

Volume 21, Number 8

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Fred Allen (1894-1956) Vaudeville and revue star who came to radio, with CBS, October 23, 1932. By 1939, his *Town Hall Tonight* became *The Fred Allen Show*, last heard on June 26, 1949. Allen is shown with his wife **Portland Hoffa**, who acted with him.



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



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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

Ever had a dream of something that you really wanted to do. But, for one reason or another, you knew you would never be able to? How about doing something in the same field that you could really enjoy and that you could do?

You should really talk to Dick Beals, 4'6", but he always wanted to play major league baseball. He spent a lot of years coaching but never got high in the leagues. But now it has HAPPENED! Dick spent most of 1995 baseball season broadcasting play by play for the Bakersfield Blaze team.

This year he will be working with the Lake Elsinore club, calling some of the games, assisting in marketing, sales, public relations, speakers bureau, publicity and whatever else comes up.

Dick comes down off the clouds once in a while just to work more on his preparation for doing the best job at whatever he is about to tackle next. He is truly a walking example of his book "*Think Big*."

By the way, R.H.A.C. still has some copies of "*Think Big*" for the cost of \$9.00 plus any postage for mailing.

We have a change of address for Dan Decker, the librarian for the first series of cassettes. Dan is now at:

10507 W Maplewood Dr, Unit #C,
Littleton CO 80127-5502.

Please keep that in mind when ordering from library #1.

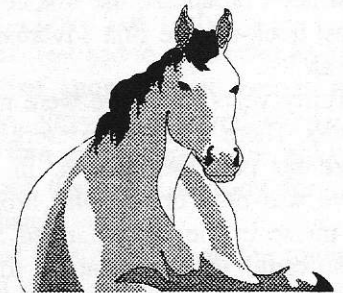
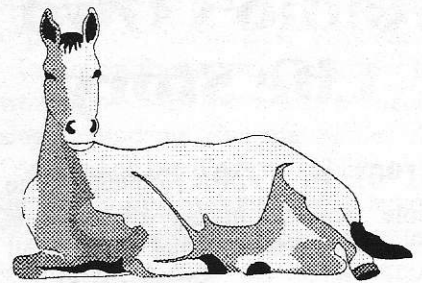
We still have an occasional member who orders tapes without listing alternatives. They are often the ones to complain when they do not receive their tapes on time. Well, folks, it just doesn't work that way. With about a third of the library in circulation you cut your odds pretty slim. No, we will not pull tapes out to hold for you and deprive someone else the chance to enjoy them. Please be sure to always give alternative choices when you order.

Another member wrote a short note about his experiences during World War II when thousands of young men were trained by the military and also trained to use the the free tobacco products issued to the servicemen. At that time it seemed to be a generous gesture. Little did we know what the consequences would be in later years. He also noted that very few radios were available for servicemen at that time. They were a luxury. But most certainly the kind of luxury that they could share with others in the barracks.

Nathan Gregory is a new R.H.A.C. member and a telecommunications scientist who will be working to improve the sound quality of old time radio shows. Nathan hopes to be able to work at that as a full time retirement occupation.

The only drawback we see at this time is that Nathan may find as many of us have that retirement years are much busier than when we worked at set hours for wages. He did mention that he was interested in the science-fiction shows. By the response we see in the libraries, he is not alone.

We try to have something for everyone among the shows we offer. If you have specific requests, why not let us know? Our schedules of new material are full for this year and into next year but we certainly are interested in hearing from you as to what you'd like us to offer in the future.



a Book Review

"*The Fat Man*" J. Scott Smart
A biography by Charles Laughlin
Three Faces East Press, 1994

A fast moving biography of the life of J. Scott Smart in only 65 pages.

Smart started his show business career with silent movies in 1922-23. He worked on the stage and some very early radio. His great success came with his taking the lead in "*The Fat Man*" on ABC January 21, 1946. The run concluded with its run on CBS in 1951.

In later years Smart moved to New England and became a painter and art critic.

I found the book interesting and enjoyable reading.

Many thanks to Charles Laughlin, the author, for furnishing this book to our lending library for your continued use and pleasure.

John Adams, R.H.A.C.

Radio's Own Life Story

1901 to 1920: Nothing in the whole fabulous history of radio is more astounding than the fact that all broadcasting for entertainment is barely thirty years old.

Well within the memory of many people not yet middle-aged is the very first news broadcast, the first coast-to-coast hook-up, the first advertising on the air.

Thirty years ago there were no networks. There were no sponsors. There were no paid entertainers. In 1919, there was only one regular broadcast of music in the entire United States. That came from Pittsburgh for two hours each Wednesday and Saturday evening, and it was devised for the amusement of only one hundred people listening through earphones.

Forty-five years ago, the first broadcast of a voice was still to be made. Fifty years ago even the dots and dashes of the Morse Code had not crossed the Atlantic by wireless.

