

RETURN WITH US NOW...

The Radio Historical
Association of Colorado, Inc.





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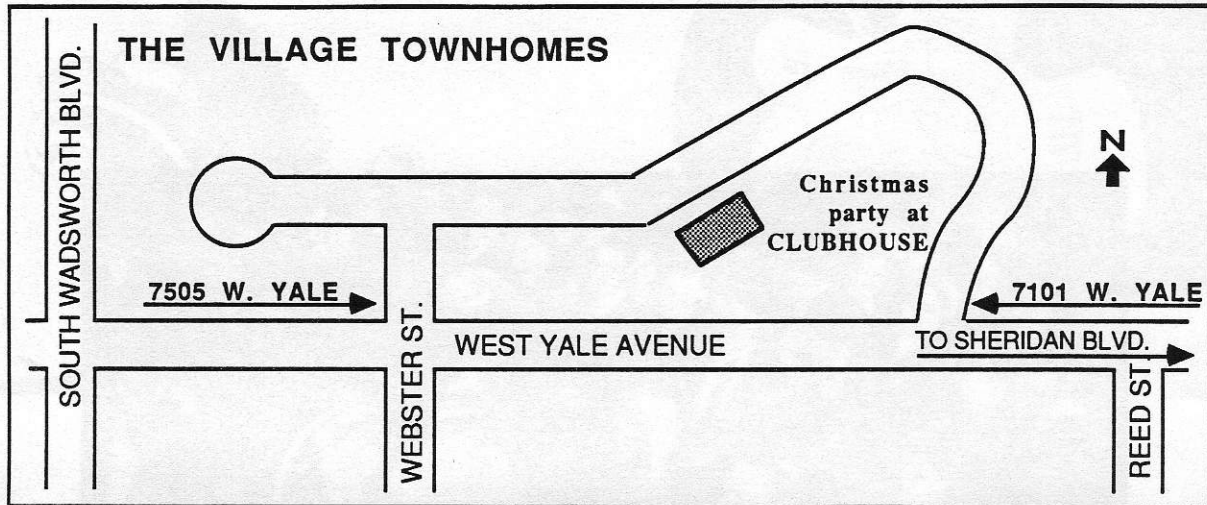



Don McNeill's "Breakfast Club"
with its unashamed cornball humor,
began June 23, 1933 and ran through December 27, 1968.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING: There will be a board meeting January 5, 1995, 7:30 p.m., at the home of John Adams, 2811 S Valentia St, Denver CO 80231. ALL MEMBERS are welcome and invited to attend and participate at the Board of Directors Meeting.


 There will **NOT** be a regular monthly meeting in December, 1994

The next meeting will be a Yuletide Gathering, Saturday, December 10, 1994, 5 p.m. at the Clubhouse at 7101 W Yale Ave, Denver CO 80227.




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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From the

King's Roost

December is knocking at the door and we haven't finished the 1994 projects yet. Have you?

We seem to be overrun with requests for contributions to very worthy causes, but there is just no end. We decide just how much we can give and make a list of donations for our accountant, but with today's tax laws, we can only deduct a percentage of donations and must keep the canceled checks to prove it. Such is life. But it has certainly cut down on the amount we contribute.

We have a young friend who will be just right for a copy of Dick Beals' book "Think Big." Great incentive for a young person. If you have someone in your circle of friends who could benefit from the words of one who made it, despite some handicaps, this book would be a nice gift that might help shape their future. R.H.A.C. has several copies of the book "Think Big" on hand for just \$9.00 and another \$1.00 for mailing.

We both missed out on the Newark convention. We heard good reports from John Rayburn, who was one of the old time radio personalities they

had there. We shall hope to make it next year.

Dick was able to go to the SPERDVAC convention in November but he had to cut short his visit there in order to get back and help Maletha.

We have the farm going now, although we still do not have a pump set in the well. So we have to haul water for the horses. And Dick did not want to be gone too long in



case the weather turned bad and left too much of a load on Maletha.

About the farm: We have the forty acres we fenced and have some cross-fencing to divide the pastures. We still need to put up another 3,000 feet of fencing to complete our project. We have put up almost 7,000 feet of fence so far. The last stretches look like we almost knew what we were doing. We bought a post hole digger that puts the old PTO diggers to shame. We were able to put up fence without any problems caused

by the dry and hard-packed ground. Good tools certainly make a big difference on any project, whether it is making cassettes for old time radio or building a fence.

By next year we will have a hay barn for the winter's hay storage. For now, we have it stored in one end of the indoor riding arena (that measures 60' x 150'). Our weather has been nice enough for outdoor riding except for a few days or when the wind gets too bad. However, we have been too busy to do much riding. (I'll be the horses are having fun but they will have to go to work later on.)

