



RETURN WITH US NOW...

RADIO HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION OF
COLORADO

Volume 21, Number 6

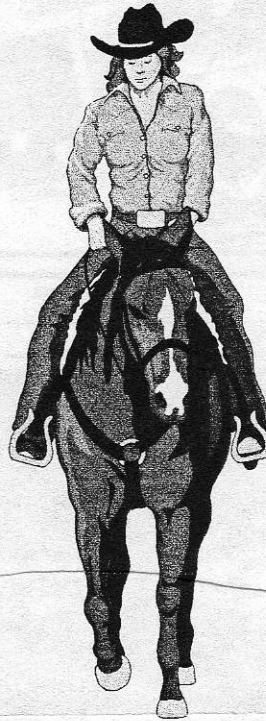
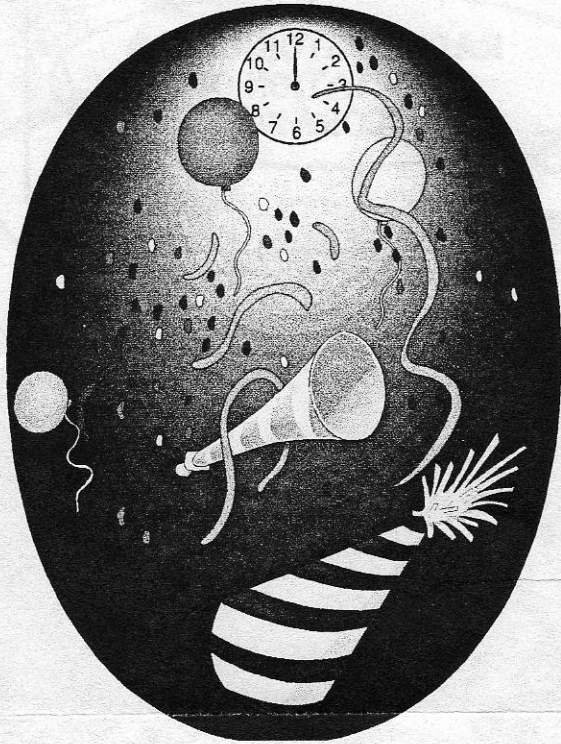
January, 1996



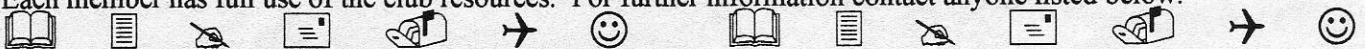
Agnes Moorehead (1906-1974) Probably spent more time on radio than on stage & films. Debut as singer in 1923, appeared in *Les Misérables* (Mutual, 1937), *The Shadow* (CBS, 1937-1939), was the star of the first episode of *The CBS Radio Mystery Theater* in 1974. Always remembered as Mrs Stevenson in *Sorry, Wrong Number* (on *Suspense*)(first heard CBS, May 25, 1947).



BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING: There will be a board meeting will be 7:30 p.m., February 1, 1996 at Herb Duniven's home. All members are invited and encouraged to attend.



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

The end of the year has come. But we have not received any replies to our request for any copy of "The Lincoln Highway." We received one copy through one of our buy groups but it was so broken up that we could not use it. Rick Jonas, an RHAC member, is also Secretary /Treasurer of the Northwest Indiana Chapter of the Lincoln Highway Association and they are trying to get at least one copy.

Rose Renner, another RHAC member, would like to hear from you if you have a tape of some of the last day of broadcasting of KHOW. Does anybody out there have such a tape?? If you do, please, contact one of us.

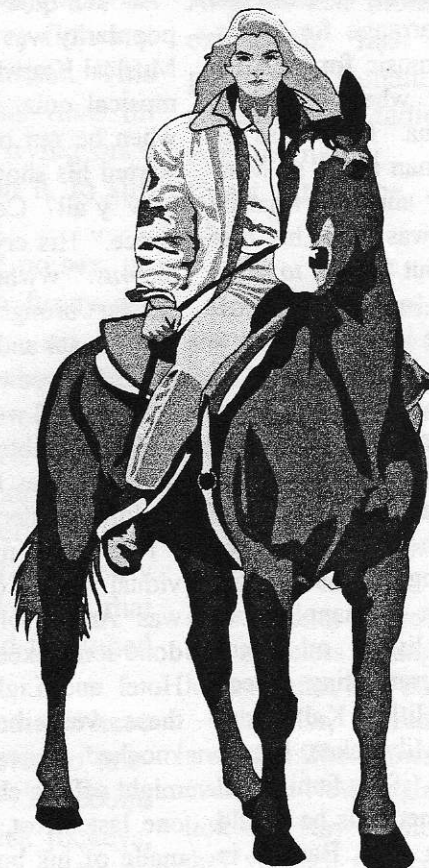
There has been a lot of snow in the mountains. However, the Denver area is dry as usual with no hope for even a white New Year's. We are not skiers and we are now finding the time to get some of the things done that we put back for this season.

