

DUFFY'S TAVERN: Short Statistics on a Popular Comedy

By Martin Grams © 2001

Ed Gardner was not so much a person as a human symbol variously associated with Brooklyn, Hell's Kitchen or First Avenue. This husky man with the rugged features and aggressive manner provoked the feeling that pretty soon someone would belabor the floor with a cue stick and shout: "Rack 'em up." Or else that a pop bottle will hurtle into space, accompanied by "T'row yuh spikes at 'im, will yuh, yuh bum!" But there was no mistaking the flat, slightly nasal voice with the sarcastic edge, even when it bounced off the modern French decors of the Hotel St. Regis suite where Gardner had stayed in recent years.

As conceived by Gardner himself, who drank only milk (not liquor), *Duffy's Tavern* was an old-fashioned, mirrored, and saw dusty place that attracted "mostly ordinary people but a few of the hoi polloi." Duffy himself was never around, but while he was the little man who wasn't there, he had a definite character nevertheless. "Duffy," Gardner explained, "is a thick-hearted old gent who might have started as a bartender and built up the place that I'm now running for him. When I was a kid out in Astoria there was an old-fashioned place like it. My Uncle Henry, who was a carpenter, used to hang out there most of the time and I used to work there occasionally. They'd have pig roasts on Saturday nights and I used to play the piano, a fellow

named Fredy Vopat the drums, and a guy called Theodore Smith the violin. We were the band and we were rotten. It was a nice place, though, and everybody had a good time."

"*Duffy's Tavern* is sort of like that," Gardner continued, "only John Kirby's music is good and he gets more money than we did. Duffy himself is the old, conservative-type. He's the kind of guy who still thinks John L. Sullivan was the greatest heavyweight champion of the world. No fads for him; he's sort of allergic to progress. In fact, Duffy is waiting for radio to blow over."

On March 1, 1941, *Duffy's Tavern* became part of the regular CBS lineup of comedies. (Just three days before, *Meet Boston Blackie* premiered at the Rialto, the first of what would be fourteen Boston Blackie pictures for Columbia, based on the popular radio mystery series.) Gardner didn't know it at the time, but *Duffy's Tavern* would become so successful, that four years later, a film adaptation of their program would also make it to the big screen.

The *New York Times* reviewed the program shortly after the program's premiere:

"The delightful half hour at Duffy's each week is rapidly becoming one of radio's best comedy

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RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO

PO BOX 1908, Englewood, CO 80150 303-761-4139

Dedicated to the preservation of old-time radio programs and to making those programs available to our members.

RHAC Board Meeting Thursday, April 5, 2001 - 7:30 PM

At: Larry Weide's 5270 E. Nassau Cir. Englewood, CO 80110303-758-8382

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KFKA 1310 AM	<i>Radio Memories</i> Sundays	6:00 to 12:00 PM
KUVO 89.3 FM	<i>Destination Freedom</i> Tuesday, April 17th	9:00 PM - "Transfusion, The Story of Charles Drew"

RHAC WEB SITE <http://www.rhac.org>

RHAC WEB PAGE <http://www.old-time.com/rhac.html>

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LIBRARIES

Reference Material:	Bill McCracken	7101 W Yale Ave #503	Denver, CO 80227	303-986-9863
Logs & Scripts:	Fred Hinz	c/o RHAC P O Box 1908	Englewood, CO 80150	
Open Reel Tape:	Malettha King	900 W. Quincy Ave.	Englewood, CO 80110	
Cassette Tape:				
#1 (1-499)	Ron Gallagher	888 South Dexter #607	Denver, CO 80246	303-692-0531
#2 (500-999)	David Gatch	PO Box 70	Glen Haven, CO 80532	970-577-0805
#3 (1000-2000)	Dave Logan	5557 S Sherman Cir.	Littleton, CO 80121	303-730-1430
#4 (5001 up)	Mika Rhoden	3950W Dartmouth Ave.	Denver, CO 80236	303-937-9476

RHAC Calendar of Events

Watch here for upcoming events

August, 2001

RHAC Picnic

December, 2001

RHAC Christmas Party

2001 Conventions

15th Annual OTR and Nostalgia Convention Apr 20 - 21, 2001 Radisson Hotel in Cincinnati, OH
Contact: Bob Burchett, 10280 Gunpowder Rd., Florence, KY 41042 (859) 282-0333 zharadio@hotmail.com

