

RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO
1975

RETURN WITH US NOW!!!

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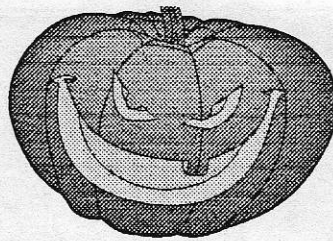
Jack Webb (1920-1982). Many of the television series and films with which Jack Webb is closely associated had their origins in earlier radio programs featuring the actor-writer-producer. Webb could be heard on *One Out of Seven* (ABC, 1946), *Johnny Madero*, *Pier 23* (Mutual, 1947), *Jeff Regan, Investigator* (CBS, 1948-1949), *Dragnet* (NBC, 1949-56) and *Pete Kelly's Blues* (NBC, 1951).



BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING: There will be a board meeting November 2, 1995, at Dick King home. 900 W Quincy Ave., Englewood. All members are invited and encouraged to attend.



There ***WILL NOT*** be an **October, 1995** regular membership meeting.



RETURN WITH US NOW... is the official publication of *The Radio Historical Association of Colorado, Inc.*, a non-profit organization. Cost of membership is **\$25.00** 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

"Light On The West," a program from January, 1936 was presented at Belmar Museum September 19th. We were pleased to find a lot of interest, thanks to KEZW and Rick Crandall, who acted as our announcer and also played a role in the second of two presentations that evening. Belmar had limited seating in the old school house that we used, but all went well after we decided to have a second show.

Hal Stone did a great job of directing and also in the role of Colorado Territorial Governor Gilpin in the historical novel "*Gilpin and Glorieta*." John Rayburn had given several scripts of "*Light On The West*" and John played a major role in the presentation. Denver's own Pete Smythe was persuaded to come out of retirement and play the role of the story teller, a role that fit him well. Dick Beals easily played the roll of the ten-year-old to whom the story was being told, and Sam Edwards played the role of a Public Service lineman, the boy's father. Fred Arthur, John Licht, and David Gatch all played important roles that helped make the whole show come together. John Lilly helped update the script and he and Dick King handled the sound effects for the show.

The whole production was presented in co-ordination with the Colorado Antique Radio Collectors

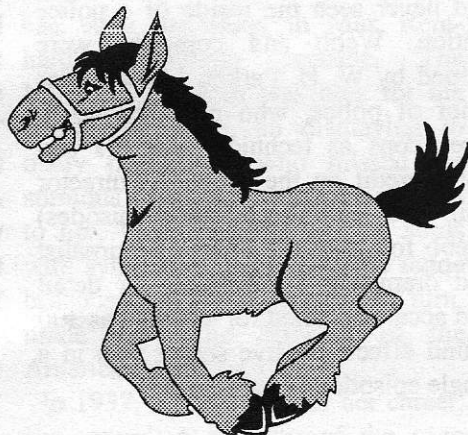
and their show at Belmar Village. Our thanks to Larry Weide for getting it all together.

Our three out-of-town guests addressed the RHAC meeting on Thursday, Sept. 21st and members were able to get some one-on-one conversation with them. We had a bit of luck with the weather, just a skiff of snow on the 19th, but it sure did let loose on Wednesday, the last day of summer! Old man weather just doesn't read the calendar very well.

Our guests will be long remembered by both the general public and our members who enjoyed their work. Dick Beals was able to get in several hours of horseback riding during his visit and became a safer rider for the work he put in.

We are finding many new members from our E-Mail connection, and several of them have already started to enjoy the treasures we have in our libraries.

Enjoying OTR is a real break from the busy life of today's world and the senseless TV programs being presented today.



BOSTON BLACKIE

Boston Blackie, one of the most memorable names of radio early TV, was radio's answer to the B-movie. In fact, the character started in a B-movie, Columbia's *Meet Boston Blackie*, in 1941. In 1944 Chester Morris (the screen Blackie) came to NBC with a *Boston Blackie* airshow, sponsored by Rinso and announced by Harlow Wilcox as a summer replacement for *Amos and Andy*. The series had a spotty radio history, running for a short time under Morris, and revived by 1945 as a syndicated show with Richard Kollmar as Blackie. *Boston Blackie* in, any case, was a private detective with a flair for the smart comment. Billed as "enemy to those who make him an enemy, friend to those who have no friends," Blackie liked nothing better than making the cops look stupid. With Inspector Faraday heading the local police effort, that was a snap. Richard Lane played Faraday in the NBC Morris version; the role was played under Kollmar by Maurice Tarplin. Leslie Woods played Blackie's girlfriend, Mary. The show was high in corn content, but hardly one of radio's schedule stoppers.