We saw a very nonchalant coyote by the road this morning after we went to feed the horses. Coyotes are no problem for horses.

Nonetheless, a young city-raised neighbor came over to warn us about them. They have a place in the whole balance of things. Without the coyotes we would have field mice eating more grass than the horses. They also keep the rabbit population under control. The deer do not seem to mind the horses; they can't get through the fence we have put up, so they stay in neighboring fields.

Retirement is great! But why are we so tired at the end of each day?

**35 YEARS OF
CORN
DON MCNEILL'S
BREAKFAST CLUB**

Breakfast Club listeners accepted Don McNeill as one of the family, because he is a family man.

His devotion to his wife Kay, their three boys, and his parents and sister Agnes is well-known.

When Don was born in Galena, Ill., December 23, 1907, his father, Harry McNeill, was a mining engineer. Two years later the family moved to Sheboygan, Wis., where Don's father joined his father—in the furniture manufacturing business.

Don grew through grade school and high school in Sheboygan, winning the nickname, "Daddy Long Legs." He learned to hunt and fish with his father and grandfather; acquired the knack for writing, cartooning and story-telling.

A childhood illness, the result of growing too fast, taught him the value of patience, understanding and moderation. These lessons, together with his naturalness, friendliness and shyness, have raised him above the category of paid entertainer. He actually is the family man next door who comes to breakfast.

Don McNeill sent a photograph and the following letter to NBC in June, 1933.

"My start in radio came in 1928 — one year before I was graduated from Marquette University in Milwaukee. I was engaged at WISN as an announcer and radio editor. After a year I joined WTMJ, the Milwaukee Journal station, in the same capacity. In 1930 I transferred to WHAS, the Courier-Journal in Louisville. Here I teamed with Van Fleming in a comedy act.

"For two years we wrote and presented a daily west coast network program, 'The Two Professors', from San Francisco. Earlier this year we split up the team and I returned to Milwaukee and WTMJ. Sample scripts of 'The

Journal Jamboree', which played to capacity theater audiences, 'The Rise Of A Rookie' and other features are enclosed.

As a result of this letter, Don was asked to audition with two others for the m.c. role on an early morning show called "The Pepper Pot." Sid Strotz, then program director of the central division, told Don later that everyone on the program board, except him, thought McNeill was the worst of the three. Since Sid was the boss, Don got the job.

"The general idea behind *Breakfast Club* when I took over on June 23, 1933," recalls Don, "was to try to do something to change the old American custom of not smiling before breakfast.

"This was a real challenge for me ... a breakfast grouch. Those first few mornings on *Breakfast Club* were a nightmare. Several times I was ready to give up the job. Then things began to happen.

"I must have sounded cheerful, even though I felt miserable, because letters began to come in from people saying they enjoyed smiling with me at breakfast. The letters made me feel better. I began to enjoy myself and, in doing so, I encouraged more people to join me around the breakfast table."

Breakfast Club continues to follow the policy of being cheerfully corny and helpful with complete disregard for routine broadcasting practices. The result has been a completely informal, relaxed program sprinkled with McNeill's personality.

The breakfast menu changed little in 35 years. To the four musical calls, songs, chatter, March Time and Memory Time which McNeill introduced on the first show, he has added comedy and singing acts, studio interviews, his famous Prayer Time and the Sunshine Shower. Now it takes 47 persons to get the show on the air, compared to 17 in 1933. But it still is, as Don originally announced . . .

"The Breakfast Club of the Air — a get together time for all of us who smile before breakfast and then can't break the habit all day long — the place to come when a feller needs a friend."

The *Breakfast Club* was heard on 352 stations in the U.S., Canada, Alaska and Hawaii, compared with 56 stations in 1933. A survey of *Breakfast Club* listeners shows 65% women, 20% children and 15% men. 27% live in rural areas.

The daily listening audience is estimated at two million families. More than 150,000 persons attend broadcasts each year in Chicago and on tour. Beginning in 1950 the *Breakfast Club* traveled four weeks out of the year, making it possible for broadcasts to originate in the east, the south, California, Texas and the Pacific Northwest.

Don McNeill worked for three different networks in his *Breakfast Club* career. He was hired by NBC in 1933. He and the show became the property of the Blue Network in 1942; made the change to ABC in 1944.

In its history Don McNeill's *Breakfast Club* has piled up one record after another. More than 750,000 fans have purchased eight different editions of Memory Time poem books and *Breakfast Club* yearbooks. For many years *Breakfast Club* has been voted radio's "Favorite audience participation show."