This story of broadcasting will deal mainly with the great entertainers of radio rather than with the great inventors who made radio possible though their stories are fascinating, for their discoveries set the stage for the biggest show on earth—the show that comes free to us for the turn of a dial—the show that fills the air that was empty and silent half a century ago.

The story of broadcasting in this country starts on December 12, 1901, when the young Italian, Guglielmo Marconi, waited on the icy shores of Newfoundland for the sound of the signal his men in England were trying to send over more than two thousand miles of winter sea.

Marconi must have held his breath as he waited in the little control room under the weirdly cumbersome wooden masts of his crude aerial as the time drew near.

Then he heard it. Dot Dot Dot. Clear and hard, the prearranged signal crackled out from the tip of Cornwall, and rounded the curve of the world at the speed of light—186,273 miles per second. Feeble and faint, but unmistakable, it was netted by the flimsy web of wire all the way across the Atlantic. Four hundred and nine years after that other great Italian, Christopher Columbus, heard the cry "Land ho!" Marconi conquered the ocean again. The day of radio was at hand.

Broadcasting is not the invention of any one man. Scores of brilliant explorers of the ether contributed. Marconi, himself, was only part of the great stream of experiment. The presence of ether waves had been noted long before he was born.

He is properly called "the father of wireless," however. He was the first to harness the thin ether for practical use when he built the first sending aerial in 1895 and picked a sound out of the air a mile and a quarter away—a miracle no man had done before.

He was twenty-one years old, son of an Italian father and an Irish mother. The family was wealthy. The boy had been educated by tutors. In his teens, when he became absorbed in his wild surmise that the ether was another uncharted ocean waiting for its Columbus, his father gave him 5,000 lira or about \$1,000 for pocket money with which to carry on his experiments.

He is one of the few great inventors whose way was easy from the start. His genius won almost immediate recognition and quickly brought honor, fame and great fortune. There was one major set-back, however.

When he succeeded in sending a Morse Code signal through the air to a station out of sight behind a hill, young Marconi knew that he had something of enormous value. Patriotically, he offered his discovery to the Italian government. The fantastic fact is that it was courteously but firmly refused as not important enough to deserve official consideration, and Italian ships

continued to use homing pigeons to carry messages from ship to shore!

Marconi's mother had influential connections in England so they took young Guglielmo's "ether telegraph" to London, and he took out his first patent in 1896. Demonstrations were given for the proper people, including Queen Victoria. By 1897 a company had been formed. Marconi owned half the stock had fifteen thousand pounds in his pocket, and wireless was headline news around the world.

Sea-faring, fog-bound England put it to work immediately. What a wonderful thing for a maritime nation was this invention that could jump fifty, a hundred, maybe two hundred miles through dark and storm and warn ships of danger in thick weather. There was talk of ringing the entire rocky coast of Britain with wireless stations to supplement the foghorns of its countless lighthouses. By the time he was twenty-three, Marconi was famous, well on his way to wealth, crowned with success.

But he was not satisfied. If his wireless could reach two hundred miles, why not five? Why not a thousand? Why not set up a station on each side of the Atlantic so that a ship leaving England could keep in touch with its homeland to the middle of the ocean? Then, as it passed beyond reach of signals from behind, it could move into signals sent out from the shores of America.

The thing was fantastic, absurd, ridiculous! Against all sober counsel, he set up a huge ring of wooden masts and wires in the little village of Poldhu in Cornwall. The masts were 170 feet high and covered nearly an acre. He powered his station with such a fierce force of electricity that a three-foot wooden lever was used to turn current off and on. Then he crossed the Atlantic to build his receiving station at St. John's in Newfoundland. By this time his plan had changed. He was going to cross the Atlantic by wireless in one leap!

In December, 1901, all was in readiness. The savage winter storms had blown down the first masts that had held his aerials, but they had been replaced. On the other side of the Atlantic his generators were whirring and his staff was waiting. When they thrust the lever home, the world entered a new era.

It was a world that would seem fantastic to us if we could spin back the dial of time and take a look at it. It was a world without movies. Not until 1903 would the first one-reeler with a story, "The Great Train Robbery," be produced. There were no electric refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, plastics air travel. It would be two years before the Wright brothers would lift their plane into the air at Kitty Hawk and stay aloft for one minute. Automobiles were erratic toys that only the very rich could afford, and, outside of cities there were no paved streets for them to travel on. Pianolas were vying with Mr. Edison's phonograph—the one with the cylindrical records and the morning-glory-shaped horn. Many city homes were still lighted with gas, and kerosene lamps were the rule on farms. The Yellow Kid, Foxy Grandpa, The Katzenjammer Kids, and Happy Hooligan had just started and were seen on Sunday only. The daily comic strip was not to begin until 1909 when Mutt and Jeff took the plunge. Vitamins? Not until 1913. Permanent waves, rayon, crooning, aluminum pans, pressure cookers, jazz—what were they? The newly born twentieth century was to see a rush forward on every scientific front, and discoveries in radio came in a tidal wave. Hundreds of men share the credit but above them all, two American giants tower: Lee deForest and the greatest of them all, Edwin Howard Armstrong.