12th Radio Classics Live! May 4 - 5, 2001 Massasoit Community College - Buckley Center, Brockton, MA
Contact: Buckley Center Box Office, 1 Massasoit Blvd., Brockton, MA 02302 (508) 427-1234
<http://www.radioclassicslive.org>

National Audio Theater Workshop June 18 - 24, 2001 William Woods Univ., Fulton, MO
Contact: Sue Zizza, 115 Dikeman St., Hempstead, NY 11550 (516) 483-8321 Suemedial@aol.com
<http://www.natf.org/>

Radio Enthusiasts of Puget Sound Radio Showcase IX June 29 - 30, 2001 Seattle Center, Seattle WA
Contact: Mike Sprague, Box 723, Bothell, WA 98041 (425) 488-9518 HRRMIKES@aol.com
<http://www.repsonline.org/01.htm>

26th Friends of Old-time Radio Convention Oct 25 - 28, 2001 Holiday Inn-North, Newark, NJ
Contact: Jay Hickerson, Box 4321, Hamden, CT 06514 (203) 248-2887 JayHick@aol.com



Newsletter Editor Needed

Effective with the July, 2001 issue, a new Editor will be needed for the RHAC Newsletter.

Our current Newsletter Editor will continue producing *Return With Us Now* . . . through the June, 2001 issue.

A local member is preferred for this position.

It would be helpful if this person has computer skills (possibly with Internet access) and reliable transportation.

It usually takes between 15 – 17 hours a month to accomplish the activities that are associated with the production of the Newsletter.

The general duties of the Newsletter Editor are as follows:

- ◆ Acquisition of and review of articles from members and other sources
- ◆ Pickup of Monthly Tape Library Insert
- ◆ Compilation and layout of newsletter from computer files and printed matter
- ◆ Drop off of print-ready Newsletter copy at the printers
- ◆ Pickup of approximately 475 finished Newsletters and extra Library inserts at printers
- ◆ Pickup of stamps and mailing labels and drop off a few Newsletters to Membership Chairperson
- ◆ Put labels and stamps on Newsletters
- ◆ Delivery of Newsletters to Post Office for mailing
- ◆ Miscellaneous activities

All inquires about this volunteer position should be sent to:

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Duffy's Tavern

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programs. One bad feature, however, is the applause after each character finishes his chore. Let Hope, Benny, Allen and the rest continue with this routine; perhaps it compensates their players, but phase, Archie, in situation comedy let the unseen audience remember that the scene is at Duffy's on Thoid Avenue and not Studio 6B. For the guest star it's all right. It "flatters them with flattery," as Miss Duffy might say, and also pays for their transportation from and back to Hollywood. But when our real friends, Eddie the waiter, Finnigan, Clancy the cop and the rest start taking bows – look out!"

Beginning October 6, 1942, the program was titled *Duffy's* instead of *Duffy's Tavern*. An employee working for Bristol Myers felt the "saloon" connection was unsavory, and with a little persuasion, convinced the head publicity department at Bristol Myers to demand the word "tavern" be dropped from the title. A press release explained in more detail that "some listeners - the majority being Catholics - had started public protests in an attempt of having the word "tavern" dropped from the title. The protestors' excuse was that the word "tavern" was partly advertising the hobby of drinking, and should not be used over the radio." Fans, however, went on calling the show *Duffy's Tavern* as before. Gardner even suggested the title *Duffy's Variety*, which was used for only a few episodes, but that idea was soon dropped.

Finally, in early March, the truth became known. There was very little to support the statements of the employee working at Bristol Myers. Apparently there were no protests whatsoever. A handful of letters, maybe, but no protests and petitions. On March 5, 1944, another press release, this time issued: "The sponsor of *Duffy's* apparently has come to the conclusion that the citizenry was not greatly outraged by the alcoholic connotation in the word "tavern." In any event, the Ed Gardner show is reverting to it's original titled *Duffy's Tavern*." Beginning with the March 9, 1944 broadcast, *Duffy's Tavern* returned with full title, and here it was to stay. And to celebrate, Colonel Stoopnagle, who was guest on both the audition and March 1941 premiere, paid a return visit to *Duffy's Tavern*.

Ed Gardner was endowed with his boundless energy and quick thinking. He credited those two assets with putting him in a Hollywood mansion, the accompanying swimming pool to match, and an income from radio alone that was estimated at \$200,000. Gardner and Simone, had two children, Edward, Jr., and Stephen.