The Radio Historical Association of Colorado has been growing and the libraries have been very busy. Because of this we would like to request that you return your rentals as promptly as possible. This will permit others to hear the shows more quickly. Thank you.

The Radio Enthusiasts of Puget Sound, a very active group of old time radio collectors in the Seattle area, have already sent out their 1996 convention information. They will meet June 27-29. June 29 will be the only day of day-long activities. June 27 & 28 will have only evening activities. This group has done a great job in past, so we feel confident in recommending their program to anyone who can get there. You can contact either Mike Sprague or Gary Polich for more information at (206) 365-7131 or (206) 488-9518.

There is a special interest group being formed for those of you who are fascinated with or interested in "One Man's Family." They are particularly interested in contacting anyone

who had a part in the presentation or production of "One Man's Family." This great show lasted for many many years and was first rate family entertainment and listening. Anyone so inclined should feel free to join this special interest group or contribute to their efforts. They are offering charter membership for \$12. They hope to combine their efforts to add to one of Radio Enthusiasts of Puget Sound's future conventions. For more information, please contact either Mike or Gary as mentioned above. They have great plans for future activities if they can get enough response. Call soon!



Radio's Own Life Story

1938: Until this year, people could take radio or leave it alone. Suddenly it was different. When Hitler's legions marched into the Sudeten, everybody rushed home to a news broadcast. On March 13, CBS invented the International News Round-up, calling in on the same program Edgar Mowrer in Paris, William L. Shirer and Ellen Wilkinson in London, Pierre Huss in Berlin, Bob Trout in New York, Lewis B. Schwelienback in Washington and Edward R. Murrow in Vienna. These names were then unknown to the average listener, but they were to become more closely followed than the greatest of the comedy stars very shortly.

It is interesting how Edward R. Murrow became one of the most famous of news commentators. It was the result of one broadcast. He was the Director of Talks and Education at CBS and was in Europe to arrange for a program of children's music for the CBS School of the Air when the Nazis marched into Vienna. There was no regular CBS news man there, so Murrow went on the air and told what he saw. He thought it was to be his first and last broadcast, but "*Listen to Murrow Tomorrow*" is a top-rated program to this day. He is one of the few newsmen who never worked on a newspaper. Bob Trout is the only other one of top stature who started reporting directly for the air.

During the Sudeten crisis H. V. Kaltenborn went on the air eighty-five separate times, staying in the studio for twenty straight days, cat-napping between broadcasts, living on sandwiches and coffee, translating speech after speech from Hitler. Kaltenborn was brought up in Milwaukee, but he spoke fluent German (if his family had not chosen to be Americans he would have been known as Baron in

Germany). He was magnificently equipped to comment on the coming war. He had broadcast news since 1922. His uncle had been a German Minister of War. He, himself, had fought in Cuba in 1898, had covered the Spanish Civil War, and had interviewed both Hitler and Mussolini. People hung on his words for those twenty days.

Then Prime Minister Chamberlain took his umbrella to Munich and came back to tell the world over the radio, "I believe it is peace in our time."

The nation settled down to its old pattern of listening to such fascinating new programs as Information Please, featuring the dazzling wits of Franklin P. Adams, John Kieran, Oscar Levant and Clifton Fadimen. The success of this super-intelligent panel astounded everybody. There had been gloomy warnings when Alan Golenpaul planned it. Too highbrow! The wisecracks were stunned when a huge following rallied to the call, "Wake up, America! Time to stump the experts!"

