



# RETURN WITH US NOW...

RADIO HISTORICAL  
ASSOCIATION OF  
COLORADO

Volume 27, Number 6

June, 2002

## GUNSMOKE ON RADIO

by Dr. Charles Beckett, © June 2002

*A seven piece orchestra plays introductory theme music. Then an announcer tells us that:*

**"Around Dodge City and in the territory out west, there's just one way to handle the killers and the spoilers -- and that's with a U.S. Marshal and the smell of gunsmoke. Gunsmoke, starring William Conrad, the transcribed story of the violence that moved west with young America, and the story of a man who moved with it."**

*Next, a commanding, yet weary, voice is heard saying:*

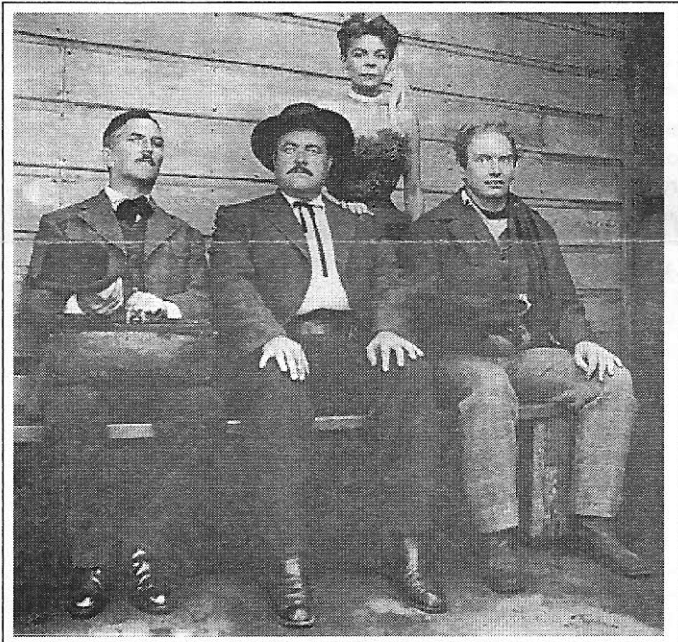
**"I'm that man -- Matt Dillon -- United States Marshal, the first man they look for and the last they want to meet. It's a chancy job and it makes a man watchful -- and a little lonely."**

Thus began another radio episode of Gunsmoke. The series first show, "Billy the Kid" was broadcast on April 26, 1952. The final new show, "Dec's Visitor" was aired on June 11, 1961.

However, one more show followed on June 18, 1961 -- a rerun of "Letter of the Law", originally heard July 15, 1956.

Gunsmoke was on radio for nine seasons. The program aired 480 times. There were 417 original

radio dramas and 63 re-broadcasts. The series has been referred to as the first adult western on radio.



Georgia Ellis  
Howard McNear - William Conrad - Parley Baer

Although the show didn't begin its series run until April 1952, there were two Gunsmoke audition shows produced in 1949 -- three years before the official beginning of the series. The first audition show was titled Mark Dillon Goes to Gouge Eye (yes, he was originally called Mark, not Matt). This show starred Michael Rye as "Mark" Dillon, and was recorded June 11, 1949. Prior to his Gunsmoke audition, Rye (Also known as Rye Billsbury) had been heard on the Jack Armstrong and Mr. First Nighter radio series.

(Continued on page 3)

# 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

## *Old-Time Radio is Alive and Well in Colorado!*

|                   |  |  |
|-------------------|--|--|
| KRMA TV Channel 6 | "Tribute to OTR" - Secondary Audio Program (SAP) | Sunday, 2:00 - 3:00pm                      |
| KEZW 1430 AM      | "When Radio Was"                                 | Weekdays, 7:00 - 8:00pm                    |
| KFKA 1310 AM      | "Radio Memories" (Greeley)                       | Sunday, 6:00 - 12:00pm                     |
| KNUS 710 AM       | "Radio Revisited"                                | Week, 11:00 - 12:00pm, Sat, 7:00 - 12:00pm |
| KGNU 88.5 FM      | "Destination Freedom"                            | Third Monday of every month, 8:00pm        |

also visit: [www.kgnu.org/destination/html](http://www.kgnu.org/destination/html)

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

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

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| Tape Donations:     | Bill McCracken                               | 7101 W. Yale Ave. #503 Denver, CO 80227         | (303) 986-9863 |  |
|                     | Herb Duniven                                 | 4184 S. Syracuse St. Denver, CO 80237           |                |  |
| Directors at Large: | David L. Michael, Herb Duniven and Dick King |   |                |  |