Tune in Yesterday, © 1976 by John Dunning
Prentice-Hall



Dragnet

Dragnet, offering police dramas of unprecedented realism, came to NBC July 7, 1949. For its first two years it was heard Thursdays for Fatima Cigarettes. Jack Webb had been active in radio for about four years before finding the series that finally shot him to fame. *Dragnet* did that, but it also stereotyped Webb, stamped him indelibly into his hardboiled role, Sergeant Joe Friday of the Los Angeles Police Department.

But if the stamp has been bad for Webb, it doesn't show. In the 1970's, a middle-aged Webb could still be seen cavorting with Harry Morgan in a revamped modern version of *Dragnet* on television. Yeah, still Joe Friday. Still a cop, after more than twenty years.

With its first broadcast, *Dragnet* was a trend-setter. Friday was a cop's cop; his world unfolded every week in painstaking detail. Designed to show the cop's day-by-day routine and the tedious double-checking that leads to an arrest, *Dragnet* still managed to come alive and grab listener interest in its first five minutes. The listeners were totally in the dark; they didn't know any more than the cops. There is a crime. A woman is missing and her husband suspects foul play. Your job: find her.

The cases developed clue by clue. Suspects were identified only after careful questioning and checking. The evidence had to be strong, not merely circumstantial. Strong enough, perhaps, to convince a real jury of the suspect's guilt. Slowly it is gathered by listener and cop alike, as Friday takes us minute by minute through his day.

It was Tuesday, June 17th. It was warm in Los Angeles. We were working the day watch out of burglary. The boss is Ed Backstrand, chief of detectives. My name's

Friday. I was on my way to work that morning, and it was 7:53 a.m. when I got to room 35. Burglary Detail.

From that first immortal DUM-DE-DUM-DUM of Walter Schumann's theme, *Dragnet* was something special. Announcer Hal Gibney virtually commanded attention when—after those opening bars—he said, “Ladies and gentlemen, the story you are about to hear is true. Only the names have been changed to protect the innocent.”

That phrase in itself would become a classic. The voices of Gibney and George Fenneman, tossed back and forth between story and commercial, kept the story moving at an intense pace.

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Dragnet became one of the first radio shows to effectively break the unwritten taboo against dramatizing sex crimes. It was the first show to effectively introduce the jargon of cops to the world. Through *Dragnet*, such terms a “MO” (method of operation) and “R and I” (records and identification) became known to people who had never seen the inside of a police station. Webb and company were helped by W. H. Parker, Los Angeles chief of police, who provided up to three cops as technical advisors and got a credit on the show. As director (Bill Rousseau directed early episodes) Webb followed the paths of journalist and dramatist; his demand for detail and accuracy called for as many as 300 sound effects by five sound men in a single episode.

As *Dragnet* developed, the characters of Friday and Romero were expanded. Character-building quirks were incorporated into story lines. Friday was a bachelor who lived at home with his mother; his partner was a family man with family problems. Ben Romero was played by Barton Yarborough, well known to radio addicts as Cliff in *One Man's Family* and Doc Long on the original *I Love a Mystery*. When Yarborough died in 1951 the character Joe Friday went through a succession of partners before settling on Frank Smith.

Frank, a genial worrywart, was played to perfection both on radio and TV by Ben Alexander. Alexander was a veteran entertainer by the time his *Dragnet* slot opened, having learned the ropes as a child working in films under Cecil B. DeMille and D. W. Griffith. As Frank he brought the show decided comic relief. When he wasn't playing cupid for Joe, he was fretting over some minor problem with his wife Fay, or worrying over the fact that she had packed his brown bag with tuna sandwiches for the third day in a row. Frank became the most human member of the small cast.

But it was Webb's show all the way. *Dragnet* bore the strong Webb stamp that would follow him through his professional life. When the banter with Frank was finished, there were still criminals to catch, still justice to be met. And they were. And it was. The *Dragnet* closing was pure Webb. Trial and punishment, summarized in a few brief sentences. DUMMMM-DE-DUM-DUM, and out. In 1951-52 Chesterfield sponsored the show on Thursdays, on Sundays from 1952 until 1953, Tuesdays 1953 to 1956. *Dragnet* ran until 1956, was televised with great success, and was the basis for a full-length *Dragnet* movie in 1954.

Tune in Yesterday, © 1976 by John Dunning
Prentice-Hall

Radio's Own Life Story

By Llewellyn Miller

1925: Spin back the dial of time twenty-five years and take a look at the world in which broadcasting was only five years old. It was a world that considered itself the ultimate in sophistication. It was fashionable to be cynical and disillusioned about everything—about the war, about the peace, about love, about prohibition.