Another quiz show that gained instant popularity was Kay Kyser's Kollege of Musical Knowledge, featuring the first musical quiz. He came into his own when he put on a cap and gown and started his show with "Evening, folks, how y'all? Come on, chillun. Let's dance." His cry, "How about that—students." when someone missed an answer brought the studio audience into the act and they loved it. Quizzes, prizes, giveaways and audience participation all were gaining momentum.

Hobby Lobby was evidence of the trend. So was Battle of the Sexes run by Julia Sanderson and Frank Crumit.

Two young men had enormous individual impact on radio this year. One was Arch Obler, a writer who had done some excellent playlets for Grand Hotel and Lights Out. Successful as these were, he was not happy. He knocked unavailingly at doors that might offer a chance at wider fields. In one last effort, he had a transcription made of his best effort, "The Ugliest

Man in the World" which is now a radio classic. He barged into an NBC office and started his show before the indignant executive could have him thrown out. The result was that NBC signed him for a sustaining spot to experiment with new forms of radio drama in much the same way as CBS Workshop was doing. In 1940, Obler wrote Oxydol's *Everyman's Theater* and some wonderful short plays now in several books. Beyond argument, he is one of the most distinguished of radio playwrights but when radio people talk over old scandals and mischances, his "*Adam and Eve*" is always mentioned. It kept Mae West off the air for ten years.

The idea was an innocent one. Mae West played Eve. Charlie McCarthy was Adam. The script was brilliantly funny. Everyone loved it. In rehearsals, Eve emerged as a very human wife a little fed up with sitting around the house. "I want something to happen, a little excitement, a little adventure. A couple of months of peace and security and a woman's bored...if 'trouble' means something that makes you catch your breath..." To this point all was well. Eve sounded just like a thousand other housewives. However, as do so many seasoned stars, Miss West did not give her all until actual performance. Once on the air, she marshalled her forces and in Diamond Lil's most significant drawl finished with, "If trouble is something that makes your blood race through your veins...mmmmmmmm, Adam, my man, give-uh-me-uh-trouble!"

Adam didn't, but radio did in spite of the fact that there was nothing wrong with the words and the idea was meant to be funny.

Behind all the laughter this year there was the distant mutter of news from Europe. An indication of how conscious all listeners were of impending war came on October 30 when another innocently broadcast drama sent the entire eastern slope into panic. It was

Orson Welles' "War of the Worlds" on CBS's Mercury Theatre. It made Welles famous overnight but it almost wrecked his radio career. He was a hard working young man of twenty-three, already known as the "boy wonder" of Broadway. He had done eighteen dramas on The Mercury Theatre of the Air. His voice was widely familiar as was his "This is your obedient servant—Orson Welles," so it is very hard to know just why "The War of the Worlds" was taken as a factual broadcast, especially as it was listed by title in all radio columns. In addition, clear announcements were made at the beginning and during the show that it was an account of an attack from Mars by a survivor in the year 2,000. To give the feeble yarn a little novelty, Welles had modernized it with the use of radio bulletin technics like "Flash! A space ship has just landed near Princeton," and further announcements that martial law had been declared in New Jersey. Anyone who listened for more than a few sentences could not fail to recognize the show as a fantasy, but the panic among those who tuned in late, heard only "Flash! They're bombing! The monsters from Mars are landing by thousands!" Evidently a great many people did not wait for more. Women fled to neighbors' homes crying havoc. People began to stream out of cities by car, jamming the highways, before the fearful Martians could get them.

Two extremely important facts were brought into sharp focus by this furor. One was that we were thoroughly conditioned to implicit belief in our news broadcasts, and subconsciously we knew the threat of invasion hanging over Europe could happen here. The other fact confirmed the sponsors' gnawing suspicion that the listening audience was developing deafness to commercials. They found the answer the next year. It was the lusty revival of the singing commercial.

RADIO MIRROR, September, 1950

Bob and Ray: Radio's Two and Only

By Leslie Seifert

They were the best chocolate rabbits money could buy. But an alert, uniformed attendant stored them next to the steam pipes in the overstocked Bob and Ray surplus warehouse. So the good news Saturday night, friends, was that you could now have them at a ridiculously low price—genuine, laughably edible, all-chocolate *wobblies*. They are backed up by the Bob and Ray unconditional guarantee: Not one of the kiddies will know that these once were rabbits. And remember, each of these wobblies has somewhere in it... a real purple ribbon.