## LIBRARIES

|                     |                |                        |                      |                |
|---------------------|----------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Reference Material: | Bill McCracken |                        |                      |                |
| Logs & Scripts:     | Fred Hinz      | c/o RHAC PO Box 1908   | Englewood, CO 80150  |                |
| Open Reel Tape:     | Maletha King   | 900 W. Quincy Ave.     | Englewood, CO 80110  |                |
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| #1 (1-499)          | Ron Gallagher  | 888 S. 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)        | Mike Rhoden    | 3950 W. Dartmouth Ave. | Denver, CO 80236     | (303) 937-9476 |
| CD Library:         | Ron Gallagher  | 888 S. Dexter #607     | Denver, CO 80246     | (303) 692-0531 |

## 2002 Conventions

**10th Annual REPS Radio Showcase** June 28-30 in Seattle WA. Re-creations, Guests, OTR exhibits.

For information: Mike Sprague 9936 NE 197st St., Bothell WA or email at [mrrmikes@aol.com](mailto:mrrmikes@aol.com), or REPS at [www.responline.org](http://www.responline.org)

**The 26th Friends of Old-Time Radio Convention** Oct 24-27, 2002 Holiday Inn-North, Newark NJ

For information: Jay Hickerson, Box 4321, Hamden, CT 06514 (203) 248-2887, or email at [jayhick@aol.com](mailto:jayhick@aol.com)

**SPERDVAC Convention:** Nov 8 - 10 at Hacienda Hotel in El Segundo; details when available

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**RETURN WITH US NOW...**

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June, 2002

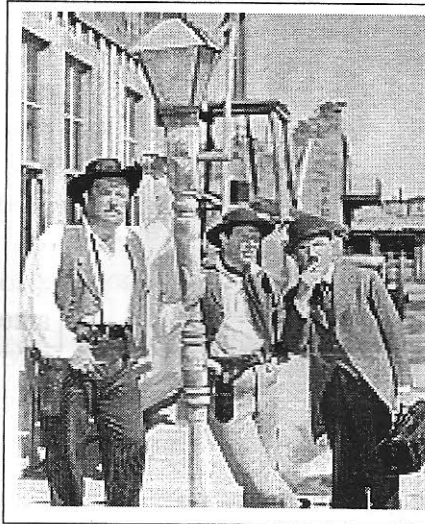
The original Gunsmoke audition script was considered too wordy and cumbersome, so it was re-worked and a second audition show was recorded on July 15, 1949. To his disappointment, Rye wasn't invited back for the second audition. Instead, Howard Culver was chosen for the role. Five other actors also auditioned for the Dillon part. The audition tapes of Rye, Culver and the other actors were submitted to the CBS executives for them to make their Dillon choice. Culver won the audition. But, unfortunately for him, by the time he was selected, he was starring in the Straight Arrow series on another network. And his contract wouldn't let him star on another western show on a competing network. Interestingly, Culver did eventually get to play a role on Gunsmoke -- the television version -- as Howie, the Dodge House hotel clerk.

After finally approving the adult western concept, CBS gave producer Norman MacDonnell one week to get a show together. As MacDonnell summarized the situation, "In that week, we had to find a writer, we had to find a star, we had to have a theme composed." A flurry of activity ensued. Rex Koury, a former radio organist, was hired to write the theme and interior music for the show. There was only one problem. Koury had never written music for a western, let alone one that still didn't have a script. Diligently, he finished his interior music for the show. He had planned to get up early the morning of the first broadcast and write the theme music. "I knew pretty well what I wanted," Koury said. But, he overslept. While shaving, he remembered that he hadn't completed the theme music. He recalled that "... at 8 o'clock in the morning I'm in the middle of shaving and I suddenly realized we haven't written the theme. So I grabbed a magazine, a piece of manuscript and a pencil, and sat down in the most convenient spot, and that's where the Gunsmoke theme was actually composed." He completed it in ten minutes.

MacDonnell wanted William Conrad for Dillon. But the CBS executives didn't. They felt that he had been overexposed on radio. Also on the negative side, he didn't have a western-type voice, and he was thought of primarily as a villain, frequently playing heavies on both radio and in the movies.