Without the inventions of these two there might be no symphony in the air today, no news round-ups from the ends of the earth, no sixty-four-dollar question, no Lone Ranger, no Sinatra and very possibly no United Nations.

Lee deForest was born in 1873 at Council Bluffs, Iowa, one year before Marconi opened his eyes on the fashionable world of Bologna. It would be hard to find backgrounds more dissimilar. A Congregational minister, deForest's father had left a comfortable home in Iowa when Lee was six years old to accept the scantily paid presidency of Tallageda College in Alabama. It was a school for Negroes. In those unenlightened days, that was enough to make the white community practically ostracize the family of the Reverend deForest. Young Lee had a lonesome and poverty-bitten childhood. His college years were not much better. He took his entrance examinations at Yale in a shiny suit, shoes a year old and a straw hat his father had discarded.

He did not have enough money for most of the social activities at Yale. The laboratory became his main diversion. After he won his Doctor's degree things were still hard. His first job paid eight dollars a week. Even after his sensational invention of the audion tube, his career was harassed for years by financial struggles, though the audion made him famous and brought broadcasting very near. It was the first practical vacuum tube, and what it did was pick up the weakest signals and magnify their sound enormously. It could make the ticking of a watch sound like a drumbeat. It could lift sounds out of seemingly silent air and make them heard.

By 1906, many men were working on the possibility of sending the human voice through the air. The race was won by Reginald A. Fessenden, brilliant Canadian who had an experimental station at Brant Rock, Massachusetts. It was deForest, however, who led the way in the commercial development of our wireless telephone.

The story they tell of his first voice broadcast is fascinating.

In 1907 he had a laboratory in New York. It was devoted to the improvement of wireless, but on the side he

was carrying on a special experiment—the wireless telephone.

One night friends came to inspect his workshop. With them was a concert singer, Madame Eugenia Farrar. deForest asked her if she would like to be the first to sing over his new invention. Not quite sure whether it was a pretext to get her to sing, or the real thing, Madame Farrar stepped in front of the curious instrument.

"Did anyone really hear me?" she asked when she had finished the last note of "I Love You Truly."

Dr. deForest had to admit that he had no way of knowing, but over in the Brooklyn Navy Yard a wireless operator had torn off his ear-phones, aghast, convinced that he was ready for the booby hatch.

He had been listening to the routine dot and dash signals of ships at sea when suddenly the loveliest singing he ever had heard came through. He lifted his ear-phones. All was quiet in the Navy Yard. He put them back on. The beautiful music came through clearly again.

"Angels! Angels singing in the air!" he muttered, and, completely unnerved at being so close to heaven, shouted for his commanding officer who listened and then excitedly called the *Herald-Tribune*.

A bored night editor almost let the story die right there. Voices in the air? Silly. Half convinced that one of his reporters was trying to pull his leg, he refused to cover the story until he had called the Navy Yard back to verify the source. By the time his reporter reached Brooklyn, the singing had long since ceased. The faintly skeptical newsman wrote a brief account which appeared in the paper the next morning. Not until he read it did Dr. deForest know that his experiment was a success.

Once again it was the men of the sea who recognized the great potential of the new instrument. Six months later twenty-four Navy ships steamed out of

New York harbor on a round-the-world cruise, equipped with the new wireless telephones.

Lee deForest is also credited with the first broadcast by remote control when Enrico Caruso's voice was carried by wire from the Metropolitan Opera House to the laboratory and from there put on the air.

Even though the singing of one of the greatest tenors of all time had been heard 260 miles at sea, no one thought of radio as anything but a new method of communicating messages. Broadcasting as entertainment was undreamed of, though wireless was fast becoming a fascinating hobby for "hams." By the thousands these amateur operators began to set up home-made sending and receiving sets, and the air bristled with the clicks and cracks and dots and dashes of Morse Code. Since anyone ingenious enough to build a set could launch a wave on the unregulated air, their messages overlapped and interfered dreadfully. Worse yet, the gabby gossip of the amateurs began to jam messages from ship to shore to such an extent that Congress passed the Communications Act of 1912—first federal attempt to deal with the airways. The act gave the Department of Commerce the right to license stations and assign frequencies. It did, but nobody paid much attention. The hams went merrily on their way, flooding the air with calls.