Here were Bob and Ray, still together 38 years after they first met at a radio station in Boston. This time the two comedians were on stage at Carnegie Hall trying once again, as they would put it, to slip us the old rubber peach.

For two guys who use no sex, no ethnics, no politics, no funny accents, no funny clothes, no dirty words and no jokes about their wives, Bob and Ray are enjoying a remarkable renaissance. Using nothing but their resonant, elastic voices and some sound effects, Bob and Ray create a world of silly characters in satirical sketches that mimic the style of old-fashioned radio shows.

Most old radio comedians have long since died or defected to television, and except for 13-second clips by some clever disk jockeys, comedy on commercial radio is

dead. Yet Bob and Ray have stayed with radio and kept their radio style whenever they have appeared on stage or television. So it's not surprising that a writer in Los Angeles recently called them "the gentle dinosaurs of comedy." But while they may be gentle, they are hardly extinct.

Their two recent appearances in Carnegie Hall brought them back to the stage for the first time since 1970, when their Broadway show, "The Two and Only," ran for five months, and they are making plans to appear in other cities. "The Bob and Ray Public Radio Show," 14 new half-hour programs, is now airing on 175 public radio stations. The Radio Foundation which is producing the series, hopes to get funding for 26 more shows next year. New York's museum of Broadcasting showed its popular Bob and Ray retrospective in Los Angeles last month in a traveling exhibition. Last fall Atheneum published Bob and Ray's second collection of radio scripts, "From Approximately Coast to Coast... It's the Bob and Ray Show."

Most of the material the two comedians are using today is classic Bob and Ray. They have added a new soap opera, inspired by "Dallas," called "Garrish Summit." "There—in stately splendor far removed from the squalid village below—socially prominent families fight their petty battles over power and money." "Garrish Summit" stars Rodney Murchfield, a "wealthy but spineless young executive," and Miss Agatha, his "dowager mother."

Otherwise, dozens of old favorites are back. The names of the characters evoke the New England where Bob Elliott and Ray Goulding grew up, but they've been twisted and recombined just a little—names like Wally Ballou,

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Mary McGoon, Calvin Hoogevin, Augustus Winesap, Doctor Gerhart Snutton, Herbie Waitkus, Biff Burns, Mary Backstayge, Webley Webster, Chief Orderly Schnellwell, Doctor Merton Chesney, Bodin Pardew and Martin LeSoeur.

So it might seem that Bob and Ray are capitalizing on the same nostalgia that has brought big band music back to radio in most large cities. But at Carnegie Hall, and at the tapings of their new radio shows last fall, there were hundreds of people in their 20s and 30s who probably don't remember the old Bob and Ray (though they might have heard them on WOR in New York in the mid-70s, the last job they had in commercial radio). And these people certainly don't remember most of the radio and television shows Bob and Ray satirize.

Larry Josephson, who produced both the Carnegie Hall show and the new radio series, says he isn't sure that Bob and Ray fully understand why they've endured so long. Mr. Josephson says it's the universal message of their comedy. It seems buffoonish on the surface, but there's a deep intelligence to it, in some zany way.

In the world of Bob and Ray lives every variety of crook, phony, bore and idiot, be he psychologist, journalist, physician, film star, corporate president or collector of odd shaped fruits and vegetables. (Parnell W. Garr, who says: "I'm always reading in the paper about somebody who's grown a hubbard squash in the shape of an elephant—or something like that. So I usually hop the next plane to go dicker with the owner about buying it for my collection." The only trouble is that there are no albums for displaying collections of fruits and vegetables, and Garr keeps his specimens in brown paper bags, taped at the top.

A typical Bob and Ray show might include:

- The adventures of Wing Po, the Chinese philosopher who wanders across the American frontier in search of work. (The rainbow of color left by

nature upon the dirty glass is not a thing to be washed away. It must first be held to the light and carefully perceived.")

- Speaking Out, the public-service feature that gives listeners a chance to call in with opinions on a controversial issue of the day. ("I think that people who try to pull off a big adhesive bandage real *easy* suffer more than if they'd just yank it off fast.")

- Dining Out With Bob and Ray reviews of some of the lesser-known but truly outstanding gourmet restaurants around New York and around the world, like Eddie's House of Iceberg Lettuce in Long Island City and The Little Bit of Honduras Bar and Grill in Jersey City.

