING

By Dick Beals



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 on September 2, 1993. ALL MEMBERS are welcome and invited to attend and participate at the Board of Directors Meeting. The September 2nd meeting is at the home of Glenn Ritter at 7:30 PM.



CLUB MEETING: The September 1993 R.H.A.C. meeting will be Thursday, September 16th 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).

Dick Beals, nationally known as the voice of Speedy Alka-Seltzer, radio actor, businessman and motivational speaker, will be our September Guest Speaker.



NOMINATIONS FOR 1994 R.H.A.C. OFFICERS! Nominations will be accepted at any time before the Election on September 16th, 1993. Nominations are solicited and will be accepted in writing or by phone to Secretary Glenn Ritter at 377-4798. Regular or absentee votes will be accepted by Glenn Ritter any time before the Sept. 16 meeting. Attend! Nominate! Vote!

Dick Beals to speak in Denver at RHAC Meeting!

Church of The Master, Thursday, September 16, 1993 at 7:30 p.m.

Dick Beals was in the third grade in Birmingham, Michigan when he performed in his first film.

Radio shows included Dragnet, Dr. Christian, The Railroad Hour, Gunsmoke, one Man's Family, etc.

Club of Southern California. He is Past-President of both. He is a Rotarian and served as President of

Following four years in Michigan State, where he majored in radio broadcasting, he entered the acting profession in radio and television in 1949 in nearby Detroit. Shows included the Lone Ranger, Green Hornet and Challenge of the Yukon and an assortment of pioneering television shows.

In 1952, he pursued a career in Hollywood.



In 1953 he was placed under contract for the voice of Speedy Alka-Seltzer, a voice he continues to do today.

He is active in the Michigan State Alumni Club and the Big Ten

the Escondido Elementary School Board. His hobbies are golf, tennis and he is a tournament bridge player. He is an instrument-rated pilot and flies his own airplane. He is a student of baseball, basketball and football and has coached at all levels for 30 years.

Dick commutes to Hollywood regularly to perform on cartoon shows and TV commercials.

Do Big Names Mean Good Radio?

Sunday, 3:00 p.m., NBC

For something like just under \$300 a minute, NBC is now bringing its Sunday dialers ninety minutes of big names. Question that arose at the prospect of this mike extravaganza was — would ninety minutes of big names mean ninety minutes of good radio entertainment? At this writing, it looks as though NBC has played it smart.

The Big names that are being paid the big money to put on *"The Big Show"* are not restricted to its performer line-up. A substantial percentage of the sizable weekly \$25,000 budget is being allocated in the direction of quality scripters, chief among them, Goodman Ace. The result is that *"The Big Show"* is also turning out to be a good show.

The big star of *"The Big Show"* is Tallulah "Darling" Bankhead, and already radio fans are choosing up sides, pro and con Tallu. This is usually a sure sign of success. One of the issues tossed back and forth by the pro-and-con-ers is Miss Bankhead's lavish use of the word "darling." We're told that the first time Tallulah glanced through the script of the show's initial airer, she issued the same complaint: "There are too many 'darlings' in this, darling." Somebody took count and found out there were 400 of them. Tallulah blue-penciled, cut hem down to a mere 240. For the 'darlings' scratched, she substituted any

name that came into her mind, like 'George,' 'Jim,' or 'Joe.'

Renowned as a wit, *"The Big Show's"* femcee lives up to her reputation — but it seems she has to do an awful lot of talking to do it. Once, during a late Saturday night rehearsal, Tallulah was asked to read a line in the script. She read it, but didn't stop at the period. When she had finished her embellishment of the dialog, producer Dee Engelbach asked his assistant, "Did you get a timing on that?"

Muttered one of Tallulah's fellow wits — Groucho Marx: "The Timing of the Shrew."

To date, *"The Big Show's"* big line-up of big-name, big-money talent has included Fred Allen, Jimmy Durante, Danny Thomas, Ethel Merman, Frankie Laine, Jose Ferrer, Ezio Pinza, Fanny Brice, Bob Hope, Groucho Marx, Eddie Cantor, Perry Como, Lauritz Melchior, Ed Wynn, Jack Carson, Vincent Price, Jane Powell and Ed Gardner. Its listener rating is still less than half of CBS's Jack Benny, but is moving up while the latter is moving down to the same degree.

Bob Hope summed up NBC's "Operation — Buck Benny" neatly when he offered the observation, "This show is either going to break Benny — or the Rockefellers."