Gardner and company acquired the name of *Duffy's* from Duffy's Radio Tavern on west 40th street in NY City. The late Bernard C. Duffy, proprietor, once told Ed

that the first Duffy's was established back in 1795. The inn, run by two women, was in Pennsylvania, on the stage coach route from Williamsport to Pittsburgh. Gardner jokingly said he couldn't understand why the book in which the first *Duffy's* is described, makes no reference to a 1795 Archie.

In the summer of 1945, *Duffy's Tavern* received a unique honor. It was named to the Honor Roll of Race Relations by the Schomberg Collection of Negro Literature (which was affiliated with the New York Public Library) for featuring Negro actors "without the use of jokes that are offensive to any racial group." Thus did *Duffy's Tavern* join Lester B. Granger, executive secretary of the National Urban League and Lt. General John C.H. Lee, General Eisenhower's deputy commander and supply chief, as recipients of this distinguished award.

In early 1946, the Paramount picture of the same name premiered but sadly, even with a cast of thirty-some Hollywood stars, ranging from Dorothy Lamour to Bing Crosby, the film did badly at the box office.

In February of 1946, CBS issued a press release:

"Ed Gardner of 'Archie' fame will not be on hand when *Duffy's Tavern* opens for business on February 15. Right after this Friday's broadcast over NBC at 8:30, Mr. Gardner will go to the hospital for a tonsillectomy and is expected to miss at least one show. Alan Young will be substitute boniface in the interim. "The aforementioned Mr. Young, incidentally, will move from Tuesday to Friday, at 9 p.m. over ABC beginning this week. Meanwhile, Mr. Gardner's sponsor, looking toward the future, has already signed a summer replacement entitled *McGarry and His Mouse*, a comedy show written by Matt Taylor, which will run through the summer months in place of either *Duffy's Tavern* or *The Eddie Cantor Show*."

On May 4, 1946, "Hush My Mouse," a Warner Brothers Looney Tune animated short premiered in the theaters. Directed by Chuck Jones and voice characterizations by Mel Blanc, Sniffles the Mouse made his last Warner Brother cartoon, in a spoof of the radio show *Duffy's Tavern*. At Tuffy's Tavern, tough guy Edward G. Robincat comes in for today's special, Mouse knuckles. Tavern keeper Art sends his moronic flunky Filligan to catch the over-talkative little Sniffles Mouse. After a few chase gags, Sniffles turns the tables by putting his little hat on a bulldog's bone. Filligan brings the bone to the Tavern, where the bulldog retrieves his bone by beating up Robincat and Art. Filligan tells Tuffy over the phone, "No, he doesn't need mouse knuckles, but he can sure use some brass knuckles!"

In May of 1948, Gardner brought *Duffy's Tavern* to

the stage. Outside of a few introductory minutes, the stage show followed the radio format pretty closely. Screen star Jane Russell was the featured guest star along with the Matty Malneck Orchestra and Henry Jerome Orchestra. Regulars Eddie Green, Charles Cantor and Florence Halop were each given an opportunity to trade insults with Gardner. Green was even given an opportunity to take the spotlight for a deftly contrived pantomime routine about poker playing.

Russell was attired in a strapless evening gown and given two vocal solos and she and Gardner closed the show with a duet. Then a dead panned announcer walks out to the center of the mike and, script in hand, intones: "Are your hands rough? Well try Sal Hepatica." Gardner remarked, "We'd better go; the show must be over." The stage show didn't last long, merely an experimental program, which happened to be performed three blocks away from Radio City Music Hall.

On December 28, 1951, after 420 broadcasts, *Duffy's Tavern* left the radio waves, replaced by *NBC Presents: Short Story*. In the late 1950's NBC's *Monitor* began using excerpts (newly recorded and previously broadcast segments) of *Duffy's Tavern* for their program. About 53 of these five-minute shows are circulating among collectors.

With the radio program off the radio waves permanently 1952, Ed Gardner took a little rest and relaxation, which was long overdue. Moving back to his Beverly Hills home with his family, Gardner began negotiations with Hal Roach studios, who possessed an interest in marketing a television syndication. Contracts and proposals went back and forth between Ed and Hal Roach's executives / board members. Regardless of his age showing, Ed insisted that he star in each episode. The board of directors had no problem with that request, but the post-production was a different matter. Gardner had very little choice in casting or scripts, only to give a final "go ahead" when all was said and done. The initial contracts stated that only 26 episodes would be filmed, and later syndicated for stations across the country. The CBS network signed as host. This way, if local stations had to pre-empt any programs due to elections or other local events, *Duffy's Tavern* could be broadcast later at a different day and time slot. If the program was successful, reruns would give them an additional 26 weeks (thus an entire year) to begin production on shooting additional episodes. The manpower and work that went into a television production was much more than Gardner put into one of his radio productions, and he found that out the hard way.