Incidentally, the nickname "ham" which has confused so many people has a simple explanation. It originated in England. British sports writers' slang for amateur is "am." Cockney fans added a gratuitous "h" making the word "ham," and so it remains to this day. Not for one minute is it to be confused with the stage slang meaning a corny performer who chews up the scenery.

In radio, ham is a proud title, deserving the respect of the nation as we shall see when we get to the record of service given in fire, flood and disaster by the amateur who stayed by his Morse Code key, without pay and frequently

at the risk of his life, when he was needed.

Like all other traditions of service the radio operators' creed was developed in disaster. The one particular tragedy that waked the world to the importance of radio, more than any other, happened in 1912 when the fastest, safest, proudest ship built to that date went down in the Atlantic.

She was called the Titanic. She was the biggest thing that had ever sailed the seas. she was vast. she was beautiful. Her passenger list of 2,223 was packed with the distinguished, the famous and the rich when she set out on her maiden voyage.

She was so big that nothing could hurt her. she was so fast that when an iceberg was sighted dead ahead she could not possibly change her course in time. She veered, but not enough. The wallowing berg raked a three hundred foot hole in her steel side below the water line, jamming the mechanism that operated her waterproof compartments. Four hours later she was gone.

"Angels! Angels singing in the air!"

The CQ went out first, the call meaning "All Stations Stand By for News." Then, shortly after midnight, the wireless operator on the Carpathia, fifty-eight miles away, was shocked to hear CQD-SOS-CQD-SOS from the great unsinkable Titanic.

CQD—the signal of distress. SOS the newer signal that meant death at hand.

(SOS is newer than you think. When the Marconi company first started, CQD was chosen to mean an urgent call to clear the air for the message that was to follow. It did not mean "Come-Quick-Danger" as many people thought, because it meant the same thing in other languages besides English. In 1906 SOS superseded it as the

international code for distress. It was chosen because the three dots, three dashes and three dots of SOS were easier to send and to identify than the dot - dash - dot - dash - dash - dot - dash-dash-dash-dot-dot of CQD. SOS does not mean "Save Our Ship" or "Save Our Souls." It means "Distress-Help" in every language in the world from Persian to Chinese.)

But SOS was new in 1912, so the Titanic's radioman took no chances. He sent it and then CQD and then SOS again as it became hideously, incredibly certain that the Titanic was doomed.

"Coming hard," wirelessly the Carpathia, turning off her course though her old engines could not bring her to the scene until dawn, hours after the Titanic had disappeared. Tragically, another ship only fifteen miles away chugged calmly on through the dark oblivious to the Titanic's cry. she carried a radioman, but, as was the custom in those days, he had closed his key and gone to bed at the end of the day.

The sinking of the Titanic and the loss of all but 706 of her passengers focused attention sharply on wireless as an essential supplement to cable and telegraph lines.

The American Telephone and Telegraph Company was pouring money into experiment, and it was needed. Radio was wildly erratic. At one moment signals would be clear. The next they would fade into humming silence or the crackle of static.

Then young Edwin Howard Armstrong entered the picture with the first of the four discoveries that were to qualify him as the greatest of all radio inventors, and, according to many engineers, the greatest American inventor since Edison.

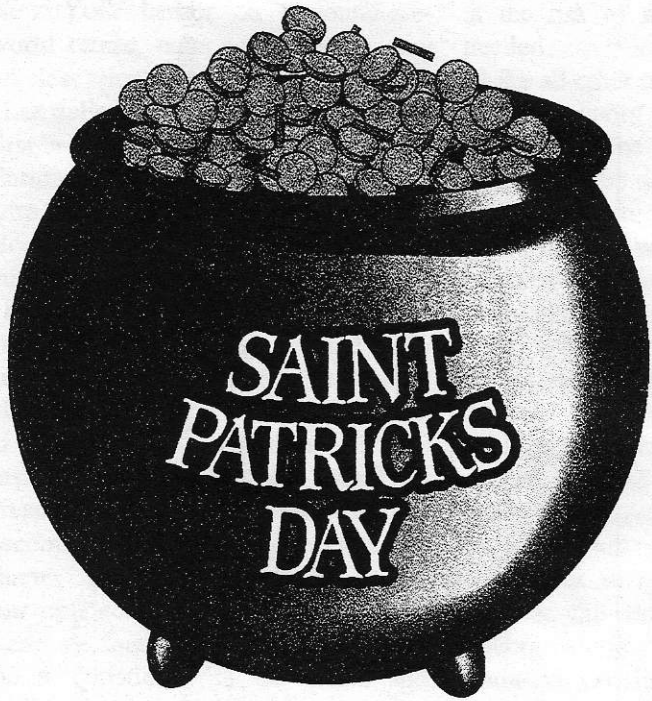
His background was completely different from that of both Marconi and deForest except for one thing—all three decided to become inventors in their teens.

RADIO MIRROR, January 1950

To be concluded in April 1996

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