RADIO-TV LIFE, January 12, 1951

Winchell's Chips

Robert Kintner, president of ABC, gave the radio chain's top-rated news commentator what he wanted last week. After

dickering with NBC and CBS, Walter Winchell signed an exclusive lifetime contract with ABC in the Stork Club's Cub Room and became "America's No. 1 taxpayer." In return for his services as "consultant to ABC for radio and television," Winchell will receive about \$520,000 a year plus 10,000 shares of his current sponsor's (Warner-Hudnut, Inc.) stock and a potential hunk of ABC if the FCC OK's the proposed merger with United Paramount. While ABC is hopeful he will go in front of TV cameras sometime this year, Winchell, who enjoys Nielson's highest rating (41.6), still prefers radio and sunning in Miami. He is waiting for early '53, when the coaxial cable is due to reach Florida and give him as large an audience. In the meantime and for the rest of his life, he will stay on top of the payroll even if his voice gives out.

Newsweek, October 8, 1951

Cantor on the Coast

Commercial television went coast to coast this week when the two-way microwave relay system was taken over by the networks Sunday night. Eddie Cantor, on the Colgate Comedy Hour (NBC-TV, Sunday, 8-9 p.m. EST), became the first star to telecast a major commercial show from Hollywood.

Newsweek, October 8, 1951

Big Sister

Big Sister was one of the most popular and durable of radio's soap operas, the story of Ruth Evans, and her troubles guiding

her younger sister and brother through the trials of life.

This heartthrobber was first heard on CBS September 14, 1936, and sold Rinso for ten years. In an abrupt change, sponsorship then went to Procter & Gamble, Lever Brothers' top competitor, which carried it for another six years. It was last heard December 26, 1952.

In the beginning, Ruth Evans was a swinging single. Jim Ameche introduced her strife, to the shows opening gong of four bells from the Glen Falls town hall clock. By 1939 she had settled down as the wife of Dr. John Wayne, a physician working with Dr. Duncan Carvell. She was "big sister" to Sue Evans (Dorothy McGuire) and Little Neddie Evans (Michael O'Day), a cripple who had been cured by Dr. Wayne. But to Reed Bannister, her husband's best friend, she was womanhood perfected, the impossible, unattainable love. The noonday serial focused on Ruth's relationship with her husband and friends, and was filled with all the stock heartaches.

There were bouts with amnesia, a rare malady that became almost commonplace between the hours of noon and five. There was John's eye for a pretty leg, finally manifested in an affair with Hope Evans, wife of Ruth's little brother Ned. There was a long separation during the war, when John was held in a Japanese prison camp, and a hundred and one other troubles that could only happen in a radio soap opera.

Problems came early to Ruth and John. Even before they were married, John was getting plenty

of trouble from his first wife Norma. Consider this early episode, retold in a 1939 issue of *Radio Mirror*:

Norma had trapped Ruth and John in a secret cabin rendezvous to cause a scandal that will wreck John's career. She rushes back to town in triumph, with John and Ruth in hot pursuit. Norma's automobile is wrecked, leaving her on the verge of death. John and Ruth carry her to a farmhouse, and there must face a terrible decision. Without an immediate operation, Norma will surely die.

If Norma dies under the knife, John will surely face a murder charge. If she lives, she will surely ruin his career. What should they do?

Being good people, they hesitate but an instant. With Ruth shakily holding a flickering lamp, John performs the operation and saves Norma's life. But the operation leaves Norma's mind impaired, and John must face disciplinary action from a hospital review board. When "allowed to resign" gracefully, he opts for the coward's way out. He signs as a crewman on a freighter and ships out in the middle of the night. The freighter is reported lost at sea, with all hands drowned. Ruth is heartbroken until she learns that John may indeed have survived. She traces him to his remote farm (the one place he might go), where she learns that he was blinded in the explosion aboard the ship. John mistaking her true devotion for pity, sends her away in anger.

This art of snowballing complication, of misery piled upon

disaster, could keep a story line alive indefinitely.

The part of Ruth was initiated by Alice Frost, who met her future husband Wilson Tuttle when he was director of the serial. Nancy Marshall took the part in 1942; Marjorie Anderson, and Mercedes McCambridge also played Ruth before the role finally passed to Grace Matthews in 1946.

Martin Gabel originated the part of Dr. John Wayne. In later years John was played by Paul McGrath, one of the creepy hosts of *Inner Sanctum Mysteries*, and Staats Cotsworth, best known as Casey, in *Casey, Crime Photographer*. The show was created by Lillian Lauferty and for a time was written by Julian Funt, well known in the trade for his ability with medical material.