What was libelously labeled “rye” was selling at around \$100 a case. Home brew was seething and blowing its corks in many a basement. People were still adding juniper berries to bathtub gin made from straight alcohol and distilled water. Later they did not bother. Jazz, on the upgrade for several years, was sweeping the country. So was golf. It was estimated that two million players, wearing those stylish plus fours, left “golf widows” at home on Sundays.

Professional football came into its own this year when Red Grange of Illinois took the plunge. People were paying fantastic prices for land in Florida, sight unseen, in the boom that was to collapse following the disastrous hurricane of 1926. The Gumps, Harold Teen and Casper Milquetoast were brand new arrivals in the comics, and Douglas Fairbanks did “*The Black Pirate*” in lurid two-color Technicolor. Its shrieking peacock blue and its vibrating orange were a stunning novelty but so expensive that Hollywood regarded it without enthusiasm. Why bother when the public was packing theatres to see the untinted “*Big Parade*” (John Gilbert and Renee Adoree), “*Stella Dallas*” (Belle Bennett and

Ronald Coleman), and Charlie Chaplin's “*The Gold Rush*?”

In radio, new “Hours” were starting on all sides, mostly sponsored by the set makers—Philco, Victor, Brunswick and Atwater Kent, among others. Before this year, the biggest of the concert and opera stars had been faintly superior to the new medium, but after the great Irish tenor, John McCormack, and the Metropolitan star, Lucrezia Bori, condescended to sing on the air in 1925, the ice was broken and the talent on these new programs was wonderful. People who had not heard any opera at all were humming it on farms and in the little towns.

The sale of sets took another giant leap because a wonderful thing had come on the market—the first all electric set. No batteries! A glorious invention! No more worrying about the radio going dead in the middle of the Jessica Dragonette program.

The beautiful Dragonette started this year on WEAf in New York and almost immediately became a sensation. She was known as “Vivian the Coca-Cola Girl” at first, but fans soon discovered her identity and she used her own name on the famous old Cities Service show (which started this year and is still going) and on the Palmolive Beauty Box. This tiny, golden-haired soprano was genuinely shy and retiring and she abandoned with relief a great stage career which was just starting. She had sung the angel in Max Reinhardt's mammoth spectacle, “*The Miracle*.” Stardom was hers for the taking but radio, so dismaying to many performers who missed the stimulus of an audience, was a haven to her. With the exception of solos with symphony orchestras, she made broadcasting her career. It, in turn, made her “*The Princess of the American Air*.”

In 1937, at the height of her career, she retired, a casualty of the soap

opera. Her salary had climbed to \$2,500 a week. Daytime serials were produced for a fraction of that, and were selling mountains of soap. Sponsors found the combination irresistible. No formal explanation was made of her absence from the air, but the fans sensed that something was wrong and made bitter outcry. For a while, the Jessica Dragonette Clubs banned *all radio* until her return, but without success. That is the answer to the question still being asked, “What ever happened to the wonderful Dragonette?”

1925 was the year of stunts with everybody trying to broadcast something for the first time, such as the gong of Big Ben in London as it struck midnight, a bridge game between the Ely Culbertsons in Schenectady and a team 6,000 miles away in Buenos Aires, and the sound of a baby robin breaking out of the egg. Some fun.

Michael Arlen's *The Green Hat* was a terrific best seller, but so was Bruce Barton's *The Man Nobody Knows*. In spite of the frivolous attitude on the surface, people were thinking hard. Everyone was reading, or at least quoting Freud, Jung and Adler. Employers started giving aptitude tests. I. Q. tests were used in countless alert schools. Psychiatry was king. Einstein's theory of relativity was front page news. Science was the only verity to many in a questioning world, but not to all. The conflict between science and religion exploded into a bitter national argument when the Protestant churches split and the Fundamentalists managed to introduce bills in nearly half of the states forbidding the teaching of the theory of evolution. Such bills were actually passed in three states: Tennessee, Oklahoma and Mississippi.

1925 was a year of many other “firsts.” Admiral (then Commander) Richard E. Byrd and Floyd Bennett

flew over the North Pole and kept in touch with their Spritzbergen base by radio. The first presidential inauguration on the air was when Colidge took office—a transcontinental hookup of twenty-four stations. Imagine! The First Fair Practice Code was drawn up by the National Association of Broadcasters, and the first non-denominational radio church was started. The Little Brown Church of the Air, a forty-five minute service every Sunday, began when Sam Guard, reporter for WLS in Chicago, returned from broadcasting an on-the-spot description of the death and destruction spread by a tornado through Illinois and Indiana. He was so deeply moved by the suffering he had seen that he urged a radio program to give solace to all creeds. This was the first continuing service designed for radio, though the National Radio Pulpit is the longest established of all services on the air. Dr. S. Parkes Cadman began it in 1923, and Dr. Ralph W. Sockman is its pastor today.