Two events in 1952 illustrate *Breakfast Club's* greatest asset — its ability to sell. Fifteen hundred communities staged "Don McNeill Week" events for Swift & Co., and in four weeks, more than 30,000 fans voted for Salesman Don or Sam by buying Philco products.

Radio Magazine, 1953

The show opened with a bang, to this snappy theme from the salad days of 1944:

Good morning, Breakfast Club-bers
It's time to sing ya
Another cheery greeting,
So may we bring ya:
Four — calls — for break-fast!
Kel-logg's — call — to break-fast!

So every Breakfast Club-ber
Young and old,
Come and join our hap-py
Care-free fold;
Yes, wake up, Breakfast Club-bers
And smile a-while;
A day begun with Kellogg's
Makes Life worth-while!

From *Tune in Yesterday* by John Dunning
Prentice-Hall, 1976

The Bogart's Venture

Last week Humphrey Bogart was in Africa working on a new movie while his wife, Lauren Bacall, vacationed nearby. But back home the sound of their voices, broadcast over 423 radio stations, was earning them more than \$4,000 a week. The trick, of course, lay in a new recorded radio series called *Bold Venture*.

Never one to let work interfere with pleasure, Bogart had stubbornly rejected all bids for a live radio series. Then last fall the Frederick W. Ziv Co., specialists in recorded radio programs and filmed TV shows, made an earn-while-you-play offer, involving a pure Bogey-and-Baby script. *Bold Venture's* story is set in Havana, but it could as easily be *Casablanca*, scene of tough-actor Bogart's first romantic click. As Slate Shannon, Bogart is the proprietor of a small, quasi-respectable hotel, tenanted by a motley, shifting cast of characters. Instead of the Sam of "*Casablanca*," there is a calypso singer named King Moses. There is Shannon's boat, *Bold Venture*, ever ready to roar to the rescue of a friend or the search of an enemy. And there is Sailor Duval (Mrs. Bogart), described as Shannon's ward but played with sultry, sexy monotonous.

In Hollywood this winter the Bogarts cut as many as three scripts a week, a speed facilitated by tape recording which permitted them to work in movie fashion, recording one scene and moving on to the next. Operating on a \$12,000 weekly budget, bigger than most new network programs. Ziv backed the Bogart's with David Rose's music, and braced them with \$1,500 scripts. When the stars sailed for Africa they left their voices on 38 finished shows, a series which got started last week. Running on a 52-week-a-year basis, the programs will also earn the Bogarts a total of \$250,000 in the next two years.

Offered to one station or sponsor per locality, *Bold Venture* is priced at \$15 a show for towns with 10,000 or less population, ranges on up to \$750 in New York City. With television weaning network sponsors away from coast-to-coast radio, new markets and better time have been made available to the recorded show with the cut-ins for local commercials. By upping its production budgets, luring big names and playing up to local sponsors, Ziv expects the early TV age to be the most profitable in the company's 14-year radio history.

Newsweek, April 9, 1951

Radio's Summer Bonanza No. 1

By Evelyn Bigsby

Tabulate as exciting a luncheon date with Chester Morris, who is holding down Amos 'n' Andy's summer spot with his "*Boston Blackie*" series. To movie goers, the "*Boston Blackie*" series, with Morris is a familiar story in which

Morris is sort of a modern Robin Hood, a little on the gangster side, wise to all the tricks, but always reversing to do a lot of good. It is this thrilling role that Morris is recreating for ether lane audiences for the first time this summer and it was because of his debut as a regular radioite that we were lunching with star Morris.

The meal was interesting, not because handsome, five-foot-eleven Chester exuded his personal charm, but because he proved to be such an expert conversationalist. His theme, in our instance, was his leg-erdemain, which he performs so deftly that he could, if he so desired, be classed as a professional.

We almost expected rabbits to pop from his top hat as we ate our scrambled eggs. Instead, quarters disappeared into rare space and the luncheon check vanished into thin air.

Laughingly, Morris recalled the first time he guested on a radio program of a brother magician, Edgar Bergen. Ten minutes before air time, Bergen confided to Morris: "You'll do better if you make Charlie made."

Morris obligingly proceeded to call Charlie "Mortimer" and in swift retaliation, Bergen, or rather Charlie ad libbed such a heckling for Chester that he shook from stem to stern.

He has since made several appearances on the Bergen show, has guested on Lux five times this season, but just this summer came to radio regularly with his own program.