Each sketch is presented by a different sponsor, like Mushies, the great new cereal that gets soggy even without milk or cream. A recent addition is the Rudolph and Erma Dance Studios, 5913 Harper St., Auburne, Long Island, "Where you'll learn the breakaway fade, popularized by Henry Armstead, the wizard of the waxed floors...or the conga-monga, as taught by Perry Sanchez, the hero of the hard-boards."

A large part of Bob and Ray's genius comes from their love of language. Their characters "cut corners," gaze at "the lull before the storm," get "the old heave-ho," turn "green with envy," go to the "hoosegow, for sure," seem "drawn and haggard," have a "legion of friends," and sense "a note of rancor, there." Pretensions can peel away with each turn of cliché, like the time Wally Ballou, the street reporter, asked Judge Merton Claypool why he wanted television cameras admitted into his courtroom:

Ballou: Well, you do cut an impressive figure, sir, but...

Claypool: It's a certain star quality that I have about me, Mr. Ballou.

Ballou: I guess that's the term I was groping for...

Bob and Ray also play heavily on the dynamics of conversation. Characters have nothing to say to each other, run off in non sequiturs, or, particularly in the case of interviewers, simply don't listen. The interview with the Komodo Dragon expert, Dr. Daryll Dexter, is a classic example:

Ray: Doctor, would you please tell everybody all about the Komodo Dragon, please?

Bob: The Komodo Dragon is the world's largest living lizard. It's a ferocious carnivore. It's found on the steep-sloped island of Komodo in the lesser Sunda Chain of the Indonesian Archipelago and the nearby islands of Rinja, Padar and Flores.

Ray: Where do they come from?

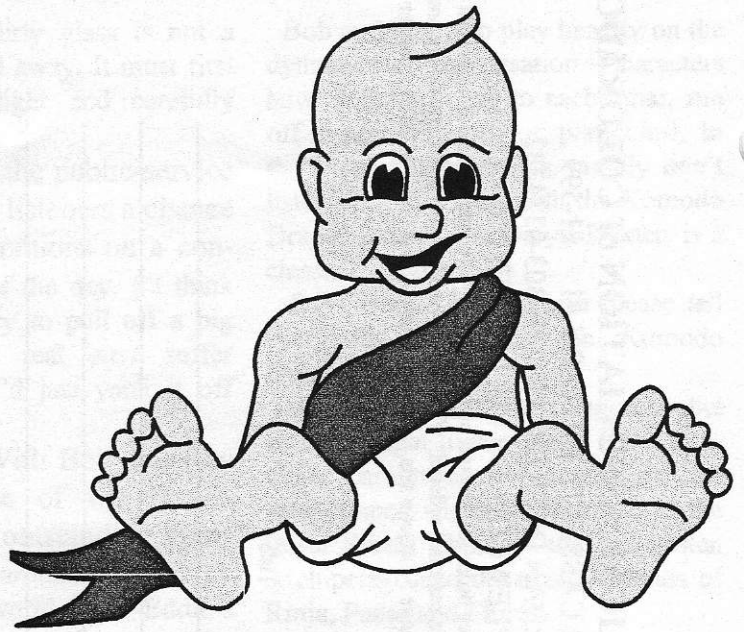
The two comedians perform with the same control and precision they use in their writing. Ray, who is 62, can make his rich bass voice crackle in a falsetto (he plays all the women) or boom with blow-hard's authority. He can also sound like a toothless drunk. Bob, 61, has dozens of nasal variations to use for experts, executives and toadies. He can also imitate an old-fashioned radio announcer like Milton Cross or sound like Howard Cosell.

Occasionally, such as when the Backstayges are getting ready to open their House of Toast fast-food franchise, Bob and Ray will play four characters in conversation. It can sound like music.

Unfortunately this is not the kind of music that gets onto play lists at commercial radio stations. Those stations have become specialized and tightly formatted; Bob and Ray's routines usually are too long or too old-fashioned sounding to blend in. So they have to earn most of their income from writing and recording commercials and making comic presentations for corporate meetings. The Radio Foundation's revival of The Bob and Ray Show is not making the two comedians rich, but at least it is keeping their art alive. Plenty of people, it seems, are ready to stop and listen.

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**HAPPY
1996 !**

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