Admittedly, Conrad was very active in radio work at the time. In his words, "We were averaging 10 to 15 shows a week." He was heard frequently on shows such as The Adventures of Sam Spade, Lux Radio Theatre, Dragnet, Suspense, The Whistler, and Escape, to name just a few of the many on which he was appearing. But, the casting crew was running out of time and potential candidates to test for the Dillon role. As Conrad recalled, "They auditioned everybody in town, and as a last resort they called me and said, 'Okay, we give up. Come on in.' And I went in and read about two lines and they said, 'Okay, thank you.' And I walked out. Then the next day they called and said, 'You have the job.'" Today, listening to Gunsmoke, it's difficult to imagine anyone else playing the radio Matt Dillon.

Miraculously, somehow



everything came together -- The music, the cast, and the script. The Gunsmoke theme became one of the most recognized in radio. The cast was filled out, with William Conrad as Marshal Matt Dillon, Parley Baer as deputy Chester Wesley Proudfoot, Georgia Ellis as Kitty Russell -- house mother to the saloon girls of the Texas Trail and emotional anchor to Matt, and Howard McNear as Doctor Charles Adams, better known as "Doc" -- the town's lone medical man. Writer John Meston and his staff prepared an intelligent and

action filled first show script for the cast to perform. The theme of the show centers around Dillon's fateful meeting with 12 year old Billy the kid, The highlight of the program is a tense standoff between Dillon and a mob who wants to hang a prisoner falsely accused of murder. Radio history was in the making.

Besides playing the lead in the radio series, Conrad was responsible for naming two of the show's main characters. Chester was initially written into the script as "Townsmen," But, Conrad complained to producer Norman MacDonnell, that "... I can't just say, Townsmen, come here, I want to talk to you. Call him Chester, or something like that." So Townsmen became Chester -- and Marshal Dillon's deputy, The rest of his name came about accidentally. While Baer was ad-libbing himself out of an awkward dialog situation on the show, he said,

"as sure as my name's Chester Wesley Proudfoot." The name stuck.

Parley Baer claimed that Conrad also had named Howard McNear's character. Originally, his name was only Doc in the script. Conrad explained it. He said that "one day we were all sitting around laughing at the ghoulish way that Howard played the part; he was always so happy when someone got shot down because then he had a little business. I said, 'My God, Howard, you're like a Charles Addams character. In fact, that's what you should be called, Doc Addams.' and that's how he got his name." The last name was shortened from Addams to Adams.

The recurring supporting players included many talented and seasoned actors from Hollywood's radio pool. They included Vic Perrin, Harry Bartell, Lawrence Dobkin, Barney Phillips, James Nusser, Sam Edwards, Richard Beals (as Yorky), John Dehner (who was Paladin in the radio version of *Have Gun Will Travel*, and starred as J.B. Kendall in the *Frontier Gentleman* series).

Ironically, Dehner had originally turned down the roll of Matt Dillon for fear he'd become typecast in western roles. Other stellar supporting players were John McIntire and his real life wife Jeanette Nolan, and Virginia Gregg and Ben Wright, who were regulars (Missy Wong and Heyboy) on the radio version of *Have Gun Will Travel* during 1958-60.

William Conrad (Matt) was born in Louisville, Kentucky in 1920 and moved to Los Angeles when he was seven years old. He had his first paying radio job on a local station at age 17. Then, while working with the Armed Forces Radio Service in 1945, he auditioned for a small part on a *Whistler* radio show and, to his surprise, ended up with the lead in it. Before, during and after *Gunsmoke*, he enjoyed successful careers in radio, television and the movies. Besides his work in many dramatic radio shows, he starred in three television detective series -- *Cannon*, *Nero Wolfe*, and *Jake and the Fat Man*; and acted in, directed and produced movies.

Parley Baer (Chester) was born in Salt Lake City, Utah in 1914, and got his start in radio there. During his long and illustrious career, he appeared in over 10,000 radio shows. Like Conrad, Baer also

carved out a successful television career, appearing in *The Andy Griffith Show* (as the mayor), *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriett* (as neighbor Darby), *The Addams Family*, *Night Court*, *The Golden Girls*, and too many others to mention here. Until recent years, Baer was active as a featured guest and participant at old time radio conventions. He had an award for contributions to old time radio named for him by an old time radio convention group.