If it just weren't for the physical activity, Gardner actually would have found the TV film version of *Duffy's Tavern* a good deal easier than the radio show.

"In radio," Gardner recalled, "I was the producer and director, and half the time the writer, and also Archie. I was goin' all the time. It was an awful mental strain. But here it's different. Hal Roach, Jr. does the producing and Harve Foster directs and they bring the scripts in and they're in pretty good shape. All I have to do is memorize the lines and I'm not so sharp at it. But it's them hot lights and all that standin' around that gets me."

Duffy's Tavern never went beyond twenty-six episodes. A few were filmed in color, but all of them were broadcast in black and white. The television series was the final inception of this great comedy. Later in the 1980's, television viewers paid return visits to another bar – similar in fashion to *Duffy's Tavern* – entitled *Cheers*. It was *Duffy's* and it never featured Ed Gardner, but it was still funny.

Ed Gardner died August 17, 1963 in a Los Angeles hospital, leaving behind a wife of twenty-one years, former New York radio and stage actress Simone Hegeman and two sons, Edward, Jr. and Stephen. He was 58.

RHAC member Martin Grams, Jr. is the author of "Suspense: Twenty Years of Thrills and Chills," "The History of the Cavalcade of America," "Radio Drama: American Programs, 1929-1962," "The Have Gun-Will Travel Companion," and co-author of "The CBS Radio Mystery Theater: An Episode Guide and Handbook to Nine Years of Broadcasting." Martin's latest book, "Alfred Hitchcock Presents: A Companion," should be released in the very near future. He also was a contributing author for the book "The Alfred Hitchcock Story."



By Helen Lozynsky

The RHAC *Players* performed as scheduled at the Denver Merchandise Mart for The Denver Book Fair at 58th & Washington on Sunday, March 4, 2001. There were two performances, the first of which the *Players* will not soon forget. In the middle of doing "Peter and the Wolf" the players were interrupted by a loud speaker blaring announcements for about 10 minutes. Although the "spell" of their play was broken they continued like

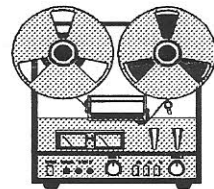
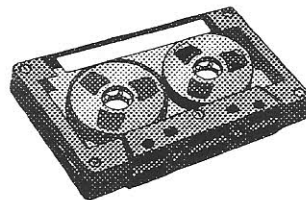
RETURN WITH US NOW...

the troopers they are. Needless to say there was no repeat of this in the second performance.

Congratulations once again to Larry Weide (narrator), Sophia Ernst (Peter), Erie Witte (Grandfather and Guadamere), Nancy Witte (Sasha), Ellen Benoit (Sonja), Les Benoit (Ivan and the Wolf), and Forrest Ernst (Misha and Yasha). JoAnn was the hostess who kept everything running smoothly, and everyone was backed up by the very experienced and capable technical crew, Dave Clow and Fred Bantin. This play will be presented again at St. Luke in September, 2001.

In the future there will be a high school presentation; the details of which have not yet been finalized. Also, once again there will be a very late spring, early summer presentation of a radio play and a decision will also be made soon as to which play is to be performed for our Christmas get-together.

I want to express my thanks for being chosen to help the RHAC *Players* as a new chairwomen. Since it's inception radio was able to introduce a new kind of cultural excitement that RHAC continues to celebrate. I hope to count on everyone's support to continue the legacy that RHAC enjoys.



New in The Tape Library

By Maletha & Dick King

Before we mention the new entries into the library, we want to thank the members who help us keep up the quality of the sound on our tapes by sending us notes about any problems they find. It really is a great help, although it may take a few weeks to make corrections or replacements.