The great shows that were to have enormous influence were getting started. The National Barn Dance was under way in Chicago, and the oldest continuous hillbilly show, Grand Ole Opry, was making its bow, by accident, in Nashville. The Tennessee mountaineers had long made a practice of bringing their guitars and banjos to town on market days and ending the excursion with a dance. The story was that it was Uncle Jimmy Thompson who found his way to WSM to see for himself how that mysterious new-fangled thing called radio worked, and who asked the question:

“Is it true that there tin can kin pump my music right through the moutins thousands of miles?”

George Dewey Hay, the announcer already famous as “The Solemn Old Judge” was inspired to answer, “Sit down and try it.”

It turned into hillbilly jam session, and was a crashing success from the

start. Fantastically, Nashville was ashamed of the show at first, and certain citizens even petitioned to have it taken off the air. They were afraid that four hours of hillbilly music would give the world the wrong idea of their big city. Fortunately, they were over-ruled, and the show still originates in Nashville, but now from its huge Civic Auditorium that seats four thousand. Musicians consider Grand Ole Opry one of the most valuable cultural contributions radio has made in that its broadcasts have preserved the only genuine folk music we have, with the exception of spirituals and, to a lesser degree, cowboy ballads.

As the fame of the show spread, mountaineers poured in, bringing in old songs that had never been written down, many quaint sayings, and beloved personalities like The Possum Hunters, Roy Acuff and his Smoky Mountain Boys, Cousin Minnie Pearl, Pap and his Jug Band, not to mention Ramblin’ Red Foley, now master of ceremonies, or Uncle Dave Macon who became a star overnight at the age of fifty-seven. It was Uncle Dave who made the classic retort when he was kidded about the funny people from the hills during a trip to New York: “Yes, we got ‘em, too, but they don’t come in bunches like here.”

What is believed to be the oldest six-day-a-week show still to be heard at its original time and station started this year when *The Musical Clock* went on WOR at 7:15 a.m. It was Bernard Macfadden’s idea. He was then the publisher of a tabloid, *The New York Graphic*, of *True Story Magazine* which later was to sponsor a long series of famous shows, and *The Physical Culture Magazine* among others. Macfadden was a leading exponent of exercise and a raw vegetable diet. Maybe he had something, because the old gentleman made a parachute jump “for fun” in 1949 at the age of eighty-one, but at the time he was active in his

publishing empire, his executives were known to curse the day when they had to share a lunch of raw carrots with the boss. Macfadden conducted his own program, turning out at the crack of dawn to lead listeners in setting up exercises. One morning he wearied of this, called the station, said he was not going to do the program any more and to put someone else on in his place. The only man on duty at that dreary hour was a young Scotsman, John B. Gambling, who had served in the British Navy as a wireless operator. He had just joined WOR as an engineer, and until that moment had entertained no idea whatever of becoming an announcer—but he has been doing the show ever since.

In Chicago, a young couple by the name of Marian and Jim Jordan, with no fanfare at all, began to do what is believed to be the first show with a continued story of family life. They were stock company players and were doing *The Smith Family*, a series of weekly skits, on the side for a much appreciated ten dollars a show from WENR. The response was cordial. The Jordans loved the stage, but they began to think that maybe radio had something for a young couple with a family. The idea of *Fibber McGee and Molly* began to take shape, though very dimly. It was not to flower until 1935 when Fibber first opened the famous closet door and the resulting crash heralded national fame.

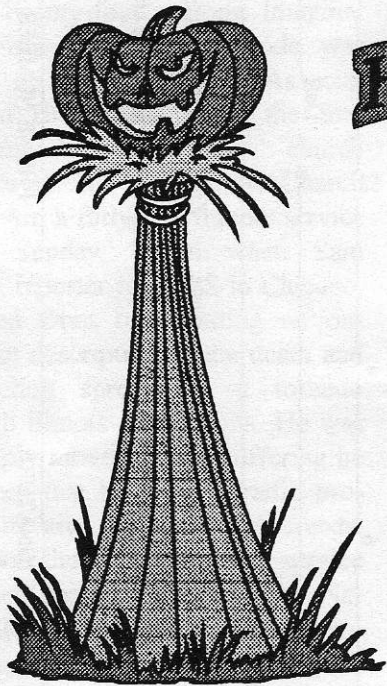
A pair of black-faced comedians were starting on WGN the same year. They were called *Sam ‘n’ Henry*. You’ve guessed it. It was *Amos ‘n’ Andy* getting ready for their network break that was to come in 1929 and was to expand the radio audience as nothing has since.

Radio Mirror, April

1950

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HAPPY HALLOWEEN



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