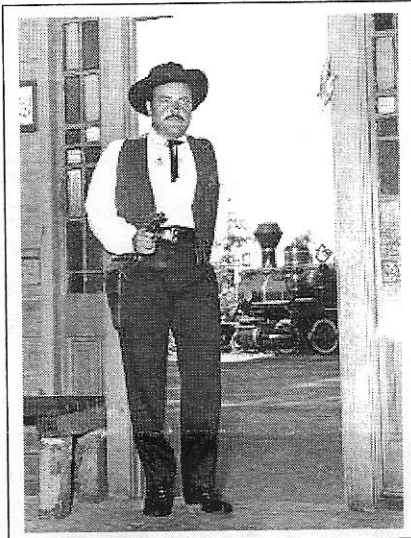
Prior to beginning her professional radio career, Georgia Ellis (Kitty) attended UCLA and the Pasadena Playhouse in California. Her first professional acting role was in the 1942 movie *Lost Canyon*, starring William Boyd. Besides *Gunsmoke*, her radio credits include co-starring with Will Rogers Jr., on *Rogers of the Gazette* (as Maggie Button), and supporting roles in *The Adventures of Philip Marlow*, *Dagnet*, *Escape* -- and like Parley Baer -- too many other programs to do justice to here.

Howard McNear (Doc), was also a multimedia performer. He acted in radio, and appeared on television and in the movies. Besides *Gunsmoke*, his distinctive voice was heard on such radio shows as *Yours Truly Johnny Dollar*, *Night Bear*,

*The Six Shooter*, and many, many others. He was an established character actor in movies, including *Bell, Book and Candle*, and *Irma LaDouce*. However, he is probably best remembered for his television role as Floyd the barber on the *Andy Griffith* television show.

A television version of *Gunsmoke* spun off from the radio series on September 10, 1955, and ran for two decades, becoming the longest-running prime time drama in television history. James Arness was Matt Dillon, Dennis Weaver portrayed excitable deputy Chester Goode (instead of Proudfoot), Amanda Blake played the glamorous and unflappable Kitty Russell, and Milburn Stone was seen as the dryly humorous and surly Doc Adams. The TV version of *Gunsmoke* is still in syndication, and can be seen regularly on various cable channels around the country.

Not only were the radio scripts of *Gunsmoke* superbly crafted, and the acting of the highest quality, but the sound effects were unbelievably



realistic -- from the scraping of chair legs on the floor when someone stood up, to the sounds of footsteps and the jingling of spurs indoors and on the Dodge City streets and boardwalks, the whizzing of bullets, the rattling of wagon wheels, and the galloping, whinnying and blowing of horses. The three sound effect technicians saw to that. They were perfectionists. They even went into a woods in Laurel Canyon to pre-record .45, .38 and .22 caliber gunshot sounds. Producer MacDonnell claimed -- with a wink -- that "always used a .45 for Matt, and for the heavies there would be a .38 or a .22."

In 1959, Gunsmoke was selected by TV-Radio Mirror as the best dramatic program on radio for the fifth time.

Gunsmoke ended its long run on radio June 18, 1961. Parley Baer recalls that "those were happy, happy halcyon times. Some of those Saturday recording sessions seem as though they were just yesterday ... and I wish they were tomorrow."

With the end of Gunsmoke's radio era, Chester Wesley Proudfoot might have been heard to exclaim, "But, that just don't seem right, Mr. Dillon!" Cheer up Chester. We fans still have our radio tapes of you and the rest of the Dodge City folks to listen to and enjoy any day and any time we choose.

*[RHAC member and gifted writer Dr. Charles Beckett discovered OTR in 1940. Career and other interests diverted him until the mid-1980s when he rediscovered the joys of OTR listening. As he says, "Once OTR is in your blood, it stays forever."]*

*From the Desk of  
the Editor  
by Carol Tiffany*



Just a brief note this month to acknowledge my 12<sup>th</sup> issue of RWUN. It is hard to believe that a year has passed already. I would like to thank all of you, readers and contributors alike for all your help and kindness to your fledgling editor this past year. It is my hope that you will continue with your active participation, which helps to make our newsletter a truly interactive project.

## ON THE OTR BOOKSHELF ...

A new release as of April, 2002 is a limited edition (500 copies only) of *Invitation to Learning* by Martin Grams, Jr. The book deals with the rather obscure albeit long-lived (24 years on the air) CBS program of the same name. The program, which featured Dr. Stringfellow Barr, president of St. John's College at Annapolis, attempted to expand liberal education by radio by exploring classical literature.

The book covers the history of the program, a detailed broadcast log, air dates, plot synopsis, and information on regular and guest panelists. The book also addresses the question of how and why they managed to keep the program on the air for such a long time. This paperback will be sold on a first come, first serve basis at \$14.95 a copy plus \$3.50 for Priority postage from OTR Publishing, PO Box 252, Churchville, Maryland 21028.