Morris, who stems from acting stock and whose Hollywood success was preceded by stage acclaim, became interested in magic when he was twelve and his father

gave him a simple magic set for Christmas. Now, he has equipment valued at \$10,000 and a whole room full of large appurtenances which are in storage at Bekins. For more than 800 camp shows he has played throughout the country with his lovely ex-Powers model wife, Lilli, as assistant, Morris has found it better to confine his tricks to those requiring small properties.

"One doesn't need to have elaborate equipment to do tricks," he pointed out. He expressed the opinion that magic and interest in it are on the rise. "This is continually demonstrated when we play the camps," he observed. "After the show, a score of kids always flock backstage, each one yelling 'Take a card. Take a card. Have you seen this one?'"

"I'm always amazed," said the kind-hearted star, "and always let on that I can't understand how they do the trick."

Morris has seen some of the foremost magicians of our day perform, among them, the great Thurston. Chester, himself, has a fondness for the guillotine trick, which he enacts on all of his camp shows and which, as you doubtless recall, involves cutting off a man's head—in terms of magic. For this feat, he always delights the pfc's by putting a top sergeant under the knife. Twice, so far, the blade has jammed and Morris has had to coat himself with nonchalance while making an apologetic speech to the servicemen.

The favorite trick he performs during the Lux warm-up is done with a Lux box. Into one end of it, he stuffs several gaily-dyed handkerchiefs. Then, out of the opposite end, he is seen to draw them out as immaculate white ones. The

baffled audience clamors for more every time.

Questioned as to what he considered was the hardest feat to perform, Morris replied he thought it was the hoop trick, in which rings pass around persons seemingly suspended off the floor.

"Of course," he explained, "magic is not predicated on the fact that the hand is quicker than the eye. It isn't. The principle of the whole thing is distraction. While I'm doing a trick, I act as though I'm not doing what I am. You are looking at what you think is going on while I'm really doing the trick on the side." He paused here and demonstrated with a quarter.

Patter is very important in putting over this principle of distraction, according to Morris. Most tricks are accompanied by written patter, but Morris recommends that the performer learn his own line. "Never say 'I have here an ordinary, unprepared drinking glass' as preface to a drinking glass trick," he advised. That's the mark of an amateur to point out such an obvious thing."

Morris' son by his first marriage, Brooks, does not evidence any special interest in magic as yet, although he frequently dresses as a page boy and assists in performances. His daughter, Cynthia, likes to get in the act, and his wife, Lilli, is extremely wrapped up in it and has learned to do some tricks quite well. On the whole, though, women do not make very good slight-of-hand artists, asserted Morris.

Until recently, he used to make a regular visit every Saturday to Thayer's shop out in Beverly Hills, when all the magicians would give to inspect the week's shipment and

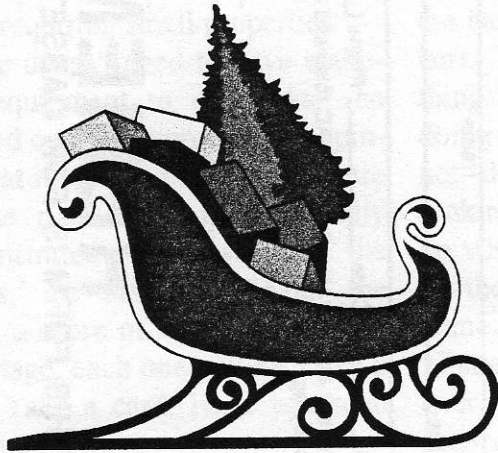
compare notes. Camp appearances have more or less curtailed this pleasure for Morris, but he still delights in the monthly meetings of Los Magicos. This comprises a select group of 27 men, mostly professional men, who are expert magicians on the side and who meet to discuss and perform tricks. Both Morris and Bergen belong to this select society, whose initiation is a thing fearful and wonderful, according to Morris. Initiates are always assigned certain ordinary tricks, amplified by twists that make them next to impossible to execute. In Morris' case he managed to make a huge bird cage disappear by hooking it into an accomplice. The customary feat is to make a small cage vanish.

Morris chuckles, too, in recalling the magicians conventions which used to occur before the war. "Your life wasn't your own," he remembered. "Set your suitcase down and when you'd go to pick it up, it would explode. Or start down the hall and someone would pelt you with bricks. When you'd turn to holler a protest, you'd get one smack in the face. The other bricks were real. This one proved to be a sponge."

After the war, Morris has dreams of resurrecting his pet trick.

"It's a wonderful one," he said enthusiastically. "The equipment alone costs \$250. I consists of setting up three chromium poles and a small curtain, and describing a movie starlet's routine in preparing for the set. At the end of the act, a beautiful girl steps out from behind the poles and little curtain.

"But I can't tell you how it's done. A good magician always leaves his audience guessing."



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