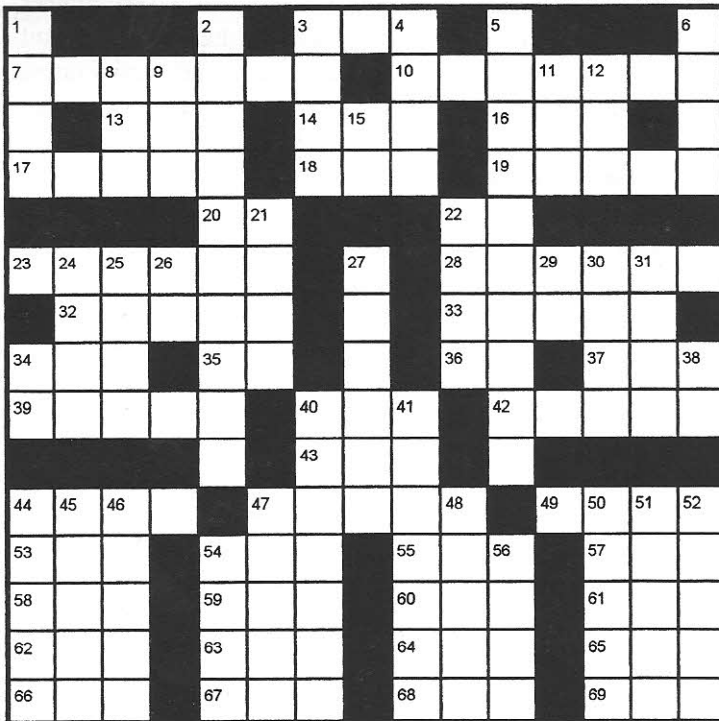
This month's entries into the Contributor's Library start out with Fred MacMurray and Irene Dunne in *Bright Star*. Although the setting is based in a local newspaper, it certainly makes one think of *Lux Radio Theater* and several other light story shows that made good listening.

Whispering Streets continues on with the pattern of good stories, but with an assortment of great radio actors that varied from show to show. The shows in this entry are from AFRS transcriptions and do not have commercials, but the shows are complete and very good listening.

Crossword Puzzle

By Jack Richards © 2001

Answers on Back Page



ACROSS

- 3 High priced heating fuel
- 7 "Grand Central _____" stands at the end of a two and half mile tunnel
- 10 Soap opera writer
- 13 Parent
- 14 Sum
- 16 Sphere
- 17 Howard Duff played Sam _____
- 18 Petal digit
- 19 If you collect OTR, try to get on Hobby _____
- 20 Compass direction
- 21 ___ Pearce played the inept salesman Elmer Blurp

Across

- 23 Tree farm
- 28 The ultimate horror show, _____ Out
- 32 Before TV
- 33 Brownish color
- 34 Indo-Chinese language
- 35 Not off
- 36 Same as 34 across
- 37 Naval rank
- 39 Fred _____ was Jack's old enemy
- 40 Type of sandwich
- 42 Gained possession
- 43 ___ Costello
- 44 Type of hair style
- 47 Noise
- 49 Set fire to
- 53 ___ Benaderet once played the mother on A Date With Judy
- 54 Character in Gunsmoke
- 55 ___ Englenach produced Hallmark Playhouse
- 57 National Education Association
- 58 Short sleep period
- 59 Seabird
- 60 Radio and TV company
- 61 Greek letter
- 62 Ending for specific place
- 63 Employ
- 64 Two good grades
- 65 Plural ending
- 66 Denver transportation company abbreviation
- 67 Not good
- 68 Crafty
- 69 Utmost degree

Down

- 1 Employs
- 2 SciFi program
- 3 Small fly
- 4 Foot wear
- 5 Face cream
- 6 Command to a dog
- 8 Doctors group
- 9 Boys name
- 11 "Lights Out" writer - short form
- 12 Recede
- 15 To work at
- 21 English school
- 22 In addition to
- 24 Spoken
- 25 _____ road Hour starred Gordon MacRae
- 26 Mr. Wynn
- 27 Bob and Ray character
- 29 Medical profession
- 30 Rural character
- 31 Recording media
- 34 ___ Speed Riggs auctioned on Your Hit Parade
- 38 Not off
- 40 Prevented from moving
- 41 Alaskan fields
- 44 Lum and _____
- 45 Big meal
- 46 Violated
- 47 Band leader
- 48 Window sticker
- 50 Unfasten
- 51 Place again
- 52 J. Carrol _____ played Luigi Basko
- 56 Not hard

Crossword Puzzle Answers

U		D		G	A	S		E		S				
S	T	A	T	I	O	N		H	U	M	M	E	R	T
E		M	O	M		A	D	O		O	R	B		A
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