Big Sister always got respectable ratings and, in an unusual experiment, one of the characters on the show was lifted and placed in his own format. This was Michael West, played by Richard Kollmar, and the new serial was *Bright Horizon*, first heard on CBS in 1941. Alice Frost played Ruth briefly until *Bright Horizon* was established on its own. But this show never attained the prominence of its *Big Sister*, and faded from the air after a few seasons.

Tune In Yesterday, by John Dunning
Prentice-Hall, 1976

Blondie

Blondie, Chic Young's popular character, was first seen on the comic pages in 1930, graduated to

movies in 1938, and came to CBS on July 3, 1939. A zany situation comedy, this show ran on Mondays for five years, under sponsorship of Camels cigarettes. To concoct it the creators took an actor who once described his own life as "bumsteady," added a blonde refugee from movie bit parts, stirred in a little *Great Gildersleeve*, and seasoned heavily with Hanley Stanford. Then -- Uhh-uhh-uhh -- don't touch that dial! Listen to . . . Blonnnndie!

Dagwood and his wife Blondie formed the nucleus of the Bumstead home, center of radio chaos through the 1940's. Cartoonist Chic Young, who brought the Bumsteads into the world, believed that even comic strip characters should grow and change over the years, and so it was with Blondie and Dagwood. There were no eternal infants like Popeye's Sweet Pea in the Bumstead home. "Baby Dumpling" eventually grew into a copy of Dagwood and became known as Alexander. A daughter born during the war became Cookie. The family owned a dog, Daisy, which became as much a part of the family as its human members.

The stage was already well set, through a decade of comics and two feature films, by the time *Blondie* premiered on CBS. For the radio show, the film stars were lured to the microphone, in a team effort that would remain essentially intact for the first seven years of the run.

Arthur Lake needed little coaxing. He enjoyed the part of Dagwood, and sometimes remarked how nice it would be if

the show could just go on forever. Lake was the son of Arthur Silverlake, a circus strongman, and Edith Goodwin, legitimate stage actress. Grease-paint got into his blood early, as he toured small-town tent shows in the South with his family. It is said that Lake got his first taste of footlights at the age of one year, serving as the infant in the ice-jumping scene for a backwoods production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. By 1930 he was a movie veteran; nine years later a radio star.

Penny Singleton capture the part of Blondie well. Her portrayal transferred some of the logical insanity from comic page to audio -- no small feat. She had been a Broadway songstress before her Hollywood days; though she had come West in the early 1930's, starring roles eluded her until Columbia filmed *Blondie* in 1938. The films followed in sequence: *Blondie Meets the Boss* (1939), *Blondie Goes Latin* (1941), *Blondie Hits the Jackpot* (1949), and so on. They were popular B-films, and the radio show might well be classified the same way.

As in the strip, Dagwood worked for the J.C. Dithers Construction Company as an accountant. His mind worked literally like an adding machine. Sometimes in the radio shows we could hear him adding; computerlike sound effects were employed to suggest the Great Brain at work. Dithers, his foul-tempered boss, was well done by Hanley Stafford, better known as "Daddy" to "Baby Snooks." Herb Woodley, the Bumstead's neighbor, was played

by Harold Peary, "The Great Gildersleeve," and later by Frank Nelson. Various performers carried the roles of Alexander and Cookie.

Tommy Cook introduced the Alexander role in May 1943; in the Summer of 1946, Larry Simms took the part, and Bobby Ellis began playing it in 1947. Jeffrey Silver became the fourth Alexander around 1949. Leone Ledoux was the first Cookie, and also played Alexander during his cooing Baby Dumpling years. The first Cookie speaking role was handled by Marlene Aames, who played it in the 1946-1947. Norma Jean Nilsson played the part in 1947-1948, and Joan Rae took over in 1949. John L. Greene wrote the scripts.

Sadly, Lake's wish didn't come true. The show didn't last forever, but it did have a respectable run of about eleven years.

In 1944, *Blondie* moved to Sunday, where it was heard for four years for Super Suds. In 1948 it moved to Wednesdays, NBC, for Colgate. It was last heard on ABC in 1949-50, as a Thursday night sustaining show. Not unexpectedly, Lake went all the way as Dagwood. Penny Singleton dropped out in the mid-1940's, and "Blondie" was played by Patricia Van Cleve, Mrs. Lake in real life. Although Penny Singleton returned to the show briefly in 1948-1949, she didn't stay, and the final season in 1949 and 1950 starred Ann Rutherford.

*Tune in Yesterday by John Dunning,
Prattice-Hall, 1976*



RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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Dick Beals

National Radio Personality and Motivational Speaker
will be GUEST SPEAKER

September 16, 1993, 7:30 p.m. at

**THE CHURCH OF THE MASTER
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