### Answers to the crossword puzzle on page 6

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
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| E | V | I | L |   | B | E | G | E | T |   | A | R | C | H |
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| M | A | C | E |   |   | B | R | E | A | D |   | E | D | G |

# OTR Crossword For June

By Jack M. Richards - © 2002

## Across

- 1 Bad  
 5 To become a parent  
 9 Creator of Lights Out  
 13 Real name of Mary Livingston  
 14 Poetic before  
 15 Stick to  
 16 The story line  
 19 Horse doctors (abbr.)  
 20 Army officer (abbr.)  
 21 Uncle Bill \_\_\_ hosted  
 22 Per item (abbr.)  
 23 For instance  
 25 Appendage  
 26 Toe number  
 29 Male parent  
 31 Lorenzo \_\_\_ was a soap  
 33 Ice \_\_\_  
 35 Top most room  
 37 Fairy tale author  
 38 Cover  
 39 Bud Collyer played \_\_\_ man  
 40 Bread or whiskey  
 41 Belonging to that girl  
 42 Head wear  
 43 Strange  
 44 Shade tree  
 46 A bad actor  
 48 Radio network  
 51 Form of water  
 54 Address for a lady  
 56 Wife beating  
 59 A soap, Helen \_\_\_  
 60 Unit of pressure (abr.)  
 61 Church govern. body  
 62 South Africa (abr.)  
 63 Question  
 65 Skirt feature  
 66 All of us  
 67 Follows JKL  
 68 Leg parts  
 69 An alternative  
 71 Joan Davis stared in Leave It To \_\_\_  
 73 Contest  
 75 Flower month  
 76 Egg  
 78 Stage whisper  
 79 Attack repellent  
 80 Staff of life  
 81 Rim

## Down

- 1 Beyond the five senses  
 2 February holiday (abbr.)  
 3 Small statue  
 4 Curly headed girl in a red dress  
 6 Electrical Engineer (abbr.)  
 7 Hal Peary or Willard Waterman  
 8 Architectural Engineer (abbr.)  
 9 Sequel to I Love A Mystery  
 10 Flightless bird  
 11 Whale  
 12 Time periods (abbr.)  
 17 Droop  
 18 Fast airplane  
 23 \_\_\_ Cassidy appeared on Fred Allen Show  
 24 The sun  
 27 Catch sight of  
 28 To smooth into  
 29 Pastry  
 30 Land measure  
 32 Opposite compass directions  
 33 \_\_\_ Pearce played Elmer Blurt  
 34 \_\_\_ Gardner stared in Duffy's Tavern  
 36 Bathroom requirement (abbr.)  
 46 Assault boats  
 47 Entry on bill of sale (abbr.)  
 49 Foundation  
 50 To grant a treaty  
 52 \_\_\_ la la  
 53 Same as 6 down  
 54 Military police (abbr.)  
 55 Spanish yes  
 57 United Nations (abbr.)  
 58 Seed  
 64 Infamous organization  
 65 33rd president  
 66 Alternate spelling of a boys name  
 70 Sneak attack  
 71 A jazz session  
 72 W.W.II government office  
 73 No definition. Use CDE  
 74 Shoe measurement  
 76 Same as 69 across  
 77 Drinkers group (abr.)

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| 75 |    |    |    |    | 76 | 77 |    | 78 |    |    |    |    |
| 79 |    |    |    | 80 |    |    |    |    | 81 |    |    |    |

## New in the CD Library

by Maletha & Dick King

Last month we started the new CD library with a series of "The Six Shooter", "Fort Laramie" and "Luke slaughter of Tombstone" CDs. This month we introduce the great "Favorite Story" series, which is the favorite program of many different personalities and covers almost the full range of literature. These episodes are all performed by the radio and movie stars of the times. After feasting on these great stories we move on to "Maisie", played by Ann Southern. We have added six new shows to this series and most of the shows have complete closings.

During the next few months we will continue to add to the CD library with "Box Thirteen", "Damond Runyon Theater", "Adventures of Frank Race", "The Lives of Harry Lime" and a lot more great shows. After that we will return to the reel-to-reel and cassettes.

A word of caution to members collecting 7" reels and some of the cassettes; We have found that the older emulsion is aging and has a tendency to flake off. This is over a period of many years and with no airing. It might be a good idea to run some of your favorite shows, even if you just "high-speed" them.

**PLEASE**, be considerate and remember to rewind cassette tapes before returning them. The next member who rents them thanks you!

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